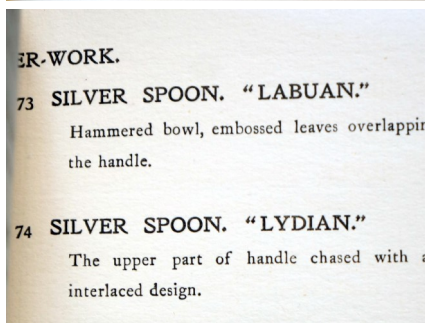
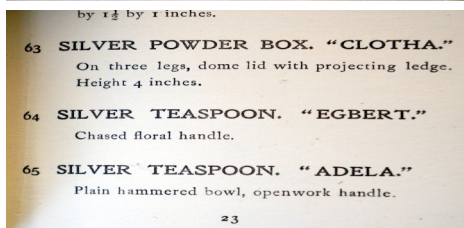
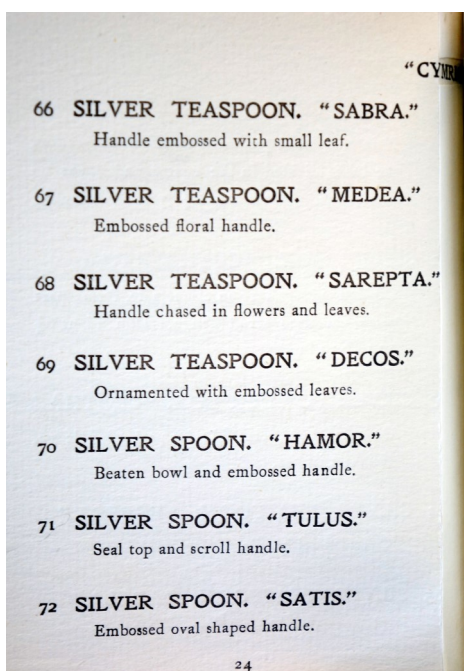


# The first spoons of Liberty's *Cymric* silverware

By Simon Moore

Many of you will have hopefully read the introductory article (Moore, 2015) outlining the design and designer conundrums of Liberty's that arose from the issue of the first sets of silver spoons in 1899. This article serves to give more facts and show some of the scarcer items that have since come to light. Many apologies for any areas of repetition!



In May 1899 the Liberty store released its first array of silverware by British designers via an exhibition at the Store. An Octavo format catalogue was fine-printed but likely produced in some haste, as there were no illustrations. The section on spoons described six patterns for teaspoons, six salt spoons that accompanied saltcellars and five larger spoons, soon to be augmented by a further three before the end of the year.

The director John Llewellyn was responsible for choosing and purchasing the designs that would best fit the store's ethos so the silver items were listed as *Cymric* silverwork in presumed deference to his success. The Welsh-sounding name has no linguistic meaning but is close to the meaning for Welsh (*Cymraeg*).

Although many designers were involved, only Archibald Knox's work was chosen for this initial tranche of spoon designs while he was working at the Silver Studio. He likely had his promising work shown to the Liberty design team by Harry Napper, the Studio's senior co-worker, c. 1897. During 1898 Rex Silver's work was also accepted for the Liberty exhibition although the Studio's books show that he submitted no designs for spoons (Moore 2017).

Fig. 1: List of spoons, as descriptions, from the May 1899 catalogue. Note the name of Tulus misinterpreted from Knox's handwriting for Julius!



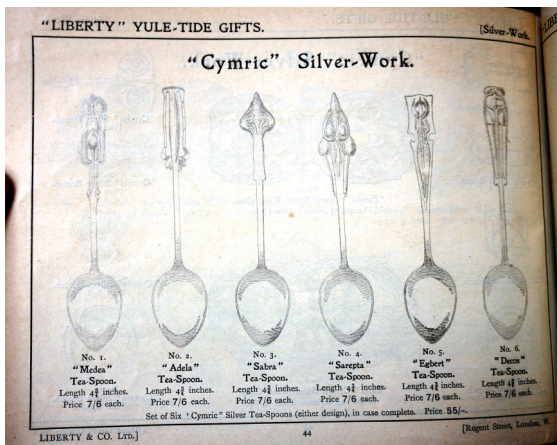


Fig. 2: The first 'sextet' of teaspoons printed in silver ink for the November 1899 catalogue.



Fig. 3: Five of the six spoons that appeared in 1899. Most of these have been beautifully enamelled and date from the 1902-1904 period. The distinctly oval bowls were attached to their handles with solder joints; the Decos spoon to the right was made in one piece with a wider bowl. Note how the upper seam/line of the bowl is not visible as with the other four.

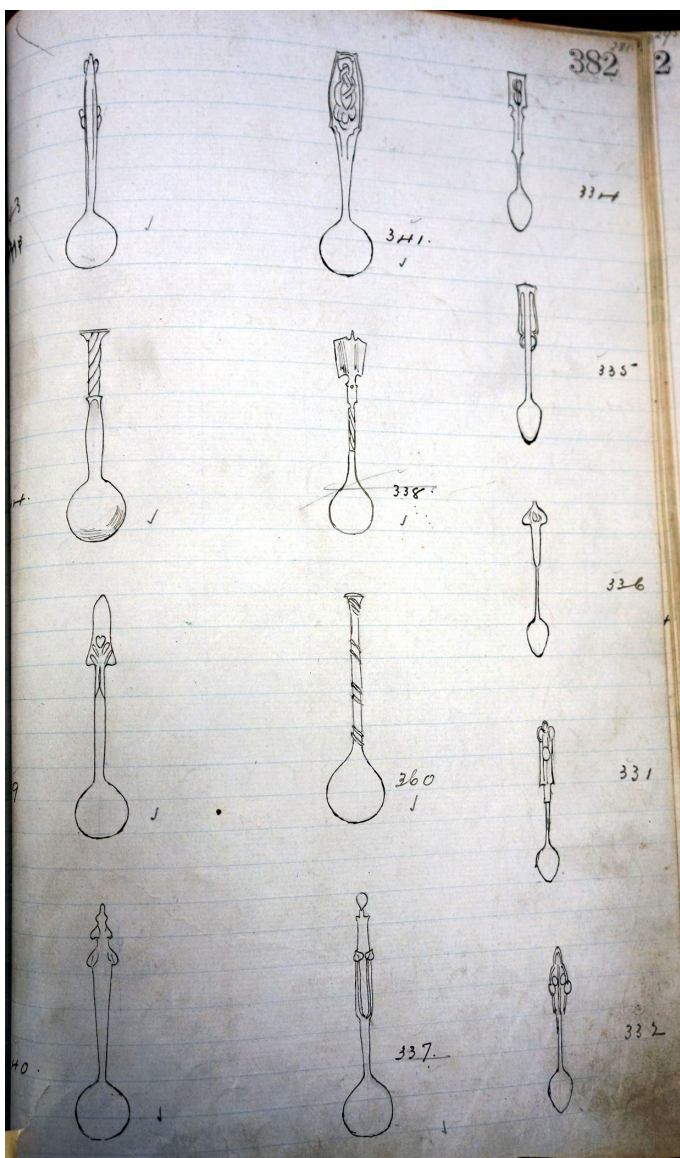


Fig. 4: Page 382 from Liberty's Silver Sketch Book showing the design numbering system that was stamped onto many spoons after the naming system was found to be confusing. This page shows Knox's designs for the larger spoons (to left and centre) and the tea-spoon sextet to the right, although the Decos design isn't listed at all. (Courtesy of Westminster City Archive and Liberty Retail Ltd.)

Fig. 5: (Right) the sixth from the 1899 sextet: an example of the scarce Adela teaspoon, 1902; note that this spoon's bowl is wider than the norm once again. Listed in the Sketch Book as 335, the London-hallmarked 1899 set of '1<sup>st</sup> edition' spoons (below) conforms to the more usual oval bowl pattern and the finial exactly as in the catalogue than the more Art Nouveau form of the 1902 spoon. (Private Collection).



Fig. 6: 'First edition' of the Medea teaspoon with open-sided finial and hall-marked for London 1899. Note that the bowl and handle appear to have been made (die-stamped?) as one, as have the Adela teaspoons.

The spoon and other silverwork items were initially given exotic-sounding names, largely originating from Classical times - *Cybell*, *Lydian*, *Hamor*, *Medea*. However the names were dropped the following year and a 'less-confusing' numbering system was adopted from the design numbers in Liberty's Silver Sketch Book.

Knox's large spoons were not listed as being for a specific purpose at this time, although they later became designated as fruit or serving spoons.

The Sketch Book is helpful in listing most of the spoon designs but is not entirely comprehensive. The numbers are not always sequential but tend to group the designers' accepted submissions together - helpful in starting to make loose attributions and seeing if these fit in with the designer's mind set.

During this 'melting pot' period, Liberty and his team were looking for a manufacturer for their products; much of their early silverware was produced and assayed in London, most likely from the jewellery and small silver makers in nearby Soho. However, none of these were permitted to strike the CYMRIC mark; this was reserved for the eventual sole producer of these wares. The sub-company Cymric Ltd contracted the firm of William Hair Haseler (pronounced *Hayzeler*) in Birmingham to produce the Liberty silverware with an advance of £20,000; Haseler's started production in 1899. One of their first silver spoon sets appeared during the same year, although this may have been in early 1900 (if before 1<sup>st</sup> of July). This comprised six stylish teaspoons with quatrefoil finials centred with a turquoise spherical bead, whose design may be attributed to Oliver Baker. The set (shown below) appears to have been produced in some haste as two of the finials have been attached the wrong way round!

From c. 1901 to c. 1905 the Haseler-made teaspoons were generally made in two parts, the oval bowls soldered onto the handles, whereas those from London were made (likely die-stamped) in one piece.



Fig. 7: Unusual set of six Haseler-produced teaspoons, with Birmingham Assay for 1899-1900. The two finials to the right have been attached back-to-front

## The large spoons

Fig. 8: From the Yuletide Gifts section of the Liberty Catalogue for November 1899, printed in silver ink. The cost of these spoons was quite prohibitive at the time, especially the Hamor spoon at 2 guineas (a bit heavier and equivalent to c. £250 in today's money) but many would have paid up, especially at Christmas time.

Fig. 9: Knox's designs for the Hamor and Julius spoons; his handwriting for the name Julius was misconstrued as Tulus in the May 1899 Liberty catalogue. [All of Knox's drawings shown are from the Silver Studio Archive: courtesy of MODA – Museum of Domestic Design and Architecture]

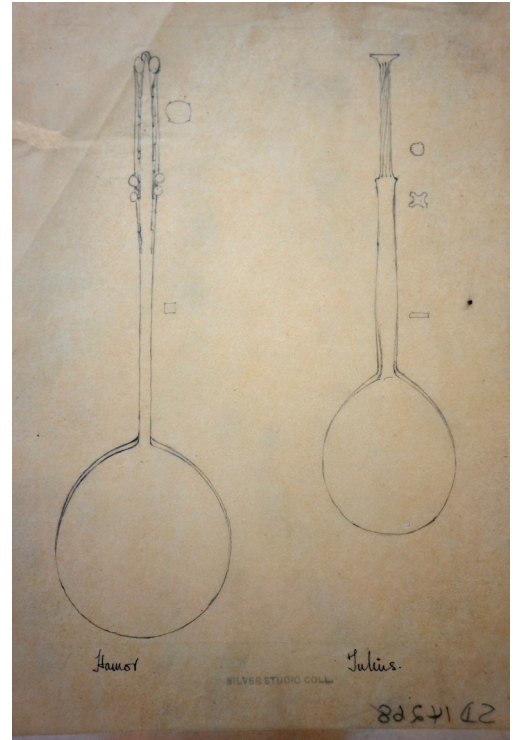


Fig. 10: Septet of the larger spoons (Julius is separate, below). (Left to Right): Labuan, Lydian, Hamor, Satis, Unnamed, Neeba and The Neb. The latter names relate to the Manx language and to local landmarks. Most of these are London made (1899). The enamelled Neeba in 1904.



Fig. 11: Pair of Julius tablespoons, 1902 and bearing the triple lozenge L&Co that was registered by Haseler's at the Birmingham Assay Office in 1899. Each bear the CYM-RIC mark on the stem.



The spoon shown third from right is a slight mystery as the drawing has not yet been found with the other spoon designs and is was not listed in the Liberty catalogue until 1900 by which time the naming system was obsolete. It was entered in the Liberty Silver Sketch book as number 360. The spoon (third from right) was London assayed in 1899-1900. Knox's more typical style is most noticeable in the Lydian spoon (second from left). The style of the other spoons and their exotic names were likely chosen to appeal to the well-educated and sophisticated clientele – Labuan a remote, former British colony in northern Borneo, Hamor a biblical character and so on. The 1900 catalogue appeared primarily, as a Trade catalogue, bigger than before and well-illustrated, occasionally using colour. A few of Oliver Baker's spoons (and other metalwork designs) were also shown in this catalogue.

The Neeba and Neb names were chosen by Knox for his Isle of Man roots but his nomenclature does not appear in the catalogues as Liberty's had decided not to use design names after 1899. The Neb and Neeba spoons show Knox's occasional design quirkiness. The Neeba with its folded over finial and two thorn-like points must have been modified, the upper part of the finial removed before production, as the spoon has not yet been found as shown in the design (above). As the enamelling of spoon finials became more popular (c. 1902), this spoon acquired a blue stripe along its central furrow. Conversely the Manx river Neb from which the other spoon was named, was designed with a more angular /geometric finial. The Neeba name is difficult to ascertain and may derive from Knox toying with the name of the Greeba hill on the Isle of Man. In my view The Neb should have the blue stripe and the angular Neeba like the craggy hill - maybe Knox just confused the two names?

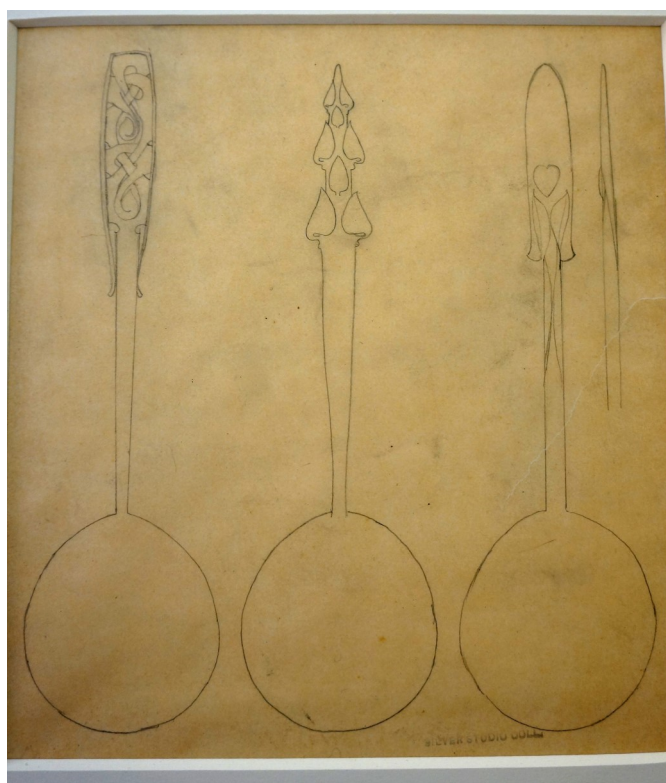


Fig. 12: Knox's designs for the Manx-named spoons. The Neeba with its quirky finial tip (not used); for later versions, the central furrow was enamelled blue and (right) The Neb an IOM river.

Fig. 13: Knox's designs for Lydian, Labuan and Satis (right) with its small love

## The elusive CYMRIC mark

Many collectors of Liberty spoons always try to find those that bear the Cymric mark. True they are scarcer on spoons as there wasn't much space on a spoon's stem (Moore, 2015) and they are only found on Haseler-made spoons with a Birmingham Assay. Even for the larger spoons they were gradually phased out after c. 1905. The design number was often stamped by the manufacturer, as well as the sponsor mark for Liberty's. However, the latter mark was occasionally substituted by the W.H.H. for Haseler's, as their contract seems to have permitted use of the Liberty designs for their own ends.

The Liberty sponsor marks varied over time. The London assayed version was at first L<sup>Y</sup> & C<sup>O</sup> in a rectangle, that appeared on the imported silver in 1892 and continued to be used until c.1900. The better-known L & Co in a triple lozenge was used in Birmingham from 1899 onwards. A quatrefoil mark of L C & C L<sup>D</sup> that appeared in 1903 was used only briefly at Birmingham until 1905 and thereafter at Glasgow c.1910-1913.

The next few years saw a flourish of Liberty spoons appear, often enamelled, and with the designs of Oliver Baker and Bernard Cuzner to the fore. Knox also designed further teaspoons and was commissioned by Liberty to produce a design for a spoon for King Edward VII's Coronation day. He did this but produced five designs, all accepted by Liberty's. These were recycled for George V's coronation but were slightly eclipsed

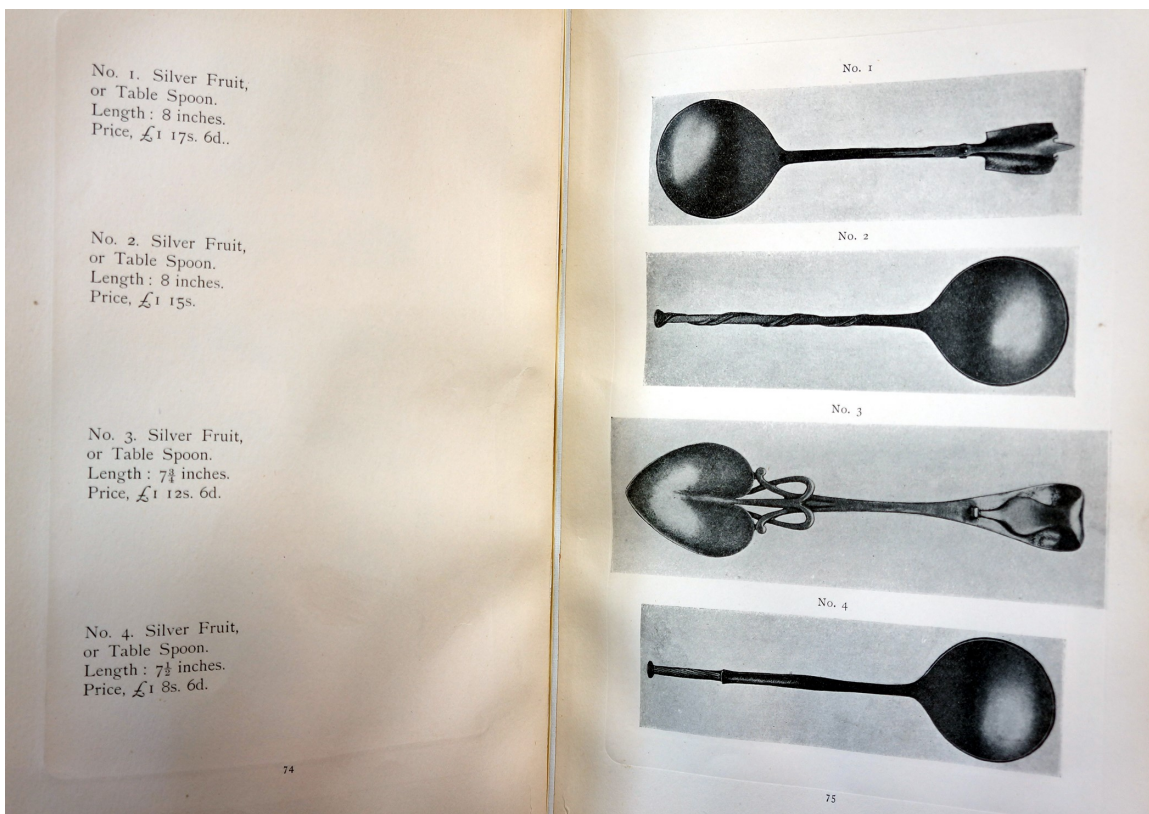


Fig. 14: Page spread from the 1900 catalogue showing The Neb (Knox's name), the unnamed pattern, one of Oliver Baker's complex spoons and Julius.

by two fresh designs, most likely from Bernard Cuzner. As with many successful designers Knox could not easily move on stylistically and his artistic popularity started to wane. The pre-war years saw the departure of Knox back to the Isle of Man and the coming of age for Harry Silver, younger brother of Rex. He produced a number of very acceptable spoon- and other flatware designs for Liberty's. The post 1910 years saw many of Knox's more popular designs reworked into other eating and tea accoutrements. The only spoon design from Knox to continue after the Great War was the Medea pattern for teaspoons, although larger bowled versions with side cut-outs for grapefruit were also produced at this time.

### Acknowledgements

To Museum of Domestic Design & Architecture, Middlesex University for use of the Knox drawings in the Silver Studio Archive.

To Westminster City Archive and Liberty Retail Ltd., for use of the Silver Sketch Book illustration.

To Yvonne Cresswell, Andrew Johnson and Laura McCoy of the Manx Museum & National Trust for guidance with Knox's Manx nomenclature.

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**Simon Moore** has written extensively about flatware and cutlery. His most famous book is *Cutlery for the Table, A History of British Table and Pocket Cutlery*, Th3 Hallamshire Press, 1999.

