

## Some flatware from the St Dunstan's Studios of Omar Ramsden and Alwyn Carr and including a remarkable set of figural spoons. Part 2.

By Simon Moore

**I**n the 20-year post-partnership period (1919-1939), Ramsden continued unabated and went on to great commercial success whereas Carr continued as an individual studio silversmith, using some of the studio's patterns /moulds and producing some of the older designs. Although his work is every bit as good as Ramsden's it is much scarcer. The back of one finished spoon shows a slightly rushed job, uncharacteristic for Carr, always so painstaking in detail (Fig. 6). I suspect that when he left the partnership, he took some of the semi-finished stock items as an agreed share, to produce under his sole name and without a team of workers he may have found it impractical to finish the cheaper/ less important items to the same standard as Ramsden's studio.

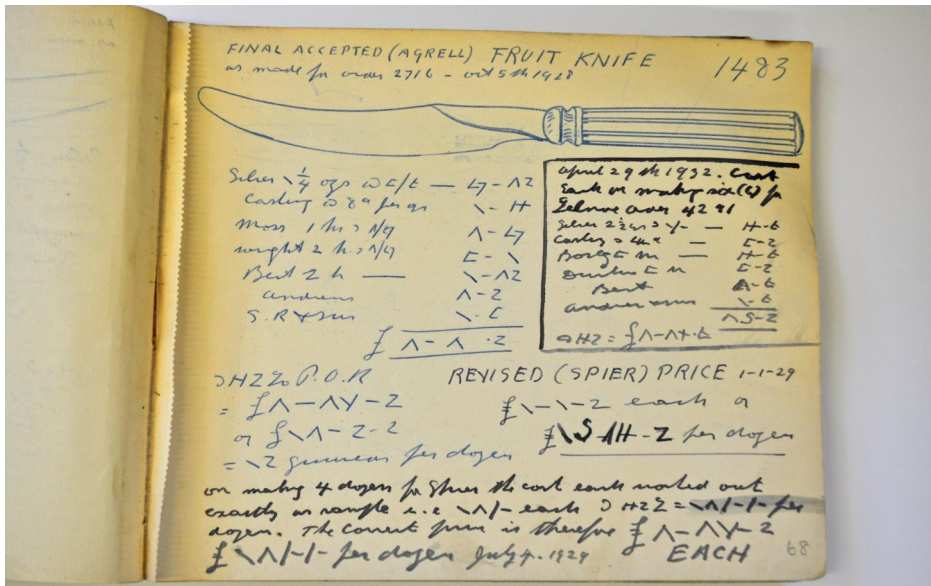
However, among his continuing silversmithing commissions, he did produce the occasional spoon of his own devising. The St Christopher spoon, assayed in 1922, is amazing and involves much of his silversmithing skills (Fig. 7). The bowl is typical of the partnership days with a pear-shaped bowl whereas the finial involves a veritable concatenation of square silver wire cunningly woven around and forming a complex framework for the *vesicapiscis* oval and central medallion. Along the base of the framework are letters almost woven into the design, maybe for the owner's initials CW or CFFW1 or a motto? The medallion shows the scene of the famous carrying of the Christ Child over the river and dramatically lit by beams of light emanating from Christ's halo and particularly the lantern with, perhaps the St Esprit in the base – maybe a nod to Carr's Catholicism. This spoon appears to be Carr's unique work, the design is not listed among the Ramsden archive.

Ramsden's work continued to diversify, and his range of flatware burgeoned into occasional dinner services of flatware using some of his simpler and more restrained designs such as Agrell. (Fig.8)



Fig. 6 Two almost identical Tudor Rose spoons, left by Carr 1923 and right by Ramsden 1925

Fig. 7 St. Christopher spoon by Carr, 1922. The overall design shows some influence from the partnership days, especially the shape of the bowl.



Some of the flat-handled spoons, designed during the partnership period were re-modelled by Ramsden as three-dimensional during the 1930s, more in the style of the spoons from the medieval and later period, with narrower stele-like handles adorned with patterning and with elliptical bowls. The later Rosemary pattern, poppy head and the tri-form handle of the Wheatear are three such examples.

Ramsden's business acumen, helped by his wife Annie (they married in the mid-twenties and his highly-skilled team of workers, all

Fig. 8 Page from St Dunstan's studio archive showing the design for the Agrell pattern for flatware (there are other pages for the spoon and fork) Image courtesy of Goldsmiths' Company London



Fig. 9



Fig. 10



Fig. 11

Figs. 9– 11 The poppy head spoon, 1930 on a Susie Cooper plate and (below) the redesigned Rosemary spoon (1935) and the Wheatear spoon (1931) in a contemporary soup dish



Fig. 12

helped the business to flourish. Throughout the studio's history with the Ramsdens at the helm, the quality of the quoted 'design in handicraft' never dropped off. Both Ramsden and Carr never strayed from the Arts & Crafts maxim that items should always be hand-made. After Ramsden died in 1939 and Carr followed the next year, Annie managed to keep the business afloat for a few years after, when presumably business fell off due



Fig. 13



Fig. 14

Figs. 13-14 The Ramsden logos for a cheaper cardboard version of the wooden box and the letter head for the studio.

to more serious consequences. One of Ramsden's leading students and workers,

Leslie Durbin, was given access to various patterns from the studio by Annie (Fig. 12). The legacy of the two men is well-reflected in the collectability of their excellent craftsmanship.

### Ramsden & Carr's figural Saint Spoons.

In these days of greater accuracy in academic fact, I still hear comments about sets of Apostle Spoons. Such

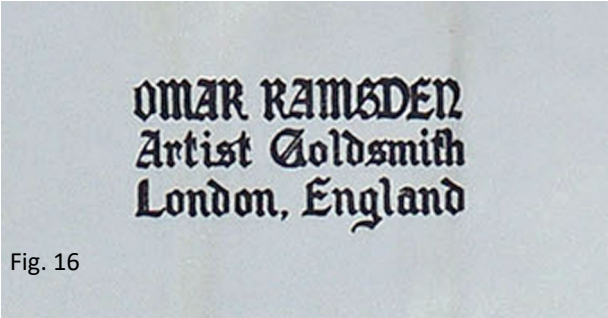


Fig. 15 Ramsden and Carr's joint workshop sponsor mark

comments usually stem from Granny's 'lovely' set of such spoons: alas, often referring to the die-stamped and mass-produced electroplate I used for eating boiled eggs as a child. Occasionally a set of well-made spoons is shown even if from the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. Antique sets of apostle spoons are scarce and some makers started producing other lesser-known saints, outside of The Twelve: the terminology gets a bit blurred, so

many play safe and refer to spoons bearing sacred figures, more simply as Saint Spoons. Terminology for other (sets of) figures as spoon knops is more accurate – the twelve Worthies, more usually known as the Tichborne Celebrities by William Cawdell of 1592 is a mixture of sacred figures, Jews, pagans, Christians and royalty.

The finest set of figural spoons to have emanated from the studio of Omar Ramsden & Alwyn Carr, depicts a



OMAR RAMSDEN  
Artist Goldsmith  
London, England

Fig. 16

Fig. 16 The cloth label with Ramsden's name printed alone. Shouldn't Carr's name be there too?

dozen pre-Norman invasion British saints largely from Northumbria, Mercia and Wessex, with a date range of assay from 1909 to 1915. The sponsor marks show the usual R<sup>N</sup> & C<sup>R</sup> but the box label printed inside the lid clearly shows Ramsden's name alone (Fig. 16). Maybe these were sold sometime after 1919 when the partnership ended? Maybe they agreed that Ramsden's name alone should appear on the box lids? I have searched for examples of box labels with both names printed on the liner but none have come to light as yet! Although Carr volunteered for war duty in October 1914 he wasn't sent on active duty until 1915 when the latest spoon was assayed. Carr also referred to these as 'saints of the early English church'. He also expressed a wish that his own set of early saint spoons might be chosen by the V&A museum, implying that he certainly played a major role in their production (Ashton, 2018).

Each spoon bowl has been cast and then finished by hammering with great skill to match exactly with each other, in 14<sup>th</sup> century styled ficulate (fig-shape) tradition with hexagonal steles and sharply-detailed finials that have also been cast from moulds, rather in the style of the aforementioned Tichborne set, although latterly, only the figures would have been cast. Ramsden would probably have regarded the hand-raising of the stems and bowls as taking up too much studio time.

The Ramsden & Carr set of finials range from a turbulent time in our history, figuring a range of slightly less well-known canonised personalities from the mid-7<sup>th</sup> century to 1066, culminating in King Edward the Confessor. Many of the bishops were promoted to Canterbury during their often-short lives. The earliest spoon figure is St Oswald, holding a cross and sword and each spoon has been engraved just below the finial; at the front is the name and description and on the back the dates of the character or date of death – St Oswald, King of Northumbria & Martyr (killed by the Mercians at Oswestry), AD 642.

St Aidan, (bishop of Lindisfarne, holding a cross at which



Fig. 17



Fig. 18



Fig. 19



Fig. 18 rear

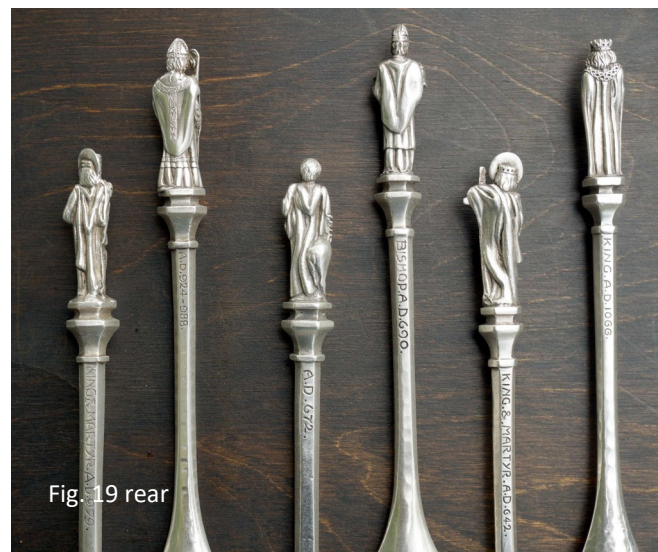


Fig. 19 rear

Fig. 17 The dozen set of magnificent saint spoons by Ramsden & Carr between 1909 and 1915. Carr would have been working at the studio during nearly all of that time.

Fig. 18 Closer details of the figures, in groups of six, obverse and reverse views showing their details and attributes with the inscriptions of their names and histories.

Fig. 19 Showing the second group of six, obverse and reverse sides.

he is pointing), 651,

St Chad (Northumbrian bishop) with a stag, 672,

St Boniface, (with a crozier and a sword piecing the gospels with which he tried to defend himself against Frisian bandits) 680,

St Cuthbert (also of Lindisfarne holding a sea bird and with two seals at his feet) 687,

St Benedict (holding the monasteries of Monkwearmouth and Jarrow which he founded) bishop 690,

The Venerable Bede / St Bede the Venerable (he was canonised by Pope Leo XIII in 1899), not preaching at a pulpit (as was originally supposed) as the quill pen indicates his writing the Ecclesiastical History of the English People) 673-735 (fig. 21),

St Edmund, King & Martyr (King of East Anglia and shot with arrows by Danish invaders) 841-870,

St Edward, King (of England) & Martyr - murdered at Corfe Castle aged 15 / 16 in 978 and eventually buried at Shaftesbury in 979,

St Dunstan holding a crozier and the goldsmiths' tongs with which he held Satan's nose; there is also a passing resemblance to Ramsden in the face! (Fig. 21), 924-988,

St Alphege, Martyr - a west country bishop, his attribute is an axe with which he was killed by the Danes, but represented here as a bishop with hands clasped in piety, 1012,

St Edward the Confessor, King (Last of the Anglo-Saxon kings) 1066.

Each spoon figure's details are sharp having sustained the slightest wear over time; they have likely been kept in their box since manufacture but would have been occasionally cleaned. Most of the Studio's flatware was made by casting the handle and bowl separately and then joining the bowl onto the stem, often with a rat-tail junction but in this instance left plain; however, a few bubble craters are still observable (Fig. 20). The hammered finish may be attributable to Leonard Moss, whose workmanship was so fine that Ramsden apparently criticised it for looking too good to have been handmade!

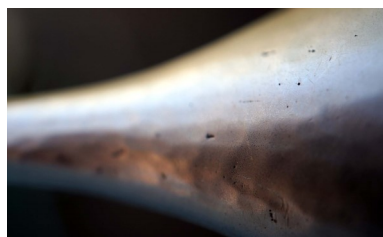


Fig. 20

The figure depicting Saint Dunstan is doubly interesting as he is the patron saint of all goldsmiths including the London Goldsmiths' Company. There are several legends about St Dunstan and how he bested Satan either involving a painful horse shoe on his cloven hoof or blighting / frosting some cider apple trees so that Dunstan's beer business would benefit! Dunstan holds a pair of pincers for holding hot metal and with which he is purported to have held Satan's nose when the latter visited him, maybe after alleged the tree-blighting. Legends aside, the spoon's figure is dressed in full Episcopalian robes with crozier, mitre and the all-famous tongs but his face bears more than a passing resemblance to Ramsden himself! Whether this is coincidence, part of his natural flamboyance, vanity even, is pure conjecture; maybe one of the Maxwell Road

Fig. 20 Attachment of each bowl to the stem, showing traces of bubble craters and the fineness of the hammered finish.



Fig. 21



Fig. 21 Details of two figures: Bede writing with a quill pen, St. Dunstan whose face bears a resemblance to Ramsden!

workshop's employees enjoying a joke.

Ramsden and Carr's Chelsea/Fulham house and showroom in Seymour Walk was named St Dunstan's and their actual workshop was in nearby Maxwell Road. Carr somewhat acrimoniously moved out in 1919, due to the installation of Ramsden's lady friend, Annie Downs Butcher, helping to run the business. Carr set up in west London near Leighton House, he named his later studio in like manner to show that he was Ramsden's equal as a craftsman.

The designs for these Saint spoons seem to have been extrapolated from St Dunstan as the lead figure

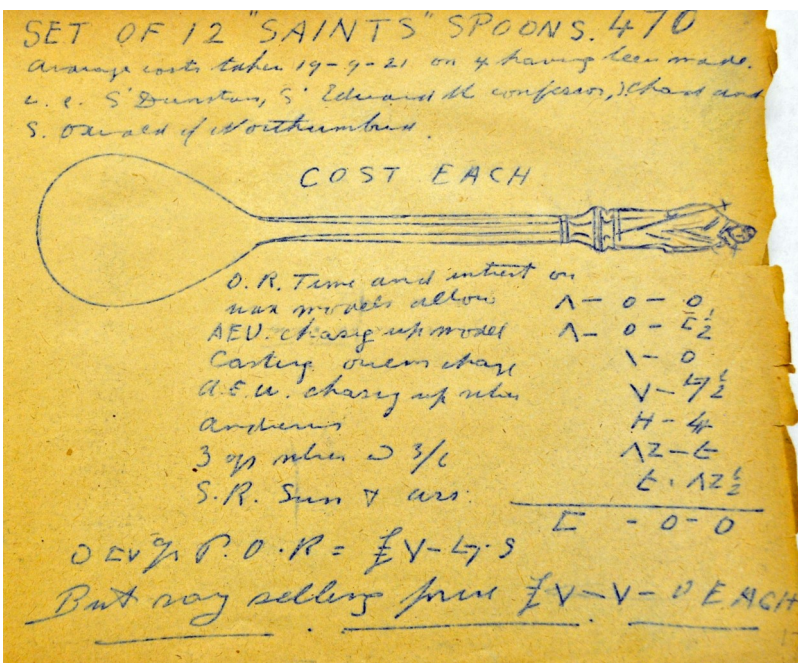


Fig. 22 Carbon copy from the studio day/work book showing the original Dunstan figure designed by Ramsden and Carr and holding the tongs and a long cross staff instead of the more usual crozier. The figure was made later (assayed 1920) and appears in the Birmingham Museum catalogue of 1973 (Section 2, no. 40). The costing of each spoon, using Ramsden's code, included all the processes (AEU [Ulyett] for chasing up model 5s 7 1/2 d) was £3 each with 3 ounces of silver at 3s 6d per troy ounce, with 35% Profit to O.R. = £ 5 7s 9d. But say selling for 5 guineas EACH.

Image courtesy of Goldsmiths' Company, London.

(perhaps like a Master spoon in an antique saint spoon set even though he is not the 13<sup>th</sup> figure). The day-book design shows a different figure with a long cross staff (as for John the Baptist) rather than the more usual crozier that the bishop figures hold.

How many of these amazing sets, or individual figural spoons, were made is yet unknown but they are another fine legacy of the design and manufacturing skills of Ramsden & Carr's joint craftsmanship.

### References

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### Acknowledgements

With many thanks to Helen Ashton for great help correcting biographical errors in the earlier drafts of this MS.

The Goldsmiths' Company, Foster Lane, London EC for permission to reproduce the St Dunstan daybook entries.

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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**, The Hallamshire Press, 1999