

Elusive Adela or the Liberty Teaspoon Sextet, complete at last!

By Simon Moore



Fig. 1 Adela hallmarks

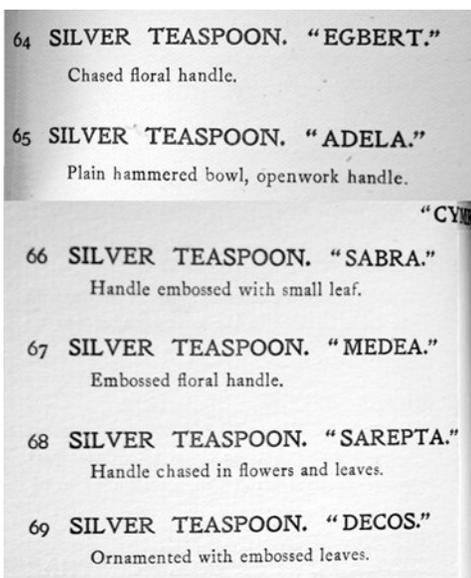


Fig. 2 Description of the spoon designs in the May 1899 catalogue.

I have been searching for a certain teaspoon for a long time and would appreciate how difficult it can be to search for that last elusive item to complete a set!

Some weeks ago, that wish came true and at last I have an example of the first six teaspoons that Liberty's named and offered for sale at their highly successful store exhibition in May, 1899. The catalogue produced in some haste so that illustrations of the spoons did not appear until November the same year.

Finding Liberty teaspoons from 1899 when the store was recruiting local silver firms, to complete a rather hurriedly-assembled display of their newly-designed *Cymric* silverwares, has always been difficult.

Each of the 'first edition' spoons was assayed in London and marked with the Liberty sponsor mark of L^Y&C^O (Fig. 1). These particular spoons were not enamelled just yet. Once the *Cymric* range of Liberty silverware had been safely established and the contract with William Hair Haseler's family firm in Birmingham finally signed (May, 1901), then the making, and sometimes enamelling for the more upmarket range, started during the ensuing years under the direction of William Rabone Haseler.

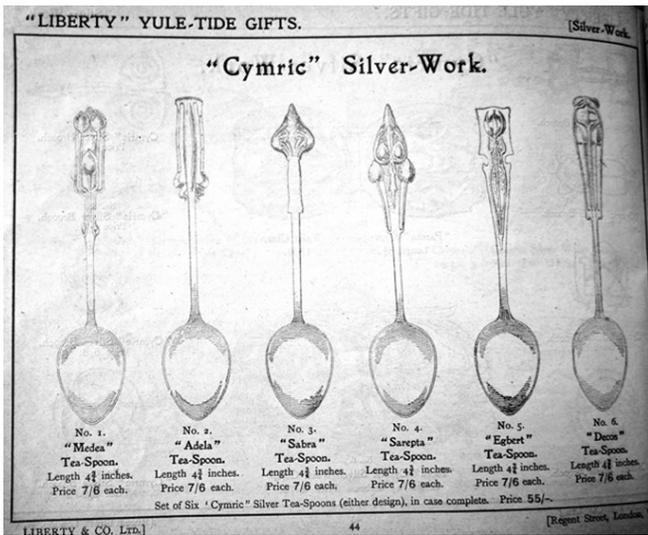


Fig 3 The sextet as illustrated in the November 1899 catalogue with the silver versions below.



Fig. 4 The silver version

The first edition spoons were all designed by Archibald Knox. They are often hard to find but being non-enamelled, can sometimes be cheaper! They were also made in one piece whereas the Haseler-made spoons' bowls were fashioned separately and then hard-soldered to the handles, until c. 1910 when they reverted to one piece again. My elusive spoon was named 'Adela' in the first two catalogues only and was presumably made in small numbers as it was rather fragile and likely more difficult to make than the remaining five other spoons. I had seen a version of it illustrated in one of the *Collecting for Tomorrow* series of books, by Michael Snodin and Gail Belden (1976) and from an Australian collector and all of these were non-enamelled. I was somewhat surprised when the same dealer offered me a boxed set of six with full polychrome enamelling! The format of these is slightly different to the first edition as the open areas of the finial required a silver backing to contain the *cloisonné* enamel. *Plique-à-jour* enamelling would have been infinitely more difficult to apply and highly vulnerable! The finials of the set (Fig. 6) have been skilfully enamelled with the four on the right showing the full colour spectrum with red at the top and violet at the bottom.

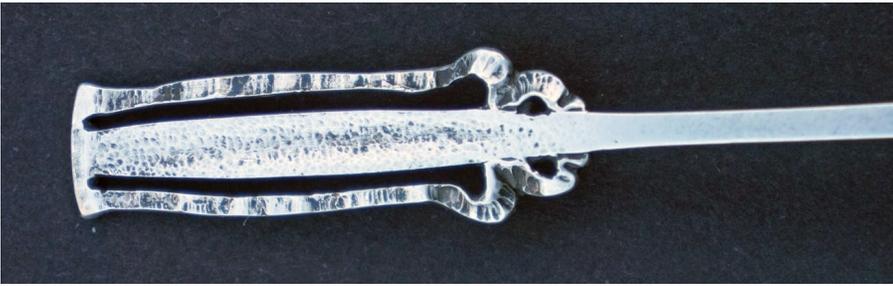


Fig. 5 The Adela finial up close showing the tiny hammer marks that adorned the finial of some 1899 spoons.



Fig. 6 The even scarcer enamelled half dozen Adela tea spoons! (L to R): green down to blue (1903), green to red (1904) next four (1902) polychromed red through violet! These were produced by Haseler's and assayed in Birmingham.



Fig. 7 & 8 Pair of enamelled (green and red) but London-made. Sabra teaspoons with L^y & C^o marks, 1902. The rather more worn non-enamelled finial to the right showing the enamel has preserved the detail of the finials.

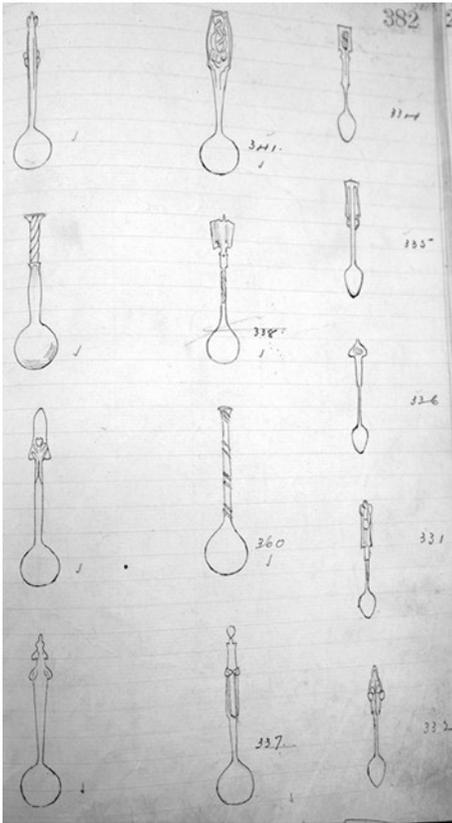


Fig. 9 Page 382 from the Liberty Silver Sketch Book, showing only five of the 'sextet' down the right-hand side of the page but the Decos design (right of Fig. 3) is absent. (Courtesy of Westminster Archive and Liberty Retail Ltd.)

Finally, I was offered (via eBay) a pair of 1902 enamelled 'Sabra' spoons (Figs. 6 & 7) and nothing remarkable about that, except that they have the London assay, with L^Y&C^O marks and hammer-marked finials under the enamel! I have given these a thorough examination and they appear to be 'right' – presumably one of the London makers decided to continue to produce a few spoons to sell via Liberty's.

References

Moore, S. The first spoons of Liberty's Cymric silverware. *The Finial*, **30** (3): 4-9, 2020.

Belden G. & Snodin, M. *Spoons*. Collecting for Tomorrow series. BPC Publishers Ltd. 1976.

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