Collection Significance Report:
Scottish Decorative Arts & Design: Metalwork

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About this Document

This document is extracted from a report by Glasgow Museums submitted to the Scottish Executive's Recognition Committee as part of its recognition scheme for non-national collections.

Overview

Metals have been utilised for centuries in Scotland. The specific properties of worked metals mean that objects can fulfil many functions, from useful vessels and containers for everyday use to objects which signify status or are imbued with symbolic meaning. Objects made from metals, especially the precious metals, were often leaders in contemporary fashion and design.

Collection Size

Brass (c210) Bronze (c25) Other (c52); Pewter: domestic, civic, ecclesiastical (109, excluding communion tokens); Silver: Scottish Burghs (137) Edinburgh (75) Colonial (18) Glasgow (79).

The Collection

This collection comprises a number of groups, focused mainly on the different materials from which the objects are made and their function. Objects in base metals, such as pewter and brass, include items from domestic, ecclesiastical, regimental and civic life. The extensive collection of objects in precious metals, mainly silver, which were made and marked in Scotland or by Scottish makers, ranges in date from the mid seventeenth century to the 21st. There are items from domestic, civic, ecclesiastical and regimental life. Glasgow-marked items form the most significant group. There is also a group of items by makers working in the British colonies.

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Collection Significance

This collection provides a rich insight into the many roles played by items made of metal in the history of Scotland. The base metal collections are of mainly local significance, though pieces of Glasgow-marked pewter have national significance. The silver from the Scottish Burghs and Edinburgh has national significance and Glasgow's collection complements the holdings of the National Museums of Scotland and other museums throughout Scotland. The Glasgow silver collection is of international importance as it is the major holding, along with the collections in the NMS, of Glasgow craftsmanship in precious metals.

The pewter, brass and other base metal collections, dating from the seventeenth to the twentieth centuries, fall into three categories: domestic life, including plates, jugs and tankards; civic life including a large group of weights and measures; ecclesiastical life including communion cups, jugs, plates and tokens (see also separate section on Communion Tokens). There is a good collection of pewter objects stamped by Glasgow makers, such as the two flagons of 1771 and c1781, both marked by Stephen Maxwell, and the tavern pot of 1805-21 marked by Robert Turner.

The large gift by Victor J. Cumming in 1946 forms the core of the silver collections. It includes a fine group of rare examples of work stamped by silversmiths from places such as Banff, Wick, Tain, Inverness, Dundee, Paisley, Perth and Aberdeen. Most of the items are smaller domestic wares such as cutlery, mainly spoons and ladles. There is a good group of Edinburgh marked pieces, including one of the 1645 Haddington communion cups by Patrick Borthwick, a peg tankard of 1663-80 by Edward Cleghorn, an ovoid urn of 1733-4 by James Ker (both Pollok House gift) and the large 1877 clock decorated with figures from Sir Walter Scott's novels. One group gifted by Cumming, including a teapot and several pairs of salts, was thought to be by makers in the Scottish Burghs. Research has shown that the pieces are all by silversmiths working in the late eighteenth or nineteenth century in India or the West Indies, for colonial expatriate clients. This group is unique in a Scottish museum.

The Cumming gift has been augmented by a series of purchases and a bequest from Lewis Lyons. The Glasgow silver dates from the later seventeenth to the early 21st century and includes domestic, ecclesiastical, civic, some regimental and presentation wares. The tumbler cup by Thomas Moncur of c1680 is the earliest known example of Glasgow domestic silver. The designs of some of the early pieces, such as the patch box of c1695 by William Clerk and the large 1704 quaich by James Luke, show continental influences. By the 1730s, the coffee, tea and chocolate pots, salvers and waiters, wine funnels, tea caddies, sugar bowls, cutlery and the like, are influenced by London fashions. The rococo tea kettle by James Glen of c1750 is of particular note. One item of importance is the neo-classical goblet by Adam Graham of about 1780, made from silver mined in Islay. The two presentation trophies by Robert Gray & Sons of 1819 and 1821 illustrate the links between the trade in Glasgow and London.

Of the late pieces, the art nouveau Edinburgh Gold Cup of 1902 by D.C.Rait is especially noteworthy. A bowl by Edward & Sons is important historically as the last item hallmarked in the Glasgow Assay Office before its 1964 closure. There is a presentation flower bowl by John Creed from 1974. Recent additions include prize-

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winning entries for the Young Designer Silversmith of the Year Award, a national competition run by the Worshipful Company of Goldsmiths of London and won five times by students from the Glasgow School of Art, Silversmithing and Jewellery Depatment. The objects include a 1998 coffee pot by Marion Kane and a 2006 fruit bowl by Karen Simpson.

There is a small and important group of Glasgow-made church plate, including a communion cup of 1699 from Cardross by John Luke, and two from the set of four 1756 cups from Lochwinnoch by James Glen.

Bibliography

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