

Origins of the Liberty Cymric Silver Range

by Anthony Bernbaum

Introduction

This article looks at the period 1898/9 and the birth of the Liberty Cymric silver range. It particularly focuses on the work not just of Knox but also of Oliver Baker, Rex Silver, Bernard Cuzner and David Veazey who are typically recognised as early contributors to the range.

The article draws two main conclusions. Firstly that Archibald Knox did contribute significantly to the early Cymric silverware. The article identifies examples of Knox early metalwork design style allowing new designs to be attributed to him, and in some cases possibly away from him. Secondly the article demonstrates that above all one other designer, notably Oliver Baker, played a key role in the launch of the Cymric range in 1899.

The article draws extensively on three primary sources. The Silver Studio archive is held at the Museum of Domestic Design and Architecture, Middlesex University, England (the archive is referred to throughout this article as "MODA"). The archive contains hundreds of early Cymric silver designs, which are unsigned and are therefore not readily identifiable to a designer, but many of which do have names, for example "The Magnus" clock. Secondly the first Liberty Cymric catalogue titled "Cymric silver-work" was published in May 1899. A copy is held at the National Art Library in London¹. This is not illustrated but each piece in the catalogue (around 80) is named and described and so a few items can be tied back to the designs at MODA. Finally the article draws on a slightly later Liberty Cymric catalogue from around 1900 which is illustrated, though pieces are not named.

The article also draws extensively on a number of secondary sources notably, my own article for the Silver Society Journal Volume 26, 2010 entitled "More Light on the Liberty Metal Work Venture" which focuses on the role of Oliver Baker, Mervyn Levy's book "Liberty Style 1898-1910", the catalogue for exhibition "Archibald Knox at the Silver Studio" by Zoe Hendon and of course Stephen Martin's book, "Archibald Knox".

Birth of the Cymric range

Haselers and Oliver Baker

There is a key article entitled "New Light on the Liberty Metal Work Venture" published by Shirley Bury in 1977 and reprinted most recently in Stephen A Martin's book titled "Archibald Knox". Shirley Bury was the metal work curator of the Victoria and Albert Museum who organised in 1975 a major centenary exhibition at the V&A of Liberty's wares from fashion to metalwork. She was frustrated by the difficulties in identifying the designers and origins of the Cymric range and was subsequently successful in interviewing the elderly Max Haseler who was the son of the late William Rathbone Haseler, who ran the family business W.H. Haseler in the late 19th, early 20th centuries. Max Haseler himself ran W.H. Haseler from around 1920 to 1939.

Max Haseler provided a handwritten seven page account of the Haseler firm and its relationship to Liberty at the time of the establishment of the Cymric silver range². The firm of Haseler was the principal manufacturer of the Cymric silver range, which in May 1901 cemented their Liberty relationship by forming a joint venture company with Liberty, solely for the purpose of manufacturing Liberty silver, and pewter, wares.

Max Haseler gave a clear account of his family recollections of the birth of the Cymric range. These are that his father William Rathbone (W.R.) Haseler, who much admired the pre-Raphaelite movement and the work of William Morris, in around 1897, approached his friend Oliver Baker³, a well known water colourist and antiquarian, together with a few other Birmingham artists, and sought to create a new distinctive innovative silver range. In Max Haseler's own words:

In about 1897 he [William Haseler] conceived the idea of making some jewellery and silverware from designs which were in complete contrast to the heavy and ugly Victorian style which was in vogue at the time. Most of the designs were the work of Mr Gaskin and his pupils and friend Oliver Baker. He [William Haseler] employed several ex pupils to make up the designs

Max Haseler goes on to explain that many silver items were produced in around 1898 but were too distinctive and modern for Haseler's customers. Indeed in Max Haseler's words:

...he [WR Haseler] built up quite a collection of these revolutionary designs but unfortunately he could not persuade any of his customers to buy any of it, in fact some of them laughed at it

Examples of such designs are shown in Figs 1a and 1b.

Max Haseler's account goes on to explain that Haseler then took them to London and, finally, found a buyer - that buyer being Liberty's which bought the entire range and gained exclusive rights to sell this range of artistic silver "within a five mile radius of Charing Cross, London". The date of this is uncertain, but probably in the first half of 1899. William Haseler negotiated with Liberty to be the exclusive retailer of the range. John Llewellyn, Managing Director of Liberty at the time and a Welshman, gave the silver its Cymric name.

Max Haseler's account is validated by a near contemporaneous article on Oliver Baker in the journal "The Artist", Volume 32, published in 1901.

The [Liberty silver] work was originally undertaken at the request of Messrs Haseler, an enterprising local [Birmingham] firm of jewellers and silversmiths, who were dissatisfied with the inartistic groove into which most of the modern jewellery and silverware had fallen, and were anxious to produce something of higher interest. With this end in view they applied to Oliver Baker, as a personal friend, for assistance. The artist at once consented to see what he could do in an entirely new direction...

The 1899 Arts and Crafts Society Exhibition took place just five months after the launch of the Cymric range and the Catalogue (which is not illustrated) shows that Baker produced nine of the eleven Liberty silver items displayed. Archibald Knox is not listed in the catalogue at all, either linked to Liberty or otherwise. The other two designers listed are Bernard Cuzner (see below) and A.H. Jones who briefly formed a partnership with Cuzner in around 1902.



Fig 1a. Silver candlesticks. Marked for William Hair Haseler (WHH), Birmingham 1898. Almost certainly pre-dating the Liberty Cymric launch and part of what Max Haseler described in his account. Awkward but radical in their design.



Fig 1b.

Saturday 28 (148-217) Oxford Trinity Term begins.
Worked all day on candle
sticks & the large copper
& silver fruit bowl.

Fig 1c.

Silver Studio and Rex Silver

On this basis it would seem appropriate to assert Haseler and Baker as the primary driving force in the establishment of the Cymric range, but there is strong evidence supporting a competing theory. This is that Liberty, in conjunction with Rex Silver and the Silver Studio, originated the range.

The Silver Studio was a leading design company supplying Liberty at the time across a range of wares, principally fabric and wallpapers (the name "Silver" refers to the founder, not the metal). It was based in London, Hammersmith and founded by Arthur Silver in 1880. After his death in 1896 it was run by two senior employees, Harry Napper and JP Houghton, until 1900 when Rex Silver, Arthur's son, came of age and took over the business.

The MODA archive contains a sales' register for 1898 giving details of designs sold and to whom. Together these show that as early as October 1898 (the date of the sale register entry for the silver work for Libertys) the Silver Studio was designing silver for what would presumably become the Cymric range. Some of the sketches at MODA can be attributed to Archibald Knox but many, especially those that can be identified to the earliest Cymric catalogue of May 1899, do not have Knox's characteristic design features. Since there is no evidence that Oliver Baker designed for the Silver Studio the presumption historically is that at least one other designer was at work - and this is traditionally assumed to be Rex Silver⁴.

This paper casts doubt not just on Rex Silver's contribution but also supports the view that Knox, whilst at the Silver Studio, designed many of the early Cymric pieces, even those lacking his characteristic design style.

Oliver Baker

So just who was Oliver Baker? He was born in 1856, a fourth son, into a middle class Birmingham artistic family. Baker's father was Samuel Henry Baker who was a renowned water colourist and RA. Of the four brothers, two died at a relatively young age, leaving Oliver and his brother, Harry. It was Harry who married Willam Haseler's sister, bringing Oliver Baker into the Haseler family.

Oliver Baker himself studied art under his father and at the Birmingham School of Art. He was elected a full member of the Royal Birmingham Society of Artists (1884) and Royal Cambrian Academy (1908). He was an antiquarian and ran a gallery in Stratford upon Avon for much of his life. His art work was exhibited from 1875 at the Royal Academy, Royal Society of British Artists, New Watercolour Society, New Gallery and elsewhere though he was never an especially commercially successful artist. He took up etching in 1880 and worked mainly in watercolour (from 1887).

Baker died, aged 84, in 1939 and on his death was accorded a sizeable obituary in the Times newspaper. The obituary makes no mention of Baker's metalwork designs or work for Liberty but emphasises the point that Baker was at heart an antiquarian with deep knowledge of medieval and historic artefacts.

The Work of Oliver Baker

Baker's silver work was published in a number of contemporary Journals of the period, notably the Studio and the Artist. Additionally a sketch book and his diaries from this period are held in the family archive at Stratford⁵. From this we can be pretty confident of his design styles.

His work tends to be inspired by antiquities from medieval England or South America. He liked to use stones in his work, more often than enamel. His work has an authentic arts and crafts look, often mixing silver and copper and using scrolled metal feet. The gauge of silver

used is heavier than most of the other Liberty pieces. This probably reflects his personal interest and proximity to the manufacture (his diary references him visiting the Haseler factory). Also, by designing directly for Haseler Baker probably escaped the harsher commercialism that Liberty itself could bring to bear on its commissioned designers (including Knox) working for the Silver Studios. A number of Baker's works are set out below.



Fig 2. Large Cymric footed bowl with stones. Liberty, Birmingham 1900. The shape of the body of this vase or bowl forms the basis of a number of Baker's Cymric designs. Illustrated in the 1900 Liberty catalogue page 27.



Fig 3. Large silver enamel bowl. Marked Birmingham 1900. Illustrated in Liberty 1900 catalogue page 35.

I estimate that approximately one fifth of all the silver items in the 1900 Cymric catalogue were designed by Oliver Baker. His contribution to the May 1899 Cymric catalogue is less clear. Items described in that catalogue seem not to have his trade mark use of stones or copper. That said, some items, for which sketches can be linked at MODA, appear very much to be by Baker though he had no known links with the Silver Studio.

Rex Silver

Rex or Reginald Silver was born in 1879 and died in 1965. He was the son of Arthur Silver who established the Silver Studios which became one of the leading commercial design studios of the latter 19th and early 20th centuries. This includes providing Liberty with many of its fabric and metal work designs.

Rex was working at the Silver Studios from the age of around 17, at which time he became a member of the Junior Art Workers guild, and at the age of just 21, in around 1901, Rex Silver took over the running of the Silver Studios together with his brother Harry. Rex managed the Silver Studios until its closure in 1963. There is a wealth of evidence to show that Rex, especially prior to 1914, played an active role in the designs of the Silver Studios, annotating sketches with detailed comments. What is less clear is what he himself designed and what was his own particular design style.

Taking these factors together it is extremely difficult to identify what Cymric silver designs are Rex Silver's. At the end of his life, Silver at the age of 84, at the request of Shirley Bury, annotated a catalogue similar to the 1900 Liberty catalogue (but slightly later), marking his designs with a pencil tick. Unfortunately Silver marked as his own a number of known Oliver Baker designs and several that are manifestly Archibald Knox, so this affords little insight⁶.

Shown in Figs 4 and 5 are images of two pieces from both the May 1899 and 1900 Cymric catalogues that epitomise the difficulties of attribution; neither reflecting Knox's classic style or any other designers.

Held within the MODA archive is the art work for an 1899 Christmas card that appears to be for the Silver Studio's own use (Fig 6). It is monogrammed "R.S." allowing a strong attribution to Rex Silver. The style of this is high art nouveau, with intricate flowing organic patterns as was classically associated with the Silver Studio and its Liberty fabric and wallpaper designs at this time. On that basis it is tempting to assume another designer altogether was involved in the austere silver work in Figs 4 and 5, alternatively shown in Fig 7 is a design

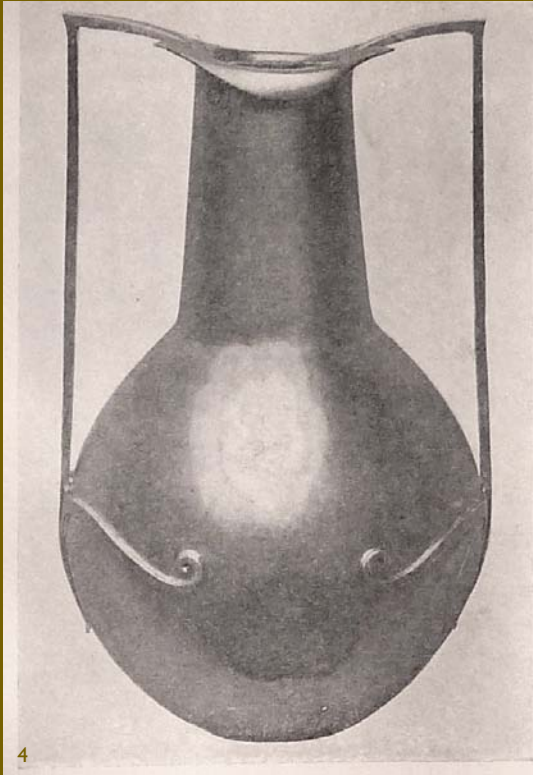


Fig 4. The Ceres. Two handled vase. Number 9 in May 1899 catalogue and Page 55, 1900 Catalogue⁷.

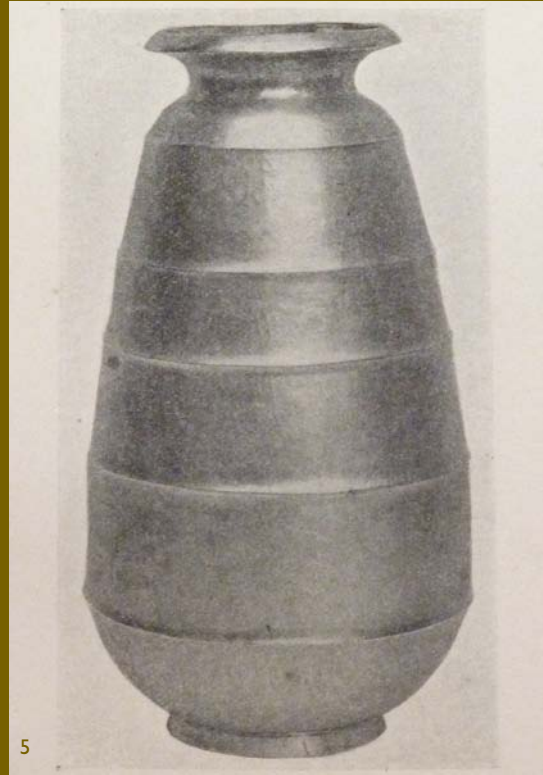


Fig 5. The Sepa vase. Number 15 in the May 1899 Catalogue and Page 53, 1900 Catalogue. Design based on a roman pottery vase.



Fig 6. Rex Silver designed Christmas card, 1899. Museum of Domestic Design & Architecture, Middlesex University.

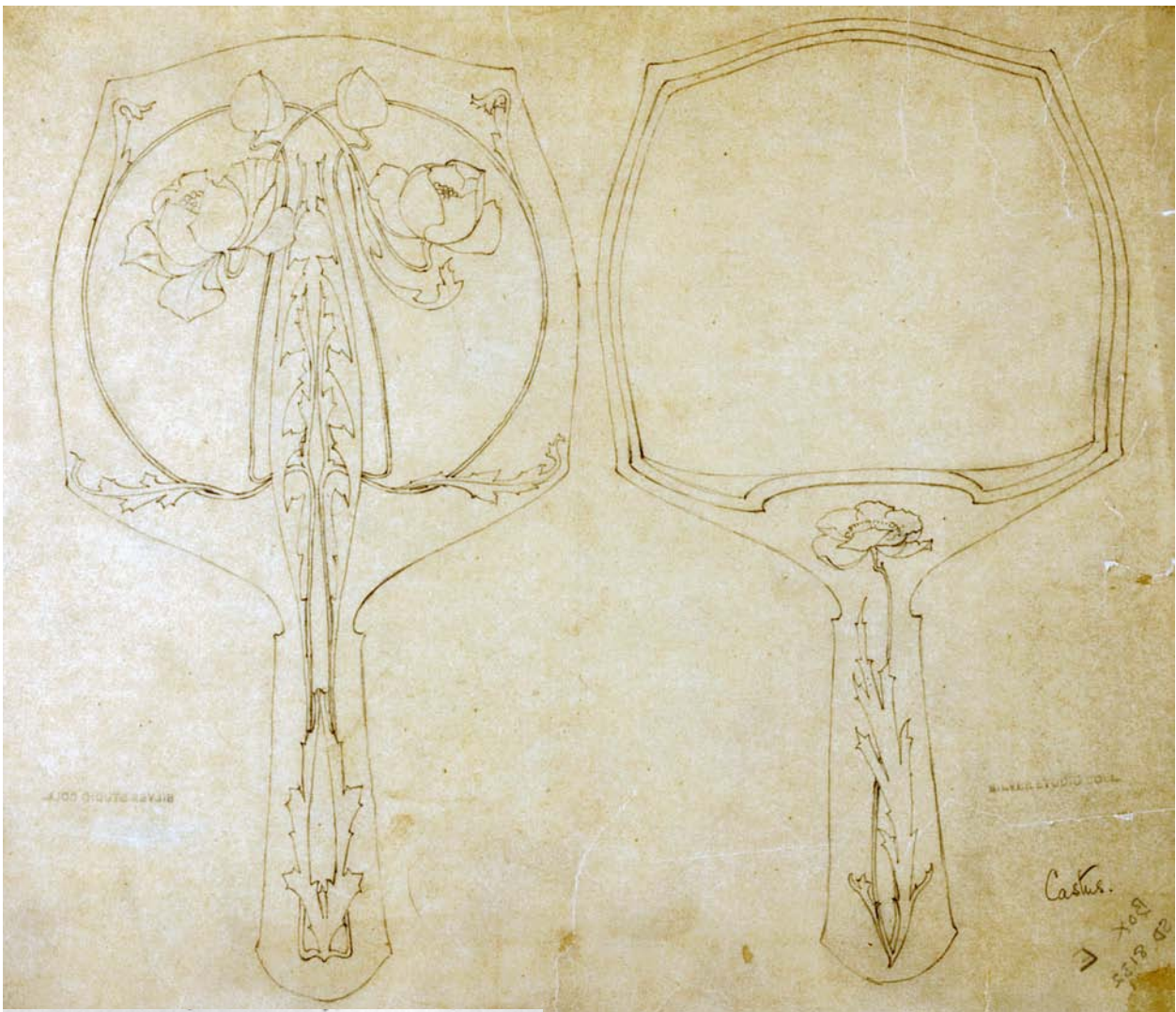


Fig 7. Castus mirror and brush set design, Number 75 in May 1899 Catalogue. Museum of Domestic Design & Architecture, Middlesex University.



Fig 8. Bookplate design by Harry Napper, Studio Illustrated Journal, March 1894.

held at MODA for a mirror and brush set "Castus", number 75 in the May Cymric catalogue only. There seem to have been a number of designs like this in the first Cymric May catalogue which were never then repeated in subsequent catalogues⁸. This design is much more in keeping with the Silver Studios general design approach, captured in Rex Silver's Christmas card drawing, and may therefore better represent the (modest) contribution of Rex Silver to the Cymric range.

This is an area requiring further research as in fact the design motif on the mirror is very close to the style of Harry Napper (see article by Liam O'Neill in this Journal). This is illustrated by Fig 8 which is an 1894 design, unequivocally by Napper. The stem and flower designs, whilst classic motifs of the period, are very similar to the design pattern on the Castus mirror⁹.

Bernard Cuzner

Bernard Cuzner was a young silversmith and contemporary of Baker. Cuzner was apprenticed to his watchmaker father on leaving school but he abandoned this after two years to work for both William Haseler and Horton & Allday silversmiths in Birmingham from 1899-1901. Simultaneously he attended evening classes at the recently opened Vittoria Street School for jewellers and silversmiths. Oliver Baker's 1899 diary records Cuzner assisting him with the manufacture (not design) of Baker's own work.

Cuzner began designing for Liberty's in about 1900 and various Liberty designs are attributed to him. In 1902 he set up his own workshop and registered his B.C mark in 1902 with the Birmingham assay office. He used this mark throughout his career but his own silver is rare. In 1910 he was appointed head of the Metalwork Department at the Birmingham School of Art in Margaret Street, a position he held until retirement in 1942. He continued to design for Liberty into the inter war period.

Cuzner's design style varied throughout his lifetime. His earliest work includes one known Liberty piece exhibited in the 1899 Arts and Crafts Society Exhibition alongside Oliver Baker's work. Unfortunately the appearance of this piece is unknown. His jewellery is illustrated in a variety of journals around 1900 and variously used ships and motifs common in the arts and crafts work of the period by the likes of the Gaskins and Dawsons.

His earliest illustrated pieces for Liberty seem to be to a design to that shown in Fig 9. A similar version to this bowl is in the V&A and bowls to this design appear in a number of size variants. The earliest date found for this bowl is 1901 and it does not appear in either the May 1899 or Liberty 1900 catalogues.



Fig 9. Rose bowl set with opals. Liberty, Birmingham 1904.

Overall it seems Cuzner did a limited number of Liberty designs at this time with the bulk of his work for Liberty occurring later, including during the inter war period for which most Liberty pieces seems to be in his style. Typically this later work can be identified by the use of fine engraving of flower and geometric patterns derived from 17th Century English silver. An example of this work is shown in Fig 10.



Fig 10. Plate or butter dish. Liberty, Birmingham 1911. The engraved design, consisting of small geometric patterns and stylised flowers is classic, later Cuzner.

Fig 10a shows the engraving pattern in detail.

David Veazey

There is very little biographical information on David Veazey. A review of the National Census sees him living in London and in both 1901 and 1911's census returns he describes himself as a professional metalwork designer.

Veazey's work can largely be identified from his contributions to the Studio under his chosen artist name "Soldier", and then from around 1900, "Tramp". He regularly entered and won, or was awarded a medal prize, in the Studio's quarterly competitions and as such his illustrations were published. Several of these were bought by Liberty and can be linked to Liberty designs in silver and pewter.

His earliest metalwork design (for a metal name plate) is in the July 1897 Studio (Volume 11, Issue 52) and this, together with other illustrated pieces up to 1899 show an eclectic style. In March 1900 he won first prize for a silver cup which exhibited two design themes which then seem to have consistently formed part of nearly all his work. These were the use of "annual honesty" or "money plant" seed pods and the classic arts and crafts "tree of life" design. Based off these precedents it seems Veazey contributed no pieces to the 1900 Liberty catalogue, and similarly therefore almost certainly none to the May 1899 catalogue also.

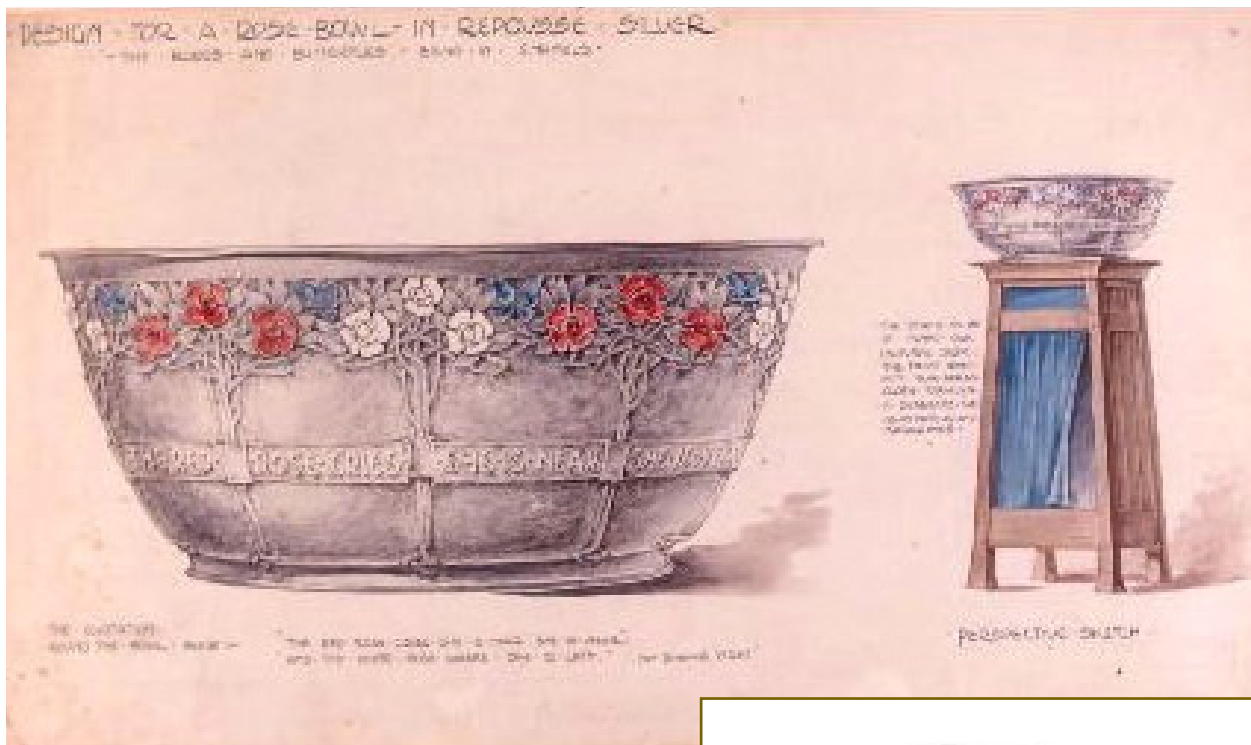


Fig 11. David Veazey water colour submitted as "Tramp" to a Studio magazine competition published March 1901 (Volume 22, Issue 96). The bowl shows his characteristic design style and was adapted by Liberty to form a footed bowl without enamel commonly seen in the pewter Tudric range.



Fig 12. A pewter Tudric loving cup exemplifying Veazey's tree of life and honesty leaf motif designs.

Other early designers

There are three other identified designers to the early Cymric range, about whom very little is known. Firstly Katherine Claude Coggin appears to have been an amateur designer who, like Veazey, regularly entered successfully the Studio competitions and whose work was then acquired by Liberty. Her chosen artist name for the Studio was "Elgitha" from the Ivanhoe novel. She won her first metalwork prize for a fire screen in September 1897 (Studio volume 11, Issue 54) and second prize for a design for a silver cup in December 1897 (Volume 12, Issue 57). Her style was typically art nouveau and one of her pieces is shown in Fig 13. This won first prize in design for a silver cup in September 1898 (Studio Volume 14, Issue 66) and is illustrated on page 19 of the Liberty 1900 Catalogue. From this work perhaps one or two other items can be attributed to her in the 1900 Cymric catalogue but no more.



Fig 13. Silver cup by Katherine Coggin. Liberty, Birmingham 1899.

Alfred Henry Jones (AH Jones) is listed in the Arts and Crafts Society Exhibition of 1899 as having designed one piece for Liberty. AH Jones seems to have been a fellow Birmingham student of Bernard Cuzner and together they briefly formed a partnership in 1901. His silver design style and contribution

is not known although images of his jewellery has been published and is similar in style to Cuzner's.

C.C. Carter is listed as winning the Studio competition for a silver cup in which Katherine Coggin came second in December 1897. Liberty's bought this design which appears in the Liberty 1900

catalogue on page 25. The original is now held at the Birmingham assay office (Fig 14). In fact it seems C.C Carter was erroneously spelt by the studio and that the designer was Christopher G Carter, an architect¹⁰. No other Cymric pieces by Carter are identifiable.



Fig 14. C.G Carter silver cup. Page 25, 1900 Cymric catalogue.

Finally it is worth finally mentioning Jessie King who made a significant contribution to Liberty's Cymric silver and jewellery in particular. Her work for Liberty was, however, later than the designers listed above and seems mainly to have been around 1904-1910¹¹. Her style is readily recognisable and consistent with her illustrations of the period, typically comprising delicately grouped and trailing flower heads (Fig 15).



Fig 15. Jessie King silver enamel buckle. Liberty, Birmingham 1905.

Knox's early work

So what are the early Knox designs and how do we distinguish them from Rex Silver's or other unattributed work. From around 1900 this question is easily answered as Knox's designs become uniquely sophisticated, of both modern form and with classic Knox surface repousse decoration. Works dated with Birmingham date letter "a" must have been marked between July 1900 and July 1901 (date marks did not run for calendar years) and an example of Knox's work with date letter "a" is shown in Fig 16; unmistakable Knox, designing to a very high standard. Other exceptional works from the year 1900 can be seen in Stephen Martin's book¹².



Fig 16 Liberty Cymric biscuit box, Birmingham 1900

But what of the designs prior to this that formed pieces for the May 1899 Catalogue and the illustrated 1900 Catalogue. You can see hallmarks on several pieces in the 1900 Catalogue which are dated London "d" meaning they were made (and therefore designed) before May 1899, up to May 1900¹³. Really very few of the pieces in this 1900 catalogue manifest Knox's classic modern design qualities or Celtic influence patterns.

Identification is aided in that several pieces illustrated in the 1900 Catalogue can be linked back to named designs held at MODA, which in turn can then be traced to the named items

in the May 1899 Cymric catalogue. Taking the May 1899 Catalogue as a starting point; this has some 80 items listed of which seven can clearly be associated with Celtic or Isle of Man themes¹⁴.

Two of these pieces appearing in both the early May and 1900 Cymric catalogues are shown below in Figs 15 and 16. What can be seen is that these exhibit a strong flavour of Knox and, in my view, can be confidently attributed to him.

The "Runic" (Fig 17) is number 41 in the May Catalogue and listed as a silver waist clasp. Its Runic name clearly links to the Isle of Man with its Rune stones and Norse influence. The design has all the attributes of an early Knox design.



Fig 17. "Runic" silver clasp, Liberty London 1900. Number 41 in May 1899 Cymric catalogue.

The Iona bowl is shown below in Fig 18. The shape is not as well conceived as Knox's work just one year later but the unusual "flying saucer" form to the bowl is probably indicative of Knox's early work, with the embossed entrelac confirming this as a Knox piece.



Fig 18. The Iona bowl, number 60 Cymric May 1899 Catalogue, Page 37 Liberty 1900 Catalogue.

Turning to the 1900 Cymric Catalogue, below in Fig 19 we have the "Fergus" (13th century Isle of Man king). This is not in the May catalogue but is at MODA and in the 1900 catalogue. The embossed pattern is indicative of Knox as are the designs of the two other bowls shown from the same catalogue page. These also appear at MODA named Somerled and Solken. Somerled is the twelfth century warlord of Norse/Gaelic origin who conquered much of Scotland including the Isle of Man.¹⁵



Fig 19 The Fergus, Somerled and Solken, Liberty 1900 Catalogue, page 61, number 1.

Additionally, the clock in Fig 20 is found at the MODA archives and titled Olaf. It is also in the Liberty 1900 catalogue on page 57. Olaf was the 13th century King of the Isle of Man. On first inspection it would seem an implausible Knox piece. However, the base is identical to that of the Knox biscuit box in Fig 16, the architectural vertical applied silver strips have kinks on the ends similar to those pieces in figs 17 and 24, and the flat top, and overall shape of the body, is similar to Knox's famous Magnus clock. Just as Knox may have taken inspiration from Charles Rennie Macintosh for the Magnus clock perhaps he similarly drew inspiration for this clock from Voysey.



Fig 20. The Olaf Liberty Cymric clock. Birmingham 1903. Illustrated with white dial in 1900 Cymric catalogue page 57.

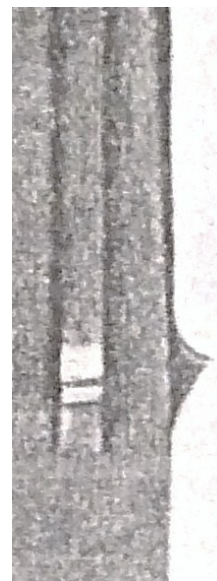


Fig 20a Detail of kink on the applied vertical silver strips taken from the image in the 1900 catalogue.

To emphasise this further the Olaf clock above is sketched on the same sheet at MODA as the Sigurd clock (Fig 21). Sigurd is a legendary figure of Norse mythology. This rare clock is clearly by Knox. If one visualises the design without its pattern but retaining the vertical stems that seem to form pillars; it transforms to the clock shown in pewter in Fig 22. This Liberty clock design is well known and often thought not to be by Knox. It can now be established that it is, at the very least, based on a Knox design.

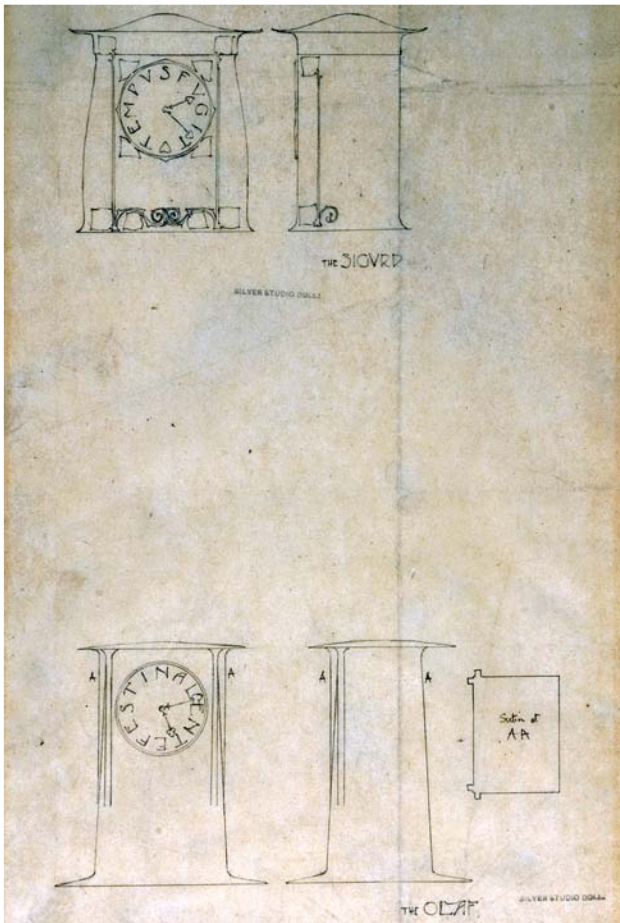


Fig 21. Drawing of the Sigurd (upper) and Olaf clocks (lower). Museum of Domestic Design & Architecture, Middlesex University.



Fig 22. A pewter Tudric (model 0761) clock derived from the Sigurd design.

What may be observed is Knox coming to terms with designing three dimensionally and in metal, not for fabric or wallpaper. Furthermore, I believe there is evidence that Knox pieces were embellished with un-Knox like additions, obscuring a clear attribution to him. The frame below in Fig 23 provides some insight into this since someone has written on the design "Not used thus altered". The frame is titled Arrosey. Arrosey is a fictional Isle of Man captain from an 1897 novel by John Quine¹⁶. A more obscure Isle of Man reference would be harder to find and given that Knox was a very close friend of Quine we can confidently attribute the original design to Knox.

Finally, the design sketches in MODA appear more distinctive than many of the manufactured items. It may be we are also witnessing the manufacturer of these early pieces, possibly Haseler¹⁷, coming to terms

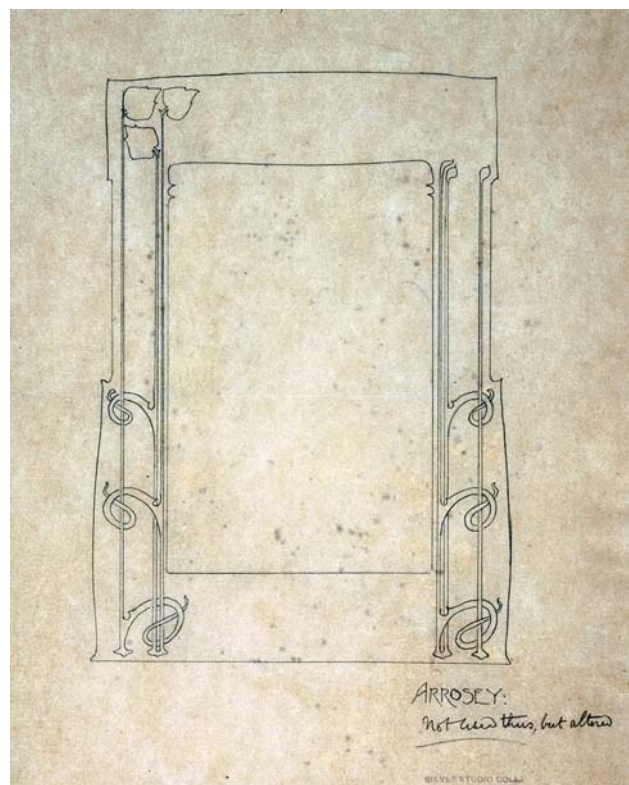


Fig 23. Drawing of silver frame, "The Arrosey". Museum of Domestic Design & Architecture, Middlesex University.

with interpreting and manufacturing Knox's unique, radical, style. By example it appears that the manufacturer struggled at this time to properly capture Knox's distinctive elbowed curves or to properly represent the seamless flowing lines with which Knox drew feet or handle attachments.

This is partly exemplified in Fig 24 below. The intricate design at MODA, clearly by Knox, translates into something altogether softer and less distinctive once manufactured.

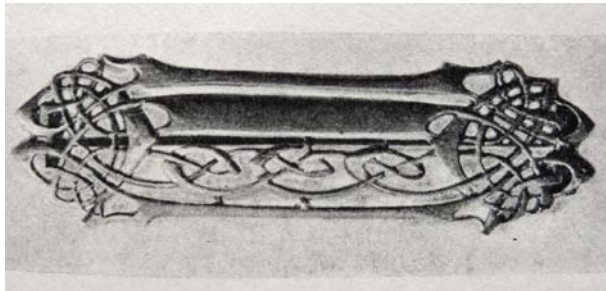


Fig 24 (above) and 24a (right), Image of brooch and brooch design held at MODA. Museum of Domestic Design & Architecture, Middlesex University. Image of brooch is from Liberty 1900 Cymric catalogue page 109.

Who then do we attribute as designer for the other early Cymric works (besides those clearly by Oliver Baker) which have names drawn typically from English history, ancient Greece, or middle eastern towns; or for whom we only have images and no names in the 1900 catalogue.

It is possible many of these may be by Knox too. Firstly we have pieces named by virtue of their design. For example we have the Floris clasp, a highly stylised leaf design that seems characteristic of Knox but is presumably named after its design pattern (Fig 25, lower image). The Floris clasp is number 35 in the May 1899 Catalogue and illustrated on page 95 of the 1900 Cymric catalogue. In addition there are pieces that exhibit Knox like design features that have names unrelated to Celtic or Manx themes. In the May 1899 catalogue we have a silver waist clasp, number 34, "the Cedric" (Fig 25, upper image). Cedric is the sixth century, first Saxon king of Wessex, so not a specifically Celtic or Manx name but the piece very much appears as a Knox design and in the May 1899 catalogue is described as having:

"....lower part decorated with interlaced ornaments, suggestive of the Runich epoch"

Taking this one step further is an example in Fig 26 which illustrates the "Ostia", a bowl that is listed as number 1. in the May 1899 Cymric catalogue and is illustrated in the 1900 catalogue

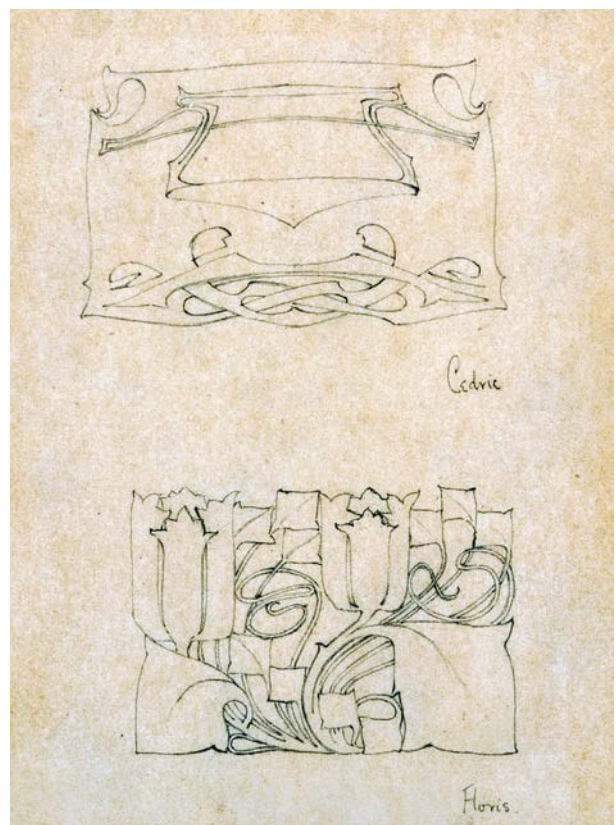
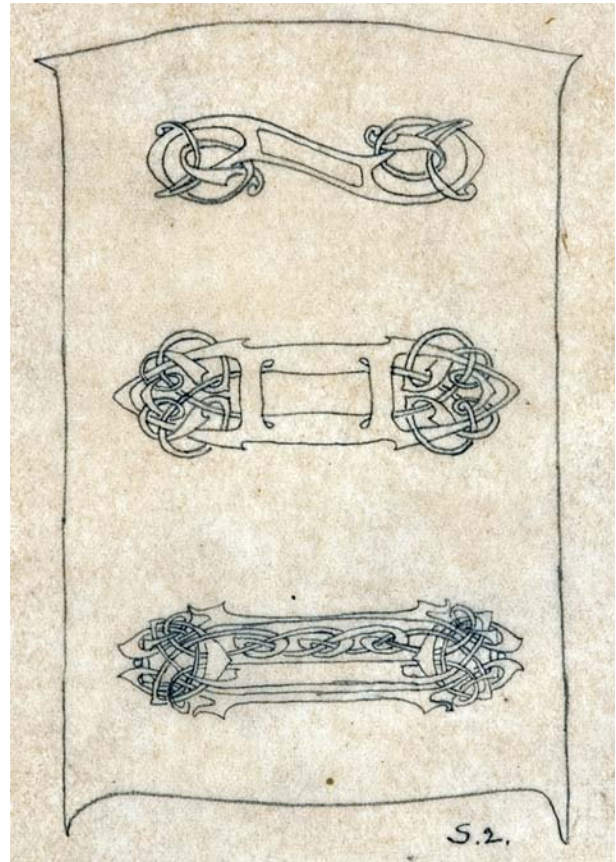


Fig 25. Drawing of the Cedric and Floris waist clasps. Museum of Domestic Design & Architecture, Middlesex University.

on page 63. The design is quite sophisticated, the handles forming distinctive linear "ski" feet to the bowl. The stylized pattern on the bowl's rim has strong similarities to Knox's designs. This piece could well be an early formative Knox design even though the catalogue name Ostia has no links to the Isle of Man; Ostia being a harbour city in ancient Rome.



Fig 26 "Ostia" silver footed bowl. Number 1 in May 1899 Cymric catalogue. Illustrated page 63 in the 1900 Cymric catalogue.

Through my research I have identified thirty two images at MODA that can be linked to silver items in the first May 1899 Catalogue. Of these I believe at least eight can clearly be attributed to Knox (for example the Runic and Ionia above) with some of the rest quite probably by Knox too.

This still leaves approximately fifty named pieces for which we have no designs or illustration and all bar one (the Cuthbert¹⁸ powder bowl) seem to have names unrelated to Celtic or Isle of Man themes so they may, or may not, be by Knox.

Similarly for the (illustrated) Liberty 1900 catalogue (including jewellery items) I believe twenty seven can be confidently identified to Oliver Baker, fifty to Knox, with approximately sixty unattributed, of which Figs 4 and 5 above represent good examples.

These other unattributed pieces, as best can be identified, tend to be interpretations of ancient artefacts and, assuming these are not by Oliver Baker, they may be Rex Silver's work or another designer altogether. Perhaps surprisingly, I would include the Cyrus vase (Fig 27) as such a piece. This is commonly attributed to Knox but it is based on a Merovingian¹⁹ sixth century glass vessel excavated at Kent and, at the time, held in the British Museum. It is named Cyrus after the mythological Persian King of Media²⁰. The strap work handles on the vase and the inspiration for the piece very much suggest Oliver Baker as the designer but given this design is in the Silver Studios perhaps it is the work of another designer altogether.

This piece epitomises the difficulties in identifying the designers of this early work and further research is required in this area.



Fig 27 "Cyrus" silver vase, Liberty, London 1899. Number 16 in May 1899 Cymric catalogue. Illustrated page 49 of 1900 Cymric catalogue.

Conclusion

It seems there are two paths that led to the establishment of the Cymric range in 1899, both traceable to 1898. One path was initiated in Birmingham by William Haseler and Oliver Baker, the other in London by Liberty itself and the Silver Studios. Quite which came first is unclear but both contributed significantly to the Cymric range over the course of 1899. Oliver Baker's work is readily distinguishable in this range, but the work of other designers far less so. The distinctive styles of David Veazey, Bernard Cuzner and Jessie King suggests the bulk or all of their work came later, post 1900, leaving the attribution of these early designs to Rex Silver; a formative Archibald Knox, or other less well known designers. My own view is now that many of these early works are by Knox even though they may lack his characteristic design features; and that very few, if any, are designed by Rex Silver.

Archibald Knox remains the pre-eminent designer for Liberty's Cymric (and Tudric) ranges, his work after 1900 having a modernity, style and beauty that distinguish it from nearly all the other Liberty silver work. This article nevertheless seeks to demonstrate that there may be earlier more formative works by Knox, designed in 1898/99, illustrating his development as a designer and that there remain a number of other designs which cannot be attributed. This remains an area for further research, to which I hope this article represents a useful contribution.

Acknowledgments

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Origins of the Liberty Cymric Silver Range

NOTES

1. V&A, National Art Library, Exhibition of "Cymric" Silver-Work Ref Lib(57)89. Throughout this article it is referenced as the Liberty or Cymric May 1899 Catalogue.
2. V&A, National Art Library, Ref 86KK, Box III (XXIX).
3. Oliver Baker's brother, Harry, was married to William Haseler's sister.
4. See Shirley Bury, *New Light on the Liberty Metalwork Venture* (reprinted in "Archibald Knox" by Stephen Martin).
5. The Shakespeare Birthplace Trust includes the Shakespeare Centre Library and Archive and contains the local archives for Stratford which in turn contain the Baker family archives, Reference DR142. The diaries are catalogued under DR142/53-54.
6. See article by Mark Turner in Stephen Martin's book *Archibald Knox* p 49.
7. This has features similar to an Oliver Baker piece. Equally the drawing at MODA of this piece is slightly different to that above and has early Knox like features too - see later section on Knox.
8. See the Idwal ash tray, number 33 in the May Cymric catalogue or Orior mirror, number 76 in the May catalogue for which the designs are also held at MODA.
9. Napper principally designed fabrics and wall paper. He is also known to have designed furniture. Whilst he is not known to have designed metalwork it is quite plausible the Silver Studio would use his design motifs on their new silver range. As with the metalwork designs at MODA it is hard to link individual designers to fabric, wallpaper and other designs so this monogrammed book plate design published in the March 1894 Studio allows a useful direct attribution. The design might also be attributed to Knox though the flower heads are not his typical style.
10. The address of C.C Carter in the Studio of 51 Aynhoe Road, Brook Green was inhabited by C.G Carter aged 51 at this time.
11. The date of Jessie King's contribution to the Cymric range is based on identifying items hallmarked at auction and references to her work in the Studio (see Studio Yearbook of Decorative Art 1909).
12. See pages 179, 187, 193, 201, 243 of Stephen Martin's book "Archibald Knox" (second edition) for examples of Knox's modern characteristic design style dated Birmingham 1900 (July 1900-July 1901).
13. Birmingham and London date years were different at this time.
14. In the May Cymric catalogue we have the Runic and Iona (figs 17 and 18), a mirror Orior, (ancient Gaelic name for region of Ireland, a buckle, Parma (first ancient Celtic city), a brooch Blowden (Celtic name), and a powder box, the Cuthbert (Celtic saint). There is also a salt cellar "Athol" (spelt with a single l), the name of the street of Knox's family home. Other early named designs held at MODA but which are not in the May catalogue (some are in the later 1900 illustrated catalogue) and have not been included in this article are provided at the end of this paper. At this early period of the Cymric range there is no association (for example in the introductions of either the May 1899 or 1900 Cymric catalogues) with Celtic or Isle of Man history or design so a name associated with Manx themes are almost certainly an indication of Knox's personal contribution.
15. The drawings for Solken held at MODA show top and end views which show the piece to be a large tray and with clear Knox design features. The Somerled design at MODA shows it to have a classic Isle of Man triskelion symbol embossed in the base of the bowl. The origins of the name Solken have not been established.
16. *Captain of the Parish* by Rev John Quine was published in 1897 the year Archibald Knox is believed to have started work at the Silver Studios. Arrossey is an Isle of Man farmstead.¹⁷
17. There is a view that these early pieces were made by a manufacturer other than William Hair Haseler. My paper for the Silver Society Journal covers this in more detail but casts doubt on this view.
18. Cuthbert is a Celtic saint.
19. Merovingian was a Germanic Frankish dynasty that established rule over what we now know, broadly, as France. See page 472 "Modern Art of Metalwork", published by the Brohan Museum.
20. St Cyrus is also a place in Scotland; adding to the difficulties of attribution.

Museum of Domestic Design & Architecture, Middlesex University references to all images shown or mentioned in this article and held at the MODA archive are as follows:

Fig 4 Ceres SD 8151

Fig 5 Sepa SD 8333

Fig 6 Christmas card SE 487

Fig 7 Castus SD 8132 (used), SD 8177 and SD 8149 (similar sketch, not named)

Fig 17 Runic SD 8330

Fig 18 Iona SD 2077

Fig 19 Fergus SD 8324, Somerled 8126, Soken SD8139

Fig 21 Olaf and Sigurd SD 2065

Fig 23 Arrosey SD 25743 used and SD8323

Fig 24a Brooch SD 2078

Fig 25 Cedric and Floris waist clasp SD 2062

Fig 26 Ostia SD 8148

Fig 27 Cyrus SD 2071

Not illustrated but referenced in this article or with Manx names and in MODA:

Orior mirror SD8153 (Ancient gaelic name for part of Ireland)

Arrahgon photo frame SD8755. Includes note "not used thus but altered"

Idwal pin tray SD8329

Parma buckle SD2068 (ancient city first established by Celts)

Blowden brooch SD8163 (Celtic name)

Keristal Bowl, jug, tongs SD14204 and SD8178 (Isle of Man beach)

Sumark bag mount SD 8349 (Hillfort, Isle of Man)

Godred bowl SD2108 (King of Isle of Man, c.1175)

Thousla candlesticks SD8327 (Rock off Isle of Man). Includes note "not used thus but simplified"

Magnus clock SD2081 (Scottish King, who conquered Isle of Man)

Niarbyl candlestick SD8154 (Isle of Man coastal site)

Rhennie photograph frame SD2063 (Hamlet on Isle of Man)

Rhaa photograph frame SD2072 (colloquial Manx term for fort)

Phingola brooch SD2066 (wife of Godred, Isle of Man King c.1175)

About the author

Anthony Bernbaum works in financial services and has a long standing interest in British Arts and Crafts design, focussing particularly on the silver of that period. He is especially fascinated by the origins of modern design and modern silver design specifically. He first discovered Archibald Knox when, inadvertently, he acquired a pair of base metal replica Knox cufflinks at Liberty & Co when he was eighteen. Researching silver and writing about it has become his hobby. He has a BA in Economics from Cambridge University.