



**ARTIFICERS' GUILD'S ARCHIVE**

The tea caddy (left) was bought at a small Leicestershire auction. It had an estimate of £40-£60 which, sadly, had no bearing on the final hammer price. Unmarked, it had the classic wire work and shell design associated with John Paul Cooper, or the Artificers' Guild in London.

The Artificers' Guild was established in 1901 by Nelson Dawson. Unacknowledged for much of the 20th century, the guild is now recognised as an important producer of high-quality metalwork and jewellery in its own right. Its work is characterised by the use of multiple materials – other than silver – including stones, enamels and wood or ivory. At its peak, it employed more than 40, including a large number of skilled craftsmen, many of whom would have been trained in the guild's workshop.

Cooper, who trained as an architect, also focused on metalwork, which he taught in the early 1900s at the Birmingham School of Art. From around 1910 he worked on his own, producing fantastic jewellery and silver. He is perhaps best known for his shagreen (ray skin) covered boxes. But was the caddy by the guild, or Cooper?

A lengthy trawl through hundreds of the Artificers' Guild's extensive archive of original drawings and watercolours (held at the library of Goldsmith's Hall in London) threw up no results. Inconclusive as this was, it afforded the possibility Cooper was

the maker. Fortune went on to play a part. Having purchased the item, the vendor approached me in the auction room and, with his help, it seems we may have tracked down a family connection to Cooper, who came from the area.



# Arts school



*Noted for their beauty and craftsmanship, many arts and crafts pieces can be traced to a specific designer, presenting a myriad of opportunities for provenance-seeking collectors. Anthony Bernbaum reveals the best tools*

**T**he arts and crafts period has been thriving for many decades – collectors drawn to both the aesthetic of the pieces and the social context in which they were made. Enticingly for collectors, authentic arts and crafts pieces are, by definition, handmade and can frequently be attributed to a studio, or even worker. For dealers and collectors, it is this search for provenance that adds extra pleasure to their acquisition and selling. Bringing to life the story of the maker or designer is itself highly rewarding. But what tools are available to the would-be researcher?

**Top** The mixed metal caddy looks likely to be the work of John Paul Cooper

**Above** The inscription reveals the maker

**Right** The tea caddy is by the Keswick School of Industrial Art (KSIA)





## MARKS AND INSCRIPTIONS

The silver tea caddy, or casket, (left) is a well-known early design by the Keswick School of Industrial Art (KSIA), although generally made of copper or silver plate. KSIA was founded, in the true arts and crafts tradition, by Canon Hardwicke Rawnsley, who wanted to do something to educate and ameliorate the poverty of the local Cumbrians.

Hallmarks identified the maker and date of 1891, making it one of the earliest pieces of Keswick silver and, in turn, one of the earliest arts and crafts pieces of silver.

The caddy revealed a faintly scratched inscription to the interior: "Made by Rob't Temple, 1891". Robert Temple was one of the KSIA's most regarded and important silversmiths, and his family still lives in the Keswick area to this day. A signed piece of silver of any period by a named worker (as opposed to an assay mark of maker) is extraordinarily rare. That said, with Keswick worker's copper pieces, look out for a scratched signature on the base.

## CATALOGUES AND BOOKS

The large silver gilt and enamel box (above) was made by the renowned Swedish architect Ferdinand Boberg (1860-1946), who was the Swedish version of the British arts and crafts designer Charles Ashbee.

Both trained as architects, Boberg leading the Swedish modern movement from c. 1900-1914, which enjoyed the patronage of the Swedish royal family among others. For decades he was, like Ashbee, somewhat forgotten, but today recognised as one of Sweden's most important designers of the 20th century.

Boberg designed a few pieces in silver, most made by the leading Swedish silversmith C G Hallberg, who made this box. One of Boberg's most celebrated commissions was to design the Swedish Craft and Design Fair in Stockholm in 1909 – the country's response to international fairs in Turin, Budapest and St Petersburg. As well as designing the fair's buildings, Boberg and his wife Anna, created a main room which was reported in *The Studio* volume 47, August 1909.

Hours of studying published material on Boberg, using a magnifying glass, revealed the box in a photograph on a console table in the exhibition room Boberg and his wife had designed. Provenance assured. Other publications can also aid the researcher and photographs of pieces can be found closer to home in arts magazines of the day such as *The Studio*.

**'An extensive archive of the Artificers' Guild's original drawings and watercolours is held at the library of Goldsmith's Hall in London'**



**Above right** The large silver gilt box is by one of Sweden's best architect designers

**Right** The box on show at the Swedish exhibition in 1909

**Below right** The sundial pointer is marked AK and dated 1905



## MUSEUM QUALITY

Metalwork by Archibald Knox is relatively common, having been commercially produced in pewter and silver for Liberty & Co. from c. 1899-1907. In most cases, Knox was the designer and had no role in the actual manufacture.



But this bronze polished sundial pointer is from an altogether different stable. By 1905, Knox had returned to his birthplace of the Isle of Man, where he formed the Sunnyside Workshops with his friend James Wilson Ashburner and foundry man Joseph Cannell. It was a small guild, and a true arts and crafts venture, inspired by Charles Ashbee's lead, to produce local metalwork. The initials JWA and JC are cast on the side of the dial.

To my knowledge only one other item is known from this endeavour, an identical sundial to this that now sits in the Manx Museum, Douglas, and was made for a local farm house. To my amazement, this polished version appeared in an internet auction where I was lucky enough to buy it.





**NATIONAL ART LIBRARY**

I acquired the piece (above) privately as part of a larger collection. The cast and applied frieze of leaves were immediately recognisable as the Artificers' Guild. But who was/were the "Minns Howie" inscribed makers' names to the base?

With the near certainty that Minns / Howie must have worked for the guild, a few hours in the National Art Library at the V&A, came up trumps. Research revealed that Horace Minns was a completely forgotten but, in his day, highly-regarded arts and crafts metalworker. He worked for the famous Bromsgrove Guild as well as the Artificers' Guild, producing his own work, seemingly using Artificers' Guild designs. His studio on Willow Road in Hampstead can still be seen to this day, albeit now residential. For much of his life he lived on Oakwood Road in an "artisan's cottage" within Hampstead Garden Suburb, itself a famous arts and crafts venture. On the other hand, "Howie" remains hidden, a complete mystery. A similar bowl has since appeared at Bonhams at auction.

**'Nelson Dawson and his wife Edith were early innovators in metalwork and enamel'**

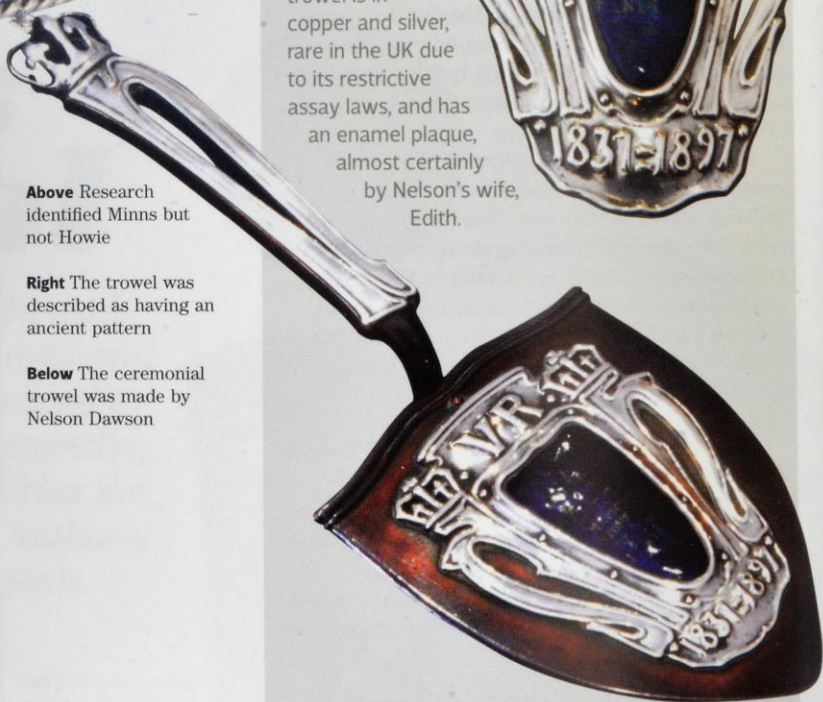
**CEREMONIAL TROWELS**

I have a weakness for ceremonial trowels, traditionally used at foundation stone ceremonies for new buildings. The arts and craft metalworkers, many of whom were invariably short of funds, used commissions for trowels for some of their most exciting work. This, in combination with a ready provenance typically inscribed on the trowel's spade, make them collecting nirvana in my view.

This trowel came to me privately when I helped identify the maker as Nelson Dawson, from his unusual maple leaf and "D" monogram engraved to the back. Nelson and his wife Edith were early innovators in metalwork and enamel. Some of the earliest arts and crafts metalwork from around

1896 is made by them and can be seen in the V&A. But their output was small and they produced very little metalwork after 1914. The trowel is in copper and silver, rare in the UK due to its restrictive assay laws, and has an enamel plaque, almost certainly

by Nelson's wife, Edith.



**Above** Research identified Minns but not Howie

**Right** The trowel was described as having an ancient pattern

**Below** The ceremonial trowel was made by Nelson Dawson

*Anthony Bernbaum is founder and director of The Peartree Collection, which specialises in arts and crafts and art nouveau silver and jewellery. He will be exhibiting at this month's BADA Fair from March 20-26 where all of these pieces will be on sale. More details can be found at his website [www.thepeartreecollection.com](http://www.thepeartreecollection.com)*