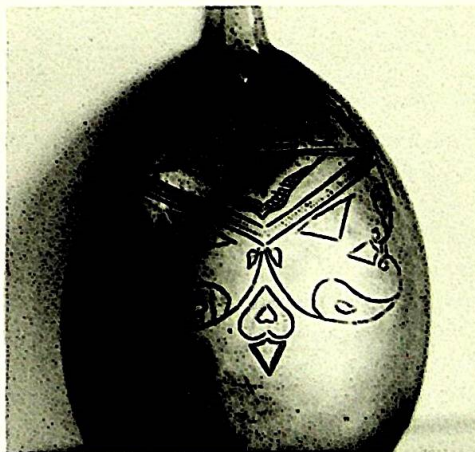


Decorative Features of 17th Century English Provincial Silver Spoons

BY TIM KENT

Many Provincial silver spoons of the period 1600–1700 have survived. In regions such as Wessex and East Anglia prosperous involvement in wool, agriculture, and maritime trading proved sufficient to provide support for the goldsmith's trade. In many country towns one or more men were working and providing a modest range of goods, most notably spoons. Often such goldsmiths were men of some originality, in addition to competence at their craft, and able to adapt with individual character decorative features they had seen on other objects. Such types of decoration, having been introduced to a particular corner of England by one goldsmith, then proceeded to 'catch on' locally so that a distinct style, followed in one or more towns or a wider area, evolved. The purpose of the present paper is to discuss and explore some of the distinctive local decorative styles and ascribe them to their suggested places of origin. Clear patterns emerge.

The first group is to be found in East Anglia. The date is roughly 1595–1645, and the area appears to extend northwards from Ipswich as far as Norwich, taking in such towns as Woodbridge and Beccles, the latter being then the third largest town in Suffolk after Bury St. Edmunds and Ipswich. The main feature is the decorated bowl back, which probably derives from continental spoons, since there were close mercantile contacts with the low countries and Scandinavia, though if so the East Anglian goldsmiths made a free and individual interpretation. Spoons in this category (invariably seal-tops) often bear inscribed dates and the earliest I have seen is dated 1596, with large hexagonal seal engraved RB (Corfield Collection). It is probably of Beccles origin. A specimen dated 1601, (fig. 1) still in the reign of Elizabeth I,



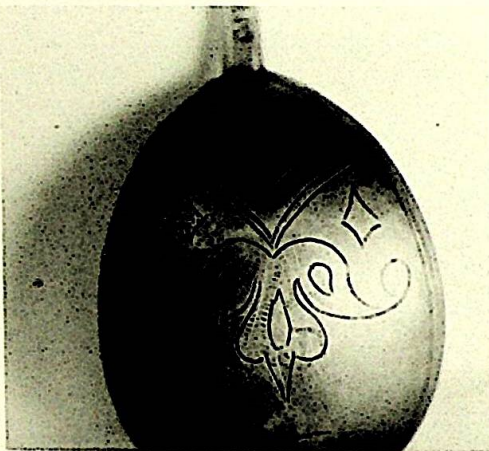
1. Robert Dale junior of Woodbridge, dated 1601.

displays standard features – shaded borders, arabesques, lozenges, hearts and reservation for date. Initials and date are engraved: this is rarer than the ubiquitous pricking.

This spoon bears a maker's mark RD in the bowl and can be ascribed to Robert Dale junior of Woodbridge, who died in 1614 leaving a will which mentions sundry spoons; he bequeathed to his niece 'halfe a dozen of silver spoones of the value of tenne shillings apeece' and to his nephew similarly 'a dossen of silver spoones' which gives us a good idea of contemporary value.

Another spoon ascribed to Beccles (though in the past allocated first to Barnstaple and then Plymouth) is remarkably massive with very big seal, doubtless made to special order, and dated 1622 with maker's mark RC. Unusually it is decorated on both back and front of the bowl, but it has much affinity with the decoration on other examples and can be allocated to this group. There are also panels of decoration on back and front of the stem. The maker is, I believe, Richard Chesten of Beccles, member of a local goldsmithing family (Hammond and John being others) whose name features in Beccles registers of this period. Ellis Lot 242 also belongs to the group and is dated 1606, bearing the bowl mark found on Church plate adjacent to Beccles. Lot 172 of the Walter Collection (1954 - Christies) had . . . 'the back of the bowl engraved with a foliate design' and was marked with a fleur-de-lys, which may pertain to Bury St. Edmunds. A further member of the group, dated 1613 and attributable to Beccles, belongs to the British Museum.

That the group must be of East Anglian origin is proved by several undoubted Norwich examples. In the Barrett Collection (Christies 27 April 1983, Lot 182) was a spoon having the standard group features and fully marked for Norwich 1631 by



2. Timothy Skottowe of Norwich, 1631.

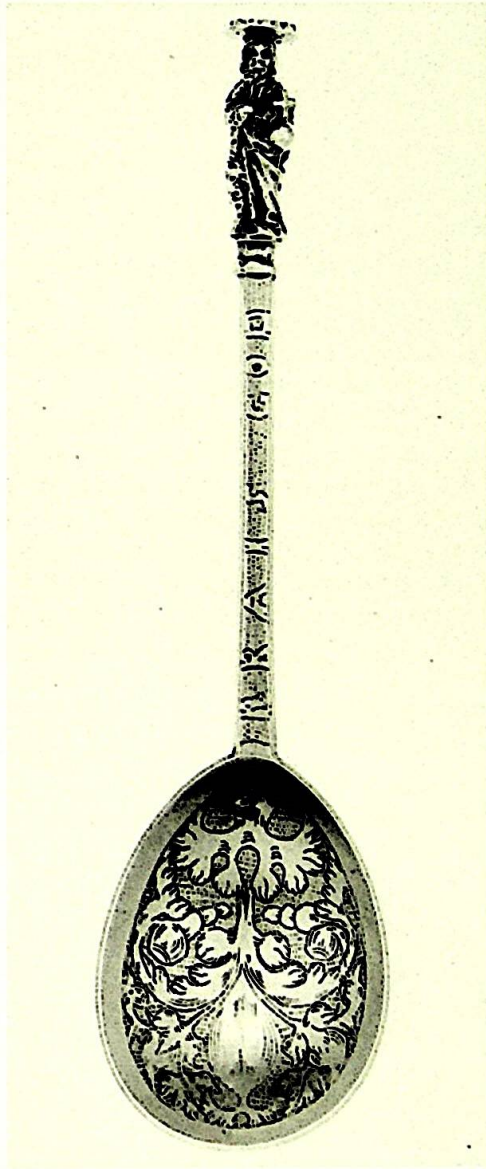
Timothy Skottowe (fig. 2). This is the 'link spoon' which firmly anchors the group in its homeland. Two other Norwich specimens were in the Walter Collection, both attributable to Arthur Heaslewood I. Lot 152 was dated by the catalogue, following Jackson p. 318 line 8, to circa 1670 which cannot be right. As with Lot 155 ('the back of the bowl engraved with leafage and having a reeded and tooled border') the correct dating has to be circa 1645 early in Heaslewood's career.

A further example has the putative Beccles town-mark in the bowl, a seal reminiscent of Norwich, and bowl decoration which shows a free and unusual adaption of the group style. It may be a late example circa 1640.

A secondary feature of these spoons is that frequently the lobes of their seals bear, alternately, scratch-engraved decoration of zig-zag pattern.

Research has disclosed working goldsmiths in the places concerned - at least 5 in Beccles, 4 in Yarmouth, 4 in Ipswich, 2 in Woodbridge, and 4 at Bury St. Edmunds.

We now move to Barnstaple, for a group which has already become celebrated, namely those spoons with elaborate decoration in their bowls and on their stems. The group may be dated circa 1625 and the most common examples are seal-tops. It is likely that the maker responsible is John Quick, but in spite of intensive research he remains a shadowy figure. Occasionally a maker's mark IQ is found in the bowl, but more commonly a fruitlet mark (cf. Thomas Mathew) accompanied by the BARUM monogram mark on stem. Usually these marks are struck from worn punches. In addition to the predominant seal-tops, the decoration is found on spoons with 'Aphrodite' terminal figures, the most elaborate of which may be seen at Ellis Lot 215, now at the North Devon Athenaeum. This is a remarkable spoon, the stem being cast in sections with a central hollow knop. It also appears on one unique Master spoon with large and impressive finial (fig. 3). The bowl decoration, of which this



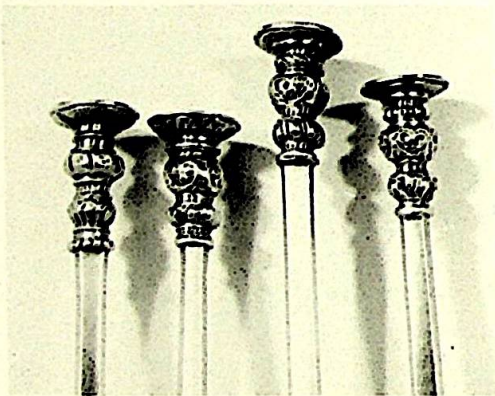
3. Barnstaple, c. 1625, by John Quick (credit Sotheby's).

is a good example, is once again likely to be of continental inspiration and the spoon has an exceptional quality and individualism. As to the 'Aphrodite' finial, I am convinced that this is *not* of any religious significance, though I am not sure how it was explained away in a puritanical town like Barnstaple. I have found no evidence of any 'Guild Ceremony' for which the spoons may have been made, though at Exeter and elsewhere admission to the civic body called for presentation of a spoon. Mr. Charles Beard supplied a note to the Ellis Catalogue (pp. 158/60), drawing attention to the continental precedents, particularly those from Germany or the Netherlands. This type of finial was also made by John Parnell of Truro. Figures of this type were popular as the figureheads of ships, as well as on various forms of furniture, and it is worth noting that by a lease dated 12 April 1595 Barnstaple Corporation granted to Peter Quick, goldsmith, certain premises actually on Barnstaple quay.

Some of the spoons in the group, including the Master spoon already noticed, have religious sentiments engraved on their stems, including HONNOR GOD, HONNOR GOD ONLIE, PRAIS GOD, PRAIS GOD ALWAIES, and FEARE GOD.

An associated but distinct West Country type, though somewhat later in date, circa 1635–1655, has an 'Oriental figure' terminal, sometimes misleadingly called a 'Buddha'. These figures (which certainly seem to have Indian overtones) pertain to Plymouth as well as Barnstaple, and may have been made at other places in the West Country also. Many bear a maker's mark RC which was formerly ascribed to Raleigh Clapham of Barnstaple, who was born in 1629 and therefore cannot be responsible for the earliest examples. Richard Chandler of Plymouth is now regarded as a better choice. The precise inspiration for this particular type of finial is hard to determine, but presumably it derives from something which made its appearance in the West Country by way of mercantile dealings with the orient. Furthermore the adoption and elaboration of grotesque elements in Renaissance decoration was not uncommon, e.g. the amazing carved wooden figures on Joiners' Hall, Salisbury, which may be the work of Humphrey Beckham (d. 1671).

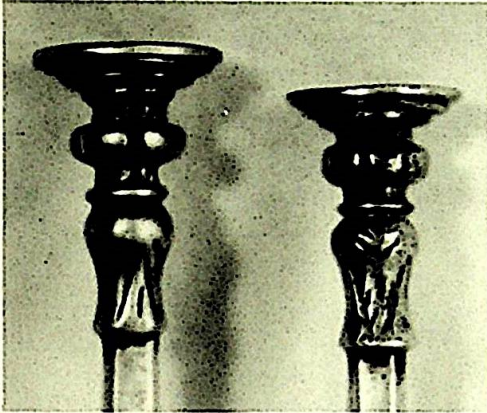
During the period 1620–1645 one of the most important provincial centres of spoon-making was Salisbury, where a very large number of spoons was produced by various makers. Often these spoons can immediately be identified by their distinctive features. Apostles by the prolific maker Robert Tyte (working c. 1590–1636) often have figures with very large emblems, and among the seal-tops two prominent groups may be noted. The first group, which I have termed 'group A', comprises decorative baluster castings of generous size, and fig. 4 shows specimens by (L. to R.) Robert Tyte, Thomas Senior, Robert Tyte, and Thomas Thornburgh. The first Tyte example shows



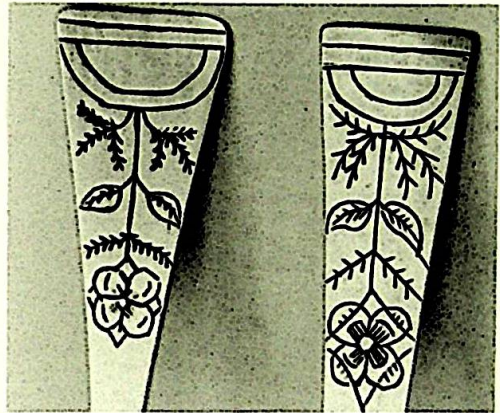
4. 4 Salisbury cast baluster seals.

typical die-struck decoration on the upper lobes of the seal and an incised star-shaped motif on the underside of the cap, while the Thornburgh finial shows crisp standard detail. Similar finials are to be found on spoons by John Greene I and Thomas Hooper (Thornburgh's master). The slight variations in detail suggest that the individual makers cast on their own account, but there was probably quite a lot of interchange and supply of spoons to men trading in other adjacent towns (the London Wardens' search of 1633 found Robert Williams of Winchester in possession of spoons made by Tyte).

The second distinctive Salisbury group is termed 'group B' and is of more modest type, but likewise immediately recognisable. The baluster finial is much less substantial



5. Engraved Salisbury seals by (L) Thomas Hooper and (R) John Ivie.



6. 2 Puritan Spoons with simple incised decoration, probably Barnstaple, circa 1670.

and its decoration is limited to a simple incised motif. Fig. 5 shows specimens by Thomas Hooper and the celebrated John Ivie, Mayor of Salisbury in 1626 and 1647. These relatively modest finials were placed on less expensive spoons than those which called for the more decorative castings. Provincial goldsmiths set up their stalls at agricultural fairs, and several Salisbury makers were present when the London Wardens visited Weyhill Fair (near Andover) in 1637. Modestly-priced 'off the peg' spoons would have been on sale at these fairs, to be given appropriate pricking as required on the spot.

An important collection of Salisbury seal-tops is that found at Netherhampton near the city early in this century and now in the British Museum. These spoons have been the subject of misunderstanding over the years, but all are of Salisbury manufacture and the makers include Tyte, Ivie, Hooper and Batter. Both 'group A' and 'group B' styles are represented.

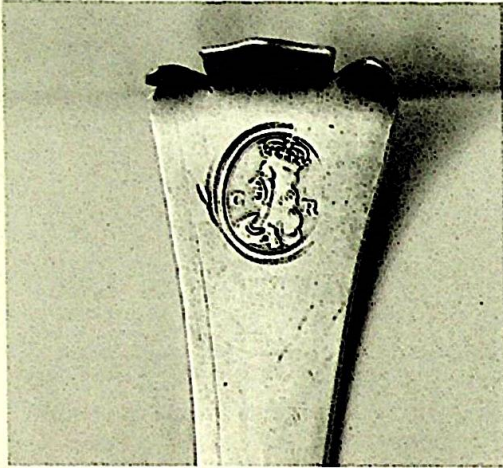
Other distinctive local seal-top finials are those which hail from Taunton or Sherborne, and are recognisable at a glance.

We turn next to a most interesting group of decorated Puritan and early Trefid spoons, circa 1660 – 1680 from the Exeter-Barnstaple area. Decoration is usually of the simple scratch-engraved type on the front of the stem. Formalised flower and leaf motifs are features and the engraving is often somewhat crude. A common decorative pattern is the semi-circle at the top of the stem. There seems to be no equivalent in London or elsewhere in the provinces.

A pair of Puritans with typical decoration establish the area, being marked in their bowls with the Exeter Town-mark. Fig. 6 shows two examples pricked 1669 and 1670

respectively, probably from the Barnstaple area, with the semi-circle once again in evidence. Others have die-struck decoration, and are dated 1668 and 1670. Some specimens bear the maker's mark of John Peard I of Barnstaple, together with the fleur-de-lys mark which accompanies it on sundry pieces of Church Plate in North Devon. A child's Puritan spoon has been noted with a very simplified version of the motif: it bears the Exeter Town-mark in its bowl and on the stem maker's mark IC in monogram, probably for John Combe, admitted to freedom in 1673. These and similar motifs carried on into the era of the Trefid.

A very rare type of spoon of this period is that which carries on its terminal a die-struck bust of King Charles II flanked by the letters CR. (fig. 7). This spoon is il-

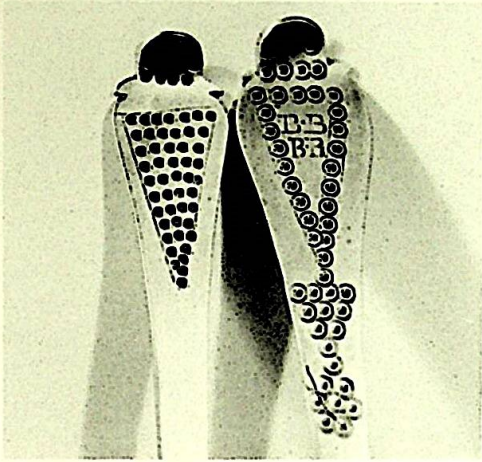


7. Samuel Cawley I (Exeter) c. 1670.

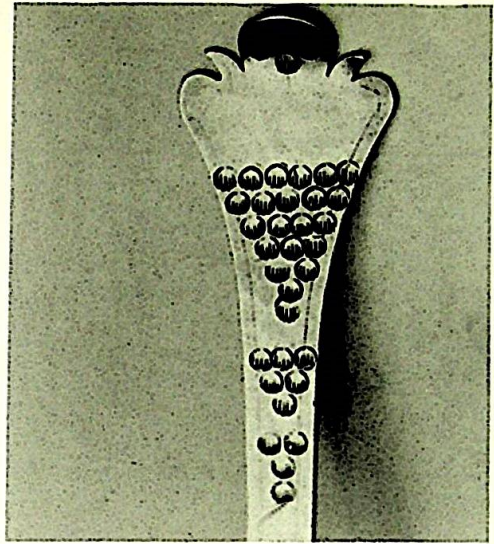
lustrated in Ellis and How and ascribed to Bridgewater by reason of the bowl mark, a single-towered castle on a bridge. There are reasons to suggest that this is not the case, and that the maker is Samuel Cawley I of Exeter. The stem-marks, a quatrefoil struck thrice, appear on Church plate of the period at Otterton and Brushford, the former parish near Sidmouth and the latter near Dulverton. Cawley's allegiance was Royalist, as he was admitted to freedom of Exeter in 1645 at the express instigation of Sir Richard Vyvyan, who was in charge of the King's Exeter mint. We may infer that Cawley's task was to operate the mint and see to the necessary die-cutting. The King's likeness is a good one with coinage analogies and clearly the work of a skilled man. Cawley lay low under the Commonwealth (he may well have been the proprietor of the so-called 'London Forgery Group' marks) but on the restoration he was back in favour, and the Exeter Receiver's accounts for 1659/60 record: 'Pd. Samuell Cawly for making the Kings armes in the sword and gilting . . . £2-17-0.'

Puritan spoons with Royal busts by John Parnell of Truro have also been noted, and he may well have had a hand in the Royalist mint there. This prolific spoon-maker, who lived from 1582 to 1666, was Mayor of Truro in 1644.

An interesting group of decorated trefid spoons circa 1675-1685 is that termed the 'shaded roundels' because the decoration consists of small circular punches with linear motifs. The area of location is mid-Wessex, stretching from Salisbury and district as far as Sherborne, but stopping short of Exeter. Commander and Mrs. How proposed a Cornish origin by reference to the 15 'Bezants' found in the Arms of that County, but my studies do not support such an ascription, and the 'link spoon' anchors the group in the area I have suggested.



8. 'Shaded roundels' probably Salisbury circa 1680.



9. 'Shaded roundels' spoon by Oliver Arden of Sherborne, c. 1680.

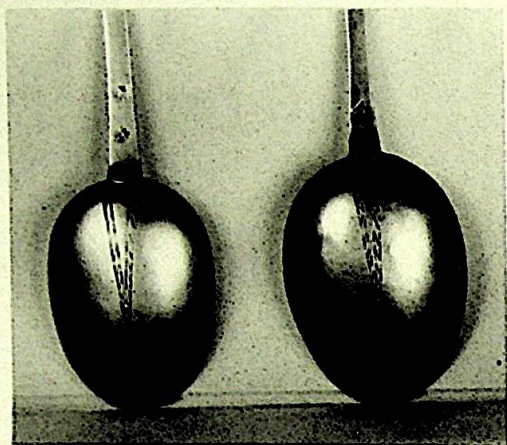
We first note two spoons which by reason of their marks I allocate to Salisbury or district (fig. 8). These spoons have pricked dates of 1677 and 1679. The roundels differ in size, but the main part of the layout is triangular in shape, and the semi-circular arrangement at the top follows the contour of the terminal. We now move on to the 'link spoon' (fig. 9) and note the similar layout of the roundels. This spoon bears the Arden family mark in the bowl and the marker's mark OA struck four times on the stem for Oliver Arden of Sherborne, who lived from 1644 to 1684, and is of great interest, as his 'Lower Shopp' contained '31 silver spoons weighing 24 ounces at 4s. 10d per ounce, £5-16-4' as well as a variety of jeweller's ware and '3 bookes of Heraldry and a workeinge bench.'

Other spoons in the same group may relate to Wincanton.

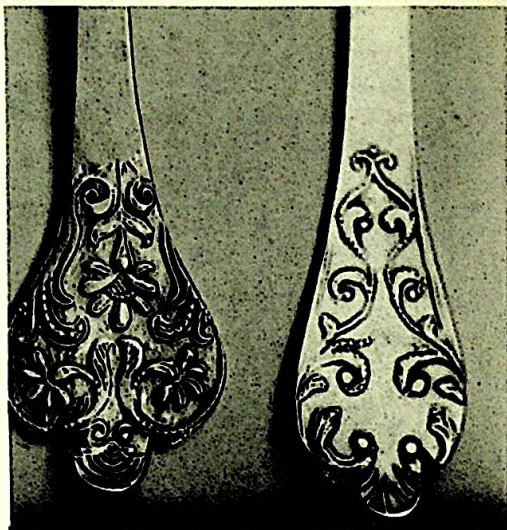
During the period 1660–1700, the trefid was king. This new style came over with Charles II on his restoration, and an early reference in the Goldsmiths' Company records describes them as 'French fashion spoons'. During the 1660's the popularity of trefids spread into the provinces, although Seal tops and puritans (sometimes with notched or split terminals) were still being made down to the 1670's, while in some places Apostle spoons maintained a market, e.g. Exeter down to c. 1675 and Taunton to c. 1685. However the trefid soon achieved universal popularity and this lasted beyond 1700 in the country districts: for example the Elston workshop at Exeter went on producing them during the Britannia period, and they are encountered there well into the 1720's, still made as individual wedding or christening presents rather than in sets.

Some of the earliest London-made trefids have raised rat-tails on their bowls, but this feature does not seem to have taken hold in the provinces for a long time. Down to the 1680's the great majority of provincial trefids have little more than a small raised V-shaped piece of metal at the joint of stem with bowl-back, in fact little more than a puritan would have had. Many trefids with this vestigial feature are found down to the 1690 mark, by which time the full decorative rat-tail was universal.

Some provincial rat-tails incorporated decorative features such as beading, but the



10. Devon engraved rat-tails, L. Tiverton c. 1690, R. Exeter c. 1690 by Thomas Foote.



11. Late 17th/early 18th century die-struck terminals, by (L) Edward Sweet of Dunster, and (R) his father Richard Sweet of Chard.

most noteworthy category (fig. 10) are the *engraved* rat-tails which seem limited to the Exeter/mid-Devon area. On the right we see one dated 1689 by Thomas Foote of Exeter, while that on the left is dated 1693 and bears one of the Tiverton townmarks of the period, as encountered on church plate at Washfield.

The most popular forms of decorative embellishment on provincial spoons of this period are the die-struck foliate motifs on terminals and bowl-backs. These often have a local or even family flavour, and it may be inferred that dies were shared locally. We may note two specimens by members of the Sweet family (fig. 11) that on the left by Edward of Dunster (fully marked for Exeter 1701), that on the right by his father Richard of Chard and dated 1688. Other spoonmaking members of this family were located at Crewkerne and Honiton and their spoons are often encountered with decoration struck in common dies.