

THE ORGANISATION OF AN EIGHTEENTH CENTURY GOLDSMITH'S BUSINESS

by *Helen Clifford*

Historian, Lecturer and Archivist of The Paul Mitchell Frame Archive

All interpreters of any period, our own included, work within a framework of ideas which influences not only our view of the present but also of the past.

Our ideas about pre-industrial craftsmen and how they worked are deeply coloured by the belief that during the late 18th and throughout the 19th Century a continuity with the past stretching back to at least the Middle Ages was broken.

The transformation from rural to urban, from field to factory and from hand to machine labour was seen to have had two major consequences for the history of craftsmanship in the luxury trades. First, it has been assumed that up until the mid-18th Century the most common form of production was the individual workshop, typified by an independent master craftsman working with a small number of apprentices and journeymen supervising and contributing personally to the raising and decoration of plate. An unbroken line of hand craftsmanship was thought to have been severed with the advent of the machine. In the process the small and intimate workshop was replaced by the large and impersonal factory. The transition between the two types of production however, has yet to be explained clearly.

This brings me to the second point. Because the goldsmith has been viewed as working on commissions for high quality silverware, the craftsman was transformed into the "artist". In fact the Artist Craftsman was largely an invention of the late 19th Century, a legacy of the Arts and Crafts Movement.¹ Artistic production suggests aesthetics rather than profit. By seeing the craftsman as an artist, and his products as artistic rather than commercial, he is placed above the sordid concerns of the market. Hence questions about size of stock, and the variation in quality, pricing and marketing of his products are rarely investigated.

The master craftsman as author of individual pieces of art fitted well into a picture of the period that was dominated by heroic individuals. History and more particularly the progress of the industrial revolution was written in terms of the biographies of the great men of industry and invention, men like John Kay, James Hargreaves, Matthew Boulton and Josiah Wedgwood.²

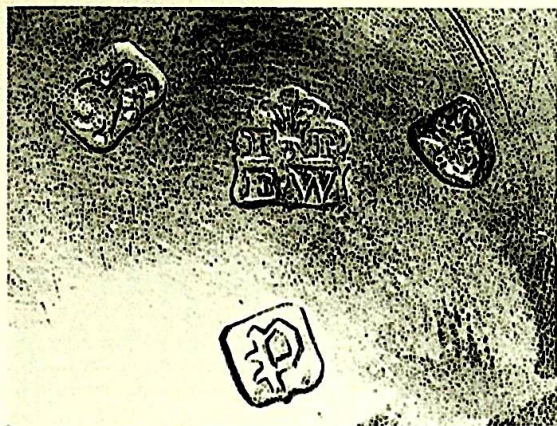
The picture of the "craftsman as artist", and in the case of the goldsmith's trade, the concentration on individual pieces of silverware, was the result not only of the influence of a particular *way* of seeing the past, but of the *type of evidence* that survives. The primary source for reconstruction of the goldsmiths' trade, both before and

after the industrial revolution, has been based on the number, type and quality of silverware bearing a goldsmith's mark that has survived in museums and churches, in private collections and those pieces which have found their way into auction catalogues. This is not only because the objects themselves are fascinating but because there is a severe lack of alternative documentary evidence.

But we should consider three shortcomings in the visual evidence upon which our view of the goldsmiths' trade has been based. First, silver that does survive has been assumed to be representative of all the wares a particular goldsmith sold. Changes in fashion which influenced what the goldsmith sold new, also influences what is collected in later decades and centuries, resulting in a bias in the amount and type of silver that survives today. Second, the maker's, hall, sterling and date marks used as the primary means of identifying objects were stamped only on wares made of precious metals. From 1738 small articles weighing less than ten penny weights, such as thimbles, toothpick cases and nutmeg graters were exempt from the Assay, as well as any gold and silverware that might be damaged by marking. Wares made of materials other than silver and gold, like copper, brass and tin often sold by goldsmiths; work involving additions to existing plate like engraving or gilding; work unrepresented by actual objects such as the carriage of goods and the payment of plate tax, are impossible to attribute to an individual business without documentary evidence.

The most important factor in identifying an individual goldsmith's work has been the reliance placed on his mark; it has been compared to the artist's signature. In the light of recent research however the so called "maker's mark" can no longer be taken as proof of the identity of the manufacturer.³ Not only did apprentices and journeymen produce work that has been attributed to their masters, but it was also common practice to sell goods made by outside workshops, stamped not with the maker's mark but with that of the retailer.

It is possible to reconstruct the number, type and range of goods a particular business sold? The answer is to find a long enough run of business accounts to establish a complete picture of sales and purchase for a select period of time. At this point I would like to introduce John Parker and Edward Wakelin, a partnership of goldsmiths who operated from Panton Street, just off the Haymarket between 1760 and 1776. Their accounts survive as part of the Garrard Ledgers, (Edward Wakelin's son John, took Robert Garrard as his partner in 1792).⁴ Norman Penzer recognised the importance of the Ledgers when they came to light in 1952, in the



1. Courtesy W.R.T. Wilkinson & R. Barker. The mark of John Parker and Edward Wakelin.

basement of Garrard's premises in Albemarle Street at the time of their amalgamation with the Goldsmiths and Silversmiths Company. In the basement were forty-two volumes of ledgers dated from 1735 to 1818, and as many again down to the present day. With the assistance of Arthur Grimwade and John Hayward from the Victoria and Albert Museum the ledgers were rescued

from the pulping machine for which they had been destined.⁵

The ledgers remained unresearched until 1968, when Elaine Barr saw them. The result of her work was the publication in 1980 of a study of the founder of the firm and entitled *George Wickes 1698-1761 Royal Goldsmith*.

The largest group of ledgers to survive are customers' accounts, known as the Gentlemen's Ledgers. They begin in 1735. A smaller group of Workmen's accounts survive from 1764. The Gentlemen's and Workmen's accounts are the equivalent of the "debt books" that Daniel Defoe refers to in his *Complete Tradesman* published in 1726, "Where every person buying or selling to the tradesman has his account: which is in short, a register . . . here all books . . . centre". The debt books represented the last stage of accounting.

In order to create a complete picture of the business at a given time it was necessary to take both a Gentlemen's and a Workmen's Ledger where the dates of accounting overlapped. Fortunately a Gentlemen's Ledger catalogued as covering 1764 to 1776 and a Workmen's Ledger covering 1766-1776 survives. It appeared to me that the only way to tackle over 10,000 individual orders represented in the two books was to transcribe the details onto a computer. The result was a sample period of five

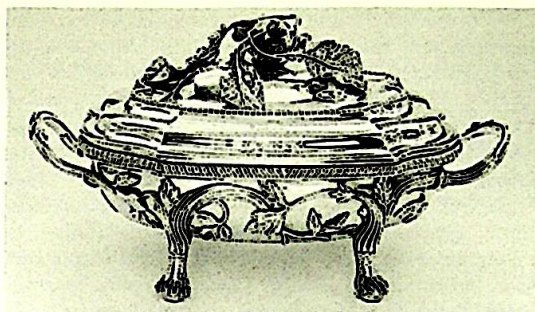
2. Courtesy of the Victoria & Albert Museum. Page from Workmen's Ledger VAM7.

amounted to over 18,000 ozs. in 1766 (£5,000), reaching over 33,000 ozs. in 1769 (£9,000).⁷ The reason for the dramatic increase in the weight of silver in 1769 was the delivery of ten dinner services costing the customers more than £8,700. In 1766 by contrast only part of a service was ordered by the Earl of Shelburne.

The majority of orders each year were for newly wrought plate but must be set within the context of a wider range of work including mending and the supply of jewellery. What I have called "accessory work" accounts for the various services which involved neither the activities of working metal nor mending, such as the payment of plate tax, the execution of inventories and the sale of secondhand plate. Parker and Wakelin did not deal extensively in the latter. Silverware was however, taken in part payment of customers' bills and sent to Parker and Wakelin's refiners Spindler and Palmer in Gutter Lane.

After the supply of new plate, the mending of silver and jewellery accounted for the largest source of orders. There were three main categories of mending; cleaning, alterations and replacement. If customers wanted their silver cleaned and polished they either bought "crocus", an abrasive powder at 2s a box, and brushes, skins and buffs; or, if the layer of oxides and sulphides became too thick, they sent the silverware to be "boyled" in a pickle solution of acids and was then burnished. Thomas Brand was charged £1.4s for having his "fine chased candlesticks and branches" cleaned in such a manner. The second type of mending involved alterations and re-fashioning, which was the most expensive as it usually necessitated the addition of silver. Adding "gadroons on 2 tureens and doing up as new" would have transformed the Earl of Kilmorey's service, and at £4.11s.2d. at a fraction of the cost of buying two new tureens. Thomas Beaver had "5 rings made to size" for 10s. Third, the repair or replacement of parts, the most common form of mending work. Removing bruises from silver, binding cane round handles, known as "wickering", supplying ivory buttons for tea kettles, re-lining tea canisters with lead and adding mahogany bases to candlesticks account for the majority of these orders.

Although Parker and Wakelin's trade card devoted much of its wording to jewellery it in fact accounted for only a small number of orders each year. The business sold far less jewellery in the 1760s and 1770s than it had in the 1740s and 1750s. Parker and Wakelin did sell a wide variety of brooches, earrings, bracelets, rings made of garnets, jet, seed pearls, coques (nautilus shell), marcasites, pastes and foiled stones, also buttons and buckles for shoes, garters, stays, shirts, belts and stocks. There are no references however to stomachers, giardinetti rings, seigné brooches or rivière necklaces that appear in surviving accounts of fashionable jewellers, such as Peter Webb and Charles Belliard. Jewellery made of diamonds (which were called "brilliant"), emeralds and topazes usually only appear in the accounts when pieces needed re-setting or mounting. Of the few exceptions is a "pair of Brill" 3



4. Courtesy of the Victoria and Albert Museum. Tureen, mark of Parker & Wakelin, 1760.

drop earrings" delivered to Joseph Gulston the print collector in July 1767, with an invoice for £280.⁸ Parker and Wakelin had bought them complete from Francis and John Creuze for £240 two weeks before.⁹ By comparing Parker and Wakelin's jewellery prices with that of other London jewellers it is clear that they did not offer competitive rates. Gulston's extravagant purchases from Parker and Wakelin are perhaps explained by the fact that in 1763 he had inherited over £250,000, all of which he had lost by 1775.

Within the category of newly wrought plate, tableware accounted for the largest proportion of orders. In no other category of Parker and Wakelin's trade was there such a diversity of objects that could be bought; tureens, épergnes, plates for meat, cheese, fish, pancakes, soup and stews; dishes for salad, entrées, and macaroni, for chafing, baking and stewing; rings and crosses to support dishes; baskets for bread and fruit; waiters; condiment servers in the form of pots, casters and vases, with accompanying bottle tickets to identify their contents; machines for serving beef and oysters; and scallops.

Fifty to sixty orders each year were for lighting ware which included mostly candlesticks but also branches to turn the sticks into more elaborate candelabra. The number of orders made for tea ware outnumbered that for coffee ware, and mainly concerned tea canisters. Ware for the serving and consumption of wines, beers and spirits came next, while there were no more than ten orders each year for writing equipment (mostly inkstands). Toiletware and commemorative ware (mostly racing cups) account for only a few more orders each year. Some objects sold do not fit into any of the above categories of silverware. These include several hundred visiting cards supplied to Lord Exeter, swords, spurs, two hearing trumpets made for Richard Bull, a bosun's call for Sir Kenrick Clayton and a mouthpiece to a french horn.

Having established an idea of the full range of products and services, we can move to the second point of this paper; the organisation of supply. How did Parker and Wakelin manage to provide their customers with such a large and diverse range of goods and associated services?

In order to understand the problems of making, supplying and selling goods one has to be able to distinguish between makers and retailers.

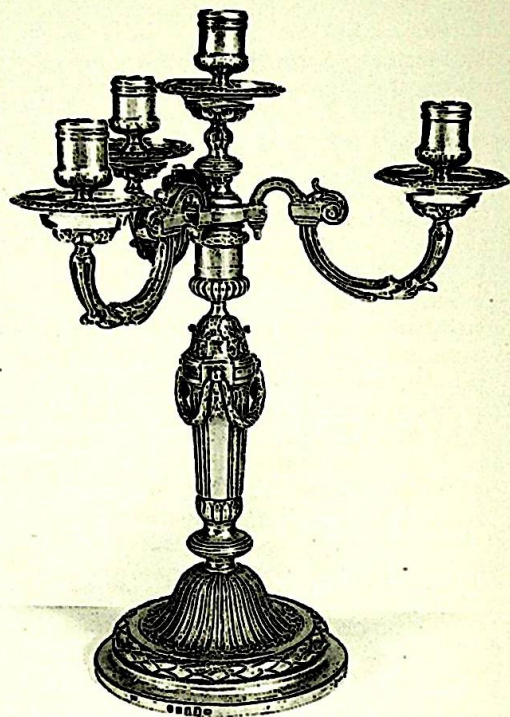
In his *Touchstone for Gold and Silver Wares*, published in 1677, William Badcock divided goldsmiths between manufacturing "private workmen" and those that had a "publick shop". They were tied together by their mutual dependence on each other's skills (either as makers or salesmen) and often by social links of friendship and intermarriage. The system of contracting work out by goldsmiths (makers, retailers and those who did both) was not a recent phenomenon in the mid-18th Century. Demarcation of the goldsmith's craft was nothing new; specialisation was already evident in the 15th Century. The different tools and techniques involved in the making of a spoon, raising a bowl or casting a handle, let alone the decorative techniques of engraving, embossing and chasing have changed little over time and have always required specialist skills and tools.

To summarise there were manufacturers (called plateworkers) and retailers (called goldsmiths). Manufacturers required neither large capital nor a retail site, they had to be skilled metalworkers, be able to manage a workshop and secure orders from retailers. Retailers needed large amounts of capital (to cope with the credit customers expected), and a retail site, they had to be able to organise the supply of goods and services and cope with customers. In the *Complete English Tradesman*¹⁰ published in 1726, Defoe added a third group, those who did both who "made the goods they sell, though they keep shops".

Into what category did Parker and Wakelin fall? Elaine Barr has drawn attention to the fact that George Wickes referred to himself as *the maker* in an advertisement placed in *The London Evening Post* in June 1735. But Wickes's mark does not appear on any surviving silverware after 1747. In that year Edward Wakelin began supplying George Wickes with plate. The products of Wakelin's workshop which were sold by Wickes,¹¹ bore Wakelin's mark, whilst Wakelin had no retail outlet. We do not know if Wakelin made products which he sold to other goldsmiths. It is likely that from the date of Wakelin's association with Wickes the balance between making and retailing in the firm began to change.

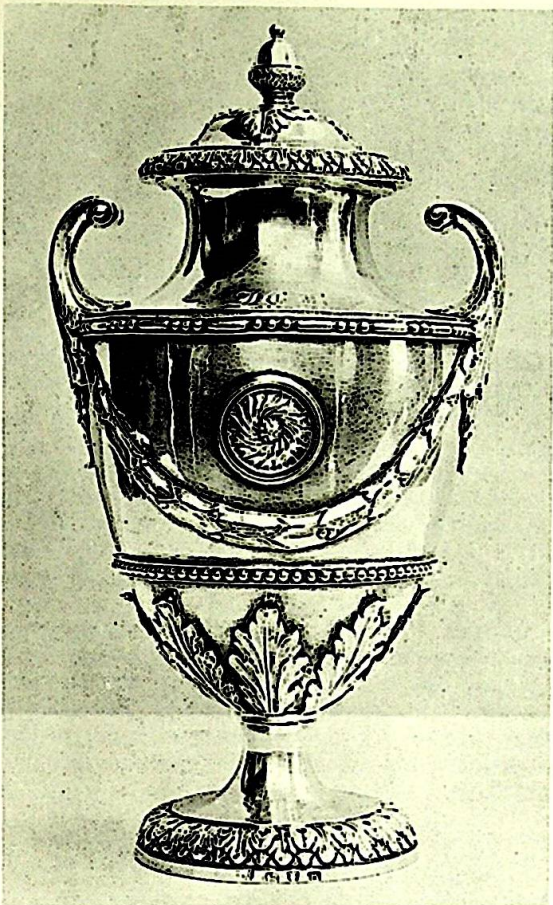
The survival of Parker and Wakelin's Workmen's Ledger for the years 1766 to 1772 opens a window into the organisational complexities of the London goldsmiths trade. It is made up of the accounts of seventy-five plateworkers, goldworkers, associated craftsmen and retailers to whom Parker and Wakelin contracted work out. The suppliers were paid by the piece. Twenty-three of these outworkers were based within a half mile radius of the firm's premises in Panton Street.

The difficulties involved in managing such a network can be demonstrated by tracing the suppliers of the



5. Courtesy of Christie's. One of a pair of candlesticks, mark of Parker & Wakelin, 1768, the other Wakelin & Tayler, 1790.

constituent parts of a dinner service sold by Parker and Wakelin. On his appointment as British Ambassador in Paris Lord Harcourt ordered a set of dinner plates from Parker and Wakelin. It was delivered on 13th March 1769 and included one hundred and seventy four plates, ten tureens, thirty dishes and twenty six dish covers with ribbon bound reeding and overlapping motifs of shells and husk pendants. The complete service weighed over 3,700 ozs. Part of that plate appeared in *The Glory of the Garden* exhibition held in January 1986. The tureens bear Thomas Pitts' mark and appear in his account with Parker and Wakelin. David Hennell and Son supplied "4 pair of festoon salts" which Parker and Wakelin received on 7th January.¹² Ansill and Gilbert delivered the plates, dishes, tureens, sauceboats and candlesticks to Parker and Wakelin on 9th March.¹³ It is interesting to note that Ansill and Gilbert charged £125 for making the "11 dozen baggatt plates" which weighed just over 2,514 ozs. Parker and Wakelin made £64 profit on the sale of these plates alone. William Portal sent "7 dozen octagonal threaded table knives", on 30th January.¹⁴ Philip Norman supplied "12 threaded olio spoons" on 12th March.¹⁵ Isaac Callard provided "36 threaded forks and spoons, 18 double threaded table spoons, 2 gravy spoons and 2 butter ladles" between 6th February and 1st March.¹⁶ Thomas Squire sent "36 ferrils and dessert blades, and a small silver pickle fork" between 27th February and 6th March.¹⁷ Only when the complete service was assembled could it be delivered to Lord Harcourt.



6. Courtesy of the Victoria & Albert Museum. Vase, mark of Parker & Wakelin, 1770.

It was not only at the level of whole dinner services that the co-ordination of the skills and specialisations of a group of suppliers had to be organised. The manufacture of a single type of object often relied on the contribution of many different workmen. The supply of tea canisters referred to in the ledgers as "tea tubs" relied on smallworkers, locksmiths, engravers and casemakers. Richard Cox, the founder of the great 18th Century banking dynasty ordered "2 square tea tubs" from Parker and Wakelin, weighing 26ozs. 7 dwts. Of the £18.19s.2d he paid them £7.7s.2d can be accounted for in the cost of the metal. Ansill and Gilbert charged Parker and Wakelin £4.4s. for making the boxes. They were constructed out of rolled sheet metal, scored and soldered. Ansill and Gilbert also supplied the cast flower finials attached to the lid by means of a nut. The undecorated tubs were then sent to William and Aaron Lestourgeon in Clare Market for the locks and linings to be fitted, at a high cost of £6.6s. Included in this last sum was the "graving of Characters". A further "2 Coats" were added costing an extra 2s. It is not clear who was responsible for the engraving before 1773 but it was possibly done in the workshop of Robert Clee, who as Robert Barker has discovered, was a specialist silver engraver living opposite Parker and Wakelin's shop in Panton Street.¹⁸ Edward Smith provided the

"Plain Mahogany Case". He supplied chests and cases to Parker and Wakelin until 1774, when the book keeper noted that he was "Out of Business". Parker and Wakelin made a profit of only 18s on the sale. The tubs and case were delivered to Cox in March 1768. What has been interpreted as the work of one or two craftsmen turns out to be the product of the masterly organisation of many individuals, balancing cash, credit, custom and commodities, not within one workshop but over many, and stretching right across London.

When the orders in the Workmen's accounts are compared with those in the Gentlemen's accounts it can be seen that all Parker and Wakelin's orders were supplied by these seventy-five outworkers. This should not come as a surprise as by 1766 Parker and Wakelin had only four apprentices, Thomas Boswood, Daniel Flowerdew, Thomas Kinnaird and Edward Wakelin's son John, and it is likely that they were employed in the sales shop. There is no evidence to show that they were employing any journeymen.

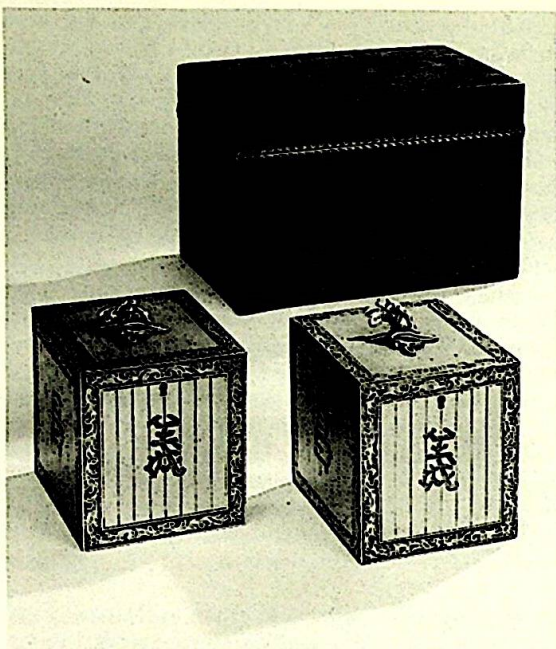
By dividing the suppliers according to their products there are three broad groups. Those who supplied a wide range of goods of no particular type either in large or small quantities like the partnerships of Ansill and Gilbert and Aldridge and Woodnorth.

Second, those who supplied specialist products. Thomas Pitts supplied épergnes and tureens; Walter Brind, more usually known for his cups and covers supplied pannikins and papboats for feeding children; Whipham and Wright, and later Butty and Dumée supplied coffee pots and cups and covers, Langford and Seville supplied pierced work, especially salts, bottle stands and bread baskets; John Arnell and Ebenezer Coker supplied candlesticks; John Daniell, Francis Chanel, Robert Piercy and Thomas Nash supplied cruets and castors.

Thirdly there were those who provided not specialist goods but skilled techniques such as gilding, engraving or stone setting. Thomas Caler and John Crockett were responsible for most of Parker and Wakelin's gilding.

Most of Richard Frewin and Samuel Rush's work for the firm concerned the mounting of cornelian seals. Toussaint and Morisset dealt with all Parker and Wakelin's enamelling work. Elias Russell, George Padmore, and John Morley Evans dealt with most of the orders for jewellery.

One partnership of suppliers in particular highlighted the inter-relationship between makers and retailers. The Workmen's Ledger shows that James Ansill and Stephen Gilbert supplied more silverware and mended more goods for Parker and Wakelin than any other supplier. Between 1768 and 1769 they supplied 318 orders of over 25,000 ozs. in weight costing Parker and Wakelin over £2,000 for their labour. The enormous size of their output compared to that of other suppliers suggests a special relationship between the two partnerships. Included in the balance of their account is the payment of £40.0s.10d for the rent of their



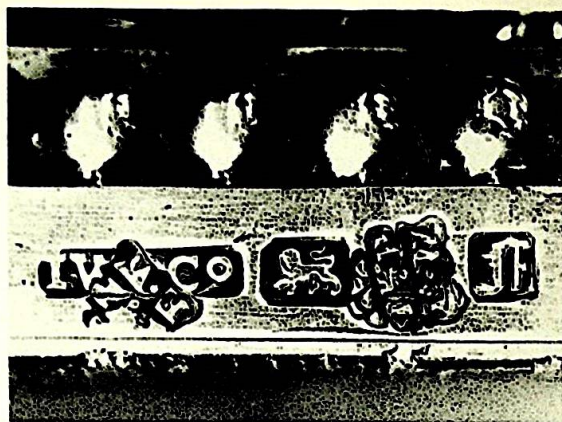
7. Courtesy of Christie's. Pair of tea tubs, mark of Parker and Wakelin, 1767.

workshop. Ansill and Gilbert were in fact based in the premises where Edward Wakelin had begun supplying George Wickes.

Ansill and Gilbert's arrangement with Parker and Wakelin could not have been seen as unusual to either partnership. Both James Ansill and Stephen Gilbert had been first employed by, then apprenticed to Edward Wakelin (Ansill was Wakelin's first apprentice). While in partnership they did not register their own mark.

All of Ansill and Gilbert's products sold by Parker and Wakelin bear the retailers' mark and until recently these objects have been attributed to Parker and Wakelin's craftsmanship. We have no way of knowing whether Ansill and Gilbert made wares for other retailers.

It is only with the combined forces of dealers and collectors, on the one hand, and archivists and historians on the other that the complex organisational web of the London goldsmiths trade can be slowly unravelled.



8. Courtesy of W. R. T. Wilkinson & R. Barker. Mark of John Parker & Edward Wakelin overstepping that of their supplier, John Winter and Company of Sheffield.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Mrs. Glanville at the Victoria & Albert Museum for introducing me to the ledgers; Tony Dove and Martin Gubbins for their tireless enthusiasm and support. Charles Truman, Wynyard Wilkinson and Brand Inglis for their generosity in supplying photographs and Robert Baker without whose help this paper could not have been written.

Footnotes

- ¹ Gillian Naylor, *The Arts and Crafts Movement A Study of Its Sources, Ideas and Influence on Design Theory*, London, 1971, p. 11.
- ² J. H. Plumb, *England in the Eighteenth Century 1714-1815*, London, 1950, pp. 77-83.
- ³ John Culme, "Attitudes to Old Plate 1750-1900", in *The Directory of Gold and Silversmiths, Jewellers and Allied Traders 1838-1914*, London, 1987, pp. xvi-xxxiii.
- ⁴ Arthur Grimwade who was instrumental in their rescue documented the discovery in a paper published in *The Proceedings of the Society of Silver Collectors*, April 1961.
- ⁵ Microfiche copies of the ledgers dating up to 1818 are available for consultation in the National Art Library in the Victoria and Albert Museum.
- ⁶ VAM7, p. 213.
- ⁷ The price per ounce of troy silver averaged at 5s 7d between 1766 and 1770, see John McCusker, *Money and Exchange in Europe and America 1600-1775*, Chapel Hill, 1978, p. 17.
- ⁸ VAM7, p. 182.
- ⁹ VAM8, p. 32.
- ¹⁰ Daniel Defoe, *The Complete English Tradesman: Directing Him in the Several Parts and Progressions of Trade*, 2 vols. London, J. Rivington, 1726, New York, 1970.
- ¹¹ Wickes went into partnership with his erstwhile apprentice Samuel Netherton in 1750 until they both retired in 1760.
- ¹² VAM8, p. 87.
- ¹³ VAM8, p. 71.
- ¹⁴ VAM8, p. 99.
- ¹⁵ VAM8, p. 102.
- ¹⁶ VAM8, p. 9.
- ¹⁷ VAM8, p. 60.
- ¹⁸ Unpublished paper read before the Society of Silver Collectors, 1988.