
http://repository.nms.ac.uk/1093

Deposited on: 20 October 2014
This chapter sets out to present a preliminary investigation into the numerous Scottish silversmiths who ventured across the Atlantic.¹ The position of the silversmith within Scottish society in general and in particular at the top of the crafts elites has been discussed elsewhere (Dalgleish and Fothringham 2008, 5, 6). We are concerned here rather with the reasons why many made the journey west and, to a lesser extent, their impact on the Atlantic world. The period under discussion could be called the ‘long’ eighteenth century, bleeding into both the preceding and succeeding centuries, while the geographical area corresponds with the modern Caribbean, the USA and Canada.

Modern historiography frequently emphasises that a considerable number of Scots migrants, particularly in the eighteenth century, came from what could be characterised as the ‘middling sort’ of society; often well educated, literate and highly motivated, and not the poor, downtrodden, landless labourers of other waves of emigration (Devine 1999: 26–7; Devine 2003, passim). They came to better themselves, often with the intention of returning homeward with a fortune in their pockets; this was particularly true of many Scots ‘sojourners’ who journeyed to the sugar plantations of the Caribbean (Karras 1992, passim), were involved in the tobacco trade of the Chesapeake (Devine 1975), and in the fur trade farther north. These highly lucrative ventures were heavily populated with that most impressive of creatures: ‘the Scotsman on the Make’. It is not surprising, therefore, that several Scottish silversmiths sought to hitch their wagons to these success stories and travelled across the Atlantic to make use of the extensive kin-based networks that were an essential characteristic of this early Scottish diaspora.

Before looking at the migration of the craftsmen themselves, it might be worth reflecting on the impact of the export of examples of Scottish-made silver to the Americas and whether this had any effect on encouraging its makers to follow suit. Unfortunately, while many Scots presumably took examples of silver wares with them, either as functional requisites, portable sources of wealth, or as heirlooms of the old country, it has proved exceptionally difficult to trace many surviving examples that were taken over in the eighteenth century. Most of the large quantity of Scottish-made silver that is currently in both private and public collections in the USA and Canada is the result of twentieth-century collectors, rather than earlier migration. There are, however, a few important extant pieces which suggest that much more must have been taken, but then presumably melted down and recycled.

Two will serve to make the point. A rather curious-looking teapot now in the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, was made by Robert Cruickshank, a silversmith in Old Aberdeen, about 1710 (Dalgleish and Fothringham 2008: 5.6). It is of interest for two reasons. First, it has an impeccable provenance (partly engraved on the teapot itself in the nineteenth century) (illus 5.1). It seems to have been made for Alexander Middleton, Collector of Customs in Aberdeen. He married an Aberdeenshire lady, Elspeth Burnet, in 1705. Their son, also Alexander, left the north-east of Scotland for Boston in 1735, taking the family teapot with him. The teapot descended to his daughter Mary, who married a James Lovel, a fairly prominent rebel against the Crown. The teapot remained within the family until it was donated to MFA in 1991 by Mrs Eleanor Lowell (information provided by MFA). Second, it is potentially the earliest Scottish teapot in existence, although its current form suggests it has been altered or ‘improved’ at some point in the past. Its maker, Robert Cruickshank, was one of the most important silversmiths in Old Aberdeen. He was admitted as a Freeman of the Hammermen’s Incorporation in 1699 and continued working until at
Illustration 5.1
[Courtesy of the Boston Museum of Fine Arts]
least 1731 (James 1981: 53–4). It is currently on loan to National Museums Scotland and forms an important part of their displays on the Scottish diaspora.

The second piece is a ‘thistle’ cup, made by Hugh Ross, a silversmith in Tain in Ross-shire, about 1710, and used in Canada by James Thompson, also from Tain (illus 5.2). Thompson was a remarkable man. Born in 1733, he went to Canada in 1757 as a volunteer with the 78th Regiment of Foot, or Fraser Highlanders, to fight in the French and Indian War. The Fraser Highlanders were raised by Simon Fraser, son of the executed Jacobite peer Lord Lovat, in an area which had a few years previously been ‘out’ in the ’45 on the Jacobite side. The 78th was one of the loyal Highland regiments that became a major instrument of the Hanoverian government’s imperial expansion (and a means of cementing the rehabilitation of old Jacobites). In this instance Thompson’s silver cup was definitely seen as a family heirloom of the old country. He did not take it with him originally, but had his sister send it on to him. He later told his son: ‘This is one of the cups which each of my grandmother’s children received and it was her rule to make them take a small dram of whisky on New Year’s morning … In order not to break the family rule I have made a point to take a drop of whisky out of it every New Year’s morning since it has been in my possession’ (Quick 2009: 22). Thompson became a significant figure in Canada and remained there until his death in 1830, aged ninety-seven. He was one of the last survivors of the young Highland soldiers who had left home seventy years previously to become part of the spearhead of Empire (Quick 2009: 45–7). This little cup is therefore a witness to the Scots’ crucial involvement in the development of the British Empire. However, it did not have any impact on the development of...
MAKING FOR AMERICA

silversmithing in Canada, and eventually was collected from Thompson's family by David Ross McCord, and ended up in the museum that bears his name in Montreal. Because of its provenance it is one of the most important pieces of Tain-made silver in existence.

It is curious that two of the most important surviving examples of early Scottish provincial silver found their way across the Atlantic. This perhaps says something about the accidents of survival, where 'heirlooms' of the old country were treasured in a way they would not have been at home, where most likely they would have been melted down to create something more fashionable. Doubtless there are other examples of the early export of Scottish silver types, but survivals seem to be rare.

If, as seems likely, exported Scottish silver types had very little direct impact on styles or production techniques in the Americas, it might be instructive to look now at whether the migration of the craftsmen themselves could have had a greater effect on the material culture of the transatlantic world.

One must first consider the scale of this migration. The following, very incomplete survey was compiled from existing secondary sources and is merely suggestive rather than exhaustive. It does, however, bring to light a number of craftsmen identified as goldsmiths, silversmiths or jewellers migrating across the Atlantic within the period of our discussion. There are references to about forty craftsmen who went to what is now the US, in the eighteenth century, arriving mainly in North and South Carolina, while those in the early nineteenth century mostly shipped in to the port of New York. A considerable number presumably travelled on to other destinations in the Americas. About twenty-five went to what is now Canada, mainly to Halifax, Nova Scotia, Quebec City and Montreal. Many also went to the Caribbean, all in the eighteenth century; at least sixteen of whom went to Jamaica, and one each to St Kitts, St Eustatius, Cuba and Tobago.

This is clearly not a huge migration, but it is still reasonably significant, and may have had some discernable impact on the production of silver wares in these areas. Like all other emigrants, Scottish silversmiths crossed the Atlantic for a variety of reasons. Dr Ross Fox has identified four basic categories into which most emigrating craftsmen fell (Fox 2008: 86).

First, apprentices who failed to complete their required 'time', usually seven years followed by one to three more as a journeyman. Such a lengthy training involved a heavy outlay. Initially, apprentices were not paid by their master, being given board and lodgings only. Costs were normally paid for in advance either by the apprentice's family or charity. Failure to complete their training would prevent them legitimatley setting up in a Scottish burgh. Haphazard application of such rules in less-regulated or unregulated colonies therefore held some hope for a 'failed' apprentice to become established.

Second, even a 'time-served' journeyman might not have the necessary financial means to set up as a master/freeman with a workshop of his own. The resources needed were substantial. For example, the fees required by the Incorporation of Goldsmiths of Edinburgh before a qualified journeyman could gain entry as a freeman were heavy; and, of course, considerable capital was required for setting up in business (EGM: 119, A423 & 424). Many journeymen (particularly those from families outwith the existing goldsmiths' elites) simply could not afford this outlay and remained journeymen throughout their careers, working for 'meat and fee'. In Edinburgh they were the backbone of the workforce, outnumbering the freeman masters. It is from these first two groups that most Scottish silversmiths who went to the Americas came, with the hope of establishing a thriving business in less constricted circumstances.

The third category were others seeking their fortunes who came from the smaller provincial towns where demand for luxury goods and therefore prospects were limited. Indeed, this was also true of the larger centres in times of economic downturn in the regular cycle of boom and bust. Many Edinburgh-trained apprentices went south to Newcastle and London in an attempt to make a living (Dietert and Dietert 2007: 168–72). One can argue that a move to North America or the West Indies was simply a move to a more far-flung destination, given the economic factors pushing some craftsmen out of Scotland. Equally, Aberdeen was the source of many goldsmiths who found their way to the Indian subcontinent (Wilkinson 1987: xvii).

Fourth, there were also freemen/masters who had got into personal financial difficulties at home, who sought to improve their fortunes on the other side of the Atlantic.

I would add a further category. There were several goldsmiths who were amongst those unfortunate enough to be forced to leave Scotland for political reasons; that is, being on the wrong side of the prevailing political establishment.
I now propose to look at a few illustrative examples of craftsmen who fell into one or other of the above categories.

One of the earliest known transatlantic goldsmith emigrants is a good example of the last group – a political victim. Alexander Kerr was the younger son of a laird, Archibald Kerr of Graden in Roxburghshire in the Scottish Borders. He was apprenticed to William Law, goldsmith in Edinburgh on 22 December 1708 (IoG Reg Archive). Kerr does not seem to have completed his time, and is not recorded as either a journeyman or a master. This is unusual for a goldsmith of his social position. Several successful Scottish goldsmiths of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries were younger sons of the gentry (Dalgleish and Fothringham 2008: 56). Kerr’s failure to prosper in Edinburgh was a result of his involvement with the Jacobite Rebellion of 1715–16. He was captured as a rebel at the battle of Preston in 1715, convicted of high treason at Chester and sentenced to transportation to Virginia as an indentured servant. He was shipped out on the Elizabeth and Anne from Liverpool to Yorktown, Virginia, where he was ‘signed for’ by the Lieutenant-Governor of the Colony, Alexander Spotswood (Calendar of Virginia State Papers, vol 1, 1652–1781: 185–6). In a perfect illustration of the strength and penetration of Scottish kinship networks, Kerr seems to have had a rather easier time of adjusting to his new abode than many other transported rebels. Governor Spotswood was a distant relative, whose family were originally Border lairds as well. The Governor’s cousin, John Spotswood, who lived in Scotland, corresponded with him regularly, and in a series of letters of 1716–17 he says: ‘I recommend to your protection Alexander Ker, a younger son of the Laird of Graden in Teviotdale, a jeweller by trade, who has sett up a shop in Williamsburg. His mother is a daughter of Sir Harry of Roslin & again her mother

Illustration 5.3
Sauceboat by David Downie, Edinburgh, 1783–4.
[Courtesy of the Trustees of the National Museums Scotland]
and grandmother were Spotswoods of our family’ (Virginia Magazine, vol 60, no 2, April, 1952: 234–5). Kerr seems to have prospered, first leasing then buying the house which originally bore his name on the corner of Capitol Square and Duke of Gloucester Street in Williamsburg. He died on 20 October 1738, and was recorded as a ‘A Jeweller and Silversmith . . . Proficient in his Business and well respected’. His estate was put up for sale the following November including ‘a large parcel of very saleable Store-Goods, Diamond and other rings, Gold, Silver, and other Snuff-boxes, Gold and other tooth-pick cases, and other silver Work; together with the furniture of his House’ (Helen Bullock, Colonial Williamsburg Foundation Library Research Report, series 1133 and 1938, 1990). Clearly, Kerr’s unfortunate political dalliance with rebellion ultimately did not hinder his success in business. Doubtless this was aided by being part of a kinship network that included the Deputy Governor of the colony.

At the end of the eighteenth century we have evidence of another goldsmith exiled for political reasons. David Downie from Edinburgh ended his days in Augusta, Georgia. Downie was unusual in the Edinburgh goldsmiths’ fraternity, being both a Roman Catholic and a political radical. The son of a watchmaker, he was apprenticed to William Gilchrist in 1753, becoming a freeman of the Incorporation in 1770 (IoG Reg Archive) (illus 5.3). Although little of his work remains, records make it clear that he did a considerable amount of business within the small Scottish Catholic community.

He became involved in the radical politics of the 1790s, influenced by the spirit of republicanism, the events of the American War of Independence and the more recent French Revolution, and, of course, by the restrictions under which he and his co-religionists had to labour. Many sought, if not a republican nirvana in Scotland where the government was in hands of a very small self-perpetuating elite.

Downie joined the Friends of the People and in 1794 became involved in a conspiracy to overturn the Edinburgh city government known as the Pike Plot. Caught stockpiling weapons, including pike heads, he was tried for high treason along with the ringleader Robert Watt. In October 1794 both were convicted and sentenced to death, in the particularly grisly manner reserved for traitors; hanging, drawing and quartering. In the end Watt was simply hanged, but even this caused an outcry, forcing the government to become more lenient. Downie’s sentence was commuted to ‘exile from Britain for life’ (Fortescue 2012: 50). He fled to Augusta, Georgia, where he took up his former profession. Unfortunately, it is not known how well he fared, but it is clear that he took on at least two apprentices, so presumably business was reasonably good. He died there on Christmas Day 1816 (Augusta Chronicle, 1 January 1817). In a curious postscript, one of his daughters, Peggy, married a Paisley weaver and one of their descendants was President Ronald Reagan (The Scotsman, 7 June 2004). There seems to be no surviving example of Downie’s work made in the United States, so it is impossible to speculate about whether he brought any Scottish stylistic influences to his new homeland.

Neither Kerr nor Downie left any examples of their wares made while in the Americas, but the following examples of migrant craftsman certainly did. Having looked at political motivation for goldsmiths migrating, we will now consider some of the financial and social factors. Moving down the eastern seaboard, the West Indies provides further examples.

Before investigating a few individual cases it is worth making some general comments about the Scottish experience in the Caribbean. Across the area, throughout the eighteenth century, but especially after 1763, when the British made huge territorial gains from the French, the number of plantations growing sugar cane, coffee, indigo or cotton increased. Many were owned by Scots and provided employment opportunities for other Scots from the home country. Utilising kinship and local connections, or networks, Scots on plantations extended their links throughout the West Indies, buying land, and engaging lawyers, managers and bookkeepers. Many so-called ‘adventurers’ were from landed families and developed a whole series of networks based on pre-existing bonds; they were consciously transatlantic. Scots in the Caribbean drew heavily on these networks for support and patronage. Such ‘spheres of influence’ had characterised Scottish society for generations, the ‘sojourners’ simply transplanted them to wherever they settled.

Scots and their firms also contributed to the extension of credit and mercantile facilities which fostered an increase in the production of Caribbean staples. As these grew so did the demand for enslaved Africans. Scots were heavily involved in both the use and supply of slave labour. Key Scottish politicians, from the Dukes of Argyll to Henry Dundas, used
government-sponsored colonial posts to extend their patronage, and they made astute use of this in distributing such patronage to ‘useful’ individuals. These connections were essential bonds that held together the Atlantic world and, as such, certainly played a role in the careers of several Scottish silversmiths seeking their fortunes in the West Indies.

During this period, Jamaica witnessed the immigration and settlement of Scots from virtually the whole of the country. Many came from landed families with well-established transatlantic networks; Campbells, Grants, Gordons, and Grants to name but a few. Charles Allan (1710–62), goldsmith in Edinburgh, London and Jamaica, was able to make extensive use of some of these connections to further his career.4

Allan was born in 1710, son of Benjamin Allan, an Edinburgh lawyer, and Sarah Campbell. Having been orphaned, he appears to have been apprenticed, c1724, without indentures, to Colin Campbell (who in turn had been the apprentice of one of the most talented Edinburgh goldsmiths of the early eighteenth century, Colin Mackenzie (IoG Reg Archive)). Campbell was probably related to Allan’s mother; yet another instance of the importance of kinship links within the goldsmiths’ profession. Unfortunately, there is no record of Allan finishing his ‘time’ with Campbell, which would have been about 1731, but it is fairly certain that he would have continued in his master’s workshop as a journeyman until the mid-1730s. At some point he left Edinburgh for London, like so many other Scots at this time, presumably in order to better his career. It is possible that he worked in London as a retailer, or as a journeyman in another goldsmith’s workshop, as he doesn’t seem to have registered his mark with the Goldsmiths’ Company there. However, the Allan family was connected through business with the notable legal family of Dalrymple of North Berwick, and Charles Allan was therefore able to draw on this connection to borrow significant sums from Sir Hew Dalrymple MP and his brother Dr Robert Dalrymple. This allowed him to establish himself in London, and then in the early 1740s to proceed to Kingston, Jamaica, where he set up a goldsmith’s business in partnership with his former master’s son, Archibald Campbell (Barker 2007: chapter 3, passim).

Here it is perhaps worth investigating another one of the connections which might have helped Allan’s business. We have already seen he was well connected with the Dalrymples, a significant group in both Edinburgh and London. However, through both his mother and his master, Charles Allan was intimately connected with a Campbell network, and this is perhaps just as significant for his Jamaican venture.

The first Campbell to become involved in Jamaica seems to have been Colonel John Campbell, leader of a band of some of the survivors of the Darien adventure, who drifted across to Jamaica in 1700 and settled in the west of the island. Many other Campbells were to be born there or to follow from Argyll. Before his death in 1740, John Campbell established an enormous network in Jamaica, formed largely of people from Argyll, and consequently ‘through his extreme generosity and assistance, many are now possessed of opulent fortunes’ (Hamilton 2005: 56). While it is difficult to be certain how closely related the various Campbells in Jamaica were, it is reasonable to suppose the existence of a powerful Campbell network in the island. In 1774 the planter turned historian Edward Long mentions a ‘computation … of no fewer than 100 of the name Campbell … actually resident in [Jamaica], all claiming allegiance with the Argyle family’ (ibid). John, 2nd Duke and Archibald, 3rd Duke of Argyll, were the political masters of Scotland for most of the first half of the eighteenth century. They were instrumental in furthering the early commercialisation and, indeed, industrialisation of Scotland, impelling many of their own and other clansmen to seek their fortunes overseas and creating a pool of migrants, many of whom settled in North America but a significant number of whom ventured to the Caribbean.

With the help of these connections, it was clear that Charles Allan had grand ambitions and hoped to supply luxury goods to the planter gentry of Jamaica. Here it is perhaps worth recalling that goldsmiths and silversmiths were businessmen first and foremost and so were driven by their clients’ demands, both financially and artistically. Allan obtained credit from both the Dalrymples and another Scottish merchant in Jamaica, and began by importing a large amount of highly fashionable rococo silver from London, to retail in Kingston. Unfortunately, this did not go as well as planned; he found it difficult to sell for cash. At some point about 1745 he started to manufacture in his own extensive workshop, producing a wide range of wares from spoons, bowls, salvers, cruets, and substantial covered cups. All were characterised by good, heavy-gauge metal and well-executed chasing in the current rococo fashion, presumably reflecting...
Illustration 5.4
Cup and cover, by Charles Allan, Jamaica, c 1750.
[Courtesy of the Trustees of the National Museums Scotland]
both the tastes and wealth of his customers (Barker 2007: chapter 3, passim) (illus 5.4).

Significant examples of his output have now been identified, particularly since we have been able to differentiate it from the work of Coline Allan of Aberdeen. For many years, prior to Robert B Barker’s pioneering work, most pieces with a ‘CA’ maker’s mark were confidently ascribed to Coline Allan, one of the most gifted and prolific mid-eighteenth-century Aberdeen silversmiths. This misidentification was further complicated by the facts that Coline was also a master of rococo chasing and that many such pieces appeared with an additional ‘AD’ mark, which some silver enthusiasts suggested was a hitherto unknown contraction of the ‘AberDeen’ town mark. In fact, this mark relates to Anthony Danvers, one of the Jamaican assay masters whom Charles Allan was instrumental in having established on the island in 1747 (Barker 1984: 134–5) (illus 5.5). He and another goldsmith from Edinburgh, William Duncan, successfully lobbied the Jamaican Assembly to introduce a local assaying system, in order to ensure the quality of metal used in the island. Significantly, this system looked to Edinburgh rather than London for its model; hence the assay master’s initials were stamped on wares to identify the assayer who had tested and passed the silverware as being of sterling standard.

The island’s mark was an alligator’s head. Charles Allan undoubtedly became the largest and most prolific goldsmith in the colony, but his success was short-lived – principally because it was entirely based on credit, and he was unable at crucial periods to obtain hard cash from his customers in order to pay his own debts. His creditors began to close in on him, demanding payment, and his business suffered dramatically in the early 1750s. He died in 1762.

Jamaica was not the only island in the Caribbean to attract Scottish craftsmen. Tobago, in the Windward Islands, was captured from the French and ceded as a British colony in 1763. The French later invaded and recovered it in May 1781 and held it until 1793, when it was finally retaken by the British. At the time of the French invasion, Tobago was under the governorship of a young Scottish lawyer and plantation owner, George Ferguson of Pitfour, but he was not to hold the position long. Despite conducting a valiant and cunning defence, Ferguson was overwhelmed by the French forces (Gilchrist 1999: 4). He was not the only member of his family to have military skill: his older brother Patrick is famed for his invention of a breech-loading musket and for his heroic death at the battle of Kings Mountain, South Carolina, where he led a group of American Loyalists against the rebels in the war of American Independence (Gilchrist 2003: passim). The family also had an earlier connection with the island of Tobago; for Patrick, while serving in the West Indies, bought a sugar plantation in 1768 for the family at Castara. George Ferguson looked after this when Patrick returned to Britain for health reasons in 1772 (Gilchrist 1999: 6). He was still in the West Indies in 1795 when he fought a duel on the island of Grenada, but he was certainly recorded, at the time of his death in 1821, as being one of the last members of the gentry to remain living in the Old Town of Edinburgh. He was buried in the family vault in Greyfriars Churchyard on 15 January 1821 (ibid, 4, 12).

Ferguson was a man of considerable taste and commissioned several examples of excellent quality, highly fashionable silver. A pair of candlesticks, hallmarked Edinburgh 1814–15 and originally from a much larger set of eight or twelve, are of particular importance to this study. They are formed of plain columns set on domed bases, with capitals formed from three boars’ heads supporting screw nozzles and rising prickets. They are of a highly unusual design for Scottish candlesticks, which usually followed fashionable London patterns. Their almost severe plainness, combined with very heavy-gauge metal, are characteristic of this maker’s work. The domed base and the use of an element from the engraved coat of arms (three boars’ heads, for Ferguson) as part of the capital are, in my experience, a unique feature in Scottish sticks. The ingenious use of a rising pricket is also rare. Obviously, however, it is the maker that is of most importance for the present discussion; they have the maker’s mark ‘GF.Tobago’, for George Fenwick (illus 5.6). There are, however, full hallmarks for Edinburgh 1814–15, clearly suggesting they were made in that city. The reasons for the inclusion of the word ‘Tobago’ in the maker’s mark are presently unclear, but certainly indicate a fascinating connection with the island.
Illustration 5.6
Pair of candlesticks with ‘George Fenwick, Tobago’ mark, hallmarked in Edinburgh 1814–15.
[Courtesy of the Trustees of the National Museums Scotland]
Two silversmiths called George Fenwick, father and son, were working in Edinburgh at about the same time and it is not clear which is which at any given time. Fenwick senior was admitted as a freeman of the Incorporation of Goldsmiths on 20 September 1810, having previously been working in the city as an unfreeman. He was in a productive partnership with George McHattie between 1800 and 1807, and continued in business until his retirement in 1853 (IoG Reg Archive). He took his son, also George, as an apprentice in November 1811. George junior in turn was admitted as a freeman of the Edinburgh Incorporation on 23 May 1820, and very shortly afterwards emigrated to Tobago. It now seems clear that both Georges had some connection with the Fergusons of Pitfour and Tobago, as the mark on both these candlesticks and numerous other pieces of silver made before the younger George headed for the West Indies proves. Unfortunately, like so many Europeans, he succumbed to the climate and died at the Fergusons’ plantation of Castara on Tobago on 4 September 1821. Surviving examples of the Fenwicks’ work indicate that they were productive and talented craftsmen, not always following the set conventions of the day. Many of their pieces display bold design and the use of particularly heavy-gauge metal, something noted earlier with the Scots silversmiths in Jamaica. Unfortunately, there is not yet a complete answer to this story, and more research is still to be done, but these candlesticks are a remarkable piece of evidence for the Scots’ links with the West Indies. They tie together the experience of a younger son of a laird who returned to Scotland with a fortune and a craftsman who did not.

For the final example of a Scots migrant goldsmith in this short study, we must turn to Canada, and the career of a fully time-served master goldsmith who possibly migrated because of a downturn in his financial affairs at home. Robert Cruickshank moved to Montreal in 1773 and became one of Canada’s most prolific and influential silversmiths of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.6

The son of George Cruickshank, a Presbyterian minister in Arbroath, Cruickshank was born in April 1743 and at the age of sixteen was apprenticed to Alexander Johnston, goldsmith in London. Johnston was also a Scot, who had originally worked in Dundee, served in the Jacobite army in the 1745–6 rebellion, and had been forced to seek his fortune in London. Cruickshank was connected to Johnston through an extended kinship bond and became a freeman of the London Company of Goldsmiths on 9 April 1766, taking over his master’s business when he retired to a Scottish estate in July 1766. Recorded as a plateworker (a maker of larger objects, such as cups, tureens, sauceboats etc) in Old Jewry from 1766 to 1773, Cruickshank seems to have pursued a successful career in the capital (Fox 2008: 83). Dr Ross Fox has convincingly reattributed numerous London-made pieces to Cruickshank, and from this evidence he was clearly a talented craftsman (ibid, 84). He certainly had links with the transatlantic trade, supplying James Craig, another silversmith of Scots descent, active in Williamsburg (ibid, 85). It is likely, however, that Cruickshank’s fortunes took a turn for the worse during the extreme credit crisis that hit Britain in 1772, bringing on a widespread economic depression. It was presumably this that prompted him to emigrate to Montreal in 1773, one of the major centres of the burgeoning fur trade (ibid, 86). Scots were at the centre of this trade, occupying prominent positions in the management and operation of the North West Company.

Cruickshank was obviously a talented and adaptable craftsman and a skilled businessman. Very soon after his arrival he was producing a wide range of domestic and ecclesiastical silver for a range of customers. It is perhaps ironic that this son of a Scottish Presbyterian manse found himself producing large numbers of sacramental vessels for the growing Roman Catholic congregations of Montreal. While his forms follow standard French prototypes, one can argue that Cruickshank brought a measure of Calvinist simplicity to them in the form of restrained use of chased ornament. His domestic wares also echo the current neoclassical tastes demanded by his French- and English-speaking customers (Fox 2008: 87; Villeneuve 1988: 60).

However, it is in his production of so-called ‘trade silver’ that we can most see his Scottish roots. The use of silver goods for barter within the fur trade grew in the second half of the eighteenth century, especially by those traders operating out of Montreal. Many types of silver ornament were traded with Native Americans, particularly medals, gorgets, brooches and crosses. All helped to ‘brighten the covenant chain’, as the strengthening of the links between European traders and native peoples was described. However, one particular piece of jewellery found favour with native peoples in the east of the country – the heart-shaped brooch. So popular were these small brooches with the Iroquois that the style became something of a national badge.
It is now accepted that the design of these very distinctive brooches had its origin in Scotland, where it later became known as a ‘luckenbooth’ brooch. The first scholar to suggest this and to discuss its significance was Ramsay Traquair (1874–1952), the influential Professor of Architecture at McGill University. His article on ‘Montreal and the Indian trade silver’ was published in 1938 (Traquair 1938: 4). The physical similarities between Scottish brooches and Montreal-made ones are obvious, from the use of the basic heart shape, through the addition of open-work crowns to the complex shapes arrived at by intertwining two hearts. How and why this example of Scottish folk-jewellery made the transition to become Canadian-made trade silver, sought after by native peoples, are complex and only partially answerable questions (illus 5.7).

Native American interest in these brooches may have started with seeing Scots settlers – women and children – wearing them. The numbers of Scots settler families in the east of the country increased after the end of the French and Indian War, and, of course, again in the aftermath of the American Revolution. It is quite probable that women wore the brooches as a reminder of emotional links with their home country. As many Scottish heart brooches were either made or used in the north-east of Scotland, it is certain that Robert Cruickshank, who hailed from that area, would not only be very familiar with their design but would also know of their cultural significance (Dalgleish 2006: 125). He became one of the largest suppliers of trade silver to the Montreal-based fur traders, many of whom were Scots or of Scots descent.
Trade silver both in Canada and the continental United States of America was a considerable commercial enterprise, and merchants ordered many tens of thousands of silver items. This trade saw its height during the days of bitter conflict between the Hudson’s Bay Company and the North West Company.

We get some idea of its sheer scale from an order placed with Robert Cruickshank in May 1800, by Angus Mackintosh, an agent working for Mactavish, Frobisher & Co. The order included 12,000 small brooches at 6/6, 6,000 small brooches at 8/– and 5,000 large brooches at 15/– (Langdon 1966: 18–19). This account was by no means exceptional in terms of total numbers of items ordered, as other bills and accounts confirm (Fredrickson and Gibbs 1980: 43–8).

One can perhaps see why in the wonderful painting of an unknown native woman with her son, erroneously titled Pocahontas and Her Son (illus 5.8). The portrait clearly dates to the early part of the nineteenth century. The woman’s dress is lavishly decorated with alternating lines of heart and ‘council square’ trade silver brooches. Whoever painted this picture was aware of the cultural and ethnic complexity of the interaction between Native Americans and Europeans involved in the fur trade. In Scotland heart brooches were normally only worn by women or children, and usually one at a time. Native American women seem to have preferred to wear them in large numbers, as did Native American men with other forms of trade silver. One can get some idea of the value of the brooches in the fur trade from a list of ‘Equivalents for barter of goods and skins’ dated 1765. This indicated that one silver brooch (although unfortunately the list does not stipulate if it was a heart type) was to be exchanged for one racoon or musquash skin (Dalgleish 2006: 126).

Trade in silver ornaments decreased dramatically after the amalgamation of the North West Company and Hudson’s Bay Company in 1820, as the Hudson’s Bay Company did not favour the use of trade silver in their business. By this time, however, Robert Cruickshank was no longer on the scene. In 1805 he had moved over to being a hardware merchant and in 1807 passed the business to his son-in-law Arthur Webster – another Scot, from near St Andrews in Fife, and yet further evidence of the importance of kinship ties in our story. Cruickshank died in 1809 on board ship, just as he was returning to Canada from a visit to Britain (Fox 2008: 93). He was undoubtedly one of the most successful transatlantic Scottish silversmiths in our period. He also brings to an end this brief look at the careers of a few of the silversmiths who made the journey across the sea in the eighteenth century.
Conclusion

Assessing the impact of Scots craftsmen on the transatlantic silver trade is clearly problematic. While significant quantities of silver made in Scotland were doubtless carried overseas by emigrants, little has survived; certainly not enough to form the inspiration for identifiably Scottish styles in their new homelands. Nor did the reasonable number of migrant craftsmen themselves seem to develop particularly ‘Scottish’ products. With the obvious exception of the heart-shaped brooches so favoured by the North West Company’s fur traders, one does not find large numbers of American–made quaichs or Jamaican egg-shaped coffee urns.

Like most other Scots émigrés, goldsmiths, silversmiths and jewelers left the country for a variety of reasons: economic, social and political. Equally, as part of the ‘middling sort’, they made particular use of the range of pre-existing kin- and area-based networks to further their careers. They were primarily businessmen geared to supply what their clients wanted and undoubtedly willing to adapt to the demands, taste and pockets of their customers. The use of heavy-gauge silver by West Indies silversmiths is probably a reflection of this. Some settled for good and integrated into their host societies, while some returned home, with or without a fortune. What is clear is that they were an integral part of the huge economic and social impact that the Scots had on the developing transatlantic world and, as such, I hope this short survey will prompt further research into the Scottish silversmith in the Americas.

Notes

1 My original conference paper owes a great deal to the pioneering work of Robert B Barker, Dr Ross Fox, Rene Villeneuve, Henry Forthingham OBE, Julianne Berger and William Fortescue, people I am privileged to call friends and colleagues, and whose work I relied on throughout.

2 I am grateful to Ms Julianne Berger, an intern from the Centre for British Studies, Humboldt University, Berlin, for painstakingly preparing a survey of Scottish silversmiths culled mainly from existing published sources.

3 Much of the following section is based on Douglas J Hamilton’s detailed survey of the Scots in the Caribbean (Hamilton 2005: passim).

4 I am immensely grateful to Robert B Barker for generously allowing me to draw on unpublished material from his MPhil thesis (Barker 2007), as well as quoting heavily from his many published articles. He also kindly read this article in draft and made many helpful and constructive comments.

5 These two candlesticks were acquired by National Museums Scotland in 2003.

6 Much of what follows is based primarily on the work of two Canadian scholars, Dr Ross Fox and Dr Rene Villeneuve; both have very kindly allowed me to use their recent research, published and in discussion, on George Cruickshank. The following theory about Cruickshank’s inspiration for the use of heart brooches as trade silver is, however, my own interpretation.

7 I have not been able to consult the original account quoted in Langdon (1966: 18–19) and at first sight the prices, if quoted for individual brooches, look unrealistically expensive. As he emphasises elsewhere that the trade goods were to consist of ‘inexpensive silver trinkets’ (ibid, 18) it seems probable that the prices were actually per dozen items. I am grateful to Robert B Barker and Wynyard Wilkinson for alerting me to this apparent anomaly.

Bibliography


Dietert, R & Dietert, J 2007 The Edinburgh Goldsmiths I, Training, Marks Output and Demographics. Private publication.


IoG Registration Archive Incorporation of Goldsmiths of the City of Edinburgh Online Hallmarking Archive.


