

Scottish Silver and Accessories

Tuesday 16th August 2011

33 Broughton Place

Edinburgh



THE INVERESK COMMUNION CUPS



104

An important pair of James VI (I of England) communion cups

George Crauiford, Edinburgh 1619-21, Deacon's mark James Denniestoun, with zig zag assay scrape above marks, with additional assay scrapes to interior of domed foot and base of foot rim, the wide shallow hemispherical bowls above baluster stem with large tapered knob, with stepped section with gadrooned collar below, on domed spreading circular foot above baluster foot decoration with fine borders of foliage, flower heads and slender S scroll formed panels, on stippled background (2)

21.5cm high, bowl 17.5cm diameter, bowl 6.5cm deep, foot 12cm diameter, 19.5oz each

Provenance:

Gifted by Alexander Seton, Chancellor of Scotland and later the first Earl of Dunfermline in 1621 Inveresk Parish Church Christie's, London, South Kensington, 'Scottish Silver', 29th June 1999, illustrated

Reference:

'Old Scottish Communion Plate' Rev T Burns, pages 212 and 213, figure 20

Note on cups:

While this form of communion cup is well recorded for the Edinburgh and East Lothian area, these examples are of a particularly high quality, and rightly considered amongst the finest surviving examples. The overall shape and form, while restrained in design, shows a great skill and quality in manufacture, the large knob to the stem, while at first looks slightly cumbersome, gives the piece real presence when in the hand. The only additional flourish of decoration, seen in the running border of foliage to the foot rim, is of exceptional quality and skill for the period and shows the fine degree of craftsmanship employed for the pieces overall. As noted by Burns, these cups originally formed part of a larger gift, of five cups (four without engraved decoration - such as this), and one with the addition of Alexander Seton's armorial to the interior of the bowl. The example with the additional engraved armorial is now in the collection of Huntley House Museum, City of Edinburgh Museums. Of the three other cups originally sold by Inveresk Parish Church these are the only two to re-appear on the market and the whereabouts of the third cup is currently unknown.

Alexander Seton, 1st Earl of Dunfermline, Lord Fyvie and Lord Urquhart, Baron of Fyvie and Pinkie, Pluscarden etc (1555-1622), was without doubt a hugely influential figure in late 16th and early 17th century law and society. He represented King James VI (I of England) at the highest level in Scotland and held the post of Lord President of the Court of Session from 1598 until 1604 when he was elevated to Lord Chancellor of Scotland until 1622. He had



previously held positions in the Privy Council from 1585, Lord of Session (as Lord Urquhart) in 1586. His title changed once more in 1598 to Lord Fyvie and finally to 1st Earl of Dunfermline in 1605.

Within these positions he was heavily involved in the uniting of the two crowns of Scotland and England and forming what would become Great Britain, creating Scotland's King James VI as King James I of Great Britain.

Alexander, from an early age, was connected to the Royal Court of Scotland and was godson to Mary Queen of Scots. As a gift she bestowed upon him the lands of Pluscarden and the priory within and the title 'Baron of Pluscarden'. The Seton family had long been supporters of the Scottish crown and the Roman Catholic faith so this gift followed in their tradition of protecting the Church, the Benedictine Monks and Royal family.

From an early age, great hopes were placed on Alexander's future and he was sent to Rome where he studied at the Jesuit's College. His intention was to enter the priesthood, however this would soon change and his course of education moved towards civil and canon law. During the short time spent in Rome he had made a great impression and it was considered that he might have reached the position of Cardinal.

However, this was not to be and with the overthrow of the Roman Catholic monarchy in Scotland his vision and pursuits changed rapidly; a decision he would surely not regret.

One of Alexander Seton's most important and what would become controversial positions came when he was elected an 'Octavian' one of eight members of nobility who in 1596 were chosen to manage the public affairs in Scotland on behalf of the King (now based in London).

he Octavians introduced various controversial reforms and were viewed with great concern by the clergy in Scotland, a point which did not go unnoticed with the Monarchy and allowances for the clergy were made.

At this time, however, the Court of Session was often considered to have bias towards the Monarchy's will and their judgments were often considered lacking, however under Seton it can be seen, in very colorful terms, to be a turning tide back to the judgment of the Court.

This is most obviously seen with the case of Robert Bruce, the leader of the Presbyterian Church in Scotland, whose views obviously stood apart from those of the Roman Catholic Monarchy. During this case King James's views and hopes for the judgment of the court were made clear that what he wanted, what would later prove to be an, unjust ruling to be made against Bruce. In response to his King, Alexander Seton shows the staunch nature of his belief in the law and Court and even while acting against King James his even handed approach surely could not be questioned.

'This is a matter of law, in which we are sworn to do justice according to our conscience and the statutes of the realm' 'Your majesty, may indeed command us to the contrary, in which case I and every honest man on this bench will either vote according to conscience, or resign and not vote at all'.

After this firm and fair statement the judges voted in favour of Robert Bruce and against the will of King James, with only two voting against the majority.

Alexander Seton's influence on Scottish architecture is well recorded and can still be seen. His main residence, Pinkie House, which would become a favourite of Prince

Charles (later to become Charles I), was restored to a new glory from its virtual destruction after the battle of Pinkie in 1547 where the long gallery survives with a finely painted ceiling. He was also instrumental in the Seton's of Meldrum rebuilding the ruin of Fyvie castle, which to this day remains a jewel in the crown of Scottish Baronial architecture. Huntley House Museum, Edinburgh, houses part of a ceiling bearing his monogram and heraldry and another similar ceiling has been recently recorded in a private home. These ceilings, when considered with the Seton portraits and communion cups, show the influence and consideration Seton bore, not just on law in Scotland, but also the arts.

Alexander Seton continued with his staunch religious and lawful ways right until his death in 1622. After his spectacular funeral procession which would become immortalized in the poem 'Tears for the Death of the Earl of Dunfermline Chancellor of Scotland' he was buried in the vault beneath the church of Dalgety which lay in his now vast and wide reaching lands in Scotland, after a service performed by Archbishop Spottiswood.

Perhaps not the most colourful testament of Alexander Seton, 1st Earl of Dunfermline, but no doubt a restrained contemporary one, gives us a final thought on this important man and character within Scotland goes to Advocate George Seton of Cariton;

'An able lawyer, an impartial judge, a sagacious statesman, a consistent patriot, an accomplished scholar, a discerning patron of literature, a munificent builder, a skilful herald, and an ardent lover of archery and other manly sports.'