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The Cadboll Cup

by Robert B K Stevenson

The purchase of the Cadboll Cup, with generous help in particular from the National Art-Collections Fund as recorded in *Proc Soc Antiq Scot*, 103 (1970-1), 244, brings back to Scotland the remarkable silver vessel long exhibited in the Victoria and Albert Museum, and in facsimile in our Museum (pl 44). It is now, in two senses, the latest of the notable series of exhibits here that have been associated in various ways with the Macleods of Cadboll and Invergordon Castle; the earlier are ten Pictish stones from Tarbat, and that from Hilton of Cadboll, and the two Pictish silver brooches from Rogart (*Proc Soc Antiq Scot*, 88 (1954-6), 239; 56 (1921-2), 60-3; 22 (1887-8), 271-4).

A very good account of the Cup was read to the Society in 1888 by Sheriff Norman Macpherson (Macpherson 1888), and much stylistic study is still needed before the problems set out in his discussion can be evaluated fully. He recorded the family tradition that the Cup was saved from the fire of Invergordon Castle in 1801 along with an English one dated 1588, that both had belonged to the Macleods of Lewis and that one or both came from an Armada wreck. (The whereabouts of the first is not now known.) The Cup bears no silver-marks and from the character of the ornamentation, both profuse and unusual, Sheriff Macpherson discounted the possibility of a Spanish origin but said that 'the bowl, the handle [stem] and the base of the cup seem to be of different date and character'. He considered but rejected the possibility that the most striking part of the decoration was modern. 'No doubt any time since the commencement of the Celtic furor, half a century ago, one familiar with Celtic ornament in its various stages prior to the Reformation, might have devised similar patterns, but, so far as we have been able to observe, no one ever did.'

These judgments are the starting point of the present note. Mr C C Oman has kindly answered an enquiry about the possibility that parts of the Cup might be, or be copied from, a French sixteenth-century wine-cup by sending a photograph of one (pl 45).

It may also be said that in general shape the Cadboll Cup, like many Scottish seventeenth-century communion cups, resembles a standing mazer of the second half of the sixteenth century. These mazers were first brought to notice as an outstanding group of Scottish works of art by Commander G E P How (1934). The finest of them have a pear-shaped stem with a projecting

moulding where this begins to flare out to the wide base. At that point on the Cadboll Cup there is a clumsier flange, which visually serves the same purpose. A hollow reel-shaped moulding at the bottom as well as at the top of the stem on the French analogy is, however, likely. Stylistic influence from the mazers may perhaps be seen in the elongated bosses round the flange, which are coarser versions of the classical ovolo round the foot of the Galloway Mazer (Maxwell 1956) or the ends of the ribs on the base flare of the Tulloch Mazer. The background of these bosses is rather crudely tooled with a small close all-over rocker pattern.

Below the flange, the foot of the Cup consists of further separately-made elements, a narrow vertical band decorated with a close row of square indents and between that and a double convex rim a rather rough decorated convex band. On it there is repeated an interlace or knot which, as Sheriff Macpherson noted, greatly resembles in design and quality that on the Losset Brooch, still belonging to the Macneals of Ugadale in Kintyre, which indicates a Scottish and probably West Highland origin for it; we may note that the panels of each seem to have been stamped into a casting-mould rather than directly into the metal.

Sheriff Macpherson also remarked that such stamped panels were very common among Scottish silversmiths, and we may see a more sophisticated version, of semi-classical scrolls, in a corresponding position on the base of the Fergusson Mazer made in Edinburgh in 1576. Unlike the mazers already named but rather like the St Mary's College Mazer, the Fergusson has a plain tubular stem tapering upwards slightly. The lower flare of that stem, and the proportions and elements of the base on which it rests, are so extraordinarily similar to those of the lower part of the Cadboll Cup, that we must conclude that this has been cut down from such a stem. What we have called the flange can be seen to be a cap made to cover the remains of the tube and to provide a transition and support for the pear-shaped stem from another vessel. This is an obvious weak spot in the Cup and bears signs of damage – the 'cap' has been pressed down in the centre and split radially, the joint with the stem is thickly soldered, and a strengthening rivet inserted from below. Evidence that there had been a reel-moulding at this point is provided by a large hole in the centre of the cap, too large to support the stem and now built out with solder.

An analysis of various parts of the Cadboll Cup was carried out by the Museum's Research Laboratory, as reported by Dr McKerrell on pp 309–15. The quality of the silver varies considerably but the amounts of lead in particular indicate that none of the metal is modern except the rivet. The bowl and stem are statistically quite similar to one another, and distinctly better than the concave moulding between them, or than the base except the remains of the tubular stem which required to be more malleable and so perhaps purer. The cap, which if we have interpreted correctly the sequence of events was the last part to be made and on its own, is the least good silver and the only part with a high zinc content.

The pear-shaped stem and the outside of the bowl are both engraved with the most striking decoration on the Cup. The Renaissance strapwork and arabesque of leaves on the stem are reserved against a horizontally hatched background. This is somewhat similar to that of the twelve panels on the bowl, which are a conception not found on any other vessel. The patterns on them are also exceptional for some seem to combine cross-head and leaf motifs derived from West Highland sculpture with Renaissance foliage. As Sheriff Macpherson observed the design on the stem 'is not so unlike some of the patterns on the bowl as to be pronounced with certainty the work of a different hand'. Two further panels contain broad triple-ribbon interlace like that which fills the panels of the two known Scottish whale's bone caskets probably of fifteenth–sixteenth century date, but which goes back many centuries further (Callander 1926; Stevenson 1956, 93–5); a third is filled with an unusual triple-ribbon chequer, found on a small

copper box from Barr of Spottes, Kirkcudbrightshire (NMA cat no. FC 171; Coles 1908). In each case (but not on the caskets or earlier) the underlying ribbon is emphasised by a row of short parallel strokes, as on interlaces on sixteenth- and seventeenth-century brooches, and as used to shade their leaves and flowers, and those of the Cadboll panels. The difficulty of finding stylistic parallels or dating for the panels on the caskets emphasises the fragmentary nature of the evidence for the artistic context of the Cup. Although the sureness of execution and design on the West Highland sculptured stones degenerated completely during the sixteenth century, there was no general artistic stagnation but rather the reverse. A fusion of incoming Renaissance art with older styles, comparable to that on the Cup but better documented, is that of Scottish architecture and painted ceilings towards and past the end of the century. One example in good metalwork, though not closely datable, is the brooch of the MacIver-Campbells of Ballochyle which combines a central crystal and eight-pointed outline with Renaissance leaves on a hatched background like that of the Cup, and a ring of egg and dart in relief (NMA 1966, pl 21). A few brooches indeed seem like the Cup to stand intermediate between late medieval art and the 'folk-art' of the latter half of the seventeenth century with its targes, brooches and powder-horns, best illustrated in Drummond's *Highland Weapons*.

One main feature of the Cup remains to be mentioned, the roundel that is engraved, in lieu of a separate 'print', in the centre of the bowl. The shield of four quarters, flanked by the letters M N, is little more than scratched, and was considered by Sheriff Macpherson to be later than the ring of orthodox West Highland foliage round it, and later than anything else on the Cup. He identified the arms - castle, lion passant, lymphad, and two eagles' heads erased affrontée with a fish in base - as Maclean because of the eagles' heads, and possibly Maclean-Macleod.

The central roundel has been gilded, as have the twelve exterior panels, the lip of the bowl, and the ornamented areas of the stem and base. The height of the Cup is 6 inches and its diameter $6\frac{3}{8}$ (15 by 16.3 cm), the weight 16 oz.

Finally, it should perhaps be said that the composite character of the Cup is not unusual in valued heirlooms. The print of the Bute Mazer with the lion and the enamelled shields is no less than two centuries older than its sixteenth-century engraved rim, and the silver shrine of the Guthrie Bell, also from the West, is another example (Stevenson 1931; Eeles 1926). We are indebted to the Director of the Royal Scottish Museum and to Mr Aldred for permission to mention too in this connection the Watson Mazer. Dr McKerrell's analyses, made for them, have been incorporated into a discussion of a series of further analyses including the Cadboll Cup to form a companion paper.

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The Cadboll Cup



French sixteenth-century wine-cup (copyright Victoria and Albert Museum)