

...The Finial...

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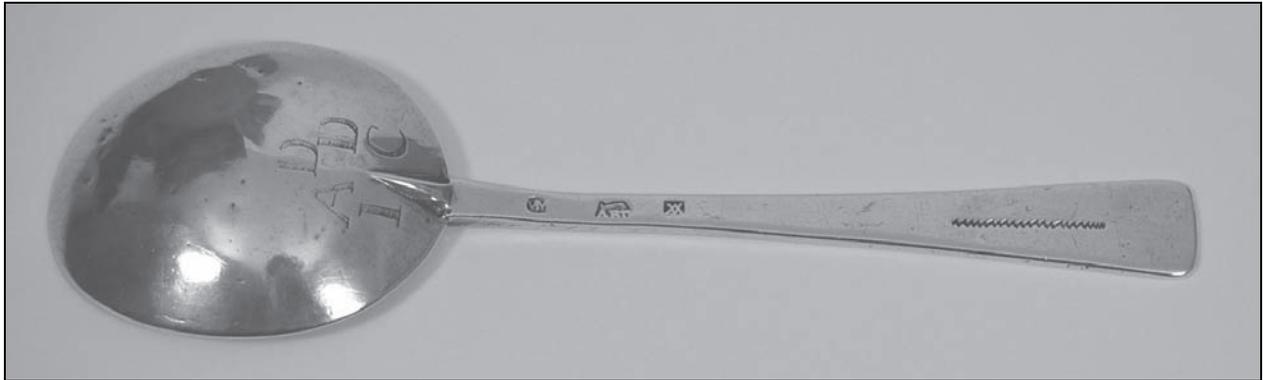
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An Important New Discovery In Early Scottish Silver

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The discovery of a previously unrecorded Scottish provincial puritan spoon (sold as lot 138, Bonham's New Bond Street on the 21st of November 2007, estimate £2000 - 2500) has suggested a re-evaluation of early Scottish spoons. While its rarity and interest were never doubted, the final price of this spoon, £20,400.00, has been somewhat of a surprise to many interested parties.



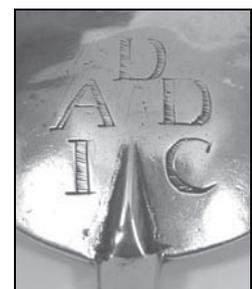
The extreme rarity of surviving early Scottish flatware has led to a relative lack of recent debate amongst collectors. To date, only seven other Scottish Puritan spoons have been recorded, only one of which is of provincial manufacture. While survival of early spoons is rare for any location, the fact that this is one of only eight known to survive for Scotland does make it excessively rare and surely a nationally important piece.

The spoon, dated circa 1650, is of simple notched design made by Walter Melville of Aberdeen.

It is marked with full Aberdeen marks of the period, 'WM' conjoined (maker Walter Melville) ABD with serif above (Aberdeen town mark), 'WA' in monogram (the Tryer's mark of William Anderson of Aberdeen), and with a 2.5cm 'assay' scrape, in the continental zigzag style.



The tapered 11.8cm stem has three 'V' cut notches incised to the terminal and the 6cm long bowl has a short 'V' shaped rattail flanked by the engraved initials 'D/AD/IC'. The initials are currently un-traced but it is hoped continuing research may lead to an identification of the original owners.



Listed in brief detail below are the other known Scottish Puritan spoons. This basic outline detail is only meant to give rough comparison between the other examples and to try to place the current piece within the group as a whole:

1. **‘Barncleuth’ puritan spoon.**
George Cleghorne, Edinburgh circa 1653 – 1655, Deacon Andrew Burrell.
19.2cm, long with three V cut notches to terminal, no rattail to bowl and simple linear collar to base to stem above bowl, 2.08oz (Private collection)
2. **Puritan spoon.**
George Cleghorne, Edinburgh 1657 – 1659, Deacon James Fairbairn.
19cm long, with V cut notches to terminal, simple engraved stylised foliate borders towards terminal and triangular detailed collar at base of stem, no rattail to bowl, 1.52oz (Private collection)
3. **Puritan spoon.**
David Boog, Edinburgh 1665 – 1667, Deacon James Symontoun.
18.4cm long, the stem with engraved heart and scroll design, the terminal with three V cut notches, no rattail to bowl, weight unrecorded (National Museums Scotland)
4. **Puritan spoon.**
Thomas Lindsay II, Dundee circa 1665.
17.6cm long, the stem engraved with simple stylised foliate design and slightly notched rounded stem, short V shaped rattail to bowl, 1.32oz (National Museums Scotland).
Note: this is the only other recorded puritan spoon of provincial manufacture.
5. **Puritan Spoon.**
Alexander Reid II, Edinburgh 1667 – 1669, Deacon Alexander Scott.
18.7cm long, the stem engraved with stylised tulip with initials above and three V cut notches to terminal, no rattail to bowl, 1.73oz (National Museums Scotland)
6. **‘Glentanner’ Puritan spoon.**
Alexander Scott, Edinburgh circa 1653 – 1661.
19cm long, the stem with simple incised heart decoration, five V cut notches to terminal, no rattail to bowl, weight unrecorded (Glentanner Collection)
7. **‘Christ College Cambridge’ Puritan spoon.**
Patrick Borthwick, Edinburgh circa 1650 – 1660?
Struck maker’s mark only, no other details (Christ College Cambridge)
(Recorded by Commander and Mrs How, not seen by the author - this is included for completeness.)

*Note: While in the process of writing this article a private collector has made himself known who appears to have another Scottish Puritan spoon, struck with maker’s mark only (maker unknown to the author). This piece has not been included as it has not been possible to record this example yet and caution must be taken with any new find such as this before its being added to such a small body of extant work. It is hoped to gain access to this spoon shortly, and its details to appear in *The Finial* in due course.*

Quick comparisons show that, as with English spoons, Scottish Puritan spoons were only produced for a short time before fashions and designs changed. In the case of Scottish spoons the variety in style and manufacture can be quite contradictory. The simple lines and notched stems described above are a constant, but the addition of decoration seems to be variable and unique not only to each maker but to each spoon.

Comparison of just the two provincially made examples illustrate this point. Both were made at roughly the same date and, though of similar basic outline, are quite different. First, it is curious to note that they are the only examples with rattails to the bowl. They both have engraved initials to the back of the bowl (unlike the A. Reid II, engraved to reverse of the terminal, and the 1657-69 G. Cleghorne, engraved to reverse of terminal and bowl) but the position is noticeably different. On the Melville example they are flanking the rattail, and on the Lindsay piece they are engraved above the rattail - but placed as if either side of a rattail.

The Melville example probably slightly pre-dates the Lindsay example and this could explain the simpler and plainer design, and the reason for the more rounded and stylised terminal to the Lindsay example, which appears to be a cross over between Puritan and Trefid spoons. The addition to the Lindsay spoon of foliate decoration to the stem also follows the style for additional decoration of the slightly later spoons of this type.

Continued overleaf...

Not only the two provincial spoons, but all the recorded examples have very different decoration. The decoration appears to grow and become more constant the later the manufacture, beginning with just simple collars engraved at the stem above the bowl. Decoration is not only variable between makers as both examples by George Cleghorne (dated circa 1653-55 and 1657-59), the only maker where more than one example of a puritan spoon has so far been recorded, show no real comparables in decoration.

The Melville spoon, like all these Scottish puritan spoons, shows some common features whilst others are unique. Survival from this early period of provincial manufacture is rare, although Melville does have a relatively high survival rate of known work of high quality.

Even though the body of work for Walter Melville is well recorded (see below) much about the maker is unknown. Within the records of the Aberdeen Hammermen there is no record of his training or apprenticeship. His most likely Master has to be William Anderson (whose mark as 'Tryer' is struck on this piece) but this has not been possible to prove. Melville was admitted to the Hammermen on 10th October 1649.

He was an active member of the Trades and was the head of the Trades Hospital in 1655 and 1656, Deacon of the Hammermen in 1662 and, in the same year, Deacon-Convenor. During his career he was also elected one of the two trade representatives on the town council. He took three recorded apprentices during his career, John Boyne in 1665, Alexander Galloway in 1657 and Gilbert Leask in 1662. Only items by Alexander Galloway are recorded extant. Melville is recorded in Aberdeen as late as 1675 but details of his later career and date of death are unknown.

William Anderson the Tryer of this piece is also worth mention. Again there are many gaps in our knowledge of this maker. His indenture and admission to the Incorporation of Hammermen of Aberdeen is unrecorded but it seems safe to assume it was around 1630, as he is first recorded within the Hammermen as Deacon in 1636. On the 7th of November 1649 (only one month after his probable apprentice was elected a freeman of the Incorporation of Hammermen), the council appointed Anderson as the 'tryer' or assayer of all gold and silver made in Aberdeen in an attempt to control and guarantee fineness of all precious metal wrought in the city. Within the extract from the minutes it states that "*by the tenour heirof nominates and appoiuntis William Andersone, goldsmith, to be tryar of all gold and siluer wark to be maid within the burghe for the year to cum, and being sufficient and markit with the prob, to put the tounes mark*" and carries on to read "*all work that sould pas his mark and townes mark sall be elevin pennie fine and if thar be any work fund of less valuer market as said he sall be liable*" (for a full transcription see 'The Goldsmiths of Aberdeen 1450 – 1850', Dr I E James).

This passage referring to the "*markit with the prob*" suggests he was to take a sample of the metal for assay, which accounts for the zigzag assay scrape, as can be seen on this spoon and other pieces with his Tryer's mark and the "*tounes mark*" also to be present. This act was the earliest Aberdeen instruction to assay.

It is interesting to note that Anderson held the posts of Tryer and Deacon of the Hammermen at the same time, much like the posts of Deacon and Assay Master of the Incorporation of Goldsmiths of the City of Edinburgh. Perhaps a deliberate intention, as with the marking of the silver, to imitate the practices in Edinburgh.

Anderson's mark of 'WA' in monogram is often referred to as 'XX' in error but when examined carefully it is obviously a WA in monogram. This appointment as Tryer for the town was not without controversy and in 1653 he is recorded having great trouble with three craftsmen who were flouting the fineness laws and indeed the trial got so heated that Anderson himself was fined for a verbal attack on the accused. William Anderson was last Deacon of the Hammermen in 1651 and died in Aberdeen 17th February 1662.

It must not be assumed that Melville was a more prolific maker than his contemporaries but perhaps was a more important one with important and high-powered clients who presented his items to institutions, where they often still reside.

Known surviving examples by Walter Melville include:

- **Communion Beaker, Ellon** circa 1650.
Location: Kirk Session of Ellon, on loan to National Museum of Scotland.
References: Burns, p.427-8; Scottish Gold and Silver Work 1956 plate 38; Scottish Gold and Silver Work revised 1991 plate 39 page 104; Silver: Made in Scotland item 7.10, page 149.
- **Mace of King's College, Aberdeen** circa 1650.
Location: King's College, Aberdeen.
References: Scottish Gold and Silver work 1956 plate 32; Compendium of Scottish Silver Volume 2 page 25; Marks illustrated in Jackson's Silver and Gold Marks (Pickford edition) page 583; Silver: Made in Scotland item 8.4, page 164.
- **Strathnaver cup** circa 1653
Straight-sided bowl on baluster stem and spreading foot, engraved with strap work and coat of arms inscribed "*D. Georgius Gordonius Strathnauerinae Dominus hoc poculum in educationus et armoris tesseram Collegio Marescallano donavit Anno 1653*"
Location: Aberdeen University,
References: Burns page 202; Glasgow 1911 exhibition item 409; Exhibition of Scottish Art – Royal Academy of Arts London 1939 item 886; Scottish Gold and Silver work 1956 plate 38; Goldsmiths of Aberdeen 1450 – 1850 plate 2 piece and marks; Scottish Gold and Silver Work revised 1991 plate 39 page 104; Marks illustrated in Jackson's Silver and Gold Marks (Pickford edition) page 583; Silver: Made in Scotland item 8.18, page 171
- **Archery Medal** circa 1664
Medal won by George Mackenzie in 1664. Engraved signature on the obverse: VM *fecit.* (conjoined).
Location: Aberdeen Grammar School
References: Palace of History Exhibition 1911 number 409; Silver: Made in Scotland item 9.6 (part), page 187
Note: Although unmarked it seems possible that Walter Melville was the maker of the Aberdeen Grammar School prize arrow. Melville as the maker of the first prize medallion and a representative of the Hammermen on the town council seems a likely candidate to have received the commission. It is seen throughout prizes presented by town councils that the Goldsmith present on the council received the commission to produce the prize. Whilst not recorded that Aberdeen Town Council presented the prize to the Grammar School there are many precedences throughout Scotland. See 'Silver: Made in Scotland, Sporting Glories'

One of the constant factors with these pieces is the variety, skill and processes of manufacture. The other noticeable factor is the important commissions many of these pieces must have been at the time. It is through these commissions that an insight into the climate of the North East population and their affinity for the arts can be made; we are also lucky that so many of the items were either made for or presented to the institutions they now reside.

With all these aspects considered the true nature of this spoon and its place within such a small body of early work must now be reconsidered.

Acknowledgement

To the current owner, without whose help and access to the piece this article would not have been possible.

Literature

- *Silver: Made in Scotland*, Dagleish and Fotheringham – for full descriptions and discussion of the other known puritan spoons, with detailed photographs of both pieces and marks, and illustrations and detail of other W Melville pieces.
- *The Goldsmiths of Aberdeen 1450 – 1850*, Dr I. E. James – for details of both W. Melville and W. Anderson, and images of their marks.
- *English and Scottish silver spoons, Medieval to late Stuart and pre-Elizabethan hallmarks on English plate*, Commander G. E. P & Mrs J. P. How, for illustration and detail of all previously known Scottish puritan spoons.