

...The Finial...

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Tricuspid & Bicuspid Duty Marks Used in Edinburgh?

By Kenneth J Reid

Having recently joined the Club, I am avidly reading the current volume of *The Finial* together with a number of back issues. As a 'new boy on the block', I realise that there are many gaps in my knowledge, but already appreciate that there is a wide range of expertise among contributors.

Anthony Dove's article '*The Cusped Duty Used in the Assay Offices from 1797*' (Volume 14/04, March/April 2004) interested me. He noted the rises in duty in 1797, 1804 and 1815 and highlighted the changes in duty marks in London and the provincial assay offices. With regard to Edinburgh, he commented that the assay office refused to comply with the changes, but in 1815 amended the start date of the assay year. He illustrated a double cusp, hourglass-outlined duty mark for 1822/3, but was unable to link this to a specific change in duty. Commenting in summary he stated that this mark was found only on Edinburgh silver (and London gold rings).

Stimulated by the article, I wondered if any new information had come to light in the intervening five years concerning Edinburgh. I also feel a number of questions need to be raised, initially concerning the tricuspid duty mark (Fig. 1). This particular mark occurs on an Old English dessert spoon made by Alexander Gairdner & Co in 1798/9 (Fig. 2).

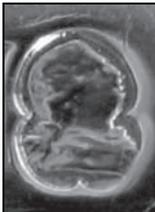


Fig 1



Fig 2

Was this in fact the mark introduced in 1797? And for how long was it used? The mark above is evidently different from those illustrated in Jackson¹ and Bradbury²; in addition, the mark in Bradbury is not the same as that in Jackson for the same dates. The bicuspid, hourglass mark of 1822/3 illustrated by Anthony Dove would seem to be the type of mark that Jackson shows as being used between 1806/7 and 1822/3.

However my observation of Edinburgh duty marks would tend to lead me to think that the tricuspid mark was used much more extensively throughout this period. Examples, taken from flatware, are provided for 1806/7 (Fig. 3), 1810/11 (Fig. 4), 1812/13 (Fig. 5) and 1815/16 (Fig. 6) to illustrate my point.



Fig 3



Fig 4



Fig 5



Fig 6

Marks on an Edinburgh wine funnel also show the tricuspid mark for 1817/18 (Fig. 7). There follow two sets of marks from wine labels for the consecutive two years, 1818/19 (Fig. 8) and 1819/20 (Fig. 9); it will be noted that these have a bicuspid (hourglass) duty mark (Fig 10).



Fig 7



Fig 8



Fig 9

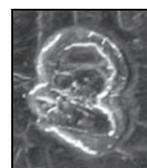


Fig 10

What was the earliest date for the introduction of the bicuspid mark in Edinburgh? Is there any possibility that it could have been as early as 1806/7 as Jackson suggests or was this an erroneous assertion? And then what are we to make of the marks found on an oar pattern dessert spoon for 1818/19 (Fig. 11)? The duty mark is tricuspid. Comparison of this duty mark with Fig 8 could suggest that this represents the year when the duty mark changed. It would be interesting to hear from anyone who has Edinburgh pieces from 1820/21 and 1821/22 who could confirm which duty mark was used. Anthony Dove also stated that apparently indiscriminate use was made of the tricuspid duty mark in provincial assay offices until c.1830. Is there any evidence of this practice in Edinburgh after 1818?



Fig. 11

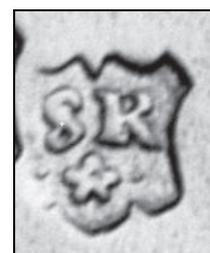
It may not seem unreasonable then to conclude for the present that between 1798 and 1822 the Edinburgh assay office used two duty marks, a tricuspid mark for most of the period and a bicuspid (hourglass) mark latterly; the certain date of introduction and the specific purpose for the use of this second mark are still to be determined conclusively. This sequence of duty marks also seems to differ not only from London, but also from all English provincial assay offices.

Notes

1. Jackson's Silver & Gold Marks (3rd edition revised 1989).
2. Book of Hallmarks (revised 2004)

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Cathlyn & Simon Davidson: We would be grateful if the following could be inserted in the January/February issue. We have a request for information from members who may possess a spoon of the 1670 - 1710 period, which has the following mark struck with no town or date letter. The mark is often struck several times. We are researching this provincial maker and would like to know of examples of his work.



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