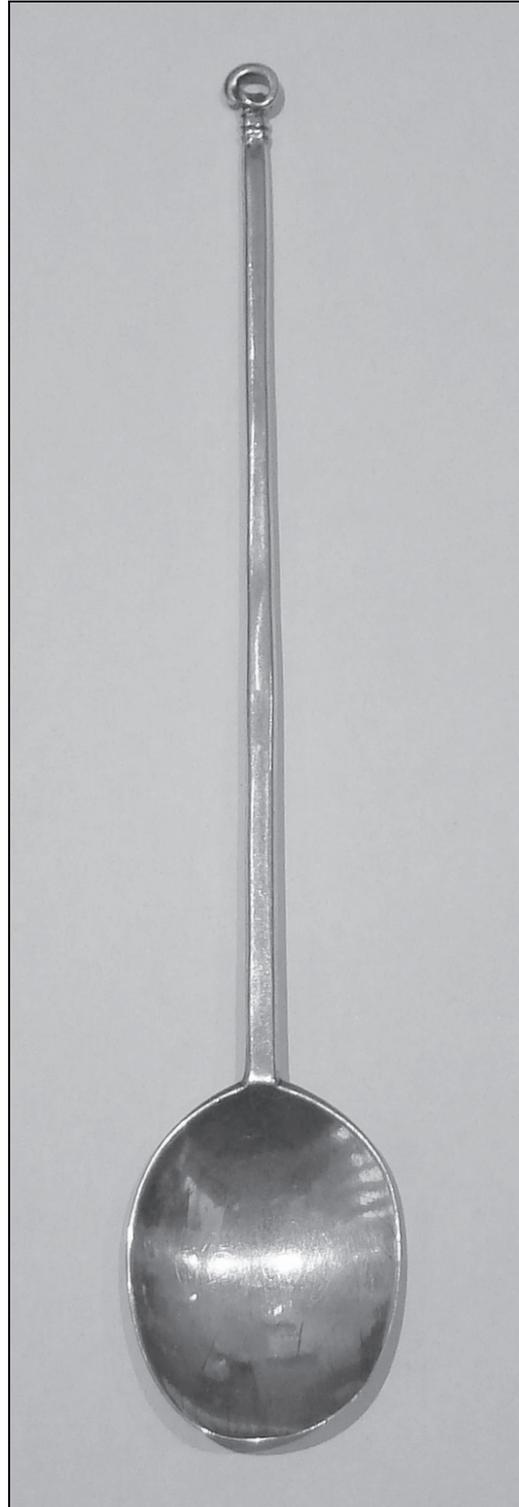
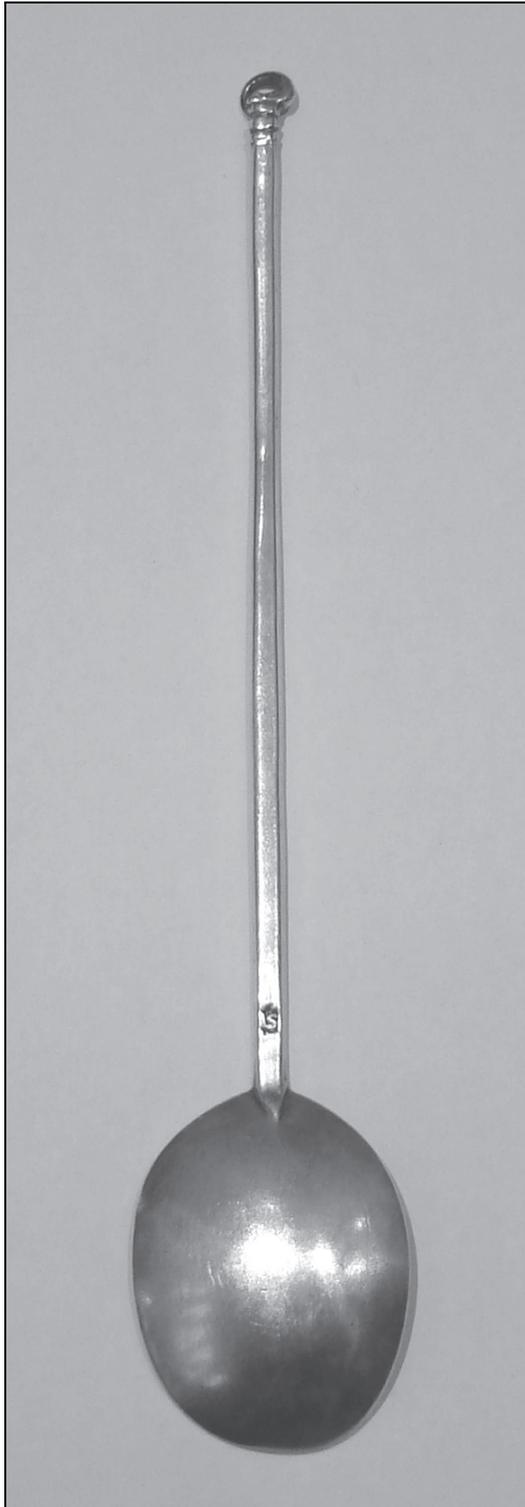


# ...The Finial...

ISSN 1742-156X  
Where Sold £8.50

Volume 20/04  
March/April 2010



# Some Doubts on the Attribution of the Mitre Mark And a 'JS' Maker's Mark to James Sturrock of Montrose

By Jonathan and Laurence Joyce

In an earlier article (James Sturrock in Montrose, *The Finial* Vol. 19/03, Jan/Feb 2009, page 10) we looked at the life of James Sturrock and the marks attributed to him in Dundee and Montrose, most notably in *Jackson's Silver and Gold Marks of England, Scotland and Ireland* (Third edition, 1989). However, an item formerly in the collection of Dundee silver assembled by the late William Guthrie appears to raise some doubts about the dates of manufacture of items attributed to James Sturrock, and therefore of the validity of that attribution.

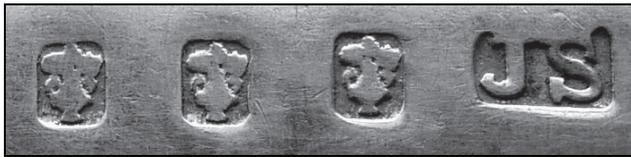


Fig. 1

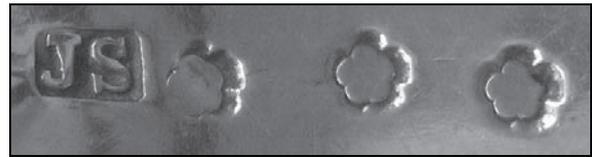


Fig. 2

The items attributed to James Sturrock, mostly spoons, are marked in several different ways: some bear the 'pot of lilies' mark associated with Dundee, usually stamped more than once (Fig. 1); some the 'five-petalled rose' associated with Montrose (Fig. 2); and some the 'mitre' mark, also usually stamped more than once (Fig. 3). All of these are accompanied by the distinctive 'JS' punch. The mitre mark also occurs in combination with a five-petalled rose (Fig. 4), and although *Jackson's* appears to indicate that these marks appear alongside a 'JS' punch, this is not illustrated. Richard Turner's CD *A Directory of Scottish Provincial Silversmiths and Their Marks* also has an example of a mitre mark in combination with a rose, but to date we have seen neither a spoon nor a photograph showing the 'JS' punch in combination with both a mitre mark and a five-petalled rose. If such a combination of marks did exist it would indeed connect a maker with the initials 'JS' to Montrose. Whereas the combination of rose and mitre marks strongly indicates an item that was either manufactured or sold in Montrose, the occurrence of a mitre without a rose mark does not. There is an association, perhaps, but it is not in itself a standalone symbol for Montrose.



Fig. 3

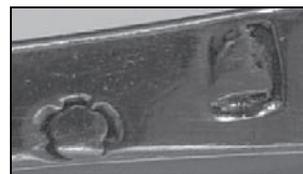


Fig. 4

The mitre marks that occur with a 'JS' punch appear in two distinct forms: in an earlier state (as in Fig. 3); and with a V-shaped horizontal notch to the right-hand side of the mark as viewed in Figure 5. This appears to have been caused by accidental damage to the punch. It is possible to demonstrate, by means of a process described below, that both the notched and the un-notched marks were made by the same punch before and after the damage occurred. Indeed, all the mitre marks can be shown to come from the same punch, and it seems reasonable to assume that those with the notch, and the items on which they appear, are of later manufacture than those without.



Fig. 5

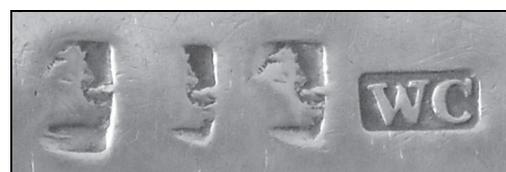


Fig. 6

In William Guthrie's *Dundee Silver 1750–1850* (Perth 1994), in the section on the Dundee maker William Constable (1771–1833), we noticed a photograph of the marks on one of two oar-pattern dessert spoons, described as 'Marks of William Constable with Montrose town marks'<sup>1</sup>. Sadly, although these marks appeared to be mitre marks, the quality of the photograph made exact identification difficult. William Guthrie had died in 2003, but was it possible that these two spoons were in the possession of his family?

We contacted William Guthrie's son, who kindly agreed to let us look for these two spoons in his late father's collection. Having identified them (most pieces had been carefully numbered and tagged), we were able to handle and photograph them, along with other items<sup>2</sup>. On the two oar-pattern dessert spoons were three notched mitres alongside William Constable's maker's mark (Fig. 6), not merely similar notched mitres to those appearing on items marked 'JS', but mitres stamped by the same punch.



Fig. 7



Fig. 8



Fig. 9

Figure 7 shows an image generated in the computer software programme Adobe Photoshop. This has been built from two separate images: a notched mitre mark from a spoon marked 'JS' (Fig. 8); and the notched mitre from one of the William Constable oar pattern dessert spoons (Fig. 9). Before these two images were combined, they were first made partially transparent to enable the superimposition of one on the other. In the resultant image, coincident details match exactly, indicating that both marks were made by the same punch.

As for William Constable's mark on this spoon, this punch is identifiable from a number of peculiarities. Look at the 'W', which is composed of four diagonal lines: (i) the first ascending diagonal (in terms of handwriting) rises too steeply, almost curving towards the vertical, and culminates in (ii) a slight bobble to the top left of the W's central triangle; (iii) the left-hand side of the serif on top of the second ascending diagonal is itself diagonal and parallel to the two ascending diagonals. This same punch can be found on various items of silver by William Constable, on teaspoons, dessert spoons and sugar tongs. Not only is it found on items marked with pots of lilies for Dundee, it is also found on items marked for Edinburgh and bearing the date letter of 1811 or earlier. The latest example bears the Edinburgh date letter for 1833, the year of Constable's death (see Guthrie's book and Richard Turner's CD for this 1833 mark, and other examples).

There are many possible explanations for this strange set of marks in which William Constable's mark occurs with the mitres usually associated with the maker's mark of 'JS'. No doubt the readers of this article will be able to think of some of them. But what seems probable is that these two oar pattern spoons were made and marked during William Constable's lifetime, at the very latest in 1833 and perhaps more than 20 years earlier. And if this were the case, whoever 'JS' was, he was using a punch that was already damaged in 1833 and, moreover, it follows that those articles stamped with the un-notched mitre punch must have been made and marked even earlier. All of the fiddle and oar pattern spoons bearing the 'JS' maker's mark strongly resemble, in both style and shape, similar spoons marked by William Constable. And some of them, particularly those spoons having long narrow oar pattern handles with almost parallel sides, appear to have been made around 1810, rather than in the middle of the century or later. Figure 10 shows a William Constable oar pattern tablespoon, marked for Edinburgh in 1811, alongside an oar pattern dessert spoon and an oar pattern teaspoon, both of which are stamped with mitres (un-notched) and the 'JS' mark.

Continued overleaf...



Fig. 10

James Sturrock of Montrose was born in 1811 and is not found in Dundee until 1846, when he is named as a watchmaker in Dundee Howff records. It is just possible that he could, at the age of 22, have been stamping spoons in 1833 with a punch that was already damaged, but it seems highly improbable<sup>3</sup>, and one would also have to swallow the unlikely explanation that he continued to mark silver for another 30 years with the same faulty punch, until his death in Montrose in 1864. And if we accept an earlier dating for the 'WC'/mitre marked spoons (consistent with the 'WC' stamp on earlier Edinburgh marked pieces) then it is simply not possible for the 'JS' stamp to have belonged to James Sturrock: he would have been far too young or not yet born.



Fig. 11

There are still many questions to be answered, not the least being: If James Sturrock was not the maker of the items bearing the 'JS' punch, then who was? And what are we to make of this strange set of marks (Fig. 11), on a pair of Old English pattern teaspoons sold at Woolley & Wallis in 2009? In that sale these spoons were catalogued as being made by John Sellar in Tain, yet the distinctive 'JS' punch is clearly the same as the one used by the maker under discussion in this article.

The authors would be glad to hear from Finial readers who might be able to throw further light on this particular 'JS', and we would be particularly interested to learn of any examples of the mitre mark occurring in conjunction with other makers' marks.

#### Notes

1. These two spoons appear to have formed part of a harlequin set of six, four oar dessert spoons with Dundee town marks engraved 'B' (192–195), two oar dessert spoons with Montrose town marks engraved 'B' (196–197). Picture caption on page 21 of *Dundee Silver 1750–1850*, William Guthrie (Perth 1994).
2. Among the other items were some of the 'JS' marked spoons from William Guthrie's book, in particular the mustard spoons and toddy ladles mentioned in the endnotes to our previous article (*James Sturrock in Montrose*. The Finial Vol. 19/03, January/February 2009). These items are marked for Dundee and some of them bear the curious inverted double 'C' mark. Inspection of the 'JS' marks indicated that they were made from the same 'JS' punch found on articles marked with mitre marks or multiple pots of lilies.
3. In the 1841 census, James Sturrock and his wife Ann are living in Carnoustie in the Civil Parish of Barry, where his occupation is listed as '*Linen Hand Loom Weaver*'.

#### Acknowledgement

- The photograph used in Figure 1 is taken from Richard Turner's CD, *A Directory of Scottish Provincial Silversmiths and Their Marks* and is used by kind permission.