

...The Finial...

ISSN 1742-156X
Where Sold £8.50

Volume 22/01
September/October 2011



The Reappearance of a Major Scottish Provincial Rarity The Ellon Toddy Ladle

By Colin T. Fraser FSA Scot



Fig. 1

The recent reappearance of one of the great rarities in Scottish Provincial silver, an Ellon fiddle pattern todody ladle, length 16.4cm; weight 36.2g (Fig. 1), by John Mackie (Fig. 2), has given collectors another chance to view this piece after ten years since its last appearance on the market. The ladle last appeared in the inaugural 'Made in Scotland' auction held by Phillips Edinburgh in 2000. It was subsequently reported in the sale report published in the *Finial*¹.

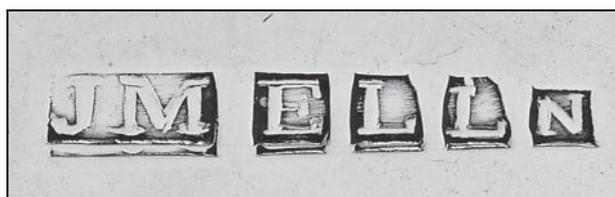


Fig. 2

While there are many items of flatware bearing rare Scottish provincial town and maker's punches, Ellon must be considered the rarest of all. Even when compared with the other classic rarities such as Peterhead, Wick, Tain and Stonehaven, of these 'classics' Stonehaven is without doubt the rarest with perhaps less than ten items known to exist, compared to Wick or Tain, whilst scarce do turn up occasionally. However, this Ellon todody ladle appears to be unique if not actually so. It has been the **only** fully marked item for Ellon to appear on the open market or published.

While this is the only recorded example, it is reputed that one or two other todody ladles have been noted apparently bearing Ellon marks. However, their existence cannot be confirmed or the possibility that they may be repeated appearances of this piece couldn't be discounted. Also worthy of note: this is the piece the marks are taken from that are illustrated in the revised edition of Jackson's², making it a duplication rather than a second surviving example.

Neither have any examples of Ellon have been represented in any of the important collections of Scottish Provincial silver dispersed through auction: Shaw of Torrdaroch (1983); David Morris (1984); any of the 1980s Phillips sales (which have included most of the great rarities of Scottish provincial) or more recent auctions. It should also be noted that no example has been exhibited in any of the major exhibitions on the subject either, including the various late Victorian Scottish History and Life exhibitions, *Old Scottish Silver*, Glasgow 1938, *Exhibition of Scottish Silver*, Royal Museum Edinburgh 1948 etc. Most recently after wide research no example could be traced for the seminal 2008 National Museum of Scotland's *Silver; Made in Scotland* exhibition, and was the only Scottish town not represented.

Some spurious examples attributed to Ellon have been noted in recent years but cannot be considered part of the Ellon survival. These pieces which bore a 'JM' or 'J.M' makers punch none were struck from the same punch as this piece or with any recognisable form of an Ellon town mark. Without these factors they must be considered unattributed and must all be discounted from the survival of Ellon.

The town mark struck to this piece would also suggest that little variation could even exist in the Ellon town mark as all the five punches are struck simultaneously on a stub punch.

This also immediately discounts the previous theories levied that the piece could be considered mis-struck and lacking the 'O' of Ellon or indeed a badly/mis-struck Elgin town punch. While stub punches are not standard with provincial silversmiths it is noted by various makers and towns within Scotland and the North East. Perhaps most clearly seen with John McQueen of Banff (Fig.3), who seems to have used this practice throughout his career.

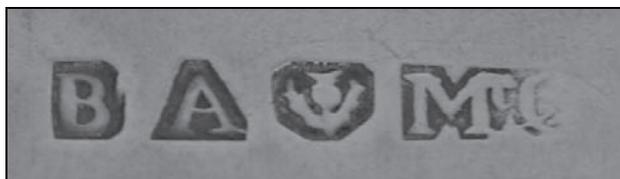


Fig. 3

Also contracted versions of town names used as town marks is common throughout Scotland, although missing only one letter is uncommon and certainly seems to somewhat defeat the purpose. Little is known about the maker John Mackie and indeed he is not recorded as a trained silversmith but a trained and working Clock and Watch maker³.

By the date of this toddy ladle, circa 1840, as was common throughout Scotland and the United Kingdom, the rise of the retailer over the manufacturer had become far more prevalent. This ability to purchase unmarked but finished blanks meant that any retailer could become a 'silversmith' selling high quality wares, in many cases bearing their own marks. This is seen throughout Scotland with numerous names, which we now consider makers, who were no doubt no more than luxury goods retailers. In fact every provincial town most likely has its proportion of these whether we now realise it or not.

The range of businesses which many provincial silversmiths advertise is varied, from imported goods, luxury wares, watches, china, glass and even as varied as dentistry and opticians. It would be naive to assume that the watch/clockmakers businesses would have been any different; there is also testament to this in the many surviving watch papers and billheads showing their trade.

John Mackie of Ellon appears to be a classic example of watchmaker turned retailing silversmith, if only on very rare occasions.

John Mackie of Ellon (1806 – 1849) was a fully trained clock and watchmaker and based in Ellon from c.1820 and works continually until his death in 1849. During his career he only took on one apprentice, James Stewart, in 1841, who would later take on his business upon his Master's death in 1849. As one of the few (if not the only) luxury goods retailers in Ellon, John Mackie would have been the obvious candidate to supply goods out with his mainstay of clocks and watches, such as silverware.

Whether or not John Mackie's hand can be considered the one to actually make this toddy ladle, regardless it is without question an extremely rare and important survival of Scottish provincial silver. This of course would still be the case if the other two reputed examples were to surface, and it would still hold its place as the rarest Scottish town. The rarity of this piece cannot be explained, as is often commented '*toddy ladles were not often sold as singles*', but the classic response is always, and in this case perfectly demonstrated by, '*show me another*'.

I would welcome any feedback from members on other John Mackie/Ellon items known or items previously attributed to Ellon, bearing the town mark or not, so that a fuller picture of this rare maker and town might be recorded and understood.

Notes

1. *The Finial*, October/November 2000, volume 11/02.
2. *Jacksons Silver & Gold Marks of England, Scotland & Ireland*, revised edition.
3. *Clock and Watch Makers of Aberdeen and North East Scotland 1453 – 1900*, Donald Whyte FHG, FSG (HON.)

-O-O-O-O-O-O-