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George Balsillie in Dundee

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Although they are few in number, three items marked 'GB' with either mitre marks or pot-of-lilies associated with Dundee are extremely interesting because of the similarity of these marks to items bearing 'JS' and 'WC' makers' marks. These marks and their similarities have been discussed in previous articles (The Finial, Jan/Feb 2009; Mar/Apr 2010; Jul/Aug 2010). The three items are:-

1. An oar pattern teaspoon in the McManus, Dundee, marked 'GB' with three pot-of-lilies (Fig. 1).
2. An oar pattern tablespoon in a private collection, marked 'GB' with four notched mitres (Fig. 2).
3. A toddy ladle sold recently by Lyon & Turnbull, marked 'GB' with three notched mitres (Fig. 3).



Fig. 1



Fig. 2



Fig. 3

There is one prime candidate for the 'GB' mark, given the apparent connection with Dundee indicated by the pot-of-lilies mark: George Balsillie, aged 29, watchmaker, first appears in Dundee in the 1841 census, where he is listed with his wife Hannah and two-month-old son Andrew living in Union Close¹. From 1842 to 1847 he is listed in the Dundee Post Office directory at 44 High Street.

George Balsillie was born in Cupar on 5th May 1813 to Andrew and Alison Balsillie. His father was a watchmaker with premises in Crossgate, Cupar (Pigot's Directory 1825). George's first wife Hannah died in Dundee in 1843, and the entry on the Dundee Howff website gives: *'Perret, Hannah, buried 13 August 1843 from near Salisbury, Wilts. Cause of death, consumption. Wife of George Balsillie, watchmaker, Perth Road'*. He remarries in 1844, to Barbara Kay, and there were two further children: George, born in Dundee about 1846, and William, born in Leuchars about 1848, these details are from the 1851 census for Leuchars, where Barbara Balsillie gives her occupation as a watchmaker's wife. There is no trace of George Balsillie in the 1851 census, neither Dundee or Cupar, though George's son Andrew, now aged 9, is found in Cupar, living with his grandfather, the watchmaker Andrew Balsillie.

In 1847 Mr William Henderson, watch and clock maker, places an advertisement in the *Dundee Courier* indicating that he has taken over the premises at 44 High St *'lately occupied by Mr Balsillie'*. What happens to George Balsillie after this date is something of a mystery, even to his second wife, apparently. In 1855 when Barbara Kay wished to marry John Berry in Leuchars, the groom's father, Arthur Berry, objected on the grounds that she was already married to George Balsillie, sometime watchmaker in Dundee, who was said to be in *'parts unknown, possibly America, and not known to be dead'*.²

There may be other candidates for the attribution of the 'GB' mark and an inspection of local directories turns up George Booth in Aberdeen, George Bain, watch and clock maker in Brechin, and George Brown in Arbroath. The Edinburgh Assay Office website also gives a George Black in Arbroath from 1860 and a George Brunton in Cupar from 1857. But in view of the existing evidence indicating an association with Dundee, George Balsillie appears to be the only valid candidate. The authors would be glad to hear from Finial members of any other items marked with a 'GB' maker's mark.

Notes

1. A transcription of what appears to be an 1840 Dundee directory has been posted on the internet by the Friends of Dundee City Archives and lists George Balsillie, watchmaker, at 44 High Street.
2. Leuchars Kirk Session Minutes, 15 May 1855.