

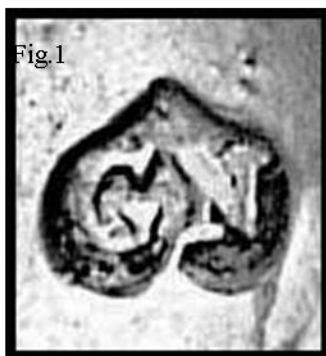
Gawen Nash

A specialist Eighteenth Century Goldsmith with an interesting life.

By: David Shlosberg

Whilst conducting research for my book on Silver Tea Tongs I regularly came across fine pairs of Tea Tongs marked with the initials GN in an up-turned heart shaped punch. I am pleased to say that I have now definitely established the identity of the goldsmith who used this mark, as recorded in a recent article that I submitted to The Finial (the magazine produced by the Silver Spoon Club of Great Britain). This mark is illustrated in Fig. 1 below and can now confidently be ascribed to Gawen Nash.

Having established with certainty the identity of this maker, I decided to look into his life, using all the sources available to me, and I soon discovered what an interesting character Mr.



Gawen Nash was. The date of his birth is unknown but he was the son of Gawen Nash late of Norwich, clerk deceased. He was

apprenticed to the goldsmith Thomas Merry on the 16th June 1713 on payment of £28 and set free on the 4th June 1724. This apprenticeship of eleven years was a long one, but not uncommon.

Very soon afterwards, on July 1st 1724, he entered his first mark as a smallworker (Grimwade 854) and provided the information that he was working as a goldsmith from an address in Gutter Lane. This location was close by Goldsmiths' Hall and was a very popular place to set up ones workshop - if only for the convenience of taking goods to be hall-marked - as, indeed, were all his other addresses, as will be seen by reference to the map in figure 2. He entered a further three marks subsequently - on 7th January 1726 from the same address, on 23rd November 1726 from an address in Wood Street and on 27th June 1739 from an address in Carey Lane (Grimwade 2084, 853 and 859).

On March 8th 1740 he was declared bankrupt, as a silversmith of St John Zachary, on petition of John Clarkson, Citizen and Ironmonger of London, and Jane Haynes of St John Zachary, widow, the executors of Robert Haynes, late Citizen and Haberdasher, deceased. He appears free 'de novo' at Goldsmiths on August 5th 1742 – presumably having expunged his bankruptcy by then. On Friday the 13th, Saturday the 14th, Monday the 16th, Thursday the 19th, and Friday the 20th of January 1749 he is recorded as being a member of the London Jury at the Old Bailey.

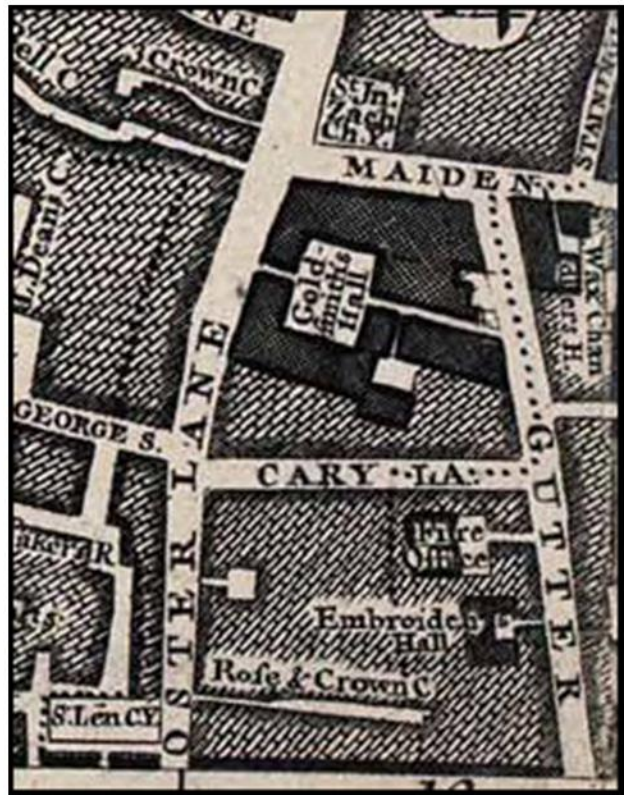


Fig.2

In 1753 he became involved in the most notorious criminal case of his time – the alleged abduction of an eighteen year old girl called Elizabeth Canning on New Year's Day. Miss Canning worked as servant for a jobbing Cabinet Maker, named Edward Lyon, who was mainly employed by the Goldsmiths' Company. At this time, Gawen Nash worked as a butler for Goldsmiths' Hall and was still a Junior Weigher for the Company. His main occupation, though, seems to have been as the owner of a rowdy drinking club situated in Gutter Lane – a venue attended on a regular basis by Edward Lyon.

Basically, the girl's story was that on New Year's Day 1753, as she was returning from a visit to 'her uncle's at or near Salt-peter bank, by the dead wall against Bedlam, in Morefields, near ten at night she was set upon by two men who robbed her of half a guinea, 3s and a halfpenny; that they took her gown from off her back, and a straw or chip hat'. She further alleged that she had her mouth stuffed with a handkerchief and that she was told that if she made any noise or resistance they would kill her. She was hit a blow on the head and remembered being forced along Bishopgate Street but



Fig. 3 above, Fig.4 below



then passing out. She became conscious again in a place called Enfield Wash where the persons there, led by Mother Wells – madam of the brothel – attempted to induce her to become a prostitute for them. When she refused, she was taken up to a hay loft where a gypsy named Mary Squires cut off the lace of her stays (worth ten shillings) with a knife, and stole them from her. According to Canning, she was kept in this room for a month until, on January 29th 1753, she made her escape through a window and walked all the way back to her mother's house in the City.

Her employer, Edward Lyon, got to know of this a few days later and formed a posse to travel from the City to Enfield to apprehend the guilty parties. Members of this posse included three goldsmiths – not only our subject, Gawen Nash, but also John Hague and Edward Aldridge. Susannah Wells and the gypsy were arrested and appeared before an Enfield magistrate and thence to appear for trial at the Old Bailey on February 21st 1753. Wells was sentenced to be branded on the thumb for keeping a disorderly house, whilst the gypsy Squires was sentenced to death by hanging for stealing the stays. Numerous paintings and cartoons of the main protagonists

were made available to the public (figures 3 and 4) – much as celebrities are feted today in popular magazines.

This case became a ‘cause celebre’ amongst the dinner parties of the day and there were even theories that Canning had been in seclusion, during the time of her alleged captivity, having an illegitimate baby which was subsequently taken as their own by a relative of the Governor of the Bank of England. Sir Crisp Gascoyne who, as ex officio Chief Magistrate, sat in on the trial and was dissatisfied with the verdict, since he had been impressed with the gypsy’s alibi which was backed up by a clergyman. He appealed to King George II who granted, first a stay of execution, and then a free pardon.

In 1754 Elizabeth Canning, herself, was indicted for perjury and imprisoned in Newgate Prison where her portrait was painted by Hogarth. He appeared at the Old Bailey on April 24th 1754 where Gawen Nash appeared as a witness at her trial. She was found guilty and sentenced to 7 years deportation to America. Influential friends made special arrangements for her passage to America and so, instead of being transported in the filth

and squalor of a convict ship, she travelled in comfort in an Indiaman. She settled in Connecticut and, in due course, married a relative of the Governor of Connecticut, and had five children.

The only other evidence as to the life of Gawen Nash is the record of the deaths of two sons: William Henry, son of Gawen Nash ‘from St Martin in the Fields’ was buried at St Paul’s Covent Garden on 3rd March 1755. Gawen, son of same, was buried at the same church on 27th January 1758. He acted as butler to the Goldsmiths’ Company for more than 24 years at social functions – perhaps yet another reason for his need to live close to the Hall. . The recorded comment states ‘it was observed that the said Gawen Nash did for several years next before his death keep a coffee house in Gutter Lane and it was alledged (sic) that it was highly inconvenient to suffer the Junior Weigher to keep a coffee house or other public house’. The Court then passed a motion forbidding any repetition of this occurrence by Nash’s successors.

He was dead by 9th December 1763

when the Court had to elect a new Junior Weigher in the Assay Office in his place. On his death his two daughters were given £50 to 'set them forward in any business they may attempt or to go out into the world for their future substance'. His output as a Goldsmith seems to have been restricted to Tea Tongs - nobody that I have contacted can remember having seen any other pieces bearing his mark.

I illustrate in Fig.5/6/7 a range of examples of his unusual work. Figure 5 shows three pairs of early Tea Tongs bearing, inside the grips, the mark shown in Fig. 1 and the pre 1739 lion passant. It will be seen that the central baluster pair is conventional in form but is quite substantially heavier than the normal for this style. The pair on the left is an extremely unusual variant of the style of those on the right, which are also a very heavy pair for this style that became common some ten years later, and which, when I wrote my book, I mistakenly dated as from the late 1740s.



Fig.5



Fig. 6

Figure 6 illustrates a trio of identically shaped tongs but each with a different design for the grips, which seem to have been a sub-specialty for this goldsmith as some examples shown later will illustrate. The central pair has lovely lemon gilding and bears a fine crest of a squirrel sejant holding a hazel branch slipped, that can be attributed to the Holt family. Finally, I illustrate in figure 7 a near



Fig.7



Fig. 10 : a rocaille rococo grip



Fig.11: a semi incuse grip

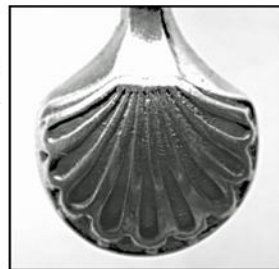


Fig.12: a fully incuse grip



Fig.8 "Eureka" punch in the grips of a pair of tea tongs



Fig.9 Fleur de Lys grip

pair of Tea Tongs (only the lower shafts and grips are different) the left hand one of which gave me the vital clue as to the identity of the maker who used the punch seen in Fig. 1. These marks are shown in figure 8 where the previously unattributed mark and that entered in November 1726 (Grimwade 853) are seen together.

As mentioned earlier, the other outstanding characteristic of Gawen Nash's work was the extraordinary detail that he gave to the design of the

grips of his Tea Tongs. Figures 9 to 12 below shows a range of these grips and it will be seen how meticulously he fashioned them so as to be truly individual in their design. Such elaborate grips were only rarely seen on tea tongs marked for other goldsmiths.

Gawen Nash differed from his contemporaries in that, even though he was a master craftsman in his chosen profession, he was prepared to be somewhat entrepreneurial in his choice of other trades and interests - a very interesting man of his time, indeed.

Endnotes:

1. "Eighteenth Century Silver Tea Tongs - An Illustrated Guide for Collectors" Dr David Shlosberg 2004
2. "The Finial" Volume 18/04 2008
3. "London Goldsmiths 1697-1837 Their Marks and Lives" Arthur G. Grimwade 1990
4. History Today, March 2003. Bevis Hillier
5. Silver Society Journal 12 p152 Arthur Grimwade
6. Ibid
7. Silver Society Journal 12 p152 Arthur Grimwade
8. I would appreciate it if readers who have evidence to the contrary would contact me directly at Shlossy@aol.com.

*Dr. David Shlosberg
completed a busy,
fulfilling 40 year career
as a GP. Next to being an
avid golfer, he collects
tea tongs. He has
published a very
interesting book on his
research "Eighteenth
Century silver Tea
Tongs", 2004. He
updates knowledge about
tea tongs on his website:
www.SilverTeaTongs.com
m
He can be reached by
email: Shlossy@aol.com*