

Bernard Cuzner (1877-1956), a little-known but remarkable silversmith, designer and spoon-maker.

Part 1: his pre-Great War spoons.

By Simon Moore



Mention the name of Bernard Cuzner and, once again, many will often ask “Who?” I am constantly ‘policing’ (and doubtless annoying) sellers on eBay who describe their Liberty silver spoons as being designed by Archibald Knox when in fact many of these pieces were likely designed either by Harry Silver (of the famed Silver Studio where Knox worked) or, more usually, by Bernard Cuzner. The reason for the annoyance is that Cuzner’s wares are generally seen to be less appealing and his name less well-known than Knox but should this be so?

Knox ceased designing for Liberty’s c. 1905 but Haseler’s (the Liberty manufactory in Birmingham) continued to produce his wares until well after 1910, a few lines even into the 1920s and 30s like the Medea teaspoons (Fig. 1).



Fig. 1. Six Medea teaspoons and tongs, c. 1905 and the most popular teaspoon design that Knox created for Liberty.

True to Arthur Liberty’s entrepreneurialism, popular flatware designs were often re-designed in house to give them a new lease of saleability. Knox’s innovative and bold design persona just could not move on from his combination of Celtic and Art Nouveau that had been so appealing at the beginning of the century and which is likely why he moved back from designing for Liberty, into teaching. As the country moved to war, people had more pressing matters on their minds and once the war was over and the gradually emerging Art Deco style took over, Liberty’s, like everyone else needed to update to the new style.

Bernard Cuzner was born in Alcester near Warwick in 1877. He trained in watchmaking (his Father’s trade) but found his true calling in silversmithing during evening classes at Redditch School of Art. He then graduated to the Vittoria Street School of Jewellery & Silversmithing, founded in 1890 as a much-needed branch of the

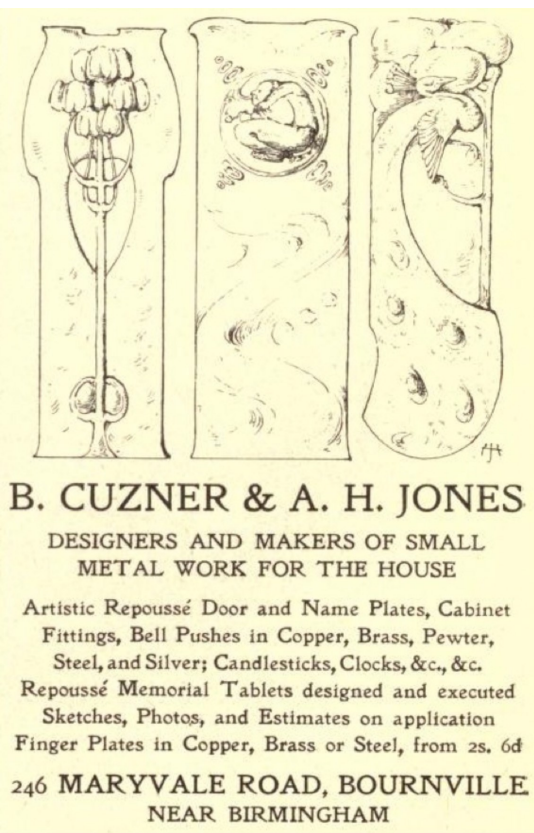


Fig. 2. Business card of Cuzner & Jones in 1901 showing their work in base metal door plates and using Art Nouveau designs as no doubt these were more saleable at the time.

Municipal School of Art in Margaret Street. He became influenced by Robert Catterson-Smith (its first headmaster) and Arthur Gaskin (Smith's successor).

From 1900, he taught at the Vittoria Street School, becoming head of metalworking from 1910 to 1942. During this time at the school he also freelanced for Haseler's becoming one of their chief designers and makers and started to design for Liberty's from 1899. His skill in silversmithing is often reflected in his spoon design work, some of which would have been quite complex to make.

He became an expert silversmith and, among many other related works, wrote *A Silversmith's Manual* in 1935, a very comprehensive book that became a bible to many aspiring precious metal-workers and which ran to many editions, the latest in 1993.

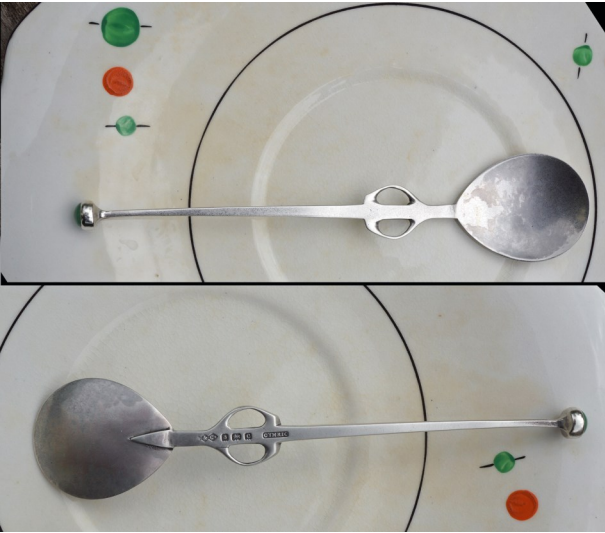
He set up his silversmithing business with a fellow student from the Vittoria Street School, Alfred H. Jones and in 1901 their joint business card shows some of their more saleable output (Fig. 2). Their early ventures would include items that were cheaper to produce such as base metal fittings for furniture and other household items, presumably to earn them enough funding to branch out into silverware. Their Art Nouveau designs may have horrified their tutors – Catterson-Smith and Gaskin who despised the Nouveau style, dubbing it The Squirm! The business must have rapidly succeeded as the same year (1901) they were already winning prizes and awards for their metalworking and jewellery, especially their silversmithing. By 1903 the partnership had dissolved and each set up their own workshops, Cuzner staying in the Bournville suburb. By this time Cuzner had been designing for Liberty for nearly four years and had helped to encourage Oliver Baker (Moore, 2017 & 2021) to join the Liberty design team.

Designing

Although there are some that don't rate Cuzner's designing skills as greatly as both his smithing or his amazing output, he doubtless increased the sales of Messrs Liberty & Co. considerably, as many of his spoons, as well as those he produced via Haseler's for Liberty's, are quite common among collections. Although, once again, some may deem his designs to be more 'careful' rather than the bolder designs of his contemporary Liberty designers, Archibald Knox, David Veazey et al.,

Fig. 3. Five silver spoons designed and made by Cuzner for the Studio Magazine International Exhibition in 1902.

Fig. 4. The design for the same spoon in the Liberty Silver Sketch Book c. 1900. The caddy spoons to the right are by Knox. (Courtesy of City of Westminster Archive and Liberty Retail Ltd.)



he would certainly have tested the silversmithing skills of those working for Haseler's at the time as some of his designs are amazingly complex and eye-catching. He also continued to design successfully for Liberty's even after Haseler's Cymric contract came to an end in 1927.

Cuzner's spoon designs are first mentioned in *The Studio*, one of the more celebrated journals of the Arts & Crafts movement and in the 1902 edition a photograph of five of his spoons are shown (Fig. 3) as a small part of The Studio International Exhibition. His decorative door fittings were also mentioned and he was awarded a Class I silver medal (the highest award) with several other artists and designers at that exhibition.

Fig. 5. The same medieval style, Cymric-marked spoon by Cuzner and assayed in 1902. The same design was also displayed at the International Exhibition the same year (ref. Fig. 3).

The illustrated five spoons show a new style and may be the first that Cuzner produced. The spoon on the right appealed to the Liberty team and in 1900, it was produced by Haseler's, complete with a green chrysoprase finial. The 'side arms' were a new feature among

the other spoons shown - largely based on the styles of late medieval and early Tudor spoons and true to the precepts of the Arts & Crafts Movement. This design was recorded in the Liberty Silver Sketch Book as number 358 (Fig. 4) whereas the other four alongside, suggest that the bolder design alone held more appeal for the Liberty Committee. This spoon is quite a rarity and maybe the first of Cuzner's designs to be offered at the famed store.

At the same time, he was also designing and making jewellery especially during his partnership period with A.H. Jones. Since both men were more than competent precious metal workers, the designs were often complex, requiring the skills that they could perform routinely. Cuzner also designed some wirework spoons very slightly later (Figs 12-13) and which appeared on the next page (385) of the Liberty Silver Sketch Book.

Design motifs figure quite liberally in Cuzner's earlier spoons and some are fortunately linked to photographs in period art publications (Figs 6-8) with finials, although slightly modified, which are from the same hand. The purse-bowled spoons in figures 6 & 8 also feature a decorative area where the handle joins the bowl and this also reflected in other of his spoons from that period (Fig. 9).



Figs 6-8. Set of Liberty spoons and tongs, 1904, attributable to Cuzner as the finials are close in style to the wirework-handled spoon from the Birmingham *Studio Talk* of 1905.



Fig. 9. A spoon of 1902 bears similarities in design to those in 5 & 7 and also attributable to Cuzner (ref. Fig. 3). The acanthus leaf to the back of the bowl is significant in the use of a classical motif and its bud finial was also used on Victorian post / pillar boxes!



Fig. 10. Full dozen set of coffee spoons, designed and made by Cuzner but from his own workshop and using his personal B.C sponsor mark, 1906.

Fig. 11. The two spoons from figure 7 are shown again alongside one of Cuzner's 'ram's head' spoons (E4 presumably) but this time from the 1906 *Art Workers' Quarterly*.



Fig. 12. This amazing Liberty set, also assayed in 1902, shows Cuzner's use of wirework twist to ornament handles and is another of his designs, quite possibly made by him when working at Haseler's.

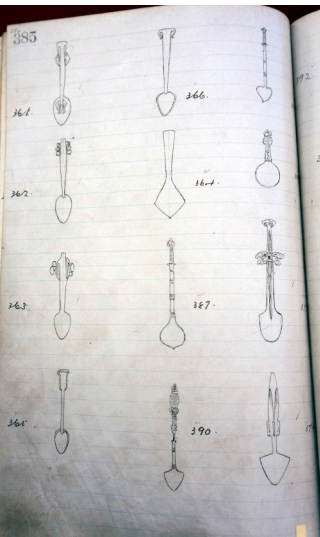


Fig. 13. The design for these spoons is at the top right of Page 385. Although the design number (starting 38) cannot be completely read, there is another similar design (no. 387) and which starts a series of four Cuzner designed spoons before Knox's designs resume on that page.

Fig. 14. Long stirrer spoon designed by Cuzner and assayed in 1907.

On occasions, he would make his own spoons and a full dozen set of ram's head coffee spoons was made, possibly at Haseler's or more likely at Cuzner's own workshop as they were stamped with his BC sponsor mark (registered in 1902) and assayed in 1906; with pear-shaped bowls, that seem to figure in much of his work at this time. The wire-twist finials were also noted in *The Art Workers' Quarterly*, complimenting his designing, the same year.

As his success with Liberty's grew, so did his output. He also designed and made a set of coffee spoons c. 1902, with leaf bowls and ornamented with tiny silver beads and wirework twist in the manner of the Artificers' Guild in London (Fig. 12). This design was recorded in the Liberty Silver Sketch Book (Fig. 13) alongside some other spoons designed by Knox. Note that design number 387 for a similar spoon from Cuzner's hand, was also accepted by Liberty at the same time. He also designed a long-handled spoon, normally associated with cocktail mixing for use in taller tumbler glasses – a little ahead of his time, some might say but maybe it had some other domestic purpose?

During the war years, his designs moved on to stylised botanical and related motifs, sometimes combined with the rising style of what became known as Art Deco.

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Acknowledgements:

All Silver Sketch Book figures are courtesy of City of Westminster Archive and Liberty Retail Ltd.

Bernard Cuzner (1877-1956), a little-known but remarkable silversmith, designer and spoon-maker.

Part 2: his developmental period with botanical motifs.

By Simon Moore



During the years of the Great War, Bernard Cuzner continued designing for Liberty in addition to his freelance silver-smithing for W.H. Haseler (sponsor mark above) and his teaching work at the Vittoria Street School in Birmingham. It was at this time his flatware design work began to be more influenced by natural forms and during this 'botanical period' his workload increased. With Knox back in the Isle of Man and Harry Silver away fighting in the war, Cuzner appears to have had *carte-blanche* with the Liberty spoons, there being no other suitable designer that could presumably be recruited at the time.

Haseler's *Cymric* contract with Liberty appears to have allowed them flexibility to sell some of their surplus stock to other retailers. This would explain why some spoons listed in Liberty's catalogues sometimes bear the W.H.H sponsor mark rather than the L & Co mark, or those of other retailers including Mappin & Webb and later, Suckling Brothers (Figs 1-2). Some of Knox's designs occasionally appear in the mixed pattern sets for M&W but Suckling's S.B mark appears to be exclusive to Cuzner's designs, especially during the 1920s and 30s and after the winding up of the *Cymric* contract with Liberty's, in 1927.



Figs 1-2. Sets of tea/ coffee spoons designed by Knox and later, by Cuzner for Liberty. These were sold by Haseler's for Mappin & Webb (1905) and right, for Suckling Brothers whose SB sponsor mark is just visible on the reversed spoon, 1932.



Fig. 3. Cuzner's commemorative tea-spoons of 1911 for the Coronation of King George V (22nd of June) and to the right, his caddy spoon. The King's initials highlighted with blue and green enamel in each design.

One of Cuzner's first contracts for Liberty's was to design some new Coronation spoons for King George V and he duly produced designs for a teaspoon and a caddy spoon (Fig. 3). True to Liberty's recycling of older designs, Knox's Coronation spoons for King Edward VII were also given a new airing but with the lettering altered for the new monarch (Figs 4-5). Although each of Knox's five designs were listed in the Silver Sketch Book with the altered markings, they were made in limited numbers (Fig. 4) and no enamelled versions have yet come to light. Knox enthusiasts might argue that Cuzner's designs were rather more careful, even conventional than the bolder styles produced by Knox. Despite this possible criticism, Cuzner's spoon designs are more subtle, often elegant and incorporating much complex smithing, giving credence to the large production of his wares for Liberty's and Haseler's.

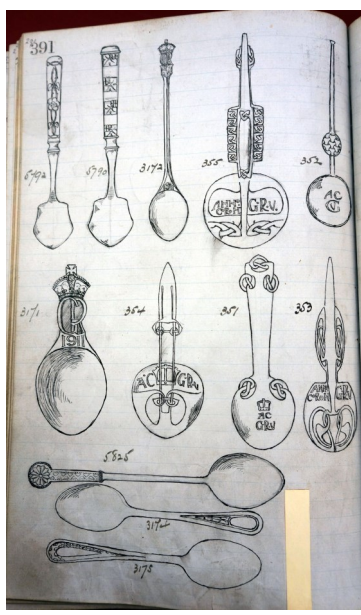


Fig. 4. Left - the smaller versions of the Knox-designed Edward VII Coronation spoons and with the same design recycled (right) for King George V in 1911. The larger spoons were also produced to their original size (centre) in the same year, but appear to be even scarcer!

Fig. 5. Page 391 from the Liberty Silver Sketch Book, showing the five recycled Knox Coronation designs to the right and Cuzner's designs for the new King's Coronation (3172, 3171). Two of Harry Silver's jam spoons are also shown top left (5792, 5790).



Figs 6-7. Cuzner's beautiful soup spoon (3168) with very fine detailing to the top of the bowl and upper handle; the lower part of the handle has a more neo-classical feel to it and enhanced with silver wire twist. The same as it was drawn in the Silver Sketch Book. The handle of the (presumed) aspergillum to the left, was also used on another of his spoon designs.

Fig. 8. Another soup spoon (1915) with simpler punched decoration to the handle but the lower section shows more subtle complexities required by the maker.

Cuzner's venture into botanical motifs can be clearly seen on the spoons (Figs 6-9) which appeared in 1913 and on pages 392 and 395 of the Liberty Silver Sketch book, latterly above the sketches for seven Art Deco coffee spoons of which more in part 3. Alongside his stylised botanical motifs were those incorporating hardstone cabochons – a feature often used by fellow silversmiths and designers like Bernard Instone who made much by way of small silver and especially jewellery for the famed designer and retailer Sibyl Dunlop in London's Kensington Church Street. Information about Instone and his prolific work can be found in the excellent book by Tracy Henriksen (2022) and which also illustrates his spoon output.



Fig. 9. Another page from the SSB showing more of Cuzner's botanical spoon designs. Note, at the top left his design for a more traditional, armorial finial for the Middlesex Golf Club and design 3179 as shown in figure 11.

Fig. 10. A dessert knife designed by Cuzner and although assayed in 1938, the roundel style first appeared c. 20 years earlier.



The carnelian-mounted spoon in figure 11 and another smaller in 12, are also testament to Cuzner's silversmithing skill as the handle of the former appears to have been fashioned from a pre-chased silver sheet, applied to the handle in the manner of close-plating and then the joins carefully polished out by stoning. His spoon work, from this period, is amazing and doubtless tested those working at Haseler's manufactory and whom he likely advised and oversaw.

The new design era that came to be known as Art Deco was gradually evolving during the later war years and once the Armistice had been signed and Europe had started to recover, a few years later, Cuzner was quick to latch onto the new style. More of this in the final part 3.



Reference

Henriksen, T., 2022. Bernard Instone, designer and craftsman: the art of a jeweller. Published by Tracy Henriksen.

Acknowledgements:

All Silver Sketch Book figures are courtesy of City of Westminster Archive and Liberty Retail Ltd.

Figures 11. Two of Cuzner's spoons incorporating the hardstone carnelian. The spoon, (1928) with the chased concave-sided rhomboids and circles may have been applied onto the handle as a decorated silver sheet and then further ornamented with the hardstone in a silver twisted wirework bezel.

Fig. 12. A slightly earlier spoon (1923), based on a later medieval style with a finial of concentric twisted wires.

Bernard Cuzner (1877-1956), a little-known but remarkable silversmith, designer and spoon-maker.

Part 3: his Art Deco period

By Simon Moore

Once the Great War had ended and life had achieved some degree of normality, the gradually-increasing *Style-Odéon* or *Style Moderne*, took the design centre stage. In 1925 it was Paris that hosted the next World Fair - the *Exposition Internationale des arts décoratifs et industriels modernes* and which launched the angular and geometric style that had been evolving during the war years and which was later dubbed as Art Deco.

Bernard Cuzner was presumably contacted by Liberty's Design Committee to produce something more in-keeping for their range of spoons.

He would have duly obliged, designing a range of coffee spoons of which seven were accepted by Liberty's for production. The page from the Silver Sketch Book (Fig. 1) shows these designs that the Committee favoured and most of which were produced straight away at Haseler's. However, only four of those designs were produced during the 1920s and the other three were allotted a different set of numbers prefixed by 503, two of them with the last digits subsequently transposed, likely a clerical error. Why were the 503 designs only produced later on? If these numbers were presumably allocated later then why were they included with the other 4-digit numbers at this time in the Silver Sketch Book? One can only surmise that Liberty's were being careful at first to see how the 4-digit numbered spoons would sell before accepting and numbering the bolder Deco designs?

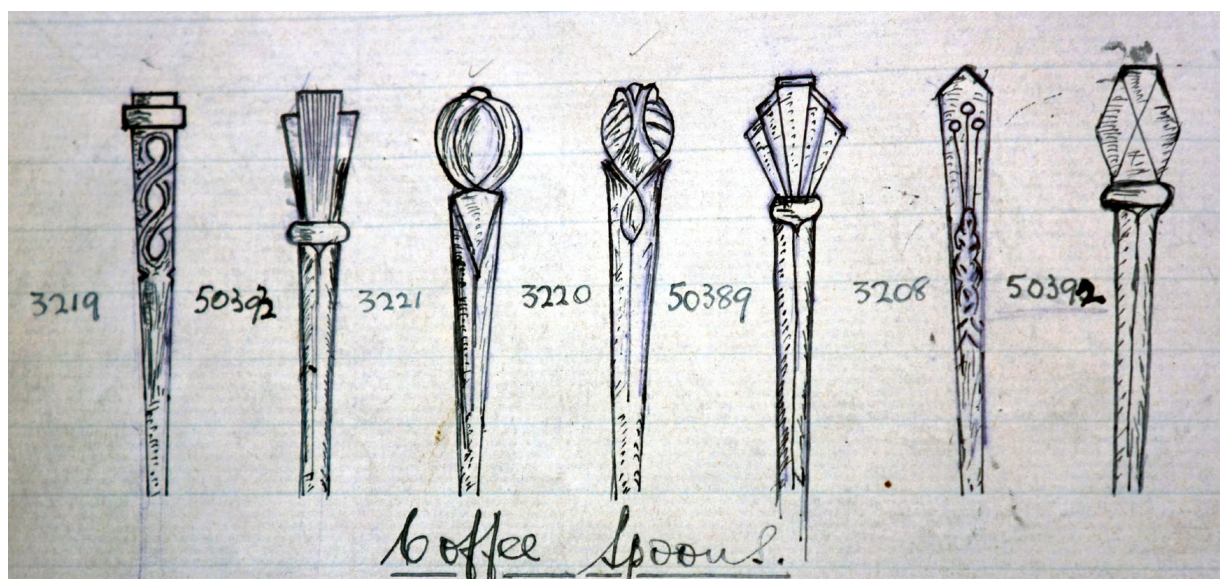


Fig. 1. Page 395 from the Liberty Silver Sketch Book showing the seven coffee spoon designs by Cuzner and which were produced and sold by Liberty's and Haseler's.

Design number 3219 – is likely a salute to Knox’s Celtic designs.

3221 – dubbed as the Coffee Bean, as it stylistically resembles the coffee bean finials, frequently found on coffee spoons of the period.

3220 – dubbed as the Beetle’s Wing since the enamelled versions have a slight resemblance to beetle elytra.

3208 – dubbed as the Shooting Stars, rarely enamelled and slightly cheaper to make, came in three other subtle variations of this pattern (Fig. 8).

The three 503 numbered designs typify the Art Deco style, slightly less for the Saltire Cross – 50392.



Fig. 2. The same seven finials, six of them enamelled in blue and green. Celtic scroll, Deco half fan, Coffee Bean. Beetle Wing, Deco full fan, Shooting stars, Deco Saltire cross. [These names are purely conjectural having been devised by the author.]

So far, I have not been able to find someone with the knowledge of how these numerical allocations were made or why. [If anyone knows, I would be most grateful if they could share their knowledge or thoughts!]

Some have surmised that these designs were too far away for Cuzner’s more usual style but this begs the question of who designed them? By default, it still comes back to Cuzner. The 503 Deco series spoons were assayed and sold via Liberty’s and Haseler’s long after the Cymric contract, signed by Liberty’s design board members and William Rabone Haseler and Frank Haseler in 1901, had been finally wound up in 1927. So, the 503 numbers could be surmised to denote a new post-Cymric numeracy series.

Cuzner produced various spoon designs at this time, some based on Art Deco (Fig. 3) but other spoons show that he steered away to more traditional styling like the split oak leaves, shown on an ice cream spoon from Liberty’s and a set of teaspoons from Suckling Brothers and enamelled with the traditional blue and green colouring (Figs 4-5).

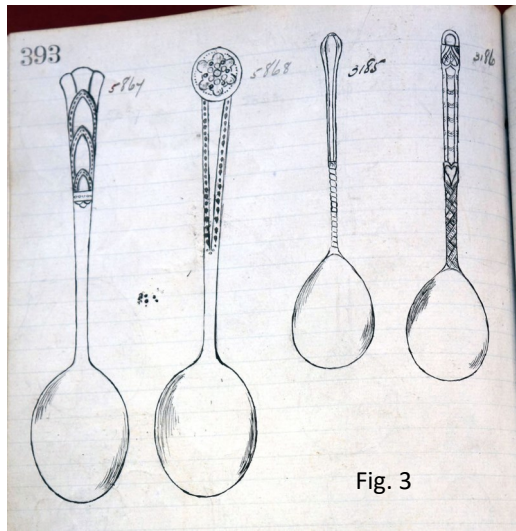


Fig. 3. A typical Cuzner Art Deco dessert spoon, assayed in 1929, plus its listing as design number 5867 on page 393 of the Liberty Silver Sketch Book.

Figs 4-5. An ice cream spoon of 1936 from Liberty's and a 'split oakleaf' design teaspoon of 1928, produced for Liberty's but this from an enamelled set and retailed by Suckling Brothers.



Fig. 6. A set of six tea knives in their Liberty box, 1937, and hardly ever used judging by their sharp condition. (Courtesy of Willow Antiques Ltd.).

Fig. 7. The same design for teaspoons.

Another of his more popular designs from this period was the curlicue and teardrop pattern which appears to have been confined to tea ware (below). As usual, this design was enamelled in blue and green or left plain.

The Shooting Star design has only been found (so far) on teaspoons but has three subtle variations:



Fig. 7a showing the curlicue and teardrop design.

Fig. 8. Three variations of the Shooting Star design (1932, 1933), the latter made for and retailed by Adolph Scott who requested enamelling, maybe to brighten up the design (1928).



Fig. 9

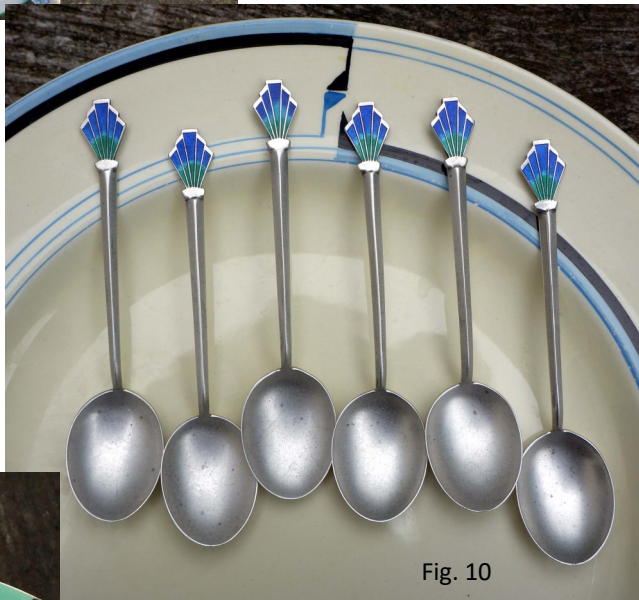


Fig. 10



Fig. 11

Fig. 9. The Adolphe Scott enamelled set, 1928 in (descending) purple, pink, yellow, lilac, red and pale blue enamels.

Fig. 10. The wonderful Fan spoons in blue and green enamels (1937).

Fig. 11. The Haseler & Restall teaspoon in two-tone green enamels (1948).

The Art Deco Designs

Throughout this creative period for Cuzner, the Art Deco designs started to appear, although only from the post-Cymric (post-1927) era. So many of these designs are difficult to ascertain when they first appeared but most of the 503-number designs appeared during the 1930's and continued well into the 1940's. The first two fan designs typify Art Deco, especially the half fan (Fig. 12) but the Saltire Cross finial is strangely less so but nonetheless striking and looks good on a Deco tea plate (Fig. 13). Haseler's association with the Liberty Cymric silverwares continued long after their contract had ended and Haseler's moved from Vyse Street to nearby Warstone Lane in 1934, becoming Haseler & Restall c. 1946 when they registered the H&R sponsor mark at Birmingham Assay Office (Figs 11-11a).

Bernard Cuzner retired from teaching at the Birmingham Municipal School of Art in 1942¹ but still kept silversmithing. During this time, he was asked to submit a design for an Olympic torch for the 1948 London Olympic games. Although the winning design was by Ralph Lavers of EMI Factories Ltd, Cuzner's design was made for the London Goldsmiths' Company by Stanley Morris and engraved by William Biddle.

Eventually, he lived in semi-retirement at his house in Harborne, Birmingham but like most true craftsmen, chose to continue his work whenever he could.

¹ There have been many conflicting reports as to whether Cuzner worked as Head of Metalworking from 1910 to 1942 at Birmingham's Municipal School of Art in Margaret Street, or the Vittoria Street School of Jewellery and Silversmithing. Most opt for the Margaret Street School.

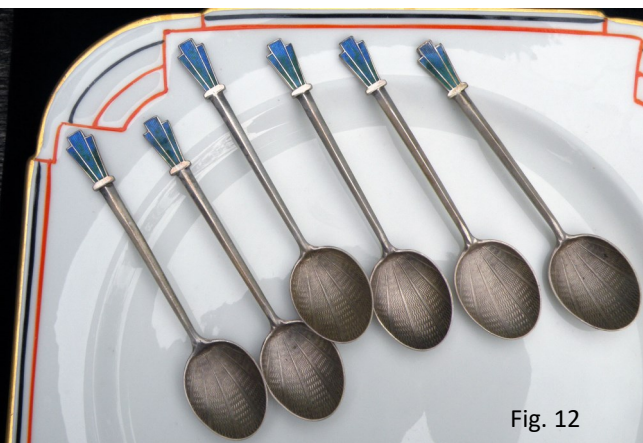


Fig. 12

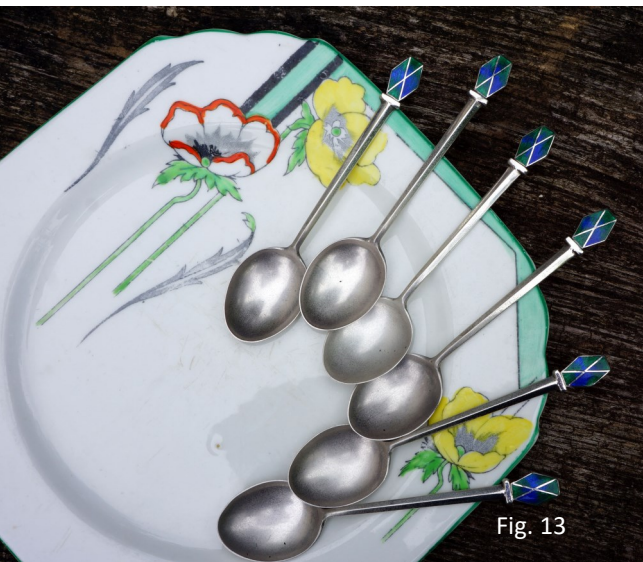


Fig. 13

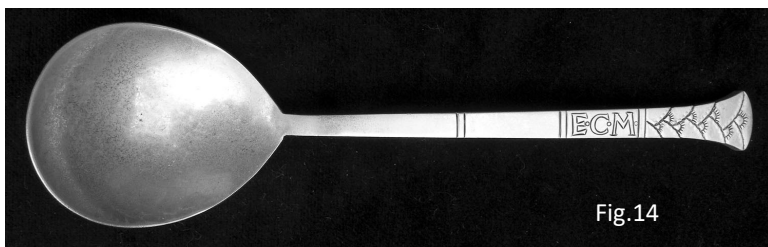


Fig.14

Fig. 11a. The Haseler & Restall sponsor's mark.

Fig. 12. The half-open Fan spoons that are so representative of Art Deco and, as always, enamelled in blue and green (1941).

Fig. 13. A set of the Saltire Cross spoons (1935).

Fig. 14. One of Cuzner's last spoons and still true to Deco form with alternating sunrise patterns on the handle and engraved to E.C.M, assayed in 1951.

The spoon (Fig. 14) reflects this, having been assayed nearly 5 years before his death on the 4th of January, 1956. Note the peeping sunrise design on the handle, still using the Art Deco design features that he presumably loved and which are found on many of his spoons.

Acknowledgements: All Silver Sketch Book figures are courtesy of City of Westminster Archive and Liberty Retail Ltd.

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Finally, please note that the design nomenclature has been invented by the author.