

SILVER SOCIETY VISIT TO TRINITY COLLEGE, SPRING 2024

By Sylvia Lassam



Fig.1



Fig. 2

On the evening of April 10, members of the Silver Society met in the Trinity College Archives to view a selection from the College silver collection.

We began our visit by examining some of the pieces with a historical connection to the College, housed in an exhibit case. The ‘Strachan Épergne’, a gift to Trinity College founder John Strachan by his former students from Cornwall in 1833, is a spectacular piece of Victorian silver, created by William Kerr Reid. Consisting of a base with four allegorical figures, four arms culminating in crystal baskets, with a large central silver basket, the épergne is inscribed with tributes to Bishop Strachan. The names of his former students, who contributed to the purchase and commissioned the work, are etched into the bottom. Strachan left the épergne to the College in his will with the stipulation that it be used every year at a celebratory dinner. This tradition continues with its use at the annual December holiday dinner in Strachan Hall. [Fig. 1 + 2]

The exhibit case also houses a communion set by I.J. Keith from 1845, that exemplifies the ‘High Anglican’ or Anglo-Catholic direction of the Canadian church under John Strachan. Known as ‘the King’s College silver’ and consisting of a chalice, paten, and cruet, Keith’s work was likely influenced by the architect William Butterfield, the advisor on church plate to the Cambridge Camden Society. The Society was concerned with church architecture and artistic matters, part of a movement to return to pre-Reformation models. Our communion set was likely inspired by the Bishop Fox chalice at Corpus Christi College, Oxford, and the Guille cruet at St. Peter Port,



Fig. 3, 4 and 5

Guernsey, according to Stephen Otto's notes in our files. The communion set was presented in 1845 by Anglican 'presbyters' to King's College, Toronto, Strachan's first attempt to create an Anglican university in Canada. When the secular University of Toronto was created out of this attempt, the communion set was transferred to Trinity in a manner that was not documented. Beautiful in its own right, the set represents the controversy over university education in mid-19th century Upper Canada. [Fig. 3, 4 + 5]

Also in the exhibit case is an interesting High Victorian 'Stewart Altar Cross', a silver plate piece created by Cox Sons, Buckley & Co., London, c.1861. The cross was a gift by his fellow students in memory of Pakenham Edward Stewart, a Trinity student who died in somewhat mysterious circumstances in November, 1861. Stewart's memory lived on as he was the first Scribe of the infamous Trinity secret society, Episkopon. [Fig. 6]

Trinity's great 20th century benefactor, Gerald Larkin, gave several pieces of silver to the College during his lifetime and following his death in 1961. In our exhibit case we show the 'Larkin Covered Cup', by John Payne, London, 1768-1769 [Fig. 7] and the Monteith Bowl [Fig. 8], given by Miss Aileen Larkin, Gerald's sister. This piece has the maker's mark 'IC' with pellet below. Made in London, likely in the late 17th century. The repoussé decoration would have been added in the 19th century. Another notable piece in the exhibit case is a more recent piece, the 'Gahan Rose Bowl' [Fig. 9], made in Edinburgh by Brook & Son, likely in the 1930's. The inscriptions 'F.G. from C.S.M.' is followed by 'parvum non parvae amicitiae pignus' [a little token of a friendship that is not little]. After our visit from the Silver Society, we dug a little deeper into the story of this bowl and discovered that Frank Gahan (FG) had been at Oxford when a young Canadian student, Pat Moss, died tragically.

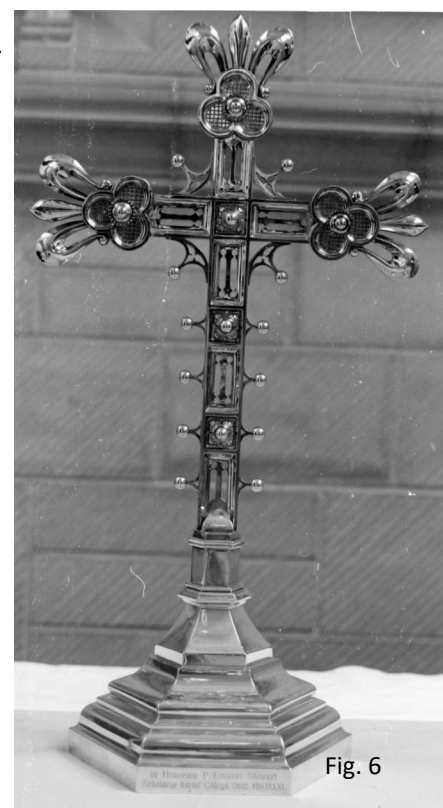


Fig. 6



Fig. 7

Fig. 7 Larkin covered cup, London 1768, maker John Payne

Fig. 8 Monteith bowl, marked with '1C' with pellet below, 17th century

Fig. 9 Rose bowl, Edinburgh 1930's, by Brook & Son



Fig. 8



Fig. 9

The student's uncle, lawyer C.S. MacInnes (CSM) had asked his friend for help discovering what had happened to his nephew, whose body had been found in a farmer's burning haystack. The mystery surrounding his death has never been solved.



Fig. 10

The Schneider Alms Dish [Fig. 10] is a piece of continental silver with no hallmarks. This silver dish dates from about 1680 A.D. and is probably of German workmanship, though very similar embossed designs of large flowers (lilies, tulips etc.) and foliage are found on English silver of the time of Charles II. Continental silver was not so regularly marked as English silver. Dishes of this character were originally used for secular purposes. Diplomas, address, testimonials, and other gifts were placed on them, and so presented to the recipient. Hence, they were called in Germany "Präsentierplatten". The dish is a gift from the estate of the Rev. G.A. Schneider, professor of Divinity at Trinity College from 1882 to 1885. He returned to England and purchased this piece from an estate sale in Cambridge in 1917. Silver Society members agreed as to the German origin of this lovely piece, and also pointed out the evidence of re-use of an earlier piece to create this one.

Several small items were admired in the exhibit case, including two pieces given by alumna Doris Grigaut, a small footed salver [Fig. 11], made by Robert Abercromby, London, in 1739, with a charming squirrel on the central crest, and a late 18th century tastevin [Fig. 12]. Another small piece in the case is the Body Snuff Box (Birmingham,



Fig. 11



Fig. 12



Fig. 13



Fig. 144

Matthew Linwood, 1809) inscribed with the name of Jane Schon, aunt of our second Provost, Charles Body [Fig. 13].

We turned our attention from the exhibit case to two pieces by Harold Stacey that are kept in the Chapel and were borrowed for the occasion. The Kingston Chalice and Paten [Fig. 14] was a gift of the children of Archbishop George Frederick Kingston and his wife, given in their memory in 1975. Embedded within the base of the paten is a Pectoral Cross inlaid with 5 amethysts, probably the cross worn by their father in the execution of his duties as Primate of the Anglican Church of Canada from 1947 to 1950. We also displayed the Cosgrave Memorial Processional Cross, designed by A. Scott Carter and created by Harold Stacey [Fig. 15]. The cross was named for F.H. Cosgrave, Trinity Provost from 1926 to 1945, an anonymous gift that likely originated with Gerald Larkin. The cross contains an enameled boss, depicting a head of Christ, on one side. The final piece we viewed from the Chapel collection was the 'TCDS Lavabo', a small bowl, or lavabo, given to the Chapel by the Trinity College Dramatic Society. In November 1959 the Society staged a production of T.S. Elliott's *Murder in the Cathedral*, which turned out to be a huge financial success. The society executive proposed the gift of a piece of silver in lieu of rent. Hallmarked Sterling, the maker is unknown.



Fig. 15

The group enjoyed viewing and handling several pieces brought from the silver vault. A set of six silver candlesticks, the gift of



Fig. 17



Fig. 18



Fig. 19

the Estate of Gerald Larkin, were interesting because four are original and two are electroformed reproductions. [Fig. 17] The originals are marked TH (London, 1789-90), and the reproductions are also water-marked. The candlesticks are inscribed with the Larkin crest and motto: greyhound over scroll, "Oderint dum metuant" (Let them hate provided they fear), ascribed to the tyrant Caligula, an odd choice! A candelabrum of similar style was the gift of Miss Aileen Larkin in 1943, with a sterling silver base (Sheffield, Waterhouse, Hodson & Co., 1825-26) [Fig. 18]. A companion candelabrum was stolen many years ago. Other Larkin candlesticks were of neo-classical, columnar design (London, Erick Romer, 1762-63).

The Bethune Footed Salver was on display (London, Barnard & Sons, 1838-39). The inscribed central panel reads: "Presented to The Rev. A.N. Bethune, Rector of St. Peter's, Cobourg, Canada, by his affectionate parishioners in grateful acknowledgement of his exemplary zeal, fidelity and efficiency with which he has discharged his sacred duties during a period of fourteen years; and in admiration of his steadfast maintenance of evangelical truth and apostolic order. Cobourg Canada 1841". [Fig. 19]

A tall, graceful pitcher was one of the surprise items of the evening. Our Strathy Flagon, was made in New Orleans c.1825, created by H.E. Baldwin & Co. We learned that pre-Civil War silver from the American South is quite rare and valuable. Our piece was the gift of a former Bursar, Elliott G. Strathy, and his wife, in 1952. [Fig. 20]

Our last piece for discussion was immensely popular despite its lack of solid credentials. The Davies Water Ewer is silver plate but has an engaging design of applied leaves with twisted snakes as the handle. Created about 1865, it has a hinged lid and no spout. [Fig. 21]

The visit was a success for the archives, with the host learning more than the visitors. It was great fun to share our treasures with an enthusiastic and knowledgeable group and we would be delighted to have future interactions.

Sylvia Lassam is the Rolph-Bell Archivist

at Trinity College. She can be reached via email:

archives@trinity.utoronto.ca



Fig. 20



Fig. 21