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Early Scottish Silver Collectors **The Beginnings of a Collecting Field** Gavin 1st Marquess and 7th Earl of Breadalbane

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Rightly, much weight is given to provenance in collecting silver; however the relatively young subject of Scottish silver makes this more difficult than in many other fields. While provenances are available they often only go as far back as the 'early sales' of Scottish and provincial silver in the 1980s. Indeed many of the larger London auctions seem not to have handled Scottish silver separately or catalogued it in the main sales until the 1950s and 1960s, unless highly important early objects. Indeed it is this unknown of Scottish silver that has often been its allure and collectiveness from the earliest collectors to the current.



Gavin Campbell 1st Marquess and 7th Earl of Breadalbane.
Courtesy Dix Noonan Webb, London

Perhaps the earliest collector of note is Gavin 1st Marquess and 7th Earl of Breadalbane. His collection, while now dispersed, is perhaps the best known of the period, not by its contents alone, nor auction catalogue as testament, but by the virtually unique applied collector's mark he used on pieces within the collection, 'Breadalbane' in script struck incuse. During his lifetime he built an unrivalled collection of objects and spoons. Many of these marks and his attributions (some now considered erroneous) formed the main reference for the Scottish sections in Sir Charles Jackson's first (and later) edition of *English Goldsmiths and Their Marks* in 1905.

Gavin Campbell was born in 1851 and succeeded his father John, 6th Earl in 1871. The succession of father in 1867 had not been a simple one as he was not descended from the main Breadalbane line and was a cadet branch, the Campbells of Glenfalloch. When considering the importance the family had in Scotland and the lands they held, in excess of 450,000 acres from Perthshire to the Atlantic Ocean, this five-year dispute set legal history.

Educated at St Andrews he succeeded his father as 7th Earl of Breadalbane, Earl of Holland; Viscount of Tay and Paintland; Lord Glenorchy, Beneraloch, Ormelie and Weik; and Baronet of Nova Scotia. He was created Baron Breadalbane in 1873; and Earl of Ormelie and 1st Marquis of Breadalbane in 1885.

He married in 1872, Lady Alma Imogen Carlotta Leonore Graham, the youngest daughter of the 4th Duke of Montrose.

A favourite of Victorian society he held many important roles within the country, notably Lord-in-Waiting to the Queen, Treasurer to the Royal Household 1880 – 1885, Privy Councillor 1880, Lord Steward of the Household 1892 – 1895, Lord High Commissioner to the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland 1883 – 1885, A.D.C. to King Edward VII, Keeper of the Privy Seal of Scotland, 1907, Brigadier-General of the Royal Company of Archers - the Royal Body Guard for Scotland, Colonel of the Highland Cyclists Battalion; Colonel of the 5th Volunteer Battalion Royal Highlanders, Chairman of the St. Andrew's Ambulance Association, Deputy Lord Lieutenant of Argyllshire, from 1914 and Member of the Fisheries Board.

In 1893 he was created a Knight of the Garter and was also a Knight of Justice of the Order of St. John and a Knight of the Swedish Order of the Seraphim.

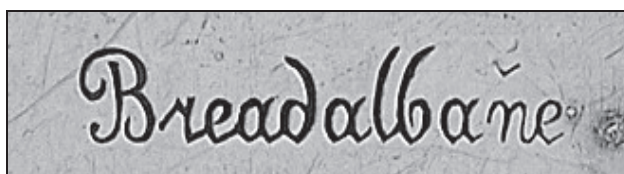


Medal group, comprising 1887 Queen Victorian Golden jubilee medal with 1897 Diamond jubilee bar, Edward VII 1902 Coronation medal, Edward VII 1903 Visit to Scotland Medal, George V and Queen Mary 1911 Coronation medal, Edward VII Volunteer Force medal, Royal Humane Society silver medal.
Courtesy Dix Noonan Webb, London

In 1888 he was perhaps one of the few noblemen ever to be awarded the Silver Medal of the Royal Humane Society, the award being recorded as follows:-

*'On the 6th December, 1888, a party of gentlemen were shooting in the grounds of Taymouth Castle, the Marquis of Breadalbane being one of the number. Two men named Jamieson and McLean were acting as beaters, and for that purpose went across in a small boat to an island in the River Tay below the bridge at Newhall. The river was in a flooded state, and the current running rapidly. A rope was attached to the boat, but somehow it became entangled, and was the means of swamping the boat, precipitating both men into the water. Jamieson, although an expert swimmer, had considerable difficulty, owing to the strength of the current, in gaining the shore. McLean, who was unable to swim, was carried down stream about 100 yards, and finally rescued by the Marquis of Breadalbane. It appears that immediately after the boat capsized, the Marquis stripped off his cartridge-belt and rushed into the river to McLean's assistance, as did Mr Robson, the Head Keeper; they were however unsuccessful, and both had a narrow escape. The Marquis, on gaining the bank, ran quickly down the river side, when he again plunged in, and after a severe struggle succeeded in catching hold of McLean, with whom he swam ashore. The river at the time was in spate (as it is called in Scotland), that is, high flood, and immediately below the scene of the rescue was a deep whirlpool, surrounded by rocks. The rescue was rendered more difficult by the eddies and boulders. It may be said that the Marquis risked his life on each occasion on entering the river under the circumstances.'*¹

The Marquis died on 19th October 1922, without issue, and was succeeded by his nephew, Iain Edward Herbert Campbell, to the Earldom and Scottish titles.



Collector's mark, as struck to a pair of Hanoverian spoons by William Aytoun of Edinburgh 1744 – 1745, converted to Trefid³
Courtesy Lyon & Turnbull, Edinburgh

It has long been questioned why he struck this mark to objects and spoons, perhaps a note of egotism showing his ownership, perhaps an inventory against theft from the cabinet by staff at his main home, Taymouth Castle, when he was away for extended periods, or indeed just for fun. However I think we need to look wider afield at his interest and scholarly attitude towards Scottish silver. While we now look at early editions of Jackson's with modern eyes and see mistakes, problems and mis-attribution (often with the early collectors such as Breadalbane or Jackson as the originator of the so called knowledge) these people's knowledge started from virtually no printed sources and built to what we now take for granted and have continued to build on and in many cases still rely on and quote.

Continued overleaf...

The scholarly attitude and interest for both Breadalbane and his great friend Sir Charles Jackson was given an insight in 2006 when a small group of letters between a collector Mr David H. Lane and scholars of the day, Breadalbane, Jackson and Dudley Westropp were found and printed within the *Finial*². They show a close working relationship between these great figures and a common and friendly attitude to sending items of silver through the post often in a three-way-deal between them. While we would not find this unusual in 2014, to send items securely through the post in 1906 must have been a rather large leap of faith and trust with the system and the addressee. Indeed the letters show a chain of discussion on a spoon by an unknown Perth maker and comparison with known marks with items being sent for handling and sealing wax impressions to be taken.

Perhaps the collector's mark of Breadalbane was more for the identity of items when not in his collection or hand than just for the times when they were. It is unknown what percentage of the collection was struck with the collector's mark; while it is encountered it is perhaps not found as often would be expected from as a collection the scale of which we know, the 1926 sale having 98 lots alone and including some 364 spoons.

Another interesting facet of the letters shows an insight into his collector's mind not wanting to duplicate items he already owns and indeed (even for a man of such wealth) not paying what for the time were extravagant prices – however we would all be happy with large quaichs at £9 per ounce now! It is often said between modern collectors that Breadalbane was a rich man buying these pieces indiscriminately with no care for costs etc. These letters dispel that and show connoisseurship, care and attention from an important man no doubt busy in official roles but still personally researching and discussing silver. Looking at his 'mistakes', whether mis-ascribed, fake or converted items, with modern eyes also gives the reader the impression of indiscriminate and non studious buying but we must judge his purchases with the eyes and knowledge of a Victorian gentlemen and the books and knowledge available to him. It seems unlikely any collector could have had a better advisory board of friends than Breadalbane.

The silver collection was split and sold in two main portions (other collections and castle contents sold separately over various sales); however it is known other items were bequeathed in his will so while these sales represent a large proportion of the original group they likely do not illustrate the full extent. The two sales were:-

'The well-known Collection of Early English and Scottish Spoons formed by the Most Honourable Gavin, Marquess of Breadalbane, Deceased', Messers. Christies, Manson & Woods 12th May 1926

'Catalogue of the major portion of the choice collection of antique silver, formed by the late Most Hon. Gavin, Marquess of Breadalbane, K.G., P.C., now the property and sold by instructions of the Right Hon. the Earl of Breadalbane, M.C.', Dowell's Ltd, Edinburgh 30th and 31st May 1935.

Although the extent of Breadalbane's interest is unknown, it appears the focus was often in early Scottish silver (early George III and earlier), and in particular Perth and Dundee silver, both local to his estates, the unusual and un-ascribed marks always holding interest too.



Pair of spectacle cases engraved by David MacGregor of Perth, showing Marquess and Marchioness of Breadalbane, made (and hallmarked) by Deakin & Francis Birmingham 1897
©National Museums Scotland

However the importance of the 1st Marquess was not solely as a collector, researcher or contributor of the antique and unknown, he was also a key commissioner and supporter of contemporary Scottish silver, notably that of David MacGregor of Perth. This is best seen within the commission by the '*Tenantry on The Breadalbane Estates*' of a pair of covered vases on granite stands and freedom casket with illuminated scroll. Although sadly now, in part, split with the location of one vase unknown, this commission is rare within the Scottish archive as preparatory drawings and finished products still survive.



Breadalbane Vase and preparatory drawing, designed and wrought by David MacGregor of Perth, made (and hallmarked) by J Wakely & F C Wheeler, London 1894
©National Museums Scotland

Commissioned in 1893 to celebrate Gavin Campbell's elevation to Knight of the Garter, the vases not only shows the high Victorian ideal of design and decoration but also uses important heraldic devices and designs, again promoting and cementing the succession of his and his father's right to their Breadalbane titles.

David McGregor was perhaps the most important Scottish provincial silversmith gaining popularity by the skill and detail of his decoration and engraving. The remarkable lifelike images he created in silver and gold are unsurpassed in detail and quality. His fame permeated at society's highest levels and he received Royal patronage from Queen Victoria, Edward VII and Queen Alexandra⁴. By this time David MacGregor was styling himself '*Jeweler to the Queen*' as well as '*art engraver*'. Perhaps two of MacGregor's most important commissions, out with the royal commissions, are the Breadalbane vases and casket and the spectacle cases for him and his wife.

Although we will never know the interest that fuelled such an early and prolific collector as Breadalbane it would appear that what interested him could easily be mirrored in many collectors of today. The ability and interest to buy, research, sell and make mistakes is a thread common to collectors of all disciplines and times. Hopefully this has given an insight into what we can definitely say of a still rather elusive collector.

Please note

Copies of the two dispersal auctions appear rare and if any member has copies they would be willing to copy (or indeed place originals within the Finial auction) I would be very grateful and cover any photocopying and postage costs. I would also welcome information on items in collections bearing the '*Breadalbane*' mark to try and build a larger picture not only of what was collected and marked but, also importantly, what survives.

References

1. Royal Humane Society case 24231, from Acts of Gallantry, Vol. 2, compiled by W. H. Fevyer.
2. Previously discussed in The Finial Volume 21/05 May – June 2011 '*A Pair of Scottish Spoons from the Breadalbane Collection*', L. Joyce.
3. The Finial Volume 16/03, January/February 2006, pages 10-16.
4. A gold plaque engraved with her portrait done by MacGregor in 1886 is in the collection of the Worshipful Company of Goldsmiths of London