

Arts and Antiques

Stories in Silver and Gold

by Abby Cronin



It's not every day that a US president writes a thank you note to a London jeweller. So you can imagine how pleased Richard Jarvis of Pall Mall felt when he received a letter from former President George Herbert Walker Bush (41st President of the United States) to say how delighted he was to be given the *Presidents Rule*. Jarvis is very proud to know that his exclusive hall-marked Sterling Silver ruler sits on Bush Senior's desk. It serves as a reminder of G.H.W. Bush's respected and esteemed office. The ruler is indeed a beautiful object. Engraved with the Great Seal of the United States, it includes the names and terms of office of every President from George Washington to Barack H. Obama (see it pictured left).

Jarvis describes the *Presidents Rule* as a fitting tribute to a great nation and all of its 44 elected presidents. He regards his design as 'precise, practical and precious'. The *Presidents Rule* was not the first one he designed. Given his interest in history and a particular fascination with British sovereigns throughout the centuries,



Symbol & Sign Series – Lapel Pins 2008 18 ct Gold by Wendy Ramshaw
Courtesy Goldsmiths' Company

Jarvis wondered what canvas would be appropriate for recording the history of rule. What better than a ruler, the perfect metaphor! So in 2001 he introduced his first Sterling Silver ruler – *Rule Britannia*, engraved with the name and date of every English Monarch. Next he added the *Premier Ruler*, engraved with the name of every UK Prime Minister from Robert Walpole 1721 onward. But for readers of this magazine, perhaps it is the *Presidents Rule*, a limited edition of 1000 with the capacity for almost 250 years of further presidents on the reverse side, which probably has the most appeal. The ruler is etched with imperial and metric measurements, supplied in a presentation case and is a superb gift for friends, family and business associates.

Knowledge of silver, jewellery, antiques, china and glass are key areas of Richard Jarvis's professional expertise. Formerly Managing Director of Garrard, The Crown Jewellers, he is well placed to source and commission new designs from artist-jewellers and craftspeople working in the fine art gift market. Jarvis provides personal service to a select, mainly private clientele in his fashionable St James' shop.

If exclusive luxury is not your priority, remember – London is bursting with venues for lovers of silver and gold, be they avid collectors or just curious browsers. There is always a bumper crop of specialist venues to visit – with prices ranging from modest to mega. Begin by strolling off the beaten path and visit the London Silver Vaults in Chancery Lane WC2. Here you will find expert dealers who stock every style of silver – from antique to contemporary. Treasures here are locked away waiting to be discovered. The history of the Vaults



Brooch in the Artery Series, 2009 Silver & Red Beads by Dorothy Hogg
Courtesy Goldsmiths' Company

goes back to 1876 when the Chancery Lane Safe Deposit rented strong rooms (vaults) to London's wealthy elite in order to safeguard their household silver, jewellery and personal documents. Despite a dip in trade before and after the Second World War, serious interest in historic pieces has attracted a new clientele. When the London Silver Vaults opened to the public in 1953, dealers and private buyers recognised that here was the largest single collection of silver for sale in the world. Ever since,

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Two Rings, 2008 by Malcolm Betts
Platinum, 22 ct gold, rose cut & Brilliant diamonds
Courtesy Goldsmiths' Company

the Vaults have featured prominently on the London tourist map.

Virtually all the vaults are multi-generational family-run businesses. Today some 30 expert dealers offer advice and have brought together a wide variety of goods dating from the 17th century on through to some of the best modern work. Seek out this 'hidden gem'. It's a shopper's private paradise. Trade is buoyant and prices competitive. In recent years, there have been a number of specialist selling exhibitions highlighting themes such as *Collecting to Impress*, with an emphasis on decorative pieces both modern and antique. *The Let There Be Light* show focused on Christmas lighting and included a diverse selection ranging from an extravagant five-light Regency candelabrum to avant garde lights and candle holders. The *Silver Service Selling Exhibition* presented a glimpse of the history and styles of English silver cutlery. *Accessories For Wine* was most popular since it featured goblets, decanters, claret jugs, wine coolers – all practical and decorative vessels for connoisseurs. More recently *The Sculptor's Art in Silver* exhibit displayed silver statuary reflecting English pursuits and passions from the 1800s to the present. Riding, hunting, fast cars, beautiful women and brave men, were all represented. The exhibition, *Silver Service: A Place at My Table*, included a unique array of silver cutlery and flatware from the Stuart period through to the 20th century. Recently *'Time For Tea'* displayed a service for breakfast in bed as well as one for High Tea. Collectors of tea paraphernalia were delighted with the range on offer and had a chance to snap up such gems as an 1800 Bateman tea caddy, an

PHOTO: KEITH DAVEY.



Octagonal, silver and enameled salt, 1910
 Maker-Alexander Fisher Diameter 7.3cm
 Eight translucent enamel plaques depict the Last
 Judgement and the Seven Virtues
 Kindly loaned by the Salters' Company
 Courtesy Goldsmiths' Company

1880 Victorian tea machine (the ancestor of the "teasmaid"), a George III tea set or a soldier's four-piece campaign set that packs away into its tea pot, made by Hukin and Heath in 1887. The Silver Vaults are currently planning a themed show entitled: *At The Dressing Table* (12th October to Jan 10th 2010) which will include all manner of combs, hair ornaments, silver compacts, and perfume bottles. Through to 4th October 2009, the Vaults will feature *British Silver Dynasties 1750-1950*, a showcase for the great British silversmithing dynasties spanning 200 hundred years.

Not far from the Silver Vaults is the historic Goldsmiths' Company, one of the twelve Great Livery Companies of the City of London which received its first royal charter in 1327. In addition to carrying out its statutory function of assaying and hallmarking, it also supports, promotes and ensures excellence in the design and craftsmanship of silverware, jewellery and art metals. The magnificent Hall is another of London's hidden treasures. The Company sponsors and publicises a diversity of exhibitions throughout the year- all open to the public. The spring 2009 exhibition *Silver with a Pinch of Salt* looked at the role of silver and the silversmith in the context of the history of salt as a condiment and its place on the dining table. Because salt was so expensive in the later Middle Ages and early Renaissance, only the wealthy could afford it and hence salt cellars, which had a mainly ceremonial



Late 19th century Chinese Tea Caddy (left) &
 Japanese silver tea caddy-19th c.

CREDIT: LONDON SILVER VAULTS

purpose, became an outward display of social status and wealth. Pictured bottom left, is one of the delights from that exhibit: Alexander Fisher's octagonal, silver and enameled salt, 1910.

The Goldsmiths' Company's current summer exhibition, CREATION II, (until 11th July) includes an elite group of 12 distinguished artist-jewellers chosen by curator Mary La Trobe-Bateman, OBE. She explains, "My choice of jeweller illustrates the diversity in the field – in design, technique and individual creativity." The exhibition explores the multi-faceted stages in the creative process. Pictured here is the work of two designer-makers. Wendy Ramshaw, the doyenne of British women jewellers, who exhibits her lapel pins from the series entitled 'Symbol & Sign'. Dorothy Hogg's stunning brooch is from her Artery Series, 2009. Hogg, MBE, was the Victoria and Albert's first jeweller in residence. She explains her approach to



Flower vases, 1923

design: "The work I am currently engaged with is the 'Artery Series' where the pieces are constructed of sheet metal formed into tube. I am interested in how silver and other metals can be fabricated to create hollow forms that have visual weight without physical density." The work of both Ramshaw and Hogg is held in many collection in the UK and internationally.

One of the highlights of the Goldsmiths' Company 2009 season is the two-week Autumn Fair. Held in the Goldsmiths' Hall, this is the largest and most inspirational selling event of its kind in Europe. Showcasing the very best of British design and craftsmanship, 27 years on, the Fair continues to attract an ever increasing number of visitors and collectors from around the world. With an irresistible array of fabulous designer jewellery and stunning, innovative silverware, it is a must for anyone who appreciates individuality and superlative design, from cutting-edge

CREDIT: LONDON SILVER VAULTS

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Perfume bottles

and flamboyant to classic and restrained. The Fair runs from September 28th – October 4th (closed October 5th). Week Two is from October 6th to October 11th.

One hundred and sixty leading and upcoming designer-makers from around the country present their latest collections in Goldsmiths' Hall. Admission fee includes the catalogue.

While this article has only presented a snapshot of the numerous *Stories in Silver and Gold* you can find at your fingertips in London, the stories are embraced within the fabric of precious metals. They reveal and represent changing customs, taste, and evolving fashions. These extraordinary works in silver, gold, platinum, titanium together with precious jewels always attract lovers of the applied and decorative arts. Whether you fancy a Presidents Rule or modest teardrop earrings, you are quite simply spoiled for choice. ■



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Chased & pierced silver gilt vine pattern-F. Higgins
 1851-Great Exhibition.

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