

Press Release

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**A rare opportunity to see silver and associated artefacts from
Birmingham's celebrated Arts and Crafts past.**

Did you know that in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, a beautiful range of silver inspired by the Arts and Crafts Movement was manufactured in Birmingham?

A rare number of items from that time form part of the private collection of the Assay Office, Birmingham, where hallmarks are applied.

This winter as part of a feature exhibition, a privileged glimpse into this very special private collection will be afforded to visitors attending the Antiques for Everyone Winter Fair, held at the NEC Birmingham from 1-4 December 2016.

Visitors can expect to see the elegant silver standing cup, hallmarked Liberty & Co which dates from 1901-02, Mediaeval inspired caskets from the Birmingham Guild, together with other artefacts from the Movement like the Tales of Chaucer, printed by William Morris with illustrations by Edward Burne Jones.

This unique collection helps to underline the importance of Birmingham as a centre of jewellery and silver manufacture both historically and today.

Marion Wilson, Academy Director said: "Assay Office, Birmingham is delighted to be part of Antiques for Everyone Winter Fair and make its unique collection of Arts and Craft Silver and other articles accessible to the Fair's many visitors,"

"One of the unique aspects of our Private Collections is that they include not only a fabulous range of silver but also associated artefacts, literature and archives. These assets all complement one another, creating an informative and fascinating resource."

At the exhibition visitors will learn how the Arts and Crafts Movement inspired a flowering of creativity in the metals and silversmithing trades in Birmingham and how the Birmingham Guild of Handicraft was established 1890 to concentrate on hand-craftsmanship, going against the trend for mass-production at the time.

The history of the Birmingham's Assay Office is fascinating in itself. It is the only surviving enterprise of Matthew Boulton, founded by Act of Parliament in 1773. It continues to carry out its statutory duty of hallmarking today.

Mary Claire Boyd, Antiques for Everyone's Winter Fair Director said, "We are delighted to have this opportunity to see one of the Assay Office's private collections. . This exhibit will allow us all to celebrate the Arts and Crafts movement and delve into the historic connections it has with Birmingham."

In addition to this special exhibition from the Assay Office there are over 200 specialist dealers exhibiting at the Antiques for Everyone Winter Fair. Whether you are looking for jewellery, glass and metalwork or furniture, paintings and *objets d'art* – it's all here and much, much more! For more information, opening times and to buy tickets visit: www.antiquesforeveryone.co.uk

Venue details and ticket information:

Halls 5, National Exhibition Centre, Birmingham, UK, B40 1NT.

Admission: £15.00, including free car parking.

In Advance: £12.00 for Adults and Senior Citizens from the Box Office Tel: [0844 581 0827](tel:08445810827). Public Open Times: -[Thurs - Sat 11am-6pm](#) / [Sun 11am-5pm](#)

Now in its 31st year, Antiques for Everyone offers what is undoubtedly the largest collection of quality, vetted art and antiques outside of London, taking place at the NEC in Birmingham.

Editor's notes

Highlights from the Assay Office Private Collection



The Liberty Cup is one of the highlights of the Assay Arts and Crafts Collection. An elegant silver Standing Cup, hallmarked Liberty & Co and dates from 1901-02.

The Mediaeval style is typical of the Cymric style introduced by Arthur Lazenby Liberty in partnership with W. H Haseler. This new silver range filled with luxurious Oriental wares so popular in the store at the time.



A hot water jug in sterling silver, from a design by the architect Arthur Stansfield Dixon, which bears the hallmark of the Birmingham Guild for 1904.

The two caskets typical of the Arts and Crafts

period, dating from 1901-02. Mediaeval in style, the hammered finish and riveted seams make obvious the hand crafting of the caskets. They are decorated with cabochon stones just as Ruskin advocated.



Copy of the Tales of Chaucer - printed by the William Morris Press at Kelmscott with illustrations by Edward Burne Jones – Robert Catterson-Smith worked on the Kelmscott Chaucer. He subsequently became head master of the Jewellery School and then Headmaster of the Art School.

Celebrating Craftsmanship

The Arts and Crafts movement, inspired by the writings of John Ruskin and popularised by the designs of William Morris, advocated a return to traditional ways of working. It celebrated creativity and craftsmanship, encouraging ownership of work from start to finish, from design to execution, and was a direct reaction to life in an increasingly industrialised society. Its mission was to give the artist/craftsmen a greater sense of pride and pleasure, in contrast to the impersonal nature of mass-produced machine items.

In Birmingham, the Arts and Crafts philosophy was particularly influential in the metals and silversmithing trades. The Birmingham Kyrle Society, established in 1880 to provide education for working people, gave rise to The Birmingham Guild of Handicraft in 1890. It was the intention of the Guild to concentrate on hand-craftsmanship, to resist the demands of the market whilst also working within the principle of profit.

Liberty silver and Birmingham

The famous London department store Liberty and Company went into partnership with the Birmingham silversmiths W.H. Haseler to produce the 'Cymric' silver range from 1898 onwards. It was a great success, tapping into the middle-class demand for silver and metalware in the Arts and Crafts style, which had become extremely fashionable.

However, handmade Arts and Crafts pieces were extremely expensive to buy, so Arthur Lazenby Liberty (1843-1917), who founded Liberty & Co, decided to introduce a range of more affordable silver into his store that utilised some machine production in its manufacture and Cymric was born. The new silver range fitted in perfectly with the luxurious Oriental textiles, ceramics and objects that were also on sale at Liberty & Co and that had helped make the store popular amongst English aesthetes such as Oscar Wilde.

Craving out an Ecclesiastical Niche

Another famous name whose work will be featured at the exhibition is A. Edward Jones. He studied at Birmingham School of Art, served his apprenticeship with John Hardman and Company, and for the Birmingham Guild of Handicraft from 1901, before setting up his own business in 1902.

A successful, self-styled entrepreneur Jones quickly gained a reputation as a master craftsman, carving a specific niche for high-end commissions for *church plate and ceremonial pieces*. His craftsmen worked in the true Arts and Crafts tradition, creating the designs and making them with no division of labour.

The Assay Office Heritage

Assay Office Birmingham is the only surviving enterprise founded by Matthew Boulton. It was founded by Act of Parliament in 1773 and is still carrying out its statutory duty of hallmarking. The Assay Office was the catalyst to the development of the Birmingham Jewellery Quarter and remains at its heart, providing services, support and expertise to the UK jewellery industry as a whole. Many significant items have been hallmarked here during the last 240 years.

The Birmingham Assay Office has hugely valuable heritage assets. These include a private silver collection of 1700 items which also includes jewellery and coins; a library which contains 5,500 books, catalogues, drawings and other un-catalogued artefacts of value and interest to enthusiasts, scholars and researchers. Our collections also underpin our mission statement as an organisation championing high quality and standards.

The Assay Office Today

Assay Office Birmingham has now expanded its services far beyond its statutory Assaying and Hallmarking duties and offers independent expert opinion on every aspect of the precious metal, jewellery and gemstone trade. It works to support the jewellery trade and campaign on its behalf.

The UK is one of a handful of countries in the world that enjoys statutory independent hallmarking and in the 21st Century the Office has to work harder than ever to ensure that this crucial consumer protection is neither diluted by European harmonisation, nor discredited by global pressures.

The Jewellery industry has changed significantly, even in the last twenty years and The Birmingham Assay Office has had to reinvest in new technology. It now operates five different divisions, offering a range of different services including: **SafeGuard Valuations, AnchorCert Gem Lab, AnchorCert Academy**. More information can be found on the website at: <https://theassayoffice.co.uk>

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