

NEW COLLEGE SILVER
A FINANCIAL AND CULTURAL PATRIMONY

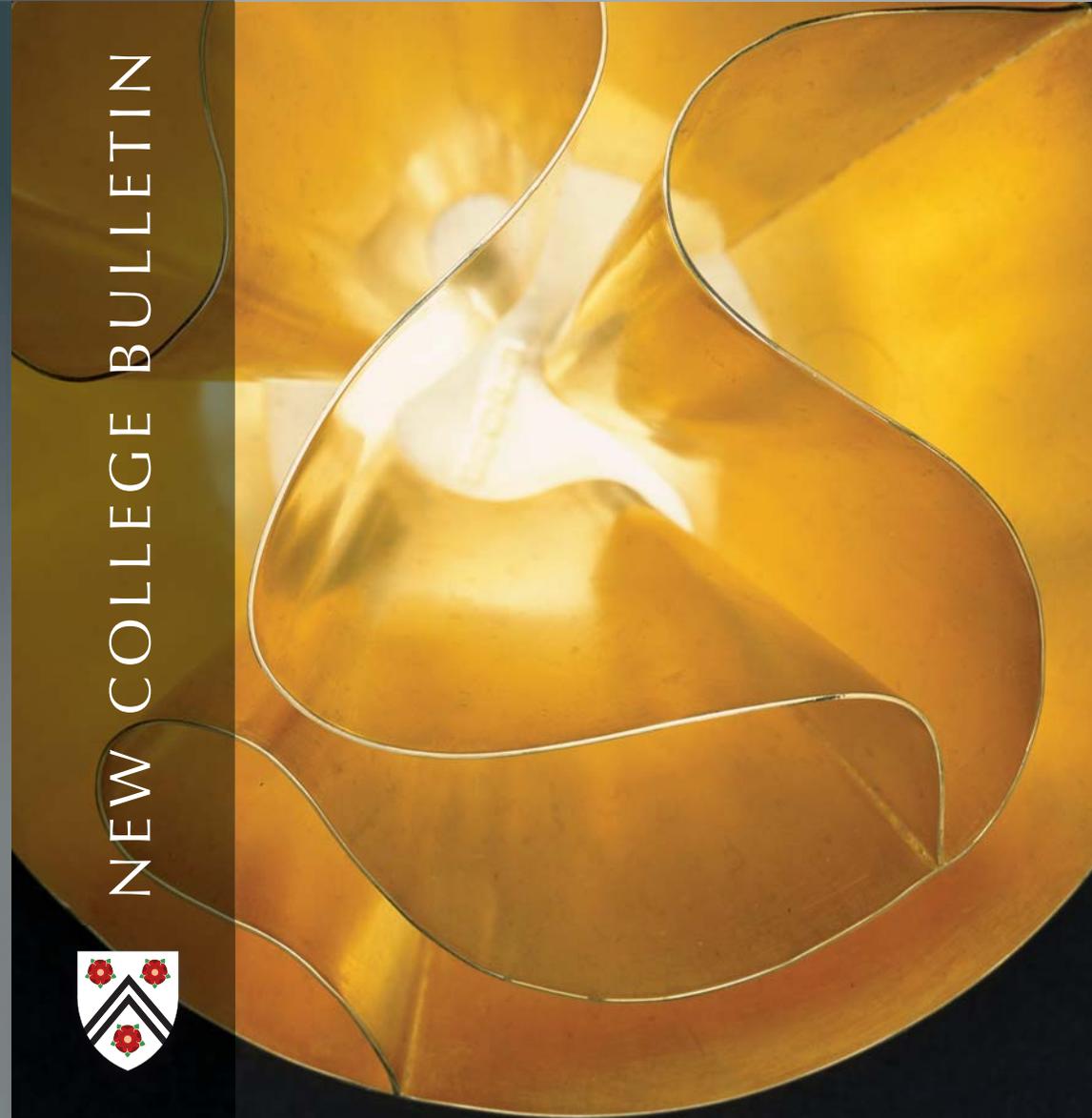
MICHAEL BURDEN
DEAN, TUTOR IN MUSIC, AND CHATELS FELLOW
WITH HELEN CLIFFORD

Nº 2

NEW COLLEGE BULLETIN



NEW COLLEGE
UNIVERSITY OF OXFORD
NEW COLLEGE, HOLYWELL STREET,
OXFORD OX1 3BN, UNITED KINGDOM



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MICHAEL BURDEN with HELEN CLIFFORD



THE NEW COLLEGE
BULLETIN IS A
PERIODIC PUBLICATION
THAT ADDRESSES TOPICS
OF INTEREST TO OLD

MEMBERS OF THE COLLEGE. THE COLLEGE IS
PLEASED TO INVITE THE MUSIC AND CHATELAIN
FELLOW, MICHAEL BURDEN ASSISTED BY HELEN
CLIFFORD TO WRITE THIS PIECE ON THE HISTORIC
AND CONTEMPORARY IMPORTANCE OF THE
COLLEGE'S SILVER COLLECTION.

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This page: Crozier, William of Wykeham, 1410

Front Cover illustration: Finger Bowl, Sidsel Dorph-Jensen,
College commission 2006

Back Cover illustration: Coconut cup with flowering hawthorn,
College commission, 1492

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The collection of plate at New College is extensive and varied. Despite its museum quality, it is a working collection with large parts of it in use in the Hall, Chapel, Senior and Junior Common Rooms, and the Warden's Lodgings. The collection dates from the founding of the College; at that time (before regular banking and today's stock market holdings) it was one of the cornerstones of the College's endowment, for the bullion value represented a considerable resource should the College get into financial difficulties. The collection today is still an asset of significant financial moment, although its value now lies in the intrinsic merit of the objects.

Nearly all the items were gifts, either voluntary ones or those given by requirement. In the early 17th century for example, both Fellows and undergraduates were expected to present plate on election; those members of College who 'proceed to Masters of Arts There' presented spoons, and by 1641 the College had 59 of them. These appear to have been lost during the civil war, but after the Restoration the College was again accumulating plate; by 1664, New College's butler Henry Nobes could divide the silver into 'gift plate' and 'colledge plate', the latter division consisting largely of spoons, tankards and other items for daily use.

The motivating force behind most early presentations to the College, however, was the desire to be remembered in perpetuity. Although not always expressed as forcefully as Dorothy Wadham – who, when referring to her gifts of plate to Wadham College in 1617, declared that they were to 'remayne... in the said college for ever as a Remembrance of me their Foundress' – most gifts of ceremonial plate were made for precisely that reason, and are inalienable. William of Wykeham's legacy to New College includes his crozier (left), his mitre, ceremonial girdle, and ring; these remain in the College as 'a Remembrance' of our founder.

SPANNING EIGHT CENTURIES

The collection of silver at New College is important not only within Oxford, but also nationally, if not internationally. Why is this? Firstly, an impressive amount of the collection is of pre-Reformation manufacture. Unlike many Oxford and Cambridge colleges, city corporations and noble households who gave up their plate first at the Reformation and then during the Civil War, New College managed to protect a significant amount of its holdings. This suggests that the Fellows adopted particularly shrewd and audacious strategies for its successful survival. Even at this point, then, it seems that the silver meant far more to the College than its simple bullion value.

Secondly, not only does an impressive quantity of plate exist, but it is also, for English silver, of high quality design and making. The two late 15th-century silver-gilt salts, for example, are rare items of courtly dining plate that could have graced even the monarch's table.

Thirdly, the surviving plate can be seen in the context of a rich background of archival information, dating back to the foundation of the College itself. The account rolls, benefaction books, bills, and receipts provide almost unparalleled opportunities for researching the commissioning, making, giving, using, maintenance and chequered histories of both individual pieces and the silver collectively. It is not merely sporadic documentation but an almost continuous record covering over 600 years of possession.

For these reasons it is hardly surprising that antiquarians like George Vertue (1684-1756), John Carter (1748-1817), and others were drawn to pieces of the College's silver as examples of quintessential medieval English art. From the eighteenth century, New College plate came to represent not only the glories of a particular college, but also the triumph of English craftsmanship.

Helen Clifford



14TH CENTURY

The New College Jewel
c. 1350

Donors:
Peter & Christina Hylle
and son Thomas



15TH CENTURY

The Warden's Grace Cup
c. 1480

Donor:
Richard de Mayhew
(later Bishop of Hereford, 1504-1516)



16TH CENTURY

Pair of communion cups and patens 1590 and 1599, patens Richard Bailey, 1741

College purchase & commission



17TH CENTURY

Alms Dish, Ebenezer Coker, 1665

Donor:
John Nicholas (later Warden 1675-79)



18TH CENTURY

Pair of tureens, IB/BW 1766, 1775

Donors:
Peregrine Bertie and William Clarke



19TH CENTURY

Tea urn, John Emes, 1806

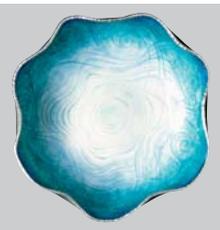
Donor:
Philip Shuttleworth
(later Warden 1822-40)



20TH CENTURY

Chalice and paten, Leslie Durbin, 1961

Donor:
Gareth Vaughan Bennet



21ST CENTURY

Finger bowl, Jane Short, 2005.

College commission

SOME OBJECTS IN CONTEXT

REMEMBERING ALFRED, LORD MILNER

Alfred Milner, 1st Viscount Milner (1854-1925) was elected to a Fellowship at New College in 1876, but left for London and greater things in 1879. His subsequent career was spent in Colonial politics, becoming High Commissioner to South Africa in 1897, Secretary of State for War in 1918, and Colonial Secretary from 1918 to 1921. A collection of portraits, papers, and other objects relating to his career came to the College from Violet, Lady Milner. Included in the benefaction were a number of pieces of presentation plate. Four are caskets which contain the scrolls of the freedom of the City of London, given to Milner by Livery Companies: the Drapers (third from left) and the Fishmongers in 1901, the Grocers in 1906, and the Skinners in 1907 (Far right and far left). Three of them are silver-gilt and are decorated with symbols of each company; the fourth, that from the Skinners, is silver and employs motifs associated with the colonies for which Milner was responsible. The most unusual piece in the benefaction is a silver-gilt book (second from left) engraved to commemorate the signatures of 377,057 'fellow countrymen', who presented it to Milner on 31 July 1906 'to place on record our high appreciation of the service rendered by your Lordship in Africa, to the Crown and Empire'.

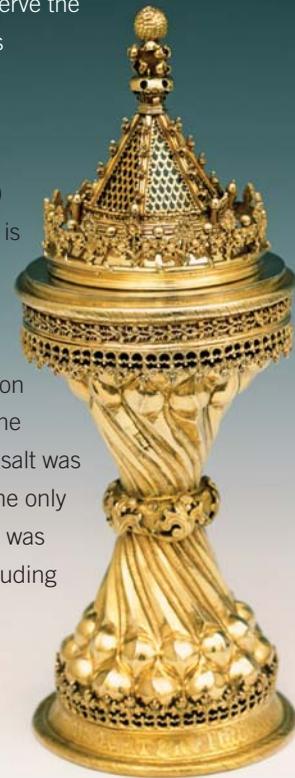


PRESERVING A WARDEN'S BENEFACTION

In 1494, the then Warden of the College, William Porter (Warden 1494-1520), gave the College a cup of unknown form. Its history is now obscure, but by the end of the 18th century the cup was obviously in poor condition; the College decided that it could no longer be repaired and it was melted down. To perpetuate Porter's (and others') gifts including one from Warden Coxed (Warden 1730-40), the College commissioned a set of trays from the London silversmith, Richard Rugg. The suite consists of two salvers (above) and four waiters, each with a raised border with an inverted tulip design; their extraordinary weight suggests an attempt by the College to preserve the value of the original gifts and the reverse of one of the large salvers is engraved to commemorate the sequence of events.

AN INTERNATIONAL GOTHIC ICON

Created some time between 1475 and 1490, the standing salt (right) was given to the College in 1493 by Walter Hill (Warden 1475-94). It is illustrative of the ingenuity of English goldsmiths, and its lid has half a dozen red glass panels decorated with gold foil. After the 1851 Great Exhibition, publicly expressed concern over the standards of art and design led, in 1857, to the Manchester Art Treasures Exhibition organised to show 'some of the choicest works of the old masters'. The College was prevailed upon to lend both the crozier and the salt; the salt was illustrated in the accompanying sumptuous polychrome catalogue, the only example of Oxford college silver to be thus honoured. After the event was over, Elkingtons made a set of electrotypes of a group of objects, including the salt, for an international installation. 'Warden Hill's salt' can now be found in galleries as far flung as Sydney, Australia, and the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.



THE AUDIT

Once a year, the College plate undergoes a complete check or 'audit' against the inventory. The earliest requirement for an Oxford audit is that recorded in the statutes of University College in 1292; the founder's statutes of New College refer to an annual audit of 'all jewels and silver or gold vessales which are not in daily use'. The earliest inventory of New College plate is that from 1396, with the most important one being that of 1508; there are also early lists of silver in the annual Bursar's Long Books. In 1673 the brief was expanded when the new Warden, Warden Traffles (Warden 1701-1703), ordered that 'a book bee bought in which a True and perfect Inventory of all ye Goodes belonging to every chamber shall be registered with their just worth and value'. The grand pieces such as the Ape Salt can be traced through these listings, but sadly, many inventories are, for the most part, of limited use to us today, for most of the silver listed is unidentifiable. The modern inventory which includes the silver is kept electronically in a museums' package called MODES; the listing also encompasses all other objects in College including furniture, glass and pictures.

Given that in the past the collection's worth was largely that of its bullion value, one of the most important parts of the audit was the weighing of the silver to ensure that the pieces had not been 'clipped' by unscrupulous members of College. There was also the natural silver loss to be calculated. The main method of keeping track of the silver was the scratch weight expressed in ounces and pennyweights, which was either scratched or engraved on the bottom of the object. Today, the differences between the scratch and actual weights is often the best guide to past alterations; a tankard may, for example, have lost its lid, or a bread basket been given a new handle. The scratch weight engraved on the College's 1751 cup given by Robert Rich was one of the indications that it had had at one time a lid; it made it logical to design a replacement in 2000.

A full audit takes around four days – predictably enough, the process shows up misplaced sugar bowls, damaged teapots, and lost flatware. Its completion is marked by the consumption of alcohol (as it was in the 17th century) and a thematic showing of some of the silver.



Silver Audit: 'Eating Meat', 2003



Pages from a 1631 inventory, which records goods of all sorts owned by the College.



An invoice from 1690 for repairs to college objects.



Silver Audit: 'Medals and Sporting Trophies', 1998

COMMISSIONS....

There is a further reason to celebrate the importance of New College silver, which highlights not the richness of the past, but the treasures being stored up for the future. The College's policy of commissioning new silver when the opportunity arises from some of Britain's leading silversmiths, like Michael Lloyd and Jane Short, and younger makers such as Sidsel Dorph-Jensen, means that the College is wisely investing in the best examples of modern design and craftsmanship. Exhibition curators are already looking to the New College plate collection not only for exemplars of the past, but as evidence of a thriving, innovative and internationally important craft, that now more than ever relies on enlightened patronage.

Helen Clifford



Commissioning new silver is perhaps one of the greatest challenges for the curator of any collection. It is, of course, counterproductive to attempt to dictate to a craftsman; selecting the craftsman in the first place is the essential task, and a short, clear brief is all that is needed. Nearly all such commissions are the result of gifts to the College, although small ones – such as Simone ten Hompel's fingerbowl which then formed part of her winning Jerwood Applied Arts Prize entry in 2005 – have entered the collection.

The College marked the turn of the 21st century with a Millennium Medal from the silversmith Rod Kelly, whose work includes not only silver, but stamps and coins for the mint; the medal was struck by Spink. One side of it has a representation of the New College jewel in the form of an 'M' for the Virgin Mary; in this context, it represents both the College – as the College of St Mary Winton in Oxford – and the millennium. The reverse (left) has the College's sundial, newly restored that year, and paid for by a benefaction from Edward Hall (1946).

Many colleges in Oxford have a design which can be thought of as a standard 'college cup' or tumbler, given to the Colleges by their members. New College has never had such a cup, and to fill this gap, Peter Musson – who designed and made a finger bowl for the Collection in 2001 – produced a small footed tumbler with a gilt interior and a hammered surface, these to be made only for the College. The first four (right) – gifts to the foundation from four retiring Fellows – have been produced, and are now in use at High Table.



The results of one series of commissions can be seen overleaf, and is an example of the interweaving of College use and donors' wishes. Rod Kelly's first commission for the College was a lavabo bowl; it was commissioned using funds given to the Chapel for its greater improvement by a number of couples married in the Chapel. The water and wine vessels followed, one made possible by an anonymous donation again given for the Chapel, and the other by a concert staged to mark the Amicabilis Concordia. The silver replaced items of kitchen glassware which, though functional, did look out of place at events such as communion celebrated during wedding services! The latest addition from Rod Kelly is a large paten, and is pendant to the altar silver mentioned above. Christened 'The Dish of the Golden Grains', it is chased with wheat, barley, and rye. It was first seen in June 2008 at the exhibition at Goldsmiths' Hall to which the College was a significant lender.

Two of those involved in the Chapel silver commission write:

JAMES BOWMAN:

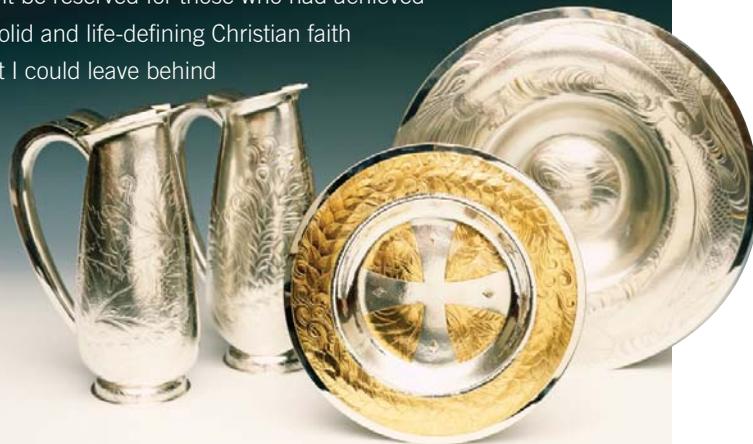
In 2001, I was invited by King's College, Cambridge to take part in a fund raising concert for their chapel. My co-artists were Charles Brett and Michael Chance, and between us we represented the foundations of the Amicabilis Concordia, the agreement drawn up in the 15th century between New College, Winchester, King's, and Eton. The concert provided a tidy sum to the benefit of King's College Chapel, so I naturally felt that New College should also profit from our endeavours, hence the concert to raise money to assist in the purchase of the silver vessels. When I came to New College, the services, although extremely dignified, were somewhat austere, and the rather Calvinistic atmosphere seemed to me to lack 'the beauty of holiness'.

AN ANONYMOUS BENEFACTOR:

When I was up at New College, I was required to write my first will.

In the splendidly arrogant language of youth, I detailed my plaque to be mounted in the cloisters. Some time after that I left (with a Pass degree!), it dawned on me that the wall might be reserved for those who had achieved something in the College. A rock-solid and life-defining Christian faith followed, and I came to realise that I could leave behind something more worthwhile:

I could fund some of the beautiful silver commissioned for the altar in the Chapel. Soli Deo Gloria.



...AND BENEFACTORS

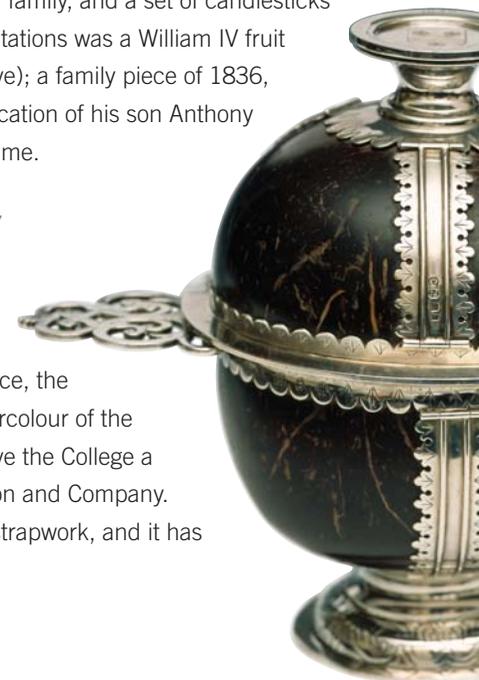


The circumstances of the donations are as varied as the resulting objects.

The Senior Common Room has been the recipient of many gifts over the centuries, including an historic tankard and salver from the Lyell family, and a set of candlesticks from Follitt Sandford. One of the more recent presentations was a William IV fruit stand decorated with cast figures of bacchanals (above); a family piece of 1836, it was presented by Peter Sanderson to mark the education of his son Anthony (1972), and is now in thrice weekly use during term time.

The College is, on occasion, offered silver as thanks, both corporate and personal.

During World War II, the College gave protection to the silver of two London institutions, the Weavers' Company and the Beef Steak Club. To mark this service, the Weavers' Company presented the College with a watercolour of the New College Lane gate, while the Beef Steak Club gave the College a modern coconut cup (left) made in 1928 by Carrington and Company. The coconut shell is mounted with Elizabethan-style strapwork, and it has the College arms engraved on the centre of the lid.



LENDING THE COLLECTION

The willingness of the College to allow others outside its precincts to enjoy its silver has meant that it holds an important (and growing) place within the international literature of the fine and decorative arts. During this process the College gets, cumulatively, to know more and more about its plate from experts in the field. As a result of this welcome exposure, New College silver now travels the world, appearing in high profile exhibitions across the globe. As curator of the Treasured Inheritance Exhibition staged at the Ashmolean in 2004, I can say that such an exhibition would not have been possible without the presence of New College plate.

Helen Clifford

The business of lending items from the College's collections is time consuming and often exasperating, but it is, ultimately, rewarding; the research done on the objects in question is of the utmost importance in understanding the objects themselves and their historical contexts.

Two of the biggest loans in recent years have been those to the Ashmolean exhibition, 'A Treasured Inheritance, 600 Years of Oxford College Silver', and to the Victoria and Albert Museum's 'GOTHIC – Art for England 1400-1547' show. The former was the first comprehensive exhibition of Oxford college silver since 1928, and the College's loans to it included the smallest, the newest, and the most valuable single items in the show;

in the case of the 'newest', the unchased body of the water jug being made for the Chapel was included as an illustration of on-going developments and commissioning. 'GOTHIC – Art for England 1400-1547' exhibited a whole group of pre-1600 College objects; a personal revelation was the beauty of the figures and engraving on the College's 1520 pax, one of only two surviving pre-Reformation paxes in England, and the only one to show the crucifixion.

One of the more entertaining loans was that to the exhibition, 'In Pursuit of Refinement: Charlestonians Abroad 1740-1860' at the Gibbes Museum in Charleston. The Charlestonian in question was William Trapier (d 1872) who, visiting the College in 1856, was so shocked that no-one in the institution knew how to make a Mint Julep that he endowed the Mint Julep Feast. To assist with its dispensing, he presented the College with an 18th-century tankard suitably embellished; the cup was voted by the curators of the exhibition as the object with the best story attached to it.

The College has been able to welcome Old Members to events held in conjunction with some of these loans; those who attended the reception at the Bard in New York, heard the lecture at the Ashmolean given by Helen Clifford, or managed to see the 1492 Coconut cup at the Musée du quai Branly, will recall the thrill of seeing New College objects in different contexts.



London
Victoria and Albert



Charleston
Gibbes Museum



Rome
Villa Giulia



Paris
Musée du quai Branly



Domaine de Seneffe
Chateau de Seneffe



New York
The Bard

The tankard and salver bequeathed to the College by James Patrick Ronaldson Lyell, commoner 1930 to 1948. The tankard, a William and Mary piece, is hallmarked 1691, while the salver is George III from 1798; the latter is engraved with the arms of Lyell's maternal great-grandfather Charles White Williams, whose fortune came from a number of sources including two large Jamaican plantations. Lyell (1871–1948), a 'self-taught bibliophile and scholar of extraordinary enthusiasm and discrimination', bequeathed his medieval manuscripts to the Bodleian Library, and under the terms of his will, the Lyell Readership in Bibliography was established in Oxford.



LOANS TO RECENT EXHIBITIONS

- 1982 Goldsmiths' Hall, London:
'Leslie Durbin: Fifty Years of Silversmithing'
- 1987-1988 Royal Academy of Arts, London:
'The Age of Chivalry: Art in Plantagenet England 1200-1400'
- 1998 The Manor House Museum, Bury St Edmunds:
'George Wickes – Royal Goldsmith'
- 1998-1999 Bröhan Museum, Berlin; the Museum of Decorative Arts, Prague:
'Metalmorphosis: British Silver and Metalwork 1880-1998'
- 1999 Gibbes Museum of Art, Charleston:
'In Pursuit of Refinement: Charlestonians Abroad 1740-1860'
- 2003 Gilbert Collection, London:
'Silver Sparks: the Bishopsland Connection'
- 2003-2004 Victoria and Albert Museum, London:
'Gothic – Art for England 1400-1547'
- 2004 Ashmolean Museum, Oxford:
'A Treasured Inheritance: 600 Years of Oxford College Silver'
- 2004 Victoria and Albert Museum, London:
'Encounters: The Meeting of Asia and Europe 1500-1800'
- 2004-2005 Chateau de Seneffe, Belgium:
'Le Banquet des Animaux'
- 2004-2006 The Bard, New York; Gilbert Collection, London; Villa Giulia, Rome:
'The Castellani and Italian Archaeological Jewelry'
- 2005-2006 Crafts Council Gallery, London:
'Jerwood Applied Arts Prize 2005: metal'
- 2006 Musée du quai Branly, Paris:
'D'un regard à l'autre: Histoire des regards européens sur l'Afrique, l'Amerique et l'Océanie'
- 2007 Goldsmiths' Hall, London:
'Rising Stars: a blazing trail of new talent'
- 2008 Bodleian Library, Oxford:
'Beyond the work of one: Oxford college libraries and their benefactors'
- 2008 Goldsmiths' Hall, London:
'Treasures of the English church: Sacred gold and silver 800-2000'

TAILPIECE

The broader College collections are a source of pride and pleasure for all members of the College community. In addition to the silver, the College cares for an impressive collection of books, paintings, portraits, contemporary art and antique furniture. This is an integral part of the fabric of our exciting and varied intellectual community and which we are happy to share with Old Members and Friends of the College.

The College does announce the loans in one or other of its publications, but those interested in the collection or in any particular object are always welcome to write to the Chattels Fellow. And we do, of course, always want to hear of pieces with College connections; they do surface every now and again.

It is an enormous privilege to care for a collection of such breadth and depth. Most importantly, it is a collection that is not just a group of internationally significant objects or a major College asset, but one that reflects the story of the institution and the personal histories of those who have taught and studied here for over 600 years.



From top to bottom: Marrow spoon: AW (hallmarked 1733); Salad server: Nathaniel Alsop Bliss (1766); Meat skewer: College purchase (hallmarked 1793); Fish servers: Edward William Lear (1856); Marrow scoop: Henry Nobes, Archipromus (hallmarked 1642); Gravy spoon: Edward Rowden (1796); Stilton scoop: Thomas Rogers, choral scholar (1859).

