

SILVER MENU HOLDERS

The use of silver menu card holders, usually in a set of four for households, or in small households in ones or twos, or at the formal (1) dinner table (especially a Livery Company's) was highly popular between 1890 and 1939, according to a reasonably representative sample supplied by the sale of part of the "Guy Davey" collection of 130 different styles sent for auction by Duke's at Dorchester in 2012 (2). 74 out of the 130 sets reviewed were made in sets of 4. One was made in a set of 8 (or perhaps two sets of four), ten in 6, four in 5, eight in 3, twenty-eight in 2 and five in 1. The earliest holder noted is the red squirrel eating a nut made by Henry William Dee in London in 1877, possibly heraldic, as in the case of the GIN spirit label illustrated by figure 370 in "Wine Labels". The earliest holder in the collection was hallmarked for 1883 and was made by Frederick Elkington in Birmingham and modelled in the form of a lyre (for the Musicians' Company?) on graduated parcel gilt circular bases, hinting at an increasing interest in a return to classicism.

A place name card holder positioned between a devil's head and his (adjustable) claws made by Thomas Smiley of London in 1885 has been noted. It could have housed a small menu, perhaps for use at a club. A menu dated 9th October 1934 for a Sainsbury Club Committee Luncheon held in Bristol took up very little space:

MENU

Native Oysters
Clear Turtle Soup
Saddle of Welsh Mutton
Braised Celery and Cauliflower
Grilled Mushrooms on Toast
Cheese and Biscuits
Coffee

Next in menu card holder line was a crested fan embossed with scenes full of figures in classical landscapes by Susanah Brasted of Bell and Brasted in 1888 (for the Fan Makers'?), repeated in concept by Wang Hing in Hong Kong at the turn of the Century. Next was Hilliard and Thomason's swan (for the Dyers' or Vintners'?) of 1890 (repeated in 1894 and by William Hutton in 1897), then William Hutton's cherub with bow and arrow (for the Fletchers' or Bowyers'?) of 1891, then the imported foreign cherub with fan (for the Fan Makers'?) of 1893 (repeated in 1898), then Charles Edward's Britannia of 1896 and finally Joseph Davis' galleons of 1897 and 1909 (perhaps inspired (3) by a brass galleon with castellated crows' nests of circa 1895 or the well known silver nef design) and repeated with Omar Ramsden's galleons of 1923 and 1928 and ships by other makers (for the Shipwrights'?) perhaps inspired by menu holders in similar style but smaller in size made by Stuart Clifford or his son Albert Clifford of S.Clifford and Co. (4) in 1909. The attribution to Joseph Davis is based on Dyus being excluded as a locks specialist, Dodd being excluded as a manufacturing jeweller, Dudley being excluded as a clockmaker and Damant being excluded as a walking stick maker.

That these holders were used for menus is made evident by Matthew John Jessop's silver designed tracery MENU of 1899 made in Birmingham, Henry Matthews' silver "Menu" set upon a reeded plinth made in Birmingham in 1902 and a silver fisherman casting his net above the word "Menu" made in Birmingham in 1928. Several other

versions of “Menu” exist, notably produced in 1898, 1904, 1910 and 1919. Many other images can be viewed on Google. Wang Hing of Hong Kong made exotic elaborate 15 stick fan menu holders decorated with fruits and flowers. That menu card holders were used in the City of London is demonstrated by H.C. Freeman Limited’s “Royal Exchange Assurance” of 1919. The Mansion House and the Livery Companies used silver as part of fine dining, and indeed a set of “Cries of London” was produced in 1973 to maintain the tradition.

Two of the cherubs with fan menu holders bear the hallmarks of London assay for 1893, the foreign import mark and the sponsor’s mark of William Moering in a diamond shaped punch. Two more, with slightly different cherubs (their hands holding the fan are closer together), bear the Chester hallmarks for 1898, the foreign import mark and the sponsor’s mark of Franz Carl Berthold Muller in a rectangular shaped punch. All four menu holders bear the capital letter F mark in an oval stamp which was applied to all foreign imported wares from 1867 to 1904. Five more cherubs with fan holders are known. One of these cherubs has wings. All nine holders belong to members of the Worshipful Company of Fan Makers. A pair of late 19th Century holders designed as fans without cherubs and made in France has been observed, reproducing classical scenes (5).

William Moering was a plate worker who was registered as a “foreign agent”. He was also a continental carrier and furniture remover. In 1893 he operated from 36 Camomile Street and two storage warehouses at Dyers’ Hall Wharf at the bottom of Dowgate Hill close to many of the Livery Companies. Adolph Kruger joined William in 1903 as a plate worker and shipping agent trading under the firm name of Barr Moering & Co.

Berthold Muller was also a plate worker who was listed in 1893 as a “manufacturer’s agent” operating from 165 Wardour Street. In 1905 he was joined by his son Berthold Hermann Muller. They carried on business as wholesale silversmiths under the trade name of Berthold Miller (sic) & Son from about 1915 with this subtle anglicisation of Muller secured by a formal change of name.

But who was the actual foreign maker of these charming objects of undoubted quality and appeal and finely detailed fans? The answer lies in detecting an almost hidden mark in the design, an artistic small letter “n”. This is the maker’s mark of Ludwig Neresheimer and Co. of Hanau in Germany, near Frankfurt am Main and on the way to Wurzburg, Nurnberg and Augsburg. In Hanau the old town hall was of more recent times used as the “German House of Goldsmiths”, an educational centre for the teaching of silversmithing based on traditional values reflecting the influence of the Huguenots who settled in Hanau at the end of the 16th Century. Dr. Franciscus Sylvius, who has been credited with the invention of Jenever gin and who founded the first academic chemical laboratory in 1669, was born in Hanau and indeed practised medicine there from 1634 to 1639. Ludwig’s mark is known as the “Nurnberg n”. It was designed by Ludwig to reflect his admiration for the work of bygone Nurnberg silversmiths. He had at least two agents in Britain, Moering who had his imports assayed in London and Muller who passed his wares through Chester.

Moering acted as Ludwig’s agent in 1895 in London for the import of a set of two imposing menu holders some 13cms in breath and height made by Neresheimer for

the English market and representing two monarchs, Henry VIII and Elizabeth I, for use on the grand dinner table above the salt (6). A similar imposing figure of Alfred the Great was made in 1907 in London by Corke Brothers and Company, specialist engravers of heraldic devices and inscriptions on twist wire cipher menu stands and makers of “crest menus”(7).

Muller acted as Ludwig’s agent in 1905 for the import of a cylindrical silver pot and cover engraved with a boy playing a horn (perhaps for the Musicians’ Company?) and of a foxhead stirrup cup beautifully engraved (for the huntsmen).

According to a report by W.A. Steward, who visited Ludwig’s factory in Hanau in 1903, “...in the silver-goods trade, which is carried on under excellent conditions, the imitation of antiquities plays, and has always played, a large part...I was able to see the careful and artistic manner in which they produced copies of old masters...nothing too small or too large, everything being copied with a care and a minuteness...I saw some tiny little figures being most carefully reproduced” – perhaps he referred to the cherubs.

Ludwig Neresheimer was described by Steward as a “clever artist” and a “student in the Hanau School”, inspired by the work of Nurnburg and Augsburg silversmiths of the Eighteenth Century. Ludwig copied Livery Company items such as drinking cups, goblets, baskets, pots and boxes. The Vienna Secession, Art Nouveau, Arts and Crafts and Art Deco movements secured ongoing interest in hand raised menu holders and place name card holders for use at formal dinners. So perhaps members of Livery Companies from about 1890 onwards commissioned and used menu holders reflecting their Company’s interests.

Sporting interests are reflected in choice of menu holders which makes them of interest to golfers, cricketers, polo players, tennis players, hockey players, bridge players, sailing enthusiasts, rowers (Doggett’s Badge), bear baiters, cock fighters, horse racers, hunters and shooters with gun dogs and game birds. Interest in the countryside is reflected in a number of ways: flowers, foliage, clovers, landscape and the British Delphinium Society. Ever popular subjects are birds, brown trout, butterflies, cats, chickens, cockerels, crabs, cranes, dogs, elephants, fauna, fish, fish catches, fish flies, flora, foxes, frogs, game birds, hens, horses, owls, salmon, snakes, squirrels, stags, storks, sunflowers and swans. Singleton, Benda & Co. Ltd. imported, probably from Germany, in 1902 cherub menu holders clutching products of a successful shooting party. Other subjects include aircraft, alabaster, armorials, cars, chefs, classical maidens, coins, courting couples, crests, crowns, dragons, drinking jesters, emblems, foliate scrolls, galleons, gargoyles, gnomes, hearts, highlanders, His Masters Voice, horseshoes, Lucky Symbols, maidens, music screens, oriental figures, oysters, Punch and Judy with Toby, shells, ships, teddy bears, top hats, tortoiseshell, trellis, Trusty Servant, vintage cars (including a Rolls-Royce Silver Ghost of 1907 by Blanckensee), Wedgewood and wishbones. The moon was also a popular subject with moon faces, half moons, man in the moon and owl on the moon.

Political interests were reflected by the use of Britannia and in 1914 by Levi and Salaman’s enamelled flags belonging to World War I allies, mounted in silver on oval

bases, and Cohen and Charles' soldier on guard. Army, navy and air force interests were well represented.

Art deco fashion was reflected in a wide range of geometrical shapes selected, such as the circle, crescent, diamond, disc, dome, pyramid and triangle.

A. E. Jones summed up the interest in this small collectible in producing a Birmingham Arts and Crafts example dated 1914 in the form of a plaque reading: "May good digestion wait on appetite and health on both".

Some United Kingdom makers of menu holders are listed below. The dates given relate to hallmarks seen on examples. Holders were also made in China, France, Italy, Thailand and Zimbabwe.

Abrahall & Bint	Birmingham 1900
Adie Brothers Ltd.	Birmingham 1928, 1928
Adie & Lovekin Ltd.	Birmingham 1907
Asprey & Co. Ltd.	London 1906,1908,1911,1916,1925, 1932, 1934
Barker Brothers Silversmiths Ltd.	Birmingham 1933
Barr Moering & Co.	London 1893
John William Barrett	Birmingham 1936
William Base & Sons	Birmingham 1927
Bell & Brasted	London 1888
J.W. Benson Ltd.	Birmingham 1905, 1998, 1909, 1927, 1935
S. Blanckensee & Son Ltd.	Birmingham 1907
Albert Edward Bonner	London 1913
Charles Boyton & Son	London 1904
George Brace & Co.	London 1910
C. Buck & Co.	London 1911
Thomas Callow & Son	London 1918
Cohen & Charles	London 1911, 1914
S. Clifford & Co.	London, 1895,1899,1900,1902,1904,1909
William Comyns & Sons	Birmingham 1896, 1910,1912,1913,1913 London 1907,1911, 1912,1914,1914, 1915, 1930
Corke Bros & Co.	London 1907
Crisford & Norris	Birmingham 1909
Joseph Davis	London 1897
James Deakin & Sons Ltd.	Sheffield 1924 Chester 1906
Deakin & Francis Ltd.	London 1914
William Devenport & Co.	Birmingham 1926
Stuart Devlin	London 1974, 1977
Deykin & Harrison Ltd.	Birmingham 1930
James Dixon & Sons Ltd.	Birmingham 1933
James Dudley	London 1904
Charles Edwards	London 1896
Elkington & Co.	Birmingham 1883
Lawrence Emmanuel	Birmingham 1890, 1900
Henry Charles Freeman Ltd	Birmingham 1919
Gibson & Co. Ltd	London 1898

The Goldsmiths and Silversmiths Co. Ltd	Chester 1907 Birmingham 1913 London 1913,1924, 1924, 1926,1929,1935,1936
Grey & Co.	Birmingham 1905,1909,1909 Chester 1909,1909,1911, 1911,1913 London 1896, 1911
Henry Griffith & Sons Ltd.	Birmingham 1906
R.H. Halford & Sons Ltd.	London 1910
Martin Hall & Co.	Chester 1908
Hamilton & Inches	Edinburgh 1896, 1909
Hilliard & Thomason	Birmingham 1890, 1894
C & C Hodgetts	Birmingham 1912
W. Horace & Co. Ltd.	Birmingham 1904
William James Hornby	London 1907, 1910
Horton & Allday	Birmingham 1898, 1901, 1905
John Hunt	London 1906, 1922, 1927
William Hutton & Sons Ltd.	Birmingham 1912 Sheffield 1916,1922 London 1891,1905, 1907,1907,1910
Jacob & Sons	London 1892,1895,1899,1899,1899, 1899,1900,1903,1906,1912, 1912,1913
Matthew John Jessop	Birmingham 1899
A. Edward Jones Ltd.	Birmingham 1914
Karl Karlsson	London 1904
George Knight	Birmingham 1898
Levi & Salaman	Birmingham 1905,1909,1910,1910,1911,1911, 1913,1914, 1915,1925
Liberty & Co. Ltd.	Birmingham 1913
Mappin & Webb Ltd.	London 1904,1904,1913 Sheffield 1912
Henry Matthews	Birmingham 1906,1909
Moore & Clark	Birmingham 1910
Berthold Muller & Son	Chester 1898 London 1893
Norton & White	Birmingham 1903
Patterson & Sons Ltd.	Birmingham 1913
Pembroke & Dingley	London 1898
C. Perry & Co.	Chester 1929
Ramsden & Carr	London 1928, 1929
Frederick James Ross & Sons	Chester 1906, 1910, 1913 London 1922
Sampson Mordan & Co Ltd.	Chester1904,1906,1906,1906,1906,1908,1908, 1908,1909,1909,1909,1911,1911,1914,1918,1925 1927 London 1904,1909,1919,1920,1924,1927,1927, 1928,1930
Saunders & Shepherd Ltd.	Chester 1907 London 1910
Smith & Arrowsmith	Birmingham 1901
Stokes & Ireland Ltd.	Chester 1909, 1911, 1930

Sydney & Co.	Birmingham 1907
The Usher Manufacturing Co.	Chester 1913
Vander & Hedges Ltd.	London 1934
John Collard Vickery	London 1905, 1905, 1905, 1906, 1907, 1909, 1909
Wakeley & Wheeler	London 1938
A. Wilcox	Chester 1932, 1932, 1933, 1936, 1937
Henry Wilkinson & Co. Ltd.	Birmingham 1906
Williams (Birmingham) Ltd.	London 1918
Wilson & Gill	London 1913
Wilson & Sharp	Edinburgh 1909
George Wish Ltd.	Sheffield 1902
Horace Woodward & Co. Ltd.	Birmingham 1909, 1911, 1913

Notes

- (1) A 22 place setting including 22 menu holders is shown in a picture entitled "My First Season. The Dinner Party. A Middle Aged MP took me in" reproduced by Butler and Walkling in "The Book of Wine Antiques" at p.44.
- (2) The catalogue of the sale held on 20th June 2012 is a good written introduction to the subject of silver menu holders.
- (3) The brass galleon was displayed by Wick Anderson, Maritime Works of Art, at Olympia International Art and Antiques fair in June 2013. A silver model of an Elizabethan warship by Charles and Richard Comyns in 1920 was sold at Christie's King Street on 4th June 2013 (Lot 406).
- (4) The mark is noted by Culme number 12983.
- (5) Sold recently by Woodys Antiques.
- (6) On display at the BADA fair in March 2013.
- (7) See Woolley & Wallis sale catalogue for 16th July 2013 (Lot 510).