

The work and legacy of the Sheffield Artcrafts Guild

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For around seventy years the Sheffield Artcrafts Guild played a key role in supporting and promoting the work of craftspeople in the city. The legacy of Guild silversmiths, such as John Walker, Joyce Himsworth, Helena Ibbotson, Sydney Wilkinson and James Havenhand, has undoubtedly contributed to the vibrant designer silversmithing community that exists in Sheffield today.

The Sheffield Artcrafts Guild was founded in 1894 by Charles Green (1836–1916).¹ Like many organisations of its type, the Guild brought together artists and craftspeople for meetings, activities and exhibitions of work [figs 1 & 2]. Its aims were²

the encouragement of skilled artistic handicrafts, promoting fellowship between artist craftworkers, disseminating information by means of demonstrations, exhibitions and lectures.



1 Guild members enjoying a trip to York Minster, 1920s.



2 A display of Joyce Himsworth's work at a Guild exhibition, circa 1930–40.

From the 1920s onwards, the Guild aspired to establish a Guildhall in the city to celebrate excellence in craft and design. Despite fundraising and local publicity campaigns, their ambition was never realised. Their endeavours to this end included the creation of a book intended to record the names of donors to the Guildhall fund, which was described as 'a wonder book which will be unequalled in the world. It will be the quintessence of the arts and crafts of Sheffield'.³ It was designed by John Beresford Walker, but was only partly made before the project was abandoned due to

1 Charles Green was born in Chesterfield. He was a sculptor and designer, and designed large architectural pieces such as stove grates and church fittings.

2 As described in the 1932 Annual Report, Museums Sheffield Archive.

3 *Daily Herald*, 5 December 1930, Sheffield Archives, 1993/105 (unlisted collection).



3 Joseph Beeston Himsworth, circa 1910–20.

a lack of money and interest. Joseph Beeston Himsworth [fig 3] recorded that 'what had been so far produced of the book was put in a tin-lined case and deposited in a local bank for safety. To the best of my knowledge it is there today'.⁴ It would be fascinating to discover if it survives.

The Guild embraced a wide range of artistic endeavours including silversmithing, leatherworking, sculpture, ceramics and textile design. This holistic approach was reflected in its broad membership. Guild members seem to have played a key role in the education of young craftspeople in Sheffield. A number of Guild members had links to Sheffield School of Art, as students or members of staff and some are known to have taught in other art schools across the region.

Membership was not restricted to independent craftsmen and many members were involved in Sheffield's manufacturing industries. The creative outlet that the Guild offered counterbalanced the daily grind of industrial production:⁵

Over a long period all the chief designers in the Sheffield stove-grate firms, as well as in the silver and plate trade, were members. There were also a number of independent free-lance men who testified to that independent spirit always so marked among those who disliked the restraint of factory life ... There was, at times, a Bohemian element in strong measure among the members, but it was largely kept in control by industrial demands with which they were in daily contact.

In the early years of the Guild membership was restricted to men, though later women were able to join. Both Joseph Beeston Himsworth and his daughter, Joyce, were active members. Formal application to join the Guild had to be supported by two existing members. Examples of work were submitted for consideration by the membership panel, to ensure they were of appropriate quality. It was also possible to apply for Associate Membership if you could demonstrate an active interest in arts and crafts but were not a maker.⁶

In 1953, the Guild changed its name to Contemporary Craftsmen Incorporated. Its original aims and ambitions largely remained, including the desire to establish a Guildhall, but interest seems to have dwindled and a letter in the Guild archive indicates that a resolution to disband the Guild was presented at the 1964 Annual General Meeting.⁷



4 Statuette, bronze, designed by John Walker, Elkington & Co., circa 1930. (Museums Sheffield 1991.309)



5 John Walker, circa 1930. The chain he is wearing could be the SACC chain of office.

John Walker (1877–1948)

... a man of outstanding ability, experience and knowledge ... who brought with him ideas and ideals that appeared likely to help forward a revolution in the applied art life of Sheffield.⁸

John Walker was born in Edinburgh and trained at the city's School of Art before moving to Sheffield in 1898. He was a highly acclaimed designer, sculptor and craftsman in silver, gold and bronze, and was master of the Sheffield Artcrafts Guild from 1927 to 1928. While in Sheffield (where he worked freelance), Walker undertook important commission work including the creation of an Ascot Gold Cup, a Royal Hunt Cup, church plate for Ripon Cathedral and works for the Viceroy of India. Walker was appointed Designer and Supervisor of the Art Department at Elkington & Co. in 1928 and moved from Sheffield to Birmingham. On 4 June 1930 he was made a freeman of the Worshipful Company of Goldsmiths, by special grant; he joined the livery in November 1935. Walker retired to Paignton in Devon in 1932, but continued to keep in touch with members of the Sheffield Artcrafts Guild.

Unlike many older members of the Guild, Walker is said to have encouraged younger members to embrace the new artistic styles emerging in the early 1900s. The influence of Art Nouveau can often be seen in his own work. A news clipping, probably from the 1920s, critiques a local exhibition of work by Guild members. Walker's work is given a very favourable and eloquent review:

[His] work as a silversmith combines a perfect technical mastery of all sorts of processes used in the craft with that rare gift of producing an original, yet a good design. There is in all Mr. Walker's designs just that degree of balance between the traditional styles of ornament and the original and purely subjective ideas which come to every true designer, which constitutes first-class modern work.

Sheffield's Designated Metalwork Collection* includes several pieces by Walker, as well as a number of designs on paper. They include an elegant silver chatelaine clasp of circa 1902 [fig 6] and a bronze statuette of a jester designed around 1930 and made by Elkington & Co. [fig 4]. It clearly was an important piece and a highly personal piece of work, demonstrated by its inclusion in a photographic portrait of Walker [fig 5].

In his biographical account of the Guild, Joseph Beeston Himsworth makes a special note of this piece:

... he produced a bronze statuette of a Jester with cap and bells, and this he considered one of his best works, having executed it just to please his own fancy entirely.

A hand-bound illuminated address [fig 7] was designed by Walker and created in 1925 by several members of the Sheffield Artcrafts Guild, including James Havenhand, Helena Ibbotson and Joseph Beeston Himsworth. It was presented by the Guild to Thomas Peters, who was a fellow and former master of the Guild. A silver panel on the reverse of the binding includes the initials SACG over the crossed arrows of the Sheffield coat of arms. Walker created the silver mounts set with lapis and jade and chased the ornate central plaque. The address gives an insight into why Walker chose to incorporate particular materials and symbols into his design:

The Personification of our wish to our Past Master and his wife, will be found embodied in the Symbolism, depicted in the design, materials &



6 Chatelaine clasp, John Walker, circa 1902.
(Museums Sheffield L1902.63)

*Since 1998, collections that are considered of national importance can be awarded Designated status by the Department of Culture Media and Sport (DCMS), if they are housed by a non-national museum.

4 J.B. Himsworth, *Biographical account of Members or Associates of the original City of Sheffield Artcrafts Guild and their associates, with Photographs*, unpublished monograph 1964. Sheffield University Library, B 709.42741 (H).

5 *ibid.*

6 Sheffield Archives, 1993/105 (unlisted collection).

7 *ibid.*

8 Himsworth (as note 4). See also G.R. Hughes, *The Worshipful Company of Goldsmiths as patrons of their craft 1919–53*, exhib cat, London 1965, nos 295–97 for entries on Walker's work in 1928 and 1931.



7 Illuminated address, designed by J.B. Walker, made by several members of the Guild, 1925. (Museums Sheffield K1939.36)
Colour illustration p40

stones, used in the compilation of this token. In the centre panel are two spiritual figures supporting the globe of Life in silver, (Purity) with monogram in gold (Truth) i.e. their life, which we leave in the hands of our Creator. The figure in the attitude of prayer and cherubs in the act of laying down garlands of roses. Our desire, that their future may be as on a path of roses, with footsteps light, each new day, as represented by the four carved ivory panels, Dawn, Noon, Even and Night, throughout the Seasons until Eternity. The Lapis and Jade corner stones, an attribute to their Art devotions and labours. The Leather and Vellum, our hope, for endurance against stern buffetings of Time. The Writing, an embodiment of the highest blessing bestowed upon mankind, fellowship, by universal communion in colour and form. The Craft Guild monogram and the Sheffield Arms, for remembrance of all that is best of the craftsmen within its call.

Joyce Rosemary Himsworth (1905–90)

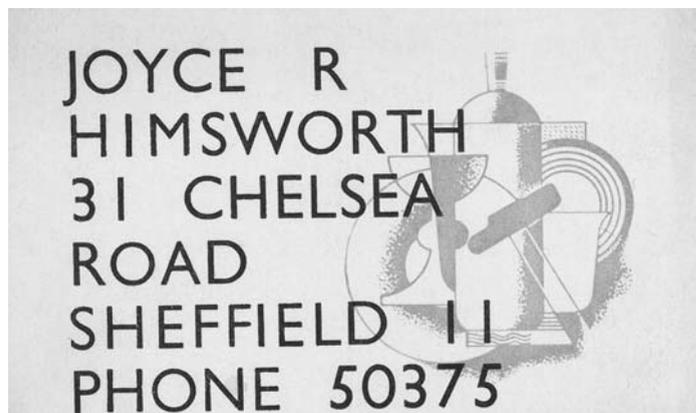
Joyce Rosemary Himsworth was born in Sheffield [fig 8]. From an early age she worked with her father making small spoons and items of jewellery. She went on to study at Sheffield School of Art and became a member of the Sheffield Artcrafts Guild in 1925. Himsworth also taught at art colleges in Rotherham and Chesterfield.⁹

Joyce and her father registered a joint mark at Sheffield Assay Office in 1925, and she used this mark on work she produced as an independent designer silversmith, working mostly to commission in her own studio [fig 9]. Around 1935 she studied under H.G. Murphy at the Central School of Arts, London, and registered the mark JRH at both the London and Sheffield assay offices. After a successful career which included commissions for a pair of lily vases and two chalices for Westminster Cathedral, she retired in the 1960s. A retrospective exhibition of her work was held in 1978.¹⁰

Himsworth's stylistic influences were far reaching and included Egyptian and Celtic design. A trip with her father in 1934 to the Soviet Union, to view the decorative art collections held at the Hermitage Museum and Kremlin, appears to have had a lasting impression on her. She became a member of the British-Soviet Friendship Society and the British Peace Committee. In 1943, in response to the German invasion of Stalingrad, she was part of a group of makers involved in the creation of 'a stainless steel enamelled casket containing the signatures of Sheffield women on parchment ... sent to the women of Stalingrad commending their courage and sacrifice in face of overwhelming odds'.¹¹



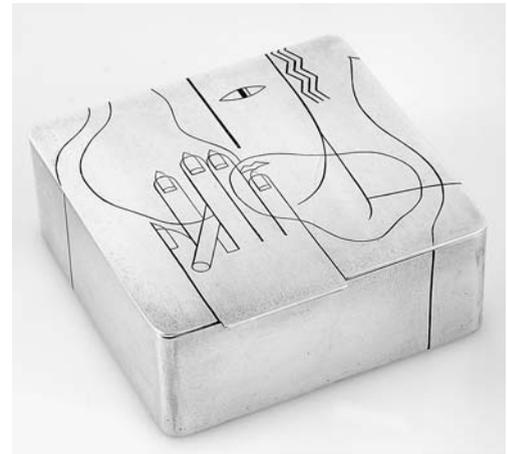
8 Joyce Himsworth (right), 1940s.



9 Joyce Himsworth's business card, circa 1930–40.



10 Design for a cup, Joyce Himsworth, circa 1936.
(Museums Sheffield 1990.1053)

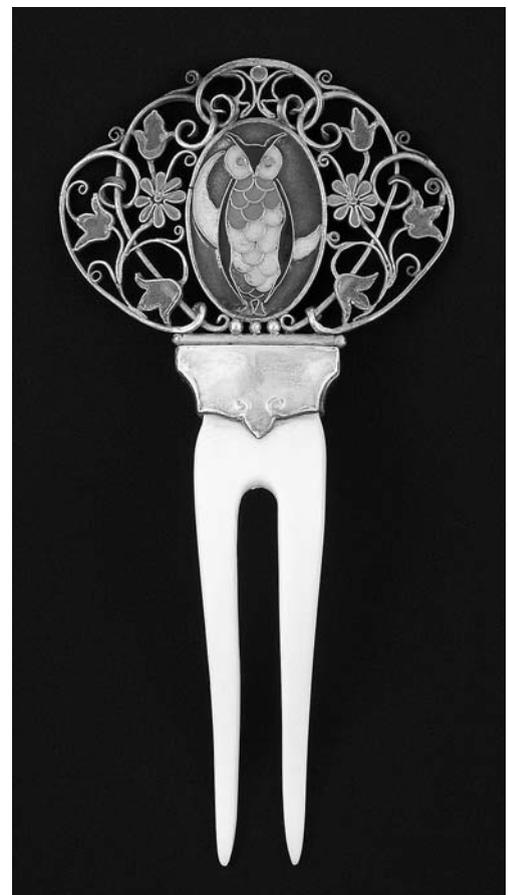


11 Cigarette box, silver and niello, Joyce Himsworth, Sheffield 1935/36. (Museums Sheffield 1990.1038)

Sheffield's Designated Metalwork Collection includes a number of objects, designs and archival materials relating to Joyce Himsworth. The cigarette box [fig 11] perfectly captures the modernist style adopted by Himsworth around 1935. It is an excellent example of the relatively affordable and fashionable personal items that must have contributed to her commercial success and longevity as a studio silversmith.

The hair ornament [fig 12] is a fine example of her talent as an enameller. The comb is carved from ivory and the decorative upper section is made from scrolling silver wirework and *plique à jour*. Much of Himsworth's work was decorated using enamelling techniques, which seems to have appealed from an early stage in her career, as she focussed on enamel work and jewellery manufacture while studying at Sheffield School of Art. In 1934 Himsworth received a first class City and Guilds certificate in Goldsmithing and Silversmithing and was awarded the highest mark nationally for her enamel work.¹²

The design for a drinking cup dates from around 1936 and was made to celebrate the coronation of Edward VIII [fig 10]. It is engraved with the royal cipher E:R and the date 1937. It was one of a number of different objects Himsworth designed to commemorate the coronation, including a set of napkin rings and several decorative spoons. Records tell us that, following the king's abdication, the cipher was changed to G:R in reference to the coronation of George VI in May 1937.¹³ The cup was entered in the coronation competition organised by The Worshipful Company of Goldsmiths in November 1936, a few weeks before King Edward's abdication. A note states 'this design was approved by the Judges'. Himsworth submitted 24 designs for consideration, including two designs for drinking cups. One of these, numbered design 16, was described as a drinking cup with niello decoration, priced at £6, and probably refers to this design. Half of Himsworth's entries were approved as official 'Coronation competition' designs, the niello and engraved decoration being noted by the judges as a particular strength. She was one of just four designers to be granted a prize of £10.¹⁴ Rather intriguingly, the designs were submitted in partnership with Leonard Beaumont, described in Joseph Beeston Himsworth's Guild biography as 'designer, etcher, colour prints, publicity



12 Hair ornament, silver, enamel and ivory, Joyce Himsworth, circa 1920–40.
(Museums Sheffield 1974.657)

9 Anneke Bambery, *Joyce R. Himsworth Sheffield Silversmith*, exhib cat, Sheffield City Museums, 1978.

10 *ibid.*

11 Himsworth (as note 4).

12 Museums Sheffield Archive.

13 Information courtesy of The Worshipful Company of Goldsmiths, M.III 2 [b] 4 i-ii.

14 *ibid.*



13 Spoons, with enameled finials, James Havenhand, Sheffield 1890–1910. (Museums Sheffield 1982.298 f-k)

artist'.¹⁵ He was Guild master in 1935 and later relocated to London. I am not certain of the nature of their connection: perhaps Beaumont assisted or collaborated in the production of the designs for this competition?

To end on a more personal note, a bracelet [fig 14] was made as a gift for her father around 1940. The links are embellished with a stylised landscape, a cutler's grinding wheel (reflecting his involvement and lifelong interest in Sheffield's cutlery trade¹⁶), and a spade and pick, almost certainly symbolising his passion for archaeology.

In promoting and supporting the work of its members, particularly



14 Bracelet, silver-gilt, made by Joyce Himsworth for her father, circa 1940. (Museums Sheffield 1990.1037)

in metalworking, Sheffield's Artcrafts Guild helped to lay the foundation for the varied and vibrant activities taking place in the city today and continuing excellence in the formal education, training and encouragement of young designer silversmiths. Establishments such as Sheffield Hallam University, Sheffield Assay Office, Starter Studios at Persistence Works and the newly founded Academy of Makers at Butcher Works, continue this legacy of skills and encouraging talent and creativity.

*Since 1998 all museums with Designated collections have been able to apply to the Designated Challenge Fund (DCF), which is administered by The Museums, Libraries and Archives Council (MLA) for funding for collections development projects.

Sheffield Galleries & Museums Trust has recently changed its name to Museums Sheffield. This embraces Graves Art Gallery, the Millennium Gallery, Weston Park and Bishop's House. Silver is primarily displayed in the Millennium Gallery.

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All images are courtesy of Museums Sheffield.

¹⁵ Himsworth (as note 3), p93.

¹⁶ After leaving school he worked at his father's cutlery firm, B. Worth Ltd, and published *The Story of Cutlery* in 1953.