

The Goldsmiths of Limerick.

By M. S. D. WESTROPP, M.R.I.A.

It is known that Goldsmiths must have worked in various parts of Ireland in early times, but it is now impossible to say when working in precious metals first took place in Limerick.

There is archæological evidence that Goldsmiths carried on their craft in the Limerick district from a very early period, and that the magnificent gold gorgets of about 700 B.C. may have been made in parts of what is now County Limerick. The distribution of these gorgets belongs chiefly to the area of the Lower Shannon, and the indications are that they were made from earlier types, in gold secured in the form of plunder from the surrounding country, as no gold is found naturally in the vicinity.*

The Ardagh Chalice, made of gold, silver and other metals, and the silver brooches which were found with it, of about the ninth or tenth century A.D., may have been made in the country around Limerick.

It is not until much later that we have any records of goldsmiths working in the Limerick district. On the metal band of the mitre of Bishop Cornelius O'Dea of Limerick is engraved the name of the Bishop and the date 1418, and also "Thomas O'Carryd artifex faciens." This Thomas O'Carryd may have been a goldsmith in Limerick, and if so, we have the earliest record of a Limerick craftsman.

The next definite records we have are the names of Gilladuffe O'Cowltayn and Donald Mecgyllysaghte (Lysaght), goldsmiths of Limerick, in 1559, and of Thomas Kinraghte (Enright), goldsmith of Kilmallock, in 1569. Then after an interval of over one hundred years, the name of Robert Smith, goldsmith, of Limerick, is mentioned in 1674 and 1687. From then onwards during the eighteenth century and early nineteenth the names of numerous Limerick goldsmiths are recorded. No mention seems to be forthcoming of any guild of Goldsmiths and Silversmiths in Limerick, though Cork, Youghal and Kinsale possessed guilds of Hammermen in the seventeenth century. These guilds of Hammermen comprised goldsmiths, silversmiths, blacksmiths, braziers, pewterers, cutlers and other craftsmen who work by fire.

No Assay Office is known to have existed in Limerick; Dublin appearing to be the *only town in Ireland which possessed one*. Probably purchasers of Limerick-made plate depended on the integrity of the local silversmiths.

Notwithstanding that the Goldsmiths' Company of Dublin had the sole right to assay and mark all gold and silver articles made in Ireland, very large quantities were made in Limerick, Cork, Galway and other towns in the country during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries which were never assayed nor marked in Dublin.

It is recorded in the books of the Dublin Goldsmiths' Company that Limerick, as well as Cork, Waterford and Clonmel, sent plate to Dublin to be assayed and marked during the eighteenth century. Amounts varying from 3lbs. to 20lbs. weight at a time are entered as having been sent up by Limerick silversmiths.

It is not at present known at what date Limerick goldsmiths first marked their plate. The Cork goldsmiths having formed a guild of Hammermen in 1656, probably then, or a little later, adopted a Town Mark. Perhaps Limerick followed the example of Cork and adopted a Town Mark during the latter part of the seventeenth century.

The earliest mark on Limerick silver known, is the city arms—a gateway between two towers. This mark appears on two pieces of plate in Limerick Cathedral—a flagon and a paten; and also on a flagon in Bruhenny Church, Buttevant. These pieces bear also the maker's marks of a B and I B respectively, which may be the initials of some members of the Buck family, of which several were silversmiths in Limerick.

The flagon in Limerick Cathedral was given by Sir Joseph Williamson, who also presented a tall cup to the Corporation of Dublin in 1696. This cup bears the Dublin

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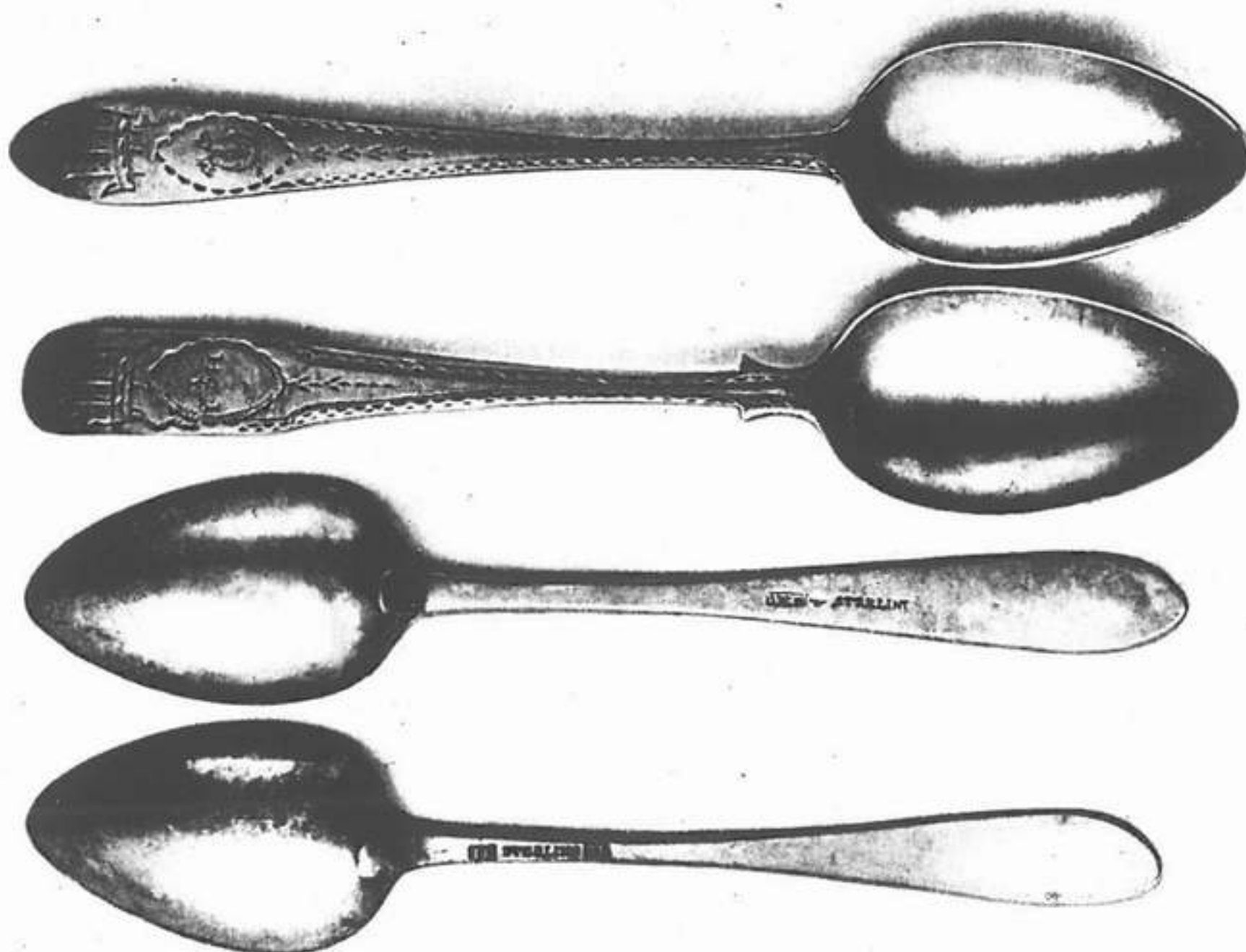
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Flagon, St. Mary's Cathedral. Marks on Flagon (— Buck). Marks on Paten, St. Mary's (Jonathan Buck).



Limerick Spoons, showing "plume" engraving and marks.

hall mark for 1696, and probably the Limerick Cathedral flagon is of about the same date. Sir Joseph Williamson died in 1701. In Limerick Cathedral there is the paten and in Bruhenny Church the flagon, both of which bear the Limerick Town Mark, a gateway between two towers, and both bear the same makers mark I B (Buck?) in a quarter-foil punch. Neither has any inscribed date, but the Bruhenny flagon was given by Sir John Percival, who was made Baron Percival in 1715, consequently the gift would have been made before that date.

About the year 1710 Cork appears to have adopted as a guarantee mark on silver the word **STERLING** in place of the City Arms, and very probably Limerick changed its mark about the same time.



JOSEPH JOHNS.



GEORGE MOORE.



W. FITZGERALD.



R. O'SHAUGHNESSY.



GARRETT FITZGERALD



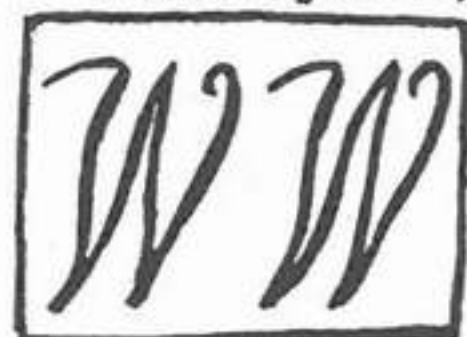
SAMUEL JOHNS.



PHILIP WALSH



GEORGE HALLORAN.



W. WARD.



SOME LIMERICK MAKERS' MARKS.

As far as is present known no Limerick silver of the reign of Queen Anne has been found with the **STERLING** mark. A chalice dated 1718 exists bearing the mark A B in an oval shield, perhaps the mark of Adam Buck, but no **STERLING** mark. Also on the silver seal of the Corporation of Kilmallock dated 1738, is the makers mark I B in a rectangular punch, but no **STERLING**. This is probably a mark of Jonathan Buck, who worked in Limerick from about 1725 to 1740, when he went to Cork.

The first entries of provincial plate having been sent to Dublin for assay and marking occur for Cork in 1709, and for Limerick in 1711. Perhaps this departure may have been caused by the change of mark. In any case after about 1710 **STERLING** is certainly found on Cork plate and on Limerick plate after about 1720.

The full marks on Limerick silver during most of the eighteenth century and early nineteenth century were the word **STERLING** and the maker's mark, the latter often stamped twice.

There are several varieties of the **STERLING** mark used on Limerick silver. Usually it is **STERLING** within a rectangular punch, but sometimes **STARLING**,

STER **G**
STARLIN, **LING**, **STERL**, **STERG**, **STER**, and *Ster* in rectangular punches, and rarely the contracted **STERLING** in an oval. The mark is also found as **STERLING** and **STER** in incuse letters without any surrounding punch. The capital letters of the word have always serifs and are not plain block letters without serifs. Pieces of silver of Limerick or Cork make bearing the **STERLING** mark in plain block letters without serifs are almost certainly all forgeries.

STER

The mark **LING** in a shaped or rectangular punch is also found on some English silver. It was used at Chester towards the end of the seventeenth century, and at Sheffield about 1770. New York has adopted **STERLING** in incuse letters on silver since about the middle of the nineteenth century.

The maker's mark usually consists of the initials of the christian and surname of the goldsmith. Occasionally there was some device enclosed in the stamp, as the lion rampant in the case of Joseph John's mark. The maker's mark like the **STERLING** mark, varies a good deal. The initials of the name of the maker are usually capital letters, though occasionally script letters are to be found. The letters themselves are generally enclosed in a punch of varying shape, such as rectangle, rectangle with clipped corners, quaterfoil, oval, etc.

A curious variety of maker's mark employed in Limerick towards the end of the eighteenth century is that of using a punch exactly corresponding to the outline of the Harp and Crown punch used in Dublin. However, in this punch initials of the maker are substituted for the figure Harp, the Crown alone remains above the initials. Presumably this mark seems to have been instituted to make it appear like the Dublin Harp and the Crown punch. The mark has been found in connection with the maker's initials **PW** (Patrick Walsh), **IS** (probably John Strit or Stritch) and **GH** (George Halloran).

Towards the end of the eighteenth century and during the early part of the nineteenth another mark is sometimes found in addition to the maker's mark and **STERLING**, though **STERLING** is occasionally omitted. This mark bears a rude resemblance to a plume of three feathers. It is usually found in a separate stamp, but sometimes it occurs within the punch of the maker. A mark of a fleur-de-lys is found occasionally in connection with the mark of George Hodder of Cork, but this is quite distinct from the Limerick mark. On a large majority of bright-cut spoons made in Limerick towards the end of the eighteenth century and early in the nineteenth, a plume of three feathers is found engraved on the end of the handle. What connection this plume of feathers has with Limerick has not yet been ascertained.

Large quantities of plate must have been made in Limerick during the eighteenth century, and the pieces which have so far come to light bear testimony to the high degree of excellence attained. Most of the old Limerick silver is severely plain and of fine technique, but occasionally pieces with repoussé work are to be found.

The following is a list of Limerick Silversmiths as far as it at present known : —

NAME.					MENTIONED.
Adam Buck	...	...	...	...	1725, died.
Jonathan Buck	...	...	...	...	1725-1740.
Collins Brehon	...	...	...	...	1768 died.
George Brush	...	...	...	...	1769.
Robert Bradford	...	...	...	...	1770.
Thomas Burke	...	...	...	...	1784, 1800 died.
Caleb Colbeck	...	...	...	...	1720, 1730.
John Collum	...	...	...	...	1751, 1788 died.
Patrick Connell	...	...	...	...	1784, 1788.
Henry Downes	...	...	...	...	1788 died.
Maurice Fitzgerald	...	...	...	...	1760, 1810.



Limerick made Sauce Boat.



Silver Cup (Joseph Johns) and Spoon with fleur de lis engraving.

Garrett Fitzgerald	...	...	...	1768, 1780 died.
William Fitzgerald	...	...	...	1800.
William Fitzgerald & Son	...	...	...	1820.
John Gloster	...	...	...	1755.
— Hill	...	...	...	1727.
Joseph Johns	...	...	...	1731, 1773—Mayor.
Samuel Johns	...	...	...	1765, 1795 died.
George Halloran	...	...	...	1766, 1804 died.
John Hackett	...	...	...	1770, 1784.
George Hurst of Pallaskenry	...	...	...	1842 died.
Daniel Lysaght	...	...	...	1786, 1788.
John Laing	...	...	...	1846.
Donald Mecgyllysaghta	...	...	...	1559.
George Moore	...	...	...	1768, 1784.
W. D. Moore	...	...	...	1779.
Thomas O'Carryd	...	...	...	1418.
Gilladuffe O'Cowltayn	...	...	...	1559.
Robert O'Shaughnessy	...	...	...	1802, 1842 died.
Edward Parker	...	...	...	1731, 1782 died.
John Purcell	...	...	...	1787, 1813 died.
Francis Phipps	...	...	...	1788.
Samuel Purdon	...	...	...	1800, 1846.
James Robinson	...	...	...	1680, 1698.
John Robinson	...	...	...	1730, 1739.
George Robinson	...	...	...	1750, 1768.
Joseph Robinson	...	...	...	1767 died.
Robert Smith	...	...	...	1674, 1687.
John Strit or Stritch	...	...	...	1771, 1784.
H. Smith & R. Wallace	...	...	...	1832, 1840.
Philip Walsh	...	...	...	1777, 1784.
James Watson	...	...	...	1774.
Mathew Walsh	...	...	...	1784.
William Ward	...	...	...	1798, 1810.
T. Walsh	...	...	...	1810, 1846.
John Walsh	...	...	...	1846.
