

A Trail of Paul de Lamerie Silver in the V&A

The V&A collection includes many items of silver made by Paul de Lamerie, the greatest silversmith working in England in the 18th century. This trail leads you through highlights that can be seen in the galleries. It will take you about 45 minutes.

Part 1: British Galleries (54, 53, 53a, 52b and 118a)

The trail starts in the middle of the British Galleries, turning left into Gallery 54 from the stairs down from Gallery 114. The first object is in a huge case, entitled Buffet, behind a large wooden carved scene ahead of you. The buffet was a side-table used for lavish displays of silver demonstrating wealth and status.

1. Pilgrim bottle, London, about 1710, Pierre Platel. Museum Number M.854&:2-1927, Room 54, label 55.



De Lamerie was apprenticed to the maker of this bottle, Pierre Platel, from 1703 to 1713. It was made for General Charles Churchill, brother of John, 1st Duke of Marlborough and was probably intended for display on a buffet (see above). A number of different techniques have been employed in its construction and decoration. The lower part of the body is boldly chased (the surface pushed into relief). On the neck, fluting descends from palm leaves of cut-card work (motifs cut out of sheet metal and attached with solder). On either side is a mask of a female surrounded by acanthus foliage. The masks were cast in a sand mould and then finely chased.

Pilgrim bottles date to ancient Roman times in the West and to 7th century China in the East. They were made in a wide range of materials, including earthenware, porcelain, silver, and glass, and also in more perishable materials such as leather. Originally, they were carried by pilgrims or other travellers on their journeys, but the ones that have survived are generally very grand and their function was ornamental. Their form was brought to Britain by Huguenot (French Protestant) goldsmiths such as Platel.

2. Cup and Cover, London, 1736-37, de Lamerie. Museum Number 819-1890, Gallery 54, label 54.



This object is immediately above the pilgrim bottle.

In the 18th century the two-handled cup developed into a ceremonial object, rather than a functional one. Covered cups were the ideal grand gift, and became a popular choice of prize for sports. In particular, they were presented to and used by male societies, such as colleges or trade and craft associations. As a result of their status as heirlooms, a disproportionately large number of cups has survived, compared to other categories of silver plate.

Here, the inverted bell shape is typical of cups of 1720s-80s. The elaborate cast mouldings reveal how de Lamerie, like many London goldsmiths, was moving away from the simpler decoration favoured by earlier generations to the much more ornate Rococo style which became popular in London during the 1730s. 'Rococo' comes from the French word 'rocaille' - the rock and broken shell motifs which formed part of Rococo design.

3. Coffee pot, London, 1749-50, James Shruder workshop. Museum Number M.312-1975, Room 53, label 15.



Retrace your steps and walk on into Room 53. The next two objects are in the case on the left hand wall ahead of you.

This coffee pot is designed on a marine theme, using elaborate and fantastical decoration, and asymmetry, characteristic of the flamboyant Rococo style. Many elements, including the sea-horse, dolphins and boat, are taken from engravings by the celebrated designer Jacques de Lajoue (1686–1761), which were published in Paris in 1734.

Ivory has been used for the handle because of its heat-resistant properties. A matching tea kettle is in the collection of the Museum of Fine Arts, Richmond, Virginia (the sea-horse motif appears on both the items). James Shruder (a German Catholic immigrant, active 1737–49), the goldsmith from whose workshop this coffee pot came, was probably personally responsible for the scene depicting Poseidon with his trident. Unusually, he designed his own trade card, which you can see in the exhibition in Room 117.

4. Ilchester Ewer & Basin, about 1740, unmarked. Private Collection, Room 53, label 10.



Ewers and basins, used for washing hands at table in days before forks were in regular use, were the most ambitious form of Elizabethan table plate and continued to be made through the 17th and 18th century for personal and display use. These two beautiful and complex pieces are vigorously sculptural and boldly asymmetrical. Although their designer and maker is not known, their style and use of heraldry strongly suggest that they were made by de Lamerie.

An example of the best Rococo design, the helmet-shaped ewer has cast and applied foliage ornament. This is decorated with bullrushes, perhaps from the work of Jean-Baptiste De Lens of Paris who produced a pair of wine coolers in 1732 with very similar decoration. Two asymmetrical cartouches (enclosures) flank the handle, which is a mermaid with long flowing hair supporting the body of the ewer with her left arm.

The ewer and basin was probably a love gift from Stephen Fox, created 1st Earl of Ilchester (1741), to his young bride, Elizabeth Strangways Horner, on her 18th birthday. His and her impaled (divided half-and-half) coats of arms are engraved on cartouches on both ewer and basin.

5. Newdigate Centrepiece, London, 1743/4, de Lamerie. Museum Number M.149-1919, Room 53a, label 51.



Turn to your right and walk into the small room towards the embroidered dress ahead of you. The next object is beside the dress, on the left.

Centrepieces sometimes comprise several separate objects, designed to be seen together along a table, often including functional items such as tureens containing ragouts (spicy stew). By the 1750s, this composite centrepiece had developed into the now more familiar dessert centrepiece, which became the grandest single item of dining silver, often with hanging baskets and placed in the centre of the table for formal meals. As here, some were very elaborate and could serve as a fruit stand, set out at the beginning of the meal and supplemented by further dishes of fruits and sweetmeats for the dessert course. Sweetmeats, long known in the Middle East and Asia and to the ancient Egyptians, were at first preserved or candied fruits, probably made with honey. Subsequently, dessert foods from custards to candied violets were referred to as sweetmeats. Wet varieties were eaten with a spoon and included jellies, creams, floating islands and preserved fruits in heavy syrups. Dry varieties, for which this centrepiece could have been used, included nuts, fruit peels, glacéed fruit, sugared comfits and flowers, chocolates and small cakes.

This elaborate centrepiece, a wedding present, is richly decorated with characteristic Rococo motifs – bold scrollwork, flowers and shells – but also contains elements typical of de Lamerie’s work, such as the helmeted putti.

6. Tea Caddy, London c.1730, de Lamerie. Museum Number M.314-1962, Room 52b, label 32.



Go back into Room 53 to the huge marble statue of Handel, down the slope, turning right at the end into the Norfolk House Music Room. The next object is at eye level in a case in the small room beyond the Music Room.

From the mid 17th century, tea, coffee and chocolate entered Europe from China, Arabia and Central America. In 18th century, English imports of tea outstripped coffee and chocolate. One of a pair of tea caddies, this one is engraved with the letter 'B' to indicate that it held the black fermented leaves known as Bohea. Its pair bears the letter 'G', indicating that it held the green, unfermented tea leaves commonly called 'Green' tea. Tea was heavily taxed. As it was both expensive and extremely popular at this date, this caddy is typical in having a hinged lid which could be locked to prevent theft.

Although this canister is unmarked, it was probably made by de Lamerie. The shape and ornamentation is fairly typical of the early eighteenth century, in that the decoration consists mainly of heraldry and is confined to relatively few areas of the object. The coats of arms were probably engraved by William Hogarth (1697-1764), celebrated painter and engraver, after a design by Ellis Gamble, his master (and at one stage business partner of de Lamerie). The same arms appear on a silver-gilt spoon tray by de Lamerie, suggesting that the caddies formed part of a much larger tea service. The word 'caddy' was adopted towards the end of the eighteenth century and seems to be a corruption of the word 'kati', which was used in the tea trade to signify a weight equivalent to slightly over a pound. Previously, caddies were referred to as canisters.

7. Walpole Salver, London, 1727/8, de Lamerie. Museum Number M.9-1956, Room 118a, label 19.



Turn left towards the lift, left and right and out of Room 52, up the stairs past 20thC galleries and into Room 118.

Walk to the left of the model of the state coach and follow the 'Horace Walpole' arrow into a small room on the left.

This square tray or 'salver' is one of two commissioned by Sir Robert Walpole to commemorate his terms as Chancellor of the Exchequer. It was a long established custom for the holders of certain Crown offices to receive as a perquisite ('perk') the official silver seal of their office when it became redundant, as, for example, after the death of a sovereign. The recipient then commissioned a piece, made from the melted down silver, and had it engraved with the designs of the official seals. Sir Robert Walpole was Chancellor of the Exchequer when George I died in 1727 and this salver is engraved with the design of the Second Exchequer Seal of George I. The salver was eventually inherited by Sir Robert's youngest son, Horace, politician, writer and architectural innovator.

The superb engraving, of the highest quality, is attributed to William Hogarth. The seal roundels are supported by a figure of Hercules, representing Heroic Virtue, flanked by allegorical figures representing Calumny and Envy, with a view of the City of London in the background. The figures above represent Prudence and Fortitude. The border is of elaborate strapwork between masks representing the Four Seasons and cartouches in each corner. These show, within the Garter collar, the double cipher (initials intertwined) 'RW' twice; the arms of Walpole quartering those of his wife Catherine Shorter; and the Walpole crest of a Saracen's head.

Directions for Part 2: Go back and out of Gallery 118 and down the stairs. Walk through the 20thC Galleries, turning left half-way through. As you turn right into the Whiteley Silver Galleries, No. 8 is hanging on the wall on your right.

Part 2: Whiteley Silver and Sacred Silver & Stained Glass Galleries (70a, 65, 83)

8. Portrait of Paul Crespin, c.1725, anon. Museum Number P.29-1985, Room 70a, label 1.



Paul Crespin (1694-1770) sometimes worked with de Lamerie. He was an accomplished goldsmith, the son of Huguenot (French Protestant) refugees. He registered his first marks 1720/1 and flourished in the 1720s, winning commissions for the grandest objects from the English aristocracy as well as the Portuguese court. He was an innovative designer who maintained a very high standard of workmanship throughout his career and kept abreast of stylistic developments, adapting the fashionable Rococo style as early as the mid 1730s. Here he has chosen to have himself shown holding a lavish late 17th century vase (suggesting that he was a dealer as well as a goldsmith), in working attire, confident in his status as a highly respected creative artist and master craftsman supplying the nobility.

Nos. 9-11 inclusive are all in the second case on the right, labelled 'Form and Ornament'.

9. Chesterfield Wine Cooler, London, 1727-8, de Lamerie. Museum Number M.1-1990, Room 65, case 4 'Form & Ornament', label 1



This magnificent wine cooler is for a single bottle of wine. It has the maker's mark of Paul Crespin over striking that of Paul de Lamerie, who worked with other silversmiths including Crespin. With its pair (now in the Royal Museum of Scotland), it formed part of the large service supplied by Crespin to the Royal Jewel House and issued to Philip Dormer Stanhope, 4th Earl of Chesterfield (1694-1772), for his embassy in The Hague (1728-1832). It is decorated with four plaquettes representing the Elements and engraved with the Royal Arms and cipher of George II.

10. Ewer, London, 1736, duty dodger - marked 1944, de Lamerie. Museum Number M.16-1954, Room 65, case 4, label 2.

This elaborate example of a ewer by de Lamerie is decorated with the applied arms of Philip of Yorke, Baron Hardwicke impaling the arms of his wife Margaret Cocks. From the 1680s, helmet-shaped ewers were fashionable for the buffet (sideboard) or dressing table.

The ewer is an example of a 'duty dodger'. English silver was taxed by weight after 1720 and marks from smaller, lighter pieces were sometimes added to larger, heavier objects to avoid the expense. An additional plate with the Paul de Lamerie mark and the hallmark for 1736-7 from a smaller, less expensive item, that had already been assessed for tax, was soldered to the underside of the foot in an attempt to avoid large bills from the tax on wrought plate.

11. Sweetmeat basket, London 1743-4, de Lamerie. Museum Number M.6-2001, Room 65, case 4, label 14.

This sweetmeat basket, the very small basket on the lower level of the case, has intricate pierced work and a beautifully cast Rococo ornamented handle. It is a superb example of the work of Paul de Lamerie.

Now go to the end of these galleries, walking towards the silver group of lions, and turn right into Room 83. No.12 is on the top shelf, at the window end of the of the last case on the left before you get to the arch into Room 84.

12. Asylum Chapel Plate: Flagon, cup, paten & almsdish, London, 1763-4, de Lamerie. Museum Number M.16 to C -1986, Room 83, case 2 C, label 1.



De Lamerie provided church silver 1717-50, subcontracting some of the work. From the early 17th century, straight sided flagons were used in churches for communion wine. Domestic jugs were also used and had the advantage of having spouts.

This communion set was presented by the banker and philanthropist Sir Thomas Hankey to the Asylum for Female Orphans at Vauxhall, London. The asylum or house of refuge for orphan girls was established by voluntary subscription from several 'noblemen and gentlemen' in 1758, with the main aim of preventing prostitution. As recorded in the records of the House of Commons, 23rd April 1800, when William Wilberforce proposed a Bill formally to establish and govern this Charitable Institution, 'a great Number of Orphan Girls have been received into and maintained and educated thereby, and at proper Ages, apprenticed therefrom; ... such Orphan Girls have not only been sheltered and protected from Vice and Want, but carefully instructed in the Principles of Religion, and in Reading, Writing, Needlework, and Household Business, and trained to Habits of Industry and Regularity, whereby the Public have been, and continue to be, provided with a Supply of diligent and sober Female Domestic Servants'.

David Pugh, writing as David Hughson in 1805-9, describes the chapel as 'very neat...in which some respectable minister of the Gospel officiates as a preacher on Sundays; the girls also sing appropriate hymns accompanied by a good organ... A number of the nobility and gentry frequent this place of worship'. The silver is dated 1763-64 and was designed by Abraham Portal (1726-1809) who was apprenticed to de Lamerie (and wrote poetry and plays) and continued to work as a goldsmith after de Lamerie's death in 1751.