

CARIBBEAN SILVER IN THE COLONIAL PERIOD

An international conference organised by the Silver Society,
at Goldsmiths' Hall, London

Monday, 3rd June 2024



View of Bridgetown Harbour, Barbados, 18th century, National Trust (Dyrham Park) Photo: NT Images/James Dobson

This ground-breaking conference will celebrate the life and work of noted silver researcher, Robert Barker. On his death in 2019 Robert made two bequests: to the National Museums of Scotland he left his collection of 57 items of 18th-century Jamaican silver, and to the Silver Society he left a generous legacy, the purpose of which was to encourage original research into 'eighteenth-century silversmiths from Great Britain, its colonies and possessions and their works'.

The conference will focus on Robert's collection and on recent research, including that supported by the Barker Fund. Together it will show the Caribbean islands to have been a significant and hitherto understudied area of silver patronage and craft.

The conference will take place in the magnificent setting of London's Goldsmiths' Hall. Anticipating keen interest from the Caribbean nations and in North America, it will also be available online and will be timed to minimise the inconvenience of the time-change between the UK and the Americas.

For any queries other than registration, please contact events@thesilversociety.org



Top right: Robert Barker (1960-2018)

Bottom right: Cup and cover by William Duncan, Jamaica, circa 1750, National Museums of Scotland (Robert Barker Bequest)

Left: The livery hall, Goldsmiths' Hall

The Programme

- 11.00 Registration and coffee
- 11.30 Welcome, **Timothy Schroder**
- 11.40 **Wynyard Wilkinson:** *Robert Barker, an appreciation*
- 12.15 **Professor Louis Nelson:** Keynote speaker, *Colbeck Castle: a collaborative journey of discovery*
- 13.15 Lunch
- 14.15 **Catherine Doucette:** *Eighteenth-century silversmiths of Jamaica*
- 15.00 **Luke Delmas:** *Glimpses of the colonial goldsmith trade in Barbados during the long eighteenth century*
- 15.45 **John Rogers:** *Patrick Wilson, silversmith of Antigua* (based on the research of the late Laurence Joyce)
- 16.30 Tea
- 16.50 **Brandy Culp:** *Silversmiths of the Virgin Islands*
- 17.35 **Philippe Halbert:** *Silver and society in Saint-Domingue*
- 18.20 **Wynyard Wilkinson:** *The search continues*
- 18.45 Q&A and panel discussion (including on-line participants)
- 19.15 Concluding remarks, **Timothy Schroder**
- 19.20 Close and drinks



Sugar bowl by Solomon Saldana, Jamaica, circa 1750-60, National Museums of Scotland (Robert Barker Bequest)

Registration

In-person participation (including sandwich lunch and refreshments): **£60** per person; discounted rates of **£45** for Silver Society members and **£30** for students
Participation by Zoom: **£15**

Places for the conference are limited. To book a place please go to Eventbrite:
<https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/caribbean-silver-in-the-colonial-period-tickets-801779412807?aff=oddtcreator>

Speakers

Brandy Culp

Currently Curator at the New York firm Steven W. Spandle Architect, Brandy Culp also serves as a trustee of the Bard Graduate Center. Previous roles include Richard W. Koopman Curator of American Decorative Arts at the Wadsworth Atheneum Museum of Art, Curator of Historic Charleston Foundation and Andrew W. Mellon Curatorial Fellow in the Department of American Art at the Art Institute of Chicago.

Luke Delmas

Born and educated in Barbados, Luke now lives in London and is a Senior Teaching Fellow at Imperial College where he undertook his PhD studies in synthetic chemistry. Luke joined the Silver Society committee in 2020, leading on the launch of the Early Career Silver Group and has recently taken up the role of Events Secretary.

Catherine Doucette

Catherine is a PhD candidate in Art and Architectural History at the University of Virginia where she studies the material culture of the early modern Caribbean and Atlantic world. Before starting her PhD, Catherine earned her MA in Art History from the Courtauld Institute of Art.

Philippe L.B. Halbert

Philippe Halbert is the Richard W. Koopman Associate Curator of American Decorative Arts at the Wadsworth Atheneum Museum of Art. A graduate of the College of William and Mary and the Winterthur Program in American Material Culture at the University of Delaware, he received his doctorate in the history of art from Yale University.

Louis Nelson

Louis Nelson is Professor of Architectural History at the University of Virginia. A specialist in the early modern Atlantic world, he has published works on the Caribbean, West Africa, and the American South. His most recent monograph, *Architecture and Empire in Jamaica* (Yale, 2016) won multiple book awards.

John Rogers

John studied Fine Art and Art History at Goldsmiths, and Sculpture at the Royal College of Art. Since 2017 he has been associate director and head of the Silver and Objects of Vertu department at Chiswick Auctions in London. His specific research interests are Britannia standard silver, colonial silver, and the silver of 20th-century Persia.

Timothy Schroder

President of the Silver Society; former curator, Los Angeles County Museum of Art and Victoria & Albert Museum and former trustee of the Wallace Collection. He is author of numerous book and articles, including *British and Continental Gold and Silver in the Ashmolean Museum* (2009) and 'A Marvel to Behold', *Gold and Silver at the Court of Henry VIII* (2020)

Wynyard Wilkinson

Son of a Colonial administrator and an unapologetic child of Empire, Wynyard Wilkinson was born in Kenya. It was on a childhood visit to his father's birthplace in India that Wynyard's fascination with silver made in the far-flung corners of the Colonial world began. His perpetual research has yielded several books and articles, all underwritten by his weekly gig in the Portobello Road.



The Staircase, Goldsmiths' Hall

Abstracts

Brandy Culp

'A mark of their own': Silversmiths of the Virgin Islands and the Greater Antilles

In the 18th and 19th centuries, skilled silversmiths of African descent – both free and enslaved – may be identified throughout the Americas in every major early urban centre from New England to the Caribbean. Many notable 18th-century metalsmiths directly benefited from the labour of enslaved peoples – who were hired as day labourers or confined within enslavers' workshops and households. In many instances, their stories remain obscured by their enslavement and their life's work often concealed by the maker's mark of another silversmith. However, by the early 1800s there were several documented instances of silversmiths of African descent successfully operating their own workshops in the Caribbean, including the Virgin Islands and the Greater Antilles. These individuals navigated the transatlantic world, leveraging trade networks to bolster business and bettering economic opportunities for themselves and their families. This lecture will highlight the life and work of several silversmiths of colour.

Catherine Doucette

Eighteenth-century silversmiths of Jamaica

In 1745, Caesar Cross bequeathed gold sleeve buttons, a set of silver shoe buckles, silver knee buckles, and a silver watch to Robert Pope, a fellow free Black Jamaican in Kingston. In the same year, the Kingston-based goldsmith Ephraim Crow bequeathed five pounds to Cudjoe, a Black journeyman who had worked in his shop. As the wills and other documents show, free Black Jamaicans were involved with silver and gold as both makers and consumers. Surviving silver wares from this vibrant and vital economy are few, however, and one of the most remarkable collections of 18th-century Jamaican silver was assembled by Robert Barker. Barker's collection – encompassing a range of wares such as teaspoons, sugar bowls, and a kettle – offer material evidence of silver production and consumption in Jamaica. This paper offers an introduction to the Barker collection and uses archival evidence to explore the engagement of both free and enslaved Black Jamaicans in silver in domestic and urban spaces during the period.

Luke Delmas

Glimpses of the goldsmith trade in Barbados during the long eighteenth century

By the middle of the 17th century Barbados was the richest colony in the Americas and the sugar industry was producing intoxicating profits. This resulted in a fertile demand for European goods, with Bridgetown's natural harbour becoming a key trading hub. The prospering planters and merchants furnished their homes both for comfort and to display their new wealth. That silver contributed to this endeavour is evidenced by travellers' accounts of hospitality and by surviving inventories, and while imported wares dominated the retail market on the island, Bridgetown also became home to numerous working goldsmiths. These artisans were engaged in manufacturing new wares (when supplies from Europe were interrupted) and repairing worn or damaged pieces. The present study uses archives to explore how the Barbadian goldsmiths' trade operated during the long 18th century, who the artisans were, and how they marketed themselves. So far, over 90 members of the trade have been identified between 1688 and 1815. Tentative attributions to Barbados of several previously unasccribed silver makers' marks will be proposed.

Philippe Halbert

Silver and society in Saint-Domingue

In October 1710, officials in Petit-Goâve passed an edict forbidding Saint-Domingue's silversmiths from buying or acquiring silver in any form from enslaved people. The ordinance was responding to incidents in which slaves owned by silversmiths were accused of stealing silver from their masters; it also addressed suspicions over the purity of items produced in colonial workshops. To combat this, silversmiths were ordered to register a personal mark (*poinçon*) and to strike their work with it. The 1710 edict anticipated a much more elaborate set of regulations, promulgated in 1781. Under this new legislation an assay office had to be opened in every colonial town and assay masters were tasked with assaying locally-made wares and applying a new countermark, the *poinçon de la colonie*. In a further provision, however, while white creole and immigrant goldsmiths continued to rely on enslaved labour, free craftspeople of colour were henceforth banned from these trades. Using a rich cross-section of archival sources – including the colony's only newspaper, the *Affiches américaine* – this presentation will trace a larger history of silver in 18th-century Saint-Domingue. In addition to providing an overview of the sophisticated merchandise within reach of French colonial consumers, it will also lay bare the emergence of an increasingly racialized Caribbean social order built on slavery.

Louis Nelson, *Colbeck Castle: a collaborative journey of discovery*

In April of 2012 I received an email that would change the course of my career. Having learned that I was to lecture in London on the subject of early Jamaican architecture, Robert Barker reached out wishing to have lunch and learn more about me and my work. That lunch launched a years-long friendship that brought the two of us into deep engagement on many research topics on early Jamaican architecture, art and history. One of those was Colbeck Castle. When I first saw the extraordinary and singular ruin in the summer of 1998, it was commonly described as a 17th-century, possibly incomplete, remnant. Some even wondered if it was a legacy of the Spanish occupation of the island. Now, a quarter of a century later, we know the ruin to have been a remarkable Scottish-built great house from the middle of the 18th century. This much fuller understanding was only possible through my careful inspection and documentation of the surviving ruins, Robert's mastery of early Jamaican cartography, and our shared commitment to examining any possible archival lead. This paper tells the story of our work together to better understand one of Jamaica's most important great houses.

John Rogers, *Patrick Wilson, silversmith of Antigua*

Antigua is known to have supported a silver trade during the 17th and 18th centuries and witness statements following the Antigua Slave Rebellion of 1736 include the names of several individuals described as goldsmiths or silversmiths. But little is known of the wares they produced and, so far, no firm attributions have been made. Joyce's research focused on silversmith Patrick Wilson, whom he considered within the context of the general economy of Antigua. Among other things, he discovered that Wilson had business dealings with a London wholesaler. He also uncovered evidence that colonial silversmiths were sometimes peripatetic, moving between the various colonies. For example, another Antigua silversmith, Charles Allen, was later recorded in Kingston, Jamaica, while Thomas Savage appears in Boston records in 1706, before relocating to Bermuda around 1714. *Laurence Joyce was awarded a grant under Robert Barker's bequest in 2022, enabling him to travel to Antigua to pursue his research into the 18th-century silversmith Patrick Wilson. Sadly, Joyce died shortly after returning from his trip and before he was able to write up his research. We are grateful to John Rogers for interpreting his notes and presenting his findings to the conference.*

Wynyard Wilkinson

Robert Barker, an appreciation and The search continues

Identifying goldsmiths and silversmiths working in the Caribbean islands in the 18th and 19th centuries is a slow and painstaking process. In those rare instances where surviving pieces of silver can be confidently attributed to the once living, breathing person behind the dry historical records, the researcher is presented with a roller-coaster of discovery. Following the snippets of archival evidence left by each goldsmith's life and career helps the researcher to develop an idea of the landscape in which the broader luxury trades played out. Continuing Robert Barker's work on Jamaica, several intriguing Caribbean artisans have come to light whose stories provide illustrative examples of a silversmith's life and work in the Colonial West Indies.