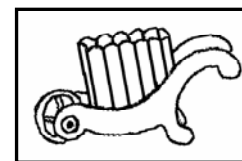


Salty Comments

Facts and Opinion about Open Salt Collecting



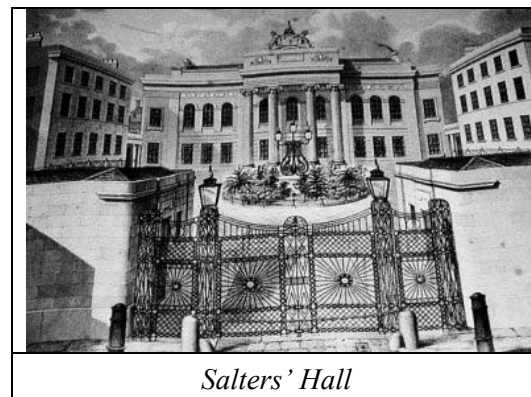
Number 90

March 2005

Salters' Hall and More Heisey

If you ever go to London, England be sure to try to visit to Salters' Hall on Fore Street.. Its museum is described as open for "viewing by arrangement by anyone with a special interest". They have an unusual collection of old and new open salts and other historic silver and gold articles.. They buy more items for the collection as they come available and also commission the making of salts to mark special occasions. We don't know what the Tower of London collection has on display, but Salter's is definitely worth viewing..

We learned about Salters' through a new book we purchased and by exploring on the Internet. It is the home of the Salters' Guild, which we think is similar to a trade union in the US. It was formed as the Guild of Corpus Christi in 1216, and through the years developed into a group of people who controlled the salt trade in England. Their primary function was to establish local control by setting standards of workmanship and providing status to members of the Guild. They have built a number of Halls (headquarters) over the centuries, most of which were lost to fires. The Great Fire of London in 1666 was the end of one of them, and the bombing raids of 1941 flattened another.



Salters' Hall

Today the Salters' Company ranks 9th among the 12 Great Livery Companies in England. It is unclear who the members are – certainly a number of the nobility belong, but there is no mention of rank-and-file people or of activities beyond the collection of rents from a number of properties and donations from their patrons. It may be like a philanthropic club with carefully selected members.

About 100years ago the salt trade gradually became less important, so the Guild evolved into a group which supports education in chemistry today. Their current name is the "Worshipful Company of Salters". They have income from member donations and from rentals of property which they own in London. The money is used to support chemistry courses in schools, give prizes in Chemistry and Chemical Engineering education, support summer Chemistry Camps, and to buy special salts and similar items for their collection when they become available. Their evolution is expressed by their statement, "1000 years ago most food was preserved by salt, 100 years ago most chemicals were made from salt". Among other things, they have a motto, "Sal Sapit Omnia", which translates to "Salt Flavours Everything". The same motto is used by the city of Droitwich Spa, a location with salty springs that attract tourists. The springs are reported to be even saltier than the Dead Sea, and if you bathe there you will float on top of the water.

(2)

The Salters' also has a coat of arms, shown at the right. The shield in the center depicts three covered salts with salt overflowing from them. The felines are snow leopards, which explains the spots, we guess.

The book we reference shows color pictures of over 30 shapes of elegant open salts, with dates ranging from 1613 to the present day. All are special, and are not ones we would ever expect to own. The earliest is a standing salt which has two trencher sections and a pepper caster on top. This type evidently came into fashion during the reign of Henry VIII, when they were placed on the high table as a sign of magnificence.

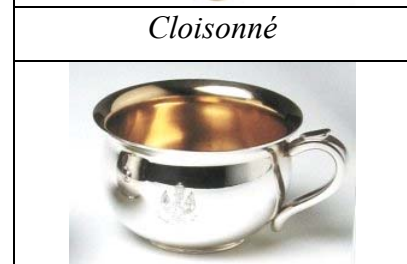
Their salts made before they 1750 are all trencher type. The bowls are gold-plated to withstand corrosion, though none of them look like they ever had any sodium chloride in them. They don't have any nicks or scratches either – we can't tell if they have been restored or just never used.

The only salts with liners are a pair by Hester Bateman, dated 1789. These have cobalt glass inserts, and look similar to a 1785 salt that we own. Later salts all have gilded bowls for protection. There is one Russian cloisonné dated about 1890 that is similar to one of ours. They even show one "salt caster" (read shaker) along with several peppers. We regret that they chose to contaminate such an elegant book by including a shaker! The most recent salts are less than 30 years old, and are obviously made as presentation pieces, not useful articles.

One pair resembles miniature chamber pots, and have an interesting story behind them. In 1813, at the Battle of Vitoria, the King's Royal Hussars defeated the French under the command of Joseph Bonaparte. One of the things captured during the battle was Joseph's chamber pot, reputedly a gift from his brother, the Emperor Napoleon. The vessel became a mascot of the Regiment, which is affiliated with the Salters' Company. In 1998, the Regiment commissioned two salts shaped as miniatures of that pot, had them engraved with the initials KRH, and gave them to the collection.

This book is the first one we have encountered which features a large number of elegant silver and gold salts made over the centuries. A typical one of these, made in 1895, is shown at the right. There are many more of this kind to be seen and admired. If you are interested in dishes that you can't match or afford, by all means buy the book or visit Salters' Hall.

(3)



As a second topic for this issue, we'd like to add to the Heisey data we have published over the years. For previous discussions on this topic, please see Salty Comments No.s 1, 61, 76 and 82. The new information focuses primarily on salts that were modified by others or that Heisey advertised as something else.

The first area is work done on salts by others. Both the silver deposit firms and the decorating houses used some of the Heisey salts as blanks. The most striking examples we have are the silver deposit ones. Unfortunately only one of them is marked, but we know that the principal companies doing this type of decoration were Alvin, Mauser, Depasse and La Pierre (see Salty Comments 38). The first of our silver deposit salts is the Heisey EARLY PURITAN individual size shown at the right. There is no question in our minds about this being a Heisey blank – nobody else we know of made this shape. The second is a pair in the PRISCILLA pattern – master and individual size. These have elaborate designs on them and the larger one is marked “L Sterling” – the La Pierre insignia.. Though we got them about 20 years apart, they still make a matching set in our eyes. For these two the shape of the glass is similar to that of salts from other companies, but when we put authenticated Heisey PRISCILLA pieces beside them, the shape of the bowls and the sizes match perfectly. We have another PRISCILLA individual with a different silver deposit design, but unfortunately it is not marked. This is shown at the right.



EARLY PURITAN



PRISCILLA – La Pierre Silver



PRISCILLA Individual Unmarked

An usual piece we recently were given by our sister-in-law, Evelyn, is a PUNTY BANDS individual size with a silver rim projecting upwards from it. The rim is probably silver plate, since there is no "sterling" mark on it. Who put it on the salt is a mystery – we wish we knew more about it. We asked the Heisey Museum, and they say that many other companies added metal to Heisey salts, but they have no information about who did what. In any event, it wasn't Heisey who decorated the rim.



PUNTY BANDS – Plated Rim



Engraved REVERE

The Heisey Company did some engraving – our book shows a number of goblets they sold. There are no engraved salts mentioned, however, and we have one of the REVERE pattern with a Diamond-H mark in the inside bottom. The Heisey Museum believes the engraving was done by some other firm – the Heisey engraving shop had limited capabilities and there is no record of them ever working on REVERE salts. We know that outside decorators did use Heisey REVERE blanks. We have seen one of them with a gold band around it, signed Hawkes. We also have a COLONIAL PANEL salt with a similar gold band around the rim – unfortunately it is unsigned.



*Gold Decorated
COLONIAL PANEL*

There are several small dishes that Heisey didn't realize were good individual open salts. The first are the CRYSTOLITE swans which they sold as nut dishes. When the Boyd Crystal Art Glass Co. found the mold they realized the potential, and sold open salts in this shape. We guess this makes the Heisey product a nut dish while the Boyd version is a legitimate addition to our collection. Now the mold is back in the hands of the Heisey Collectors organization, and they have made souvenir swans with their HCA mark. We suspect they are being advertised somewhere as salts.

One of the more useful "ash trays" that Heisey sold were the ones in the OLD SANDWICH pattern. They didn't even have indentations in the sides for a cigarette, so they would be perfect for dipping celery or other vegetables. We suspect that somewhere a customer saw this potential and put them in front of her place settings with salt in them.

There are two nice dishes with matching under-plates that Heisey made and listed as Ash Trays. These are the BEADED OVAL and DIAMOND POINT patterns. Each comes with the Heisey Diamond-H mark on both the plate and the dish. The first of these is rather scarce, but the second can often be found at antique shows. They are too nice to be taken out of our open salt collection.



We hope that you are intrigued by Salters' Hall and get a chance to visit it sometime. Please let us know all about it if you do!

Re the Heisey salts, we're putting together a complete Heisey Story for the Open Salts Collectors national newsletter. It should be published sometime before the end of this year, according to the editor. You may want to get a copy. If you send \$10.00 through your local club or directly to us (the National Organization Treasurer), it will buy you a year's membership including two of these newsletters.

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March 2005

References: "Treasures at Salters' Hall", by Graham Hughes
Salters' Internet Web Site: www.salters.co.uk
Heisey Museum Web Site: www.heiseymuseum.org