

**CUT IN**  
*THE Hand Engravers Association*  
OF GREAT BRITAIN  
**CLERKENWELL**

**Angus McFadyen**

Hand Engraver



Interviewed by Lucy Moseley  
in Stoneleigh, Warwickshire  
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## **Approach to work**

Angus McFadyen's work falls into two categories: that made to commission; and that made more speculatively for exhibition. In both cases the aim is to make something which somebody is going to enjoy using.

Ornamentation by low relief engraving is seen by Angus as an integral part of many designs. Even though a strong form will often stand alone as a finished piece without further embellishment, it is still sometimes possible to enhance it and to strengthen its character. Often his engraved imagery depicts something of significance to the client.

His formal training in silversmithing was minimal and so, by necessity, there is a strong element in his working philosophy of 'try it and see.' This applies to most aspects of making a piece whether forming a hollow handle for the first time or teaching himself to engrave. Such an approach does rather rely on a sometimes blind belief that there has to be a way of doing most things. Driving this attitude is the continuing pleasure to be had from making something in silver or gold. A simple raised form can be as exciting and taxing to make as a heavily engraved piece with many components.

## **Early life and learning**

Angus McFadyen was born on the 1 April 1962 in Bristol. He enjoyed both art and crafts when he was younger, learning woodwork skills from his father, and drawing skills during art classes at school. After school Angus did an art foundation course at Bristol Polytechnic. He then did a 3D Design Wood Metal Ceramics degree at Manchester Polytechnic from 1981 to 1984. After leaving he became a self-employed jeweller. He learnt how to make jewellery at college, and built up a collection of pieces for exhibition. He sold items at galleries, events and trade fairs. He started his engraving career after learning how to silversmith. Angus recalls a job - a vase he had made - on which he wanted a particular design. The only way to do this design was to engrave it, and so he learnt how to do that. Angus did not have formal training in engraving, but taught himself from a book.

He bought Engraving on Precious Metals by A Brittain and P Morton which explained how to hold the work, how to see it properly, and how to sharpen the tools. These three things Angus considers key to learning how to engrave.

## Career

Angus started engraving around 1990. The metal he works on the most is silver, as he tends to make his jobs in silver, which he subsequently engraves. However he happily undertakes commissions in other metals: gold, steel and platinum. He describes his work as low relief carving, mostly on items like vases, teapots, fly boxes and candlesticks. He works alone in a purpose built workshop in his home. This is fully equipped with a full range of silversmithing hand tools, a hearth, spinning lathes and a pendant motor. He holds his work in a ball vice, and although he uses a Graver Max occasionally for deeper work, he mostly uses hand tools for his engraving. He likes to have films on whilst he works, as he finds he works better with some background noise.

The biggest problem Angus has encountered as a hand engraver was finding somewhere to sell his work: somewhere to stock it, put a decent price on it, and have a realistic chance of selling it. He doesn't feel he has entirely overcome this problem, but has side-stepped it somewhat, as most of his work is now by commission. He still sometimes sends work to galleries, but notes that many people consider it expensive. If a customer says this, he tries to explain what is actually involved in the work, but has nevertheless had to develop a thick skin. Angus feels that there is a lot of public ignorance with regards to how long it really takes to produce engraved work. Even within the silversmithing trade, clients may want a job back in two days that would take a week to complete. This is a difficult problem to overcome, and it is one of the reasons Angus likes to attend game shows – this allows the public to see what is actually involved.

Angus says that he is motivated to continue engraving because he loves to do it; he loves making things. He notes many memorable pieces that he has worked on. One was making the trophy for the King George VI Chase horse race, commissioned by De Bere's. This was in 2001; he was given a set budget, and the piece had to have a certain number of diamonds in it. Angus chose to make a rose bowl. It was particularly memorable because it was such a big job; Angus considered it a milestone in his career, as the commission is always offered to professionals of a high standard. He was also able to spend an enjoyable day out at Ascot.

Another memorable project was a beautiful set of condiment pots, including a salt dish, and a mustard pot. He engraved images on each piece that related to their intended home. The client gave him some artistic license, and so Angus was able to be really creative on the work. He was proud with the end result, and had repeat commissions from the client.

Angus considers being commissioned for projects good recognition of his work as a hand engraver. He also thought being asked to produce the King George trophy a wonderful honour. Given his time again, he says that he would definitely join the profession again.

Angus has taught others how to engrave in the past. He has given one-on-one sessions, and classes of up to ten people, in his workshop. He likes to do it, as it helps to educate others about what engraving really involves.

Angus thinks that, to ensure the future of the profession, it is a good idea to provide more training, and create more public awareness. He thinks that there is still a market for hand engravers; people at the game fairs have been surprised that people still do the job, and are keen to find people in the profession who can do certain jobs for them. Angus feels public demonstrations are worthwhile, as people love to watch engraving being done. He also thinks that it would be helpful for engravers in the profession to do more training of those interested in it.

In terms of recent technological developments in the field, Angus feels the GraverMax is a big development, and the Steve Lindsay system too. These pneumatically powered tools allow for deeper cuts, and Angus can use them all day without any aches and pains. He feels it would be a good idea for others to recognise it as a useful tool in the trade.





Bowls made in fine silver and then engraved



Angus uses these at exhibitions to demonstrate his work



Tea pot with engraved Chrysanthemum detail



Fern detail engraved on a vase



Oval Rose Bowl about 30cms wide



Salt and mustard pots