

The logo features a decorative background of overlapping, light grey circular and swirling lines. The text is centered and reads: "CUT IN" in a large, bold, black serif font with vertical hatching on the letters. Below it, "THE" is written in a small, plain font. The main body of the logo is "Hand Engravers Association" in a large, elegant, black cursive script. Underneath that, "of GREAT BRITAIN" is written in a smaller, plain, black serif font. At the bottom, "CLERKENWELL" is written in a large, bold, black serif font with vertical hatching on the letters.

CUT IN
THE
Hand Engravers Association
of GREAT BRITAIN
CLERKENWELL

Bruce Mackinnon

Engraver

Interviewed by Chris Rowley

Interview took place in March 2013

Born in 1959 in Tasmania and moved to Scotland when he was 8. No family connections with jewellery or engraving (although his sister now paints pottery). After school, he started working in a large jewellery (white metal) factory in Livingstone. It was there that he first picked up a graver which belonged to his boss. The boss was initially cross but eventually bought Bruce his own set of tools. While the boss was away, Bruce designed and made a new Celtic jewellery line.

Bruce then decided to become a chef but there was so many delays that he went down to enrol at the Birmingham School of Jewellery where he did a three year City and Guilds course, followed by a two year HND. He had originally wanted to do jewellery but his teacher Neil Oliver said that it would be a waste of talent if he did not concentrate on engraving. So Bruce did specialise and even worked for Neil Oliver for a time while he was at the School of Jewellery. He met Peter Taylor as a student. He also still occasionally meets Robert Campbell-Legg who followed Neil Oliver as the engraving teacher at the School of Jewellery.

The all-round jewellery and silversmithing that he learnt has come into use in subsequent years when he makes and repairs jewellery, in addition to the engraving work (which, incidentally, is getting less).

When he left the Jewellery School in 1982, he set up in business by himself. *"I just went round the Jewellery Quarter every week and eventually I found a place in a workshop. It was paid for by the Enterprise Allowance Scheme."* However, he does sometimes wonder whether, ideally, he should have gone and worked with one of the 'old boys' who had been engraving for years. He is impressed by the lady engraver Mrs Peta Greenwood, who works at Lancaster Engraving in Birmingham, who did work with a couple of elderly men when she left the School of Jewellery and picked up many tips from them. Bruce reckons that she is one of the best engravers he knows (she thinks that Bruce is better than her!) and gives her his work if he is away and cannot do it.

Another good hand engraver in Birmingham is Matthew (Matt) Smith who has a workshop in the Deakin and Francis Building, 15-17 Regent's Place.

“When I was about twenty three – it must have been in 1982 – I entered an engraved plate into the Goldsmiths’ Craft and Design Awards. It was meant to be in the Junior category, but by mistake they put it into the Senior category. But I still got a commended. I’ve got the certificate on my wall. The trouble was that they dropped the plate. So when I got it back I had to repair it. Luckily, I had still got all my jewellery tools and the training at the Jewellery School meant that I could straighten it out.”

Bruce has mainly concentrated on small, flat work to be engraved but occasional other types of work come in. One of the strangest was a huge rectangular silver slab of about four feet by two feet, which was, in fact, a kind of candle holder. Bruce had to put a coat of arms on two sides. He has also engraved the Variety Club of Great Britain shield for the last ten years. *“It had forty signatures of supposedly famous people on it when I did it recently.”* Bruce also likes doing seals *“but sadly with the price of gold so high – and a signet ring takes a lot of gold – that the market has dried up. I don’t think I’ve done any – maybe one – in the last year. But luckily I still get a reasonable amount of jewellery – repairs and making my own, if there is a lull in the engraving. I also do my own polishing – I have to for the jewellery.”*

At one stage, Bruce started to take on a trainee – a young girl. But, annoyingly, it did not work. He agrees that it is difficult to take on an apprentice if you are a one-man firm. And it would cost a large amount of money. But, if there was money available, he might at least think about it as long as there was a suitable candidate.