



21st CENTURY ARCHIVE OF HAND ENGRAVERS

Graham Stewart

1955-2020

Dunblane, Scotland



Graham Stewart engraving at the bench, photograph by David McIntyre

Biography collated by Sally Dodson,

with special thanks to Elizabeth Stewart and Gordon Foster

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Career summary:

Graham began a 'formal' apprenticeship with jewellery designer Norman Grant before being accepted at Grays School of Art in Aberdeen in 1973 where he received his diploma and went on to complete a post graduate scholarship 1977-78 . While he was a student, he spent some weekends at the studio of Malcolm Appleby where he learned valuable lessons about engraving. During the summer of 1978 he worked in jewellery designer Roger Doyle's workshop in London before setting up his own shop in Dunblane later the same year. This unique and welcoming retail space in the centre of Dunblane, run with the help of his wife Elizabeth, sold fine jewellery and silverware hand crafted by Graham.

Date and place of birth:

1955 in Bridge of Allan, Scotland.

Background:

Graham was inspired to follow a creative career from an early age by his father, an industrial designer and his two art teachers at school (the prestigious Dollar Academy, that later went on to commission silver from Graham).

His love of drawing and lettering inspired Graham to take up hand engraving; he incorporated engraving early on in his work as a student and learned valuable lessons while spending time at Malcolm's workshop.

Graham was known for his sculptural silverware and fine jewellery, which were often adorned with beautifully hand engraved elegant, elongated letter forms and stylised representations of birds, fish and landscapes. Influenced by his environment, there was a Celtic nuance to his work and the simple, uncluttered linear designs epitomise the years of knowledge and technical skills required to create such serene, pleasing works of art.

A skilled silversmith and a talented engraver, Graham's creative process is described by Gordon Forster, antiques expert and former Head of the Silver and Jewellery department at Christie's Glasgow:

Graham loved the physicality of drawing and some of his earliest memories were of drawing. He said himself that the pencil was one of his favourite tools and his archive of meticulous drawings will be preserved for future aspiring silversmiths. His carefully-considered and finely engraved lettering is perhaps the most distinctive aspect of his work and was incredibly important to him. It has an exquisite rhythm, flowing effortlessly like the movement of water, which imbues each piece with a lyrical quality and deeper meaning. He used spiralling calligraphy to great effect around the interior of his silver bowls. This engraving of each individual letter requires a high degree of technical skill, delicate precision and immense accuracy. He incorporated lines which were of particular relevance: 'The Ancient Celtic Blessing' May the Road Rise up to meet you... the eccentrically British and slightly mysterious 'Shipping Forecast' Cromarty, Forth, Tyne... with the undulating inscription evocative of waves and shifting tides; and, most especially, verses from Norman MacCaig's poetry.

A member of the Hand Engravers Association, Contemporary British Silversmiths, a Freeman of the Worshipful Company of Goldsmiths; Graham took pride in making sculptural silverware using traditional techniques such as raising, chasing, hand engraving, forging and planishing. Graham employed a team of two skilled craftsmen, as well as his brother Iain, to help construct the silverware and fine jewellery but the hand engraving was Graham's domain, occasionally working with other engravers such as Emmet Smith at RH Wilkins and Graham Saggars when demand for stock engraved pieces was high.

Collectors would purchase direct from Graham at his gallery but exhibiting regularly at the annual Goldsmiths' Fair in London brought his work to a wider audience and attracted a number of large scale commissions. To name just a few, Graham had been commissioned by The Commonwealth Games, the Scottish Parliament, the BBC, Unilever and the Incorporation of Goldsmiths. His work was acquired by public and private collections including those of HM The Queen, the V&A Museum, the British Embassy, Washington D.C., the Pearson Silver Collection, the City of Birmingham Art Galleries, Aberdeen Art Gallery and Magdalen and Queens College, Oxford.

One of the last pieces of silver Graham made was a hand raised bowl with cursive script hand cut around a stylised lapwing. This piece, selected for the exhibition *Lettering: Art & Illusion* at Ruthin Craft Centre in Wales, 2019 was engraved after seeing a group of Spring lapwings in flight near his home and is a lasting testament to his excellent skills as a designer, draughtsman, gold and silversmith and hand engraver.



Lapwing bowl created and engraved by Graham Stewart, photo by Shannon Tofts