



Beyond the Maker's
Mark

*Paul de Larnerie Silver in the
Cahn Collection*

by Ellenor Alcorn

with a foreword by Tessa Murdoch

John Adamson
Cambridge

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The endpapers show Paul de Lamerie's signature on
a document authorizing Robert Hackett to collect a
private loan, dated 1718. *Cahn Collection*

number. In Eastern Europe, for example, there was a tradition of unaffiliated journeymen, who moved according to the availability of work ("tramping journeymen"), and goldsmiths operating from illegal workshops, who supplied the established makers as needed.¹⁸ The evidence for such a workforce in London is limited, but there seems to have been a steady supply of undocumented foreign talent.

Whether stranger or native, a goldsmith wishing to engage in trade or t#*wn land in London was required to obtain his freedom of one of the Livery Companies in one of three ways.¹⁹ The son of a freeman could claim the privilege by virtue of patrimony. De Lamerie's master, Platel, born, and very likely trained abroad, obtained his freedom of the Goldsmiths by redemption in 1699, meaning that he paid a fee. De Lamerie, upon completion of his apprenticeship in 1712, was made free of the Company "by service." By long and confusing tradition, however, a freeman of one Livery Company was not required to practice in that trade, but could do business in any arena. Thus a goldsmith—one who legitimately entered a mark and was allowed to sell or make silver, might be a Freeman of the Butchers', Grocers', Fishmongers' and Leathersellers' Companies, rather than the Goldsmiths' Company.²⁰ Furthermore, by the early eighteenth century, many of the London Livery Companies had substantially lost control of their trade.²¹ The suburbs—the settled areas outside of the city walls—were beyond the jurisdiction of the Companies, and unfreemen could set up shop there without fear of reprisal. Faced with growing numbers of "foreigners" (an unfree Londoner, or an immigrant from the provinces) as well as strangers (those born abroad), city officials were already debating the problem in the early seventeenth century.²² As the expenses of becoming a freeman of a company began to outweigh the benefits, guild membership began to decline. In controlling their respective trades, the livery companies relied upon their right to conduct unannounced searches of shops, to seize illicit goods, and to levy fines on offenders. These prerogatives were challenged in court in the early seventeenth century, and many of the livery companies had all but abandoned the practice of policing by search and seizure by the early eighteenth century. The Goldsmiths tried to revive the practice in 1737, but opposed by de Lamerie and others, they failed, and it was abandoned.²³

The Goldsmiths' Company seems to have maintained a better grasp of their authority than many of the other livery companies, particularly in enforcing the requirement that every piece offered for retail sale be assayed.²⁴ However, one senses an ongoing strain between the officials of the Company and the practitioners of the trade. It is hard to get a clear picture of the gap between regulations and practice since there is little surviving record of the sub-legal activities of the trade. In 1725 a complaint was presented to the Wardens proposing to withhold the "benefit of assay and touch [hallmarking]" from any but freemen of the Company, but the petitioners were reminded that "the Attorney General in his report for the Treasury says that the Company cannot refuse to mark plate marked by unfreemen."²⁵

De Lamerie's early career

Paul de Lamerie, who served a traditional apprenticeship and soon set up his own shop, was on a path to work within the system rather than on its fringes, but even so he had numerous scrapes with the authorities. He worked as a journeyman in PlatePs shop for two years before returning to the Hall and recording his own mark in 1713, but there is some evidence

over the course of his career, and he formed a partnership with the engraver Ellis Gamble, who may have served as a retailer for him.³³ He became prominent on the Court of Assistants of the Goldsmiths' Company, and in the 1740s he served as Fourth, Third, and Second Warden of the Company. The top post of Prime Warden would surely have been next, but by the late 1740s it seems that his health was failing.³⁴

Interwoven with this record of institutional achievement is a continuous thread of violations of the Company's regulations. Early in his career he had a new steel punch cut for his mark without recording it at the Hall. He was accused in 1722 of deceiving a chimneysweep's boy who had found a piece of jewelry in the street. De Lamerie's apprentice removed the stones and his master quoted a low figure for the piece, which the chimneysweep's boy rejected. The outcome of the ensuing civil trial—that the greater claim to ownership lay with the boy—established a precedent still upheld today.³⁵ Perhaps the most telling exploit was recorded in the trial of Robert Dingley, a goldsmith in the business of exporting silver to Russia. In 1726 Dingley had assembled a large cargo of silver wares which he was storing in a warehouse prior to shipment. The Goldsmiths' Company tried to intercept the goods on the suspicion that the pieces had not been assayed, and that the requisite duty of 6 pence per ounce was unpaid. Indeed, a considerable portion of the cargo, 4,108 oz., was unmarked. About half of this lot was supplied by Paul de Lamerie, and the rest was contributed by other prominent goldsmiths: Nicholas Clausen, Peze Pilleau, Isaac Ribouleau, Simon Pantin, and Augustine Courtauld. The inspection was averted, however, because the resourceful Dingley managed to distract the Goldsmiths' Company officials in the Vine Tavern while the ship was loaded and dispatched to Russia.³⁶

The clear impression in countless such anecdotes is that the London goldsmiths viewed the Company's regulations with some skepticism. More important than the letter of the law were the relationships forged within the community of makers and retailers. These allegiances, often elusive and undocumented, were based on family connections, proximity within the neighborhoods, technical specialization, and language and cultural affinities. With so many variables—some goldsmiths only retailing, others only manufacturing, some doing both, and many unrecorded and unrecognized by the Goldsmiths' Company—it is extremely difficult to piece together the organization of the trade.

Business practices: suppliers and outworkers

Much of what we do know about how these businesses were structured has been gleaned from a set of accounts known as the Garrard Ledgers.³⁷ They record the transactions of a long-running business established by George Wickes in 1735. Among the volumes are two Workmen's Ledgers, and some cash, stock, and supply books, which reveal the practices of this highly successful retail operation. Individual purchases by clients, both noble and self-made, are recorded in twenty volumes known as The Gendeman's Ledgers. The books are a bonanza of information, shedding light on the complex workings of a thriving business. A client's life events—marriages, deaths, and bankruptcies—are reflected in the records of his goldsmith. The business secured stock items from long established suppliers, and ordered one-off pieces from a network of subcontractors, a practice that increased after about 1760.³⁸ There is no comparable documentary source to reveal the suppliers to Paul de Lamerie, who must have been one of Wickes's most formidable competitors.³⁹

he was selling silver before that: the household account book of William Trumbull of Easthamstead Park, Berkshire, records £70 payment to "Mr. Lamary" for a tea kettle and chafing dish, in 17n.²⁶ Though a young goldsmith might win his freedom and the right to register a mark with the completion of an apprenticeship, few young men had the capital required to establish their own shop. Setting up shop as a goldsmith could mean establishing one of several distinct businesses. A 1747 guide to the trades explains the possibilities: "Goldsmiths are strictly speaking all those who make it their Business to work up and deal in all Sorts of wrought Gold and Silver Plate; but of late Years the Tide of *Goldsmith* has been generally taken to signify one who *banks*, or receives and pays running Cash for others, as well as deals in Plate." However, some businesses, he continues, are strictly retailers of silver, with no manufacturing capability; some are strictly makers, with no retailing capability, and still others have both a workshop and a retail shop.²⁷

The costs of establishing a workshop and storefront were substantial: an estimate of 1757 put the figure at £500 to £3,000.²⁸ It is unclear who might have provided de Lamerie with the capital to set up in business; his father had only been able to gather the fee for his apprenticeship by appealing to a relief fund for refugees, and he died a pauper in 1735, a troubling fact in view of his son's business success. In his first premises on Windmill Street, Paul de Lamerie must have had a workshop, and possibly a retail space as well, the size of which is unknown. But he was also handling the goods of other makers, for in 1715 he was charged with submitting wares for assay that had been made by foreigners not free of the Company. The complaint stated that de Lamerie (and others) had "made private Contracts to buy the foreigners plate so y^l they might swear it to be their own and after it was toucht sold it them back for the same price," clearly offering the service of sponsoring for a fee.²⁹ De Lamerie's fine of £20 was considerable, equal to two years' wages for a menial laborer. This phenomenon—goldsmiths sponsoring wares for assay that had been executed by foreign goldsmiths who had no mark of their own—is at the heart of a central confusion about the work of Paul de Lamerie and his contemporaries. Though de Lamerie's marks are traditionally called maker's marks, they cannot be taken as an indication that de Lamerie was personally responsible for the design or execution of a given piece. A better term, growing in usage but still not widespread, is sponsor's mark, which more accurately reflects the practice of the goldsmiths' trade. De Lamerie's output was prodigious, and he was clearly ambitious and gifted, but the truth is we do not know how much of the surviving work bearing his mark was designed or executed by him, produced under his supervision, or bought in, ready-made, from outside sources. It is vexing to admit that we are so uncertain about the central activity of the most famous English goldsmith of the eighteenth century. Was he an artist or an entrepreneur or both?³⁰ We do not know the nature of his retail operation, or, for that matter the size or volume of his workshop. We are left to sort out scattered documentary evidence and the large number of surviving objects bearing his mark which together give a fragmented but enticing view of the world in which he worked.

De Lamerie's business showed early signs of success in spite of repeated run-ins with the Wardens. In 1717, only a few years after setting up shop, he took over a second house on Windmill Street, very likely in anticipation of his marriage to Louisa Juliott, whose parents, like de Lamerie's, were French-born Protestants.³¹ He had apparently made a connection to supply the king, for he is referred to as "the King's silversmith," in Goldsmiths' Company records, albeit in reference to a complaint that he was making silver that was never submitted for assay and marking.³² He steadily took on apprentices, thirteen

over the course of his career, and he formed a partnership with the engraver Ellis Gamble, who may have served as a retailer for him.³³ He became prominent on the Court of Assistants of the Goldsmiths' Company, and in the 1740s he served as Fourth, Third, and Second Warden of the Company. The top post of Prime Warden would surely have been next, but by the late 1740s it seems that his health was failing.³⁴

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