

THE SILVER COLLECTION

Marvel at the exquisite craftsmanship on display in the University's Silver Collection, showcased in the foyer of the Naughton Gallery and the entranceway of the Administration Building. One of the University's most fascinating assets, this captivating collection features items of historical significance and world-class artistry, including the prestigious Sir Robert Hart Silver Collection, ceremonial graduation maces, and an array of ornate tableware used for formal dinners. These pieces not only represent the University's rich heritage but also its commitment to preserving and celebrating its artistic and cultural treasures. Visit the Naughton Gallery foyer to view the following pieces.

THE SIR ROBERT HART SILVER COLLECTION

Sir Robert Hart (1835–1911) was a British diplomat and official in the Qing Chinese government, serving as the second Inspector-General of China's Imperial Maritime Custom Service from 1863 to 1911. Hart began his academic journey at Queen's at the remarkable age of 15. He arrived in China at the age of 19 as a student interpreter in the consular service, and he resided there for 54 years, except for two short leaves in 1866 and 1874. Hart was the most important and influential Westerner in Qing dynasty China, playing a pivotal role in shaping China's trade, foreign relations, and infrastructure.

The exquisite Sir Robert Hart Silver Collection (Goldsmiths' & Silversmiths' Co., London, 1888) is an ornate set of table silver gifted to Hart by his staff, celebrating his remarkable influence during a transformative era in Sino-Western relations. The collection is a masterpiece of chinoiserie, blending Western craftsmanship with intricate Chinese-inspired designs. It includes a grand tureen, an elegant pair of candelabras, and four delicately crafted compotiers, each piece telling a story of cultural fusion and historical significance.

The presentation of the silverware was spurred by Hart's notable decision to turn down the British Ministership in Beijing, opting instead to continue his vital work with the Customs Service. This exquisite silverware was gifted to Lady Hart in London on 20 November 1890, described as 'a united expression of esteem by the members of the service Foreign and Chinese'. With his characteristic wit, Hart remarked, "I value the 'motive', but I fear the plate itself will hold out attractions of another kind of value to burglars!".

This cherished silverware, along with Hart's extensive personal archive, was eventually bequeathed to the University by his great-grandson. Among the treasures are 77 volumes of diaries, chronicling Hart's experiences from the day he arrived in China in 1854 until his retirement in 1908. These diaries offer over 50 years of meticulous observations on every aspect of his life, including invaluable first-hand accounts of China's early modernisation. Alongside the diaries are over one thousand photographs, letters, articles, and various ephemera, all preserved by the team at Special Collections and Archives at the University's McClay Library.

THE JAMES McDONNELL ESQUIRE SILVER COLLECTION

The impressive charger on display forms the centrepiece of a ten-piece silver service presented to James McDonnell Esquire, the revered physician known as the 'Founder of Belfast Medicine'. The reverse side is adorned with the engraved signatures of the 'Nobility, Ladies, and Gentlemen of the Belfast vicinity', who contributed to this magnificent gift. McDonnell's pivotal role in establishing the Belfast Fever Hospital and Dispensary, now the Royal Victoria Hospital, is immortalised in this stunning silverware, a true testament to his enduring legacy.

The inscription tells us McDonnell was a man *'Who devoted his time and eminent talents to the work of humanity. Whose gratuitous advice has always been at the service of the poor and to whose exertions this town has been principally indebted for that invaluable institution the Fever Hospital and Dispensary.'*

McDonnell emerged as a towering figure in Belfast's literary, cultural, and scientific communities, also leaving an indelible mark on the field of medicine. As a founding member of the Belfast Reading Society (today's Linenhall Library), and a key figure in establishing the Belfast Academical Institution, his influence was profound. Beyond his academic and medical pursuits, McDonnell was also a passionate musician, playing the harp and organising the famous Belfast Harp Festival of 1792. Immersed in the vibrant intellectual and revolutionary atmosphere of the time, he naturally forged close friendships with leading figures of the United Irishmen movement, including Wolf Tone, Henry Joy McCracken, Thomas Russell, and many other influential personalities.

AWARDS AND CEREMONIES

The Collection is rich with objects that play pivotal roles in the University's various ceremonies of academia. The 18-carat **Gold Mace**, crafted by Goldsmiths' and Silversmiths' Co. in 1909, was given to Queen's in celebration of its new status as a University, now proudly carried at graduation ceremonies. The Collection also includes a silver mace, known as the **City Mace** (James Warwick and Robert E Stone, London, 1959), which was presented to Queen's to celebrate the 50th anniversary of the granting of the Charter by the Belfast Corporation. It is used at graduation ceremonies at which the Lord Mayor of Belfast is in attendance.

The **Presentation Seal and Trowel**, crafted by Gibson and Co. Belfast in 1896, with their intricate ivory twist detailing and embedded rubies and emeralds, were presented to George Henry, Earl Cadogan, when he laid the Foundation Stone of the Union at Queen's College, Belfast, marking a momentous occasion in the institution's history.

The **Mulholland Cup for Rowing and Athletics** (London, 1866), an intricately engraved trophy, celebrates athletic excellence, with winners' names etched into its surface dating back to the 1860s. Also displayed is a pair of **Silver Loving Cups** (London, 1972-73), made by Matthew Warwick, typical of 1970s design with plain robust bodies and large rosewood handles.

DINING AND ENTERTAINMENT

Silver is regularly used in ceremonial dinners at the University, where a selection of ornate sugar bowls, milk jugs, gravy boats, and candlesticks gleam with tradition. Among these treasures is **Seed Heads** (2007) by Cara Murphy, a contemporary piece commissioned for the Silver Collection. This functional yet artistic silver tableware draws inspiration from the majestic ambiance of the University's Great Hall and the surrounding natural environment.

AN ECLECTIC COLLECTION

Some of the more idiosyncratic items in the collection have been donated by Alumni and friends of Queen's over the years, including the **Silver and Bronze Crucifix** from the J. H. Grundy Bequest. This nineteenth century Russian crucifix in its original leather case once belonged to Felix Yusupov, one of the aristocrats involved in the assassination of Rasputin (1871-1916), the infamous advisor to the ill-fated Tsar Nicholas II and Tsarina Alexandra of Russia.

The **Victorian Inkstand**, crafted in 1844, holds a rich historical significance as it commemorates the pivotal settlement of the Ulster Boundary in 1925. This distinguished artifact was presented by Sir James Craig, Northern Ireland's first Prime Minister, to his esteemed Cabinet Secretary, Charles Blackmore, marking a momentous occasion in the region's history.

Also featured are **The Egyptian Rose Bowl** (date unknown), which captivates with its intricate embossments of ancient Egyptian figures, and the charming **Silver Cockerels**, gifted by the Queen's University Association in 1960. Though purely decorative, their exceptional craftsmanship and whimsical appeal have made them two of the most beloved pieces in the collection.