

Silver gilt Ewer.



Most museums and galleries have items in store that have been received in poor condition, have deteriorated or suffered mishaps.

What happened to this piece is unknown but the two parts were in store and covered in a layer of a sticky, black, waxy substance. Removal of the thick layer of surface accretions revealed, to great surprise, a full set of hallmarks for 1868, indicating that this was solid silver with a gilded surface. Also partly obscured was the inscription 'Alice'.

A search of the inventories revealed that a silver gilt claret jug was one of the possessions of Alice Dorothea Henderson (1875-1954) but she in turn may have received it from Alice Radcliffe (1852-1930) her benefactress.

Alice Radcliffe, a noted art collector, was the daughter of the Rev. John Radcliffe of the Scots Kirk, Kingston, Jamaica but, with her surviving sisters, Alice was adopted by her uncle and aunt in London at an early age.

The ewer (37.5 cms X 13 cms) has a maker's mark partly and very badly struck, under the edge of the curved foot but which may be for Samuel John Hunt, later of Hunt and Roskell. Hunt was the nephew of Paul Storr the greatest of the English Regency silver smiths who, with Rundell, Bridge and Rundell, made the unparalleled silver gilt 'Grand Service' in 1811 for the Prince Regent which is now at Buckingham Palace. It is still used for State banquets. Hunt and Roskell were the heirs to the Storr business.

Hunt and Roskell were well known for producing versions of the so called Cellini ewer, named for the renowned Benvenuto Cellini (1500-1571) the finest of the mannerist goldsmiths. It would be wonderful to be able to be sure that this one was by these makers.

There was a great fashion for copies of and versions of 'The Antique' at the time the Victoria Art Gallery ewer was made. This interest was fuelled by HRH the Duke of Sussex (1773-1843), who was collecting silver that was considered by many to be unfashionable and out of date.

The Victoria Art Gallery ewer was restored by the silversmith who works for Goldsmith's Hall and the work paid for by the Friends.