

The Influence of the Silversmith on 18th Century English Porcelain Sauceboat Shapes

A paper read by Nick Panes at the Courtauld Institute on 13th January 2007

The influence of silver design on early English porcelain has been well documented in many books and journals. This short paper examines the extent to which this influence was present in porcelain sauceboat design over the 18th century as a whole, and seeks to explain the results of this enquiry against the background of the social and economic history of the period.

The identification of influences relies mainly on observation and connoisseurship, rather than on documentary evidence. However, the starting point for any review of 18th century tableware should properly have regard to the food and dining fashions that shaped it. In the case of sauceboats there was nothing new about the use of sauces to moisten and add taste to food. Indeed, there is a reference to gravy in Chaucer, and the use of melted butter pre-dated the 18th century by a considerable margin. However, these simple sauces were accorded no particular status, and were served from any vessel suitable for containing a liquid.

In Europe the development of "haute cuisine" began in Italy, but today it is the French that are often credited with this achievement. French cuisine was perhaps assisted by the fact that it developed at a time when printing processes were also being perfected. Consequently, information, techniques, recipes, and fashions could cross international borders with greater ease than in any previous era. One notable influence was *Le Cuisinier François* by Paul de la Varenne, published in 1653.

La Varenne was a chef to Louis XIV. He is credited with the first use of flour to thicken sauces, and with the development of the classic sauce bases that still form an important part of French cuisine.

Whilst his work may sometimes be given too much credit for originality, there is no doubt that by consolidating and expressing a range of culinary techniques in a single volume he created the most influential work of his day. The book was published in several languages and reached both Britain and America.

The fashions adopted in the French Court quickly spread to England. Diplomats who dined in the Court brought back, both by word of mouth and in written form, information about what they had seen. Phillippa Glanville, specifically identified a reference to two handled, two spouted silver sauceboats used in the 1690s in the Court of Louis XIV.¹

It would appear that the first known hallmarked English silver sauceboat, of similar design, was dated 1698. However, it was the 1720s, perhaps in response to the spread of the original nouvelle cuisine, before silver sauceboats were seen in any quantity in England. The double handled, double spouted shape lasted throughout the 1720s but in England it then faded in popularity in silver. This was against the trends in Europe, as in France and in other territories the shape retained its appeal, and was copied in ceramics, for many years.

When English porcelain was first produced it would appear that in the fine houses where French chefs were employed, silver defined what a sauceboat should be. By the 1740s the porcelain factories could see double handled, three legged, and single footed silver sauceboats on the tables of these houses, often costing ten times the price of a porcelain sauceboat, so it is not surprising that this was the market that they targeted. Indeed, it may then have been the only market of any significance.



1. A pair of double handled sauceboats, dated 1731, by John Edwards of London. Picture: N&I Franklin

A pair of silver sauceboats supplied by David Willaume to the Tollemache family in 1734 cost £13 19s 2d with an addition of £10 for being fashionable². The most expensive recorded porcelain sauceboats were the Lund's white examples similar to that in (13), which Dr Pococke, on his 1750 visit to the factory noted as costing 16 shillings per pair. (1) shows a fine pair of double handled English silver sauceboats c1731 by John Edwards of London. (2 & 3) show sauceboats by Bow and Worcester, respectively. The later Worcester example has an inverted rim, a feature designed to avoid spillage. This was a feature not only of some early European silver sauceboats, but also of perhaps the earliest known European porcelain sauceboat, which is dated



2. A Bow double handled sauceboat, c 1750-2. The shape is similar to Chinese and St Cloud porcelain examples manufactured from the 1720s onwards, but these were themselves likely to have been influenced by continental silver. Length 18.5 cms. Private Collection



3. A Worcester double handled sauceboat c 1755-6. The shape is broadly inspired by silver but in the detail it is unique to Worcester, who more than any other factory seemed not to make direct copies of silver objects. Length 19 cms. Private Collection



4. A Chinese export porcelain sauceboat, c 1750. The shape was probably originally inspired by continental silver but is similar to early St Cloud porcelain sauceboats produced in the 1720s. Length 20 cms. Private Collection.

c1720 and was made by St Cloud.³ The feature was much copied by the later Chinese porcelain double handled sauceboats, such as that in (4), and indeed, it appears that virtually all Chinese sauceboats had their origins in European designs. certainly none seems to have been used in China.

As the 1720s gave way to the 1730s, two principal designs of sauceboat were available in English silver.

The first was a single footed sauceboat with a rather deep body shape, of the type illustrated in (5). This type was not much copied in later porcelain, although the early Bow sauceboat in (6) and arguably the later Bow sauceboat in (7) owe something to these designs.

The second style of silver sauceboat shape, commencing in the late 1730s, had a more profound effect on English porcelain. These were the three

5. A silver sauceboat, c. 1735, maker unknown. The deep bodied shape was initiated in the 1730s and early versions had an almost round body, though this elongated over time. Length 22 cms. Private Collection.



6. A Bow pedestal sauceboat of deep bodied design, c 1748-50. This unusual shape may have been influenced by 1730s silver models. Length 19 cms. Private Collection.

legged boats, some of which had two feet at the front and one at the back, others with one at the front and two at the back. (8) shows a silver example by Benjamin Cignac of London, c 1745 and (9) a sauceboat by John Swift of London, c 1747. These sauceboats had a strong grip on fashion by the time English porcelain was first being made. Not only did the shape dominate the 1740s and 1750s, but arguably

it was the most popular silver shape of all time, certainly in the eighteenth century as a whole and of course it is still available today. The footed shapes were elegant and practical, or at least they were in silver, and it appears that the early factories wanted to compete with silver, hopefully to supply the aristocracy, or more likely to provide a more affordable alternative for the merchant classes.

7. A Bow sauceboat c 1762-5. This shape does bear a resemblance to the 1730s style seen in (5). The scrolled handle is also silver influenced. Length 19.7 cms. Private Collection



8. A silver three legged sauceboat made by Benjamin Cignac, London, c 1745. The three legged shapes were first seen in silver in the late 1730s, but continued throughout the 18th century and beyond. In porcelain they may have had practical disadvantages but they were adopted by Limehouse, Bow, and rarely, Vauxhall. Bow discontinued the shape around 1760. Length 22 cms. Private Collection.



9. A silver three legged sauceboat by John Swift, London, c 1747. The “flying” handle is probably an unlikely silver feature to be attempted on porcelain but this did not stop it being attempted. Length 19 cms. Picture: Silvermans, London.

The 1740s and 1750s saw three legged sauceboats made by Bow (10), Limehouse (11) and Vauxhall (12). Although not the subject of this paper, they were also very popular in salt glazed stoneware, a material, if anything, more influenced by silver than porcelain was. Some porcelain examples, like that in (10), even had a “flying” handle and the placing of two legs at the front was sometimes done at Bow, though not elsewhere. The sad truth was that although elegant, these three legged porcelain sauceboats were probably not robust enough to avoid damage, so their popularity, so strong in silver, had diminished in porcelain by the late 1750s.

From the earliest dates of English porcelain the initial target market for the wares was amongst the wealthier classes. It is therefore to be expected that silver style would be influential. Throughout the 1750s, even when this following of fashion was not consistent, occasional fine pieces of silver inspired a porcelain equivalent. (13) shows a rare Bow high footed rococo sauceboat with a moulded dragon instead of a looped handle. This model may have been inspired by a silver sauceboat c 1743-4, attributed to Charles Frederick Kandler, (14).

10. An early three legged sauceboat from Bow using the “flying” handle popular in silver. The sauceboat dates from 1748-50 and is therefore broadly contemporary with the silver example in (9). This example is unusual in having two legs at the front and one at the rear. Both this and the more usual configuration are seen in silver. Length 18 cms.

Picture: Simon Spero.



11. A Limehouse three legged sauceboat c 1746-8. As well as the three legged shape this sauceboat and the Bow example in (10) have the lion head moulding on the legs. This was a baroque feature adopted by English silver-smiths from the 1690s onwards. Length 22 cms. Private Collection.

12. A rare example if a three legged sauceboat from the Vauxhall manufactory, c.1755-7. Painted and over glaze printed. Length 18 cms. Private Collection.



13. A fine Bow sauceboat, c 1750.

Following the rococo theme of other contemporary sauceboats but with the dragon handle previously seen in silver. This model is not an exact copy but may have been inspired by the silver sauceboats in (14) below. Length 19.5 cms. Private collection.



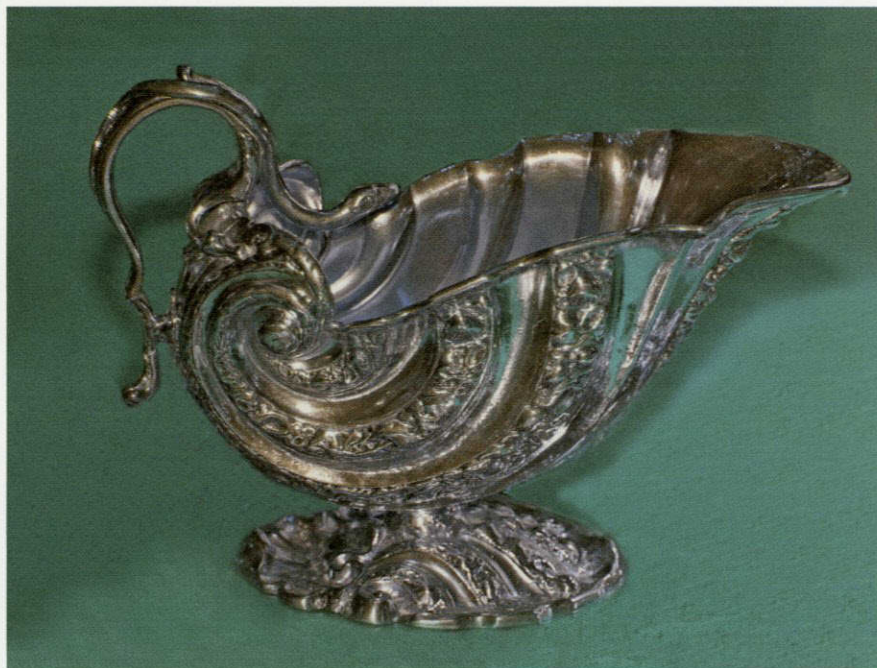
14. The body of each of these fine silver sauceboats is applied with scrolls. The shaped rim is applied with bats' wings, further chased ornament and a band of gadrooning, with chased dragon handles. The oval foot is applied with grotesque masks and scrolls. London, sterling standard, 1743-44, maker's mark probably that of Frederick Kandler. Length: $7\frac{3}{4}$ in (19.5 cm). Weight: 55 oz (1733 g). Picture: Koopman Rare Art

Nicholas Crisp of the Vauxhall manufactory, himself a silversmith, ironically seems to have been influenced by Nicholas Sprimont of Chelsea, another porcelain manufacturer with a silversmith's back-

ground, when making the fine rococo sauceboat shown in (15). Surely this was based on the Sprimont piece in (16)?⁴



15. A Vauxhall sauceboat c 1755-8. Of rococo asymmetric shell form and painted with the typical "stick blue" palette. Silver sauceboats of shell form are often said to be associated with fish sauces, although no such claim has been made for porcelain examples. Length 19 cms. Private collection.



16. A silver sauceboat of rococo shell form, probably by Nicholas Sprimont, c.1745-7. Sprimont, the proprietor of the Chelsea factory, was active as a silversmith during this period. An example of this type may be seen in the Victoria and Albert Museum, museum number M41-1993. Length 21 cms.

However secure the influence of silver had become, it is important to note that even in the 1750s, it was far from being the only influence. Sometimes the silver influence probably came indirectly, as with the Meissen influenced sauceboat by Longton Hall in (17). The Meissen sauceboat was based on a continental silver shape, but, although we cannot be certain, it was probably the Meissen example that motivated William Littler, not silver directly.⁵

Some popular 1750s sauceboat shapes owe little or nothing to silver at all. (18) shows the popular “Cos lettuce” shape which was said to be influenced by Meissen, and the Vauxhall sauceboat in (19) started life in salt glazed stoneware. Whilst this, and the originating saltglaze examples, bear surface moulding scrolls influenced by silver, and although the shape is sometimes referred to as a silver shape, the author has found no evidence that the shape came from silver. If it did, then it was a rare and unpopular silver form.



17. A Longton Hall helmet shaped sauceboat c 1752-4. Length 19.5 cms. Seen alongside it is a modern Meissen reproduction of a late 1730s Swan Service boat. While both may emulate a shape seen in continental silver, the often seen influence of Meissen over the Longton Hall concern, seems the most likely explanation for the design of this piece. Private Collection.



18. A Worcester “cos lettuce” shaped sauceboat, c 1755. This shape is attributed to Meissen and the author has not seen it produced in silver. Length 20 cms. Private collection.



19. A Vauxhall low sauceboat c 1758-60. This was a popular shape with many manufacturers. Whilst the surface moulded scrolls are redolent of silver, the shape is not, and it is likely to have been derived from salt-glazed stoneware models produced by Aaron Wood. Length 13.5 cms. Private Collection.



20. A fine Lund's white sauceboat, c 1750, with an elaborate scroll handle. Undoubtedly silver in inspiration and the forerunner of the classic Worcester "silver" shape. However it may not have been an exact copy of any silver sauceboat. Length 23.5 cms. Private Collection.

Finally, the classic high footed "silver shape" produced by Lund's (20) and Worcester amongst others, whilst redolent in silver influence, cannot be matched with any degree of exactitude with extant silver pieces. So even in their adoption of silver influenced shapes, and the double handled shape is another instance of this, the factories, Worcester in particular, imposed their own design influence to make the product unique.

The 1760s perhaps saw the beginnings of a sea change in sauceboat design, and this is probably the appropriate place to note the changing economic conditions. It is controversial amongst economic historians as to quite how stagnant the economy had been between 1725 and 1750. Some say it was a period of deflation and/or zero growth.⁶ Perhaps what can be accepted is that during the 1750s, and certainly after the seven years war in the 1760s, England's economy began to grow more noticeably.

The agricultural revolution had largely preceded the industrial one, and although conditions for the poorest of the population were still appalling, food shortages were progressively eliminated as the century continued. Labour displaced by more efficient farming was absorbed by the new industrial expansion, and the population growth fuelled demand.⁷

Perhaps the most fundamental social impact of these economic changes was the growth in size and influence of the middle class. This was a time of opportunity in which the opportunities for upward mobility increased. Shopkeepers, businessmen, and merchants all responded to the

increased demand, and all aspired to move up a level in the social scale. The effect of this was to pull a greater part of the population into the market for luxury goods. Anticipating this trend, manufacturers brought their products down to a price which met the aspirations of those with more disposable income. Many such people still could not afford the cost of the finest and most elaborate porcelain products, but they could manage something a little more ordinary. In porcelain generally, and in sauceboats specifically, the flair and imagination which greeted the availability of the material in the 1750s was replaced by a more utilitarian era. The high point, in the view of many, had past.

Sauceboat shapes changed, and there were now many fewer examples of silver influence. By this time the three legged sauceboat still dominated silver

design but none existed in porcelain. The inverted rim sauceboat shape, of which the strap fluted variety is an example (21) was made from the late 1750s for 25 years but really owed little to silver even though some persist in calling it a silver shape. Worcester, Caughley, Lowestoft, Isleworth, Derby, Champion's Bristol, and Christian all made this shape.

An exception to the waning of silver influence were the products of Nicholas Crisp. The late Vauxhall sauceboat in (22) may have been influenced by the earlier silver creamer shown in (23) and this shape, retaining the rococo influence, was possibly repeated at Bovey Tracey⁸ (24). Finally, when moulds and other materials were transferred to Cookworthy at Plymouth that older shape, by now old fashioned in London, was kept alive a little longer (25).



21. A strap fluted Worcester sauceboat, c 1760-3. This popular shape was produced by several makers, but does not seem to have any strong silver influence. As the 1760s progressed social and economic changes caused the factories to produce less elaborate sauceboat designs. Length 17 cms. Private collection.

22. This Vauxhall sauceboat dates from c 1758-60. The rococo influence so popular at Vauxhall is marked. Length 13 cms. Picture: Simon Spero.



23. This fine cream jug is attributed to Edward Wakelin, c.1750. The shape may have influenced Crisp in producing the sauceboat shown above. Picture: Marks Antiques, London.



24. This sauceboat shape is tentatively attributed to Nicholas Crisp's pottery at Bovey Tracey (c 1766-8) and follows closely the Vauxhall design in (22). The small foot of the Vauxhall model has been enlarged, however. Length 13.5 cms. Private collection.



25. A similar shape produced at Plymouth, c 1768-70, retains the larger foot but introduces a less elaborate handle. These shapes, if originally influenced by silver, are amongst the latest examples of rococo silver influence in porcelain. Length 13 cms. Private collection.

At the beginning of the 1780s, after the recession of the 1770s, porcelain makers were faced with many challenges. Not only were creamware products challenging porcelain successfully on price but a new fashion, seemingly instigated by silver, saw some

sauceboats replaced by sauce tureens. Although Derby (26) used this shape for dessert services, copying silver products such as that in (27), few porcelain makers seem to have followed this shape influence. However, in earthenwares the shape was popular (28).



26. Only a few porcelain manufacturers followed the trend for sauce tureens, initiated in silver, although Derby produced dessert tureens which probably contained sugar or cream. This example is c 1795-1805. Length 22 cms. Private collection.



27. A typical silver sauce tureen dated 1778. Maker unknown. This type of tureen was more enthusiastically adopted by earthenware manufacturers than by porcelain makers, as the next Figure shows. Length 23 cms. Private collection.



28. A tureen made in a cream colour, but which seems to have a pearlware glaze, c 1790. A sauceboat from the same service is in the author's possession. The tureens may have kept sauces warm and been used to top up the sauceboats. Length 20 cms. Private collection.



29. A sauceboat from John Pennington, c 1780-5. As the influence of silver diminished sauceboats were designed to be sold at a competitive price. It would seem that there would be little commercial sense in a porcelain model which copied the cheaper pearlware bodied products. This would appear to be an exception, perhaps it is possible that pearlware was being made on the premises, and moulds were shared. Length 17.5 cms. Private collection.



30. Towards the end of the century porcelain sauceboats had almost disappeared and it was to other materials that we should look for innovation. This pearlware sauceboat (c 1790) has an internal reservoir for hot water, accessed through a hole in the handle. Length 20 cms. Private collection.

The last quarter of the 18th century was one in which inflation increased. It seems likely that this increased the price gap between porcelain and earthenwares. In 1784 the sharp reduction in duties on tea in William Pitt's Commutation Act provided a new opportunity for growth. Such an obviously attractive business opportunity for increased sales of teawares, in the author's view, sounded the death knell for the production of the porcelain sauceboat in the 18th century. A few products emerged from Liverpool late in the century, some based on shapes

more similar to contemporary pearlware even though they had themes from the past in their design (29). It could be that the relevant factories were also making pearlware. However, as factories such as New Hall started to emerge, teawares were their staple diet. Occasional innovations appeared, such as the sauceboat with a reservoir for hot water shown in (30), but this was not a porcelain product. Only a very few examples of porcelain sauceboats, usually of Liverpool origin, can tentatively be dated to the 1790s.

Conclusions

When English porcelain was an innovation, sauceboat products challenged silver, and also capitalised on the rather limited ability of the Chinese to design, make, and economically ship porcelain sauceboats. The target markets for these products were the tables of the aristocracy and the wealthy merchant classes.

As the economic and social structure of England developed, a much wider market emerged amongst the "middling sort". Progressively, design of porcelain sauceboats took account of this wider market, and products were made to a price which precluded the more elaborate examples. The influence of silver, whilst still present occasionally, was on the wane, and

potters largely ploughed their own furrow through the 1760s and 1770s.

From 1780 the influence of silver tureens, copied in the less pricy earthenwares, may have contributed to the fall in the number of manufacturers of the English porcelain sauceboats. Sauceboats did continue in silver throughout the century, so although their numbers must have been affected a little by the use of tureens, the change was less marked than in porcelain.

Porcelain manufacturers struggled during this period to deal with the price competition from creamware and pearlware. In creamware it seems that sauceboats became integrated into the dinner services, something only rarely seen in the past by such porcelain factories as Chelsea, as many others

were not able to make dinner plates (and therefore services) in competition with the Chinese. In any case for many manufacturers, by the mid 1780s, tea-wares presented a greater business opportunity¹⁰.

Sadly, by the 1790s the high rococo splendour of a silver-influenced porcelain sauceboat was a thing of the past. It was not just that the influence of silver over porcelain had waned, but also that there were few sauceboats in porcelain left to influence. Although price competition and fashion can be used to account for part of this change, the reasons for the almost complete disappearance of sauceboats in porcelain remains something of a mystery. From 1800 to 1820 the trend continued, and it is hard to find any sauceboat made during this period, except in creamware or pearlware.

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NOTES

¹ Philippa Glanville – 'French Fancy': Silver from Paris and English patrons, *Silver Society Journal*, No. 20, 2006

² Recorded in *Silver in England*, Philippa Glanville, Unwin Hyman, London, 1987.

³ Illustrated in the *Discovering the Secrets of soft paste porcelain at the Saint Cloud Manufactory c 1690-1766*, p.146). The Bard Centre for Studies in the Decorative Arts, New York. ISBN 0-300-08107-3

⁴ A sauceboat similar to the one illustrated may be seen in the Victoria and Albert Museum, museum number M41-1993, with accompanying under-tray. Ironically the under-tray was seen in almost identical form at Chelsea yet Sprimont is not known to have reproduced the sauceboat in porcelain.

⁵ An original sauceboat from the Swan service can be seen in the decorative arts collection of the Seattle Art Museum. Accession number 56.192. An image is currently available online.

⁶ *Deceleration in the Eighteenth Century Economy*, Anthony J Little, 1976.

⁷ Still one of the most enlightening sources of general reading on the economy of the period is T. S. Ashton's *An Economic History of England*, 1955.

⁸ Nicholas Crisp at Bovey Tracey, by Roger Massey, *Trans. ECC* Volume 18, Part 1

⁹ T.S. Ashton, op cit

¹⁰ William Pitt's Commutation Action of 1784 reduced the import duties on tea from around 119% to 12.5% and fuelled a boom in tea drinking, which in turn influenced the business focus of New Hall, Keeling and a number of other Staffordshire china makers.

¹¹ Further aspects of the shape influences on porcelain sauceboats are discussed in *British Porcelain Sauceboats of the 18th Century*, Nicholas Panes, 2009, ISBN 978-0-9562267-0-9.