



7. TREFID SPOONS

In the previous chapter we discussed the bifid, a spoon with a terminal that has two lobes. We now turn to the trefid group (a modern term). It comprises spoons that give the collector a great deal of scope because of the opportunity to collect the different styles from London and the provinces. As previously mentioned, this group takes us through to the dog nose – and if you so desire on to the Hanoverian and many styles of modern spoon. The spoons in this group are generally less costly to acquire than earlier ones, and there are a number of interesting variations on the styles mentioned below.

You have seen in the puritan section how some of the spoons have developed, and in the light of that it might be considered that the trefid pattern was a natural progression. It is generally considered, however, that the trefid did not develop from earlier English types, but came to the British Isles from the continent with Charles II in the early 1660s. Trefids are termed 'the French Fashion Spoons' in Company records, a strong pointer in a different direction. London-made trefids date from 1662 or so to 1710; in the provinces they are a little later, from 1655 to 1720. Irish examples range from 1663 to 1708, and Scottish ones from 1665 to 1715. For the date ranges of all the early types of English silver spoon, see table 3 on page xx.

A trefid has three lobes, just like the trefoil, a common wild flower. It is a small European plant of the pea family with yellow flowers, and it has three-lobed leaves, similar to clover. During the eighteenth century the name 'trefid' was derived from 'trifid' and referred to antique spoons 'which have three notches splitting the end of the handle'. In the nineteenth century they were sometimes called *pied de biche* (French 'deer's foot'), referring to the termination of a leg with a cloven hoof.

This new design meant that the assay office was soon entrusted with an unusual assignment. The Company's attention had been drawn to the fact that spoons made in recent years had not been 'wrought for length and wideness of the bowl as they ought to be, but much shorter in the handle, and lesser in the bowl than heretofore'. In July 1663 it was directed that a sample spoon should be hung up in the assay office to serve as a pattern. If any spoons were received that were not made in accordance with its dimensions, the assayer should return them to be refashioned. It is not known for how long this order was enforced.

In the following pages there is a wide range of trefid spoons. Other types which are in this date range are included; certain features warrant their being in the grouping. The dating is for guidance; it is possible to have spoons that are significantly later than the official dates. On this basis I have dated the commencement of the London-made trefids as 1662. How, *Silver Spoons* (vol. I, p. 326), shows a trefid dated 1662, noting that it is the earliest known trefid and suggesting that c.1695 would be a reasonable date to end the type as the dog nose came in at that point. In the provinces trefids were popular by the 1670s, and in this section there is a York trefid made in 1665/6 – the earliest recorded provincial example with a date letter. In West

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Country Silver (p. 127), Tim Kent notes a 1722 example by Edmond Richards of Exeter, which shows that in the provinces trefids remained popular down to the 1720s.

At the end of some of the sections there are further examples of backs of the bowls and fronts of terminals, to enable the reader to compare more variations and in some instances see the natural progression of the spoon as flatware. This arrangement has been an interesting exercise. I started by putting the spoons in chronological order; however, on laying out the photographs of bowls and terminals it soon became clear that there was a logical progression to some of the designs. It was also apparent that certain goldsmiths shared their dies with other workshops, not only in the provinces but also in London. Sometimes a terminal was struck by using the die made for striking a bowl, or only part of a die has been used, or the die was made for a smaller spoon; the result in all these situations is that only part of the original die decoration is found. This is evidence that some goldsmiths had a number of dies in their workshops. In some instances on receipt of an order for a spoon one made previously was available to fulfil it, and that results in another variation or in a shared die being used.

As well as terminal designs and lace back designs for the bowls, another kind of change is to be found: in the rat-tails. As we have seen, the very early acorn knops and diamond points in particular did not have even a rudimentary rat-tail. As spoons developed into items of daily use, the rudimentary rat-tail was found not to be strong enough to support the junction of the stem and bowl. Therefore the reeded rat-tail was born. How referred to this style as 'ridged' and some catalogues describe it as 'ribbed'. Not only was the rat-tail created to strengthen the bowl, but it became an aesthetic feature in its own right. Again there is a misconception that the reeded rat-tail came from the continent with Charles II. On the contrary, the Romans were ahead of the seventeenth century. If you study the Roman spoon of c.350 below, you will note that it has a plain rat-tail within reeds (the second to last style in this section). In Constable, *Benson Collection*, no. 1 (pp. 18–19), there is another Roman spoon of c.350; it has a plain rat-tail, the last style in this section.

The beginning and end of the rat-tail styles are relatively easy to arrange in order, but those between the two are more difficult to categorise. Therefore I have considered them by theme, so that, for example, reeded rat-tails are followed by other variations.

Rudimentary rat-tail

The rudimentary rat-tail is found on all of the early spoons with a hexagonal stem and follows through to puritan spoons, as may be seen in the previous chapter. It is unusual to find it on London trefids. Until the mid-1690s it was found on many provincial spoons, in particular the engraved provincial and shaded roundel groups.



Reeded rat-tail

This the simplest and earliest style of rat-tail, and it may be found on many examples of trefid spoons, including those with lace back or flame back decorations. These rat-tails are generally very crisp. They are formed by hammering the bowl of the spoon into a die which has been die cut with this form of decoration; there are three reeds within the design, one in the centre and one on either side, creating a long V shape.



Reeded rat-tail within reeds

I have found only one spoon with this style of rat-tail. It was made by John Peard II and has very delicate lace decoration to the back of the bowl.





Beaded rat-tail

This design is very similar to the reeded rat-tail. However, the centre reed has been replaced with an effect that looks like graduated beads – hence the name. You will rarely find this style in conjunction with decorated bowls.



Beaded rat-tail within reeds

This design is similar to the beaded rat-tail above. It has a further reed either side of the centre beading, starting at the tip of the rat-tail, extending almost the full length of the rat-tail and terminating in a single bead. It is generally found with a plain bowl and not incorporated into a lace design.



Beaded rat-tail within scrolls and reeds

This design has the added detail of scrolls within the design of beads and reeds.

Outside beaded rat-tail

This design is very similar to the reeded rat-tail. Unlike the beaded rat-tail in the centre, this type has a row of uniformly sized and spaced beads on the outside of the reeded rat-tail.



Scrolled rat-tail

This is a variation of the reeded rat-tail that encompasses scrolls within the reeding. It may be a rat-tail on its own or be within a lace back design. There are varying amounts of scroll within the rat-tail.



Engraved rat-tail

This style of rat-tail is quite rare and seems to be unique to the West Country (specifically Exeter and Tiverton). There is a rudimentary rat-tail, and then an engraved rat-tail the size of the three above types which is in the shape of two tall Vs with hatching between them.





Plain rat-tail within reeds

There is a plain rat-tail in the centre, and on either side a single fine reed.



Plain rat-tail

This is the simplest of all rat-tails and is the forerunner of modern flatware post 1700. It first appeared on Roman spoons.

Having looked in some detail at the sequence of rat-tail designs, we shall consider other significant features whose evolution we may trace.

Plain trefid

This style marks the beginning of the new era. The terminals are devoid of decoration except pricked or engraved initials, crests and so on. There is a wide range of terminal shapes, and the backs of the bowls have a range of decoration.

Lace back

Lace back decorations featuring many different designs on the back of the bowls are countrywide; generally they appear in conjunction with similar decoration on the front of the stem at the top. Like rat-tail manufacture, they involve hammering the

bowl into a pre-cut die. The West Country has a particularly wide variety of designs, possibly more than anywhere else in the country. There are no discernible differences between provincial and London lace backs.

Particularly in the West Country, it was common practice for families to share the same dies. An example is the Sweets. With experience, it is possible to suggest which set of dies was used by the different branches of their family. They had several sets of dies to choose from; according to Anthony J.H. Sale, 'Laceback Trefid Spoons', *Silver Studies*, autumn 1993 (pp. 153-7), John Peard is represented by five designs of lace back.

Lace back designs vary from relatively simple ornamentation to quite complex. When you look closely at them you may see within the designs variations on pineapples, rabbits, dogs, flowers, cherubs, bunches of grapes and even a tadpole. A small number have a mask in the decoration; these are particularly associated with Adam King.

Flame back

There is a small number of spoons known as flame back. The known London examples appear to come mainly from the workshop of John King. They have similar flame designs on the front of the terminal, and the rat-tail is always reeded. Care should be taken when buying this style of spoon; the decoration may have been added later to some, a result of the rarity of this design attracting those who wanted to make more money.

Acanthus back

There are few examples of this type known. The decoration on the back of the bowl resembles acanthus leaves, made as a cut-card decoration. This type has been noted in the West Country, East Anglia and Scotland.

King's head trefid

King's head trefids are comprised of a small group of spoons, probably all made by Samuel Cawley I of Exeter, a Royalist goldsmith connected with the London forgery group; see Kent, *West Country Silver* (p. 20). The bust of Charles II struck on these spoons is of good quality, and has the appearance of work by a skilled die-cutter, which Samuel Cawley was. A communion cup of Commonwealth date struck with London forgery group marks belongs to Atherington Church, between Exeter and Barnstaple; church silver with an associated mark relates to Otterton and Brushford.

Engraved

These spoons (and sometimes forks) come in a range of sizes. They are generally of good gauge and very finely engraved with different decorations on the full length of both the front and the back of the stem. The back of the bowl is also engraved, often with a flame design round a reeded rat-tail. These spoons were commonly gilded to add to their attractiveness.

There are some small and very interesting provincial engraved spoons, all of which have a rudimentary rat-tail and a puritan-style bowl. The trefid-style terminals are