



Stephen M. *Goldsmith*

Stephen started his career 40 years ago (1971) when he was 15.

Polishing is often considered the Cinderella of the trade but it is never appreciated how much this craft can make or break a piece so easily.

His CV reads like a 'Who's Who' - from Garrard's the Crown Jewellers to celebrity jewellery designer Theo Fennell.

From polishing Prince Charles & Lady Diana's wedding presents to years later, burnishing the inscription plate on the late Princess's coffin.

"I don't tell many people about that" says Stephen, "as it sounds a bit grim."

But let's not stop there. This is a fellow who not only restored a silver fire gilt wine cistern, presented to Queen Victoria in 1837 (may be seen in the Jewellery Room, The Tower of London) but who also advises a company who manufacture gold and platinum cell phones! The Royal Mint has even asked for his advice plus The Royal Society has even used Stephen's services. He has trained palace staff, army Officer's Mess 'Silvermen', butlers and more on how to care for silver & gold in his extended 3 day course at Birmingham City University for the more serious craftsman.

How did Stephen get to be a Master craftsman from this humble craft?

His first step was to attend a art college where he studied a foundation course covering all aspects of the trade at Medway Art College, Rochester, Kent. 'You study everything from ceramics to jewellery, setting, engraving, silversmithing and of course polishing. He did this for a year to help him make an educated guess about what he intended to do with his future.

Stephen worked with 7 polishers about 15 silversmiths and 6 spoonies in a very dirty workshop. It was the 3-day week whilst he was there and even a strike, so he learnt how to paint. If the Master wasn't present then he was not allowed to work. His first week's wages were £8 unlike today where you would not even consider starting on such a low wage even with the prospect of making big bucks at a later date. Consequently, he did all the usual things like making the tea and keeping the workshop tidy.

Stephen was trained in the traditional methods handed down from years gone by, trained in how to make his own tools in leather & felt and used Trent sand for sanding which is an art in itself. He still uses the same method on silver today as he likes to keep the craft alive rather than just using black bristle brushes etc. Far as polishing a spoon there is no easier method than sanding with a felt or leather bob. He was trained in the very patient ways of polishing by hand, using pumice blocks and 'water of Aye stone' and even charcoal. The techniques are very regional in this country for instance if you were to go to Sheffield you would discover polishers using just one method and pass onto the next polisher for another stage, so one polisher starts a job but never finishes it. In London the polisher goes through every stage from start to finish. It is very much like silver & jewellery polishers tend not to cross over as silver is very hard to get a mirror finish and so easily scratched just on the last sweep of the swans down mop!



Whereas jewellery is so intricate you have to work with an eye glass to forever check your work and the tools are sometimes so tiny "I never thought I would have to become more of an artist than a polisher to complete some of the tasks I have come up against"

Whilst he was serving his apprenticeship Stephen was expected to study Silversmithing at the art college in Rochester, Kent for 1 day a week so he could converse with a silversmith and explains what he wanted him to do, as it was up to the polisher to make sure that a piece ends up being of the highest quality.

'While I studied at college I made various pieces and won various awards' later in his career he won 'The Goldsmiths Company Award' twice with Paul Marsden, Designer and Ian Calvert, Silversmith.

Once Stephen finished his apprenticeship he was made both a 'Freeman of the City of London' and a "Freeman of the Worshipful Company of Goldsmiths". He then went onto work for Stuart Devlin who was part of the Brat Pack of Silversmiths specialising in Faberge-style eggs and very modern pieces of silver and still restores these eggs today. There were 7 Polishers and about 30 Silversmiths in that workshop, at that time.

Stephen only stayed employed at Devlin's for 7 months and then moved on because he gained more enjoyment from polishing traditional pieces.

Stephen explained, the next company was "Nayler Brothers" which was owned by Garrard's the Crown Jewellers and we were the main workshop for the showroom. In 1977 the Queen's Jubilee we enjoyed a very busy year indeed with the head designer Alex Styles.

Later Stephen was involved with the wedding presents for Prince Charles & Lady Diana Spencer. While he was at Naylers he learnt how to gold & silver plate which is always a dodgy business because you have to work with some very toxic poisons such as cyanide etc. - although polishing is not without its risks.

During his time at Nayler's Stephen dealt with both the rich and famous including the Royal Household. He used to look after the Queen's Tea Pot which held just two cups and also advised the Queen's Household on how to look after the silver and often had visits from Buck House polishers. He also advised the Army on how to look after their silverwares.

Indeed, one time he met the former butler to Camilla Parker-Bowles and the butler said that it was the most memorable day of his life to spend the day with a master craftsman and Stephen felt very honoured.

Stephen was asked to go to the Tower of London, Jewel House and to take along a camera as well as George Oliver a silversmith. He was presented with a very large extremely heavy majestic golden wine cistern made towards the end of George IV reign in 1829, designed to look like a giant silver lily.

The Wine Cistern, or Grand Punch Bowl, was supplied for George IV in 1829 by the Crown Jewellers of the day, "Rundell, Bridge, and Rundell". It bears the maker's mark of John Bridge. It is said to be the heaviest recorded surviving piece of English plate weighing 257.23kg, nearly a quarter of a ton. The upper section of the body is elaborately decorated with Bacchanalian scenes and the lower half is encrusted with rocks, shells, and all manner of marine life. The interior is engraved with the royal arms of George IV. It can hold 144 bottles of claret, which would have been cooled with ice and damp cloths as claret was often not served at room temperature in the 19th century. The cistern was first used at the baptism of Queen Victoria's first child, Princess Victoria. In keeping with a tradition as old as the Crusades, it was filled with water collected from the River Jordan.

In 1842, the Wine Cistern was used as a punch bowl for the christening of Albert Edward, Prince of Wales, who was Queen Victoria's eldest son and would later become King Edward VII.

Stephen was told to take photographs of the cistern which were later confiscated in case he tried to make a copy from the pictures. The cistern was taken into a room and dismantled by the silversmith and then Stephen was asked to restore the piece to its former glory which meant that he had to work inside the Jewel House for 11 days under armed guard. This entailed removing the lacquer which was added to protect the fire gilding in earlier years.

One of Stephen's TV appearances concerned the America's Cup. A Maori in New Zealand destroyed the cup over Land rights. Garrard's had made the cup 150 years beforehand and offered to repair the cup free of charge.

New Zealand TV made a film about the restoration of the cup and Stephen was told that he was seen in newspapers and on TV on the other side of the world. He remembers the interviewer being very amused when having restored it so that it looked like new he then proceeded to make it look 150 years old in front of his very eyes! Stephen has had his hands on most of the major sports trophies including the Premier League, The Davies, The Heineken, The Wimbledon and the Dubai cup's, The World Snooker, The World Cricket Trophy, plus the Masters to name a few.

He has even had his hands on an Oscar but not for acting, plus the Brit & The Pride of Britain awards.

The workshops of Asprey & Garrard's in Bermondsey amalgamated and 3 other polishers joined Stephen after working for many years on his own. The amalgamation meant that 60 craftsmen were working in one building - ranging from engravers, leather workers, clock & watch makers, jewellers and of course the silversmiths who totalled 30. It was the biggest workshop in the country.

The works of art that were made were beyond your imagination Family Trees as high as 12ft, a Coffee table made of white gold & 380 diamonds!

In 2003 Asprey decided to downsize and move from Bermondsey back to the West end.

It was in the beginning of April 2003 that Stephen decided to go it alone & start his own company called SMG (Kent) Ltd.

You may have thought this is where the story had ends but this is really where it begins!

Stephen was hired by the top west-end celebrity jeweller 'Theo Fennell' and ensures that every piece in the showroom sparkles and blings. He works with brilliant craftsmen in Theo's workshop above the flagship store on the Fulham Road where all Theo's bespoke designs are crafted.

Theo prides himself on having a real workshop in London and is always singing the praises of his elite craftsmen and design team. It is not just a PR exercise if it was not for Theo techniques which are used in his workshop would have died 20 years ago. If you ask Theo what a particular craftsman is working on, he would know very hands on and is an amazing ambassador for the trade. He has a story to tell about each and every one of us to entertain his many clients. Before Stephen could do this he had to relearn on a much smaller scale, as gold and platinum are very different to polish and because jewellery is so much smaller it gets checked more closely.

Also he had to do very fine work and get used to using a paint brush as you can imagine creating the different colours that are popular you need to stop out each element and so each part can be plated.

The items below are
Stephen's work for Theo Fennell



18ct Gold, Moonstone, Black Spinel,
Diamond, Tsavorite & Ruby Cleopatra
Brooch PAO



18ct Yellow Gold, Rock Crystal & Diamond Tropical Paradise Opening Ring £26,500



18ct Yellow Gold, 42.66ct Emerald & Diamond Kissing Frogs Ring POA



Sterling Silver USA Ares V Space Shuttle Tequila Shot Set £18,000



Sterling Silver Swan Dish £7,650

Just last year Stephen was restoring the actual chalice used by Blessed Cardinal John Henry Newman who was an important figure in the religious history of England in the 19th century, his beatification officially proclaimed by Pope Benedict XVI on 19 September 2010 during his visit to the United Kingdom.

He has also restored the Royal Society book with such names as Charles Darwin, Isaac Newton, Alexander Fleming and Albert Einstein plus their Silver Gilt Ceremonial Mace presented to them by Charles the Second in 1663 in preparation for 350th Anniversary Convocation as part of the convocation where Prince William was admitted as a Fellow of the Society.

Stephen also restored the sister to the ceremonial mace in the Houses of Parliament In 1987, Ron Brown then Labour MP for Leith, picked up the mace during a debate on the poll tax, and threw it to the floor. The mace was damaged and Brown was ordered to pay £1500 to repair it. When he later failed to read out a pre-agreed apology to the speaker, he was suspended from the Commons and the Labour Party.

He has been accepted as a Fellow into the Institute of Professional Goldsmiths and is also a judge for the Crafts Council in his craft.

Stephen is really proud to be part of the short course programme held at the Birmingham City University Jewellery School and has been asked to tutor many bespoke courses including various companies.

He teaches the traditional methods and tries to keep everything organic, to use a buzz word of today!

Contact Stephen M Goldsmith
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