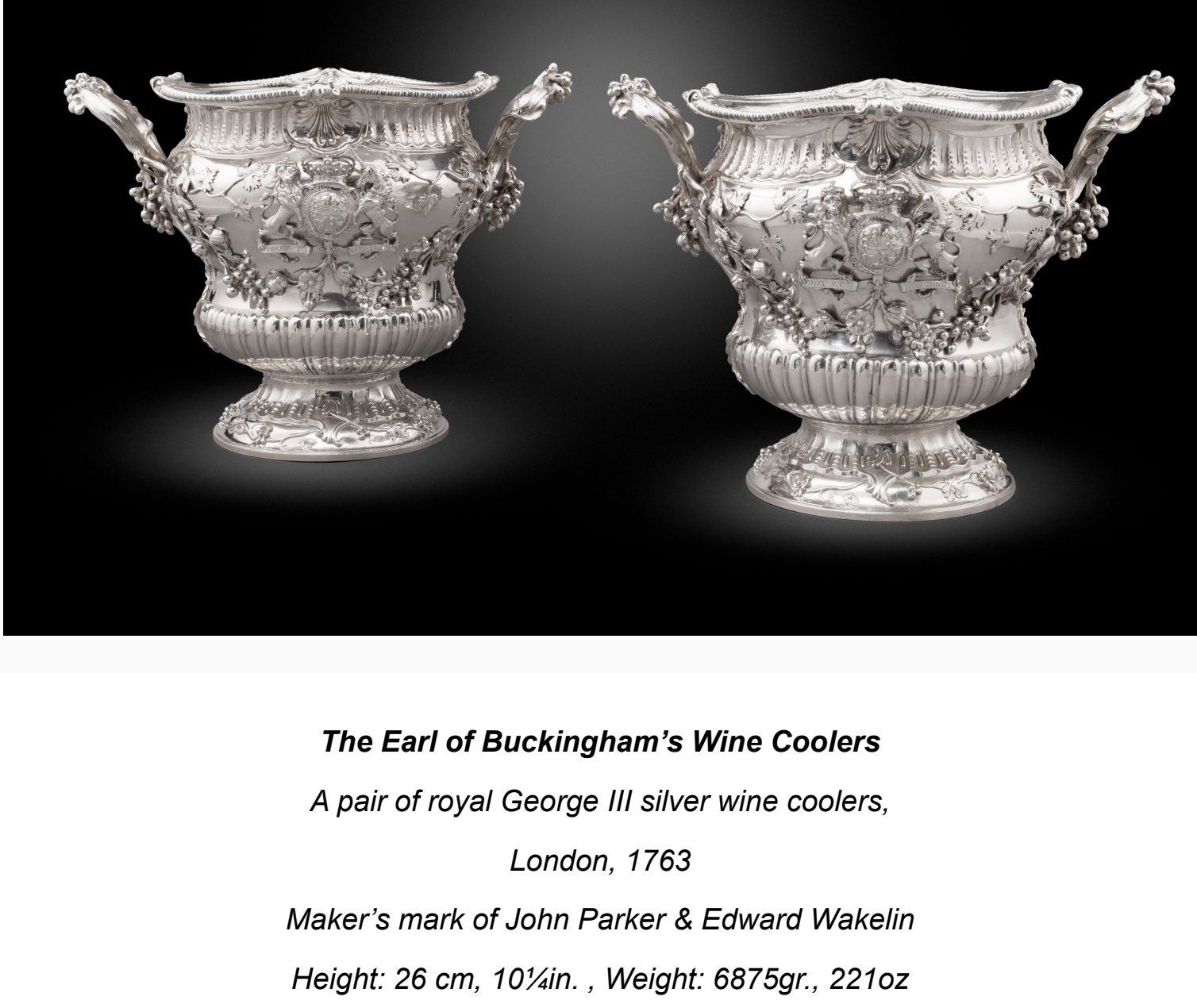


Director's Choice The Earl of Buckingham's Royal Wine Coolers Ambassador to Russia and the court of Catherine the Great



The Earl of Buckingham's Wine Coolers
*A pair of royal George III silver wine coolers,
London, 1763*
Maker's mark of John Parker & Edward Wakelin
Height: 26 cm, 10 1/4 in. , Weight: 6875gr., 221oz

As early as the 16th century, silver in Britain was not only a measure of wealth but also a tool of diplomacy and cultural display. The ambassadorial services were a strategic and symbolic tool in British diplomacy, combining artistry, wealth, and ceremonial function that reinforced the prestige of the Crown and its emissaries abroad.

Our ambassadors were expected to entertain in a manner that reflected the dignity and power of the English crown. To achieve this, the Jewel Office, a division of the royal household responsible for precious metals, issued silver services to officials posted at foreign courts. These services included elaborate dinnerware such as tureens, sauceboats, serving dishes, and cutlery, often designed to accommodate large gatherings of thirty-six guests or more.

Serving far more than just their obvious function, the Ambassadorial services were expressions of taste, education, and sophistication. The silversmiths produced highly detailed and technically sophisticated pieces. Their work featured die-stamped borders, intricate engraving, and animated grotesques, reflecting both artistic skill and the prestige of the Crown. The silver was sometimes displayed on buffets to impress foreign dignitaries, with royal arms prominently engraved or cast to signify the ambassador's official status.

When sending an ambassador abroad, they would receive diplomatic pay and expenses, and the material objects with which they were furnished in their role as the king's representative. These comprised large quantities of silver plate from the Jewel House and a chair of state and canopy from the Great Wardrobe; diplomats were also provided with allowances for commissioning the monarch's portrait and gala coaches for their formal entry. During the fifty years after 1660 a notable evolution occurred in which diplomats played a greater personal role in the fashioning of their royal perquisites, and during which the dictates of elite fashion affected the way they looked and the goldsmiths, joiners, and craftsmen who were employed. By 1714 an ambassador's official environment had become as much a reflection of his own tastes as those of diplomatic precedence.

These magnificent Royal wine coolers achieve this with a gusto with their inverted baluster form. Their bases are applied with grapes and olive branches and their bodies partly fluted. Of course, applied with George III's royal arms on both sides, with floral swags leading to the grape vine handles, the gadrooned rims centred with shells. Each wine cooler also with inventory numbers and scratch weights engraved "N°1, 110=4" and "N°2, 113=7.

Provenance:

John Hobart (1723-1793), 2nd Earl of Buckinghamshire, to his eldest daughter, Henrietta, married 1793 William Kerr, later 6th Marquess of Lothian, to their son, John Kerr, 7th Marquess of Lothian
Parke-Bernet Galleries Inc., New York, 18 October 1941, lot 26
Sotheby's, New York, 21 October 1997, lot 265

Literature:

Apollo, July 1937
H. Clifford; *Silver in London: The Parker and Wakelin Partnership 1760-1776*; New Haven: Yale University Press for the Bard Graduate Centre for Studies in the Decorative Arts; New York; 2004; fig. 133, pp. 164-65



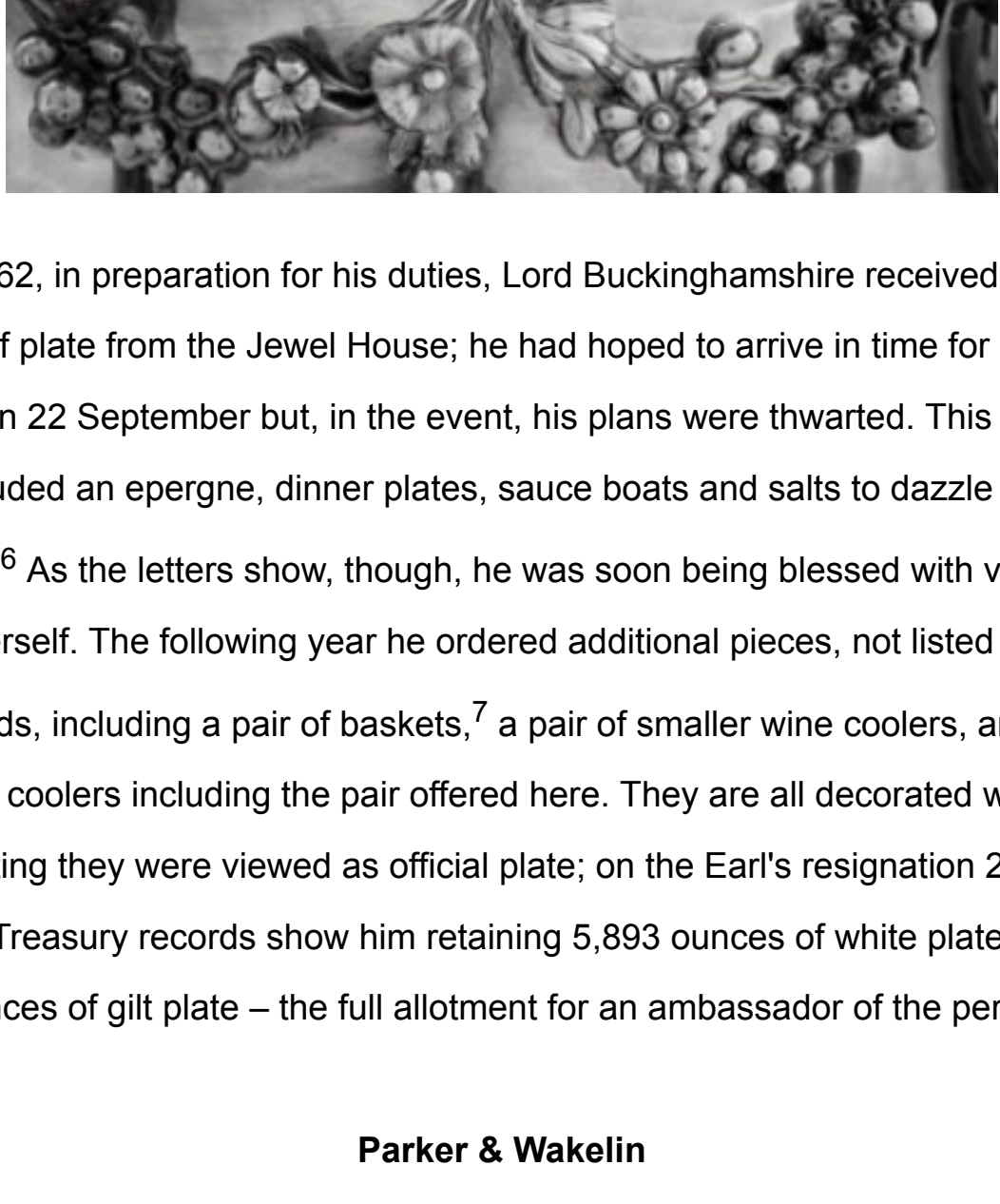
Portrait of John, 2nd Earl of Buckinghamshire by Thomas Gainsborough, oil on canvas

John Hobart, 2nd Earl of Buckinghamshire (1723-1793) was chosen as Ambassador to Russia and the court of Catherine the Great between 1762 and 1765 partly for his strikingly handsome appearance, which was likely to ingratiate him with the Empress Catherine.¹ She was duly impressed and during much of his time in Russia, the Empress was said to have 'showered favours' on Buckinghamshire, who wrote in his diary, 'to see her is to know that she could love and that her love would make the happiness of a lover worthy of her.'²

He was born in 1723 to John Hobart (1693-1756), from 1728 Baron Hobart of Bickling, and from 1746 1st Earl of Buckinghamshire. Despite considerable political experience, he was thought to owe his peerage to his sister Henrietta, Countess of Suffolk, Mistress to George II. The son served as M.P. for Norwich from 1747 to 1756, as Comptroller of the Household in 1755-56, Privy Councillor in 1756, Lord of the Bedchamber to George II from 1756 to 1760 and to George III from 1760 to 1767. Horace Walpole wrote a typically wishy description of him as 'The Clearcake – fat, fair, sweet, and seen through in a moment.'³ He married in 1761 Mary Anne, daughter and co-heir of Lieutenant General Sir Thomas Drury, Bt., who brought him a fortune of £50,000.

The Embassy

The Earl was sent to Russia as part of the diplomatic manoeuvring at the close of the Seven Years' War. His dispatches reveal how busy he was: keeping England informed of the shifting balances of power at the new Court, pushing for an Anglo-Russian alliance and trade treaties, feeling out the possibilities of a Northern Confederacy, and debating the fate of Poland after the death in 1763 of Augustus III. They also indicate how much entertaining was part of his duties. During one of the periods of unrest, he had all of the foreign ministers dining with him to discuss the situation, while at other times he hosted Catherine's Chancellor and her private secretary; of the latter, soon to be Secretary of State, he wrote, 'the table is his first passion.'⁴ In April 1763, the Earl wrote to Lord Halifax: 'The Empress had flattered me with the hope that she would honour my house with her presence on Monday last, as she had done before at an entertainment of the same kind.'⁵

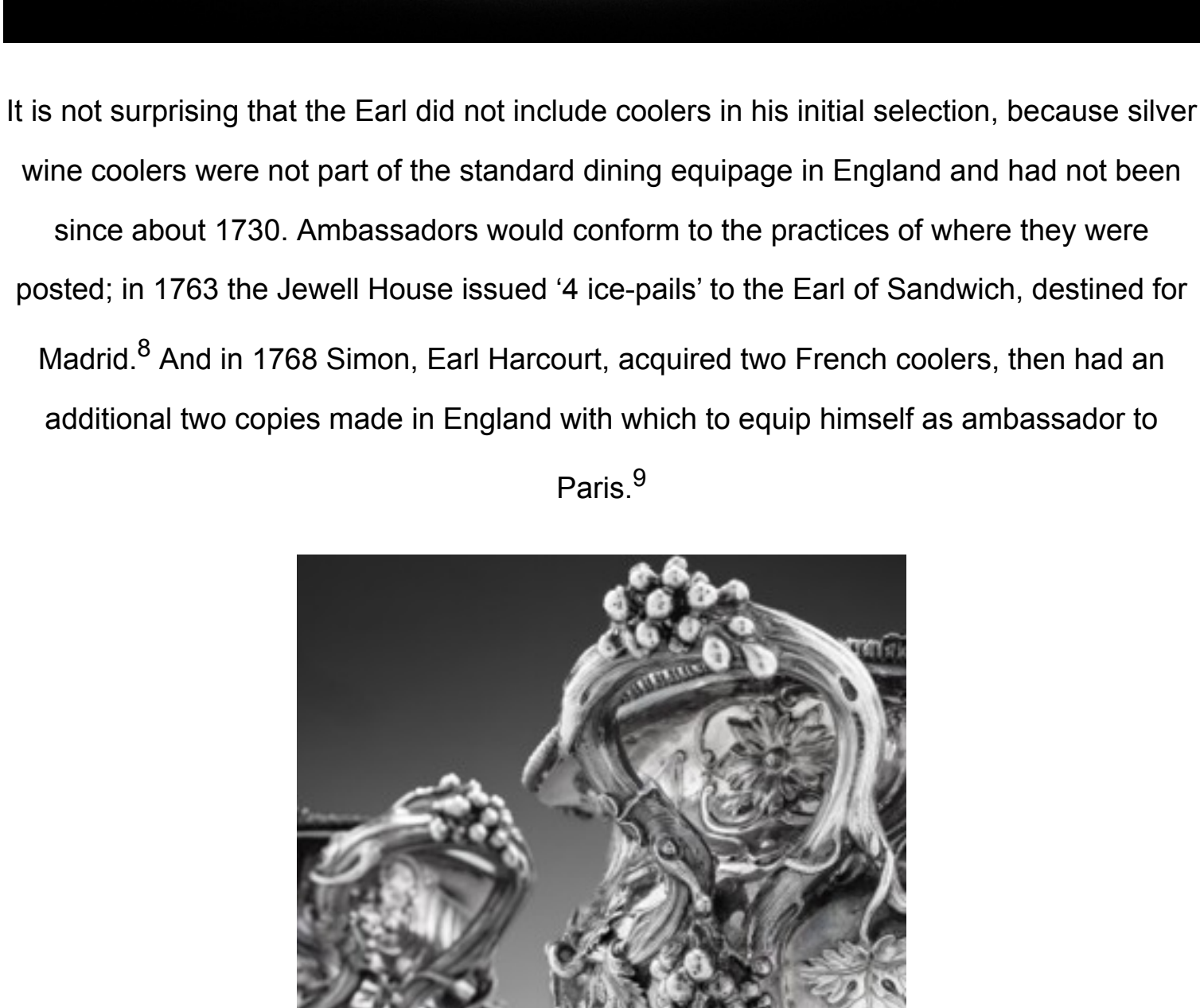


In August 1762, in preparation for his duties, Lord Buckinghamshire received an extensive allotment of plate from the Jewel House; he had hoped to arrive in time for Catherine's Coronation on 22 September but, in the event, his plans were thwarted. This first selection of silver included an epergne, dinner plates, sauce boats and salts to dazzle guests at his new posting.⁶ As the letters show, though, he was soon being blessed with visits from the Empress herself. The following year he ordered additional pieces, not listed in the Jewel House records, including a pair of baskets,⁷ a pair of smaller wine coolers, and two larger pairs of wine coolers including the pair offered here. They are all decorated with the Royal Arms, indicating they were viewed as official plate; on the Earl's resignation 20 September 1765, the Treasury records show him retaining 5,893 ounces of white plate and 1,066 ounces of gilt plate – the full allotment for an ambassador of the period.

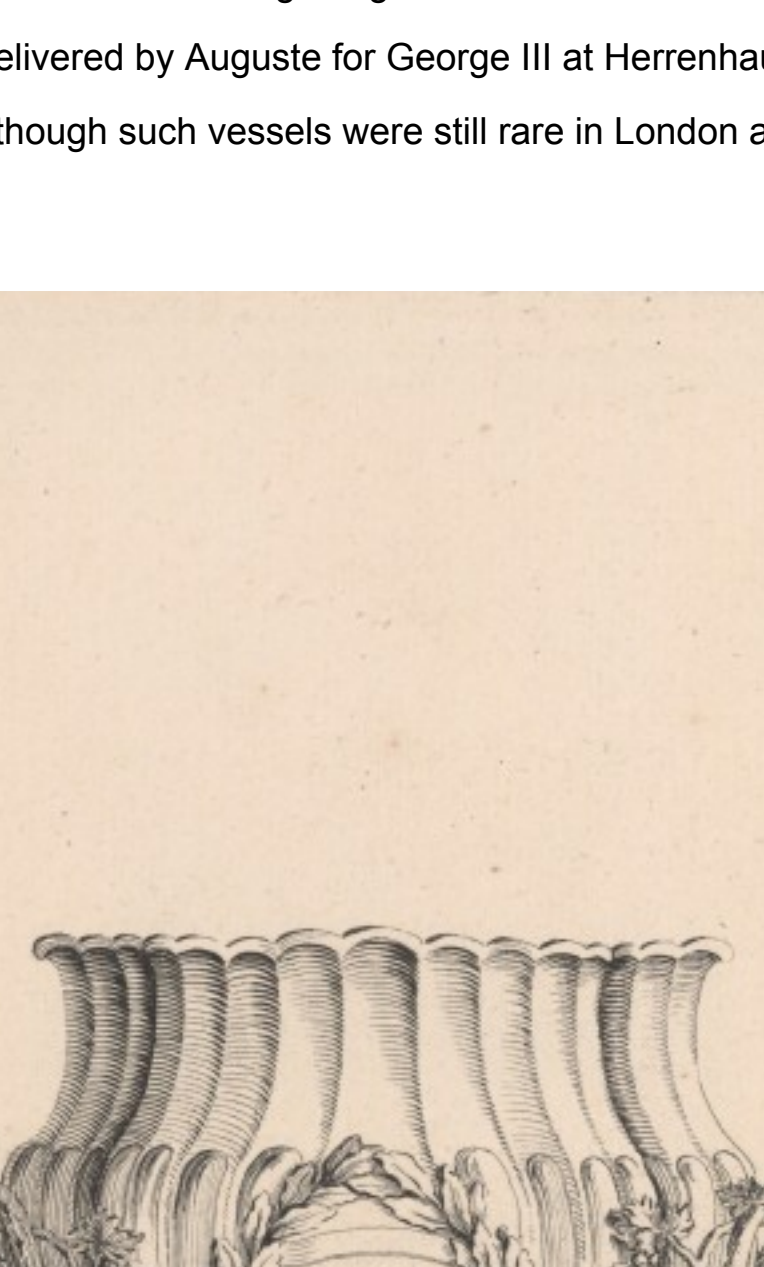
Parker & Wakelin

The partnership between John Parker and Edward Wakelin, trading as Parker & Wakelin (successors to Wickes & Netherton) ran from about 1759 to 1776. The business was continued thereafter by Edward Wakelin's son, John in partnership with William Taylor. In the 19th century, this firm became known as R. & S. Garrard & Co.

The Wine Coolers

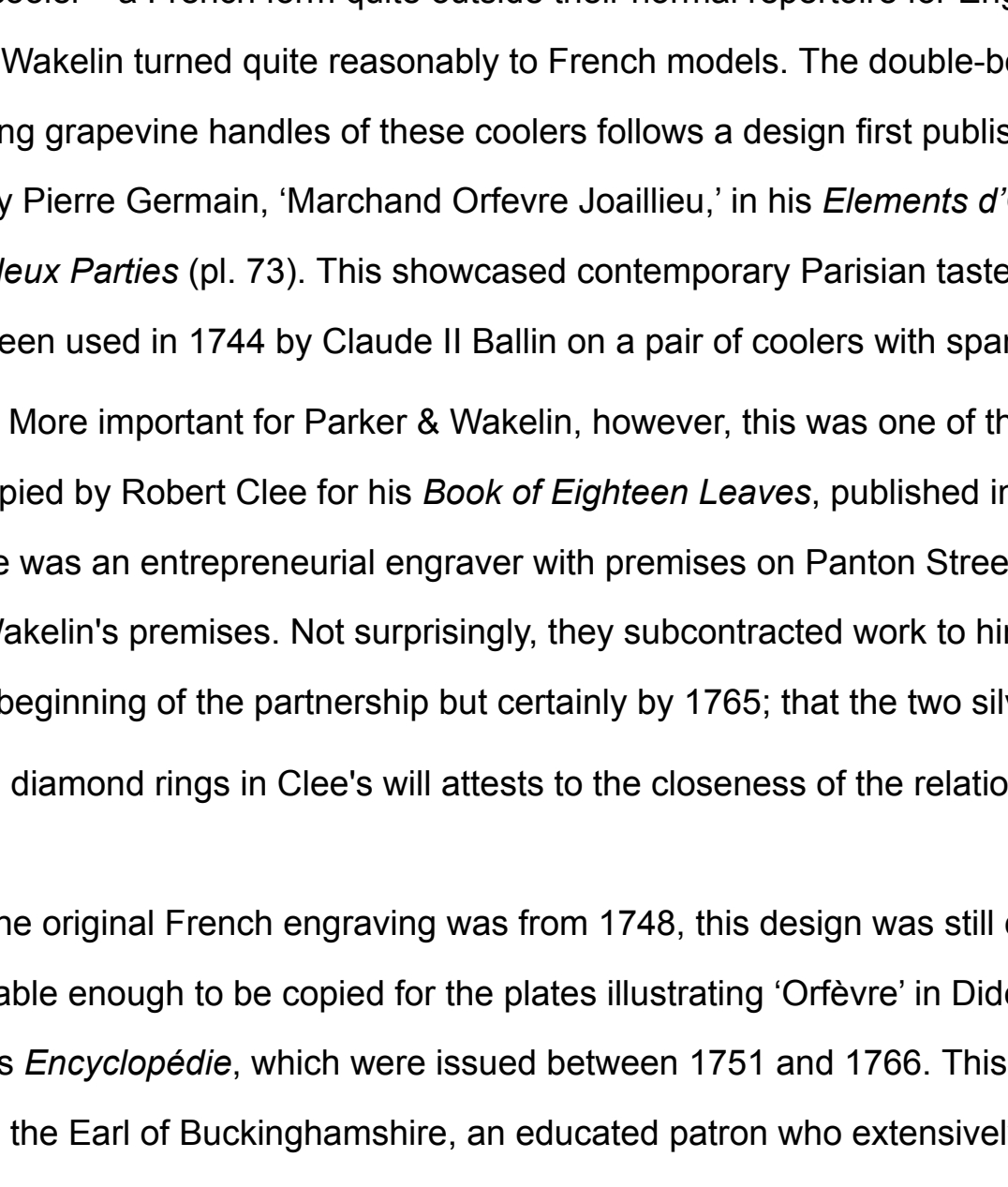


It is not surprising that the Earl did not include coolers in his initial selection, because silver wine coolers were not part of the standard dining equipage in England and had not been since about 1730. Ambassadors would conform to the practices of where they were posted; in 1763 the Jewel House issued '4 ice-pails' to the Earl of Sandwich, destined for Madrid.⁸ And in 1768 Simon, Earl Harcourt, acquired two French coolers, then had an additional two copies made in England with which to equip himself as ambassador to Paris.⁹



The Russians followed the French practice of using silver wine coolers at the table. The service delivered by François-Thomas Germain for Empress Elizabeth in 1761 included four 'seaux riches',¹⁰ while the contemporary service delivered by Germain for Portugal (a close trading partner of England) did not contain this form.

The four silver services delivered for Catherine the Great between 1774 and 1776 do not seem to have included wine coolers, but the services supplied from France in 1776-78 and 1782 and those from Augsburg in 1779-1781 did have this form.¹¹ In 1775, even the service delivered by Auguste for George III at Herrenhausen included wine coolers, although such vessels were still rare in London at that time.



Pierre Germain, Elements of Goldsmithing divided into two parts, published in Paris in 1748, pl. 73.

For a wine-cooler—a French form quite outside their normal repertoire for English patrons —Parker & Wakelin turned quite reasonably to French models. The double-bellied shape and spreading grapevine handles of these coolers follows a design first published in Paris in 1748 by Pierre Germain, 'Marchand Orfèvre Joaillieu,' in his *Elements d'Orfèverie divisés en deux Parties* (pl. 73). This showcased contemporary Parisian taste, the outline having been used in 1744 by Claude II Ballin on a pair of coolers with spaniel-head handles.¹² More important for Parker & Wakelin, however, this was one of the Germain designs copied by Robert Clee for his *Book of Eighteen Leaves*, published in London in 1757. Clee was an entrepreneurial engraver with premises on Panton Street, opposite Parker & Wakelin's premises. Not surprisingly, they subcontracted work to him, probably from the beginning of the partnership but certainly by 1765; that the two silversmiths received diamond rings in Clee's will attests to the closeness of the relationship.¹³

Although the original French engraving was from 1748, this design was still considered fashionable enough to be copied for the plates illustrating 'Orfèvre' in Diderot and D'Alembert's *Encyclopédie*, which were issued between 1751 and 1766. This would have counted with the Earl of Buckinghamshire, an educated patron who extensively remodelled his family seat, Bickling Hall, on his return from Russia. Parker & Wakelin, however, or their suppliers, do not seem to have repeated this late rococo model for another customer. Within five years, they had a newer, French Neoclassical model before them, when they were asked by Lord Harcourt to copy his Parisian rams' head wine-coolers for his embassy to France.

¹ Name:
² The Complete Peerage
³ Cited in the sale catalogue of the Lothian emerald necklace, the emeralds supposedly a present from Catherine the Great. Sotheby's, New York, 28 November 2000, lot 176; Christie's, Geneva, 20 November 2008, lot 269
⁴ Bickling Hall, The National Trust, 1972, p. 20
⁵ Adelaide D'Arcy Collyer, editor, The Despatches and Correspondence of John, Second Earl of Buckinghamshire, Ambassador to the Court of Catherine the Great II. of Russia, 1762-65, London, 1902, p. 16
⁶ Ibid., p. 21
⁷ Various other items from the Earl's Ambassadorial plate with the Royal Arms have appeared at auction. These include 24 dinner plates, William Crisp, London, 1748, and Sebastian & James Crespel, London, 1762, and seven meat dishes, William Crisp, London, 1748, and Thomas Hemm, London, 1762 (Sotheby's, London, 13 June 1983, lot 51); and two sauce tureens and stands, Thomas Hemm, London, 1762, and twelve gilt dessert spoons, T. & W. Chawner, London, 1762 (Sotheby's, London, 15 May 2003, lots 97 and 99)
⁸ A pair of baskets with the Royal Arms, Thomas Hemm, London, 1763, was probably another later addition. (Sotheby's, London, 15 May 2003, lot 98)
⁹ Because Lord Sandwich never took up this position it is possible that his wine coolers were reassigned to Lord Buckinghamshire; no other coolers appear in the Jewel House records for this period. The listed weight of 330oz. 10dwt. for the four Sandwich coolers, however, does not seem to match (even if grouped as pairs) with the Buckinghamshire scratch weights of 115=12 and 115=6 for the larger coolers and 73=4 and 76=0 for the smaller.
¹⁰ Sold Sotheby's, London, 20 November 2003, lots 196 and 197
¹¹ Christine Perrin, François-Thomas Germain, Orfèvre des Rois, Saint-Rémy-en-l'Éau, 1993, p. 204
¹² Marina Lopato, 'English Silver in St. Petersburg: British Art Treasures from Russian Imperial Collections in the Hermitage', New Haven: Yale, 1906, pp. 131-132; Björn R. Kommer, Zirkelhaus und Zarenader: Augsburger Silber für Katharine II. von Russland, Munich: Deutscher Kunstverlag, 1997, pp. 48-49, 71 and 75
¹³ Sold from the collection of George Orsz, Sotheby's, New York, 13 November 1996, lot 4
¹⁴ Item I Give and Bequeath to Mr Parker Mr Wakelin and [the King's goldsmith] Thomas Hemm Esquire a Diamond Ring Each of the value of Ten pounds to be made by themselves (Robert Clee's will, signed 15 May 1773, proved 25 May 1773, Public Record Office, Kew, PROB 11/987; Clifford, pp. 49, 99, 101 and 164-166

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