

koopman rare art



Elkington & Co

A Victorian Silver, Enamel, & Hardstone Cup & Cover,
Silver

Birmingham 1863

Maker's mark of ELKINGTON & Co.

Weight: 37oz, 1,151g

Height 9 $\frac{7}{8}$ in, 25cm

£ 15,000

The cup with strapwork bands enclosing scrolling foliage on blue enamel ground with applied classical figures, busts and putti also with musicians at intervals. The cup applied with garnet cabochons at the knop and on the cover and with turquoise cabochons on the foot as well as the putto finial.

The cup hallmarked throughout, the base applied with a Department of Science and Art, Elkington plaque.

From 1853 to 1899, the British government operated the Science and Art Department under the

leadership of Henry Cole to promote education in art, science, technology and design. Elkington owned the patent to the electrotype process, which made faithful copies of original objects, and was licensed to bring international examples of the greatest items ever made to a wider audience. The plaques were applied to electrotypes made by Elkington that were officially approved of by the Department.

Artist description:

The success of this well known firm of electro-platers and manufacturing silversmiths, the original patentees of the electroplating process, was largely due to the energy of George Richards Elkington. The son of James Elkington, a gilt-toy maker, he was born at St. Paul's Square, Birmingham on the 17th October 1801 and was subsequently apprenticed to his uncles Josiah Richards and George Richards, later becoming a partner with them. Although the partnership with G. Richards only lasted til 1840, G.R.

Elkington was also in business at about this time with various other individuals, most notably his cousin, Henry Elkington with whom he conducted researches into gilding base metal which led to three patents in 1836 and 1837. In 1837 a subsidiary partnership, lasting until 17th October 1843, was formed to exploit these patents with the proprietors of two Birmingham firms of button makers; besides G.R. Elkington, the partners in this venture were John Hardman senior and junior and Jeremiah Illiffe of Hardman & Illiffe, William Hammond Turner, James Turner and Henry Turner. Meanwhile, G.R. Elkington and Henry Elkington, together with a number of assistants, among whom was Alexander Parkes, were able to bring the technique of electroplating to perfection in 1840 with the reluctant help of John Wright whose invention of electrolyte containing potassium cyanide was the deciding factor.

Convinced of the eventual success of their experiments, G.R. Elkington commenced the building of a large factory in the late 1830's at Newhall Street, Birmingham; another, for the manufacture of 'electro-plated goods of the plain and useful kind, as spoons, forks, etc.' was built between 1848 and 1851 at Brearly Street, Birmingham. Money to finance such an ambitious programme was provided by the introduction in 1842 of a third partner, Josiah Mason, a successful steel pen nib manufacturer, whereupon the style of the firm was changed to Elkington, Mason & Co. In addition, G.R. Elkington, listed at his London showroom at 74 Hatton Garden as a gold, gilt and silver ornament manufacturer, came to an agreement in 1840 with his relative by marriage, the London manufacturing silversmith, Benjamin Smith (Jr.) , to open electroplating workshops at 45 Moorgate Street, City, and retail shop at 22 Regent Street. The connection ended unfortunately for Smith when G.R. Elkington took control of both premises in 1849, forcing the former into bankruptcy.

Although Elkington's electroplate met with initial resistance in the trade, especially among those connected with the Sheffield plate industry, it was soon accepted with the result that the firm allowed a number of other manufacturers to use the technique under licence. Among the earliest granted were those to Christoffe & Cie in France and in England to Thomas Prime & Son of Birmingham, and William Carr Hutton of Sheffield.

Described as electroplaters, gilders manufacturers of silver, gilt and plated goods and brozists of Birmingham, Liverpool, London and Dublin, the partnership between G.R. Elkington and J. Mason was terminated, by an agreement dated January 1858, on 31st December 1861 after which the business traded under the style of Elkington & Co. G.R. Elkington died at the age of 64 on 22nd September 1865, leaving an estate of £350,000; under the terms of his will his four sons and co-partners, Frederick Elkington, James Balleny Elkington, Alfred John Elkington and Howard Elkington continued the firm.

Further retail premises were opened at Church Street, Liverpool, a branch which was subsequently moved to 9 Parker Street, Liverpool, before taking over in 1901 at the lease of William Angus & Son's premises at 27 Lord Street, Liverpool. Early in 1874 Elkington & Co. acquired the business of Giovanni Franchi, the Italian electrotypist, who died in 1875, and his nephew remained to manage the workshops, from where Elkington & Co. advertised in 1881 that, 'having established a branch manufactory at (Franchi's place of business), (they) are now prepared to do depositing in Silver and Copper and also Plating and Gilding for the Trade; Prices and estimates on application.'

The partners, meanwhile, were joined by Hyla Elkington and Herbert Frederick Elkington. Described as goldsmiths, silversmiths, electrogilders, electroplaters and general metallurgists, their partnership was dissolved on 31st December 1886 prior to the firm's conversion into a limited liability company in 1887 under the style of Elkington & Co. Ltd. with Thomas Henry Rollason recorded as managing director, and the following as directors: Frederick Elkington, Herbert Frederick Elkington, Hyla Garrett Elkington and William Lee Matthews, Sir George Scott Robertson, Gerard Bartlett Elkington and Andrew Binniw.

During this period the company opened additional retail premises at 73 Cheapside, EC, which were opened in 1893 and then closed in 1925; St. Anne's Square, Manchester; 84 St. Vincent Street, Glasgow, which were opened in 1898 and subsequently moved to Buchanan Street, Glasgow; Commerce Street, Glasgow; and at 32 Northumberland Street, Newcastle, which were relinquished in 1913.

On 25th April 1907, Elkington & Co. Ltd. was registered as a new company under the same style.

Elkington & Co.'s vast output over the hundred years after 1840 included all types of silver and electroplate, from table silver and domestic holloware to fine display and artworks. Besides their original experiments, the firm constantly improved techniques, such as the perfection in the late 1890s of electroplating for decorative purposes on to glass or porcelain, a process which appears to have been pioneered in America.

Elkington & Co. were probably the most frequently represented of all British manufacturing silversmiths at the many local, national and international exhibitions held between 1840 and 1914.