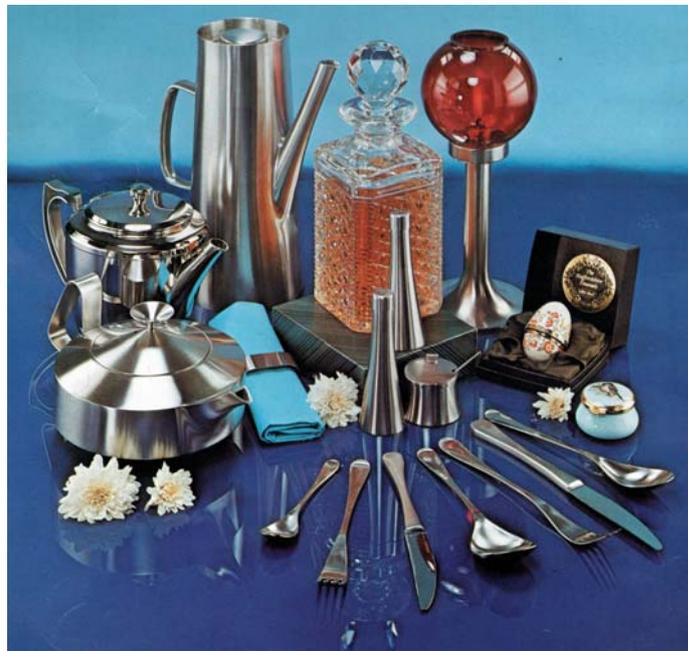




Part of an exhibition organised by The Old Hall Club at Moseley Old Hall, near Wolverhampton, in August 1999.



Selection of Old Hall items, 1980.

Know your **Old Hall**

by Nigel Wiggin

'Old Hall' stainless steel tableware, the 'Wedding Present of the 60s', is back in vogue again as a result of the Collectors Club formed by Nigel Wiggin. It was the family business of J & J Wiggin Limited at Bloxwich, near Walsall, who developed the Old Hall range in the 1930s and which reached its peak in the 1960s but regrettably had to close down in 1984 due to changing market conditions. Quality was the keyword for all aspects of Old Hall and the designs of Robert Welch from the mid-1950s onwards helped the company attain world-wide recognition.

The Old Hall Collectors Club is now well established both within the UK and overseas. The quarterly Newsletter is full of information on Old Hall and reprints of many of the catalogues enable the progress of the company to be followed and assist in identifying items. Advice and information on all aspects of Old Hall is available and the exchange of items between members is all part of the fun. Meetings/exhibitions are held twice a year.

Here are ten of the most frequently asked questions about Old Hall:

1. Why the name 'Old Hall'?

The name is derived from a Salvation Army Mission Hall, known as 'The Old Hall', into which the Company moved in 1904 when the stable at the rear of the Wiggin family home became too small for the expanding engineering company set up in 1893 by father James Thomas Wiggin and his eldest son James Enoch. (hence the name J & J Wiggin)

2. When did production of Old Hall begin?

William Wiggin (Nigel's grandfather) made what is believed to be the world's first item of stainless steel tableware (apart from cutlery) in 1928, this being a simple four-section toast rack which was followed in 1930

by what is thought to be the world's first stainless steel teapot. Both of these items are in Nigel's proud possession and are shown in the accompanying photograph.

3. What is the significance of 'Olde Hall' compared to 'Old Hall'?

The Company's original trade mark, registered in 1922, was 'Olde Hall' and was used initially for a range of chromium plated bathroom fittings. Its use was extended in 1928 to include the new items of stainless steel tableware. The 'e' was dropped in 1959 to present a more modern image. From 1933/35 a trade mark of 'Ye Olde Hall' was used, but it was found that this was too similar to an existing trade mark being used by Sheffield cutlery manufacturer Walker & Hall Limited so it had to be withdrawn. Any items having a die stamp of 'Ye Olde Hall' are therefore very collectable indeed!

4. What is 'Staybrite'?

'Staybrite' was the trade name given to stainless steel by steelmakers Thomas Firth of Sheffield in 1913 when it was discovered by chance, by their works metallurgist Harry Brearley. All products made from this new material, including Old Hall, were marked up with the name 'Staybrite' until 1939 but this practice did not continue after the war. Therefore, all Old Hall items marked with 'Staybrite' or 'Firth Staybrite' are pre-war.

5. Who was Robert Welch?

Robert Welch was appointed Consultant Designer to the company in 1955 on completion of his studies at the Royal College of Art. Prior to this, virtually all the designing had been done by the Wiggin family, mainly by brothers Leslie and Wilfred Wiggin. The marriage between J & J Wiggin Limited and Robert Welch was a long and happy one,



The world's first stainless steel toast rack, made by Old Hall in 1928, and the world's first stainless steel teapot, made by Old Hall in 1930.



Nigel Wiggin (left) and Robert Welch in Robert's Chipping Campden studio in 1998.

bringing world acclaim to both parties. Most items designed by Robert Welch carry his name on the logo. Sadly, he died in March 2000, aged 70.

6. Design Centre Awards

Robert Welch designs won three Design Centre Awards for Old Hall. The first was in 1958 for the Campden toast rack. The second, in 1962, was for a range of twenty two dishes and the third, in 1965, was for the Alveston range of cutlery, notable for the hollow handles of the knives which very much improve the balance. Cutlery virtually identical to the Alveston continues to be on sale at the Robert Welch Studio Shop at Chipping Campden under the name of RW1.

7. Bright or Satin Finish

Initially everything was in bright finish but Robert Welch introduced the more modern satin on all his designs from 1955 onwards. Both finishes continued with some items being available in both bright and satin. One tea set, the Stirling, was two tone i.e. basically satin but with a bright rim to the lid and a bright handle. Look out for this! A hammered finish was used pre-war and into the 50s on one tea set (the Warwick) and on several other items such as trays and teapot stands.

8. Tea Set Names

All tea sets were given names, which is why it is useful to obtain the catalogues from the Old Hall Club so that you can identify your items. Somewhat confusingly, some names were used twice, albeit with a gap of some twenty five years or so in between. The four names used twice were Avon, Sandon, Savoy and Warwick, so obtaining both designs of the same name is another challenge for collectors.

9. Most Collectable Item

The Alveston tea set (unofficially known as Aladdin's lamp), designed by Robert Welch in 1962, is without doubt the item most sought after by Old Hall collectors and consequently is very scarce indeed. See photograph.

10. Most Popular Item

The Connaught tea set, designed by Leslie Wiggin in 1959 and available in a range of sizes and in both bright and satin finishes, was Old Hall's best seller. See photograph.

Where can I find Old Hall?

Try car boot sales, charity shops, antiques/collectables fairs, the Internet, etc and you'll be pleasantly surprised how often Old Hall turns up, especially now that news of it's renaissance is spreading. The Old Hall Club has items for sale and also circulates members sales/wants lists with each Newsletter.

Want to know more?

Contact Nigel Wiggin at Sandford House, Levedale, Stafford ST18 9AH. Tel: 01785 780376, email: oht@gnwiggin.freeserve.co.uk Website: www.oldhallclub.co.uk Nigel is available for giving talks on 'The Old Hall Story' which includes showing the world's first stainless steel toast rack and teapot.



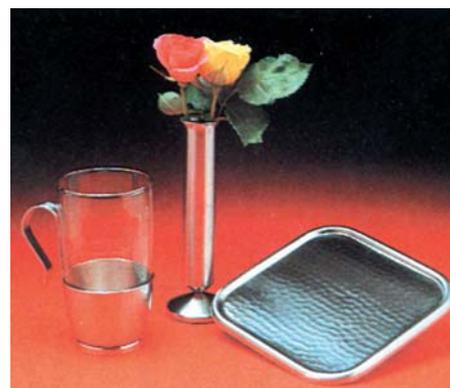
The 'Connaught' tea set, Old Hall's most popular item, 1959.



The 'Super Avon' coffee set, 1970.



The 'Alveston' teapot, Old Hall's most collectable item, 1962.



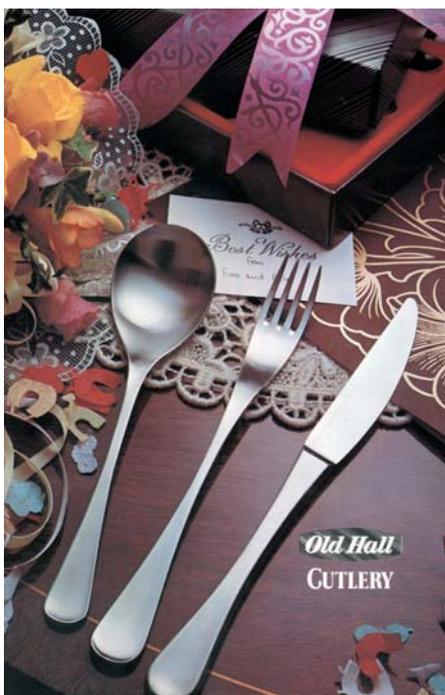
'Special attractions', 1975.



The 'Stirling' tea set, Old Hall's only two tone tea set, 1970.



'Campden' range of dishes and trays, 1975.



Robert Welch's 1965 Design Centre award-winning range of 'Alveston' cutlery.



Robert Welch's 1958 Design Centre award-winning 'Campden' toast rack top and bottom left.