A GUIDE TO SILVER

# Dishes

Round or oval sideboard dishes were made for display decreasingly until c1720, often parcel gilt and highly embossed. In Italy they remained renaissance in style; in Spain, Portugal and Germany they were sometimes very pictorial with a raised central boss; while Antwerp in the late 16th and early 17th centuries was unsurpassed for fine engraving on fairly small octagonal dishes.

Plates

Wooden trenchers were gradually replaced by silver plates from about 1550, survivors mostly dating from c1700. Decoration was confined to borders and shapes. Made in dozens as part of a matching services, their size decreasing from about 150mm (10in) for meat to 120mm (5in). Fruit plates, usually gilded and embossed with fruit motifs, were rarely made *en suite* with a dinner service.

Strawberry dishes

Small fluted dishes with scalloped rims forming panels, used for soft fruit c1700-30, occasionally later, when the shallow sloping sides became steeper and deeper. Usually made in Britannia standard silver and engraved only with armorials, a few being flat-chased in England and Holland.

Mazarine

A pierced plate for use in a serving dish, allowing juices to drain. Usually oval, with fine engraving and piercing indicating fish as a principal use. Made from the late 17th century, but usually in Sheffield plate after 1780.

Sauceboats

The earliest sauceboats were double-lipped on an oval base, made in superb quality silver with a molded wavy rim decorated only with armorials particularly c1715 in England. This shape was used again with rococo decoration, particularly in France and Germany, but rarely in England. The character of the boats, with a lip at either end squared off by a handle on each side, made it difficult to pour from them.

Salts

The medieval great salt was of prime social importance in England, placed on the table before the host, and the most important guests grouped around him. Many also had compartments for spice, but these great sculptures were of no more practical use than the “hour-glass” salt; the architectural salts made in all countries during the 16th century.