

Summary for translation – Hammerclub Dundee 2019

Contemporary British Silversmiths the leading association for contemporary silver in the United Kingdom. It is a membership organization (volunteer led, non-profit) set up to inspire creativity and promote excellence in design and craftsmanship to new audiences nationally and internationally. In 2017 the Contemporary British Silversmiths Skills Training Programme was officially launched, in partnership with the Goldsmiths' Centre. The Programme evolved from an offer of help by Tony Bedford (a very experienced Silversmith, Head of silver at Asprey on retirement). Tony offered his services to train silversmiths, as long as it was for professionals, committed and dedicated people, who might be able to grow their skills and express their creativity more fully with his help. Initially, Tony taught a pilot course, where we learned a new skill (Raising a seamed vessel) while collectively figuring out what was the best way to deliver training to busy professional silversmiths in the most effective way, the shortest possible time and at the best value. The courses running now, with the support of the Goldsmiths' Centre, are mostly week-long Masterclasses, focusing on a specific technique, in depth, in professional workshops all over the UK. All participants stay together in shared accommodation, cooking food and eating together, so that the learning experience goes on from waking to sleeping, with sharing of information, resources and ideas. In addition, there are Graduate courses (members within up to 5 years since graduation) run with two tutors, to give extra support.

The ethos of the programme is to create a domino effect, in as many ways as possible. Everyone who takes part agrees to pass on what they have learned, and disseminate their new found knowledge wherever/however it is appropriate. This can be formal or informal. Many people are not confident in doing that, so we are also training people to give training, nurturing new tutors. For example, if someone has been on a Masterclass, they may be asked to be an assistant tutor the next year, so they can help the tutor deliver the best training possible in a week, but also learn how to teach. The next step is to become a tutor on a Graduate course, passing on what they have learned. This trickle-down effect will create a much bigger pool of tutors for the future. The new tutors are mentored and helped by the more experienced tutors, for example with a workshop day to 'top-up' their skills, and make sure that what they are passing on is training of the highest quality, delivered with confidence.

Master craftsmen used to guard their skills jealously, worried their apprentice might steal their job. Nowadays, silversmiths are generally extremely generous and collaborative, and supportive of each other's development. We need to be. Learning in groups, with other professional smiths, is very powerful, as we all have our quirky ways, things we've worked out for us. Ask three silversmiths how to approach a particular job and you get 3 different answers.

There are many models for transferring knowledge and passing on these incredible skills that we hold between us, and we have a responsibility to do so in every way we can. The more variety, the more schemes, courses and methods we devise, the better. We collectively hold the future in our hands and our heads.