Pair of sauce boats with covers

Place of origin: Birmingham (made)

Date: 1776-1777 (made)

Artist/Maker: Boulton, Matthew, born 1728 - died 1809 (manufacturer)
Wyatt, James, born 1746 - died 1813 (designer)

Materials and Techniques: Silver, chased, with cast and applied decoration

Credit Line: Horn Gift

Museum number: M.432 to C-1936

Gallery location: British Galleries, Room 118; The Wolfson Gallery, case 2

Public access description

Object Type
The sauceboat, as a vessel for serving sauce, came to England from the French Court in the early 18th century along with the fashion for sauces. An early pair were supplied by the Jewel Office (a state department storing, lending and buying silver for officials) to the Duke of Argyll in 1719. The first sauceboats were double-lipped, but forms which poured from one lip only became more popular after 1730. The sauce tureen appeared in about 1765 in response to the neo classical style and the fashion for vase shapes. Sauce tureens and sauceboats were often sold in sets of four although one of the largest and grandest dinner services, made for the Duke of Leinster in 1745-1747, contained ten sauceboats.

People
The sauce tureen was made at Matthew Boulton's Soho factory in Birmingham. Boulton began to make silver in about 1766 to challenge the dominance of London and Paris in the market for high profile luxury goods. Silver and ormolu, largely made using traditional craft techniques, provided loss leaders for his more substantial trade in buckles and other small steel wares and the Sheffield plate business. The design of these tureens proved popular. Mrs Montague, a leader of fashionable society, ordered identical tureens and was told by Boulton that he had 'never made any as rich before'.

Design
The sophisticated and assured design of the sauce tureen demonstrates an elegant but restrained use of neo classical ornament such as reed moulding, shallow fluting, scroll work frieze and pendant husks. It has been suggested that the architect, James Wyatt, who is known to have collaborated with Boulton, may have designed this tureen.

Descriptive line
Pair of neoclassical silver sauce boats of shallow vase form with gadrooned bodies, marks of Matthew Boulton and James Fothergill, Birmingham, 1776-7

Physical description
Pair of sauce boats and covers, each in the form of an oval two-handled vase with fluted and gadrooned body, the lip chased with floral scrolls, loop handles forked at the junction with the lip, spreading foot with border chased with a flower and ribbon with low domed matching cover surmounted by a knob finial. The full sets of hallmarks are on the lip inside the lid. The foot of each tureen carries the marks for Matthew Boulton and James Fothergill.

Dimensions
Height: 14.6 cm, Width: 25.4 cm

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Object history note
Manufactured by Matthew Boulton (born in Birmingham, 1728, died there in 1809) during his partnerships with John Fothergill (1762-1781) at the Soho factory, Birmingham; possibly designed by James Wyatt (1746-1813)

Historical context note
Traditionally, metal goods were produced in a network of small, complementary workshops. An object might pass through several of these before it was finished. From the mid-eighteenth century this changed, as entrepreneurs created large factories where all the skills could be contained under one roof. Matthew Boulton (1728-1809) claimed that his Soho factory in Birmingham had: 'seven or eight hundred persons employ’d in almost all those Arts that are applicable to the manufacturing of all the metals...I have almost every machine that is applicable to those Arts. I have two Water mills employed in rolling, polishing, grinding and turning various sorts of laths.’ (letter to James Adam 1 Oct. 1770)

URL
http://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O78583/pair-of-sauce-boulton-matthew/