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### George III Sixpence in a Ladle

This object may not look very interesting upon first glance. It resembles a ladle that many people likely have in their own homes today. However, upon closer inspection, one can see that a George III sixpence has been embedded and incorporated into the bottom of the ladle. This begs the question, what was this item used for and why was it made this way?

In the 17th century punch became a very popular drink for social gatherings and celebrations. The ladles used at this time were, again, not very wide-spread and they tended to be much heavier than their 18th century counterparts. Silver ladles were not widespread in England until the middle of the 18th century in order to accompany the popularity of the soup tureen, and they were produced in many different shapes and sizes (Historic Huguenot Street). Because of the decorative nature of the handle, it is likely that this ladle was used to serve either punch or a beverage called hot toddy, which was a bourbon-based drink that was meant to soothe aches and pains and to keep the cold at bay (Historic Huguenot Street). If we assume that this ladle was a punch or hot toddy ladle, that would explain the coin on the bottom of it. The 18th century experienced a shortage of silver that led to silversmiths making the handles out of other materials and making the bowl of the ladle lighter. They also began to weld silver coins into the bottom of the ladles to compensate for the lack of silver available to them. Because of its sleek baalen handle and the shiny silver base, the ladle may have been made to be a decorative

household item used to communicate the good taste held by the owners. The 18th century was marked by a notable increase of uncontrollable coin vandalism. According to a writer at the Historic Huguenot Street newsletter, “silversmiths melted down coins, or acquired silver illegally from ‘opportunists who amassed bullion by clipping small pieces of silver from coins’”. Most silver coins in circulation at the time were damaged in some way, but because of the shortage the government could not afford to replace the vandalized coins. Vandalizing coinage was seen as an attack on the monarchy and severe punishments were dealt to those caught doing so. Once found guilty, a person could be “hanged, drawn, and quartered if male, or strangled and burned if female” (Historic Huguenot Street). Therefore it is no surprise that silversmiths who did this did not leave any identifying mark or stamp on the ladle in order to avoid being caught.

Now we come to the complicated question that is, *when* was this object made? There is no mark of a silversmith on the ladle, so it could have been made during the time period of the silver shortage. However, this ladle has what appear to be initials, or some other kind of identifier, on the sides of the ladle. An additional complication to dating this object is that according to the museum archives the coin is made of gold. This is odd because George III sixpences were made from silver, which is likely the reason it is in the bottom of this ladle in the first place. When I went to meet with Ellen Alvord, one of our museum staff, to see the object in person to try to find more information about it I could see that the coin does in fact appear to be made out of gold. One theory that another museum staff member, Emily Wood, had is that it may have been gilded in gold after being set into the ladle. How soon that would have been done after being set into the ladle is unclear. The theory poses an even stronger case that this coin has been transformed into something that is made of monetarily valuable materials, but was clearly made with aesthetic and artistic value in mind. The delicate initials, E.E. and E.A.E., engraved

onto the sides could perhaps indicate an additional commemorative purpose behind the creation of this ladle. But because we do not know for sure who or what E.E. and E.A.E stood for, we cannot say for certain at this time.

Ultimately, this object shows obvious signs of being treasured for its artistic value, its ability to communicate a high social status, and perhaps even sentimental or emotional value. Investigations into the new mysteries that this ladle with the George III sixpence inside it have brought up will hopefully continue.

## Works Cited

Historic Huguenot Street. "A Ladle's Tale." *Object of the Week*, 6 Mar. 2017,  
[hscollections.wordpress.com/2017/03/06/a-ladles-tale/](https://hscollections.wordpress.com/2017/03/06/a-ladles-tale/) Accessed 25 Apr. 2024.