

Dealer buys second Celestial Cup at auction

by Roland Arkell

The sale of Fine Asian Art at Alastair Gibson Auctions in London on March 23 included a particularly impressive example of 19th century Chinese export silver.

This massive 'dragon' cup and cover used as a shooting prize by the London Scottish Rifle Volunteers stands exactly 2ft (60cm) high and weighs a muscular 215oz.

The Celestial Cup (a name common to many Hong Kong sporting trophies) is engraved with the royal coat of arms of Scotland, the regimental motto and an inscription reading: *Presented to the London Scottish Rifle Volunteers by Old Members & Friends of the Corps Resident in China 1864.*

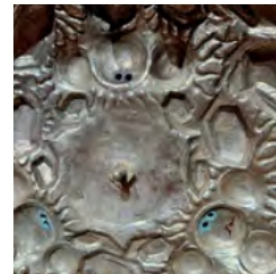
It is rare to find presentation cups of this exceptional size. This one was thought to have



been made in the workshop of Feng Zhao Ji of Canton and retailed by Lee Ching who was active in Canton, Hong Kong and Shanghai c.1830-95. Its only marks are the four LC stamps to the underside of the base.



Left: 19th century Chinese export silver 'dragon' cup and cover that was used as a shooting prize by the London Scottish Rifle Volunteers, **£38,000** at Alastair Gibson Auctions.



Above: details of the silver 'dragon' cup and cover.

The London Scottish Rifle Volunteers were formed in 1859, sponsored by the Highland Society of London and The Caledonian Society under the command of Lt Col Lord Elcho, later Lord Wemyss and March (1818-1914).

The trophy was being sold to raise funds for the renovation and maintenance of the regiment's memorials and building in Horseferry Road, Westminster. The seller was

the London Scottish Regimental Trust.

It was given an estimate of £20,000-25,000 but found many admirers before it was hammered down to one of five phone bidders at £38,000 (a total of £47,500 with 25% buyer's premium added).

It was bought for stock by specialist dealer S&J Stodel of the London Silver Vaults. "The cup is an outstanding piece of Chinese export silver," Stephen

and Jeremy Stodel told ATG. "It has great overall presence and – although larger trophies were made at the time – there hasn't been a bigger one on the market in recent memory.

"However, it is the one-owner history that makes the piece particularly special. It is pictured in the February 1906 edition of the *London Scottish Regimental Gazette* in an article titled 'Our Regimental Plate'. We know everything about it."

Exceptional provenance

Another Celestial Cup, a trophy made for the Hong Kong Races dated 1850, was sold at Lawrences in Crewkerne in January 2022 for £26,000 (plus buyer's premium).

Although considerably smaller at 16in (40cm) high, it had an exceptional provenance having been displayed at the *Great Exhibition* of 1851. It too was bought by S&J Stodel.