

ANTIQUES TRADE
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THE ART MARKET WEEKLY

Stodel wins the £26,000 trophy

The potent mix of China, horseracing and the 1851 *Great Exhibition* yielded a strong price for this splendid 'export' silver trophy at Lawrences in Crewkerne on January 18.

Standing 16in (40cm) high, chased with foliage, birds and scrolls, and applied with two dragon handles, it has a shield inscribed *Hong Kong Races 1850 Celestial Cup, Presented by D Jardine Esq won by Mr Dudgeon's Great Western. Ridden by J King Esq, HM 59th Regt.* It is struck to the pedestal base with both pseudo hallmarks and the mark KHC for the maker-retailer Khecheong of Old China Street, Canton.

Unbroken provenance

As pointed out in an *ATG* preview, the cup was on display at the *Great Exhibition* of 1851 and is recorded in Robert Hunt's handbook to the event: 'Two silver cups, the Celestial Cup presented at Hong Kong Races, 1850 and a smaller cup of silver... are shown among the Chinese contribution...'

Passed by descent in the Somerset family of the owner of 'Mr Dudgeon', it had an unbroken provenance and is a relatively early Hong Kong racing trophy. It was only after the first Opium War (1839-42) that the treaty port was ceded to the British, its population numbering just 32,983 in the census of 1851.

Hopes of £2000-2500 were modest in the context of a strong market for Chinese silver (a similarly decorated teapot by Khecheong sold for \$6500 at Christie's sale of the Posner collection of Chinese export silver in August 2019). Instead bidding reached £26,000 (plus 25% buyer's



Left: the Celestial Cup, a Chinese silver trophy, c.1850, marked for Khecheong of Canton, sold for **£26,000** at Lawrences. It was shown at the *Great Exhibition* the year after it was the prize in a Hong Kong horse race.

premium), at which point 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, but more than that, it has a wonderful story," Stephen and

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Chinese export trophy

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Jeremy Stodel told *ATG*. Research has found the cup was presented by David Jardine, a future taipan of the merchant firm of Jardine, Matheson & Co and one of the first two unofficial members of the Hong Kong Legislative Council.

The owner of the racehorse was Patrick Dudgeon, one of Hong Kong's first Justices of the Peace who is known to have returned to Scotland in 1850, while the jockey was Lieutenant J King of the 59th Regiment, an infantry division posted to Hong Kong in 1849.

Exhibition link

The connection to the *Great Exhibition* is key and makes the trophy "the most important item of Chinese export silver that has come to the market in a generation" according to the dealers.

They added: "At the time of the [Hyde Park] exhibition, China was in a state of turmoil due to the Taiping Rebellion, and consequently did not respond to requests to send objects for display.

"The organisers therefore turned to the merchant community and importers of Chinese art to Britain, to provide suitable and splendid objects to showcase the treasures and produce that China had to offer. The Celestial Cup was one of those pieces."

Roland Arkell