

Tools from the Caine Collection – Drawing Instruments

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Among the property Thomas Caine left to the National Trust there is a nice box of drawing instruments. “Nice” refers to the box, not at first glance, the contents, which are not immediately attractive. It is a typical box for drawing instruments, with a fitted tray for the instruments and a space underneath for accessories. The box is sound but plain, but more than half the fitted recesses on the tray are empty, and the lower level of the box contains a miscellaneous accumulation of odds and ends of drafting paraphernalia. Only recently have we had a good look at this item. However, we now find that there are a number of interesting features to be seen.



Illus 1 – Thomas Caine’s box of drawing instruments

The Instruments

The box contains the typical lift out tray recessed to take the instruments, the tray being covered with green cloth. There are 14 recesses, but, sadly, only five are occupied. However, the remaining instruments are of particular interest. Three of them have adjustments which are set by screws with hand-cut butterfly-shaped heads, like small wing nuts.

Heads like these are unusual, because they are only found on the oldest drawing instruments. Most drawing instruments use a screw with a knurled head, and research indicates that winged heads were phased out in the early part of the 19th century, suggesting that these instruments may be about 200 years old. This is supported by the use of “long joints” on the compasses and dividers. Long joints were superseded by “sector joints” by about 1860.



Illus 2 – A butterfly-headed locking screw, circa 1800

Another surprise is that, considering they are about 200 years old, the instruments are in very good condition. The surface of the instruments is clean, bright and glossy, with little sign of rust or tarnish. They look like well polished silver. We believe that the base metal is brass, with points and some hinge parts made from steel. (Common practice was to make mating hinge parts of different metals to reduce the risk of binding.) As we know that they haven’t been touched for at least 38 years, and probably not for many more years than that, we believe that originally they were bare brass and steel, and that at some time, perhaps early