

Restore renew, revive

By Widget Finn

Craftsmanship is woefully undervalued in this country and in a recession training has a low priority in every field. However, over two decades the Queen Elizabeth Scholarship Trust (QUEST), the charitable arm of the Royal Warrant Holders Association, has awarded scholarships to 242 craftspeople for study, training and work experience.

“Our scholarships are incredibly important in restoring the status of craftsmanship and in supporting craftspeople who maintain and add to our heritage,” says QUEST chairman, Richard Watling.

QUEST was established in 1990 to celebrate the 150th anniversary of the Royal Warrant Holders Association and the 90th birthday of the late Queen Elizabeth, the Queen Mother. It awards scholarships every year to craftspeople of all ages who are involved in crafts ranging from silversmithing to boatbuilding. Churches in particular are benefiting from a new generation of QUEST scholars whose skills contribute to ecclesiastical decoration and conservation.

The charity is launching the QUEST 2012 Diamond Jubilee Appeal, aimed at doubling the number of annual scholarships. Distillers and royal warrant holder John Walker & Sons has pledged profits from the sale of a rare edition whisky, blended from those distilled in 1952 in a limited edition of 60 crystal decanters.

For details of QUEST scholarships and the appeal, visit www.quest.org.uk/appeal.html

A quest for craft

Work of heart

Mel Howse, a glass artist, used the QUEST scholarship to develop enamelling skills working on steel. “I had the ideas but lacked time and space to experiment in a new medium,” she says. “The scholarship gave me time to think about what I was doing and enabled me to rent space in an enamelling factory.”

One of her most recent works, Poverty Over, is a sculpture of two bowls in spun steel and vitreous enamels 2.2 metres high, commissioned by Christian Aid to publicise its Poverty Over campaign.

Howse sees herself as a contemporary designer, yet enjoys working in a traditional environment. She works with challenging topics. Her acid-etched memorial window to Father Trevor Huddleston in Lancing College Chapel, West Sussex, dedicated by his friend Archbishop Desmond Tutu in 2007, tackles the subject of apartheid. The scholarship enabled Howse to

The charitable arm of the Royal Warrant Holders Association supports skilled craftspeople and their work in preserving our heritage



Mel Howse, above and main, creates art using steel and glass



Bernard Johnson, above, carves lettering in to stone. Right, panel carving from an Eric Gill design



build relationships with other businesses that could help her create large-scale artwork. But its greatest value was to allow her to bring a new medium to the ecclesiastical arena. “It’s the first time that fired enamel on steel has been used in a church commission – I was making history.”

Carving a niche

After a publishing career with Oxford University Press, Bernard Johnson found his true vocation on a weekend course in stone carving. In 2005 he set up as a freelance stone carver and a year later, at the age of 52, won a QUEST scholarship for individual teaching from the eminent lettering craftsman Iuan Rees.

When six rough drawings by Eric Gill for carved marble capitals in Westminster Cathedral were rediscovered, Johnson got permission from

the cathedral to use them as the basis for a set of panel carvings. “It was a unique opportunity for me to get into the mind of a stone carver whom I admire enormously,” says Johnson. A donor has bought the panels which will be displayed in the University Church at Oxford.

A brush with history

Spike Barlow’s career changed direction thanks to a QUEST scholarship. A trained scientist, then one of the creative team behind television’s Spitting Image puppets, Barlow used QUEST funding to complete a PhD in paint conservation.

“My first conservation commissions were restoring the two oldest altarpieces in the country, Thornham Parva [Suffolk], dated 1330 and Westminster Abbey, painted in 1260 – so no pressure.

Working on them gave me a huge respect for the sophistication of medieval craftsmanship.”

His resulting book, *The Alchemy of Paint*, looks at the philosophy of medieval craft and Barlow now has a grant to survey the 500 surviving rood screens in East Anglia.

The write move

Sally Mangum, calligrapher and heraldic artist, learnt about QUEST scholarships when she became a royal warrant holder for her calligraphy work for the Lord Chamberlain’s office. It led her to study heraldic art. “The scholarship was a lifeline,” she says.

Then, in a natural progression, she agreed to become a trustee of QUEST. “Having benefited myself I saw how important scholarships could be to craftsmen desperate to expand their knowledge and expertise.”

Seal of approval

On the global stage, the royal warrant is seen as a mark of innovation, the finest quality and service...and good for the environment

By Widget Finn

From electric road sweepers to luxury cars, the royal warrant is seen worldwide as recognising innovation, and British export sales often benefit as a result.

For Peter Munnoch, technical sales director at Tennant UK (formerly known as Applied Sweepers), whose Green Machines sweep the Royal Mews at Buckingham Palace, the royal warrant effect is unquantifiable but undeniable.

“How do you differentiate your product from competitors? Eighty per cent of our



Mark of quality: Bentley’s State Limousine

business is export, and when I mention our royal warrant it registers as a plus. You can make all sorts of claims about your product – ours is the world’s first lithium ion phosphate suction sweeper – but it has earned Tennant a royal warrant because it’s a good machine with excellent after-sales service.”

At Bentley Motors, which sells to more than 50 countries, Richard Charlesworth claims that the biggest markets – US and China – quote the royal warrant as the reason they buy. “Chinese entrepreneurs regard it as the new must-have car,” says Charlesworth, who rejoices under the splendid job title of director of royal and VIP relations.

Bentley flies the British flag for luxury and performance, in one year delivering both a state limousine and a Le Mans winner. The company has a strong tradition of

Eighty per cent of our business is export and when I mention our royal warrant it registers as a plus – Peter Munnoch

apprenticeships and hand craftsmanship in wood veneering and hand-stitched leather with several generations of families working together.

Grundon Waste is a family firm, founded in 1929 by Stephen Grundon, the father-in-law of Frances Grundon, the current warrant holder. The company pioneers environmentally acceptable waste collection and new technologies to create energy from waste, but Frances Grundon is particularly proud of achieving a royal warrant. “In most people’s mind it is a subliminal seal of approval,” she says.