



THE ROYAL COLLECTION TRUST

Peter Carl Fabergé and the Fabergé firm

Peter Carl Fabergé was born in St Petersburg in 1846. Under his management, the House of Fabergé flourished from its modest beginnings as a family firm of silversmiths into one of the world's most prolific jewellers.

Carl Fabergé took over the management of his father's firm in 1872, having spent time in Europe completing apprenticeships in Frankfurt, Florence and Paris. He created several workshops in Moscow and St Petersburg, and at the height of the firm's success employed over 500 highly skilled craftsmen. In 1882 he came to the attention of Tsar Alexander III at the Pan-Russian Exhibition in Moscow and three years later was appointed as Imperial Goldsmith and Jeweller. In the same year, the Tsar commissioned Fabergé to create the first Imperial Easter Egg as a gift for Tsarina Maria Feodorovna. In total, Fabergé created 50 Imperial Easter Eggs – three of which are today in the Royal Collection.

The patronage of the Imperial Family and subsequently the British Royal Family was fundamental to the success of the firm, and Fabergé dealt personally with these important orders. Fabergé's flair for combining exquisite design and technical skill, and applying it to a vast range of desirable products, meant the firm soon became the most popular supplier of gifts for the wealthy elite. Premises opened in St Petersburg, and in 1903 a branch of the Fabergé firm was established in London, thanks to the patronage of King Edward VII and Queen Alexandra. King Edward VII's reign coincided with the most prolific and successful period in the firm's history, and between 1903 and 1915 the London branch sold over 10,000 objects.

The international success of Fabergé was not only dependent on royal patronage but also his ability to stay ahead of his many competitors. The firm used only the highest quality materials, and Fabergé continually developed new and unique styles and designs that set him apart from his contemporaries. The firm became internationally famous for intricately crafted miniature animals, trinkets, cigarette cases and jewelled Imperial Easter Eggs, however it continued to produce everyday silverware and to take on more modest commissions on demand. Fabergé was more concerned with ingenuity than value, and was reported to have said, 'Expensive things interest me little if the value is merely in so many diamonds or pearls'. His international acclaim was further affirmed in 1908, when he was appointed court jeweller and enameller to the King of Siam.

Following the Revolution in 1917, the Bolsheviks took control of the Fabergé firm and seized all stock, effectively closing the business down. Carl Fabergé fled Russia and died in Switzerland in 1920.

Fabergé's Workmasters

Head Workmasters

Erik Kollin (1836 -1901)

Erik August Kollin was born in Finland, where he completed his apprenticeship before travelling to St Petersburg. In 1858 he obtained a position in the workshop of the goldsmith August Holmström, who had been appointed principal jeweller by Gustav Fabergé in 1857. In 1870 Kollin opened his own workshop. He was made head workmaster by Fabergé two years later and held the post until 1886. Kollin is famous for his gold work.

Highlights of his work include

- A cup made before 1896 of a single piece of carved and polished banded agate. Originally belonging to Princess Mary Adelaide, Duchess of Teck (1833–97), it was inherited by her daughter, Queen Mary.
- A cup made in 1874 of red and yellow gold to imitate woven cloth. It is one of the earliest pieces of Fabergé in the Royal Collection. It was given to the Prince of Wales (later King George V) in 1874 by Marie Duchess of Saxe-Coburg-Gotha and stood on King George V's dressing table.
- Miniature Terrestrial Globe made rock crystal before 1896 and purchased by Tsar Nicholas II in 1897. It was subsequently owned by Prince Vladimir Galitzine, from whom Queen Mary purchased it in 1928.

Michael Perchin (1860 -1903)

Born in Petrosavodsk, Michael Perchin worked initially as a journeyman in the workshop of Erik Kollin. In 1884 he qualified as a master craftsman. His artistic potential must have been obvious to Fabergé, who appointed him head workmaster in 1886. Many new objects in gold and enamel that were elegant yet functional were produced in his workshop. His period as head workmaster is generally acknowledged to be the most artistically innovative, embracing a huge range of styles – from neo-rococo to Renaissance.

Highlights of his work include

- The Kelch Easter Egg, made in 1899 for Alexander Kelch, a wealthy Russian who commissioned a series of seven Easter eggs from Fabergé. This egg is the second of the series and bears the initials of Kelch's wife, Barbara.
- Coronation Vase, made between 1896 and 1903 of rock crystal. It was presented to King George V and Queen Mary on the day of their coronation, 22 June 1911.
- Miniature Grand Piano produced before 1896. The piano belonged originally to Tsarina Alexandra Feodorovna and was acquired by Queen Mary acquired between 1922 and 1931.

Henrik Wigström (1862 -1923)

Born in Tammisaari, Finland, Henrik Wigström was apprenticed to a local silversmith, Petter Madsen. He travelled to St Petersburg and in 1884 was taken on by Perchin as a journeyman, becoming his most valued assistant. When Perchin died in 1903, Wigström took on his workshop and Fabergé appointed Wigström head workmaster. The workshop continued to produce important commissions

and some of the firm's best cigarette cases and boxes, in Wigström's largely neo-classical style. Many of the hardstone animals and figures, and the flowers were produced in his workshop.

Highlights of his work include

- A study of a Chrysanthemum, presented to Queen Alexandra in December 1908 by Stanislas Poklewski-Koziell, a councillor at the Russian Embassy in London and a good friend of King Edward VII.
- Colonnade Imperial Easter Egg presented to Tsarina Alexandra Feodorovna by Tsar Nicholas II for Easter 1910 and acquired by Queen Mary in 1931 as a gift for King George V.

Other Workmasters and Highlights

Johan Viktor Aarne (1863 -1934)

- Silver-gilt and enamelled notebook case, presented to Queen Victoria from Tsar Nicholas II and Tsarina Alexandra Feodorovna in December 1896.

Karl Armfelt (1873-1959)

- Silver elephant bell push probably purchased by Tsarina Marie Feodorovna and given to Queen Alexandra.

August Hollming (1854-1913)

- Cigarette case of ribbed two-colour gold acquired by Queen Elizabeth for King George VI in 1949.

Anders Nevalainen (1858-1933)

- Lacquer frame with a photograph of Queen Alexandra produced between 1896 and 1908. Anders Nevalainen specialised in frames and enamelled objects.

Julius Rappoport (1864-1916)

- A large-scale kovsh (traditional Russian drinking vessel) produced before 1896 and mounted in silver-gilt in the form of a boat. Julius Rappoport became Fabergé's most important supplier of silver objects.

Feodor Rückert (1814-1917)

- Enamelled box, produced c.1908, and depicting an episode from the Tale of Tsar Sultan from a poem by Alexander Pushkin (1799–1837). The box was given to Queen Elizabeth by Wartski in May 1979. Feodor Rückert was Fabergé's chief enamellist in the Russian style.