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The Conway Stewart Tradition

One-hundred years ago, two former employees of the De La Rue company—Thomas Garner and Frank Jarvis, founded Conway Stewart.

Drawing from knowledge and experience gained while working for De La Rue, Garner and Jarvis, two entrepreneurs, took a great risk in leaving secured jobs to start a new enterprise reselling fountain pens made by other manufacturers. Initially, they focused on importing pens to England from America.

After an arduous month of persistent selling, the company reaped the rewards of a rather healthy turnover of more than £13 and 9 shillings.

This was a great accomplishment considering the rent for their business premises was only five shillings a week. Even though this turnover would be pleasing to many new ventures, the strength of De La Rue made it difficult for the company to succeed

selling no-name fountain pens.

In the same year, De La Rue reportedly invested £50,000 in a promotion campaign for its new launch—the Onoto. However, Garner and Jarvis soon recognized there was an audience desiring reliable writing instruments that were also affordable. This is when Conway Stewart began to capture a market among the English.

The 1920s was an excellent decade for the ambitious owners. Not only did the duo trademark the name of the business, Conway Stewart, but also the list of filling mechanisms grew to include eye-droppers, lever fillers, pump fillers and safety pens. While the first of these pens were almost indistinguishable from others of that period, by 1925 Conway Stewart was coming into its own in terms of design. A trademark for the name Dinkie was registered in 1924 along with a patent for a new locking lever mechanism. Conway Stewart was rapidly growing in popularity and demand. So much so that it was taking away market share from other dominant pen manufacturers.

Another introduction around this time was the use of brightly colored celluloid. In the 1920s, Conway Stewart offered dozens of colors in its various lines, and the customer could choose from either the simple and conservative, or the newest trendsetting styles. The pens of this period were of high quality yet remained affordable.



This reasonable pricing and successful marketing contributed to the success of Conway Stewart for the next decade. The company invested in new premises in 1927, which became its headquarters for 21 years. As the economic depression of the 1930s hit, Conway Stewart was in the enviable position of marketing pens that were considered "good value." Although this decade proved to be a low point for Conway Stewart in terms of profit, it was able to ride out the depression successfully.

Colorful plastics soon became a signature for Conway Stewart. It is interesting to note that the company did not designate titles for its patterned plastics. The names we recognize today have been adopted by collectors over the years. Examples are Cracked Ice, Reversed Cracked Ice and Tiger Eye, favorites which were used for many of the brand's models for over 25 years.

By the middle of the decade, Conway Stewart was ready to expand, and in 1935, it went public, offering shares to raise capital. Advertising campaigns managed to keep the name Conway Stewart in the forefront of the public mind, much like the advertising from Sheaffer, Parker and De La Rue.

The war years were no easier for Conway Stewart than for any other manufacturer in England. However, it managed to emerge ready to participate in a post-war boom. As the 1940s drew to an end, Conway Stewart was still offering the public good, reliable pens at reasonable prices and continued to prosper accordingly.

The company's models were now adorned with the famous diamond clip in place of the old ball clip, model names were phased out in favor of model numbers, except for the Dinkie. It is interesting to note that during the late 1940s, Conway Stewart used the same material to produce its 58 model as Montblanc did for the 146.

The 1950s proved to be a second "golden age" for Conway Stewart, since materials from this era are

eagerly sought after by today's collectors from around the world. For instance, the Herringbone pattern and many versions of marbled colors are popular today.

Even more notable is the No 22 Floral, with its flowered design set on a cream background. Today, 50 years after its launch, there are still many discussions concerning the Floral. Was production limited due to the complexity of the material or was the market not ready to accept such an exotic plastic? Either way, whenever a mint No. 22 Floral is on the market for sale, it always attracts interest.

The 1950s ushered in the era of injection molding for the manufacture of pens. This led to the use of solid colored plastics in place of the wonderful patterned celluloids. By 1957, the Conway Stewart line was represented with pens that, while still very reliable and well made, were not in the same league as previous models in terms of appearance. It was at this time that the first ballpoint pens were offered by Conway Stewart.

The 1950s provided the last of the great Conway Stewart models. The company began to stagnate through the 1960s as the market turned relentlessly towards the disposable ballpoint. Conway Stewart persevered in trying to keep up with the market trends with the release of a ball pen and also by launching the 106, a cartridge pen mounted with a semi-hooded nib. In the 1960s, the company was sold and relocated to Wales, where the last pen rolled off the



from far left—Conway Stewart No. 1206 in Reversed Cracked Ice, ca. 1936; No. 58 in gray crosshatch marble, ca. 1951; Duro in mottled red hard rubber, ca. 1920s.
at right—Conway Stewart No. 77s in Herringbone patterns, blue, green and red, all ca. 1955.
Photos by Bill Riepl.

production floor in 1975.

Collecting Conway Stewart pens can be a demanding but rewarding challenge. The numbering system used for the models is unlike that of any other major pen manufacturer. Normally model numbers relate to the various aspects of that individual model: size, filling system or nib size. The advertising of Conway Stewart shows that model numbers were issued randomly. Many times, the same model was designated with two different numbers, depending upon whether it was sold domestically or exported.

For the enthusiast, it can make identifying the Conway Stewart models difficult. But the pens can be divided into two groups: early pens and later celluloid pens. Finding early pens made of hard rubber can be more of a challenge. It is important to remember Conway Stewart pens were marketed as "everyday" writers. Thus, the original owners used them every day. Searching for an original Duro lever filler in mottled hard rubber in mint condition can be quite a quest and will not be as easy as

locating some later pens.

Of course, it's not necessarily a simple task to compile a complete collection of the later pens. Some of the celluloids are scarce and command a premium price today. The Herringbone pattern, in green, red and blue, for example, is considered quite desirable. Others, however, can be easier to locate and allow collectors the opportunity to enjoy vintage Conway Stewarts at an entry-level price. Conway Stewart collection opens the door to a world of vintage or colorful celluloid favorites. «

Author Mary Burke works in sales and development for Conway Stewart and Luxury Brands USA. Of collectible Conway Stewart pens, she says, "My personal favorites of their signature celluloids are Herringbone in every color; mottled hard rubber in red and black; black lined olive green; floral and of course, the famous Cracked Ice." Photos by Bill Riepl. For further information on this brand, telephone 877.707.4681 or visit <www.conwaystewart.co.uk>.

BY MARIE A. PICON

Conway Stewart Now

The year 2005 marks the one-hundredth anniversary of British brand Conway Stewart, and the penmaker is celebrating with a number of new offerings representing its highest achievement to date. The 100 Series, an ivory casein version of which is featured on the cover of this issue, is named for the brand's centenary. Less obviously linked to the anniversary but even more exquisite are several offer-



The Conway Stewart 18 Carat Gold Barley Corn fountain pen.

ings in Conway Stewart's 18 Carat Gold Collection. These limited edition series have barrels and caps crafted of gold then finished in several different styles.

Perhaps the purest interpretation of this theme is the Barley Corn pen, featuring the traditional all-over engraving, broken only by an engraveable cartouche, a wide band engraved with the maker's name at the cap lip and an 18 karat gold nib. Production is limited to 50 pieces, as it is for each of the models in this collection, and the list price is US\$9,000.

The newest addition to



from above—The Conway Stewart Centenary; the Floral Rose; the Steinway special edition.

the collection is the Centenary, embellished with a patchwork of hand-applied enamel over guilloché. The champlevé technique is used to isolate each color. Also fitted with an 18 karat gold nib and limited in production, the pen is valued at US\$18,000.

The Floral Rose features a hand-painted floral design in opaque enamel over a gold base. A filigree band in a modified Greek key pattern adorns the cap. Another member of the 18 Carat Gold Collection, this pen sells for US\$18,000.

Also this year, Conway Stewart is producing a number of limited editions in conjunction with world renowned companies. One such special edition is

the Conway Stewart Steinway, honoring the makers of the Steinway piano and celebrating the shared traditions of the two companies. Based on Conway Stewart's Churchill pen, the Steinway pen is black with 18 karat gold fittings and nib. The crown of the cap is marked with the Steinway & Sons logo. The lever-filled pen is offered at US\$575.

As the year progresses, we can be sure to see more from Conway Stewart, now headed by managing director Glenn Jones in the UK and distributed in the US by Luxury Brands, USA. And, of course, the next century holds limitless possibility. «



Photo: Bill Riépal