

George Wintle or Gabriel Wirgman? **an article by Graham Hodges**

The maker's mark "GW" is often seen on silver sugar tongs dating between 1786 and 1812. More often than not this mark is attributed to George Wintle. In fact there was another silversmith of this period who, I suggest, also made sugar tongs, Gabriel Wirgman.

The purpose of this article is to discuss the two makers and attempt to draw a distinction between them. The main source for the maker's marks described is Grimwade.¹ From an examination of a wide range of sugar tongs, dating from 1786 onwards, I have come to the conclusion that the rectangular punch "GW" is in fact Gabriel Wirgman's mark, whilst the script and oval punch marks are George Wintle's. Grimwade records a number of "GW" marks, but only two in a rectangular punch:

- No. 922 attributed to Gabriel Wirgman, registered on 22nd June 1772.
- No. 925 attributed to George Wintle, registered on 15th May 1813.

Grimwade also records three buckle-makers with marks in a rectangular punch:

- George Webster, 1782 and 1794
- George Wood, 1787
- George Whitaker, 1794 and 1798

We cannot completely discount these makers, as buckle-makers sometimes did make sugar tongs.

Gabriel Wirgman

Gabriel Wirgman's will was proved on 23rd September 1791. This means his work theoretically spans the 19 years between 1772 and 1791. I have seen sugar tongs with the rectangular "GW" punch dating up to 1792/93. This is nearly two years after Gabriel Wirgman died. There is a good explanation for this. The Wirgmans owned a shop, described as a toy shop. Gabriel's brother Peter was involved in the family business and was described as a "working jeweler and goldsmith". It would therefore not be very surprising to find Peter selling sugar tongs from his shop some two years after his brother had died.



Gabriel Wirgman maker's mark, dated c1786 - 1790

Gabriel Wirgman's tongs are all bright cut, tending to have attractive, elaborate patterns which extend into the bowls. They are not particularly distinguishable from tongs by other Georgian makers of the period.



Gabriel Wirgman, c1786 – 1790

Unfortunately I have two pairs of tongs that are a potential problem! These two pairs of tongs are dated 1791/92 and 1792/93 and are identical. The difficulty is that one pair is marked with the rectangular punch and one with the oval punch. There are two possible explanations for this:

1. Both the maker's marks are from the same maker, which would be George Wintle. This would mean that all of the tongs identified as made by Gabriel Wirgman were in fact made by George Wintle and that Gabriel Wirgman did not make sugar tongs, or
2. They were made by the two different makers, but were in fact made the same, either through both makers following the same pattern, or by them sending the tongs to an out-worker, who made them to the same pattern. If this is the case then the theory that Gabriel Wirgman's mark is in a rectangular punch and George Wintle's in an oval punch still stands up.

George Wintle

George Wintle was one of the most prolific of all of the makers of this period. He registered his first mark on 2nd January 1787 and other marks are recorded by Grimwade up to 1823. On 17th February 1813 he was tried at the Old Bailey for forging hallmarks on his work.² He was found not guilty. At the time, the business was largely being run by James, George's son. Of the items discovered at the shop there were Salt ladles, Forks, Tea spoons, Salt spoons, Mustard spoons, Caddy ladles, Tea tongs, Table spoons, Ladles and Gravy spoons. The final part of the trial is of particular interest as George Wintle stated that "For the last three years and a half I mostly resided in the country; my business has been left to my son and my servants". This indicates that George Wintle was probably not actually running the business after about 1809. This is despite him having theoretically registered marks in 1813, 1818, 1820 and 1823. This is up to 13 years after he had retired to the country.

In examining George Wintle tongs, we see the complete range, with nothing particularly distinguishable to enable us to tell his tongs apart from many other Georgian makers.

George Wintle entered several different maker's marks. In date order, George Wintle's marks are:

1787 – 1790	script mark
1790	incuse mark
1791 – 1801	oval mark, with a pellet
1801 – 1823	oval mark, without a pellet

1813 – 1823 rectangular mark

On 7th October 1790 he also entered an incuse mark.



Incuse mark 7th October 1790 to 27th February 1791

Apart from one pair of tongs shown below, all tongs with a date letter have the oval maker's mark and all those with no date letter have the script maker's mark. Given this, it would be strange for George Wintle to have used the rectangular punch [at the same time](#) as using the oval punch or the script punch. This seems to suggest that perhaps the rectangular punch was in fact Gabriel Wirgman's as previously suggested. The script mark was registered on 2nd January 1787 and lasted until 7th October 1790. There are two versions of the mark. I cannot be certain about which of the two marks came first, however the first mark is on a pair of beaded tongs, (marked in the bowls), so I have assumed these are earlier.



mark 1 - c1787 - 1788

A second script maker's mark was registered on 25th June 1789 and it has some very distinct differences. The loop of the "G" does not cross over the vertical stroke and the loop of the "W" forms a complete circle. There is also an extra small stroke to the left of the "W".



mark 2 - c1789 - 1790

George Wintle used the script maker's mark up to 1790 and the oval mark from 1791 onwards. The oval mark was registered on 28th February 1791. This was three months before the date letter was introduced on sugar tongs. I have just one pair of tongs that have the oval maker's mark and no date letter. These tongs must therefore be dated between 28th February 1791 and 29th May 1791.



George Wintle 28th February 1791 to 29th May 1791

The first oval mark, with a pellet, was registered on 28th February 1791. ^(mark 3)
On 6th December 1794 the mark was changed to being a mark without a

pellet. ^(mark 4) This mark lasted through to some time between 1798 and 1799. Some tongs with the date letter “G” have this mark and some have a new mark. In 1798/99 the maker’s mark was changed. This new mark was a much bolder and clearer mark in a slightly longer, narrower oval punch. ^(mark 5) At some point between 30th May 1800 and 4th May 1801, he reverted to a very similar mark to one used earlier. ^(mark 6) Then on 4th May 1801 another new mark appeared. This mark has a pellet. ^(mark 7) On 14th December 1804, he switched back to the mark without a pellet. ^(mark 6) This mark appears to have been used through to the end of his career, although in the later years it has a mottled background, perhaps due to excessive wear. The latest pair of tongs that I have seen with George Wintle’s mark are dated 1812/13. This pair of tongs has an oval mark. Given that we know that George had handed over his shop to James in around 1809, it is reasonable to assume that there are actually no tongs with George’s mark after 1812.



mark 3 - 1791



mark 4 - 1795



mark 5 - 1798



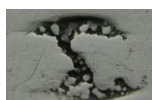
mark 6 - 1801



mark 7 - 1802



1804



1812

George Wintle's tongs are very similar to those of other makers of the period. His earlier tongs tend to be bright cut, with occasional pairs of plain or flared tongs. From 1806 he produced more plain tongs until by 1810 he was producing nothing but plain tongs. This is completely in keeping with most other makers.

I therefore conclude that the maker's mark "GW", if in script form or in an oval punch, will be that of George Wintle. If it is a rectangular punch then it will be Gabriel Wirgman. I believe that there is some doubt over the validity of the maker's mark identified in Grimwade, (No. 925), on the basis that George Wintle had retired to the country by 1809. Did his son James register his father's mark? Was there another son, George, registering marks between 1813 and 1823? Was there another maker altogether with a mark of "GW"? I would be very interested if any other experts have a range of George Wintle's work, dated between 1812 and 1823, or whether anyone has definitive evidence regarding the use of the "GW" maker's mark in a rectangular punch.

This article has focused wholly on sugar tongs. Perhaps from an examination of some of George Wintle's other work, we can obtain a few more facts.

¹ London Goldsmiths 1697 – 1837, their marks and lives, by Arthur G Grimwade.

² www.oldbaileyonline.org, 16 November 2005, February 1813, trial of George Wintle (t18130217-39).