

Skyenner Cup



A silver urn given to Commander Skyenner (1762-1846) by the people of Malta for his contributions in the Napoleonic Wars. The urn is graced with the intricate features of a sculpted silver figurine of a woman clutching an albatross in one arm, a laurel wreath extended from the other hand, and surrounded by various nautical paraphernalia. The two handles are formed by entwined snakes, complete with the details of every scale on their bodies. Medallions of the English rose, the Scottish thistle and the Irish shamrock encircle the rim, while the base is decorated with acanthus leaves. The inscription on the urn reads: 'This piece of Plate is humbly inscribed to LIEUTENANT JOHN SKYNNER late Commanding His Majesty's Brig of War HIRONDELLE by the Merchants and Others residing in the Island of Malta as a token of respect for his very meritorious conduct and unremitted attention to the numerous Convoys under his charge while in the MEDITERRANEAN'.

The hallmarks on the silver urn date it to 1808, at which point it appears that Skyenner was on half-pay. The urn was made by the small silversmith firm of James Ede and Alexander Hewat of London. This partnership was registered in the silversmith guild on December 10, 1808 and only lasted until 1810. John Skyenner (1762-1846) was born in England in 1762 to a family steeped in the traditions of the Royal Navy; both his father and grandfather had been high ranking officers. From 1802 until at least 1807, Skyenner was stationed in the Mediterranean, with command of his own vessel after 1804. The Hirondele was a fast-sailing French privateer which had racked up many prizes in the Indian Ocean before being captured. During the Napoleonic wars, protection of the East India fleets was paramount to the British economy. In the Mediterranean, the attacks on convoys from hostile privateers was so insistent that the British fleet was hard pressed to provide the necessary escorts and to keep the whole complicated convoy system in smooth running order. Skyenner immigrated to Upper Canada in 1839 and made their home in The Anchorage, a comfortable and stylish cottage on the shores of Lake Ontario. The property itself had belonged to the Jarvis family who had used the protected waters as a shipping point for goods to and from York (Toronto) and Niagara.

For information on John Skyenner, see: O'BYRNE'S NAVAL BIOGRAPHICAL DICTIONARY, 1849.