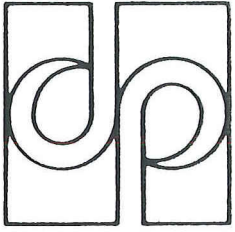


G

ACN



de tinnegieterij

dépendance historisch museum 'de dubbelde palmboom'

zakkendragershuisje, voorstraat 13/15, rotterdam, tel.010-4772664

POOR MAN'S SILVER

Pewter

Pewter was already known to the Egyptians and the Chinese more than 5000 years ago. In Europe its chief component, tin, was first used in the Bronze Age (1500 B.C.), while the Greeks and Romans also made use of this material, which does not have too high a melting-point and is easy to cast and mould.

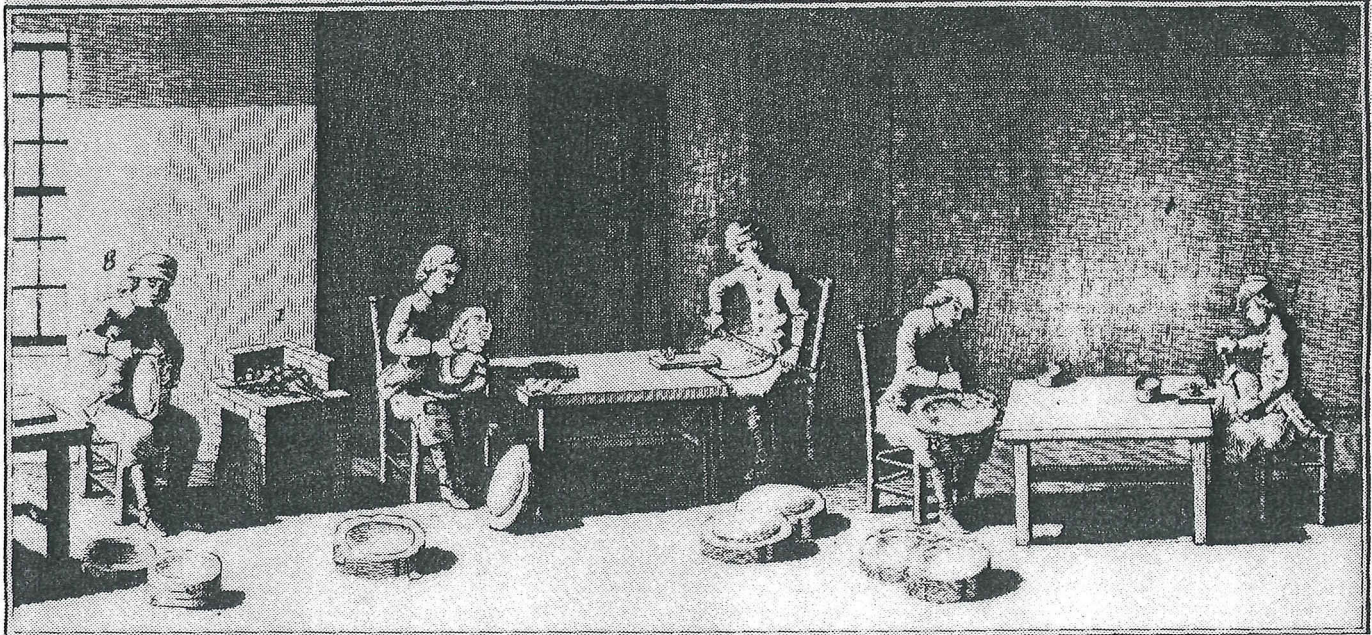
In this country it was not until the Middle Ages that pewter objects began to be made on a large scale. At first they were mainly things like candlesticks and holy-water stoups for churches, but before long utensils such as wine and beer flagons, plates, bowls and dishes were being produced for domestic use. Pewter rapidly became popular as it was cheaper than silver, copper and brass and, unlike pottery, unbreakable. The tin was imported in blocks and bars from England and Germany where the ore was mined.

The guilds

Once several pewterers had set up in the same town, competition arose between them, leading them to try to sell their wares as cheap as possible. This could result in a decline in the quality of pewter objects, something that town councils tried to prevent in the interests of trade. Thus as soon as there were enough pewterers a guild was established, as was customary for other crafts as well, and each pewterer was then obliged to belong to it. The officers of the guild were chosen from among the members by the town council. Their duty was to see to it that the members abided by the rules and to this end the pewterers were required to mark all their products. From these marks, struck in the rims of plates or flagons with the aid of a marking hammer, it can be seen who made the object and what quality of pewter was used for it. At the town hall was kept a lead touchplate on which the marks or touches of all the local pewterers were struck. The officers or assay-masters of the

Art du Potier d'Étain

Pl. III.



The finishing of objects

Engraving from: 'Art du potier-d'étain par M.Salmon, marchand portier-d'Étain à Chartres. Paris 1785

guild conducted a search from time to time to find out whether the quality of the pewter was being impaired by too copious an addition of lead. If there is too much lead in pewter, its quality is less good and it can also constitute a danger to health.

In the guild's strong-box were kept pieces of pewter of various qualities. These were the assize or standard and each pewterer was given samples to ensure that he had a proper knowledge of the different grades.



Some pewter marks: the mark on the left is that of the Rotterdam pewterer J. Druy

The essay

Anyone who wanted to become a pewterer had first to spend a specified time as an apprentice to a master-pewterer from whom he learned the trade, while generally being taken into the master's house as a member of his family. When the period of apprenticeship was over, it was time for the essay. This was a sort of examination which usually involved making a mould and then casting an object in it. For example, a Rotterdam apprentice had to make a mould for a plate or a wine flagon and then cast the plate or flagon and finish it off.

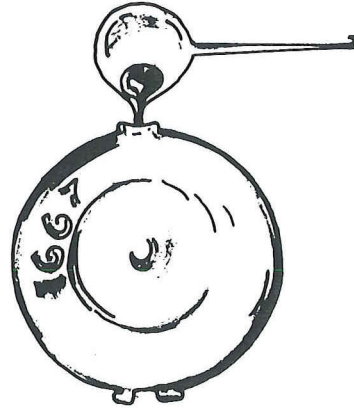
If the apprentice was successful, he was then allowed to set up on his own as a master-pewterer. However, a substantial sum had to be paid to the guild for this privilege, so many pewterers went to work for a master as journeymen.

Casting

Pewter is cast with the aid of a simple iron furnace on which a casting-pan is set. Pure tin is too soft and thus other metals, including lead, have to be added to it. Because lead is much cheaper than tin, pewterers have always tried to add more than the stipulated amount, so giving rise to the disadvantages already mentioned.

When the alloy has reached a temperature of around 400° centigrade, it is ready for casting. Since about 1550 moulds made of bronze have mostly been used for this. For simple objects like spoons and plates moulds consisting of two parts

suffice, but for flagons and suchlike a number of moulds are needed, the handle, lid, spout and other parts all being cast separately and soldered to the body of the vessel. After casting, irregularities on the object are removed with a chisel and it is then burnished.



The hot, molten pewter is cast in a mould (a plate mould)

The Zakkendragershuisje (Porters' House) is a restored historical building in old Delfshaven with a pewterer's workshop in operation and a display of bronze moulds, pewterers' hammers, marks, stamps and so forth.

Hours of opening:

Tuesday - Saturday: 10 a.m. - 5 p.m.

Sunday and public

holidays: 11 a.m. - 5 p.m.

Demonstrations of pewter casting.

Pewter objects for sale,



Tile-picture in the Porters' House