The

PEWTER COLLECTORS' CLUB

of AMERICA

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PEWTER IN AMERICA, ITS MAKERS AND THEIR MARKS. *By* LEDLIE IRWIN LAUGHLIN, Vol. I, pp. 1-xviii, 1-139; frontispiece and pls. I - LVIII; vol. 2, pp. 1-242, frontispiece and pls. LIX - LXXVIII; quarto. Houghton Mifflin Company, Boston, Dec. 1940. $25.00.

It was well worth waiting for. After perusing these volumes the reason for the delay is readily seen. Mr. Laughlin had undertaken an endless task, for new information is coming to light constantly, and as long as the stream flowed, there was no particular stopping place. Let us hope that he regards this merely as a report of progress, albeit a monumental one, and that he will report again when he reaches a convenient landing.

It is difficult to characterize so voluminous a treatise, but Mr. Laughlin has done for the United States what Mr. H. H. Cotterell did for Great Britain in "Old Pewter, Its Makers and Its Marks." Both books stress the evolution of the pewterers' industry in their respective areas, the evolution of the forms of the various products, the names of the producers, and the touch-marks by which they are recognized. Since Mr. Laughlin's field is somewhat smaller in time, if not space relations, he has been able to include much more biographical data, and therefore to make a book which is excellent reading, as well as a standard for reference.

Forty-three of the 80 splendid plates show the various articles made by American pewterers, and 27 illustrate the best preserved touches that have so far been found. Although some are not as clear as we should like, when we realize that the touch was impressed on the rough casting, before it was skimmed and polished, and later suffered all the vicissitudes of use and cleaning, it is a wonder that so many are as legible as they actually are.

Mr. Laughlin obviously makes a class distinction between the sheep, pewterers who cast their products in molds, and the goats, britannia workers who spun their metal into shape. The sheep get all the first volume and all but 27 pages of the second. Mr. Kerfoot's little group of "transition workers" lose their special position and are taken into one of the other groups, becoming sheep, if like the Boardmans, they were dominantly pewterers, or herding with the goats, if like the Trasks and Gleason, they worked chiefly in thin metal. But even the goats fare better than the pewter-button makers, who do not get in at all. Proper credit for improvement is,

however, given, for the pewtering sons of the button-making Samuel Yale are included among the sheep.

The book begins with most courteous pages of acknowledgements for help rendered. There, among many others, are the names of 24 members of the Pewter Club. We are certainly glad that we could help. This is followed by a brief discussion of English pewter, and the chief problem of the pre-Revolutionary American makers, that of raw materials. Tin was not to be had on this continent, and the English Pewterers' Company was strongly opposed to its exportation. It is concluded that the earlier makers were dependent upon scrap pewter for their work, which goes far to explain the scarcity of colonial wares at the present time.

Chapter 3 admirably describes the making of hollowware and sadware. It contains information which has been greatly needed. The author acknowledges the help of Mr. Lauritz E. Eichner, our fellow member craftsman, and it is illustrated by plates reproduced from a French treatise of 1788, loaned by Mr. J. Ritchie Kimball. Every member of the Club will enjoy and profit by careful study of text and plates. How one would like to have his pick from the rubbish heaps in figure 1, plate 1!

Next come chapters on marks on pewter, and pewter-making in America, followed by two on the various articles made of this metal. The various types of plates, dishes, basins, and porringers are first described, then the tankards, pots, measures and beakers, all illustrated with beautiful pictures of the most perfect specimens in many collections. The pages on spoons, ladles, and dippers remind us of the extreme scarcity of marked American specimens of this sort, which is equally true of members of the next category, coffee and teapots, creamers and sugar bowls. To get a good representation it has been necessary for the author to relax a bit and let a little britannia-like material creep in.

The pages on ecclesiastical pewter illustrate the best and most dignified articles ever made in this metal in America. The reviewer had always thought the Peter Young chalices the optimum till he saw the cups on plate 25. Now he is inclined to waver,—but of course the cups should be silver.

Beginning with page 46, the author takes up the pewterers themselves, inserting a short biographical sketch of each. If any of their products are known, he figures the touch or touches in case more than one has been found. Even a cursory perusal of these pages gives an idea of the tremendous labor which has gone into research for their preparation. Months have been spent in libraries and record offices all the way from Maine to Georgia. Anyone who has done any genealogical work knows how elusive biographical facts are, and how often one has to go back to the same records as new clues are found, or new surmises occur to one. Pewter-history is everlastingly indebted to Mr. Laughlin for his skill, patience, and the logical workings of his orderly mind.

The subject is taken up geographically. Massachusetts Bay comes first, since it has the distinction of having had four pewterers as early as 1640.

The extraordinary number of 54 men is listed, although some journeymen, who had no shops or touches of their own are included. Nevertheless, there remains much for our local members to do, for the work of only 8 of these 54 is known. In fact, we must needs blush a little, for plates of three of the 8 pewterers, John Carnes, Thomas Simpkins, and David Cutler, have recently been discovered by men who are not residents of New England.

Since Massachusetts' plates are widely distributed among members, it may be of interest to mention a few of the new facts. Perhaps the most striking thing is that poor old "Semper Eadem," after being almost tied up, has gone adrift again, and what is as bad, has dragged all but one of the known pieces of Robert Boyle of New York with him. Mrs. Stephen S. Fitz Gerald is partly responsible, for she found a plate with both the R.B. and Semper Eadem touches, and Mr. Laughlin partly, for he found that the Boston scroll touch which was used by Badger and Richard Austin really belonged originally to the earlier David Cutler. I won't tell you the whole plot; you'll want to read it yourself. Among other local hits are that Nathaniel Austin was not a goldsmith, Mary Jackson and Paul Revere were not pewterers, nor was Thomas Badger, Sr.

The section on Rhode Island brings out little that is new to those who have followed the writings of Kerfoot, Charles Calder, Myers, and Madelaine R. Brown, but it is nice to get the connected and corrected story together.

The pewterers of the Connecticut Valley receive the last 38 pages of volume 1, which is little enough space when we realize that they cover an area from Taunton, Mass., to Buffalo, N. Y., by way of Springfield and Castleton, Vermont. But this is really the fault of the Danforths, and even as it is, only a part of their influence is included in this section. The author probably thought that the amount already in print concerning this family justified his compression of the story, but he could write a book about it, and we hope he will. He seems to have unraveled all the snarls in which the various Danforth touches were entangled, and gives a clear account of the relationships both within that family and to the Boardmans. I regret to say he has almost convinced me that we do not know the touch of Thomas I. Mr. Myers rather jeered at the Boardmans, but Mr. Laughlin welcomes them wholeheartedly into the sheepfold, although he admits he has seen one teapot of their production which he deplores. To the Danforth-Boardmans and their trainees he gives full credit for the beginnings of quantity production and distribution, even though it led to britannia ware and electroplating.

New York City starts the second volume, and with 6 pages on Albany, occupies the first 34 pages. New York, like Boston, has some pewterers whose products are still to be sought, but much more of her pre-Revolutionary pewter is known than is the case with the latter city. And a brave showing her magnificent tankards make. In American collections they occupy the place of the Stuart tankards among the English, and entitle the Bassetts to the appellation of the aristocrats of American pewterdom.

The pewterers of Pennsylvania receive 35 pages, the Germanic influence upon William Will and Christopher Heyne being perhaps the most interesting topic. More is known about Simon Edgell and his pewter than in Mr. Myers' day; Thomas Byles plates are tentatively identified; and the Hera mystery solved. It turns out that Hera was not their name at all, but I must not reveal this plot either. Incidentally, have you heard that B. Barns was Blakslee Barns, and that he came from Connecticut?

Sixteen pages suffice to tell of the pewterers of the South, that is, from Baltimore to Augusta. Pewter seems never to have been popular in the South; not even the Connecticut yankees were able to make it so. The highlights of this section are the Copeland spoon and the plates and molds of John Philip Reich of Wachovia, North Carolina.

Having finished the biographical section, the author returns to general topics. A new idea, tending toward the solution of the "initialed porringers" problem is advanced and unidentified touches are figured, with suggestions as to probable ascriptions. All but one of Kerfoot's unidentified eagles have been disposed of, but some new ones have cropped up.

Then comes the Britannia Period, the makers listed alphabetically, with sketches of their touches, if known. Brief biographical notes accompany most of the names. And here among the goats, are the names of the transition workers, so if one wishes, he can separate the "simon pures" from the partially contaminated. The accompanying plates show candlesticks, lamps, pitchers, and teapots. The reviewer is complimented that Mr. Laughlin has accepted the designation of tall teapot in place of coffee-pot.

The thanks of all collectors are due to Mr. Laughlin for having the courage to publish descriptions of the faked touches known to him, and photographs of some of them. The Bassett and Badger ones we are most apt to see around Boston, but we are likely to encounter others. This chapter alone might save one more than the price of the book.

Next is an essay on the cleaning of pewter, followed by one full of suggestions for the collector, and a couple of paragraphs on unsolved problems.

Appendix 1 is what we have needed for years, a check list of all men who are known to have made pewter, britannia, or block tin in America before 1850. It occupies 14 pages, and gives the location of the shop and the approximate working dates. I have probably spent a thousand dollars worth of time in the past 15 years looking up just such things. Now it is possible to look up one per minute.

Appendix 2 contains inventories of the contents of the shops of representative pewterers, a most informative set of lists.

Then follows the Bibliography, which really consists of references which in a less handsomely gotten up book, would have been put at the bottoms of the pages. One will find there the topics and pewterers in the order in which they appear in the main body of the text.

At the end are three indexes, one to the symbols and initials in the early touch marks, one to the makers of pewter whose products are shown in the plates, and finally, a general index.

It is a splendid piece of work. Painstaking search and research have produced trustworthy information which is admirably condensed and clearly and interestingly presented. It is beautifully illustrated, and the publishers can well be proud of it as a piece of book-making. The proof reading is unusually good, although there are a very few of the usual slips which rise up to plague authors.

—PERCY E. RAYMOND.

WHAT IS A PORRINGER?

Collectors of pewter do not give this subject a thought, for they know the answer. But students of English silver tell us that what we call a porringer is a bleeding bowl, and they assign the name porringer to deep, bowl-like cups with two vertically placed handles. This is the sort of vessel more commonly known as a caudle cup or posset cup.

It is difficult to get much information about porringers in any one place, or to find actual descriptions of them in old records. However, it is possible to draw some inferences from the entries printed in Welch's "History of the Pewterers' Company," and from certain other sources. The word porringer itself is a relatively modern one which seems to have appeared first at about the middle of the 16th century. It is, however, obviously a derivative of the earlier word pottenger or potenger, which came from the French *potage,* and its derivative, *potager.* In the early days potage was something cooked in a pot, hence of soupy consistency. The ingredients were highly variable, as may be seen by consulting the oldest known English cookbook, which dates from 1390. In general, a potage had a liquid base, to which was added herbs (vegetables) or herbs and pieces of meat. A pottenger, then, must have had a basin-like form.

The first reference to what we now call a porringer in the archives of the Pewterers' Company is in the Norman-French version of the ordinances of 1348. The word used there is *esquelles,* which is the old French form of *écuelles,* a term now translated as porringer, but which may originally have been applied to various types of basins. We know, however, that as early as 1453 *escuelles a oreilles,* eared basins, are mentioned, and Viollet-le-Duc has figured a specimen which, from the style of the figures on the handles, he believed to be of the 14th century.

The next reference in the English records is in the ordinances of 1438, where we read "That ther be no conterfete that cometh out of lundon but it be well and sufficiantly bete." In the same ordinance, "counterfete salers" (salts) are mentioned. From that time there are various references to "dysshis countfete," "new fascioned counterfeit vessels," etc., down to 1618, when the inventory of Sir R. Putllett lists "7 old counterfett dishes." No one would have any idea what was meant by these expressions were it not

for the fact that the inventory of the Cell of Stanlowe in 1537 mentions "counterfettes, otherwise called podingers of pewter." Why this extraordinary name was ever applied to porringers has never been explained. Even Welch had no idea what it meant.

Potenger first appears in the records of the Company in the statutes of Henry VIII, 1512/3, but was undoubtedly in use before that time. It occurs in the form pottinger in 1572, which is the last use that I have noticed. Evidently at about this time it gave place to porringer. This word is used in the inventory of the Archbishop of Canterbury's possessions in 1575, and Harrison employs it in his description of England written at about that time and published from 1577-1587. From this period onward, porringer is the word generally used.

There is nothing in the records to indicate the shape of a counterfett, pottinger, or porringer; but as early as 1484 an "erde (eared) dyssh" is mentioned. In 1556/7 it was ordered that henceforth "any Eare Disshes fflower delices (fleurs de lis) or any other manner of Eares" should have the ears cast in the same mold with the body, and not soldered on. In 1560/1, "earemasers" are mentioned, that is, drinking bowls with ears. Since silver-mounted wooden mazers of the period are preserved, this gives one a good idea of the form of the ear dish.

Fortunately there is ample evidence that ear dishes and what we call porringers are the same things. The last entry in the Company records using the form "ear dish" is in 1595/6, when two pewterers were accused of using false metal. In one entry the goods in question are listed as "eare dyshes beakers & godderdes," and in the other as "porrengers beakers & godderdes," showing that the names were interchangable. Moreover, in the list of pewterware of 1612/3, under the heading "Porringrs," we have the following classification of them: "Great eared porringrs, Greate flower de luce, Small (flower de luce); The three leafe grasse eare; Great ringe, Middle, and Small." What the ring porringers were, I cannot say, but the other three kinds were eared dishes, among them the fleur-de-lis type mentioned in 1556-7. The "three leafe grasse eare" was undoubtedly a trefoil handle, specimens of which have survived, but I have seen no specimen or picture of a fleur-de-lis handle.

In 1673/4 a new table of weights for various pewter articles was adopted, in which we find the first mention of bleeding bowls. Porringers are here grouped in five categories, as follows: Great pintes, to weight 9 lbs. per doz., small pints 7½ lb. Bosse, six sizes, from 7 down to 2 lbs. per dozen, Ordinary blood porringers, 1½ lb. per doz. Guinney, 3½ lb. per doz. Great, middle and small corded, 9, 8, and 6¼ lbs. respectively.

Although this list is only moderately helpful, it is interesting as showing that not all porringers were bleeding bowls, since they represent only one of the thirteen kinds and sizes then made. What the bleeding bowls could have been, if they weighed only two ounces apiece, it is difficult to imagine. A Richard Lee 2¾ inch porringer weighs two ounces, and holds

two ounces. A bleeding of two ounces or less was hardly the practice in 1674. I am inclined to think that there was a mistake made in copying these weights, for the two 17th century specimens in the Victoria and Albert Museum are at least 4 inches in diameter and could not weigh less than 12 ounces apiece. Bosse porringers were obviously the popular ones at the time, being made in six sizes. This is the type which was adopted in America, and of course gets its name from the raised boss in the bottom of the bowl. The plain basin type seem to have been called a booge porringer. John Pettiver was summoned on Sept. 22, 1680/1 for having the ears of his "booge" porringers run on with pale, and promised to have them burned on in the future. What the great corded or Guinney porringers were I cannot learn. "Guinie basons" were made in six sizes at the time, and Guinney porringers were probably made by adding ears to them. The name suggests that they were made for trading purposes.

The net result of this investigation, which should be pursued further, is the conclusion that most, if not all of the pottingers, counterfetts, and porringers mentioned in the records of the Pewterers' Company were ear dishes, that is, shallow bowls with horizontal handles. Whether one or two ears were present there is no evidence. No actual specimens of English pewter porringers older than the second half of the 17th century are known. Almost all those of that particular period have but one handle. Indeed Mr. H. H. Cotterell once said that he had never seen an English porringer with two handles, but in later years he had to retract this, for a dozen or so have turned up, mostly lidded porringers in the fashion of the French *écuelles a boullion*. Blood porringers are graduated inside to enable the physician to know how much blood he is letting. Except for specimens made within the past fifty years they are rare in pewter, and Mrs. Yves Henry Buhler tells me they are practically unknown in silver.

How the caudle and posset cups got the name of porringer I cannot learn. Caudle cups of two kinds, one with "joints" and one with "rings" were being made by the pewterers in 1612/3, and were listed separately from the porringers. I doubt if the pewterers ever confused the two types of vessel.

—Percy E. Raymond.

CANADIAN PEWTER

Some of the members will be interested to know that Professor Ramsay Traquair has included a short account of the pewterers in his book "The Old Silver of Quebec" just published by The Macmillan Company of Canada, 70 Bond St., Toronto. Price $4.00.

Mr. John P. Remensnyder, 45 Elm Ave., Metuchen, N. J., is collecting information about marked pieces of American brass, copper, and bell metal. He will be glad to hear from any of the members who know of specimens.

Mr. Ledlie I. Laughlin has been good enough to present a copy of "Pewter in America" to the Club. It is a notable addition to our small but growing library.

At the November meeting, the President mentioned the fact that Mr. Wheelock deplored the use of the word "flatware" to designate plates and dishes. Technically he is correct, for the pewterers themselves refer to such articles as "sadware." In this class they include also basins and bowls, which can hardly be called flat. As Mr. Laughlin states in his book hollowware consists of vessels which have to be built up by soldering together parts cast separately. Sadware would be a useful term, but unfortunately it has become obsolete and is not found in the popular dictionaries. On the other hand, the term flatware is apparently being broadened to include flat pieces of any material, as may be seen by consulting a dictionary. One will note that Mr. Laughlin felt forced to use this word, although he mentioned sadware as an alternative term.