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To my friend B. Dubbe
It is always a joy to quote from his works
(vide note 6.)

Hans

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OVERDRUK

VRIENDENBOEK A. J. BERNET KEMPERS

AANGEBODEN DOOR DE
„VERENIGING VRIENDEN VAN HET NEDERLANDS OPENLUCHTMUSEUM”

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The Soup Bowl, the Brandy Bowl and the Porringer

One has only to order a simple thing like soup to realise that ways of serving food in restaurants vary considerably. Admittedly, in some eating places, usually the least pretentious variety, the crockery has, in the course of time, been simplified to the point where one type of cup does duty for any hot liquid, whether it be coffee, tea or soup, the form selected being that considered handiest and cheapest by the proprietor. But there are plenty of restaurants where a much greater diversity still obtains, coffee being served in tall cups with one handle, tea in shallower, wider ones, and soup in still wider cups or bowls with two handles or ears. These two-eared bowls in particular still figure in the inventory of many a Dutch household nowadays, and they are often still included by young engaged couples in their wedding-present lists (fig. 1). Nevertheless there is no denying that they are by no means as important a piece of household equipment as they were in the past.

Services of tableware as we know them today originated in the second half of the 17th century, broadening out in the 18th to take in a much wider variety of forms which were subsequently developed further in the 19th century. While all this was going on, however, the two-eared bowl was steadily being driven further and further away from the dining-table, thanks mainly, no doubt, to the evolution of the deep plate to hold such things as soup and porridge. In some areas it still retained a certain importance, but only in a more or less perfected form, generally in silver, and with a specialized function, namely as a brandy bowl. In the northern provinces of The Netherlands in particular it used to be the custom, on such occasions for family rejoicing as the birth of a child or the betrothal of a son or daughter, to bring out the brandy bowl and the ladle that went with it, so that everyone who came to offer their congratulations might partake of a few spoonfuls of its contents, generally brandy with raisins and sugar. Elsewhere in Europe — in virtually the whole of North Germany, for example — a similar practice prevailed and in some places the brandy bowl performed its good offices on common feast-days such as Christmas and New Year's Day as well as at private family festivals¹. Certainly there were differences between the customs and the types of bowl used in different areas. In the wealthy Netherlands, for instance, there was a decided preference for silver brandy bowls, whereas in Germany these were exceptional. Also, in Germany bits of 'Lebkuchen' (spiced honey cake) were generally added to the mixture². The function of the brandy bowl, however, was essentially the same wherever it was used: to whip up the festivities with the aid of a strong alcoholic drink which would, at the very least, make everyone slightly merry, something generally regarded as a "must" for a successful party.

Since the unusual aspects of a culture inevitably attract more attention than everyday things, there has always been much more interest in brandy bowls than in ordinary porringers. This bias is reflected in the literature and in descriptions of objects in public and private collections, where one repeatedly finds porringers listed as brandy bowls. Thus in an otherwise admirable article on Netherlandish tin-glazed earthenware in the museum at Drammen in Norway we find four ordinary porringers illustrated and described as brandy bowls³. Obviously any two-eared bowl could have done duty as a brandy bowl, but this does not mean that every commonplace bowl in pewter or earthenware that has survived from former days was so used.

An even more glaring example of "interpretation by hindsight" occurs in a publication by F. Hahn and E. Hanssen⁴, who had been looking for the earliest representation of a brandy bowl and thought they had found it in a painting of 1599 by Pieter



Pl. 1. Pregnant woman with pewter porringer, detail from 'The Battle between Carnival and Lent', Pieter Brueghel, 1559. Kunsthistor. Museum, Vienna

Brueghel in the Kunsthistorisches Museum in Vienna, known as 'The Battle between Carnival and Lent'. Among the multitude of figures depicted there they spotted, on the extreme right, a pregnant woman holding a two-eared pewter bowl in her left hand (plate 1) and apparently they concluded that this was a brandy bowl she was keeping by her against the celebration of the forthcoming birth. But surely in such circumstances the bowl was far more likely to have been a porringer or a pap bowl, especially as a woman as poorly clad as this one will have been much more concerned with the imminent problem of how she was going to feed herself and the child than with any notion of throwing a party with lots of drink and titbits. This would certainly seem a more logical conclusion, particularly when one remembers that at that period the two-eared bowl was in general use for eating, as can be seen, for example, from the well-known representations of the Virgin feeding the Infant Jesus from a pewter pap bowl, a homely scene that enjoyed great popularity in the 16th century. At the same time, the simply dressed woman in Brueghel's painting also reminds us of the beggar trying to come by something to eat in difficult circumstances, and her pewter bowl is, morphologically speaking, the direct descendant of the carved or turned wooden bowl which was used, at all events in simple milieus, for porridge, soup, pap and other semi-

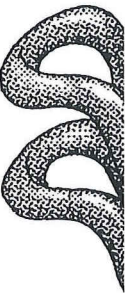


Fig. 1. Dutch ear

Fig. 2. 17th-century party for usen



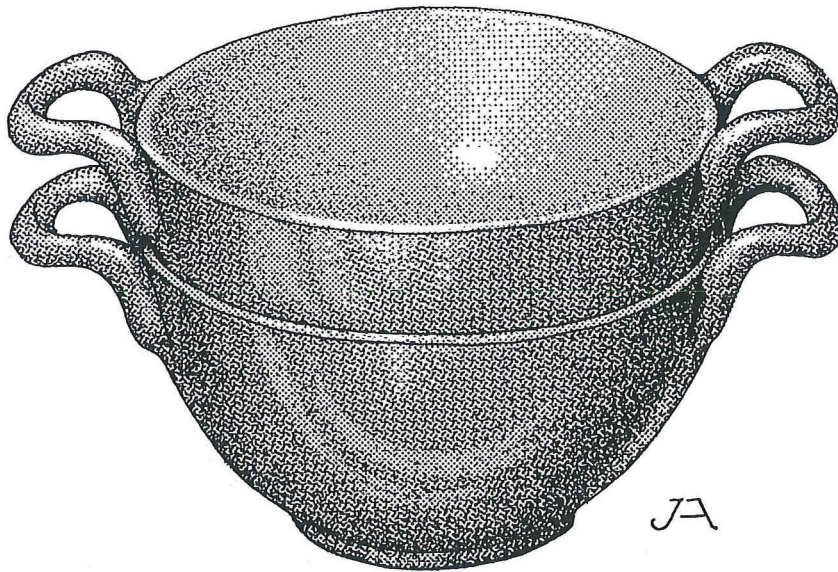
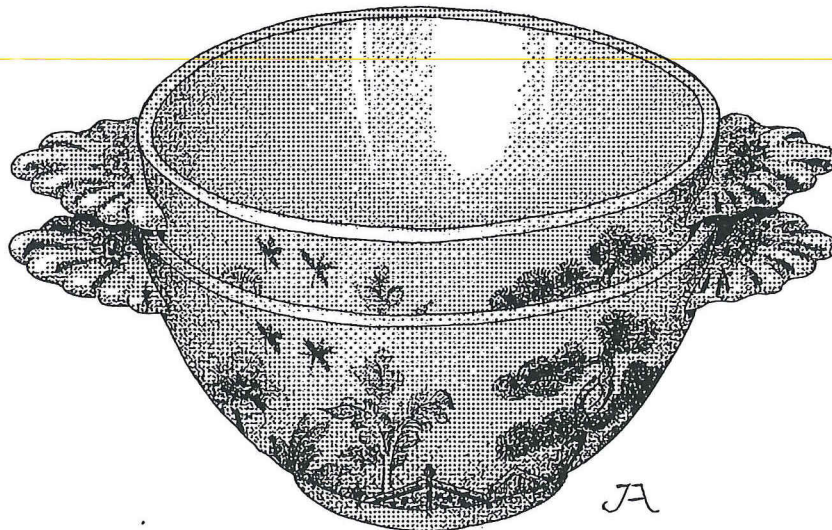


Fig. 1. Dutch earthenware soup bowls of 1960. Private collection. Drawing by J. J. Arentsen

Fig. 2. 17th-century porringers of Japanese porcelain, ordered by the Dutch East India Company for use in Holland. Netherl. Open Air Museum, Arnhem. Drawing by J. J. Arentsen



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Fig. 3. 17th-century Dutch porringers of lead-glazed earthenware with vertical ears. Netherl. Open Air Museum, Arnhem. Drawing by J. J. Arentsen

liquid foods at least until the early 17th century, and which is clearly reminiscent of the begging bowl. Such bowls have a long history, which we need not go into here, but it is perhaps pertinent to point out that wooden bowls with an ear or a knob for a handle were in use for both eating and drinking at a very early period, and certainly from the third century A.D. ⁵.

As for pewter and earthenware porringers, references to the way in which these were used are hard to find, for the simple reason that to our ancestors they were such familiar humdrum objects that there was no need to write about them. The most one finds is a reference to their quality as, for example, in a by-law of October 16, 1503, concerning the pewterers of 's-Hertogenbosch, where it is stipulated, among other things, that flat plates and porringers must be made of good quality pewter ⁶. Even the names previously given to two-eared bowls tell us less about them than we could wish. Sometimes in old inventories or written orders we come across terms such as bread-and-beer cups or bowls or 'bogyne' cups or bowls (the 'bagijnen' or 'beguines' were a Catholic order of lassistresses in the Low Countries). For example, on November 21, 1614, the Directors of the Dutch East India Company were already instructing their factors to order objects to be made in Chinese porcelain after Dutch models: "... the Directors want, to be bought at Patani a great quantity of various porcelain . . . , also a lot of beer- and-bread cups of all kinds . . ." ⁷. From this it is clear that at the time when the trade in 'Chine de commande' was just beginning the bread-and-beer cup was a perfectly familiar, traditional utensil.

In fact bread sopped in beer had formed a normal part of the diet of ordinary people since the Middle Ages and was still being regularly eaten in the 17th century. For instance, in 1634 the students at Groningen University who ate at the 'bursa' were offered at midday on Tuesdays a choice of either "warm beer and bread" or a cold dish (kolde schale) ⁸. On other days different varieties of pottage were available, all of

them, no doubt, in the same way, out of which on Mondays but these, if not the people's diet in popularity in England delftware porringers . . . our ancestors" ⁹.

The other old have been applied majolica porringers in Antwerp and wrote that in many. In Holland, however, ones, even as late as Japanese porcelain en route to its final form from home. The three sizes, large blue decoration in

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Fig. 4. 17th-century . . . Museum, A



them, no doubt, of a similar consistency to the bread-and-beer mixture and eaten in the same way, out of porringers. Thus on Sundays there was 'bread soup' (broodsoppe) and on Mondays barley-gruel, a sort of porridge made of groats. Pappy concoctions like these, if not these actual dishes, were at one time in fact a typical feature of most people's diet in The Netherlands, and in much of the rest of Europe too. Their popularity in England, for example, is indicated by F. H. Garner in his survey of English delftware: "Two-eared flat bowls are shown, by a dinner-service of 1686, to be porringers . . . , these porringers were needed for pottages, the sloppy foods eaten by our ancestors"⁹.

The other old name for the two-eared bowl, 'bagyne' bowl, is supposed originally to have been applied in Flanders only to pewter porringers. Thus, in discussing the 83 majolica porringers which formerly belonged to the 'Maagdenhuis', the girls' orphanage, in Antwerp and which mostly date from the end of the 16th century, L. M. Philippen wrote that in many respects they were very like the familiar pewter 'bagyne' bowls¹⁰. In Holland, however, the name was applied to ceramic porringers as well as pewter ones, even as late as the second half of the 17th century, as is shown by the list of Japanese porcelain brought in the ship 'Veenenburgh' from Deshima to Batavia in 1663, en route to its final destination in Holland: ". . . 3542 pieces were made after samples from home. They consisted of large gourd flasks, large bagyne cups, . . . beakers in three sizes, large beer jugs . . ." etc.¹¹. A typical 'bagyne' bowl in Arita porcelain with blue decoration is shown in fig. 2.

The fact that the name 'bagyne' bowl was applied to ceramic and pewter bowls alike suggests that the essential thing about them was not the material they were made of, as Philippen thought¹², but their form, and in particular the two-eared form and the way in which the ears were applied. We can perhaps best explain this by looking more closely at the various types of handle found on porringers, especially in relation to the various methods of storing them when not in use. For one thing is certain: the handles were not added simply to enable the bowl to be raised to the mouth with both hands, as Philippen suggested. A bowl does not need handles for that, as we can see from the practice common to numerous parts of the world. In the Far East bowls never have handles and are used for eating (rice bowl) as well as drinking, the Japanese tea-bowl (chawan) being the classic example.

The earliest known two-eared bowls in Holland have round ears applied vertically to the side of the vessel (fig. 3). On earthenware examples we find characteristic rounded ears which are essentially the same, though different in size, as those used on earthen-

Fig. 4. 17th-century Dutch majolica porringers with flat horizontal ears. Netherl. Open Air Museum, Arnhem. Drawing by J. J. Arentsen



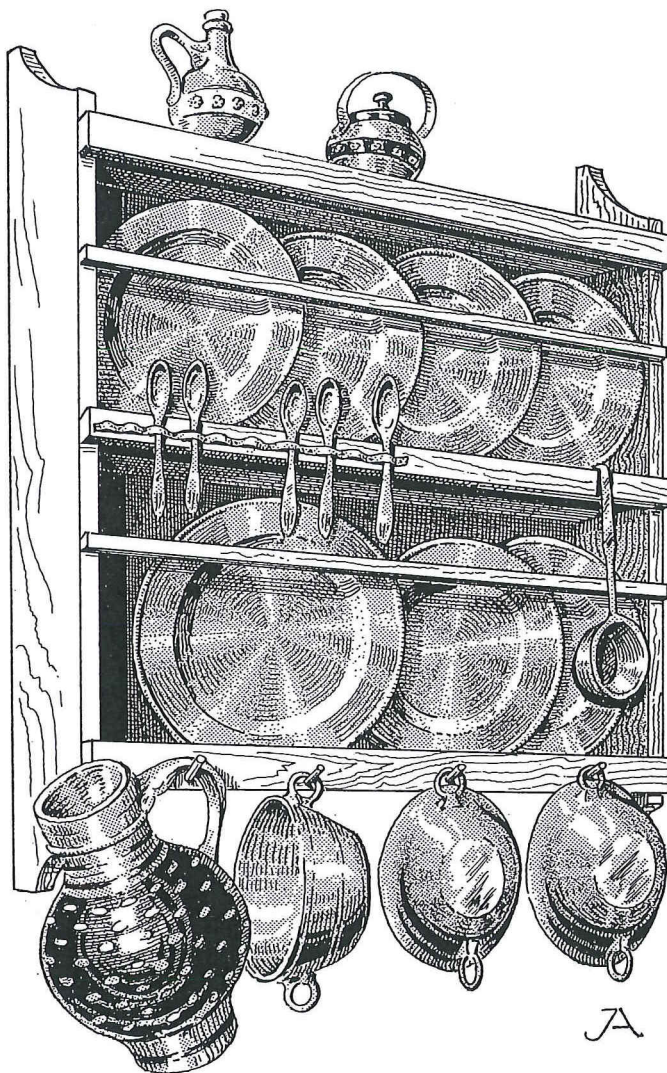


Fig. 5. Rack for tableware with, on the bottom row, pewter porringers, some with two horizontal ears, others with one horizontal and the other vertical. Drawing by J. J. Arentsen

ware jugs. These made the bowls easier to handle while they were being filled with pottage of one sort or another or passed at table, and when not in use they could be hung up by one of the ears on the wall or a wooden rack, as jugs were in the 16th and 17th centuries. Before this bowls must have been either stacked or stored side by side. The vertically applied ears, however, will have been a hindrance to stacking (fig. 3), and presumably it was this disadvantage that led to the position of the ears being altered in the course of time.

The pewterer was evidently the first to make the change. Originally, at the beginning of the 16th century, he had given his porringers one or two ring-shaped ears, sometimes attaching both vertically, sometimes one vertically and the other horizontally, possibly in order to facilitate hanging and unhooking (fig. 5). But during the course of the

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- ¹ H. Fincke, Br.
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- ² Idem, p. 152.
- ³ Henning Alsvi
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- ⁴ Die Darstellun
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- ⁵ W. Dexel, Hol
- ⁶ B. Dubbe, Tin
- ⁷ T. Volker, Por
- ⁸ L. Burema, D
1953. Pp. 113-
- ⁹ F. H. Garner,
1938. P. 3.
- ¹⁰ De oud-Antw
1938. P. 3.
- ¹¹ T. Volker, op.
- ¹² Vide Note 10.

century he changed over to making flat ears, generally in trefoil form, which he soldered in a horizontal position to the top of the rims of his porringers and brandy bowls. This made stacking easy and reduced storage space to a minimum. The majolica potter faithfully followed the pewterer's example, with the result that many earthenware porringers have ears that look like cast metal ones. By the end of the century, however, some potters were already beginning to give their porringers horizontal ears of a truly ceramic form, and these have persisted up to the present day (fig. 1).

Notes:

- ¹ H. Fincke, Branntweinkaltschale in Niedersachsen. Rheinisch-Westfälische Zeitschrift für Volkskunde 12 (1965), p. 160 v.v.
- ² Idem, p. 152.
- ³ Henning Alsvik, Hollandske fajanser i Drammens Museum og deres kulturhistoriske stilling. Drammens museums årbok 1967-1968. Drammen, 1970. P. 45 and figs. 20a-20d.
- ⁴ Die Darstellung einer Branntweinkaltschale aus dem 16. Jahrh. Rheinisch-Westfälische Zeitschrift für Volkskunde 15 (1968), p. 233.
- ⁵ W. Dixel, Holzgerät und Holzform. Berlin, 1943. Abb. 11.
- ⁶ B. Dubbe, Tin en tinnegieters in Nederland. Zeist, 1965. P. 30.
- ⁷ T. Volker, Porcelain and the Dutch East India Company. Leiden, 1954. P. 26.
- ⁸ L. Burema, De voeding in Nederland van de Middeleeuwen tot de twintigste eeuw. Assen, 1953. Pp. 113-115.
- ⁹ F. H. Garner, English delftware. London, 1948. P. 13.
- ¹⁰ De oud-Antwerpsche majolica van het Maagdenhuis-museum te Antwerpen. Antwerpen, 1938. P. 3.
- ¹¹ T. Volker, op. cit. P. 148.
- ¹² Vide Note 10.

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