

EBM

Seventeenth Century Pewter Candlesticks

*The Connoisseur Apr
Jan-June 1956*

BY A. V. SUTHERLAND-GRAEME, F.S.A.

AT the zenith of their powers in the seventeenth century the pewterers of England were able to produce fine wares by concentration on form and proportion; vessels which were not only suited to their various uses but which also appeared to be so; though it may perhaps be doubted if the latter consideration was more than a sub-conscious result of that good taste with which all crafts were imbued at this period.

However that may be, the purely functional results achieved between 1630 and 1700 are, in all branches of the pewterers' craft, whether for the church, mansion or tavern, for the most part completely satisfying: and pewterers seldom broke out into purely ornamental effects or applied decoration other than in the more personal articles, such as domestic tankards. Even there they limited themselves to engraving, some of which was good and some decidedly crude (though to the present-day collector not the less intriguing for that), and to occasional elaboration of small parts like thumbpieces.

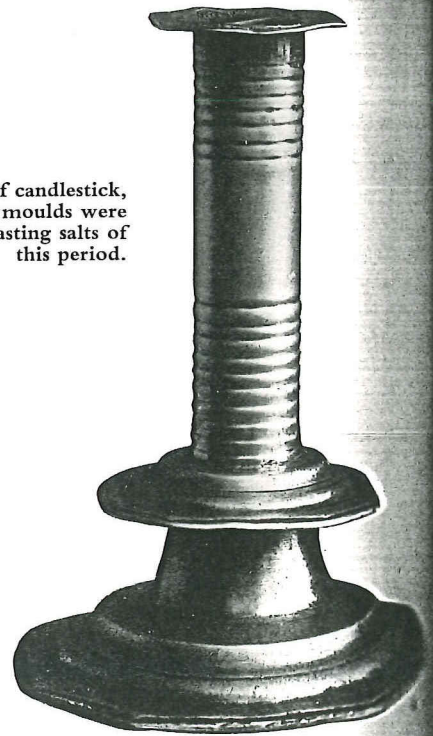
There was, however, one class of product on which the pewterer did exercise a good deal of decorative ingenuity. This was the candlestick which, unlike the majority of his wares, was not usually put away when not in use but remained on view in dining room, business room or boudoir. During the last half of the century, in particular, some quite elaborate and beautiful designs were produced on which even the silversmiths would have found it difficult to improve. Writing over twenty years ago the late Howard Cotterell ascribed the genesis of the English domestic pewter candlestick to Holland—which country, incidentally, has provided us with other pewter exemplars—and there is little doubt that Dutch candlesticks were being imported in the sixteenth century. They appear to have had domical feet and short baluster-shaped stems with upward curving grease pans. From them Cotterell traced a line of descent by examples which exhibited the gradual elimination of the domed foot and the elongation of the stem until he arrived at the shapes seen in Nos. 3, 4, 5 and 6.

We will, however, first turn to two illustrations which indicate that the English craftsman was quite able to produce types of his own. The first shows the famous 'Grainger' candlestick in the Victoria and Albert Museum. This is called after its maker, William Grainger, who was a 'searcher for false wares' to the Pewterers' Company in 1612 and became Upper Warden in 1638. His name will be seen in the oblong cartouche, a series of which, separated by circular bosses, decorates the high pedestal base. The boss to the left bears the shield of the Company and that to the right the well-known symbol of the Rose and Crown. It is dated 1616, stands 9½ inches high and bears no resemblance at all to the Dutch importations.

So far as is known no other candlestick of comparable design exists, and there is some scope for speculation as to its *raison d'être*. There is no record of Grainger's admission to the Com-

pany, nor of his striking a Touch. Neither does any Touch appear upon the candlestick itself. He was a 'tryffelere', i.e., a worker on small objects (though, as a separate branch of the craft, trifling had practically disappeared by this time, leaving nothing but a common word to the English language), and after being chosen as one of the body of twelve for carrying out the onerous duties of searching the country markets for wares which might fall short of the Company's high standards, he was installed as steward in 1620, succeeding in due course to the offices of Renter Warden (1628) and Upper Warden as already stated. Is it possible that he made this Magnum Opus for presentation to the Company in 1616 when, having wearied of 'syzeing' quantities of 'dubble Bells, Chapnuts, Thurndalls and Danske potts' to say nothing of 'stoole pans', up and down the country, he returned to the proper business of pewtering, and no doubt with an eye to future promotion. The Arms of the Company and the Rose and Crown, incorporated in the decoration, might well point that way. There is little doubt that a pair was made, since in the craft candlesticks were always reckoned by the pair. Grainger and his colleagues had, in 1612, 'syzed' no less than 17 'parcells' of different kinds of candlestick, including 'Greate pyller', 'Greate bell' and 'ordinarie highe'. Perhaps these provided the inspiration.

4. The pillar type of candlestick, c. 1675. Base moulds were also used for casting salts of this period.



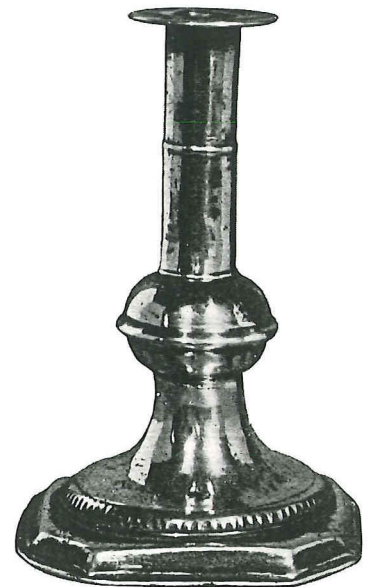
1. The Grainger candlestick. 1616. William Grainger was a searcher for false wares for the Pewterers' Company. 2. Bell-based type. Mid-seventeenth century or earlier: possibly the 'Greate Bell' mentioned by Grainger. 3. Knopped type, c. 1680. The restoration of a ruin.



1

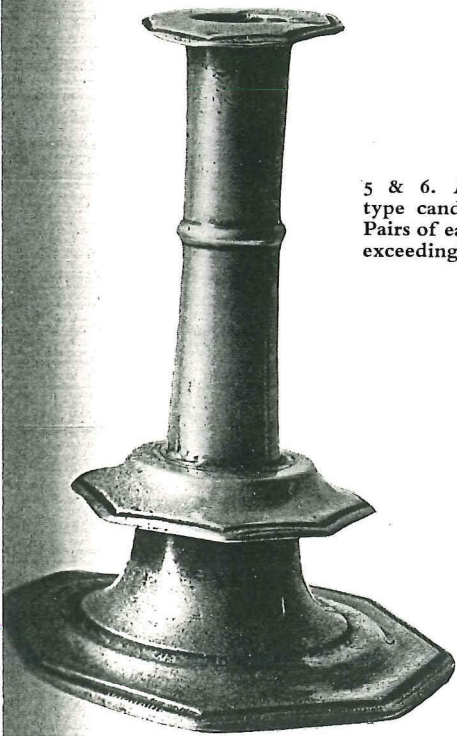


2

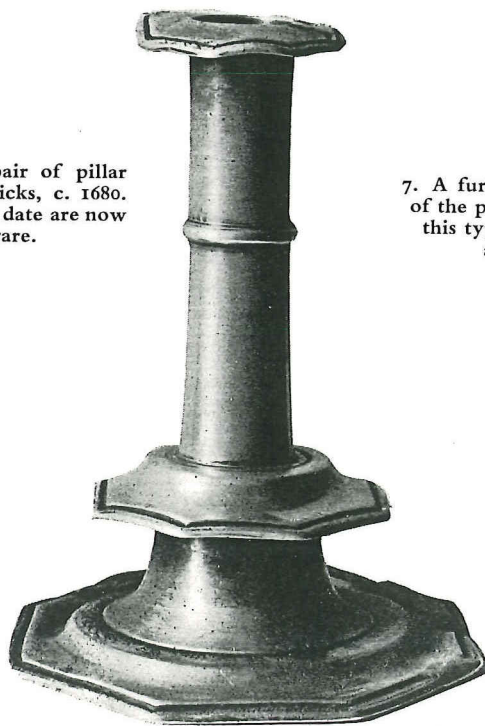


3

5 & 6. A pair of pillar type candlesticks, c. 1680. Pairs of early date are now exceedingly rare.

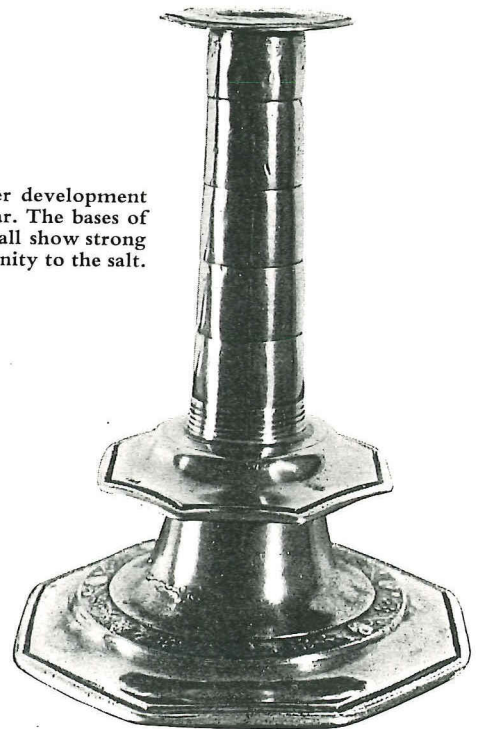


5



6

7. A further development of the pillar. The bases of this type all show strong affinity to the salt.



7