

EBO



'E.G.' Pewter Church Flagons

BY CAPT. A. SUTHERLAND-GRAEME

IN *The Connoisseur* for June, 1946, writing of pewter church flagons, I referred to an early seventeenth-century pewterer whose initials are *E.G.*, whose Touch (above) and one of whose flagons I illustrated. Of him I wrote 'his Touch does not appear on the earliest of the (post-Fire of London) Touch Plates (1668) preserved by the Worshipful Company of Pewterers; and he was, therefore, either a provincial, or a London craftsman who had died before the Touch Plate came into use. It is possible that he was Edward Gilbert of London, first mentioned in 1633 . . . Master in 1662'.

The Touch is interesting in that it shows two flagons, of which that at left above is a very early type, of which only one (No. 1), in the possession of Mr. Cyril Minchin of Reading, is known to have been a church piece; two others of somewhat similar design are in the National Museum of Ireland and the Ludlow Museum respectively (Nos. 2 & 3). None of these is by *E.G.* although he obviously knew the type and probably made it, since it is incorporated in his Touch. On the other hand, the flagon on the right (No. 3) is of a type of which many exist, in churches, museums and private collections, and it is well known in silver.

With very few exceptions all the pewter examples were made by *E.G.*, whose Touch is nearly always struck clearly upon the back of the handles and who must have been a most prolific craftsman. Furthermore, so far as I am aware, no other articles, e.g., dishes, plates, candlesticks or even tankards, are known bearing this Touch.

The type represents probably the first outright attempt to provide the 'pot or stoup of pewter, if not of finer metal' required by the Jacobean Canon of 1603 consequent upon the considerable increase in the quantity of wine due to the re-admission of the laity to the Chalice under the new order. Incidentally it is possible to see the direct intervention of James VI, in the use of the typical Scottish word 'stoup'.

It is true that an earlier type exists, apart from that shown on the left in the Touch, and that comparatively large numbers of these exist; but they are inclined to be heavy and ugly and were probably made originally for domestic use. None is marked nor does any exist in silver. Where churches possess them they nearly always have one or more of *E.G.*'s flagons in addition. It is with these latter that we are concerned, that is, with the type shown on the right of the Touch.

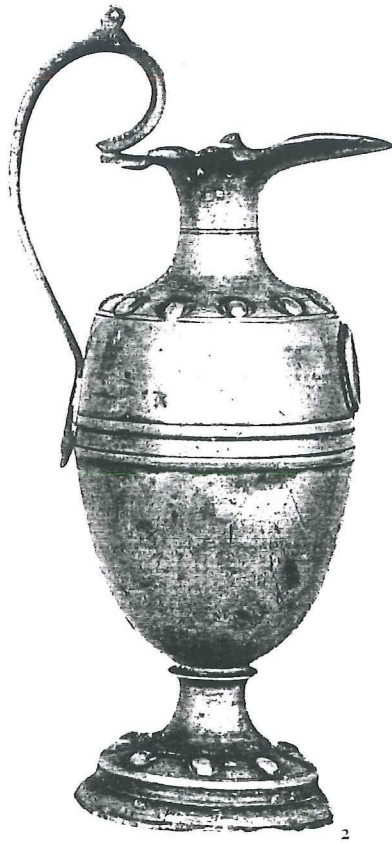
This was first brought to the notice of pewter enthusiasts by an illustration, in the late Howard Cotterell's book *Old Pewter, its Makers and Marks*, of a beautiful pair, dated 1634, then in the possession of the late E. W. Turner of Herne Bay, and formerly

at St. Mary's Church, Northgate, Canterbury. The names of the churchwardens are engraved upon them, and it was possibly the fact that one of them was Thomas Gilbert that suggested Edward Gilbert as the maker, as a possible relative of Thomas. However, so many of *E.G.*'s flagons have come to light in so many different localities that this attribution cannot carry any weight. No less than ten were shown in an exhibition of ecclesiastical pewterware held in Norwich in 1934, and several others have been 'discovered' since. Moreover, valuable information supplied by the late Mr. Bertrand Johnson, a past Master of the Pewterers' Company, has produced no less than five further possible claimants to the initials from the Company alone, none of whom is mentioned in Cotterell. All of these were working between c. 1580 and 1640; but so far neither church inventories nor accounts, nor any other possible source of reference has provided any clue to the name.

No. 4 shows a unique group of church flagons, every one of which was made by *E.G.* It will be noticed that there are actually two designs A and B; A, possibly the earlier, represented by Nos. 2 and 4 from the left, and B by the remaining three. A has a plain ovolo foot, flat underneath and hollow inside—an insanitary arrangement making internal cleansing difficult—and is without the finial surmounting the 'bun' lid. In the case of B the foot is of ogee moulding, the hollow space formed by the moulding being external, and the inside of the drum terminating in a semi-sphere easy to clean. The finial on the lid is a feature pleasing chiefly by reason of its deeply undercut base. This appears to be the whole range of sizes, to one or other of which all other known *E.G.* flagons conform.

Their respective heights (not including finials), reading from the left are: 9½, 10¼, 12, 13¼, and 16 inches. The smallest is in my own collection and the owners of the remainder are Mr. Minchin, Mr. Cooper, F.S.A., of Nottingham, Dr. Hutchinson of Haywards Heath, and the Parish of Raunds, Northamptonshire. The latter is one of a pair (No. 5) each of which holds 9 pints! Their use, at least during a Service, must have been none too easy as they weigh 13 lbs. 6 oz. when empty. In all cases, apart from varying proportions, the handles and the thumbpieces, with their heart-shaped piercing, are similar, and each bears the *E.G.* Touch upon the back of the handle. No. 5 is added to show the contrast between the enormous Raunds vessels and the smallest of the five (weight 4 lb.).

My thanks are due to all authorities and private owners for permission to illustrate their treasures.



1, 2 and 3. Three early types of pewter flagon, none of which bears the 'E.G.' Touch although this pewterer must have known the type (see the flagon at left in his Touch opposite). In the possession of Mr. Cyril Minchin, the National Museum of Ireland and Ludlow Museum respectively. 4. A unique group of church flagons (see right in Touch) all of which were made by 'E.G.' Owned by the Author, Mr. Minchin, Mr. Cooper, Dr. Hutchinson and the Parish of Raunds respectively. 5. The pair of 16 inch high Raunds vessels, with the Author's 9½ inch high example.

