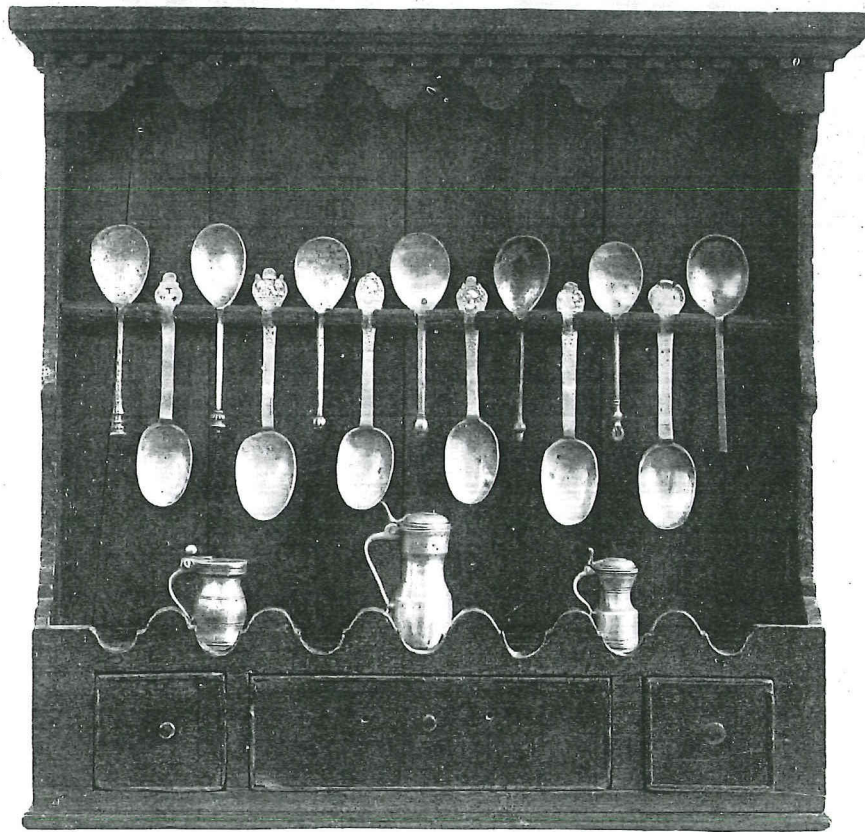


PEWTER SPOONS

By CAPT. A. V. SUTHERLAND-GRAEME, F.S.A.



No. I.—AN OAK RACK OF THE LATE SEVENTEENTH CENTURY CONTAINING THIRTEEN PEWTER SPOONS OF VARIOUS TYPES RANGING IN DATE FROM CIRCA 1550 TO CIRCA 1720

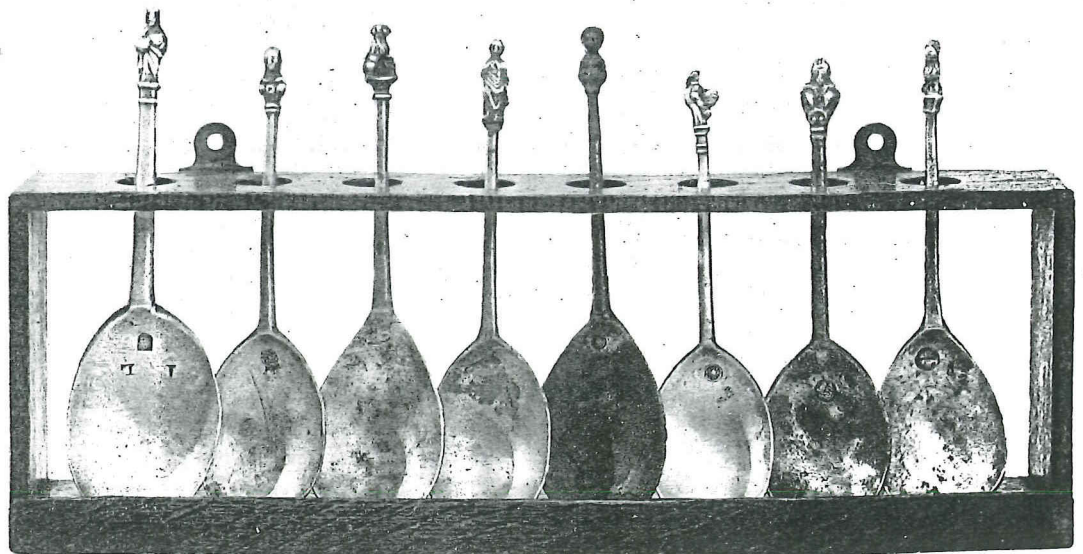
MR. NORMAN GASK, in his fascinating *Old Silver Spoons of England*, tells us that budding collectors of silver spoons used to start with spoons of pewter and latten in order to gain experience. I have myself encountered only two collectors who commenced thus, and each of them became so fascinated with this 'introductory' hobby that he proceeded no further.

It is with these spoons, particularly those of pewter, that I am concerned here; and I would start by raising a question which

will probably occur to anyone who contemplates starting a collection.

What is the aim? Is it to form what must necessarily become a very large collection, containing examples of every type and variety, irrespective of condition, in order ultimately to possess a complete record of the spoon-maker's craft? or merely to acquire a few good specimens as part of a representative collection of old pewter? If the former, how are the spoons to be kept? Are they to be openly displayed, or confined to the drawers of a collector's cabinet?

Not all the objects of collectors' zeal are decorative, or even displayable, however historical they may be. Silver spoons of all periods are usually in good condition for display, due to the fact that they were valuable and were carefully handed down from one generation to another. Pewter spoons, however, had little value in their own times, and no great outcry would have been occasioned by their loss. The majority of the early types have been found in excavations, and had been subject, in varying degree, to corrosive or discolouring influences in the soil, and consequently were not immediately decorative; the later types, however, and particularly those of the Eighteenth Century, have frequently come to light in old chests or forgotten cupboards, where they have been better preserved.



No. II.—EIGHT FINE 'FIGURE KNOB' PEWTER SPOONS DISPLAYED IN AN IMPROVISED RACK: AUTHOR'S COLLECTION

As indicating the diversity of views upon the subject, I would mention three collections with which I was formerly acquainted. The first was housed in a cabinet, and was largely unknown to all but its enthusiastic owner. It formed a fine historical record, but the greater part was unsuitable for open display. The second, containing some six hundred specimens in various states of preservation, was exhibited in a series of glazed wall cases of sombre aspect, which had the effect of turning its owner's dining-room into a museum, to which class of building alone, in my opinion, such an exhibition is appropriate. The third collection contained some two dozen of the finest specimens, their surfaces cleaned and polished, exhibited in two fine seventeenth-century oak spoon racks; the *ensemble* was charming and 'old world'



No. III.—FOUR 'ROYAL' SPLIT-END SPOONS, WITH (IN THE CENTRE) A LATER EXAMPLE : NOS. 1 AND 5 BEAR BUSTS OF QUEEN ANNE; NOS. 2 AND 4 WILLIAM AND MARY; NO. 3 GEORGE III AND QUEEN CHARLOTTE

in the best sense of that much-abused term, and lent added distinction to an already beautiful pewter room.

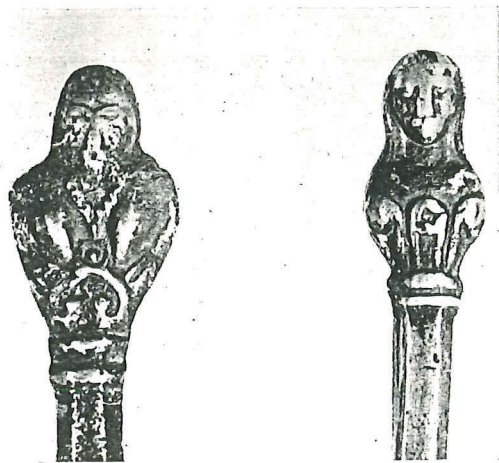
In this connexion I would also mention the strange case of the well-known Ellis Collection of silver spoons, dispersed in 1935. It contained many rare and early examples, of which the majority were described as being in 'fine,' 'very fine,' 'superb,' etc., condition. Yet the appearance of these beautiful spoons had been completely marred by paper labels, poorly inscribed with dates and attribution, pasted across the bowls. The catalogue notes that these labels were those of the owner; and that they were not affixed by him for the purposes of the sale is proved by the fact that this did not take place until after his death. Whether the spoons were openly displayed or kept in cabinets, this, surely, is not the way to treat such lovely things, especially as several alternative methods of description could have been devised.

Returning to my subject, not all of the excavated spoons are in such bad case that nothing can be done; many of them have not suffered actual corrosion, but are merely covered with a black coating, or, in some cases, by a beautiful 'pigeon-breast' patina, caused by chemical action.

I am aware that to some collectors cleaning is a heresy, but, personally, I see no objection to it, provided the proper specimens are selected; to one who knows his subject, dirt should not be necessary as a proof of age—or genuineness. A corroded spoon should never be touched; it is difficult to ascertain how far the process has gone, and treatment with

an acid solution—the sole means of eliminating corroded areas—might result in almost total destruction, or at least the erasing of the most interesting features. Nor should any attempt be made to remove the 'pigeon-breast' patina, which enhances, rather than detracts from, the appearance of the spoon.

This leaves the spoons which are merely black; these can be treated, in the bowl and stem at least, with dampened pumice powder carefully rubbed over the surfaces, and with plate polish thereafter; if additional proof of age is really necessary,



No. IV.—THE 'ALDERMAN' AND 'MAIDENHEAD' TYPES



No. V.—TWO MORE 'MAIDENHEADS' : ENLARGED

the backs may be left uncleaned.

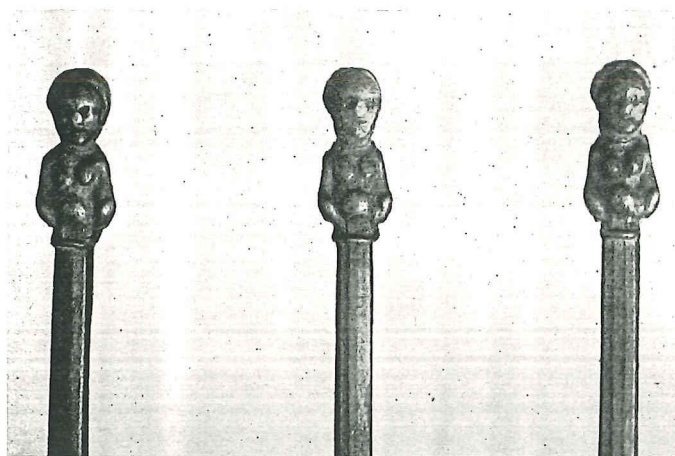
'Fakes' are not unknown, but, for financial reasons, are not numerous nor cleverly executed. A few years ago, a collector incautiously let it be known that, to complete his collection, he required one spoon only, having an exceedingly rare knop. It duly appeared and was accepted at, of course, a stiff price; then a second arrived and doubts began to arise; a microscopic examination showed that a clever splicing operation

had been performed in both cases, between a genuine bowl and a knop which, by comparison with genuine examples, showed a poor degree of craftsmanship. In this connexion, at least three London museums possess notable collections of pewter spoons with which comparisons may be made.

To my mind nothing can better display the charm of spoons than the old kitchen spoon rack. Pewter is a homely metal and needs a homely setting, and these racks, usually home-made and of oak, are completely satisfying. They must once have been quite common, and seventeenth- and early eighteenth-century examples are still to be found.

No two are entirely alike; some are merely for spoons, others have troughs for knives, whilst more elaborate examples have one or more drawers for spices. Age has given them a fine surface, and the glow of polished metal against them completes a delightful group. They are open to one objection only: early types of spoon must be hung bowl upwards, otherwise the small knops would fall through the slots; and whilst, in certain cases, this arrangement is immaterial, it is desirable that 'figure-head' knops, such as 'Apostles' and 'Maidenheads,' should not appear upside down. For such, in my own collection, I was able to acquire a 'stand' which, though of considerable age, had more recently been used as a pipe rack! The later spoons, with their wide terminals, look well in the spoon rack proper, for which types it was made.

Before describing the illustrations, I would remark that the late Mr. F. G. Hilton Price's *Old Base-metal Spoons* (1908) is still the standard work upon the subject, and would refer all who are interested to the pages of this admirable little book, merely stating that spoons generally may be ascribed to two main periods, i.e. before and after the mid-Seventeenth Century, at which time a complete revolution in design took



No. VI.—'MAIDENHEADS': MAKER'S TOUCH & INITIALS APPEAR IN NO. VII

No. 7 a Pumpkin-knop, c. 1590; No. 9 an Acorn-knop, c. 1550; No. 11 a Horse-hoof-knop, c. 1600; and No. 13 a Slip-top, the commonest type of early spoon, c. 1600.

The spoons with terminals upward are all known as 'split-ends,' and range from c. 1670 to c. 1715. To two of these their makers' names may be assigned, No. 10 being by David Heyrick, c. 1675, and No. 12 by Edward Matthews, who joined the Pewterers' Company in 1691 and was Master in 1728.

No. ii illustrates eight fine 'figure-knop' spoons in the improvised rack already mentioned. No. 1 is an 'Apostle,' a type introduced from the Continent c. 1450, and fashionable for over two hundred years; this example is very late, as is evidenced by the fact that it has a known maker, Moses Winkworth, who struck his touch in 1673. The shape of its bowl is indicative of the change in design

already referred to. The hexagonal stem is surmounted by the figure of St. John, bearing a cup. No. 2 is a 'Maidenhead,' so called, we are told, after the Blessed Virgin, 'cum ymaginibus Beatae Mariae in fine eorundem,' as a set is described in 1446; this example is of the early Sixteenth Century. No. 3 is a Lion rampant, rare in pewter, c. 1600; No. 4 another 'Apostle,' St. Peter, holding a bunch of keys in his left hand; this spoon is at least a century older than No. 1. No. 5 is another Maidenhead, with delightfully naïve features beneath a wimple; this spoon, of late fifteenth-century date, has not been touched; to have cleaned it would have destroyed its outstanding charm, since the incrustation has gone deep. No. 6, 'Chantecleer,' the Cock, c. 1575, is unique, and is described and illustrated in Hilton Price; this is a typical case of a spoon which was merely black, except for the knop, which had pigeon-breast colour; the cleaning of its bowl and stem has greatly improved its appearance. No. 7,



No. VII.—BOWL OF SPOON, SHOWING TOUCH & INITIALS APPEARING ON THE THREE 'MAIDENHEADS' IN NO. VI

also illustrated in Hilton Price, is likewise unique. Although described therein as a 'debased Maidenhead,' I have called it the 'Alderman'; the detail of it in illustration No. iv shows male features, and the protuberances which, to Mr. Price, indicated the female bust, bear no resemblance to the breasts of other undoubted Maidenheads, but are more akin to padded robes, to which the aldermanic chain and badge add the final touch of civic dignity. Period *c.* 1550. Lastly comes 'Lion séjant,' a well-modelled figure rarely found in pewter, *c.* 1600.

No. iii shows to larger scale the four 'Royal' split-end spoons seen in No. i, together with, in the centre, a later example. Nos. 1 and 5 bear busts of Queen Anne, Nos. 2 and 4 those of William and Mary, and No. 3 those of George III and Queen Charlotte, much worn by repeated polishing throughout the years. John Vaughan, its maker, joined the Company in 1753 and was its Master in 1792. In viewing Nos. iv and v, it becomes, perhaps, more apparent why those budding silver spoon enthusiasts got no further than pewter. In No. iv appears the Alderman, and the Maidenhead already illustrated in No. ii (No. 2), but here enlarged to double size; whilst No. v shows two more Maidenheads, also enlarged, of which the *sonsie lass* mentioned under No. ii is to the left, with an older, but equally jovial, dame to the right. Can anything more intriguing be found in silver? Whilst still discussing Maidenheads, I would draw attention to the three shown in No. vi. Although individually bearing a close resemblance to the little lady with the wimple, as a group they are probably unique, as all three were made by the same pewterer for the same client, whose touch and initials, respectively, appear in No. vii.

Finally, in No. viii, we have an example of the rarest of all spoons, in either pewter or silver; and with it one of the earliest English pewter spoons. The first (left) is the 'Horned Head-dress,' showing the ornate mitre-like hat affected by ladies early in the Fifteenth Century; the other has a small leaf-shaped bowl, and a central and terminal ball to the stem, which is formed of a thin sheet of pewter rolled round a slender thread of iron, introduced, no doubt, as a stiffener. It is probably of fourteenth-century date.

The group in No. vi are in the collection of Dr. R. Blake Marsh, and the Horned head-dress spoon is the property of Mr. Cyril Minchin, to both of whom I am indebted for permission to illustrate them. The remaining items are in my own collection.

Having opened with what is virtually a quotation from Mr. Gask's work, in which he refers to latten spoons, I feel that some reference to these would not be out of place here.

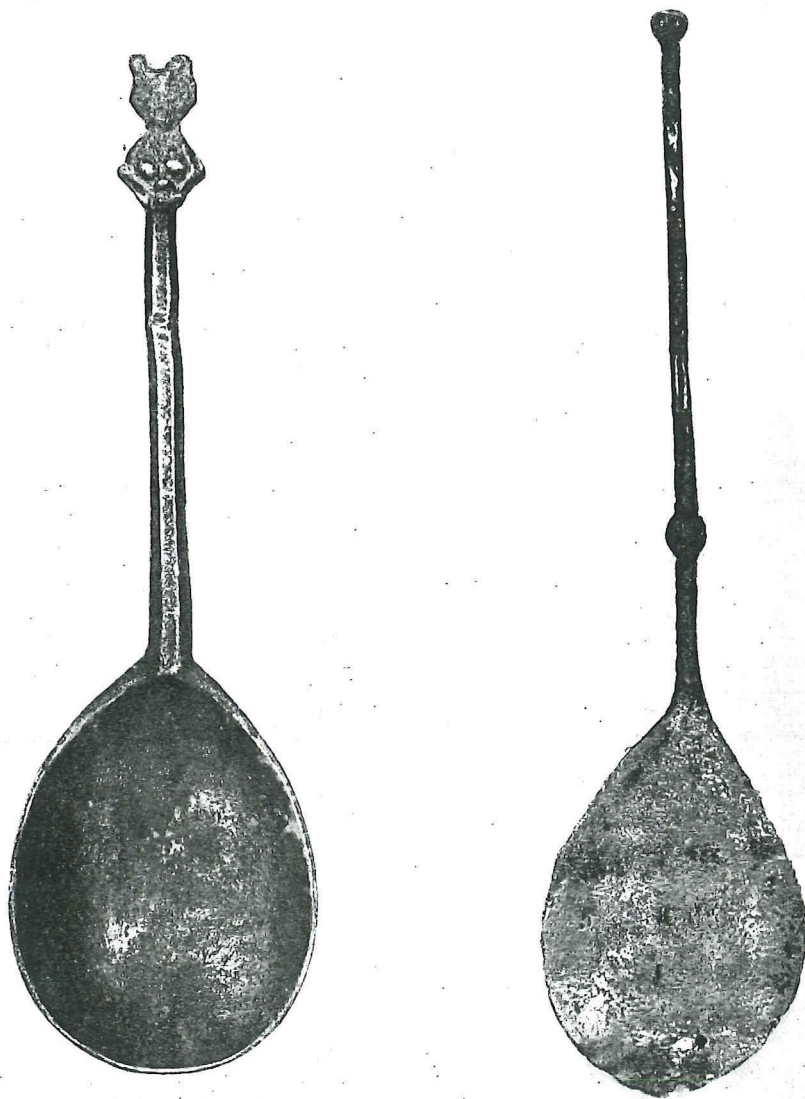
By reason of his great experience his remarks must be authoritative; but I must confess that I have so far encountered only one collector who took any interest in latten spoons.

Latten is a metal hardly distinguishable from brass, and spoons of nearly all types were

made of it. Owing to their toughness and resistance to external influences of all kinds, most of those which exist to-day are well preserved. They take a fine polish and present a beautiful appearance against dark oak; and the presence of 'Touches' adds to their general interest, so that I am at a loss to understand why they are neglected by collectors.

Latten spoons are fully dealt with and illustrated in Hilton Price's book, and their Touches are recorded therein; and, as this article is mainly concerned with pewter spoons, it has not been possible to enter very deeply into the history of their latten counterparts. In any case the subject deserves an article to itself; but it may be inferred that, in early days at least, many latten spoons were actually made by pewterers.

At a Court of the Pewterers' Company in 1567/8 'it was agreed by the whole Company that there shoulde Be no spones made of Bras or latten or any yelow metall uppon payne that if any person hereafter be found that he doth make any suche spones shall forfeyt and pay for every spone iijs. iiijd.' There, for the time being, I must leave the subject.



NO. VIII.—TWO OF THE RAREST OF ALL PEWTER SPOONS: ON THE LEFT THE 'HORNED' HEAD-DRESS, FIFTEENTH CENTURY: TO THE RIGHT A FOURTEENTH-CENTURY EXAMPLE