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# Some Anomalies in English Candlestick Design

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IN the latter half of the XVth century the simple English candlestick was eclipsed by the introduction of a Venetian model which the Venetians in turn had copied from the Near East, and it became very popular on account of its appeal to the bell-founders, for the profile of their smaller bells could be utilised in the formation of the base. The sketch in Fig. I shows such an example made of bell-metal in the reign of Henry VI and is now in the writer's collection.

Before proceeding further it is essential to understand why a city so far removed from this country should have so dominant an influence. As, in this brief article, it would be impossible to treat fully the cause of this close association between Venice and England, a few salient facts must suffice.

All churches under the domination of the Pope had to conform to Roman Catholic ritual, which ordained the use of candles of wax on the High Altar, in the celebration of Mass, and on the Holy Sabbath of Easter. The enormous amount of beeswax used in our churches, particularly for the Paschal Light, is exemplified in the records of Canterbury Cathedral under the year 1457, where mention is made of a candle used for the Paschal Light weighing three hundred pounds.

Yet the Paschal candlestick of Durham Cathedral was much more imposing and was termed "The Wonder of England." With the candle in place it reached, within the height of a man, to the topmost vault and was kindled through a hole in the roof by a man with a long pole conveying a lighted taper. When once lighted it had to burn for six weeks without being rekindled, and this of course applied to all the Paschals throughout the realm.

Venice was the chief source of our supply of wax, as it was then termed, and the value of this imported commodity through the Port of London between the years 1479 and 1483 exceeded £11,000. In the year 1456 Venetian merchants set up their headquarters in London at a place called The Factory, and two ships from the Venetian fleet calling at the Low Countries made annual visits to our shores. This constant and close intercourse resulted in the introduction of Venetian designs in our candlesticks, and not only so, but new *motifs* adopted in Venice were promptly reproduced by our makers of candlesticks.

During the XVIth century, while still retaining their preference for Venetian designs, the English makers in their search for new ideas endeavoured to incorporate with them Flemish *motifs*, resulting in a candlestick of so composite a form as to puzzle collectors by its bizarre appearance, and the result of these efforts forms the subject of this article.

When a new *motif* of Venetian origin appears in the stem of an English candlestick the correlation of dates all of the XVth century ensures accuracy within a decade in allocating the period of its introduction.

As English candlesticks are unmarked and no records exist concerning them, it would be advisable to select an example which has been well authenticated from other sources, and this is provided by a specimen in the British Museum featured in Fig. V.

Encircling the base of this candlestick is an inscription which reads, "In ye begynnynge God be my," and has been interpreted, "In the beginning God made me," and by the style of lettering and the mode of spelling the authorities pronounce it of XVIth century origin.

Being fashioned in brass at a period prior to its manufacture in this country, it must have been constructed from foreign metal and at a time when a great quantity had been thrown on the market by the melting down of church brasses. Starting with the Dissolution of Monasteries, the practice became so remunerative that the custom of despoiling the churches on the slightest pretext by tearing the brass tablets from their stone matrices was all too prevalent even in Elizabethan times, and it is possible the inscription is a vague reference to the brass of the candlestick having once done duty in the adornment of the church and in the service of God.

As this candlestick, shown in Fig. V, is so well authenticated it may be desirable to examine it in some detail in order to determine more precisely the period of manufacture.

In their desire to break away from Eastern influence the Venetians introduced towards the close of the XVth century a baluster stem copied from the stem used in their wine glasses, as may be seen in a picture painted by Ghirlandaio in the year 1480 (Fig. II).

The English experienced great difficulty in their endeavour to incorporate the pear-shaped baluster with their stems, for the latter were cylindrical without tapering. The example in Fig. V shows the culmination of these efforts throughout the XVIth century, none preceding it being so true to form, and this suggests the last quarter of the century.

A Venetian artist named Catena painted a picture in the year 1530 entitled "S. Jerome in his Study," and on a shelf depicts a candlestick showing a new *motif* in the stem, Fig. III, which may be termed the Catena stem cup, and this *motif* occurs in the stems of English candlesticks as early as the reign of Henry VIII. In the example under discussion, however, it takes on a new form, being duplicated by inversion, and it is obvious this will be a later type than the simple stem cup. Hence the latter part of the century is indicated.

This British Museum specimen is the latest of the four anomalies, but is treated first because of authentication by external evidence. So in referring to the type of socket with its bulging centre due to the presence of a convex band as evidence assigning it to the last quarter of the century, one must defer support of this statement until we are considering earlier examples.

Between the balusters and the stem-cup *motif* is the Venetian circular drip, quite redundant, as there is a pronounced drip-tray conjoined with the base, and below the stem-cup is a Venetian bell-shaped base changed from the usual truncated cone to a complete bell form. Once again one is confronted with a late development not seen in any type preceding it.

Finally, the whole rests on a double-saucer base, a type originally introduced by the Flemings towards the end of the XVth century and featured in a picture by Marinus called "The Misers," Fig. IV. In the earlier

SOME ANOMALIES IN ENGLISH CANDLESTICK DESIGN

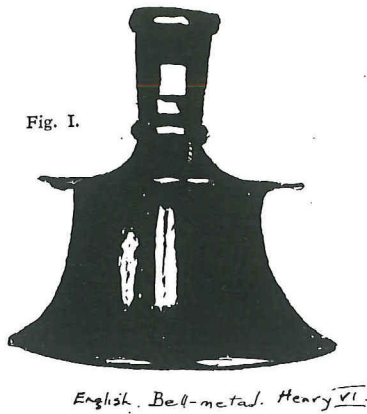


Fig. I.

English. Bell-metal. Henry VI.

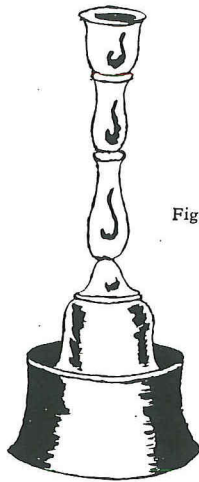


Fig. II.

Ghirlandajo. 1480.

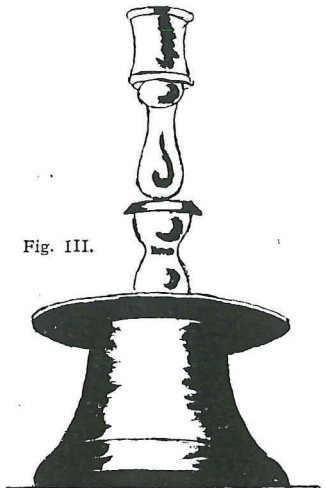


Fig. III.

From Catena's S. Jerome. 1530.

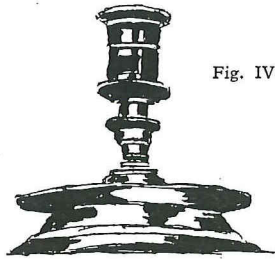


Fig. IV.

From "The Misers" by Marinus

Flemish examples the two saucers are about the same size, the upper one resting on the base of the inverted lower one, but in later types the upper saucer is much more shallow and features as a drip-tray conjoined with the base.

Thus the British Museum specimen consists of a Venetian socket slightly modified by the English, a Venetian baluster, a Venetian circular drip-tray, a Venetian stem-cup, a Venetian bell-base modified, and the whole resting on a Flemish base supporting what is visible of a Flemish stem, only a single lenticular node proclaiming its origin. And all these Venetian motifs, with the single exception of the unchanged drip-tray, indicate a period occupying the last quarter of the XVIth century. Surely such a conglomeration of motifs may be termed an anomaly.

This Elizabethan example is later than the specimen from the writer's collection illustrated in Fig. VI, which stands 11½ in. high on a circular base 6¾ in. in diameter and was obviously an altar candlestick. Being fashioned in bell-metal is significant of the days of Mary I, when for the short period of her reign the looting of brass was suspended as Roman Catholicism was again paramount.

There is a pronounced lip to the socket, but otherwise it shows indecision in the moulding of the cylinder, having a shallow groove round its centre and a slight

convexity below it—an intermediate type between that of Fig. V with its central convex band and the grooved cylinder of the variety preceding it. It is essential to point out these minute changes, for when these findings are borne out by slight differences in other motifs and all tend to consolidate the period assigned, confirmation results.

The short stem consists of a series of mouldings based on the baluster, but the perfect type is not yet attained. The circular drip-tray in the centre forms a cover for the boldly-designed stem-cup of Catena, the stem being somewhat conventionalised, and the Venetian bell-base shows a decided break in outline, the lower part inclining towards the vertical. This is an advanced form compared with the next example, which precedes it in period, but not so late as the bell-shape seen in Fig. V. The whole rests on the Flemish base, the upper portion of it forming a definite drip-tray. Here again there is a welding rather than a blending of Venetian and Flemish motifs.

In Fig. VII is shown another of this type, but in this instance it is composed of the finest brass and is one of a pair in the writer's collection. Obviously formed from looted brass, it was probably made in the reign of Edward VI.

Whereas the period from 1535-1545 was the most devastating in the destruction of church brasses, and the Catena stem-cup was probably introduced about the former date, yet the conventional form shown in this candlestick would have taken some years to have been evolved, and also because the simpler form appears in other examples made in the reign of Henry VIII.

The Venetian bell-base is not so pronounced as in the later examples; in fact there is a gradual rise in height from the earliest to the most recent and the Flemish base is not so deep.

Almost a Flemish tendency is shown in the socket, the sides being not quite vertical. A narrow groove encircles it at the centre and this type preceded that with a convex band.

There is no separate drip-tray, the broad lip of the stem-cup fulfilling that purpose, and the stem rises from the base of the hollow cup. The baluster shows a typical effort in conjunction with a Flemish cylindrical stem. This example is the most pleasing mainly on account of the graceful stem-cup and the bell base being less dominant.

Fig. VIII illustrates one of a pair of candlesticks in the collection of H. Willis, Esq., of Hendon. Carried out in bell-metal, it is covered with a black patina due to the formation of copper oxide. This specimen is an anachronism, for the socket is a reversion to the type associated with the first stabilised form of candlestick made in the reign of Henry V, and was changed about the year 1500 by the addition of convex bands above and below, after the Venetian model, and this latter type persisted through at least four centuries in what may be termed the truly English candlestick, for apart from these convex bands its form may be traced with little modification from the XVth to the XIXth century and probably beyond.

This reversion to a primitive form is disconcerting, but luckily other features, either by their presence or absence, enable one to date this candlestick to within a period of thirty years.



Fig. V. Brass Candlestick. Late XVIth century. *British Museum.*



Fig. VI. Bell-metal Candlestick. Mid-XVIth century. *Author's Collection.*

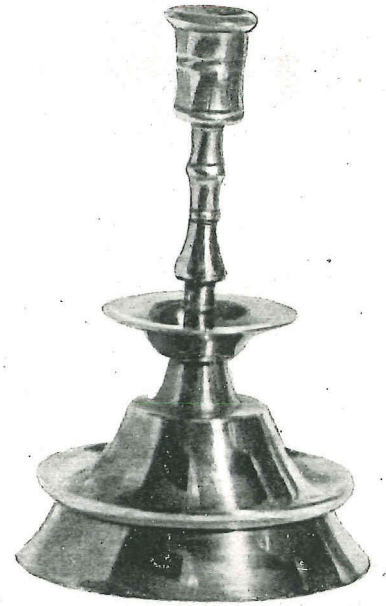


Fig. VII. Brass Candlestick. Edward VI. *Author's Collection.*



Fig. VIII. Bell-metal Candlestick. Early Tudor. *Willis Collection.*

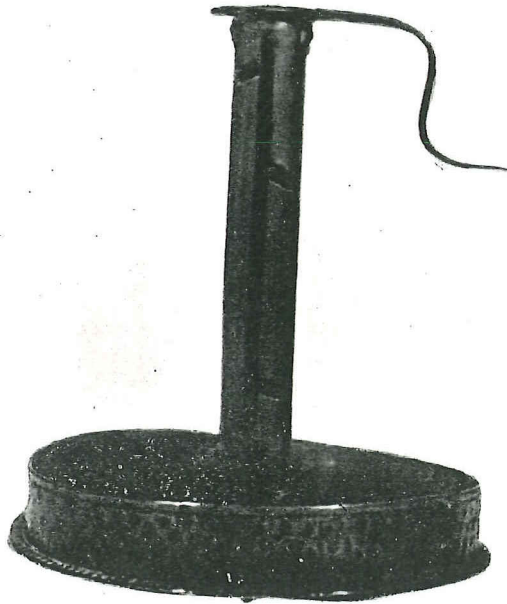


Fig. IX. Pewter Candlestick. "The Grainger" 1616. *Victoria and Albert Museum.*



Fig. X. Copper Candlestick. XVIIth century. *Author's Collection.*

The presence of a baluster, although in its most primitive form, would suggest a date later than 1500 which was about the time of its introduction in English candlesticks, and the absence of the Catena stem-cup, present in the other examples of this type, fixes the date prior to 1530. It is therefore quite in order to place it as Early Tudor, especially so as the stem-cup appears in examples made in the reign of Henry VIII.

The Venetian bell-base is lower than those already described, and the lenticular node to the socket has not yet been modified. A new *motif*, a deep convex moulding, connects stem and bell-base.

The appearance of an isolated *motif* of more primitive form may be insufficient to prove earlier origin, but when all the principal *motifs* of an earlier type are featured in one candlestick it is reasonable to assume an earlier date.

So in these four examples there is a gradation in the development of the baluster, the socket, the bell-base and, where present, in the Catena stem-cup, the example in Fig. VIII being the most primitive and descending numerically to Fig. V, the most recent.

These XVIth century examples have been selected to illustrate a particular type and by no means exhaust the varieties of English candlesticks still extant and made in that period.

It would appear that there were three important firms making candlesticks in the XVIth century, all these anomalies being examples made by the same firm; another type consisting of Venetian and Flemish *motifs* in the stem and socket only and resting on an English base, having no secondary bell-base, and no drip-tray, were probably made by another firm; and finally the simple English candlestick, rarely deviating from the original design of Henry V period, having a shallow circular base, a cylindrical stem without knobs and a laterally symmetrical socket without lateral apertures and no separate drip-tray, and continuing to be produced throughout the centuries despite the multifarious collection of designs appearing in the XVIIth and XVIIIth centuries was made by yet another firm.

It may be likened to a gold thread forming a continuous strand through the kaleidoscopic fabric of English candlestick design, a hiatus occurring in the latter half of the XVth century when it was smothered by the enthusiastic adoption of the Venetian model.

The pewter candlestick illustrated in Fig. IX is the most important in the Victoria and Albert Collection. It is cast in relief with the arms of the Pewterers' Company and the name William Grainger, the Steward of the Company, and bears the date 1616, the earliest dated candlestick of English make. But it occupies no place in the history and development of candlestick design and reminds one of a totem pole enclosed in a circular fence. So far as design is concerned, it is a travesty and not to be compared with many English candlesticks whose graceful stems rise naturally from the base by means of an intervening foot.

The only example with this type of base in the writer's knowledge is a specimen in hand-wrought copper shown in Fig. X. Being made of sheet metal, it presents a good example of hammerwork, and being strictly utilitarian is a desirable acquisition.

Even the baluster of the stem in the Grainger candlestick is angular and appears to have been designed to present a larger surface for engraving. This may be

permissible in examples designed for enamelling but certainly not desirable in pewter. The only parts of the stem of pleasing design are the two spool-shaped *motifs* unmarred by engraving. Strangely enough, pewter collectors are seldom interested in specimens with surface decoration whether it is repoussé work or stamped with various designs, and generally speaking they are usually of foreign origin, and of all types of decorated pewter surface casting is the last desirable.

No metal capable of receiving a high polish is so pleasing to the eye as pewter, for accompanying the polish is a sheen not noticeable in any other metal, due probably to the play of light on minute irregularities in its surface. The difference may be clearly seen when compared with a surface of polished steel approximately of the same colour.

It is because of this quality that English pewterers have generally refrained from disfiguring its surface with engraving of any kind, for a clear unbroken surface reveals a beauty best unadorned.

Hence the main interest of the Grainger candlestick lies in its close association with the Pewterers' Company in its authenticity and its being the earliest dated candlestick of English origin. On the other hand, there are pewter candlesticks produced in this country and still in existence made over a hundred years earlier.

Generally speaking, the English makers of candlesticks were loth to incorporate in their designs either a separate drip tray or a lateral aperture in the socket and certain groups of candlesticks in the Tudor Period possess peculiarities common to all in the group, evidence of their manufacture by a particular firm and also showing their English origin by an abstention of one or the other of these features.

For example, in these anomalies, despite their conglomeration of Venetian and Flemish designs, they each possess a typically English socket unmarred by a gaping aperture—a constant feature in all examples from the Western mainland.

In another group made in the Tudor period, while all the earlier examples have a lateral aperture in the socket, not one in the group possesses a separate drip tray, and in the latter half of the period even the lateral aperture disappears.

But there is one type of candlestick composed almost entirely of Venetian elements blended into a composite English design which may have been produced by a great number of firms throughout the country, for it was the most popular candlestick ever made in Britain, retaining its popularity for over one hundred and fifty years. Strangely enough, it bears a Dutch name, being termed The Heemskirk Candlestick, and is so important as to require a long article to do it justice.

#### CHINESE ENAMELLED POLYCHROME PORCELAIN— Continued from page 13.

The expression has not been adopted, since the Chinese first used it, by any European writers, because the term "cloisonné" is already in use for something quite different, namely one kind of enamel on metal; its extension to porcelain will only puzzle those who do not know under what conditions it was first mistakenly used by the Chinese writer who prepared the Chinese Government Catalogue of the London Exhibition of 1935-6, and who evidently did not consult a French dictionary.