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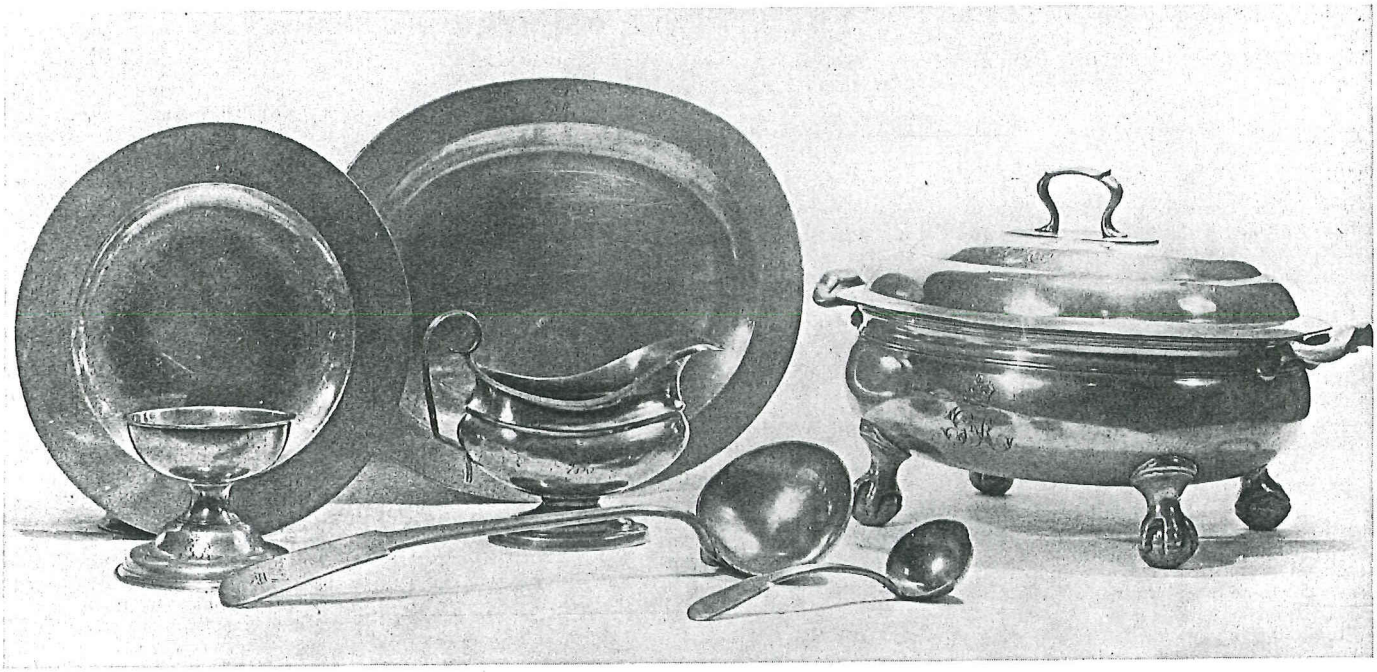
EVERYDAY METAL FOR ROYAL PERSONS

By JUDITH BANISTER



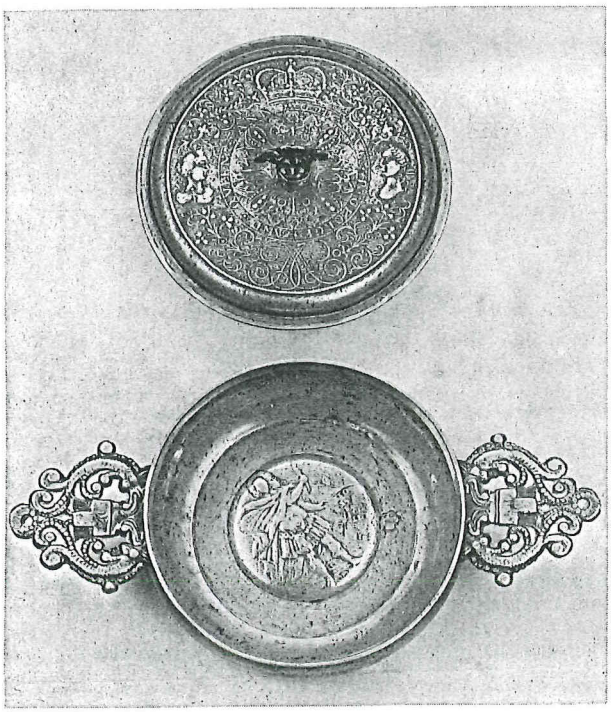
1—PEWTER FROM THE "GARNISH" MADE FOR THE CORONATION OF GEORGE IV IN 1821, BY THOMAS ALDERSON. From the exhibition "Pewter with Royal Associations" at Pewterers' Hall from July 1 to 13

PEWTER in England dates back for certain to Roman times, when the tin mines of Cornwall—the Stannaries—were opened up. During the Middle Ages, the pewterers' guilds imposed strict rules on the craftsmen, for pewter is an easy metal to abuse. They set up standards for the metal and they seized wares that infringed them, their chief concern being the "fine pewter" used for dishes and plates, an alloy containing 26 parts of copper to 112 parts of tin. For tankards, jugs and other hollow-wares, the prescribed pewter was a similar alloy of tin with lead, and known as "lay metal". Ordinances regulating the trade date back at least to 1348, but it was not until 1474 that the Worshipful Company of Pewterers received a Royal Charter, an occasion they are celebrating by a 500th anniversary exhibition of *Pewter with Royal Associations* at their charming small Hall in Oat Lane in the City of London.

It is not strictly true to suggest that pewter was the poor man's silver. It was, rather, the everyday metal-ware of everyone, including the more affluent classes. Almost everything made in silver was also made in pewter—plates and dishes, tankards and flagons, porringers and candlesticks, salts and spoons. Unfortunately, because the metal is relatively soft and subject to oxidation, huge quantities have been lost, and pieces made before the second half of the 17th century are exceptionally rare. There are no equivalents, for example, of the "pewter sesterne" such as Pepys purchased in March 1668 (though an 18th-century wine-cistern does survive), nor of sconces such as he bought for his "stayres and entry" in January 1662.

The exhibition at Pewterers' Hall limits the subject yet further, for it is restricted to pewter which is both decorated—rare enough in itself—and which commemorates royalty. The organisers have succeeded in finding some 80 examples, many from the Company's own superb collection—which is enhanced, of course, with such treasures as the five historic, and now seldom seen, touch-plates, fragile pewter sheets which give the marks of the London pewterers free of the Company from 1667 until 1935.

The earliest piece on show—a little hexagonal casket of early-14th-century date—was probably a chrismatory, though its provenance is unknown. On the cover are the Arms of France and of England below a relief of the Annunciation, while round the sides appears the Salutation. Rather like a font-cover, a cast model of a talbot stands guard as the finial to the lid, while the box, only 3½in high overall, is supported on three bold paw feet.



2—TWO-EARED PORRINGER AND COVER. The bowl carries a portrait of the Duke of Marlborough as a Roman warrior, while Queen Anne and Prince George of Denmark are on the cover

The technique of impressing—instead of engraving—armorials or other symbols of ownership is almost exclusive to pewterwork, and several dishes feature stamped badges and cyphers, among them that of Queen Elizabeth I on a pair of saucer-dishes, 6¼in. in diameter, which were found during excavations at Hampton Court Palace, and are shown by permission of The Queen. Another dish, 13½in across, also bears the stamped badge and cypher of Elizabeth I, and in addition has on the rim the Roman numeral LIV, the "L" being reversed. Found at Westminster, it was perhaps part of a Court service or "garnish" of pewter about 1560. Two other dishes of the same size are from a series of 20 found in 1899 on the site of Guy's Hospital, and are struck with a crowned feather device, believed to be the plume of Prince Arthur, eldest son of Henry VII, who died in 1502. A smaller dish, with the Royal Arms as used between 1405 and 1603 enamelled on the central boss, has the mark of William Curtis, an eminent pewterer of the mid-16th century, while the same technique was used for an 18-inch oval dish of about 1630 with lobed ornament on the rim and round the boss, which is of enamelled brass.

Two pewter beakers show the extremely rare cast relief-work—one of them exceptional in that it can be closely dated from the device and initials of Henry, son of James I, who was created Prince of Wales in 1610 and died two years later. The other beaker is of the squat type on a low foot known as a Magdalen Cup. The body is decorated overall in relief with flowers and royal emblems—the Rose, Thistle and Fleur-de-lys—within strapwork cartouches. It is 4½in high, and must be dated soon after 1600.

Perhaps the most endearing exhibits are, however, the chargers made at the time of Charles II's Restoration—mostly, it transpires, to celebrate his betrothal and marriage to Catherine

of Braganza in 1662. Fewer than a score of these dishes are recorded —and some half-dozen of them are suspect—but the exhibition contains three superb examples. That belonging to the Pewterers is one of the finest of the series. The broad rim is engraved with roses and foliate trails in wrigglework, around four roundels showing the King and Queen, a phoenix and an eagle with child. In the well are the Royal Arms within the Garter, while the words, common to most of the series, *Vivat Rex Carolus Secundus Beati Pacifici* 1662 appear in the booge, or sloping side of the piece. Measuring 20¼in. in diameter, the touch is attributed to William Pettiver.

Another dish (Fig 3), 11⅜in across, is rather more naive in style, with a trail of acorns and thistles around the rim and a crowned lion and unicorn supporting the Stuart Arms in the centre. The ornament on the rim closely approximates to that on yet another dish on show. At the top is a fouled anchor, while in the well appears a portrait of James, Duke of York, and his flagship which is engaged in battle, presumably the Battle of Lowestoft, in which the future James II was victorious over the Dutch in 1665.

3—CHARGER WITH WRIGGLEWORK DECORATION; IN THE WELL ARE THE ROYAL ARMS OF CHARLES II WITHIN THE GARTER

Such charmingly ingenuous designs make the rather more formal and unadorned "garnish" of dishes and other pewter from the Coronation Banquet of George IV in 1821 (Fig 1) look rather dull—though their history is far from that, for many were simply purloined by the onlookers who swept into Westminster Hall as the Royal party retired.

However, amusing commemorative pewter did not disappear with Charles II and his brother James. The accession of Mary II and her husband William of Orange occasioned a number of beakers, tankards and porringers decorated with the royal couple either in wrigglework or in cast relief. Again the portraits have an artless quality very much akin to the slipware dishes and mugs of the period: a naivety no doubt due to the fact that pewterers, unlike silversmiths, were not allowed to employ outside engravers, but had to do it in their own workshops or be fined for the misdemeanour. The fine zigzags used on pewter necessitated a rather coarse outline, but most of the subjects are readily recognisable, and the style may well have appealed to the pewter-buying populace more than the finer lines of conventional engraving. The technique was by no means restricted to England, as can be seen from a pair of Dutch beakers representing William and Mary (Fig 4) decked out with crowns of rather unusual form, and complete with sceptres.

Cast relief portraits were also popular at the end of the 17th century, and were often applied to the bases of the shallow porringers which usually featured one or two flat and often intricately decorated and pierced ears. Many of the two-eared variety also had low domed covers, very much in the manner of the French *écuelles* given full of sweetmeats to nursing mothers. The English pewterers often chose to dress their royal and other subjects in Roman dress, as in one example showing William and Mary as a Roman emperor and empress somewhat inappropriately accompanied by a Tudor rose. England's victories overseas found expression about 1705 in a very beautifully cast design in low relief (Fig 2) showing Queen Anne and her consort Prince George of Denmark amid fine scrolling foliage on the cover, and a Roman warrior, intended no doubt for the victorious Duke of Marlborough, in the medallion in the base of the bowl.

By now, silver designs were more than ever influencing the pewterers, as in the scroll-handled cup (Fig 5) dated 1702 with a swirl-fluted base above which are impressed the words "God save Queen Anne" and the arms of the Pewterers' Company.

Under the Hanoverians, the pewterers returned, perhaps a little sadly, to simpler designs—practical ale pitchers, such as those engraved with the crown and cypher of George II and perhaps a royal gift to the Hospital at Chelsea, who have loaned two to the exhibition.

By the middle of the 18th century, there were, of course, alarming developments in Birmingham and Sheffield that were in time to oppress the pewter trade severely, and a century later silver-plated wares had almost entirely superseded pewter except for tavern measures and tankards. Today, the pewterers have retaliated with fine cast-work and with attractive spinnings—achievements to be admired in the special pieces made to commemorate recent royal occasions—Her Majesty's silver wedding and the marriage of Princess Anne. For those who think of pewter as a dull metal, fashioned only into simple and functional shapes, the Pewterers' exhibition is an enlightenment not to be missed.

4—ONE OF A PAIR OF DUTCH-MADE BEAKERS. Decorated with wrigglework, they show William III on one side, Queen Mary on the other. (*Right*) 5—TWO-HANDLED CUP, 1702. The inscription is punched in relief