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1. An elaborate early 19th-century teapot.

2. Mug, about 1810–20.

3. A 17th-century English jug.

Pewter

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PEWTER is one of the few remaining antiques that can be collected cheaply. Pewter prices have scarcely risen in the past twenty years except in the more expensive antique dealers' galleries, where only rarities are to be had. The attractions of pewter lie in the beautiful patinas of the metal, the sturdy, bold and unembellished designs, and the associations that come to mind when examining a fine flagon, tankard, or a monastic platter.

England has known pewter for nearly two thousand years. The Roman conquerors of Britain manufactured it here, and used good Cornish tin, to which lead was added. Some of this pewter has been found in archæological excavations; the plough has turned up more. In fact, the tin and lead mixture of Roman pewter found in our soil differs very little from that used in Britain in the fourteenth century, when the Guildhall decreed that the proportions of the alloy for the Pewterers' Company was to be 16 pounds lead to 112 pounds tin.

On the Continent, at about the same time, the proportions were four parts lead to ninety-six of tin, for dishes, porringers and the like. Ten parts lead was used for the smaller articles. Limoges, Montpelier, Nuremberg, and other pewter-making centres all laid down the exact proportions to be used, but none was more rigidly enforced than those of our own Pewterers' Company. Records made in 1351 tell of disciplinary action taken against pewterers using incorrect formulæ. The secrets of English "fyne peauter" were not only jealously guarded, but the methods of alloying were constantly being improved; hence the reputation which England possessed, at least up to Victorian times, for the finest pewter in the world.

The exact alloy to be used differs for varying articles, and must comply with ordinances laid down through the years. More recently copper and brass in varying amounts were added to the lead content. To-day pewter may be defined as an alloy consisting of about ninety per cent. tin with small additions of lead and brass or copper.

During the Middle Ages, when pewter-making was at the height of its prosperity, the pewterer had to serve six years' apprenticeship before admission to the Guild. Even then his life was circumscribed by rules enforced by the Master and Wardens. He must not work after dark by artificial light, his metal was examined, his home was liable to search by Guild officials for forbidden metals; the weight, quality, type, and price of all that he made must be recorded, together with full details of sales and customers.

Although little of the pewter of mediæval times remains available to the collector, there are many examples to be had, at reasonable prices, dating from the seventeenth, eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Like all guildsmen, the men who made this pewter were not only masters of their craft but artists as well, working for the good of their Guild. Personal recognition, so far as posterity was concerned, did not interest them. True, the pewterer, having served his six years and produced his "test" piece, was granted the privilege of recording his "touch," or mark, with which he might stamp his wares on the touch plates at the Company's Hall. In nine cases out of ten, however, he did not trouble to reproduce it on his goods again. Hence the lack of identification marks on most pewter vessels that have survived.

Although the plates of "touches" still exist, the registers of names to which they correspond have, in many instances, been lost. The striker, too, often left his mark haphazard on any plate he chose, irrespective of the era to which it belonged. These are but a few of the difficulties which stand in the way of attempts at identification.

A crowned V.R. on a mug or a tankard does not necessarily mean that the vessel was made in Victorian times. It may be the Government excise stamp guaranteeing the correctness of the measure, and may quite possibly appear on pieces made, say, in the days of Queen Anne.

To bewilder collectors still further, Edinburgh pieces are sometimes stamped "London." The St. Andrew's cross was a recognised English quality mark at an early period, yet wares from Ghent and Nuremburg bear the same stamp and on inferior pewter.

To the pewter enthusiast these things do not matter. The most he can hope to do is to assign to his pieces an approximate date and the country of origin.

Even the dating has its pitfalls. For instance, in Georgian times tinkers and the travelling gipsies repaired most of the household pewter. Being unable to

4. Tankard, late 18th century.

5. Mug, William IV.

6. Flagon, mid-18th century.

7.—Mustard pots, late 17th and 18th centuries.

obtain fresh moulds, owing to Guild edicts, they recast from examples of local designs, many of which were of considerable antiquity. The result is that there are many mugs, tankards, porringers, goblets, plates, and other pewter objects on the shelves of antique dealers to-day made by Georgian journeymen from moulds of a pattern at least a hundred years earlier.

A safe rule to follow in judging pewter is to remember that the simpler the object the greater the age. Straight and tapering sides come before "pretty-pretty" curves, plain tankard tops before nodule domes, straight spoon handles before those with carvings. Many pieces speak for themselves. The highly decorative teapot (Fig. 1) can only be Georgian. Similarly the fine English jug (Fig. 3) can be identified at a glance as being considerably older than the tankard, mugs and flagon, also of English make, illustrated in Figs. 4, 5 and 6. Conversely, the beautiful communion flagon (Fig. 8) is almost Gothic in design, but being a church piece must not be regarded as typical of seventeenth-century simplicity.

To know and feel the true age of pewter comes far easier if the student has a working knowledge of period furniture and decoration. It helps, too, to be familiar with the work of goldsmiths and silversmiths from the Renaissance onwards. This is particularly so when dealing with Continental pewter (Figs. 9, 10, 11).

The collector will also do well to remember that for the past three hundred years pewter has been the poor man's table silver and the plate of the modest country church. Look at Fig. 8 again. Viewed from a pew, in dim light, with the reflections of the candles playing on its patinated surface, this communion vessel would have appeared beautiful and rich indeed. Similarly, pewter should be intelligently displayed in the home. Place it on mantelpiece, oak bench, chest, or sideboard so that it reflects the light of lamps, or candles, or even the firelight's glow. Only then will its surfaces repay the care bestowed on them by occasional wipings with a silk cloth.

Never scour pewter. Shine it bright and you ruin the lovely grey tints of brass, copper, or lead showing through the tin. If you must have your pewter bright, then clean it as the owners of your pieces did in their time, by "washing every three months in soape suddes and rub with oats or other huske-bearing grain."

Pewter which has been used in public-houses has generally been scoured to such an extent that the patina can only be restored by long exposure to the weather. These pieces more often than not bear the name of the inn to which they

8. This communion flagon, a fine example of its type, comes from a Sussex church and is dated 1677.

belonged. Some collectors obtain much pleasure from owning pieces bearing inscriptions such as "R. Harris. White Hart. Dunmow," "Geo. Thompson. Saracen's Head. Malling," "R. Shuttleworth," "Jno. Adams," and so on.

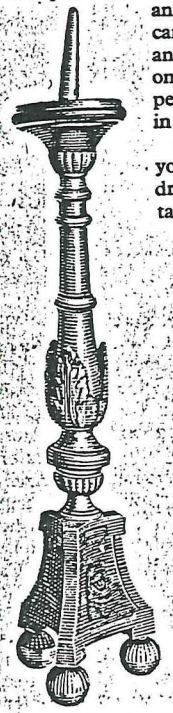
Do not be deterred by lack of markings, or by "touches" which are obviously incongruous. Judge your pewter by its patina, its shape, its feel, its finish, and your own good sense.

A word on prices. Twenty-five shillings is a fair price for pint tankards. For Scotch "tappit hens"—the generous Scots' pint—three to four pounds. These pieces are rare in England. For quart mugs, thirty-five shillings. For a good-sized early pewter plate, two pounds. Gill and half-gill measures, with or without brass rims, seven-and-sixpence. You should be able to buy a sound teapot for two or more pounds, according to period and condition. Mustard, pepper and salt pots should not cost more than seven-and-sixpence; spoons, five shillings each. Ordinary flagons can be had, with a little happy hunting, from thirty-five shillings upwards.

Many people are averse to making actual use of the pewter utensils which they possess. This is a mistake. Tea in a well-scoured pewter teapot—the scouring being confined to the inside of the pot, of course—can be delicious, especially if one's taste is on the strong side. Tea can also be kept with advantage in the tea caddies and canisters which are still to be had in dealers' shops, particularly in the country. The Queen Anne shape, with small ivory nodule on the dome-shaped lid, should be found for about thirty-five shillings; the cylindrical type, which many people mistake for tobacco jars, for even less. Pepper, salt, mustard and spices all keep well in their respective pewter utensils. Wax candles in a pair of pewter candlesticks of almost any design are pleasing. Flagons can be safely used for hot water, and nothing looks more lovely on an old oak table than a great pewter plate or dish, water filled, in which float full blown roses.

And any ale drinker will tell you that there is only one way to drink beer. From a pewter tankard.

9. Swedish tankard, about 1840. Note taper from top to bottom.



10. Flemish church candlestick, 35 in. high: a 17th-century altar-piece.

11. Swiss guild tankard of "silver" pewter cast in relief. About 1600.