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A collection of Continental pewter of both straight and twisted folds.

Old Pewter and its Story (I.)

The Would-be Collector will Find this Article Full of Invaluable Hints on How to Start

By HOWARD H. COTTERELL, F.R.Hist.S.

IF it were possible to step back and peep into the homes of our ancestors of three or four centuries ago and join them in a meal, we should find their table and other appointments simple and very few. On the plain solid oak refectory table we should see trenchers of wood (treen) or pewter, more probably both. No knives would be used, for each guest brought his own, and probably his own drinking vessel, too; forks were unknown, and each man helped himself with his fingers to whatever food was brought to the table, according to his fancy. A few loaves of bread and a flagon or two of pewter would probably complete the setting.

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THIS association of pewter with treen is age-old. It is impossible to say when either first came into use. The earliest form of pewter plate (as also of treen) was a plain, flat square, which in time developed into a square with a slight depression in the centre.

The next stage in its evolution was the addition, in one of the spandrels, of a second depression to receive salt or some other condiment. The final development brought the plate to the circular type we are familiar with in our dinner services to-day.

Vessels for holding liquids were made, in earliest days, of earthenware or strips of wood, built up barrel-wise and bound around the top and bottom, and sometimes in the centre, with willow bands, the inside being coated with pitch to make it water-tight. In Scandinavia there are pewter pots which display raised, moulded bands around them in perpetuation of the old willow-banding of the treen vessels which they had supplanted. So do ideas cling, long after their uses have passed and are forgotten.

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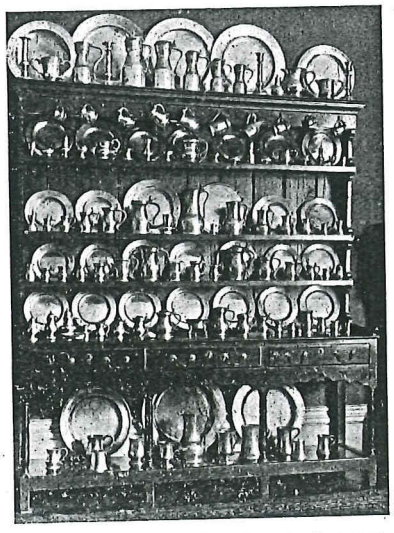
PEWTER was the greatest of the tin alloys. Its chief ingredient was tin, to which was added, in proportions according to the purpose for which it was to be applied, brass, lead, antimony, and sometimes bismuth.

Tin alone was too brittle, the addition of lead made it more ductile.

The various compositions were strictly regulated by the Pewterers' guilds, and search was made, without notice, to see that such regulations were being complied with by the pewterer.

To anyone desirous of forming a collection of the many interesting vessels made from pewter there is still an enchanting field. It is not necessarily the most beautiful pieces which are the most expensive. Very often it is quite the reverse, and if one's collecting is limited by a slender purse there can surely be no field with so many chances of success.

If, on the other hand, money is no object, there is every opportunity of forming a really fine collection, though the chase is hot and strong, and no time must be lost in dallying when scent of a good thing is struck.



The fine decorative value of pewter is seen at its best with an oak dresser as a background.

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A definite plan for making a collection must be formed at the start, otherwise it is certain that one will, for sheer love of the metal, buy anything and everything one sees, and fill one's shelves with an altogether heterogeneous and unsuitable assemblage of pieces.

One may specialise in English, Scottish or Irish pewter, or make a British collection with nothing later—without some very good reason—than a fixed date, *e.g.*, 1750, 1775 or 1800, or any other date which suits one's fancy. There is plenty of scope in whatever plan is chosen.

Again, there are those who may elect to confine their collection to some European country or period, or to specialise in tankards, flagons, measures, church pewter, or any one of a hundred other ways, but having made your plan stick to it, determined to lead the way in that particular field of pewter collecting.

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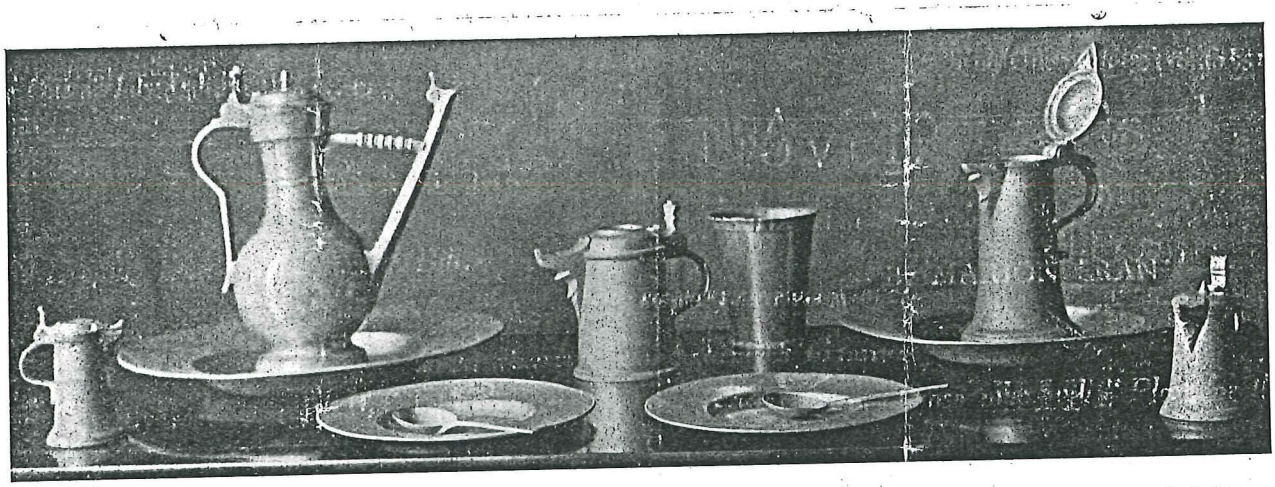
How well I can remember my own early days and mistakes when pewter and more pewter seemed the only worth-while thing in life, and collecting without a plan was my method!

And the result? When eventually I became acquainted with fellow-collectors and their long-expected visit to my treasures materialised, I failed to obtain the equally long-expected praise and appreciation. I received, instead—criticism — for mixing seventeenth-century English plates with early nineteenth-century



tavern pots, or an English church flagon with a Swiss rococo teapot, and so on.

This friendly advice—hurtful at the time—I listened to in chastened mood, but with a determination to resort, as soon as my friend had gone, to the torture which every beginner needs must face, the weeding out early " finds "! One *only* may he be allowed to keep, although this, too, will ere long be relegated to the back of the deepest drawer—his first piece! So much one has to grant for sentiment.

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HAVING decided the form a collection shall take, the question arises how to set about it? The ideal way, of course, for those whose vocation permits, is to " nose around " small antique shops in town and country.

Another way is to have your name put on the lists of those who receive catalogues from the sale rooms. Another plan is to insert a simple advertisement in one or two of the papers and magazines which are read by collectors. Such advertisements have produced treasures ere now at little cost—*and will again!*

IF possible, get into touch with other collectors, they may have quite good " weedings " for disposal cheaply.

Of course, if money is not a chief concern, there are dealers who specialise in pewter, but they, of course, are conversant with current values and, though they do get hold of fine pieces, it is not to be expected that many bargains will be discovered there, for they are under heavy expenses. I wish that I could mention the names of those in whom I have acquired faith!

Chief of all, however, learn—by reading and by study—to have faith in your own judgment. In the Victoria and Albert Museum, South Kensington, a wonderful collection of old pewter, British and Continental, is permanently displayed. Spend a few half-days there getting familiar with types and the " hang of things." Roman pewter may be studied at the British Museum.

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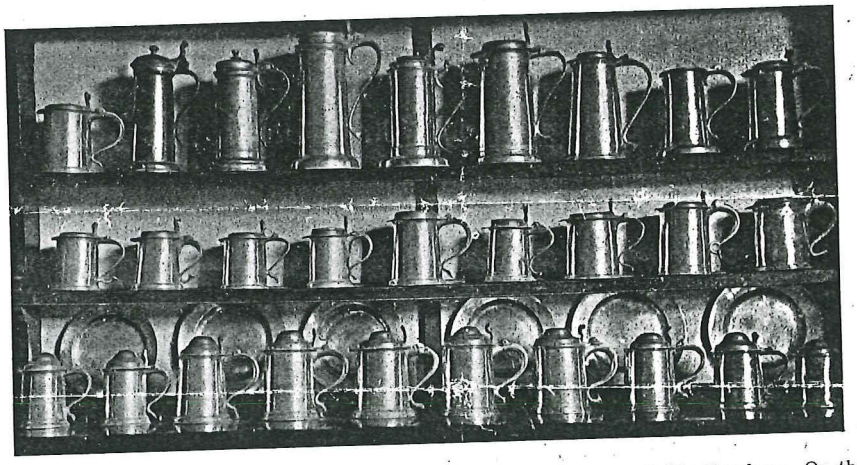
The cleaning of pewter has ever been a debatable point, though my own view is all for cleaning, except in rare cases of beautiful patination. Apart from such treasures, how can " the restful sheen of pewter " be known to those who keep their pieces in a state bordering on old iron in appearance?

THE illustrations have been selected to cover as much ground as possible in a short space, and to show both British and Continental examples. The head-piece to this article shows a collection of German, Austrian and Swiss rococo pewter of both straight and twisted folds. The six plates on the upper shelf are Bohemian, and those on the lower shelf from Zurich. The two " helmet " ewers and the bowl hanging at the back are, left to right, South German, West German and Bohemian, respectively as they hang. Of the coffee-pots, Nos. 2, 6 and 12 are Bohemian; 3, 4, 11 and probably 1 are South German; 5 and 13 are Austrian; 7 Swiss; 8, Frankfort; 10, Karlsbad; and 9, probably Tyrolese. On the bottom row, 1, 2, 3, 5, 7, 8 and probably 9, are Bohemian, and 4 and 6 Viennese.



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THE second illustration shows British examples, from the collection of Dr. Young of Manchester, at an early stage in its development. Whilst it shows extremely well the fine decorative value of pewter, it also shows pieces, none of which, even to-day, is beyond the reach of the person of average means.

All the plates and dishes shown, with the exception of a flat scale plate almost in the centre, are of the ordinary single-reeded or plain-rimmed types which dominated the eighteenth century. On the very top of the dresser, interspersed with mugs, a feeding-bottle and ordinary candlesticks, are six Scottish tappit-hen shaped measures, five of the lidded variety and one of the rarer, unlidded Aberdeen type.

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HANGING below these are various measures of gill and lesser capacities, Nos. 1 and 9 are English lidless pear-shaped type; 2, 3, 4, 8 and 10 Glasgow lidded, pear-shape: 5 and 6 Baluster measures, with an Irish " Haystack "

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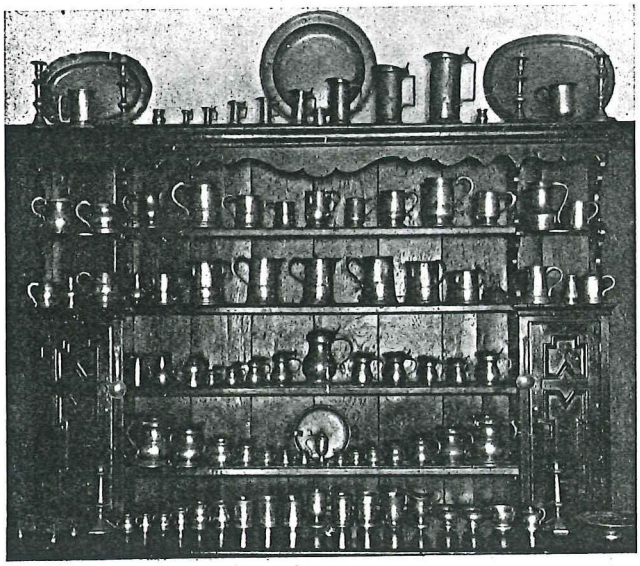

(Top) Some of the plainer forms of Continental pewter, including broad rimmed dishes of the seventeenth century.

(Above) A magnificent array of British tankards and flagons.

(Left) A collection of pewter showing the types available to the average collector.

OLD PEWTER AND ITS STORY (I.)

(Continued from page —)

in No. 7. Below these is an assortment of salts, peppers and mugs.

At either end of the shelf below is a double measure, between which, left to right, are five English Baluster measures of the "Double-Volute" type, two small "Thistle-shaped" Scottish measures (very rare) and a set of six Channel Islands measures of the Jersey type.

Below this again are Edinburgh baluster measures with "Ball" and "Embryo-shell" thumbpieces, and in the centre—with a lidless Aberdeen baluster on either side—an English baluster of the "Bud" type, to the right of which are a quart Glasgow lidded pear-shape, four more Edinburgh balusters and a spice canister at the end.

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On the body of the dresser are three Dutch mustard pots, a "Nip" tappit hen-shaped measure, and four pear shapes of the Edinburgh type, and in the centre a small bowl on three wooden feet, probably Dutch, followed by five more Glasgow pear shapes and a set of four Irish lidless and handleless measures of baluster form. On the lower shelf are modern tankards and mugs with another Channel Islands measure in the centre.

With the exception of the one "Bud" type baluster measure and the single-reeded dishes—which are all of the first half of the eighteenth century—all the pieces on this dresser are of the period 1750–1820, and nearly all are obtainable without great difficulty to-day.

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Since this photograph was taken, Dr. Young's collection has developed into one of the finest in the world, and in the fourth illustration is shown a magnificent array of tankards and flagons which now adorn his shelves, all of which are of the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries.

Between a Stuart tankard 1675 and another 1690, the seven flagons appear in their correct chronological sequence, which roughly is as follows: 1615, 1635, 1635, 1660, 1675, 1675 and 1680.

On the middle shelf are nine more fine examples of the late flat-lidded type of Stuart tankard ranging from 1660 to 1705, several of which, though it does not come out in the reproduction, are covered with most interesting wriggled work engraving. On the bottom row is an equally interesting series of the double-domed variety, ranging from 1695 to 1740.

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Of the many forms of pewter which can be acquired quite cheaply to-day a goodly array is shown in the fifth illustration. A few of such pieces backed by some plates and dishes will enable one to acquire familiarity with the colour and the "feel" of pewter, for there is nothing like handling it to learn what there is to be taught by this fascinating metal.

On the top shelf is a set of eight cylindrical French wine measures from double-litre capacity downwards. On the shelf flanked by two spoons, are further examples of Scottish pear shapes, and on the left of the body of the dresser is a box-inkstand, or Standish, on four cupped feet and with two flaps working on a common hinge pin running down the centre.

Beneath one of the flaps is a full length compartment for pens, but the other side is divided into three compartments in one of which is a detachable sand-sprinkler, in another is an ink-well, and the third is empty, for wafers.

The bulk of the remainder of the pieces shown are the ordinary types of salts, peppers, mugs, tankards, cups, beakers and measures as used in homes and taverns from 1780 until pewter gave place to china and other present-day commodities; indeed, it is by no means exceptional to find them still holding on in country taverns and inns and places remote from the crowded towns and cities.

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The third illustration shows some of the plainer forms of Continental pewter, including broad-rimmed dishes of the seventeenth century of the type common to all countries at this period.

A Bernese spouted flagon, 13in. high, stands towards the left, with four smaller flagons of the type known as "Stitzen" in between. These, reading from left to right, are Tyrolese, Austrian, Zurich and Augsburg, with two Dutch spoons and a beaker with rococo lip and base to complete the picture.

These pieces, as also those in the first illustrations, are from the fine collection of my Continental collaborator, Robert M. Vetter, Esq., of Amsterdam,

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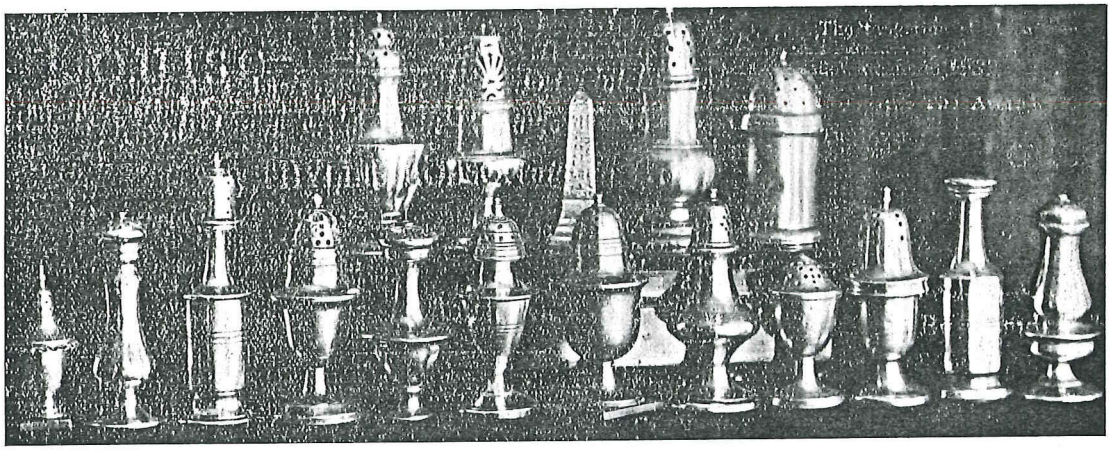

Beauty of form predominates in this collection, the various items of which cost but a few shillings each.

Old Pewter and its Story (II.)

Types that can be Acquired at Reasonable Cost, with Comments on the Display and the Restoration of Damaged Pieces

By HOWARD H. COTTERELL, F.R.Hist.S.

THE previous article consisted of a general survey of the pewter field, and I now want to focus attention on some of the items one can readily discover to-day.

If—as unfortunately is all too often the case in these days of high taxation—the laying-out of money is a serious obstacle, then there are few branches of collecting where so fine a display may be accomplished at so comparatively small a cost.

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IT will, I suppose, be readily conceded that one of the greatest charms of pewter is to be found in the æsthetic loveliness of its restful sheen. If this be granted, two conclusions follow: (*a*) It cannot be left in a dirty state—some measure of cleaning *must* be undertaken, though a *brilliant* polish should not be aimed at; and (*b*) beauty of form need be the only other test. Just these two points—beauty of form and sheen—constitute pewter's chief claims to æsthetic appreciation.

Rarity, high values, age and similar considerations may be brushed aside by the true lover of pewter for its own sake, who will find abundant satisfaction in many of the items which the advanced collector passes by.

But the latter has to pay very dearly for his selectiveness. In these articles I propose to illustrate and discuss such items as fulfil the claim to beauty of form and which may still be acquired at quite reasonable prices.

By way of breaking the ice I give in the first illustration a few peppers and similar minutæ, which will add diversity to a collection at a cost of but a few shillings each. The second photograph shows a most beautiful type of Normandy cider flagon of which several sizes may be found at quite reasonable cost.

The third illustration should convince even the most sceptical that there *is* something in pewter which is "different"! Is there any other ware which could achieve an effect as restful as this, in its unostentatious dignity? And yet this assemblage contains little which cannot still be bought for from half-a-crown to two or three pounds per piece!

Few are the homes one enters to-day wherein one does not see *some* odd piece preserved—a hot-water plate maybe, hanging on the wall, or a pint pot—thus adding a silent testimony to its mute, but almost universal appeal.

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WE encounter the same thing in the call for the quasi-Tudor expression in modern architecture, which, to complete its entity, shrieks for one or two pieces of pewter over the oak mantel or panelling.

Indeed, pewter making has, in a small way, received quite a re-birth from this call for it as a complement to the modern interior, and even for table wares, for there is a growing tendency — especially in America — towards serving meals off pewter, for which complete table appointments are essential—spoons, mugs, plates, bowls, salts, peppers, flagons, mustards and what-not.

Pewter is being collected to-day for its own sake, and used; not the "New Art" hammered type one sees in the shop windows, but either genuine old examples or perfect reproductions of them made from the old moulds.

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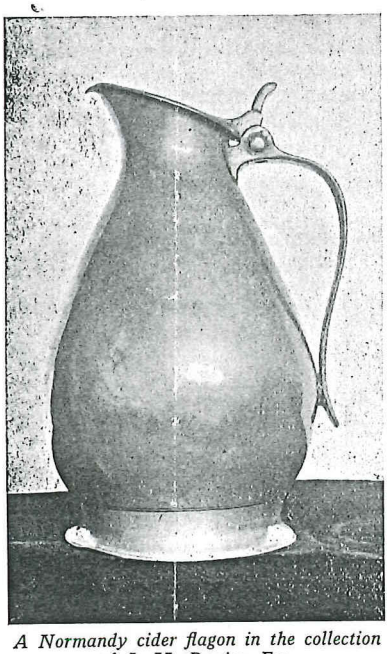
THE very first purchases towards a collection should, of course, be in the nature of a background of simple plates and dishes which, with care and circumspection, may be acquired for quite moderate prices in the directions indicated in my previous article.



A Normandy cider flagon in the collection of J. M. Davies, Esq.

Within the last few months I purchased five very good eighteenth century 9½in. plates at public auction for 50/-. They are well marked and in good condition; one of them—which was worth all the money I paid for the five—being engraved around the front of the rim with the name and address of an old City tavern. I do not say one will do that regularly, or frequently, but it is still to be done.

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IT is, however, little use attempting to buy much until one has bought some experience, so just at first go slowly, buy a plate or two, handle them, become familiar with the hang and weight of them, compare them with similar examples illustrated in such text books as you may possess; for one assumes that every collector will have sufficient enthusiasm to buy *and study* some of the handbooks on the subject.

See what your books say, hunt up the marks, and you will be surprised how your interest will grow, and what a lot the very handling of your treasures will have taught you about weight, texture, colour, "feel," and in other ways, throughout this hunting-up business.

By the time you have beaten out every available shred of information on your first half-dozen pieces, confidence will be half born and you will go on—along the same lines—from strength to strength.

There is something in the balance, the weight, the shut of a lid, which tells one as much as the sight of a piece. Watch a connoisseur—he will take a thing in both hands and lift it up and down, as a mother rocks her baby, his eyes fixed on the ceiling; then he'll turn to you with a smile . . . "That's a fine piece!" And you know it is right, though it is not until afterwards that he really examines it with his eyes! Try it yourself and this flair will come, "as sure as eggs is eggs!"

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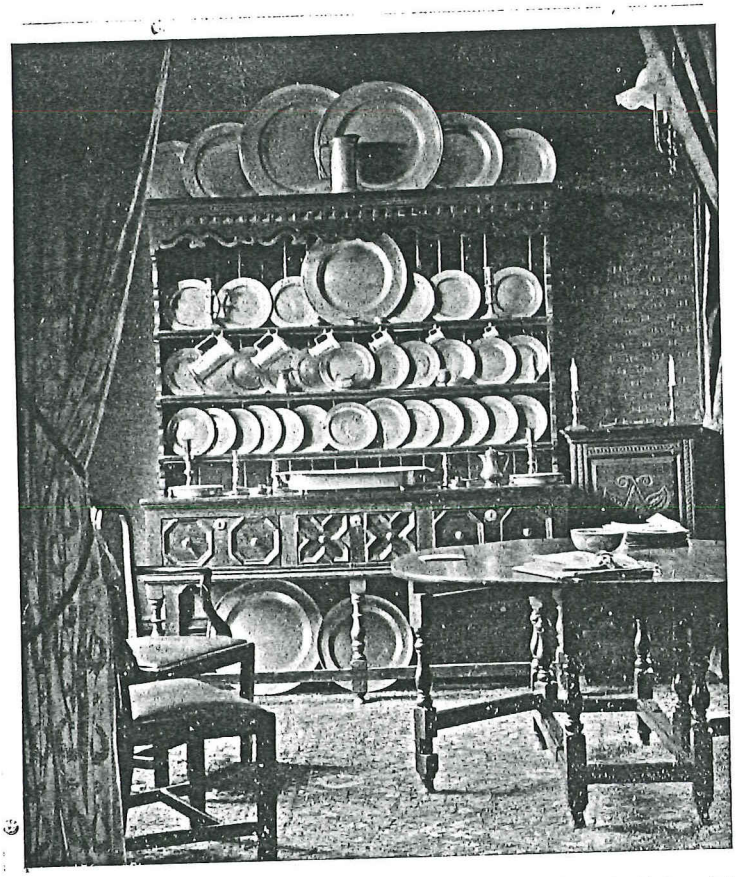
HAVING thus rubbed off the sharp edges of our initial blindness, and acquired a satisfactory background of plates and dishes, some small pieces of hollow-ware must now be acquired, to stand between, or in front of them, on one's shelves, with a flagon or two for dignity.

In this connection, examples of Channel Islands measures, as illustrated in the fourth



The collector should first of all acquire a good background of plates and dishes, and, if possible, an oak dresser upon which the treasures may be displayed.

illustration, from the collection of Mr. George H. Frazier, Philadelphia, will fill both requirements. Eminently pewtery and pure in style, these measures can be acquired quite reasonably if bought singly, as one comes across them, and the joy of building-up such a set as the one shown, piece by piece, is infinitely greater than if bought complete at the flourish of a cheque book.

The set here illustrated, ranging in size from about 3in. to 10in., are from Jersey, from which the Guernsey type is distinguished by a band of moulding round the narrowest part of the neck and a distinct " foot " which raises it from the table top.

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Here, then, one has already an environment of pewter from which the same pleasure may be derived as from a similar number of pieces costing from 20 to 30 times the amount you have expended. The sheen is there, and beauty, too, and the acquirement of every piece has been a victory, a bargain found, a bargain driven, maybe !

I have on several occasions acted as intermediary in connection with the transfer of collections *en bloc*, at prices running well over four figures, but the exquisite thrill of the chase is absent, the thrill known only to those who have walked daily past a shop window to see if a desired piece was still there, still unsold, and then — the day of consummation, when its purchase seemed possible !

Pieces so acquired, and later condemned by one's friends, have a meaning which makes their eventual weeding out a genuine heart-rend.

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But it will have to be done sooner or later, so, though the sentiment must always be present, try not to weave around these early pieces too great a web of affection, but learn to regard them as the clay worker does his first efforts at the modelling of a figure, something which must eventually be demolished before perfection can be attained.

When I first started collecting, from the very commencement I took careful notes of each piece, as I acquired it, in a loose-leaf book, the pages of which I divided up into spaces for the following details : My private number ; a full description, with weight and dimensions ; a sketch ; a rubbing or sketch of all its marks ; notes, and comments on similar pieces in such works of reference as I possessed ; where and when purchased, and the price paid.

It took a little time and sometimes I was tempted to wonder if it was worth the trouble, but the number of times I now refer to it has proved that point, for I have in it such minute details as are to be found in no printed work, and the weight alone of individual pieces has, ere now, provided the deciding point where the genuineness of a piece was in question.

It is hardly likely that the average collector will go to quite the same amount of trouble, but the keeping of some sort of record of your purchases will be found a very valuable habit to acquire.

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In the matter of display. *Don't* associate pewter with Sheraton or Hepplewhite furniture if it can be avoided, they ask for silver. I have seen it look quite well with some pieces of Chippendale, but oak is its real home.

Try, as far as possible, not to mix periods on the same shelf. For instance, do not mix early Georgian tankards with nineteenth-century pear-shaped measures, or reeded-edge dishes with late peppers ; keep a shelf for a period, if possible, and the effect of the *tout ensemble* will be greatly enhanced.

Never hang pewter on the wall unless it was obviously destined so to be hung, as in the case of the large wall-salts and the wall-fountains from lavabo sets and similar examples. The suspension of hot-water plates from nails or the clamping of dishes to the wall by means of wire plaque-holders or by piercing the rims—as is so often done—betrays a total lack of appreciation of the fitness of things.

Always keep in mind pewter's original setting —on the dresser, the sideboard or the kitchen mantleshelf—and the risk of your committing these errors will be reduced to vanishing point.

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Never despise any old piece merely because of its condition, for if all its parts are there it is quite a legitimate thing to have it reshaped, cleaned and its cracks repaired to save it from further disintegration.

Indeed, it seems to me to amount almost to a duty to have such a piece restored ; it is too good to cast away, too unsightly to give pleasure as it stands and is capable of perfect restoration if committed to expert hands for the purpose.

Let me give an instance which is fresh in my mind. Some few months ago I received from a collector friend what had been a very fine William and Mary lidded tankard, with a note asking if anything could be done for it. I cannot adequately describe its condition when I first saw it. The lid had broken away from the thumbpiece, the sides were collapsed and crushed in and dents and cracks were everywhere—and yet, none but a vandal would have thrown it on the scrap heap.

When the piece came back to me some time afterwards from the restorer, reshaped and repaired, I sent it on to its owner, who could hardly believe that such a wonderful restoration was possible, for it had been changed from a battered and shapeless mass back to its former graceful self.

So for about a couple of pounds my friend—who had originally paid very little for it—had added to his collection a piece which, but for his vision, would have cost him from 15 to 20 guineas, and a fine old specimen has been saved to posterity.

Such a restoration as this is permissible and praiseworthy where the wholesale substitution of new parts would approach the border-line of reproduction. *Never* send such work to your local jeweller or your plumber ; it is an expert's job ! They cannot be expected to understand the nature and peculiarities of this metal in the same way as those who have made a special study of it, and of whom we still have two or three, practising what is in reality a highly skilful form of craftsmanship.

The melting point of pewter is so near to that of solder that under a careless use of the " doctor " or the blow-pipe, anything might happen, and many a good piece has been ruined in this way. " Safety first " is never more to be enjoined than when pewter repairs are in the air!

A set of Channel Island measures.