

EDK

PEWTER and MULLED ALE

*Methods of Spicing of the Ancient Pewterers :
Ingenious Types of Infusers : The Ritual
of a Warm Brew on a Cold Winter's Night*

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THE title of this article will make a wide appeal for the simple reason that already a tinge of romance has woven itself around the word *mulled*.

We read of mulled claret and mulled ale, and our minds are deeply stirred by visions of a custom now discontinued, in itself a stimulus to curiosity and further inquiry.

In spite of this romantic atmosphere which the word creates, mulled drinks are by no means so long discontinued but there are among us to-day many who remember them. My dictionary gives: "Mull, v.t., To warm, spice and sweeten (wine, ale, etc.)." Just so! We glibly use the words but, like so many of our current phrases,



Fig. 2.—A typical Salzburg tankard of the straight-fold rococo-type, made by Philip Aichinger of that city and dated 1759. It is now in the collection of Dr. Karl Ruhmann of Vienna.



Fig. 1.—A baluster-shaped spice canister with removable lid, in the author's collection. It is possibly of British origin, though such pieces dealing with the old method of mulling are almost untraceable in this country.



Fig. 3.—Close-up of the thumbpiece on the Salzburg tankard below, showing the upper half unscrewed and lying on the top of the cover.

they convey but a general impression of their meaning and so—we will nail this one to the mast.

We all know how to warm or sweeten drinks, but of the methods of spicing we have but a hazy idea. Let us, therefore, inquire how the ancient pewterers provided for the rite. And here I regret to say that, though continental examples are not too difficult to acquire, I know of no single instance of a piece of pewter of definitely British origin, which gives us any clue to the custom and its operation.

First, and which *may* be British, I illustrate in fig. 1. what one must regard as the holder of reserve supplies in the form of a baluster-shaped spice canister with removable lid, a desirable little fellow, presented to me many years ago by my friend, Capt. Nelson G. Harries, of Wolverhampton, from a pair of which the other is still in his possession.

In such small vessels as this the reserve supply would be kept, just as we, in the present day, have sets of small canisters in our kitchens, labelled Cloves, Thyme, Nutmeg, etc., and from such canisters was taken the pinch necessary to flavour the amount of beer or other liquid in course of preparation. The actual flavouring of the drink was accomplished in several ways.

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Writing some few years ago in the American magazine, "Antiques," I drew attention to the overpowering size of many of the ball thumbpieces encountered on German beer-mugs. Some months passed and then, a correspondent, who signed himself "G. A. R. Goyle," writing from China, pointed out that he had seen some of these balls which unscrewed at their centres, thus forming a receptacle for a nutmeg; and I now reproduce here two examples which display this feature admirably.

The one shewn in fig. 2 depicts a typical Salzburg tankard of the straight-fold rococo type, made

by Philip Aichinger of that city. It is dated 1759 and is now in the collection of Dr. Karl Ruhmann, of Vienna, to whom I am indebted for this and many other fine photographs. Fig. 3 shows a close-up of the thumbpiece with the upper half unscrewed and lying on the top of the cover.

Carrying this type a stage further, in fig. 4, I show one of the well-known continental stone-pots with pewter mounts, the ball open and raised. This interesting piece is in the Germanisches National Museum at Nuremberg, by whom the photograph was most courteously supplied.

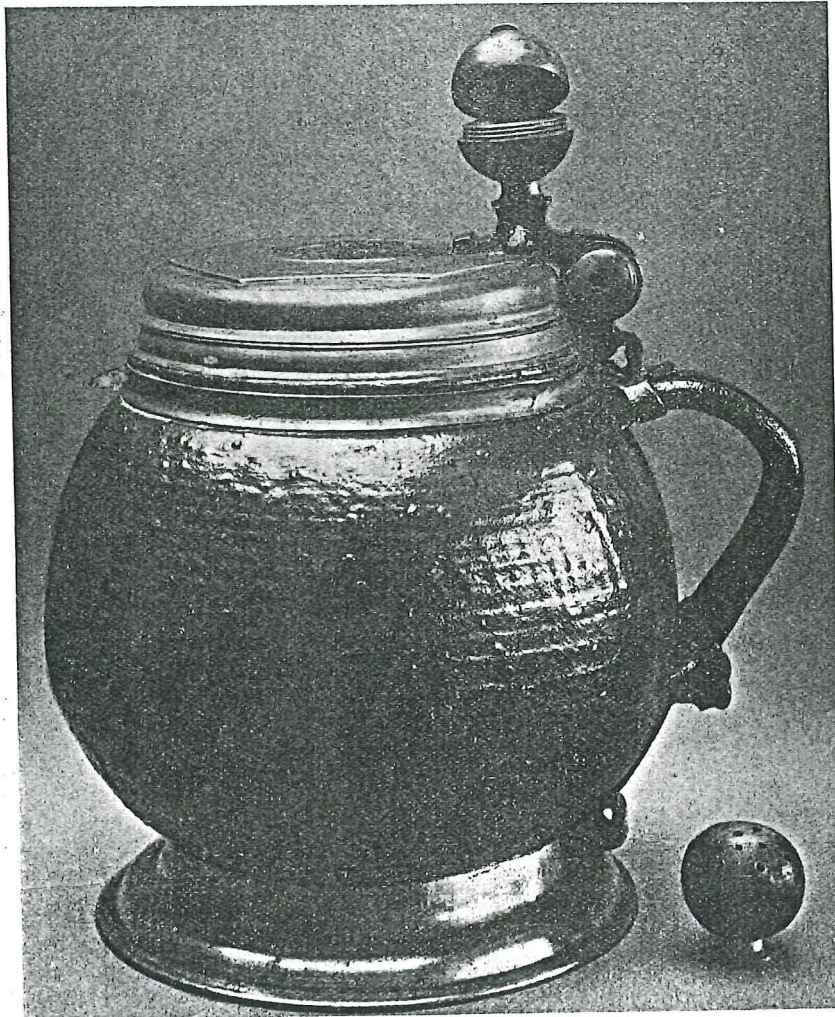


Fig. 4—One of the well-known continental stone-pots with pewter mounts, showing the spicing accessories. It is in the Germanisches National Museum at Nuremberg.

Standing behind this tankard is a second ball, to which is attached a short, tubular base, while its upper surface is pierced with several small holes. The tubular base is screw-threaded, and fits on to a similarly threaded stud on the inside of the base.

This second ball my eastern correspondent erroneously interpreted as a nutmeg grater, but I pointed out that pewter is so soft a metal that constant rubbing, even against a nutmeg would very soon wear down the sharp edges of the holes, rendering it quite useless for such a purpose.

No, it is not a grater but a spice infuser. A few grains of the nutmeg would be cut off and dropped inside this ball, with any other desired spice. The tankard was then inverted and the infuser screwed back firmly into its place, which, being accomplished and the whole turned back to the normal position, the liquid was poured into the mug and the spices quietly did their work.

Proof that this diagnosis was correct was not long in making its appearance in the form of another tankard from the Ruhmann collection, illustrated here at fig. 5. This fine piece was made at Wels in Upper Austria in the seventeenth century.

Fig. 6 affords a peep down into the base of this tankard and shows the spice-infuser in its place, but to make the whole

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Fig. 5.—An exceptionally fine tankard made at Wels in Upper Austria in the 17th century, of the type used for hot spiced beer. The feet prevented the hot vessel damaging polished surfaces. It is now in Dr. Karl Ruhmann's collection.

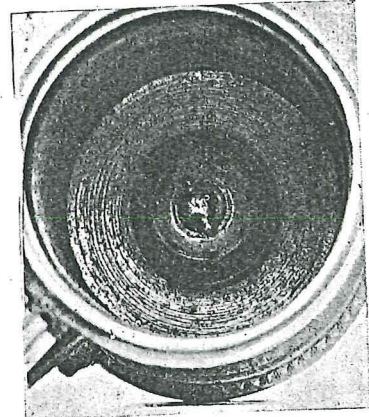


Fig. 6.—Shows the interior of the tankard with the spice-infuser in its place.

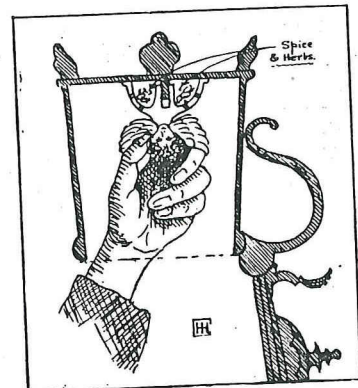


Fig. 7.—A sectional sketch illustrating the method of removing and replacing the spice-infuser.

more clearly understandable, I have made a sectional sketch, fig. 7, showing the method of its removal and replacement. Here will be seen the tankard inverted with the hand inserted, screwing the infuser into place, with the spices within it. It will be noted that a winged cherub's head forms a convenient grip for this purpose.

No question of a nutmeg grater appears in this example which is not a nutmeg-tankard, no space being provided for one in the thumbpiece. Moreover the size of the infuser is such as to suggest its use more especially for herbs.

The width of the mouths in this class of tankard is designedly so great to facilitate the insertion of the hand to adjust the infuser and, as is usual in this type, it is raised on three feet, for *Würzbier*

(Spiced beer) was served hot, and these feet raised the heated surface to save marking the polished table-top.

A further and very simple method of nutmeg flavouring found in some pieces consists of a metal ferrule fixed to the inside of the base, and through the former a winged screw is operated to hold the nutmeg at the bottom of the tankard.

The charming little object shown in fig. 8 can only have been used as an infuser, the surrounding horizontal collar being admirably adapted to rest on the lips of various sized vessels. Its total length is but 5½ in. and the length beneath the collar but 3½ in., thus permitting its insertion into very small tankards or measures.

(Continued on following page.)

AMERICAN GIFT of the CANNING JEWEL

*Victoria and Albert Museum's Fortunate Acquisition : Cellini's
Inspired Adaptation of a Baroque Pearl : Its Traditional Story*

THE celebrated Canning Jewel, attributed to Benvenuto Cellini, has been presented to the Victoria and Albert Museum by an American (who prefers to remain anonymous), and is now on view in Room 43 together with other recent acquisitions.

The jewel was sold on July 16th last at Sotheby's for £10,000 as the result of a single bid by Messrs. Bluett & Sons. It had been sent for auction by the Earl of Harewood, and it was stated that Messrs. Bluett were acting for an American lady who wished to present it to a museum in the U.S. It may be stated that the anonymous donor of the jewel to the Victoria and Albert Museum is the purchaser herself, who has changed her mind where she should present it, to the great benefit of this country.

The remarkable feature of the Canning Jewel is the curious baroque pearl which forms the basis of the design. It bears an uncanny likeness to a human torso, both front and back, and Cellini (if he was indeed the artist) fashioned it ingeniously into a triton or merman, with the head and arms enamelled white with gilding. In the right hand he flourishes a jawbone or scimitar set with diamonds; in the left he holds a buckler representing a Gorgon mask. There is rich ornamentation throughout with diamonds and rubies. The whole jewel may be regarded as the outstanding example of high Renaissance goldsmith craftsmanship, at least

according to one authority. Its size is 4in. high by 2 $\frac{3}{4}$ in. wide.

The traditional story behind this famous jewel is that it was given by a Grand Duke of Tuscany to a Mogul Emperor in India, and that it was found in the treasury of the King of Oudh after the capture of Delhi in the Indian Mutiny, 1857. At any rate it was bought, with this tale of its origin attached to it, by Earl Canning (1812-1862), the first Viceroy of India.

Then in May, 1863, the jewel was again sold along with Earl Canning's Indian collection. It passed to the first Marquess of Clanricarde, Canning's brother-in-law. The second Marquess left it in 1916 to Lord Harewood, his great-nephew.

Such is the pedigree of the pendant which is now permanently at rest for all to see at South Kensington, where it will be a cynosure even amidst the museum's already wonderful collection of Renaissance art treasures.

By a curious coincidence another important Renaissance pendant arrived at Sotheby's for auction within a few hours of the Canning Jewel, though quite independently, as it had been sent by Lady Lathom. It represented a female figure in classical armour, but though offered for sale on the same day as the Canning Jewel it realised but £300.

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It bears no maker's mark, but from the hardness of the metal and the geometrical arrangement of the perforations—similar to those in marked colanders and straining dishes—one has little hesitation in saying that it is English. The handle, which is of wood, fits into a pewter socket and the whole is admirably suited to its purpose.

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Call it mulled ale, *Würzbier*, or what you will, the foregoing remarks and illustrations will afford proof that, in the spacious days of our ancestors, time was found for many of the more comfortable things of life, and one cannot—though there may be compensations in other ways—tear oneself away from the feeling, that a warming brew on a cold winter's night must have been a soothing and delightful close to the day. The "Good old Days" may in reality have been very bad old days, but who can read of many of their rituals without some measure of a sigh that they have escaped us? *Sunt lacrimæ rerum!*



Fig. 8.—An English infuser in pewter of quaint design. The surrounding horizontal collar makes it easily adaptable for resting on the tips of various sized vessels,