

EDQ

PAPER READ WITH THE LANTERN LECTURE
ON "OLD PEWTER" BEFORE THE ISLINGTON ANTIQUARIAN
AND HISTORICAL SOCIETY, on the 16th MARCH 1931, BY
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SOCIETY OF PEWTER COLLECTORS.

When I was invited to read a paper before the Sette, I was moved to select our present subject for the reasons that the subject does not appear to have been previously treated of, and further that it might afford me an opportunity to justify in some small degree my appointment as Pewterer to the Sette. But at the outset I would allay any misgivings which may be present in your minds, by stating that I do not propose to detain you by unduly prolonging my remarks, and shall refrain from enlarging on the technicalities involved in the composition and manufacture of the metal, but rather endeavour to interest you in a few facts bearing on its antiquarian side, its limited but interesting literature, and the reasons which have induced the collection of ancient specimens of the pewterer's craft. Serious interest in the matter has only been evinced during the last 20 years or so. Pewter dishes and plates were used as studio decorations by artists; architects had recognised the value of a splash of pewter against old oak; county families retained old services adorned with their crests, and quantities of old tankards, wine measures and other articles in pewter abounded in country hotels, London chop-houses and elsewhere. Little was known about their marks or age, for no textbooks had appeared, and those who collected and those who sold were almost equally ignorant of the antecedents of the pieces they dealt with. Even the National and County Museums contained few specimens of the ware, save examples discovered in excavations such as the Romano-British vessels found by the Rev. C. H. Engleheart at Appleshaw, near Andover, in 1897, in the British Museum sepulchral chalices recovered from the tombs of deceased ecclesiastics, and various pewter relics of old London preserved in the Guildhall Museum in the City. In 1902, however, the publication of the History of the Worshipful Company of Pewterers of London by W. Chas. Welch, F.S.A. the subsequent issue of Mr. Masse's work, "Pewter Plate", in 1904,

and the remarkable exhibitions of pewter arranged by M. Masse at Clifford's Inn in that year threw a flood of light on a hitherto obscure subject, both volumes containing a mass of information not previously available, while the Exhibition disclosed the existence of a variety of fine specimens, of which even the most ardent collectors were unaware.

Mr. Welch's History was illustrated by colotype facsimiles of the surviving touch-plates on which the trade marks or touches of some 1000 London pewterers were stamped, thus assisting collectors to identify the makers of many of their pieces and to approximately date them. The two works alluded to were followed by the late Mr. Ingleby Wood's exhaustive work on "Scottish Pewter and Pewterers," in the compilation of which I was privileged to give some small assistance, and Mr. Antonio de Navarro's gracefully written and beautifully illustrated quarto, "Causeries on English Pewter." Since then several books and magazine articles on the subject have appeared, but with the exception of valuable privately issued monographs on West Country, York and Irish Pewterers by Mr. Howard Catterell, of Walsall, little has been added to the store of knowledge contained in the four standard works I have referred to. The subject, and especially that of marks, is by no means exhausted, and a work largely confined to that phase of the matter, and which is nearing completion, will prove of outstanding assistance to those who delight in the graceful and dignified form, subdued lustre and the undefined charm which characterize most of the early specimens of the British pewterer's art that have survived the many adverse influences that tended to their destruction.

As you are doubtless aware, pewter is an alloy, the basis of which is tin. This metal in its pure state being brittle and having interent disadvantages which render it unsuited for the manufacture of vessels unless tempered and rendered more amenable to the tools of the craftsman by amalgamation

with other material, the ancient pewterer obtained a suitable alloy for his work by the admixture of a certain proportion of lead with the tin, and it was of this alloy that the surviving Romano-British ware and sepulchral chalices I have referred to and ancient oriental pewterware were mainly composed. However, as pewter, in classic times, was recommended, in common with glass and silver as a suitable material for receptacles for drugs and antidotes, it seems clear that for such vessels some other metal must have taken the place of lead, which would certainly have had a detrimental effect on the contents, for lead if used beyond a certain proportion renders the pewter dangerous for the use of liquors containing acids, such as beer, wine and vinegar, by reason of the chemical action they set up, the excess of lead producing poisonous oxides. Indeed some 20 years ago the French Government, as a result of experiments, passed a law fixing $16\frac{1}{2}\%$ as the largest proportion of lead which may be safely used. When we examine the existing records of the Pewterers' Guilds, the earliest of which date from the 14th century, and particularly those of the Bristol Guild founded in 1456, and the London Mystery, founded in 1473, we learn that from the formation of these Guilds date the various ordinances under which definite standards for the alloys suited to various classes of articles were laid down and with small variation, insisted on. From such ordinances we learn that, in addition to lead, antimony, brass, copper, bismuth and zinc were used for incorporation with the tin. As examples of variation suited to differing requirements the following formulae may be of interest:-

Fine pewter or plate metal consisted of 112 parts tin to 26 of copper or brass. Another good pewter, which like the first, was used for plates, dishes, salt-cellars and kindred receptacles of food, was composed of 100 parts tin to 17 of antimony. A commoner pewter, was made of 83 of tin to 17 of antimony, other intermediate qualities contained varying

proportions of bismuth or zinc combined with the tin and antimony; while the common black metal used for tavern pots was composed of 60 parts tin to as much as 40 lead. From this, therefore, you can deduce the composition of the metal used in the fabrication of home-made half-crowns. I may, at this juncture, take the opportunity to reply to a suggestion made by our Bro. bookbinder on some entertaining vases he has been good enough to contribute for our that pewter is a mar-joy metal for drinking vessels. Personally I have found that the cups from which we drink our claret at pewter suppers which the Rhymer and have attended at my humble abode, have not had any more detrimental effect on their liquor and cups than on the beer and tankard of the thirsty imbiber of malt liquor for any lengthy period. But to resume. Foreign alloys varied considerably, but continental pewter was generally below British standards of quality, although the French and German pewterers produced more small articles than the British makers, who studied quality of metal, simplicity of design and utility before other characteristics. Indeed the production of the Star performers in elaborate decorated pewter, such as Briot, the Frenchman, and Enerlin, the Swiss, may be regarded as perverted silversmith's work rather than the successful efforts of the craft of the pewterer. Very little pewter earlier than Tudor times survives, and specimens of that era are very rare, most of the earliest pieces dating from the Stuart period, as, apart from the wastage of worn pewter, the disappearance of early specimens is also due to the practice of recasting pieces, which obtained during the 17th and 18th centuries; thus Tudor metal may be incorporated in a Georgian vessel. With the introduction of Britannia and similar white metals in the middle of the 18th century, huge quantities of old pewter were melted down by the Sheffield makers of such metals and the manufacturers of tin deed boxes and the travelling

tinkers were responsible for utilizing many old pieces for solder in their trades. I recently met a white metal manufacturer in Birmingham who told me that he had in his time melted down hundreds of tons of old pewter, and that even within the last 20 years a colleague of his had found an excellent collection of old pieces, by carefully examining the weekly consignments of old metal sent in for melting down, one of his recent "finds" being a valuable pewter salt-cellar of the Restoration period.

The methods of manufacture and the tools still used by the pewterer are traditional, little variation having been made in either during the centuries. Certain articles were cast in gunmetal moulds, some wrought from sheet metal, while others were built up by a combination of both processes. Dishes and plates were cast, turned in a lathe and were generally hammered at the back to harden and strengthen them. This beating and hardening of plates and dishes was carried out by means of polished steel hammers shaped much like polo clubs, the panes or falls of the hammers being made at an angle to render them convenient for beating the curved booge or convex back of the article in hand. This operation required great skill, and as the hammermen, anticipating modern trades union tactics, would "larn no apprentices," their places were not easily supplied. Plates and dishes so made and hammered were comparatively costly, but very lasting, as is evinced by the condition of certain of the 17th century exhibits tonight. In two of the facsimiles of 18th century trade cards contributed by Mr. Howard Cotterell, of Walsall, for our delectation, you will see the representations of old time hammermen engaged in their work. The gunmetal moulds in which articles, or their parts, were cast were very costly, and apart from those owned by the pewterer himself, the Guilds also possessed moulds which they lent on hire to their members. Many of these moulds

by reason of their massive construction and high quality of metal have survived 200 years of use, and so primitive are these and the other appliances and tools still used by the few surviving working pewterers that it has been said that were a pewterer of the 16th century to visit the workshop of one of his surviving present-day brethren he would see little change from his own methods save in the substitution of an engine or motor for the old "turn-wheel" labourer of his own time. The old time pewterer worked strenuously, and from a memoir of an old man pewterer who in the last quarter of the 18th century worked for a still existing firm, we learn that at the workshops which were then situated in Spitalfields, hard by the headquarters of the discoursed of so charmingly by our Bro. Horslager, the resident porter having awakened the domestic servants of the master pewterer, proceeded exactly at six o'clock in the morning to open the gate for the men, who came in and straightway set to work. At 9 o'clock they had half an hour for breakfast; at one o'clock one hour for dinner; at five, half an hour for tea, after which they worked on until the curfew, which was still rung at Christchurch, Spitalfields, in 1795, tolled at the hour of 8, and allowed the workers to return to their homes after 14 hours' absence, for it will be seen that the working hours were twelve, apart from the 2 hours for meals.

For this arduous labour the skilled men or journeymen received from 30/- to 40/- per week, while the labourers and unskilled men received 18/-.

From the same source we learn that John Gray, the subject of the memoir, although abstemious, consented to make tavern pots and measures, but by consistently refusing to outrage his religious convictions by engaging in that remunerative branch of the trade, the making of guinea basins, never during his long years of employment earned more than 30/- per week. Of course the purchasing power of money was greater in the reign

of the 3rd George than in our time, but it is none the less remarkable that this good man, who was a bachelor and allowed 7/- per week of his scanty earnings to an invalid sister, on his death early in the 19th century, left a little fortune of £200.

I may explain that the guinea basins I have referred to did not derive their name from their price, but from the fact that they were used as food receptacles for the unfortunate victims of the slave trade on the Guinea coast. Hence our journeyman's objection. As a matter of fact the British pewterers, both English, Irish and Scottish, worked largely for the export trade, considerable quantities going to South Africa and America, and among our exhibits tonight is a bowl made by Graham and Wadropp, of Edinburgh, who after the American War of Independence endeavoured to cultivate the United States trade, and their mark consisting of a ship in full sail and the words "Success to the United States of America", appear in the bottom of the piece.

The old time Dutch farmer in South Africa also favoured British pewter in preference to breakable earthenware and in many Boer farms old pieces of English pewter are still found in use.

The makers' marks on their productions are also a large subject, and information is constantly being gained by the discovery of hitherto unrecorded "touches", as the marks were technically termed. The touch plates in the possession of the London Pewterers' Company, which cover a period of about 200 years, contain, as I have said, over 1,000 impressions of London marks alone, and the provincial marks already recorded are legion.

The earliest recorded marks were quite small and took the form of a tiny circle or diamond containing the maker's initials and frequently a date; later they increased in size, and in the 18th century reached the size of a postage stamp. The photographic reproductions of the 5 surviving London touch-plates are exhibited tonight, and an inspection of them will enable you to follow the gradual variations in the size and elaboration of

the marks, from the earliest recorded in about 1640 until the latest in 1824, when the impression of touches on the plates ceased.

It is impossible to peruse any work on old pewter without meeting with references to that most important of the British pewterers guilds, the Pewterers' Company of London. There were many provincial pewterers' guilds, in Bristol, York, Bridgwater, Exeter, Bewdley and elsewhere, and in Edinburgh, Glasgow and other Scottish cities the Hammerman Societies regulated local pewter manufacture, but outstanding from them all was the Worshipful Company of Pewterers whose Hall has been for centuries, and still is, situated in Lime Street, City. The history of this ancient guild, dating from the 14th century, and set forth in Mr. Chas. Welch's fine work on the Company, and based on its ancient records, is a fascinating study for anyone interested in old trade customs and the guilds and societies governing the crafts. Under its various charters granted by successive sovereigns, the Company exercised wide and somewhat autocratic powers, by which it regulated the manufacture of pewter; the standards of metal, the shapes, weights and quality of the various articles produced in the metal; the admission of Freemen and liverymen to its ranks, the devices and application of trade "touches" or marks; the suppression of trade malpractices in London and the provinces, and engaged in endless activities connected with the craft. Like other authorities, the Company had its troubles. We find that on 20/3/1707 "One John Duncumb of Birmingham" was refused admission to the freedom of the Company by redemption, viz., purchase. Yet, as indicating how the provincial makers occasionally defied the London Company's authority, we have on exhibition tonight a plate by this John Duncumb, or Duncumb, made about 1710, on which he unblushingly stamps his touch, "John Duncumb Freeman", and the word London, although all his goods were manufactured in Birmingham. Again, in Mr. Howard Cotterell's interesting monograph on West Country Pewterers, we are

reminded that Boswell in his Life of Dr. Johnson records their meeting "Catoctt the pewterer" at Bristol in April, 1776, yet this well-known trader and acquaintance of the great Samuel did not hesitate to mark "London" on his Bristol-made ware, and by so doing constitute himself one of the many thorns in the side of the London Pewterers' Company.

The minutes of the Company's meetings teem with interesting details of the happenings during many centuries; the extortions of kings; difficulties over charters; the delinquencies of pewterers, both in town and country; the safeguarding of trade secrets; until in the reign of Queen Anne it began to lose its hold on the trade; the difficulties of search and inspection gradually became insurmountable, and its authority waned. The trade of the London pewterers gradually declined under the competition of the country makers, who had been refused admission to the London Guild; the influx of cheap earthenware and Britannia metal, until by the beginning of the 19th century its trade activities had almost ceased, and at the present time, although active members of the craft such as that much esteemed master craftsman and Past Master of the Company, Mr. W. F. Englefield, still appear on its members' roll, the labours of the Court are mainly confined to the dispensing of those charities with which the Livery Companies of the City are so honourably associated.

The powers of the London Guild exercised under their charters were very wide, and not only affected London craftsmen who were under their immediate supervision, but provincial pewterers, who appear to have occasionally ventured to evince dissatisfaction at the somewhat autocratic, though just, regulations of the Worshipful Company, which, in a proper desire to maintain a high standard in both material and workmanship, meted out stern justice to all delinquents. Among other offences dealt with under their powers, were failure to keep to the standards of work and material referred to; to submit work for testing, for irregularities in striking touches or trade marks; for setting up in business without submitting specimens of work to

the Master and Wardens of the Company; for working by artificial light; for selling goods except in a shop attached to a dwelling-house; for hawking pewter; for enticing away workmen from their employment; for using old pewter in alleged new work. Even personal differences between members of the Guild were adjudicated on by the Company, and among many instances of the sort, we find a record that at a Court Meeting in 1559 a member was ordered to bring his wife before the Authorities in order that she should reconcile herself to a and others of the Company for "her naughty misdemeanour of her tongue towards them."

It seems fortunate for our quest, the Master, that his duties do not now include the settlement of differences between the ladies of their members, as in these democratic and plain-speaking days, he might have distinctly stirring times at the meetings of his Court. Still notwithstanding the apparently drastic regulations of the Company, it must be accounted to it for righteousness that its rule during many centuries tended to place British pewterers in the forefront of the craft, and made their wares esteemed not only in the past, but in these latter days when collectors seek the work of certain old pewterers as they do the handicraft of Wedgwood, Whieldon, Chippendale, or Paul Lamerie.

The domestic articles made in pewter were many: dishes, flagons, tankards, bowls, spoons, porringers, candlesticks, cups, measures, salts, pepper castors, and such small articles as snuff boxes and coins, while, for the service of the church, were produced Communion and baptismal flagons, chalices, patens, alms dishes, etc.

In referring to some of the characteristics of these domestic and ecclesiastical pieces, I would express my regret that owing to difficulties of transport I have been unable to exhibit to you such a selection of my own and other collectors' treasures as I might have under more favourable conditions, but hope that such old specimens as I have been able to shew may not only interest you, but serve to illustrate my brief remarks on types.

Perhaps of all the surviving examples of the pewterer's craft, dishes, plates, and above all spoons most largely preponderate,

and although spoons dating back to the earliest times have been, and still are being discovered in excavations, dishes and plates have remained to be in greater numbers than any other pewter articles.

By the kindness of my friend, Mr. Ed. le Port, F.S.A., of Worthing, who has one of the finest collections of base-metal spoons in existence, I am able to shew a few typical early examples. In inspecting these spoons, dishes, plates, etc., one cannot help noting that the pewterer was largely indebted to the silversmith whose designs he closely followed, save when dealing with an article having no silver prototype, when he contented himself with perpetuating a traditional shape. An example of this consistent adherence to an old pattern is found in the shape of the baluster wine measure, which with small variations in the thumbpiece and lid remained practically the same from Tudor times until the beginning of the 19th century.

The earliest dishes and plates that have come down to us have plain broad rims and are of fine and rather soft metal. We have here a dish by John Cave, about 1670, which will illustrate the type. In the middle of the 17th century these were largely replaced by dishes and plates having thick reeded edges designed to give increased strength. The example of this style which I am able to show has a special interest for as it is the work of an excellent craftsman named Adam Churcher and whose work, dating from about 1680, is very As in many other cases, this craftsman used a mark having a reference to his own name (Adam), introducing our first parents in the Garden of Eden. With this dish are 2 reed-edged plates by Nicholas Master of the Pewterers' Co. in and John Hicks, Master, in neither piece being any the worse for their 250 years existence. This reeding of the rim ceased in Anne's reign and was superseded by plain moulded edges of the Georgian period.

Tankards also largely followed the silver shapes being flat-lidded, up to Anne's reign, lids after that date, specimens of these periods show small interesting variations in the lids and thumb pieces or billets. Perhaps the most interesting of such vessels is one indigenous to Scotland and known as the tappit-hen. It was in general use prior to the time when old Scots measure was abolished and English Imperial measure forced on the reluctant Scot. When one realises that it held a Scots pint, equal to nearly 3 English pints, one can understand that its disappearance as a measure of capacity was locally regretted. It is perhaps hardly necessary to remind you that claret and other French wines were the prevailing beverages in Scotland until comparatively recent times, and that it was due to the heavy duties placed on imported wines that the native whiskey superseded wine. The tappit hen was often used as a receptacle for the mulled wine served to coach passengers on their journey, and many of the measures were provided with a little cup fitting into the neck, from which to drink the contents. There were three in a set, the smaller measures being of the same shape, but of lesser capacity, and called the choppin and Genuine old specimens are scarce, but I hear that at least one enterprising craftsman in Glasgow is rising to the occasion and endeavouring to meet the demand among inexperienced collectors. Other domestic articles in pewter were salt-cellars, candlesticks, wine tasters, muffineers, etc., and if tonight I have failed to show you early specimens of certain of these, I ask you to pardon me for relying on the resources of my own collection, as apart from risks in conveying valuable pieces, my brother collectors rightly prefer not to lend early pieces unless exhibited under glass. In the two vellums I have brought, however, will be found photographs of most of the finest specimens in other collections, such as standing, master and trencher salts, Jacobean candlesticks of great value. Among other pieces made in pewter are inkstands, drinking cups,

salvers, rose-water dishes, basins and bowls. One of the latter which you will find among our exhibits is a survival of an old, if not widespread, custom. It bears the legend "Sir! your quarter is up," and was used by the old time barber as a means of conveying a broad hint to a regular customer who was permitted to run a quarterly credit account for shaving and wig-dressing; failure to respond to an intimation of the amount due resulting in the production and ostentatious use of the "reminder" bowl. Specimens in Lambeth delft will be found in the Victoria and Albert Museum and the Willett Collection at Brighton, but in pewter they are very rare.

Turning from such secular subjects, I would very briefly refer to a few ecclesiastical types. The subject of ecclesiastical pewter would alone yield material for a lengthy paper, but I must refrain from the consideration of the chrismatories, benetiers, cruets, aspersoria, associated with the services of the Roman Catholic Church, or the many beautiful specimens of foreign work in pewter for church use, and merely refer to the flagons, etc., used in English and Scottish churches.