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PEWTER: FINE WORK OF THE YORK CRAFTSMEN

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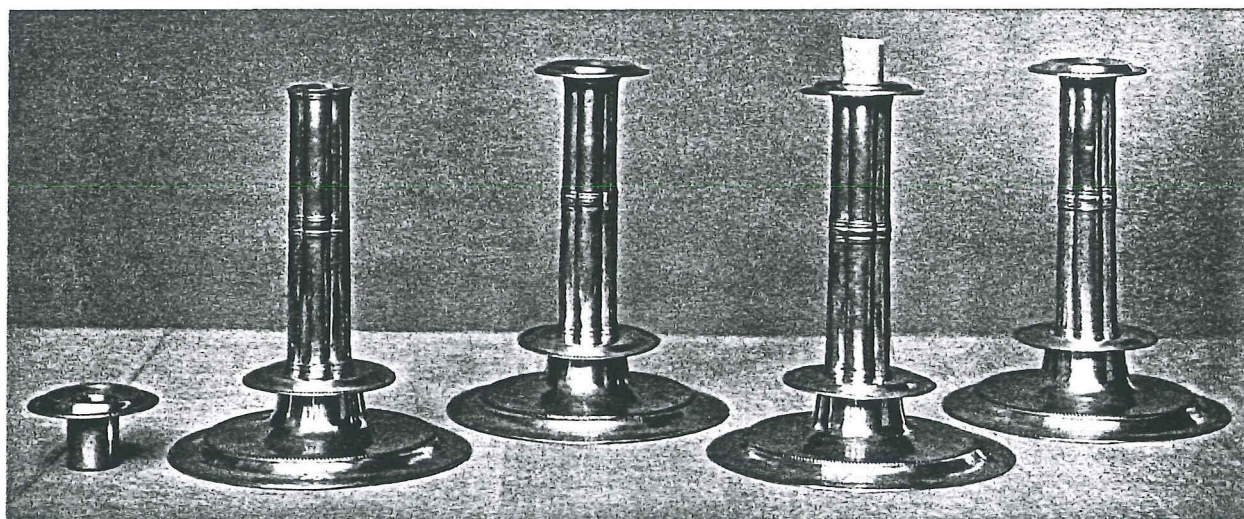


Fig. I. A FINE SET OF FOUR LATE SEVENTEENTH CENTURY CANDLESTICKS IN YORK MINSTER.
By Francis Lucas of that City

AFTER many years' experience—and to their honour be it said—I cannot call to mind having seen a bad piece of York pewter. One may go even further and say that the York craftsmen were no imitators, but created types which find no counterpart in other districts, and *they were honest*.

Other provincial pewterers thought it no dishonour to strike the word "London" on their wares, but it was seldom done—if ever—at York. Labels bearing the words "Made of Pewter from London," "Tin from London," and similar phrases, may almost be taken as indicative of York origin. In other words, though many of them did use London tin, or pewter, they put their own brains into the fashioning of it.

In 1916 I issued a privately printed monograph entitled "York Pewterers," and, though my efforts have never since relaxed, I do not think I could add a hundred words to the text after the interval of seventeen years, for, like the Arabs in the well-known couplet, they seem to have come, done a worthy period of work and then folded up their tents and silently stolen away, leaving but little in the way of records. But what they have left is more than tantalizing, for we have a record of records which no longer

exist, even their priceless touchplates—or, as they called them, "counterpaynes"—having disappeared. So much by way of prologue.

The chief things I can add to the above monograph—and which it did not contain—are illustrations of several most interesting pieces which have since been found to be the work of York craftsmen.

In Figs. I and II are shown some early examples of York pewter. Fig. I displays a magnificent set of four late seventeenth century candlesticks in York Minster, the work of Francis Lucas, Senior, of that city. After years of neglect, through which they were practically in ruins, they were found by Mr. James C. Fenton, of Cleckheaton, and in conjunction with him I had them thoroughly restored in 1931, and they are now in use again in the Minster crypt, but, as I wrote a full description of them at the time, there is no need to do more here than say that they are 11½ in. in height, with a base diameter of 9½ in.

Fig. II shows an equally fine pair of communion flagons in Carlisle Cathedral. These bear the same touch (see Fig. III), and are of the same period as the above candlesticks, but—and this adds greatly to their interest—upon the lids we have also a clear impression of

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Lucas's imitation silver-marks, a lion passant in a small circle, repeated four times (Fig. IV).

Mentioned in a cathedral inventory in the late seventeenth century, these flagons bear several unusual features, departing entirely from the normal. Thus, the deeply recessed moulding of the covers, in place of the perpendicular collar, and the concave band around the lip, are seldom met with. Their dimen-

sions—though they are not an exact pair, as may be seen by their base mouldings—are: height, about 12 in.; diameter of base, $7\frac{1}{8}$ in.

I have recently had these flagons restored as part of a scheme I have undertaken for the putting in order and making an inventory of the pewter church plate in the Diocese of Carlisle, in connexion with the Commemoration Celebrations, this year, of the 800th anniversary of the foundation of the diocese.



Fig. II. A BEAUTIFUL PAIR OF COMMUNION FLAGONS IN CARLISLE CATHEDRAL

From Dr. A. J. Young's collection and of about the same period as the foregoing examples, is the flagon, or tankard, pictured in Fig. V, and here we get to the flat Stuart lid. It is a very rare type, being a kind of halfway house between the flagons and tankards. Upon the inner side of the base is struck the maker's touch—a small shield whereon appear a small leaf spray with

the initials S. B., between three mullets—probably that of Samuel Booth, 1661–62, F. Another example of this type bears the touch of John Harrison, of York, and a third, the touch of Adam Banckes, of Wigan. The height of this type is round about $7\frac{1}{2}$ in.— $8\frac{1}{2}$ in., and the base diameter from 5 in.— $5\frac{1}{2}$ in.

In Fig. VI is a York rendering—and a very perfect one—of the Queen Anne–Early Georgian type with double-domed cover and dolphin-tail finial. It is in the Carvick-Webster collection, of quart capacity, and—as also does the next piece—bears the touch of Edmund Harvey, and from these two examples one will have little hesitation in pronouncing him a high master of design, for I regard the flagon pictured in Fig. VII as one of the finest pieces of British pewter in existence.

This form is known as the "York" flagon. It is of acorn-shaped contour, a shape which finds an echo in the lid knob. Upon its side appears the fine inscription shown in Fig. VIII, dated 1725, from which it will be noted that the engraver miscalculated his available space, with the result that he was up against the side of the spout ere he had time to finish, so the final "h"

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Fig. V. A RARE TYPE OF FLAGON WITH FLAT STUART LID



Fig. III



Fig. IV. LUCAS'S IMITATION SILVER MARKS



Fig. VII. THE "YORK" FLAGON. It is of acorn-shaped contour, probably one of the finest pieces of British pewter



Fig. VI. A LATE QUEEN ANNE OR EARLY GEORGIAN TANKARD WITH DOUBLE DOMED COVER AND DOLPHIN TAIL FINIAL

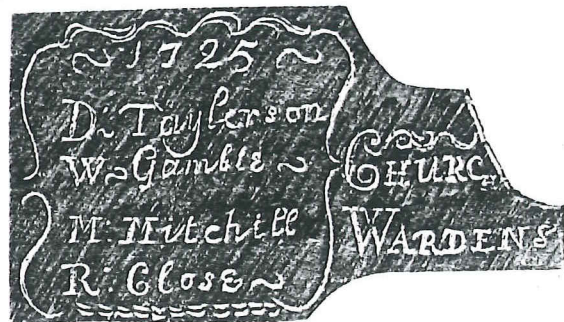


Fig. VIII. This inscription appears on the side of Flagon Fig. VII above, and is dated 1725. It will be noted that the last letter of the word "Church" has been dropped to the line below.



Fig. IX. A FLAGON IN THE CARVICK-WEBSTER COLLECTION, LATER PERIOD THAN FIG. VII AND UNDATED

of "Church" had to be dropped to the line below! This flagon is 12 in. in height.

Also in the Carvick-Webster collection is the less robust example in Fig. IX. It is about an inch shorter in stature than the preceding one, and is of the same or a slightly later period, but it is unmarked.

A third example, but with heavier and more decadent handle—one of a fine pair formerly in the Charbonnier and Fieldhouse collections, but now in that of the late Mr. Antonio de Navarro—is given in Fig. X. This handle is *pure* "York."

The acorn-shaped "York" flagon is a very rare type, of which I do not call to mind twenty examples. York Museum has four, Mr. Clapperton has another (ex the Kirkby-Mason collection), and a very fine later one is in the collection formed by the late Mr. E. Scott-Nicholson, A.R.I.B.A., this latter being inscribed. "Bought at the Expence [*sic*] of the Parish of St. Saviours and St. Andrews;

Richard Cussons & Rob't Cundell, Church Wardens, 1750."

Quite a feature on this type and also on the one which follows is the fine, massive thumb-piece, itself indicative of York origin. It is well shown in Fig. XI and in profile in Figs. IX and X, and measures some $1\frac{1}{8}$ in. across. This last picture shows an example of the straight-sided York flagon from the Young collection; though the finest example of which I have knowledge, with serrated front brim, is also in the Scott-Nicholson collection, and bears the touch of Leonard Terry.

A further and plainer specimen from the collection of the late Mr. Chas. G. J. Port is pictured in Fig. XII. All these latter are about contemporary with the acorn type and are from $10\frac{1}{2}$ in.— $12\frac{1}{2}$ in. in height. They, too, are very rare.

A very desirable piece is shown in my last illustration, Fig. XIII. Though it bears no



Fig. XIII. AN OCTAGONAL PIECE IN THE COLLECTION OF MR. J. E. PINK, 7in. high. Probably a ceremonial Snuffbox

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maker's touch, the arms, cap of estate, sword and sceptre of the city of York are engraved upon one of the faces of its octagonal body with the initials W. B. above them and the date 1770 beneath. This beautiful piece is in the collection of Mr. J. E. Pink. It is some 7 in. in height, the base is heavily weighted and the cover lifts off. It is on the small side

One is tempted to wonder if all hope must be abandoned of the ultimate recovery of the York Touchplates, or "Counterpaynes"? May they not still be in the hands of some private individual, probably kept as curiosities and their high significance but little comprehended?

We have no record of their shape or size, but one visualises that they might be slabs of



Fig. X. ONE OF A PAIR IN THE COLLECTION OF THE LATE MR. ANTONIO DE NAVARRO



Fig. XI. SHOWING THE FINE YORK THUMBPIECE AND HANDLE



Fig. XII. A PLAIN SPECIMEN IN THE COLLECTION OF THE LATE MR. CHAS. G. J. PORT

for tobacco and was more probably the ceremonial snuff box of some city official. Like most of the York pewter the metal is of silvery whiteness and takes a brilliant polish. Indeed, it well may be that this brightness of the local pewter has done more to establish the myth about "silver-pewter" than that of any other pewtering centre in Great Britain, in high contrast with which is the metal generally used in another important Northern Pewtering Centre, Wigan, where the large families of Baldwins, Banckes and Leatherbarrows used a very soft greyish alloy, bespeaking a far too great proportion of lead. Indeed, it is hardly too much to say that one can, almost at sight, detect their work, and that without close examination and handling. Had their metal been as fine as were many of their designs, they might have taken rank with the best.

The third great Pewtering Centre in the North was at Newcastle-upon-Tyne, where the alloy in use was a great improvement upon that of Wigan, being harder and whiter, though scarcely attaining to the high degree of excellence of York.

pewter some $\frac{1}{8}$ in. or more in thickness and anything from 12 in. to 18 in. wide, with a height of some 15 in. to 24 in., and would be covered with the devices of the Pewterers of the City, struck when each was admitted to the Freedom of the local Guild of Hammermen. The Edinburgh Touchplates were recovered under somewhat similar circumstances, so one offers no apology for putting forth this feeler, and for asking anyone who may have, in his or her possession, anything which might answer to this necessarily rough description, to submit it, or them, either to me or to the Curator of the York Museum for inspection. Their presentation to York Museum would be an act of far-reaching historical importance entitling the donor—or the seller, for they would be purchased if necessary—to the deepest gratitude of the ever-growing body of pewter lovers and students of this bygone craft.

Since these notes were originally written, the "silver-marks" shown in Fig. IV have been found also with the touch of John Harrison, Senr., of York, 1659-60/F., which points to these four lions passant, being a real "Mark of the Hall" for York, culled from the City's Arms, *e.f.* Fig. XIII.