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Left: Figure 1. A mid-17th century two-handled cup similar in style to contemporary silver examples. This piece, possibly unique, now in the Victoria & Albert Museum, is a delightful example of the pewterer's craft.



Right: Figure 3. Of similar form to figure 2 this beautifully wiggled example has typical 17th century tankard-style handles and dates from c.1670-80.

# PEWTER TWO-HANDLED CUPS

## by Ronald F. Homer

In this article I shall use the term "two-handled cup" to include a variety of drinking vessels which are variously known as posset cups, toasting cups, loving cups and wassail cups (or bowls). The term "porringer" frequently used to describe silver two-handled cups is used in pewter in another context, for shallow bowls with one or two flat "ears", and these are outside the scope of this article. The two-handled cup is much commoner in silver than in pewter and silver examples date from at least as early as the first part of the 16th century. In pewter, to judge from surviving examples, it made its appearance in the mid-17th century. Of course earlier examples may have existed which have disappeared, as with pewter tankards which are known to have existed long before the date of the earliest extant mid-17th century survivor.

As with much pewter there is some correlation in style between two-handled cups in that metal and those found in silver, which is a convenient aid to dating the former — which are often unmarked, or bear an unrecorded maker's touch mark. There is, however, one major difference. Many silver examples have lids or covers, but I know of none in pewter which have an original lid, though lids from other sources may sometimes be added and deceive the unwary. The form, in pewter at least, appears to be exclusively English and I do not recall seeing a foreign two-handled cup, even of colonial American origin.

Despite the various descriptive names given to them, the purpose of some of these vessels is far from obvious. Clearly some, and presumably the larger ones, were made to be passed from hand-to-hand round a dining table as a com-

munal drinking vessel. The smaller sizes, however, seem hardly large enough for this purpose and sizes down to half a pint, or possibly less, are found. The later 19th century examples, and others well into the 20th century, were evidently made as sporting trophies (as witness their inscriptions) and they have a decorative quality which a plain tankard may lack. It has been suggested that the smaller sizes could have been used for serving hot liquids. Both the server and the served had a handle to hold, avoiding the need to grasp the hot metal body of the cup. Those on a high foot would also conveniently keep the heat away from polished table-tops. This idea receives some measure of support from the dictionary definition of "posset" — a hot milk-based drink with wine and spices; and that of "caudle" — a warm gruel with similar additions. Some 19th century specimens are found with



Figure 2. A rare bucket-shaped cup of c.1660, 5½ ins. high, with fine wiggled engraving. The design on the reverse is of tulips and cornflowers. Value (if perfect) £1,000 plus.



Figure 4. A late 17th century cup of shallow footed shape with well formed grotesque caryatid handles and wiggled floral decoration.

“Imperial” capacity stamps and hold one (or one half) pint. These were presumably for the serving of ale or beer — perhaps mulled.

The earliest pewter styles to survive are shown in figures 1 and 2 and both date from the mid-17th century. The cup shown in figure 1, formerly in the Yeats’ collection and now in the Victoria and Albert Museum, may be unique and is very similar in style to certain silver examples of the period. The bucket-shaped cup shown in figure 2 is also very rare, only four specimens appear to be recorded, and this appears to be a form unique to pewter. The one shown has unfortunately at some remote date been converted to a sieve by the drilling of numerous small holes, but in common with all but one of those recorded is finely decorated in wriggle-work with floral motifs. This decoration was applied in the pewterer’s workshop before the handles were attached as the decoration runs under the handles in a position where a wriggle tool could not be used. Although the known examples bear at least two different touch marks, certain flaws in the handle

castings show that all the handles are from the same mould and were thus made by a common supplier. The singular shape of the handles is a debased form of the caryatid handle found on silver and on some pewter examples such as those shown in figures 4 and 5. Were it not for the wriggle, which can scarcely be dated before 1660, it would be tempting to ascribe a date of c.1640 to this style. A little later the bucket shaped body is found with handles identical to those found on Stuart tankards and one such is seen in figure 3. This also bears wriggle-worked decoration. All bucket-shaped cups are large, some three or four pints in capacity.

Later in the 17th century rather elegant and rare pewter two-handled cups are to be found with well-formed caryatid handles, as mentioned earlier, and as seen in figures 4 and 5.

Late 17th and early 18th century two-handled cups in graceful footed silver styles were also made in pewter, either with plain bodies, or like the example shown in figure 6 (from the collection of the Worshipful Company of Pewterers),

with the lower half of the body gadrooned. This particular cup appears to have been decorated to commemorate the coronation of Queen Anne in 1702. Note again that no lidded specimens appear to exist in pewter.

Early in the 18th century, and persisting with little change until the third quarter of the century, numerous two-handled cups in all sizes were made in a flared plain-bodied style, with or without a central fillet on the body, and with a plain foot-ring. As these cups are seldom marked, dating may not be easy within the period. However, handle forms may be of help as these follow those of contemporary tankards. Examples of these cups are seen in figures 7 and 8.

At the beginning of the 19th century a diversity of styles appears and these are readily available to the collector. It is interesting to note that some of these used the standard body-shapes of tulip tankards and footed single-handled cups (see figures 9 and 10). This emphasises the economy in moulds practised by the pewtering fraternity, due to the high capital cost of the heavy bronze moulds



Figure 5. Another late 17th century cup with caryatid handles but with an undecorated body, 4 $\frac{1}{4}$  ins. high.



Figure 6. A superb two-handled cup with gadrooned mouldings to the lower half of the body and ornate double-curve handles. This example has a repoussé inscription apparently commemorating the coronation of Queen Anne in 1702. Value, without inscription, £800-£1,200 plus. In the collection of the Worshipful Company of Pewterers. Approximately 5 ins. high.



Above: Figure 7. An early 18th century plain bodied cup typical of many produced from c.1710-1760. Value about £200 depending on size.

Right: Figure 8. A cup with rather heavy double-curve handles having scrolled tops and fish-tail terminals c.1770. Value approximately £100. Height 4 $\frac{1}{2}$  ins.





Figure 9. An early 19th century two-handled cup made by adding a second handle to a standard one pint tulip tankard. Of Birmingham or Bewdley make c.1830. Value £60-£70.



Figure 10. Another early 19th century example, this time made by adding a second handle to a footed cup of one pint capacity. With the marks of Yates, Birch and Spooner, Birmingham 1829-39.



Figure 11. A more decorative one-pint cup bearing an "Imperial" stamp and the marks of Abel Grove, Birmingham 1823-46. Value about £75.



Figure 13. A puzzle piece. This large, well made, and well proportioned piece, some 9ins. in diameter, is of uncertain use. A chamber pot? Early 18th century.

then used. From the mid-19th century two-handled cups appear to have been made primarily for decorative purposes rather than for use, though some are found with "Imperial" stamped on them, see figure 11. These styles (and others) continued well into the Britannia metal period and late examples, spun rather than cast, and frequently with

florid embossed decoration and silver electroplate, will frequently be encountered. These usually carry the impressed initials "EPBM" (Electroplated Britannia Metal) on the underside of the foot.

Less common than conventional drinking vessels, the two-handled cup provides a relatively unexplored area of

pewter collecting and examples can be found relatively cheaply if the obvious rarities are avoided. Their diversity of style adds variety to any pewter collection and there remains scope for research on dating and use.

A final word of caution. During the late 17th and well into the 18th century, two-handled chamber-pots were made in a variety of rather pleasant styles. These may be found offered as "punch-bowls" and "wine-coolers". If you like them, collect them, but recognise them for what they are. However, as always, there exist puzzle pieces and the large vessel shown in figure 13, 9ins. in diameter, and dating from c.1700, may be such a humble utensil or perhaps a table piece of some sort.



Figure 12. Three mid-19th century two-handled cups of half pint, pint and quart capacities. Value £40-£80 depending on size.

The photographs illustrating this article are from the photographic archives of The Pewter Society save for figures 6 and 8 which are reproduced by courtesy of the Worshipful Company of Pewterers.