

OLD ENGLISH PEWTER—I

By G. BERNARD HUGHES

PEWTER, that grey quakeress among metals, invariably appears in severely plain attire. Her sombre beauty is seen best when illuminated by mellow candle-light: then she glows, more mellow, even more softly grey than silver. In one of the *Bab Ballads* a duke, an earl and a knight are described as wearing gold, silver and pewter under-clothing. This shows the position relegated to pewter since silver and china drove it from the dining-room, in the same way that, four centuries earlier, pewter was superseding treen.

During the twelfth century pewter was made only to ecclesiastical requirements. Two more centuries passed before it was used for domestic purposes, and then only in the homes of the higher clergy and nobility. Pewter was too expensive for common use. Its first mention for table purposes was during 1274 at the Coronation banquet of Edward I, who owned three hundred pieces. Towards the end of the Elizabethan régime, however, pewter was in common household use among all except the very poor: it reached their tables about a century later. Harrison in his *Description of England*, published before 1587, speaks of the presence of pewter in the home and the skill of the pewterers, who "have grown into such exquisite cunning that they can in manner imitate any form or fashion of cup, dish, salt, bowl, or goblet."

The grey silvery sheen of pewter is due to the presence of tin, a metal with almost the brilliance of silver. The researches of Mr. Walter Churchill record the following proportions: best quality, known as "tin and temper," 112 parts of tin to 26 of copper; ordinary

flower or animal. The earliest were small initials and in general the smaller the mark the earlier the piece. The addition of a small circle of beads or dots is indicative of 16th- or 17th-century origin.

The touch-mark to pewter, being what the hall-mark is to silver, makes it one of the surest means of dating a piece. When a date is included in the touch-mark it refers to the year that the touch was struck on the "counterpane" at Pewterers' Hall. Pewterers were not permitted to alter their touch once it was struck, except by a general order of the Court. Once a date appeared in a pewterer's touch it continued unaltered throughout his career: it is therefore no guide as to year of manufacture.

There were, until Cromwellian days, two qualities of pewter, both without lead. Everything was strictly controlled and pewter goods were assayed by the local Guilds. The fine quality metal was marked with a heraldic rose surmounted by a crown bearing an X, the X indicating richness of metal; the coarse quality was stamped with the maker's name. During the nineteenth century, however, the rose and crown mark came to be stamped on measures and tankards irrespective of quality. When public-

house black metal with its lead content came into vogue, it was used almost entirely for drinking purposes.

Imitation "silver" hall-marks were stamped on pewter during the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries: four small shield-shaped punches containing the lion passant, date letter, maker's initials and the leopard's head, which to the casual observer had every appearance of genuine silver marks.

A great deal of English pewter is unmarked, mostly made in the provinces by journeyman pewterers not associated with any Guild. The towns with Pewterers' Guilds of their own were York, Exeter, Newcastle, Bristol, Birmingham, Bideford, Barnstaple, Bewdley, Edinburgh, Glasgow, Dublin and Cork. Peter Monamy's painting of Broad Quay, Bristol (Fig. 3), shows in the right-hand corner the Block Inn where resided and worked a well-known 18th-century pewterer, Richard Going. Pewter ware is seen displayed in the shop window. The workshops were at the rear and the Going family lived overhead. Going's pewter is stamped with the Lamb and Flag together with his name.

Foreign pewter was nearly all marked. The rose and crown with the addition of initials in the crown or on the heart of the rose is never English. Unmarked pewter can be approximately dated by remembering that the simpler the piece the earlier, both in general line and in ornament.

Hollow-ware was cast in gun-metal moulds coated with fine pumice and resin or egg white and red ochre. The molten metal was poured in: after cooling it was removed, a dull and lifeless piece of pewter. Some articles were cast in several sections and soldered together before



1.—PEWTER FROM SCRAP METAL YARDS IN WOLVERHAMPTON
Left and right are Stuart lidless tankards which cost 2s. 6d. each in 1930. In the middle is a mid-Georgian lidless tankard, which with the plates cost 10s. in 1928



2.—19th-century pewter made from public-house metal and collected for less than £1 from scrap-metal dealers in 1925. The cups and ale pitcher were made for domestic use in 1800-25

quality metal, 100 parts of tin to 17 of antimony; public-house black metal, 60 parts of tin to 40 of lead.

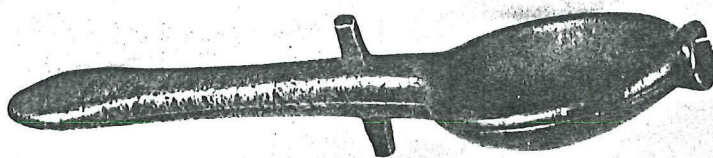
Experts can recognise real pewter by its weight, colour, and feel. Masse recommends this test for old pewter: "Bend the pewter backwards holding it close to the ear, listening for the characteristic noise made by the metal while being bent. This 'cry' is known as the *cri de l'étain*." When buying plates test them for resonance. A genuine pewter plate when struck gives a pleasant sound like a gong.

In the latter part of the fourteenth century, the Worshipful Company of Pewterers was established in London to maintain the highest standard of design, workmanship, and quality of metal: also to limit the manufacture of pewter to skilled workmen and their apprentices, who were required to serve six years. The scarcity of pre-Jacobean pewter is due to the strict regulations issued by the Pewterers' Guild, a trade union whose members were not allowed to repair a broken piece brought to them. The Guild compelled them to throw it into the melting pot and cast a new piece from the mould then in use.

The brotherhood of Pewterers, like other mediaeval guilds, was a religious organisation, under the patronage of the Virgin Mary. During the reign of Henry VII the Pewterers made compulsory the old system by which every reputable pewterer stamped each article that he made with his "touch" or private mark. These marks had now to be registered on a special plate called a "counterpane" or "touchplate," kept by the Guild to which he belonged. The touch mark may be the maker's name alone or with the addition of an emblem such as a



3.—BROAD QUAY, BRISTOL, FROM A PAINTING BY PETER MONAMY (1670-1749). In the bottom right-hand corner is the shop of Richard Going, who displayed pewter wares in his window. Reproduced by courtesy of the Bristol Museum and Art Gallery



(Left) 4.—AN OLD
MOULD FOR
PEWTER
SPOONS IN THE
MUSEUM
OF FINE ARTS,
BOSTON, U.S.A.



8.—FULL SKIRTED
CRESTED FLAGON OF
ABOUT 1760

(Above) Its hall marks and
quality mark X



5.—FLAGON WITH UP-
RIGHT THUMBPIECE OF
ABOUT 1610



6.—CROMWELLIAN
FLAGON WITH ACORN
KNOP ON THE LID



7.—EXCELLENT SPECIMEN OF
THE 18TH-CENTURY YORK
FLAGON

being turned, scraped and burnished on a lathe. Low relief work such as plates, dishes, and chargers, known as "sadware," was finished by hammering on anvil and swage: makers were known as sadware men. Hammering was a speciality of the London pewterers who first turned their sadware on the lathe, then hardened it by hammering round the boogie (the shaped or shouldered part between the rim and the base). It was turned again on the inside so that hammering is only visible outside. Hammered plates and dishes are stronger and more valuable than the plain type.

Because pewter received constant and sometimes rough usage, shapes were designed to facilitate frequent scouring. With this necessary limitation household utensils were made for every purpose, for the most part characterised by fineness of line, elegance of curves and rightness of proportion. Little decoration is found, seldom more than simple beadings or reeded edgings to emphasise structure. Ornamentation was sometimes applied. At first there was wriggled or joggled work, achieved by tapping a rough chisel and rocking it from side to side. Then followed engraving, cut with a sharp tool and frequently of later date than the casting: deep engraving is seldom found.

Pewter engravers journeyed from pewterer

to pewterer, doing their work on the premises. Engravers of silver called this work "scratching," although on good pieces coats-of-arms and floral devices were cleverly executed. Owners' initials were always popular on plates, bowls and tankards. If the three letters occur in a triangular shape, the single letter at the apex indicates the surname, the lower left-hand letter the man's christian name and the right-hand initial the wife's. This was a 17th-century custom which died out about 1720.

Garnishes of pewter plates and dishes were the pride of the old-time kitchen, being displayed on oak dressers with their backs facing outward. The custom was not only to wash and rub the pewter vigorously after each meal, but also to give it a monthly scrubbing with oil, rotten stone or sand, and rushes. Harrison tells us that pewter plates were "usually sold by the garnish, which doth contain twelve chargers, twelve dishes, twelve plates and those are either of silver fashion, or else with broad and narrow brims, and bought by the pound, which is now valued at sevenpence, or, peradventure, eightpence."

Pewter plates from which food was eaten were eight inches to ten inches in diameter, the larger circular dishes being used to bring viands to the table. The expert can read the approximate date of a pewter plate by the style of the rim: the diagram illustrated (Fig. 9) will serve as an accurate guide to the amateur.

Dishes and chargers have correspondingly wider rims and the metal is thicker. Other shapes, such as decagonal and wavy-edged in the form of lobes, are to be met with: these were merely the passing whim of individual pewterers or their customers. Touch marks are usually found on the rims of plates, dishes and chargers.

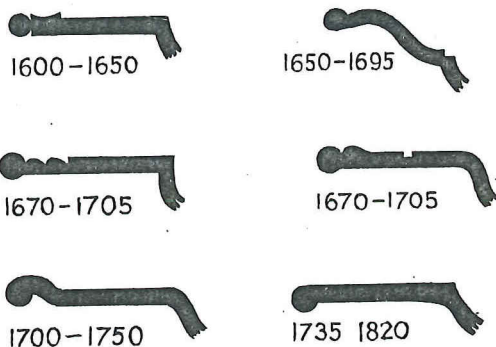
Flagons to hold liquor for the table and tankards to drink from were produced in great numbers, for the most part well-proportioned and graceful. Some were lidded, others open. Early flagons were weightily massive, displaying the Gothic

influence. They had a towering upright thumbpiece, heavy hinge-lug and a sturdy handle reaching well towards a plain skirted base with a reeded rim matching the beaded lip. The flat lid was enlivened with a low wide knop. During the days of James I flagons became lighter in weight, were given a shorter handle and a more shapely, but still upright, thumbpiece. The thumbpiece is the vertical lever by which the lid is raised. The upright type consists of two curves, set back to back, with the lower end of the upper curve slightly overlapping the upper end of the lower one.

Charles I flagons were more spreading of skirt than formerly, their moulded rims containing more curves. Thumbpieces were of the erect heart-pierced type, their bun-lids having fine central knobs considerably taller than previously. Pewter designers during the puritanical Cromwellian régime preferred a flat lid, devoid of knop, with a boldly curved skirt at the base. Bodies until about 1650 were slender and considerably wider at the base than at the mouth. When the lower joint of the handle is set flat against the body of any vessel it shows an earlier construction than if set with a short intervening strut.

The Restoration brought in its wake increased shapeliness in the products of the pewterer's art. Flagon bodies, decorated with reedings, became plumper and less tapering. A shallow dome appeared on the centre of an otherwise flat lid, to be quickly followed by the knopless befeater lid, so called because of its resemblance to a befeater's hat. Lips were finished with plain narrow beading and the thumbpiece, now bent backwards, was shaped to fit the thumb. This style, with local variations, continued throughout the eighteenth century, contemporary with the rare York flagon (Fig. 7). This spouted flagon had an acorn-shaped body with a double-domed lid, centrally knopped. A light moulded skirt lifted the body about an inch above the table. The Oxford flagon, a Regency innovation, had a spherical body and a squat lid which left the spout uncovered. The touch mark was generally stamped beneath the lips of flagons and tankards: sometimes it appears, rather indistinctly, on the bottom.

(To be concluded.)



9.—GUIDE FOR TELLING THE DATE OF A
PEWTER PLATE BY THE STYLE OF ITS RIM

OLD ENGLISH PEWTER—II

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FLAT-LIDDED tavern measures with baluster-shaped bodies, of the type illustrated by the central lower piece in Fig. 1, were made from the time of Henry VI to early Victorian days. Their original form was derived from the leather black jack. Six types appeared during those four centuries, each taking its name from the shape of the thumbpiece (Fig. 2): wedge-shaped, hammer-head, bud, double volute, embryo shell, and ball. Their lids were enlivened by at least

one circle upon the top, varying from a thin incised line to a wide shallow gutter. First was the rare stumpy thumbpiece, cast with a heavy wedge-shaped attachment lying sideways on the lid. The slight projection at its uppermost point was sometimes topped by a $\frac{3}{8}$ -in. or $\frac{1}{2}$ -in. ball. Handles were soldered direct and without curving terminals to slightly curved bodies, curves which tended to be accentuated with each succeeding type.

The wedge-shape was superseded during

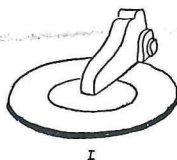
the reign of James I by the rare hammer-head which has the appearance of a double-faced hammer-head laid sideways on the lid. The body between base and lip rim was fuller than formerly. Some handles belonging to balusters of this type, which continued until 1685, were attached to the body by a diamond-shaped strut, cast in a piece with the handle and joining handle to body. The strut was generally of more pronounced proportions in later types.

From about 1680 until 1750 the important-looking bud thumbpiece held the field. It is recognised by being somewhat in the form of an opening bud or fern fronds, tilted forward over the V-shaped attachment which stretched half way across the lid. Twice the size of its predecessor, it accompanied a plain flat handle with a terminal tending to curve outward. This was followed about 1725 by the double-volute thumbpiece, leaning backwards over the handle, and a fleur-de-lys lid attachment. This type continued until Victorian days. In the larger sizes the lid attachment was cast in outline; in smaller sizes the fleur-de-lys was

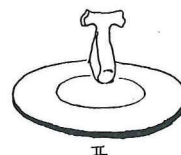


1.—(Left to right) RARE SCOTTISH POT-BELLIED MEASURE, 1690-1720; TANKARD WITH DOUBLE DOME ON THE LID, 1695-1715. EVOLUTIONARY TYPE OF TANKARD WITH FILLET ROUND THE BODY AND DOMED LID. ABOUT 1695. (Lower middle) BALUSTER MEASURE WITH WEDGE-SHAPED LID ATTACHMENT. ABOUT 1520. VICTORIA AND ALBERT MUSEUM

(Below) 3.—18TH-CENTURY DOUBLE-DOMED LIDDED TANKARD WITH FILLET ROUND THE BODY AND MARKED "PITT AND DUDLEY" WITH A BOW. DOMED-LIDDED TANKARD WITH PLAIN BODY ENGRAVED WITH PORTRAITS OF WILLIAM AND MARY AND MARKED WITH LEOPARD'S HEAD, BUCKLE AND LION PASSANT. VICTORIA AND ALBERT MUSEUM



I



II



III



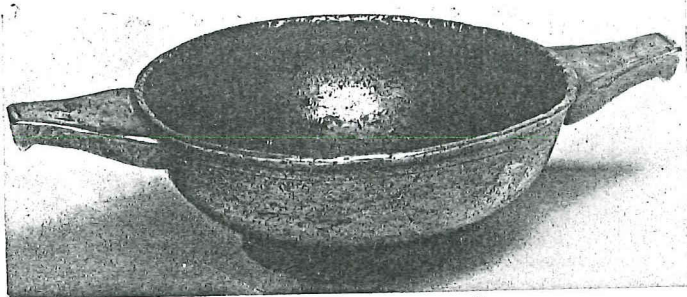
IV

(Left) 2.—SKETCHES OF LID ATTACHMENTS AND THUMBPIECES OF PEWTER BALUSTER MEASURES: (i) WEDGE-SHAPE; (ii) HAMMER-HEAD; (iii) THE BUD; (iv) DOUBLE VOLUTE



(Below) 4.—PEWTER TEA CADDY. ABOUT 1730. VICTORIA AND ALBERT MUSEUM





5.—SCOTTISH QUAIL OF HEAVY METAL WITH SOLID DOUBLE LUG NOT SEEN ON THE ENGLISH PORRINGER



6.—RARE PEWTER BLEEDING-BOWL WITH INTERIOR GRADUATIONS. ABOUT 1670

embossed on a diamond. Characteristics of the baluster measure were now fullness of body; handle terminal developed into a bulbous end curved flamboyantly away from the body: the strut ending in another diamond-shaped piece.

Contemporary with the double volute were the embryo-shell and ball types. The embryo-shell thumbpiece was quite plain, displaying no radiating flutes. It developed into a shell on Scottish pear-shaped measures of the nineteenth century. The rare Bristol measure is similar in form to the copper measures of to-day.

There were eleven measures to a set, ranging from one-twenty-fourth of a pint to a gallon. The old English wine standard was used and measures were tested when filled to the brim: the most common to-day are the half-pint, pint and quart. Touch marks are seldom found owing to the trade custom of not marking measures.

Among the most useful of pewter table utensils were those small shallow bowls or porringers with a small pierced flat lug, ear or handle. They were a development of the earlier and very rare pottangers or soup bowls of thick metal and solid ears, known in Scotland as quails (Fig. 5). Pierced ears, usually variations of the trefoil in form, enriched by pierced or fretted design, were usually soldered to the bowl without any additional support to the $\frac{1}{2}$ -in. thickness of their own metal. In the earlier porringers this thickness was more than doubled at the junction of the body. Later, a strengthening bar of squarish section was used, running almost the entire width of the ear. Another type of strengthening was a triangular or semicircular projection curved to fit the bowl, running down from the underside of the ear. English porringers were never given more than one ear: Continental specimens generally had two. Covered porringers are rare and usually commemorative. If one can imagine a time when there was very little earthenware, the importance of the porringer in the English home is readily realised.

There is a tendency to elevate the more ordinary porringers into association with the ancient profession of barber-chirurgeon by dubbing them bleeding-bowls or cupping dishes; but there does not appear to be any justification for this. The true bleeding-bowl (Fig. 6) leaves one in no doubt as to its purpose, for around its inner sloping sides is a series of incised parallel horizontal graduation lines. Such bowls are rare in pewter.

Pewter candlesticks were made in great quantities. Until late Elizabethan days they were squat affairs of the pricklet type. Then the domed trencher salt was given a short baluster stem and candle-socket, the outer curve of the salt container forming a deep, saucer-like drip-tray (Fig. 7i). Pewterers made a practice of using one mould for several purposes: trencher salts, for instance, were widely used as candlestick bases and as feet for tazzas. In Jacobean days the trencher-salt base was superseded by a taller, heavy bell-shaped base, at first supporting a plain pillar stem, later an elaborate baluster column. Between stem and base was a wide circular grease-ledge or drip-tray. With Charles II came the plain trumpet base (Fig. 7 iii), and for the next forty years the drip-tray found a place half-way up the streamlined stem. About 1680 the trumpet settled

into a round base supporting a plain pillar stem, sometimes knopped, still with a central drip-tray. Almost simultaneously came the octagonal candlestick. Its base, from which rose a plain round or knopped stem, was octagonal in outline, drip-tray and nozzle flange following suit. With William and Mary the octagon feature gave way to the more graceful scallop, and at the turn of the century the knopped stem gave way to a bulbous baluster minus the drip-tray. This style held the field until about 1770, when the round base with its allied variations re-appeared, this time holding aloft either a round pillar or an attractive baluster stem. Eighteenth-century candlesticks of pewter closely followed the basic form of their more wealthy silver relatives.

Pewter candlesticks with round pillars were made until about 1830. In many instances they possess a bayonet catch or "pusher"—a rod going nearly the whole length of the stem centre. Fixed to the upper end of the stem is a disc, to the lower end a brass button by means of which the rod can be pushed far enough up the stem to eject the unburned candle-stub from its socket. Other, and earlier candlesticks, have holes in the sides of the sockets so that stubs may be levered out with a wire.

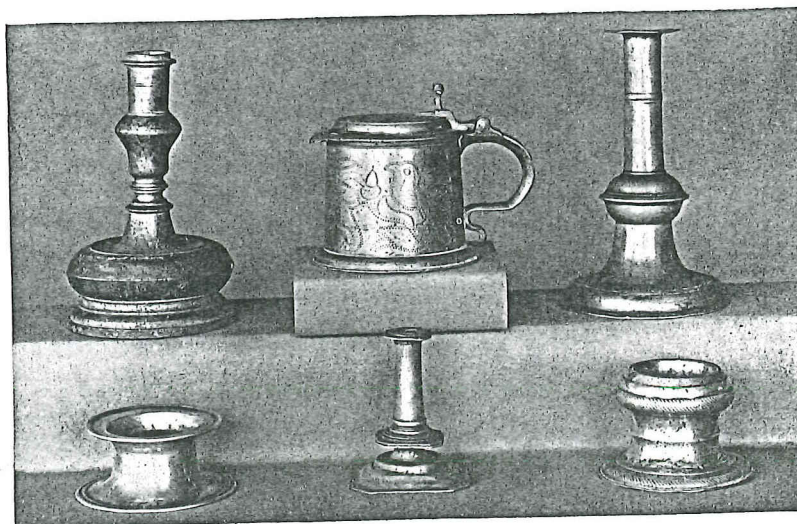
Pewter salts are not difficult to acquire, although early specimens are rare. The term salt-cellar is entirely wrong: the French word for a salt container is *salière*; the proper English term is *salt*. Cellar is a corruption of *salière* and to use the words salt-cellar is equivalent to using the word twice over. The early pewter salt was a solid square, rectangular, or circular block of pewter with a depression in the

middle. These trencher salts are rare, although made until about 1690.

The Restoration was responsible for the spool-shaped or standing salt, sometimes delicately engraved (Fig. 7 iv). About 1675 appeared the octagonal salt, base and rim sandwiching a hollow baluster salt container. Five years later came the capstan salt, plain and with beading. This had a fifteen-year vogue; then it was replaced by the gadrooned capstan (Fig. 7 vi) which continued until about 1720. Trencher salts, more elaborate than formerly, were made from 1705 until 1730. Then came the cup salt, supported at first by a short stem and circular foot: then by four ball-and-claw feet, a style which continued until china and glass sounded the death knell of pewter.

The earliest inkstands, low, circular and entirely plain, belong to the sixteenth century. Early in the following century moulding was added to the base and a hinged lid to the top with a couple of holes for the quills. Then the base developed into a tray. Towards the end of the seventeenth century sand-box and wafer-box were added, the whole thing taking on an air of importance. About 1730 ball feet or claws were added, these being supplanted by lions' heads late in the century.

The collector has many other articles to select from, each with a chronology of its own: hot-water dishes, cruets, jugs, tea-caddies, herb canisters, tobacco boxes, spoons, beakers, brandy warmers, snuff-boxes, etc. Even toys were made of pewter. Furniture for dolls' houses was a distinct branch of the craft and tiny tea services on miniature trays were clever copies of traditional shapes.



7.—17th-CENTURY PEWTER :—(Left to right, above) (i) CANDLESTICK WITH SALT BASE; (ii) DECORATED TANKARD OF CHARLES II PERIOD; (iii) TRUMPET-BASED CANDLESTICK WITH KNOPPED STEM. LATE SEVENTEENTH CENTURY; (Below) (iv) SPOOL-SHAPED SALT OF ABOUT 1660; (v) OCTAGONAL CANDLESTICK WITH DRIP TRAY. ABOUT 1690; (vi) GADROONED CAPSTAN SALT. VICTORIA AND ALBERT MUSEUM