



A selection of 19th century articles in pewter, including a tobacco jar, snuff box, invalid feeder, and a Britannia flask.



A selection of various 19th century pots, clockwise from top right, a spouted two bank U and Filet, a Footed Cup, a Bucket and Ridge, a Footed Beaker, a Concave, and a Bell shaped with a rectangular handle.

PEWTER AND METALWARE

By Harry Makepeace

Collecting Old Pewter

Pewter has all the attributes to make it ideal for collecting. It is available in many different forms, it dates back to antiquity, having been made continuously for many hundreds of years, and yet is still reasonably available. There is a lot of literature available for research and pewter is still affordable. In spite of this it is under-collected in Canada, which to my mind means there is an opportunity to put together an interesting and varied collection without spending a fortune. A collection will grow in value as pewter inevitably finds its place in collector's esteem and prices rise.

While we cannot claim a large native pewtering industry in our past, pewter has been imported, principally from Britain, since our country's beginning and is associated with early Canadian homes.

Pewter is made principally from tin, which was not mined in Canada until late in the 20th century. Therefore early Canadians had three options, either import all the constituents and make it here, melt down old pewter when it became worn, and recast it into new articles, or import the manufactured pewter.

There is no evidence that tin was imported in any significant quantity to make pewter, and only limited evidence that pewter was recast in Canada.

There was a father and son team work-

ing in Montreal in the mid 19th century by the names of Thomas and Jean-Baptiste Menut, whose touch marks of a beaver and TM, and an angel and IM, have been found on spoons. Donald Webster in *The Book of Canadian Antiques* shows a circa 1800 touch mark DS which is attributed to David Smellie of Quebec, who was evidently both a silversmith and a pewterer, but items so marked are extremely rare. It is probable that the above makers recycled old pewter.

While it is interesting to find one or two items of Canadian manufacture, it is to Britain that we must turn to obtain most of the examples of pewter found in early Canadian homes. I will confine my remarks principally to British pewter and list in the bibliography books that are currently available that will help to research and identify pewter from Britain.

Pewter has been made in Britain since Roman times and numerous museums have examples that have been unearthed. The principal constituent of pewter is tin, which on its own is difficult to cast, is soft, and not very durable. It was therefore alloyed with copper and lead to improve its castability and durability. Late in the 18th century it was discovered that the addition of bismuth and antimony resulted in a much harder metal. This new metal, in addition to being cast, was able to be rolled into thin sheets, stamped into various shapes and

soldered. It was also capable of being spun on a lathe over a wooden form. This new metal became known as Britannia metal. I think most people are familiar with the tea pots and coffee sets that were made by the thousands in the 19th century, all out of Britannia metal.

Since tin was available in Cornwall, copper and lead from Wales and Derbyshire, all of the elements to support a growing industry were readily available. During the 15th century pewter was second only to cloth as England's most important manufactured export.

In 1503 an Act of Parliament was passed that required pewterers to strike their makers symbol, or touch mark, on their wares. All of the pewterer's touch marks were kept at Pewterer's Hall in London, on large pewter sheets, however these were lost in the Great Fire of London in 1666. Fortunately, after the fire, new sheets were started and all pewterers active at that time, and many subsequent pewterers, stamped their touch. These records still exist.

These sheets are reproduced in Howard Cotterell's major work *Old Pewter, its Makers and Marks* initially published in 1929. It is still the bible for pewter collectors, in spite of numerous additions and corrections by members of The Pewter Society of the UK. Cotterell's book has been reprinted and is still available today.

There are many marks to be found on pewter, in addition to touch marks. These

include hall marks, volume verification marks, town and county marks, house marks, owners marks, quality marks, capacity marks, etc.. The study of such marks can be very interesting but is a subject unto itself and perhaps the subject of a future article.

In its heyday pewter was made into almost every conceivable article and many of these from the 18th and 19th century are available to us today.

I'll review some of the more common items you might come across in your travels.

Flatware

As the name implies these are plates and dishes etc.. You hear them referred to as plates, patens, bowls, dishes, trenchers and chargers. While there are no hard and fast rules, the generally accepted terminology is:

- Plates - under 10" in diam.
 - Dishes - between 10" - 18" in diam.
 - Chargers - over 18" in diam., very rare over 20".
 - Trenchers - not a name applicable to pewter plates.
 - Patens - plates used for communion bread, or on which to stand flagons.
 - Bowls - deep well plates and dishes.
- The above can be identified and roughly dated by the rim design. Reeds are the lines around the edge of the rim on plates and dishes. Initially they were inscribed on a lathe, and later were cast.
- Broad rim and narrow rim - very rare, pre - 18th century

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Three 19th century measures, from left to right, a bellied measure with a standard handle having a ball finial, and a mid body fillet; a straight sided pot with a standard handle and 'attention' attachment; and a tulip measure with a double scroll handle. The straight sided and tulip have Geo. IV verification marks.

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- Triple reed - made approx. 1670 - 1710
- Single reed - made approx. 1690 - 1750
- Flat rim - made approx. 1720 - 19th century

There is some overlapping of the above dates, since molds were expensive, and pewterers used them as long as they could.

Rarity varies somewhat between plates and dishes. In plates, approximately 70% of those currently to be found are plain rim, 13% single reed, and 3% triple reed. In dishes, about 50% are plain rim, 35% single reed, and 14% triple reed.

You may also encounter wavy edge, octagonal, hot water plates and oval dishes, but these are relatively rare.

Most British flatware is hammered in the *bouge*, which is the curved portion between the well and the rim. The hammer marks are often visible in spite of the fact that the plate has been skimmed in a lathe to clean and polish the surface. Contrary to popular belief, this hammering process is to soften the metal rather than to harden it, making it more able to absorb the stress of being bounced on a table for many years, without rim splits. Pewter is exceptional in that it does not harden when worked, contrary to most other metals.

Hollowware

Hollowware consists of measures, pots, jugs, salt shakers etc. A measure is a vessel on which a capacity has been stamped, while a pot is an unlidded drinking vessel without a capacity stamp, and a tankard is a pot with a lid.

Many different types of tankards, measures and tavern pots have been made in the last 300-400 years, initially for wine and gin, and subsequently for ale and beer.

Baluster shaped, lidded measures and straight sided lidded tankards, with different types of thumbpieces, by which it is possible to roughly date them, were made from the early 17th century to the late 18th century. All of these are quite rare and expensive so I'll confine my remarks to the vast array of tavern pots and measures that were made in the 19th century, and which were given a great boost by the introduction of Imperial Measure in 1826. It is great fun to examine all the tavern pots you find in dealer's shops, antique sales and auctions to try to determine those that are pre-Imperial.

By far the most available are the belied measures one associates with British pubs of the 19th century. These were made from about 1820 to about 1900, in sizes from a half-gallon down to a quarter of a gill. The earliest ones are those without a fillet (a ring around the body cast during manufacture) and those with a well defined ball finial on the end of the handle. If you are lucky you can find one with a maker's name on it which will enable you to date it more closely.

Since innkeepers, and others, were not above using measures that short changed the customer, inspectors were employed for many years to check the capacity of tavern pots and measures. The introduction in Britain of Imperial Measure in 1826, with its town and county markings, and later a Uniform Verification System of numbering in the 1880's, where each town or district was assigned a specific number, stamped

together with a crown and the reigning monarchs initials, enables us to determine where the pot was used.

Straight sided pots, or as the collectors call them, truncated cones, have been made for a very long period of time, dating back to the 17th century. These pots have a 'Swan's Neck' or so called 'Standard' handle whose lower extremity terminated in a finial shaped either like a ball, a fishtail or a spade. Later in the 19th century, this finial was omitted and the handle terminated at its lower attachment to the body. It was called the 'attention' attachment, as it's said to resemble a soldier's hand at his body when standing at attention. In earlier 19th century models, this attachment point was rounded, with later ones being cut off to form a triangular like attachment. Attention handled pots were made in the period 1830-1870.

Straight sided pots were also made occasionally with the 'double scroll' or 'broken' handles, although this type of handle is more common on tulip and U shaped pots.

Variations of the straight sided pot include those with a heavy rim of either pewter, or later of brass, and those with a glass bottom. Glass bottomed pots can be early, dating to the late 18th century, so don't dismiss them out-of-hand as only late pots made as trophies.

Straight sided pots are difficult to date accurately without the help of a maker's mark or inscription to give you some guidance.

Tulip pots also date to the early 18th century, when they were not as common as straight sided ones, but became more popular in the period 1820-1860. The earliest pots had standard swan's neck handles with a ball finial, and a mid body fillet, but by the beginning of the 19th century the fillet had disappeared and the handle had changed to the double scroll type.

Tulip pots are occasionally found lidded, which would place them in the earlier part of their existence. The type of thumbpiece and the existence of a fillet would help in close dating. Again a maker's mark would be invaluable in helping to accurately date any pot.

Not all pewter bore a maker's mark, particularly in the 19th century, by which time the influence of the guilds had waned significantly. Not all London marked pots came from London. Provincial makers, trying to cash in on London's reputation for quality, were not above marking their wares with the London mark.

Do not be dissuaded from collecting any pewter by the absence of a maker's mark. Many well designed, beautifully-made pots, of excellent metal and patina, are well worth collecting, even though they do not bear a maker's mark.

Other less well known 19th century pots include U and fillet, bucket and ridge, footed cup, beaker, bell, and concave. They had either a standard or broken handle until late into the century when the rectangular handle made its appearance. Experience with the various types of handles, finials and fillets, will enable you to place these pots into their correct place in the century.

Many other articles made from pewter in the 18th and 19th century are still available to the inquisitive collector and

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An interesting and rewarding hobby awaits those who are willing to invest the time to read some of the many books available on the subject, talk to knowledgeable dealers, visit museums where pewter is on display, and handle as much as you can. For the advanced collector, membership in either the Pewter Society of the UK, or the Pewter Collectors Club of America, or both, opens up a world of scholarship. Happy collecting.

Harry Makepeace is a collector and dealer of antique pewter. He is the owner of Makepeace Antiques, Brantford, Ontario.

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Photos by Tony Makepeace