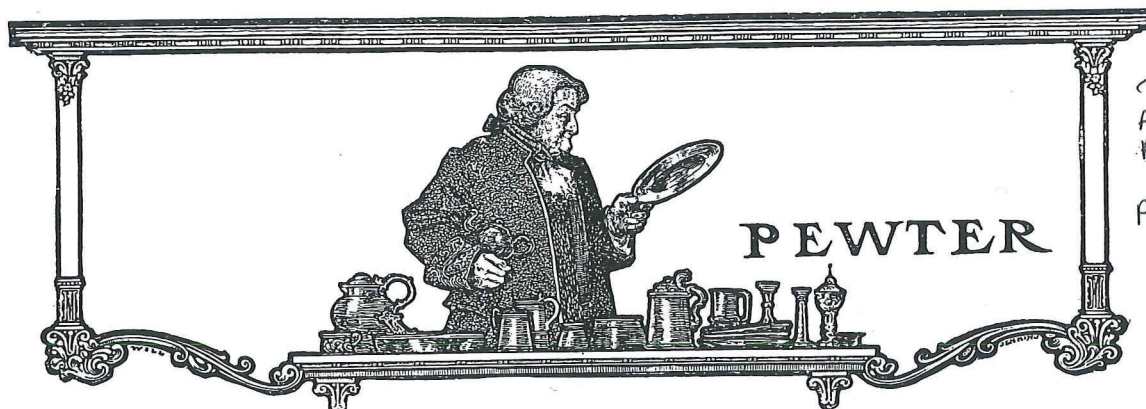


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Pewter Baluster Measures

By Howard Herschel Cotterell, F.R.Hist.S., etc., of Walsall

By many collectors of old pewter, the measures which form the subject of these notes have always been regarded as desirable on account of their being essentially British in form, pleasing to the eye, and quite apart from anything made in any other country, some of the earlier types being amongst those pieces most eagerly sought after. As with most things in pewter, difficulties encumber the path of the student, the particular difficulties in the present case being:—

- (a) The inexplicable but almost universal absence of makers' marks, arising from which is
- (b) The consequent difficulty of fixing definite dates for the various types.
- (c) Their capacity.
- (d) The question of the nationality of various specimens, whether English or Scottish.

Difficulties, however, may, in many cases, be overcome by serious effort, and it is hoped that much light is thrown on *b*, *c*, and *d* in these notes. The absence of makers' marks has, up to the present, declined to yield an answer satisfactory to the theories advanced. It is *not* enough to say that through the constant usage to which these measures were undoubtedly subjected, and their equally constant scouring, the marks have been worn away. The entire wearing away of a mark is a much more difficult matter than might be supposed to be the case even when considering a comparatively soft metal like pewter; and further, it is generally on the earliest types, or those which have lived through the greatest number of years of scourings, that the most perfect marks are found. No, I think the theory of the marks being worn away must be abandoned.

No reason can be assigned for makers refraining from striking their touches on this particular form of vessel, for one looks for it with confidence upon nearly all its contemporaries, and usually with success. One can, however, but conclude that it was, for some reason

yet to be discovered, an almost universal trade custom not to mark them.

One must turn to the late Mr. Ingleby Wood's *Scottish Pewterware and Pewterers* for the only serious attempt at throwing light on the baluster measure, and one is left to conjecture how much further he might have carried the subject but for his regretted and untimely death.

At p. 131 of this work Mr. Wood affirms that "measures of this form were common from earliest times in both England and Scotland."

Of the comparatively few marked specimens which are in existence, one cannot call to mind a single example which suggests anything but *English* origin; except in the "embryo shell" and "ball" thumb-pieces, which are types peculiar to Scotland in the later period; and one is tempted to doubt if the baluster was *made* in Scotland at all until the latter half of the eighteenth century—a doubt which is shared by that careful student of these matters, Mr. Richard Davison.

In the case of the unmarked specimens, one is left to determine this by testing their capacity (see later), and here again all the evidence is against their having been *made* in Scotland until the later date referred to. That this type of vessel may have strayed beyond the border into Scotland in earlier years is more than probable, and I should welcome correspondence with anyone who can be helpful in enabling me to *settle* the point whether they were actually *made* there before the middle of the eighteenth century. The evolution of the form of these measures from that of the old leathern vessel known as the "black-jack" seems to find almost universal acceptance, and the idea loses nothing by a comparison of the two, for which purpose they are here illustrated side by side from specimens in the possession of Mr. Walter Churcher (Nos. i. and ii.).

That the reader may be familiar with the terms

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used to describe the various parts of these measures, a diagram (No. iii.) is given:—

1. Is the *lid attachment* which secures the lid to the



No. I



No. II.

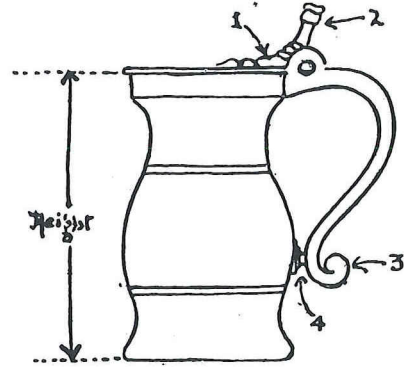
thumbpiece, of which, indeed, it may be said to be a part.

2. Is the *thumbpiece* itself.
3. Is the *handle terminal*.
4. Is the *strut*, cast in a piece with the handle, between which and the body of the vessel it intervenes, and is usually of more pronounced proportions in the later types and quite absent in the earliest.

The height in all cases is taken to the lip.

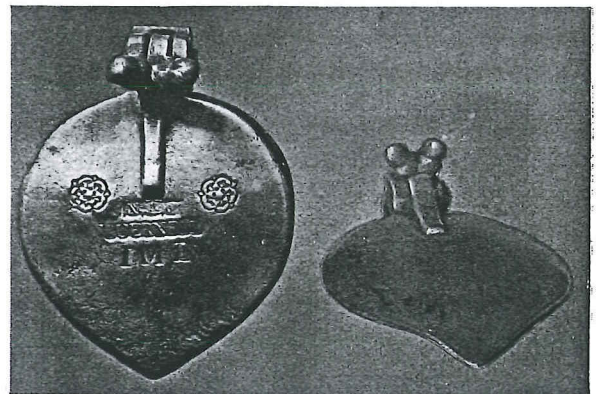
One of the distinguishing points of the baluster is

the perfectly circular flat lid with usually one or more circles cut into it in the turning process, and which circles vary in width in different specimens and sizes



No. III.

from a narrow incised line to quite a wide but shallow "gutter" (No. xix.). This feature of the flat, circular lid occurs on no other kind of British measure, and is not to be confounded with the Channel Islands and Continental quasi-heart-shaped flat lids, illustrations of which, *for comparison only*, are given in Nos. iv. and v., from pieces lent by Mr. A. E. Kimbell for the



Nos. IV. AND V.

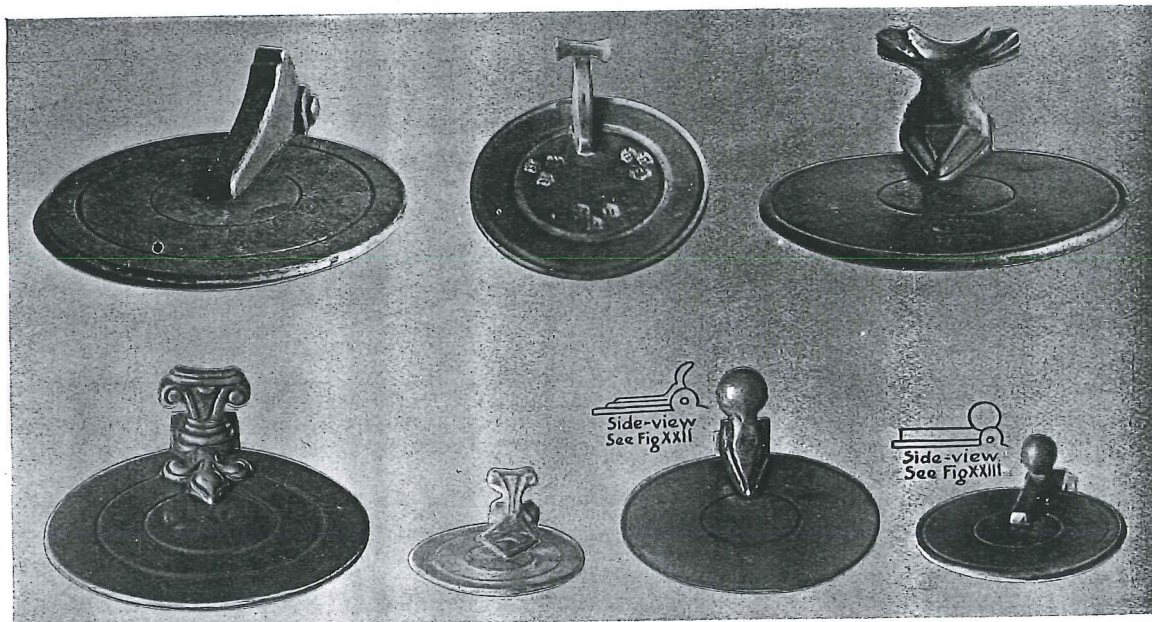
purpose. These latter occasionally bear the marks of London makers; but this opens up a question which does not concern English baluster measures.

With these few general remarks, one may pass on to consider the various types known to collectors, the illustrations in all cases, except where other ownership is indicated, being taken from specimens in my own collection.

First, shown in Nos. vi.-xi., are the various types of lid-attachments and thumbpieces referred to in these notes.

A careful study of these types, with the illustrations of the complete pieces, will at once make it apparent that there is no lack of diversity. They are shown as

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Nos. VI., VII., VIII., IX.*a*, IX.*b*, X., XI.

nearly in rotation of age as is possible where two types overlap to any considerable extent, as in the case of Nos. vii. and viii., and are described in the same order as shown above.

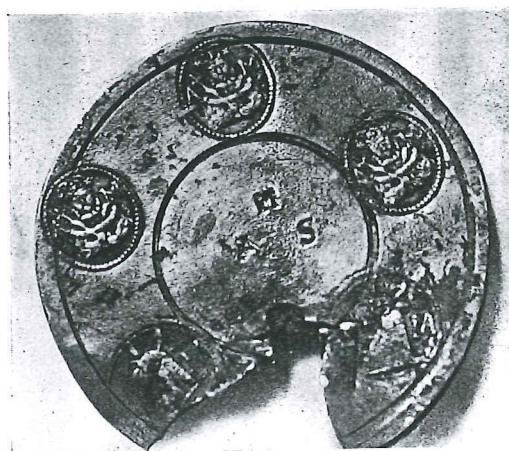
No. vi. is known as the *wedge-shape*; No. vii. as the

in Nos. xii. and xiii., which latter shows the severed lid from this measure. This fine piece, some 6 in. in height, was some years ago refused by so many English collectors at a price which was then considered high, that it eventually found a sympathetic home abroad, to the lasting shame of those who turned it down. How many of us would not now pay a considerably enhanced price for the possession of such a treasure. Covered with a wonderful patina, which gave the false impression of its having been gilded, it was, as is shown by the device in three of the marks, *tempus* Henry VIII., and unique. Speaking of this type, the late Mr. Ingleby Wood says: "The earliest



No. XII.

hammer-head; No. viii. as the *bud*; Nos. ix.*a* and ix.*b* as the *double-volute*; No. x. as the *embryo shell*; and No. xi. as the *ball*. The *wedge-shape* is well illustrated



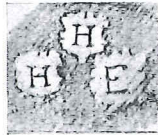
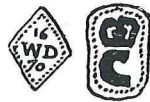
No. XIII.

types of these measures date from the latter part of the sixteenth century," but this specimen tends to antedate that time by *at least* half a century. The marks

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are, of course, pre-touchplate, and are those of an unknown maker. The illustration shows in a marked way the flattened curves of the body, peculiar to these earlier examples; curves which tended to increase in fullness with each succeeding type.

Nos. xiv., xv., and xvi. show four fine specimens of the next or *hammer-head* type. Those in No. xiv. are in Mr. Walter Churcher's collection, and that in No. xv. in Mr. Cooke's. The smaller of Mr. Churcher's is $4\frac{3}{8}$ in. high, with no maker's mark, the larger being $5\frac{1}{2}$ in. high, and is marked on the rim, both measures having the owners' initials H.E.H., which are struck three times on the lid of the larger one, and once on the handle. Mr. Cooke's piece is $4\frac{5}{8}$ in. high, and unmarked; the fine gallon shown in No. xvi. being $11\frac{1}{2}$ in. high, with no marks. Mr. Ingleby Wood ascribes the period 1650-1740 to this type, but I should feel safer by putting the figures back by at least a quarter of a century, and I doubt very much if many were made after the close of the seventeenth century.



The next type, illustrated in Nos. xvii., xviii., and xix., is variously styled the *bud*, the *fern-frond*, or the *wheat-ear* thumbpiece, each of which seems to find an appropriateness in certain examples, but the *bud*, which in a certain sense may be said to embrace the others, is perhaps the best of the three. Apparently



No. XIV.

this type was unknown to Mr. Ingleby Wood, for he does not so much as mention it.

The heights of the three examples in No. xvii. are—the smallest, $3\frac{3}{8}$ in.; the centre one, 5 in.; and the largest, 7 in. The latter has touch No. 297 (first London touch-plate) on the lip-rim. Of the

time when this type was first used, it is impossible to speak with certainty, but it was superseded in the first half of the eighteenth century by what has come to be known as the *double-volute* and *fleur-de-lys* type,



Nos. XV. AND XVI.

of which I speak later. Mr. Massé, at p. 153 of *Chats on Old Pewter*, and in other of his works, illustrates a measure of this type which has in the marks all the semblance of an early Tudor piece (Henry VIII.), but its characteristics—fullness of body, strut, splayed-out foot, and the very thumbpiece itself—all point to a date some century and a half later. Apart from this specimen, one would have little hesitation in putting the dates of this type down as *circa* 1650-1740, or more or less coeval with Mr. Ingleby Wood's dates for the last type.

A singularly fine example of this appears in Nos. xviii. and xix. This little gem, $5\frac{1}{4}$ in. high, is in Mr. Richard Davison's collection, and has the early feature



No. XVII.

of the handle soldered direct on to the body of the vessel, and is marked on the lid with a Tudor rose

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crowned and the maker's touch, R.T., in a diamond. Following this type, and by far the most frequently met with to-day, is the *double-volute* variety, which seems to have been in more or less general use for upwards of a century, *i.e.*, from early in the eighteenth to well on into the nineteenth century.

No. xx. shows one of the earliest of this type ; one



Nos. XVIII. AND XIX.

might almost call it a transition piece, for with the new thumbpiece and lid-attachment is found the plain, flat handle terminal of the preceding type, which so soon afterwards developed into the bulbous ending so plainly shown in the next illustration. This piece is of "pint" capacity, 5¼ in. high, and unmarked, except for W.R. crowned on lid. It is of fine metal, in beautiful preservation, and was made when good, honest work was of more account than superfluous display. It stands to-day to bear witness to its unknown maker's skill.

No. xxi. shows a set of six of the later ones of the



No. XX.

double-volute type, including (second from left) a rare "two-glass" size. It will be noted that all these pieces have the bulbous terminal already referred to—a

feature by no means displeasing in some specimens but lacking the simple appeal of its prototype, and



No. XXI.

indicative of that period when ornamentation was considered necessary to please the taste of a public which hitherto had found satisfaction in pure outline and fine craftsmanship. The heights of these six pieces are 2½ in., 3⅝ in., 3⅞ in., 4 in., 4⅜ in., and 6⅝ in. In the larger sizes the fleur-de-lys attachment is in outline, as shown in No. ix. *a*, and in the three smaller ones it is embossed on a diamond, as in ix. *b*, whilst the end of the strut, which is soldered on to the body of the vessel, ends in another diamond-shaped piece in all sizes. This feature is well shown in Mr. Churcher's fine gallon of this type, No. ii. Attention may be called to the *tilt* of the thumbpieces of these last two types, for whereas in the *bud* variety it leans forward over the lid, in the *double-volute* it leans backwards over the handle. In some instances this tilt is very apparent, but one feels safe in saying that it is always present in some degree in the directions indicated.

The last of the series of lidded balusters are shown in Nos. xxii. and xxiii. The one illustrated in No. xxii. is what Mr. Ingleby Wood has so aptly described as the *embryo shell* thumbpiece, and which so soon afterwards was to develop into a shell on the Scotch pear-shaped measures of the nineteenth century. No. xxiii. shows the *ball* thumbpiece. A set of



Nos. XXII. AND XXIII.

either of these measures in later years consisted of six or more sizes. Mr. Wood ascribes to these types the date 1700-1826, and having no proof to the contrary,

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I cannot gainsay his opinion, though I have never seen an example of either of a date anything like so early as 1700. The two pieces illustrated as examples are 4 in. and $3\frac{3}{8}$ in. high respectively, and bear in raised cast letters on the insides of the lids the name of the maker and the date, in three straight rows. They are of Imperial capacity, as opposed to *all* the other specimens of lidded balusters illustrated in this article, which are of the old English wine standard (see end). They differ also from the English ones in having a bead cast on the under-side of the lids, which, fitting into the lip of the measures, prevents their working about from side to side, a decidedly practical addition, saving much wear on the hinges. These last two types are found in both the Imperial and Scots standard sizes. It will be noted that the simplicity of the earlier types is manifested in these two late Scottish pieces, a testimony to the conservative nature of the race. The handles are thinner and lighter in weight and the strut longer and thinner, but the main characteristics remain. No words can convey the same amount of information as may be gleaned from a careful and intelligent study of the illustrations, which have been chosen with much care, each specially emphasising the points alluded to.

There are, of course, other variations met with from time to time, some very beautiful, others decidedly the reverse; but, so far as one can gather, the above types represent what are known amongst collectors as the recognised varieties. There is one other which might



No. XXIV.

perhaps be added to the number, but of which so few examples are known that it is quite impossible to fix a date for it in the absence of makers' marks. A

fine specimen of the type in question is illustrated in No. xxiv., from the collection of Major John Richardson, D.S.O. From its slender body, the absence of a strut, flatness of its curves, and its general "bearing," one feels tempted to assign to it an early date, but in the absence of evidence that date cannot be fixed. It is $7\frac{5}{8}$ in. high, and old *English* wine standard, quart capacity.

Turning from the lidded to the lidless varieties, one finds in No. xxv. a type which seems to be more or less peculiar to the Aberdeen district. It has, invariably, the hinge part cast in a piece with the handle, but this has never been slotted to receive the part attached to the lid, a feature found also in Tappit-hen and other types of measures from the same district.



No. XXV.

The one illustrated is of Imperial gill capacity, $3\frac{3}{8}$ in. high.

Nos. xxvi. and xxvii. show the ordinary types of baluster measures without lids, and No. xxviii. a measure which has been converted from the old wine standard to the Imperial, by the addition of a band of metal about $\frac{1}{2}$ in. wide to the lip, a device which, judging from the several pieces I have seen, would seem to be more or less peculiar to the Suffolk district.



Nos. XXVI., XXVII., AND XXVIII.

There is no evidence that balusters were in use, or in regular use, in Ireland, but a comparison of the Irish "Noggin" shaped measure in No. xxix., with

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any of the foregoing types, will at once suggest more than a strong family likeness.

Having now studied, as well as may be in a short

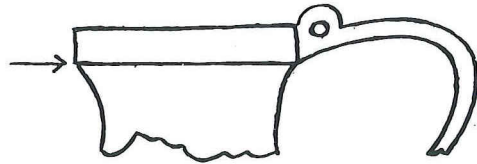


No. XXIX.

article, their outward form, we turn to the consideration of the capacities of baluster measures, a point which has been the subject of much speculation and observation, coupled with splashings about in pails of water in various places, a process which does not always make one a welcome visitor on such errands! But my friends have been very considerate, and I have come through scathless! One feels safe in believing that a baluster measure of any antiquity, with the capacity stamped upon it, has yet to be found. If any reader of these notes knows of such an one and will correct me on this or any other point, he will have earned, and may accept in advance, my gratitude; for *all* the knowledge of *any* subject, even such a side issue as that under notice, is not stored in one mind alone, and it is more than possible that many details can be added which, so far, I have hunted for in vain. One of the first questions one had to settle was, are they measures of capacity at all, or merely a useful series of covered vessels of convenient sizes. This latter idea was soon abandoned in view of the fact that each one bears a certain proportion in size to the others. Having then assured one's self that they were

used as measures, one first tested them in comparison with the present Imperial standard, but it soon became evident that they persistently refused to acknowledge even a nodding acquaintance with anything so modern, so the old Scots standard was next introduced, and by filling them to the bottom of the lip, as indicated by the arrow, they appeared roughly to coincide, and the problem seemed solved; *but*, this was the *wrong* method, for they should be tested when roughly *brim-full*.

Finally, it fell to the lot of Mr. Richard Davison to solve the problem, which solution is that they correspond to the *old English wine* standard, and it may



not be out of place to give here the comparison between the present Imperial, the old English wine, and the old Scots standards in fluid ounces:—

	Gallon.	Quart	Pint	Chopin	Mutchkin	Pint	$\frac{1}{2}$ Mutchkin	Gill	$\frac{1}{2}$ Gill
Imperial Standard	160	40	20	—	—	10	—	5	2.5 fluid oz.
Old English Wine Standard	133.3	33.3	16.6	—	—	8.3	—	4.15	2.07 „
Old Scots Standard	480	120	60	30	15	—	7.5	3.75	1.875 „

From this table it will be seen that the Scots gallon, quart, and pint were three times the size of the correspondingly named sizes of our present Imperial standard. An application of one or other of these standards should at once settle the query as to whether any particular specimen is of English or Scottish origin, remembering always that the measure should be roughly full to the brim.

My sincere thanks are expressed to Messrs. Walter G. Churcher and Richard Davison for the photographs they have taken specially for these notes, and the copyright of which is strictly reserved to the writer; also Captain H. E. May for much useful criticism; and to Mr. A. E. Kimbell for the use of his photographs (Nos. xii. and xiii.), and to all who have lent their treasures for reproduction. I have also to thank Mr. Churcher for the subjoined list of known balusters of gallon capacity, and should be glad of a note of any further examples in this rare size.

Charbonnier, Churcher, Cooke, Cotterell, Davison, Hudson, and Tomson Collections, one example each; South Kensington Museum, and Custom House, London, two examples each.