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## OLD PEWTER SCALE PLATES

By HOWARD H. COTTERELL, F.R.Hist.Soc.

THERE must be very few collectors of old pewter of more than a year's standing who have not come across examples of these scale plates and been mystified by them, and it is in all probability on this account that they are passed by as undesirable, for no one is too keen on having things in his or her collection which may prove to be the subjects of awkward questions.

In my recently published *Old Pewter, Its Makers and Marks* I illustrated one of these "scale plates" at Plate LIX. g., from the collection of my friend, Mr. Edward Hancox, of Nacton, and, as I said in describing it, these articles are so designated in an old catalogue, issued by Messrs. Gaskell & Chambers, Pewterers and Bar Fitters, of Birmingham. Nevertheless, my use of the term has been challenged, and as there seems to be so much doubt on the point a few notes on these interesting pieces may not be out of place at the present moment.

First, I give, in No. i., a facsimile of that portion of the catalogue to which I referred and which puts us in possession of the maker's ideas about them. Having done this, let me proceed to explain the manner of their use.

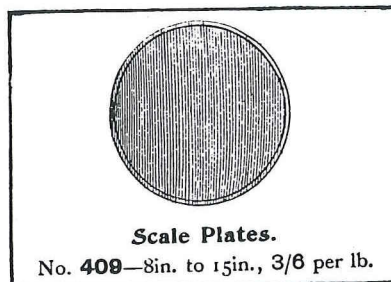
Not long ago, this same Edward Hancox, when visiting a lady friend, was invited into her kitchen to see some of the good things she had prepared for Christmas, and I cannot do better

than quote from a letter which he subsequently wrote me:—" . . . and there I saw, much to my pleasure, a scale plate (by Cocks, like the one you figured of mine) *in situ* as it were, and in use every day. The ordinary iron scales, but with a flat cross piece upon which the plate sat, in place of the present-day tin scoop. . . . It was you who converted me to the scale-plate theory . . . " I can but imagine that for the rest of his visit, my friend's mind was much more full of the scales than of the good things for Christmas!

Since then, the owner's leave having been obtained,\* Mr. Hancox has had these scales photographed for me in two positions. No. ii. shows them

with the scale plate snugly bedded upon them, and No. iii. the cross-piece on which the said plate rests, with (standing) the plate itself, displaying the Touch of Samuel Cocks (of London, circa 1820) in the centre.

From this latter it will be seen that, whereas the rest is dull, the centre of the plate and the inverted "U" section rim are worn quite bright, due to constant rubbing on the supporting cross-piece, which in itself is an interesting point, proving, as it does—which has puzzled many—that these plates were placed on the scale with



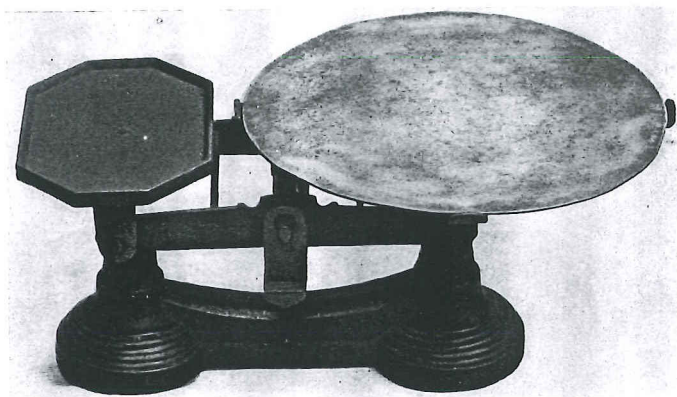
No. I.—FROM AN EARLY CATALOGUE OF GASKELL AND CHAMBERS, BIRMINGHAM

\* Since these notes were written, the scales have passed into Mr. Hancox's possession through the owner's death.

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the marked side down, the "business-surface" being the dead flat back. In further proof of this point, Mr. Hancox has a 14-in. example, by Henry Joseph, of London, *circa* 1750, of which the beaded and marked side was painted when

or *vice versa*. But it is established beyond peradventure that these were made, known in the trade, sold, and used in the first place as scale plates, and we have their successors still with us in the porcelain plates which we see on



NO. II.—SCALE PLATE BY SAMUEL COCKS  
WITH PLAIN SIDE UP

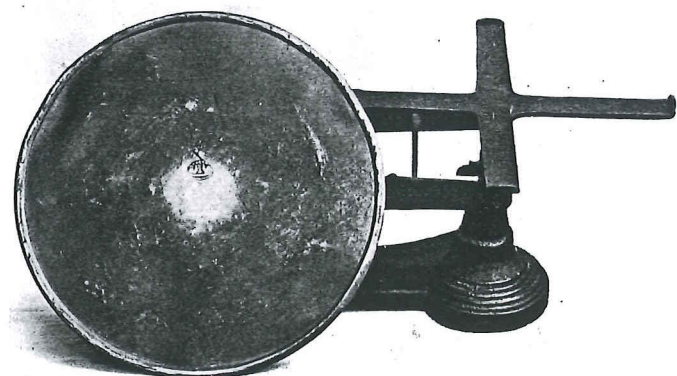
IN ACTUAL USE  
CIRCA 1820

it came into his possession! The weights accompanying these scales are of the ordinary flat, circular, nested type.

So much by way of evidence. Let me now proceed to a few conclusions after passing in review some of the uses which have been suggested

scales in many grocers' and butchers' shops to-day.

On reference to No. i., it will be seen that these are quoted as being made from 8 in. to 15 in. in diameter, though I have seen them more than 18 in. In No. iv., I show a 9-in.



NO. III.—SCALE PLATE SHOWING TOUCH OF SAMUEL COCKS  
CIRCA 1820

for these plates. By various collectors they are styled salvers, bread plates, cake stands, cheese platters, trays, etc., and I see no reason to doubt why so obviously useful an article should not have been employed for many of these purposes, for I know of no law which forbids one to use what the maker sells as a butter dish, for jam,

example with very clear Touch-mark, in Mr. Hancox's collection, and in No. v., a 15-in. plate in the collection of Mr. Antonio de Navarro, F.S.A., of Broadway. This latter, it will be noted, has no maker's Touch, but in its place, in the centre, is engraved the owner's crest, a *Saracen's Head*, on a torse.



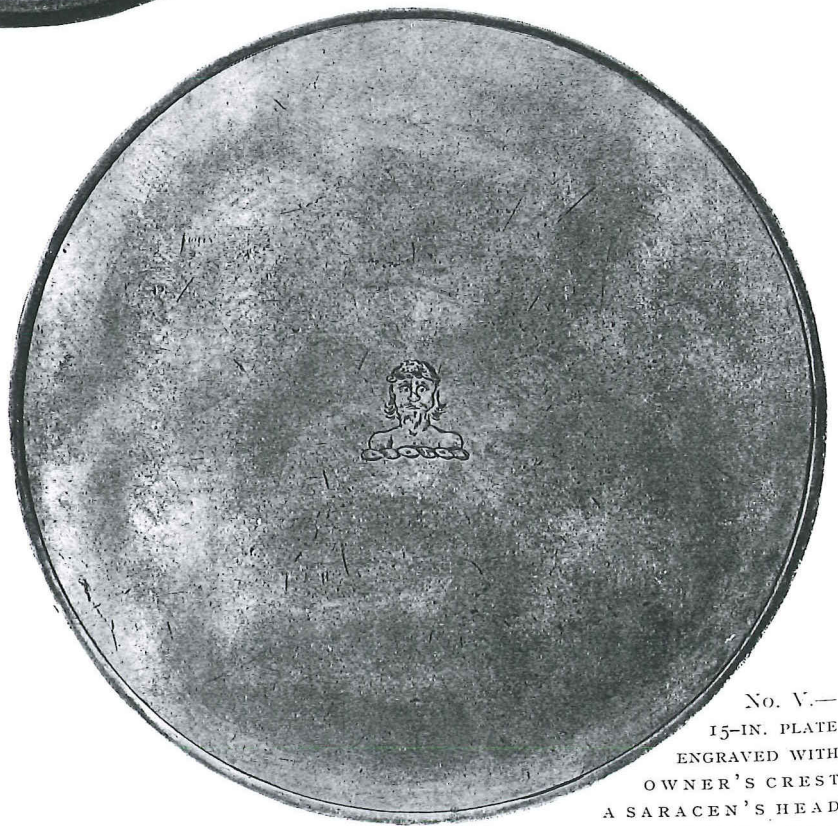


No. IV.—  
9-IN. PLATE  
BY S. ORFORD,  
LONDON. CIRCA 1825  
IN MR. EDWARD  
HANCOX'S COLLECTION

Departing from these plain types, we have in No. vi. a very early example made by John Kenton, who was Steward of the London Pewterers' Company, in 1694, and whose "Hall-marks" appear in the upper triangle. This piece, formerly at Rushbrook Hall, Bury St. Edmunds, and now in the collection of Mr. E. W. Turner, M.A., of Herne Bay College, differs from the others in its geometrical piercing, a feature which rather argues against its use as a bread plate or for any other purpose where the use of a knife was necessitated. Further, it would be useless for keeping the crumbs

from the table, whereas such perforations would be no bar to its use as a scale plate, upon which it would be customary to place a sheet of paper, both for wrapping and to obviate constant cleaning. On the obverse of this fine example, the triple-reeded edge of the late seventeenth century replaces the inverted "U" section rim, and the maker's proper Touch is struck in the centre.

If now we look at all the five examples shown, we shall notice that knife-cuts are practically non-existent, but on the backs one finds evidence on many of them of their having been pretty freely used for this purpose, another grain of evidence that



No. V.—  
15-IN. PLATE  
ENGRAVED WITH  
OWNER'S CREST  
A SARACEN'S HEAD  
IN THE COLLECTION OF MR. ANTONIO DE NAVARRO, F.S.A.

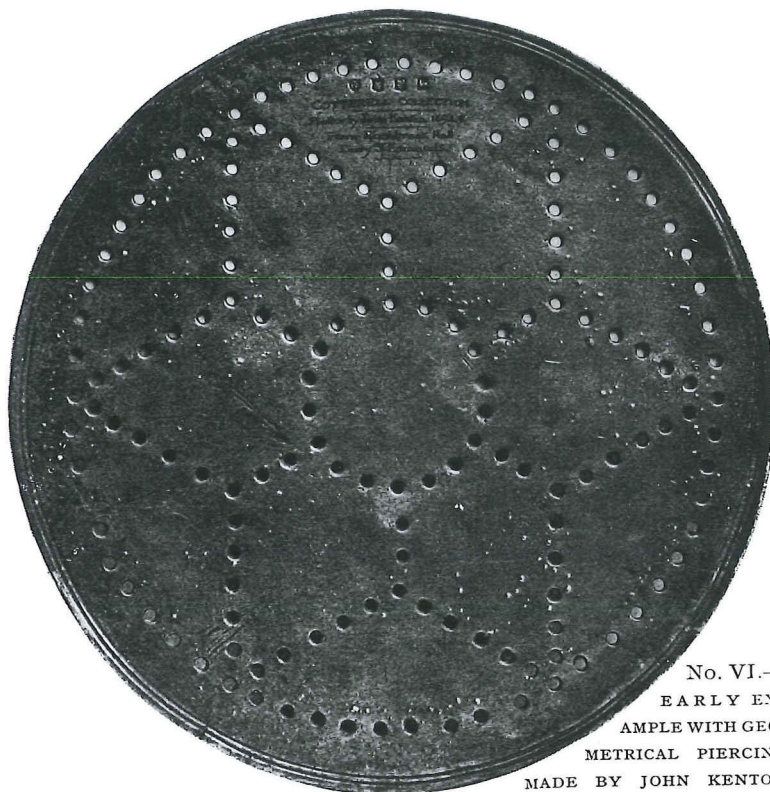


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the flat side was the business side. After all, what could form a more ideal base for a nicely iced Christmas or birthday cake? And if Milady chose so to deflect it from the maker's trade description, what about it? Would not such a clean flat surface appeal to anyone, for a thousand uses?

It is of course not impossible that plates such as these were sold apart from their accompanying scales, but we have no evidence on the point.

A 15-in. flat platter of this form, raised on a circular foot, and evidently intended as a salver or cake stand, is in the collection of Mr. Alfred B. Yeates, F.S.A., F.R.I.B.A., and is shown in No. vii.; it bears the mark of William Buckley, and its date is *circa* 1700.



No. VI.—  
EARLY EX-  
AMPLE WITH GEC-  
METRICAL PIERCING  
MADE BY JOHN KENTON  
IN MR. E. W. TURNER'S COLLECTION

*CIRCA* 1694

The added feature of the circular foot, the ring of which is plainly seen in the illustration, entirely eliminates any idea of its having been in use as a scale plate; it enters another category by that very feature. On this piece also appears the reeded edge of the period.

It well may be that such scales as I have illustrated are still in use in many places, but until this auspicious invitation to my friend I had never heard of or seen such a set; indeed it is the link we have long awaited to complete our chain of evidence, and I am not without hope that so interesting a find may have an appeal to many outside the ranks of pewter lovers.



No. VII.—  
15-IN. PLATE  
RAISED ON CIR-  
CULAR FOOT BY  
WILLIAM BUCKLEY  
*CIRCA* 1700 IN THE COLLECTION OF MR. ALFRED B. YEATES, F.S.A., F.R.I.B.A.