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EARLY PEWTER BALUSTER MEASURES AN EXPLANATION OF THEIR LID-MARKINGS

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Fig. I. A FINE "WEDGE"-TYPE BALUSTER MEASURE.
Sixteenth Century

FOR some considerable time there has been doubt in my mind as to the correct interpretation of certain markings which are found upon the lids of many early pewter baluster measures. I refer to that type whereon one or more marks are repeated, two, three, four or more times, usually in a circle around the outer margin of the cover, the best-known example of which is that shown in Figs. I and II—from photographs kindly sent to me by Mr. A. E. Kimbell—the former showing the measure itself, with its severed lid laid upon it; and the latter, the upper side of the lid with its five marks, surrounding the initials $A^M S$. Upon

its underside other marks appear: a woman kneeling to the right of an (?) altar; a star with rays; and a further one indecipherable.

Which, of all these, is the maker's "touch"?

From this example alone the obvious conclusion did not leap to the mind, but other pieces of a similar type, which have since been noted, have—I contend—supplied the solution.

It will, however, facilitate the theory I desire to expound if we first assimilate two important axioms, which bear forcibly upon what I am about to say. These are:—



Fig. II. THE UPPER SIDE OF LID WITH ITS FIVE MARKS SURROUNDING THE INITIALS A.S.M.

(a) The Pewterers' Company's attitude towards self-advertisement.

(b) The meaning of three letters set triangularly, so: π^c_g .

In regard to (a), the late Mr. Charles Welch, in his invaluable "History of the Worshipful Company of

Pewterers of London" (II, p. 171), records that at a Court of the Company held on December 14th, 1698-9:

"Any Member that shall from henceforth publish or distribute any Bills, printed or wrote, to commend or boast of his ware, or to invite customers to come to him before another, shall forfeit and pay fforty shillings for every time he shall offend therein."

and on p. 169 (*ibid.*) Mr. Welch remarks:—

"Anything approaching the nature of an advertisement was sternly forbidden."

These, and many similar references in the same work, leave us in *no* doubt as to the company's attitude towards self-advertisement, or "The stealing away of

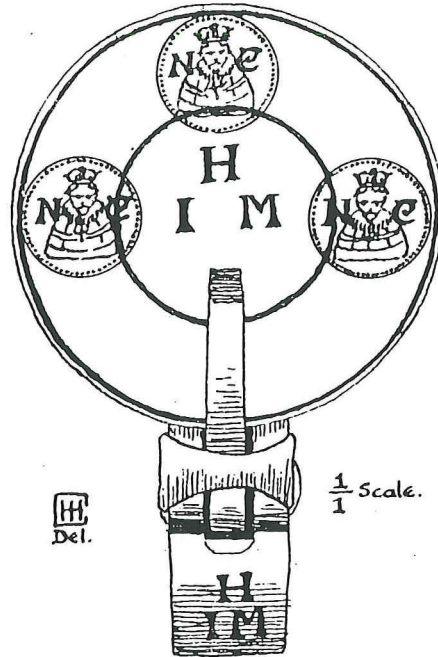


Fig. IV. LID OF FIG. III WITH DEVICE OF KING'S HEAD

another man's customers." One can, therefore, but imagine what their ideas would have been towards a member who struck his touch several times on the same piece! In all probability he would have been summoned to the hall, and there "whipped in open court" for his misdemeanour; a punishment by no means unknown in those days.

In regard to (b), it is a fact—universally accepted, and beyond dispute—that the three initials struck triangularly, as above, denote ownership; the upper letter indicating the surname, and the lower ones those of the husband (left) and wife (right) respectively. Thus, the instance given might be transcribed: "Howard and Gertrude Cotterell."

Now, has this latter point any bearing on the lid shown in Fig. II? Yes, partially, for we have the initials A. (& S.) M., as the ownership initials in the centre, and A. M., in the five marks surrounding them, and herein is our first ray of the dawn of intelligent observation of facts.

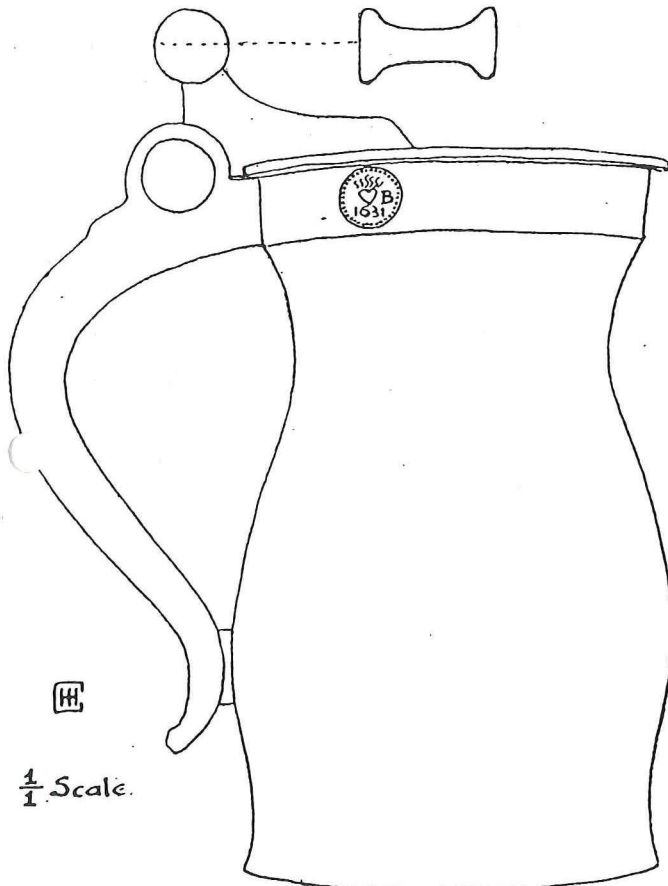


Fig. III. SHOWING MAKER'S "TOUCH" ON THE LIP

I shall, however, adduce more convincing proof than this in subsequent examples, though it may not be out of place if I here set down my theory that these repeated marks are *not the maker's marks at all*, or anything to do with him, but are ownership marks; in other words, house signs, shop signs, inn signs, tavern, coffee or eating-house signs.

The first example, which set me upon the right trail, was a very beautiful gill-size measure of the "Hammerhead" type (Fig. III) upon the lid of which, struck three times, is a device of a king's head—probably

the first touchplate), the affinity between the two will at once be apparent, for we have in both the same device—the flaming heart—the same initial "B" of the surname, merely the date being changed; (16)68 instead of 1631. The appearance of this maker's touch upon the lip at once rules out the marks upon the lid as being those of the maker. The heavy construction of this fine measure will be seen in Fig. V (and Fig. III).

Since the killing of long-accepted beliefs is never easy, let us start with common sense. In the Guildhall Museum—and here let me say that Mr. Quintin Waddington,

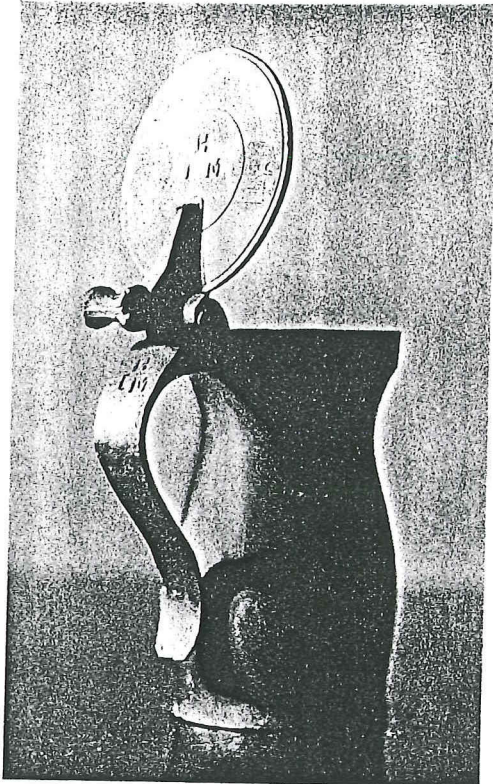


Fig. V. An exceptionally massive example, the weight of which is nearly 11½ oz. as against an average of 8½-9 oz. for gills. The handle is some ⅝ in. across at the hinge, and not less than ⅞ in. at its narrowest. All these are early features. (See also Fig. III)



Fig. VI

H
I S



Fig. VII

F.S.A., the Assistant Curator, is entirely in agreement with my theory—there is an example which, at the onset, gives the lie to the idea that these repeated marks are those of the maker. I refer to a measure with "Bud" type thumbpiece upon which the mark shown in Fig. VI is struck four times containing the initials I. S. H., the same initials being struck triangularly, ownershipwise, in the centre of the lid, thus proving that—in conjunction with others I shall illustrate—I. S. H. was the owner and not the maker. But, by great good fortune, also upon this piece, struck as is more usual, upon the lip, appears the maker's touch No. 1106A in my book (No. 378 on the second London touchplate). This touch, dated 1683, is that of John Cooper, who was given leave to strike it on March 22nd, 1684. (See Fig. VII).



Fig. VIII

G
T E

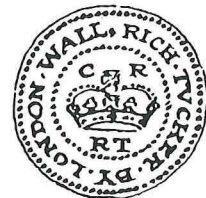


Fig. IX

T
R A

Here then we have the evidence we want: the maker's mark—a touchplate mark at that—upon the lip; the owner's initials struck triangularly upon the lid, and *the same* initials within the compass of the repeated mark, evidently the house sign of I(ohn) and S(arah) H(arris)—or some such names—of "The King's Head." This should be proof enough, but let us consider one or two other pieces in the same museum.

On a pint size "Wedge" type baluster, struck six times upon the lid, is a mark of a Tudor rose within a beaded circle and with the initials T. E. G., surrounding the rose (Fig. VIII) and upon the handle, struck triangularly, these same initials, T^aE, proving the marks to be those of the owner. Thus we may transcribe it somewhat as follows: "Thomas and Eleanor Gregg, at the sign of 'The Tudor Rose.'"

James I—with the letters N. C., in quasi-lombardic type, but with the ownership initials I^HM struck upon the lid and the handle (Fig. IV).

Admittedly, these ownership letters, differing as they do from the N. C. in the marks, seem at first sight to confound my theory; but obviously they are later than the king's head marks, which latter was the sign of the house with the founder's initials, I. & M. H., being subsequent owners. Ruling all this aside for the moment however, what is of first-rate importance about this piece is, that the maker's touch appears upon the lip! (See Fig. III.)

Now if this touch be compared with No. 5416 in my "Old Pewter: Its Makers and Marks" (No. 108 of

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Again, there is a "Hammerhead" type of measure with the ownership initials $R^T A$ struck triangularly both in the centre of the lid and upon the handle; while surrounding the former is repeated three times the mark shown in Fig. IX, with the device of a royal crown and C. R., for *Carolus Rex*, and beneath this R. T., for Richard Tucker, whose name is set out in full in the exergue, thus: "Rich. Tucker, by London Wall."

More proof than this should not be necessary, for those ownership initials are obviously those of Richard (and Anne?) Tucker, at the sign of "The Royal Crown"

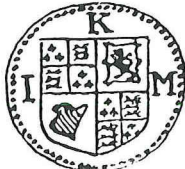


Fig. X

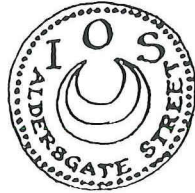


Fig. XI

by London Wall.¹ This *cannot* be a maker's touch, for no pewterer would have been allowed to have both *his initials, and his name, and his address in full* within his touch, nor would the device of the royal crown with C. R. have been permitted as a device. The

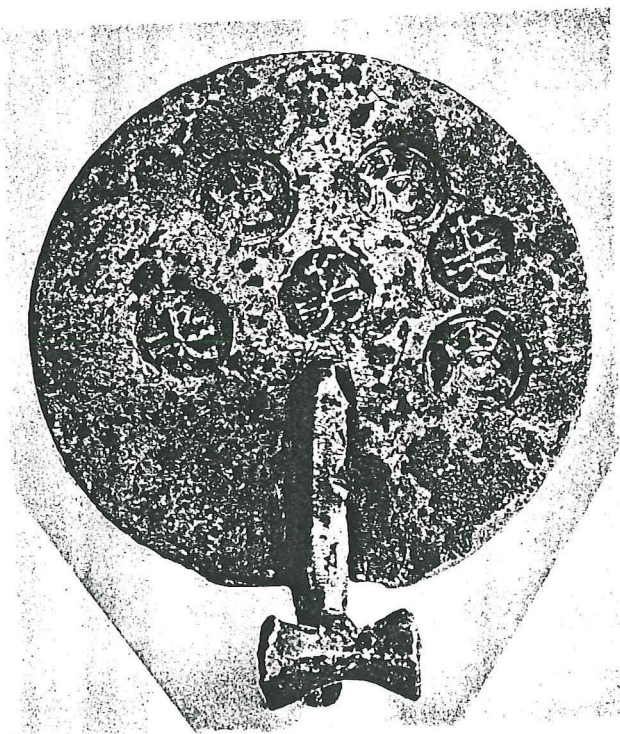


Fig. XII. MERCHANT-MARK AND HOUSE-SIGN

Since these notes were typed, Mr. Quintin Waddington has written me in reference to Fig. IX as follows:—
 "Richard Tucker actually issued a token from 'The Crown' by London Wall. So, there is no doubt about him being the landlord and not the pewterer. The token is undated. (Williamson & Boyne, London, No. 1773.)"
 This really seems to settle the point at issue. He also points out that John Hind & Thomas Gwilym (Brewers) issued a token from "The King's Head" in Peerpool Lane (Williamson & Boyne, London, No. 2206), some ten years before John Cooper had leave to strike his touch (Fig. VII), so they may well have some connection with Fig. VI.

whole thing is a colossal piece of self-advertisement to which—as we have seen—the company were so bitterly opposed.

If now we turn to the London Museum we find still further evidence. On a lid of the "Bud" type appears the mark shown in Fig. X, struck five times, and bearing the Royal Arms surrounded by the initials, set ownershipwise, $R^T M$.

There is absolutely no evidence to support the suggestion that any pewterer would have been given the right to use the Royal Arms as his device; the thought

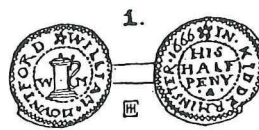


Fig. XIII

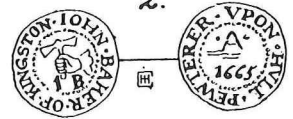


Fig. XIV

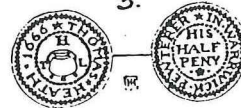
B
R E



1.



2.



3.

Figs. XV—XVII. PEWTERERS' TOKENS

is too absurd to need contradiction—and I am not overlooking their use in the Arms of Dorchester, by George Lester of that city; nor by Spackman & Co., in their Letters Patent stamp; nor yet again by Robert Stanton in his device of the Royal Standard—none of which was used, as is this one, the Royal Arms pure and simple. There is no instance of any such licence in any known pewterer's mark, and we must interpret this one somewhat as follows: "John and Mary King at the sign of 'The Royal Arms' (or 'The King's Arms')."

Upon another lid of the same type, we find the mark shown in Fig. XI struck five times. Here the initials are in such palpable ownership style as to leave us in no doubt, and this mark should be read as, possibly: "John and Sarah Osborne, at the sign of 'The Crescent' in Aldersgate Street." This mark also carries its own failure to comply with the no-advertising regulations of the Pewterers' Company.

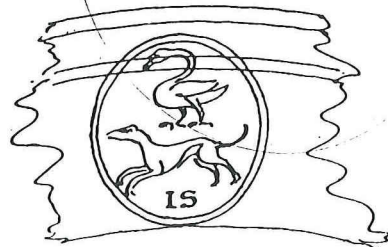


Fig. XVIII. HOUSE-SIGN ON A PLATE-RIM

One other point, to which I have not as yet alluded, is, that if these three initials do *not* denote ownership, then they indicate a great many more men with double christian names than ever existed in those early days!

The predecessor of these triangularly-set ownership initials was the old Merchant Mark, an example of which, with the house-sign of "The King's Head," is shown in the fine lid from the collection of the late Mr. R. Garraway Rice, F.S.A., in Fig. XII.

Many other instances might be quoted, but I believe my point is already made, for if one looks at all these devices one sees how readily they lend themselves to such adaptations: "The King's Head," "The Queen's Head," "The Bull's Head," "The Crown," "The Tudor Rose," "The Bell," "The Crescent," "The Blazing Sun," "The King's Arms," "The Royal Arms"; while in the Victoria and Albert Museum we have "The Bishop's Head" (Fig. XIII); and on the well-known example from the Buckmaster Collection, "The Bear" (Fig. XIV).

It can but be presumed that all these pieces were formerly the property of houses to which the public had ready access, and that they were so marked as a precaution against the "souvenir" hunters of former days; even as to-day we find in our restaurants and hotels the name of the establishment branded or transferred on their plate and crockery, a relic of these house signs of this bygone age.

I am convinced that the fortunate owners of these interesting pieces are the possessors of the old tavern, eating-house or coffee-house plate of the sixteenth, seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, invested—by these house signs—with an interest far more human than any maker's touch could give to them.

Between them and the devices in many of the seventeenth-century tradesmen's tokens we find a very great affinity and further proof for our theory. Indeed, one says without fear of contradiction, that the spirit which fired the one idea was responsible also for the other. (See Figs. XV to XVII).

None would suspect W. M. of being the *maker* of William Mountford's token, or I. B. of John Baker's, or, again, T. L. H. of Thomas Heath's. No, they

stamp them indelibly as being *the property of* "William Mountford at the sign of 'The Flagon,'" of "John Baker at the sign of 'The Hammer-in-Hand,'" and of "Thomas and L(ucy?) Heath at the sign of 'The Flesh-pot,' in Warwick," respectively. In exactly the same way these signs upon baluster lids are ownership signs.

That the system was carried to other things besides measures is instanced by the fragment of a reeded-edge plate in the Guildhall Museum, upon the back of which is struck the touch of Thomas Burges, with his Rose and Crown mark; while on the front of the rim—as is usual—are struck the imitation silver marks, and further, the house-sign shown in Fig. XVIII, evidently "The Swan and Greyhound," or some similar inn.

Where we find ownership initials which differ from those in the house sign we may, I think, conclude that the latter was the original die, and the triangularly-struck initials those of a subsequent owner, and for these reasons:—

(a) The cutting of these dies was expensive and—once done—they were therefore kept in service as long as possible.

(b) A well-known device is an asset to any business and would only be changed after long deliberation.

(c) The case was adequately met by striking the old sign, plus the initials of the subsequent owner.

Where we find two devices with the same initials, as in Fig. II, it may point to "A. M." being the owner of two houses—"The King's Head" and "The Bull's Head"—who struck the device of each on all his pewter, thus rendering them interchangeable, for use at either.

To those who possess my "Old Pewter: Its Makers and Marks," I suggest the deletion of the following, which can no longer be considered as maker's marks:—

No. 5567. The two outer marks.

No. 5769. The whole; text and illustrations.

No. 6080. The whole.

In conclusion I desire to acknowledge indebtedness for certain details to some notes kindly sent to me by Mr. A. B. Yeates, F.R.I.B.A., F.S.A., and to the authorities of the Guildhall Museum for assistance in affording me ready access to their many treasures.

