

EJK

Pewter

by
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Sotheby's



Figure 1. A record-breaking English charger c.1660-65. £32,000. Courtesy Phillips.



Figure 3. Stuart candlestick. £4,600. Courtesy Sotheby's.



Figure 4. Spice-plate, late 17th century. £1,400. Courtesy Sotheby's.

All areas of antique collecting are liable to changes in taste and fashion. Pewter has been the victim of this trend several times, but has always recovered.

In the 1920s and '30s, when the Tudor Cottage style was prevalent, pewter was in considerable demand. Then, with the Brave New World of the 1950s and '60s, interest declined. The 1970s saw the dispersal, mainly by auction, of some of the finest and best-known pewter collections, such as those of R.F. Michaelis and C.A. Peal. Prices rose again, but in a slightly more selective sense, as these collections contained what was becoming increasingly rare, fine examples of early British pewter. However, the rise did strengthen the prices of more mundane pieces, such as ordinary undecorated 18th century plates, and the less, to the average collector, scintillating pieces of common domestic pewter.

The advent of the 1980s found the pewter market in the doldrums. It was too limited to absorb the quantities of day-to-day domestic pewter, and pieces of exceptional quality became available very infrequently. Whilst pieces of high quality are still seldom seen on the market, there has been a general strengthening of pewter prices over the last seven months.

Last year ended with two world record breaking prices at auction for pewter. Undoubtedly the grandest was a large English charger (figure 1) with a broad rim decorated with hunting



Figure 2. Stuart flat-lid tankard. £3,600. Courtesy Sotheby's.

scenes, dating from between 1660-1665, and, at 28 3/16ins., being perhaps the fifth largest decorated English charger outside royal ownership. This fetched £32,000, an outstanding price, and the highest ever paid for a piece of pewter. The other was an undecorated Stuart flat lid tankard (figure 2), formerly in the Cooper collection and in excellent condition, which achieved £3,600, a world record price for an undecorated flat lid tankard.

Sets of six plain 18th century plates have been making as much as £500, against previous prices of £200 to £300. Recently, a Stuart wriggled-work dish, whose decoration was very naïve, made £1,300. This is of particular interest, as it had last been on the market in 1973 as part of the Michaelis collection, when it

made the considerably more modest price of £240.

This strong trend has been continuing, with a rare Stuart octagonal-based candlestick (figure 3) fetching £4,600, and an octagonal spice-plate or saucer, late 17th century (figure 4) making £1,400. A William and Mary wriggled-work portrait beaker (figure 5), dating from around 1689-94, with an English maker's mark, reached £2,700. These beakers are frequently Dutch and, if not marked at all, assumed to be Dutch, and so the verification of this example's origins by the maker's mark excited great interest. The following lot was an almost identically decorated beaker, but without a maker's mark, and this piece fetched £1,100.

Another area to watch in the pewter market are those pieces with Hebrew inscriptions. Whether they are of British or Continental origin, their value often lies intrinsically in their Hebrew connections. The pewter itself is sometimes of only very moderate interest, particularly the plates which were used in Hebrew ceremonies, which are inscribed and sometimes decorated with wriggled-work designs, and it is their importance as ceremonial objects which dictates their value. A perfectly ordinary 18th or 19th century Continental plate with a Hebrew inscription and decoration fetches anywhere between £150 to £600. The value of the plate itself, as an



Figure 5. William and Mary beaker. £2,700. Courtesy Sotheby's.

ordinary piece of pewter, would probably not exceed £60. In a recent specialised Judaica sale, a richly decorated German pewter Passover dish (figure 6) with owner's inscription dated 1768, made £2,600. Obviously, there are some pieces which are of such high quality and rarity as pewter that the



Figure 6. Hebrew Passover dish. £2,600. Courtesy Sotheby's.

presence of a few Hebrew characters of no great religious significance would not greatly affect their value.

Although the market for British pewter has been strengthening over the

last months, the price of Continental pewter has not been greatly affected. Although often more elaborate in design, it does not attract very much interest from British collectors, and the Continentals are unlikely to travel to England for a sale including only a few pieces of Continental pewter. However, if one can get a large enough group of foreign pewter together for a sale, with copious illustrations, buyers will make the journey, or send commission bids.

Generally, there is a definite buoyancy in the pewter market, with prices at least equalling, and for fine pieces far outstripping, the highs achieved in the late 1970s.

It must be repeated that for those wishing to start buying pewter, for pleasure or investment, it is always wisest to buy the best piece your means allow, rather than three or four more mediocre pieces. Avoid pieces with restoration or damage, and buy from reputable sources.

Expert advice is at hand in both the auction house and in the trade. If one has little knowledge of pewter, it is advisable to seek a reliable, and knowledgeable, person's or institution's help.

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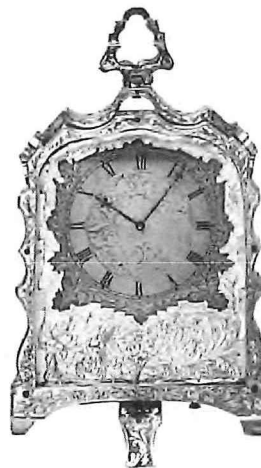
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