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## CHURCH VESSELS IN PEWTER

By A. V. SUTHERLAND-GRAEME

THE pieces of pewter illustrated in *COUNTRY LIFE* of April 13, 1951, have, to judge by the ensuing correspondence, given rise to considerable interest in what was made when the pewterers' craft was at its zenith in the 17th century. It will be remembered that the late Antonio de Navarro, in his *Courses on English Pewter*, published by *COUNTRY LIFE* in 1911, illustrated a number of fine pieces which his zeal and that of other enthusiasts of the time had brought to light, and it has been my aim to extend the list by the addition of further notable examples which have been discovered during subsequent years.

One result of the Reformation was the introduction into the Church of large flagons for containing the Sacramental Wine. There was, of course, a considerable time-lag between the event and its result, and the earliest of these flagons date from the reign of James I, though some few may be slightly earlier.

Production increased considerably during the ensuing century, and there is no doubt that by the time of Queen Anne nearly every parish church in England and Wales possessed one or more flagons, many of course being of silver, especially in cities or where wealthy patrons or parishioners made donations. Large numbers of pewter flagons were made, however; in *The Pewter Communion Vessels of Essex Churches* (c. 1927) the late Rev. W. J. Prosser wrote that visitation books for the county of Essex show that of 120 churches, visited between 1683 and 1686, 92 possessed pewter flagons, and 29 others were ordered to obtain them.

Flagons remained in use for many years, but gradual changes of custom in the conduct of services eventually made the employment of such large vessels unnecessary.

Silver flagons, being by then

extremely valuable, were carefully preserved, but, alas, many pewter flagons have disappeared, at least from the churches to which they belonged. They were doubtless considered of little importance or value and were gradually omitted from inventories and terriers. Fortunately many of them have found their way into the collections of pewter enthusiasts, where they will receive the attention and admiration that they deserve, which would not have been so had they remained in at least some of the places in which they have come to light. It should, however, be stressed that ancient sacramental vessels, be they of precious or base metal, should not be alienated other than by faculty or other legal consent.

A case in point is illustrated in Fig. 1. This is a pewter Communion flagon of skirt-based type which was discovered by its present owner in a lamentable state of decay in a Midland church. Funds were needed for fabric restoration, and expenditure upon the preservation of the relic in such circumstances would not have been justifiable. Proper permission having been obtained, it passed into the possession of Mr. R. W. Cooper, of Bukote, Nottinghamshire, who had it carefully restored and cleaned, with the beautiful result seen here.

The flagon stands 9½ ins. in height and was made by a namesake of the owner, Thomas Cooper, a member of the Pewterers' Company of London, who was working between 1660 and 1680. Around the drum is engraved: "THIS IS MY BLOOD, 1678."

The history of the chalice is very involved, and those who may wish to gain some knowledge of its ramifications in many countries could with advantage read the introduction to J. W. and M. I. Walker's *Church Plate of Berkshire*.



1.—SKIRT-BASED COMMUNION FLAGON, FORMERLY IN A MIDLAND CHURCH. Made by Thomas Cooper about 1678



2.—A CHALICE AND A PAIR OF SMALL REEDED PATENS OF THE 17th CENTURY

office it to say here that, in the main, the church throughout the centuries has always taken the view that the chalice should be made of precious metal; and Councils and high ecclesiastics have at various times prohibited the consecration of vessels of pewter or other materials which did not conform to that view.

It should be remembered that during the last two centuries an enormous expansion of church building took place, so that where in 1000, 1750 parishes were served by one church, they have since become sub-divided into smaller units with a church in each. For the new churches sacramental vessels were needed, and it is obvious that the regulation as regards the material from which the vessels were made is relaxed in order that full ministrations could begin at once.

This fact, together with the later purchase, as a gift, of silver plate, as the new churches got to their stride, accounts for the majority of pewter chalices which may occasionally be seen in antique shops or private collections to-day, though even they are few in number. To them must be added vessels from churches of other denominations; all are of late date and, with the exception of some Scottish types, notably for their engraved inscriptions, are not of great interest.

In the majority of cases the old parish churches, being going concerns, were already in possession, by various means, of silver vessels, and therefore a 17th-century pewter chalice is a rarity. One of these is seen in Fig. 2, together with a pair of small reeded patens. The chalices measure 6½ ins. in height and beneath its foot is the maker's touch of a dove and the initials I.R. The patens are 4¾ ins. in diameter and are marked. They were originally in a Yorkshire church.

In Fig. 3 can be seen a flagon and paten in my collection. This flagon measures 10¾ ins. to the top of the finial and is of graceful proportions. The finial itself, deeply undercut, forms a pleasing feature adding distinction to the whole design. Upon the back of the handle are stamped the words DINGINGTON [sic] PARISH. There are three parishes named Dinnington, two in the North Country and one in Somerset, and it is probable that the last was the original possessor, but of this there is not positive



3.—PATEN, POSSIBLY OF THE 16th CENTURY, AND A FLAGON OF ABOUT 1640, PERHAPS FROM SOMERSET

knowledge. The maker's touch contains his initials, R.B., with a fleur-de-lis, and the period is about 1640.

The paten is obviously earlier, and may even be late 16th-century. It is 9½ ins. in diameter and is distinguished by an extraordinary breadth of rim (2¼ ins.) and by the arms and mantling with which it is embellished. When discovered it was so black and corroded that the arms were barely visible, but careful cleaning eventually revealed them. The reverse of the piece has been left in its original state; there is a touch, but it is too corroded to be deciphered.

Two further outstanding examples are shown in Figs. 4 and 5. The chalice is 7½ ins.

high and is unmarked. It is of mid-17th-century date. The paten is 7¼ ins. in diameter and bears the touch of an anchor with initials I.R. within a shield. This touch has been found upon a flagon dated 1634 at Glympton Church, in Oxfordshire. Upon the face of the rim are stamped the letters WSTON, possibly meaning St. John at W, the initial of the parish.

All these examples show that the pewterers' service to the church, in the 17th century at least, was no mean one. Though never highly decorative, their products possessed dignity and were well suited to the high purpose for which they were made.

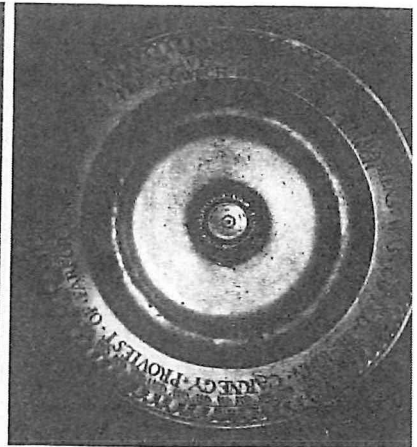
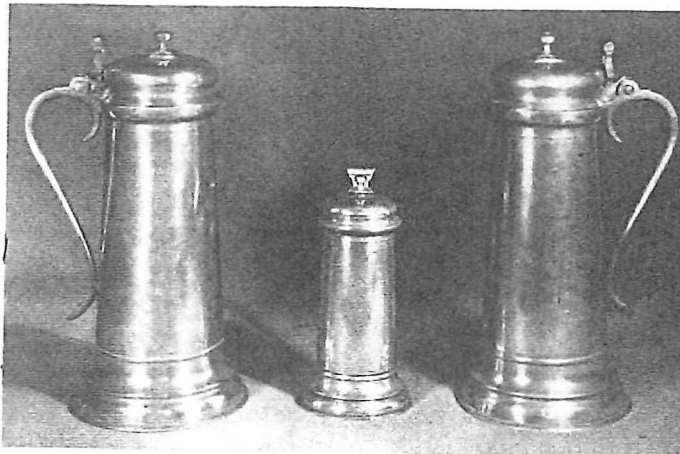
Photographs: 2, 4 and 5, Victoria and Albert Museum.



4 and 5.—A CHALICE AND PATEN OF THE MID 17th CENTURY

# CHURCH VESSELS IN PEWTER

SOME FURTHER EXAMPLES. ◊ By A. V. SUTHERLAND-GRAEME



1.—A PAIR OF UNUSUALLY LARGE FLAGONS AT RAUNDS CHURCH, NORTHAMPTONSHIRE, PHOTOGRAPHED WITH FLAGON OF NORMAL SIZE. They are all by the same maker and date from about 1630-40. (Right) 2.—ONE OF A SET OF FOUR EMBOSSED DISHES AT FORFAR CHURCH, PROBABLY MADE BY EDINBURGH PEWTERERS

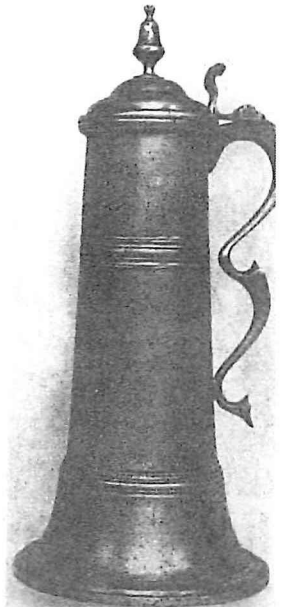
MY article published in the issue of December 26, 1952, appears to have created considerable interest in the work of the 17th-century pewterers for the ecclesiastical authorities. It has been thought, therefore, worth while to bring together a few more examples for illustration.

Most of the ensuing correspondence had reference to the size of the flagons which were provided to contain the wine for the service of Holy Communion as administered after the Reformation, and to the changes in administration which have since occurred and which have, *inter alia*, rendered unnecessary the provision of large quantities of wine. One instance cited was taken from the records of Hartland Church, Devon, where, in 1636-7, we are told, 20 gallons

were purchased for Easter alone, and a further 7 or 8 gallons for Whitsunday, All Saints and Christmas.

In a letter of my own (March 27), I drew attention to a pair of enormous flagons at Raunds Church, Northamptonshire. The present series of illustrations may well begin with these giants, Fig. 1, which are shown in company with a more normal sized flagon such as was illustrated in my previous article. Their height overall is 17 1/4 ins., their weight over 13 lb. empty, and their capacity 1 gallon and 1 pint each. All three flagons are by the same maker, one E.G., whose full name has not yet been discovered. A great deal of his work still exists, particularly in the churches of Norfolk. The period is *circa* 1630-40.

In Fig. 2 can be seen one of a set of embossed dishes, the property of the church of Forfar, and perhaps the most remarkable pieces of ecclesiastical plate in Scotland. It is 16 1/2 ins. in diameter, and around its rim a band of decoration formed of leaves in groups of three, outside which is a band of arc resting on alternate buckles and roses pun in the metal. Below these is an inscription obviously engraved without proper consideration for scale, since the words have overlapped: "JULY • 1682 • THESE • FOUR • BAS • WAS • GIFTED • BE • JOHN • CAR • PROVIST • OF • PARFOR • FOR • THE • EWS • OF • THE • CHWRCH • OF • TH • SAID • BRWGL." The four dishes are identical except for some differences in spelling.



3.—FLAGON BY WILLIAM EDDON AND ALMS DISH BY RICHARD GRUNWIN. Both pieces have inscriptions dated 1742, but they are probably of earlier date. (Middle) 4.—EARLY 18th-CENTURY FLAGON OF THE TYPE KNOWN AS ACORNS AND MADE USUALLY BY YORK PEWTERERS. (Right) 5.—TALL FLAGON AT PURITON CHURCH, SOMERSET, INSCRIBED "JOHN SQUIRE 1731," AND MADE BY JOHN DOLBEARE, OF ASHBURTON, DEVON

## CHURCH VESSELS IN PEWTER <sup>Country Life</sup> 16/1/53

SIR,—In *COUNTRY LIFE* of December 26, 1952, Mr. A. V. Sutherland-Graeme writes: "One result of the Reformation was the introduction into the Church of large flagons for containing the Sacramental Wine." Why was it necessary that these flagons should be so large?

Later he says: "Flagons remained in use for many years, but gradual changes of custom in the conduct of services eventually made the employment of such large vessels unnecessary." What were the changes in custom? I am sure your readers would be glad of answers to these questions.—F. W. MORTON PALMER, *Woodlands, Totnes, Devon.*

Mr. Sutherland-Graeme writes: After the Reformation the laity was permitted to partake of the Cup, formerly denied to them, and Communion Services were infrequent, in many cases only once a quarter and at Festivals. These two facts, at a time when attendance at services was high, necessitated a considerable provision of bread and wine for quarterly Communion. Moreover, the Service evidently partook more nearly of the form of a commemorative Supper, with the Communion Table set on an east-west axis, the minister officiating on the north side, the parishioners facing him and the wardens in attendance. The difficulty at first was to provide suitable vessels to contain the wine on the Communion Table. It is known that the nature of some of these vessels was anything but dignified, and that this led to the promulgation of the XXth Canon of 1603-4 (James VI and I): "Wine we require to be brought to the Communion Table in a clean and sweet standing pot or stoup of pewter, if not of purer metal." As to the size of these flagons, this obviously depended upon the average number of communicant parishioners at the time.

The changes in custom, referred to in your correspondent's second query, were, like many others, very gradual, and no doubt much at the whim of the Bishop and Incumbent. They included the placing of the Holy Table against the east wall and the fencing of it by rails at which communicants knelt, as now. This arrangement was abolished by the Long Parliament in 1643, but was later reintroduced; the emphasis gradually changed more and more from what might be called the Imitative to the Sacramental; and the consumption of the Elements became symbolic rather than practical. For this manner of administration little wine was needed and the heavy and unwieldy flagon gave place, in most cases, to the cruet. So the pendulum gradually swung back, as so often it will after far-reaching changes.—ED.