EPF

THE SCOTTISH QUAICH

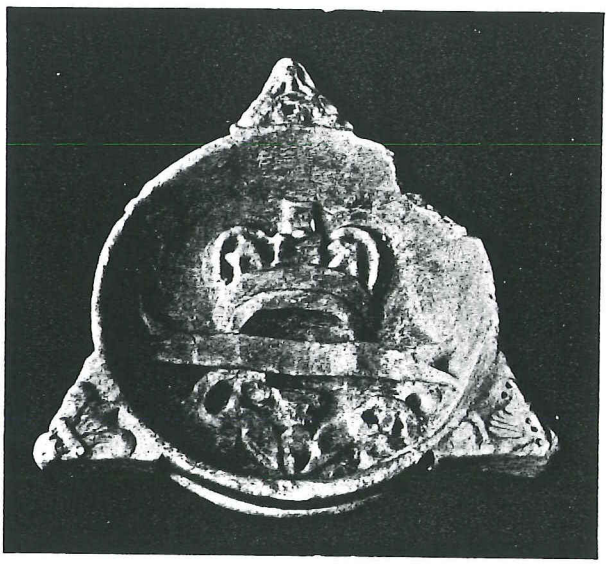
Some Rare Examples of a Distinctive National Vessel

By Major J. MILNE-DAVIDSON, I.S.O., F.S.A.

RESEARCH has so far failed to provide us with much early information as to the origin or uses of the exclusively Scottish vessel, the Quaich. As will be seen, by reference throughout this article, it has been utilised for a number of purposes, but it is clear from the very name that it was primarily, and has been all through its history, a drinking vessel or one for liquid food. In Gaelic "Cuach" is a cup or bowl, and that leads me to the not unnatural opinion that in the days when utensils were scarce it quite likely served in the dual capacity. The small ones, however, of which there are many examples, were obviously used for pretty potent spirits. Mottoes are frequent, and the Gaelic one "Squab Ase" ("Sweep it up"), is very applicable to a stirrup cup.

In form it is not far removed from the earlier Mazer Bowl, but the lugs, always more than one, point to the probability of communal use; although what was more common than to see a person on a Scottish farm holding a bowl or wooden "cappie" with both hands when drinking? The lugs may have been an assistance to better manners, or else to allow of the use of the Quaich for very hot drinks. All these conjectures are as they may be, but the fact remains that the introduction of the lugs has given to us a very graceful and purely national form, which is in a class entirely of its own.

Marble, silver, pewter, brass, ivory, and various woods have all been used for Quaichs, from the plain wooden ones, many of them beautiful in simple form, to those, costly and elaborate, in the more valuable materials. I cannot imagine a more fascinating pursuit than the collection of Quaichs. Apart from their beauty, rarity and value, their variety gives so much scope that interest never flags.



Marble quaich, diameter 3¼ in., height 1 9/16ths in., late 16th or early 17th century. The lugs bear the three symbols, harp, fleur-de-lys, and rose, the bottom showing the thistle between the initials J.R. under a crown. In the National Museum of Antiquities, Edinburgh.

It is interesting to note the similarity in the construction of built-up Quaichs to the contemporary and equally typically Scottish "vase shape" Snuff Mulls. It almost suggests the possibility that they were produced and sold together. I have no doubt but that an 18th century Scotsman often had one of each in his pockets, as he would not travel far from home without either.

Three quaichs found in the Abbey Strand, Edinburgh, made out of solid wood. Dimensions, from l. to r., over lugs, 6 in., 8 in., and 7 in. respectively. (By courtesy of H.M. Office of Works, Edinburgh.)

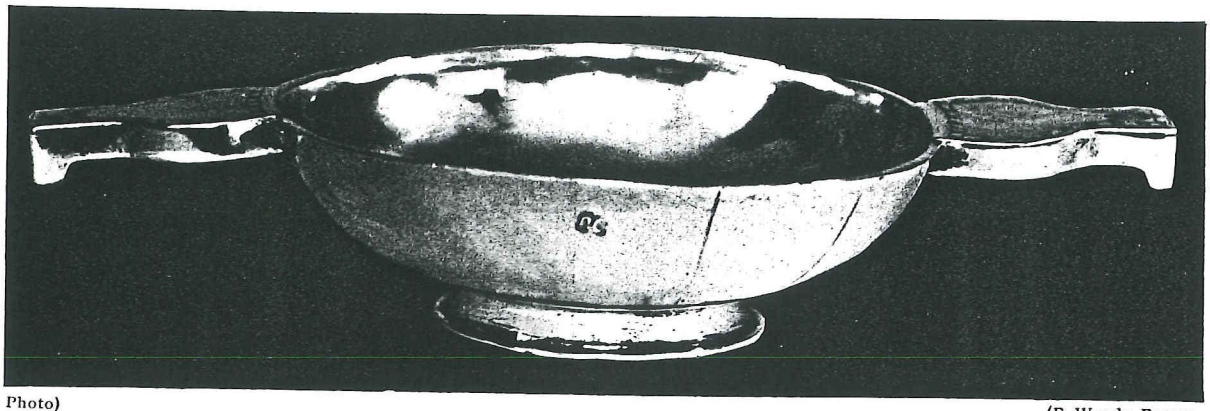


Photo) (F. Woods, Epsom

Silver quaich by Robert Cruikshank, old Aberdeen, c. 1700. Diameter 3 in., height 1 in., weight 1 oz. 12 dwt.

The oldest example of a Quaich which I have been able to trace is in the National Museum of Antiquities of Scotland, Edinburgh. It is marble, and certainly either late 16th or early 17th century.

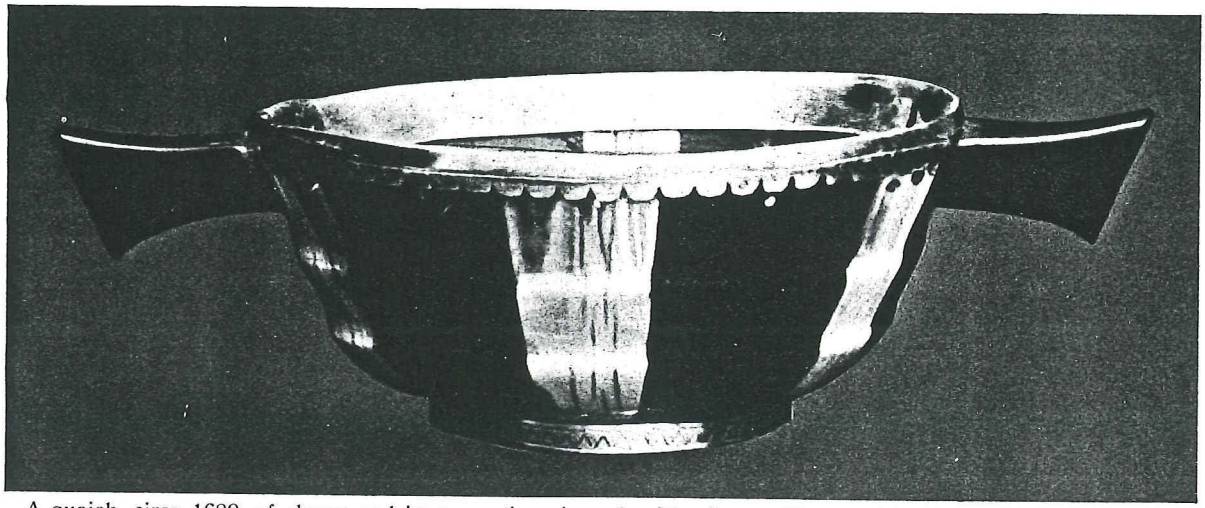
Three very interesting 17th century solid wood examples were recently found in the rooftrees of some old houses in the Abbey Strand, Edinburgh, during renovations, together with old papers bearing the date 1690. They are the true early shallow type. Next, there is a fair number of built-up 17th century Quaichs, many of them large and important. Different woods, and in rare cases ebony and ivory, were used alternately in the sections for effect, and silver hoops, lip edging and lug mounts are found.

Well before the close of the 17th century silver Quaichs were being made all over Scotland by the fine provincial silversmiths, but although it would be fascinating to trace their activities here, it would need to be done in great detail to be of use. It is significant that many of these silver Quaichs show lines to represent sectional building up. That strongly inclines one to the theory that silver was a development from wood. In one case a silver Quaich has the alternate sections gilded, showing further probability of such evolution.

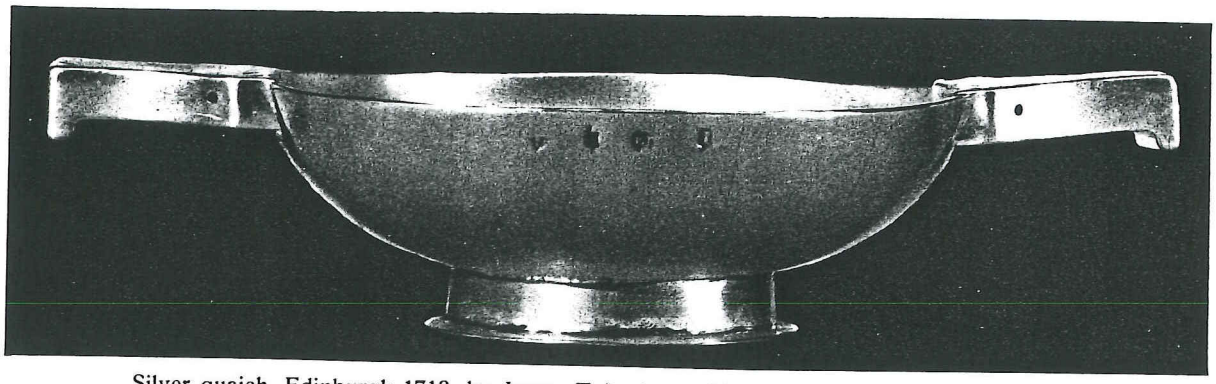
Of the very rare pewter Quaichs known, authorities date two as early as 1670, but they are, of course, castings and did not tempt the engraver to the same extent as silver.

Two brass Quaichs are preserved in Cullen Parish Church (Banffshire), but the only indication I have as to their date is that they were used for collecting for the poor of the Parish on Communion Sunday; and that would be contemporary with the 18th century practice of allocating the proceeds of the charge for the use of the Parish pall at funerals to the poor. These Quaichs are therefore not later than at least the 18th century.

There is further evidence of the use of Quaichs in churches, for in the Parish Church of Alvah, Banffshire, there is a very fine silver Quaich, Edinburgh, dating to the second half of the 17th century. Its diameter is 6.3/8", and height 2.5/8", the maker being Edward Cleghorne and the Deacon's



A quaich, circa 1680, of ebony and ivory sections bound with silver. The quaich has at some time been damaged and reassembled, and the silver rim round the foot is probably a replacement (Messrs. How of Edinburgh).



Silver quaich, Edinburgh 1713, by James Tait, Assay Master Edward Penman. Diameter 5 in., weight 6 oz. 3 dwt. (Messrs. Crichton Bros.)

Stamp that of Patrick Borthwick. In the Kirk Session Records, under the date "1745, Aug. 29" is the following inventory: "Two Silver Cups, a Silver Dish for collecting money at the Sacrament." No doubt this is the Quaich, put to the same use as at Cullen. Now it is used as a baptismal basin—quite an appropriate purpose in that district. The children were generally brought to the Manse for baptism and I have in my possession a porcelain bowl long used similarly in the next Parish, Ord.

The Parish Church of Ayr has a silver Quaich which is used for Communion. It is inscribed on the lugs "Ayr 1722," and is by Charles Dickson, Assay Master Edward Penman, Edinburgh 1719, diameter 6¾". It was exhibited at the Loan Exhibition of Scottish Art, London, 1931, and was illustrated in the catalogue.

Another instance of the Church use of Quaichs is at Kinellar, Aberdeenshire, where in 1770 the Kirk Session desired the Minister to buy two pewter Quaichs for holding the tokens and collection at the Communion Table.

Pewter Quaichs are now so rare that, in addition to the above, I understand that only four others have been traced. One is in the Smith Institute, Stirling, diameter 2¾", height 1", no mark. Another is in the Museum of Antiquities, Edinburgh, diameter 4.7/8", quite plain, date circa 1670. Two others are in private collections, and both are now in the Pewter Section of the Loan Exhibition in the Empire Exhibition, Scotland. One belongs to Mr. Lewis Clapperton and is illustrated in the Scottish Pavilions Official Guide. It is circa 1670, diameter 5". The other is in the possession of Mr. C. S. Murray, and is circa 1730, diameter 2.1/8" (from the Breadalbane Collection).

With the advent of the 18th century we naturally find silver Quaichs are more numerous, brought about no doubt by the fact that a larger number of people had the means to acquire them, but the beautiful engraving found on the earlier ones is mostly absent, except on the lugs. A fine exception is the Edinburgh Quaich, dated 1723, in the Exhibition at Glasgow, which is decorated externally with

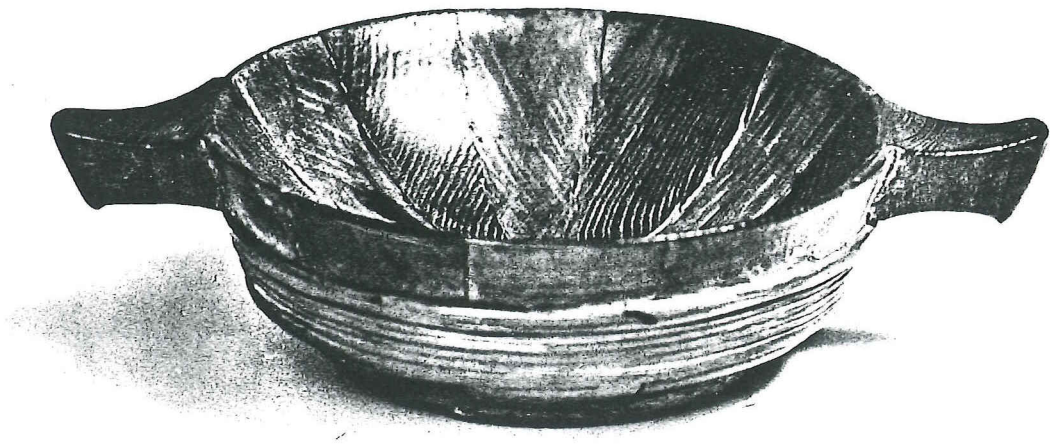


Photo) (F. Woods, Epsom

A quaich with sections in plane and laburnum alternately. Diameter 5½, height 1⅝, mid 18th century. This illustrates the dovetailing together of sections.

The Scottish Quaich

A quaich of laburnum wood, initialled "H.M. and W.L." on the handles. Late 17th or early 18th century.

On the print is engraved "K. Charles the 2nd. 1660. Restoration Amen." (Messrs. James Connell & Sons.)

Tupils and Roses in the alternate sections, as were the earlier ones. The Tulip was the Emblem of William of Orange and appears in the late 17th century, not only on Quaichs, but frequently on Scottish Pistols. When found in conjunction with the Rose it makes one think of the possibility of the "canny" Scot sitting on both sides of the Fence—"Orange" and "Jacobite"!

A very unusual type of silver Quaich, of bowl shape and ornamented with repoussé thistles, roses and foliage was in the 1931 Exhibition in London. Maker W. E. (unidentified) A B D (Aberdeen), circa 1700. Diameter 6½". This was also illustrated in Catalogue.

It is safe to say that the Quaich reached its zenith and was beginning to deteriorate about the middle of the 18th century. When the 19th century came it went the way of most of the purely Scottish products of its class, losing all beauty of line and decoration.

So far as I know, except amongst enthusiasts, the Quaich has lost its place in the Scottish household for actual use, but happily the old family one is honoured in our homes, and only leaves them, by the kindness of the owners, to give pleasure to many in the great loan exhibitions. There are 18 outstanding specimens, mostly privately owned, now at the Exhibition in Glasgow, twelve in silver, two in pewter and four in wood, silver mounted. There was also an exceptionally fine collection at the exhibition in London in 1931.

To those who may wish to go into more detail than is possible here I would refer them to such publications as :—

Scottish National Memorials (Glasgow Exhibition, 1888) by James Paton.

Catalogue of the Palace of History, Glasgow Exhibition, 1911.

Catalogue of the Loan Exhibition of Scottish Art, London, 1931.

Catalogue of Old Scottish Silver in the Scottish Pavilion, Empire Exhibition, Scotland, 1938, by Mr. Victor J. Cumming.

Notes on a Small Collection of Quaichs, Drinking Cups and Heart Brooches (Transactions of the Glasgow Archæological Society, 1908), by Mr. C. E. Whitelaw.

Old Communion Cups (Transactions of the Banffshire Field Club, 1934), by Mr. William Adam.

Scottish Pewter Ware and Pewterers, by Mr. L. Ingleby Wood.

Old Scottish Communion Plate, Edinburgh, 1896, by The Rev. Thomas Burns.

As so many interested people have the opportunity or seeing those Quaichs which are now in Glasgow, I have thought it advisable, with one exception, to go to other sources for the examples illustrated, and I desire to express my appreciation to their owners and those in charge of them in public collections for their courtesy which has enabled me to reproduce them.

Silver quaich by Alexander Johnson, Dundee, c. 1740.

Diam. 3¾ in., weight 3 oz. 18 dwt. (Mr. Ralph Hyman.)