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*A Unique Group of Early English Pewter
Baluster Measures*

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This article is really to enthuse over a unique group of four extremely early and rare English lidded wine measures, 16th to 17th Century. No similar group exists in any collection. Amazingly the four measures were gathered together over a period of less than eighteen months.

To introduce the group there must first be a condensed treatise on English baluster measures through the years. They were made in many sizes from the 16th Century onwards for some three hundred years right into the 19th Century. The styles changed periodically.

The most important feature to change was the thumbpiece. There was a gradual change in the handle and also in the body. The thumbpiece however was the main guide to the approximate date of balusters. Where a type was made over a considerable period, then the combination of the thumbpiece, handle, and body had to be taken into consideration. It is always the exception which makes the collector's life interesting and often difficult. There are many notable exceptions in collections.

The types and changes must now be described. Starting with the latest and working backwards to the earliest.



FIG. 5. Measure with DOUBLE-VOLUTE or FLEUR-DE-LIS thumbpiece. English, c. 1715-1830.



FIG. 6. Measure with BUD thumbpiece. English, c. 1690-1710.

Fig. 5 illustrates a measure with what is called the DOUBLE-VOLUTE or FLEUR-DE-LIS thumbpiece. The body is a squat baluster, heavy and strong. The lid is a cast turned disc with incised lines. The handle is curved and has a curled-up terminal in most cases. On many at base of handle there is a diamond-shaped piece and a strut which keeps base of handle away from the body. Made in sizes from a handsome gallon down to the half-gill, old English Wine capacity or standard. The earliest was made c. 1715 in George the First period. Produced with only slight variations for over a century until c. 1830. In the absence of a Touch-mark (and many are un-marked) it is often difficult to give better than an "educated" guess at the actual date.

Fig. 6 illustrates the next type. This has a winged thumbpiece called the "BUD". The "Bud" is on a triangular stepped platform, which is attached to a lid which is a heavy cast disc. A strut keeps base of handle away from body. Thus the "Bud" differs from the "Volute" inasmuch as the handle is not so curved; it never has the "diamond" attached to the strut. The body in most cases is similar in both types. There are the usual variations. Made in many sizes from the very handsome Gallon down to the half-gill. No genuine smaller size exists. The earliest known "Bud" balusters are



FIG. 7. Measure with HAMMERHEAD thumbpiece. English, c. 1660-1680.

17th Century, from the Charles the Second period onwards. Produced for some sixty years right into the 18th Century with just slight variations in shape of body. It seems that most were produced approximately c. 1690 to c. 1710 William and Mary to Queen Anne. There was an overlapping period in the 18th Century when Bud balusters were still being produced even after the Volute balusters became popular to eventually oust and supersede them. The reason for the overlapping was the reluctance of many pewterers to change their moulds and keep abreast with the times.

Now we step back into time several decades. Comes the "HAMMERHEAD" thumbpiece. The Hammerhead thumbpiece is actually a WEDGE with a HAMMER on top. The type was made from the reign of Henry the Eighth and Queen Elizabeth the First until into the second half of the 17th Century, approximately Charles the Second c. 1660-80. The type was made for about one hundred years. The main changes were in the handle which "grew" a strut, and the body which gradually became squatter. Illustrated are four unique early specimens. The first three are 16th century, the smallest is 17th Century. Fig. 1 was discovered in England, by an American dealer. He sold it for a "song" to a Boston, Mass. dealer who happens to be a personal friend of the writer. This Boston dealer sent a picture of the measure and was persuaded to return it to England to happily join the rest of the group. That is where the luck in collecting comes in. This Fig. 1., besides being extremely rare, is the largest specimen known. Overall height 12". Heavy solid satisfactory. The weight is six pounds. Note two important features seen only on the earliest 16th Century types; the body lines are long and simple; the handle is long and at its base fixed close to the body. The lid is a heavy cast round disc. Condition pristine, untouched, with a fine patina. An unrecorded Touch-mark on lip. This magnificent measure was made more than four hundred years ago, c. 1550.

Fig. 2. Also a HAMMERHEAD. The next size down. Overall height 10 1/4". Weight three pounds. The lines long and simple. Base of handle fixed close to body. The lid is a heavy cast disc and has a stamped "House-mark" a Bell, probably indicating this was used in the "Bell Inn" or the owner was named "Bell". Inside on bottom is a medallion, a cast "five-pointed mullet". Another

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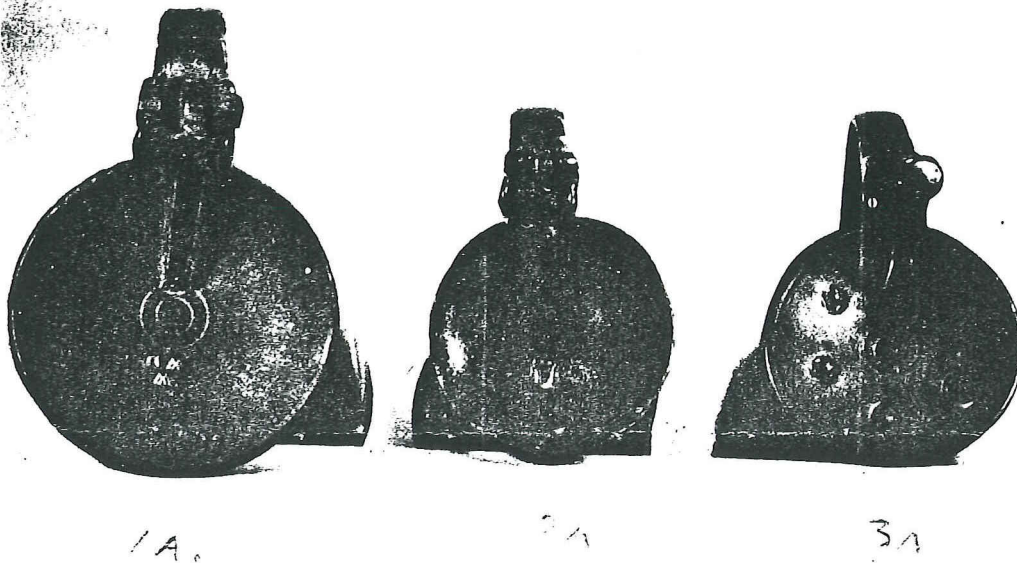
Figs. 1, 2 and 3 are 16th century English HAMMERHEAD measures. Fig. 4 is 17th century.

fantastic rarity of the mid 16th Century, c. 1550.

Fig. 3 illustrates the next size down with a WEDGE & FLATTENED BALL thumbpiece. Overall height 9". Weight $2\frac{3}{4}$ pounds. Slim heavy body; handle soldered close to body at base. An extremely interesting specimen. The lid which is a heavy cast disc has

stamped on top six times, a "House-mark" with the initials "R. A.". Repeated on the lip twice. The initials are undoubtedly those of the Inn Keeper or owner. An unrecorded Touch-mark "A harp with initials I.B.", under the base. This too is 16th Century, c. 1550-1600.

Fig. 4. The smallest of the group. This has the WEDGE and BALL



Figs. 1a; 2a; and 3a illustrate tops of lids with House-marks, etc.

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thumbpiece. The "ball" is somewhat crumpled. Slender lines. The handle has a strut at base holding it away from body. The period is 17th Century. Maker's mark "I.B." in a diamond underneath. This mark appears on a 17th Century porringer in the possession of Ronald F. Michaelis. This measure was made c. 1660-1680.

Fig. 7 has been deliberately left to last. It demonstrates the evolution of the body with Hammerhead thumbpiece. It is a 17th Century specimen, c. 1660-1680. The body is squat; the handle has a strut at base keeping it away from body. At a glance one sees the difference between this and figs. 1 and 2.

We must mention the WEDGE thumbpiece. The bodies are the same as the earliest Hammerheads. They are undoubtedly 16th Century. Opinions differ as to whether the Wedge ever had originally a ball or a hammer perched on top of the wedge. There are various other later types of pewter baluster measures, English, and Scottish, West Country and Welsh. Made with and without covers. All interesting and satisfying collector's pieces. Each category needs individual articles, as the field is wide.

To conclude there is no thrill as great as procuring an exciting rarity. Once in a lifetime that thrill comes to most ardent collectors.

THE END.