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18TH CENTURY BALUSTER MEASURES



Fig. 1. Half-pint and gill (old English standard) baluster measures. Mark on lip of the larger measure R * M.

Notes on
Old Pewter
Measures
with special
reference to
the "Double-
Volute"
Thumb-piece

By
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THE 18th/19th century type of English measure, popularly known as the double-volute baluster, is too well known to collectors to require detailed description (Fig. 1). The description "double volute" is derived from the design of thumb-piece and has by long usage become part of the pewter collectors' vocabulary: it is the more surprising that investigation has not been directed towards the origin and nature of a thumb-piece design which is unique and peculiar to baluster measures over a period of something less than one hundred years.

It will be found that the dies in which were cast the thumb-pieces for the larger measures, such as quart, half-gallon and gallon, were usually finished in much greater detail than for the smaller sizes. Careful examination of good examples¹ in the former category will leave little doubt, once pointed out, that the thumb-piece represents three feathers, caught in

together at the base. The tip of the central feather in the well-moulded examples (Fig. 2) protrudes well out from the general plane of the thumb-pieces, a feature which is often entirely lacking in the smaller more summarily executed examples in which the central "full-face" feather is merely suggested by a series of lines, diverging towards the top. Fig. 3 shows a close-up of the thumb-pieces of the two measures of Fig. 2. It is surprising to find that in the smaller thumb-piece the tip of the central feather is moulded slightly in relief, but not at all in the case of the larger.

Recognition having been established, it remains to determine why this particular symbol was adopted for the thumb-piece of a common domestic or tavern measure. The answer might well enable the transition from "bud" to "double-volute" thumb-piece to be dated more exactly than has yet been possible.

The best-known three-feather emblem is that of the three ostrich feathers, adopted in 1346 by Edward, Prince of Wales, after the battle of

¹ H. H. Cotterell—*Old Pewter, its Makers and Marks*—Plate XLVId—P. 114. H. H. Cotterell—*Pewter Baluster Measures*—Figs. I, II, IXa. *Connoisseur*—Aug., 1919.

Crecy as his "shield for peace". The theory of a heraldic origin is supported by the fleur-de-lys lid attachment, the fleur-de-lys being a common heraldic charge. Perhaps it is stretching the theory too far to point out that the lower handle attachment is usually in the form of a lozenge, another common heraldic charge.

It is interesting to note that at the time in question, the Royal Arms of England and hence of the Prince of Wales, still included the ancient arms of France (fleur-de-lys) in the second quarter of the shield. Moreover, in the reign of Charles II it was ordered that "the son and heir apparent to the crown of England should use and bear a golden coronet of crosses patée, and fleurs-de-lys . . ."

There have always been divergencies of opinion as to the limiting dates of bud and double-volute measures, and it has been reasonable to suppose that there was some overlapping of the types. It is quite possible that this supposition is not

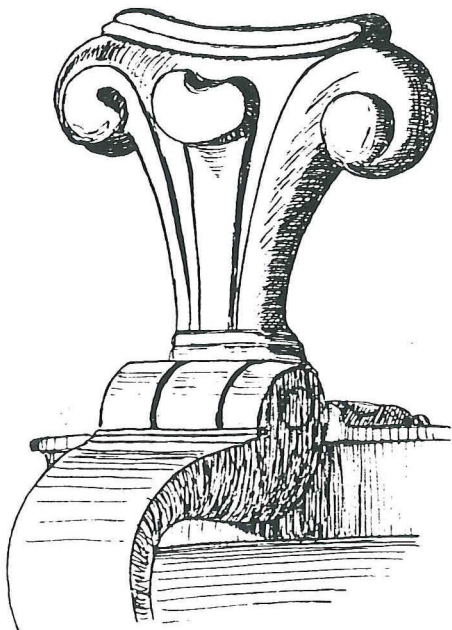


Fig. 2. Sketch showing typical moulding of double-volute thumb-piece on large baluster measures.

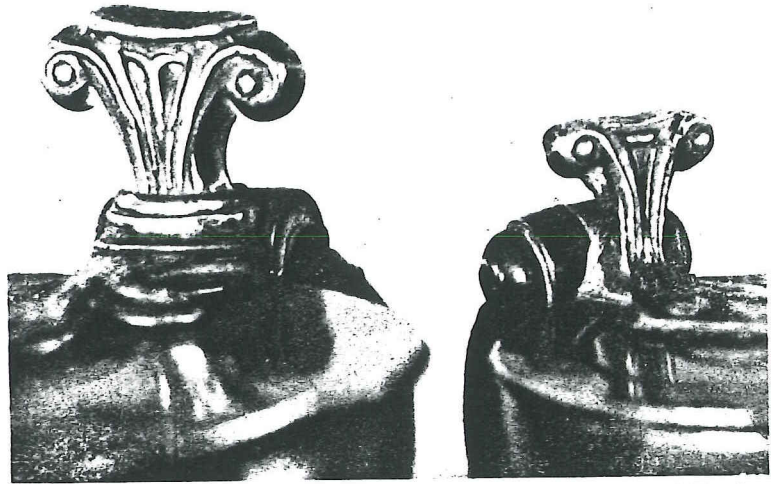


Fig. 3. Thumb-piece details of pint and gill baluster measures of Fig. 1.

correct. If the thumb-piece and lid attachment are derived from a Prince of Wales coat of arms it appears possible, and indeed probable, that the change in style was adopted, possibly by agreement or direction of the Guild, in honour of the birth or creation of a Prince of Wales.

George Augustus, later George II, was created Prince of Wales in 1714. George II's son, Frederick Lewis (died 1751) was created Prince of Wales, presumably in 1727, the date of his father's accession. George Augustus Frederick, Prince of Wales, was born in 1762. Frederick, Prince of Wales, was extremely popular, and it is possible that the new design was adopted in his honour, either in 1727, or at some date thereafter. It would indeed be interesting if confirmation could be obtained from contemporary literature or from records of the Pewterers' Guild. The impression gained from an examination of many baluster measures is that the change from bud to "double-volute" was abrupt rather than the slow processes of changing fashion.

Some years ago, Cotterell described a pint double-volute transitional baluster in the Rollason Collection.² The main point of interest was the combination of double-volute thumb-piece with the earlier type of handle. In Fig. 4 is illustrated a pint measure obviously by the same maker, identical in all respects to the Rollason measure including the crowned WR, except for the bud thumb-piece. When the writer purchased this measure in Birmingham it was offered with a half-pint measure, by the same maker, but with a double-volute thumb-piece, thus proving fairly conclusively the fact that these balusters were made just when the double-volute thumb-piece was adopted. Apparently the pewterer had not then had time

² H. H. Cotterell—*Great Pewter Collections* (Part 2), *Treasures in the Rollason Collection* (Part 111). Fig. XXX 1X—*Apollo*, 1934.

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Fig. 4. Pint baluster with "bud" thumb-piece. Lid stamped WR crowned. Weight 1 lb. 9 ozs.

to equip himself with moulds to produce the type of handle thereafter used exclusively on double volute measures.

All the measures by this pewterer which have come under the writer's notice are stamped on the lid with WR, crowned.³ Assuming that the introduction of the double-volute measure was between 1720 and 1740,⁴ this cannot therefore be a verification stamp as is so often stated. WR would have referred to the reign of William III, who died in 1702. Two other measures⁵ with a crowned WR in the Rollason Collection, both with bud thumb-pieces, were by A. Hincham. It is interesting to note that the curves of the body, and the design of the heavy handle are apparently identical with the transitional measure in the same collection and with that shown in Fig. 4. It is not impossible that the unknown pewterer who made the two latter measures may have taken over Hincham's business or possibly borrowed his moulds. Both makers were in the habit of using the crowned WR mark.

³ Also Plate XLV1C, Cotterell *Old Pewter, Its Makers and Marks* Plate XX Cotterell *Pewter Baluster Measures—Connoisseur*, Aug., 1919.

⁴ Christopher A. Peal—*Notes on Pewter Baluster Measures and their Capacities*, *Apollo*, Jan., 1950—A. V. Sutherland-Graeme—*Old British Pewter*, P. 15—Ronald F. Michaelis—*Old Pewter Wine Measures—The Antique Collector*, Feb., 1953.

It seems probable that marks such as these may have referred to enactments during the reign to which the initials refer. It is doubtful, however, whether there was any organised official enforcement of these acts, and this is confirmed by the absence, other than on late double volute measures, of any verification marks which would have been stamped by an inspector.

Mr. Harold W. Speight⁶ states that Local Authorities were not required to inspect weights and measures until early in the 19th century. It also appears that the Guild itself required a certain standard of accuracy in measures made by its members,⁷ although this edict must have been disregarded as often as those concerning self advertisement, use of quality marks and pseudo silver marks.

It must be realised that the baluster measure was not used exclusively as a tavern measure. We find it used as church plate⁸ and for domestic purposes.⁹ It is likely that the majority of surviving 17th and early 18th century measures, particularly those in fine condition, were never subjected to the rough and tumble of tavern life. Many are stamped on the lid with three initials, the first letters of the surname and christian names of the married couple who owned the measure¹⁰, suggesting that such measures were originally in domestic, rather than tavern use.

This fact may account in part for the wide discrepancies in capacity from standard units of measure which have been noted by several writers¹¹, as volumetric accuracy would be less important in vessels not supplied or used specifically for measuring liquids for sale to the public. Admittedly, however, there are also many measures which were obviously used in taverns and which appear to be inaccurate in the light of our present limited knowledge about local and contemporary rules and regulations governing weights and measures.

⁵ H. H. Cotterell, *Rollason Collection*, Fig. XXX VII.

⁶ *Verification Marks on Old Pewter Measures*, *The Antique Collector*, Dec., 1938.

⁷ Michaelis *Old Pewter Wine Measures*, P. 24, *The Antique Collector*, Feb., 1953.

⁸ H. H. Cotterell *Early Pewter-Plate in the Diocese of Carlisle*, Fig. 1. A. V. Sutherland-Graeme *Pewter Church Plate*, Fig. II.

⁹ W. Redman *Marks on Old Pewter and Sheffield Plate*, 1903, P. 83.

¹⁰ H. H. Cotterell *Old Pewter, Its Makers and Marks*, P. 54.

¹¹ Christopher A. Peal—*Apollo*, Jan., 1950.

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Copy
15th. March, 1954

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ENGLAND.

Dear Mr. Myrtle,

I was interested to read your article on the possible origin of the type of thumbpiece (commonly known to collectors as "double-volute") on pewter baluster measures, and whilst I feel that there is insufficient evidence to either prove or disprove your theory, I can say that I have had the opportunity of seeing and handling considerable numbers of balusters of all types and periods, and my experience has been that the double volute thumbpiece design is very differently interpreted by different makers; some very obviously likening the design to that of the Prince of Wales' feathers whilst others have adopted and adapted the design to conform closely to that of an Ionic column capital, and it is the latter attribution which, to my mind, is the right one.

I have, in the past, given thought to the very possibility you have mentioned, and I have consulted many works on these architectural features with the object of tracing the precise origin. I cannot, at the moment recall the titles of all the works consulted, but I have before me one which shows a very close resemblance to the double volute and I enclose a drawing therefrom. You will notice a very close similarity, but I have found others even closer.

It is no argument to say that because the change from "bud" to "d-v" was over a comparatively short period and (as it so happened) about the time that Frederick Louis, son of George II, was created P. of Wales, that the design must necessarily have been influenced by this event. The change from "hammerhead" to "bud" (which occurred during the period c.1650-1700) can offer no logical explanation, nor is there known any good reason why, in Scotland, the thumbpiece change from "ball and bar" to "embryo-shell". Such changes can be attributed to caprice of fashion, but just why any particular design was adopted by all pewterers wherever located, almost (it would seem) at a given signal, is not explained anywhere to my knowledge. Certainly the records of the London Company of Pewterers ~~does~~ do not throw any light on the subject.

One thing which can be said very definitely is that the diamond lozenge fixture at the base of the handle of d-v's cannot possibly have any connection with the three feathers in any heraldic sense; the reason for its adoption being just as much a mystery as is the change in thumbpiece type. The logical explanation is that the larger surface offered a much more secure fixing for the handle than did the rounded strut formerly used. At about this time we find other pewterers, notably William Eden on his tankards, using a strengthening plate of metal at the fixture points of both top and bottom of the handle.

The diamond lozenge was used by a well-known pewterer who, so far as is known, only made "bud" type measures. I have a $\frac{1}{2}$ -pint, ~~a pint and~~ quart by this maker, who used the mark shown in the margin, and I have heard recently of a complete set of measures from the quart to the $\frac{1}{2}$ -gill, all "buds" and all with the diamond. There is definite



↑ Very probably Thomas MATTHEWS (Coll. 3138)

evidence in one case of the above that the measure was not made later than 1725. This rules out any possible connection with Frederick Louis (who, incidentally, was not created P. of W. until 1729).

One final point has a bearing on the "W.R." verification mark.

I agree that its appearance on measures obviously later than Wm. III period precludes any possibility of it having been used only during his reign. There is, however, evidence which leads one to believe that the Crowned W.R. was adopted purely as a mark to indicate that measures had been "sealed" in accordance with a Parliamentary recommendation made in the reign of William III (i.e. in 1696), and in my opinion all the "W.R." marks imply compliance with this order, irrespective of when the mark was applied.

I have written further on this matter in an article which is due to appear in the "Antique Collector" in the June/July issue this year. I shall be glad to have your comments after having read the article.

Miss White, the Editor of "Antique Collector", tells me that there is a possibility of your visiting England in the near future, and I hope you will take the opportunity of contacting me on that occasion.

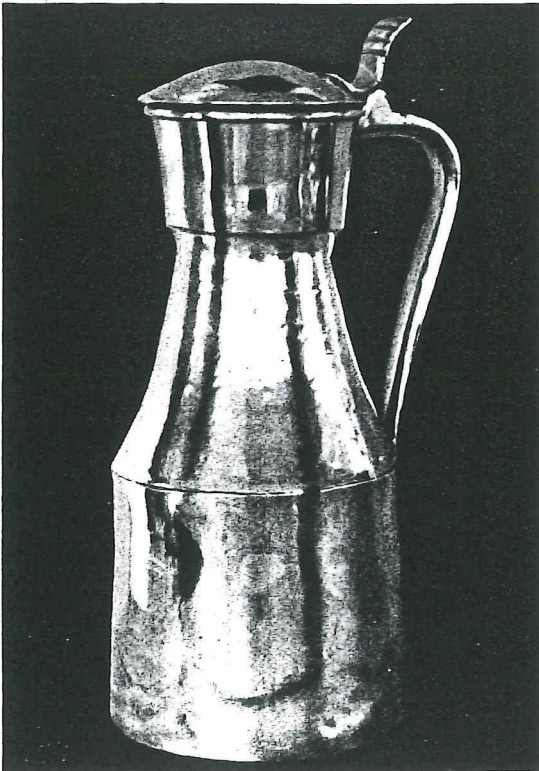
I have a fair collection of antique English pewter, and we shall, doubtless, have much in common for discussion.

Yours sincerely,

Ronald F. Michaelis

P.S. I am, incidentally, Hon. Librarian of the Society of Pewter Collectors, and an Hon. Member of the Pewter Collectors' Club of America.

"Antique Collector, December, 1953"



An unusual Scottish brass tappit hen measure.
(See paragraph on this page.)

Brass Scottish Measure

IT is generally accepted that the Scottish "tappit-hen" type of measure was never made in any metal other than pewter. However, about twenty years ago in Edinburgh, a reader, Mr. J. H. Myrtle, of Sydney, Australia, bought the brass measure, a photograph of which is shown on this page. He writes: "It is made from sheet brass, except for the handle and thumbpiece which are brass castings." The height to lip is $9\frac{7}{8}$ inches, the bottom diameter is 5 inches, and the top diameter $3\frac{5}{8}$ inches.

The three sections of the body were made separately and soldered together. The vertical joint for each section is on the handle side and is very neatly done in a kind of zig-zag dovetail with no overlap. The workmanship throughout is of a high order.

The form in every detail is obviously that of the tappit hen type of measure, and at first it was thought likely that a domestic jug or utensil had been made as a curiosity in the form of a tappit hen. However, this was discounted when it was found that the capacity was 1988 cubic centimetres, or within 0.6 per cent of two litres. As this is well within the standard of accuracy of most measures, it can be assumed that the vessel was intended to be a two litre measure.

We thus have a "tappit-hen" measure, which is presumably Scottish and which differs in two major respects from conventional measures of this form, namely, the metal from which it is made and the fact that the capacity is in a Continental unit of measurement.

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