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18th CENTURY BRITISH PEWTER

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LOOKING at a comprehensive range of 18th century British pewter shown in decade groups, what are the immediate impressions?

1. The opening two groups show enterprise and execution of design, and a lightness achieved by considerable delicacy and detail.
2. In the next three groups the Dome lid, and the plain rim plates and dishes predominate: and a general tendency to massiveness and the mundane.
3. In the last five decades the same plates and dishes, and many lidless pots of rather familiar style hold the field—familiar by being so similar to those of the 19th century. For the most part, certainly to the uninitiated, it is very difficult to segregate these later decades. Apart from the very first group the overall first impression may well be rather unexciting. How illusory· Apart from much absorbing variation in detail, there are many other pewter products which one may reasonably hope to encounter — provided that they are recognised.

But what is the reason for the turnabout in styling? In the 17th century the Restoration liberated a flow of exuberant art forms, in pewter typified by the glorious Flat lids, Candlesticks with skirt-drip-trays, and the zig-zag wriggled decoration. However, there were more pewterers than work, and it appears to have been tacitly agreed to put all they could into design and workmanship, in the best interests of craft, craftsmen, and customer. The coming of the House of Orange brought new tendencies, and particularly a new impetus to wriggling. Styles changed more swiftly, some of them radically. The domed lid was introduced, and perhaps a turning point was reached, unconsciously, when the tavern pot (i.e. the property of the tavern, often used in the home, to be collected next morning)—the tavern pot was launched, without a lid; the first economy in styling and manufacture.

The coming of Anne in 1702 followed the exuberance of style, and as always, a Coronation is an excuse or a reason for introducing new

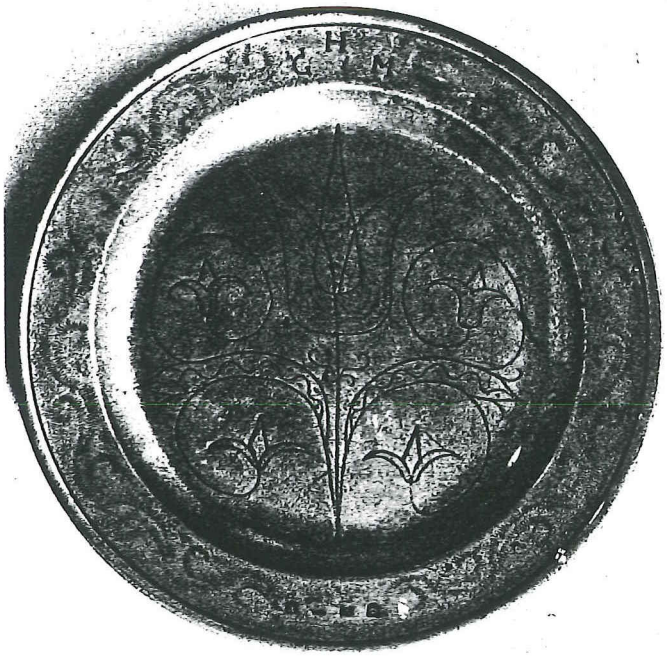

Fig. 1. *Wriggling.* This finely decorated single reed 12 in. plate of *c.* 1710 demonstrates the use of tools of different widths for carrying out the wriggling. The pattern was traced onto the plate, and the flat-ended tool was "walked" forward by pivoting on alternate corners.

Fig. 2. *Development of trifid Spoons.* Some of those shown are in latten. but the forms are common to both media. *c.* 1670-*c.* 1710. The penultimate example bears the bust of Queen Anne on the handle. a feature confined to pewter. It measures 7 in. long.

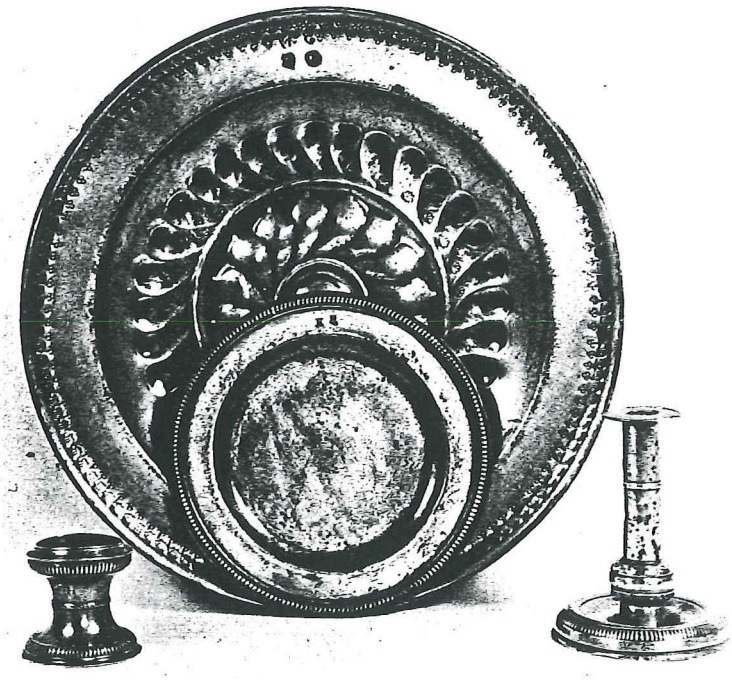

Fig. 3. *Cast Decoration.* The large dish (16½ in. dia.) is one of a complementary pair. Although the general type had a very long run in Nuremburg. it appears to have been a very transitory fashion here, probably *c.* 1727 - *c.* 1730. The salt, plate, and candlestick all bear gadrooning. They date from the very early years of the century.

fashions. Spoons were just finishing their evolution of the trifid, now sometimes bearing Anne's bust; they rapidly went through the stages of wavy end to round end—and the modern spoon was born, with its long thin graceful handle and narrow oval bowl.

Cast decoration for detail came in a flood. Plate rims in the triple reed and narrow rim types were already established; now it appeared as gadrooning or beaded borders, just within the outer limits of diameter. Plates, salts, candlesticks can all show the treatment; two handled cups with diagonal fluting round the lower half are also one of the most attractive styles of all time, and are redolent of the period. In my early days I had a beauty, but became increasingly convinced that it was 'made up', the handles being obviously genuine, while the body was completely clean. So I got rid of it before subsequently realizing that the alloy used was really subject to the pewterer's resources of the moment, and that the handles had merely been cast from a quite different alloy. Almost all Anne pewter is interesting and universally desirable, for its age, rarity, design, and workmanship.

The House of Hanover sat on the throne as from 1714—and sat they did! Times were even harder for the pewterers, and now they met competition by economies. Styles changed slowly, and to a very large extent the larger moulds were used for a very long time. Although these larger moulds (for bodies, dishes and plates) really worked for their outlay, the ancillary parts for holloware such as thumbpieces, knops, finials on the handles, the handles themselves, and even the lids did change in most intriguing detail, and are invaluable for dating. In pewter one has to date by style — the makers marks will not tell you anything other than at best the commencement of his working career, and death, but certainly the recording of the latter is often missing. May their souls live on in the happiness their remaining products give us now. In my book "British Pewter and

Fig. 4. *Engraving.* In the 17th century occasional pieces were engraved, but its use in the 18th century became more popular, and was largely confined to pieces made in harder alloy. 1747. Height to lip 5½ in.

Fig. 5. *Early 18th century Pewter.* Narrow rim plate; early plain rim plate of 9¾ in.; single reed wriggled plate; triple reed plate. Hammerhead baluster bearing "A.R." crowned (apparently only used during her reign); salt; dome-lid tankard and bowl, all three of the early years; salt, probably *earlier* than that on left; lidless tankard and salt of *c.* 1720; bud baluster of *c.* 1710.

Britannia Metal" (Gifford 1971, £1.50) there is an illustrated chart of the various characteristic parts of 18th century tankards, giving the approximate date span, weight of popularity, and height of popularity of all these pleasing details, and I am told this has been found as useful as I had hoped.

The distress referred to above was met by plant economy, it was also met by the use of better alloy, or rather, one should say, by a better alloy (and contrarily some tried to get away with a poorer alloy). Tests by analysis are now in progress to determine the onset of this better alloy, and its standard proportions. This was tin alloyed by antimony with small amounts of copper instead of the usual lead addition (in the Middle Ages copper was used as the additive for flatware). This alloy casts superb plates, tankards, and other items, and is, in fact, the alloy called Britannia Metal. But it is most important to appreciate that products were cast in exactly the same way as lead pewter. Articles of tin/antimony pewter, obviously superb metal, slower to oxide (and what a brute this oxidations to remove), are universally admired, and certainly not considered as "Britannia metal". However, this is liable to get us a little off the track, since the items made by the manufacturing processes more usually associated with this alloy, and these latter items normally referred to (usually unnecessarily disparagingly) as Britannia, came on the scene after the century under

Fig. 6. *18th century Balusters.* These are the three main types. The hammerhead soon died out after about 200 years use. The bud ran from *c.* 1670-*c.* 1800 and the double volute from mid century to 1824. The bud form was also made lidless. more commonly latterly. The double volute is 5 in. to lip.

Fig. 7. *Lidless tankards* of the first half century. Pint. *c.* 1710. Height 5.1 ins. Note two fillets, tongued handle, ball terminal. Pint. *c.* 1725. Low fillet. Pint. *c.* 1740. Maker, Richard Going. Fish tail terminal. Spouted pint, *c.* 1740. Maker, William Eddon. Note how similar to those of 80 years later.

review.

In the opening lines of this article three impressions were spotlighted, and we have already touched on the first. The illustrations will clarify and exemplify points brought out. The first was a period of almost superlatively attractive knopped candlesticks, bowls on a foot, gadrooned capstan salts, ringed or rectangular salts, plain drum dome lid tankards with bold entasis, tall two-fillet or one low fillet tavern pots, the last of the hammerhead baluster measures, the bud baluster whose range in different sizes and differing proportions is such a delight — the plates, (still the triple reed and narrow rim) and footed plates. True that the single reed plate, even the plain rim plate too, came on the scene at this time. Wriggling, particularly on plates, with birds, tulips and other emblems abounded. Church flagons at first had a flat lid, a carry-over from Stuart times; then the slightly curved flat lidded type much more commonly seen later in the century in Scotland, followed by a dome, or dome drawn up and surmounted by a spire-like or acorn knop. Porringers, with bulging sides and one ear—these were the essence of Anne pewter.

By the time George I had sat down the typical

Fig. 8. *Flagons of the century.* Spire, *c.* 1750 ± 30 years. Slightly curved lid. *c.* 1715 (Although this type was subsequently adopted ubiquitously in Scotland, it was originally by English makers, and examples are still in the possession of some English churches.). Acorn York. 9½ in. to lip. Engraved (inter alia) "1750". An early Spire type, engraved (inter alia) "1719" contemporarily. A straight sided flagon hitherto called York, but its prevalence and makers appear to be more Lancastrian *c.* 1740.

Anne flamboyance departed, so 1720 onwards saw the run-down of enterprising line and form. The single reed and plain rim (the latter was minutely wider in its earlier years than subsequently), continued; the former ceased at about 1730. For a brief while, in about 1728, cast lobed dishes came and went. They are quite unlike any other English pewter in conception of design, being obviously of Nuremburg lineage. They contrast violently with the fine balance of plainness and delicate nuances of line for which English pewter is so highly regarded by objective collectors. Salts, still extremely rare, were the pleasing rectangular trencher style (with the corners taken off) up to about 1730, and then apparently disappear until the cup salt, which I can date no better than Cotterell's "*c.* 1750", although it was still in production, seemingly, at the turn of the century. Latterly it would seem that the cup developed into an urn, but again dating is obscure.

Fig. 9. *Channel Isle and Scottish Measures.* The famed Channel Isle measures of Jersey and Guernsey types were sometimes made without lids (note the unslotted hings lug). Capacities are very confusing. This specimen is 3¾ in. high. The equally renowned tappit hen of Scotland is here exemplified in a most attractive small measure 1 16 of a Scottish (60 fl. oz.) pint. This type ran far into the 19th century.

English pewter candlesticks of between *c.* 1725 approximately just do not exist· By the appearance of antique shops alone the answer is easy to see—brass swept the field. A prime example of difficult in dating accurately is the bud baluster. Curves, proportions, rings on body and lid all seem to be meaningless as to date. Almost none bear any inscription, few have makers marks; when marked, few are identified, but if so, date of death is very seldom recorded. It is as well here to remember that a mark with a date in the device is not the date of the piece, (no matter what the vendor says), but is the year in which the mark was struck—and so may have been in use for a half century or so. So the bud, a comparatively well-known type of a hundred years' span remains a dating enigma. (All British balusters are in Old English Wine Standards still perpetuated as the American standard fluid measure).

The lidded and unlidded tankards hold the most interest by far in this 1720-1750 period. The dome lidded tankard had a long run from earlier than 1685 (when it appears in a touch of that date) right on through to the mid-19th century. As a broad, possibly over-simplified guide the smaller, taller crowns of the dome are the earlier. But look also at the drum, fillet, handle type and finial—and the chart in the book mentioned above. The unlidded pots throughout the whole century are the most fascinating item, and because they are often rather unassuming in appearance, they do occasionally turn up unexpectedly.

Although times were hard, a few pewterers were very successful, judging by the number of examples of their specimens surviving proportionate to other makers, for instance William Eddon for his dome lid tankards, and Richard Going for pots and plates. The porringer (which the silver collector calls a taster—some gulp!) remained almost unchanged, but there are some more rare examples with a crown design on the ear, which appears to be closely related to trade with America, this style appearing in their porringers also. The church flagon of the period holds a real surprise, for it is, I think, without doubt the most delicate and beautifully designed flagon of the whole range from 1605 to 1800 covering over a dozen different types. Mid-century Yorkshire produced an acorn shape, with the first spout to be noted, and Lancashire a straight-sided version of the York. In Scotland styles changed even more slowly. The only items likely to be met are the slightly curved flat lidded flagons of English ancestry (later specimens often by Stephen Maxwell with slogans such as "May USA flourish") and an occasional com-

Fig. 10. *Some pots of c. 1750-c. 1800.* Pint specimens:— Tulip. *c.* 1750: rare Yorkshire type which looks early, but is probably loosely mid-century. 4¼ in. high; Barrel (with engraving of scenes), *c.* 1765: a lidless bud type. *c.* 1760—but is enigmatical: on extreme right below—a most satisfactory squat pint, probably late century. Half pints:—Liverpool (note extreme similarity of body and rings to Lancastrian flagon, fig. 8): a squat example with heavy handle, with thumb rest similar to (l) and (v): a more tapering type, but again with heavy handle. Note handles carefully, and that five have the rather meagre "Attention" Finial. (This range is not comprehensive).

munion cup: plates are indistinguishable from the English plain rim type, (except where the touch indicates Scottish). The Scottish measure of the period was the potbelly, of which there are specimens in collections, but seldom are they at large. Tappit hens were made in the period, but it is doubtful if many of the hundreds in existence date back much further than 1800—certainly very few are pre-1750. (They were also made in Imperial measure, and these are post 1826.) By the way, I have said little about fakes etc., but beware the multitude of repro tappit hens—light substance, "hall marks" on the neck, and possibly a crowned X. Irish pewter of the time is very scarce indeed—rare bold flagons with sweeping handle, and plain rim plates. However, the Channel Isles can show a remarkable number of surviving examples of their most attractive domestic measures in a fine range of sizes (their capacities are a little too complicated to discuss here—just accept them at their beautiful face value) of both Jersey, and Guernsey types, both lidded and unlidded.

1750-1800

Very loosely speaking—and pewter speech in this nebulous period is perforce loose — dating is even more difficult. Fewer pieces bear marks, and the same further restriction on information as in the last period is accentuated. Again, the pots bear the major interest, not only for the enigma of dating, but at this time there were strong efforts to cast around for new shapes. They are rare to find, but really comparatively easy to spot, being obviously latter period (say post 1750), but might be 19th century. What makes them stand out is ones awareness of differences—some radical, but mostly in proportion, absence of fillet, and other characteristics we have already mentioned. The handles become a little more varied, and the double curve, or broken handle which had been introduced just before 1750, gained immensely in popularity, and ran on virtually unchanged for 100 years. Bases tended to be more plain than subsequently. The dull "attention" finial on the standard handle swept the ball finial and the earlier fishtail almost out of production and was probably the most popular handle from the mid-18th to mid-19th century. Of the handles themselves, apart from the broken type, they ran very true to form, butting to the drum; and perhaps a generally earlier feature is the tip-tilted tongue thumb-rest. If only some finely discriminating scientific method of dating the life of alloy since the molten state would appear!

The design of plates and dishes continued undistinguished, with the addition of soup plates, but adding the squib of popularity which the wavy edge, adopted from France and The Netherlands, had earned. These were largely promoted, very successfully, by Thomas Chamberlain (*c.* 1765 - *c.* 1780). These were followed by the now more rare octagonal plates. But the plain rim rumbled on. Possibly the hot

water plates were introduced in the latter years of the century, but it would be more prudent, I think, to regard them as 19th century.

The cup salts continued, quite pleasing, and very large indeed for their purpose, being about the size and appearance of a modern grapefruit glass. The subsequent varieties of urn salt defy dating, but encourage ones attempts to define a chronological sequence. Candlesticks of hard, surely antimony alloy, with iron push rods, appear in several not dissimilar designs in about 1770, and although more easy to find single examples, it *is* quite possible that you may come across a pair. Handsome, solid, they look so much more authentic than brass specimens of the same period: and what an advantage to have different shapes and proportions in a display.

It is most interesting to study the detail of the pieces depicted in Trade Cards, as illustrated in the book mentioned above. Alas, there is no date on them!

Let us revert to the dome lid for a moment. It is very interesting and significant that at about 1760 the dome lid on tankards suddenly lost favour, and although they continued to appear until about 1840, from 1760 the lidless tankard, or pot, was tops. As we said earlier, there were a number or attempted new fashions, but by 1820 they had stabilized. How commonplace they must have been, but how elusive, almost rare, they are now. Why?

The latter part of the 18th century saw the vast surge of the Industrial Revolution, its development of power, its manufacturing techniques, and the calls for metal. Prices soared. The Government could not even afford to mint "copper" coinage in the '80's and '90's (although private enterprise produced the tokens by which shortage of change was alleviated, being used at first as pay tokens, but accepted by all retailers, thankfully). Then the Napoleonic wars demanded all possible scrap. Just as in 1940 we had "Saucepans for Spitfires" I expect they had "Pots for Pitt", or "Bowls for Ball" etc. It remains that the

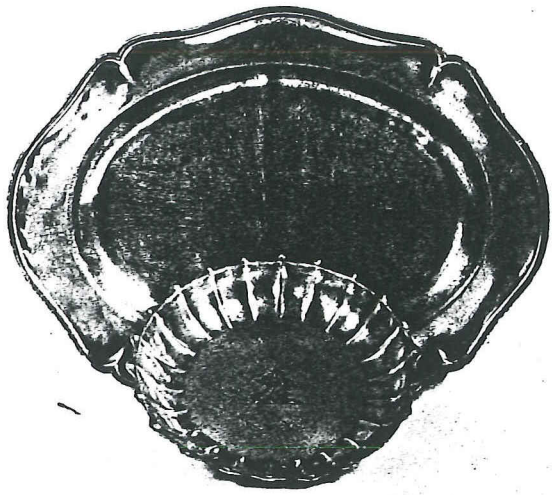

Fig. 11. *Latter century styles.* Wavy edge adopted from, and more usually of continental ware. Strawberry dish adopted directly from silver—both *c.* 1760. Dish 17¼ in. long.

number of probable latter 18th century pots is remarkably small compared with those of the 19th century. Admitted that the new standard of measure (Imperial) in 1826 certainly brought about a big fillip to the pewter industry in furnishing the new rash of pubs with drinking and measuring vessels, but the old standard was so near as to be acceptable in the new. Many of these 18th century pots bear 19th century verification of capacity marks of the various different counties, boroughs and districts. Herein lies the great attraction of late 18th century ware—that with diligence, and eye to detail, knowledge by experience—here is the period now with the greatest hope and excitement. In this field you can so easily know more than the general antique shop, and you can get your pieces of 1760 at prices of those of 1840. The significant detail looms large to the eyes of the iniated.

Perhaps I have rambled too much. What can you expect to find from the whole of this century? Perhaps "expect" is to optimistic for most of the items; "hope" is more realistic.

You will certainly not have to look for very long before you come across good plain rim plates

Fig. 12. *Latter 18th century Salts.* These never bear marks. Other media do not give a lead as to dating. Left to right:—*c.* 1728. *c.* 1750. *c.* 1760. *c.* 1770. *c.* 1790. *c.* 1800. (One must be careful not to accept a visually diminishing size as criterion of sequence). It is possible that (ii), (iii), and (iv) should be rearranged.

Fig. 13. *Late 18th century group.* Tobacco box. *c.* 1760: Domestic Bowl. belonging in an existing piece of furniture. *c.* 1760: Ale Jug this specimen of after 1800 perhaps—but the type ran in the last quarter of 18th century. more usually with a lid: Funnel. of very nebulous date. but doubtless used over a wide span: Bleeding Bowl. with graduated rings marked in 4 fl. oz. steps: Large Caster of probably *c.* 1790. 7 in. overall height.

and dishes, probably single reed plates, even triple reed dishes of the very early years of the century; funnels; with never a mark; push-rod candlesticks, domestic bowls (the identical style was used for collecting in the porches) not passed along the pews; possibly a bleeding bowl, with rings marking the fluid ounces to draw off; certainly pots, if you have an eye "tulip" body, truncated cone, or barrel (although the latter are much scarcer now); perhaps an ale jug—but this is more likely to be 19th century; late salts; tobacco boxes, rather rare now; wavy edge plates and oval dishes—but these are far more likely to be continental; possibly a "double volute" baluster, or less likely, a "bud"; Cup salts are a possibility; dome lid tankards of the later years may occur (rather ungainly, these),—but, unless I have overlooked a major item, we are now in the realms of specialist dealer stock, and indeed, some of the items of the first half of the century may await you there. This is the period of hope, optimism, and one-upmanship. Wherever you live you can probably go out (in a car) tomorrow, and start, at least to search and to handle. Then do a little reading, and then look around again. Don't spend more than your knowledge and pocket warrant, and get to recognize the multitudinous repros—there will not be any *fakes* of this period, but repros—yes plenty, particularly of plates, and specially of small plates. Every collector buys stinkers in their haste, but now would-be collectors have so much literature to help them. Be warned. On marks one can not say much in the space available. Plates and dishes usually bore the makers mark, and his subsidiary mark (rose and crown) on the back. Probably also they bore his (imitation) silver "hall marks"—on the front of the rim in the very early years. In the first half of the century there were often other legends on the back, such as address, and/or slogans such as "Superfine Hardmettle". Often too there is an "X" surmounted by a crude crown, which is either a genuine or misleading quality mark. On the front there may be owners initials, or a crest. It is well here to comment that an engraved dated inscription is seldom fact for dating. It was often added later, e.g. when a used domestic tankard was given to a poor church for use as its flagon. Marks appear only seldom on the balusters; on salts and 'sticks after about 1725, never; porringers, seldom, funnels never; pots, the odds are about 8 to 1 against—look carefully inside the base: they *may* bear"hall marks" on the lip, and quite often the "X" crowned; and sometimes WR under a crown, which denotes its conforming to William III Ale measure. Note particularly that they were never stamped with the contents in the 18th century—where crudely added this occured at or after, even some time after, 1826. Of course many old measures were verified, and often verified several times through the 19th and into the 20th centuries.

Finally, pewter is a subject that you must study by close contact—careful cleaning, and do *use* your special pots for the purpose they were intended. I do. You will never regret the liaison; it breeds respect, research, satisfaction and stability. The only thing which changes in pewter is value—upwards.

Good luck!