

Introducing Pewter

By L. G. G. RAMSEY
(Editor of *The Connoisseur*)

Nov 1953

ANTIQUE pewter of the kind now sought by established collectors, and which should be studied by intending collectors, has not survived to nearly the same extent as antique silver. The probable reason is that whereas early silverware had great beauty and was carefully preserved, early pewter, though many pieces were indeed graceful and pleasing, was intended and made for hard and constant use and in due course was cast away or melted down. That is the reason why fine antique pewter of good proportion and craftsmanship, as opposed to nineteenth-century rowing trophies with glass bottoms, is found with difficulty to-day and is not to be purchased cheaply.

The main components of pewter are tin, brass, lead and antimony. Articles were made of pewter during the Roman occupation and thereafter all through the centuries. In the mid-fourteenth century the London Guild promulgated its first ordinances for the control of the craft: and spoons in pewter are amongst the few extant relics of those early days.

An enormous amount of interest is provided by the collection and study of this fascinating alloy. Historically it can be said to have succeeded the use of wood, leather and horn vessels. When first used to any extent in England it was possessed — usually in the great kitchens of their establishments — only by the rich: and many of the early inventories of the possessions of nobles and ecclesiastics include extensive lists of pewterware. As trade was opened up, and the numbers of craftsmen increased, so pewter became far more generally used, until, by the seventeenth century, there was hardly an article in the finishing of house or tavern which was not made in pewter.

A close study of it, and the many ways in which it was fashioned, shows that it is classed

under three headings: Ecclesiastical, Domestic and Tavern. Further pewter terms break it down again into Sadware (the pewterers' term for plates, dishes and chargers) and into Hollow-Ware (flagons, tankards, measures, pots, mugs and beakers). Both these types of ware have their own individual terms in pewter language. They are too numerous for many of them to be mentioned here, but in Sadware, for example, a *plate* can be classed as being up to 12 in. diameter; a *dish*, 12 in. to 18 in. diameter; a *charger* (Fig. 1) is over 18 in. diameter; and a *paten* is a broad rim



Fig. 2. Tankard, 5½ in. high, maker "W.B.", of date circa 1675-85. The fine thumb crest, unusual terminal to handle and pierced ribbon edge projection to the cover are desirable features. In the collection of Reginald W. Cooper, Esq., F.S.A.

plate used usually in the administration of Holy Communion. In Hollow-Ware the term *flagon* is self-explanatory; a *porringer* (Fig. 3) is a shallow vessel with flat, horizontal handle or handles used for semi-liquid foods; and a *tankard* (Fig. 2) was usually a domestic drinking vessel. Another department of pewter collecting is that concerned with spoons, the desirable feature to seek being unusual or rare knobs or stem terminals (viz. acorn, rat-tail, apostle, etc.). Spoons are best displayed in a spoon rack.

There is much to be studied in relation to the use of pewter for ecclesiastical purposes. But in many parish churches throughout England, and in a number of private collections and museums, there are examples to be seen of fine flagons, patens, alms dishes and plates. Early chalices, by reason of the fact that sacramental vessels were usually made from precious metals, are rare: and the later and commoner examples which can often be acquired are of insufficient interest to be worth acquiring by the serious collector.

The 20¼ in. diameter engraved charger illustrated in Fig. 1 is of particular interest. It commemorates* the marriage of Charles II and Queen Catherine of Braganza and bears their portraits, the Royal Arms within the



Fig. 1. Engraved charger 20¼ in. diameter, commemorating the marriage of Charles II. Maker, possibly William Pettiver. In the collection of Captain A. V. Sutherland Graeme, F.S.A.

garter which completely covers the well, together with the inscription VIVAT REX CAROLUS SECUNDUS, BEATI PACIFICI, 1662. The maker was possibly William Pettiver (died in 1680).

In illustration Fig. 2 is a tankard of outstanding interest because it provides noteworthy points to look for in the study of this department of pewterware. The cover and body are decorated with roses and lilies in what is known as wrigglework. In addition it has a fine thumb crest, an unusual terminal to the handle and a most desirable pierced ribbon edge projection to the cover. The maker was "WB" and its date is circa 1675-85. In good pewter tankards there was much the same sequence in styles as in silver. That is to say the flat cover, the domed cover with straight sides and the domed cover with tulip-shaped body. Early thumbpieces were twin-lugged, to be followed by a type known as "Ramshorns," "Lovebirds-cum-Volute" and other ornate examples, ending with another form of thumbpiece known as the "Chair-back" either solid or pierced. In the seventeenth- and early eighteenth-century types of tankard wrigglework (a form of decoration made by progressing and rocking a gouge from side to side) and line engraving was applied to the drums.

Usually somewhere on most pieces of pewter (and particularly on the reverse side of the rim of a plate or dish) is struck what is known as the pewterers' selected touch or mark. Thus Timothy, William and Martha Fly, pewterers of London in the early eighteenth century, selected as their "trade mark" a device of a fly between crossed plumes beneath their names, the whole within a cartouche. A new master pewterer who had thus selected his touch registered it by striking it on a Touch-plate at Pewterers' Hall in London. All touches so struck before 1666 were destroyed with the Hall in the Great Fire, but the striking of touches was revived in 1668 and was continued up to the beginning of the nineteenth century.

This short causerie of a big subject takes no account of such important objects in pewter as spoons, candlesticks, salts, inkstands, snuff-boxes, measures, pots, etc. These items have their attraction, especially when grouped together and displayed on old oak furniture.

* See Pewter "Restoration" Chargers, A. V. Sutherland Graeme, F.S.A., *The Connoisseur*, June 1942.

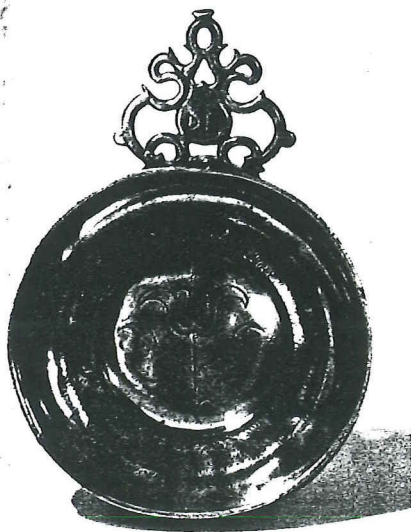


Fig. 3. Engraved porringer, diameter of bowl 4 in., of date 1690. The trade mark on the back of the handle is "T.R." in small beaded circle. Courtesy: Charles Casimir, London

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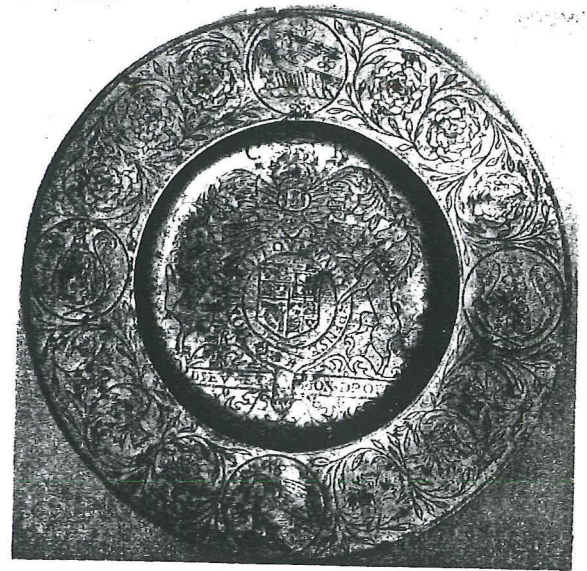


Fig. 1. Engraved charger 20½ in. diameter, commemorating the marriage of Charles II. Maker, possibly William Pettiver. In the collection of Capt. A. F. Sutherland Graeme, F.S.A.

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