

A PEWTER COLLECTOR'S PROBLEM

BY ROLAND J. A. SHELLEY, F.R.HIST.S. *President of the Society of Pewter Collectors*

IN my collection of old pewter are four alms plates (part, probably, of a set of ten or twelve) bearing the touch of Henry Hammerton, who became a Freeman of the London Pewterers' Company in 1706 and attained the office of Renter Warden in 1733. These came to me from a fellow-collector who could not offer any information of their history.

On the front rim of each plate "St. Luke's Church, 1714" is inscribed, and directions to the respective collectors reading as follows:

(a) "Please to Collect in the East Gallery, begin at the Pulpit End."

(b) "Please to Collect in the West Gallery, begin at the Pulpit End."

(c) "Please to Collect in the South Gallery, begin at the East Door."

(d) "Please to Collect in the East Aisle, begin at the Pulpit End."

The task which now confronted the collector was to discover the church for which the plates were made: research which did not appear unduly difficult because, apart from the infrequency of an English church being dedicated to St. Luke, there is also the fact that one plate refers to an *East Gallery*, a very exceptional, if not unique, feature of a mediæval building. Enquiry was then made

to Mr. Fred. H. Crossley, F.S.A., adviser to the Dean and Chapter of Chester Cathedral, who has unsurpassed knowledge of ecclesiastical architecture in this country, and he stated that there was an English mediæval church with an *East Gallery* at Nantwich (but not dedicated to St. Luke) which has a central tower, with a gallery in front of the tower west arch, and another at Tiverton, Devon, but this latter was removed in 1854; therefore, it was not impossible to have an *East Gallery* in a church built before the XVIIth century.

No replies were forthcoming from enquiries made of readers of "Notes and Queries," which emphasized the extreme rarity of such a feature.

Several eminent antiquaries were consulted to discover the whereabouts of a "St. Luke's Church," and

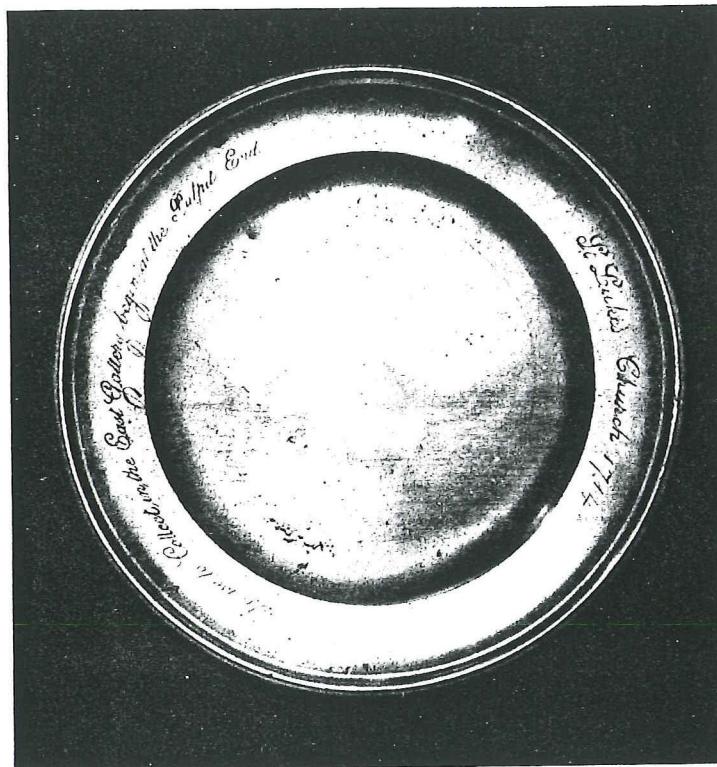
at length Mrs. Arundel Esdaile, an authority on Old Chelsea, informed me that she was confident the plates had been made for Chelsea Old Church (of ancient foundation), because records show that in 1698 "an additional gallery, facing westwards, was built at Chelsea and removed in 1832"; and also took the view that a Town church was obviously implied by the number of galleries for which separate pewter plates were made. A country church would have fewer worshippers whose charity could be sought.

The Chelsea Old Church was originally dedicated to All Saints; but at the end of the XVIIth century its Rector, Dr. Adam Littleton, the lexicographer, altered the dedication to the physician evangelist St. Luke, in honour, it is said, of his friend Beldam Hamey, an eminent London doctor, who retired from practice in 1665 and took up his residence at Chelsea, where he died in 1676. He had been a liberal benefactor of the church and was buried in its chancel. When a new and much larger parish church was built at Chelsea in 1820, it took the dedication to St. Luke, and the first building reverted to its old dedication to All Saints.

And so, as one of my correspondents comments, up to the time of its destruction (for it is a sad fact that this historic home of the Christian faith has suffered the disasters of war, though, happily, its ancient monuments survive), the first church in these latter days was known to the "man in the street" as Chelsea Old Church, to antiquaries as St. Luke's, and to the ecclesiastical authorities as All Saints.

Mr. Walter H. Godfrey, F.S.A., F.R.I.B.A., a distinguished architect, intimately connected with the fabric, agrees with Mrs. Esdaile's view; and so also does Mr. Reginald Blunt, Secretary of the Chelsea Society. He is under the impression that the whole of the church plate was stolen in 1827, except some of the alms plates, and those missing, he assumes, must be the ones in my possession.

(Continued on page 30)



THE EAST GALLERY PEWTER PLATE, one of a set believed to have been made for Chelsea Old Church, 1714

... they have produced a very remarkable and representative series of finely designed and perfectly executed specimens of modern pottery which have established their reputation at home and abroad.

A PEWTER COLLECTOR'S PROBLEM

(Continued from page 20)

In a final effort to completely solve a difficult problem, I enquired from the advisory architect to the building whether the Churchwardens' accounts for 1714 showed an expenditure on pewter plates and thus complete the evidence, but here the research has come to a temporary halt, for the Vicar is with the Fighting Forces and the whereabouts of the church accounts unknown.

And thus, whilst circumstantial evidence strongly point to the plates having been made for Chelsea Old Church, there is no positive proof. But it appears certain that that building should hold the field—as Mr. Godfrey fitly puts it—until any more likely claimant can be found.