

ESC

# OLD ENGLISH PEWTER FLAGONS & TANKARDS

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1.—(Left) SCOTCH POT-BELLIED TANKARD, circa 1680. (Middle top) EARLY DOUBLE-DOMED TANKARD WITH PROJECTING LID RIM AND HOLLOW-CAST HANDLE, circa 1725. (Middle bottom) TANKARD DECORATED WITH JOGGLED WORK, S-SHAPED HANDLE, circa 1670. (Right) TANKARD SHOWING DECORATIVE REEDING, BEEFEATER'S LID AND SOLID HANDLE, circa 1680.

FROM pewter tankards polished to a silvery sheen, Samuel Pepys and his roystering companions drank at the famous Cock ale-house in Fleet Street, the drawer dispensing the liquor from a tall two-quart flagon. Pewter lingered on in the old taverns and chop-houses long after industrial improvements in the pottery trade had enabled potters to put on the market much less costly utensils in ware that was strong and white and easy to clean.

In England, it was only in the reign of Richard II (1377-1399) that householders were equipped with complete arrays of pewter hollow-ware and full garnishes of pewter plates and dishes. Such quantities of the expensive ware long remained the prerogative of the rich. Inventories of the 15th century, however, mention almost every article that could be made of this dark, silvery metal. The Pewterers' Act of 1512 referred to "platters, chargers, dishes, saucers, pottingers, trenchers, basons, bottles, pots, salt sellers, goblets, spoons, cruets, candlesticks and flaggons." Tankards were not mentioned.

The royal household regulations made by Henry VIII in 1510 required "officers of the squillery (scullery) to see that all vessels, as well as silver and pewter, to be kept and saved from stealing." This metal was evidently still too valuable to be left unguarded, and some indication of its expensive nature is given as late as 1590 in the household inventory of Sir Thomas Ramsey. This valued "pewter of divers sorts, weying one with the other" at fivepence a pound—almost ten shillings a pound by modern standards.

The term flagon had for centuries been applied to any vessel

containing approximately two quarts of wine; it first came to be applied to a specific style of hollow-ware when adopted for the church Communion vessel. These early ecclesiastical flagons replaced Communion cruets in which one vessel had contained wine, the other water. Like cruets, flagons were also made in pairs. These flagons had bulbous bodies resting upon spreading tazza-feet, a type made as late as 1615. St. Margaret's Church, Westminster, possesses a pair in silver hall-marked 1583; at Cirencester

there is a pair hall-marked 1576.

Such early ecclesiastical flagons were seldom made of pewter, however. As early as 1175 a Council at Westminster had forbidden bishops to consecrate pewter. Nevertheless, Elizabethan church flagons were not always of precious metal, for an entry in the churchwarden's accounts at Wing Church, Buckinghamshire, records a payment made in 1576 "for a tynne wyne bottell for the Church, XVijjd." After the accession of James I, clerics were officially permitted by the 20th canon of 1603-4 to "bring to the Communion table a clean and sweet standing pot or stoup of pewter—if not of purer metal."

Silver flagons set the fashion for pewter. Short, vertical-sided Communion flagons in silver were made during the 1560's, one of the few remaining examples being hall-marked 1572. Not until after 1590 were such flagons made sufficiently tall to contain two quarts of wine. Inventories during the next decade contain frequent entries of "1 paire of pewter flaggon pottes." None of these appears to remain.

Copies were made in pewter for both ecclesiastical and lay purposes. These early pewter flagons were tall, weightily massive vessels made of thick metal. The body was very slightly conical with straight sides and no spout. To the sturdy handle was hinged a lid with a stout, upright thumb-piece. A slightly spreading convex moulded skirt with a beaded rim served to lift the base a little above the table, for without this protection the flat, soft-metal base of the vessel itself tending to develop a slight bulge in the course of time, proved unstable in use. In the 17th century a deep, widespreading skirt might be fitted, such a design being specifically



2.—PLAIN TANKARD WITH BEEFEATER'S LID AND PROJECTING LID TO THE LIP, circa 1680.

referred to in contemporary inventories.

The majority of pewter flagons still intact are those which were made for ecclesiastical purposes, their association with the church having prevented their destruction in the melting pot. The churches of Leicestershire possess some 350 examples. Among the earliest dated pewter flagons is an example preserved in Werrington Church, Northamptonshire. Inscribed with the date 1609, this measures 14 inches in height, 6½ inches across the skirt, and 4¾ inches at the top. The majority of flagons were about 11 inches high: when taller they were termed "great flagons." The inventory taken at Chastleton House near Moreton-in-the-Marsh, in 1632, refers to "Three great flaggons."

The pewter flagon made earlier than about 1610 had a thick towering thumb-piece fitting into a pair of strong hinge-lugs cast in the handle.

ing to a point immediately above the foot moulding and terminating in a flattened finial, usually semi-circular. From about 1640 a short intervening strut might join handle to body. At about the same time appeared the now rare knobless flat lid, and the skirt tended to become deeper and more expansive. A hammer-head thumb-piece was not uncommon from now until 1760.

The influx of Continental craftsmen at the time of the Restoration led to increased lightness and shapeliness in pewter ware. The flagon body might now be decorated with encircling reedings often singly but more frequently in pairs, dividing the body surface into a series of plain bands alternately narrow and wide. A flat, shallow dome rose from the centre of an otherwise flat and knobless lid. By 1665 this had changed into the befeater lid, so-called

because of its resemblance to a befeater's hat. A few years elapsed before the lid was extended to cover the spout opening, this extension often having a serrated edge. Such a lid was usually surmounted by a moulded knob, frequently an acorn. At about the same time appeared the re-curved scroll-handle with its decorative terminal: the S- and D-shaped handles continued in general use until pewter flagons ceased to be made. By 1750 the profile of the skirt was re-designed to form a continuous line with the tall body, now considerably tapering towards the lip. By the end of the century the flagon base was finished merely with a narrow band of moulding matching similar decoration around the lip rim. The Oxford ale flagon, a Regency innovation, had an urn-shaped body, a vertical neck and a double-domed lid leaving the spout uncovered. Such a flagon was fitted with a perforated grating behind the spout.



3.—(Left) DOUBLE-DOMED TANKARD WITH HOLLOW-CAST HANDLE, *circa* 1785. Marked "Pitt and Dadley" with a bow. (Right) TANKARD WITH BEEFEATER'S LID AND PLAIN BODY DECORATED WITH JOGGLED WORK, INCLUDING PORTRAITS OF WILLIAM AND MARY, *circa* 1695. Marked with leopard's head, buckle and lion passant.

This was the lever by which the lid was raised. A D-shaped handle extended two-thirds down the body, terminating in a flat, semi-circular finial. The bold, single-curved convex foot-rim with a beaded edge, matched similar moulding, inverted, encircling the mouth. The low-domed lid above was designed with a matching profile, and enlivened with a wide flattened knob. By 1615 pewter flagons were tending to become lighter in weight, the more slender thumb-piece possessing a backward tilt.

During the reign of Charles I flagon-skirts became more expansive, the moulding containing more curves than formerly, but seldom matching the lip moulding. This still matched the lower-moulding of the bun lid typical of this period. The well designed central knob on the lid was considerably taller than formerly. The thumb-piece tended to be wider and flatter and might be decorated with heart-shaped piercing.

The handle now became S-shaped, extend-

because of its resemblance to a befeater's hat. The body might be plain, or might show decorative reeding, either encircling the lower body above the cavetto moulding of the base, or else at each end of the body. The lip rim might be finished with plain narrow beading. Twin-ball thumb-pieces were now common and sloped backwards. They were shaped to fit the thumb and might terminate in buds, acorns, shells, links or pomegranates. This type of flagon, with numerous minor local variations, continued throughout the century.

The lip of the cover from about 1690 was provided with a flat frontal projection, generally with a serrated edge and always plain surfaced. The lid now became double-domed and the dolphin-tail finial is found on some S-shaped handles.

Shortly before 1720 the spouted or lipped flagon made its appearance in England: already for centuries it had been popular on the Con-

The now rare acorn-bodied York flagon, with its centrally knopped double-domed lid and its heart and leaf-spray thumb-piece, was made from about 1725 until 1760. The bodies of early examples were plain and smooth, the sides of the spouted upper body being perpendicular. By 1750 the upper body had become tapering and might be enriched with reeding, as was the outer perimeter of the spherical lower body. In late examples the spout projected from the body in a bolder curve than formerly. The S-handle was soldered to the body immediately above its most prominent bulge. A light, moulded base rim lifted the base of the flagon above the table.

Flagons and tankards were the work of specialist hollow-ware pewterers. Until late in the 18th century the Pewterers' Company required all domestic pewter to be well hammered after casting to make the metal compact. Pewterers assembled flagons from six cast sections: upper body and lip; lower body and base mould-



4.—TANKARD WITH DOUBLE-DOMED LID, REEDING AROUND THE BODY, AND HOLLOW-CAST HANDLE WITH DOLPHIN TAIL FINIAL, circa 1720. Marked inside W.E. with hour glass, the touch of William Edon, Master of the Pewterers' Company in 1732 and 1737.

ing or skirt; circular base; lid; thumb-piece and hinge; handle. The bodies of pre-Restoration flagons were usually cast in two vertical halves.

The difference between a flagon, particularly a domestic serving flagon, and a tankard is sometimes very slight. But the standardised forms of the component parts during the various periods usually display features enabling a distinction to be made at a glance. A large tankard may occasionally be mistaken for a small flagon, but these half-way pieces, 7½ inches to 8½ inches in height, are comparatively rare in pewter, though frequent in silver.

The word tankard does not appear to have been applied to drinking vessels until late in the reign of Henry VIII. The Naval accounts of Henry VII for 1485 refer to "drynkyng bolles of tree, XX; tankardes Viij." These were nine-gallon vessels, of wooden staves and hooped, used for carrying water from the conduits: the carriers were called "tankard-bearers." Leather cups with metal lids were called tankards from about 1550. An early use of the new application of the word is found in the will, dated 1576, of Sir George Heron of Harbottle, who bequeathed "3 silver tankards" to his daughter.

Pewter tankards are not heard of until the reign of James I. An inventory of pewter taken in 1614 lists "three tankers" and a "tanckerde potte." Tankards always possess lids. Doctor Johnson defined tankards as "large vessels with covers, for strong drink." Lidless tankards were advertised at this period as "pewter potts."

The tankard lid of the James I and Charles I periods was flat with a low, vertical-sided central lift and a slight front lip. The sides of the cylindrical body were vertical and encircled by narrow base mouldings. The D-shaped handle with a short tail was light, with little thickness

of metal at the upper terminal, and the lower end placed low upon the body. Very few pewter tankards remain that may be correctly assigned to this period.

Little change took place in the basic features of the tankard until the accession of George I. After the Restoration, the body was made slightly tapered and might be of greater diameter in proportion to the depth than at any other period. The base-rim was deeper and more elaborately moulded. The beefeater lid had a flat rim ¼-inch to ½-inch wide. In this style of lid the vertical rise of the former period was replaced by convex moulding, below the flat top. At the front, the rim on such a lid was usually extended into a projection with serrated edges and a plain surface, sometimes fretted. The graceful swan's neck handle now appeared on pewter tankards, the lower terminal sometimes ending in a twin spiral, a heel-shaped slice, or an applied shield. Such handles continued until Georgian days. Reeding encircled the bodies of many tankards from about 1695 and continued in general favour throughout the collector's period, with the exception of the two decades immediately following the accession of George III.

Tankard lids were lifted by pressing on

time the swan-neck handle began to give place to a more massive-looking handle displaying more flowing curves in an S outline. These handles were cast hollow. As in earlier work, the upper end of the handle was usually sliced obliquely across its section and this area soldered to the body; in other cases the handle was provided with a lug which might extend half-way down the body of the tankard. The re-curved scroll handle appeared on some tankards from about 1730, with a short strut between either or both terminals of the body.

A tankard with a swelling bell or tulip-shaped body raised on a narrow moulded foot and with a double-domed lid, was a west-country design, contemporary with the cylindrical tankard from about 1720 to 1790. There was a period of high popularity between 1760 and 1780, when few tankards with vertical bodies were made.

Tankard bodies from about 1660 might be decorated, but the majority were left plain, sometimes with the addition of enriching applied during manufacture. At first large floral devices in broken or wavy line-work were produced by what was then known as wriggled or joggled work. This was carried out by tapping a rough chisel and rocking it from side to side. Later decorations were done with a graver or a tracer: these engravings are sometimes of a considerably later date than the tankard itself. The graver removed a fragment of the soft metal at each cut; the tracer removed no metal as the tool was held vertically and struck with a hammer, displacing the metal and forming a furrow. Deep engraving is seldom found as this would weaken the pewter. Tankard bodies might be engraved with portraits, coats-of-arms and cyphers, symbolic Stuart designs, and lions, birds, foliage and flowers.

Pewter engravers journeyed from pewterer to pewterer, carrying out decoration on the premises with their own tools. Engravers of silver, whose advertisements and trade cards indicate that they decorated pewter, too, called this branch of their art "scratching."

The majority of early pewter tankards are unmarked: some were struck with the makers' initials. When touchmarks are present they are usually found on the inside base of the tankard; so-called hallmarks were struck either across the outer surface of the lid or on the body near the junction of lip and handle.

All the examples illustrated in Figs. 1, 3 and 4 are in the Victoria and Albert Museum.

thumb-pieces, known to contemporary pewterers as purchases or levers. The pre-Restoration twin-dome thumb-piece is rarely found. From 1660, to 1715 ram's horns and the fleur-de-lys in numerous variations were most frequently used. Late-Stuart types included also beaded scrolls and love-birds beak to beak. Scroll patterns were used throughout the reigns of the first two Georges, followed by the perforated type, which held the field to the virtual exclusion of other designs.

The double-domed lid fashionable during the 18th century is not found on pewter tankards made earlier than about 1695. The extended serrated lip, without perforations, continued until about 1715. Then the flat rims around the lid gave way to cavetto mouldings starting direct from the outer edging of the lid. This style of lid was never superseded as a standard pattern.

At about the same



5.—FULL-SKIRTED AND CRESTED PEWTER FLAGON WITH DOUBLE-DOMED LID AND DOUBLE-CURVED HANDLE, circa 1760.

*This copy belongs to the collection of the Victoria and Albert Museum.*