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THE
PEWTER
SOCIETY

Old Pewter Snuff-Boxes

Wide Scope for a Collection

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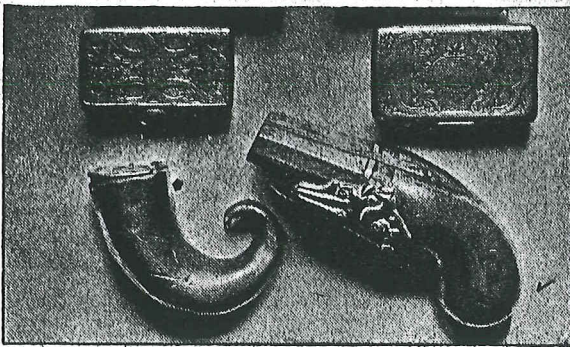


1 A selection of pewter snuff-boxes, including the rare horse's head pattern. Sporting, historical and topographical (St. Paul's Cathedral) subjects will also be noticed in the decorations.

THE business of collecting has tended to become increasingly specialised of late years. Whereas in times past people collected old furniture, silver, china, pottery, etc., picking up here one piece and there another, irrespective of period or type, and content that each piece should be good of its kind, in these days each classification is divided into many sub-sections, and collectors specialise under, say, mediæval, oak, walnut, spoons, makers, and countless other sub-divisions of each subject.

This tendency to specialise has not affected collectors of old pewter to any great extent up to now, though it is not unknown.

However, the building-up of a really representative collection is nowadays not the comparatively inexpensive matter that it was; old pewter has become increasingly centralised, and it is rarely possible to obtain "bargains" in country towns and villages. The effect of this is to compel the collector of strictly limited means to search for a sub-division on which he can allow his collecting instinct full play without damaging his pocket.



2 The box imitating a Scottish snuff mill is one of the rarest. With it is a box fashioned as a flintlock pistol.

It is of one of these "side lines" that I write, one that can still be indulged in with great satisfaction by those who do not feel that they can face up to the rarer and earlier pieces.

The extent to which snuff-taking prevailed and the long innings the habit had, led to the manufacture of great quantities of snuff-boxes and mulls. To those who could afford it, silver, naturally, appealed, but for the poorer man pewter was available and, as will be seen, every variety of design was employed to produce individuality, with results that were generally pleasing, often curious, and sometimes amusing.

In addition to snuff-boxes the makers produced needle-cases, patch-boxes and ever vinaigrettes, some of which are included in the groups illustrated.

There is comparatively little that can be said about these boxes. They were seldom marked with their makers' touches, and this is understandable as the majority are of early 19th century date, by which time the Companies and Guilds which had formerly controlled the manufacture of pewter had, to a great and ever-increasing extent, lost their control, with the result, among others, that the marking of wares was no longer enforced.

There are certain exceptions, however. The Scottish horn mulls mounted in pewter (Page 3) were nearly all made by one Durie, an



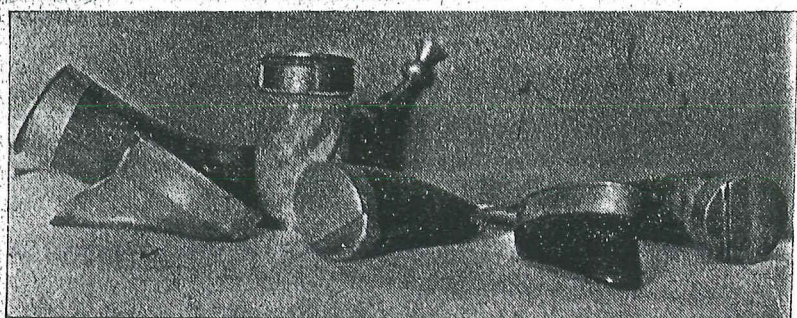
3 Shoe shape snuff and needle boxes and other patterns, including a satyr's head and a shell. The three smallest boxes near the bottom are patch boxes. Another illustration on page 3.

Aberdeenshire pewterer of the late 18th century, who stamped his name in a "label" on the underside of the lids. Then again, certain of these boxes bear the marks of Samuel Duncumb, a Birmingham pewterer, who was working between circa 1740 and 1780; but the great majority have no marks whatsoever.

One of the rarest of these many designs is that which takes the form of a horn, similar to those fashioned by Durie, but made completely of pewter (Fig. 2). The three small boxes seen towards the bottom of Fig. 3 are patch-boxes, and the shoes above them were used for needles as well as snuff.

The metal from which these boxes were made varies considerably in quality, some boxes being heavy and strong and others thin and fragile, but one outstanding feature, of special value to would-be collectors, is that seldom does an exact replica occur; this fact adds enormously to the fascination of collecting them.

The sole collection of these delicate little pieces of the pewterers' craft which I have seen was gathered together from the four corners of Britain—a feat which I imagine is almost impossible of achievement to-day—and was charmingly displayed on black velvet mounted trays. Each piece was carefully polished so that the decoration should not be damaged, and the effect was delightful.



4 Scottish snuff mulls of horn mounted in pewter were nearly all made by an Aberdeenshire maker, Durie. (See article on page 3).