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Figure 1.—Two views of a flat-lidded pewter tankard of the Charles II period, maker Jonathan Ingles, showing punched and wriggle work.

WRIGGLE WORK ON OLD PEWTER

Illustrating a Common Type of Decoration in the Restoration Era

By Capt. A. SUTHERLAND - GRAEME, F.S.A., A.R.I.B.A.

ELABORATE decoration of pewter was never popular in this country. We have no counterpart to the decorative productions of the famous 16th century Continental craftsmen Gaspar Enderlein or François Briot, nor can we show ornamental flagons of the kind produced in Germany for the many Trade Guilds of that country. British pewter was in the main strictly and sturdily utilitarian, and to quote the late Mr. Howard Cotterell :—

“Pewter—once the Plate of Kings, later of low estate—
Was wrought for use, and hardest use, and not to emulate
The chased and decorated styles of gold and silver wares,
But just to last a man his life and then—pass to his heirs.”

The same authority, in *Pewter Down the Ages*, put forward a plea for a less insular outlook among British collectors; but, personally, I have never considered that pewter takes kindly to elaborate ornamentation, and, whilst admitting that the decorative work of Continental pewterers

is frequently finely conceived and beautifully executed, it is, in my opinion more in keeping with precious metal than with base, and that beauty in pewter is sufficiently manifest in purity of form and outline and in the correct proportioning of mass and detail.

It is true that during the late Jacobean period decorative engraving was sometimes used, and arms, crests and inscriptions were engraved upon dishes, platters and tankards, but these are rather indications of ownership. There appears to have been no general trend towards engraved decoration, and what there was ceased with the advent of the Commonwealth.

It should be understood that the reference to decoration does not include such matters as the design of thumb-pieces and handles, finials, reeding, etc. These may be termed constructional ornamentation, and in these matters pewter followed the general trend in becoming increasingly inclined to elaboration up to the 19th century, when production practically ceased. But throughout the whole period the objective remained utilitarian.

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The Restoration released an exuberance of feeling which had been kept severely in check during the Puritan régime. It expressed itself in all walks of life and even invaded the pewterer's workshop. Ornamentation was freely indulged in. Great commemorative chargers were made, of which quite a number still exist; and tankards, bowls and even ordinary plates were engraved with every kind of fanciful device.

The commonest form of engraving employed is known as "wriggle work." It was not new, but was a revival on more elaborate lines of that which had been sparingly used before the Commonwealth.

The late Mr. H. J. L. J. Massé in his book *Pewter Plate* gave much information as to the method used in producing wriggle work. A flat tool, held at an angle of about 50 degrees, was forced forwards with a regular rocking motion, and the process was sometimes varied by using a chasing tool or punch, which did not remove metal but merely displaced it. An example of the use of both types on one piece is illustrated in Figure 1.

This fine specimen of the flat-lidded tankard of the Charles II period was made by Jonathan Ingles whose Touch of clasped hands with initials I.I. is dated 1670. The engraving in this

case was evidently done by a skilled workman, but, as we shall see, this was not always the case.

Incidentally an example of constructional art is seen in this view, as also, and even better, in the illustration of the smaller tankard (Figure 2). This is the entasis or bulge given to the drum, which undoubtedly places the whole design on a higher basis than that of later tankards with straight sides, either vertical or tapering. It is a subtle feature, entirely pleasing to the eye, producing the effect of one continuous line of curves and broken only by the projecting edge of the lid, as by a cornice.

The smaller tankard referred to is decorated with wriggle work alone. When discovered it was terribly dilapidated and corroded, but has been skilfully restored to its original beautiful outline. Unfortunately the Touch has become indecipherable, but the period is circa 1685, as evidenced by the deeper lid, which shows a tendency to dome.

With this tankard appears a narrow-rimmed plate $7\frac{3}{8}$ in. in diameter, with a conventional wriggle-work design worked upon its face. The maker was Richard Boyden, who was probably a provincial pewterer, as his Touch, dated 1699, does not appear on the London Touch Plates. From the absence of knife scratches it is clear



Figure 2.—A pewter plate, $7\frac{3}{8}$ in. diameter, maker Richard Boyden, decorated with a wriggle work design; and a small tankard, c. 1685, similarly decorated.

Wriggle Work on Old Pewter



Figure 3.—A pewter bowl, c. 1670, with caryatid handles.

that the plate was never used for ordinary eating purposes. It was probably a salver or "marriage plate."

Figure 3 illustrates a beautifully designed two-handled bowl of circa 1670. Here the pewterer has allowed himself considerable latitude by providing handles of caryatid form, possibly copied from similar Continental pieces of the same period.

The maker's name is unknown, but his Touch with initials C.T. is number 57 on the first (post Fire of London) Touch Plate. He was in business prior to the Fire and was one of the many pewterers who were ordered to restrike their Touches after that catastrophe in which Pewterers' Hall was destroyed and the earlier Touch Plates perished.

This piece was evidently highly prized as it is in perfect condition. It has been cleaned so thoroughly that the engraving has worn considerably except near the handles, where cleaning was more difficult.

Figure 4 shows a copy of a rubbing from a portion of a large charger. Had the whole piece been illustrated the decoration would have been so reduced in scale as to render it difficult to discuss what appears to be a very human little trait.

It is common to find pewter and other articles marked with a triangle of punched initials, thus I.^RH., and it might be said that almost 50 per cent. of pewter plates and dishes alone are found to be so marked. These initials are those of the owner and his wife. The initial to the left is that of the husband's Christian name, that to the right the wife's, whilst the surname initial is above. The example given might stand for John and Harriet Robinson. The pewterer used these initial punches when requested, and in this instance the three initials are indicated by an arrow, on extreme left.

It is obvious, however, that such plebeian methods of marking did not appeal to the owners of this charger. They had doubtless

seen on silver as well as on pewter ware the Crests and Arms of those entitled to bear them, and decided to enhance their own importance in a similar manner. Hence the crudely ornate shield, initials and mantling. It is probable that this coarse wriggle work was carried out by someone other than the pewterer who made the charger. Had it been otherwise, there would have been no occasion for him to use his punches. Moreover the craftsmanship is poor compared with the examples already shown.

The pieces shown here are typical of the period 1660-1710 and come from my own collection; but I have in mind many similar pieces in other collections, some of which bear engraved portraits of Charles II, William and Mary and, sometimes Anne; some good but mostly rather crude.



Figure 4.—Copy of a rubbing from part of a large pewter charger, c. 1670, with coarse wriggle work decoration; the Touch, a bull's head, with initials W.G., is that of an unknown pewterer.