

ESu

NEATE et al

Stratford on Avon

7th June 1998

John Richardson

Presumably since soon after the initial manufacture of pewter objects began there have been collectors of pewter. As soon as these objects have sufficient relative value there is an incentive for the dealer and, human nature being what it is, the faker to become involved.

The concern here is with those items made to deceive and not to become too involved with the shades of activity between making reproductions, converting reproductions to fakes or making fakes from scratch.

As collecting flourishes so dealers multiply to feed the needs of avid collectors. Collecting is a benign disease, dealing is rational but need not always be honest. Collectors become dealers in a sense when they improve their collections by trading unwanted pieces for items which they feel will enhance their collections. If demand greatly exceeds supply then amongst those most keen to acquire there will be a few not discerning enough ~~not~~ to purchase passable look-alikes. The problem is not the dealer who very occasionally buys a fake unwittingly, collectors and dealers have all done that, but the dealer who knows that a piece has been made to deceive and sells with that knowledge.

In Britain, although pewter collecting has existed for centuries, it was not until the second half of the C19th that it reached a significant level, aided and encouraged by increasing numbers of written references in the regular periodicals, such as 'Apollo' and 'Connoisseur', affordable only by the middle classes. Thus the growth in pewter collecting around the turn of the century centred on the relatively affluent, many taking up the hobby because it was fashionable and did not require much immediate relevant knowledge - after all, the dealers advised and guided!

There was scope, therefore, for the unscrupulous dealer.

One form of faking is by reducing the quantity and quality of the alloy used in making a piece of pewter. From the 15th to 18th Centuries

the Worshipful Company attempted to control this practice by their searches. These were eventually aborted. This aspect is covered in Welch's 'History of the Company' <sup>(1)</sup> published in 1902.

In the publication 'The Bystander' of July 13th, 1904, referring to Masse's book 'Pewter Plate' <sup>(2)</sup> which was newly published, 'When we were giving an account of the Exhibition of pewter held in Clifford's Inn Hall, (held in Fleet Street in February/March, 1904) we adventured the hope that the cult of this commonplace material might not develop to an overwhelming extent. But now there can be no doubt that the rage has started and is spreading rapidly'.

Such publicity would encourage new collectors, start a rush to buy good pieces while they were still available and bring a twinkle to the eyes of unscrupulous dealers!

It seems reasonable to take 1900 as a watershed in pewter collecting. Fakes existed then and it is merely a truism to say that some fakes will never be detected and that some genuine pieces will be labelled as fakes, the latter more likely to come from amongst pieces made by 'country' pewterers and not conforming exactly with the shape, style or fabrication techniques of the products of the major pewtering centres. Detection of fakes is largely subjective and the ability to detect should increase with experience of handling pewter. There remains, however, an element of doubt in a small percentage of cases. It is still risky to claim with certainty that any one piece is right. Whilst an admirable intention, giving guarantees can be something which may backfire.

That there was a growing awareness of the increase in fakes by collectors and writers can be judged from Masse's writings. In his 'Pewter Plate' <sup>(2)</sup>, published in 1904, he mentions the fact

apart from the deviations in the quality and quantity of metal, the compulsory marking of pewter-ware led to abuses, the chief of which was the counterfeiting of well-known pewterers' marks by other workers, notably so by country makers.' In the revised edition (3) in 1910 this comment remained unchanged.

However, in 'Chats on Old Pewter' (4), published in 1911, there are several comments on fakes. A collection of many fake pieces on public display is raised. He writes of 'the prevalence of a large amount of faked pewter' and 'there are shops whose pewter of certain periods and nationality may be ordered - if not commissioned'. More of this later. Amongst Masse's list of the more commonly faked items are spoons, porringers, benitiérs, tappithens, dishes with arms cast in high relief and finished with some chasing, usually marked with a crowned rose and ND, St George or St Michael and a dragon and AIC, (Arthur Chaumette, Paris). He also mentions genuine plates engraved at a much later date. Thus there is direct evidence that Masse's knowledge of existing fakes increased rapidly between 1904 and 1911. The 1949 revised edition (5) of 'Chats on Old Pewter', which was carried out by Michaelis, is not so specific but suggests that since 1900-1910 some clever fakers have been at work.

In Masse's 'The Pewter Collector' of 1921 (6) the warning is repeated with more emphasis on pieces that were made abroad. The 1971 edition of the book (7), also revised by Michaelis, is more general on the subject and merely advises collectors to be careful in buying pewter. 'Fakes' has disappeared from the index.

Fakes had been increasing in numbers, then, since 1904 upto 1921. By the latter date the Society of Pewter Collectors had been formed in 1918, initially more a club of middle class people who collected pewter and whose meetings revolved around fairly elaborate dinners in evening dress with limited discussions on pewter. One important feature was that it was not good manners to express doubts or criticism

about pieces in fellow members' collections. This did not prevent a flow of private correspondence amongst members expressing such criticisms!. Such 'etiquette' continued until about 1950 and the advent of Fenton as President.

A group collectors with money in the early 1920's, an interest in pewter and building collections but without, in some cases, a wealth of knowledge of the alloy and its various forms was a heaven-sent opportunity to others to unload fake pieces. The period lasting upto the outbreak of war, particularly, saw many pewter pieces produced to deceive. This practice has, of course continued to the present day but let us focus on the first half of the century.

Who produced these pieces? Many reproductions were being made on the Continent. Upon the second sale of such pieces many became fakes as the fact that they were reproductions was not mentioned. Chaumette in France, Weygang in Germany and others were taking orders , not only for reproductions but items 'in antique and modern style with chasing and engraving work and in the following finishes which included antique and extra old. Family arms, city views, etc, provided as per sketch and old plates and dishes can be chased and engraved.' Weygang was operating from about 1885. As well as meeting orders for pewter he also produced items with old touches, eg. from Wurtenburg and Nuremburg. No doubt pieces could be made without any marks and buyers could add these later as it suited them.

That this was also happening in Britain there can be no doubt.

The larger manufacturers were involved as cited in a letter from Cotterell to Sutherland-Graeme, (3), dated 3rd October, 1931.

He alleges that reproduction pieces with spurious marks were being

produced by some of the larger firms in England, including Pearson, Page and Jewsbury. When he complained about it to the representative of another firm similarly involved 'the man merely smiled and said he was prepared to make anything which sold well'.

In the same letter it is alleged that Englefields were also making items, sold as genuine reproductions, on which they did not stamp their own mark. Members of the Society obviously knew of what was happening and that there were others involved in making and altering other items. M H Rollason, a well-known collector wrote in July, 1934 about one piece, 'It is well known among collectors to be a modern fake, palmed off on Mr 'X', (name given in letter) by some Roman Catholic forgers who were ready to take advantage of their common faith and of his (Mr X's) theory that silver designs could always be found in pewter'.

That there was more than one person involved was also known. In a letter to Sutherland-Graeme <sup>(G)</sup> dated 22nd March, 1934, Cotterell discusses a 'wrong' candlestick sold to a Society member and writes 'Isn't he a clever devil?! If I were on the Bench and he came before me - or Black Jack - I'd give 'em six months on their faces alone. Hang-dog, hunted, suspicious faces with nothing 'open' in either of them'. In other letters between the two, Cotterell writes of Black Jack, an ugly fellow, who wore a leather motoring coat and his friends as the 'leather coat group'. At present no identification of these men has been made. But why was <sup>m</sup>soething not done?

In 1930-31 Cotterell set up a scheme to mark with a star pieces which he thought were genuine. Many Society members and other collectors thought this a good idea and submitted their collections for vetting.

Others opposed the scheme saying that Cotterell was being arrogant and that it was only being done for the fees that would be charged. It did not help when some pieces from well-known collections did not 'pass'! Whatever the total reasons for the scheme, that part which noted genuine pieces was admirable and was the first public action against the fakers. The good collections such as Rollason's, Fenton's and others emerged as totally 'starred'.

In 1933-35 the President of the Society was Francis Weston and he realised more needed doing. He suggested that search teams, similar to those used by the Company centuries before, be set up to find the fakers' workshops but there was no organisation that could grant the powers.

Jimmy Fenton, President in 1949-51, was the catalyst for changes in the Society's attitude towards detecting fakes. In a letter to Sutherland-Graeme <sup>(10)</sup> of 7th November, 1947, he writes about the failings of the Society, praises Masse', Cotterell, Cooke and Churcher, talks about the responsibility of training new members and 'I look on the Society as a foil to show off the remarkable capacity of the Neate-Mundy (sic) School and very little else.' He went on to suggest that reliable dealers be used to train new members just as sports clubs use professionals to train their members. Sutherland-Graeme wrote a very long <sup>(10)</sup> and considered reply on 9th December, 1947, agreeing with Fenton's aims but pointing out the difficulties, which Fenton acknowledged on 29th December, 1947. That there were several selling pewter fakes during the late 1920's and into the 1930's there is no doubt. Wrong pieces produced during that period are called 'Neate' pieces. Whether there was a central planning and organisation run by Neate no evidence has been found. Neate was a dealer who sold genuine items but also a much higher proportion of fakes than would be expected from merely errors in detection by an experienced dealer. The Society published a booklet



on 'The Richard Neate Touch Plate' (12), which included a section on 'Neate - The Man'. More personal details have emerged during the subsequent searches and all are included here for completeness. Note that all the addresses involved are within a very small area and may give a clue in deducing other facts.

Richard Henry Neate was born on 22nd May, 1880, at 46, St Paul's Crescent in Camden Town. In 1887 he was living with his parents at 196 Brecknock Road, Camden. His father died in November, 1897. In 1906 he and his mother moved to 222 Brecknock Road and on April 29th, 1907, Neate married Margaret Ethel Forsyth of 94 Albany Street. Does this address have any significance as the pewter-mould makers, Biertumpfels, were at 138 Albany Street until 1904? Did Neate meet his future wife whilst working close to her home? In 1914 Neate and his wife lived at 56 Camden Square and his mother died in May 1917. In 1918-19 Camden Borough kept a register of those householders away on war duties. Neate is not on that list so one must presume that any contribution to the War effort by Neate did not involve serving in the armed forces. The couple moved into 133 Albany Street in 1920, into 92 Albany Street in 1923 and there his wife died in 1932. From 1936 until his death in 1953, Neate lived at 109 Albany Street. Sometime between 1932 and 1953 Neate remarried a lady who became his widow and sole beneficiary, Frances Nettleton Neate. He was buried with his parents and first wife in Highgate Cemetery, perhaps more famous as the resting place of Karl Marx.

In 1991 the Society acquired a lead sheet with 135 touches. At the time members were told that it was from Richard Munday's effects. The touch plate became known as 'the Richard Neate' touch plate and the Society produced a booklet about it; whoever wrote the introduction

to that booklet implied that the touch plate was from Munday, 'a well-known London dealer'. Why we were misled I do not know but the plate did NOT come from Richard Munday's effects. Enough evidence exists to confirm that Neate and Munday knew each other well and worked together, with Munday being used as a sales representative for suspect items on his trips around England and elsewhere. After Neate's retirement these activities appear to have ceased and Munday started to become a 'reformed' character. By the 1950's he had become a friend of Michaelis. The two of them received a contract for moving the Worshipful Company of Pewterers' collection from storage, cataloguing it and arranging its display in the new Pewterers' Hall, opened in 1961. Both became Freemen of the Company and Munday later became a very proud and loyal Liveryman, acting as agent for buying new pieces for the Company's collection.

To return to the touch plate; from whence then did it come? My understanding is now that a lady connected with the previous possessor offered it, wrapped in male underwear, to a dealer in East Anglia who bought it and sold it on to another dealer, knowledgeable on pewter and aware that the Society would be interested in it. He then sold it via a Past President to the Society.

Before the plate reached the dealers it had been in the possession of one Godfrey Patrick Worsley (known as Patrick Worsley). He was born on 30th October, 1902, and died in hospital in Taunton, Somerset, on 15th May, 1983. At the time of his death his home address was in Langport in Somerset and his profession, as listed on his death certificate was 'retired antique(s) dealer'. There is hearsay evidence that Worsley was involved in the making of suspect pieces of pewter as some years before his death, probably the late 1970's, a candlestick

or pair of candlesticks were entered at the auctioneers, Sotheby's, for sale. These aroused some suspicions and two people were sent to talk with the potential vendor from the West Country whom, it is alleged, turned out to be Worsley. It is also said that there was and had been much more similar pewter produced. Police action was considered but not proceeded with. The evidence points to Worsley being a producer of forged pewter and the possessor of the touch plate. But did Worsley know Neate or produce pewter for him? Did Neate produce the touch plate and give it to Worsley? I have no evidence which provides answers to these questions. Stories and myths proliferate but firm evidence must be obtained. I am sure other makers were also involved.

One fact that must be stressed at this stage is that I have no evidence that Richard Neate ever made a piece of pewter as a forgery. He may have changed the appearance or decoration on pieces but made the original bodies, no!

What should the Society do about pieces that are agreed to be wrong? In my view an agreed policy must be threshed out which is workable in its application and offers some protection to would-be collectors. Perhaps Transatlantic co-operation in devising such a scheme would be even better.

John Richardson

May, 1998.

References:

1. Welch, C, 'History of the Worshipful Company of Pewterers',  
Blades, East and Blades, London, 1902.
2. Masse, H.J.L.J., 'Pewter Plate', Bell & Sons, London, 1904.
3. ditto 2nd edition, 1910.
4. Masse, H.J.L.J., 'Chats on Old Pewter', Fisher Unwin, London  
1911.
5. ditto Benn, London, revised, 1949.
6. Masse, H.J.L.J., 'The Pewter Collector', Jenkins, London, 1921.
7. ditto Barrie & Jenkins, London, revised, 1971.
8. Letter from Cotterell to Sutherland Graeme, Archives, 3.10.1931
9. ditto Archives, 22.3.1934.
- !0 Letter from Fenton to Sutherland Graeme, Archives, 7.11.1947.
11. Letter from Sutherland Graeme to Fenton, Archives, 9.12.1947.
12. 'The Richard Neate Touch Plate', The Pewter Society, 1996.