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A good tureen and cover with wood handles by Lacombe of Lausanne, 1830-50. The importance of standards governing lead content in pewter was evident in vessels used for cooking.

Pewter with a Continental touch

By PETER JOHNSON

BEARING in mind the generally accepted principle that each country likes to collect its own antiques — wherever they are to be found in the international market — the British collector of Continental pewter is faced with a fairly easily defined line-up of competition at the moment. Unquestionably at the top of the buying league are the Dutch, the Swiss and the Scandinavians.

The Dutch have a long and deep-seated tradition of pewter craft; the Swiss, quite simply, have the money as well as tradition; and both those nations and the Scandinavians have aspects of furnishing

style which can be successfully embellished by the addition of pewter decoration. Similarly, much German furniture is enhanced by pewter, and the Germans are tolerably busy pewter buyers.

That the French and Italians trail behind the field is no reflection on their countries' respective records in the manufacture and styling of pewter. There is, for instance, a fair amount of good French pewter available to the collector, and a clue to current demand for pewter in these two countries is probably to be found yet again in the furniture idiom: ormolu-mounted veneers, painted wood

and lacquer patently are no resting place for pewter, as is solid northern oak.

Dealers report a perceptible change in buying patterns over the last year. Said one: "Up to about six months ago, overseas buyers — the Dutch, Germans and Americans — would comb Britain, calling at every shop they could find which sold oak, hoping to pick up pewter — almost any pewter. Now they are much more selective. A piece has to be good, undamaged, to claim attention, and the number of foreigners looking for Continental pewter has fallen off. General tightening of money is one reason, of course, but the main reason is greater specialisation and selectivity after the first flush of 'pewter at any price' during the early 1970s."

BRITAIN AND HER RIVALS

Historically, Continental pewter has often loomed as a threat to Britain's craftsmen, who actively engaged themselves in attempts to penalise imports, the while fighting strenuously for free trade in the other direction. With characteristic chauvinism, an early



LEFT — The *Glockenkanne* (bell-shaped can) was of German and Swiss origin and was used for several purposes including the carrying of wine, and wine in a half-fermented state. Features of it were the ring screw top and the hexagonal spout with its own hinged lid. This attractive Swiss version with 1748 inscription sold for £340 at Phillips.

RIGHT — Another Swiss *Glockenkanne*, like the example seen left about ten inches high, has wriggled decoration, made by a tool operated with a rocking movement. It sold for £240. With it is an 18th-century flagon with attractive hinged lid, made by Johannes Weber of Zurich: £230.



English propagandist on the subject stated: "In some places beyond the sea a garnish of good flat English pewter, of an ordinarie making . . . is esteemed almost so pretious as the like number of vessels that are made of fine silver, and in manner no less desired among the great estates, whose workmen are nothing so skilful in that trade as ours, neither their mettall so good, nor plentie so great, as we have here in England."

The author was William Harrison, whose *The Description of England* written around 1576 could not have been bettered by a battery of Elizabethan tourist-board publicity men — "I do rejoice rather to see how God hath blessed us with His good gifts". Fine pewter was, in Harrison's view, important among God's good gifts bestowed on England and denied to the poor foreigner.

Despite Harrison's ultra-patriotism, however, it is true that the crafts of the 15th- and 16th-century English pewterers stood high among Europeans. One reason was the ample supply of high-quality tin in England, and tin was a considerable export alongside fashioned pewter. English tin exports, having increased by 50 per cent in the last 25 years of the 15th century, doubled between 1500 and 1510, reaching a total of 600 tons a year. But Europe was moving, too, and at the same time the production of central European tin mines also doubled. Thus European pewterers seriously challenged the British and exports of artefacts from this country began to suffer.

Germany led the European pewter industry, with flourishing craft in the main cities. Guilds and associations proliferated. The dominance of the Hanseatic League in the Baltic and eastern Europe gave lucrative markets to the German makers. In the Netherlands and France also expansion was the keynote, for both these countries had had long-established pewter-making traditions. Ironically, exports of English tin fed new-born pewter industries around Venice and in Spain, thus taking the bread out of the mouths of British-based pewterers.

The detailed story of this Europe-wide commercial battle for the pewter markets is told in a recently published study, *A History of British Pewter*, by John Hatcher and T.C. Barker (Longman, £7.50). The book is a valuable adjunct to the collector's library, concentrating on the social history of pewter, its uses, its contribution to the economy and its essential place in the fabric of a nation's life. Although the main thesis of Messrs Hatcher and Barker (historians both) is our own pewter, the industry's inter-relation with Europe is amply dealt with and the book is of much value to the collector of Continental pewter, particularly because pewter is notably bereft of modern bibliography and the student must resort to expensively

out-of-print authorities. In passing — and only that, as the work does not set out to be a collector's record — a marginal criticism should be made of the quality of some of the photographs of pewter, a failing which seems to affect so many otherwise excellent books on antique subjects.

TRAVELLING PEWTERERS

In Britain the pewterers' guilds fought a running battle against the activities of itinerant workmen, whose standards of craftsmanship were impossible to channel into agreed confines. These roving traders were no less active on the Continent and just as much a thorn in the side of the established craft organisations, of whom the first European record is believed to be that of a guild in the Bordeaux region of France in the 11th century. In Italy the pewter hawkers, known as *stagnarini*, were more numerous than stationary pewterers. They were not entirely fly-by-night gentlemen, however, as their more established brethren would like to argue: many had regular rounds and a shoddy workman would soon be sent packing when next he called on a regular customer, whether farmer's wife or nobleman's steward.

Itinerant pewterers toured country areas of eastern France up to about 80

years ago. They repaired dishes, recast spoons and retinned coffee-pots in a regular yearly programme of visits. Understandably, when recasting, say, a spoon they took care not to harden it very much by hammering, thus ensuring their services would be needed again within a due period.

FAKING AND RECYCLING

Whether this breed of travelling salesmen is responsible for the majority of Continental fakes which have ensnared gullible collectors is not entirely clear. Certainly the hawkers have made a contribution. Some of the most common articles of Continental pewter that have been reproduced or faked are Dutch spoons of the round-bowl variety with round or octagonal stems. It is said that there are more household round-bowl spoons on collectors' shelves today than there were in existence when they were in everyday use in the Netherlands.

Vessels with added *repoussé* decoration — often in the form of bogus heraldry in examples from Bavaria and the Tyrol — are another product of the European forger, as are Dutch rose porringers. These porridge pots, with one or two handles, were an essential part of dinner-table ware before the universal availability of inexpensive earthenware.



ABOVE LEFT — This pretty 19th-century Normandy flagon was sold for £150 by Phillips among contents of Twyford Lodge, Horsted Keynes, Sussex. Note the attractive twin-acorn thumbpiece. Normandy flagons are often similar to Scottish tappit-hen measures, but the latter never taper inwards at the base. This example is 10¼ inches high.

RIGHT — This Swiss wine measure is by maker André Utin of Vevey, 18th-century. Its decorative shape makes it a highly prized collector's item; it made £280 at Phillips.



Tavern pewter is a wide field for the collector. Top — A straight-sided lidded tankard (left) with curled, decorated thumbpiece. The other is a tapering lidded measure with ball thumbpiece. Both are 19th-century Swedish and bear cast medallions of King Oscar on the lids. £110 and £105 at Phillips. Above — Two more tankard variations, this time German. The taller (10 inches) has a body engraved with figures and floral patterns (£200); on the right, the tankard's broad foot is accentuated (£170, both at Phillips).

Left — Sober, workable design for a Swedish or Baltic drinker: the flat-topped tankard has ball thumbpiece and a cast-decorated strap handle. It measures nearly 8 inches in height and dates from the 18th century (£220 at Phillips).

In the 18th-century Netherlands they had large roses at the bottom of the bowl. In genuine examples the roses are much more finely detailed in relief than the faker's attempts, which usually also have roughly soldered handles.

Incidentally, the handles were a distinctive feature of Continental (and, for that matter, British) porringer, often having a more decorative underside of the ear, indicating that the decoration was to be viewed when the bowl was hanging on its hook. Possession of a good garnish of pewter was undoubtedly a sign of comparative affluence, an example of keeping up with the 18th-century Joneses, Schmidts, Lebruns, and Johannsens.

The quaintly named tappit-hen, a highly-prized collector's item and a Scottish vessel of originally three Imperial pints' capacity, has been a popular target of the faker. The unwary may sometimes confuse the Scottish measure with the more common Normandy tavern flagon and unscrupulous traders have been known to capitalise on this confusion. The Normandy flagon's lower section tapers inwards slightly towards the base (*see illustration*), but the tappit-hen never slopes inwards and often spreads outwards.

One of the strangest examples of pewter trickery I have heard of, however, is the production of a deep dish from one of the two halves of an old bed-pan; surely a classic case of adding insult to injury. Perhaps the most sceptical approach of all was the advice that if you advertise widely enough for a set of spoons of the time of Charlemagne or for a beaker bearing the arms of Frederick the Great there will be no shortage of offers within a very short space of time, such are the workability of pewter, the skill of the forger and rewards for "rarity".

AN INFINITE VARIETY

Pewter's essential qualities as a workable metal have, of course, led to its use in an enormous number of forms over the centuries. Much has been melted down and recycled, but its inherent variety of form has contributed a great deal to its attractions for collectors. This is no less true of Continental pewter than it is of British. In a recent pewter sale at Phillips more than one third of the lots were of Continental origin. They ranged from chamber-pots to a Cardinal's hat, a broad-rimmed dish which takes its name from its appearance when turned upside-down (*see illustration*).

One of the chamber-pots was of bulbous form with a cast armorial device on the front and placed on a later capstan-shaped foot; this hybrid hailed from France or Belgium, 18th/19th century, and while not the purest of art works it was sufficiently intriguing to make £75 at auction. For something

entirely different, a Dutch pear-shaped wine-pitcher, dated 1751, went at £170 and a delightful altar cruet-set comprising two small lidless vessels on an oval plate, of 18th-century French or Spanish origin, was a snip at £20.

Beakers — the name is German in origin — were widely used on the Continent, in the Baltic and in Scandinavia. Lutherans employed them at Communion, others were in everyday use around the home and a representative collection of European beakers would cover a vast area and cost many thousands of pounds today.

Coffee-urns on tripod-bases usually derive from the Netherlands; they are embellished with attractive brass taps, the feet sometimes also being of brass. Some examples are engraved with typical Dutch pastoral scenes.

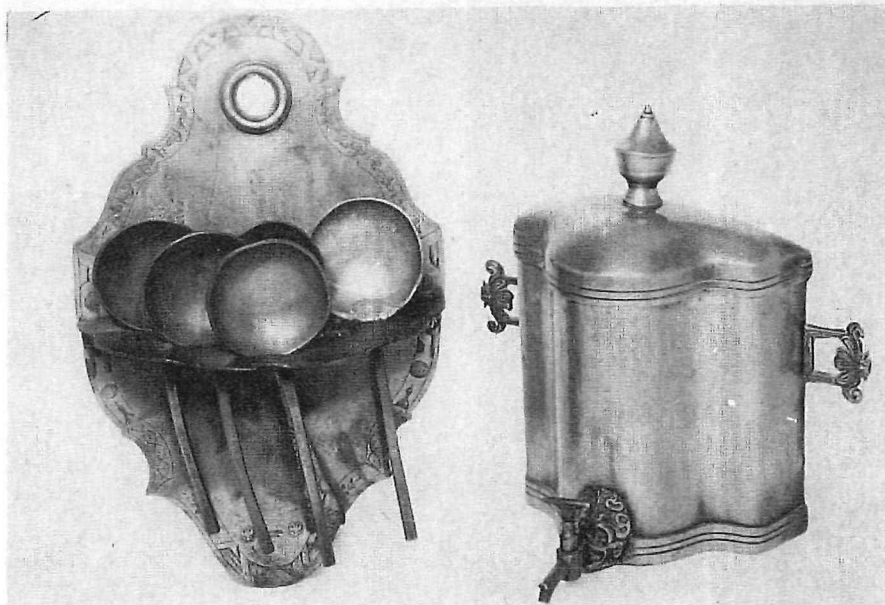
There are an infinite variety of European tankards, probably the best-known examples being the lidded German variety, with tops heavily decorated. In fact, decoration is a distinctive feature of Continental pewter when compared with its plainer English counterpart. The acme of decoration is to be found in German *Edelzinn*, a degree of fine ornamental work is base metal up to the best goldsmith's standards. Needless to say, pieces are rare and fetch astronomical prices today.

PEWTER TODAY

Modern pewter has had a resurgence of popularity in the past decade and it is once again a flourishing industry in Britain and in Europe, including Holland, Germany and France. British pewter exports now total more than £2 million a year. Perhaps a dress rehearsal for this latest show of pewter was the rise of Arts and Crafts pewter around the turn of the century, epitomised here in Liberty's popular Tudric ware, which holds its own today in Art Nouveau salerooms.

Arthur Liberty's adoption of pewter as a commercial art form for the mass market was prompted by the success of contemporary pewter which he had observed in Germany. In a paper on pewter read in 1904 to the Applied Arts Section of the Society of Arts, he observed: "Alongside the foolish and undesirable, it must be admitted that the Germans have recently produced many original and pleasing designs in pewter."

Standards of manufacture, as developed under the guild system, are being maintained today by the modern pewterers' organisations of Europe. They have, however, moved far from the restrictive practices instituted by their predecessors in the past. For instance, some makers' organisations in the 16th and 17th century placed a total ban on the sale of second-hand pewter. Think what a shudder that would send through the antique business if the idea spread today! □



ABOVE — Examples of desirable kitchenware in pewter. The German 19th-century spoon-rack is shield-shaped with a strengthened hole for hanging. Made in Lubeck around 1820, it contains five pewter spoons of contemporaneous German or Dutch origin (£140). The water cistern has a flat back for hanging on the wall, brass tap and urn finial to the lid. It is 9 inches high, late-18th century French or Swiss (£150, all at Phillips).

RIGHT — A Cardinal's Hat or broad-rimmed dish, the reverse stamped with its French maker's touch mark of lily-pot and flowers. It is 15½ inches in diameter, dates from around 1700 and sold at Phillips for £210.

BELOW — Channel Islands makers mirrored French tastes. These are two Jersey wine measures of typical form, both about 5½ inches in height (£170 and £140, left to right, at Phillips).

