

EVA

Antique Collectors Club Jan 1968

Base Metal Spoons

The most common spoons from Saxon to Elizabethan times were made from horn and wood. The better classes used imported metal spoons made of latten, which is a type of brass. It is difficult to state with any authority when pewter spoons were first made in England, but it is generally accepted that if any were made before the 14th century, they have disappeared.

The main purpose of an article of this kind is to impart useful information to collectors. In the present case this objective can very well be fulfilled by the statement that English spoons from the 14th to the mid 17th century had FIG shaped bowls, broad at the end and narrower at the stalk or stem, which were mostly of hexagonal cross-section. (See plate 1). Around the time of the Commonwealth a revolution took place in spoon design, the bowls becoming narrower at the end and broader towards the stem, which lost its six-sided shape and became flat and four-sided, culminating around 1760 in more or less the shape of present day spoons (see plate 2). Thus one look at a pewter or latten spoon and it can immediately be assigned to the first or second period.

The earlier fig shaped spoons had stems of two basic kinds; those terminating in a fancy attractive knob representing various objects such as Acorns, Apostles, Maidenheads, Ballusters, Seal Tops, Animal heads and other designs and those with plain ends, cut off at an angle near the end, and known as Slipped in the Stalk. (see plate 1 nos. 3 and 4). Many more of this latter type are in existence than those with fancy knobs, which suggests that they were popular on account of cheapness and possibly because the knobs could be broken off, when the spoon would have to be thrown away, which may also account for their relative scarcity.

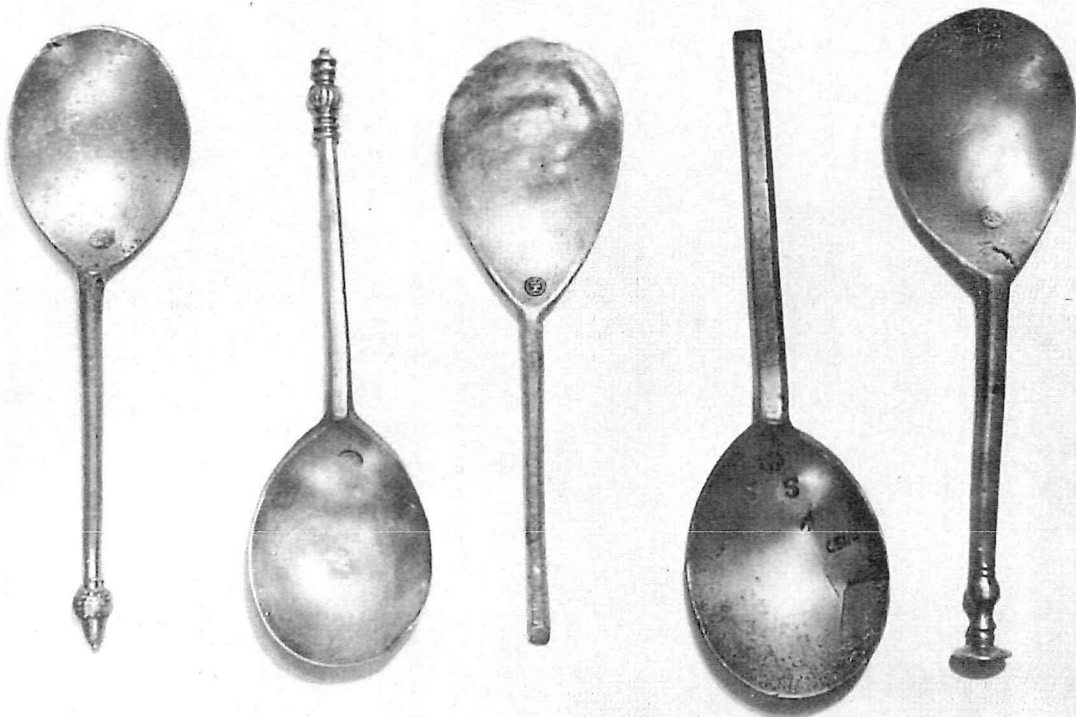


Plate I - Note the early fig-shaped bowls.

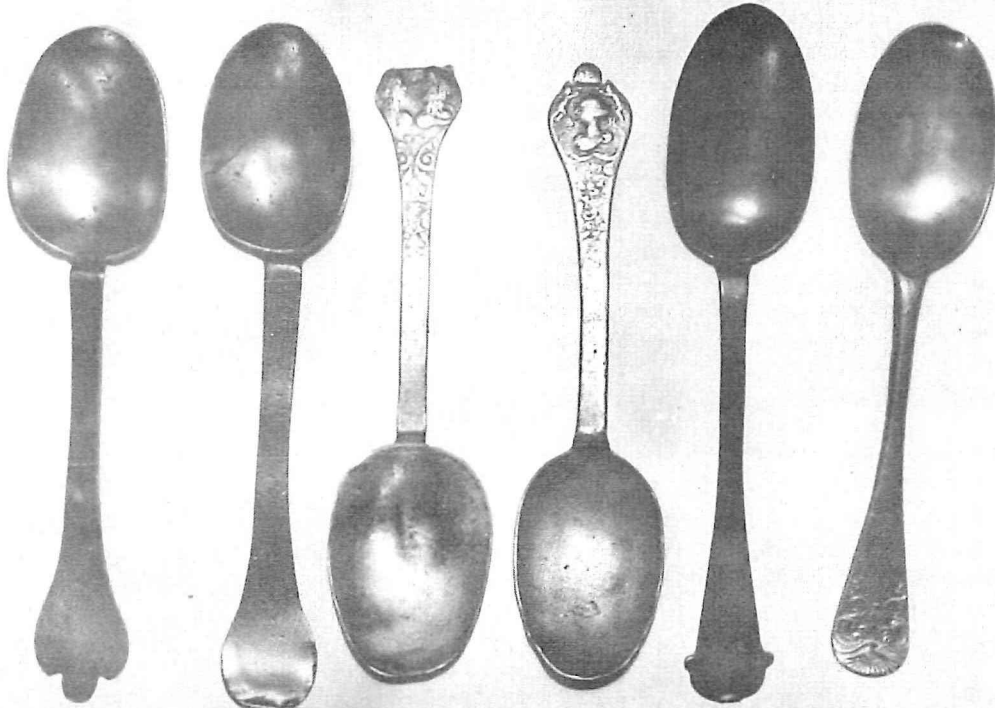


Plate II - Spoons of the transitional period.

In the second phase of spoon shapes, the first major change produced the Puritan with a rectangular stem. This type was almost immediately followed by the split end which is called also a Trifid or Pied de Biche, in which the end was hammered out flat and cut obliquely with two deep notches (see plate 2 No. 1.)

In the reign of William and Mary, 1689-1702 there appeared a very fancifully decorated spoon bearing the heads of the two monarchs and the letters W. M. , which was followed by a similar spoon with the head of Queen Anne, either alone or with the letters A. R. (Anna Regina). Similar spoons can also be found commemorating the marriage of George III to Charlotte. These spoons were cast from moulds and from the variety of patterns must have been very popular as souvenirs. They are also called coffee or chocolate spoons (see plate 2 Nos. 3 and 4).

Early Saxon spoons of horn had circular shaped bowls and there exist a few silver spoons of this period having the same round bowl. Anyone starting a collection should be wary of round bowls unless they can get an expert's advice, as on the whole they may be classed as foreign. Today you can purchase coarse round-bowled spoons made in Holland and Belgium, often sold in painted wooden racks. These may make a souvenir suitable for the kitchen wall, but are certainly not for the collector.

Latten Spoons.

Latten spoons, being made of brass, were tougher and more durable than pewter spoons. Hence they were popular and were turned out by pewter spoon makers. Pewter spoons were also made with latten knobs, soldered on, (see plate 1 No. 5). The Pewterers' Company however were alarmed by this inroad into their field and around the middle of the 16th century, their manufacture was forbidden. It appears that although this measure had some effect for a time, latten spoons reappeared in number early in the

No. 1 is a Trifid or Pied de Biche development of the plain Puritan, with a rat tail extension of the stem on the back. The mark is W. L. with the date 1668. A decree issued by the Court of the Pewterers' Company on December 19th 1667 ordered the spoon makers to alter their touch, and it is probable that when a date is found incorporated with the mark, it is a retouched mark.

No. 2 is round ended, circa 1690, marks a letter P, a harp, a leopards head and a lion passant, arranged like silver hall-marks. Nos. 3 and 4 are chocolate or coffee spoons probably celebrating the coronation of (No. 3.) William and Mary and (No. 4.) Queen Anne.

No. 5 is a later variant of the Trifid end and marked Vaughan, early 18th century.

Considering the age and fragility of early pewter spoons it is remarkable that quite a number still exist. Good specimens may be obtained for a few pounds and should be collected before they all disappear into museums.

Most of the books on pewter contain descriptions of spoons. However the great authority on this subject is, "Old Base Metal Spoons" by F.G. Hilton Price. see also "Old Pewter Spoons of England" Norman Gask - The Antique Collector vol III pages 385-388, 1932, and "Pewter Spoons" by Capt. A. V. Sutherland-Graeme - The Connoisseur, December 1947, pages 105-108.

Pewter and latten spoons can sometimes be found in shops which specialise in pewter, but on account of their scarcity, are rarely seen in the general antique shops. Special pewter sales which occur about twice a year at Auction houses such as Sotheby's, Christie's etc., usually include spoons. Sometimes they are dispersing a good collection, and this is the time to step-in.

Mr. Richard Munday of 19 Chiltern Street, London W. 1. has spoons in stock. I recently saw some pewter slipped-in-the-stalks there, together with latten Trifids and others. Latten spoons are at present cheap, good specimens being under £5, and these should be snapped up. As regards pewter spoons, so much depends on the condition of these fragile articles, but for £10 to £15 you should be able to pick up the commoner varieties. Rare varieties of knops can cost a lot of money.

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