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English Notes on Various Pewter

By HOWARD HERSCHEL COTTERELL

EDITOR'S NOTE—American pewter derives directly from that of England. There is no question as to that. Yet examples of the native product not infrequently exhibit departures from the normal English type, which are likely to be more apparent to an English connoisseur than to his confrere in the United States. That we shall observe our own pewter ware much more appreciatively when we have learned to view it, in part at least, through English eyes, is one of the interesting lessons to be drawn from the following genial "notes," which Mr. Cotterell has from time to time furnished for the Editor's personal benefit, and which are now brought together for publication under a single unifying entitlement.

Mixed Motives in Early American Tankards

IN *Art in America* for February, 1923,* are published two tankards, described as early American, which immediately challenge the attention of the connoisseur, because, even at the very first glance, they convey an impression of bewilderingly jumbled details, the segregation of which, though simple to the trained mind, necessitates an analysis of the two types *ab initio*.

In the evolution of the tankard, certain well defined shapes and details are recognized as belonging to certain more or less clearly understood periods. Of these the earliest known to us in pewter, is the type which came into fairly general use in the days when Charles I was King of England (1625-1649), and which existed until the early years of the reign of Queen Anne (1702-1714). To the *genus collector* this is known as the *flat lidded type*, another feature of which is the serrated extension forward of the brim of the lid or cover. This latter feature is illustrated in the example in the lower left corner of Figure 2, but it is more clearly defined in Figure 3. Both illustrations give an excellent idea of the main characteristics of this type.

Following this, and for a few years contemporaneous with it, appeared the type with a *double domed* lid (well shown in Figure 4) which continued the use of the serrated brim already referred to.

These two types may also be isolated by their plain bodies, or drums, free from the surrounding fillet which was a feature of the succeeding style—shown in Figure 5—which also discards the serrated brim. This filleted type without the projecting brim did not come into use until the reign of King George I (1714-1727).

In all the above types, however, it will be noted that the sweep of the handle and its lower terminal have remained fairly constant; whereas in the next, or George II type, illustrated in Figure 6, it will be observed that the older

downward sweep of the lower end, gives place to a turned-up, bulbous kind of finial, to fix the date of which I have here ventured to include Figure 7, which shows an example of an English baluster measure, upon the rim of which appears the mark of a London pewterer, Thomas Stevens, who, in 1720, was granted leave to use this mark, and probably continued to do so until about 1750. Quite apart, however, from this piece of evidence, the life of the bulbous finial is roughly represented by those dates, 1720-1750.

Having now assimilated these various cardinal points of tankard evolution, let us turn to a short consideration of the two American tankards pictured in *Art in America*.

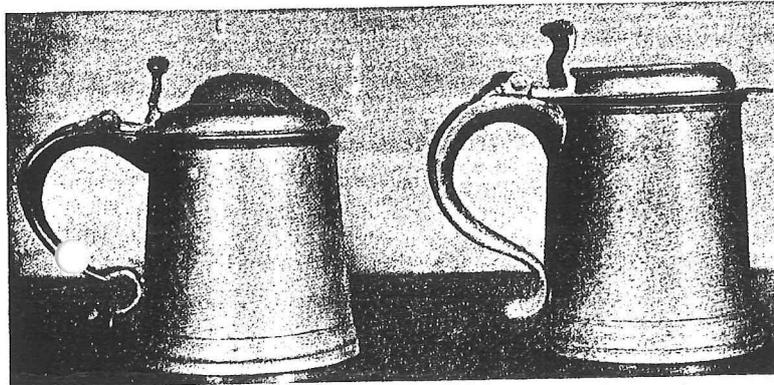


Fig. 1 — TWO EARLY AMERICAN PEWTER TANKARDS (eighteenth century)

These two tankards, published in *Art in America* for February, 1923, called forth the notes constituting the present article by Mr. Cotterell. They indicate on the part of American pewterers an eclectic use of motives, at variance with established English procedure. These tankards, formerly belonging to the late J. Milton Coburn, have since passed into other hands. Reproduced by courtesy of *Art in America*.

If we compare these with the specimens shown in Figures 3 and 6, we shall discover that the handles are reversed; in other words, in these American tankards, a Georgian type of handle is affixed to a Stuart type of body and a Stuart handle to a Georgian body—for the latter, being devoid of the serrated brim, cannot be considered as earlier than Georgian.

One might be tempted to leave things at this stage and drop the whole matter with the old, familiar conclusion to one's problems in Euclid, *Quod erat demonstrandum*; but one prefers to explore the matter further to see whether some reason may be adduced which shall throw further light upon, or explain the situation. One or two suggestions immediately present themselves.

1. If, as is stated, these tankards are of American origin, the maker or makers, as the case may be, may have tried to cut away from traditionally accepted types; for that he had knowledge of these accepted types we have evidence in the fact that both the handles used, though wrongly applied, are in themselves correct and are identical with those shown in Figures 3 and 6.
2. The handles may have been applied from other specimens by way of repair.
3. The pieces may be entirely reproductions.

Judging from the illustration wherein the details have come out very clearly, one rules out the second suggestion entirely; for the handles seem too well set and too neatly joined to the body to admit of their being repairs.

Equally certain would it seem that the third suggestion cannot apply; for there is—even after allowance has been made for the loss in detail which is unavoidable in making blocks for printing purposes—abundant evidence of the mellowing hand of time on the surface of the metal of these tankards, lending an air of venerability which, up to the present, has defied all the superingenious efforts of the faker to counterfeit.

This brings us to the acceptance, after careful study of all other suggestions, of the theory that the tankards are of American origin, made by craftsmen who, whilst ignoring tradition in so far as the assembling of parts was concerned, knew their business sufficiently well to produce two fine, boldly modeled examples, expressive of good, honest workmanship.

Concerning Mr. Kerfoot's Book

As I have read J. B. Kerfoot's *American Pewter*, there have occurred to me several points which it would seem advisable to place on record,—as they form a sort of summing up of the work from the viewpoint of the English collector; and may, I think, be of service to many of Mr. Kerfoot's American readers.

The first of these points, noted in the work itself, is that there existed, so far as is known, no central or local organization in America for controlling the pewterer's craft; nothing, in short, which operated in a manner similar to the Worshipful Company of Pewterers of London. We can therefore never hope for the discovery of American touch-plates "with the impression of every man's mark therein."

The second point I have noted is that—except for the occasional appearance of their touches on their wares—the early American pewterers put us into the way of making grave errors in dating their pieces; for they had a terribly embarrassing habit of adopting types which, for half a century or more, had been relegated to oblivion by both the pewterers and the silversmiths of England!

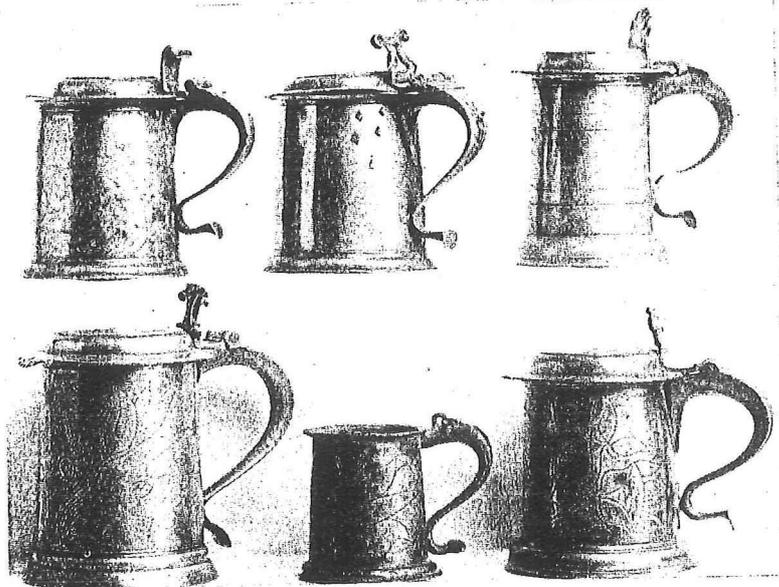


Fig. 2 — ENGLISH TANKARDS (flat lidded type (1665-1704))
Flat topped lids whose brims have a serrated overhang in front are characteristic of English pewter tankards from the days of Charles I through the age of Queen Anne. Drums, or bodies, are plain—without a fillet. In these examples the finial of the lower curve is a leaf, fish-tail or shield form.



Fig. 3 — ENGLISH TANKARD (flat lidded type)
This photograph well shows the overhanging brim.

Instances of this use of early types are found, not only in tankards, but in American plates and porringers; for, in so far as I can gather from Mr. Kerfoot's illustrations, not a single plate is known of any type other than that in vogue in England from about 1700 to about 1750. This is what I describe as *Type 5* in my article on *Rim-types of Pewter Plates* in the *Connoisseur* for February, 1919. It is known by its *single-reeded rim*. This rim would seem to characterize American plates in whatever period they were made.

Turning to porringers, the same consid-

erations apply; for we find the same types being made by the American workers that were made in England a century earlier. Perhaps I may here be permitted to dispel a wrong impression which has been conveyed to Mr. Kerfoot. In referring to certain of these articles in the center of page 27 of his book, he says,

The English are said to have applied the name *porringer* to a two-handled dish of similar design (sometimes called a *caudle cup*) much used both there and on the Continent, but little seen in later days in America; and to have called what we know as a *porringer*, a *bleeding-dish*.

Who or what ever gave rise to this impression was responsible for disseminating a very great fallacy; for I have yet to see either a porringer or a bleeding-dish of undoubted English origin with *two* handles. These utensils invariably had one handle, similar to the types illustrated in Figure 18, and elsewhere,

throughout Mr. Kerfoot's volume. The only difference between the porringer and the bleeding-dish, or blood-porringer, is the presence in the latter of horizontal lines engraved around the interior of the bowl and with figures up the side, rising, of course, from the bottom, 2-4-6-8-10 and so forth to indicate to the surgeon how many ounces of blood he had taken from the patient.

A further point worthy of special note is found on page 80 where Mr. Kerfoot, in speaking of a plate, says:

It is one of the very few American plates that I have ever seen finished with the hammer after the method prescribed by the London Society of Pewterers.

One is glad to have it on so high an authority, and after an examination of many thousands of specimens, that,



Fig. 4 — ENGLISH TANKARD
(double domed lid)

A type which for a few years ran with the earlier flat lidded type and eventually superseded it.

Fig. 5 — ENGLISH TANKARD
(double domed lid)

This type with the fillet, or band, around the body came into use during the first quarter of the eighteenth century. The form of the handle is closely similar to that shown in previous illustrations.

although the practice of hammer finishing was rare in America, it was not unknown.

Collectors' Narrowmindedness

And now I come to a point often heavily stressed: the insistence upon collecting only that which is old and rare, as opposed to the collecting of anything which is attractive, regardless of its age, provenance, or rarity.

The great majority of collectors, it would seem, find themselves eventually in the former grouping; but there is an ever increasing group among the younger generation of discerning collectors which is already beginning to look, not alone for those items which are costly and rare, but for pieces the lines of which compel admiration for their inherent beauty of form, regardless of such considerations as age, rarity, price, and whatnot.

The craze for old pewter being such as it is, I am convinced that the day is approaching when anything which can claim for itself beauty of form and suitability for its purpose will become very difficult to acquire; for we find such pieces being absorbed, not only by lovers of old pewter, but by those to whom the metal appeals for purposes of decoration alone, without undue concern for the idea of *period* as such.

This being so, it is high time that collectors began to appreciate some of these less costly pieces while the opportunity for acquiring them still exists.

A few examples will serve to illustrate my point:

Figure 8 shows, to my mind, a very beautiful lidded tankard, from about 1790, valued today at anything from two to five pounds. Figure 9 shows—also to my mind—a by no means beautiful un-lidded tankard some hundred years



Fig. 6 — ENGLISH TANKARD

A typical George II example, with double domed lid, fillet about the body and bulbous termination of the handle. The tendency to place the lower point of attachment of the handle well down toward the base molding of the tankard is worth observing.

earlier, and worth, say, anything up to twenty pounds or even more. Why? Certainly beauty of line is not the deciding factor in assessing the value of these two pieces; for would not the late piece be the more pleasant of the two as a daily companion? Is it not far more beautiful to look upon?

It is, in any case, a piece well worth the attention of the young collector; and is, I can assure my readers, by no



Fig. 7 — ENGLISH BALUSTER
MEASURE (1720-50)

In this the advent of a bulbous termination of the handle is observable.



Fig. 8 — ENGLISH LIDDED PEWTER
TANKARD (c. 1790)

A beautifully proportioned piece, of great refinement.

means despised by its present owner, Walter Churcher, who is one of those advanced collectors who can see beauty in later pieces.

Figure 10 shows us the familiar Normandy flagon, which also stands valued—and apparently condemned thereby—at a few pounds. Has it beauty of line? Most decidedly it has. Is it keenly sought after by collectors? No. Why not? I cannot say!

Figure 11 shows what is, perhaps, one of the most beautiful types which ever was made in pewter. It is not common; it is Scottish, and this particular piece is dated about 1780, though the type lasted from about 1700 until well into the nineteenth century. Its lack of popularity must surely be attributable to this latter "crime." To be sure, it is not looked down upon as are some of the other pieces illustrated; but, if beauty of line were the dominating concern, there would not be a collection in the world without an example of this flagon until the supply became exhausted.

Figure 12 shows what even a beautiful type can be brought down to by the addition of features for which it was never intended. Here, inherent beauty of line is



Fig. 9 — ENGLISH PEWTER TANKARD
(c. 1700)

A type less graceful in all respects than that shown in Figure 8; but viewed by most collectors as more valuable.

ruined by the addition of an utterly impossible spout and a lid finial which, though quite good in its way, had been better omitted. One would have no occasion to ask why collectors should pass such a piece as this, for it carries on its face the marks of its own condemnation, though the type does occur amplified by spouts and finials which add to, rather than detract from, its beauty.

Figure 13 depicts a piece which—as we say in England when we desire to convey the idea of cheapness—is almost “given away with a pound of tea.” It will be noted that it is very similar to many of the pitchers illustrated in Mr. Kerfoot’s book. Is this piece devoid of beauty of line and fine proportion? Quite the contrary, or so it seems to me; and yet it is one of the most neglected types in England.

Figure 14 illustrates an English lidded tankard of very pleasing form, with open thumbpiece, dated 1775, and valued at a few pounds; whereas a practically identical piece but with solid thumbpiece, some thirty-five to forty years older will bring four or five times the price. Why? It certainly is not beauty which, in this instance, settles the value, for to all intents and purposes the two pieces are the same thing to look upon.

Surely the answer to all these queries is obvious, is it not? Collectors as a whole are not governed so much by the esthetic claims of pewter as they are by its rarity. Hence a longer price might easily be obtained for the faked monstrosity shown in Figure 15 than for any other of the pieces here illustrated!

Figure 16 illustrates two sets of late Scottish measures—that on the upper line being of the Glasgow type, and that on the lower the Edinburgh type. None of these pieces is earlier than about 1820; they are not by any means devoid of beauty and eminent fitness for their purpose; neither are they easy to obtain in the larger and smaller sizes today; but, except by Scotch collectors and a few others, they are not collected. Again, why?

In Figure 17 is shown another very beautiful type which has so far striven in vain to find acceptance among English collectors. No one can gainsay the fact that such measures are full of charm; but, although many of them bear the marks of English makers, they were produced for use in the Channel Island of Guernsey. One can only assume that it is for this foolish reason alone that such pieces are relatively taboo.

It will not surprise me in the least if, when the time comes that these and the other pieces here illustrated become better appreciated, as come it will, we find that our American cousins have taken time by the forelock and cleared the market of such types.

Is it not time, especially for those who are only beginning

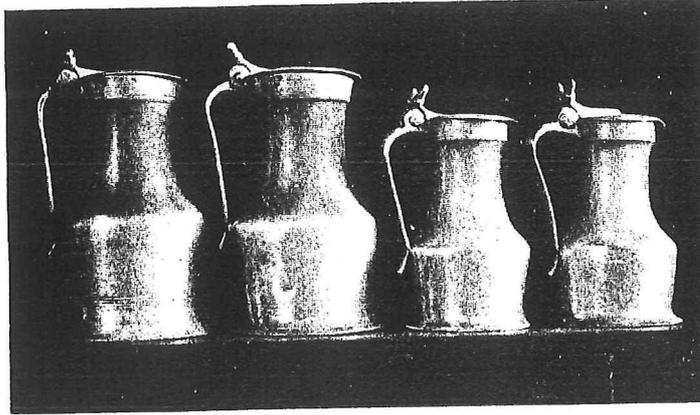


Fig. 10 — NORMANDY PEWTER FLAGONS

Note the acorn thumbpieces, the overhanging brim of the lid, the sturdiness of general proportions. The pieces are typical of their kind and worth having for those who view pewter as pewter and not as a national monument.

to taste the sweetness of collecting, to pause a moment and survey the whole position. What do we find? A certain number of pieces of great rarity, some extremely beautiful, others equally ugly, are in the hands of a few collectors who love them, some for their beauty, some for their rarity. There are not enough of such pieces to go round, and they never come into the open market; but they change hands, as occasion arises within the limits of present own-

erships, very readily, very quickly, and at an ever enhanced price.

Is your policy to be that of sitting on the fence gnashing your teeth with envy and waiting in the vain hope that some day some of these pieces may be yours? Or, will you take your choice from the many other equally beautiful, if slightly less rare, examples which can be acquired at fairly reasonable prices?

If I might presume to advise, I would say, buy anything today which you feel will give you constant and daily pleasure; put aside considerations of age as a primary test, and dare to pin your faith to beauty of line alone. Your collection will not long want for admirers if you maintain

for it *against all temptations* the standard of beauty which you have set up.

Confusing the Crown Mark on Pewter

On page 193 of ANTIQUES for April, 1925, the writer of *Some Early American Pewter* in his discussion of the pewter plate marked I. W. with rose and

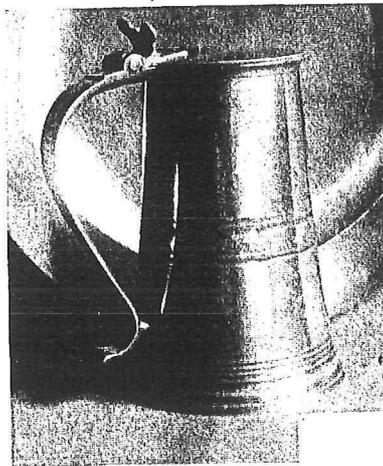


Fig. 11 — SCOTTISH PEWTER
(c. 1780)

The type, shown above, was produced well through the eighteenth century and into the nineteenth, a fact which may account for its lack of prestige among collectors.

Fig. 12 — SCOTTISH PEWTER

The type at the right illustrates what may happen to the best of basic forms. This specimen might have endured the addition of a huge spout, but not in conjunction with the insignificant and inappropriate lid button.





Fig. 13 — A NEGLECTED TYPE
A covered jug of comfortable proportions, good metal and genuinely pleasing aspect, but not fully recognized as "collector" material.

Figure 7, page 4, of my *National Types of Old Pewter*, I illustrate an English rose and crown with the maker's initials at the sides. But the crown in this instance is the *Royal Crown of England* with arches, mounds and cross over all, whereas on the *I. W.* plate the rose is surmounted by a Duke's coronet, which is not a crown in any way.*

To my mind there is no doubt that the plate discussed is an American piece. There are several other ship marks on British pewter, besides that of Maxwell of Glasgow (not London, as Mr. Kerfoot has it), but none of them bears any resemblance to the one illustrated in ANTIQUES. Moreover, it is quite contrary to anything within the range of my experience to find so many marks on a British example. To be sure, one may find five marks, but not after this manner.

The Untrustworthy Nutmeg

In the May, 1925, number of ANTIQUES,† one who signs himself *G. A. R. Goyle* explains the huge ball thumbpieces on German pewter drinking vessels by observing that such balls were hollow, and frequently consisted of two parts, the upper one of which was removable by unscrewing. The hollow space between upper and nether hemispheres was

*Mr. Cotterell's shrewd analysis of Mr. Lawton's *I. W.* plate is particularly interesting in view of the recent discovery of a John Will, father of Henry Will, the early New York pewterer. There seems no good reason to question that Mr. Lawton's plate, now, by the way, transferred to the collection of Louis G. Myers, of New York, was made by this John Will. A still more remarkable specimen of pewter by the same maker will be illustrated in a subsequent number of ANTIQUES.—ED.

†Vol. VII, p. 244.

occupied, so *G. A. R. Goyle* states, by a piece of nutmeg, whose grated fibre, he further observes, was considered by the thirsty to add potency to the foaming draught.

observes that this rose and crown would in themselves ordinarily be accepted as evidence of the English source of the plate. This is an error. In

occupied, so *G. A. R. Goyle* states, by a piece of nutmeg, whose grated fibre, he further observes, was considered by the thirsty to add potency to the foaming draught.

The query flashes across my mind, prompted maybe by the choice of a pseudonym, whether or not this *G. A. R. Goyle* is indulging in a huge game of "leg pulling"! However, if he is, I am willing to respond; for I deem it the duty of any seeker after truth in antiquarian matters to delve into mares'-nests or to follow any old wild goose rather than leave one iota to chance. Presuming, therefore, that the correspondent confines his sense of humor to his pseudonym, I would say that he opens up a line of investigation quite new to me; for I had never even thought of looking for the receptacle to which he refers.

Since I have thought of it, however, the few pieces I have examined do not unscrew; neither could they. Moreover, I have seen many of them, in years gone by, of which the upper half was missing, for of course, being hollow, they were always made in two halves; but no trace of the thread of a screw has remained on the edge of the remaining half. Otherwise I have faith enough in my powers of observation to feel sure I should have noted it and sought for the reason of its being there.

However, the correspondent has raised a point of interest, and maybe a new clue to a



Fig. 14 — ENGLISH LIDDED TANKARD (1775)
The form is agreeable and the value by no means insignificant; but were the thumbpiece solid instead of open, the piece would be older, rarer, and considerably more precious.

clearer understanding of the import of the "overpowering" ball.

Like Father, Like Son

With regard to the two porringers bearing *D. Melvill's* mark, Figure 1 of *Some Early American Pewter** There are many instances

*ANTIQUES, Vol. VII, p. 192.

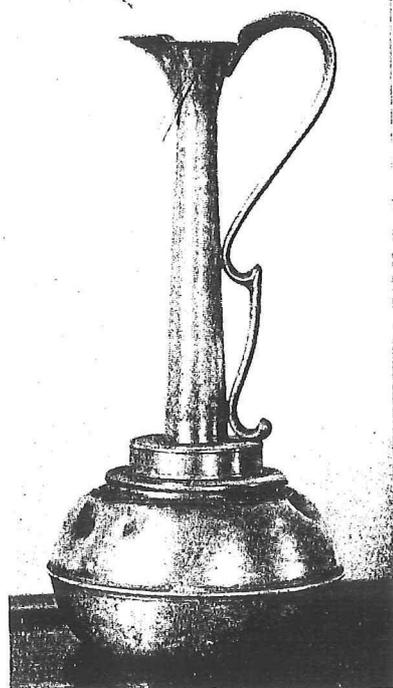


Fig. 15 — A PEWTER NIGHTMARE
A piece of hybrid tinkering that might deceive the inexperienced and unwary; for, since even the most hardened miscreant could scarcely do such a thing twice, it is providentially rare.

amongst English pewterers, of a son's continuing to use the mark of a predecessor. Surely the reason is not far to seek: the predecessor's mark would already be well known, and would carry with it a measure of good will which it would be nothing short of rank folly to discard. What business concern today would dream of changing a well known trade-mark upon the demise of the head of the company? The addition of the initials of the successor, in this instance T(homas) M(elvill) is also occasion for no surprise.

Pap Boats and Biberons in Pewter

The pap boat is familiar in pewter, usually of the same plain type as in Figure 1, page 301, of the December, 1924, issue of ANTIQUES. We have nothing to serve as a reliable guide in dating such pieces as have come down to us in pewter, but the period usually ascribed to them is the last quarter of the eighteenth and the first quarter of the nineteenth centuries; though this dating is based upon the knowledge borrowed from similar vessels in silver.

The pap boat type with the forepart covered as illustrated on page 301, in ANTIQUES, December, 1924, and page 246, for May, 1925, is unknown to me in pewter. May it have been used solely for children and the open topped ones for invalids?

The biberon is a vessel, the use of which for invalids is, I think, open to question;—a point of view which finds support



Fig. 16 — SCOTTISH MEASURES (c. 1820)
The upper line displays the Glasgow type; the lower, the Edinburgh type. These are pleasing, and by no means common; but they are chiefly prized by Scotch collectors, who seem to be like other collectors in being possessed of national prejudices.

believe, the bracket fixed to the sideboard or other piece of furniture.

The idea of having the inner tube going right down to the very bottom of the vessel was, doubtless, two fold; first, to prevent the child from consuming dust or any foreign body which might by chance fall on the surface of the water; second, to ensure the slow consumption of the contents, which, owing to the smallness of the orifice, had to be sucked out rather than drunk, a necessary precaution with children who run indoors hot from their play.

The very construction of the vessel implies something in the nature of a long armed bracket for suspension.

In pewter it is a distinctly Swiss type, though I am unable to say definitely that it was totally unknown in the adjoining districts of southern Germany and southeastern France.

From its nature, massiveness, and the presence of the large iron handle, it seems totally unsuited for invalids' use.

*Vol. VII, p. 246.



Fig. 17 — CHANNEL ISLAND PEWTER
Though many of these Channel Island examples bear the touch mark of English pewterers, their form is very specifically different from that of English pewter; and they are placed in a different and less highly prized category.

