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Cannibalism and Calvinism - these were forces that destroyed so much of Scottish pewter. Indifference to the crafts took care of the rest even if some found its way into museums, largely to be stored out of sight. The major part drifted down to the London salesrooms to be carried abroad on a tide that would never return. The recorded craft had begun in the 16th century. It died in the 19th, assassinated by substitutes of lower cost.

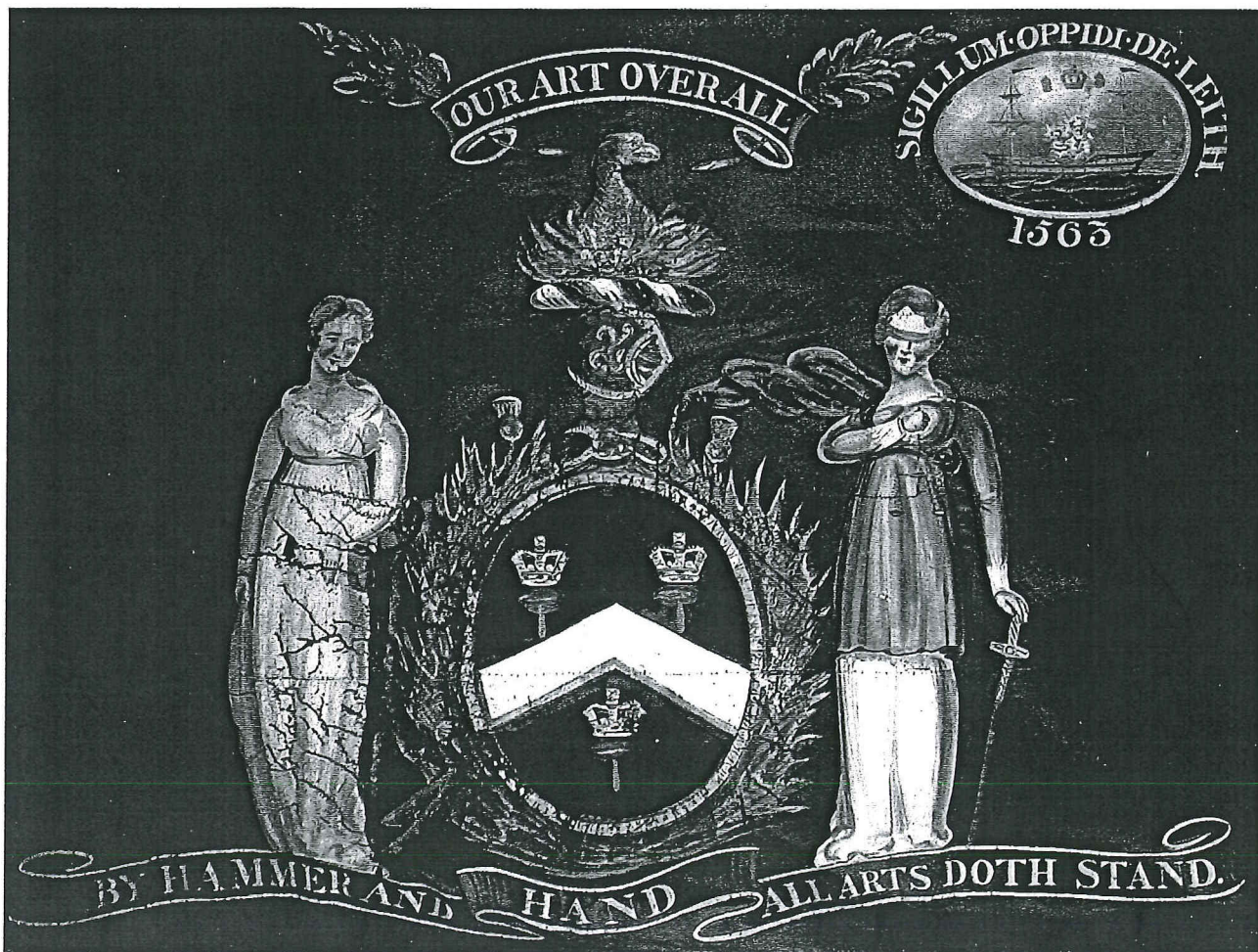


The Stirling Corn measure c. 1708

The Pewter of Scotland

Alex Neish

Flag of the Hammermen of Leith, 1822. (City of Edinburgh Council/SCRAN)



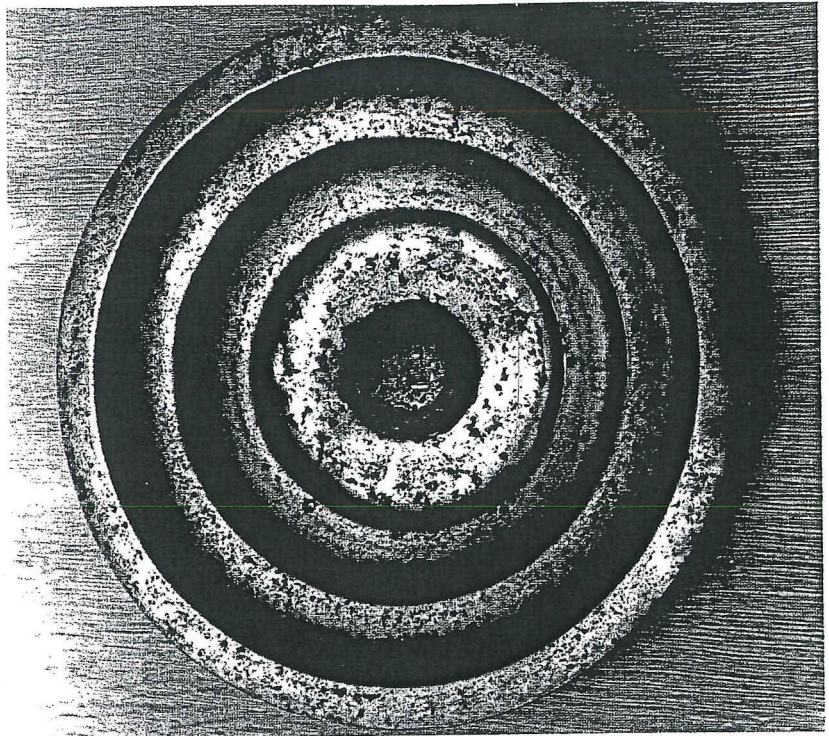
The cannibalism was inevitable. Pewter's main ingredient of tin was foreign to Scotland and had to be imported. By 1661 the price of pewter north of the Border was practically double that of London and Charles II was banning the export of "broken pewter" in an attempt to overcome the tin shortage. The older pieces were melted down by craftsmen and tinkers to become the raw material for another generation

Calvinism did its part. As the national religious struggles ebbed and flowed, the pewter vessels that had graced the communion tables were destroyed or stolen - like the important pair of St. Giles' altar candlesticks entrusted to the clergy in 1559 for safe keeping and never seen again. By the time the 20th century arrived the established Church was selling off its historic treasures to finance repairs and the General Assembly failed to generate any photographic record until it was far too late.

The Scottish pewterers deserved better than this. They had faced the historic poverty of the country and its almost impossible early communications that even in the 18th century saw travellers sailing from Edinburgh to London to avoid the discomfort of a week's stagecoach journey. Sir William Brereton visited Edinburgh in the 17th century and wrote "The sluttishness and nastiness of the people is such that I cannot omit the particularizing thereof... their houses, and hall, and kitchens, have such a noisome taste, a savour and that so strong as it doth offend you as soon as you come within their wall. I never came to my own lodging in Eden borough, or went out, but I was constrained to hold my nose or use wormwood, or some such scented plant...their pewter pots, wherein they bring wine and water, are furred within, that it would loathe you to touch anything that comes out of them."

Dire poverty

This was not an exaggeration. According to one historian Scotland in the 18th century "was in dire poverty - a famishing people, a stagnant trade, rude manufacture and profitless industries." Just about everything had to be imported and there is record of the import from London for the use of the King at Holyrood of eight dozen pewter vessels, a hundred dozen



The Weir rosewater dish c.1603 for Holyrood Palace

wooden cups, and 20 casks of red wine. Henry Arnott's 1779 *History of Edinburgh* quotes the 16th century historian Holinshed as writing of the natives "They eat mostly out of wooden dishes, which they call trenplates, used wooden or horn spoons, and drank out of wooden cups. To see silver, except in monasteries or cathedrals, was a miracle, and even pewter vessels were esteemed so rare and costly as to be used only upon Christmas and other high festivals.

In addition hordes of beggars roamed the land as they had from the 15th century onwards. A 1402 Statute of Perth prohibited "this begging and harbouring on kirkmen or husbandmen" unless those between 14 and 70 were unable to "win their living oth-

erways" - in which case they were to be licensed with a token or badge. 1449 saw another attempt to control the problem with the "away of...masterful beggars." They were to be imprisoned or put in irons, and those with nothing to live on "their ears are to be nailed to the bone or any other tree and then cut off." If they still returned they were to be hanged.

Inside this national context there were two primary impacts on the pewterers. The first was that from the 16th century onwards they joined the other metal-working crafts to form the Incorporations of Hammermen that formalised the earlier tradition of mutual help amongst the craftsmen. The pewterers, like others, looked after retired members and their wives,

Three of the rare thistle measures c. 1850





(above) A Galbraith jug from Glasgow.
 (below) 3 unlidded tappit hens



awarding pensions, renting out mort clothes to cover the rude coffins, apprenticing surviving children, and so on. It was a private and coveted forerunner of the modern Welfare State. As early as 1727 the desire to participate in these benefits saw the Glasgow Incorporation admit its first "pendicle" or associate member. He was accepted without any proof of metalworking ability - and on condition he would not work at any trade. In 1658 and 1674 the Perth Incorporation of Hammermen had already led the way on this front.

The second impact of the national poverty on the pewterers was to see

the expensive craft moulds being passed down from father to son. A widow was entitled to use both them and her husband's touchmarks until better times appeared. There are examples of this in Edinburgh, and across the country others of Incorporations buying the moulds of deceased members to benefit their families. This in fact was one of the factors that allowed the forms of Scottish pewter to survive far longer than those in England. It led to a simplicity of design and the repetition of formats for two centuries or longer, the most notable being the solidity of the north-eastern pot-bellied meas-

ures with their Dutch influence and then the unique tappit hen, the earliest example of which was found in a 1669 Edinburgh excavation and is struck with a maker's mark that appears on the Edinburgh Touchplates now in the National Museum of Scotland. Curiously Sir Walter Scott in *Guy Mannering* described Edinburgh lawyers going to drinking dens where they sat "birling" until they had "a fair tappit hen" of claret under their belt, were "both motionless and speechless" before being miraculously revived to write their legal papers.

The second half of the 17th century saw the appearance of the lavers and flagons that were to be used both domestically and for religious purposes. Plates again served both purposes. The smaller ones tended to be domestic and the larger chargers to have their place in the church. With the early 19th century came stylistic innovation with the unique Edinburgh and Glasgow baluster measures and the uncluttered purity of the jugs of the Galbraith family from Glasgow.

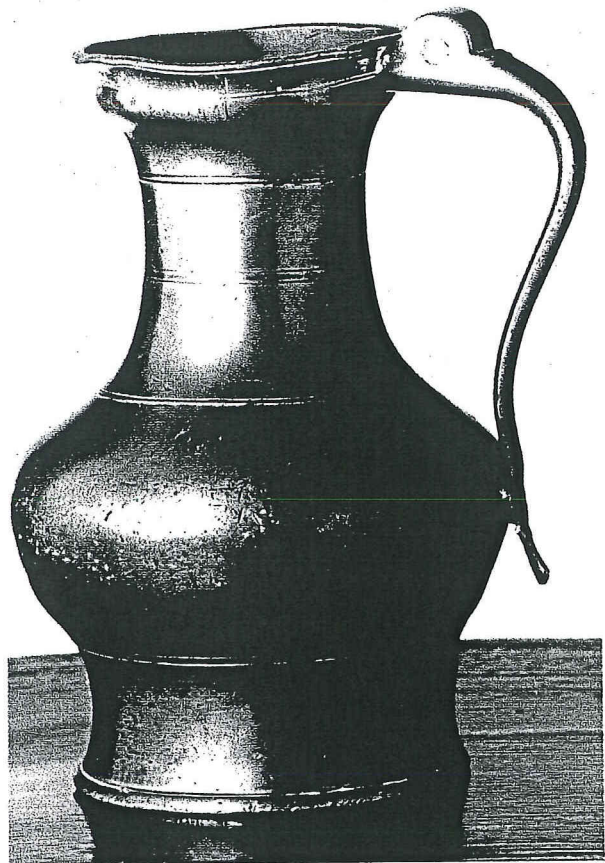
Most famous of all are the extremely rare Scottish thistle measures from the mid-19th century. These were ordered to be destroyed but not because of their false capacity as is generally believed. Most in fact are legally certified. The problem was simply that they tended to retain part of the liquid in the belly. Doomed, however, they were and their resulting rarity makes them one of the most expensive pieces of Scottish pewter even when they come from a period when the craft was moribund and being overtaken by china.

Rosewater Dishes and Pirlie Pigs

It would, however, be quite wrong to think that Scottish pewter was limited inside traditional guidelines to a handful of formats. Stirling around 1708 developed in various sizes its unique corn measures bearing the town's seal of a wolf upon a rock. With their disproportionate handles they were not attractive, but formed part of the post-Union campaign to unite the weights and measures of Scotland and England. The greatest pieces of Scottish pewter, however, were not functional in the limited sense. They respected no guidelines and rank with the best of anything created in the United Kingdom or Europe over the past five centuries.



A Scots pint tappit hen, one of the only two known with the palmette thumbpiece



An unlidded pot belly measure from north-east Scotland 18th century

The first is a pair of 17- ins. diameter rosewater dishes made around 1603 for the Palace of Holyroodhouse by Edinburgh's Richard Weir. They bear in the well a copper and enamel boss with the arms of James VI and I and the dishes fall in terraced tiers in a uniquely Scottish format. They were lost for close on a quarter of a century until one was bought back from Belgium by the National Museum of Scotland. Soon afterwards the second and better example was acquired at a London auction and is now in the Museum of British Pewter at Stratford-upon-Avon.

The other unique Scottish pewter creation is the Dundee Pirlie Pig - the name given to a child's ceramic money box.. This example was a collection box for fines imposed on Council members for non-attendance at meetings. It was recovered from a scrap-heap in 1839 and a Council resolution of 2nd March 1602 states:

2 Martil 1602

The provest bailleis and counsall hes concludit that ye haill p(er)sonis of ye counsail that sall be absent upon ye ordinare dayis &



A run of the smallest lidded tappit hens

h(ou)ris sall pay xl.d precislie for ilkdayis absend by all u(the)r penalteis (con)tenit in ye former CTIS. And that the p(ro)vest w(i)t(h) his awne (cons)ent sall ilk tyme pay ten sh(illings) & ilk. baillie 6s 8d.

In other words absent ordinary members were to pay forty pence (i.e. 3 shillings and four pence), the provost ten shillings, and each baillie six shillings and eight pence - all inside a disciplinary scheme almost as unique as the Pirlie Pig itself.

The fines box has a melon-like shape some 6 ins. x 3 ins. It is covered

by engraved lattice work upon which are raised chains and crescents. Imposed between these are four large circles with shields. One carries the royal banner of Scotland surrounded by the legend "Feare God and Obay the King" - plus the inscription J6R for James VI and I. A second is inscribed "Sir James Skrimzeour Prowest, Anno 1602 14th May," and the surrounding circle is engraved "Lord Blesse the Prowest Baulisies and Counsell of Dundi." The third shield carries the burgh's coat of arms, a pot of lilies dividing the words "Dei Don" the gift of God - as a pun on the town's name. The final circle bears the



This 'brod' in the Magdalen Chapel, Edinburgh records a donation from Walter Melvill to the Hammermen in 1700. (Scottish Reformation Society/SCRAN)

initials "PL, RE, MI, JL, WH" and "Baillies Anno 1602"

Despite the affirmation of Ingleby Wood in his *Scottish Pewter*, the box does not carry the crooked scimitar arms of Scrymgeour. This tends to suggest it was paid for by the Council itself. It would have been an expensive item - but then the commercial wealth of Dundee is apparent from its repeated sackings up to 1651.

The piece bears no touchmark to identify its maker. It is, however, significant that amongst the initials of the four bailies appears a WH who almost certainly was the William Hill who on 2 October 1599 had been appointed as the representative of the crafts on the Council. As such it is extremely unlikely he would have countenanced commissioning non-guild labour as the burghs of Scotland developed precisely to advance and protect the interests of their craftsmen. Another mystery is who did the engraving which at that time was quite unknown in Scotland.

The Edinburgh Hammermen

When James Moyes gave up his business in Edinburgh in 1880, Scot-

tish pewtering was dead, its massive solidity destroyed by fragile china. It did, however, leave behind these supreme examples of great craftsmanship. It was the end of another *auld sang*. Even so it was only in 1907 that the English architect, Lindsay Ingleby Wood, was to publish his *Scottish Pewterware and Pewterers* which pre-dated all the classic English books on pewter. It dealt not only with the craftsmen and their creations but also with the Incorporations of Hammermen that were part of Scottish history.

These ranged from what was probably the earliest in Dunfermline to that in Edinburgh which became the most dominant as the city evolved into the nation's Capital. Its Incorporation was granted its *Seil of Cause* in 1483 before becoming incorporated in 1496. Even before this there was an altar to its patron St. Eloi in St. Giles Cathedral and this is mentioned in 1477 in a deed of Augmentacion. This was the home of the famous blue blanket of the crafts - allegedly carried by "vast numbers of Scottish mechanics" who marched to the Crusades.

The Hammermen remained there till 1558 when the Reformation brought a new direction into the national life. In 1546 the Incorporation owned nine graves in the crowned confines of St. Giles and the

physical impossibility of increasing this number convinced Michael Macquhen, an Edinburgh burgess and merchant, to endow before he died in 1537 the Magdalen Chapel and Hospital in the Cowgate, then the Capital's second most important street. His widow carried on his business - which included lending money to the Crown - and completed the Chapel where to-day she is buried.

Containing the nation's only remaining pre-Reformation stained glass, it was from its outset under the protection of the Edinburgh Incorporation of Hammermen and even today is dominated by its symbol of the crowned hammer - plus the unique boards that record the donations of individual hammermen to its upkeep.

The Reformation saw the altar of the Chapel destroyed, its sacred vessels lost for all time.

But it is now known from the diaries of one William Balfour, Purse-bearer of James, duke of Chatelherault, the second earl of Arran, that the Chapel was the home of the first General Assembly of the Church of Scotland. Balfour, who was confirmed in the Reformed Church of Scotland in 1560, represented Linton at the Assembly and recorded his presence at the meeting held in "the old chapel in the Cowgate, which had been dedicated to St. Magdalene." John Knox was also present but all of this has been ignored by the Church of Scotland.

The Incorporation of Hammermen continued at this time largely inside the Catholic faith but was immensely proud of the building. The first part of the 17th century saw a flurry of investments in what had become their meeting hall. A clock and bell-tower were added and in 1634 Thomas Weir, "peutherer", brought from Flanders at a cost of £1000 Scots a new bell bearing the Hammermen arms and the inscription "God This the Hammermen Patrons of the Magdalene Chapel." Below the dais on which the Incorporation officers took their seats were painted the coats of arms of the various crafts. It is now known that hidden under the plaster behind are others waiting to be revealed. In 1708 one Thomas Heron of the Cowgate was commissioned to make a six and a

(left) a 1786 communion laver from Bristo Church, Edinburgh
 (right) an extremely rare beaker communion cup from north-east Scotland



Scottish communion cup from the late 18th century



half foot, oak throne-like chair for the Deacon of the Hammermen with Russian leather for its seat and the back carrying in plaster the full arms of the Hammermen in colour.

The Hammermen rented the Chapel bell to neighbouring Greyfriars Church to summon the congregation. The bodies of the dead Covenanters were laid out there before a fire in the hope they might revive and in the 19th century the Chapel served as a morgue, a fact made tangible by the drab Victorian varnish that covered up the original blue painting. It also saw the founding of the Scottish Baptist Church and the Livingstone Medical Missionary Society. For all of its associations it has been deemed "arguably the most important building in Scotland." It stands as a living tribute to the importance of the Edinburgh Incorporation of Hammermen and the pewterers who led it.

The Scottish pewterers were present in the other Incorporations of Hammermen across the country. None, however, could rival Edinburgh which had another two Incorporations. That of the Canongate was granted its *Seil of Cause* in 1535 and seems to have been one of the more disorderly where "idle and disdainful speiches" were common and servants and apprentices unwilling to abandon the sins of drunkenness and "night-walking" "And will not gang to their bed in dew tyme quhairby they may be the mair abill to ryse in the morning to their Maister's work."

The other was in the now-vanished Potterow off George Square. Commonly known as Thieves' Row it housed a gypsy group working under the supervision of the Edinburgh Incorporation but regarded as the descendants of the Johnie Faw James V had believed as being of royal descent and under his patronage. Their main activity was making pottery - hence the name Potterow- and especially mugs which give rise to their makers being called with a fine double-meaning "muggers."

Alex Neish

(Photographs of pewter courtesy The Neish Collection at the Stratford-upon-Avon Harvard House Museum of British Pewter.