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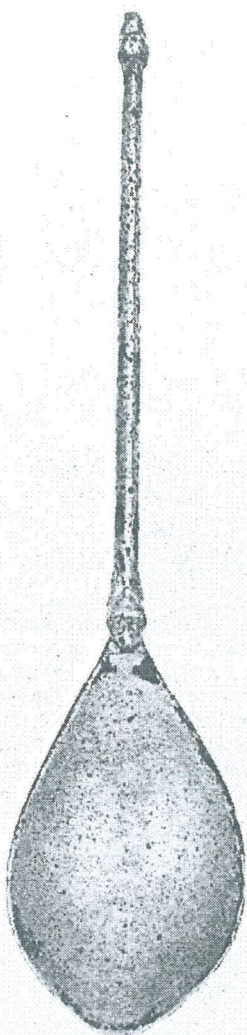


Figure 1. An early pewter spoon, c.1300, 7in. The leaf-shaped bowl is typical of the period but the animal head at the junction of the stem and bowl is unique in pewter spoons.

There are few fields of antique collecting where it is possible to acquire a representative range of examples from the 14th century to the 18th century for a relatively modest outlay. Base metal spoons is one such area and although examples from the late medieval period are rare they do appear at auction or are available from specialist dealers at intervals.

The base metal spoons which were made during this period are either in pewter or latten. Latten is a term used to describe finished articles in brass from pre-1700 and its meaning is synonymous with brass. There are extant examples in

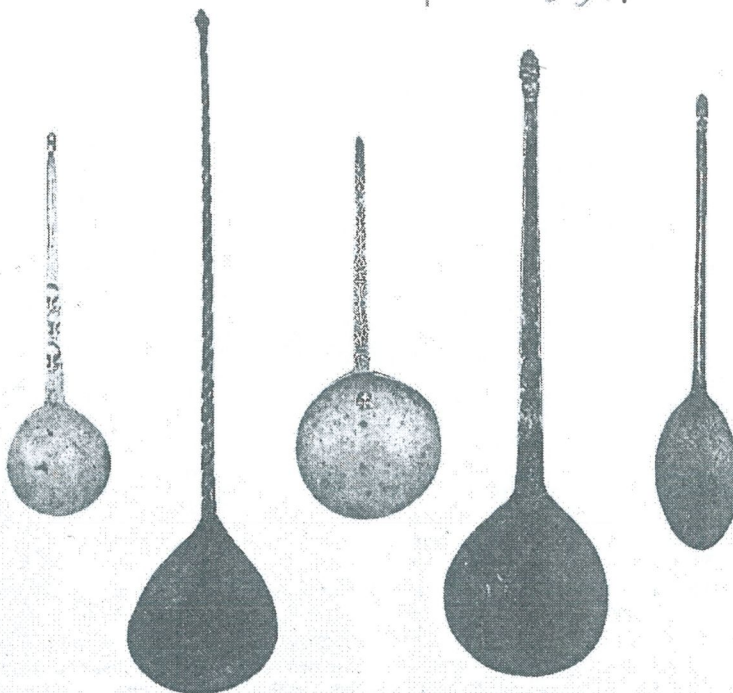


Figure 2. Latten spoons (from left to right): 14th century spoon with cut knob, 5in., £186. 14th century spoon with deep mandolin bowl, wrythen stem and cut and filed knob, probably German, 9in., £440. Low Countries 15th century spoon with flattened tapering stem having chased decoration, and crossover fleur de lys maker's mark, 5in., £275. 15th century spoon with flattened stem and wrythen knob, probably Flemish, 8in., £220. 13th century spoon with leaf bowl and proto-acorn knob, 6in., £175. (All sold November 1988).

Collecting Base Metal Spoons

by Paul Davidson

Phillips

pewter from the 13th century to the early 19th century, although the majority of known latten examples are from no later than the 17th century. The majority of surviving base metal spoons from the 15th century onwards are of pewter, probably due to the burgeoning strength and influence of the Pewterers' Guilds. Except in the very early period there are close similarities between the designs of latten and pewter spoons, both of which appear to have followed or been influenced by the main silver forms. An interesting phenomenon rarely found in other metalwork is the combination of brass and pewter to form latten knopped pewter

spoons, mainly in the 16th century. Although latten is a more durable material than pewter, the surface had to be tinned so as not to taint food, and it could not be readily melted down and re-cast as pewter could.

In the 13th and early 14th century base metal spoons tended to have a relatively flat leaf-shaped bowl ending in a point. The stem was either of round or hexagonal section and pewter examples often have a mid-stem knob, and wire support, for strengthening. Some latten examples had flat stems, which was feasible because of the greater strength of the metal. The pewter spoon in figure 1

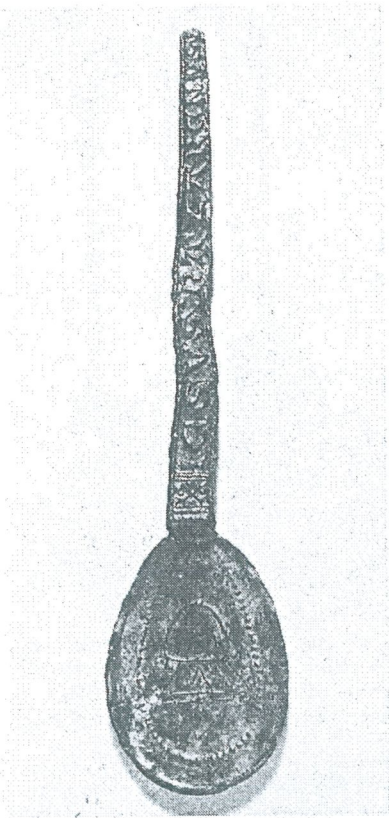


Figure 3. 14th or 15th century pewter pilgrim spoon, 4in.

is the earliest recorded example and unique in pewter because of the animal head at the junction of stem and bowl, although this feature has been noted on a few early silver and latten spoons. Early knobs on pewter spoons include the ball and the acorn, although the ball knob is known on latten spoons of this time, most of which have either a finial (tower and steeple) or acorn knob, often cut with a file. It seems likely that the latten spoons from this period found in this country had originally been imported from France or other parts of Continental Europe since there is little evidence of a brass industry in England at the time.

Apart from the leaf-shaped bowl, circular bowled spoons in both latten and pewter have been found in London and attributed to the 14th century. There are also oval and mandolin-shaped bowls found on spoons of this period but by the 15th century a deeper fig-shaped bowl had become fairly uniform.

Figure 3 shows a pewter spoon of small size (4in.) more akin in form to a pilgrim badge than to a domestic pewter spoon (between 6in. and 7in.). The cast inscription 'JESUS NAZARENUS' suggests a devotional rather than functional purpose, and the decoration on the bowl would not have survived long in regular usage.

The curved fig-shaped bowl was

Figure 4. (Left): A pewter spoon with fig-shaped bowl and diamond point, c.1500, 5½in., £231. (Right): A pewter spoon with leaf bowl and central knob to the stem (wire reinforced), c.1300, 6½in., £528.

almost universally adopted for pewter and latten spoons from the 15th century to the middle of the 17th century. The main variation is in the form of the knobs. As mentioned above, the ball knob is found on very early pewter examples whereas variations of acorn knobs are seen on early latten spoons, as are cut and filed knobs which, at their most pronounced, resemble a tower and steeple. Another form of knob which is known on early silver spoons is the diamond point which in pewter dates from the middle of the 15th century for about a hundred years (see spoon on left in figure 4). For many collectors of early base metal spoons, as with silver, those with figural knobs are the most desirable. Figure 7 illustrates 15th and 16th century pewter spoons with such knobs. The alderman knob is the only example known and the male bust appears to be wearing a chain of office. More common is the maidenhead knob, mainly found in pewter from about 1450-1600, although there are also Continental latten examples. Another version is the horned head-dress which is rarer, and, with one exception, found only in pewter. The so-called monk's head knob depicts a bust wearing a cowl, and is more likely to represent a nun. The Museum of London has a unique example of a jester head knob spoon dating from the 15th century (currently on view in its Pewter Exhibition). Examples of lion sejant knobs are known in both pewter and latten, and one shown here (figure 7, second from left) is unusual in that it is facing sideways rather than to the front (see also figure 7). Terminals in the form of apostle figures are rarer in base metal than they are in silver, and full sets are unknown. They are found both in pewter and latten, although the latter are more common. Other rare knobs found on pewter spoons include a cockerel, and variants of human heads. A difficulty in identifying the specific nature of knobs, particularly figural examples on early spoons is that the detail is often rubbed or worn, either through wear or through having been buried for hundreds of years. It seems likely that due to crude casting techniques many base metal spoons may not have been crisply detailed from new, and this has led to variations in classification of knobs, particularly pre-1600.

There are a number of non-figural knobs found in fig-shaped bowl spoons. One of the more desirable is the horse's hoof knob. The wrythen ball knob appears

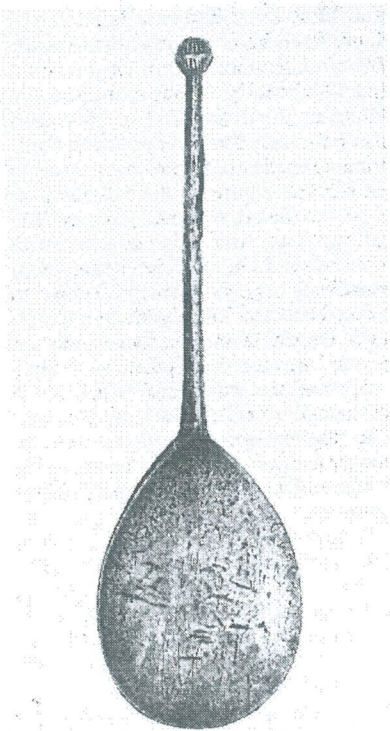


Figure 5. 15th century pewter spoon with fluted ball knob, 5½in., £242.

to date from the early 16th century and is found in latten and pewter, and there are also examples in latten on pewter stems. Although 13th and 14th century ball knobs tended to be plain, later

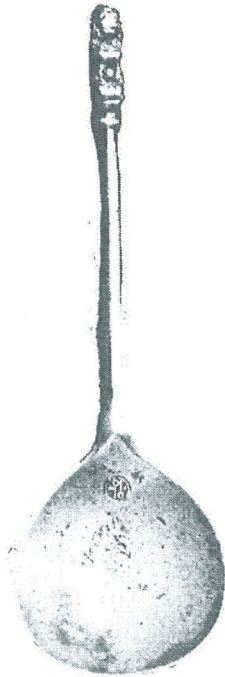


Figure 6. 17th century latten spoon, the bowl with IW touchmark, the stem with lion sejant knob, 7in., £286.

variants include those with chequered decoration known as peachstone, and the fluted ball (see figure 5). The strawberry knob is found in latten (see figure 9) more commonly than pewter. The most common type of knob on 16th and 17th century spoons is the seal-top dating mostly from 1550 to 1650, and also frequently found on pewter spoons. Some examples have a baluster beneath the seal (see figure 8), the ball of which is often fluted. Derivatives are the baluster knob which is similar but with a projecting finial, and the melon knob, found only in pewter, which is similar to a fluted ball seal knob, without the seal. Two simple terminals found only in pewter are the hexagonal, a faceted knob, and the stump end which has a substantial stem truncated at the end. The slip-top spoon occurs widely in pewter and is also found in latten, being produced from about 1500 to 1700 (see figure 8).

During the 17th century the shape of pewter and latten spoons changed considerably, in line with the evolution of silver spoons. The Puritan spoon evolved from the slip-top, the bowl becoming more egg-shaped, the stem hammered flat towards the end. The next step was for the stem to become wider, flatter and more rounded while the junction of stem and bowl was continued by a rat-tail on the back of the bowl. From this evolved the trefid or 'pied de biche' spoon, where the hammered end is notched on either side of a central node and the almost oval bowl is strengthened by the rat-tail on the reverse. Such spoons were commonplace from the Restoration period

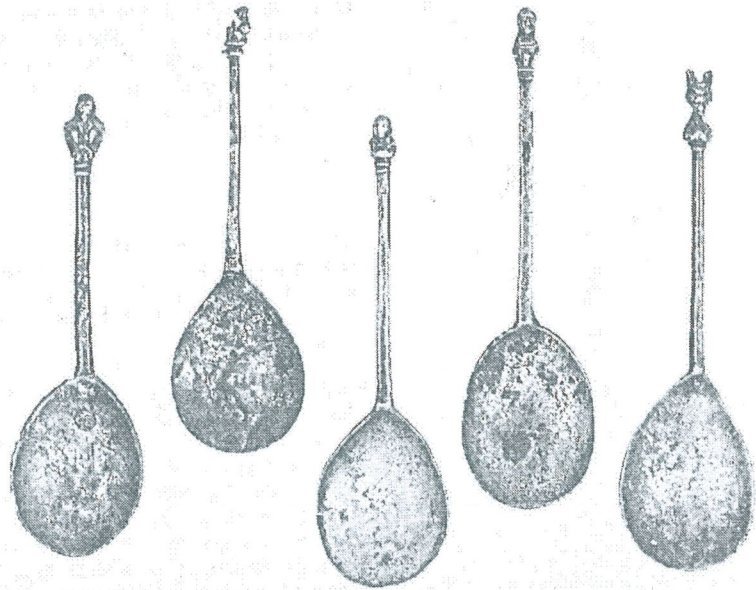


Figure 7. Pewter spoons (from left to right): 16th century spoon with alderman knob, the bowl with CR touchmark, 6in. 15th century spoon, the wire reinforced stem with lion sejant knob, 6in. An early 16th century spoon with maidenhead knob, 6¼in. An early 16th century spoon with monk's head knob, 6¼in. An early 15th century spoon with horned head-dress knob, 6¼in.

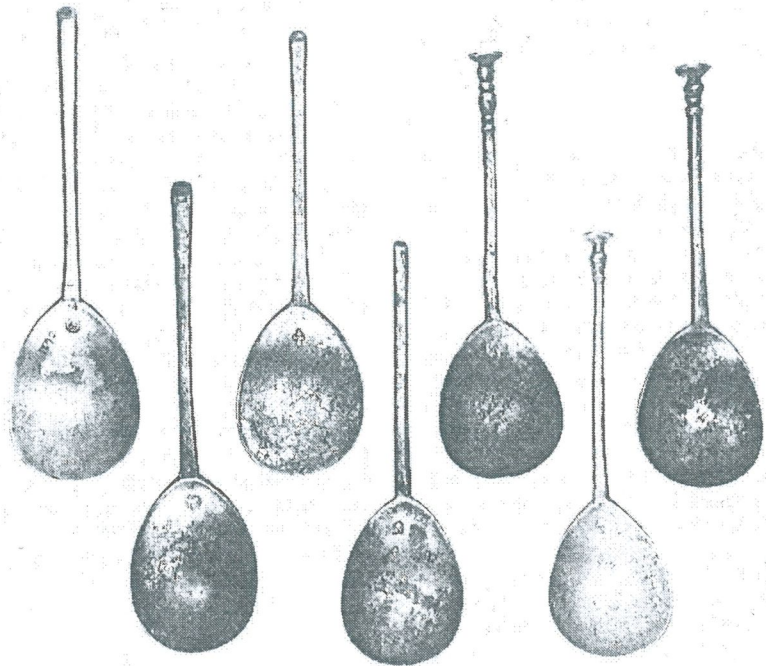


Figure 8. Latten spoons (from left to right): Slip-top, c.1600, 6¼in. (seeded rose 'touch'). Slip-top, c. 1620, 6¼in. (Tudor rose 'touch'). Slip-top, c.1600, 6¼in. (fleur de lys 'touch'). Slip-top, c.1550, 6¼in. (maker's 'touch' IW). Baluster seal-top, c.1600, 6in. (fleur de lys with crown 'touch'). Baluster seal-top, c.1570, 6¼in. (maker's 'touch' IG). Baluster seal-top, c.1570, 6in. (rubbed touch). Latten spoons of this period are usually clearly marked.

until the end of the 17th century, and largely superseded the Puritan type which had emerged circa 1640. By 1700 few latten spoons were being produced but decorated pewter spoons had become

popular. Figure 10 depicts such an example and others were produced to commemorate the coronation of William and Mary. Commemorative spoons were also produced to celebrate the coronation

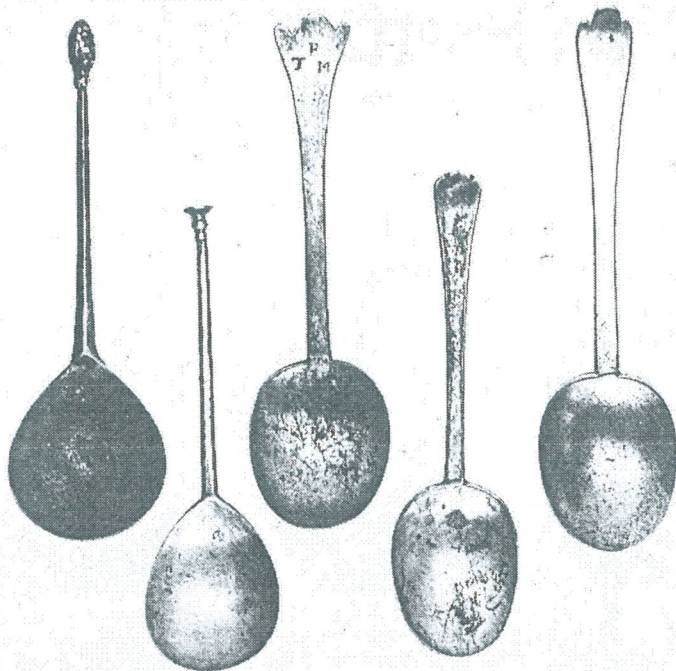


Figure 9. Latten spoons (from left to right): A mid-17th century spoon with strawberry knob, 7in. A seal-top spoon, c.1560, 6¼in. (compare the knob with the baluster seal-tops in figure 8). A latten trefid spoon, c.1680, 7in. (note owner's triad on the top). A latten Puritan spoon with cleft terminal, c.1670, 6¼in. A latten trefid spoon, c.1680, 7¼in. (note the evolution of the top from the previous example).

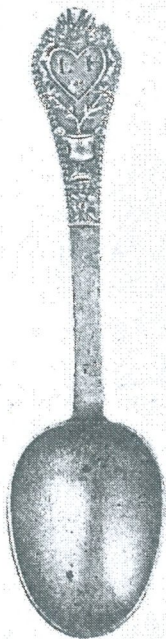


Figure 10. Decorated pewter trefid spoon, c.1680.

of Queen Anne, some having lace-work decoration around the rat-tail. The tradition was continued at the time of the marriage of George III and Queen Charlotte.

During the early part of the 18th century the bowl became more elongated and the terminal evolved to a wavy-end or dog-nose, and later a rounded end. Figure 11

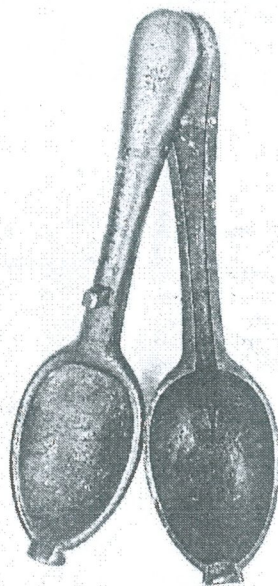


Figure 11. 18th century bronze spoon mould, 8in.

shows a bronze mould for the casting of round end spoons in the 18th century and the rat-tail for the bowl is clearly visible. This was the last stage in the evolution of pewter spoons and, as pewter was generally superseded by other materials, marks the end of collectors' interest, with the exception of the commemorative spoons referred to above.

Base metal spoons from about 1500 often bear a maker's stamp in the bowl. Hilton Price made a comprehensive study and listing of such marks and there are some records of pewter spoonmakers, particularly after the first touchplate of the Pewterers' Company. Certain makers produced different designs and this is helpful in comparative dating of different types of knob. Trefid spoons frequently bear an owner's touchmark, or 'touch', on the front of the stem end and such spoons tend to bear maker's marks on the reverse of the stem (see figure 9, middle).

There are several factors which can determine the value of base metal spoons. Above all, a collector who desires a particularly rare example might pay substantially more than the logical market price. Most surviving pre-17th century base metal spoons have been excavated, as have many later examples, since, unlike silver spoons, they would not have been considered worthy of safe-keeping. Relative condition is of course still a determinant of value but rarity can override this. The early pewter spoon on the right in figure 4 was recently sold for £528 despite its twisted stem and pierced bowl. A latten spoon of similar age in better condition (figure 2, right) only realised £175. In this case the greater general interest by collectors in pewter rather than latten spoons may also have been a determinant. Pre fig-shaped bowl spoons are so rare that it is difficult to generalise about values. The rarest early pewter spoons in good condition could be worth a four figure sum. The rarer knobs of fig-shaped pewter spoons, such as maidenheads, are worth between £300 and £500 depending on condition, whereas examples of ball knobs and diamond point knobs in reasonable condition have recently sold for between £200 and £250. A latten seal knob pewter spoon recently fetched £330 at auction. Latten seal-top spoons from the 16th and 17th century can be obtained for about £120-£150 whereas a lion sejant knob spoon of the same period from the Franklin collection fetched £300. Plain slip-top spoons should cost no more than £100 and Puritan spoons and plain trefids should be available for around £50. However, decorated trefid and dog-nose pewter spoons with royal portraits are likely to cost between £200 and £400 depending on condition.

On an investment note, the spoon illustrated in figure 2 far right had realised £132 in October 1981, the increase of £40 suggesting that this is not a field for the speculative investor.

Bibliography

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Hilton Price, F.G., *Old Base Metal Spoons*, Batsford, 1908.