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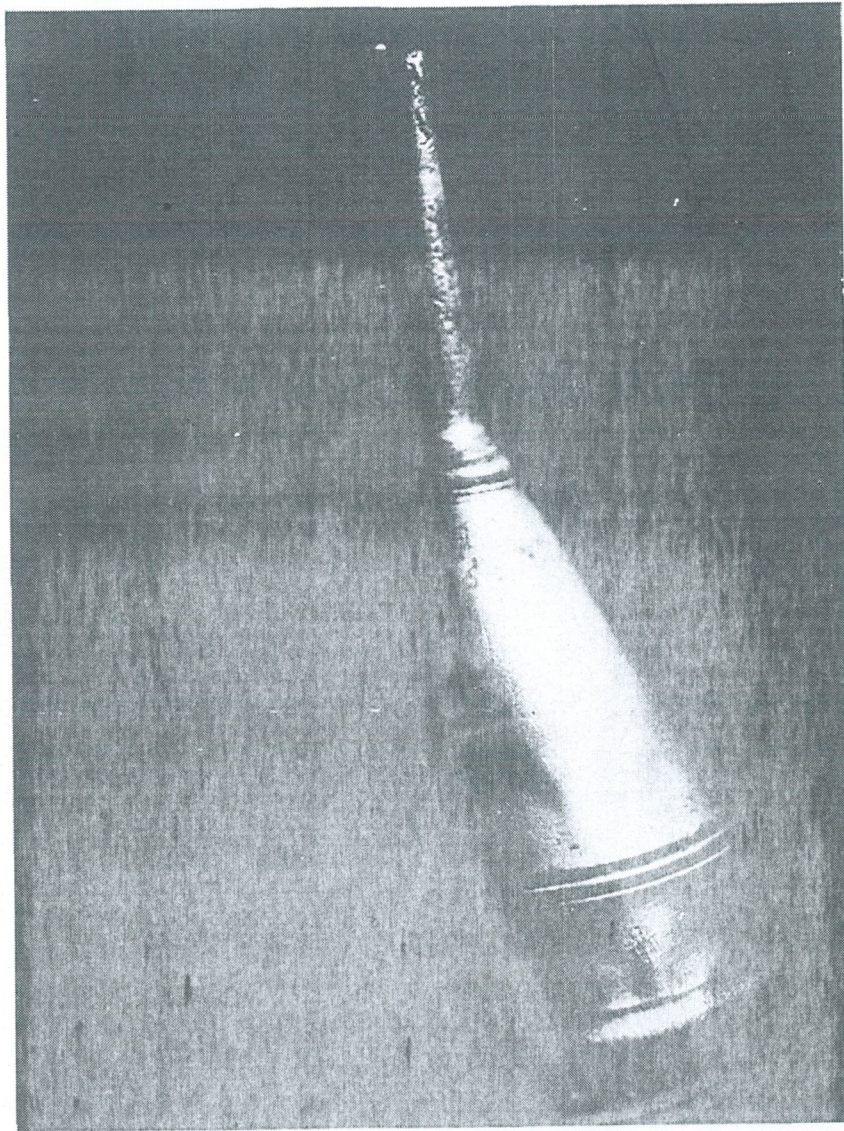
Concerning the Pewtering Bassetts

By H. V. BUTTON

The following observations imply some familiarity with the late J. B. Kerfoot's invaluable book *American Pewter*. For the convenience of the reader, however, certain of the *F. B.* touches illustrated in that volume have been here reproduced. For permission to use Mr. Kerfoot's original photographs, ANTIQUES gratefully acknowledges its indebtedness to Mrs. Annie Haight Kerfoot of Freehold, New Jersey. — *The Editor.*

MR. KERFOOT'S volume *American Pewter* mentions two Bassetts, Francis and Frederick, and illustrates their respective marks. The marks which can be attributed to Frederick are fairly numerous, there being, in addition to the touches with the name spelled out and the *New York* touch in a fan-shaped device, four, and possibly five, different *F. B. in-circle* touches; namely, Kerfoot Figures 45, 45A, 46, 46A and 49, if indeed this last touch be from a different die than 45A. This may or may not be true, since it is hard to be positive on the evidence of the cuts alone, and I have been unable to assemble, for comparison, examples of pewter bearing these several touches. However, the question as to whether there are four or five different *F. B. in-circle* touches is not important for the purposes of this discussion.

Coming now to the known marks of Francis Bassett, we have only the two touches illustrated by Mr. Kerfoot, in Figure 44. One or two other pewter pieces have come to light bearing the *F. B. with-passant-lion-in-oval* touch; but examples of Francis' work remain of the first order of rarity.



Mr. Myers, in his book *Some Notes on American Pewterers*, gives us considerable information on the pewtering Bassetts. Briefly summarized, it appears that a Francis and a John Bassett, cousins, were making pewter in New York in the 1720's or 1730's. This John was the father of another Francis, and of Frederick. As to John, Mr. Myers states, "Examples of his work are known to exist, but I have not succeeded in locating any." John's touch is here illustrated; but, before proceeding with comments on the man's work and its relation to that of his sons, it may be well to briefly dwell on the question of the two Francis.

The fact that there was a Francis, cousin of John, making pewter at some

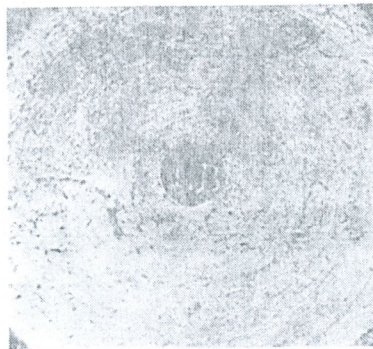


Fig. 1 — PEWTER FUNNEL BY JOHN BASSETT (1732-1761)

Marked with the initials *J. B.* in a circle, with fleur-de-lis above and below.

From the collection of Mrs. Richard S. Quigley

Fig. 2 — THE JOHN BASSETT TOUCH

Photographed from the interior bottom of a pewter beaker.

From the collection of Leslie I. Laughlin

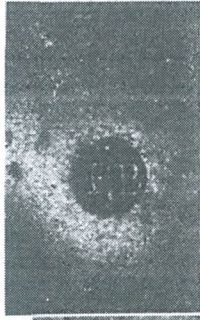
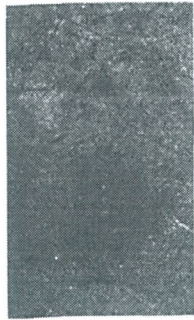
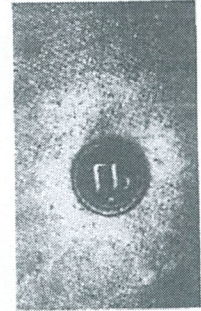
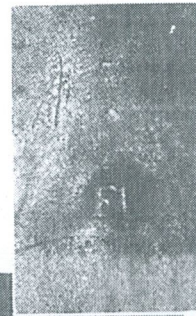


Fig. 3 (left and right) — VARIANTS OF THE *F. B. in-circle* TOUCH

These circle touches were used by Frederick Bassett, often in conjunction with a rose and crown touch and a fan-shaped device. All of them are shown in Kerfoot's *American Pewter*, Figures 45, 45A, 46, 46A, 48, 49, and 50. Here, only the *F. B. in-circle* touches are reproduced, for purposes of comparison.



ime about 1720, leads us to ask whether the existing Francis Bassett marks may not belong to the earlier holder of the name. At present, the question has only a passing interest, but the discovery of other specimens bearing different Francis Bassett touches would give importance to a consideration of the authorship of the entire group. Yet, before dismissing the question entirely, it is reasonable to suggest that the known Francis Bassett touch — the *F. B. with-passant-lion* — may well be the mark of Francis I. Its aspect implies relatively great antiquity; the documentary evidence concerning the activities of the various Bassetts shows that Francis I may well have been a more prolific pewterer than his namesake, Francis II; and, in any case, it would not be foolish to assume that the second Francis, for a time, used his predecessor's dies.

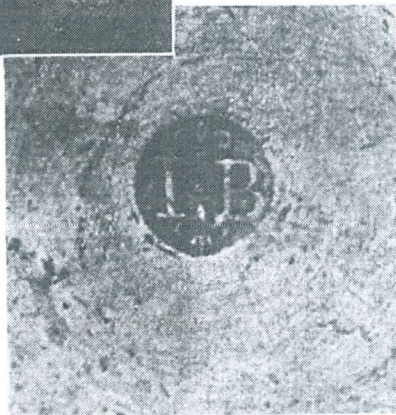
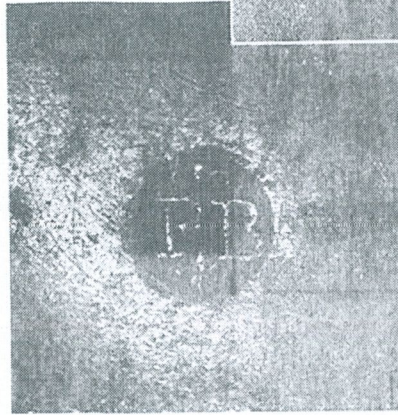


Fig. 4 — *I. B.* AND *F. B.* TOUCHES (enlarged)

These marks are obviously from the same die. To change the *I. B.* to an *F. B.*, it was a simple matter to enlarge the *I* into an *F*, though the design lost its symmetry.



two marks are carefully examined. In the first place, it will be noticed that the *F* runs into the "tail" of the upper fleur-de-lis, and that the spacing of the *F* in this touch is faulty, since it is not in the middle of the area which it occupies. In the second place, the

vertical members of the *I*, the *F*, and the *B* exhibit, in both touches, the same slightly irregular relation to one another. Finally, these two marks, as they occur on actual pewter pieces, show no variation in any of the measurements carefully taken with micrometer calipers.

It being thus established that these two marks, *I. B.* and *F. B.*, were both struck from the same die (the *F. B.* after alteration), there can be no possible room for doubt that the *I. B.* touch is the mark of the John Bassett who made pewter in New York between 1732 and the year of his death, 1761. The identification of these *I. B.* specimens gives us another name to add to the small group of pre-1750 American pewterers.

The discovery of John's touch and the certainty of its employment, after alteration, by the son Frederick, open a wide field of speculation about all the separate *F. B.* touches, and makes risky their attribution to Frederick alone. The question arises as to whether or not Francis II, or even Francis I, used one or more of the *F. B.* marks. And did the son, or cousin, or both, use the very *F. B. with fleur-de-lis* touch made from John's die? Possibly these queries will be answered with the finding of other specimens of the Bassett family's work; but, until this happens, it is probably safest to leave the ownership of the marks as they are now pretty definitely ascribed. That is to say, we have no known marks of Francis I; we have two or three examples of John's *I. B.* touches; about the same number of Francis II marks. The rest we may allow to the prolific Frederick until additional touches, or combinations of existing touches, appear to puzzle us anew. Though the past few years have added greatly to our pewter knowledge, much remains to be learned.

Turning now to a consideration of John, cousin of Francis I, we are on surer ground, since the *I. B.* touches here illustrated (Figs. 1 and 2) may safely be assigned to him. The mark on the funnel (Fig. 1) is not perfectly defined, due to its having been struck on the curved surface near the funnel's rim. But we should be grateful to John for having troubled to strike this touch on so difficult a surface, for the fortunate preservation of this piece adds (so far as the writer knows) a new form to marked American pewter, in addition to giving us a rare new touch. Figure 2 shows the same *I. B.* touch, in legible condition, on the inside bottom of a beaker.

That this *I. B.* touch is attributable to John Bassett is hardly to be doubted on the evidence of the mark itself; but further corroboration of its ownership is found in comparing it with Kerfoot's Figure 46, here illustrated in Figure 3. The same mark appears on the back of an eight-inch plate, credited to John's son, Frederick Bassett. Close scrutiny of Figure 4 will reveal the fact that both the touches there were made from the same die, which, for the *F. B.* touch, had been altered to change the *I* into an *F*. There can be no doubt of this when the details of the