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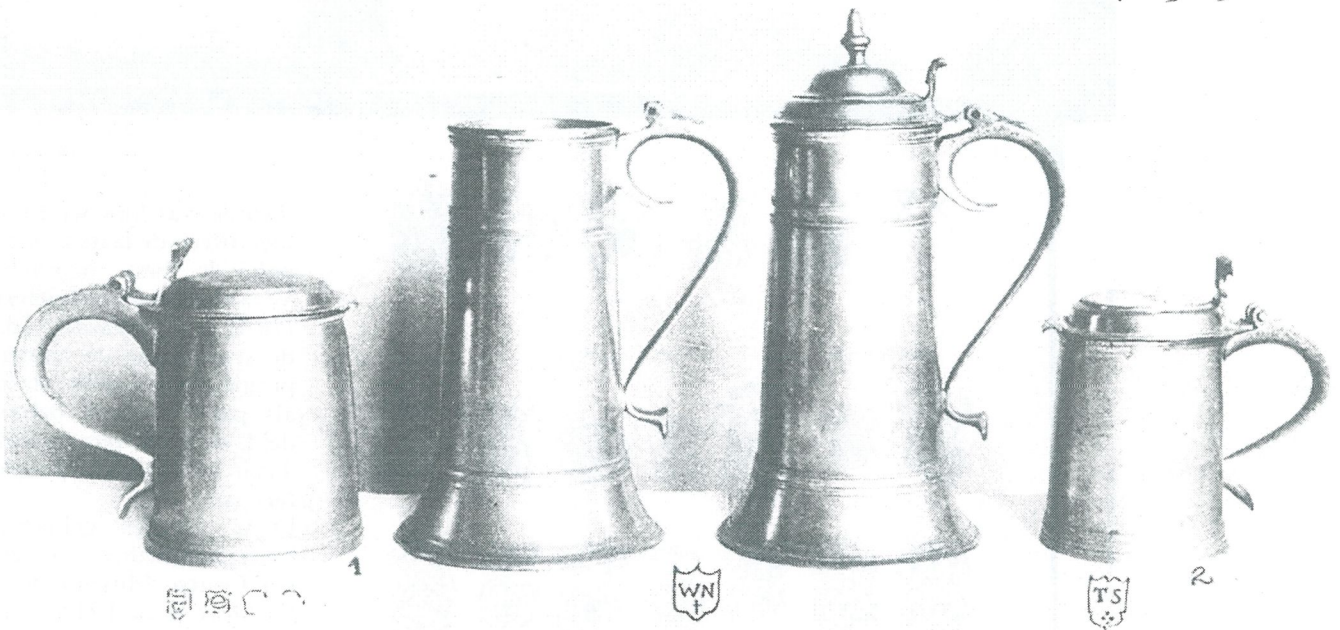


Fig. 1 — PEWTER SERVICE OF THE CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH, HADDAM, CONNECTICUT, AND ITS MARKS

The two tankards, right and left, are of the late seventeenth century. The flagons, centre, are of about the year 1725. A transcript of the maker's marks, so far as legibility permits, is shown below each piece. One of the flagons has lost its lid. The other pieces are all in excellent original condition. The tankards measure slightly more than 6 inches in height; the complete flagon, 13 1/4 inches over all

## An Unproductive Study of a Pewter Service

By HOMER EATON KEYES

*With acknowledgment to Howard Herschel Cotterell and Allen Willey*

IN THE first place it is my will that all my lawful debts shall be payed concerning my estate that God hath left me. It is my will that my sons have after the rate of twenty and my daughters fifteen." So begins the testament of Gerrard Spencer of Haddam, Connecticut. From that point on, the document proceeds in almost Biblical phraseology to devise the parceling of the testator's lands and the dwellings upon them among his children and grandchildren, and to specify the future ownership of his rapier, his carbine, and his residual estate. It concludes with the afterthought: "One thing I forgot: one feather bed which I give to my son Nathaniel." The will was signed and witnessed September 17, 1683. Two years later it was probated. (See *Our New England Ancestors and Their Descendants*.)

Our immediate interest in Gerrard Spencer and his bequests is, however, quite unrelated to the old man's concern for his own progeny. Instead it springs from his one expression of public spirit when, rather cannily, he ordains: "A pewter flagon and rim bayson I give unto the church at Haddam, if there be one within five years after the date hereof."

That such a church was established within the time limit imposed, I am assured by Allen Willey of East Haddam. To Mr. Willey, further, I am indebted for photographs of sundry ancient pewter vessels still belonging to the Haddam congregation and locally accepted as evidence that the terms of Gerrard Spencer's bequest were fulfilled both by the church and by the donor's estate.

These photographs, it may be remarked, are the fruit of three pilgrimages among the Connecticut hills where Haddams variously disguised are scattered in bewildering profusion to all points of the compass. At length, Mr. Willey's diligent search was rewarded by the discovery of the right Haddam and the locating of the precious pewter in the custody of the local library. "And here," to quote his letter, "under the watchful eye of two librarians, a church deacon, the sheriff, and an attorney from Deep River, the pieces were measured and photographed by Hugh Spencer — who, by the way, is a descendant in the eighth generation from old Gerrard of pious memory."

Complicated as was the original task of unearthing this ecclesiastical treasure and perpetuating its lineaments with the camera's the subsequent struggle to identify the outfit in terms of Spencer's has proved no less involved. It may be observed that in disposing of personal property mentioned in his will, Gerrard Spencer speaks of "my carbine" and "my rapier." His gift to the church is to be "a pewter flagon and rim bayson." We are, therefore, justified in surmising that the last-named articles were not already in his possession, but to be purchased in behalf of the church, provided the latter were prepared to receive them within five years. This hypothesis is strengthened by the fact that the will fails to designate an alternative disposition of the pewter in case of failure to meet the terms of the gift. Evidently, if the fund were taken for granted that, in the latter event, the fund provided would revert to Gerrard's heirs. If, then, the church eventually received a sum of money instead of items from its benefactor's own domestic hoard, we need not be particularly surprised if the Communion pieces now cherished by the Haddam church fail to correspond precisely with what a reading of the old will might lead us to expect.

Instead of two pieces we encounter four. Instead of a flagon and a "bayson" we meet with two tall flagons and two tankards. And that is not the whole story. We might perhaps assume that, after due consultation and with proper permission, the Haddam congregation had substituted an extra flagon for the proposed basin. It is harder to believe that they would so far have transgressed the wish of the deceased as to substitute two tankards. Yet, curiously enough, the two tankards of the existing service are of the type showing a flattened domical lid, serrate lip, unbanded cylindrical body with slightly molded base, generously out-curving handle, current at the close of the 1600's. Flagons, on the contrary, exhibit features that place their making within the first three decades of the following century.

The flagons, therefore, demand the closer examination. The characteristics ascribed to pewter vessels will depend primarily on general contour, shape of lid, banding or absence of banding on the body, treatment

ad base moldings, and form of handle. Studying these features of Haddam flagons, with the aid of Howard Herschel Cotterell's encyclopedic volume *Old Pewter*, we shall find that the hook-shaped lid on flagons occurs fairly early in the seventeenth century and remains in use for more than one hundred years. During most of the period, however, this feature is associated with lids of low or quite disflattened single domical form, with bases of wide-spreading ogee shape, and with bodies infrequently banded save by a single salient band which occurs just above the spring of the flagon's base. At the year 1700, the double-lid begins to be manifest; the lid is out in a gentle curve, and the body is banded by two modestly raised beads emphasized by a cavetto molding above and below. The various features described reach their combined fullness in a flagon illustrated by Cotterell (*Plate XI, 1a*), and attributed to the year 1725 or thereabouts. The piece is in all respects identical with the Haddam flagons. Allowing the latter to be of ten years, their acquisition by the Connecticut church may have occurred until Gerrard's death had been some thirty years or more.

In the light of all this evidence, it is scarcely avoid accepting one of the following conclusions: (1) that Spencer's money was expended for tankards, and not for a basin and for two flagons; (2) that the donation, though originally intended for more suitable articles; (3) that the fund was held for three decades before it was disbursed and was applied to the acquisition of two flagons instead of a flagon and a basin for some reason the Spencer bequest was never paid, and the Haddam pewter was derived from other sources.

I incline to the first alternative, partly because of the suitability of the two tankards, and partly because of the common-sense reason that the sacrament of Communion necessitated the employment of drinking vessels, and that, without these primary apparatus, a flagon and basin would be obvious superfluities. If the records of the church during its early years are extant and reasonably complete, they might supply a key to a problem that otherwise must remain unsolved.

It is as baffling a mystery confronts us when we abandon questions of the personal association of the Haddam Communion service and make a consideration of its manufacturing source. The approximate date of the four pieces may be estimated thus: the two tankards, c. 1680; the two flagons, c. 1725. But whence came they? Are they likely to have been made in America? If not, are they of English or of Continental origin? Do their fairly legible touch marks identify their makers? Seeking answers to these questions, we may at once dismiss the possibility of any Continental provenance. The Haddam pewter is of English or American make. My first assumption was that it must be of former. No similar forms occur in any identified American pewter acquaintance. The makers' initials of the touch marks fail to correspond to any names in the meagre lists of pre-Revolutionary American pewterers. In so far as I am aware, no American pewter of any kind that is as early in date as these Haddam tankards and flagons. We must admit, however, that these considerations are purely negative. From them several arguments may be advanced. It is, for one thing, highly doubtful that anywhere in the United States other than at Haddam could be found pewter items, either English or Continental, of known pedigree as ancient as that of the Communion service in Haddam. The need for ammunition, not only during the French and Indian wars and the War of the Revolution, but also in times of localized disturbances, brought quantities of household pewter to the Haddam pot. Changing styles and the fact that pewter is a rather fragile

metal will account for the destruction of what little may have escaped the bullet mold. But for the extreme conservatism of a rural community, the Haddam Communion service would almost certainly have long since disappeared. In short, it is foolish to contend that this pewter does not resemble American types of the same period, since we have no knowledge of what those types — granting that they were produced — may have been. The absence of names to fit the initials on the Haddam pieces may be explicable on the ground of incomplete records. Such a line of reasoning is, to be sure, a matter of fitting negative against negative. It leads to no definite conclusion; but it may hardly be avoided as a preliminary to examining the pewter's claims to an English origin.

Here we encounter a very curious situation. Mr. Cotterell, who constitutes a court of last resort for settling questions relating to English pewter and its makers, has kindly examined photographs of the Haddam service and transcripts of its marks. With the latter he confesses himself quite unacquainted. Nevertheless, he writes, "the first point I considered was the touch on the two Haddam flagons (w s above a sword in a shield), and the name that leapt to my mind was William Newham. On turning him up in my book, I find no such touch, but that does not preclude the idea. In *Plate XIIa* of my book appears an almost identical type made by John Newham, Yeoman pewterer in 1699; Upper Warden in 1731. The small dagger in the touch shrieks of the arms of the City of London. Altogether I have little doubt that the

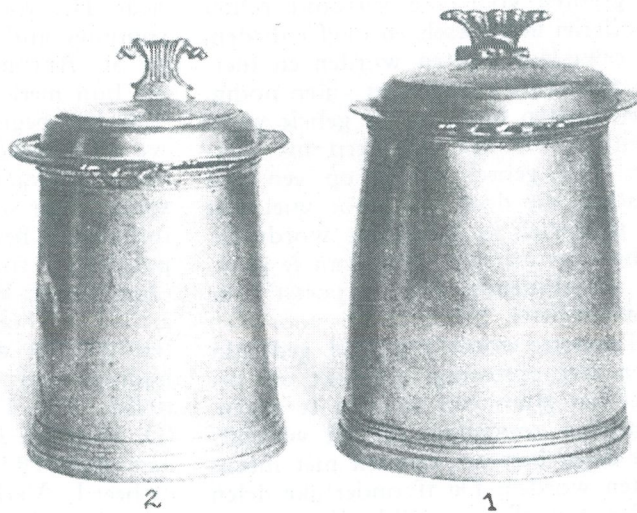


Fig. 2—PEWTER TANKARDS FROM THE HADDAM CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH  
Front view, showing pattern of the thumbpieces. They are numbered 1 and 2 to correspond to the numbering in the preceding illustration and to facilitate reference to the text

flagons in question were made by William Newham (No. 3373 in my book), Yeoman in 1708, Steward in 1727; or another William (No. 3374), who became Yeoman in 1730. Probability favors the earlier one.

"Turning to the tankards we find a more difficult problem. The lower terminals of their handles are fine and spell English in both instances. The thumbpiece of Tankard Number 2 is equally specific; whereas that of Number 1 has no English counterpart so far as my experience goes." After some technical discussion of handles, Mr. Cotterell continues, "As if to contradict all this, the marks on Number 1 are earlier in style than the mark on Number 2. Indeed, it is just possible that they are those of William Eddon, Yeoman 1689, who was permitted to strike his recorded touch in 1690. The body of this piece, by the way, with its fine entasis, is better than that of its mate." The initial shield is, however, so illegible that, in view of the probable date of the tankard as indicated by its form, an earlier man might quite as well have been selected. The τ s touch is not listed in Mr. Cotterell's records, though many seventeenth-century English pewterers with these initials are.

While there is no occasion for wonder that the badly worn marks on Tankard Number 1 forbid identification, strange indeed is the circumstance that the exceptionally distinct w s and τ s touches should have no known English counterparts. Fairly good reasons have been presented for failure to find such counterparts in America. But do these reasons, plausible as they may be, point to any affirmative conclusion? They do not. All that has thus far been accomplished is the adding of one column of zeros and from their sum subtracting the total of a like column of naughts.

To pursue our study further on the basis of the data at hand would be quite unavailing. We should but remain in our present position of clinging to a hole with no doughnut to frame it. Nevertheless, we may be permitted to express our opinion. For my own part, until American names are found to absorb the touch initials on the Haddam pieces, I shall believe all four of these vessels to have been made in England. We know that extensive importation of such ware was of common occurrence throughout colonial days and for some time thereafter. Probability insists that Haddam relied upon this means of supply. And though possibility urges a contrary view, its voice is feeble.