

6988

# SOME PEWTER OF LITTLE IMPORTANCE

By PERCY E. RAYMOND

*Mr. Raymond, Professor Emeritus of Paleontology at Harvard, turns to the comparatively "modern" field of antiques as a pleasant change from fossils. His special interest is in pewter, particularly English, though "that of any age intrigues me," he says.*

"SWEET ARE THE USES OF ADVERSITY." Those of us who are too poor to buy pewter tankards and flagons and rare plates have to browse about among the more humble things. Occasionally something unusual rewards us.

The *Norfolk Democrat* of February 11, 1848, carried an advertisement by Roswell Gleason of Dorchester, Massachusetts (ANTIQUES, August 1931, p. 89). Among other things he offered wash bowls. I bought one of them in 1946. Was I his first customer? No one else appears to have seen one. This is obviously no christening basin (Fig. 1), but just an ordinary washbasin, with a ring by which to hang it over the kitchen sink. Or, perhaps, over a bench in an outhouse. On my grandfather's farm there was such a bench outside the kitchen, in what, in polite modern parlance, would be called the "breezeway." On hooks above the bench hung tin washbasins and towels. It was obligatory for me "help" to perform ablutions there before entering the kitchen for dinner. Gleason added a neat little ornament to the hanger, and I've seen silver basins of poorer design than this one. Yet it is just plain despised britannia, and 1848 at that!

In the same class belongs a "spitting Bason" by Josiah Danforth. It bears his late intaglio touch (Laughlin's No. 395), and perhaps dates from about 1835. The shape and the bear's paws which uphold it are not unattractive. And I have a suggestion for those ladies who prefer to have their cuspidors on the table instead of on the floor where they belong. Take out the funnel, replace it with a 6-inch pewter bowl, and make an arrangement of flowers, as Mrs. Chester Cook did for Figure 2.

Not new, but generally overlooked, are the cups or handled tankards circulated at the time of the campaign of William Henry Harrison for the presidency. One of them was illustrated in ANTIQUES (March 1929, p. 236) with a contemporary American flag as a background. A pair of them fell into my hands at about that time. A well-done pewter medallion is soldered to the front of a britannia cup with a capacity of a little over a half-pint (Fig. 3). ANTIQUES called them cider mugs, which is probable, for that was the "hard cider" campaign. The cups are not beauti-



FIG. 1 — THE GLEASON washbasin and detail of hanger. Diameter at top, 11¾ inches; of foot, 6 inches.



ful, but the broken-S handle is a little more attractive than the norm of the time. No marked example is known, but George Sweet Gibb, in *The Whitesmiths of Taunton* (p. 119), tells us that the year 1840 brought a short but vigorous trade in Harrison mugs. According to Mr. Gibb these cups not only made a profit for the company (Leonard, Reed, and Barton), but also expressed the Whig sentiments of Henry Reed.

An article which puzzles the average collector turns up now and again (Fig. 4). It is not a doughnut cutter or an imperfect candlestick, as some have supposed, but an adjunct to the spin-



FIG. 2 — Cuspidor by Josiah Danforth.



FIG. 3 — THE Harrison campaign mug, and its medallion (diameter, 1½ inches).



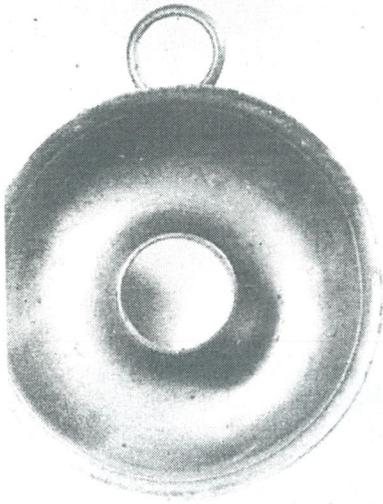


FIG. 4 — A DAMPER. Diameter,  $3\frac{7}{8}$  inches.

FIG. 5 — A CREAMER by Boardman and Hart. Height, 4 inches. It is obviously just a mug with a spout.



*Illustrations from the author's collection; photographs by Frederick Orchard.*

... wheel. The tapered hole in the middle allows it to perch on top of the pole. Mrs. Eaton H. Perkins tells me her researches reveal that its American name is "damper." It held a small amount of water, in which the housewife could moisten her fingers as she twisted the flax into thread. One which Mrs. Melville T. Nichols brought in from Germany had with it a card stating that it was a *n-raden*. Literally, that means distaff, suggesting the place, not the real function of the article. Glass dampers are more common than those in metal. This one was found in southeastern Pennsylvania, is unmarked, but has the initials *M F* and the date engraved on it.

The creamer (Fig. 5) is remarkable only because this type is thought to have been overlooked. It bears the mark of Boardman and Hart. The plebeian aspect pleases me. It is not one of those three-legged imitations of silver, designed chiefly with a view to stability, but a sturdy piece fitted for the kitchen table, where pewter made at that time belonged.

Small-size pitchers are rare. This one (Fig. 6) had sat on a stove some time. Its smooth, uninterrupted curves are unusual. The handle is more like that used by Boardman and Hart than any I have so far illustrated.

One cannot understand why writers ignore bedpans so completely. I do not recall having seen a picture of an American bedpan. Mr. Kerfoot had a column for them in the tables at the end of his book, but there are no checks in it. One by Thomas Southworth Boardman was shown by Mrs. John Mitchell at the Worcester exhibition at Springfield, Massachusetts, in May 1948. Here it was with its mate, with the marks of Boardman and Hart (Fig. 7). Doctor Melaine R. Brown, in an article in *Bulletin 16* of the Pewter Collectors' Society of America, mentions having seen specimens made by the Boardmans, Samuel Kilbourn, Spencer Stafford.

These useful but unfortunate utensils have in many cases been desecrated by being converted into bowls. The handle makes a good hammer.



FIG. 7 — A BEDPAN and its marks. Its two large marks are *Boardman Warranted*, smaller one, *Boardman and Company*.



FIG. 6 — A PINT-SIZED cider pitcher. Unmarked. Height originally 5 inches.

