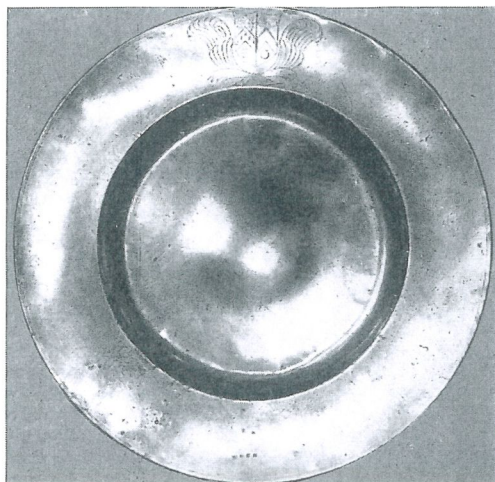


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R. F. Homer

PEWTER CHARGER 24½ in. IN DIAMETER
AT BITTERLEY COURT, SHROPSHIRE

CHARGER FOR A WEDDING

SIR,—Broad-rimmed pewter chargers of more than 22 in. in diameter are of considerable rarity. The largest usual size is 20 in. or slightly over, and this corresponds to “chargers of the largest size” weighing 7 lb. each, which are mentioned in the records of the Worshipful Company of Pewterers for 1438. The plate shown in the enclosed photograph, from Bitterley Court, Shropshire, is of interest not only because of its great size—it is 24½ in. across—but because it bears engraved on the rim a coat-of-arms that indicates its provenance and original ownership.

Commemorative marriage plates impressed or engraved with the initials of the owner and his wife surrounded by a decorative Stuart mantling are not uncommon, and small “wriggle-worked” plates were made in large numbers at the end of the 17th century and early in the 18th to celebrate weddings, births and other events. The impaled arms of a man and his wife are, however, seldom found. Those which appear on the present plate can be identified as the arms of Thomas Walcot (argent a chevron between three chess-rooks ermine differenced with a crescent), and those of Mary Lyttleton daughter of Sir Adam Lyttleton (argent a chevron between three scallops sable). It is, therefore, almost certain that this magnificent example of the pewterer’s craft, which was recently discovered in a

Birmingham antique shop, was engraved at the time of their marriage at Bitterley on December 10, 1663, and in commemoration of it. Later it was no doubt a treasured possession of the Walcot household at Bitterley Court.

Sir Thomas Walcot was the second son of Humphrey Walcot, the Royalist, and was born at Lydbury in 1629. In 1647 he was a student at Middle Temple, and in 1671 he became Recorder of Bewdley. He was MP for Ludlow from 1679 to 1681, and was elected to the King’s Bench in 1683. He had been knighted in 1681 and died on September 6, 1685.

Although the present charger bears a maker’s touch-mark enclosed in a small beaded oval, the device, which appears to include a bird surmounting an ill-defined object, is indistinct, and the mark is unrecorded. The hallmarks that are visible on the front of the rim include: a device that appears to be a pewterer’s hammer; a lion passant; a thistle; and a fourth mark that is indistinct.

Larger pewter chargers are known: one of 28½ in. diameter was exhibited at Clifford’s Inn in 1908, and six of 36 in. diameter are reputed to exist, but this appears to be the largest that has come to light in recent years.—R. F. HOMER, 326 Nine Mile Ride, Wokingham, Berkshire.