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p 124-128

Samuel Pierce, Pewterer, and His Tools

By Julia D. Sophronia Snow

The Man

Saturday Evening, September 25th, A. D. 1790, Mr. Samuel Pierce of Middletown came with my eighth daughter, Anne, and they, in a very decent and becoming manner, asked our consent that they might be joined together in Holy Matrimony — which request of theirs we freely granted. Accordingly, the said Samuel Pierce and Anne Joyce, in the evening of Sunday following, being the 26th day of September, A. D. 1790, were joined together in Holy Matrimony at my house, ourselves being present when the ceremony was performed by the Rev. N. Abraham Jarvis.

SUCH is the record of the Joyce-Pierce nuptials, as it appears in John Joyce's Bible, which has been handed down through succeeding generations of the Pierce family, and is at present owned by the Misses Pierce, great-granddaughters of Samuel, the pewterer, whose dates and provenance have hitherto eluded the student and collector.

Mr. Kerfoot made a happy surmise when he assigned Samuel Pierce a place in the hall of fame of our American pewterers. Mr. Myers has gone one step beyond Mr. Kerfoot in localizing *a* Samuel Pierce in Middletown, Connecticut.* But the "patriotic gentleman" who he hopes may be *the* Samuel must have been the father or uncle of the pewterer. The latter could have been only eight years old at the time of enlistment in Colonel Charles Burrel's regiment; for he died in 1840 at the age of seventy-two.

But from the Pierce family Bible and deeds for land, as well as from the tools here illustrated, we are able to assign to Samuel a definite seat in Pewterers' Hall. We know that he lived in Middletown during the early part of his life; and, with this knowledge, we may, perhaps, imagine him serving his apprenticeship in the workshop of the Danforths.† But, wherever he learned his trade, Greenfield, Massachusetts, and not Middletown, Connecticut, shall claim him as hers.

*Louis Guerineau Myers — *Some Notes on American Pewterers*, Garden City, 1926, p. 62.

†A thirteen-inch, I. Danforth plate found in the Pierce house, and doubtless an inheritance from Samuel, adds color to this theory.

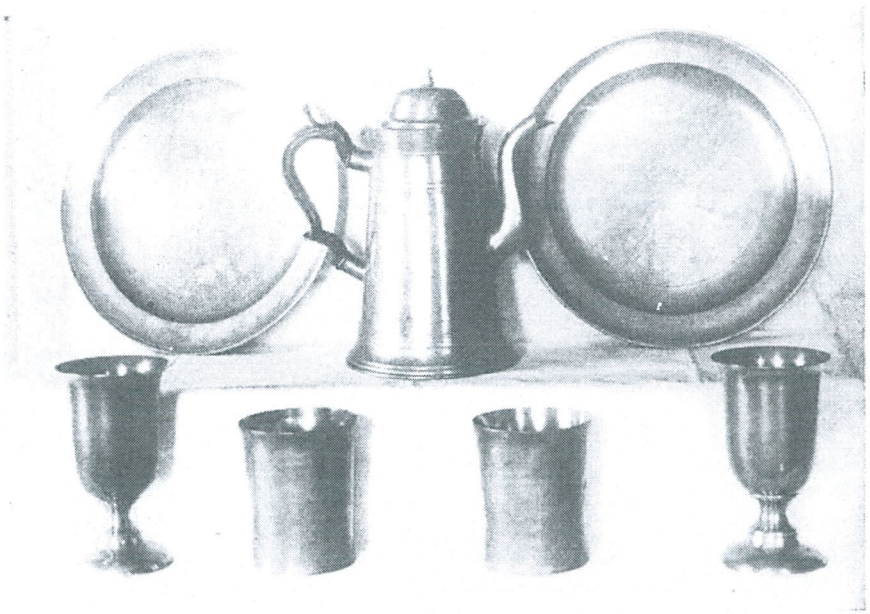

Fig. 1 — The West Hawley (Massachusetts) Communion Service
A coffeepot had to do duty as a wine flagon. Only the plates are marked.
Owned by the author.

Back in the early 1790's, report had gone abroad as the enterprise of Greenfield. Colonel William Moore, pioneer from Worcester, had settled here, and through courage, foresight, and wealth, had developed several dustries, and v giving employm to a great ma hands. Samu Pierce, in the v turesome spirit youth, unable withstand the l of Greenfield's pr perity, packed his belongings, a together with twenty-year- wife, and the inf Abigail, braved broad Connecti

We are somew in the dark as the exact day of arrival in Gre field, and can o approximate it fr the fact that vital statistics the town record birth of a son, John Joyce, to Anne and Samuel Pie May 26, 1793. Inasmuch as the birth of Abigail is not corded — but only her death, in 1802 at the age of ter we infer that the family's coming occurred some t between 1792 and 1793. But Samuel did not own prop in the town until February 14, 1794.

From all appearances, Samuel Pierce was not one precipitate himself thoughtlessly into new ventures. fore leaving Middletown, he was assured of employm in Greenfield by Colonel William Moore. Just how long remained under Moore's jurisdiction, however, we are able to say; but, by April, 1799, we find him engage the shipping business, transporting lumber, produce, hides to points along the Connecticut as far south Middletown, and returning with cargoes of rum, molas fish, tobacco, crockery, and glassware for the Green merchants.†

Realizing the need for supplementing the pittance cruing from freighting on the river — for little Phebe Anne had now joined the Pierce family—we find Sar forming a "copartnership" with Ambrose Ames, in tember, 1799, for the purpose of carrying on the "oil salt business."‡ Although we have no actual record o

*Francis Thompson — *History of Greenfield*

†Manuscript *Ledger* kept by Samuel Pierce in 1799.

‡*Franklin Gazette*, 1799.

making pewter in conjunction with these other two enterprises, it is not improbable that his spare moments were devoted to his craft.

Since Samuel Pierce adhered so tenaciously to the early English custom of refraining from crying his wares publicly in the newspapers, save at times of forming or dissolving partnerships, and since surviving manuscript records are fragmentary, we are forced to rely on conjecture in spanning the wide gaps between the known facts of our pewterer's life.

During the summer of 1802, a great plague befell the inhabitants of the town of Greenfield, for two consecutive months working its destruction among young and newly-born children.* Where possible, parents sent their children away to be cared for by relatives or friends. Entire families moved to other communities in the hope of escaping contagion.

Fig. 2 — Unfinished Items Found in the Samuel Pierce Chest
a. Teapot. *b.* Basin or porringer bearing initialed touch mark. *c.* Handle for teapot. *d.* Hinge for cover or lid. *e.* Syrup cup lid.

Disease is never a respecter of persons. During one month, Samuel Pierce lost three of his five children. Marking a single mound in the Federal Street Cemetery, a marble slab bears the names of Abigail, Anne, and infant Samuel. Then Samuel Pierce, with his wife and two remaining children, fled to a higher altitude — to the town of Colrain, not far from Greenfield — where the "cooper", as he was titled in a deed of 1804, bought a tract of land and a corn mill thereon, to engage in farming, milling, and, presumably, pewtering. During his residence in Colrain, the three places at his board made vacant by the epidemic, were filled once more — now by George, Henry, and Elijah.

After a five years' rural sojourn, however, Pierce sold his Colrain property, and went back to Greenfield, where he lived until the time of his death. Shortly after his return, he entered into partnership with one Hart Leavitt, a well-known merchant of the day, and, under the firm name of Pierce & Leavitt,† dispensed such wares as have always been found on the shelves of country stores the world over.

In the olden days, the principal occupation of business organizations seems to have been the making of partnerships one minute and the dissolving of them the next. Samuel was no exception; for he and Leavitt severed their business connection two years after forming it.

The next definite information we have concerning Samuel's affairs is gleaned from his diary for the years 1816–1817. Here he records the purchase of large amounts of sheet iron, nails, steel, tin plate, and sheet and white lead from Hartford concerns. Following his rupture with Leavitt, he apparently took his eldest son, John Joyce, into partnership with him, and conducted business under the name of Samuel Pierce & Son; for, a few years later, the paper advertised the dissolution of this firm, on April 23, 1821.

Later notices tell us that John Joyce carried on the business independently for a time. In his daybook, kept between 1821 and 1826, the son records payments to his father for pewter which the latter had made and displayed for sale in his son's store. Between this date and 1830 I have found no mention of Samuel's activity as a pewterer, but, in his diary for 1831, he occasionally records having made lead aqueduct for his son, George, who had a pewtering and coopering establishment in Northampton, Massachusetts, or of having spent the day in casting teapots.

Although it is possible that Samuel worked at his trade intermittently for a few years following 1831, we assume, from his offering four cows and a yoke of oxen for sale in June, 1834, that he was no longer able to engage in either farming or pewtering, and so relinquished his trade to be perpetuated by his sons, John Joyce and George, whose careers were marked chiefly by a rapid series of making and breaking partnerships with each other and with coopers and craftsmen outside of the family.

Death finally called the father, Samuel Pierce, on the twenty-fifth day of March, 1840. His final resting place may be seen today, in the Federal Street Cemetery, Greenfield.

His Tools

Where did Samuel Pierce make his pewter? When Mr. Kerfoot set collectors agog over American Pewter, I, too, joined the hunt for specimens. My search, especially in the immediate environs of Greenfield, rewarded me with a surprising proportion of Samuel Pierce examples among those items of American origin which I found. At once I developed a "hunch", and began scanning archives. I discovered that a Samuel Pierce had made pewter here in Greenfield early in 1800.* Could it be *the* Samuel Pierce of the eagle touch mark? If so, how could I prove it? I interviewed the present generation of Pierces in the town, explained my dilemma, and, among other questions, asked if by any chance the family had preserved any ancestral tools.

Franklin Gazette, July and August, 1802.
†*Franklin Gazette*, 1811.
Franklin Gazette, April 23, 1821.

There *were* some old tools in a chest in the carriagehouse, but no one knew that any ancestor had made pewter. An uncle had been a civil engineer, and the tools were probably his. Still, it would do no harm to look.

Having some notion of what a pewterer's seal might be like, I cautioned my good friends. Two days later the telephone rang. An excited voice urged me to come at once to see what had been found. I lost no time in answering the summons. There, in the Pierce carriagehouse, in the tray of an old chest filled with strange looking, long-handled tools, lay Samuel Pierce's *eagle!* — Its discovery proved that my "hunch" had been correct.

For the benefit of the lay individual who finds it difficult to visualize a pewterer's kit, and for those who have not seen Israel Trask's set in the Beverly Historical Rooms,* I am illustrating the molds and tools found in Samuel Pierce's chest, with exception of varying sizes of the same instrument. It is regrettable that so few tools were preserved, and that none of the chucks around which the craftsman spun his metal, or his turn-wheel, have as yet been discovered.

It is, further, disappointing, not to say humiliating, to confess ignorance of the names and uses of two of the tools illustrated, but they have proved enigmas to all whom I have consulted. Guessing is simple at times, but not always correct. Instead of that, pocketing my pride, I have included the unidentified items with the others in the photograph, hoping that someone, more tutored in the manufacture of pewter, will enlighten me.

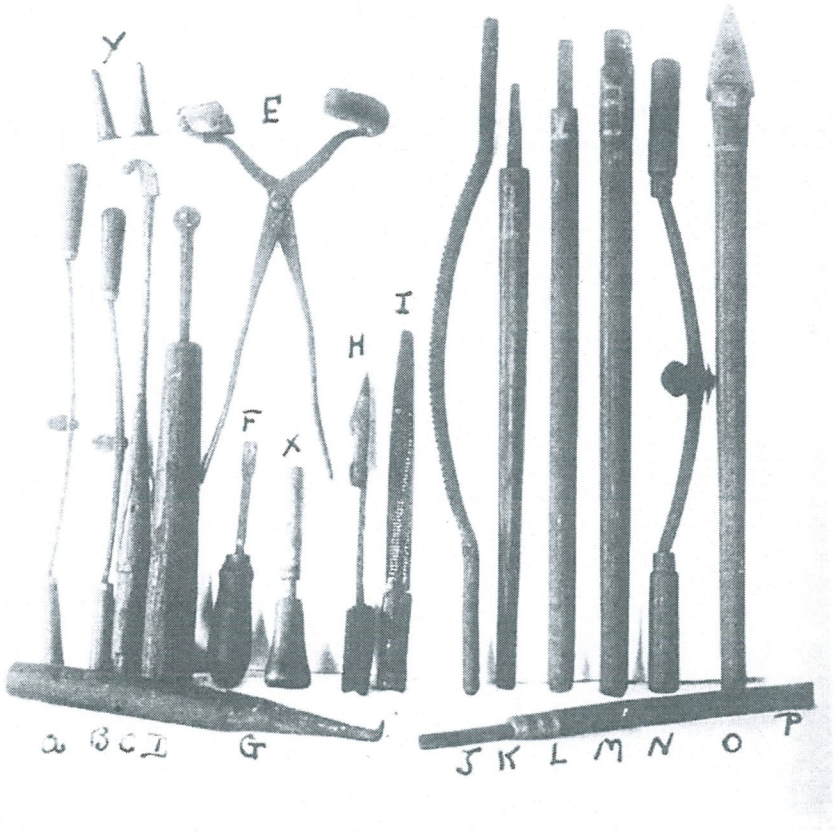

Fig. 3 — Lathe and Hand Tools of Samuel Pierce Found in the Samuel Pierce Chest
a and *b*. Burnishers for two hands. *c*. Burnisher with crooked head. *d*. Knurl. *e*. Forceps. *f*. Lining tool with toothed edge. *g*. Turning hook (lying in left foreground). *h*. Soldering iron with corncob handle. *i*. Coarse file. *j*. Rasp with two handles. *k*, *l*, *m*, *n*, *o*. Cutting tools used in spinning. *p*. Grooving tool. *x* and *y*. Unknown Quantities.

Comparing the pewterers' tools enumerated by Massé† with Calder's‡ list of molds, the Danforth inventories recorded by Mr. Myers,§ and the Samuel Pierce outfit, we are enabled to approximate a fairly complete list of the instruments used by the early workers in the metal. I have appended a list of molds, and lathe and hand tools compiled from these four sources, and, by referring to the accompanying cuts, one may obtain a good idea of the appearance and size of many of them.

From the receipted Calder bill for molds, and the inventory valuations of the Danforth tools, we may realize that it required no small fortune to establish a man in the pewtering business i colonial times. Accordingly, we are not surprised to find pewtere sharing one another's molds, and exercising their utmost i genuity in making the most of their tools. I would especially ca the reader's attention to the roughly hewn helve of the knurl Figure 3*d*, the linen padded handles of the wrought iron force (*Fig. 3e*) and the insulating corncob of the soldering ir (*Fig. 3h*).

Molds were made from various substances. In the case forms for porringer handles the mold metal was *bronze* (*Fig. a*, *b*, *d*, *e*). The dies for coffeepot spouts and handles were of *lea* (*Fig. 4, middle row* and the bottoms the beakers we molded in soapsto (*Fig. 4, r* and *s*). Wo was used for casti the curious device Figure 4, *o* and Spinning and turni tools, burnishers a rasps were made steel; the solderi iron, forceps and tu ing hooks, of iron.

Two puzzles serve special att tion. Figure 3*x* sho one of a set of similar instrumen the handle, in e case, being holl and detachable. T tool proper is m of a cylinder-sha piece of pewter w grooves at either and in the mid that seem solely or mental. The two low brass cones sh in Figure 3 are equ puzzling. Perh they are no more t ferrules; but I hoping for their e identification.

To collectors of erican pewter, San Pierce's eagle t mark needs no introduction, but I have the privilege of pres ing the seal, or die, which made these impressions — Figur It is engraved in a bar of steel, five and three-quarters inches l the intaglio being a fair specimen of the early die sinker's ar feeling of symmetry and patriotism in design compensates the somewhat crude delineation of the bird of freedom.

The other die used by Samuel Pierce in marking some o pewter was not found among his tools, but an unfinished ol (*Fig. 2a*), rescued from the chest, assures the doubting coll that Samuel employed this mark as well as the more common touch in branding his wares. This second stamp consisted o letter x beneath the initials S.P. enclosed in a circle. Inasmu the seal for this is missing, and few specimens bearing its im sion have been preserved, I am of the belief that it was an stamp, which finally gave way to the more patriotic eagle f

The finding of these tools possesses more than cursory int It not only authenticates a second touch mark used by Sa

*John Whiting Webber, *A Massachusetts Pewterer*. See Antiques for January, 1924, Vol. V, p. 26.

†H. J. L. J. Massé, *Chats on Old Pewter*.

‡Charles A. Calder, *Rhode Island Pewterers and Their Work*.

§Myers, p. 22

e, but it also dispels the mystery, hitherto surrounding the erer's place of abode by definitely assigning him to Green- Massachusetts.

Pewterers' Tools

listed by Massé, in *Chats on Pewter;* Myers, in *Some Notes merican Pewterers;* Calder, *Rhode Island Pewterers;* and as l among Samuel Pierce's effects.

'eepots and teapots — Bottoms, handles and spouts for them.
ringers — Pint, one-half pint, and gill size; handles.
es — Sizes: Batter, eight-inch, nine-inch, and soup.
ins — Sizes: three-
, two-pint, and one-
kards.
s.
tain ring pins.
ons, large size.

Tools

n — The extreme length handle, designed to be l under the arm of the kman, facilitated preci- in execution.)
he, spindle and wheel.
Turning hooks for nning metal on chucks lathe.
quare tools.
Cutting or trimming ds.
Burnishers for two ds.
Burnisher with crooked d.
Blocks or chucks over ich to spin the metal.
Tooth-edged tool for ing.

l Tools

Sizes planishing ham- rs for beating the oge of objects.
Rasp with two handles r scraping.
Sizes of files for smooth- g soldered seams.
Soldering irons.
Blowpipe for soldering.
lder method.)
Sizes of knurls for ribbing edges.
Sizes of brushes for applying mixture of red hre and egg white to molds before casting.
Casting ladles.
ncers.
Pair of snips for cutting sheet metal.
hisel.
ales.
ompass.
Wire.
Borer.
Bellows.
Hone.
Set of fourquettes.
7 Cores or mandrels.
Chinole for turning molds.
Dies for twenty-four letters.
Die for touch or seal.

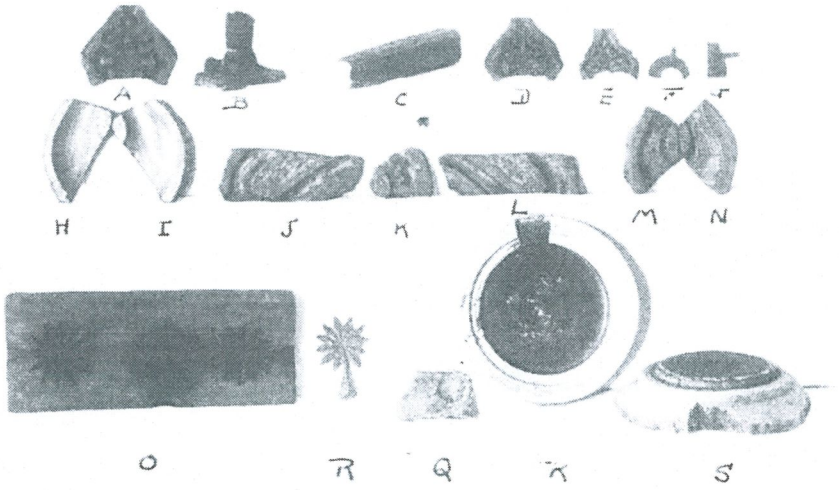

Fig. 4 — Molds and Seal of Samuel Pierce Found in the Samuel Pierce Tool Chest

Top Row (left to right) Bronze Molds.
a and *b*. Face and back of large porringer handle mold. *c*. Eagle seal. *d* and *e*. Smaller porringer handles. *f* and *g*. Two sections conical shaped mold for coffeepot handle.
Middle Row Lead Molds
h and *i*. Two halves of base of coffeepot spout. *j*, *k*, *l*. Three sections of teapot handle. *m* and *n*. Two sections of base of teapot spout.
Bottom Row
o and *p*. Wooden mold and ornament. *q*. Soapstone mold for lead balls. *r* and *s*. Halves of soapstone mold for bottoms of beakers.

His Pewter

Who, among us, honoring the maker's handiwork, would not rish a copper teakettle, a lantern, a tin rattle-box with thistle, a "back candlestick", or even a tin "shandelier", that had come from the workshop of Samuel Pierce! But here we are only concerned with pewter. The intrinsic merits of Pierce's pewter alone would justify praise, yet its comparative rarity among American marked specimens in general lends an extrinsic element that sanctions admiration.

Fig. 5 — Early Mark of Samuel Pierce

Pierce's product is characterized primarily by fineness of metal, and by a certain argental appearance. Most of his specimens extant still retain their pristine perfection, but occasionally we meet with a trencher whose unappreciative possessor has submitted his heirloom to the corrosive abuse of rock salt or putty.

Judging from the old Pierce ledger, Samuel threw off the yoke of England's early guild laws, and wantonly bought "old pewter" from which to mold and spin his product. For this secondhand metal, he paid an average of seventeen cents a pound. Only rarely did he indulge in the extravagance of new pewter, for that cost nearly double. He doubtless added lead, tin, and antimony to suit his own fancy, but he never betrayed his formula by leaving records of the proportions of his mixture. This was his secret. Otherwise, why stamp his wares with a trade-mark?

Since so few molds were found in his chest, and the majority of his tools were those used in spinning, I am inclined to the opinion that Samuel's wares were largely a product of the lathe. Furthermore, most of his specimens bear the concentric rings which typify spun objects. Whatever his method, he was a master craftsman, whose pewter needed no advertising.

Although his branded pieces have been found in greatest quantity in the vicinity of Greenfield, I have never sighted a large flock of Samuel's eagles soaring in any one locality (unless it be New Jersey). Most of these fowl seem to have alighted on eight and eleven-inch plates and platters. The eight-inch basin was also a favorite perch.

Pierce's initialed touch is rare. Once I found it hiding in a quart mug. Mr. Myers speaks of its appearance on beakers as well. But these are the only places where his marks have been discovered. The fact naturally raises the question, "Did Samuel ever make any other pieces?" For one answer, look to the communion service illustrated in Figure 1. Only the plates bear the Pierce eagle; but, from the general feeling and appearance of the cups and the flagon — (Pardon the sacrilegious coffeepot! The little church in West Hawley was too poor in the early days ever to afford the more costly flagon. The sect is still poor, or was, until it sold its ecclesiastical plate in order to raise money for paintng the meeting house. That is how I happen to be its privileged possessor) — and from the fact that the pieces were always used in the same parish, there is no possibility in my mind of their being the work of any other pewterer. Furthermore, the bottom of the beaker fits rather conclusively into one of the soapstone molds of Figure 4.

Fig. 6 — Later Mark of Samuel Pierce

Albeit no porringers, tumblers, or teapots bearing Pierce's touch have been

found — to my knowledge — the following list of items, together with their selling prices, is positive proof of his having made these other forms.

Porringers	.06, .12, .13, .14 each	Tumbler	.12
Coffeepots	.75 — 1.50	Basin (quart)	.40
Teapots	1.25	Basin (pint)	.25
Quart cup	.92	Platters	.92
Pint cup	.25	Curtain pins	.13 for ten pins
Shaving cup	.25	Wash pans	.42
Mug	.20		

The unfinished teapot-handle and syrup-cup lid found amo his tools (*Figs. 2 d* and *e*) are additional testimony.

Through Samuel's failure to set his seal upon all his pewt the unauthenticated pieces of his handiwork have lost th identity, and have thus enhanced present-day values of the su viving authenticated specimens to heights widely disproportic ate to their original costs.*

*The list is derived from John Joyce Pierce's ledger in which occur entries items purchased from Samuel.

London Notes

By F. C.

THERE was a time when boxes were made in England to hold the precious little caddies of tea — sometimes with but one compartment, sometimes with two: one for China and the other for India tea. I don't know that there is such a thing as an essentially Chippendale tea caddy,* but I have many a Sheraton one in my collection. And, by the way, I am by no means alone in my passion for tea caddies. People are buying them very eagerly here, and using them for cigarettes or trinkets, and, as is usual with the things made by "old fogies," the wood is finer and the workmanship better than that of the modern boxes, however costly.

The woods used in the boxes made between 1780 and 1820 are beautifully chosen and dexterously worked. One specimen, in mahogany, has its slanting sides inlaid with fine strips of holly; another, of satinwood, that really does look and feel like satin, carries a faded tracery of tiny green leaves in olivewood. Yet another has its body (of white holly) overlaid with tortoise shell, and it is further beautified with a noble plate of silver on the lid, and with silver ball feet.

But the box I really love best was made very evidently at home, out of curled and tinted paper. This paper work was a favorite pastime of ladies of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. A long strip of colored or gilded paper was curled or elaborately folded, and then cut in minute cross sections and stuck on the prepared surface of a box, in such designs as the artistic taste of the maker suggested. The background was usually frosted with sparkling tinsel, against which the roses and whorls and curlycues of paper showed up very prettily. There are several lovely specimens of this kind of thing in the Victoria and Albert Museum, where, in fact, I first fell in love with tea caddies.

. . .

In Victorian days, when tea was not so precious as before, but still valuable enough to keep under lock and key — as indeed was the sugar — the small caddy was superseded by the teapoy, a more or less ornamental article of furniture as large as a work-table and standing upon a sturdy plinth of its own. The early teapoys were nearly always in mahogany or satinwood, later in rosewood.

. . .

Rosewood, by the way, is again growing in favor. Christie's not long ago held quite an important sale in which some thirty or forty pieces in this wood were shown, and were bought at substantial prices. Of course, what Christie's sells shows which way the wind blows.

I asked Edward Tustin, a wood expert here, why rosewood had been discarded so suddenly after several generations of fav And this was his answer:

> Too hard on the cabinetmaker, who, just about that time, began to hu Rosewood is, of course, not the wood of the rose tree at all, but a commer name given to a dozen different woods. The American variety is *dalbergia ni* Then there are the Burmese rosewood, quite a different species, and the Car and Dominican, Indian and Jamaican, and endless other sorts, all, however, the same weight, depth of color and worm resisting characteristics. Its use discontinued here because it proved very brittle, and was difficult to re because of its resistance to glue.

Rosewood certainly has a beauty of its own, however; and o here, at any rate, old pieces are returning into favor witl celerity that makes one want to warn the dealers abroad t they would better begin "salting down" choice specimens wl such things are still comparatively cheap.

. . .

No less a person than the distinguished Curator of Ma scripts at the Rylands Library, Manchester — Dr. J. Ren Harris — has declared that he has in his possession what believes to be the actual cup from which Our Lord drank at Last Supper — The Holy Grail Itself! Dr. Harris has trave extensively in the East in search of scriptural and other ma scripts. It was at a lecture largely attended by the "ur learned" that he made his amazing announcement.

The cup is a little glass affair, about four inches in heigh Sidonian product of the first century, of which there are kn to be seven in existence. He suggests that there were origin twelve, as well as a central bowl from which the wine was dip Each of the cups bears, around the rim, an inscription in Gr which, translated freely, means, "What are you here for?" T of these cups are in the Berlin Museum, another in Leyden, on Italy, one in the British Museum, and the seventh in Toledo, O

At this point I am reminded of the true story of the Pope, who, hearing miraculous stories of the wonders worke those most holy relics, the teeth of Saint Apollonius, ord them all to be brought to the Vatican. His mandate was obe and two tons of teeth were safely delivered!

. . .

I cannot resist quoting a paragraph that appeared in the d *Express* just twenty-five years ago. It is an excerpt from the d of the Editor and reads:

> In the new Kingsway Street, which will be one day a splendid aven bought this morning a fine Queen Anne walnut table, with drawers, all in lent state, for £1.10.0. Also a pair of exquisitely made Queen Anne style She plate candelabra for £2, and a mahogany knife box for ten shillings. They all worth much more. The dealer wanted to press on me a dozen linen fol panels for £3 but, though they were quite genuine and in good condit declined, because I can get all I want in Essex for half the money.

Ye Gods!!! And yet we were living then. What in the w were we doing?—Buying golden oak, I daresay.

*Chippendale illustrates several in his *Director*.— Ed.