



## THE PEWTER-CRAFT. ❧ BY RANDOLPH I. GEARE



IN colonial days, household utensils of pewter ware were in common use in this country, and perhaps would still be, but for the introduction of cheap forms of pottery, glass, Japanned iron, etc. Britannia metal, too, and German silver, are also in part responsible for the general disappearance of pewter ware. In Japan, pewter objects were made as early as the eighth century, and the first record of the industry there is referable to the reign of the Empress Shotoku, at which time pewter vases and other objects were made from native tin. Still more ancient was the introduction of pewter into China, although the actual date is not known. In England, France, Germany, and Switzerland, the pewter industry rose to its highest importance during the fourteenth, fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, and even as early as the time of the Plantagenets, pewter chalices were used in some of the English churches.

Before considering the early history of this industry in England and the European countries, where it undoubtedly reached its greatest importance, a glance at the introduction of the manufacture of pewter objects into the United States may be of interest. It happened at the time when wooden ware was in common use here, and this it largely displaced, although not a few handsome pieces are still to be found in New England country houses. Their number would doubtless be much larger, had it not been for the discovery that new pewter is much improved by mixing the metals of which it is composed with a certain amount of old pewter which, therefore, has always commanded a high price.

In the seventeenth century, there was a considerable exodus of English pewterers to this country, conspicuous among whom were Richard Graves, who established himself in Salem, Massachusetts, and Henry Shrimpton, who afterward became one of the prominent merchants of Boston. The Massachusetts colonists gave employment to these craftsmen, whose number increased steadily until the War of the Revolution, when the importation of Oriental and English china, and stoneware soon began to tell upon the pewter industry. All kinds of objects had been made from pewter, including cans for holding beer and cider, basins, cisterns, and ewers for parlors, etc. Candle-

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sticks of pewter were common, too, while "savealls" were made of both pewter and iron. Many of the colonists used pewter salt-cellars, spoons, plates, platters, and porringers.

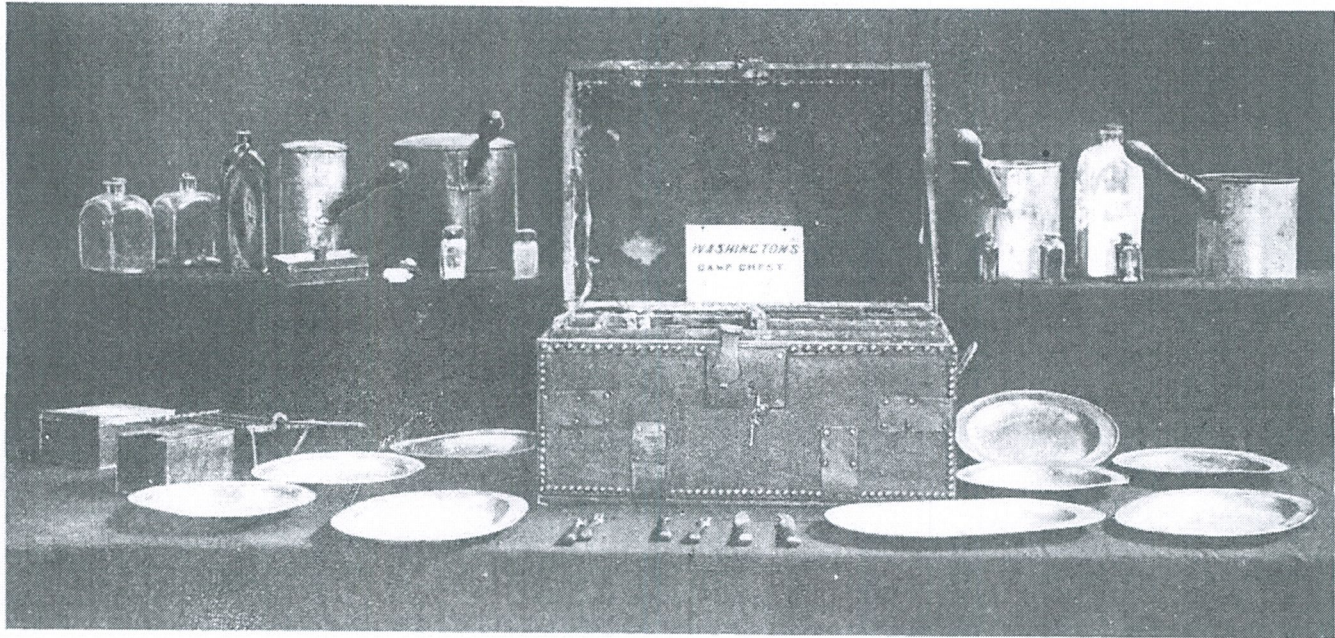
The popularity of pewter in those days, is further evidenced by the fact that men occupying high positions often became noted for their collections of pewter ware. Thus Washington's mess-chest and camp outfit contained a number of pewter articles; Governor Bradford of Massachusetts left to his heirs fourteen pewter dishes and thirteen platters, three large and three small plates, a pewter candlestick and a pewter bottle. Governor Benedict Arnold, of Rhode Island, and Mr. Pyncheon, of Springfield, Massachusetts, made special bequests of their pewter plates and dishes, some of which were elaborately lettered and marked with armorial devices. The New England churches frequently made use of communion services of pewter, and the Essex Institute in Salem still possesses such a set, in four pieces, which was said to have been in use as early as 1685, in the Marblehead Church. We also read that in 1729 the First Church of Hanover, Massachusetts, bought and used for many years a full service, as well as a "christening basin" of pewter. Some of these pieces are still preserved as relics; while the tankards, which have been silver-plated, are said to be in use to this day. In colonial times, and later, pewter dishes and plates were jealously cared for, and housewives took particular pleasure in keeping them brightly polished, which they did by rubbing them with "horsetails" (*Equisetum*), or "scouring rush," until they shone like fine silver. The descendants of some of the oldest families have preserved their pewter articles among the most cherished ornaments of the kitchen and dining-room. In an old homestead in Shrewsbury, Massachusetts, the greatest treasures which it contains are cupboards and dressers full of pewter dishes.

In olden times, pewter was hammered, spun, or cast into shape. The molds were of brass or gun metal, very carefully fitted, massive, and costly. The metal was poured directly into them, as in the case of lead or zinc. If hollow castings were required, the mold was reversed before the metal became chilled through. What was still molten, ran out, leaving a cavity in the interior of the casting, just as in French art-zinc work. The surface of the casting needed no touching except where it was to be left plain and bright, and then it was turned on a hand-lathe and burnished. Afterward, the castings



UPPER FIGURE: PEWTER SALVER: EMBOSSED WITH MEDALLIONS CONTAINING ALLEGORICAL PERSONAGES REPRESENTING THE FOUR ELEMENTS AND THE SCIENCES: "TEMPERANTIA," A SEATED FIGURE ON A RAISED MEDALLION, IN THE CENTER; BY F. BRIOT, SIXTEENTH CENTURY. OBJECT NOW IN SOUTH KENSINGTON MUSEUM

LOWER FIGURE: PEWTER PLATEAU: ENGRAVED IN THE CENTER WITH THE ROYAL ARMS ENCIRCLED BY THE GARTER, WITH SUPPORTERS, AND THE INITIALS "C. R." BENEATH IS THE ROYAL MOTTO, AND THE INSCRIPTION, "VIVAT REX. CAROLUS SECUNDUS, BEATI PACIFICI. 1662." RUNS ROUND. OBJECT OF ENGLISH ORIGIN, AND NOW IN SOUTH KENSINGTON MUSEUM



WASHINGTON'S MESS CHEST AND CAMP OUTFIT; MANY OF THE ARTICLES BEING IN PEWTER

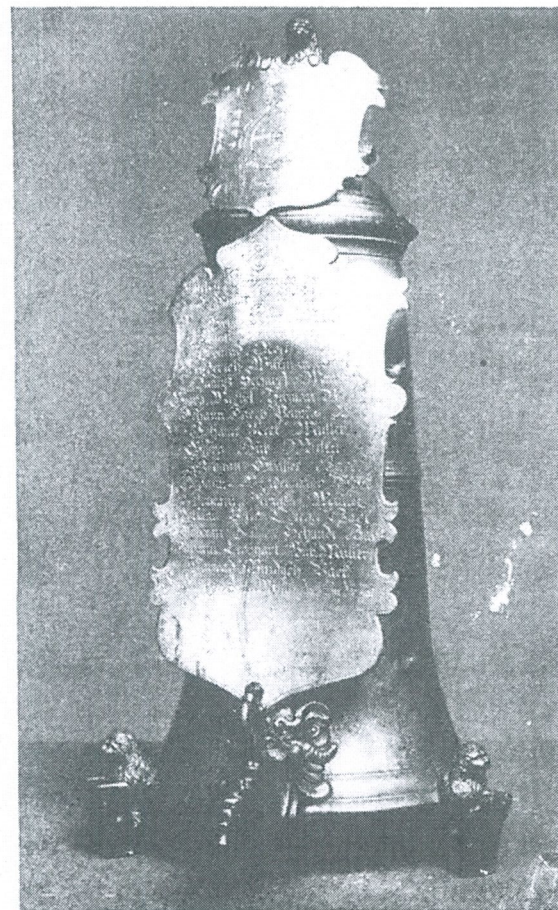
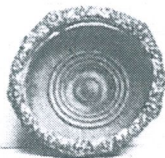
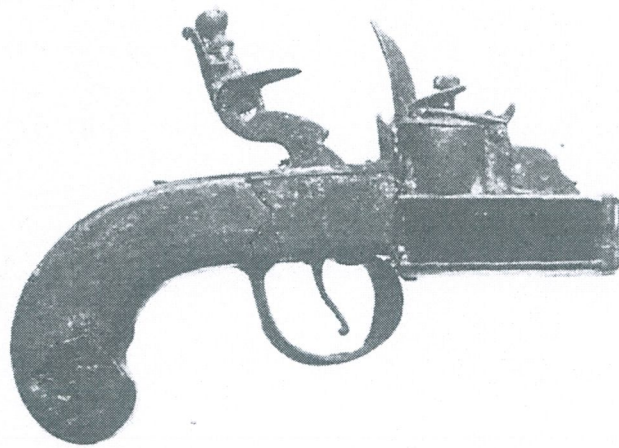


FIGURE AT LEFT: PEWTER FLAGON, ENCIRCLED WITH TWO BANDS OF ALLEGORICAL FIGURES IN RELIEF. DATE ABOUT 1550. OBJECT NOW IN SOUTH KENSINGTON MUSEUM. FIGURE AT RIGHT: PEWTER TANKARD, WITH BRASS TAP AND IRON FEET. THE LID SURMOUNTED BY A LION RAMPANT HOLDING A SHIELD, ENGRAVED WITH ARMS. IN FRONT IS AN ESCUTCHEON STATING THE TANKARD TO BE THE PROPERTY OF A UNITED GUILD OF MILLERS AND BAKERS. GERMAN (NUREMBERG). DATED 1695. OBJECT IN SOUTH KENSINGTON MUSEUM



UPPER OBJECT: MATCHLOCK (SNUFFERS OF PEWTER), USED AT CLEAN DRINKING MANOR, MARYLAND, DURING THE REVOLUTION. MIDDLE TIER: PEWTER POT AND PITCHER, USED BY SAMUEL CHASE, JUSTICE OF THE SUPREME COURT AND A SIGNER OF THE DECLARATION OF INDEPENDENCE. LOWER TIER: PEWTER TRAY, DECANTER HOLDER, AND TANKARD, USED AT CLEAN DRINKING MANOR, DURING THE REVOLUTION

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were usually hammered over, to improve their general appearance and to toughen the metal. Spun, hammered and embossed pewter, is, however, no longer produced except in the quality of Britannia metal.

It was in hammering pewter that the genius of the workman found its best expression, and some of the most highly decorated specimens were probably produced in this way; *e. g.*, the celebrated Gloucester candlestick, made in the twelfth century, and now on exhibition in the British Museum; a superb dish made for Henri III, now in the Louvre collection; the salver and flagon with medallion portraits of Augustus of Saxony, etc.

As later, in the New England colonies, so in old England, and in continental Europe, pewter was extensively used for church vessels and other ecclesiastical purposes. There is a record, dating from Merovingian times, of a pewter canopy over the figure of a saint in St. Vincent's Church, on the Garonne; while Gregory of Tours mentions a basilica roofed with pewter. In the Convent of the Holy Cross, at Erfwith, Saxony, there were found, as far back as 1470, one hundred and fifty pewter amphorae, seventy cups, jugs, porringers, etc.; and, at St. Cyr, two hundred pewter amphorae, with a number of flagons and tankards. Even organ pipes were not infrequently made of pewter, and an old record, dated 1481, states that in one instance fourteen thousand five hundred pounds of the alloy were thus utilized.

In France, the working of pewter as an art-craft dates back to the time when Jules Bratteau and others began the production of their beautiful plaques, coffee-sets, canisters, flagons, etc. In Germany, excellent work was done in pewter, including engraved work and etching with the *niello* effect, which consists of cutting the design in the metal and afterward filling the incised places with a black alloy.

In the sixteenth century, the use of pewter spread to the homes of the middle classes, although its employment for fashionable ware also does not seem to have diminished; as evidenced by the fact that, in 1575, the Archbishop of Canterbury possessed "eighteen score and ten pounds of pewter vessels in the kitchen, in jugs, basins, porringers, sauce-boats, pots, and nineteen candlesticks; also pewter measures in the wine cellar, eight pewter salts in the pantry at Lambeth, and two garnishes of pewter, with spoons, at Croydon." It would seem al-



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most as if the flavor of wine must have been improved by coming in contact with pewter—so generally was it used in that connection; at any rate, these worthy dignitaries of olden times would appear at least to have had no aversion to drinking from vessels made of this alloy.

The early history of pewter discloses some very curious and interesting facts. The skilled artisans employed in manufacturing pewter ware were not only anxious to produce the best results for their own sake, but were specially protected by municipal enactments, which also served to prevent fraud in the composition of the alloy, as well as to check the execution of inferior work. As early as 1348, ordinances existed in England, permitting the use of only two qualities of pewter; the first of which was called "finite," and contained "as much brass as the tin of its own nature will take." Of this kind were made the porringers, salt-cellars, platters, pitchers, cruets, and other articles which were "squared or ribbed." The second quality consisted of tin, with about twenty per cent. of lead, and this was used for pewter plate. Occasionally other metals beside lead were mixed with tin to produce pewter: such as zinc, bismuth, copper and antimony. So careful was the Mayor of London in protecting this important industry, that no pewter goods could be brought into that city until they had been assayed, and, in 1450, an exact weight was assigned to all the principal kinds of pewter vessels. In 1503, an act of Parliament was passed prohibiting the sale of pewter outside the premises of a pewterer, except in open market, and it was necessary that every piece should have the maker's personal mark. Of course, infringements of these ordinances occurred sometimes, which led to the appointment of wardens to search for defective wares.

In the reign of Henry VIII, statutes were enacted forbidding the importation of pewter, and no foreigner was allowed to practise the trade in England; nor were English pewterers allowed to exercise their calling abroad, upon pain of alienation. Under later sovereigns, each maker of pewter was obliged to deliver to the "master" a private mark, which was impressed upon a plate kept in the hall of the Pewterer's Company, and with this mark all his wares were stamped. By a later ordinance (1575), every one who aspired to be a master pewterer was obliged to make, within the space of a week, "a quart ewer on a foot, a dish about four pounds in weight, and a pitcher holding four or five pots, bearing a written snatch or proverb."

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Moreover, silversmiths were prohibited from working in pewter, and *vice versa*, and, until 1650, it was even unlawful to plate with silver or gold any objects made from the baser metals; and, after that date, pewter objects covered with silver or gilding, had to be specially marked, in order to prevent their being placed on the market as specimens of the precious metals.

In some cities in France the quality of the pewter ware was so jealously guarded by the authorities that pewterers were not allowed to work at night, for fear that artificial light might prevent first-class results. Fines were imposed for the employment of unauthorized alloys, and the use of leaden imitations was also punishable.

It is thus evident that the pewter craft was, for centuries, one of considerable dignity and importance, and was carried on for the production of genuine works of art and not merely for objects of household utility. Although the industry has never been revived to its former extent, and possibly never will be, yet there are signs of a revival of some of the lesser arts, including the pewter craft, if we judge by the present demands of the public and by the fact that in some countries, especially England, societies are now being organized to encourage the production of artistic objects in metals by means of hand-work.

*In the valley of the Pegnitz, where across  
broad meadow-lands  
Rise the blue Franconian mountains, Nu-  
remberg, the ancient, stands.*

*Quaint old town of toil and traffic, quaint  
old town of art and song,  
Memories haunt thy pointed gables, like  
the rooks that round them throng.*

*Here, when Art was still religion, with a  
simple reverent heart,  
Lived and labored Albrecht Dürer, the  
Evangelist of Art.*

*Everywhere I see around me rise the won-  
drous world of Art;  
Fountains wrought with richest sculpture  
standing in the common mart;*

*And above cathedral doorways saints and  
bishops carved in stone,  
By a former age commissioned as apostles  
to our own.*

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