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English pewter for the collector

The eighteenth century

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The eighteenth century provides the collector with a wide range of attractive pewterware, from the prestigious tankard and flagon to the humble kitchen spoon. Almost everything that was made in silver was also produced in the base metal; in addition, some items were made in pewter which have no counterparts in precious metal. In 1772, the London Pewterers' Company published a sixteen-page booklet listing twenty-one sizes of plates and dishes from 4 inches to 28 inches in diameter; eight different types of basins, each in a variety of sizes; no less than eighteen styles and sizes of standishes, and fourteen types and sizes of porringers. To these must be added tankards, tavern pots, wine measures, tea and coffee pots, hot water plates, spoons, funnels and chamber pots. Included in a multiplicity of other items are such oddities as alembics, fowl boilers, fumigating pots, ice-cream moulds and dish stands.

Of this varied output, perhaps the most pleasing pieces are the tankards and flagons which graced the tables of the middle classes – the tradesmen, clerics and country gentlemen who could not yet aspire to the expensive silver. These wares closely followed the style of the contemporary silver and the best of them are in no way inferior in craftsmanship.

The earliest eighteenth-century tankards have a scroll thumbpiece. This was followed by the "chairback", both solid and pierced, from c.1730 to 1770, and the open chairback followed in the later decades of the century. Hollow single-curved handles, made by slush-casting, span the whole period. Those with a spade terminal are found only up to c.1710; the fishtail was in fashion from c.1700 to 1725 and was superseded by the ubiquitous ball terminal. Examples of the two latter types are illustrated in figure 1. From around the mid-century, more or less ornate double-curved handles are also commonly found. Tankards with tulip-shaped bodies were produced in quantity after about 1730 and many of these were made in Bristol and the West Country, as well as in London.

Tall, elegant flagons with knopped lids and flared skirts mainly date from between 1720 and 1780 and are the predominant type. Nevertheless, particularly in the first quarter of the century, a variety of straight-bodied, unskirted forms were made with knopless lids. Many of these are from Wigan or York (figure 1). The last-named city was also the source of the rare "York flagon" which had an acorn-shaped body and which was produced for a period of some eighty years from just before 1700. Though some flagons are

ecclesiastical in origin, and may be found engraved with the name of a church or of its churchwardens, most were domestic vessels. Good mid-century tankards and flagons can be bought at auction for about £400 and tulip tankards for considerably less.

Plates and dishes stood in serried array on dresser shelves, sometimes with their faces to the wall to display polished undersides, a practice which has unfortunately led to the wearing away of many makers' marks. The commoner eighteenth-century types have already been described in a previous article (*Collectors Guide*, August 1985, pp.50-2). The scarcer earlier plates and dishes with decorative reeding cast at the edge of the rim – so-called "triple reeds" – originated in the 1680s. A plate of this period is shown in figure 1. They continued until about 1720 with somewhat narrower rims than that illustrated. Although rather uncommon in the smaller "plate" sizes, the larger dishes of 15-16 inches diameter are more frequently found. A rarer form of contemporary plate is the distinctive narrow-rimmed variety once thought to be characteristic of the West Country, but now known to have been widely made (figure 3). Wavy-edged plates and dishes, both round and oval, copied the prevalent silver fashions and were made with

a variety of edge mouldings between about 1740 and 1800. From the same period come the scarce octagonal and ten- and twelve-sided examples.

The earlier part of the period provides some attractive footed plates. These are termed "salvers" in the records of the time and were presumably used for serving sweetmeats and the like. The eminently practical hot water plate appears about 1770. Both salvers and hot water plates are at present somewhat unpopular with collectors and tend to be undervalued.

The sturdy utilitarian baluster-shaped wine measures were part of the furnishings of every tavern and were used to deliver wine from the barrel to the table. They are unique to pewter and exist in sizes from the gallon down to the half-gill. (The authenticity of the few quarter-gills is very suspect). The earliest examples date back to the fifteenth century and the shape probably stems from the medieval earthenware jug. These measures had "bud" thumbpieces hinged to the top of the solid strap handles from before 1700 to perhaps 1760, though a few were made later. A second type, with the "double-volute" thumbpiece, emerged about the mid-century and ran on until its end. Comparatively few bear makers' marks, which, when present, are usually struck on the lip. This may also carry a verification stamp, "AR", "WR", or (rarely) "GR". The commoner sizes may be bought for £150-250.

Also part of the tavern scene were the rare tall twin-banded beer pots which began to be made in pewter in the previous century. Their style derives from the staved and hooped wooden tankards of an earlier period. This distinctive type died out about 1725 and few straight-sided lidless tavern pots can be confidently dated between then and c.1760. From the latter date they differ only in detail from those of the early nineteenth century. As with tankards, many examples from the middle decades of the eighteenth century are of tulip shape.

Pewter porringer, though past their heyday, continued in use until the 1750s in England and were made until much later for the export market of North America. They normally have a single decorative ear (figure



Opposite page, fig. 1. A straight-sided York or Wigan flagon c.1710 (left); a conventional skirted example with open chairback thumbpiece, c.1760 (right); a triple-reefed plate c.1680; and a footed cup or chalice, c.1730. Above, fig. 2. A porringer with an ear cast with the initials "AR", perhaps commemorating the coronation of Queen Anne in 1702.

2). Few were made with two, usually a mark of Continental origin. Some, graduated inside, are frequently claimed to be bleeding bowls, but are much more likely to have been kitchen or invalid measures. "Blood porringers" were indeed made, but records indicate that these were of diminutive size. Some, I suspect, are now dignified with the name "wine taster".

Spoons closely follow silver patterns. The trifold, the dog-nose, the Hanoverian and later styles are all found in pewter. Coronation souvenir spoons cast with the bust of Queen Anne on the handle end are not uncommon,

Below left, fig. 3. A narrow-rim plate with wriggle-work engraving of a crowned rose, c.1700. Below right, fig. 4. A cup salt on footed stem, c.1750.

but some are reproductions cast in still-existing original moulds. The order book of the Bewdley firm of Ingram and Hunt, preserved in the Hereford and Worcester Record Office, shows that they produced over 100,000 spoons a year at the end of the century. Of this prodigious output, not a single one of their making has yet been identified. Presumably all were consigned to the melting pot when pewter in the kitchen became outdated. The same fate must have befallen the early eighteenth-century trencher salts in round and elongated octagonal shape, for few survive. However, the larger, later, cup salts on footed stems (figure 4) and later still on squat foot rings, are readily found.

Very few pewter candlesticks date from the eighteenth century. No doubt the advent of cheaper brass displaced the rather unsatisfactory low-melting alloy. Cast pewter tea and coffee pots, as opposed to Britannia metal ones, are also scarce. They can be dated by analogy with silver. Note, however, that pear-shaped "Queen Anne" teapots with tall domed lids are still being made for North African markets and some bear Arabic marks.

Little English pewter bears applied decoration, but wriggle-working, performed by rocking a narrow chisel over the surface to give a characteristic zig-zag line (figure 3), began in the mid-seventeenth century and lasted into the 1730s. The designs include birds, beasts, foliage and flowers and have some affinity with contemporary slipware pottery. They have a certain naïve charm and are currently much in demand, fetching several hundred pounds at auction.

Some fake eighteenth-century pewter exists, mainly made in the 1920s, but it is not as prevalent as that of the wares of the seventeenth century. Baluster measures, cast in old moulds and subsequently more or less distressed, are perhaps the most deceptive. More likely to trap the unwary are made-up or restored pieces with new lids, thumbpieces, or other parts. However, minor repairs to the soft alloy are quite acceptable to most collectors. Modern reproductions, not made to deceive, lack characteristic wear patterns and distinctive patina of genuine old pieces and are unlikely to pose a problem ▲



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The late 18th and 19th centuries

RONALD F. HOMER



PEWTER is an alloy of tin with minor quantities of other metals. In best-quality "fine" or "hard" metal, these comprise a low percentage of copper and/or antimony, and in the cheaper "lay" metal, up to 25 per cent of lead may be added. Pewterware, cast in bronze or iron moulds and finished by turning on the lathe, provided for some four centuries relatively cheap and durable utensils in a wide variety in all but the poorest homes and also furnished churches with ecclesiastical plate. Richard de Blountesham died in 1317 possessed of twelve plates, twelve dishes, eighteen saltcellars and two flagons of pewter, and in 1406 a London draper owned no less than two hundred pieces weighing 400lbs. In later centuries, most probate inventories list at least a few plates, spoons and vessels in the metal. It has been estimated that in the latter part of the seventeenth century, the heyday of pewter, between 22,000 and 35,000 tons were in use, perhaps seventy million

separate items among a population of about five million people.

The earliest identifiable pewterer, John le peutrer, is recorded in London in 1305 and another of the same name worked in Bristol in 1343. By the 1470s, pewter was being worked in at least thirty-five provincial towns in England, and in the seventeenth century virtually every market town had at least one pewterer.

Despite the prodigious cumulative output of several thousand pewterers over several hundred years, very little has survived due to the practice of trading in old wares in part exchange for new, for the low-melting alloy was readily re-cast. For this reason, as well as the depredations of time, pewter made before the seventeenth century, spoons apart, is unlikely to come the way of the collector. Such pieces as exist have mostly been excavated and are in the main housed in museums.

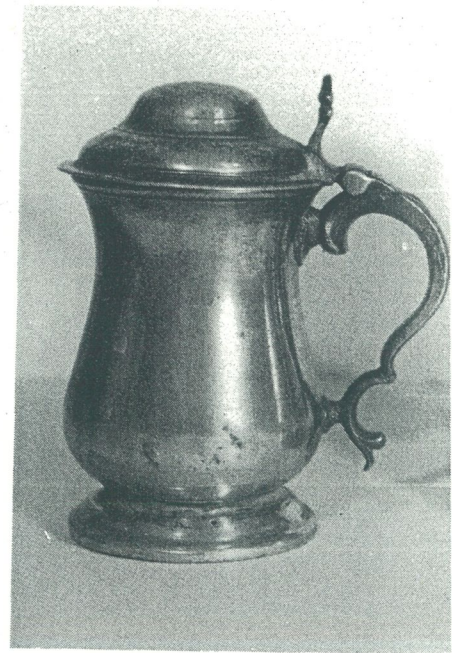
Dating from soon after 1600, plates and flagons and more rarely items such as

porringers and baluster wine measures may be found. A wide range of tankards, salts, tavern pots, candlesticks, footed cups and other items are available in increasing numbers from the time of the Restoration to the end of the century.

The eighteenth century provides an even wider range of pewterware for the collector, and at more affordable prices. By mid-century, however, domestic pewter was in decline, faced by competition from tinsplate, brass and cheap pottery. Even so, the nineteenth century provides wares produced for other markets, taverns, public houses, hospitals and military institutions and the colonies. The collector therefore has a wide choice, limited only by the depth of his or her pocket.

Despite the exceptional record auction

Above, fig. 1. A group of 18th to 19th-century pieces: a plain rimmed plate, c.1750; a quart tavern pot, c.1830; a candlestick, c.1830; a mid-19th-century jelly mould; and (foreground) two salts, c.1780-1800.



price of £32,000 recently paid for a massive 28-inch engraved charger of c.1660-65, significant later seventeenth-century pieces can be obtained for less than £500, and good late seventeenth-century plates and dishes for under £100. Most eighteenth-century pewter can be bought for prices ranging from a few tens of pounds to a few hundred. If these prices are beyond your means, look to the nineteenth century, a range of wares from which can be acquired for no more than a few tens of pounds each.

This article looks at plates and dishes of the earlier eighteenth century, which are quite common, and at pieces from the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, which provide the bulk of the pewter to be found at antiques fairs and in non-specialist shops. For the collector of limited means and for the beginner who wishes to get a feel for the subject without great financial outlay, this is a field where bargains are still to be found if one is equipped to spot them.

The most frequently found items are plates, dishes, bellied measures and tavern pots. Tea pots, coffee pots, jugs and the like, offered as "pewter", are almost certain to be Britannia metal, for cast pewter ones are rare. Britannia metal should not, however, be despised as it is now becoming collectable. But Britannia ware, fabricated from thin sheet pewter and formed by rolling, spinning or stamping, is outside the scope of this article.

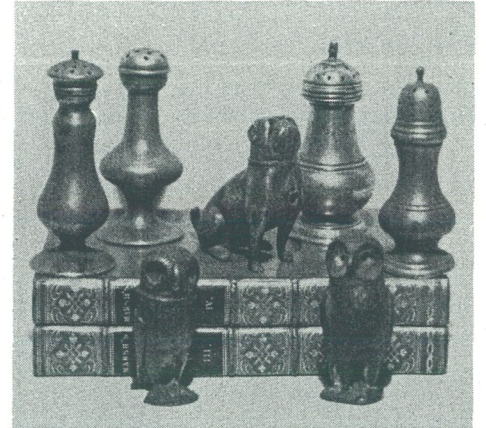
Pewter plates, categorised as "saucers", "plates", "dishes" and "chargers" according to dimension, were in sizes from 4 inches across up to monsters of 3 feet in diameter. Most commonly found are 9 to 10-inch plates and 15 to 16-inch dishes. Plain rimmed plates were made from soon after 1700 (the earliest being probably those from the wreck of the *Stirling Castle* sunk on the Goodwin Sands in the great storm of 1703) and were still being produced in the 1840s. In the absence of a known maker's

Top left, fig. 2. A plain-trimmed plate, c.1750, and 3 pint tavern pots. Left to right: c.1830-40, nicely engraved with its capacity; c.1820, with a prominent crowned "WR" mark and a later "Imperial" stamp (the spout indicates that this was a measure rather than a drinking vessel); and c.1800, with a cartouche reading "J. Fisher, Marqs Granby, Brightwalton".

Above left, fig. 3. A series of 18th-century funnels in various sizes. These never seem to bear makers' marks.

Above, fig. 4. Two lidded tankards: top, a tulip tankard, c.1800; above, an example which, by its maker's mark, can be dated to 1829-39.

touch-mark or an identifiable coat of arms engraved on the rim, close dating may be impossible. Plates and dishes with a single cast reed to the edge of the rim, the so-called single-reeded type, were made over a shorter period, perhaps c.1710-60, but are frequently to be found. Chargers over 20 inches, the largest usual size, command a premium, as do sets in any size by the same maker. Look for well-marked examples and avoid heavily oxidised pieces. Although



Top left, fig. 5. An 18th-century half-pint tavern pot with tongued handle.

Above right, fig. 6. A group of tavern pots: that on the right in the back row, with a ball-terminal handle, is mid-18th century. The others date from c.1800-80.

Above, fig. 7. Four mid-19th century bellied measures, quart to gill capacity.

Above right, fig. 8. A group of 18th-century pepperpots in a variety of forms.

these can be cleaned, the underlying metal may be heavily pitted. Avoid also, at least until you are confident, newish-looking plates with the touch-marks of Duncumb (a horse's jamb rising from a coronet) and Bush and Perkins (hall-marks including the initials "BP", Britannia, a gryphon's head and a rose); they have been extensively reproduced from the original moulds. Avoid also anything with an incuse "LONDON" mark and 4-inch saucers, virtually all of which are modern ashtrays.

With pewter measures and tavern pots there is a watershed at 1826, the year Imperial measure was introduced. Many measures made prior to that date conformed to Queen Anne's wine standard, which was smaller than the Imperial gallon (128 rather than 160 fluid ounces) and as they were no longer legal, most were destroyed. Survivals are thus rather rare and may be identified by measuring their capacity. Others conformed to William III's ale gallon which was marginally larger than Imperial measure; these can be identified by the crowned "WR" verification mark, which was in use from 1688 to 1826. Subsequently, the verification mark is

that of the then reigning monarch, George IV, William IV, Victoria and later sovereigns. Some pots which remained in use for long periods have a sequence of regnal stamps on them. In some parts of the country inspection was carried out annually and pots may be found with a long series of two-figure numbers stamped on them; these are the last two figures of the year. From 1878, each district had its own numbered "VR" stamp and these give both an indication of the date and the locality where the pot was used. C. A. Peal's *British Pewter and Britannia Metal* (1971) gives a list of them.

Most tavern pots are of the simple truncated cone shape with handles fixed flush with the body at their lower end. They come in quart, pint and half-pint sizes, with a very few half-gallons. However, many other shapes were made - tulips, waisted bodies, U-shapes and later inverted truncated cones or buckets. Handles may also be double-scrolled and late in the century come the plain square or C-shaped handles. A selection is illustrated in figure 6. Glass bottoms date back to the late eighteenth century, though most are mid-nineteenth-century. Pots with "tongued" rather than "cranked" handles (figure 5) tend to be early and hence pre-Imperial, though some persisted later, for moulds were long-lived. Pots with marks or inscriptions are more interesting than plain ones and rather desirable are those with a cartouche containing the name of the publican and pub, necessary since it was the custom to loan out pots with ale sold for taking away (figure 2). Plain drums tend to come before those with

fillets round the middle and plain foot mouldings are usually earlier than more ornate ones, though again there are exceptions. Makers' marks are found inside the base or stamped on the lip. Hall-marks were used until about 1840. The familiar bellied measures shown in figure 7 are found in sizes from the gallon down to a small fraction of a gill, and the assiduous collector can put together a long set. Most are Victorian (or later), a few are George IV and a very few are pre-Imperial. Styles changed little with date and attempts to date by handle styles are unreliable due again to the long life of moulds.

Plates, tavern pots and measures can be supplemented by pepperpots in variety (figure 8), tobacco jars, snuff boxes of all sizes and shapes, funnels (figure 3) and beakers and footed cups in a variety of forms. Salts, candlesticks, jelly and sweet-meat moulds are also to be found (figure 1), as are kitchen spoons and ladles - these add variety to a collection. If you are lucky you may find a lidded tankard (figure 4) though these are relatively uncommon and few were made after about 1820 except for engraving as sporting trophies, a class of collectables which has been almost entirely neglected.

C. A. Peal's *Pewter of Great Britain* (1983) is an excellent and comprehensive book with much practical information for the collector. The standard work on marks, H. H. Cotterell's *Old Pewter, its Makers and Marks* (1929, reprinted 1963) is now, alas, both scarce and expensive. Future articles will describe pewter of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. ▲