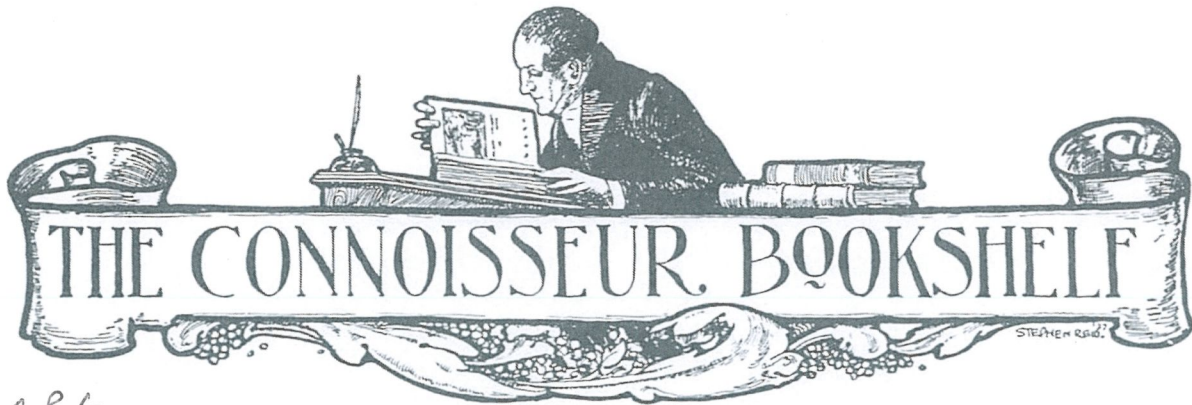


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p. 401-402



C.R.G.

"Pewter down the Ages," by Howard Herschel Cotterell, F.R.Hist.Soc. (Hutchinson, London, 21s. net)

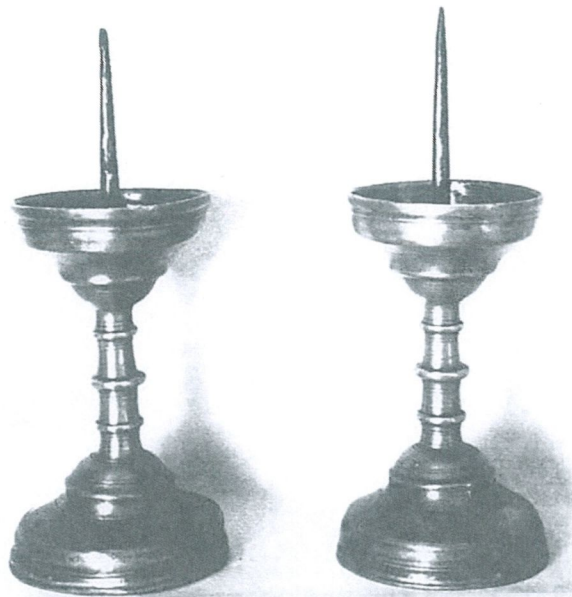
NEARLY all English pewter—known to be such— anterior to the second half of the 17th century has disappeared, so for earlier types of the ware Mr. Cotterell has turned to surviving Continental examples. He has drawn upon most of the German states, France, Holland, Denmark, Switzerland and Bohemia for the examples he illustrates: a goodly show including types of pieces which in England were more frequently executed in silver, and others too ornate to suit our plain national taste. Mr. Cotterell, feeling a "keen sense of humiliation" at the paucity of authenticated examples of mediæval British pewter, seems disposed to think that the British pewterers of earlier days were behind their Continental rivals. He writes of British pewter "which sought inspiration from neighbouring Continental countries," and states "that most of the types which up to now have been accepted as *purely British*, are in reality nothing more than local adaptations of well-established European types whose roots are away in the past, centuries earlier than the so-called British types." But he brings no evidence to support his contention. The earliest types of Continental pewter which he illustrates date chiefly from the 15th century, with one or two examples assigned to the 14th. None of these appears to suggest any well-known British type. Then Mr. Cotterell says of certain pieces: "They were fashioned at the time when pewter was made only by the monks, and cannot be later than the 14th century." But no evidence is adduced that at any time "pewter was made only by the monks." Certainly this cannot have been the case in 14th-century England,

for, as early as 1348, the London pewterers were such a flourishing community that they were granted a charter by King Edward III., in which it was expressly directed that no one was to offer any pewter for sale in the Kingdom unless the metal of which it was composed was first assayed by the officials appointed for the purpose by the Pewterers' Company. Indeed one would like to ask if Mr. Cotterell has any evidence to prove that pewter was ever made in any British monastery?

This ordinance would also stop the importation of foreign pewter, if any did come over then, for the metal in the latter was not of sufficient purity to conform with the English standard. But in the Middle Ages the working of pewter was emphatically an English craft, and the export of pewter abroad was an important source of wealth to the country. In 1551, in Soranzo's report to the Venetian Government (quoted by Mr. Salzman in his *British Mediæval Industries*), it is stated that 100,000 ducats worth was exported from England yearly, chiefly to Spain. It seems likely, then, that what resemblance there exists between English and Continental wares was

caused by the latter being imitations of the former.

This, however, does not make the early Continental wares less interesting, and among the pieces which Mr. Cotterell introduces to his readers there are many types with which English collectors are by no means familiar. Highly attractive in this respect are three massive Hanseatic flagons of the 15th century, distinguished by their ponderous weight of metal, and various examples of *gourdes*—vessels with gourd-shaped bodies, much in use on the Continent during several centuries. Sixteenth-century Dutch pictures are pressed into service to illustrate rare types of pieces, some of which appear now to survive in



PAIR OF PEWTER PRICKET CANDLESTICKS 15TH CENTURY  
HEIGHT, 10 IN. VETTER COLLECTION  
FROM "PEWTER DOWN THE AGES" (HUTCHINSON)

these presentments only. There are numerous German flagons, belonging to the same periods, of various kinds; two highly interesting English baluster measures, *temp.* Henry VIII.; and a beautiful classical ewer and several 16th-century candlesticks, with central drip trays, which were taken with them by those bold Dutch navigators, Jacob von Heemskerck and William Barendtsz, when, in 1596, they made a second attempt to reach China by the Northern Asian route. The expedition miscarried: its survivors only managed to get back to Holland by leaving behind most of their gear, which was rescued as recently as 1876. These especial pieces are of an ornate character, quite different from the others discovered in the ships, and it is suggested that they may have been intended as gifts for the Emperor of China. Their Dutch origin has been disputed in favour of French, but this hardly seems consistent with their known history. It is true that some of the principal features of the candlesticks follow French types, which were made in bronze as early as the 15th century, but popular patterns and styles of ornament appear to have percolated freely from one country to another, and it seems hardly likely that the Dutch would try to push French wares in China.

During the latter part of the 17th century, British examples are far more in evidence, but though there are many elegant and tastefully decorated pieces among them, it is noteworthy that English fashion favoured far less exuberant and ornate styles than are shown in some of the Continental wares. Mr. Cotterell carries his survey down to the middle of the 19th century, and the 160 illustrations—many of them full page—which he gives represent a wide variety of different types embracing the work of all the leading European countries. In his letterpress he explains the sequence of these, and gives a comprehensive summary of the evolution of pewter through nearly six centuries. Though written for easy reading, it is a book that no serious pewter collector can afford to ignore, while its glossary and list of English pewterers and their marks—the latter being loose so as to afford facility for carrying it about—are highly useful features. The late Mr. Antonio F. de Navarro, the well-known collector, in his foreword, contributes a gracefully expressed and well-deserved tribute to the "meticulous care" which Mr. Cotterell has lavished on this and his other works concerning pewter.—C.R.G.

**"English Furniture from Gothic to Sheraton,"**  
by Herbert Cescinsky. (Ernest Benn, London.  
£3 3s. net)

This, though handed in for review quite recently, is not the latest of the author's books, for its title-page shows that it was originally published in America in 1929, and consequently precedes by two years his *Gentle Art of Faking Furniture*. Mr. Cescinsky explains in his Preface that the work is the expansion of a series of thirteen lectures delivered in 1927 and 1928 at the Metropolitan Museum to extra-mural classes of New York University. The expansion has resulted in the production of a handsome volume containing over 900 good illustrations of pieces of furniture and woodwork. Mr. Cescinsky complains that the effects of lecturing are evanescent—perhaps in this case not altogether a misfortune, for though the New York extra-mural students

did not learn as much as they might have done, they had also the less to unlearn, and in 1929, not to say 1928 and 1927, Mr. Cescinsky was still capable of making mistakes. This is well exemplified by the opening page of plates (page 32) accompanying the first chapter on "English Oak Furniture," for three out of the four illustrations which occupy it are repeated in the *Gentle Art*, and the difference between their ascriptions in this and in the earlier *English Furniture* is somewhat striking. A "Mid-sixteenth century oak chest" in the latter, set down as the work of the "inferior craftsmen" whom Mr. Cescinsky calls "arkwrights and huchiers," becomes a "Chest of the late fifteenth century. The work of the carpenter"; while a "Mid-sixteenth century oak chest . . . the panels decorated with the device of the wheel of St. Catherine," and a "Mid-sixteenth century oak side table" are transformed respectively into "An oak chest purporting to be of the early sixteenth century. . . . With the exception of the top, the whole chest is modern, with signs of age imitated in the clumsiest possible manner," and "An oak side table of pseudo-post-Dissolution Gothic. . . . A piece such as this is demonstrable as a fake from a photograph alone." It is edifying to see the almost contemptuous way in which the Mr. Cescinsky of 1931 corrects the Mr. Cescinsky of 1929. The two pieces which he presented to the extra-mural classes in 1927 or 1928 as genuine examples are in 1931 denounced not merely as fakes, but as "obvious" and clumsy fakes: such, apparently, which any reliable furniture expert should detect at once. Would that one could now assure the New York students that Mr. Cescinsky's corrections of his descriptions of these three pieces have now made them wholly accurate, but truth must out. What Mr. Cescinsky thought in 1929 was a "Mid-sixteenth century oak chest" made by a "huchier," and in 1931 a "Chest of late fifteenth century," made by a "carpenter," is in reality a very well-known and typical 13th-century example in the Victoria and Albert Museum. Seemingly, Mr. Cescinsky alone decided to question the period assigned to it, and however many dates he may propound as alternatives, it is probable that the authorities of the Museum and most other people interested in old oak will think fit to accept that originally and officially given.

Of course, one would not for a moment suggest that the proportion of misdescriptions on page 32 is maintained throughout the book. Indeed the great bulk of the nine hundred and odd items illustrated appears to be correctly named and dated; yet the alterations already mentioned show that the *Gentle Art of Faking Furniture* is on the whole the more accurate work of the two. There are numerous items duplicated in both books, and these, when wrongly described in the *Gentle Art*, are in practically every instance wrongly described here; but as nine pages of THE CONNOISSEUR (Vol. 79, pp. 189-190, and pp. 332-338) have already been spent in discussing these errors, with perhaps a few others which do not appear in *English Furniture*, there is no necessity to recur to them. Want of space prevents an examination of Mr. Cescinsky's excursions into English philology and history, but his description of "wrought" as a "modern word" derived from "wright" suggests that they need not be taken too seriously.—C.R.G.