

Hardmetal pewter

Translation of Albert Löfgren's¹ transcription of minutes dated June 6, 1739 at the Royal Swedish Chamber of Commerce in Stockholm after a meeting with the Master and aldermen of the Stockholm Pewterers' Company: (*The Company had been advocating a total ban on imports for some 60 years. Failing that, they insisted on various price and duty concessions.*)

'The Chamber suggested the necessity of the pewterers improving their quality and price in such a manner that imports could thereby be entirely excluded and also communicated complaints that their wrought work was not as good as the English and the Chamber asked for the reason and if the Masters understood the correct composition. They replied that after the new Ordinances of 1694, 1697 and 1700 they were allowed a certain addition [*meaning lead for hollow ware*] but that they now wrought the tin as they received it from England with the exception of the necessary addition of copper and "markasita" (Bismuth acc. to Dalin, or else Fe S²) [*Löfgren footnote*]. The Company insisted they understood the composition as well as the English and if they were just able to get a better price, they should be able to deliver as good as the English. With the use of "regulus antimonii martialis" the pewter became tougher and of beautiful appearance, but for this they had to pay 24 daler per pound. Answering the Chamber's question why the English [pewter] was more sought after, although more expensive, and how they could maintain that they understood the English composition when they had not been to England, they replied that there were Masters in Germany who had worked in England and who understood the composition. The Masters offered to work-up samples, but stated that coal and tools now cost twice as much as some time ago. The Chamber insisted that there were complaints about their pewter which was not as strong or of the same appearance as the English. *The Masters insisted that their pewter was equally good and that old such pewter served much better for recasting, whereas the English thereby totally lost its ring [my emphasis]*. The appearance stemmed from the "regulo antimonii martiis", a metal which had been forbidden in Vienna in pewter composition as dangerous to the health. The Chamber found this very statement significant of their ignorance of the correct composition as similar statements about the English pewter were unheard of. When the Masters also insisted that the English Masters had the advantage of the best tin too, the Chamber illuminated them about the procedure leading up to the stamping of the tin in the mines of Cornwall and that their statement was without foundation. It will be the ruin of our Companies if they were satisfied with what they learnt in their youth without bothering about later and better speculations and attempts at experiments. The mixing of tin with "Spiauter" from Eastindia was a practice used in France and England and made the pewter very fine and silvery. ...

*[The Stockholm Chambers had members from the mighty Merchants' Companies which is evident from their detailed knowledge of Cornwall practices etc. The Chamber's deep involvement in the alloy illuminates the serious state of the home industry, then threatened by the London imports. The erroneous Chamber's "zink" ("Spiauter?)" suggestion above too points at a London "method". The Chamber obviously knew that **something** improved the London sadware, and if it was not Antimony, they were eager to suggest what they believed was the "hardener/silver-maker", namely zink which was patently as wrong as was the **plain** Antimony addition to the alloy constituting the "English Secret" !]*

... As they did not understand this, a “materiologist”, understanding the composition, was essential and it was suggested that they contributed somewhat to such a person for his travelling expenses and towards an advance. The Masters replied that such a materiologist might be essential and useful, who had access to suitable premises and nothing else to do [!!!], and that they would be willing to make use of his services were it not for the fact that the Company lacked the funds to supply him with any support. As an example of the suffering the Company endured, due to the encroachment of English pewter, the Masters named a Merchant’s warehouse in which alone, after the Peace Treaty, as much wrought pewter had been found as in their combined Stockholm workshops. They suggested that the Minister should twice annually search and test the pewter of their workshops so that those who broke the rules of the Ordinance might be punished and that others, producing good work, may not be compared with them.’

In the end, the Chamber instructed the pewterers to deliver to them samples of their best, 4-struck so called “english” pewter.

[No further alloy action appears to have been taken by the Chamber until the introduction of hallmarking of pewter together with silver at the assay offices from 1754.]

¹ Löfgren, Albert. *Stockholms Kanngjutarekrå Band I-III*. Stockholm: Nordiska Museets Förlag, 1925,1933,1950, (Vol III, pp. 97-98.)