

Pewter at the Harrison Gray Otis House

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THE assemblage of pewter, acquired by the Society more or less incidentally or accidentally, has a certain interest as a whole, for it gives an idea of the sorts of things which survive the vicissitudes of ordinary family life. It contains few drinking vessels but is rich in plates and platters. There is no flagon, no tankard of colonial usage, only a couple of measures, and but few mugs. Nearly all the hollow-ware consists of teapots and beakers of the britania period (1820-1860). The absence of tankards is not surprising, for those made of pewter seem never to have been popular in New England. Unless a man could afford a silver one, he drank from a mug or can. But English measures of the eighteenth and even of the seventeenth century have survived to a remarkable extent in New England. Perhaps, now that their absence from our collection is noted, good friends may bring in some of them. In the olden days each town was required to have a standard set, and each vendor of spirituous or malt liquors was expected to have his measures inspected and stamped by the Sealer of Weights and Measures.

As would be expected, the collection is dominated by articles of English origin. This report was compiled before Mr. Charles K. Davis's splendid gift of American pewter was received. That acquisition is of such importance as to deserve separate listing, hence what follows refers to the status of the shelves as of about November 1, 1949.

There are 58 pieces of English sadware. "Sad" in this connection means "heavy," as in sadiron, and many pew-

terers were known as sadware men, for they made plates, platters, and chargers only. By definition, a plate is 10 inches or less in diameter, a platter more than 10 inches and less than 18, a charger 18 inches or more. By the above standards, we have 2 chargers, 1 deep plate, 16 platters, and 32 plates. Also 2 hot-water plates, made by soldering a ring of pewter around the rims of two plates, adding handles, and cutting a hole in the rim of the upper plate to allow one to pour in the water.

It is of some interest that many of the plates are by Samuel Ellis, who made pewter in London from 1721 till 1765. Ellis seems to have built up an especially good reputation in the Boston district, for his products are found here commonly. It may be remembered that John Hancock, in ordering a new service of pewter from London in 1783, stipulated that it should be made by Samuel Ellis, if possible. But by that time this pewterer had been succeeded by Thomas Swanson, whose work also is represented in the present collection.

Until the Davis collection arrived there were only four marked pieces of American sadware, but all were made in Charlestown or Boston. One is a platter by Thomas Badger, two are plates by Nathaniel Austin, and there is an excellent basin bearing the eagle of the same maker. Among the unmarked pieces, probably American, are six basins, one of them only $5\frac{3}{8}$ inches in diameter, seven porringers, and a 6-inch butter plate.

The only seventeenth-century piece in the collection is an excellent broad-brimmed $16\frac{3}{4}$ -inch platter by Jeremiah



FIG. 1. THE OCTAGONAL BASIN, WITH THE ATTUCKS TEAPOT IN FRONT AT THE LEFT, AND A LATER PEAR-SHAPED ONE ON THE RIGHT

Loader of London, who struck his touch on the first of the existing touchplates about 1667. Not having much room, he spelled his name Iere Loader, encircling his device, which was a sun-in-splendor on an anchor. This mark is on the back of the brim, a general characteristic of seventeenth-century pewter. On the front of the brim are his hitherto unknown hallmarks: 1. Lion passant, 2. Sun in splendor, 3. obliterated, 4. IL. The broad, plain brim went out of fashion before the end of the century, and "Iere" fades from the records after 1686.

Next, in point of age, is the best piece of pewter on the shelves, an octagonal basin or deep dish, with a handsome ga-

drooned rim. (Figure 1) It is 12 inches in diameter, $2\frac{1}{4}$ inches deep, and was made by John Newham who struck his touch in London, January 14, 1700. He was still alive in 1731, where he was a dignified Upper Warden of the Worshipful Company of Pewterers.

The octagonal dish is exceedingly rare in English pewter. Mr. Cotterell, in his great work, *Old Pewter, Its Makers and their Marks*, figures three 9-inch plates of this sort, to all of which he ascribes a date of about 1755, and two more which seem to have been made about 1780. But these have neither the size nor the depth of the one under discussion.

The only comparable piece the writer

knows is one in his own collection, and it is 12½ inches wide and only 1½ inches deep. This one was made by W.L., who struck in 1668. It has a furrowed, double-reeded but not gadrooned rim. It seems that the specimen in the Otis House may be unique, and the second oldest known octagonal piece. These plates and basins are in the French taste, for ornamented rims were unusual in England. Mr. R. F. Michaelis has identified W.L. as William Lewis, who became a freeman of the Worshipful Company of Pewterers in 1667. His hitherto unrecorded "hall-marks" are: 2. a bird with one displayed wing, 3. a leopard's full face, 4. a lion passant.

Added interest is given to the specimen in the Otis House by its inscription, "The Gift of the Honorable Theophilus Burrill, Esq. to the third Church of Lynn." The donor was born in Lynn, July 15, 1669, son of John and Lois (Ivory) Burrill, and grandson of George Burrill, who was a resident of Boston, England, when he received a license to marry Mary Cooper of Appley, January 12, 1626. George was one of the proprietors of Lynn, Massachusetts, and died there in 1653, after establishing what has been referred to, rather jocosely, as the "Royal Family of Lynn."

Colonel Theophilus Burrill was Captain of the Lynn Company on the expedition to Port Royal, June, 1707, promoted to Major of Militia, 1723, and Colonel of the Essex County regiment in 1732. He was Representative to the General Court 1725-1726, and on the Governor's Council 1727-1730. He died July 4, 1737, leaving in his will "100 pounds each to the First and Second Churches for the purchase of silver plate, and a like sum to the new meeting house at the westerly end of Lynn for the use

of the Society." The Second Church became the First Church of Lynnfield, and the new meeting house at the westerly end seems to be the Universalist Church in Saugus, for they bought a communion service with money left by Colonel Burrill.

The use to which this piece was put is problematical. It is far too deep for a paten, and too capacious for collecting alms a new and struggling community was likely to supply. It seems probable that it served as a christening basin.

Before leaving the subject of sadware, another word may be said about the so-called hall-marks. These small stamps on pewter have none of the significance of the real hall-marks on silver or gold plate. Each pewterer put on such as he pleased, not to deceive the customer with the notion that he was buying silver, but possibly to gratify his vanity. In most cases, one of the hall-marks, better called small marks, bore the initials of the pewterer. But many specimens are found which bear the touch-mark of the maker, and the hall-marks of some other pewterer. A recent writer has suggested that in such cases the small marks were put on by a middleman, or as we should call it, a dealer. That undoubtedly happened to American silver during the late eighteenth and the nineteenth century, but it would have been impossible when the Pewterers Company was enforcing its ordinances. It seems more probable that a man beginning business used the small marks of his former master, either out of respect, or for such prestige as it may have given him. A case in point is a plate in the collection which bears the touch of Samuel Ellis, but the small marks of John Silk. John Silk could not have sold plates made by Samuel Ellis, for he struck his touch twenty-eight years



FIG. 2. THE POCKET CALENDAR, OBVERSE AND REVERSE

before Ellis did. Probably Samuel was one of his apprentices. When Thomas Swanson took over from Ellis in 1765, he took over the Ellis small marks. It is somewhat curious that the second of John Silk's small marks was a black-letter R. Despite the fact that his father was a pewterer, he was probably trained by some unidentified man whose family name began with R—Raymond, perhaps.

For some inexplicable reason, English collectors take little or no interest in pewter teapots. The best Cotterell could do was to picture a handleless, pear-shaped pot of about 1760, and I note that Mr. Michaelis lets Massé's slighting reference to them continue in the 1949 edition. As Cotterell himself admitted, eighteenth-century teapots are about the rarest of objects in pewter. Most of the early ones are of the pear-shaped type, copied from those the silversmiths began to produce about 1690. Even more rare are the globular ones, copied by silversmiths from the Chinese hot-water pots. The early specimens, made in the second quarter of the eighteenth century, had straight spouts, as in the one shown at the

left in Figure 1, but later ones had the curved type. Some of the silver ones are really globular, others depressed at the top, drawn out below, bullet-shaped. And this led to the inverted pear-shape which succeeded the globular form about 1770.

The specimen at the Otis House is small, and unusual in that it has a splayed, rather than a ring-foot. No touch is visible, but one may be hidden under the patination on the bottom. The writer feels that it would be sacrilege to clean or repair the pot. The nearly straight spout, coupled with the depressed spherical body, reminds one of the silver specimens made in England as early as 1723. The spout has been detached at some time and very crudely soldered on again. It is not quite straight, and although almost circular in section, it is rather faintly panelled. The small lid is a low dome with a finial which originally had a wooden button. Since teapots of this type were copied from porcelain ones with set-in lids, the hinge is made flush with the upper surface, so that it does not show in lateral view. The slender makeshift handle is

not even a remnant of the original one. The total height is about $4\frac{1}{2}$ inches, the greatest diameter about $4\frac{3}{8}$ inches and the bottom of the foot $2\frac{1}{2}$ inches in diameter. The material is a rather soft pewter.

This much-damaged teapot, badly repaired at the spout, and with an improvised handle, is perhaps the most historically interesting article in the collection. It is believed to have belonged to Crispus Attucks, "the first martyr to the cause of liberty." As in most such cases, it is necessary to depend upon tradition for the association. But in this instance, tradition seems unusually well supported. The teapot was given to the Bostonian Society by Miss S. E. Kimball of Westboro, and by them transferred to the Society in 1918. Miss Kimball wrote of it: "This relic, once the property of Crispus Attucks, has been in possession of different members of the Brown family since his death. Deacon William Brown, who owned Crispus, was the younger brother of my mother's great-grandfather, Jonas Brown."

A little genealogical research shows that Deacon William Brown was baptized in Lexington, April 28, 1723, that he removed to Framingham, and died there in 1793.

Whether the good Deacon really owned Crispus is a question. When the twenty-seven-year-old servant ran away, he was certainly a bondsman of William Brown, who advertised in the *Boston Gazette* of October 2, 1750, for his return, describing himself as his "master" but not as his owner. J. H. Temple, in his *History of Framingham*, names the slaves who were probably alive in that town in 1760, and Attucks is not among them. William Barry, in his history, says that there were only seven "servants for life" left in the town in 1764-1765. If

ever a slave, he must have been freed some time before his death, for he has been described as fond of sailing voyages, and as of having been lately a resident of New Providence. When he met his death in the Boston Massacre of March 5, 1770, he was in town enroute to North Carolina.

Attucks was probably a descendant of the "Jno. Attuck, Indian" who was unjustifiably hanged along with Capt. Tom (Wuttusa componom), Indian, Chief Sachem of the Nipmucks, on lecture day, June 22, 1676. He is said to have been one-third Indian, one-third Negro, and one-third white, but on what evidence is not related. When he ran away at the age of twenty-seven he was six feet two inches tall, but on the night of the disgraceful street brawl which has been advanced to the status of a patriotic demonstration, he seems to have increased in stature. John Adams, who defended Captain Preston at his trial, said of Attucks, "He was a stout fellow, whose very looks were enough to terrify any person." He led the rabble of disorderly, much-provoked ropemakers, sailors and Negroes from Dock Square up King Street and fell upon the sentries posted in front of the Customs House. Probably Attucks did not know what it was all about, but for once in his life he was at the head of something, a leader instead of a bondsman—he was the first to fall at the fatal volley. But he fell at the culminating moment of his life. His grave was his path to glory. He lies in the Granary burying ground, along with the other victims. But no monument marks the spot, and since the old larch tree died, there seems to be some uncertainty as to just where it is. All Bostonians are familiar with the "Attucks" monument on Lafayette Mall.

Another teapot, shown at the right in

Figure 1, is of the conventional pear-shaped sort. It bears the rare antelope-head touch of Robert Bush and Co. of Bristol, England. The spout is interesting in having a convex upper surface and six panels at sides and below. The high, domed lid has a beaded edge, a characteristic of the so-called Queen Anne teapots made by William Calder of Providence and the Boardmans of Hartford. Since Robert Bush and Co. was dissolved in 1793, this pot was probably made before that date, but after 1774. After the days of the popularity of Ellis, Bristol and particularly the firms in which the Robert Bushes were interested, sent a great deal of pewter to New England.

There are several teapots of the britannia period, some made in or near Boston (R. Gleason, Putnam, Israel Trask, Morey and Ober) and two by James Dixon and Sons, Sheffield, England, who after 1730 were purveyors by Royal Authority to our great-grandmothers. These "duck-bodied" pots are comfortable looking, and arouse pleasant feelings in those of us who used to go back home to "grandpa's" on Thanksgiving back in the eighties. I bought one with my grandmother's initials on it here in Boston—probably thrown out when the old folks died. Even sentiment does not extend to britannia ware; collectors will not touch it, but it has historical interest. One of our teapots has the torus body popular in Sheffield plate. Another a base which was spun on the same chuck used in making sugar bowls and basins for tea-slops. Almost everything has an interest, if you think it out.

There are a few coffee pots in the collection, but one should realize that one cannot distinguish a tea from a coffee pot merely by the height or shape—look inside to see the size of the openings in the strainer; small for coffee, larger for tea.

The best one is a large affair, made by Leonard, Reed and Barton between 1830 and 1837. It still retains the ring which originally supported the coffee-bag. Britannia coffee pots are really scarce. The metal was not at all well adapted to be set on the hot stove—old-timers boiled their coffee.



FIG. 3. THE HALVES OF AN EARLY EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY SPOON-MOLD

An extraordinary piece is one labeled as a "perpetual calendar." (Figure 2) It can hardly have been such, for it lacks the thirty lines of epacts, so it would be impossible to calculate from it the date of Easter in the year 6551. But it is remarkable that it should have survived. It was obviously made before 1750, for in that year the Calendar (New Style) Act was passed by the Parliament in England, ordering that the third day of September, 1752, was to be counted as the fourteenth, and that the legal year was to begin January 1 instead of March 25. This pocket calendar states distinctly that March begins the year. Pepys and other seventeenth-century diarists had long ig-

nored the legal, in favor of a January 1 beginning.

Molds for teaspoons are rare, but the Society has two of them. The older and more interesting one (Figure 3) would produce a spoon $4\frac{1}{2}$ inches long. The elliptical bowl is braced by a rat-tail, hence the mold was probably made before 1730, when this sort of drop went out of fashion. The handle is of the wavy-end type, but, curiously, has a spade-shaped, almost pointed terminal lobe. Such spoons were made as early as 1690, and the rounded end superseded the wavy about 1710, so there are rather good limiting dates. The function of a spade end on a pewter spoon is not obvious. In a harder metal it might have been used in breaking loaf-sugar. Possibly the mold was used in casting latten rather than pewter spoons. But Malcolm Bell figured a $7\frac{3}{4}$ -inch spoon with this same sort of terminal on plate XX of his book, *Old Pewter*.

The collection contains a considerable number of spoons. Some were cast in old rat-tail molds owned in private families; two or three of the real pewter ones bear the touches of English pewterers. Others are of britannia, the kitchen spoons of the second half of the nineteenth century. A few were made by Bingham, a man who may have been either English or American. It sounds as if he came from Connecticut, but he does not seem to be listed.

Another unusual specimen is what might be called a pan-candle holder, since it has a sort of frying pan handle, somewhat like that of a pan-lamp. It is the only such pewter object the writer has seen. The saucer, which is only $3\frac{3}{8}$ inches in diameter, has a gadrooned border, and, on the under side, a circular foot or flange. Since the sides of this are

vertical, it is probable that the saucer fitted into the top of a wafer box, as in the silver writing sets of the eighteen twenties and eighteen thirties. The proper designation would probably be taper-stick, rather than candle-stick. The handle is short, thick and almost square in section where soldered to the saucer, but wide and flat at the distal end. It springs abruptly upward from the saucer.

The candle socket is only $1\frac{3}{4}$ inches high and seems to have been provided originally with a bobèche, or nozzle, as the somewhat inelegant English term is. The end of the handle is ornamented with a rococo shell, much like that on a spoon made by P. Ashberry. Since the spoon was made in the days of William IV, that is, 1830-1837, it is probable that it was made at about that period, possibly by Ashberry.

Much more could be said about the collection if this were a full report. There are several lamps for burning whale-oil and burning-fluid, and some candlesticks, mostly of the saucer type. One of the lamps is of a spool-shaped, peg type, with brass troughs for two wicks. It is real pewter: Mr. Malcolm Watkins identified it as being French, of about 1780-1790. There are numerous beakers, with and without handles, some pewter and some britannia. One footed specimen, of large diameter, marked YATES, was probably once part of a communion service.

There is an English bed-pan, and a German hot-water warmer: all the comforts of home. A lidded medicine spoon, and a pewter syringe, represent the medical equipment.

With the exceptions noted earlier in this article, it is a well-rounded collection, illustrative of the homely furnishings of modest houses of the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.