

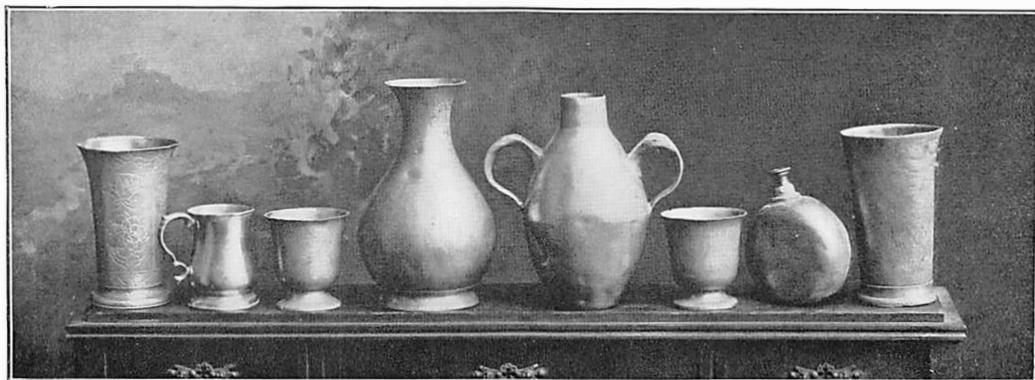


A COLLECTION OF ENGLISH PEWTER
BY E. W. LOW

THE true collector not only revels in that which is beautiful and rare, but he finds an added zest in the possibility of being deceived, in the difficulty of discriminating between the true and the false, in the tracing to its origin any object in his possession, or which he has a mind to acquire; in short, he values his treasures, not so much for their intrinsic worth, or even for the fictitious value fashion or fancy may have accorded them in the sale-room, as for the tangible evidence they furnish of his keenness, his untiring industry, and his triumphant instinct. That, of course, is a picture of the perfect collector, all too rare, alas, in these days, when many a private individual who looks askance at the name of "dealer," scarcely deserves to rank higher than the latter so far as his keenness for a bargain, his avowed object in "buying for a rise," are concerned. Still, the other type does exist, and he should rejoice that there are branches of the art of collecting, which, in spite of almost everything being reduced to a commercial basis, still offer ample opportunities for the indulgence of his ruling passion.

He may rest assured that if he takes to collecting pewter, no demoralising certainty with regard to value, no commonplace books of reference to which the uninitiated can turn need damp his ardour for the exploration of a very little known tract of country. Doubtless a certain amount has been written on the subject, but even the best authorities, few as they are, are fain to acknowledge how little they really do know, how scant and inadequate are the scraps of knowledge which have come to them as the result of much toil and research.

For something over seventy years the pewterer's craft has practically fallen into desuetude in England; to some extent it still flourishes on the Continent, though not perhaps in a very genuine form, the wares palmed off on the ingenuous tourist and brought home and exhibited by him with no little pride, being more often than not fashioned of a metal which a glance reveals to be spurious. But in England the sale of modern pewter made after the old manner and upon the old formulæ is confined to one or two firms, and then only as a small and trifling part of their



NO. I.—COLLECTION OF PEWTER DRINKING VESSELS

A Collection of English Pewter

businesses. The Pewterers' Company, which once upon a time was the head-centre of the craft, is but a name, and, unfortunately for the collector, the records that have been preserved are of the scantiest. Indeed, it would be more correct to say that no authentic records of the early makers and the marks used by them are in existence. The natural consequence is that such information as may be obtained towards the identification of any particular piece from private sources, is more or less apocryphal, and not to

advisable, or to be quite frank, safest, merely to refer to the collection belonging to Mr. Henry Dann, of Brixton, as "English," which the bulk of the articles undoubtedly are. Indeed, with the exception of a few, the major part of the collection bears the Crowned Rose, which is, so to speak, the hall-mark of British pewter, and when in addition to this the word "London," or in one or two cases "Shoreditch" appears, assurance is, of course, rendered doubly sure.

Mr. Dann's collection consists in all of 192 pieces,



NO. II.—COLLECTION OF PEWTER ON OAK DRESSER

be depended upon. This and other matters relating to the craft having been dealt with at length in *THE CONNOISSEUR* some time back, it is not necessary to enlarge upon them here. They are only mentioned in order to show that in dealing with a collection such as the present, the individual pieces can as a rule only be approximately dated, it not being possible to associate many of the marks—where indeed they are not so worn as only to be roughly decipherable—with any known maker.

Such being the case the writer has deemed it

including practically every article that was manufactured in the metal. To enumerate them one by one would take up too much space; it will be sufficient to refer to the most notable specimens. Dearest perhaps to their owner's heart are a pair of large dishes, measuring 24 ins. in diameter; they are marked "Watts, London," and also "X X Superfine Hard Metal," which points to their being of fairly early origin, possibly early seventeenth century. One of the dishes has the mark cut out and a piece very deftly inserted, the repair having been effected, if one

The Connoisseur

can judge by the workmanship, at a considerably later date. Large dishes such as these are exceedingly rare, and are not often to be found, except in the possession of ecclesiastic and other public bodies. The reason for this is curious; many such dishes were at one time manufactured, but that few survive is due

sacrificed. Wantonly, surely, will exclaim every good collector; for what is the merely practical that it should be allowed to claim for its own ephemeral needs what ought by right to have belonged to the beautiful and ornamental for all time.

Another pair of dishes of 10 ins. in diameter—



NO. III.—CORNER OF ROOM WITH PEWTER COLLECTION

to the fact that when the general use of the metal declined, such utensils were broken up or melted, and used for various useful but common-place purposes, such as mending roofs and other repairs. How many of these "old-fashioned" utensils were devoted to such base purposes can only be surmised, but from their rarity one may guess that a great number were thus

and from their depth evidently designed for vegetables—are notable, although virtually modern (1832). They have upon them a naked winged man (an angel?) and the name "J. Hironstadt," and are probably of Belgian manufacture. The pewter emanating both from Ghent and Brussels bears similar devices; on the other hand, it must not be

A Collection of English Pewter



NO. IV.—COLLECTION OF PEWTER TOBACCO JARS AND TEA CADDIES

forgotten that at one time many foreign makers settled in this country. These vegetable dishes, as we may call them, are of very fine light metal, and evidently have a goodly proportion of silver in their composition.

All Mr. Dann's pieces have been acquired in true collector's style; that is to say, he has purchased here, there, and everywhere when the opportunity occurred, and the acquisition of his treasures has lasted many years and practically taken all England for its field. Everyone knows that what collectors of such articles hanker after more than anything else are "sets" of similar articles, and such sets when purchased *en bloc* generally run to high prices. As will readily be seen from the illustrations the collection is rich in such groups, but their completeness represents patient search and careful purchase rather than the easy prodigality of the *dilettante* who buys at any price.

The group of candlesticks contains at least one of quite early date. The quaint specimen of three-cornered shape probably left the craftsman's hand while Queen Elizabeth still ruled o'er this realm. The other groups, those consisting of the inkstands, the beakers (*en passant* one may say that the modern so-called "pewter" pot in use at some public-houses is usually made of quite a different metal), the tobacco jars, and the sacramental cups, are equally fine and complete.

As a contrast to the other pieces, and more particularly to those which are characteristically English in their design and workmanship, one is struck by a Chinese pewter tea canister, the metal of which it is made being of a lightish silvery colour. The canister is chased in the most delicate and exquisite fashion imaginable, and represents a veritable model of industry, artistic perception, and unerring craftsmanship. Not absolutely unerring



NO. V.—COLLECTION OF PEWTER CANDLESTICKS AND INKSTANDS

The Connoisseur

perhaps in an age of machine turned articles; one observes with no little pleasure that here and there on this canister the worker has misjudged his distance or the strength of his stroke, and has, in consequence, had to deviate by a hair's breadth from his design, or otherwise make a trifling compromise in order to carry out the remainder of his scheme.

It will be seen that the illustrations practically explain themselves, but there are one or two special points which call for notice. In the collection of drinking vessels (No. i.) the beaker on the right has engraved upon it the unmistakable figures of William and Mary, so that there can be small margin for doubt as to the date of its origin. The flask to the left was literally "picked up," as it was rescued from the bottom of a well in Yorkshire.

The complete collection makes a brave display with the old Cromwellian dresser (a thing of beauty in itself), upon which Mr. Dann has fittingly grouped it. The "Black Jack" on the centre left hand shelf

cannot be passed over without a word, although not really within the purview of the present article. Engraved upon its silver rim are these words, "James Ist: the greatest fool in Christendom 1605." This was formerly the property of Sir Harry Parkes. The oval dishes to which reference has been made will be noticed standing on the floor in the illustration showing the angle of the room in which the collection is kept. Indeed, this illustration and the one showing all the articles arranged on the dresser give a much better idea of the scope and variety of the collection than any amount of verbal description.

In the absence of really reliable and definite information which would enable one to verify the marks, any attempt to deal in detail with the pieces is bound to lead to unsatisfactory and unreliable conclusions. A glance at these two pictures will, however, convince anyone that there is little exaggeration in claiming for this collection that it is unique of its kind.



NO. VI.—CRUCIFIX INCENSE TUBES
ABOUT 1600