

A TALE OF TWO PLATES

A collector emails

“Some years ago, I bought a plate in an antique shop in London. The plate has a lovely weight to it, a crude but pretty monogram to the front and touch marks to the rear. The date was unknown.

Some years later I was at an antiques fair in Milan. There is a metal specialist who often attends and this particular day he had a plate for sale that seemed very familiar. I realised it was very similar to the plate I had bought in London some years earlier and decided to buy this one and make them a pair. There was something lovely about the romance of having found items that had been separated for so long. The plate I bought in Milan was described as European pewter and dated between 15 and 16 hundred.

When I returned home, I compared the two plates and realised that they were, in fact, identical in almost every detail. I asked the dealer in Italy about this and he said that often there were imperfections in the moulds and that would account for similarities. So far so good but something is bothering me -

1 - I understood engravings and ownership marks to the front were applied after manufacturing? And yet on my plates the monograms are identical and in an identical position with only minor variation - perhaps one is crisper than the other but if these were engraved by hand surely one would expect to see more variation? Or perhaps they were stamped rather than engraved, is that possible?

2 - I understood touch marks were applied after manufacturing? And yet these are in identical position and more or less show identical wear revealing identical portions of the touch marks. My chap in Italy thinks the touch marks could have been in the mould which would explain their consistency of position and condition but is that normal?

3 - Perhaps the greatest variation in these plates is the wear shown to the rims. One plate (right) is definitely more worn than the other and in general is a little less crisp overall which is particularly visible in the monogram. I guess that's consistent with age and the different usage of the plates?

4 - Pitting and imperfections. There are identical marks such as the pitting to the lower left, some scratches under the monogram and a tiny split to the lower left. I

imagine these could have been imperfections in the mould. Beyond that the plates do show signs of different wear which is a positive sign.

5 - But it's the usage cuts in the surface that confuse me the most. They're often what gives an old plate such wonderful character but look at how similar they are. All the main cuts are in the same position with one or two variations. How is this possible?

Where all of these questions are leading me to are the possibility, they are actually fake. That all of the details, monograms, cuts in the surface, age and touch marks were in the mould and the moulds were created to manufacture fake aged plates. Is this possible?

The next photo is of both plates –





plate to the left



Plate to the right

Comment from various experienced pewter collectors

The reverses are also in exactly the same condition as the fronts. I have very few plates with the reverse in exactly the same condition, they generally have oxidisation through the passage of time and only the fronts have been cleaned up.

My conclusion is they are fake. The dealer I bought one off was so unwilling to discuss the possibility - I think he must have been offended but I wasn't asking for a refund, just to investigate it.

Anyway, I also contacted the Pewter Collectors Club of America and their opinion was - *fake*.

I also contacted the Worshipful Company of Pewterers. They identified the marks as Gabriel Syren of Frankfurt which placed them as 18th C. The Italian I bought one from said 16th C so his opinion is clearly doubtful if not simply - wrong.

The WCOP then in turn contacted the German Pewter Society and the president wrote back ...

"The Frankfurt pewter smiths were very active and exported a lot of pewter to other German towns, so you do indeed find those plates in great numbers.

But I do understand your concern, as those two plates do seem a little too similar. The engravings are identical, as are the position of the marks, and even defects seem to be identical. I do have the feeling that these are modern copies made from the same mould."

They just don't feel right in the hand either, even the imperfections around the touch marks are almost identical - just doesn't seem possible to me. No plate could be scratched and pitted on the underside through similar use.

Another collector related that he had come across such a pair that had been so made in Italy from old English plates.

The same collector tells Pewterbank of his experience with what appear like rather nice Heemskerk candlesticks about 2 years ago.



Collector's

At auction these realised £1125 and assumed OK; but are they? Are they really a Pair? Perhaps we should look closer. We see that the base the knop and the holder are different.

I also bought a pair of Heemskerk candlesticks about 2 years ago from a very reputable dealer. He sold them to me as early 18th C and possibly late 17th. Why would I doubt him given his stock is fabulous on the website? But I did have a question mark which was the price.

They were reasonable and when I questioned why he was happy with a low price he said it was because he'd bought them very reasonably.

I thought I understood, he sounds like a decent chap. But they always bothered me, something didn't feel right so I spent quite some considerable time investigating and learning about Heemskerck candlesticks.

I came to the same conclusion as the plates ... fake. Fast forward a couple of years and I had them appraised by someone I have since come to realise is something of an expert in Heemskerck, and the moment he saw them he said fake, probably made in the 1960's to 1980's! Ouch, what a disappointment.

Having handled several real sticks of the period since it was so obvious the ones I bought were fake.

They just didn't have the wear, the age, the dings, the weight and of course the massive giveaway, had I only known back then, **is -**

Heemskerck candlesticks were not made in pairs.

They were always single items and therefore you simply don't find early 18th, 17th or 16th century examples in pairs. Only much later were pairs manufactured and yet I still see dealers passing them off as 17th century pairs. Another huge give away is if they unscrew apart into sections ... a total no-no for early sticks of this type. I have since found some real ones and they are gorgeous - the weight and quality of metal is a totally different ball game.

What I have learned is make sure you learn more about the items you're buying before you buy.

Even dealers can get it wrong so they may not be trying to pass fakes off as real, but better to have some knowledge than none.