Two Pewter Plates from the Tobacco Pipe Company's Seventeenth-Century Dinner Service

Jan Gadd, *Society for Clay Pipe Research Newsletter 69,* Spring/Summer 2006, pp 10-13

The London livery companies' dinners and feasts were costly affairs. They were normally paid for out of the companies' purses, but they also put Masters and Wardens, and sometimes also the livery, under some financial pressure on several occasions annually.

The pewter services used on these occasions were called 'garnishes' and most companies appear to have owned a number of such garnishes, which were paid for by the membership. These were used on a day-to-day basis, as well as for smaller functions by officers of the Court.

The historian Charles Welch, who published the records of the Worshipful Company of Pewterers in 1902, notes for the year 1509-10:

> ***Itm*** *Rs of good men of the Craft toward ij garnesh & đi of vessell iiij^{xx} £ iiij ££. (£84.-)*
> ***Itm*** *Reseyved in money of good folke of the kraft toward our vessell XiX s. ij d.*
> ***Itm*** *for a markyn Iren of the strake of Teyn & lellepott xvj d.*

From the above can be seen that the yeomanry also paid their share towards what must have been a very handsome service indeed. The sheer size of it probably made the hire of extra plates and dishes unnecessary even for the largest of feasts. The supply of this service was 'in-house', and one or more pewterers were honoured with the task of casting it. To favour any one member with lucrative hire-contracts on a continuous basis would probably have invited internal jealousy. The last item above was a punch for marking the pewter with the Pewterers' Company's coat of arms.

For grander occasions, a number of pewterers provided a hire service for the benefit of other livery companies. Some invoices and receipts from individual pewterers to the Stationers' Company dating from between the years 1677 and 1705 (with a single later bill dated 1772) have survived, and remain at the Stationers' Hall (*Records,* 1987*)*. Most of the remaining Stationers' Company's bills dating from the last quarter of the seventeenth century were issued by the London pewterer Major John Hulls. The table (Figure 1) is an attempt to summarise the Stationers' ever increasing demand for hire-pewter for one particular feast over a period of 16 years, based on these invoices. Upon return of the pewter, all missing items were charged for at a nominal price. Out of the four dozen spoons hired in 1693, 17 spoons were missing, which indicates that some members left the feast with a souvenir in their pocket.

	1677	1681	1683	1693
16" dishes	9	-	-	-
12" dishes	9	26	16	6
10" dishes	12	12	20	22
7" dishes	21	18	26	40
5" dishes	-	4	-	6
pasty plates	24		18	16
trencher plates	18 dz		24dz	30dz
pasty plates	9		9	3
salts	6		6	8
spoons	4	2 dz	?	4dz

Table cloth, glasses, pitchers and jugs, knives and spoons (the pewterers' hire spoons were for serving) were provided by the 'butler' who, with '6 men' included in the invoice (probably head waiters), charged £4:15:00 for his services. This is evident from a bill dated 1692 (also at Stationers' Hall) and it is almost exactly the same price of £4:08:06 that the Stationers' Company paid for the hire of pewter in 1693.

The author has been involved in the cataloguing of the pewter collection at the Museum of London for some time. **Two plates there are of note because they belonged to the Tobacco Pipe Makers' Company and were stamped on the back with the Company's coat of arms.**

The Plates

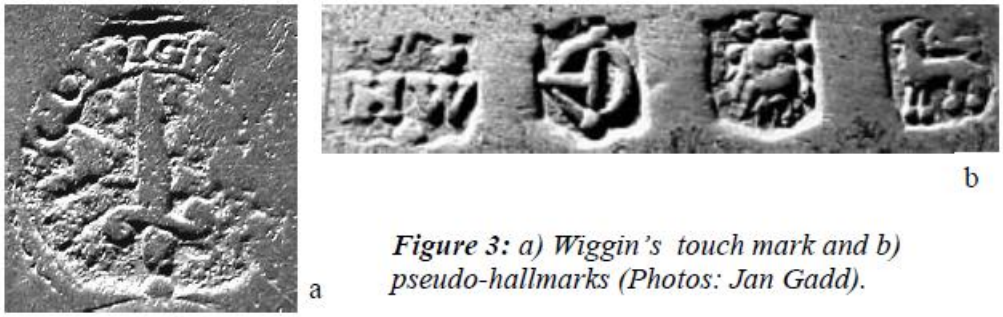
The quality and condition of the two plates is very good indeed - London flatware pewter was traditionally completely lead free. They are of the multi-reeded, 'Baroque' style that developed after about 1660 from broad rimmed plates and dishes (Figure 2a). This style peaked in popularity in 1670–80 but had lost popularity in favour of plates with a single reeded rim or with plain rims by *c*1700.



Figure 2*: (a – c). a) One of the narrow rimmed, multi-reeded plates from the Tobacco Pipe Maker's service, c1685, at the Museum of London. b). The Tobacco Pipe Makers' arms struck on the back, compared to c). the arms copied from the London Armoury, 1677. Courtesy of the Museum of London (Photos: Jan Gadd).*

The plates are easy to date with some precision for two reasons. The multi-reeded style with *narrow rims* arrived *c*1680 but it does not appear to have been popular with customers. As a result it was by necessity, but grudgingly, discarded by the manufacturing pewterers after very few years, perhaps as early as 1685, judged by the scarcity of remaining plates of this style. All pewter was cast in expensive moulds representing a substantial capital investment for the pewterers so discarding and replacing a set of moulds was probably painful! Customers were used to having their ownership, in the shape of names and crests, etc., engraved on the front of plate rims, which this narrow style of rim could not accommodate. The arms of the Tobacco Pipe Makers (Figures 2b and 2c) would have been proudly struck on the front rim rather than on the back, had the Company chosen a different style of plate.

The pewterer who made the plates for the Tobacco Pipe Makers' Company was Henry Wiggin of London, recorded by H. H. Cotterell in his standard work on British pewter as No. OP5136 (Cotterell, 1929). Wiggin, from Shenstone, Staffordshire, was apprenticed in November 1672 to one of the great flatware Masters of the period, Samuel Jackson, and given his freedom on December 18, 1679. He opened shop in March 1682 but had a very short career as he died in 1694, which is the second reason why the Company plates are easy to date to *c*1685 (Ricketts, 2001). Wiggin struck his registered touch on the back of the plate and his set of pseudo-hallmarks on the front rim (Figure 3). Upon opening a shop, a pewterer was required to strike (thus register) his touch on a touch plate kept at Pewterers' Hall, which was an early form of consumer protection. The pseudo-hallmarks arrived in London *c*1660 and had a decorative but no formal purpose to serve – nor were they intended to deceive as most devices here apart from the pewterers' initials were purely fictional.



a b

Figure 3: *a) Wiggin's touch mark and b) pseudo-hallmarks (Photos: Jan Gadd).*

The accession numbers of the two surviving plates at the museum are 16561C and D and they arrived as a gift to the Guildhall Museum in 1946, before the creation of the Museum of London. Their diameters are 239 mm with a rim width of 29 mm.

References

Cotterell, H.H. (1929) *Old Pewter,* B.T. Batsford, London

Hatcher, J., and Barker, T.C., (1974) *A History of British Pewter,* Longman Group Ltd, London, 273 and 267-8.

Records of the Stationers' Company 1554-1920 (microfilm), (1987), Chadwyck-Healey, Cambridge.

Ricketts, C., *et al.* (2001) *Pewterers of London 1600 – 1900,* Pewter Society.

Welch, C., (1902) *History of The Worshipful Company of Pewterers*, Vols. I and II, East & Blades, London.