

# BIRD SEED HOLDERS OR INK WELLS

A WEBSITE READER ASKED ABOUT BIRD SEED HOLDERS AND COMMENTS ON THE PERHAPS MISTAKEN CONFUSION WITH INK WELLS. THESE THOUGHTS LED TO SOME INTERESTING ILLUSTRATIONS.

FOLLOW THE LINK - *hausbuch der mendelschen zwölfbrüderstiftung*

FOR MANY WONDERFUL ILLUSTRATIONS OF OCCUPATIONS IN THOSE TIMES

*In the 14th - 16th c. there were produced what Mitchener, Medieval pilgrim & secular badges, called 'bird seed holders' (p. 223 and 258/259).*

A recent publication can be found on the website of the Dutch Pewter Society [www.nederlandsetinvereniging.nl](http://www.nederlandsetinvereniging.nl) → literature → Oostveen J. van, Een Utrechts vogeldrinkbakje.

*The London Museum has a number of those and also a certain collector G. Bailey ( I also own some (see picture 1)- 5).*

Although in the hausbuch mentioned here above of 1437 AD there is a medieval illustration of a monk holding such object as an inkwell, it is hardly believed it was used for this purpose, because pewter is supposed improper for holding ink, it would destroy the metal. My question is, did you ever test this assumption or Do you know of others testing it ?

The holders are often tin with a high lead content and the same is true for holders which undoubtedly are inkwells (picture 6 - 7). What makes this comparison difficult is that such inkwells often have a round hole in which a holder of glass or porcelain may have been put.

I have several but never found one in which such a holder was still existent. In other words also here the ink was perhaps put into the pewter/lead holder directly.

FOLLOWING is a miniature from the book of hours of Catharine of Cleve (M p. 247 of the version of the Guennol coll. and the Pierpont Morgan Library).



A FEW QUESTIONS -

What this item is likely to be - ringed in red?

Looks like there is a hole above for the bird to put its head through

ANSWER

I think indeed a bird can put its head through the hole of the attached cage. The colour of the object is white, it seems a water bucket of porcelain whereas the other 'annex' to the right was for seeds.

My attention was drawn to this subject by a page in a book of 1437, if you google

### *hausbuch der mendelschen zwölfbrüderstiftung*

you will find pictures of this book, in the submenu 'more pictures' you find as first picture of row 18 a monk (brother John), who is writing in a book holding an inkwell in his left hand.



## AN ANSWER TO THE QUESTION OF INK

About the more important question regarding ink - the traditional formula consists of LAMPBLACK, WATER and GUM ARABIC. However, there were other formulations which used Tannin (Iron Sulphate,) and oak galls together with various vegetable dyes. None of these chemicals is very corrosive, even iron sulphate will not corrode pewter. If these containers had an insert it is not surprising that they have been lost. Even the common Treasury inkstands are often found minus their inkwells.

# Bird Seed Holders (or ink wells?)



