

CLEANING OLD PEWTER

A pewter collector who likes a certain glow with his pewter whilst still showing that the pieces is of age writes to say how he looks at and cleans old pewter pieces. -

I do try to avoid buying anything dark and oxidized unless I feel that the piece can be hand cleaned. In fact, we have made a decision that we will never again risk a heavily oxidized piece.

Whilst we have not bought many over the last 35 years, only one has turned out satisfactory that piece being the "Chained Swan" wriggled plate. The reason it is satisfactory is due to hand cleaning after the removal of oxide by electrolytic method- not by me hence the large expense incurred by insisting on hand finish cleaning.

Regarding cleaning, I try to buy pieces in such condition that very little is needed other than a coat of metal polish.

However, I do not use "elbow grease" when polishing but simply use a light touch to remove the polish thus producing a "glow" without looking as if it has been on a buffing wheel.

If it is necessary to use anything stronger, as it will on the John Grave Penrith Dome lidded Flagon, I start with "0000" wire wool which looks to be of the same softness as your brass wool and use metal polish as opposed to water as the "wet part".

If necessary, I will use "wet & dry" again with metal polish but start fine say "1200" grade. Assuming that I have stuck with my principles of not buying heavily oxidized pieces, I would not expect to use anything more abrasive than "800" grade- in fact, I have never needed to do so.

Once the piece is at the desired colour, apart from the odd dust, I would probably clean with metal polish every 3 or 4 years. Again I would stress that the polish is removed gently without vigorous rubbing thus the original colour is retained with a "new glow".



** "Chained Swan " Wriggled Worked Plate by Martha Fly Circa 1690. The images show before and after cleaning, not done by me. The wriggled work was covered with varnish before Electrolytic

cleaning; thereafter, after removing the varnish with paint stripper (not recommended) the plate was hand cleaned with wet & dry and then hand polished. A success, but as I did not formulate the total cleaning method except insisting on the hand finish, it might be prudent not to give away trade secrets!



*** The (uncleaned) 18th century Penrith Flagon (above) by John Grave. I will make a start on cleaning by hand using the methods mentioned i.e starting with the finest "wet & dry" or wire wool and moving to a courser grade if necessary but I will not use courser than 800 grade. It is hard work and takes hours but the finish is far superior to any others, in my opinion.



*** 18th century English Salt : partly hand cleaned by me using the methods already stated. I decided to just clean part and leave the heavy oxide showing on most of the salt, to use this as an example of cleaning. I nearly gave up as it is hard and lengthy work. Fortunately, the metal is hard hence the surface after cleaning is free of "pocking".