

# FAKES REPROS AND WORRIES – AND A FEW CLUES

This article attempts to advise the novice how to look at some evidence and guess that what appears to be a very old piece of pewter might not be. This article only deals with the likelihood – it does not say that this is definitive – it spells out only what would make the writer uncomfortable. In as much then it is a personal view. It will not always be correct.

This is not to advise the buyer what to buy as there are very good reproductions of old pewter to be found excellent new work, and even fakes can offer great interest. The aim is simply to help buyers know the difference.

This information is for the novice, the beginner – a good deal more information has been published to assist the better informed in how to spot fakes.

Let us start with the marks found on some pieces of Pewter. Firstly consider this plate –



The marks would try to tell you that this is a Bush & Perkins Plain Rimmed Pewter Plate. The London mark looks worn, the crowned rose with ferns to the side looks very old and worn with the use, cleaning and care of the plate.

Bush & Perkins were a partnership who worked in Bristol from 1775 onwards – so it might be assumed this plate was made around 1800? When fakes were being made in the early 1900s Bush & Perkins marks were popular with the fakers.

### **What worries the writer –**

Do remember these are simply the writers own views and he does not try to represent himself as an experienced expert but simply writes about that which he looks out for.....

- 1) The plate looks more engineered than cast – the lines are harsher – it takes some time to see this.
- 2) Those hallmarks could have been made with one punch containing all four whereas in 1800 and before they would use individual punches and it might be clear that it was difficult to achieve good symmetry striking one at a time.
- 3) The London mark has no cross hatching ( criss-cross fine line work behind the letters) it is a little crisp.
- 4) The Crowned rose with ferns is easily produced in a strike with a worn out punch. A little polishing to the edges and it appears to have been there for a long time.
- 5) The patina – surface colour effect is very even all over. On really old pewter it never is some bits are always far worse, oxidation is never regular. Dark aged oxidation gathers to the edge of the rim, sometimes in patches on the rim and elsewhere, sometimes where the booge (area curving down to base) meets the base. Further I will relate more on how such an all over even patina is achieved on pewter.

### **Let us look at (what the writer thinks) is a genuine old plate –**





**This is a Single Reeded Pewter Plate by John Langford perhaps about 1800**

Giving his address as the Rising Sun Bishopsgate, London John Langford began work c 1780.. This plate has a variable pewter patina with some oxidation and a surface cleaned a good while ago.

Notice the irregularity of the oxidation – not impossible to create but really difficult and too time consuming. Notice the hall marks have worn and the bigger space between the third and fourth confirms that they were put on individually as does the very slight tilt to the first mark.

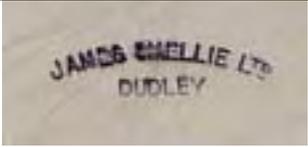
Notice the oxidation to these marks and its variety of tone. Notice the workmanship in the mark with his name - the serrated outline to the name and the detail in the crowned rose, the serrated edge to the London label and maybe there was some work to the back of the London mark - it isn't really clear but also it isn't completely plain.

So for two plates purporting to be the same age it is suggested that the differences as shown here are very apparent, and that with such information the buyer can begin to be careful

Let us be clear – there is nothing wrong with buying a reproduction or a fake if that is what the buyer wants – but it is the responsibility of the buyer to know – it is the buyer's money. Sellers cannot be expert in all they sell. It is extraordinarily rare to find anyone who could make a living out of selling antique pewter alone.

**STRIKING PUNCHES AND WHAT IT MIGHT TELL US** – the writer recently struck a lot of 20<sup>th</sup> century and earlier punches and so gained a little foresight into how these marks are made. (These marks are all shown elsewhere on this website).

Let us consider the following –

	A	B	C	D
1				
2				
3				
4				
5				

## TO COMMENT ON THOSE ABOVE –

Each punch mark is in a rectangle which can be identified by a number (first column - vertical, and a letter from the first top row – horizontal)

**2A 4A 4D 5A** – the Crowned Rose with Ferns – this is how a worn out punch strikes the metal

**B 4** – is a regularly found Birmingham mark shown here as made by the worn out punch

**B1 B2 A3 C3 D3 C4** – (When David Hall visited James Smellies in 1981, a couple of years before they packed, up he persuaded the foreman to stamp various punches and touches, that were kept in a couple of boxes, on some sheets of pewter. This confirms the connection of the Yates business with the numbered Crowned ‘X’s and the triangle with Gaskell and Chambers. It has been suggested the numbered marks were to identify the individual craftsmen who made items and the triangle containing the apparent ‘Y’ was to show old James Yates moulds had been used to make the piece concerned. This is of course speculation, as the firm’s records were apparently destroyed in the blitz.

If the numbered Crowned ‘X’s were to identify individual craftsmen it has some logic; there were questions of quality control and piecework payments (not that the Victorians would have used those terms). It does appear, however, that there might be other possibilities. For instance if the men worked in gangs or groups, possibly self-employed as they still do in some Sheffield businesses, then their gang might have been identified in this way. Perhaps even less likely but just possible might the numbers refer to a particular mould that been used to make the pot so marked. From what Smellies had – in what was already a downsized enterprise – this might just be possible. )

**A1** – This ‘James Yates’ signature style mark found at Smellies is now thought to have originated maybe in the 1950s. An article elsewhere details Sales literature of Smellies James Yates collection cast in James Yates molds up to the early 1980s.

**C1 D2** – are James Smellies 20<sup>th</sup> Century marks

**C2 B3** – are likely 20<sup>th</sup> century marks – with the Dublin Mark certainly found on some faked pieces. The London mark is questionable but the serrated edging is ‘lazy’ having good serrations but smaller and less of them than earlier such marks – this though is open to unanswered questions.

## CLUES ON ESTIMATING THE AGE OF A MUG

Let us be very clear again – there is nothing wrong about buying a Reproduction piece (there are some very nice ones) or even a Fake (they can be very interesting) – but only if that is what the buyer wants to do, and knows he or she is doing.

The problem is one of deciding what the piece is – if the seller doesn't know or doesn't say.

It is not too difficult to age the patina of newly made pieces. An explanation of how this might be done will be given later.

Consider these pieces –

**1 - a style not made before 1850 – likely to have been made in the second half of the 1900s**, little or no variation in patina/colour/oxidation, verification marks for George IV and William IV and Victoria

Notice the very even all over patina, little or no variation in colour – a certain give away that this is not very old. We could guess that it was made in the last 30 years.



2 – A style not made before 1850 – this was likely made in the second half of the 1900s, patina varies but the mottled effect around the middle of the body is worrying, as are verification marks for George IV, William IV and Victoria.

A darker all over patina can be achieved by dipping in ‘Aqua Fortis’ a diluted mixture of nitric acid (and sulphuric acid?). The longer immersed the darker it goes. A way of matching patination in a repair by brushing on the area – whilst protecting the area around it. The total immersion darkens and needs removing when the colour required is achieved but the all over colour is the same everywhere.

To achieve the speckled oxidised look in this example covering the body with a fine powder like a talc and then sprinkling with the acid solution will create this effect. That is not to say this was done that way but that such a method might well produce such a result. Clearly this speckling was produced to imitate oxidation. But you cannot create a real oxidation effect as the next example shows.



Looking at the example above you see that at the junction of the lower handle terminal inside of the waist fillet and within the lines of the footrim there is little sign of oxidation. Yet these are the very areas that even with good cleaning it is difficult to remove true oxidation from as that is where oxide forms firmly.

### 3 – A Glasgow Pint Mug likely made about 1850 – (verified for County Antrim)

This very nice and genuine piece has dark areas of oxidation on it despite being cleaned by the proud owner at some stage. Look at the thumbpiece, the handle terminals, the reeding and fillets of the waist and foot and you see where oxidation of age is most difficult to remove, fake, or create. Difficult – maybe not impossible, but there is always the question of value and time spent.

Compare this with example two and this gives real clues for this writer anyway as to what to look out for. This is not intended to be definitive it is simply offered as a good guide.



4 – A Half Pint pre imperial Ale Standard Mug made before 1820 – Crowned WR mark for William III to the left of the top handle terminal.

Here again looking at the handle, thumbpiece, lower foot and fillet, as well as just the overall subtle variables in the body colour and signs of use – reasonably convinces of its age by its appearance.



## AQUA FORTIS

**This website accepts no responsibility for any who might try to use this. Websites dealing with this product give warnings as to the dangerous effects and the need for protection of eyes hands and any exposed body areas. Anyone intending to try this out should seek instruction and carefully follow any advice.**

What is it – well it is defined as –

**Aqua fortis**, or “strong water,” in alchemy , is a corrosive solution of nitric acid ( $\text{HNO}_3$ ) in water. It is made from salt peter **Potassium nitrate** . It was used in alchemy as a solvent for dissolving silver and most other metals with notable exceptions of gold and platinum that can be dissolved using aqua regia. Aqua fortis was prepared by

mixing either sand, alum, or vitriol **Sulfuric acid**, or the last two together, with altpetre, then distilling it by a hot fire. The gas collected from this condenses into aqua fortis. The discovery of aqua fortis is credited to Jabir ibn Hayyan sometime around 800 AD.

Aqua fortis was useful to refiners for parting or separating silver from gold and copper; to the workers in mosaic for staining and coloring their woods; to other artists for coloring of bone and ivory, which is done by tinging the items with copper or verdigris, then soaking in aqua fortis.

Nitric acid is a strong oxidizing agent. It ionizes readily in solution, forming a good conductor of electricity. It reacts with metals, oxides, and hydroxides, forming nitrate **nitrate**, chemical compound containing the nitrate (NO<sub>3</sub>) radical . Nitrates are salts or esters of nitric acid , HNO<sub>3</sub>, formed by replacing the hydrogen with a metal (e.g., sodium or potassium) or a radical (e.g., ammonium or ethyl).. salts. Chief uses of nitric acid are in the preparation of fertilizers, e.g., ammonium nitrate **ammonium nitrate**, chemical compound, NH<sub>4</sub>NO<sub>3</sub>, that exists as colorless, rhombohedral crystals at room temperature but changes to monoclinic crystals when heated above 32°C; and explosives, e.g., nitroglycerin and trinitrotoluene (TNT). It is also used in the manufacture of chemicals, e.g., in making dyes, and in metallurgy, ore flotation, etching steel, photoengraving, and reprocessing of spent nuclear fuel. It is produced chiefly by oxidation of ammonia (the Ostwald process). Small amounts are produced by the treatment of sodium nitrate **sodium nitrate**, chemical compound, NaNO<sub>3</sub>, a colorless, odorless crystalline compound that closely resembles potassium nitrate (saltpeter or niter) in appearance and chemical properties. It is soluble in water, alcohol, and liquid ammonia.

**with sulfuric acid. Nitric acid was known to the alchemists as *aqua fortis*; the name is used in commerce for impure grades of it.**

**Nitric acid**, chemical compound, HNO<sub>3</sub>, colorless, highly corrosive, poisonous liquid that gives off choking red or yellow fumes in moist air. It is miscible with water in all proportions. It forms an azeotrope (constant-boiling mixture) that has the composition 68% nitric acid and 32% water and that boils at 120.5°C;. The nitric acid of commerce is typically a solution of 52% to 68% nitric acid in water. Solutions containing over 86% nitric acid are commonly called fuming nitric acid. White fuming nitric acid (WFNA) is similar to the anhydrous variety, and red fuming nitric acid (RFNA) has a reddish brown color from dissolved nitrogen oxides. When treated with hydrogen fluoride, both varieties form inhibited fuming nitric acid, which has increased corrosion resistance in metal tanks, e.g., when used as an oxidizer in liquid fuel rockets.

**TAKE GREAT CARE AND SEEK OTHER ADVICE AND GUIDANCE BEFORE CONSIDERING ANY USE OF AQUA FORTIS**

Another product used is from – ([www.fredaldous.co.uk](http://www.fredaldous.co.uk) and search 'Pewter')

This is supplied by this firm of art, craft and design material suppliers – this website has not tried it, and hence knows little of it, but is going to. An experienced pewter collector has spoken well of it.

**Pewter Patina 100ml**



Code: 332150002

Use on finished pewter articles to age the product. **Price: £2.99** (including VAT where applicable)

This product – **Pewter Patina** in Directions for Use – For Antiquing Pewter – Wear Rubber gloves and protect all work surfaces, Remove all grease and dirt from the pewter by rubbing well with a grease remover on some damp cotton wool. Wash and dry. Shake the bottle and apply the patina with a paint brush until almost black. When dry, wash off with water and buff the highlights with grease remover. For a bright finish use a good metal polish. Finally coat with metal lacquer.

They also offer a product this collector had used called – **Black for Lead and Solder** – (to tone down soldered repairs?) it says – Poisonous – avoid contact with skin and eyes. If affected wash with water and seek medical advice. Corrosive irritant. Contains Selenous Acid.

This website has not yet tried these products but the serious and experienced collector who spoke of these did say he had had good results and no problems (for himself).