

MEDIAEVAL PEWTER SPOONS

BY NORMAN GASK

MEDIAEVAL English pewter spoons, by one of the curious paradoxes of collecting, are, in general, considerably rarer even than their scarce silver prototypes of the same period. Comparatively few have survived.

The pewter examples resemble closely in shape, size and design, their rich silver relations and are often of fine workmanship, some, indeed, little masterpieces of the ancient pewterer's art. They

have an enthusiastic following, particularly among pewter collectors.

When made in the far-off days of the Middle Ages they were hailed by those lucky enough to acquire them as a marked improvement on the horn, bone and wooden spoons of the period; a number were employed for church purposes.

All the famous types of mediaeval silver spoons—which were reserved for nobles and the wealthy—were also made in pewter.

Fig. I. Diamond-point, 6½ ins., unmarked.

Fig. II. Acorn-head, 6½ ins., c. 1450; mark, small Gothic "S" within a rectangle.

Fig. III. Hexagonal- or six-sided knop, 6½ ins., c. 1500; mark, a swan above N.B. all within a circle of pellets.

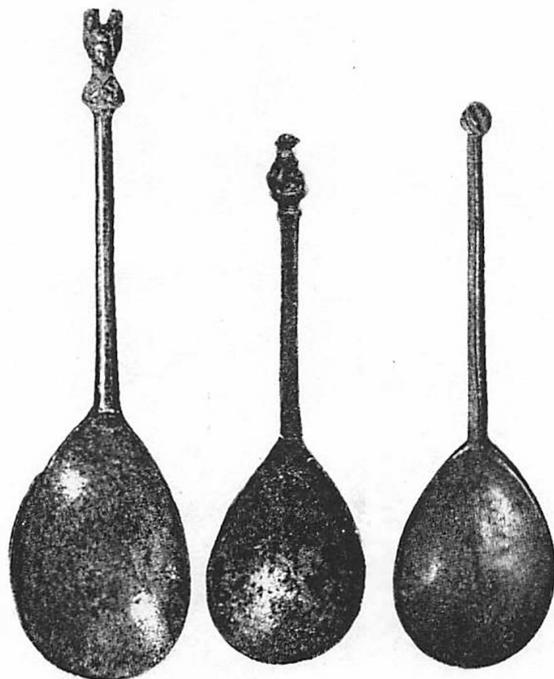
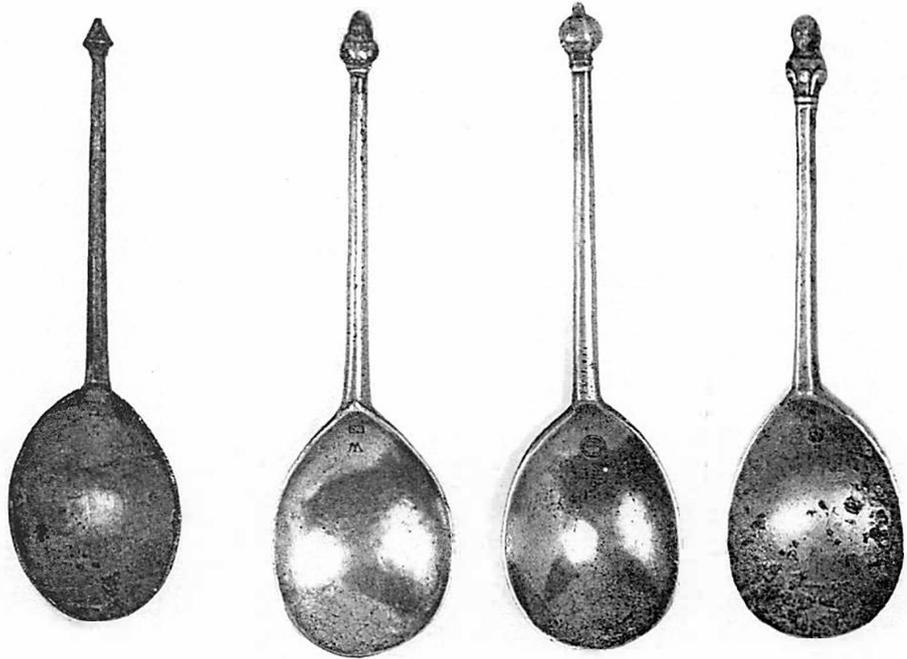
Fig. IV. Maidenhead, 6½ ins., c. 1500. *Ex A. B. Yeates Collection.* Maker's mark, a rose slipped and leaved within a beaded circle.

(Below)

Fig. V. Horned-head-dress, 6½ ins., c. 1430.

Fig. VI. Knopped with a lion statant in profile, XVth cent.; unmarked.

Fig. VII. Small wrythen knop, 5¼ ins. Late XVth century. Mark: Fleur-de-lys within a beaded circle.



A possible exception is the variety knopped with a Woodwose, or Wild Man, which I have still to see in the humbler metal. The pewter specimens bear only one mark—the maker's—which is punched in the bowl; sometimes, indeed, there is no mark at all, so that the dates, like those of the early XVth century silver ones, can only be approximated.

Thrown on the dust-heap with changing fashions in olden times, or when broken or otherwise damaged, flung into plague-pits, for fear of contamination, during London's periodic visitations of the Pestilence, forming part of the *débris*, afterwards built upon, of the Great Fire of 1666; slipped accidentally beneath the flooring of old rooms and cupboards, dropped overboard into Thames River by sailors in passing ships or by careless housewives living in the houses which lined Old London Bridge, the majority have been found during London building excavations and demolitions or fished from Thames mud.

One veteran dealer recalls that as recently as the latter part of the XIXth century he was wont to obtain a fair supply of old pewter spoons off Waterloo Bridge by commissioning the "mudlarks" who frequented the river there, encouraging the lads by the offer of two shillings for every old spoon they retrieved. Most of the pewter spoons now seen in public or private collections bear unmistakable evidence of their long burial.

Those dug up, if left in the original condition in which they were unearthed, often display lovely patinas of green, gray, black, brown, tawny bronze or iridescent purple, due to the action of chemicals in the soil through the centuries of burial.

Two of the earliest varieties of mediaeval pewter, as of mediaeval silver, spoons are the diamond-point and acorn-head which were made from about the middle of the XIVth century, right through the XVth and even into the early part of the XVIth century.

Like most of the surviving pewter and silver diamond-points, Fig. I is unmarked, but another in the same collection is that double rarity, an example with a maker's mark, in this case a crowned rose within a shaped shield.

The front of bowl and stem of Fig. II have been carefully cleaned, as is the practice of some modern collectors, without damaging the old surface, but the rest of the spoon, including the knob, is patinated an iridescent purple. A former owner's initial "W" visible in the bowl, is, as often noticed, of considerably later date than the spoon.

Fig. III is one of the handsomest of all the pewter types. This variety was a favourite in the late XVth and early XVIth centuries, judging by the number that have survived. Few silver examples are in existence.

The deep corrosion in the bowl of Fig. IV, due to long burial, should be noted.

Fig. V shows what is generally considered the rarest and most interesting of all the mediaeval pewter spoons. This is the famous horned-head-dress, so called because it is knopped with the head and bust of a woman of fashion wearing the crescent, or horned, head-dress of the days of Henry V and Henry VI. This type of head-dress has been immortalised in mediaeval illuminated manuscripts and paintings such as Quentin Matsys' so-called "Ugly Duchess." It was Anne of Bohemia, the wife of Richard II, who is said to have introduced the original form of the woman's horned head-dress into England in the closing years of the XIVth century. One description of the original head-dress is that of a hat with two cardboard horns, 2 ft. high and 2 ft. broad, covered with gold and silver lace and sewn with pearls.

The example illustrated has a thin gray-green patina in the bowl, and dark-brown on the stem and front of the knob, with yellow scale inside the horns and at the back of the knob. Like most of the surviving pewter horned-head-dress examples, it is unmarked but a few of this variety bear makers' marks. The only silver specimen known was in the Sir Charles Jackson collection. It also was unmarked.

Fig. VI shows one of the outstanding pewter spoons from the W. F. Pavy Collection dispersed at Sotheby's in 1931, and previously shown at the Burlington Fine Arts Exhibition of Heraldic Art.

The bowl in Fig. VII is dark gray and the stem and knob dark purple. A remarkable example of this variety in Guildhall Museum has not only a wrythen knob but a wrythen, or twisted, stem, like a stick of old-fashioned barley-sugar.

The most varied collection of old English pewter spoons of the XVth and subsequent centuries is probably that housed in the Victoria and Albert Museum. The British, Guildhall and London Museums also have good collections and there are a few in the Ashmolean Museum.

GEORGE H., the Toy-maker

BY REGINALD G. HAGGAR

"AN Old Potter," reminiscing of his childhood experiences in the hungry 'forties of the XIXth century, describes the small toy manufactory at which he was employed when he came out of the workhouse, the character of his employer, and the nature of his productions.¹ It should be possible, by collating his account with information derived from other sources, to identify this early Victorian figure-maker, and the mantelpiece ornaments which he made. "Old Potter" describes his employer as George H., or Geo. H. "The toy manufactory," which Geo. H. owned, "was a curiosity in structure and management. It was rusty and grim. As for form it might have been brought in cartloads from the broken-down cottages on the opposite side of the street. The workshops were neither square, nor round, nor oblong. They were a jumble of the oddest imaginable kind, and if there had been the ordinary number of workshops on an average-sized pot-works, placed as these were placed, it would have been impossible to have found the way in, and the way out. The one-cart road went round a hovel nearby, and then dived under a twisted archway. Only about a dozen people were employed on this 'bank'." A poor sort of place it may have been, but life on this works was always pleasant. Geo. H. was "the president of a small republic of workers. All were equal in a sort of regulated inequality."

Geo. H. was apparently a stout little man with a finely moulded face and head, not unlike John Bull—a genial, kindly sort of person even in the days of his misfortune, for "Old Potter" assures us he had seen better days and formerly owned a fine factory in Tunstall, enjoyed "carolling" on his white horse in the streets of the town, or the company of the gentry at the

Highgate Inn. In his later days he was an industrious man, not afraid of working at the bench himself. He was evidently, too, a good if not a religious man, and his little workshops were entirely "free from those demoralising influences prevailing in much larger concerns." Moreover he was not embittered against the world or even the man who had wronged him and brought about his change of circumstances.

Who was Geo. H., the little toy-maker who, as "Old Potter" put it, glorified misfortune "by a quiet magnanimity"? Perhaps the early XIXth century directories afford us a clue. In 1822-1823² a George Hood is listed as an earthenware toy and figure manufacturer at Tunstall, his private address being Commercial Street, Burslem. Since the business is not mentioned in the directory for 1818 we may assume that George Hood started to make figures about 1820. The business evidently prospered, for according to Jewitt,³ he bought land off Randle Wilkinson to build a new factory in 1831 when he founded the Highgate Pottery, Tunstall. This agrees with "Old Potter," who says that originally Geo. H. was in "a large way of business." In 1834⁴ George Hood made Egyptian Black. The Highgate Inn at that time was kept by Jane Mullock. Although Jewitt does not record any failure in business on the part of George Hood, he says the factory was sold in 1846 to William Emberton,⁵ who carried it on himself until 1867 when it passed to the control of his sons. It was about this time (1846) or shortly after, that "Old Potter" went to work as a toy-maker for Geo. H. White's 1851⁶ directory does not mention George Hood as a potter in Tunstall but lists him as an earthenware manufacturer at Bourne's Bank, Burslem. His home address was in Queen Street. Although one cannot be certain, it would seem that George Hood, who had a prosperous business in Tunstall from about 1820 until 1846 and subsequently a tiny pot-works in Burslem, may have been the George H. or Geo. H. of "Old Potter's" narrative.

Having tentatively established Geo. H. as George Hood, what sort of figures and toys did he make? "Old Potter" again provides the answer. The leading article of manufacture was a standing figure of Napoleon Buonaparte, right leg advanced, and arms folded, wearing a blue buttoned coat with gold facings, buff waistcoat, white breeches, and a large black hat. "Shoals of them were made at that time" (about 1845-1850). This information is valuable as indicating the persistent popularity of the Napoleon figure *motif*, and should serve as a corrective against the too early dating of similar figures. Other products of the factory included a "toper publican with his left hand in his breeches pocket, and in his right hand a jug full of foaming beer," modelled by Geo. H. himself; cats on box-lids in the form of cushions; dogs of all sizes and varieties; and the "gentlest of swains and the sweetest of maids" against a tree background "amiably squinting" at each other. Figures of the publican and his wife inscribed "Landlord" and "Landlady," exactly similar in style to the gesticulating figure in the "Bull-Baiting" groups, were popular and may be identified as the work of Obadiah Sherratt (c. 1775-c. 1850). Geo. H.'s toper publican was a little different in treatment. Cats and dogs were almost ubiquitous. The "Courtship" groups, too, were made by many potters, Pratt, Walton, and Salt included. The tree-background group made by Geo. H. suggests he may have been a plagiarist of the Walton School. It should be possible to identify the publican and Napoleon figures from the clearness of "Old Potter's" descriptions. Perhaps some readers of APOLLO who collect farmhouse chimney ornaments and toys may possess unidentified examples of Geo. H., or George Hood,⁷ of Tunstall and Burslem.

¹ Anonymous—*When I was a Child*. London: 1903, pp. 118-120, 124-126. The "Old Potter" who wrote this account of the Potteries in the 1840's was C. Shaw.

² *Newcastle and Pottery Directory, 1822-1823*.

³ L. Jewitt—*The Ceramic Art of Great Britain*. London: 1878. Volume 2, p. 430.

⁴ W. White—*History, Gazetteer and Directory of Staffordshire*, Sheffield: 1834.

⁵ L. Jewitt—*op. cit.*

⁶ W. White—*History, etc.* Sheffield: 1851.

⁷ Several George Hoods are recorded in the Baptismal Registers of St. John's Parish Church, Burslem:

1794, April 20	John and George, twin SS. of Ralph and Sarah Hood.
1801, Aug. 23	George, S. of Joseph and Ann Hood.
1801, Oct. 18	George, S. of James and Jane Hood.
1803, May 1	Andrew, S. of George and Margery Hood.
	George and Margery Hood (nee Shuffebotham) were married at Stoke, May 3, 1802.

Perhaps one of these refers to the toy-maker of Burslem.

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