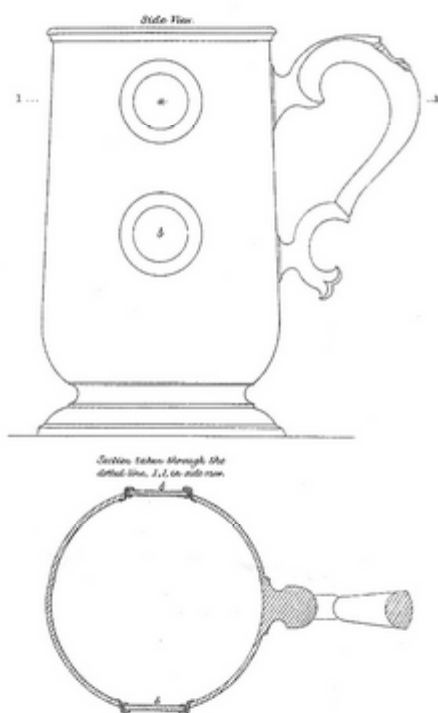


SIDNEY'S PATENT BEER MUG

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In 1852, George Sands Sidney (PS13912) of the Willows, Brixton Road, South London lodged 'provisional' patent specification 1087 of 1852 for 'Improvements in Jugs or Vessels for Containing Liquids'. He did not pursue it, but instead filed another, identical application the next year (1537 of 1853) which he did pursue. The object of the invention was to: *provide a means for measuring and ascertaining the quantity of liquid, such as beer, drawn into a jug or vessel, notwithstanding any head of froth, which may be poured.*

He achieved this by providing glass windows in the side of the vessel. As one example, he showed (Fig. 1) a U-shaped 'metal' mug (clearly pewter) with an oversize drum. At 90° relative to the handle he provided two round glass windows for half and full measure respectively. The windows could, he said, have graduations. Rather unnecessarily, he also provided two more windows on the opposite side (at 270° to the handle), making four in all. His second example showed the same idea applied to a china mug.



1. Side view and cross section of the mug drawn in Sidney's patent #1537 of 1853

The only known pewter mug embodying this invention is illustrated overleaf (Figs. 2 & 3). It is a development of the drawing in the patent specification as it only has one rectangular window not two round ones. From a manufacturing viewpoint, this simplification makes sense. However, the mug would still have been relatively expensive to make because it needs a special, oversize drum and requires four extra manufacturing steps - cutting a hole in the side, cutting a small piece of glass, making a pewter frame for it and mounting it over the hole. It is not surprising, therefore, that it did not catch on, which is confirmed by the fact that the logo 'Sidney's Patent' is hand-engraved in cursive script. Had the mug been mass-produced, this logo would be stamped, not engraved.

The capacity to the brim is 22% in excess of an Imperial pint. The glass has an engraved line one-third of the way up, but the capacity to this line is 5% short of a pint. A full pint is ½ way up the window, and interestingly the word 'Pint' and a short line are engraved alongside the window at this point. Perhaps this was an experimental vessel, and Mr Sidney discovered it was not easy to get the engraved line on the glass in the right place!

The patent says that the invention: *avoids that disgusting practice, so prevalent, of blowing into the vessel to ascertain the extent to which a vessel is filled.*

This may sound difficult to believe, but it was clearly true because nearly forty years later Donald Mackintosh, a wine and spirit merchant of Glasgow, filed patent 1635 of 1891 to overcome the same problem. The patent specification starts: *When using the beer measures as heretofore made, the barman is either in the habit of blowing on the beer in order to ascertain if the required quantity is being supplied to the customers or he, perhaps, gives an extra pull of the pump so as to supply sufficient liquid to compensate for the froth. In the former case the blowing is very objectionable, as if the barman is suffering from disease, he is very apt to communicate contamination to the liquid and so to the customer; in the latter case by constantly giving a small extra supply the profits accruing from the sale of the liquid are either entirely lost or seriously diminished.*

Vessels with windows were not totally new in 1853. Two bottle-capacity measures with windows have been recorded which must be earlier as they have baluster bodies¹. However, these were used for a somewhat different purpose.

REFERENCE

1. See *J Pewter Society* Autumn 2001 p36 and Autumn 2006 p44



2. Side view of Sidney's patent mug. Height to rim 150mm.



3. Close-up of the Sidney's patent mug