

Two Rare Slim Balusters from the same mould.

Displayed together at the Pewter Society meeting of Autumn 2010 in Halifax Yorkshire



To the left above Lot 21 unsold at the Little Sale and described there as -

A rare English Pewter Slim-Baluster Half Pint Measure 16th Century. With wedge and ball thumbpiece, the cover with two incised lines, a locating flange under the lid, the body with three incised lines, indistinct touch under base, 8.5 fl oz capacity (6") 15 cm overall. Estimated at US \$ 7800 – 12000. Compare with one from the Museum of London 1989 Pewter a celebration of the craft no.101, with 'HR' verification excavated from the Thames.

Later in the Pewter Society Journal of Autumn 2007 additional information showed the 'indistinct touch' to be the initials N L over a lamb with flag all within a circular outline, faint dots or pattern might be visible in the circle edge. Measuring showed it to hold 8.8fl oz a half pint – so likely based on the wine standard of Henry VIII. A possible maker was thought to be a Nicholas Lamkyn of London c1560 (PS14766).

N L Touch	I B Touch	I B Thumbpiece	N L Thumbpiece	Initials beneath
PS14765	PS1355	(Metal added)		Lid on I B



To the right in the first illustration is another such slim baluster agreed at the meeting to have been made from the same mould.

Other wares have been found carrying this I B mark. No fakes are known that carry this touchmark. The other pieces known date this maker soundly to 1680 to 1715.

This second slim baluster was sold at Woolley & Wallis in Salisbury in September 2010 within the estimate range of £100 - £200.

A rear view of the two pieces -



Some measurements of the two slim balusters

Little lot 21	Salisbury lot 145	Weight in grams Measurements in inches using digital calliper by Trojan
428	392	weight
5.2650	5.2650	Underside base to top of lid
2.4430	2.3310	Diameter across belly
1.7285	1.7230	Diameter across neck
2.1855	2.2005	Lid diameter
0.4985	0.4820	Width of handle immediately below hinge lug
2.1530	2.0775	Base diameter – Little appears the more used
2.0910	2.0910	Top of lower handle attachment to lower edge of base rim
6.077	6.193 (later small addition to thumbpiece)	Overall height

Conclusion – same mould

Why then did the one at Salisbury being so rare attract such caution?

Reasons given were the provenance – a Munday ticket – the small addition of metal to the top of the thumbpiece – the initials under the lid – and a general feeling that it was doubtful.

Examination at the meeting by experienced members gave the opinion that both must have been made from the same mould and that both pieces were right. No member could produce a reasoned argument for rejecting the IB slim baluster. One or two members were still cautious and several members thought such pieces so rare that it was incredible that two such pieces from the same mould might ever be found.

The thumbpieces are not ball and wedge, not detrited hammerhead, and are unknown to pewter collectors.

It was considered unlikely that the first piece had been made by Nicholas Lamkyn as there was no evidence to date the piece different to the dating given to IB, of whose work more pieces are known to survive. There is said to be no conclusive evidence for the dating of any of the known slim balusters, including those sold at the Shemmell sale.

Knowledgeable comment included –

The fact that general styles persist over a long period doesn't necessarily mean that specific moulds also remained in use over an equally long period. It's possible, but equally the same general style would be implemented by different pewterers using different moulds with, inevitably, minor variations. However, in my view the key points here are:

- 1. The dating of the IB measure is fairly secure from the known date ranges of the other wares he made. There are plenty of examples of these other wares with firmly-attributed marks to establish their date ranges with a high degree of confidence. That means this style of measure was still being made in the last part of the 17th century.*
- 2. The dating of the NL measure seems to be based on assertions by collectors that have very little, if any, evidence behind them. The only evidence-based dating for this style that we've got is the IB measure.*
- 3. Apart from their body and lid shape, the measures have two distinctive features - the truncated-wedge attachment and the very odd thumbpiece. If these features went on for 150 years, we should have come across more examples of them.*

One or more talks at the meeting dwelt on the many years that styles appear to have lasted. For this style to have been made after 1700 then perhaps there might have been many more survivors – whereas actually none are known. For this style to have started in 1650 – then it did not last long, but again no other examples, the same as these, are known.

So two very rare pieces and naturally the owner of both is keeping his eyes peeled for a third.