

## Men and Books

### PEWTER OF MEDICAL INTEREST\*

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Pewter is an alloy of tin with copper, antimony or lead in various proportions. Good pewter contains about 80 per cent of tin and is quite similar in composition to modern solder. Pewter utensils were made by casting, by hammering a flat plate of the metal, by fashioning on a lathe, or by a combination of these methods. Pewter utensils dating from the Roman period have been found in England, but are of such rarity that they are unobtainable by the private collector. The use of this metal persisted until the discovery of Britannia metal in the early part of the nineteenth century. Britannia metal is an alloy of tin with antimony, plus copper or zinc. This material can be more easily fashioned on the lathe and the discovery that it could be electroplated spelled the doom of pewter.

Various marks are frequently found on pewter but the absence of a mark does not mean that the article is a modern copy, or that the article is not made from good metal. From the early part of the fifteenth century until the end of the eighteenth the making of pewter was under the control of the Pewterers' Guild. This Guild which was very powerful in the early part of its existence specified the marks which could be placed upon pewter. An X, with or without a crown, could be placed on articles made from metal of extra good quality. The rose and crown, with the addition of "London," could be stamped on high quality material. The individual maker's trade mark is known as a touch mark. This consisted of a design, frequently heraldic, with or without the maker's name. The members of the Guild were required to stamp their touch marks on the lead plates, which are even yet preserved. From these touch marks the approximate age of any article bearing them can be determined. Some articles bear a series of small marks in simulation of the hallmarks on sterling silver. Possibly

these were used, though frowned upon by the Guild, to persuade the purchaser that he was obtaining a superior article.

On account of the low melting point of the metal no article to which direct heat is to be applied can be manufactured from pewter. In the accompanying illustrations are shown some articles in this metal of medical interest from the author's collection. All objects shown are of English manufacture. The three infant feeding flasks shown in Figure 1 are of eighteenth century manufacture. Their capacity is from 10 to 16 ounces. These were tipped with sponge-filled nipples made from cloth or chamois, the food being sucked through between the loose stitches. A tanned cow's teat was supposed to be especially attractive to the infant. Rubber nipples did not come into use until the middle of the nineteenth century. The fourth specimen is a croup kettle or inhaler. This bears the touch mark of Henry Joseph, dating the specimen from about 1743. On the top can be seen the spout to which



FIG. 1.—Eighteenth century infant feeding pots and an inhaler.



FIG. 2.—Seventeenth and eighteenth century bleeding bowls.

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the tube for inhaling can be fixed. The second opening which can be closed by the perforated brass window is for the introduction of the balsam. The handle is hollow, perforated at its upper part and opens into the inhaler at the base.

Three bleeding-bowls are shown in Figure 2. The left one dates from about 1650, the central is late eighteenth century and the specimen on the right is from the beginning of the nineteenth

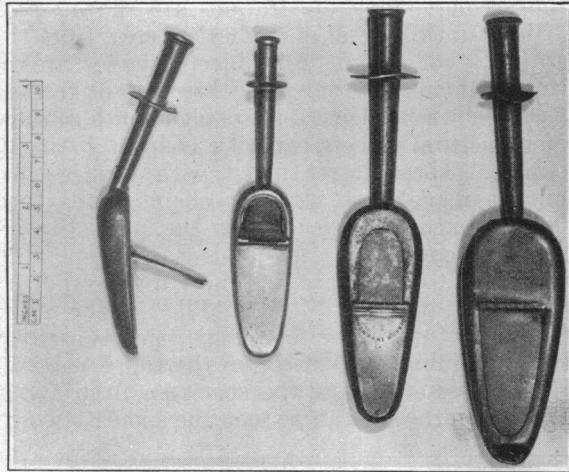


FIG. 3.—Medicine spoons.



FIG. 4.—Eighteenth century pap boats and a medicine measurer.



FIG. 5.—Eighteenth century feeding pot.

century. The last two are graduated by circular markings, the smaller in 2 ounce graduations to 14 ounces, and the right in 4 ounces to 24. Great care should be exercised in purchasing bleeding bowls, many modern copies made from the old moulds being on the market.

Figure 3 presents a series of medicine or castor oil spoons, dating from about the end of the eighteenth century. These have a capacity of from 1 to 6 drams. They were sold with a straight slit across the tip which could be enlarged by cutting away the soft metal with a knife. The spoons were filled through the trap door in the bowl. This tip was placed in the patient's mouth, the flow being controlled by the finger placed over the end of the hollow handle. If the contents were not taken as rapidly as desired one could blow down the hollow handle. It has been stated that the larger sizes were used for the feeding of thin paps.

Two pewter pap-boats *circa* 1780 are shown in Figure 4. One bears the X and crown mark. Pap was made by boiling cereals or bread with water and sugar, and was fed from the boat or spoon. The central specimen, a medicine measure, is marked  $\frac{1}{2}$  ounce, 1 spoon on the smaller portion and 1 ounce on the upper.

Feeding pots of many types for use of the infant and adult are met with. The specimen shown in Figure 5 dates from about 1780, and its capacity is about 1 pint. A very interesting series of infants' feeding pots is illustrated in Still's History of Pædiatrics.

While eighteenth century pewter is quite common, in fact objects dating from this period being as cheap in England as is modern pewter, objects of medical interest are becoming increasingly difficult to obtain. All those shown were obtained by correspondence. The values of the objects illustrated are approximately as follows; feeding-bottles \$7.50 to \$10.00; croup-kettles \$7.50; bleeding-bowls from \$10.00 to \$25.00; medicine spoons \$4.00 to \$5.00; pap boats \$5.00 to \$6.00. I have been able to obtain most of the objects from one dealer who has a *carte blanche* order to buy for me anything of medical interest that turns up in the auction rooms. In this way I have obtained specimens at a reasonable price. Practically all English dealers will send articles on approval against suitable references. Some idea of values is necessary with some dealers, in witness of which I have just returned a Grecian feeding-pot in pottery sent on approval at \$25.00, having already obtained an exactly similar specimen for \$1.87.

Opinions differ as to whether pewter should be polished. Dealers usually leave it in the rough. The average collector's opinion is that there is no more reason for leaving pewter unpolished than there is for leaving silver uncleaned. As pewter is easily scratched, a high grade silver polish is the only one that should be used.