

Dating the Pewter Tankard

By Howard Herschel Cotterell, F.R.Hist.Soc.

TO THE CONNOISSEUR for February and August, 1919, I contributed articles on "Rim-types of Pewter Plates" and "Pewter Baluster-measures" respectively. Those articles were efforts towards the highly desirable aspiration of a standardisation of types. The measure of their adoption has been such as to inspire me to essay a similar service in standardising the various types of the English Pewter Tankard, the earliest form of which takes us back to the first half of the seventeenth century, though very few examples can lay substantiated claim to be of earlier date than *circa* 1660.

The word tankard is probably derived from the Latin—*cantharus*: a large goblet with handles. It was a vessel common to all European countries under such names as *beker*, *bier-krug*, *canette*, *chope*, *kan*, *kanne*, *kande*, *krug*, *pot*, etc., and, of course, under widely different shapes. To many Englishmen the word will conjure up its most familiar—and maybe most fragrant—application, in the phrase, "A tankard of Bitter"!

As a preparation towards my present task, I have for many years been noting, from illustrations and actual examples, the periods covered by the various details of silver examples, and this has given me courage to put into print these notes, with a certain amount of confidence in their general reliability.

In the consideration of these silver pieces, my first desire has been to fix definitely well-defined dates for the varying types of bodies, covers, handles, thumbpieces and bases, and, though I am to some extent dissatisfied with the result, the issue is considerably narrowed by embracing the earliest and latest dates at which each has been noted. Of course, in differing cases they overlap in varying extent, for the evolution of a new type did not automatically apply the *coup-de-grâce* to its predecessor. In some cases, the struggle for supremacy was only ended by the appearance of a third, as in the case of the handles illustrated in Nos. 18 and 19, which continued in competition until both were eventually ousted by those pictured in Nos. 20–23, the latter itself being a mild resurrection—so far as its lower terminal is concerned—of No. 19.

I have been at some pains to show, in imperfect drawings, the main outlines of the varying members of all the betterknown types, believing that they will be better assimilated in this way than

in photographs, however excellent, of the complete vessels. The thumbpieces, excepting those of which I have been unable to obtain adequately clear ones, are from photographs, for the reason that it is quite impossible to show the great beauty of many of them by any other means.

As it is always wise to start at the beginning, I have first attempted this analytical dissection that the illustrations of the complete tankards which follow may the more readily be understood. Beneath these complete examples I have given a description which—if the accompanying detail sketches have been carefully studied—should alone enable anyone to visualise the piece, even though the illustration itself were removed.

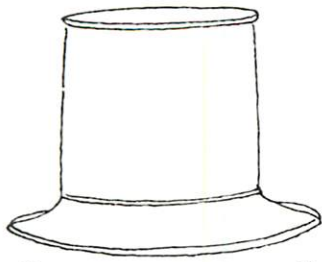
BODIES.

Broadly speaking, the more squat the body, the freer from mouldings and the more pronounced the entasis, the earlier is the piece. But this is not altogether an infallible rule, for one of the finest Stuart tankards I call to mind was entirely free from the latter; had rather pronounced mouldings, was tall and graceful, and its date was *circa* 1640!

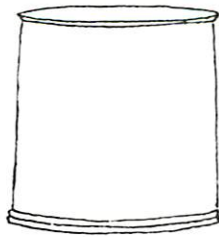
In the collection of Mr. Antonio de Navarro, F.S.A., of Broadway, Worcestershire, is a fine squat example, with very slight base-mouldings (as No. 2) and a thin, graceful handle of type 13, of which the lower terminal meets the body so low as only just to afford itself table-clearance—another early feature to bear in mind! The body shown in No. 4 made its appearance very near to the close of the seventeenth century, in the reign of William and Mary, and with the exception of a break from about 1755 to *circa* 1780, was in more or less general favour until the end. During this break it was swamped to a large extent by the early "Tulip" form pictured in No. 6, which with the "Bell" shape in No. 5, had run side by side with it from the end of the first quarter of the eighteenth century. The two latter seemed to lose in popularity during the last quarter of the century, but again returned to favour, in the period around 1800, as the Tulip in the debased form seen in No. 7, which is a not unfamiliar sight in out-of-the-way inns to-day.

The Early Tulip was very popular with the West Country pewterers, and it is not too much to say that eight out of every ten one examines

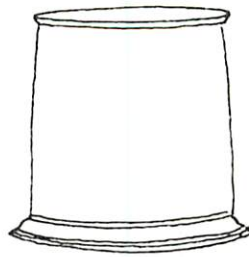
THE BODY



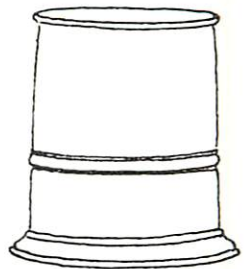
No. 1.—SKIRTED BASE



No. 2.—PLAIN DRUM, EARLY

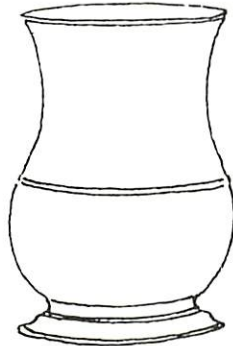
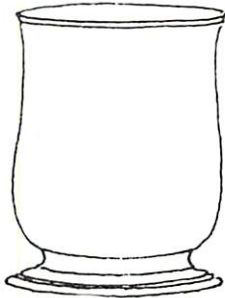


No. 3.—PLAIN DRUM, LATER

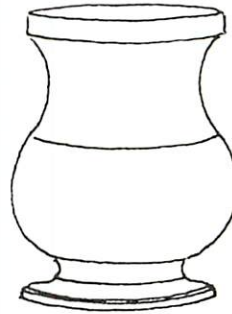


No. 4.—FILLET ROUND DRUM

No. 5.—BELL SHAPE

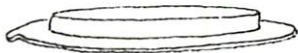


No. 6.—CENTRE TULIP SHAPE, EARLY



No. 7.—RIGHT TULIP (OR PEAR) SHAPE, LATER

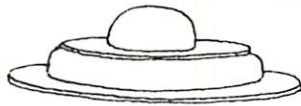
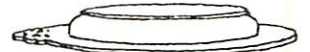
THE COVER



NOS. 8 AND 8A.—EARLY STUART



NOS. 9A AND 9.—LATER STUART



No. 10.—TRANSITIONAL (UNCOMMON)



No. 11.—DOUBLE-DOMED WITH SERRATED PROJECTION

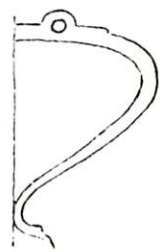


No. 11A.—DOUBLE-DOMED WITHOUT PROJECTION

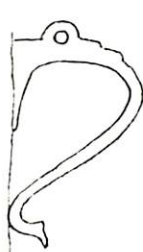


No. 12.—DOUBLE-DOMED, LATE

THE HANDLE



No. 13.—EARLY STUART



No. 14.—C. 1655-1700 ("SWAN'S NECK")



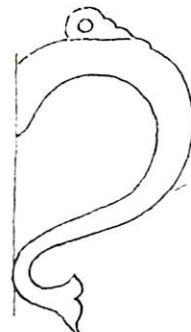
No. 15.—C. 1665-1715 ("HEEL")



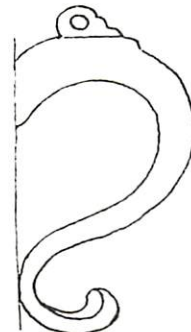
No. 16.—C. 1690-1710 (UNCOMMON)



No. 17.—LATE STUART (UNCOMMON TERMINAL)



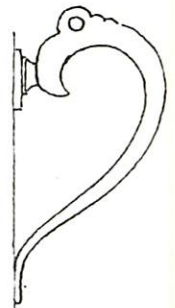
No. 18.—C. 1725-1755



No. 19.—C. 1715-1700 ("S" HANDLE)



No. 20.—C. 1730-1850 ("DOUBLE" HANDLE)

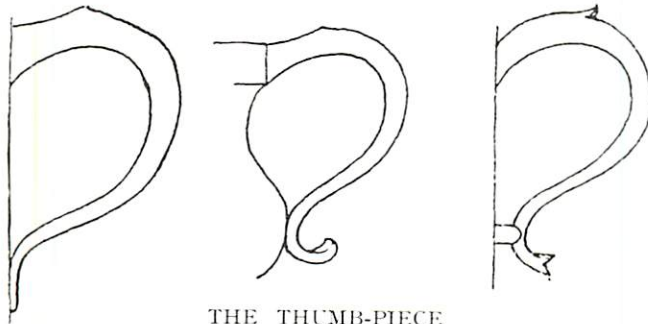


No. 21.—C. 1785-1840

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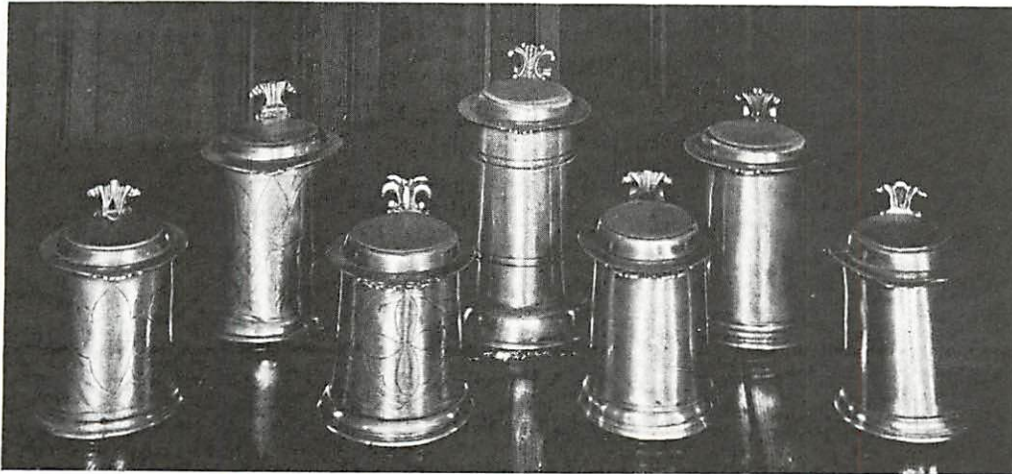
No. 22.—CIRCA 1790-1850

No. 23 (CENTRE)—CIRCA
1790-1932



THE THUMB-PIECE

No. 24.—CIRCA 1780-
1825 SCOTTISH

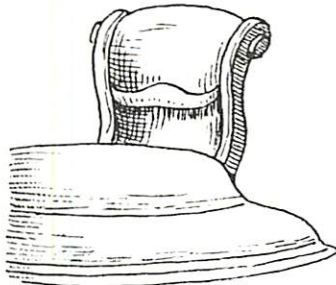


LATE STUART TANKARDS BELONGING TO DR. A. J. YOUNG
26.—"RAM'S HORN" NOS. 27-28.—"FLEUR-DE-LYS"

(FROM LEFT TO RIGHT)—NOS. 25 AND
NOS. 29, 30 AND 31.—"RAM'S HORN"



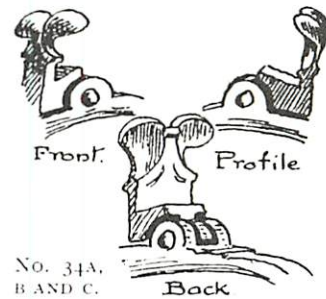
No. 32.—"LOVE BIRDS"



No. 33.—"CHAIR BACK"



No. 34.—"OPEN"



No. 34A.
B AND C.
"TWIN-DOME." C. 1620-60

are found to bear, inside the base, the circular touch of one of the Bristol or Exeter makers.

COVERS.

Almost the same general remarks apply here as to the bodies, for the more squat and the freer from mouldings, the earlier they are. If one looks at No. 8, one will see that, had such a process then been in use, it might easily have been pressed out in a die from sheet metal, and therein lies its charm. This is the earliest form of pewter tankard lid known, and was in use during the second quarter of the seventeenth century. Towards the year 1650 it gave place to the type

pictured in No. 9, which takes on quite a different form, for, in place of the vertical sides to the dome, convex mouldings have appeared, and upon these—giving the appearance of its having been soldered on, rather than all in a piece—rests the flat top. The transitional cover illustrated in No. 10 is very rare, from which may be deduced the fact (in which I heartily concur) that it did not meet with the public's approval. It appeared *temp.* William and Mary, as did also the two shown in Nos. 11 and 11a, the only difference between which is the absence or presence of the serrated brim-projection. In form it is the earlier type (No. 9), with the addition of the second dome.



No. 35.—BODY TYPE 2; HANDLE 15
A. J. YOUNG COLLECTION
CIRCA 1670

No. 36.—BODY TYPE 3; COVER 9;
HANDLE 15; THUMB-PIECE 28
CARVICK-WEBSTER COLLECTION

Here it will be well to point out the difference between all the foregoing and the succeeding type figured in No. 12. For whereas all the former had a flat brim of some $\frac{3}{8}$ inch in width, before the dome mouldings commenced, in the latter such mouldings start flush, at the outer edge, with a *cavetto*. This later type would seem to have come into use *circa* 1715. Thence onwards it held the field alone until the decline of the industry, and still finds favour on the "Pewters" given as prizes in college sports, examples of which are pictured in No. 48, complete with glass bottoms. On this latter point a word is necessary. Though I have urged over and over again the widening of our outlook and scope, in deciding what is and what is not worth collecting, I cannot yet bring my mind to recommend that anything with a glass bottom should find a place there. Its day *will* come, but it is not yet. The glass bottom is taboo!

has ventured too near its nest—you have seen the Stuart handle depicted in No. 14. Hence its name.

All Stuart handles are not of this graceful type, and for the proof of that remark I cannot do better than refer the reader to Plate XIX. of Mr. de Navarro's *Causeries on English Pewter*, which he has rightly entitled *Beauty and the Beast*. It speaks for itself.

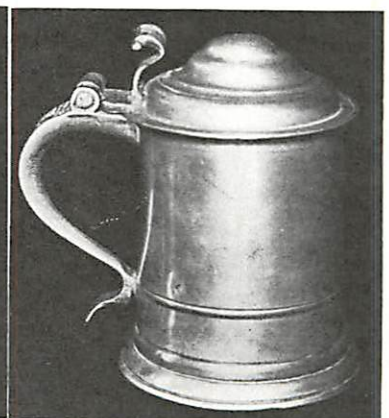
The difference between No. 14 and Nos. 13 and 15 is apparent by reason of the long "V" piece, or swan's bill, running down the back of the drum; but the only real distinction between types 13 and 15 is in the extreme lightness of the earlier one, with practically no thickening of the metal at its upper, or hinge, end. After the year 1655 or thereabouts, types 14 and 15 had the field all to themselves for some fifty years or more, the latter going on well into the eighteenth century and appearing with early examples of the double-

HANDLES.

No feature can so make or mar the beauty of a tankard as its handle. Nothing finer in this respect has ever been designed than the beautiful "Swan's-neck" sweep of types 13-15, and, surely, nothing more ugly than No. 16, which was an effort to "improve" upon them. If you have ever seen a mated swan, its neck laid back and tail depressed, with wings ready to strike, churning through the water after some hapless duck which



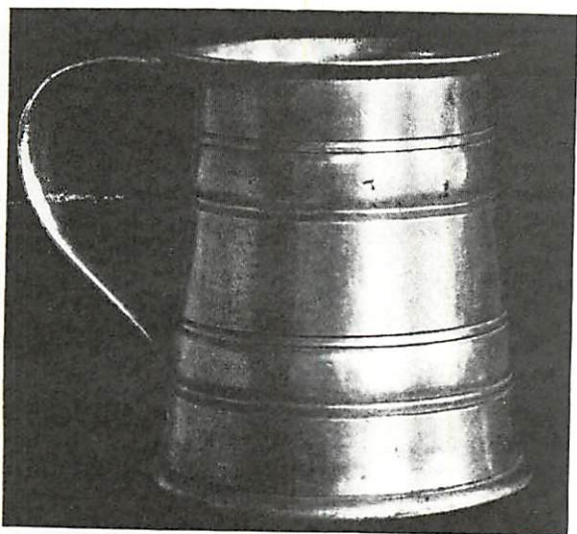
No. 37.—LEFT: BODY TYPE 4; COVER 9; HANDLE 15; THUMB-PIECE 27
NAVARRO COLL. No. 38.—CENTRE: BODY TYPE 3; COVER 11; HANDLE
15; THUMB-PIECE 26 CHURCHER COLL. No. 39.—RIGHT: BODY
TYPE 4; COVER 11A; HANDLE 15; THUMB-PIECE 26 CHURCHER COLL.



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domed cover. The lower terminals of these types took forms other than those shown; *e.g.*, the twin spiral in No. 17, and sometimes in the fixing of a small shield to the end, both of which are very effective and less common than the others.

From about the year 1715, the beautiful form of these handles gives place to one of more flowing curves, with an outline resembling a reversed "S." Not only is it different in form, but in place of the graceful examples we have been discussing, we have now to deal with a much more massive-looking thing (see Nos. 18 and 19). But they are massive in looks only and are cast hollow, a result achieved by filling the casting mould with molten metal and, when sufficient of the metal



No. 40.—BODY TYPE 4 (VARIANT): HANDLE 15
BY JOSEPH PRATT, LONDON C. 1705
YEATES COLLECTION

next the mould has cooled, by a dexterous movement of the caster's hand throwing out the unset metal from the core. If this is done by a man who knows his job it can be satisfactory enough, but how many an otherwise desirable piece is ruined by the collapse inwards, and probably large gaping holes, caused by the inversion having been performed before a sufficiently thick shell of metal had cooled.

Of the remaining types little need be said; they speak for themselves. The double handle had a life of some century and a quarter, which began about 1730. In some examples the proportions are good, but the intervention of a *strut* between either or both ends of a handle and the body of the vessel is never a desirable feature and usually bespeaks a date when interest begins to wane (see Nos. 20, 21 and 24). The best examples of any type are those whereon the handles are set flush against the body as in Nos. 35-42, 44 and 45.

THUMBPIECES.

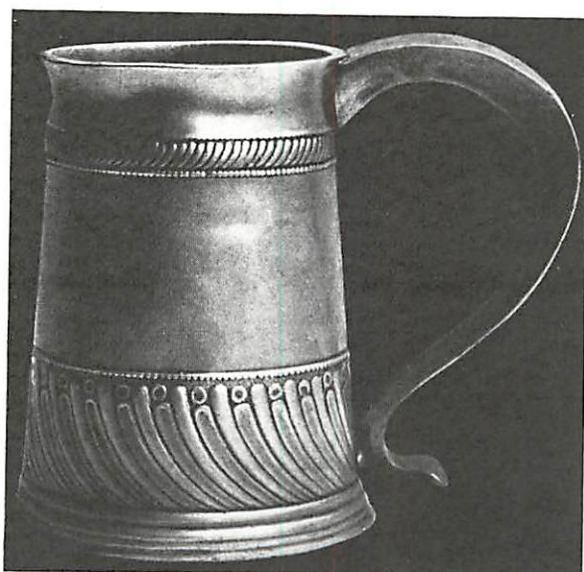
Styled thus, or as "Billets," "Purchases," "Levers," etc., these are one of the most delightful features of the whole. The fine series illustrated in Nos. 25-31 show late Stuart tankards in the collection of Dr. A. J. Young, of Manchester. The photograph was taken specially by their owner for the purpose of showing the Thumbpieces and Brim-projections. This particular group are all of the last forty years of the seventeenth century, though the same types are found also on pieces dating from *circa* 1650 to *circa* 1720. It shows five variations of the "Ram's-horn" thumbpiece and two of the "Fleur-de-Lys," no two being exactly similar. Indeed, their variety is legion, but between these two main types and the "Love-birds" in No. 32 nearly all the later Stuart examples will be found to range.

The delightful thumbpiece figured in 34a, b and c, is one of the hardest to find on tankards, though less rare on flagons, where its size is at least twice as great and much taller, the plain lower part being extended in some examples beyond all necessity. It is one of the most beautiful and convincing types ever found on pewter.

In early Georgian days, this galaxy of delights was swept aside to make room for the far less pleasing designs in Nos. 33 and 34, known respectively as the "Chair-back" and the "Open." The former was in favour for some fifty years, after which the "Open" type had no other competitor.

MAKERS' TOUCHES.

Many of the earliest tankards are either unmarked or have touches which bear but the



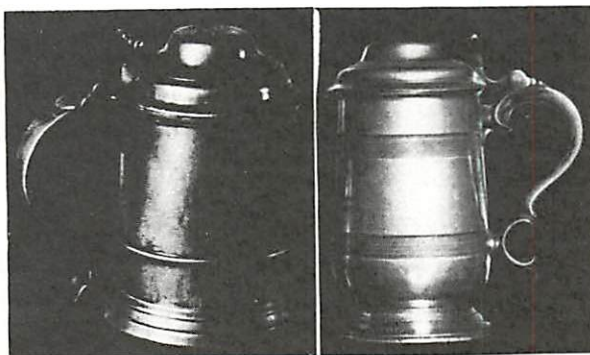
No. 41.—BODY TYPE 4 RARE (VARIANT
DECORATED) NAVARRO COLLECTION

makers' initials, and so afford but slight evidence of the makers' names. On the other hand, many of them have beautifully clear touches, and so we arrive at the proof we seek as to the dates of the others. Usually, the marks will be found on the bottoms, inside, with the "Hall-marks," if any, either across the outer side of the lid or as shown in Nos. 34 and 43. It is most unusual to find marks inside the covers.

* * * * *

Though the tankard was usually provided with a cover, they are more often found in the unlidded state, and by comparison—but the fact does not seem to be generally appreciated—the lidless types are far more valuable.

Though the handle is slightly more on the massive side than one would have looked for on such a piece, the beautiful lidless example, *circa* 1670, pictured in No. 35, from the Young collection, with its squat body and shallow mouldings, is one of the finest I have ever seen, and, so far as my knowledge goes, stands alone, with the beautifully proportioned treasure in No. 40 hot on its heels. This latter is in the collection of Mr. Alfred B. Yeates, F.S.A., F.R.I.B.A., of London, and bears the mark of Joseph Pratt, of London, *circa* 1705.

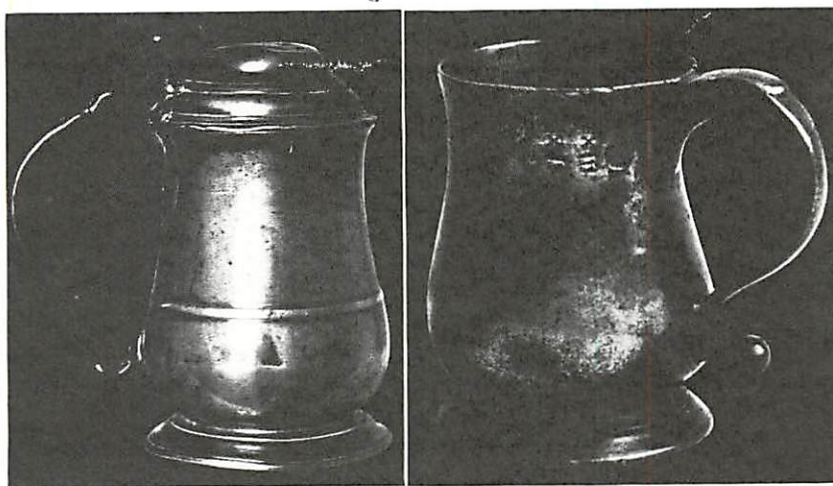


No. 42.—LEFT: BODY TYPE 4; COVER 12; HANDLE 18; THUMB-PIECE 33
CARVICK-WEBSTER COLLECTION
No. 43.—RIGHT: BODY TYPE 5; COVER 12; HANDLE 20; THUMB-PIECE 34

The early Tulip-shaped specimen in No. 45, in the Carvick-Webster collection, *circa* 1720, is a worthy successor to the foregoing. Such fine examples of the lidless types can be counted on the fingers of the two hands, and yet the constant cry is for lidded examples, of which one could compile a list hundreds long. One wonders why?

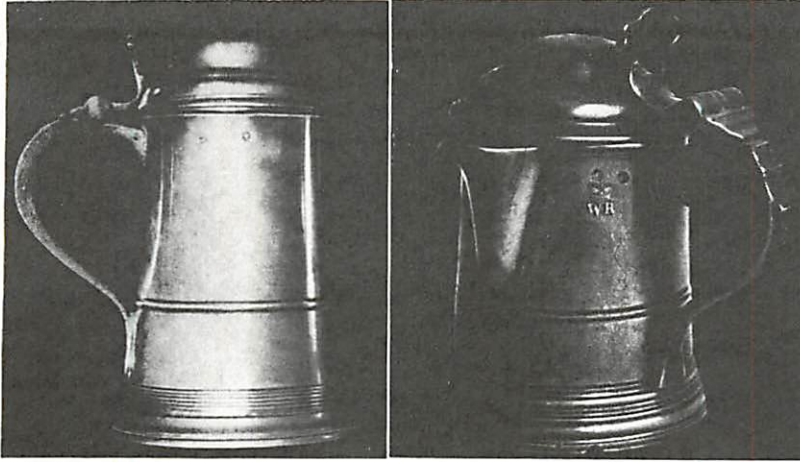
The Decorated tankard in No. 41 admits of no comparison with those we have been discussing, for examples of Decorated English pewter are amongst the greater rarities. This particular one is in the Navarro collection and dates from about the year 1700. I know of its twin brother, and that is about the sum total, though different shapes of the same gadrooned ware are in both the Navarro and Yeates collections. From the former is also the rare lidded example in No. 37, which shows the unusual feature of a Stuart lid on the late body with central fillet, evidently of the Transitional period, *circa* 1700; and as if to reverse matters, the one figured at 38, from the collection of Mr. Walter Churcher of Bedford Park, shows the plain Stuart drum with the later double-domed lid and rim-projection.

A very beautiful Stuart tankard in the Carvick-Webster collection is illustrated at No. 36, perfect in every part. Its fine graceful body and handle,



No. 44.—LEFT: BODY TYPE 6; COVER 12; HANDLE 19; THUMB-PIECE 33
BY WILLIAM EDDON, LONDON C. 1730 LATE C. G. J. PORT COLLECTION
No. 45.—RIGHT: BODY TYPE 6; HANDLE 19; THUMB-PIECE 33
CARVICK-WEBSTER COLLECTION CIRCA 1720

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No. 46.—LEFT: BODY TYPE 4; COVER 12; HANDLE 22; THUMB-PIECE 34
No. 47.—RIGHT: BODY TYPE 4; COVER 12; HANDLE 21; THUMB-PIECE 34

the fit of the lid and the poise of the thumbpiece all bespeak perfection.

The next stage in progression, and the last with the horizontal brim, No. 39, is again from the Churcher collection, and dates from *circa* 1715; to be followed by the fully developed Georgian type in No. 42 from the Carvick-Webster collection, *circa* 1730, which completes the sequence of the straight-sided types in their first period, for towards the close of the century this body came back again, albeit with added base mouldings and differing forms of handles and thumb-pieces (types 46-48).

In the interval between these two periods, the "Bell" and the earlier Tulip shapes disported themselves. A very fine example of the latter, made by William Eddon, of London, *circa* 1730,

and in the collection of the late Charles G. J. Port, of Worthing, is figured in No. 44, and may be considered representative of many similar types.

Nos. 43 and 46-48 all show the "Open" thumbpiece, and No. 43 the later "Bell" shaped body. The later "Tulip," No. 7, needs but little explanation; it is so familiar. One cannot say with certainty when it was evolved, but it must have been within a few years of 1800, and it is still being made at the present time. Though it is usually uncovered, covered examples are not unknown. And so my story is told. I should be grateful for a note of any pieces which may seem to controvert any of the suggested dates for these varying types, which I believe to be reliable, but the accumulated verdict of a number of intellects is better than that of any individual.



No. 48.—BODY TYPE 4; COVER 12; HANDLE 20; THUMB-PIECE 34