

EARLY PEWTER TAVERN POTS

By CAPT. A. SUTHERLAND-GRAEME, F.S.A.



No. I.—LEFT AND RIGHT, TAVERN POTS OF THE SECOND HALF OF THE SEVENTEENTH CENTURY
CENTRE, TAVERN MUG OF EARLY QUEEN ANNE DATE: ALL ARE ENGRAVED WITH INSCRIPTIONS

THE saying 'Horses for Courses' has its counterpart in the sphere of liquid refreshment.

Apart from the epicurean dictum that old brandy must be imbibed from enormous rummers, there is the inseparable connexion of champagne with the wide shallow glass, allowing free play to the effervescence which has dubbed the wine with its unhallowed nickname; the long trumpet for iced lager; the 'stone' cider jug and the pewter pot for good English ale.

'Beer is best!' shout the hoardings: yes, but even better out of pewter; yet how often, in these labour-saving days, is it possible to find this ideal combination? Pewter must be kept clean and sweet; this takes time and time is money; great combines have engulfed local breweries and dividends must be provided for thousands of shareholders;

the time taken in cleaning pewter pots was out of all proportion to the cost of the humble pint, so pewter had to go, although its disappearance was gradual. First came the introduction of the glass bottom replacing that part of the vessel most difficult to clean; then the plated tankard appeared, smoother and less tarnishable, many of which are in use today; but the vast majority of inns have gone completely over to

thick glass—one dip into water and it is ready for the next customer. Time is money!

Some of us, with recollections of a draught of ale from the pewter of some country inn or in one of the ancient City taverns, may have wondered what manner of pot our ancestors drank from in the same places; the object of this article is to describe and illustrate some of the few which are left to us.

I do not go back to the time of 'treen' or leather, nor can I do more than make a passing reference to the early custom of 'drinking at pins,' in which one tankard



No. II. THE SAME VESSELS AS ABOVE, PHOTOGRAPHED IN PROFILE TO SHOW SWEEP OF HANDLES

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No. III.—INSCRIPTION ENGRAVED ON THE TANKARD SEEN TO LEFT OF NO. I: 'THO HUTTON AT YE FRENCH ARMES IN DRURY LANE'

served a group of customers, each drinking from one internal projection or 'pin' to another. The custom was widespread and it is recorded that participation in pin drinking 'schools' brought down a rebuke upon the clergy from a seventeenth-century divine.

The earliest tavern pots which have been preserved date from the second half of the Seventeenth Century. In shape (Nos. i and ii, L. and R.) they were slender; the body was divided into three by wide bands which are obviously in direct descent from the iron bands of the coopered wooden vessel. The handle has a bold purposeful sweep and one can imagine the customer gripping it and banging his tankard upon the table to attract the 'drawer's' attention. A variant of the type is seen in No. v, in which the broad bands are replaced by narrow double fillets. These pots vary between 6½ in. and 7 in. in height.

Perhaps the most interesting feature of these otherwise somewhat plain vessels is the inscription which almost invariably encircles the drum, giving the landlord's name and the name and locality of his tavern.

These inscriptions, usually somewhat crude,

conjure up visions of the old ale houses, low ceiled and dark, with panelled walls and sanded floors; or of posting houses and larger inns at which the stage coaches called.

The pots to left and right in Nos. i and ii are engraved respectively 'Tho Hutton at ye 'french Armes in drury lane' (No. iii), and 'Edward — at ye Rose & Crown in Greek Streete Sohofields.' In addition the first has the owner's initials T^HM (Thomas and ?Mary Hutton) struck trianglewise upon the top of the handle; whilst the initials E^FH appear in a similar position on the other. The first was probably made by John Champion, who became a liveryman of the Pewterers' Company in 1662, Renter Warden in 1676 and Upper Warden in 1681; the second



No. V.—TANKARD INSCRIBED 'EDWARD HILL AT YE RED LYON IN YE POULTERY': C. 1670-90

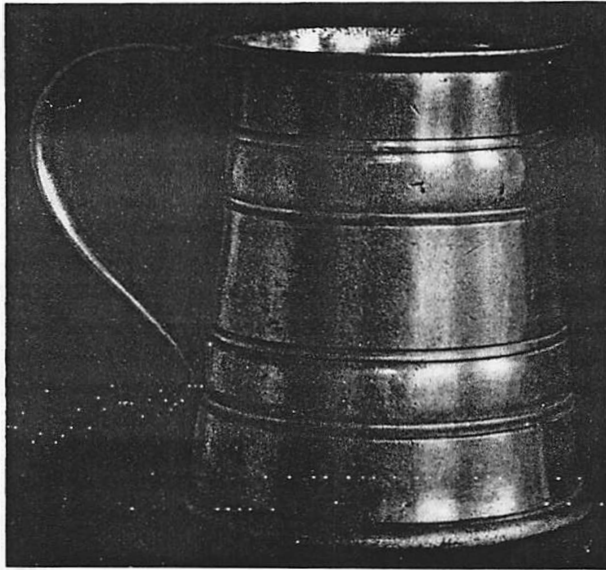
Donne who received his Freedom in the Company in 1685 but of whom nothing further is known; the surname of the owner has been burned through, possibly owing to the pot having been placed on a trivet with the body touching a fire bar.

Other pots of this type bear the following inscriptions:

'Richard Coleman in Brede, 1687.' (Brede



No. IV.—TWO INSCRIPTIONS ON TANKARDS OF SIMILAR TYPE TO THOSE IN NOS. I, II, WITH OWNERS' NAMES AND ADDRESSES



No. VI.—MADE BY J. PRATT, MASTER OF THE COMPANY IN 1720

is a small village in East Sussex.)

'James Braine att y^e Red Lyon, in Black Fryers Near Bridewell Bridg' (No. iv).

'Edward Comberford at y^e pelican in Tetons yard in brid lane' (No. iv).

The two latter inscriptions open up vistas of London's history. Space does not permit of an incursion into the environs of the Fleet river and Bridewell; suffice it to say that the Fleet was formerly an open river, the latter course of which followed the line of Farringdon and New Bridge streets till it joined the Thames near Blackfriars Bridge. In 1560 it was spanned by bridges at points near Holborn Viaduct and Ludgate Circus and, later, by a third known as Bridewell Bridge, approached from the Blackfriars side near what is now called Apothecaries' Lane. It was near this point that James Braine kept the Red Lyon. The bridge was demolished in 1765.

'Brid,' or Bride, Lane, where stood the Pelican, is on the west side of New Bridge Street which was, of course, the west side of the Fleet. Teton's Yard has, however, disappeared, as have also both the Pelican and the Red Lyon. The neighbourhood of Bridewell was notable for the number of its taverns, and even to-day there are four in, or adjacent to, the Lane.

The inscription in No. v reads: 'Edward Hill at ye Red Lyon in ye Poultry'; the maker's touch is illegible, but the owner's initials E^H_A (Edward and ?Ann Hill) appear in the usual place on the handle. All these pieces are *c.* 1670-90.

No. vi shows a pot of somewhat later date and of more squat proportion. Its maker was J. Pratt, who joined the Livery in 1691, passed through the ranks of Renter and Upper Warden, and became Master of the Company in 1720.

We now come to the delightful little mug shown in Nos. i and ii (centre); it is of early Queen Anne date, and John Thomas, who made it, was obviously a Master Craftsman, although he never held any of the higher offices in the Company, of which he was made a Freeman in 1698. The fluted skirting is beautifully executed and the vertical ribbing of the upper band, sole survivor of the pair, is a simple but decorative feature.

On the front, enclosed in a semi-wreath appears the inscription 'Arnold Swingscoe Att the Grayhound Att Wordon' (No. vii, which also shows the Queen Anne excise stamp). The initials A^S_M (Arnold and ?Mary Swingscoe) appear on the handle. Warden is in Bedfordshire and the name of Swingscoe was prominent in the district in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries. Arnold, mine host of the 'Grayhound,' was born in 1666 and died in 1704; he is recorded in the Register as an alehouse keeper.

I hazard the guess that this beautiful mug was his private property, as it appears unlikely that such decorative pieces would be



No. VII.—INSCRIPTION ON MUG SHOWN IN CENTRE OF NOS. I AND II

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kept for the use of the agricultural labourers who were probably the Greyhound's principal customers.

As Arnold Swing-scoe died in the second year of Queen Anne, he could not for long have enjoyed the use of his mug, for if, as seems likely, the excise mark was struck when the mug was made, the year of its making cannot have been earlier than 1702.

It is possible, however, that, on his death, it passed into public use and was stamped in consequence. Later it appears to have been owned by M.F., a person whose ideas of calligraphy were somewhat hazy!

The vessels illustrated in Nos. viii and x should not, strictly speaking, come within the scope of this article, as, albeit tavern pieces, they were not used for drinking but for serving. Their inscriptions, however, have induced me to include them. The fine example (No. viii) of the measure known amongst

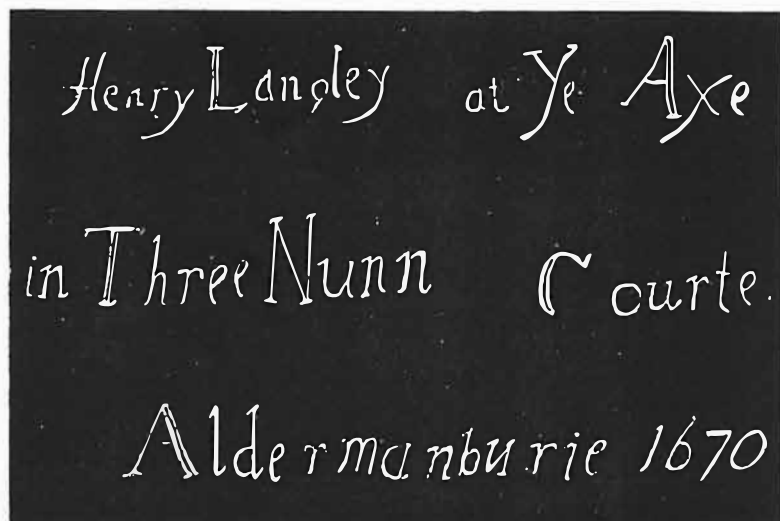


No. VIII. — A QUART MEASURE OF 'HAMMERHEAD BALUSTER' TYPE: FROM THE AXE INN, ALDERMANBURY

collectors as the 'hammerhead baluster' (from the type of thumbpiece and shape of body), was, as its inscription (No. ix) states, formerly in use at the Axe Inn in Three Nunn Court, Aldermanbury, which no longer exists. It is of quart capacity and shows unmistakable signs of having been buried.

The Axe was a notable inn for at least two centuries; it is first mentioned in 1581 and was destroyed in the Great Fire. The lessee at that time was Edward Jackson, and he rebuilt the premises after that calamity. In 1681 it had sleeping accommodation for over one hundred guests.

It is curious that nothing definite can be traced as to the identity of Henry Langley. He was certainly not the landlord at the period of the inscription, as Jackson still held the lease at that time. A tallow chandler of the name is recorded as having resided in Southwark, but his will was proved in 1659; he had, however, a son Henry who may have been our man, but unfortunately nothing is known of him. Equally curious is the fact that someone other than the landlord should have owned a *measure* at an inn; had it been a drinking vessel, it



No. IX. — RUBBING OF THE INSCRIPTION ON THE ALDERMANBURY MEASURE (NO. VIII)

might be assumed that the owner was a regular customer who kept a private tankard at his favourite 'port of call,' but, as has been said, these 'balusters' were measures and as such would have been handled by the staff and not by the customer. This piece of outstanding interest was recently acquired by Mr. Roland J. A. Shelley, F.R.Hist.Soc., who has generously presented it to the Athenaeum Club at Liverpool, to bear record that it was from the Axe that the first regular line of stage wagons between London and Liverpool set forth toward the Mid-Seventeenth Century; and that several prominent eighteenth-century citizens of Liverpool made it their headquarters when in London.

The last piece (No. x) hailed from the 'Bull's Head,' Strand-on-the-Green, Chiswick, London, an ancient inn still existing. No maker's touch is visible, but the period is *c.* 1760. No. xi shows the inscription. This interesting relic is in the collection of Mr. Gilbert L. D. Hole, W.S.

In conclusion, reverting to the drinking pots, it will be realized that these notes deal only with the earliest types which have come down to us—which may well have been the

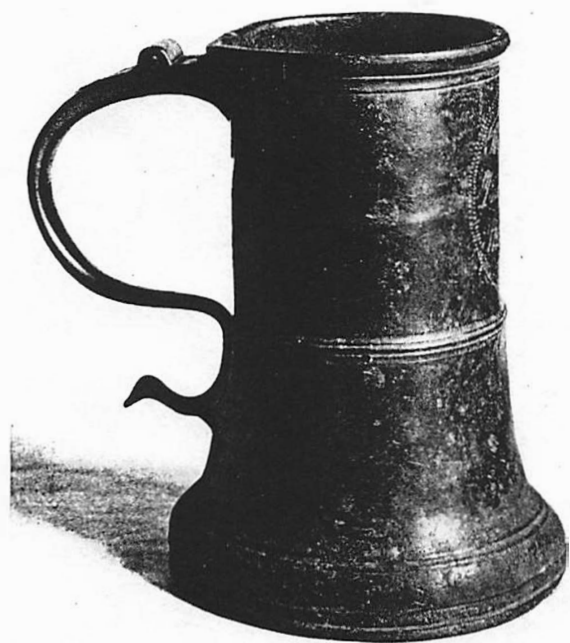


NO. XI.—INSCRIPTION ON FRONT OF NO. X : PERIOD, *c.* 1760

earliest made. It is obvious that the production of these pots or mugs must have continued at an increasing rate throughout the succeeding reigns, and yet it is a remarkable fact that examples which can be definitely assigned to the period of the first two Georges are as rare as those of the preceding period back to Charles II, whilst mugs made during the long reign of George III are almost as scarce. It is not till we reach *circa* 1820 that tavern mugs begin to appear in any considerable number, and from that date down to *c.* 1860 many thousands must have been made. To the advanced collector of to-day these are of little interest. As in all forms of Art and Craft, design degenerated and, bereft of control by the once powerful Company, so did material and workmanship. But even from these 'beer is best' and it is—or was—sad to see literally hundreds of these worthy vessels exposed for sale as so much junk.

In support of an earlier remark, I may add that I have, in various sale rooms, examined between 500 and 1,000 of these pots, in the hope of finding one of mid-eighteenth-century date, but entirely without success. Nevertheless, they should not be disregarded. They are the Antiques of to-morrow.

The centre piece in Nos. i and ii belongs to Mr. Cecil Higgins, the pots in Nos. v and vi to Mr. Alfred B. Yeates, F.S.A., F.R.I.B.A., and the remaining two to myself.



NO. X.—TAVERN MEASURE FROM 'THE BULL'S HEAD,' CHISWICK