

# OLD IRISH PEWTER IS EXPRESSIVE

*The National character of Ireland is fully expressed in its old pewter. Even Irish pewter plates can, with a little practice, be picked out at a glance, so individual is their type.*

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**T**HOUGH it may seem incredible, probably less is known about the pewter of Ireland than of any other country in Europe. This may seem a sweeping statement, but, as one who has studied the pewter of every country in Europe, I can truly say that nowhere have I found myself up against such an utterly insurmountable brick wall.

When, in 1917, I prepared a paper on Irish Pewterers with Mr. Dudley Westropp of the National Museum, Dublin, for the Journal of The Royal Society of Antiquaries of Ireland, we had to dig odd references to our subject from files of the Irish House of Commons Journals, News-sheets, and similar places, and we soon found that any constructive plan was destined to failure; and now, since the destruction of the priceless records in the Four Courts, the chances would seem to be altogether non-existent.

So we will not fritter away the small amount of space at our disposal with any attempt at writing a history of Irish Pewter.

The earliest reference we found to the metal was in an Account Roll of Holy Trinity Priory, Dublin, where, in the Seneschal's accounts for the year 1344, the purchase is recorded of "One dozen saucers of Pewter, one dozen dishes, one dozen of plates and two dozen chargers, for the Prior's use, for the sum of seven shillings," and "Walter the Goldsmith was paid ninepence for marking them." This *marking* was in all probability the engraving, or stamping, of the badge of the Prior or Priory.

We have records of Pewterers taking their Freedom as such, in Dublin, from the mid-fifteenth century onwards, but nothing is known either of these early workers or their work. The Pewterers'



FIG. 1. ONE OF A PAIR OF IRISH CHALICES  
A late 17th century piece from the Port Collection, 8 ins high.  
The other chalice of the pair is in the Alfred B. Yeates Collection. They are both unmarked.

Crafts were incorporated with those of other trades into the Guilds of Smiths, Goldsmiths or Hammermen, as they are severally designated in varying places.

Little is known of any purely Irish types before the latter part of the seventeenth century, to which period, and later, all existing examples may be ascribed.

Probably the pewter of no other country is more expressive of its nationality than is the pewter of Ireland. The rich, spontaneous generosity of the Irish nature, the simple tastes of its peasantry, and its individualism each seem to find expression in the few purely Irish pewter types.

Even in so ordinary a thing as small pewter plates, they have changed them so that one can almost tell them at a glance, either side uppermost, and without so much as touching them; and this is effected by two simple features.

*First*, they have, in many instances, made their rims very slightly wider, not very much, but enough to give to them an individuality; for, whereas the usual width of rim on a 9½ in. plate is from about 1⅜ to 1 5-16 in., the Irish ones are from 1⅜ in. to even 1½ in. It is surprising what a difference this fraction or two makes; it gives them a greater dignity.

*Second*, and this is also a feature often found in Welsh examples, they almost invariably cleaned their plates from the back, leaving the upper, or business side, to tarnish. Slight experience with Irish pewter will convince one of this. One can but draw the conclusion that the family pewter was kept as the show-piece, the *tour de force* of the household; and very well it looked with its back to the world, showing off on its brightly polished surface



Fig. 2. A TYPICAL IRISH COMMUNION FLAGON, DATED 1758  
From the National Museum, Dublin. It is 11 ins. high, without maker's mark.

all the glory of its marks and "Hall-marks," thus earning for itself the title "The Poor Man's Silver."

One other effect of this cleaning from the back was that the constant pressure of rubbing against the hollow well of the piece gradually forced up the centre. This gave it a shallow domed effect when regarded from the upper side, which is another test for Irish plates and dishes.

One of the earliest pieces of Irish pewter which I am able to show is the late seventeenth century chalice from the Port Collection illustrated in Fig. 1. It is one of a pair, 8 in. high, the other being in the collection of Alfred B. Yeates, Esq., F.S.A. Both are unmarked and hail from Comber, Co. Down.

Fig. 2 illustrates another typically Irish piece in the form

of a Communion Flagon, eleven inches high, in the National Museum, but it emanates from Co. Fermanagh and is engraved around the body, below the spout, "For the Church of Ennis McSaint, 1758." The lengthy backward sweep of the upper terminal of the handle is found on no other type.

Also in the Dublin Museum is the "Standish" ink-box in Fig. 3, which bears the touchmark of John Heaney, a Dublin craftsman who operated from c.1750-1790. It has a hinge running down the centre of its length on which work two flap-lids, one on either side. As is seen in the illustration, under the one flap are concealed the sand-sprinkler, wafer compartment and ink-well, whilst the other covers a full-length compartment for quills. It is  $7\frac{3}{8}$  in. long,  $5\frac{3}{8}$  in. wide and  $2\frac{3}{4}$  in., total height including the inverted-cup reet.

This last-named piece, as also the set of "Haystack" measures shown in Fig. 4, from the Harry Walker Collection, is among the most popular of all pewter types. Not many years ago one could find "Haystack" measures easily, but now it is becoming increasingly difficult, and before long they will be exceedingly rare.

This type is known from gallon down to  $\frac{1}{4}$ -gill, though the latter is almost unobtainable. They in-

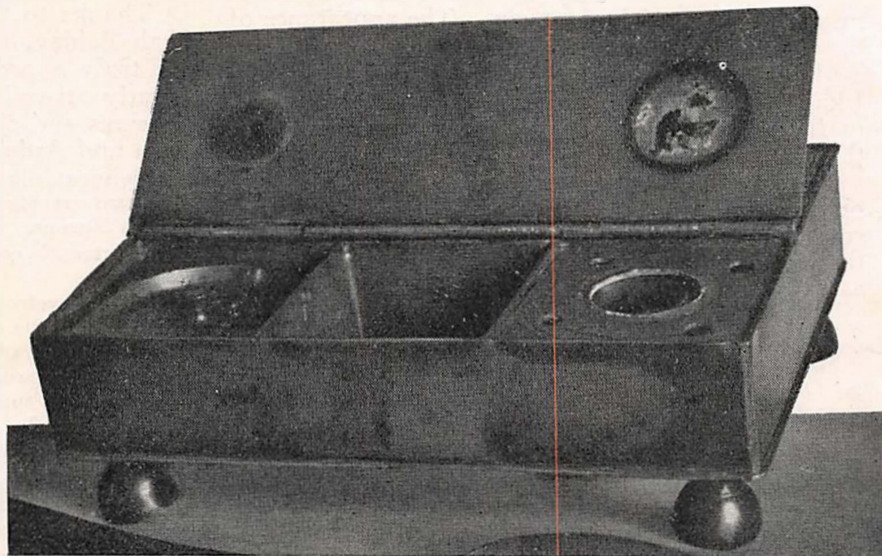


Fig. 3. A "STANDISH" INK-BOX WITH A DUBLIN TOUCHMARK  
Under the flap-lids are concealed a sand-sprinkler, wafer compartment, ink-well, and a full length quill compartment. The maker was John Heaney, of Dublin (c.1750-c. 1790).



Fig. 4. A SET OF IRISH PEWTER "HAYSTACK" MEASURES  
Such examples are increasing in rarity, though they were once readily obtainable.

variably bear the circular mark of Austen & Son of Cork or his successors, The Munster Iron Co., and are of the first half of the nineteenth century. Of the same period is a set which is made in these four sizes only;  $\frac{1}{2}$ -pint— $\frac{1}{4}$ -gill. In the three larger ones it is reminiscent of the English Baluster Measures, but without their handles and lids, and though in England and Scotland the Balusters were the standard measures for more than three centuries, this is the only trace of its influence in Ireland.

This range is not extensive, but it embraces all those types which are purely Irish.

The appearance of the words ENGLISH BLOCK TIN on any piece may be taken as an almost infallible proof of Irish origin. The appearance of the Tudor Rose beneath a Crown may be taken as evidence that the piece was *not* made in Ireland, for I know of no single instance of the use of this device in Ireland, either in the maker's touch-mark or as the quality mark.

Another type of mark which points to Irish origin consists of the maker's name and address contained in three or more curved labels one above the other, their length diminishing towards the base, as in the accompanying illustration.



A James II. Irish Pewter Halfpenny and the Trade Tokens of some Irish Pewterers are illustrated in my "Old Pewter, its Makers and Marks," at pages 95 and 64 respectively, whilst at Pages 16-19 are given other historical gleanings and every known Irish pewterer is listed and his marks illustrated in Chapter VI., pages 145 (*et seq.*), and to this work the reader is directed for further information.

## PERSIAN ART FOR LONDON

(continued from p. 11).

a scale of one-third of the original, is being made of the portal of the Masjid-i-Shah at Isfahan, and with its glazed faience will be the most striking object at Burlington House.

Architecture of such rich and vivid colouring is a physical impossibility in a country like England. Photographs of other examples of Persian architecture will be displayed and the largest lustre mihrab known is to be placed directly in line with the entrance to the model portal of the mosque.

Thanks to the generosity of His Majesty Riza Shah Pahlavi the loans from the royal collections are truly superb, and four aeroplane loads have already arrived in this country. Among the royal treasures and objects from the shrines of Mashhad, Qum and Ardabil are:—

The great silk carpet from the tomb of Shah Abbas II. Only two carpets of this type have previously found their way to Europe.

A sixteenth century carpet from the Mosque of Imam Riza.

Splendid velvets and gold and silver brocade tomb covers from the Mosque at Ardabil.

A group of the magnificent accessories to the throne, including ceremonial dishes in gold, enamel and jewels, and a sceptre with spirals of rubies and diamonds.

A beautiful manuscript containing nearly thirty miniatures, the work of Bihzad, the most famous of the Persian painters.

The exhibition is to be truly international, for almost every nation possessing Persian treasures of importance is contributing loans. These countries include the United States, Italy, Austria, Germany, France, Holland, Belgium, Denmark, Poland and Egypt.