

PEWTER CHURCH FLAGONS

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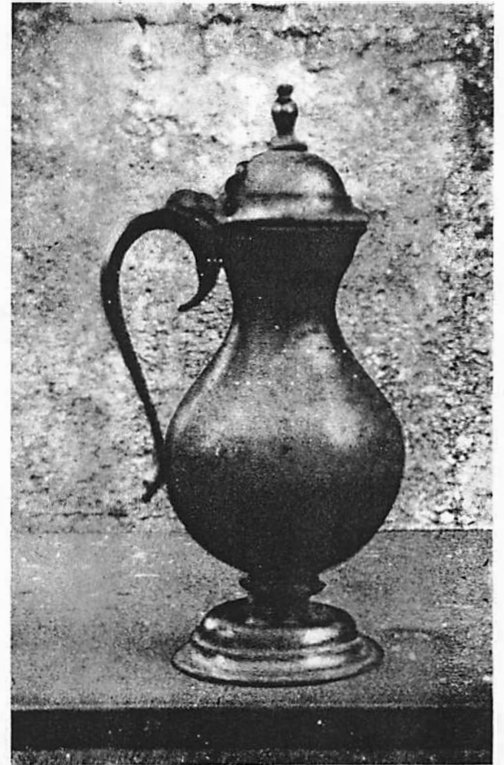
last fifteen or twenty years, and not only by the laity, which I sum up by quoting one specific example: 'I have found a large pewter pot at the bottom of an old chest in the church; can you tell me what it was used for and what is its age?' It certainly seems astonishing that an incumbent should not know a communion flagon for what it is—i.e. a



No. I.—ONE OF TWO SILVER FLAGONS, DATED 1576 CIRENCESTER: FROM A DRAWING BY THE AUTHOR



No. III.—TOUCH MARK OF A SEVENTEENTH-CENT. MASTER-PEWTERER



No. II.—PEWTER FLAGON OF COEVAL DATE WITH NO. I IN THE PARISH CHURCH OF WOODDEATON, OXFORD

IN THE CONNOISSEUR for October 1936 and April 1940 I contributed two articles on Pewter Church Plate still in ecclesiastical possession. It had been my hope to have continued these articles, and, indeed, there is no lack of interesting and outstanding examples of the pewterers' craft to warrant a continuation of the series. Correspondence with incumbents and others during the last six years has brought to notice several pieces of great promise from both the historical and the artistic points of view. But it was essential that these 'discoveries' should be seen and photographed; and with the war effort in full swing, the real necessity of one's journey in question, and the well-nigh complete impossibility of obtaining photographs, all of which obstacles still remain in whole or in part, several fine flagons and patens must, for some time to come, remain in semi-obscurity.

In the meantime, however, there is one matter to which it might be profitable to devote some little attention. It arises out of a query which has been addressed to me frequently during the



No. IV.—EWER OF C. 1630: LUDLOW MUS.

flagon in which wine was brought to the Holy Table prior to consecration.

A brief ecclesiological survey of the use of flagons indicates that they first came into use during the reign of Elizabeth. The 'official' date of the Reformation may be said to be 1538, when the Bible appeared in every parish church. The change in the conduct of public worship was, however, gradual; and, so far as it concerns our subject, took shape in 1547 (Edward VI), when the laity were readmitted to the Holy Communion in both kinds. This necessitated two principal alterations: firstly, the substitution of larger cups, or chalices, for those which had hitherto been for the use of the priest alone; and, secondly, the provision of a seemly vessel in which wine could be conveyed to the place of consecration. With the first we are not here concerned, but, as regards the second, necessity was the precursor of ordinance, since there is no doubt that flagons, both of silver and of pewter, were, in fact, provided before, in 1603, the 20th Canon of James I and VI required that the 'wine is to

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be brought to the Holy Table in a pot or stoup of pewter, if not of finer metal.'

Probably the earliest flagons existing are the silver pair at Cirencester, dated for 1576, of which an outline drawing is given in No. i. A similar pair was formerly at East Horsley. To account for the apparent time-lag of nearly thirty years between 1547 and 1576, it must be remembered that the continuity of the Reformation was broken by the accession and five years' reign of Mary, during which the old order was revived. Only one pewter vessel coeval with the Cirencester pair is known to me (No. ii): it is at Wood-



No. VI.—FLAGON WITHOUT COVER FINIAL, 1627

eaton Church in Oxfordshire; the general similarity of design—bulbous body, spreading foot, domical cover and bold S handle—will be noted.

During the first half of the Seventeenth Century there was working in England a Master-pewterer

'hollow-ware' man—i.e. specializing in flagons and tankards; and that his *forte* was the manufacture of the types shown in his Touch. As to his output of vessels of the ewer type, we have no knowledge whatever, since the Wood Eaton example is un-

having refused the office of steward; though, to have been offered it indicates that he must have already been working for several years. He became Master of the Company in the year 1662.

Whatever his origin, his Touch is of peculiar interest; in it will be observed, beneath his initials, two flagons; or, more properly, a flagon and a ewer, the latter bearing some resemblance to those illustrated in Nos. i and ii, and an even closer one to the vessel shown in No. iv, which is, however, of later date (c. 1630). It would appear that E.G. was essentially a



No. V.—FLAGON, INITIALS E.G. IN SMALL CIRCLE



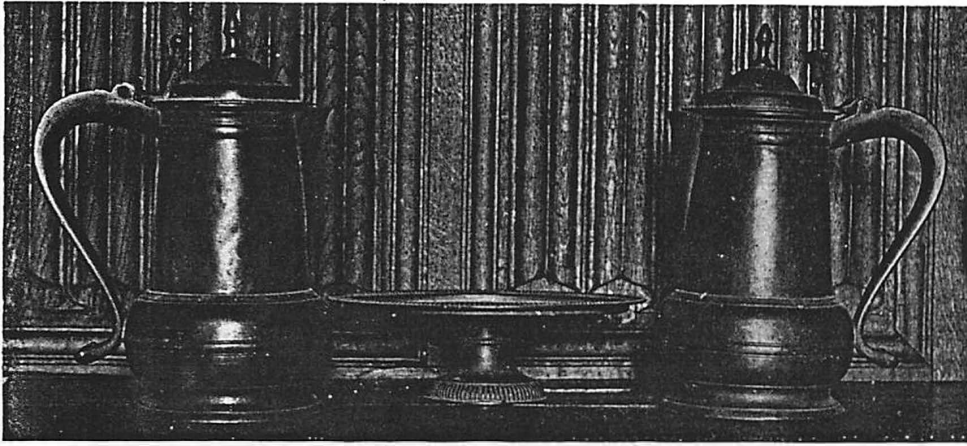
No. VII.—FLAGON OF PLAINER FORM, CA. 1610

whose initials are E.G. His Touch (No. iii) does not appear on the earliest of the (post-fire of London) Touch plates (1668) preserved by the Worshipful Company of Pewterers; and he was, therefore, either a provincial, or a London craftsman who had died before the Touch plate came into use. It is possible that he was Edward Gilbert, first mentioned in 1633 as



No. VIII.—FLAGONS, VARIANTS OF THE SAME TYPE DATING BETWEEN C. 1650 AND C. 1685

marked; but the fact that this type appears in his Touch, and that both silver and pewter examples actually exist, dating between 1576 and 1630, would indicate that this is the first type of vessel which was introduced into the Church of England for the purpose above described; and that E.G. certainly knew of it, and probably made it, though his output is unknown.



No. IX.—TWO SO-CALLED 'YORK' FLAGONS WITH DOMED LIDS DATING FROM THE QUEEN ANNE PERIOD

When we come to the other type shown in his Touch we are on firm ground. No. v shows one of this type made by E.G. himself, and examples of his are widespread. At an exhibition of ecclesiastical pewter held in Norwich in 1934 (described and illustrated in *THE CONNOISSEUR* for October 1936), out of seventeen flagons of this type, ten were by this maker, and only one by another, six being doubtful owing to defaced touches. A slight variation of the type, without a cover finial, is seen in No. vi; nine of these latter were exhibited at Norwich, of which seven were by E.G., the other two being by Robert Martin of London. Both these variants were made also in silver, and in large numbers, often very ornate. They date between *c.* 1630 and *c.* 1650. But between the early ewer and the flagon depicted in E.G.'s Touch, appears another type of flagon, entirely peculiar to pewter. No. vii illustrates a fine example of this, and it will be seen to be of simpler, almost crude, form, especially as regards the plain ovolo base and lip, to which latter the equally plain handle is directly connected by a sweated joint. It is an unaccountable fact that these flagons were scarcely ever marked by their makers, though the rules, of the London Company at least, were strict upon the point; and of seven shown at Norwich only one had the remains of a Touch. This type dates from *c.* 1590 to *c.* 1630.

Only one really universal type of flagon remains to be described. This is the skirt-based 'beefeater,' as it is called, from a fanciful likeness of its cover to the hats worn by the yeomen warders of the Tower of London. One of these is in the centre of No. viii, flanked by a magnificent pair which, though having their own marked characteristics of cover, thumbpiece and handle, are nevertheless obviously variants of the same type. They date between *c.* 1650 and *c.* 1685. Coeval with, and succeeding, them, variants of former types and various individual designs were produced; generally speaking, the latter followed certain

broad lines—for instance, flat covers during the Carolean and William and Mary periods and domed covers from Queen Anne onwards. Prominent among the latter are the 'York' flagons, so called because nearly all known examples are preserved in, or emanate from, that county (No. ix), which also shows a fine footed paten plate.

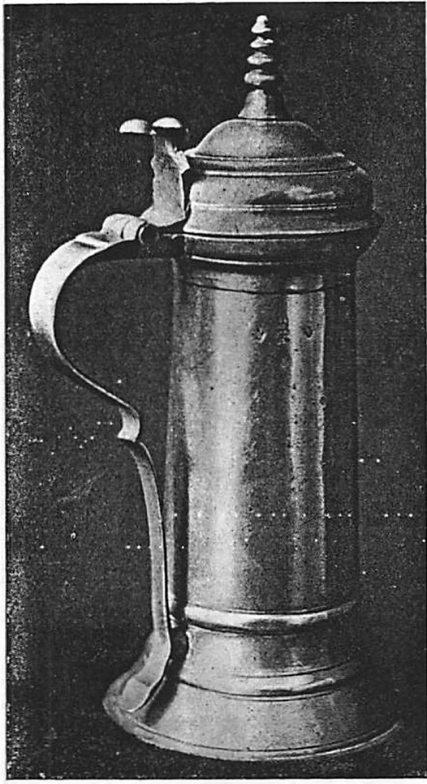
No. x shows three flagons, the 'flat lid' (*c.* 1680) in the centre, the 'domed lid' (*c.* 1710) on the right, and a Georgian example (*c.* 1780) on the left. The flagon illustrated in No. xii is an offshoot of the 'E.G.' type; its abnormalities are the thumbpiece (common to both the north and west countries) and the heavy lip mould. A more debased form is shown in No. xi. The last illustration (No. xiii) is of a very fine variant of the normal 'E.G.' the differences being in the finial and the thumbpiece, which latter, like that in No. xi, is of the twin-lug type. This flagon comes from Dinington, a name common to three parishes, one in Yorkshire, one in Northumberland, and the third in Somerset. Beside it is a beautiful paten plate of *c.* 1670, bearing the arms of Jenison.

It is no exaggeration to say that many scores of pewter communion flagons of all dates from 1590 to 1800 remain in the parish churches of England; many more have been 'alienated,' the majority undoubtedly without any legal permission; possibly, no doubt, because, owing to disuse and consequent relegation to obscure places, succeeding incumbents were unaware of their existence; though, I fear, that may be a somewhat charitable explanation of their disappearance. But, whatever the cause, large numbers of these church vessels, fine examples of the pewterers' craft, have enriched the trade financially and their present owners aesthetically; and they will be preserved and revered in private collections as they have not been for many years in their spiritual homes.



No. X.—LEFT A GEORGIAN EXAMPLE *c.* 1780, CENTRE 'FLAT-LID' FLAGON *c.* 1680, AND RIGHT 'DOMED-LID' *c.* 1710

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No. XI.—FLAGON WITH TWIN-LUG THUMBPIECE

It cannot be too strongly emphasized that church vessels are held in trust, and that alienation of them without a Faculty is illegal. This applies as strongly to pewter as to gold or silver.

There is, however, another and brighter side to the story. With the approval of various ecclesiastical authorities and the assistance of incumbents, it has been possible to examine, clean, and, where necessary, restore, very many fine pewter flagons and patens which, it is to be hoped, will be reverently cared for and kept in the permanent custody of the churches to which they belong.

Much research and work of this nature was carried on, up to the time of his passing, by the late Howard Cotterell, and also by the Society of Pewter Collectors, both as a body and through its individual members.

Much prominence was also given to the preservation of pewter plate by the exhibitions which were held, shortly before the late war, in the dioceses of Carlisle and Norwich; and, to show the extent of the Church's heritage in one relatively small area, no less than one hundred and thirty-seven pieces, all from the Archdeaconry of Norwich, were on view at the latter exhibition, which was held in the disused church of St. Peter Hungate, now an ecclesiastical museum.

The writer has himself had the privilege of restoring the plate of some sixteen parishes, of which three are in Scotland and one at the extreme western end of Cornwall.

In the latter case, a flagon of the type shown in No. vii was discovered in the last stages of corrosion, its cover missing and its handle torn away. No attempt was made to do more than prevent further decay, since complete restoration

would have required more metal than was left to the piece itself. It is, however, now kept, visibly, safely, and free from cold and damp—the two greatest enemies of old pewter—in a glazed case, together with the remaining pewter vessels; and, by a happy thought of the incumbent, these pieces are placed upon the Holy Table on Easter day. I should like to place on record an act of preservation of a somewhat different nature. Some years ago a well-known collector discovered in a provincial antique shop, a fine 'beefeater' flagon, bearing the name of a west-country church. He acquired it for his collection at a somewhat high price. In the following year, happening to be in the town in which the church was situated, it occurred to him to visit it. He did so, and found three other similar flagons (incidentally, a commentary upon the provision which, in the Seventeenth Century, was considered necessary for the needs of the congregation); and, in conversation with the vicar, found that a fourth flagon had disappeared a year or so earlier, and had never been found.

On his return home he sent his highly prized possession back to the church, where the whole set of four is now reunited and carefully guarded; and, as was typical of him,

did so anonymously. He has now passed on, and only one or two of his friends know of his act.

Of the pieces illustrated, No. iv is at Ludlow Museum; Nos. v, vi, vii and xi, Mr. Harry Walker; and No. viii, Mrs. Carvick Webster; No. ix belonged to the late Mr. Fieldhouse, No. x to the late Alfred B. Yeates, No. xii to the late Major John Richardson (whose collection was bequeathed to Truro Museum). No. xiii in my collection.



No. XII.—'AN OFFSHOOT OF THE "E.G." TYPE'



No. XIII.—A FINE VARIANT OF THE 'E.G.' TYPE FROM DININGTON AND A PATEN PLATE, C. 1670