

# COLLECTING BRITISH PEWTER TAVERN-WARE IN SOUTH AUSTRALIA

By Geoffrey R Lock of Adelaide – written May 2009

## ***Collecting British Pewter Tavern-ware in South Australia.***

### **Introduction**

These notes are written as a general guide to what one might find in searching for old pewter tavern-ware. I have been collecting British pewter for over 40 years, buying my first piece in April 1968. Since then, I have assembled a representation of more commonly found tavern-ware that is of the period c1780's to c1860's with the settlement era of South Australia being in the latter years of 1836 onwards.

My personal interest in old pewter stems from my childhood as I grew up in our family hotel, the "Cumberland" in Glanville which is a waterside suburb of Port Adelaide. In the store-room of the pub was an old pewter quart pot that I was fascinated by as a child. It was made by Yates & Birch of Birmingham and had the owner's name "*S Marsden*" inscribed on the front; I still have it today.

### **Some points to consider:**

South Australia was settled at a time when pewter was going out of domestic use in Britain.

No known pewterers practiced their trade in Australia, unlike silver-smiths and gold-smiths.

There was no gold rush to South Australia as in Victoria and New South Wales in the 1850's with the corresponding rapid growth of townships and population.

Most of our domestic requirements were imported from Britain throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

Unlike stamps, coins, weapons, silver, china-ware etc, collecting old pewter has never been "fashionable", hence there are few avid pewter collectors today in Australia.

### **What is pewter?**

For the general purposes of this discussion, pewter is defined as an alloy of tin and lead, with antimony in ratio of 95:4:1 that is cast into bronze moulds. Britannia Metal is a different alloy of pewter and can be stamped from sheet metal in much thinner form. Both pewter and Britannia Metal wares were soldered except flatware such as plates, platters and chargers which were cast in single moulds and hammered afterwards in the bouge for strengthening.

### **Settlement of South Australia.**

Permanent European settlement in South Australia commenced in 1836 with the arrival of settlers at Glenelg after a brief "interlude" on Kangaroo Island. The colony was officially proclaimed on 28th Dec 1836 by Gov. John Hindmarsh. In the very early days until the discovery of the Port River, Glenelg was the only landing place for emigrants until c1840. Since then, South Australia's main shipping port has been Port Adelaide due to its close proximity to the capital city, Adelaide. Country town-ships gradually spread out from there along the Fleurieu Peninsula to the south, in the Adelaide Hills and Mt. Lofty Ranges and north along the Wakefield Plain and Barossa Valley until the 1850's.

It was during this time of early settlement that families coming from Britain might have brought items of pewter table-ware with them but it was already obsolete having been replaced in homes by inexpensive china-ware. However, pewter, being metal, survived long sea voyages quite well unlike glass. Along with the development of small villages and towns which saw the growth of stores, farm trades, churches and schools, there was also the steady growth of inns, taverns and hotels.

Many small townships grew from wayside taverns that sprang up every 5 miles or so along the Main South Road to Victor Harbor and Main North Road to Port Wakefield and beyond. As all transport was done by either bullock or horse teams, these animals had to be watered every so often, as did the drivers and teamsters. It is here in the taverns that old pewter made its "Last Stand" so to speak which lasted throughout the remainder of the 19<sup>th</sup> century up until the First World War.

### **How pewter came to South Australia.**

As there were no factories that made pewter in Australia, all pewter and Britannia Metal was imported from Britain as part of the colonial sea trade. Whilst it had all but disappeared in home use, the steady growth of taverns meant that customers and traders needed measures and pots to use.

From the earliest days of settlement, importers included whitegoods as part of their inventory.

This meant various items of metalware made from tin which would have included enamelled plates, cups, bowls, jugs, basins, buckets and pewter pots, measures and ale-jugs.

Newspapers from the day {The Register up to 1858 and subsequently, The Advertiser} carried regular advertisements announcing ships' cargoes and larger stores carried trade catalogues from manufactures in Britain selling all kinds of goods, including pewter-ware.

It is well-known that pewter was exported to the Colonies from Britain from the records of manufacturers such as James Yates of Birmingham. This company sent a variety of pewter-ware to

several Australian states in the latter part of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, continuing up until c 1910. During this period, the company existed as Yates & Birch until c 1850's, next as James Yates to c 1880's and finally as Gaskell & Chambers until the First World War.

### **Main uses for pewter-ware.**

In the period under discussion, {c 1830's to c 1900} pewter was used mainly as follows:

#### **Domestic home use.**

This includes metal utensils such as plates, soup tureens, meat-covers, cheap Brit. Metal wares as tea-sets, coffee pots, tea-pots, pepper pots, salts, sugar bowls, sauce boats and mustard pots etc.

Pewter plates had ceased to be made towards the end of the 18th century in any great quantity and were replaced by inexpensive Staffordshire china.

From time to time, 9" plain-rim plates turn up at auction. These are usually c 1740 to 1780's and sometimes have legible maker's marks struck on the back of the plate. It is rare to see a large platter or charger for sale in Adelaide, partly because they were already obsolete before 1836. There was little demand for the use of large serving pewter flat-ware in the hotel trade which was more concerned with the sale of beer, wines and spirits.

#### **Church service sets for Holy Communion.**

Whilst electro-plated wares were more frequently used from c 1840's, some Free Church of Scotland and Presbyterian churches may have used pewter for their communion service plate. This would have been in keeping with tradition in Scotland where pewter had been part of church use for centuries. Little evidence has been found of its use in South Australia, most likely because of the lateness of the settlement of the state in comparison with the rest of the nation.

A communion service consisted of a flagon, chalice and large platter, all of which were usually enscribed with the name of the church. Pewter communion tokens were also used well into the 19<sup>th</sup> century in Scotland but none have been found with any connection to a church in this state.

#### **Tavern-ware.**

This was by far the most wide-spread use of pewter in the many taverns and hotels that sprang up in both the metropolitan and country areas of the state as settlement expanded.

The most commonly found pieces of pewter are ale-pots, wine measures and, rarely, ale-jugs that were used throughout the nineteenth century in South Australia until replaced by cheap glass.

#### **Ale-pots or tankards.**

These are of various shapes and designs as I will describe separately. All pieces used in South Australia were of Imperial Standard capacity as conforming to the regulations of 1826. Ale-pots were in three set sizes; ½ pint {10 fl.oz.} pint {20 fl.oz.} and quart {40 fl.oz.} Body styles or shapes found include truncated cone, U&fillet, 2-band U shape, tulip, bucket, concave and glass bottomed. Handles also vary in style, the most common being standard, scroll or "Broken", tubular and rectangular.

Pints and ½ pints are more often found than quarts with the "truncated cone" body design most common.

U & Fillet and 2-band U shapes are scarce with both tulip and bucket styles quite rare. Glass-bottomed pieces were common until recent times.

#### **Wine measures.**

The bulbous or pot-bellied wine measure is the most often found style of tavern-ware from this period. These vary in size from ¼ gill to quart and are in Imperial capacity. A full set of measures includes ¼ gill {1.25 fl.oz.}, ½ gill {2.5 fl.oz.}, gill {5 fl.oz.}, ½ pint {10 fl.oz.}, pint {20 fl.oz.} and quart {40 fl.oz.}. Smaller measures such as 1/20<sup>th</sup> pint also turn up infrequently. This style of measure was used for small capacities of spirits and for larger amounts of wine. They were used for measuring quantities of household and farm liquids such as methylated spirits and turpentine as well as transferring quantities of wine and spirits from kegs to bottles.

All pieces have their capacity struck either on the rim or on the body; those with quarter or  $\frac{1}{2}$  quarter tend to be earlier in manufacture, pre 1850. It was still possible to obtain a shot of whiskey, rum or brandy from a pewter measure in some country hotels up until World War 2.

### **Marks found on old pewter tavern pots and measures.**

Pieces from the period under discussion {c1830's-1900} usually have a variety of marks, mainly on the body or sometimes on the top of the handle. Marks under the base, except for maker's marks, are rare.

#### **Maker's marks.**

Not all pots and measures have maker's marks but the most common that I have encountered over the years are as follows: Yates & Birch {c1838-1850's} James Yates {c1850's-c1880's} Gaskell and Chambers {c1880's-c1920's} Morgan & Gaskell {c 1850's-1870's} and occasionally pieces by C Bentley {c1830's-1840's} J C Edward {c 1850's-1860's} and J C Crane, {c1820's-35}.

Most of these makers were from Birmingham which became the dominant location for pewter manufacturing in the second half of the nineteenth century in Britain.

Likewise, Sheffield became the centre for Britannia Metal-ware so that these two midlands cities distributed goods world-wide, especially to the developing states in Australia, from 1850 onwards.

Maker's marks, other than those of Gaskell and Chambers, are always struck on the upper body of the pot, near to the handle. Some makers, {Bentley and Edward}, used "Hallmarks" that included their initial and two or three symbols that were struck on the upper body of a piece. Gaskell and Chambers always struck their mark under the base of measures except in the case of  $\frac{1}{10}$ <sup>th</sup> and  $\frac{1}{20}$ <sup>th</sup> pint measures when a mark was struck inside the base.

#### **Capacity marks.**

Almost every piece that I have come across has its capacity in some form stamped on the body.

In the case of tavern pots, this is either  $\frac{1}{2}$  pint, pint or quart. Early pots may have the capacity struck in individual large capital letters such as QUART. The capacity was often stamped on by the manufacturer and later verified by an inspector.

In the case of pot-bellied measures, the capacity was usually struck on the rim either as  $\frac{1}{4}$  gill,  $\frac{1}{2}$  gill, gill,  $\frac{1}{2}$  pint, pint or quart. Different capacities were struck, such as 10 or 20, meaning that fraction of a pint. Early measures may have their capacity struck with individual letters. This method of verification was done in Britain c1826 to c1840's during the transitional period from O.E.W.S. to Imperial Standard. It is not unusual to find both pots and measures from that time having "IMPERIAL" also struck on the body.

#### **Inspection or Verification marks.**

Pots and measures were inspected and stamped to verify that they held the correct capacity of fluid.

There are numerous reasons for this, primarily to comply with the Act of 1834/35 which stated that all vessels had to be inspected and stamped to guarantee their true capacity. Likewise, fraud existed then and now and to prevent "Short measure", containers were stamped by an inspector. Some pieces have many stamps on them, from different reigns so that it is possible to find a piece with a crown over G IV, VR over a number, e.g. VR over 120, ER over 120 and even GR over 120. This would indicate that the piece had first been inspected during the reign of King George IV, c1820's, then again during the subsequent reigns of Queen Victoria, King Edward the 7<sup>th</sup> and King George the 5<sup>th</sup> or 6<sup>th</sup>. I have seen late pieces with marks for the current monarch, Queen Elizabeth the 2<sup>nd</sup>. The number system for districts in Great Britain was introduced in 1878/79 to replace different county, city and borough marks and lasted until the 1960's.

#### **Australian State Marks.**

Pieces of pewter turn up from time to time with marks indicating that they were inspected in one of the Australian states, usually before Federation. Victoria used a numerical system incorporating a crown over the letter E with a number, over VIC. The number represented a locality in Victoria and this system was in use until the 1960's. It was used to verify copper or tin measures used in wineries and hardware stores.

A different system was used in New South Wales being a series of graduated stamps each with NSW over a lion passant, all within a shield. Often this mark would be accompanied by a letter, A to L, signifying the month and a number, 0 to 9 indicating the year. A small crown was also used with these marks. Pewter ware was marked in New South Wales until the mid 1950's using a combination of the above marks.

Yet another system existed in South Australia from the 1840's to Federation. Initially, pieces were stamped SMVR with individual letter punches. This signified Victoria Regina Standard Measure. Using separate punches was time consuming so a more simplified system was used combining VR with a crown and SM. Different designs and sizes of this verification were used in South Australia until it was replaced with a crown and number system c 1890. Both pewter and copper wares were stamped using these marks.

Pieces with Australian State marks tend to be made in the second half of the nineteenth century, often by Yates & Birch, James Yates, Morgan & Gaskell up to the 1880's and later, Gaskell & Chambers, c 1890-1910. I have never seen an Australian State mark on a piece of pewter made before 1830 nor on pieces with any British inspection mark. This would indicate that pewter was not inspected prior to export to Australia. It is highly likely that an organised system of inspection did not exist within the states outside of the capital cities and that the growth in exports to Australia really took off with the gold rush boom, post 1850.

#### Other marks.

Besides those mentioned in the above sections, pewter tavern-ware sometimes has other forms of marks including owner's initials, names or hotel /tavern /inn. The style in which these marks are inscribed or struck on the piece often assist in the approximate dating of its manufacture.

#### Initials.

Large cursive capital letters on the front of the body, with flecking around, date from c 1790 to c 1830's. Also seen on rim of plain-rim plates of same period. Initials without flecking tend to be later 19thc.

#### Names.

Sometimes found as individually stamped such as A.H. BEYER or in cursive such as *S Marsden* within a wriggled border. Also inscribed under the base of pots together with hotel name in cursive script.

#### Hotel /Tavern / Inn name.

This type of inscription is usually found on pots made and used in the London area from c 1760's to 1840's. Early examples have the name of the publican, hotel or inn and town / suburb contained within a wriggled boundary. These labels were circular to begin with, then rectangular and finally shield-like. After the 1830's, it was more common to find pots inscribed under the base around the rim up to the 1880's. Records of when publicans were licenced for which premises in London help to date the era of the pot as these do not always have maker's marks to identify them. This type of inscription is rarely seen on pot-belly measures.

Pots and measures with Australian States provenance thus described are scarce indeed.

I have four in my collection, two of ½ pint capacity and two quarts. The first ½ pint being a pot-belly measure with *J Inde Paradise Bridge Hotel* and stamped VR crowned and SM. J Inde was the proprietor of this hotel in 1861 and died in 1865. The next is a bucket beaker with *W Square Globe Inn Gawler Town* inscribed under the base. W Square ran this inn from 1852 to 1858. The first quart is a plain-bodied truncated cone with **A.H. BEYER** stamped with individual letters on the front of the body as well as VR crowned within an ellipse and SM likewise. A H Beyer was the proprietor of the Bridgewater Inn, dying in 1858. The second quart is the one that started me off on my collecting, being a truncated cone by Yates and Birch, c 1840's, of Birmingham. This piece has the name *S Marsden* inscribed on the front of the body within a rectangle and VR SM verification marks that have been scratched. A Samuel Marsden was the publican at the "Albert" hotel from 1850 to 1855, in Alberton, near Port Adelaide so it's probable that this quart was his.

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