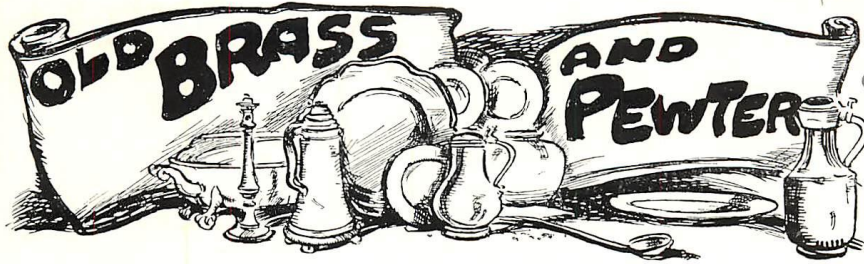


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G. M. Howes  
1 May



## SCOTTISH PEWTER MEASURES AND THEIR ORIGIN

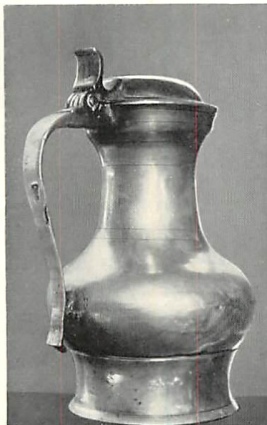
By HOWARD H. COTTERELL, F.R.Hist.S., etc.

IT seems that long accepted traditions and theories concerning some of the more familiar Scottish vessels must be the subject of revision, and that forms which one has hitherto regarded as purely Scottish are in reality but modifications of other forms. This also applies to the Scottish and English Baluster Measures.

Let me be more precise. It would seem that the types known as the "Tappit-hen" and the "Pot-bellied" measures are, in fact, evolved from vessels embodying almost identical features which were in use in France and the Netherlands in mediæval times. This may come as somewhat of a blow to national susceptibilities, and one expects

a certain amount of criticism for that very reason. But I think a dispassionate consideration of the arguments which follow will be of a sufficiently satisfying nature to convince even those who do not wish to be convinced.

Accepted tradition is hard to alter, but in this case no one has ever been satisfied with the suggestion that the name "Tappit-hen" had reference to "a crested hen"! Even in the wildest flights of imagination one can find no trace of similarity, and yet Jamieson, in his *Scot's Dictionary*, gives it as:—"A cant phrase, denoting a *tin* measure, containing a *quart*, so called from the knob on the lid as being supposed to represent



No. I.—SCOTTISH  
END OF 17TH CENTURY



No. II.—DUTCH  
EARLY 17TH CENTURY  
MR. A. VERSTER'S COLLECTION

## Scottish Pewter Measures



No. III.—CONTINENTAL  
C. 1500 MR. G. FRAZIER

by Wood says, in his *Scottish Pewter-ware and Pewterers*:—"In the XVIIth & XVIIIth centuries, and the early part of the XIXth century, the two words *quart* and *pint* seem to have been synonymous in meaning." So much for what we have been told by these writers,

but to those of us who are most familiar with these fascinating vessels, the true Scottish Tappit-hen was of Scots pint capacity, *i.e.*, three English pints. That point is accepted amongst collectors the world over.

With regard to the origin of the name: against Dr. Jamieson's suggestion of a crested hen, the incontrovertible fact that the earliest known Tappit-hens—and therefore those from which one might rightly infer the name was evolved—WERE NOT CRESTED, but had a plain, domed cover. Some recent correspondence in the *Glasgow Herald*, under the title "Tales of a Grandmother," turned upon the subject of the Tappit-hen, and writing on July 10th, 1930, a correspondent, who signed himself "T.S.," gave what I believe to be the clue to the whole matter when he quoted Francisque Michel's *Critical Enquiry into the Scottish Language*, wherein "Tappit-hen" is given as a corruption of *Topynett*, a French measure containing a quart. "T.S." went on to observe: "As it is generally agreed that we owe to the incursions of the Norman-French most of our terms dealing with the social customs of mediæval Scotland, there can be little doubt that the people who gave us *tassies* and *ashets* and *serviettes* provided also the flagon measures originally

a crested hen." (The italics are mine.)

By "Tin," he, of course, means pewter, which at that time was often so-called. (Much Continental pewter was stamped BLOCK-TIN.) And in using the word "quart" he is not, strictly speaking, correct, though, as Engle-

known as *topynetts*." It is an accepted fact that the Tappit-hen was first used for claret, and it is well-known to pewter collectors that certain types of Normandy and other French measures are widely designated "Tappit-hens." We have always thought this wrong, but is it?

The second size of the series of "Tappit-hen" shaped measures is known as the "Chopin." Why? This, certainly, is neither a Scottish nor an English word, but is the French word, *Chopine* = one pint. And as a pint is half a quart, so is a Chopin half a Topynett, Q.E.D.!

Is not the inference obvious? The claret was imported into Scotland in Topynett and Chopin sized vessels of local shape, and the series which we know as the Tappit-hen shaped measures were evolved from these imported shapes. The word Topynett was soon corrupted into Tappit-hen, and Chopine became Chopin, though neither had any reference to shape, but to capacity, hence we have *topynett* and *chopine* capacities in other forms than the Tappit-hen.

The third size, the Mutchkin, is the only one of the series which has a name of definitely Scottish origin, derived from *mutch*=a cap, and *Kin*, little. Probably no French measures of so small a capacity would pay for importation, and so a name had to be created.

Turning to the illustrations, let us first consider carefully the points of the three vessels shown in Nos. ii., iv. and iii., the two former being of pieces in the collections of Mr. A. Verster, of The Hague, and the third

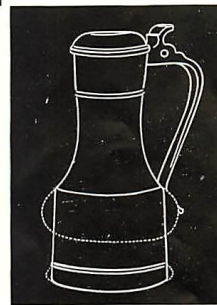


No. IV.—DUTCH 17TH  
CENTURY MR. A. VERSTER



No. V.—SCOTTISH  
EARLY 18TH CENTURY

of Mr. G. Frazier. In these three types we have practically all the constructive features of the Scottish "Pot-bellied" and "Tappit-hen" types as shown in Nos. i. and v. respectively, the former from a photograph supplied by Mr. T. Barlow, and the latter from one of my own photographs.



No. VI.—DIAGRAM SHOWING  
EVOLUTION OF THE TAPPIT-HEN

*Scottish Pewter Measures*



No. VII.—STILL LIFE

BY GERRIT WILLEMSZ HEDA, 1642  
COMPARE WITH NO. II.

IN THE RIJKSMUSEUM

If the long pipe-spout were taken away from the flagon illustrated in No. ii., which is an early seventeenth-century piece, we have, with very slight modifications, an almost exact counterpart of No. i.

But whereas in Scotland the earliest known examples of this type are those in Brechin Cathedral, dating from 1680, specimens from as early

as the fourteenth century are still to be seen in the Historical Museum at Basle, whilst the elder and younger Hedas faithfully depicted many of them in their pictures. One of these by Gerrit Willemz Heda, 1642, is reproduced here by courtesy of the Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam (No. vii.). This type was so popular in Holland that the celebrated Dutch artist, Jan Steen, made it

### Scottish Pewter Measures

an almost invariable practice to include one in his compositions, to such an extent that it has become known over Europe as the "Jan Steen" type. Here, then, we have proof of the existence in Holland and elsewhere of the pot-bellied type, some three centuries before the earliest known examples in Scotland.

Turning to the Tappit-hen, much the same thing is found. The earliest known example of this type is probably to be found in the Chopin size in the Edinburgh Museum of Antiquities, whereupon the touch is dated 1669; but that refers only to the date when its maker was admitted a free pewterer, and the piece itself may be some years later.

A comparison of the example shown in No. v.—which is typical of all—with the details of the vessels illustrated in Nos. iii. and iv., will at once show the sources of its inspiration. The lid, thumbpiece and handle, the truncated cone-shaped mouth and the waisted body of the seventeenth-century example, shown in No. iv., down to its central line, are almost identical with the same parts in the Tappit-hen illustrated in No. v., whereas the lower part, with its slightly tapering cylindrical outline, is obviously inspired by the type which was all-pervading for many years in Northern France and down to the Mediterranean and into Switzerland. An extremely fine example of this latter type, certainly not later than 1500, is seen in No. iii.

In No. vi. I have made a rough sketch of an uncrested Tappit-hen and have superimposed the vessel shown in No. iv., the difference in outline being indicated by the dotted lines. From this it will surely be conceded that the inspiration of the Tappit-hen is apparent. It just omits the bulbous central portion and splayed-out base,

substituting therefor a base similar to that shown in No. iii.

Enough has probably been said to establish the fact that, in form, these two Scottish types are but modifications of age-old Continental ones, and if this be admitted, is it surprising that the Continental names, "Topynett" and "Chopine," should also have been retained? There are, indeed, collectors who use the phrases *Tappit-hen sized* and *Chopin sized* when speaking of the pot-bellied types, and so it should be. To attach the word Topynett to a particular type is wrong; there is a topynett size in every early Scottish type. But it will never be altered; it has gone too far; and though one hopes the derivation of the name at last has been established, the error is so deep-rooted that it will remain. Let us therefore retain the name Tappit-hen to denote this type, distinguishing between the sizes, as Topynett-size Tappit-hen; Chopin-size Tappit-hen, and so on; but it will be wrong in future to criticise those collectors who also call a Normandy flagon a Tappit-hen.

And now one must turn to another type of measure, the whole family of Balusters, English and Scottish, of which the best-known types are shown (from the fine series in Mr. Harry Walker's collection) in No. viii. The earliest period which can be ascribed to the oldest of these—that on the left of the series—is "Henry VIII.," and yet the type was known long ere that in Europe. Here again it would seem we must forsake the time-old theory that in these measures we had a purely national type. The more one studies and the deeper one's researches go, the more one begins to believe that all types were international, differenced only by local modifications and adaptations.



NO. VIII.—SERIES OF BALUSTER MEASURES IN MR. HARRY WALKER'S COLLECTION  
DATING FROM HENRY VIII.'S REIGN TO EARLY 19TH CENTURY

ENGLISH AND SCOTTISH

