

The Isher Commemorative Charger

At a Meeting of the Pewter Society at Cheltenham Museum on June 22nd 2017. Several of the first group of 14 (half those attending) declared this to be a good piece. Those so saying included several members with a great deal of experience.

The basis of their opinion was that the oxidation or aging over the wrigglework and parts of the plate was real, authentic and could not be so faked.

If correct then Jan Gadd and Ron Homer were both – wrong.

This document (draft/article) looks at the evidence available –

- 1) The Charger and pewterer's/owner's marks on it as photographed on the day
- 2) The previous opinions and writings about it by Jan Gadd and Ron Homer
- 3) A look at the oxidation
- 4) A look at the wrigglework
- 5) A review of the design work

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Firstly then the Charger as photographed on the day –





2) The writings of Jan Gadd and Ron Homer about this piece

No. 9 (JG 31) - The Isher Bequest at the Cheltenham Museum



DATED 1660

Jan Gadd details how this plate in Jan's view is a complete fake – made new and aged in the 1920s by **Richard Neate**. He writes that the touch is a fabrication and the fake hallmarks crisply added around 1920 as and when the plate was made. The decoration is an imaginative use of pseudo heraldic detail. Diameter 46cm rim 8.8cm. RON HOMER AGREED

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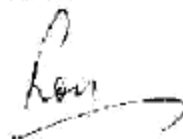
29 October 2004

Dear Jan,

I am quite confident that the Isher charger is a fake. The heraldry defies rational explanation and the hallmarks, as you point out, are stylistically quite wrong. The whole thing is a meaningless confection of motifs, initials and inscriptions. Two minor points strike me, I don't think 'honor' is a likely 17th spelling of honour, and what a coincidence that the ownership initials below the date are the same as those in the touch! What surprises me is that Ken Bradshaw repeated the bizarre story about Charles II presenting it to the Vintners' Company!

If you want to pass on my first paragraph to Cheltenham Museum, that is fine by me.

Best wishes,



1976.29

Broad Rimmed Charger dated 1660 with wriggled worked inscription 'Feare God and Honer the King' and the date '1660' and 'EM' in the bouge. The well is naively engraved with the Arms of the Vintners' and also the Innholders' Company and the verse 'Com ye blessed, I was harberlesse, ye lodged me'. The outer rim section with a wriggle worked garland framing alternative twigs of acorns and oak leaves in the same style as the so called 'restoration chargers' celebrating the coronation of Charles II.

This charger is an elaborate and very clever fake and belongs in a group of similar fakes that appeared during the first part of the 20th century - coinciding with the first decades of serious pewter collecting in England. All of these chargers are characterised by an excessively naive decoration in a 'horror vacui' style, leaving no part of the surface undecorated. This style of decoration suddenly 'appeared' on many chargers with dates of c. 1660 and 'disappeared' without trace some twenty to thirty years later, again according to the dates on the fakes. (For a genuine commemorative pewter object, see the William and Mary tankard in the museum's collection, acc. No.1976.38). The museum also owns some wriggle worked plates and a beaker illustrating the technique used on genuine objects of the c. 1680 – 1700 period. (Acc. Nos. 1976.32, 1976.26 and 1976.39.)

The Curator at the Cheltenham Art Gallery & Museum at the time of the bequest undertook extensive correspondence with the London Companies involved, also including the Pewterers' Company, in order to research the charger. She arrived at no conclusion whatsoever as no member of the Companies in 1660 had initials matching those on the charger during this year. The combining of the arms of livery companies in this manner 'was unheard of'. Owners of similar style chargers undertook similar correspondence with other London guilds such as the Butchers' Company with similar negative results.

An unidentified fake touch and four fake HMs by 'TM' were struck on this charger. The crown and heart device was used by Thomas Haward, London (Cotterell OP2214) and later by William Matthews, London (Cotterell OP3140) who was apprenticed to Haward 1648-1655. It is a strange coincidence that Thomas' initial 'T' appears to the left in the touch and his apprentice Matthews' 'M' to the right – or is it? (Compare with Matthews' genuine touch on acc. No. 1976.30 in the museum's collection.) The touch appears very worn indeed and lacks detail. This was achieved by lightly grinding and polishing the steel punch itself rather than the touch impression after striking. The hallmarks are all of a style and outline not used during this period, especially not in London where such pseudo hallmarks arrived somewhat later. They are, however, as sharp and crisp as they were when struck c. 1920.




The London antiques dealer and well known purveyor of fakes, Richard Neate, used exactly this style of fake marks. In order not to put an 'out-of-the-period' mark on a fake item, he probably struck his collection of fake marks on one or more pieces of pewter sheet metal and could therefore give the correct marking reference and touch to whoever was helping him at the time in the 1920s. One such plate of fake marks thought to have belonged to Neate has survived. It was photographed and each individual mark published by the Pewter Society (Pewter Society, 1996).

Although several similar fake chargers were after decorated in the 20th century on genuine, undecorated chargers cast in the 17th century, the museum's example was totally faked. The marks do not appear on the one recorded 'Richard Neate touch plate.'

The charger was cleaned by Mr Kenneth Bradshaw in 1976 with the use of hydrochloric acid in Bradshaw's usual 'timed' fashion, leaving black corrosion in suitable places, attractive to most British collectors, and he therefore unwittingly became party to the general deception.

Diameter 460 mm, rim 83 mm

JG31

<p>No. 31. Cheltenham Museum collection.</p> <p>Marks: Unidentified fake marks and four HMs by 'TM'. The crown and heart device was used by Thomas Haward, London (OP2214) and by William Matthews, London (OP3140) who was apprenticed to Haward 1648-1655.</p> 	<p>Ex. A.T. Isher coll, part of his bequest to the museum in 1976.</p> 	<p>Dated 1660. The well naively engraved with the Arms of the Vintners' and also the Innholders' Company and the legend "Com ye blessed, I was harberlesse, ye lodged me" and the date "1660" and "EM". Wriggle worked inscription "Feare God and Honer the King" within a wriggle worked border on the inside of the rim. The outer rim section with a wriggle worked garland framing alternative twigs of acorns and oak leaves in the same style as the restoration chargers.</p> <p>The Curator at the Cheltenham Museum at the time of the bequest undertook an extensive correspondence with the London Companies involved, inclusive of the Pewterers' Company, in order to research the charger. He arrived at no conclusion whatsoever as no member of the Companies in 1660 had matching initials during this year. The squaring of the arms of livery companies in this manner 'was unheard of'.</p> <p>The charger was cleaned by Ken Bradshaw in 1976 with the use of hydrochloric acid in Bradshaw's usual 'timed' fashion, leaving black corrosion in suitable places, attractive to most British collectors, and he therefore unwittingly became a party to the general deception!</p> <p>The touch bears all the hallmarks of the London dealer Richard Neate. It appears very worn indeed and lacks detail. This was achieved by lightly grinding and polishing the steel punch itself rather than the touch impression after striking. The hallmarks, however, are as sharp and crisp as they were when struck c. 1920.</p> <p>Diameter 460 mm, rim 83 mm</p>	
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3) A look at the oxidation



What the members on June 22 said was that this was honest oxidation over the wrigglework and not possible to create.

This writer has briefly looked at 4000 photos of other pieces and found no other oxidation/aging to match it.

Gadd writes and Homer does not disagree that -

The charger was cleaned by Ken Bradshaw in 1976 with the use of hydrochloric acid in Bradshaw's usual 'timed' fashion, leaving black corrosion in suitable places, attractive to most British collectors, and he therefore unwittingly became a party to the general deception!

This writer wonders if this effect could be created by lightly splashing the plate with acid a small area at a time. This might be done by gentle spray release from say a glass pipette

It would be interesting to find other examples of similar oxidation. The PS Library has no such (as yet found).

4) A look at the wrigglework

The reason this writer wants to check the wrigglework is that it appears to him probable that at the very least the central decoration was carried out far later than the date suggests with some intention to deceive. Decoration is considered in section 5. However, if the wrigglework in the centre and to the outer part is the same then it is likely both were done by the same hand. So here is an attempt to compare.

RIM (left hand side centre)

CENTRE (left hand side)



This is taken from the right hand side of centre. There are differences but then there are differences in the style of work the wiggglework is for. Left hand side shows a border to the lettering – right hand side shows bordering to the central illustration.

RIM (right hand side centre)
 Is it reasonable to compare the double line above GOD with the double line around the central shield? Is it reasonable to compare leaf and flower wiggglework with the stands of Barley ? The stem wiggglework with the central decorative wiggglework. If it is then these differ – but overall is it inconclusive?



Left hand shows the swirling plant stems and the right hand above the swirling design. There are clearly differences but these are perhaps inconclusive.

CENTRE



6)

6) A look at the - CENTRAL DECORATION



This is perhaps a figure of a 'one legged, four fingered, naked, man with cartoon like nipples and genitals, wearing a peasant's hat (perhaps), with long wavy hair and dimpled cheeks (?). (sat on what?)

- is to this writer –

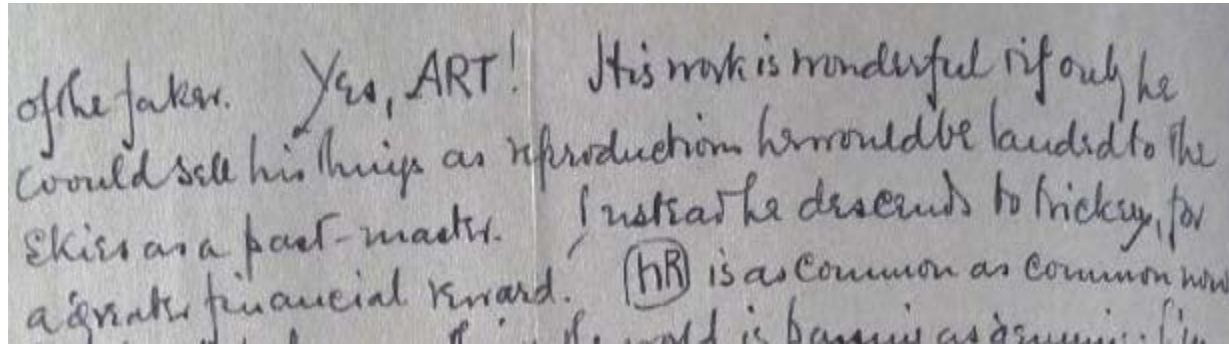
A probable attempt to laugh at (even scorn) the owner of the plate – a figure totally without parallel in the period. (A bitter Joke)

This is not without comparison as the Burrell Fire Plate (an acknowledged fake supplied by Richard Neate) also shows cartoon like figures with humorous intent.

Richard Munday says about Richard Neate's alleged craftsman 'Edward' in his own typed script –

until one day in walked an elderly man we will call Edward. He looked around "I can make anything you have in pewter in the shop!" That was the start of an era. Edward was a villain. Originally a goldsmith he also had dealt in bullion. It seemed that each time Hatton Garden bought his gold the eventual alloy was polluted. The reason was not hard to find for a slice of lead was sandwiched inside each ingot he sold. His career as a goldsmith abruptly ended he turned to pewter. He made moulds and between his skill and Neat's overseering a spate of "rarities" grew. Gossip had it that if a collector inadvertently mentioned a specific piece he wanted, it mysteriously turned up in due course. The output halted when Edward had long-lasting alcoholic bouts one of which ended his pewter career. Alone

H H Cotterell wrote that his (the faker's) work was –



This 'career' seemed to come to an end at about the time of the Burrell Fire Plate. Too much 'alcohol' might explain the cartoons on that plate and this figure on this plate.

Or one of those members of the Society who consider this plate genuine might be able to identify use of similar figures on other pewter or ceramics of the period.

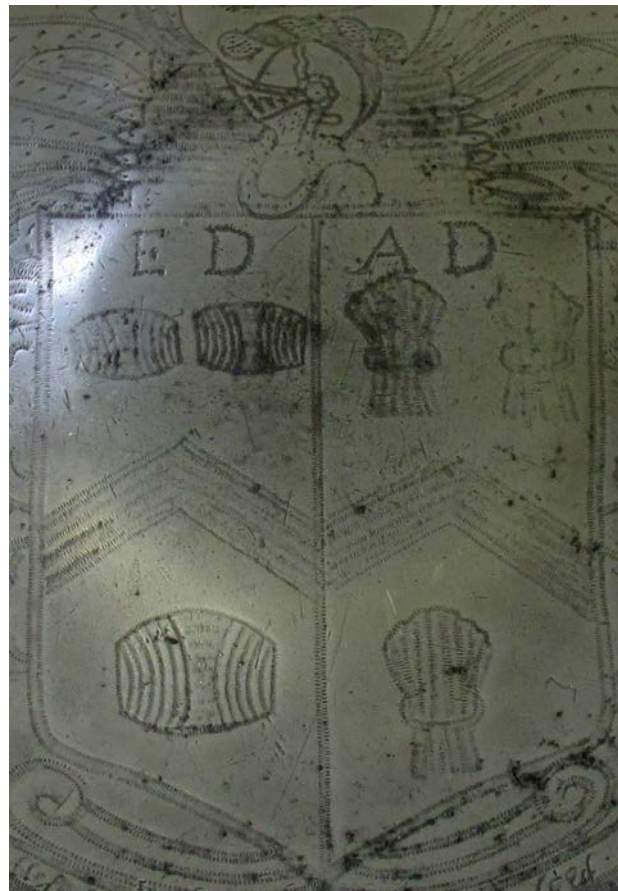
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Mottos in small script are not found in pewter or ceramics of the second half of the 17th century.



Gadd says this reads as –

**Broad Rimmed Charger dated 1660 with wriggled worked inscription 'Feare God and Honour
the King' and the date '1660' and 'EM' in the bouge. The well is naively engraved with the
Arms of the Vintners' and also the Innholders' Company and the verse 'Com ye blessed, I was
harberlesse, ye lodged me'. The outer rim section with a wriggle worked garland framing**

The helmet shown below is not in the style of the period –



Gadd writes the following concerning the arms shown above.

The Curator at the Cheltenham Art Gallery & Museum at the time of the bequest undertook extensive correspondence with the London Companies involved, also including the Pewterers' Company, in order to research the charger. She arrived at no conclusion whatsoever as no member of the Companies in 1660 had initials matching those on the charger during this year. The combining of the arms of livery companies in this manner 'was unheard of'. Owners of similar style chargers undertook similar correspondence with other London guilds such as the Butchers' Company with similar negative results.

The three flowers shown below appear on a number of Commemorative Chargers including one certainly decorated before 1900. Jan Gadd considered these flowers to be an artist's mark/signature – if so then such plates were decorated before Neate started work.

Thus if Gadd is correct this is a conundrum.



Could the rim decoration be of the time? – and the well have been worked later?

The following is the style of decoration on a plate in the Navarro Collection whose authenticity has not been called in question.



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There is no good reason to this writer that this plate is other than a fake. Perhaps one of those who decided it was good and genuine might respond.