



Pewter in Churches

Introduction

Much of this initial information is taken from a leaflet published by the Pewter Society.

In medieval times pewter was used to make chalices and patens - and pilgrim badges - but in the 17th and 18th centuries its use became more widespread in domestic settings, including for platters, jugs, tankards, candlesticks and buttons. Pewter items found in churches today are most likely to be flagons, chalices, plates or candlesticks dating from the 17th or 18th centuries. Some may have originally been household items and then donated to the church at a later date. Pewter flagons may have been used to hold the communion wine or the water for baptism. Plates may have been alms plates or patens for the communion bread, while the chalices can range from the communion cups to tiny medieval sepulchral chalices buried with the priest.

The terminology for describing ecclesiastical pewter is largely the same as for other church plate except that the finial at the lower end of a handle is called a 'terminal'. Identifying the pewterer's maker's mark or 'touch' is not always possible as they were not required to register all their marks, but a database has been established and now has a substantial and ever-growing 'population'.

Here are two examples of pewter flagons:

FLAGON

- 1 A Charles I style pewter flagon with a shallow-domed bun lid with a compressed knob on a circular base plate. The lid is annulated and has a flared rim with no inner bezel. The high flat moulded thumb piece has concave curved sides and is pierced with a heart shape. The lid is attached to the body by a large two-in-three hinge, which lies flat on top of the S-shaped strap handle with a heel terminal. The top of the flagon, which has no lip, mirrors the lid, narrowing to the neck of the tall tapering body. The body is annulated at the base where it meets the flared step to the domed foot. There is a triad ownership mark of three initials in roman caps cast into the handle just below the hinge: M (for the surname) above T and D (the names of the man and the woman). Below this is an oval maker's mark which is worn and unidentified. It has a representation of a figure but the other features are indistinct. (ref a & b)
- 2 Pewter.
- 3 Mid 17th c.
- 4 wt. 2,675g. h. 33 x diam of top 12 x diam of base 14cm.
- 5-6 -
- 7 This is probably the pewter flagon listed in the Terrier dated 5th May 1707, held in the Archive Office. (ref c)
- 8-9 -
- 10 a) Dr J R, pewter expert. b) D B, pewter expert.
c) Ter/19/146.





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FLAGON

- 1 A plain lidded flagon with a cylindrical, tapering body and a stepped, domed lid, which has a compressed, annulated knop finial. The high corkscrew thumbpiece connects the lid to the two-in-three hinge, which lies on top of the S-shaped scroll handle, with a ball terminal. Engraved on the handle is R S in caps and the numbers 1736 below, presumably a date. Above is an indented stop. The foot is stepped and domed. Misalignment of the lid and handle suggests damage and repair.
- 2 Silver plated pewter.
- 3 First half 18th c.
- 4 h. 29 x diam. of base 13·8, diam. of lid 10·8cm.
- 5-6 -
- 7 A pewter flagon is mentioned in the church inventory of 1707 (ref a) Accounts in 1760 refer to the cost of new silvering of the flagon and mending the same, including the carriage involved. (ref b) Subsequent records refer to a pewter, silver plated flagon. (ref c)
The identity of RS and where this flagon fits into the church records remain a mystery. Is 1736 the date when RS presented the flagon to the church, in the place of or in addition to the flagon of 1707? Was this the flagon which was re-silvered (probably just on the outer visible surfaces) in 1760?
- 8-9 -
- 10 a) Inventory 1707. b) Church accounts 1760. c) Church Plate of X-shire, 1903 p 25.

