

# Tiny Tots - a comment

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David Hall comments on the article, *Tiny Tots*, in a recent issue of *The Pewterer* ([Volume 6.2](#))



The whole subject of 'miniature' pewter is an interesting one. Were miniatures made as samples, or as toys ('playthings')? By the way in earlier centuries the term 'toy' was used to describe any small item, not just playthings for children. Whatever the answer to the above question is, I know of no record of pedlars pewter-selling on any scale in 18<sup>th</sup> century Britain. There is one known record of a large manufacturer using a travelling salesman who carried trade samples but likewise I know of no evidence for miniatures being made in England as trade samples. It is understood that they were made in the USA in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, on some scale, as children's toys.

In earlier centuries what are described in the article as 'miniatures' were probably made as toys in the plaything sense.

Illustrated, left, is a porringer, believed to be English and 17<sup>th</sup> century in date; just over 2 inches in diameter. It would almost certainly, when made in the 17<sup>th</sup> century, have been referred to as a 'toy'; the question remains, is it a plaything or just a small practical example? I have no answer!

The two toy/plaything chargers, (illustrated, right) are both just over 2 inches in diameter. The larger is of a typical 1680/1710 multi-reed and is probably Dutch. The second shows the representation of a cornucopia; other toys or playthings of the period show fruit, fish, etc. I do not know



17<sup>th</sup>

where it was made, but stylistically it dates from circa 1700. I think although these were made as playthings for children that they would be rather large to be used in any but the very largest of dolls' houses.

My final pictures (above and below) are of two 'toy' porringers, both probably Dutch and made as playthings for children. They look smaller than the chargers and therefore more like dolls' house furnishings but, in scale terms, are not that much different. The tri-lobed porringer, in style terms, is 16th century; the other example, in style terms, is late 16<sup>th</sup> century early 17th century.



Incidentally 'hard metal' was the 18<sup>th</sup> century name for a pewter alloy which was the forerunner of 'Britannia metal'. In addition to tin it consisted of between 1% and 3% antimony and some copper. Britannia metal is similar in composition but has between 4% and 8% antimony and, say, 2% copper. Britannia metal was in the last resort a cleverly chosen trade name, harping back to Britannia standard silver and harping on Britain's 18<sup>th</sup> century naval successes.

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*The Pewterer*, Volume 6, number 4. September 2015.

Editor: Alan Williams

Published by Alan Williams, 14 Dandridge House, 31 Lamb Street, Spitalfields, London E1 6ED and endorsed by the Worshipful Company of Pewterers, Pewterers' Hall, Oat Lane, London EC2V 7DE

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