

A Unique Pewter Tea Caddy

I was very excited to hear from Alex Neish the other day that he had acquired what he considers to be a very rare piece of pewter, one that, he says, will eventually join the Neish collection at the Smith Museum in Stirling.

“It is probably the earliest known English pewter tea caddy”, said Alex. “It stands 3 ins high and 3.25 ins. in diameter. The chain that holds the key to the lock on the rim of the container is attached to the knotted lid. Clearly, this dates from the time when tea was a rare commodity, familiar only to the very wealthy.”



It bears an engraving with the initials ‘IHG’ and what I interpret as the date ‘1785’, though Alex says it might be ‘1783’. The cartouche containing the initials and date is surrounded by engravings of flowers, what Alex calls: “Large daisies, very popular at the time”.

Alex Neish has been a major collector of pewter for many years. Please see earlier articles about him, his collection, and the Smith Museum in Stirling, in *The Pewterer*:

Issues 1.1 and 2.2 (<https://sites.google.com/a/thepewterer.org.uk/thepewterer/home/the-pewterer-volume-3-4-1/the-pewterer-first-four-issues>);

issue 4.1 (<http://www.thepewterer.org.uk/home/the-pewterer-volume-4-1>); and

issue 4.2 (<http://www.thepewterer.org.uk/home/the-pewterer-volume-4-2>).

“I bought the the caddy a few weeks back from an English dealer who shall be nameless”, said Alex. “I believe that it must be English, as the Scots favoured a stronger brew! There is no touch mark and the maker is unknown, as, unfortunately, is the person who bore the initials ‘IHG’.”

Tea caddy

Wikipedia defines a tea caddy as ‘a box, jar, canister, or other receptacle used to store tea.’

It says that the word is believed to be derived from 'catty', the Chinese pound, equal to about a pound and a third avoirdupois. The earliest examples that came to Europe were of Chinese porcelain, and approximated in shape to the ginger-jar. They had lids, or stoppers likewise of china, and were most frequently blue and white. Until about 1800 they were called tea canisters rather than caddies.



Wikipedia goes on to say that 'Earlier tea caddies were made of either porcelain or faience. Later designs had more variety in materials and designs. Wood, pewter, tortoiseshell, brass, copper and even silver were employed, but in the end the material most frequently used was wood, and there still survive vast numbers of Georgian box-shaped caddies in mahogany, rosewood, satin-wood and other timbers. These were often mounted in brass and delicately inlaid, with knobs of ivory, ebony or silver. Many examples were made in Holland, principally of the earthenware of Delft. There were also many English factories producing high quality goods.'

Tea

According to the UK Tea & Infusions Association:

'Tea first appeared in Europe thanks to Portuguese Jesuit, Father Jasper de Cruz, in 1560. By the mid 18th century, tea had replaced ale and gin as the drink of the masses to become Britain's most popular beverage.'

According to the website of the Bramah Tea Museum: 'Everybody knew that in order to make tea, the water had to be boiled, which made it a safe drink to enjoy. ... By the eighteenth century China tea and teaware were a feature of every aristocratic and middle-class English home.'

'Taxes were imposed on tea in Britain from 1689 to 1764, and also in the American colonies, but in 1773 the American merchants angrily rebelled against the charge they had to pay, throwing a shipment of tea into the sea. This act became known as the Boston Tea Party. In Britain itself the tax encouraged smuggling, which led to tea being brought in to Ireland, Scotland and other parts of Britain as well as by the legitimate trade through the port of London.'

'Tea was soon recognized as an invaluable drink for the workforces of the Industrial Revolution. It was cheap and non-alcoholic and, mixed with milk and sugar; it provided needed sustenance for people working long hours in factories.'

Wikipedia says: 'Tea was sold in a coffee house in London in 1657, Samuel Pepys tasted tea in 1660, and Catherine of Braganza [brought] the tea-drinking habit to the British court when she married Charles II in 1662. Tea, however, was not widely consumed [here] until the 18th century, and remained expensive until the latter part of that period.'

The Smith Museum

The Museum houses the Neish Collection of pewter. According to the Museum, it is "One of the most important collections of British Pewter". Formerly based in Spittal Street, Stirling, the Neish Pewter Collection has taken up permanent residence in Gallery 3 of the Stirling Smith - See more at:

<http://www.museumsgalleriesscotland.org.uk/about-us/news/news-article/511/neish-pewter-collection#sthash.EhhZVU9e.dpuf>

Alex Neish commented that: "For the pewter part, there has been strong support - notably from the Worshipful Company of Pewterers."

Alan Williams

Notes

The Smith Museum

The Smith Museum is involved in multiple fund-raising events in favour of the Restoration Appeal. Connect with the Museum at <http://www.smithartgalleryandmuseum.co.uk/>

Smith Art Gallery & Museum
Dumbarton Road
Stirling
FK8 2RQ

01786 471917

www.smithartgalleryandmuseum.co.uk

Opening Hours: Tues - Sat: 10:30 - 17:00. Sun: 14:00 - 17:00

The Bramah Tea & Coffee Museum

(It is not clear from the site whether the Museum is currently open or closed): <http://www.teaandcoffeemuseum.co.uk/index.html>

1785

A personal selection of events occurring in 1785

- | | |
|-----------|---|
| January 1 | The first issue of the Daily Universal Register, later known as The Times, is published in London. |
| January 7 | Frenchman Jean-Pierre Blanchard and American John Jeffries travel from Dover, England to Calais, France in a hydrogen gas balloon, becoming the first to cross the English Channel by air. |
| May 10 | A hot air balloon crashes in Tullamore, Ireland, causing a fire that burns down about 100 houses, making it the world's first aviation disaster (by 36 days). |
| June 15 | After several attempts, Jean-François Pilâtre de Rozier and his companion, Pierre Romain, set off in a balloon from Boulogne-sur-Mer, but the balloon suddenly deflates (without the envelope catching fire) and crashes near Wimereux in the Pas-de-Calais, killing both men, making it the first fatal aviation disaster. |
| July 6 | The dollar is unanimously chosen as the money unit for the United States. |
| July 16 | The Piper-Heidsieck Champagne house is founded by Florens-Louis Heidsieck in Reims, France. |

Precise date in the year unknown:

Coal gas is first used for illumination.
Louis XVI of France signs to a law that a handkerchief must be square.
Napoleon Bonaparte becomes a lieutenant in the French artillery.
Music: Mozart's "Haydn" String Quartets are published.

Births

- | | |
|-------------|---|
| January 4 | Jacob Grimm, German philologist, folklorist, and writer (d. 1863) |
| March 27 | Louis XVII of France (d. 1795) |
| April 26 | John James Audubon, French-American naturalist and illustrator (d. 1851) |
| April 29 | Karl Drais, German inventor, created a precursor to the bicycle (d. 1851) |
| May 22 | John Hindmarsh, English naval officer and the first Governor of South Australia (d. 1860) |
| July 6 | William Jackson Hooker, English botanist (d. 1865) |
| July 20 | Mahmud II, Ottoman sultan (d. 1839) |
| October 18 | Thomas Love Peacock, English satirist (d. 1866) |
| November 18 | David Wilkie, Scottish artist (d. 1841) |
| December 23 | Christian Gobrecht, designer of the "Liberty Seated" coins (d. 1844). |

[Home](#)

Photos: Grilled Cheese Studio

The Pewterer, Volume 7, number 1. February 2016.

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

Articles: copyright the several authors 2016. Get-up: copyright Alan Williams, 2016.

No reproduction without permission.

All enquiries to the [Editor](#).