

Series: Pewter owned by the Nation - the National Trust

Pewter at Cotehele

The estate at Cotehele was acquired by the Edgcumbe family, by marriage, in 1353. The current house incorporates parts of the fabric of the medieval house. The estate is now owned by the National Trust, acquired through the National Land Fund in 1947. Based on my visit there last summer, it is more than well worth a visit - it is a 'must see' if you are anywhere near Saltash.

But the prize is that it has a fascinating pewter collection, one that was catalogued by the Pewter Society in 2013. Steve Custons wrote about the collection in an interesting article published in the that Journal; and Rachel Hunt, the House and Collections Manager at Cotehele, has been enormously helpful in providing further information about the collection.

The family clearly owned - and treasured - a lot of pewter. When King George III and Queen Charlotte visited Cotehele in 1789, the Queen wrote of her visit: 'At Breakfast we Eat off the Old Family Pewter, & used Silver knives Forks & Spoons which have been Time immemorial in the Family & have always been kept at this place...'

Although the house and estate were transferred to the National Trust in 1947, the contents remained in the ownership of the Edgcumbe family until 1974. Hundreds of pieces of pewter were sold at Sotheby's in 1956, presumably to pay off death duties in connection with Mount Edgcumbe House, one of the family's other properties.

The two pewter chargers, right, were re-purchased by the National Trust at Bonhams, Chester in May 2009 for a total cost of £13,442. There was a third, smaller plate of the same set for which the NT bid, but sadly did not have enough money in the budget to secure the purchase.



The three chargers must have been used at Cotehele for hundreds of years. The larger ones measure 22½" each in diameter; each is engraved with the Edgcumbe coat of arms. They were made *circa* 1640, presumably for Colonel Piers Edgcumbe, who succeeded his father in 1639, by the Dolbeare family of Newton Abbot, so they are relatively local. It is highly likely that these pieces belong to the set that Queen Charlotte was describing.



Some experts believe the coat of arms, illustrated left, was added long after the plates were produced, providing further evidence of the Edgcumbes' antiquarian interests.

Although the Earls of Mount Edgcumbe (as they became) purchased pewterware from local West Country pewterers, they also purchased from London pewterers. Steve Custons' article contains a comprehensive list of the makers and their wares

(of sadware produced between ca1600 and ca 1800; it does not include the mugs and kitchenware made in the 19th century, and included in Cotehele's own inventory).

I have extracted photographs of a few examples of the Cotehele pewter, but I refer you to the Journal and, more particularly, to visit Cotehele itself where you can see the pewter on display there.



In the Great Hall, there is a pair of pewter 'trumpet-based' altar candlesticks from 1660; the foot of each is engraved with a coat of arms. See one example opposite.

There are also pewter mugs, 1800-40. On the left is a pint mug by Yates and Birch; on the right, a mug and jug by James Yates of Birmingham. See also the illustrations, below, of a pewter plate and a pewter flagon.



At the time Steve Custons wrote the article (late 2013), of the 270 items in the list, 49 are to be found back at Cotehele; 28 at Colonial Williamsburg; 11 in Pewter Society members' collections; and 2 owned by the Worshipful Company of Pewterers, leaving the whereabouts of 180 unknown.

One of the pewter plates c.1742, engraved with arms of Richard, 1st Baron Edgcumbe

Alan Williams

Notes

Cotehele House, St Dominick, near Saltash, Cornwall, PL12 6TA

National Trust website: How to get there: <http://www.nationaltrust.org.uk/cotehele>

The Edgcumbe Pewter at Cotehele House, by Steve Custons. Article first published in The Pewter Society Journal, Volume 12, Autumn 2014. (The Pewter Society: <http://www.pewtersociety.org/>)

Sadware: A term historically used to describe pewter pieces that today we would call flatware, that is saucers, plates, dishes, chargers and soup bowls, and the like.

Steve Custons is the database manager for the Pewter Society and an expert in old English pewter and its uses in historic context.

Photos: With thanks to Steve Custons and the National Trust



Pewter flagon with domed and hinged cover, and shell thumb piece

[Home](#)

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 2015. Get-up: copyright Alan Williams, 2016.

No reproduction without permission.

All enquiries to the [Editor](#).