

The story of James Taudin

by Ronald F. Homer



The late Ron Homer

The late Ron Homer was the Worshipful Company of Pewterers' archivist, and a collector of, and expert in, pewter. He wrote and researched many articles on pewter and subjects related to pewter.

This one is about the French pewterer, James Taudin; the full article, from which this is an extract, can be found in the Pewter Society's Journal, the Autumn edition, 1984. Mr Taudin caused the City pewterers much grief - they did not like foreigners coming onto their patch!

First Oliver Cromwell, the Lord Protector, then Charles II, newly restored as king, became involved for the purpose of restoring order between their unruly subjects. Read on

The name of James Taudin has long been known to collectors and has always been shrouded in mystery. It is apparent from the brief and somewhat scattered references to him in the Court Books of the Worshipful Company of Pewterers that he was a Frenchman who came to England as a refugee in the 1650's and established himself as a pewterer in London, where he soon became known for the quality of his wares.

The Company took exception to him as a foreigner who was trespassing on their domain and seized certain of his pewter and set out to sue him in the courts. Taudin obtained the support of Cromwell and the Company admitted him as a freeman in 1658. They continued to be unhappy about him and, after the restoration of Charles II, harassed him from time to time on various pretexts - until the king took his part and wrote to the Company in 1668 commanding that he be left in peace.

[Charles' signature, though not the one on the command referred to above, appears later in this extract. Ed]

This, together with the likely surmise that part of the Company's objection to him was due to his introduction of a superior antimony-containing alloy, is essentially all that has hitherto been known about him.

Recently, a bundle of original documents and letters relating to James Taudin has come to light, including the original of Charles II's letter, which was otherwise known only from the

transcript in the Company's Court Book. From these, a much more detailed picture of the whole affair can be reconstructed.

On the 21st April 1656 Taudin wrote to Oliver Cromwell a petition as follows:

"To his Highness the Lord Protector of ye Commonwealth of England, Scotland and Ireland and the Dominions thereunto belonging:

The humble petition of James Taudin and Peter Gerard late soldier in the State's service during ten years and now associate and interested with the said Taudin.

Humbly Showeth,

That the petitioner for expressing his affection both to Religion (being a protestant) and to the English interest in the late troubles in Bordeaux in France, hath been necessitated to forsake his native country and reside in England, as he humbly conceives it is well known to your Highness. That in consideration of his unjust sufferings, your Highness was graciously pleased about a year since among divers others to grant him the benefit of indenization [naturalisation, Ed] in this Commonwealth, ... Notwithstanding which too gracious favour of you Highness under the Great Seal of England, ... on a sudden, namely the 17th instant, your petitioner was violently assaulted in his own house by one James Jacombe, a pewterer of London, and many other persons unknown to the petitioner, pretending likewise to be pewterers, who though they had the assistance of a constable and of several men pretending to be soldiers of your Highness' army, yet refused to show any warrant for their so doing, as indeed they had none but their own pretended authority.

Notwithstanding which (after forcible coming in) alleging they were merely come to visit his pewter to see whether it was good or no, they were quietly admitted into your petitioner's house, but instead of a regular visit as they had pretended they fell abattering and spoiling with hammers, or rather a kind of poleaxe, all the pewter they met with there ready-wrought (such as themselves acknowledged to be beyond their own skill and much better and better made than they or any of them could have made it) and after a very great tumult they raised in these quarters they forcibly and of their own authority carried away (your petitioner knows not whither) several cart loads of his said pewter to a very considerable value, having refused to accept a very sufficient security offered them to let the said pewter in the petitioner's hands, and the constable having likewise refused (though required by your petitioner as being a public officer) to take the same into his custody, and both denying him the liberty to take a note of what they carried away.

And whereas your petitioner exhibited to them your Highness' patent of indenization, they slighted it, saying that their charter was above it. Which proceedings being contrary to the laws of this country and to your Highness' gracious intention.

Your petitioner doth ... [crave] ... that your Highness would be pleased to order that not only a present restitution of all his pewter and of all his damages arising by that violent and wilful spoil be made unto your petitioner, but such justice might be done on the said Jacombe and his complices ...

And your petitioner shall (as in duty bound)
ever pray for your Highness' long life and prosperity.
(Signed) James Taudin

The petition was endorsed by the protector's secretary referring it to the Lord Mayor and Aldermen for adjudication in their court, and requiring that their opinion be notified to Cromwell.

Jacombe and the others concerned were therefore summoned to appear before the lord mayor "this day sevenight" by a letter dated 29th April. The mayor's court found that Taudin's pewter had been seized by the Company in conformity with the Act of 25 Henry VIII "forbidding strangers born out of the realm to exercise or use the craft of pewterer" and that "the said Masters and Wardens do not allege the said pewter to be ill wrought, nor have (they) tried the same, but proceed in the authority of the said statute".

... However, the mayor had been pre-empted from further consideration by the fact that the company had in the meanwhile filed suit in the Exchequer Court where the matter was *sub judice*.

An unsigned and undated report to Cromwell's counsel, perhaps drawn up by the mayor, does nevertheless give us more details. The quantity of pewter seized was no less than "one thousand eight hundred three quarters and thirteen pounds", and the real point of law at issue emerges.

An Act of 32 Henry VIII states that "no alien by any patent of denization shall be privileged against any act of parliament unless such patent contains in it all such privileges particularly expressed by special words". The pewterers claimed that Taudin's patent contained no such words.

The report confirms Taudin's story as to the forcible entry and seizure and indeed goes further, stating that Jacombe and his companions "dealt roughly with the petitioner's servants, holding their hammers over their heads making show as if they would strike them and caused one of their company to get through a window into a room where the greater part of the pewter was and did violently with their hammers and other instruments like poleaxes break and batter several pieces of the said pewter".

... The pewter in question, is itemised in the next document and comprised, 32 dozen and 9 dishes, 3 dozen and 7 platters, 15 dozen long plates, 3 dozen trencher plates and one dozen of round plates. (The meaning of "long plates" is obscure, unless they were oval in shape). The whole was valued at £114.9s.1d.

The Company's ... efforts at sueing were however in vain, Cromwell put an estoppel on the Exchequer Court action and summoned the parties before commissioners appointed on 19th June 1656 by himself to enquire into the case. The commission apparently sat on 1st July but regrettably there is no copy of their findings.

The commissioners' findings can however be inferred from a writ from the Exchequer Court ordering [the Company] to return the seized pewter to Taudin, and from an order to him early in 1657 "to commune, compound and agree to and with James Taudin otherwise Debart, pewterer". Added information can be gleaned from a document drafted six years later, on 31st March 1663, by the company, as an intended petition to parliament seeking to deny Taudin continued naturalisation. This reads in part,

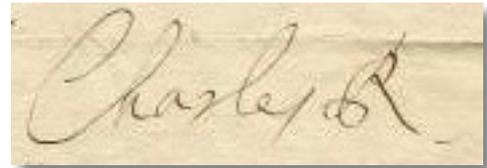
"James Taudin afterwards procured his naturalisation from the said usurper (i.e. Cromwell) who then being naturalised procured orders from the attorney general and other committees to whom the business was referred, to summon the Master and Wardens before them to their great vexation and trouble. Where we were much threatened and commanded speedily to make agreement with him and to admit him a member of the said Company, which we were forced to do".

Part of the compromise reached with Taudin was that he would send away the strangers who worked for him, who were variously reported in the earlier documents as being between six and ten in number. He was apparently not keeping to his side of the bargain since a second draft of the same document alleges that "the said James Taudin now keeps eight or ten men constantly at his house beside several that work to him from abroad". It further complains,

"that he allegeth his pewter to be better than ours, which we deny, and are ready to make assay to the contrary only the name of French pewter is much taken by several of this kingdom and are willing to give him a far greater rate than (they give to) natives. Which, if he be naturalised, will unavoidably bring this corporation into the condition of the Weavers who are so overspread with strangers that natives are mightily impoverished and their trade much deranged".

The record is unfortunately incomplete in these later years and the next surviving paper is Charles II's letter of 7th November 1668 in which he commands the Company thus,

"We have thought good to let you know, that we expect you will look on the said James Taudin as our servant, and that he shall not have any occasion given him from you or any of you to complain at any time against any hard usage he may receive from you. We shall not doubt your compliance with our pleasure hereby signified unto you, and so we bid you farewell".



The Royal signature, but from another document, not from this command

Not surprisingly the record is silent after this!

An interesting fact which emerges from the contemporary record is that the Company never assayed Taudin's pewter, or never admitted to having done so, indicating that they were well aware that it would have passed the test. Neither was it ever part of their case that the ware was of sub-standard alloy. The scale of Taudin's business is also surprising; at various times he employed between six and ten men and also imported pewterware from France. Why he fled from France is not clear, but it was asserted by the Company in 1663 that it was for "rebellion against his king".

...

His [nephew], also James, was admitted to the livery of the Company soon after his death, but it seems that relations were still strained for the younger James was required to pay £20 "beside the usual fees".

One of the set of five Taudin plates in the Company's collection (Company Catalogue Nos. 40-44) has now been analysed by Dr. R. Brownsword, through arrangements kindly made by Peter Hornsby, and has been found to contain 2.3% antimony, 0.6% copper and 0.2% bismuth.

...

R. F. Homer

Illustrations: the editor.

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The original of this article was published in The Pewter Society Journal, Autumn 1980; and for the full text, please refer to the article.

The Pewterer re-published in 2013 two other articles by Ron Homer, as follows:

Ron Homer - the Search of 1702, Pt 1. **Issue 4.3:** <http://www.thepewterer.org.uk/the-pewterer-vol-4-3> : and

Ron Homer, Good Old Days, part II. **Issue 4.4:** <http://www.thepewterer.org.uk/the-pewterer-vol-4-3/the-pewterer-volume-4-4>

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