

II.

NOTE ON THE SUPPOSED "CHARTER CHEST OF JOHNNY FAA" AND ITS CONTENTS—PROBABLY THE OFFICIAL BOX AND PLATES, WITH TRADE MARKS OF THE INCORPORATION OF PEWTERERS OF EDINBURGH. BY JOHN ALEXANDER SMITH, M.D., V.P.S.A. SCOT.

The box and its contents, two metal plates covered with die stamps, &c., now exhibited, were apparently given some time ago by Mr E. Huie to the late Sir J. Y. Simpson, Bart., to be presented to the Society, but somehow or other had been overlooked, and were only presented to the Museum after Sir James's death. The box contains also a written paper, which tells the following curious history :—

" JOHNNY FAA'S CHARTER CHEST.

" This coffer and contents belonged to a gipsy family of the name of Faa, and was called the Charter Chest of the celebrated Johnny Faa and Family, the Stamped Charter being their warrant to travel and trade through the country. It is stamped from 1600 to 1750, one hundred and fifty years. After the one was filled, a second has been prepared, but only two stamps appear on it, and on two other detached pieces. Perhaps at that time the printed hawker's licence superseded the more primitive one."

" E. HUIE."

A card in the box, with the date "1843, states that the box and contents were preserved in a gipsy family till within the last few years."

The box, which is of oak, bound and richly ornamented with iron straps and two separate locks, has a sort of official looking character, and contains two peculiarly shaped plates of pewter. These plates are elongated in form, and have circular heads. They somewhat resemble in shape the old conventional representations of the Stone Tables of the Law, and measure $12\frac{1}{2}$ inches in length by $4\frac{1}{2}$ inches in breadth ; they bear on their surface a series of punched impressions of stamps or dies, some with dates running from 1600 down to 1764. The die stamps on the rounded head of the plate vary considerably both in shape and character. They are apparently the earliest in date. We have among the first a figure like

a St Andrew's Cross; another with the addition of initials, monograms of initials as J. S., and simple initials. One displays the initials J. R., with the date, 1600, above them. Then we have simply a castle; next we have the castle, varying in style, with initials on each side, and later, with the addition of a date below the castle; the first being 1610, with the initials G. G. This series of castle stamps then runs regularly on over the plate, with varying initials and dates down to the year 1764. A few stamps of a different character occur among the earlier castle stamps, as, for example, one displays the initials and a hammer between; another initials and a small expanded rose between them, and the date 1616; this last single stamp is repeated on the back of the plate, which is otherwise plain. The second plate bears only two stamps, the castle, with the initials J. B. and the date 1760, and another with the initials J. G. and the date 1764.

Besides these official like plates, the box contains two cut portions of apparently an ordinary pewter plate; one of these bears two stamps, a large expanded rose, like the rose on the early coins of England, with a crown above, and with the initials on each side. The other portion of pewter plate bears a slightly differing rose, &c., and is inscribed below it **HARD MET**—the rest of the word being illegible, probably for **HARD METAL**; evidently the stamp for some particular kind or quality of a compound metal, probably pewter as contrasted with a softer quality of the metal.

The box likewise contains a small pewter cup, $1\frac{3}{4}$ inches high by $1\frac{1}{2}$ inch broad, with the initials A W scratched on its side. There is also a small squared piece of pewter with a couple of stamps on it, of the castle, and dates 1669 and 1671.

The statement in the MS. paper seems a very extraordinary explanation of the box and its contents, and not a very satisfactory one. The idea of the wild Gipsy Faas of Yetholm carrying about this almost empty box, with its stamped plates of pewter and dates thereon, as their mysterious authority to rove about the country, seems to me too wonderful to be true—at least in the total absence of any apparent evidence to support it. On the other hand, the box, with its rich ornamental iron mountings, as I have said, has a certain official-like character, and with its regular series of stamped impressions and dates on the peculiarly shaped pewter plates, seem to me, in want of a better explanation, much more suggestive of its having been the official record of the trade or assay marks of some

incorporated body of workers in metal, probably pewterers, than anything else.

The pewterers were once a very important body of craftsmen in this country, at a time when almost all the dishes and plates for domestic or table use were made of this mixed metal; and the glory of old kitchens consisted of a bink or rack filled with shining rows of well-polished pewter plates and dishes of various sizes. These, however, are now among the fashions that have passed away, the introduction of earthenware dishes, got at a moderate price, and so much more easily kept clean, having completely taken their place; and the few pewterers now left, carry on a much diminished trade in pewter pots for beer, or measures for the sale of liquors, &c.

The stamp of the castle so exactly resembles the conventional castle on the shield of the Edinburgh City Arms, that there can be no doubt it represents Edinburgh as the seat of the manufacture of the articles stamped with it. The initials on each side of the castle probably refer to the quarter-master, appointed, I understand, to examine the work, or the official head of the craft. They do not appear to agree with the names of the various Deans of Guild, or the Conveners of the Hammermen, at the corresponding dates, in the lists of these officials given in "The Constitution of the City of Edinburgh—Edinburgh 1826." An examination of the records of the Incorporation of Hammermen might probably throw some light on this matter. The badge of the rose (a small one only occurring on one of the early stamps), which is stamped on the cut portions of pewter plates contained in the box, is not, indeed, part of the coat of arms of our old Edinburgh "Pewtherers," at least as given by Alexander Pennecuik in his "Historical Account of the Blue Blanket." These are—"Azure, on a chevron *argent*, betwixt three portcullices *or*, as many thistles *vert* and flowered *gules*." The rose forms part, however, of the armorial bearings of the ancient Pewterers of London, who date their Incorporation from 1482; their armorial ensigns are—*Azure* on a chevron *or*, between three cross bars *argent*, as many roses *gules*; the crest two arms holding a pewter dish proper, the supporters two sea horses *per fesse or* and *argent*. The motto, "*In God is all my trust*." Here, then, we have the roses borne on the shield. The cross bars on this shield correspond to the portcullises of the Scots pewterers, the shape of both is somewhat alike, could there

be no mistake in the reading of the Scottish shield, may it have been formed upon the English shield? Curiously enough, the woodcut of the arms given by N. Bailey in the second volume of his Dictionary, represents these cross bars of a corresponding shape to the pewter plates contained in this box, only broader in proportion. I should, indeed, have rather supposed them to represent three plates of pewter *argent*, the form of the pewter plates of the box being so much like them, that it looks almost as if they might have been copied from the blazonry of the shield. (See N. Bailey's English Dictionary.)

Some time ago I called on Mr Moyes, now almost our only Edinburgh pewterer; he occupies a shop in the Grassmarket, at the foot of the West Bow, where he succeeded, he believes, to several generations of pewterers. I asked him if they used any stamps now, at least with the pattern of a rose on them; he told me they did not use many stamps or dies now (except, perhaps, the Government stamps for measures), but long ago they used various stamps, and he remembered many lying about the shop, which had been mostly thrown aside as useless. He still, however, had a stamp or two, and it was rather interesting to find that one of these consisted of the words SUPERFINE HARD METAL, corresponding to the HARD METAL die stamp in the old oak box, this being distinctive of the finer metal of the pewterers, formed of a larger proportion of tin and less of lead. Other dies consisted of a large Scots thistle displayed, the initials of a previous pewterer, with ED. for Edinburgh; another his full name, William Scott, with a bird perched on the globe, and a flower at each side; while another closely resembled the rose stamps on the pewter plates of the box. He kindly stamped this last die for me on a piece of pewter (and it is now exhibited). (See the annexed figure printed from the die itself.) This stamp of the rose had also the crown above, and to show, perhaps, that it had nothing to do with England, or, at least, to give the correct locality of the place where the article stamped with it was made, it had the name of EDINBURGH cut across it on a ribbon below the rose. In this stamp, then, we have a proof of the rose having been actually used as a dis-



Pewterers' old
Die Stamp.

tinctive stamp by our Scottish Pewterers, probably, however, only at a comparatively recent date.

Whether this box, with its stamped plates, taken in connection with the rose stamp of the pewterer with its "Edinburgh" inscribed above, may possibly also show that, at the date when these rose stamps were used, some members of the London Incorporation of Pewterers came to settle in Edinburgh, and brought their rose stamps with them, I cannot tell. Had time and health permitted, I intended to have made some search or inquiry into the records of our Edinburgh Hammermen, and especially the Pewterers, to see if they would throw any light on the matter.

All things considered, I have little doubt this box and its contents will be found to be a relic of our Scottish craftsmen. However this may be, I think I have, at least, shown the probability of its being connected with a body of pewterers; and I may also refer to the small cup of pewter in the box, which may have been used for some assay, or other purpose, connected with the process of testing the quality of the metal preparatory to stamping the manufactured articles of pewter.