

HISTORY/
ARCHAEOLOGY



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A Guide to Artifacts of Colonial America

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A GUIDE TO



A rtifacts of

Colonial
America

The indispensable

guide for collectors &

fans of Americana — all

you need to know to evaluate & buy colonial artifacts

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rim with another that was no more than a thickening or slight evertng of the upper wall. A reinforcement beneath the handle still occurred from time to time, but was usually very angular and no longer resembling the ear. Feet continued to be shaped and the legs were sometimes fluted. In the seventeenth century, and possibly later, the upper surfaces of skillet handles were often decorated with molded inscriptions giving either the name of the founder or some pious reminder, such as *YE•WAGES•OF•SIN•IS•DEATH•*. Many of these vessels seem to have been made in Kent and Devonshire. They continued to be used throughout the eighteenth century, but the legs were generally plain and tapered almost to a point.

One other skillet type should be mentioned, though I have only encountered a single example in a well-dated archaeological context. This was a sheet-copper or brass pot similar in shape to the body of the later skillets, but which seated in an iron collar to which the legs and handle were welded. The detachable pot usually had its everted rim rolled over an iron wire or rod, while the iron legs had flat, everted feet and the handle ended in a loop or hook to enable it to be hung on the kitchen wall. The excavated example was thrown away in the mid-seventeenth century.

Tripod-legged copper-alloy cauldrons continued to be made in the seventeenth century, but the majority were of small size. By this time the cast-iron cooking pot of the same general shape was used in most homes and avoided the much-feared dangers of copper poisoning. It should be noted that pots and skillets of copper, bronze, bell-metal, or pot-metal were invariably tinned on the inside to minimize that danger.

The iron pots ranged in capacity from half a gallon to ten gallons and more, and were made in both England and America well through the nineteenth century. As they became later, the collar necks grew shorter, and the body cordons less pronounced; the ear handles also developed into something resembling cow horns, tapering upward from the shoulders and with a much lighter crossbar returning to the rim. Nineteenth-century cauldrons are frequently embossed with capacity numbers in Arabic figures. Until the early eighteenth century, the legs tapered downward and then expanded again into a bifid or trifid foot. Thereafter, the leg simply tapered until it came to the end and then stopped. By the last

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LINDSAY, J. SEYMOUR: *Iron and Brass Implements of the English and American House*. London, 1964 (first pub. 1927).

§ CUTLERY and SPOONS

The seventeenth-century manufacture of knives was divided into four operations theoretically undertaken by four different craftsmen, the bladesmith, the hafter, the sheather, and finally the cutler who assembled the components and sold them. It is, however, the work of the seventeenth-century bladesmith that is of greatest interest to the archaeologist, in part because more blades survive than do handles, but also because cheaper and more common varieties of handle are less readily datable. It is important to remember that it was not until well into the century that the fork was used for anything other than serving or anchoring the food to the plate while cutting it. The use of the fork to transport the cut food to the mouth did not filter down to the lower classes before the third quarter of the seventeenth century, and therefore the medieval pointed knife continued in common use.

The typical table knife of the first half of the seventeenth century had a narrow, straight blade and long, solid shoulders that were often faceted and inlaid with brass or precious metals. (Fig. 63, No. 1) Although these heavy shoulders became smaller among the more costly cutlery of the second half of the seventeenth century, they continued to be used for cheap table knives of the first thirty years of the eighteenth century, though I have yet to encounter any that were inlaid.

As the fork gained in popularity among the wealthy, the points of the spearing knives were rounded off; in the third quarter of the seventeenth century fashionable knives had their blades square-ended, looking almost as though the points had been snapped off. (Fig. 63, No. 3) In the same period a round-ended blade, wider than the medieval style, was introduced. This became the forerunner of the table knife as we know it today. The next stage (c. 1670) saw the new blade slightly concave at the back and proportionately convex along the cutting edge; the round end now became slightly bulbous. (Fig. 63, No. 4)

By 1700, the curved blade had acquired a dorsal ridge about a third of the way along the blade, which gave it the appearance of a round-ended scimitar. The new blade shape which was to continue almost to the end of the eighteenth century was almost invariably associated with a new-style handle whose butt curved down to balance the bulbous and upswept blade end. (Fig. 63, No. 5) Such hafts are known as pistol-grip handles. By about 1770, the blade's cutting edge had lost its convexity and became a direct extension of the handle. These later eighteenth-century knives were frequently made with handles having bone or ivory plates anchored to a flat tang by brass rivets and gripped at the end of the haft by a metal cap. In contrast, the majority of seventeenth-century and early eighteenth-century handles were attached over a spiked tang which, in the former century, extended right through and was beaten over a terminal washer. However, the flat, rivet-pierced tang can be traced back to the Bronze Age, and its presence or absence can therefore never be an inviolable dating factor.

In the second and third quarters of the seventeenth century many knife handles were made from stone and crystal sections ground and polished by lapidaries to fit neatly together when mounted in series on the tang. Tapered, cylindrical bone or ivory handles of the second half of the century were frequently elaborately inlaid in floral designs using small brass tubes. (Fig. 63, No. 4) The same technique was sometimes employed on the later, plated pistol-grip handles in much simpler patterns in an attempt to disguise the purely practical brass rivets. Silver and silver-plated handles of the first half of the eighteenth century were made in two cast sections joined down the middle, but in the second half the entire handle was often machine stamped in very thin silver and filled

with plaster composition which gave it weight but little durability. Staffordshire potters of the mid-eighteenth century produced excellent pistol grips in their popular, blended-clay "agate" ware, while the porcelain makers of Bow and other factories made them in their medium, decorated in underglaze blue or overglaze enamels. Porcelain handles are attributable to the third quarter of the eighteenth century. At the other end of the scale, being cheapest of all, were wooden handles which were made in both plain and pistol-grip forms. For obvious reasons, few of them survive in the ground, and being little prized by their original owners they rarely lasted long enough to become antiques.

There were two principal centers of cutting in England: London and Sheffield. In the seventeenth century the London craftsmen were superior, and although in the eighteenth there was little reason to choose between them, London knives continued to command better prices than did those from Sheffield. Through both centuries, and even into the early 1800's, Sheffield bladesmiths were wont to pirate London makers' marks. Throughout the sixteenth century, cutlers working in England had struck only their personal marks into the blades (inlaid with copper until the mid-century), but in 1606 the London Court of Cutlers ordered that all London bladesmiths should add the "dagger" (sword of St. Paul) symbol of the City to their marks, a practice that continued into the eighteenth century. In using this helpful guide, it should be noted that bladesmiths of Solingen in Germany used a similar mark, though their dagger's blade was longer than that of the London symbol.

Blade marks should be examined with care, for they are not always what they seem. I recall one which at first glance appeared to be the London dagger under the letter L, but which turned out to be a pistol. I later discovered that this was the mark of James Bernardeau (or Bernardo), whose eighteenth-century trade card revealed that he was a "Razor Maker, at the Pistol & L in Russell Court, in Drury Lane," London, who also made and sold "Sisors, Penknives, Lancetts, and all other Instruments. Also Silver, Chiney, Ivory, Ebeny, Handled Knives & Forks &c."⁷

⁷ Ambrose Heal: *London Tradesmen's Cards of the XVIII Century* (London, 1925), Pl. LXXXI; reprinted New York, 1968.

The earliest-recorded English silver fork is two-tined and bears the date letter for 1632/3, but slightly older French, Italian, and Spanish specimens are known. The silver fork, however, did not become popular in England until the end of the seventeenth century, at which time it generally had three tines. By the mid-eighteenth century it had acquired a fourth and closely resembled the style that has persisted into the present century. It should be noted that Spanish silver forks had four tines by the early eighteenth century; examples (one bearing a Mexico City mark) of these were aboard the plate fleet wrecked off the Florida coast in 1715. Four tined French forks in brass and iron have been found in contexts of the 1730's and '40's at Louisbourg, Nova Scotia.

Silver forks are rarely found in excavations, but those of steel are common and range in their two-tined form from the last quarter of the seventeenth century to the beginning of the nineteenth, though a wider-shouldered variety with three tines became popular in the second half of the eighteenth century. Very long and thin tines occur on some forks of the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, and they should not be confused with the much larger and heavier double-tined carving forks that have been made with few changes ever since the late seventeenth century, at which early date the folding guard first appeared.

Fork handles were invariably similar in shape to those of the knives they accompanied, though the majority were slightly smaller. The shanks of steel forks were somewhat balustroid in shape, a style sometimes transformed into a midsection bulge (Fig. 63, No. 8); this seems to occur more often in the third quarter of the eighteenth century than in the first half of it.

The evolution of the spoon is readily traceable through dated silver examples, for the same styles were religiously followed (with some minor time lag) by makers of brass, latten, and pewter. Latten, it should be noted, was an alloy of copper, zinc, and iron (approximate proportions: 73, 25, and 2 per cents) which, from the second half of the seventeenth century and when used for spoons, was usually tin-plated, giving the appearance of silver. The makers of latten (and other tin or tinned products) were known as whitesmiths.

From the fifteenth to the mid-seventeenth century all spoons had fig-shaped bowls, being rounded at the end and curving weakly

up to their junction with the stem. The stems were usually rectangular in section and extended out as a very slightly tapering shaft to an ornamental finial, the latter being the spoon's principal feature and the one by which the type is now identified. The earliest are probably those ending in a female head; they go back at least to the fifteenth century, as is evidenced by the elaborate bifid headdress with which they are capped. All the female-headed spoons are known as maiden heads; the earliest-known literary reference to them occurred in 1446, while the latest-dated example that I can find bears the letter for 1549. (See SILVER.) It is quite possible, however, that such spoons may have found their way to the colonies in the early seventeenth century. Less likely to be found are those with acorn and diamond-point finials, for neither of these seems to have occurred much after the end of the fifteenth century. More elaborate finials in the shape of a lion seated (*sejant*) began that early but continued at least to the late sixteenth century. Much better known are the "Apostle" spoons that began to be made around 1500 and which continued to at least 1642. These take the form of a robed human figure capped with a disc halo and were made in sets of twelve, plus a thirteenth "Master" spoon; they were frequently given as christening presents. Yet another variety also ended in a flat disc, generally over a baluster or ball knop. These are known as "seal-top" spoons, and I have located dated examples ranging from 1494 to 1699. A latten specimen has been found at Jamestown and another of the same metal has been recovered from an Indian grave at East Dennis in Massachusetts. Others omitted the seal and ended only in the knop, sometimes writhen ornamented, and these belong mostly to the sixteenth century.

As a general rule, it may be deduced that spoons with any of the foregoing terminals date prior to 1670. But not all spoons were that elaborate, and by about 1500 the straight shaft was sometimes cut off at an oblique angle. These are, quite logically, known as "slipped ends" and were made at least as late as 1657. One such silver spoon bearing the owners' initials *WEC* has been unearthed at Jamestown.

In about 1660 the silver spoon bowl became broader at the shoulders and thus more oval; at the same time the straight, flat stem became a little wider and was square cut at the end, eliminating the necessity to thicken the shaft toward the terminal to permit

Cutlery and Spoons

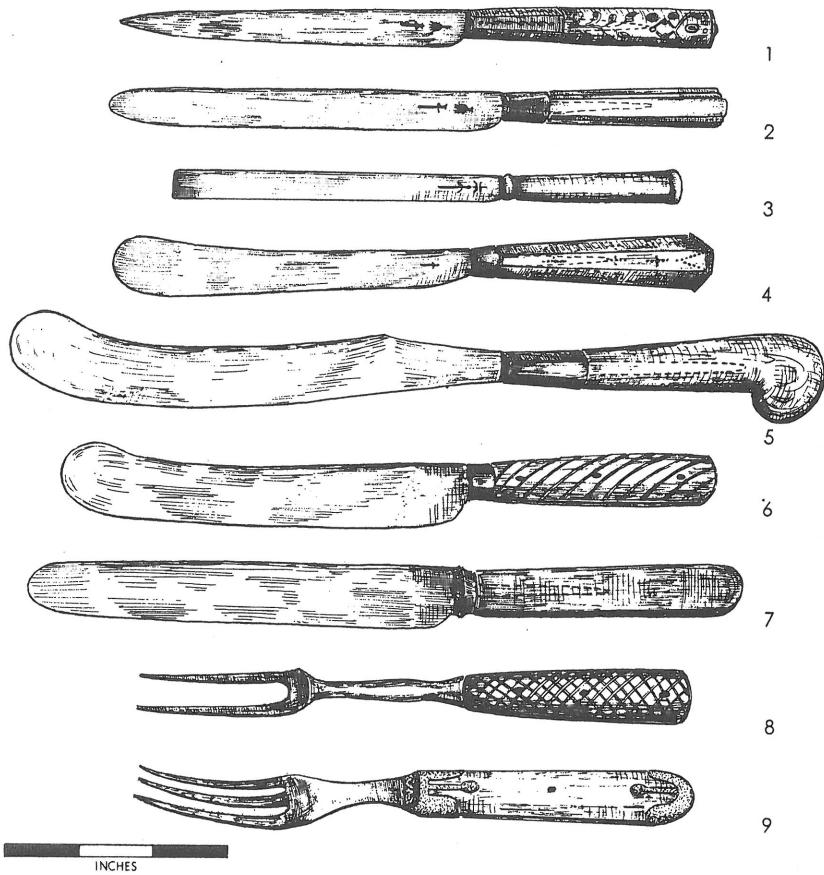


Fig. 63. Examples of English and American cutlery. 1. Shank inlaid with brass, handle bone with incised ornament; early 17th century. 2. Ridged bone handle; mid-17th century. 3. Blade deliberately square-ended, handle silver; late 17th century. 4. Octagonal bone handle inlaid with brass tubes and with iron cap; late 17th century. 5. "Pistol grip" bone handle; early 18th century. 6. Riveted bone plates for handle with incised decoration; mid-18th century. 7. Polished bone or ivory handle; late 18th to 19th century. 8. Steel fork type comparable to No. 6. 9. American iron fork with bone-plated handle held together with pewter mounts (knives are similar); c. 1850-80? Nos. 1-4 have marks of the London Cutlers' Company.

the angular cut of the slipped end. The new shape is known as "Puritan"; it was soon replaced by a spatulalike terminal which was generally notched to create a trifid end. The "Puritan" bowl was retained, though deepened, and the junction with stem and bowl was reinforced with a spinal rib which extended down the back of the latter and was known as a rat tail, thus giving this class of spoon its generic name. The rat tail continued to be used on silver until the second quarter of the eighteenth century and considerably later on pewter. Latten spoons were most common in the rat-tail period, usually with trifid stem terminals, though often without the rat tail itself. (Frontispiece) Their popularity was greatest in the second half of the seventeenth century, but lost out to the pewter spoon in the early 1700's. Although there is irrefutable archaeological evidence that rat-tailed latten spoons were still being made in Williamsburg, Virginia, as late as the 1740's, there can be no denying that pewter became the common American spoon metal of the eighteenth century. So simple was it to work that householders frequently cast their own spoons.

Although the rat tail continued well into the eighteenth century, it was generally associated with an evolved egg-shaped bowl (by c. 1710) and a handle which, by 1715, had abandoned its trifid terminal in favor of a rounded, upcurling spatula which was usually thickened at the edge. It was a stem style that would remain popular almost to the end of the eighteenth century. By about 1740, the rat tail had been replaced by a single or overlapping double, scale-like junction ornament, and that, too, continued late in the century. In the second half of the century, however, it was generally associated with a much more pointed bowl, in fact almost the reverse of the early fig bowl. In the 1760's yet another change occurred, for the stem terminal which hitherto turned up now turned down and was shorn of its ornamental, thickened upper edge, though this detail was sometimes transferred to the back. Another new feature that occurred in the third quarter of the eighteenth century was a widening of the stem to provide two, small, earlike projections above the bowl. Although this was absent from most silver in the last quarter of the eighteenth century, it reappeared in the nineteenth and has lasted into our own time.

A few additional pointers are worth remembering. The so-called

Sheffield plate was invented by cutler Thomas Bolsover in 1742, and, as previously noted (p. 90), it was superseded in England almost exactly a century later by electroplating, the latter being marked EPNS—electroplated nickel silver. Pewter also fell before the advances of technology, being at least partially superseded by Britannia metal, which was developed in about 1795 and which contained 90 per cent tin and 10 per cent antimony. In the nineteenth century this new alloy was generally plated, but at first it was used simply as an improved pewter. Spoons and other household items made from Britannia metal were generally so stamped. It may also be noted that Britannia-metal spoons were often reinforced by an iron wire around which the handles were cast. This also occurred in some pewter spoons, but not, as far as I can determine, before the 1770's.

HAYWARD, J. F.: *English Cutlery*. H. M. Stationery Office, London, 1956.
PRICE, F. G. HILTON: *Old Base Metal Spoons*. London, 1908.

§ DRINKING GLASSES and DECANTERS

Drinking glasses in delicate and elaborate forms were well known to the English before the first of their colonists set foot in America, but the glasses themselves were rarely of English manufacture, the best of them having come either from Venice or Antwerp. However, an English glass industry had existed since the thirteenth century, though its products had been confined largely to window glass and bottles. It was not until 1571 that the first successful venture into the making of Italian *cristallo* was launched in England by the Venetian Giacomo Verzelini. His products were direct copies of current European styles, having stems molded in the shapes of lion masks (Fig. 64, No. 1), or inverted balusters, some of the latter vertically and horizontally ribbed and known as "ladder" stems.

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in the late sixteent
time Sir Jerome Bowes was granted a patent to be the sole maker
and importer of glasses into England. In 1615 a similar patent was
granted to Sir Edward Zouche, on whose board of directors sat Ad
miral Sir Robert Mansell, who thus became interested in glass and
who, in 1623, obtained letters patent from Charles I authorizing
him to carry on where Zouche had left off. The glasses produced in
London in this early period were frequently extremely tall, stand
ing on elongated inverted balusters known as "cigar" stems (Fig.
64, No. III) or, alternatively, on very small chestnut-shaped
balusters. (Fig. 64, No. II) The soda metal was very thin and there
fore very fragile; it inclined to a pale straw color. Although more
complicated designs were attempted during the period of the Man
sell monopoly (1623-c.1649), the elaborate dragonesque and butter
fly stems using entwined clear rods and applied wings in other
colors which are occasionally found on early colonial sites must be
classed as either Venetian or Flemish.

A certain amount of Rhenish glass was also imported into Eng
land in the first half of the seventeenth century and some of it also
came to America, though whether it did so in trade or among emi
grants' personal possessions is uncertain. The principal types were
cylindrical-stemmed goblets ornamented with "raspberry" prunts
and with conical feet encircled by thin glass trails. These vessels
with their balloon-shaped bowls were produced in a deep-green
metal characteristic of the German *Waldglas*, or forest glass. The
second form was that of a cylindrical beaker (*humpen*) with a
padlike base slightly conical in the middle and surrounded by a
notched or "rigaree" trail; such pieces were often elaborately
enameled with heraldic devices, wedding processions, or scenes of
rural crafts. Dated examples run through most of the seventeenth
century.

The Mansell glass industry came to grief during the English
Civil War, and little or nothing was done to revive it until the
restoration of the monarchy in 1660, whereupon various patents
were issued, the most important being that granted to the Second