

A Bacchanalian Procession English Stein

By Salvatore Mazzone

Florida Sun Steiners



Picture 1. My Henry Bourne Stein.

With time on my hands due to the COVID-19 lockdown, I've been rummaging through my stein collection and doing some research to see what hitherto unknown bits of information I might uncover about them. One of the ones I recently took a look into is a handsome English stein I acquired in 2011 that depicts a group of ancient musicians and revelers executed in deep relief (Picture 1). It is 6-3/4 inches tall to the top of the lid (7-1/4 inches to the top of the thumbblift), 5-1/8 inches in diameter at its base, and approximately one liter in capacity. The antique dealer that I bought it from dated it as c1880, and my research indicates that that seems about right.

The stein was once completely silver plated, but years of polishing by previous owners has removed much of that plating, showing the underlying copper plating that was used to form a stable base for the subsequent silver plating.

The underside of the stein is marked with the hallmark HB inside of a rectangle and my research revealed that this was the mark of the Henry Bourne Company of Ludgate Hill, Birmingham, England. Bourne registered his company's mark in October 1871 and



worked as a maker of fine sterling and silver plated articles until retiring in or around 1899. His son Henry Hutton Bourne succeeded him. The firm subsequently closed in or around 1910.

The interior of the stein and the stein's lid is bright and untarnished and may have been Rhodium plated. Rhodium is the most expensive metal on the planet, even more so than gold or platinum, and is extremely rare. In addition to being highly lustrous, non-tarnishing, harder than silver and gold, and highly durable, it is corrosion resistant and hypoallergenic, properties that make it safe to drink from. A stein with such an

interior would have been a premium item destined for an upscale clientele.

My research also uncovered the look-alike stein shown in Picture 2. This stein was sold in The Stein Auction Company's February 27, 2014 auction. I initially thought that this was another copy of my Henry Bourne stein, but closer inspection of both, and the reading of the stein's description, disabused me of that idea. The description read: "Copper stein, 1.0L, 7.5" ht, marked J. G. & Sons, John Gilbert & Co., Birmingham, relief, silver plated base, top rim and handle." Despite the description, the copper is likely just copper plating underlying what was once a fully silver plated surface. Although the accents, thumbblift, and handle are somewhat different than those on my stein, and the picture in the lid is rotationally offset by 90° from mine, the close similarity is striking.

John Gilbert, I learned, was active from 1812 as an "Old Sheffield" maker. Old Sheffield is a layered combination of silver and copper that was used for many years in a wide range of household articles. His firm was listed as having three facilities in Birmingham, England. In 1865, the company was



Picture 2. John Gilbert Stein.

listed as "Silversmith and Electroplater" with production still in Birmingham, but also with a business office in London. In 1880, the firm was converted to a limited liability company under the name of John Gilbert & Co Ltd. I was unable to locate any information when they ceased operation.

Given the strength of the Bourne and the fact that both companies were in Birmingham, I half expected to find information of an alliance between them, or possibly a takeover by the other. However, I have not found any such information.

But wait! Continued interest led me to order yet another look-see at the tankard which was sold by Bonhams on December 8, 2003. The lot number was simply said, "A GOOD TANKARD, makers mark decorated with a Bacchanalian procession, the hinged cover with



Picture 3. A&NCSL Bacchanalian Procession Stein.



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...tioned offices, but friends of the Society could also join by introduction. In addition to purchasing inventory from manufacturers at wholesale, the Society itself also manufactured and commissioned the manufacture of items that then bore the A&NCSL hallmark. The Society quickly became a booming operation and, with a large demand from members in India, stores were opened in Bombay, Karachi, and Calcutta. It changed its name in 1934 to The Army & Navy Stores Ltd. and was eventually taken over by The House of Frazer in 1981.

ly that the stein shown in the picture was not manufactured in one of their own workshops, but commissioned to an external workshop, perhaps either in London. Indeed, it is quite common for steins marketed by the Society may have all or part of their design from an external source.

...Bacchanalian scenes that have been seen in the past. In viewing the tankard in pictures 2 and 3, have you noticed any of the wonderful details that have seemed to be missing? It is especially interesting to see these Bacchanalian scenes in a museum.



Picture 4. The Borghese Vase.