

## Concerning treen.

The word means quite simply 'made of tree', but it has come to define a group of small, wooden objects made for daily usage. These items were found in the home, dairy, on the farm and in the workshops of most trades and professions. Treen mostly defines the products of the woodturner and most of these are one piece items eg bowls and platters.

Treen is not a term normally applied to items of multiple parts that are cabinet or joiner made. Treen, however, can be used to describe simple hand carved or whittled items such as spoons.

Before the late 17<sup>th</sup> century when pewter, silver and ceramic tableware filtered down the social scale, wooden bowls and platters would have been found on every table. The simplest woodware was carved or turned on pole-lathes by local artisans, whilst court craftsmen used quality woods to turn fine and elaborately decorate tankards and wassail bowls for the highest tables in the land.

Scottish ceremonial quaiches (whisky cups) are often formed from two different woods using the now lost art of 'feathering' to finely splice them together.

Working class treen was made from the local trees most suitable for the job in hand. Sycamore wood is odourless and tasteless and so was popular in the dairy and kitchen. All the fruitwoods (apple, pear, cherry, plum etc ) are fine grained and resist splitting making them useful for spoons, bowls and platters. Ash turns well, as does birch and maple; chestnut, and even oak was turned to make cups and goblets - although I wonder just how much skill it took to turn an oak goblet that would not crack and split on drying? A pole-lathe is used to turn 'green' or unseasoned wood and the turner must know how the wood will behave as it dries after turning.

From apothecary jars and bleeding bowls to cheese cradles and sweetmeat bowls, from sheep salve bowls (in the days before sheep

dipping) to butter hands and cream stirrers, salting dishes, oven peels, strainers and laundry bats - treen reigned supreme! Sutterby would have been awash with treen, none of which would leave any trace in the ground. Its greatest enemies are damp and woodworm. It comes as no surprise that that examples become rarer the further back in time you go. What is noticeable is the fact that basic designs change very little. Once the basic form of a piece of treen develops to the most suitable for its given job, that form does not change and fashion plays little part.

These wooden items were there at hand in every home, in daily use. Humble but essential they were easy to obtain and affordable (or free if you made your own) and once worn up would kindle your fire. Surviving examples are beautiful, burnished with use and age, their natural material and truthful, utilitarian forms a delight to handle and a reminder of a simpler way of existing on the face of this earth.

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