

The Buttonmonger

T H E L I F E , A R T & H I S T O R Y O F T H E B U T T O N

GILDED BUTTONS!



Buttons, a farthing a pair.

Come, who will buy them of me?

They're round and sound and pretty,

And fit for girls of the city.

Come, who will buy them of me?

Buttons, a farthing a pair.

Mother Goose

The first gilt buttons were made in Birmingham between 1797 and 1800. Being elegant, yet affordable, people took to them immediately. Americans began making gilt buttons by 1810, after stealing the gilding secret from the British: Five grains of gold per gross (144) of buttons was added to a mixture of mercury, and then brushed on the brass buttons, which were then cooked in a furnace.

Using this method, buttons could be gilt, double gilt or triple gilt



"Treble Gilt"



"Imperial Orange Gilt"

The controversy over the quantity of gold and the quality of the gilding led manufacturers to stamp the backs of their buttons with claims and identification marks.

Typical quality marks are "Extra Rich," "Rich Gold Color (or "Colour"), "Treble Gilt," "Best Orange Gilt," or any combination of those words ("Extra Orange Gilt," for example).



"Extra Fine Gilt"

The process of gilding buttons was so perfectly known in the 18th century that button makers in England had to ask Parliament for laws to keep the unscrupulous from gilding buttons with too little gold. The approved amount was 1/96th of an ounce of gold to cover a 1" button.

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GILT BUTTONS (CONT.)

Some marks were informative. Double Gilt showed that twice the legal amount of gold was applied. Treble Gilt meant that three times the legal limit of gold was applied. Other markings such as "Rich", "Orange" & "Extra Fine" were marketing attempts by the manufacturer to promote the quality of their buttons.



"Extra Rich Treble Gilt"



"Superior Strong Plated"

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Here's to Life, Happiness and the Pursuit of the Perfect Button

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It is my goal to provide that best possible experience to all visitors to my site.

If you have a question, comment or a concern, please contact me via email: customerservice@thebuttonmonger.com or you can write to me at:

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I am just a person living in a small village... in a small cottage...with a lot of grand ideas. An artist, a poet, an eclectic collector of stuff and nonsense a quiet soul with flecks of cynicism and a sense of curiosity about the world around me. One wonder being the unbelievable detail of an antique button. These little works of art were beautiful as well as served a purpose. Worn as jewelry way back when, nowadays when popped is not even worthy to some to lean over and be rescued.

“ H A R D W H I T E ” B U T T O N S

Pewter is the generic name for a group of tin alloys whose compositions can vary quite considerably. The most common mix used in the 18th century was four or five parts tin to one part lead. The highest grades of pewter used about 90 percent tin to 10 percent copper,



Early 19th century pewter buttons were made of a good grade of pewter

with a high proportion of tin. This made them harder than many pewter buttons of the previous century. Their makers called them “Hard Whites” in an attempt to overcome the association with the cheap, low grade pewter button used by the working class.

Between 1800 and 1830, the American button industry was struggling to survive and improve its manufacturing processes. By the 1830s, American manufacturing had improved both the quality and manufacturing of massed produced gilt buttons. Thus, causing the demand for Hard Whites to drop off.

Hard whites were made to resemble steel buttons popular at the time.

Some makers went so far as to backmark their buttons “imitation steel”.



Hard white pewters have steel or brass wire loop shanks embedded in a hump of metal on the back. Face patterns are usually conventional, with variations of stars and pinwheels being the most popular.