

ART. XVIII.—*Some Leaden Spoons from Eskdale.* By
MARY C. FAIR.

I HAVE to thank Mrs. Williams of Calder Abbey for bringing the spoons to the notice of our Society and lending them to me for photographing and making enquiries as to origin and history, and for her help in obtaining information concerning them; The Hon. Marjorie Cross for exhibiting the spoons at the Society's summer meeting at Ulverston ; Mr. Wilson Butler who put me on the track of the mould and maker of the spoons; Mr. and Mrs. Tracey of Calder Abbey Gate Lodge for most complete notes of the history and origin of the spoons (of which Mrs Tracey has examples) ; the late Mr. Towers Hartley, of Kirkhouse, Boot, whose forebears were the designers and makers of the spoons, several of which his son still possesses, and Mr. J. E. Tyson, of Bridge End, Boot, whose account of the making of the spoons below, is of great interest.

The spoons illustrated herewith, were purchased by Mrs. Williams (our member), of Calder Abbey, at a sale where it was stated they were made in Eskdale of Eskdale lead. They seemed such an interesting survival of local industry in bygone days that it was felt inquiry as to their origin and manufacture should be undertaken, and Mrs. Williams and I now set forth the details we have succeeded in collecting.

The spoons, which are of an ample " dessert " size, are substantially made of a lead alloy cast in a mould. They are ornamented with the head of a fat-faced gentleman in a beaver hat which has either a feather or an ear of corn stuck in front, above, a crown. Below the head are the

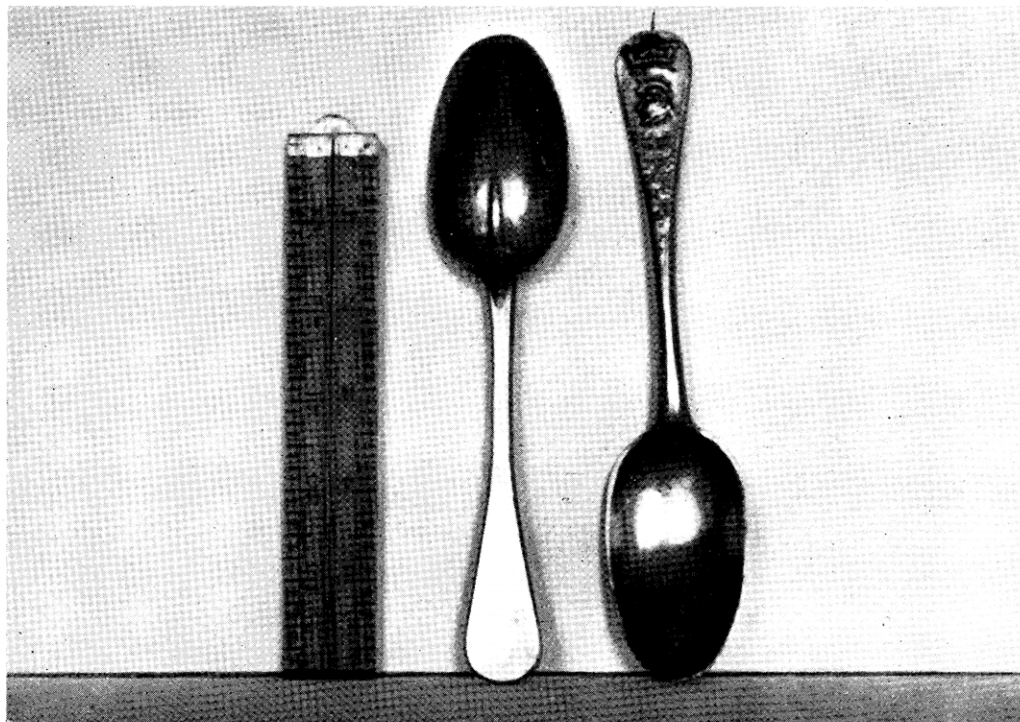
initials I.H. upon a cup (?) and an oak spray. The initials stand for Isaac Hartley (formerly of Kirkhouse, Boot, one of the leading yeomen of the Eskdale valley as are his relatives the Hartley Family and Mr. J. E. Tyson to-day), the original owner of the moulds.

The late Mr. Towers Hartley informed me that the moulds are now in the possession of his son, Mr. Isaac Hartley, descendant of their original owner, who has as well the casting ladle with which the molten metal was poured into the moulds.

The alloy used to give the spoons the requisite hardness for use was old teapots and the like, which would contain a certain amount of tin. The moulds later passed to Mr. Aaron Hartley, nephew of their original owner, also of Kirkhouse, at whose death they became the property of Mr. James Briggs, upon whose death, a short time ago, they came to Mr. Towers Hartley and his son. (Information from Mr. J. E. Tyson of Bridge End, Boot, nephew of Mr. Aaron Hartley).

Mr. J. E. Tyson (who is a son of our late member Mr. Towers Tyson, of Christcliff and Paddockwray, Boot), further adds "When I was a mere lad I was sent with some Eskdale lead to Church House to have some spoons made in these moulds. I still have six of the spoons made at that time. The lead, mixed with a proportion of old tea-pot, which I was told was pewter, and was included to produce hardness, was melted down by my Uncle Aaron. The molten metal was poured into the moulds which had been prepared for it by being smoked in the flame of a rush dip, and the portions of the moulds were then pressed one upon another. The head upon the spoons, I was given to understand, was that of George III."

Incidentally my father, the late T. Wilson Fair, then vicar of Eskdale, purchased at a sale at Kirkhouse, after the death of Mr. Aaron Hartley, two rush taper and dip holders made of wrought iron set in oak blocks, and Mr.



Spoons, property of Mrs. Williams, Calder Abbey, said to be made of Eskdale lead
for an Eskdale Hotel (? King of Prussia now King George ?)

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Photo. Miss Fair 1938.

Towers Hartley's mother gave me some rush tapers for the same. The dips were made by pouring melted fat into moulds in which were inserted rushes to form the wicks, while the rush tapers were made by dipping rushes in the hot fat. Formerly every farm in the dales made their own candles and tapers, and the rendering down of the fat for the purpose was one of the usual tasks of the housewives even within my own memory. As well as the holders set in blocks to stand upon tables there were holders of metal only (some very elegantly designed) by which dips and tapers could be hung from the beams to provide light from above.

I do not know whether the Eskdale lead was made from local ore which I believe occurs in the Ulpha district and also very sparsely towards the east end of Muncaster Fell where it has been found as thin veins of galena occurring in granite, a most refractory form to work.

My friend, Mr. J. D. Porter, of Eskdale has some of these spoons in his possession and says he remembers them in use many years ago when as a child he supped his porridge with them. And Mr. Wilson Butler writes that Lead Spoons, home-made, were common in the dales, and Mrs. Wilson Butler remembers their use, but they did not last long, as indeed would be the case unless a hardening alloy were used, lead alone being too pliable a material. The Eskdale spoons are firm and good though somewhat heavy as compared by present day standards. I have in my possession a silver tea-spoon reputed to have been made in the 18th century from Alston silver; this is heavier than modern tea-spoons, elaborately ornamented and somewhat soft, but a handsome example of some local silversmith's work; it has no hall-mark. I also have an 18th century punch ladle whose bowl is said to have been made of Alston silver, hammered out from sheet silver, not cast in a mould.