

# Alex Neish

My pewter collection was formed over a period of 50 years. It started when I was living in South America, working for an international conglomerate. During my 20 years in Brazil I travelled extensively around the world and, having been bitten by the pewter bug, visited antique markets in search of good pieces.

In those days Sothebys, Christies, and Phillips all had regular quarterly pewter sales in London and I would bid off the catalogues. On a visit to London I met Richard Munday, the doyen of British specialists, at his shop in Chiltern Street. I had never seen such a cornucopia of outstanding antique pewter. We became great friends and soon he was bidding for me at auctions. We would agree what to buy and he, being the expert, would decide the price levels.

Over a period of years my collection swelled. Richard would occasionally sell me a special piece from his private collection when he wished to supplement his pension. When he died on the eve of his 90th birthday, I bought his residual private collection of over 100 unique pieces from his widow. Our combined collections became internationally recognised as the dominant one of British pewter in the world. I continued to add to it, buying notable pieces at auction or from major dealers like Michael and Hilary Kashden who supplied me with incredible Anglo-Roman pewter.

When I retired from business and settled in Barcelona, the collection had grown to over 1200 outstanding pieces. I began the search for a home for it in Britain. News of this situation percolated through to the Shakespeare Birthplace Trust in Stratford-upon-Avon. It had just completed a major and expensive restoration of Harvard House, the most outstanding of Tudor houses on the town's High Street. Its Director, Roger Pringle, and Curator of Museums, Ann Donnolly, were determined to do something special to endow it with a unique character. They travelled to Edinburgh. I flew across from Brazil - and the Harvard House Museum of British Pewter was born. I gifted my collection with a proviso that it had to be on regular public display failing which the collection would revert to me.

After two decades, however, winds of change were blowing. Roger Pringle had retired and the new Director, Dinah Owen, initiated a major cost cutting campaign. When it was decided that the Trust's activities should focus exclusively on Shakespeare, it seemed to me that pewter had become irrelevant and that the Museum of British Pewter was clearly doomed.

I exercised my contractual rights and the Collection reverted to me. At one point it seemed it would leave the country for the States but then the Smith Museum in Stirling appeared. It is encouraging that this small, historic Scottish town can - unlike Stratford - see beyond Shakespeare and appreciate that there is a wider British heritage. It is also good that a collection that began in Scotland can return there in its maturity. However, until the Stirling Smith Museum's redevelopment plans have been completed, over the next 2 to 3 years, the pewter collection will be going into store.

**Alex Neish, Liveryman**

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## The Smith Museum

The Smith Museum in Stirling has a unique collection of Scottish pewter. It includes the historic Stirling jug that defined liquid capacities across the country and the run of 1707 grain measures that sought to harmonise standards with England.

It has Scotland's only known punch-decorated plate and the earliest surviving quaich. It also houses a remarkable collection of pewter from the local churches, saved when these disappeared. From the 19th century comes a unique tea service mounted in pewter and carved from coconuts (see illustration). By far its most unusual feature, however, is that unlike other British museums, the pewter is all on display.

## Alex Neish, Liveryman

Note: As noted in the article by Alex Neish on his Collection, shortly the Smith Museum's display will increase when the Trustees of the Smith ratify a draft agreement to receive the Neish Collection of British Pewter from Roman times up to the 20th century. The Collection, which began in Scotland, will now be returning there in a vastly amplified form.

Initially a selection may appear in the present Museum facilities or other local historic buildings but the total display will probably await completion of a rebuilding programme. A public appeal has been launched and support is anticipated from Historic Scotland and the Heritage Lottery to allow all the Smith collections to be displayed.



A rare pewter mounted coconut creation from the Smith Museum Collection

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[Smith Museum](#) *Dumbarton Road, Stirling FK8 2RQ, Scotland, United Kingdom* Tel: 01786 471917  
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