

# The Holbein Jug

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Or

**Putting Holbein's Wine Jug back.**

**A vision in Pewter.**

Marc Meltonville; Experimental Archaeologist, Historic Royal Palaces.

My job is a little unusual.

I tend to be interested in things that other people, often people a long time ago, have thrown away! That's the archaeologist's job all over; the reverse of a dustman, and therefore, not necessarily as useful to society.

I am charged with putting objects from the past, back into place and then having a team of chaps test them, often to destruction, to see if we can learn from actually using historic items in their original setting. The setting that I spend most of my time in is the Kitchens of Henry VIII at Hampton Court.

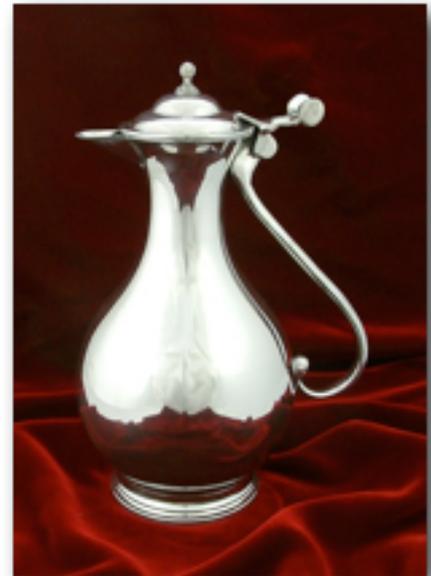
So, I hear you say, what does all this have to do with pewter? Did Henry VIII eat it? No.

Did he eat from it? Probably not; but he did have an awful lot of the stuff about the Palace 500 years ago.

So when, in 2006, I was asked to help return the kitchens back to how they may have looked in Tudor times, I had to start looking for all the lovely things that would have been used there, and finding craftsmen who could still make them. My training is in ceramics. Technically, if you give me a dirty piece of pottery from out of your garden, then I should be able to tell you what it was and how long ago it was broken!



Pewter store at Hampton Court



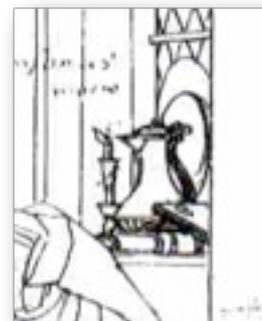
For reasons that I have never questioned I was also given pewter and glass things to work on. I thought I knew a little about historic pewter. I had attended a couple of courses on identifying pilgrim badges and worked on a Museum project to reproduce some of these badges in cuttlebone moulds. (This is dangerous as you hold the mould together with your fingers as someone pours molten metal into it. Just ask my colleague who received a dose of molten metal down his throat inside of his boot!)

I was wrong - I knew precious little about the sort of pewter that we needed for service wares in a Palace. After a little scrabbling around looking at items in

Museum collections and searching through as many paintings of dinner tables as I could, I suddenly remembered AE Williams. They were a company I had contacted some years earlier about buttons. This all led me on a journey that ended up with the wonderful wine jug you see above.

My first visit to AE Williams was a complete eye-opener. Finally I understood how you designed and manufactured historic pewter. For me, the biggest learning curve was nothing to do with the bronze moulds, nor the pouring of the metal; no, it was to do with how the pieces were put together. For some reason I had presumed that you had an idea for an object you wanted and a mould was made of it. In reality there are many many moulds, few of which were for any one object, just parts thereof.

For many hundreds of years, one saw a great wine jug or serving bowl at a noble dinner and thought, 'I fancy one of those'. So off you went to your pewter-smith, made a crude sketch on the back of some parchment and your craftsman goes; "Ah yes, that will be our small bowl mould with a #7 neck shape on top and one of our #5 handles". These items combined to make the object of your choice.



Detail; Family of Sir Thomas Moore; Royal Collection.

This new understanding, and the wonderful chance to 'dib' about in David Williams' world class mould store, led to the manufacture of around 600 items for our Pewter store at Hampton Court. Trenchers, dishes, goblets, serving bowls and lids. All of this pewter tableware is used when the kitchens cook Tudor meals and dine in the Tudor fashion. Most impressive last year was an event to allow our 'King' to dine out in the gardens.

Not content with the hundreds of items we now had, we wanted something a bit special and new. Images of the king or even the court dining are few and far between, and when they do appear all we see is a simple dish or goblet. Inspiration came in the form of the Family of Sir Thomas Moore. Not him personally, but the sketch of his family by Holbein which includes many interesting details around the room. Best of all for me was a wine jug on a shelf in the picture.

The thing I liked about this jug was its simple shape and unusual handle. The handle, to our modern eyes, is upside down. This made it an interesting project to have a go at and then test out; full of wine of course!

And so the full Tudor manufacturing process was put back into operation; maybe assisted by emails and digital photos. I drew a picture of the jug, AE Williams cast a model, I adjusted it, they made suggestions and so the piece unfolded, back to life after 500 years. Each stage followed the original process. The moulded pieces were soldered together. The body of the jug put on a lathe and turned to shape before the lid, spout and handle were added. (Please see the illustrations on page 3. Ed)

And so we have our wine jug, and can now test it, but I hope there is more to it than that. We have a beautiful wine jug that without the hard work and effort put in by the fine people at AE Williams would never have seen the light of day. It holds wine, it pours wine, but it also helps, along with all the items that we have researched and recreated, to bring to life so many facets of the past: solid objects that can help bring an old building back to life; objects that help us to understand the way in which we use to live; and craftsmanship that gives an idea of the beauty and refinement of a bygone age.

Once we have a bigger picture of the past, we might more understand how we came to the place we are now.

All from one little pewter jug; no, but it is helping, and its story is now part of our history.

**Marc Meltonville**

See all the Hampton Court Pewter daily at the Palace or see it used in cookery experiments held on the first weekend of each month and all holidays. [www.hrp.org.uk](http://www.hrp.org.uk) follow links to Hampton Court.



Incorrect

Moving the thumb piece to the correct position



Correct



Cast pieces being offered up



Finished Wine jugs stored in the Clerk's office.

Enjoy the Holbein Wine jug for yourself from AE Williams!  
[www.pewtergiftware.com](http://www.pewtergiftware.com)



Digital changes to the shape