

# TIN - 92-6-2!!

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At the time of writing (September 2010), the price of tin ingots on the London Metal Exchange had reached \$23,800 per metric tonne. Since tin started the year at a little over \$15,000 per metric tonne, the increase in the cost of pewter's main raw material has been 40%.

Today, pewter contains around 92% tin, 6% antimony, and 2% copper. In a later article I will explain why pewter contains these other metals, but today will concentrate on tin, and on our trade.

It was forty years ago that the Association of British Pewter Craftsmen was formed by Barry Johnson, (the managing director of George Johnson & Co (Birmingham) Ltd), and the Worshipful Company of Pewterers. There were at that time some 28 pewter manufacturers in Sheffield, seven in Birmingham and two in London.

Outside these three cities there were only a few other manufacturers. Now, throughout the country, only a handful remain. The ubiquitous tankard still holds sway as the most popular item made in pewter; but, in addition, a huge range of high quality items is also available. It has to be asked - what happened?

First, pewter is very much a "gift" material and as such, subject to the whims of fashion. Secondly, it competes against ceramic goods, glass, copper, stainless steel and, to a lesser extent, silver. However these items, with the exception of silver, are considerably cheaper. Forty years ago, when tin was priced at around £3,000 per imperial ton, pewter could compete quite happily with other materials mainly because of its exclusivity - pewter was then very much "poor man's silver" in that it had a warm, quality feel.

In the present climate, our manufacturers are fighting for survival and it is only by producing items of the highest quality that they can aspire to think that they might still be around in forty years' time.

**Ian Wilkie, Court Assistant**

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*The following commentary on the price of pewter has been taken from A History of British Pewter by John Hatcher and TC Barker, published by Longman in 1974 (ISBN 0582 50122-9) page 275. The work was commissioned by the Worshipful Company to commemorate the 500th anniversary of the first Royal Charter - Ed.*

“The retail price of pewterware before 1700. There was no single price for pewterware. Different prices were charged according to the composition of the alloy and the amount of workmanship involved. Thus we find that in 1615 the London Company specified that sadware (fine) should be sold retail at 10 1/2d per lb and lay (holloware) at 9d per lb.

But these were only general guidelines, and in 1674 a further ordinance specified in detail prices ranging from 12d to 14d per lb for various types of dishes and plates, each made of the same alloy but each requiring a different amount of workmanship; and in 1560 the workmanship allowed for tavern pots ranged from 9s to 11s per 100 according to style.”

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