

Fairs 2013

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The Pinder View from Birmingham, at the NEC

3rd to 7th February, 2013

The International Spring Fair is amongst the top 4 fairs in the world for the giftware industry. It takes over the entire Fairground.



In the last few years the North American and European Trade Fairs have become less important as trading conditions have transferred to Asia, particularly the Hong Kong Gifts Fair together with the Canton Fair.

Birmingham is no exception to this and indeed it felt quieter than usual this year, reflecting trading conditions generally. The Fair organisers claimed exhibitor numbers were up 8% year on year, though if this was a comparison with last year, remember that snowy conditions hit last year's Fair very hard.

The high quality metal trade, including the pewter trade, has withdrawn from this Fair progressively over the years. The causes include very heavy expenses and a lack of serious buyers, particularly for the export trade.

Many of us have memories of both the Blackpool and Birmingham Fairs in the 60s, when there would be over 30 pewterers, silversmiths and cutlers showing their wares.

The Birmingham Fair has progressively become a fair of importers showing their wares, with very few British manufacturers in evidence. It is now much more gift-orientated, and at the lower end of the market, too.

There is a high quality watch and jewellery hall. Reports suggested that this was very quiet and that much of this business had transferred to a fair held in London every autumn.

This year, I found only 4 pewter manufacturers showing at the Fair. These were: ABPC members Pinder Bros, AE Williams and St Justin Pewter; and non-member, the English Pewter Company. English-manufactured pewter was displayed on 3 or 4 wholesale stands also.

At Pinder Bros, we reported an average show, with few orders being placed, but in addition, many accounts calling in to say 'hello'. There were very few new buyers for pewter. The price of tin is of serious concern and there is no doubt that this has reduced demand for pewterware.

English Pewter Manufacturers have developed firm distribution channels, both at home and abroad, and the need to show in Birmingham is much reduced. The savings on not showing at the Fair can be used to better effect elsewhere in promotional budgets. That being said, we at Pinders expect to show in Birmingham again in 2014 but on a very small stand. This is now the only exhibition where we take up a stand.

David Pinder OBE

Another view of the NEC, from Sam Williams

The spring fair, held at the NEC the early part of February each year, is the largest trade show held in the UK. It attracts a vast wealth of buyers, from small independent gift shops, to huge high street fashion stores, from all parts of the world. So the excitement of who may step onto your stand next always keeps you on your toes.

It was great to see a range of British Pewter manufacturers exhibiting at the show, displaying their finest wares. This included David Hinwood, who had a good range of centrifugal castings which were all giftware items. Royal Selangor were also exhibiting this year.

Although some trade shows have shown, the last number of years, a steady decline in exhibitor numbers the NEC still manages to pull in exciting commerce from all corners of the globe. We found a growing number of overseas customers interested in pewter, and our export levels are on the rise.

One of the exhibitors at the show commented: "Sunday is always a strange day at the NEC, as you tend to get a lot of the smaller retailers visiting to place their orders. However on the Monday the type of visitor is more likely to be the bigger museums and outlets that tend to have a larger customer database and footfall, so generally the bigger spenders."

In summary the NEC was another success with most exhibitors I talked to stating that they will be returning in 2014 for the next Spring Fair!

Sam Williams of AE Williams, Birmingham

The Pinder View from Frankfurt, at the Giftware Fair

15th to 19th February, 2013

The Frankfurt Giftware Fair is the largest fair of its type in the world. It continues to attract exhibitors and visitors from at least 80 countries.

Although the fairground has fewer Halls than Birmingham, many of the Halls have three or more floors and it would be impossible in the time the fair is open to tour every Hall.

This year, many exhibitors report that the Fair was less well attended, although high value buyers were there as usual. Others report a difficult 2012 and are not expecting 2013 to be very much better.

Also reflecting Birmingham was the fact that there was little silverware and pewter on show; and in fact, not one member of the Hong Kong delegation displayed any silverware at all.

The biggest change noticed this year was the progress of holloware and stainless steel manufacturing in India. At least 20 manufacturers were showing some very advanced pieces of stainless steel holloware. Stainless steel cutlery was on many stands.



Entrance to the 'Frankfurt Messe', the Fair arena

The exhibition originally contained mainly German manufacturers with a few from adjoining countries but, today, many of the Halls contain exhibitors who are manufacturing in Asia.

The only pewter to be seen, in three days' touring the stands, was that of the EPU member, Artina, one manufacturer from Malaysia (Great Esthetics Sdn. Bhd.), and one from Thailand (The King's Pewter). Royal Selangor were not noticeably present at the Fair.

Asian manufacturers who work only in cast pewter report difficult trading conditions and are now showing only small items or items with glass and pewter.

Artina are now the only manufacturers in Europe to use the pressure die cast method of manufacturer. They concentrate on specialist German/Austrian lines which are beautifully finished in dark pewter. Trade has not been easy in this sector but as production of this type of merchandise ceases at various other locations in Europe, they pick up more of this business.

The fair offers a remarkable collection of giftware, unrivalled anywhere else in the world, but competition from Asia, and the fairs held there, is clearly starting to affect even Frankfurt.

David Pinder OBE



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