

# Philip Wakeham

Philip Wakeham, artist, made his name in pewter, first working with the late Tom Neal, and then on his own account. Now, for various reasons but, principally it seems, the high cost of tin, he has turned to bronze. *The Pewterer* tracked him down to Cornwall, where he now lives, and interviewed him about his work.



## What is your first recollection of pewter?

I think I've always been aware of pewter in the clichéd tankard sense. But I first became aware of it as a material I could use when I met Charles Grant, who then introduced me to Tom Neal

## Where did you learn about how to use pewter?

It was with Tom Neal that I learnt first his innovative techniques of working with pewter. And then I taught myself the lost wax casting - in my kitchen oven!



The Poulterers' Swans

## When did you start making pewter items, what and why?

It was with Tom Neal, I think. The first thing I made, using a rubber mould, was a paper knife with a cast pewter handle.

## What work did you create when you were in

## partnership with Tom Neal?

I made a wide verity of commissions, from a salmon to funeral urns; and together we did a number of notable commissions, such as the Millennium bowl, along with Christopher Laurence, for the Worshipful Company of

Pewterers, and two commemorative plaques for the Museum of Rowing in Henley to mark its opening by the HM The Queen.

It was during this time that I designed and made the Seahorse Covered cup which was later bought by Alex Neish's Museum of British Pewter [Now at the Smith Museum in Stirling. See The Pewterer, issue x.x. Ed].

## **What did you do after you left Tom? Is your work materially different?**

After dissolving my partnership with Tom, I was trying to make a living working in pewter and bronze, but I was dealing with increasing mental health problems brought about by a mis-diagnosed learning disability from childhood.

Unfortunately, it took eight years finally to get the correct treatment, so it is only within the last three years that I have been working again, now solely in bronze.



## **What methods did you use (spinning, casting etc)?**

All my pewter work was made using the 'lost wax' process as, although it is a very lengthy and difficult process, this gave me the most creative freedom. I also used welding rather than soldering, which enabled me to produce work with no solder lines.

## **What inspires your designs?**

When working to commission, my designs are very much inspired by the client and the details of the commission, though my personal work is very much rooted in the figurative tradition and the natural and manmade environment, whilst drawing on the ideas of Carl Jung, and Iain McGilchrist

## **Tell me about the Pair of Swans; and the Ewelme Church Finials and the Seahorse Covered Cup**

I designed and made the Seahorse Covered cup as my 'master piece'. I chose a covered cup simply because I liked the potential of the form, and the seahorse because of the association with the Pewterer's Company. The Swans table centrepiece was commissioned by the then Master of the Worshipful Company of Poulterers'. I chose swans as they featured on that

Company's coat of arms - and for their obvious sculptural grace

## How did the price of tin affect you?

The price of tin stopped me using pewter for my own work. When it hit £50 a kilo, I simply couldn't afford to use it any more, as it was cheaper (because I cast my own work) for me to work in bronze; and bronze has a much higher perceived value. However, I must say that I always enjoyed working with pewter.

## What was your market?

When I worked in pewter, my main market was word-of-mouth commissions, but they were very diverse: essentially anybody who wanted something made specifically in pewter, for what ever reason. My secondary market was selling through craft galleries. Now, my main market is private collectors whom I reach through art galleries. I am currently in discussion for a public commission of a life-sized bronze figure; this came about via my Facebook artist page.



The Seahorse Covered Cup

## What (if any) are your current work and exhibition plans?

I am very busy at present making and promoting my work, though it is currently almost all cast in bronze.

## Philip Wakeham

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