

# The Appleford Hoard

Home



Appleford hoard displayed in the 'Rome' gallery at the Ashmolean Museum

When in Oxford, one should not miss the opportunity to visit the Ashmolean Museum. When the Livery & Freedom Committee of the Worshipful Company of Pewterers organised a weekend outing to Oxford last autumn, it followed this advice and arranged a private tour of the Museum. The curators at the Ashmolean went to a lot of trouble to identify items that they thought would interest the visitors.

One visitor reported that: "There were quite a few Roman pilgrims' badges and receptacles in 'lead alloy'; and of particular interest, the Appleford Hoard of Roman pewter. This had been found, in 1968, in a gravel pit, which was possibly, originally, in a well, now defunct, as there were bones and vegetable matter in the area.

"This had lain hidden since the fourth or fifth century AD. Roman coins and pottery had been found in the field at least since the nineteenth century.

"The hoard comprised: one jug, eight small bowls and fifteen plates of various sizes, the largest measuring 50cm in diameter. Most of the pieces are plain, having been polished but given no decoration apart from beading on some of the rims. Two exceptions are the small fluted bowl with a central rosette (all cast decoration) and the etched rosette inscribed between two interlocking squares in the centre of one of the largest plates."

Having seen the items of public display, the group was guided into a private room, offered white gloves, and then allowed to examine specially-selected precious artefacts, many elaborately decorated, including: a German pewter and a ceramic delftware plate with the Pewterers' coat of arms on it. This was, as the Company's coat of arms now still is, with the same motto, but in Latin 'Totame fiducia estinde'. At first sight, it seems as though it might have been part of a Company dinner service, in which case there should be evidence, order or invoice, in the archive, but would the Pewterers have accepted ceramic tableware at this time? Or was it a private commission, perhaps of commemorative pieces?

Or did someone want to demonstrate association with the Company, which he may or may not have had?

According to the Museum: *The hoard itself consisted of at least 24 pieces of pewter tableware, making it the third largest hoard of Roman pewter found in this country to date.*

I spoke to Dr Susan Walker, recently retired as Keeper of Antiquities at the Museum. She retains a strong interest in the Hoard and intends to undertake further research into it. She wrote: "My interest in the Appleford Hoard relates to the nature of the deposition. Your correspondent was right to question the nature of the "well" in which the hoard was found at Appleford. Other Roman wells excavated in the immediate vicinity are neatly boxed with timber and there was no sign of that here, though the site was wet, so timber would be expected to have survived.

"The pewter, along with various iron farming tools, was deposited at the turn of the fourth and fifth centuries AD, so very close to the end of the formal Roman occupation of Britain. It has always

been assumed to be a hoard, that is deposited at a time of stress with the intention of later recovery by the owners. It has been tentatively associated with a Roman villa at nearby Dropshort, but recent investigations by Time Team have shown that the villa in question was deliberately demolished much earlier, about AD 200, with no evidence of later occupation in the area surveyed and partially excavated.

“Indeed, my research suggests that the Appleford "hoard" is better identified as an offering: one of the largest serving dishes is inscribed on the underside in cursive Latin ‘Lovernianus gave what he had bought with his own money.’ From the damage caused to this platter by the bucket and drag-line of the gravel extractors, it is likely that this was the covering dish of the deposit and the inscription would thus have been legible in antiquity. In any case it is clear from the sense of the text that the hoard was actually an offering to an unnamed recipient, probably a local deity. By analogy with similar platters recently excavated at Steane (Northants), it is likely that the two largest serving platters held food that was shared within a group, the smaller bowls and plates representing vessels used by individual diners.

“The serving platters were then deposited above the individual plates and bowls, one platter covering the other to protect unconsumed food offered to an unnamed deity. Unfortunately we can't now recover any residue of the food as the Appleford vessels have been chemically cleaned. With the pewter was found a remarkable iron chain of complex design, certainly used for a cauldron (now lost), which was most likely used to cook the meal. The iron farm tools and the cauldron chain are also displayed in the Rome Gallery of the Ashmolean, on the other side of the case used to display the pewter.”

Dr Walker suggested that anyone interested in further reading on Roman pewter might wish to turn to the most recent work known to her, one by Richard Lee, *The Production, Use and Disposal of Romano-British Tableware*, BAR British Series 478, Oxford 2009.

For a fuller description of the Appleford Hoard itself, please refer to the Ashmolean Museum's relevant website page (see Link below).

### **Alan Williams, with thanks to Mary Kearney**

Note: There was much more to the visit, but this article concentrates on the pewter element. Ed.

<http://britisharchaeology.ashmus.ox.ac.uk/roman-oxon/appleford.html>

Matthew Winterbottom, Curator of Nineteenth-Century Decorative Arts, answered my query about Mary Kearney's reference to a delftware plate from the Museum's collection. This was one of the non-pewter items shown to the party. He said that the delftware plate had been made at Lambeth and was dated 1750. “It is thought that it was probably made for the personal use of a member of the Pewterers' Company. His, and his wife's, initials (T over B M) are painted on the back over the date 1750”.

This reference intrigued me, and I referred the question to Hazel Forsyth, David Hall and William Grant. Hazel Forsyth, Senior Curator, Medieval & Post-Medieval, at the Museum of London, told me that it was usual for tin-glazed earthenware (delftware) to have a triad of initials: the apex letter representing the initial of the surname; the letter bottom left the initial of the husband and the letter on the right, those of the wife. Occasionally, she said, the two lower letters signified father/son or even more rarely; brother/brother – as a working partnership.

David Hall, Archivist at the Worshipful Company of Pewterers, said that, with pewter anyway, the initials were those of the owners; and when you got one letter above two other letters, the upper letter was usually the first name of the surname and the lower the first letter of the Christian names of husband and wife.



I asked William Grant, the Company's Assistant Archivist and he told me that he had looked at the Company's records for members of the Company with a surname beginning with a 'T' and with a forename starting with a 'B' - and had found three of them.

The first was Benjamin Tomkins who had become free of the Company on 17th December 1691.

The second was Benjamin Townsend who had become free of the Company on 21st June 1744.

The third was Benjamin Turner who had become free of the Company on 20th June 1765.

Bill said: "Benjamin Tomkins does not seem to have continued in the trade, but he did rent a property belonging to the Company in Fenchurch Street in around 1755/7".

He went on to explain that there were a lot of references to Benjamin Townsend in the records. He had stayed in the trade, striking his touch in 1754 and having a number of apprentices. "He did appear before the Court for 'poor metal'. However, he fell on hard times and received money from the Company's various benefactions., one of these being at the time of one of the Great Frosts."

Accession no.				
WA1963.136.39	Lambeth Plate, 1750 diameter: 22.3 cm	earthenware, tin-glazed (delftware), blue and white		<b>The Pewterers' Coat of Arms and motto in blue, in the centre, slanting floral border on rim, inscribed T over B M above 1750 on base.</b>  Presented by Mrs Jean Dorothy Warren in memory of Robert Hall Warren, 1963.
Ray (2000) 24; Ray (1968) 39				

The third, Benjamin Turner, "served his apprenticeship but seems to have dropped out of the trade after that."

Bill then turned to initials on the plate. "The most likely candidate seems to me to be Benjamin Tomkins. Although he wasn't in the trade for long he was still alive in 1750 and was the tenant of a property owned by the Company.

"I think that Benjamin Townsend was too young in 1750 to have had such a plate made; and Benjamin Turner may well not have even been alive in 1750."

"So there you are," said Bill, "nothing for sure, but a possibility!"

Photos: © Ashmolean Museum, Oxford.

My thanks also to the curators at the Ashmolean, to Dr Susan Walker, to Hazel Forsyth, to William Grant and to David Hall.

Diana German, Liveryman of the Worshipful Company of Pewterers, and long-standing member of the Pewter Society, told me that she had written an article on a Delft Bottle; and that it had been published in the Pewter Society Journal in the Autumn of 2012, page 3.

(The Pewter Society - <http://www.pewtersociety.org/>)

[Home](#)

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