

(This time, the BBC News Magazine, February 2014)

Extracted from BBC News Magazine, 1st February, 2014 . For the full article, please go to:

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/magazine-25977432>

# Tin: What the world owes this dull grey metal

By Justin Rowlatt Presenter, Business Daily, BBC World Service



Tin wouldn't come anywhere near the top of most people's list of the most important elements, yet the history of our species is very closely entwined with this dull grey metal.

Tin was the basis of man's first great technological revolution. Thanks to its low melting point, this relatively abundant metal was one of the first to be smelted - by placing a rock into a fire.

Metallurgists, working more than 5,000 years ago, discovered that

mixing tin and copper would make a much harder and more durable metal than either metal alone, one you could fashion into blades which would - crucially - keep their edge.

They had discovered the world's first alloy. Mankind began to throw away its stone weapons and tools - the Bronze Age had begun.

Even as we moved from bronze to iron and on into the industrial age, tin remained at the centre of human culture, as I discovered in the impressive surroundings of London's Pewterers' Hall.

The building is modern, but this is the home of one of the most ancient of all the ancient Guilds of London, the Worshipful Company of Pewterers. The first reference to the company is in 1348 and, as its names suggests, it is dedicated to producers and workers of pewter, another tin alloy, made this time by combining it with small amounts of copper, antimony, bismuth or sometimes lead<sup>1</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> In 1348 undoubtedly there was likely to be lead in the pewter alloy. Nowadays, there is none. Ed.

## This Dull Grey Metal. May 2017. The Pewterer, volume 8.2

Pewter provided a cheaper alternative to gold and silver, explains Andrea Sella, a professor of chemistry at University College London, as we look at the huge ornate pewter plates, tankards

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Tin in periodic table

### Tin - key facts

Symbol: Sn (from Latin stannum)

Atomic number: 50

Melts at 232C (450F)

In the carbon group (group 14) of the periodic table, next to Germanium and Lead

Obtained from the mineral, cassiterite (SnO<sub>2</sub>)

More than half of the world's tin comes from South-east Asia

and trophies on display. But the popularity of pewter - and therefore tin - declined rapidly, as mass production made cheap porcelain tableware available in the 18th Century.

Continue reading the main story in the Magazine: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/magazine-25977432>

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