

Editorial

This issue contains articles on antique pewter, a report of the goings on at the Pewter Society (well, their AGM and an interesting talk on the place of Guilds in mediaeval London); and a report on the pewter presence at the NEC Spring Fair at the beginning of February.

That's just the start.

It is also the start of a new year and we are into the 8th volume of this ezine, so it might be a good time to take stock on what we have achieved over the past seven years, and what the goals for the future should be.

And what a good time to thank the many contributors who have helped us on our journey.

Where will the trade be in 50 years' time, let alone next year? The NEC in Birmingham has just closed its doors on another Spring Gift Fair. The Gift Fair sees a number of pewterers attending to display their wares; I went up on the first day, the Sunday, to test the temperature; and I am happy to say that everyone seemed very positive, though the shadow of the 20% increase in the price of tin caused by the recent devaluation of the pound was exercising those who are looking to sell in the UK.



See the following article for:

Pewter at The NEC at Birmingham

What does the Spring Fair say about itself?

“Spring Fair is the UK’s No.1 trade show for gift and home, welcoming more than 60,000 visitors through the doors of Birmingham NEC over five days.

Connecting wonderful people and products (across 14 curated show sectors) for more than 40 years, it’s an explosion of newness, trend-led design, expert-led seminars, industry insights and more.

It attracts a purchasing power of £2.4 billion, making it a must-do event for 2,500+ exhibitors a must-see for buyers across independents, multiples, e-Commerce and department stores.”

“Yes, great start to the day.” I was at the first day of the Spring Fair (5th February), having travelled up from London for the afternoon.

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It is a short, covered, walk, turning right from the railway station to the Fair. If you turn the other way, you get to the airport. A very efficient check in (at the Fair, yes I turned right!) and it's all bright and air conditioned. The Fair Directory gave me the co-ordinates of the stands I wanted to visit.



<http://www.pewtergiftware.com/fairy-and-tree-tooth-fairy-box-1356-p.asp>

Most of the exhibitors have already been here for a couple of days putting up their stands. They will be taking the rest of the week off from manufacturing, in order to man the stands, pace the aisles, see what the competition's up to and meet customers, old and new.

Today, the first day of this year's Fair, the pewterers I talked to, all were happy about the start to the week. But then I would expect optimism on the first morning. Anything else, and how could you face the rest of the week? Five whole days living out of a suitcase and being on your best, customer, behaviour.

Of course, the stands will have to be dismantled and taken home at the end of the week, or straight on to the next Fair - the Frankfurt one is coming up shortly.

While the pewterers' stands were bursting with shiny displays of pewter that included lots of tankards and hip flasks, there was also much, much more. The inventiveness of the pewter manufacturers and designers is breathtaking. Pendants, tie pins, key rings, and napkin rings jostle for space with lapel badges, bookmarks, tooth fairy boxes, and letter openers (amongst a host of other designs).

One stand displayed, amongst the latest ranges, some rather attractive 'shot' glasses supported by pewter stands. The glasses simply slip out of the pewter support for washing.

One exhibitor was very gratified that as a result of a late cancellation, the Fair Administration had offered him a free corner stand, across the aisle from his own. "More space to fill with displays", he chuckled. But some were very open about the effect that the current state of the pound has had on trade. "The price of tin went up 20% overnight with the fall in the pound." This will, they fear, inevitably have an effect on business in the UK.

More than one said how well the day had started. "We've had five serious customer meetings already; and Sunday is usually not good for business; it is the day the retailers come, and our main trade is with distributors," said another.

The Fair Guide said that I would find Royal Thai Pewter at stand 4D93, but there was another company there, not a sign of Royal Thai. And where's the Royal Selangor stand? Hiding under the 'Star Wars - Selangor' at stand 4G87 (Key to understanding this code: 4 is the number of the Hall; 'B' is the row in that Hall; and 87 the stand position). It has been a number of years since I last found Royal Selangor at the NEC, but they are certainly back now. David Mills, the General Manager, was warmly welcoming. He told me that Royal Selangor have a new shop in the King's Road.

I found different opinions amongst the pewterers present as to whether in 50 years' time, the trade will have changed shape dramatically or not. There are some who argue that, with the difficulty of finding people willing to take on this dirty job and to spend years training, the big manufacturers will morph into a collection of artisan craftsmen sharing overheads; and there are those who say that there will always be room for the larger manufacturer.



Selangor: Tooth box

But whatever the position over that, I found a trade humming with enthusiasm (well, it was only the first day of five) and looking forward to the challenges ahead. A trade that used to rely almost

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exclusively on tankards and hip flasks still makes a lot of them, though whereas a trade customer a few years ago could easily order 20 - 30 tankards in one go, nowadays they are selling two a day. And behind the tankards and hip flask marches innovation and creative flair, as exciting designs flourish: key rings, napkin rings, picture frames, bottle stoppers, bottle openers.

It was only a few years ago that everyone was saying that the trade was finished, and the Fair was getting less and less worth attending. Now I detect that there is a fresh breath of life and enthusiasm.

AE Williams: <http://www.pewtergiftware.com/about-us-1-w.asp>

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English Pewter: <https://www.englishpewter.co.uk>

Pinder Bros: <http://www.pinder.co.uk>

William Sturt: <http://www.williamsturt.com>

Westair: <http://www.westair.co.uk>

Royal Selangor: http://uk.royalselangor.com/?__from_store=0&__store=uk

Royal Thai Pewter: <http://www.royalthaipewter.com/CONTACT%20US>

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