

Letters to the Editor

(Pewter in the Cloisters; Aberconwy House; and Wives and Widows)

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Pewter in the Cloisters

Dear Mr Williams,

As always, I read your latest articles with great interest.

With reference to the painting of St Jérôme (*The Pewterer*, volume 9.2, 'Pewter in the Cloisters': <http://www.thepewterer.org.uk/the-pewterer-vol-9-2>), the three pewter objects are all fairly standard Catholic liturgical pieces:

- Holy water sprinkler bucket, the brush is used to sprinkle Holy Water during various blessings. Not unusual in pewter. I have a couple from 18/19th century.
- Censer or Thurible, for burning incense, again used for various blessings. I have once or twice seen pewter examples, it is not a satisfactory material for the job. The chains are subject to a lot of wear as they are swung continually. The burning charcoal could also damage most pewter alloys. They are more common in brass or silver.
- The third object is an incense "boat", used to supply extra incense. A traditional form, you can clearly see the spoon used to put the incense on the burning charcoal. Even though these are more often found in other metals, you do come across them in pewter, that is largely fit for purpose.

Clearly none of these are likely to be found in English pewter, but I do seem to recall having seen a mediaeval Holy Water bucket from some dig, or the Thames, but I cannot remember where.

Regards,

Timothy Fenwick

Aberconwy House

Dear Alan

It's Aberconwy House - see <https://www.nationaltrust.org.uk/aberconwy-house> . It is a grade 1 listed building which was left to the National Trust in 1934, and that probably post-dates your postcard. According to Wikipedia, it had previously been a temperance hotel, and the postcard could date from that period. If so, it is quite likely the pewter never went to the National Trust. The Trust's 'collections' website shows just 25 artefacts at Aberconwy and none of them is pewter, though the 'collections' website is far from complete.

The Pewterer. vol.9.4. December 2018

I'm surprised no one else has been in touch as the delightful walled town of Conway is a popular stopping point for tourists in North Wales. It also boasts another superb house, Plas Mawr, run by Cadw (the Welsh equivalent of English Heritage). That does have some pewter on display, but sadly - as far as I can see from the pictures online - it is mostly Continental.

Best wishes,

Peter Hayward

Wives and Widows

Dear Alan

I wonder if you will permit me to make a few observations on your article about Anne Sutton's recent book entitled *Wives and Widows of Medieval London*, being a collection of essays, edited by Anne F. Sutton ([The Pewterer, volume 9.3](#)).

Many people today associate tin mining in the British Isles with Cornwall alone. This is perhaps unsurprising, since the last two tin mines in Cornwall only closed in the 1980s and in recent years it has been possible one would reopen. For many centuries, however, tin was mined in Devon as well as Cornwall. In Devon the activity was focused on Dartmoor. At the time Dr Sutton was writing about, tin was definitely being mined in Devon as well as Cornwall.

As far as Southampton is concerned its role in the late medieval tin trade has been researched and written up. The results of this work can be found in a book written by John Hatcher (later a Cambridge professor) entitled *English Tin Production and Trade before 1550*. However, this book was published in 1973 and is not today easily accessed, whereas his next work on pewter, *A History of British Pewter*, written with T. C. Barker is far more easily obtained. This latter book was commissioned by the (Worshipful) Company (of Pewterers).

English Tin Production and Trade before 1550 does not give the same picture of Southampton. In one place Hatcher actually describes Southampton as, in effect as far as the tin trade is concerned, an 'out port' to London. Earlier in the 15th century, he found evidence of London merchants shipping a large part of the annual output of tin from Cornwall and Devon by sea to London.

Later in the century he says the pattern changed and the tin was brought by sea to Southampton whence the much greater part was taken by road to London, only a small part being exported overseas. He indicates this trade was, in part, in the hands of local merchants from Cornwall and Devon; the rest is largely in the hands of London merchants. I think in earlier centuries Continental merchants were going direct to Cornwall and Devon to buy tin, by the 15th century this had virtually ceased.

As far as Joan Haynes' relations with the Pewterer's Company is concerned, at this date any working pewterer, whether a master, journeyman or apprentice, would come under the supervision and control of the Pewterer's Company, whatever their sex. Court records of

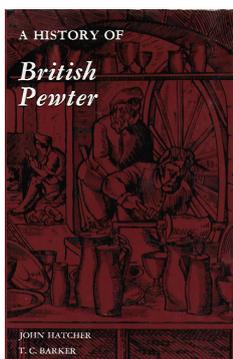
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the minute book type (Orders and Entries) do not survive earlier than 1551, so securing any detailed evidence of what exactly was her relationship with the Company is difficult, if not impossible.

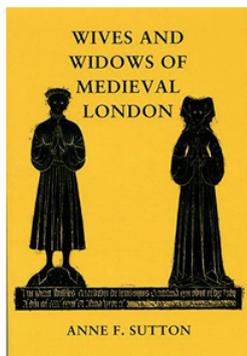
Finally I was interested in this comment “The London Ironmongers’ trade often overlapped with that of the Pewterers”. I am not aware of this suggested relationship although, at a later date, in the early 17th century, the Pewterers were in the Ironmongers’ group for the London Ulster Plantations.

I hope these comments will be of some use, particularly to Dr Sutton, in her work.

David Hall, Hon. Archivist, (and Liveryman) of the Worshipful Company of Pewterers



A History of British Pewter, by John Hatcher, and TC Barker
ISBN: 0582 50122-9
Published by Longman



Wives and Widows of Medieval London, a collection of essays edited by Anne F Sutton,
ISBN: 9781907730573
Published by: Paul Watkins Publishing

Anne Sutton commented: “Thanks for this. All the works cited in the commentary were used by me in the article – but perhaps he did not read the actual article only the summary!”

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