

# Pewter Pilgrim badges

The Museum of London has an internationally important collection of medieval pilgrim souvenirs in its reserve collection (and also in its Archaeological Archive). Most of the souvenirs are in the form of badges but there are also ampullae (small bottles for holy water), figurines, pendants and other trinkets. Opposite: a pewter pilgrim badge of the head of St Thomas Becket wearing a bishop's mitre. Around his head is a church-like architectural frame. Below is an inscription: '+ S CAPVT THOME' (the head of St Thomas).



<http://collections.museumoflondon.org.uk/Online/group.aspx?g=group-19998>

As the website says: Pilgrim souvenirs were bought by medieval pilgrims as mementoes of the pious journeys they took to visit shrines in England and abroad. These objects were also believed to protect their wearers from harm and to heal the sick. Before specially-made souvenirs were manufactured, pilgrims would often chip pieces off holy shrines, which could lead to irreparable damage. The solution was the make cheap metal souvenirs, which were mass-produced in moulds. Records show that pilgrim badges cost about a penny for a dozen by the 15th century.

- See more at:

- <http://collections.museumoflondon.org.uk/Online/group.aspx?g=group-19998#sthash.PQg3w2c1.dpuf>

In the second half of the 12th century in Western Europe pewter ampullae and other metal souvenirs started to be made. Badges became the most popular type of souvenir from the 14th century onwards. Souvenirs often depicted the saint or the relic at the shrine. They were sold by specialist makers from stalls outside the church door or from shops lining the nearby streets. Pilgrims attached the badges to their hats or cloaks or wore them round their necks. Badges could even be sown into the pages of prayer books. When they got them home pilgrims could nail their souvenirs up as an aid to worship (some have nail holes in them that suggest this, though holes were commonly made so that the badges could be attached to items of clothing (most especially cloaks and hats).

However, so many badges have been found in the River Thames that it seems as though many might have been ritually deposited in the river as sacred objects. Some people have suggested that the high proportion of finds from the Thames may be due to the fact that much of the north bank was extended out into the river and the timber revetments were back-filled with household and other rubbish – in effect a land-reclamation process which continued more or less constantly from the 12<sup>th</sup> – to mid-16<sup>th</sup> century.

The anaerobic conditions on the foreshore also mean that artefacts of all kinds survive extremely well in comparison to those from 'land' sites (unless from a well or cesspit).

See more at: <http://collections.museumoflondon.org.uk/Online/group.aspx?g=group-19998#sthash.PQg3w2c1.dpuf>

The most important aspect of the badges and other souvenirs was that they should be touched against the saint's shrine or relics to absorb some of the shrine's virtue and thus be able to carry out miraculous acts like healing sickness. Badges could be given to sick family members or dipped in wine or water which would then cure ailments when drunk. Some badges contained mirrors so that pilgrims could catch the reflection of holy relics in them at busy shrines where it was not possible to physically touch the relics.

The most common pilgrim souvenirs found in London are from Thomas Becket's shrine at Canterbury Cathedral. This shrine had an international reputation and was particularly popular for Londoners as Becket had been born in London. Canterbury was only four days walk from London and if pilgrims travelled on horseback they could make a return journey there within a week. However, souvenirs have been found in London from shrines in France, Germany, Italy and Spain, showing how well-travelled some London pilgrims were.

See more at:

<http://collections.museumoflondon.org.uk/Online/group.aspx?g=group-19998#sthash.PQg3w2c1.dpuf>

For more detailed information about pilgrim souvenirs and pilgrimage, see the following books: -

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### Secular badge

During the 14th and 15th centuries, the heart was the most common symbol of love. Heart brooches and pendants appear to have been universally popular. Over 50 medieval pewter heart badges have been found in London, most of these on the Thames foreshore. Many are crowned hearts, fringed with imitation pearls. Some, like this one, have a sash-like scroll with the lover's message 'herte be trew' ('heart be true'). This was probably a love-token, given to a loved one as a present.

Above, right: Badge in the shape of a heart with a crown, with the words "heart be true" written across it) Bull Wharf, Upper Thames Street, London; 15<sup>th</sup> century; copper alloy; H 53mm; W34 mm

See more at: <http://collections.museumoflondon.org.uk/Online/object.aspx?objectID=object-290897#sthash.Kwlqp9fg.dpuf>

### Pilgrim Badge



Part of a badge in the form of a man dressed in a long robe with a hooded cloak. He is possibly a saint and this may be part of a pilgrim badge. If this is a pilgrim souvenir, the shrine where it was made is currently unknown. Pilgrims who travelled to religious shrines frequently bought souvenirs of their pious journey such as ampullae (small bottles for holy water), badges and figurines.

See more at: <http://collections.museumoflondon.org.uk/Online/object.aspx?objectID=object-28576#sthash.6OM8IT6p.dpuf>

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