

Bewdley and the Worshipful Company of Pewterers

[Home](#)

Bewdley and the Worshipful Company of Pewterers have a common benefactor - King Edward IV. King Edward granted the Company its first Charter in 1474; but two years earlier, in 1472, he had granted Bewdley borough status, as well as the right to hold a weekly market.

On the River Severn, Bewdley has been described as '*the most perfect small Georgian town in Worcestershire*'. The settlement of Wribbenhall, on the eastern side of the Severn, and now part of Bewdley, was recorded in the Domesday Book as being part of the manor of Kidderminster. By the 14th century, the town had come to be known as *Beau lieu*, French for "Beautiful place" - a compliment that fits well with John Leland's statement in his *Itinerary* two centuries later that "a man cannot wish to see a towne better".

The town and the Company have another thing in common - pewter. This article explores Bewdley's importance in the pewtering world, and how and why it prospered in this sense in the 18th century, and then subsequently declined.

Research carried out in the 1980s demonstrated that Bewdley had been, in the 18th century, the base for the operations for one of the most important provincial pewter manufacturing enterprises of that century. Today Bewdley is a modest market town on the River Severn, for a long time overshadowed, economically, by many other more successful West Midland's towns.

It has a population of barely 10,000. The survival of many 18th century houses in the centre of the town, and the Severn Valley Railway with its many restored old Great Western steam engines, makes it an attractive place to visit as does.

A reconstruction at Bewdley Museum shows an 18th century dining room with pewter plates stored on a rack on the wall and pewter tankards, plates, serving dishes and a candlestick on the table which is set for a meal. Pewter was a substitute for silver in middle-class households.

Pewter-making in Bewdley lasted from the 16th until the 19th centuries, but the most dynamic period for the industry was in the hundred years or so following 1719, after John Duncumb had moved to the area. Duncumb and his successors used mass-production methods to meet different consumer demands and to compete with competition from other products such as brass, earthenware and porcelain.



The photo is of Pewterers House, a B&B in Bewdley, to be found in Pewterers Alley, just over the bridge from the town.

At a time when it was meant to be in national decline, Bewdley became, according to Malcolm Dick, the most important location for pewter-making in Britain.

A party of pewterers from the Company is making an expedition to Bewdley at the end of May.

See more at: <http://www.bewdley.org.uk/#sthash.axQX6EXR.dpuf>

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