

THE COMPANY'S HALLS

Extracted from the Worshipful Company of Pewterers' 500th Anniversary Banquet Menu, 23 April 1974

The first recorded place of meeting of the Company was at the Austin Friars, where a Hall was hired as needed, until the Company in 1486 took possession of their own newly-built Hall which they had started in 1475 in Lime Street, on the site occupied by the Company until shortly before the last War.

The Hall was built by direct labour and the Beadle acted as Clerk of Works. The site itself cost £120 and was purchased by or through, one William Smallwood, a Past Master of the Company. This Hall continued in use throughout the sixteenth century, being used not only for Court and Livery Meetings, but also for Wardmotes, weddings of Pewterers and meetings of other Companies who hired it, very much as the present Hall is now.

This Hall was destroyed in the Great Fire of 1666 and the new Hall was started on the same site in 1667 and virtually completed in 1670. This Hall was again used for many other functions besides those of the Company. The Great Fire, which destroyed most of the Company's property, had had a crippling effect on its finances. Accordingly the new Hall was noteworthy more for the decorative treatment of individual rooms than for its overall structure. A fire of 1840, which is often, incorrectly, said to have destroyed the Hall, did unfortunately destroy many of its finest features.

In the meanwhile the Company had in fact let the Hall on a permanent basis. The last occasion on which the Hall was used by the Company was for its November dinner in 1901. Thereafter its business activities were transferred to one of its houses facing Lime Street and its dinners took place elsewhere.

The second Hall was finally pulled down in 1932, after it had been found to be in too ruinous a condition to be worth repairing. The site was let on a building lease, the Company declining to take up an option to use part of the new building for its Hall.

The oak panelling and plaster ceiling were presented to the London County Council and were re-erected in the Geffrye Museum, Kingsland Road, Shoreditch. Some panelling and three chandeliers were put into store and are now in use in the present Hall, and the original entrance arch portals stand incongruously in a building leading to the Department of Zoology in University College, London.

The Company then became nomadic, being given hospitality by the Worshipful Companies of Grocers and Cutlers. The possibility of erecting a new Hall on a site in Queen Victoria Street was considered, but this site was required by the City Corporation for a fire station following the Second World War. This proved to be a blessing in disguise for the Company, since the Corporation was persuaded to exchange the Queen Victoria Street site for the site of the present Hall in Oat Lane, off Gresham Street. The foundation stone of this Hall was

laid on 10th March 1960 by the then Lord Mayor, Sir Edmund Stockdale, whose successor, Sir Bernard Waley-Cohen, declared the new Hall open on 15th May 1961.

The building of the present, or third, Hall has proved to be a turning point in the history of the Company. The Hall was built to the neo-Georgian designs of Mr. David Nye and built by Fairweather Builders Ltd. It incorporates the panelling and the chandeliers from the second Hall and includes many fine features. It is one of only two completely free-standing Livery Halls in the City, i.e. it is a Hall completely unattached to the offices of any other body.

Having a Hall has given the Company the opportunity to collect and house one of the finest collections of antique British Pewter in existence and to display many of its other treasures. The Hall is now the focal point for pewter, both ancient and modern, in Britain today. It is the registered office of the Association of British Pewter Craftsmen, the trade body for the pewter industry today, and each year the Pewter (collectors) Society holds its Annual General Meeting in the Hall.

The number of queries regarding both antique and modern pewter which come there are proof enough that Pewterers' Hall is once again taking its rightful place as the fountain head for all matters pertaining to Pewter in Britain.



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