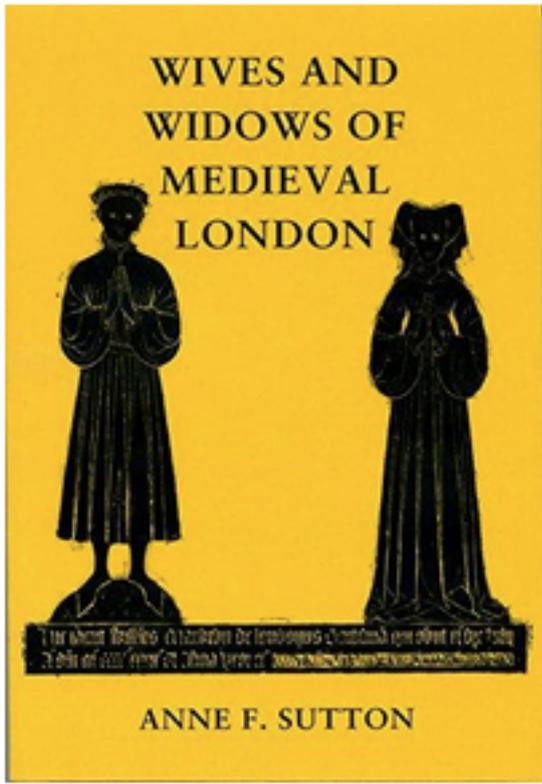


# Wives and Widows of Medieval London

a collection of essays, edited by Anne F. Sutton

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*This fascinating book examines the lives of five women, their several husbands, and their widowhoods. This is a book about how women coped with the culture and laws about property in England.*



*What has that to do with pewter?, I hear you ask. The Worshipful Company of Pewterers is mentioned frequently, and also a number of individual pewterers and their families. I have extracted a small number, but by no means all, of the references. Read on ...*

*In her Introduction, Anne Sutton says:*

This collection (of essays) is very much focussed on the 15th century when the custom of protecting and governing the lives of London women was long established and not yet significantly eroded by the common law ... (p 1).

They encountered and adapted to a wide variety of crafts, trades and jobs when they married: administrator, clerk of the king's council, ironmonger, lawyer, mercer, merchant adventurer, pewterer, silk woman, stapler, wool merchant, and the civic hierarchy of alderman, sheriff and mayor. (p 4).

The techniques, the raw materials and the structure of the craft trade or industry are essential for an understanding of the life of any man or woman involved in them: for example how did a new wife or widow cope with the noisy, dirty and male dominated trade of the pewterer ...? (Note 10, p 4).

Marriage would always have been the parents' hope for their daughters, for female wages were low and approximately half what a man might be paid for the same work. ... Many manual trades, such as the working of pewter or the metal crafts associated with the ironmonger were seen as exclusively male - mentioned here because ... Joan Haynes inherited a pewterer's business from her first husband. (p 6).

Wealth gave a widow great opportunities. How far did Joan Haynes' first period of independence from her first marriage [protect against] the Pewterers' Company? She chose a new husband higher in status than a pewterer and moved to a better parish, and perhaps that should be understood as her answer to any attempt by the Pewterers to control her and her business - and contrariwise their careful cultivation of her new Mercer husband. (p 9).

Wives and widows could undoubtedly be successful business-women. ... Joan Haynes managed a pewterer's business, and she may have wound up her second husband's cloth and adventuring business after his death. ... (But) she had a journeyman-foreman, John Green, to oversee her pewterer's business. (pp 10/11).

#### Agnes Don-Bretton

Agnes appears in my article in *The Pewterer*, volume 3.4 (<http://www.thepewterer.org.uk/home/the-pewterer-volume-3-4-1>) about St Dionys Backchurch. Her second husband was involved in the tin trade. As mentioned there (and here) tin was the major metal exported from Southampton (where Agnes lived); England boasted the purest and most abundant supply in medieval Europe, with Devon and Cornwall producing 500 to 750 tons a year in the fifteenth century. It is tempting to make this the trade that brought Bretton to Southampton; tin was transported along the coast from Cornwall in three fleets a year, and Londoners were encouraged to come to the port to buy tin and send it home by road or by sea along the coast to the wharves of London where Bretton lived. Tin was exported in the raw state or as pewter, a highly-valued alloy of tin and lead (and other metals'), all over Europe, for example by the Italians using the ports of Southampton and London. (pp 179/80).

An exceptional man of this Company (the Ironmongers), which Thomas Bretton was to be, had to find other sources of wealth: a rich wife and the wool trade in his case. The London Ironmongers' trade often overlapped with that of the Pewterers who combined tin with lead to make pewter, as mentioned above. The Pewterers' Company of London was rising in wealth and power, they still tended to focus on the manufacture of vessels at this date, but can regularly be found exporting their goods via Southampton. Despite their apparent failure in overseas trade, the Ironmongers managed to cling to their status as one of the twelve great companies of London (number ten), and it was to their company rather than to the Pewterers, that an important Yorkist servant from the Stannaries, Avery Cornburgh, sought admittance in 1463. (p 184).

#### Joan Haynes

Joan Haynes' first husband was Nicholas Westwood, Citizen and Pewterer, of St Mildred Poultry, London. He was born about 1410, the son of John Westwood. The family was prosperous and had the means to pay the premium required to apprentice a son to a manual craft of good standing, but not to place him in a trade of mercantile status. The status of the chosen master, the well-off pewterer, Hugh Game, is another indication of the Westwoods' financial standing. (p 218).

The Westwood family lived on the north side of Poultry. This area and the adjacent five parishes to the west and the south side of Cheapside contained a number of influential pewterers, nine of whose careers overlapped with Westwood's. Of these, only one, John Kendale, is a known associate for he made him an executor. Other neighbours, like Robert Chamberlain, were influential in the trade and appear regularly in the company's accounts. It is unfortunate that the first surviving company accounts are for the year after Westwood's death (1451/52), a fair copy of which was inscribed in a book given the company by Robert Chamberlain and his wife, Cecily. (p 222).

The Pewterers' Company was becoming increasingly successful. During Westwood's life, in 1444, it gained a concession from the common council of London that the Company could buy a quarter of all the tin brought to the City for sale. During the lifetime of his son, John, the Company was to be incorporated by Edward IV, receive a grant of arms, and then a confirmatory charter in 1478, with wide powers of search throughout England. It immediately set about acquiring a site for its hall

in Lime Street, into which it moved in Joan's lifetime, in 1486; the hall had benefited from gifts from her and her second husband. (p 222).

It is certain Westwood was well-trained as a pewterer by Game, that his goods were well made and sought after. Tin was the product of Cornwall, the only source of this metal for medieval Europe, and (as mentioned) from 1444, the Company had the right to buy a quarter of all the tin which came into London for sale. Alloyed with copper and lead, tin produced the highly desirable English pewter (the proportions being a guarded secret), which was made into a variety of vessels, mainly for domestic use, by craftsmen pewterers. (pp222/3).

The members of the London Company were still largely craftsmen in the lifetime of Nicholas, Joan and their sons, producing thousands of items each year while the Company's rights of search throughout England maintained quality. There were elaborate rules, for example, as to what quality of the metal was to be used for flat ware or round wares. After he had completed his apprenticeship, a journeyman received wages of 40s a year and hoped to work up to his own shop and take apprentices. A master owned the moulds from which to cast his vessels, which he then hammered, soldered and perfected; he owned tools, the metals which he mixed, and solder. He had his own mark to identify his wares, and he often kept a stock of vessels which could be hired out for dining (a garnish of pewter contained 12 dishes, 12 plates and 12 small platters. (p 223).

Westwood made his will on 5th March 1450. ... He asked the parish priest ... to pray for his old master, Hugh Game, and his first two wives (his third wife, Margaret, was probably still alive) and also for a John with no surname. This was probably John Andrew, the pewterer, who had been executor to Game and to whom Westwood had been executor in his turn. (p224).

Westwood's will is a perfect illustration of how the craft might dominate man's life: his company's common box received £7 6s. 8d., of which £5 came from the goods of the pewterer John Andrew, to whom Westwood had been executor; the company was to pray for Andrew's soul and his own, and to receive 1000lbs of 'laymetall', 'which I have received for the work of the said craft from the goods of Hugh Game'. (p 225).

Nicholas [his middle son] and his money, during his minority, were to be cared for by William Baker, who is given no designation, but who was probably the master of the Pewterers, 1450-51, with security taken at Guildhall. It is possible the boy was apprenticed to Baker but no further notice of this has been found, and only John, the eldest son, is known to have been in the trade 1469-71. (p 225/6).

(Footnote: William Baker, Welch, *Pewterers*, vol 1 p [not given] and vol 2 p 203). (p206).

Joan and (Westwood's) sons were to have the basin and ewer 'marked with the mark that I used' (*signat' cum signo meo quo utor*); it was to be hers and her sons' while they lived - these may be assumed to have been fine work of which he was especially proud. When any of them died, the basin and ewer were to pass to the others. If Joan or her sons remained in the trade during their lives they were all to share equally and reasonably in his *mooldes de bras cum clames de ferro eisdem pertinent' et cum omnimodis necessariis meis voc' hamer' et toole arti predictae pertinent*. If any of them died, their share would descend to the others; and while any of them remained in the trade they should have the use of the tools, If none, however, stayed in the trade then all the tools were to be sold, half the proceeds to be spent on the souls he cared for and the other half to be divided equally between Joan and their sons. (p 226).

In 1451/52, it is known that Nicholas Westwood's executors gave £16 18s to the Pewterers - considerably more than the £7 6s. 8d. Westwood had specified for their common box. Did the extra sum sweeten the Company as regards the widow's control of the business? Management of the business was undoubtedly her main concern and she had two pewterers to advise her among her fellow executors and supervisors. (p 229). [See also note 49 on page 229].

*I do not undertake that these extracts, chosen because pewter and the Pewterers are mentioned, are comprehensive, but they give, I hope, a flavour of this fascinating book. I encourage you to acquire your own copy. David Hall, the Archivist of the Worshipful Company, comments on these extracts in the next issue of The Pewterer. Ed*

## Alan Williams

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Article in *The Pewterer*, on St Dionys Backchurch, volume 3.4: <https://sites.google.com/a/thepewterer.org.uk/thepewterer/home/the-pewterer-volume-3-4-1>

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