

THE ROAD TO THE COURT OF ORPHANS – and where it led me.

From a talk by Alan Collins to the UK Pewter Society in Buckingham May 2009.

The Court of Orphans dealt with the security of those of young age orphaned, and the estates of their late parents likely left for their benefit. Apparently 51 pewterers of London died between 1662 and 1750 leaving children without parent. Other pewterers were likely the assessors of their property and perhaps guardians.

The wills of those pewterers offer good clues as to how business was conducted and what the possessions and trade accounts by way of debtors and stocks revealed as to the way of life of pewterers at that time.

Alan is clearly deeply interested in Cornish Pewter and the Pewterers of Cornwall. His researches have especially led him into a real interest into the area around St Columb Major in Southampton, the Trevelyan family - with estates in Cornwall Somerset and Yorkshire - and to the joys and surprises found in Lays Auction Room in Penzance.

Alan told us that St Columb, was – *a place more wasted than any you might like to see* – whilst sparing the detail that implies.

His research has led him to trails through salerooms and down many blind alleys but in a special moment for him and now for others of similar interest he discovered the database and web site for Access to Archive (www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/AZA) which gave him 3500 references to pewter and pewterworkers in Cornwall. To research by using the web – he showed us how to use the words Pewterer and County and gave the example of where our meeting was held – Buckinghamshire.

He cheered the audience by mentioning that this web site access was usually FREE. In researching Buckinghamshire he found pewtering families of – Quicks, Surges, Jordan, Frethren and Hawkins from 1605 to 1754 amongst others.

Alan mentioned that using Pewterer and Pewter on the web brought up a somewhat complicated recipe using decapitated moles and pewter plates to provide a cure for something that this writer had difficulty understanding - but that clearly was understood by several present.

A reference to the Goldsithrey Fair in 1609 1637 (near Perranuthnoe Cornwall) - revealed that where records are still available then the Pewterers who showed at this fair - 3 in 1609 and 5 in 1637 - might thus be traced to give an indication of Pewter work within the area.

Alan mentioned that aging still has its compensations whereby (as he described it) - EUREKA moments in occur in research. One such Eureka Moment he described whereby he realised that a Thomas Carter of St Columb Southampton led him to Ann Carter his widow who was, with little doubt, the renowned maker of Guernsey pewterer of that name.

The 'Rolls' that he came across (literally tight and hence well preserved rolls of written on parchment/paper) detailing the estates of the parent of the orphans; led him on to sales to other pewterers which can then be plotted on a map (references to the M4 corridor rather captured it for the writer) and to Molds shared amongst pewterers - wherein were clearly listed shares and the financial values, at that time, in groups of molds loaned out to other pewterers.

Alan concluded by telling that the real gripping moments were not when the researcher said to himself

‘EUREKA’

But when the researcher said to himself (in the words of Isaac Asimov of 1920 to 1992) –

‘BUT THAT’S FUNNY?....’

