

# Tips for photographing marks on pewter

We'll assume you've got an ordinary digital camera and no special equipment. The two main issues are getting the lighting right and getting a clear image.

## Lighting

The angle at which a mark is illuminated can make a big difference, so you need to be able to alter the position of the light source relative to the mark to find the angle that best throws the details into sharp relief. It's much better to adjust the lighting angle than the camera angle, because if you don't keep the camera square on to the mark you will get a distorted image. You also need a good bright light, because the automatic white balance and the automatic exposure control on most cameras work less reliably on close-ups unless the lighting level is good. A cheap anglepoise®-style desk lamp with an 11W fluorescent tube. It has a so-called G23 fitting and is technically known as a PLS compact tube - a 9" fluorescent tube is ideal. (Full Spectrum Energy Saver 20W BC – was the bayonet fitting recommended by lightbulbs-direct). Because the light is coming from a long strip, not a single point, you get more-even illumination and less risk of shadow from the camera. It will even illuminate the mark in the base of a mug pretty well.

If you use a lamp with a conventional bulb, you'll have problems with uneven illumination and shadows. If you take the picture outdoors, you will again have shadow problems, and it's much more difficult to alter the illumination angle as you can't move the sun! True, you can alter the angle of the piece of pewter, but you have to prop it up on something and you then find you are photographing in an awkward position.

## Image clarity

The two commonest faults are poor focus and camera shake. It's important to check your camera's minimum focussing distance (in macro mode if you've got one) and do not go closer than this. If you do, you'll have a blurred image and no amount of image processing afterwards can rectify that. If the image seems too small, don't worry. Cameras usually have a much higher resolution than you need for most purposes, so you can crop the image quite drastically afterwards and still end up with an acceptable result.

For a close ups, the camera needs to be held very steadily, and that's not easy. Invest in one of those cheap mini-tripods and you'll find that even if you only rest one foot of the tripod on the piece of pewter, that's enough to steady the camera. Make sure your tripod had a soft rubber or plastic foot so it doesn't scratch the pewter.

## To photograph pewter wares

The only effective solution is to buy a light tent. They're not too expensive, but it is a bit of a nuisance to put them up each time. If you don't want to buy a light tent, then you're battling with reflection and glare problems all the time. However, the very least you can do is drape a sheet or tablecloth behind the pewter so you are not photographing it against a cluttered background. Unless the pewter is very brightly polished, a white background works best.