

## **Pewterers and pewter supply in mid Wales and the Marches.**

**By Kathryn Wilson**

Pewter filled the dressers of the farms and houses of eighteenth century mid Wales and was used in the public houses of the region into the early twentieth century. Its origins were more varied than the pewter of south and west Wales discussed in earlier newsletters which was almost entirely transported by sea from the West Country. Bristol pewterers also supplied this area but other pewtering centres in the West Midlands found plenty of customers in mid Wales leading to a greater variety of pewterer's wares found here.

The practice of displaying sadware with the backs polished and displayed outwards still occurred in mid Wales but was less established than in the south and west of the principality. This has resulted in more marks being available for study and shows the great number of makers and pewtering centres selling their wares over the border.

In the seventeenth century there were makers of pewter in Worcester and Shrewsbury who would have supplied the Marches but there were also links with London. Apprentices were sent from mid Wales to London, although having learned their trade they remained in the capital. Howell Gwilt left Montgomeryshire in 1690 and by the early years of the eighteenth century was a successful pewterer in his own right setting up his own shop in London in 1704.

In the same period a Brecon family travelled to Bristol to become pewterers. The Berrows were pewterers in the city from the 1660s to around 1740 but retained strong links with Brecon and would certainly have supplied pewter to the town. Matthew Berrow the first of the family to become a pewterer appears in the rent roll of burghal tenants in Brecon and held several tenements in the centre of the town. The inventory of John Berrow, his son, pewterer and brazier who died in 1706, and who was a churchwarden of St. John the Evangelist, Brecon is in the records of the Brecon Archdeaconal Court. It values his goods at the significant sum of £56 10s. It records he had pewter to the value of £10 in his shop along with brass wares to the same value, moulds for casting metalware and tools. It includes other items suggesting he also sold candles and general merchandise. As general braziers and pewterers they would not have produced pewter on the same scale as those who set up business purely for pewter production. Sadly none of the wares of this family seem to have survived and we do not have a record of their touch mark.

A more prolific pewterer was William Watkins who went left Brecon for Bristol. He was bound as apprentice for seven years ending in 1728. He learned his trade under a woman pewterer, Honor Batcheler, and in turn had the very successful Allen Bright as one of his apprentices. His pewtering business was located on Bristol Bridge until his death in 1741.



Marks of William Watkins and extract from the will of William Watkins

In the Name of God Amen  
the one and twentieth day of April in the year of our Lord  
Christ one thousand seven hundred thirty and three  
William Watkins of the parish of Saint Nicholas within the  
City of Bristol for ever being in a competent state of health  
and of sound mind memory and understanding (for which I  
praise God) do make and Ordaine this my last will and  
Testament in manner and forme following hereby revoking  
disannulling and making void all and every former or other  
will and wills by me at any time or times here before made and  
declare this only to be taken as and for my last will and Testament  
First I give devise and bequeath unto my dear and well beloved wife  
Mary Watkins all and singular the use Issues and profits of all  
my

Watkins' will leaves his estate to his wife Mary and daughters Mary and Martha, with an interesting group of Welsh and English executors:

William Saunders Esquire, Captain Edmund Saunders of the parish of Saint Mary Redcliffe in the City of Bristol Merchant, William Williams of Carleon Gentleman, Thomas Madocks of Bristol Gentleman and my kinsman William Watkins of Swanzdy to be overseers of my said Wife and Children and also of this will and to be Tutors and Guardians of my said Children during their minority.

Looking back from a modern perspective it seems extraordinary that Watkins selects as one of those to supervise the development of his daughters Captain Edmund Saunders, a privateer and Bristol's most active slave captain. Captain Saunders transported around ten thousand enslaved Africans to Jamaica and America in appalling conditions bringing back rum and sugar on the return trip. However, Saunders was, at the time of the writing of the will, a wealthy man, well connected to Bristol merchants and a churchwarden of St Mary's Redcliffe. He may even have carried Watkin's pewter for sale to the colonies. Fate determined it was after all a poor choice of guardian; a year before Watkins died Saunders was declared bankrupt.

Another Brecon man who was apprenticed as a pewterer in Bristol was Thomas Vaughan. He was free in 1705 but does not appear to have become a pewterer in his own right. He may have continued as a journeyman but The Brecon parish registers of 1739 record a Thomas Vaughan, ironmonger, which may be the same man retailing metalwares, probably including pewter made elsewhere.

Several mid Wales braziers are recorded from the early seventeenth to late eighteenth centuries at Welshpool, Abergavenny and Brecon. Braziers often sold pewter made by others in addition to their own brasswares. Their suppliers would have been Midlands makers, and those whose wares turn up in that area include the Greenbanks of Worcester, an unknown pewterer of Shrewsbury whose triple leopard head touch mark is found on much Marcher pewter and the Duncumbs of Bewdley.

The Duncumbs brought mass production to pewtering and their business on the banks of the Severn was a very large concern operating from 1718 to 1767. John Duncumb and his son Synt supplied retailers in the border areas and their plates and dishes are still found there. Their successors, John Ingram and Charles Hunt, supplied around seven hundred customers from 1769 to 1790 covering most of England and Wales as far West as Haverfordwest. They even sold pewter to Bristol pewterers who were starting to struggle by the end of the eighteenth century.

As pewter sadware went out of fashion and mugs and measures became the mainstay of pewterers the few remaining Bristol pewterers, predominantly Preston Edgar & Son, supplied the taverns of Mid Wales but increasingly Bewdley and then Birmingham based manufacturers supplied the trade. The partnership of Villers and Wilkes and sold mugs and measures to mid Wales taverns in the early nineteenth century, followed in the mid nineteenth century by the highly productive Birmingham firms of James Yates and Joseph Morgan.



The mid Wales area, though not responsible for producing any pewter of its own did produce pewterers who worked elsewhere. It was also a good market for pewter plates, dishes, mugs and measures from a great number of makers and areas. This gives pewter found in the area a wonderful variety of forms, origins, makers and dates exceptional in a small regional area. There is plenty of scope for the collector to build a very interesting display of pewter with links to mid Wales and the Marches.



Mid nineteenth century glass  
bottomed pint mug without makers  
mark inscribed for the King's Arms  
Brecon.

Sources:

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