

WOMEN AND PEWTER

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Until recently it was assumed that pewter was a man's world. Recent research by British, German, and American writers has found that a small number of women in Western Europe either managed pewter workshops, made pewter for sale, or collected pewter. Regarding the latter, four women contributed pewter to the 1904 and 1908 London pewter exhibitions.

Rosemary Weinstein of the London City Museum deserves much of the credit for establishing the contribution of women to the history of European pewter. She has found four eleven women either managing pewter workshops or making pewter in the years between 1670 and 1760, and many more in the nineteenth century, although only two are known to have received training as apprentices, the first stage to becoming a master. It appears that the majority of English women connected to pewter were widows, who inherited functioning workshops from their husbands. Some took over their husband's pewter mark while others registered their new mark. It is unclear how many of them were physically involved in the production of pewter for sale. Two, Ann Carter of Southampton and Susannah Cocks of London directed major enterprises with a significant market share. In the case of the latter, her husband died just as his training was completed and a shop established. His wife registered her mark, he never had one.



Turning to Germany, scholars have recently discovered Anna Barbara Habfast of Bollingen in the state of Wuerttemberg. Her brother died at thirty three years of age and left his pewter business to his 22 year old sister. Anna immediately had her own mark made, rather than use her brother's and managed it for the next eight years. There is no evidence of a male working for her until 1738, eight years later, when she married him. He was fifteen when Anna took over the business. German guilds were very powerful at the time and would not have allowed a woman pewterer to be trained. Anna may have learned to make pewter from her brother and evidently was a natural. She redesigned German stave tankards to a slimmer and more elegant form. Of the eight that survive from Bollingen, five have her mark, two are unmarked, and one has the mark of her husband. One of the unmarked tankards has an engraving of a woman on the body of the

piece. What is clear about Germany and Britain is that women could inherit land and businesses when their spouses died. This may have been a back way into the business, but it did offer at least one path that some women found desirable.

