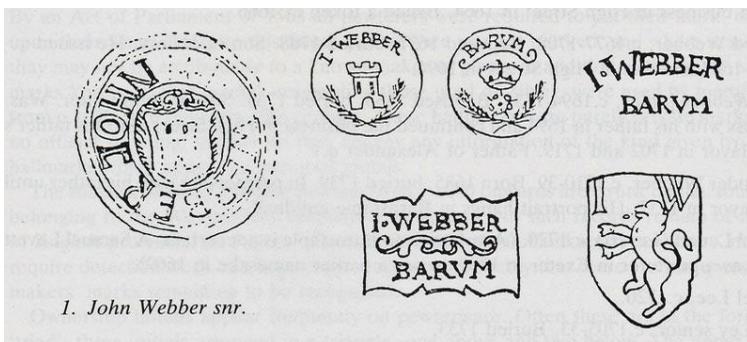


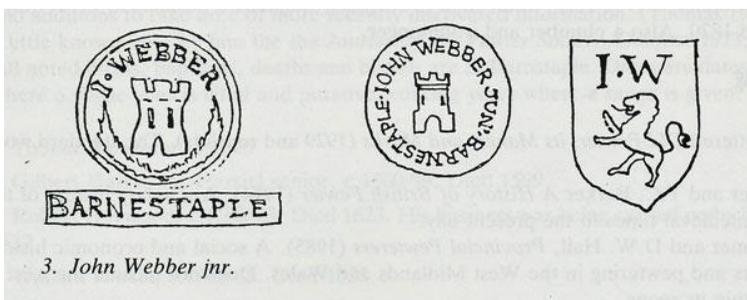
Four Generations of Webber pewterers in Barnstaple

Jeffrey Webber c1600 – 1677 (77)
m **Rebecca Mocke** 1599 – 1679 (80)

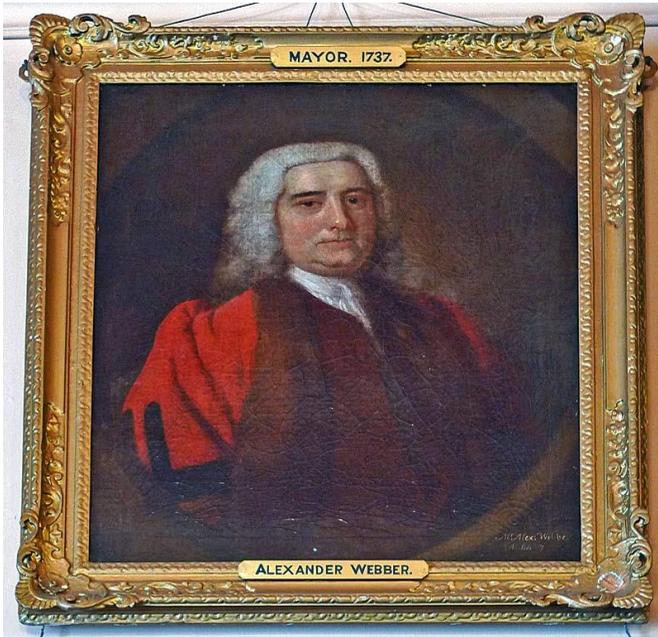
John Webber Snr 1629 – 1703 (74)
m **Dorothy Hawking** 1630 – 1663; m2 **Mary Nicholes** 1642 – 1697 (55)
worked with brother **Richard Webber** 1637 – 1708 (71)



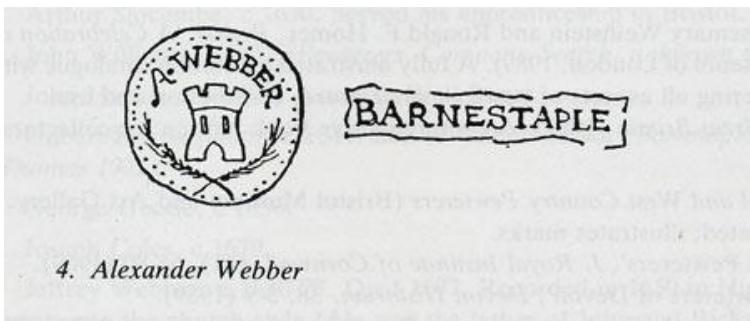
John Webber Jnr 1653 – 1735 (82)
m **Mary Fleming** 1657 – 1687 (30); m2
Elizabeth Schiff ? - 1706
Mayor of Barnstaple 1702 & 1719



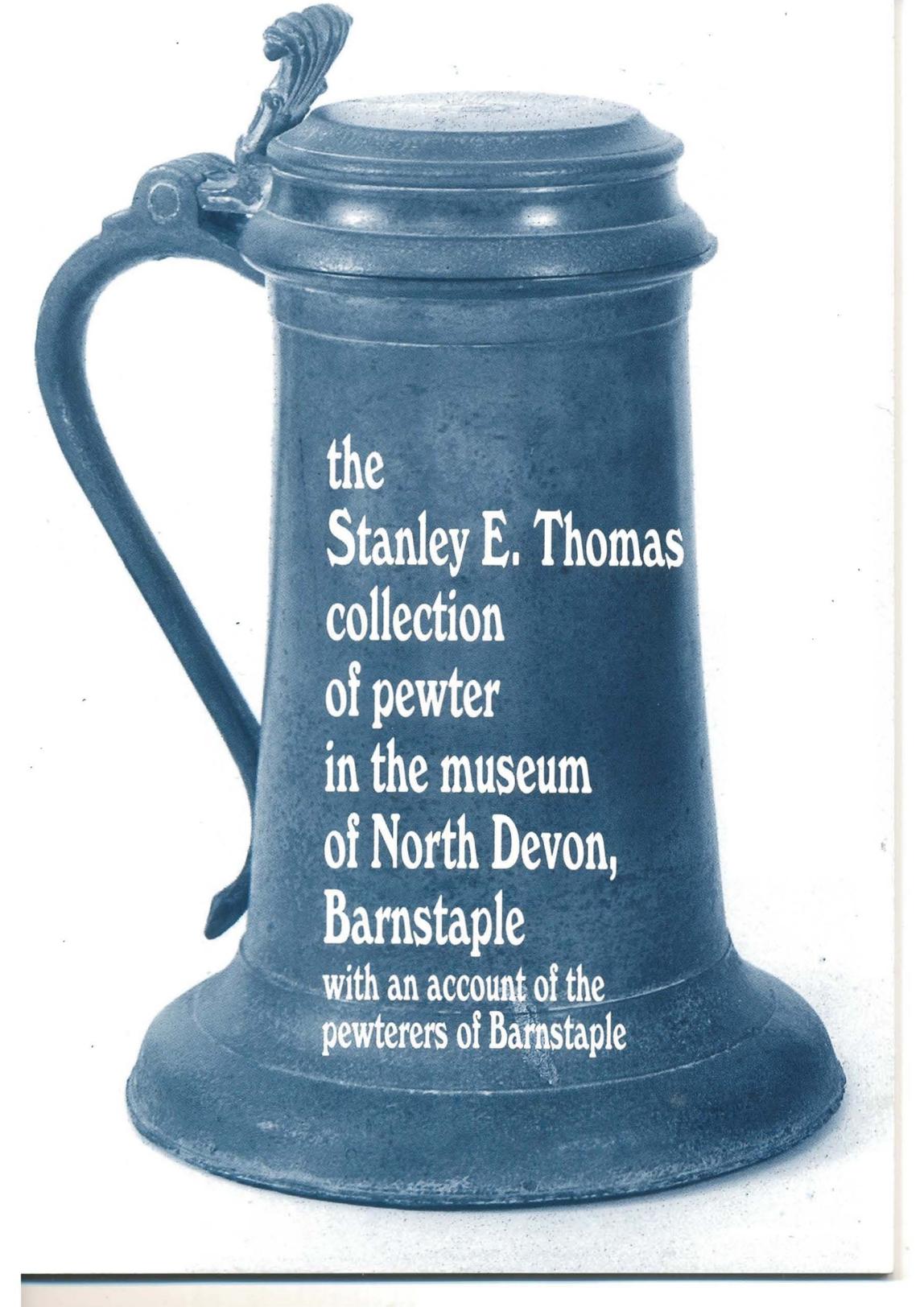
Alexander Webber 1685 – 1739 (54)
m **Elizabeth Rogers** 1703 -1737 (34)
Mayor of Barnstaple 1737
Adrian's 6xGrt Grandparents



Portrait by Hudson in Barnstaple Guildhall



Source – Museum of North Devon (Barnstaple) booklet
(see following pages for detail)



the
Stanley E. Thomas
collection
of pewter
in the museum
of North Devon,
Barnstaple
with an account of the
pewterers of Barnstaple

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*with an account of the
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written and compiled by Ronald F. Homer F.S.A.

photographs by Peter Hooper C.Eng. M.I.E.E.

Design and production by Arthur Muir

The Pewter Society 1993

INTRODUCTION

Pewter - the poor man's silver

Tin from the mines of Devon and Cornwall provided the essential raw material for the countless pewterers who plied their craft throughout Britain for some 500 years. Alloyed with a little copper, or later with antimony, it formed a hard pewter with a silvery lustre. This was used for high quality wares. For cheaper wares, and particularly for pots and measures destined for tavern use, the tin was alloyed with lead to give a softer, duller metal. The low-melting alloy was cast in massive bronze moulds and the rough castings were finished by turning on a lathe. The separate parts which made up the piece were assembled by soldering and the finished article was finally polished to resemble silver. The metal might additionally be hardened and compacted by hammering. This traditional method of making pewterware remained essentially unaltered over the centuries and is still practised today by a few specialised firms who make quality modern pewter.

The Romans made pewterware in the west country in the 3rd and 4th centuries AD, but with their departure the art of pewtering was lost for many centuries, Pewter reappeared as a metal used for making chalices and other ecclesiastical vessels at the end of the Anglo-Saxon period. By the early 14th century pewtering had established itself as an organised craft which supplied a growing domestic market with a range of tableware and household utensils. The price of pewter was then about one hundredth of that of silver. Many of those who previously had perforce to manage with treen, horn and coarse earthenware, could for the first time afford the luxury of metalware at their tables.

By the seventeenth century every household save the very poorest possessed a range of pewter plates and dishes, together with spoons, drinking vessels, measures, candlesticks, flagons, chamber pots and a host of other everyday domestic items. Every taven and ale-house had its complement of pewter measures and beer mugs. It is estimated that towards the end of the 17th century the amount of pewter in general use throughout England averaged some 12 pounds weight for every man, woman and child in the country. In 1583 John Davy, a Barnstaple goldsmith, possessed at his death 4 platters, 3 poddingers (porringers), 4 potage dishes, 2 saucers, a quart cup, a cruet and a salt cellar of pewter valued together at 10s - 2d (51p).

Of this enormous output of pewterware only a tiny fraction survives today. The reasons for this are twofold. During the period in which it was in general use old pewter was traded-in for remelting in part exchange for new; and unlike silver it had no significant intrinsic worth. Once it passed finally from fashion it had no prestige value for the owner and was consigned to the melting pot as scrap metal, to be used for making solder or tinning iron.

For some three centuries pewterers were to be found working in every market town throughout the land. One of the country's most widespread minor industries flourished with little competition until cheap decorated pottery, better quality glassware, more plentiful brass and the increasing use of tinplate sent it into decline during the 18th century.

The pewterers of Barnstaple and the West Country

In the west country the earliest pewterer of whom record survives was working in Lostwithiel in 1327. Barnstaple can boast the earliest so far discovered Devon pewterer; the town's records name Thomas Pewterer in 1343. Barnstaple was a market town in Saxon times and a flourishing sea port by the 12th century. Far from other urban centres, it had to develop its own industries to supply the townfolk, and the rural population of a large hinterland, with the necessities of life. With ready access to coastal shipping for the

transport of both tin and finished pewterware, Barnstaple soon became an important centre of pewtering.

In the south of the county, at that time remote and difficult of access from the north, there were pewterers at work in Exeter by 1370. Very likely there were medieval pewterers in Totnes also, though the earliest mention of one in that ancient town dates from 1509. With the passage of time the increasing demand for pewter among a growing and more prosperous populace led to pewterers establishing themselves in most of the county's market towns. By the 17th century they were to be found additionally in Ashburton, Bideford, Honiton, Plymouth, Tavistock, Tiverton and Torrington. The Dolbear family of pewterers of Ashburton supplied much pewter to the Edgecombe family at Cotehele House and Mount Edgecombe, where some of it remained until it was dispersed in the 1950s.

In Somerset, Taunton, Wells and Wookey had pewterers in the 15th century. Pewterers worked in Bristol from at least as early as 1345, and were numerous enough by 1456 to justify the formation of a pewterers' guild in the city in that year. To the west, in Cornwall, the craft had established itself before 1400 in Launceston, Restormel and Truro. In these counties also, as in Devon, and indeed throughout the country at large, pewterers would have been found in most market towns by the 17th century.

There were naturally far more pewterers at work in the populous cities of Exeter and Bristol than in Barnstaple. However, as far as can be judged, Barnstaple was next in importance to these cities in the size of its pewter industry. The prestige and local importance of the craft in the town, and the standing of its practitioners, was perhaps higher than anywhere else in the west country. As evidence of this, in the century between 1702 and 1801, no fewer than five of the town's mayors were drawn from the ranks of its pewterers. The most prominent pewtering family were the Webbers, five members of which carried on the craft from c.1630 – 1739. Three members of the Harris family also practised the craft from c.1560 until the middle of the 17th century.

During the 17th and 18th centuries the Barnstaple Port Books reveal sizeable exports of pewter to the North American colonies. As early as 1672 the 'Maryland Merchant' of Northam carried two cargoes of pewter to Maryland and in the same year two consignments left for Virginia in the 'Virginia Merchant'. In 1740 over two tons of pewter left Barnstaple for North America. There was export trade also to Ireland, with records of cargoes for Waterford, Cork and Dublin. Trade with Europe is evidenced by the export of 15 hundredweights to San Sebastian in 1672.

The evidence for a trade guild in Barnstaple is scanty. It appears that the town's silversmiths were organised in a guild and, by analogy with other comparable boroughs where records have survived, it is likely that the same guild also embraced the pewterers and other metalworkers in the town. Several Barnstaple pewterers also worked in brass and lead and described themselves indifferently as pewterers, braziers or plumbers.

The Worshipful Company of Pewterers of London, under their royal charter of 1473-4, were given a right to control the standards of metal and workmanship throughout England and Wales. For over 250 years the Company organised search parties throughout the land, visiting pewterers' workshops and seizing substandard ware. By good fortune the account survives of a search made in Devon in 1637. Four pewterers' shops were visited in Barnstaple and among the goods seized from John Williams, Jeffery Webber, Widow Howard and John Harris were chamber pots, spoons, wine measures, porringers, saucers, children's cups and a still-head. The luckless pewterers were fined a total of £3 – 18s (£3.90), equivalent to perhaps £500-1000 in present day money, and the faulty wares were broken and confiscated.

Marks

By an Act of Parliament of 1503 all pewterers were required to put their mark, or 'touch', upon their wares. Despite this, much pewterware was not marked, and where marks appear they may not be attributable to a known maker or place. In addition to the touch, subsidiary marks known as 'hallmarks', resembling those used on silver, were used by many makers from c.1630 until the early 19th century. These hallmarks were purely private marks and had no official standing; neither do they convey any information of the kind given by the hallmarks which appear on precious metals.

The touches of many London pewters from c.1640 onwards are struck on the 'touch plates' belonging to the Worshipful Company of Pewterers. No such records remain of the marks of English provincial pewterers. Thus the identification of unknown pewterers' marks may require detective work of a high order. It is most probably that there are more west country makers' marks remaining to be recognised.

Ownership initials appear frequently on pewterware. Often these are in the form of a 'triad'; three initials arranged in a triangle, one above and two below. The upper initial is that of the surname of a man and wife. The lower left-hand initial is that of the husband's first name and the lower right-hand initial that of the first name of the wife. Thus J^SM could stand for John and Mary Smith.

Two pairs of initials may indicate that the item was a church piece, the initials being those of church-wardens. Alternatively they could indicate two different ownerships, or be the initials of a betrothed couple.

BARNSTAPLE'S PEWTERERS

This chronological list is a condensed version of that appearing in Stanley Thomas' 'The Barnstaple Pewterers' (*Trans. Devonshire Assn.*, 103, 85-102 (1971)) with some revisions and additions to take note of more recently discovered information. (Thomas 1973 refers to a little known note by him the *Journal of the Pewter Society*, October 1973, pp.16-17. All noted births, baptisms, deaths and burials are at Barnstaple. Dates are dates of mention where a single year is cited and putative working years where a range is given.

Thomas Pewterer, c.1343

Gilbert Harrys (or Harris) senior, c.1560-99. Died 1599

Robert Heywood, c.1600-23. Died 1623. His business was being carried on by his widow in 1637.

William Harris, c.1608-25. Died 1625.

Arthur Slocumbe, c.1630. Served his apprenticeship in Bristol.

John Williams, c.1637 (*Pewterers' Company Search, unknown to Thomas*)

John Harris, c.1637-51. Lived in Well Street.

Gilbert Harris junior, c.1641. Son of Gilbert senior (*Barnstaple Borough Record 4112, Thomas 1973*)

George Goode, c.1650.

Joseph Coles, c.1679.

Jeffrey Webber, c.1630-77. Died 1677. Recorded in 1650 in High Street in a tenement 'next unto the church stile.' He was the father of John and Richard Webber, *q.v.*

John Webber senior, c.1660-1700. Baptised 1629, buried 1703. Son of Jeffrey with whom he was in business in High Street in 1664. Issued a token in 1666.

Richard Webber, c.1677-1708. Baptised 1637, buried 1708. Son of Jeffery. He issued a token in 1667 and was in High Street in 1694.

John Webber junior, c.1694-1735. Baptised 1653, buried 1735. Son of John senior. Was in business with his father in 1694 and continued the business in High Street after his father's death. Mayor in 1702 and 1719. Father of Alexander *q.v*

Alexander Webber, c.1710-39. Born 1685, buried 1739. In partnership with his father until 1735. Mayor in 1737. His portrait hangs in Barnstaple guildhall.

Samuel Leuett (Levett), c.1720. (Attribution to Barnstaple is not certain. A Samuel Levett was free as a pewterer in Exeter in 1708 as was a earlier namesake in 1669).

Samuel Lee, c.1720.

John Ley senior, c.1705-33. Buried 1733.

John Ley junior, c.1747. Son of John senior. (*Barnstaple Borough Record 2703, Thomas 1973*)

Marshall Swayne, c.1730-60. Born 1707, buried 1760. Mayor in 1746. His portrait hangs in Barnstaple guildhall.

John Swayne, c.1763. Son of Marshall Swayne (*Barnstaple Borough Record 2441, Thomas 1973*)

Nicholas Shephard, c.1760-92. Baptised 1730. Mayor in 1773.

Christopher Pawle, c.1765-86. Died 1786. Also a brazier and ironmonger. (Members of the Pawle (Powle, Paul etc.) family are found as pewterers in Exeter throughout the 17th century).

Thomas Copner, c.1792-1820. Succeeded to Nicholas Shephard's business in 1792. Mayor in 1801 and 1820. Also a plumber and ironmonger.

Further reading

General.

H.H. Cotterell *Old Pewter, its Makers and Marks* (1929 and reprints). The standard work on marks.

J. Hatcher and T.C. Barker *A History of British Pewter* (1974). A scholarly history of the craft from medieval times to the present day.

R.F. Homer and D.W. Hall, *Provincial Pewterers* (1985). A social and economic history of pewterers and pewtering in the West Midlands and Wales. Does not include the west country within its scope.

Peter G. Hornsby, Rosemary Weinstein and Ronald F. Homer, *Pewter, A Celebration of the Craft, 1200-1700* (Museum of London, 1989). A fully illustrated exhibition catalogue with introductory articles covering all aspects of pewter manufacture, distribution and use.

C.A. Peal *Pewter of Great Britain* (1983). A comprehensive book written for collectors.

West Country.

H.H. Cotterell, *Bristol and West Country Pewterers* (Bristol Museum and Art Gallery, 1918). Now somewhat dated; illustrates marks.

H.L. Douch, 'Cornish Pewterers', *J. Royal Institute of Cornwall*, 6(1), 65-80 (1969).

R.F. Homer, 'The Pewterers of Devon', *Devon Historian*, 38, 3-9 (1989).

S.E. Thomas, 'The Barnstaple Pewterers', *Trans. Devonshire Assn.*, 103, 85-102 (1971).

Marks of the Barnstaple pewterers



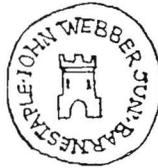
I. WEBBER
BARVM



1. John Webber snr.



2. Suggested mark of Richard Webber (Now thought to be the mark of Roger Willoughby of London. See C.A. Peal, More Pewter Marks, No.5200)



BARNSTAPLE

3. John Webber jnr.

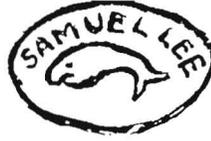


BARNSTAPLE

4. Alexander Webber



5. Samuel Levett



6. Samuel Lee



7. Marshall Swayne



8. Nicholas Shephard

Barnstaple's pewterer Mayors

John Webber jnr.	-----	1702, 1719
Alexander Webber	-----	1737
Marshall Swayne	-----	1746
Nicholas Shephard	-----	1773
Thomas Copner	-----	1801, 1813