GAP

Garrick's garnish takes a bow

By Ann Donnelly, Museums Curator

The augmented Pewter Museum has now re-opened at Harvard House in High Street, Stratford-upon-Avon. Admission will be free and the house is open between Tuesdays and Sundays (10.30am to 4.30pm) until 28 October.

Pictures by Malcolm Davies.

David Moulson, pewter conservator and collector, first suggested to me the exciting prospect of the Trust acquiring a nationally important collection of pewter one quiet afternoon in 1996. Coincidentally an ideal venue was to hand. For some time the Trust had been considering ways of presenting the fine Elizabethan town house in the High Street, called 'Harvard House', in a way that would both complement and contrast with the displays in the five Shakespeare Houses. The Harvard House Memorial Trust had administered the house since 1909, but the Shakespeare Birthplace Trust had recently taken on its repair and custodianship. The idea of displaying a remarkable collection of pewter, with its considerable number of rare, sixteenth- and seventeenth-century pieces in the property, immediately appealed to both the Trust's Director, Roger Pringle, and myself.

A magnificent spire flagon and a candlestick with gadrooned base from the newly-installed section of the Pewter Museum at Harvard House, Stratford-upon-Avon. The ribbon is based on a Coventry silk sash made for the actor David Garrick. Above right: a wavy-edged charger also once owned by David Garrick.

In a matter of weeks and following this initial approach and the approval of the Trustees, we rapidly assembled a draft proposal for the display of the collection. Roger Pringle, David Moulson and I went to Edinburgh to meet with the pewter collector, Alex Neish, to discuss our plans. Other museums, including a significant one in the USA, were actively bidding to acquire the collection, but our plans for a pewter museum at Harvard House met with Mr Neish's approval. The first stage, to present a 'taster' exhibition on the ground floor, was completed in a matter of months, made possible thanks to the donor's generous provision of funding for display cases.

Five years later, with the collection records and photographs entered into the museum's departmental catalogue and subsequent additions made to the displays, the final phase of the Museum of British Pewter at Harvard House is being completed.

Considerable building and electrical work preceded the installation of this final stage in the re-display of the house. An appraisal of the building by the Trust's architect and structural engineer led to the creation of a tubular steel truss on the top floor to support the roof, replacing the cumbersome and obtrusive structure inserted in the 1950s.

The major part of this project has been undertaken by the Shakespeare Birthplace Trust's maintenance department and museum craftsman during the period between September 2000 and spring 2001.

It was one of the conditions of Alex Neish's gift that the greater part of his collection should be displayed. An 'open storage' approach to the showcase design has made this possible. While new thematic displays such as 'Pewter and Alcohol', 'Pilgrim Souvenirs', 'David Garrick's Garnish' and Eighteenth-century Tableware' and 'Medical Pewter' occupy the main display area of the new show cases, specially designed drawers underneath accommodate many items from the reserve collection.

Volunteers required

The Shakespeare Birthplace Trust is recruiting volunteers to support the small team of professional guides at Harvard House. If you would like to help and can offer a day or half day on a fairly regular basis we would love to hear from you now. The summer season runs until 31 October

Please contact: David Foster, Personnel Officer on 01789 201832 or Val Ivers on 01789 201833.

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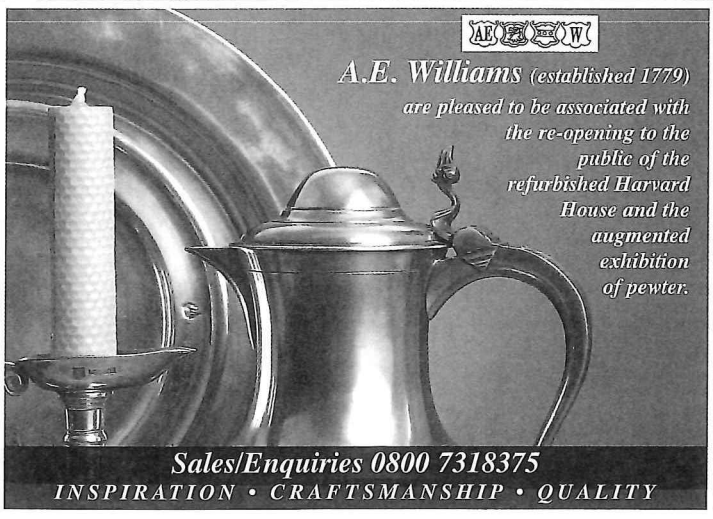

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for the world's Shakespeare heritage

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Wednesday, 18 July 2001

Dear Dr Van Wijk

I am pleased to announce that the newly presented Harvard House and the Museum of British Pewter were opened to the public at the end of June, and will be formally opened on 3 August. None of this would have been possible without Alex Neish's gift to the Trust of his extraordinary collection of pewter, or your generous contribution to the venture.

Three main themes are illustrated: the history of British pewter; the life of John Harvard (video presentation), and the history of Harvard House (computer and graphic display.)

Despite the modest proportions of the building, ingenious displays provide a balanced presentation with a wealth of things for the visitor to enjoy. *Pewter Power*, encourages young visitors to discover pewter by touching and looking at selected objects in specially designed handling domes. Two exciting new computer games allow children and adults alike to 'make a tankard' with their own touchmark design, and to find hidden pewter objects in a 'virtual attic room'.

Showcases on the upper floors exhibit a stunning collection of eighteenth–century tableware, a backlit display of pilgrim badges and porringers, and a variety of other pieces illustrating the versatility of pewter, from a medical syringe to Friendly Society maces. One of the main aims is to allow access to as much of the Neish collection as possible. Drawers below several of the showcases allow the visitor to inspect additional pieces from the collection.

I am sending you a copy of the second issue of our new magazine, as I think you will be interested in the pewter article. At the same time, I am sending you a Friends' membership leaflet, together with a Freepost envelope, in the hope that you will consider joining. Not only will your membership help the Trust's work in caring for the Shakespeare houses and Harvard House, but it will also go towards securing the future of the newly established Museum of Pewter.

Yours sincerely,

Roger Pringle
Director

Chairman Professor Stanley Wells *Director* Roger Pringle, MA, FRSA

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