



Gibson Pewter

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S H O P N E W S

2003



A MESSAGE FROM JON GIBSON

Dear Friends and fellow pewter enthusiasts, Greetings from Hillsborough Center and the Gibson Pewtershop. 2003 is certainly going to be an exciting year. First and foremost, my wife, Camille and I welcomed our second child, Lily into the world February 1, 2003. She is healthy and beautiful and has her mother's long, artistic fingers and her father's broad grin(sans teeth)! Lily has brought joy to our lives during this past, long winter. Emily, now 4, is thrilled to have a little sister.

WHAT'S NEW IN PEWTER

My friend and fellow craftsman, William Thomas, master cabinetmaker, from Rindge, N.H., found the time in his busy schedule this past winter to machine and turn a segmented "chuck" for the 2 quart water pitcher shown in this newsletter. The chuck is the form around which the pewter disc is shaped. The need for a segmented/collapseable chuck relates to the smaller diameter of the "neck" of the pitcher



compared to the larger midsection. The chuck is as wonderful as the pitcher itself. Thanks Bill!



I've added two new porringers to the product line as well. The small heart handle porringer, bowl dia. 3 in., is a wonderful baby gift item. The large "Old English" handle porringer, bowl dia. 5 1/2 in., is a beautiful "keyhole" type handle, used by New York City pewterer William Bradford, Jr. circa 1719 - 1758. Many thanks to friend and antique pewter dealer, Wayne Hilt for supplying superb handle models for my mold making. Last but not least, thanks to Ted Harris for the photographs in this newsletter and those in the Whats New section of the website.



Finally, I look forward to seeing, or hearing from all of you again this year. Peace and good health to all, Jon Gibson

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COMING EVENTS

The pewtershop will be featured on ABC's Boston show, **Chronicle** in late May, early June. The crew was up filming in April. Chronicle airs after the evening news at 7:30 pm (seen on channel 5 in New England).

We'll be hosting the Northeast Regional Group of the **Pewter Collectors Club of America** Saturday, June 7th in an all day event. We hosted the Club 25 years ago when I was a junior in high school!

I'll be demonstrating pewter casting at the **70th annual Sunapee Craftsmens Fair** August 2-3 (opening weekend only) and at the Newport R.I. Historical Societies 3rd Annual Artisans & Antiques Fair in the Fall (date pending).

artisans' showcase

By Helen Hill

Set high on a hilltop about three miles from the 19th century mill town of Hillsborough, New Hampshire is the historic district known as Hillsborough Center. Originally settled in 1769, there are 13 historic dwellings that remain. Gibson Pewter occupies a brick Georgian structure that is adjacent to an intact oneroom schoolhouse. Behind the house is where Jonathan Gibson, second-generation pewterer, carries on his craft in the same 200 year old barn where he apprenticed as a young boy. The view here is spectacular, with a pasture and pond at the south end and a view of Temple Mountain and Mount Monadnock just behind.

His father, Raymond Gibson, founded Gibson Pewter in 1966, running it as a seasonal family business for the next 20 years. Gibson, a retired Congregational minister, has always been involved in the craft world, taking up weaving, woodworking, and finally metal spinning in the 1960s. He apprenticed with Arthur Barnes of Norwich, Connecticut and was enthralled with the pewter craft. Now 78, he is fully retired but still finds time to work in the shop.

Historically, apprenticeships lasted for seven years before leading to journeyman status. There was no exception made for Jonathan Gibson; he learned his craft from his father just as any apprentice would. Today he produces over 100 products in both traditional and contemporary designs.

Each lead-free piece of pewter is made by Jonathan with precision and care, whether cast, hammered, or spun.

Pewter is an alloy comprised of mostly tin, with small amounts of copper and antimony to harden and strengthen the mix. It is the fourth most valuable metal in general use after platinum, gold, and silver. Jonathan reproduces period forms, and he is particularly proud of the drum-shaped teapot with beaded edge and finial that follows the lines of one introduced by William Will (1764-1798). "He was the Paul Revere of American pewter," noted Gibson. "He was a master, and his work is very rare and desirable." Collectors prize Will's work for its classic design.

Gibson Pewter produces products that often become gifts for weddings, anniversaries, and births. He is particularly proud of his father's Gibson Fruit Bowl, a contemporary design that is one of only two pieces of 20th century pewter taken into the permanent collection of the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston. The other piece of pewter in the MFA's collection, a unique Wood-grain Beaker, Jon designed with his father. The firm also makes reproductions of lidded quart tankards, candlesticks, a double-lens whale oil lamp, plates, vases, and porringers. The high end of the line is a full tea set on a tray based on William Will's design. Sets of



18th century style
Dome Lidded Tankard.



A reproduction of a
Bull's-eye Whale Oil
Lamp, also called a
Lacemaker's Lamp.



William Will Tea Service

mugs, cups, plates, and tankards are popular items. We visited Jonathan in his workshop barn on a sun filled day, and the cool crisp autumn air was intoxicating. The view from the open window of the barn was distracting and revealed a meadow with apple trees and stone walls beyond. Jonathan was making beakers. He explained that the tall 16-ounce classic colonial form was originally cast in a mold, and the base would have been made separately from the sides. He was using a more contemporary method of metal spinning. The cost of producing a chuck, the form over which the metal will be spun, is far less than the process of making a bronze mold for casting. It is also more versatile. Metal spinning came about just after 1821, at the same time that makers began to remove the lead from the alloy. He explained that these new alloys were stronger, more durable, and could be polished just like silver.

The metal had already been rolled out in sheets and cut into circles using dies and stamping machines. Jonathan took a disk and clamped it into place on the lathe using a back-up or friction block. It is important when working on a spinning lathe that the disk be perfectly centered. He expertly took the metal spinning tool of polished steel with a wooden handle and tucked it under his arm. Using his body weight to hold the tool on the tool rest, he began to shape the metal on the lathe. He actually rubbed the tool against the disc until it was forced up and next to the form, carefully drawing the metal down over it. The process of shaping the beaker took about 15 to 20 minutes and was followed by sanding the inside and out to remove rough edges, tool marks and to refine the lip. Wet/dry emery paper was the last step before final polishing. The metal lathe he used was made in 1885. Jon prefers to use mostly old tools, and watching him work is like taking a step back in time.

Gibson emphasizes that he also uses the casting process. On the previous day he spent his time casting pewter spoons from period bronze molds. He has a collection of many molds that date back to the 18th and 19th century, but he constantly works on the development of new products. He showed a prototype for a water pitcher as well as four whale oil lamps. Each

was meticulously crafted to resemble those made many years ago. In addition to designing and producing pewter, Jon offers a pewter restoration service. For more information on restoration, call (603) 464-3410 or email jc@gibsonpewter.com. Gibson Pewter also has an impressive website with illustrations of the entire line of products and directions to the workshop.

Gibson Pewter is open year round, Monday through Saturday from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. and on Sunday by chance. Visitors are welcome to watch work in progress.