

# Base Thoughts

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The Newsletter of the Antique Metalware Society  
Autumn 2015

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## AUTUMN MEETING

**FROM PIGS TO DRAGONS**  
English and Welsh Japanned Metalware - 1730-1930  
Yvonne Jones

Yvonne Jones ably demonstrated how recent research has shed new light on the early development of this trade, and how the distinction between the wares of both regions is far less clear-cut than previously believed. Drawing on eye-witness accounts and other contemporary references, the illustrated talk focused on the first fifty years of production, tracing its influences and taking in such entrepreneurs as John Baskerville and Matthew Boulton whose manufactures laid the foundations of what became an important Midlands industry for close on 200 years. Understanding was further enhanced by the later study of pieces brought to illustrate this stimulating and fact-filled talk. A full account of this talk will appear in the journal in 2016.



Tin tea caddies and snuff box with marbled grounds and Sheraton-style motifs; typical, early 19th century Bilston products. H: 9cm (larger caddy)(courtesy of Keith Pinn)

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## THE NEW AMS WEBSITE Update on progress Megan Williams

The attention of members was drawn to several exciting features which are soon to appear on the AMS website, [www.antiquemetalwaresociety.org.uk](http://www.antiquemetalwaresociety.org.uk). The first is a Forum to which members will have exclusive access, and where images can be uploaded and ideas exchanged. The second new feature is a Blog, where the Society will be highlighting topics of interest, ranging from new discoveries and new research into the history and technology of base metal artefacts, developments in the management and conservation of antique metalware, to reviews of exhibitions and publications and proposals for the further development of the Society itself. This

The Society's aim is to increase the knowledge and promote the appreciation of base metal objects of all kinds and historical periods. The term "base metal" encompasses a whole variety of non-precious metals, including copper, brass, iron, bronze, steel, nickel, zinc and lead, which have played a vital part in the development of human society since the earliest times. Unlike precious metals, these humbler materials were closely involved at every level of society and in every aspect of daily life. Surviving artefacts from different historical periods, ranging from distant antiquity to times still within living memory, are a source of informative, fascinating and often surprising insights into the everyday lives of our forebears.

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feature will be open to comment by both members and non-members alike. Both of these developments provide new opportunities for members and others to communicate their interests in early metalware.

In due course, Notes and Guidelines for submitting items for inclusion in the Society's forthcoming 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary On-line Exhibition, **Touch Base : 101 Objects from the Antique Metalware Society**, will appear as a new area of the website.

Login details, required for use of features like the Forum, will be circulated to all members in due course.

## SOME ON-LINE DATABASES FOR IRON-RELATED TOPICS

Jeremy Hodgkinson

Jeremy Hodgkinson introduced the iron industry that had once flourished in the Weald of south-east England. From the late-15th to the mid-17th century it had been responsible for the majority of iron produced in the kingdom and the furnaces and forges that had been the centre of production were briefly described. Much of what is known about this industry had been discovered by the Wealden Iron Research Group that had been founded in 1968. In recent years it had compiled a database of the sites and people of the industry – [www.wirgdata.org](http://www.wirgdata.org) – and Jeremy gave a cursory introduction to this resource, pointing out the information available on more than 1000 sites and how users might search for data about them. The sites linked to parallel databases of over 2000 people known to have managed or worked in the industry and to a comprehensive bibliography. The people database could also be searched separately and the demonstration of a

search for the individuals known to be founders had a particular resonance as it has recently been established that some iron founders working in the region also engaged in casting bronze domestic wares. In the short time available, it was only possible to skate across the surface of what would repay many hours of investigation.

## Firebacks

[Search](#)  
[List all firebacks](#)

**F**irebacks began to be made in Germany at the end of the fifteenth century. From their beginning the opportunity was taken to embellish their plain surfaces, firstly using simple objects, then with carved motifs and later with designs moulded from carved patterns. Firebacks probably began to be made in England in the first quarter of the sixteenth century, in the decades following the introduction of cast iron to these islands. Their heyday was the seventeenth century, but they continue to be made as special commissions to this day. There is also a market in second-hand firebacks, in copies cast from originals and in pastiches of earlier designs.

This database has been assembled during, and subsequent to, research for the book, *British Cast-Iron Firebacks of the 16th to Mid 18th Centuries* (Hodgers Books, Crawley, 2010; ISBN 9780956672605; [hodgers.com/books](http://hodgers.com/books)). From this page it is possible to search for details and pictures of cast-iron firebacks not only from Britain but also from continental Europe, many examples of which have found their way to Britain, particularly since the second half of the seventeenth century.

Where a number of firebacks have been identified as having characteristics suggesting a common source or patternmaker, they have been allocated a *series*. Firebacks with similar decorative elements, such as armorials of a particular reign or the same allegorical subject, are also grouped. Clicking on a *series* or other grouping on the description of a fireback will reveal others in the *series* or group.

This database will be added to as new examples are recorded, and the [Editor](#) will be delighted to receive details (including a photograph and dimensions) of examples visitors to the site think could be added.

*The photographs of the firebacks are protected by the copyright of the owners of the places where they have been recorded and/or the photographers, and permission to use images for publication must be sought from the copyright holder, details of whom can be had from the Editor.*



Jeremy then turned his attention to another database dear to his heart, that of iron firebacks – [hodgers.com/firebacks](http://hodgers.com/firebacks). This, if anything, struck a louder chord with members in that it more closely compared with what might be envisaged in the future for the Society. Features, that would fit in with a variety of other metalwares, included decorative elements, details of makers, inscriptions and chronology. Each fireback on the database is illustrated and individual details can be cross-referenced to group backs with similar characteristics.

Discussion afterwards suggested some enthusiasm for the notion of a Society database. Comparisons were drawn with the excellent example to which members of the Pewter Society had access. Although the assembly of the data would be a long and onerous task, it was pointed out that the design of the structure of such a database would be crucial and would require lengthy consideration.

### 2016 DIARY DATES

*The possibility of a change of venue is being explored, but these dates will still hold good. Any change of venue will be notified as soon as possible.*

Sunday 6th March 2016 - THE AGM & SPRING MEETING at Hartley Wintney. The two speakers, both European members of the Society, will speak on Early Continental Candlesticks and Nutcrackers respectively.

Sunday 2nd October 2016 - THE AUTUMN MEETING at Hartley Wintney will focus on a group of goods in 'as made' condition, and what can be learnt from them.

Would anyone interested in a Discussion Day at a private collection in the Salisbury area on Sunday 17th April 2016, focusing on items of Salisbury interest, please contact Valentine Butler [v.butler9@btinternet.com](mailto:v.butler9@btinternet.com) Tel: 01404 42169.

## WARMING PAN INSCRIPTIONS

On a recent Regional Furniture Society visit to a house in North Devon that has remained in the same family for several hundred years, we were able to examine three interesting items of metalware; one complete warming pan and two warming pan lids. The complete example with a flat iron handle and probably dating from the middle of the 17th century bore the inscription - 'THE IORNMONGERS ARMS', an original typo, not mine!

The two lids were also of 17th century date, the first has the inscription – 'GOD SAVE PRINCE CHARLES 1624' (see photo). Interestingly the date is just one year before Charles ascended the throne. I note that Ernest Hopwell's article (Base Thoughts No.4) lists a similar inscription, but dated 1617. The example we saw is in unusually good unworn state so that the detail of the Prince of Wales crest in the centre can be seen clearly, also the raised lettering, normally quite smooth, has a stippled or hatched finish (see photo). One wonders if many early pans were finished like that originally. We so rarely see them in such good condition.



The second lid has, as far as I know, an unrecorded and somewhat mysterious inscription. In the centre is a Tudor Rose around which is written – 'TO THIS ROSE PUT THY NOSE' (see photo). I can find no reference to such a phrase but feel sure that it had some political significance at the time. There is a small punched date, 1673, at the hinge but this appears to be a later addition to an earlier piece. The suggestion that the script refers to the addition of aromatic herbs to the embers within, in order to impart a pleasant smell, might be plausible. However, if, as I suspect, the lid dates from the early 17th century, the phrase might relate to some kind of conflict or bad feeling between the Tudor and Stuart supporters.



Any thoughts or information that could clarify the meaning of this curious inscription would be most welcome.

Keith Pinn

Photos courtesy of Keith Pinn and Roderick and Valentine Butler.

## AN OPPORTUNITY SEIZED?



This cast brass ornament, which measures eight inches (20cm) wide by seven inches (18cm), high depicts a man wielding a large knife and holding up the severed head of a woman who lies on a table of some sort. On the ground below, two severed legs can be seen. From the base of the head is what I believe was intended to represent blood, as they bear traces of red paint. The woman's hair has traces of yellow paint, suggesting this item was painted all over when newly made. On the in-turned base of the ornament are three holes for screws to hold it onto a plinth of some sort. The detail is quite fine and the man's clothing and shoes would appear to be of a style from the first half of the nineteenth century. What would lead to the casting of such an ornament? The answer casts light on public attitudes to crime and punishment in the first half of the nineteenth century and the surprising involvement of an enterprising brass-foundryman.

In March 1837, James Greenacre was arrested in London for the murder some months previously of his intended wife Hannah Brown. The murder was unusual in that her head had been severed badly and that both legs had also been cut crudely from her torso. The head, legs and torso had been hidden in different places in the district but medical evidence showed that they were all part of the same body, that of Hannah Brown. The case became known as the 'Edgware Road Murder' and was widely reported in the newspapers, broadsheets and 'penny dreadfuls' of the time. Greenacre was charged with murder on April 10th, found guilty and sentenced to death. He was hanged at Newgate on May 2nd.

Public hangings were commonplace at the time and attracted large crowds. Often, immediately after the execution, broadsheet sellers would offer the 'last dying speech' of the accused and these would sell in large numbers at the hanging, circulating through the less literate members of society. Relics of murders were sought avidly, and the house where Greenacre murdered Hannah Brown had to be placed under police guard to prevent relic-seekers from taking away anything they could.

Is it too fanciful to suppose that, between Greenacre's capture and his execution, an enterprising person saw an opportunity to benefit from the business and had a brass ornament cast to sell at the time of the execution? Painted in bright colours, it would remind the purchaser of the ghastly events which led to Hannah Brown's death, and become a talking point for months to come. It is known that other memorabilia were available at the hanging, but producing a brass mantle ornament was surely an entrepreneurial act! Before radio, before TV and at a time when most of the population was barely literate, what a vivid means of recording a murder most foul.

**Geoff Smaldon**

## 'LAST' HONG KONG TINSMITH DIES AT 99, TAKING KNOWLEDGE OF HIS TRADE WITH HIM

Sai Kung's Main Street has been quieter over the past months, absent is the persistent rhythm of Mak Sing-yin's hammer. Mak, a tinsmith known as the tin man, died on June 24th 2015 at the age of 99, taking with him his knowledge of the art of shaping the metal. Wiry and with an unflagging energy, Mak spent his days over 81 years turning plain sheets of tin into cake pans, watering cans, letter boxes and buckets.

Located in a narrow alley of Sai Kung's Old Town, his shop, named Wo Cheong Hou, opened everyday from 9.30am to 4.30pm. Residents and tourists alike would stop to watch Mak, as he shaped and punched holes in tin sheets. The tin man was a neighbourhood institution. But his trade has no descendents. 'Even my children never learned this. They couldn't make a living from it,' Mak told Hong King's *Sunday Morning Post* last November.



'Why would I teach it to someone? It would be a burden.' One of his grandsons, who also lived in Sai Kung, said at the time he regretted not having had the chance to learn his grandfather's craft. 'I asked him many times to teach me,' recalled Mak Mau-hei, 26, an air conditioner technician, 'but he always said that with this kind of job we couldn't make money.'



Born in the Shunde district of Guangdong province, Mak was about 18 when he followed the path of relatives, who roamed south to escape the Japanese occupation. He learned to craft tin for three years in Kowloon before moving to Sai Kung in the early 1950s with his wife and firstborn son. 'If you asked me what I made ... I'd say I made everything,' Mak said. 'The world was different then. I made spittoons, basins and I helped to build barns.' He remained at the No 14 Sai Kung Main Street, in the same three-

storey building where his five children grew up and his 13 grandchildren ran around. Over the years, he saw Sai Kung change, but his shop always looked about the same, with pliers, scissors and hammers scattered around. He was particularly proud of a photo hung on his wall, which portrayed him shaking hands with the late British prime minister Margaret Thatcher in 1994.

Mak was mourned by members of the local community, who placed flowers outside his shop and burned a candle and incense to pay their respects. He would have turned 100 in September. His shop - as he always said it would - remained open as long as he could hold his hammer.

[It makes one wonder how many metal-workers in Britain in the past had long-established business like his – Ed)

## NUTCRACKERS!

Base metal nutcrackers will be well known to AMS members and will form an important part of many collections, which might also include examples made of wood, ivory and even porcelain.

My interest in nutcrackers is related to my business: I have a company importing nuts and dried fruits from around the world. We repack and distribute throughout the Baltic States and Scandinavia.



Over the last ten years or so we have amassed a collection of 6000 nutcrackers of all types and materials. For example, we have over 1000 metal nutcrackers of both lever and screw types, made of iron, steel and brass. The earliest dated metal nutcracker in our collection is dated 1687 but there are doubts over the validity of this date. However, another nutcracker dated 1700 is authentic and is a very early example.

16th century wooden nutcrackers. As only about thirty dated nutcrackers from this period are known, our collection is an important reference group.

Our large collection will soon be on show in the 'European Nutcracker Museum' which will open next year in the heart of the old town in Vilnius, Lithuania. AMS members with an interest will be welcome to visit!

We are also planning to publish a book on dated nutcrackers from 16th - 18th centuries, including metal and wooden examples. No book on this topic exists at present. When available, details will be circulated to AMS members.

Returning to more recent times, we also have an interest in figural brass nutcrackers which were mass-produced from the end of the 19th century through to the mid-20th century. Companies such as Pearson Page Jewsbury produced these in many different designs.



Any AMS member who has dated nutcrackers or who would like to discuss the whole topic of metal and other nutcrackers will be welcome to contact me. My contact details are: [arnas@arimex.lt](mailto:arnas@arimex.lt)

**Arnas Jurskis**

**It is with regret that we record the passing of three former members of the Society:**

**ROBERT DUFF (ASHLEY)  
1953 - 2015**

Robert was born in 1953 in Oxford to Angus and Queenie Duff. Queenie was the last of the Ashley family who had lived and worked in Ramsbury since the mid-17th century, tanners for generations. He grew up in Oxford until the family moved to the Old Tannery. As a child he was a very practical person, taking things apart and putting them back together. He was interested in history and antiques, and as a teenager he learned also from the antiques shops and owners in Oxford.

On leaving school, Robert qualified as a motor mechanic. He also found time during his life to be a designer and builder of kitchens that led him to appreciate the quality of the small antique furniture and domestic items that he later traded. Although he subsequently entered the world of antiques, he maintained his interest in cars and motorbikes, restoring both a 1956 Sunbeam Talbot and a 1971 Morris Traveller.

Michelle and Robert married in 1986, and when Robert and his sister Elizabeth inherited the Old Tannery in 1992, it was agreed that Robert and Michelle would live there. Robert had an antique shop in Aldbourne and then Hungerford High Street for a while, and later had units in several antiques centres including Hungerford, Marlborough, Lechlade and Stow on the Wold.

Robert had a great fondness for animals, especially dogs; visited with Michelle and learned from many National Trust houses over the years; was a keen reader with an interest in science fiction; enjoyed family history and research, and spent time as recently as July this year visiting Dumfries and Galloway where the Duff family had lived. A quiet and practical man, when diagnosed with cancer in 2004 he used his skills to build out of mahogany his own coffin.

With his strong interest in early lighting and other base metalwares, Robert became a member of the Antique Metalware Society during its very early days, and was a regular attendee and major contributor over the years, latterly only when his health permitted. He quietly set about meticulously researching for his book *The Rush Light and Related Holders, a Regional View*, the production of which came as a total surprise to many when published and dedicated to the Ashley family in 2001. By visiting museums in every region of the UK and Ireland, Robert endeavoured to build up an accurate picture of the distinctive designs developed in each area. He studied the early museum acquisitions with their provenances in an effort to avoid being misled by modern 'bodged jobs'. By making rush lights experimentally to the original designs, Robert was able to determine their use and function. The book bears testament to his organised methods and his precision. It also shows his awareness of how collectors, dealers and academics would be using it. It is a wonderful memorial to Robert who was well-known and respected in the antiques trade, but it gives no hints of his kindness, generosity and wisdom.

We share with his widow Michelle and sister Elizabeth their great loss.

**Valentine Butler**

**JAN GADD  
1938-2015**

Jan was brought up in Sweden but moved to England in 1974 when he set up a tool-manufacturing company in the Cotswolds. He lived first at Moreton-in-Marsh and then, for the last 30 years, at Upton-upon-Severn. Jan and his late wife Gun were always very hospitable when visitors arrived at their beautiful and tastefully-decorated Queen Anne home on the banks of the Severn. It was full of antiques, but Jan was not just a casual collector. He studied and researched every piece thoroughly. As an engineer, he always looked at how they were made and what that could tell him, and Jan's emphasis on this aspect led to some of his greatest contributions to our understanding of antique metalware. However, his background also led him to take a deep interest in the history of metalworking in the rest of Europe, a subject on which he became something of an expert.

Whilst pewter formed the bulk of Jan's metalware collection, he was also interested in brassware. He had been a member of the Antique Metalware Society for nearly 15 years, and during that time wrote three articles for our Journal on Swedish and German brassware and one on candlesticks, a speciality of Jan's. His articles on Nuremberg basins and the Skultuna Manufactory in Sweden are typical examples of the depths to which he would explore and research any subject that caught his attention. He did not attend meetings regularly, but gave talks at the Cotehele visit in 2007 and at the study of alms dishes in 2011.

Whilst Jan didn't suffer fools gladly and could be brusque, he was always willing to share his knowledge and would often go to great lengths to help with enquiries. His wider interests included jazz. He was a very good double bass player, and helped turn the once-teetering annual Upton-upon-Severn Jazz Festival into the success it is today. Latterly his health deteriorated, and after his wife Gun died six years ago he never really recovered his spirits and withdrew into himself more and more. He died in July aged 77, and will be missed by all those in both the Antique Metalware Society and the Pewter Society who had been stimulated by his challenging approach.

**John Douglas and Peter Hayward**

**CATHERINE A. HERRIMAN  
1957 - 2015**

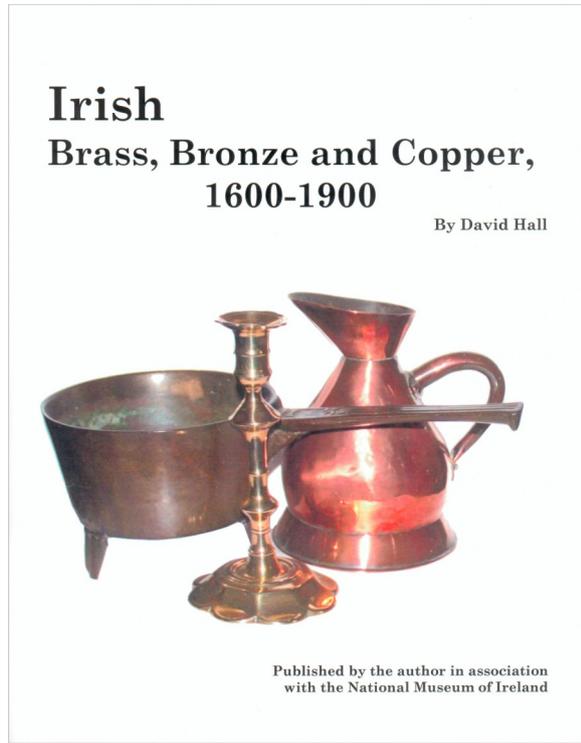
Cathy came to England from the USA as a student, studying at Bristol and at Hull University where she gained a Degree in Psychology. After university she moved to London where she worked for a magazine selling advertising space. After a few years in London she decided to escape to the country, moving to Devon where she renovated a small cottage. As she had an interest in antiques from an early age she decided to try her hand as a dealer and for a while she had an antique shop in Bideford. She also bought antiques and exported them to the USA along with her mother's export business. Unfortunately the market took a down-turn so Cathy decided to return to a more conventional nine-to-five job. By this time she had moved to Fontmell Magna and then on to Sherborne, renovating cottages on the way. In Sherborne she took a job as a physics laboratory technician at the local boys' school and continued to work there until her premature death. Throughout she continued with her interests in history and antiques. Her last home was at Merriott in Somerset from 2002 where she renovated cottage number four. In December 2014 Cathy was diagnosed with a brain tumour and she passed away on February 7th, 2015. She will be sadly missed by many.

## RECENT PUBLICATIONS

### Irish Brass, Bronze and Copper, 1600-1900

by David Hall

published by the author in association with the National Museum of Ireland



The book has 60 pages and contains 71 figures some of which contain several pictures; all but one of the pictures are in colour. In addition there is an appendix which contains the names of 391 Irish based bell founders, brass founders and some copper smiths. Many of the pictures are of pieces in the collection of the National Museum at the Collin's Barracks, Benburb Street, Dublin.

The book complements the earlier similar publication, *Types of Irish Pewter*.

Available from the author at The Smithy, Manafon, Welshpool. Powys, SY218BL  
Price £12 (plus £2 p&p)

This book will be reviewed in the forthcoming AMS Journal

### The Laurence Cadbury Collection at Selly Manor

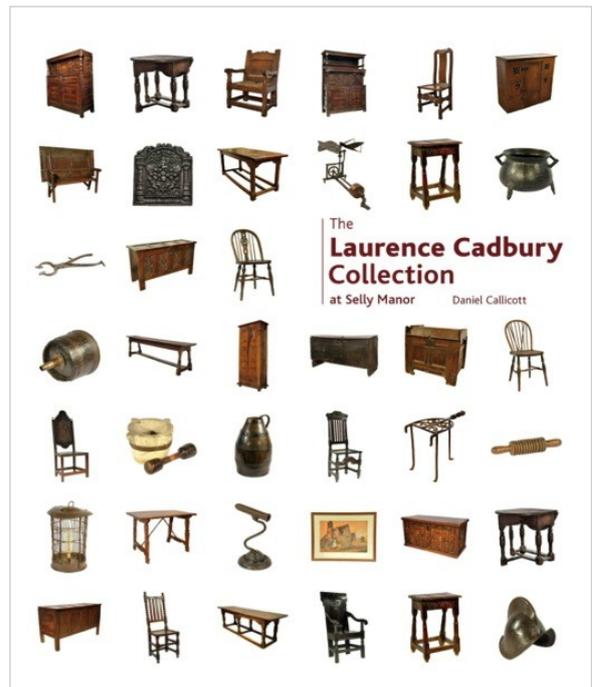
by Daniel Callicott

This publication focuses on the outstanding contribution of Laurence Cadbury in creating a wonderful collection of early furniture, domestic objects and archives for Selly Manor in Bournville, Birmingham. Based on original research, the collection is described in detail with chapters on early furniture, domestic objects, decorative items and arms and armour. The section on domestic objects highlights in particular firebacks, fireplace equipment, the spit and associated objects, cauldrons and skillets, kitchen utensils, warming pans and rushlight holders and related implements. With over 170 full colour images this is a fascinating, illuminating and colourful publication that brings this important collection to print for the first time.

Available from Selly Manor Museum, Maple Road, Bournville, Birmingham, B30 2AE

[sellymanor@bvt.org.uk](mailto:sellymanor@bvt.org.uk)

Price £15 (plus £2.50 p&p)



## ANTIQUE METAL

Antique Metal

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**Welcome**

Welcome to the site that I have created for Antique Metalware Society members to share their collections.

I will gladly answer any questions that you may have, and would welcome hearing about other members' collections. Please contact me at [rbrooks555@aol.com](mailto:rbrooks555@aol.com). Your anonymity will be strictly protected.

Dan Brooks has been a member of the Antique Metalware Society since 2012, but since he lives in the United States he is not able to attend the Society meetings. Nevertheless, he would welcome the opportunity to exchange information with other collectors who share his interest in gothic metalware. He has therefore set up a website on Shutterfly with photographs of objects in his collection that he hopes will be the starting point for a dialogue with Society members.

The procedure for accessing the website is simple (*very important note: you do not have to become a member of Shutterfly to access the website*):

- 1) Go to the website at the following address: [antiquemetal.shutterfly.com](http://antiquemetal.shutterfly.com)
- 2) Enter the Site password [gothicmetal](#) in the long box
- 3) Left click on 'Go'. This will take you to the Antique Metal Home page (*see above*)
- 4) On the menu bar below the words Antique Metal, click on 'Pictures & Videos'
- 5) Click on any of the albums to see all of the objects in the album

Dan would welcome questions and/or comments from other members of the Society, especially from collectors of early metal. His e-mail address is [rbrooks555@aol.com](mailto:rbrooks555@aol.com).

## OTHER WEBSITES

## KELTEK TRUST

Conservation by Re-use; Helping churches acquire surplus and/or redundant bells to be hung for English-style full-circle bell-ringing. [www.keltektrust.org.uk/](http://www.keltektrust.org.uk/)

JOHN WILKINSON 'KING OF THE IRONMASTERS'  
[www.oldcopper.org/john\\_wilkinson.htm](http://www.oldcopper.org/john_wilkinson.htm)

## EXHIBITION



The National Maritime Museum Cornwall at Falmouth [www.nmmc.co.uk](http://www.nmmc.co.uk)  
*The Viking Voyagers* Exhibition opens 20 March 2015 until 22 February 2017. It is billed to feature 'nationally and internationally historically significant artefacts'.

Members will be informed of details when available of an International Conference entitled 'Empire of the Sea and King Cnut 1016 - 2016' due to take place on March 10th -13th 2016.

'This is undoubtedly our most important exhibition to date. The museum's legacy of award winning work has afforded us the opportunity to access national and international collections', says Richard Doughty, Museum Director of this 11 year old museum.

### EDITOR'S NOTE

I look forward to receiving your contributions. Newsletters are published in April and November each year. Items for publication should be received by 25 March and 25 October, respectively, for the next issue. Please send by email preferably, by CD or hard copy; I can work with most PC formats. Pictures are welcome (colour or b/w). **Please send images separately, not embedded in the text. Captions should be included with the text, not added to images.** Digital images need to be at least as big as their expected published size (column width 170mm), ideally at 300 dpi or more.