



# NEWSLETTER

BRUNSWICK COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY  
P. O. BOX 22, WINNABOW, NORTH CAROLINA

Vol. X, No. 2

May, 1970

## THE ENGLISH CLAY PIPE: SIXTEENTH THROUGH EIGHTEENTH CENTURIES

It has been said that the decorative objects of man's handiwork — the recognized things of beauty and objects d'art — will always be preserved by each generation because of their recognized and intrinsic value. On the other side of the coin, however, John Graham, Colonial Williamsburg's eminent and tireless curator paints a telling picture by remarking that if you want to do a future restoration a favor, "Buy yourself a can of tomato soup and keep it 250 years."<sup>1</sup> The point is clear and well taken. Those common and everyday things, the trivia that is looked at one time and then thrown away, are the very things that become scarce and then ultimately, rare. Early soft drink bottles are recently coming into their own as collectable items and everyone has thrown away his share at one time or another. Some day the value placed on these cast-off items will be nothing short of ridiculous in our present-day viewpoint.

So it is now with one of the most commonly found artifacts on today's excavated colonial sites. It was in its day among the cheapest and most frequently encountered objects to be seen in the streets, homes, and public houses. This was the clay pipe. Colonial Williamsburg's archeological collection reflects that remains of the clay pipe is the third most frequently encountered artifact.<sup>2</sup> Brunswick Town is no exception and literally thousands of fragments ranging from the tapering mouthpiece to the bowl have been recovered during the course of excavations. Being made of a compact and hard-fired clay, they arrive at the surface more often than not in a remarkable state of preservation. Bowls have been recovered showing blackened interiors from the last smoke.

Though it is thought that pipes were used in Europe for smoking medicinal herbs long before the arrival of tobacco, the tobacco pipe is regarded as a purely American invention.<sup>3</sup>

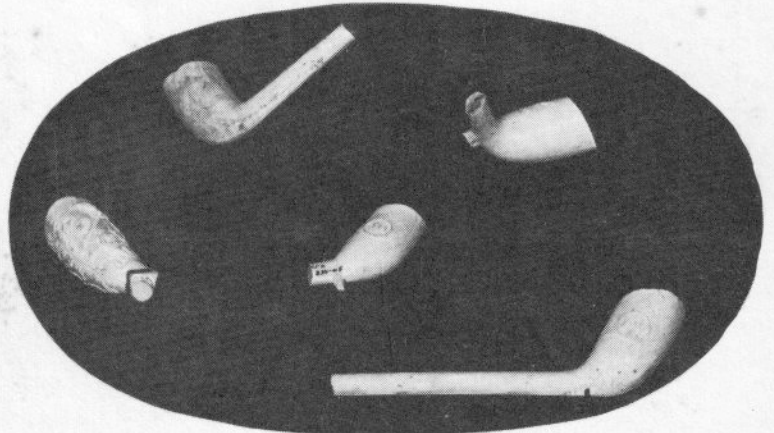
The English had first seen a tobacco pipe being used by the Indians of Florida in 1565.<sup>4</sup> The idea was brought to England and cautiously tried. Though the Indians of Florida used a rough pottery cup and reed stem, it was the all clay version utilized by the Virginia Indians that was adopted and adapted by the English. Small quantities of tobacco were imported in the late 16th century to England from the New World via Europe, but the cost was terrifically high and the product extremely scarce. The manufacture of pipes that subsequently began was very small, some theorizing that they were first made in and around the village of Broseley in Shropshire.<sup>5</sup> At the very least, we know that pipes were made there as early as 1575. They were probably hand-made, without the use of molds, and they were very short. The stems of the smallest measured only 1 1/4" in length. The average length was about 3 1/2".<sup>6</sup> The bowls were barrel-shaped and leaned forward at a rakish angle, as much as 45°. Below the bowl was a tear-shaped flattened base that would later rise in height a bit. This part was called the "heel." It served two purposes. First, it allowed the pipe to be placed on a table and not roll to one side. Secondly, it served by being thickened, to insulate the pipe so as to not blister the wood on which it rested.

In the late 17th century, pipe-smoking was in its infancy, and it remained for Sir Ralph Lane to have the dubious honor (in light of the present-day smoking controversy) of getting the vogue of smoking off the ground. Lane, the governor of the Roanoke Island (N.C.) colony sent as a present to Sir Walter Raleigh a pipe and a quantity of tobacco in 1586. Everyone is more or less familiar with the now legendary story of that particular pipe which ended with a servant dousing Raleigh, thinking that his master was on fire.<sup>7</sup> With such an important personage as Raleigh more or less personally endorsing it, the new "sport" quickly grew.

The colonists of the first permanent English settlement in the New World, Jamestown, Virginia, brought their pipes with them in 1607. Within the space of less than a year the demand for pipes grew so much that in January of 1608, one Robert Cotten came to Jamestown to ply his trade as a tobacco pipemaker.<sup>8</sup> The gold that the English had longed for in Virginia in an effort to gain supremacy over the Spanish and their glittering empire in the Americas, turned out to be the "black gold" of the rich tidewater soil. From this soil, with the ever-present and ambivalent Indian aid, Jamestown colonist John Rolfe succeeded in developing a sweet-scented leaf during the years 1611-12. From that time on, the wealth of Virginia would ride the undulating crest of the seasonal and soil changes and their effects on the years' tobacco crops. Personal fortunes and magnificent plantation houses would come and go as the quality of the crops rose and fell.

This new leaf caused a sensation in England and the demand for pipes spiraled upward. Pipes were far from common, but they were on their way there. Even in the remote wilderness of Jamestown, English-manufactured pipes still continued to be received as a welcome treat in the infrequent shipments from "home." Today, the Jamestown archeological collection has about 50,000 clay pipe bowls and stem fragments (none have been found whole) with many from the very early period. This is a clear indication that even in the savage wilds, the Englishman still had time to enjoy his pipe.

These early pipes are variously called "Elizabethan" (though the majority were certainly not made during her reign, the basic shape was retained), "Fairy," or "Elfin."<sup>9</sup> From the period 1580 to roughly 1680 the basic shape continued to be an angled bowl, gradually increasing in size, due to the availability of tobacco, with a slight "pinching-in" at the top. The stems were straight as a rule, and this was due primarily to the convenience in manufacturing. The pipe making center had moved from Shropshire in the first half of the 17th century to London. Clays had to be brought in from nearby counties. By the middle of the 17th century other cities had taken up the manufacture and were seriously challenging London. Bristol, in particular, seems to have been the principal supplier of pipes to the New World colonies from the 1660's throughout the colonial period.<sup>10</sup> Pipes were now mass produced, using molds. Decorative designs began to be molded on the bowls, but this practice was very limited and not at all common. Seen more often were the makers' initials on the heels, or the back or sides of the bowls. The stems were pierced by a wire while the clay was still in a plastic stage before firing and still in the mold. As the stems became longer, the diameter of the wire was reduced, so as not to rupture the stem wall. The pipes were fired. Some were burnished and/or glazed after firing to remove the exterior roughness. By 1682, there appears to have been at least eight different styles of pipes available in England and subsequently in America. It is a continual surprise to learn how far these fragile products travelled and to what secluded places they came. An early pipe bowl of the style prevailing in the period 1640-1660 and several stem fragments have been found during the course of investigation near the alleged site of "Old Town," a temporary 17th century settlement on the Cape Fear River in Brunswick County, N. C.



Pipe bowls recovered from Brunswick Town

The beginning years of the 18th century saw several changes being made in pipe design. The stems began to grow longer and thinner. The bowls were larger and more "pipe-like," though still angled. The heel had grown downwards and narrowed considerably, forming a protrusion known as the "spur". The spur could be pointed or blunt. There were pipes made with no spur at all, though these were intended for export to America for trade with the Indians since without the spur they closely resembled the Indians' native pipe. These were Bristol products. Not only were they used by the Indians, but archeological evidence on colonial town sites in particular, show that the colonists found them to their liking, too. It is interesting to note that the English were particularly fond of retaining the spur during the 18th century and few pipes were reserved for the domestic market that were without spurs. <sup>11</sup>

A good estimation of the span of time from the manufacture of a pipe to its discard date is two years at the most. Being fragile they were prone to shatter into numerous fragments at a drop or to snap into if tapped heftily. Soon they were heaved out into the streets, trash piles, etc., much the same as discarded cigarette ends today. The demand for pipes continued to climb and naturally this invited competitors for the various markets. By the first decades of the 18th century, English pipemaking was being given a run for its money by the Dutch, who were determined to undercut the market. No matter how the prices swung, whether higher or lower, the cost of a pipe was well within the economic range of every class. During the reign of Queen Anne (1702-14) the "best" English pipes cost only eleven pence per three dozen and the Dutch offered their common quality pipes for 2 shillings per gross. <sup>12</sup>

The shape of pipe bowls changed relatively little during the remainder of the 18th century with the exception that decoration was much more common now. Plumes, royal arms, as well as the initials of the makers adorned the sides of the bowls. Some ribbing was also to be found. The stems, meanwhile, grew to fantastic lengths, as much as two feet or more. Advertisements in Boston newspapers of the



1760's offered London pipes of " short,.....midling.....(and)....long " lengths. <sup>13</sup>

Two new additions were also to be seen in the 18th century. One was making a series of vertical ribs or grooves about midway of the stem length where the fingers could grip the pipe at its balance point. The other, which was not common, consisted of glazing the mouthpiece for an inch or so to provide a covering for a soon-to-be-stained end.

One interesting sidelight is the fact that the clay pipes were also copied in metal, though not in many numbers. Commonly encountered ones are those of iron or brass, some of which unscrew halfway of their lengthy stems for ease of travelling. Precious metals were also used and an example of a silver 18th century long pipe can be seen in the Council Chamber of Tryon Palace at New Bern, N. C. Metal pipes were not an innovation of the 18th century, however. A pewter example of an early short pipe has been unearthed at Jamestown, Virginia. <sup>14</sup>

The pipes found at Brunswick Town are principally of English manufacture, being made of the fine white kaolin clays of probably Devon, Kent, and Dorset. They were undoubtedly exported from Bristol. Bowls in the collection at Brunswick Town's museum show a date span of ca. 1725-1776, paralleling the town's colonial existence. The Bristol trade pipes are represented as well as the very decorative ones. An example on public display bears the full royal arms with supporters.

Since the clay pipe was such a fragile object and usually disappeared in a two-year span, the presence of their remains is of considerable value in helping date the various sites on which they are found. From the very beginning the shape of the pipe bowl was recognized as being of the most value since the basic evolution of pipe bowl configuration was generally known. Of course, pipe bowl designs did not change abruptly at the beginning of each new decade and a good bowl design would be repeated for years. The shape of the bowl is still the most reliable

method of dating the 17th century pipe.

For a long time another indicator of relative age lurked among the fragments of pipes nestled in their catalogued rows of boxes. Then in the autumn of 1954, Mr. J. C. Harrington of the United States National Park Service presented his theory on a new way of arriving at dates using the diameter of the pipe stem holes as a gauge. He stressed caution in accepting this thesis as an absolute and admitted that it should only be considered workable if a sufficient number (75 to 100 minimum) of stems were employed in the sample from a single site. By using his chart, gauged in 64ths of an inch, a date can be arrived at within a 20-year period as to when the pipe was discarded. As a rule of the thumb, the larger the diameter of the hole, the earlier the pipe. As the stems became longer and thinner in later years, the diameter of the hole became smaller. Tests have shown the reliability of Mr. Harrington's chart seems to be most valid in the approximate period of 1680-1760.<sup>15</sup>

One other attempt has been made by Dr. Lewis Binford at dating pipes by the use of pipe stem bore diameter. It is a regression formula based on Mr. Harrington's chart. Thus, if Mr. Harrington's chart is off a bit, so is the Binford process. It has been used with relative success in dating pipes found in many places, including those of the Fortress of Louisbourg in Nova Scotia, Canada.<sup>16</sup>

Today the graceful and pleasingly simple pipe shapes of the 18th century are still being made in limited numbers in England, Germany, and the Netherlands. One notes with a sense of the historic and romantic that, though on a minute scale, the English pipemakers of Broseley continue to practice their ancient craft. It is satisfying as well to know when handling a fragment of an early clay pipe in today's bustling, technological world that this impersonal, yet personal, remnant transcends and transports us to a bygone era when the "brave new world" was not, as now, a new planet, but the region beyond the next hill.

Ben H. Gault

Brunswick County Historical Society

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The Publick to William Dry, in the time of the Spanish Allarm at Brunswicks  
1748, Sept. 8th -

To Cash paid William Simpson for Beef & other Provisions for the Men	£ 40 6 0
To William Gradey, for Ditto .....	17 7 6
To William Ross for Cash gave the Express to Chas. Torn .....	1 5 0
To Ralph Bugnion for 2 Dollars & 5 Bitts gave Do. ....	6 5 0
Sept. 6th -	
To Cash paid for Powder & Ball for the Men .....	7 0 0
To John Davis for 3 galls. Rum .....	9 0 0
To a negro Fellow, cost me to George Ronalds L45 Sterling, which was kill'd by accident in assisting in the Allarm .....	450 0 0
Sept. 8th	
To Fort Johnston for Beef, Pork and Rice for 40 people 2 Days & half	25 0 0
Sept. 10th -	
To Cash paid sundry Sailors & for Burying the Dead Spaniards .....	10 0 0
Sept. 12th -	
To Cash paid sailors for assisting to get the Guns & anchors, etc., on shoar out of the wreck & for Boat Hire .....	30 0 0
To ditto paid a second time to men .....	5 0 0
To Rum & Sugar bo't of Corp. Starkett for the Men in getting the things on shoar .....	20 0 0
To 1 Barr'l Beef & 4 Bushels Corn to the People getting the sails & other things on shoar, etc. ....	16 0 0
To a Pettiangood & three negroes 4 days assisting .....	20 0 0
Old Tenour .....	1657 3 6
To 1 pair Pistols had of John Moore, which were lost .....	15 0 0
	<hr/>
	1672 3 6

Brunswick, September 4th, 1751  
Errors Excepted

P. WILLIAM DRYE

LIST OF MEN IN THE SPANISH ~~ARMY~~ UNDER THE COMMAND OF WILLIAM DRY, AND HOW MANY DAYS EACH MAN WAS ON DUTY

No.	Days		
1. Schenck J. Moore, Lieut.	16	29. Maurice Moore, Senr.	6
2. William Moore, Ensign	6	30. Edward Wingate, Junr.	6
3. Edward Wingate, Sergt.	6	31. John Wingate	6
4. Samuel Jarvis	4	32. Edward Porter	6
5. John Jane	5	33. John Daniels	5
6. Corns. Harnett	6	34. John Simmons	5
7. John Wright	4	35. Jacob Simmons	5
8. Duncan Cowen	5	36. Francis Thomas	6
9. John Davis, Junr.	6	37. Solomon Ogden	4
10. James Moore	6	38. Isaac Ogden	4
11. John Moore	6	39. John Hall	4
12. Francis Rhodes	5	40. Simon Howard	4
13. Burges White	5	41. Hope Williss	6
14. William Watters	4	42. George Nicholass	6
15. Joseph Watters	4	43. Edward Pemberton	6
16. John Watters	4	44. Peter Lord	6
17. John Gibbes	4	45. William Lord	6
18. George Gibbes	4	46. Christopher Cain	6
19. Eleanor Allen	4	47. George Richardson	6
20. James Hasell, Junr.	6	48. John Wooldrick	6
21. John Potter	6	49. Thomas Fletcher	6
22. Myles Potter	6	50. William Davis	6
23. Harison Lewis	6	51. Benj'n Morrison	5
24. William Lewis	6	52. William Simpson, Senr.	6
25. Joseph Lewis	6	53. Edward Simpson	6
26. James Lewis	6	54. Willia, Gradey	6
27. John Blake	6	55. Henry Bosheer	4
28. Berringer Moore	6	56. Thomas White	4

List of Men in the Spanish Allarm, cont.

57. Henry Simmons	4
58. John Grange	4
59. John Lucas	4
60. John Bell	6
61. Thomas Bell	4
62. James Bell	4
63. John Sullivant	4
64. Henry Shaw	6
65. James Galloway	6
66. John Leay	6
67. Thomas Davis	6

There is a highway marker at Brunswick River bridge telling of the Spanish Alarm. Also in the book "The Lower Cape Fear in Colonial Days" by Lawrence Lee on pages 232-234, there is a graphic account of what happened during the Spanish alarm. There was also a reprint of the October, 1748 newspaper account in the August, 1963 Newsletter.

Mrs. Lucile Blake

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MAY MEETING

Date: Monday, May 11, 1970

Time: 8:00 P. M.

Place: Fellowship Hall, Camp Methodist Church  
Shallotte, N. C.

Program: Unknown, at time bulletin was printed