



# The Society for Clay Pipe Research

## 2022 SCPR Conference – Bristol

*by Susie White*

After a conference drought of nearly 3 years, September 2022 finally saw us meeting face-to-face again. The conference was held in Bristol, a city SCPR had not been to since 1986. It was a relatively small turnout but in terms of the quality and breadth of the papers, one of the best!

Our meeting was held at Commonwealth House in Clifton, a Grade 2 listed building belonging to the Bristol Commonwealth Society. Conference organiser Peter Taylor kicked off the day's proceedings with a brief introduction to the city. Bristol became a city in 1542 but was well developed before that and one of the principal maritime cities in the UK. The main imports were wine, dried fruits and dye, with cloth accounting for most of the exports. By the nineteenth century, tobacco had become Bristol's main trading commodity.

Susie White then presented the first of her two papers with a look at the life of a Bristol pipemaker, Thomas Appleford, who had also been a successful prize fighter – this paper was subsequently published in SCPR 101. Peter Taylor took to the floor again with a fascinating presentation about pipemaking in the 1590s. This was the first decade when pipemaking really became an occupation, no doubt tied into an explosion in the number of taverns and playhouses at this period. Peter concluded his fascinating paper by pointing out that one of the earliest shipments of pipes was not from London, as one might expect, but from Bristol to Cork in January 1597.

This brought us very neatly back to Bristol and our next paper, from Chris Jarrett, on the distribution of Bristol pipemakers. Two of the earliest named pipemakers from Bristol are Richard and Ann Berriman, who took on an apprentice in 1619. The last pipemaker in the city was Thomas George, who fired his kiln for the last time on 9 December 1921. Through the use of a series of maps Chris was able to chart the movement of the pipemaking centres across the city.

The final paper of the morning session was from Ian Beckey who presented the results of an excavation of a late nineteenth-century group of pipes from Matthias Park, St Jude's. The excavations took place in 2004 in advance of some new power cables being installed for the Cabot Circus development. Working with the late Mike Baker, Ian recovered some kiln waste that appeared to have belonged to an earlier pipemaker named Thomas George.

The conference venue provided an amazing lunchtime spread and there was an opportunity for delegates to look at the display material that had been brought along, and to view a slide presentation prepared by Chris Jarrett. This slide show, titled "Around the World in 80 (ish) Facebook Pipes" drew on the staggering range of pipes that had been posted on the Society's Facebook page. This presentation has since been uploaded onto our Facebook page for all to enjoy.

The afternoon session was geared more towards other national and international papers, and we began with Susie White's second paper of the day looking at W D and H O Wills of Bristol and the Liverpool Connection – the connection being the National Pipe Archive – this paper has been published in SCPR 102.

Roger Moore then took to the floor and gave us a summary of the tobacco industry outside of the major cities in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. If you have pipes, you also need tobacco, and as early as 1598 Lord Harris asked the House of Lords if English and Irish farmers may be permitted to test whether tobacco could be home grown at a profit. This was clearly something that neither the government at the time, nor the tobacco merchants, including those in Bristol, wanted to happen.

Just before afternoon tea break, David Higgins presented a paper looking at British 'Export Style' pipes that were specially made for the Atlantic Trade. These are the heelless / spurless pipes that are rarely found in this country, since they were not used here, other than a few examples found near production sites. These pipes are, however, commonly recovered from excavations down the eastern seaboard of North America and into the Caribbean.

The export theme continued with Peter Taylor's presentation on English pipe exports to France in the first half of the seventeenth century. Adrian Oswald had already noted that there were exports to France in the later seventeenth century, but Peter's research for his PhD thesis showed that between 1590 and 1640 five main destinations are known for exports from southern England – America, France, Ireland, Scotland and the Netherlands, with France and Ireland being the two biggest markets. Some orders went as far as Bordeaux and Marseille.

Peter Davey followed with a short paper looking at two seventeenth-century wrecks off the south-west coast of England. The first was of a Dutch vessel whose construction was dendrochronologically dated to June 1629, and was wrecked in February 1631 in the Swash Channel, just outside Poole Harbour, *en route* to the Caribbean. The second wreck was discovered in 1992, off the Devon coast near Salcombe, initially only thought to be the site of a cannon. However, as the seabed changed over the next few years, more artefacts were recovered including a Baroque pipe.

The final paper of the day was a short tribute to Mike Baker from Ian Becky. Mike had been an active local archaeologist in Bristol and a member of SCPR and had worked with Ian on a number of rescue excavations in and around the city right up until his untimely death in 2020.

With the formal part of the day over, we reconvened at the Square Club in Berkeley Square, for the conference dinner.

The following day was beautifully sunny and we gathered at the steps of the Victoria Rooms in Queens Road for a tour of some of Bristol's highlights. This began with a visit to Bristol's Museum and Art Gallery and a most unexpected viewing of a brand-new Banksy painting, which had just appeared on wall outside the museum. From here we went on to Red Lodge with its impressive Elizabethan interiors. This was initially built in 1568 by Sir John Young, who was a member of court under both Henry VIII and Elizabeth I, and later extended. Our next stop was the Georgian House, built around 1790 for John Pinney, who was a sugar merchant and owner of the plantation of Mountravers on Nevis. Lunch was taken at the M Shed on Prince's Wharf.

For the few remaining hardy souls, the afternoon was spent out at Warmley, Kingswood, about 9km east from the centre of Bristol. This was the house and gardens of William Champion (1709-1789), who had moved his brass works, which were founded in 1742, out to Warmley in 1746 to develop his ideas for large-scale production of copper, zinc and brass. The house is not open to the public, having been converted to an old people's home, but the gardens which Champion laid out in the 1750s are. As an added bonus, there is a small museum attached to the grounds and the curator was more than happy to look out a small collection of clay pipes for the assembled pipe specialists!

This brought to a close a really enjoyable conference and thanks must go to Peter Taylor, conference organiser, ably assisted by his wife Mary, and Chris Jarrett.