



The Society for Clay Pipe Research

Society for Clay Pipe Research Conference 2018 – Cardiff

by Susie White

This year's conference took us to Cardiff, the first Welsh conference for SCPR. We were based in the John Percival Building at the University of Cardiff. The conference was one of the better attended meetings we have had for some time with delegates from as far as Ireland, Italy and the USA as well as a number of "old" faces who came to the conference for the first time in a long time – it was wonderful to see everyone. Thanks to some very successful publicity on social media we also managed to attract people from the Facebook group as well as from the local historical and archaeological community. We are very pleased to say that some of those delegates have now joined SCPR as fully paid up members.

Our day started with registration and a coffee which gave everyone a chance to settle down to the first session looking at pipes and pipe making in Wales.

Our amazing local support, Alice Forward, set the scene for us with a fascinating introduction to the archaeological and historical background of the Cardiff from its Roman beginnings. Alice was followed by David Higgins who presented a paper on some recent research he had been doing into the pipemaking industry in north east Wales. His research shows that there were three main areas where pipe production took place in NE Wales during the nineteenth century; at Holywell to the NW of Flint, in the Hawarden area to the SE of Flint and at Wrexham in Denbighshire. Prior to this study, there were only nine known pipemakers from anywhere in north Wales, however as a result of David's work that list now runs to 55 pipemakers at eight or nine different centres in north-east Wales. Another interesting feature of the research showed how mobile the pipemakers were with connections extended right across England and Wales and into Ireland.

Peter Hammond presented a paper on the Pardoe family of pipemakers at Nantgarw. Although renowned for its porcelain production Nantgarw was in fact a centre for pipe production for just over 100 years. This paper gave the delegates some invaluable background information in preparation for the visit to Nantgarw the following day.

These papers were followed by a short coffee break whilst we were introduced to the displays of pipes and pipe related publications that delegates had bought with them.

The start of our second session kicked off with a Tale of Two Ditches, from Chris Jarrett, in which he reported on the clay pipe assemblages recovered from excavations from two ditches. The first was the mill leat at Cardiff Castle the second was part of the civil war defences in London that were discovered in the grounds of the British Museum.

David Higgins's second paper of the day was on punch pipe produced by the Spooner family of Tredegar. This distinctive style has the figure looking back along the stem towards the smoker. Some of the known examples were marked with the name SPOONER which enabled research to be carried out to try and pin down when the pipe may have been produced. What was particularly interesting about this design was that it had broader parallels with similar designs being made widely across England, Scotland and Wales.

David's paper led quite neatly on to the next paper of the day which was from Peter Hammond and the Havard family, since the Havard's had taken over the Spooner's works in the mid-1860s.

A slight hiccup in the delivery of lunch by the caterers meant that our lunchbreak was slightly delayed, but it gave us an opportunity to have the AGM before, rather than after lunch. It also provided time for a more leisurely look at the displays of pipes and pipe related literature that delegates had bought along.

The first paper of the afternoon session took us away from Wales and was a fascinating talk from Peter Taylor on London's pipe exports to the Baltic before 1630, in which Peter asked if we can trust the

documentary evidence? It was clear from his research that the commodities that were recorded aboard these vessels in the London records were quite different from the records made at the Baltic ports!

Chris Jarratt then gave his second paper of the day looking at the recent urban excavations in Manchester and Salford and reported on a number of interesting pipe finds that these excavations revealed, including a number of pipes with Irish motifs.

We moved from pipe production in Manchester to pipe production in the south west with Marek Lewcun's paper on the excavation of two nineteenth-century pipe factories in Bath and Bristol.

The final paper of the day, from Susie White, took us away from artefactual evidence altogether and looked at the pictorial evidence for female pipe smokers, with the intriguing title of *Fact or Fantasy?* posing the question of whether the way in which women smokers have been portrayed, since the first introduction of tobacco, painted a "true" picture. This final paper brought a very full, but very enjoyable first day to a close. Delegates adjourned to a local hostelry before reconvening at the *Pen and Wig* for our conference dinner.

The following day, delegates met up at Nantgarw Chinaworks and a very civilised start to the day – coffee and Welsh cakes! We had a most interesting and informative tour of the works and displays followed by a wonderful lunch. A few hardy souls stayed on at the works until well in to the afternoon before finally making their way home.

We are most grateful to the staff at Cardiff university, in particular Alice Forward, and also to everyone at Nantgarw for making us all so welcome. With another successful conference completed where next? The answer is Sheffield and the date for your diary is Saturday 7th September 2019. As soon as we are able, we will provide more detail, and booking information.