



The Society for Clay Pipe Research

2019 SCPR Conference – Sheffield

by Susie White

Our 2019 conference took us to Sheffield, in south Yorkshire, where we were based at the Art House. Courtenay-Elle Crichton-Turley, fresh from being awarded her PhD, started off the day with an excellent presentation on the history and archaeology of Sheffield. Everything from the Iron Age through to the industrial revolution including the legend of the dragon of Wantley, slain by a knight on Wharnccliffe Crag.

Having set the archaeological mood for the day, the morning session began with papers on pipes and pipemakers from in and around Yorkshire. First to speak was Susie White who presented an overview of Sheffield's pipes and pipemakers. This survey drew on the clay pipe fragments recovered from more than 57 city centre sites which produced 23,089 clay tobacco pipe fragments comprising 3,213 bowls, 19,306 stems and 570 mouthpieces. There is very little evidence of pipe production in Sheffield in the seventeenth century and even by the eighteenth century there only appears to have been one documented maker from the city itself - Thomas Crew. Most of the pipes consumed in Sheffield appear to have come from the makers in Rotherham, where there was a thriving industry. It is not until the nineteenth century, with the industrial boom in the city, and improved transport links, that Sheffield's pipemaking industry really took off, with an increase from one maker to over 97 documented makers.

This overview, which set the pipemaking scene in Sheffield, was followed by a paper from Peter Hammond who focussed on one specific Sheffield pipemaker, Thomas Crew, who began life in Nottingham. Thomas was baptised on 4 August 1696, the son of Thomas, who was also a pipemaker. Sadly, his father died while he was very young and Thomas was bought up by his mother. He was apprenticed to William Sefton in 1710, for whom he would have been working when William produced the famous pipe clay gravestone, which is in St Mary's, Nottingham. By 1720 Thomas Crew had moved from Nottingham to Sheffield where he continued to make pipes until at least 1754, some of which carried a very distinctive stem mark.

Following a coffee break, and a chance to view the many pipe displays, the Yorkshire pipe theme continued with a second paper from Susie White, this time on the clay tobacco pipes recovered from Riverside Exchange in Sheffield. The excavation took place on a site formerly known as Millsands, which was right on the edge of the historic core of Sheffield on the west bank of the River Don. This provided a rare opportunity to study material from a large area in the centre of the city with a recorded history for the site going back 800 years. The site produced 1,499 clay pipe fragments that exhibited a number of features that were unique to Sheffield. These include a distinctive form of internal bowl cross; production flaws that point to some potentially 'sloppy' manufacturing techniques; and evidence for what would appear to be the first documented case of 'industrial doodling' in the form of stems held against a spinning grindstone. These sharply faceted fragments suggest that even in the most arduous of working conditions there were still occasional idle moments to fill.

The next paper, from David Higgins, took us from Sheffield to York and a group of tavern pipes from Swinegate, which had initially been dismissed as being unstratified and therefore of little interest. However, close examination of the pipes and associated pottery suggested that this particular group may have been a clearance group from a tavern. Two distinctive bowl forms were identified, some of which could be reconstructed to a complete length of 390-400mm (about 15 ¼" to 15 ¾"). By researching the makers marks on the associated stoneware bottles, it was possible to pin down the pipes to c1845-1860 and to show that these were 'common long' pipes, a class of pipe that can be traced from the seventeenth century onwards.

Our final stop in our tour of Yorkshire was Doncaster, with a paper from Peter Hammond on the nineteenth-century pipes and pipemakers from that city, drawing on the work of the late John Andrews. Of the nine pipemakers recorded as working in Doncaster during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Peter focussed on three main families – the Hodgson family (Benjamin 1, 2 and 3 *fl.* 1834-1871 and William *fl.* 1837-1851); John Sharrott (*fl.* 1834-1851) and the Ward family (George *fl.* 1848 and William *fl.* 1908-1928).

To finish off the morning papers Peter Taylor took us right up to Scotland to consider the clay pipe monopoly of 1619-1640. This monopoly was granted to the illegitimate grandson of James V of Scotland – a man called John Stewart. He appears to have been quite a character and, amongst other things, had been tried for conspiring to murder his brother in 1597. The trial collapsed and he attended the coronation of James I in 1603 and was a favourite of both James I and Charles I. One of the makers producing pipes in Scotland under Stewart's monopoly was William Banks. Banks was one of the few makers to mark his pipe, thus allowing his products to be identified.

The afternoon session began with a presentation by Roger Moore on the proposed excavation of a pipe kiln in Worcester that was run by John Russell between 1818 and 1868. Following a desk-based study of old maps of the centre of Worcester and a geophysical survey, an area was identified for further study by excavation. This excavation took place the week after the conference, from the 15th to 22nd September, and was carried out by volunteers. The project's blog site was updated daily and a report on the findings is scheduled for completion by the Spring of 2020.

Chris Jarrett then had two papers back-to-back. His first paper looked at two groups of clay pipe wasters from Cambridge. These were the results of excavations carried out approximately two years ago in the Bramwell area of the city. The first was 11 Sidney Street where the Pawson family worked. The other site was at 97 Newmarket Road, where the Cleaver family, among others, were working. After tea break, Chris moved on to his second paper when he spoke about clay tobacco pipes from London inns and public houses. This was a fascinating paper looking at how the character of the material culture from a post-medieval period inn or tavern varied from a domestic assemblage of the same period. He posed the question of whether new social habits and fashions changed the material culture of such assemblages.

Talk of taverns and inns lead nicely on to the next paper of the afternoon from Victor Buckley with an intriguingly titled paper "Barristers, Brothels and Breakages" referring to Copper Alley in Dublin, which was named after a lady who lived there producing copper coins. It was also the site of an excavation that produced a group of around 245 clay tobacco pipes. Analysis of the pipes showed a huge dip in the number of pipes being consumed in the period 1640-1660, which appeared to coincide with a dip in the population in the same period. One of the more notable features of this particular assemblage was a large group of unsmoked pipes clearly with very strongly nationalist motifs including shamrocks and Irish harps, which appear to have been a single batch of pipes that were broken before they could be smoked!

The final paper of the day was from Paul Jung who spoke about a very special pipe that had been commissioned in 1907 for the Jamestown Exposition to commemorate 300 years of the Jamestown settlement. This pipe took the form of the old church tower at Jamestown and was a design patented by Charles Culpepper. A chance conversation between Paul and a stall holder at an antique fair in Richmond, Virginia, not only uncovered a number of these pipes and the original brass mould, but also a lot of documentation and correspondence. This incredible archive of material documents Culpepper's correspondence with the pipemaker Charles Kurth and details the process by which the mould was made. All the brick detail on the mould was applied by hand and there is a trial area on the edge of the mould where Culpepper practised producing this brick effect before applying it to the whole mould.

This final paper concluded a very full and very interesting programme of lectures. The pipe talk continued over a drink prior to our conference meal, which was at Ego Mediterranean Restaurant and Bar, just five minutes' walk away from the conference venue.

On the Sunday morning there was a very informative walking tour of the historic centre of Sheffield, starting at the cathedral and ending at the nearby Church House pub in time for the remaining hardy souls to have lunch together before heading home.

We are most grateful to SCPR member, Courtenay-Elle Crichton-Turley, and to the staff at the Art House, for helping to make this such a successful conference.