



2017 SCPR Conference – Stoke-on-Trent

by Susie White

Our 2017 annual conference saw us in Stoke-on-Trent at the Potteries Museum. The day was divided into two broad sessions. The morning session focussed on the archaeology and pipes from in and around Staffordshire. The first paper was from Jon Goodwin, the city archaeologist for Stoke who set the scene for the archaeology and history of Stoke (Fig. 1). Stoke only became a city in 1925 being made up of a number of towns, which would explain why it has seven town halls, historically there were 13! Jon talked us through the history of the area from Roman times, through to the elusive Saxons; and from the medieval period when potters were exploiting a range of different coloured clays, right up to Stoke's heyday as a major potting centre with around 2,000 bottle kilns by the mid twentieth century, only 48 of which survive today.

Our next speak was David Barker a former keeper of archaeology at the City's museum and art gallery. The title of David's paper was *Pots, Pits and Pipes* and he reported on the pipes and pipemakers of Newcastle. By the nineteenth-century Newcastle had been a place of retreat from the "smoke" of the Potteries. Very little archaeology had been done in the town but it had been possible to establish that some small scale pottery and porcelain production had taken place. In the late seventeenth-century Newcastle had become noted as one of the main pipe production centres in the county. Although 24 makers had been noted in an old thesis from the 1660s/1670s only 18 of these could actually be traced in the records, but for a much longer period than had previously been suggested.

The final paper before coffee break was from Susie White, who talked about a group of pipes in the National Pipe Archive's collections which had been collected by Dennis Robinson of Willaston, Cheshire. The was a group of pipes that had been collected by Dennis over a number of years of fieldwalking and amounted to over 1,800 fragments, more than 1,500 of which were marked. By analysing the marks and identifying the makers it has been possible to study the range of pipes that were circulating in the Willaston area and how the market changed over time. It is hoped that this paper will be published in full in due course.

After coffee the conference continued with a paper from David Higgins looking at a particular style of stem stamp that occurs in Liverpool; the long, full-name marks. In particular David looked at the marks of the Morgans of Liverpool and their possible connection with the Morgans of Newcastle-under-Lyme. Peter Hammond then presented another of his incredibly detailed account of a pipemaking family, this time Turpins of Macclesfield.

A slight technical hitch with a pen-drive meant that we were unable to hear Chris Jarrett's paper on the recent excavations in Manchester and Salford, but to make up for it he talked us through some of the material from the excavations that he'd brought with him. Chris has promised to present this paper at next year's conference, hopefully minus the gremlins!

This bought the morning session to a close and gave us an opportunity to enjoy some lunch and have a leisurely viewing of the many displays of pipe material and books that delegates had laid out for us.

The AGM followed lunch for members of SCPR, which gave the non-members amongst us an opportunity to explore the galleries of the Potteries museum. The committee reported to the delegates the Society was in a comfortable position, financially, although they were all concerned that membership numbers seem to be falling slightly. This is despite the fact that the number of people joining the SCPR Facebook group was on the increase. It was difficult to see how to turn Facebook members in to "real" members in order to help support the Society. The question of the next occasional monograph was also raised for discussion and it was reported that the committee had decided to set up an informal editorial board in order to try and get another issue of the monograph prepared. Members were to be kept informed of progress.

The afternoon session, with papers on a national and international theme, began with a paper from Peter Taylor looking at the relationship between the Stuart monopolies on raw material and finished goods – in this case pipeclay and clay pipes. We then had a fascinating paper from Courtenay-Elle Crichton-Turley with an update on her research into pipe clay figurines both in London and in the New World using 3D modelling techniques.

After tea break, Peter Davey picked up the baton to give us the first of two international papers. Peter's paper looked at a very rare baroque pipe from the Fremling Collection in Lund. Rather unusually this pipe was made of brass rather than clay but rather more curiously, the pipe had a label with it to say that it was from north America despite being a form that would normally be associated with the Dutch baroque pipes of the seventeenth century. Why such a pipe was made of brass and how it ended up in America remains a mystery, but a full discussion is to be published in the volume 10 of the journal of the *Académie Internationale de la Pipe*.

The final paper of the day was from Jan Kwint who presented the preliminary results from a study of clay pipes from Rotterdam. You can read a summary of Jan's paper in SCPR 92.

The concluded the formal part of the day and everyone lent a hand to tidy up so that we could head off to a local hostelry to continue our pipe discussion - The Coachmakers Arms fitted the bill perfectly and filled in the time until our conference dinner at the Piccadilly Brasserie which bought a very successful first day to a close.

Our Sunday excursion was great, but didn't quite go according to plan thanks to a burst water main in Telford that had huge ramifications for everyone in the Ironbridge gorge. Thankfully this did not disrupt our plans too much, but it did call for some quick thinking and last minute re-planning. The day began, as planned, at the Broseley Pipe Works with tea and coffee as we arrived. We had a wonderful tour of the works with a pipemaking demonstration from Rex Key. By the time we had to leave the Pipe Works we were working "off script" since the burst water main meant that all the major attractions in the Gorge were being closed to the public, so our planned lunch and visit to Blists Hill was no longer going to be possible. There were a number of frantic phone calls and dashes to the Tourist Information office to come up with a Plan B for the afternoon. Whilst all this was happening the Ironbridge Staff managed to find us an alternative venue for lunch at the Bird in Hand pub, which was excellent. We were incredibly impressed with how quickly the staff at the pub were able to provide a splendid 2-course lunch for us all given how little notice they had been given. As we left the water in the Bird in Hand also went off! Our Plan B turned out to be a trip to Moseley Old Hall, who had kindly offered to take our group provided we could arrive before 4pm – we literally threw ourselves through their doors at 4:01! We had a splendid visit with an incredibly knowledgeable guide who was 90 years young and agreed to stay for an extra half an hour so that we could have the full house tour.

This bought to a close a very full, but very enjoyable conference and we are grateful to all those who made such a fabulous success. Of course for some SCPR members the conference didn't really end because it rolled on into that of the *Académie Internationale de la Pipe* (AIP), which began the very next day. A write up of what the AIP got up too can be found in SCPR 92.