

SCPR Annual Conference 2011 - York

by David Higgins

This year the Society's annual conference was held in the north-east, on 10th and 11th September at the Priory Street Community Centre in York. The meeting was organised by Susie White and was well attended, with a mixture of 'regulars', as well as a number of new faces too. These included some members who had not been to a conference before, as well as some non-members who had seen details about the conference on our new website. The papers that were presented covered a wide range of topics, starting with talks on pipes and pipemakers from Yorkshire and then moving on to newly discovered pipe kilns, scientific analysis of pipe clays, ground breaking finds from Derbyshire and finally branding on pipes to bring us back to York. Most of the speakers have been persuaded to write up their papers for the benefit of members who were unable to get to York, and they are included in this issue of the newsletter.

The programme for the Saturday was nice and relaxed giving everyone plenty of opportunity to look at the displays that fellow delegates had brought along, and also providing a chance for people to chat. Thanks are due to all those members who brought such an interesting range of pipes and related objects for us to look at.

The conference opened with a welcome from Pete Connelly from the York Archaeological Trust (and director of the Hungate Project). He was able to give us a great introduction to the city and whet our appetites for the tour of the Hungate excavations that was to follow on the Sunday.

Susie White presented a double paper. The first part provided a taste of the pipes that were being excavated from Hungate, which linked in nicely with Pete's introduction. The second part of her paper looked at a selection of pipe makers from York from the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. She focussed on just two makers, Abraham Boyes from the late seventeenth century, and Richard Shaftoe from the early eighteenth century, and contrasted not only their pipes, but also the details that can be gleaned about their lives from the surviving documentary records. This was quite neatly followed by a paper from **Peter Hammond** on Christopher Boyes, Abraham's son, and the link between pipe making and trunk making trades; a link that appears to be peculiar to York.

After coffee break **Hilary Brook** gave a very good, and very detailed paper on the Birstall pipemakers, which was full of information about the inter-family connections. Birstall may not be a particularly large place but the pipemakers it produced certainly made an impact on the wider profession. **Peter Hammond's** second paper of the day looked at the nineteenth-century pipemakers in York and once again we had lots of very interesting and detailed information about the pipe makers there. This paper brought to a close the Yorkshire element of the pipe conference. Just before lunch **Heather Scharnhorst** gave a fascinating account of a recently discovered pipe kiln site in Wareham – that of the early nineteenth century maker Augustus Moore. Heather was planning to go back and excavate the site in the early autumn, so we look forward to a progress report on that.

A very nice buffet lunch had been provided for us by the Priory Centre, which meant that everyone had time to look at the displays and exchange information. The afternoon session began with a paper from one of our Canadian members, **Francoise Duguay**, who introduced us to the world of archaeometry. The paper focussed on scientific analysis of a small sample of clay tobacco pipes and put forward the suggestion that such analysis might be able to help in identifying the origin of pipes, particularly 'counterfeit' pipes that were made in one place but copying styles used elsewhere.

The author (**David Higgins**) then followed with a paper on a very exciting group of pipes from Staveley Hall in Derbyshire. The 2010 excavations at the hall have recovered a midden deposit with an excellent group of pipes that will change the way we view early eighteenth-century pipes in this part of the country. This midden has produced pipes with stems that appear to have been longer than any of the period that have been previously recorded, and with glazed tips that are more than 50 years earlier than any previously discovered. Another season of excavation was undertaken on the midden this summer and so further work will be required before a full report on this group can be prepared.

The final paper of the day was from **Jenny Basford** a final year PhD student from the University of York, who presented a small part of her study on branding and how that manifested itself on the pipes from York. Jenny illustrated her paper with pipes from York and from Hungate, which brought us very neatly full circle.

After tea break we had the AGM. Pete Rayner was thanked for his contribution to the committee over the last few years, having decided to step down, and, in the absence of any other offers of help, the remaining committee were asked to carry on running the Society (David Higgins as Chairman, Peter Hammond as Membership Secretary / Treasurer, Susie White Newsletter Editor, Libby Key as General Secretary; Chris Jarrett as Publicity Officer and Rex Key as a committee member). Peter Hammond reported on the state of the Society's finances – which are nice and healthy – and noted that current membership stands at a respectable 148 members. Susie White reported on the progress of the newsletter and on a number of other projects that she has been working on, including the development of the new website, the preparation for publication of a new SCPR Monograph, and on indexing of the back issues of the newsletter. All of these projects are slowly moving forward in her 'spare' time, so keep a look out in the newsletter and on the website for developments.

This brought the formal part of the conference to a close and gave everyone a little time to get ready for the conference meal, which was at the Royal Oak in Goodramgate, where we had a superb meal in a timber framed setting.

Sunday was a glorious sunny day and saw the remaining conference delegates gathered in Exhibition Square for a two-hour walking tour. This gave us an opportunity to take in some of York's earlier history, starting with the Roman remains of Eboracum. However, being an SCPR tour, our eagle eyed members managed to spot a nineteenth century frieze including a pipe on one of the buildings we walked past, and managed to persuade our guide that he really should include it in all his future tours! Having walked round part of the city walls, and through the Shambles, our tour came to an end close to the Hungate Dig, just in time for lunch. Our lunch venue was the Black Swan with its amazing painted wooden panelling, and this gave us time to recover from the mornings exertions before our final tour of the day – a tour of the Hungate excavations led by Pete Connelly. Pete gave us a whistle-stop tour of the site, 2000 years of York's history, in about an hour. This visit included a chance to go behind the scenes to take a close look at some of the objects that they have been recovering from the site, particularly from the Roman and Viking levels, which are currently under excavation.

This brought to an end a very full, but very enjoyable conference in York. Thanks to all those who made the weekend such a success – the speakers, the staff at the Priory Community Centre, our York guide, Pete Connelly from York Archaeological Trust, and last, but by no means least, to Susie White for organising everything so professionally.

Where will we be next year? Well, it looks like we are heading south for a change, to Kent. Brian Boyden and Chris Jarrett have taken up the baton and have very kindly offered to organise next year's conference for us, so watch this space.