

Lyme Regis Museum
Lyme's History in Objects
6: c.1640 - Tobacco Pipes
Accession Numbers LRM1991/69 and 1999/35

By Felicity Hebditch

Summary

These are clay pipes made for smoking tobacco and are evidence of Dorset connections with America, which started with fishing fleets going to Newfoundland in the 15th century before Columbus and Cabot. Tobacco was imported to England probably in the mid 16th century and quickly became popular. It was thought by some to have medicinal qualities and able to ward off the plague. The first clay pipes made in England had very small bowls as tobacco was expensive, but pipes were made larger as it became more plentiful. Lyme's pipes were probably made in Chard. The maker's mark is usually stamped on the bowl.



Clay tobacco pipe bowl from around the time of the Civil War (c1630-50) dug up in 1991 in the garden of Buena Vista, Pound Street (LRM1991/69). Bowl 2cm long.



Clay pipe stems and bowls from the garden of the Roman Catholic Church in Silver Street (LRM 1999/35), donated by Monica Palmer-Smith.

Tobacco

Wild tobacco *Nicotiana rustica* came from South America. The cruder the leaf the less addictive it is; impurities protect against addiction. Montezuma smoked cigars as a tube mixed with sweet gum. The Incas inhaled it as powder to clear the head. Native Americans, such as the Powhatans, in Virginia, used tobacco in religious ceremonies for the Great Spirit and as medicine. It was smoked on special occasions such as in ceremonies for peace with conflicting parties. They had silver pipes which were shared around.

Dorset and the discovery of America

Europeans had been going to Newfoundland long before Christopher Columbus' journey to America in 1492. The Vikings colonised Greenland (it is still Danish) and they penetrated the American coast from there, but left few lasting legacies.

There were tremendous numbers of fish off Newfoundland, unlike Europe where there had been so many different people overfishing the stocks of the Mediterranean and Atlantic. It is now thought that Basque fishing fleets were involved in cod fishing from 1000 AD; their ships were derived from Viking designs and could survive rough seas. Because the Basques made salt, they could preserve what they caught, bringing it back to Europe and to Britain. By 1534 it was reckoned that there were a thousand Basque ships in Newfoundland.

Bristol had bought cod from Iceland, and from the 1480s was sending ships to bring back cod from Newfoundland. They were amazed at the size of the fish - 'as big as a man' - and the plentiful catches. A letter to the Duke of Milan reporting John Cabot's return to Bristol states that *the sea there is swarming with fish which can be taken not only with the net but in basket let down with a stone.*

Fleets of fishing boats went from Poole and Lyme and other South West ports to fish for cod. There is a painting in the Dorset County Museum, Dorchester, showing one of the large huts which they built to dry their catch. They generally stayed for the summer and returned before winter set in. An excavation of one of these summer huts has shown that all their goods were brought from Britain. You would have thought they would trade with the native peoples, but even their tobacco was transported all the way to Britain and then carried all the way back across the Atlantic. At first the fishermen only stayed in summer and returned home for winter but eventually they became permanent settlements.

Jamestown in 1612 was one of the first British colonies in Virginia. Here the English came to settle and eventually take over the land of the Native Americans. When asked 'What is the name of this island?' they replied 'Ours.'

From Fish to Colonies

Richard Bushrod of Dorchester invested in furs and fishing. He obtained a license in 1623 to 'settle a plantation in New England'. (The King, James I, gave concessions for colonies or trade.) There may have been Dorchester men at the small fishing station at Port Ann, in what became Massachusetts. John White, the puritan preacher in Dorchester, had set up the Dorchester Company in 1624, which became the Massachusetts Bay Co. Lyme's Thomas Coram was one of the founders of Massachusetts.



John White wanted fishing stations to be more than that; they should establish puritan settlements in New England as a protestant force to counter Spain and Catholicism in America. The *Mary and John*, with a number of Dorchester people on board, left Plymouth in 1630 to found the colony of Dorchester (now a suburb of Boston). They described the journey and noted *porpoises leaping and playing about our ship, the huge whales puffing and spewing up water as they went by*. Ships also went out from Weymouth.

Slavery and the “Three Cornered Trade”

Europe benefited from American produce with potatoes, tomatoes, maize, pineapples, beans (haricot, kidney, French and runner beans), chocolate, vanilla, peanuts, peppers, tapioca, turkeys, gold and silver, rubber and tobacco - most of these from the South (Dorchester people were eating turkey in 1630).

The real money was to be made out of sugar. The Portuguese made sugar plantations in Brazil; in 1550 there were 5, by 1623 there were 350.

The English made plantations in the West Indies to grow sugar cane, using slaves from Africa to do the hard work. Salt cod from America’s west coast was sold to the West Indies as cheap food for slaves. John Hawkins, the Elizabethan admiral, was involved in this ‘three cornered trade’, going to Guinea in Africa to sell English goods and to buy slaves to sell in the West Indies and America, returning to England with American goods.

Richard and John Burridge were Lyme’s leading merchants from the 1680s. Among their many voyages their ship *Mary and Elizabeth* sailed in 1712 to Gambia, collecting 135 slaves which she carried to Virginia, 22 of which died on the journey. They returned to Lyme with 10 cwt (0.5 metric tonnes) of ivory and 50 tons (50 metric tonnes) of tobacco.

Tobacco in Britain

Sir Francis Drake brought back tobacco from America in 1585 and sold some to Sir Walter Raleigh, who is said to have been smoking in the garden of his house at Sherborne when his servant threw a bucket of water over him, thinking he was on fire, although this story has doubters.

A German traveler, Paul Hentzner, described the spectators at London theatres in 1598 smoking tobacco in long clay pipes, *putting fire to it, they draw the smoke into their mouths, which they puff out again through their nostrils like funnels*.

Tobacco was thought to be medicinal; quinine, useful in the treatment of malaria, came from South America, so was tobacco good for you? It was supposed to ward off the plague, and pipes are found in plague pits. Boys were encouraged to smoke. Books were written against smoking and even King James I wrote a *Counterblast to Tobacco*, in which he denigrated the *barbarous and beastly manners of the wild, godless Indians*. But the Powhatans, unlike the Europeans, only smoked on special occasions, not every day.

The difficult times of the 1640s, leading to the Civil War, might have led to an increased use of tobacco. Certainly in the Second World War people derived comfort from smoking.

Clay Pipes

Clay pipes were cheap to make: there was a maker in larger towns. The first ones had very small bowls to save tobacco as it was expensive and carried a tax. Sometimes they have a decoration, for example a crown means that the pipe was made in London. Pipes were sold over long distances, even though they were fragile - London pipes were exported to Colonial Williamsburg in Virginia.

Native American shared their pipes, but soon Europeans each had their own. Inns provided their customers with pipes, often later cooked in the oven to clean them. Briar pipes were used from about 1870.

These pipes may have been made by George Butt in Chard. The Museum has many other collections of pipes and pipe fragments in its collection and some are on display, including the pipes described here, in the Early History Gallery on the Ground Floor.

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