



The Society for Clay Pipe Research

2024 SCPR Conference – Hereford

by Susie White

August 2024 was the Society's first trip to Hereford, where we met at the Kindle Centre for our annual conference. Although the first paper was not scheduled to start until 9:30, there were lots of very keen pipe people waiting at the door to get in – which was great.

The first part of the day was devoted to presentations on the pipes from Herefordshire and Shropshire, but to set the scene we needed an introduction to Hereford itself. That was expertly handled by Clara de Sousa Cunha, who is the Finds Liaison Officer for Shropshire for the Portable Antiquities Scheme. Clara gave us a brief run down on the history and archaeology of Hereford – a city known for its cider, beer and the famous Hereford breed of cattle, but less so for its clay pipes – an omission we aimed to correct!

David Higgins opened the proceedings with a paper looking at the pipes and pipemakers of Hereford. Shropshire, immediately to the north of Herefordshire, dominated pipe manufacture in the region from the mid-seventeenth century onwards, with the trade in the county's distinctive products taking advantage of the course taken by the River Severn. It was this navigable river that enabled the movement of pipes from Shropshire down through Worcester and on to Gloucester and Bristol where cargoes could be trans-shipped globally. In his 1975 list of pipemakers for the county, Oswald listed just four makers, suggesting that not many pipes were made in Herefordshire itself. However, David was able to show that pipe making had been established in the county by the early seventeenth century. The work carried out by Allan Peacey, Graham Berlyn and the late John Potts has now documented at least twenty-two makers working in seven different locations, almost all of whom were active during the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries. Although Broseley styles influenced production in the north of the county from the late seventeenth to mid eighteenth centuries, distinctive regional bowl forms and styles of marking were emerging elsewhere in Herefordshire by the mid seventeenth century. The use of a rose and crown mark, often flanked by the maker's initials, was a particularly distinctive characteristic of the county. Local production declined or died out by the mid eighteenth century with pipes being supplied from surrounding centres, including Bristol to the south. Much more research is needed to fully document the pipemakers and study pipe styles from across Herefordshire, but it is already clear that early pipemakers worked in the county and developed their own distinctive styles.

Peter Taylor then took to the floor and told the story of Pipe Passage in Coleham, Shrewsbury, and the pipe maker William Taylor, from whom Peter descends. It was a fascinating tale with a note of caution not to believe everything you read in the papers or, for that matter, everything that appears in "official" documents! A full write up of Peter's paper has been published in issue 106 of the Society's Newsletter.

The final paper on a Hereford/Shropshire theme was by the author looking at pipe research in and around Pipe Aston, in North Herefordshire. We couldn't come to Hereford for a pipe conference and not mention the work carried out over many years by Dr Allan Peacey. Allan is probably best known for his study of pipe kiln technology, but he also carried out extensive documentary research, excavation and fieldwork at Pipe Aston and in the neighbouring parishes. Susie gave a summary of some of this work, the physical archive of which is now housed with the National Pipe Archive, but went on to talk about one site in particular, at Birtley. Recovered from a house there many years after Allan first visited, were three large, framed displays of local pipes that had been collected by the owner. These have been deposited with the local museum and, thanks to the local FLO, Clara, who spoke earlier in the day, these frames were bought along to the conference for delegates to look at. A full write up of Susie's paper has been published in issue 106 of the Society's Newsletter.

Peter Hammond took to the floor next to present some of his favourite pipe finds, with tales of how his interest and love of pipe collecting and research started.

The final paper of the morning was easily one of the most animated that we have had at any SCPR meeting, from one of our new members, James Ashwell. James has just taken up a part-time residency at Broseley pipe works and has received a grant from the Heritage Crafts Association to 3D print pipe moulds from scans of historical clay pipes. His paper titled "*Bringing Clay Pipe Making into the Digital Age*" was the story of how all of this came about, and the incredible work he is doing at Broseley to try and reinvigorate this age-old craft. The highlight of his talk was almost certainly the unveiling of a pipe made using a 3D scan of Rex Key's head, which has now been turned into a pipe mould – and rather splendid it is too!

Just before we broke for a superb lunch provided by the Kindle Centre, there was an introduction to the displays that had been set up by some of our delegates. It is always really nice to be able have the opportunity to see and handle actual pipes at our conferences.

Germander Speedwell kicked off the papers for the afternoon session which focussed on pipes and pipemakers from further afield. Germander's talk was entitled "*Recent Pipe Surprises from the Thames*" and was illustrated with some fascinating finds including some French and Dutch pipes that had ended up in the Thames. One of the English pipes was decorated with a very distinctive character that is almost certainly Joseph Grimaldi. Joseph was born in 1778 and was to become one of London's leading clowns, being described as the most popular entertainer of his day. He was the original "white-faced clown" and contemporary images of him show him with a broad painted grin, black eyebrows and with distinctive triangles of make-up on his cheeks.

The next paper was by Susie White who presented an overview of the smoking artefacts that have been recorded on the Portable Antiquities Scheme database. She outlined the value of recording this later material, which is not systematically recorded by the PAS. It is not just the pipes themselves that are of use to researchers but also all the associated smoking related items such as pipe stoppers, pipe prickers, smoking tongs and smoker's companions. Susie went on to look a selection of pipes and pipe related objects that had been recorded from the Herefordshire and Shropshire area.

The first of two international papers was presented next, by Ruud Stam from the Netherlands, looking at Dutch pipes used for the slave trade in Africa. Tobacco was introduced to West Africa by the Portuguese in the mid sixteenth century, and smoking amongst the local population was already widespread before the first Western pipes appeared. Local excavations suggest that Dutch pipes, particularly those from Gouda, were popular among the Dutch settlers in this part of Africa as well as with the local population. In the seventeenth, eighteenth and early part of the nineteenth centuries, a barter system operated on the Gold Coast. Pipes were traded for a wide range of food and trade goods, including gold and ivory, but also in exchange for enslaved persons which formed part of the infamous "Triangular Trade". Ruud talked about the cargoes from two of the ships; the Dutch ship *Prins Willem V* in 1762, with 12 gross of long pipes and 18 gross of short pipes on board, and the French ship *Reine des Anges* in 1740, with 14 crates of pipes. He went on to look at the some of the pipemakers and their products that may have been involved in this trade.

After a tea break and a chance to look at the displays once again, Susie White presented the second international paper on behalf of Denis Gojak entitled "*The Mysterious M/G Pipemaker: The Global Hunt for a Likely Suspect*". Denis' paper looked at the unknown pipemaker with the initials MG, whose products have been found in mid-nineteenth-century contexts in New South Wales and Tasmania in Australia, as well as at sites in New Zealand and Canada. Increasingly these pipes are being attributed to Glasgow pipemaker, Macolm Galbraith, and with the ease that we can now search entire archives of reports for a single keyword, the Galbraith attribution is rapidly becoming an internet fact. But is it a fact? Having reviewed the evidence, the excavated pipes appear to be a little earlier than the working dates for Galbraith, leading Denis to question whether he remains the most likely candidate and, if not, then who? What is needed is more information on the nineteenth-century pipemakers and their products within the UK so that exported finds like this can be identified and dated more reliably - and Denis put out a plea for us to carry on with this work!

The final paper of the day was from Ian Becky who rounded off his story of the Bristol pipemaker John George Reynolds, bringing us up to date with his research into this maker and his products recovered from kiln dumps.

After clearing away the displays, delegates adjourned to the *Imperial* for a drink and more pipe talk. Our conference meal was just a few yards away at the *Cosy Club*, where we enjoyed an excellent dinner and - yes - more pipe talk.

Those of us who were staying for the Sunday met that morning just outside Hereford Cathedral, where our guided walking tour began. We had a fascinating tour of the city with our very knowledgeable local guide. Unlike the walking tours we have had at past conferences, this one included a number of musical interludes, thanks to Sir Edward Elgar - the famous English composer who lived in Hereford - and our tour guide's portable sound system!

At the end of the tour, we rounded off the conference with a superb lunch at the riverside restaurant, *de Koffie Pot*, whilst being entertained by a very talented young local singer. Our thanks to all the contributors and to those who made the conference such an enjoyable and successful event.