

Who made them ? – determining the manufacturer of a clay pipe

Recently Philip Whaites and the National Trust gardening staff at Wimpole Hall found two clay pipe bowls – one in the West Garden, the other in the Walled Garden area. Our latest field walking has also produced lots of clay pipe stems together with a pipe bowl and stem. How can we tell who made them and where? These three pipes illustrate the ease and/or difficulty of doing so.



Photograph 1. Photograph showing the inscriptions on the West Garden pipe (photo courtesy of Stephen Reed).

Pipe one, shown above, is unused but is missing the mouthpiece end of the stem. It has impressed inscriptions on either side of the stem – to the left (as viewed by the smoker) is “Hanley & Co” while on the right is “Waterford”. In addition an oval badge

on the rear of the bowl contains the impressed words “Ben Nevis Cutty”. There is no foot or stem on the bowl base. What can we tell about this pipe?

Well, telling who manufactured it is easy - it was made by J. Hanley & Co in Waterford, Ireland as the inscriptions show. The company was active from 1869 to the 1950's so it is hard to date exactly when it was made. Its style is that of a heavy duty, thick-walled workman's pipe with a short stem which has a 7/64ths inch diameter hole down it. The name Ben Nevis Cutty tells us two things – it was a pipe originally made for the Irish and Scottish market and the cutty name indicates a specific type of pipe meant to be clasped between the teeth so that the hands remain free to carry out (usually) manual work.

What is it doing at Wimpole, a long way from its intended market place in Scotland or Ireland? Early pipes (in the 18th century and before) were generally fragile and did not transport well by the available transport of the day so they tended to only be sold in the area close to the manufacturer. However, in the later 19th century and subsequent years, the advent of trains (and then motor vehicles) meant a more easy way to transport goods over longer distances. So Hanley's may have had a local sales outlet here in Cambridgeshire selling their goods shipped from Waterford by sea and train. However, the coprolite industry in Cambridgeshire and construction work on roads and railways in the late 19th C employed large numbers of Irish navvies so it is not impossible that one of them had brought a supply of his own. The robust thick walls of the bowl would have made this pipe less prone to damage but obviously the stem broke.

Pipe two, shown in photo two, presents more of a problem. This is a used, thin-walled and brittle bowl with a spur that only has a short piece of stem attached. Its shape is classified (using the Oswald notation of AO28) as being typically made between 1820 and 1840. There are several relief items on the bowl – the identical cross keys decoration on both the left and right side of the bowl and the barley head (also called oak leaves) type of decoration on the front and the back of the bowl. The latter decoration is used to cover up imperfections in the joint formed when two halves of the mould are pressed together. The Cross Keys could symbolise a pub of that name – pubs of the period not only sold alcohol but also pipes and the tobacco to go in them.



Photograph 2 Photograph showing the decoration on the Walled Garden pipe (photo courtesy of Stephen Reed).

This type of pipe was an early form of advertising. However, the cross keys symbol is also the sign of St. Peter in the Catholic Church (he was said to be the gatekeeper to Heaven). Also crossed keys are the symbol used on Masonic regalia for the treasurer of the Lodge. However, the pub source is most likely with a number of pubs of that name in the area, including one in Magdalene St. in Cambridge. The Cleaver family are known to have produced pipes with this decoration at their Newmarket Road base while an unknown maker from St Neots produced them as well (Flood, 1976).

More interesting still are the initials on the spur beneath the bowl. The convention is that the manufacturer's first name is on the left (as seen by the smoker) and the surname on the right side. This gives the initials S M for the maker. Looking at the recorded makers in Cambridgeshire (Flood, 1976 and Cessford, 2001) there is only one with these initials – that is Sarah Mumby who in 1839 was listed as working in St. Ives. This date would fit in with the style of the pipe. However, it is known that Sarah

inherited the business when her husband James died and continued to use his moulds (with the initials J M on them) for some time after. If, and when, she used moulds with the initials S M is unknown. She was succeeded in the business by her son Joseph by 1847.

Of course, as we have discussed, the pipe could have been brought into the area from anywhere in the country by the mid-19th C. Interestingly, in the period 1800 – 1899 Oswald (1975) does not list a single maker in London using the initials S M and only two in the rest of the country (in Chester and Bristol but earlier in the 17th and 18th C) so the use of these particular initials is quite rare. Finally, it is possible that these initials belong to a small maker, most likely locally, whose details are not recorded. Clay pipe making was almost a cottage industry and the circulation of their wares may literally only be within a mile or so of the kiln site.

Pipe three is the one found while field walking at Great Eversden.



Photograph 3 Photograph showing the initials on the plain Great Eversden pipe (photo courtesy of Stephen Reed).

This is a used, thicker-walled bowl with a short foot that only has a short piece of stem attached. Its shape is classified (using the Oswald notation of AO25) as being typically made between 1700 and 1770. There is no decoration on the pipe bowl or on the stem which is typical of many of these early pipes, although decoration does start to be used in about 1730. Cambridgeshire is also known for having much fewer decorated or marked pipes than other counties.

There are, however, initials on the short foot beneath the bowl. The convention is the same as described above - the manufacturer's first name is on the left (as seen by the smoker) and the surname on the right side. This gives the initials G S for the maker (although the G may actually be a stylised C) and here we see the difficulty of identifying the actual maker, even when we have initials. Flood (Flood 1976) only lists one G S maker who was active around 1850 in St Neots – but this date does not match the style of the pipe. There is also a comment that this may be a misspelling of a Joseph Sleigh in which case it would more likely have initials J S (or sometimes an I is used instead of a J). Cessford (2001) lists Joseph Sleigh but no-one with the initials G S in either Cambridge city or the surrounding area. Finally Oswald (1975) does not list a G S in Cambridgeshire, Huntingdonshire, Essex, Bedfordshire or Norfolk. However, he does list a George Stebbing in 1715 living in Woodbridge, Suffolk. So right initials, right sort of date based on the pipe style - but then we run into the problem of how did a pipe from the East Coast find its way to Cambridge, especially a field way out of the town centre? Of course it is possible that a visitor brought his own pipe with him all this way but what is the likelihood? We then go back to the scenario of a small local maker of pipes who made so few and in such a restricted area he/she failed to be listed.

Conclusions

Although the presence of maker's initials or decoration on a particular clay pipe may make identification of the maker possible, it is not always the case. Many producers of clay pipes worked on such a small scale they were never recorded. Without some exact parallel or known example, it is very difficult to identify many local pipe producers. The examples here illustrate the problems: pipe 1 is easy to identify, pipe 2 has a likely maker but with no clear provenance we can only suggest a maker while pipe 3 has no likely maker or known provenance and we can only guess at a maker.

Bibliography

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