

Faversham's Clay Tobacco Pipes

Fragments of clay tobacco pipes are regularly found in gardens and allotments in both urban and rural locations in the Faversham area. Such a common and fragile artefact has become an important dating aid for archaeologists working on sites from the late 16th to 19th centuries.

Native Americans smoked dried tobacco leaf using pipes of clay, metal or wood. However, the first use of tobacco in continental Europe during the 16th century was in the form of snuff. Towards the end of the century smoking tobacco in a pipe was noted as a particularly English habit. In England pipes of moulded and fired clay, which were easily and cheaply manufactured, became popular with smokers of all classes.



Research into the development of pipe design, based on examples datable by other means, has identified changes in form which suggest a chronological progression.

The bowls of earlier pipes were of a form which has become known as 'heart shaped' – the mouth/rim of the bowl being narrower than the maximum diameter (Fig 1). Later, pipes got larger, and the shape changed (Fig 2). It was also noted that the bowl became more upright and the angle between the mouth and the stem got flatter as the form developed.

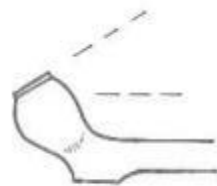


Fig. 1



Fig. 2

American studies of earlier colonial settlements further revealed that the stem bore size generally decreased from 8/64" circa 1620 to 4/64" circa 1760. After the later date bore size became less reliable as a dating aid. Another dating indicator is the inside diameter of the bowl which increased from 1/4 " circa 1560 to 1/2 " circa 1700, again becoming less reliable at later dates.

Pipes with simple embossed decoration occurred from the early 17th century. However, complex and sophisticated decoration became more common in the 18th century. Public houses and fraternal organisations such as the Freemasons and Buffalos commissioned pipes – often given away free. Local and national events were commemorated, politicians caricatured, naval and military heroes celebrated. Such decoration aids dating.

Pipe production, though centred on Bristol and London, was widespread throughout the country. The larger Kentish towns and cities – Canterbury, Maidstone, Dover, Rochester etc – had pipe makers. Locally, makers were recorded at Sheerness, Milton and Sittingbourne. At least two makers worked in Faversham – John Baker circa 1708 and the Irish family circa 1840s. From the earliest days some pipe makers stamped their initials on the bowl or, more commonly, on the 'spur' of their product.



During the course of the 'Hunt the Saxons' excavations, July 2005, many clay pipe fragments were uncovered. The most significant pieces will form the basis of a study collection to which can be linked to a specific location and examples already in the collection at the Fleur de Lis.

Further reading.

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