

**A SHORT HISTORY OF CLAY SMOKING PIPES
(INCLUDING THOSE FOUND AT GRIFFYDAM)**



**Moulded pipe made post 1750
Found in the allotments at the rear of the Wesleyan Methodist Chapel,
Griffydam
© David Maltby**



**Moulded pipe made post 1750
Found in a garden on Elder Lane, Griffydam - Rear view shown on page 3,
LH side**

BY SAMUEL T STEWART - SEPT 2023

**EXAMPLES OF CLAY SMOKING PIPES DUG UP IN
GRIFFYDAM
(MANUFACTURING DATES GIVEN ARE APPROXIMATE)**



**Found in the area of the Cunneries off Elder Lane, Griffydam
© John Bramley**



**Moulded pipe post 1750
Found in the allotments at the rear of the Wesleyan Methodist Chapel,
Griffydam
© David Maltby**



**After 1700
© David Maltby**



After 1750

After 1710

After 1750

Found in a garden on Elder Lane, Griffydham

© Alan Robinson

A BRIEF HISTORY OF CLAY PIPE MAKING

Tobacco was first brought to England from America during the Tudor period, and was first smoked in a clay pipe. Clay pipes may have been smoked before the introduction of tobacco using herbs and plant leaves from the 15th century or maybe even before that time. Clay tobacco pipe making began c. 1580-1585, probably in London, and spread across the country, springing up in the main cities and towns and especially those with access to suitable clay. Over the next 250 years, almost every city and town and many villages had a clay pipe maker.

The evolution of clay pipes took many forms and the original bowls were barrel shaped in form with a flat heel and a small internal diameter, about 6mm, due to the high cost of imported tobacco. Stems were some 100-150mm long with a hole approximately 2mm in diameter down their length

The traditional techniques for making a clay pipe were practised from the 1580s. Clays were prepared, and blanks or 'dummies' from the wet clay were rolled. A wire was inserted along the stem and the dummy was then inserted into a pre-oiled, two-part mould which was clamped in a vice to ensure both parts of the mould were fully closed. A stopper is then inserted in an opening in the mould to form the bowl and the wire then pushed through into the bowl. The moulded pipe is then removed and the excess clay is trimmed off. The pipe is then left to dry before the final trimming and firing in a kiln. The pipe stem may then later be tipped with glaze or varnish.

Tudor moulds were made of carved wood, but metals such as lead, brass, bronze and iron were subsequently used. In the nineteenth century, three or four part moulds were used for more complicated designs such as portrait pipes, and steam-powered presses were developed to close the moulds. Hand-finishing of special pipes in the nineteenth century often involved skills of incorporating coloured glazes or pipe parts made of other materials. The craft involved men, women and children either as a family business or a larger factory employing dozens of workers and apprentices.

As tobacco prices started to fall in the first half of the 17th century, the pipe bowl inside diameter by about 1640 had increased to about 10mm but the stems remained about the same length. After this date, the bowls grew progressively larger and the stems increased in length to 250-350mm. A pointed spur replaced the flat heel and this became the standard for the next 60 years or so. Generally, 17th century pipes were plain but occasionally you may find milling or a plain ring around the top with a maker's mark. By about 1700 the bowls had become more elongated with a further increase in the bowl internal diameter to about 13mm, but the bore down the stem remained at about 2mm diameter.

The clay pipe industry peaked c.1700, after which snuff-taking became more popular with the upper classes, but the production of clay pipes still continued and peaked again in the early-nineteenth century

Pipe designs evolved through small changes, and due to better manufacturing methods, the accuracy and finish improved, meaning that thinner walls on the bowls and more slender stems could be achieved. The diameter of the bowls continued to increase and by the mid 18th century moulded bowls were developed which enabled the makers to introduce fancy designs with in some cases advertising symbols on them such as Public houses, Masonic arms, Regimental badges etc. These were referred to as "fancy clays" or "fancies". **Examples of fancy clays are shown in the preceding photographs.**

By the mid 18th century, very long pipes known as Alderman or Straws had been introduced. These were some 450-600mm in length with a stem bore averaging 2.4mm. This was a remarkable achievement for such a long stem. Broseley in Shropshire was celebrated for making the 25-inch (63 cms) churchwarden pipe. After 1850, what was known as the "yard of Clay" or churchwarden pipe appeared, with stems up to 900mm in length. Decorated pipes greatly increased in numbers, however, the working man required a short stem pipe which could be gripped between their teeth whilst working.

As cigarettes and cigars became popular and more robust meerschaum and briar pipes were introduced, this caused the decline of the industry at a local level, and by the early 1900's the industry had largely disappeared.

Specialist manufacturers continued to produce moulded pipes until 1992 when Pollocks of Manchester finally closed its doors.

Oliver Meeson – having a lifelong interest in history and a background in art, through an accidental introduction to pipe making and learning of its decline, was inspired to learn the craft and ensure this aspect of social history is not forgotten. Oliver makes 19th century clay tobacco pipes using traditional techniques and moulds, producing briars, cutty's and bubble pipes. He currently produces around 1000 pipes a year, for private sale and museums, and also demonstrates pipe making at [Broseley Pipeworks](#) in Ironbridge Gorge.

Rex Key made pipes at the [Broseley Pipeworks](#) in Ironbridge Gorge, which was an original 19th century business owned by the Southorn Family that closed in 1964 and was boarded up but later discovered and reopened. Rex used original tools and moulds belonging to the Southorn Family, and made pipes as part of his living. He is now based in Stafford. For anyone interested, Rex has an excellent video on 'You tube' which takes you through the complete process of pressed pipe making in moulds.