

Clay tobacco pipes from Stepney Green (XRV10)

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Chapter 1 Medieval and Tudor moated mansion (Periods 2 and 3)

A handful of clay pipe fragments were found in contexts dated from the medieval period to the 18th century, and all of them appear to be displaced chronologically. Two undecorated and unmarked clay pipe bowls from Open Areas 2 and 3 in Period 2 date to c 1640–60, and represent the casual losses of an artefact type that was not introduced into England until the end of the 16th century. The same applies to the two pipe bowls and three stem fragments recovered from drain fill in Open Area 2 in Period 3, since the only datable features (the bowls) come from pipes made in the second half of the 19th century. Both are decorated with a simple arrangement of leaves along the seams of the bowl, a widely available form of embellishment for clay pipes that was very popular during the Victorian era.

Chapter 2 Early 19th-century Baptist College (Period 4)

There are 18 clay pipe bowls from contexts dated to Period 4, and three stem fragments. On their own, stems are almost impossible to date closely and it is the bowls that provide valuable clues to their period of manufacture and use. The earliest datable pipes from this period in the history of the site were found in cesspits in the garden associated with for St Dunstan's Dwellings in Open Area 9, and the garden plot on the site of the original Stepney Meeting House in Open Area 12. Consisting of no more than eight bowls and one stem, these range in date from c 1660 to 1780, with half the bowls made c 1730–80 (mostly from OA90). They are all plain and typical of London manufacture during the 18th century. Four of the pipes have makers' marks in the form of moulded initials on the sides of the heel, the chief means of identifying the products of individual workshops at this date. The only example for which a possible pipe maker has been identified is of a type made c 1700–30 and marked WW. This may stand for William Wilder, who is recorded as working in Whitecross Street 1717–63 (Oswald 1975, 149). The other pipes are marked with the initials ER (unidentified), with a second example marked ?R under crowns (perhaps ER again), while the fourth marked pipes simply has a fleur-de-lis on each side of the heel – its maker must unfortunately remain anonymous.

The remaining Period 4 pipes come mainly from Open Areas 10, 14 and 15, and range in date from c 1780–1880. The large industrial waste pit in OA10 yielded five pipe bowls with a latest date of c 1800–40, four of them decorated with moulded leaves on each side of the seam. This kind of decoration was very popular at the turn of the 18th and 19th centuries and continued to be used by pipe makers throughout the Victorian period, often without any other kind of embellishment. Two (possibly three) of the OA10 pipes are marked with the initials IF moulded in relief on the sides of the heel. These stand for John Ford, one of a prominent family of Stepney pipe makers whose products are well represented on the site (more details are given in Chapter 3). As a rule, clay pipes were sold and smoked within a fairly limited radius of the workshop where they were made, giving a marked local distribution that is well illustrated by the Stepney Green finds. Amongst the marked pipes recovered from the site, only local

Stepney makers or those working in other nearby areas of east London have been identified with any degree of confidence. Another of these is represented by a pipe from the OA10 pit marked with the initials WS. These could stand for William Sutton, recorded in Ratcliffe in 1836, or possibly William Squalfield, working in Whitechapel 1799–1805 (Oswald 1075, 146).

Two plain pipe bowls from a cesspit in Open Area 15 to the north of the Congregational Sunday School yard are dated at the latest to c 1840–80, but only one is marked, unfortunately illegibly. Two more pipe bowls were recovered from a cesspit in Open Area 14, both again dated to c 1840–80. One of these is decorated with a series of oak leaves and acorns down the seams of the bowl and is marked with the initials HS on the sides of the heel. This was probably made by Henry Strutt, recorded in Romford in 1839 and in Stepney in 1854 (when he died). Other possibilities are Mrs Harriet Silk (recorded 1864–95) or Henry Silk (1884–5) in Bow (Oswald 1975, 145).

Chapter 3 19th- and 20th-century Stepney (Period 5)

The largest collection of clay pipes found on the site comes from Period 5 features in Building 3, Open Areas 4, 6, 7 and 8, amounting to 43 bowls, 125 stem fragments and eight mouthpieces. All five pipe bowls from Building 3 date to the late 17th to 18th century, and were found in a context associated with the foundations of the new Meeting House built for the Congregational Church in 1863. They were clearly disturbed from earlier levels, and although two are marked with the initials CS they cannot be traced with any confidence to a pipe maker.

The remaining Period 5 pipes date chiefly to the 19th century. There is one more possible Henry Strutt pipe (Romford and Stepney) in the Open Area 8 cesspit, decorated with moulded leaf seams and dated to c 1820–40. A similar date in the second quarter of the 19th century comes from pipes found in the yard to the rear of 9 Garden Street (Open Area 6) and a cesspit at 7 Garden Street (Open Area 7). These finds are typical of the kind of domestic ‘litter’ that results from everyday activities, of which smoking is a prime example. Ten pipe bowls and 24 stem fragments in all were found in these two features, spanning the period c 1780–1880. Another John Ford pipe was identified in OA7, as well as a pipe marked with the initials IE, which probably stands for John Edwards, recorded 1784–1812 in Wapping and Aldgate (Oswald 1975, 136). The makers of pipes marked DB, OO and simply with stars moulded on the sides of the heel remain unidentified. Apart from one example that has moulded wheatsheaf decoration along the bowl seams, all are perfectly plain and so come at the cheapest, most basic end of the pipe-making spectrum.

The largest number of pipes recorded in Period 5 features come from the fill of a well and cesspits in a yard to the south of 2- Garden Street, in Open Area 4 (27 bowls and 100 stems as well as eight mouthpieces). Twenty-two of these bowls are of types made between c 1780 and 1840, with the remaining examples made after c 1840/50. Seven different pipe makers can be identified with reasonable certainty out of the 15 whose products are marked with their initials. Two of these are represented by several pipes each in the total assemblage recovered during excavation. John Ford, with two pipes in OA4, one of them decorated with moulded vertical ribbing and leaf seams (<TP1>), is one of

the better-known Stepney pipe makers. A thriving pipe-making business was run by the Ford family in White Horse Street from the 1820s to 1909, and they also had premises in Mile End Road from 1841 to 1905, while running a profitable export trade with North America through the Hudson's Bay Company (Waterson 2011, 3–4). The second pipe maker represented on the site by several examples is more elusive. Four pipes datable by form to c 1780–1820 have the initials SS moulded in relief on the sides of the heel. Three of these also have the maker's name and address moulded along the sides of the stem, but in each case this is frustratingly only partly legible. A composite reading drawn from all three gives S STOLI... / THE CHURCH STEPNEY. It has not been possible to trace this individual in surviving records, or anything approaching the incomplete name that has survived, but local manufacture is clearly indicated. Two of the SS pipes are the most decorative examples found on the site. Both heavily smoked, they have the three ostrich feathers of the Prince of Wales moulded in relief on the back of the bowl, facing the smoker, with the motto ICH DIEN below and simple garlands to each side, as well as a moulded leaf seam down the front of the bowl (<TP2> <TP3>). Use of the three feathers emblem was widespread amongst London pipe makers in the 18th and 19th centuries (Le Cheminant 1981), and with these later Stepney examples doubtless relates to the Prince Regent, probably made for a public house called The Feathers, The Prince of Wales or similar.

The emphasis on local pipe makers is further reinforced in the pipes from Open Area 4. Apart from John Ford, there are examples of pipes marked by Thomas Coles, recorded in Deptford, Wapping and Stepney between 1781 and 1812 (Oswald 1975, 134), William Cluer in Limehouse 1832–54 (ibid 134), William Jacobs, recorded in Stepney in 1868 (ibid 140) and William Watson, 1809–11 in Silver Street, Lemans Pond (ibid 149). One other identifiable pipe maker is represented, usefully giving his surname in full by means of an incuse stamped mark positioned on the back of the bowl, in full view of the smoker (good advertising). Unusually, the mark has been stamped upside down (<TP4>). It was made by Michael Keens, who is recorded in Limehouse Fields in 1836 (ibid 140). Apart from the SS pipes with Prince of Wales feathers, and the ribbed Ford pipe, the only decoration found on the 19th-century OA4 pipes consists of moulded leaf, wheatsheaf or feathered seams on seven of the bowls, and one other ribbed bowl marked by the unidentified pipe maker FC.

The local emphasis in the clay pipes whose makers can be identified with some confidence is typical of the way these commonplace items were marketed and used. None of these pipe makers had their workshops further away from the site than the area covered by Stepney, Wapping, Limehouse, Ratcliffe, and possibly Aldgate, Whitechapel and Bow. This pattern is reflected on other sites excavated in east London, with 30 pipes marked by John Ford of Stepney and 10 by Thomas Coles found in cess- and refuse pits on the site of artisans' properties in Limehouse Causeway (site code LHC93), along with a wide range of early 19th-century pottery and household goods (Pearce 2007, 3–4). These are all serviceable, inexpensive pipes made in great quantities for a ready mass market. None of the more elaborately decorated made during the 19th century pipes were recovered from the Stepney Green site, with the exception of the Prince of Wales examples – and even these are fairly crudely moulded, so not of the best quality. The lack of 'fancy' pipes, or examples from further afield, is very much in keeping with the general impression of the social standing of people living and working in this neighbourhood. The sample recovered brings us closer not only to the individuals who bought and smoked these pipes,

but also to the local network of craftsmen who made them over the course of the 18th and 19th centuries.

Bibliography

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