

Master, Wardens, Fellow Master, Ladies and Gentlemen,

As an Engineer by training, I have earned my living over the last 40 years supplying specialist equipment to the cigarette industry, all around the world. It is a fascinating playground of different technologies – very high speed, high precision machinery, lasers, microwaves and much more.

However, the cigarette business only dates from the late 19th century and given my interest in obscure historical subjects, I would like to take you on a light-hearted wander through some of the odd histories of the tobacco world and the Worshipful Company of Tobacco Pipe Makers and Tobacco Blenders.

The tobacco plant was used for thousands of years by indigenous American people for social, ceremonial, trade and medical purposes.

Introduced to Europe by the Spanish in the 16th century, tobacco pipe smoking was popularised in England by Sir Walter Raleigh, who brought the first Virginia tobacco from America.

Almost immediately, it attracted disapproval, and in 1604 King James I wrote his *Counterblaste to Tobacco*, in which he denounced tobacco use as "a custome lothsome to the eye, hatefull to the Nose, harmefull to the braine, dangerous to the Lungs, and in the blacke stinking fume thereof, neereest resembling the horrible Stigian smoke of the pit that is bottomelesse."

However, his dislike of tobacco did not stop him raising money by placing a heavy protective tariff on tobacco imports, with the duty rising by a factor of 40 to 6s and 10 pence per pound.

That approach sounds vaguely familiar, but I can't think why...

Ultimately, except for medicinal purposes, the growing of tobacco was banned in England to protect the economies of the Virginia and Bermuda colonies, thus giving a strong economic base to what was to become the USA.

At this time, there were over 7000 shops in London selling tobacco, and clay pipes were being made all over the country, so much so that in 1619 some Westminster Pipe Makers formed the first trade association, becoming the Company of Tobacco Pipe Makers a few years later.

Unfortunately, they lost their charter in the 1640's, presumably for not paying their bills!

In 1663 they restarted with a new charter, but in 1690 the Grocers Company got the licence to control tobacco cutters and sellers, which is one of the many reasons why the Grocers Company have a wonderful hall and we don't!

In the meantime, ground, flavoured tobacco, called snuff by the Dutch, had also arrived in Europe, becoming a luxury commodity very popular in England after the Great Plague of 1665, due to its perceived medicinal properties.

However, objections continued:

Pope Urban VIII threatened to excommunicate anybody who used snuff in church, and in Russia, Tsar Michael prohibited the sale of tobacco, promising to cut off the nose of any snuff-taker.

Others claimed that smoking dried out the humours, that snuff made the brain sooty, and that old people should not smoke as they were naturally dried up anyway!

Despite this, by the 18th century snuff had become the tobacco product of choice amongst the elite.

Prominent users included royalty; King George III's wife Queen Charlotte was referred to as 'Snuffy Charlotte', and she apparently had an entire room at Windsor Castle devoted to her snuff stock.

Most people of course, continued to use clay pipes to smoke tobacco, and pipes made in England were exported all over the world.

At the same time, Tobacco Smoke Enemas became accepted as a serious medical treatment.

In 1746, one of the earliest cases of resuscitation by rectally applied tobacco smoke was documented, when a seemingly drowned woman was treated.

On the advice of a passing sailor, the woman's husband inserted the stem of the sailor's pipe into her rectum, covered the bowl with a piece of perforated paper, and "blew hard". The woman was apparently revived.

This led the Royal Humane Society to install tobacco resuscitation kits at various points along the River Thames, each consisting of a pair of bellows and a tube, and the practice was considered to be as important as artificial resuscitation!

By the 19th century tobacco had become big business, with wealthy companies making pipes by the thousands and blending tons of snuff at a time, made to their own secret recipes, which they jealously guarded.

Unfortunately, the industry wealth did not appear to reach the Pipe Makers company. In 1802, auditors found that their only possessions were a silver seal, a staff and silver arms, with a chest containing a half-destroyed Company Charter and an IOU for £5 and 18 shillings.

In 1821, the company bye-laws were rewritten to allow prosecution of any member who did not take up the freedom or pay quarterage. Several pipe makers were sued on these grounds and one renter warden was prosecuted for not turning up to Court meetings for nine years!

These costly but unsuccessful legal actions eventually ruined the Company, and it became extinct once again in the 1860s.

As time went on, cigars, cigarettes and briar pipes became the main way of consuming tobacco and the trade in clay pipes and snuff began to decline, so that by the 1950's almost all clay pipe factories were closed.

The Worshipful Company of Tobacco Pipe Makers and Tobacco Blenders was reconstituted again in 1954, as an open company, but with many members drawn from the tobacco business.

We are classified as a Modern Livery company, even though we have just celebrated the 400th anniversary of our original foundation!

We try to keep our heritage alive by supporting the few working clay pipe craftsmen remaining in the UK and also the Broseley Pipe Museum, a former pipe factory that was abandoned intact in the 1950's.

Fortunately, we can still get our own blend of snuff made in the UK, so I have brought some along today with two rams horn and silver snuff mulls, to pass around the tables for you to try if you wish!

Traditionally, snuff is sniffed or inhaled lightly after a pinch is either placed onto the back surface of the hand or held pinched between thumb and index finger.

Do not worry about sneezing – that is a very common reaction and helps clear the tubes!

On that note I will leave you try out the snuff, but in the meantime, I would ask you to please raise your glasses and toast the Master of the Worshipful Company of Environmental Cleaners.