

Clay pipes: a Victorian soldier's vice

MANY DO NOT consider pipe smoking, especially in the latter half of the 19th century, as a subject of much historical interest. Local records on this aspect are scant, if non-existent. There were various occasions when I commenced researching these pipes but had to shelve my intentions for various reasons, mainly the lack of artefacts in hand.

Recent developments and finds, the articles "A controversial vice" (*The Sunday Times*, January 31, 1999) by John Wood and "Former RN diver tracing history of Maltese pipes" by Natalino Fenech (*The Times*, September 20, 1999), have all contributed in rekindling this interest.

Since the earliest days when tobacco smoking was brought over from the Americas, practically all smoking was by means of a pipe; clay pipes being the most common, convenient and cheap. In the British Army, Senior Officers usually smoked cigars, especially after dinners, in the mess or clubs, where there was even a smoking parlour.

Junior Officers generally smoked cheroots, while pipes were more common among the other ranks – the ordinary soldier. It was prohibited for the men in uniform to smoke in public, especially for officers, which was considered a conduct not becoming of a gentleman. The widespread smoking of cigarettes among the troops commenced some time before the Boer War (1898-1900) in South Africa, while it took its largest boost during World War I when troops found that smoking a cigarette was quicker, less bulky and required the least of effort. The British monarchy was also in the habit of issuing gifts in the form of cigarette boxes and other treats to the troops on the front.

Smoking by the troops also fell under certain restrictions and regulations in both their comportment and as a health hazard. Of particular interest is the incident which occurred in Vittoriosa during the

early years of British rule in Malta. While unloading and storing gunpowder in the stores behind Main Gate, a spark suspected to have originated from the pipe of one of the cart drivers, caused such an explosion that much of the debris had landed in Senglea across the creek. For decades to come, locals referred to this area as *I-Ingarrat* (the destroyed).

Nor was smoking accepted to the extent that various Garrison Orders were issued from time to time. GO No. 2 of January 23, 1855 read: "Its having been observed that soldiers of the Garrison are in the habit of smoking in the streets, contrary to orders, this practice will at once be discontinued. It is the duty of all officers and NCOs to take immediate notice of any such irregularity they may perceive especially as regards their own Regiments either by confining the offenders in the nearest Guard Room, or seeing them escorted to their quarters".

GO No. 75 (Malta) of June 1886 stated that: "Soldiers are not to go beyond the precincts of their barracks unless properly dressed, and they are not to smoke in the streets until after 5.00 p.m., from the 1st October to the 31st March, and 6.00 p.m. from the 1st April to the 30th September."

Even as late as March 1908, one Garrison Order was rather discriminative towards the habit: "Owing to injurious effects on young soldiers of cigarette smoking, the GCO directs that for the future only pipes shall be permitted when the Troops are under arms."

My own involvement with the subject commenced during the restoration works on Fort Rinella, a voluntary project by *Fondazzjoni Wirt Artna*. The story behind the building of this fort by the British is quite an interesting one as Fort Rinella and its sister, Fort Cambridge in Sliema, were not originally part of the intended system of new shore fortifications and coast artillery batteries. Their existence came to be when

unified Italy had planned expansion and reorganised its fleet after its defeat against Austria.

Following the success of the famous *Minator* of the US Civil War, a new concept of battleship of the *Duilio* Class was designed, on which were two Armstrong 100-ton RML guns, each capable of firing a 17.73-inch shell weighing 2,000 lbs, which at 7,000 yards could pierce 18 inches of armour plating.

Because of this threat to shipping and its Mediterranean bases, the British military were concerned as Malta's major defences at the time only relied on a number of 38-ton RML 12.5-inch guns with an effective range of only 1,000 yards. Following a report in 1877 by Sir Lincolnton Simmons, Inspector General of Fortifications at the War Office, later Governor of Malta, after much consultations and decision-making, it was decided to install four such guns in the Mediterranean. Two were for Gibraltar at Napier of Magdala and Victoria Batteries and two in Malta to cover the harbour's approach with a wide and effective arc of fire.

The Fort Rinella garrison

Both Forts Rinella and Cambridge were not constructed as a barracks or for the use by infantry but to house and service the 100-ton guns. Both forts were assigned to the Royal Regiment of Artillery (RA). That at Fort Rinella was transported and placed on site by men of No. 2 Company, 2nd Scottish Division, RA. Although no exact record was located, the fort and gun were manned by elements of the Royal Garrison Artillery, a complement that varied from 29 to 35 gunners. Until 1923, the RA was divided into two regiments, the Royal Garrison Artillery that manned the guns in forts and other fixed defences, and the Royal Field Artillery, which as the name implies, transported and manned the guns on all field campaigns. When gunnery practice and manoeuvres were

active, a company of infantry was also billeted at the fort. When in 1905 the fort and gun were 'struck off' the Main Armament List for Malta, the fort was converted into a store for the Admiralty and was guarded by elements of the Royal Marine Light Infantry and detachments from the Royal Navy until well into the 1930s.

This leads to the part which was not covered in previous articles: pipe smoking and the British soldier. During this period, the British 'Tomnies' and 'Jacks' were renowned at puffing away on clay pipes. Those stationed at Rinella and its environs were no different.

During restoration works, the rubble and debris clearance from inside the fort, the ditch and glacis, various fragments and remains of pipes, clay grog bottles and glass containers discarded by these servicemen were found. My personal interest was in the remains of clay pipes which were much evident in material build-up in the ditch.

Obviously, when the stem broke from a clay pipe and it was no longer salvageable, it was thrown over the wall into the ditch or possibly a heap of rubbish was emptied in some corner and set alight. With the passing of time the fragments became embedded in the soil, only to come to light when clearance works were taken in hand. Many such pieces were unearthed when the material cleared by the Italian Military Mission was sifted so as to ensure that only loose rubble was being discarded.

The pipes

Many forms and styles of clay pipe fragments were located among the rubble from the main ditch and the debris in the tunnels leading to the counter-scarp gallery and caponiers. The majority were of white clay but two of terracotta were also uncovered. What is certain is that, just as stated by Mr Wood, the majority of pipes were imported, while shapes and designs vary as well as to their origin and make.

A considerable number of pipe fragments are of the 'spur' or 'heel' type, plain or with just a fine design referred to as either 'rouletted', 'milled' or 'grooved' along the bowl's edge. 'Spur' pipes have a pointed projection below the bowl; 'heel' pipes have a broad, flat projection; and the term 'incuse' indi-

cates that a mark or design is impressed on the bowl's surface or stem. Other categories found have relief-moulded designs, mainly on both sides, all around or just on the front, and are of the 'thorn type' bowl; 'Buffaloes' type with buffalo horns as a motif, accompanied by the initials 'RAOB' for 'Royal Antediluvian Order of the Buffalo' and very likely to have been made by Leigh & Co. of Portchester; 'coiled rope' type; 'manx' type, having the 'Leg of Mann', emblem of the Isle of Mann; 'Maid of Erin' or Irish Harp with boroughs of shamrock below and topped by a Victorian Crown; others with just a plain harp and one particular type has a design attributed to the infantry and artillery, having crossed rifles on one side of the bowl and a field gun on the other.

At a later stage, material build-up against one of the caponier walls was cleared in order to expose the full view of the entire flank. When sifted prior to being discarded, a number of other pipe fragments were found. One unique bowl has a pattern which resembles fish or snake scales of which Henry Leigh of Portchester had manufactured a similar design.

A bowl fragment has a wicker basket pattern that is somewhat identical to a pipe made by F. Goodall of Gosport. Two moulded terracotta 'pipi tal-qasba' (reed pipes) were also unearthed in the adjacent fields which cannot be definitely attributed to having been used by a soldier but could have belonged to a farmer or passer-by. Quite obviously, soldiers also made use of locally-made or other imported pipes.

Origin and makers

One can easily claim that the pipes had originated from Britain and that the three main areas were Portsmouth in England, Glasgow in Scotland and Cork in Ireland, then still Ireland. One famous Portchester firm, Henry Leigh & Company, pipe maker from 1840 to 1932, was considered a leading manufacturer in the 1870s when clay pipes showed a terrific increase in demand in a rapidly expanding market.

Pay was based on piece-work and a man earned eight pence (4 cents) a gross, which were produced in less than an hour and production reaching 500 gross a week. Pipes were made

16 dozen to the gross to allow for breakage.

It is quite easy to understand how large quantities of clay pipes were exported worldwide and many found their way across the world to British naval and military establishments throughout the Empire. Three local importers who were also the leading retailers of clay pipes were Genovese of Cart Street, Borg of East Street and Reno Baldacchino of just beyond Victoria Gate, all in Valletta and whose business has since ceased.

Clay pipe production first dwindled when more durable materials such as briar and Meerschaum were introduced, but the greatest cause was definitely the cigarette. The last of Portchester's clay pipe makers was Henry Baker, who retired in 1932 at the age of 78.

Makers' initials, names and marks are mainly found incused or in relief on the heel or stem. One example has 'The President' in an oval annulus incised on the rear facing the smoker, while another has a crescent on the heel, which is part of the coat of arms of Portsmouth. Others have 'Cork' on the stem, which are identical to those manufactured by John Fitzgerald, whose factory was at 3, Adelaide Street, Cork.

There are others with a plain harp on each side of the bowl, which have part of the surname 'McDougall' and '175' on one side of the stem. 'Glasgow' on the other and the number '2' on the heel. These were obviously the product of the pipe maker Duncan McDougall & Co. of 87 King Street, Caltan, an area in Glasgow, Scotland. The firm founded in 1846-7 established itself as 'The Glasgow Pipe Manufactory' in 1849. In 1851 it moved to Parliamentary Road and 40 years later to 18 Charles Street, St Rollox, where it remained until it closed down in 1967, then under the name of C.B. & McDougall Ltd.

A similar 'harp' type has 'W. White' and '500' on one side of the stem and 'Glasgow' on the other. A second pattern bore the same maker's name inside a twisted rope cartouche and cruciform and similarly 'Glasgow' on the other side. The mould number on this pattern is shown as '309'. Although not exactly an 'Irish' harp, it is unusual to have such a design on a pipe originating from Glasgow, but then again it could have been ordered from there

for the Irish market. In 1805 William White and Sons had opened business also in Caltan and in 1831 moved to Gibson Street until 1955 when it merged with the McDougall firm.

An other pattern is a plain pipe which has a simple, decorative grooved feature at the joining of the bowl and stem, a feature common to pipes known as 'Gladstones'. Unfortunately much of the stem is missing and the maker remains unknown. A bowl fragment which has not been matched to others found shows 'Chal' in an oval or circle and is possible to be part of the maker's name.

Remnants of various stems were also discovered during the rubble clearance process. Some have since been matched to a particular bowl or bowl fragments. Others remain loose, although quite known as to which particular type of pipe they had originally formed part of.

A unique example is a section from a wide elliptical stem, possibly from near the mouthpiece. Two other mouthpieces were found in the material that was cleared from inside the underground passages leading to the caponiers.

One is the thin elliptical end, and the other has a raised rim for the pipe to be held secure by the lips or teeth. Of unknown make is the segment having the number '6' or '9' stamped on the side and another showing what is possibly the first part of the maker's name or country of origin, 'Tri...'. The last stem found in a field by the Fort's 'bent entry' passage leading to the main gate is part of a reed pipe.

The short stem has a tapered edge with a wide hole in which the disposable reed was fitted. It is of French origin, having the names 'Aparie' and 'Gambier' in bold serif on opposite sides. Gambier of Givet was one of the largest pipemakers in France from 1780 to 1926. A stem with a very elaborate and unique design resembling a tree trunk in the section close to the bowl, could have easily been made by Henry Leigh and Co.

Modern makes

Fondazzjoni Wirt Artna is a volunteer society and the project of faithfully restoring a site of the size of Fort Rinella is a constant drain on its limited resources. As part of its fund-raising programme to generate additional income to sustain restoration works, a limited number of accurate copies of three of the patterns

uncovered were exclusively reproduced locally by the renowned Potteryware Ltd., of 'Ta' Qali' crafts village.

Other clay pipes not related to Fort Rinella

The use of clay pipes during the period in which this study is related was obviously not just reserved to the military or Fort Rinella. As already explained, pipe smoking was as common as that of cigarettes today and therefore a general practice.

Other remains have been uncovered in various locations or found among somebody's long discarded trophies, only to be brought back to light to be sold at some *monti* stall, car boot sale, bazaar or among curios in an antique shop. Whenever encountered, such pieces were collected. One reason is that it is a shame to let them pass and also to be included in a separate display with those already in hand to show the variations of clay pipes in general.

The first is a 'heel' type bowl, quite plain and unmarked, apart from a small raised rectangle on the left side of the remaining stem. A 'spur' pipe has milling around the rim. The most interesting features are an incuse shield enclosing the name Critchfield, being either the name of the maker or locality from where the pipe originates and a diamond shape. The name was not on any makers' list available at the time. In addition there is an irregular, four-pointed design, relief moulded on the spur on both sides.

Considered to be one of the few remaining with such a large stem section still intact, this pipe's shape is very near in design to modern makes. Its spur is quite a shallow one and possibly serves to give the fingers a good grip around the bowl. The next bowl has quite a thick wall on which there is a design consisting of a beaded belt. The bowl is oval and at the curve, the stem changes from the normal round type to square with its points to North, South, East and West.

Another spurred bowl with milling around the rim and front is an incuse consisting of the Cork with a very shallow pattern of the 'Maid of Erin' harp and what could possibly be shamrock foliage enclosed in a circle. The raised moulded design on this bowl's base resembles an open



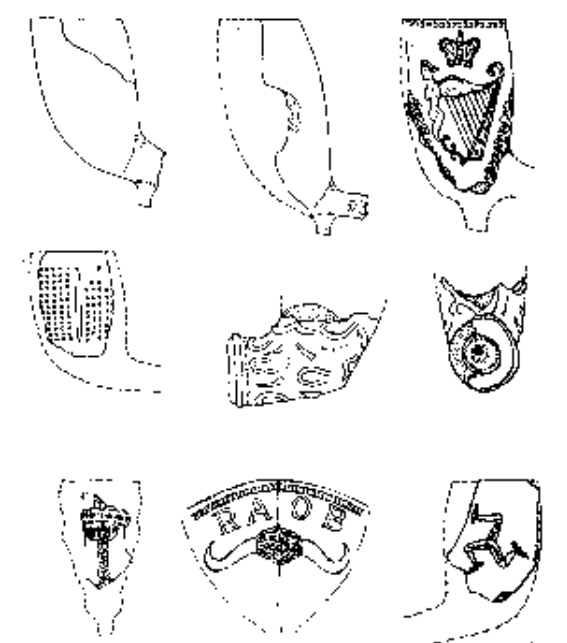
THE ARMSTRONG 100-ton RML gun at Fort Rinella, Kalkara

flower and is bound to have given the smoker a good grip. It also has a leaf or feather pattern along the front and back. The last bowl has what could be interpreted as a 'flaming' heel. The design is very original and could not be located in any of the works consulted.

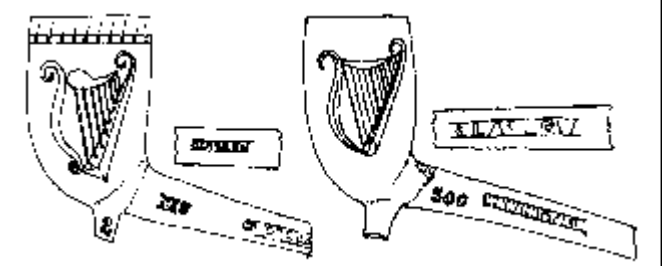
A very interesting item which was recently added to the Fort Rinella collection is a clay pipe with a very detailed Billy goat's head supporting the bowl. Mr Anthony Sammut of the former Reno Confectionery and Tobacconist of Zachary Street, Valletta, who has since changed the nature of his business, donated it to the collection.

The pipe is estimated to be some 80 years old and originated as part of a consignment from Turkey. It is interesting to note that Natalino Fenech's article had shown a pipe of similar design which was featured in the pages of the D. McDougall catalogue. It seems that the copying of models of renowned brands was also common then and not just something of today!

Worth noting is the fact that the stem is still coloured red with either soap, wax or gum. This was done to prevent the smoker's lips from sticking to the porous clay. There were other practices when coloured lacquer was applied with a brush instead.



DETAILED sketches by the author of some of the clay pipe types recovered



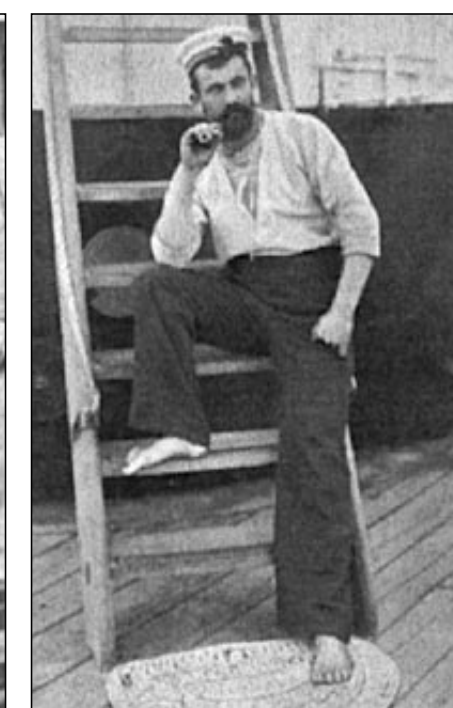
A SELECTION OF recovered pipe bowls: stand pipe, artillery-infantry types, basket weave and scroll, coiled rope, Irish harp and thorn types



A COOK and Royal Marines smoking pipes



A QUIET smoke on deck



A 'JACK' smoking his pipe

Acknowledgements

I am deeply indebted to my colleague Mario Farrugia, executive director of *Fondazzjoni Wirt Artna* and keeper of Fort Rinella, for his assistance and encouragement, to Ms Sheila Lane MA, MIPA of Rochestown, Cork, Ireland, who was kind enough to supply me with the two papers relating to clay pipes from Cork, Mr Neil Grieve of the University of Dundee, Scotland, Ms Fiona Hayes, curator at the Glasgow City council, Mr Noel Vassallo of Florida, USA, and Mr Malcolm Borg.

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