

Pipes from St. John Street, Valletta, Malta

John Wood

Introduction

Following the unsuccessful Turkish Siege of 1565, Pope Pius V appointed the Italian architect Francesco Laparelli to design a new city named in honour of the victor, Grand Master Jean de la Valette. Valetta was built on the Sceberras peninsula, a spit of land between the Grand Harbour and Marsamuschetto (Fig. 1)



Figure 1: Valletta, Malta.

Valette was the leader of the Knights of the Order of St. John of Jerusalem and St. John's Cathedral had a central position in the city. Travelling south from the façade, St. John Street (Triq San Gwann) crosses Merchant Street. On the left, at number 111, is a late sixteenth-century building where, in the nineteenth century, during the British period, part of the building was altered to function as the Cumberland Hotel, which it continues to do (Fig. 2)

Renovation work that was undertaken in July 2016, involved excavation in the basement of the Cumberland Hotel. This work revealed a number of artefacts, including clay tobacco pipes. The archaeology on site was managed by the Maltese company *En-Sure*. Their finds are in the custody of the Superintendence of Cultural Heritage, who kindly granted the author access.

The Pipes

On the site there is an entrance corridor leading from St. John's Street to a courtyard on the left and an underground space with two cellars. Clay pipes were located in area SU34, which the excavators described as a grey layer of mixed small stones (Fig. 3). Above this layer was SU35, which was identified as a modern construction debris layer. Several items of cultural heritage were noted mixed in this layer. Figure 4 shows fragments of smoking pipes



Figure 2: 111 Saint John Street, Valletta (Adapted from a Planning Authority map provided by the Superintendence of Cultural Heritage).



Figure 3: Location of the clay pipes (*En-Sure* Monitoring map provided by the Superintendence of Cultural Heritage).



Figure 4: In-situ photograph (*En-Sure* Monitoring image provided by the Superintendence of Cultural Heritage).

during the excavation, together with pieces of green glass and some blue and white, and brown glazed pottery. These latter artefacts have yet to be examined.

All the pipe pieces were allocated the same catalogue number, SGN2016 SU34 CMC 25/10/2016. All of the clay pipes are made from white clay and none were cleaned before examination

There were 113 stem fragments mostly unmarked, although there were some with the incuse moulded mark WHITE / GLASGOW. The bulk of the pipe assemblage consists of 105 undecorated bowls; many are complete pipes which have not been smoked. These bowls are spur forms with 3mm thick walls and a stem bore measuring 2mm (Fig. 5).



Figure 5: Undecorated bowl. Photograph: Author.

In addition to the plain bowls were three bowls in the form of an eagle claw holding an egg. All three bowls have a short length of stem surviving. Each stem has the incuse pattern number 317 with W... on the smokers left, and ...WO on the smokers right (Fig. 6). These pipes can be attributed to William White of Glasgow. Pattern number 317 appears in William White's 1900 list of the Pipemakers' Society and is described as 'Claw' (Gallagher 1987, 150).

There was just one example of a pipe decorated with the Prince of Wales' feathers under the bowl joint where the bowl and stem meet and with a tassel on the seam facing the smoker. The stem has a relief twisted rope-work cartouche with the incuse lettering W WHITE, on the smokers left, and GLASGOW, on the smokers right. Also, on the smokers left, is the incuse pattern number 177 (Fig. 7). Pattern number 117 is described in the 1900 list of the Pipemakers Society as 'Prince of Wales Feathers' (Gallagher 1987, 149).



Figure 6: William White 'Claw' pipe. Photograph: Author.



Figure 7: William White Prince of Wales Feathers pipe. Photograph and drawing: Author.

This pipe must refer to Edward, the eldest son of Queen Victoria, who was Prince of Wales from shortly after his birth in 1841 until his accession to the throne in 1901. He travelled widely both in Britain and overseas, including a visit to Malta in 1876 and was popular as the visible face of the monarchy following the Queen's withdrawal from public life. His popularity can be gauged by the variations on Prince of Wales pipes produced by William White. Their 1900 list of moulds includes the Bent Prince of Wales (67), Bent Large Prince of Wales (132), and Prince of Wales (133), Prince of Wales Feathers (177) and Prince of Wales (490) (Gallagher 1987, 148-52).

Discussion

There are references to pipes being imported from the UK in the Maltese Shipping Registers (Fig. 8). The earliest reference, specifying Glasgow as a source, is during the early twentieth century. It is possible that the pipes from the Cumberland Hotel were part of these cargoes.

Date	Carrier	Source	Cargo
04 Jan 1900	Neva	London	Cases pipes
28 Feb 1900	London Prince	Manchester	1 case pipes (for Mifsud)
19 Nov 1919	Serbino	Glasgow	61 cases pipes (for Quintano)
24 Feb 1920	Scottish Prince	London	8 cases pipes (for Brocktorff)
24 Mar 1920	Sitra	Glasgow	140 cases pipes (for Quintano)

Figure 8: Extracts from the Maltese Shipping Registers.

After 1869, when the Suez Canal came into operation, there was a rapid rise in the number of ships calling at Malta. By 1880 the island, being ideally placed, was established as a convenient coaling station for vessels travelling between Britain, India and the Far East.

Mifsud, Quintano and this branch of the Brocktorff family were importers of various commodities such as wines, spirits and tobacco.

Reference to pipes arriving at a shop in St John Street, was elicited by Guido Lanfranco during a local folklore programme on RTK Radio and published in *L'Innara* (Lanfranco 1994):

Plaster pipes used to come in wooden boxes packed in straw ... sold by a ... Mr Karm. His shop was in Saint John Street steps leading to Ta' Giezu church.

Children in the 1930s remember a shop in St. John's Street where they would be given broken pipes. A matchstick was used to join the pieces, so they could play at smoking. With regard to locating Mr Karm's shop, Michael Cassar (*pers comm*) notes:

The Gas Board Office and shop used to be in front of Cumberland so you would really be looking at a small shop abutting up or down. Down there is the dilapidated Taliana watch shop. Up street from Bonaci ex Gas Board, now a shop selling ladies dresses, I remember a shop called Display - a bazaar which would fit with your pipes shop. Pierre Portelli, the artist, described a tattooist shop in the same street. Pipes, tattoos and sailors ... your pipes and the tattooist could be related.

Conclusion

The pipes recovered from the 2016 excavations at the Cumberland Hotel appear to have been unused, although

many pieces are damaged, which raises the question of whether they were in storage prior to sale, or damaged by accident and used as hard core. Also, was there some connection with Mr Karm, whose shop was so close? Perhaps Karm's trading space was minimal. It would be speculation to guess the reason for such a collection of pipes being found in these circumstances, although they do appear to be from a single consignment produced by William White of Glasgow.

Acknowledgement

The author is grateful to Christian Mifsud and Mevrick Spiteri, Superintendence of Cultural Heritage, for their help and guidance and to Dennis Gallagher for identifying these pipes so precisely and suggesting further areas of study. Guido Lanfranco is a Maltese writer on natural history and folklore. Michael Cassar is co-author of a number of publications on twentieth-century Malta.

References

- Gallagher, D. B., 1987, 'The 1900 List of The Pipe Makers' Society', in P Davey (ed.), *The Archaeology of the Clay Tobacco Pipe*, X, British Archaeological Reports, British Series 178, Oxford, 142-163 (358pp).
- Lanfranco, G. 1994, 'Old Smoking Pipes' *L'Innara*, 5, No. 1, 21-22.