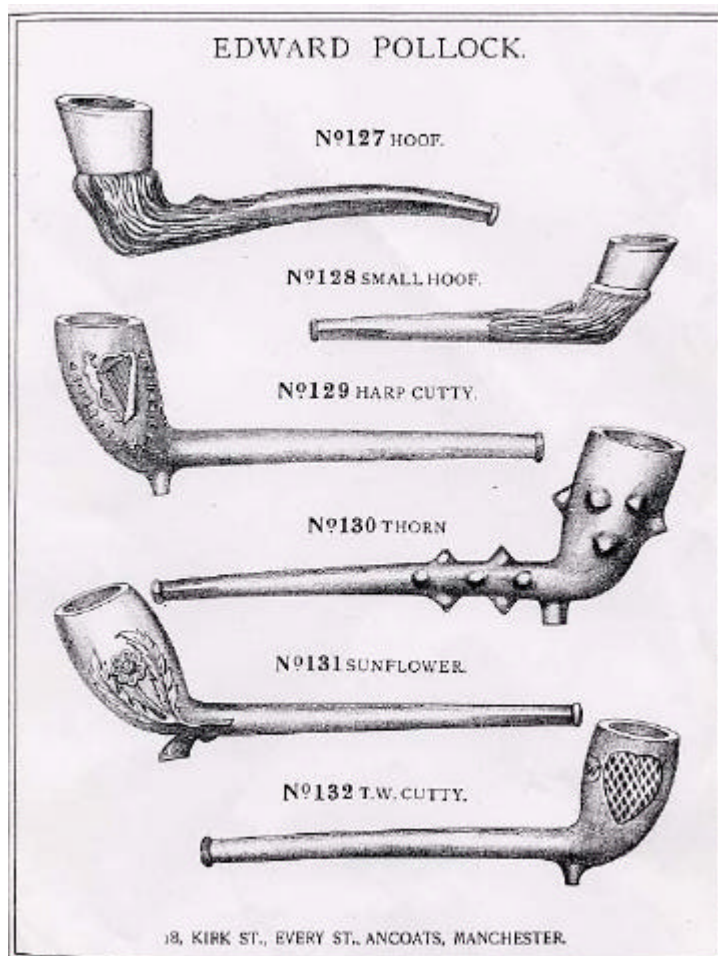


Manchester Clay Tobacco Pipes

The Museum holds a nationally important collection relating to the clay tobacco pipe industry in Manchester. From 1968, John Pollock & Company of Manchester was the last commercial clay tobacco pipe firm in Britain. The Pollock factory closed in 1990. The Museum's collection includes tools and equipment used at the Pollock factory, left-over stock and a small group of company records, including order books and accounts ledgers.



Edward Pollock, the founder of the Pollock clay tobacco pipe business, was born in Scotland in 1841. He learnt the pipe-making craft at a firm in Leith. In the 1870s, he moved to Manchester and in 1879 set up a clay pipe factory on Kirk Street, Ancoats, on the north of the city centre. Manchester already had a successful clay pipe industry. About fifty clay pipe makers are known to have been based in Manchester during the nineteenth century. The other two major firms were Samuel McLardy of Swan Street, established in 1865, and Joseph Holland & Sons of Blackburn Street, established in 1845. The presence of local competition meant that the Manchester businesses were very active in expanding their range of styles. An Edward Pollock catalogue of about 1905 shows that the firm was offering well over 100 models of pipe.

While the pipe manufacturers supplied the export market as well as the domestic market, falling demand in Britain hit the industry hard. By the end of the First World War, the British clay pipe industry was in serious decline and many firms went out of business. Under Edward's son John, the Pollock business survived and traded as John Pollock & Company until its closure. It acquired moulds from some of the redundant factories.

When John's son Gordon took over the business after the Second World War, it needed to find new markets to make up for falling trade in Britain. Gordon Pollock had made useful overseas contact during the War. Back home, he fostered these contacts and revived the

company's export trade. Stencils used to mark the crates that pipes were packed in show the diverse destinations of Pollock pipes, ranging from West Africa to Australia.

The company also looked at reviving old markets and developing new types of market. Earlier in the century, clay pipes had been a popular, cheap toy for blowing bubbles. In the 1950s, Pollock revived this idea with a line of glazed pipes in bright colours and featuring more child-friendly designs such as the football game and the skull and



crossbones. Two related lines were the toy smoker's outfit, consisting of a miniature pipe, pouch and pipe cleaner, and the miniature clay pistol. However, cheap, colourful plastics were becoming the standard material for many toys. Another promising market was mementoes. The firm took advantage of opportunities to revive historic forms of pipe to commemorate current events. Thus, the coronation of Elizabeth II was marked by a line of reproduction Elizabethan pipes, which were supplied gift-packaged. The production of refractory laboratory wares was another business avenue, but tobacco pipes remained the backbone of the business.

Right up to the closure of the factory in 1990, Pollock pipes were made using much the same traditional techniques as in 1879 and some of the original equipment. Cast iron moulds, although durable, are subject to wear because of the abrasive nature of clay. The survival of many early Pollock moulds is the greatest strength of the Museum's collection.

For more information:

Read Ayto, Eric G. *Clay Tobacco Pipes*. Princes Risborough, UK: Shire Publications Ltd, 1999.

Maude, Keith. 'Mr. Pollock's Pipe Factory' *Popular Archaeology*, July, 1986.