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An Early Rainford Pipe from Welshampton, Shropshire

by David Higgins

In 2017 Janice Fletcher posted a pipe that she had found on the SCPR Facebook page. This had been discovered in the garden of her house at Welshampton, near Ellesmere, in Shropshire, which had formerly been a pub. The pipe is of interest because it is of a distinctive style from Rainford in Merseyside, making it a very unusual find for Shropshire. Once the significance of the pipe was realised, it was reported to the Portable Antiquities Scheme and has been recorded on their database (WREX-ED2805).

The pipe itself dates from c1650-70 and is of a typical Rainford style, with a bulbous body to the bowl and a distinctive crescent shaped bowl stamp on the back of the bowl, facing the smoker (Fig. 1). This bears the initials IB, which could relate to any one of a number of pipemakers from that production centre and which is by far the most common pipe mark to occur there. The pipe is made of a typical Coalmeasures clay from the South Lancashire coalfield (on which Rainford is situated) with coarse gritty inclusions and it has a stem bore of $7/64$ ". The surface has been finished with a fine burnish and the rim has been bottered and half milled. Overall, this is a well-designed pipe that has been neatly made and finished.

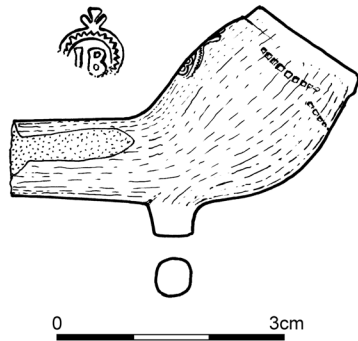


Figure 1: IB pipe from Welshampton (drawn by the author).

While the pipe itself is typical of Rainford products of the period, it is the location of this find that is interesting. Pipemaking became established in Rainford during the early seventeenth century and the makers there quickly developed an unusually extensive market area, with their products being found right across the north-west of England west of the Pennines and as far north as the Lakes, some 65 miles from Rainford (Higgins 2008). In contrast, the Mersey provided a natural boundary to the south and relatively few examples are found beyond this. The Robinson Collection in the National Pipe Archive, for example, was collected from fields around Willaston near Nantwich in Cheshire, some 40 miles SSE of Rainford. This collection contains some 1,500 seventeenth and early eighteenth-century pipes with stamped marks and yet there is only one Rainford bowl with a crescent-shaped IB stamp amongst them (Higgins 2019 forthcoming).

The Welshampton find is, therefore, significant in that it comes from an area where it would not be expected and because it is the most southerly example a crescent-shaped Rainford bowl stamp yet discovered. The pipe was found just over 50 miles south of Rainford and is the only known example of its type from Shropshire. Shropshire had its own very extensive pipemaking industry centred on the Much Wenlock / Broseley area and dominated the pipe trade down the Welsh borders and into the Midlands (Higgins 1987). This find, however, shows that Rainford pipes were occasionally carried into the county, where they must have looked very different to local products, which at this date did not include any spur forms at all. While it is impossible to say exactly who carried this pipe so many miles across country and into Shropshire, or for what reason, it does at least provide a new marker for the southerly limit of the Rainford trade, while at the same time demonstrating the considerable distances that goods could be carried during the seventeenth century.

References

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Some Marked English Pipes and an Intriguing Decorated Pipe from the Netherlands

by Jan van Oostveen

Clay tobacco pipes that were produced in England and that are found in the Netherlands are rare. Taylor (2017) notes an interesting record from the year 1605. From this record it is clear that clay tobacco pipes were exported from London to Flushing (see Figures 1 and 2 for early pipes that can be dated to around the year 1600 and that were found in Flushing). When these pipes are found their find spots are in the western part of the Netherlands, in provinces such as North and Southern Holland and Zeeland. Most of the times these English pipes are unmarked.