



NEWSLETTER

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A George Smith Pipe from Bucknell, Shropshire

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Some years ago Derek Starkins found a pipe bowl in the garden of his house in Bucknell, Shropshire (Grid Reference SO 3502 7410), which he has kindly passed on to the author via his brother-in-law, Graham Berlyn of Ludlow. The pipe (Fig. 1) is a typical Broseley Type 5 bowl, which is characterised by its distinctive tailed heel, and which was a mainstay of the Broseley area pipe industry from c1680-1730 (Higgins 1987). The bowl has been exposed to considerable weathering so that the surface is very eroded and pitted, which has made the mark hard to read and means that it is no longer possible to see whether the bowl was burnished originally. The rim has been milled and the pipe is made of a typical coarse Coal Measures clay with a rather small stem bore for the period of 5/64". The mark has been added to the national catalogue that is maintained by the author (Cast 754.16) and the pipe has also been recorded with the Portable Antiquities Scheme (WREX-451627).

Comparison with better preserved examples shows that the mark can be identified as comprising the initials GS flanking a hand or gauntlet device, with small triangular marks above and below the letters (Die 1318 in the national catalogue that is being compiled by the author). Two or three different versions of this GS and hand mark are known, as are a similar number of full name stamps reading either 'GeORG / SMITH'

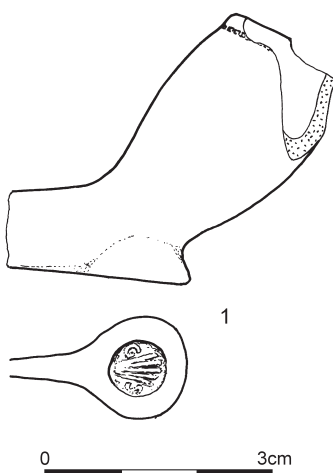


Figure 1: Pipe bowl marked GS from Bucknell (drawn by the author).

(this lettering appears as both large and small dies) or ‘GEORGE / SMITH’ (Fig. 2). These two forms of mark (initial and full-name) occur on both round heel pipes and tailed heel pipes dating from between about 1670 and 1730. The distribution of these marks is centred on the Much Wenlock area of Shropshire and, as long ago as 1907, Thursfield noted that they were common finds in that town (Thursfield 1907, 163). It seems likely that all of these mark types belong to one or more pipemakers called George Smith who were based there. Atkinson has also recorded a circular GS mark without a dotted border from near Church Stretton, which may well be another George Smith mark (Fig. 3).



Figure 2: Marks attributed to George Smith with their national catalogue die numbers, plus an additional full name variety illustrated by Thursfield in 1907. National catalogue die drawings by the author.

Quite apart from the overall distribution, there are three further reasons why Much Wenlock is suggested as the origin of these pipes. First, the specific style of the hand motif used in the marks is particularly associated with this centre, where it was used by several other pipemakers. Second, George Smith marks are found at Wenlock but have not been noted from nearby Broseley, which was itself a major pipe production centre and where examples would have been expected had they been made there. Finally, Joseph and Richard Smith, presumably members of the same family, are recorded as Much Wenlock pipemakers at the same period, which reinforces the suggestion that George was also based there. Unfortunately, it is hard to pin George Smith down precisely in the documentary sources, since the same name



Figure 3: *A heel fragment marked GS recorded by Atkinson from Wall, near Church Stretton (after Higgins 1987, Fig. 48.1).*

occurs frequently in the Much Wenlock parish registers, as well as at nearby Broseley and Benthall, where many other pipemakers worked, and almost none of the local parish register entries at this period give an occupation. It is also the case that the same Christian name was often passed from father to son at this period, so that the broad date range encompassed by the marked pipes may represent two or more generations of pipemakers working in the same family and with the same name.

Atkinson (1975) and Oswald (1975) both list George Smith as a Broseley maker and give a baptism in either 1631 or 1661 and a death in 1712 for this maker. However, the 1712 burial they refer to is actually in the adjoining parish of Benthall and there are several other references to individuals of this name in the Broseley registers, for example marriages in 1708 and 1715 and a death in 1716, that they do not mention. Furthermore, none of the Broseley references give any occupation and so the individuals listed cannot be confirmed as pipemakers. Atkinson and Oswald appear to have made the attribution to Broseley based on selected references from the Broseley and Benthall parish registers, and without considering other alternatives. Given that no George Smith pipes have been recorded from Broseley, while other known pipemakers with the surname Smith were working at Much Wenlock, this is considered a more likely origin for the pipes. Once again, no occupations are listed in the Wenlock registers, which include the following references to individuals named George Smith: -

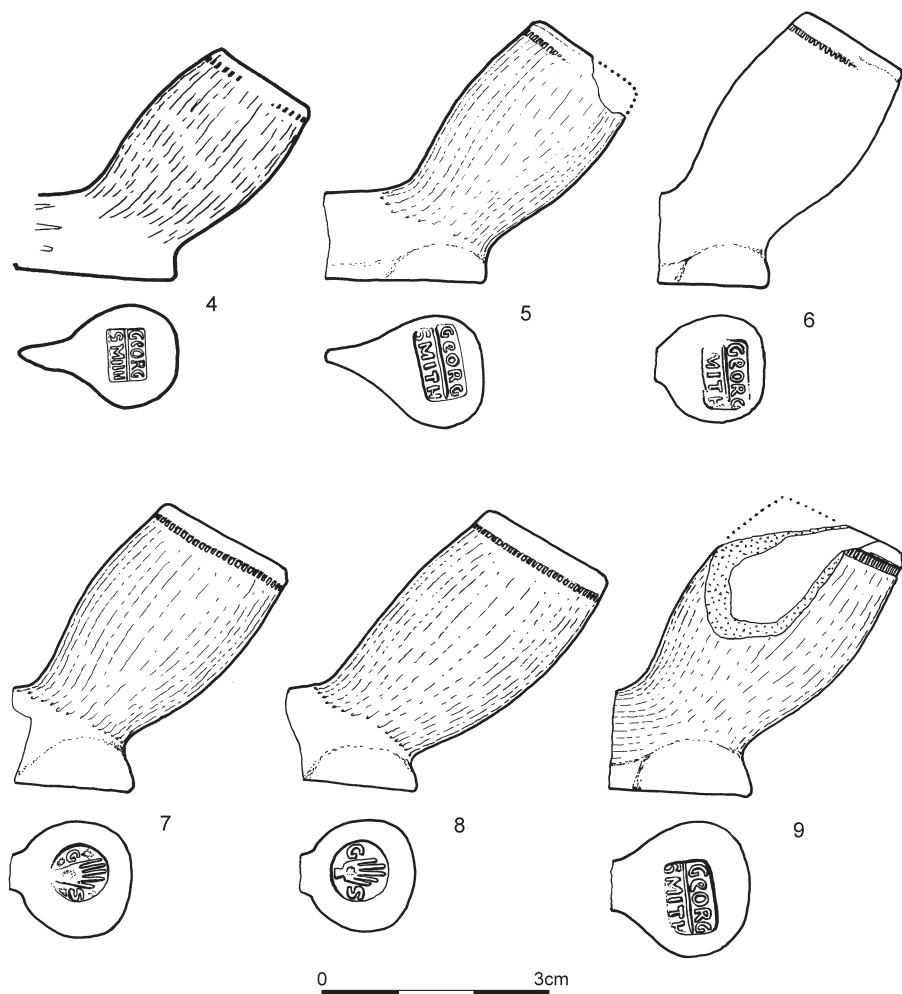
- 1679 – George Smyth married Joyce Lammas at Much Wenlock on 1 May.
- 1707 – George, son of George and Joyce Smyth, buried at Much Wenlock, 17 July.
- 1710 – George Smyth married Mary Leigh at Much Wenlock on 14 May.
- 1715 – John, son of George and Mary Smyth, baptised 9 January 1714/5.
- 1718 – Joyce, daughter of George Smyth, buried at Much Wenlock on 20 February.
- 1719 – George Smyth married Mary Watson at Much Wenlock on 2 May.
- 1720 – George Smyth was buried at Much Wenlock on 19 December.
- 1736 – George Smith recorded living in New Town in the Wenlock survey.
- 1747 – George Smyth Senior married Margaret Gorton at Much Wenlock on 29 October.

The above references ranging from a marriage in 1679 through to a burial in 1720 could potentially all fit with one individual named George Smith who married three times (wives named Joyce Lammas, Mary Leigh and Mary Watson), although it seems more likely that more than one individual with the same name is represented. There was also a slightly later George Smith recorded at New Town in the Wenlock Survey of 1736 (National Library of Wales, Wynnstey Coll, M2530), who lived in a small dwelling of poor stone with a thatched roof. This was let in four parts, the other occupants being Edward Wilkinson, Samuel Gough and widow Parsons. The marriage of George 'senior' in 1747 suggests that two individuals of this name were alive at that time, so that at least two individuals of this name lived in Wenlock after the 1720 burial. The reference to a George Smyth who married Joyce Lammas on 1 May 1679 is particularly interesting, since Joyce was almost certainly the daughter of the Much Wenlock pipemaker Robert Lammas and pipemaking families often intermarried.

While the exact working dates for the pipemaker or pipemakers named George Smith remain uncertain, what seems likely is that the GS pipe from Bucknell was made in the Much Wenlock area, which is some 25 miles away to the north-east. Although Wenlock area pipes are known to have been widely traded, it is interesting to be able to add another dot to the distribution map at Bucknell, which is in the extreme south-west corner of Shropshire, close to the borders with Herefordshire and Wales. This is a relatively remote rural area with very few previously recorded pipe finds and so it is interesting to find that a Wenlock pipe was traded there. More significantly, Bucknell is only eight or nine miles west of Pipe Aston and Ludlow, both of which had their own thriving pipemaking industries at this time producing comparable tailed heel forms of pipe, and yet numerous other examples of these imported George Smith pipes are also known from Ludlow. This raises the question as to why these GS / George Smith pipes were brought so far when more local sources were available. Was the Bucknell example simply an isolated incidence lost by a traveller or part of a more organised trading pattern? This is where it is important to set this find within its broader context, rather than just see it as an isolated example.

There are not many recorded pipes from such a rural area of Shropshire with which to compare this find, but there are two groups from nearby places in Wales that contain material of a similar date. A large assemblage of pipes from Pool Road in Montgomery, some 19 miles north-north-west of Bucknell and 30 miles west of Much Wenlock, produced 137 bowl fragments of mixed dates (Arnold 1985). Amongst these were two bowls with circular GS stamps, one with the initials flanking a hand and the other without. Another group of pipes has been seen by the author from Monaughty at Knighton, some 9 miles west-south-west of Bucknell and 35 miles south-west of Much Wenlock. This group contains two different types of GS stamp flanking a hand (one of which was produced using the same die as the Bucknell example) and one example of a GeORG/SMITH stamp (Figs 5, 7 and 8). These two Welsh sites show that the Bucknell find is not an isolated example but one that forms part of a broader pattern of pipes being traded west and southwest from Much Wenlock into Wales for distances of at least 35 miles.

From within England there are also further finds of GS / George Smith pipes (e.g., Figs 4, 6 and 9), showing that this maker produced bowls in a range of different sizes (presumably reflecting different stem lengths) and finishes (sometimes burnished, sometimes not).



Figures 4-9: Bowls with tailed heels marked GS or GeORG SMITH, showing the range of sizes and finishes that occurs. 4: A bowl in Much Wenlock Museum (after Higgins 1987, Fig. 68.4; Cast 2.46). 5: Found by Mrs D. E. Blain in the Great Hall at Monaughty (Cast 644.18). 6: An unburnished bowl found by Mr N. Aikens in garage foundations at The Old Bell House, Ludford, near Ludlow (Cast 530.14). 7-8: Found by Mrs D. E. Blain in the Great Hall at Monaughty (Casts 644.19-20). 9: Found in a garden at Stokesay by Mr K. Lewis in the early 1990s (Cast 529.17). Cast numbers from the national stamp catalogue; drawings by the author.

These different styles would have sold for differing amounts and catered for the various demands of the market. The pipes are typically made of a coarse Coal Measures clay, which is characteristic of Broseley area production, and neatly finished with fully milled rims and (usually) a burnished surface. Some of the forms have comparatively thin bowl walls and smaller stem bores, for example, Figures 7 and 8, both with bores of 6/64". These features occur on late examples of the tailed-heel bowls, suggesting that these particular examples date from c1700-1730. The Bucknell example also has a small bore, suggesting that it too is of the same date, and all three of these have the initial rather than full name marks. Details are not available for the other finds, but it may be that the initial stamps are specifically associated with these late, thin-walled bowls with smaller stem bores.

Other English finds come from Bishop's Castle in Shropshire, where Graham Berlyn (1999) has recorded three marks from Poppy House (two GeORG SMITH and one GS with a hand), while Tim Perks has also found an example of a GS mark from there (Die 1318; SCPR Facebook page, 14 April 2022). The Oswald mark index in the National Pipe Archive includes references to single finds from Newcastle-under-Lyme, Hale Roman villa and Coalbrookdale, as well as multiple examples from Sibdon Castle. There is also a single published example from Coventry (Muldoon 1979, Fig. 12.50) and another from Wall, near Church Stretton (Fig. 3). The author has recorded three examples of these marks from Willaston, some 40 miles north of Much Wenlock (Higgins 2018, 125-6) and numerous examples of these marks from Ludlow, some 20 miles to the south-south-west (e.g., Fig. 6), as well as a single example from nearby Stokesay (Fig. 9). While these finds all show places where pipes attributed to George Smith were traded, it is perhaps equally significant to note places where they have not been found. In the course of recording pipe marks, the author has seen sizeable groups from a number of places where other Much Wenlock / Broseley area pipes are well represented but which do not include any of the GS / George Smith marks. These places include Shrewsbury, Broseley, Benthall, Stafford, Pipe Aston, Bridgnorth, Bewdley, Worcester and Birmingham (the Birmingham Museum collection does include several examples, but these are all unprovenanced and the collection is drawn from a wide geographic area).

When this data is plotted out (Fig. 10), an interesting pattern emerges. While the overall distribution extends 40-50 miles from Much Wenlock in most directions, there is a marked difference in the concentration of pipes from different areas. Although there are three examples from Willaston, these come from an exceptionally large sample of more than 1,500 marks (Higgins 2018), so that the George Smith pipes only represent a very small proportion of those in use there. Apart from this, there are just single recorded examples in an arc from the north to the south-east of Much Wenlock and none at all from the Severn valley, which was a major conduit for the trade in other Broseley area pipes (Higgins 1987). In contrast, there are numerous finds from the south-west of Much Wenlock, often with multiple examples amongst what are generally smaller sized assemblages, indicating that they make up a high proportion of the finds. This suggests that George Smith had a particular market area that he usually supplied, perhaps through



Figure 10: Location map of places mentioned in the text with the approximate line of the River Severn shown. Small black dots represent places where single GS or George Smith marks have been recorded and large black dots multiple examples. Open circles represent other places where no GS or George Smith marks have been recorded.

an established route that he regularly travelled himself or that was serviced by chapmen who used him to supply their goods.

The one place that stands out in particular is Ludlow. The author has recorded some twenty-three examples from the town, which is by far the largest number found in any one place. This is especially notable since the town not only had its own pipemakers at this time (Berlyn 2008), but it was also just a few miles from Pipe Aston with its own pipemaking industry, both of which were producing comparable style pipes. There are a particularly large number of examples from the High Street in Ludlow Museum, which would otherwise be taken to suggest production in the town if the broader distribution

evidence were not known. It is possible that George Smith had family connections in the town and that he used this as a base to stay when selling his wares, or even that he moved and worked in the town for a while (there are contemporary references to individuals named George Smith in Ludlow). There are several examples of pipemakers at this period having moved from one centre to another, often retaining links with the place that they came from. A good example is provided by John and Jane Mats who moved from Benthall in Shropshire to Warwickshire, where they produced pipes using Shropshire styles of bowl form and mark, while still retaining property in Benthall itself (Melton 1997; Melton 2014).

There is growing evidence that the Broseley / Much Wenlock area pipemakers often had their own specific regions or areas that they traded pipes to. The marks of Henry Bradley, Morris Deacon and Richard Legg, for example, are particularly common to the north at Willaston (Higgins 2018, 112) while those of Michael Brown of Much Wenlock are dominant in the Birmingham area to the east (Higgins 2009, 198), with just a single example at Willaston. The George Smith pipes provide another example of a Broseley / Much Wenlock area maker with a specific trading area (to the south-west), showing that the marketing of the pipes produced in the Broseley area was far from random. It appears that each principal maker would have had his or her own trading network through which the majority of their pipes were disseminated to a particular area. While acting corporately in terms of clay source, finishing techniques, bowl forms and mark styles, the pipemakers seem to have operated independently in terms of selling their wares. They were, however, able to capture markets up to 40-50 miles from their workshops, even when more local pipe supplies existed, such as at Ludlow. This market area is far greater than for most contemporary pipe workshops in other English centres and shows how this specialist production centre in the Broseley / Much Wenlock area was able to dominate the surrounding areas through targeted marketing by its individual members.

By looking at this single find from Bucknell and placing it within its broader context it is possible to reveal something of the complex trading patterns that radiated out from the Broseley / Much Wenlock area. This not only shows how important it is to record these isolated finds from rural areas, but also how interconnected these places were with distant markets during the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries. This case study shows the potential for using pipes to examine the origins and development of small-scale manufacturing during the Post-Medieval period and demonstrates the importance of recording marked pipes from across broad geographic areas so as to enable detailed regional or national studies.

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