



PIPE SMOKING TODAY

GUY N SMITH

AN INTRODUCTION

From 1996 – 2007 I competed in the annual British Pipe Smoking Championships. In 2003 I won with a time of 1hr 38 mins, 38 seconds for a 3gm pipe of tobacco smoked throughout without re-lighting.

It was one of the most convivial gatherings which I have ever attended. Competitors came from all parts of the UK and it was the only occasion when we saw one another.

Now these friendships have been cruelly destroyed. On July 1, 2007 a law was introduced banning smoking in public places in England. As our venue, although hired exclusively for the event, is deemed to be a public place then the Championships could no longer be held there. Alternative premises, pubs and clubs, were no longer legal either.

Pipe clubs around the country suffered a similar fate. The only alternatives available were outdoor ‘shelters’ which had to be open to the elements on 3 sides.

Competition smoking involves keeping the pipe alight as long as possible, hence even a slight breeze causes the tobacco to burn faster and uncomfortably hotter. This, of course, is counter-productive for competitions.

Currently I am trying to form a Pipe Club. Its HQ will be at my own home on the Shropshire/Welsh border. Being private premises, smoking is legal and is nothing to do with anybody else. Politically-correct do-gooders, health freaks and any other protesters will not be admitted.

Anybody interested in joining please contact myself. Applicants must be aged 18 or over. Or maybe we could have a “one-off” contest in the summer to see how it goes.

HEALTH ISSUES

I think that the notice displayed on my office door (see illustration) puts the smoking issue into perspective. Whilst I would never smoke in a restaurant or anywhere that caused discomfort or annoyance to others, surely properly segregated smoking areas

would solve the problem, Day by day our democracy is being under-mind and I fear that we are fast approaching a police state. According to Professor John Britton, chairman of the RCP Tobacco Advisory Group, it is the toxic chemicals in cigarettes which cause death rather than nicotine.

Both the government and the medical profession either do not understand, or choose not to do so, that pipe-smoking is entirely different from cigarette smoking. Not that I have any axe to grind with those who prefer a cigarette, but the fact remains that pipes are far less harmful than fags. When this issue is raised, my frequent quote is that "cigarette smoking is a habit, whilst pipe smoking is a hobby." July 1st 2007 saw a law which forbade smoking in public places. This is synonymous with restrictions introduced by Hitler in Nazi Germany. He did not consider smoking in keeping with his secure and sanitary utopia. So he tripled tobacco taxes and restricted indoor smoking.

In 1938 he passed a law forbidding Jews from smoking and denied them the coupons necessary for the purchase of cigarettes.

Rather than a cost of millions to the nation being squandered on no-smoking campaigns, would it not be better if cigarette smokers were gently encouraged to take up the pipe? All Tobacco packaging is plastered with labels warning of the innumerable dire consequences of smoking. They seem to think up a new one every day! I really do not think that many people take any notice of these, but my own complaint is that tobacco tins, many of which carry superb illustrations and one day might become collectable items, are subsequently ruined.

Smokers, like motorists, are easy targets for those hell-bent on introducing draconian legislation. The drug problem has spiralled out of control in the UK, so targeting smokers, I feel, is a convenient whitewash. All too often the excuse is given that the money saved on treating "smoking-related" diseases would provide greater resources for the NHS. Some time ago I saw some figures which contradicted this, the income from tobacco taxes is way in excess of the cost of treating so-called self-inflicted illness. If there were no smokers then who would foot the costs of an NHS which seems hell-bent on closing hospitals and making staff redundant? The tax-payer, of

course. The pockets on non-smokers would be hit hard and then they really would have something to whinge about!

What exactly is a smoking-related disease? Whilst there are doubtless many genuine conditions, mostly caused by cigarette smoking to excess, it would appear to me that if somebody dies, and they are known to be a smoker, then that is another statistic used in furthering NHS calls for a ban.

One life-long pipe smoker tells me that a couple of years ago, he suffered a small stroke. Instead of his doctor telling him to “give up”, he advised that to do so could be counter productive as a pipe was stress-reducing. The effect of suddenly stopping could even be a stumbling block to recovery. I am pleased to report that this gentleman is now fully recovered and still smoking his pipe.

Something else was pointed out to me after this year’s British Pipe Smoking Championships had finished when around 60 of us were sitting in the same room, smoking our pipes for pleasure rather than competing and enjoying well-earned refreshment.

“Have you heard anybody coughing?” a fellow pipe enthusiast asked. “No”, I replied, realizing that, in spite of the smoke, I had not been aware of any coughing during the competition.

“That says it all”, my acquaintance smiled. “If everybody here was a cigarette smoker then we would not be able to hear ourselves talk amidst all the coughing.”

Never was a truer word spoken.

TOBACCO BRANDS

I am told that there is a growing interest in vintage tobaccos, unopened tins of those marvellous brands of which there was a plethora back in the 1950’s. Coincidentally, a few months ago whilst browsing an antiques mart, I acquired a few ounces of Erinmore Mixture and Three Nuns Empire Blend. Out of curiosity I opened a packet of the former and restored it to a smokeable condition by means of a damp sponge.

The result was excellent, but I have to say that the quality of a product some fifty years old had today's equivalent paling into insignificance.

Why, then, have so many favourite brands from yesteryear been discontinued? The answer lies in the fact that these days pipe-smokers are in a minority. I have heard a figure of 5% of all smokers being devotees of the pipe.

Very few of the old proprietary brands of pipe tobacco are still available. Ogdens made an attempt to reproduce Grand Cut, Tam-o'-Shanter and Digger Flake, but have now discontinued all of their loose tobaccos. The legendary St. Bruno Survives, but is a poor imitation of its former self.

Of course, there are still many specialist tobacconists throughout the UK who offer a selection of good quality "proper" tobaccos to suit the discriminating pipe-smoker. So, all is not lost in spite of the attempts of our opponents to deprive us of our pleasure.

Whilst on the subject of tobacco brands, I recall an old favourite from the 1950's, W.D. & H.O. Will's "Westward Ho1" A latakia-based mixture, the packaging, picturing Sir Walter Raleigh, carried a quote from Charles Kingsley's famous novel of the same name:

"When all things were made, none was made better than Tobacco. to be a lone man's Companion, a bachelor's Friend, a hungry man's Food, a sad man's Cordial, a wakeful man's Sleep, a chilly man's Fire. There's no Herb like it under the canopy of Heaven."

I guess that says it all.

"TOBACCO CULTURE"

My book "Tobacco Culture was published in hardcover by Spur Publications in 1977. It is a DIY guide to growing, curing and processing your own tobacco. Profusely illustrated with photos, drawings and diagrams, it covers the whole process from seed to filling your pipe. I consider that my method leads to a finished product which is as near to the commercial brands as it is possible to achieve in British climatic conditions.

Long out of print, copies have become scarce and highly collectable.

Black Hill Books (www.blackhillbooks.com) now has a small quantity of Fine condition copies available at £12.00 each plus postage and packaging.