

## HISTORY SNIPS FROM THE BRANSCOMBE PROJECT - AUGUST 2020

### Barbara: old news: **FIRST, GLOW WORMS ...**

Linda Hughes reports: *'Just spotted a glow worm amongst my pots outside the backdoor!! Wonderful. I have seen them in the past, but only in the main garden.'*

And John Torrance reports from Beer:

Putting out the recycling after eleven —  
empties from a week of drinking wine,  
screwed-up pages, poems that didn't work —  
I straighten up, and breathe the damp sweet joy  
of gardens after rain. Facets of gravel  
dimly catch the moonlight, but one pinpoint  
shines more brightly. Stooping, looking closer,  
I see the twin green tail-lights of a glow-worm.  
Another's on the bank across the way.  
While covid locks us in, these tiny lanterns  
seem to say 'We're always here, you know,  
awaiting lovers flying down the lane'.  
I go indoors and pass the message on —  
'Pandemic or no, we have a house of love!'



### **SECOND, HAIR-CUTS:**

It wasn't just Freddie Dowell at Wobble that cut mens' hair. Betty Rowson remembers her dad, Bert Somers, and Jim Burnell cutting hair before the war. Men only, out of doors, with a table cloth round them, and using clippers. Took it in turns, sometimes up at Bert Somers' at Sellers Wood, sometimes at Jim Burnell's, at the cottage opposite Great Seaside Farm. Bert worked for the Fords at the Sea Shanty, Jim worked with the shire horses at Great Seaside. Meanwhile, Marion Ivey remembers how, after the war, her uncle Reg Abbott, cut hair in his cellar at 11 Hillside 'he wasn't very good', and Charley Taylor cut hair from Shute Cottage, Street.

*Jim Burnell & young Frank Chard*

### **NEW NEWS: SUE DYMOND: CLAY PIPES**

Have you ever come across small sections of old clay pipe stems in your garden, or, more rarely, their bowls? These were used for smoking tobacco; the stems were fragile



and broke quite easily. Mostly we think of them as belonging to the Victorian era, but some may be earlier.

So how did they come to be in the soil? Well, past generations threw most of their rubbish onto middens, and this mix of ashes, animal and vegetable waste and general household rubbish was often spread onto the land as fertiliser. Our gardens and houses are built on

earlier fields, and so we come across the pipes. Alternatively, the pipes were thrown away where they broke, in a field where a labourer was working, or in a garden.

How long have they been in use? Production started in the late 1500s, after tobacco was reputedly brought to this country by Sir Walter Raleigh from Virginia. Or perhaps a bit earlier, when British sailors having met up with Spanish and Portuguese sailors took up their habit of smoking tobacco in clay pipes. Clay pipes were smoked by all levels of society, but the wealthier chose more ornate or finer pipes. These might be better finished and more fragile, with longer stems, as they didn't have to worry about damaging them whilst working. Working women often smoked, and poorer people might carry on using a pipe which was slightly damaged as a matter of economy.

By WW1 cigarettes gained popularity, especially amongst the troops - they were more convenient, and less fragile, and by WW2 clay pipes had almost disappeared.

How can you date the pipes? You can compare your finds to collections in local museums, articles online, or in published works. Pipes sometimes have patterns or makers' marks that indicate age and source.

There's another interesting way for getting a rough date. Imperial drills, sized by sixty-fourths of an inch, have their size stamped into the metal. You can insert a drill into the pipe stem and record the size: the wider the bore the older the pipe. The range of bores is from  $\frac{4}{64}$  of an inch to  $\frac{9}{64}$  of an inch.

The bowls of the pipe, although often broken, can also help fix a date. Larger bowls date from times when tobacco was cheap; as the price increases, the size of bowl (and size of bore) reduce.

A fine smooth clay known as ball or pipe clay was used in manufacture. It's different from the clay used in ceramic production. The nearest suitable pipe clay is found in the Bovey Basin in Devon and in the Poole Harbour area in Dorset. Early pipes were sometimes made from more local clays, and these can be identified by inclusions in the

fabric. Exeter had a clay pipe industry, using imported clay. North Devon manufactured the pipes from locally available clay. It is probable that most pipe fragments found in East Devon have been imported, mainly from other parts of the county.

Pipes were made in moulds and then finished to remove rough and protruding parts. If you're interested in finding out about your pipe finds, you might check the following websites:

*Guidelines for the Recovery and Processing of Clay Tobacco Pipes from Archaeological Projects (Funded by Historic England) at:*

[http://www.pipearchive.co.uk/pdfs/howto/Guidelines%20Ver%201\\_2%20030917.pdf](http://www.pipearchive.co.uk/pdfs/howto/Guidelines%20Ver%201_2%20030917.pdf)

Clay pipe making at: <https://heritagecrafts.org.uk/clay-pipe-making/>

Photograph of clay pipes: Simon Speed - Own work, Public Domain,  
<https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=11554402>