

of
**REALLY USEFUL
INFORMATION**

compiled by
"CHAS. MUNDUNGUS"



SIMULACRAN PRESS

**A PIPEMAN'S HANDBOOK
OF
REALLY USEFUL INFORMATION**

Compiled by
“Charles Mundungus”



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2008**

CHAR-LIGHT (An Introduction of Sorts)

This *Handbook* is the sort of thing I have been looking for since I took up the pipe over thirty years ago but have never found. While there have been some decent pipe books over the years, none of them really talked about the useful stuff, the *praxis* of the Art of Smoaking. For awhile in the 1980s I tried publishing my own little smoker's zine, but even that didn't help me answer some of the basic questions every pipeman has regarding his art. Then came the internet. And with it, pipemen from all over the world began to come together and share their collective experience.

This anthology began as a web-crawl in search for a method to restore my aging, oxidized stems and recondition the bowls to which they were attached. My search was a long one, piecing together various fragments and bits of advice, then trying them out in the workshop. One search led to another, and I began to ferret out various other topics I've had on my mind for some time, things like health issues connected with pipe-smoking, nomenclature for this or that piece of the pipe, aging tobacco, packing it, books about the literature of smoaking, and so on. When I found something great, I book-marked it. But being of a certain age, I longed for something more. I wanted it all in one place, and I wanted it in a non-electronic form I could hold in my hands—a book. What you're reading now on your computer screen as a PDF (or if you're of a certain age have probably printed off and hold in your hands) has been assembled as a reference work to answer the fundamental questions about the Art of Smoaking. None of it is original to me, although I've written and included a simplified a method of pipe restoration based on the advice of others.

A Smoker's Handbook of Really Useful Information is the result of pipemen just like you, men who have been smoaking for six months or sixty years, and done us all the service of sharing their wisdom. I have cited the authors and URLs where and when I found them. Most of the pipemen I have dealt with on the internet were thoughtful, considerate, and free with their advice. A few, of course, weren't. I have consulted an internet librarian at the local university, who assures me that no copyright infringement has been incurred—everything you find in these pages is offered free of charge, with directions to the web site where I found the original document. The “value-added” is simply to have them all in one place.

Over thirty years have passed since I took up the pipe, but then as now I can count the number of pipe-smokers I have within my personal, face-to-face acquaintance on one hand. We are a peculiar breed, and it is with some justification that many of us think of ourselves as “briar friars” in the pursuit of the joys and solace that only a pipe can bring. If you find this document useful, feel free to pass it on to anyone else who might benefit from its advice. And if you have suggestions for future editions, please send them along to the email address below.

“Chas. Mundungus”

Easter 2008

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PIPE ANATOMY

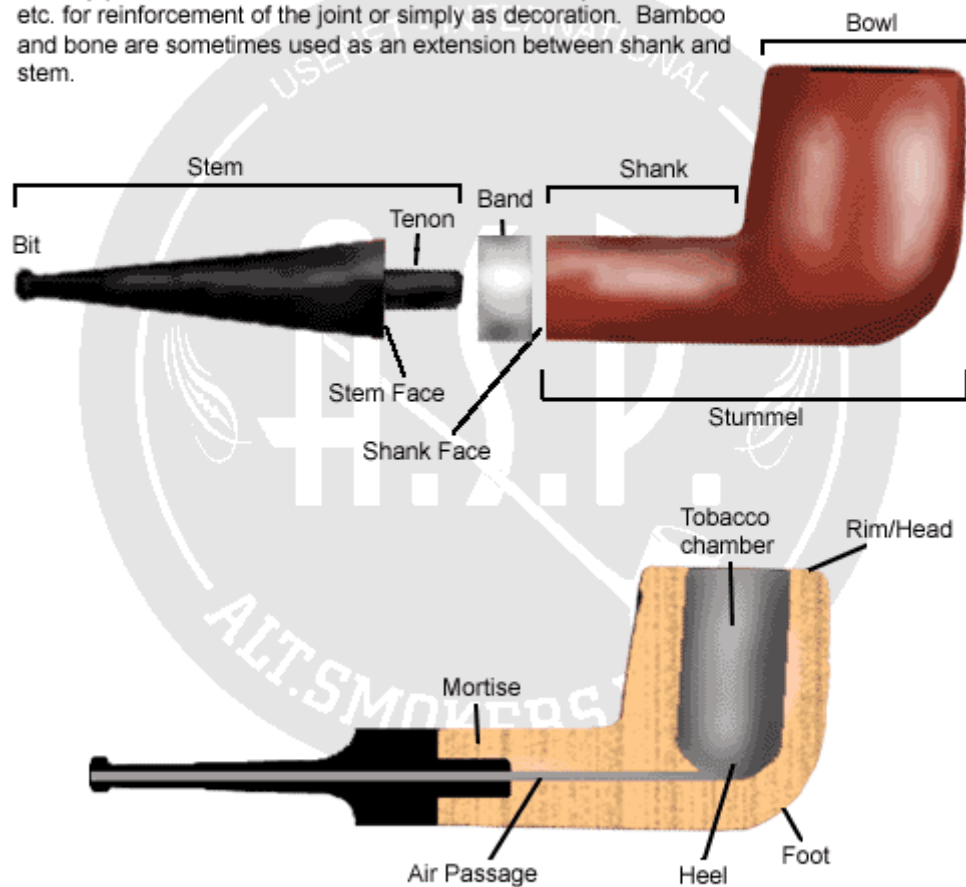
The following anatomy, "Pipe Parts," was taken from the Alt.Smokers.Pipes website, www.aspipes.org , August 2007.

Pipe Parts - Page 1

Standard briar and meerschaum pipes consist of a stem attached to a stummel (bowl and shank). The stem may be made of vulcanite-a hard rubber material, plastic (lucite, perspex), amber or horn.

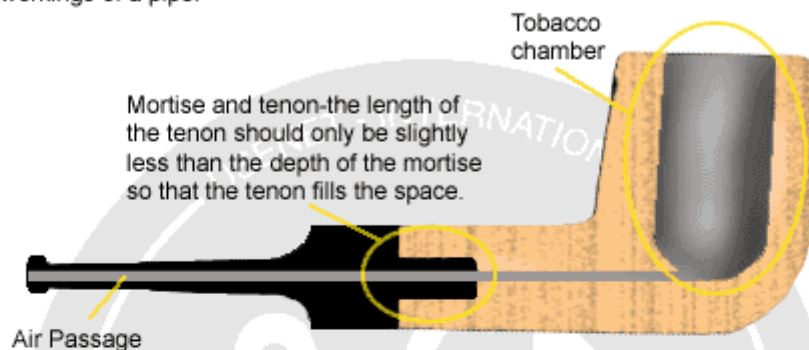
The joining is usually by way of a tenon in the stem which fits into a mortise in the shank. This makes it possible to remove the stem from the shank for cleaning.

Some pipes feature a band or ferrule made of metal, plastic, horn, etc. for reinforcement of the joint or simply as decoration. Bamboo and bone are sometimes used as an extension between shank and stem.



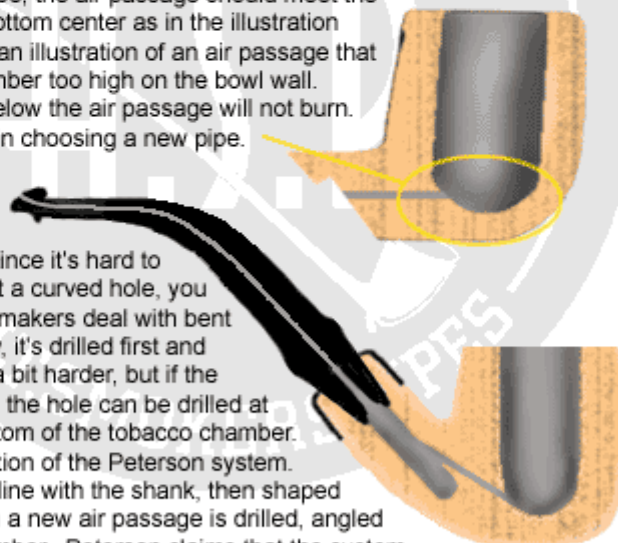
Pipe Parts - Page 2

No matter how pretty a pipe is, from a smoking standpoint, it's the hidden inside part that is most important. A well-designed and well-built pipe will probably smoke very well, while a poorly designed, poorly built pipe will always be a disappointment. Here is a look at the inner workings of a pipe.

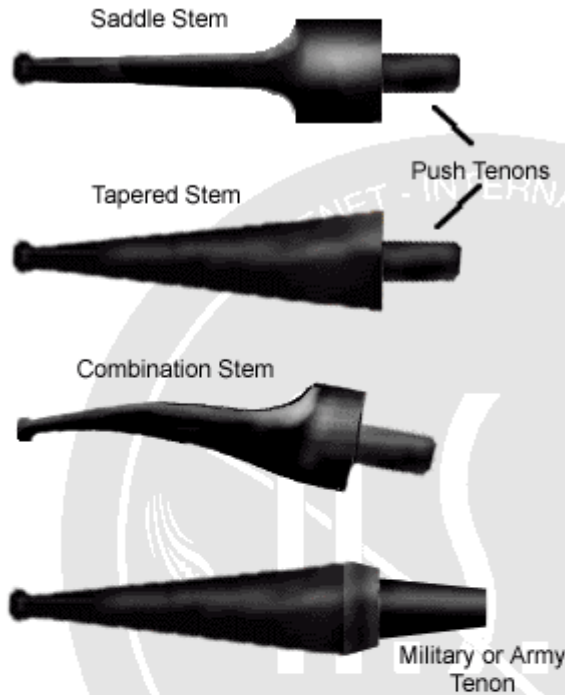


In a correctly drilled pipe, the air passage should meet the tobacco chamber at bottom center as in the illustration above. To the right is an illustration of an air passage that joins the tobacco chamber too high on the bowl wall. Tobacco in the bowl below the air passage will not burn. Something to look for in choosing a new pipe.

How do they do that? Since it's hard to find a drill bit that will cut a curved hole, you might wonder how pipe makers deal with bent pipes. The stem is easy, it's drilled first and then bent. The bowl is a bit harder, but if the mortise is large enough, the hole can be drilled at an angle toward the bottom of the tobacco chamber. To the right is an illustration of the Peterson system. The mortise is drilled in line with the shank, then shaped for a military tenon, then a new air passage is drilled, angled toward the tobacco chamber. Peterson claims that the system smokes drier because moisture is trapped in the oversize mortise hole.



Pipe Parts-Page 3

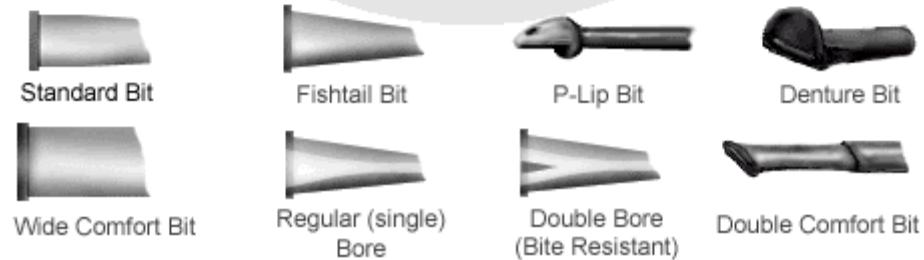
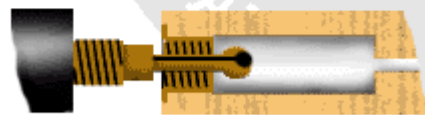


Stems come in three varieties: the saddle stem, the tapered stem and the combination, which is tapered on one side and saddle on the other. The fitting between the shank and the stem involves a mortise in the shank and a tenon on the stem. The push tenon has a straight-sided mortise and tenon. The military or army tenon has a tapered mortise and tenon to make it easy to remove the stem without damage when the pipe is still warm-something you should not do with a push tenon.

Inexpensive pipes are often made with metal screw fittings instead of mortise and tenon. These fittings usually include a metal tube called an evaporator designed to reduce the amount of moisture going into the stem. Unfortunately, they work poorly, if at all.

Some materials, such as meerschaum are more fragile than briar, so bone or plastic tenons are used for durability.

Screw Fitting with Evaporator shown with shank cross-section

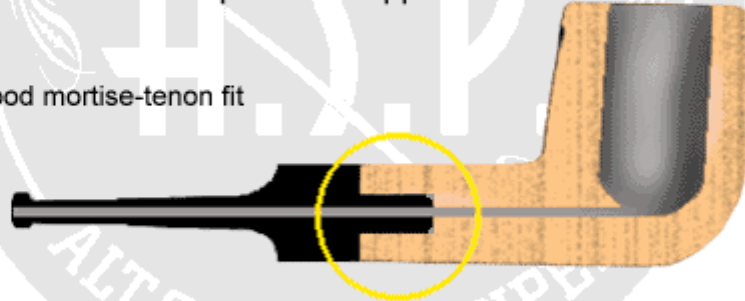


Pipe Parts-Page 4

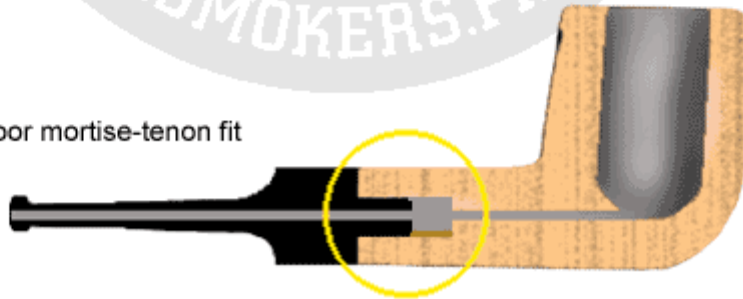
Probably the most important qualities that separate good pipes (or good-smoking pipes) from great pipes are hidden deep inside. The fit between the mortise and tenon is critical to a dry smoke. If the tenon is too long, there will be a gap between the stem and shank. If the tenon is too short, it creates an open area, as in the lower illustration, that allows the moist smoke and air mixture to expand. This expansion causes the mixture to cool and the moisture to condense. Once the moisture has condensed, the stem acts like a straw (yecch!).

Many pipemakers trim off the sharp outside edges of the tenon to leave a small gap between the tenon and mortise without affecting the airhole fitting in hopes that any moisture that builds up will be trapped there.

A good mortise-tenon fit



A poor mortise-tenon fit



PIPE PACKING

A BASIC METHOD

by Uncle Bob at Just for Him (www.justforhim.com) (found March 2008)

Pipe packing is basically a three step process.

Step #1: Sprinkle the tobacco loosely into the pipe until it fills up to the brim. Note that I said sprinkle loosely and not pinch and put! This is one of the biggest problems with even guys who know how to pack their pipes! Sprinkle loosely until full and then poke it down until the bowl is half full. If you have a tapered bowl then you may wish to make it more like two-thirds. If you were to draw on the pipe there would be little if any resistance.

Step #2: Sprinkle loosely again until the bowl is full. Poke it down evenly until the bowl is three-fourths full. If you were to draw on the pipe there would be a little resistance; say less than a cigarette.

Step #3: Sprinkle loosely until the bowl is full and then round up the top so that a little mound of tobacco rests over the bowl. The mound should be less than a half inch tall and nicely rounded. Then poke it down flat and even with the brim of the bowl. If you were to draw through the pipe it would seem slightly less resistance than a cigarette. The pipe should be ready for the lighting!

Lighting: Now I know that many of you out there are now going, "Hmphf! Why is he bothering me with this?" But this art is often lost in today's hustle and bustle light up a quick cigarette world. If you have problems keeping your pipe lit even after packing correctly then try this: take five or six puffs as you walk the flame around the whole bowl charring the entire area of the tobacco. Then tamp the ashes flat and even and relight using another five or six good puffs and you are ready to go!

Tamping: Many pipe smokers will pack and light their pipes correctly and still have problems keeping the pipe lit or smoking the entire pipeful. The reason is that they are tamping too hard! When you tamp your pipe you should only be crushing the ashes flat and even; not pushing down tobacco! You may tamp as much as you like, but just push down the burning ashes onto the unburning tobacco. Keep it even and keep the draw consistent.

AIR POCKET PACKING

adapted from Fred Hanna, Pipes and Tobaccos (Winter 2007)

Many pipemen are turning to the APP method, which (at least in my experience) seems to live up to its claims to produce a cooler, more flavorful smook.

Because of copyright issues, I can't quote the Hanna method verbatim, but offer a paraphrase of its salient points. Interested readers can track down the article or purchase the back-number of Pipes and Tobaccos, but the following should do the trick.

Step #1. Squeeze or compress a large portion of your favorite tobacco into a clump between your thumb and first three fingers. The clump must be large enough to fit tightly into the upper half of your bowl.

Step #2. Leaving the bottom half of the bowl empty, force the clump into the upper half of the bowl with a shove so that the upper half of the tobacco chamber is tightly packed. Remember: no tobacco in the bottom half of the bowl!

Step #3. Immediately after shoving the clump in, give a twist to the remainder of the clump, screwing it in. You could also shove and screw at the same time. Don't press the center of the clump. You're just trying to get it at just below rim level. If some strands remain over the rim, remove them or else push the entire clump down a bit more.

Step #4. Check the draw. If you can't draw air through the pipe, it's packed too tightly and you'll need to take the clump out and start over. The draw should have about the same or a little lighter resistance than you experience in the Basic Method.

Step #5. Light the center of the clump. There's no need to go around the entire top surface with your flame, as the center light will eventually ignite the tobacco around the circumference of the bowl. If your tobacco seems to require a char-light (like my Virginia Flakes), give it a light tamping, being careful not to press the clump down into the bowl.

The Remainder of the Smook. This type of packing produces a really easy draw. It also keeps the tobacco lit better than other methods. You should notice an increase in the flavor of your favorite tobacco as well.

At some point well into the smook, when you tamp the clump will fall into the bottom of the bowl. Just give it a light tamp to keep it together.

The method also delivers (again, in my experience as in Mr. Hanna's and others who have used it) a cooler smook. For Virginia smokers, this may prove to be the ultimate packing method. I wonder if I could take up MacBaren Virginia #1 again?

--"Chas Mundungas"

FLAKE (SLICES) PACKING

Flake—Much Better than Its Reputation

by Per Georg Jensen, Mac Baren Tobacco Company A/S (www.mac-baren.com) (March 2008)



How many pipe smokers have not cast a suspicious glance at that small tin of flake tobacco and said to themselves that they would rather have a “normal” pouch of tobacco - partly because the packet is bigger and partly because you do not have to spend time preparing the tobacco. But this would be to deny yourself a unique tobacco experience. Because a pipe filled the right way with flake tobacco is an extraordinary smoking experience.

Throughout my adult life I have been among pipe smokers – the first 23 years as a pipe maker with Georg Jensen Pipes and the last 4 years as “Tobacco Professor” at Mac Baren. During all these years I have very often encountered prejudice among many pipe smokers towards flake tobaccos, and never have I savoured a moment more than when the idea behind flake tobacco is explained to a pipe smoker for the first time, and then he fills his pipe with it and lights it. To see his face slowly transform into an understanding smile, to watch his eyes light up as the taste of a well-prepared flake tobacco pipe provides convincing evidence, is an experience not to be missed.

Why are so few pipe smokers familiar with flake tobacco? To find the answer to this question, we must look at how society has developed from the 1800s to the present day. In the last century, when pipe smoking was very common, a father would normally give his son a pipe on his confirmation. The son would draw on the father's experience, ask questions and find out how the various tobaccos should be smoked in order to get the maximum pleasure out of this unique plant that is a product of nature. While pipe smoking is not difficult, good advice passed on by your own father nevertheless proved invaluable. I was such a son, who gained from the experiences of his father just as he had from his father before him.

Today, to put it mildly, it is considered “politically incorrect” to give a pipe as a confirmation gift. The giver of such a gift would be the subject of much acrimony, with the result that the “father to son” tradition has all but disappeared. And with the disappearance of this tradition, the experiences gathered by pipe smokers for generations are also being lost. This has inspired me to pass on the experiences I gained from my father to pipe smokers all over the world.

Is flake tobacco difficult to smoke?

As with every good thing in life, you have to be prepared to devote to it the most valuable thing we have – time. Flake is a tobacco where, as a pipe smoker, I devote the time that it takes to properly prepare a flake tobacco pipe, I enjoy the pleasure of expectation, and I smile with

satisfaction as the preparation and expectation turn into sheer enjoyment. Allow me to make one thing clear: there is nothing difficult involved in enjoying flake tobacco. You just have to know what to do. No doubt there are many different ways of smoking flake tobacco and it is not possible to categorically say which is the right one. Here I would like to pass on the advice that I was given, and when you know how flake is produced and the qualities that tobacco takes on when it has been pressed, the advice contained herein will make good sense.

I have chosen to structure the story of flake under the following chapter headings:

1. History of flake tobacco
2. Production of flake tobacco
3. How to fill the pipe with flake

Flake Tobacco in the Whirl of History

When and where the first flake tobacco was produced is uncertain, but what is known for a fact is that pressed tobacco was invented to solve a major problem at the time in a country with great seafaring traditions. Turn back time some 300-400 years, and you find that pipe smoking was the most common way to enjoy tobacco – and seafarers were among its most avid advocates.

Among seamen in particular, pipe smoking was highly esteemed – but there were problems with storing the tobacco. Way back at the beginning of the history of tobacco, spun and loose tobaccos were the forms most commonly found. But on long sea voyages the tobacco would become dry and the taste deteriorated. Many seamen tried moistening the tobacco with water to prevent this problem, while others tried packing the tobacco in canvas and sealing it with liquid tar to retain the moistness. No doubt this did help to retain moistness, but it was found that when the tobacco was smoked it had a very strong taste of tar. Compared with the tobacco we know today, smoking it must have been quite an unpleasant experience and would certainly have given nowhere near the pleasure a good tobacco gives. Others experimented by boiling water and sugar to form brine that was then poured over the tobacco. This method gave the seamen tobacco that tasted better and retained its moisture longer. The sugar brine made the tobacco “fatty” and acted as a binder when the tobacco was pressed together with the hands, which reduced the surface area so that the tobacco did not dry out as quickly. At the same time, tobacco pressed in this way took up less space, which was a great advantage on a cramped ship. Thus sugar brine helped to keep the tobacco moist for a longer period of time.

The experience thus gained eventually came to the notice of the tobacco factories, and after numerous failed attempts the first blocks of pressed tobacco were eventually ready for market. It is not known which factory or country can take the credit for the “invention” of flake tobacco, but seamen were now able to buy ready-pressed tobacco – and pressed substantially harder than they could manage by hand. So seamen finally had a tobacco that dried out much more slowly, and what had started out as a problem and an irritation to seamen eventually culminated in a new type of tobacco – pressed tobacco.

Seamen everywhere quickly got used to the new type of pressed tobacco and soon refined a method of filling the pipe with it. In fact, the right method is really very simple – once you know how to do it.

When ships were at sea the seamen had to follow the captain's rules about smoking on board, which meant that smoking was only allowed in a certain part of the ship and only with the captain's permission (today we are familiar with the no smoking concept, but in those days the rules were introduced to prevent the wooden ships catching fire). When a seaman was granted permission to smoke, he quickly fetched his pipe and tobacco, went astern and the ritual would begin. The tobacco block was placed on the cutting board and with his knife he would cut slices of tobacco as thinly as possible. The seamen called a slice a “flake” (today we are all familiar with the term “Navy Cut”, which actually dates from the birth of the flake). Once the appropriate number of “flakes” had been cut, the tobacco was folded down the middle and bent into a U shape, taking great care not to loosen the tobacco. Now the pipe could be filled with the tobacco.

Here I will just stop for a moment to create the right mood. Naturally, it was important for the seaman to enjoy a good pipe of tobacco, but equally important was the camaraderie with his colleagues that always accompanied a good smoke. When the captain gave permission to smoke, fellow seamen from all sections of the ship would gather and the ritual of cutting the tobacco and filling the pipe became more than just a seaman's experience – it was a social event. While enjoying the tobacco, important topics would be discussed and – another significant element in those days – snippets of news would be exchanged between the seamen. News passed on during a tobacco session would quickly spread throughout the ship. There can be no doubt that officers, too, used these “smoking breaks” as a way of spreading information to the crew of the ship.

However, pipe smoking also served another very important function. Imagine being on board a large sailing ship in a raging storm. For days the wind has been ripping at the sails and massive waves are breaking over the decks. The entire crew are fighting for their lives against the forces of nature.

The stress building up in each man has to be dealt with at some point – and this is where pipe smoking comes in. When the storm finally abates and the captain again gives permission to smoke, it is not just the act of smoking that is important. Filling the pipe, lighting it, slowly exhaling the smoke... the pure satisfaction and enjoyment of a properly filled pipe were all part of the pleasures of pipe smoking. Another important aspect of pipe smoking was the psychological effect. The seamen would stand shoulder to shoulder, each with his pipe, and talk among themselves – many would take the opportunity to gather their thoughts, reflect on the dangerous situation they had just been through and let the stress slowly subside with every puff on the pipe. With only a slight stretch of the imagination, you could say that pipe smoking can in some instances be considered as “psychological first aid”, or at least a means whereby one's psychological balance can be regained. Many will have used this moment of camaraderie to talk out their sorrows and concerns, and the others will certainly have rallied round and tried to help where they could. In any case, many topics were doubtless mulled over in this way, and simply being able to talk about problems and sorrows with others must have been a great help. At other times the atmosphere will have been more relaxed and congenial, and then the pipe smokers

probably told jokes and poked good-natured fun at one another. Who has not experienced the cheerful atmosphere that so often prevails when smokers gather together?

In this stressful day and age, a pipe would be a good way for many people to counter some of the stress that builds up during the course of the day. To fill a pipe, light it, and lean back in a comfortable chair in peace and quiet is an excellent way to gather your thoughts again – and a pipe full of flake tobacco is a fine way to end the day.

The Production of Flake Tobacco

The present-day production of flake tobacco by Mac Baren does not differ significantly from the method used when flake tobacco came into being. The means may have become more advanced, but the principles have not changed – they remain just as they were 200 years ago.

In order to produce a good flake, we must be fully versed in the old traditions associated with flake tobacco. When a pipe smoker opens a tin of tobacco, he should be aware that the tobacco he holds in his hands is deeply rooted in these old traditions.

The first thing is to select the tobaccos that will make up the mixture. By using different types of tobacco, we can modify the taste experience of the finished tobacco mixture. Following the selection process the tobacco is threshed, i.e. the large stem is removed from the tobacco leaf. Sugar water is then added to the tobacco, exactly as the seamen used to do when the idea of flake tobacco was still developing.

The sugar water helps emphasise and underpin the natural taste nuances of the tobacco, and also keeps the tobacco moist. After 12 hours the tobacco is then dried, or cured, so that the sugar water that has not been absorbed by the tobacco evaporates. Then the final taste enhancer is added and the tobacco is ready to be pressed. Thus far the production of flake tobacco does not differ from the production of loose cut tobacco – but that all changes from here on.

Compressed

A good flake is characterised by the tobacco being firmly pressed together – and remaining pressed together. This result can only be achieved through the application of carefully tested technique and exceptional instinct on the part of our tobacco experts. We start by adding moisture, in form of steam, to the tobacco. This enhances the natural taste of the tobacco and ensures that it stays firmly pressed together. Given that tobacco is a natural product which differs from year to year and from region to region, the dexterity and experience of our tobacco experts is what determines how much moistness to add.

After the tobacco has been sufficiently moistened, it is packed into a holder measuring 40 x 40 cm and about 1 metre deep. Then a large plunger slowly presses the tobacco together to form a block of tobacco measuring 40 x 40 cm and about 3 cm in thickness. The block is laid on top of the other blocks, and it is important that they are kept under pressure until sufficient blocks have been produced to fill the tobacco press.

The press

When 34 blocks of tobacco have been pressed, they are stacked in the tobacco press. The heavy covers are closed and screwed firmly in position, and a hydraulic press exerts 55 tons of pressure on the tobacco blocks. This may sound a lot – and it is. The blocks of tobacco are subject to this tremendous pressure for 12 hours, after which they are pressed so hard together that the degree of hardness is comparable to that of a wooden board. This slow, constant, strong pressure is the key to the finished flake tobacco not breaking apart and ensures that it retains its block form.

Storage

Now that the tobacco is pressed as hard together as possible, it is allowed time to mature and develop the last nuances of taste. The blocks are again stacked in a storage press, where the iron bars ensure that the pressure is sustained. During the next 30 days the taste develops and spreads evenly throughout the blocks, the taste nuances mix - and an exquisite smoking experience is close to being realised.

Cutting

In days of old, seamen carried a pressed block of tobacco to sea and would cut a slice from the block to have a smoke. Today flake smoking is much easier for pipe smokers, as the tobacco is already cut into slices. First the outer edge is cut off all the way round, as the tobacco at the very edge of the block is a little loose. The rest of the block is then cut into 5 pieces each measuring 7 cm x 40 cm. These 5 pieces are then placed together and secured in a slicing machine to be cut into 1.4 mm thick slices – so-called flakes. After each cutting the result is studied and any flakes that are too loose are removed.

Packaging

The actual packaging into tins is done by hand. In this way we can be 100% certain that the pipe smokers of the world get a flake tobacco that is consistent and undamaged. The packaging is the crown of this great work that began with selecting the right raw tobaccos, pressing them and generally handling the tobacco with the respect a good flake warrants. Finally, about 40% of the air in the tin is extracted to ensure that the flake tobacco stays fresh for decades.

Our production of flake tobacco is now complete and we are ready to entrust the tobacco to the real main person – the pipe smoker. We at Mac Baren hope that our tobacco will be enjoyed with due regard for the great amount of meticulous work that has gone into its production, combined with respect for the proud traditions of flake tobacco. But are these not just big words and empty talk? No; the extensive work that goes into the production process is a fact.

How to fill a pipe with flake tobacco

As I mentioned in the previous section, many a pipe smoker has cast a suspicious glance at a tin of flake tobacco. On taking the flake out of the tin, they could see clearly that the pressed tobacco simply would not fit into a pipe! If the flake is put in the pipe edgewise it is far too long, with the result that much of the tobacco remains above the rim of the pipe. And if you try to put the flake in the pipe lengthways, it is far too wide. Of course, you could try to screw the tobacco into the pipe, but on closer inspection you will find that there is no screw thread in the tobacco! So it rather looks like a blunder on the part of the producer. However, most pipe smokers are

energetic people, and with practice the flake can be easily rubbed loose between the palms of the hands. The result is a loose tobacco that fits all pipes – how difficult can it be!

No doubt some of you are thinking that I am being somewhat sarcastic in describing filling a pipe with flake in this way. But the fact is that many pipe smokers I have spoken to have expressed these thoughts, which sadly has led to many of them deciding not to try flake tobacco. Smoking the tobacco pressed or loose gives a tremendous difference in taste. Pressed tobacco burns slowly and gives a cool smoke, whereas loose tobacco burns faster and at a higher temperature. This gives a different, stronger taste than we have otherwise tried to give the tobacco. Therefore our recommendation is to smoke the tobacco pressed. But let us get to the heart of the matter – namely, how to get the greatest pleasure from flake tobacco.

What to do – step by step

Before you start filling your pipe with flake tobacco, you should be aware that the size of the tobacco hole can vary from pipe to pipe. You should therefore have some experience of how many slices of flake tobacco to use. And while experience is something you gain by trying and testing, I suggest that you read through this flake manual before deciding how many slices of flake tobacco are best for your particular pipe. In general, it is better to use less tobacco to start with and then decide whether to use more next time.

Tip: Remember that flake tobacco expands in the pipe when you smoke it. If you put too much tobacco in the pipe, you will find that there is less draw through the pipe. Therefore I recommend that you use slightly less tobacco and tamp it more often, so that your pipe always gives an optimal draw.

Step 1

Take the number of slices of flake you consider right for your pipe and place them in the palm of your hand. For instance, if you use 1½ slices simply half one slice down the middle and lay the half slice on top of the full slice. Then carefully fold the tobacco down the middle.



Step 2

Hold both ends of the folded tobacco and carefully bend it in the middle to form a U shape. You will find that the tobacco becomes slightly loosened at the base of the U shape – as it should. It is important that you hold the tobacco pressed together so that it only loosens at the base.



Step 3

Lightly press the loosened tobacco at the base so that it is easier to put in the pipe.



Step 4

If you have held the top of the tobacco tightly pressed all the time, you can now put the pressed tobacco in your pipe. If you find that too much of the tobacco is sticking out of the pipe, try removing some of the tobacco before you start folding it.



Step 5

You must now regulate the draw in your pipe. Press lightly on the tobacco, as you would with loose cut tobacco. Remember not to press too hard, as tobacco expands when it becomes hot.



You are now ready to light your pipe. You may find that flake tobacco is a little more difficult to light and to get to burn, but this is simply due to the fact that it is pressed together. You need to concentrate a little more when lighting your pipe, but once the tobacco is burning it will continue to burn quite easily. You do not need to draw as hard or as often as you do with many other tobaccos. It is only when lighting it that the flake requires a little more concentration.

Tip: To make it easier to light your pipe, take some of the loose pieces of tobacco and lay them on top. They burn a bit easier and will not give a higher temperature and different taste.

Now you can lean back and enjoy the taste of a well-filled flake. If you do not succeed the first time, give it another chance. Remember – even a seasoned flake smoker can sometimes fill his pipe in such a way that it does not work. As you gain experience with flake, filling the pipe the right way becomes almost a game. I wish you much pleasure with your new “friend” among pipe tobaccos.

Happy Smoke!
Per Georg Jensen
Mac Baren Tobacco Company

N.b.: As of this writing (March 2008), MacBaren’s still has this article on their web site. The pictures in the article printed in this handbook are animated gifs on the website, giving a good visual demonstration of the method. I have smoaked several tins of sliced flakes this way—and it works like a charm.

–“Chas. Mundungus”

GUIDE TO CLEANING & CARING FOR YOUR PIPE (from www.smokingpipes.com / February 2008)

Without regular and diligent cleaning, your wonderful new pipe will become a soggy, ill-tasting mess, and will no longer provide you with the smoking pleasure you desire. To eliminate such problems, you need to embark on a regimen of regular cleaning and maintenance for your pipes.

Materials Needed:

Tapered Pipe Cleaners
Bristle Pipe Cleaners
Regular or extra fluffy pipe cleaners
Pipe sweetener or grain alcohol
Shank brush or cotton swab
Pipe reamer
Pipe tool or pick

Concerning 'Rotation':

A smokers rotation is the number of pipes they own, and the order they are smoked in. This is an important concept to the care and cleaning of your pipes. First and foremost, because pipes need a rest in between smokes if they are to continue to function optimally.

Before Smoking:

The care and cleaning of your pipe begins with your very first smoke, and should continue forward from there. Before each smoke, run a pipe cleaner, either bristle or regular, through the stem to dislodge any leftover ash and dottle, and gently tap your pipe on a cork knocker or the palm of your hand to remove these obstructions from the bowl.

While Smoking:

During a smoke is an excellent time to begin the process of caring for your pipe. You can begin by paying careful attention when lighting your pipe. Keep your flame source over the tobacco, so that it does not char the rim of your pipe. If the rim of your pipes begin to develop a bit of a dark tint to them, it can usually be removed by moistening a pipe cleaner with saliva and gently rubbing the rim of the pipe with it. Done regularly, this will eliminate the cause of the charred, blackened rims so common on un-cared-for pipes. During smoking is also when you will notice if a more thorough cleaning is in order. If a pipe begins to taste sour, salty, or just plain bad while smoking it, it is probably time for a good cleaning. See Periodic Cleaning below.

After Smoking:

First, a warning: Do not remove the stem of a pipe while it is still warm. This will cause the stem to loosen, and can cause you to crack the shank or break the tenon of your pipe. At the end of each smoke, your pipe should be given a good cleaning. Allow the pipe to cool, and then stir up any ash and dottle left in the bottom of the bowl. Placing one finger or the palm of your hand over the top of the bowl, shake the pipe for a few seconds to evenly distribute the ash along the inside walls of the bowl, which will greatly speed the formation of 'cake', a protective layer of carbonized tobacco and ash inside your pipe. Cake acts as an insulator, greatly extending the life

of your pipe and guarding against burn outs. See the Periodic Cleaning section below for instructions on maintaining the cake, Dump out the remaining ash and dottle, and run a bristle pipe cleaner through the stem until it is just barely visible in the bottom of the bowl. Remove it, and either turn it around or use another pipe cleaner, repeating this process until the pipe cleaners come out clean. Moisten a pipe cleaner with saliva and rub the mouthpiece with it to remove any buildup there. Blow gently through the stem of the pipe to dislodge any leftover ash and wipe your pipe down with a soft cloth, perhaps impregnated with a compound such as Briar Pipe Wipe. If you wish, you may insert a regular pipe cleaner into the stem of the pipe before placing it back on the rack, in order to absorb any residual moisture, but if you are diligent in using your pipe cleaners, this is not necessary. Place the pipe back on it's rack or stand and allow it to rest, hopefully for two to four days before it is smoked again.

Periodically:

You will want to, on occasion, give your pipes a more thorough cleaning than just swabbing out the stem after smoking. Most smokers do this fairly regularly, some going so far as to do so after all of their pipes have been smoked once, thus providing themselves with a fresh, clean rotation of pipes. You will have to experiment a bit with how often you do this cleaning to find what works best for you. To start this cleaning, carefully remove the stem of the pipe from the bowl and lay the two pieces on a paper towel. Dip a regular pipe cleaner in alcohol and run it through the stem, from the tenon to the mouthpiece, pulling it through. It will most likely come out with a bit of black or brown gunk on it. Follow this pipe cleaner with a dry one, and repeat until the moist pipe cleaner comes out the same color it was when it went in. Push one final dry pipe cleaner through to remove any moisture and set the stem aside. Using bristle pipe cleaners, moistened with alcohol, vigorously swab out the airhole of the pipe, alternating with dry, regular pipe cleaners. Don't be afraid to use a lot of pipe cleaners doing this. Pipe cleaners are cheap, new pipes aren't. If the airhole of your pipe is large enough in diameter that there is little resistance when you do this, you may want to fold the cleaner in half in order to scrub the sides of the airhole properly. Once your dry pipe cleaner comes out of the airhole the same color it was when it went in, run one more dry cleaner through the airhole to absorb any residual moisture. Using a cotton swab or shank brush, clean out the tenon, the portion of the pipe where the stem attaches to the bowl. a doubled over regular pipe cleaner will do in a pinch. If your stem or bowl has a band, now is the time to polish it, using a good silver, or other metal, polish, depending on what your band is made of. Carefully reinsert the stem into the bowl, and give the pipe a good wipe with a soft cloth, perhaps impregnated with a compound such as Briar Pipe Wipe. Cleaning over, allow your pipe to sit for a day or so before smoking it, to allow the alcohol to completely evaporate. If you have cleaned most or all of your briar pipes at once, now is a good time to smoke your meerschaums and corncobs you have been neglecting.

PIPE REFINISHING by “Chas Mundungus”

THE STEM DEOXIDATION METHOD.

I have battled stem oxidation almost as long as I have been smoking. Over the years, different people have suggested different remedies, but I never found anything that would actually remove the brown oxidation and return the vulcanite stem to jet black—until now.

1. Chlorox Stem Dip: Immerse the oxidized stem in a jar or bowl of undiluted, unscented, full-strength Chlorox and wait. One hour is usually sufficient for the greenest, foulest stem. Then rinse the stem in clean, room-temperature tap water for several minutes (you may just want to let it soak in the sink for 5-10 minutes). If you notice a white haze anywhere on the stem (it usually shows up on the sides on my Petes), put it back into the chlorox for another soaking—the older the vulcanite, the longer it will have to soak. The stem should be a matte finish, rough feeling, and charcoal gray when the chlorox has done its job. Dip a wire bristle pipe cleaner in 91% isopropyl and run it through the stem until it comes out clean. You’ll probably have to do this three or four times to scrub out all the oxidation from the stem channel.

2. Micro-Mesh Sanding: After drying, a previously oxidized stem (brownish-green) will now look light gray and have a rough finish. Look at it with your magnifying headgear and you’ll see it has millions of tiny pocks from the bleach—that’s what gives it the rough finish and matte color. To return the stem to a silky-smooth, ebony black color, usually you’ll have to work through all nine grades of Micro-Mesh, beginning with the 1500 grit pad and working all the way up to 12,000. (The Micro-Mesh Craft Kit for Model Makers and Hobbyists is available on the internet through Amazon for under ten dollars US). The first thing you have to do is strip the white haze or tiny bubbles and cut the vulcanite back to a uniform dark silver. This is the foundation of a great stem restoration. You will want to work the stem horizontally then vertically at each grade of grit or you’ll have trouble with the finest grits, having “scratched” the stem in one direction only.

If the stem was only lightly discolored to begin with and you can’t see any white haze, then try beginning with the 3200 pad. But remember, your first Micro-Mesh goal is to achieve a dark silver finish, however low you have to go. If you see white haze, you haven’t dug far enough into the vulcanite, and all the finer grits won’t cover it up, resulting in an end product that shows brown under a good light. (On my old 1984 issue Peterson Mark Twain stem—smoked for 25 years—I had to do a 2 hr soak, followed by a 1 hr soak, then began with the 1500 Micro-Mesh to get a truly black finish.) As a rule, you can’t go wrong beginning with 1500 and working on up to 12,000.

Let me repeat that it IS necessary to do the difficult cross-stem sanding followed by vertical-stem sanding at each grade of grit. Pay attention to the saddle (a bulge around the middle) and other difficult-to-sand locations (i.e., the mouthpiece of a Peterson P-Lip)—you will be rewarded! On these difficult spots, I’ve sometimes had good luck applying a little Simichrome Polish (available on ebay and from bicycle shops), then return to whatever grit you’re working on.

The whole process really doesn't take a whole lot of time or elbow grease—depending on arthritis and the strength of your fingers, you're talking about somewhere in the neighborhood of 45 minutes to an hour and a half at your workbench. And each successive grit will go faster than the one before it. When you hit 3600 the bit will begin to turn black and acquire a glow. At 12,000 it will look reborn.

3. Polish, Wax & Buff: While the stem will look great after the 12,000 grit Micro-mesh, it will look like a black mirror if you go ahead and polish, wax, & buff it. As others have noted, if you're nearing middle age and have been smoaking your whole life, or if you've got a sizeable collection of pipes, you owe to it yourself to go ahead and get a Freedom jeweler's lathe. They don't cost much more than a hundred bucks and will repay you in spades every time you pick up a choice pipe to smook. The ASP buffing/polishing FAQ is informative but rather labyrinthine, and can be simplified as follows:

A. Put on the buffing wheel you use for Fabuluster (a jeweler's buffing compound available on the internet) & buff the stem cross-grain and then in-line with Fabuluster. Fabuluster is an important protectant as well as buffing agent. I now routinely treat my new pipes to Fabuluster and Carnuba before the first smook. This seems to retard oxidation, and is analogous to putting a good coat of wax on your new car. It's worth the investment.

B. Put on the buffing wheel you use for carnuba wax and buff the stem with carnuba—cross-stem then in-line (or vice-versa—with practice you'll begin to find that each stem seems to want the buffer used in a different way).

C. Put on the final buff wheel and give it a final buffing, cross-stem and in-line, or vice-versa.

You really won't believe how easy (or rewarding) this is until you've tried it for yourself.

If you follow up your stem restoration with a routine after-smook handbuff with a BriarWipe-impregnated handwipe, you're good to go for several years.

Many thanks to all the smokers from whose advice I've pieced together this method.

RIM TAR & CHAR REMOVAL.

Over the years, the lip around the top of the bowl, which is usually referred to as the “rim” or “head,” will develop a tar buildup from the tobacco burnoff. It may also develop a degree of actual briar charring if the smoker uses a butane or torch pipe lighter or is careless with his matches. Both tar and char can be removed—the former completely, the latter to some extent, with the use of 91% isopropyl alcohol.

The Method.

First, pour a small amount of 91% isopropyl into a fruit dish, then place an oval cotton pad (used for removing makeup and available at most drug stores) in the bottom. There should be enough alcohol to fully saturate the pad, but not overflow into the dish. Caution: You want the pipe rim to sit on the soaked pad, but not sit in alcohol. The alcohol will remove some of the bowl’s stain, and while this can be remedied later on, better not to get that ugly light stripe in the first place, right?

Next, after removing the stem, place the bowl of the pipe upside so the rim is resting on the pad. Let the alcohol do the work for you. It can soak, depending on the tar buildup, for anywhere from 20-45 minutes.

Finally, Use clean, dry cotton pads and slightly dampened ones to wipe off the tar. A little fingernail pressure usually doesn’t hurt.

Repeat the process as necessary until the top rim is clean.

If genuine char is revealed, some of it can be removed with this process, depending on how deeply the bowl has been scarred. To remove it all you’ll have to use Micro-Mesh to sand and then (probably) restain the bowl.

BOWL CLEANING (THE SALT SLUSH)*

Fill the bowl and shank with sea salt or iodized table salt, cushioned in a paper towel and ashtray so that it won't spill.

Use an eyedropper and carefully saturate the salt. I stick a pipe cleaner out the shank, pointed toward the ceiling, which will absorb any excess alcohol. You're trying to create a salt and alcohol.

Leave the bowl for 3 to 5 days, or until you're reasonably sure the alcohol has evaporated. The top of the slurry will now be a brown or black crust.

If the pipe doesn't smell sweet, repeat the process. I have done this up to three times on really old or heavily smoked estate pipes, and it works like a charm.

NOTE: This is an excellent method for removing the stain inside the bowl of a new pipe, especially recommended for Peterson pipes, removing the bitter taste most smokers notice in new Petes.

*For more information, see Dennis Congos' famous "The Professor's Pipe-Sweetening Treatment," available at <http://www.pipes.org>, and on similar directions provided by Jim Beard at <http://forum.pipes.org>,

PIPE TOBACCO AGING, STORING, AND CELLARING
by Jason Newquist

This FAQ is a compendium of knowledge and advice for the pipe-smoking enthusiast interested in the aging, storage and cellaring of pipe tobacco. The primary source of the excerpts used in this document is the public archive of the USENET newsgroup [alt.smokers.pipes](#). I have attempted to quote each writer's words precisely, and their meaning faithfully. I have taken the editorial liberty of making slight changes for purposes of readability and conciseness. Each author retains ownership over their original words. Another significant source is [TobaccoReviews.com](#).

Many of these questions have a subjective component, and therefore do not have a single correct answer. In cases where there is a difference of opinion, I have tried to present each view evenly. It is up to the reader to make up his or her own mind.

Cheers,
Jason Newquist

FUNDAMENTALS

Why does this FAQ exist?

What is aging?

Why does tobacco age?

Does properly sealed tobacco have an expiration date or shelf life?

Does aging actually change and improve tobacco?

What kind of taste does aged tobacco have?

1 ~ Why does this FAQ exist?

This FAQ exists for two reasons. First, because many people wish to increase their enjoyment of the pipe, and smoking aged tobacco is a powerful way to enjoy a richer, more complex world of flavor. Second, because it's criminal to let information such as you'll find here hide in the nooks and crannies of the internet, that's why. -Jason

2 ~ What is aging?

As you will see in many questions that follow, we have selected here a number of responses from Gregory Pease, of GL Pease Tobaccos. Greg gets us started with an important distinction between "melding" and "maturing", which are both part of aging:

There are a couple things that are often lumped together as "aging." The first is more properly termed melding or marrying. This is the result of the various tobaccos "swappin' spit," resulting in something is closer to a homogenous blend than a mixture of different tobaccos. Most consider this a desirable thing, including me. This will probably take place under just about any condition imaginable, providing the tobacco is kept properly humidified.

But, then there are the subtle biological and chemical changes that take place in that sealed tin. These are slow, slow processes. Many organic reactions just take TIME, unless hurried along through catalysis or heat. Heat is a poor bedfellow of tobacco, as it radically changes it - unless of course, those changes are desired. So, we're stuck with the waiting game. Waiting for microorganisms to do their work, waiting for slow organic reactions, which lead to other slow organic reactions, and so on. Once these processes are well under way, the introduction of fresh air can, and will, change things dramatically.

- GL Pease, 2003-04-17

Greg adds a little about melding, with a nice simile to finish off the explanation:

Basically, there are a couple of things which go on. If tobaccos are allowed to play in the same playground for long enough, they start to take on each others characteristics. The blend becomes more integrated and more harmonious. Complexity remains (and is, in most cases, amplified), but the overall characteristic is more like a finely rehearsed orchestra, rather than a bunch of individual musicians; individual notes are still there, but are so well integrated that they become less noticeable than the whole. - GL Pease, 1997-10-13

3 ~ Why does tobacco age?

Again we hear exclusively from Mr. Pease. Not much formal research is available (or well understood) by the community. Perhaps if we had a biochemist in the fold. Meanwhile, Greg's no slouch, and his grasp on fermentation processes seems to be increasing over time. Listen:

The whole aging thing is pretty amazing, really. From what limited research I've been able to do on the subject, and based on a lot of speculation, it goes something like this: It's all about microbes. Some live in air (aerobes), some live only in the absence of oxygen (obligate anaerobes), some live in either environment (facultative anaerobes). Each does a different thing, and the order of what they do is important. Aerobes eat stuff, consume oxygen, spit out CO₂, and eventually die, 'cause there's no more air. Facultative and obligate anaerobes can then live, some of which will consume the chemicals left behind by the now dead microbes as by-products of their metabolic pathways.

So... The tobacco is sealed in a tin. Aerobic bacteria (and facultative anaerobes, I suppose) go to work consuming some of the sugar, producing CO₂, and using up the oxygen in respiration. Once the breathable air is gone, the aerobic bacteria die. Facultative and any endospore borne obligate anaerobes will then set about to do their things, probably relying on fermentative anabolic pathways. Most of what we're interested in is the production of esters - organic flavor and aroma components. This can be easily accomplished by some of these lovely living factories. - GL Pease 2001-10-17

Tobacco requires moisture to age. Some oxygen is necessary for the initial stages of fermentation in the tin. There's plenty of sugar in most leaf, and the presence of yeast, or, more specifically, the enzyme they secrete, zymase, will result in primary fermentation of some of those sugars. - GL Pease, 2001-05-03

Also, there's a secondary "fermentation" which takes place as the residual sugars in the leaf continue to be broken down. This adds some flavours which don't exist in the original mixture, and further increases the complexity of the smoke. - GL Pease, 1997-10-13

4 ~ Does properly sealed tobacco have an expiration date or shelf life?

A common question among those coming from the world of grocery store tobaccos, and one that's been covered several times over the years.

Tobacco doesn't need preservatives. The curing process is sufficient to ensure that tobacco, if stored properly, will last indefinitely. It *can* mold, if too wet, and ultimately rot, again if too wet. But it doesn't putrify, spoil, rot, become septic or anything else which warrants a "preservative." The reason some manufacturers put humectants [chemical preservatives] in their tobaccos is to prolong the "shelf-life" of the "fresh" (read moist) tobacco. For some reason, people don't want to find their own personal "humidity index" for their tobaccos, so the

manufacturer second guesses, loads the stuff with propylene glycol, and packs the stuff in little pouches. Not all tobacco is so adulterated, but in some cases, the tobacco in pouches is, while that in tins is not. Pouches have a shorter "shelf-life." - GL Pease, 1997-12-22

In terms of quantity sold: most tobacco mixtures are flavored with chemical additives. This includes almost all 'dime store' blends, most premium continental European blends (including most of the traditional English blends being produced on the continent now), and many premium US & UK blends. These blends will most probably not improve with age & are probably best smoked as close to 'off the store shelf' as possible. - John C. Loring, 2000-05-04

And just to give you a taste of the full scope of time we're talking about, and to set expectations properly, check these next two bits of experience from Mssrs. Lindner and Pease:

One complication is that some blends will simply be over the hill in 40 years. Many latakia blends fade over time, and really only have a 30 year shelf life. So I have to hope that whatever blend it is will still be available in 20 years' time if I am to enjoy them in 50 years. - Michael D. Lindner, 2001-11-16

Some tobaccos, most notably Virginias and Virginia blends, seem to have the longest life expectancy; I've smoked Three Nuns that was over 50 years old, and it was simply amazing. Latakia mixtures don't seem to improve for as long, but still a long time. I've smoked stuff that is over 30 years old, and it's wonderful, though some 40+ year old Balkan Sobranie I smoked last year had become a little disappointing. - GL Pease, 2001-02-02

5 ~ Does aging actually change and improve tobacco?

There seems to be universal agreement on this topic, or just about. There aren't that many people on ASP who claim that aging ruins a tobacco. However, we reserve the possibility that there may be some who believe it. Look how open-minded we are:

It depends on the blend and on your individual palate. With some tobaccos, it's night and day - a grassy, bland taste when young blossoms into a sweet-tart, malty flavor with a little age. With others, it's not as overt - a shift in the "color" of the flavor... away from brightness and toward deeper notes, or perhaps just a mellowing of a previously aggressive flavor element.

Then, sometimes, there's just the "wow" experience... Where a tobacco blend is smoked at just the right moment in its lifetime. Where your senses all scream "This is the BEST thing I've ever put in a pipe - EVER!" It only happens once in a blue moon, which I suppose is a good thing. I don't think I could handle dealing with that sort of bliss on a constant basis. - Rob Novak, 2004-07-08

You will definitely benefit from cellaring tobacco. Aging a tobacco blend allows the various tobaccos to "meld" together. The tobacco will also begin to ferment as it ages, this improves the blend as well. A significant difference is usually not noticed until the blend has aged for at least six months. - G.W. Fletcher, 2001-05-10

As a rule, many quality, unopened tinned tobaccos can and do benefit from aging. I really enjoy smoking tobacco that has been aged a considerable time (10+ years). It is fun to check out "hole-in-the-wall" stores when I'm on the road and find a treasure trove of old tobaccos. I find that giving the leaf extra time to marry adds a wonderfully sublime quality. - Jeff Folloder, 1997-10-12

Once you've smoked natural tobaccos for a while, you can then make more intelligent choices about what types of tobaccos to pursue. I personally found that high-quality natural tobaccos, expertly blended and aged, offer a taste that is infinitely more interesting, complex and satisfying than any artificially flavored tobacco. Your experience may vary. - Paul Szabady, 1999-10-26

If you have never seen Cairo or Three Nuns change from light brown to a deep, rich, chocolatey brown then you're missing something. - Edward Mitchell, 2002-05-20

But there are caveats, of course! Sadly, aging isn't always the magic bullet. Here are a few things to keep in mind:

Aged tobaccos may not be to everyone's tastes, but they're worth exploring. When you find a blend you really enjoy now, put a few away for later. - GL Pease, 2001-08-15

The golden rule is if a tobacco is natural and you like it as it is when fresh, then you're likely to like it even more when it is aged. If it is a flavored one, then the risk of your not liking it later is greater (no one can predict the chemical interaction of the tobacco components and the artificial flavoring). - Tarek Manadily, 2000-09-24

Great tobaccos age to become wonderful tobaccos. Bad tobaccos age to become bad old tobaccos. Though it might become "better" with time, if the stuff isn't pretty darned good when it's young, it never will be. - GL Pease, 1999-06-01

Aging generally mellows the tobacco, creates subtleties of taste, and reduces bite (if any to begin with). Don't know if I would call this enrichment, but it definitely improves it.
- James Beard, 2000-08-12

Yes, and there are even those who smoke serious tobaccos who explicitly don't bother with age. Fair enough!

Personally, as I smoke stronger tobacco, I don't worry about aging because the tobacco is defined less by the subtlety and complexity of flavor and more by the depth of body and strength, which really doesn't change all that much over time. Of course I do put tobacco into a "cellar", but not for the purposes of expecting it to get better. - magnulus, 2004-02-05

6 ~ What kind of taste does aged tobacco have?

Mr. Pease and a mysterious ASPer known only as "Bob" try to describe how the taste of tobacco changes with age.

Some of us have grown to love the "funk" that comes from well aged weeds in tins. Charles Rattray, on the other hand, didn't even believe tobacco should be kept in the tin for any length of time, instead feeling that fresh air was essential to a tobacco's proper life expectancy. He believed it should be purchased, and smoked as quickly as possible. - GL Pease, 2003-04-17

You can't really go wrong with tinned blends, providing you like them when they are "young." At worst, the stuff will mellow a little, meld a little, and become better integrated, less focused. At best, time will yield increased complexity, depth and richness, with some of those amazing surprises that only age can provide. - GL Pease, 2001-01-16

Perhaps the easiest way I can think of to get some idea of what happens to a blend as it ages would be for you to get some fresh McClelland's [bulk] 5100; try some now and jar the rest. 5100 is a good one to do this with as it's just a straight red Virginia: no perique or stoving to complicate the issue. Then in about three months get some more of the fresh stuff, smoke it and then open your three month old jar and try it. This is what I did and even though I have nothing resembling a sophisticated palate the difference almost knocked my socks off. After you try that terms like maturity and fullness will mean something to you. - Bob, 2001-11-06

Some palettes are even able to observe quite fine gradations. These differences become more pronounced as the fine character of the tobacco emerges with age. Once again, Greg Pease:

The only problem is that tobacco, like wine, being a natural product, inevitably changes slightly from crop to crop. Steps are taken to hold the flavours fairly consistent, but some slight changes are bound to take place. I recall when I was just learning about Balkan Sobranie in the early 80's. The crop of 79 was different from the crop of 80, from the crop of 81, and so on. The changes were often very subtle, but detectable. All were good. Now, with almost 20 years on the tins I squirreled away, the effects of age has been similar upon all of them, and only now can the differences be really appreciated. I've got quite a few vintages of the stuff, and it really is different from year to year, though only slightly. - GL Pease, 1999-06-02

AGING

How long should I let properly sealed tobacco age?

Do all kinds of tobacco leaf age equally?

How well do aromatics age?

Are there milestones in the aging process?

Do blending houses or tobacconists age the tobacco before selling it?

What are these crystals on my aged tobacco?

Does heating, or "stoving", tobacco help? Can I do it at home?

What is tobacco bloom?

1 ~ How long should I let properly sealed tobacco age?

The pithy answer:

How patient are you? I've got tobacco that's 30 years old, and even older, that is wonderful.

- GL Pease, 1999-01-14

More thorough responses describe the general boundaries:

Provided blends are cellared in decent conditions, they should 'improve' with age for at least one to two decades and in all likelihood for longer. When they 'peak' is probably as much dependent upon individual taste and storage conditions as the blend itself, but I suspect that in most all cases if reasonably well stored it is sometime after at least a decade. I also suspect that the greatest improvement comes during the first decade, that for the most part the peak is sometime during the third decade, but that the most memorable experiences will come, together with some disappointments, from well stored tins closer to a half century old.

- John C. Loring, 2000-05-04

I've smoked Three Nuns that was over 40 years old, and was magnificent. I've also smoked Balkan Sobranie of a similar vintage, and found it over the hill, though a 30 year old tin, sampled the same night, was spectacular. [...] Any truly exquisite tobacco will stand up to the test of time, and be bettered by patience. When it will begin to decline is highly speculative. Five years is safe, as, probably is ten. Beyond twenty years lies the gray zone. - GL Pease, 2000-05-03

There is some practical upper limit to this, just like with wines. At some point, the tobacco's smoking quality will actually begin to decline. This turning point is determined by several factors, including the types of tobaccos in the blend, the conditions under which it is stored, how much air was left in the tin at packaging time, how moist the tobacco was originally, and so forth. As a general rule, the darker a tobacco, the longer it will age, while lighter, more delicate leaf loses some if its flavour and aroma if aged too long. (Interestingly, some light tobaccos will get quite dark after a few years of aging. Lemon Virginias, for instance, can turn to a lovely nut-brown.) - GL Pease, 1997-10-13

2 ~ Do all kinds of tobacco leaf age equally?

Now this is a gargantuan question! Mr. Pease's considerable experience is once again featured here in bulk, alongside a response from Mr. Loring. But first, the high-level capsule responses:

Virginias, and to a lesser extent, oriental tobaccos, age wonderfully. Latakia softens a bit, but still has a nice sweetness. Burley is still Burley. Since it has essentially no sugar in it, there's nothing to ferment. Sure, the flavours meld and mellow, but the stuff really doesn't change character much. - GL Pease, 1998-07-09 (revised 2003-12-23)

Aging seems to plateau at different times for different types of blends. While Virginias seem to last nearly forever (I've smoked some Three Nuns tobacco from the late 1940s that was unbelievably wonderful), Orientals, particularly blends very heavy with Latakia, and little or no Virginia leaf, seem to have much shorter lives. But, in any event, 20-30 years seems quite safe. (I have some Garfinkel's Orient Express #11 that dates back to the mid 1960s, and the stuff is sublime, while some Balkan Sobranie I sampled from the 1950s was clearly "over the hill." Quite sad, really.) - GL Pease, 2001-08-15

Mr. Loring admonishes us to remember that we're talking mainly about quality non-aromatic tobacco products and blends:

Today there are relatively few blends available that will improve with age; these are Virginia, Oriental & Latakia blends to the extent they are not chemically flavored or laced with chemical preservatives, primarily the few remaining traditional English blends, e.g. Dunhill, and some small American blenders who use tins suitable for aging, e.g. Hermit Tobacco & Gregory Pease. - John C. Loring, 2000-05-04

And here are several additional excerpts from Mr. Pease's posts over the years, discussing various aspects of the topic.

From my experience with tasting old tobaccos, Virginias, really good ones, have indefinite life expectancies. I have no idea where the plateau is, or if there is one. Perique is another tobacco that seems to age indefinitely. Good grades of Turkish have sufficient sugars to hold their own for an amazingly long time. Latakia does not. Burleys are interesting. Being higher in nitrogen than other leaf, a Burley that is not well cured, properly sweated and well aged before blending will produce the greatest amount of ammonia if left in a sealed environment. But, assuming it's a good quality leaf to start with, it will continue to mellow somewhat for a finite period of time. Beyond that, I feel there's little to be gained by extended aging. However, a good Burley/Virginia blend will probably continue to age well, much like a good Virginia/perique blend will. This is merely speculative, however, as I have no empirical evidence to support it. That said, ANY blend worth its salt should age a minimum of 20 years, and probably much longer. - GL Pease, 2001-01-14

Nearly any good tobacco, like a good wine, will improve with age. How much it will improve, and how long, depends on a lot of factors. Virginias and perique will improve with age,

seemingly indefinitely. I've smoked ANCIENT Virginias and VA/perique blends that were just sublime. Oriental tobaccos seem to age for a very long time before losing their delicate flavors. Latakia ages, as well, but over the course of time, it begins to lose some of its spice, and after many, many years, it can go quite "flat." Burleys soften a little, get a little more mellow, but don't really seem to age. - GL Pease, 2001-04-04

Virginias, and to a lesser extent orientals, undergo greater changes over time than Burley will, largely due to the greater sugar content of the leaf. Burley is essentially sugar-free, the diet tobacco. While it does undergo some of its own changes, the most important of these is probably the loss of "edge" and harshness that many Burleys can possess when young. If the tobacco is good, much of this mellowing has occurred before the leaf is cut and blended.

Burley is a bit of a chameleon when it comes to its flavor. The leaf is very "open," and it takes on the flavors and aromas of the tobacco surrounding it. When first blended, the Burley component can readily be picked out in the mix of flavors. Within days, the change is already noticeable. It's still there, still identifiable as Burley, but it's already begun to integrate into the blend. Over months or years, this assimilation will become more complete, and the Burley's influence will become more and more subtle.

Personally, I don't think it's worth it. Spend your cellaring money on Virginia and oriental blends, tobaccos that will improve and develop over time, and smoke the Burleys while they're young. They may not get worse, but they're not likely to get much better, either.
- GL Pease, 2002-04-24

It appears that orientals change [in the course of 6, 12, and 18 months, and perhaps even more] more notably and more rapidly than other leaf. I've long suspected this, but have done no controlled experiments, so it's still little more than supposition. - GL Pease, 2003-12-30

3 ~ How well do aromatics age?

For tobaccos which are steeped in flavorings, aging prospects are quite different than the quality non-aromatics described above. Mr. Pease and Mr. Hamlin discuss.

Aromatic tobaccos may or may not age, depending on the base tobaccos, and how they were flavored. Casing can kill the fauna that are responsible for the early phases of aging, so Captain Black, in all probability, will not age. - GL Pease, 2001-04-04

Since mass-market styled aromatics use low character base tobaccos and spray their top note or sweeteners, these tobaccos will actually decline in character over time. Heavy cased aromatics, both in bulk form and in packed form (pouch or tin) should be used "fresh" and not left to cellar. True cavendish processed aromatics, usually Danish produced, can be smoked now, but will continue to improve over a period of time of up to a year. After the first year little additional change will occur in the base tobacco of Danish Cavendish, although the flavor, sweetness and character will "hold" for several additional years under proper storage conditions. - R.C. Hamlin, 1995 Pipes Digest

The real problem, I believe, is that a majority of heavily sugared and sauced aromatics rely almost exclusively on the additives to provide flavour, using the lower grades of tobacco to simply carry the flavourings to the smoker, and provide some nicotine for body and "strength." These lower grades of leaf do not benefit from age. To cite the wine metaphor once more, no amount of aging will make a bottle of plonk anything more than old plonk, while a bottle of a grand cru will develop much of its complexity and bouquet only after years of bottle age.

It is not the fermentation, or cessation of fermentation through a hostile environment which produces the bad taste found in the tobacco equivalent of "old plonk." There is a difference between aged tobacco, and tobacco which has just gone stale, and that difference starts long before the aging process has worked its magic. - GL Pease, 1999-02-08

4 ~ Are there milestones in the aging process?

One of my favorite questions! There is a subjective element here, of course, where each cellarer perceives (and waits impatiently for) a real superior shift in flavor. But to the extent we can generalize, we have room for discussion. Mr. Pease in particular has weighed in on the topic, over ASP's lifetime. Here are his responses, in chronological order:

The most major changes occur over the first six months to a year, though there is significant improvement in two months. After a year, it takes about another year to notice much difference, then about two more...see a pattern? After about 10 years, things really slow down. But, smoking tobaccos that have been aged 2-5 years is a real treat, and worth the wait, for some blends. - GL Pease, 1998-03-08

There is really no optimal interval, but there are ranges that are significant. The first real difference is noticed after a couple months in the tin. Here, the melding of the flavours has really started to take place, and there's a little more "evenness" throughout the smoke. After about 6-months or so, significant fermentation has begun, and the flavours really start to become enhanced. Beyond that, 1-year, 2-years, 5-years show distinct changes, though not as dramatic as the early ones. Aging continues, but at a slower pace. There's not a lot of difference between a 5-years old tobacco and one which has been aged for 6-years, but at 10-years, it's noticeable, though subtle. - GL Pease, 1999-06-01

As with wine, the best thing to do is to buy plenty, cellar it carefully, and taste it often - at six months, at a year, at two years, again at five. It is better to enjoy it sooner, and dream of what it may become, than to find it over the hill later, and lament what it might have been. - GL Pease, 2000-05-03

It seems that somewhere between 12 and 24 months is something of a magic number, and that seems to be pretty universal amongst most tobaccos I've experimented with. - GL Pease, 2002-05-20

While six months makes quite a difference, I've noticed that 18 months to two years is really where the turning point lies. You can expect increased complexity, a rounding out of the flavours, enhanced sweetness, and greater depth. - GL Pease, 2004-08-05

5 ~ Do blending houses or tobacconists age the tobacco before selling it?

A fine practical question, with several ASPers offering answers:

That tin of McClelland's No. 27 Virginia which has a 1999 date may have been harvested sometime between 1994 and 1996 (depending on just how that company does it). Sometimes the length of time is even longer, like the Kentucky that Greg uses in Cumberland -- for 20 years it sat in bales in some hidden controlled-environment tobacco warehouse, fermenting and aging and mellowing, before someone stumbled across it and said, "Who the hell didn't sell this?" - Krister K., 2003-09-08

It often takes a while for the blends to marry and to soften the edge of newly shredded tobacco. Storing tobacco means the blender will have to pay taxes on the inventory and he has his money tied up much longer. Same thing with cigars. The tobacco is aged only as long as required to provide a decent smoke. Wine is sold green or young for the same reason. It is drinkable, but is nowhere near it's potential. Selling young moves the aging to the buyer, removes the inventory (thus taxes), and returns the money to the seller. - Walter L. De Visser, 1998-03-30

I look through the tins when I go tobacco shopping and try to find the oldest, dustiest ones - or in the case of McClelland's I look on the bottom and find the oldest date codes. Several shop proprietors have figured out that I'm nuts, but I don't mind - at least I'm smoking aged tobacco while going insane! - Colonel Panic, 2000-12-19

6 ~ What are these crystals on my aged tobacco?

Answer: nobody really knows. But Greg Pease has some thoughts...

The crystals that appear on aging tobaccos are more likely something that is soluble within a narrow pH range. These crystals are not very soluble in water. As the tobacco ages, the pH changes, and some things that had previously been in solution may, and apparently do, precipitate out. But, from some very preliminary testing, it is almost certainly not sugar. - GL Pease, 2003-10-01

I don't think the crystals that form on tobacco are sugar. A long time ago, I did some messing around with some of the crystals I discovered in a tin of Virginia, a little analysis, and they did not behave like any sugar that would be in tobacco. They were not even soluble in water! At the time, I could neither harvest enough of them, nor did I have access to the necessary equipment to get a read on what they might be. - GL Pease, 2002-06-26

7 ~ Does heating, or "stoving", tobacco help? Can I do it at home?

A very popular topic of conversation, which has generated a variety of technical and practical responses! First, the technical:

Increasing the temperature would speed up chemical processes, making the aging go faster, but would likely not speed up all processes equally so the effects would be somewhat different. And increasing the moisture content would likewise speed things along, but may lead to speedy growth of mold. - James Beard, 2001-01-01

Yes, heat will accelerate aging, but the aging and darkening will happen regardless - it just takes longer. Heat also changes the character of a tobacco. This isn't necessarily a bad thing. But, to be on the safe side, I have always advocated cool, dry, dark environments. (The darkness keeps the labels from fading.) - GL Pease, 2001-08-21

Microwaves won't disrupt the micro-organisms present, but heating the tobacco is just not a good idea. It can undergo other changes, not all of which will be benevolent. [...] If you heat the tobacco sufficiently to kill any mesophiles that are present, you're cooking the tobacco, which will alter its characteristics dramatically. If you like a tobacco the way it is, raising the temperature to something in excess of 40C will certainly change it, and it won't be what you remember!

Heating tobacco can be beneficial, if its done by the blender. Stoving, steaming, panning all serve to change the tobacco in ways that CAN be beneficial, but it has to be done under controlled circumstances, and the blender must take the stoved leaf into consideration. - GL Pease, 2002-08-19

As with any healthy internet discussion forum, people offer personal experience, as well. :)

[This is the "Steve Laug Method". -Jason] The method is to bake the tobacco in the oven at 225 degrees in mason jars covered in tin foil for 2 1/2 to 3 hours. One main difference I noticed, was now the tobaccos have about twice the aroma than before. I also notice the flavor is more intense, and perhaps a bit rounder, more mature. I have no idea what the prevailing thinking is on this, but I do know that I'll be stoving some others to experiment as a result. - John Rocheleau, 2004-11-11

At 300 deg. F, you'll do a little more than stove the stuff, and will, in fact, scorch it. The right temperature to do this sort of thing is no higher than 220 deg. F. Too, if you put sealed tins or closed up mason jars in the oven, be aware that they may explode. The pressure that builds up can be quite high.

After tobaccos are "stoved" in this manner, it'll take them a week or two to settle down. The changes over that timeframe can be nearly as dramatic as what you experience from the process itself! - GL Pease, 2004-11-11

Having been told several times that heating my tobacco in the tins would improve the tobacco (Most likely many here have heard the old "Leave it on your dashboard on a hot day" adage), I was curious to find out if there was any truth I could detect to it. I put a stack of selected

tobaccos out in a window for the entire month of August, through the EU heatwave with a full day's direct sun every day. I stored an equal tin of each blend away in my usual closet stash.

Recently I finally decided to open a pair of tins of Elizabethan, a mix that was recommended as a good guinea pig. I'm sorry to say I can't tell any difference at all between the two - they're both very good and as potent as ever, but the heated tin doesn't offer any depth or richness that the closeted one lacks. Not that I'm complaining, having two tins of good tobacco to smoke! :) It's possible that there wasn't enough heat involved (though, I have to say, solid weeks of 100 degree weather in direct sun seems pretty toasty). It's also possible that others of the test blends may offer different results. And, of course, it's likely that my taster may not be sensitive enough. For the moment, though, this looks like a bust at first glance. - Trever Talbert, 2004-04-19

I took bulk 5100 and stoved it in a mason jar with aluminum foil on the top (instead of a lid) for 3 hours at 300 degrees. I stopped it before it became 5105. It is so superior to regular 5100 that it is the only way I smoke it now. - max, 2005-01-29

The "hot car method", described here, is widely attributed to Freddy Vegas.

I have stoved tobaccos many times, using different methods, such as leaving a tin in the trunk of a car (in the hot weather) for several days, in the rafters of my garage for several days, in the oven at 200 for different lengths of time. Overall, I've had the best results using a crock pot. It's best to check out the temperature, so if you have a meat thermometer put it in the crock pot and change the setting as needed to reach a constant temperature of about 150. Once you know where to set it to obtain that temperature, it seems to work best, put a tin or two or three or whatever different tobaccos in the crock pot and forget about it for at least eight hours - ten to twelve is even better. It works wonders with virginia and virginia/perique tobaccos. I've tried it with English blends but the results are questionable, at least for me.
- JohnnyFlake, 2004-06-17

In early 2005, this topic came up again -- pertaining specifically to sealed tins! Fred Hanna started the discussion with his "220 for 220" method...

Over the past month or so, I have been experimenting with a different tobacco treatment. I say it's new only because I do not know of anyone who has done it in quite this way. This method may not be new at all but here it is, and I believe I am on to something. **BUT TRY THIS AT YOUR OWN RISK!!!**

The technique is limited in application, but results so far have been exciting, for me, but I am still experimenting. It's quite simple. I call the process, "220 for 220." I have used this mostly on Virginia (and some English) tobaccos up to this point but intend to try it with more Virginia and English blends soon. Here's what I have been doing. As I said, it's quite simple, really.

I take the ENTIRE TIN, UNOPENED and STILL SEALED, of a Virginia or English tobacco, REMOVE THE PLASTIC TOP and place it in the oven for 2 hrs and 20 mins, at a temperature of 220 degrees. I do not remove the label as this temp is too cold to set the paper on fire. Some tins swell and expand at the lid, but they seem to reduce to normal size, or nearly so, after

cooling. So far, McClelland, Rattray's, McCranie's, and Pease tins have not popped open (with the exception of 1 tin of St. James Woods). The tall tins tend to hold their seal throughout the process. THE FLAT TINS, such as Escudo and Solani DO POP THEIR SEAL BUT THE RESULT IS STILL POSITIVE, for me, at least, as the tobacco inside does not dry out or become "roasted." After cooling for a few hours, I remove the tobac from the baked tin and place it in a separate container.

THE RESULTS? This process seems to change the tobacco in such a way as to, like stoving, make the tobac more dark in color, and makes it smoke more mellow, smooth, and often more sweet. Several experienced pipe smoking friends who have smoked tins thus treated agree with this assessment.

Try it with a tangy, sharp 2003 or 2004 Christmas Cheer and see what happens. This method made a tin full of the current version of McCranie's Red Ribbon smoke downright heavenly. And with the McClelland's, the vinegary ketchup smell reduces significantly, just as it does with aging. And it made a tin of Rattray's Marlin Flake smell like oatmeal raisin cookies (must be some topping they put on it, that I was previously unaware of), but the topping seemed to meld nicely with the tobacco. I have not done this with aromatics and probably will not. - Fred Hanna, 2005-01-28

Okay, I'm finished (220 for 220). The 220 for 220 Red Flake is a deeper red than the fresh tin. Much of the sharpness is gone and it's somewhat smoother. The flavor is different, not necessarily better or worse, just different. Only time will tell if I'll try this again, but I'm sure I'll enjoy this tin. - Steven Fowler, 2005-01-29

For me, this is not meant to be a substitute for aging, but merely another way to enjoy young tobacco without having to pay top dollar for the old stuff. I love Virginias but I don't care for that tangy sharp taste. I love English blends but I don't care for the rough taste that many of them have before aging. This method seems to diminish the tang and roughness and that makes me a happy guy. I would only do this to a tobacco that I believe would benefit by it. It's that simple.- Fred Hanna, 2005-01-29

I thought of [how this method will never replace long-term aging], but it shouldn't matter if you immediately open the tin. I think the idea is to make unaged tobacco taste better for immediate enjoyment. - Steven Fowler, 2005-01-29

I am smoking a bowl full of the 220 treated Half and Half now. The tobacco seems to be more mellow and flavourful than the same tobacco before 220 treatment. I will use this method again in the future. I really think that it helped smooth and mellow this Va/Burley/Perique mixture. - Lannes Johnson, 2005-01-30

Well, I've completed my experiment. I had some tins of Haddo's on hand, and as I posted last night, I baked one of them at 220 for 2:20. I opened two tins today and smoked samples from the baked tin and from an unbaked. Both tins have the same date stamp of 12/15/04.

The first thing that I noticed when I opened the baked tin was the different tin aroma. It has a deep almost chocolaty tobacco smell. Not very much left of the fig & raisin aroma that I'm used to. Comparing it to the unbaked tin, it is much more mellow and sweet. The colors are not that much different. In the baked, there is a noticeable darkening compared to the unbaked, but not as much as I was expecting.

I smoked the baked Haddo's this morning, and it was wonderful. It was mellow, sweet, and noticeably different! And best of all, no "brightness" in the flavor! I puffed hard to see if it would bite, but it didn't. It got hot and didn't taste that great, but no bite! I set it down and let it cool and re-lit. It was a very nice mellow smoke to almost the bottom. The flavor was much "deeper" if that makes any sense.

I am now half way through the bowl of unbaked Haddo's in the same pipe as this morning, and boy, what a difference! For one thing, there's that Virginia "brightness". Just a bit of tangy harshness that you have to be careful puffing to avoid. And the harshness is just a fast puff or two away. The flavor while good is not near as good as in the baked. I would say that your process resulted in a very definite improvement in newly tinned Haddo's. - Rad Davis, 2005-01-31

[Responding to reports that certain tin lids go "pop!" in the oven...] Keep the temperature of the oven between 170 and 180 deg F. Shouldn't have any popping then. - Craig Tarler, 2005-01-30

8 ~ What is tobacco bloom?

Seen commonly in premium cigars, bloom is typically seen as a good indicator that the cigar is aging. Some claim to have seen it on pipe tobacco, and it may be related to the crystals described above. Answers below courtesy of posters of ASC.

For the record, bloom is like a coating of very very fine dust. Similar to powder one might say and it is virtually always distributed evenly over the entire cigar/cigars. - Winston Castro, 2005-07-13 (alt.smokers.cigars)

Generally if it brushes off easily, it's bloom. Also look at it with a magnifying glass. Bloom is crystalline and symmetric whereas mold is fuzzy and web-like. - Bernie, 2005-07-14 (alt.smokers.cigars)

If you are looking at a white, off-white, or bluish splotch, that looks a little fuzzy, and your retailer ever tells you it's plume, or bloom don't buy it; you're right, it is mold. Mold = Bad.

OTOH, if you come across a cigar that seems to glisten under the light, looks like it is covered with a fine crystalline powder, and has no splotches or lumps, congrats, you've got bloom. Bloom = Good. - Ron B, 2002-07-20 (alt.smokers.cigars)

TIN STORAGE ISSUES

Should I pop the tins and seal the tobacco in another container?

Does the aging process continue after I open a container?

Once I open a tin, what are some good short-term storage options? How long is "short-term"?

Is rust or corrosion be a problem for tins?

Can I store tobacco containers in a freezer or refrigerator?

1 ~ Should I pop my tins and seal the tobacco in another container?

This is actually two questions in one. The hidden other question is, "Does tobacco age as well if I just re-seal a tin and hide it away for a while?" These results surprise people new to the world of quality tobacco aging. Mr. Pease elaborates:

Open tins dry out quite quickly, actually, which is not necessarily a bad thing if you are smoking it (some of us prefer out tobacco in the dry range of the spectrum), but a terrible thing if you are aging it. Part of the process seems to rely on a sealed environment, in my experience. - GL Pease, 1998-07-09

Tinned tobaccos have a distinct advantage over "bulk" tobaccos when it comes to aging, providing you don't open the tin. The *lack* of oxygen exchange is actually beneficial to some of the organic processes which are responsible for the "aging," and, as long as the tins are stored in cool, dry location, you don't ever have to worry about the condition of the contents. - GL Pease, 1999-01-14

Once a tin is open, store it in a cool place, sealed as best you can seal it. [Aging is] an amazingly complex medley of carefully choreographed chemical and microbial dances. But, the bottom line is, when you open the tin, it's over. Other changes will take place, but it's never going to be the same again. - GL Pease, 2001-10-17

2 ~ Does the aging process continue after I open a container?

A topic mentioned briefly above, but which deserves elaboration. Not all aging is equal, friends! Thus:

Once air is reintroduced, the anaerobes snuff it. If there are endospore forming, they'll sporulate, and the process *could* conceivably be restarted, *if* the correct environmental conditions were made present. But, one of those correct conditions is the absence of oxygen. So, either the tin would have to be fully evacuated, or some aerobic bacterial process would, once again, have to consume the O₂ that is now in the tin. It's all a delicate dance of tiny life forms. Once you mess up the ecology that's been carefully crafted over thousands, even millions of generations of bacteria, it's tough to get it back "the way it was." - GL Pease 2001-10-17

If you buy tobacco with significant age already, the picture changes. As soon as you open that tin, or high-barrier bag, you introduce significant changes to the environment within the container. From that point, all bets are off. Perhaps I shouldn't say that the blend will no longer age, but it will age differently from that point forward. - GL Pease, 2003-10-28

The aging process is a series of both biological activities and organic reactions, some of which can be very slow. Many of reactions tend to happen sequentially, so once the environment is radically changed by introducing fresh air, all bets are off. Further, all those lovely aromas that emanate from that freshly opened tin are volatile organic products that, once shared with the angels, is lost and gone forever. There's no way to reverse time and return things to the original state. Once you open it, smoke it. It will certainly change, but it will not likely improve in the same way that it will once it's sealed up. - GL Pease, 2003-11-11

3 ~ Once I open a tin, what are some good short-term storage options?

An issue that can be of considerable import to those who don't smoke at a heavy pace, or who have a lot of irons in the fire simultaneously. I have found spice jars to be excellent containers for small amounts of tobacco. I'd recommend small mason jars for storage, but once you open the mason jar, put it into a spice jar. Many of the spice jars that you can buy from kitchen stores have a little plastic shaker lid with a mylar-type liner inside. I keep these in place. Very convenient, inexpensive, easy to organize and store, and they seem to hold around 5 bowls' worth. - inquisitor, 2004-10-12

Once [a container of tobacco is] opened, there are many options for storage, but, ideally, it should be consumed within a month or two of opening. - GL Pease, 2003-05-06

I always transfer open tins to half pint mason jars, then label the top. These make for excellent storage, and they are easy to stack. - Joe LaVigne, 2003-11-01

An opened tin is good for a few days (maybe, in the Mojave Desert) to a few weeks, and maybe several months if relative humidity is high in your area. But don't count on much more than a few weeks. - James Beard, 2001-02-04

Round tins with screw-down lids can stay fresh for many months if the lid has a rubber/plastic gasket and you make sure to tighten it properly. Mac Baren and JF Germain tins have the right kind of gasket, and I have kept those tobaccos fresh for up to a year when I screw the lid down tightly. Tins with plastic pop off lids, such as McClelland's, Rattray's and GL Pease, will not stay fresh very long, maybe a month or two at best. Either smoke these quickly or transfer the contents to bail-top jars. Rectangular tins are the worst since their lids can't be tightened. A few weeks after being opened, you'll find these tobaccos completely dried out. I store rectangular tins in ziploc freezer bags, even for very short term storage. - Tim Parker, 2003-11-01

There are volatile components that dissipate to the air if not contained, and, once gone, they're never coming back. When I open a tin of something I'm not going to smoke fairly quickly, I usually either put the contents in a canning jar for longer term storage, as has been suggested, or at least, in heavy zip-locks if shorter storage is likely. - GL Pease, 2002-07-01

I have solved the problem [of too-dry tobacco] by using small plastic bags. If I leave the tobacco uncovered in the tin, it will dry up, especially the tobaccos that are moistened only with water. So when I open up a new tin I always put the tobacco in a plastic minigrip bag, press the air out and the I put it in the tin. - Jari, 2002-06-29

A simple way of keeping tinned tobacco moist for a short period of time is to place a small plastic sandwich bag over the open tin and then screwing the lid tightly down over the bag. - Max Kama, 2004-01-06 (via email)

Most of the round 50gm tins do an admirable job of keeping blends fresh. I have an opened tin of Gordon Pym that's been in very good shape since 1999 when I bought it (I smoke primarily virginias). Of course, some don't seal as well as others, especially the rectangular tins that many flakes come in. A very effective solution, I've found, is to wrap the tobacco and paper liner in a plastic sandwich bag, close the lid as tight as possible, and then put the whole tin inside one or two freezer-grade zip-lock bags. I've found that this method will keep the tobacco in very acceptable condition for over a year. With the Rattray's 100 gm tins or the McClelland tins, just transfer the tobacco to a zip-lock bag and put back in the can. - Clifford W. Woodward, 2005-08-21

4 ~ Can rust or corrosion be a problem for metal containers when cellaring over the long-term?

The short answer is "yes".

I recently opened a jar of tobacco that I had canned last year. I had an impossible time getting the outer ring to unscrew, and eventually had to cut it off with wire snips. When I did, I discovered that the reason it wouldn't come off was because it and the inner lid had rusted together. I guess there had been some water left inside the ring from when I washed it beforehand.

The lid had not rusted all the way through, since it had been sealed only 12 months or so. Had I been more patient, however, and let it sit for several years, I suspect the rust might have eventually eaten through the lid. I always dip the top of my jars in paraffin, though, so I guess even then it wouldn't have done too much damage. A good point to remember in the "to wax or not to wax" debate, I suppose. - Joe00637, 2004-12-10

My tins are internally coated, as are most tobacco tins. The rust problem is generally a result of the tins being stored in a humid environment; they rust from the outside in. I've had very few tins rust from the inside, though it's not unheard of, and even a good coating can fail occasionally. - GL Pease, 2004-08-27

Some tins fare better than others. The worst tins seem to be thin aluminum ones, whose side walls can become perforated with little pinholes from corrosion far too easily. The next most likely thing to be effected is aluminum pull-tops. Examine these frequently for signs of damage, which will normally first appear as a white powdery area. If you see a problem area, wipe it off with a damp cloth, and keep a close eye on it. If you shake and tap on a tin, and it sounds dry inside (I don't know how to really describe this, but there is a difference in the way dry tobacco

"sounds" when it's dry...) it would probably be best to transfer the contents into a glass container immediately. You'll lose some of the "bottle bouquet" of the sealed tin, but you'll save the tobacco. - GL Pease, 2000-06-23

Comment | The rust won't hurt you, but it will impart an unpleasant taste and smell to the tobacco, if present in sufficient quantity.- GL Pease, 2002-11-23

5 ~ Can I store tobacco containers in a freezer or refrigerator?

A topic which makes some people scratch their head. Nip this one in the bud! Remember, we're not talking about preserving tobacco, but aging it. Would you freeze wine?

No need to freeze tobacco. [...] Freezing *might* damage the cell structure of the leaf, if the temperature is low enough. The things you want to avoid are hot and cold cycles (can damage the integrity of the tin's seal) and excessive humidity, which can rust some tins. - GL Pease, 1994-12-27

Do NOT store tobacco in your fridge or freezer [in a non-airtight container]. One of the purposes your fridge serves is to remove moisture from the air inside of it. You will end up with dry tobacco. - Michael D. Lindner, 1999-02-12

Storing in a refrigerator is not a good idea unless you have absolutely air-tight bags to contain the tobacco. Tobacco will readily absorb aromas and flavors from anything in the area, and in a refrigerator there is a lot of stuff in the area that you might not want to taste in the tobacco. - James Beard, 1996-09-08

[In a freezer,] the moisture in the tobacco will become ice. When water becomes ice, it expands. When it does this, it destroys the cellular structure of the tobacco. This must have an influence on the character of the smoke. - Sailorman Jack, 2004-01-04

BULK STORAGE ISSUES

Generally, which storage containers should be used for aging? What kind of container should I use for bulk tobacco?

How well do bail-top jars work for long-term storage?

How well do vacuum-sealed plastic bags work for long-term storage? Why are vacuum-sealed tins different?

How well do commercial opaque tobacco pouches work for long-term storage?

Is there any advantage to storing bulk tobacco in one large container, or many small containers?

I have a large pack of tobacco I would like to sub-divide into smaller containers. Should I do this sooner or later?

What can I do to prevent mold contamination when jarring my own bulk tobacco?

1 ~ Generally, which storage containers should be used for aging?

This is a critically important topic. I took some editorial license here and separated out Mr. Pease's findings into this first "general" question because I believe that they deserve to frame the discussion which follows.

I recently completed an experiment wherein the same tobacco was cellared, after blending, in heavy bags, glass jars and sealed tins. There is a slight, but perceptible difference between the tobacco aged (a mere 6-months) in the jars and in the tins, but a distinct difference between the bagged tobacco and the other two samples. This supports a theory which I have posited in the past that gas exchange is not advantageous to long term aging. The tinned/jarred tobacco had become much richer, with a lovely complexity not found in the bagged sample, even though the bagged sample had not lost significant moisture.

These results demonstrate that plastic bags are not optimal for long term storage or aging of tobacco, but that canning jars are nearly as good as tins, as long as they are left sealed, and in an environment which is not hostile to the contents.

In any event, use quality jars with good rubber seals. These seals do have a limited life expectancy, but that life is several, if not many years. I recently bought a couple of antique jars, and while I have no idea how old the rubber seals were, they were quite brittle and useless as seals. I've kept some tobacco in modern jars for upwards of 7 years, with no sign of deterioration of the seals, so good quality rubber will last at least that long, if kept in a cool location. High

heat, extremely dry conditions and UV from sunlight are definite no-nos. - GL Pease, 1999-05-04

For almost as long as I've been smoking a pipe, I've bought nothing but tinned tobaccos. I like aged tobaccos, and I'm too damn lazy to do anything else but cellar tins. I've certainly experimented with mason jars, and other types of containers, but for me, the 2-oz tin is the ideal package. If stored in a cool, dry place, it should keep the tobacco in perfect condition for many, many years. I've had tobaccos dating back to the 1940s, and they were delightful.

Jars certainly work great, as long as they are absolutely clean before you put the tobacco into them. If the tobacco is tinned, though, leave it alone. Why take it out of one sealed container just to put it in another? - GL Pease, 2005-08-20

2 ~ What kind of container should I use for bulk tobacco?

A perennial topic of discussion on ASP. A number of people have given their advice, and I replicate the best of it here.

When it comes to bulk blends the consensus seems to be to put the tobacco in an air-tight container. The main concerns here are to keep the tobacco from drying out and to avoid mold. Understand, that most "air-tight" containers are not completely air-tight, some air exchange will happen. Again this is where a proper environment (as mentioned above) will aide the process. I have also read that you should not give in to the temptation to open these containers during the aging process, doing so will prevent the magic that is "aging" and invite mold into the equation. If you wish to sample them at different stages, I suggest separate samples be put back for each stage that you wish to try them. - G. W. Fletcher, 2001-05-10

I've done some short-term experiments with various forms of packaging, and will say that tobacco that's been put away in heavy plastic bags for 1-2 years shows only a slight change, while the same tobacco, from the same batch, aged in tins had undergone significant change for the better. I'm quite convinced that sealed, non-permeable containers, whether tins or glass jars, are essential for proper aging. - GL Pease, 2001-01-18

If you buy fairly fresh tobacco, no matter what the packaging, break it up, and repack into sealed jars, you're good as gold. - GL Pease, 2003-10-28

Mason jars are the choice of many, many ASPers.

For bulk tobacco storage mason or Ball [brand] jars with good rubber seals work very well as they are air tight and keep the contents from drying out. I would suggest keeping the jar in a dark place (closet, drawer, etc.). - Bob Pelletier, 1997-11-23

I use Mason jars exclusively. I use the large ones (Quart) for ageing, and I usually put 8 oz in these. You could fit more with tight packing, but I like them at 8oz. - Joe LaVigne, 2004-10-11

Jars are a better choice, as glass is less permeable than any plastic. The best thing is to fill the jars nearly full, as minimizing the air will improve the aging. So, press that tobacco into the jars, and put those lids on tight! If you warm the jars before putting on the lids, it will form a slight vacuum, which is also beneficial, both to keeping the lids tight and aging the tobacco. - GL Pease, 1997-10-14

Glass is also kinda neat in that you can see how the color has changed over the years. The tobacco in the jar I'm referring to was golden brown when new, but now is almost black. - Greg Sprinkle, 1997-11-23

A reminder from Mr. Pease that some bulk containers from aging-sensitive producers will work just fine!

[The GL Pease 8oz] bags are designed for aging, and for storage, they will be fine for years, though for long term, I still recommend the tins, for a couple of reasons. First, the tins *may* age more quickly, in the same way that wine in fifths ages faster than wine in magnums. While I've done some testing of the bags, that testing represents no more than two years of aging.

Once you open the bag, the process pretty much stops. The bag can be resealed, and will hold the contents in good condition for a long time, but transfer to jars is probably the safest thing.

As an aside, I put some tobacco in one of these bags, folded it over several times, and taped it up, just to see what would happen. Even without a true seal, the contents aged, and were in perfect condition when I opened it 18 months later. It's a darn good bag. - GL Pease, 2003-02-11

3 ~ How well do bail-top jars work for long-term storage?

In addition to mason-type jars with their familiar two-piece lids, these kinds of cannisters have their own sets of advantages and disadvantages which have been thoroughly discussed.

I have a half dozen of these, that have held various blends for more than 6 years, without ill effect. - Terry Hagley, 2000-05-12

The bail top jars are better suited to being opened frequently since the gaskets on the canning jars are very thin. For long term storage I (so far) prefer the canning jars. I've had at least one bail top gasket split in many places (over time), and no longer trust them where I can't see them. - Fred Latchaw, 1999-08-21

I use the wide mouth jars that have large rubber gaskets and wire cages. Based upon my experience with some Gawith and Hoggarth Dark Birdseye Shag, tobacco is good for more than a decade in the aforementioned containers. - Irwin Friedman, 1997-11-32

I once did an experiment in which I took the same tobacco, tinned 2oz, put 2oz in a bail top jar, put a bunch in a double-thick, heavy plastic bag. The tinned and jarred tobaccos aged nicely after just six months, while the stuff in the plastic bag showed only the improvement one can expect from melding, even though the moisture content was unchanged. - GL Pease, 2001-07-04

One thing to keep in mind is that the rubber gaskets used with [wire cage] jars will deteriorate. If left alone, they'll probably last 20 years. If opened after about five years, the re-seal may not be reliable. The current rubber gasket material used for Mason jars seems to be a very durable rubber compound. I have some that are about 20 years of age and they're still functional. - Buddy, 1998-11-05

A comment on the bail top jars. I have been using them to cellar tobacco for the past few years. The tobacco I have stored seems to be picking up the smell of the rubber gasket. - Jim Kooy, 2000-05-08

There are a couple of different sorts of gaskets available, and I have noticed that some seem to possess more "rubber smell" than others. A couple of the jars I have have a silicone gasket which has little detectable aroma to it, though I don't know where these would be available individually. - GL Pease, 2000-05-08

4 ~ How well do vacuum-sealed plastic bags work for long-term storage? Why are vacuum-sealed tins different?

Now this... this has been the subject of much experimentation and debate over the years. Recently, debate has subsided more often in strong favor of the "aging needs air" contingent. Nevertheless, there remains a contingent of people who still have all that vacuum seal equipment laying around and use it to seal up their bulk. They seem to find it beneficial.

Fully evacuated plastic pouches: Up until about two years, these work fine at sealing the tobacco. However, minimal aging takes place, probably due to the lack of oxygen. The pressure compacts the mass into a fairly firm block, nothing like a real pressed flake, but pretty solid as the pressure continues over a period of years. I found the apparent effects of this "pressing" the best aspects of the method of storage. Unfortunately, somewhere between two and three years, enough H₂O vapor escapes to begin a drying process, usually noticeable around the edges of the tobacco mass, which begin to feel crispy through the plastic. Note that the vacuum remains tight--the plastic used apparently passes H₂O more easily than O₂, N₂, or other atmospheric gasses. Bottom line: not recommended if you want to age the tobacco. I recommend double bagging and double sealing. - Toren Smith, 2001-07-25

No problems, just less real aging. Some air is necessary to start the whole process off. It's been shown that sucking out the air will "preserve" the tobacco in its current state, and that little or no change will take place over time. So, while it may be fine for storage, it's not going to provide the advantages of age. Toren's experiments, interestingly, also demonstrated that vacuum sealed tobacco can dry out, while still maintaining the seal! Apparently, the plastic used in the vacuum sealers is somewhat permeable to H₂O, but less so to atmospheric gasses. Different materials provide a good barrier to different types of molecules, while being permeable to others. Not knowing what material the bags are made from, I can't comment on why this happened, but Toren's experimental methods are quite sound. - GL Pease, 2001-08-16 (revised 2003-12-23)

Vacuum sealing is a bad idea. (I read an ancient Rattray's catalogue on tobacco, in which was presented a short discourse by Charles himself. Old Chuck had some pretty strong words to say

against vacuum packing, and experiments conducted by myself and others, notably Toren Smith's recently published findings, bear this out.) - GL Pease, 2001-08-15

There is a difference between an air tight tin and a vacuum sealed bag with all the air evacuated out. A sealed tin still has a small amount of air left in it. This allows the tobacco to age; the chemical reactions that take place in aging require some air to get going. A plastic bag with all the air removed will not have enough air left for the reactions to start. - Mark Hogan, 2003-05-21

The vacuum used to seal tins is minimal. Foodsaver type vacuum pumps are quite weak, but they do a very good job of evacuating a great deal of the air from the bags they use [which therefore prevents substantial aging from occurring]. - GL Pease, 2003-07-06

None other than Charles Rattray himself first wrote, in his "Disquisition for the Connoisseur" that vacuum sealing tins is NOT ideal. Prior to the more recently common flat tins, such great old brands as Balkan Sobranie, Rattray, McConnell, Drucquer & Sons, and many others were put in tins similar to what we use today. All the old knife-lid tins were sealed at normal atmospheric pressure, not vacuum packed. Still today, quite a few producers continue with the "old school" method of atmospheric sealing. Vacuum sealing is the new fangled method that is done by producers who rely on assembly line techniques to speed production and reduce costs.

I've explored the virtues of aged tobaccos throughout my 25 years as a pipe smoker, having been introduced to aged tobacos by Robert Rex during my pipe smoking infancy. While many wonderful experiences have come from well-aged tobaccos vacuum-sealed in hockey puck tins, the most memorable have always come from the old-time, "conventional" containers. Vacuum sealing is certainly not necessary, and I'll stick to the notion that it is not ideal. After all, who am I to argue with Chas? - GL Pease, 2005-04-18 on Knox Cigar Boards

Vacuum sealing, while quite popular, is simply a waste of time, and may actually be detrimental to the overall aging potential of the tobacco. Certainly the plastic materials that are used with home-vacuum sealers are NOT high-barrier films, and while they'll keep most of the water in, they'll let much of the goodness out. - GL Pease, 2005-08-20

5 ~ How well do commercial opaque tobacco pouches work for long-term storage?

Not many high-grade, cellar-worthy tobaccos are sold in this form (in the USA, anyway) these days, but it's an interesting question.

I have some english blends that are 5 yrs old in pouches and they are fine.- Ben Ciccarelli, 2005-04-05

The other evening, I opened a sealed pouch of vintage Amphora which has to be at least eight years old. This is the old Amphora pouch prior to the USA ban and it was just slightly dried. It smoked wonderfully. - Fleep, 2005-04-05

The problem with pouches is they are not completely air-tight.

Whether the tobacco will dry out or not depends on the humidity where it is stored. If relative humidity is 65 percent or somewhere near that, the tobacco should not become dry out much. If you live on the edge of the Mojave Desert, you will likely have a problem unless your storage area is humidity-controlled.

The second potential (and often real) problem is that tobacco will absorb any aromas in the air that comes in contact with it. Pouches allow some ambient air to enter, and the tobacco will pick up whatever aroma is in that air. If you store a half dozen or dozen tobaccos in the same place, they will all acquire a little taste of all the others. And if the aroma in the area is not real tasty when mixed with tobacco, you will have a problem.

The Mason/Ball canning jar with a lid that will keep a near-perfect seal for many years is best for long-term storage.

On the other hand, there are a number of drugstore tobaccos that contain enough humectant they will never dry out, and the chemical flavoring is so stable and strong you will never notice admixture of anything short of skunk oil. It is not uncommon to read of someone "losing" a pouch of Borkum Rif or Amphora behind the couch for a decade, and finding it to be just as good (or as bad!) as when new. - James D. Beard, 2005-04-05

6 ~ Is there any advantage to storing bulk tobacco in one large container, or many small containers?

An issue of practicality, preference, and your puffing pace.

One of the reasons, probably the most important one, that I recommend smaller packaging for long-term aging, is that, in my opinion, the delicate flavours that result from the aging process begin to dissipate as soon as the package is open. Volatilization, oxidation, other chemical processes take place, and the stuff changes. My belief is that once an aged tobacco is opened, it should be smoked fairly quickly, to enjoy it at its best. So, buying the 8oz bags, breaking them up into smaller quantities, and sealing them in jars is a reasonable alternative to the tins. - GL Pease, 2003-10-28

Keep an eye on things once you put it up. Better to do lots of small jars than a few large ones, so you can taste them over time. Keep notes. You'll learn a lot about the aging process this way. It's great fun. - GL Pease, 1998-03-08

7 ~ I have a large pack of tobacco I would like to sub-divide into smaller containers. Should I do this sooner or later?

A fine question in the age of 8 oz. tins and bags.

Your best bet would be to re-package it now, as once you open an "aged" tobacco, the little biosphere in the package will be forever changed, and things just won't be the same afterwards. It won't be BAD, but it will certainly be different.

[Very occasional smokers] might even consider repackaging into smaller than 2-oz quantities. Personally, I find that aged tobaccos deteriorate rather rapidly once opened. Again, they don't get BAD, but they lose a lot of the beautiful aroma they've developed over the years. Personally, I have always found the first bowl out of an old tin to be the most delightful. (Others feel that even a well aged tin must breathe a little before it's smoked. To each his own.)

That said, the bags are actually quite good for storage, and for keeping the tobacco in good shape after you've opened them. Refold the top several times, compressing the leaf somewhat, and put a rubber band around the whole thing to hold it tight, or use a binder clip on the folded part of the bag. I've got a bag of Robusto from the first run that I dip into every once in a while. It's not the same now as a freshly opened tin from the same vintage, but it's still very nice. - GL Pease, 2005-01-07

8 ~ What can I do to prevent mold contamination when jarring my own bulk tobacco?

The dreaded mold! A lot of folklore surrounds this topic. Read the following responses and perceive some general guidelines. Some people have resorted to sacrificing chickens and goats, but the jury is still out on those "advanced" techniques. Meanwhile, the wisdom of ASP:

Mold spores are literally everywhere. Whether or not they begin to bloom is a bit of a mystery. I've lost a jar of Balkan Sobranie, some Penzance, a jar of Perfection and a tin of F&P Templar to mold. Just use very clean (boiled) jars and pray for the best. The only 100% sure way to get spore/mold free tobacco would be to use a heavy dose of gamma radiation, but it sounds a bit overkill. ;-) - Tapio Pentikainen, 2000-10-22

Actually, there are enough mold spores around that any tobacco not in an air-tight sealed container will have some in it. But mold requires free water to thrive. The spores can survive for eons in a dry environment, but they cannot grow. Just let there be free water (not chemically glomed onto something else) and the stuff flourishes. [...] I would suggest drying the tobacco until it is at the low end of the acceptable moisture range for you, and then store it far, far from your other tobaccos (just in case). It may be you will be able to smoke all remaining before the mold gets enough water to wreak havoc. - James Beard, 2000-07-26

Vinegar won't disinfect [jars]. It'll kill alkalophiles, in sufficient concentration, but that's just not enough. Try bleach. (Another reason not to use plastic containers - they'll hang on to the bleach "aroma," and be nearly forever tainted.) Just add a little bleach to your hot, soapy water, and wash with that. Rinse thoroughly, and allow the container to air dry. (The last thing you want is to transfer whatever is on that dishtowel to the jar once you've gone to all the trouble to make it disease-free.) The bleach smell will dissipate, and the jars will be quite mold-free. You could also heat-sterilize the jars, using a pressure cooker, but that seems like SO much effort. - GL Pease, 2002-01-11

Containers can definitely contain mold spores. Once mold is in a container it must be sterilized very aggressively. With glass containers its easier to accomplish. I would just toss a plastic container if it were me. Not worth taking a chance. They are more permeable, or absorb aromas and spores. - Terry McGinty, 2000-06-22

Propylene glycol will prevent mold growth. It's possible a small amount in distilled water will serve the purpose without affecting the smoking quality. I routinely use a very small amount when rewetting moistening disks, and I haven't noticed any bad effects in English-type blends. - Buddy, 1998-09-11

Everybody keeps blaming the climate at the point of storage for causing mold. Not so. While climate conditions can accelerate or discourage mold growth, the real question is how heavy a live mold spore burden the tobacco carries. Sterile tobacco will never grow mold, no matter what the storage conditions are. Most people do not store or handle their tobacco in such a place/manner that would introduce a lot of new mold spores, so my guess is that the spores are almost always already present when the tobacco is purchased. It also makes sense that people are reporting particular blends as being more susceptible to spoilage; between differences in final moisture content and handling conditions during production and packaging, you would expect that particular blends (and especially particular batches) would experience more problems than others. You would probably find a good correlation with the geographic region and/or the particular wholesaler if you cared to do enough research. I smell a PhD thesis here! - L.M. Spitz, 2000-10-19

Too much moisture seems to be the culprit; that and being in an enclosed environment. I had mold in years past, but not recently. I am inclined to let my tobacs dry a bit if there is any feeling they are too moist. [...] Since I prefer my tobacco a little on the dry side, I have a habit of letting the tin set with the lid off for awhile before I put it in the humidior. Perhaps this helps. I think it is because mold was more a problem for me years ago, before I watched the moisture level. - Terry McGinty, 2000-10-23

Distilled water makes no difference. In fact, most municipal water is chlorinated to some extent, which MIGHT help to minimize mold. Did you get the tobacco too wet? Probably, but mold can even form on pretty dry substrates. - GL Pease, 2002-02-26

TOBACCO JARRING GUIDE

Step 1 - Prepare the Jars

Step 2 - Pack the Tobacco

Step 3 - The Heat-Vacuum Method

Step 4 - Apply Sealant for Extra Security (Optional, but Recommended)

Step 5 - Label the Jars

Complete Examples

Step 1 ~ Prepare the Jars

The upshot here is to use common sense and be thorough. Details follow.

1) Sterilize the jar (boiling works, but I just put it in the dishwasher at the highest possible heat).
2) Dry the tobacco to [your desired] smoking moisture, or just a tiny bit moister. 3) Put #2 in #1.
- Inquisitor, 2000-10-26

Heat the jars in hot water (close to boiling but careful, boiling could crack the glass if you don't allow them to temper in the water properly), pour in the tobacco and then seal the jars. The heated jar will create a vacuum as it cools. - Jeff Schwartz, 2000-10-27

Put the stuff in the jars, after a through washing (the dishwasher works well, but run an extra rinse cycle, to rid the thing of any aromas from the detergent, and don't put the rubber gasket in there), and, assuming the moisture level of the tobacco is right to start with, it will stay right. Then, put the jars in a cool, dark place, and forget about them until you are ready to sample the delightful contents. - GL Pease, 1999-08-19

The jars should be sanitized before use--running them through the dishwasher is best, but if you don't have one, the usual techniques used for beer-making are fine. Also sanitize all surfaces and containers you'll be working with, and wash your hands well and often. Mold sucks. - Toren Smith, 2001-07-25

Step 2 ~ Pack the Tobacco

Both the condition of the tobacco and the method of packing can be important.

The tobacco should be moist. Not dripping, of course, but pop the lid on a tin of GLP tobacco and check it out. That's the way you want it. Water is as necessary as oxygen to the aging process, and you can always dry it out to your preferred level when you [open] the jar. [...] Don't pack it in too tight. Remember, oxygen is your friend in the aging process. I never pack it any tighter than I'd pack a pipe for smoking. - Toren Smith, 2001-07-25

I'm far from an expert, but in the short time I've been "canning" tobacco, I typically find I can fit about 1/2 as much tobacco as the jar size given (i.e. 4oz of tobacco in an 8oz widemouth jar). - Kip, 2004-04-26

The [2:1 ratio is] pretty close, though I've found the fit depends on the cut of the tobacco, and the humidity level. There are some tobaccos which, if I attempted to fit in that 2:1 ratio, would be way too tight. The good thing about wide-mouth canning jars is they are dirt cheap, and allow me to store bulk - purchased tobaccos affordably, yet they are nice and tight, and stay sealed forever, even if they are opened on a regular basis. - Steve Lawrence, 2003-04-26

How tightly you pack it seems to be a matter of preference.

I pack it tight. [With English blends] I will use something with a wide flat bottom to pack it tight as tight as possible. For VA flakes and such, I just stuff it as tight as possible but not so tight it ruins the flake. For the 6-inch flakes, I will fold a couple over length-wise and alternate packing the jar until its as full as it can get. - Michael Peebles, 2005-04-04

I gravity feed, and leave it loose. - Stephen Lawrence, 2005-04-04

I pack as tight as I can, not due to some belief that it affects the aging process, but because I have so much tobacco space is an issue. - Steven Fowler, 2005-04-04

I jam it in there, then use a can of butane to pack it down, re-fill, and repeat until I can fit no more. - Joe LaVigne, 2005-04-04

Step 3 - The Heat-Vacuum Method

After wide use in the community for many years, this method promises solid results if performed correctly.

You are going for a seal, not sterilization. You can use a shallow hot water bath to heat up the tobacco-stuffed jars or even a short time [15-30 seconds] in the microwave. The slight heating shouldn't seriously affect the tobacco, and all you need to do is create warm air in the jar so when you put the lid on, the warm air cools, contracts and seals the lid. - Robbie, 2001-06-08

The jar should be immaculate and dry when you put the tobacco in it. The tobacco should be of proper moisture content for smoking, or perhaps slightly on the dry end of the proper range. The seal on the lid should be in good shape. If you wish to "vacuum seal," prepare the jar by putting it in a pan of near-boiling water for maybe 15 minutes and then [fill with tobacco,] put on the top, and tighten well. - James Beard, 2002-01-29

My method that has worked very well, providing an air tight seal yet allowing for aging, is to store in mason jars, and then process in a hot water bath to seal the jars. I just put the jars in a pan of boiling water until the temp inside the jars is high enough to expand the air inside, then I tighten the rings on the jars and allow the jars to seal. There is a slight negative pressure inside the sealed jars, but there is still enough air in there to allow for aerobic aging. My Cajun Half and Half stored in this way keeps getting better and better with every passing month. The hot water bath also provides some light stoving to the tobacco. - Stephen E. Williamson, 2004-01-19

When putting the tobacco into jars, heat/vacuum sealing is not only not necessary, it's probably not optimal, as air is an essential component in the aging process. Just make sure the jars and lids are CLEAN, and seal-em up. To clean the jars, I recommend a couple drops of bleach along with hot, soapy water. Rinse them thoroughly, and let them air dry, inverted, to minimize the risk of mold spores finding their way in. It may take a while for the bleach smell to completely leave the jars, so give them a sniff before you bottle up the baccy. - GL Pease, 2003-02-11

Step 4 ~ Apply Sealant for Extra Security (Optional, but Recommended)

Short answer: yes. Some people would make this an emphatic "yes!" But it's certainly an advanced technique, given the process.

Unevacuated sealed mason jars (bands/lid dipped in paraffin after sealing). This gave by FAR the best result, with excellent and sometimes surprising amounts of aging. A recently opened sample of McClelland 5115 smelled utterly delectable and smoked like a dream [after 3 years] -- it was *vastly* superior to identical samples packed on the same day using methods 1 [fully evacuated plastic pouch], 2 [unevacuated plastic pouch], and 3 [evacuated mason jar]. - Toren Smith, 2001-07-25

If you don't seal with wax you run the risk of air migration into (or out of) your [canning-style] jars. I use paraffin, which my local grocery stocks. It's cheap, fast and easy, and if I'm careful, it requires no cleanup.

Over the years, air pressure changes along with temperature changes can cause a vac-sealed jar to lose its seal. Gasses may be released by the aging tobacco that negate the vacuum; which combined with the above mentioned outside forces, may cause leaks. And if you're only relying of hand-tightened threaded seals, even with rubber gaskets, you're just asking for trouble. Why go to all the trouble to jar up tobacco for aging if you aren't willing to take the final step to be safe? - Tim Parker, 2003-05-29

As an alternative to the above, freevito recommends a certain kind of lid with a self-sealing agent:

Metal Lids with Plastisol Seals. Plastisol is a relatively inert, very forgiving material that will form an excellent long-term airtight seal without the need for additional sealing procedures.

I'm sure the paraffin procedure is very effective. In fact, it might even be necessary if you are using jars with rubber seals. However, if you use the stuff I've recommended, the Plastisol seals are all that you need. They will form a reliable seal without the need to take any additional steps.

The 6 oz. jars are perfect for storing the contents of a 50 gram or 2 oz. tin of tobacco. They make other sizes as well. Whichever sizes you get, be sure that you get the accompanying lids with Plastisol seals. They are the food-grade seals that ensure a positive long-term airtight seal.- freevito, 2005-12-16 (on the Knoxville Cigar Bulletin Boards)

Step 5 ~ Label the Jars

If you're going to go through the bother of labeling (and you should), use a good labeling scheme which meets your needs of today and tomorrow, after you've lost all your hair and half your marbles.

I write with an indelible marker on the metal lid. - Chris Keene, 2004-01-25

Economy Solution: Dymo Labelmaker - less than \$10 for the little one. Fancy Shmancy Solution: Brother P-Touch Label Maker. Overkill Solution: Custom label stock for your computer printer. Affix label to jar and then stick in place with wide, clear shipping tape. I use the economy solution for baccy jars. The labelmaker material sticks to the glass like glue. - Tim Daneliuk, 2003-01-25

You need two things: 1) Sharpie marker, extra fine point. 2) Clear package tape. Write directly on the container's surface, cover with a patch of tape. Indelible markers only work on absorptive surfaces (cloth paper, etc.) - the ink will abrade / flake off glass or polished metal. The purpose of the tape is to provide a protective cover. Semi-caveat: Block print your letters, there is a tendency for the ink to absorb into the tape adhesive over time, blurring the edges of your pen strokes. If you tend to print with a "small hand" you'll need to size it up a little. 3/16 or 1/4 inch capitals (proportionate sized lower case) done with a extra fine point are legible decades later. - Dave Kever, 2004-01-26

I print "labels" from my computer, then use packing tape to attach them to the jars. Works every time for me. - John Offerdahl, 2004-01-26

Instead of labeling the jars, I purchase small lightweight, cardboard tags (about \$2-\$3 for a 100), the kind with a looped string attached. I write the blend and date on the tag then loop the tag through itself on the lid, similar to attaching a luggage tag on a suitcase. This method works for Ball jars and should work for bail jars by attaching the tag to the wire on the lid. The string on these tags is long enough to hold the tag on the bottom of the 4 oz. jars when dipping it into paraffin if this is your method. The tag can be held on the side with your fingers for larger preserving jars. When cooled, I place the jars back in the original box (with flaps removed), placing the tags, face up, on top of the jar. This eliminates the need to remove each jar from the box to see what the contents are. One quick glance will tell me what's in a box of a dozen jars. I store my tabaky in an old, four drawer file cabinet.

If you are sealing the jars with paraffin, writing or affixing anything to the slippery wax becomes problematic. If you are not sealing the jars with paraffin, then writing on the lids or using an Avery label of the appropriate size would work just fine. - Mark Z., 2004-01-26

Whenever I buy a pouch of tobak, I transfer it immediately to a clean mason jar and cut out the logo from the pouch which I tape it to the front of the jar for identification. Not the classiest thing I've ever seen but it does the job admirably and very cheaply. - KMFDM, 1997-01-13

Complete Examples

Tim Parker's description:

After sterilizing and filling the jars, I screw the lids down firmly. Then I melt the paraffin wax in an old sauce pan. After the wax has melted completely, I allow it to cool somewhat so that it thickens a bit, at which point I invert the jars and dip them into the wax. The idea is to get the wax thin enough to easily cover the top of the jar, yet keep it thick enough so that it won't drip all over the place. Your aim should be to allow the wax to completely cover the top of the jar to a point well below the lid. After the wax hardens, I usually repeat the process, dipping each jar into the wax a second time to insure a good seal.

Afterwards, I apply self-stick labels to each jar noting the contents and date sealed, and put the jars back in their box, which then goes straight into the cellar. I store the excess paraffin wax in the same sauce pan that I use to melt it. The hardened wax can be kept indefinitely in the pan and reused many times.

When the time comes that you wish to open a wax sealed jar, I've found it's best to run the jars under the hot water spigot for a few minutes, which will soften the wax enough so that you can easily wipe it away or peel it off with a dishrag or paper towel. - Tim Parker, 2005-12-11

And Steven Fowler from a couple years ago:

After I fill the Mason jar with tobacco, I tighten the lid, turn the jar upside-down and dip the top (to just below the lid) in paraffin. I have had a couple of jars over the years where the top didn't seal perfectly. Of course, the tobacco will dry out. Also, it doesn't provide the anaerobic environment that facilitates the aging process. The tobacco inside is not affected by the paraffin on the outside. The paraffin is just insurance, and in most cases is not necessary.

I melt paraffin in a double boiler and allow it to cool. Just before it turns solid I dip the lid under the paraffin. You can tell it's ready to become solid when the wax starts to turn opaque. When it's really hot the wax is transparent. **BE CAREFUL: PARAFFIN IS FLAMMABLE.**

Heating the tobacco and jar in the microwave is not necessary. Simply, boil the jar for 10 minutes. Take the jar out of the boiling water with tongs and turn upside-down. The big drops of water will empty by gravity and the rest will evaporate in a few seconds. While the jar is still hot, stuff the tobacco in and seal. It cools within a couple of minutes. The cooling promotes a vacuum. Cool air takes up less volume than the previously warm air. Even after a few days, the lid of the jar is indented on top, due to the vacuum.

I know it sounds like a pain in the ass, but it's not that bad. Actually, I kind of enjoy it. It's become a ritual. - Steven Fowler, 2003-05-29

CELLARING

What should I use as my actual tobacco cellar?

What is the optimal environment for my cellar?

I would like to stock up a cellar. Any good rules of thumb?

What's a good way to determine the age of the tobacco in my cellar?

Should I keep track of my cellar inventory?

Besides aging, are there other reasons to cellar tobacco?

1 ~ What should I use as my actual tobacco cellar?

No, nobody has built an elaborate wine cellar-like to furnish your 200-2000 tin tobacco cellar. You may be horrified to learn that just about everyone (including the pros!) improvise. Witness:

As for storing unopened tins, I just pile them in a large plastic cooler, no humidification, in my basement. - JHowell982, 2001-02-26

I love my cellar - it's a large ice chest with a handle and wheels, like a wagon. I've moved twice since starting to collect and age tins, and it's been both rugged and temperature-stable. I only age tins and sealed bulks, so I don't need much more than that. - Mike Jacobs, 2001-08-22

My cellar consists entirely of cardboard U-Haul boxes, as well as the cartons the mason jars come in. I have boxes dedicated to tins of Pease blends, Rattray blends, Butera/Esoterica, and the rest. - Fred Latchaw, 2001-08-22

I keep mine in boxes in a closet. - GL Pease, 2001-04-03

I use coolers of various sizes and dimensions -- perfect accommodations for tins and bags of bulk. The coolers are kept in a closet. - Jeff Schwartz, 2001-04-03

When we built our house, we had one of the rooms converted into a den. The closet was converted into my "cellar" by placing a bookcase in it. Most of my jars are on this bookcase (around 40 or so bail tops) with the rest of the shelves stacked with tins. - Stanmed, 2002-02-05

I store my tobacco in a two door metal cabinet (typical storage cabinet like those used for office supplies). It is a cheap one from Office Max (US\$100 or so). It has a lock to keep the kiddies out. - Charles Perry, 2004-08-02

Part of my cellar consists of a couple of CD/DVD racks purchased from an office supply store and one from IKEA. With a minimal amount of cannibalizing, I was able to "rework" them both to fit into the unused corners and wall space in my smoking den. They're ideal for both tin and bail-top jar storage, as the units are between 6" and 10" deep and the shelves are usually very adjustable, allowing for efficient organization. The IKEA "Billy" unit can be adjusted to perfectly fit the 1000 ml bail-tops sold at ebottles.com. As I keep about fifty tins open at any one time (I like variety), the CD/DVD rack is ideal.

I also was fortunate enough to purchase an old custom-built pipe cabinet that was made from a quality china closet; the bottom is home to about 250+ tins. Additionally, I also use the two deep bottom drawers of my desk as storage for the overflow (makes the desk smell great). "Out-Of-Print" tins are stored in an antique Pennsylvania Dutch inlaid box (10" X 12" X 18") and everything else goes into a metal two-drawer large-format index card filing cabinet.

And finally, I have my eye on a 1940's-era maple gun cabinet that, with the addition of some properly crafted shelves, could hold a couple of hundred tins. - Clifford W. Woodward, 2005-08-21

2 ~ What is the optimal environment for my cellar?

To the extent that we can control our environment, we should, is the upshot. Discussion:

Cool and dry is best. If you can keep it between 55 deg F and 70 deg F, you're doing well; perhaps a 65 deg F upper limit is better still.

Heat, despite the apparent popularity of some of the "Dashboard Stoving" techniques, is not your tobacco's friend. Among other things, you increase the probability that dormant mold spores will germinate. Freezing is also a bad idea.

Of course, moist environments will do nothing other than contribute to rust development, so dry is better. (Remember, the tins are sealed. Moisture inside the tins will stay there, irrespective of the external RH.) - GL Pease, 2005-03-29

If you are comfortable, the tobacco will be comfortable. - James D. Beard, 2005-03-28

The main concern is to keep them in an environment that will keep the tins from rusting. The idea is an environment that does not fluctuate in temperature or humidity. - G. W. Fletcher, 2001-05-10

The stuff should be stored in a cool, dry place. Dry is important. Tins, while coated on the inside to prevent rust from within, are susceptible to rusting from the outside in. There's nothing worse than opening a tin of something you've been looking forward to for years, only to find a dry, rusty mess inside. Rust does have a flavour of its own. It's terrible. - GL Pease, 2001-08-15

Cool, but not cold, storage conditions will allow your tobacco to mature in a slow, even manner. The proper range is slightly less than room temperature (55 F to 65 F) for slow, steady maturation of tobacco. Tinned tobacco that is stored at a slightly warmer range, say 75 F, will mature quicker with only a slight loss in the overall final product. Remember that heat is used with steam, some types of pressing and stoving of tobacco, but these processes are used during manufacturing rather than the long term maturation of the "finished product". - R.C. Hamlin, 1995 Pipes Digest

DO NOT put sealed tins in the humidor! Tins are actually made of steel, and pull-tops are aluminum, and corrosion is their worst enemy. I've lost some remarkable old tobaccos to the dreaded rust. - GL Pease, 1998-11-16

3 ~ I would like to stock up a cellar. Any good rules of thumb?

Mr. Folloder offers the definitive answer:

How big is your cellar? - Jeff Schwartz, 2000-10-28

Answers with more words, and possibly philosophies more easy on your bank account, follow.

As much as you can get my hands on, or at least as much as you can afford. [...] When I empty a tin, I don't open anything from the cellar, I order more; typically in a one-to-five relationship, where I buy one to open and five to stash. - Fred Latchaw 2001-04-03

Every time you buy a tin to smoke, buy one to "lay down" for a while. Better yet, buy two to cellar for a while, so you can build your sampling stash. - GL Pease, 2001-08-15

Might I make a tiny suggestion? Start to think of yourself as a "tobacco collector", and those feelings of mild trepidation you're having will be transformed into immense pride. - Mark Shelor, 2003-05-12

It took me a couple of years before I knew for sure which blends I wanted to cellar, and which blends cellar well. Until recently, I still had dozens of open tins - tins that eventually dried out as I began to smoke others regularly. I probably blew a few hundred dollars in tobacco over three years experimenting, but that's part of a hobby. I'm happy I found some personal favorites, and now I'm "investing" with a plan. I would have had no idea what to buy before I identified my ideal blends. - Mike Jacobs, 2001-11-19

My objectives are: 1) never smoke anything that's less than five years old, and 2) to hedge against discontinuation of my favorites. Hedging against inflation is a nice side benefit but there's also a lot of economic risk associated with it - I don't mind the risk, but for me the opportunity cost just about balances any likelihood of tin appreciation. - Mike Jacobs, 2001-11-17

4 ~ What's a good way to determine the age of the tobacco in my cellar?

Down this road lies obsessive-compulsive disorder. But at least you'll have good data!

For me, writing the date on the top of a jar, or a tin, is really just a way to keep track of stuff. I actually keep a log book of what I cellar, when I cellared it, where it came from, and eventually, when I dip into it, and how much (relatively) I have left in the tin/jar when I seal it up again. - FatMax, 2002-05-20

Buy twice as much as you smoke, and put the extra away in a closet. Label each tin with the date you purchased it, and realize that its age is indeterminate when you buy it. After a year, try some of your fresh stuff, which you have been continually smoking, and know and love, and some of the aged stock. Try again after two years. If you are a Virginia or Latakia mixture smoker, you'll be glad you did! - GL Pease, 1997-10-13

Make sure that you date the tins in your cellar with the month and year of purchase. This can be done by writing on the label or using a marker on the underside of the tin. [...] I would suggest that you month/year date all tobaccos you decide to cellar. [...] As a final step in tracking the progression of tobaccos that you cellar, you should keep a log. Your cellar log can be as simple as a 3x5 card with dates and tasting comments or as complex as you like. Your log should list the dates that you added to your cellar, by type and brand of tobacco. You will also find it very helpful to keep tasting notes based on either a point scale (taste, bite, sharpness, softness, sweetness, etc) or just a text based reaction to each tobacco as they mature. This written history will serve you well when you track the other tobaccos in your cellar. A cellar log will help you learn to recognize the progression of various types of tobaccos, especially those that you decide to add to your cellar selection in the future. - R.C. Hamlin, 1995 Pipes Digest

5 ~ Should I keep track of my cellar inventory?

Surprisingly few people seem to keep track of the contents of their cellar, for fear of cataloging the full range of tinned temptations available, which time has forgotten. Probably wise, I guess.

I started to do an inventory, once. Counting things, sorting things, putting things in columns is not something I'm particularly fond of, so after filling a couple pages of a legal pad with the miscellany, I gave up, and settled for getting a "feel" for what's stored in the cellar. - GL Pease, 2001-05-07

I have put together a Microsoft Access database with pictures of my pipes and information about them. I also have a section of the database for tracking the tobaccos I purchase as far as date, type, impressions, etc. I haven't maintained it faithfully, but can see the potential in it for someone so inclined. - Fred Langer, 1998-06-28

You may wish to check out the Online Pipe Tobacco Cellar developed by Ryan Vanderbijl and me.

6 ~ Besides aging, are there other reasons to cellar tobacco?

Yes, there are some people who seem to collect tobacco for other reasons. Weird, huh?

There is, to me, another compelling reason to have a tobacco cellar, and include in it blends that you enjoy but might not expect to do any more than taste at least as good to you as they do now: future availability and cost. Tobacco taxes seem to know only one direction-- up. There are a ton of new products on the market, and not all of them will survive. The return on investment from being in the pipe tobacco business has been deemed too low to justify staying in it in the past by some very prominent makers. Only a few years ago, things were disappearing right and left because of "bean counter" decisions. If the economy goes south, product liability insurance premiums go up, fashion trends change, whatever, then you will start to see those kinds of "bean counter" decisions being made again. - Daniel L. Merriman, 2000-10-06

If I find something I don't like, I cellar it. As tastes changes, what I don't like now may be quite enjoyable to me later. And if I don't change enough, the tobak may. - Bill Triplett, 1999-08-18

Some ASPers are convinced that tobacco is going to be increasingly regulated, taxed, or outlawed - and find this trend a compelling reason to cellar their favorite blends in quantity.

Maybe tobacco will be outlawed, maybe not. I'm not taking chances. Pick up a few years worth, whatever that means to you. If you smoke a pound of tobacco per year, hit your favorite shop and order 10-20 pounds of McClelland, Rattray, Esoterica, Dunhill, C&D, GLP, or whatever tobaccos you like. Seal them in some large mason jars. Worst case scenario is that you will have some primo tobacco to smoke in 10 to 20 years, or you will be able to pay for your kid's tuition [down the road]. - Inquisitor, 2004-01-14

While a total [tobacco] ban in the US is possible, I think that the probability is very low. What does score a perfect 1.0 in probability is taxation beyond the reach of many of us. This is why I've curtailed buying pipes for the last two years and have been buying tobacco like it's going out of style - it is. After two years I've built up enough poundage to supply my smoking rate for about 10 years. - Dave Keever, 2004-01-14

TOBACCO CATEGORIZATION [TYPES & STYLES OF TOBACCO]

Which pipe tobacco categories are generally acknowledged?

What is an aromatic blend?

What is an English blend?

What is a Balkan blend?

What is a Scottish blend?

What's the difference between English, Balkan, and Scottish?

What is a Burley blend?

What is a Virginia blend?

What is a Virginia/Perique blend?

What is an Oriental blend?

What is the American or American English style?

What is a Navy style blend?

What is a Lakeland style blend?

What is the difference between a tobacco "blend" and a tobacco "mixture"?

1 ~ Which pipe tobacco categories do most people acknowledge?

For the record, I divide the world of tobacco into the following categories: English, Oriental, Virginia, Aromatics and Burley blends. Also, there are Balkan blends, but I don't think ANYONE knows how THEY differ from English blends. - Inquisitor, 2000-10-06

For me (and I'm by no means an authority) there are: Natural/English, Blended/Balkan, Aromatic, Flavoured. - Kevin Winkless, 2003-01-14

Bear in mind that my classification is a kind of mixture of classifications as I have understood them over the years, but I believe that they're pretty close to William Serad's who has been doing the "Trial by Fire" column for Pipes and Tobaccos magazine: English, Balkan, Scottish, Oriental, American English/American Balkan, American/Burley, Virginia, Virginia/Perique, Aromatic.- Russ Ouellette, 2005-08-07

Tobaccos are normally divided into four types: English (with Latakia), Straight Virginia (possibly with Perique), Straight Burley, and "Flavored" Tobaccos (commonly known as "Aromatics" or "Scented").- Tarek Manadily from Pipe Smoking: A Realm of Confusion

For the Online Pipe Tobacco Cellar, I used the following categories: Aromatic, Burley, English/Latakia, Oriental, Virginia, Virginia/Perique, and Hard to Classify.

2 ~ What is an aromatic blend?

A lot of ASPers are starting to prefer the term "flavored" for the category of artisan (and generally natural) blends which contain a modicum of flavoring. This term is opposed to "goopy aromatics" or "cased aromatics" which refer to those blends with so much added flavoring as to overpower the natural tobacco flavor, and eliminate all hope of aging. As you can immediately tell, the term "aromatic" is - apart from its technical definition - often pejorative.

This is much like the definition of "English". If you look on the Cornell and Diehl site, "English" seems to refer to all the blends that aren't aromatics. [...] There seem to be a lot of blends that *might* be classed aromatics if we broadened the definition. Anything with Cavendish, for instance, like Dunhill Aperitif. That's flavored with smoke and Cavendish. - Ian Rastall, 2003-01-13

Alcohol just doesn't count, but any other kind of flavouring agent does. - Bernie, 2003-01-13

I wonder if the confusion over the term has to do with whether a person is favorable or not towards the notion of aromatic tobacco. Those who use the term as a pejorative, as I did jokingly in another thread, are probably referring to substandard tobacco artificially flavored to mask the poor quality. (Crap tobacco with cherry additives just tastes like cherry-flavored crap...for instance.) - Andrew Garner, 2003-01-13

The definition of aromatic is, I believe, pretty much agreed to refer to those blends that smell of something other than tobacco and possibly taste of same. Some are made of very good quality tobaccos and others aren't. - Bernie, 2003-01-13

The minute you flavor a tobacco, you've got an aromatic. [...] There are some blends that have just a touch, if that, of sweetener. But I say again, the minute you put your brandy, or other flavoring, no matter how little or how much, you've got an aromatic. They don't have to be goopy, or anything like that, but there you are. - firedancerflash, 2003-01-13

Aromatic tobaccos, in my mind, have come to be associated with tobaccos containing natural flavouring agents other than the tobacco itself. I consider alcoholic spirits to be natural flavouring agents. This would include the perfumed Gawith and Hoggarth/Samuel Gawith blends as well as a number of European blends. The key here is that the tobacco is mixed with *natural* materials such as extracts or even the flavouring plant itself, and the lot is allowed to meld together. The flavouring is meant to enhance the tobaccos, not to hide them.

Flavoured tobaccos on the other hand, are typically simple burley or VA blends which are then flavoured with a pre-prepared syrup or similar flavouring agent. In this case, the smoke is meant to be primarily about the flavour. I.e. Chocolate Cream Cherry Sundae should taste and smell like a Chocolate Cream Cherry Sundae and not like anything else. - Kevyn Winkless, 2003-01-14

This class covers heavily cased blends that are commonly sold in convenience stores, but also includes higher-end aromatics that come in tins as well. Any blend that has a flavoring added to it falls into this category. Suggestions for examples: Captain Black, Rattray's Terry Red, Dan Blue Note, Dunhill Royal Yacht. - Yarnspinner, 2003-11-29 (Knoxville Boards)

Can be pretty much any tobacco which has flavoring agents (sauces, liquors, extracts, etc.) added for additional flavor and/or aroma. - Russ Ouellette, 2005-08-07

3 ~ What is an English blend?

Here, you'll find a range of definitions arranged like concentric circles. The largest circle claims that "English" simply means "not aromatic". Another very popular definition has "English" to mean "a natural blend containing a significant amount of Latakia tobacco." And the definitions available ratchet down from there. This is one of those topics - and terms! - that never seems to die.

'English' style blends are so called because at some point, there was a law on the books in England that tobacco manufacturers could not adulterate their blends with flavorings. That is really all that 'English' means; uncased. Find when the law was passed and take the group of tobaccos available immediately afterward, and those are your prototypical 'english style' blends.

I submit that most people who use the term 'English' blend could not explain what they meant by that term in under 90 seconds, making it, to me, a useless term. If we could hammer out a term that WE agreed on, I would be willing to accept it for the sake of the discussion, but probably not any further.

As an aside, as I have used it heard used, most people divide tobacco blends into 'english' and 'aromatic' which is actually the proper usage. - Jon Tillman, 2002-12-19

I submit that most pipe smokers (and blenders, distributors, retailers, etc) make a distinction between English blends, Balkan blends, Virginias, etc. I could be very wrong, but I thought the generally accepted definition of English blends is a little more restrictive.

I think, as I said before, that the term "English," as used by most folks, is far more descriptive than simply "not aromatic." And indeed, the many non-aromatic Virginias on your web site are not described as "English" in the product descriptions. The reason for this, I think, is that most people do not think of Virginias as English, even when they are uncased.

An off-the-top-of-my-head, less than 90 second definition of English blends...I guess I'd say, "an uncased blend of predominantly Virginia tobaccos, with Latakia and some Orientals added in smaller amounts."

There really isn't complete agreement about what is meant by the term "English". Still, they all have in common...Virginia, Latakia, Oriental. - Sean Chercover, 2002-12-19

In my opinion, once again going back to the original definition of an 'english', there should not be any casing applied to a blend for it to be an 'english'. Beyond that, I agree that the major components are Virginias, Latakia, Orientals and perhaps other spice tobaccos, in varying quantities. - Jon Tillman, 2002-12-20

There seems to be distinction made by some between "English mixture" and "English tobacco," the former indicating a blend of Latakia and other things, the latter suggesting that the tobacco isn't adulterated with chemicals. - GL Pease, 2002-12-20

To my mind, an English blend has a significant portion of Virginia backing up the Latakia, and orientals serve as a spice. - GL Pease, 2002-09-07 (from his FAQ)

English blends usually increase the portion of Latakia and sometimes the Orientals as well, while reducing the Virginias. While there are exceptions, traditional English blends don't use a topping of alcohol. - J.W. Davis, 2000-05-18

A classic English ('Scottish' means the same thing) mixture is a blend of ribbon-cut tobaccos on a base of bright virginia: the condiment tobaccos are Turkish/Oriental (formerly individual tobaccos, now a melange called 'Basma'), Latakia, and Perique (usually only present in the 'full' mixtures.) Additional tobaccos could include various other grades and types of virginia, and very occasionally, a bit of Maryland. - Paul Szabady, 1999-08-14

English means that the tobacco is primarily VA or Burley, with small amounts of other tobaccos such as perique, latakia, orientals intended primarily to make the smoking experience more complex by highlighting/complementing certain aspects of the main tobacco. - Kevyn Winkless, 2003-01-14

My understanding is that indeed, "English" blends typically do use Latakia tobacco and do not use additives. Latakia is a strong, smoky tasting tobacco grown principally in Syria and Cyprus, not an additive. Those two points, Latakia and the lack of additives, seem to be the definition of most "English" blends. The "stronger" the blend, the more Latakia it contains. - Tim Wisner, 2002-05-06

I only consider blends with VA, Turkish, and latakia to be "English" blends. Of course there are several varieties of VA, several varieties of Turkish, and two types of latakia. I do not consider blends with burley to be "English" blends. They might be tasty as all get out, but they aren't technically "English". "Latakia" blends, yes, "English", no. - Weston in Atlanta, 2002-05-06

English. English blends are most known for that smokey condiment (usually only condimental) ingredient--Latakia. Latakia is a tobacco from the Middle East that is cured over fires fueled with an assortment of woods and herbs. The persistent rumor that Latakia is cured over camel dung fires is patently untrue. It may have been true in the past but it is no longer true (the discovery of Latakia is an interesting story, but I'll leave that for another thread and time!). English blends have a base of Virginias with Latakia and other orientals added to the blend. The Latakia is the tobacco in these blends that give them their trademark "campfire" aroma (loved by pipesmokers...hated by most wives and girlfriends of pipesmokers!). For me, English blends contain at least 50% Virginias. Examples of English blends: Dunhill My Mixture 965, Dan Gordon Pym, Peterson Old Dublin, Rattray's Highland Targe, Rattray's Black Mallory. - Yarnspinner, 2003-11-29 (Knoxville Boards)

A blend containing Virginias and Latakia, which may also contain some Orientals for depth or spice. Dunhill's Early Morning Pipe is an example. - Russ Ouellette, 2005-08-07

"English" is particularly slippery. There seem to be two basic classifications that adopt this description. The first, probably the oldest, is a tobacco that contains only tobacco and a restricted level of ammendments or additives in accordance with the purity laws that were extant up until the late 1980s.

"English Mixture," on the other hand, the word mixture being important, has been used to denote a blend containing Latakia for quite a long time, at least in the US. In the UK, such a blend was more often simply referred to as a "Mixture." - GL Pease, 2005-08-10

A typical English Mixture has as its base one or more Virginias, Orientals/Turkish, Latakia, and possibly a bit of Perique. Same tobaccos that contain, or are based, on Burley and Black Cavendish have found their way into what I prefer to call "modern" English mixtures. In some countries, and in particular the USA, the word "English" is used to describe tobaccos that contain no additives, regardless of the ingredient tobaccos or the type of blend; that is, a blend could be with Latakia or a straight Virginia (pressed or not). - Tarek Manadily from Pipe Smoking: A Realm of Confusion

4 ~ What is a Balkan blend?

I would say that when the Latakia and Orientals take the driver's seat, supported by the Virginias, then it is a "Balkan". - Sean Chercover, 2002-12-19

Balkan blends use a heavy proportion of oriental tobaccos sourced from the Balkans (mostly the former Yugoslavia and the northern reaches of Greece.) For Balkan Sobranie, the source and inspiration of the appellation, that tobacco was mostly Yenidoje, but since these pure oriental varieties are apparently unavailable to blenders these days, 'balkan blend' today refers to anything that resembles the old classic Sobranies - i.e., a rich tasting English with plenty of turkish/oriental in addition to the customary latakia. - Paul Szabady

A Balkan, on the other hand, is predominately based on oriental tobaccos and Latakia, and just enough Virginia is used to provide structure and balance. - GL Pease, 2002-09-07 (from his FAQ)

Balkans. Aaaah...Balkans! My favorite class of blends! To my thinking (and I think to most pipesmokers), Balkans can be considered a subset of English blends since they contain Virginias, Latakia, and Orientals. What sets them apart, however, is that they are at least 50% Latakia and/or Orientals. You'll sometimes even find Burley or Perique in Balkan blends. Examples of Balkan blends: Dan Bill Bailey's Balkan Blend, McClelland Frog Morton on the Bayou, C&D Star of the East, C&D Baalbek, C&D Levant. - Yarnspinner, 2003-11-29 (Knoxville Boards)

Similar to an English blend, but more Orientals than Virginia is used. G.L. Pease's Odyssey is a well-known example. - Russ Ouellette, 2005-08-07

The Balkan moniker probably originates with the venerable Balkan Sobranie, a blend that's been around for a very, very long time, and for decades, set the standard for this type of mixture.- GL Pease, 2005-08-10

5 ~ What is a Scottish blend?

In my opinion, no [the inclusion of Cavendish does not have anything to do with a Scottish blend]. I think of tobaccos like Rattray's Highland Targe to be characteristic of Scottish mixtures, and I don't taste any Cavendish in the old tins I have sampled. I can't speak to the new version. - GL Pease, 2002-09-07

Scottish mixtures typically use Virginias as a base, then are enhanced with spicy Orientals. Latakia is used as a *condiment* (as opposed to a side dish) and the mixture is then sometimes topped with a flavouring of some kind, but typically a whisky (scotch). The blend may or may not be steamed and/or stoved at this point. Latakia content should be no more than 20% or thereabouts. - J.W. Davis, 2000-05-18

Scottish blends were usually just 'English' blends - that is, mixtures of Virginias, Orientals, Latakia and Perique associated with Scottish blending houses like Rattray, John Cotton (?) and Bell and others. The Scottish houses also produced flake tobaccos through different pressing techniques and as a loose generality, tobacco flavors were usually more robust than those produced in the effete South of England. The tobaccos were of high quality and much in demand and although few houses with Scot names are now produced in Scotland, the term lingers on. - Paul Szabady, 1998-05-26

It is, I believe, ***a blend consisting of Virginias with a dash of Perique***. So, for example, Esoterica's Dunbar is a Scottish blend (most excellent), and Davidoff makes one as well, although the latter is "sauced" excessively. Peterson's makes an Irish blend that is very pleasant, and similar to Scottish. - Samuel M. Goldberger, 1998-05-27

"Scottish" blend is a term applied by some manufacturers (McConnell, for instance, when they were making excellent tobaccos!) to Latakia/Virginia mixtures, often with some Perique, but very light in the oriental end of things. If you were fortunate enough to ever smoke the much missed (at least by me) Elephant and Castle "Scottish Blend" and their "The Stout", you have experienced some of the best of the "Scottish" and "English" mixtures made in the eighties. These were made by Robert McConnell for Marble Arch. Garfinkel's also made some "Scottish" mixtures and flakes (a favourite was Scottish Cut Plug...long gone, *sigh*), as do McClelland's. They are rich and sweet from the Virginas, sometimes pressed lightly, sometimes broken flake. These are not known for the piquancy of more oriental based mixtures. - GL Pease, 1998/05/28

P&T magazine tobacco reviewer William Serad described MacBaren Scottish Cake as "This is what the Danish are always trying to make when they say something is "Scottish." A very fine aged cake of dark red Virginia with a subtle amount of Perique ... sweet, with stewed fruit overtones ... a fine example of its sort." I would like to think that "Scottish" isn't just any aged red VA/P mix with a sweet casing, but I really don't know. - Inquisitor, 2001-01-02

An English blend which also contains Cavendish. By this definition, Dunhill's 965 is a Scottish blend, not an English. - Russ Ouellette, 2005-08-07

"Scottish" mixtures are reliant upon a high percentage of Virginia tobaccos, either in their pure state, or processed through stoving, panning, pressing, and so on. The Virginias are augmented and enhanced with the addition of small quantities of spice tobaccos. ***The term probably derives from Rattray's blends, which gained wide acclaim as being the gold standard for this sort of tobacco.*** (The earliest examples of these tobaccos were all blended and tinned by hand in Rattray's shop. Later, Robert McConnell, arguably the finest blending house in the new world until their closing in the early 1990s, were contracted to produce the range, and for a time, the blends were produced both in Scotland and in England. It's my understanding that only old knife-lid tins were ever produced in Scotland, and that all pull-tops came out of McConnell's factory, but this may not be 100% accurate.)

McConnell produced their own "Scottish Mixture," which was a lovely rubbed-out Virginia with a gentle addition of Latakia. They also produced several of the Garfinkel's blends, including "Scottish Cut Cake," which was a beautiful example of a red VA blend. "Westropa Rough Cut" was another fantastic Garfinkel tobacco produced by McConnell in the "Scottish style." - GL Pease, 2005-08-10

6 ~ What's the difference between English, Balkan, and Scottish?

A Scottish blend is similar to an English, with less Latakia, a more dominant Virginia character and, perhaps, little or no oriental leaf. - GL Pease, 2002-09-07 (from his FAQ)

I use the term "English Mixture" to refer to a tobacco that's dominated by Latakia and Virginia, but spiced with orientals. This differentiates it from a "Balkan," in which the oriental component is more pronounced. This doesn't mean that there is more oriental leaf than Virginia, but that it's

character is dominant in the smoke. (Some oriental tobaccos are quite assertive, and a little goes a long way.) - GL Pease, 2005-08-10

For me, if the oriental component is more dominant in the smoke, it's a Balkan, while if the Virginias play the supporting role behind the Latakia's performance, it's an English - providing the orientals do their cameos well. - GL Pease, 2005-08-19

7 ~ What is a Burley blend?

These blends have Burley as their major component. They usually pack a pretty good nicotine punch because of this, but the nutty flavor provided by the burley tobacco is a beloved and long-time staple of the pipe. It is sometimes called the "King of Tobaccos". Suggestions for examples: C&D Old Joe Krantz, MacBaren Burley London Blend, C&D Barrister, C&D Haunted Bookshop. - Yarnspinner, 2003-11-29 (Knoxville Boards)

Mainly Burley, but may contain Virginias, Maryland, Carolina or Orientals. Most of the old foil-pouch blends (Half and Half, Carter Hall, Prince Albert) belong here. - Russ Ouellette, 2005-08-07

8 ~ What is a Virginia blend?

These blends have Virginias as their major components. Virginias tend to be sweeter and lighter in flavor than most other tobaccos. If Burley is the King, then Virginias are the Queen of Tobaccos. Very versatile and offering a huge variety of different flavors and strengths, Virginias are probably the most widely-smoked tobacco blends worldwide. Examples of Virginia blends: Rattray's Marlin Flake, Rattray's Old Gowrie, McConnell's Red Virginia, SG Full Virginia Flake, McClelland #24. - Yarnspinner, 2003-11-29 (Knoxville Boards)

Almost exclusively pure blends of Virginias, although there's a wide variety of this type of leaf. Rattray's Hal O' The Wynd and Marlin Flake are popular ones. - Russ Ouellette, 2005-08-07

9 ~ What is a Virginia/Perique blend?

Perique is a specialized form of burley that is grown and processed on only one small farm in St. James Parish in Louisiana. Other "perique" is made and sold around the world, but St. James Parish Perique is the only genuine Perique. It is spicy and a little goes a long way. It mixes well with a variety of tobaccos, but Virginia/Perique blends (aka VAPERs) are by far the most popular. The spiciness of the Perique is the perfect complement to the sweetness evident in most Virginias. Examples of Virginia/Periques: McClelland 2015, Bell's Three Nuns, A&C Petersen Escudo. - Yarnspinner, 2003-11-29 (Knoxville Boards)

Just what the name says. McClelland's bulk 2015 is a good example. - Russ Ouellette, 2005-08-07

10 ~ What is an Oriental blend?

Any tobaccos that have a goodly portion of Orientals in the mixture are often referred to as "Oriental mixtures". Countries where Orientals are grown: Macedonia, Greece, Turkey, Bulgaria, Yugoslavia, Syria and Cyprus. This includes Latakia, but they don't have to contain the condiment tobacco Latakia. - Terry McGinty, 2000-03-07

One other thing to consider, there are some mixtures or blends referred to as "Oriental". This generally means a Virginia based tobacco with various "Oriental" tobaccos added for flavor BUT NO latakia. They tend to taste more "perfumed" and less "smokey" than blends with latakia. - Michael Hogue, 1999-08-18

It is safe to say that an Oriental mixture relies predominately upon Oriental tobaccos for their spice and fragrance, making them distinct from straight Virginias, or English/Scottish styles with greater proportions of Virginia in the mix. There is no single, concise, accurate lexicon of tobacco terminology. Oriental, originally, implied something different from New World tobaccos. All the Turkish and Greek varieties would be included in such a definition, and one could, loosely, include the Latakias, both Cyprian and Syrian. But, Latakia, being a processed leaf, deserves a place of its own, and is therefore not generally included under the appellation of Oriental. - GL Pease, 1999-08-18

Orientals are typically only Turkish, or maybe Turkish with Virginia, but not much latakia (or none). A couple examples are McClelland's Bombay court (which has just a touch of latakia, but I hardly notice), GLP Cairo, which has a little perique. To me, orientals tend to be relatively sweet, fairly light, and have some citrus/sour to them. - Justin Holmes, 2005-08-07

A blend in which the Oriental or Turkish tobaccos are dominant. - Russ Ouellette, 2005-08-07

"Oriental" really refers to leaf from the tobacco regions in Greece, Turkey, and so on. When used to describe a mixture, I've found that it generally indicates reliance on oriental tobaccos to provide a the dominant taste. A straight oriental tobacco is not exactly a joy to smoke. They're quite assertive, tend to produce an astringent smoke because of their low sugar content, and can be hard to keep lit. There may or may not be Latakia in blends espoused as "Oriental," so it doesn't seem to be a very useful way to describe a blend. Fox's Campanile is an example, as is my own Cairo, though the latter does have a touch of perique, which might remove it from the category, if the category had a codified definition. - GL Pease, 2005-08-10

11 ~ What is the American or American English style?

I would say that an American blend is "dry", in the sense of not being sweet. It has only American-grown tobaccos in it (VA, Burley, Perique, Carolina, Kentucky, etc), and its taste is somewhat simplistic (in the sense of a "simple pleasure"). That could describe at least both Nassau and Cumberland. - Ian Rastall, 2003-03-19

English or Balkan blends which also contain Burley. A few of the House of Windsor retro blends (Revelation, Barking Dog, etc.) are examples. - Russ Ouellette, 2005-08-07

A blend in which the Oriental or Turkish tobacco [flavors] are dominant. [Strictly by percentages] the most common blending ingredient is Virginia, and a condimental amount of Latakia may be included. - Russ Ouellette, 2005-08-09

12 ~ What is a Navy style blend?

Back in the day of sailing ships the sailors would collect different tobaccos from the ports of call. They would then [take] these tobacs, roll them up, then roll the whole blend of tobacs up in sail canvas. This pressure would marry the tobaccos and help in the curing process. BTW, different casings could be added. Those sailors in the "spice triangle" used mostly rum, molasses, and some native fruit juices. ***So it is the "process" not the blend that makes a tobac "Navy Flake."***

The ropes were then cut. This is the type of tobacco you see like Escudo, Three Nuns, and other popular "roll cakes." The square slice that is also common is from a more modern method of "pressing" but achieves the same result. The square cuts are really not that much different. Think of cutting a length of pepperoni across to get discs or lengthwise to get slices like MacBarens. - Steven Banks, 2002-02-20

The term 'navy' is used so casually in contemporary usage that it almost means nothing anymore. Players uses it for a cigarette cut, Dunhill for their rolls and McClelland for a flake flavored with rum.

The original meaning referred to rolls, ropes, and twists of tobacco that were issued to British sailors. If 2 ropes were plaited together, they were called negrohead. The rope was wrapped in canvas and tied with a string. The smoker cut some off, chewed it, or put it into a pipe. It was rather potent stuff, consisting of lugs and cutter grades of Virginia and other low grade tobacco types, stoved and steamed, usually with a great deal of flavoring. Rum and molasses were often used.

As far as form goes, Dunhill's navy rolls are sliced versions and all the 'coin' tobaccos available are really sliced navy rolls. The only 2 extant manufacturers of the genuine form of the tobacco - the Gawith twins - generally use burley now to give the tobacco its oomph, where traditionally the tobacco was just generally cheap and potent. - Paul Szabady, 2002-07-12

13 ~ What is a Lakeland style blend?

Let me try. I believe the definition of a "Lakeland" tobacco is soft and may include more or less than I specify here. The term is usually applied to a type of tobacco blended with floral scents. The only blenders I know who produce these tobaccos are Samuel Gawith and Gawith and Hogarth.

These firms are located in the "Lake" district of England, hence the term "Lakeland." Not all of their tobacco blends would be "Lakeland." Certainly not a Virginia/Latakia blend such as Squadron Leader by Samuel Gawith. Grousemoor does have a floral scent and would be considered a "Lakeland" type tobacco. - Sailorman Jack, 2003-04-15

It applies to tobaccos coming from the lake area around Kendal in the N.W. of England; Gawith & Hogarth and Samuel Gawith are the two most well known manufacturers, but they are more. They also use (as do other UK tobaccos such as Erinmore) a scent that smells like Camay soap to me and many others. - Sonam Dasara, 2003-04-15

To me, Lakeland is synonymous with tobacco that is steam-pressed in a certain way to produce a certain natural flavor type. The addition of casings to some of the blends is another factor, but if you smoke a couple of SGs and G&H unscented blends, you will pick up some common traits. They tend to smoke cool, with muted top ranges, sweet/round mid-ranges, a lack of great complexity offset by a satisfying richness, and either a hay-like flavor (SG) or a cinnamon pastry flavor (G&H). Actually, the flavors are much more complex than I can explain. - inquisitor, 2003-04-15

14 ~ What is the difference between a tobacco "blend" and a tobacco "mixture"?

In the United States of America, most pipe smokers treat the terms as synonyms, and use them interchangeably.

The British do maintain a distinction. However, they designate a mixture as a manufactured tobacco, ready to smoke, that did not go through a pressure-treatment stage. This distinguishes the mixtures from the ready-rubbed tobaccos, which are first pressure-formed into flakes or squares and then rubbed out to form a loose tobacco. They recognize any combination of differing tobaccos as a blend. - James Beard, 1997-09-18

It is worth remembering that the two terms are absolutely and completely synonymous in English. "Blend" is derived from Old English and Old Norse, (blenda and blendan respectively) and means "to mix" i.e. to combine, while "Mix" is derived from Latin word meaning "to mix" i.e. to combine or blend.

Lastly, remember, most "pipe tobaccos" are made up of more than one type of tobacco, and as such, are all blends or mixtures (though yes you can get straight burley, etc.). - Steve Lehman, 1997-09-19

All this talk of the difference between a blend and a mixture is too confusing. Think of it this way: One blends tobaccos to make a mixture. It's as simple as that. - Buddy McNiel, 1997-09-19

I've been given a simple explanation by tobacconists in the past as to the distinction between a "blend" and a "mixture", but I doubt that it's in any way authoritative. The difference, allegedly, is that a blend is a combination of like- or similar-types of leaf, whereas a mixture combines different types. That is, combinations of old belt and middle belt virginias would be referred to as "blends", whereas combinations of virginias, turkish, latakia, and perique tobaccos would be referred to as "mixtures".

I think this is a worthwhile distinction. A "blend" attempts to achieve the best qualities of a given type of tobacco, whereas a "mixture" attempts to create a new entity that's greater than the sum of its parts. - Mark Shelor, 2000-06-01

[A] blend is the putting together of any more than one tobacco, not necessarily for smoking the resulting product as it is. [A] mixture is once the above "blend" the final product. That is, a "mixture" is a way of presenting and producing a blend. Hence, EMP and Cairo are originally blends, but to us smokers, they are mixtures, since the latter refer to how it is sold. If the "blend" is processed in a different way, such as pressing, then the end product WAS a blend at the factory and then it became flakes, twist, plug, etc. - Tarek Manadily, 2000-06-02

Blend: the term generally implies a mixture (combination) of different *types* of tobacco (eg: burley, Virginia, or oriental) rather than merely of the varieties within one type.

Mixture: Name given to coarse-cut shredded tobacco blends used in pipe smoking. To be distinguished from plug and bar tobaccos, and shag and flake. - Robert Crim, 2000-06-02

Somewhere in the dark recesses of my mind is the notion that it depends on the nature of the tobaccos at the time they are brought together. If each of the tobaccos is smokable in its own right, put them together and you get a mixture. If the tobaccos in theory could be smoked "as is" but in practice almost no one would do so, put them together (and age, to allow them to marry up) and you get a blend. - James Beard, 2000-06-02

A blend is made by selecting various tobaccos and marrying them together by whatever method (pressing, barrel fermentation, whatever) and then slicing / shredding / cutting / rubbing out, to the final consistency. That means that all the components are made as a single batch together and are cut to the same consistency at sale ie, flake, shag, ribbon, whatever.

A mixture is different. It is where different tobaccos or different blends are mixed together, sometimes AFTER final cutting. - Norman Lever, 2000-06-03

I can't recall anything in the pressed, coin, rope, or flake varieties being referred to as a mixture. - Greg Sprinkle, 2000-06-01

FLAKES

What kinds of tobaccos typically come in flake form?

How should I approach flake tobacco?

What does "rubbing out" mean?

Why would I want to rub flakes out?

Contrariwise, why would I keep the flakes intact?

Is rubbing out all-or-nothing?

If I don't rub, how do I pack flakes into my pipe?

Do environmental factors affect whether I should rub out or not?

Are some tobaccos made to be smoked unrubbed?

Does one rub out ropes and plugs as well?

1 ~ What kinds of tobaccos typically come in flake form?

Traditionally virginias were straight virginia tobaccos, though that has been changing. The addition of perique is a noteworthy complement, adding a distinctive aroma and flavor, while also serving to intensify the richness and intensity of the flavor. Perique also serves to cut bite. Escudo and Three Nuns pioneered the addition of perique into popularity.

The addition of burley to virginias is relatively recent and has become common in the old rope, twist and bar tobaccos, supplanting the heavier-grade, bottom-of-the plant virginias to provide the requisite nicotine kick. It also is used in the lighter Northern European tobacco blends. Also recent is the pressing of traditional English mixtures into form, pioneered by Bengal Slices, and continued by McClelland and Esoterica. So today a tobacco can contain almost any kind of tobacco.

Also worth mentioning is the persnickitiness of Virginias regarding the pipes it is smoked in. Since this tobacco evolved in England in symbiosis with English pipes, it is of great benefit to try it in UK/ Irish pipes. Most long-term virginia smokers will attest to the almost magical synergy of virginia tobaccos to certain brands of pipe. - Paul Szabady, 1999-11-14

2 ~ How should I approach flake tobacco?

Listen, friend, to ASP emiritus Paul Szabady, for he is wise.

If your palate has become accustomed to the flavor intensity of English mixtures, sampling va/perique flakes first might make for a smoother taste transition. Yes, Escudo, but also McClelland's 2015, St. James Woods and Ashton Black Parrot would be the obvious choices. Adding perique and integrating it seamlessly into the blend (a rare art!) produces a more intense flavor and aroma while also upping the nicotine content a bit. It can also cut the sting of bright virginia. Though never getting as potent in flavor as a turkish or latakia, va/periques have a unique taste and aroma that is every bit as satisfactory.

If you dive straight into the pure virginia flakes, make sure you take the time for your palate and your pipe to re-adjust: the carryover of turkish/latakia in a pipe will mask and distort the subtler flavors of virginias and lead to fatally erroneous conclusions. - Paul Szabady, 1999-11-24

Most Virginia and Virginia/Perique flakes hover around the medium range of body and nicotine content (perique blends being the heaviest): because of this they can usually be smoked all-day long without dulling the palate or exhausting the smoker. The distinct advantage they have over other tobaccos is that they improve as the bowl progresses, reach and hold a peak all the way through the second-half of the bowl all the way into the dottle. Many VA smokers find the last 1/4 of the bowl the best: a rare occurrence for aromatic, burley and turkish smokers. The tobacco also has the benefit of being easily re-lit without turning harsh, sour and nasty. So it can be smoked for a while, set aside, and then re-lit with no loss of taste and pleasure. In fact it improves. - Paul Szabady, 1999-06-28

Mastering the smoking of virginia flakes demands developing smoking skills that almost verge on an art: well worth the effort, as with increasing mastery, another level of virginias' secrets are revealed. Virginias have a very narrow range of moisture content and smoking temperature in which they reveal their complete glories. Too moist and the pipe smokes wet, the flavor disappears: too dry and the smoke stings, bites and burns. Optimum is just to the dry side: a delicate balance to achieve. Most flakes are packed wet and need some airing to reach ideal smoking moisture. A couple of hours exposed to the ambient air, assuming non-tropical humidity levels, should get you into the ballpark. But determining the absolute "just right" moisture level is part of the learning curve and will vary with each flake. Obviously the thicker the flake, the longer the time needed to reach the ideal moisture level.

Bright, golden, lemon and yellow virginias offer most the subtle and delicate virginia flavors, but cut into a ribbon (or an even finer cigarette cut) will challenge even the most glacial and seasoned smoker. Processing them into flakes allows a slower, cooler burn, and also serves to mellow the sharpness through aging, and through marriage with the other virginias in the blend. Most flakes are composed of a variety of different virginias, including varying grades of the brights, red, stoved, and other leaves from lower down on the plant. In general the darker the color, the less sting and temperament, but also the less exotic and complicated the taste variations. McClellands with the most brights are #22 and #2010. The most stoved and cutter leaf is in #2035 and Dark Star. The darker the flake the drier it can be smoked without sting.

Pipes must be clean, dedicated to virginias (to keep carryover from obscuring the subtleties,) and well-broken in, with a cake covering the inside all the way down to the bottom of the bowl.

The cooler the smoke, the more heady and richer the flavor: hence thick flake to allow a very slow burn and a very very slow smoking technique - hardly even puffing, almost at the level of shallow breathing when one is at rest. Lights and relights should not involve big puffs, only enough to draw the flame: 2-3 puffs maximum. Puff lightly and let the burn spread on top of the tobacco, occasionally adding more lights until the top of the tobacco is smouldering and then just smoke as slowly as possible down the bowl. Dump most of ash about 2/3 of the way down the bowl, but leave a slight gray ash cover. Make sure to smoke all the way down the bowl: the last half-inch or so is the climax of the symphony. Pack 1/2 bowls or use a smaller pipe bowl to make sure you get the orgasm. - Paul Szabady, 2002-06-20

3 ~ What does "rubbing out" mean?

Mike Jacobs defines the term:

To separate the tobacco a bit. You can rub it out a bit between your thumb & forefingers to break it up a bit and it will burn a little easier. Flake and square cut styles of tobacco are meant to be rubbed out. They come in sheets that you can't smoke without breaking them up. - Mike Jacobs, 1999-08-28

4 ~ Why would I want to rub flakes out?

I'm one who almost always rubs out flakes. I find they burn smoother and more completely and provide for a much easier smoke than when whole. I find the pipes much easier to puff as well. I haven't found all that much difference in flavor in either method. - Tim Parker, 2003-08-05

If [you are new to flakes], then I would recommend you rubbed them out as well as you can, and gradually rubbed them out coarser, till you get to pack them whole. That is if you want to have the full experience. If you start the other way around, you might give up halfway. Packing whole flakes, as Jeff pointed out, is usually difficult and the tobacco is not that easy to light and keep lit. - Tarek Manadily, 2000-06-01

As a mostly-VA smoker, I guess I have gotten in the habit of slow smoking. My experience with the McClelland VA flakes, however, is that they provide much more flavor if well rubbed.

Lightly-rubbed Dark Star was an early favorite, but I didn't see why everyone raved about it. One night, before meeting some cigar-smoking friends, I decided to rub some out fully to avoid frequent re-lights. Because I am a lazy SOB when it comes to rubbing, I popped the Dark Star (well dried, also very important for best flavor) into the coffee grinder for a quick spin. Well, not quick enough, 'cause 25% was just larger than dust particles, the rest quite fine. Cursing, I loaded

the bottom with 1/4" flakes (cut with knife), then poured in the puree. WOW! Best damn bowl I had ever had. Since then, I am a full-rubbed fan (though not quite to that extent). - inquisitor, 2000-10-25

And some people say it doesn't matter!

To me it's all about actual smoking technique and not so much about preparation method. All other things being equal (how wet or dry a given flake may be, whether I rub it out, fold it up, or make "flake balls" what direction the wind is blowing, whether I've left the flake out 1/2 an hour, day, week, year?) the way I SMOKE the tobacco makes all the difference. I'm content to re-light a tobacco, and tamp frequently (if that's what it takes to smoke it with pleasure). I'm content to light it several times (if that's what it takes to get it burning). I would rather under puff it and have it go out, than to suffer the wrath of high sugar content tongue-bite or spoil the subtle flavor of fine Virginia. As a converted Latakia Heavyweight smoker, I too at first wanted "more flavor" from VA blends and puffed impatiently. Little did I know until I'd smoked Virginias for awhile that they indeed have flavor, sometimes much MORE flavor than big bold latakia monsters, it's just that my technique and what I was smoking had my pallet too fried to taste it.

If the sides of your bowl are getting warmer than "comfortable" you are smoking too fast, slow your rate down, cut it in half, and then slow it down some more. If your pipe gurgles (and doesn't when smoking other blends) you are smoking too fast, slow your rate down, cut it in half, and then slow it down some more. If the sweetness of Virginias starts turning bitter or harsh you are smoking too fast, slow your rate down, cut it in half, and then slow it down some more.

Learning to enjoy Virginia mixtures and flakes has made me a "better" pipe smoker. My technique is more refined, my attention to detail is more pronounced, my pipes smoke cleaner, drier and don't foul as quickly. The added benefit is that now I have nearly tripled my rotation of fine tobaccos. - kilted1, 2005-06-14

5 ~ Contrariwise, why would I keep the flakes intact?

I find that the charm of flakes is that they are, well, flakes! I never rub them out. If I am in a rush, I will fold it up, but if I have time, I cut the flake into a size that is the diameter of the bowl I will be using, and stack them like pancakes. - Sonam Dosara, 2003-08-06

After almost a year of experimentation I won't rub flakes out anymore. I do, however, have to pack carefully and gently "breath smoke" to get the best experience; it's gentle work.

One reason I don't rub the flake out is because I want lots of air down there. It's too easy for flake tobacco to get soggy even with very dry tobacco, and then without realizing it I begin drawing harder to keep the temperature at optimum levels (raw mouth results). So, I often rearrange the "sticks" in the bowl, and I try to smoke very, very gently. One day I'm going to be able to smoke flake tobacco in a stack - a tall bowl - all the way down to the bottom - I can't quite do that yet.

With conventional bowl-shapes, however, unlike non-Virginias, the flavor gets better and better as I burn farther into the bowl. This is why I can't get excited over burleys or latakia blends; a

"bad" Virginia smoke is painful and frustrating, but a "good" Virginia smoking session is a religious experience far exceeding the pleasure provided by other blends. - Mike Jacobs, 2000-06-04

I used to rub out flakes until they were like a RYO shag, and then wondered why every flake smoked so damn hot, while Three Nuns always smoked cool and sweet. Just a lapse of reason, but one that lasted, what, 15 years?

As a result of this, I had avoided flakes over most of my smoking life. I'd smoke an occasional bowl of some well regarded flake, and think, "it would sure taste great if it didn't BBQ the surface of my tongue!" It was only after reading all the praise for flakes on this group that I, once again, decided to brave them in earnest, and really give some time and thought to the process. For some reason, this time, I filled a bowl a la the Nuns, that is, the flakes barely broken, and was amazed by the experience. It wasn't a perfect bowl, and many re-lights were required, but the flavour was wonderful, and so I began to experiment with different techniques, but was reasonably convinced that I'd never rub out a flake again.

Now, when I smoke flakes, I get a lot of flavour, no bite at all, and it burns wonderfully. I must admit that the lighting takes some time, some care, but once the ember is established, I can puff slowly infrequently, and it stays lit perfectly. Finally, I can really enjoy some of these wonderful tobaccos. - GL Pease, 2000-06-06

6 ~ Is rubbing out all-or-nothing?

One major advantage of flake tobaccos is you can rub them out to the degree that *you* find best suited to your tobaccos, your pipes, and your preferences in taste. The flip side is, you may have to experiment a bit to find what works best *for you*. - Jim Beard, 1999-12-29

It's a question of trial and error: sometimes the flake has been compressed so tightly that the individual tobaccos seem to have merged into one and then there is no option but to rub it out a bit. A smaller pipe and a bundle of flake inserted so that its 'grain' is vertical to the pipe bowl and the burn will sometimes work with recalcitrant individual types of flake, but some flakes are so dense they just won't burn unless rubbed a bit. One can always resort to scissors and cut the flake into little squares and then pack them either like pancakes or on edge. It's worth experimenting a bit with individual brands of flakes to try to smoke it in its least rubbed-out state: the flavor difference is often marked. If the difference is not subjectively significant, one can eliminate some of this additional hassle and rub the tobacco out fully. But in general the rule of thumb is to rub a flake out just enough to allow a burn. - Paul Szabady, 1999-08-29

The amount you rub a flake will determine both how quickly it burns, and also the density of the fill of the pipe. It's possible to get greater flavour out of either method, depending on your smoking style, the size of the bowl you prefer, your packing style. I've tried a great many methods of smoking flakes, and have advocated each of them as the best way to do it at one time

or other. (There's that multiple personality thing coming through again...) Like so many things in pipe smoking, there is no single right answer.

The easiest way to smoke flake is to rub it out fine, since the tobacco fills and smokes evenly and consistently, and you can keep your gentle puffing without much trouble, enhancing the overall smoke.

Making little cigars can work brilliantly, but it takes a lot of practice to get the method exactly right. When the tobacco begins to burn, it will expand, so if the little cigar is too tight in the bowl to begin with, it will quite quickly transmogrify into a little tobacco brick through which you'll get nothing, apart from a possible hernia trying to smoke the stuff. If you DO get it right, it'll burn nicely, and provide a wonderful smoking experience. For me, the risks aren't worth it. I've thrown away too many bowls of really nice flakes trying to get this just right.

In the middle is a more rough rubbed approach. This, too, can provide a great smoke, if you get everything just right, but, again, as the tobacco smolders and expands, it can make it harder to get the bottom third of the bowl to smoke well.

The Three Nuns coin-stacking method has usually worked well for me in fairly wide bowls, and dismally poorly in narrow ones.

Too, climate can play a role. In damper weather, I'll tend to rub more and pack more loosely than when it's arid.

Give yourself some time to spend with a variety of methods, and find the ones that work best for you in different pipes. Here's a favorite of mine:

Rub out the flake fairly fine, leaving it in a little mound in one hand. Invert the bowl of the pipe over the mound, and make little circles with the pipe. The tobacco will sort of "screw in" to the bowl, providing a very nice pack, slightly tighter at the top, looser at the bottom. This method has nearly always worked well for me, though there have been occasions when the results were dismal. It's the smoker, in those cases, not the technique that failed... - GL Pease, 2004-01-12

7 ~ If I don't rub, how do I pack flakes into my pipe?

Packing: flake allows rubbing out to the desired consistency, but rubbing out to the consistency of a mixture negates most of flake's wonders, so leaving it unrubbed or very slightly rubbed works best. 2 techniques that can help get it just right. One: cut the flakes into little squares with a pair of scissors just short of the size of the inner bowl, so that you can build up the pack like a layer cake or stack of pancakes. To make this even easier, rub out 2 of these squares fairly well: one gets placed at the absolute bottom to help form the dottle, the other on the top to make lighting easier. Two: rub each piece of flake between your palms lightly and roll it into a loose ball just smaller than the bowl diameter. Pack each of these marbles into the bowl, layering up as you go and pressing and expanding each marble to get a firm draw. - Paul Szabady, 2002-06-20

Besides rubbing out the flake you can also roll the flake into a sausage like shape and pack that into the pipe. Though the charge will be more difficult to light and stay lit, once lit it tends to offer a "cooler" smoke in the opinion of some. Some flakes can be rolled both with the grain and against the grain. Others will offer you no choice as they will tend to break up if rolled the wrong way. Experimentation is in order and what suits you is purely personal. - Jeff Schwartz, 2000-06-01

Another way I prepare flakes (only occasionally and depending on my mood) is by using a pair of scissors to cut each flake into little squares. This would provide a slower burning smoke, and is beautiful to feel between the fingers and look at. I go through it mainly to enjoy looking at the tobacco and fondling it! If you try this approach, you will probably realize there is nothing more to it than that. - Tarek Manadily, 2000-06-01

I have recently rediscovered the joy of cutting the flakes to the appropriate height for the bowl, rolling a cylinder that fits the bowl comfortably, and lightly pressing it in. The result is almost like a cigar, and once lit, the cylinder expands slightly, and smokes very easily, staying lit quite well between long pauses.

In general, I don't like to rub out flakes too much, as it seems to me to work slightly against the purpose of smoking a flake. I really like the slow burning and intensity of flavor I experience when it's either rolled or just broken-up enough to get a consistent density in the bowl, with just enough air to keep it smouldering. - GL Pease, 2000-06-02

At one time, I was pretty dedicated to the notion that the best way to smoke flakes was to roll little cigars for the pipe. I dropped that method as being entirely too complicated - if the "cigar" is a little too fat, once it swells, it becomes impossible to draw; too skinny, the burn is unpredictable. As a result, I started rubbing out flakes to varying textures, and finding amazing differences in the resulting smokes. - GL Pease, 2002-07-12

Recently discussed on ASP is the "ball method"...

When I smoke flakes I always leave them unrubbed. I ball up sections of flake and drop them in the bowl one after the other and top with loose. This method really works well, it works so well that I won't even consider changing. Unrubbed flakes simply have more flavor, burn slower and cooler. - buck, 2004-11-19

What I was doing was perfectly satisfactory but what I am doing now is even better. My way of smoking flakes is to keep them as intact as possible maximizing flavor and burn time. I ball up a flake or section of flake and drop it into the bowl. I want the ball of flake to be small enough to go close to the bottom of the bowl without any pushing required, so as not to bust the flake up. I repeat this until the bowl is filled. Some bowls need three balls of flake some need two, etc. Because unrubbed flake is already pretty dense, to begin with, a small push is all that is needed to adjust the draw. Now, it might be hard to light. A small amount of tinder on top helps a lot.

The second method might be a little iffy without some practice and judgement. This method results in a smoke similar to the "Frank" method, if it is executed properly. With the second

method I only use one larger ball of flake. The one larger ball of unrubbed flake can be manipulated in several ways. My preferred method is to orient the grains of the flake to optimise the burn. Place sections of flake or whole flake down on a surface, orient the flakes, radially, 90 degrees to one another, ball the entire thing up and push the ball into the bowl. Yes, there is no tobacco in the bottom of the bowl as in the Frank method, there is none necessary. This is a kind of plug. You will find with practise how large of a plug you want. It will work with a plug just large enough to stay in the upper part of the bowl to one that is quite tight. What you want is that happy medium. I swear this works great. It smokes up every piece of flake and seldom needs any tamping or lighting. Oh, it also works with ribbon cuts, too. I smoked a bowl of dried out Bohemian Scandal using this method and found that the flavors were actually enhanced. - buck, 2005-01-11

OK, this is easier to show than to describe. Here is what I do. Most flakes are rectangular. I smoke small to medium pipes (group 4 or so) so I take a single flake and fold it in half in the middle of the long edge. You will still have a rectangle, but it will be closer to a square now. I then roll the flake into a cylinder with the folded edge being one of the outside edges (ends) of the cylinder. I then cram the cylinder into the bowl, with the folded end down. A little twisting and pushing on the top to flatten it out and evenly distribute the tobacco in the bowl and you are ready to light.

I like to smoke flakes this way. The only problem is that they can sometimes be hard to light. Once you get them going, the flavor seems to be much better than rubbing them out. - Charles Perry, 2003-08-06

I've always had a preference for taking a few of the flakes, rubbing them between my palms until a ball of a certain, loose consistency that has worked out for me in the past, with adjustments allowed for if I'm smoking it in still air at home or howling winds out on the water.

Is there a best way to prepare a flake? I could be talked into believing that. What is it? Well, that depends on what you want out of it. There's a world of different ways you can prepare and cook an onion. It can turn out sharp, it can overwhelm you with sweetness, it can even be made sour or bitter... It's the same onion, but... it's the way that you use it that makes the difference. What you like the best is the way you probably ought to do it most. But it's fun to play with other techniques now and then see how your evolving palate responds to the new things, or old things revisited.

Is there a definitively wrong way to prepare a flake? Shy of running it through a coffee grinder until it is ground into dust...if you enjoy it, it's a good smoke for you. That's a good thing, a thing that can only be enhanced by a good fire in the hearth in cold weather, a good fish at the end of your line in moderate weather and good air-conditioning and an engaging book when it's gawdawful hot. - Doc Elder, 2005-03-17

8 ~ Do environmental factors affect whether I should rub out or not?

Even if you're a rubber-out, situational awareness is important...

If I'm going to be smoking outside in the breeze I never rub out. Basically though, the lighter the blend (more yellow VA) the less I rub no matter where I'm smoking. - Colonel Panic, 2000-10-23

Since I do a lot of my smoking outdoors flakes are largely smoked either whole and rolled into a log which get stuffed into the bowl or very coarsely broken with some finer rubbed out tobacco on the top. These methods to some extent tend to cut down on fly-away ash due to the wind and provide for a slower, cooler smoke. - Jeff Schwartz, 2002-07-10

If you are going out and it is windy, it is better not to rub at all or as lightly as possible, whereas for indoors smoking you can rub the flakes as much as you like. I have found it good to rub the topmost layer fine in order to easier lighting even if you'd use the "sausage method". - Antti Kalliokoski, 2000-06-01

9 ~ Are some tobaccos made to be smoked unrubbed?

Many flake and spun cut tobaccos are designed to be smoked unrubbed: 3 Nuns, Escudo and Lane's Golden Cavendish Slices come to mind. One has the option to rub them out, but any flake will produce its maximum of flavor and aroma when rubbed out as little as possible. - Paul Szabady, 1999-08-29

Interestingly, I've never rubbed out Three Nuns, preferring to follow the instructions on the insert which fairly admonish the smoker to stack the disks, and only "tease" the top ones to provide for easy lighting. - GL Pease, 2000-06-06

A & C Petersen's web-site shows an Escudo 'coin' folded up like a crepe and inserted into the pipe whole, and Three Nuns used to include a little flyer that recommended stacking their smaller coins like a layer cake, lightly 'teasing' the top coin to accept the flame. The 3N technique works fine, but I've had little success with whole-coin Escudo loading. - Paul Szabady, 1999-08-29

10 ~ Does one rub out ropes and plugs as well?

Most of the UK plugs and bars are so dense, it's difficult enough to cut them with a knife, much less light them. Inserting them whole is out of the question. I usually cut off a slice with a very sharp knife, cut that slice into tiny cubes or squares and then rub it out as much as possible. Even then it's somewhat hard to ignite. - Paul Szabady, 1999-08-30

Plugs require a sturdy, thick blade knife with a very sharp edge. Use the knife to cut across the grain to produce slices, AKA flakes, to your desired thickness. I prefer them thinner than an 1/8

of an inch. Once you have them cut you place the flakes between your palms and rub them out. This will provide you with a very smokable consistency. For ropes I use an exacto razor. I cut the rope into thin curlicues (coins about the same thickness as Escudo) that I either smoke as is or rub out to a finer consistency. - Jeff Schwartz, 2000-05-24

I slice ropes up into thin coins with a single edge razor blade. I then rub the coins out. I like to let the tobacco dry a bit before I pack and smoke it. Plugs I do in similar fashion, but the harder plugs take a lot more elbow grease to cut and rub out. - brians, 2000-05-24

I cut a 1-inch hunk of rope off with a cigar cutter, then chop it up with a coffee grinder. The chopping must be brief, though, or else I have to use the results as insecticide dust.

I also find that drying the rubbed-out tobacco is a must. I still don't understand quite what makes a dense, bone-dry rope turn sopping wet once it's cut up. - Ben, 2000-05-27

Definitely agree here. While cutting along the grain seems to make logical sense in terms of sheer effort expended, what you'll get is a sheet that may or may not rub out depending on how dry the plug is. Gotta cut across it, which means you need something really sharp.

Personally, although it's hard to do and sometimes a pain, I **like** cutting the plug by hand. It's part of the ritual for me. However, at one time when I was not feeling like doing the cutting for an awfully long time, I found that the "slices" blade of one of those grater things worked pretty well. I'm sure you could find one with a nice sharp blade (ginsu would be cheap and low maintenance) and an adjustable thickness that would do the job on most plugs. Some of them are pretty darn hard though, so you might still end up needing to use a strong, sharp knife (pocket knives are not a good idea as they often can't handle the pressure, and the blade just snaps off).

I've had good results from a little device I whipped up with an old cutting board: I cut a small trough across the middle, and used it as a runner for a pair of blocks that can then be moved out or in to match the size of the plug, push the plug so just as much as you want to slice off is sticking out, and then use the blocks as a guide for your knife. Recently I've been using a garden knife I bought at a used thingy shop, whatever those places are called in English (it eludes me for the moment) but I used to use a cleaver - strong, holds a good edge, and works well as a guillotine when the blade is pressed up against the guide blocks.

A deli slicer would probably be more convenient and certainly much easier, but you might not want to fork out for one, and it could take a while to find one at a price you're willing to pay. - Kevyn, 2001-04-25

TOBACCO TOUCHSTONES [STYLES OF PIPE TOBACCO]

Grouped by Style:

Straight Virginias
Virginia Flakes, Light
Virginia Flakes, Full
Virginia/Perique Blends[VaPer or Va/Per]
Virginia/Burley Blends
English Blends
Balkan Blends
Oriental Blends
Burley Blends
Traditional American
Lakeland Style, Unscented
Lakeland Style, Scented
Ropes and Plugs
Flavored

About this List

The following is a list of what I am calling "tobacco touchstones" - blends that meet some combination of the following criteria:

- the blend may be one of the gold standards, or benchmarks, of its style
- the blend might be of exceedingly high quality, as apparent in the leaf itself, or by the craftsmanship of the blender
- the blend may be an exceedingly unique example for its style
- the blend could have a considerable reputation among connoisseurs of the style
- the blend might be highly recommended for its accessibility to smokers exploring the style

Note that it's very hard for a tobacco to meet all these criteria, especially both "unique" and "definitive". And so, some amount of subjective evaluation is required. In some cases, a tobacco will make it onto the list on the strength of how well they do in one category, but in general, a blend needs to be strong in several categories to make it onto the list.

A great many excellent blends available today exist outside this list, and a world-class blend's absence is no indictment. Please don't be upset if your personal favorite isn't on the list! Consider how it matches the criteria above before sending me hate mail. :-)

The idea behind this list is to give the intermediate pipe smoker a specific and convenient list of blends to try, in order to broaden one's tastes and establish greater common ground with one's fellow pipesmokers.

Notes:

- The numbers in parentheses are mentions in Tobacco Reviews postings, as an attempt to scope how commonly a blend is used as a comparison. These numbers were generated by Googling with the following types of query: BLENDNAME -"browse by rating" - "reviewer detail" -"update blend" -"blend index" -"brand detail" site:tobaccoreviews.com ...This is a bit of an experiment!
- Blends presented in italics are not currently being produced, as far as I know.

Straight Virginias

The straight, non-flake, virginia is an ancient and beloved category of tobacco, and it is fitting to begin our list of touchstones with them.

- (132) Bulk No. 5100 Red Cake by McClelland
- (129) Old Belt Ready Rubbed by W.O. Larsen
- (155) Old Gowrie by Charles Rattray
- (25) Red Ribbon by McCranie
- (50) Virginia No. 1 by Mac Baren

Virginia Flakes, Light

In compiling this list, it became clear that a single list for all flakes would swell beyond a manageable size. Here are those of a light-to-medium character.

- (61) Bulk No. 2010 Classic Virginia by McClelland
- (36) Capstan Medium Navy Cut by Imperial
- (41) Cut Virginia Plug by Fribourg & Treyer
- (71) Hamborger Veermaster by Dan Tobacco
- (107) *Light Flake by Dunhill (Murray's)* (Changed blending houses to Orlikin 2005; new recipe suspect)
- (15) No. 109 Medium Flake by Astley's
- (13) Virginia No. 24 by McClelland

Virginia Flakes, Full

...And here are those Virginia flakes of medium-to-full flavor.

- (77) Best Brown Flake by Samuel Gawith
- (93) Blackwoods Flake by McClelland
- (162) Dark Star by McClelland
- (233) Full Virginia Flake by Samuel Gawith
- (106) Hal O' the Wynd by Charles Rattray
- (228) Marlin Flake by Charles Rattray
- (30) Red Flake by McCranie
- (53) Scottish Flake by Robert McConnell

Virginia/Perique Blends

Perhaps no group of tobaccos has more zealous adherents than the famed Virginia/Perique mixtures. Don your robes, chant the oaths, and join the cult of Vapers...

- (102) 633 by Solani
- (35) Bayou Morning by Cornell & Diehl
- (166) Bulk No. 2015 Virginia Flake by McClelland
- (101) *Elizabethan Mixture by Dunhill (Murray's)* (Changed blending houses to Orlik in 2005; new recipe suspect)
- (222) Escudo by A&C Petersen
- (193) Haddo's Delight by GL Pease
- (42) Luxury Navy Flake by Peter Stokkebye
- (64) St. James Woods by McClelland
- (190) *Three Nuns (original) by Bell's* (Unavailable for many years, but legendary!)

Virginia/Burley Blends

It became clear that a single group for Burley would not contain that beloved tobacco's various manifestations. This group pertains to blends in which both burley and virginia tobaccos share center stage.

- (111) Brown Flake by Gawith, Hoggarth, & Co.
- (86) Cumberland by GL Pease
- (83) Long Golden Flake by Reiner
- (115) Golden Sliced by Orlik Tobacco
- (69) University Flake by Peterson

English Blends

The hallmark English tobaccos are the ultimate in civilized tradition. And they're stunningly popular. Look at these numbers!

- (61) Commonwealth Mixture by Samuel Gawith
- (129) Frog Morton on the Town by McClelland
- (182) *London Mixture by Dunhill (Murray's)* (Changed blending houses to Orlik in 2005; new recipe suspect)
- (120) Margate by Esoterica Tobacciana
- (423) *My Mixture 965 by Dunhill (Murray's)* (Changed blending houses to Orlik in 2005; new recipe suspect)
- (333) *Nightcap by Dunhill (Murray's)* (Changed blending houses to Orlik in 2005; new recipe suspect)
- (248) Penzance by Esoterica Tobacciana
- (196) *Renaissance by GL Pease* (Unavailable since late 2004)
- (64) *Standard Mixture Medium by Dunhill* (Changed blending houses to Orlik in 2005; new recipe suspect)

Balkan Blends

When Latakia and Oriental share center stage, we are in geography of the Balkans.

- (307) 759 by *Balkan Sobranie* (Unavailable for many years, but legendary!)
- (40) Abingdon by GL Pease
- (14) Balkan Sasieni by Sasieni
- (62) Blackpoint by GL Pease
- (41) *Bohemian Scandal* by GL Pease (Unavailable since late 2004)
- (109) Caravan by GL Pease
- (79) Charing Cross by GL Pease
- (111) Odyssey by GL Pease

Oriental Blends

The spice and fragrance of Oriental tobaccos have the spotlight in these blends. With a few notable exceptions, this isn't a very popular grouping at this moment in history.

- (28) Bulk No. 2045 Oriental Mixture by McClelland
- (103) Cairo by GL Pease
- (25) Campanile by James Fox
- (134) *Durbar* by *Dunhill (Murray's)* (Changed blending houses to Orlik in 2005; new recipe suspect)
- (299) *Early Morning Pipe* by *Dunhill (Murray's)* (Changed blending houses to Orlik in 2005; new recipe suspect)
- (9) Oriental by Robert McConnell
- (13) Oriental No. 14 by McClelland
- (9) Oriental No. 40 by Peretti
- (221) Squadron Leader by Samuel Gawith

Burley Blends

These modern tobaccos tend to be more creative and sophisticated in their handling of the tobacco than typically seen in years' past.

- (150) Barbary Coast by GL Pease
- (50) Burley London Blend by Mac Baren
- (28) Haunted Bookshop by Cornell & Diehl
- (73) Morley's Best by Cornell & Diehl
- (124) Navy Flake by Mac Baren
- (29) Old Joe Krantz by Cornell & Diehl

Traditional American

This is that style of blend which had its heyday in the United States decades ago, smoked by the fathers and grandfathers of today's American smokers. Generally, these tobaccos are straightforward, sweet, and nutty.

- (44) Barking Dog by House of Windsor
- (41) Bourbon Street by House of Windsor
- (61) Carter Hall by John Middleton
- (100) *Edgeworth Slices by Edgeworth* (Unavailable since late 2005)
- (66) Half & Half by Pinkerton Tobacco
- (62) Nut Brown Burley by Pipeworks & Wilke
- (151) Prince Albert by John Middleton
- (90) Revelation by House of Windsor

Lakeland Style, Unscented

Blends produced in the Lakeland district of England which tend to share a certain flavor profile.

- (77) Best Brown Flake by Samuel Gawith
- (34) Broken Scotch Cake by Gawith, Hoggarth, & Co.
- (33) Dark Birdseye by Gawith, Hoggarth, & Co.

Lakeland Style, Scented

The unique flavoring style used by tobacco makers in this region sets this group apart from both the unflavored Lakelands and the general "flavored" group, below.

- (63) Bob's Chocolate Flake by Gawith, Hoggarth, & Co.
- (54) Ennerdale Flake by Gawith, Hoggarth, & Co.
- (60) Rum Flake by Gawith, Hoggarth, & Co.

Ropes and Plugs

"Block" tobaccos -- in rope or plug form -- are a class unto themselves. They are colloquially referred to as "nicotine bombs", for reasons which are obvious to anyone who has tried the stronger examples of this group of tobaccos.

- (23) Black Irish Twist by Gawith, Hoggarth, & Co.
- (12) Black XX Rope by Samuel Gawith
- (6) Black XXX Rope by Samuel Gawith
- (46) Brown Rope No. 4 by Samuel Gawith
- (19) Coniston Cut Plug by Gawith, Hoggarth, & Co.
- (15) Kendal Plug by Samuel Gawith
- (7) Sweet Rum Twist by Gawith, Hoggarth, & Co.

Flavored Tobaccos

These are tobaccos which have more than a slight topping, ranging from the tastefully flavored to outright saucy.

- (88) 1-Q by Lane Limited
- (155) 1792 Flake by Samuel Gawith
- (30) Autumn Evening by Cornell & Diehl
- (138) Blue Note by Dan Tobacco
- (33) Cross-Eyed Cricket by Cornell & Diehl
- (30) Dark Twist by Mac Baren
- (50) Erinmore Flake by Murray Sons & Co.
- (225) Frog Morton by McClelland
- (41) *Royal Yacht* by *Dunhill (Murray's)* (Changed blending houses to Orlikin 2005; new recipe suspect)
- (41) St. Bruno Flake by Imperial
- (55) Sweet Vanilla Honeydew by Dan Tobacco

A PIPE TOBACCO GLOSSARY

aging - Biological processes which occur only in properly sealed air-tight containers containing natural tobaccos. Mr. Pease notes that such containers are "little ecosystems" in their processes and complexity.

airing out - The technique of exposing a quantity of tobacco to open air in order to decrease the amount of moisture in the leaf. Many people believe that this process results in a loss of crucial flavor-bearing molecules ("anything you can smell is flavor not contributing to the smoke"), but some people maintain that airing out tobacco produces desirable flavor changes. Controversial.

ASP - The Usenet newsgroup alt.smokers.pipes.

Balkan Sobranie - The long-lost blend which has attained a status as one of the legendary pipe tobaccos, prior to the change of its recipe. If you listen to ASP for any length of time, you will come upon threads where people who smoked the original Sobranie shall be enticed to hold forth on its unique majesty, now all but lost to the ages.

B&M - Brick and Mortar, indicating a physical tobacco shop.

bail-top jar - A glass jar with a glass lid attached with a wire hinge. Such jars often have rubber gaskets. There is some concern that the rubber will impart a flavor over time, or at any rate that it will decay and destroy the air-tight seal. Sometimes called "French hermetic jars".

blend - A tobacco product whose constituents come from more than one source (and type) of leaf. For example, an all-Virginia product whose constituents include red Virginias sourced from two farms is still a blend. The term generally refers to ingredients, not the final form.

bulk - Tobacco stored in loose bins, and sold by weight. Transferring the tobacco into a container for purposes of preservation or aging becomes a primary concern for the buyer.

C&D - Refers to [Cornell and Diehl Tobacco, Inc.](http://www.cornellanddiehl.com)

cellar - A perhaps grandiose term referring to a place where tobacco containers are stored while aging and awaiting use. Cellars should not experience high temperature variation, if at all possible. And cellars with tins should absolutely not experience high levels of humidity, lest plagues of rust be visited upon it.

dottle - Residual, unburned tobacco left at the bottom of a pipe.

GH - Refers to Gawith, Hoggarth, and Company.

GLP - Refers to American blender Gregory L. Pease, a long-time ASP contributor, or his company [GL Pease Tobaccos, International](http://www.glpease.com).

long-term storage - The storage of tobacco for more than a couple years -- up through many decades.

Mason jar - Once a brand name, the term is often synonymous with canning jars: a glass jar, and a two-piece lid consisting of a wax-treated lid and screw-top ring. A very inexpensive and popular method of storage for tobacco bought in bulk.

medium-term storage - The storage of tobacco a few years.

melding - The natural homogenization of tobacco over time, which causes a blend of many flavors to meld together and mellow. Requires sufficient time that a moisture-tight container is required to maintain proper humidity and keep the aromatic (airborn, flavor-bearing) molecules contained.

mellowing - What happens to a tobacco leaf's youthful character of time. In particular, Latakia leaf's unique flavors are said to mellow over time.

mixture - A somewhat ambiguous term which seems to refer to both a tobacco product's ingredients and its final form. Like a blend, a mixture is made from at least two distinguishable types of leaf. But a mixture is also typically of a loose presentation, and not pressed.

preservation - A tobacco is said to be well-preserved if it has retained enough moisture to still be suitable for smoking without any re-hydration techniques being required.

properly sealed container - A container used to storing tobacco is considered a "properly sealed container" if it is both moisture-tight and air-tight. The presence of at least some oxygen is required as well, so aggressive vacuum sealing actually serves to inhibit aging -- although it's perfectly adequate for preservation.

re-hydration - Any number of techniques designed to increase the amount of moisture in a quantity of tobacco to a more desirable level.

SG - Refers to Samuel Gawith Tobacco Company.

short-term storage - The storage of tobacco for a few months.

stoving - Applying heat to tobacco with the intent of darkening the appearance and flavor profile, and accelerating the melding of the tobacco. If attempted at home, it must be done carefully.

TAD - Tobacco Acquisition Disorder. A condition in which one purchases tobacco at what might be called an alarming rate.

tin - A sealed metallic container used by manufacturers. Compare with bulk tobacco. Tins come in a variety of shapes and sizes, including cylindrical and rectangular.

tobacconist - A professional proprietor of a tobacco shop. Ideally, someone who is helpful, knows of what he or she speaks, and can make excellent recommendations.

VA - An abbreviation for the Virginia tobacco leaf. Often also refers to that type of blend called "straight Virginias", indicating that the blend contains nothing but Virginia leaf.

VAPER - Also called "VA/Per", this is an abbreviation for a style of tobacco involving primarily Virginia and Perique burley.

WHICH TOBACCO FOR ME? (TOBACCO REVIEWS)

I was a MacBaren man from 1975 until the early years of the 21st century, sticking almost exclusively to that hazardous addiction known as MacBaren Virginia #1. As middle-age crept ever closer, I was getting frustrated that I could only smook my pipe every other night or so—thanks to the hazards of the hottest tobacco on the planet. And so for awhile I turned to cigars to supplement my beloved pipe.

Then I stumbled upon what has to be one of the three most important web sites for pipe-smoakers on the planet: www.tobaccoreviews.com. The rest, as they say, is history.

If you're new to the pipe, chances are you've begun with one or another type of flavored or cased tobacco. But before long you want to get off the porch and run with the big dogs—get out into the heady and intoxicating world of Virginias, English, Orientals, Burleys, Vaper, and all the rest. Now you can do it with some assurance that your tobacco money won't go to waste. You can find out in pretty short order whether you like high or low nicotine content, full, medium, or mild blends, and so on.

I was a Virginia man first, and so it was to the Virginia blends that I gravitated. I soon added a Vaper blend to my regular smoaks, and then (joy of joys) an English/oriental blend. I also keep a jar just for those experimental, occasional smoaks—a burley, a flake, a flavored tobacco, or whatever strikes my fancy. But tobaccoreviews.com is usually my first stop on the way to whatever new tobacco I buy.

Happy smoaking!

--Chas Mundungus

RISKS OF SMOAKING

by Kevin Boyd,
from a lecture by Dr. Henri Gaboriau
(Seattle Pipe Club, Internet, 2002)

A few months back, Seattle Pipe Club's own Dr. Henri Gaboriau delivered a very informative lecture on ways that smokers can reduce the risks involved in pipe and cigar smoking. While I myself was unable to attend this lecture, another SPC member, Kevin Boyd, wrote a summary of the keynote address.

In my opinion, this is a topic that all of us smokers should be concerned with. And some of the points Dr. Gaboriau made might come as a surprise...

The highest to lowest risks from tobacco products are as follows:

- (#1) Cigarettes - Lungs, throat (Erythroplaleia)
- (#2) Cigars - Lip, tongue
- (#3) Smokeless (snuff, chew etc.) - Gum line (Leukoplakia)
- (#4) Pipes - Tongue

Lung cancer risk index study*:

- Non-smoker - 1.0 (base number)
 - Cigarette (20 grams / day) - 16.0 (i.e. 16 x the risk of non-smokers)
 - Cigar (20 grams / day) - 3.2
 - Pipe (if > 10 bowls per day) - 6.7
 - Pipe (if 5 bowls per day) - 3.2
 - Pipe (if 3 bowls per day) - 1.5
 - Pipe (if 2 bowls per day) - 1.26
 - Pipe (typical - 2 bowls every 2-3 days) - ~1.05 (almost same as non-smoker)
- (*Source Webline – reviewed 22 articles. 21,520 smokers studied between 1969 – 93)

Bladder cancer risk index (although more rare in smokers than is lung and throat cancer)

- Non-smoker - 1.0
- Cigarette - 3.5
- Cigar - 2.3
- Pipe - 1.9

Do Pipe and Cigar smokers inhale?

Most Cigar and Pipe smokers do not inhale - unless they were former cigarette smokers. To test the theory, a study* was conducted with an endoscope camera down the nose and throat to observe breathing patterns in smokers. Here were the results:

- Former cigarette smokers inhaled pipes like cigarettes
- Cigar and pipe smokers – breathed normally first, then inhaled into mouth only, smoke was mostly blocked from throat by tongue, then exhaled the smoke w/o going into the lungs.

- You can test this on yourself. Take a toke on a pipe or cigar as you normally would. Now breathe in and out through your nose two or three times. Do you see smoke when you in exhale? If yes, you are inhaling. If no, now exhale the smoke from your mouth. Did smoke come out of your mouth? If yes, you are not inhaling and are tremendously decreasing your risk of lung cancer.

**Pattern of inhalation of Tobacco Smoke in Pipe, Cigarette and Never Smokers” AM Rev Respir Dis 1985 – Sep 132(3) 628-32*

Reducing the risk of tongue burn and/or tongue and mouth cancer.

- A burn or scar from hot smoke is what you are trying to avoid. This can lead to cancer.

- Don't leave the pipe clenched in your teeth in one position touching your tongue for a long time. Move the pipe around your mouth as you smoke.

- Sip your pipe like a fine wine, don't draw heavily.

- Find a cool burning tobacco that you enjoy. Aromatic tobaccos tend to burn hotter than do English.

- Always drink while you smoke. This helps cool the mouth, quench the thirst from dry smoke, coat the mouth from hot smoke, and wash away any hot debris. Water, sodas, coffee, tea are fine. Don't drink anything very hot though.

- However, sorry everyone, do not drink alcohol while you smoke. The combination of alcohol and smoke is not just a linear risk, but exponential. This is a huge mistake most smokers make. The alcohol destroys the flora and protective lining of mucus in the mouth. Then the hot smoke will directly come in contact with the unprotected mouth lining. Drink alcohol only after you smoke.

- Smoking depletes the body of vitamins A and C. Take up to 3000 mg of VC a day. Also take selenium and other antioxidants that will help buffer your body from free radicals, cancer and anti-aging.

Medical examination:

At least once a year, tell your physician you are a pipe smoker and would like to have your mouth and tongue examined. Schedule your teeth exams ~ 6 months after your physician's and have your dentist give another exam. You now have two exams a year, by two different medical specialists.

Life expectancy for Pipe Smokers:

Okay, sit down for this.... A US Surgeon General report “Smoking and Health” (No. 1103, page

112) noted, “Death rates for current pipe smokers even with men smoking 10 pipefuls per day and with men who had smoked pipes for more than 30 years.” On page 92 the report also stated, “Pipe smokers who inhale live as long as nonsmokers and pipe smokers that don’t inhale live longer than non-smokers.

What? Life expectancy for pipe smokers is three years longer than... Non-Smokers! Just try to use that argument with an anti-smoking activist! Of course this is not to encourage people to smoke, but has more to do with the personality of a typical pipe smoker. Most are type “B” where most cigarette smokers are type “A”. So a pipe smoker, on average, is a more laid back person. Second, smoking a pipe is very relaxing. You just can’t be angry when you are smoking a pipe.

Cigars are also relaxing but it seems, not as much as pipes. Most cigarette smoking is not so much a relaxing experience as it is a need for nicotine.

Other interesting facts and some to keep in mind:

- 1) Pipe smoking is the lowest tobacco risk - but the risk is not zero.
- 2) Pipe smoking risk is much like a second hand smoke risk
- 3) Pipe tobacco has less nicotine per gram than cigarettes and contains very little of the additives.
- 4) Wet smoking is the worst risk so be sure and clean pipe thoroughly.
- 5) If you have any sores in your mouth or a sore throat, wait to let the mouth heal first.
- 6) The main risks from cigars is chewing the cigar and the direct contact with the lips.
- 7) 27% of all smokers are pipe smokers in Sweden. In US only 2%

I hope you follow the tips above. If you do, you should significantly lower your health risks from pipe and cigar smoking. Wishing you a wonderfully aromatic, relaxing and healthy enjoyment of your favorite pipe and cigar for a long lifetime.

Written by Kevin Boyd, from a lecture by SPC's own Dr. Henri Gaboriau
Seattle Pipe Club
Internet / March 2002

IRWIN: See p. 112 of the Surgeon General’s famous report, and quote in full. See also p. 92.

**AN INSTRUCTIONAL NOTE
TO THE PIPE SMOKER AND PIPE COLLECTOR:
RECOMMENDED READING**

by Ben Rapaport
(Winter 2005, Internet)

In May 1987, I had prepared a handout for a seminar on the history of tobacco literature presented at Barry Levin's pipe show in Westborough, Massachusetts. Since then, many other works have appeared in print, and it is time to update the list for those into book collecting. I feel qualified to assemble the list since my own library is comprised of more than 3,000 volumes, but if I omitted any that should have rightfully deserved proper recognition, I am prepared to apologize for those absent titles. The list is not proprietary, so reproduce it at will.

On the next several pages I list only English-language books organized by rather arbitrary topical headings. Using an arbitrary set of topical headings is not a bibliographic crime, but it creates a false sense about these domains; most books in this field cover a multitude of related subjects. I have excluded foreign titles; this denies the uninitiated foreign-language-fluent reader the opportunity to know about some very lush and colorful books published in foreign languages. The list also excludes books on snuff, cigars, and cigarettes; since some pipe smokers also smoke cigars, the right side of my brain has been telling me to add cigar books to this list, and the left side of my brain has been saying: "create a separate list for cigar smokers." I have listened to both sides of my brain, and I have prepared a separate list for the cigar-smoker cum literati. On this particular list, you will find many rare and out-of-print titles cited. If the book is a good reference, it belongs on the list, even if you cannot easily reach out and find it at your out-of-print bookstore.

Preceding this list are some of my observations, many formulated during the last 40 years as a passionate bibliophile, and others formulated during the past 10 years merchandising these books. If the following snippets and the list serve you well in your search for a new or an old book, this instructional note will have served its purpose. I share these thoughts with you for whatever they are worth.

● The literature of tobacco and smoking is an arcane field because, today, few think of tobacco as a field of research. However, would you believe that, next to religion, it's an area covered by many printed words? In 1989, when I published *The Global Guide to Tobacco Literature*, I had counted some 5,800 titles in the predominant languages—English, French, German, Italian, and Dutch. By mid-1994, another 150 or so books had appeared in print! So, the inventory continues to expand, but this inventory covers a wealth of interrelated and, sometimes disparate, areas such as: history of smoking customs and tobacco technology; agriculture and farming; prose and poetry; and occasional fiction; specialty books on pipe crafting; snuff and its accouterments; tobacco boxes, jars, and pocket tins; cigar boxes, labels, cigar bands and cigar accouterments; tobacco art; cigarette packs; matchboxes, matchbox labels and match books; cigar-store figures; industry and company histories; museum exhibition catalogs; special auction house catalogs...and the list goes on.

☉ The range of material is as broad as the variegated interests of most smokers who choose distinctive pipes and tobaccos to suit their own particular tastes. Plenty of books are in print from which to choose something suited to individual tastes. Many of the titles appearing herein have been published privately, some as a limited edition, others as vanity press or facsimile reprints. Some were short-runs and the supply was exhausted within six months to one year after the ink was dry. That may be why your local tobacco shop and bookstore never stocked them.

☉ Where do you get some of these hard-to-find titles? You know your tobacconist better than I do, so you also know whether he sells literature. Some do, some do not, but most have as difficult a time determining what's in print for the consumer. Why? There's no industry clearinghouse that keeps the retailer apprised; few publishing houses know how to penetrate the tobacco industry; and let's face it, books on tobacco just aren't that profitable, and today's tobacconist is trying to stay alive with higher-margin product lines. So, you've got to find other avenues such as researching Books in Print, querying out-of-print and antiquarian book dealers, going to book fairs and pipe shows, and getting on the good side of those who have a personal library of tobacco books.

☉ One avenue to build a referential library is through my newsletter, "Antiquarian Tobacciana." It's not a totally free service, but it comes close to being free. The newsletter is designed to keep its readership abreast of 'baccy goings-on, including new releases from around the globe. I do not stock every title for I am very selective. I am not interested in selling books that promote the anti-nicotine theme, and books on harvesting tobacco, after all, are not very invigorating. My criteria are that the book be illustrated, well written, and reasonably priced, and that the central theme be popular and interesting. But, I am not averse to providing you the bibliographic details about any book in print that I do not stock so that you can order it directly from the publisher.

☉ Comments on books in general? The very best of poetry and prose was published in the late 19th Century - early 20th Century, and the very best illustrated books are those published in the late 20th Century. As to the caliber of books — binding, quality of paper and ink, photography, number of color illustrations as a relative measure of merit to price — I would have to say that, on average, foreign books win for their character and their 'je ne sais quoi.' Since no foreign titles appear in this list, write to me about your interests and I'll offer you some suggestions.

- Robert, J.C. The Story of Tobacco in America (New York, 1949; Chapel Hill, 1967)
- Silberberg, L. Tobacco: Its Use and Abuse (London, 1893)
- Spinden, H.J. Tobacco is American. The Story of Tobacco Before the Coming of the White Man (New York, 1950)
- "How To"**
- Arias, J.R. The Pleasurable Art of Pipe Smoking (n.p., 1968)
- BAT Co., Ltd. What Every Pipe Smoker Should Know (London, 1968)
- Beale, M. Secrets of Enjoyable Pipe Smoking (Mt. Pleasant, 1998)
- Benson and Hedges Live in Peace With Your Pipe (London, 1973)
- Brown, J.L. The Art of Pipe Smoking Pleasure; A Pipe Smoker's Handbook (New York, 1946)
- Crole, R. Pipe. The Art and Lore of a Great Tradition (Rocklin, 1999)
- Dunhill, A.H. The Gentle Art of Smoking (London, 1954)
- Faught, M.C. How to Scratch a Match and Other Secrets of Successful Pipe Smoking (New York, 1947)
- Gallant, P.A. Pipe Smoking: The Pleasant Alternative to Cigarettes (Chicago, 1978)
- Graves, C. A Pipe Smoker's Guide (London, 1969)
- Herment, G. The Pipe Book; A Serious yet Diverting Treatise on the History of the Pipe and All Its Appurtenances (London and New York, 1954)
- Jeffers, H. P. The Perfect Pipe. A Celebration of The Gentle Art of Pipe Smoking (Short Hills, 1998)
- Kolpin, E. The Story of Your Briar Pipe. Prepared from over 40 Years Experience and Study on Pipe and Tobacco Combustion (Santa Monica, 1969)

- McMahon, K. The Pipe Book. An Introduction to the Pleasures of Pipe Smoking (Dublin, 1981)
- Neelin, J.E. An Introduction to Pipe Smoking (Ontario, 1980)
- Ogden's of Liverpool The Pipeman's Companion. From Ogden's of Liverpool (Bristol, 2000)
- Olrik, P.C. Pipesmoker's ABC (Birkeröd, 1973)
- Parker, H. My Pipe, My Tobacco and I: A Narrative Dedicated to the "Pipe Smoker Who Cares" (Fresno, 1972)
- Philip Morris, Inc. Tidbits, Tips and Trivia on The Art of Pipesmanship (n.d.)
- Puffington, H.B. How to Smoke a Pipe (New York, 1958)
- Ram, S.P. How to Get More Fun Out of Smoking: A Guide and Handbook for Better Smoking (Chicago, 1941; revised edition, 1949)
- R.J. Reynolds Love That Pipe. A Fun Guide to Pipe Smoking (1966)
- Spaniola, J.W. Smoke A Pipe (Flint, Michigan, n.d.)
- Tobacco Assn of America Pipe Smoker's Guide (n.p., n.d.)
- Verdaguer, J. The Art of Pipe Smoking (London, 1958, 1968)
- Weber, C.B. Guide to Pipes and Pipe Smoking (New York, 1962, 1983)
- _____. The Pleasures of Pipe Smoking (New York, 1965)
- Weber, R.J. Everyman's Guide to Pipe-Smoking and Tobaccos (Victoria, 1983)
- Yunker, A.D. Toward a Theology of Pipesmoking (St. Louis, 1970)

Art of Briar Pipe-making

- Cole, J.W. The GBD St. Claude Story (London, 1976)
- Doll, E. The Art and Craft of Smoking Pipes (New York, 1947)
- Gregorio, J.M. How to Make Smoking Pipes (New York, 1971)

- Cope's Tobacco Pipes and Meerschaum. Pipes: A Familiar History. Part The First. American Pipes. Cope's Smoke Room Booklet Number 9 (Liverpool, 1895)
- _____. Pipes and Meerschaum. Pipes: A Familiar History. Part The Second. Pipes. The Pipes of Asia and Africa. Cope's Smoke Room Booklet Number 11 (Liverpool, 1895)
- _____. Pipes and Meerschaum. Pipes: A Familiar History. Part The Third. Pipes. English and European. Cope's Smoke Room Booklet Number 12 (Liverpool, 1896)
- Dunhill, A. The Pipe Book (London and New York, 1924; revised ed., London, New York, and Toronto, 1969 and later reprints; New York, 1999)
- Fairchild, D. The South African Pipe Calabash (US Dept of Agriculture, Washington, DC, 1909) & Collins, G.N.
- Fisher, R.L. The Odyssey of Tobacco (Litchfield, 1939)
- Fresco-Corbu, R. European Pipes (Guildford, Surrey, 1982)
- Goes, B. The Intriguing Design of Tobacco Pipes (Leiden, 1993)
- Hungarian National Museum The History of the Hungarian Pipemaker's Craft. Hungarian History Through the Pipemaker's Art (Budapest, 2000)
- Jung, S. P. 19th Century Patents, Designs, and Trademarks for Tobacco Pipes and Related Material Issued by the U.S. Patent Office 1858-1899, 2 volumes (self-published, Bel Air, 1987)
- _____. Tobacco Pipe Manufacturers and Distributors Found in U.S. Directories in The Library of Congress (to be published in 1999)
- Larus & Brother Co. Pipe-ology. From Mayan to Modern (Richmond, n.d.)
- Levardy, F. Our Pipe-Smoking Forebears (Budapest-Pecs-Velburg, 1994)
- Libert, L. Tobacco, Snuff Boxes, and Pipes (London, 1986)
- Museum of Tobacco Meerschaum Masterpieces. The Premiere Art of Pipes (Nashville, 1990)

Art and History

- Orhant, A. Up in Smoke. The Art of Collectibles (Paris, 2000)
- Pritchett, J.R. Ye Smokiana, Historical, Ethnographical (London, 1890)
- Rapaport, B. A Complete Guide to Collecting Antique Pipes (Exton, 1979; revised, 1998)
- _____. Collecting Antique Meerschaums: Miniature to Majestic Art, 1850-1925 (Atglen, 1999)
- _____. Museum of Tobacco Art & History Guide Book (Nashville, 1996)
- Rebeyrolles, J. Collectible Pipes (Paris, 2002)
- Schmied-Duperrex, A. e. The Lausanne Pipe Museum/Il Museo della Pipa di Losanna e degli Oggetti da Tabacco
(Ivrea, 1989)
- Scott, A. & C. Smoking Antiques (Hertfordshire, 1970; Bucks, 1981)
- _____. Tobacco and the Collector (London, 1966)
- Silverman, H. History of the Pipe (Atlanta, 1895)
- Vandalis, G.E. Water Pipes (Athens, 2000)
- Yates, S. Smoking Accessories. A Collector's Guide (London, 2000)

Tobacco: General Survey for the Smoker

- Association of Ind. Tobacconists The A.I.T.S. Tobacco Index (Exeter, n.d.)
- Blair, L.C.M. Tobacco Blender's Handbook (Montclair, New Jersey, n.d.)
- Brennan, W.A. Tobacco Leaves: Being a Book of Facts for Smokers (Menasha, 1915)
- Players From Plantation to "Players." A Brief History of Tobacco, Including Cultivation and Manufacture (Bristol, 1936)

- Sherman, M.M. All About Tobacco (New York, 1970, 1974)
- Tanner, A.E. Tobacco. From the Grower to the Smoker (Bath, 1912)
- Werner, C.A. A Textbook on Tobacco (New York, 1909, 1914)
- _____. Tobaccoland (New York, 1922)
- Winans, R.F. The Pipe Smoker's Tobacco Book (Provincetown, 1977)
- Wolf, F.A. Aromatic or Oriental Tobacco (College Station, 1962)

Prose and Poetry

- Adams, C.S. Poem on the Use of Tobacco (Boston, 1852)
- Allen & Ginter With The Poets in Smokeland (Richmond, n.d., c. 1886)
- Anon. An Arm-Chair in the Smoking Room; or, Fiction, Anecdote, Humour, and Fancy for Dreamy Half-Hours (London, 1868)
- Anon. Joys of Tobacco (Boston, London and Edinburgh, n.d.)
- Anon (Ferguson, R.) The Social Pipe; or, Gentlemen's Recreations. A Poem (London, 1826)
- Bain, J. Tobacco in Song and Story (Boston, 1896; New York, 1953)
- _____. Tobacco Leaves (Boston, 1903)
- Browne, I.H. A Pipe of Tobacco: In Imitation of Six Several Authors (London, 1736; New York, 1924)
- Chaffee, F. Smoke Rings and Roses (Cleveland, 1904)
- Edwards, G.W. Thus Think and Smoke. Tobacco. A Rhyme (XVII Century) (New York, 1891)
- Hamilton, W. An Odd Volume for Smokers; A Lyttel Parcell of Poems and Parodyes in Prayse of Tobacco (London, 1889)

- Harrison, J.L. With Pipe and Book. A Collection of College Verse (Providence, 1897)
- Herford, O., and S. Collins The Smoker's Year Book (New York, 1908)
- Hutchison, W.G. Lyra Nicotiana: Poems and Verses Concerning Tobacco (London, 1898)
- Jenkinson, A. M. Whifflets (Pittsburg, 1897; 1900)
- King, W.H. My Smoking-Room Companions (New York, 1899)
- Knight, J. A Smoker's Reveries (Boston, 1909)
- _____. Pipe and Pouch; The Smoker's Own Book of Poetry (Boston, 1894; Freeport, 1970)
- Lloyd, H. The Smoking Concert Reciter (London, 1890)
- Miles, A.H. The "Smoker" Reciter (London, 1902)
- Miltoun, F. (McManus, B.) The "Sov'rane Herb" and the Smoker's Year. A Calendar for MDCCCCV, With Certain Excerpts from the Wits and Historians of All Ages; Concerning the Virtues of the Necessitous Weed (Boston, 1904)
- Mitchell, C.L. Puffs From An Old Pipe. Random Thoughts Of An Old Amateur (New York, c. 1919)
- O'Neil, H. Invocation to My Pipe (London, 1871)
- Ousley, C. Rings o' Smoke (New York, London, Montreal, 1902)
- J.B. Pace Tobacco Co. A Bit of Advice (Richmond, n.d.)
- Palmer, C.W. The Weed: A Poem (London, 1880)
- Partington, W. Smoke Rings and Roundelays; Blendings from Prose and Verse (London, 1924; New York, 1925)
- Potter, E.D. Ode to My Pipe (Toledo, 1905)
- Rayner, G.H. Notes From My Pipe. A Book of Rhyme and Verse for Smokers (Leeds, 1896)

- Reynolds, D.C. A Romance in Smoke (Providence, 1876)
- Reynolds Metals Co. In Praise of Tobacco: A Collection of Poems from Many Pens
(Richmond, 1960)
- Rossetti, D.G. The Ballad of Jan Van Hunks (London, 1929; J. R. Wahl [ed.],
Arents Tobacco Collection Publication No. 3, New York Public
Library, New York, 1952)
- Sargent, J.W. Smoke and Bubbles (Chicago, Akron, and New York, 1906)
- Schwartz, B.S. Stories to Smoke A Pipe By (privately printed, 1992)
- Shoemaker, W.L. La Santa Yerba, Preluded by a Few Choice Mottoes from Lovers
of the Indian Weed, from the Time of Sir Walter Raleigh to the
Present Day (Boston, 1897)
- Sims, A.E. The Witching Weed: A Smoker's Anthology (London, 1912)
- Watkins, S. C. The Pleasures of Smoking as Expressed by those Poets, Wits and
Tellers of Tales Who Have Drawn Their Inspiration from the
Fragrant Weed (New York, 1948)
- Webb, A. P. The Fragrant Weed (New York, 1925)
- Welsh, C. The Fragrant Weed: Some of the Good Things Which Have Been
Said or Sung About Tobacco (New York, 1907)
- Wolcott, G.V. Rings of Smoke (Wilmington, 1902)

Arcania, Esoterica and Curiosa

- Anon. A Bit of Advice (n.p., n.d.)
- Anon. The History and Mystery of Smoking; or a Few Fragrant Whiffs of
the Weed, Evolving Sundry Pleasant, Pithy and Profitable Hints
Touching the Poetry of Smoking; Enlivened With Divers Curious
Illustrative Anecdotes (New York, 1844)
- Anon. The Smoker's, Chewer's, and Snuff-Taker's Companion, and
Tobacconists Own Book (Philadelphia, New York, Boston, and
Baltimore, 1841)

- Anon. Opinions of the Press (Liverpool, 1878)
- Anon. A Doctor's Fallacy on Smoking and Smokers, Examined and Explained by One Who Smokes (London, 1857)
- Anon. Tobacco Whiffs for the Smoking Carriage (Cornhill, 1874); Revised as Tobacco Whiffs for the Smoking Carriage. A History of the Tobacco We Smoke, &c. (2nd edition, Norwich, 1881)
- Baring, M. Whiffs From a Short Briar (London, n.d.)
- Barrie, J.M. My Lady Nicotine. A Study in Smoke (London, 1890, and later editions) FICTION
- Beaumier, J.P.,
and L. Camp The Pipe Smoker. Being an Entertaining & Scientific Treatise on Pipes & Tobaccos With Wholly New Revelations About the Pipe Smoker (San Francisco, 1980)
- Bewlay & Co. Tobacco Leaves (London, c. 1901; second edition, c. 1902)
- Blanchard, E.L. A Pipe of Tobacco: With Whiffs and Clouds (London, 1845)
- Bowen, W. The Old Tobacco Shop (New York, 1922) FICTION
- Cavendish (Bevan, S.) To All Who Smoke! A Few Words in Defence of Tobacco; or, A Plea for the Pipe: With Practical Observations on the Philosophy and Art of Smoking (1857)
- Chatto, W.A. A Paper! - Of Tobacco Treating the Rise, Progress, Pleasures, and Advantages of Smoking. With Anecdotes of Distinguished Smokers, Mems. on Pipes and Tobacco- Boxes, and a Critical Essay on Snuff (London, 1839)
- Chispa The Fragrant Weed. Dedicated to Its Lovers (Liverpool, 1877)
- Cope's The Plenipotent Key to Cope's Correct Card of the Peerless Pilgrimage to Saint Nicotine of the Holy Herb: Expounding in Prose and in Verse All the Mysteries of Its Splendid Hieroglyphs; Recording (Positively for the First Time in Print) The Authentic Legends of the Blessed Saint and Martyr Celebrating the Miraculous Virtues of the Holy Herb; Telling of the Happy Pilgrims and the Glorious Shrine...(Liverpool, 1878)

- Cope's Cope The Universal Soother. Breitmann's Rauch-Lied, and Sundry Tobacconalian Ballads and Verses by Divers Pens, all Decorated & Humourously Set Forth by the Sober Pencil of Master Pipeshank (Liverpool, n.d.)
- Cope's Cope's Leaves Gathered From His "Tobacco Plant." For The Smoking Room (published at irregular intervals, Liverpool, 1885)
- Crowquill, A. (pseud.). 1947) A Few Words About Pipes, Smoking and Tobacco (New York, 1947)
- Cundall, J.W. Pipes and Tobacco. Being a Discourse on Smoking and Smokers (London, 1901)
- Delamotte, W.A. Smoking and Smokers, an Antiquarian, Historical, Comical, Veritable, and Narcotical Disquisition (London, 1846)
- Frankau, G. The Dominant Type of Man (London, 1925)
- Gentleman, F. The Tobacconist; A Farce; Altered From Ben Jonson (London, 1821)
- Glass, J. Chats Over a Pipe (London, 1922)
- Hall, J. 140 Different Varieties: A Review of Tobacco in the Canon. Musgrave Monograph Number Five (Northern Musgraves, 1994)
- Hatton, J. Philadelphia, 1892) Cigarette Papers for After-Dinner Smoking (London and Philadelphia, 1892)
- Hawkins, W. My Dear Old Pipe (Peterborough, 1947)
- Heilmann, R.K. 1983) The Pipe Smoker's Guide to Love, Sex, and Women (Pittsburgh, 1983)
- Jefford, A. Smokes (London, 1996)
- Kline, B., Dr. (Scotts Valley, 1996) Pipefuls and Old Stogies (Cigar and Pipe Smoker's Quote Book)
- Machen, A. The Anatomy of Tobacco; or Smoking Methodised, Divided, and Considered After a New Fashion (London, 1884; New York, 1926)
- Manson, G.J. Smoking: A World of Curious Facts, Queer Fancies, and Lively Anecdotes About Pipes, Tobacco, and Cigars (New York, 1891)

- Meller, H.J. Nicotiana; or the Smoker's and Snuff-Taker's Companion; Containing the History of Tobacco; Culture- Medical Qualities and the Laws Relative to Its Importation and Manufacture; With an Essay in Its Defence (London, 1832)
- Odhner, C. T. Tobacco Talk. The Science of Tobacco: Its Botany, Chemistry, Uses, Pleasures, Hygiene, Etiquette, History and Ethnology (Philadelphia, 1894)
- Phillips, C. J. The Best Tobacco Cartoons of All Time (Grand National Press, Spokane, 1992)
- Potter, A.C. Tobacco Talk and Smokers' Gossip. An Amusing Miscellany of Fact and Anecdote Relating to "The Great Plant" in All Its Forms and Uses, Including a Selection from Nicotian Literature (London, 1884)
- Rice, F.P. Sancta Croce: A Nicotian Treatise with Illustrative Antitheses (Worcester, 1887)
- Steinmetz, A. The Smoker's Guide, Philosopher and Friend (London, 1864)
- _____. Tobacco: Its History, Cultivation, Manufacture and Adulterations (London, 1857)
- Straight, D., Sir Musings Over My Meerschaum (1866)
- Taylor, B. C. The Pipesmoke Carry (Chicago, 1912)
- Thompson, J. Three Fashionable Luxuries: Namely, Smoking, Chewing, & Snuffing; or, Facts About Tobacco, Including Its History, Nature, & Effects (Scarborough, c. 1900)
- Tobacco Office Tobacco Jokes for Smoking Folks (London, 1888)
- United Cigar Stores Co. About Pipes (n.d., n. p.)
- Vesuvian (pseud.). The Smokers' Annual (London, 1891)
- Wright, F. What Shall We Smoke? (Cheltenham, 2nd edition, n.d.)

Smoking in Other Collections

- Anon. Bachelor Ballads. Being Certain of the Masterpieces of Verse; Wherein is Set Forth the Sentiment of Good-Fellowship: Set to Pictures by Blanche McManus (New York, 1898)
- Gray, A. Bath Robes & Bachelors and Other Good Things (New York and Boston, 1897)
- McClure, J. (ed.). The Stag's Hornbook (New York, 1918, 1943, and 1945)

Some Reflections on the Industry

- Alford, B.W.E. W.D. & H.O. Wills and the Development of the U.K. Tobacco Industry, 1786-1965 (London, 1973)
- Anon. American Tobacco Company. Sold American! The First Fifty Years (New York, 1954)
- The American Tobacco Story (New York, 1964)
- Imperial Tobacco Company, 1901-1951 (London, 1951)
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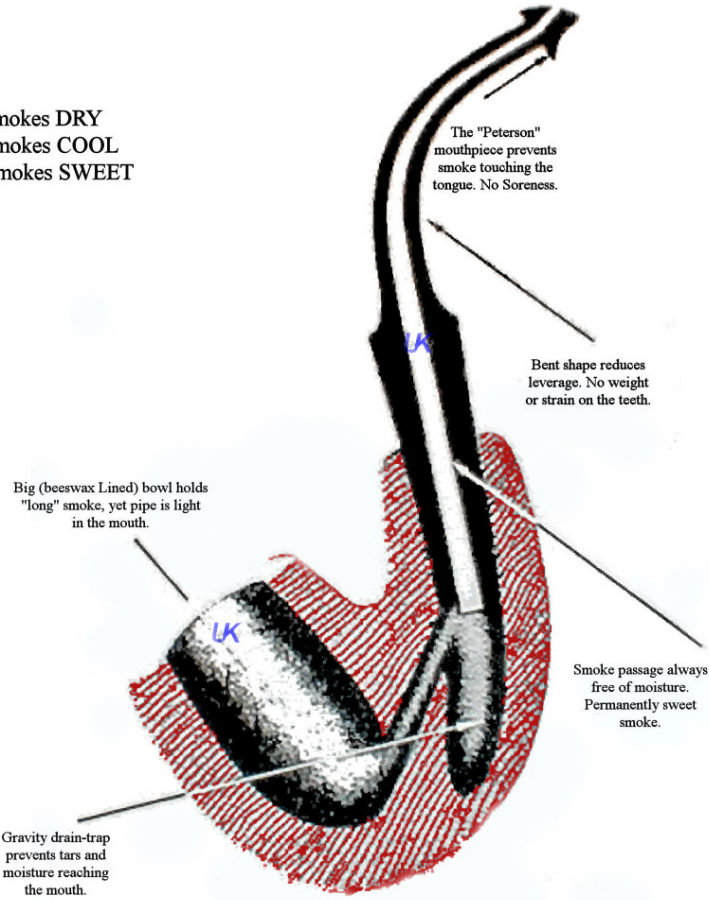
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PETERSON ANATOMY CHART

THE PETERSON "SYSTEM"

Note the simplicity of construction based on scientific and effective graduation of smoke passages

smokes DRY
smokes COOL
smokes SWEET



← This metal cap is called a "ferrule."

PETERSON HALLMARKS CHART

reproduced from Peterson's Smoker's Guild Vol. 5 (2005), p. 16

quality of the pipe, the hallmark is your guarantee of the quality of the silver.
It's a convention that even pre-dates Peterson pipes and therein lies a story...

Kilroy

Peterson Silver Hallmarks
As well as the Peterson name and the words 'STERLING SILVER', all Peterson silver mounted or silver cap pipes carry three distinguishing marks:

1. Hibernia, seated, arm on harp, represents Ireland (country of manufacture). There have been minor design changes over the years.
2. The Harp Crowned is the fineness mark denoting the high quality (purity) of the silver, and was used in a variety of designs until October 1992 when it was replaced by the new European Standard or Millennial mark, which gives the purity or quality of the silver in parts per thousand.
3. The Date Letter Code for the year in which the silver was hallmarked (see chart at right). N.B. In certain years a fourth hallmark is applied, e.g. 1966 – a Sword of Light for the 50th anniversary of the Easter Rising, 1973 – the Glensheen Collar for Ireland's entry into the E.C., 1988 – the 150th anniversary of the founding of the Goldsmiths' Company of Dublin, 1988 – the Dublin Crest for Dublin City's millennium year, and in 1999 a special Millennium mark. These are illustrated here under the heading 'Special Marks'.

A 1896	B 1897	C 1898	D 1899	E 1900	F 1901	G 1902	H 1903	I 1904	J 1905	K 1905	L 1906	M 1907	N 1908
O 1909	P 1910	Q 1911	R 1912	S 1913	T 1914	U 1915	V 1916	W 1917	X 1918	Y 1919	Z 1920	A 1921	B 1921
G 1922	H 1923	I 1924	J 1925	K 1926	L 1927	M 1928	N 1929	O 1930	P 1931	Q 1932	R 1933	S 1934	T 1935
U 1936	V 1937	W 1938	X 1939	Y 1940	Z 1941	A 1942	B 1943	C 1944	D 1945	E 1946	F 1947	G 1948	H 1949
I 1950	J 1951	K 1952	L 1953	M 1954	N 1955	O 1956	P 1957	Q 1958	R 1959	S 1960	T 1961	U 1962	V 1963
W 1964	X 1965	Y 1966	Z 1967	A 1968	B 1969	C 1970	D 1971	E 1972	F 1973	G 1974	H 1975	I 1976	J 1977
L 1977	M 1978	N 1979	O 1980	P 1981	Q 1982	R 1983	S 1984	T 1985	U 1986	V 1987	W 1988	X 1989	Y 1990
F 1991	G 1992	H 1993	I 1994	J 1995	K 1996	L 1997	M 1998	N 1999	O 2000	Q 2001	R 2002	S 2003	T 2004
U 2005													

Special Marks

	1966
	1973
	1988
	1999

*Up to and including 1931, the date letter was changed on June 1 each year. From 1932 it was changed on January 1.

A PETERSON DATING GUIDE; A RULE OF THUMB

by Mike Leverette

Originally posted 26 August 2006 @ www.pipelore.net

Introduction

The history of Ireland is an old and honorable one; steeped in warfare, family, racial and religious traditions. No other country can compete in comparison. However, the first couple of millennia of Irish history have no relevance to this dating guide. Should you wish to read more on the history of the Irish, I recommend "The Story of the Irish Race" by Seumas MacManus who gives a very vivid, and near as we can tell, an accurate portrayal of their history.

History pertinent to our purposes began in the year 1865; the year Charles Peterson opened a small tobacco shop in Dublin. Later in 1875, Charles Peterson approached the Kapp brothers, Fredrich and Heinrich, with a new pipe design and with this, a very long-lived partnership was formed, Kapp & Peterson. This new pipe design is the now famous Peterson Patented System Smoking Pipe. By 1890, Kapp & Peterson was the most respected pipe and tobacco manufacturer in Ireland and rapidly gaining followers in England and America. In 1898 another of Peterson's remarkable inventions became available, the Peterson-Lip (P-Lip) mouthpiece, also known as the Steck mouthpiece. So for the purpose of this dating guide, we will study Irish history, relevant to our pipe dating needs, from 1870s until now.

Before we start with this Peterson dating guide, an observation; the Kapp Brothers were making pipes as early as the 1850s and in many of the shapes we now associate with Peterson since the Kapp Brothers simply took there existing shapes and incorporated Charles Peterson's patented design into them. From their inception, Kapp & Peterson's goal was to make a good smoking pipe that the ordinary, common working man could afford and we believe they have, very admirably, lived up to this.

Explanation of Title

The vagaries of Peterson's processes do not allow for an accurate dating guide so this guide is a 'rule-of-thumb' guide only. For example; Peterson did not take up the old Country of Manufacture stamps as new ones were issued so depending on which one the various workers happen to pick up, the stamps can and do cross over the boundaries of the various Eras. Some of the pipes of the Sherlock Holmes Series of the 1980s have pre-Republic stamps, as well as other pipes produced in 2000. However, there will not be too many of these missed stamped pipes. For silver anomalies, see the section on silver marks.

Stamping of Bowls

During the years of Kapp and Peterson's business operations, the country of Ireland has undergone several name changes and K&P's stamping on their pipes reflects these changes. Knowing these changes, a Peterson pipe can be roughly dated and placed in "eras."

- The Patent Era was between the years of K&P's formation until the expiration of the patent; 1875 through approximately 1910. Though for our purposes we will list this era as 1875 through 1922. Peterson pipes made during the majority of this period had no

"Country of Manufacture" (COM) stamped on them. However, later in this period, say around 1915/16, Peterson began stamping their pipes "Made in Ireland" in a block format.

- ***The Irish Free State*** was formed on 15 January 1922. So the Free State Era will be from 1922 through 1937. Peterson followed with a COM stamp of "Irish Free State" in either one or two lines, either parallel or perpendicular to the shanks axis and extremely close to the stem.
- ***Eire*** was formed on 29 December 1937. The Made in Eire Era will be from 1938 through roughly 1940? or 1941?. For dates with ?'s, see below. Peterson now stamped their pipes with "Made in Eire" in a circle format with "Made" and "Eire" in a circle with the "in" located in the center of the circle. This COM was used during the years of 1938 - 1940?/41?. Later they stamped their pipes with "Made in Ireland" in a circle format (1945?-1947?) and still later with "Made in Ireland" in a block format (1947?-1949). The "Made in Ireland" block format came in either one line or two lines.
- ***The Republic Era*** is from 1949 until the present. The Republic of Ireland was formed on 17 April 1949. From 1949 to present the stamp for this era is "Made in the Republic of Ireland" in a block format generally in three lines but two lines have been used with or without Republic being abbreviated.
- ***English made*** Peterson pipes actually spans between the pre-Republic and Republic eras. In 1895, Peterson opened a shop in London England that lasted until the late 1950s or early 1960s. So the English Era, for a simplified date, will be from 1895 through 1959. The stamps Peterson used in London and that we have seen are;

Made in England - block format

Made in England - circle format

Made in London

Made in London England

Simply, London England

Great Britain

Though there are a couple of more, the above will give one the general idea. We believe the earliest stamp of this era was the "Made in England" in a block format since Peterson was using the "Made in Ireland" block format at about the same time on their Irish production pipes. The

"Made in England" circle format was used during the same time frame as the "Made in Eire" and "Made in Ireland" circle formats.

As one can see this is pretty straightforward but there have been inconsistencies within this method of stamping. Peterson was never very energetic in removing their old stamps from the work stations so the older stamps can and did cross-over into the newer Era/s.

The explanation for the question marks in the 1940s dates is, during the Second World War briar was hard to come by for obvious reasons, so no one can say for sure what years Peterson produced briar pipes and how many briar pipes were produced in those years. Why the switch from "Made in Eire" to "Made in Ireland" is anyone's guess since the country was still technically Eire until 1949. As a point of interest and due to the shortage of briar, Peterson did make clay and Bog Oak pipes during the war years though they had ceased clay pipe production in the Patent Era and Bog Oak production back in the early 1930s (see below).

The "Made in Ireland" block format can be another headache in dating Peterson pipes since this stamp was used in the late Patent Era as well as the late 1940s. So for a guide we must take into consideration the style of lettering Peterson used on their pipes. From the start of the Patent Era until somewhere in the early 1930s, Peterson used the "Old Style" lettering that used a forked tail "P" in Peterson (See enclosure 1). From then until now, Peterson used the more familiar script "P" (See Enclosure 2) intermixed with a plain block letter "P." Later in the 1970s, Peterson began production of "commemorative" pipes, often referred to as "replica" or "retro" pipes and these will also have the old style lettering but according to the pipes that we own and have seen, most of these will have a small difference in the forked tail "P" (See Enclosure 3). Again, there appears to be a cross-over with the old style forked tail and the later forked tail P's. However, these commemorative pipes generally have a silver band with hallmarks so one can date these pipes by the hallmark.



Also, we must address the stamp "A Peterson Product." During the last few years of the Pre-Republic era and throughout the Republic era, Peterson began stamping their other lines, such as Shamrocks and Killarneys, with "A Peterson Product" over the COM stamp. So a pipe stamped thusly will have been made say from 1948 to the present with the COM stamp identifying it as a pre-Republic or a Republic pipe.

Silver Band Dating

Silver hallmarks are placed on the silver after an assay office, in Peterson's case, the Dublin Assay Office, has verified that the silver content is indeed sterling, in other words 925 parts of silver per 1000 parts of the metal. The silver hallmarks on Peterson pipes are a group of three marks, each in an escutcheon; the first is a seated Hibernia denoting Dublin Ireland, the second is a harp denoting the silver fineness, and the third is a letter denoting the year. The style of letter and the shape of the escutcheon the letter is in, will determine the year in which the assay office stamped the metal band and not necessarily the year the pipe was made. Peterson orders these bands by the thousands and sends them to the assay office for hallmarking. The assay office will stamp the date of the year in which they received the bands and it may be a year or two or three before Peterson's employees happen to place one of these bands on a pipe though generally the bands are placed on a pipe in the year they were stamped. The Dublin hallmarks can be found in any book on silver markings or on one of several web sites.

For the one year, 1987, the Dublin Assay Office added a fourth mark to commemorate the City of Dublin's founding in 988. However, the Peterson pipes we have and have seen with silver dates of 1987 and 1988 generally do not have this fourth mark.

Here again, we must add a "maybe" to the above hallmarks. On 1 June 1976, certain countries attended an international conference on silver markings and decided to adopt an entirely different mark for sterling silver. This mark is an Arabian numeral, 925, located between the scales of a balance beam and in Peterson's case may or may not have the Hibernia and Harp marks to either side. These particular pipes can only be said to date between 1976 and the present, and were stamped as such for shipment to the different countries involved in the conference. For pipes shipped to all other countries, Peterson still uses the old style hallmarks. Peterson pipes with a sterling silver band that does not have hallmarks could have been made for the United States market since the United States only requires sterling silver to be stamped "sterling silver" or "sterling."

Before we close this section on silver hallmarks, we must address the marks that many people refer to as hallmarks. Peterson uses three marks on some of their pipes that are not silver hallmarks but are rather another Peterson logo (See Enclosure 4). These marks are:

1. A Shamrock for the many shamrocks found in Ireland
2. A Prone Fox representing the famous fox hunts in Ireland's history, and
3. A Stone Tower for the many hundreds of stone towers spotted throughout Ireland



Again these are not genuine silver hallmarks.

Also many of the newer pipe smokers think that Kapp & Peterson's official logo of "K&P," each in a shield shaped escutcheon, are hallmarks but, of course, they are not. They are simply Kapp & Peterson's initials.

Dating by Series

Dating by series or numbers is an area in which we are having a difficult time of establishing. For instance, the 300 series are all shapes used during the Patent Era and we believe Peterson started using this number system when the original patent expired. In the case of the 300 series and without looking at the COM stamp or silver hallmark, one can only say that they were made between 1910 and today. The 300 series was not in Peterson's 1905 catalogue.

Though we are still trying to find the start dates of many series, here are some that we are pretty positive about:

1. Centennial Edition - 1975 (for K&P's Centennial)
2. Great Explorers Series - 2002
3. Harp Series - 2002
4. Mark Twain Numbered Edition - 1979 (numbered 1 through 400)
5. Mark Twain 2nd Numbered Edition - 1981 (numbered 1 through 1000)
6. Mark Twain Un-numbered Edition - 1983 to c1989 (There must be a fourth production of Mark Twain pipes for there a couple of men who own Mark Twain pipes with a silver date of 1998; we are still trying to pin down the dates of this fourth production.)
7. Emerald - c1985 to 2003
8. Millennium Edition - 1988 (for the City of Dublin's founding)
9. Sherlock Holmes Series - 1987 to c1989
10. Return of Sherlock Holmes Series - c1991
11. Sherlock Holmes Meerschaums - 2006¹

Peterson Clay, Bog Oak and Cherry Wood Pipes

Peterson Clay, Bog Oak and Cherry Wood pipes were offered in the Patent Era with or without a formed case, as also offered with their briar and meerschaum pipes.

¹ To these we might will add three more:

12. *The Old English Collection* – 12 pieces with gold-plated sterling bands, all smallish pipes, which reproduce shapes from the 1930s and 1940s Peterson Catalog, available in a boxed set the mid 1990s.
13. *The Antique Collection* – 4 pieces, hallmarked 1995, reproducing a 1903 Dublin, 1905 Billiard, 1909 Bent, and 1910 Bulldog, which were apparently available in a boxed set and individually, with or without P-Lip.
14. *The Antique Collection [2]*—2 pieces, featuring a 1904 diamond-shanked bent, and a 1908 straight “Dublin/Pot” replica. In production in the early 2000s.

Peterson made clay pipes during the Patent Era with only two shapes being offered and depicted in their 1905 catalogue. During this period their clay pipes were stamped/molded "Peterson Patent" and could be purchased with either a silver or nickle band. How long and in what years Peterson made these clays is not known but as stated above two shapes were offered in their 1905 catalogue. Then during World War II, Peterson again made clay pipes due to the understandable shortage of briar. The clays of this period are stamped "Peterson System" and were only offered with nickle bands. This later production of clay pipes ended with the closing of Peterson's London Shop in the late 1950s or early 1960s.

Also during World War II, Peterson again made bog oak pipes and again, this was due to the shortage of briar. They had previously ceased production of bog oak pipes in the 1930s during the Irish Free State Era. On the subject of bog oak pipes, Peterson's bog oaks will always have a metal band with either an amber (early production only) or vulcanite stems and will have the appropriate COM stamp. As with their clay pipes, Peterson offered a silver or nickle band on their early bog oak pipes of the Patent Era and just a nickle band on their WWII bog oak pipes.

Peterson made pipes of cherry wood during their Patent Era in both the smooth finish and the bark-left-on finish; and as with their clay pipes, Peterson used both amber and vulcanite stems and choice of silver or nickle bands. And like their clay pipes of the Patent Era, the introduction and termination dates are not known. Peterson Cherry Wood pipes were offered with or without a meerschaum lining.

Metal Ferrules of Military Mounted Pipes

As pipes get older, wear will, with all the handling, cleaning and polishing, take its toll on the nomenclature which will eventually disappear, thus, making it harder to determine the age of your Peterson. A good thorough cleaning of old hand oils, dirt and ash will sometimes bring out a faint outline of the nomenclature but sometimes the nomenclature has completely worn away and even this cleaning will not bring it back. So where do we go from here to determine the pipe's age? The shape of the metal ferrule on Peterson pipes with the military mount will give you some hint though not a precise date.

During the Patent Era, the metal ferrules of Peterson military mounts will have a more 'acorn-ish' shape, that is, the bend will have a larger radius as it turns down to meet the stem. This larger radius gradually(?) changes to a smaller radius, more abrupt bend, during the Irish Free State Era and even more abruptly after World War Two when the bend takes on the modern day shape.

The metal ferrules on Peterson clay pipes during the Patent Era are angular while their clay pipes of World War Two will have the bend shape as do most of the Peterson pipes from then until now.

As with everything pertaining to the dating of Peterson pipes, this method can only give us a hint to the age of the pipe but it is better than nothing at all. The years of these changes in the metal ferrule shape are, we are sure, lost to the ages. However, someone with a larger number of Peterson pipes than we, may be able to check the silver dates for more precise age boundaries.

Well, this is a very short dating guide and we hope that you will be able to date more accurately your favorite Peterson with this information.

THE MARK TWAIN PETERSON

The Mark Twain Peterson, a reproduction of Twain's 1896-hallmarked Peterson, is the most famous of the Peterson was issued in four parts. From the 1981 Peterson brochure we learn there was a 1981 Numbered Edition (400 pipes) and a 1981 Deluxe Edition of 2500 unnumbered pipes (both with a gold inlay "P" on the stem). The set of 400 pipes was issued with a small statuette of Twain. Subsequently, there was an unnumbered issue of pipes hallmarked 1984 with the "P" stamped in white. But in 1985 there also seems to have been another Numbered Edition, this time with a gold ferrule, also with a a gold inlay "P" on the stem. The 1981 Deluxe Edition pipes had more of a cherry-brown finish, while the 1984 unnumbered issue was the more typical (for the time) Peterson honey-brown. The pipe would seem then to have been issued as follows:

- 1981 Limited Edition of 400 pipes, numbered with sterling ferrule and accompanied by a statuette of Twain. Cherry-brown finish. Issued in wooden box (see Fig. 1).
- 1981 Deluxe Quality Edition of 2500 unnumbered pipes, with gold inlay "P" on stem. Cherry-brown finish. Issued in red oversized box.
- 1984 Unnumbered issue of pipes, honey-brown finish, white stamped inlay "P" on stem. Issued in red oversized box.
- 1985 Limited Edition of 1000 pipes, numbered with gold ferrule, gold inlay "P" on stem, in wooden box (see Fig. 2).

Mike Leverette believes there the first Limited Edition appeared in 1979, but this seems to be contraindicated by the replica brochure's statements that work began "in late Spring 1981" (see Figure 1 below).

--Chas. Mundungus

**THE ORIGINAL IN
PERFECT REPLICA**

Both the Limited Edition and the Deluxe Quality Mark Twains faithfully recreate that 1896 Peterson bowl in the Mark Twain Museum in Hannibal, and will give their owners the same dry, cool, sweet smoke Mark Twain enjoyed from 1896 till his death in 1911.

The craftsmen at the Kapp & Peterson factory in Dublin, Ireland who invested so much of themselves in the creation of these unique pipes, join us in wishing you a lifetime of enjoyment from your Mark Twain by Peterson.

Mark Twain™
~

The™
MARK TWAIN
SYSTEM PIPE
by
PETERSON

**PETERSON OF
DUBLIN**
November, 1981

Peterson of Dublin
137 Scranton Avenue
Lynbrook, NY 11563

Figure 1.

MARK TWAIN'S PIPE

For years it rested, almost unnoticed, in the Mark Twain Museum in Hannibal, Missouri. Well-worn, with the bowl scraped thin by thousands of cleanings, it obviously had been one of the famous author's favorite pipes.

Then one day in 1980, Henry Sweets, museum curator, received a phone call from Bill Sweeney, President of Peterson of Dublin. Sweeney had come across an old photograph of Twain smoking a pipe — and it looked like a Peterson. A look at the hallmarked sterling silver band confirmed it... a Peterson it was.

Mark Twain's old friend was on its way to fame!

AN 1896 EDITION

Photographer/historian Susan Stark made a complete series of photographs for Sweeney to take to the Kapp & Peterson factory in Dublin, Ireland, home of the Peterson System Pipe since 1890.

The hallmarked band dated the pipe in 1896. The shape, for some unknown reason, had been discontinued in the early 1900's. Twain, the world traveller, had obviously heard about the remarkable smoking qualities of the Peterson System Pipe on one of his trips abroad, and had added this one to his collection. And it had clearly served him well.

RECREATING A CLASSIC

Justifiably excited by his discovery, Bill Sweeney decided that any pipe that had served its famous owner so long and well should be made available to today's pipe lovers, too.

Because the shape had been discontinued for so long, new measurements were needed. Kapp & Peterson's pipe expert, Pat Shaloo, flew from Dublin to Hannibal to record the exact dimensions. At the same time factory manager Jimmy Nicholson began the selection of aged briar blocks fine enough for this premium pipe.

AN HISTORIC INTRODUCTION

Hand work began in late Spring, 1981, and by July 4th two prototypes were ready for introduction. The occasion was appropriate: a special "1890's" Fourth of July celebration in Washington, D.C.

Meanwhile Paddy Larrigan, master pipemaker in Dublin, had selected the 400 finest bowls for special finishing. These were numbered (starting with 1/400) and each was marked with an inlaid gold P, signifying that it was one of the 400 Limited Edition Mark Twain System Pipes.

Another 2500 bowls were finished as Mark Twain Deluxe Quality System Pipes.

Figure 2.



Fig. 3. Limited Edition With Sterling Ferrule.



Figure 4. Limited Edition With Gold Ferrule, c. 1985.