

## “A Counterblaste to Tobacco”

**“Smoking is a custom loathsome to the eye, hateful to the nose, harmful to the brain, dangerous to the lungs”.** It would be more than three and a half centuries before the accuracy of King James 1st judgement on tobacco in 1604 was found to be accurate. Yet even so our relationship with the evil weed remains ambiguous. On the one hand it provides for the government an ever useful source of large tax revenues, whilst on the other they try to preach from the moral high ground that smoking damages our health and should be discouraged. Their latest effort in this area is the compulsory introduction in May (2017) of unattractive cigarette packets covered in dire warnings of death.



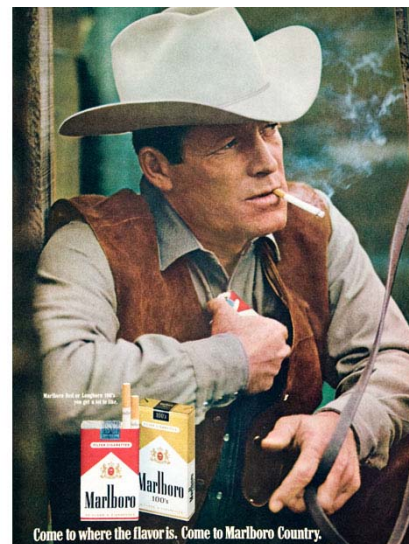
It is thought that colonists returning from Virginia in 1586 and puffing on their pipes started the smoking craze at Court which rapidly spread throughout the population as a whole, causing concern leading to the above pronouncement of King James. He tried to control the new habit with taxes, but with little success. In 1610 Sir Francis Bacon commented on the rise in tobacco consumption and noted that it was a habit difficult to drop. In 1614 the first export shipment of tobacco from Jamestown arrived in Britain. By the 1680s Jamestown was producing more than 25 million pounds of tobacco per year for export to Europe.

Almost from day one the medicinal powers of tobacco were recommended. It would cure, it was claimed, anything from toothache to cancer. (Bizarrely, the potato, introduced into this country at the same time, was regarded as potentially dangerous.) In the plague year of 1665 smoking became almost compulsory as a defence against the evil vapours thought to cause the disease. Pupils at Eton were compelled to smoke a pipe of tobacco at breakfast. On the 7th of June 1665, with the spread of the plague terrifying Pepys he wrote in his diary: **“... I was forced to buy some roll tobacco to smell and chew, -which took away the apprehension...”**

Foreign visitors to this country in the second half of the 17th century were struck, perhaps even startled, by just how popular and widespread smoking had become, reaching into all levels of society, but especially popular amongst the “common sort”. No one was excluded. Men, women and children, all enjoyed their daily pipe or several of tobacco. One such visitor was told that many children were given a pipe of tobacco in the morning instead of breakfast. Our own epic traveller round Britain, Celia Fiennes (1662-1741 author of **“Through England on a Side Saddle in the Time of William and Mary”**) commented on the large number of women and children she saw in the West Country puffing on their pipes. Always pipes of course, since the modern cigarette was not created until the second half of the 19th century, although King Charles II started a fashion for snuff. A clay pipe might last for four smoking sessions before breaking and being discarded, which helps to explain why fragments are so frequently found during archaeological digs.

Astonishingly, it is only within the lifetime of most people reading this that the true horror of the risks to health posed by tobacco was revealed, leading to the ongoing struggle to try to

reduce the number of smokers and victims of smoking. This initially produced an advertising counter attack from the tobacco industry which featured men in white coats, doctors and dentists, as well as he-man types like cowboys, recommending the benefits of cigarettes. Such hypocritical advertising is now forbidden, but the tobacco industry still ducks and dives to promote its dubious wares. The cowboy in the Marlboro advert is thought to have died from lung cancer. Such is one of life's little ironies.



## Post Scriptum

The impetus for this item came from an article in the Huddersfield Examiner (22/5/2017) which reported that a shop in Huddersfield has noticed a renewed and growing interest in a return to pipe tobacco and pipe smoking, especially amongst younger people.

As King James 1st so rightly said:

***“Have you not reason to be ashamed and forebears this filthie noveltie, harming yourselves in both persons and goods?”***

David Cockman for HDAS May 2017