Hands On Learning
with Reading Museum Service

SMOKING H153A

We all now know that smoking is very bad for your health, but in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries smoking was considered a harmless and pleasurable pastime.





It was during the Elizabethan era that tobacco first came to Britain. European explorers discovered the plant (pictured on the left) in South America, where it had been cultivated since 6000 BC. At first it wasn't popular, as you can see from the account below, written by King James I in 1604:

[smoking is] a custom loathsome to the eye, hateful to the nose, harmful to the brain, dangerous to the lungs, and in the black, stinking fume thereof, nearest resembling the horrible Stygian smoke of the pit that is bottomless.

You might think that anti-smoking campaigns are a new thing, but as you can see, they started as soon as tobacco was introduced to this country!

Despite this early warning, smoking grew in popularity and by the eighteenth century it was commonplace. By the late nineteenth century rolling tobacco in paper to form a cigarette had become the most popular way to smoke. Developments during the Industrial Revolution meant that machines were invented that could produce 200 cigarettes a minute. Today they can produce 9000 in the same amount of time. During the early twentieth century cigarettes were even promoted as being good for you, as you can see from some of the advertising slogans below:

AND NOW - CHESTERFIELD FIRST TO GIVE YOU SCIENTIFIC FACTS IN SUPPORT OF SMOKING.
Chesterfield: 1950s

NEW MIRACLE MINT IN JULEPS FRESHENS THE MOUTH AT EVERY PUFF. EVEN IF YOU CHAIN-SMOKE, YOUR MOUTH FEELS CLEAN, SPARKLING ALL DAY LONG!
Juleps: 1940s

SO MILD! YOU CAN SMOKE ALL YOU WANT!
ATHLETES SAY- "CAMELS DON'T GET YOUR WIND!"
Camels: 1930s

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During the second half of the twentieth century research into the negative effects of smoking on health began. The results were shocking. Smoking became a less popular habit from then on. People also realised that the tobacco industry was trying to mislead them by making adverts that ignored serious health warnings and encouraged smoking. They tried to portray smoking as fashionable and attractive, even though the law stated that a health warning must be printed on the actual packet. Here are some slogans used by tobacco companies during the 1990s and a health warning on a cigarette packet from 2003:

WHY DO WE APPLY MASCARA AT 55 MPH?
BECAUSE WE CAN.
VIRGINIA SLIMS - IT'S A WOMAN THING.
Virginia Slims: 1997

"B KOOL!"
Kool: 1999



This box contains objects linked to smoking from the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

Clay pipe

Nobody knows exactly when clay pipes were first used for smoking tobacco, but the idea was probably introduced in the sixteenth century when the plant was first brought to Britain. There have been many changes to the shape, size and design, but the basic structure and function has remained the same. A pipe has a long, thin stem with a round bowl on one end. The tobacco is packed into the bowl and lit with a match. The smoke draws up the stem towards the mouth. The pointed part that sticks out at the bottom is called the heel, and is designed to give the smoker a more secure grip.

This nineteenth century pipe has a ribbed bowl with the initials of the maker on the heel. If you look closely you can see a 'W' on each side. This probably stands for W. White and Sons, who were a large and successful company from Glasgow, Scotland. They made millions of clay pipes and exported them all over the world.



Snuff

Snuff is a type of finely ground tobacco that is sniffed up the nose in small pinches. It became popular in Britain at the same time as smoking tobacco. A few people still take snuff today as it is thought to be a healthier alternative to smoking cigarettes, although doctors are not convinced that this is true.

Owning a good quality snuff box was very important. The box should be airtight and have a strong hinge. It must not be too big because if you carried around more than you needed in a day then it will begin to go stale. For this reason the lid of the snuff box should ideally be flat so as not to contain unwanted air. The little boxes can be highly decorative and are now sought-after collectors items.

This wooden snuff box is carved in the shape of a pair of clogs. The sticker on the bottom shows that it was purchased in Brittany, France in 1897. The lid is flat and is engraved with a picture of a boat.





The brass box is thought to have been used for carrying snuff or ordinary tobacco for a pipe in the eighteenth century. It has a very practical curved shape, which could easily be held in the palm of the hand. The inscription of the owner, 'G. Thorp' is shown on the lid.

The following extract is from *The Pickwick Papers* - a novel written by Charles Dickens, published in 1837. It talks about the decorative boxes and also the difficulties some people had in taking snuff:

"Do you do anything in this way, sir?" inquired the tall footman, producing a small snuff box with a fox's head on the top of it. "Not without sneezing" replied Sam. "Why, it is difficult, sir, I confess" said the tall footman. "It may be done by degrees, sir. Coffee is the best practice. I carried coffee, sir, for a long time. It looks very like rappee [snuff], Sir".

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Brass tinder box



A tinder box contained a piece of flint, steel and some tinder - a dry fibrous material like straw, wood shavings or grass. The flint and the steel were struck together to make a spark, which ignited the tinder.

Imagine trying to make a spark with wet materials. A tinder box solved that problem by keeping the tinder dry and all the equipment needed was together in one place. Their use declined when matches were invented in the eighteenth century.

This box has a special compartment inside for the tinder and a hinged panel with a candle holder. On the lid of the box is a picture of a pedlar - a man who travels around selling goods. The quote underneath says 'some old shoes for new broom'.

Sutton's Seeds ashtray

Sutton Seeds is an internationally renowned company selling flower and vegetable seeds, young plants, fruit bushes and many other gardening products. The company started out as a small business in Reading in 1806, originally just selling corn. But by the end of the nineteenth century they were employing 2000 people and had even started to supply Royal farms and gardens. Their Reading headquarters were proudly named 'The Royal Seed Establishment'.

Today Suttons is part of an international company called Vilmorin, the largest suppliers of seeds in the world. The company has moved its factories from Reading to Devon.

This glass ashtray was used as advertising for the company and features a garden path bordered with flowerbeds - a lot more fragrant than smelly cigarette smoke!

