

# Tobacco through the ages

## History of Tobacco Overview

Tobacco's history goes back too far to trace. Paleontologists project that it may have begun growing in the Americas as long as 8000 years ago, and archaeological data indicates that folks have been smoking it, one way or another, for almost four thousand years

- First cultivation of the Tobacco plant in America
- Indigenous Americans begin smoking and using tobacco enemas
- Within 150 years of Columbus finding tobacco in the new world in the 15<sup>th</sup> century, tobacco was being used around the globe
- The mode of nicotine delivery has changed from use of pipes in C16<sup>th</sup>, snuff in the 18<sup>th</sup> century to the cigar in C 19<sup>th</sup> and then manufactured cigarettes in C 20<sup>th</sup>
- Numbers of smokers greatly increased in the 20<sup>th</sup>-21<sup>st</sup> century's with one third of the world's population smoking today despite thousands of studies showing that tobacco kills users and non users,

## Tobacco and Slavery

- The link with Tobacco and slavery started in the Portuguese colony of Brazil in the 16<sup>th</sup> Century
- It is believed between two and five million slaves were brought from the Slave Coast in Africa to Brazil from 1640-1870
- By the end of the 17<sup>th</sup> Century tobacco was grown on plantations in the American colonies
- As other countries entered the slave trade, they also exchanged tobacco for slaves
- Tobacco also was provided to slaves during their transport from Africa to the New World. It was considered, along with rum and brandy, to be a way to sedate the slaves.
- Glasgow grew from a small town to a city of commerce through its dominance of the tobacco trade from the American colonies to Europe in the 18<sup>th</sup> century.

## The history of tobacco

The origins of tobacco are lost in the mists of time. Smoking is universal and this history relates primarily to Britain.

Tobacco came to Europe via the New World. Christopher Columbus made the first recorded reference to tobacco in 1492. In Britain, tobacco was introduced to the Elizabethan court by Sir Walter Raleigh and he was a confirmed smoker until his death on the scaffold at the Tower of London.

Originally tobacco was classified as a drug and could only be bought from apothecaries. It was recognised for its medicinal qualities, particularly on the continent.

Contrary to popular opinion there have always been detractors of tobacco. James I of England (James VI of Scotland) published his famous counterblast to tobacco in 1603. He concluded that it was a custom loathsome to the eye, harmful to the brain and dangerous to the lungs. The warning did not have the desired effect nor did raising the tax from 2d per lb. to 6s10d per lb. This was the start of tobacco being used as a revenue raiser, which has continued to the present day.

Tobacco was grown in Virginia and it is regarded as America's first crop. Until the American War of Independence, tobacco could only be sold to Britain, and these trade restrictions were one of the reasons for the war. Before George Washington became the first President of America, he was a tobacco planter.

Snuff had been popular at the court since Charles II returned from exile on the continent. The popularity of snuff with people at large dates from the introduction of ground snuff in 1702. In its heyday, there were teachers of etiquette on the taking of snuff.

Cigars reached Britain following the end of the Napoleonic wars in 1815. They gradually gained in popularity and there was a smoking room in the Houses of Parliament.

British soldiers returning after the Crimean war in 1856 brought cigarettes to Britain from Turkey. At first these were considered effeminate, but gradually gained in popularity. Cigarettes were a favourite present for troops in the First World War.

Women began to smoke and were encouraged to do so by advertising and the glamour of smoking in Hollywood films.

Most men and many women smoked until the 1980's when health warnings, changing social attitudes and punitive taxes began to take their toll. Smoking is now banned on many premises.

[Above excerpt \(History of Tobacco\) from Smokerama](#)

## **The Glasgow Tobacco Lords**

Glasgow merchants had financed trading missions to the Chesapeake since 1707 and they began to dominate the tobacco trade after 1740. Surprisingly, only a small proportion of Glasgow's merchants were regularly involved in the tobacco

trade with the big three syndicates headed by William Cuninghame, Alexander Speirs and John Glassford.

The Glasgow merchants used a store system along the shores of the Chesapeake - Maryland and Virginia in the USA. The stores were looked after by Scottish factors who stockpiled hogsheads of tobacco in anticipation of the arrival of a company vessel, which ensured a rapid turnaround. The factors offered credit as well as consumer goods, plantation equipment and money in exchange for tobacco. Many of the bigger stores used slave labour to work on company farms which provided food for the storekeeper and his assistants and also to carry out general labouring tasks.

The Glasgow tobacco lords made their money from re-exporting tobacco through Scottish ports as well as by handling the domestic demand for tobacco. They invested their money in industry and land and many built townhouses in the centre of Glasgow, spreading westwards from Trongate.

The outbreak of the American War of Independence in 1775 sparked the beginning of the end of the tobacco age. The American planters were heavily in debt to the Glasgow merchants and collection of these debts was impossible during hostilities. Glasgow tobacco fleets were also seriously threatened by hostile action. In 1783 when peace came, the now independent United States could send tobacco direct to Europe, cutting out the need for the Glasgow merchant.

[http://www.scan.org.uk/exhibitions/blackhistory/blackhistory\\_3.htm](http://www.scan.org.uk/exhibitions/blackhistory/blackhistory_3.htm)

**With special permission from 'Glasgow City Archives and Special Collections'**

## Useful websites

[http://www.tobacco.org/History/Tobacco\\_History.html](http://www.tobacco.org/History/Tobacco_History.html)

<http://www.ash.org.uk/information/tobacco-industry/tobacco-chronology>

<http://www.forces.org/writers/james/files/history.htm>

[http://www.ashscotland.org.uk/media/3650/Learning%20About%20Tobacco%20IDL%20Pack%20\(2\)%20\(2\).pdf](http://www.ashscotland.org.uk/media/3650/Learning%20About%20Tobacco%20IDL%20Pack%20(2)%20(2).pdf)

<http://www.smokerama.co.uk/about.asp>

[http://healthliteracy.worlded.org/docs/tobacco/Unit1/2history\\_of.html](http://healthliteracy.worlded.org/docs/tobacco/Unit1/2history_of.html)

<http://smokingsides.com/docs/hist.html>

<http://www.chickenhead.com/truth/1950s.html>

<http://www.tobacco.org/resources/history/>

[http://timelines.tv/atlantic\\_trade.html](http://timelines.tv/atlantic_trade.html)

[www.eduplace.com/kids/socsci/books/applications/maps](http://www.eduplace.com/kids/socsci/books/applications/maps)

<http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2007/03/23121622/4>

Tobacco Fact Sheet 8, History of Tobacco, Tobacco Facts, NHS Health Scotland: <http://www.healthscotland.com/documents/311.aspx>

[www.glasgowlife.org.uk](http://www.glasgowlife.org.uk)

Book: Tobacco Lords, Fred Rendell and Arnold Bell, Jordanhill College of Education, 1983

The Tobacco Atlas History of Tobacco page sourced from <http://www.who.int/tobacco/en/atlas2.pdf> Atlas page

Class visits may be arranged to Glasgow Peoples Palace where they offer a workshop to groups of no more than 20 people for a cost of £35

For Information log on to : [www.glasgowlife.org.uk](http://www.glasgowlife.org.uk) or Text Phone: 0141 276 0795 Fax: 0141 276 0787

You may also visit the National Museum of Scotland in Edinburgh where there are displays about the tobacco and sugar trade in Glasgow (case 2) in the Trade and Industry section.