

Golden Gate Pipe Club Meeting November 2011

Our Pipe Club met on 3rd November 2011 at Telford's, and I must say this was the best gathering yet.

I drove in with a friend named Barney who used to work at the legendary (now sadly defunct) pipe shop Drucquer & Sons Ltd in Berkeley. As we arrived early and my friend had never seen Telford's before, we spent some time admiring Brian's vast displays of pipes both old and new.

Greg Pease, America's foremost creator of artisanal tobaccos, had kindly sent me some tins of his newest offering called Lagonda, and I put them out for the Club to enjoy. What a rich, wonderful smoke it is, reminding me of some older "English" mixtures. The Latakia, while present, is not overwhelming, and I imagine Lagonda will age nicely in a cellar.



Greg Pease's Lagonda

I had invited Greg to the meeting, and was very pleased to have him there. His knowledge of pipes and tobacco is world class, and we welcome him heartily.



Greg Pease aka The Dark Lord of Pipe Tobacco

Meanwhile, Brian Telford passed out some wonderful old estate pipes from a client of many years' standing, and I purchased one: a fine Extra Large Charatan from the Lane-era.



Estate Pipes

Dr. William Miller, our club historian, showed a Peterson centenary pipe which looked very classic and distinguished.



Peterson 1890 Centenary Pipe

But the highlight of the evening was a wonderful surprise unveiled by Dr. Axelrod, our energetic club president. I had seen the object earlier, and was thus sworn to secrecy. Nonetheless, I emailed a few members we had not seen in a while, and, without divulging the mystery, urged them in the strongest possible terms to show up for the meeting. This was too momentous an occasion to miss.

So what was this great secret? Mike Axelrod slowly, teasingly, skillfully unveiled it thus:

First he produced a large, almost suitcase-like box made of fine leather for Harrods, the most exclusive department store in London.



Mike with the case. What is inside?

Then he opened the case to reveal two hinged compartments, each covered with a leather and suede panel. The brass fittings were splendid. Carefully removing one panel, he revealed a gorgeous array of smooth pipes. Then Mike lifted the other panel to display beautiful rusticated and blasted pipes.



The case is opened!

Gasps of admiration rose from the club members assembled around the opened case. As Mike explained, this is a 31 day Dunhill pipe set commissioned by Harrods in about 1970. This magnificent collection is the only one of its kind in the world.

Then came the most exciting moment of all: Mike said we could each select a pipe and smoke it.

To determine who could choose first, we each took a playing card from a deck. As luck would have it, I drew the ace and had the right to start. However, as I had been to Mike's house twice and already smoked two pipes in the set, I yielded my place till last so that others could pick whatever pipe was calling out to them.

As each member made his choice, he left his card in the case as a place marker.



Place markers

Eventually, when my turn came up, I chose a sweet little prince with a finely executed blast. It was feather light and smoked perfectly.



A Dunhill Prince



A crowded table

As we sat contentedly puffing on the Dunhills (many never before smoked), Mike opened the floor to a discussion of a book we read for the meeting. Our president believes strongly that the Pipe Club should, in addition to admiring briars and baccies, pursue other activities such as music (hence the interest in Segovia), movies and books.

The assigned book was a novel: Sarah's Key by Tatiana de Rosnay. Set in France, it consists of two interwoven stories. One takes place during the Second World War when France was occupied by the Germans, and the collaborationist government of Vichy helped the Gestapo in rounding up thousands of Jews to send to the death camps. The other story is set in contemporary Paris where an American woman discovers that her French husband's parents are mysteriously linked to a Jewish family which disappeared that awful summer in 1942.

The discussion around the table was lively and well informed. Sarah's Key is a gripping, sad tale posing difficult moral questions.

This meeting was the best one yet: many fascinating pipes and tobaccos, some interesting new members well known in the pipe world, a lively book discussion and, best of all, the marvellous pipe set from Harrods. Thanks again to Dr. Axelrod for sharing this exquisitely rare treasure with us. Gosh, how do we top all that?...