

THE PRE '25 DUNHILL PIPE

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please note that to a substantial extent this paper has been superseded by my [Dunhill Pipe Book](#)

Commencing business in 1893 as an auto supply house, Dunhill began producing its own oil cured briar smoking pipes in 1910. In the following decade and a half almost all the elements of the now classic Dunhill pipe line came into place, for instance the two principal finishes - a mahogany "Bruyere" and a black sandblast "Shell" - the metal 'inner tube' fitting and sandblast patents, most all the classic shapes, the white dotted bit, the one year guarantee, and the associated date code stampings. In recent years a number of articles have addressed how to use those date code stampings to date Dunhill briars dating after 1925 but virtually none have addressed the earlier years (R.D. Field 'A Dunhill Pipe Dating Guide' Pipe Smoker Vol 2 No.1 Winter '84; the Levin Pipes International dating guide in its Dunhill catalogues compilation; 'A Dunhill Pipe Primer' The Smoker's Pipeline, Vol 10, No. 4 March '93; [see Chart](#), and Pipeworks @ Wilke Dunhill & Barling, 'General Information and Dating Guide'). In fact however, a good many Dunhill briars dating to those earlier years may still be found today and working with a 1980's letter from the long since retired Dunhill archivist, S.F.Gomersall (as recounted in an article by Michael Friedberg published The Smoker's Pipeline, Vol 6, No 5 July '89 p. 13 [See Article](#)), pipes in my collection and some of others, I find that most such pipes may be quite accurately dated.

A 1910 - 1925 DATING GUIDE

BRUYERE - PRIOR TO OCTOBER 21, 1918

1910 - October 20, 1918 - "DUKE STREET". Initially only "Bruyere" pipes were produced. Through June of 1918 they were stamped on a straight line:

**"A DUNHILL
DUKE ST. S.W."**

From June 1918 through October 1918 a small subscript " ° " (sometimes called a "stop") was added after the "A".

The only finish to ever bear this 'duke street' stamping was the Bruyere and after June 1918 the only other time Dunhill has employed the stamping was in 1985 in connection with its two Bruyere pipe sterling banded 75th Anniversary Set. These anniversary pipes (model 1, a small ¾ bent, and model 3, a small billiard) are readily recognizable as the reverse side of the shank is stamped "75 YEARS" and the sterling band has a floral letter "L" as one of the hallmark strikes. Thus if you find a 'duke street' stamped pipe without these markings, you know it dates from before October 21, 1918.

Some further refinement of the pre- October 1918 period is also possible. While Dunhill introduced it's initial "inner tube" fitting (a metal removable tube that fits in the shank to ease cleaning and removal of tobacco fragments) around 1911 it did not secure it's initial patent for the same until 1913, thus 'duke street' pipes with patent number stampings may be dated to the 1913 - 1918 period. Similarly, if the 'duke street' stamped pipes also are stamped PAT. 1914 or PAT. MAR.9.15 they may be dated to either the 1914 or 1915 - 1918 period respectively. However, it must be emphasized that the lack of such patent stampings on a 'duke street' pipe is not indicative of an earlier period.

[NOMENCLATURE & EXAMPLES](#)

BRUEYRE - SUBSEQUENT TO OCTOBER 1918

October 21, 1918 - to Year's End - 'Equal Length LONDON'. On October 21, 1918 the "duke st. s. w" stamping was changed to "LONDON". For a two-month period, through the end of 1918 this "LONDON" stamping was equal in length to the "DUNHILL" stamping immediately above it. This is the only time that the "DUNHILL [/] LONDON" stampings are of equal length. Thus if the that stamping is of equal length you know the pipe dates from late 1918.

[NOMENCLATURE & EXAMPLES](#)

1919 - 'Arched DUNHILL'. In 1919 the "DUNHILL" stamping was changed from a straight line to a shallow arch. This is the only time that this stamping was employed. There are two variations of the arched "DUNHILL" stamping. From January 3, 1919 to May 20, 1919 the straight line "LONDON" stamping immediately below the arched "DUNHILL" is within the compass of the arch, while from May 21 to Year's End it is equal to the compass with the "L" and final "N" of "LONDON" being immediately below the "D" and the final "L" of "DUNHILL". Thus if the "DUNHILL" stamping of the pipe forms a shallow arch you know the pipe was made in 1919.

[NOMENCLATURE & EXAMPLES](#)

1920 (actually to November 1920) - 'No Code or Tails'. 1920 is the trickiest year to date since absence rather than presence are the keys, so please bear with me for some explanations.

First, the 'code'. Dunhill began its one year pipe guarantee policy in 1921 and in order to determine the pipe's year of purchase, sometime in that year it began adding a raised underlined "1" immediately after the "MADE IN ENGLAND" or patent stamping. In 1922 this number was changed to "2" and increased by a factor of one each year through 1925 (see standard dating code guides for years thereafter). Prior to 1921 there was no such code stamping.

Second, the 'tails'. Customarily the "D" of the "DUNHILL" stamping is made up of a vertical backbone line met flush at the top and the bottom by a semi-circle. This is called a "D" without tails or simply "no tails" and you can see it by looking at virtually any Dunhill pipe you pick up. However, from November 1920 to apparently sometime in 1922 the "D" stamping was "with tails" meaning that the ends of the semi circle clearly and noticeably extended past the vertical backbone line at both the top and bottom (the two extensions being the 'tails').

With this in mind, a Dunhill Bruyere from 1920 is one that like all pre 1921/1922 Dunhill pipes does not have a date code and within that twelve year universe of pipes, does not have a 'duke street' stamping, does not have an arched "DUNHILL" and does not have a "DUNHILL" "D" with tails. Or to put it affirmatively it looks like most any other pre World War II Dunhill Bruyere except that the date code is absent. But here's the rub, pun intended, prior to the war on occasion pipes inadvertently left the factory without a date code or more often with date codes less heavily struck than the adjacent nomenclature. Thus the absence of a date code can more often be more indicative of subsequent pipe buffing or factory error than of a 1920 pipe. As a consequence dating a pipe to 1920 is always a judgment call and even if all the objective tests are met ultimately rests on a subjective 'feel' for the period.

[NOMENCLATURE & EXAMPLES](#)

1921 (actually from November 1920) - Tails and/or Code. 1921 is far less problematic. The key distinction between 1920 and 1921 is that beginning in November of 1920 the "D" in the "DUNHILL" stamping is with tails. As Dunhill appears to have discontinued the tails stamping sometime in 1922, a pipe having a "D" with tails' and without a "2" date code can be comfortably dated to 1921 (note that even

if the "2" was buffed off or omitted in the factory the uniqueness of the "D" with tails means that at most you are a year off in the dating).

It also appears that sometime in 1921, probably late in the year, a raised underlined "1" date code was added after either the "MADE IN ENGLAND" or patent stamping.

[NOMENCLATURE & EXAMPLES](#)

1922 - 1925 - Date Code. From 1922 on pipes can be reliably dated based on the date code stamping that immediately follows either the "MADE IN ENGLAND" or patent stamping and is generally found either raised and/or underlined. "2" indicates 1922, "3" 1923, "4" 1924 and "5" 1925. (While these single digits were also used as date codes for the early '40s, '50s and '60s, the later pipes can be readily distinguished. For instance pipes from the '40s do not have an "INNER TUBE" stamping but do have a patent number while those certain bent shaped pipes from 1922 - 1925 that lack the "INNER TUBE" stamping will also not be stamped with a patent number. Additionally generally speaking the patent number used on pipes from the '40s is from the 1930's (e.g. 417574/34) obviously ruling out an earlier manufacture date. In a similar mode pipes from the '50s and '60s have size stampings (e.g. a circled 4), a stamping not found on pipes made before the '50s. Further in 1952 the "LONDON" stamping on Bruyere pipes made before 1952 was changed to "BRUYERE".)

[NOMENCLATURE & EXAMPLES](#)

SHELL

1919 - 1921 - No Date Code. Although Dunhill applied for its English sandblast patent in October of 1917 it was not granted until October, 1918 and it is believed that manufacture of that finish did not begin until after that grant or effectively 1919. It appears for all practicable purposes that the initial 1919 Shell stamping was "DUNHILL'S "SHELL"" when there was also a "MADE IN ENGLAND" stamping or "DUNHILL'S "SHELL BRIAR"" when there was no additional "MADE IN ENGLAND" stamping and in both cases additionally a patent stamping (It would also appear that there was a prototype stamping in either 1918 or 1919 that omitted both "SHELL" and "SHELL BRIAR", simply reading "DUNHILL'S" but either that stamping was never generally used or was used for only a brief time).

With the same caveats directed to the 1920 Bruyeres applying here, generally speaking the absence of a date code dates a Shell briar to the 1919 - 1921 period. Some further definition is possible based on the patent stampings. A "/20" patent number without a date code obviously eliminates 1919 dating the pipe to 1920/1921 and a "PAT. MAR. 9.15" with a "PAT. APP FOR" stamping dates the pipe to 1919/1920 (note however, that a "PAT.1914" with a "PAT. APP FOR" offers no such definition and can date to as late as 1923).

[NOMENCLATURE & EXAMPLES](#)

1922 - 1925 - Date Codes. From 1922 forward the same date codes discussed with reference to Bruyeres also apply to Shells.

[NOMENCLATURE & EXAMPLES](#)

OTHER NOMENCLATURE ISSUES, COMMENTS & CURIOSITIES

"MADE IN ENGLAND" & "FABRICATION ANGLAISE". While "MADE IN ENGLAND" & "FABRICATION ANGLAISE", as the case may be, appear to have become a uniform alternative stampings by the mid 1920's, initially those stampings appear to have been reserved only for pipes intended for export.

"SHELL" vs "SHELL BRIAR". This seems to be a matter of ascetics, the former being used in conjunction with a "MADE IN ENGLAND" stamping and the latter being used when the "MADE IN ENGLAND" stamping is absent.

SHELL MODEL NUMBERS. While all Shell pipes began as standard Bruyere model shapes the deep sandblasting of the period meant that the resulting pipe could be far from standard. During this period and for a time after the nomenclature examples as well as catalogues seems to suggest that there was in a place a dual model number system, one number reflecting the original Bruyere model shape and the second, a single digit, reflecting a Shell category. The particulars of this apparent dual system and it's evolution however, are unknown to me.

"INNER TUBE". While generally speaking the "INNER TUBE" stamping is standard for Bruyeres during this period, when an inner tube was not fitted in the pipe (e.g. many bent shapes) the stamping together with related patent numbers was omitted.

"A". In this period Bruyere pipes were uniformly stamped with an "A", however, sometimes the "A" was circled and sometimes not. Whether the "A" is circled or not has no bearing on the date of the pipe. I am presently unawares of the distinction underlying the two styles. [Example](#)

Stop after the "A". On Bruyeres between June and October 1918 and with some non date related omissions, from 1920 through at least 1925, a 'stop' (a subscript "o" and in one known instance square shaped) was stamped immediately after the "A". The rationale for the stamping appears to have been ascetic and other then dating a 'duke street' stamped pipe to the second half of 1918, the stamping appears to have no interpretive value. [Example](#)

"DR". Dunhill used a "DR" stamping to denote straight grained pipes as early as the 'duke street' (1910 - 1918) period. However, such straight graining is largely lost in the dark Bruyere finish effectively making the stamping a curiosity until the Root finish, which allows for the effective display of the grain, was introduced in 1930 (from that time on Bruyeres were never stamped "DR" regardless of grain - since at least in the pre war period the Root finished pipes were not a result of grading the grain of potential Bruyere briar but rather were made from a different briar altogether one can occasionally find an exceptionally grained post 1930 Bruyere that in an earlier time might have been stamped "DR").

PATENT INFORMATION. Patents in this period refer either to the inner tube (including the inner tube with flange refinement) or the sandblast process. The year date after the slash for English patents refers to the application date while for US patents to the grant date. While the patent numbers are generally given (with or without a slash year date) a PAT. MAR.9.15 and PAT. 1914 stamping referring respectively to the US and Canadian inner tube patents was also used, apparently up to 1924. PAT. APP. FOR is a generic stamping, e.g. if preceded by "PAT. 1914" stamping it refers to the Canadian sandblast patent application, but if preceded by a PAT. MAR.9.15" stamping it refers to the US sandblast patent application. Pertinent patent numbers follow:

| | INNER TUBE | INNER TUBE with FLANGE | SANDBLAST |
|---------------|------------|---------------------------|------------|
| ENGLISH | 5861/12 | 116989/17 | 119708/17 |
| UNITED STATES | 1130806/15 | 1343253/20 | 1341418/20 |
| CANADIAN | 158709/14 | 197365/20 | ?????? |
| FRENCH | ????? | 491232/19 | ?????? |

"EX". The Dunhill one year guarantee was good for only one replacement pipe. Accordingly, a replacement pipe was given a supplementary "EX" stamping to preclude further replacement. This stamping was put in use at the same time as (or at least less than a year after) the date code stamping. **"DAMAGED PRICE" & "X" Out.** In this period Dunhill apparently marketed damaged pipes stamped as such, e.g. a Bruyere and a Shell respectively stamped "DAMAGED PRICE 3'/6'" and "X" (obliterating part of "DUNHILL'S") have been found. [Example](#)

INCONSISTENT NOMENCLATURE. I'm not sure whether it was Barry Levin or Bob Hamlin who first recounted the story of a visit to a famous pipe maker who explained that some nomenclature changes were simply the result of mislaying the right stamping tool and then later finding it again, but the point is not all pipe nomenclature is consistent or lends itself to 'logical' explanation. Similarly Michael Friedberg in his '89 article on early Dunhill dating advised that "In the early years, Dunhill was not always consistent in its stampings." quoting for support Dunhill archivist Gomersall's letter to the effect that:

"We hope you can appreciate that it is only with some trepidation we issue information on this subject especially in reference form, for from our experience, the interpretation of such data, can be and often is, much adrift. The markings have to be taken as points of evidence and weighed in the balance of experience and 'feel', for at times all the factors do not add up for the uninitiated to make a positive judgment."

Alfred Dunhill was very much a perfectionist, and while inconsistency and inadvertent omission are a necessary part of the human condition, I interpret Mr. Gomersall's comments differently, for I have found that with respect to Dunhill nomenclature, seeming inconsistencies when viewed with sufficient nomenclature examples or given thought do in fact reveal a fairly consistent logic. So rather, I interpret Mr. Gomersall as simply saying that early Dunhill nomenclature is not without its complexities, that the factory records are incomplete for this time period, and the time increasingly distant. Thus when faced with seeming inconsistencies (e.g. the circled and uncircled "A") I believe it is most probably the result of having not yet developed a sufficient universe of pipe nomenclature examples to allow for an understanding of the underlying logic or alternatively simply not having thought the complexities through. To wit, two examples:

Example 1: The apparent "MADE IN ENGLAND" and "SHELL" vs "SHELL BRIAR" inconsistencies, the logical explanations for which only became (hopefully) apparent when sufficient nomenclature examples were put together and compared (of course there is always the danger that more examples will throw the 'logical' explanations out the window).

Example 2: I have a Dunhill Bruyere with clear 1920 stampings (i.e. a "D" without tails rather than with tails) except for an equally clear raised underlined "1" date code. One could view this as simply an inconsistent "DUNHILL" stamp use, on the other hand knowing that Dunhill has long had a history of supplementary stampings dating back to at least 1922 (e.g. the "EX" example above), it seems far more likely to me that this pipe was manufactured and initially stamped in 1920 but remained unsold at the time the one year guarantee was introduced in 1921 and received a supplementary date code stamp at that time. [Example](#)

THE PIPE

Having discussed the nomenclature of the pre '25 Dunhill pipe it would seem appropriate to close with a few words about the pipe itself.

The pre '25 Dunhill comes in only two finishes the Bruyere and Shell. In other words if the striking appearance of beautiful grain is important to you, give these pipes a pass, for even a DR Bruyere can't begin to hold a candle in terms of readily visible grain to a post 1930 well grained Root briar. Similarly if

you only like large pipes the pre '25 Dunhill is likewise generally a pass, for while the pre '25 Dunhill is found in a full range of shapes, in general it is an appreciably smaller pipe - roughly a group 3 by today's standards - and pipes larger than what is today a group 4 are relatively rare. On the other hand if you are looking for a medium or smaller pipe with great smoking characteristics, a warm tactile feel, and exceptional character I doubt you will ever find better.

The pre '25 bit is a thicker, rounder vulcanite, which in my view works exceptionally well for a smaller pipe, less so for larger pieces.

Due no doubt in large part to age, the pre '25 Bruyere finished pipes tends to have developed a wonderful patina, warm to the touch and unsurpassed by most any other pipe I know of save Root briars from the mid to late '30s which are perhaps the more exceptional in that regard.

The pre '25 Shell is an unusually craggy sandblast giving a piece great character although admittedly often at the expense of unbalancing the shape. I find however, that this works well for the smaller sized bowl, less so for the larger. For the larger sizes, e.g. the LB or 120, the more refined, better balanced but still craggy blasts of the '30s and early '50s are preferable, the reverse in my opinion being true for the medium and small shapes.

The Dunhill, like almost all English briars is an oil cured pipe and I have come to the firm belief that these pipes truly mellow with age. You can sense it with briars from the '50s and as far as I am concerned it becomes eminently demonstrable in Dunhills from the '30s and before. A post war Dunhill is a great smoke but a pre war piece is a taste of heaven. I have had less than good smoking post war Dunhills and less than good smoking pre war pipes of other manufacturers, but after being cleaned up I have never had less than an excellent smoking pre war Dunhill. In my opinion such older Dunhills represent a superlative marriage of age and quality pipe making.

In short, while I must admit a preference for a '30s Root Briar or '30s - early '50s Shell Briar when it comes to the larger size bowl or for the grain, in my opinion when it comes to the medium and smaller sizes a Dunhill from the 1920's or 1910's is unsurpassed.

(Thankyou's to Mike Hagley, Bob Hamlin & Ed Price for assisting with information helpful for this article.)

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