



ALFRED DUNHILL

Pipe Manufacturer

ALFRED DUNHILL'S FLAGSHIP SHOP ON DUKE STREET, JUST OFF LONDON'S FAMOUS PICCADILLY, IS AN EXERCISE IN RESTRAINED ELEGANCE. CORDIALLY GREETED AT THE DOOR, MONITORED BY HELPFUL ASSISTANTS AND REFRESHINGLY UNJOSTLED BY THE WEST END CROWDS, A VISIT TO THE SHOP IS A RETURN TO A GOLDEN AGE OF GENTEEL BROWSING AND BUYING. YOU QUIETLY STROLL PAST THE ROWS OF CLOTHES AND ACCESSORIES THAT HAVE MADE ALFRED DUNHILL AN INTERNATIONALLY RECOGNISED LUXURY GOODS BRAND, WHILE THE MUTED SOUNDS OF ORCHESTRAL MUSIC PROVIDE A RESTFUL AMBIENCE. AND THERE, AT THE HEART OF THE SHOP, YOU FIND THE SPIRITUAL HOME OF THE WHOLE ALFRED DUNHILL ORGANISATION - THE TOBACCO DESK.

By Tim Rich

Surrounded on one side by a display of Dunhill pipes, and in front by cases of chic smoking accessories, the tobacco desk is a small area with a great heritage. It was on this Duke Street site that Alfred Dunhill opened his first tobacco shop in 1907. Fourteen years earlier, however, he had been fully immersed in a completely different area of commerce, for in 1893 he had taken over his father's business, which made and sold leather goods and accessories for horse-drawn vehicles. Alfred Dunhill, showing the business acumen which was to sparkle throughout his career, realised that the future of transport lay with the motor car, and focused his company on this emerging area. Dunhill Motorities sold a wide range of accessories to the fast-growing band of excitable, rich and gadget-hungry 'motorists.' One of those accessories was an extraordinary 'windshield' pipe, so-called because it had a raised lip at the front of the bowl which allowed the motorist to smoke while driving. The pipe opened Dunhill's eyes to the growing demand for tobacco products and, characteristically, he reacted by throwing himself feet first into the tobacco business.

Extraordinarily sophisticated

The Duke Street shop sold hand-blended tobaccos, cigars and Dunhill-made cigarettes. Pipes made by two respected pipe makers, Alfred J. Nathan and Adolph Posner, were bought in. The shop quickly established a reputation for its

tobaccos and cigars, but Alfred Dunhill was left with the feeling that its pipes were not up to scratch. So, in 1910, his company started making its own pipes, bringing in Joe Sasieni from Charatan & Son to head up the production team. For a man who, in under fifteen years, had moved his business from horse-drawn vehicle accessories to pipe manufacturing - with a brief interlude for designing and building houses - Dunhill's understanding of the pipe business was extraordinarily sophisticated. 'He introduced new processes - and patented new processes - in pipe manufacturing that we still use to this day,' reveals Robin Philpott, General Manager of Alfred Dunhill Pipes Limited. 'In fact, 95% of the methods of operation we use in the manufacture of pipes now are exactly what we introduced 85 years ago.'

At first, the Dunhill pipes were made at Mason's Yard, just a short walk from Duke Street, but as the size of the operation grew, it moved on to bigger premises, first at Notting Hill and later at Plaistow. Following the acquisition of Charatan & Sons, the operation was moved to the old Parker Hardcastle factory in Walthamstow in 1982, where it remains to this day. 'Every Dunhill pipe is made in that factory,' explains Philpott. 'A high proportion of Charatans are made there too, but it is basically an Alfred Dunhill factory. The process and the people are geared up to make the very best quality products. It's a unique factory in terms of the number of individual processes involved and the length of time it takes. Consequently, it's not cheap in terms of manufacturing costs to make an Alfred Dunhill pipe.'

Traditional techniques

In fact, there are ninety stages in the manufacture of an Alfred Dunhill pipe. Indeed, the transformation of raw materials into finished product is a dramatic one. It starts with a piece of briar root. Normally found on the Mediterranean coast, particularly in Algeria, Morocco, Sicily and Corsica, the root grows in >

Cumberland Road Factory, Plaistow, London.





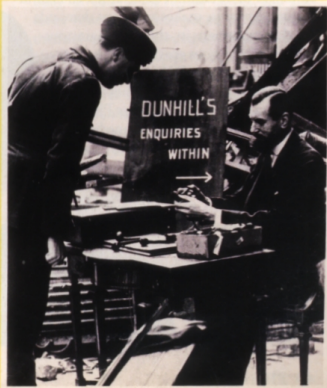
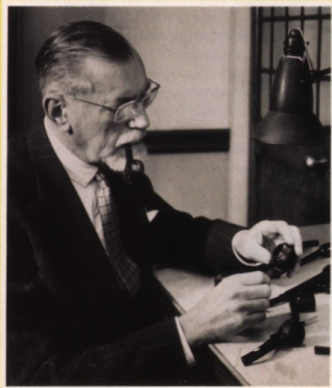
Clockwise, starting at the big picture:

The Alfred Dunhill shop at 27b Throgmorton Street, which opened in 1923.

The Seven-Day Companion Case - 'Pipes smoke sweeter and cooler when rested.' It could be fitted with bruyère pipes, shell briars or a combination.

Alfred Henry Dunhill seated at a table amid the rubble of his shop, busily selling pipes. His shop was destroyed by a bomb during the Second World War.

Alfred H. Dunhill inspecting some finished pipes.



arid conditions, and may take up to one hundred years to reach the right shape and size for pipe making. Local country folk dig up the root and sell it to briar dealers. It is then dried, seasoned and cut to the rough shape of a pipe (which is called an ebauchon). It is at the seasoning stage that Alfred Dunhill's most closely guarded secret is employed. A seasoning process is used to remove the sap and moisture from the wood, so that when the pipe is smoked for the first time, there is no bitterness from any residues left in the wood. Not only does this give an Alfred Dunhill pipe the advantage of smoking sweetly from the very first, it also gives each pipe greater longevity.

At the factory, craftsmen using turning machinery create the basic shape of the bowl and stem. It is then paired with a solid piece of vulcanite from which the mouthpiece is made by hand. The bowl and stem are then further worked to create exactly the right shape. This is followed by the many polishing processes, using a range of materials, including pumice, sand, oil and beeswax. 'People often think our pipes are varnished, because you get such a high sheen on them, but in fact it is just wax,' explains Philpott. 'There are layers and layers of wax put on and taken off, put on and taken off.'

With limited mechanisation, and reliance on a number of traditional techniques, the manufacturing process makes stringent demands on the craftsmen in the Walthamstow factory, all of whom are overseen by master craftsman Steve Wilson. 'It's not only manufacturing skills that they have, it is also natural creativity,' says Philpott. 'No two pipes are ever the same because every individual craftsman will have his own way of achieving a balance and a look. You can give two guys in our factory the same raw materials and ask them to make a pipe, and the two pieces you would get out of it would be slightly different in balance, weight and colour.'

The manufacture of most of today's



An early catalogue.

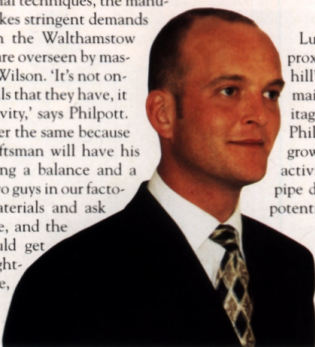
products - cars, sweets, compact disc players - is mostly an exercise in creating standard products with minimal wastage. Making a Dunhill pipe is a very different matter. For example, one sack of briar wood containing 100 blocks will probably only contain one or two blocks good enough to become an Alfred Dunhill pipe. To make such raw material costs viable, the remaining blocks are then used for other pipes, hence the logic of pipe makers owning a range of less expensive pipe brands in addition to their premium line.

The unpredictability factor continues throughout the manufacturing process, according to Philpott. 'There aren't many production operations where you don't actually know what you are going to get. We'll start a bowl and mouthpiece at the beginning of the process, it will be graded according to its grain, and we'll know what colour finish we want to put on it to enhance its grain. But as it goes through the polishing process, the grain pattern can change. So you might set out to produce a pipe with a natural brown, bruyère finish, but you find by the end of the process that the grain has improved so you can put a different finish on it.'

The Future

Luxury goods now account for approximately 95% of Alfred Dunhill's sales. Yet the pipe business remains crucial to the image and heritage of the company. While Robin Philpott is not predicting a huge growth in Dunhill's pipe smoking activities, he is optimistic about the pipe division's future and excited by potential markets.

'The US is going through an enormous boom in fine cigars, which has brought younger people in their twenties and thirties into



Robin Philpott.

smoke shops there. They're being exposed to an environment they haven't seen before, and that has an immediate spin-off effect on pipes and other smoking products.'

Philpott believes the cigar 'explosion' is partly to do with a backlash against the politically correct no smoking lobby - 'people are standing up and saying "look, if I want to smoke I'm going to smoke" - but he feels a more important factor is the perception of non-cigarette tobacco products as a socially acceptable option: 'It's definitely a consolidation of a trend we have seen for a number of years, where pipes and cigars are definitely viewed as an acceptable alternative to cigarettes. If you smoke pipes and cigars many insurance companies still don't regard you as a smoker. Little things like that reinforce the message in people's minds that the pipe is an alternative to a cigarette.'

The smoke shops Philpott refers to include Dunhills' Principal Pipe Dealers. There are five hundred of these worldwide, forming the backbone of the business. While the range, pipe preferences and tobacco tastes of pipe smokers in each country may vary widely, Alfred Dunhill remains consistent in its image and appeal. 'As a general rule, our customer tends to be established, he's made his money, he's relaxed, he's confident, he's not really trying to make a strong statement about himself by smoking a pipe - he's smoking a pipe because it's part of his relaxation and he enjoys it. Having said that, it does say something about him, because the signal a pipe sends out is that you're thoughtful, contemplative and intelligent.'

'We're very conscious of the need to attract younger smokers,' states Philpott, 'but we could obviously never turn our backs on our established customers. They're the people who have given us the name we have got, and they have a clear picture of what we are; reliable, steady, classical, not flashy, good quality. If we were suddenly to do something as an image statement to appeal to the younger smoker, we would be betraying our established customer base.'

Fellowship of the White Spot

So don't expect to see Alfred Dunhill pursuing a host of younger smokers by creating novel-

THE ALFRED DUNHILL HISTORY IN BRIEF

In 1893, Alfred Dunhill, following in his father's footsteps, opened his own shop selling leather, jackets, saddles and stable requisites. The company, which originally sold horse and carriage accessories, expanded enormously with the arrival of the first motor cars. From then on, such things as motor jackets, goggles, suitcases and car headlights were sold under the name of *Dunhill Motorities*. The development of the pipe which was to bring Alfred Dunhill world-wide renown arose out of sheer coincidence. A regular customer came into the shop and complained that it was impossible to smoke a pipe while driving his open Ford. The young Dunhill took up the challenge, and designed a pipe with a built-in 'windshield'. This pipe provided the spark for what was to become his lifetime passion: pipes and pipe tobacco. In 1907 Alfred Dunhill opened his shop on Duke Street. From then on, he began selling not only the blends he made himself, but also the mixtures he made specially for each of his regular clients, and mixtures which were composed by the clients themselves. He recorded all these personal blends in a journal which he called 'My Mixture'. This custom continues to this day in the Alfred Dunhill shop.

In 1910, Dunhill opened his own pipe factory in Mason's Yard. There he developed the 'Ultimate Pipe', which, despite being twice as expensive as any other pipe in London, went on to become a roaring success, achieving enormous popularity.



Pipe for motorists.



The first Dunhill lighter (1920) is made of an empty mustard tin.

ty products or by trying to graft on some kind of MTV image to its brand values. Instead, it is attempting to attract more customers - young and old - by emphasising the enduring social qualities associated with pipe smoking. The grandly named Fellowship of the White Spot is at the forefront of its activities. (The white spot was first introduced in 1912 because customers could not tell which side of the vulcanite mouthpiece should point upwards. It has since become a hallmark, indicating that the pipe is fit to bear the Dunhill name). 'We've created a forum where pipe smokers all over the world can communicate with each other,' explains Philpott. The idea is that smokers join the Fellowship via their local Principal Dealer. Through the Fellowship's magazine, the company can offer product news and special offers, but it can also receive feedback from smokers and put individuals in touch with one another. Special offers can be made, and a generally closer manufacturer-customer relationship can be forged. 'Fellowship sums it up. Pipe smokers are fellowship-type people. They are usually easy-going, friendly,

DUNHILL'S 'WHITE SPOT'

During the First World War the officers of the British Army, while stationed in Europe, ordered their pipes and personal tobacco blends from the front lines. The ingenious Dunhill found a way of smuggling the pipes and tobaccos through the lines by packing them together with toilet-paper and marking the packaging 'Castor Oil'. Nobody would ever have thought of stealing Castor Oil, which was freely available in those days. The officers could buy on account and pay on their return from the war. In this way, Alfred Dunhill made friends and customers for life. He also repaired pipes broken during the war. In most cases, the mouthpiece was damaged. Mouthpieces were made by hand, and it took an expert to tell the top from the bottom. To solve this problem, Alfred Dunhill inserted a white spot on the top of the mouthpiece. The white spot, using ivory, soon became synonymous with the name Dunhill, and the master's signature became a symbol.



Classic Series.

easy to get-to-know people. The Fellowship carries that ambience.'

The Fellowship dovetails neatly with the essential ingredient of Alfred Dunhill's image - Englishness. This is not the Englishness of football hooligans, fish and chips and political isolation, it is more a nostalgic evocation of more ordered times gone by: 'Many things happen which tarnish the reputation of England, but the Englishness we are talking about is based on the reputation of craftsmanship, of reliability, of classic-ness,' says Philpott. 'It is the English Gentleman image. It's an established Englishness rather than a contemporary Englishness.'

This image has been extremely successful for Alfred Dunhill, from the US to Japan. However, the company now faces the challenge of doing business with emerging markets in Eastern Europe, China and South America. The main problem is not that customers in those territories don't want to buy into the Dunhill image, it's that most of them can't afford to. Yet Dunhill has shareholders to appease - should it not be seeking to exploit these new markets by making more affordable products? 'It's something we have discussed on various occasions - how do we create an 'entry level' to an Alfred Dunhill pipe? To find a less expensive entry level we would have to compromise on something, and that goes against everything the Alfred Dunhill pipe business has always stood for. We won't do it.'

So, the Dunhill focus on craftsmanship and premium quality will continue. However, those

looking for innovations will be pleased to know that something new is on the way: 'We're launching a new finish in the Autumn this year,' reveals Philpott. 'It's virtually a reproduction of a colour Alfred Dunhill was doing in the twenties. The original colour was called Root Finish, which is still an important part of our range, but we've evolved that to produce a new finish called Amber Root - it's a more reddish-gold colour. That's a difficult finish to produce, hence it will be in very limited supply. Collectors will love it because it is evocative of the early pipes. This is the first new finish we have introduced for eight years.'

Duke Street

Back at the Duke Street shop, business is brisk. As I wander in, Marc Burrows at the tobacco desk is busy helping a German customer, while an American couple are perusing the display of pipes and a Japanese man is inspecting the pipe tools. The Desk boasts a cosmopolitan clientele, and obviously today is no exception. I ask Burrows whether various nationalities have very definite tastes in pipes and tobacco. 'Absolutely. For example, the Italians are the only people who buy pure Latakia. If they have a mixture, it has a high content of Latakia in it. If they buy a pipe it is normally a smaller bowl. It suggests they like strong tastes and they like to smoke a pipe a little at a time.' In contrast, Burrows says, most Japanese customers opt for highly aromatic tobaccos. But perhaps the most interesting recent trend is the appearance of younger smokers: 'We're seeing a lot more younger people in their twenties going onto pipes. They come in with their father or friends and I try to get them onto a pipe. Also, a lot of people who smoke cigars want to try something else because they don't want to spend so much money on cigars, so I've suggested a pipe.'

Do these young smokers go for a certain type of pipe? 'Yes, they like a straight pipe rather than a bent pipe. Bent pipes tend to look a little 'old'. They like a small bowl with a straight stem. In terms of tobacco, I would have thought they would have liked more aromatic tobacco, but

surprisingly not. They prefer the ones that are a very English mixture with Latakia.'

My Mixture

Whatever the tastes of customers, the tobacco desk can cope, for it offers a unique hand blending service. Each customer can create their own mixture. Each order is written into an enormous book that sits behind the desk. The 'My Mixture' book was begun by Alfred Dunhill shortly after he opened the shop, and contains the personal blends of some of London's most notable figures, including various Kings and Queens (including Queen Victoria), Rudyard Kipling and JB Priestley. Despite suffering bomb damage during the Second World War, it is still



very much in use today. A quick glance through the most recent pages reveals an internationally diverse range of customers with very definite tastes.

The 'My Mixture' book symbolises Alfred Dunhill's smoking products operation, for in the course of serving customers it has become a piece of history itself. Each page of the book seems imbued with Alfred Dunhill's personality. Indeed, from the pipe manufacturing processes used in Walthamstow to the ambience of the Duke Street shop, Alfred Dunhill the man is visible everywhere. Perhaps Alfred Dunhill himself - writing shortly after he opened the Duke Street shop - best summed up the philosophy of the company and the products it makes today: 'It must be useful. It must work dependably. It must be beautiful. It must last. It must be the best of its kind.'

In case you are interested in becoming a member of the Fellowship of the White Spot, please fill in the insert, enclosed in this magazine.