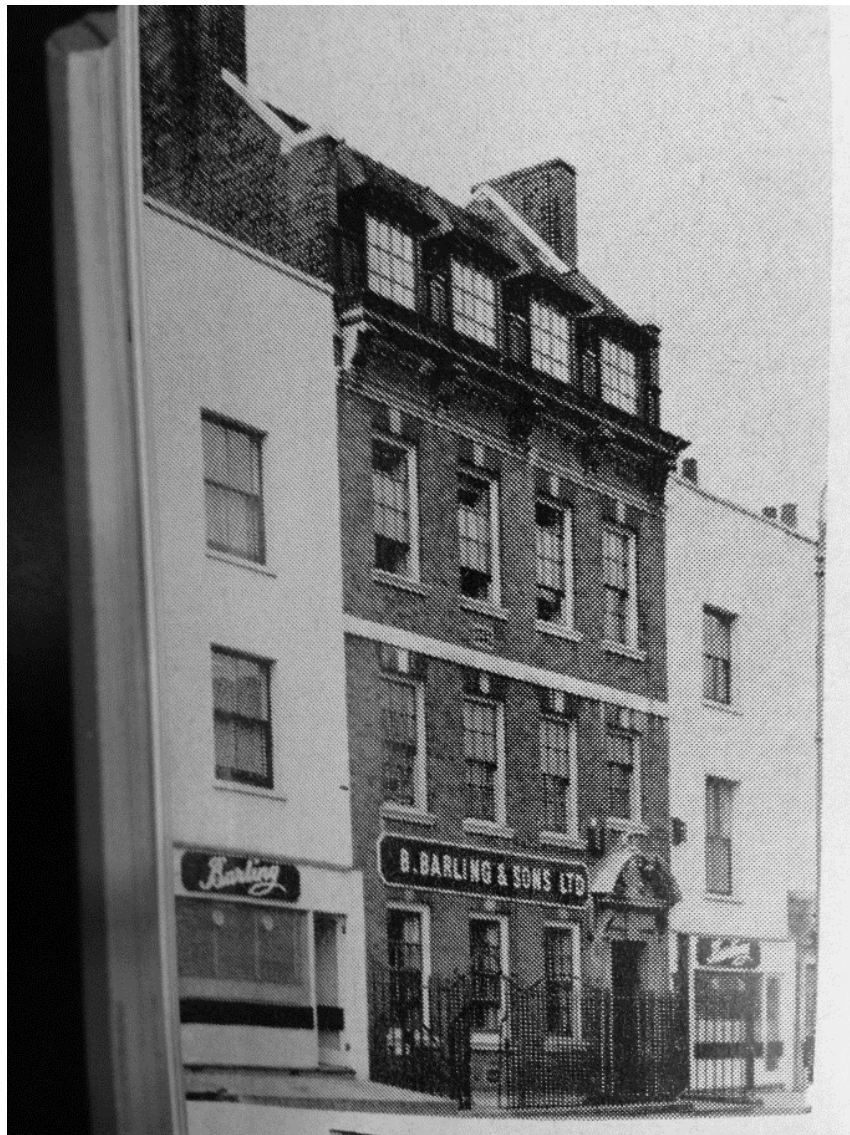


# How Many Angels?

## Another Look at the Barling Transition



*Barling Factory on Park in Camden Town*

**By Jonathan Guss**

### *So What?*

A lot of ink is spilt on the minutiae of pipe history. Like medieval scholastics arguing over how many angels can fit on the head of a pin, pipe enthusiasts, especially those with a love for classic English marques, take seemingly endless pleasure in debating the misty origins of their favorite brands.

Have you ever wondered why?

In theory the argument can be construed as being about something that matters: how to tell a good pipe from a bad one, or help distinguish a pipe that's valuable from one that's worthless. In practice, however, it's unclear how much of the dispute revolves around questions that are inherently unanswerable; questions which even if addressed, would only yield fundamentally useless information. Which raises another question: are all such debates sterile?

Let me try to explain what I mean by using the famous and difficult question of the Barling transition as an example. Classic Barlings, more than just about any of the other pipes produced by the old English factories, retain a special mystique, a glow that still beckons enthusiasts decades after the men and women who produced them have passed from the scene. More than Dunhill, Sasieni, Comoy, Ben Wade, Loewe, Orlik or even Charatan, the Barling pipes of yore are, by the passionate collector, held to be lightning in a bottle: fashioned out of consistently superb wood, beautifully constructed, invariably yielding a wonderful smoke. Not always the prettiest pipe in the rack, perhaps, but believed to be possessed of an inner beauty.

These marvels were thought to be the product of a tradition so emblematic of old world craftsmanship, that they might well be considered tiny wooden parables. A single family dedicated itself for generations to the manufacture of a product universally recognized for its excellence; like Hershey's in America, advertising was unnecessary; more, in this case it would have been crass. Objects this exquisite aren't sold that way. Even the self-promotion inherent in the issuance of a catalog would have been considered slightly gauche. And so through good times and bad, Barling made its way: a quintessentially English product sold in a quintessentially English way to discerning customers around the world.

But as many of us already know, this Edenic tale has a tragic ending: the Barling family, after some 150 years of ceaseless labor, grew weary and sold the business. And as far as loyal customers were concerned, the new owners knew them not. Quality slipped, probably because the corporate behemoth that bought the company emphasized filthy lucre, and self-aggrandizing marketing was given free reign. The

pipes made thereafter quickly devolved; good went to bad, bad to worse, and worse to worst: in this case the end result being a Scandinavian exile before a kind of resurrection on the Isle of Man.

And so collectors today go to great lengths to find and buy pipes which pre-date these calamitous events. Squarely in their path, however, is an interesting obstacle: determining at what point Barlings become mediocre. How did it happen; and when; and why? If only we could decide when good turned bad, and learn how to separate the older from the new, the eBay wheat could be distinguished from the chaff. This, in a nutshell, is the impetus underlying the questions surrounding the great transition.

### ***Historical Background: The Family Era***

My précis of the Barling story is, of course, a little tongue in cheek; even misleading. What's true, however, is that there remains a surprising amount of misinformation about Barling and the immediate steps that led to the family's separation from the business. Before clarifying these steps, it may be useful to recapitulate a brief (and more realistic) history of the company. Along the way I'll try to highlight a few important facts about the evolution of Barling's business that aren't generally known.

The founder of the business that eventually became famous for its briar pipes was born long before briar was first used to smoke tobacco. His name was Benjamin Barling (1788-1870). Benjamin's ancestors, with roots in Wiltshire that went back at least to Elizabethan times, had been involved in the working of precious metals for two generations before Benjamin was born. His father, John Barling, was a silversmith. In a surviving indenture from 1821 John contracts to teach an apprentice the art of silversmithing (the apprentice's last name, interestingly enough, is Williamson; this suggests an intriguing possible link between the first Barlings in the pipe business and the last; see below). Benjamin's grandfather, Aaron Barling, was another such craftsman, having been apprenticed to a goldsmith in his adolescence. Aaron appears to be the first Barling to follow what became the family trade.

Sometime before his marriage John Barling moved to London, where Ben was born and raised. Ben was likewise married in London in 1811, and eventually produced seven offspring there. Four were sons, and two of these (Edwin, 1817-1905, and William, 1820-1882) would grow up to play primary roles in the family business; of the remaining two boys one emigrated to Australia, and the other disappears from the records in the late 1840s.

The very next year after his marriage, in 1812, Ben is said to have established his famous business. This could well be true. The 1812 date wasn't claimed until several

decades had passed, however, and foundation dating of 19<sup>th</sup> century businesses is notoriously tricky. What is clear is that Ben registered his first silver hallmark just a few years later in 1815; four others followed over the next 37 years.

Ben apparently started out his professional career in Soho, first at 53 Princes street, then by 1820 at 23 Broad St, Golden Square, where he is listed as a jeweler. Ben remained at Golden Square for some years before surfacing in Camden Town first at 37 Southampton Place by 1834, and then by 1839 at 142 High Street. Throughout all the succeeding generations, as long as Barlings were involved in the family business, various addresses in Camden Town would remain its home.

Interestingly enough Ben continued to be listed as a jeweler, worker of copperplate, silversmith, goldsmith, and engraver, until the time of his death in 1870. Clearly all these skills were integral to his livelihood. It's a fair inference that Ben learned these crafts from his father, and passed them on to his own sons in turn. Certainly both Edwin and William eventually enter their own hallmark in 1882, and are listed as jewelers, silversmiths or goldsmiths in various censuses for their entire lives.

It's an interesting fact that none of Benjamin's descendants are listed in censuses or directories as pipe makers until the better part of a century after he established his business. The 1895 London P. O. Directory and the 1901 census are among the first sources that list pipe making as the primary Barling occupation. This isn't to say that Barlings didn't previously produce many silver fittings for meerschaum and eventually briar pipes; just that they described themselves as silversmiths and jewelers first and foremost until shortly before the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Their specialty from at least the 1840s, though, appears to have been objects connected to tobacco. Beautiful cigar cutters and match strikers made by the family, for example, have survived.

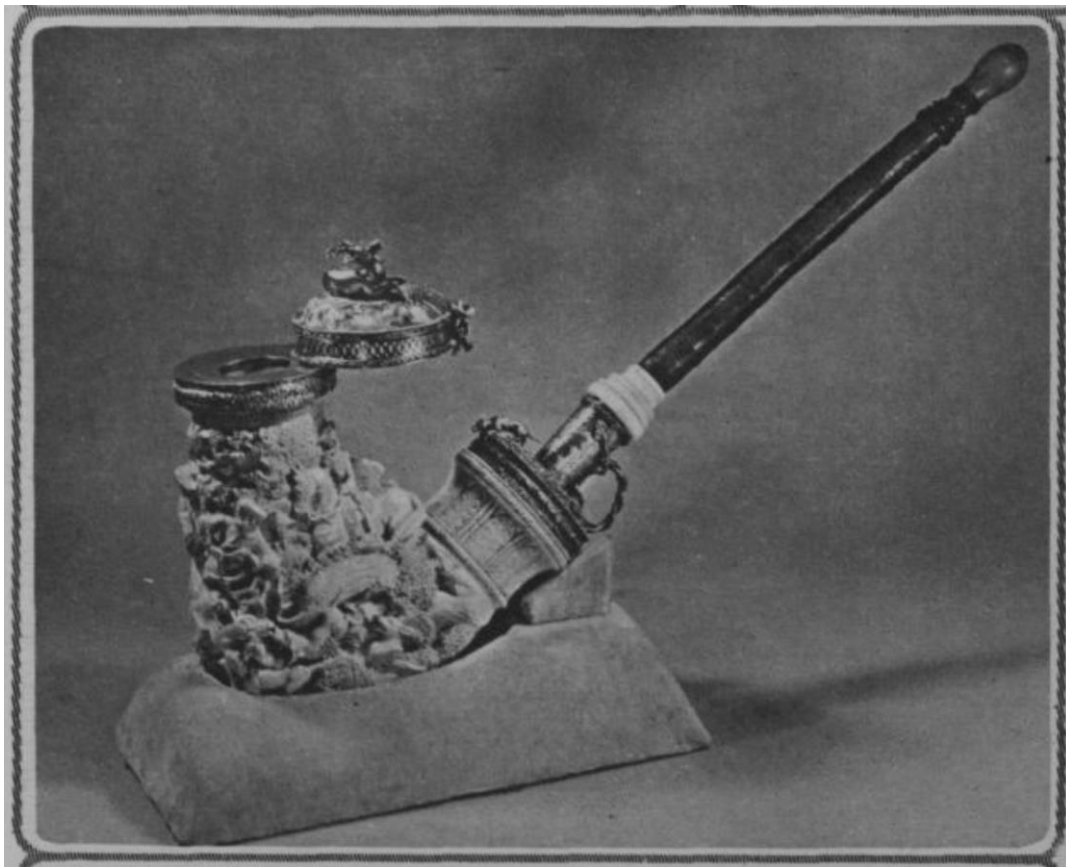


*Cheroot Cutter/Vesta Case (1853)*



*Match Striker with Cigar Cutter (1862)*

One early notable triumph for the family occurred at the time of the Great Exhibition of the Works of Industry of all Nations at the Crystal Palace in 1851. There Benjamin and his sons (it's just before this time that the name "B. Barling & Sons" first appears; immediately before they called themselves "B. E. & W. Barling") won a prestigious medal for their work as "designers and manufacturers" of "silver-mounted meerschaum smoking pipes". Of the eight remarkable specimens on display, perhaps the most intricate showed a fox and a leveret, with the motto *Not Caught Yet*. The pipe had a silver-mount which was chased (i.e. textured through punching), engine turned (i.e. machine engraved with a repeating pattern), and engraved, and possessed of oak border. Two other pipes were almost equally stunning examples of the silversmiths' art; one illustrated a pointer dog and a bird, while the other showed an oak and dolphin.



*Meerschaum with silver fittings from 1851*

After Benjamin died in 1870 the business was carried on by his sons and business partners Edwin and William. While the company had by this time long been importers of meerschaum pipes, they were still on the periphery of actual manufacture; the emphasis remained on silverwork. In 1878, for example, the brothers received a patent for "improvements in mounts for tobacco pipes".

It would be natural to assume that Edwin, as the older child, would lead the business and bequeath it (or the bulk of it at any rate) to his children when the time came; all the more so because William died in 1882, while brother Edwin lived on until 1905. For whatever reason, however, this is not what happened. Two of Edwin's three sons were indeed trained as jewelers; the older even spent time as a pipe-mounter in the early 1890s. But eventually all three boys departed from the trade, into more blue-collar work as painters or haulers of cartage. It was William's children, not Edwin's, who would lead the Barling business into the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

William also had three sons: William Henry (1853-1930), Alfred Montague (1855-1934), and Walter Frederick (1858-1941). These three men were taken into partnership with their uncle Edwin after their father died in 1882. And when Edwin in turn passed away 23 years later, they ran the business still. It was also these three men that were the first Barlings to make the transition from considering themselves primarily as jewelers and silversmiths (up through the 1891 census) to pipe makers (in 1901) to briar pipe manufacturers (in 1911). Likewise directory listings for the company began identifying it as a briar pipe manufacturer early in the new century.

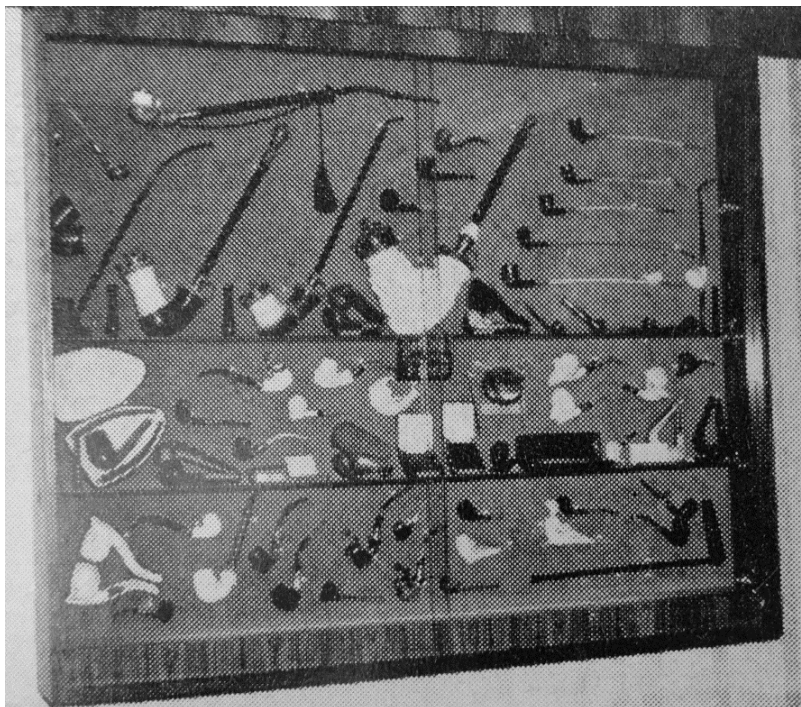
This last step in Barling's evolution is significant. Although briar pipes sold by British companies in the late 1800s and early 1900s were generally marked as made in England, this was usually false. Many pipes so stamped were imported as finished bowls and stems and simply put together upon arrival in England; extraordinarily few had bowls that were turned in Great Britain. Barling started to import briar bowls in just this way as early as 1870, but in 1906 decided to make the jump to turning bowls themselves. Hence the newfound emphasis on being a manufacturer of briar pipes.

Barling's decision to start turning its own bowls is an interesting one. Prior to that time the company, like the vast bulk of the trade, relied on turned bowls from St Claude as a critical raw input to its business. While it's no doubt true management expected to reap the benefits accruing to greater control over the quality of its product, another reason for bringing bowl turning in-house may well have been the terrible strike that hit St Claude in the summer and autumn of 1906. Because of this strike production in France virtually stopped for three months, crippling pipe companies throughout the UK and beyond. One outcome of the strike was a significant increase in the cost of turned bowls. Because of this the price consumers paid for their pipes went up sharply; those at the lower end of the scale saw prices increase by an astounding 50%. But there was another outcome of the strike: Barling's decision would never again leave it vulnerable to that particular threat.

At any rate, after Edwin's death in 1905 William's three sons ran the business in concert. By the end of the First World War some 13 years later, it had become clear

by process of elimination where the next generation of Barling management was going to come from. The eldest of William's sons, William Henry, never married, and naturally produced no acknowledged heirs to play a role in the family business. The next eldest, Alfred Montague, married late in life to a girl named Amelia Mound; Alfred and Amelia had a daughter, but alas no sons. The patriarchal urge ran both deep and strong in the Barling clan, a natural reflection of the society of their time. One or more Barling-denominated sons were clearly desired to carry on the family enterprise. These, providentially, did arrive, a product of youngest brother Walter Frederick's marriage. Interestingly enough, Walter Frederick married Amelia Mound's sister, a girl named Matilda. This made Alfred and Walter brothers-in-law as well as brothers; a more common circumstance in the 19<sup>th</sup> century than it is today. The girls' father, John Thomas Mound, was employed, unsurprisingly, in an allied trade; his profession was gilding, and perhaps he worked on Barling silver.

So it was to Walter Frederick and his sons that the family business went. These sons were named Walter William (1883-1939) and Montague ("Monty") Henry (1885-1963). Walter William entered the family business at the age of 17 in 1900, while younger brother Monty followed at the age of 16 in 1901. Both became partners in 1914. On December 31, 1918 the existing Barling & Sons partnership was formally dissolved; William Henry and Alfred Montague retired, while younger brother Walter Frederick and his two boys took over the enterprise in its entirety.



*Barling Showcase holding pipes from 1815-1930  
Where are these pipes today?*



Monty and his brother were active in the business throughout their lives, carrying on in partnership with their father until Walter William died first in 1939, and Walter Frederick died second in 1941. Both brothers, however, failed to produce a son. Each had two daughters, precipitating an unprecedented crisis: for the first time in over a century B. Barling & Sons faced the prospect of having no “& Sons” to provide the next generation of management.

In the event Monty’s solution was simple. In 1944 his older daughter Beryl married a man named William Alan Williamson (remember the name of the apprentice on John Barling’s 1821 bond?). Williamson agreed to take the Barling name in addition to his own, and was thereafter called William Alan Williamson-Barling. He and his father-in-law therefore have the distinction of being the last Barlings involved in the business.

### ***Historical Background: The Transition***

What is a transition, exactly? I suppose most people would agree it constitutes an evolution from one state to another. But how do we define the states? How do we measure them? Metrics are the curse of our age; with every increase in technology, we tend to believe more and more only in what is tangible enough to track, and discount the rest. This is understandable; for the man with a hammer, everything looks like a nail. Armed with our increasingly finely tuned machinery and software we are the proverbial man with the hammer. This prejudices everything we do. Unfortunately it’s a bit like the joke about losing something one place but looking for it in another because the light is better. While that approach works well on some occasions, other times it fails. This is particularly true where what is being measured is qualitative, or subject to such infinitesimal gradations of change that they challenge quantification.

In this case we’re trying to track a decrease in the quality of a pipe manufacturer’s output; so how do we go about it? Look at pipes? Sure. But there are three difficulties: a) getting a large enough sample to be reasonably certain the analysis will be representative of an evolution in production, b) being able to date the pipes that are used since without a chronological ordering the evaluation is useless, and c) having some generally agreed upon rubric for evaluating quality.

In the case of Barling all three are problematic. Finding the requisite number of pipes is tough; dating them precisely tougher still (with the obvious exception of hallmarked pieces); and agreeing to and implementing a quantitative method for assessing their quality perhaps toughest of all.



In practice many experts have premised the answer to this conundrum by positing that pipes made while the business was still under family management were “good”; those made subsequently are assumed to be inferior. Under this school of thought special allowance is made for depletion of inventory in place at the time of the transition, and crafted into pipes under the hands of pre-existing employees. These transition pipes, where identifiable, are assumed to be less “good” than pre-transition pieces perhaps, but still better than what followed. This approach has the effect of working backwards from the answer. Dating of pipes becomes all-important; by definition a pipe made during or after the transition is inferior to one made before.

Since under this theory family management transition is synonymous with quality transition, let’s try to nail down the personnel changes as precisely as we can.

Tad Gage and Richard Carlton Hacker are the two leading authorities on Barling; each, particularly Gage, has done landmark work in researching and presenting important aspects of the company’s history. All subsequent efforts owe them a debt. On this particular topic, both men assume an immediate and direct link between the sale of the business by the family, their departure, and the onset of the transition. In each case they believe they know when the sale occurred, and infer from that date the start of the transition (Gage assumes 1962; Hacker 1960).

Jesse Silver, another accomplished Barling scholar, is less certain about the sale date of the company; he’s more confident, however, about dating the management transition to the second half of 1962. Silver bases his conclusions on letters he has uncovered from Barling’s files, documents which he believes strongly suggest that the family was still in charge as late as early June, 1962. In essence the letters are an exchange between Montague Barling and Bing Crosby concerning the offer and acceptance of a gift: a special companion case of pipes. From this Silver infers that the end of the family involvement in the management of the business must have taken place subsequent to the date these letters were written, since Monty Barling was, according to these documents, still President. As for the timing of the actual sale, Silver does hedge a bit by stating that the date must have been between “late 1961 or 1962”. The earlier date is a nod to a statement made about twenty years after the fact by ex-Barling executive Peter McNab, while the latter date is consistent with Gage’s belief, the ready implication of the Crosby correspondence, and information Silver derived from an interview with an ex-director of Barling. Silver’s conclusion about the timing of the family’s departure from Barling management is correct; his inference that the date when the Barling family sold the business was in “late 1961 or 1962” is not.

Where Gage, Hacker, and to a lesser extent Silver all go astray is in conflating the date of the sale with the role of the family in the business; they are not synonymous.

We've seen that the dates for the initiation of the famous Barling transition vary by expert; 1960, 1961, 1962 have all been used as the starting point, with the transitional period said to extend as far as 1967 (the putative but inaccurate departure date of Williamson-Barling). Much of this confusion is based on a failure to understand the history of the relationship between Finlay and Imperial Tobacco, and the key fact that there are three distinct transactions that must be identified and understood.

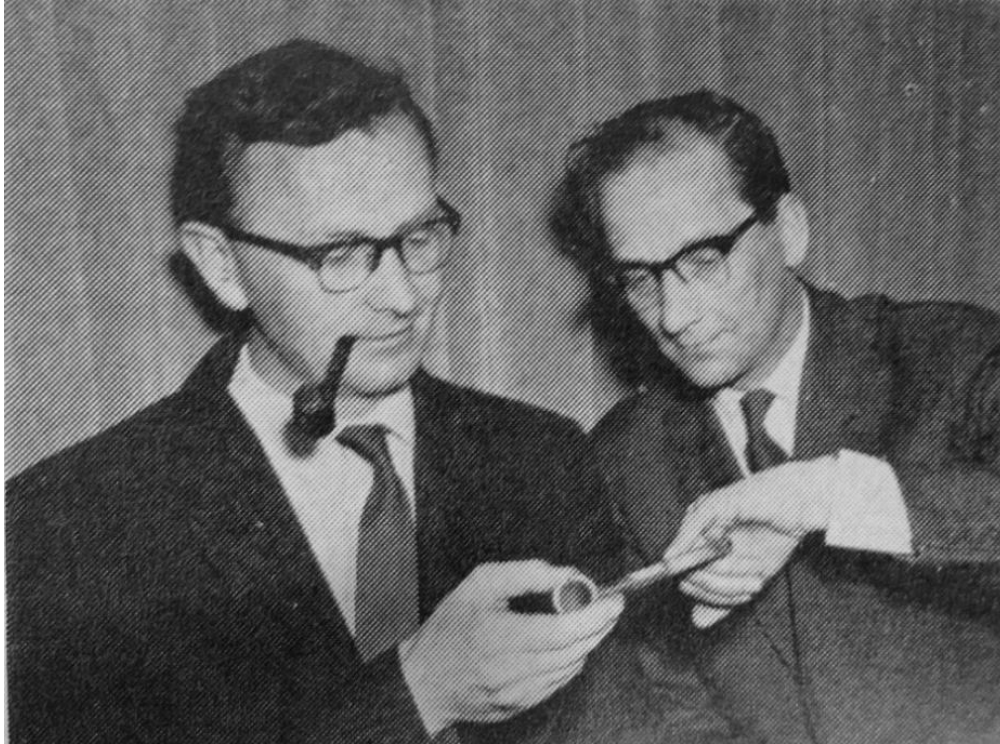
The first transaction dates back to 1927. That was the year industrial giant Imperial Tobacco actually bought its initial stake in Finlay & Co., a famous chain that eventually grew to 700+ British tobacconist shops. This interest consisted, however, of only a minority of the common equity (49%), and a majority of the preferred.

The second transaction took place on October 3, 1960. At that time Finlay's, still only minority owned by Imperial, bought B. Barling & Sons Ltd. from the Barling family for an undisclosed amount.

The third and final relevant transaction was announced March 23, 1963. Imperial bought the remaining 51% of the Finlay common outstanding for about 2.6 million pounds, and swapped its own preferred for the Finlay preferred it didn't already have.

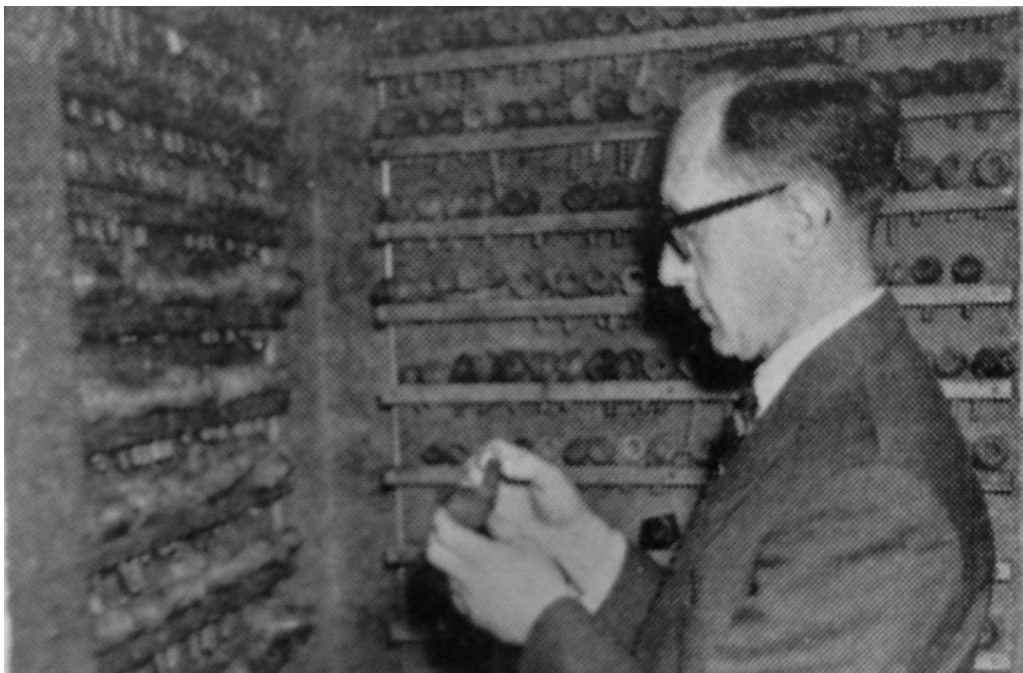
One point becomes immediately clear: Barling was never sold directly to Imperial. Barling was sold to Finlay, and only two and a half years later was a majority interest in the Barling parent (i.e. Finlay) bought by Imperial. Emphasizing this little round of Pac-Man is not, I think, focusing on a distinction without a difference. As we'll see in a moment, the changes in management which Barling devotees cite as the hallmark of the onset of the transition took place over a year and a half *after* the family sold the company, and some nine months *before* Imperial gained complete control.

By an insightful comparison of two consecutive catalogs issued by Barling in mid and late 1962 Silver determined that a major change had taken place in that short interval, and that the family was no longer involved. He's right. And his inference from the catalogs is confirmed by explicit contemporaneous news articles. Montague Barling's son-in-law, William Alan Williamson-Barling, resigned as Managing Director and departed the company as of June 1, 1962, and was replaced by Ronald Gibbons, a long-time employee of Finlay. At the same time Sydney Webb, former production manager, was elevated to the Board as administrative director. Shortly thereafter Peter Brewer took Webb's old job directing operations, and was elevated to the board as production director; simultaneously Ron Harden became Sales Manager (promoted to Sales Director and a seat on the board not long afterward).



*New Barling Top Management: MD Ronald Gibbons (left) and Sales Mgr Ron Harden (right)*

Finally both Barling factories received fresh management too: Dennis Marshall at the Parkway facility, and Lawrence Lake at Jeffrey's Place.



*Lawrence Lake, manager of Jeffreys Place factory, at the pattern cupboard*

A clean sweep indeed, but clearly not one enacted immediately after the family's sale of the business. Two alternative conclusions (at the least) are possible to draw from these changes; first, that Finlay was disappointed in the performance of the company they'd bought some 18 months earlier and replaced the management team en masse in a bid to improve sales and profitability. Second, that Finlay may well have seen the second and final phase of the Imperial deal coming down the road; such deals generally take six months or more to execute, and it's not unreasonable to assume that Finlay management knew the sale to Imperial was on the horizon at the time they restructured Barling's executive team. In the case of under-performing divisions such efforts to improve the appearance of a business are common pre-transaction practice (sometimes called "putting lipstick on the pig"); a review of other Finlay subsidiaries to see if they went through similar changes at the same time might be instructive. Both explanations could be true, or neither. For our purposes causation is irrelevant. The point here is that the Barling management transition was not an immediate consequence of the family's sale of the business.

### ***Historical Background: Some Notes on Operations***

A complete history of B. Barling & Sons would include a comprehensive look at product evolution, sourcing of raw materials, approach to marketing, geographical expansion, manufacturing techniques, and perhaps much more. The outcome would be a better understand of how Barling established and maintained its position in a highly competitive industry, as well as greater precision in our ability to date their pipes. All this is clearly far beyond the scope of this essay. It is worth a little space, however, to make a few remarks about how the business was run in its heyday by Monty and his brother Walter, and how that changed after the family sold out. These changes are fundamental to understanding possible drivers of quality erosion, and help us distinguish those which pre-date the sale by the family from those that grew out of the management and strategy changes imposed by Finlay. Two areas are particularly illuminating in this regard: marketing and production.

Let me start by knocking down an easy straw man. The notion that under family management Barling didn't promote its products is absurd; their display at the Exposition of 1851 alone is enough to demonstrate an interest in marketing that reached back very far into the company's past.

More modern examples of the company's sensitivity to the value of marketing abound. One of the most revealing revolves around a set of hearings in 1928 on marking requirements for imported briar pipes and bowls. The hearings were precipitated by Montague Barling, who filed the application with the Board of Trade under the provisions of the Merchandise Marks Act (as amended in 1926). In essence

Barling requested that all briar pipes (i.e. completed product) and briar bowls imported into the UK be required to bear a mark indicating their country of origin. At stake was the immense cachet and marketing value associated with being able to mark a pipe as “London Made”, “Made in England”, or the like. Everyone in the industry firmly believed that the reputation associated with an English pipe was genuine, and conferred a distinct marketing advantage over foreign products. But everyone in the industry did not turn all their own bowls; few, in point of fact, did. In making its request Barling, having turned its own briar in England for over twenty years, clearly was bidding for an almost exclusive right to the prestige of selling a pipe marked as an English product. Nearly the entire industry closed ranks against them.

With the opposition led by the Briar Pipe Manufacturers Trade Section of the London Chamber of Commerce, Barling competitors stood up one by one to offer statements as to why Barling’s request was a bad idea. Dunhill raised the prospect of economic consequences so dire that he would have to move his production entirely off-shore, with a subsequent loss of English jobs; Sasieni trivialized the importance of a bowl in the overall value-added of pipe manufacture; and Comoy complained that the skills needed to turn bowls neither existed in the UK nor could be brought and sustained there on an enduring basis. All of these arguments could be and were refuted.

In the end Monty lost; after three months’ deliberation, the Standing Committee of the Board of Trade agreed that pipes of foreign origin would be so marked, but ruled that bowls of foreign origin would not. The basis of its ruling looks strange indeed to more modern eyes. The Standing Committee referred not to any of the arguments made by Barling’s competitors, but simply stated that in accordance with the Act it felt an obligation to defer to the wish of the majority of pipe manufacturers. The Committee reported that it “...was satisfied that the marking of bowls was not desired by those who represent the bulk of the manufacturing industry in this country.”

The details revealed over the course of the hearings are rife with broader meaning for students of pipe history. But for purposes of this essay the whole incident provides valuable evidence that Barling was no naïf when it came to marketing; it knew and understood the value of customer perceptions, and was willing to more aggressively to gain advantage over its competitors.

Just a year after the Standing Committee ruled, Monty again steps into the spotlight, playing a leading part in one of the greatest promotional initiatives undertaken by the pipe industry as a whole during its pre-War glory days.

On June 4, 1929, the Briar Pipe Trade Association (BPTA) was formally inaugurated at a meeting held at the famous Pagani's restaurant in London. Barling, who had acted as chairman of the Provisional Committee that had preceded the establishment of the Association, was selected to be its first President.

The purpose of the BPTA was to "encourage, promote, and protect the briar pipe industry." This included taking any "steps as the Association may deem necessary for the benefit of the trade generally", as well as "assist any member who may be engaged in enforcing any principle adopted by the Association, or in resisting any action or proposal deemed by the Association to be inimical to its interests." Although not specified, "inimical" actions would clearly have included price competition by retailers on sales of briar pipes (manufacturers of pipes and tobaccos continually sued tobacconists to get them to toe the line on pricing of their products), and governmental tariffs or taxes aimed at the trade.

In a fascinating about-face that says much for both Monty's agility and his stature in the industry, in only twelve months he went from threatening his competitors over the branding of pipes as "London Made" to leading them against their common enemies.

Virtually everyone climbed aboard: representatives of Barling, Civic, Comoy, Deguingand, Delacour, Duncan's, Dunhill, A. Frankau (BBB), Hall & Fitzgerald, Hovenden, Kapp & Peterson, Lewis & Hardcastle, Loewe, Marechal Ruchon, Masta, Oppenheimer, Orlik, Parker, Portland, Ropp, Sasieni, Ben Wade and Weingott (as well as many others) were either honorary officers of the new organization or members of its council.

But the primary purpose of the BPTA wasn't defensive; it was intended to serve as a vehicle for "propaganda to increase the popularity of pipe smoking by means of co-operative advertising and other means of publicity."

Its first large promotion was a clear illustration of what the BPTA meant by "other means of publicity". Less than a year after its creation the BPTA announced "International Pipe Week," scheduled to take place May 24-31, 1930. Aimed squarely at tobacconists throughout the United Kingdom, "International Pipe Week" was a high-profile window dressing competition which encouraged retailers to give special emphasis in their window displays to briar pipes. Rules were quite specific (e.g. "windows must be at least 60 per cent pipe display"), and required all entries to be submitted by photograph no later than June 14, 1930. The country was divided into five geographic regions, and the winner in each would receive 10 guineas, with a



second place prize of 3 guineas. Monty played a key role as one of the two coordinators for the event. The other was Stanley Bird of Comoy's.

**X INTERNATIONAL X  
PIPE WEEK X**

(Organised by the Briar Pipe Trade Association)

**MAY 24th—31st, 1930.**

**WINDOW DRESSING COMPETITION,  
CASH PRIZES.**

*REGULATIONS AND CONDITIONS.*

Ten Prizes will be awarded for the finest Window Display of Pipes, consisting of a

**FIRST PRIZE OF TEN GUINEAS**

AND A

**SECOND PRIZE OF THREE GUINEAS**

*FOR EACH SECTION.*

The British Isles will be divided into five sections, as follows :—

SECTION A.—The whole of Ireland.

SECTION B.—The whole of Scotland.

SECTION C.—The whole of Northern England, above a line drawn from Chester to Grimsby.

SECTION D.—The whole of Middle England and Wales, below line drawn from Chester to Grimsby and above line drawn from Gloucester to Ipswich.

SECTION E.—The whole of Southern England, below a line drawn from Gloucester to Ipswich.

Judgment will be effected by a photograph of the window.

All Tobacconists are eligible by filling in the Entry Form hereunder, which must be accompanied by the photograph. Additional forms for branch shops can be obtained from Mr. S. H. Bird or Mr. M. H. Barling, addresses as below.

Windows must be at least 60 per cent. pipe display.

Photographs must be approximately 10ins. by 12ins., but must not be smaller than 8ins. by 6ins.

Name and address must be written distinctly on the back of the photograph.

All windows must include the Official International Pipe Week poster, which is 20ins. by 12ins.; also the Official Showcard, which is 10ins. by 7ins. Requirements in this respect, if not already ordered, should be notified immediately to any Pipe House.

Posters and showcards will be issued by the 17th of May.

All photographs must be received on or before 14th of June.

Judgment of photographs will be made by a competent independent Committee of Window Experts, whose decision will be final. No correspondence can be entertained in connection with this Competition.

Results will be published in the August issues of the Trade Journals.

**I We enter the International Pipe Week Window Dressing Competition, hereby accepting the conditions thereof, and accordingly enclose photograph of my our window, which is not returnable. PLEASE DO NOT SEND FORM WITHOUT PHOTOGRAPH.**

Name .....

Address .....

Town .....

Section .....

All photographs must be sent to :—

Mr. S. H. BIRD, Alliance Works, Windus Road, London, N.16,

or Mr. M. H. BARLING, 9/11, Park Street, London, N.W.1,

by June 14th.

*Advertisement and Retailer Submission Form for International Pipe Week*

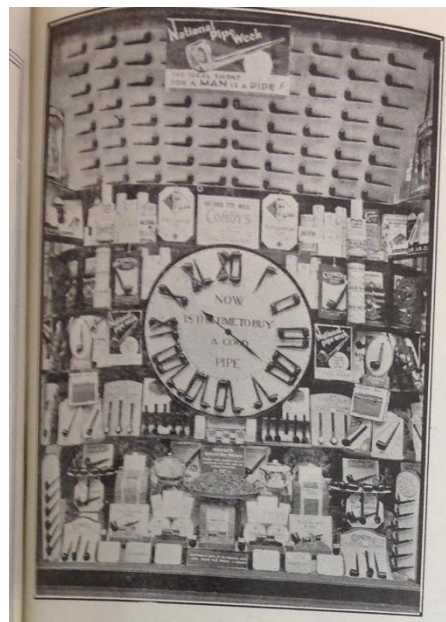
Barling, along with other major manufacturers, supported the event by advertising it in trade publications in the months leading up to the competition.





*Barling Trade Advertisement for International Pipe Week*

Tobacconists from one end of the country to the other decided to compete. Pipes were suddenly seen everywhere; *Tobacco World* reported that briar was highlighted in windows from “Lands End to John O’ Groats.” The campaign was judged a great success, and credit was largely given to its organizers: Barling and his colleague.



*1<sup>st</sup> Place Winner, Display Window in Scotland Section*

In addition to such bold gambles, Barling demonstrably understood the blocking and tackling of everyday marketing too. Three different catalogs (and a few leaflets), for example, are known to exist today, and I suspect many more were produced over the course of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Catalogs, then as now, are a vital means of reaching the

wholesalers and retailers who comprise the product distribution channel. All Barling's competitors used them extensively; scores of such examples survive. There is no reason to believe Barling was any different. Moreover, Barling routinely employed another standard marketing tool to reach their end-customers: successive retail advertising campaigns placed in prominent magazines and newspapers of the day, hundreds of examples of which may be found from at least the 1930s onward.

THE PERFECT PIPE  
THE **BARLING**

The merits of the Barling pipe have for generations been outstanding. Barling pipes are the result of over one hundred years of British Pipe Craft. No better pipe can be obtained at any price. Medium, 10/6. Large, 12/6.

*Barling*  
PIPE CRAFT

If any difficulty in obtaining, write B. Barling & Sons, 9, Park St., London, N.W.1; or 'phone, Gulliver 1600. Estd. 1812. The oldest firm of pipe-makers in England and producers of the World's Finest Pipes.

Typical Barling Newspaper Ad September 1934

The existence of catalogs and a vast number of advertisements are *prima facie* evidence that Barling must have built up a fairly significant work-in-process inventory; ready ability to ship product was inherent in their marketing efforts. Catalogs were clearly intended to generate demand from the trade, while retail advertisements were similarly meant to encourage product “pull” by the consumer through the tobacconist. Factory pipes are not generally speaking highly customized goods; most Englishmen expected to be able to go into their local shop and buy a pipe on the spot (absent the abnormal shortages during and immediately after the War).

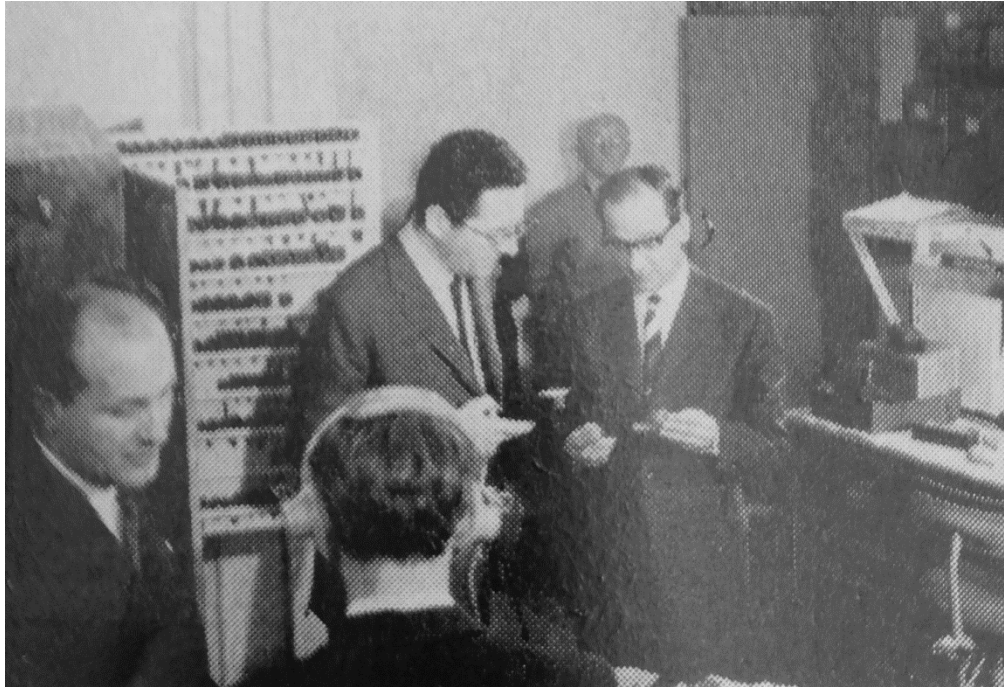
Likewise the frequency and nature of Barling’s regular appearances in industry journals targeted at the trade would have little rationale for a product that must be special ordered. For decades Barling listings in the *Cigar and Tobacco World* annual pricing directory, for example, clearly described their product range (by line and size) and cost. The same trade venues saw regular Barling advertisements as well.

On a side note, even the early Barling catalog discovered by Silver was not the first one issued by the company. The very first words printed in the introduction are “We have much pleasure in presenting our *New* Catalogue illustrating some of the principal shapes...” (italics mine). To my mind the use of the word “new” implies the existence of an “old”. More definitively, a Barling advertisement from a trade directory published in 1904 offers retailers a “Catalogue and Terms on application.” This statement, in conjunction with the several Barling examples which have survived, clearly suggests a pattern over many decades of preparing catalogs for trade utilization. In this Barling’s behavior was entirely consistent with such competitors as Dunhill, Loewe, Orlik and other pipe manufacturers of the time.

So ample evidence exists that Barling promoted its wares to both the trade and retail consumers long before the family left the company. It’s still a fair question, however, whether the tempo or nature of promotional activity changed in the wake of the management transition. Here the answer appears to be yes. Based on a review of years of industry journals in the decades leading up to the summer of 1962 my strong impression is that the period after the accession of new management saw a great increase in Barling’s press clippings, reflecting a concerted effort on the company’s part to use nontraditional methods to put itself in the public eye.

The kinds of press Barling pursued became much more varied than had been the case previously. The early 1960s saw not just the typical advertisements or trade listings of the past, but promotional activities of all kinds, each clearly meant to expand general awareness of the Barling name. As examples, in the first two and a half years after the family left the company Barling engaged in a variety of promotional firsts, including:

- Hosting a short television documentary dedicated to the craft of pipe making...



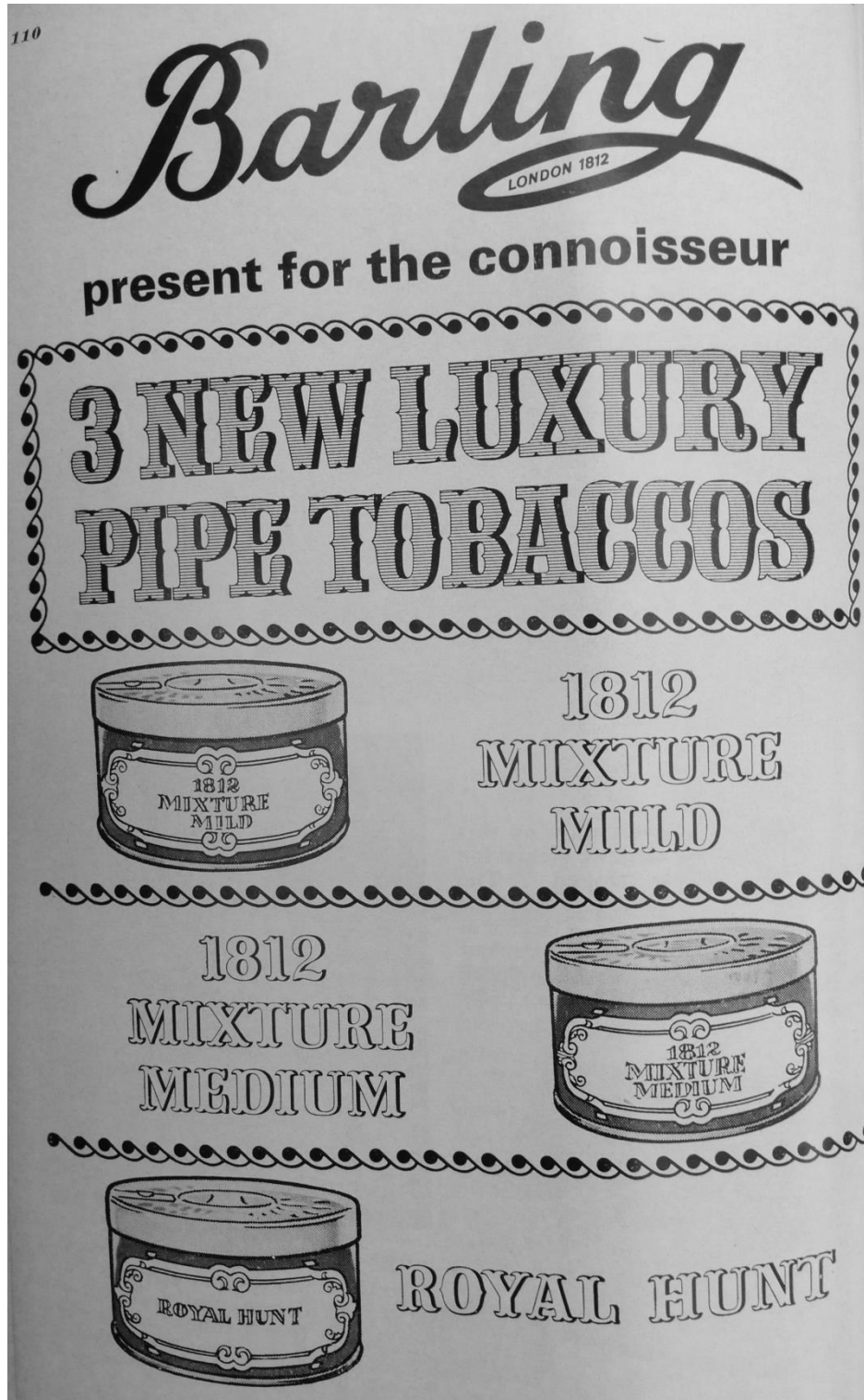
*Ron Harden (on right) being interviewed for documentary aired in April 1964*

- Presenting Alfie Howard, third generation Town Crier for Lambeth, a briar pipe to use and display on his worldwide trip publicizing British goods...



*Ron Harden present Barling briar pipes to Alfie Howard October 1964*

- Leveraging the Barling brand name by introducing a range of Barling pipe tobaccos, manufactured by Ogden (not coincidentally another Imperial Tobacco subsidiary by that point)...



*Ad introducing Barling pipe tobaccos to the trade November 1964*



- Forming a Barling football team outfitted with crests on their jerseys emblazoned with a Barling pipe (they played and bested Oppenheimer Pipes two years running)...



*Barling Football Team Photo February 1965*

- Fabricating an enormous Barling pipe for display at annual Blackpool trade fair



*Ron Harden (left), Ron Gibbons (center), and Giant Pipe March 1966*

No single one of these events, taken on its own, is particularly impressive; several in fact may seem silly from a 21<sup>st</sup> century perspective. But considered in aggregate they represent a serious effort on the part of the company's new management team to grow sales through increased brand awareness.

But changes at Barling weren't limited to promotional activities. Many were made inside the company, and not as readily visible to the outside world. An important one had to do with representation in America, and was really only perceived by retailers in the United States. The other two, perhaps even more significant in their impact, were in the areas of raw material sourcing and production; these changes were rarely if ever really understood outside the company.

Unlike Sasieni, Barling historically did not regard shipments to America as the dominant factor in its revenues. With the sale of the company to Finlay this began to change. In the early sixties Barling decided to terminate its existing American sales representative, a man named Nichols based in New York. Nichols is best remembered today for the numbering system which bears his name. For reasons not clearly understood today, each shape, size, and mouthpiece combination of pipe sold in America had a different number stamped on the shank than it bore in the UK. Both Nichols and his nomenclature were dispensed with at about the same time.

The reasons behind this change, however, may be less obvious than a simple drive for more sales revenue. As early as December of 1960, only two months after the sale by the Barling family to Finlay, Daniel Stevens of Barling was already in preliminary talks to have George Hunt and his company, Diversey Machine Works (DMW), take over distribution of Barling's products in the United States. Why DMW? The answer is complicated. Hunt was already well known in the pipe business. A dozen years earlier DMW had assumed responsibility for the sales and marketing of Falcon pipes with spectacular results. In late 1956 after protracted litigation Hunt acquired all patents, trademarks, and manufacturing rights to the Falcon as well. In early 1957 Hunt started negotiations with David Morris of A. Lewis & Co. (Westminster) Ltd for expansion overseas; the eventual result was the creation of jointly owned Falcon Pipes Ltd, formed to both manufacture and sell Falcon pipes everywhere but the United States and its possessions. By late 1958 manufacturing in England had begun, and Barling was one of the early suppliers of briar bowls to Falcon's UK operation. It was around this time, perhaps facilitated by David Morris, that Hunt met and became friends with members of Barling management. In April 1961 it became clear that Hunt and Barling's managing director, William Williamson-Barling, were very close to a deal on U.S. distribution of Barling product. Williamson-Barling must have hoped that Hunt could do for Barling what he'd done for Falcon; sell millions of pipes. And



so the switch was made: DMW got the exclusive U.S. rights to distribute Barling sometime between April 1961 and September 1962.

But there is perhaps another reason Barling chose DMW, one rooted in a growing relationship between the two companies. At about the same time Barling dropped Nichols, the UK Falcon plant was having continual difficulty purchasing briar bowls in adequate quantity and quality. The solution was ultimately determined to be setting up a factory in Ireland to supply Falcon demand. Hunt Associates was created to build, own, and manage this factory; while the largest block of equity in this new company was held by George Hunt, large minority shares were held by David Morris and Barling. This intermingling of interests would very shortly come back to haunt DMW in one respect; by the end of 1965 Barling found its investment in the Irish operation disappointing, and as a result sold out to the other shareholders. At the same time Barling, perhaps generally disenchanted with its partners, terminated DMW as its US distributor.

But all that lay in the future. Back in the fall of 1962 we find Hunt, acting on behalf of DMW, contacting retailers across the U.S., offering both the 150<sup>th</sup> Anniversary 1962 catalog and a table that provided them with a way to cross-reference between the old Barling numbering system used in the UK, the Nichols system previously employed for pipes sold into the American market, and a new system being introduced by the company (and reflected in the catalog). Such a table was essential during a transitional time when tobacconists, the distributor, and the manufacturer all had inventory of varying ages bearing varying nomenclatures. Without this guidance it would have been difficult or impossible for retailers to either place correct product orders with Hunt's company, or offer consistent pricing to end-consumers.

For years before the switch in American distribution, however, Barling had been experiencing another change even more profound; one that affected every pipe the company made. Barling, as Gage and others have noted, was particularly famed for its usage of Algerian briar. But with the beginning of the Algerian War for independence in 1954 such briar became tougher and tougher to find. Barling management acknowledged this explicitly, and admitted to responding by sourcing its briar from "France, Italy, Sardinia, Spain and Greece" as a result of the Algerian crisis. Whichever side of the "brand vs. briar" divide the reader falls on, most would agree that briar does matter, that it comes in varying degrees of quality, and as a natural material individual pieces can be well or ill-suited to the making of a pipe. A large plurality, perhaps a majority, would further agree that different growing regions yield different performance characteristics. Under the circumstances it's possible to understand the perspective of those collectors who argue that a change (in their view

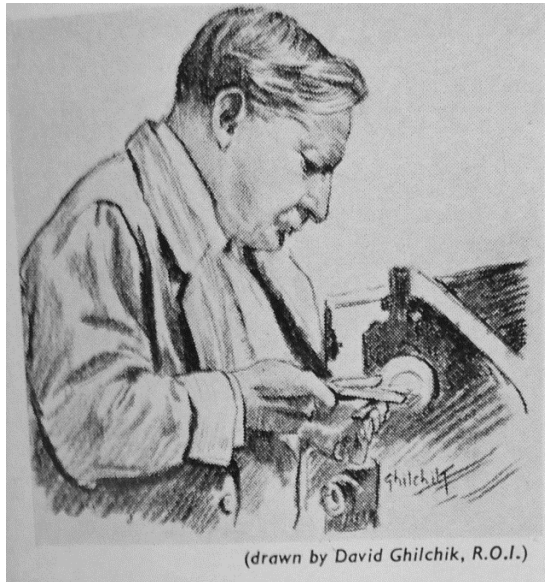
a degradation) in Barling quality is perceptible years before the family sold the business, in fact as far back as the mid-1950s.

But briar is just part of the story. It seems readily apparent in retrospect that Barling was if not a turnaround, at least seriously underperforming at the time it was purchased by Finlay in October of 1960. Monty was in his mid-seventies when the family sold out; the degree to which he was engaged in actively managing the business is far from clear. The title of “President” on the Crosby letters is not definitive; Monty wouldn’t have been the first elder statesman to be retained as a figurehead in the wake of a transaction. And the very magnitude of the changes initiated by the new parent and announced in early 1963 is a sign that they were almost certainly begun before the family was forced out in June of 1962; by the time Finlay reported its financial results in February of 1963 they were in full swing. At that time Finlay admitted to losing 35,000 pounds at Barling in the preceding twelve months (an amount worth the better part of a million dollars in today’s money), and attributed the bulk of it to interruptions in production caused by a “...large-scale reorganization of the Barling factories...with a great deal of reequipping, reconstruction, and renovation...”. Changes to the factories included modernization (e.g. the addition of independent electric motors for each lathe, replacing belt-driven machines that had been in operation for decades), and improved handling of raw materials (e.g. the installation of a new briar root storage system at Jeffreys Place employing “specially designed metal containers...developed for ease of handling”).

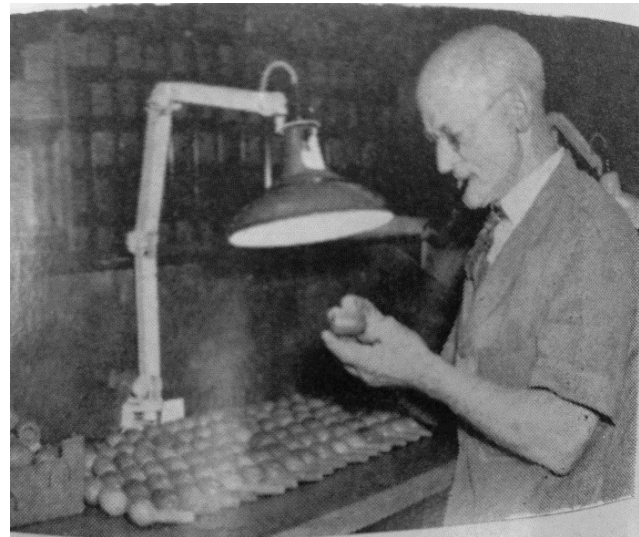
This new investment in the business by itself could be considered a fairly damning indictment of the condition Barling was in when Finlay acquired it. It suggests the possibility of a business in decline; one subjected to neglect over an extended period of time. Whether that’s true or not, the Finlay investments were clearly meant to lay the groundwork for growth, the kind of significant growth that would support the sales volume necessary to validate Finlay’s recent infusion of capital, as well as perhaps provide a justification for the original deal. And of course the recent spurt of promotional activity is another sign that the company both wanted and expected growth. But there is a third sign as well, perhaps the important of all; one with severe implications for the quality of Barling production.

In June of 1963, about a year after Monty Barling and his son-in-law left the company, management stated that Barling had grown its workforce by an astonishing 150% in the prior three years: from 80 to over 200 employees. The importance of this and its implications cannot be over-stated. And it should also be noted that this massive expansion began while the Barlings were still employed at the company.

The bulk of the family era was dominated by craftsmen who had spent their working lives with the company. Arthur May and Bob Channan are prime examples; together these two men worked at Barling more than 110 years. Both were still there in 1963.



*Arthur May, Barling stem maker from 1905 on*



*Bob Channan, Barling pipe carver from 1909 on*

By mid-1963 a remarkable sea change had occurred in the make-up of the workforce; women, largely very young, now outnumbered men four to one. They can be seen dominating almost every step in the production process.

From stem-work...



*Woman operators shaping and polishing vulcanite stems*

...to the refinement of the briar bowls.



*Woman operators sanding bowls to remove waste and retain exact shape*

Management attempted to compensate for the inexperience of its new recruits by a system of employee training. To aficionados of the briar pipe, it will seem implausible that the 50+ years' experience of an Arthur May or a Bob Channan could be duplicated very quickly. More generally speaking, few businesses of any kind can grow their employee base so much in such a short period of time without an adverse effect on the quality of output.

And there is still another conclusion that can be drawn from the rapid expansion of the workforce, one that has an important implication for the likely duration of any transition period. For those who do believe in the superiority of raw materials acquired while the company was under family management, clearly this sharp increase of production in the early 1960s had to entail a correspondingly rapid depletion of prior inventory. It's hard to see how any transition period which is in part defined by and predicated on usage of superior pre-existing briar material could have lasted very long: a doubling (or more) of volume would inevitably have resulted in a swift draw down of stocks on hand.

## *Conclusions and Closing Thoughts*

Transitions are like the advent of the dawn, or perhaps of death; who can perceive the instant when light has come, or life is extinct? Some processes are so gradual as to defy useful analysis.

I started this essay by questioning the wisdom of debating questions that lack answers; questions that even if answerable provide no useful guidance. I think the Barling transition is an example of such a debate.

We want to understand what happened at Barling, presumably, for the best of reasons. We seek a shortcut that will teach us how to distinguish a better pipe from a worse one. But in this particular case is this remotely realistic?

Experts in the field are unanimous in using the date the family left the company as a surrogate for the start of the transition to mediocrity; they also largely believe the sale of the business by the Barlings was coincident with their departure. But history shows that the real facts are messier than that. The Barlings departed in the interval between two sales. Some of the factors which could reasonably be expected to have decreased quality started to take effect while they were still at the company; some many years before they left. So when did the transition really begin? And how useful is it to link it with family involvement if this is no longer the bright line we expected it to be?

But let's assume for the sake of argument that the line is indeed bright; the transition was a real and finite event. We've answered the question: the transition began on such and such a date. What have we accomplished?

I'm prepared to accept that rapid growth often diminishes quality of production. I'm also prepared to believe that founding families may pay more attention to quality than the larger businesses which buy them out. What seems less clear to me is how quality is measured, and whether the results would be consistent across time, and across the people doing the measuring.

If it's true that pre-transition Barlings (however defined) are the better pipes, it should be determinable in some consistent way. If I arranged a blind test of pre- and post-transition pipes how many "experts" would be able to tell one from the other? How many would choose the pre-transition pipe? How consistent would their evaluation be across multiple tests? If it's true that pre-transition Barlings are superior, shouldn't we be able to tell from smoking them? Otherwise what does superior mean?

On this score I admit to considerable skepticism. Knowledgeable friends who have both types of Barlings have stated that post-transition pipes can be as good as or better smokers. Is this anecdotal evidence definitive? Of course not. From what I can tell nothing would be. And that's the point.

I recognize that there are other attributes that are valued by pipe smokers besides a pipe's smoking qualities; attributes that some believe cannot be quantified. Greg Pease makes this point eloquently in his essay on the role of objectivity in pipe smoking. He articulates a compelling view that many characteristics combine with varying degrees of emphasis across individuals to create a unique experience, one rooted in time, memory, and ultimately, romance. If the subject is a general one, such as pipe smoking as a pastime, I'm inclined to agree with his assessment. When the subject under discussion becomes more specific I take a different view. The end product of an argument for complete subjectivity is stasis: the debate on the Barling transition (or any other specific issue) becomes futile and is over before it begins. If a transition is defined to take place from one undefinable state to another, there is no common ground for discussion, no basis for agreement.

I have no quarrel with analyses focused on objective assessments of difficult subjects; in fact I welcome them. Where we find questions not susceptible to definitive resolution it is largely, I suspect, because they are ill-defined. If the question was "when did the Barling family cede control?" or "at what point and in what way did the company change its sourcing of briar?" we could reasonably expect a clear answer. Even vaguer questions about erosion in quality can be answered provided there is a common definition of terms and techniques of measurement. The problem, of course, is that common definitions are generally lacking. Failing these the debate quickly fades into opinionneering.

It's interesting to think about why we seek to clarify the nebulous to begin with. Perhaps it's akin to one of the reasons why wine bottles have labels. Such markers provide a guide; they tell people what's supposed to be "better" and worth more money. Not incidentally they confer prestige on the astute consumer. Labeling things helps us choose between alternatives; but often it tells us more about ourselves than it tells us about the contents beneath the label.

It's human nature to want to punch above our weight class; aspirations are a big part of who and what we are. One aspect of that is manifested in our desire to have the best, whether we have the critical apparatus to appreciate it or not. For that matter we often want what is generally perceived to be the best, whether it's really the best or not. Our possessions often provide us with validation, driven by our conviction that

they project the desired image of who we want to be (or more precisely, who we want to be seen as). The quest for approbation comes to trump all else.

How much of the debate over the Barling transition is influenced by such considerations? No matter how deep the level of introspection we achieve I suspect we still wouldn't know; after all, what people say they believe, how they behave, and the underlying facts can be three very different things.

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### *Acknowledgements*

I want to offer special thanks to Neill Roan and Tad Gage for their many constructive comments on and criticisms of earlier drafts of this article. Both men shared valuable information drawn from their own research and experiences. Each read this essay more than once and gave generously of their time to provide me with insight into errors and omissions. Any mistakes remaining are of course my own responsibility.

I also want to express my gratitude and appreciation to Kathy Worth, granddaughter of George L. Hunt and author of *Back from the Ashes: Uncovering the Lost History of G. L. Hunt and the Falcon Pipe*. Her detailed responses to my questions and willingness to spend time reviewing the personal files of her grandfather added significant insight into Barling's U.S. distribution during the period of its transition from family to corporate ownership.

Finally I want to thank Jesse Silver for his generosity in giving me a copy of his beautiful reproduction of the early Barling catalog he discovered, as well as for his willingness to engage in brainstorming and constructive debate on the topic of dating such ephemera as well as other issues.

Despite the tone of this essay, I am painfully aware of the imperfection inherent in all historical research. The only thing I can be completely confident of is that this article, like all its predecessors and successors on the same topic, has one or more material errors embedded somewhere inside it. Any corrections or commentary would be greatly appreciated.



### *A Brief Note on Sources*

In writing these essays on pipe history I go back and forth on the whole idea of footnotes. On the one hand they provide a means for the curious to verify statements made by the author; they also impart a generally pleasing air of academic plausibility to what is after all a trivial exercise. On the other hand they are a visual distraction, and whether put at the bottom of the page or at the end of an article are a major nuisance to most readers. In this case I've decided to compromise by summarizing some of the most important sources here at the end of the essay, organized by subject matter, and stated both informally and in general terms. Those who want additional information are welcome to contact me via email ([willdunbar@aol.com](mailto:willdunbar@aol.com)).

- Conclusions of Barling experts: Tad Gage (original version in the Spring 2000 issue of *Pipes & Tobacco Magazine*; updated version in GKPC August 2012 newsletter); Richard Carlton Hacker (*Rare Smoke*); Jesse Silver (extensive revisions to Pipedia entry on Barling)
- Barling address chronology: Available Pigot's and Post Office Directories for London; British telephone directories; John Culme's *Directory of gold and silversmiths, jewellers, and allied traders, 1838-1914*
- Barling genealogical information: Censuses of England 1841-1911; birth/marriage/death civil and church records, both indices and specific documents; England and Wales National Probate Calendar
- Barling transaction dates: *London Gazette* (December 2, 1919 for the dissolution of the partnership between Walter Frederick and his brothers); *Tobacco* (September 1960 for the sale to Finlay; April 1963 issue for the subsequent sale of Finlay to Imperial); *The Times* (August 25, 1960 for the sale to Finlay; March 21, 1963 for the sale of Finlay to Imperial)
- Barling's involvement with briar, and initiation of the Board of Trade Standing Committee meetings: *The Times* (Sept 1, 1927; Feb 23, 1928; March 13, 1928; March 14, 1928; June 19, 1928); *Cigar & Tobacco World* (April & July 1928)
- Barling operational information: *Tobacco* (May & August 1962; Feb, May, & June 1963; May 1964; March 1965; June 1966); *Cigar and Tobacco World* (BPTA activities: July 1929, April, June & August 1930); *Illustrated London News*, *The Strand Magazine*, *The Countryman*, *Blackwood's Magazine* (various issues: examples of Barling consumer advertising campaigns)
- Barling and George L. Hunt ephemera: Materials in the private collections of Tad Gage, Jesse Silver, and Kathy Worth
- Discussions of objectivity: Dr. Fred Hanna, PhD (*The Myth of Brand and Maker in Pipesmoking*), and Gregory L. Pease (*Can There Be Objectivity in Pipe Smoking?*)