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## Quaint Pipe-stoppers as a Collector's Hobby

Old Village Curios that Exist in Astonishing Variety : How to Recognise Fakes.

By ARTHUR EVEREST.

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*There are numbers of collectors who like to obtain curios which can be conveniently accommodated in a small space. For such people the fascinating pursuit of collecting pipe-stoppers is quite ideal.*

AT one time the pipe-stopper was an essential smoker's requisite ; it was used for pressing the precious weed into the bowl of the pipe, but it appears to have fallen out of use with the passing of the old narrow clay pipe. Or perhaps the pipe-stopper fell out of favour with the introduction of cheaper tobacco.

For the past fifteen years I have been an ardent collector of these one-time handy little objects, and during my hunting have found them fashioned in almost every metal, including gold, silver, pinchbeck, brass, bronze, gun-metal, iron, steel, pewter and white metal. I have also found them in mother-of-pearl, china, glass, jade, amber, ivory, bone, horn, wood, and even in slate. Curiously enough, the stoppers made of the more common materials are the rarer "finds." The average length seems to be from one inch to three inches, and the base

about a quarter-of-an-inch in diameter. The smaller stoppers are, no doubt, the earlier ones.

### Legs and Hands as Stoppers.

The designs for the tops of the pipe-stoppers are of a wide variety of subjects, from the figure-head of Charles II. to that of the humble London crier. Napoleon is often beautifully modelled in silver, and figures of St. George and the Dragon, Britannia, Justice, negroes, boxers and jesters are favourites. The commonest devices, however, are those of human legs and hands. The former usually display footwear—a lady's slippered foot and gartered leg, or sometimes the leg has an elastic-sided boot on it ; often the leg of a huntsman is in a high top-boot.

There seem to be few specimens of the unshod foot, and as yet I have only come across two. One is in brass and one in white metal ; and these two stoppers are exceptionally well-modelled. The ankles are beautifully shapened and the toes clearly cut out. Stoppers with hands are found with

the hands both closed and open. The closed hand is often holding a pipe, and there is one case of a heart resting in the palm of the open hand—the Oddfellows' emblem of to-day, I believe.

In my collection I have stoppers with tops representing dogs, dolphins, pair of pigeons, a blacksmith's anvil, a pick, a box containing miniature dominoes, and one in iron with an ecclesiastical eagle on a lectern. I have also a very interesting one, which was evidently made for a lady; it consists of a brass egg-cup, which contains an ivory egg. It has been suggested that this served the double purpose of holding the lady's thimble when not in use as a stopper.

The stoppers were manufactured locally from the seventeenth century to the early part of the nineteenth century, and at the time when the village clubs flourished; it is surprising to find that the old village club head emblems were not used as designs for the stoppers.

#### Some Handy Specimens.

Referring to the illustration, it will be noticed there are two stoppers (in the second row) with rings. The ring enabled the smoker to hold the stopper conveniently on

the finger ready for use. The fourth one in second row (reading from left to right) shows a very nice early silver stopper which unscrews and reveals a pipe pricker. The last one in top row (reading from left to right) is a fine old steel smoker's companion set of a stopper, spoon and pricker on a ring, and the iron stopper to the left of it has a corkscrew attached thereto.

The base of some of the later stoppers is cut in grooves (*e.g.* the hand shown fourth in the top row of illustration). These stoppers were also used for pressing the wafer seals which were affixed to the back of envelopes before the introduction of gummed envelopes.

#### The Active Faker.

Alas! the reproducer has not passed over these little objects, and fakes are very plentiful. The majority of the reproductions are in brass, but they can easily be detected. The fakes lack finish and attention to detail, whereas the genuine stoppers are splendid specimens of fine workmanship. Dickens' characters are often imperfectly copied, and the reversible medallion (shown seventh in second row) of the Pope and Jester is one of the most common reproductions.

