

# MORE PIPECLAY BEADS FROM NORTON ST PHILIP, ENGLAND

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*During the 17th century, Norton St Philip was a major production center for clay tobacco pipes. As a sideline, they also made such items as wig curlers, gaming pieces, and beads. A previous article discussed six beads recovered from pipe-making wasters in fields adjoining the village. Here are described an additional five specimens, each with different decoration.*

Since the publication of the initial article on pipeclay beads in this journal (Lewcun 2015), five more decorated specimens have been found in Norton St Philip, an ancient village on the eastern edge of the county of Somerset, southwest England. The six previously reported beads were found over a period of 13 years, a find rate of roughly one every two years. The most recent batch, however, was found over a period of just two years, three of them in a single month in 2018. This increase in numbers is a reflection of the recent prolonged dry weather in the United Kingdom which afforded the repeated and more detailed search of the arable fields which surround the hub of the village.

The five new beads are all made from the same pipeclay as those discussed in the 2015 article. Two are spherical, another slightly ovoid, while the remaining two are cylindrical. The boreholes range from 2.4 mm to 3.4 mm, typical of the holes in pipes of the latter part of the 17th century in Somerset. Each bead is decorated with designs and motifs similar to those previously reported. The decoration consists primarily of wheel spokes, crosses, milling, squares, and “staples” (design elements composed of two small indentations connected by a shallow groove). The stamps used to impart the individual motifs were probably fashioned from pipe stems. An example of these stamps – used to decorate not only beads but various other pipeclay objects found in the village – was recently found in one of the fields. It is 32 mm long and 9 mm in diameter at the working end (Figure 1).

Bead 1 (Figure 2) is incomplete but was spherical originally. The design consists of seven bands of milling which stretch from end to end, interspaced with “staples,”



**Figure 1.** Stamp with wheel-spoke design (all photos by author).

all produced by the same stamps as those used on Beads 3 and 4. Some of the staples form crosses, while on one side three staples have been combined to form the letter H which may represent the surname initial of Jeffry Hunt, its probable maker. The bead is 19 mm in diameter with a hole diameter of 2.6 mm. It was found in the same field as Beads 2 and 4 in this paper and Bead 1 in the 2015 article.

Bead 2 (Figure 3) is also roughly spherical. Paired bands of milling are spiraled along the axis, and are interspaced with small squares with serrated edges. This bead differs from all the others, the milling being of a toothed form rather than the traditional style found on pipes of the period and as seen on Beads 3 and 4. It is 16 mm long and 18 mm in diameter with a bore that is 3.0 mm wide. It was found in the same field as Bead 3.

Bead 3 (Figure 4) is slightly ovoid in shape. Although battered by the plow, the design elements are discernible. They include three bands of milling, one around either end and one encircling the middle. Between each band of milling, and at each end, is a series of staple-like indentations identical to those which feature on Beads 1 and 2 in the 2015 article. The bead is 20 mm long and 16 mm in diameter with a hole diameter of 2.4 mm. It was found in the same field as Bead 5.



Figure 2. Bead 1, side and end views.

Bead 4 (Figure 5), the largest one to date, is cylindrical with slightly rounded ends and decorated with a combination of milling and staple designs from the same tools used to decorate Bead 3. The eight lines of milling gently spiral about the bead. Between each line is a series of three or four lines of parallel staples. Additional staples spiral around the ends, while five staples are arranged across the axis on one side. The bead is 32 mm long, 13 mm in diameter with a hole diameter of 2.8 mm. It was found in a part of what was once the medieval South Field, where the softer soil has been kinder to its condition.

Bead 5 (Figure 6) is broken at one end, but would have been cylindrical in form originally. Battered by the plow over the years, the design consists of crosses within circles, with an indentation central to the edge of each quadrant. The bead is 19 mm long and 15 mm in diameter with a 3.4 mm hole. It was found on the northwest side of the village, in the same field as Bead 3 in *Beads 27*.

Bead 2 was found close to a deposit of pipes by Richard Greenland (1633/1640-1710), and although it could theoretically date from anytime between 1660 and 1710, it is more likely to be of a similar date to the other three. Beads 3 and 5 were associated with pipes made by Jeffry Hunt of



Figure 3. Bead 2, side and end views.

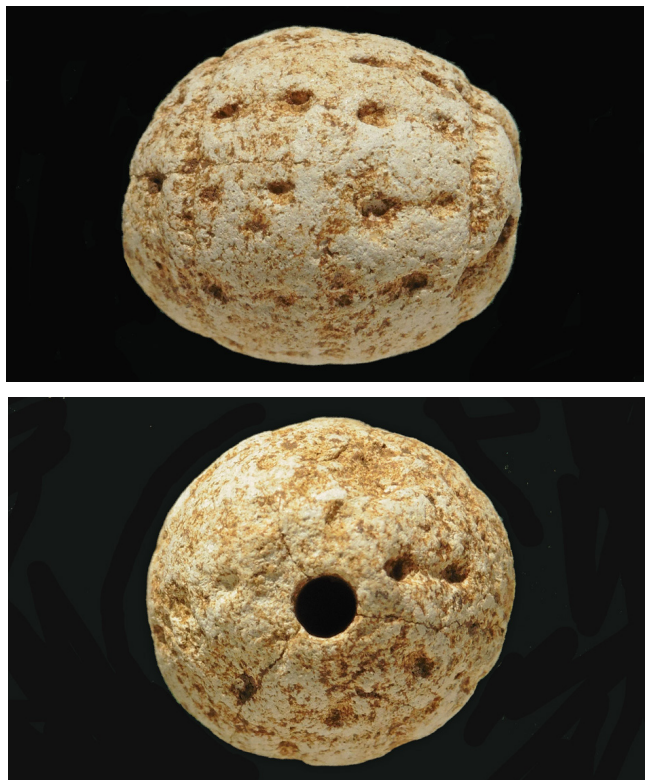


Figure 4. Bead 3, side and end views.



Figure 5. Bead 4, side and end views.



Figure 6. Bead 5, side and end views.

Norton St Philip (1599-1690), and can be dated to between 1670 and 1690. Bead 4 was associated with pipes made by both Jeffry Hunt and Richard Greenland and is probably also of the 1670-1690 period.

Whereas the vast majority of the clay tobacco pipes with which the beads were found were workshop waste, discarded due to accidental breakage or over-firing of the kilns, four of the beads are perfectly fired and complete or almost complete, while the other was probably broken by a harrow or plowshare at some point in the last 300 years.

These, and the beads previously published, remain the only examples known in Britain, and are thus nationally unique as a group. Milling was typically used on most tobacco pipes between 1620 and 1670, but very rarely thereafter, and not at all in Norton St Philip after 1670. The 1670-1690 date of the beads is reliable, and their decoration might represent the continued use of the milling tools used on pipes but put to a different purpose. More beads must still lie buried and await discovery in the village soils, and they will be reported in due course.

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