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**Object(s):** Wooden Containers.

**Object Number(s):** STMEA: 1990-3.1a and b.

**Researcher details:** Richard Hall, Volunteer.

### **Wooden Containers STMEA:1990—3.1a and b**

Within the Museum's collection are two identical wooden boxes, believed to have been used for the storage of snuff, a form of dried, milled tobacco, which was inhaled by the user. Both items were donated to the museum by Mr and Mrs Cooper, who also believe that they had been made by German Prisoners of War who were detained in or around Stradbrook, Suffolk, at the time.

Both boxes are in the shape of shoes and have a surface texturing of small holes (pitting). The boxes have sliding tops, forming a good seal, which would have been necessary to keep any contents dry during use.

### **The detention of Prisoners of War (POW's) in Suffolk**

Records of POW detention from the second world war are difficult to find, although empirical evidence exists from local farmers who, being exempt from military service, were able to host POW's on their farms to provide additional agricultural labour.

In 2010, the Guardian Newspaper, produced an article on its "Datablog"<sup>1</sup>, from a book written by Sophie Jackson, entitled 'Churchill's Unexpected Guests: Prisoners of War in Britain in World War II.' In the article, is a list of every POW camp in Britain, with a rough description of what the camp was comprised of.

As might be expected, Norfolk, Suffolk and Essex, hosted a large number of these camps, usually on former, disused airfields or other military camp sites. In Suffolk, there were eight such camps listed:

Botesdale;

Mildenhall;

Bungay;

Redgrave Park, Diss;

Ellough, Beccles;

Hardwick Heath, Bury St Edmunds (site of the current West Suffolk Hospital);

Flixton Airfield, Bungay; and,

Debach Airfield, Woodbridge.

It is possible that the POW's from nearby Botesdale, Redgrave Park, Bungay or Ellough, could all have been working on farms in the Stradbrook area at that time.

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<sup>1</sup> Simon Rogers. Every prisoner of war camp in the UK mapped and listed. the Guardian.

<https://www.theguardian.com/news/datablog/2010/nov/08/prisoner-of-war-camps-uk#data>

## POW Folk Art

The production of Folk-art forms has long been associated with POW's. Whilst it was not intended that they should have significant amounts of free time, many POW's found time to use the few tools at hand to manufacture small pieces and it is likely that STMEA:19903.1a and b, would have been crafted by POW's in their spare time.

There are several examples of POW Folk-art through history, many of which are collectable items, finding their way into auction houses across the world. Most sought after examples include 'Scrimshaw'<sup>2</sup> work from the Napoleonic wars, Bottle art and carved items, which might be of practical use, such as snuff boxes.



Image: 1. Wooden Snuff Boxes.<sup>3</sup>

For some reason, shoes were very popular shapes for turning into Snuff Boxes. It is possible that the shoe was considered as a romantic symbol<sup>4</sup>, dating back to the middle ages, when a father would hand over a shoe to the bridegroom to transfer his authority over his daughter, to the groom.

During the first world war, a particular form was developed, now commonly known as 'Trench Art'<sup>5</sup>. This particular form made use of the readily available materials at the front including empty artillery shell cases etc. Several examples of Trench Art still survive today.

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<sup>2</sup> Scrimshaw [Internet]. En.wikipedia.org. 2020 [cited 23 January 2020]. Available from: <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Scrimshaw>

<sup>3</sup> [Internet]. Cogpunksteamscribe.files.wordpress.com. 2020 [cited 23 January 2020]. Available from: <https://cogpunksteamscribe.files.wordpress.com/2015/10/selection-of-treen-snuff-boxes-in-the-shape-of-shoes.jpg>

<sup>4</sup> 2. [Internet]. 2020 [cited 23 January 2020]. Available from: <http://snuffbox.com/shoes-final.pdf>

<sup>5</sup> Trench art [Internet]. En.wikipedia.org. 2020 [cited 23 January 2020]. Available from: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Trench\\_art](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Trench_art)



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## What is Snuff?

Snuff is an alternative form of tobacco. The BBC History Extra site<sup>6</sup> provides a brief history of the use of Snuff, which suggests that the 'taking of Snuff' originated in the America's and was brought to Europe (Spain) following Columbus's second voyage to the New World.

Snuff is made by a process of continuous milling, drying and, where appropriate, the addition of other flavouring powders. Such was the popularity of Snuff in the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> Century's that several specialist rolling mills were established in England. The National Trust currently own and maintain Snuff Tobacco Mills at Moreden Hall<sup>7</sup> in London. There are also several examples of Mills in other parts of the country from Bristol to Kendall.

## The use of Snuff

The use of Snuff has declined significantly over the years in line with the decrease in the use of tobacco products generally. However, Snuff can still be found and one of the more famous locations in England, is the Houses of Parliament, which has its own Snuff Box by the entrance into the House of Commons. The Parliamentary Review website contains an article first published in September 2014<sup>8</sup>, which talks about the introduction of the box following the prohibition of smoking in the House of Commons in 1693, when it was agreed that Snuff should be available as a substitute for smoking tobacco.

The current Parliamentary Snuff Box dates from 1941, being made from wood reclaimed from the door frame of the old chamber door, bombed during the second world war. Responsibility for keeping it full falls on the Doorkeeper to the Commons, whose name will be engraved on a plate on top of the box.

According to the Parliamentary Review site<sup>9</sup>, the last time Snuff was taken from the box was in 1989 (Margaret Thatcher was Prime Minister), when 1 ½ oz (approximately 42.5g) was removed at a cost to the tax payer of 99p!

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<sup>6</sup> What was snuff? [Internet]. HistoryExtra. 2020 [cited 23 January 2020]. Available from:

<https://www.historyextra.com/period/georgian/what-was-snuff/>

<sup>7</sup> A history of the snuff mills at Morden Hall Park [Internet]. National Trust. 2020 [cited 23 January 2020].

Available from: <https://www.nationaltrust.org.uk/morden-hall-park/features/a-history-of-the-snuff-mills-at-morden-hall-park>

<sup>8</sup> Snuff Said [Internet]. The Parliamentary Review. 2020 [cited 23 January 2020]. Available from:

<https://www.theparliamentaryreview.co.uk/news/snuff-said>

<sup>9</sup> Ditto.