

# Chinese Opium Pipes Displayed in London for the First Time



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## **Exhibition tells the extraordinary story of opium smoking in 19th-century China.**

May 30, 2013, 9:04 am -- [/EPR NETWORK/](#) -- A remarkable selection of antique Chinese opium pipes is going on display on June 5th in central London, the first time such items have ever been seen in the United Kingdom. The pipes mainly date from the 19th -century and reflect the Chinese obsession with smoking opium, which they did through richly decorated pipes made from bamboo, porcelain, ivory, horn and jade. The exhibition – called Opium – will be at Maggs Bros bookshop at 50 Berkeley Square until the end of July and entrance is free. Berkeley Square is in the centre of Mayfair and surrounded by excellent restaurants and bars – for more information see [LondonTown.com](http://LondonTown.com). It is also within easy reach of all London mainline stations such as Euston. See [LondonTown.com](http://LondonTown.com) for a wide range of hotels near Euston that are available for booking.

Opium was grown in India and taken to China by British and American smugglers in the 1700s, where a rich material culture sprang up. The drug was at first smoked with tobacco, but eventually opium was taken on its own and huge numbers of Chinese men – and some women – began smoking the drug on a daily basis. Opium smoking was initially the preserve of the wealthy and fashionable, and many of the most attractive and decorative pipes would have belonged to rich Chinese, but it soon cascaded through society to be taken up by the very poor, who smoked cheap opium through disposable bamboo pipes.

The smoking process was very complex so was often done in pairs, with one person preparing the pipe while the other smoked. This process also required the use of numerous tools, many examples of which will be on display at Maggs Bros. The raw opium was placed on a needle and heated over a special lamp, before being placed in an earthen or porcelain bowl, which was attached to the pipe by a metal saddle, often made of silver and incredibly ornate. There were also special tools for cleaning the pipes and for storing pipes and bowls, and some pipes could even be broken into three parts for travelling. Many of these pipes and tools were destroyed by Chinese authorities in the 20th century as they attempted to stamp out what was increasingly regarded as a dangerous vice that was hampering Chinese prosperity and also reflecting poorly on China's image abroad. Thousands of pipes were burnt on huge public bonfires, making the exhibition of material at Maggs Bros a particularly rare and valuable insight into a lost tradition of Chinese society.

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