

# Pottery Identification Guide

# Pottery identification

## Roman

### Samian ware (1st – 2nd century AD)

Hard shiny red fabric, fine-grained, glossy-slipped with moulded relief decoration in a wide range of relatively expensive fine tableware, including bowls and cups. Made in various parts of France, and imported all over Europe and North Africa.



### Colour-coat ware (mid 1st – 3rd century AD)

Fine grey, cream, pink or orange fabric dipped in coloured slip (e.g. red, orange, blue, black) in a wide range of fine tableware, including beakers, jars and dishes. Made in Britain, particularly in Oxfordshire and the Nene Valley near Peterborough.



### Greyware (1st – 4th century AD)

Light to dark grey fabric, fired to a high temperature, little or no decoration and describes various forms of locally produced utilitarian pottery for cooking and storage, including jars, dishes and bowls.



### Black burnished ware (2nd – 4th century AD)

Dark grey or black fabric, burnished (shiny) surface with cross-hatching. Originally produced in Dorset and later the Thames Estuary. Early forms hand-made, later wheel-thrown, jars, dishes and lids.



### White oxidised ware (mid 1st – 4th century AD)

Fine white to pale orange fabric made at the same production centre as mortaria. Narrow mouthed globular flagons with ring or flanged necks and jugs, sometimes colour-coated, used to decant wine and olive oil from amphorae.



### Mortaria (1st – 3rd century AD)

White, cream or light grey fabric with coarse internal grit to aid grinding, formed into large thick-walled and rolled-rim bowls for food preparation. Used for grinding spices and sauces.



### Amphora (1st – 3rd century AD)

Off-white, cream, yellow, pink or buff fabric, coil made and kiln fired. Large, carrot-shaped and globular two-handled storage jars used to import wine, olive oil, fish sauce and stewed fruit from southern France, Spain and Italy.



### Ceramic Building Material (mid 1st – 4th century AD)

The Romans introduced the use of ceramic building materials to Britain in the mid 1st century AD. Building materials included bricks, roof tiles, flue, chimney pots, pipes and *tesserae* (the small square pieces used in mosaic floors).



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## Medieval

### St Neots type ware (10th – 12th century AD)

Shell-tempered and wheel-made but still fired in bonfire kilns. It appears in a multitude of colours that vary from black to pink to brown to red. The fabric is soapy to the touch and the shell is finely crushed. Unglazed and decorated with rouletting or thumbled strips, typically formed into small jars or bowls.



### Stamford ware (mid 9th – mid 12th century AD)

Hard, white to pinky-buff or pale grey fabric, and the first glazed pottery in England, usually with a translucent yellow or pale green glaze. Made into good quality vessels which were quite thin-walled and smooth such as jugs with handles and a spout.



### Potters Marston ware (12th – 13th century AD)

Light red or reddish yellow fabric with large igneous rock inclusions. The vessels are hand or coil built most commonly cooking pots, jars, bowls and jugs used in the households of medieval Leicester. Made 5km south-west of the town.



### Medieval shelly ware (12th – 14th century AD)

Hard grey-brown fabric with a lot of small pieces of fossil shell in it, giving the pot a speckled appearance. Sometimes, in acid soils, the shell dissolves, giving the sherds a texture like cork. Mainly cooking pots, although bowls and jugs were also made.



### Green glazed wares (13th – 14th century AD)

Made all over England, assorted fabric colours but usually pale. These represent the high point of medieval pottery production, in terms of technical expertise and artistry. The jugs in particular occur in a huge range of shapes and sizes, all decorated with green glaze.



### Midland purple ware (late 14th – 15th century AD)

Hard red to dark purple or brown fabric. The inside and outside surfaces are rough with small pimple-like features. May have a dark purple or black glaze which does not cover all of the pot. Vessel forms include cooking pots with handles, dripping dishes, cisterns, jugs and cups.



### Floor tiles (mid 13th – 16th century AD)

Thick glazed square tiles in an orange fabric, often with an inlaid (encaustic) heraldic, zoomorphic or geometric pattern picked out in a pale clay inlay. Typically found in cathedrals, churches and monasteries, and also occasionally in wealthy houses.



### Ridge tiles (13th – 16th century AD)

Long tiles with a V-shaped or semi-circular cross section, often decorated with crests or loops along the apex. Made all over England with assorted fabrics. Glazed to make them waterproof.



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## Post-medieval and modern

### Cistercian ware / Midland black ware (mid 15th – 17th century AD)

Usually brick red or purple, and covered with a dark brown or purplish-black glaze on both surfaces. The pots are very thin and hard. Sometimes decorated with painted dots and other designs in yellow clay, the main forms were jugs, tankards and drinking cups.



### Glazed red earthenware (mid 16th – 19th century AD)

Also known as 'Pancheon Ware' after the main bowl type. The clay fabric is usually sandy pink to brick red and can have many inclusions. The glaze is usually only on the inside and can be black, dark red, green or yellow. Sherds with the glaze worn off can sometimes look quite like modern flowerpots.



### Midland yellow ware (mid 16th – 17th century AD)

White to pale cream and buff fabric with yellow glaze. Similar forms to glazed red earthenware, including pancheons, jars, storage vessels, chamber pots, shallow bowls, candle sticks and table wares.



### Staffordshire Manganese Ware (mid 17th – mid 18th century AD)

Made from a fine, buff coloured clay, with the pots usually covered with a mottled purple and brown glaze, which was coloured by the addition of powdered manganese. A wide range of different types of pots were made, but mugs and chamber pots are particularly common.



### Staffordshire Slipware (late 17th – mid 18th century AD)

Pale buff fabric, usually decorated with thin brown stripes and a yellow glaze, or yellow stripes and a brown glaze. This was the first pottery to be made in moulds in Britain since the Roman period, and the main products were flat dishes and plates, but cups were also made.



### English stoneware (mid 18th – mid 20th century AD)

Very hard grey, buff or brown fabric often with salt-glazed finish. Widely used for ginger beer, spirits, ink and blacking bottles, jars for preserves, stew and sauce pots, bowls, colanders and tea pots. Bottles often have printed product information on them.



### Refined whiteware (19th century - present)

Hard white fabric with under-glazed transfer print made into a wide range of different types of pottery, particularly cups, plates and bowls often with blue decoration which are still used today.



### Plant pots and glazed ceramic pipes (19th century – present)

Machine-moulded unglazed earthenware and glazed stoneware, used to make plant pots and sewage pipes.

