

POTTERY

Pottery is a very useful source of information for archaeologist. Its made of material that is easy to source and very versatile. The ceramic pot is useful and durable but easily broken and cast aside.

Worksheet 2a and **2b** allow the students to work as archaeologist looking at the pottery sherds from archaeological excavation. All the examples illustrated have been found on archaeological excavations in Ireland and many are on display in our museums. The following is a detailed account of these pots:

(The prehistoric pots are all hand made using coils or pinched into shape.)

Nomenclature: The naming of pottery styles uses items like the shape and use of the bowl, where it is found and its date. Sometimes the name of a particular find is used.

PREHISTORIC POTTERY

1. Western Neolithic Ware

These are plain well-made earthenware pots—with occasionally a little simple decoration around the rim. They are round bottomed and may have shoulders like this example. The first farmers, around 4000 BC, introduced pottery to Ireland. This type of pottery was the main type in the country from c. 4,000 - 2,500 BC. It is domestic pottery—probably used mostly for cooking—another advantage of the round bottom. It is often found in association with Neolithic houses. This style of pottery is called *Western Neolithic Ware*—its name derives from the fact that there are certain broad similarities in pottery styles along the Atlantic fringe at this time—pots with a generally rounded shape except for a ‘shoulder’ near the rim.

2. Carrowkeel Ware

A simple-shaped Neolithic handmade earthenware pot. The vessels were made from coarse, gritty clay sometimes mixed with broken shells as temper. This style takes its name from the *passage-tomb* cemetery of Carrowkeel, Co. Sligo; this type of pottery is associated with *passage-tomb* burials. The outer surface can be plain in the earlier examples and decorated like this example as the Neolithic progresses.

3. Ballyalton Bowl

Well-made decorated Neolithic pottery dating to the early and middle Neolithic c. 3,500 - 2,500 BC. Its form (shape) is round-based and shouldered, with the diameter of the rim less than that of the shoulder, sometimes markedly so. Decoration includes vertical linear grooves and cord impressions arranged in lines or arcs. The name derives from a *court tomb* in Co. Down. This was excavated in 1933 and sherds (pieces) of around 20 of these bowls were found.

4. Beaker

Beaker pottery is well made with thin walls. A *beaker* has a distinctive inverted bell-shaped profile and in size it is about similar to a very large tea mug. Their exact function is not clear—some are found at domestic sites and appear to have been drinking mugs. Others are found in association with burials and ritual sites.

Beakers are decorated all-over using comb stamps, twister cord and grooves. The decoration is zoned in horizontal bands, with herringbone and zigzag patterns. Beaker pots are found across the western part of Europe, during the Late Neolithic/Early Bronze Age, around 2,500 - 2,000 BC.

5. Vase Food Vessel

Early Bronze Age pottery c. 2,100 - 1,700 BC, found in Britain and Ireland but not on the Continent. A coarser, thicker and heavier type of pottery to Beaker but still strong and well fired. There are two types: bowl and vase. Vases have flat bases and bowls have rounded bases and tend to be shorter. The Vase Food Vessel average height is c. 15cm. They are decorated usually with a series of scores in herringbone and triangular patterns. They are sometimes associated with domestic sites but the majority is found in cist burials (about 500 examples to date). The name derives from idea that these pots contained a 'last meal' for the dead on their final journey

6. Vase Urn

This is a large handmade pot dating to the Early Bronze Age—2,000 - 1,750 BC. Vase urns, as the name suggest, are found in cist and pit burials where the urn is inverted over the cremated remains. They are generally 20cms in height. There are about 100 examples found in Ireland to date.

7. Collared Urn

This is a large handmade pot dating to the Middle Bronze Age c. 1,950 - 1,500. The collar, which gives it its name, is achieved by applying a thick band of pottery around the rim. It is usually only the collar area that is decorated, usually with incised lines or twisted-cord impressions. It is mainly associated with pit burials. There are about 50 examples in Ireland to date. They are slightly later in date to the Vase Urn and larger in size—c. 35cms in height.

EARLY MEDIEVAL, MEDIEVAL AND POST-MEDIEVAL (4TH CENTURY AD – 19TH CENTURY AD)

8. Souterrain Ware

Souterrain ware is a locally, hand made pottery dating to the Early Christian period around c. 8th-12th century AD. It occurs mainly in the northeast of Ireland, particularly in counties Down and Antrim. There is very little pottery from the Early Christian period elsewhere in Ireland.

9. Leinster Cooking Ware

This is the typical shape of a medieval cooking pots with a flared rim. It is made of very coarse clay with quartz (white stone) and mica (shiny platelets) and sand-gritted clay. Fired in bonfire kilns. They have a general domestic use and date from the late-12th to the mid-14th centuries.

10. Saintonge Green Glazed Jug

This is wheel-thrown, white earthenware made in Bordeaux, France. Saintonge jugs are generally tall, elegant and green-glazed. They are associated with the import of wine, and date from the early 13th century. This pot is glazed (outer glassy finish) with a characteristic green glaze.

Saintonge is a region on the Atlantic coast of France near Bordeaux. This area is famous for its widely exported medieval pottery, sherds of which are found in large quantities on medieval excavations throughout Ireland and other European countries. They consist of an off-white clay is full of mica (with moderate amounts of quartz and sparse inclusions of haematite). They are glazed on the external surface only, with a clear lead glaze, to which the addition of copper filings produces a mottled mid-green colouring. Many forms of Saintonge pottery were produced. The most common forms were wine jugs. These were tall jugs, with slightly ovoid bodies, flat bases, parrot-beak spouts and strap handles.

This ware has been found on Irish excavations, some examples from later 12th century contexts but most commonly dating to the 13th century.

11. Bristol Ham Green Ware—jug

This is a hand-made green-glazed jug. It was made in Bristol and imported into Ireland by the Anglo-Norman's. It is found on Anglo-Norman sites all over Ireland, dating from the early 12th century to the mid-13th century.

12. Bristol Redcliffe Ware

This is a wheel-thrown ware that replaced Bristol Ham Green ware by the mid-13th century. Less widely imported into Anglo-Norman Ireland as pottery was being made locally by this time.

13. Dublin Type Pot

This is a very typical of locally made jugs in Anglo Norman Ireland of the 13th/early 14th century. The shape and design is very similar to the contemporary imported Bristol jugs.

14. Seville Coarseware Olive Jar

This is a wheel-thrown pot made in Seville, Spain. It was imported into Ireland in the 17th century. It has a white exterior surface as a result of salt being used in the firing process. It is occasionally glazed green internally. These pots are in the same tradition as the earlier Roman amphora. They were used to contain expensive items such as olive oil and almonds. Their shape were convenient for storage.

15. Cologne/Frechen Bartmann Stoneware—jug

This is wheel-thrown stoneware jug made in Germany in 16th/17th century. Stoneware is the result of firing to a very high temperature (c.1500 degrees centigrade). It has Tiger glaze (very like texture of orange peel) achieved by the addition of salt into the kiln at particular stage of firing. It is decorated with the face of a bearded man (German—*bartmann*).

These were made in Frechen, Germany. It is a saltglazed stoneware jug produced and exported in great quantities to Britain and Ireland from c. 1550 to c. 1680. England succeeded in establishing its own stoneware industry in the 1680s. The jugs are also known as Bartmann or "bearded man" for the whiskered face that adorns the neck. Bartmann jugs are also identified in the literature as "Bellarmine," a term popularly believed to be a satiric reference to Cardinal Robert Bellarmine (1542 - 1621) who was an opponent of Protestantism.

16. North Devon Sgraffito Ware—plate

This is a 17th century wheel-thrown tableware made in the towns of Barnstaple and Bideford in North Devon. It is a coarse earthenware, made with a red clay and a white clay slip (thin wash). It was decorated by scratching (sgraffito) through the white slip—giving a brown decoration with a yellow background. It can have a green, yellow, or brown lead glazed applied over the decoration. North Devon Sgraffito wares date to the second half of the 17th century. It is domestic ware used for food consumption. Especially common from Irish excavations are platters and plates. It was the principal tableware taken to America by The Pilgrims.

17. Glazed Red Earthenware

A domestic chamber pot made in Ireland. It has a flat rim and handle. It is a wheel-thrown earthenware pot. It has red clay with clear lead glaze on the inside to a brown finish.

18. Stoneware Bottle

Pottery stoneware jar made in the 18th /19th century. Made in England to contain small quantities of liquid such as ink.