



Potterspury Ware Jug

Potterspury ware jug found in the remains of a kiln excavated in the village of Potterspury.

Pottery production was important to Potterspury which is why the village name has included a reference to pottery since the thirteenth century. Although the quality of Potterspury ware was not the finest, and it may not have travelled well, for over 400 years it provided vital utensils for rural communities across areas of Northamptonshire, Oxfordshire, Buckinghamshire, and Bedfordshire.

The kilns were simple in structure and wood-fired indicating small scale manufacture. Clay was found locally, and fuel was obtained from the nearby forest of Whittlewood. However, by the early-seventeenth century industrially produced good quality pottery from Derbyshire and Staffordshire, along with improved transport across Britain, had destroyed the market for locally produced wares.

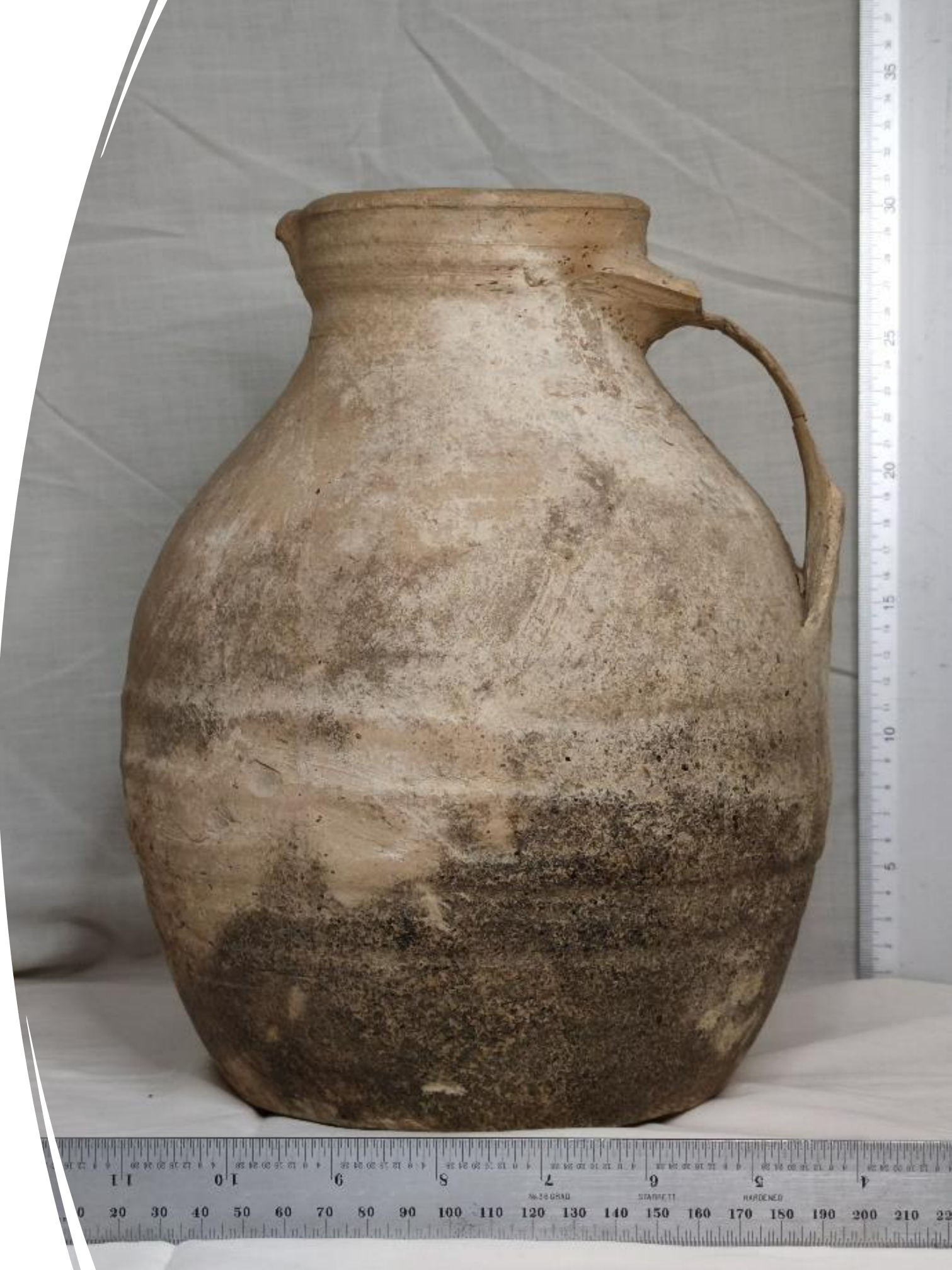
Numerous kilns have been found throughout Potterspury since the first kiln was excavated in 1949 by the Ashmolean Museum in Oxford, but intact local examples of locally produced pottery are rare. This jug was discovered during house construction in Church End in the 1970s. It was discovered in the remains of a kiln beneath the floor of a barn by a builder, who retained it but returned it to the house owners 40 years later in 2014.

Number 48 of the objects selected for the *A History of Northamptonshire in 100 Objects* exhibition 2025.

A jug from Potterspury

Intact pottery is not often found at archaeological kiln sites because good quality pots were usually sold; kilns were often back-filled with failed pottery.

The story of this jug's survival is quite remarkable.



Selected for the Northampton Museum exhibition

The jug in the Northampton exhibition was not recovered by the Ladd family, but was found by their builder, who kept it for almost 40 years only returning it to the Ladds in 2014.

It was selected by Steve Parkin on behalf of Potterspury History Group as a Guest Curator for the *History of Northamptonshire in 100 Objects* exhibition. Steve chose the eponymous object because of his conviction that Potterspury must have been an important local centre of pottery production.



Histories of Northamptonshire



From a medieval kiln to a barn

The kiln site in Church End where the jug was discovered is in Church End, next to the former Blue Ball Inn. The kiln and its remains lay buried for several centuries under a well-used stone barn which was used in the 19th century by the Duke of Grafton to store his carriage when visiting St Nicholas Church.

A charmed life?

The barn was demolished in the 1970s when the Ladd family purchased the site and constructed their family home. On the site they found the remains of a kiln and they began investigating the pottery it contained themselves.

Examples of that pottery are on show today courtesy of Mike Ladd.

Right: Margaret Ladd, in head scarf excavating the site.





Margaret Ladd (centre)
at Potterspury WI Christmas Party, 2007.

Importance of Potterspury ware

- Pottery has been part of our village name since the 13th century, and there is evidence that pottery production continued for around 400 years.
- Potterspury ware was good quality, artisan pottery, suitable for everyday use.
- Potterspury ware has been discovered throughout Northamptonshire, Buckinghamshire, Cambridgeshire and neighbouring counties, so it must have had a significant market at a time when the transportation of fragile goods was difficult.
- By the 18th century, the potteries of Staffordshire scaled up to industrial production with efficient national distribution, and locally produced pottery could not compete.



*Right: Rounded Potterspury ware jug, dating from the 14th/15th centuries. Found in Brackley. Height 315mm.
(Courtesy Ashmolean Museum, Oxford.)*

The village name



“ . . . the Town with us being undoubtedly call'd **POTTERS-PERRY** from the Potters there, to distinguish it from **PAULS_PERRY**, a neighbouring Town. ”

From John Morton's *The Natural Historie of Northamptonshire* (1712)

For how long was pottery produced in Potterspury?

In Domesday Book, the village was known as Est Perie, but by 1287 the name had changed to **Pottersispirye** suggesting that pottery was a well-established trade in the village by the 13th century.

Pottery from the 1949 excavation in the High Street is dated to the 14th century and other digs have produced material of similar age.

The kilns discovered in Church End in 1968 contained material was from the late 17th century but there is scant evidence of production later than that period.

The Collier & Baker maps commissioned by the Duke of Grafton in 1728 show no evidence of kilns in the village. It is likely that production in Potterspury finished in the late 17th century and it is therefore safe to claim that Potterspury produced pottery for at least four centuries.



Medieval potter with stick wheel

Where were the kilns?

Sites of medieval kilns have been found around the historic areas of Potterspury, but particularly close to the High Street. The village clearly had a thriving cottage industry producing basic ceramic ware.

Potterspury pottery is held in local museums and in national collections such as the British Museum and the Ashmolean in Oxford. However, relatively intact examples of everyday pottery are rare.

Most kiln locations in Potterspury have been logged on official archaeology databases. The map indicates multi-kiln sites. For example, the site at 102 High Street contained seven kilns, and near the Cock Inn, five were discovered.

Kiln sites



“The Potteries of greatest Note are at Potters-Perry.”

Potterspury Pottery Kilns

Some important kiln sites

Location	Date Excavated	Archeology	Pottery Found
102 High Street	1949	Prof EM Jope	14-15 th century; jugs & pans
9 Church Lane	1965	Philip Mayes	c.1650; jugs, pots & dishes
4 Church End	1974	Ladd Family	14-15 th century; jugs & pots
28 High Street	2001	Richard Ivens, Paul & Charmian Woodfield	14-17 th centuries; jugs, pots, cups, & mugs
6 Church Lane <i>Rose Cottage</i>	1995/2001	Charmian Woodfield	14-15 th century;
21 Woods Lane	1998-2001	Paul Woodfield & Richard Ivens	14-17 th centuries

Note: Excavations of some sites showed there were multiple kilns - as many as seven

Rear of 28 High Street

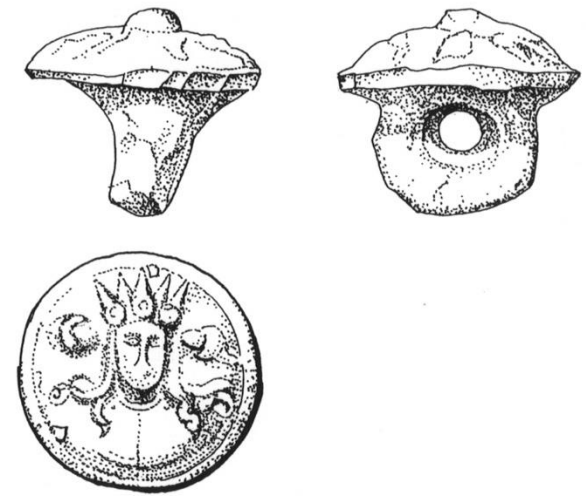
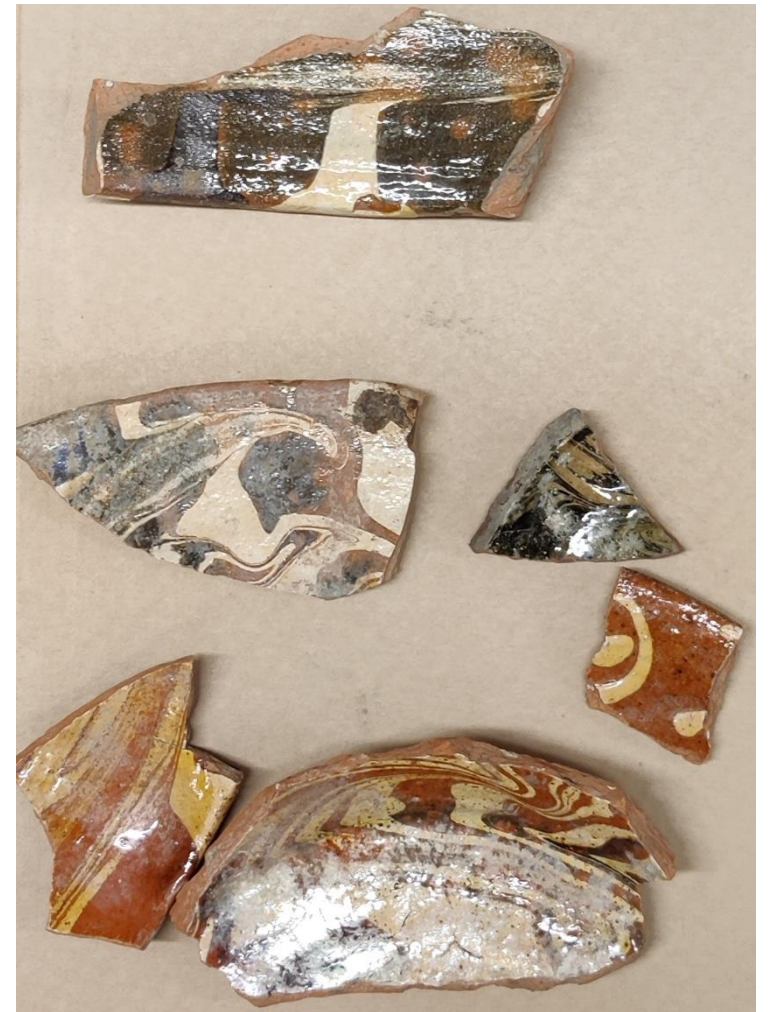
Excavated 2001 prior to construction of five houses (now 30-36 High Street)

Archaeologist Richard Ivens noted:

“ The site is of considerable significance not merely because of the number of kilns, their wide chronological range and the presence of formerly unknown Potterspury types but because it demonstrates quite conclusively that there is a 'potters' quarter' at the west end of the village in addition to the well-established potting area in the Woods and Church Lane area at the east end of the village. ”

Rear of 28 High Street

“Decorative styles of 17th century pottery have been noted some of which have not previously been recognised as products of the Potterspury industry: glazed jugs, cups, mugs, flower pots including ornamental urns, and an enormous number of large bowls and platters. The two latter types had frequently been decorated with different coloured clay slips forming elaborate and ornate patterns (joggled or marbled slipwares). Unusual items were also recovered, such as water pipes, perhaps for garden fountains and the like, and a unique example of a pottery button bearing a decorative device which may be the 'fair maiden' symbol of the Worshipful Company of Mercers.”



Rear of 102 High Street

Excavated 1949 when digging a pit for a septic tank in Mr Hobson's garden.

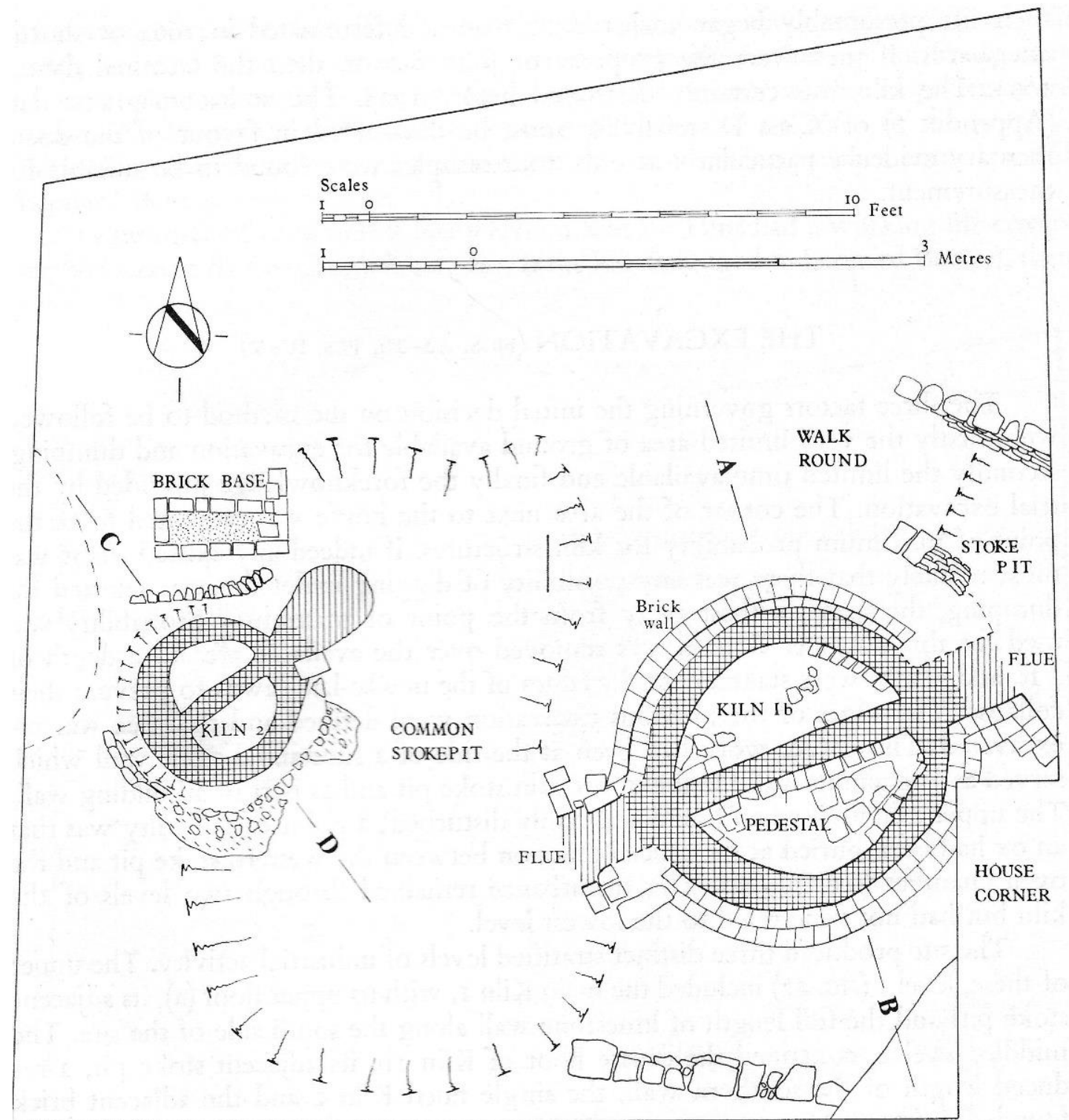
This was the first medieval pottery kiln to be excavated – confirming the long-held view that the village was a centre of pottery production. Joan Wake, of the Northamptonshire Records Society, recognized its importance and contacted the Ashmolean Museum in Oxford who organised the dig.

There was considerable interest by the local press and the pupils from Potterspury School visited the site – including Mick Wootton.

Much was made of the damage done to Mr Hobson's vegetable produce during the dig.

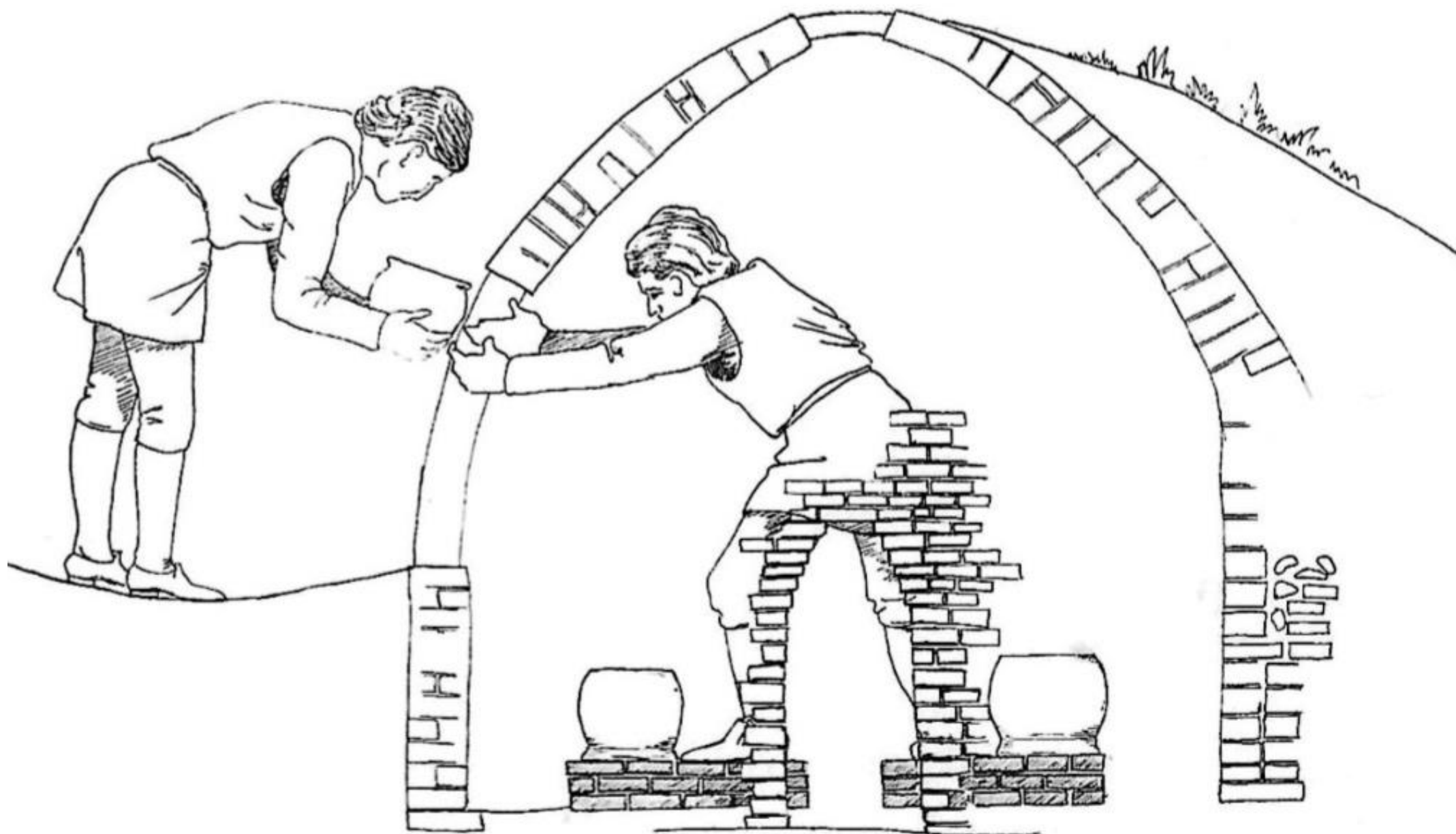
What size were the kilns?

- The kilns in Potterspury were modest, simple structures that suited artisan production.
- The two kilns found in Church Lane in 1965 were about 1.5 m and 3 m diameter, were around 2 m high and had single flues. They dated from towards the end of the period of pottery production, the latter half of the 17th century. This indicated that the techniques involved remained simple.

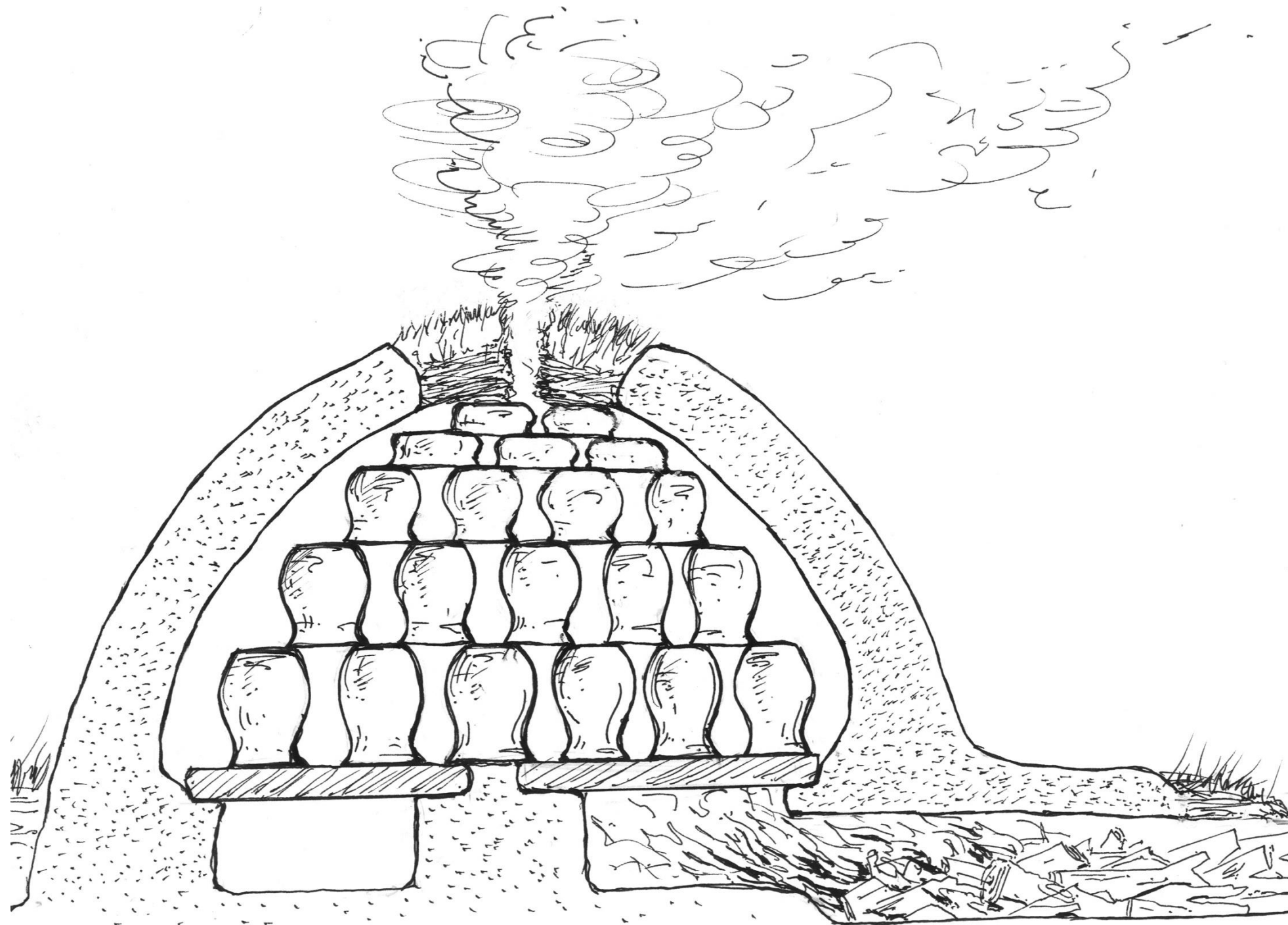


How were the kilns operated?

- The kilns were constructed from brick and limestone. The fuel was probably wood retrieved from Whittlewood Forest just the other side of Watling Street.
- It is likely that clay was retrieved from local fields, although in 1712 John Morton in his *Natural History of Northamptonshire* claimed that most of the clay came from near Cosgrove. He also noted that Potterspury potteries were “*the oldest in those parts.*”
- Water would have come from the brook.



Conceptual drawing of the 17th century kiln discovered in Church Lane, Potterspurty being stocked



Conceptual drawing of how the kilns were fired and the pots stacked

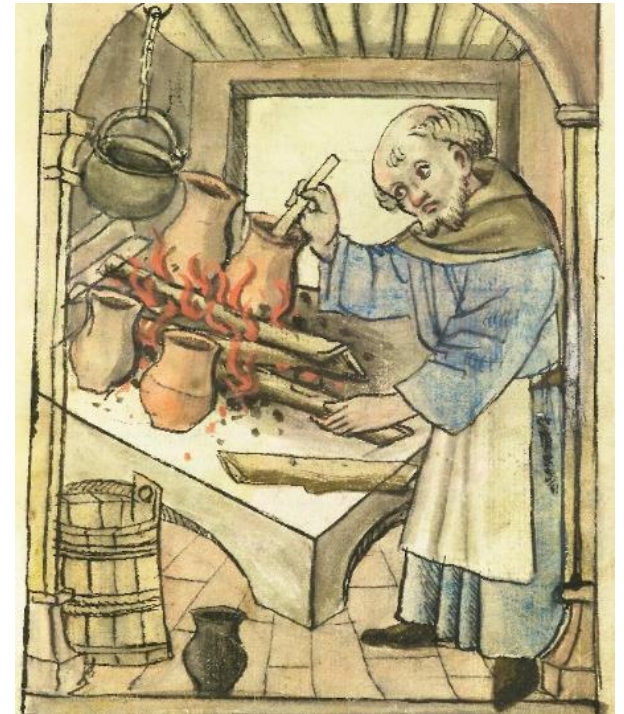
Excavations of a 16th century kiln site

Woods Lane, Potterspury 1999

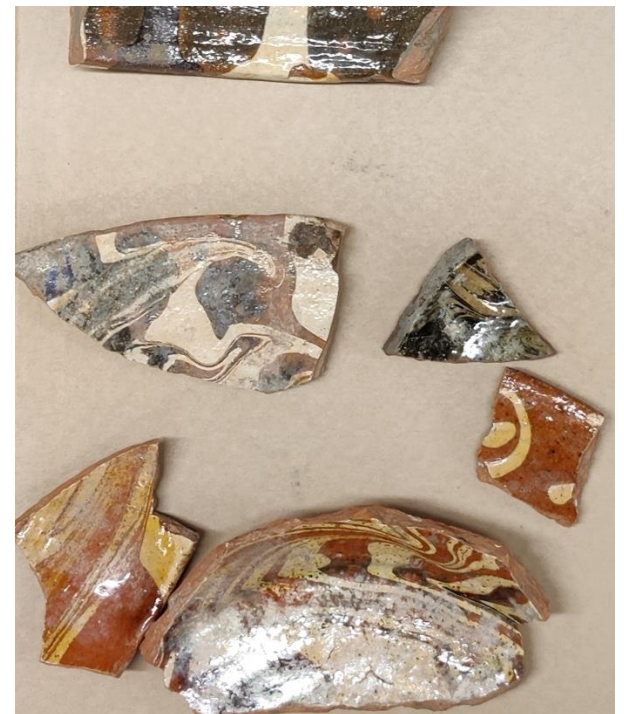


What type of pottery was produced?

- Cooking pots, jugs, pitchers, bottles, counters, curfews, fish dishes, costrels and drinking jugs appear to have been produced.
- Medieval domestic ware was often unglazed, although by the 16th and 17th centuries, glazes were more common. Jugs often had slashed handles.
- Roof tiles and water pipes were also produced.



Above: a medieval cook at work, using earthenware pots.



Examples of post-medieval Potterspury ware glazes.

In the Name of God Amen

Leonard Benton – the last potter

Finding details of employment in the 17th century is difficult but a strong candidate for the last potter operating in Potterspurty is Leonard Benton, who died in 1665.

Sherds of 17th century pottery were found behind the Cock Inn in 2001, while archaeologist Philip Mayes, concluded that the kilns found in Church Lane were in operation during the same period, 1646-1664.

The Bentons were a well established Potterspurty family in the 17th century. The inventory of Leonard's estate is extensive, and includes, among the household goods and several acres of arable land, 'All the Potts, sould and to sell', at a value of £3 10 shillings.

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Sherd or Shard?

It's simple:

SHERDS are
ceramic fragments

SHARDS are glass

