

Roman Middlewich Teachers' Pack

Roman Pottery

Pottery was used for a variety of purposes including cooking and storage. A lot of pottery is found on Roman sites because when vessels broke it was often not worthwhile mending them and the pieces were thrown away. Generally pottery was cheap and readily available. An exception was the expensive Samian ware which was imported from Gaul. There are examples of the Romans themselves attempting to mend broken Samian ware.

Archaeologists are able to use pottery

- to build up a picture of life at a site.
- to see what trade patterns existed (both in the origin of the pots and the contents if they were containers).
- to discover how the pottery was made and decorated.
- to help date a site through style, origin and the way it was manufactured.

Originally Roman pottery was imported. It was made mainly in South, Central and Eastern Gaul (parts of France and Germany today). It was transported by river across Europe and arrived in Britain via the English Channel.

As time went on, during the 2nd century AD, major potteries were set up in Britain e.g. at Aldgate, Yorkshire, Colchester, Essex, Wiltshire, Oxfordshire, Hampshire, Caerlon in South Wales, and the legionary kilns of Holt near Chester.

Pottery was also made by local potteries in Britain, especially pottery that was to be used for everyday storage and cooking. There was pottery being produced for export in Wilderspool in the 2nd century. Nearly all of this pottery was made on a potter's wheel. The evidence for this may be rings of parallel lines made by the potters' fingers as the pot spun. Marks on the base made by the wire which was used to cut the pot from the wheel.

Pottery is generally described by archaeologists as being either **coarse-ware** or **fine-ware**. Coarse-ware was for everyday use, particularly for cooking and storage and also for use at table. Fine-ware is thinner, often glazed and decorated, and was for use at table.