

Prescot Pottery

Pottery was made in Prescot from at least 1550 and at its height in the 1750s there were numerous potteries working in the town. The kilns would have dominated the landscape and were centred around the Eccleston Street area.



The 'Mugg Fair' at The Roundhouse

Little is known about the origins of pottery making in Prescot. The earliest references to potters and potteries occur in the 16th century town records. Excavations have found some 15th and 16th century pottery, but no kiln sites have yet been discovered. However, evidence of early pottery working has been discovered at Derby Street in the form of 16th century kiln damaged pots and discarded kiln waste.

A wide range of 'Prescot ware' was produced, from large coarse storage jars, cooking pots and pans, to fine thin walled drinking vessels. The Prescot potteries also produced items for industrial use, especially the sugar manufacturers in Liverpool. Many local potteries made pots just for the immediate area with much of the pottery sold at the weekly market held in Market Place, under the cover of the 'Round House'. Prescot developed a reputation for producing fine pottery which was exported across the world, it was exported to America as early as 1702.

The early Prescot potteries mainly produced coarse earthenware pots 'thrown' on a potter's wheel using a mixture of local red and white clay. The pots were then dipped in a glaze made from a watery mixture of ground lead and clay, which when fired gave a waterproof finish, ranging from golden brown to pearly black. Blobs of clay called 'stilts' would be used to separate the pots to prevent them from sticking together in the heat of the kiln when the glaze melts to form a glassy surface. By the early 19th century, salt glaze stoneware was also in production.

<http://www.knowsley.gov.uk/things-to-see-and-do/galleries-and-museum.aspx>

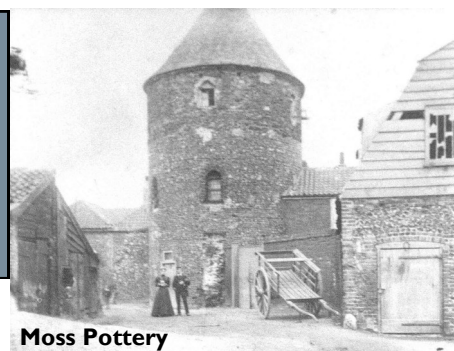
Each year a fair was held in Prescot which became known as the 'Mugg Fair', so called because of the pottery on sale. Pottery was also taken in wagons on the toll roads, especially to Liverpool to be sold on the streets or exported.

Detail from Prospect of Prescot engraving 1743, showing pottery kilns and windmills.



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Moss Pottery

The first Ordnance Survey Map of Prescot dated 1848 shows in detail three of the remaining potteries in Prescot at that time. Brook Pottery in the south west of the town where the potter's house still survives at 6 Beesley Road. Mill Pottery to the east, and Moss Pottery to the north, near Prescot Cables Football Club. These potteries were all abandoned by 1869 due to competition from Staffordshire.

A small pottery, opened in the 1840's by John Twist in Kembles Street, was the last to close in 1893 bringing an end to pottery manufacture in the town. The site was used to build the BICC factory.

Evidence of other potteries in Prescot has been found at Twist House, Knowsley Park Lane. When building work was in progress in the 1980s archaeologists were called in. Broken 18th century pots were found under the floor of a barn, but many of the pots were near-complete and could therefore be pieced together. Workmen demolishing walls in Derby Street found the foundations were packed with hundreds of broken pieces of late 18th century pottery and 'kiln waste'.

Broken or waste pottery called 'sherds' had many uses. It was used for filling in pot holes in roads, providing extra drainage, and as on the Derby Street site, for filling foundations. This is one of the reasons that so many sites in Prescot have pottery sherds scattered over them, and why they are the most common find in archaeological excavations in Prescot.

We have an idea of where the potteries were, but it is more difficult to know exactly how they may have looked. However, in 1834 the owner of Snig Lane Pottery moved to Whiston. A 1900 photograph of Whiston Pottery survives giving an idea of how the potteries in Prescot would have looked.

"I went onto Prescot, a little town most delightfully situated on a hill, its steep windmill, glasshouse and earthenware houses render it a very beautiful point of view at 2 or 3 miles distance. They have 2 or 3 houses for Coarse Earthenware and one for the Whitestone, where they also make brown stoneware and work it as they say higher with fire than Lambeth. They make it of two sorts of clay which they find here."

Dr Richard Pococke,
Travels through England.

Whiston Pottery 1900 showing kilns in the style probably used in Prescot



Detail from The Edge Map showing a pottery kiln and windmill.