

From the *Transactions* of the
Bristol and Gloucestershire Archaeological Society

Crews Hole Pottery, St. George, Bristol

by K. Marochan
1962, Vol. 81, 189-193

© The Society and the Author(s)

Crews Hole Pottery, St. George, Bristol

By K. MAROCHAN

DURING the summer of 1960, it was decided to put a small excavation in hand, to ascertain the role that the Crews Hole Pottery played in the history of the Ceramic Art in Bristol. Almost nothing has been written on this manufactory, and until the excavations, it was not known what particular ware was produced at the kiln.

The works stood on the banks of the River Avon at Crews Hole, not far from the earlier, well known, Brislington Delft Works which were situated on the other side of the river, on the site of the former medieval Chapel of St. Anne.

Until recently there were visible signs that a pottery existed there, but the remaining cone was demolished and the site covered in its rubble. The works were housed in a single storey building measuring, in its kiln area, some 100 feet long by 40 feet wide, with additional buildings of the same measurements which probably contained the potters' wheels and raw materials of the craft. Owing to the depth of the rubble in this part of the building, it was impossible to examine it. Also at the kiln end of the works was a three storied dwellinghouse.

The manufactory was that of Anthony Ammat,¹ probably a native of Derbyshire, who built the house and kiln in 1812, on the land previously occupied by a cottage and gardens. Between the years 1768 and 1777 he was employed by the well known Richard Champion as a Thrower and Painter,² after which he worked for other local potters. His first wife died in 1808 and was buried at Twerton, Bath, where her headstone carried an inscription in pottery made by Ammat.

The life of the Crews Hole Pottery was very short as it closed in 1819, after which Ammat was employed at the Temple Gate Pottery of Powell's, where in 1835 he helped to perfect a certain type of stone-ware glaze. Ammat died in Bristol in 1851 at an age of well over 80 years, having been a pensioner of Powell's for some considerable time.

A blank Invoice heading of Ammat declares :—

ANTHONY AMMAT,
IRON STONWARE MANUFACTURER,
WHOLESALE AND FOR EXPORTATION
CREWS HOLE
BRISTOL.

¹ Land deeds and documents in the possession of the Bristol and West Tar Distillers Ltd.

² W. Chaffers, *Marks and Monograms on Pottery and Porcelain* (1903), p. 854.

Much of Ammat's ware was sold in the then villages on the outskirts of Bristol such as Hanham, Kingswood and adjoining areas, a great deal consisting of public house mugs and jugs, although household utensils such as cups, colanders, bowls and chamber pots were made by him, these being sold locally from a cart.

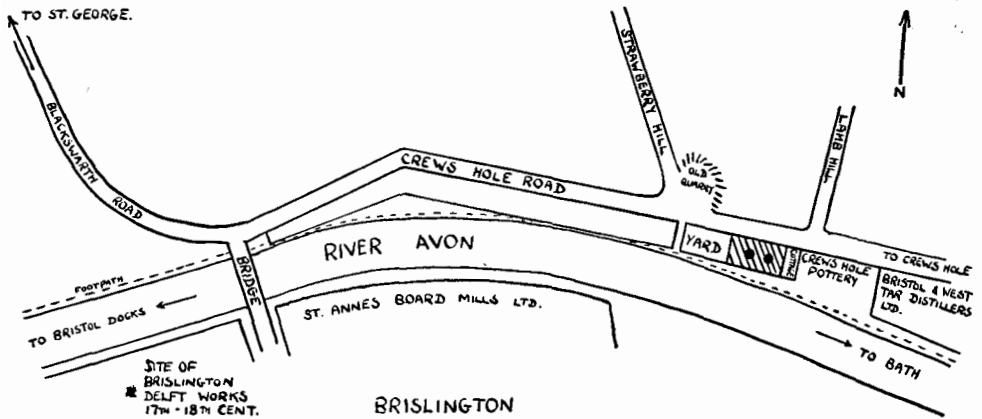


Fig. 1. Crews Hole Pottery, St. George, Bristol

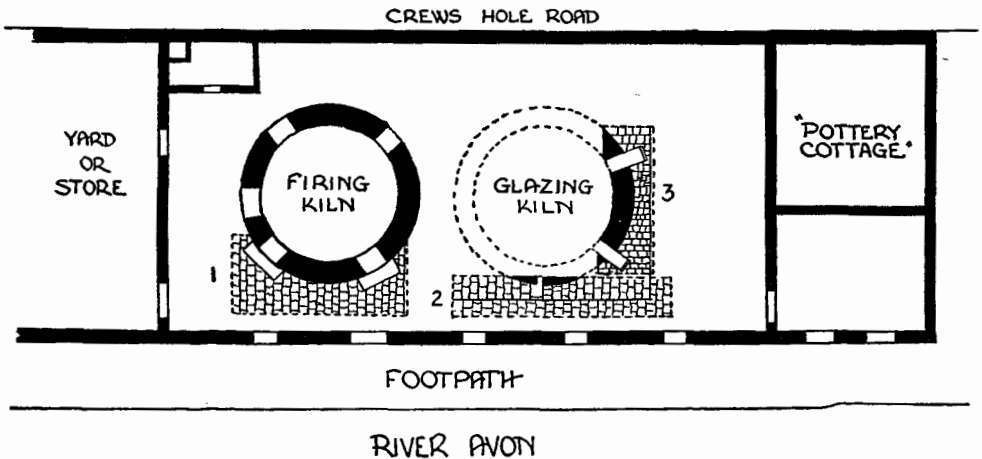


Fig. 2. Crews Hole Pottery, St. George—Plan

During the excavation, two kilns and the surrounding areas were examined. The first kiln was the 'ghost oven' or the chamber in which the glaze was fired. The second was the kiln proper in which the ware was fired. Much pottery came to light from both kilns, probably the remnants of the last batch to be made there. Coal was used for firing purposes, being easily obtained from the nearby Conham Pit.

THE POTTERY

The Crews Hole Pottery produced a ware called 'Mocha,' the name being most probably derived from the Arabian Ornamental Quartz, 'Mocha' stone. It is recorded that Staffordshire, Tyneside, Wearside and Glasgow produced this ware, but it was not generally known that Bristol also manufactured this type of Pottery.

Anthony Ammat imported the basic materials of his craft from outside Bristol. Isle of Wight and Poole clay were used. One entry in Ammat's notebook, dated 13 December 1812 states—'Captain Williams of the Sloop *Fidelity* will soon be in with 8 or 10 tons of flint stones' . . . and later . . . 'more stone and clay, freight to Bristol, 12s per ton.'

The ware itself was extremely well potted, some pieces for example his cups, bowls and large dishes, showed the marks of an earlier influence in shape. The cups point to his earlier work with Richard Champion, whilst the bowls and large dishes are developed from the later types of Bristol Delftware. Employing the basic ceramic materials clay, lead and earth pigments, 'Mocha' was always inexpensive. As late as 1870, pint mugs could be purchased for 10d per dozen and although it was cheap, each piece was unique owing, in part, to the method of decoration. This consists of the main body of the vessel in either white or cream or varying shades of buff, decorated in bands of colours, with the main motif in the shape of trees or ferns. Sometimes the bands are wide, in blues and oranges—on others, narrow bands of brown, buff and light grey and vice versa. The fern-like decoration on Crews Hole Pottery is in brown or blue. The ingredients for effecting the decoration seem to have been tobacco, boiled in water and mixed with the dry pigment, or a brew of hops. A small quantity of human urine and Tansy leaves was sometimes used to make the action of the acid more ornate.

This 'tea' or mixture was let fall, or blown onto the vessel, which was in a 'green' condition, so that it spread into the characteristic fern-like design.

The only mark on Crews Hole Pottery and then only found on pie dishes, is A. A. WARRENTED FIREPROOF.

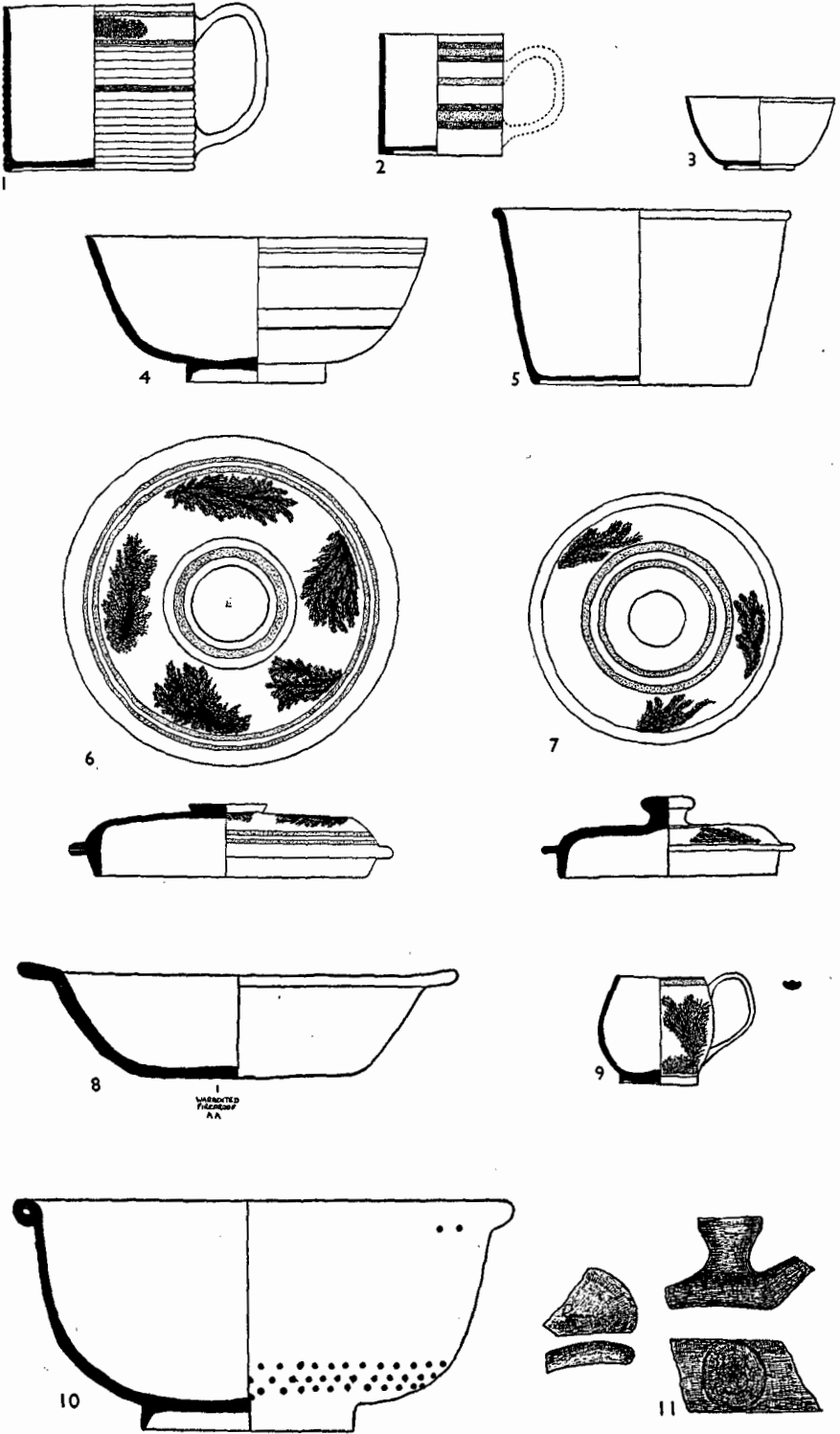


Fig. 3. Pottery from Crews Hole (4)

CREWS HOLE POTTERY, ST. GEORGE, BRISTOL

Illustrated Examples (FIG. 3)

1. Mug. Dark Buff body. Brown decoration on white with brown bands (similar mugs with blue decoration).
2. Small Mug. Buff body, decorated with orange and white bands, unglazed.
3. Small Bowl. No decoration or glaze.
4. Bowl. Yellow body with light and dark brown bands.
5. Basin. Unglazed and without decoration.
6. Pot Lid. Buff body with brown motif and bands of brown and white. No glaze.
7. Small Pot Lid. Decoration as 6. Unglazed.
8. Pie Dish. No decoration or glaze. Mark on base A. A. WARRENTED FIREPROOF.
9. Small Cup. Brown decoration on yellowish body with brown band around rim.
10. Colander. No glaze or decoration.
11. Fragments of Potters gauges, used in connection with the diameter of vessels.

A large quantity of 'saggers,' 'cock spurs' and other waste materials were also found.

CONCLUSIONS

'Mocha' ware today, is rarely met with, yet at one time it was widely used and known throughout most parts of the country. Although at Crews Hole, it was manufactured on an industrial scale, it was essentially a 'peasant' pottery, made for utilitarian purposes amongst the mass of the people. Its manufacture seems to have started late in the 18th century in Staffordshire, but by about 1910 its production had practically ceased. In its cheapness and everyday use, lies the most probable explanation of why it never became popular as a collectors' item and, unfortunately, has had very little study.

N. Tuelon Porter, the foremost authority on this ware, holds it to be truly British. 'It was born, evolved and finally died here.'¹

Grateful thanks are due to the Directors and their representatives of the Bristol and West Tar Distillers Ltd. of Crews Hole, for allowing the Excavations, and examination of documents relating to the site. Also to Mr Keith Reed and Masters Andrew Stevens and Nigel Watts of Monks Park School Archaeological Group, for their help on the site.

¹ *City of Stoke-on-Trent Museum Publication* (1953), p. 6.