



# Weston Potteries

## The Royal Pottery

It's difficult to imagine now but Weston-super-Mare once had a thriving pottery industry. As the town grew there was a growing need for building materials.

Bricks and tiles are made from baked clay and Weston was fortunate in having large and deep deposits of suitable clay. Yet hardly a trace remains of the kilns, buildings, yards and clay pits that once sprawled along the Locking Road and gave employment to several generations of Weston people.



*The potteries workforce, 1928 © courtesy of Weston Library*

The story began in the 1830s when John Harvey established a brickyard on the north side of Locking Road just past the junction with Ashcombe Road. Before long a second, larger, brickworks opened next door.

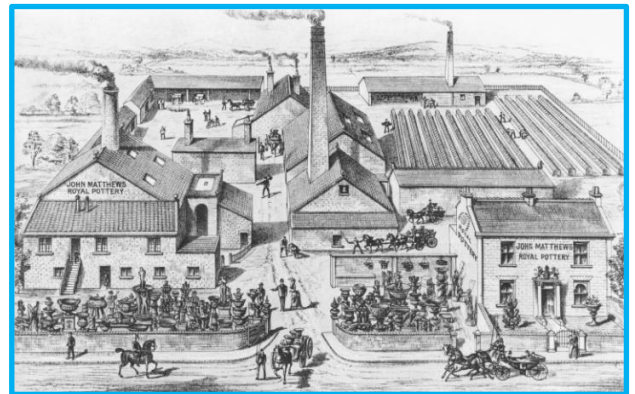
William Wilcox, Charles Phillips and John Matthews all played significant roles in those early days and you can see their names neatly stamped on examples of their work displayed in the Museum.

The two potteries were combined in 1847 by Charles Phillips, who developed the business and led it in its most productive period. In its early days the focus had been on making bricks and tiles. Phillips added flowerpots and garden ornaments to the range and exhibited work at the Great Exhibition of 1851 in Hyde Park, London.

His pots received an Honourable Mention and orders came flooding in. Amongst the customers were the Royal Parks and Kew Gardens, so Phillips renamed the factory "Phillips' Royal Potteries". From that time his wares were stamped with a small crown.

In 1871 Phillips retired and John Matthews became the new owner of the Royal Pottery. He extended the Pottery and concentrated on developing the range of ornamental pottery. But he didn't lose sight of the more practical side of the trade and it was during his ownership of the company that an interesting innovation took place.

A local draughtsman, E Y Poole, came up with a design for a new type of roofing tile. There is an example on display in the Museum and you can see how tightly it would have locked together with its neighbour to keep out both wind and rain.



*The Royal Pottery works © courtesy of Weston Library*

In 1888 Matthews retired and sold the Royal Pottery to Conway Gould Warne. Demand for ornamental work was decreasing and Warne now focussed on bricks and tiles once more. He also introduced a new design of land drain and a special trough for supporting electric cables.

A major decision was taken in 1897 to close the old works and move all production to an extensive new site south of the Locking Road. The business adopted the new name of "The Weston-super-Mare Brick and Tile Co. Ltd". The clay pits of the old works were filled in with town refuse and the site was eventually developed for housing.

In 1923 a serious fire caused a great deal of damage and Warne, who was already in poor health, died soon afterwards.

Following Warne's death, the business was taken over by Arthur Beck. A building boom ensued in the 1920s and for a time things went well with a return to the basic products of bricks and tiles.



*A brick produced at the potteries © Weston Museum*

However, economic problems in the 1930s caused a drop in building and the business fell back on the production of flowerpots. During the Second World War the buildings were used to store food supplies and very little pottery production was possible.

Work resumed after the war but the business never really revived. A final Royal order came in 1952 for 126,000 flowerpots to be used in the Coronation displays, but the business began to suffer from staff shortages and there was competition from the newly introduced plastic flowerpots.

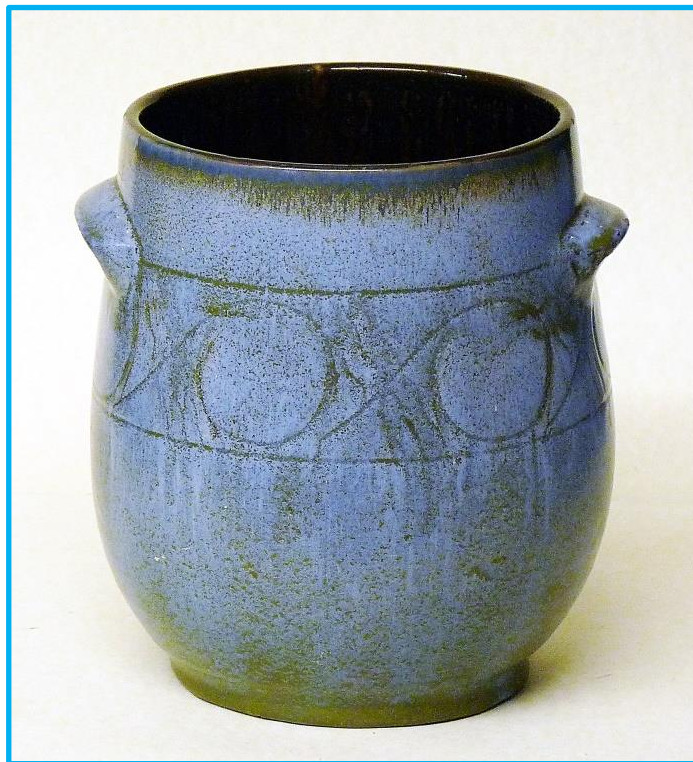
The factory closed in 1961 ending 125 years of near continuous production.



*A sculpture marking the site of the former potteries © Rodney Harris*

## The Wesuma Art Potteries

In contrast with the mass-produced work of the Royal Pottery, Weston was also home for a short time to a talented craft potter. Thomas Lemon, from Barnstaple, established a small pottery here around 1926 and produced high quality work in a range of different glazes.



*An example of 'Wesuma' ware © Keith Poole*

His earlier work included hand-painted birds, such as kingfishers and seagulls. He went on to experiment with glazes, and decorated his pots with floral and geometric patterns. You can see examples of both styles in the Museum.

He named his pottery "Wesuma Art Potteries", creating the name from his new home town.

**Thomas Lemon was a highly skilled craftsman and was able to form a teapot, including the lid and rim, in twenty-five seconds.**

Lemon died in 1941. His pottery was destroyed by enemy action the following year, never to be rebuilt.



**Weston-super-Mare**  
Town Council