

# **The Buckley Potteries**

Recent Research and Excavation

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With contributions by

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Cover: The base of the beehive kiln at Lewis's Pottery (Site 5) during excavations in 2000

Back cover: Workers at Hayes Pottery, Buckley c. 1910. Courtesy of Flintshire Record Office.

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## Introduction

Despite Buckley's impressive industrial past, a visit to the town today reveals little evidence to suggest the extent and importance of what were once major regional industries. The remains of brickworks, potteries and collieries are now extremely scarce, the area having seen extensive redevelopment during the last 20 years.

Between 2013 and 2017 the Clwyd-Powys Archaeological Trust (CPAT) conducted an assessment of the Buckley pottery industry, followed by small-scale fieldwork on the site of three of the potteries (Jones 2014; Hankinson and Culshaw 2014; Hankinson 2015; Hankinson and Culshaw 2015; Watson and Culshaw 2015; Hankinson 2017). The results of the project, which has been funded by Cadw, are presented here, together with summary reports on two excavations undertaken by Earthworks Archaeology.

The small town of Buckley, in Flintshire, lies 13km west of Chester and 4km east of Mold (Figure 1). The area surrounding Buckley has been associated with the production of pottery for at least 600 years, from the medieval period to the mid-20th century. The scale and location of pottery manufacture during the Middle Ages and through the Tudor period is poorly known, but by the early 17th century a group of cottage potters had settled around Buckley Mountain where they exploited the suitable supplies of clay, coal and, on Halkyn Mountain, lead. Potteries were often established on encroachments on common land, which can be readily identified in 18th- and 19th-century cartographic sources.

Contemporary accounts are few, although the Buckley potteries were noted by the late 18th-century traveller and writer Thomas Pennant: 'within the lordship are very considerable potteries of coarse earthenware; such as pans, jugs, great pots for butter, plates, dishes, ovens, flower pots, etc. There are fourteen works, which make annually between three and four thousand pounds worth. The ware is mostly exported to Ireland, and the towns on the Welsh coast, particularly to Swansea' (Pennant 1786, 91). Several years later, in 1798, the Reverend Richard Warner provided a fascinating and detailed account of pottery manufacture in Buckley (Warner 1813, 244-7). His introduction to the area states that 'we ascended Buckley hill, in order to visit the large potteries scattered over the face of it; fortunately we met with the master of the works on the spot, who was so good as to conduct us round the manufactory'. Samuel Lewis, in his *Topographical Dictionary of Wales*, also made reference to the industry, although in less detail: 'potteries for the manufacture of coarse earthenwares, and kilns for making fire-bricks and tiles of superior quality, a considerable quantity of which is shipped to Ireland' (Lewis 1833, listed under Coed-Eulo).

It is worth noting here that while Buckley may have been an important supplier of traditional earthenwares, a number of other centres also made a very similar range of products, also based on Coal Measures clays. The most important of these from a north Wales perspective are Stoke-on-Trent, Liverpool/South Lancashire, Whitehaven, and the Glasgow area. Each of these produced black-glazed, red-bodied earthenwares using very similar clays and techniques to those at Buckley. The identification, particularly in archaeological circles, of this style of pottery as 'Buckley Ware' is clearly unreliable and likely to be misleading (Davey and Longworth 2001, 64).

Research by the Buckley Society, the Buckley Clay Industries Research Committee, and others from the mid-1970s onwards had previously identified 19 possible pottery production sites, few of which had been subject to any detailed examination. A recent review of cartographic evidence has increased this number to 31 (Jones 2014), which are listed in the Gazetteer section of this volume, although some are not well located. The overall distribution of potteries is shown in Figure 1, while a basic timeline has been developed which indicates in broad terms their relative life spans (Figure 2).

Evidence from the few excavations, and particularly as a result of work by Jim Bentley and Martin Harrison in the 1970s and 1980s has, however, identified a number of pottery styles and products which are sufficiently different to allow their possible or probable identification when they are found elsewhere.

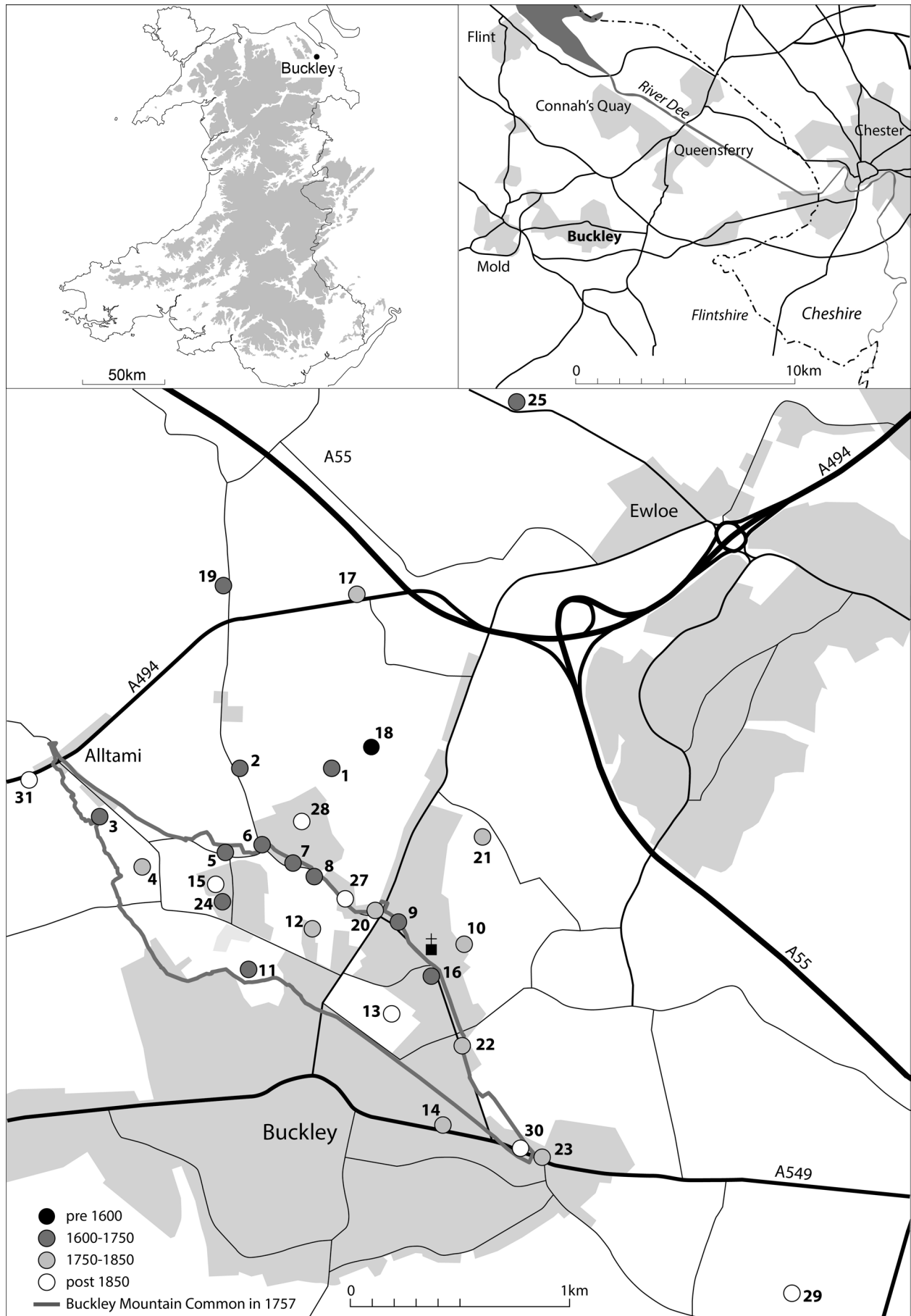


Figure 1 The location of Buckley and the distribution of known pottery sites. The date ranges for potteries is based on their earliest known date rather than their period of operation.

pottery sites	approx. dates								
	1300-1400	1400-1500	1500-1600	1600-1700	1700-1750	1750-1800	1800-1850	1850-1900	1900-1950
site 1				■	■				
site 2				■	■	■	■		
site 3					■	■	■	■	■
site 4							■	■	
site 5					■	■	■	■	■
site 6					■	■			
site 7					■	■			
site 8					■	■	■	■	
site 9					■	■	■	■	■
site 10						■	■	■	■
site 11					■	■	■	■	
site 12						■	■	■	
site 13								■	■
site 14							■	■	
site 15								■	■
site 16						■	■		
site 17							■	■	■
site 18	■	■							
site 19				■	■				
site 20						■	■		
site 21							■		
site 22							■		
site 23							■		
site 24						■	■		
site 25						■	■		
site 26							■		
site 27									■
site 28									■
site 29									■
site 30									■
site 31									■

Figure 2 The periods of operation for the Buckley potteries.

Broadly, these comprise the following, though readers are referred to Davey and Longworth 2001 for further detail:

- clay tobacco pipes with the initial TH or Thomas Heyes on the underside of the tailed heel.
- thrown sgraffito ware in a red fabric, all-over yellow slip and lead glaze, with the use of distinctive animal or geometric designs.
- Tripod cooking pots, found in the earliest contexts at Brookhill (Site 1).
- Thrown slipwares with a similar fabric and decoration to the sgraffito vessels.
- Press-moulded slipwares – fragments of moulds and wasters are known from Sites 1 and 2.
- Moulded handles applied to black-glazed and slipware products from Brookhill (Site 1).
- Distinctive thrown forms from Brookhill (Site 1), including large, flared, heavily built beakers, thick-walled pedestal cups or lamps, and trailed slip biconical vessels.
- Mottled wares are not particularly distinctive, but Buckley products are dominated by dishes, many of which were slip-coated before glazing.

The Buckley area has seen considerable new development in the last 20 years, to an extent that significant elements of the pottery industry have already been lost. There are, however, some remarkable survivals, including the site of the Brookhill Pottery (Site 1), which was in operation from c. 1640-1720 and was partially excavated by James Bentley, although his work remains unpublished. A substantial archive of finds, site records and related documents – including those derived from the Bentley and Harrison excavations at Brookhill and Pinfold Lane (Site 2) – has been donated to National Museums Liverpool. A smaller collection of material from a number of the sites is held by Flintshire Museums Service.





Figure 3 Examples of Buckley wares: a - medieval pottery from Site 18; b and c - sgraffito dish and slipware dish from Brookhill (Site 1); d, e and f - press-moulded dish, trailed slipware dish and black glazed cup from Cotterell's Pottery (Site 2); g - 19th-century brewing jar; h - 19th-century jugs; i - 19th-century black glazed cup; j - Catherall's stoneware. Photos courtesy of Peter Davey.