



[http://www.webbaviation.co.uk/gallery/d/53763-1/GladstoneMuseum\\_fb32748.jpg](http://www.webbaviation.co.uk/gallery/d/53763-1/GladstoneMuseum_fb32748.jpg)

So our second item for the day was a visit at the Gladstone Pottery Museum, in Longton in the south of Stoke. It claims to be “only complete Victorian pottery factory from the days when coal burning ovens made the world’s finest bone china”. We were greeted by some very impressive and iconic bottle kiln ovens.



Next to the entrance of the museum was this row of very impressive industrial ceramic shapes. Their scale is impressive as well as their beauty. I presume they are either used in the sanitary or electrical industries. They remind me of a couple of ceramic insulators which I’ve found.

We had a look into the interior of the one of their bottle kiln ovens. What I didn’t realise was that the large brick build bottle kiln ovens one sees from the outside aren’t the actual kilns. They act merely as chimneys to the kilns which are contained therein. They are like an outside shell with the firing kiln build within. The pottery kilns inside are shaped similarly to the outside chimneys with a narrow space between the two with just enough space for a person to move around to stoke the fires of the kiln. When standing in that space looking up you can see the sky where the smoke would have escaped.



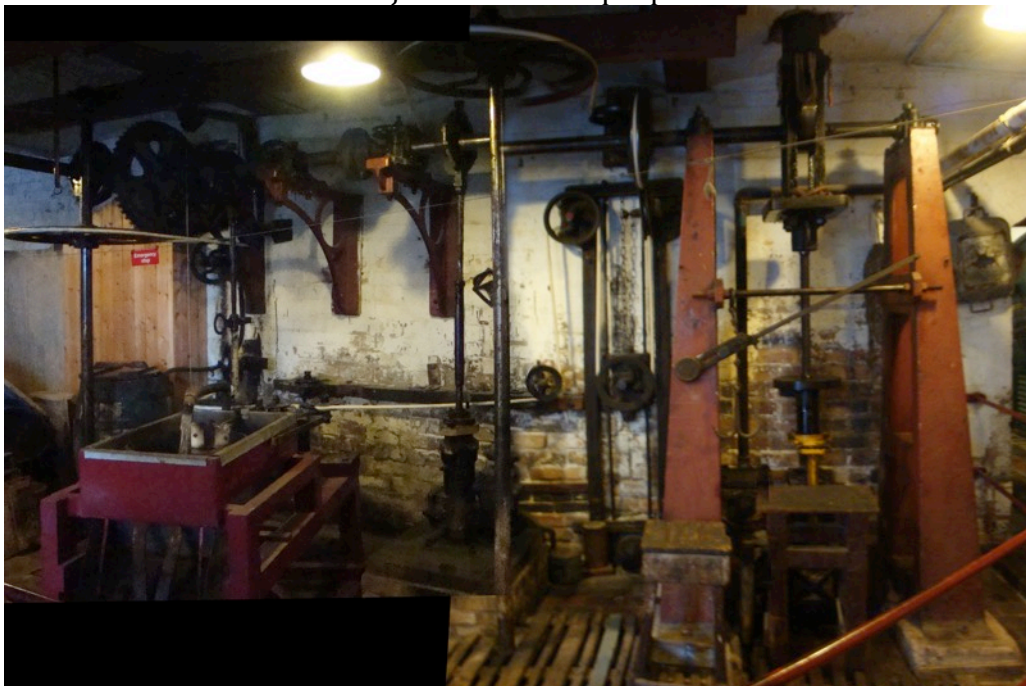


Looking inside of the kiln one can see towers (bungs) of the saggar pots stacked high.

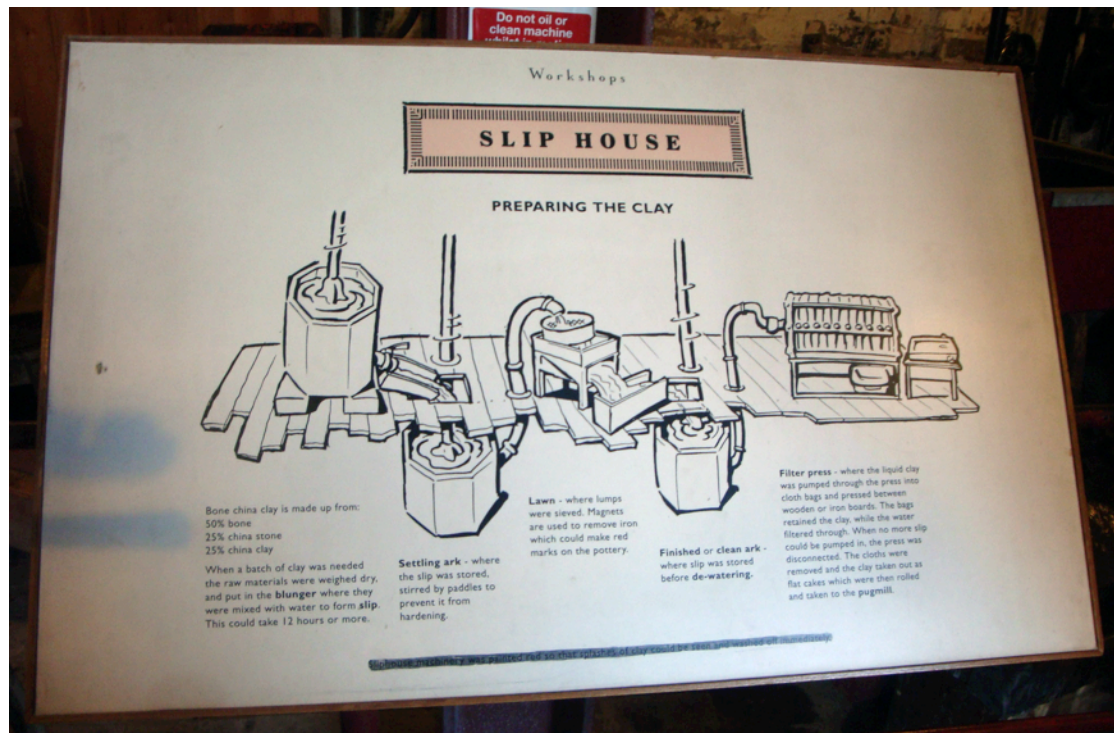


What I had not fully realised was that before kilns were fired with gas or electricity all commercial pots were fired with saggar pots which were stacked in the kilns. This was to keep any contamination from marring the pottery, such as coal dust and smoke.

In the slip house we saw some impressive Heath Robinson type machinery with bits that seemed to be there just decorative purposes.







What I didn't know was that bone china is not really strong enough to hold its shape by itself when wheel thrown. So, cylinders were thrown and put into plaster mould which then went on to be shaped by the jiggers and jollies. Still done today but much more automated, of course.



The Jollying is done on the inside when clay is in a drop mould.  
The Jiggering is done to the outside when clay is on a hump mould.

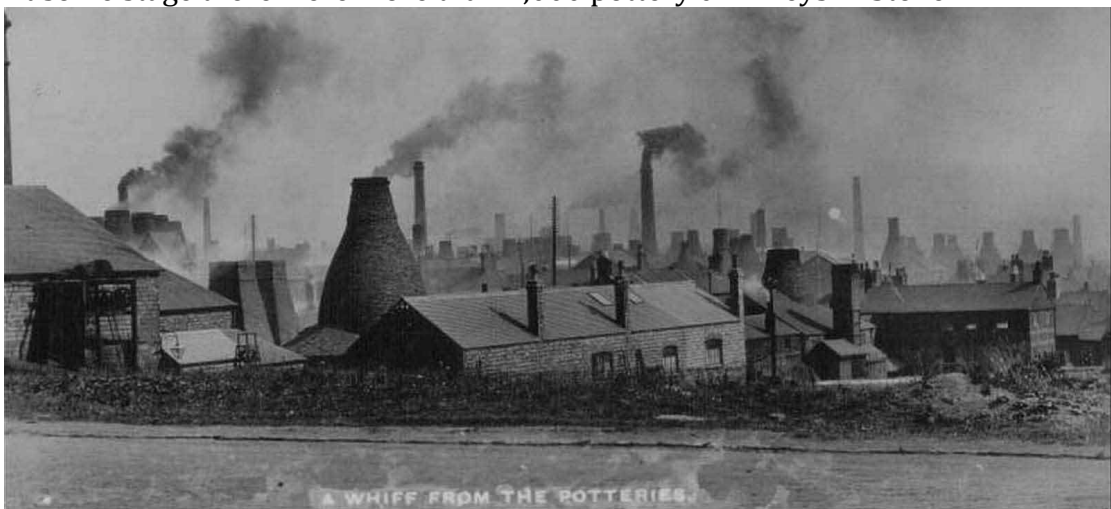


The Gladstone potteries use plaster moulds to make bisque figures for visitors to decorate. In the presentation we were told that on average the slip is left 10 minutes to set before being poured out. Then they wait for an hour before releasing the clay figure from the mould. The figures are left for a day to dry before the edges are smoothed away (fettled) and they are ready to be fired.

We also had a brief demonstration by a woman making delicate flowers by shaping these individually by hand. It is a dying craft and she only knows of four women who are still doing this in Stoke. The clay body has gum arabicum mixed in to give it extra flexibility. This clay is not used for anything else. She uses vegetable oil to oil her hands and working surface. The woman who used to do this work would have been paid by sets of a dozen of flowers. So, they were very fast. It was interesting how basic the tools were which she used; a few disks to impress a pattern on the petals, half a dozen metal tools, an adjusted plastic comb and a sharpened crochet needle was all.

All in all, it was nice to come and get an impression of how an old small industrial pottery would have worked. It is also good to keep this part of history and local heritage alive.

At some stage there were more than 2,000 pottery chimneys in Stoke.



<http://thepotteries.org/postcards/noel/whiff.jpg>