

Prehistoric Pottery – a Guide to Recognition

Prehistoric pottery covers around 4,000 years (4000BC- AD43). This is broken down into the Neolithic (4000-2400BC), Bronze Age (2400-800BC) and Iron Age (800BC-AD43), though Late Iron Age type pottery runs on into the actual Roman occupation period).

Grog tempered (Grog is crushed up old pot)

Starts with Grooved ware (Late Neolithic) runs through to around 1500BC as dominant temper, then used only as one of a mix of tempers until the Late Iron Age when it comes back into dominance 100BC- AD75.

Look for:

- freckly surface with lots of little dabs of grog. Dabs can be buff, reddish or blackish
- smooth, soapy feel

Flint tempered

Dominant late Bronze Age onwards (c1150BC). Small speckles of crushed heat stressed flint, abrasive to the touch. Sometimes present at other times because the clay being used has flint bits anyway.

Late Neolithic: Grooved ware, flat bottomed, soft, soapy

Beaker period: Oxidised outside, reduced inside beakers, decorated. Fabric fine grog with background of sand and sometimes flint.

Early Bronze Age: Collared urns, narrow base. Fabrics similar to beakers (grog) but not as fine. Cord decoration, thick walled. Shapes echo late Neolithic urns.

Middle Bronze: Food vessels - mixed temper some grog.

Late Bronze: Undecorated, flint tempered, plain, thick walled, grog only as part of fabric.

Early, mid Iron Age: Flint tempered dominant.

Late Iron Age: Grog tempered, fine fabric, Romanised towards end of period.

Watchpoints: Confusions with early medieval shelly ware (mistaking it for flint inclusion).
Difficulty in pinning down Late Bronze Age - nothing really distinctive about it.