# THE CCF CLAY GUIDE

Your guide to discovering ceramics by Chester Ceramics Fair



DISCOVER CLAY

# WELCOME TO THE WORLD OF CLAY

Clay has a way of drawing you in.

Where imagination takes shape and everyday materials become something extraordinary.

Perhaps it’s the feel of a handmade mug, the colours and textures of a pot, or the thoughts behind why the person made it.

Whatever brings you here, welcome.

Ceramics are all around us - in our homes, museums and galleries, independent shops, studios and everyday lives. This guide is an invitation to discover that world around Chester and Cheshire, explore local creativity and championing a shared love of making.

Whether you’re just starting to explore or already have a passion for pottery, there’s always something new to uncover.



## SO, WHAT ACTUALLY IS CLAY?

Clay is earth with a special talent: add the right amount of water and it becomes soft and flexible enough to shape. Roll it, pinch it, squash it, stretch it or turn it on a wheel - it holds the shape you give it.

Leave it to dry and it becomes firm, but it’s still fragile. Then comes the kiln: a very hot oven that changes the clay permanently into ceramic.

**CLAY HAS A MEMORY**

Fingerprints, tool marks and little dents can stay visible in the finished piece - tiny traces of the hands that made it.

### THE JOURNEY FROM EARTH TO OBJECT

And that’s the transformation: natural earth becomes something made to be used, kept or treasured.

CLAY — SHAPE — DRY — FIRE

# WHERE TO BUY HANDMADE CERAMICS

Find something made with care, character and a little bit of clay.

- **MEET THE MAKERS**
  Buy directly through makers' websites, social media, studio shops and open studios.
- **INDEPENDENT SHOPS & GALLERIES**
  Look beyond dedicated ceramics shops. Galleries, gift shops and creative spaces can be good places to discover handmade work.
- **POTTERY STUDIOS: THE CCF CLAY TRAIL**
  Visit local pottery studios, giving you the chance to discover the people and places behind the pots.
- **CERAMIC FAIRS**
  Browse independent makers in one place, meet the people behind the work and discover something unexpected.
- **LOOK BEYOND THE HIGH STREET**
  Keep an eye out for artisan markets, open studios, exhibitions, museum shops and online collections.

## A QUICK GUIDE TO CERAMICS

A few words you might come across when browsing handmade pieces - so you know what the maker means.

**HAND-BUILT**
Made by hand rather than on a wheel.

**WHEEL-THROWN**
Clay shaped on a rotating wheel.

**EARTHENWARE**
Ceramics fired at a relatively low temperature.

**STONEWARE**
Durable, high-fired ceramic.

**PORCELAIN**
Fine, smooth ceramic made from very pure clay.

**GLAZE**
A coating adding colour, shine, texture or protection.

**BISQUE**
Clay fired once before its final glaze firing.

**SLIP**
Liquid clay used for joining or decorating.

**FOOD SAFE**
Suitable for food use according to the maker.



# 5 THINGS YOU MAY NOT KNOW ABOUT CLAY

**IT STARTS OUT SOFT**
From squishy clay to a permanent ceramic.

**YOUR POT MIGHT NOT BE THE SIZE YOU THINK**
Clay shrinks as it dries and again during firing.

**THE KILN CAN BE FULL OF SURPRISES**
The maker plans carefully - but the kiln gets the final say.

**CLAY CAN REMEMBER**
Fingerprints, pressure and tool marks can become part of the finished piece.

**CERAMICS CAN OUTLIVE US BY THOUSANDS OF YEARS**
Ancient pottery can survive for millennia.

## A LITTLE ABOUT CHESTER'S CERAMICS HISTORY

Just a few miles east of Chester, Ashton Hayes was home to a medieval pottery industry. Archaeological discoveries, including evidence of a pottery kiln, reveal how local craftspeople shaped and fired clay to produce vessels for everyday use. Pottery made here found its way into Chester, connecting a small rural community with the bustling medieval city.

Roman pottery discovered in Chester offers a fascinating glimpse into the lives of the people who once called this place home. From everyday cooking pots and storage vessels to finely made tableware and goods brought from further afield, these fragments of the past reveal stories of daily life, skilled craftsmanship and trade across the Roman Empire. Each piece of pottery connects us to the people who made, traded and used it.

Later, decorative clay tiles brought pattern and colour to religious buildings, while nearby Buckley developed a pottery industry supplying everyday wares to the region. Blessed with rich local clay and coal to fire the kilns, Buckley became an important centre for pottery and brickmaking. Local potters created practical earthenware for everyday life, including bowls, baking dishes, storage jars and dairy vessels, often decorated with distinctive, flowing slip patterns.

It’s a reminder that clay is more than a material: it connects us to the places we live, the hands that make and the generations who have shaped our relationship with ceramics.



**DID YOU KNOW?**

A medieval tile found in Chester Cathedral features three hares sharing just three ears (pictured above).

**WORTH A VISIT**
Grosvenor Museum

# YOUR CLAY BUCKET LIST

How many can you tick off?

- [ ] Visit a ceramics exhibition
- [ ] Try your hand at pottery
- [ ] Go to a ceramic fair
- [ ] Visit a museum and look for ceramics
- [ ] Take part in a clay workshop
- [ ] Meet a ceramicist
- [ ] Find an ancient piece of pottery
- [ ] Learn what happens inside a kiln
- [ ] Make something from clay yourself
- [ ] Buy something directly from a local maker
- [ ] Visit a pottery studio
- [ ] Follow a local ceramicist
- [ ] Find a handmade mug you love
- [ ] Follow the CCF Clay Trail
- [ ] Watch a pot being thrown
- [ ] Visit a gallery showing contemporary ceramics
- [ ] Discover a ceramics book
- [ ] Come to Chester Ceramics Fair

## YOUR OWN CLAY ADVENTURE

What would you add to the list?

## CCF RECOMMENDS

BOOKS TO INSPIRE

A few ceramics books for curious minds - from practical guides to beautiful visual books.

Clay: A Human History by Jennifer Lucy Allan
Earth & Fire: Modern Potters, their tools, techniques and practices by Kylie Johnson
Firing Earth: An Unexpected History of Pots and Potters by Keith Brymer Jones

**LOCAL PLACES TO DISCOVER**

Port Sunlight
Williamson Art Gallery
Castle Park Arts Centre
Grosvenor Museum

# THE CCF CLAY TRAIL

Discover clay around Chester.

Our CCF Clay Trail brings together six local pottery studios, giving you the chance to discover the people, places and creativity behind the pots.

Six studios. One clay-filled adventure.

- The Art School, Chester
- Pictura Studios, Chester
- The Pottery Rooms, Chester
- Earth, Sand & Fire, Deeside
- House of Clay, Frodsham
- Cheshire Pottery School, Frodsham




## AND FINALLY...

Chester Ceramics Fair is our way of bringing people together around clay - makers, collectors, curious visitors and anyone who enjoys beautiful handmade things.

We hope this guide gives you a few ideas for your own clay adventures around Chester and Cheshire.

### A DATE FOR YOUR DIARY

**Sunday 15 November 2026**

Storyhouse, Chester • 9.30am–2.30pm • Free entry

www.chesterceramicsfair.co.uk

