

The Gladstone Pottery Museum

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During the last 25 years the Pottery industry in the North Staffordshire area has developed from the long established "Pot Banks" with their Bottle ovens and uncomplicated processes, into highly organised manufacturing plants using the most advanced technical processes – tunnel kilns and mechanised units and safe working conditions.

Soon all traces of the past will have been bulldozed. The quaint old workshops and simple machinery have almost disappeared with the few now-idle Bottle ovens. Even children living in the Potteries now have no conception as to how the present industry has been evolved and the old Potteries of Staffordshire will be but a legend.

The Gladstone Pottery Museum in Longton is just one old factory, preserved in architecture, style and atmosphere much as it was more than 100 years ago. When the project was first mooted opinions differed. Both manufacturers and workers became quite emotional about it. Some opposed the idea of preserving and putting on display pottery-making methods, which were, to say the least, open to criticism on health grounds and on conditions of work. Others felt that here was a unique opportunity to preserve a process which had become very nearly just a memory, with the advance of mechanisation in the pottery industry.

The objective is to preserve the craft of pottery – making, when skilled hands, the expert eye and rule of thumb exercised their judgement, to create the perfect piece, before the age of scientific measurement. The piece with individuality of a particular 'Pot-bank' and even of an individual Thrower or Fireman. The Gladstone Pottery Museum is now open from Tuesday to Saturday, 10.30 to 17.30 hours and Sunday 14.00 to 18.00 hours. Parties of 10 or more are welcome and a guide will be provided on application.

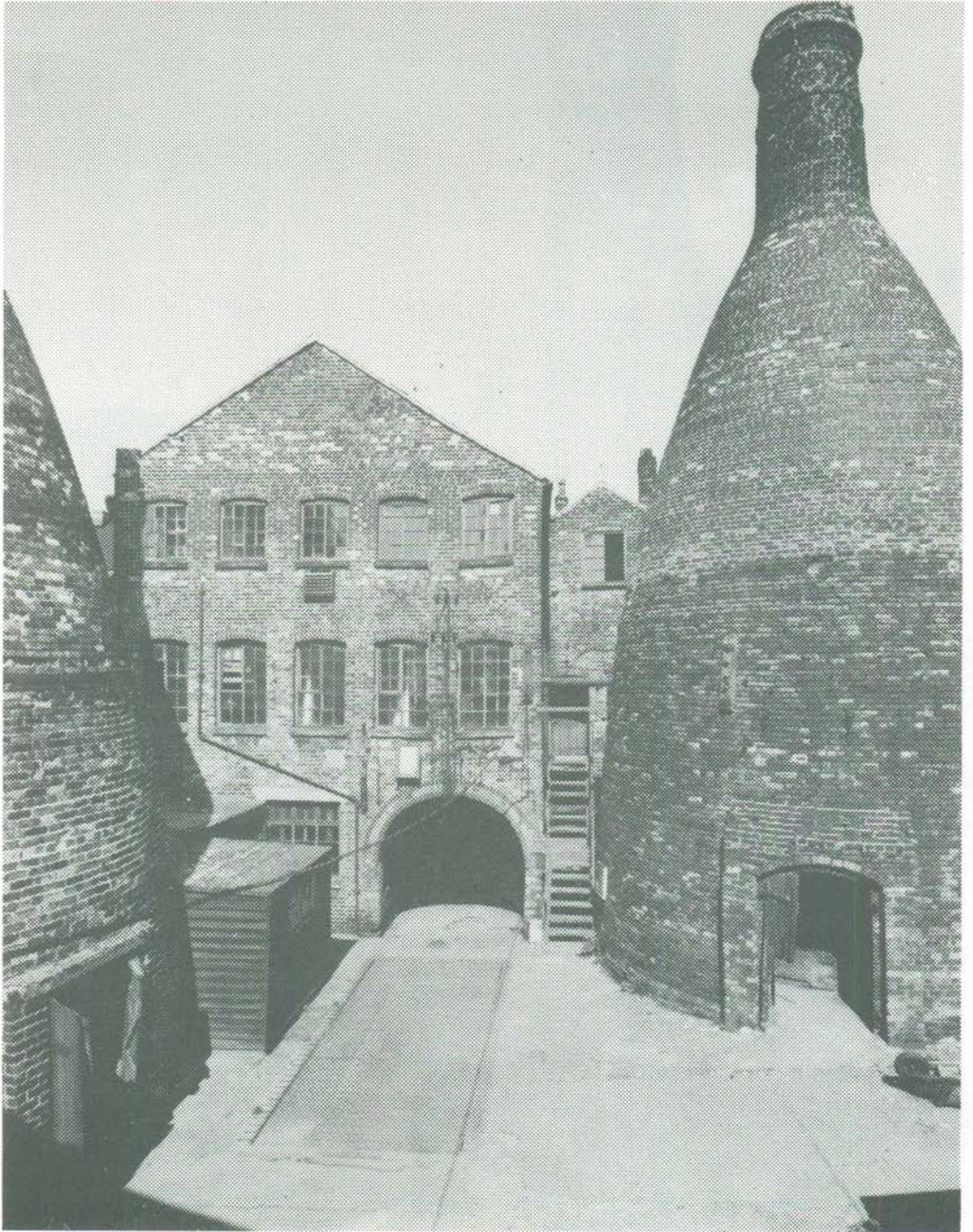
The museum is not just a collection of showcases housed in a building although there are various static displays, like the tile

gallery and the Story of the Rise of the Staffordshire Potteries, up to the beginning of the 19 Century, but there is also a manufacturing circuit to walk round beginning with the steam engine, which powered the machinery and pumped the clay from the arks, the clay preparation rooms and leading on to the making shops and casting shop, with a thrower at his wheel, casters and spongers, and a fettler, who are pleased to answer questions and demonstrate their skill in a way that is not possible on a modern factory. Perhaps the most vivid impression one is left with is from walking inside the Bottle ovens themselves – although these have yet to be restored.

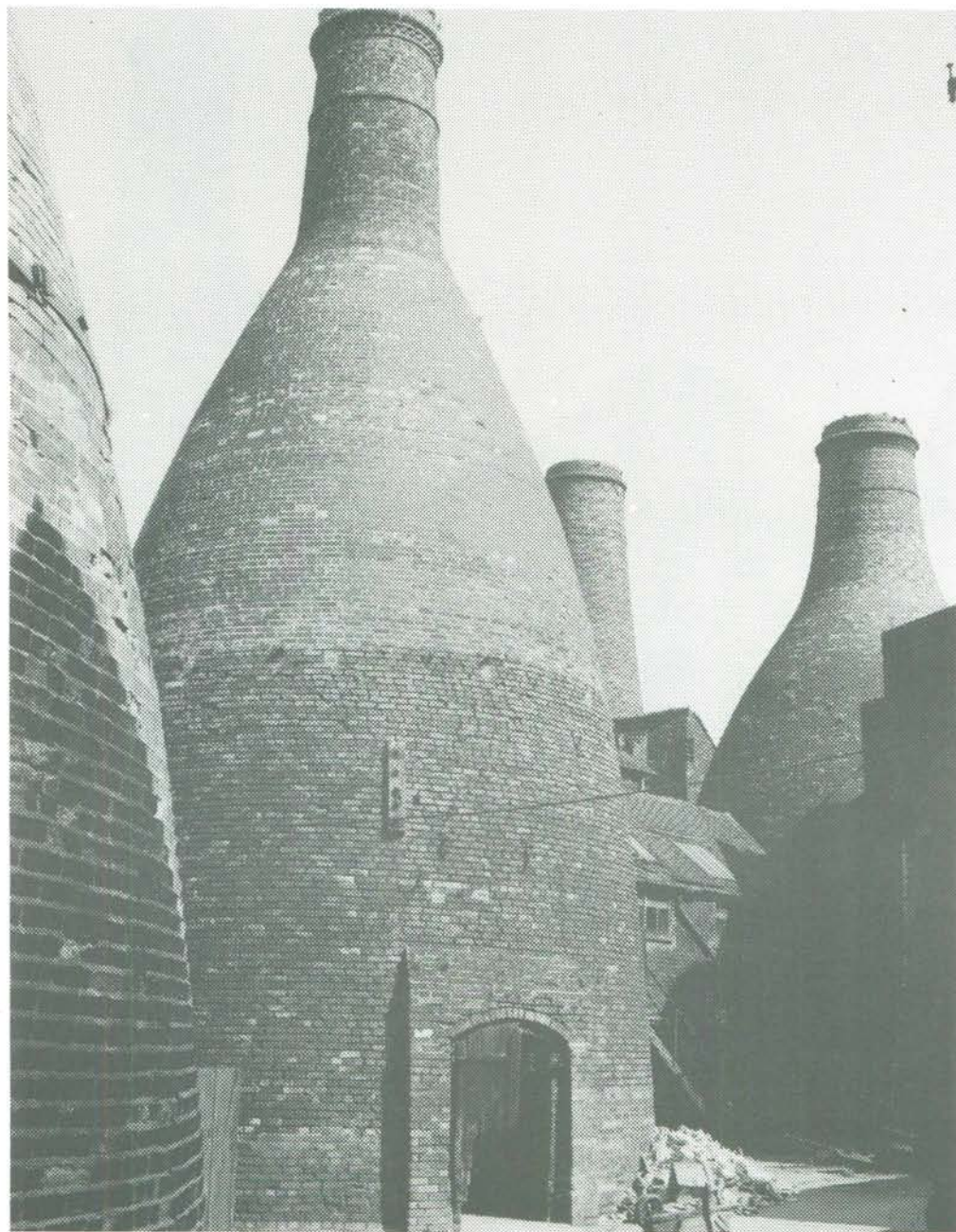
To enable more of this restoration work to be done, to enlarge the static displays and to extend the production line, the museum will close from 24th December until Easter, 1975, when finances permitting Gladstone will have already cost £¼ of a million.

The static display of the Rise of the Pottery Industry will be continued to the present day, production processes completed, a museum of the Sanitary Pottery Industry initiated and a history of Lithography (decoration), put on view.

The Pottery Industry was in many ways a perfect microcosm of the Industrial Revolution in England, i.e. rise of population, introduction of steam engines, growth of chartism, bread riots, mass production, division of labour etc. The Gladstone Museum claims to be a microcosm of the Pottery Industry during its period of greatest expansion.



A general view of the Gladstone Pottery



The ovens, Gladstone Pottery