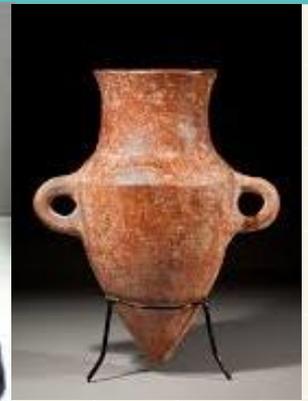




Historical Archaeological Site Fact Sheet

Relative Dating with Ceramics



What? Ceramic materials dug up from historical sites can be used by archaeologists to tell us many things about people of the past. We can use them to date when people were using the site and we can also get information about what they were used for, how long ago they were made/used and what they were used for. By doing this we can help to get an understanding of who the people using the ceramics were and what sort of activities they took part in.

Where? Ceramic materials are a focus at many archaeological excavations of historical sites all over Australia.

How? There are a number of different aspects of ceramics that can be studied to tell us about the piece and the people that used it, these include:

What material is it and how has it been glazed? – Different firing temperatures produce different types of ceramics. The most common categories are earthenware, stoneware and porcelain.

What colour is it? – Whether a ceramic is white, off-white, cream, blue, green, red, or brown can tell you a lot about the materials used to create it. This can then tell us about the time period it was made in and who it was made by/used by.

Is there any decoration? – Different ways of decorating (painted, engraved, etc.) and the colours and designs used were popular during different time periods so this can also tell you about when the piece was made and about who made it and who was using it.

What shape/form is it? – Sometimes you can tell what the ceramic was used for just by looking at it. Is it a plate or other food vessel? Maybe a jug?

Manufacturer – Has the manufacturer left a manufacturer mark, stamp or code on the ceramic? By studying the manufacturer's mark we can find out about the people making it and when it was made (see picture below for an example of a manufacturer's mark).

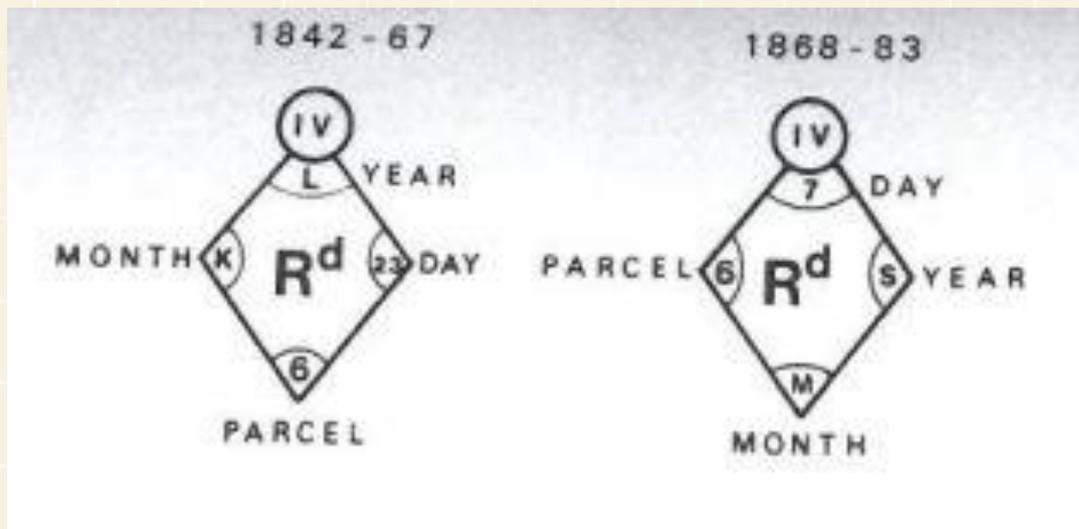
When? The earliest ceramics date back as far as 27,000 years, and these were mostly made from clay which was then hardened by intense heat in a fire. Nowadays ceramics are glazed before fired so that a smooth and coloured surface can be created and any decorations can be protected. However, in Australia, pottery and ceramics were not introduced until European settlement so this narrows down our search.

Who? By understanding the purpose that the ceramic was made for, who made it and who may have used it archaeologists can answer many questions about people of

the past. We can try and understand some the of the following:

- The kinds of food/drink/medicine/cosmetics that were used by people in their day to day lives
- Their socioeconomic status (how rich/poor they were)
- Where they getting their ceramics from, i.e. local producers or from overseas, etc.

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