



**Wibsey Pottery**      **By H. J. M. Maltby**

THE subject of old village potteries is so interesting and important in the history of English pottery manufacture, that it is desirable to place on record any information, however meagre, concerning them, especially such as are now extinct.

The increased demand for domestic pottery during the eighteenth century resulted in the establishment of potteries in many rural areas. In Yorkshire, particularly the southern part of the county, potters were manufacturing earthenware and stoneware articles in districts abounding in large quantities of clay associated with ironstone and coal measure areas. The clay was easily accessible to the potter, who found it very suitable for the purposes of his craft.

There were such potteries at Elland, Howcans, Soil Hill, and Ovenden, in the parish of Halifax, and also at Thornton and Denholme, near Bradford. The objects manufactured at these village factories were chiefly red, brown, and black wares, having a lustrous transparent lead glaze, and occasionally ornamented with slip decoration. They were intended for domestic use, and included, among other things, cottage ornaments, posset-pots, tea-caddies, salt-kits, knife-boxes, plant-pots, and puzzle-jugs. Although the pottery was rudely made, and could by no means claim to possess artistic beauty, it was, nevertheless, appreciated by the people for whom it was intended—those with simple tastes and of humble means.

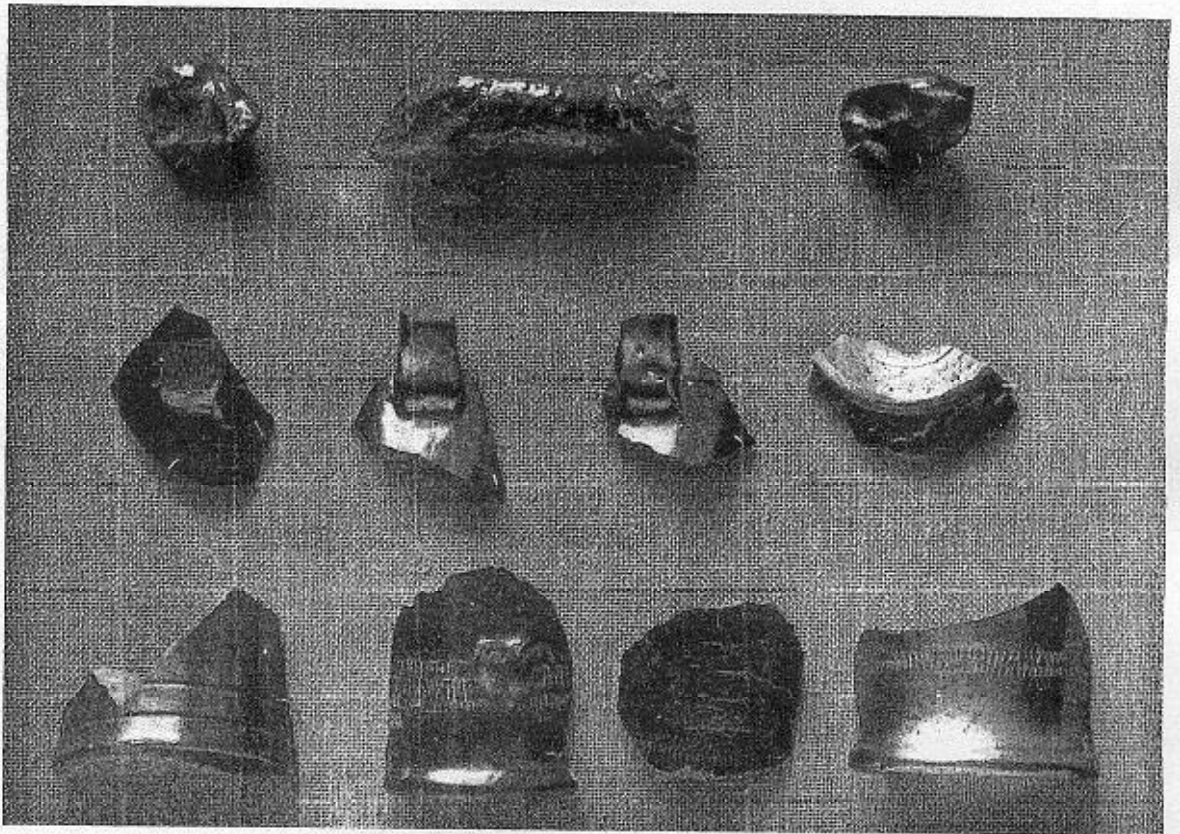


No. I.—POT HOUSE, WIBSEY, NEAR BRADFORD  
THE EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY RESIDENCE OF THE TORDOFF FAMILY, POTTERS

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One of these eighteenth-century Yorkshire village potteries, the history of which has not been hitherto recorded in any work on English ceramics, was situated at Wibsey, a village three miles from Bradford, and five miles from Halifax. Unfortunately, there are no records available to determine the year in which this factory was established, or by whom it was founded. It is, however, certain that the Pottery was in being

confusing, because it suggests that some other potworks in the neighbourhood had an interest in the Wibsey Potteries, but of those local factories, Howcans, near Halifax, which was founded about the middle of the seventeenth century, and Keelham, near Thornton, appear to be the only works contemporary with that at Wibsey in the year 1770. It is difficult to believe that the Leeds Potteries, which were producing wares of



NO. II.—FRAGMENTS OF SALT-GLAZED BROWN STONWARE  
FOUND ON THE SITE OF THE OLD POTTERY AT WIBSEY

some time previous to the year 1770. According to an advertisement dated June 26th, 1770, it was offered for sale or lease for a term of years. It was described as "the well-known and well-accustomed Potworks at Wibsey, near Bradford, with all the utensils, and in very good repair." The owners were William and John Tordoff, who announced "that if the works were not sold or let before the tenth day of July, 1770, very good wages would be given to two able and experienced workmen to carry on the said branch."

The word "branch" is both interesting and

such excellent quality in the eighteenth century, had any connection with the Wibsey Potworks.

In the Baptismal Register of the old Thornton Chapel, in the parish of Bradford, for the year 1767, mention is made of John Parpoint, of Thornton, potter, and again, in 1779, of Samuel Maltkiln, of the same place, potter. A pottery was established at Keelham, near Thornton, between the years 1760 and 1770, by Jonathan Catherall, who later removed from the district to establish the Soil Hill potteries in the township of Ovenden, and parish of Halifax. It is therefore probable that these potters were in his employ, but

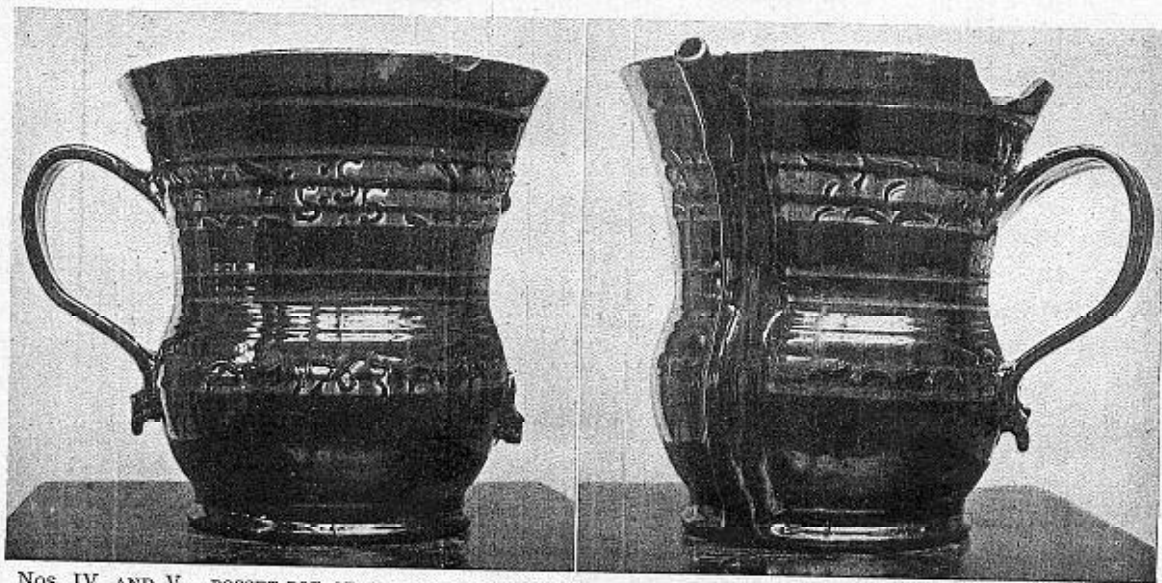
*Wibsey Pottery*



NO. III.—TEA-CADDY (NECK MISSING) DATED 1773  
SALT-GLAZED BROWN STONEWARE 3½ IN. HIGH

whether Jonathan Catherall had any interest in the works at Wibsey is unknown. As has been stated, the proprietors of the

Wibsey Potteries in the eighteenth century' were the Tordoffs, one of the oldest families in the district. As early as 1631, William Tordoff held



NOS. IV. AND V.—POSSET-POT OF GLAZED EARTHENWARE  
8½ IN. HIGH

BEARING INITIALS S.S.S. AND DATE 1763

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NO. VI.—PUZZLE-JUG  
EARLY NINETEENTH CENTURY  
SALT-GLAZED BROWN STONEWARE

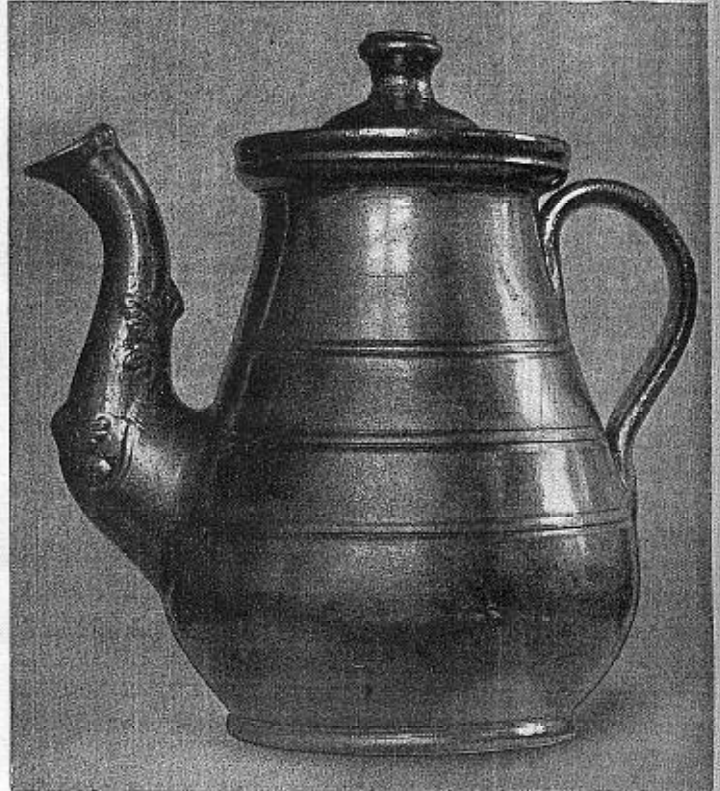
land at Wibsey equal to the eightieth part of a knight's fee. At that time he was assessed to pay the sum of one penny yearly in lieu of service to the state. During the eighteenth century, members of the Tordoff family resided at Pot House, in Wibsey, where they were actively engaged in the manufacture of pottery. The building (No. i.), which still exists, stands at the extreme end of Pot House Road, and overlooks the old road from Bradford to Halifax. It is substantially built of stone, being typical of the less ornate style of domestic architecture prevalent in the district during the eighteenth century.

William Tordoff severed his connection with the works soon after the year 1770, but his partner, John Tordoff (who, in addition to carrying on the business of a potter, devoted himself to parochial affairs, being a chapelwarden of the old Wibsey Chapel in 1782), retained a lively interest in the undertaking, and took into partnership a potter named Joseph Bacon.

In the year 1780, the potworks at Wibsey were purchased by Edward Rookes Leeds, Lord of the Manor of

Royds Hall, and the last member of the Rookes family of Rookes Hall, Norwood Green, and of Royds Hall, Low Moor. Edward Rookes assumed the name of Leeds upon his marriage, in 1740, to Mary, daughter and heiress of Robert Leeds, of Milford. Although Edward Rookes was a member of an ancient and honourable family, his later years were marred by misfortune and unhappiness, and he died by his own hand in 1787, hopelessly involved in bankruptcy.

Edward Rookes Leeds appears to have had some interest in other local potworks. In the eighteenth century he built at, or near, Morley Carr, in the township of North Bierley and parish of Bradford, a glass-house and pot-oven. Some dispute arose over the erection of the same between Edward Rookes Leeds and Richard Richardson, of Bierley Hall. The latter gentleman objected to the buildings because he considered them to be an infringement of his and other freeholders' rights on the commons of Royds Hall, and he authorised a number of men to demolish the structures. They were subsequently re-erected by Edward Rookes Leeds, in the year



NO. VII.—COFFEE-POT  
EARLY NINETEENTH CENTURY  
SALT-GLAZED BROWN STONEWARE

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1780, on his own enclosed land at Wibsey, and near the Potworks which he had purchased the same year. The glass-house and pot-oven, together with three cottages and a smithy, were sold in 1784 by Mr. Rookes Leeds' Trustees for the sum of £105.

On December 5th, 1780, Edward Rookes Leeds, in consideration of the sum of £36 15s., leased to William Shaw, of Wibsey, yeoman, for a term of 999 years at an annual rental of one shilling, "all that pothouse situate on Wibsey Slack, lately in the tenure of Joseph Bacon and John Tordoff, together with all the stone and other material belonging the same, and the ground lying northwards being seven yards in breadth, and the ground lying towards the north-east part of the Pot House being five yards in length, and the whole to be made into a square and to contain 568 yards."

William Shaw had full and free liberty to pull down the Pot House and to use the stone and other material for the purpose of erecting a cottage, or any other building which he thought desirable upon the ground. It is evident that he did not interfere with the building, for on November 22nd, 1781, he assigned the lease of Pot House to Isaac North the elder, and Isaac North the younger, both of Buttershaw, yeomen, for the sum of £31 10s.

The property known as Pot House was purchased towards the end of the eighteenth century by the Low Moor Ironworks Company, and retained by them until the year 1887, when it was sold by public auction, the purchaser being Mr. Adam Hall Hardy, of Wibsey.

The district in which the Wibsey Potteries were situated contains rich layers of clay ironstone underlying a seam of the Low Moor "better-bed" coal measures. There is a section known as the Odsal split coal seam, which contains a blue clay

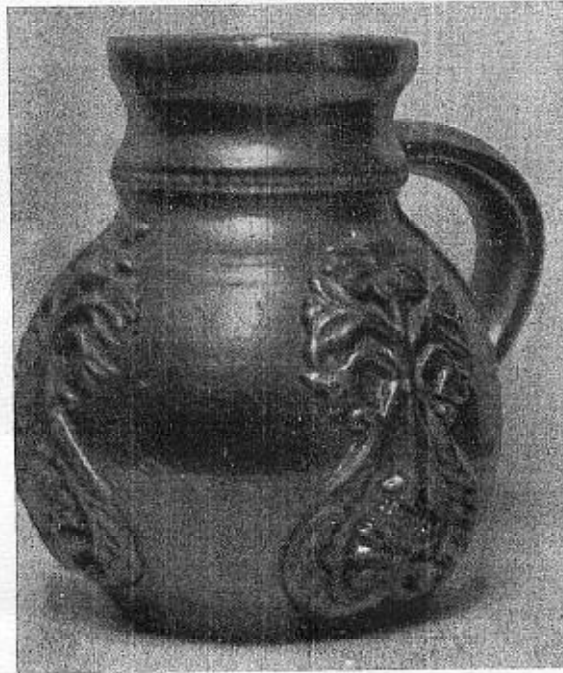
and a yellow clay. These clays are, no doubt, one and the same thing, the one being a decomposed form of the other. There is also a boulder clay, which is related more to a sand than a clay. The basis of all these clays is the same, but the clay ironstone contains a large percentage of oxide of iron in addition, making it very suitable for the manufacture of stoneware articles. With such rich deposits of local fire-clay and of coal, it is not

surprising to find that enterprising potters, recognising the value of the clays, manufactured stoneware and other articles at Wibsey in the eighteenth century.

Excavation on the site of the old Potteries at Wibsey has revealed fragments of the wares made there (No. ii.). These are of stoneware and earthenware. The fragments of stoneware, which are more common than the earthenware, are salt-glazed brown ware similar to those made in the eighteenth century at Nottingham, and in the district of Chesterfield, and also at Brameld's factory, afterwards the Rockingham

or Swinton Pottery Works, near Sheffield. A similar ware was also manufactured at the Manor Potteries, Eccleshill, near Bradford, during the last century.

The fragments of stoneware vary in shade from a light to a dark brown colour, and are portions of articles for domestic use and utilitarian purposes, such as drinking vessels and cooking utensils. Some of the pieces are crudely decorated, the ornamentation consisting of incised simple patterns. Amongst the fragments were found what are technically known as "wasters," the discovery of these being indisputable evidence of a potter's waste tip; consequently, the site of a pottery would be in close proximity. The earthenware is reddish brown in colour, and is covered with a transparent lead glaze, being similar in general character to, but much finer in



No. VIII.—JUG  
4½ IN. HIGH  
SALT-GLAZED BROWN STONWARE  
SECOND HALF OF EIGHTEENTH CENTURY

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execution than, the wares made at Howcans, Soil Hill, and Denholme.

An old Wibsey resident has informed the writer that he remembers having seen, many years ago during excavations at the New Works Yard, Low Moor, near Bradford, a number of old drain-pipes bearing the mark, "Wibsey Pottery," with the maker's name, which, unfortunately, he has forgotten. This information, if correct, is of interest, because it suggests that a mark was used at the potteries, and indicates that the wares were considered to be of such quality and importance as to warrant their being marked. None of the fragments, however, bears any trace of being so marked.

Wibsey Pottery is extremely rare. In spite of many inquiries and much persistent search, very few pieces have so far come to light. One of the most interesting examples is a posset-pot of reddish-brown earthenware, ornamented with bands of white slip decoration under a lustrous yellow glaze (No. iv.). It formerly possessed

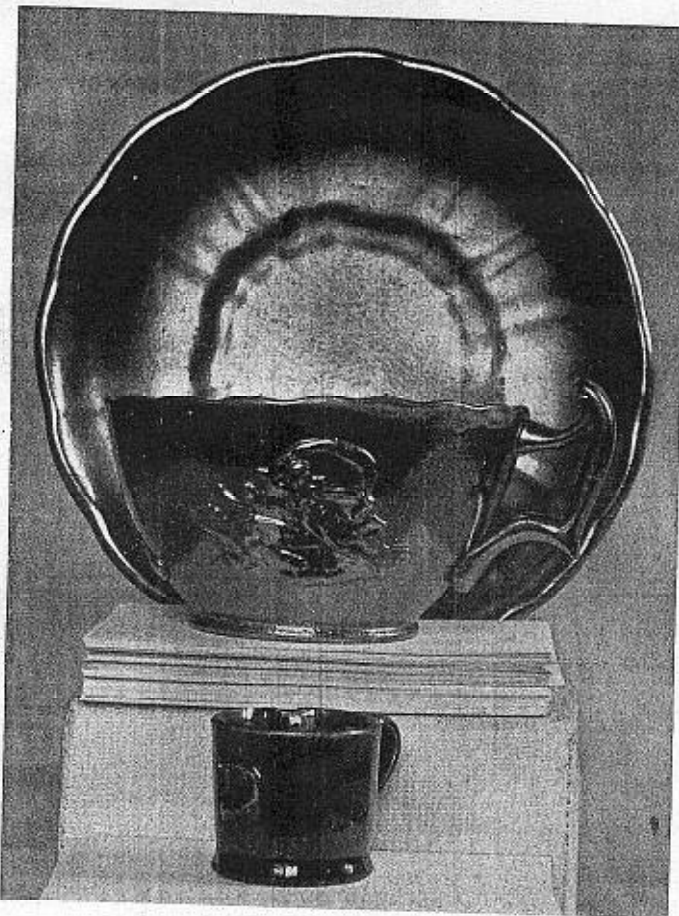


No. IX.—BOWL SALT-GLAZED BROWN STONWARE  
EARLY NINETEENTH CENTURY

vessel. On one side are the initials S.S.S., and the date 1763, the year in which it was made for Samuel and Sarah Smith, of Wibsey (No. v.). This rare piece of earthenware is the property of

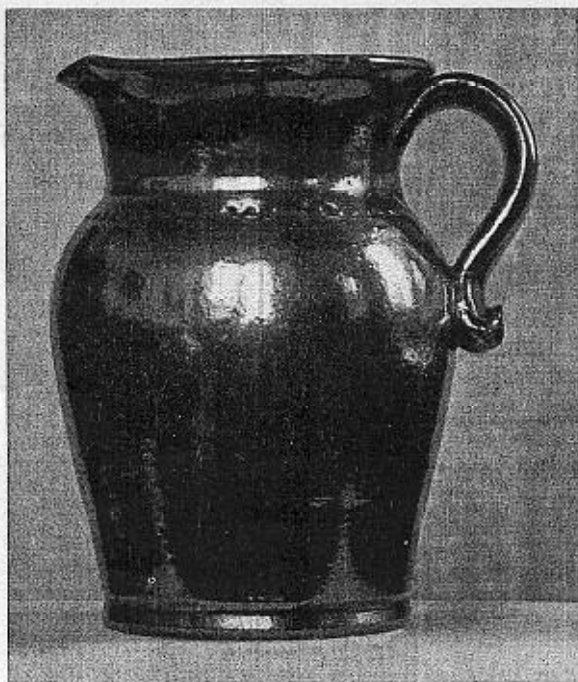
a descendant of Samuel Smith, and, as the owner is fully acquainted with its history, there is no reason to doubt its authenticity. The posset-pot is 8½ in. high, and is a typical specimen of those quaint vessels which contained a mixture of ale and milk (posset) or other beverage so freely indulged in at Christmas and various festive seasons throughout the year.

A salt-glazed brown stoneware tea-caddy, devoid of its neck, is a typical example of the ware made at Wibsey in the eighteenth century (No. iii.). It is a very crude piece of workmanship, and was evidently made



No. X.—TOP: CUP AND SAUCER SALT-GLAZED BROWN  
STONWARE EARLY NINETEENTH CENTURY  
BELOW: MUG GLAZED EARTHENWARE 1825

## Wibsey Pottery



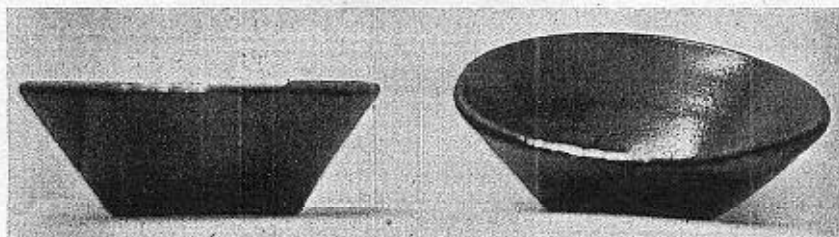
No. XI.—JUG                      SALT-GLAZED BROWN STONEWARE  
4½ IN. HIGH                      EARLY NINETEENTH CENTURY

by an illiterate potter named Roger Binner, whose name appears on the base of the caddy. It bears the date 1773, and the following scriptural quotations:—"Jesus is preshious to a believin heart," and "Jesus invits us Home." The ends are incised with floral decorations, and a V-shape border ornamentation appears on the four corners of the tea-caddy, which is 3½ inches high.

Several early nineteenth-century salt-glazed brown stoneware articles include a puzzle-jug, rather bold in design, with an ornamental band on the body (No. vi.). A salt-glazed bowl (No. ix.), ornamented below the rim, is a peculiar and rather unusual example, as is also a coffee-pot (No. vii.), 7½ inches high, with the spout decorated in relief. Another rare piece of earthenware is a child's mug (No. x.), 1¼ inches high. It is light brown in colour, glazed, and bears the letter D in relief. This mug was made in the year 1825

by a Wibsey potter, and given to the father of the present owner when he was five years of age. A stoneware cup and saucer, somewhat heavy and clumsy in make, but quite typical of the village pottery of a century ago, are shown in the same illustration. Two pieces practically devoid of decoration—a jug, 4½ inches high (No. xi.), and a pair of bowls, 1½ inches high (No. xii.)—are examples of the more simple type of ware manufactured at Wibsey.

It is impossible to state with any degree of accuracy when the manufacture of pottery ceased at the Wibsey Potworks. The oldest resident in the district does not remember potters being at work there in his boyhood days. The industry must have died out about the year 1830, at the time when large quantities of finer and cheaper wares were being imported into Yorkshire from Staffordshire and other important pottery centres.



No. XII.—PAIR OF SMALL BOWLS                      SALT-GLAZED BROWN STONEWARE  
1½ IN. HIGH                      EARLY NINETEENTH CENTURY