

# Throwback Thursday: Pottering Around Haringey (part 1)

## Thursday 30 April 2020

Welcome to Throwback Thursday: Pottering Around Haringey (part 1) – sharing our heritage from Bruce Castle Museum & Archive.

We welcome back local historian and [Friend of Bruce Castle](#) Ken Barker, as he shares a local history which is also a family history – his own. Ken undertook a lot of research over many years amongst the archives at Bruce Castle, as well as very kindly adding photographs, ephemera and objects to our collections too. Ken's family were the South family who ran South & Son's potteries. Ken has written three books and has created a fascinating [website](#) with a wealth of information about and associated with the South family and the potteries.

The potteries run by the South family were by no means the only pottery in the area – we have evidence and other collections relating to several from around Haringey. We will of course come back to these other histories at a later stage.

Today's focus on South's potteries begins with this advert from its hey-day during the 1920-30s when it states it was the largest maker of horticultural pottery in England. Perhaps being challenged on this, the additional stamp ('ONE OF') was printed on the later, making the claim a little less! As we can see with reference to South's in a [cartoon in the London Evening News](#), and (far below) a focus of the pottery on Pathe News film reel, this pottery business was certainly one that was admired, respected and well-known. We have also admired and enjoyed Ken's talks over the years at the museum – and can't forget the one called '*The Man Who Made Millions*' (of pots that is!). We will now hand over to Ken to pick up the story ...



ONE OF  
THE ...  
LARGEST  
MAKERS  
OF  
HORTICULTURAL  
POTTERY  
IN  
ENGLAND

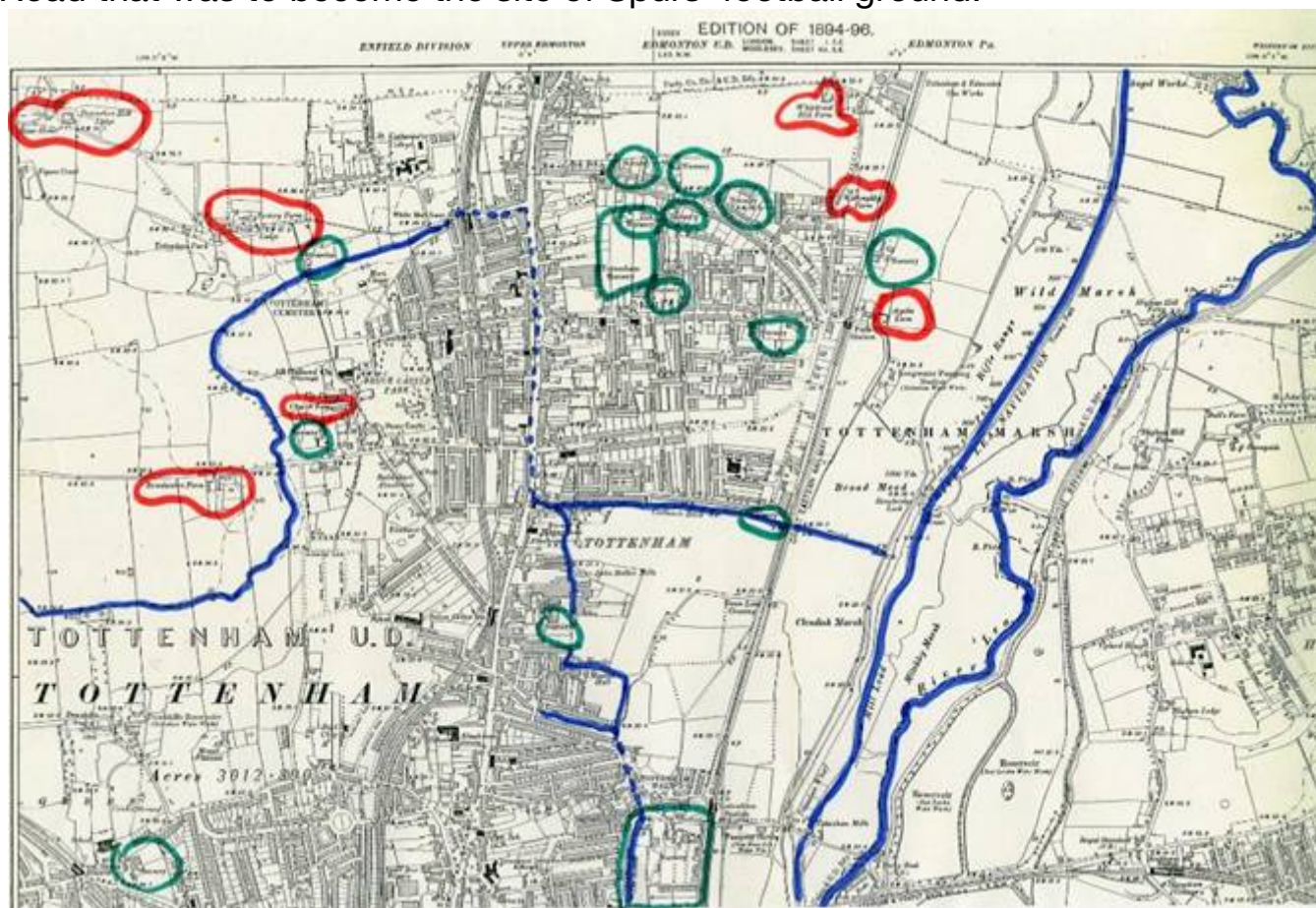
GENERAL VIEW OF WORKS.

FROM **S. SOUTH & SONS**, Tottenham Potteries.  
WHITE HART LANE, LONDON, N.

TELEPHONE No. 54 TOTTENHAM

From the collections and © Bruce Castle Museum (Haringey Archive and Museum Service)

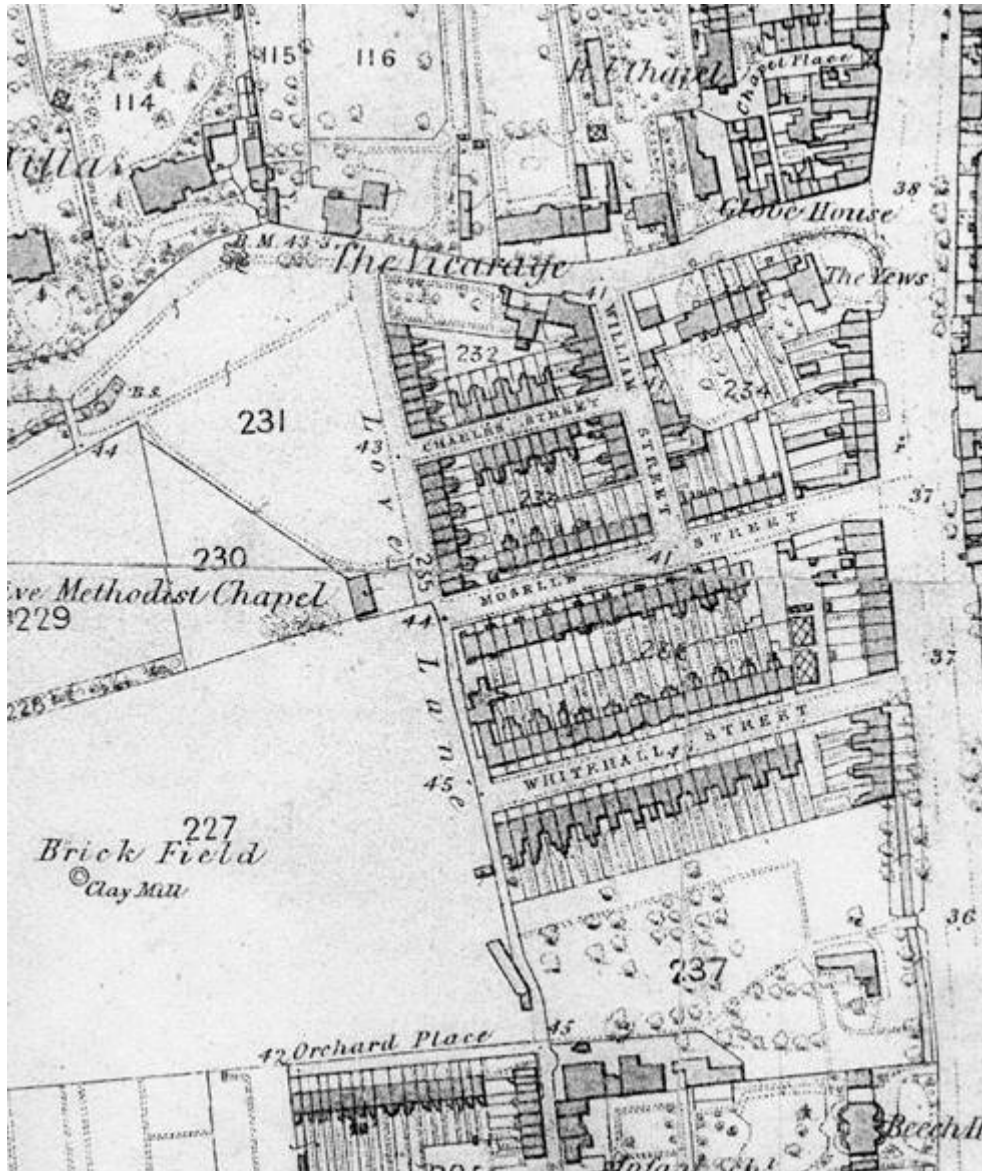
“During the 19<sup>th</sup> century Tottenham was gradually evolving from its rural past to the urban landscape that we know today. Several market gardens and nurseries were established in the district, including that of George Beckwith off the High Road that was to become the site of Spurs’ football ground.



Extract from 1894-96 OS map showing mainly the northern part of Tottenham. Circled in red are farms; circled in green are nurseries; blue are the watercourses in the area. From the collections of Bruce Castle Museum & Archive.

Nurserymen had been attracted by the richness of the alluvial soil and the proximity and ease of transport to the London markets. Coal for the boilers heating the glasshouses was conveyed on the River Lea. Vegetables were grown and grape vines cultivated but the increasing pollution resulting from residential and industrial development of the area caused the nurserymen to move northwards along the Lea Valley to the cleaner air of south east Hertfordshire.

The nursery industry flourished between the mid-19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries and at its peak boasted that it had the greatest acreage under glass in the world. This success created a huge demand for clay flowerpots which the clay soil of Tottenham and the surrounding areas was particularly suited to provide.



Extract from 1864 OS map showing a brick field and clay mill, just off Love Lane (north of Bruce Castle), Tottenham.

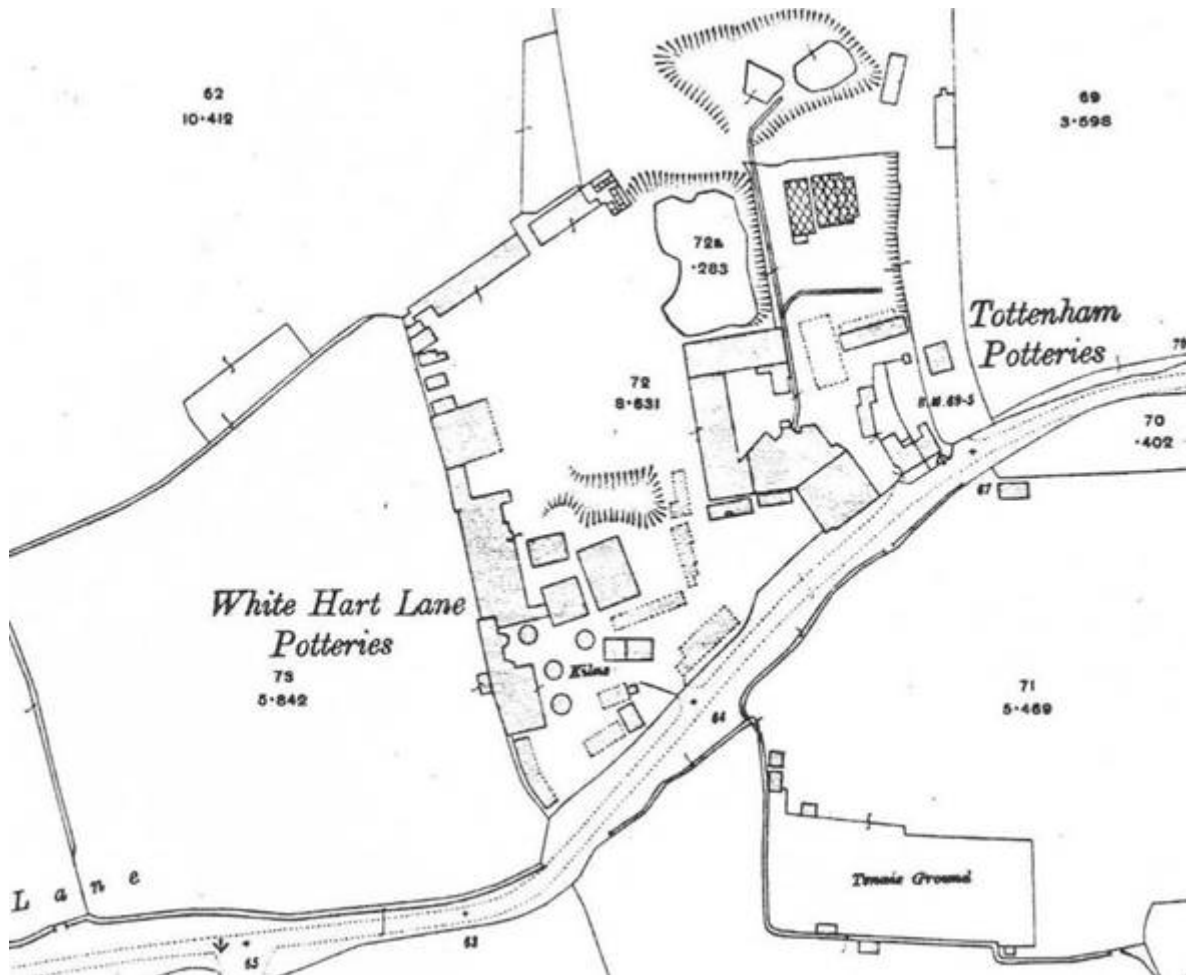
From the collections of Bruce Castle Museum & Archive.

By the 1880s two potteries had been established in White Hart Lane, both of which were to contribute to the local economy for the next 80 years. Edward Cole was the first to arrive with E. G. Cole & Son trading as Tottenham Potteries, to be followed by the White Hart Lane Potteries of Samuel South & Sons.



Cole's Potteries, Wood Green – a watercolour by W. N. Marshall, painted in August 1860 and showing a cricket match on the field of what is now Coles Park Football Ground in White Hart Lane (home to Haringey Borough Football Club).

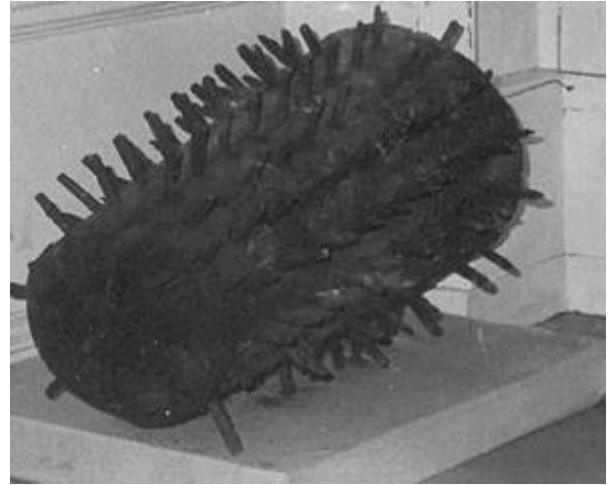
From the collections and © Bruce Castle Museum (Haringey Archive and Museum Service)  
In 1888 Wood Green, formerly part of Tottenham, became a separate administrative authority and the potteries came within its new jurisdiction, although Cole continued to trade as Tottenham Potteries and both potteries retained the N17 postal address.



Extract from 1913 OS map, showing the two potteries on White Hart Lane.  
 From the collections of Bruce Castle Museum & Archive.

Pot-making is of course a traditional craft that has seen potters potting over 1,000s of years, around the world and across many different cultures. The manufacturing processes at the potteries in White Hart Lane Potteries would have been instantly recognisable to a potter of any generation or century even, although powered mechanical assistance had become available. Clay was excavated on the sites creating deep pits which were replenished by material from the construction of Piccadilly Line extension between Finsbury Park and Bounds Green in 1930-1932.

The clay was winched on a truck to the pug mill and after thorough mixing travelled between two sets of rollers to crush impurities finally emerging in a plastic, malleable state ready to be wedged into balls and taken to the potters.



Excavating clay for the potteries (on the left); and a pug mill (right, photographed at Bruce Castle in 1988) that was found during the culverting of Stonebridge Brook in 1960 and was identified by Samuel J. South of the potteries as a tool that would have been used during the process of softening of the clay. He suggested the pug mill was about 200 years old.

From the collections and © Bruce Castle Museum (Haringey Archive and Museum Service)

Pot-makers were the skilled men paid on piecework and an experienced potter was capable of a daily output of 1,400 pots. Here's the workforce (below) during the 1950s.



From the collections and © Bruce Castle Museum (Haringey Archive and Museum Service)

Do you recognise or know anyone in this picture (above), or do you know of someone else who worked at South & Sons Potteries at another period of time? *(We, at Bruce Castle, would love to know and collect more memories – we have some memories but would like to know more, so please do get in touch!)*

Here's a much older photograph (below) of the South & Sons workforce, standing in front of the very impressive kilns, c.1895. Samuel South is seen standing in the front row on the right, wearing a bowler hat. He took over the pottery in 1896.



From the collections and © Bruce Castle Museum (Haringey Archive and Museum Service)



A potter throwing pots on the wheel at South's, c.1960.

From the collections and © Bruce Castle Museum (Haringey Archive and Museum Service)

The potter's wheel was driven originally by the potter 'kicking' a foot operated crank that after some years resulted in the development of a limp. Steam driven shafting to drive the wheels was introduced. After a period of drying, the pots

were stacked, with the largest at the top, in one of the brick built kilns which had diameters of 18/20ft and a capacity for 40,000 pots each. The pots were fired for four to five days, during which temperatures of 900 degrees Fahrenheit were reached and eight to ten tons of coal were consumed.

Samuel South was also involved in brickmaking, cartage and contracts for the Tottenham and Wood Green District Councils. At the beginning of the 20th century, over 200 men were employed and teams of horses were maintained to deliver the pots to customers but from 1922 motor transport was introduced. Both potteries continued in family ownership but production was brought to an abrupt halt by the outbreak for the Second World War.

It was found impossible to shield the glare from the coal fired kilns during the 'black-outs' imposed as an air raid precaution and each pottery closed down for the duration, except for essential maintenance. Re-opening after the War, the potteries were never quite able to recover fully from the closures. There was a shortage of skilled labour, increased labour costs, significantly increased costs of coal which, during the immediate post-war years, was subject to supply cuts. Competitors introducing machine-made and plastic pots to nurseries cut costs and were cheaper than the traditional handmade pots. The Tottenham Potteries of E. G. Cole & Sons closed in 1957 and the South's pottery in 1960. "

With our immense thanks to **Ken Barker** for sharing and uncovering so much of his family's business history. Ken also discovered a short film made in 1951 of his family's potteries. You can see just how fast the potters worked when throwing a pot on their wheel at South's & Sons – it took about 6 seconds to make each pot on the wheel. What a production! To see the film, just click [here](#).

Below are a collection of the last pots that were made at South's potteries on 5 October 1960, which were presented to the Museum. Each potter inscribed their names on the pots – E. Challis, B. Cullen, E. Webb and L. Woor, with the date they were made.



From the collections and © Bruce Castle Museum (Haringey Archive and Museum Service)

Or at least we *thought* these were the last pots made at the potteries, until Ken brought his cousin Graham South to the Museum in 2016. In the photograph below, in the display case, you will see *the* very last pot made! Graham was one of the last potters at his family's Works when the potteries closed in 1960. On 5 October 1960, as we know, the potters potted their last pot. But to make sure he



had definitely made the last pot, Graham crept back after everyone else had left to actually make the very last pot himself. He inscribed it 'THE LAST POT', and dated it 6 October 1960. Graham has kindly donated his pot to the Museum, so it can be part of the legacy of South & Sons potteries.



From the collections and © Bruce Castle Museum (Haringey Archive and Museum Service)

You might also be able to see in the photograph above two tiny little pots on display (in the middle of the case). Graham also donated these as the smallest pots ever made at the potteries. One of the potters who worked there during the 1950s – Billy – prided himself in being able to make these. Although these little flowerpots didn't have a wide use, it was possible to plant cactus seeds in them. By contrast you can see in the photograph below the yard foreman Owen Davis Jnr holding one of the smallest and largest pots made and sold by the potteries.



From the collections and © Bruce Castle Museum (Haringey Archive and Museum Service)  
Echoing the traditions of the potters at South & Sons, in 2016 – 2017 a group of 'Designers in Residence' from Middlesex University, [Collective Exchange](#), came to the Archives to research potteries in our area to develop their [own community art project](#) in Tottenham, using freshly excavated clay from ground of the soon-to-be Spurs' new football stadium. You can explore the origins of this project on [Collective Exchange's website](#) and their first Tottenham exhibition at 810 High Road.



© The artists: Collective Exchange

A new and much longer second stage in the project saw more research from our collections by Collective Exchange, inspired by the traditional craft and heritage of South Potteries especially, and a new exhibition and community engagement programme evolving at Bruce Castle during 2016-2017. This involved talks, workshops for families and a special Clay Day in February 2017, with local craft people working with ceramics, pots and clay showcasing their work to the visiting public and getting them hands-on in making pots! You can see more of this on Collective Exchange's website. Below, are a few photos of our galleries at Bruce Castle and some of the pots created through the 'making in the community' workshops.





me a little bit about where  
this clay come from?"





This series of photographs © The artists: Collective Exchange

The last photograph above shows the three artists from Collective Exchange (Ina Norrman, Kate Grimes and Sarah Higgins) in the galleries as they met up with Ken Barker (left) and his cousin Graham South.

With our thanks again to Ken – we hope you have enjoyed too pottering about Haringey and finding out more about South & Sons and the collections at the Museum. Perhaps some of you have seen the #MuseumFromHome campaign with the BBC today, as highlighted in yesterday's post? If not, do catch up with it and explore [here](#) too.

Tomorrow, another post and another topic as we share our heritage.

Keep well, stay safe, stay indoors.

Best wishes

From us all at Bruce Castle

**Deborah Hedgecock**  
Curator

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