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**Pottery Production in Westbury-on-Trym during the late 17th and  
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## Pottery Production in Westbury-on-Trym during the late 17th and 18th Centuries

By REG JACKSON

### *Introduction*

Westbury-on-Trym, hereafter referred to simply as Westbury, lies 4.5 kilometres to the north-west of central Bristol. Originally a separate village, it has now been absorbed within the Bristol conurbation.

In the later 1770s it was noted of Westbury that ‘the only manufacture carried on in this parish is a pottery of coarse, red ware, and it seems to be chiefly employ’d in making pans for sugar bakers in Bristol’.<sup>1</sup> In 1878 the ceramic historian Llewellynn Jewitt recorded that in 1775 the Sugar House pottery in Westbury had passed from the ownership of George Hart to Stephen Fricker.<sup>2</sup> The pottery was apparently so-called because it produced sugar moulds: pottery cones with a hole at the tip in which the liquid sugar was placed to drain during the refining process. In addition to sugar moulds the pottery manufactured ‘the usual classes of brown ware articles’. In 1971 Peter Brears in his survey of English country potteries listed the Westbury pottery as having produced flower-pots, chimney-pots and pancheons.<sup>3</sup>

The writer became interested in pottery production in Westbury when, during his research on the Bristol pottery industry, a number of documentary references were found to potters working in the village from the late 17th century.<sup>4</sup> The Yeamans family appears to have played a significant part in pottery production in Westbury until the mid 18th century, although precisely where the Yeamans worked remains unknown. However, from the 1740s documents refer to a pottery at Burfield – the later Sugar House pottery – to the south of the village (Fig. 1).

It is necessary to consider Westbury’s geographical position and the parish’s natural resources in order to understand why it became the location for pottery production. It was able to supply the potter’s essential requirements for carrying on a successful business: convenient sources of clay, ingredients for glazes, fuel for firing kilns and a ready market for the finished wares.

Of all the basic raw materials required by the potter, clay was the most important. It was the availability of a good clay source that most often decided the location of a pottery. The solid geology of the Westbury area is Carboniferous limestone, which in places is overlain by Triassic marls, and there is evidence that potters were exploiting these marls as a source of clay. On 23 June 1783 the potter Stephen Fricker paid a year’s rent for ‘the Claypits’ to the Westbury churchwardens.<sup>5</sup> On 19 December 1815 a small piece of the field called the Four Acres belonging to the Cote estate and adjoining Durdham Down, measuring 91 by 28 yards, was let to another potter, Henry Yabbicom.<sup>6</sup> It was agreed that Yabbicom could ‘dig and carry away clay from the said piece of land’ provided that he ‘engages from time to time to fill up the places from which clay is dug, and to cover them on top with the mould which has previously been removed ... in consideration of his being allowed to leave at the expiration of his term one place or pit not filled up but which shall not be larger than sufficient to hold twenty cart loads of rubbish’. In 1838 Henry Yabbicom was the tenant of another area in the parish, not part of the Cote estate, called the Clay Field (Fig. 1).<sup>7</sup>



Fig. 1. Westbury-on-Trym c.1880 (based on O.S. Map 6", Glos. LXXI.NE., 1881 edn.).

From early medieval times the English earthenware potters had used lead glazes to render their products more attractive and less porous. When beaten into a dust and mixed with a slip, galena, the natural sulphide of lead, gave particularly good results and was widely used for glazing. Lead occurs in Carboniferous limestone and was mined on Clifton Down, close to Westbury, between

at least the late 16th and early 18th centuries.<sup>8</sup> This would have been a convenient source of the lead for the Westbury potters.

In common with other potters of the period working in country areas those in Westbury were likely to have used wood to fire their kilns. Even by the middle of the 19th century areas of woodland and coppice survived in the parish, notably in the Trym valley and around Combe Hill.<sup>9</sup>

Although some of the finished wares would have been sold locally there were potentially large sales to be made in supplying the nearby city of Bristol with horticultural wares and chimney pots. Large quantities of sugar moulds would have been needed by the sugar refineries established in Bristol during the 17th and 18th centuries to process the raw sugar imported from plantations established on the newly acquired British possessions in America and the West Indies.<sup>10</sup> Westbury potters were also able to exploit the vast overseas markets served by vessels trading out of the port of Bristol.<sup>11</sup>

A number of documentary sources have enabled the Burfield pottery to be accurately located. In the early 19th century a building called the 'Pot House' stood on the east side of the road from Westbury to Bristol, now known as Westbury Road (Fig. 2).<sup>12</sup> A series of title deeds and leases for properties in the same area dating from 1750 to 1912 also makes various references to the pot house.<sup>13</sup> A lease of 16 March 1832 describes

all that messuage or tenement (formerly a messuage, tenement or pothouse), coachhouse, stable and other buildings, yard and premises lately in the occupation of ... Stephen Fricker and afterwards of Roger Yabbicom & Son created and built upon a close called Burfields ... bounded on the front or westward side by the highway [Westbury Road], on the back or eastward side by a cottage and waggon house ... and on the north by a lodge and lands of ... Edward Bowles Fripp and on the south by ... the New Close ....

A map of 1829 attached to the lease shows the location of the buildings. Those nearest to the road were almost certainly the pottery premises while those further to the east were most likely the cottage and wagon house (Fig. 3). The site of the pottery can be located as the area now occupied by nos. 137 to 143 Westbury Road (Fig. 1; O.S. Nat. Grid ST 57117632).

### *The Yeamans Family*

The Yeamans family probably operated a pottery in Westbury during the late 17th and early 18th centuries as at least seven members of the family – John, Richard, Robert, Roger, Sampson the elder, Sampson the younger and Samuel – were potters living in the parish during that period. They certainly owned a kiln by 1746 when it was mentioned in the older Sampson Yeamans's will.<sup>14</sup> Robert and, possibly, Samuel were the sons of Roger Yeamans while the younger Sampson Yeamans was the son of his own namesake. The relationships between the remaining members of the family cannot be determined.

Roger Yeamans was described as a potter of Westbury in a bond dated 11 February 1695.<sup>15</sup> His name appears in the parish registers from 1689 and he was buried at Westbury on 15 September 1705. His son Robert was baptised in the parish church on 17 April 1693<sup>16</sup> and was himself described as a potter of Westbury on 27 January 1722 when he was granted a licence to marry Ann Hone of St. James's parish, Bristol.<sup>17</sup> The marriage took place the same day in St. James's church.<sup>18</sup> On 28 July 1730 Robert acted in the administration of the estate of the Westbury potter, Reece Derrick.<sup>19</sup> He may have been the Robert Yeamans who was buried in the parish on 3 March 1742.<sup>20</sup>

Samuel Yeamans, possibly another son of Roger Yeamans, was described as a potter of Westbury when his own son William was apprenticed to the Bristol mariner, John Roberts, on 28 September 1717.<sup>21</sup> A Samuel Yeamans appears in the parish registers from 1711.<sup>22</sup> On 31 January 1721 he was granted a licence to marry Mary Montague of Gloucester at the church of St. Augustine-the-

Less in Bristol,<sup>23</sup> the marriage, presumably Samuel's second, taking place the following day.<sup>24</sup> A potter of Westbury he was named as a surety in the marriage licences granted to Robert Yeamans and Ann Hone on 27 January 1722 and to James Boise and Sarah Roach on 11 April 1723.<sup>25</sup> He was referred to as an earthenware potter of Westbury in the records of the Bristol tolzey court on 26 May 1738.<sup>26</sup>

John Yeamans was described as a potter of Westbury on 20 June 1720 when he obtained a licence to marry Anne Ballard of St. James's parish at St. James's church, Bristol.<sup>27</sup> He also acted in the administration of the estate of the potter, Reece Derrick. Richard Yeamans employed the potter Thomas Jones of Westbury and according to an inventory of Jones's goods dated 11 November 1718, owed him £2 9s. 0d. for his service. Richard was described as a potter 'late of Westbury-on-Trym' in the inventory of his own estate, valued at £41 13s. 11d., prepared on 15 August 1732.<sup>28</sup> The inventory did not list any tools of his trade.

Between 1719 and 1748 a Sampson Yeamans was paying poor rates on three properties in Westbury including his own premises and land described as 'Tophill' and 'The Butts'.<sup>29</sup> This was probably the older Sampson Yeamans who described himself as a potter of Westbury in his will dated 24 October 1746.<sup>30</sup> He left his wife Hester, son Sampson, daughter Elizabeth and other relatives his land at Filton, six tenements, other unspecified land and a tenement, kiln, shop, outhouses, garden and orchard then occupied by his son. He died on 26 October 1747 at the age of 71 and was buried in the north aisle of the parish church beneath a family monument on which he was described as a yeoman rather than a potter.<sup>31</sup> Burial within the church together with the provision of a monument suggests the family were of some wealth and status. By 1749 Sampson's widow, Hester, had started paying rates on the Westbury properties.<sup>32</sup>

Sampson's son, the younger Sampson Yeamans, was recorded as a potter of Westbury on 18 April 1732 when he was granted a licence to marry Ann Skuse of Westbury.<sup>33</sup> The marriage took place in St. James's church, Bristol, on 27 April.<sup>34</sup> Either Sampson the father or son served as an overseer of the poor for Westbury tithing in 1732.<sup>35</sup> Ann Yeamans died in 1751 and Sampson junior died on 24 August 1756, being buried with his wife and father in the family tomb in the parish church.<sup>36</sup> It seems that the younger Sampson must have remarried as on 4 September 1757 'appeared personally Hannah Yeamans of the parish of Henbury ... and made oath that she is the widow of Sampson Yeamans late of the same parish, potter, deceased ...'.<sup>37</sup>

It is possible that the Yeamans family were related to the brothers and baronets John and Robert Yeamans, the latter of whom lived nearby at Redland in the late 17th century. John, the elder brother, settled in Barbados, a suggestion that he was involved in Bristol's sugar trade which may be significant given that local pottery production supplied the city's sugar refining industry.<sup>38</sup>

#### *Other Early Potters*

Other potters who are mentioned in documents as working in Westbury during the late 17th and early 18th centuries may have been employees of the Yeamans family. Both Samuel and Richard Yeamans employed the potter Thomas Jones as the 1718 inventory showed that they owed him wages.

The earliest evidence of a pottery in Westbury is from 7 January 1691 when Ralph Eaton, a potter living there, was granted a licence to marry the widow Anna Williams, also of Westbury.<sup>39</sup> On 22 October 1715 he was again referred to as a potter of Westbury when his son was apprenticed to the Bristol potter, Mary Orchard.<sup>40</sup> Recorded as paying the parish poor rate in 1719,<sup>41</sup> Ralph was buried at Westbury on 3 October 1721.<sup>42</sup>

Another Westbury potter was Thomas Jones, who as mentioned above was in the employ of Richard and Samuel Yeamans. At the time of his death in 1718 they owed him wages of £3 12s. 0d. The only possessions in the inventory of his goods were clothes valued at £4.<sup>43</sup>

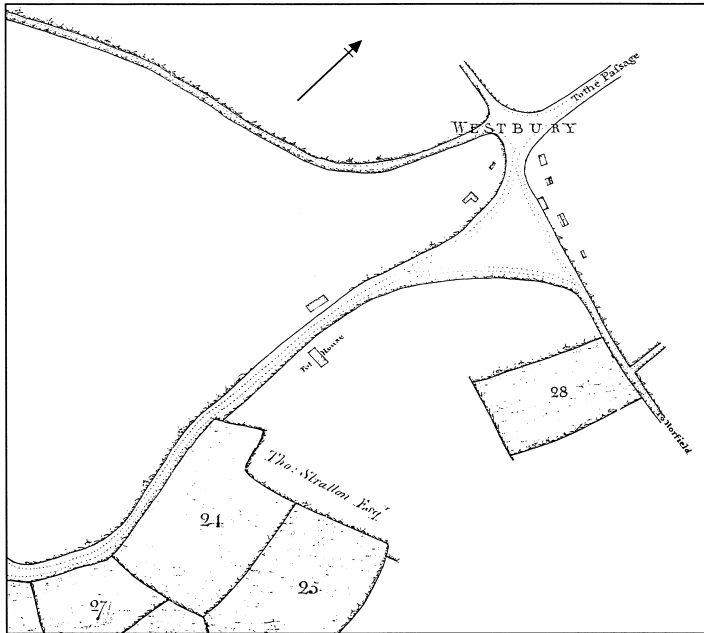


Fig. 2. Early 19th-century map (Bristol Record Office, 32690[47]) showing the location of the 'Pot House' known as the Burfield or Sugar House pottery.

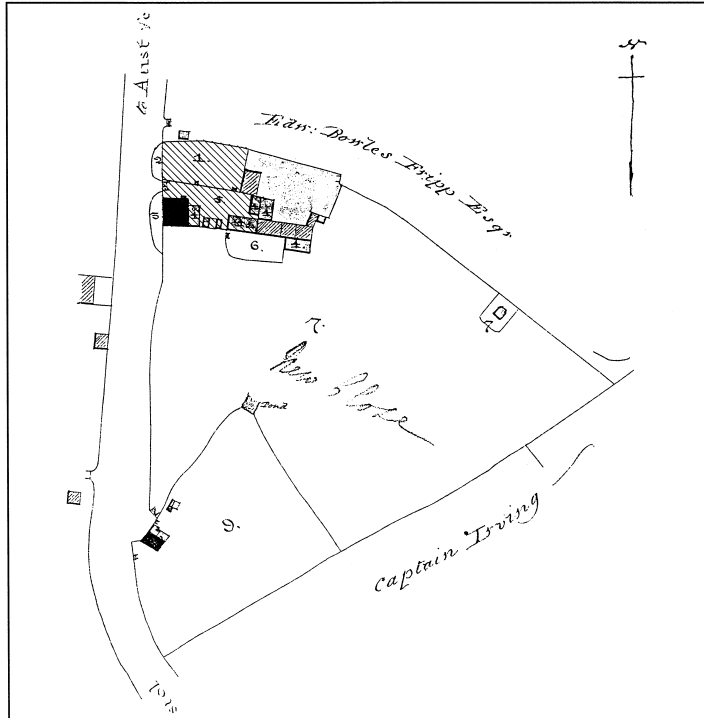


Fig. 3. Map of 1829 (Bristol Record Office, 21782, box 17, bundle 6) showing the location east of the Bristol-Aust road of the Burfield or Sugar House pottery.

On 21 August 1723 the Westbury potter Reece Derrick stood surety for the appearance of his wife, Elizabeth, at the next session of the Bristol tolzey court.<sup>44</sup> Reece was buried at Westbury on 7 April 1728<sup>45</sup> and afterwards his family received poor relief from the parish.<sup>46</sup> On 28 July 1730 his widow, Elizabeth, was required to make an inventory of his property, with the potters John and Robert Yeamans providing surety.<sup>47</sup>

Stephen Boyce, another Westbury potter, was granted a licence to marry Martha Peirce of Henbury on 30 October 1732.<sup>48</sup> The marriage took place at Henbury church the following day.<sup>49</sup>

In 1732 Henry Albright, a Westbury potter, married Elizabeth Morley at St. John's church, Bedminster.<sup>50</sup> On 21 October 1746 it was probably the same Henry Albright, then described as a potter of Bristol, who made his will leaving his wife Elizabeth 'all ... my messuage and tenement wherein I now live together with the garden, workhouses and all appurtenances thereunto belonging ...'.<sup>51</sup>

### *The Burfield or Sugar House Pottery*

#### *Daniel Saunders*

On 5 February 1742 the Bristol merchant Samuel Jacob made his will. He left his nephew Christopher Twynihoe his property at Cote in Westbury with the rent 'settled for the ground called Burfield on which is a pottwork erected as by articles between Daniel Saunders and myself'.<sup>52</sup> Both Jacob and Twynihoe are commemorated with Daniel's wife Elizabeth on a monument in the nave of Westbury church<sup>53</sup> and it seems possible that Elizabeth was Samuel Jacob's daughter, although Daniel was described in the will simply as Samuel's 'beloved friend'. Daniel was the son of William Saunders of Cote House and later inherited the Cote estate.<sup>54</sup>

Daniel Saunders had a number of business interests besides the pottery and was variously described as a merchant, potter, dealer and chapman.<sup>55</sup> By 1749 he was paying the poor rate on a dock at Sea Mills on the River Avon in Westbury parish,<sup>56</sup> where he owned other property.<sup>57</sup> Established in 1712 by Joshua Francklyn the dock was only the third wet dock to be constructed in Britain and was run by the Sea Mills Dock Company of which Saunders was a shareholder. The dock was never popular with Bristol merchants and fell into disuse after 1766.<sup>58</sup> This probably contributed to Saunders' financial difficulties for on 13 October 1769 he mortgaged various properties including

all that pasture ground called Burfield containing by estimation 8 acres ... lying over against the White Horse Inn bounded with the highway leading from Bristol to Westbury ... on the west side and certain grounds then or then late of Jonathan New on the east side thereof. And also all that messuage, tenement or pot house with its appurtenances then lately erected and built on some part of the said ground called Burfield, together with the several messuages or tenements and other buildings also then lately erected & built adjoining or near adjoining and belonging to and occupied with the said potohouse with the appurtenances.<sup>59</sup>

The mortgaging of these properties did not solve Saunders' financial problems and by 24 September 1770 he had been declared bankrupt. In the advertisement of bankruptcy he was described as a merchant and potter of Cote.<sup>60</sup> On 21 August 1772 Stephen Penny, an accountant who had been appointed to administer Saunders' affairs, sold the pottery at Burfield to George Hart for £1,000.<sup>61</sup>

Three other potters, Abraham Corp, James Corp and John Roberts, were working in Westbury during Saunders' ownership of the Burfield pottery. They were presumably his employees. Abraham Corp was described as a potter when he married Ann Knowlston on 2 July 1754<sup>62</sup> and Martha Evans on 4 February 1765.<sup>63</sup> James Corp was possibly the son of James and Hester Corp baptised on 2 January 1739.<sup>64</sup> He was recorded as a potter when he married Diana Rogers on 20

February 1756<sup>65</sup> and four of their children were baptised in Westbury parish between 1757 and 1762.<sup>66</sup> On 15 April 1762 possibly the same James Corp, a potter, married Mary Colihall.<sup>67</sup> John Roberts was described as a potter of Westbury when his son William was apprenticed to a Bristol joiner on 14 June 1756.<sup>68</sup>

#### *George Hart*

On 3 April 1773 the new owner of the Burfield pottery, George Hart, placed an advertisement in a Bristol journal begging leave

to inform his friends and the public that besides sugar pots and moulds he makes all sorts of useful and ornamental chimney pots, so much approv'd of and esteemed for their singular qualifications for curing smoaky chimneys, which has its desired affect after every other method has been tried. Likewise all kinds of useful and ornamental garden pots. The chimney and garden pots are made of so peculiar a sort of clay that they are warranted to stand the severity of the frost and weather without scaling off or losing any of their useful ornaments.<sup>69</sup>

In July 1773 William Plant, who owned a china, glass and Staffordshire warehouse in Wine Street, Bristol, advertised that he was the sole retailer in the city of 'all sorts of garden pots, useful and ornamental from Mr. Hart's manufactory at Westbury'.<sup>70</sup>

In addition to Hart's local trade it is known that he exported 900 pieces of earthenware to Dublin on 10 July 1773 and 2,500 pieces of earthenware to the same destination on 15 June 1774.<sup>71</sup> These shipments probably represent only a small part of his overseas trade as it was usual in port records to list export goods under the name of the merchant who put together a cargo rather than that of the manufacturer. Occasionally, as here, manufacturers arranged shipment of their own goods.

The pottery must have been financially successful as by 1776 Hart had built a house called Burfield in Westbury, which 'had a coach-house, stable and every conveniency for a gentleman's family' together with 21 acres of land including the Clay Field.<sup>72</sup> By 1780 Hart had moved to Blandford Forum in Dorset where he had taken over the Greyhound inn.<sup>73</sup>

#### *Stephen Fricker*

In September 1775 Hart had leased the pottery to Stephen Fricker who, since 1773, had been the owner of the Fountain Tavern in Bristol's High Street.<sup>74</sup> On 16 December 1775 Fricker advertised that he had taken over the Sugar House pottery from George Hart, who had retired from business, and that, in addition to sugar moulds, he was producing chimney, garden and flower pots.<sup>75</sup> In January 1778 Stephen Fricker was living in Burfield house as a tenant when George Hart sold it to John Trehawke of Liskeard in Cornwall for £2,400, the property then being described as 'two messuages, two pothouses, one stable, two gardens, four acres of land, four acres of meadow, twenty acres of pasture and common pasture for all manner of cattle'.<sup>76</sup>

Fricker had four daughters, two of whom married eminent literary figures of the day. Sarah married Samuel Taylor Coleridge at St. Mary Redcliffe in October 1795 and Edith married Robert Southey in the same church the following month.<sup>77</sup> However, by that time Fricker had died and the children were living with their mother, a school-mistress, on Redcliff Hill. Robert Southey's son wrote later that

at Bath ... Mr Coleridge first became acquainted with his future wife Sarah Fricker, the eldest of three [*sic*] sisters, one of whom was married to Robert Lovell, the other having been engaged for some time to my father. They were the daughters of Stephen Fricker, who had carried on a large manufactory of sugar pans or moulds at Westbury, near Bristol, and who having fallen into difficulties, in consequence of the stoppage of trade by the American war, had lately died, leaving his widow and six children wholly unprovided for.<sup>78</sup>



It seems that in common with many of his fellow manufacturers who exported to North America, Fricker had suffered serious financial difficulties as a result of the American War of Independence started in 1776. Research on the export of other products from Bristol has shown that trade to North America started declining in 1774, had entirely ceased by 1775 and did not resume, in a small way, until 1779.<sup>79</sup>

Two other potters, John Ifell and Samuel Rose, living in Westbury during Fricker's ownership of the Burfield pottery, were presumably his employees. On 4 October 1774 John Ifell became free to work as a potter in Bristol as a result of his marriage to Elizabeth, the daughter of the Bristol hooper, Samuel Harris.<sup>80</sup> The Parliamentary poll books of 1774 and 1784 list him as a potter in Westbury.<sup>81</sup> Samuel Rose was listed there as a potter in the poll book of 1781.<sup>82</sup>

### *The Yabbicom Family*

After Fricker found it necessary to vacate the pottery due to his financial problems the tenancy was taken over by Roger Yabbicom, although the precise date when this occurred is not known. Yabbicom and his wife Joan are first recorded in Westbury on 25 December 1755 when their son Henry was baptised in the parish church.<sup>83</sup> Joan died in June 1768,<sup>84</sup> and in May 1771 Roger, then described as a potter of SS. Philip and Jacob parish, Bristol, married Martha Marman, a widow of Westbury.<sup>85</sup> In the same year he was the tenant of the White Horse inn, which stood not far from Burfield (Fig. 1), and other land in Westbury owned by the Reverend Benjamin Hancock, and he continued paying rates on the properties until 1797.<sup>86</sup> On 3 April 1784 the Westbury churchwardens noted that they had received from 'Mr Roger Yabbicom & Son one years rent for the Claypits (late Stepn. Frickers)' so it is clear that the Yabbicom family had taken over the pottery by that date.<sup>87</sup> Certainly by 1788 the Yabbicoms were paying rates on the pottery.<sup>88</sup>

The son in the business was Henry who was described as a potter of Westbury in July 1783 when he married Sarah Bawn at Stoke Gifford.<sup>89</sup> They had at least four children: Mary and Henry were born in Westbury c.1785 and c.1786 respectively,<sup>90</sup> Edward was baptised at Westbury on 1 January 1794<sup>91</sup> and Thomas Bawn was apprenticed to the Bristol potter James Alsop on 2 August 1802.<sup>92</sup>

When Burfield house and the pottery were sold by its new owner John Trehawke to John Fitzhenry on 29 September 1792 the pottery was described as in the possession of Messrs. Yabbicom and Son. On 24 June 1794 Burfield was again sold, to John Morgan, and was described as a mansion house with a pothouse and pottery buildings, the pothouse being occupied by 'Messrs Yabbicom & Son'.<sup>93</sup>

During the late 18th and early 19th centuries Roger Yabbicom & Son held the tenancy of other properties in Westbury parish including Hart's former clay ground (sometimes also known as 'Clay Field'; Fig. 1)<sup>94</sup> In 1796 the Westbury churchwardens bought chimney pots from the Yabbicoms.<sup>95</sup> In 1795 Mathew's Bristol directory listed Yabbicom & Son's 'sugar, chimney and garden pot manufactory' at Westbury but by 1797 the firm had moved to Avon Street in the parish of SS. Philip and Jacob.<sup>96</sup> From 1797 the assessments for church rates in Westbury record the 'late Pothouse' owned by John Morgan.<sup>97</sup>

In SS. Philip and Jacob parish the Yabbicom family took over a pottery that had been established in the 1760s by Joseph Hill on land between Avon Street and the River Avon.<sup>98</sup> This had also manufactured sugar moulds, garden and chimney pots so it was already equipped for producing the wares in which they specialised.<sup>99</sup> In 1771 Roger Yabbicom had been described as a potter of SS. Philip and Jacob parish and as Hill's pottery was the only one operating in the parish at that time it seems likely that the Yabbicoms had a connection with the pottery before their move in 1797.<sup>100</sup>

The Yabbicoms continued manufacturing sugar moulds, chimney and garden pots until 1813 when *Mathews's Annual Bristol Directory* noted that they were producing 'crucibles and brown stone ware'. In 1814 they opened a second pottery in Bristol at Temple Back in Temple parish and in 1824 they closed the pottery in Avon Street and moved to new premises on the opposite side of the same street where they remained until 1840. Later they concentrated their business at the Temple Back pottery where the production of brown stone ware, water pipes, tiles and chimney pots continued until 1862.<sup>101</sup>

A poignant reminder of the Yabbicom family's association with Westbury is the survival of two gravestones in the churchyard. The inscriptions record the deaths of Roger Yabbicom on 12 March 1810, aged 79, and his wives Joan and Martha, on 13 June 1768 and 2 June 1783 aged 41 and 47 respectively.

### *Conclusion*

Pottery production in Westbury had probably started by 1691 when the potter Ralph Eaton lived in the parish. It is possible that a pottery had been established there long before that date but that no documentary record of it exists or has yet to be found. The Yeamans were the leading family of potters in Westbury during the last decade of the 17th century until the 1750s. The two Sampson Yeamans certainly owned a pottery in the parish and it probably continued in production until the death of the younger Sampson Yeamans in 1756.

The Burfield or Sugar House pottery was established by 1742 and was located to the east of what is now Westbury Road. It was owned by Daniel Saunders and George Hart and then operated by Stephen Fricker and the Yabbicom family as tenants until the Yabbicoms moved their business to Avon Street in Bristol between 1795 and 1797. This marked the end of pottery production in Westbury. In common with a number of other potteries operating in the Bristol area during the 18th century, the output of the Burfield pottery seems to have consisted entirely of utilitarian earthenware including sugar moulds, chimney-pots, flower-pots and kitchen vessels. While it mainly served a relatively local market there is evidence that pottery was traded at least as far as Ireland.

### *Acknowledgements*

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