

Tools needed * pair of pliers (long-nosed work best but any will do)
* hand lens (if you have one)

Bibliography/Helpful terms

Burnished: the surface of the pit appears polished.

Ceramic building material (CBM): This term covers brick and roof/floor tiles that are made from clay and fired in a kiln.

Sherd: the term for a fragment of pottery.

Fabric: the composition of the material used to make the pot. This varies according to the source of the clay. Each production centre used clay from a different (usually very local) source.

Form: the shape of a pot. Common types include 'cooking pots' or jars, storage jars, pitchers, bowls, and drinking vessels like cups and tankards.

Fracture: how the ceramic breaks, e.g. hackly – jagged/uneven, conchoidal – curved, often in concentric lines.

Glaze: A hard, glassy coating on the surface of the ceramic. Added as a layer before firing.

Inclusions: non-clay materials within the pot fabric.

Temper: coarse material, e.g. fragments of stone or shell, added to the pot to make it easier to fire.

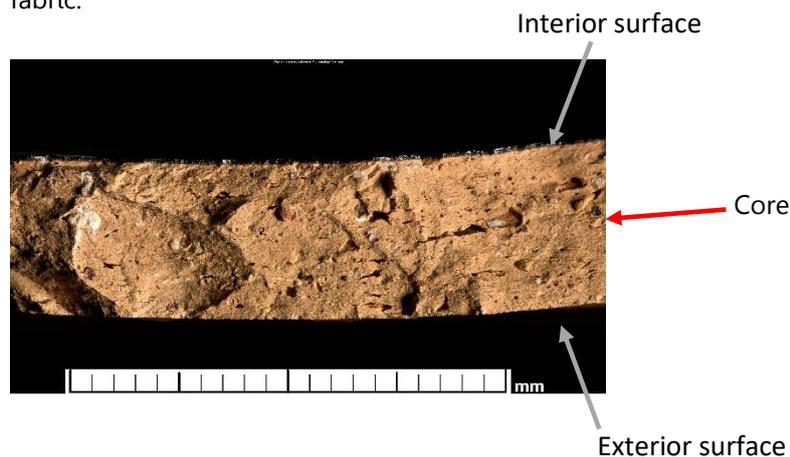
Ware: In the post-medieval and modern periods, fabrics become a lot more homogenous, and the local variations are harder to spot (at least visually). The styles and traditions of potting become more useful than the fabric for identifying the pottery.

Other useful terms/information is available at www.worcestershireceramics.org

Identifying your sherd

Take your clean sherd and nip a small piece off with the pliers. Then have a look at the fresh/clean 'surface' you have created at the edge of the sherd.

Is the sherd all one colour across its width, or are there two distinct colours, or does it have more the appearance of a sandwich? Noting the various colours of the sherd will help to identify the pottery fabric.



When using Worcestershire's Online Fabric Database <https://www.worcestershireceramics.org/> it is possible to search the fabric series using the colours of the features shown in fig 1 – the core and the surfaces.

The sherd pictured above clearly has an orange core but, in this picture, it is difficult to see the interior surface and impossible to see the exterior surface. It should be possible with the sherd you are trying

Worcestershire online fabric series help sheet

to identify to see both of these things but here are two further pictures of this sherd just to give the information needed for this practice exercise.



NB. Sometimes it will be difficult to tell which surface is the interior or exterior of the sherd but don't worry too much at this stage – work with what you know first. The colour of the core is a good place to start.

The main page of Ceramics Online has various **drop-down menus** and five **boxes** at the bottom.



Clicking on the Pottery Fabrics box brings you to the full list of fabrics starting from fabric 1 (see below), which can be a little daunting, so using the Advanced Search facility may be a better start-point.

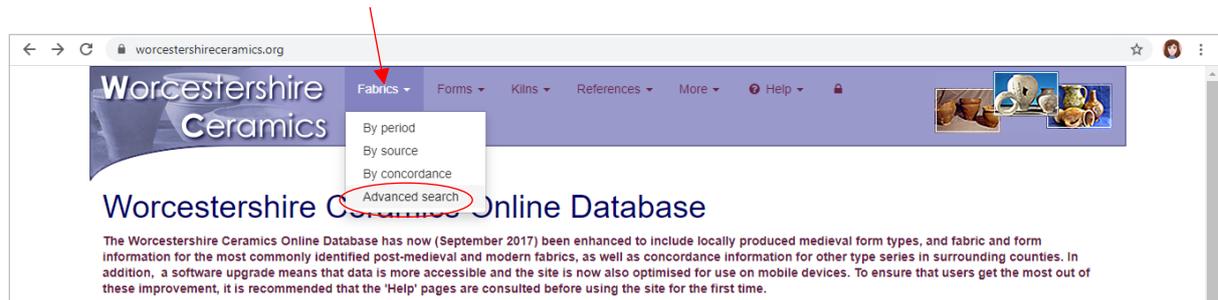
(NB Clicking on the 'Fabrics' drop-down menu can also bring you here if you click on 'by period')

Fabric no.	Fabric name	Dates
> 1	Sandy Droilwich briquetage	Iron Age to Roman (7th century BC to 1st century AD)
> 2	Organic Droilwich briquetage	Iron Age to Roman (7th century BC to 1st century AD)
> 3	Handmade Malvernian ware (Peacock Group A)	Iron Age to Roman (5th century BC to 1st century AD)
> 3.1	Handmade slab-built Malvernian ware	Roman (3rd to 4th century)
> 3.2	Handmade Malvernian tubby cooking pot	Iron Age to Roman (1st century AD to 2nd century AD)
> 4.1	Palaeozoic limestone tempered ware (Peacock Group B1)	Iron Age to Roman (5th century BC to 2nd century AD)
> 4.2	Colitic limestone tempered ware (Peacock Group B2)	Iron Age (c.400 BC to 100 BC)
> 4.3	Fossil shell tempered ware	Iron Age (c.600 BC to 100 BC)
> 4.4	Shell and sand tempered ware	Iron Age (c.400 BC to 100 BC)
> 4.5	Colitic limestone and shell tempered ware	Iron Age (c.400 BC to 100 BC)
> 4.6	Colitic limestone and sand tempered ware	Iron Age (c.400 BC to 100 BC)
> 4.7	Fossil shell and grog tempered ware	Bronze Age (c.1000 BC to 800 BC)
> 4.8	Malvernian shelly limestone tempered ware	Bronze Age (2350 BC to 800 BC)

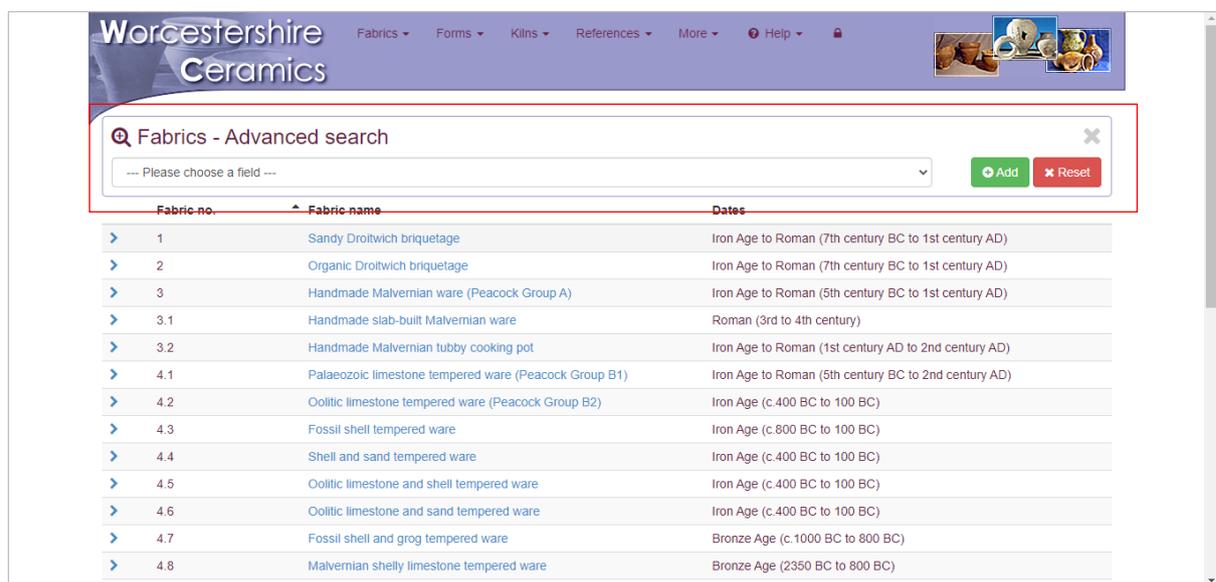
Worcestershire online fabric series help sheet

Advanced Search

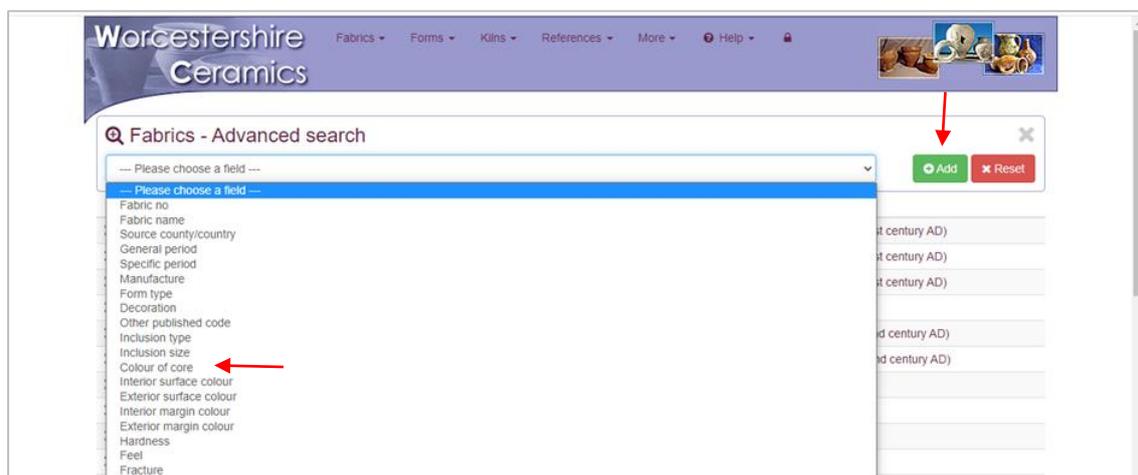
Click on the Fabrics drop-down menu and then click on Advanced Search.



The Advanced Search box will appear above the list of fabrics.

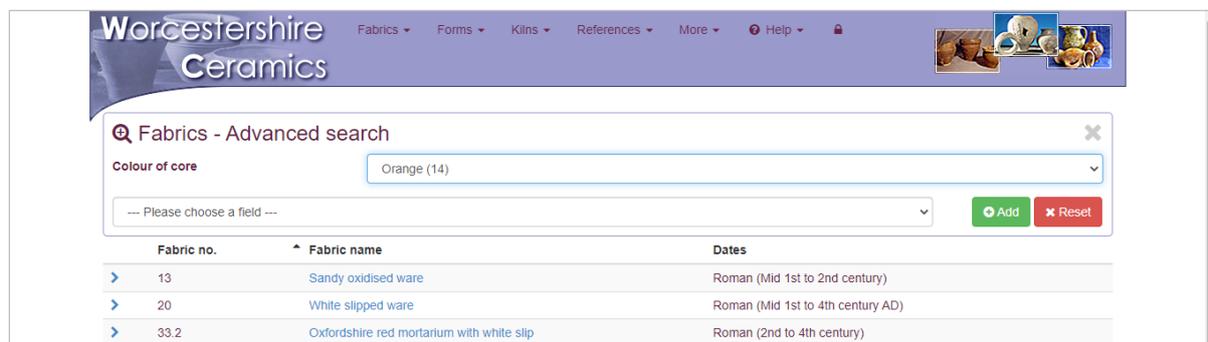


Clicking inside the Advanced Search box will bring up a list of possible search terms. It is best to start with the most obvious features that you can see in your sherd, e.g. core colour. Click on '**Colour of Core**' and then the green '**Add**' button.



Worcestershire online fabric series help sheet

Another search box will appear below the top one (which is now designated '**Colour of Core**') but ignore that for now and click inside the top box. This will produce a list of colours – click on the one that most closely matches the core colour of your sherd (for this example it is '**orange**').



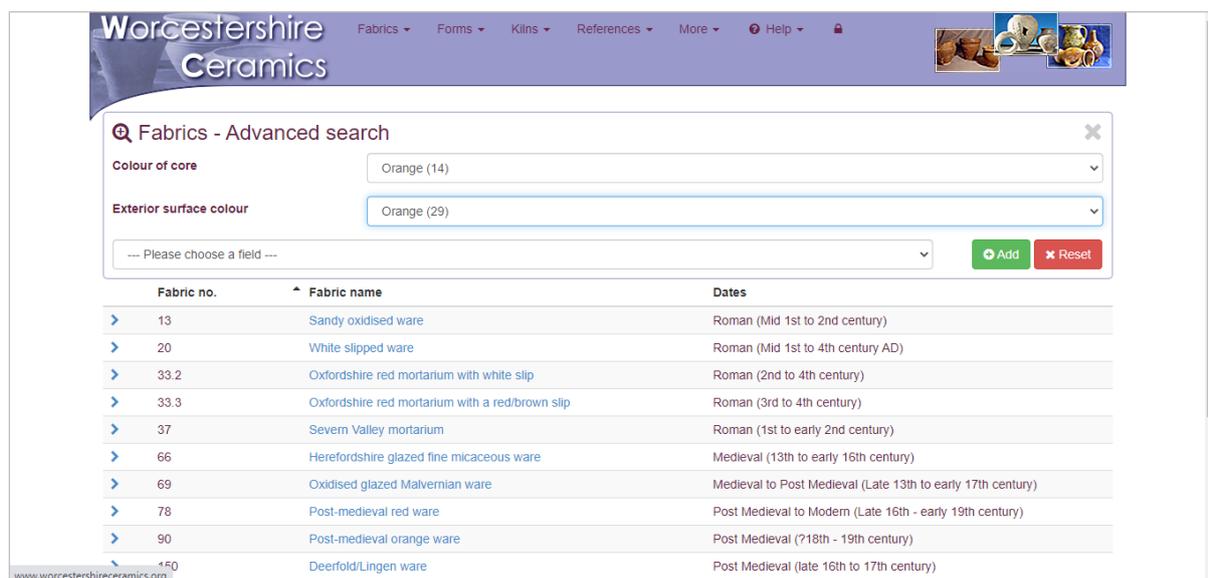
The screenshot shows the 'Worcestershire Ceramics' website with a navigation menu (Fabrics, Forms, Kilns, References, More, Help) and a search bar. The search bar is titled 'Fabrics - Advanced search' and has a search icon and a close button. Below the search bar, there are two search boxes. The first is labeled 'Colour of core' and has 'Orange (14)' selected. The second is labeled '--- Please choose a field ---'. There are 'Add' and 'Reset' buttons. Below the search boxes is a table of results.

Fabric no.	Fabric name	Dates
> 13	Sandy oxidised ware	Roman (Mid 1st to 2nd century)
> 20	White slipped ware	Roman (Mid 1st to 4th century AD)
> 33.2	Oxfordshire red mortarium with white slip	Roman (2nd to 4th century)

The list of fabrics that have an orange core are now listed below the search boxes. You can see there are 14, so it needs to be narrowed down if possible! Adding another search term should help, and in this case, we can say that the exterior surface is much the same colour as the core – orange.

Again, click on '**Please choose a field**' and from the drop-down list choose '**Exterior surface colour**', then click the green **Add** button. The second box becomes designated 'Exterior surface colour' and a third search box appears.

Select '**orange**' in the second search box using the drop-down list as before.



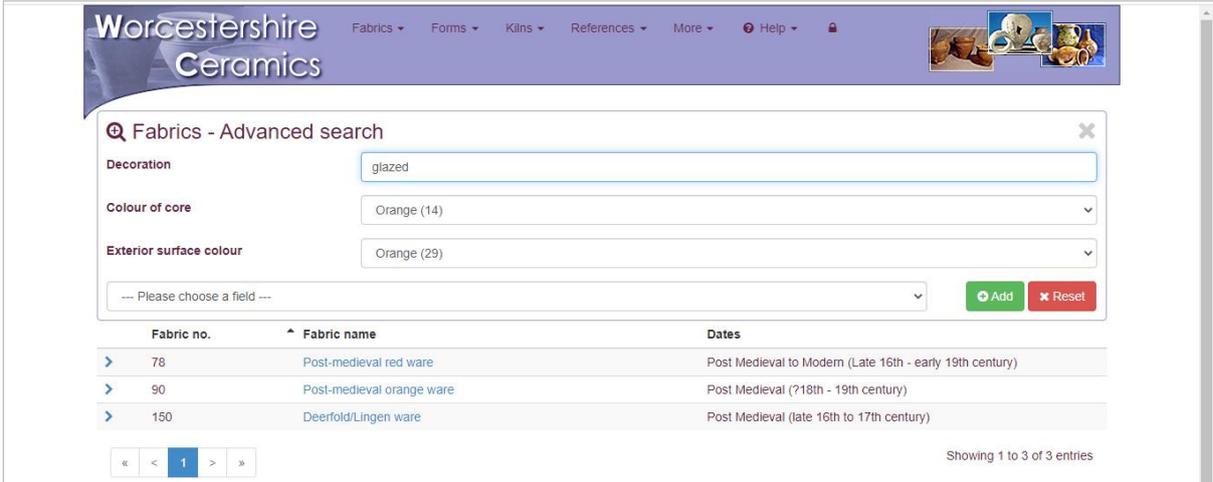
The screenshot shows the 'Worcestershire Ceramics' website with the same navigation menu. The search bar is titled 'Fabrics - Advanced search'. Below the search bar, there are two search boxes. The first is labeled 'Colour of core' and has 'Orange (14)' selected. The second is labeled 'Exterior surface colour' and has 'Orange (29)' selected. There are 'Add' and 'Reset' buttons. Below the search boxes is a table of results.

Fabric no.	Fabric name	Dates
> 13	Sandy oxidised ware	Roman (Mid 1st to 2nd century)
> 20	White slipped ware	Roman (Mid 1st to 4th century AD)
> 33.2	Oxfordshire red mortarium with white slip	Roman (2nd to 4th century)
> 33.3	Oxfordshire red mortarium with a red/brown slip	Roman (3rd to 4th century)
> 37	Severn Valley mortarium	Roman (1st to early 2nd century)
> 66	Herefordshire glazed fine micaceous ware	Medieval (13th to early 16th century)
> 69	Oxidised glazed Malvernian ware	Medieval to Post Medieval (Late 13th to early 17th century)
> 78	Post-medieval red ware	Post Medieval to Modern (Late 16th - early 19th century)
> 90	Post-medieval orange ware	Post Medieval (?18th - 19th century)
> 150	Deerfold/Lingen ware	Post Medieval (late 16th to 17th century)

This reduces the number of possible fabrics a little but adding another search term may provide a more definitive result.

The third picture of the fabric we are trying to identify shows that a dark or black glaze is present. Adding '**Decoration**' as a third search term and typing '**glazed**' into the box narrows the possible fabrics to three.

Worcestershire online fabric series help sheet



The screenshot shows the 'Worcestershire Ceramics' website's advanced search interface. The search results are as follows:

Fabric no.	Fabric name	Dates
> 78	Post-medieval red ware	Post Medieval to Modern (Late 16th - early 19th century)
> 90	Post-medieval orange ware	Post Medieval (?18th - 19th century)
> 150	Deerfold/Lingen ware	Post Medieval (late 16th to 17th century)

Navigation: < 1 > »

Showing 1 to 3 of 3 entries

From here it is possible to look at each of the three suggestions and see which is the most likely to be the correct one. Clicking on the (blue) fabric name takes you to the more detailed fabric description and, usually, some example pictures. Match the picture/s to your sherd and see if the description matches well or not. If it does then you may well have correctly identified your sherd!