



Roman kiln is a roaring success



Hot stuff: The replica kiln was stoked only with local wood and reached over 1,000 degrees before being sealed. Crowds later gathered in Highgate Wood to see the pots being unloaded. Photos Lucinda Costello @lucindacostellostudio

By Lucinda Costello

At noon on Monday 22 September, crowds from East Finchley, Highgate and surrounding areas gathered beside the cricket pitch in Highgate Wood for a first glimpse of pots fired in the replica Roman kiln there two weeks earlier.

The moment of truth came as the kiln roof was broken open to reveal the Firing London's Imagination project's most successful firing to date. Full reduction – when fire consumes all oxygen inside a kiln, including that contained within the clay – had been achieved, resulting in pots that gave the impression of being made from pewter.

This was the outcome Roman potters accomplished as they worked close to this same site from 50-160AD, making their distinctive Highgate Ware, prized in Roman London.

Fired in clay

Back in the summer months, potters from Turning Earth pottery studio made more than 300 vessels, alongside a parade of weird and wonderful clay beasts made by local children on a Heritage Day in early September.

All used the characteristic wild clay that runs through Highgate Wood and probably Cherry Tree Wood too, since they were once joined as one woodland. The ten original Roman kilns were unearthed between 1966 and 1974, located

to take advantage of the characteristic high-quality clay, wood fuel, water and proximity to Londinium's markets.

This third firing of the replica kiln was skillfully supervised by Shem Morgan, Turning Earth's studio manager, and dedicated volunteers including Nick Peacey MBE, who was involved in the first replica firings in the 1970s. The project, now known as Firing London's Imagination, is a collaboration between Friends of Highgate Roman Kiln and the City of London, supported by the

National Lottery Heritage Fund.



Roman-style pots are carefully loaded into the kiln

Shem and Nick agreed: "The firing has exceeded our expectations in terms of beauty of finish achieved on this year's pots. Months of planning and hard work, cleaning the raw clay, plus a long, hot day loading the kiln with wood to reach over 1,000°C... it was all worth it. The project inspires local people and really brings the connection with our Roman past to life. Huge thanks to all those involved."

All are welcome on Roman pottery workshops in 2026 at www.turningearth.org and to find out more see firinglondon-simagination.com

Firing London's Imagination is a partnership between City of London Corporation, the custodians of Highgate Wood, Bruce Castle Museum and Friends of Highgate Roman Kiln, supported by the National Lottery Heritage Fund.



Supervisor Shem checks the kiln temperature on firing day



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