

# DACORUM AND CHILTERN POTTERS' GUILD.

## NEWSLETTER NO.5.

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### PROGRESS REPORT.

The various committees and sub-committees have been meeting and have reached some agreements about the better running of the Guild. More about these later. Your committees are active throughout the summer. In the mean-time, more people are needed to help with the Programme and Survey sub-committees. (Survey of Pottery and Potters in the area!) If you think you can help, please contact the secretary.

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### CALENDAR.

Saturday 27th. September. Raku Firing. At Ray Phipps, 23, Hall Park, Berkhamstead. (Map in next issue.) Kiln building starts at 3pm. Kiln firing at 5pm. Reaching temperature at 7pm. (hopefully.)

Friday 10th. October. Annual General Meeting.

Wednesday 22nd. October. Toolmaking. A lecture with discussion and exchange of information. More about this Newsletter No.6.

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### SPECIAL EVENTS.

Sunday 10th. August. Brickmaking and Flower-pot making. Exhibition and demonstration, at Pitstone Museum. The museum is at Pitstone Green Farm and will be open from 11am. to 5pm. on the day.

5th. - 31st. August. Kimpton Craft and Art Centre. Woodcraft Past and Present. An exhibition of traditional tools and workmanship as part of a general display.

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### STOP PRESS.

About 100 people turned up at Mary Anns for the Garden Party. Food and wine seems to attract more people to meetings than matters appertaining to pottery do! We were entertained by the French folk singer Jacques and member folk singer Maureen. Members met members they had not met before and fraternity of the Guild was further established.

M.F.



## **eds' bit.....**

You may have noticed, by both the address on the front page and from the diabolical typing, that you have a new EDitor. At last I have cracked, after being coaxed, persuaded and finally forced into resuming the responsibilities which Rick Graves and Gilly Peel bore so admirably. I am sure you will join me in wishing them every success in their new venture and thanking them for all the work that they have done for the Guild.

Nominations are now required for the election of committee members. Please see enclosed form. Election will be by postal ballot. A ballot paper will be sent to you at a later date.

For the next meeting and indeed, all future meetings could members make up a lapel card with their name on. I for one am a terror when it comes to remembering names---and I know I'm not the only one.

Are you happy with the Guilds' achievement/activity over the past year? Whether your answer is yes or no, it is important that YOU attend the....

## **annual general meeting**

...which will be held in the St. Albans area on 10th. October. MAKE SURE THIS DATE GOES IN YOUR DIARY.

It was agreed at the last committee meeting to raise the subscription rate from £1 to £2 p.a. This will take effect immediately. A sober note to end on but perhaps you may think the increase is justified if you pause to reflect that the postage on this newsletter alone will amount to some £14.

Happy Potting

ED.

## **painters' and craftsmen's.....**

The Painters and Craftsmen's Exhibition at Amersham Town Hall in May, was most interesting, exhibiting, as it did, the work of two of our own members (Pam MacNab and Sally Marks) among that of a group of friends whose specialisms ranged from fabric design to painting.

There was no theme to the show and consequently it covered an enormous variety of ideas. Some of the pots were really new in concept and several seemed to suggest that there is no excuse for us ever to run completely out of ideas. The batiks were of a very high quality, combining energy and liveliness with a certain dexterity in the eyes of the owls, cranes and rhinoceri which were their main subjects. Stuart Green does nice drawings of racing-cars (a bit B&H but they'd go on any wall in clusters) and Noel Gregory paints large country scenes of considerable detail.

The impression given by the exhibition is that the Arts and Crafts are both alive and well and thriving in Buckinghamshire. It would be nice to launch a similar venture within the Guild.

R.G.



## **Barrie musgrave, mashiko.**

In Newsletter NO. 4 the Stop Press Last Minute event announced that on Sat. 31st. May there would be an informal party/workshop at the "Node Dairy", Codicote at which Barrie Musgrave would demonstrate some of his Japanese skills and some slides from his eight years in Korea and Japan. This was all I needed to persuade me to drive back south from Derby as I felt I couldn't bear to miss this unique opportunity. Kate Lawrence welcomed us and catered for a tea-break during the afternoon in this ideal setting (on a lovely summer afternoon.)

Shibui is a Japanese word which denotes such meanings as 'quiet, restrained, good taste, subdued and cultivated' all of which was transmitted to us through Barrie's presence. The word describes the Japanese ideal of true beauty -- austerity, nobility, warmth, certitude and unpretentiousness combined. Barrie's slides showing the throwing processes of teapots and bowls, of traditional methods of decorating using brushed slip and oxides, or slip trailed with the swift movements of a wooden spoon and of huge drums of three basic glazes made from felspar, local building stone roughly-ground and rice husk ash, built into us an awareness of "Shibui."

There were wonderful glimpses inside the stacked chambers both before and after the firing of the many-chambered climbing kilns. The biscuit firing involved a skillful stacking procedure which enabled the large quantities of ware to be packed closely and safely. The kilns were carefully regulated by constant attention throughout the firing, which alternated between reduction and oxidation, each chamber being fed separately in sequence.

Mashiko is the small potter's town where Bernard Leach worked with Shoji Hamada and where most of the requirements of the village are obtained through local craftsmen. There in childhood, a natural process of rehearsal and growth through experience is constant. Small boys will take part, as a matter of course, in making half the things used by the villagers with the consequence that they grow up knowing intimately the very nature of the materials used. In "A Potters Book" Bernard Leach quotes Soyetsu Yanagi as saying that craftsmen today need to recover a state where there is no strain between intuition, reason and action.

Barrie was asked if he brought anything back with him and simply answered that it was difficult enough to get his body back home. After such an experience this is all he needs! He fashioned his own bamboo tools of which some were made on his journey from Kings Cross, where he hopes to set up a temporary studio. His talk gave us an insight into the freedom and vitality which comes from working barefoot at a Japanese wheel in all weathers, with the inevitable flower arrangement provided for one's contemplation. The occasion was a very rewarding experience, though some felt that it was spoilt by the poor attendance. (Only a couple of dozen people.)

H.H.



The first meeting of the next session will be a Raku firing.....

Raku may be described as a process for making pottery. The ware is usually of a soft nature--this being determined by the clay, glaze and treatment. The clay body used needs to be fairly open in structure to withstand the thermal shocks it will receive in the course of the firing. Crank mixture, 'T' material or any stoneware body with about 20% grog could be used. The pottery forms made are biscuit fired in the normal way. A high biscuit seems to reduce the risk of pots breaking in the Raku firing. I prefer a low biscuit as the clay stays porous and will readily accept a good, thick coat of glaze.

There is no real size limitation on pots. Obviously they must fit in the firing chamber. Generally the smaller things are the greater chance there is of them being fired. Ideally your work should be biscuit fired and glazed before the firing.

Typical Raku glazes.

1/ 85 Podmores T.Frit.  
15 Whiting  
10 Ball Clay

2/ 82.5 Lead Mono.  
17.5 Ball Clay.

In 1/. Oxides produce the following results. Copper 2-3% Turquoise. Cobalt up to 5% Blue. Manganese 1-2% Purple. Cobalt more than 25% Blue/Purple. Tin Oxide 4% white.

In 2/. Copper oxides 2-3% greens. Iron Oxide 2-8% cream/amber. Reduction on both of the above produce lustres.

After biscuit firing and glazing the pots are placed (using tongs), directly in the red-hot kiln and left until the glaze is seen to melt (usually between five and twenty minutes). The pot is then withdrawn, reduced if desired, and then supercooled.

RAKU IS AN EXCITING PROCESS AND THE FIRING IS FULL OF DRAMA. YOU DO NOT NEED TO BE AN EXPERT TO COME ALONG AND ENJOY YOURSELF. INDEED, THIS IS SOMETHING THE KIDS SHOULD SEE. LETS HOPE WE SEE LOTS OF PARTICIPANTS ON 27TH. SEPTEMBER.

ED.

Arrangements are being made by your programme committee for a meeting/discussion on the subject of toolmaking. The venue will be in the Watford area and it is hoped that we will have a guest speaker. Have we an expert in this particular field? Do you make your own tools? We should like to know your preferences on this subject. What do you pay? Many of us have that favourite piece of bamboo or school ruler which does 1001 jobs. Finally brethren sources. Do you know of a good supplier? Bamboo, stainless steel or whatever. Provisional date is 22nd. October.

ED.

Introduce a new member to the Guild.

Name.....

Address.....

Postcode.....

To. Murray Fieldhouse,  
Northfield Studio,  
Pitstone Hill,  
Tring,  
Herts.

I enclose remittance of £2.



## **rickmansworth critique**

Pink notices distributed like confetti were successful in bringing a large audience to the June 19th. Critique, held at the Cloisters Hall, Rickmansworth. Members had been invited to bring along their pots for criticism and the two tables set aside for these were laden. Another table was made available for the overspill. Here was a magnificent example of the talent within the Guild and a good deal of enthusiasm was expressed among members before Murray introduced the panelists, Pan Henry, Bill Ismay and Derek Hass. Pieces were selected by Murray and a wide variety of stoneware, earthenware and raku soon accumulated on the table before the panel. Out of the criticism came a little audience participation and Murray did well at attempting to bring out a lot more but panel and members seemed a little apprehensive at times, maybe this could have been changed had the meeting been a little less formal and pots had been passed from hand to hand for discussion. One of the highlights of the evening was having the opportunity of seeing the traditional Nigerian pots, the work of Asibi Ido brought over to this country by Derek Tattersall. Derek carries a great deal of knowledge about Nigerian pottery and keen interest was shown in these exhibits. Derek Hass was most interested in these pieces.

Teapots and their spouting ability raised a good deal of criticism from Pan since she is a collector of teapots. Bill finds a high spout practical for pouring and went on to describe to us some of his own collection in Yorkshire.

John Chappell's colander (salt glazed) a piece of tremendous strength led Murray into relaying to the assembled company the story of one man's single-mindedness to pottery, digging his own clay on Berkhamstead Common and working there on very little capital (£2 was the figure Murray gave.) Not only did he de-salt pots in the bath, but when it was empty of pots it was used for salting pigs.

One of the last pots to be brought to the table was a coiled pot with a saucer-like lid made by June Waite which brought admiring comments from the panelists and the audience alike. Derek Hass wanted to buy it but June wasn't selling.

Bill Ismay then had to leave for Yorkshire and the critique was brought to a close. Many people lingered, talking about pots and admiring those which Pan Henry had brought down from her London gallery, whilst others went and lingered in the pub round the corner. This, of course, is a healthy tradition which ought to be kept alive, not only because it slakes the thirst, but also because we get to know each other over a glass much more easily, and this is really what the whole thing is for. Our thanks to the members of the panel for their interest in us and for travelling so far to demonstrate it, to all those who took the plunge (and their pots) and to the handful of people who worked extremely hard before, during and after the occasion in order to get the thing off the ground.

M.B.



## *roman project*

The Roman project was originally initiated by the desire to explore the possibilities of unglazed pottery, whilst taking advantage of local history and materials.

Excavations for building a Roman Kiln began on 27th. April, a Sunday afternoon. Wall Hall College kindly allowed us to find a suitable site in their backwoods. Participants came armed with suitable tools to clear the ground ivy and dig the foundation. This resembled a dumbbell - shaped hole, comprising of the stokehole, flue and chamber.

Our practical work was backed up by visits to Verulamium Museum and the monthly meetings where specialists in things Roman illuminated the way.

Although the original idea was to build two or three kilns, experimenting in, amongst other things, reduction, it became clear that time would allow one kiln only. We therefore decided to line the kiln with clay bricks, copying an advanced design by Roman standards, to ensure success as far as was possible.

Subsequent Sundays were spent chopping firewood and digging clay from Ley Hill where Mr. Finale of the Brickworks gave us all the clay we needed. Mr. Finale offered to give a brickmaking demonstration one afternoon. The bricks were simply made in moulds - the clay being mixed to a stiff consistency, he then took a lump or "dumpling", rolled it in sand, being careful not to get sand in the centre and threw it into a sand-ed wooden mould.

The three weekends prior to the firing date were somewhat frantic as the number of participants had dwindled and those left were kept busy making bricks and....chopping wood.

By 11am. Saturday, on the weekend of 28/29th June the building of the dome was well under way and people were arriving with their pots (the larger ones to be packed first). The bricks ran out near the top but both the flue and the dome were coated with a thick clay and sawdust mixture.

Firing began, as promised, at midday. It was a slow firing as the bricks were very wet. The whole dome steamed. The fire built up through the afternoon and evening, when a festive spirit caught on. In homage to the Romans, we wine and dined round a barbeque.

By midnight a faint glow could be seen inside the dome. The clay and sawdust covering proved very effective. Murray and Dorley Fieldhouse and June Waites family kept an all-night vigil. By breakfast time Sunday morning, the whole of the inside of the dome was a dull red. However, it seemed impossible to raise the temperature any higher. Whilst the stokers were worrying over their dilemma, Mr. Finale appeared and jumping into the stoke pit, he peered in up the firemouth. 'Block up the firemouth two tiles over the chimney', he declared. By 11am. a small flame appeared out of the top. There were cheers and the dome was adorned with a sprig of holly.

It was obviously much hotter at the bottom of the kiln than at the top (estimated at 1000 and 800 respectively.) The kiln was sealed and banked up with earth to allow the heat to disperse and left for a week to gradually cool down.



On Sunday afternoon, June 6th, we broke in through the top of the dome using a crowbar. Only one or two pots had cracked, the others had been successfully fired. Several people had used local clay, which they had dug and cleaned, to make their pots. Those at the bottom of the kiln had turned a metallic grey colour in reduction.

The kiln is basically intact and it is hoped that further firings will be done by any groups who are interested. It was generally felt that much had been learnt from the initial efforts which could be put to good use in any subsequent firings.. J.B.

## **appeals för help...**

### **Night Class (£3 per night 7.30 - 9pm.)**

A vacancy exists for someone to take a pottery class at the Compass Club of Bletchley Leisure, Milton Keynes. (contact Peter Payne, M.K. (94) 77251.) Large Kiln, Wengers Electric Wheel, well-established pottery room.

### **Nodes Dairy.**

A beautiful, but ramshackle two-storey building enclosing a large courtyard is going to waste at Codicote, Nr. Hitchin. Helpers (in particular skilled workers e.g. carpenters, glaziers, joiners etc.) are urgently required to save it from falling apart or being snapped up by a large company. It would make an admirable multi-craft centre so please ring Kate Lawrence at 01 794 9156 if you can help.

### **Typists.**

The Editor has typed most of this copy with two fingers on his aging Pre-war Imperial. Have we a typist anywhere in the Guild? If YOU can type please volunteer to help. You will not be overworked! Just one or two sides per issue.

**TONY PLESSNER IS AN ENGINEER** with a special interest in materials such as plastics and ceramics. The professional contacts with ceramics encouraged the pursuit of pottery in evening classes. After many years of classes, finally in Murrays class at Dacorum College, he and Carla Plessner equipped themselves with kiln and wheel at home. Only qualification for treasurer -- being numerate.



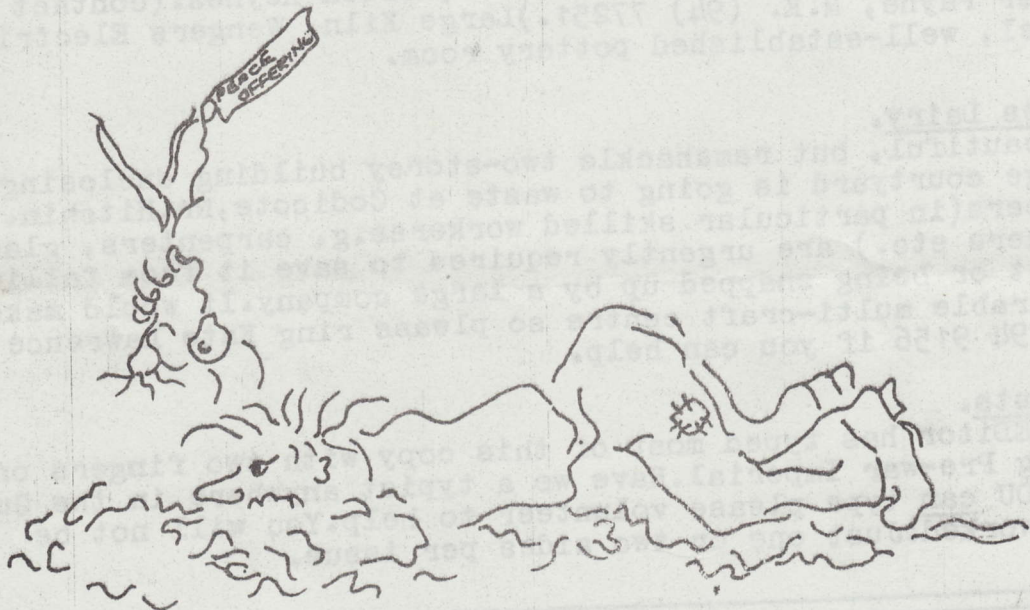
## **local clays.**

Ref. Newsletter Number Four.

Letter Addressed to Murray Fieldhouse from Mr.S.J.Ludmon.

My most humble apologies with suitable nurglings of cringe plus my commiserations on the results of your rates appeal. I was under the impression that the Newsletter was run by one of your charming young lady assistants, no aspersions on your virility, intelligence or appearance were intended,I grovel.

However one or two mistaken impressions seem to be current about me, so here goes. A few years ago I went unaccountably, suddenly mad, according to my wife and children, studied for and somehow obtained a B.A. (science) The information on Oxford clay from Marston Valley formed part of one of my assignments as an undergraduate which I abstracted and sent off in case it might be useful.



S.J.Ludmon crawling through  
dust and ashes to convey  
suitable apologies to  
Murray Fieldhouse.....

I am not busily investigating local clays as I am busily engaged on some post-graduate studies concerning the ecology and geology of the neighbouring stretches of the river Ousel. This the local council has joyously made invalid by gaily dredging the relevant parts to a neat, mathematical, inverted, isoscelise, trapezium shape -- except for the bits under the bridges which the natives use as repositories for old bikes prams, dead cats, redundant bottles and other delights for future archaeologists. So you are not the only one to suffer from the mob. However if I find anything like a usable clay it will be tested and the results passed on.

My name is spelt LUDMON (as in Ra - Sho - Mon.)  
Yours repentantly...