

Dacorum and Chiltern Potters Guild Newsletter 11

SECRETARY

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CALENDAR

10th December 8 p.m.
(Friday)

Grand Christmas Party. A jolly occasion for all. To be held at Berkhamsted Hockey Club. There will be a bar with an extension until twelve o'clock for the night of the party. An admission charge is necessary to cover the expenses of the hire of the hall and entertainment (a band or disco) will provide suitable sounds. Following the success of last year's party, we hope to provide our own food. Please bring a dish (sweet or savoury). Tickets are available from the Editor at the above address or from the Secretary. Price 50p. (Not by post) A map showing the location of the hockey club appears on page 8. Help is required early in the evening to prepare and decorate the hall. If you can help please contact Freda Earl, 32 Trevelyan Way, Berkhamsted or Jane Woodhams on Tring 4766.

17th January 8 p.m.
(Monday)

Pot Decorating session to be held at Radlett. The meeting will include demonstrations. SEE STOPPRESS!

24th or 25th February

Pottery Quiztime. Your quiz chairman - Stan Romer. The evening will take the form of a question and answer session in which it is hoped all members will participate. There will be prizes for the three with the highest score at the end of the evening.

March

Slab Pottery. Another aspect of slab pottery. (Not a repeat of the Pendley talk)

April

At Home. Mildred Slatter has agreed to be our hostess on this occasion. Mildred is a member of the C.P.A. and a fellow of the Society of Designer Craftsmen. She trained at Reading University and the Central School. She has exhibited widely in this country and makes stoneware and porcelain.

DACORUM & CHILTERN POTTERS GUILD

Celebrity Lecture - 27th October 1976

Robert Copeland: Industrial-Hand Techniques and Moulding

A Summary of the Lecture with further information.

Robert Copeland and his family have a long history of attachment with the potteries. He is involved with preservation work at the Gladstone Museum, Longton, Stoke-on-Trent, and is keenly interested in the traditional industrial-hand techniques, many of which have fallen into disuse. In the lecture, many of these were discussed. Slides illustrated many of the processes, which were used at the Spode factory up until 1955. These processes evolved through literally centuries of use.

Since Bone China lacks plasticity and strength, it is not possible to 'throw' it in the normal way. Instead, a 'liner' is thrown first. The liner is simply a hollow shape of similar proportion to the finished pot. This is then placed in a mould and pressed in while the mould is revolving quickly. In the potbanks, this is referred to as drawing. A rib is used for the drawing. This may be made of fired clay, wood or plastic. The whole technique has generally been replaced by jolleying. At this stage the mould is placed in a dobbin (a drying cabinet with doors on both sides and which is steam heated). When the shape is leather-hard it is turned on a horizontal lathe. The horizontal lathe was first introduced to 'the potteries' by Philip Aylers. It has an advantage over studio type turning in that the shaft can revolve both ways. The higher speeds used ensure a much finer finish. All bone china cups have a turned foot and this is turned by eye (a profile tool is NOT used). The turning tool is rested on a tool post which is set approximately $\frac{1}{4}$ " from the edge of the pot. The lathe chuck or chock is usually made of hardwood although plastic chucks are now coming into use.

Plates are made incorporating a process known as 'batting out'. This produces a thin slab of clay which has been compacted by hitting with a bat. The bat has a fireclay handle and its base is of very hard plaster and convex in shape. Platemakers tools are made from clay (unglazed bone china) and very often sculpted individually. In order to compensate for shrinkage, the shrinkage factor must be known. The trick here is to make the tool slightly larger than necessary. Platemakers tools acquire a fine finish which is not a machine finish but is imparted through years of use. For this reason, they are highly prized and quite individual. Because of the difficulty and skill involved with platemaking, platemakers usually begin as saucer-makers.

Dish-making is a very similar process except that a jolleying wheel is not used as they are not basically round shapes. After batting-out a polishing knife is used to produce a fine finish. Finally, a rubber kidney or, in the old days, an ox or cows lip was used to press the clay into place on the mould. The clay was then walloped at the leather hard stage. The wallower was a boss and was intended to consolidate the clay particles.

Bone china always has a foot to stand on because of the great number of firings each piece undergoes. If the pots were stood on their rims (fired upside-down) they would show stilt marks from each firing. Until quite recently, flint was used for all setting. Now Alumina (aluminium hydroxide) is used because of the danger with flint of poisoning from free silica absorbed by breathing dust. The firing temperatures were given as being: Bone China biscuit 1260; Glost 1050; Earthenware biscuit 1160; Glost at 1050.

In the potteries, the skill of the mouldmakers is probably second only to the skill of the modelmaker. The model is usually made of clay or plaster. The block mould is case direct onto the model. Since this process makes scrap of the model, the block is considered to be very precious and, because each subsequent casting on the block would wear the plaster slightly, a case is made from the block and it is from the case that the working moulds are produced. The process may be presented thus: model (positive) to block (negative) to cases (positive) to working moulds (negative) to pottery (positive).

Plaster blending is an important part of mouldmaking. As with other materials, potters have their preferences. Various types of plaster are available. Most potters' suppliers stock 'potters plaster' which I consider to be inferior to the dental or surgical plaster which is used in the industry. This is both strong, dense and white. It machines beautifully and super-smooth finishes are easily obtained. The density of the plaster mix will have a definite effect on the porosity of the finished mould. For this reason, mouldmakers in the industry mix their plaster by weight. When slip-casting commercially, it is important that all moulds used should cast in the same time. The ratios are usually stated as being kilos of plaster to gallons of water. For studio purposes, it is usually adequate to mix 'by eye'.

The correct amount of water is estimated and put into a bowl, bucket or 'plaster jug'. The dry powdered plaster should then be sieved (60s mesh will do) into the water until plaster begins to float on the surface (rather than sinking). At no time during this operation should the water be stirred. When there is a small island of dry plaster on top, stop adding plaster. Now is the time to start the stirring or blending. I once knew a professional mouldmaker who always carried a spoon in his pocket for this purpose. It is best however to use your hand for the initial stirring since it will detect any lumps of plaster in the mix and be able to remove them.. Also, the hand can detect the precise moment when to pour the plaster. This is when the mix begins to thicken. The whole operation is very controlled, not like some of the efforts which I have seen. After pouring the plaster should be hard enough to remove the cottling (retaining wall) within five minutes. This allows finishing work to be done on the mould before the final set when the plaster will become rock hard. Wet or dry paper can be used for final finish.

The release agent used when casting plaster to plaster is soft soap. If you can't obtain mouldmakers' soft soap then a good substitute may be made by boiling 'Lux' flakes until a thin paste is formed. The best way of applying the soap is with a sponge previously soaked in hot water. On application and rubbing in the surface of the mould will become very frothy. The froth is then wiped off with another sponge which has been rinsed in cold

water. This process is repeated three times. The plaster surface should develop a high gloss!

Cottling may be made using wood, linoleum, roofing felt or my favourite, which is damp-course material. The edges of the cottling must be sealed with small coils of clay and pressed carefully into any joints so as not to damage the model. The slightest trickle leaking through the cottling rapidly becomes a deluge! Plaster feet will be the result.

In the industry, plastic natches are widely used. The natch locates the pieces of the mould correctly. Plaster natches can easily be made but are not as durable as the former. A 1p piece used with a twisting action will produce a useful size of natch.

Ed Broadbridge

"TECHNIQUES FOR CONTEMPORARY POTTERS - RAKU"

by Christopher Tyler and Richard Hirsch
Pitman Publishing.

176 pp x 8 $\frac{1}{4}$ " x 11"
16 pp in colour
200 Black and White
illustrations

To describe a Beethoven symphony or a Turner sunset using mere printed words would be an impossible task.

To explain the intrinsic and aesthetic meaning of Raku, wabi, yugen, is a like problem. All these sensations must be experienced. How then does an author describe fully such sensations? The question must be left unanswered because it is unanswerable. Nevertheless, upon reading about the story of Raku in this book, one is led to the brink of understanding, and it behoves the reader to walk forward to understand and enjoy, together with the many potters mentioned in later pages, the fuller pleasurable comprehension of Raku by making the ware and firing it under natural conditions.

The book is divided into seven parts; they are not called chapters and I agree they should not be called so.

The first part tells us of the aesthetic history of Raku and the Tea Ceremony and takes us right up to modern times in England, America and Japan.

The second part relates the potter's mind to his medium; the inter-reaction between the clay form and texture and the finished colour, with the maker or user. The full understanding of the wet clay material has united with the inner feeling of the potter, and once the biscuit firing has taken place "the pot now occupies spaces and has properties of its own".

Part three deals with form and contains many pictures of the various methods of making. The pictures show how the method is achieved whilst the text talks to us explaining the questions and feelings that arise.

Gradually, the book is changing in essence to a more didactic manual. So, in the fourth part, we find out about clay mixtures and glazes for Raku ware. There are many recipes to choose from. Almost every page has a black and white photograph showing contemporary examples of Raku - jars, boxes, vases, forms, vessels or sculptures, or just Raku. Colouring is dealt with in some depth.

Then come the sixteen pages in colour which is so essential in order that the reader may be helped to realise fully the true meaning of Raku.

The practicalities are brought to a climax in part five in describing the kilns used and how they are constructed. Again there are many black and white photographs of many kilns, partly or completely made. Faults are considered throughout and hints are given. All kinds of fuel are mentioned.

The book is written basically from a great desire of the authors to share in the joy of a Raku firing, and so part six is with us through the firing process and to the finished product. The apparent slapdash lack of organisation, the rough and ready placing and extracting of the pots, the reducing, the pot washing, the standing about, - all these are part of the whole process.

Finally, the last part discusses the Nature of Raku. Now that we have fired our ware - we can think and talk about it. Is it "just another way of making pottery?" Has the work created "its essential nature in an attitude"? I leave these questions for the reader to answer.

This is a milestone volume, I believe. One can make Raku ware without it - but having read it - (many times and each time understanding and feeling more) one will be able to make Raku with "yugen".

Unfortunately, book prices have soared recently. Colour pictures cost many times more than monochrome. But I believe this volume is worth its price.

I found two slight annoyances: The American spelling, about which nothing can be done - and the few references to American clay and frits, which should have been given their English equivalents. Maybe this will be done for the reprint, which I can envisage before long.

Stan Romer

The Eastern Counties Craft Market At Triad, Bishops Stortford was commercially successful. This was obvious from the volume of trade going on and the number of empty stalls on the Sunday afternoon. It was clear from the layout of the galleries at Triad that the accent was on selling. Stalls were arranged in long rows and crammed into the galleries (especially downstairs) and the whole market was sadly lacking of demonstrations, though the glass engravers and lace makers did well in this respect. I believe that giving the potential crafts customer an insight into the crafting of the object promotes sales. So often the skill, time, patience and involvement with material are glossed

over or given so little emphasis that they might as well not exist.

The potters of the market were mostly pushed into the limelight by their fellow exhibitors. Admittedly some of the work was downright shoddy and amateur but most attention was focused on the stalls selling jewellery and, strangely enough, eggs. Not normal hens' eggs but eggs of all types painted and gilded, many with ormolu hinges and clasps and lined inside using satins and silks. Average price around £25.

Probably the most noteworthy pottery at the market was the hand-thrown oven to tableware of Maggie Humphry and Alan Brunsdon. This was stoneware with quality, one or two unusual forms, glazes subtle in colour, and varying in surface quality.

I hope not to create the impression that the market was narrow in its choice of crafts on display. Pewtercraft, wood turning, leather goods, earthenware, handspun and handknitted garments, furniture, glass, rushwork, patchwork, canework, corndollies and pressed flower pictures were also represented.

2nd ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING OF THE DACORUM AND CHILTERN POTTERS GUILD

Chairman read the minutes of the last annual general meeting. Minutes of the last annual general meeting were agreed and signed. The Chairman in his annual report spoke of the healthy state of the Guild. Although membership has dropped over the past year, this was predictable and our present membership indicates a serious desire to keep the Guild running. He had two minor complaints; one that Guild members are not coming forward with their own ideas and suggestions for Guild activities; secondly, that there were insufficient nominations to hold a vote on committee membership. He said that the programme for the coming year looked as promising as that of the last one.

Secretary, Murray Fieldhouse, reported that the Guild has at present 150 members. During the past year, the Guild organised 16 events attempting to distribute them over the catchment area of the Guild. The meetings were as follows:

1. Annual General Meeting. Celebrity Lecture by Frank Hamer entitled 'What happens inside your kiln.'
2. Raku Kiln Building and Firing at Berkhamsted.
3. Toolmaking and Report on the Roman Project 1975.
4. Book Exhibition at Tring with two members exhibiting pots.
5. Sounds, Slides and Readings. A programme of recordings in which eminent potters expressed their ideas about the craft.
6. An unstructured meeting at the Horseshoe, Hemel Hempstead, to which members were invited to bring slides of potteries and pots.
7. The Christmas Party at The Goat where we were entertained by Goat Ceilidh Band.

8. A handle-making session.
9. Teapot making at Northfields Studio.
10. Japanese Tea Ceremony - A demonstration by Madame Kaishu Careless.
11. Gordon Baldwins Salix exhibition, followed by tea (for 40 odd) at the Hines' riverside residence.
12. Sequel to Toolmaking.
13. Geoffrey Whiting, Celebrity Lecture - Glazes for the Potter.
14. Summer Garden Party. A meeting in Style with croquet on the lawn.
15. The Pendley Conference - attended by 72 with many visitors.
16. Summer Project - Saltglazing at Bedmond.

Murray reported that the sub-committees had been dropped early in the year because they were too cumbersome to operate efficiently. Communication was the major problem. Instead, individual members were given responsibility for certain areas of activity, e.g.. Jane Woodhams - mailing, Ed Broadbridge - newsletter. Our Secretary stated that there was a danger of the Guild losing sight of its objectives. Its events are not publicised enough. Original aims included those of (1) acquiring premises for our own part-time course, (2) communicating with other similar organisations, (3) regularly surveying pottery activity in the area. Murray declared that our most successful meetings are undoubtedly those of a practical nature. He concluded by saying that although the committee are not as advanced with programme work as we were last year, we have adopted 3 new members to off-load some of the work on.

Both reports were adopted unanimously. The adoption was proposed by Mildred Slatter and seconded by Digby Stott.

In his Treasurer's Report, Tony Plessner explained the various items on the balance sheet. Although the Guild is solvent, our financial position could not be described as healthy. OBVIOUSLY SOME FUND RAISING IS ESSENTIAL IF WE ARE TO EXPAND ACTIVITIES. Tony made a proposal to increase membership fees. The adoption of the report was proposed by Derek Tattersall and seconded by Philip Leaper, the verdict being unanimously in favour.

New membership fees
£2.50 single membership
£3 Family membership
£1 Student membership

Auditors were elected for 1976/77. The chairman declared the meeting closed.

Our Thanks to the Village Company

Adorning the grand Pendley staircase, casually draped potters prepared to relax and be entertained by a group of strolling players in a Victorian Melodrama. The cast of five quickly erected their stage set, miraculously transforming Pendley Hall into an intimate theatre where, within minutes, the villain of the plot was hissed off stage whilst the hero, was lustily applauded.

One hour later, so loud were the cheers and appreciation that the cast offered to perform a further entertainment. An intermission was declared - just time to fill the glasses before the bar closed. The versatility of the second act was astounding as our former damsel in distress appeared as a blues singer, and cabaret star, with guitarist support and a variety of slick and humorous highly polished acts. It was surely a bonus to an already full and delightful weekend.

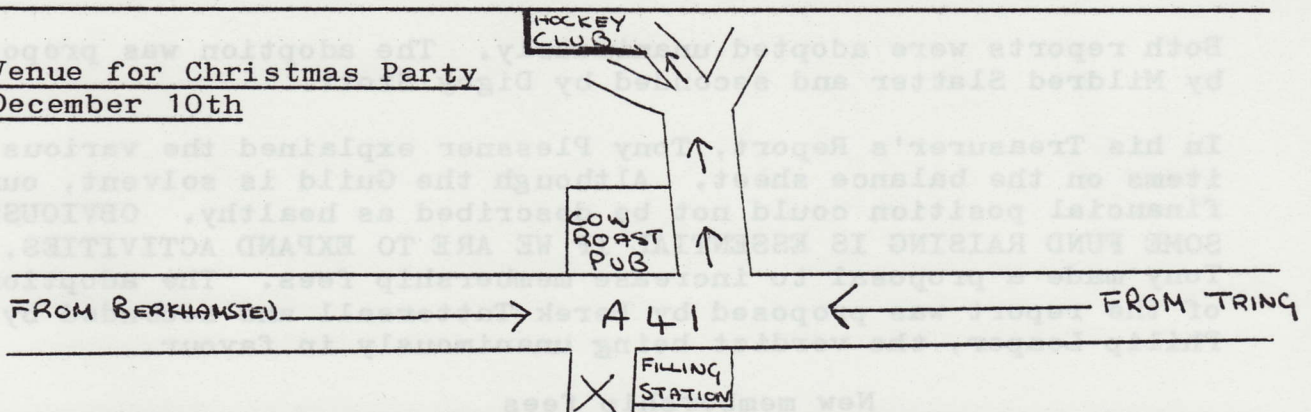
Pauline Ashley

There will be a full report of the Pendley Conference with the next issue of the Newsletter.

HELP! HELP! HELP! HELP! HELP! HELP! HELP! HELP! HELP!

The kiln built at Bedmond during the summer salt-galze project is unlikely to survive the winter unless we can get a roof over it. Mary Ann has plenty of currugated roofing material but needs scaffolding of some sort (could be timber). If you can help, (Don't worry, you won't have to deliver it) contact Mary Ann on Kings Langley 63723.

Venue for Christmas Party
December 10th



If you have NOT paid your subscription for 1976/77 then you will NOT receive any more Newsletters.

Name

The Treasurer
Dacorum & Chiltern Potters Guild
'Little Winch'
Chipperfield
Kings Langley

Address

& Postcode

Profession

I enclose cheque/P.O. value £

S T O P R E S S !!!

January meeting:

Monday 17th January at 8 p.m. CHRIST CHURCH HALL, Radlett.

KENNETH CLARK will be demonstrating and giving instruction. An opportunity not to be missed by anybody. Book the date: now.

This will be an excellent meeting for non-members. Please advertise in school, college, etc.

Full details and venue map will be circulated in January.

January 8th and 15th

Another Salt Glazing at Bedmond Hill House. Packing on 8th and firing on 15th.

Contact Mary Ann Spilman on Kings Langley 63723.