

# Dacorum and Chiltern Potters Guild Newsletter 14

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## CALENDAR

Tuesday 20th September: This meeting had had to be cancelled. We have approached six slip-ware potters and because of the difficulties of laying on a demonstration none of them have been prepared to demonstrate. Another meeting will be put into the callendar possibly early November.

Friday, 14th October: at 7.30 - AGM: See full details in this Newsletter.

Monday, 31st October: Provisionally down as the re-run of the quiz meeting but this may be altered to a demonstration with the quiz being run on a different date.

Thursday, 24th November: David Birch on Indian Pottery.

Friday, 9th December: Christmas Party.

A fresh callendar will be ready at the A.G.M. with firm dates and venues.

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JUST PRESS THE BUTTON!

In March as many of you will remember, John Anderson took some of the mystique out of photography for us humble "clay" people. He showed us that with a bit of care and thought things can be nearly as simple as the camera ads. would have us believe.

John provided us with a concise resume of his talk on a duplicated hand-out, so I will not detain you by re-writing it here. But some things, I see from my hastily written notes caught my attention.

If you have to photograph pots outside, be careful of the pitfalls - reflections and casts from the sky, foliage, even from London transport buses!

Ideally however some sort of studio set up, is best, with a featureless background for the pot. Have the lighting (preferably from a 500 watt photoflood bulb) coming from above eye level, as normally. One light emphasises the shape of the pot well, but gives appalling contrast.

As John talked he demonstrated the effect of different lighting schemes with equipment he had brought along - camera, tripod, lights, even a closed circuit television system. He tried a reflector to overcome the contrast problem, then greaseproof paper to diffuse the light. But the solution seems to be to have two lights, the second lower down to one side and further away from the first.

A slide of a Colin Pearson winged form illustrating back lighting, showed how effective this technique can be in emphasising the translucency of porcelain.

John definitely advised the use of kodachrome for colour transparencies. As it is only processed by Kodak the results are pretty consistent. Shop processing on the other hand can be a bit unpredictable. He suggested the use of a lense with a longer than average focal length to avoid distorted perspectives, e.g. 85mm or 135 mm.

The closed circuit television was really very useful. Pots by Sheila Fournier and David Leach presented different lighting problems. We saw how he dealt with them and saw an approximation of the final print on the television screen.

Questions included one about using old car headlights for illumination - "They could be used but a blue filter may be necessary". Then one about the feasibility of florescent lighting. "Avoid it!" was the quick answer. Arthur wondered how we could avoid the expense of photo floods, could an ordinary desk lamp be used instead? John said this was possible provided again that a blue filter was used for colour films. I didn't catch the answer to Dereks question



"Is there any way you can doctor a picture or slide to hide something you didn't know was there ....."

John quoted Geoffrey Whiting's dictum that the difficulties in photographing pots increase in proportion to the square of the number of pots. Whilst my experience so far bears this out, we were given some valuable hints and guidelines for minimising the problems we might meet in our pot photography.

PETER CORDON

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#### WEST MARSHALL SLAB DEMONSTRATION

When we arrived at Chorleywood Community Centre on 25th May for West Marshall's slab demonstration the twanging of guitars told us that there was a lesson going on inside, much as there was last time we went there. This time we knew what to do - we scurried into the nearest pub.

One hour later the talk began. By now about 60 people had turned up, among them two nuns from Burnt Oak - sisters, and one of them a potter - and several faces from the old Dacorum days at Hemel, the good old days of feasting and arguing presided over by the demon Murray and his flaming gas kiln.

From the previous newsletter I expected West to be something amazing, but he seemed a nice simple sort of chap with a deceptively vague line of patter - 'Let me see, where was I, now how did I do that ...'

He was very easy to listen to and it was a temptation to join in the apparently casual chat, but very soon the immensely precise and careful craftsman emerged and even his simplest shapes were arrived at with geometrical attention to details.

Very thorough wedging and slapping prepares the clay, which is an open one of low shrinkage to avoid cracking. The cutting is done with a wire and two sticks marked every  $\frac{3}{8}$ ths of an inch, and the slabs are dried in the open air for two hours on asbestos sheets. They are never sandwiched and are turned only once. Should one of them warp, West puts a pastry board on it and stands on it. When leather hard the slabs can be stored indefinitely in polythene bags.

Before joining, the slabs are deeply scored with a small piece of wood with nails in it and the joining slurry, made from the same clay, is like whipped cream. It is brushed on thickly and no coils are applied to the joins. West taps his boxes with an old butter pat and finally, when nearly firm, the slurry is carefully cleaned off, inside and out.



The little round lids on West's square pots are like half a tennis ball, no knobs, and matt glazed. The decorations are slip and incised.

During the demonstration the gallery was occupied by a gang of noble citizens making Jubilee decorations, but a quarter of the way through they fell silent and hung over the rails to look and listen.

This was a most interesting evening, instructive but not discouraging, and West's dedication and humour must make him the perfect teacher. We learned that there are no rules for slab pottery, it may be anything you want it to be, but accuracy, cleanliness and intolerance of any mistake means that self-discipline is essential.

#### RECIPES

##### Clay

Potclays red	25
SMD Ballclay	45
Leeds Fireclay (or substitute)	20
Quartz	10
Sand	10
Gorg	20

##### Glaze

C.C.	44
Quartz	21
Talc	35
Red Iron Oxide	2

MOYRA NOCKOLDS