

BULLETIN

JUNE

1989

SECRETARY:

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FORTHCOMING EVENTS

Saturday/Sunday 10th/11th June Pot Crawl to Devon.

17th - 30th June Guild Exhibition at Watford Central Library.

Sunday 16th July at 5.30 pm. Bar-Be-Cue at Christine Bull's (Princes Risborough).

NORTHCHURCH SOCIAL HALL 21st ANNIVERSARY

The Guild was invited to take part in the 21st Anniversary Celebration on the May Bank Holiday Monday, along with other users. It was disappointing as a Guild that Winifred and I were the only two members to respond to the invitation as a great deal of effort was expended on their behalf by other groups. These included lace-making, pewter, glass etching, toy making, bell ringers, local history, horse harnesses and others who reflected the talent of the local craftsmen and ladies in Berkhamsted and Northchurch in particular.

The local press, the Berkhamsted Gazette, showed interest in what we do as a Guild, when we meet and what our aims are. Whether this appears in the press is up to the editor, but I hope that it will stimulate interest in new membership. We did meet lapsed members and shared amusing moments recalling characters who were in at the start of the Guild. Perhaps they will return to the fold now that contact has been reestablished.

Though the jollifications extended to three days, we only did the one day. However, some groups must have had real endurance or a sense of duty that exceeded mine, as I felt weary after a day of explaining the many and different ways of potting and materials used.

BRIAN BICKNELL

A VISIT TO CHINA - MAY 1989

It is always a pleasure for us to invite friends and members of neighbouring guilds to come and speak to us. In this instance it was a talk and slide show given by Ron and Pat Pearson to share with us a memorable journey through China.

They joined a party organised by Christine-Anne Richards in conjunction with the CPA to celebrate the tenth anniversary of the first potters tour of China.

I cannot write more than a summary of what appeared to be hundreds of slides with explanation of each supplemented by comments by Pat. However, I have chosen a few items that are of general interest.

About 3300 miles of travelling started in Hong Kong, through Canton to Peking in the far north. Initially the route went north along the coast plains, then a huge detour to the north west to the original sites of the Northern Celadon potteries. Then east to Peking and the Great Wall of China.

The group of 18 visitors were truly international, drawn from all over the world to travel from the tropical south to the dry and dusty north. The distances can be judged by two rail journeys, one of 23 hours and the other of 18 hours, endless road travelling on good, bad and indifferent road surfaces. Along waterways crowded by concrete barges in convoy and every conceivable form of craft imaginable. Such diverse modes of transport made the tour memorable if not comfortable. The constant changes in scenery from plains to misty mountains brought the Chinese paintings to life, to be understood in a new way.

THE POTTERIES

One pottery made huge storage pots. In the west, drums of steel or plastic would be their equivalents. Two men working in tandem made the pots. The first beat the clay flat, the second clad a former with the clay using a paddle to beat it into shape. The rim and gallery were made by working a coil around the edge. The coil was originally along his arm and over his shoulder.

The pots were completed and placed outside to dry. They were then slipped with a brush, or according to Christine-Anne Richards, a glaze was applied to the unfired pot. The only firing was completed in a trolley kiln. The resulting pot was rough and sturdily simple.

The amount of identical pots was prodigious as they filled the wharf and every square inch of decking on a tied up boat. Even a small boat propelled by one man was fully loaded. There must be a huge demand for large containers to pickle the cabbage.

The second pottery to be discussed made millions of plates and crated them in woven bamboo baskets. How they remained unbroken on the rough roads, we cannot tell. Piles of rock (kaolin and the equivalent to Cornish stone) weather in a yard. These are crushed to fine powder in conditions that would be a field day to the Health and Safety Officers in the UK. However, millions of plates are made, each in a sagger, as coal is used for firing. One pottery used coal for biscuit and wood for the glost firing. Remembering just how big the kilns are, the countryside must be completely denuded of trees and bamboo.

The third pottery to be discussed here is the proud inheritor of the celadon shards. These were analysed recently and the Tang/Sung period recipes were rediscovered. Just in case the precious shards went missing, they were set in a concrete frame for all time. Here more traditional methods are used, recreating beautiful pots for the museums of the world. The decoration sometimes took four to six months to complete. The trainees practised on smaller and simpler pieces. Even by western standards the pots are expensive, heaven knows what the average Chinese workers think about the cost. It was interesting to note that the pots were supported not by resting on a surface but by a bracketed arm extending into the pot. Small pressure pads held a small rest across the pot surface. This relieves the decorator of the need to touch the pot unnecessarily. Here was displayed a treasury of crackle, painted and carved pots for well-heeled visitors to buy and ship home under licence.

Besides seeing potters by the score, doors that usually would not be opened to the general public or tourist were opened to the group with pride and a justifiable pleasure in what they do, over green tea.

The tour did not wholly dwell on pots. They somehow found time to visit museums, the forbidden city (palace of Emperors of China) in Peking, the huge open space known as Tiananmen Square, the Great Wall of China, many markets and the terracotta army. No wonder the intrepid travellers were road weary and in need of western food and comforts not available away from home.

The evening's tour by slides concluded with a rapid tour of the sights of China old and new. Hong Kong has modern roads and buildings in the business centre that are equal to anything built elsewhere. In contrast the more remote parts had pagodas built to show the esteem of the builder by the height of the structure; and temples with rooves built like tents that reflected the nomadic nature of the people the Great Wall failed to keep back. This is only a summary of

what Ron and Pat saw last year on a memorable journey through a land that has only just realized its potential. On behalf of the Guild, I would like to thank them for sharing with us this evening.

BRIAN BICKNELL

COME INTO THE GARDEN
EXHIBITION AND SALE AT THE CRAFTMEN POTTERS SHOP
Marshall Street, London, in April

Large terracotta pots and a bubbling fountain could be seen through an attractive leafy arch enlivened by bird song. Uncertain English summers have created a vogue for conservatories, patios, small gardens and window boxes which hopefully have created a market for clay pots rather than plastic ones.

Approximately 30 inch high thrown pots ranged in price from £200 to £300 (some being glazed). There were several highly decorated sundials, some including tall clay bases; whilst one very attractive dial consisted of 12 tiles mounted on a wall (£450). Or you could have a glazed raku sheep or pig wandering about your garden.

Amusing high-fired terracotta figures about 2 feet high had been produced by Penny McIntosh, whilst Kate Mellors produced high quality Japanese garden lanterns lit by electricity. Only one person made a bird bath (I gather these give great pleasure to elderly people watching birds in their gardens) but this cost £600. It was like a huge glazed flower.

PAM TAMES

EXHIBITION

"SHADOW POTS AND PAINTINGS"

CERAMICS BY MARIGOLD AUSTIN

19th June - 1st July, 10 am - 5 pm, Sunday 2 - 5 pm

at the Cow Byre, Bury Street, Ruislip

Guild members are invited to the Private View on Sunday June 18th, 6 - 9 pm

FOR SALE

Ruth Karnac is selling the contents of her pottery

Anyone interested please contact her on 0895 631738