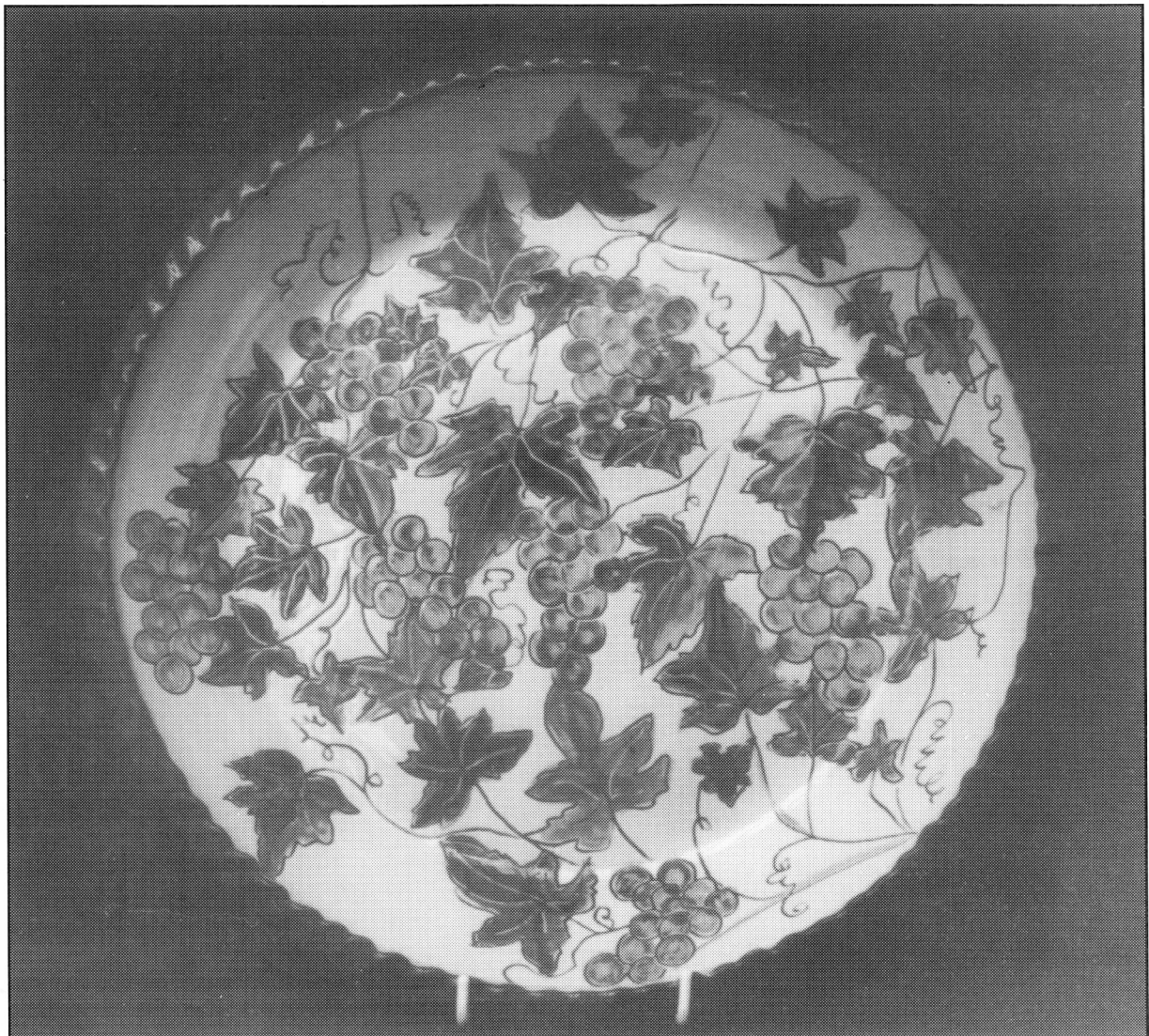




**DACORUM AND  
CHILTERN  
POTTERS GUILD**



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JULY/AUGUST  
1995  
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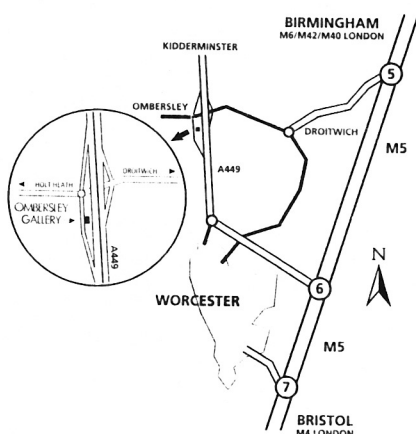
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**ABOUT THE GUILD & THE NEWSLETTER**

Membership of the Guild is open to anyone having an interest in pottery & offers the members many opportunities each year to see the top potters demonstrating their skills. In addition, an annual Open Day is held with demonstrations. A members' pottery exhibition, visits and workshops are organised at various times during the year.

The Dacorum & Chiltern Pottery Guild Newsletter is published bi-monthly in January, March, May, July, September & November, being distributed to all members of the Guild, other craft groups & organisations. Contributions to the Newsletter are always welcome. Opinions expressed in items published do not necessarily reflect the opinions of the Committee or Guild Members as a whole.

Please contact our Membership Secretary, Digby Stott, for more details; phone 01442 250 540.

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Closing date for articles for September  
Newsletter - 16th August

**Advertisements**

The Guild is not responsible for the content of individual advertisements printed in the Newsletter.

## FRONT COVER PHOTOGRAPH:

Plate with fluted rim, slip and underglaze decoration, by Mary Andreetti (see 'Profile').

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## EDITORIAL

Currently, I hardly have time to sit down, with continuous demands on my time. 'Better busy than idle though', do I hear some of you say?

Preparing the previous Newsletter did stretch various resources, but the feedback that I have had indicates that at least some of you enjoyed it and some did buy extra copies.

Now that I am preparing the next issue I find, as usual, that contributions are somewhat sparse, so I will have to engage my persuaders, damagers and telephone sales personnel again.

Sometimes though, the level of contribution can be above and beyond the calls of the Editor, since you will notice that Digby Stott registered a brand-new Company, just so that he could advertise it in the 21st issue Newsletter!!

I must stress that you do not all need to go to such lengths for the Newsletter, but on the other hand if you have time to jot a few lines, a letter, a 'Profile', a news item, or anything else for that matter, we will be glad to consider it for publication. In fact anything that any of you write will be considered and may be published...

Ho hum .....

Mervyn Fitzwilliam

## CORRESPONDENCE

Dear Mervyn,

Arthur Ball having mentioned my name in his contribution to the last issue, I feel obliged to write something too. Most of what he reported of our conversation was fair, some of it pure invention.

As Ray Phipps mentioned, there was a fore-runner to the Guild, consisting largely of Murray's students from evening classes at Dacorum College. We met sometimes at Murray's, at various pubs and, as Arthur says, sometimes at our house in Chipperfield. It was at one of these meetings that Murray took me

aside and said that Ray having "volunteered" to be Chairman, himself Secretary, would I like to be Treasurer of the proposed Guild? I consented, took about 200 subscriptions at the inaugural meeting and remained Treasurer for the next 15 years.

Mention of crowds of potters at our home reminds me of the occasion when the Abbots Langley Sports Club had double-booked their hall. Unfortunately, the other party was already in possession and our meeting was therefore moved to Chipperfield, where we managed to cram 45 people into our living room. (Arthur - I take no responsibility for what went on in the kitchen, but I expect someone was making coffee).

Tony Plessner

Dear Mervyn,

No doubt you will receive many letters congratulating you on your editorial skills and the success you had in persuading members to write articles and letters about the Guild's early trials and happy days spent together.

For my part, I have read some of the Newsletter twice and, in Murray's case, three or four times - from where does he get those beautiful phrases?

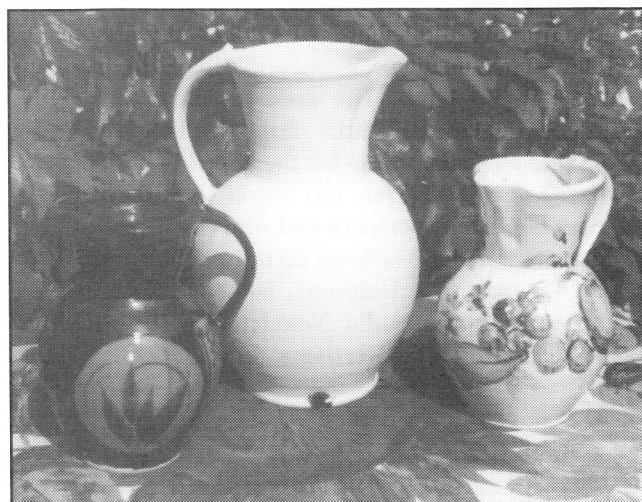
Mary's letter and Pauline & Alan's article were a joy; it was good to hear from Ray Phipps who was a wonderful Chairman and, without doubt, held the Guild together in its early days.

As I have said, I read the Newsletter at least twice and found no mention of one person we all owe a very great deal. She is always cheerful and pleasant to potters and non-potters alike; she has listened to stories of fire-boxes, underglazes, reduction, creeping and crawling, to say nothing of dunting, spit out, pinholes and dimples, always with graciousness.

So, Murray, tell Dorley we all love her.

Arthur Ball

P.S. The pots weighed 1480 gr. & 1520 gr. - one day they feel light and the next day heavy as lead. Just to show that they were finished, I enclose a photograph. (refer to the 'Competition Winners' section).



22 June 1995

Dear Sir,

I was interested to read Arthur Ball's article in your publication. I am the Co-Ordinator of the Extra-Mural classes at the School of Art and Design at the University of Hertfordshire.

Arthur's record of attending our evening classes is extraordinary and I extend an invitation to all of your members who may wish to attend our day or evening classes in ceramics or any of our other classes for that matter (we have new classes in lettering and calligraphy and creative textiles which may interest your members).

Yours faithfully,

Peter Arnold.

### FUTURE GUILD EVENTS

#### Sept.15th - GAYNOR LINDSELL at Northchurch

We are expecting a first rate evening with Gaynor Lindsell for the beginning of our Autumn programme.

She trained as a sculptor and has both taught art in a London comprehensive school and also studied in New York, working as a ceramics technician and then teaching in a well-known New York college called '92 Street Y'. This establishment is also well-known for Music and Art, Yehudi Menuhin being one of its patrons. She studied glaze chemistry there and had the benefit of teaching by many famous American potters as visting tutors. She returned to Britain in 1988 and, besides setting up her own studio, worked as an assistant to Colin Pearson.

She has exhibited in many parts of the world and is a professional member of the C.P.A. She has recently been appointed as their Exhibitions Officer.

Her work, currently using low-fired clay, has a fluidity and surface quality which is highly attractive and which reveals the qualities of the material. We are very lucky to have her visit us.

#### Oct.13th - ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING - NORTHCHURCH- at 7.30 p.m. - PLEASE NOTE EARLIER TIME

We need your support for this - in particular, we need new committee members willing to lend a hand in various ways. The most urgent need is for someone to take in hand the organisation and invoicing of advertisements for the Newsletter. This is not a very demanding job, but needs someone with a modicum of office experience and who can be relied on to ensure that our advertisers do not get free space by default! It may sound obvious, but advertising does help to keep our splendid Newsletter going and, of course, readers find advertisers' information useful, too.

Coffee at approx. 8.00 p.m., followed at approx.

8.30 p.m. by:-

ELAINE COLES

Elaine is a very practical potter who makes

domestic stoneware with a difference. She decorates it with slip inlay and bold patterns. Her methods are unusual in that she puts coloured slips onto plaster with brushes or slip-trailers and then transfers this design onto the clay.

She is partly self-taught but attended Adult Education evening classes and then, in 1987, went to Goldsmiths on their post-graduate course on the strength of her submitted work. She has been a professional potter since 1978.

If you would like to try out this technique, bring your toolbox with you, or at least a slip-trailer, brushes and a small plaster slab.

This should be fun, so put on your 'pinnies' and come along to Northchurch.

### ADVANCE NOTICE:

#### POTTERS OPEN DAY - NOVEMBER 11TH

This is going to be a real humdinger! Elaine Hudson and Lesley Risby are organising it and have managed to get for us: Michael Casson, Brian Dickenson and Tessa Fuchs. The charge for the day, including the usual food and drink, will be £20 for members and £24 for non-members; so save up your pennies, take out a second mortgage and ask all your friends and family to join you. Now is the time to put a large asterisk in your diary for the BIG DAY. More details to follow in our next Newsletter.

### OTHER EVENTS

#### August 11th, 12, 13th

Hatfield House National Ceramics Festival:

Our Guild will be participating on all the days, so as many members as possible should go along. If you want to sell your pots at this prestigious event, contact Linda Bryant on 01442 233521.

#### Sept. 9th to 24th - Herts. Open Studio Fortnight

This will include many types of Art and Crafts - Painters/Printmakers, Photographers, Sculptors, Designers/Illustrators, Craftspeople and Teachers. Enquiries to 01442 864400.

This is part of Hertfordshire Visual Arts Forum under the auspices of the Eastern Arts Board.

#### Sept.16th "CLOCK" WORKSHOP

Our Pot Crawl weekend, which has been variously described as 'excellent', 'very enjoyable', 'super', etc. (all of which are correct) will be fully reported, probably in the next Newsletter. A visit to the Horological Institute was found to be an inspiring conclusion to the weekend and led to a discussion of the possibility of having a clock inspired workshop, making ceramic objects based on the idea of clocks, their working parts & their cases. If you are interested, please refer to the enclosed application form. The Rudolf Steiner School pottery has already been booked for this workshop- **NUMBERS WILL BE STRICTLY LIMITED** so if you do want to come, then apply at once.

**JAPANESE STUDIO CRAFTS - At the Victoria and Albert Museum until September 3rd.**

I found this to be a very exciting exhibition, superbly displayed in a generous space of two rooms (separated by a band-waggon opportunist shop selling mainly Wedgwood!).

The exhibition covers the traditional, as well as the Avant Garde, and includes an interesting variety of ceramics as well as wonderful fibre art, wood, glass, bronze, lacquer, basketry and jewellery. There is an entrance charge of £4.75, but £2.75 for concessions.

You'll be sorry if you miss it. Why not go and see it, and write a paragraph or so for the Newsletter saying what you like/dislike about it? There is also a programme of demonstrations, videos, gallery talks and master-classes for those who are really keen.

**Ruth Karnac**

**COMPETITION WINNERS**

A big 'Thank You' to those who contributed articles, photographs, suggestions, etc. for our 21st issue Newsletter. Thanks also to Harry Karnac, our W.P.-er and typesetter.

The various items that were sent in made interesting reading and we hope that some of the reminiscences were of interest to our newer members, whilst rekindling the sparks of memory for those with us since earlier times.

Without further ado, I will tell you that the winners of our competition were:

For the written contribution - Pauline & Alan O'Dell, with their write-up on the Salt Glaze Kiln, built in 1985. The excitement and adventure in this article did come through and stirred the imagination.

The Committee decided that a photograph of Murray was appropriate for the front cover of this special issue and this rather restricted the scope of the competition for a front page photograph. Because of this, we decided to award the prize for submission of photographs to Mary Beerbohm, who supplied the photographs for the Laborne article by Murray, together with her own photograph for the excellent article about our first year, which she also supplied. £5.00 gift vouchers are on the way to our two winners.

The response from so many people did help to give us all an interesting "souvenir issue" Newsletter and we do hope that the same contributors and others will submit items for publication in future issues.

With some slight (but only slight) embarrassment, I must tell you that my guess for the weight of Arthur's 2 jugs was the closest at 6lb.1½oz. The weight was given by Arthur as a total of 3kg. which converts to 6lb.9.6oz. (1kg.=2.2 lb.) The runners-up were Pirette Beckley (7lb.6oz.) & Stan Romer (5 lb.)

In conclusion, I can inform you that there was also a low-key competition for members of the Committee, who had been asked to obtain additional advertising to help support the costs of producing the Newsletter. This was jointly won by Linda Bryant and Ruth Karnac, who both receive a small prize.

**The Editor**  
**(On behalf of your Committee).**

**THE FEMALE TORSO WORKSHOP ON 8TH APRIL**

A happy group of would-be sculptors gathered on this rather dull morning in early April at the Rudolf Steiner School pottery studio in Kings Langley. This is a purpose-built round building with excellent natural light and it makes a first-class sculpture workshop.

Doug Jones, our tutor for the day, is a very experienced sculptor and he has made some fine torsos. He demonstrated how we should roll out our Vinderling white grogged stoneware clay and then form it into a vertically standing cylinder. It looked so easy when Doug showed us, but some of us, including me, soon found ourselves in difficulties. My clay had dried out too much when it was left on the cloth to be rolled out. I dampened it, and that was the real reason why my torso developed a rather bulbous bottom. While the model had very pleasing proportions, I fought a losing battle with the damp, rather too flexible clay, to reproduce these proportions in my work. The clay was showing distinct signs of subsidence. Doug recommended some heat therapy and put it in front of the portable fire provided for Angelique, our model for the day.

Some members of our group had made small model torsos or maquettes to guide them in making the full size sculptures. I did not originally see the point of this. It was only after I finished my torso that I realised that making a maquette first helped to settle a number of issues, for instance how would the legs be positioned? Would one be in front of the other, or would they both be exactly alongside each other? Would the arms be raised above the head or be put in some other position? Would the back be arched or vertical? Would it be twisted to one side a little? It was only after I had seen some of the excellent torsos made by other members of the group that I realised it would have been better to have made a small model and considered some of these issues before I charged straight into the final sculpture.

Doug recommended that we made the shape we required in our sculptures by pressing out the clay from inside our cylinders. This had its hazards. If you pressed out too buxom a bottom, the torso tended to collapse or lean over at an unacceptable angle. We also soon learned that if you made the breasts too large - a mistake easily made in our enthusiasm to ensure the femininity of our sculptures - it was very difficult to reduce the bust size later. Drastic surgery had its place in the process at this stage. If a breast was too large, cut it down, if the stomach too gross,

slice off the protuberances. If the cylinder had grown too wide, make two large cuts in it, take out a strip and repair it. We all became cosmetic surgeons of a sort, seeking to remove the unintended bulges and to make our torsos more attractive.

We soon learned that you could correct the form from one angle, but when you turned the torso round to view it from a different angle, you had just distorted it. It became apparent that one had to constantly look at one's sculpture from many different angles to see where clay had to be added or removed.

We had a break for lunch, and some members of the group stayed in the pottery to eat the food they had brought with them. Others, including Angelique, Doug, Mervyn and Linda, repaired to the nearby hostelry for some warmer refreshment. Our model told us about her modelling work which is normally for art classes.

After lunch, Doug suggested that we all examine our own work critically and make the major decision. Do we abandon all we have done in the morning and start again, or do we soldier on with a piece of work which we are not satisfied with in the hope that we can breathe new life into it? Most of us took the easier decision to soldier on with our existing sculptures, but Mervyn, who normally stands out from the crowd in any case, took the very brave decision to start again. He learnt from our mistakes, and probably his own as well, and went on to produce an excellent torso in a very short time. In retrospect, I wish I had been brave enough to abandon my own work at that stage and produce that perfect torso that constantly eludes me.

A pause in the proceedings, Valerie Williams (left), John Humby and Jill Kitchener.



=====  
*AHEM! AHEM!*, flattering the Editor may be part of some devious plot, or it may not. To put everything into the correct perspective, I should tell you that our tutor, Doug, did say that he was "very disappointed" with my final sculpture and that he "expected better in future" !!! -  
Editor.  
=====

Doug had talked to us at various times during the day about the importance of the underlying bone structure in either drawing or sculpting a model. He talked about the rib cage, the breast plate, the collar bones and the shoulder blades. As the day progressed, we realised that what Doug had said was important, and the evidence of ribs, shoulder blades and the pelvis gradually appeared on our torsos, making them look more realistic, even if not a perfect representation of the model.

Doug told us how we could colour and decorate our torsos, and he offered to fire our works of art for us in his gas fired reduction kiln if we wished.

We all enjoyed the day. We learned a lot about bone structures, about the many choices we had to make in building our torsos, about the way we could improve our work next time.

We are all indebted to Doug, our tutor for the day, for his enthusiasm for the task and for his advice and guidance, and to Angelique for her understanding of how she could help us complete our sculptures satisfactorily.

At the end of the day, the main satisfaction for each of us was that of having made our own sculpture - good or bad - and having learnt, in the process how to make a better one.

**John Beckley**

## **MARCIO MATTOS: MAY 12TH AT NORTHCHURCH**

A fairly small group of us gathered to view a great many slides. These were basically showing work of very early Japanese potters as seen in the Japanese Museum and pictures taken of the demonstrations given by modern potters, plus the work of the multi-national potters who had gathered briefly in Tokonome, the famous craft town.

Marcio Mattos and others had been offered the opportunity to work with local craftsmen. The aim was to introduce and share new ideas and methods into this celebrated pottery-producing area. In Japan, it is common for work to follow in the style of the ancestors for generations, with few changes. While this can be successful, it can be stultifying for the makers.

The idea was to enable all those on the project to share their ideas and learn from each other's skills.

Marcio, travelling with his double bass, was lucky to be housed with the family of a Buddhist priest and therefore in one of the larger houses; lucky, too, to discover that this family was also musical.

After the visitors had settled into their homes, they were shown the area where they were to work - a large airy room divided into areas where they could work, each with a Shimo wheel. They had demonstrations by known Japanese potters and sculptors, and then were let loose to work with local craftsmen.

There followed four weeks of intense, hard work, using local clays, tools and equipment. They developed ideas obtained from demonstrations, using their skills and helped always by their Japanese hosts. The work produced was fired in a variety of kilns: Raku, salt, gas and wood-fired Anagama, using seaweed and sawdust. All the work produced was then exhibited in Tokonome.

After our break for coffee - sadly no pots to see, touch, buy or, at least, to lust after - we saw more slides. These were of the recent work produced by Marcio. Japan has had an influence on his work. Some reflected Japanese ware, modernised and altered. It is once-fired, textured and slip decorated, with a little matt glaze sprayed in small areas. Functional pots were glazed inside.

He works on two or three pots at a time and these are of the same shape. Texture is very important and forms a strong part in the assembled forms. These are made of slabs and extrusions. Shapes are usually altered. Jugs are powerful vessels and have strong handles. But it was the plates that I liked most. They were square with rounded corners, bordered with extrusions and minimally decorated. I would certainly have been tempted to acquire one of these, but he had brought no finished wares.

His minimal decoration demonstration was performed for us in three moves. The first was a free flourish on newspaper across the table with water and one of the rice straw brushes on display. The second, using white slip, followed the free-flowing movement as the first. The third and final flourish was with slip on the leather-hard plate - one he had made earlier.

Then it was time to go home. I was disappointed not to see work or to talk about the influence of Japan on his method of working.

**Ruth Brown**

[*N.B.* Marcio Mattos substituted at short notice for George Wilson and the committee apologise for the evening consisting of 99% slides and 1% demonstration. We hope that new members will not take this as typical, although the slides were excellent].

**Ruth Karnac**

## **BERKHAMSTED YOUNG FARMERS RALLY (MAY 13TH)**

Do you remember the Saturday following the Bank Holiday week-end in early May? It was cold. That was the day that D.C.P.G. were present at the Berkhamsted Young Farmers Rally promoting the Guild and helping many people from the very young (3 years old) to the much older (75 years old) to make a pot on the wheel.

From a cold, bright 9 a.m. start, Mervyn Fitzwilliam, myself and a new Guild member, Christine Griffin, set up three wheels plus a sales table, wedged freezing cold clay and made it into suitable pieces ready for the would-be potters!

And guess what? They flocked to us. Officially, the show opened at 11-ish but we started much earlier than this. We provided entertainment for those trying to throw, for those just standing and watching and also the other stall holders in the crafts tent. More importantly, we are likely to have gained a number of new recruits (2 other stall holders plus a few of the potential potters). We have also contributed £50 to Guild funds and introduced new Guild members to our activities - a pretty successful event, all things considered.

Many thanks to the happy band of volunteers (including one non-member, no less!) - Christine Griffin, Marilyn Adreedi, Tony Moody, Rena Green, Mervyn Fitzwilliam, Tony Stevens, Pam Bishop and Colin Smith (the non-member).

So if you would like to volunteer to help in future, please do let me know - we have several events needing more volunteers. My telephone number is 01442 233521.

**Linda Bryant**

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magazine for  
the 1990s**

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## **MICK CASSON'S 50 YEARS WITH POTS.**

On Saturday May 20th, Mick Casson gave a talk organised by the C.P.A. called "50 Years with Pots - A Personal View". It was held at the Linnean Society Lecture Room at the Royal Academy in Piccadilly.

If any of you have heard Mick Casson talk before, you will know what a great, natural speaker he is. I have heard him several times and each time I have been impressed by his modesty, sincerity and simplicity of presentation. He has none of the pretentiousness which some others bring to the subject. Mick was 'there' just post-war, at the beginning of Studio Pottery as we know it today.

He arranged his talk decade by decade starting just post-war and showing what other potters were making at that time, alongside his own work of the period. This is not the place for long lists of potters; if I mention one, I should mention them all. Suffice it to say that he gave a fascinating round-up of the last 50 years inter-spliced with amusing anecdotes. Having come only relatively recently into pottery, I must say that I enjoyed every minute of his historical review and I can't wait to hear him talk in more detail about his own work when he comes to our Potters Open Day on November 11th.

**Elaine Hudson**

## **GAS KIMISHIMA & MURRAY'S MOUNTAIN KILN**

Murray told me that his latest "Craku" event was more like the previous "Raku", since most pieces survived on this occasion! However, he has now moved into a new phase of destruction, having melted the support on a borrowed pyrometer after finding that his own device was continuing to show a temperature, akin to that of boiling water, even though the kiln was up to red heat.

Anyone wishing to start up in the pyrometer repair business will be welcome at Northfield Studios.

I visited Northfield accompanied by Sylvia and also Linda Bryant on 12th June, to see the current level of progress on the Anagama Kiln which Gas Kimishima and Murray are building there.

The project is, well - let's say - very substantial indeed.

The kiln had to be built on a steep hillside and, since a hill of suitable dimensions did not exist on the site, Murray and Gas built one! It is about 10 feet high and constructed from about 100 tons or more of earth and hardcore.

The foundations of the kiln are set on this hill, with a carefully laid brick base surrounding a beautifully interleaved structure of split bamboo, each piece tied tightly to its neighbour. The bamboo is not the average feeble garden centre bean cane variety, but 4" or 5" diameter, 20' long lengths, split into strips. This bamboo was imported by Gas from the estate of his uncle in Japan.

With the woven bamboo structure in place and other strips of wood fixed in position, to support the bricks that will eventually enclose the whole thing, the appearance is that of a sculpture of a reclining whale, beached in an unlikely situation.

I did not ask the actual dimensions of this work of art, but 'whale' in shape and size is a reasonable description.

When finished and stacked with pots, it is estimated that firing will take ten days! - the piles of wood currently on site must weigh about 15 to 20 tons and a superbly powered log-splitter is waiting to be pressed into service.

I am sure that volunteers from the Guild will be needed as the kiln nears completion and we all await further developments with great interest.

**Mervyn Fitzwilliam**

## **PROFILE**

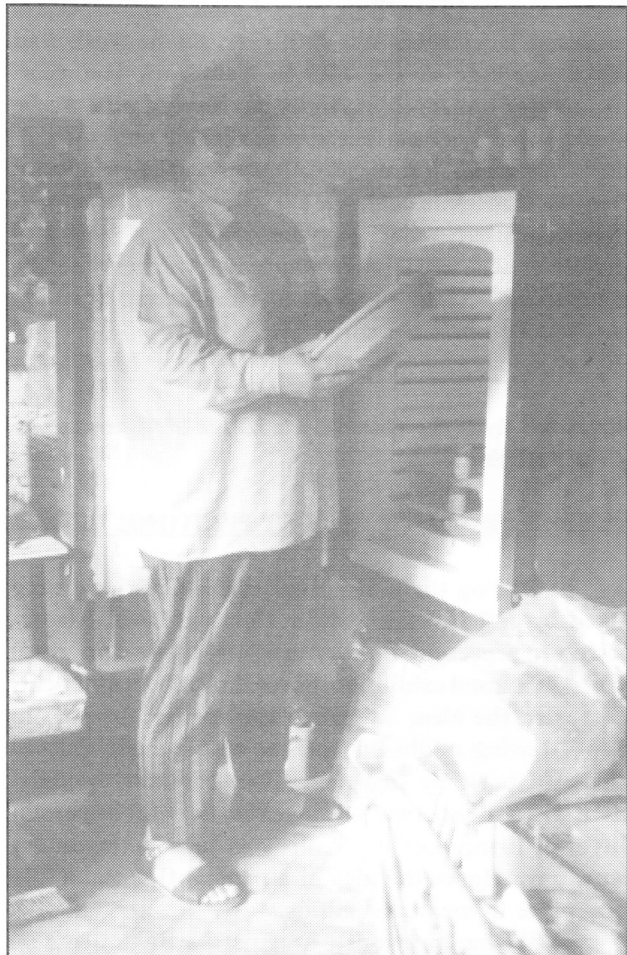
I suppose I have been playing with clay since I was about twelve years old. I was introduced to it by teachers at the Geffrye Museum in East London where I was born and brought up. After leaving school I obtained a Dip.A.D. in Ceramics from Farnham School of Art. At this time the "training" was quite tight and the emphasis was on learning "skills", which I have always appreciated. I also benefited from many permanent and visiting teachers who gave their knowledge freely and criticised constructively.

I taught for ten years before deciding to set up a studio at home, first in a spare bedroom and now, two house moves later, in a building which was probably a stable, which overlooks an interesting and inspiring garden.

I try to get into the studio at least half the week (I am currently teaching part time), but at the moment there seem to be so many other calls on my time. I work mostly in red lightly grogged clay from Ceramatch, and use ball clay to make a white slip, which I use as a background for painting in underglaze colours and oxides. For a long time I used Pottery-crafts underglaze tubes which are of really good quality, but expensive, and do not last long. So, on advice from Steve at Ceramatch, I changed to powdered colours which I mix with Glycerine and slip to make a paste which can be watered down as required. The oxides pep up the commercial colours which do not alter much in the kiln.

Most of my current work is thrown plates, dishes, bowls and press-moulded platters which I decorate with flowers, fruit, fish, animals or landscapes - basically the things in my immediate environment. I fire bisque to 1000° (although I'm thinking of taking this higher to prevent crazing) and glaze to 1120°. My pots are simple in shape and I enjoy making colourful, decorative and functional ware. I get great pleasure in seeing friends use their plates for cooking and serving food.

My kiln is an eight year old front loading Cromartie, the biggest I could buy at that time that would run on single-phase electricity. My wheel (of course) is a 15 year old Fitzwilliam, both of which have been extremely reliable. I would like this year to build a raku kiln in the garden, but the year is progressing much faster than it should.



I sell my work from home where I have a showroom, and through the Old Chapel Gallery in Pembridge (Herefordshire) (well worth a visit) as well as a few local shops including the National Trust Shop at Sutton House in East London. I am a professional member of the C.P.A.

Marilyn Andreotti

#### MEMBERSHIP NEWS

Andrea Brocks joined us during April this year, but information missed our Newsletter at the time. Andrew Watts has recently joined the Guild. Andrew is the proprietor of Lannock Pottery at Weston. We note that under the heading of 'interests' on his application form, he put "Holidays in the sun, away from pots". With the quantities of pots that are produced at his Pottery, it may not be a joke!!

Glenice Ward & Sandra Chipperfield have now joined the Guild & Shirley Bell has rejoined.

Congratulations to Lesley Reeves on obtaining a B.A.(Hons) in Ceramics.

#### OBITUARY: LUCIE RIE

Lucie Rie, the most admired potter of this century, has died aged 93 in London, where she lived and worked for over 50 years. During her life, Rie altered the whole course of ceramics in this country.

Bernard Leach, a close friend and colleague, praised her pots as being "the great and persistent elegance of a fine woman artist". Lucie Rie has always potted on the domestic scale, and the extraordinary finesse of her work is certainly somehow particularly feminine. People find its delicacy endearing: that endless succession of bottles, bowls, flasks vases, so alike yet so distinct in decoration and detail. Collectors tend to call a pot by her a "Lucie" (imagine calling a pot by Leach a "Bernard"). Yet part of their attraction is their stillness, their remoteness. Her pots are decorative but controlled, austere.

I did not meet Lucie Rie until the mid 1960s, just before her first large retrospective exhibition at the Arts Council. By then her reputation was assured: she was more or less absorbed into the British crafts establishment. But this had taken more than 20 years.

When she first arrived from Vienna as a refugee in 1938 things were very different. Her pots seemed strangely cerebral to those attuned to the British vernacular tradition, and she was rejected by galleries in London. Her personality - as evasive and as edgy as her pots - made her few friends among the sorority of British crafts ladies, hearty, tweedy, middle class. She was in any case very much a man's woman: "I am man-made" she once said in a moment of uncharacteristic frankness, referring to the influence of, first, Bernard Leach and then Hans Coper. The fact that she survived, and transcended that male influence is a measure of her toughness and innate self-confidence.

One was always aware of how close she was in spirit to the Vienna of her youth. She had trained at the Kunstgewerbeschule and had been a protégée of Joseph Hoffmann. Her first exhibition was held in Brussels in Hoffmann's Palais Stoclet. Her early earthenware pots, with weirdly pock-maked glazes, belonged to that post-Secessionist Viennese scene.

In a beautiful series of portraits taken in the 1930s by Lotte Meitner-Graf she appears the adored daughter of the artistic Jewish bourgeoisie. Her father, Professor Benjamin Gomperz, was the ear, nose and throat specialist to whom Freud referred his patients, and when she came to London it was Freud's architect son Ernst who converted her mews house just north of Hyde Park to provide her with a workshop and a flat. (She leased the building from Church Commissioners who stipulated it was only to be used for "high-class pottery").

The flat drew its atmosphere from the built-in furniture designed originally for her apartment in Vienna by Ernest Plischke the modernist architect, another of Lucie Rie's close male influences, and shipped over at immoderate expense.

In wartime London she had lived by making ceramic buttons. But by the early fifties she and Coper, who had joined her in Albion Mews in 1946, were exhibiting their pots at Dartington in the company of such celebrated craftsmen as Cardew, Leach and Hamada. The craft world divided as former Leach aficionados guiltily discovered they preferred the Ries and Copers. Robin Tanner expressed a common feeling: "the egg shell fragility and perfection of form and texture of Lucie Rie's porcelain and stoneware, and its masculine counterpart in the unique forms and memorable textures of Hans Coper's work, set a completely new standard of judgment for me. Of course I still loved Cardew's Winchcombe slipware and the orient-influenced jars of Leach that we had collected over the years. But here were two people taking a leap into the future ...."

This was the beginning of a general move away from the rather sententious, consciously revivalist spirit of pottery between the wars in Britain towards a more open-minded, not so earnest attitude which greatly influenced the teaching of ceramics in the art schools of the 1960s and helped to nurture a new group of predominantly female potters whose work was quite un-Leachlike, complex, delicate, anarchic. Without Rie could there have been an Alison Britton or an Elisabeth Fritsch?

Until the first of her strokes in 1990, Lucie Rie led a solitary and disciplined existence, living literally above the kiln and rising to start work inordinately early. She was an obsessional perfecter of technique, and the magic of her work for the spectator lies in its combination of precision and passion. There comes a point, particularly in the manic "knitted" pieces of the 1970s, when her decorative impulses seem unstoppable.

Sgraffito, the technique which became almost her trademark, was one of her few direct debts to Britain: on a visit to Avebury she found, in the museum alongside the great stones, some incised bronze age pottery. The lines had apparently been etched in with a bird bone. Lucie Rie used a steel needle to similar effect.

When David Attenborough filmed her for a television programme, he stalked her like one of his most problematic animals. Rie was very hard to know. She was even harder to buy from, as I learned as a child when my mother - an early collector of her work - had to summon up the courage to embark on what she knew from past experience would be a nerve-racking transaction. My first interview with Lucie, many years later, with Hans Coper in silent attendance, can only be described as an ordeal.

One was conscious of strong undertones of sadness in her life: the loss of a loved brother, the failure of a marriage - Rie had arrived in London with her husband Hans, manager of a Viennese felt hat factory - and the long wistful involvements with men already married.

Old age and success mellowed her. Her Damehood in 1991, the Crafts Council retrospective exhibition celebrating her 90th year, the joint Rie and Coper accolade at the Met in New York last year. Lucie never appeared anything but foreign with gentle mid-European accent, her unmistakeable (and almost totally illegible) Viennese calligraphy, the wonderful Viennese chocolate cake she served. She was a woman of extraordinary courage, who drew on a long and terrible experience of exile which imbued her with the urge for meticulous experiment culminating in a new concept of what a pot could be.

Fiona MacCarthy

*[Reprinted from the Guardian, with the kind permission of the publishers].*

#### AN ENGLISH 'RAKU' KILN AT PITSTONE, BUCKS.

During the early years of the Guild, we were asked by Jeff Hawkins of the Pitstone Local History Society to represent 'Pottery' amongst the various rural crafts on annual exhibition. Several members staunchly supported the idea. A year or two earlier, the possibility of having a kiln-firing there was mooted, chewed over and partially digested. The 'partially' qualification applied because of the difficulty (or impossibility?) of firing pots for visitors to take home on the same day. Hence the idea of an 'instant' or Raku kiln took place in members' minds.

We had previously organised a Raku firing on Sunday 18th September 1975 in Ray Phipps' garden, and at other times by different members, but the Guild had no permanent site for a Raku kiln which we could visit at a moment's notice. So it was agreed to build such a kiln at Pitstone (near Tring) which could be used by arrangement whenever desired.

The first kiln to be built was the forced air, high temperature, Black Raku (John Dickerson's) example which, although successful, took most of the day to complete one firing. Then came two 'Open Days' of the Pitstone Society, for which a Red Raku (low temperature) kiln was built and fired.

Visitors could purchase a biscuited tea-bowl, glaze it themselves (with guidance) and see it going into the kiln, then later glowing ("Like the sun on ice" - Bernard Leach), taken out and placed in sawdust and then plunged into water! They were all delighted with the multi-coloured results, and went home proud of the pot they had 'made' (glazed). This part of the pottery became very successful.

Some pictures of pots and potters were exhibited permanently in the potters' hut, which not only visitors on Open Day but also occasional parties, including schoolchildren, during the year could see and

learn about OUR activities. And the really interested ones would probably want to join the Guild. This was a successful advertisement for the Guild.

But for some time now the kiln and pottery have remained unmanned on Society 'Open Days', and the Pitstone Society have advised us that the area will be cleared for other activities.

Can **YOU** let this happen ?

Apart from the obvious advertising advantages of the Raku kiln on these Pitstone 'Open Days', which have brought in new members, we have the advantage of a permanent Raku-site which we are allowed to use at any (previously notified) time.

What would attending the kiln for the day entail ?

Two people (preferably) at one time to advise the glazing and firing of the pots would be suitable. Two more could take over by arrangement. It would be an ideal situation for members and families to spend a day's picnic whilst helping with the Raku-firing. Entrance and car-parking, as well as snacks and drinks vouchers, are free to participants, and visits can be made to all the other exhibits and activities.

Prior to the 'day' - several 'pots' would need to be made and biscuit-fired. The best material is Pot-clays' (etc.) Raku clay or buff earthenware with up to 50% grog or sand (30% is probably minimum). The easiest pots from all aspects would be 'Tea-bowls' in variety, thrown or 'thumb-pots'.

On the day:-

1. Light fire as early as possible with paper, wood shavings, etc.
2. Feed wood pieces (ideally thin and about 2 ft. long). Wood can be supplied by the Society - and members could add to this amount.
3. Test temperature with one pot before selling to visitors.

4. Visitor chooses pot, pays for it - write name and number in your notebook with brief description of glaze and decoration used. This is important, since nobody will know quite what the result will be.

5. Stress the 'individuality' of each pot - whatever the result!

6. Warm the pots on top of the kiln chamber before firing. Thick leather gloves and metal tongs will be needed to move hot pots and bricks!

7. Remove the four 'door' bricks carefully, one at a time and place securely - the 'inner' ends will be very hot!

8. When plunging red-hot pots (using tongs) into sawdust, keep them covered, smother any flames with sawdust; there will be lots of smoke - advise visitors to stand well back. Sawdust, leafmould or any organic material can be used. There are containers at the site.

9. Leave pots in sawdust for any length of time; at the very least, one minute - longer will be better. The visitors will become impatient.

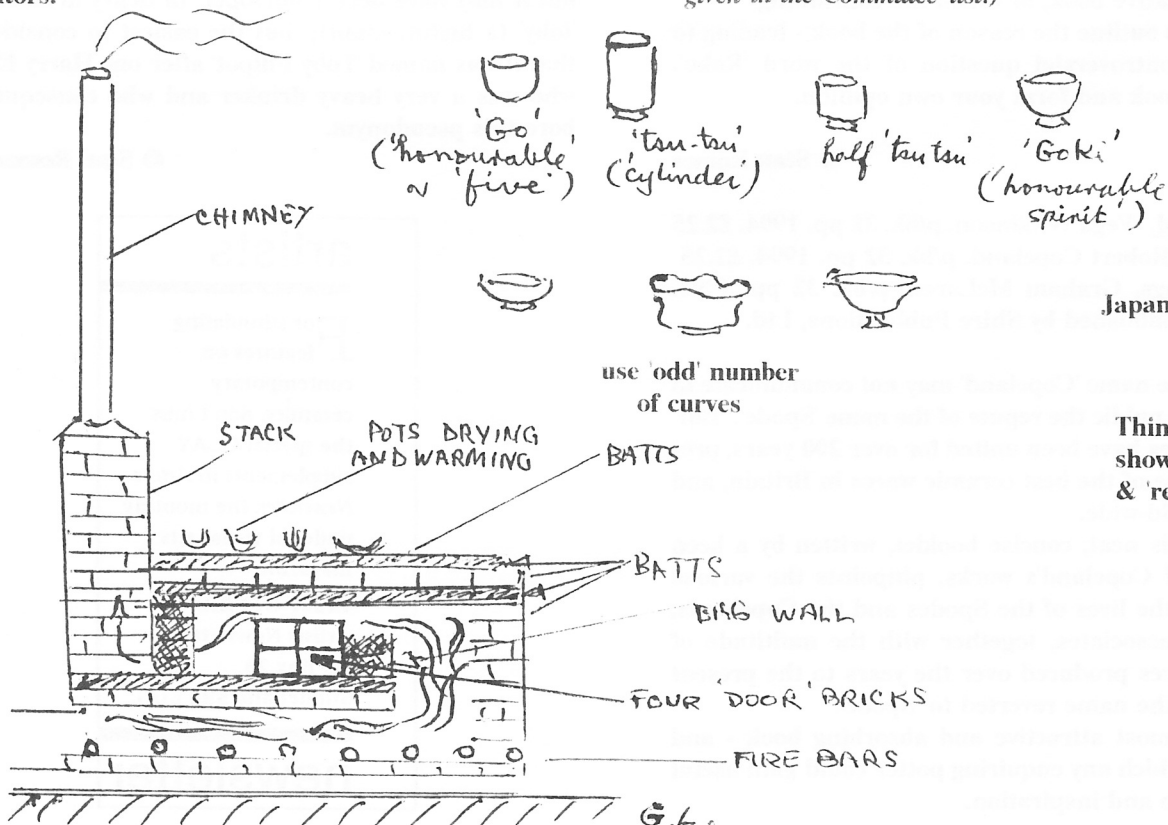
10. Always using tongs, remove pots and plunge into water (near sawdust) to stop the glaze reduction. Wait for cooling!

11. Using an old nailbrush etc. to clean the pots should show the sparkle of colours (especially if copper oxide had been used, when there should be seen bright copper streaks).

12. Pots can be put straight into water from the kiln, but these will be oxidised and coloured differently. Below, are simple drawings of the kiln and suggested shapes of pots.

*(What a marvellous opportunity!! surely some of you will want to get involved in the excitement of using the Raku kiln, not only on the Open days, but virtually at any time. If you are interested please phone our Secretary, John Beckley on 01923 822659, or write to him at his address, given in the Committee list.)*

Stan Romer



## BOOK REVIEWS

**Raku: A Review of Contemporary Work.** Tim Andrews. Hardback. 160 pp. A. & C. Black, Ltd. 1994. £19.99.

And yet another book on Raku? Yes, but previous books have dwelt mainly on brief histories and how to make it. This volume, beautifully illustrated with entrancing colours, shows and describes the work of a good number of contemporary potters working in the Raku method.

The book does give a history of the subject, with emphasis on the meaning of the word 'Raku' and the changing styles in its production. The importance of the 'accidentals' obtained by potters of all categories, amateur, professional, student or experienced practitioner, and the deliberate, decorative styles worked by the many, is stressed throughout the descriptive text to show the general trend which forms the background of the work.

Not only are many pots and sculptures shown but so are various kilns described, and also importantly the potters themselves. I believe we can learn useful information by seeing pictures of the potter at work.

Details of preparatory work on design, formed often by personal experience of nature, and the various techniques of procedure using specific formulæ for clays and glazes are explained and illustrated. This book is a mine of knowledge for all potters, and others interested in this art/craft form.

There are a few printers' errors, which however will not detract from enjoying a thoroughly fascinating and informative book, of which the concluding paragraphs outline the reason of the book - leading to the very controversial question of the word 'Raku'. Read the book and form your own opinion.

© Stan Romer

2) This is the story of a young man, Josiah Spode who, in 1749 became apprenticed to the famous potter, Thomas Whieldon, and who later became his own master, rivalling the other great Josiah (Wedgwood).

We follow through the important years of Spode's life and work, his strong connection with William Copeland and their world-wide reputation of innovation and practice in producing, particularly, 'Bone china' and the famous 'Willow pattern' of Chinese style. Many other designs were created by Josiah Spode and his successors, notably the floral patterns which have delighted so many potters and collectors.

It is indeed most fitting that the firm of Spode from 1770, having changed later to the family of 'Copeland', reverted to become 'Spode' 200 years after its foundation. A valuable booklet for the study of the history of British ceramics.

3) The anthropomorphic drinking vessels throughout history have interested many people around the world. One of the most fascinating of this type of jug, especially to the British, is the Toby Jug. Although the Toby Jug type has been produced in many countries, possibly the most varied and successful ones have been the multitude of British jugs.

The author of this booklet takes us through the history of these jugs, the various characters represented, in praise or reproach. The earliest known recognisable 'Toby Jugs' were made in the 1770s in the form of a seated ale-drinker holding a jug on his knees. Later, other figures were substituted including sailors, Shakespearian figures, Martha Gunn, Pickwickian characters, Punch, John Bull and many military and political figures.

We are not told how the name 'Toby' derived, but it may have been from 'topper' (a heavy drinker) or 'toby' (a highwayman); but the easiest to consider is that it was named 'Toby Fillpot' after one Harry Elwes who was a very heavy drinker and who consequently bore this pseudonym.

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- 1) Copeland. Vega Wilkinson. p/bk. 32 pp. 1994. £2.25  
2) Spode. Robert Copeland. p/bk. 32 pp. 1994. £2.25  
3) Toby Jugs. Graham McLaren. p/bk. 32 pp. 1994. £2.25 All published by Shire Publications, Ltd.

1) The name 'Copeland' may not communicate to the general public the repute of the name 'Spode'. But both families have been united for over 200 years, producing some of the best ceramic wares in Britain, and indeed world-wide.

This neat, concise booklet, written by a keen collector of Copeland's works, pinpoints the various aspects of the lives of the Spodes and the Copelands, and their associates, together with the multitude of master-pieces produced over the years to the present day, when the name reverted to 'Spode'.

A most attractive and absorbing book - and one from which any enquiring potter could gain useful information and inspiration.

## artists

For stimulating features on contemporary ceramics, don't miss the special CLAY supplements in *Artists Newsletter*, the monthly national visual arts magazine

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## newsletter

**Smoke-fired Pottery.** Jane Perryman. A. & C. Black.  
1995. Hardback, 128 pp. £19.99

This is a book about 'Transition' Jane Perryman, herself a well-known potter, has described the works and characters of several other potters - and has thus brought to the reader a profound and intimate enlightenment of the effects that 'Smoking' can have on various pottery wares.

The Transition? Oh yes: apart possibly from cracking in the kiln, the pottery forms don't change much during a firing. Set, prepared glazes usually produce set results; but the theme running through this book is one of the change - the transition - of a pot, dish, sculpture, which has been subjected to different conditions, especially one of heavy reduction during the firing, and also afterwards during cooling.

The desired results of many glaze-firings often may not be produced, and some outcomes may be unfortunate - even disastrous; but from time to time a piece emerges from this kiln which comes to be worth having after all those failed previous attempts. This may be due to smoke effects in the kiln, and the author has studied these 'accidents' and deliberately tried to reproduce them by producing heavy smoke-reduction during and after firing.

This must be why this book was written. The many photographs, and numerous coloured ones among them, which show the wonderful effects achieved through 'Smoke-firing', can but enthuse the potter who has not yet taken up the experimental art of this method of reduction-firing. It will encourage also those who have already tried it.

The author writes in an interesting and absorbing style (although I do wish we could all agree that 'Bisque' should refer to only Biscuit porcelain) - so that having read every page of the book, I feel that I have learned something of each and everyone of the international potters and their work described within.

Smoke-fired pottery is one of the easiest of the clay wares to produce; using paper, sawdust, wood and other fuels; in the open air, or in many types of simple kilns, over varying times from a few minutes to several hours. All methods are explained fully; as is the conception that also it is an excellent medium for educating all ages and types to live a full and artistically appreciative life.

It is particularly absorbing for even quite young children, and most rewarding as well for the handicapped. It is ideal for sixth-form and college students and, since every smoke-firing is an experiment, there is no limit to the work and adventure which it can bring to all those who practise it, watch it or just read about it being done.

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## SMALL ADS

### Raku Kiln needed

Arthur Ball & his grand-daughter had a good day with the recent Raku firing at Northfield Studio. The upshot of this is that the school is co-operating with Arthur to arrange a Raku event for a whole class of children. Arthur needs to borrow a Raku kiln, preferably gas fired, for this event. Any help that is offered will also be gratefully received. Please phone Arthur on 01707 260471 if you can supply a kiln and/or help.

WANTED - A small electric kiln,  
please phone Barbara Meeking 01442 822277

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For an application form, and further details of the Arts Centre, please ring 01895-273482. (Fax: 01895 -203250). Closing date for applications: 23 June 1995.

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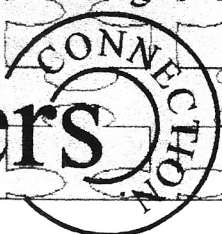
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