



August already! The Pot Crawl has come and -triumphantly - gone, and, before we know it, it will be time for the Open Day. The year has sneaked by so fast.

My brief spell as editor of the Newsletter is at an end, or at the very least, I shall be having a long break. This is partly because Alan, who has access to printing facilities, is to be away for most of the Autumn and there is no way of getting the Newsletter printed. It is also because my final Degree exhibition is in December and that has to take priority over anything else.

I have really enjoyed most of the time as editor - there have been so many interesting articles and ideas over the months. When Alan took over as editor and started to expand the original fact sheet into more of a magazine, he was inundated with articles. This continued for quite a long time - it was exciting to feel that everyone was so involved. However, round about last Autumn, interest and commitment began to wane and I found myself increasingly hard pressed to drum up material for each Newsletter. It was not a pleasant task, bludgeoning people, and in spite of occasional promises of write ups, few were submitted. I even resorted to bribery! Even that didn't work. It was all rather depressing. If it hadn't been for a handful of faithful stalwarts I should have given up long since - many thanks to those contributors.

Now, however, the moment of reckoning has come! There are two questions to be asked:

Is there anyone willing to take over the job of editor of the Newsletter? It really needs to be somebody with access to typing facilities, or preferably a word processor. It's not a difficult task: I had never done anything like this before I took over from Al. It takes time but not expertise! If anyone feels that they could take over, perhaps you would give me a ring and I'll explain the process.

The second question is more complicated. I feel that interest

in the newsletter has almost disappeared. As I have said, it is not easy to persuade people to contribute and some months have been so thin that I have had to write a fill in piece myself (and I am not even a potter!). Ask yourselves this. Is a magazine type of newsletter with articles and illustrations really what members want? If it is, then it requires everyone to have a share in producing it, even if you only send in a photo once a year.

The alternative is a sheet, giving information about meetings - this is a lot less time consuming to produce but infinitely more faceless.

Anyway, the decision is now yours. You will at least be released from my threatening approaches with a pen and paper to bludgeon you into writing up a demonstration or talk! Good luck to the next editor(s). It can be a very enjoyable job! Really it can!

So for the time being, this is your last Newsletter!

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GUILD EVENTS

Stick this in a prominent place. There will be no further notices before the events!

Lustreware

Friday Sept 13th at Northchurch Social Centre
8 pm Northchurch, Berkhamsted

Robert Goldsmith will demonstrate. See Ruth's

letter below.

AGM and Ancient Japanese Pots

Friday Oct 11th at Northchurch Social Centre,
7.30 pm Northchurch, Berkhamsted
Note earlier time

The chance to have your say!
Gas Kimishima will give a talk with slides.
See Ruth's letter below.



Jim Robison talking to us on the Pot Crawl.

THIS YEAR AND NEXT

First my apologies for not being able to attend the AGM in October. Some people regard an AGM as a sort of penance to be got through as quickly as possible. I don't feel that way: to me the AGM is the time for individual members to have their say and to influence the way in which the organisation develops. I wanted to hear what you have to say and to make the odd contribution of my own, so I am disappointed not to be going.

Hence this note. Ruth will ably chair the meeting, and it seemed better to present my report in this way, so that she can have full rein on the day.

A chairman's report traditionally begins with a review of the year. Well, we have again had a successful year. Membership numbers have kept up, and we have had some good meetings with stimulating speakers. Potter's Open Day was a triumph, as it always is, and the Pot Crawl weekend in Yorkshire and Derbyshire had everything but the weather.

There were some problems during the year, but I think we turned these to advantage. The last minute loss of a speaker from Open Day created a slot that had to be filled. We introduced a slide section which turned out to be one of the highspots of the day - how else would we have learnt of Jim Robison's involvement with ceramics in community architecture - and we intend to continue this feature in future Open Day programmes. We had hiccups with the membership list and unfortunately some members did not receive Newsletters or notification of meetings for a short period. But we now have a computerised list, and (touch wood!) we shall not have a recurrence of the problem: as a result we now have a much better knowledge of our 'true' membership. When Judith Wooton's car broke down as she was on her way to talk to the Guild, we had to think fast. Ruth Karnac, Pauline O'Dell and Les Sutherland stepped in with talks and slides, and it couldn't have been a more enjoyable occasion. We lost two stalwarts from the committee - Valerie Williams and Tony Plessner - at the beginning of the year, and we felt the loss; but it has meant that the rest of us relative newcomers have had to get to grips with some of the more obscure workings of the Guild.

And what about next year? Well, I am sure we can look forward to another successful one. We have a good programme lined up, with some interesting speakers. So why should I have a

niggling doubt at the back of my mind? I think it is because it all seems a little too cosy, not sufficiently daring; and because it seems to offer only a rather passive experience.

The 'activity clubs' - the Salt Kiln Group and the Medieval Potters Group, and the 'open house' social evenings demanded an active involvement of members. But these admirable innovations introduced by Roger Winn several years ago have gone. Participation in the Guild exhibition dwindled in recent years, until this year when it was decided not to hold one at all. The Newsletter, reactivated two years ago with the pledges of a few members to guarantee a years contributions, now struggles to find enough material to make monthly publication worthwhile.

Why are things going this way? I know that everyone finds just earning a living ever more demanding of their time and energies. But is this the only reason? Are there so few Guild members who want more than passive attendance at half a dozen demonstrations each year? Perhaps now is the time to talk about these things, and what better opportunity than the AGM. Having said that I will sidle away and let Ruth pick up the pieces!

There is one bright spot on the horizon. We now have some student members, who have been noticeably absent from the Guild in recent years. I would like to think we can keep them and increase their numbers because the Guild can only benefit from their involvement. But this does mean that we shall have to cater for their interests, and it also means that they will have to stand up and help to point the way ahead.

I found it difficult not to mention the names of committee members while discussing the past year at the beginning of this note, but it would have been invidious to single out individuals. So I can now thank them all on your behalf, as well as my own. All members of the committee are incredibly hard working, but they are great fun to work with, and it has been a pleasure to be Chairman this year.

Did I hear a murmur, "I wish I could join the committee"? I thought I did. Well - surprise, surprise - this presents no problem at all. Anyone with an interest in the future of the Guild, and with perhaps an evening or two a month going spare will be snapped up. And the AGM is the occasion to make this happen.

Alan O'Dell

A LETTER FROM RUTH KARNAC

Our next meeting is at Northchurch on September 13th, at 8 pm, Where Robert Goldsmith will demonstrate the decorating of lustreware and a slide talk. This should be really good, as the techniques for lustreware are not all that well known, and members might like to take advantage of this opportunity.

The following meeting will be the AGM on October 11th at 7.30 pm in order to get the business side of things over, before we hear from Gas Kinishima about ancient Japanese pots. He has been in Japan again this summer and should have some really interesting things to show us. He is a Guild member and you may have seen something of him at the last Open Day when we were unprepared for his generosity and had to squeeze him in during the lunch break. However, it should all be a lot better this time as he will have time to do things as he wishes.

The business side of the meeting will be, of course, the election of officers, committee members and the annual report. We always need people to help in many ways, so please don't be shy. Can you draw a poster? Take good photos of Guild events and mount them? Write your personal opinion of Guild events good or bad, serious or comic! Please contact any committee member at any time.

This is your last reminder of the September and October meetings as, very regrettably, Pauline O'Dell cannot do the newsletter any more (another volunteer wanted!) and we will miss her sorely, though hopefully she will still be able to come to meetings.

Alan O'Dell, our chairman will also be A.W.O.L for three months, so we shall be somewhat bereft.

SAWDUST FIRING ON JULY 13th.

Ruth Karnac

Karin Hessenberg came from South London, (that foreign country to us Northerners) to organise a really interesting firing. This took place in Tony and Marilyn Plessner's lovely garden near Sarratt. There was a nice, friendly sized group of us, about 15, including some new members who we were delighted to welcome. We had all brought some biscuited pots, some burnished and some not.

The kiln consisted of a floor of heavy bricks about two and a half feet square and a low, approximately round wall 3 courses high.

First we laid an inch or so of sawdust and shavings mixed, and then a layer of loosely crumpled newspapers. More sawdust was added and each prepared pot, half filled with sawdust, was laid on top on its side. More sawdust was used to just about cover the pots. The paper was lit in several places and left to burn down. No cover was needed on the top. Our firing took about 3 hours but it depends on how many layers and how windy the weather is.

The pots were "stencilled" with torn bits of newspaper lightly pressed onto the pot. The clay masked that area from the smoke. Some of us used masking tape instead or as well as the newspaper, but this gives a very hard edge to any pattern. It can be more effective if the clay is applied over a slip trailed design before biscuiting. Thoughtful preparation gives the best results but we learned the methods and it could spark off further developments.

While the kiln was burning we retired into Tony and Marilyn's living room which is delightfully decorated with pots, pictures and four little dogs and a Siamese cat very entertaining and friendly. We had a picnic lunch there as the weather remained obstinately grey and spitty. Then Karin showed us slides of the lovely garden pots she makes now and

her sculptured ones too, and talked about them.

Eventually the kiln was finished and we were able to retrieve our hot, well-kipperred pots and compare notes. The kiln probably only reached about 600°C.

I think we all enjoyed the day and we are very grateful to Tony and Marilyn for hosting us. We would also like to congratulate Marilyn on her potter son, Gary Wornell's award of a trip to Japan, the Inax Design award and #3000 and all found in Japan for three months.



Pot by Karin Hessenberg.

A VISIT TO DAVE ROBERTS

Dick Pope

Although our call on Dave Roberts was the second visit of the Pot Crawl, it was for me the first; under any other consideration. The unique, elegantly carved wooden gate was a first indication of an entry into a different world.

His pottery - an ancient barn behind his house, and at roof level due to the steeply sloping site - lay waiting for us with its double doors wide open. Clearly it was ready for visitors, but as we arrived, quite deserted. Within minutes a tall, booted figure appeared and made us very welcome. From the start he made it clear that we were his guests, and he would do his best to entertain and to be as hospitable as possible. We were pressed to partake of coffee and biscuits, which we all enjoyed standing around in the entrance festooned with two suspended raku kilns and counterweights.

Dave began by talking on the cultural influences behind his work, mentioning his northern roots, and the historic Norse/Danish influences in the North. Listening to this tall, commanding figure, it was not too difficult to imagine him clad in helmet, with sword and shield in hand. An offer to light the raku kiln was quickly accepted, and a large pot was set upon the base and the kiln top lowered into position over it. The burners were lit and once settled down to a steady warming, we all repaired to the pottery upstairs.

Currently Dave coils all his work, normally working on one pot at a time. To achieve this in a reasonable time scale it is intermittently dried with the flame from a small blow torch. All coils are hand rolled, and applied to the pot individually with shaping taking place after every two or three additions. Dave demonstrated by working on one of his current series - pots resembling large arums emerging from globular bulbs. At first sight these appeared to be impossible subjects for coiling, but it was soon shown how simple it can be - in expert hands.

Descending again to the slowly firing kiln, Dave explained that all his pots are individually fired and the temperature controlled both by pyrometer and visual inspection. When the required temperature is reached, the pot is removed from the kiln and delayed for several before it is plunged into the sawdust. At this point we all departed for lunch and returned later to see the finished pot emerging from its sawdust bath. The transformation was dramatic; gone was the bland whiteness, to be replaced by a bold black and white pattern.

Our thanks to Dave as a friendly and hospitable host giving freely of his time and knowledge. The essential ingredient of the latter is precision; precision raku firing of an individual pot basis, and precise coiling of intricate shapes. Our horizons have been extended; coils need no longer imply severely restricted solid shapes, for we have seen it can be both delicate and sophisticated. Similarly raku can be much more than a 'bung it in and hope' process, and controlled to specific end result.



Dave Roberts at work.

A VISIT TO GEOFF FULLER

Pauline Howe

Geoffrey Fuller's pub/pottery is perilously close to a stretch of wide straight road along which traffic, delighted with the chance to speed in an area of twisting narrow roads, hurtles alarmingly. The long, low buildings are a stride (or so it seems) away from the tarmac, and consist of a tiny house-like pub at one end with converted farm buildings which house his pottery and showroom making up the rest.

Geoff was a bit tired when he greeted us on Sunday morning: he had had a busy night in the pub - which had been almost full to capacity (an absolute maximum of 50 people) - and had got to bed at 2am. His wife Pat was still busy clearing up while we crowded into the showroom and the ex-milking parlour pottery!.

Geoff told us that he had been having many problems with his clay recently. A whole batch had arrived in rock hard condition; and when made manageable was found to have a massive shrinkage rate, which meant that where 12oz was once enough clay, this had to be made up to 1lb to achieve the right size. Naturally this resulted in very heavy pots which also warped dramatically. Thus much of his recent work had been ruined. He was testing another clay supplied by a brickworks, but had not yet made enough pots for a kiln load so did not know how it fired.

The result of these problems was that there were not many of his 'one-off' pieces and medieval-type pots. There was however a large selection of his cream tableware, which is thrown by another potter and slip trail decorated by Geoff. Each item has a motif such as a tree, rabbit, deer, potters wheel or watering can trailed upon it inside a circle, using green and brown slips.

Three of us felt in need of a drink, and went out of the showroom to peer hopefully in at the window of the bar. Pat invited us in, though she was still clearing up last night's

mess, and told us how they had managed to buy the pub which Geoff had had his eye on for years; and how they had 'modernised' only one thing in the room, the bar. This had been a 50s type construction with a reeded hardboard front - so they decided not to demolish it, but to build a new one over the top so that future generations could exclaim in wonder on its rediscovery!

While waiting at the bar for our drinks I managed to overturn Pat's morning cup of tea; the cup was a nice one of Geoff's and, unaware of its contents, I inverted it to look at the bottom - a typically stupid act on my part. I felt I'd got off quite lightly with "Oh! I really needed that cup of tea", from Pat, when I read the notice above the bar printed clearly in black and red, 'Please don't ask the landlord for a draught lager as a smack in the gob may cause offence'.

We sat at a three-legged table (3 legs don't wobble on the stone flagged floors) and enjoyed our drinks in a room which made few concessions to the past 40 years. I especially liked the black range fireplace which took up most of one wall, and the wrinkled, thick, dark brown varnish on the wooden partitioning.

The room rapidly filled up with the rest of our group and a bare legged, long haired, lost-looking chap, and a family in search of a quiet drink. It was time to go - so we went!



THE CAMBERWELL DEGREE SHOW

Alan O'Dell

It's interesting how fashions seem to run through students' work, and how these are concentrated in individual art schools. Presumably they follow the broad movements in the art world generally, but are modified by the influences of particular tutors or by the preoccupations of certain students. That is not to say that all the students in a given degree show exhibit identical works. In fact at the Camberwell ceramics show there is always an incredible diversity: it's just that often certain ideas or themes are detectable.

Recent fashions in this college have run through tiles, rather abstract sculpture and Raku works. One theme which has not been present for many years is domestic pottery, or vessels which could be used to hold things. But this year 'container pots' seem to have returned; though it has to be said that hand building is still favoured over the wheel, and of course colour is still 'in'.

A couple of students displayed wheel thrown salt-glazed receptacles, one using fish motifs as decoration, and the other producing work slightly reminiscent of Jane Hamlyn's by cutting and joining thrown dishes. There were, I think, four or five students producing hand built jugs vases and pots, which tended to be large, highly coloured and decorated by drawing. Lest this gives an impression of uniformity I should say that this was all highly original work.

Students whose work particularly caught my attention were:

Joanna Sharer who produced a series of modelled human figures, varying from full figures 20-30cm high, to torsos perhaps 80cm high. The body shapes were smoothed and distorted, with the heads smaller than might be expected from the body size, but surfaces were highly textured and glazed (in places) in flat greens and blacks, giving an

impression of age. The figures were solid and powerful, but gave a feeling of quietness. Particularly striking were a couple of vessels, about 30cm high, looking like hollow boulders, with single figures clinging to the outside and seemingly in the process of merging with the boulders.

Lucienne Evans had used torn slabs of clay to produce wall plaques and shallow dishes. These were decorated with very fine textured geometric patterns and were raku or smoke fired. The colour was minimal and the blackness of the smoke predominated, but this only served to intensify what colour there was, to give a jewel-like mosaic sort of effect, and with the patterning, to give a very 'Middle Eastern' feel to the objects.

Simon Harper had made 'Wally Keeler like' teapots, cups and bowls in fine red earthenware. The attraction for me, apart from the shapes of the vessels, was the way the squeezed out slip used for joining the separate parts of the pots had been left to provide a minimal decoration.

Edla Griffiths had done some simple drawings of nude figures on white tiles. Individually the tiles were not very striking, but put together in a panel of about 2m high and 1m wide they were wonderful. The differences in size and position of the figures, the variations in line and shading, the slight colour changes in the creamy white background with the odd pale green thrown in, acted together to add a rhythm and pattern to the whole.

Lucy Smailes had made a series of boxes, each about 30cm high - bulging cubes on four feet, with elaborate handles to the lids. The decoration was eastern, with elephants, tigers, camels and exotic birds painted in brilliant colours on the sides of the boxes or modelled into the handles.

David Harrison took the most conventional starting point

- white slip cast cups and saucers - but arrived finally at the least conventional exhibit. He simply broke up the objects and put them together again in extraordinary ways. So he produced '49 unique objects from 49 identical objects' - parts of the broken cups and saucers laid out in a 7 X 7 array; and 'saucers made from cups, cups made from saucers' - just what it says, but producing beautifully delicate sculptural pieces like the tracery on an iced wedding cake.

Magdalene Al-Tayyar was perhaps my favourite. She produced vases and bowls of fairly simple geometric shape, about 30-50cm in size. These were decorated with beautifully drawn human and animal figures which seemed to float above the bright blue and yellow base colours. The drawings, which were taken from episodes in the Arabian Nights stories, had a frescoe like quality, with the figures seeming to be a cross between Chagall and traditional Middle Eastern illustrations.

Having just reread what I have written, I can perhaps detect another fashion emerging, that of Eastern inspired decoration.



'saucers made from cups, cups made from saucers' by David Harrison.