

dcp g newsletter



... the first Valentine?

february 1991

Back to the word processor - or its chum who has stepped into the breach!

People have really pulled the stops out for this issue and there are some very interesting articles for your delight. Keep them coming in please! Book or exhibition reviews, questions, suggestions (with care!), tips, descriptions of pots or potters, drawings, black and white photographs - all are welcome.

My very last words on writing reviews!

Its enlightening to read accounts of our evening demos, but very difficult to persuade people to write them. Accounts needn't be lengthy or technical - an impression of the potter and the evening is quite as interesting. So be brave - there is a small prize for the person who volunteers to review our next meeting (no, I am not above bribery and corruption). Looking forward to the rush!

Our apologies to all those who have not been receiving Newsletters. We are desperately trying to get our membership lists up to date, so if you know anyone who is still having problems please let us know. And tell us if you have changed your address.

Any material for the next Newsletter should reach me by Thursday 21st February.

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GUILD EVENTS

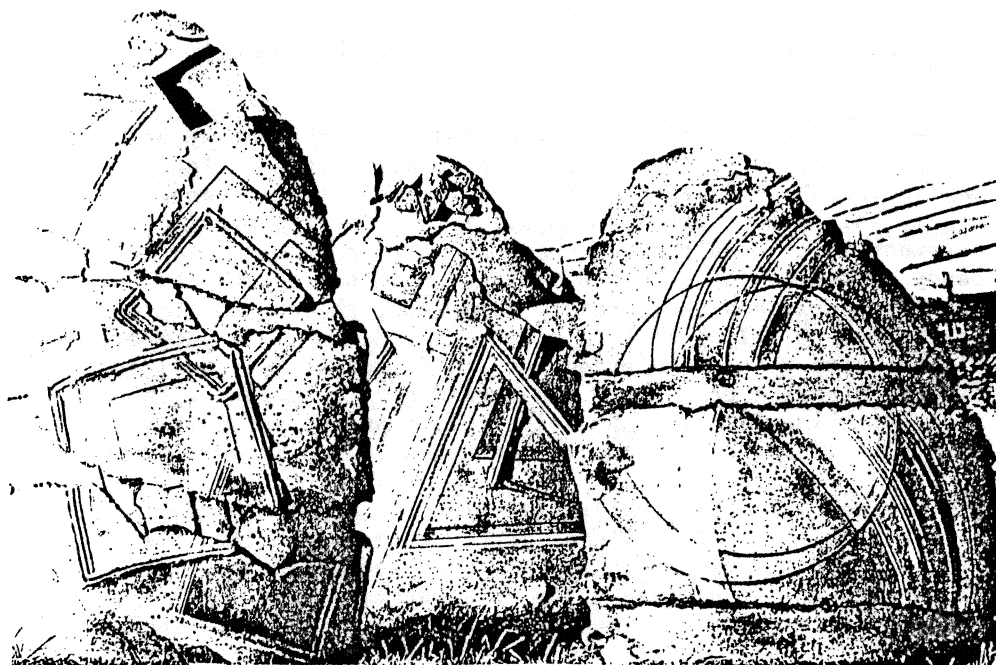
The seeing eye

February 8th at Northchurch Social Centre,
8 pm Northchurch, Berkhamsted.

George Wilson will give a presentation of 'pots in the round' using three projectors.

You might like to bring a camera to this meeting.

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***** MORE NOTES FROM POTTERS OPEN DAY *****

The following review is by Barbara Dodd, a non-potting visitor to the Open Day.

"THIS CLAY HAS A TENDENCY TO CENTRE ITSELF!"

Despite a claim that she has a natural tendency to be awkward, Sandy Brown at the Potters' Open Day at the Rudolph Steiner School on November 17th 1990, also resembled the clay with which she worked, in that she had a strong tendency to centre herself. She briefly mentioned an unhappy childhood and a family trauma and related her off-centre, chunky pots to herself (or herself to her pots?). While using the kick wheel she was calm, centred and relaxed, in contrast to the vibrant, energetic style she exhibited when she demonstrated her decorating techniques. She illustrated her spirit of freedom and courage by decorating some biscuit fired plates that had been provided for her. Her simple tools of thick and thin brushes, trail makers and her own thumb ends with two or three colours to each plate resulted in lively glowing designs. She stated that she decorated in a state of meditative trance and trusted her own internal processes. To the delight of the audience, (and the consternation of one of

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the organisers,) Sandy then responded to a challenge to decorate with her eyes closed.

While she was decorating, Sandy outlined her philosophy of the pot, attributed to the time she spent in Japan. In particular she had learned that the Japanese tea ceremony, highly valued economically and spiritually, was a meditative ceremony to celebrate the pot and the art of hospitality. Sandy suggested that where Elizabeth David had taught the British people how to celebrate good food, she would like to teach them to celebrate pots and to consider no meal complete without good pots. She ended her demonstration with a flying figure, standing calm, open and confident, to celebrate the state of being female. She said "this shows me where the journey's taking me - I don't know where I'm going next."

Jim Robison takes his inspiration from his adopted home of Yorkshire with its dark linear grids, rather than from his original country of Michigan. His work reflected the blue-green of the hills and the warm terracotta of the soil, but mostly revealed his fascination with texture. His early training was in sculpture and we were fortunate to see some of his recent work on slides. Some of this reflected his interest in standing stones and the story of creation.

For his demonstration he entertained us with an old fashioned mangle tailored to his needs by the technical refinement of four blocks of wood. He achieved his effects by 'wringing' sheets of clay with varying thicknesses of board, lace handkerchiefs and stray pieces of holey cloth. He was particularly concerned to achieve interesting edges and delightedly exclaimed at one point "this is the best slab I've done for ages!" It was good to know that the pressures and strains inherent in demonstrations do not necessarily impede the process and can result in excellence. Vessels and dishes were moulded in home made cradles after the clay had been torn into collage-like structures which echoed the rhythms, patterns, grids and colours of the Yorkshire countryside.

Yorkshire is also Anna Lambert's second home, having moved recently from Gloucestershire. Her inspiration comes mainly from fish and birds, and her coil pots often feature a predator in the middle with its prey around the edges. Some perfectionists are concerned with perceived inaccuracies, but Anna is more concerned to have fun. She enjoys having her

ducks chase the drakes to counter the natural balance!

Fish and birds appear in two and three dimensional forms. Her current wish is to decorate her fireplace with pigeons to reflect the Yorkshire values that she is now sharing. She related the apparent calm of the birds on top of the water, and the swimming-like-fury beneath, to her own experiences, particularly at times of change in her life.

She certainly demonstrated very calmly the making of a candlestick. She discussed the meditative action involved in the repetitive production of the parts. In her workshop she has an assistant to extrude the clay, prepare the decorative stage and do some of the glazing. Her husband also glazes; "it is all he can do", she said. If her pieces do not work she rarely refires them as she likes them fresh. She prefers to throw them away or "give them to friends."

During the demonstration Anna was concerned that her work was too small to be seen. The stem and branches of the candlestick were no problem, and it was fascinating to see a small lump of clay disappear into the palm of her hand and reappear as a bird. Similarly leaves appeared by magic. Finally she mixed and used glazes as water paints and she had old bun tins filled with the lovely delicate tints reproduced in her work.

This was a very productive and enjoyable day from three very different contributors. They were different in their styles of working and presentation, and in their finished work. Although I am not a potter, I found several aspects directly relevant to my own area of interest in textiles. In particular was the common theme of a meditative trance and of trusting the internal process. I also value Sandy's demonstration of ignoring the boundaries of the plates whilst decorating them and her observation of her own hand as if it did not belong to her - "I wonder what this hand is going to do now?" I think we all went away from the day with a very similar question of our own hand, and a strong wish to put it to the test quickly and see the result.

Jim Robison brought his mangle (not trundling along the road from Holmfirth behind the car, but sedately in a van). This was mangle Mark 11 and much stronger than any purpose built clay roller. It had with it the ghosts of its previous owners, sleeves rolled up, arms akimbo ready to make short work of any such latter day flimsiness.

Jim had a similarly refreshing down to earth approach to clay preparation and said he tended to make "one bag pots" or "two bag pots" and the important thing was to turn the bags right side out to stop the scraps drying and getting in the way.

He rolled his slabs through the mangle between two cloths, on boards which control the thickness. The cloths are kept under tension to avoid rucks and are damp to keep down dust. Canvas, rather than hessian is his basic cloth with a literal wardrobe of other textures.

Jim rolls, folds and re-rolls the clay. Then he tears it apart and re-assembles it, looking all the time for interesting uneven edges and unexpected effects to exploit. Parts of the rolled up sheet are painted with slips, perhaps through open weave cloth. The final sheets of clay, richly edged and textured but of even thickness, are left to settle in a damp place for 24 hours. Then they are placed face down in a pair of hammocks of hardboard lined with newspaper, and left to stiffen ready for assembling on to a prepared base. To stop the clay slabs falling from the hammocks during assembly. Jim laid a stout stick in the inside surface of each slab and held it in place with loops of soft clay: this fell away on drying, leaving no marks. As he said, that tip alone was worth the entrance fee!

He uses three slips and four or five glazes to create effects inspired by stone walls and rock layers. His clay was speckled and the slips are based on porcelain for contrast colour and texture. He sprays glazes, using a proper mask (see Ceramic Review 122 p34), into textures and rubs off the high spots, or across textures to heighten them. A tin glaze, especially over porcelain, gives a contrast and colour. An ash glaze was sprayed over the edges to 'toast' them. Jim fires in a gas kiln kept in moderate reduction from 1080°C upward, to a flat cone 8.

We were advised always to give ourselves time to play and Jim clearly enjoyed doing just that whilst making rich and thoughtful pottery, sculpture and murals.

ANOTHER review from a non potting visitor - this makes three!

CONTRASTS IN CLAY - POTTERS OPEN DAY

Peter Dodd

My main impression of the day was that of its variety - I had thought beforehand it would be interesting, but perhaps a little repetitious. This changed from the word 'go' with Jim Robison's slides of his background in sculpture in the U.S., and then the ceramic sculpture projects in the U.K. - especially the community based works. This contrasted with Sandy Brown's more 'utilitarian' pieces and her inner exploration and conscious attempt to capture unconscious spontaneity. Anna Lambert's naturalistic and painstaking approach was yet another contrast - this time to the chance element in both Jim's and Sandy's more abstract work.

The demonstrations were exciting and gave me (a non potter) many insights but mainly the freedom to contemplate doing my own thing - however naively. Especially the freedom to make mistakes, or rather to eliminate the word 'mistake' from my vocabulary, as one of the main messages of the day was that of allowing/inviting the chance element to enter the process and then to select the most pleasing results. Not that this would have been a welcome sentiment in my childhoods town of Stoke-on-Trent, but at least they'd have agreed with Sandy's view that pots were for use, not just display - how many of you are drinking your morning tea out of one of Sandy's cups?

WHERE THERE'S A QUILL THERE'S A WAY!

Our chance to have a go at 'Quilling' at the Christmas Party met with varying degrees of enthusiasm and ability - here's a comment from an anonymous writer:

A person of middle-aged years
Under paper and glue disappears.
And though somewhat willing
An evening of quilling
Finishes wrapped round her ears!

Guess Who!

CHELSEA CRAFTS FAIR contained much colourful thrown ceramics this year. I particularly liked some thrown stoneware in shades of grey with black lines zigzags and spots. I was somewhat aghast, however, to learn that a space, six foot by four foot, cost a stallholder £2000. It cost me £3 to go in so somebody was making money and I don't think it was the potters!

'Fairy Ware', decorated by Miss Jones at the beginning of this century is displayed at the V&A. They demonstrate just about every decorative process known to man. Brilliant mauves and greens sponged or painted on. Lustres and enamels with elves and fairies drawn over the top in gold. One tall vase bore the oriental legend of a creator who poured soapy water over the world and each bubble contained a baby! This was balanced by having on the other side a baby-eating dragon!

The DIVERSE CULTURES EXHIBITION at the Crafts Council Gallery in Waterloo Place, showed contemporary crafts in all media designed and made by makers of African, Afro-Caribbean, Asian, Middle Eastern and Far eastern origin who are currently living in Britain.

MOHAMMED ABDALLA was born in the Sudan, studied at Central School and Staffordshire College. He produces very thin, large bowls in porcelain and T-material. Decorated in a Westerner's idea of subtle colour, his recent works were priced at £4,200 each.

LORETTA BRAGANZA spent her childhood in India but is also influenced by Islamic and Greek Bronze Age vases. She showed amazing, flat vase shapes whose blue and turquoises were applied in such a way as to create the illusion of being round.

CHRIS BRAMBLE took his ceramic degree at Glasgow College of Art. His three exhibition pieces showed African heads of great beauty, supporting very round, thrown pots which were decorated with dry, matt glazes.

EMMANUEL TAIWO JEGADE exhibited four large story telling stoneware bowls full of Yoruba symbols. It is said that the art of story telling and visual practise in African society is an interwoven principle.

VINITHA MCWHINNIE from Sri Lanka trained in the West Midlands where she set up her own pottery workshop at home. She makes low fired, burnished and smoked vases (which proved very popular from the selling point of view) with a matt surface texture.

Finally, I must mention the three enormous 'natural' wood and rope chairs made by a young girl, they were really stunning.

FEATHER MASTERPIECES OF THE ANCIENT ANDEAN WORLD at Gibson's in Bond Street. This stunningly colourful sale of ancient clothes and art put me in a quandry. I like to see such things but, originally, they were of religious significance and were buried with the owner. Now they can be bought by anyone with around £15000 to spare. Think of all the birds who must have been killed to make a tabard!

Perhaps you saw the photos of the feathered textiles in the Sunday Times Supplement, but of course, such pictures give little idea of the true colours and textures. The abstract shapes and brilliant colours are strangely like modern abstract paintings. To the Incas, they were imbued with unique magical and mystical attributes. The two headed serpents (symbols of rain and tempest) were important to dwellers of the arid desert coast. Storms, in the Andes, produced mountain rivers running to the sea and thus providing fresh water. The sun was of particular importance as quoted in their sacred poem

'O Sun, king of the stars and our father'.

Their very simplicity of design lends itself to being copied on to pottery although I am not sure whether that is a good thing. These were, however, magnificent textiles and could truly be called masterpieces.

Well folks! Holiday time arrived and we asked ourselves "Where should we go?" and with our usual originality we chose Germany - as we go there every year, this was hardly surprising.

We threw our gear into the car and proceeded to leave the country as quickly as possible, and arrived in the Westerwald just in time to find the summer fading and the rain falling. Since our holidays are spent hiking in boots and short trousers this put us at a distinct disadvantage which was soon overcome by waterproofs and luckily a change in the weather to brilliant sunshine.

You may ask yourselves "What has this to do with ceramics?" Well, perhaps I had better put you out of your misery. The Westerwald region near the Rhein borders is on what is known as the 'Kannenbacker Strasse', or, for those who are uninitiated in these strange foreign languages, 'the Pottery Road'. When we discovered how near we were to Hohn-Grenzhausen, the centre of the industry, we couldn't wait to get out our sketch pads and visit the museum there.

However, what was in store was a rare insight into French pottery - yes, I did say French, because a special exhibition had been mounted. It encompassed pots from the Deckchair fantasies of Serge Bottagisio and Agnes Decoux, to the quiet forms of Jean Francios Fouilloux. Other exhibitors included Pierre Bayle, Claire Bogino, Allain Bresson, Jacque Bucholz, Michel Moglia and Jean Paul Van Lith. It was indeed an opportunity to see a fine cross section of French artistry.

The museum itself contained a collection of Germanic works and covered various ceramic artists both past and current. In addition, works by some potters from Finland and Denmark were represented. It was not a large collection but it was of good quality and representative of German pottery generally.

Whilst admiring the "French Collection", I was surprised to hear an English voice and was soon in animated conversation with Maggie Barnes, a potter from Yorkshire who was spending the summer living and working in Germany. She suggested that she should introduce us to an elderly German Master Potter with whom she was working and although we had no idea who

Wendelin Stahl was, we happily agreed. He was described as one of the top five German potters and although he spoke no English, a combination of Maggie's and my German overcame any difficulties. An invitation to see his workshop was given and we agreed to arrive there later in the day. Maggie said this was an opportunity not to be missed and access to Herr Stahl's workshop is strictly limited.

One could stop at a multitude of pottery shops and workshops in the area, ranging from poor quality rustic salt glaze to rare high quality domestic ware. But time was short and I decided to save my money in case Wendelin Stahl came up to expectations - little did I know!

We travelled some distance to a small village by Cochem on the Mosel following instructions, and drove up the hill to a ruined castle - yes, this is where he lived. When we reached the gates we announced ourselves by way of the intercom system, and Herr Stahl came down to meet us. This was just as well, since he owns a Lion Dog which was twice my size and could be very fierce if it didn't know someone - I quickly made friends. Luckily, the Billy goat was locked up, I believe he eats people!

Herr Stahl asked what we wanted to see first and one glance through the window of his showroom was enough to make us gasp as the quality of the pots was beyond anything we had expected or indeed had seen anywhere. Beautiful pots with crystalline glazes with controlled crystals and a high gloss, fine faultless finish which he had strived to achieve over many years. Every throwing line was removed, the pots biscuit fired in an electric kiln and then glaze fired in a wood fired kiln to 1260°C. The clay which had little or no grog, was very plastic and had been mined in the Westerwald. It took up water very readily.

When we entered the showroom, we really couldn't believe the lovely Celadons and Turquoise glazes which left me speechless and, unfortunately, so did the prices. The pots ranged from £700 for a medium sized pot upwards to £2000 for a huge one. We were not surprised to learn that he had no difficulty at all in selling his work.

Every section of his showroom was superbly set out, including a section which was rather a shrine to his dead wife Else Harney, who was also a potter in her own right, and this room

contained some of her finest work which equalled Lucie Rie in its quality and form. Across the valley one could see the cemetery where she is buried, and on her grave is a ceramic waterlily bud which symbolises death as the flower has closed at the end of the day. In the morning the sun reflects off the fine celadon glaze of Wendelin Stahl's pot and one can see the flower quite clearly.

Herr Stahl was pleased to allow us to photograph everything, demonstrated his turning techniques and presented us with a copy of the catalogue of his and his late wife's joint exhibition in Koln.

Sadly all good things must come to an end, and we gave him our thanks and made our goodbyes. Maggie accompanied us down to the gates and we passed through knowing how privileged we had been to visit him, demoralised by the standard set for us to achieve but fired with enthusiasm to continue.

A SAWDUST FIRING WORKSHOP WITH KARIN HESSENBERG

Karin Hesselberg will be giving a day's workshop on July 13th at Tony and Marilyn Plessner's home. She has sent the following instructions:

'I recommend the following clays and burnishing for best results.

porcelain, red earthenware, white earthenware,
white stoneware and T-material.

The pots should be biscuit fired to 980°C, so that they retain their burnish. It would be a good idea if members brought 3-4 pots each so that they can experiment with effects in the sawdust.'

Karin is going to give us more information later - this is to enable us to plan our pot making in good time.