

BULLETIN

JULY

1986

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FORTHCOMING EVENTS

Friday September 19th Northchurch Social Centre - 8 pm. Michael Bayley. Inlaid and agate ware.

Friday October 17th Annual General Meeting.

SPECIALIST GROUPS AND OTHER NOTICES

RAKU GROUP Contact Roy Adams 55 Shrublands Road Berkhampstead Tel: Berkhampstead 71095. Firings monthly at Bulbaggers Tip.

SALT GLAZERS A successful firing completed by Christine Bull's group in June. This facility will now cost £10 a year commencing October 1986. It will entitle you to as many firings as you like during that period. Contact Alan O'Dell or Chairman re bookings.

<u>VIDEO</u> Three titles available £2.50 plus deposit (weekly) The Potters Craft, Rolled Figures Audrey Blackman, Exhibition Work Audrey Blackman. Other titles on the way. Guild use is for members' showing at Open Houses (no charge then).

LIBRARIES Membership drive - Can you make a booking for a display corner at your local library for the Guild display boards? Periods required are September through to January. Fortnight from 17th September has been booked.

CHORLEYWOOD ARTS CENTRE The Chorleywood Community Arts Centre runs pottery groups on Wednesday evenings between 8 pm - 10 pm and Thursdays between 10 am and 12 noon.

A variety of clays and a wide variety of glazes are available for use, as well as three wheels and two kilns. Basic instruction in pottery can be given by fellow members, as well as mutual help and assistance. The kilns are loaded and fired by members giving an ideal opportunity to learn this skill.

Ring the Chairman of the Chorleywood Community Arts Centre on Chorleywood 2918, or the Secretary on Chorleywood 4627 for further information.

The CCAC have an Open Evening on Friday 12th September 1986. Please make a note in your diary about this!

LA BORNE The Guild's thanks to Murray Fieldhouse for his organisation and efforts regarding this venture. An account of the trip will probably be given after the AGM in October. Meanwhile we quote a letter from one of the West Forest Potters who took part:-

Dear Valerie, Please convey our thanks to the Dacorum group of potters for allowing Rod and myself to join your party at La Borne. We felt it was a wonderful week. The La Borne potters were so friendly and hospitable and it was a great joy to us to meet them in their studios. A truly memorable week. With best wishes to you, and to our fellow travellers Yours sincerely, Pat Peirson

THE HISTORY OF FAIENCE

As a contrast to usual practice our lecturer, Anita Fraser, was an archaeologist and historian and provided a different perspective from a pottery based speaker.

Adopting a two-part presentation, the first covered the geographical and historical background whilst the second was more specifically orientated to pottery and faience. The geographical area was Mesopotamia, a land stretching northwards from the head of the Persian Gulf and traversed by the almost legendary river Euphrates. The ancient origins of the area were almost universally known, but it was generalised knowledge lacking detail of the peoples and their daily lives. Fortunately a successful excavation at Uruk provided large amounts of material which has enabled many gaps in our knowledge to be filled. One of the more fascinating finds was of thousands of clay tablets which were used as the "writing paper of ancient times". Shaped like over-sized lozenges, their flat surfaces and on some ends as well, were covered with cuneiform script. Cuneiform script was formed by pressing a shaped reed into the soft tablet which was then sun dried and stored as a permanent record. For many years the tablets retained their secrets

but ultimately the script was decoded and the information revealed. This showed that the people living between five and seven thousand years ago were able to keep records of grain stocks and amounts owed by one person to another. All in all a highly sophisticated and civilised society was portrayed. This view was reinforced by examining the remains of stone built temples - which were impressive structures. The first part ended with a slide show of ancient pottery and scenes from modern times amongst the Marsh Arabs who until the Iran/Iraq war, were the modern inhabitants. Of particular interest were large and beautiful buildings supported on beams made from carefully arranged bundles of reeds.

After a fortifying cup of coffee and a browse among the maps and books provided to support the evening we moved onto the second half. This proved to be quite a surprise, if not downright controversial, for the archaeologists' definition of faience turned out to be: - "... an object made from a non-clay core and glazed with a separate material". Not a few doubts were raised here - some vocally expressed! As the lecturer continued to expand upon her point it emerged that Egyptian Paste was also classed as faience. Clearly the archaeological term did not accord with the potter's understanding, as for instance set out by Leech, "... tinenamelled earthenware ...". The movement of the potter's art and science was traced through Egypt, Greece, Italy and the eponymous town of Faenza, finally to Holland. On the way the product changed and latterly conforms to the contemporary definition of it.

Our lecturer re-affirmed that pottery is an ancient craft and those that practice it are carrying on a tradition extending over many millenia. Over such time spans changes are inevitable and we are indebted to Anita Fraser for this further insight into the ancient world.

DICK POPE

DAVE ROBERTS - RAKU

Tony Plessner's peaceful garden and the best sunshine we've seen yet this year, provided the pleasant setting for the raku event with David Roberts.

While we stood around waiting for people to arrive we had a good look at the converted oil drum kiln that David had brought with him. It has about 1" of ceramic fibre "stitched" to the inside with nichrome wire. It is cut in half so that the top can be lifted off at the end of a firing. Firings go up to about 950'-1000'C in this kiln. (2" of insulation is to be recommended according to David.

You can then get higher temperatures and the outside casing stays cooler.) Two propane gas burners were the medium size by Aeromatic from Slough. These are nice and quiet which David finds important and have a soft flame slightly yellow ended which he finds useful because it enables him to see exactly where the flames are. The 2 burners on opposite sides are angled so that the heat spirals round inside. These burners are a bit big in size for the oil drum but David likes it that way - you don't have to struggle with something that is only just up to the job. A very large spy hole in the top is covered over with a piece of ceramic fibre when firing. There are some spy holes in the sides too - you need to be able to see all round a pot because it can have the glaze melted on one side and not the other. David likes to have a valve to control pressure on the gas cylinder as well as ones on the burners - safer this way.

He biscuits overnight in an electric kiln to cone 06 and aims for a very well-ventilated firing, bung holes and lid slightly open for the whole firing to get rid of carbonaceous matter (otherwise this can cause bloating in the glaze fire)

David began events by showing us slides. First we saw landscapes and architectural influences on his work. Stone walls winding over the Yorkshire landscape remind him of the crackle effects he creates. He thinks in architectural terms - his pots having domes or towers, not bellies, shoulders and necks.

Early on he found that thrown things were tending to crack so he began to coil and found the compressing that the clay gets was the answer to cracking. Spherical shaped pots have their bases slab-built over a hump mould; this is quicker than coiling a base. He tends to work with a group of about 6 pots at once, and works in families of shapes making slight variations. He uses extruded coils for speed, often working with St Thomas's white clay, extended with grog - (1% kg 20's to dust grog to every 25 kg of clay). One dish shown was a 50/50 mix of T-material and porcelain.

He prices his big pieces between £200-£300 and sells them easily for this. He likes best to see his pots going into homes and doesn't want them to end up in museums.

David demonstrated his building methods and we saw him begin the base of a big pot. He puts a lot of emphasis on getting the inside shape right, and uses metal kidneys to shape and compress the clay. This was followed by more slides, this time of American raku pottery and the landscape of the places where they were made. (David was given a grant to travel in America studying the work of the raku potters there). I remember particularly some big geological-looking pots from the Colorado area.

After lunch we glazed and fired our own pots and smoke and steam were the order of the day.

Here are two of David's glaze recipes:-

Crackle White Copper Glaze Soft borax frit 40% High alkaline frit 85% Calcium borate frit 40% China clay 10% China clay 15% Copper oxide 5% Tin oxide 5%

I saw the copper glaze give a variety of effects - a definite green, a yellow green with a lustred look and a bright metallic bronze when well-reduced.

Thank you David for a most interesting, informative and enjoyable day, and thanks to Tony for providing the venue. (Hope the plants on the terrace are recovering by now!)

SHIRLEY McCONVILLE

BOOK REVIEW MARY WONDRAUSCH ON SLIPWARE

Mary Wondrausch, 136pp, large paperback, A & C Black, £9.95

This is a well-printed book, well-illustrated with many clear photographs, some in colour, and several line drawings, all explaining and illustrating clearly, the world of slipware.

The book starts with a question: "What is Slipware?" - and proceeds to answer it satisfactorily, but for collectors there may be a slight confusion here as Faience and Majolica are equated in the book. There are several kinds of Faience and, especially in France, these are often classed differently by varying connoisseurs. Nevertheless this would appear to be a minor point.

About her own ceramic background, the author, very significantly, points to the 'Ideas from somewhere' theme. She says she does not work from Nature, or just Technique, but from the actual experience gained in performing an act which is to be illustrated, such as the everyday work carried out years ago by the people who lived when these pots were made. This traditional approach must be the reason why in Part II much of the book describes the Heritage of Slipware, English and Continental. The stories are most interestingly written, including the demise of the English rural potteries, and the technique of Sgraffito, which is used to make finer and more delicate designs upon the basic slipware.

Modern slipware follows a natural progression from the medieval wares. This is explained in the very informative section on the historical aspect of much Continental slipware, eg Hungarian, Romanian and Slovakian wares, to name but a few, although it seems rather remiss that Bulgarian slipware (some going back to 13th and 14th Centuries) receives no mention.

A full chapter on Mottoes and Messages on pots heralds the last chapter, which explains the best ways to run the pottery as a business, advice which many a potter may need today. The intricacies of the techniques required in making slipwares, the glossary of terms containing almost certainly some words new to most of us, the detailed bibliography, the museum list of where to see slipware, and the useful index, all aggregate to make this most readable book a very useful addition to the bookshelves of Studio Potters, Students and Collectors.

STAN ROMER

SLIP TRAILERS

Finish with old inner tubes, scent sprays and slip trailers which make rude noises whilst they splatter your work with "fly swat"!

Daniel Frith (son of David) has perfected a fully professional <u>SLIP TRAILER</u> - just like Dad's. They are properly moulded and vulcanised, to give a good feel in the hand. PRICE: £4.50 each plus 30p postage.

Dangor Ceramic Supplies Brookhouse Pottery Brookhouse Lane Denbigh Clwyd LL16 4RE

EXHIBITIONS
Full details in June issue

PAULINE ASHLEY AND MARIGOLD AUSTIN 12th July to 9th August at Watford Museum

RICHARD AND LIZ MAYHEW

3rd to 9th August at the Cow Byre, Ruislip

PAULINE ASHLEY
11th to 23rd August at Primavera Gallery, Cambridge