



DACORUM AND CHILTERN POTTERS GUILD



Issue 45
Spring 2023
www.dcpng.org.uk



In this issue:

**Tom Knowles Jackson Demo
Mel Chambers Evening
Surface Decorations for
Ceramics - Book review
Potty Potter - Jane Russell
New members Laura Gibbs
and Mike Handcock**

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If you would like to advertise in our publication, enquire on advertising rates or other information, please contact David Evans at **evansdjal@aol.com**.

Cover picture: Mel Chambers with one of her tiles - our February demonstrator.



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Editorial Spring 2023



Ros McGuirk

The newsletter team have worked fast to get this edition out a little earlier than usual, and it has been an especial pleasure to receive more copy than expected from our contributors, both old and new. Please keep them coming in!

Remember that we can help you advertise your own events, such as open studio and fairs, or even clearance sales. A pottery clearance becomes a recycling event and we all get to benefit when we gain more tools and materials for our group activities. At this point I must thank former member Richard Bicknell

for the latest donations.

We have two new members to welcome and, happily, Laura and Mike have agreed to introduce themselves in this issue. We also wave goodbye to a former member who was for a long time a true stalwart of the Guild. Ruby Sharp passed away this February after a long illness. She will be much missed by family, friends, pottery students and the Pitstone Museum where she ran pottery activities and raku firings for many years.



Notes from the Chair



Jackie Harrop

The Guild is on the verge of another exciting season of events. Our monthly meetings are gaining momentum as you will read in the accounts of Mel Chambers' and Tom Knowles' visits.

Sales of tickets for POD have outstripped

our expectations and are selling like hot cakes. March 19th promises to be day full of surprises from Keith Brymer Jones, Sally McDonald and Kay Aplin, all



showing very different styles of work.

The kiln site at COAM is looking good with the newly erected shed in place to store the raku kilns, materials and equipment. Many thanks to all who helped clear the site, lay the foundations and put up the shed. The programme of Terrific Tuesdays during school holidays means lots of families will get an opportunity to get their hands on clay, with help from you, our members!

We have another programme of Big Builds which includes the Alban Festival in June and COAM in October.

The Market stalls have also started each month in St Albans. These are great fun and all are welcome to join in, especially new members, so if you are keen to sell your pots, want to join a raku firing, join a team working on the Big Builds, or one of the coffee mornings, check out the website, Facebook page or the Newsletter for more details - oh and don't forget to start making for the Fitzwilliam competition and the Kingsbury Barn exhibition coming up in September. Don't miss out on the excitement, be part of the fun!



DCPG

Sell your beautiful work **at** St Albans Market!

You have had your fun making your pieces, but now you need the space to make more... why not come along and sell your wares on the monthly DCPG stall at St. Albans Market? We have space for three makers each time and at the moment we are planning to go on the second **Saturday** each month. They are also hoping to start up an Art Market on the second **Sunday** of each month, starting in March, which you may prefer. We use the DCPG gazebo (which you would need to help set up) and there are tables that you can use if you do not have your own. If you would like to join in sometimes, please contact me at beverly.benson2@gmail.com and

I will add you to the sellers list. It's fun! Do come along.



January Meeting with Tom Knowles Jackson

 Ros McGuirk

Tom, or TKJ as he is also known, is one of the most enthusiastic demonstrators I have met. He is also a great adventurer and entrepreneur, having served in the army in the Middle East for over ten years and followed that with a career in business mainly in the Far East. After that he felt ready to embark on a new career, in ceramics, and in 2015, at the age of 41, he took part in the first series of The Great Pottery Throwdown. He set up his own workshop, built a gas kiln, and went on to establish a community workshop, a hub, called The Clay Loft. This is located in the village of St Chloë near Stroud. Here the members, of whom there are over 40, share a large studio and the various kilns, and also run classes.

Tom obviously has huge energy, but where did his obsession with clay come from? I was intrigued to discover that he went to Bryanston School in Dorset where the old pottery teacher was Don Potter, a charismatic character who inspired a good number of youngsters to become potters, not least of them Richard Batterham and also Mike Dodd. The teacher who taught Tom almost everything was Steve Sheridan and by the time he left school he was a very competent thrower and allowed to fire the gas kiln.

Tom shares the aesthetic of Batterham, Dodd et al, of sourcing his own materials as far as possible, using tenmoku, celadon and wood ash glazes and firing with flame to high stoneware temperatures, with some reduction. His work is classically inspired and very much part of the Anglo-Oriental tradition, including



the forms of English slipware.

He now has his own clay body made by Potclays – the TKJ stoneware clay. It is well grogged for handbuilding and sculptural work but also throws ‘like a dream’. It has excellent properties for both oven and tableware which is what Tom loves to make. After reduction it gives a well toasted colour.

Tom is an entertaining speaker and went on to show us how easy it is to work on his momentum wheel – just a few gentle swings with his right foot is all that is needed for the first part of a small pot.



He got the design of the wheel from the family of Ivan McMeekin who worked at the University of New South Wales. Tom adapted it and has started to manufacture his version, calling it the McMeekin wheel.

From this wheel Tom developed the TJK Standing Turntable. He also makes a steel turning tool and a useful wall mounted display unit for ceramics. You can find more information about these on his website, www.tkjceramics.com.

For his demonstration Tom started by throwing a couple of tea bowls off the hump. This was a good way to demonstrate the properties of the wheel, how slowing down the speed improves one's technique and prevents over throwing a piece. He explained how to centre a lump of clay by leaning into it with the elbow of the supporting hand well tucked in.

He then made a cylinder form and showed how to open up a wider base than the pot would have. That made it much easier and quicker to lift the clay up from the base. The fingers, or knuckles, of the outside hand should be placed a little below those of the inside hand so that the clay slips through in a gentle S-form as it spirals upwards. Then the cylinder was opened out to a tea bowl shape.



He used a textured paddle to imprint patterns on the outside wall while supporting it inside with his fingers. He has a number of paddles including a specially carved one from Korea and another he made by sticking thick plastic netting onto a small wooden chopping board.

The beat up pot was then thrown gently and slowly from the inside until it was a good shape. It was cut off leaving a narrow foot which would later, after turning, give the pot almost an inch of extra height.

Tom had brought several tea bowls at leather hard stage. Using his specially



designed turning tool he turned the base of one of them to make a delicate foot ring. The result was a bowl that was both fluid in form and decoration yet also delicately poised.



He finished by throwing a larger bowl. This one was made on a bat. He showed how to throw a pad of clay onto the wheel head and then he made grooves in it before sticking the bat down firmly on it. He would normally cover the pad



with plastic at the end of the day and it would last for 2 weeks.

He started throwing aiming for another cylinder, and then opened it up to make a bowl with a wide and stable rim by throwing down with the rib on the inside while the fingers supported the outside. The bowl was removed on its bat by cutting the bat off the pad of clay.

Tom was happy to answer questions and let members have a go on his wheel. He had covered a lot of ground with the aid of photographs of his studio, the hub and lots of his pots. He is an inspiring speaker and for those still in hibernating mode, like me, he made a good case for

getting back to working with clay.





An evening with Mel Chambers

 Valerie Pellett

Katharine and I dutifully remembered our coffee mugs, then I totally forgot the route to the hall! We arrived half an hour late, but before I could apologise, my volunteering hand went up to record the evening.

A delightful and enthusiastic Mel Chambers trotted us through the history of Encaustic Tiles; encaustic meaning 'burnt in'. The technique goes back hundreds if not thousands of years. It is characteristically very ornate, and examples show that it withstands the test of time on floor tiles. It is usually found in prestigious buildings, including medieval palaces, churches, cathedrals and mosques.

With a business background and a naturally artistic flair, Mel has established herself in the world of ceramics, using fairs and galleries to get her work seen. She very generously demonstrated her skills for us. Using well kneaded Valentines earthenware clay, her



tiles begin as slabs, which are carefully rolled, rotated, and re-rolled 3 times, to 1cm thick. These



slabs are wrapped in newspaper, then plastic, and are kept between boards until ready for incising "to remind them to be flat". Mel did comment at the end of the demonstration that a certain degree of 'curl' did sometimes occur, but this was acceptable because it gave the tiles character, and showed that they were handmade. The damp tiles receive minimal handling before the next stage.



For the carving process, Mel uses enviable custom-made tools of turned wood handles with cutting loops of varying size made from guitar strings. She demonstrated her technique of decorative lettering with amazing dexterity and speed, while at the same time answering our questions. No, she did not recycle the slip-peelings, or use a turntable, neither did she ever measure...(she has a 'good eye'), but did use templates. The writing is cut to a depth of about 4mm, is very ornate, and designed to hold a hidden message within each piece, as it becomes more like pattern to the eye, rather than text.

The next stage follows while the tile is still soft. Bamboo brushes work the first and darkest coloured slip into the recesses. Mel also uses the darkest colour to highlight certain features, for example those of an animal's face. To achieve an interesting marbled effect, she randomly drizzles other colours over the base slip. She tends to limit the colour palette of each piece, and introduces variation with tone by varying the strength of oxide in each slip batch. The tile is left to dry sufficiently to enable it to be scraped-back. With a simple metal scraper she removed about 1mm from the surface, which is enough to remove



excess slip and the little burrs left behind from the carving stage, without damaging the design underneath. All very skilfully and swiftly accomplished. Before being allowed to dry, Mel touches up any areas where she is not satisfied with the quality of the inlay. When the tile is touchable (without smearing), she uses 4 fired clay weights on the corners to keep the it flat.

When totally dry, the tiles receive 2 thin coats of a transparent crackle glaze before a once-firing to 1100°C, followed by a 2 day cooling. The crackle is emphasised with a brush over of Japanese ink while the tile is still warm (so crackle that forms after the inking remains clear of colour). The finished tiles display many shades of the chosen colour, with the

background firing to a soft cream.

Her designs, with lively images of wild animals, show a respect of the natural world, and often relate to specific conservation projects she has become involved in, in her home county of Cornwall. Indeed, her concern for the environment is also apparent by her intention to try to make her own slips and glazes, and buy British clay, rather than import from Germany as she currently does. Mel chooses to exhibit at fairs and in galleries to allow people to become familiar with her work, as this encourages commissions. She is becoming more involved with interior design, via the commissions. She is very enthusiastic about this as it allows her creativity to develop.



Mel gave us plenty of tips towards making successful tiles, like dipping the end of the hole cutter in water before making hanging holes, how to consolidate loose slip with a ball-tip, cleaning the back and edges of tiles of glaze before firing, and most important for hopeful tile makers, were several ways to try to keep them flat! It was a most enjoyable evening spent with a very productive and skilled ceramicist.

See www.alchemytiles.com

PS....we didn't get lost on our journey home!





Surface Decoration for Ceramics by Claire Ireland

 Jackie Harrop

A creative guide for the contemporary maker.

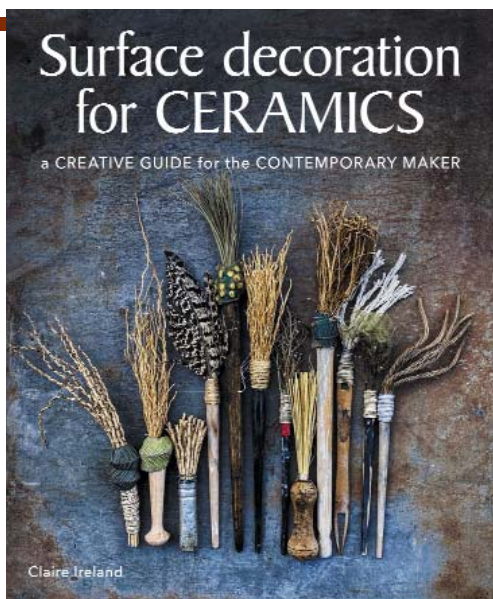
This is a well-illustrated and comprehensively researched collection of creative ideas and projects. It is also an essential and inspiring source of recipes and resources for a wide audience of potters at all levels of expertise and experience.

The book is clearly divided into sections which cover a wide and imaginative range of techniques to encourage a more adventurous approach to enhancing, embellishing and decorating the surface of clay.

Each chapter is a rich source of well-illustrated ideas, with something new for everyone.

She begins with a look at sketchbooks of a wide range of professionals, offering a fascinating glimpse into their playful exploration of themes. Chapters on tools and equipment include ideas for commercial and handmade stamps, graters, brushes and sprig moulds using both found and purchased materials including the use of balloons and plaster moulds.

The chapter on slips and engobes includes recipes using stains, oxides, ceramic inks, underglazes and a section on how to make your own colour sticks and coloured clays for Nerikami, the Japanese technique for producing pots of swirling multi-coloured clay. The Kohiki technique for creating cracks in clay covered in thick white slip by stretching, and also the Mishima



technique for inlays using different coloured slips are well explained with step by step illustrations.

Sections on printing and transfer take a look at paper stencils, water etching, printing on plaster, newsprint and using clay or ash dust to produce subtle or dramatic reliefs.

Other chapters explore mosaics, mixed media, paper clay, and foam printing as well as a chapter on simple kilns, smoke and pit firing, and how to make your own moulds and saggars. There is also a helpful list of suppliers in the US and UK.

This is a rich source of inspiration and guidance and will become a well-thumbed reference for many potters.

I certainly want a copy!

The book is published by Crowood and is variously priced at £14 - 20. (Dec 2022)



Potty Potter



Jane Russell.

My pottery pathway possibly started when very young as one of my favourite pastimes was playing with mud; mud pies, mud bombs, worms and mud. You get the picture! I was never a girly girl so getting dirty has never bothered me. I enjoyed my wind-up train set rather than dolls and helping dad carry machinery about was clearly my job.

Jumping a few decades, my interest continued. I talked and thought about "doing" pottery more and more but didn't make any attempt to access anything until that sunny day at the rally. . .

My husband, Steve is keen on old machinery so we have visited many, and I mean many, steam rallies over the years. On this bright sunny day there before me was an elderly gentleman making garden pots. He had pots all around him and was making more on his wheel. He was a character like a garden gnome, the sort of person that shares and motivates by saying very little. His words "get on a course gal and do it" got me to do just that and my journey began!

I first attended a taster course at Oaklands College and have continued to attend evening class over the last 6 or so years. Len makes sure his students start with thumb pots first, to "feel" the clay. Then you progress to making coils (no extruders) and your pots had to be finished properly before moving onto the next step. The coiling and hand building led to throwing where I would say I'm making a cup only to end up with a bowl. Each 2-hour weekly session



I would start again putting that lump of clay on the wheel only for it to take over and tell me what it was doing. It took several months before I was in control and that light bulb moment was amazing, I was making a cup and I made a cup! Yeppeee! It was onwards and upwards after that!

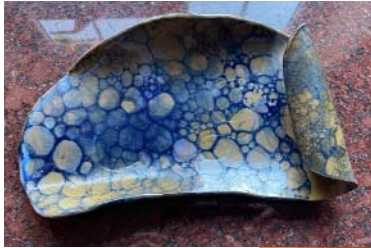


My throwing improved when I had to make 50 pots in a short time to take to Nic Collins. Daily throwing practice is something I need to get back to. What is

it we always say? Practice, practice and practice!!

I have become more ambitious over time and wanted to learn more rather than just doing my own thing at Oaklands. I plucked up courage and took myself off to West Dean for a raku course, which was great. West Dean is a real retreat but Alison worked us hard finishing late each night and up to 10pm on the Friday when we were supposed to leave by 4pm. Then both myself and my husband went to Devon to Nic Collins' wood firing course, hence the rush for more pots as Steve got a place and came with me. And last year I went to David and Margaret Frith on a 2 two-week course in May/June. I tried big pots and plates with David.

I have learnt so much from all these very knowledgeable people but there is so much more to learn. I am keen on learning the different processes, using slips and glazes for effect, doing more raku and trying burnishing. There are so many processes to learn! I have started experimenting with brush on glazes but would love to know more on reactions, making and applying different glazes, stains etc. I'm still reluctant to make up glazes, even powders that are ready to mix. I don't know what is holding me back - one day!! I have been researching courses that take you through the different processes and stages but as yet haven't found anything. There are lots of independent courses but nothing that go through many processes.



I am now looking for a gas kiln to free myself of the restrictions of the college electric kiln. I have settled on gas as I like reduction and it seems more affordable as the cost of electricity rises. Also, I think with bottled gas I will more aware of costs. So, my pathway continues. I have put my work out there which was another big step and have taken advantage of the DCPG market stall. I look forward to continued growth and you never know, the name Jane Russell might be more popular in the world of ceramics than the acting cycle!



Guild Programme of Meetings



All to be held at Kings Langley Methodist Church Hall, WD4 8BR on Friday evenings at 7pm unless stated otherwise.

Friday 14th April,

Talk and Demonstration from **Peter Black** who creates ash glazed pots in porcelain and stoneware, including functional and one-off decorative or sculptural pieces. His work is mainly thrown and finished on the potter's wheel and some is altered and assembled.



Peter graduated from Clay College in 2019 and is based in Kent.

www.peterblack.uk

Friday 12th May,

Talk and Demonstration from

Lucy Baxendale



A ceramic artist, illustrator and community artist based in Herefordshire. Her drawings are often surreal, imagined, and feed into her ceramics.

www.lucybaxendale.com

Sat 14 Oct, AGM

Expected times 9.30am – 12.30pm.



Terrific Tuesdays at COAM Dates and



Themes for 2023 **Judi Tribe**

April 4th and 11th

Theme – SPRINGTIME

May 30th – PARALYMPICS.

Broadly speaking the theme for the summer is 'Buildings'.

Aug 1st – DECORATED BRICKS

Aug 8th – THATCHED COTTAGES

Aug 15th - UTILITIES (water, light etc)

Aug 22nd – FOOD

Aug 29th – WASH DAY



Oct 24th – VILLAGE LIFE (build a few cottages or making people in costume)

COAM is located at Newland Park, Newland Manor Lane, Chalfont St Peter, HP8 4AB.

For more information contact juditribe0@gmail.com

Last year was such a tremendous success and throughout the year literally 100's of children and adults enjoyed making clay themed creations in the beautiful 14thC Northolt Barn at the Chiltern Open Air Museum. COAM.

Such fun to see the wide variety of work being made and proudly taken home. Huge thanks to all the members who volunteered and made it happen.

This year the Guild has again been

asked 'to join the Terrific Tuesday programme from Easter until October. See dates on page 15.

Clay tools and visual aids are provided as are hot drinks throughout the day. So, if you would like to be part of the Terrific Tuesday team and help for a day or just a couple of hours, or want further information, please contact Judi..

Juditribe0@gmail.com



Guild Socials

Judi Tribe



Wednesday 29th March

10.30am - 12.30pm

Blackwells Cafe, 10 The Common, Chipperfield, Kings Langley, WD4 9BS
www.blackwellschipperfield.co.uk

Blackwells Cafe faces Chipperfield Common and has a light and airy room with good refreshments. The car park is on the Common and a very short, easy walk to the cafe.



(Above) At Rowan Garden Centre by COAM

(Below) Little Heath Cafe near Potten End

Tuesday 25th April

10-30am to 12.30

Coffee social at Café on the Corner, St Albans

www.camphillvillagetrust.org.uk/shops-cafes/cafe-on-the-corner



Thursday 25th May

10-30am to 12.30

Coffee social at Sarratt Green Café, Sarratt, WD3 6AT

Monday 12th June 10-30am to 12.30

Coffee social at Little Heath Tea Room
 Little Heath Lane, Potten End HP4 2RY
www.littleheathtearoom.co.uk

Do come and join us.



Dates for your Diary in 2023



April 21 – 23

Potfest South East.

Glyne Place, Near Lewes, BN8 6SX

See www.potfest.co.uk

May 5 – 8 Living Crafts.

Hatfield Park. The largest art and craft fair in UK is this year extending into the coronation bank holiday. Tickets in advance : £10/9/7.

On the day £13/11/7. Under 5's free. Main entrance is opposite Hatfield station.

See www.livingcrafts.co.uk

May 27 – 28 Herts Show.

Redbourne. Big agricultural show with local crafts.

June 9 – 11 Potfest Scotland.

Scone Palace, Perth, PH2 6BD

June 23 – 25 Potfest By the Lake.

Compton Verney, Warks, CV35 9HZ

June 28 – 29 Ceramics UK 2023

Trade show for UK ceramics industry. NEC, Birmingham. Free entry.

www.ntradeshows.com/ceramics-uk

June 30 – July 2

International Ceramics Festival.

Aberystwyth Arts Centre.

Penglais, Aberystwyth SY23 3FL

www.internationalceramicsfestival.org

July 14 - 16 Celebrating Ceramics.

Waterperry Gardens, Oxford, OX33 1LA
Excellent day out in beautiful gardens, plant sale, big house, cafe and lots of ceramics, too.

July 28 -30 Potfest in the Park.

Hutton-in-the-Forest, Cumbria, CA11 9TH

Aug 11 – 13 Potfest in Suffolk.

Haughley Park, Stowmarket, IP14 3JY

Aug 18 – 20 Art in Clay. (Online)

The biggest ceramics show in UK is going online this year and will return in 2024. See: www.artinclay.co.uk/art-in-clay-windsor-2023-update

September

British Ceramic Biennial 2023.

Stoke-on-Trent

Applications open this April.

www.britishceramicsbiennial.com/festival

Other DCPG dates in 2023

These dates are arranged. In addition there will be firings at COAM, so watch your emails for further information.

Sat June 24

St Albans Festival. One of our busiest and most popular gigs. This year the theme is the Medieval period. Lots of

helpers needed.


There will be a big build and plenty else.

8 – 10 Sept

Members Exhibition at Kingsbury Barn with the Fitzwilliam Competition entries.

The competition theme is 'Pairs'.



New Members We give a warm welcome to two new members,
 Laura Gibbs and Mike Hancock.

Laura Gibbs

My interest in clay was initially sparked by the pieces my Dad brought home from his weekly pottery night class. After taking a few classes in my 20's, work and family intervened until about 4 years ago when my neighbour told me about his pottery shed at the bottom of his garden and invited me to a raku party. I was immediately hooked and after taking classes locally, I applied for the HND in ceramics at Morley College, graduating last summer.

My current work is cast porcelain and bone china which I then saggar fire in my electric kiln with a range of oxides, metals and organic materials. My approach to making is exploratory and my work is constantly evolving as I experiment with different materials and techniques. I am showing some pieces at the Belvere Gallery graduate show during January and I am currently preparing work for the York Ceramics fair in March.



For more images of
Laura's work see https://beveregallery.com/artists-makers/laura_gibbs

Mike Hancock

I have experimented with various techniques and ideas, often drawing on the natural world for inspiration, whether this be through the use of colour or form and texture.

At the moment the focus of my work is on the use of porcelain, and in two areas

in particular - lighting and jewellery. I use thin porcelain to give atmospheric lighting effects, and I employ the strength and refined quality of the material, coupled with simple glazing and the use of lustres, to produce simple yet elegant pieces of jewellery.



Mike can be found
on Instagram at
[@harmonyceramics](https://www.instagram.com/harmonyceramics)



DCPG Officers for 2023.

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johnceramics@aol.com

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jackieharrop1@gmail.com

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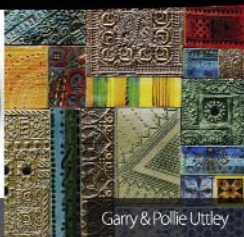
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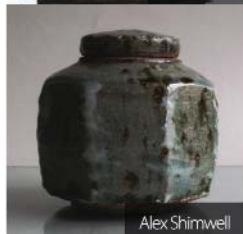
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