



DACORUM AND CHILTERN
POTTERS GUILD

Issue 56 Winter 2025
www.dcpng.org.uk

In this issue:

**Sharon Griffin, Russell Kingston
and Caroline Bird
Roger Cockram, Jeremy Nicholls
and Philip Jolley**



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David Evans at evansdjal@aol.com.

Cover pictures:

Top 2 - ceramics by Sharon Griffin

Bottom pots by Russell Kingston

Below:

Presentation of trophy for the
Fitzwilliam competition winner,
Fenella Mowbray, by Jackie Harrop
at POD 2





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Notes from the Chair

Jackie Harrop



What an incredible year we have had! So eventful, so spectacular and so good for us as a guild. Huge thanks to everyone who has made this celebratory year such an outstanding success.

We were brave, innovative, collaborative and energetic. We've even taken to an AI assisted support for our committee meetings, thanks to the youthful enthusiasm of our younger members. Be assured though, I didn't use Chat GTP to write this note to you! The commitment and determination of our incredible committee has ensured our profile at so many events and widened our audiences, increased our membership and engaged with even more members of the public. The kiln group goes from strength to strength with nearly half our members being involved in one way or another, through glaze workshops, raku, salt and wood firings, and exchanging information through the whatsapp groups.

John's brave venture of engaging a poet,

sculptor and a slip decorator for a second POD this year, was a real success and testament to his wisdom in persuading us that we could be ambitious and trust our presenters to surprise and impress us with their creativity.

Our relationship with COAM is firmly established with the new management team and terrific Tuesdays have become a magnet for families who bring their children and grandchildren to the hands-on sessions.

Thanks to Radio Mix 9.6 FM who joined us on a wet weekend in Sept for an amazing exhibition at Kingsbury, several newer members made contributions to the organisation as well as enhancing the variety of ceramics on display. A steady stream of visitors braved the weather and kept sales just as high as in previous more sunny years. The members' competition attracted some fabulous pieces and it was great to have



newer members winning prizes and receiving the brand-new trophy made by Nicole.

The annual programme of demos at Kings Langley has already attracted full houses, and a new team of helpers are getting to know the ropes and providing back up and succession to keep the guild moving forward.

Our larger than ever membership have so much to look forward to next year, driven by a growing band of volunteers and lots of exciting ideas to try out and to share. All newcomers welcome to join us in these ventures

Best wishes for 2026

Jackie



Editorial Winter 2025

Ros McGuirk

This edition has been written in the gloom of early winter. The days may be short but that has not dampened the enthusiasm of those who are enjoying the firings at COAM, even the mid-winter ones, some of whom will still be dreaming of the next wood firing whilst they glaze the christmas turkey and slip trail the icing on the cake...

Likewise, some members are making the most of the multitude of christmas craft shows to get their work out on view and find a market for their products. The new pop-up venture that is taking off in Berkhamsted and St Albans is proving increasingly popular.

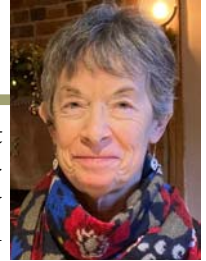
It included the first craft fair in the cathedral which was very well attended. We still have our own market stall venture – contact Bev for more.

However, as you read this twelfth night is well past and you need something to look forward to. Read on and you will find plenty more clay treats ahead.

With thanks to all our contributors and especially to Doug for an account of his life in clay, a very special treat.

Happy New Year!

Ros



Guild Socials

January to May 2026 10.30 - 12.30

Jan - Mon 19th at

Waterstones, 8 St Peters St, St Albans,
AL1 3LF

March - Thurs 12th at

Blackwell's Cafe, 10 The Common,
Chipperfield, WD4 9BS

Feb - Fri 13th at Blue Diamond Garden
Centre, (Van Hage), Chenies,
Rickmansworth, WD3 6EN.

May - Mon 11th at The Cafe in the
Park, Aquadrome, Frogmore Ln,
Rickmansworth, WD3 1NB



New Members

Dawn Carroll from Chalfont St Peter.

Parisa Moterasselzadeh from St Albans has recently graduated from the University of Hertfordshire with a degree in ceramics, since when she has been missing the creative atmosphere there. One of her works has just been acquired by the university for their permanent collection, see photo. Her focus as an artist is around women's stories – exploring resilience and the personal costs of resistance.

Sneha Doshi from Queensbury, London, who writes "I'm a hobby potter. I got the bug from school and have tried to do pottery throughout my life as time allowed. I am delighted to be able enjoy different aspects of pottery following retirement from my 'proper' job."

Emily Wilkinson from Royston who is new to ceramics, attends class at Made with Clay Studio in Letchworth and is keen to learn more.

Welcome back **Susan Swales** from Crouch End. Susan works with porcelain to make decorative sculptural pieces that are designed to convey a feeling of tranquillity. Website: susanswales.co.uk

Andrea Toon from Hazelmere in Bucks has been working with clay since art school days when she studied painting. Since lockdown she has been developing her ceramics, throwing vessels and making wall hangings, all decorated in a painterly fashion using slips, underglaze and glazes.

Pam Cawley from Saunderton, Bucks, writes "My mother was an active craftswoman and father a keen gardener, but as a young child I was more interested in the mud than planting sunflowers or knitting. So here am I, years later, still learning and playing with mud. I enjoy the sensory part of construction as much as the joy of opening up the kiln to reveal the fresh pots.

Welcome also to **Hilary Muge** from Chiltern Green,

David Gillespie from Dunstable who started pottery classes on retirement and before long had set up his own studio and is now selling online via Folksy.





Other Events

Upcoming Events

Weekend 21 – 22 March. Hepworth Wakefield Ceramics Fair. 70 potters. £3.50 and £2.50 online. <https://hepworthwakefield.org/>

Thurs May 7 – Sun 10th. Living Crafts at Hatfield House, AL9 5NG. The 50th anniversary of the largest craft show in the SE set in lovely grounds. www.livingcrafts.co.uk

Fri May 8 – Sun 10th. Ceramic Art London. The main CPA show of the year. Admission £21, 3 day ticket £50 and under 16's free. Olympia West, Hammersmith Rd, W14 8UX.

Fri 22 – 24 May. Potfest SE. Glynde Place, Glynde, Lewes, BN8 6SX. www.potfest.co.uk

Terrific Tuesdays at COAM 2026

Easter Holidays - March 31st and April 7th

Half Term - May 26th

Summer Holidays - 5 weekly sessions dates tba starting either July 21st or 28th

Currently we are waiting for more info from COAM which we will pass on by email.



Guild Meetings at Kings Langley

Unless otherwise stated, all Guild meetings are held on a Friday evening starting with refreshments at 7pm followed by a presentation from our guest potter at 7.30 – 9.30pm.

The venue is the Methodist Church hall, Hempstead Rd, Kings Langley WD4 8BR. There is parking on site and at the premises next door. During the meeting members will have access to our excellent library and may borrow for a small fee. Bring your own mug for tea or coffee. Guests are welcome for £5.

9th Jan 2026 : Katherine Kingdon. A prize winning ceramic artist who makes colourful and offbeat table ware and decorates her pots with quirky characters. www.fatbellypots.art

Feb 12th : Lesely Farrell makes sculptural vessels from pinching and coiling and enjoys creating textures using lace.

She teaches people of all ages and abilities including in community centres and for therapy. She also runs workshops. www.lesleyfarrell.co.uk

Sunday 22nd March : POD 2026. tba.

10th April : Jo Davies. A well known designer maker and teacher, Jo makes her own range of thrown tableware as well as designing for brands such as Union Coffee and Mulberry. She works in porcelain, a most seductive material, smooth and silky to throw and a joy to hold when glazed and fired. See www.jo-davies.com

8th May : John Wheeldon. Well known for his knowledge and skill as a raku potter producing wonderful copper colours and metallic lustres. He also enjoys making table ware decorated using roulettes and stamps and enhanced by his own glazes. www.johnwheeldonceramics.co.uk



'The Sea, The Sea. From sea to land and back' An evening with **Roger Cockram** by Fiona Cristol

Roger began his demonstration by giving a synopsis of his life. He grew up in Barnstable, Devon. On leaving school he became a marine biologist and teacher before he hitch hiked to Africa where, in Nigeria, he discovered women making wonderful pots. He returned to the UK and completed a pottery course at Harrow School of Art under the tutelage of Mick Casson and Colin Pearson. He returned to Devon where he built a wood fired kiln, the firing of which was a long and arduous task. He now has a gas kiln.

His early work consisted of tableware all made of wood fired stoneware, but after 10 years he rediscovered his fascination for "natural" water and it has been a major interest ever since. He once-fires so there is no bisque firing. He glazes the insides of his pots when they are damp and the outsides when dry. He currently makes two ranges of pots; functional stoneware with his hallmark turquoise glaze above black matt, and also porcelain pots which he particularly enjoys making. These are coloured with layers of glaze over a base coat of celadon so that the colours almost bubble through in soft flowing lines, reminiscent of breaking waves.

He brought his own Fitzwilliam wheel with him, which he bought in 1971 and is still going strong. He explained how he makes his own porcelain body and began by throwing a small cylinder which he altered from the inside using a home-made tool, the cylinder immediately took on the Roger Cockram look!

Using the porcelain he threw a bowl with a narrow base and flared rim which



he altered as above.



He said that he does not remove his pots from the bat immediately after throwing but allows the porcelain to firm up.

He demonstrated how to join two hemispheres to make a moon jar shape. The join, apart from scoring and adding slurry, had a thin flattened coil added to the join. He removed sufficient clay from the rim to allow his hand to access the join and he finished off the join from the inside using a spoon. He was short of time but said that the pot could have a neck added or simply finished off by neatening the rim.

Finally he took a leather hard bowl with a flared rim and narrow footring. He poured glaze into the bowl and let the clay absorb the water from the glaze. He then poured off the glaze and began gently shaping the bowl into an oval shape until it had the Roger Cockram look, fragile, and with the swell of the sea.

Periodically throughout his demonstration he sang a "potting song" encouraging the audience to join in the chorus line "Always look on the bright side of life". He certainly does look on the bright side as he has some health issues which has prompted him to retire this year. I felt humbled to be in the presence of a Master Potter who shared his love of clay, the sea, and his life with us.

Roger Cockram Base Glaze Recipe

potash feldspar (FFF)	22
talc	15
whiting	11
ball clay	26
quartz	13
bone ash	7.5
bentonite	4



This has been developed for raw glazing, but may work well on bisque ware. It is usually fired to Orton Standard Cone 10/11 in reduction, but may also work in oxidation.

For lower temperatures try a little less clay or a little more flux.

While we do not have the recipe for Roger's porcelain clay body a simple one would be:

25%China Clay 25%Feldspar
25%Ball Clay 25%Quartz
+2-3%Bentonite (Roger uses a white one)



Jeremy Nicholls demo Jackie Harrop

Jeremy's distinctive blue salt glazed teapots are a familiar sight to many of us who have seen his work at Art in Clay, Oxford, CAL and various Potfests. He was also a regular exhibitor at international events such as Kerimisto, Westerwald and Oldenburg

He began his presentation by sharing his sources of inspiration, beginning with Barnes Wallis and Norman Foster from the world of aviation which was his passion as a child and which led to his first explorations into 3D from a 2D world of aeronautical design. His interest in Islamic architecture and the Iranian blues are echoed in his salt glazes, and their domes and arches led to a recognition of the interface of art and science, the chemistry of glazes.



Moving from aeronautical engineering to social work left Jeremy with a need for alternative activities to switch off from the pressures of work and so began the courses and a move to part time working balanced with pottery at Harrow where the work of Mick Casson, Wally Keeler, Peter Manley and Sarah Walton moved his work forward. During this period, his influences were Frank Gehry, Santiago Calatrava and Zahia Hadid, whose architectural designs began to seep into his own work and encouraged him to experiment.

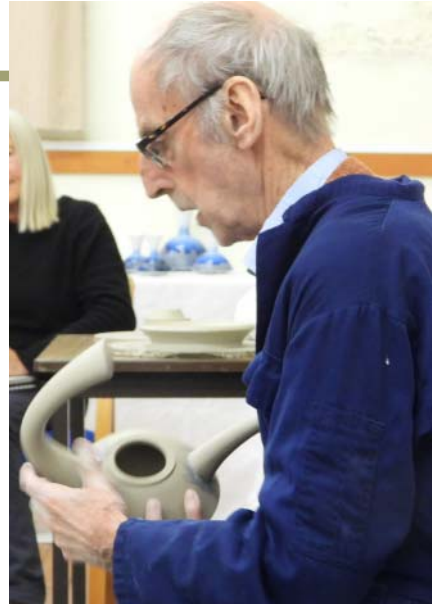




Thus began his experimental handles based on a pan handle, and an ergonomically satisfying breadknife with a vertical handle which eventually was 3 D printed from a carved and cast version which he perfected with meticulous accuracy and incremental changes. This stereo laser sintered version is now his preferred handle which can sometimes be added in a reversed position, but which he has perfected to a highly measured form .

Wally Keeler's salt glazed pots have been a great influence and Jeremy's studio in Broxbourne allows him to salt fire without annoying any neighbours. Thus he can achieve his distinctive designs with areas of orange peel and areas that are plain.

He uses Valentines E55 which is a low iron body and leaves the pots to be bone dry, then a porcelain slip is sprayed on to the areas he wants to be orange peel textured, scraping back for a definitive "skyline" before a biscuit firing in an electric kiln. He then sprays shino and applies blue or black stain, or a blue black and uses a cheap hairspray as a fixative so that he can transport the glazed pots for salt firing.





His kiln is a 600L front loader which takes 12 hours to reach cone 10. Granular dishwasher salt is added through diagonally

opposed burners using a long metal rod, using one and a half kilos each side.

Jeremy went on to demonstrate how he throws the base saucer, the bowl of the body and a lid, all oversized so that he can trim to precisely measured widths and height using engineering calipers. He leaves pieces on the batt until leather hard so each piece holds its shape. The casting slip used for the spout and the digitally printed handles were joined using a "glue" comprised of gum Arabic, bentonite, and potash feldspar with a deflocculant and then Epsom salts to reflocculate and traced onto the joins using a cake decorating syringe.

To ensure his reverse flying handles do not droop in the kiln he has devised a system of blank rings props and thrown cones which support in the salt firing without impairing the glaze finish.

Jeremy's quiet unassuming delivery and passion for detail and architectural design, created a fascinating demonstration of his dedication to perfect a style which is distinctive and unique whilst paying homage to those early influencers who he so admires.



Jeremy's "glue" recipe

This is a modified version of an industrial recipe which enables joins to be made in leather hard clay without scoring

Mix together dry quantities of 400g powdered clay body (of the clay being joined).

8 gms potash feldspar

8 gms bentonite

8 gms gum Arabic

Add 2ml dispex to 200 ml water, gradually add the powder mix to the dispex+water mixing as you go (a hand held food mixer is best) until you have a pourable deflocculated slip. (this may not need all the powdered mix as this depends on the clay body) Dissolve a little magnesium sulphate in a little hot water and add drop by drop to the slip until it reflocculates and turns into a creamy paste with a consistency somewhere between wood glue and toothpaste depending on what you are joining.

Eg with Earthstone Original he uses 5/8 of the mix to add to water to reach the desired consistency.

250gm powdered

Earthstone Original

5gms potash feldspar

5gms bentonite

5gms gum Arabic

powder in the 200ml water and 2 ml dispex





2nd POTTERS OPEN DAY 2025

Andre Hess

The 29th of October, the day chosen for the second Potters Open Day of 2025, turned out to be a bright but crisp Autumn day with clouds scurrying across a blue sky. Winter was on the horizon. Occasional bursts of rain could not hinder what promised to be an interesting and exciting day for the Guild. The auditorium filled up quickly, and proceedings kicked off smartly. There was a distinct feeling of excitement and of mystery in the air.

It was sometime in 2024, in the depths of St Paul's Cathedral on the occasion of an Arvon Writers Foundation gathering, when John Higgins heard Caroline Bird deliver a speech on the power that her Arvon* experience had had on her, her life, and her writing. There were tears. Almost smuggled into that speech, however, was mention of the power that any kind of creativity, and making things, can have on the lives of others in the wake of that. John saw the common ground she spoke of so movingly, and it sparked the idea of a POD with a poet, Caroline Bird, on the program. It is uncertain that John knew, at that point, what an immense star in the poetry and theatre world Caroline Bird was.

2025 was, and still is at the time of writing, the 25th anniversary of the DCPG, and the reason for a variety of extra events, including a second Potters Open Day. There was a determination on John's part, for this reason, that the Guild stages an event that will diverge from the 'standard' (these PODs are never truly 'standard' of course) and be unique and memorable.



We all experience those moments in our work, wanting to make something, when we are cornered into a kind of stasis/lethargy, not because we have run out of ideas, but because we experience a kind of pinch point, a frustration, a mental constipation, where nothing happens. This can make for a sadness, and sometimes even a 'walking away' from the clay. This obstacle, we know, is not unique to potters, however. It happens to poets too.

Because it happens to poets too, why not get one of the best-known poets/playwrights in Britain to talk to us about it? And why not see how that same frustration and its remedies pan out in the work of two accomplished ceramicists too. You know, that moment when an idea, a shape, a mark in the clay, a colour, a pattern, a shadow line, a foot-ring, a rim, hovers delicately on the periphery of our vision and conscious mind, and we grasp at it, sometimes successfully? But when it happens, it can manifest in a single work or in a body work that satisfies us for decades.



This is how the day looked:

◆ The President opened proceedings with a brief history of the DCPG, starting with that very first meeting at which he was one of the attendees. He also spoke about the range of ceramics the POD's have covered, from 'pots for the table' to the now hybrid and expanded field of ideas.

◆ Jacqueline Harrop, glamorous as always, was the Master of Ceremonies and introduced and thanked John, as both President and POD organiser of the Guild and also his organising sub-committee. She also covered all the Health and Safety items.

◆ This was followed by a video made by Nicole Lyster on the history of the DCPG featuring interviews with Sylvia Fitzwilliam, Dorley Fieldhouse, John Higgins, Ros McGuirk, and Judy Tribe. This, I believe, will become an important document on the history of the Guild.

◆ Then came a personal presentation by members of the COAM KILN GROUP, featuring Laura Gibbs, Debbie de Beer, Lindsay Miles and Tim Mitchell. This was a very moving moment in the day that attested to the power of craft, clay and community. It also became clear that the establishment of this set of kilns has had a transformative effect, not only on the kiln group but on the Guild as a whole.

◆ After this came the main body of the day. Each of the presenters had around half an hour to talk about themselves, their work, their ideas, their materials, and their average day.

Simon Armitage, Poet Laureate, described Caroline Bird's poetry as 'spring-loaded, funny and deadly.' Her latest collection, 'Ambush At Still Lake' (2024), which she held up for us to see, explores themes of marriage, lesbian parenthood, addiction, and recovery - not traditional pottery subjects, but wait. She started off by saying "poetry and pottery are the same word if you squint". It became clear immediately that we were in safe hands, and that she understood the creative processes potters/ceramicists are familiar with, and their difficulties. She gave us a potted history of her life and read out several of her poems to us. The enraptured audience broke into spontaneous applause.

She talked a little about her method: roughing out a poem; how it always looks at mess; catching a thing (words, images, sounds, rhythms, subjects, juxtapositions, etc) and getting it down on paper; that subsequent drafts are often no better; that you cannot trust where the end of the piece of work is; that it is useful to write (make) to a rule or a framework; a poem clicks into place when it is right; a poem can start wordlessly and be about a feeling eg that moment before a lover's kiss; when you 'send out a poem', just as a potter/ceramicist/sculptor exhibits a work, you have to help the reader, or viewer (ie be generous); it is good when your work "slightly disobeys you".

I think this business of 'roughing-out' or sketching an idea is a particularly



powerful concept, and the rest of the day proved this to be the case. The French have the word *ébauche* for roughing-out a painting or a shape, a good word to keep in mind as we approach the workbench.

Sitting right behind Sharon Griffin and Russell Kingston I noticed them nodding in agreement with Caroline throughout, but especially right at the end of her segment when she spoke about the clearly common ground she found she shared with them.

Sharon Griffin is a figurative artist who specialises in ceramic sculpture inspired by the woodland where she explores places in which to 'breathe' the textures, the smells, and the secret spaces. All provided for her a kind of 'awakening', which has sustained her way of working for a long time. Her big thing, she declared, was the business of 'finding freedom'. She also spoke of her 'lock-down work' and the powerful effect it has had on her sculpture thereafter. She uses, she said, the human figure to help communicate a sense of deeper meaning within humankind and of her own experience of being a woman and an artist. The sculptures represent and solidify a state of being familiar to all of us, she said: internal struggles of love, loss, displacement, vulnerability, and strength. Somehow, it was possible to see these things in her figures, their facial expressions, their necks, the way they hold themselves.



She achieves this through the use of fast mark-making, fast making-techniques, and 'the feeling that she is 'sketching' or 'roughing it out' in clay, she said, and continued: "my work sometimes has an unfinished quality which adds to the idea that the figure is a suggestion of a living being rather than a still ornamental object".

Preliminary sketches and drawings from life inform the work, helping ideas evolve. Once in the workshop however, the sculpture is allowed to reveal itself as it is being made, as 'a live conversation with clay'. There is much to be said for allowing the clay its voice it seems.

She talked as she worked and, as if by miracle, a Sharon Griffin figure emerged, full of longing, asking for something from the viewer, and even sadness.

Although Telford came up a lot in her lecture, Sharon is based in Wellington, Shropshire and works as a figurative artist and sculptor full time. Sharon also oversees and manages a community pottery workshop and is a fully qualified lecturer of art with many years of experience in teaching.



Russell Kingston works unambiguously in the Slipware tradition making vessels rich-and-shiny-as-toffee for the home and the hand. He was drawn, he said, to the fact that this kind of making was particular to the place he was born in and where he still lives. "It's origins in the everyday medieval pot to its place in today's studio pottery are what keeps me interested", he said. His pots are made for the kitchen, oven, and table, with function at their heart. But that bald statement belies the fact that these pots vibrate with life and embody a freshness and expressiveness that is noteworthy. This is very interesting and sits in comfort with his art school training. He said he is happy only when he is making things. Many understand this.

His pots are thrown, slabbed, and some are extruded. He uses almost no tools and few ingredients (several slip trailers; a wire pull-through, several buckets, a set of plastic callipers, and a couple of turn-tables) This was in order to preserve the mark-making and the memory of his methods. He works quickly and confidently, so the pot and the surface remain fresh and untampered with. This approach is consistent with the unself-conscious and no-nonsense way of the slipware potters of old. This, Russell said, is the aesthetic and attitude he keeps in mind. 'It is all about the mark' and 'capturing and freezing a liquid moment'.





All this he demonstrated on the stage with a crowd of slip-trailers, buckets of slip, and many leather hard plates which he decorated one after the other in a kind of confident and seamless choreography.

By this time there was a palpable warmth between the poet, the potter, and the sculptor, and several useful points emerged. I shall list a few:

- ◆ You can't make something new out of nothing.
- ◆ Begin anywhere, don't be bound by anything.
- ◆ A shape, like a word, sometimes just arrives.
- ◆ It can be about a feeling alone. Allow this feeling to run through your body and into your hands.
- ◆ Poetry starts from a shortage of words. It is about the wordless being communicated through words or clay.
- ◆ Be prepared to unlearn your habitual way of working and trying something else.
- ◆ Making is a drug.





A GAME OF CONSEQUENCES

At this point in the afternoon, Caroline asked for some of the paper-strips that had words and phrases on them to be fetched from the audience. These had been distributed earlier. Upon hearing what was on these bits of paper Sharon Griffin and Russell Kingston were required to respond in clay. This was particularly difficult but useful to witness in established makers. Some interesting clay shapes emerged, and it was rewarding to see how it might be a way of 'loosening up' and revisiting old ideas with new eyes and a new angle. This section attested to the usefulness of the 'absurd' and of juxtaposition of the unlike in the origin of ideas and 'where to go next' in your work, even within an existing format or shape. And that the work need not actually go anywhere that morning at your workbench. It is OK to try something and trash it. You had to be there for the part of the afternoon labelled

'The Collaboration of the Three Presenters'. It started with them having a quiet word, followed by energetic making, and a little bit, a tiny moment, of panic. What Russell made was fused to what Sharon had made on the floor. A kind of magic suddenly happened.

Sharon worked on the floor with a large amount of clay and, using a slabbing-coiling method, made a boat-like shape almost large enough to sit it. Russell threw, on the wheel, an occupant. Then he pulled multiple slab-like shapes that became wing-like appendages





positioned on the floor next to this shape, now curved and folded on itself.

Without fanfare, and in an almost stance-like state, Russell started to draw shapes and patterns on the structure with his slip-trailers. This, miraculously, unified the clay elements that were gathered on the stage floor. Like a POD-2025-Bird this phoenix rose before our eyes. Is it not uncanny that the day was

book-ended with the word Bird? Caroline Bird and the POD-2025-Bird?

In conclusion: A hybridity, and a hybrid approach to craft and art, is already a very old idea. It can invigorate the old format in which we are working. There is benefit in looking up from a piece we are struggling with and asking ourselves: 'What if I do this...?'

Andre Hess



Reminiscences of an Itinerant Artist Doug Jones.

It started me thinking a few years ago when I came across an old Fulham pottery catalogue and saw the prices of clay and oxides. Wow, how things have changed! So I put the said catalogue in a safe place where I cannot find it, but the one price I do remember is that tin oxide cost £1 per pound (that is about 445 grams). That was 1965 and I had a studio in a basement in Pimlico.

Going back to the start of my life in ceramics can be put down to a very determined young Youth Employment officer who worked hard to get me a place at art school. This was not easy in 1959 as I had already failed to secure a county award at the age of fifteen and only had three O levels. I eventually was given a place at Chesterfield college of Art without a grant but with my fees paid by my LEA.

There we studied every thing; painting, sculpture, drawing from life, costume, landscape, silversmithing, bookbinding, lettering and pottery. It wasn't long before I realised that making pots is one

way of becoming an artist without having to be at the beck and call of a design office.

After three years of study I achieved the Intermediate Diploma which qualified me to the next stage, the National Diploma in design. This had to be done elsewhere and although I had been accepted by York College, I preferred Goldsmiths in London as a fellow student told me that exciting work was being done in the ceramics department there and my principal agreed.

At the Goldsmiths interview I expressed my wish to do painting as my main subject but was told this was not an option so I asked that If I did ceramics as my main could I have access to the life room as I believe drawing is at the root of it all.

Meanwhile back at Chesterfield the principal offered to buy a small Martin Brothers pot that I had purchased a year earlier for twice what I had paid. I knew it was worth more but I was really strapped for cash and have regretted it ever since. I had found it in an art



supplies shop in Sheffield inside an old drawer on the floor containing bits and bobs. It was a small pot about two and a half inches high. I picked it up and saw a strip of paper stuck to the bottom which stated that it was twenty five shillings. I bought it trying to keep calm and show no emotion as the label was written in the hand of the very Martin Brother who had signed the pot. I mention this story as it has ruled my life of acquiring art ever since. I do not sell anything or buy for profit.

Some of the pots I made in those days were inspired by the likes of Lucy Rie and of course Bernard Leach. Selling them helped me through college but the artist I aspired to was William Staite Murray. I not only liked his work but that he believed that pots should be regarded as Art and priced accordingly.

When I started at Goldsmiths I had an annual grant of £330 to live on. I was lucky to find rooms in a house owned by an artist, the sculptor and glass engraver Stephen Rickard. After a few months the family Rickard offered me a space under the stairs for a small work area and the cellar for a kiln space. With a small bank loan and an offer of a cheap wheel and kiln I was away. I would arrive at college when the doors were opened and leave as they were closing until I got fed up with spending a lot of my time teaching other students and would spend more time under the stairs.

By 1963 I had become a member of the Craftsmans Potters Association and exhibiting there was rewarding not only financially but one got to meet other potters including famous ones, not that

there were that many in those days.

I had decided years earlier that repetition throwing was not for me and Goldsmiths gave me the opportunity to make large pieces in clay (a four foot high kiln helps). In the two years I was there one of the tutors, David Garbett, took a few of us to see Lucy Rie and it was wonderful to watch her throw a pot on her momentum wheel with no tray to catch water and what water was used did not reach the edge of the wheel head. She then went off to make a cup of tea for us and as we drank she started turning the pot she had made a few minutes earlier with a backed razor blade. (Jaws on floor time). I still don't know how I managed to not knock over the bowl beside me onto the floor. We also were taken to a lecture by Bernard Leach where he extolled the aesthetics of Japanese pottery and was rather scathing about a large sculpture by Peter Voulkos.

I had always admired the work of Leach and I don't think we would be where we are today without him. I recall the excitement I felt when we went from Chesterfield to see his exhibition in London around 1961 or '62 and afterwards running into his son David with a group of students from Loughborough college.

Back in London my landlord, being a member of the Craft Centre, gave me an invite to the private view of Shoji Hamada. For this occasion I bought a new shirt to wear which gave me an itch all evening. I met Hamada and we exchanged nods as there was not enough room to bow in that crowded



place in Hay Hill. When I got back to my flat I removed my shirt to discover blood stains on the back. The cause of the itch was a pin that I had missed when removing the shirt from its package. An even more crowded private view was for Michael Cardew at the Craftsman Potters shop in Lowndes court. A wonderful man looking quite uncomfortable in a suit which he seemed to rattle around in with his tanned skin seeking the sun of which the London weather was depriving him.

By this time I was teaching at Goldsmiths, Croydon and also Harrow School of Art. I was taken on at Harrow to introduce sculpture in ceramics. This amazing course had been started by Victor Margrie and I think Mick Casson, but after 18 months the constant travelling as a part time tutor was getting too much so I resigned. I think the technician replaced me, a young man by the name of Walter Keeler. In the meantime my landlord had taken in another student to occupy the room below mine. Her father employed my landlord at St Martins to teach portrait sculpture so assumed it would be a safe place to put his daughter. We were married two years later at Caxton Hall after she had finished her degree at the Slade.

Occasionally Simone was asked to look after one of her father's colleague's children when they went away. I would go with her and thus was introduced to Tony Caro the sculptor and painter and his wife Sheila. Their house was filled with fabulous works by artists like Ken Nolan, Morris Louis, David Smith, Helan Frankenthaler, Edwardo Paolozzi

etc. What a privilege to be able to wake up to see the morning light illuminating such work at close hand. Paul, the boy we were looking after is now a lecturer in painting and in his sixties.

By now I didn't feel alone any more with the work I was doing and became a little bolder. The pottery was paying for the expense of the sculpture I was making and teaching paid for rent and food. Those were the days when we could afford a studio, a flat and a dark-room upstairs in London. All these places now demand a four figure sum for rent.

Tony employed me to take the odd photo of his work and commissioned pottery for the space in his studio where he entertained guests. I became a regular visitor to St Martins College in Charing Cross Rd where one came across students who are now household names and some knights of the realm. My wife's' father thought that I was in the vanguard of the most important art movement in Britain in the sixties.

Around 1969 we were looking for a house near Goldsmiths and viewed several within our budget but the favourite needed a vast amount of work doing to it. While we were contemplating the purchase we went on a week's trip on the Oxford canal in a narrow boat and became hooked on the idea of living on one without the weight of a £25 per month mortgage for the next twenty years. (Years later I discovered that the favoured house had belonged to William Staite Murray.)

In 1970 we purchased a narrow boat that we lived on and toured England.



It was an idyllic life for a few years especially with the long vacations one got as a college lecturer. That same year I had an enquiry from a previous student who was now teaching at St Mary's college Strawberry Hill; could I recommend anyone to take her job while she took six months maternity leave? I put myself forward as it would help paying off the bank loan for the boat. I got the job and started that September.

Living a nomadic life, I had no studio and only made a few pots at various places of work. However after I had repainted the old sign on my boat I got commissions to paint others and I became a sign writer. Then one day a fellow boater asked if I knew of anybody who could paint five foot by five foot copies of record covers for the opening of the Virgin Mega store in Oxford Street. Pete was in charge of marketing for Virgin Records and his artist had let him down. Within twenty four hours I had persuaded two artist friends at the Royal College of Art and Simone to help with this emergency. Seventy two hours later four paintings were delivered to Oxford Street. This went on for several years until Laser dot printing did me out of a job.

1978 was an eventful year. We were on holiday to Devon and received a phone call from the police in Rickmansworth to inform us that our boat home had blown up. It's a long story for another time, suffice to say the council gave us a rather derelict house to live in while we rebuilt the boat. We ended up buying the house and somehow with my last pay cheque (I had been made redundant) we made

our first mortgage repayment.

This land base gave me somewhere to build a kiln one brick course at a time and a momentum hand wheel. Money from sales bought another row of bricks and so it went on. I decided to try to make some kind of living from the work I had been teaching for the last twenty years. That is when I started selling my work at craft shows especially where by demonstrating on the hand wheel my pitch fee was greatly reduced.

Working with a quality craft show made me realise that organisations like these were doing far more for crafts than the Crafts Council had done in all its years. Prices of humble pieces of pottery were going for large amounts of money so I went back to the ideas of Leach and tried to make it affordable to all and insinuate Art into peoples lives disguised as a pot.

Simone and I rebuilt the house to our style and what was once a very modestly priced property is now running the risk of some kind of annual tax. When we first lived on a boat we needed an address for mail and I had rented a room for storage etc in the street where we now live. In the days before bank cards I was buying something in a local store and signed the cheque and address on the back, the shop owner took it, turned it over, saw the address and handed it back saying, "we don't take cheques from that street".

The purpose of art is to increase our powers of perception.

The purpose of Frieze is to increase ones powers of Deception.

Just a thought.



Three day 'Scale' course at Whichford Pottery Beverly Benson

'Whichford Pottery design and make an enormous range of English flowerpots. We use traditional hand-thrown and hand-pressed methods, keeping ancient skills alive, using ethically sourced materials, support local businesses wherever possible and try to give our customers the very best.'

Many of you will remember the wonderful demonstration given to us by Adam Keeling from Whichford pottery last year - and I know that we were not the first to be inspired to take his 'Scale' course. John and I both like throwing and we are reasonably competent, but we wanted to improve our ability to handle large pieces. One of the joys of this course is that there is limitless clay: if you have a disaster, chuck it on the reclaim table for some other poor persons to deal with and take another massive lump of clay from the trolley - what a treat.



Adam's parents started the pottery in 1976 and it is still in the family with Adam as master potter and his sisters running the business including the wonderful Straw Café which provides the many coffee/tea breaks and delicious lunches to their students. The room is purpose built for teaching with six wheels and one for demonstration. We were the oldest people on the course, but we are used to that. A couple of the younger people were very talented and one had come from America just to study with Adam. I was alarmed at how low the wheels were, but all became clear when we started throwing and had to stand to finish the tops of our pots.

We began with a tour of the pottery, seeing the entire process from the piles





of local clay through to refining, preparation and throwing. There are a number of potters and apprentices, all throwing the grogged terracotta clay by hand to create the frost proof garden ware for which Whichford Pottery is famed. Adam is very keen that the skill is passed on to the next generation, so we felt a bit like imposters on the course, but we teach too, so we will pass the skills on that way...

Adam demonstrated the 'three pulls' technique that he showed us at his demonstration, but it was good to have instant hands on experience of using it, with him there to help if necessary. The clay is in 20lb lumps, but you centre as much as you are able to at one time and then add more on to the top until you have the amount of clay that you need. The centering technique is to hold your dominant hand steady and to use your other hand to push the clay against it and fold the top in.

Obviously, this is a pretty robust clay, but the technique seemed to work well and everyone managed to centre more clay than they had expected to.



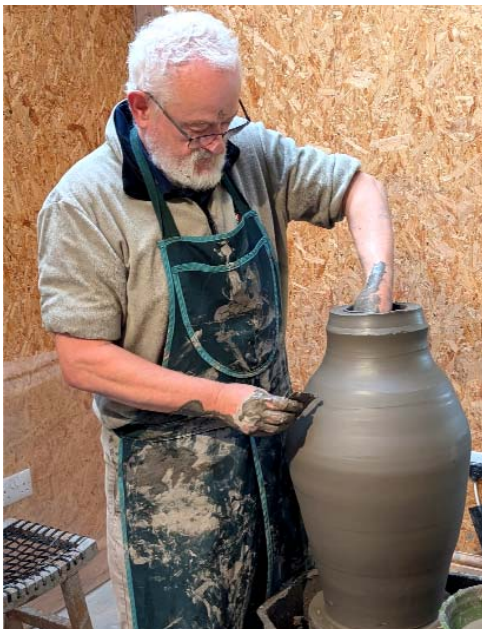
The 'stretch' was new to me. Rather than balancing his hands each side of the pot wall, Adam scoops it upwards with his inside hand and pushes it back into place with the outer hand which is following quite a bit lower down. It is amazing - the pot simply flies upwards. The final throw is to smooth the outside with a rib. Then comes the flame thrower, (John tells me it isn't a flame thrower, but the cylinder was taller than me and the flame that came out of the pipe roared like a dragon).



We dried the pot enough to make it able to take the next layer, then put it to one side while we threw the next section, which was upended and joined on with slip. By the second day we were adding third and fourth sections, standing by our wheels to refine the top edges.

The six of us on the course were all at different stages in our pottery careers, but we were all able to use the Whichford method to make massive pots.

Adam will fire one massive pot or two fairly massive pots for you, so we left our best pots behind and came home with a car load of slightly massive pots to fire ourselves (1040° with a half hour soak). Obviously, I had to add a lizard on to one of mine, but Adam has a number of sprig moulds, handle moulds and slips so that you can add more traditional decoration.



If you want to improve your throwing confidence or just have a brilliant time for a few days, this is definitely the course for you. I cannot recommend it highly enough.

<https://www.whichfordpottery.com/>

Many of the local pubs offer accommodation and there is a large campsite nearby. We stayed at The Wash House at Sibford Ferris (a converted farm outbuilding 10 mins from the pottery where they greet you with a freshly made cake...)

<https://share.google/nRsMceYef42hSH2du>



Phil Jolley December demo Jolijn Bronneberg

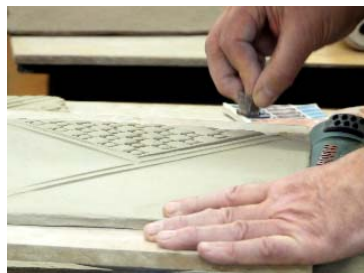
On Friday December 12th Phil Jolley joined us at Kings Langley to showcase his hand building skills. Phil builds highly decorative stoneware pieces, both slab built and sculptural.

When Phil introduced his style and inspiration we soon found he takes inspiration from everything around him, quite literally in fact, from postbox crowns to gravestones and door knockers. Phil has a growing collection of hand-made moulds he casts from intricate features he encounters on a daily basis.

He forms the clay around the feature having sprinkled it with talcum powder, and when bisque fired it can be used as

either a stamp with slip, a mark making tool, or a mould. Some stamps he uses frequently, others he comes back to after a long while. I'd like to think his studio is like visiting an antique shop, with items from the past few decades and from many places.

Phil started off making a large 4-sided slab built vessel. Applying different imprints to each slab, a mix of geometric and more baroque patterns including from a piece of corrugated cardboard, he knew





the end result he wanted to achieve without being too exact. The patterns and the four sides didn't all have to match seamlessly as long as the design is balanced. There is no right or wrong with Phil's designs, and it was a very instinctive process. To me it seemed a bit of a puzzle which sides with which patterns he wanted to match up, similar to a test question where you have to answer which side of an unfolded cube would go on the top. Phil however did this with great confidence, of course.

The second piece he made was a smaller vessel, inspired by the industrial buildings and architecture he saw on his walks. It had a different look and feel altogether, but again it felt very intuitive. To represent buildings he used newspaper cut-outs to layer on the vessel, which he selected carefully based on how balanced they felt on the piece.

To finish things off, Phil explained he only uses a very limited pallet of stains and slips and when he uses coloured clay he gets a much stronger result than with glazes. The outside of Phil's pieces are often matt, which are in stark contrast to the glossy and gold lustre insides of his vessels. He uses multiple colours across the multiple patterns on the outside, instead of painting each pattern it's own colour, which really ties the piece together.

I'm excited to start applying Phil's philosophy of taking inspiration from around you. Phil mentioned he had one stamp from a Roman breastplate on a child's suit of armour which I'm not sure I can replicate, but I'm sure there are treasures everywhere. Though please don't tell the council if they start seeing trails of talc in places near where I live in Chesham..

NB Phil does not have a website but further information about his techniques and materials may be found in our archive in Newsletter Summer 2001 and also in Spring 2015. Ed.





Children's pottery making

Jill Baxter

My local infant school asked if I would spend half a day with their Reception children (4 and 5-year-olds) making ceramic Christmas tree decorations. For this age group I was concerned to make things as simple and straightforward as possible, which proved to be absolutely the right approach!

We used reconstituted clay from one of the Guild's summer projects as it seemed appropriate to use it for another educational project. We used cardboard cut-out shapes of stars, bells, snowmen, etc. together with an assortment of available tools, some better suited to the task than others. I worked with the children in groups of 6 or 7 at a time, seated around one table, and they each got through 250g of clay in no time at all. It never ceases to amaze me how children can get through so much clay so quickly!

The children made two decorations each with varying degrees of support,



and with the addition of a few extra items made by us we managed to end up with enough for each child including absentees to have a couple to decorate.

Tony and I bisque fired the decorations and returned them to the school for painting, decorating and coating with PVA before the end of term.

The children and teachers enjoyed the experience and it has generated a request for us to make more and different animal shapes later in the year. It has been good to give the children the opportunity to play with clay.



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