DACORUM AND CHILTERN
POTTERS GUILD

Issue 58 Summer 2026
www.dcpg.org.uk

In this issue:

Demos by
Jo Davies and
John Wheeldon
St Albans Big Build
Members Gallery
Glaze Book Review









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Cover pictures:
Left: **Jo Davies and pot**
Right **John Wheeldon pots**

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Chair's note June 2026

Jackie Harrop



By the time you read this we will be well into an action packed programme throughout the summer. Check the events diary for details and make sure you don't miss out.

The members' questionnaire raised helpful suggestions which we incorporated into planning from our reset meeting to revitalise the way the Guild meets members' aspirations.

The great news is that lots of new members are bravely plunging into exhibiting at Kingsbury, helping at the St Albans festival, coming to the Friday demos and helping at Terrific Tuesdays and even joining the committee.

Planning for the Kingsbury exhibition from Sept 11-13 is moving forward and I'm really looking forward to seeing the work of lots of new exhibitors. Don't forget there is money to be won for entries to the annual member competition. This year's theme of SEASONS will be on display so get busy making.

We have a full diary of firings at COAM throughout the summer and autumn, with opportunities for both novices and experienced

firers to share skills and experience of raku, wood, soda and pit firings.

Cross your fingers for a sunny evening on August 1st for our summer picnic again at COAM. Bring your own food and drink and enjoy the music and camaraderie. Don't miss out!

Looking forward to you joining us at these events.

Best wishes Jackie

Editorial Summer 2026

Ros McGuirk



We have entered our summer season, taking a break from Friday meetings and anticipating mainly outdoor activities. In this issue you will find opportunities to get creative with community projects, firings, a visit to an archeological dig, and our annual party. Meanwhile your are encouraged to put aside some time to create your own piece on the theme of 'seasons' for our annual competition and look forward to the annual exhibition in Kingsbury Barn in September.

Two new items are included in this issue. They are a brief report on our monthly committee meetings, to keep you up to date with how we make it all work, and a gallery of members' work.

With thanks to all who work behind the scenes, and to our lovely members who put fingers to the keyboard for us.

Enjoy.

Summer Events

A Visit and a Party

Wednesday July 22:

A visit to the Cookham Abbey Archaeology Dig with resident artist Emma Przygrodzka.

Further details and timings will be provided later by email.

Saturday August 1:

Summer Party at the Chiltern Open Air Museum with live music. HP8 4AB. From 6.30 – 9pm.

Bring your own picnic and drinks.

Look out for more info by email.



Committee members and Officers

President & POD Organiser -
John Higgins -
johnceramics@aol.com

Chair – Jackie Harrop - jackieharrop1@gmail.com

Deputy Chair – Tim Mitchell

Secretary and minutes taker
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jolijnbronneberg@gmail.com

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Library - Gay Crommelin -
library@dcpg.org.uk

Kingsbury coordinator
- Jill Baxter
jillmbaxter82@gmail.com

Social Media Co-ordinator:
Nicole Lyster and Laura Gibbs with help from non-committee members Amanda Toms and Deirdre McGuirk. NB use @the DCPG on your posts to allow us to repost them.

Website co-ordinator
Gay, Amy and Mary Amme

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COAM kiln site manager-
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ros.mcguirk@gmail.com

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- Tony Baxter -
tonymbaxter@hotmail.com

Safe guarding –
Sandie Taylor -
one-earth@ntlworld.com

General Committee member –
Colin Hazelwood

St Albans market co-ordinator –
Beverly Benson
(beverly.benson2@gmail.com)

Friday night organiser - vacant post

Trustees
Mary Anne, Colin, David, Jackie, John, Ros, Laura and Tim.

Committee report of May's Meeting

1. Charities Commission submission was agreed by trustees and will be submitted by end of June.
2. Bookkeeper replacement sought from members from September.
3. The next cycle of wheel hires have been agreed.
4. Membership continues to grow with 169 members currently.
5. Website quotes have been received and we hope to review and update shortly.
6. Temporary additional Social media support from members sought.
7. Coordination of the Friday Demonstrations to be reviewed and updated.
8. Preparation and planning for St Albans Roman build on 20th June discussed.
9. COAM Heritage weekend - pit fire planning and clay needs discussing, and a timetable of firings throughout the summer shared.
10. COAM Terrific Tuesdays socials and visits update.
11. Planning for the Summer Picnic August 1st
12. Kingsbury Exhibition update on preparation, and publicity.
13. POD 2027 - speakers agreed.
14. We discussed ways of making it easier for committee members on line.
15. We discussed ways of ensuring members without transport were helped to attend events by offering lifts and lift sharing .

Members' Annual Exhibition in Kingsbury Barn

Ros McGuirk

Jill Baxter reports that we have around 39 members on the list of exhibitors, more than ever before.

She is currently juggling with how to fit them all in !

It is going to be a cracking good show so make sure you get to see it.

The venue is a beautiful ancient barn next to St Michaels Manor House and near the old water mill (now serving as a waffle house!). The dates are Fri 11 – Sun 13th Sept and there will be a social on the Friday evening. Look out in your emails for more info

Lift Sharing

We have a whatsap group to arrange lift shares. Called KL lifts it was set up to promote sharing for our Friday night meetings in Kings Langley. However it can be used for any Guild event.

Simply post your need or availability a few days before the event and wait for a response. It is an open group for members use. To join email me at - ros.mcguirk@gmail.com

New Members



Congratulations to **Snibs (aka Elizabeth) Brabham** from Croxley Green who has recently retired, joined the firing groups and jumped in to write for the newsletter (definitely my favourite kind of new member! Ed.) Snibs first learned to throw on a kick wheel in Hong Kong in the nineties. Now she mainly hand builds functional objects embossed with handmade stamps to add texture and pattern.
Find her on Instagram @snibsbrabham.
Snibs's pots to the right and below.





Aga Malmed from Chorleywood, currently attending classes at W. Herts College.

Also to **Rosita Matyniowna** from Waltham Abbey, **Grace Bau** from St Albans, **Julia Staton** from Berkhamsted, **Karen Coombs** from Hertford and **Lucy Bridger** from Bovingdon.

A warm welcome to **Sara Mabelis** who lives in Berkhamsted and writes "After several years in Asia, I've recently returned to the UK and am finally making my way back to ceramics after a rather all-consuming adventure in motherhood. I'm keen to dust off my skills, explore new techniques and learn from this creative community".









Heather Noble from Ashford in Mddx who started throwing 2 years ago, has her work fired at St Albans Pottery by Fiona and is keen to join in our firing activities. *(her pots above)*

Autumn Fair at Boxmoor

We will be taking part in the Autumn Fair on Sunday 20th Sept with our usual mix of running a workshop and selling pots. The venue is Blackbird Moor, a field in the water meadows opposite St John's church, Station Rd., Hemel Hempstead HP1 1JY.
Boxmoor is an ancient common on the outskirts of Hemel managed by the trust who runs the fair.
This event started life as a small country show around a conker championship and has grown substantially in recent years.
We have long been a part of the show and past members include a number of conker champions.

We need a minimum of 6 – 8 to run the workshop and stall, depending on availability. More hands are needed at the end for clearing up.

We set up at 9.30am, the fair normally runs from 11 am – 3 pm and the site is cleared by about 4pm.

Contact me for more info and to join in the fun.
ros.mcguirk@gmail.com

Terrific Tuesdays at COAM

Judi Tribe



Terrific Tuesday at half term on 26th May should have been really busy. We had seven members including two new newcomers ready and waiting for the expected rush in the delightfully cool Northolt barn.

However the weather did not co-operate, it was the second day of the May heatwave and few visitors turned out to the museum, only 145 all day.

Thanks to Mary Anne, Fiona, Maud, Snibs, Lindsey and Judi who came to help and especially to David for producing the worksheets.

Terrific Tuesdays, the crafting days, will continue weekly throughout the summer holidays from 28th July to 25th August.

They are always fun and full of surprises as you help others find two or three generations in one family working together it is truly inspiring.

The themes will be Wood (on 28/7), Earth (4/8), Metal (11/8), Fire (18/8) and Water (25/8) We start at 9.30 am and finish around 4pm.

Volunteers are most definitely needed, even if for half a day. Please book your place via juditribe0@gmail.com

Other Events

10 - 12th July.
Celebrating Ceramics.
Waterperry Gardens, nr Wheatley, OX33 1LA.
Tickets include entry to 'Desire Jewellery and Silversmithing', £16 online.
www.celebratingceramics.co.uk

18th July.
Sat. Summer Artisan Fair.
St Albans Cathedral.
11 am – 3 pm. Free entry.

24th - 26th July.
Potfest in the Park.
Hutton-in-the-Forest.
Penrith, CA11 9TJ

7 - 9th Aug. Potfest Suffolk. Haughley Park.
Stowmarket, IP14 3JY

28 - 31st Aug. Craft in Focus. RHS Gardens Hyde Hall, Chelmesford, CM3 8ET. www.craftinfocus.com/next-fair/rhs-hyde-hall-2026

2 - 4th Oct. Ceramics in the City. Museum of the Home, 136 Kingsland Rd, London E2 8EA. 10am – 5pm. Free.

23rd - 25th Oct.
Autumn Potfest in the Pens. Penrith.
30th Oct - 1st Nov. Potfest in the Pens Melton Mowbray.

27 - 29th Nov.
Potfest in the City. Scotland.

Guild Meetings

All our meetings are held on a Friday evening in the hall of the Methodist Church in Kings Langley, on Hempsted Rd, WD4 8BR, unless otherwise stated.

We start at 7pm when tea and coffee are available so bring your own mug. From 7.30 – 9.30 pm we have a demonstration from a guest potter. Our excellent library is available for members to borrow books for a small fee.

There is parking on site and next door. Guests are welcome for a charge of £5.

Sat 17th Oct at 9.30 am. AGM followed by Russell Collins.

A most welcome return of one of the best production potters. Russell has been in the business a long time and has much to teach us. He is now retired and potting for himself rather than running a large workshop with several employees, all production aimed at the catering industry. Look for the name Hook Norton Pottery.

Fri 13th Nov.
Chris Keenan works in porcelain, throwing forms that are perfectly shaped, sublime and delicate. These pots are glazed in black and pale turquoise colours to give cool, crisp results.

www.chriskeenan.co.uk

11th Dec.
Matthew Blakely.
Matthew has progressed from

being a porcelain potter making lovely organic shaped pots and has become an intrepid geological forager walking miles to find a new and exciting glaze material among the highlands and islands. Matthew also runs courses in the Cambridge area.

www.matthewblakely.co.uk

Guild Calendar

JULY

Sat 11 – Sun 12 *Firing weekend at COAM.
(Contact Lyndsey Miles)

Tues 14 Committee meeting. (Jackie Harrop)

Wed 22 Cookham Abbey dig with Emma Przygrodzka. (Contact Judi Tribe)

Sat 25 – Sun 26
Heritage Weekend at COAM. Pit firing + workshop. (Lyndsey)

Tues 28 Terrific Tuesday at COAM. (Judi Tribe)

AUGUST

Sat 1 Summer Party at COAM. DIY picnic.

Tues 4 Terrific Tuesday at COAM (Judi Tribe)

Tues 11 TT (Judi Tribe)

Sat 15 - Sun 16 Firing weekend at COAM. (Lyndsey Miles)

Tues 18
TT (Judi Tribe)

Tues 25
Last TT of the summer. (Judi Tribe)

SEPTEMBER

Fri 11 – Sun 13 Members' Annual Exhibition at Kingsbury

14th Sept
Newsletter COPY DATE

Sat 19 – Sun 20 Firing weekend

Sun 20 Autumn Fair at Boxmoor (Ros McGuirk)

OCTOBER

Sat 17 AGM with Russell Collins

Sat 17 – Sun 18 Firing weekend

NOVEMBER

Fri 13 Meeting with Chris Keenan

Sat 14 – Sun 15 Firing weekend

DECEMBER

Fri 11 Meeting with Matthew Blakely

Sat 12 – Sun 13 Firing weekend

14th COPY DATE

* All firing dates are subject to confirmation.

About a dozen members came together over the last weekend of March to fire both of the wood kilns. One taken to stoneware temperatures; the other being the soda kiln (also taken to stoneware temperature).

Saturday was devoted to preparing the kilns: glazing pots, loading the work, chopping and prepping wood, and attending to any general maintenance.

Wood firing is an ancient, labour-intensive technique where timber fuels the kiln rather than gas or electricity. As wood burns, fly ash travels through the chamber, settling on the pots and melting at high temperatures to form a completely unique, natural glaze. Unlike modern electric kilns, a wood fire demands constant, round-the-clock attention.

Members take shifts to manually stoke the fire, carefully controlling the kiln's temperature and atmosphere throughout.

The wood kiln was fired slowly. This resulted in an even temperature throughout the chamber. The patient, measured approach paid off handsomely, and toasty, well-matured work came out of every shelf. A pleasing result that



reflects the care and attention to the fire.

In the soda kiln, the top shelves were found to be a little underfired compared to the rest of the load. Following much discussion, it is clear that shelf position has a significant impact on the flame path and therefore on the look and maturity of glazes. Readjusting placement in future firings should help ensure more even outcomes throughout the chamber.

As the fire peaks in wood firing, handling, observation and monitoring become especially important. Wood ash becomes vaporised and lands on the ceramics; when it hits extreme heat (often between 1,280°C and 1,320°C). It fuses with the clay body to create

a natural, spontaneous glaze. The paths of the flames leave distinct 'toasted' marks, shadows, and colour flashes across unglazed sections of the pots. Members also adjust oxygen levels to starve the fire into 'reduction', drawing oxygen out of the clay and producing the earthy, rich colour variations that wood firing is celebrated for.

Because of the spontaneous, elemental forces at play, no two wood-fired pieces are ever identical. The final outcome depends heavily on where the pot was placed inside the kiln. This unpredictability, often affectionately referred to as the 'kiln gods' at work, is precisely what gives wood-fired pottery its highly prized, organic character.





On Sunday, whilst the kilns were being fired, several raku firings also took place. Members were blessed with sunny weather, which helps greatly when glazing and loading — though they have certainly managed it in downpours!

The two kilns were opened on 31st March, which happened to fall on the first Terrific Tuesday of the year, making for a busy and celebratory day for members.

The April firing weekend (25th and 26th) was dedicated to a stoneware firing, with Sunday raku sessions running alongside.

The June (13th and 14th) firing was an earthenware firing in the wood kiln. Thanks to the longer daylight hours at this time of year and the lower temperature required for earthenware firing, the glazing, loading, and firing were all completed entirely on the Sunday. A pleasing efficiency that the summer months allow.

There are usually around a dozen potters at each firing event, and the kiln site comfortably accommodates up to fifteen. The firings are expertly organised and overseen by Lyndsey, who is always supported by a number of other experienced firers.

Health and safety standards are high, and comprehensive information is provided beforehand so newcomers can feel confident that they will be well supported and will learn a great deal.





There is a WhatsApp group for each type of firing, which helps with organising, reflective learning, and knowledge sharing, as well as fostering friendships and connections within the group.

The photos and subsequent discussions, often long and detailed, are a testament to how much there is always left to discover: about each kiln, each firing, the type of work, and the different clays and glazes being used.

It is a privilege to be part of these groups, and others are warmly urged to drop by during firing weekends to find out more. Visitors to the Chiltern Open Air Museum are welcome to observe from the boundary of the kiln site and chat to whoever is available.

"Don't be Scared" Jo Davies at the April meeting

Nicole Lyster



When Jo Davies started her ceramic degree at Cardiff School of Art in the early 2000's she had no preconceptions about porcelain, and her view was 'It's a beautiful material, it's elastic'. Jo wanted her demonstration to inspire us to try porcelain for ourselves and especially 'don't be scared'.

As her artistic journey developed she began to work predominantly in porcelain. Through her 'wilderness years' in a studio in Bristol doing sculptural work, through her time at the Royal College, where she was encouraged to look more at functional work and created her lighting range..she kept returning to porcelain.



She went on to work for other potters, especially Charlotte Hodes, who taught her about making to order, constructing clay in parts, creating for other people and deadlines. After finding this restrictive in her own design she decided to concentrate on her own work and make that central to her existence as a potter, exploring how porcelain can be stretched to create forms but still maintain geometry.

She finds that it is a balancing act 70% geometry, 30% organic - too organic and porcelain becomes wobbly.

Jo sketches on the wheel, rather than on paper, and keeps any forms that she finds have potential for development.

In 2018 Jo went to China for five weeks to teach in the Jingdezhen porcelain district which gave her confidence in her abilities and won her a solo exhibition 'London Porcelain' at The Mufei Gallery, Shanghai.

It was at this time that she started to combine colours and objects. It was during the pandemic that she first began to collaborate with brands to create unique collections of functional ware, and this led to her exclusive range of ceramics for Mulberry amongst others, where she used all the knowledge she gained from working for other potters to develop a range she was happy to call her own. In 2023 she published her book 'Electric Kilns for ceramics' sharing her years of experience of running a firing service for others' work.

In 2025 Jo exhibited 'A place to keep your ghosts' at Wells Contemporary Art Exhibition at the 'Unknown Tomb' at Wells Cathedral, exploring how humans deal with grief and the need to hold onto loved ones.

This year Jo is taking time away from ceramic fairs and concentrating more on her teaching and her own creative development.

She has set up an on-line learning





community called Studium, to help ceramicists share and develop their own knowledge.

Throwing 800 grams of porcelain into a bowl, Jo first compressed the clay by slapping it on the wheel, and then coning it up and down several times as she centred it. She explained that porcelain requires very careful compression to ensure that the crystals in the clay are aligned and the base will not crack on firing. She throws all her shapes with the structure of the clay in mind, making sure that her bowls have a large base - like the shape of an elephants foot - to support the bowl walls, and forming the bowl from the inside - trimming off the large area of support later. She is not interested in creating the perfect form straight from the wheel, as porcelain will be more likely to resist this approach. It is the end product she keeps in mind, so worrying about what it looks like when its first thrown is not important. Jo turned a pre-made bowl using a tool to roughen the base with concentric circles first - to avoid large tools dragging on the porcelain, and then using a surf-former to take away the excess and form the outside bowl shape. She finished off with a metal kidney to polish and shape the final form. After a 1000°C



bisque fire she uses a diamond pad to properly polish the outside, and glazes the inside in transparent glaze which is fired to 1260oC in her electric kiln.

Jo used 1300g of porcelain to make her tall undulating vases. Again the base was wider than the top. She finally makes the undulating pattern with slow finger compressions up and down the top half of the vase. These vases get trimmed the right way up, stuck to a 'plate of clay' she throws on the wheel. She uses tiny trimming tools to avoid drag on the porcelain and smooths with a metal kidney.

All Jo's work has a flat base, as she finds foot rings do not add to the aesthetics of her pieces and just contribute to extra work in the glazing process.

Jo made using porcelain look easy, and her passion and confidence, coupled with her practical explanations and techniques, has grown my confidence in using this material. I may even attempt larger forms, rather than sticking to my tiny miniatures.

'Electric Kilns for ceramics' is published by Crowood and is available from Jo Davies' website: https://www.jo-davies.com/shop



John's lifelong fascination with ceramics was sparked by a single image: an 18th-century flower brick in his parents' AA Treasures of Britain book. Decades later that childhood inspiration came full circle, informing his contemporary work 'Pots for Flowers' – a response to his commission from Leamington Spa Art Gallery and Museum based on a 1790 Liverpool Delftware flower brick from their collection.

After Art Foundation John studied Ceramics at Wolverhampton, mastering industrial processes including slip casting and mould making. His first studio was at Sudbury Hall, where he worked two days a week for the National Trust in exchange for studio space and a kiln site. His current studio is in Wirksworth in Derbyshire.

His functional stoneware has graced many food magazines as he was commissioned by a food photographer to produce a 'large number' of plates - the arrangement being "I'll buy as many as you can make, as long as they are all different"! He has continued to make tableware throughout his career and also loves making small lidded boxes patterned with roulettes.

John is well known for his copper fumed raku work with stunning

rainbow colours. He is also a great exponent of Terra Sigillata (meaning "sealed earth") – which allows him to achieve a soft sheen or high gloss finish to the clay body without traditional glazes. By syphoning the finest clay particles suspended in water, and then evaporating to a brushable consistency, he creates a finish that feels both ancient and modern (Terra Sigillata was first used by the Romans after all!).

Whether it is his signature "Teflon roulette" dot pattern or his "Eureka" moment of making rubber matting stamps to replicate the complex lustre patterns his former wife used to paint on his platters, John is a craftsman who builds his own tools, makes stamps from found objects and door mats, and generally finds a way to make things work.

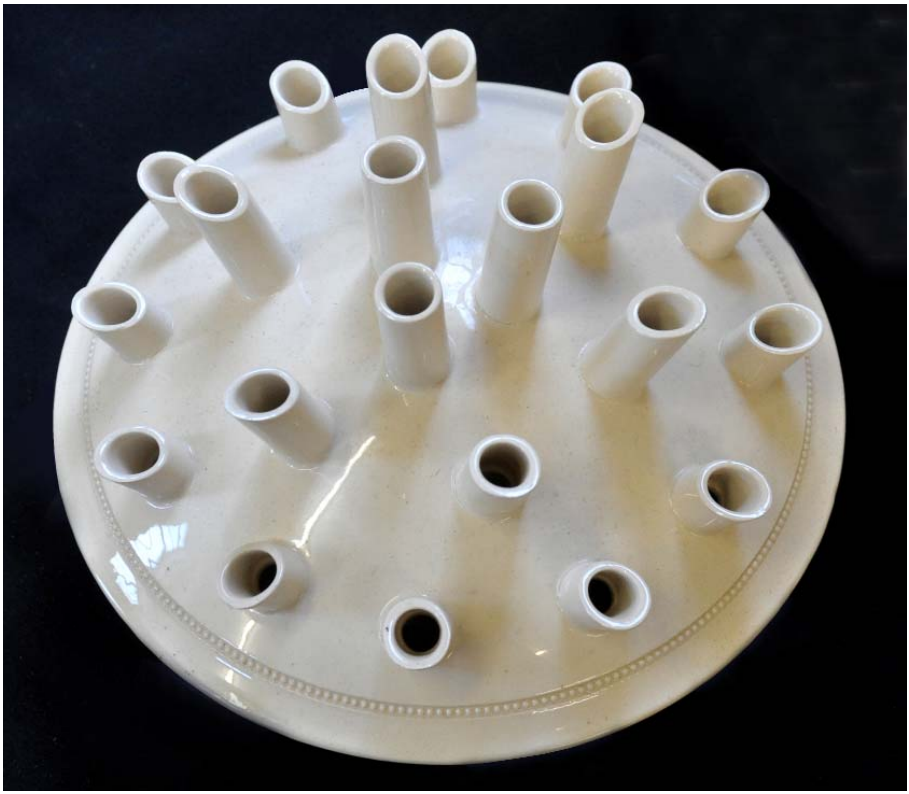






During his demonstration he turned a box and its lid, using a tool made from banding iron and also a surform, then ran a roulette around them creating a delicate pattern to be picked up by a simple glaze. His tulip vases are essentially boxes with spouts. The latter are extruded. He showed us how he cuts them at an angle using a bat marked up in sections as a simple protractor – a very quick and efficient method. He also showcased his "stick-up slip"—a magical mix of slip containing 94% clay body, 2% bentonite, 2% feldspar, and 2% gum arabic that bonds clay instantly without scoring. He used this slip to attach multiple carefully measured and cut spouts to one of his beautiful tulip vases.

This was an excellent evening with a master craftsman who has made some of the finest pottery in his explorations of different materials and techniques.



St Albans Festival Big Build Jackie Harrop



After last year's successful clock tower build the St Albans BID (Business Improvement District) invited the Guild to partake in the usual festival activities.

Enthusiastic new members tackled the logistics of constructing a Roman temple, a Roman Galley and an extremely impressive colosseum built again by our master of all trades David Evans. I don't know where he finds the time or energy, but he can always be relied upon to produce incredible constructions and is always a willing and selfless supporter.

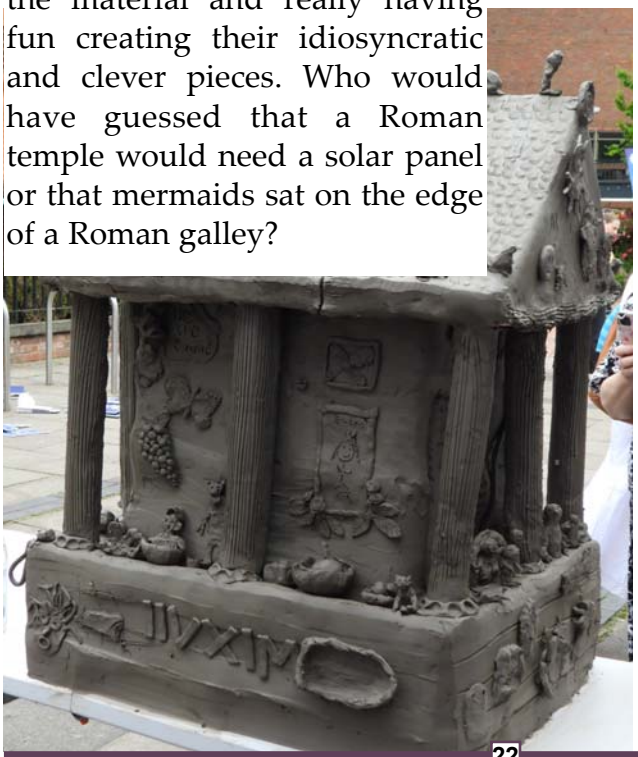
The new site created its own challenges for us in accessing water and in setting up a large amount of material in a relatively inaccessible corner of the town centre, but as always our volunteers tackle everything with good will and cheerfulness.

The morning of the festival followed an extremely hot day so we were rather nervous of the impact of heat on the build, but



our fears were groundless as the temperature had moderated, luckily for us. Unlike previous years when we had been allocated a pitch in the cathedral orchard, or in front of the clock tower, we were just off St Peters street, right in front of the civic centre, with a steady footfall the whole day. As always it was terrific to see the enthusiasm not just of the younger children, but teenagers, couples, groups of older friends and complete families, spending long periods of time absorbed in the material and really having fun creating their idiosyncratic and clever pieces. Who would have guessed that a Roman temple would need a solar panel or that mermaids sat on the edge of a Roman galley?





the material and really having fun creating their idiosyncratic and clever pieces. Who would have guessed that a Roman temple would need a solar panel or that mermaids sat on the edge of a Roman galley?



The surrounding sea was full of octopi, oysters complete with pearls, sealions, hippopotamuses and crab, as well as fish of course, rescue rafts, a few cats and plenty of slaves rowing for all they were worth to escape the sea monsters and penguins.

The colosseum soon became populated with gladiators, chariots and a variety of fruit(?) and the temple was soon adorned with grapes,





Roman lettering, graffiti, rainbows and an impressive set of columns.

The volunteer team had as much fun as the public and we cleared the site in record time, knowing what we need to do to dismantle and load up to return equipment back to the barn.



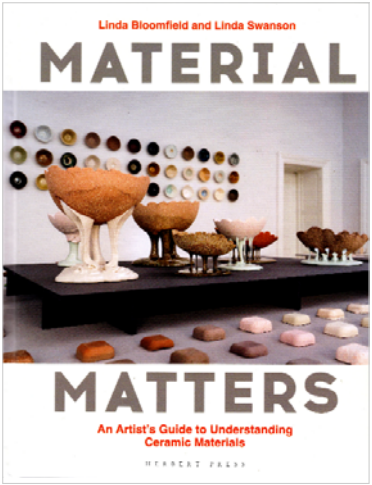
The event organisers are keen to have us back again and the exposure and publicity these events give to our Guild are really worthwhile with lots of interest being shown by Mix radio, and the numerous enquiries about what we do, with pre publicity for Kingsbury as a bonus.

Huge thanks to everyone who took part in the preparation and delivery of this amazing event.

Material Matters Jackie Harrop

An Artist's Guide to Understanding Ceramic Materials

by Linda Boomfield and Linda Swanson



This latest addition to the Guild's library is a gem for a chemically inclined potter, a geologist or a glaze enthusiast. Packed full of information with formulae, recipes, molecular weights, graphs, firing guidance and some incredible illustrations, this is a one-off reference bible, and despite its technical density, is systematic, clear and relatively easy to follow.

It is clearly articulated with lots of practical advice and tips despite the heavy weighting of chemical and mathematical information. I am sure we have members who will be fascinated by its wealth of facts and figures, the data and the detail. This is not a lightweight bedtime read, but a step by step guide for those keen to learn more about the what and why of glaze and firing magic.

Price £28 – £35 online.





Julie Leaming



Isobel Colomar





Moon Jars by Paul O





Margaret Tatton-Brown

A Journal of a Voyage to Mashiko

Doug Jones



Several years ago I used to practice a rather esoteric martial art by the name of Kyudo (sounds like queue doe) or the way of the bow. Better known as Zen Archery.

There are practitioners all over the world but outside of Japan it only amounts to a few hundred. Even so: these few were invited to a competition in Japan and the powers that be in Japan and ANA airlines would offer a cheap return ticket to Tokyo on to Miyazaki in the south island of Kyushu. We had to book our tickets for the date with our local ANA office and fortunately I went in with a Japanese friend who would also be taking part. I wasn't sure when I would want to return as it was too good an opportunity to miss out on a visit to Mashiko and other places of pottery interest: so I told the ladies in the office that I would let them know as soon as possible.

A few days later the morning mail arrived bearing my ticket to Japan, great I thought as I opened it and put it to one side and drank my morning cuppa. Shortly after the phone rang and the ANA office asked if my ticket had arrived and was I happy with it.

Yes thank you I said, unused to such concern from an office, which made me look carefully at the ticket when they had hung up. Instead of stating that the ticket was the six hundred pounds I had paid it bore the sum of several thousand and open for the year.

I sorted out my itinerary and went into the ANA office in London to inform them of my return date. As I walked through the door all three ladies behind the counter stood up, bowed and said good morning Mr Jones. Oh dear, what had I done? It turned out that they had made a mistake but it was covered and I would be OK to come back sometime in the year so I told them that I would return just one week later than the others on the trip. I then went on to the Besson gallery in the Arcade and was handling a pot by Shimaoka when a lady approached me and explained

that she was a collector of his work. I informed her that I was hoping to go to Mashiko at which point Madam Besson came over and said that she would write me a letter of introduction to Shimaoka. This was turning out to be a great day.

The day came when seven of my fellow Kyudoka flew off to Tokyo but not to Myazaki but the out skirts of Tokyo for a week with our Japanese friend at the expense of Sanyo of which Kiichi, our Japanese buddy was the manager of Sanyo UK.

I suspect that the lavish week spent in Ota Shi (Ota city) was the result of having entertained Kiichi with a meal and a tour of the house of lords with our patron and friend the Earl Grey which he had found mind blowing to say the least. A lavish meal prepared by one of the emperors chefs and archery practise and demonstration by high ranking kudoka in the Sanyo dojo to name a few. One unscheduled event was a queue round the block of young Japanese youths wanting one of our group to sign drum skins as he was the drummer with AC/DC. Kiichi took us to visit an arrow maker at one point and I enquired if it was possible to buy a large pair of shears for trimming feathers for a bow and arrow maker friend in England. I was told that there was no chance as they had to be made to order. Never mind I was enjoying myself and went to see the master arrow maker in his back room where he had a small clay oven to heat and straighten the bamboo shafts. He showed me the clay that he used to make the oven and I picked up a small piece and fashioned a tiny pot for the kiln god and placed it on the oven. We continued with our purchase of arrows and were about to leave when the master beckoned me over to his door and presented me with a pair of shears.

At the end of the first week it was off to Miyazaki and bus to Miyakonojo to take part in the international competition which was won by our buddy Kiichi. During the week we were entertained and taken on visits to places of interest. I turned down the chance to visit a pottery (silly me) and ended up at an army base to watch young recruits practice Sumo. Several tea ceremonies later we were given the

chance to go for our next Dan grade where we were examined intensely on our performance and knowledge. I am proud to say that I was awarded my third Dan to great relief.

Back to the airport to fly to Tokyo except that the alarm bells went off as I walked through security. Not for the weapons we were carrying but the precious shears in my hand luggage. Into a yellow bag for the pilot to look after to be returned to me in Tokyo. I said good bye to my friends at Haneda airport as they made their way to Narita and I went on to Tokyo to visit a professor friend who I had helped in the past with the foot notes to Henry Fieldings "A Journal of a Voyage to Lisbon". I called him on the phone and he tried to explain that it was a difficult moment as his wife had just returned from the Philippines where she had visited the site where her father was last alive in the last war. A voice in the background admonished him and she insisted I came over now. Such is the sort of kindness I received wherever I went in Japan.

The next day I started on my journey



To Mashiko with my precious rail card only obtainable in ones country of origin. Next stop Utsunomiya to catch a bus to Mashiko except tourists like me are advised to avoid buses. I asked at the desk at the station but the one man on duty didn't speak English and I felt very helpless. At that moment, on the vast empty concourse, a monk like figure in indigo walked over to the clerk and started to purchase a ticket that was going to cost a lot of money. Where is this guy going I thought at which point he turned to me and in very good English, asked if he could help. I explained my predicament

and that I was hoping to go to Mashiko and that I was a potter. We exchanged business cards for me to see that I was talking to Koichi Takita, the professor of Ceramics at Okinawa college of arts. This gentleman then volunteered to take me to the bus station only to find that it was closed: so he then said I haven't been to Mashiko for a while so I'll take you there. We went via a couple of galleries where he was received with due reverence and lots of bowing and showing me his work which cost thousands of pounds (I got quite good at the exchange rate) I gave out a couple of postcards of my work and showed a photo of Simone my wife. That was when they all got their cameras out and photographed the photo of Simone.

Takita sensei (the honorific for teachers, masters etc) explained that he could not drop in on his friend and fellow student of Hamada, Tatsuzo Shimaoka as he had not forewarned him via letter, such is the etiquette of Japan, but he would find me a place to stay. The small Pension we found was only a few minutes from Hamada's house/Museum and the Shimaoka workplace. All the hotels I had stayed in during my few weeks in Japan supplied towels, tooth brush ,soap etc. Not this one and I had left such things in Tokyo to travel light. That evening I phoned the Shimaoka residence and was informed by his daughter that he was busy but to come in the morning at eight.

The following day I arrived and was invited in and given the usual cup of tea. I offered Sensei a small bowl of mine and a piece of lace Simone had made which he placed under the bowl and said it would be good for the tea ceremony. He then went on to explain that he had a busy day as he had to go to Hawaii to open an exhibition in a museum. A few words with one of his men and I was shown around the site after he had given me two of his standard tea cups. Shortly after a couple of potters who had trained under Shimaoka took me in hand for the rest of the day. First stop was the Hamada shrine (best title I can think of) then another of sensei's proteges, Ken Matsuzaki, whose place was immaculate and organised but the work nothing like that which was to follow a few years later.

few years later.

Then onto a lunch in a restaurant in the hills where I was not allowed to pay as sensei had it sorted, followed by a visit to the house and workshop of Masa Miyajima and Darice Veri my guides for the day. Darice offered me some sweets which I at first refused as I am not a fan of Japanese sweets, but she explained that I must as the Empress had left them with Sensei the night before. An embarrassing interlude as I tried to make a pot on the Korean wheel they used and back to my pension for the night.

A few years later both Takita and Shimaoka were made National Living Treasures.

Next stop Kyoto, a must see place, to go to the Sanju sang endo temple, then on to Okayama to see a friend who wasn't in. I went several times but still out so I made tracks back to my hotel for the night only to run into my friend in the street so we went for a meal to be accosted by some of his students from the university where he taught who enquired after the foreigner he was entertaining.

Okayama is a good place to go onto Imbie for the Bizen yaki kilns which I wandered around at will and the odd gallery where tea was proffered every time.

After the first two weeks in Japan where I was always addressing senior archers as sensei it was a bit of a shock to be addressed as such every where I went. If I sat next to someone on the train they would practice their English, Translate Haiku into phonetic Japanese for me as I in return tried to teach them to say frog not flog. An adventure of a life time coming to a close all too soon.

Not unlike Fieldings Voyage to Lisbon, Mashiko was also rocked by a devastating earthquake not long after my visit. My cynicism was tried by the coincidences and kindness of strangers on my visit but the earthquake had me worried.

Any Kyudo enquiries see the White Rose Kyudo dojo web site.

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