



NPA News

October - November 1999

Contents

Profile: Alan Pickersgill	2
The Committee	4
NPA news etc.	5
Committee and listings	8

Editor's Note

This is a rather slim edition, but all of it is of the normal top quality! Perhaps you've all been away on exciting summer holidays and too busy to write in. If so, get busy and write something for the next issue.

Apologies for the rather poor reproduction of Alan Pickersgill's slides. The slides were great but it seems the scanner can't really cope. Normal colour photos are what it likes best.

Please note my new address and telephone number, which are on the back page.

See you at the porcelain event.

Ian Howie

Chat from the chair

Well here we are with summer virtually over and the Millennium fast approaching.

It is a bit nerve-racking to think that our Festival is only 11 months away (at least it is from where I'm sitting) but the line-up is coming together now and I hope to give you the final list in the next few months.

We had a meeting at Sue's last weekend which was marked by her memorable salad spread and a stunning carrot cake. Apart from eating, Eileen reported that the Turton Towers exhibition which was organised at very short notice attracted work from 26 members, with selection by Peter Seddon and Isa Denyer. Our thanks to her and Sue for a splendid effort. Also on the exhibitions front we have a Christmas selling exhibition at the Mercer Gallery in Harrogate now booked, with sending in on the 27th-28th November and a Preview on the 10th December. As a selling show, work will be held in store and replaced as sold, so please begin to get organised. The gallery will also require a short biography of all artists exhibiting.

Nearer in time, the Porcelain event in Manchester is now getting booked up and promises to be a sellout, so don't leave it too late. The AGM will be held at lunchtime, so if you have any issues that you would like included on the agenda please contact Sheila Spencer or myself as soon as you can.

Finally, a reminder once again that the committee will need your support in the coming year, so please be ready to come forward at the AGM.

I'll see you there.

Pete Clough

Deadline for next issue - Friday 19 November

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Profile: Alan Pickersgill

I came to ceramics quite late and almost by accident. Since leaving school I had trained and worked as a chef, and had also

stories of H.P. Lovecraft written in the 1930s. His fictional, ancient cultures, the 'Old Ones', the 'Great Race', the Cthulu cult, references to mysterious artefacts, ancestral masonry and sinister parallel existences which entered dreams or surfaced in the physical present, stirred my imagination, and were to become influential in my future life. I had made a connection with the ritual vessels and the imaginary cultures of Lovecraft. From this I decided to use the notion of vessels which would be evocative of an unspecified culture, with ritual characteristics as a basis for my personal style.

After leaving college in 1991, I needed somewhere to work, or at least somewhere I could get my work fired. The chance finding of a leaflet led me to the Art Base studios in Salford. This is a community workshop specializing in ceramics, print and photography. This facility has been a real lifeline for me and for others in a similar situation to myself. As well as glazing and firing my work there, I have also conducted a couple of Raku weekends.

During the following years I shared a studio in Marple Bridge for a year and spent a year as artist in residence at Kingsway School, Cheadle. Apart from these periods, I made my pots in our small kitchen, working on the floor as much as on the table.

worked as a silkscreen printer, joiner's mate and a one-armed-bandit service engineer. I had been working as a self employed gardener for four years, when in 1987 at the age of 36 I enrolled on an access course in craft, design and technology. This course was meant to lead to a B.Ed at Crewe and Alsager College. It was on the course that I had my first experience with clay since the age of 9, when I had made a small bust of Galileo using clay I had found whilst digging in the garden. I enjoyed the design and making elements of the course so much that I left Crewe and Alsager to attend the B.A. course in 3D design at Manchester Polytechnic.

At Manchester I discovered ancient Chinese ritual bronze vessels. I admired their strong eccentric form and textured decorative surfaces. I was seduced by their blue-green encrusted patinas developed over 3000-4000 years. They were used for sacrificial offerings to their gods and the spirits of their ancestors.

During the 1970s I had been fascinated by the enigmatic horror



It was last year and with great relief that I moved into my present workshop. It is a space in the corner of a large cellar in Chorlton-cum-Hardy. The landlord used to be a physics lecturer and the cellar looks like Frankenstein's store cupboard, full of jars and bottles of noxious substances, dust covered machinery and electrical paraphernalia.

my favourites is 1/3 S. T. Material, 1/3 porcelain and 1/3 paper pulp. I use all the hand building methods. I can throw quite well but I haven't got a wheel yet. I build my slab built pots from prepared slabs. I roll in various crushed dry clays and glazes, sometimes ash and apply porcelain slip. After assembly I stroke the clay outwards to encourage cracking, and punctuate the



I earn my living as a gardener so my ceramics time is quite limited. I go to the workshop two or three afternoons a week and stay until 9 or 10 p.m.

I still fire my work at Salford Art Base so I have to carefully pack the green ware into boxes. Breakages occur, which is very frustrating when I have spent hours working on a piece. I find paper clay very helpful on both adding strength to unfired work and making repairs easier should a breakage occur.

On some of my large pinch formed bowls, I like to leave to network of surface cracks that form from stroking the clay outwards from inside. Paper clay help to keep the vessel wall intact by the knitting effect of the fibres. Ordinary grogged clay tends to break open and is more difficult to repair.

I use a variety of clays, and I mix different clays to achieve the properties I want. One of

surface with small craters made with a dowel. After bisque firing I use a copper wash to emphasise the texture. I brush on high alkaline glazes containing barium which interact with the copper to give turquoise in depressions and red blushes where it is sponged off.

My ceramic work takes up time and money. The financial outlay is usually far in excess of the returns, but, like so many others I feel compelled to pursue it. It is a constant voyage of discovery, often frustrating, but also greatly fulfilling.

I once read a quote, I think from the Koran, stating 'the potter is closest to God.' I'm not sure about that, but I do believe that creativity comes from the spirit, through the mind to its physical expression, it is ancient and universal. At its most powerful it is what Sir Malcolm Sargeant said of music: '... the soul of man speaking to the soul of man.'

About the Committee

With the AGM fast approaching I thought it might be useful to pen a short article to all members to explain how your organisation functions. As a small democratic body, the role of the committee as we see it is to act in the best interests of the majority of the members. In this we seek to promote your work through exhibitions, and perform an educational role, both within NPA by sharing knowledge, skills and experiences, and also outside the NPA by promoting ceramics throughout the North of England. We also have a shared responsibility to manage the funds of the members in a responsible way. The committee is made up of members who have been prepared to offer their time and abilities for a few years to carry forward these aims, and I'm sure that I speak for both current and past committee members in saying how enjoyable and rewarding this can be.

This year we have worked with a fairly small team, which I feel has been very cost-effective, and I have been particularly pleased that we have drawn support from both sides of the Pennines. We have always tried to promote ceramics right across the North, but for many years it seemed that the majority of the committee were based in West or North Yorkshire. It is good for the NPA that this has changed.

When I came back as Chair a year ago I was conscious that we had a very committed and enthusiastic team, but was a little worried about the depth of experience in dealing with the complexities of the various jobs. My worries were completely unfounded. Sheila has done a super job as secretary, and her renowned dry humour has given us many laughs, Ian has taken the newsletter under his wing, and with assistance from better technology

has really improved the quality giving what I'm sure you will agree is a much more professional production. Brian has set up a database of members which has assisted greatly in dealing with the thorny problem of Artists Newsletter subscriptions, and in addition has been active in recruiting more members. Sue, again with support from better technology has lifted the quality of our publicity material to a new level, as well as organising the Manchester event and assisting with exhibitions. Eileen has taken on the role of exhibitions officer, and with mentoring support from Judith has done a superb job for the membership. Three exhibitions in a year is really going some! William as treasurer has provided what we all value as stable and secure fiscal advice, and some very clear and accessible spreadsheets (a rare talent). In addition, Alison, Mark, Barbara and Caroline have also provided support when required.

For the NPA to continue to function effectively we need to have a steady trickle of members willing to join the committee. In our festival year (and particularly with the largest festival ever coming up) we will need at least another six or so to spread the work around, so please consider whether you are able to help. In so doing you will have a chance to get experience of the roles which existing members have, and perhaps take on some of their work as the committee rotates. The NPA will only thrive and grow if its members support it.

On a practical note, we meet approximately 6 times a year, your travelling and out-of-pocket expenses are covered, you get to see lots of different pot collections, and eat well courtesy of your hosts. What more could you ask!!! I'll see you at the AGM.

Pete Clough

Exhibition News from Eileen Tunbridge

The Turton Towers exhibition is well under way. It runs until 10th October, ending with a workshop run by Sue Hudson.

The Christmas exhibition at the Mercer Gallery in Harrogate is going ahead and starts on December 4th, running until around February. Entry forms are enclosed with the newsletter. The preview will be held on Friday 10th December [Yes, these dates are correct] in conjunction with the Contemporary Arts Society who will be exhibiting in the main gallery. I do hope that members will be able to attend this event. We will be showing in the two smaller front galleries and the foyer. As it is a selling exhibition pieces will be chosen and some will be kept in the storeroom to replace those that are sold. It is an interesting and busy venue.

Artists' newsletter

Brian Holland has solved this long running bugbear. From now on NPA members will be eligible for a discounted subscription, but you will have to deal directly with AN. The cost will be £22 for 12 issues (the cover price is £3, so it's a good discount). Please write to Anne Thackray, AN Publications, 1st Floor, Turner Building, 7-15 Pink Lane, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE1 5DW. You should say you belong to the NPA and quote your membership number. Current subscriptions will continue until they run out.

Work wanted

Kata Dudas, a Hungarian ceramist, would like to come to England for a while, mainly to learn English. She is looking for ceramics work earning enough to live on. She also speaks good Russian. E-mail her at katya@izabell.elte.hu or dudas_kata@yahoo.com [Not sure about the _ . Ed.], or contact her via Andrea Gancs, 1076 Budapest, Thokoly u. 21, tel. +361-3214253.

Hot Off the Press Website

Been to the exhibition? Bought the book? Now visit the website at www.artcumbria.org. The project continues. NPA print and ceramics person Paul Scott has a couple of pages here too.

Gallery in Wales

We've been contacted by a gallery in Wales looking for exhibitors for Christmas and late 2000. Contact Wendy Smith, Trust Administrator, The Bleddfa Trust, Old School Gallery, Bleddfa, Knighton, Powys LD7 1PA, Wales. Phone 01547 550377, fax - 550370, email wendy@bleddfacentre.com, web www.bleddfacentre.com

Free Television Publicity

A late item from Carezza Hayhoe, our cone 6 correspondent in the South: Apparently television companies are looking to televise people who are prepared to do something for others for free, such as a pottery demonstration at a prison. It is part of 'Year of Promise' which will be publicly announced on October 17th, but you could get in early by approaching your local television station.

York Open Air Art Fair

The public admires Sue Hudson's lizards:



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Listings

Until 10th October : NPA
Exhibition, Turton Towers,
Bolton. See last issue.

October 16: NPA Porcelain
Event & AGM. Jack
Doherty, Sally McDonnel
and Margaret O'Rourke.
Some tickets still from Sue
Hudson.

December 4 - February
2000: NPA Christmas
Exhibition, Mercer Gallery,
Harrogate. Preview night
December 10th.