No. 203

November/
December 2026

Westcountry Potters

Westcountry Potters' Association – celebrating ceramics since 1993



Gill Bliss: Beyond the Full Circle

www.westcountrypotters.co.uk

Expert kiln service & repair
KILNSMITHS



Electric kilns & pottery equipment repair, servicing, and installation

Devon & Cornwall

Contact one of the Smiths today:
Colin: 07896873421
Ryan: 07791900525
Kilnsmiths.char@gmail.com
Find us on Facebook: Kilnsmiths

www.kilnsmiths.co.uk



We can breathe **NEW LIFE** into your old kiln

GM SERVICES
CORNWALL LTD
ELECTRICAL - MECHANICAL - PLUMBING - HEATING

SHOWROOM OPEN
WEEKDAYS
8am - 5pm



SUPPLIER OF KILNS
TECHNICAL SUPPORT
ANNUAL SERVICING
EMERGENCY CALL OUTS - 24 HRS
REPAIRS
REPLACEMENT PARTS





COVERING CORNWALL AND DEVON

T: 01726 821559 | M: 07879 234479 | E: customerservices@gmservicescornwall.com
GM Services Cornwall Ltd | Eothen | Roche | St Austell | PL26 8LT

In this issue

Cover: The Hare: Made in a craft crank clay in 2010. Initially the form was made solid, cut into pieces and hollowed out, before reassembly and final modelling of features and ears. The surface was left largely unglazed, with an iron oxide wash and black stain highlighting some areas. Height about 18 inches.

The views expressed in the magazine are those of the contributors and are not necessarily shared by the Association or the Editors. No part of this magazine may be reproduced without permission. © Westcountry Potters' Association 2026.

Next copy deadline: 01 December 2026

Please email your article and pictures to:
magazine@westcountrypotters.co.uk

4	Thoughts From the Chair
4	Editor's Note
4	Membership Renewals for 2027
4	Facebook Group
5	WPA Activities Calendar
5	Glazing and Firing Tips
5	Impress & Stretch – The Results!
6	Forthcoming Demonstrations: DON'T' MISS!
7	Valentine Clays Open Day
8	Kigbeare 2026 – The Great Unpack!
12	Tavistock Potters' Market
13	New Market: Save the Date
14	Beyond the Full Circle
16	Tending What Matters: Kintsugi, Step by Step
18	Book Review: Material Matters
20	Time and Place: A Story of Evolution
22	Under The 'Pot Light'

Subscription rates

Full Membership	£27
paid by standing order	£25
Additional Member at same address	£10
Full-time education*	FREE
Ceramics Apprentices	FREE

Students must be full-time at school or college. Please provide proof of entitlement. Any queries to membership@westcountrypotters.co.uk

Advertising rates

	1 Issue	Year
Half Page	£38	£190
Quarter Page	£20	£100

15% discount for WPA members

Events/Exhibition Listings ..... **FREE**

Ads and Listings of up to 40 words are free for WPA members.

Your committee

Honorary President	**Tim Andrews**			
Chair	**Anna Hearn**	Bideford, Devon	07890 549050	**AnnaH@westcountrypotters.co.uk**
Vice Chair, Activities	**Mark Sweetland**	Taunton, Somerset	07921 510168	**MarkS@westcountrypotters.co.uk**
Admin, Exeter Market Organiser	**Jayne Randall-Humphreys**	Trelash, Cornwall	07523 379055	**admin@westcountrypotters.co.uk**
Exhibitions	**Claire Davey-Potts**	Bideford, Devon	07986 784318	**exhibitions@westcountrypotters.co.uk**
Membership	**Pauline Parnell**	Cullompton, Devon	07866 028548	**membership@westcountrypotters.co.uk**
Treasurer	**Richard Cole**	Kingsbridge, Devon	07932 796969	**treasurer@westcountrypotters.co.uk**
Magazine Editor	**Deborah Hicks**	Honiton, Devon	07736 298951	**DeborahH@westcountrypotters.co.uk**
Activities Co-ordinator	**John Watson**	Dawlish, Devon	07944 079268	**activities@westcountrypotters.co.uk**
Tavistock Market Organiser	**Edward King**	Plymouth, Devon	07961 588687	**edwardking_90@hotmail.co.uk**
Activities, Committee	**Karen Edwards**	Congresbury, Bristol	07949 460897	**activities@westcountrypotters.co.uk**
E-news	**Tim Gee**	Plymouth, Devon	07845 388956	**TimG@westcountrypotters.co.uk**
Minutes Secretary, Activities	**Penny O'Brien**	Bovey Tracey, Devon	07542 085109	**pennyobrienceramics@gmail.com**
Social Media	**Charline Marzin**	Cullompton, Devon	07572 794474	**charlinema@gmail.com**
Committee	**Rebecca Davies**	Bude, Cornwall	07813 031101	**admin@westcountrypotters.co.uk**
Committee	**Olwyn Kiero Watson**	Portishead, N. Somerset	07791 887413	**olwyn@rtbear.co.uk**
Committee	**Bindy Saywood**	Crediton, Devon	07837 532191	**bindy.saywood@hotmail.co.uk**
Committee	**Patsy Lang**	Exeter, Devon	07905 810640	**ratsyfang@hotmail.com**

Supporting off committee				
Website Officer	**Nichola Hill**	Taunton, Somerset	07944 442145	**NicholaH@westcountrypotters.co.uk**
Website Admin	**Mark & Charlotte Biddulph-Armstrong**	Plymouth, Devon		**website@westcountrypotters.co.uk**
Website	**Chris Greening**	Worcester, Worcestershire	07450 008183	**ChrisG@westcountrypotters.co.uk**
Photos, Transport, Support	**Tony Smither**	Yelverton, Devon	01822 840740	**tony@orchardpottery.com**
Magazine Packaging/ Distribution	**Roy Murray**	Bude, Cornwall	07836 656091	**murrayrj77@gmail.com**
Auditor	**Graham Macey**	Musbury, Devon	07531 499636	**graham@suscode.com**
Auditor	**Martin Harbour**	Shebbear, Devon	07941 003089	**martin.harbour.666@gmail.com**
Magazine Advertising	**Laura Clatworthy**	Ottery St. Mary, Devon	07840 343635	**magazine@westcountrypotters.co.uk**

Thoughts From the Chair

Anna Hearn

As the nights start drawing in and we head properly into autumn, there is plenty to enjoy in this month's magazine – and hopefully plenty to tempt you out of the house and into all things pottery!

Closer to home, we have the results of this summer's WPA firing of the Kigbeare Anagama. Unpacking an anagama always feels a little like Christmas morning. We may have a good idea of what we're hoping for from our clays and glazes, but the magic of a wood firing is that the flame and ash can sometimes add something completely unexpected!

We had two fantastic days at Kigbeare. As always, everyone mucked in brilliantly, and by the time we left you would barely have known that a small army of potters had descended on the site. You'll find plenty of photographs from the unpacking later in the magazine – and I think the pots speak rather wonderfully for themselves.

One of the lovely things about Kigbeare is that, almost as soon as one firing is finished, thoughts begin turning to the next! And this year is no exception – we're already starting to put plans together for May 2027. We'll have more to tell you in the coming months, but for now, make a note in your diaries.

A quick reminder, too, to keep an eye on our Activities calendar and come along to our demonstrations. They're a great opportunity not only to see some excellent potters at work, but to catch up with other WPA members, swap ideas and generally spend a day talking about clay. We'd really love to see you there.

With Bonfire Night just around the corner and the clocks having changed by the time you see this, the evenings are getting decidedly darker, but there are compensations to this time of year. After all, while everyone else is wondering whether it's too early to put the heating on, we potters have a perfectly legitimate alternative: fire the kiln.

Warm house, finished pots and absolutely no need to admit that this may not be the most economical form of central heating.

Happy potting!

Editor's Note

Deborah Hicks

Closing out 2026 with an eclectic mix of articles in this issue. Our features come from Gill Bliss and Valerie McLean; Gill writes about what she describes as her "portfolio career" with clay and Valerie tells us how growing up in the foothills of the Cevennes in southern France continue to inspire her work. Stephen Johnson goes "Under the Potlight" describing his lifelong connection to clay but coming comparatively recently to work with it.

In the last issue Anna Hearn wrote about the preparation and firing of the anagama kiln and in this issue we get to see the results.

When things go wrong, or when a favourite piece is broken – what to do? Clara Bethell-Sacks specialises in kintsugi and gives a detailed account of what's involved in this ancient art.

My pottery tutor for the last four years, Rupert Johnstone, has given his expert view on Material Matters: An Artist's Guide to Understanding Ceramic Materials and I reflect on continuing my education with a visit to Valentine Clays open day in September.

Within WPA, we bring you news of a new market for next year, in Stroud, to serve our members in the northern part of the region and there's a reminder of details about the last two demonstrations in a busy year.

I hope you find something interesting and useful in this issue and while I plan six issues for next year, I'm looking for members to tell their story in Under the Potlight as well as your reports of shows and exhibitions you visit at home or abroad, maybe courses or workshops you've attended – or perhaps you have a special skill you'd like to write about. Let me know.

Membership Renewals for 2027

At this year's AGM it was agreed to raise membership fees to £30 for single website payments and bank transfers with a discounted rate of £27 for recurring payments, which are currently in the form of standing orders. We also agreed to investigate direct debit/recurring credit card payments and while this is coming soon, final details aren't yet in place. Please watch out for updates on this via email in December and check your spam folder regularly in case our emails have ended up there.

If you prefer to pay year by year, you can still renew via the website or by bank transfer in January, as normal. Please email **membership@westcountrypotters.co.uk** if you need to be reminded of the bank details.

If you currently pay by standing order please note that they will not be valid for the new membership fee.

Facebook Group

Just a reminder that the Facebook group for WPA members is now live. Search for "Westcountry Potters' Association group" (shortly to be changed to Westcountry Potters' Association – Members Only, as we've had a few odd requests to join) and ask to join. If your WPA membership is in a different name to your Facebook profile, please state the former, so we can quickly approve you. And then, please do join the discussions!

Welcome to New and Returning Members

Jo Newton	*Sherborne*
Lynne Lewis	*Exeter*
Harri Best	*Barnstaple*
Stephen Hellier	*Exeter*
Mercedesz Venczel	*Weston-super-Mare*
Alison Cadle	*Totnes*
Jo Saunders	*Cullompton*
Michael James-Jones	*Tintagel*
Lexa Laurance	*Bradford on Avon*
Georgia Fitzhugh	*Tavistock*
Kishi Bay	*Wells*
Louis Domville-Musters	*Falmouth*
Joanna Kwiatkowska	*Hayle*
Jonas Nyander	*Bath*
Geraldine Fayle	*Gloucester*
Amber Ville	*St Austell*
Maegan Blank	*Newton Abbot*
Maria van Hove	*Exeter*
Sarah Mason	*Teignmouth*
Sue Dixon	*Sidmouth*
Rosemary Dewhurst	*Dorchester*
Fred Roffey	*Beaworthy*
Jennie Hale	*Liskeard*
Chris Taylor	*Sidmouth*

WPA Activities Calendar

John Watson

Looking ahead to 2027, Committee members are currently planning a wide range of events and activities for the year.

These will include: Exhibitions; Pottery markets; Wood firing at Kigbeare; Social firing; Live demonstrations; Online demonstrations; Knowledge bank sessions; Studio visits; Autumn gathering and a Social meal together.

Details will be published in the magazine, on our website and on social media. We will email all members with reminders about booking and booking links which will also be available on the Association website.

As always, we welcome any ideas and suggestions from members, please email: **activities@westcountrypotters.co.uk**.

Activity and Venue	*Date*	*Main organiser*	*Where to find details*
Demonstration by Blandine Anderson: Kenn Centre, Kennford, Exeter	Sunday, 15th November	John Watson	September/October magazine and on Association website
Zoom demonstration by Donna Bloye	Saturday, 5th December	Penny O'Brien and Karen Edwards	September/October magazine and on Association website
AGM 2027 and demonstration by Carolyn Tripp: Kenn Centre, Kennford, Exeter	Sunday, 21st March 2027	Committee and John Watson	To come in January/February magazine and on website

Glazing and Firing Tips

A new feature suggested by WPA committee member and Tavistock market organiser, Edward King, calls on members to share tips that have worked for you. Here's one from **Louis Domville-Musters** from **Out West Studio** in **Falmouth**, who says: "I'm certainly no expert and wouldn't want anyone to think I am, but this works for me."

How I mix glaze using wood ash

Collecting

Wood ash can be sourced from obvious places, and some less obvious, for example a sauna, a pizza oven and of course your own fireplace or fire pit.

Be sure that there are no unknowns or extra impurities in the ash.

Processing

Always wear a mask! And make sure it's P3 rated.

I sieve my ash, first through a baking sieve and then a 60 mesh.

Some people wash their ash. I don't as this washes out the soluble compounds that help the glaze fire at lower temperatures. Washing the ash can make the glaze more stable but it will require a higher firing temperature.

Mixing the glaze

The recipe I use is roughly 1/3 potash feldspar; 1/3 wood ash (unwashed); 1/3 quartz (silica).

I have also started adding a little bentonite (2%).

I fire to cone 8, you may want to play around slightly with these ratios depending on your firing conditions.

From here you can play around with adding other colouring agents such as copper, cobalt and rutile.

Glazing

I mix the glaze so it is runny, roughly 6:5 water to dry.

Ash glazes can be runny when fired so I have found a thinner application is less likely to run and pinhole.

I dip my bisque ware for 2-3 seconds and fire to Cone 8 (1250c).

Send us your tips for possible publication in the next issue

Impress & Stretch – The Results!

Deborah Hicks

In the July/August issue I reported on a workshop I attended in May, where we made impressions in porcelain, stretched the clay and then formed the slabs into cups. Just to complete the picture, here are my finished pieces.





Near Okehampton

KIGBEARE STUDIOS & GALLERY

EX20 4NL

Come and join the Kigbeare crew...

A rare opportunity:

We are offering a unique combination of workspace and/or residential living, ideal for established craftspeople seeking a dedicated environment to run their practice.

The Spaces:

Studio Unit (200sf) £65 pw. Bright, self-contained unit suitable for design, drafting, fine craft or pottery

2-bed Apartment: £550 pm part furnished, on-site

Woodworking Workshop: dedicated commercial workshop space. The existing machinery is available for purchase subject to negotiation as part of the tenancy

the spaces can be let together or individually

This opportunity is specifically for full-time, professional artisans looking for a solid operational base.
to apply please email with a brief overview of your professional practice and portfolio or website.

To register interest: email kigbeare@gmail.com
www.kigbeare.co.uk/courses

Forthcoming Demonstrations: DON'T' MISS!

John Watson

We have two more demonstrations this year which promise to be really stimulating and very worthwhile. Further details of these are in the September/October edition of the magazine and on the Association website.



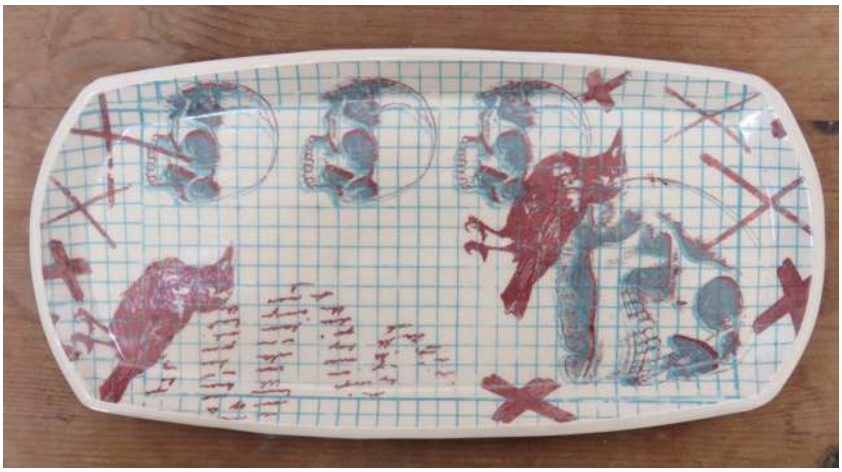


Live demonstration by Blandine Anderson

Sunday, 15th November, 10.30am to 4pm at the Kenn Centre, EX6 7UE

Blandine's much admired unique sculptural work with its delightful portrayal of landscape and the rich variety of animal life is so imaginative and creative. This will be a great opportunity to see how she makes it and to hear about her inspiration.

Tickets at £20 for members and £25 for guests are available via the members' area of the Association website.

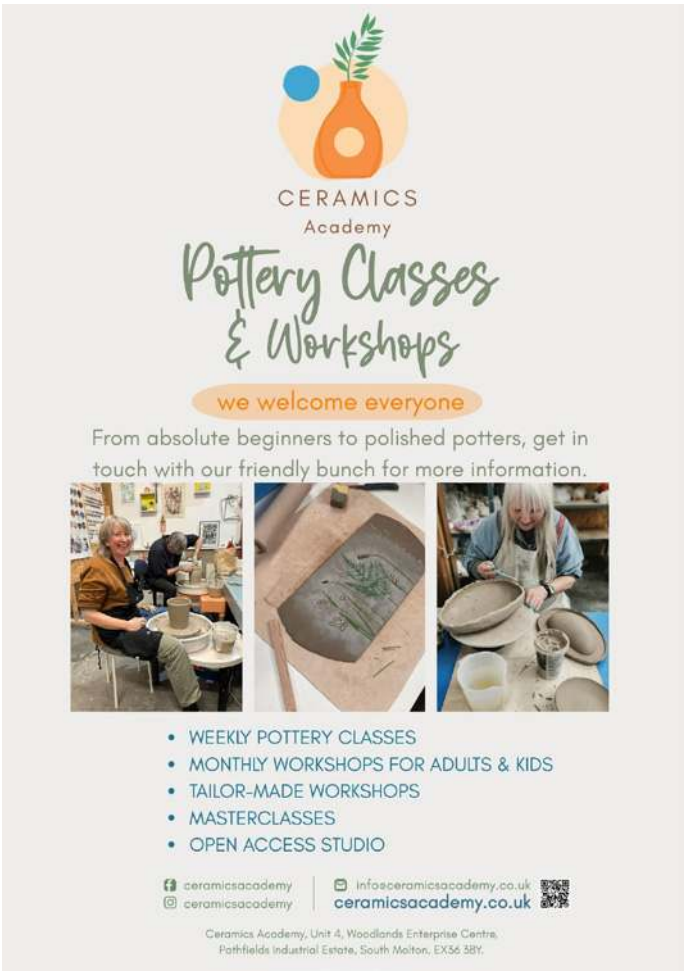


Zoom demonstration by Donna Bloye

Saturday 5th December, 10.45am to 1.30pm

Donna was the winner of the Great Pottery Throwdown in 2024 and caught all our imagination with her wonderfully varied and vibrant pottery. She has developed her work even further since then. Her demonstration for us in December will focus of her techniques for screen printing onto newsprint, transferring the images onto a clay slab and then hand building using the decorated slab. Tickets are £5 from the members' area of the Association website.





Valentine Clays Open Day

Deborah Hicks

Stoke-on-Trent, 10th September 2026

Valentine Clays organised their Open Day a bit differently this year, to feature their recent product launches. In the morning the first group of people were given a factory tour and a demonstration of the new casting slips made in three of the recently launched LoStone clay shades. The demonstration was led by Sue Pryke, who also spoke about her ceramics career and helped in the studio with the hands-on session for attendees.

My ticket was for the afternoon session, which focussed on Valentine's new venture into glazes. In partnership with Milton Bridge Ceramics they have developed a range of stoneware glazes designed to be used with the LoStone Clay (though they can be used across earthenware, stoneware and porcelain) and thus capable of being fired at a wide range of temperatures, becoming reactive at the higher end. Milton Bridge director David Bainbridge spoke about the collaboration before we joined head of production Gary Rushton for a tour of the facility. We learned how the clay is formed from the raw materials and watched while a team prepared bags of porcelain for despatch to customers.

Then it was into the studio for a glazing session using the new colours of which there are nine, plus a transparent. The glazes can be mixed to create new colours, as well as layered (giving them another measure of versatility) and the packaging was impressive too, featuring a reusable inner lid, helping to prevent leaks as well as keeping the glazes fluid.

A competition was offered for those wishing to fire their pot and post an image on Instagram, with a prize of the full range of glazes. David Bainbridge was on hand to answer questions. My decorative skills being, shall we say, rustic, I took myself outside to look at the gallery of ceramics, some of which were instantly recognisable; and the corridor display of fascinating art in the company's private collection depicting historical images of the potteries in the days of 2,000 kilns!













Kigbeare 2026 – The Great Unpack!

Anna Hearn

After months of preparation, days of stacking, five days of firing and three weeks of cooling, the moment we'd all been waiting for finally arrived – the opening of the kiln!

There is something rather magical about opening an anagama kiln. No matter how many firings you've been involved in, that first look inside never quite loses its thrill.

And what a sight greeted us! Pot after pot emerged from the kiln, each with its own story to tell. Beautiful flashes of colour, ash deposits and varied surfaces created by the combination of flame, wood and a little bit of kiln alchemy. Before long, the lawn was covered with pots, as everyone gathered to admire the results.

But, the work didn't stop there!

Once the last pot had been carefully retrieved, it was time to turn our attention back to the kiln itself. Kiln props were cleaned, shelves were scraped and batt washed, wood stacked, equipment put away and the whole site gradually restored to order. Not quite as glamorous as unpacking beautiful pots, perhaps, but every bit as important!

And so another Kigbeare firing came to an end. A huge thank you to everyone who contributed their time, energy, enthusiasm and good humour, whether preparing, stacking, firing, unpacking or clearing up. It really is a tremendous team effort, and none of it would happen without the wonderful people who make Kigbeare what it is.

The kiln is now resting, the woodpile is replenished, and the pots have gone off to their new homes.

Until next time, Kigbeare!



First glimpse



The kiln has been cooling for nearly three weeks



Each wood stack needs to be precisely laid



Front stack



The first glimpse inside



Starting to clean and batt wash the shelves



Kiln props cleaned and batt washed



Potters hard at work stacking wood



Ed keeping a note of numbers



Starting to bring the pots out



Gorgeous little bottles from the front stack



Amelia Anna and Jess from the Core Firing Crew



What the well dressed shelf grinder is sporting this season



Grinding the shelves to remove any glaze drips



Kiln fully emptied



A gorgeous array of pots



A line of potters passing pots in the sunshine



Anna starting to unbrick the kiln



The pile of wood to stack to replace the wood we used!



Potters hard at work stacking wood



The first glimpse of the inside of the kiln



Kiln shelves all cleaned, batt washed and stacked



Second stack



Third stack



Fourth stack



Fifth stack

Kigbeare 2027

And the good news is that we won't have too long to wait before we do it all again! Kigbeare 2027 will take place in May, with the exact dates to be confirmed shortly. So please make a note in your diaries and keep an eye out for further announcements!

Full details will be shared through WPA E-News, Facebook and Instagram, as well as in the January/February edition of the magazine.

We hope to see lots of familiar faces, and perhaps a few new ones, around the kiln next year!

Cromartie

Trusted by ceramic artists since 1946



Cromartie Premium range



1hp 0.5hp

NEW

H46 Top loading kiln

3kw - 13 amp domestic plug in Cone 10 (1300c)

Also Available

H30 (30 L)

H63 (63 L)

Kilns - Potters Wheels - Accessories - Clay - Glazes - Bisqueware

Kiln Servicing - Kiln Elements - Kiln Repair

MADE IN BRITAIN

STUDIO LINE

BRIGHT MATT CELADON VIBES CRYSTAL

BY MILTON BRIDGE

SKUTT

Speedball



For discount on Glaze, Bisque and Crafts trade register via our website using your WPA membership

For more information visit our website

cromartiehobbycraft.co.uk

visit our showroom

Park Hall Road, Longton, Stoke-on-Trent ST3 5AY

01782 319435

CAFÉ
CAKES
CRAFTS

CRUX

CRAFT FAIR 2026



FINE CRAFTS FROM SOUTH WEST DESIGNER MAKERS

FRI 27 NOV 12 - 6
SAT 28 NOV 10 - 5
SUN 29 NOV 10 - 4

RATTERY VILLAGE HALL, TQ10 9LD

WWW.CRUXCRAFTFAIR.CO.UK

potterycrafts

Tiranti

- KILNS
- POTTERY WHEELS
- CLAY
- GLAZES
- TOOLS
- STUDIO EQUUPMENT
- SILICONE
- RESINS
- GILDING
- PATINAS
- PLASTER
- PLUS MUCH MORE

01782 745000

SALES@POTTERYCRAFTS.CO.UK

MADE IN BRITAIN®

Klarna



10% DISCOUNT FOR MEMBERS

POTTERYCRAFTS & TIRANTI

POTTERYCRAFTS_TIRANTI

WWW.POTTERYCRAFTS.CO.UK

Tavistock Potters' Market

Edward King

Saturday, 17th October

Photos by Edward King, Jayne Randall-Humphries and Deborah Hicks

October's Tavistock Potters' Market, held once again at the impressive Butcher's Hall, was a good day out for the Westcountry Potters' Association. We brought together over 25 members from across Cornwall, Devon, and Somerset, with stalls featuring a nice mix of pieces that ranged from detailed sculptures to everyday functional pottery.

It was great to see so many new faces this year. We had six potters setting up stalls for their very first market, plus a few others who were new to the Tavistock area. To help get everyone settled in, the first-timers shared spaces, pairing up two to a table. It worked out well and gave visitors a varied mix of fresh styles to look at.

Beyond the ceramics, the market had a warm social feel to it. The shared tables naturally sparked conversation, and there was plenty of time for potters to swap tips, talk shop, and catch up with old friends. That sense of community always makes these events enjoyable for the makers as well as the buyers.

We had a steady flow of people popping in throughout the day to browse. While foot traffic might have been down a bit compared to last year – likely due to some local parking issues – the crowd was engaged. All in all, it was a nice celebration of Westcountry ceramics and the people who make them.































New Market: Save the Date

The Association is delighted to announce an expansion to our network of markets for 2027. Edward King has negotiated a new venue in Stroud.

Here are the essential details:

- Location: Subscription Rooms, Stroud
- Date: Saturday, 13th November 2027, 10am-3pm
- There are 12 spots available and tables are provided

Applications go live on **Monday, 6th September 2027** closing on **Tuesday, 14th September 2027**, with successful potters notified the following week.



Image: Philip Pankhurst / Stroud Subscription Rooms / CC BY-SA 2.0

Beyond the Full Circle

Gill Bliss

I was 19 when it first struck me that I wanted to be a potter. A friend took me to meet John Maltby at his home workshop and this had a profound effect on me. I knew then that working with clay was what I wanted to do.

I went on to study at Cardiff (1975–78), where I was taught by Frank Vining, Geoff Swindell and Mike Hose. It was a thorough immersion in ceramics: hand-building, throwing, mould making, glazing and firing. On leaving, the intensive training gave me the practical skills to set up my own workshop and I began producing repeat ranges of domestic ware in porcelain. I was selling through craft co-operatives and craft fairs, alongside bringing up two children as a single parent, and this became my life for many years. I loved having my own workshop and working with clay, but found the constant cycle of production and selling very demanding. By 1994, I was feeling burnt out.

Then I bumped into Mike Hose. He suggested that I could do the MA at Cardiff, and this proved to be an important turning point. During the MA, my work became increasingly sculptural and I started making anthropomorphic animal characters. Porcelain paper clay was then a relatively new development, and making my own paper clay helped me construct this figurative work.

I realised that I did not want to go back to sitting alone in my studio every day. I started selling my work through exhibitions and galleries, but was also looking for ways to use my skills alongside other people. This led me into model making for stop-motion animation companies.

My ceramics training turned out to be surprisingly transferable. I was initially interviewed because I could make moulds, but I soon realised how many of my skills as a potter could be applied to model-making: confidence with tools and materials; sculpting fine detail; establishing



Artist at work

effective workflows; ability to make repeat items, and understanding how to translate two-dimensional designs into three-dimensional sculpts.

I enjoyed being a small part of a large production, with everyone contributing towards a shared outcome. In ceramics, my thrown objects were the finished product. In animation, the models were only one stage in a larger process and the finished outcome was the film. It could take months or even years to complete an animation project, but there was a tremendous feeling of camaraderie and shared achievement. I was employed by Aardman Animations in Bristol and became involved in a number of their film and television productions, including Chicken Run; Wallace and Gromit and the WereRabbit; Creature Comforts and Timmy Time.

Teaching became another important part of my life. I taught stop-motion modules on animation courses and ran workshops at animation festivals. I found enormous satisfaction in using my skills





Domestic ware, from 1975 to 1994



Anthropomorphic animal characters, from 1995 to 2011





Work done as a collaboration "Mud and Thread", 2021-2023







Current work; fluted agate ware with foraged clay and porcelain



Current work; fluted agate ware with foraged clay and porcelain



Artist at work

and experience to help other people develop their own ideas and potential.

Gradually, I found myself with a "portfolio career": working as a university associate lecturer; as a model maker for media companies, and making my own creative work. I learned to work with a range of materials including plasticine, resin, silicone and paint finishes but, for me, none had quite the same warmth and expressive qualities as clay. Spending time in my own studio to make my own ceramic figures still remained an essential part of the mix.

In 2011, another unexpected opportunity appeared. A colleague suggested that I apply for a research grant at Loughborough University to undertake a PhD in Animation. Once again, I was feeling the the need for input and to recharge my ideas. Although the funding was for three years, the PhD took me six years to complete. My research topic was on "anthropomorphism as a language in animation", but the ideas I began to enjoy the most revolved around ecological questions: relationships between humans, animals and the wider environment. I now worked as an associate lecturer in the history of animation at several universities, helping students with their written work. I was drawing and making film work as part of the PhD, but the pressure of academic work left me with no time or energy for working in clay.

Around 2020, I retired from lecturing. I still had my wheel and kiln, and I felt a strong need to get back to ceramics. I wanted to throw and make useful things again. Slowly, I began to rebuild my relationship with clay.

I embarked on a collaborative project with Joy Merron called "Mud and Thread"; we were given a small grant by Somerset Art Works to explore ways of combining textiles and ceramics. Because the project took place during the Covid lockdowns, we were encouraged to look locally for materials, so Joy began working with recycled textiles and I looked at possibilities for foraging clay. I had a stroke of luck when a trench was dug in my garden to mend a broken pipe and a clear seam of clay was exposed. I started experimenting.

Initially I thought I would never like this wild clay. It was tiresome that every series of making had to begin by preparing the clay. It was so different from the porcelain I had worked with for years and I found its strong terracotta colour off-putting. Several years later, I now appreciate the slower pace of making that starts with breaking down the raw clay, sieving out impurities and gradually turning it into something workable. I feel at home with its earthy colours, and even its very particular smell. I have developed an affinity with the clay's ecology: the way it connects me to the place where I live and to the age-old culture of being a potter.

For the last few years, I have been making fluted agate-ware; bowls, vases and lidded jars. I mix the wild clay with porcelain to create a range of earth colours. I prepare balls of clay for throwing by layering several colours. As a pot is thrown, the colours spiral up through the form. After turning the surface to reveal a clean spiral pattern, I cut ridges into the form (known as fluting) and more of the pattern is revealed. I find something particularly satisfying in this largely unpredictable process – the movement of hands, wheel and clay all contribute to the individual nature of each piece and I remain continually curious as to what will emerge.

After a rather chaotic journey through ceramics, animation, teaching and research, I came back to clay with a renewed fascination for its visceral, material qualities. Now in my 70s, I find joy in sharing the clay with grandchildren: seeing the free, expressive ways they work and their delight in finding creations transformed in the kiln. My own need to explore is still strong: What will happen if I try this? Will it work if I do that? And so I am inspired to go into my studio again, to see what more there is to discover.

Website: **gillbliss.com** Instagram: **@gillbliss_ceramics**

Tending What Matters: Kintsugi, Step by Step

Clara Bethell-Sacks

Kintsugi – "golden joinery" – is rooted in the zen tea-ceremony culture of the sixteenth century. Ceremonial items too precious to discard were given a beautiful, visible mend rather than hidden or completed without regard to aesthetics. The repair chimed with the philosophy of *wabi-sabi*, savouring the imperfection and impermanence of a life lived.

I'm Clara Bethell-Sacks, a kintsugi artist working from Stroud. I love the poetry and practice of this way of mending. My kintsugi journey began 12 years ago, learning from Iku Nishikawa in Oxford and later with David Pike, based in Nara. From the beginning I've worked with traditional Japanese materials and methods, adding in western approaches where appropriate. Most of what comes to my bench isn't blue chip; it's a plate, a cup, a teapot that matters very much to someone, for intimate reasons of the heart and hands. This piece, a client's beloved cappuccino cup from Tangermünde, chipped and split clean in two, was treated to full traditional kintsugi. It's a slow, layered process using a natural tree sap lacquer called *urushi*.

Assessment and preparation

The cup arrived with a large hairline crack that had movement in it. In order to make a strong repair, it's often better to complete the break. The glazed edges are sanded or filed, unglazed areas masked and a gluing plan made, including order of placement and support for the mend while it cures.



Mixing and applying the glue

The material used for all the layers beneath the gold is *urushi*; a tree sap lacquer used in Japan for decoration, protection and repair for thousands of years before anyone thought to use it for kintsugi. *Ki urushi* is mixed here with flour and water paste to make *mugi-urushi*; it makes a stretchy glue that wants to stick to everything except the break!

The shards are aligned, pressed in place and supported as necessary. *Urushi* doesn't dry but undergoes a slow curing that results in polymerisation, for which it needs warmth and humidity. A curing box called a *muro* provides this environment.



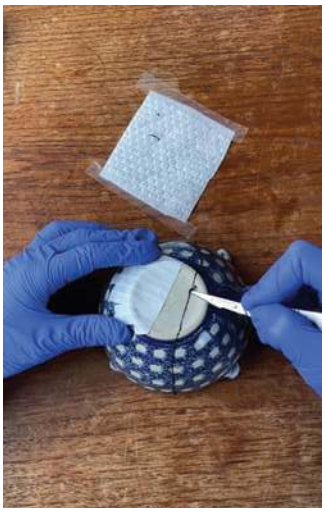






Cleaning up the glue

After around one day of curing, the glue is firm enough to carefully trim away some of the excess with a scalpel. A day or so later it may be hard enough to sand and shape with traditional charcoal.





Filling and shaping

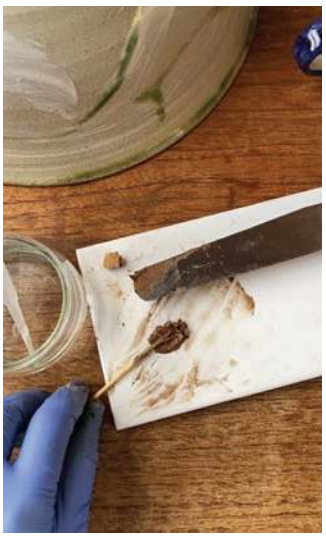
Ki urushi is now mixed with a paste of clay powder (*tonoko*) and water to make a filler, called *sabi-urushi*, for any chips.

After more curing, it's time to shape and smooth the filler using charcoal or Japanese grinding whetstones.

The application, shaping and smoothing of each *urushi* layer is foundational to the outcome and makes up the bulk of the labour, with gold application being almost like a tiny flourish at the end. I came to this work sideways, as a midwife – years of being pulled in every direction, holding calm for other people while feeling anything but calm myself. This is the part of a mend where that old habit of rushing ahead can still show up: slow down, use your hands properly, don't rush the part nobody will ever see.











The lacquer lines – black then red-brown *urushi*



Finer grade, super filtered glossy *urushi* is painted with a specialist bamboo, long haired, fine-tipped kintsugi brush crafted by a master brush-maker. Black and red-brown are commonly used, alternated to help see the previous layer as you paint. Use as many layers as needed (each cured for a day and sanded prior to re-coating) to achieve a shape and texture that feels right.

The final layer of *urushi* is filtered one last time. The red-brown is a good colour to help the gold shine. It is semi-cured until it is tacky, ready for gold application. It's a world away from the quicker epoxy-mixed-with-glitter-powder versions often seen online; slower, but it's the method I trained in and *urushi* with gold is still the only way I finish my kintsugi.

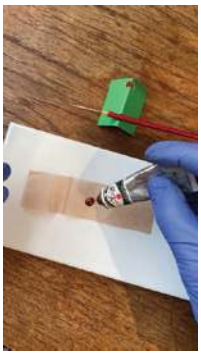




Dusting with gold

While the lacquer is still tacky, it is sprinkled and brushed with a fine gold-leaf powder (*keshifun*), working quickly before it sets. It's the moment the mend stops being a repair and starts being a visible honouring of the object's history.

Sometimes the scale or the type of repair means it's practical to do the final layer in stages. Here, the chipped areas were completed separately from the break line.







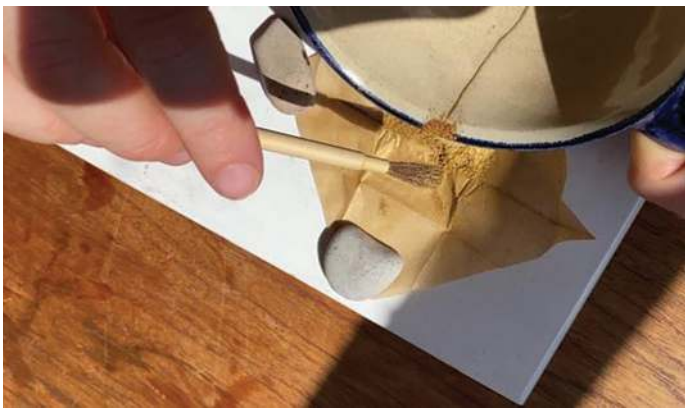






Polishing

After further curing time, the gold is smoothed and lightly polished with silk wadding (*mawata*), taking care not to smudge the underlying lacquer.



Complete



After a minimum of several days, the item can be used again. *Urushi* continues curing for a long time; achieving maximum hardness only months later. Once cured and polished, the line doesn't hide what happened to the piece – it expresses both the rupture and the repair, in gold.

Taking your first steps into kintsugi



This cup took the long route – weeks of traditional kintsugi process, start to finish. It's not the only way in, though. In my introductory workshops, I use western epoxies to condense those gluing and filling stages from weeks into an hour and a half, before finishing every piece with a single layer of traditional lacquer and brass, so participants leave with some experience of working with *urushi* and a genuinely mended piece in one sitting rather than a taste of half the process. I run these regularly across the Cotswolds and in Bristol.

Since so much of what lands on my bench started life on someone else's wheel, I'd love to see more WPA members at a session – details, and the pricing guide, are at **clarakintsugi.com**, or find me on Instagram **@clarakintsugi**.



Book Review: Material Matters

Review by Rupert Johnstone, RAMP Ceramics

Linda Bloomfield and Linda Swanson

Material Matters is a comprehensive new resource for artists, ceramics enthusiasts, students and "small scale makers" who wish to develop their knowledge of some of the key background technical information necessary for more independent research and practice. The book's aims are to open up the technical aspects of ceramics; the geology, applied science of clay and glazes, firing and Health and Safety, to a new generation of makers, in order to help build more sustainable modes of working. For most makers there is both an economic and ecological sustainability imperative here. Learning how to more efficiently use the materials to hand counts both ways.

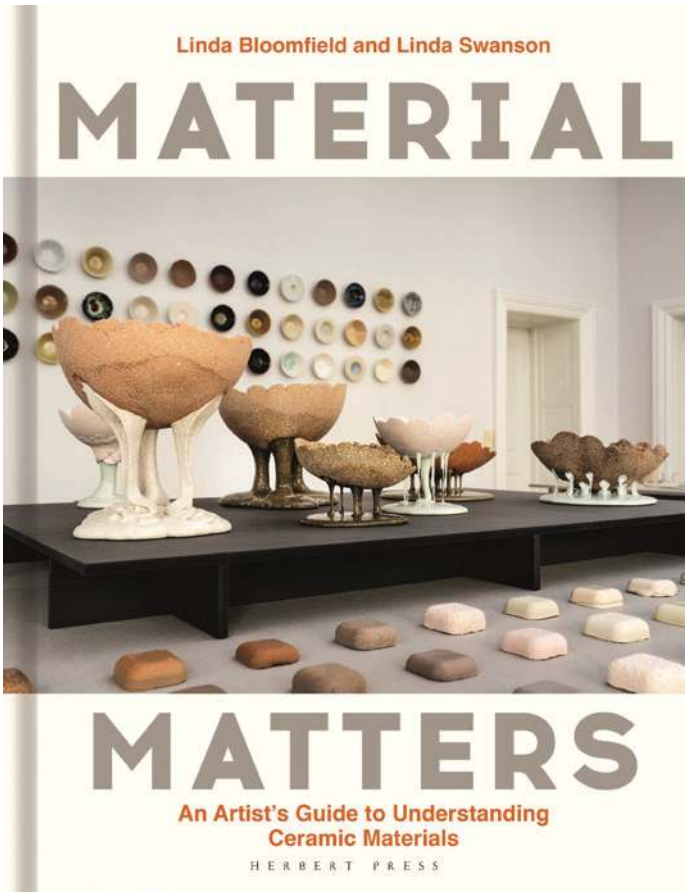
As a maker with a liking for books about ceramics, both old and new, I have a few technical books. The older ones, like Daniel Rhodes's books on Clay and Glazes or Frank and Janet Hamer's "Potter's Dictionary" are reference books that I always come back to. If I have to refresh my memory or search for a clue as to why something hasn't worked out as it should have, they are my go to's. I know the information I need will be there in rigorous detail. However, books like this can be dense and, especially with the Potter's Dictionary, not something that is an easy cover-to-cover read.

Material Matters will appeal to many of those people who have come to ceramics over the last few years who, with the demise of subject specific higher education in Ceramics over the last 25 years, may not have had the opportunity to get into much of this kind of knowledge easily. Also, those who are dipping their toes in, can see the rabbit hole, and are looking for a good guide to accompany them down.

Like any travel book (of sorts), it is a well laid out and clear guide to important parts of that trip. Importantly, there are plenty of nice photographs of contemporary ceramics demonstrating some of the effects of what is discussed in the text. The book is divided into 10 chapters starting with the Geology of Clay and its Origins and ending with Health & Safety with lots about clay and glaze chemistry in the middle. It breaks us in slowly, starting with a broad scope, good visuals and some useful charts to simplify the essentials. Relatively quickly, however, the text is providing the detail; nomenclature, explanations, etc. to really get to grips with better understanding the material.

The authors, Linda Bloomfield and Linda Swanson, in their respective careers and creative directions, have all the knowledge and experience to make this publication appealing both to craftspeople and artists alike. Bloomfield is a potter, an internationally recognised expert on glaze chemistry and author of several other books on glazes. Swanson is a Canadian artist who works with the "metamorphic nature of ceramic materials and processes" creating installations and objects exhibited internationally, as well as having a strong research background. Both contribute a thorough and extensive knowledge of the technical aspects of ceramics, but open up the subject to a much wider pool than many previous books, with a craft focus and a particular set of rules about how pottery should be understood and valued.

It is notable that four chapters in the book are given over to clay and four to glaze. Often it is the case that because there is so much similarity chemically between the two main parts of the ceramic process, most of the theory can be explained under the one heading of glaze. You can discuss nearly all of the minerals, chemicals and theoretical processes under the glaze banner. However, I like the emphasis in this book because, by giving a more equal weight to the clay, it aligns much more with what I like about ceramics, getting



my hands in the material and making, which is part of my thinking process.

The clay section of the book is thorough, linking with the previous chapter about geology to explain clay from first principles. The main types and properties of clay are laid out in enough detail for the curious to explore their local area and begin to find their own material and understand it. The following chapter about clay bodies builds on this to help the reader identify more about a clay, either processed or naturally occurring, from the differing properties. The chapter treats clay in the same manner as many other authors when breaking down the principles of glaze chemistry into its most basic forms, i.e., Flux, Glass former and Stabiliser (clay), Filler and Colourant. This is a good way to approach it, it shows the essential similarity between two parts of the ceramic technical process right from the start. From here minerals can be introduced to explain fluxes, and the authors elucidate about fillers and colours in more detail.









Usefully, some indications of percentages of different clay materials that might be present in any type of clay body are given. Whilst it is unlikely that most of the readers of this book are going to make their own clay bodies in any quantity, it will surely be useful if one was to begin experimenting. In further chapters the authors add useful recipes for the reader to recreate the effects of particular combinations of materials discussed. This is more prevalent in the part of the book dealing with glazes and is a really good way of "discovering" the knowledge empirically.

The glaze section of the book is comprehensive, clearly explained with both theoretical and practical information and with examples in the form of great images and recipes. Anyone who has read any of Bloomfield's books on glazes will recognise the style and content and in the Glaze Chemistry chapter, find information not as easily accessible in most books on the subject.

There is a lot of good information about a wide variety of different types of glazes that make me want to experiment; gloop, crystal, crawl, chun glazes all feature with pointers as to how artists have used them to express their ideas. With a final guide to important health and safety considerations the book ends with a comprehensive, illustrated glossary and appendix. This makes this one of those books which you can turn to for almost all the technical information you will need as a maker in clay. There are books with more detail in certain areas, but they are not as generally informative or as well laid out and interesting to look at as this. It might still be hard to read this in one go, because there is so much that is useful in it, but I would be happy to pick this up any time; for useful information and just to read for ceramic contentment.

Material Matters: An Artist's Guide to Understanding Ceramic Materials, was published by Herbert Press at the end of July this year and is available priced £31.50, with free postage, from Bloomsbury.com.



Time and Place: A Story of Evolution

Valerie McLean

Photos by Gavin McLean

My work is the beginning of a conversation, an invitation to talk and communicate, exchange ideas. When I show at ceramic fairs, I am frequently asked about my sources of inspiration and that is how this article came about.

I use clay to create abstract surfaces and volumes inspired by human dwellings. The interaction of forms, surfaces and space allows me to explore themes of memory – personal and collective – the impact of the past on the present, our complex relationship to time and place.

I never intended for my work to be autobiographical, but inevitably, my pieces reflect my experiences. I grew up in the Mediterranean world and it is that world which is – in a very loose sense – my source of inspiration. I use the expression "loose sense" because my work is not figurative. It is my sense of aesthetics that shape my work. And it is the landscapes of my childhood, the vernacular architecture

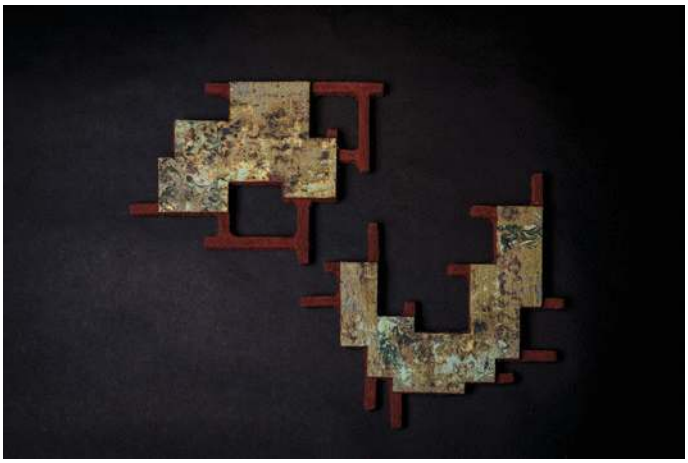


Fig 1: Wall Pieces, red stoneware



Fig 2: Metal and ceramics



Fig 3: A selection of small sculptures



Fig 4: Surface detail

that surrounded me and my exposure to the rich archaeological and historical heritage of the Mediterranean world that formed that sense of aesthetics.

My village is a small hamlet in the foothills of the Cevennes. The houses are made of stones, resting directly on the rock. The forest that surrounds us grows on rocky soil. History is present everywhere: the houses of the village, the old church, the ruins of the castle, the stone terraces slowly being reclaimed by the forest, the abandoned quarry... There were also all the stories of the village's grandparents, which created an oral tradition linking me to the beginning of the 20th century. And all around us, the rich heritage of the wider region: Roman archaeological sites, prehistoric sites, countless castles, churches and museums.

Making for me is very iterative. One type of work leads to another. The four series of work I displayed when I exhibited at Potfest Shaftesbury last summer have a direct chronology, each taking its roots in the previous one. The oldest type of work on display was the wall pieces (fig 1). A geometric flat piece of textured clay, reminiscent of a weathered wall, is supported/completed by ceramic structures that extend around it and can be interpreted as a floor plan, or imagined as ancient ruins. I like these structures because, besides contributing to telling a story, they also have a function, allowing the flat part of the work to fire without warping. In my mind, these are the pieces, alongside the metal work, that are most influenced by my attraction to archaeological sites.

My metal work came second. Besides being a ceramicist, I enjoy working with metal. I had wanted to bring metal and ceramics together for a long time but struggled to find a satisfying and meaningful way to do so. Glimpsing the chance positioning of a wall piece near some welded rods in my studio allowed me to make the connection I was looking for: I transformed the ceramic structure of the wall pieces into a 3D metal version, which was both support and a labyrinth, and welded it around a weathered ceramic piece. And so that second series was born (fig 2).

I realised that I liked the square holes I made in the ceramic pieces in order to position the square metal rods. And so, my third series came to life. I started to make a few pieces with these holes, but without the intention of inserting them into a metal frame: the positioning was immediately different. I think I was attracted to these square holes because they remind me of old tools we see in museums, used by hands whose skills have long been forgotten. I am often unable to determine the function of these everyday objects until I read the museum description, yet I am strangely attracted to them. As I progressed through this new series, the holes became smaller. I thought they looked better that way: more elegant, neater. It's only then that I made the connection with the architecture I grew up in: the villages in the South are a jumble of huge stone walls with very small openings, to limit exposure to the sun and the heat. While not being figurative these small sculptures are reminiscent of dwellings, a place where people would have lived and left their mark (fig 3).

The surfaces I create contribute to this feeling. They are layered, weathered, scratched and marked. For me, this patina references the passing of time, fading memory and the succession of generations. But it also acts as a reference to the accumulation of stories and memories, which are passed down, and become weathered and scratched and marked in the process (fig 4).

I started to wonder whether I should simplify the structure that supports these complex surfaces. I tried going bigger (which worked wonderfully, but that is another story) and smaller, which became my 4th series, the squares (fig 5). My simplest work, and yet my most recent. In my experience, it takes a long time to achieve simplicity. The small openings on the side have gone, they are simple squares of textured, weathered surface. They are small, very versatile. They can be played with, forever repositioned on a desk or on a shelf, or



Fig 5: Three squares





Figs 6 and 7: Two possible configurations of the same group of three wall pieces

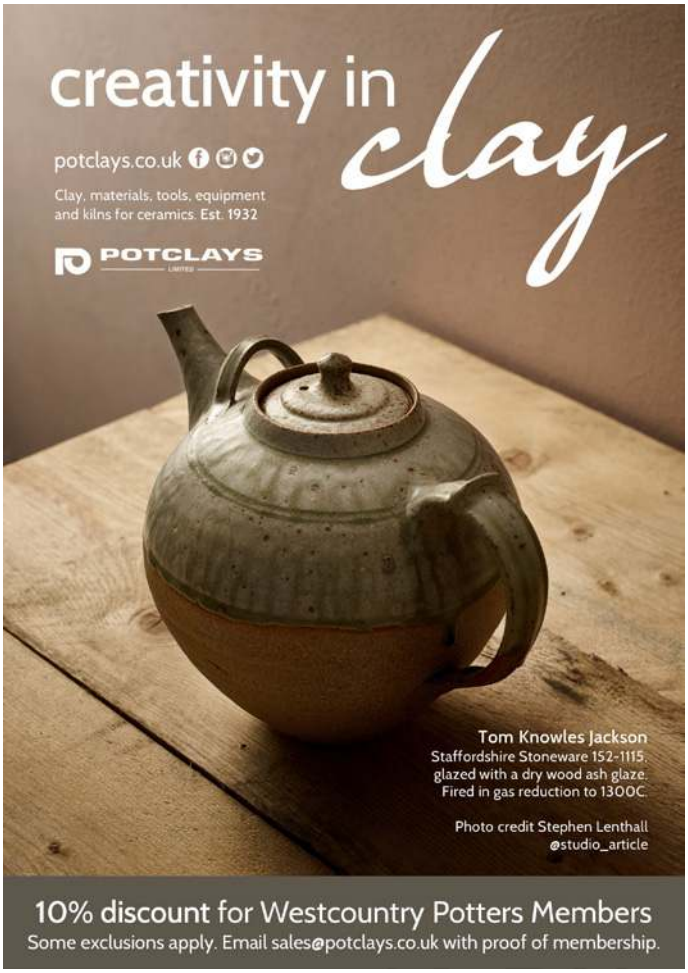
attached to a wall. Manipulating them is part of the pleasure: I often display them as a large group and let people pair them, pile them up, reorganise them…

This idea of elements that complement each other and can be repositioned is something that occurs spontaneously in my work. Is that because I like the haphazard geometry of the villages in the South of France? Or because life, particularly when you live between different cultures, is about adaptation? My wall pieces can be displayed in any orientation and, while they work very well on their own, having two or more means that the negative space in between becomes part of the story (figs 6 & 7). The same is true of the dwellings, which can be acquired as a single piece or arranged in rows and villages. As for the squares, the possible combinations are infinite.

So, my work is very personal. But it is abstract enough that people can bring their own interpretation to it. Indeed, a lot of people have mentioned the tin mines in Cornwall. Others see modern cityscapes. Others still wonder if my inspiration is Brutalism. I find all these suggestions as legitimate as my own interpretation. I explain where my work comes from, what it means to me because the story of an object is important. But there is a place both for my story (the past of the work), and the story of the viewer (the future of the work). They co-exist and complement each other.

Website: **valeriemcleanceramics.com**
Instagram: **@valeriemcleanceramics**





Under The 'Pot Light'

Stephen Johnson

My connection with pottery began long before I ever touched clay myself. From around the age of five, I would spend hours sitting beside my grandfather as he carefully repaired and restored old pieces of pottery. I was fascinated by the objects on his workbench, the tools he used, and the patience and skill involved in bringing damaged pieces back to life. At the time, I had no idea that those childhood afternoons would leave such a lasting impression on me, but looking back, that is where my curiosity about clay, form and sculpture first began.

Today, I still use some of my grandfather's tools in my studio. They are a constant reminder of where my journey started and of the craftsman who unknowingly inspired it.

Although I now live and work in Cornwall, I spent thirty three years in Nottingham, where much of my life unfolded before making the move south west. Pottery was always somewhere in the background, but it wasn't until seven years ago that I finally picked up clay for myself and began exploring what it could do.





Like many potters, my journey has involved a lot of experimentation, learning and occasional frustration. There have been successes, failures and plenty of surprises along the way. What has kept me going is the excitement of discovery and the feeling that clay always has something new to teach you.

I have always been drawn to traditional English pottery and sculpture, particularly the work of the Martin Brothers. The Martin Brothers were a family of Victorian potters whose work became particularly famous for its wonderfully characterful and often eccentric stoneware sculptures, including their grotesque figures and birds. Their pieces have such individuality, character and presence that they continue to inspire me today. I love the way they gave their creatures personality, rather than simply reproducing what they saw.

What I find especially remarkable is that I later discovered my grandfather's favourite pottery was also old English pottery. It feels as though we shared the same appreciation for these traditions, despite being separated by generations.

More recently, I have developed a real love of slipware. I enjoy its rich history and the freedom it offers for surface decoration and expression. I particularly like the character that traditional techniques and firing can bring to a piece, where variations in colour, texture and surface become part of the finished work rather than something to be hidden. It has taken a lot of experimenting, refining techniques and finding my own approach, but I finally feel that my work is beginning to come together and reflect who I am as a maker.

Cornwall plays a huge part in that. The rugged coastline, weathered cliffs and dramatic landscape constantly inspire me. I find myself studying the patterns created by nature – rock faces shaped by wind



and sea, eroded surfaces and the marks left by time. I often collect small rocks and impress their natural surfaces into the clay, allowing the landscape itself to leave its mark on my work. These influences find their way into many of my pieces through texture and surface treatment.

The wildlife and natural beauty of Cornwall are equally important influences, particularly birds, which frequently appear in my sculptures. However, I am not interested in always creating exact replicas. Like the Martin Brothers, I sometimes enjoy introducing character, personality and a slight twist to my pieces. I want them to be recognisable, but also to tell their own story and evoke a sense of curiosity, humour and individuality. That's not to say I don't love sculpting sea mammals in their more natural, recognisable forms, capturing the beauty and character of the real creatures themselves, I enjoy that too.

Through ceramics, I aim to combine my love of traditional English pottery with inspiration drawn from the natural world around me. Whether through the texture of a Cornish cliff face, the stance of a bird on a craggy ridge, or the influence of potters from the past, each piece becomes part of an ongoing relationship between tradition, nature and imagination.

For me, pottery is about much more than making objects. It is about connection – to a place, to history, to craftsmanship and, perhaps most importantly, to those early memories of sitting beside my grandfather, watching him breathe new life into old pottery and unknowingly inspiring a future potter.



Instagram:
@reidceramicscornwall

This feature is open to all members, from those who show their work at major exhibitions through to those of us who have a table in the corner of the house. Share your story.
Email **DeborahH@westcountrypotters.co.uk**

CTM Potters Supplies – maker of CONTEM Glazes

Mail Order and Collection of a wide range of tools, materials, equipment, clays and glazes etc etc
5% Potters Association Discount on all items, excluding Wheels, Kilns, Machinery and Direct Delivered Clay






Stockist for Nabertherm and Rohde Kilns



We aim to provide the most cost-effective ranges of clay, tools, glazes, materials and equipment for potters in the UK. You can visit us, see test tiles and browse, or order over the phone or email – please see ww.ctmpotterssupplies.co.uk
We Often Have 20+ Kilns In Stock In The UK



Unit 7/8, Broomhouse Lane Ind Estate, Doncaster, DN12 1EQ 01709 770801
or Unit 19, Hogsbrook Units, Greendale East Ind Estate, Exeter, EX5 1PY 01395 233077

SNEYD CERAMICS LTD



Sneyd Ceramics Limited is a family run business both manufacturing and supplying the ceramic and associated industries with:

- **Glazes** - for all Firing Temperatures
- **Coloured Stains & Underglazes**
- **Inks** - for Painting & Printing Processes
- **Raw Materials & Oxides**

SHOP ONLINE: **SNEYD**CERAMICS**.CO.UK**
TEL: **01782 814167**

scarva.com
POTTERY SUPPLIES

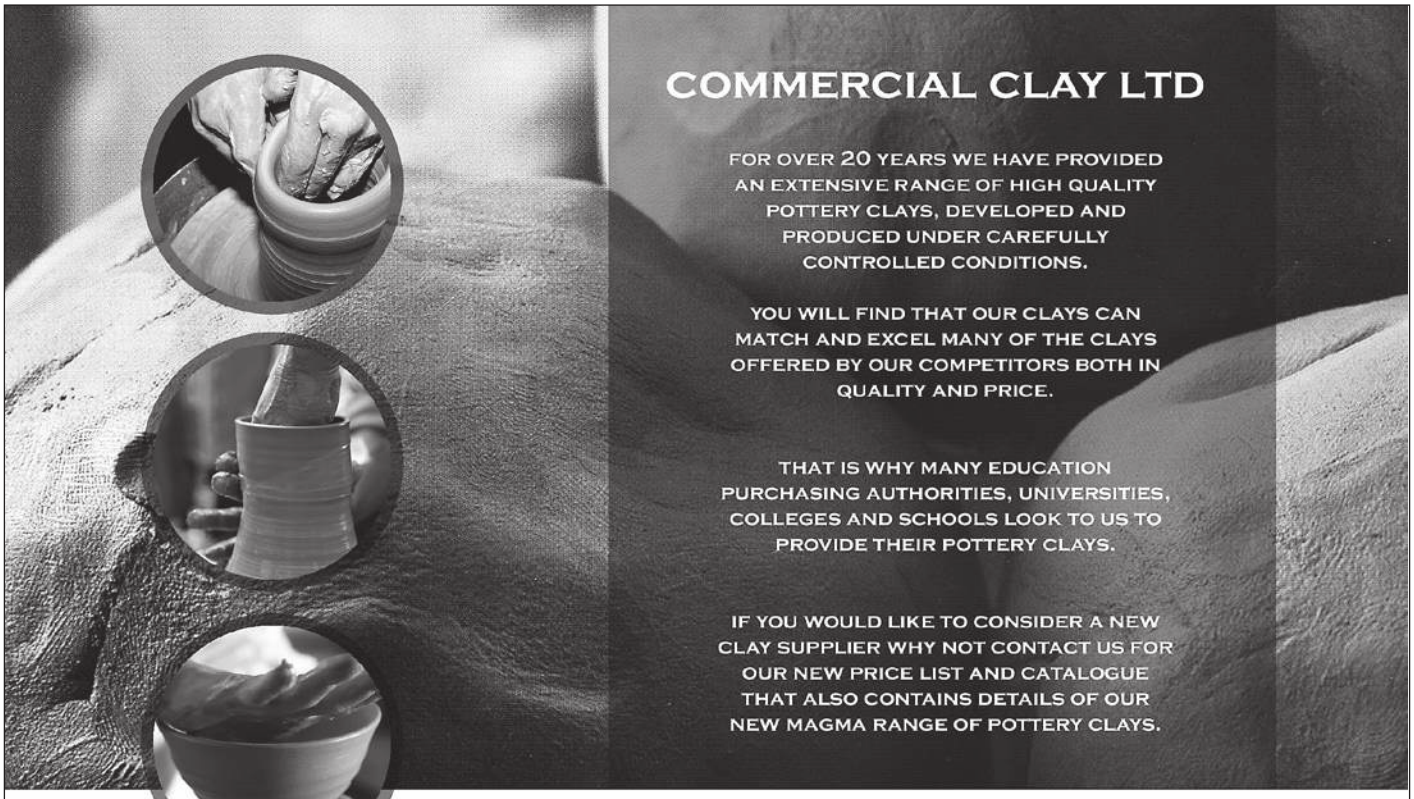
OVER 15,000 PRODUCTS ONLINE



Gráinne Watts | Landfish

Nano colours

www.scarva.com



COMMERCIAL CLAY LTD

FOR OVER 20 YEARS WE HAVE PROVIDED AN EXTENSIVE RANGE OF HIGH QUALITY POTTERY CLAYS, DEVELOPED AND PRODUCED UNDER CAREFULLY CONTROLLED CONDITIONS.

YOU WILL FIND THAT OUR CLAYS CAN MATCH AND EXCEL MANY OF THE CLAYS OFFERED BY OUR COMPETITORS BOTH IN QUALITY AND PRICE.

THAT IS WHY MANY EDUCATION PURCHASING AUTHORITIES, UNIVERSITIES, COLLEGES AND SCHOOLS LOOK TO US TO PROVIDE THEIR POTTERY CLAYS.

IF YOU WOULD LIKE TO CONSIDER A NEW CLAY SUPPLIER WHY NOT CONTACT US FOR OUR NEW PRICE LIST AND CATALOGUE THAT ALSO CONTAINS DETAILS OF OUR NEW MAGMA RANGE OF POTTERY CLAYS.

COMMERCIAL CLAY LTD
PROCESSORS OF CLAY FOR CRAFT EDUCATION AND INDUSTRY
SANDBACH ROAD, COBRIDGE, STOKE-ON-TRENT, STAFFORDSHIRE, ST6 2DR
TEL - 01782 274448 FAX - 01782 206871 WWW.COMMERCIALCLAY.CO.UK