

In his booklet Douglas Welby traces the history of Archcliffe Fort in more detail and his narrative is well illustrated with reproductions of maps and pictures. He also includes some interesting information about the guns and other weaponry installed at the fort from time to time.

Throughout the text there is a considerable amount of information about the cost of construction and maintenance work, some of which has an almost fairytale quality about it when compared with expenditure on defences in the 20th century. In 1370 a watch tower and earthworks were constructed by a team of 50 workmen in 40 days at a total cost of £15!. Even 400 years later the estimate for the modernisation, of what had by then become Archcliffe Fort, was a mere £1200.

In addition to such specific information about the fort, Douglas Welby touches on various events in Dover of both historical and social nature during the period. Altogether it makes an interesting and readable booklet.

I would add as an afterthought that during the present century parts of the fort have been demolished and with the new A20 now under construction more demolition will take place. There is bound to come a point at which it will be necessary to consider whether what then remains is worth preserving. I am a staunch supporter of conservation but equally I believe we must allow our town to develop and keep abreast of the times. I have a feeling that in the end Archcliffe Fort will go and that piece of our history will be lost. If that does happen Douglas Welby's booklet will be of particular value.

“OLD POTS FOR NEW”

*An Exhibition of medieval pottery and contemporary ceramics.
Dover Museum Gallery—26th October to 26th November 1991*

JOHN GOODING

IT was with considerable curiosity that I visited this exhibition, as the choice of European pottery from the period 900 - 1500 AD alongside recent work of the Rochester Connection, a group of ex-Medway students, seemed strange but interesting.

The exhibition was set up with the works in glass cases displayed in two separate sections. Firstly the medieval pottery, found in archaeological digs there over the past 30 years. It included pots brought into the Hampshire port from France, the Low Countries, Germany, Spain and Italy, together with some locally made finds. These were well displayed and presented in an interesting museum-type educational format.

One has to say that viewed through the critical eyes of a potter, the medieval European pots were, in the main, not very inspiring. More so, that is, when one thinks of the classical ceramics being produced at about that period in the Orient (Sung, Yuán and early Ming) and also of those Roman pots, visible downstairs in the museum, from the previous millenium, including fine Samian ware.

Reviews

In fact one had to conclude that after the Roman occupation English potters in particular seriously lost their way. The forms of "Southampton" pots were in many cases dumpy and of poor craftsmanship and sat heavily on the ground. However they were, to be fair, selected purely by historical chance events and were pots for everyday use, probably fulfilling their function as containers adequately, if one discounts lead poisoning from the galena glazes. The same materials brought early deaths to potters well into the 20th century.

The exceptions for me to this critical view were a delightful decorated Dutch vase (29), a simple red earthenware Spanish oil costrel (35) and two Norman appliqué decorated jugs with attractive colouring (5 and 6). A small simple earthenware pipkin (15) and a hand built dripping pan for collecting the fat from roasting meat (10) were pots of character, fire blackened from frequent use, and they could easily have been made by the same potter.

Coming to the work of the contemporary Medway group was quite a cultural leap. For a start most of the ceramics were non-functional in the practical sense. They ranged from abstract sculpture to the work of potters who sought a modern idiom based on traditional forms.

The standard of craftsmanship was high and the work varied and interesting. Mentioning a few of the exhibitors individually, I had by coincidence three of Ashley Howard's pieces from his Medway Diploma show some years ago. There were also electric blue and green "wobbly" stoneware pots. They contrasted with the traditional "Leach" type stoneware forms of Peter Deans, whose opulent overlaid glazes were a bit rich for my taste, but whose large teapot (3) was a superb pot and would be useful for a mega tea party.

'Clive Soord's impressive work is at its most striking with his large and somewhat threatening heads and torsos, although his small dragons (3, 5 and 6) were also fascinating. I'm not sure how his dolphin bowl got into the case – perhaps it was to sustain the dragons?

Graham Skinner's bowls with eruptive glazes on conventional shapes would have much intrigued the medieval potters, as would Valerie Snow's porcelain.

Sharon Potter's pots had the beautiful colours and textures achievable with salt glaze and as her method of glazing was developed originally in the Rhineland during the 12th to 14th centuries there was a clear link with the old German pots on display.

I thought the Medway group's work overall was reasonably representative of modern young potters' decorative ceramics and, as such, was a good choice for an interesting exhibition where comparisons were obviously invited between the different periods and types of pottery.

For those interested in good contemporary ceramics more of the current work of some members of the Rochester Connection is currently on display at the new Platform Gallery, The Westcliff Centre, 136 Sandgate Road, Folkestone. The new Gibbs Gallery, Palace Street, Canterbury is also well worth a visit.

JOHN GOODING is an artist, potter and design engineer, who recently moved to Walmer from Greenwich, London, where he was a founder member of the Ceramics 7 Group and Gallery. He is a selector for the Kent Potters Association exhibitions and currently works in Raku ceramics.