



# ASP NEWS

May 2002

The Newsletter of the  
Auckland Studio Potters  
Society Inc.  
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**TOOLS**  
New shipment in  
from Taiwan.  
Extruder guns, ribs,  
fettling knives etc.

## Ian Firth

24 October 1931 - 28th April 2002

John Kinney

Ian Firth's fascination with clay began in 1942 as an 11-year-old living in Royal Oak, Auckland. It was wartime and people all over the city were digging air-raid shelters in case New Zealand was invaded. Helping his dad, they dug nearly two metres deep through the rich volcanic topsoil into smooth plastic clay. Dad kept digging - Ian modelled animals and figures and little pinch pots, finding the clay excitingly different from the plasticine at school. A dedicated career was born!

In 1945 he biked to visit two of the country's first studio potters, Olive Jones in Onehunga and Briar Gardner in West Auckland, to learn more about making pottery. Then he met Dennis McClure, a chemist at Clark Potteries (later Crown Lynn) who gave him lots of advice on firing and introduced him to pyrometric cones - soon, with a Primus blowlamp, he was firing two coffee mugs in one hour, cold to cold; three firings in a day and he had a set of mugs to sell!

Ian attended Elam Art School, 1946 - 50, but he decided he would rather be a potter than a painter. In 1951 he and friend Peter Webb (also a potter, now an antique dealer and auctioneer) called a

meeting in Albert Park attended by over 300 people. From this, 30 people formed the country's first pottery club, the North Shore Society of Potters, holding monthly meetings and weekly teaching classes.

Membership grew to 100, then in 1961 the club evolved into the present Auckland Studio Potters, Inc. Peter Webb later went to work at the Auckland Art Gallery, but Ian kept on potting,



setting up a studio in Devonport and selling his thrown and slip-cast ware through "The Art of the Potter", "New Vision Gallery" and Eunice Chick. He soon met and compared notes with other potters: Pat Perrin, Len Castle, Peter Stichbury and Barry Brickell.

In 1954 Ian married Lorraine who had been working with him and had become a competent maker of platters in her own right.

Together they opened "Ian Firth's Pottery Shop" in Birkenhead, which Lorraine managed through most of the '70s, selling not only Ian's pots, but work from many of New Zealand's top potters.

Ian Firth served as president of the Auckland Studio Potters, 1975-77, during which time he was instrumental in establishing their clubrooms and teaching centre in Onehunga.

He was also the originator of the idea of a major sponsored exhibition/

competition. With committee member Ruth Court and her friend Trevor Hunt, then manager of Fletcher Brownbuilt Ltd, this idea became the inaugural Fletcher Brownbuilt Pottery Award in 1977, expanding into the Fletcher Challenge Ceramic Awards which ran annually until 1998.

In November 1996, Ian Firth was the guest artist at the Auckland Studio Potters 32nd annual exhibition held at the Auckland Museum. This was to honour his contribution to pottery in New Zealand and in his opening speech he said that after 50 years, pottery was still just as exciting to him - he wasn't intending to stop yet!

He certainly didn't stop, but continued to explore new ideas, clay materials, colours and processes. He remained involved in the pottery scene and was always entering fresh work in

*Continued on page 4*

### Members Social and Educational Evening.

Thursday 23<sup>rd</sup> May 7.30pm ASP Centre.

First Half: "The Chinese Experience". Greg Barron is coming down from Whangarei to take us on a video tour of his amazing journey through China last year. He and Jin Ling spent several weeks working and travelling through some of the important ceramic centres in China and they have fascinating records of their current and historic pots and potters.

Second Half: The much-awaited rescreening of "The Slide Show From Hell". Duncan and Peter will present this memorable tour of the ASP Centre facilities created for the Big Smoke conference.

Videos of the Brick Boat launching will play over supper.

Entry by koha (local term for \$5).

## A few words from our Prez.

Wally Hirsh

A quorum, Yes. A big crowd, No; but we did have an interesting annual general meeting. My thanks to the 20 or so members who attended. The annual report and financial statements were well received. There was some lively discussion and a satisfactory election of a new executive: Committee: Wally Hirsh, Chris Southern, Lex Dawson, Jenny Williams, Rosie Mutch, Trien Steverlynck, Graham Ambrose, Ngaire Wallen, Brendan Adams. Oh yes the coffee, the croissants, the company and the conversation was pleasant as always. My thanks to retiring exec members Marion and Jeffie for their work. With the business over I did make mention of the big projects which lie ahead of us and you will no doubt hear more from me in the months ahead.

I refer to the need for a major upgrade of the cottage. We need more space for our admin team. We need to upgrade the kitchen. We need better storage and a much improved gallery. Watch this space.

Folk are still speaking of the after glow of the big Easter workshop special and exhibitions weekend. It was a big blast. I don't know how often I have heard the comments that "it was the best weekend of its kind ever." I certainly agree with that and if you didn't take part you certainly missed something very special.

The big day over at Waiheke Island on the 27th of April was another great event. Twenty of us departed the ferry terminal at 10. We travelled to the island and straight up to Graham and Jackie Guthrie's remarkable home. What a place! What artwork pottery and sculptures. Wow! From there it was lunch in the village and over to the Green Gallery. Charming people. Charming place and a fine exhibition of Katie Gold's colourful works. Next on the tour it was to Penny and Ray Ericson's home and studio. This is in a setting, which is almost beyond words. Coffee and a chat there and it was time to move on again to the opening of our Shoe Box Exhibition at The Art gallery. A big crowd and a big exhibition of little pieces. Thanks are due to Trien who did such a great liaison job and to all of you who entered. It is a nice exhibition and well presented. 'Twas another great day. Thanks are due to Peter and Duncan Keep on potting

## Centre News

Peter Lange



This has been a roller-coaster month with real highs and real lows. The news of the death of one of our original members, Ian Firth, has left us all feeling extremely saddened. He was a stalwart of Auckland pottery and of the ASP, his Birkenhead shop was an icon, and he will be missed by all of us. There are tributes to him in this newsletter. We send our sympathy and love to Lorraine and his family.

Less sad, but a bit depressing: four thefts from the Centre ranging from a large sum of money from the till, our trailer (full of rubbish), cameras from the locked office, our outside hose. Very annoying and expensive, and of course our insurance never quite fits these smallish one-off events. Plus a golf ball ricocheting through two of our studio windows. A hole in one and a crack in the other.

On a more positive note... the wrap-up of the Big Smoke Conference (which incidentally turned an adequate profit for

the ASP) with the launch of the brick boat was a dramatic affair. The intersection of art and physics is always exciting; it's not always of much practical use, and to have months of work ending in a two hour float might seem a bit futile. However it was two hours I will never forget and I thank all of the positive people who supported me, and apologise to those who came to enjoy a good sinking (would the flame have kept burning under water for a while or just fizzled out with a gentle hiss? would terracottaman have quietly slipped beneath the waves?). It was a significant moment in the history of marine ceramics, and while the boat may never sail out to sea again I hope it will survive

as a sculpture somewhere in Auckland near the water. It made the Herald pages, but I wasn't the only ASP member to hit the newsstands this month.

Here's what the Sunday Star Times had to say about our committee member Chris and his relationship with Rachel Hunter: "I think she probably had little crushes on people but she never really made it known, says Morris. She had a crush on this guy Chris Southern at school who was absolutely gorgeous. He looked exactly like (Full House's) John Stamos ... but he was a couple of years ahead of us and never paid any attention to Rachel. He had a girlfriend and they were always snogging in corners."

Two things come to mind: 1. What sort of man apart from Stevie Wonder and Cliff Richard doesn't notice Rachel Hunter? Committee members must always be observant. 2. In my day girls and boys were separated by rolls of barbed wire, corners were out of bounds and in fact sometimes filled in, and "snogging" was only done by hearsay. Perhaps he meant "swotting".

No more Messrs Nice Guys at the Centre!! Duncan and I are happy to take bookings for classes and trips, BUT only with a serious deposit. We've ridden close to the wind several times in the last month with classes (and the Waiheke trip) looking promising, but on the day not making the numbers because people put their names (but no money) down and then simply don't turn up. We cannot run the ASP at a loss anymore – better to cancel the event or the class than be forced to run it to keep faith with the ones who do manage to turn up. A couple of late entries saved the Waiheke trip, and a good thing too because it was one of those really great days.

Peter and Jeanette Shearer are grandparents! Amy has had a daughter Maria Rosa. They're building their own granny flat, with just enough room to store the surfboard under the lazyboy. Great news: Jeff Oestreich has agreed to take a two-day summer school at the ASP next January! Plus he's bringing a few pots just for us to exhibit. We'll keep you informed



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## Waiheke Boat Trip

Max McLellan

Promptly at 10am the Big Cat sped the ASP group away to Waiheke and the opening of the Shoebox Exhibition. It was a wonderful sunny autumn day and we visited two private homes and their artworks and two gallery exhibitions.

The Guthrie home was undoubtedly an artwork in its own right, filled with a wonderful collection of paintings, sculpture and pottery which Jackie and Graham generously shared with us.

Lunch at Oneroa – all paninis and cappuccinos and such-like -Waiheke is very Mediterranean in spirit now! The afternoon started with a taxi-bus ride to the Green Gallery which is showing the ceramic works of Katie Gold. These three-dimensional assemblages in chalice and bowl form were full of interesting stamp and linear designs with the bright colours of earthenware glazes.

Close by was our second visit of the afternoon to the home and studio of Penny and Ray Ericson overlooking Palm Beach. The tropical gardens and sea views are really spectacular. It would be very easy to be a lotus-eater here and just enjoy the views, but Penny and Ray work

very hard on their gardens and ceramic making. A small rest and a cup of tea before the taxi-bus took us to the last appointment: the Shoebox Exhibition at the Waiheke Arts Centre. Everyone responded to the challenge of the shoebox theme in a different way and it made for a lively and interesting exhibition.

Just some of the works I saw were: a floating brick, a ceramic boot, clay boxes and hand-painted mosaic paperweights. The last act was a brisk walk down to the ferry and departure right on time – who was the ASPer left behind at the 4pm departure? All nominations to Peter Lange. A speedy return and a wonderful sunset – thanks to everyone for making my (and others') return to Waiheke a memorable one! Special thanks to Peter, Duncan and Trien for organising the trip and the exhibition. It stays at the gallery until 22nd May – works are very varied, very affordable and it's worth a trip over to see

## Final Episode

### Greg Barron's Trip to China

We were taken to visit a dragon kiln over 40 metres long, extending uphill. It was over 400 years old and still being fired once a month. The other place of major interest was Jingdezhen, a large city which is known as the porcelain capital of China. Porcelain was first developed in this area nearly a thousand years ago. There are several priceless collections housed in under-utilised museums, the most intriguing being those containing pieces reconstructed from shards. The shards were rejected and smashed by the people who procured ware for the emperor after they had acquired the best for the palace from the factory - all of it being Ming Dynasty porcelain.

It was here we were taken up a valley and saw the old water-driven clay pounders at work as they have been for centuries. Many old Sung kiln sites can be seen and we literally found Sung shards lying on the road side. The markets in town have old pieces for sale at affordable prices.

Being in an environment where everything centres around clay and has done for thousands of years, generation after generation, makes the average potter feel a little insignificant. However, a clearer perspective is also gained about a sense of history and place of ceramics in the world and human consciousness. For me, it has been important to see other approaches to working with clay and hopefully to gain a deeper understanding through contact with others both contemporary and historical. I am impressed by the desire of Chinese artists to communicate with western countries and feel we should do all we can to assist in this.

This project was assisted by a grant of \$10,000 from Creative New Zealand. I wish to thank them and the many others amongst the potting/ceramic fraternity who gave support

### new gallery

Omaha Gallery will feature the ceramic work of Christine Purdom - designer tableware and Mark Brockie - ceramic artist. Also on display are pieces by Peter Collis, Julie Collis and Lee Le Grice

Follow the Leigh Rd to Omaha beach



*Penny Ericson's studio*

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*Opening of the Shoe Box exhibition*

# classified

All phone numbers in these sections are in the Auckland free-calling area unless an area code is explicitly stated.

## Clay For Sale

The ASP has a good range of Macs Mud. Plus we also have a pile of Raku Red on hand.

## For sale

Cowley wheel, single drive \$250, o.n.o  
Phone: Joy 625 6243

"Len Castle, Potter". This book will be published during October 2002. We have forms at the Centre for advance orders, either the \$85 Standard Edition or the \$300 Collector's Edition.

John Lawrence has white bisque tiles available at \$26 (plus freight) for 68 tiles.  
Phone (06) 3746371

## Electricians

Electrical Ltd are experienced in kiln installations. They have installed our Centre kilns and do a great job. Phone 6365031.

## Workshop

Workshop available for rent: Suitable for potter, sculptor, painter ... light airy space.  
Phone Catharine 8185858

## Wanted

Members wanted: Pots of Ponsonby are looking for people to join their co-operative.  
Phone 376 0145

## ASP New Members

Welcome to:

Karen Peach  
Michael Billington  
John Whitehead  
Tanya Lloyd.

## WESTERN POTTERS SUPPLIES

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# exhibitions

## Masterworks

At the Viaduct: Australian Glass 2002 May 6th – 31st. at Ponsonby: Jeff Mincham May 27th – June 16th.

## Auckland City Art Gallery

Bronwynne Cornish's installation tribute to Frances Hodgkins is a must-see. May 11th – July 7th.

## Albany Village Pottery

Watch for John Green's exhibition coming up in June.

## Pots of Ponsonby

Bridget McArthur  
'Fallen Angels' May 12th - 26th  
Pher Scott in the winow  
May 26th - June 9th

## Ian Firth

Regretfully, I only met Ian about six years ago. I say regretfully because I felt such empathy with Ian, his approach to ceramics and indeed, his approach to life that I wish I had met him many years before. Ian gave totally from his vast knowledge about making and glazing pottery and I doubt there were many his equal - particularly in his amazing understanding of glazes and firing.

I felt that Ian took me under his wing and was excited and pleased as I was when I managed to achieve a good result. I shall always be indebted to Ian and I will miss him very much; as a generous friend and as a master potter whose works I will continue to respect and admire.

Graham Ambrose

Continued from page 1

solo and group exhibitions. Even in his last few months when asbestosis - Ian worked with asbestos for a time many years ago - was making his breathing increasingly difficult, he still kept working. Only last month Lorraine brought in one of his latest works for the NZSP exhibition at the Royal Easter Show; a new conceptual sculpture based on the September 11 "Twin Towers" theme.

Apart from being an excellent domesticware pottery maker, Ian was an innovative ceramic sculptor, an experimenter with his chosen medium, a kiln builder, an enthusiastic promoter of the art of clay and a generous teacher. His influence on New Zealand studio pottery has been exceptional, though perhaps because of his quiet, unassuming nature, probably not fully appreciated. He will be greatly missed by those close to him. We send our heartfelt sympathies to Lorraine and to their sons, Grant and Martin, to daughter-in-law Debbie and the grandchildren Christopher and Rachel

# classes

## SALT GLAZE CITY

With Lex Dawson Two weekends making (mornings only), one weekend glazing (Sat morning) and firing (Sun evening). A good chance to start finding your way around a salt kiln. A hands-on course making small objects, particularly wheel-thrown, use of slips - some experimentation. The cost of \$120 includes firing. Also limited to 12 students. Still places left in this class.

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