

Synopsis of the talk on the subject of

WOMEN WOODFIRERS – THE PIONEERS
within the context of The Studio Pottery movement

presented by Coll Minogue at the Sturt Woodfire 2008 conference at Sturt Craft Centre, April 18th–21st 2008.

Woodfiring is perhaps often perceived as a male dominated area within ceramics. In response to this perception I took this opportunity to talk about some of the women practitioners within the field, particularly those who could be regarded as pioneers of woodfiring in different countries.

As often happens when researching a subject – it soon became obvious to me that there was potentially a relatively large amount of information available about women woodfirers on a world-wide scale, who could be regarded as pioneers of woodfiring. To research all of this information in depth and do justice to the relevant women – would involve a study beyond the scope of this talk, in terms of both preparation and presentation time. Consequently I considered this paper as a work in progress rather than a finished piece of research.

I chose to narrow the field to concentrate on a number of potters who worked during the various stages in the development of the Studio Pottery Movement. Again, due to time constraints I did not include pioneer Australian woodfirers, as I felt that the work of those women who were amongst the first to build and fire woodfire kilns in this country – Sandy Lockwood, Janet Mansfield and Heja Chong – to name but a few, would already be very well known to those in the audience. I did however include Gwyn Hanssen Pigott, but in relation to the period when she worked in France – from the mid- 60s to the early 70s.

Some of those who were amongst the earliest to have woodfire kilns are still working in this field – considering that the range of variables that woodfiring can provide, whether on glazed or unglazed surfaces, is more than sufficient to satisfy a lifetime of research and experimentation. Others moved on from woodfiring – regarding it as a stage in their ongoing exploration of materials and processes within ceramics.

I then went on to discuss and show images of work by:

Katharine Pleydell-Bouverie, UK

Anne Kjaersgaard, Denmark / France

Gwyn Hanssen Pigott, Australia (during the period when she worked in France)

Ruth Gowdy McKinley, USA / Canada

Christine Pedley, UK / France

Merilyn Wiseman, New Zealand

Mary Roehm, USA

Jane Herold, USA

Joy Brown, USA

I concluded my talk:

'I hope that this brief look at the work of these women woodfirers – starting with Katharine Pleydell-Bouverie in 1925 and continuing right up to the present, may help to place the work of today's women woodfirers in context and encourage interest in the work of women woodfirers past, present and future.'