

Northern Ceramics Society Seminar August 12-17, 2008

The theme of the NCS Summer School was "Techniques & Traditions". The topic was not as widely embraced as subjects of recent years. There were only 10 members from the U.S. attending compared to as many as 25 in past years. Of course, the economy may have had an influence in discouraging international travel.

Topics of lectures included a wide variety such as: Factory processes used in the 19th and early 20th century for making ceramic tableware, Slipware: Its History and Techniques, The Salt-glaze Revolution, Creamware, The Invention and Development of ceramic printing, A discussion and demonstration of glue bat printing, Tin-glaze Pottery, and Victorian Pate-sur-Pate to name a few. Highlights included the opening lecture by Robin Emmerson, Curator of the Decorative Art Department at National Museums, Liverpool. Always an interesting and entertaining speaker, his topic was "Things Ain't What They Used to Be". Rose Kerr, former Keeper of the Far Eastern Department at the Victoria & Albert Museum, gave a talk, "The Major Chinese Kiln Types". Her presentation included illustrations of working kilns still in production. Alan Caiger-Smith, a working potter discussed "A Survey of Reduction Lustre: discoveries and rediscoveries". On the free-afternoon, members had the opportunity to view his marvelous "last firing" video that included loading and unloading a kiln of his gorgeous lusterware pottery as he explained the process as he went along.

A rather new innovation at the seminars is the installation of "Poster Boards" in the tea/coffee room. Members were encouraged to post items of interest including anything you are working on, or information you seek or want to share. Loren Zeller posted a series of print-outs from the TCC Database of Patterns to illustrate our project. It met with quite a lot of interest and questions throughout the week.

The seminar included a field trip to Stoke on Trent where we visited the Dudson Pottery Museum and the Middleport Pottery in Burslem, the home of Burgess Dorling and Leigh. The following images are from that tour. Photos are compliments of Loren Zeller.



Visit to the Middleport Pottery: <http://www.burleigh.co.uk/>

A partnership that began in 1862, Burgess & Leigh moved in 1889 to the newly constructed Middleport Pottery by the Trent and Mersey Canal which was the vision created by William Leigh.

The Middleport Pottery was widely recognized as the "Model Pottery" in the Staffordshire pottery industry. It was designed to make all production processes more efficient and to greatly improve working conditions of its workers. With its 3 biscuit and 4 glost bottle ovens, the factory was known locally as the "Seven Oven Works".

In 1999, following adverse trading conditions for Burgess & Leigh, the capable partnership of Rosemary and William Dorling purchased the business and ably assisted by their daughter Susannah and son Simon. Thus a new era of family ownership began at the Middleport Pottery. It is the oldest working pottery in Staffordshire.

Burgess Dorling & Leigh are proud to carry on a tradition of producing fine quality, pure English earthenware products using traditional process of the highest standard. Their trade name is Burleigh, and their apt slogan in the 21st century is “From clay to cup...pure English.”

A special guided tour at Burgess Dorling and Leigh was afforded the NCS Members. It was obvious that the workers and our tour guide were very proud to be working at Middleport Pottery, continuing the tradition of the ceramic industry in the Potteries.

While, today, the factory employs modern firing equipment, it has preserved one of the original bottle ovens found on the site. Seen here is the historic oven with member Connie Rogers standing at base of the structure.

All Burleigh pottery is still manufactured the traditional way. Seen below are workers employed in the process of applying the tissue paper with transfer prints of popular patterns on different pottery forms.



To the left, is one of Burleigh’s storage rooms filled with finished goods.



On the left, NCS Seminar participants are seen shopping the factory's store. Transfer printed tiles in the popular Burleigh Willow pattern could be found the pottery's public "loo"!

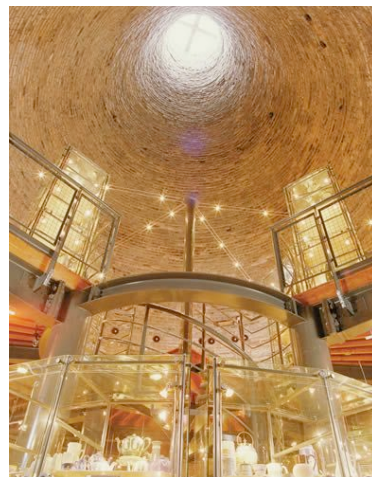


A visit to the Dudson Pottery Museum in Stoke on Trent was also included in the seminar's field trip.

Shown to the left (compliments of the Dudson factory web site) is an early photo of the original site.

One of the original bottle ovens seen on the right with NCS members in front of it has been preserved and currently serves as the company's museum.

A view of the interior of the bottle oven museum at the Dudson Center (compliments of the Dudson factory web site).





Shards of early Chinoiserie patterns displayed in the Dudson museum.

In the early 19th century, Dudson produced a wide variety of transfer-printed patterns. Their mark is seldom found on early wares because most of their work was done to help complete orders of other potteries. The Josiah Wedgwood firm is one that relied very heavily on production at Dudson to fill out orders.

Because the museum is housed in a bottle oven that was part of the original site, many shards were found during the construction of the Dudson Centre, of which the Museum is a part. It is interesting to look at some of the shards on display. Only a few patterns have been attributed as made only at Dudson.

In many ways, Dudson has a more secure future than Burgess, Dorling and Leigh because they produce institutional ware for hotels, and various other catering venues. Dudson has a very modern plant in another area of the Potteries. They have a tenuous hold on the site of their museum; however, because the space is leased from the owners of the Dudson Centre. We wish them both well in their future endeavors of producing British-made ceramics for homes and institutions.

-- submitted by Connie Rogers and Loren Zeller