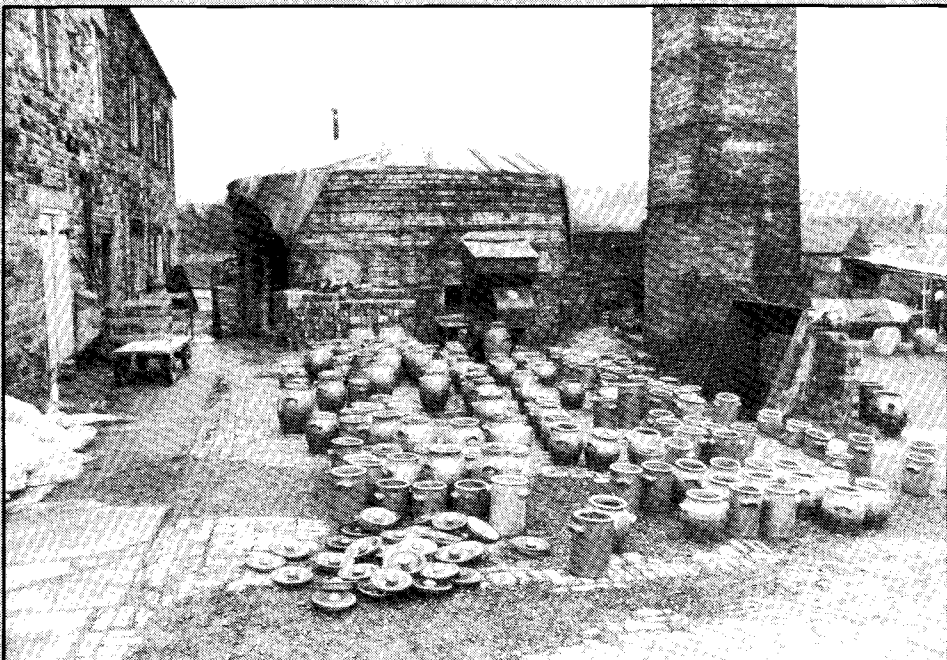


Ceramic Series

ABERYSTWYTH ARTS CENTRE · No.15

BARDON MILL POTTERY

The pottery at Bardon Mill is an interesting example of how adaptation and change to new markets and methods can revitalise a declining sector of the craft industry. Bardon Mill pottery, in the South Tyne Valley Northumberland, started out in the late 17thC. as a water powered woollen mill, and was worked as such until 1876 when a fire gutted the buildings. The site and the shell of the buildings were bought by the Reay family. Clay, coal and rail transport were all close to the site — clay close to the back of the factory, in a drift mine — and the old woollen mill became a salt glaze pottery, making bricks, drainage pipes (these were extruded then the spigots were thrown on by hand), tiles and occasionally garden furniture. In 1976 however, after nearly a century in the Reay family, the company had to cease production of the pipes — the mainstay of the business — because like the rest of the salt glaze pipe industry they had been overtaken by big business, new technology and plastic pipe. Where there used to be 70 salt glaze works in the country, now only three remain. Two options were open to the Reay brothers: to close down, or to change direction. Stephen Course (now co-director of Dart Pottery which successfully launched Janice Tchalenko designed pottery in Devon) joined the pottery at this stage and started to effect the change to different products and different markets. He was interested in putting the traditional methods and skills of the pottery to new use, and in developing techniques which



could be learnt by semi skilled workmen, and used by them with some satisfaction. He was very keen to retain the special qualities of the coal fired salt-glazing — one of the oldest methods of firing a kiln, and very much part of an old British tradition.

The Reay brothers running Bardon Mill were, as Stephen Course says, "essentially country business men", who wanted to make a living out of the factory which had been in the family for 100 years. They took pride in their skills, but considered them no more than part of the job. If they had been in a position to make more money out of plastic pipes, they would probably have done so as long as the rest of their country way of life remained unchanged. So any new developments had to make economic sense from the very start. Stephen Course put forward a number of designs based on the extruded forms produced by the redundant pipe making machines, which were then shaped and finished by hand. This ingenious combination of a mechanical extruder and work by hand meant that very large pots could be produced relatively economically



and quickly. The change over to pots from pipes was not altogether easy: the kiln — a beehive kiln built in 1932 — was too large to allow for much experimentation, even though the firing cycle for pots lasted only two days as opposed to 80 hours for the pipes. Also, the firm was used to selling to farmers and builders' merchants, and had to get used to dealing with garden centres, stores or craft shops, and to promoting its wares in a different way. Two types of pots were produced: garden pots and storage pots. To begin with, Stephen Course's designs were more exuberant, but they became modified for ease of production and also so that the kiln could be packed well. The resulting range of attractive, traditional-looking pots is still being produced, and together with a range of reproduction Victorian garden pots, has successfully brought Bardon Mill forward into the 1980s.



Y Gwres Gerameg

CANOLFAN Y CELFYDDYDAU ABERYSTWYTH
RHIF 15

CROCHENDY BARDON MILL

Mae'r crochendy yn Bardon Mill yn enghraifft ddiddorol o'r modd y gall addasu a newid ar gyfer marchnadoedd a dulliau newydd adfywio sector o'r diwydiant crefft a oedd yn dihoeni. Melin wla'n yn cael ei throi gan ddŵr, yn nyffryn South Tyne, Nothumberland, oedd crochendy Bardon Mill pan godwyd hi ar ddiwedd yr Ail Ganrif ar Bymtheg, a bu'n dal i wneud y gwaith hwnnw nes i'r adeiladau gael eu difrodi gan dân ym 1876. Prynwyd y safle a gweddillion yr adeiladau gan deulu Reay. Roedd clai, glo a rheilffordd yn agos i'r fan – y clai yn dod o bwl y tu ôl i'r ffatri, a daeth yr hen felin wla'n yn grochendy gwydredd halen, yn cynhyrchu briciau, pibelli traenio tir (roedd y rhain yn cael eu hallwthio ac yna'r sbigots yn cael eu gosod arnynt â llaw), teils ac weithiau ddodrefn gardd. Ym 1976 fodd bynnag, wedi i'r gwaith fod ym meddiant y teulu Reay am bron i ganrif, bu'n rhaid i'r cwmni roi'r gorau i gynhyrchu pibelli – asgwrn cefn y busnes – oherwydd, fel yn hanes gweddill y diwydiant pibelli gwydredd halen, eu bod wedi cael eu goddiweddud gan fusnesau mwy, technoleg newydd a phibelli plastig. Lle'r

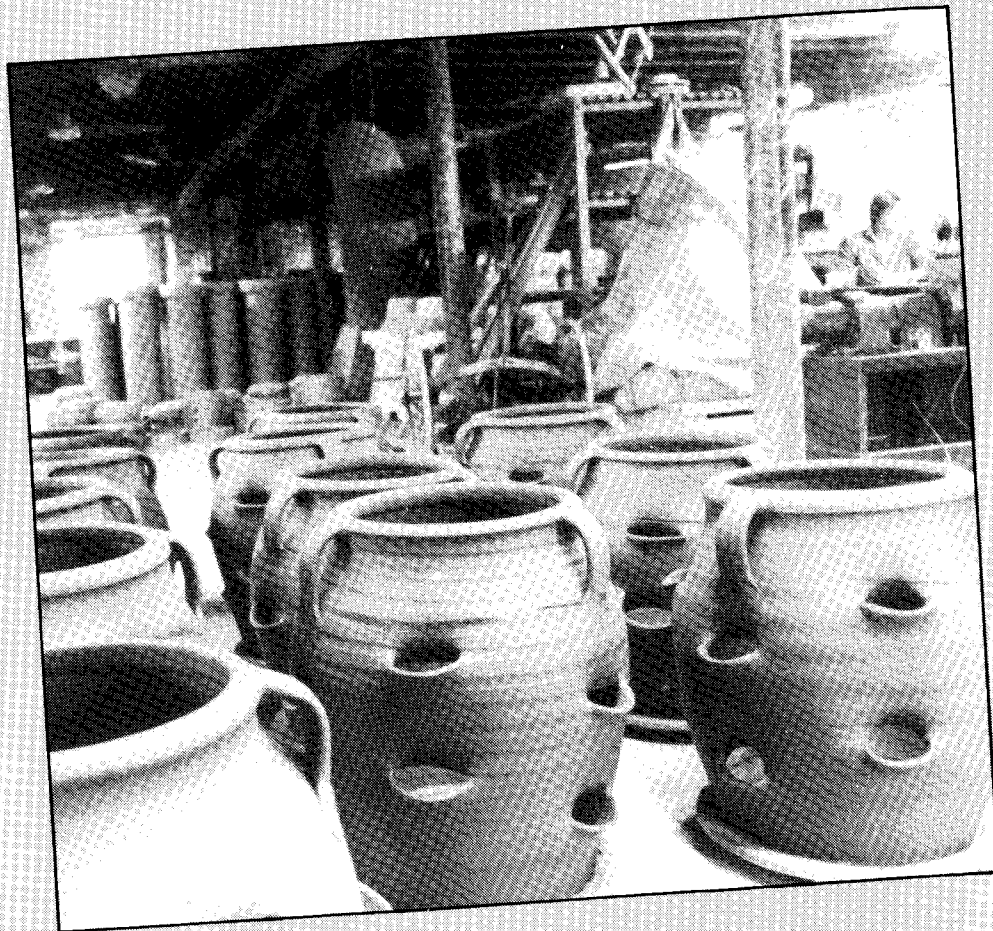


oedd gynt 70 o weithfeydd gwydredd halen yn y wlad, nid oes ond tri bellach. Roedd dau ddewis gan y brodyr Reay: rhoi'r gorau iddi neu newid cyfeiriad.

Yr adeg yma daeth Stephen Course (sydd erbyn hyn yn gyd-gyfarwyddwr Crochendy Dart a fu'n llwyddiannus wrth lansi crochenwaith wedi ei gynllunio gan Janice Tchalenko yn Nynaint) i weithio i'r crochendy a rhoddodd gychwyn ar newid y cynnyrch ar gyfer marchnad wahanol. Roedd yn awyddus i wneud defnydd newydd o ddulliau a medrau traddodiadol y crochendy, ac i ddatblygu technegau y gallai gweithwyr lled greffus eu meistrolï a chael mwynhad o'u defnyddio. Roedd yn awyddus iawn i gadw nodweddion arbennig y gwydredd halen wedi ei danio â glo – un o'r dulliau hynaf o danio ody, ac yn rhan bwysig o hen draddodiad Prydeinig.

Fel y dywed Stephen Course "yn eu hanfod gwyr busnes gwledig" oedd y brodyr Reay a oedd yn rhedeg Bardon Mill, ac roeddynt eisiau ennill bywoliaeth o'r ffatri a oedd wedi bod ym meddiant y teulu am gan mlynedd. Tra'n ymfalchio yn eu medrusrwydd, nid ystyrient ef yn ddim amgen na rhan o'r gwaith. Pe baent wedi bod mewn sefyllfa i wneud rhagor o arian drwy gynhyrchu pibelli plastig, mae'n fwy na rhebyg y byddent wedi gwneud hynny cyn belled na fyddai hynny'n effeithio ar weddill eu ffordd o fyw yn y wlad. Felly roedd yn rhaid i unrhyw ddatblygiadau





newydd wneud synnwyr economaidd o'r cychwyn cyntaf. Datblygodd Stephen Course amryw o gynlluniau seilledig ar y ffurfiau estynedig a gynhyrchid gan y peiriannau gwneud pibelli a oedd bellach yn segur. Roedd y ffurfiau hyn yn cael eu llunio a'u gorffen â llaw. Golygai'r cyfuniad deheuig hwn o waith peiriant a gwaith llaw y gellid cynhyrchu potiau mawr iawn yn gyflym ac yn gymharol rad. Nid oedd newid o gynhyrchu pibelli i gynhyrchu potiau yn gyfangwbl rwydd: roedd yr odyr – odyr ar ffurf cwch gwenyn a godwyd ym 1932 – yn rhy fawr i gynnal llawer o arbrofion, er fod y cynnod tanio ar gyfer potiau yn para dau ddiwrnod yn hytrach na'r pedwar ugain awr ar gyfer pibelli. Roedd y cwmni hefyd wedi arfer gweithio i ffermwyr a masnachwyr defnyddiau adeiladu, ac roedd yn rhaid iddynt ddysgu delio â chanolfannau garddio, siopau a siopau crefft, a dysgu hybu eu cynnyrch mewn dull gwahanol. Cynhyrchwyd dau fath o bot: potiau gardd a photiau storio. Ar y cychwyn roedd cynlluniau Stephen Course yn fwy afieithus, ond bu'n rhaid goleddfu peth arnynt er mwyn gwneud y broses cynhyrchu'n rhwyddach ac hefyd fel y gellid llwytho'r odyr yn well. Mae'r amrywiaeth o botiau deniadol, traddodiadol yr olwg, a gynhyrchwyd o ganlyniad, yn dal i gael eu cynhyrchu, ac ynghyd â'r amrywiaeth o atgynrychiadau o botiau gardd Fictoriaidd, maent wedi symud Bardon Mill y mlaen yn llwyddiannus i'r Wythdegau.

