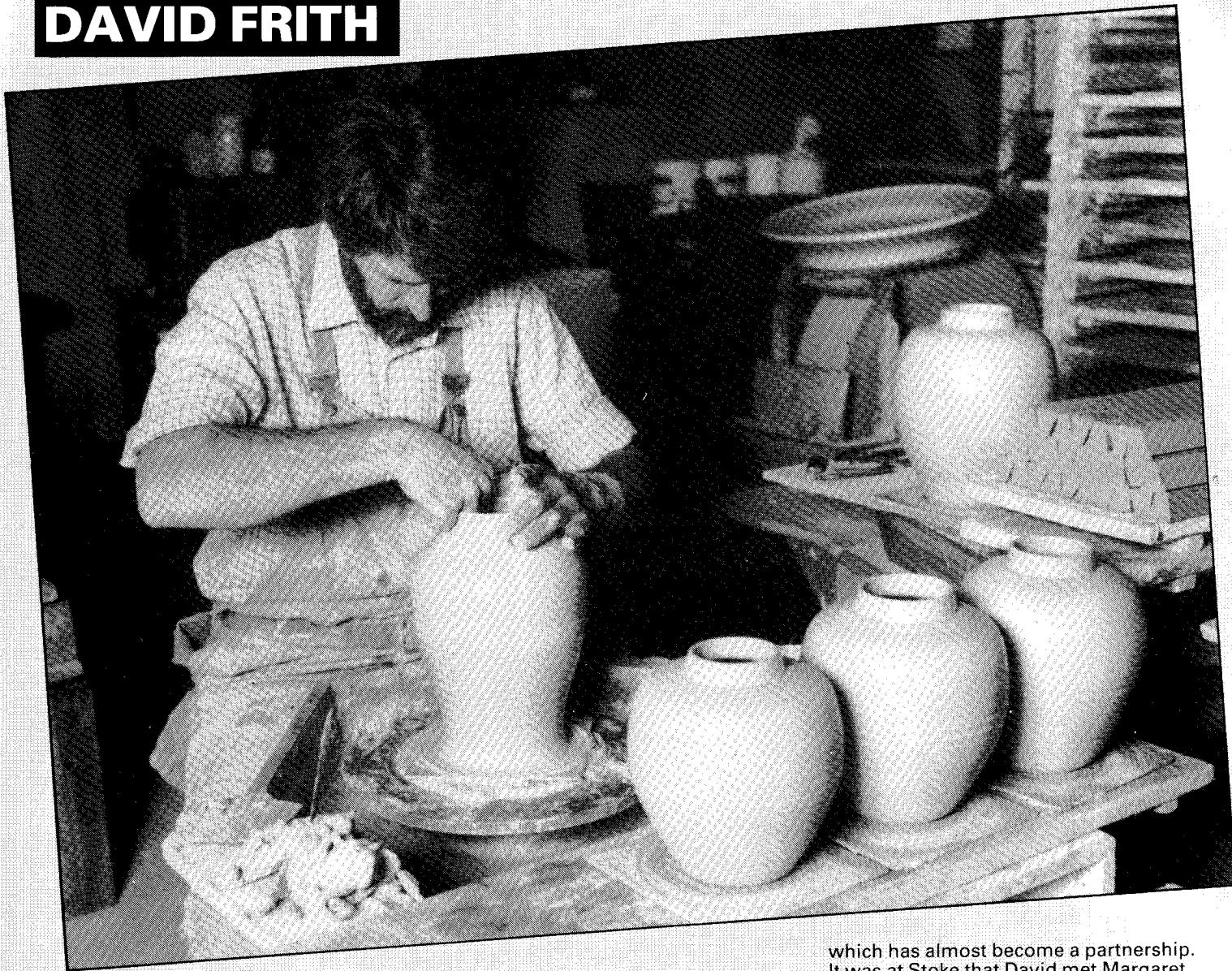


Ceramic Series

ABERYSTWYTH ARTS CENTRE · No 3

DAVID FRITH



David Frith is one of those rare potters who without compromising his ideas or changing his levels of skill makes his living from his chosen craft, relying entirely on sales for income. This is not to say that David Frith, and his wife Margaret who also works in the pottery, are indifferent or unresponsive to the demands of the market or the choice that discriminating buyers can exercise. Over the years they have developed and changed, all the time seeking to refine and hone their style, and the quality of its making.

For the last 20 years the Friths have been potting at Brookhouse on the outskirts of Denbigh, North Wales. First they were in rented accommodation but for the last 12 years have slowly converted the old millhouse which at last

has been knocked into the shape which brings workshop and house together, in a setting which mixes the industry of potting with a smattering of rural life. Bees, hens and tomatoes are tended almost as lovingly as the pots themselves.

David Frith set out at art school intending to be a sculptor: modelling classes took him to the pottery department and it was here that his fascination with clay and pottery started. At Wimbledon Art School he studied industrial ceramics and during a visit to Stoke on Trent saw for the first time reduction fired stoneware pots. These were made by students taught by Derek Emms at the studio pottery department at Longton.

They made a deep impression on him: he moved to Stoke to study under Derek Emms and formed a friendship with him

which has almost become a partnership. It was at Stoke that David met Margaret whose infatuation with clay started at school when she began modelling. A possible career as a dancer was given up for a training as a potter.

From Stoke they moved to North Wales and immediately set up a workshop producing slip decorated press-moulded earthenware dishes fired in the electric kiln. With no capital but with great enthusiasm they looked at and admired the traditional Buckley pots and these inspired his slip dishes. Indirectly they have continued to influence David Frith's work. Pots were sold at craftshops, fairs and so on, mostly in North Wales. After two years, throwing was added, firing temperatures were raised and a period of oxidised high fired tablewares followed. Later a wood firing kiln for stoneware was built; this proved impossible to use well without adequate storage space for the



wood. For a period the pottery took on apprentices and trainees and at one time 6-8 workers were employed.

The purchase of the old mill in 1972 came at a time when the employees were on the point of leaving, and for the first time for some years David and Margaret found themselves working alone. A 30 cubic foot 'Kilns and Furnaces' gas kiln was purchased (it has now had over 500 firings and is still going well), supplied by a one ton capacity gas tank. Though no conscious decisions were made to re-think shape or decoration, experiments with various bodies and glazes were carried out and slowly the distinctive Frith style emerged. At first a range of reduction

fired domestic stoneware, all priced and listed was produced, but in the last few years this has given way to the more individual forms, all decorated with wax resist and/or glaze trailed decoration.

All the thrown shapes, large platters, plates, lidded pots and large forms are thrown on bats. "It's quicker" said David. The square dishes ranging from 6" to 14" are made over hump moulds ("They provide a lovely surface to decorate" commented David), while the boxes are assembled by Margaret from neatly devised extruded forms. Much of the work is glazed with subtle pale celadons and dark tenmokus, and decorated with milky blues and khakis, to give quiet and rich effects. The forms

owe a strong allegiance to Chinese ceramics, and David speaks of his admiration for the Sung and T'ang pots, and the glaze quality of Korean wares. But this has been combined with the soft slip trailed decoration of Buckley slipwares, and the influence of the surrounding Welsh hills. Are these blue greys the colour of slate? Do the khaki and tenmoku designs recall the landscape of the Welsh hills? Many of the materials come from the area - the manganese and cobalt ore comes from an old local mine: the local granite is ground to make the basis for the khaki glaze; whiting comes from a nearby limestone quarry and the sand from a local outcrop. So the Welsh influence is present. The famous 'vine' decoration formed from painted wax and trailed slip used on large platters is a European rather than an oriental motif.

Watching David Frith decorating a plate, totally absorbed yet relaxed, is to see a skilled and sensitive artist at work. Deftly he prepares his materials, picking up and handling the large dish as if it were a saucer. The design is sketched in, and with deft brush strokes the hot wax decoration is applied. Glaze trailed round the edges is put on even more quickly, and with greater effect. Lines gently curve, defining and creating space giving the dish a new life and extra dimension.

The concern with quality, with surface, with the 'whole pot' gives David Frith's work a rare strength: some is monumental in its size and in feel. All have an integration of form with decoration. In the simpler pieces where a semi-matt white glaze carries trailed copper red decoration the result is almost cheeky, and hints that behind the quiet confidence of the potter an element of playfulness is allowed to surface. It is a quality which is present in all the work, in the liveliness of line, in the division of space: these are pots to look at and admire, as well as to use.

Emmanuel Cooper

Y Gwres Gerameg

CANOLFAN Y CELFYDDYDAU ABERYSTWYTH

Rhif 3

DAVID FRITH

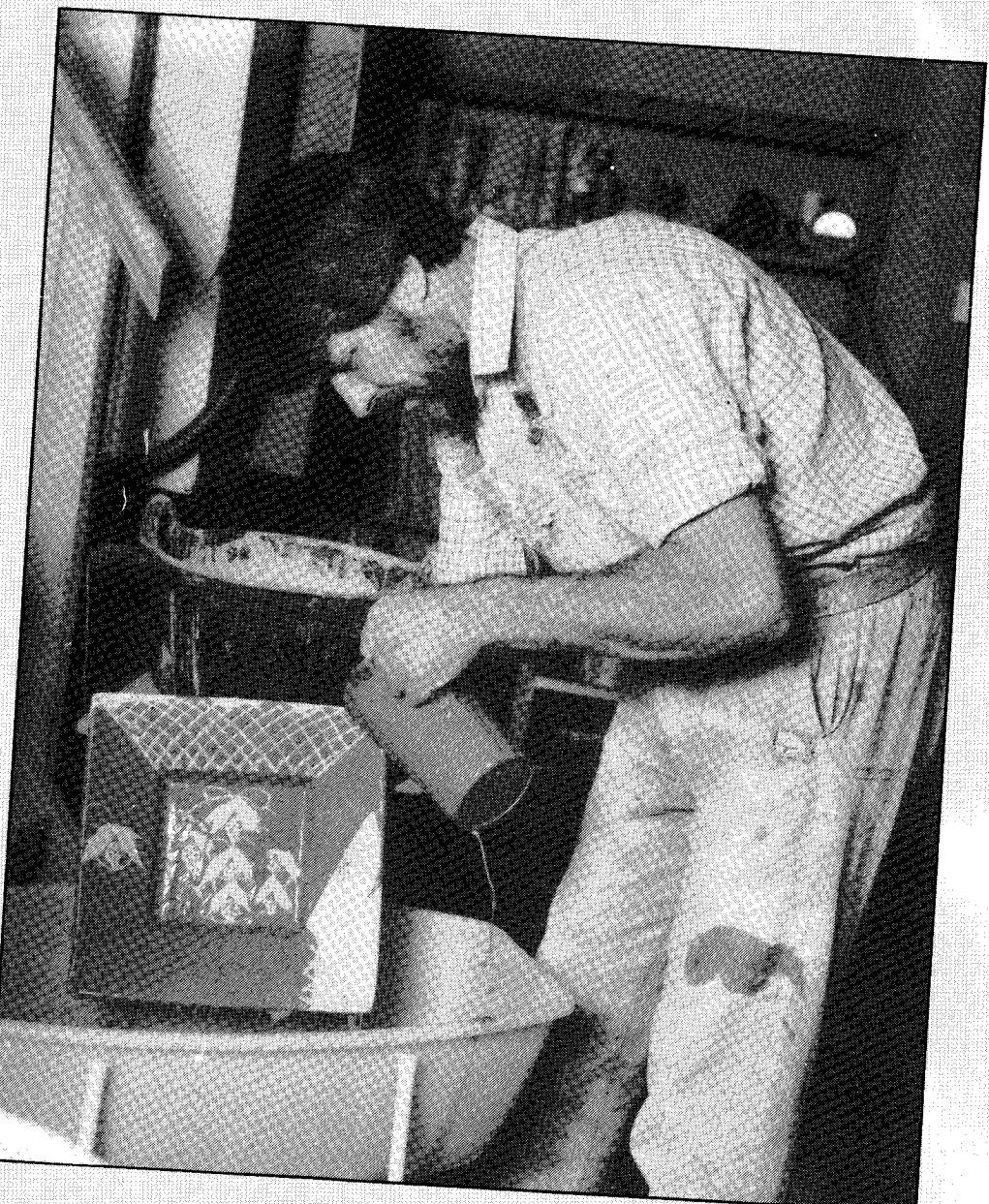
Mae David Frith yn un o'r crochenwyr prin hynny sy'n ennill bywoliaeth o'i ddewis grefft gan ddibynnu'n gyfangwbl ar elw o'r gwerthiant, a hynny heb gyfaddawd ei syniadau nac ychwaith newid lefelau ei fedrusrwydd. Nid yw hyn yn golygu fod David Frith a'i wraig Margaret sydd hefyd yn gwethio mewn crochenwaith, yn ddi-hid neu'n ddi-ymateb i ofynion y farchnad neu i ddewis a dirnadaeth prynwyr. Maent wedi newid a datblygu dros y blynnyddoedd, gan anelu at ddull mwy cain a lluniaidd a gwell ansawdd.

Am yr 20 mlynedd diwethaf mae'r Frithiaid wedi bod yn gwneud gwaith crochenwaith ar ymylon Dinbych, Gogledd Cymru. Ar y dechrau, roedd ynt yn rhentu adeilad, ond yn ystod y 12 mlynedd diwethaf mae nhw wedi trawsffurfio hen felin gan wneud y gweithdy â'r tŷ yn un, - mae'r awyrgylch yn cyfuno prysurdeb crochenwaith ac ychydig o'r bywyd gwledig. Mae gwenyn, ieir a thomatos yn cael ymron crystal sylw â'r crochanau.

Treuliodd David Frith gyfnod mewn ysgol arlunio, gan fwriadu bod yn gerflunydd: golygai dosbarthiadau modelu ymwend â'r adran grochenwaith a dyma lle y cafodd ei swyno am y tro cyntaf gan glai a chrochenwaith. Astudiodd Grochenwaith Diwydiannol yn Ysgol Arlunio Wimbleton, ac wrth ymwend â Stoke on Trent fe welodd am y tro cyntaf botiau cerrig Tân - rydwythiad. Gwnaethpwyd y rhain gan fyfyrwyd a ddysgywd gan Derek Emms yn adran grochenwaith stiwdio yn Longton.

Gwnaeth hyn argraff ddfon arno: symudodd i Stoke i astudio dan Derek Emms; ffurfiodd gyfeillgarwch ag ef a fu bron â datblygu'n bartneriaeth. Yn Stoke y cwrddodd David â Margaret; roedd ei didordeb hi mewn clai wedi ei ennynt yn yr ysgol, pan ddechreuodd fodelu. Rhododd y gorau i'r posibilrwydd o yrra mewn dawnsio, a dechrau hyfforddi fel crochenydd.

Symudasant o Stoke i Ogledd Cymru gan sefydlu gweithdy yn cynhyrchu llestri pridd wedi eu slip addurno a'u mowld wasgu ac wedi eu tanio mewn odyn drydan. Heb unrhyw gyfalaf ond gyda llawer o frwdryfedd edrychodd gydag edmygedd ar botiau Bwcle traddodiadol, a'r rhain a symblyodd ei llestri slip. Yn anuniongyrchol, mae nhw wedi parhau i ddylanwadu ar waith David Frith. Gwerthwyd potiau mewn siopau crefftiau, ffeiriau ac yn y blaen, yn bennaf yng Ngogledd Cymru. Ymhen dwy flynedd, ychwanegwyd tafledd, codwyd y tymheredd tanio, a chafwyd cyfnod o gynhyrchu llestri i'r ford a oedd



wedi eu ocsideiddio a'u tanio â gwres uchel. Yn ddiweddarach, adeiladwyd odyn a ddefnyddiai goed, ar gyfer caregwraith ond gwelwyd ei bod hi'n amhosibl gwneud defnydd da ohono heb le digonol i storio'r coed. Am gyfnod cyflogwyd prentisiaid a phobl i'w hyfforddi, ac ar un amser cyflogwyd 6-8 o weithwyr.

Prynwyd yr hen felin yn 1972, pan oedd y gweithwyr ar fin gadael, ac am y tro cyntaf ers rhai blynnyddoedd roedd David a Margaret yn gwethio ar eu pen eu hunain. Prynwyd odyn nwyr 'Odynau a Ffwrneis' 30 troedfedd ciwbigr, a gai ei gyflenwi gan danc nwyr a allai ddal un dunnell (mae'n parhau i weithio'n dda er iddo nawr gael ei danio dros 500 gwaith). Er na benderfynwyd yn ymwybodol newid siâp neu addurniadau, gwnaethpwyd arbrofion gyda gwahanol

ffurfiau a sglein ac yn raddol ymddangosodd yr arddull Frith arbennig. Ar y dechrau cynhyrchwyd gwahanol garegwraith Tân - rydwythiad, ar gyfer y tŷ; ond yn ystod yr ychydig flynyddoedd diwethaf, mae ffurfiau mwy unigol yn dod yn fwy amlwg, a'r rhain wedi eu harddu ag addurniadau sy'n medru gwirthsefyll cŵyr a/neu sglein drywydd.

Mae'r cyfan o'r siâpau tafledol, yn ddysglau mawr, platiâu, potiau gyda chaead ac yn ffurfiau mawr, yn cael eu taflu ar y "batts". "Mae hyn yn gyflymach" meddai David. Mae'r dysglau sgwâr, sy'n gwahaniaethu rhwng 6" a 14" yn cael eu gwneud gyda moldiau crwb. ("Mae gan y rhain arwynebedd hyfryd i'w addurno" yw sylw David), - Margaret sy'n rhoi'r



bocsum at ei gilydd, o drosglwyddiad taclus o'r hyn sydd dros ben. Mae llawer o'r gwaith wedi ei sgleinio â lliw seladon golau cynnil a thenmokus tywyll, ac wedi ei addurno â lliw glas llaethog a caci; mae hyn yn rhoi'r argraff o dawelwch a chyfoeth. Mae'r ffurfiau yn hynod debyg i grochenwaith Tseina, ac mae David yn sôn am ei edmygedd o botiau Sung a T'ang ac o ansawdd sglein gwaith o Korea. Ond caffodd hyn ei gyfuno ag addurniadau cynnil slip drywydd yn null Bwcli, ac â dylanwad y bryniau Cymreig sy'n eu hamgylchu. Ai lliw llechi yw'r glas-lwyd hyn? Ydy'r patrymau kaki a thenmoku yn ein hatgoffa o dirlun bryniau Cymru? Mae llawer o'r defnyddiau yn dod o'r ardal - daw'r manganâs a'r mwyn cobalt o hen fwynglawdd lle mae'r ithfaen lleol yn cael ei falu fel sylfaen i'r sglein Kaki, mae'r defnydd gwynnu'n dod o waith calch cyfagos a'r tywod o gripell leol. Felly mae'r dylanwad Cymreig yn bresennol. Ewropeidd yn hytrach na dwyreiniol yw'r addurn "winwydden" enwog a wneir o gwyr wedi ei beintio a'r slip-drywydd, a welir ar ddysglau mawr.

Mae gweld David Frith yn addurno plât, yn llwyr ymgolli ac eto yn ymlacio yn y gwaith, yn golygu gweld artist deheuig a manwl wrth ei waith. Mae e'n paratoi ei ddefnyddiau yn gelfydd, gan godi a thrin y ddysgl fawr fel petai'n soser. Mae'n gwneud amlinelliad o'r cynllun ac yna gan ddefnyddio brws yn fedrus mae'n addurno gyda chwyr poeth. Rhoir trywydd o sglein o gwmpas yr ymyl hyd yn oed yn gyflymach, a gyda chryn effaith. Mae troad llariaidd y llinellau yn diffinio a chreu lle, gan roi bywyd newydd a dimensiwn ychwanegol i'r ddysgl.

Mae ei ofal am ansawdd, arwynebedd a'r "pot yn gyfangwbl" yn rhoi grym arbennig i waith David Frith; mae rhai yn anferthol yn eu maint a'u teimlad. Mae ffurf ac addurn wedi eu integru ymhob un. Mae'r darnau trywydd o liw copr cochaid ymron yn haerllug; awgrymir fod y crochenydd yn caniatâu elfen chwareus i ddod i'r wyneb, tu ôl i'w hyder tawel, Mae'r nodwedd hon yn bresennol yn y gwaith i gyd, ym mywio grwydd y llinellau, ac yn eu cynllun. Potiau i edrych arnynt a'u hedmygu yw'r rhain, yn ogystal â'u defnyddio.

Emmanuel Cooper

