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 batts. "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 trails 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, in these are pots to look at and admire, as well as to use.

Emmanuel Cooper
DAVID FRITH

Mae David Frith yn un o'r crochenwyr pryn hynny sy'n enill bywoliaeth o'i ddefws grefft gan ddibynnynu'ryn gyfangwbwr er ei o'r gwirthiant, a hynny heb gystadwyo ei syniadau nac y chwaiith newid ifestâu ei fedryniwyd. Nid yw hyn yn golygu fod David Frith a'i wrag Margaret sydd hefyd yn gweithio mewn crochenwaith, yn ddi-hied neu'n ddi-ymateb i ofynnion y farchnad neu i ddefws a ddimadaeth Prynwy. Maent wedi newid a datblygu dros y blynyneddodd, gan anelu at ddu 3 mwy cain a lluniaidd a gwell answadd.

Am yr 20 myneddi diwethaf mae'r Frithiaid wedi bod yn gwneud gwaith crochenwaith ar ymgyrion Dinbych, Gogledd Cymru. Ar yr dechrau, roedd rhyn nhwnti adael, ond yn ystod y 12 myneddi diwethaf mae nhw wedi trawsfurfiuo hen felin gan wneud y gweithycwch â'r ty y tu'n un. Mae'r awyrgrychnyn cyfrifol ar y cynnau pryseudd mewn crochenwaith ac ychydig o'r bywyd gwledig. Mae gwernen, i'ei athro ym yr ymryn,ystafell sylet â'r crochenwaith.

Treudolodd David Frith gyfnod mewn ysgol arlunio, gan ffordd bod yn gwneud economi gweithciau modelu ymweld â'r adran crochenwaith a dyma lle y cafodd ei swyno am y tro cynntaf gan glai i crochenwaith. Astudiodd crochenwaith Diwydiannol ym Ysgol Arlunio Aberystwyth, ac ar ymhweld â'r Stokc on Trent fe wrecyl a'u tro cyna ymhweld â'r Stokc on Trent fe wrecyl a'u tro cynntaf gan glai i crochenwaith. Gwaith prawf y rhain gan fyfyrwyr a ddyddiwyd gan Derek Emms ym mhen crochenwaith trwyddo yn Llongton.

Gwaeth hyn argraff ddofn arno: symudodd i Stokc on Trent, a’i adael i’r Stokc on Trent ym ymhen Trifyll, a ddyddiwyd gan Derek Emms; ffurfiodd gyfeillgarwch ag efo’n byd bron â datblygu’r barchniaeth. Yn ystod y cyrraedd David a Margaret, roedd ei hunain mewn ddau rhywun ym mhen crochenwaith trwyddo yn Llongton. Gwaeth hyn argraff ddofn arno: symudodd i Stokc on Trent, a’i adael i’r Stokc on Trent ym ymhen Trifyll, a ddyddiwyd gan Derek Emms; ffurfiodd gyfeillgarwch ag efo’n byd bron â datblygu’r barchniaeth. Yn ystod y cyrraedd David a Margaret, roedd ei hunain mewn ddau rhywun ym mhen crochenwaith trwyddo yn Llongton.
bocsus at ei giwydd, o drosglwyddiad taclus o'r hyd sydd dros ben. Mae llawer o'r gwraith wedi ei sgleinio à lliw seladon golau cynnil a thenhysus tywyll, ac wedi ei addurno à lliw glas llaiethog a cac. Mae hyn yn hoff o argraff o dawelwch a chlyfodi. 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 gwraith o Korea. Ond cafodd hyn ei gyfuno ag addurniad u cynnil slip drywydd yn null Bwci, ac à Dylanwad y bryniau Cymreig sy'n eu hampylichu. Ai llwch llechly'r glas-lwed hyn? Ydy'r patrymau kai a thenhysu y'n ein hatgoffa o dirlun bryniau Cymru? Mae llawer o'r defnyddiau yn dod o'r ardal - dawr' rhod manganis a'r mwyn cobalt o hen fwynglawd lle mae'r ithfaen lleol yn cael ei falu fel sylfaen i'r sglein Kaki, mae'r defnydd gwyynnunod o dawath catch cyfagos a'r tywod o gripell leol. Felly mae'r Dylanwad Cymreig yn bresennol. Ewropeaidd ychwrach na drywreiniol yr addurn "winwydden" enwog a wneir o gwyr wedi ei beintio a'r slip-drywydd, a welir ar ddysgaiâu mawr.

Mae gweld David Frith yn addurno plât, yn llwyr ymgollol ac eto yn ymlacio yn y gwraith, yn golygu gweled artist deheuol a manwl wrth ei waith. Mae e'n paratoi ei ddefnyddiau yn gelydd, gan bodi a thrin y ddisgawr fel y placa'n soser. Mae'n e'n gwneud amlinelliaid o'r cynllunion ac yna gan ddefnyddio brws yn fedr uchennog. Mae'n paratoi o glog sy'n ogwys yr ymyl hŷd yn y oed yn gyflymach a gyda chrynf effaith. Mae troed llariaid y llinellau yn diffinio a chreu lle, gan roi bywyd newydd a dimensiwn ychwanegol i'r ddisg. Mae ei ofa am ansawdd, arwynebedd a'r "pot ymgyfawnbl" yn rohy grwm arbenig i waith David Frith; mae rhai yn anferthol eu eu maint a'u teimlad. Mae ffurf a'i addurn wedi eu integru ymhob un. Mae'r darnau trywydd o liw copr cochaidd ymron yn haerllug; awgrymir fod yr oesoedd yr caniatâu elfen chwareu i ddod i'r wyneb, tu ol i'w hyder tawel. Mae'r nodwedd hon yn bresennol yn y gwraith i gyd, yr mynon gwyrrwydd y llinellau, ac yn eu cynllun. Potiau i edrych arnynt a'u heddyg yw'r rhain, yn ogystal â'u defnyddio.

Emmanuel Cooper