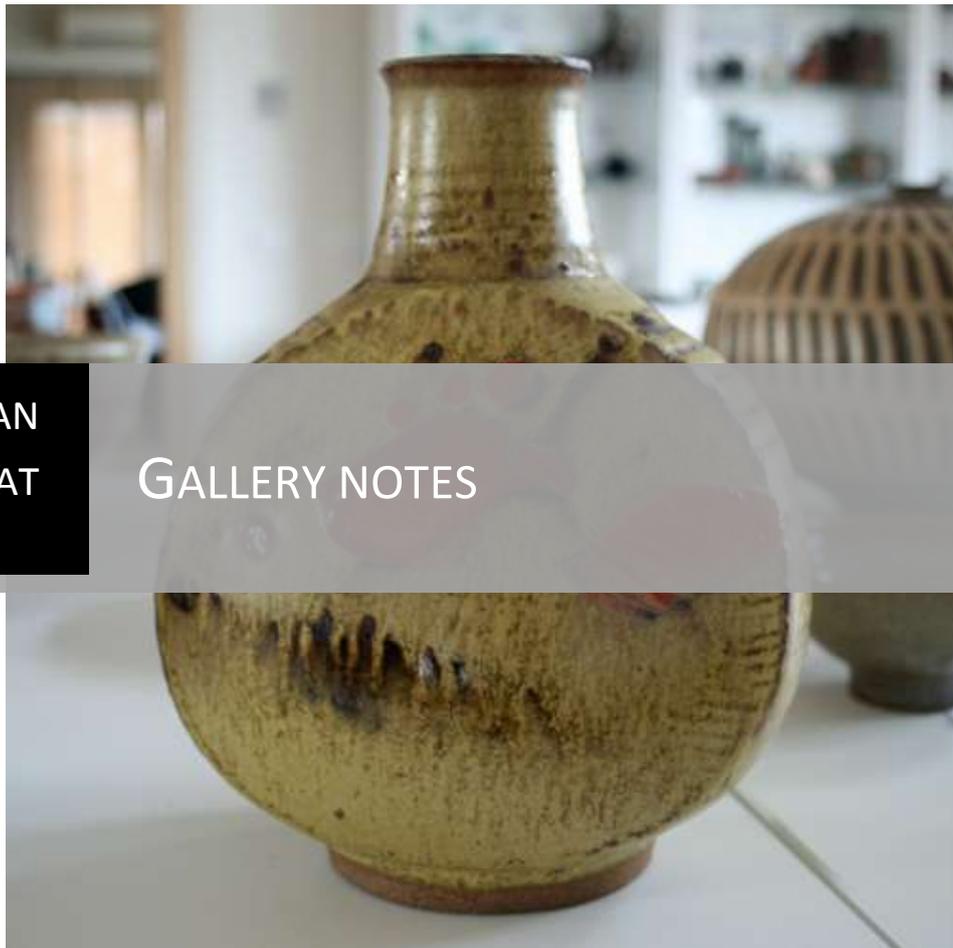


Opening Exhibition



AUSTRALIAN  
POTTERY AT  
BEMBOKA

GALLERY NOTES

September 2009 - May 2010

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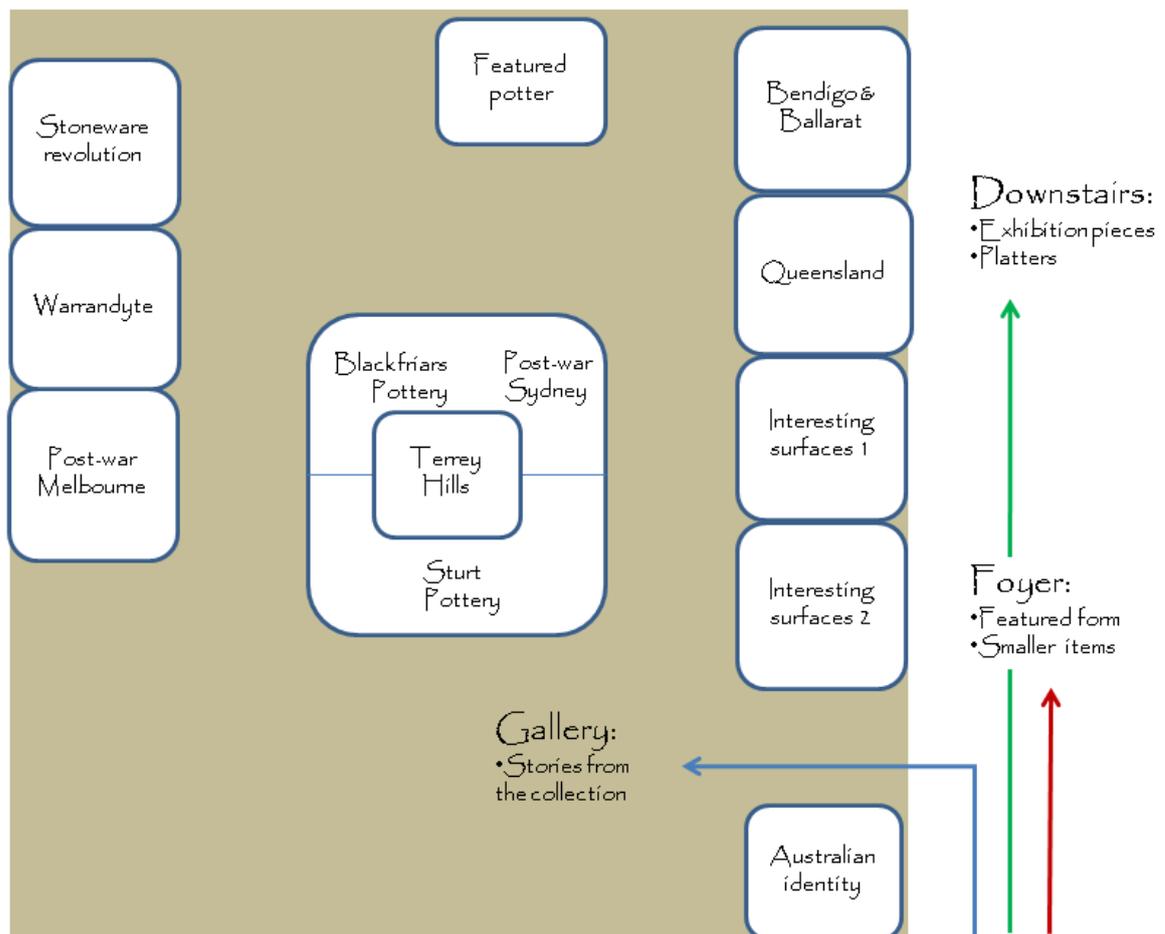
Shigeo Shiga. Bottle-shaped vase c. 1973

# WELCOME

Over the last six years, we have been adding to our own collection of contemporary Australian pottery, amassed over the last thirty-five years, by buying pottery second-hand, on eBay and through auction houses. The result is an eclectic mix of exhibition pieces and production ware made in the last half century, displayed in a contemporary house and gallery setting with mountain views.

Unlike a public gallery or museum, all of the pieces are for sale.

Our opening exhibition has been curated to show the move from earthenware to stoneware in the 1960s and 1970s, with examples from the whole period that reveal the diversity of individual styles. The featured potter is Christopher Sanders and the featured form is the casserole dish.







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Robert & Margo Beck.  
Swan Series pedestal bowl, c. 1978

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# AUSTRALIAN IDENTITY

Mirrabooka Pottery, Bank of NSW

The pots in our collection have been made by Australian potters or potters working in Australia for a time. We know this because their origins have been recorded, or we recognise a potter's mark or personal style.

Knowing who made a pot lets us place it in a historical context and use it to tell stories about the history of Australian pottery. It also helps us to understand what inspired its creation and how it was made.

A Steve Harrison bowl is made entirely of local raw materials. A Pippin Drysdale vessel expresses her experience of flying over the Tanami Desert region. Both have rich Australian associations, although neither is Australian to the unknowing eye.

## Australian Motifs

A Cuppacumbalong Pottery mug is decorated with simple gum leaf brushwork. A Marianne Cole vase evokes an Australian landscape with its colours. Napkin rings from the Cooperpedy Underground Pottery are decorated with relief gum nuts and leaves. A Jiri Bures teapot takes the shape of a Tasmanian tiger. These works use visual motifs that are inherently Australian.

## Aboriginal Themes

During the 1950s, semi-commercial potteries painted Aboriginal motifs on production or souvenir ware. Carl Cooper created hand-painted dishes and bowls inspired by Aboriginal paintings he had seen in a book. William Ricketts portrayed Aboriginal life in his ceramic plaques and sculptures. These works represent a white-Australian use of Aboriginal themes, with varying degrees of sensibility.

## Indigenous potters

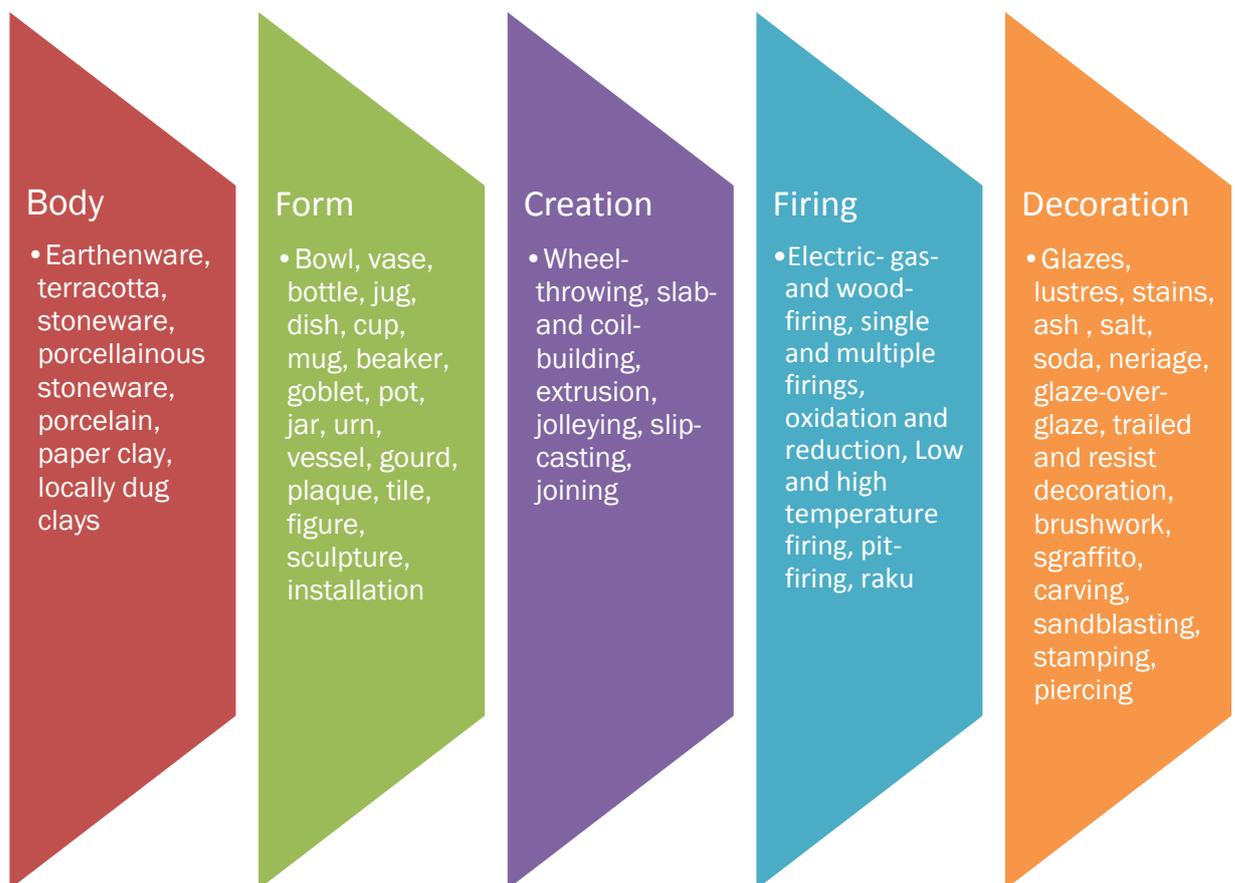
In 1968, Ivan McMeekin and Michael Cardew established the Bagot Pottery in Darwin to try and build a local industry for indigenous potters. Eddie Puruntatameri, a trainee from Bathurst Island, returned home to set up the Tiwi Pottery. Work was produced there in a range of styles, not necessarily immediately identifiable as Aboriginal.

At Barambah Pottery started in 1969 in Cherbourg, Queensland, the work of the indigenous potters was aimed more specifically at the tourist trade.

A range of indigenous artists now work in clay, some using it as a surface for dot paintings aimed at the tourist market, others striving for an individual style.

# FINDING AN INDIVIDUAL STYLE

Clay lends itself to the creation of three-dimensional forms that become vitrified through the firing process, allowing them to hold liquids or food, and to be used as cooking vessels. The function of a piece of pottery is often its primary characteristic. It is a teapot or a vase or a bowl. Some argue that its success as a finished object depends on how well it performs its function, and that the materials used, the shape, the decoration and the firing process must all serve the form. Others have taken the fired object in new directions, as a form of artistic expression, a surface for decoration, or a way to articulate social concerns or challenge values. Whatever the intention, there are many directions a potter might take when striving for an individual style:





# FEATURED POTTER: CHRIS SANDERS

Chris Sanders. Lidded vase.

Christopher Sanders was born in Melbourne, Victoria, in 1952. Son of the sculptor and potter Tom Sanders (1921-), he trained in his father's studio at Eltham, Victoria, making pots with earthenware clay and commercial glazes fired in an electric kiln, but yearning to experiment with stoneware and reduction firing, which needs the flame of gas or wood.

In 1974, he set up his own workshop and bought his first gas kiln. In 1976 he took up a two-year traineeship with Ian Sprague at Mungeribar Pottery. By the late 1970s he was working mainly in porcellanous stoneware.

On a study trip to the United States, Great Britain and Europe in 1979, he was inspired by the celadon-glazed ware he saw in museums to learn more about reduction glaze techniques and firing processes. He established a studio at Clifton Hill (where he still lives) and later formalised his studies through a Masters Degree by Research (Ceramics) from the School of Art, RMIT, completed in 1999.

We became familiar with his work in the late 1980s and 1990s, investing in several large lidded jars with oriental shapes and rich copper red and chun glazes.

Today Sanders is regarded as one of Australia's master potters. He also teaches, coordinating RMIT University's ceramics courses, and writes, publishing articles about ceramic techniques and reviewing the work of other potters. In his recent work he has been experimenting with new composite forms and the sculptural effects of exhibiting pieces in trios.

His early works are incised 'Chris Sanders', 'C. Sanders' or 'C.S.', often with a date. Later he began to use the initials 'CS' in the form of an impressed seal.



## FEATURED FORM: THE CASSEROLE DISH

Victor Greenaway, Casserole dish. Before 1973.

The casserole dish is an essential form in any production line. It can be used for both cooking and serving, and competes well with manufactured versions in price, utility and beauty. The shape consists of a bowl, usually with two lugged handles, and a lid. The challenge in the making, as with all lidded vessels, is to shape the rim to accept the lid, and to provide a good fit. Because the dish goes in the oven, it must be high-fired, the interior glazed and the surface decoration easy to keep clean. Within these constraints there can be infinite variations.



## POST-WAR MELBOURNE

Carl Cooper. Sgraffito dish. 1960

In post-war Melbourne, John A. Barnard Knight (1910-1993) was in charge of the Pottery Department at the Melbourne Technical College (later RMIT University), training the next generation of potters, and also running the Janet Gray Studio at South Yarra.

Allan Lowe (1907-2001) and Klytie Pate (1912- ), the first contemporary potters to be represented in the National Gallery of Victoria Collection, were producing thrown earthenware with bright clear glazes in their studios at Kew and Ferntree Gully.

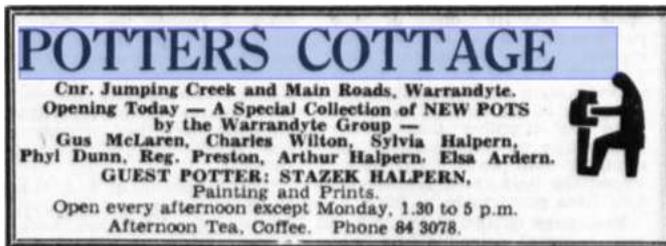
At Murrumbeena, Arthur Merric Boyd (1934-1999) was running the AMB Pottery (1944-1958) with John Perceval and Peter Herbst as a way of supporting a life of painting and study. Many artists worked there during the life of the pottery (1944-1958), including Carl Cooper (1914-1966), a neighbour recovering from polio. He went on to set up his own studio nearby.

Arthur's brother David (1924- ) and his wife Hermia (1931-) returned to Melbourne from England in 1955 and started making pottery in their own studio at Murrumbeena.

Tom Sanders (1925- ) moved from Sydney to Melbourne in 1949, working for various potteries before setting up his own pottery in Eltham in 1954. During the mid- to late-1960s he produced a range similar to Janet Gray under the name 'Dorian Sands'.

Migrants finding a new home in Australia after the war also brought new post-war European influences to the mix. Ellis Ceramics, in Abbotsford, was set up by a Czechoslovakian couple, Dagmar and Miloslav Kratochvil, in 1953. Three years later, a young Latvian migrant, Gundars Lulis, set up the Gunda pottery in the backyard of his parent's home in Camberwell.

Other post-war Melbourne potteries and potters of interest in the collection include Hatton Beck (1901-1994), Robert (1942- ) and Margot (1948- ) Beck, Guy Boyd Pottery (1952-1964), Eric Juckert (1912- ) and Henning Rathjen (1903-1968)



## WARRANDYTE

Advertisement from *The Age*, 17 Sep, 1966  
Image from Google News Archive.

In 1958, a group of potters looking for a way of exhibiting and selling their wares opened the Potters Cottage in Warrandyte, about 24 kilometres east of Melbourne.

The founding members were Artur Halpern, Reg Preston, Phyl Dunn, Gus McLaren and Charles Wilton. Sylvia Halpern, Kate Janeba and Elsa Arden, joined the group in 1961 and Peter Laycock in 1969.

During the late 1960s, pottery production by the group changed from earthenware decorated with commercial glazes to stoneware with locally sourced clays and glazes.

The cottage operated until 2005.

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- Reg Preston (1917-2000) studied at the Melbourne Technical College, then worked at a commercial pottery, before setting up his own studio at Warrandyte in 1947. Phil Dunn (1915-1999) began potting with Preston in 1956. They married in 1958.
  - Charles Wilton (1916-2000) started potting with Eric Juckert, then moved to Warrandyte in 1947 and set up his own studio there in 1955.
  - Gus McLaren (1923-2008), a cartoonist at the *Argus*, began making pottery with Preston in 1955. His wife Betty was taught slip casting by Preston and is still producing ceramic figures in Merimbula, using moulds designed by Gus.
  - Artur Halpern (1908- ) and his wife Sylvia (1918-2009) set up the SYLHA Ceramic Studio in Huntingdale in 1950, selling work through George's Department Store and the Primrose Pottery Shop before joining the Warrandyte group.
  - Sylvia had trained as a potter at Melbourne Technical College, but did not take up potting full time until 1961, specializing in hand-built pieces.
  - Artur's brother, the painter Stanislav Halpern (1919-1969), was a guest potter at the cottage on his return to Australia in 1966.
  - Before joining the Warrandyte group, Kate and Fritz Janeba sold their wares through the Primrose Pottery Shop; Elsa Arden (1918- ), a New Zealander, was a student at the Melbourne Technical College; Peter Laycock (1927- ) and his wife Helen (1931- ) had a studio at the Dunmoochin art colony at Cottles Bridge.



# THE STONEWARE REVOLUTION

Ian Sprague. Stoneware bowl

Potters active in and around Melbourne in the 1940s and 1950s worked mainly in earthenware, and drew their decorative motifs from mythological and literary sources. By the early 1960s many had turned to stoneware, and to an associated aesthetic promoted by Bernard Leach's *A Potter's Book*, first published in 1940.

Bernard Leach (1887-1979), the father of British studio pottery, had spent his childhood in the east and was strongly influenced by Chinese Sung potters and Japanese and English folk traditions. He and the Japanese potter Shoji Hamada (1894-1978) set up the Leach Pottery, St Ives in 1920. In *A Potter's Book*, Leach documented his way of working, advocating the use of natural materials, and a striving towards unity, spontaneity and simplicity of form.

Australian potters found these notions appealing as a way of life, as well as benefiting from the technical information provided in the book.

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- Harold Hughan (1893-1987), a self-taught potter and full time craftsman only in his retirement, embraced the 'Leach-Hamada' or 'Anglo-Oriental' tradition. He worked from a studio in the garden of his home in Glen Iris. In 1950 he held his first solo exhibition at George's Gallery. He has been the subject of two major retrospective exhibitions at the National Gallery of Victoria, in 1968 and 1983, and was awarded an MBE for his services to pottery in 1978.
  - Ian Sprague (1920-1994) trained as an architect, but took up pottery after a serious car accident in England. He studied for three years at the Central School of Arts and Crafts, London, before returning to Australia in 1962. In 1964, he started the Craft Centre, Melbourne, and, with the English potter Robin Welch, set up the Mungeribar Pottery in Upper Beaconsfield, Victoria.
  - Robin Welch (1936- ) had trained under Bernard Leach's son Michael in Penzance. He lived and worked in Australia from 1962 to 1965.
  - Victor Greenaway (1947- ) met Sprague after attending an exhibition of Welch's work at the recently opened Craft Centre gallery in South Yarra in 1965. He completed a Diploma of Fine Art at the Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology (RMIT) and then worked with Sprague at Mungeribar Pottery from 1969-1973. His work from this period is marked with an impressed 'G' in a square.
  - Judy Lorraine (1928- ), also an architect, turned self-trained potter based in Toorak, Melbourne, in the 1960s and 1970s, remained unmoved by the Anglo-oriental tradition, preferring the work of primitive potters, hand-building techniques and unglazed surfaces, except for her domestic wares.



# BENDIGO & BALLARAT

John Gilbert. Coffee pot

Bendigo's first pottery was established in 1858. It still operates today, after a revival as Bendigo Pottery (Epsom) Pty Ltd in 1971.

Allan Letts (1927- ) worked as a thrower there from 1940 to 1974, before setting up the Cannie Ridge Pottery 35 km south of Bendigo, at Harcourt.

Malcolm Cooke (1951- ), and Thomas Metcalf (1948- ) both worked at Bendigo Pottery in the early 1970s after training at the Bendigo Institute of Technology (previously the Bendigo Technical College, before that the School of Mines, and now a campus of La Trobe University).

- Metcalf went on to help set up Maldon Pottery in 1973 with two other Bendigo graduates, Neville Wilson (1947- ) and Graham Masters (1950- ).
- Cooke set up his own pottery at Badgers' Creek in 1974, before joining Doug Alexander at the Cuppacumbalong Craft Centre, Tharwa, ACT, in 1979, and taking over as resident potter on Alexander's death in 1981.

Doug Alexander (1945-1981) studied at the Ballarat School of Mines (subsequently the Ballarat College of Advanced Education and now the University of Ballarat), then spent some time as a thrower and decorator at Bendigo Pottery in 1968 before going to New Zealand and setting up the Red Barn Pottery at Kerikeri in the Bay of Islands. He returned to Australia in 1970, and established the Springmount Pottery in Creswick, not far from Ballarat. He became the first resident potter at Cuppacumbalong in 1976.

John Gilbert (1935- ) was also a graduate of the Ballarat School of Mines, where he later lectured until ill health forced his retirement in the late 1970s. His personal style is quite different from the work of potters influenced by the Anglo-Oriental tradition. He acquired a concern for form and an interest in sculpture from his teacher Neville Bunning (1902-1990), and from the British potter Hans Coper, whom he visited in London in 1968.

Like Bendigo, Ballarat had its own pottery, established in 1861, but the factory and kilns were demolished in the 1960s. Gilbert turned his business interests to the establishment of two potteries in Ballarat producing wares in a 19<sup>th</sup> century style for the tourist market – the Edinburgh Pottery (1972-2005) located within the Sovereign Hill precinct, and the Old Ballarat Pottery (1984-1994) located in Elsworth Street.

Ironically, while Edinburgh Pottery flourished for many years in its Sovereign Hill setting, most of the domestic ware in use on the Ballarat goldfields was imported from the Staffordshire potteries of England. One of the reasons for its closure in 2005 was that historically, the Edinburgh Pottery had never existed in Ballarat in the 1850s.



## QUEENSLAND

Carl McConnell. Stoneware vase

In post-war Brisbane, Hatton Beck (1901-1994), had been appointed as the first pottery instructor at the Central Technical College in 1948, having sold his pottery at Murrumbeena to his brother-in-law Arthur Boyd and moved to Brisbane in 1944.

The Chicago-born Carl McConnell (1926-2003), who had been stationed in Brisbane during the war, returned there in 1948 with his Australian wife and son Phillip (1947- ). He studied at the College and later taught there from 1958-1963.

Also teaching at the College was Milton Moon (1926- ), who had moved from Melbourne to Brisbane in 1949. He became interested in pottery through his friendship with Harry Memmott (1921-1991), who introduced him to Mervyn Feeney (1914-2003), Queensland's 'grand old man of pottery'.

Feeney had revitalized production at Sandison's Pottery, at Annersley, after the war. Memmott, nephew of Feeney's partner George Sandison, took over a section of the works in the mid-1950s and began making commercial wares. Moon spent many hours there, learning throwing from Feeney, and helping Memmott to decorate his pots.

When Beck left the College to return to Melbourne in 1960, Moon was appointed Head of Pottery, retaining the position until 1969, when he moved to South Australia, where he still lives and works. Moon's appointment was a blow to McConnell, who resigned in 1963 to become a full-time potter in the Pinjarra Hills. He taught again at the College from 1971-74 and ceased working as a potter in 1983.

The work of the two potters is often compared to illustrate two quite different aesthetic and technical approaches. McConnell was a highly-skilled thrower, making works of great beauty within the Anglo-Oriental tradition. Moon's Queensland work was more expressionist, with rough, textured surfaces and distorted forms decorated with oxides and dripped glazes.

McConnell's son Phillip learnt his craft at the Pinjarra Pottery and went on to study in Japan under Tatsuzo Shimaoka. He returned to Australia in 1974 and set up a studio, 'The Pottri', in Toowoomba. In 2006, he retired to live in Tasmania.

### The Dorothy Hope connection

During the 1960s, Carl McConnell spent time at Dorothy Hope's Thrumster Village Pottery near Port Macquarie, NSW. Work that he made there is marked with an impressed 'TV'. Dorothy Hope (1917- ) trained at St George Technical College, Sydney, and taught for 9 years before setting up the Thrumster Village Pottery in 1962.



## POST-WAR SYDNEY

Peter Rushforth. Stoneware vase

Returned soldiers seeking training in Sydney after the war under the Commonwealth Reconstruction Training Scheme went to the East Sydney Technical College (later the National Art School) located in the Old Darlinghurst Gaol site.

Guy Boyd (1923-1988) trained there as a sculptor, setting up a pottery named after his uncle to earn extra income. He returned to Melbourne in 1951 but his partners, Norma and Leonard Flegg, continued to operate the Martin Boyd Pottery until overseas imports put it out of business in 1963. The Martin Boyd Pottery was one of dozens of semi-commercial potteries servicing the need for domestic ware in Sydney in the 1950s and 1960s. Many were set up by, or employed, immigrants from Europe, introducing new techniques and influences, and providing work experience for emerging potters.

Students interested in ceramics in the 1940s and 1950s at ESTC had to enrol in a generalist diploma. In 1962 Mollie Douglas and Peter Rushforth established a full-time certificate course in ceramics, firmly based on the Anglo-Oriental tradition.

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- Peter Rushforth (1920- ) had trained as a potter in Melbourne before joining the staff of the ESTC in 1951. He went on to become Head of Department, staying there until 1978. In 1985 he was awarded the Order of Australia for his services to ceramics.
  - Molly Douglas (1920- ) had trained at ESTC and taught night classes there in 1944. In 1946, she set up her own pottery at Turramurra, getting experience as a production potter before taking up a full-time teaching position at ESTC from 1954-1968.
  - With Rushforth, Ivan McMeekin and Ivan Englund, Douglas was one of the original four members of the Potters' Society of Australia (now the Australian Ceramics Association) when it was formed in 1956.
  - Ivan McMeekin (1919-1993) became interested in pottery in China while in the merchant navy. He started potting with Michael Leach in Cornwall in 1949, then spent four years working for Michael Cardew before returning home in 1952 to establish the Sturt Pottery at Mittagong.
  - Ivan Englund (1915-2007) had graduated from ESTC in 1951. He taught in secondary schools before taking up a post at Wollongong Technical College in 1954. Like McMeekin, he was keenly interested in Australian clays and glazes and his name is ubiquitous in early issues of the fledgling journal *Pottery in Australia*.
  - Wanda Garnsey (1917- ) trained as a pianist and briefly studied painting before beginning a part-time ceramics course with Peter Rushforth at ESTC in 1957. She is best-known for founding *Pottery in Australia*, and editing it from 1962-1974. She also produced an interesting body of work from her studio in Turramurra.



# STURT POTTERY

Sturt Pottery. Oiljar

Sturt Pottery occupies an important place in the history of Australian pottery as a centre for the Anglo-Oriental tradition, local crafts education and small-scale studio production.

Many trainees, artists-in-residence and visiting potters have spent time there.

It was set up in 1953 by Ivan McMeekin (1919-1993) at the invitation of the educationist Winifred West (1881-1971). McMeekin had just spent four years learning his craft at Michael Cardew's Wenford Bridge Pottery in Cornwall, and returned to Australia with a passionate interest in the use of raw materials for clays and glazes.

The Sturt pottery was located in a larger craft centre founded by West to provide public school students with training in spinning, weaving and woodwork. This relationship has continued to the present day, with the potter Megan Patey (1949- ) currently the head of Sturt and Paul Davis (1955- ) the head of Sturt Pottery.

During McMeekin's period at Sturt, he had three high-profile trainees - Gwyn Johns (Hanssen Pigott), Les Blakebrough and Col Levy – who have all gone on to be masters of their craft.

Les Blakebrough succeeded McMeekin as director in 1959 and remained there until 1972. He was instrumental in bringing international potters to Australia, and also visited Japan in 1962, bringing back new ideas for forms, techniques and glazes. Japan has remained a source of inspiration for many potters working at Sturt.

Sturt Pottery celebrated its 50<sup>th</sup> birthday in December, 2003.

The Sturt Pottery seal is an impressed S over a pick, representing the digging of local clays. The seal is used by itself on production work, and with the potter's own seal, on one-off pieces. (McMeekin's version of the seal has a shovel instead of the S.)

## List of Sturt Pottery directors

- Ivan McMeekin (1953-1959)
- Les Blakebrough (1959-1972)
- Tony Burgess (1973)
- John Edye (1974 to early 1978)
- Paul Wynn (1978-1980)
- Ian McKay (1982-1986)
- Campbell Hegan(1988-98)
- Paul Davis (2002-2009)



# BLACKFRIARS POTTERY

Blackfriars Pottery. Lidded sphere

According to the Powerhouse Museum, Blackfriars Pottery was the largest production studio of its kind in Australia when it was set up by Derek Smith in Chippendale, NSW, in 1976.

Smith (1931- ) had trained as a ceramic designer and art teacher in England before coming to Australia in 1956, teaching, and setting up studios in Bowral, NSW (1958-1962), Hobart, Tas (1962-1964), and Beecroft, NSW (1965-1972).

In 1973 he was invited to establish a pottery studio within the Doulton Australia factory at Chatswood, NSW. Smith was already well-known for his use of geometric forms – the cylinder, sphere and cone – decorated with oxides, vitreous slips and dry glazes. These lent themselves to mass production by a small team of trainees and throwers. Smith designed a range of around 30 domestic stoneware pieces, mostly wheel-thrown, but some made using a jolly machine. Practising within the artist/craftsman tradition, he was obliged to justify his use of the jolly machine by saying that the ends justified the means.

The Doulton venture was relatively short-lived. Smith left in 1976 to set up the Blackfriars Pottery, taking with him his repertoire of designs and production methods.

Blackfriars continued to operate until 1984, when Smith returned to Tasmania.

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- Pieces produced at Doulton are stamped 'Doulton Studio Australia' and also have the Doulton Pottery seal.
  - Blackfriars ware is stamped 'BF' and 'Derek Smith Blackfriars Pottery' with a map of Australia.
  - Pieces produced by Derek Smith at Doulton or Blackfriars are stamped 'DS' in place of the pottery seal.



# TERREY HILLS

Shigeo Shiga. Shino teapot

Shigeo Shiga (1928- ) is a Japanese potter who trained at Kyoto Ceramic Institute and studied for ten years with Saburo Saito, Kenichi Tomimoto and Kiyoshi Nakajima. He came to Australia in 1966, at Les Blakebrough's request, to work at Sturt Pottery, and ended up staying in Australia for thirteen years. During his time in Australia, he had an important influence on Australian pottery.

Shiga stayed at Sturt from 1966-1968, meeting his wife Alexandra there. (They married in 1968.) He worked with Bernard Sahm until the end of 1971, then established the Asuka Pottery on the edge of Sydney, at Terrey Hills. From 1966-1972, he also taught at the East Sydney Technical College (now the National Art School), becoming known as Shiga-San to a generation of NSW potters.

Two of Shiga's trainees, Richard Brooks (1951- ) and Andrew Halford (1951- ), both went on to set up potteries in Terrey Hills.

- Brooks, who trained with Shiga in 1974, had previously spent three years working for David Leach in Cornwall. He went on to spend six months at the Doulton Australia Studio with Derek Smith before setting up the Boolalie Pottery in Terrey Hills in 1976, and taking in trainees of his own.
- Halford, who trained with Shiga from 1968-1969, then with Les Blakebrough from 1971-72, worked for two years at Florenz, then spent five years in Japan. He took over Shiga's studio in 1979 when Shiga went back to Japan.

Other Shiga trainees include Ian Clare, Don Court, Ross Downie and Steve Harrison.

Other potters who were based in Terrey Hills while Shiga was there include Christine Ball, Jock Shimeld and Anna Rodieck.

Other Japanese potters settling in Australia during this period include Kiyoshi Ino (who spent time with Shiga at Terrey Hills in 1973), Mitsuo Shoji and Hiroe Swen.

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