



Clive and the Hole in the Wall Pottery

by

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Saturday, 16th October 2021 was an auspicious day for Emsworth's Community Pottery, the Hole in the Wall Group. Fifty years after its inception the Group's home was renamed the Clive Yeomans Pottery by Clive's daughter, Claire.

Clive, who died last year, was an Emsworth institution. He had set up the pottery along with John Hampshire in 1971 and was involved with it over the next 50 years as a builder, fundraiser, publicist, negotiator, teacher, trustee and potter.

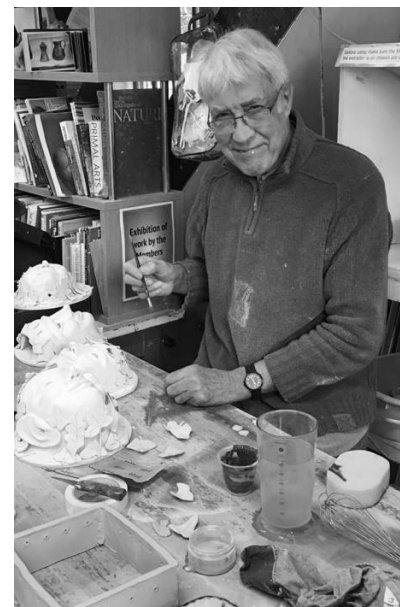
It all began when the local Rector, Rev. David Partridge, and the Church Council were looking for someone to organise and run an artistic group for 8 to 14 year olds in the Parish Hall. Crafts mentioned were painting, macramé, linocut printing and pottery. Clive pointed out that pottery was a messy business and that the equipment needed such as heavy kilns and pottery wheels required permanent fixings. A special building was needed. Much to Clive's surprise a week later, the Rector knocked on Clive's front door and invited him to "Come and have a look" at a building he had found.

The dilapidated brick building was in a landlocked area bounded by shops and offices, the churchyard and St James' Church School. The only access was through the school playground. The area was like a bomb site: junk and weeds outside, rotten doors, broken windows, unsafe roof within; the debris list was endless. However, it was for sale for £500. The building was originally built as a stables in 1899, then used as a bakery and latterly as an artist's studio in the 1960s.

Those youngsters hoping to join the youth group registered an interest. The would-be group got its name from the holes in the walls of the building and from the popular

film of the time *Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid*, both of whom were members of 'The Hole In The Wall Gang'.

Clive became a fundraiser. Small amounts of money began to trickle in and a highly successful Autumn Fayre was held. By September nearly £200 had been raised but it was not enough. The Fayre had been well publicised and as a result, Mr Humphries of Hayling Island saw a write-up in the *Portsmouth News* and donated the whole £500. Now they had enough to purchase the land. Legal possession was granted in June 1972.



Clive, the designer and potter

While awaiting planning permission, fundraising continued with competitions, a disco, coffee mornings and suppers. Over £200 was raised by modelling one fundraising activity on the Boy Scout bob-a-job week. Clive commented, "never before in Emsworth have shoes been so clean, gardens clear of weeds, shopping done with enthusiasm and poor dogs walked until they dropped with exhaustion".

The first objective once planning permission was granted was to stabilise the building. Access was difficult and it was agreed that the movement of building materials should take place out of school hours. Several Emsworthians contributed not just cash but labour. Many visited the site and came back in old clothes to clear the rubbish and the weeds, others offered expert help as plumbers, builders and electricians.

There was great enthusiasm for the project. One day a bonfire was started and a sofa thrown on the fire. Unfortunately the sofa was full of latex rubber and the heat became intense. A hose was used to dampen the inferno, water coming from the boys' toilets in the school. Someone suggested calling the Fire Brigade but luckily one of the helpers was a part-time fireman and he said that the fire was coming under control thanks to the constant deluge of water.

One of the conditions for use of the site was the erection of a six foot high security fence. One hundred and twenty five foot of fencing was needed. A wine and cheese event was held and invitees were asked to 'Buy a Foot of Fence'. Within 20 minutes all the lots were sold. Lord Bessborough donated the wood from his sawmills which also bought the cost down.

The building lacked all services – electricity, water and sewerage. Electricity came first but how to get water and sewerage. Then a water pipe was discovered while digging fence post holes. It had probably been put in when the building was first constructed in 1899. New pipes and valves were installed and the pottery had water. Now the building

work began in earnest and many children as well as Mums and Dads came to help. Professionals also gave their expertise, time and materials and by the summer of 1973 the pace of the rebuild and the fundraising was accelerating. Lights were fitted, toilets and cloakroom built, walls rendered and then in September yet another benefactor appeared. Not content with doing some painting, he also provided two electric heaters.

Fitting out and decorating continued until in October 1973 all was ready and the first session with the youth group could begin. So many youngsters were interested that three groups were held on Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday evenings. The workbench was divided into two sections with a partition in between. On one side was clay work while on the other the original range of craft activities had been expanded to include candle making and model aircraft. It soon became obvious that too many activities were taking place in such a small space and it was decided that the group should concentrate on making ceramics and stone and gem polishing for jewellery making.



In the pottery today

Other problems arose. For instance, which clay was best to use? The group had been using red earthenware clay and that clay stained clothes and did not wash out well!

It was decided to use a reasonably priced stoneware clay which could be washed or brushed out of clothing. The drawback was that the glaze firing had to be done at a higher temperature of 1220°C to 1260°C but that turned out not to be a huge expense.

By March 1974 such was the interest that sessions for adults were also started. The school moved to a new site in Bellevue Lane and the idea of a Community Centre on the site was first mooted. A fire at the new school in 1980 meant that the children relocated back to their old classrooms until the school was rebuilt.

The group flourished throughout the 1980s. Craft pottery is a great hobby: the different designs, the decoration, glazing and firing all contribute to a never ending adventure. You are never too sure what will come from the kiln firing.

In the 1990s interest began to diminish, equipment needed renewing, finances were low and the group became smaller and smaller. By the end of the 20th century, though, the refurbishment was almost complete and interest had begun to pick up.

In 2011 Clive was 70 and the pottery 40 years old. He looked back over those years and decided to write a book, *A Hole in the Wall, A personal account of Emsworth's Community Pottery*. The book was published in 2013 and all the material in this article came from that book. There are no longer specific classes for children but school children often visit for morning sessions.

As Clive said, pottery is great fun and his legacy is the work that is still being created in the newly renamed Clive Yeomans Pottery.