



AN ALTERNATIVE GUIDE TO FRAGILE?
BY NATIONAL MUSEUM CARDIFF'S YOUTH FORUM

Welcome to this alternative guide to Fragile?

Brought to you by National Museum Cardiff's Youth Forum

We hope you enjoy reading and looking at this lovely publication.

We would like to thank all the museum staff that helped us with this little magazine as well as the wonderful **Emma Geliot** who worked with us on interview techniques and writing skills, and the font-crazy Liz Price from **Chipper Designs** who made our illustrations, designs and layout what we wanted them to be.

A special thanks to **Lowri Davies**, **David Cushway** and **Keith Harrison** for answering our questions, and to **Colwinston** and **GwirVol** for funding the project. And of course it would be nothing at all without the delightful **Youth Forum** who have worked so hard on this magazine and made something truly wonderful.

We would love to hear what you think about what you read and see here. Let us know your thoughts on twitter using #FragileCardiff and let us know what you thought of the Fragile? exhibition too.

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HELLO



KEITH HARRISON

WE ARE REALLY EXCITED ABOUT HIS WORK,
SO WE INTERVIEWED HIM OVER EMAIL...

Do you think of your work as fragile?

I think in many respects yes, the large scale of 'Mute', the potential sound from the 72 speakers in the soundsystem - enough for a stadium venue - working against the instability of raw clay make this work both a vulnerable and intimidating piece. This work, like others I've made, are not built to last as materials and equipment are forced up against each other. 'Mute' will potentially get louder as the clay breaks up due to the vibration of the speakers, which are themselves operating at the edge of their capabilities. It is a fragile state as to which element of the work goes first and I hope there is some tension created because of this.

Do you think ceramics effectively reflects modern day society?

I think clay is a material that is both ancient and modern. As ceramic it is one of the few manmade products to last many thousands of years, it has the capacity to survive a nuclear explosion and today it continues to technically evolve, being used to clad space shuttles, make knives, produce car engines and, on a micro level, in our hand held devices and computers. I

think of clay as very much the stuff of life that surrounds us at all moments and in the piece I've made for National Museum Wales it is employed variously in its raw state to stifle the speakers, clad the walls in fired and glazed ceramic and through the use of a piezo ceramic compound produce the high end sounds in the speaker horns. In a very literal sense the mirror finish of the gold tiles in 'Mute' will very accurately reflect the public that pass-

**'MUTE' WILL
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es around the work. On a broader level, if ceramics is to reflect society then for me aspects of contemporary life need to have the opportunity to collide with the material and see what happens. As the here and now is always changing then I would hope that this would keep things moving forward.

Why is it important to challenge preconceptions about ceramics?

Whilst I think it's important to challenge myself personally on a material, conceptual and technical level, whether the work has achieved a wider significance in challenging previous thinking about a discipline is probably more a decision made by external agencies; curators, critics and cultural institutions. I think it can be useful to have a critical stance on what has gone before and a lot of new work comes out of a rejection of what might constitute a fixed position, especially if it begins to resemble an orthodoxy or diktat.

I also think new insights can equally come out of not knowing the backstory, and therefore it is vital that people come to clay from other disciplines and have other histories. Probably what is most important is that people keep questioning and if necessary break the rules, consciously or unconsciously. Clay is plastic and has no real inherent form, it is moulded literally and metaphorically by its surroundings - physical, political, cultural, social and personal.

What are your musical influences?

Since going to see AC/DC at Birmingham Odeon in December 1979 and getting the

double album 'Out of the Blue' by ELO that same Christmas I've always been a regular concert goer, record buyer and radio listener with tastes ranging from metal to jazz, dub reggae, electronica, Northern

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Soul to lo-fi indie and grindcore. I have used some of these musical influences directly in my work, playing tracks on vinyl by Jah Shaka, Napalm Death, New Order and various Northern Soul artists as a time frame and soundtrack for works. In November 2013 I was fortunate to be able to work with Napalm Death in a live collaboration at the De La Warr Pavilion at Bexhill.

At the moment I am listening a lot to Swans, Kraftwerk, R. Stevie Moore, the latest Napalm Death release Apex Predator and, for the purposes of this show, jazz artists who have a trumpet on the cover of their albums. 6 music is my station of choice on the radio at home, in the car and down the studio.

You talk about your work as being an experiment – what do you find out or learn from each piece of work you make?

I think the work is as much a social experiment as a material exploration so I am increasingly interested in seeing what impact the work has on an audience as well as the physical testing of clay. In general what I learn from each piece is the way that work affects an audience in terms of threat, boredom, expectation and annoyance, sometimes separately but occasionally simultaneously. I think this is different for every piece and each new work has to operate on its own merits rather than using past knowledge.

I AM INCREASINGLY INTERESTED IN SEEING WHAT IMPACT THE WORK HAS ON AN AUDIENCE

I am not so interested in using previous pieces to attain technical perfection, of either making or destroying, although some aspects of a work need to be correct and require attention to detail in order that the less controllable elements are really apparent. I was really influenced by the painter Glenn Brown who said in a talk that if his work becomes too technically accomplished it is probably time to move on to a new challenge.

And does it matter if the 'experiment' doesn't work?

Generally I say no to this question as nothing happening is one of the possible outcomes from an experiment but when I am in the position of being an observer rather than an operator of the work I find I am much more affected by the audience reaction and can feel their disappointment or disaffection or disapproval. I try to hold on to the principle of taking a risk, and by being prepared to put the work out in front of an audience to see what happens constitutes some sort of success. There are numerous times when things haven't happened as expected and sometimes I don't know what to expect myself but I think it matters that the work is a genuine live experiment tested out in public and, as much as anyone else, I am there to see what happens. I'm not really interested in asking a question if I already know the answer.

What is your favourite place to have tea or coffee?

Where I live in Plymouth my favourite place to get a cup of coffee is the cafe at a bike shop called Rockets & Rascals, when I am in Birmingham City Centre on the way to or from visiting my family I try to grab a quick coffee at Faculty in Piccadilly Arcade off New Street.



Detail of artwork by Ella Claridge

ELLA CLARIDGE HAS BEEN WORKING WITH CLAY IN LLANOVER HALL

HERE'S HER BRIEF LOG ABOUT IT ALL

As part of my art projects in school I mostly did ceramics at Llanover Hall. At the start of my first art project, focussing on support for Pussy Riot during their imprisonment, I constructed a model Russian Orthodox shrine like the one in the Cathedral of Christ the Saviour.

I originally intended to make a model re-enactment of Pussy Riot's stunts in the building, however, I found out that it would take longer than I expected so I resolved to make another model for the topic. Since the topic stretches through themes of anti-authoritarianism, distortion of religion and feminism I had be-

gun looking through Modern Russian and Pre-Raphaelite artworks until I thought of using Malevich's "Taking in the Rye". It contains the social commentary on the mechanisation of man by authoritarian exploitation which Pussy Riot is against in Putin's Russia, perfect for my project.

For another half of the term I created a plaque based on that picture. I started by drawing outlines with pen on a wet clay slab, before carving in the designs. Once dried I then added coloured glazes before baking it in the kiln again. After baking, I then buffed it with wet clay, filling in the carved outlines.



INSPIRED BY KEITH HARRISON'S WORK AND HIS LOVE OF MUSIC, CARRIE LANGLEY WENT TO SPILLERS RECORDS TO FIND OUT MORE ABOUT THE VINYL REVIVAL

Inspired by Keith Harrison's work and his love of music, Carrie Langley went to Spillers Records to find out more about the vinyl revival.

Over the past ten years there has been a significant increase in the amount of people buying vinyl, with vinyl sales reaching over 1.2 million in 2014, the highest in two decades. But why buy a physical copy of an album when you can listen online for free? I went to visit Spillers Records in the Morgan Arcade in Cardiff to find out why it's time to dust off your dad's records and embrace vinyl as a format for the future.

Speaking to one of the shop's owners Ashli Todd, it is clear that the increase in people listening to vinyl is not just a fad. Despite the fact that record sales dropped to their lowest during the 1990s vinyl collectors never completely disappeared and the recent revival which has been happening since 2000 appears to show that vinyl is here to stay. It seems that in a digital age people are looking for the

"tangible nature" of a physical collection, something that you can physically sort through and keep.

WHY BUY A PHYSICAL COPY OF AN ALBUM WHEN YOU CAN LISTEN ONLINE FOR FREE?

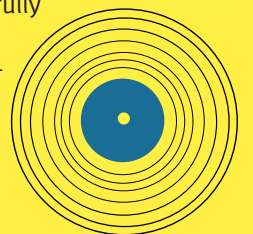
Talking to the customers, the main reason for choosing vinyl over downloads or CDs was the "listening process" involved. One music lover, George Godden, specified how listening to vinyl commands attention as it takes longer to set up and forces you to listen to the entire album as a whole, the way the artist intended. Ashli Todd agreed saying, "People respond to the concept of sitting down and listening from beginning to end", listening to music on vinyl provides a different experience to listening digitally.

Everyone I spoke to was extremely positive about the recent increase in the

amount of people buying vinyl. As Bethan Rees noted, "it's good for me because it means that more people are actually making records!". It appears as though Record Store Day (on the 18th April this year) has been extremely important in this revival of the format. Although it has been criticised for focusing only on one day of the year, more than one person stated that it was what got them back into vinyl, proving that it has made a difference.

IT SEEMS THAT VINYL IS SET TO REMAIN IN THE SHOPS FOR MANY YEARS TO COME

It seems that vinyl is set to remain in the shops for many years to come. In terms of overall sales it will never outstrip downloads, but it is successfully fighting off the CD with sales of the format dropping as vinyl sales rise. The main secret



of vinyl's success though is undoubtedly the passion of its collectors. Their unwavering enthusiasm for music has been the main driving force for the continuing success of vinyl and it is this that will ensure the format survives.

SO YOU WANT TO BE A RECORD COLLECTOR?

Here's five things you'll need if you're a complete novice (like me!):

1

A turntable.

But don't be fooled, the fancy, retro looking ones won't necessarily have the best sound quality. Spend your money wisely.

2

Your first album.

The best-selling albums on vinyl in 2014 were by Pink Floyd, Arctic Monkeys and Royal Blood but if you're looking to be a bit different you can always ask in a record shop for advice.

3

Someone to tell you how it works.

If you've never played vinyl before resist the urge to just go for it. Different records play at different rpms (revolutions per minute) so playing your records at the wrong speed could make your favourite artist sound like Mickey Mouse.

4

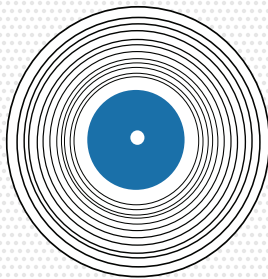
Ikea storage shelves.

According to the lovely customers of Spillers Records these are perfect for all your record storing needs, although you may want to build up your collection a bit first as these things can hold hundreds.

5

A good hour to just sit and listen.

The most important thing I've learnt from vinyl lovers is that listening to records is supposed to be an immersive experience. Take this opportunity to spend time enjoying the music you love.



WE ALSO INTERVIEWED DAVID CUSHWAY BECAUSE WE WERE FASCINATED BY HIS SMASHED CERAMICS...

Do you think of your work as fragile?

If you are asking me about the specific work 'Teapot' then no I do not consider it to be fragile; as a series of digital files it can be copied and potentially last forever and eternity. A perfect illustration of this is that I have just had a film damaged in the post that I sent to someone, as after all it exists as just a piece of plastic in DVD format, which can be a fragile material, however the issue was remedied by sending a web link to my website where the film can be watched.

The subject of the 'Teapot' film shows the potential fragility of ceramic as a material, but as the film rewinds and the teapot reforms it references the enduring nature of the ceramic object that is constantly recycled, remade and reused.

Do you think ceramics effectively reflects modern day society?

All, ceramics, or art for that matter reflect

modern day society as they are products of their time.

Why is it important to challenge preconceptions about ceramics?

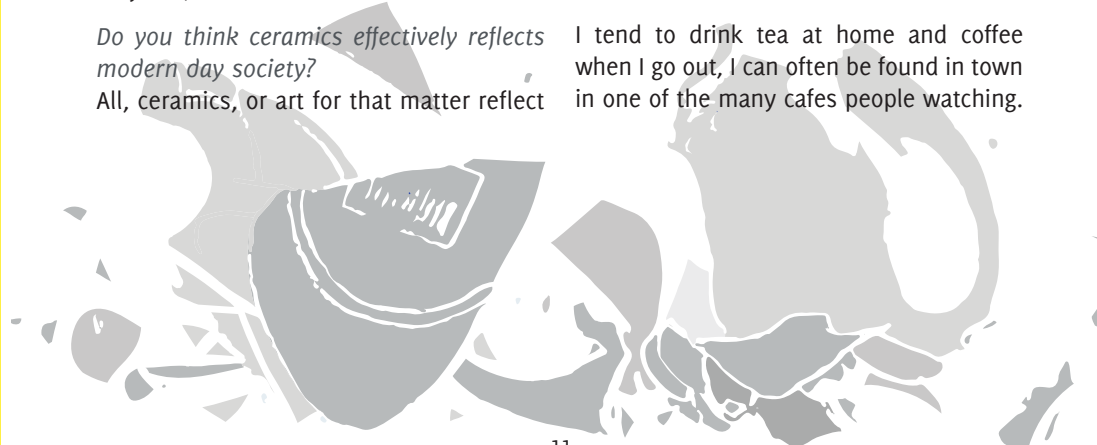
It is important to challenge preconceptions about anything otherwise the discourse does not move forward and simply stagnates.

What is the art work to you? The smashing of the object or the film at the end?

The smashing of the object and the recording of this reality is the process that enables me to create the finished artwork- the film.

What is your favourite place to have tea or coffee?

I tend to drink tea at home and coffee when I go out, I can often be found in town in one of the many cafes people watching.





MURDEROUS MANNINGS



Article by Lydia Griffiths | Illustration by Lydia Griffiths



The Staffordshire figures of Maria and Fredrick Mannings seem rather quaint and charming, however there is a dark and evil history behind the couple, who committed a murder and were hanged for their crime.

Maria was from Sweden and worked as a lady's maid when she moved to Britain. She met the handsome Patrick O'Connor but although he seemed a catch for the Swedish beauty, his incompetent proposals soon resulted in Maria marrying another man. Instead she married Fredrick Manning, a railway guard. The marriage was a stormy affair, so much so that Maria continued to see Patrick.

Patrick had agreed to rent a room in their Bermondsey home however he changed his mind, this angered the Mannings who sought revenge for his false promises.

They invited Patrick for a dinner one evening with the intent to kill him, Maria lured him into the kitchen where she shot him in the head with a pistol, Fred finished the job by beating his body with a crowbar. They buried Patrick under the floor boards in the kitchen, stole his money and went their separate ways. When Patrick was reported to be missing, suspicion towards the Mannings grew. The police found Patrick's

body in their kitchen and began to search for the wanted couple.

MARIA LURED HIM INTO THE KITCHEN WHERE SHE SHOT HIM IN THE HEAD WITH A PISTOL

Maria was caught trying to cash Patrick's money whereas Fred was arrested in Jersey. On trial in the Old Bailey they blamed one another for the murder but both were found guilty and sentenced to death. On the 13th November 1849 the couple were hanged together, thousands attended the public execution including Charles Dickens who commented in the Times, "I believe that a sight so inconceivably awful as the wickedness and levity of the immense crowd collected at that execution this morning could be imagined by no man, and could be presented in no heathen land under the sun."

The Mannings gained a celebrity status through their crimes, hence their presence in the Staffordshire figures collection. Maria was also of public interest as she was a very good-looking and well-dressed woman. The murder became known as the 'The Bermondsey Horror' and was the first time a husband and wife had been executed together since the 1700s.

LOWRI DAVIES MAKES GORGEOUS OBJECTS INSPIRED BY HER WELSH HERITAGE. WE SENT HER SOME QUESTIONS...

Do you think of your work as fragile?

My work looks very fragile, and people are often nervous holding the pieces, but actually, ceramic pieces made from 'bone china' are extremely strong. This is due to the structure of the clay and the way it is fired at extremely high temperatures.

Do you think ceramics effectively reflects modern day society?

To a degree, yes, but unfortunately there

are fewer ceramics degree courses being taught which leads to fewer graduates, and fewer young makers using the material. This means the cross-section producing ceramic work is much less. On a more positive note, clay and ceramics is seen and used increasingly in the fine art world, with examples certainly being seen more often in the field of sculpture.

Why is it important to challenge preconceptions about ceramics?

Clay and ceramics are essential to modern society. We eat and drink from ceramic items, we use them to wash, and we live our lives in buildings made of clay. It's a material that's taken for granted, having been used by man since time immemorial,

and our works will also be discovered and seen long after our time.

How does your Welshness or Welsh identity inform your work?

My background is a constant influence on my work although Welsh themes are more evident from time to time. The Welsh influences come from my upbringing, my family, childhood memories, environment, family history and inheritance – both oral and material inheritance.

Where is your favourite place to have tea or coffee?

I love popping out to a café or enjoying afternoon tea on special occasions. There's a lot of places in my neighbour-

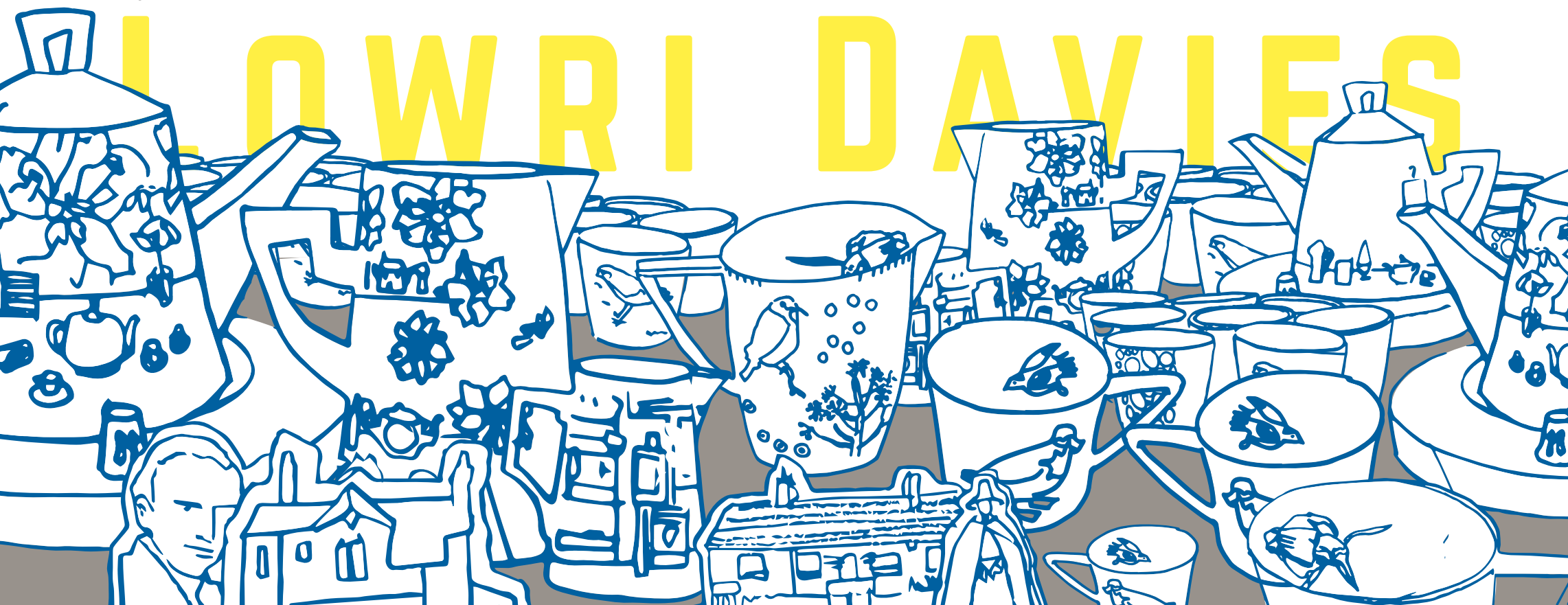
MY WORK LOOKS VERY FRAGILE, PEOPLE ARE OFTEN NERVOUS HOLDING THE PIECES

hood that make a good cup of tea, but not many that offer something special, or use interesting crockery.

I would love to visit Sketch restaurant in London to drink afternoon tea from David Shrigley's crockery, some day.

What is your #fragilefaves?

A room full of work by Jaime Hayon, and tea sets by Eric Ravillious.



BRONZE AGE CERAMICS & DEATH

LOOK CLOSELY AND THERE'S QUITE A BIT OF DEATH IN THE FRAGILE? EXHIBITION. MOIRA RICHARDS HAS WRITTEN ABOUT IT FOR YOUR READING PLEASURE.

What do you think of when you hear the words 'death' and 'ceramics' paired together? Perhaps you might think of the urn containing the ashes of Great Aunt Lillian that sits on top of your parents' mantelpiece? Or heirlooms your family inherited from relatives who have departed this world? It may surprise you, then, to think that people who lived thousands of years ago might respond to the question in similar fashion.

Archaeologists believe that ceramics during the Bronze Age held associations with the after-life, and played a role in multi-stage funerary processes. Pottery, such as urns and beakers, found in Bronze Age graves could have been incorporated into ritual ceremonies prior to a

person's inhumation. Furthermore, ceramics found with human remains can give us a glimpse into a person's life. We can learn a person's status in life and trade and commerce connections simply from examining ceramic grave goods.

CERAMICS FOUND WITH HUMAN REMAINS GIVE US A GLIMPSE INTO A PERSON'S LIFE

The Bronze Age in Britain spanned between 2500 and 850 BC. The Early Bronze Age (2400-1400 BC) marked an influx of Beaker style pottery into Britain from other parts of the continent, such as Spain, Germany, and the Netherlands, through trade and migration. Human settlement patterns have been traced through pollen samples, material culture, and more

pertinently, by burials. Beaker graves are commonly identified as being round barrows containing one individual and a smattering of grave goods.

Based on the evidence found in graves, archaeologists think the Early Bronze Age could have sparked the beginning of widespread changes in social patterns and beliefs in Central and Western Europe. Archaeological excavations of sites from the Mount Pleasant phase (2700 – 2000 BC) have revealed that people buried their dead and used simple Beaker pottery.

HIGH STATUS BURIALS COULD CONTAIN OBJECTS MADE OF GOLD, JET AND AMBER

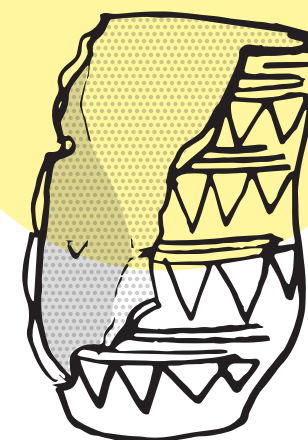
A beaker discovered in a grave in Merthyr Mawr, Bridgend, is a prime example of an Early Bronze Age Beaker. The Beaker dates from between 2250 and 1950 BC. It has an 'S-shape' profile of a wide lip, bulging centre, and a narrow base, which is typically seen on Early Bronze Age beakers. Triangular patterns inlaid along the bulge of the beaker would have been created using cords and combs. A missing fragment, which was not found with the burial, suggests that it could have been purposely broken before the interring of the body. The beaker also contains particles of bone ash, which may have belonged to a human. These curious discoveries could denote that there were complex belief systems about the relationships between the body and material goods after death.

The next Early Bronze Age phase, the Overton

phase (2000-1700 BC), overtly demonstrates a change in social dynamics and beliefs across different regions of Britain. During this period, there is a progression in the sophistication and variety of grave goods and clear social divisions within population groups. The opulence of graves matched the rank of the individual. High status burials could contain objects made of gold, jet, and amber, while other 'lesser' burials have been found with Food Vessels and collared urns.

The Bedd Branwen phase (1700-1400) marked yet another change in ideas about ceramic styles and mortuary methods. Beakers stopped being created as regional groups began adopting their own styles. Furthermore, with the emergence of a new type of urns, cremation became the most common funerary process.

The Early Bronze Age may seem like a long time ago, but have attitudes towards death and notions of funerary ritual really changed all that significantly?



#FRAGILEFAVES What is your favourite fragile thing you own? Is it a mug? A cat? A baby? Why is it your favourite? Does it have a story or special memories? Members of the youth forum, museum staff and people that worked with us on this magazine and the exhibition share their #fragilefaves right here! But we'd like to know yours too – so please share on twitter or instagram. Read more about these #FragileFaves on twitter, instagram and the Museum's blog.

Rachel Conroy



Anne Frost



Ashley McAvoy



Jennifer Evans



Sian Lile-Pastore



Carrie Langley



Sara Huws



Grace Todd



Catalena Angele



Heidi Evans



Moira Richards



Emma Geliot



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