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Fired up: the ancient art of ceramics celebrated at Gray's first communal wood firing.

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2022

This file contains a full-text copy of the original blog post and also a copy of the event poster.

Fired Up: The Ancient Art of Ceramics Celebrated at Gray's First Communal Wood Firing

By Clara Maurillon, Kevin Morris and Matthew Wilcock

Posted to RGView on 12 October 2022 - <https://www.rgu.ac.uk/rqview/student-experience/5435-fired-up-learn-the-ancestral-art-of-ceramics-around-gray-s-homemade-wood-fired-kiln>



Figure 1. Photograph of a wood-fired kiln.

Our Vibrant Campus event "Fired Up", taking place on Sunday 30th October 2022, will mark the first communal wood firing of Gray's School of Arts wood kiln built by staff and students. Gray's Technical Services Officer Kevin Morris and Lecturer Matthew Wilcock share more about their mission to bring our community together through their passion of ceramics.

"We were excited by the opportunity created by the Vibrant Campus initiative to finish a kiln building and firing project that has been ongoing prior to COVID-19. We thought our project would help animate and

bring together different parts of the campus after the pandemic. By its very nature, we feel wood firing forges cohesiveness and symbolizes the intrinsically communal and collaborative aspects of ceramics as an art form. This event not only celebrates the university, but Gray's School of Arts' own cultural vibrancy, being the only institution to offer ceramics provision in Scotland, let alone access to a wood-fired kiln!

"The development of ceramics practices at Gray's School of Art and more widely in Aberdeen is something the Head of School Libby Curtis and Aberdeen Ceramics Studio are continually advocating for. We feel it will have a positive impact on staff, students, alumni, and the wider creative community, introducing a wide audience to this ancient technique while reflecting RGU's values of curiosity, authenticity, approachability, collaboration, enterprise, and ambition.

"Both of us have an interest in wood firing partly due to its environmental benefits. For example, using a more sustainable fuel to fire the kiln helps reduce the amount of fossil fuels we consume. The characteristic earthen tones, ash deposits, burnt sienna flashings, natural glaze surfaces, and spontaneous effects, are something we embrace, as we thrive to have a more sustainable practice, continuing to build on and develop the use of natural materials in our work.

"We also believe in the importance of maintaining the knowledge and skill of firing kilns as a continuation of technology and tradition from ancient history into contemporary practice. The craft of making pottery has been declining in education for decades and it is crucial that, as the last university in Scotland to teach ceramics, we continue to pass that knowledge and passion on to future generations.

"Integral to both our practices is participation and engagement, valuing opportunities to continue to learn and work alongside others. We focus on the liberating aspects of being forced to get out of our comfort zone as makers and embrace more "limited" local materials, tools and ways of working sustainably. We constantly try to find new ways to be creative, connect and engage with others. These connections feel even more relevant after spending some time in self-isolation, during which artists were forced to consider new ways of working, maintaining connection, and embracing change.

"We would love for anyone with an interest to take part in this event, especially if they have never interacted with clay before! This is a chance to discover a new passion and an appreciation for craftspeople. The event of a wood firing has historically been considered a community event, it is still normal for potters in Japan to share a kiln and the work associated with firing it. We view our kiln in the same manner, when firing it, we are taking someone's creativity and turning it into a ceramic object that has the potential to be on this planet for tens of thousands of years.

"We hope that this will be the first of many wood firing events held on campus as well as an opportunity to support students at Grays School of Art through incorporating wooding into briefs and externally through the possibility of offering Masterclasses for the public."

Join Matthew and Kevin at Gray's School of Art on Sunday 30 October between noon and 21.00 to take part in their wood firing event. If you want to fully get involved, you can purchase clay kits from the Gray's School of Art Shop for 96p and drop off your clay pieces at Gray's School of Art Ceramic Department by Monday 24 October. This will give you the opportunity to fire your own small piece in the kiln.

Fired Up!

30th October 2022

**The first communal wood firing of Gray's
School of Arts wood kiln**

Clay kits can be purchased from the Grays School of Art Shop for 96p allowing you to make a small piece for the firing at home. All clay pieces should be dropped off at Gray's School of Art Ceramic Department by the 24th October.

