Secretary’s Notes

Council met at the British Museum on the 2nd October 2008. Unfortunately, council positions remained unfilled after the 2008 AGM and two further posts are due to become vacant in 2009. To date, there are no formal appointments to the Assistant Treasurer, Meetings Secretary or Co-editor positions (which became vacant in 2008). At the AGM in 2009, the positions of Secretary and Editor are also up for election. A review of all council positions will be undertaken shortly, and changes to the constitution concerning the length of posts are also proposed (please see the enclosed Note on the Constitution). However, these vacancies must be filled or those who remain on the council will struggle to cover each of these roles. Members are therefore strongly urged to consider joining the council at the 2009 AGM. Job descriptions for these roles can be obtained from the Secretary. Nominations for any of these positions need to be sent to the Secretary by 31st March 2009.

It was reported that the latest volume of Medieval Ceramics (volume 29) would be posted out to members who did not collect a copy in Siena. Volume 30 is progressing well and so far nine papers have been received for this edition. The editorial committee is pleased to report Helen Walker’s volume on Harlow is close to completion and will soon be released for sale. Progress is being made with the online bibliography, which had stalled for some months. Andrew Sage will deal with the backlog of entries, and strategies for maintaining the bibliography in the future are being discussed.

Victoria Bryant reported there has been an excellent response to the Professional Training Days, which were advertised to the MPRG and other professional and amateur groups. Since the council meeting, the first two sessions on post medieval pottery were held between the 17th and 20th November. Organized and run by David Barker and Miranda Goodby at the Potteries Museum and Art Gallery in Stoke-on-Trent, these were extremely successful and well attended.

The next council meeting will be held in January at the British Museum. Items for inclusion on the agenda should be addressed to the Secretary.

A Note from the President

The last Newsletter was produced before I had time to gather myself after our successful conference in Siena, so this is the first opportunity I have had to contribute. Do not be alarmed, this is not the first of a regular series of Presidential statements, but there are some things I wish to make public. I want principally to say thank you to Victoria Bryant, outgoing President, who has left the Group in a very healthy state. She has consistently looked forward to ways of addressing the issues that affect our discipline, especially in the areas of training and publicity, and it was easier for me to accept her invitation to stand for President in the knowledge that I would be leading a very active and committed Council. Victoria is very good at unifying points of view, and I am looking forward very much to working with Council members who are all enthusiastically working towards the same aims.

There is a lot to do of course. We are promoting several English Heritage funded professional training courses in the next twelve months. Indeed, the first has already been completed, at Stoke-on-Trent, and very successful it was too. We would also like to offer the more general training days that we have run in the past couple of years, but my own view is that we could perhaps usefully do this in association with other organizations. Both the Council for British Archaeology (CBA) and the Society of Museum Archaeologists (SMA) are involved in training to a variety of audiences, and I’m hopeful that we can work together to reach as many people as possible.

Victoria had also worked on a policy plan for the MPRG, and I know she is keen to see this concluded. It is my hope that we can develop this as the basis for a revised version of Maureen Mellor’s review ‘Medieval Ceramic Studies in England’. This time, however, I hope we can
extend it at least to include Scotland and Wales. We are currently discussing ways in which that might be achieved, and will keep you posted. Add to this the usual business of producing the Newsletter, publishing our journal and organizing a conference, and I know that we are all going to be very busy. As I say, I’m grateful for the energy and enthusiasm of Council.

We are still short of a few members however, so please consider putting yourself forward for election, you might find it fun!  

Duncan H. Brown, President

Proposed changes to the Constitution of the MPRG

As members will be aware, the agenda for the 2008 AGM did not include the proposed change to the Constitution suggested in Newsletter No.59. This would have allowed the President to stand for re-election for up to three more years. The reasoning was that past Presidents have been frustrated by the brevity of the term they have served, finding it difficult to conclude specific projects and initiatives. A case in point is the excellent training programme developed by Victoria Bryant, my predecessor. She has found herself having to continue managing aspects of this while the rest of us try to catch up with all that she achieved. Given a longer term in office she would doubtless have brought it all to the point where transition would have been seamless.

There is a second issue here too, in that the Group is running out of likely candidates to take on some of the more onerous positions on Council. We are all aware that the current situation in archaeology makes it hard for younger people coming into the profession to pursue a specialism in medieval ceramics. Few field units employ pottery specialists, and that isn’t likely to change in the current economic climate. Added to that is the problem that inexperienced ceramicists find it hard to make their way in a freelance capacity. Our training programmes are designed in part to address those problems, as was the support of an IFA bursary placement at Southampton. In the short term, however, we are finding that sometimes there are not enough candidates to take on certain roles in Council. We have, and have had, some very able officers who have been willing to continue beyond their constitutional term but have not been able to. Following discussions at our last meeting, therefore, we are proposing three changes to the MPRG Constitution.

The first is to allow the President to stand for re-election for a second term of up to three years, should they be willing to do so. The second is to allow the Secretary to stand for re-election for a second term of up to five years. The third is to allow the Editor(s) to stand for re-election for a term of up to five years. Each of those officers will have to give one year’s notice if they decide to stand down before completion of their second term. Other candidates to any of those posts are of course entitled to put themselves forward for election at any AGM during any term of office. Council is mindful of the circumstances that led to the first revision of the Constitution some fifteen or so years ago and have no intention of reaching a similar situation. That is one reason why one of the most important posts, that of Treasurer, will remain unaffected by these changes, but I hope we can count on your support for the changes we are proposing.

Council is very keen to receive feedback on our proposals prior to putting them forward at the 2009 AGM. Please contact your Secretary, Anne Boyle, with any comments you have.

Duncan H. Brown, President

Call for Papers:
Science and Ceramics; the MPRG one-day conference 2009

This meeting will be held at the headquarters of the British Geological Survey, Keyworth, Nottingham. The aim of this meeting is to consider how scientific approaches are changing the ways in which archaeological ceramics are analyzed and understood. We are inviting papers from speakers who have developed particular techniques, or who use them in the interpretation of ceramic assemblages. As usual, we are keen to attract international contributions to address those themes and participate in a wide-ranging and fully representative discussion. At present we are asking for papers of about 30 minutes duration. Please send a title and short description to: Chris Jarrett - cjarrett@pre-construct.com