

## A Porcelain Doll Maker's Week

Recently Heather Derkacz told us that she works with buckets, bleach, rusty wire and creepy crawlies as well as beautiful flowers. Well, this is quite close to the life of a porcelain doll maker! Tasks are very varied and it can be both a sociable activity, as I mix with pupils, fellow teachers and general members of the public, and also a very quiet activity when I spend long hours in my workroom alone.



to dry thoroughly each time before opening them.

### **Tuesday: Classes**

Tuesday sees the arrival of my regular class of adults. My oldest lady is in her eighties and has been making dolls with me for three years. She absolutely loves it and finds it a great relaxation. Each member of the class is working on a

different doll, some very large at 30ins and some small at 10ins. In the afternoon, it was out with the buckets and moulds again to pour two or three more fairies. The pupils paint firing was also placed in the kiln to fire at 750°.

### **Sunday: Visits**

For instance, this week began sociably as we received a visit on Sunday from another doll maker and her husband. Gillian Richards has a doll shop in Bristol and is a very renowned doll maker and teacher. She is in charge of the judging at competitions and over the course of lunch we discussed the British Doll Makers' Festival at Henley-on-Thames next May and an International competition in Heidelberg next April. I was delighted to learn that she would like me to judge at both of these events. I only qualified as a judge last year so did not necessarily expect this to happen.

### **Monday: Fairy Moulds**

On Monday morning I poured some fairy moulds for a Fairy Workshop I plan to run later in the month, for young people aged from eight to eighteen. Porcelain comes in jars as a liquid slip and is poured into plaster moulds. This is quite fiddly work and it took me all day to pour three fairies, waiting for the moulds

### **Wednesday: Firing**

On Wednesday morning the very delicate castings were cleaned up and soft fired at a temperature of 700°C. This makes them a little stronger so they can be cleaned very thoroughly for high firing. In the afternoon, the finishing touches were added to a special commission doll. dressed as a nun, in a habit as worn by the Sisters of Charity of Jesus and Mary in the 1930's. The last special commission I did was for a doll dressed in an exact copy of the dress, necklace, cap and gown worn by a young lady at her graduation, which her grandmother wanted to give her as a present. Both of these dolls involved interesting research and were quite different from the fantasy dolls in which I specialise. The evening was spent writing this article and one for "The Doll" magazine.

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## Thursday and Friday: Finishing

On Thursday the fairies were cleaned and prepared for the bisque firing which is 1225°C and on Friday when the kiln is opened, they can be polished ready for the young pupils to paint and decorate at the workshop. During the workshop the young people will not only paint the dolls but will dye chiffon for the skirt while the paint is firing and when the doll is assembled they will attach wings and make a wig for the fairy.

On other occasions, I give talks to local groups, travel to seminars and

workshops, have visiting students from other parts of the country who come to learn particular skills and, occasionally, make a doll myself. When I do this I make everything from the wig to the shoes and I particularly like dyeing my own fabrics, making silk paper etc. and creating machine embroidery with metallic threads. I teach all these skills in special Fantasy seminars.

### **Margaret Gibbs**

*If you would like to know more about porcelain doll making, please give me a call on 01993 832440*

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## Ordained Local Ministry in the Wychwoods

My husband, Mike, and I have recently returned from skiing, and were reminded of the two most important lessons: look down and make sure you know what your feet are doing; look up and see where you're going. This is also good advice for life. We need to concentrate on the task before us but at the same time we need to look up and see the way ahead. In September I became an ordained local minister, (OLM) in the Church of England. This involved three years of hard study and training. During the final year especially, this meant keeping my head down and getting on with the essays I still had to do. Thankfully, after my ordination, I felt that I could look up and see where I am going now. This does not mean that I will be moving, since local ministry is designed for those who are called to serve the community in which they live and work. Rather I am looking at different forms of ministry and seeing how they connect with the needs



of the communities in the Shipton benefice, both inside and outside the Churches, so that I can work out where my gifts can be used. Ordained local ministers always work in a team under the guidance of the Vicar so I can work

alongside others, learning from them and sharing my own expertise at the same time.

Of course, there are advantages and disadvantages to being local. My knowledge of the people and recent history of these villages is invaluable, especially now when things

seem to be changing so rapidly. As well as looking to the future it can be good to look back and see where we have come from. On the down side, the fact that people know me only too well can make it difficult for them to accept me in my new role. As the New Year begins, I am excited by the opportunities ahead and the wonderful support and co - operation that exists in these communities.

**Anne Hartley**