

Tony Viney - Stone bowls and vessels



As stone is everywhere in Worth, it was to quarrying that I naturally turned when I moved to Purbeck in 1976 and by chance my conversion to a new way of life coincided with a similar upheaval in the stone industry. Computers and diamond saws were beginning to transform the scene and it was relatively easy to leapfrog the traditional ways of working. I found that the new technology allowed me to cut stone thinner and produce new shapes and designs which were impossible to create with a mallet and chisel. I was interested in expanding the use of stone as furniture within the house rather than as simple building blocks. Stone saws cut in straight lines but I wanted to get away from the more traditional methods, so the tables I began to produce tended to be round rather than rectangular and many had designs etched or engraved into the top. From round tables it was but a small step to stone plates and bowls. These had previously tended to be heavy and funereal. I made mine as light and as nearly like a ceramic as I could. I was very pleased when a publisher tried to commission me to write a book on Dorset pottery because he clearly did not realise that my plates were cut from stone.

I have had a lot of fun inventing ways of getting the machines to do what I want them to do and 31 years on I still enjoy coaxing stone, which has all the unexpected surprises of any natural material to create the effect I have in

mind. Some of the surprises are not pleasant for as stone gets thinner unexpected faults can appear, but I still get excited when I cut away material and a beautiful new fossil structure suddenly appears. As time goes on, I use decoration more sparingly, for it can easily become over fussy and distract the eye from the various shells in the material. The decorative effects I still favour most are those which spring naturally from the process of manufacture. The rough indentations of diamond saw cuts can be just as pleasing to the eye as chiseled lines on hand worked stone. Alternatively many interesting decorative effects can be based on the different appearances of stone, between the parts that are highly polished surfaces and those less worked.

There is something timeless in being the first to discover a shell or a piece of bone which last saw the light of day 125 million years ago. I would like to think that the world will continue for as long again and someone will find my remains in a piece of calcified sediment but part of me fears I have squeezed in to the last few minutes of a drama just before the curtain finally fell.