

A new opportunity for potters at Sivam

A link between an Indian pottery and a UK university, set up by Traidcraft's Supplier Support team, is opening up new opportunities for traditional craft workers and British students.

Following work by Traidcraft's supplier support team, Rob Winter, ceramic technician and lecturer at Sunderland University, went to the Sri Sivam pottery, in Pondicherry, South India.

The purpose of the trip, made possible with support from the Indian Government and the university, was to help the potters develop new designs and strengthen the pottery's branding on its products.



But what he saw has convinced Rob that Sri Sivam has a lot to teach his students about traditional techniques of pottery-making and firing.

Now, there are hopes that an exchange programme can be set up which would take Sunderland students to India and bring master craftsmen from Sri Sivam to visit the university.

"Their skill base is fantastic and they have lots of things, like kiln-building, wood firing and production throwing, that I'm quite envious of from a craft pottery point of view," said Rob. "Handmade ceramic production on that scale is rare in the UK so giving students the opportunity to experience that would be a wonderful opportunity.

"And it would be equally valuable to get their craftsmen over here, learning from us and sharing their experience with students."

Rob was accompanied on the two-week trip by Sarah Gee, a final-year ceramics student and an experienced management consultant.

"Obviously, I was happy to contribute my management experience where it was useful but it was the practical pottery work that was so satisfying," said Sarah. "I learned a great deal from working with such a skilled team of people – and I hope to keep in touch."

Rob added: "I think it also helped that we are practitioners who understood the technical challenges involved – and were prepared to get our hands dirty."

"It was the experience of a lifetime – and one of the most rewarding things I've done. I think the relationship has a great deal to offer all of us."

Traidcraft Supplier Support Co-ordinator Monica Philbrick, who helped set up the trip said: "With the experience Rob now has, we believe he'll be a really useful source of technical information for other ceramics that we sell. It's great to have someone like him to refer to!"