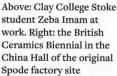
STOKING THE FLAMES

Over the past 10 years the British Ceramics Biennial has helped fuel the revival of The Potteries. Ahead of this year's edition, *Tristram Hunt*, director of the V&A and former MP for Stoke-on-Trent Central, assesses how ceramics are continuing to shape the city and outlines the challenges ahead







In Anna of the Five Towns, that small but perfectly formed masterpiece of life in The Potteries, Arnold Bennett describes the meaning of clay to the 'Bursley man'. 'He exists in it and by it; it fills his lungs and blanches his cheek; it keeps him alive and it kills him. His fingers close round it, as round the hand of a friend. He knows all its tricks and aptitudes; when to coax and when to force it, when to rely on it and when to distrust it. [...] Clay is always clay.'

The potters of Burslem, Stoke and Longton spent their working lives shaping clay. But, in turn, clay shaped the towns of Stoke-on-Trent (there are actually six). This 'rugged pot-making spot of earth', as Josiah Wedgwood called it, has been moulded and remoulded over the centuries by the mingling of clay and coal, flint and bone.