

William Moorcroft, Potter

Individuality by Design

Jonathan Mallinson



I feel there is a need for interesting, individual things. Not extreme, not fashionable, but things that will be the outcome of careful thought, things built with the spirit of love in every part of them.

William Moorcroft

WILLIAM MOORCROFT, POTTER

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For Beatrice Moorcroft

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Additional resources including images of pottery and original documents are available online at: <https://doi.org/10.11647/OBP.0349#resources>

Abbreviations

AJ	<i>The Art Journal</i>
BIF	British Industries Fair
BIIA	British Institute of Industrial Art
BPMF	British Pottery Manufacturers' Federation
CAI	Council for Art and Industry
DIA	Design and Industries Association
DOT	Department of Overseas Trade
PG	<i>The Pottery Gazette and Glass Trade Review</i>
PGR	<i>The Pottery and Glass Record</i>
RFR	<i>A Roger Fry Reader</i> (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996)
V&A	Victoria & Albert Museum
WM Archive	William Moorcroft, Personal and Commercial Papers, Stoke-on-Trent City Archives, SD1837

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To understand William Moorcroft the potter, it is necessary to see a lot of his pottery. His work is represented in museum collections around the UK, and the holdings of the Cannon Hall Museum, the Fitzwilliam Museum, the Moorcroft Museum, the Potteries Museum and Art Gallery, and the V&A provide a good range of examples. No less helpful has been the opportunity to discover (and at times examine) objects via the online archives, catalogues or sales previews of auction houses the world over, and I am particularly grateful to those who have willingly responded to requests for further details or photographs of individual pieces: Fiona Baker, Hayley Dawson, Michael Jeffery, Bill Kime, George Kingham, James Lees, Jo Lloyd, John Mackie, Gemma Sanders. I offer my sincerest thanks, too, to many collectors, dealers and experts in the decorative arts for their encouragement and support, and their invaluable assistance in locating examples of Moorcroft's work to illustrate this book: Jeremy Astfalck, Michael Bruce, Alison Davey, Steve Doherty, Stephen Elliott, Wayne Hopton, Lorraine Leightell, Andrew Muir.

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It is self-evidently true that without the energy and vision of Richard Dennis the work of many British artist potters would still be largely unknown. His landmark exhibition of William Moorcroft's pottery at the Fine Art Society in 1973, and the catalogue (with its introduction by Paul Atterbury), rekindled interest in a potter whose work had been lost from view in the decades following his death. The pioneering book which followed (with additional commentary by Atterbury) illustrated the extraordinary range of his output, and put this pottery permanently on the map. I, like many others, have benefited greatly from this work, but I owe as much to the man as to the book. From his first positive response to a speculative email asking if he would be willing to discuss my early thoughts on Moorcroft's pottery, through many visits to his home where he and Sally Tuffin were so warmly welcoming, he has given unfailing encouragement as this project has progressed; I thank him for his sensitivity and open-mindedness, and for much else besides.

I am indebted, too, to Walter Moorcroft's four daughters—Jean Potter, Sheila Moorcroft, Sara Morrissey, and Lise B. Moorcroft, who, midway through this project, gave me permission to work on an extensive archive of family papers covering the whole of William Moorcroft's career, and who, since that time, have been constant in their support. Without their generosity and trust, this book would have focussed simply on the pottery and its public reception in Moorcroft's lifetime; the evidence of the archive has added countless insights into the potter and the man. This invaluable resource has since been deposited in the Stoke City Archives, under the filename 'Personal and Commercial Papers of William Moorcroft', where its survival is assured for future generations.

If members of the Moorcroft family were for many years the custodians of this archive, its very existence is due to William's daughter, Beatrice, who gathered together in the early 1980s material accumulated during her father's career, from his earliest years as designer for J. Macintyre & Co. Ltd. to the end of his life: extensive correspondence and other documents relating to the two major institutional relationships in his life; countless letters written to him from friends, family, retailers, suppliers, owners of his work; diaries and notebooks, drafts and jottings relating to his activity and vocation as a potter. Without her foresight, these extensive primary sources might easily have been lost. It was her ambition to write a book about her father, not a memoir—neither she (nor her brother) had direct knowledge of the first thirty years of her father's career, and she understood the hazards of reminiscence—but a history based on documentary evidence and her own additional research. Her book was never written,

but her prescient collection of all this material made possible the writing of this one. To her, the debt is incalculable.

In 1934, Moorcroft confided to the publisher F. Lewis his hope that a book entitled 'William Moorcroft—Potter' might 'someday' be published, to which Lewis responded enthusiastically: 'I am definitely interested as this seems a book which [...] should go well.' I am immensely grateful to Open Book Publishers for picking up where F. Lewis left off nearly ninety years before, and for their faith in this book and its author. From my very first approach, Alessandra Tosi has been wholly supportive of the project, and at every stage of the publication process she and her team have worked with quite exceptional efficiency, sensitivity and collaborative spirit. Her own suggestions have led to countless improvements, and I have benefited greatly from the expertise of Jeevan Nagpal, Alex Carabine, Melissa Purkiss, and Laura Rodríguez. OBP are the perfect vehicle for this book, and their guiding principles are in complete sympathy with William Moorcroft's own. In their commitment to the dissemination of knowledge as freely and widely as possible, they enact his ambition to bring within the reach of many the beauty of his pottery, and they echo his belief that business is as much about service as it is about financial gain. I am most grateful to Caroline Warman, whose own publications first introduced me to OBP, and whose almost instantaneous (and unconditionally positive) reply to my enquiry about their possible interest was the final defining moment in this project.

It is no mere trope of Acknowledgements to say that this book owes its very existence to these particular contributions; to benefit from one may be regarded as good fortune, to benefit from all looks like destiny. I owe a debt of gratitude beyond words, however, to my wife, Margaret, co-excavator, fellow note-taker, and first reader of every draft of every chapter, my companion on every journey of discovery, my consultant and confidant. This project has been a dream shared from the outset; it could not have been realised alone.

Introduction:

William Moorcroft, Potter

William Moorcroft (1872–1945) was one of the most celebrated potters of the early twentieth century. His work was admired by collectors and connoisseurs of ceramics, exhibited in museums, reviewed in leading art journals, and awarded the highest honours at World’s Fairs over a period of more than thirty years. His decorative and functional wares were stocked by some of the most prestigious retail outlets in the world, from Thomas Goode & Co. in London to Eaton’s in Toronto, from Tiffany in New York to Rouard’s gallery A la Paix in Paris, and his long collaboration with Liberty’s was an unprecedented and highly creative association of innovative designer and progressive retailer. His earliest work, launched under the title Florian Ware, was rated a ‘chemical and artistic triumph’,¹ and forty years later examples of his tableware would be singled out as models of ‘undatedly perfect’ design.² He was one of only a handful of potters at the time to hold a Royal Warrant, and at his death he was said to be the equal of any potter since Josiah Wedgwood.³ In a career which extended from the final years of the Victorian age to the end of the Second World War, a period of political upheavals, economic crises and conflicting aesthetics, artistic acclaim was matched by commercial success.

This was the achievement of a potter who worked simultaneously as artist, chemist and manufacturer. Moorcroft spent the first sixteen years of his working life as Manager of the Ornamental Pottery department at the forward-looking firm of James Macintyre & Co., Ltd., where he was responsible for the design and production of both functional and decorative wares. Under his control, this soon became one of the most renowned art potteries of its time. When Macintyre’s closed the department in 1913, Moorcroft (with financial support from Liberty’s) established his own pottery from where he continued to enhance his reputation as a ceramic artist, even in the challenging conditions of wartime and post-war Depression. In both these phases of his career, he designed form and ornament for all the wares produced; he created his own distinctive decorative technique, and developed a unique palette of underglaze

1 A.V. Rose, ‘Florian Art Pottery’, *China, Glass and Pottery Review*, XIII:5 (December 1903), n.p.

2 N. Pevsner, ‘Pottery: design, manufacture and selling’, *Trend in Design* (Spring 1936), 9–19 (p.19).

3 ‘William Moorcroft’, *Pottery and Glass Record [PGR]* (October 1945), p.21.

colours; he oversaw the employment and training of his decorators; and he was responsible for the promotion and sale of his work. This combination of roles was without equivalent.

Moorcroft is most often classified among art potters, a category used to describe makers of largely decorative wares, active roughly between the years 1870 and 1920. It is a broad category, both chronologically and conceptually. It includes the craft studios of large firms such as Doulton, Minton or Wedgwood, independent factories such as Linthorpe or Della Robbia, and smaller enterprises focussed on the work of individual potters such as William de Morgan, Bernard Moore or William Howson Taylor. Art pottery covered a wide range of decorative styles, from the refined low-relief ornament of Marc-Louis-Emmanuel Solon's *pâte-sur-pâte* studio at Minton, to the charming sgraffito scenes by Hannah Barlow at Doulton Lambeth; from the dramatic glaze effects of Howson Taylor at his Ruskin Pottery, to the stylized lustre designs of Pilkington's Royal Lancastrian ware. But it was unified by its principal focus on decoration, be it that of an artist/decorator, or of a ceramic chemist; the vessel itself served implicitly as a canvas, some potters even decorating blanks supplied by other firms. It was also an essentially collaborative enterprise, its 'authorship' generally attributed to the firm which produced it. If individual names were associated with objects, it was most often the name of the decorator, artist or chemist, who might initial or otherwise identify their work.

In terms of organisation and aesthetic, Moorcroft clearly had much in common with the manufacturer of art pottery. Both his department at Macintyre's and his own works at Burslem were characteristic of many industrial workshops, employing a team of throwers, turners, and decorators to assist in the making of the wares. And yet, for all that, Moorcroft's practice differed in significant ways. Whereas the design of most art pottery was essentially collaborative, Moorcroft designed the complete object, form, ornament and colour together. And although he did not make the wares himself, he was at the centre of production in ways which had few parallels in art potteries: he drew the decoration template for each shape, he created the oxide mixtures for his colours, and, in the case of his flambé wares, he personally fired the kiln. This investment in his work would soon be noted. He was rapidly distinguished from the corporate identity of Macintyre's and recognised as a name in his own right, and after 1913, when he was working for himself, his pottery was as often attributed to him as an individual as it was to the firm in whose name he operated. At the time of his death, he was even classified as a 'studio potter'.⁴ This term was associated, from the 1920s particularly, with a quite different concept of pottery, its principal emphasis falling on the pot as a thrown vessel (rather than as a decorated one), the creation of a craftsman working alone and independently rather than the result of more collaborative enterprise. The designation did not imply that William Moorcroft fell squarely into that category, but

4 Ibid.

it did suggest what distinguished him from the generality of art potters; Moorcroft did not simply decorate ceramic vessels, he expressed himself in clay.

What made Moorcroft stand out too, though, was not just the individuality of his art, but also his commercial success. Many highly regarded art potteries closed in the opening decades of the twentieth century, from Della Robbia (1906) and de Morgan (1907) to Howson Taylor (1935) and Pilkington (1938). Even at the end of the nineteenth century, the heavily subsidised output of Doulton's Lambeth studio was described in an obituary of Henry Doulton as 'one of the few sacrificial tributes of Commerce to Art',⁵ and thirty years later the studio potter Reginald Wells would conclude (wearily): 'do not imagine there is a living in so-called artistic pottery—*there is not*.'⁶ Throughout the 1920s, though, even as the country began to drift into a post-war depression, Moorcroft's achievement was noted:

In Mr Moorcroft the present generation has an artist and a potter, who is practising successfully in commerce. The combination is remarkable, for it is one that is seldom met with.⁷

The emphasis is significant; he was not regarded as a manufacturer in the business of making pottery, he was recognised as an artist potter whose work had wide appeal. And this corresponded exactly to how Moorcroft saw himself. In the face of constant changes in taste and market conditions, he remained true to his artistic principles, often speaking out against designs which merely followed the trend of the moment. In a letter to *The Times* at the end of the 1925 Paris Exhibition which introduced a new 'modernity' to industrial design, he affirmed that artistic integrity, not fashion, was the route to commercial success. 'If we are to succeed in the markets of the world', he wrote, 'it will be mainly by being ourselves'.⁸ His survival, even in the depths of the Depression, would be evident vindication of that belief.

This success was due, too, to the range and quality of the wares he produced. Moorcroft was more than just an art potter, and his market was not simply a market of collectors; he produced pottery both functional and decorative, from modestly priced tableware to exhibition pieces which commanded prices comparable to those of the most celebrated studio potters. But all were produced by the same means, to the same standard, in a range of prices affordable by customers across a broad social spectrum; in Moorcroft, commercial astuteness and artistic integrity came together. As one critic noted in the 1920s, even a modest piece of Moorcroft's pottery is 'regarded by thousands of people as a priceless possession'.⁹ His functional wares were in competition with

5 *The Graphic* (11 December 1897), quoted in D. Eyles, *The Doulton Lambeth Wares* (1975); rev. L. Irvine (Shepton Beauchamp: Richard Dennis Publications, 2002), p.134.

6 R. Wells, 'The Lure of Making Pottery', *The Arts and Crafts* (May 1927), 10–13 (p.13).

7 'Pottery and Glass at the Paris Exhibition of Decorative Arts', *Pottery Gazette and Glass Trade Review* [PG] (September 1925), p.1398.

8 *The Times* (7 October 1925).

9 PG (September 1925), p.1398.

those produced by much larger, mass-producing factories, and successfully so. His Powder Blue tableware would be the most striking example of this, hailed as an icon of modern design more than twenty years after its creation, and which continued to sell well even when the quite different aesthetic of Clarice Cliff was dominating the market. It was a model of industrial design and commercial success, yet it was made, significantly, by hand; in this respect, too, Moorcroft's work spanned the worlds of the manufacturer and the artist.

It was this fusion of roles which clearly distinguished Moorcroft from (and for) his contemporaries, but it has led, paradoxically, to his relative neglect today. Being neither an individual potter nor a designer for mass production, he inevitably falls outside the scope of critical studies both of craft pottery and of industrial design.¹⁰ He is included in one reference work on art pottery, but his pottery is examined in entries on J. Macintyre & Co. and W. Moorcroft Ltd., thereby implying corporate authorship of the pottery produced.¹¹ In another study, his designs from the 'Art Deco' period are discussed under the name 'Moorcroft', in a section devoted to 'Established Factories'.¹² In only one book is his work considered under his own name.¹³

This perspective is significant, and it has informed other accounts of Moorcroft's work. He has been situated in a group of artist potters 'concerned about running an efficient pottery with a marketable, profitable product',¹⁴ and has been attributed with the ambition to create a 'successful international commercial art pottery business'.¹⁵ Moorcroft's close personal involvement in the design and production of his pottery has been similarly evaluated from a perspective of business management. One study characterises him as an 'autocrat',¹⁶ and another, while conceding his accomplishments at the time, considers his organisational model 'detrimental to the continued and future success of the business'.¹⁷ If his contemporaries saw him as 'a manufacturer, but also an artist',¹⁸ it is as a manufacturer that he is principally considered today. In consequence, his pottery is implicitly construed as a trading commodity, and his enduring achievement situated not in the works he made, but in the firm he established in 1913, and from which pottery continues to be produced.¹⁹ The name 'Moorcroft'

10 He is not discussed in E. de Waal, *20th Century Ceramics* (London: Thames & Hudson, 2003), and there are just the briefest references in A. Casey, *20th Century Ceramic Designers in Britain* (Antique Collectors' Club, 2001), P. Todd, *The Arts and Crafts Companion* (New York: Bullfinch Press, 2004), and T. Harrod, *The Crafts in Britain in the 20th Century* (Yale: Yale University Press, 1999).

11 V. Bergesen, *Encyclopaedia of British Art Pottery 1870–1920* (London: Barrie & Jenkins, 1991).

12 P. Atterbury, 'Moorcroft': in A. Casey (ed), *Art Deco Ceramics in Britain* (Antique Collectors' Club, 2008), pp.74–78.

13 J.A. Bartlett, *British Ceramic Art 1870–1940* (PA: Schiffer Publishing Ltd., 1993).

14 G. Clark, *The Potter's Art: A Complete History of Pottery in Britain* (London: Phaidon, 1995), p.129.

15 R. Prescott-Walker, *Collecting Moorcroft Pottery* (London: Francis Joseph Publications, 2002), p.32.

16 P. Atterbury, *Moorcroft: A Guide to Moorcroft Pottery, 1897–1993* (Shepton Beauchamp: R. Dennis & H. Edwards, 2008), p.32.

17 Prescott-Walker, op. cit., p.33.

18 *The New Witness* (26 February 1914), p.540.

19 The story of Moorcroft's firm after his death in 1945 has been told in different ways. In addition to the books of Atterbury and Prescott-Walker, see also Walter Moorcroft, *Memories of Life and Living*

has taken on a generic force, and William Moorcroft's identity has been absorbed, paradoxically, by the Company which bears his name. One writer has referred to his pottery as 'old Moorcroft',²⁰ while another has conflated the firm's entire production into one single entity: 'There is no such thing as 'old Moorcroft' or 'new Moorcroft', just Moorcroft.'²¹ It is an ironic fate for a potter who came to prominence through the force of his individuality.

This construction of a corporate identity is quite consistent with the model of many art potteries such as Della Robbia or Pilkington, whose designers often worked to a particular house style, or whose collaborative mode of production implied a more commercial product. Indeed for many, only pottery created by a single craftsman can have the personal expressiveness of an art object. But to see Moorcroft in this light is to make assumptions about his practice and priorities inconsistent with his reputation at the time, and which sit uncomfortably with his conception of pottery as a vehicle for self-expression. Self-evidently, his contemporaries could have had no conception of Moorcroft as the originator of a firm which would survive beyond his time; but nor did they consider him simply as a manufacturer. Even the British Pottery Manufacturers' Federation (BPMF) would explicitly categorise him as an artist, recognising in him quite different priorities from theirs, and when, in an obituary, he was likened to Josiah Wedgwood, it was (clearly) not Wedgwood the business man who was evoked, but Wedgwood the potter:

By the death of William Moorcroft, the art of pottery has lost a truly great exponent. In his mastery of the craft, as potter, painter and chemist, he was probably the equal of any potter since the days of the first Josiah Wedgwood. All his work was strikingly original.²²

This book sets out to recover William Moorcroft. It is not the first chapter of a longer narrative, it is the story of a potter whose ambition was simply to be himself, individual by design, and whose success, artistic and commercial, would be founded on that.

(Shepton Beauchamp: Richard Dennis Publications, 1999); N. Swindells, *William Moorcroft: Behind the Glaze. His Life Story 1872–1945* (Burslem: WM Publications Ltd., 2013); and three books by H. Edwards (aka Fraser Street): *Moorcroft: The Phoenix Years* (Essex: WM publications, 1997); *Moorcroft: Winds of Change* (Essex: WM Publications, 2002); *Moorcroft: A New Dawn* (Essex: WM Publications, 2006).

20 Prescott-Walker, op. cit., p.38.

21 Swindells, p.193.

22 PGR (October 1945), p.21.

PART I

MAKING A NAME

1. 1897–1900: The Making of a Potter

1. Background and Education

William Moorcroft was born in 1872. He was the son of a ceramic artist, Thomas Moorcroft, Chief Designer at E.J.D. Bodley's, which was one of the leading potteries in Burslem. Years later, Moorcroft paid tribute to the formative influence of both his parents and to 'their endeavour to surround their children with all things beautiful and elevating'.¹ This childhood idyll, though, was short-lived. In May 1881, Moorcroft's mother died, aged thirty-two, leaving his father to care for William and three brothers, two sisters having died in their infancy. Thomas employed a housekeeper, whom he married in 1884, but he himself died just nine months later, in 1885, aged thirty-six. Moorcroft was not quite thirteen.

If his parents had sown the seeds of artistic sensitivity, Moorcroft's formal training helped them flourish. Burslem was at the centre of progressive art education in the Potteries. The Burslem School of Art, which had enjoyed a brief existence from 1853–56, reopened in 1869 as part of the Wedgwood Memorial Institute, the result of energetic promotion by William Woodall, secretary of the organising Committee. The Institute housed Schools of Art and Science, a public library, lecture venue, and exhibition space. It was a cultural centre created for the people of Burslem, and its intention was to educate and inspire manufacturers, designers and the general public alike. It benefited from generous public subscription, not least from Woodall himself, and from Thomas Hulme, a member of the Institute's Technical Instruction Committee. Such support was crucial at a time when government funding was minimal, and the success of regional initiatives depended almost entirely on local patronage.

In Moorcroft's day, the Burslem School of Art was one of the most forward-looking Schools in the country. This was in part due to its Principal, George Theaker, formerly a teacher at the Lambeth School of Art, whose collaboration with Henry Doulton in the 1870s was one of the earliest and most successful examples of an art school training designers for industry. Theaker was an innovative teacher, taking students beyond the rigid study of historical ornament which characterised the government's design

1 'Potters of Today. No.9 Mr W. Moorcroft', *Pottery and Glass Record* [PGR] (1923), 656–58 (p.657).

syllabus, and encouraging life and landscape drawing. His impact was strengthened by the support of Woodall, Chairman of the Technical Instruction Committee and, throughout the 1880s and 1890s, M.P. first for Stoke-upon-Trent, and then for Burslem and Hanley. Woodall used his contacts and influence to bring London speakers to the Institute (including William Morris in 1881), helping to create a vibrant cultural centre that was outward-looking in its activities. Of particular significance was Woodall's membership of the Royal Commission on Technical Instruction, whose report of 1884 concluded that Schools of Art were failing in their responsibility to train industrial designers by placing too much emphasis on the academic study of ornament. Woodall shared the views of Morris and his followers that designers should understand the properties of the material for which they were designing, and he was committed to the establishment of practical science classes in the School. In this he reflected the progressive thinking of A.H. Church, first professor of chemistry at the Royal Academy, whose Cantor lectures, delivered at the Royal Society of Arts in 1880, were significantly entitled 'Some points of contact between the scientific and artistic aspects of pottery'. And he attracted some of the foremost ceramic chemists as teachers: William Burton, who would soon play a defining role in the creation of art pottery at the newly established Pilkington's Tile Factory, taught at the Institute from 1887 to 1891; and Henry Watkin, one of the first to obtain a Diploma in ceramic chemistry at the City and Guilds of London Institute, gave classes in the School of Science. These were singled out for praise in the Committee's report of 1895:

It was a matter of congratulation that the pottery class maintained its prestige and its capable teacher [...]. It was, however, a matter of regret that the facilities the classes afforded should be taken advantage of by so few students.²

It was evidently exceptional at the time to attend this class; Moorcroft, however, was one who did. Having re-enrolled at the Institute in the autumn of 1886, he attended classes in the Schools of both Science and Art for the next nine years.

Moorcroft's technical instruction was complemented by equally formative training at the Crown Works, where Bodley had found him work after he left school in 1886. During these apprenticeship years he acquired all the basic skills of potting, and by 1889 he was both decorating and designing. Bodley's new Art Director was Frederick Rhead, an experienced designer who had trained in the sophisticated decorative technique of *pâte-sur-pâte* with Marc-Louis-Emmanuel Solon at Minton in the 1870s, before moving to Wedgwood in 1878 where he worked closely with Thomas Allen. By 1891, Moorcroft may well have expected to make his career at the Crown Works, but it was not to be, as Bodley went bankrupt in early 1892. Times were precarious for pottery designers; jobs were scarce, the work was poorly paid, and security depended entirely on the commercial fortunes of the manufacturer. Rhead joined the (short-lived)

² Wedgwood Institute Burslem: Schools of Science, Art and Technology, Twenty-seventh Annual Meeting, 13 March 1895, p.2.

Brownfield's Guild Pottery Society, Ltd., set up in 1892 on the lines of C.R. Ashbee's Guild of Handicraft, and Moorcroft found work as a designer at the Flaxman Art Tile works of J & W Wade, which made majolica, transfer-printed tiles, and hand-decorated art tiles and pottery. On 13 March 1895, Edward Taylor, the forward-looking Principal of the Birmingham School of Art and (soon-to-be) co-founder of the Ruskin Pottery with his son, William Howson Taylor, was the invited speaker on Prize Day at the Burslem School; the Head of one pioneering School recognised a kindred spirit in another. Taylor paid tribute to Woodall and Hulme, whose enlightened vision and generosity provided unique facilities at the Institute, enabling the teaching of design as a practice, and encouraging a spirit of inquiry and innovation:

[...] I am glad to see from your prospectus that you have also such technical classes as will tend to link the work of the school with the industries of the town [...] these special classes [...] should be of the nature of art and science laboratories for students, in which research and experiment should be the main feature, and not the mere imparting of present trade tradition.³

This was Moorcroft's last official event as a student at the Institute, but Taylor's emphasis on the value of experiment was one which he would take with him throughout his career.



Fig. 1 Moorcroft in the mid-1890s. Photograph. Family papers. CC BY-NC

3 Ibid., p.12.

In 1895, Moorcroft was enrolled at the National Art Training School in South Kensington. He followed classes on ornament by Lewis Day, one of the leading designers of the time, and studied ancient and modern pottery at the South Kensington Museum. The course qualified graduates of the School to teach in the provincial schools of art, but it provided little practical training in industrial design, unlike the more progressive Central School, founded in 1896 to 'encourage the industrial application of decorative art'. Looking back on his very brief spell as Director of the Royal College of Art (as the School would be re-named from 1896), Walter Crane described the institution he found, just two years after Moorcroft's departure, as a 'sort of mill in which to prepare art teachers', and its curriculum as 'terribly mechanical and lifeless'.⁴ In an article published in the *Pottery Gazette* little more than three years after Moorcroft's graduation,⁵ Louis Bilton (a ceramic artist at Doulton, Burslem), expressed regret that few of its graduates were either equipped or inclined to practise their art in industry. Most would either 'drift away into the crowd of struggling picture painters', or produce designs neither 'suitable for reproduction commercially, or even practical working patterns'. But Moorcroft was not such a one. He may have obtained his Art Teaching Certificate, but within a few months of his return to Burslem he began the work of a ceramic designer for which he had long been preparing. The poor relationship of manufacturers and designers would be a recurrent topic of discussion throughout Moorcroft's career, but in his own case he could not have found a firm more sympathetic to the progressive and enlightened design education from which he had benefited, a firm which numbered among its Directors or former Directors, William Woodall, Thomas Hulme and Henry Watkin. The firm was James Macintyre & Co., Ltd.

2. James Macintyre and Co., Ltd.

First established by W.S. Kennedy in 1838 as a manufacturer of artists' palettes, door furniture, and letters for signs, the company moved to the Washington Works in 1847. Macintyre, Kennedy's brother-in-law, joined in 1852, and in 1854 became its sole proprietor, employing Thomas Hulme as his manager; in 1863, he took William Woodall (his son-in-law) and Hulme into partnership. After Macintyre's death in 1868, Woodall and Hulme expanded its production of largely functional items to include tableware, advertising ashtrays, commemoratives, household fittings, tiles, chemical and sanitary wares.

Woodall was one of the most progressive manufacturers in the Potteries. Trained as a gas engineer, and formerly Chairman of the Burslem and Tunstall Gas Company, he brought business acumen, rather than experience as a potter, to the industry. He

4 Walter Crane, *An Artist's Reminiscences* (London: Methuen, 1907), p.457.

5 Louis Bilton, 'Some notes on the decoration of pottery', *Pottery Gazette and Glass Trade Review* [PG] (February 1900), 205-07 (p.207).

understood the need for a skilled and educated workforce, hence his commitment to art education; but he was a pioneer, too, in the reform of working conditions, being the first to introduce an eight-hour working day in the Potteries. It was entirely consistent with his exemplary relationship with his workforce, that they should present him in 1899 with an album of staff photographs, 'a small token of gratitude for the many benefits received at your hands'.⁶ Hulme retired as Managing Director when Woodall entered parliament in 1880, but he kept a financial interest in the firm. A new partnership was formed, first with Thomas Wiltshaw and then, in 1887, with Henry Watkin, who had worked at Pinder Bourne in Nile Street. Other Directors were Gilbert Redgrave, who, like his father Richard Redgrave, worked in the Department of Education, and had served as Secretary to the Royal Commission; and three other members of the Woodall family, all with professional backgrounds in the gas industry: William's two brothers, Henry and Corbet Woodall, and Corbet's son, Corbett W. Woodall.

Shortly after the arrival of Watkin, the firm began production of porcelain insulators and switchgear for the new electricity industry. In 1893, a Limited Company was formed, and it embarked on a programme of expansion, with significant personal investment from the Directors. In addition to its development of electrical porcelain, it established an art pottery studio to complement its production of tableware and door furniture. Its beginnings were troubled. Minutes of Directors' meetings in 1893 and 1894 record the short-lived careers of two designers, Mr Rowley and Mr Scaife, and the slightly longer appointment of Mr Wildig, whose contract was renewed for twelve months on 20 January 1894 'for the sum of £3 per week'. His ware, marketed as Washington Faience and decorated with coloured slip, gilding and applied relief ornament, attracted the attention of the *Pottery Gazette* in June 1894 which praised its 'pure' tones and 'delicate' tints. But it was not commercially successful, and in 1895 the Directors resolved to appoint a much more experienced designer, Harry Barnard, Under-Manager of the decorating studios at Doulton Lambeth. After its triumphant display at the World's Columbian Exposition in Chicago in 1893, Doulton's art pottery enjoyed international renown; to look to this firm for their Art Director was a clear declaration of intent. A Minute of 18 January 1895 recorded Barnard's appointment 'at a salary of £220 for the first year, to be increased to £250 should he remain a second year'. This initial salary represented an increase of over 40% on Wildig's salary of £156 per annum (£3 a week); Macintyre's were evidently prepared to invest money in art pottery, although they were still uncertain of its success. Barnard had trained as a modeller, and was experienced in forms of low-relief decoration. In his unpublished memoir, 'Personal Record', written around 1931, he described the technique he developed. Patterns, applied with stencils, were created in coloured slip (liquid clay),

⁶ Wording of the presentation recorded in the Minutes of a Directors' meeting, James Macintyre & Co. Ltd (8 May 1899). Unless otherwise indicated, all unpublished documents referred to in this chapter are located in William Moorcroft: Personal and Commercial Papers, SD1837, Stoke-on-Trent City Archives [WM Archive].

further ornament being applied freehand in white slip, as had been the practice on some Doulton Lambeth stoneware:⁷

[...] I called it 'Gesso', as it was a *pâte-sur-pâte* modelling, and the tool to produce it was one that I had made. This proved to be quite a surprise, nothing like it had been seen before. To make it a commercial line, I introduced also an appliqué of 'slip' in a form of stencil pattern, and the slip modelling was a free-hand treatment and covered up the spaces necessary in the stencil pattern and so hid to a great extent the fact that it was applied in that way.⁸

Gesso Faience was given its own elaborate backstamp, and by the end of 1895, hopes were clearly high, a Minute of 1 November 1895 recording that 'the plastic decoration introduced by Mr Barnard promised to be commercially successful'.

But all this was to change. The firm was under increasingly acute financial pressure: an overdraft with the Bank which stood at just under £2,000 at the start of 1894, had increased to £6,000 by the summer of 1896, and on 18 January 1897 debentures were issued totalling £10,000 and funded by the Directors. In these circumstances, it is particularly surprising that a Minute of 25 January 1897 should record a decision 'unanimously agreed' that 'immediate attempts be made to discover a new designer'. Just six weeks later, on 8 March 1897, Moorcroft's appointment was announced: 'It was reported that Mr Wm Moorcroft had been engaged, and would that day enter upon his duty as designer at a remuneration of 50/- [fifty shillings] per week'. Moorcroft's salary (£130 p.a.) was considerably lower than Barnard's, but at (just short of) twenty-five years of age he was much less experienced, and Barnard was still working there. But not for long. A Minute of 22 April 1897 recorded a provisional extension of Barnard's contract, 'at a reduced salary of £200 per annum', and six weeks later, on 4 June 1897, the post was reduced to half-time, his salary to be paid jointly with Wedgwood. On 14 September 1897, an uncompromising Minute reported the end of his appointment: 'Mr Harry Barnard was reported a complete failure, and it was decided to relinquish all claims on his services in favour of Messrs Wedgwood & Sons'.

Financial pressures and/or the commercial failure of Barnard's designs doubtless motivated this dismissal; nevertheless, the firm's growing deficit had clearly not deterred the Directors from making another appointment. Why the post was offered to Moorcroft, though, is a different matter. It is certainly the case that he was known to some of the firm's Directors from his days at the Burslem School of Art, not least to Watkin whose classes Moorcroft had attended. He would also have been known to Watkin and Hulme from the Hill Top Chapel, where Moorcroft served as a Sunday School teacher, Watkin was a lay preacher, and Hulme was both Organist and Choirmaster. But it is true, too, that Moorcroft, newly returned from the National Art

7 F. Miller described 'a form of decoration suggestive of sugar-icing to cakes produced by squeezing slips out of a tube' ('Doulton's Lambeth Art Potteries', *The Art Journal* [AJ] (1902)), 50–53 (p.51).

8 H. Barnard, 'Personal Record', unpublished memoir, p.34 [I am most grateful to Mrs Maureen Leese for allowing me to consult her copy of this document].

Training School, was not the standard product of state art education; his training had been a mixture of theoretical study and practical experience, learning ceramic design both through paper and clay, art and science, history and nature. He had taken full advantage of the progressive environment into which he had been born, and it was quite characteristic of Macintyre's Directors, several of whom served on the School's Technical Education Committee, that they recognised in him a designer with the potential to bring originality to their art pottery production.

Early in 1898, shortly after the departure of Barnard, Moorcroft was appointed Manager of Ornamental Ware, and given his own workrooms, a staff of decorators, and the exclusive services of a thrower and turner; he had sole responsibility for the training and supervision of his staff. It was the start of a period of creative collaboration, not just between Moorcroft and Macintyre's, but also (and just as importantly) between Moorcroft and his decorators. Such was his appreciation of, and concern for, his staff that on 8 May 1899 a Directors' Minute recorded a decision 'at the request of Mr Moorcroft', to give them more security. Some of these decorators may be seen in photographs surviving from the album presented to Woodall in 1899, just one week before Moorcroft's request; two (Fanny Morrey and Jenny Leadbeater) would still be working with him more than thirty years later.



(L) Fig. 2 Decorators in Department of Ornamental Ware, J. Macintyre & Co. Ltd, 1899. Left to Right: Emily Jones, Mary ('Polly') Baskeyfield, Fanny Morrey, Jenny Leadbeater, Nellie Wood. Photograph. 'Personal and Commercial Papers of William Moorcroft', Stoke-on-Trent City Archives, SD 1837. CC BY-NC

(R) Fig. 3 Decorators in Department of Ornamental Ware, J. Macintyre & Co. Ltd, 1899. Left to Right: Lillian Leighton, (?) Toft, Nellie Wood, Sally Cartledge, (unidentified), Annie Causley. Photograph. 'Personal and Commercial Papers of William Moorcroft', Stoke-on-Trent City Archives, SD 1837. CC BY-NC

3. A New Slipware

When Moorcroft first joined Macintyre's, he was employed to create designs for the functional wares produced in a department run by Mr Cresswell; responsibility for art wares remained with Barnard. Moorcroft designed a completely new range of decorations, with stylised floral motifs combined with abstract ornament in the form

of frets and diapers. The patterns were applied by transfer printing, and finished off with gilding and enamel colours; the range would be called Aurelian. His first designs, featuring poppy, cornflower and briar rose, were registered in February 1898; these, and others, proved very popular and were produced for at least ten years. This collaboration with Cresswell's department continued even after Moorcroft assumed responsibility for art wares. One early range was decorated with a repeating butterfly motif and other ornaments, applied in slip over a dark blue ground and finished with gilding and touches of white enamel. His most sophisticated range, however, was produced entirely in his own workshops; it was a completely original form of decorative slipware, and was named Florian ware.

For many contemporary critics, the quality of English pottery was declining, as much on account of its means of production as of its poor design. The widespread use of printed transfers, for instance, implied decoration which was merely applied, being neither literally nor metaphorically of a piece with the object. Ornament created in clay, however, had an integrity and permanence which was seen to characterise the highest form of ceramic art. The most esteemed example of this was *pâte-sur-pâte*, created by applying layers of slip to an unfired ceramic body, and then sculpted into low-relief decoration of great delicacy and sophistication; it was a method perfected in Solon's studio at Minton, and subsequently adopted by Wedgwood and Doulton. In an article on the technique published in *The Art Journal* [AJ], Solon presented it as the model of authentic ceramic art:

[...] as a single operation is required to fire the piece and the relief decoration, which becomes, in that way, incorporated with the body, it may be regarded as essentially ceramic in character, a fundamental quality of truly good pottery [...].⁹

Macintyre's had long been looking to develop a less labour-intensive, but equally authentic form of slip decoration alongside their printed, enamelled and gilded ware. Washington and Gesso Faience were both, in their different ways, 'essentially ceramic' in so far as their decoration was integral to the body of the vessel, but their artistic qualities were too limited to attract the interest of a discerning public. Moorcroft situated his work in this same tradition, using slip as the means of creating ornament; but he used it in a quite different way, and with quite different effects. Some of his earliest Florian designs required the application of slip to form elaborate, abstract embellishments of great delicacy. But he was soon using it to adapt for ceramics the ancient technique of cloisonné enamelling in the decoration of metalware, creating compartments with slip rather than wires, and using metallic oxides to stain the clay, rather than applying enamels to the surface of the vessel. To the decorative potential of slip, Moorcroft added the limitless possibilities of colour. A similar technique was used occasionally for the decoration of the finest art tiles, but it had not been developed for the more challenging three-dimensional surface of pottery.

9 M.L.E. Solon, 'Pâte-sur-Pâte', *AJ* (1901), 73-79 (p.78).



(L) Fig. 4 William Moorcroft, Vases in Butterfly Ware (1898), 17cm and Aurelian ware, with Poppy motif (c.1898), 7.5cm. CC BY-NC

(R) Fig. 5 William Moorcroft, Early Florian designs with prominent slip decoration. Vases with Cornflower motif (1898), 27.5cm, and gilded floral motifs (1898), 25cm. CC BY-NC



(L) Fig. 6 William Moorcroft, Experimental vase in Butterfly design decorated with Watkin's Leadless Glaze (1898), 20cm. CC BY-NC

(R) Fig. 7 William Moorcroft, Early experiments with underglaze colour. Narcissus (c.1900) in shades of blue, 18cm; sleeve vase with Peacock motifs in celadon and blue (1899), 27cm; Iris (c.1899), in blue, green and russet, 25cm; 2-handled coupe with floral motif (c.1900), in blue, light green and yellow, 8cm. CC BY-NC

The widespread use of on-glaze enamel colours was seen as another sign of the declining quality of ceramic art. In a series of Cantor Lectures entitled 'Material and Design in Pottery', William Burton examined pottery decoration through the ages. In one lecture, he deplored the 'general substitution of hard, thin, scratchy overglaze painting in place of the rich, juicy colour produced when the colour is used underglaze'.¹⁰ The ready availability of mass-produced and standardised colours may have been welcomed by many manufacturers, but for Burton it led to lifeless, standardised effects. Research and experiment were no longer the basis of modern industrial practice, as he lamented in a lecture to the Society of Arts, 'The Palette of the Potter':

Mechanical finish, and not artistic excellence, is now the great aim of all manufacture; to get an even ground of colour without the least trace of variation, and to repeat this thousands of times in succession, is the point at which the modern potter is compelled to aim.¹¹

It was this desire to produce bright, uniform colours which largely accounted for the resistance to reducing the lead content of glazes, at a time when its dangers to pottery workers had become increasingly evident. Lead significantly reduced the melting point of the glaze, thus allowing both greater control of the firing, and a much wider range of colours.

A surviving trial vase in the Butterfly series carries the manuscript inscription 'Watkin's leadless glaze' on its base, and is decorated with on-glaze enamels. It is clear, though, that Moorcroft did not pursue this method of decoration; his attitude to ceramic colour was very similar to Burton's, for all the evident challenges. The firing temperature of a glost kiln was significantly higher than that of an enamel or muffle kiln, and the range of colours which could resist these higher temperatures without degrading was more limited. But whereas most underglaze colour was applied to the once-fired biscuit body, Moorcroft decorated the unfired clay, thereby limiting the range even further. The unusualness of this method was implied by Burton in 'The Palette of the Potter':

[...] the method of colouring the pottery after it has been once fired, saves the colours from being exposed to a fire angrier than need be, and the palette is extended by several colours that will endure the glazing heat, while they would be decomposed by exposure to the higher temperature of first firing.¹²

The difficulty was exacerbated, too, by the temperature of Macintyre's kilns, firing industrial ceramics at temperatures around 1300 degrees Celsius, exceptionally high for earthenware. For all these limits, though, the potential for creating particularly rich colours was all the greater. Unfired clay was more porous than a biscuit body; this allowed the oxides to penetrate more deeply, a more intense colour ensuing as a result.

10 W. Burton, 'Material and Design in Pottery', *PG* (January 1898), 104–07 (p.107).

11 W. Burton, 'The Palette of the Potter', *PG* (July 1900), 805–07 (p.805).

12 W. Burton, 'The Palette of the Potter', *PG* (June 1900), 689–92 (p.690).

Moorcroft's technique was not only without modern parallel, it required the experimental skills of the chemist to produce viable results. Commercially available colours were of little use, even if he had wished to use them; he had to produce his own. To create colours of the rich luminous quality only achieved by chemical reactions, he needed to experiment with different combinations of oxides, glaze recipes and kiln conditions. Nor did he rely on lead-based glazes to intensify his colours or to extend the range, adapting instead to the use of fritted lead, a method which reduced both the concentration and the toxicity of the lead oxide in the glaze. Moorcroft's diaries and notebooks from this period testify to his irrepressible spirit of enquiry. One notebook entry recorded a path yet to explore: 'Experiment: the effect of green body and cobalt glaze', and in his diary for 1900, he made notes on different ways of producing yellow, one of the most unstable of colours, particularly at high temperatures. Research of this kind was acknowledged as rare, but for a critic writing in the *Pottery Gazette*, it represented the future of ceramic art:

[...] where in the history of English ceramics can a statement be found that this chemist or that has succeeded in compounding a new body or in developing a colour hitherto unknown. [...] And why not? [...] The reason is that as yet, in this country, scarcely any man of high scientific attainment has been encouraged to devote himself to ceramics.¹³

But Moorcroft's interest in colour was not just scientific, it was undertaken in the service of 'artistic excellence'. Contrasts and harmonies of colour were as essential to his conception of good design as form or ornament. In a notebook from 1900, he reflected on new experiments:

Ground to be washed all over in broken green; no ground to be prominent.
Green to be more conspicuous in design, blue forming borders.

And in another jotting from this same period, he wrote quite simply: 'Form and colour unite to raise the highest sentiment'. The more restricted palette of underglaze colours at this early stage of Moorcroft's work contrasted markedly with the more vibrant colours achievable with other methods of decoration. But what he produced were more subtle effects achieved by the interaction of different tones of blue or green, or the application of a light wash of secondary colour on a stained body. It was a mark of his originality that he should explore these possibilities, and of Macintyre's faith in him that he was encouraged to do so.

4. Design and Realisation

Moorcroft's conception of art pottery overlapped with modern thinking about ceramic decoration, drawing inspiration from the application of science to art. But it was modern, too, both in its aesthetic principles and its means of production. *Pâte-sur-pâte*

13 'Science in Ceramics', *PG* (November 1897), 1428–29 (p.1428).

focussed attention on the applied decoration; the vessel itself was, inevitably, secondary in its significance. Moorcroft's ware, conversely, integrated ornament and body not just at the level of material, but also at the level of design.

It is characteristic of Moorcroft's approach that his starting point was the introduction of new shapes, many inspired by Middle and Far Eastern, classical and early English traditions. The advantages of working with a thrower are evident. Not constrained by the use of moulds which limited the scope for variety and experiment, Moorcroft could trial a wide range of different forms. It was an invaluable asset for exploring new design possibilities, but it was also a luxury. At the end of the nineteenth century, the skilled thrower was already fast disappearing from the industrial workplace, as moulded ware became increasingly common. The economic advantages of a mould were clear, but no less clear, for some, was the resultant loss of quality; an article published in the *Pottery Gazette* was categorical:

There are so-called artistic potters who haven't a throwing wheel on their premises [...]. There is something about a piece of well-thrown ware, giving it a distinguished air, which the best moulded ware can never possess.¹⁴

Woodall and his directors clearly shared that view; theirs was an ambition to provide the best facilities for the best art ware, and they were prepared to invest in it.

Moorcroft was often inspired by classical shapes, but he decorated them in his own style. To do so was in itself a gamble, both for him and for Macintyre's. The taste for conspicuous decoration still prevailed, and contemporary design seemed to be driven by commercial opportunism not artistic sensitivity; an article in the *Pottery Gazette* lamented the absence of 'any simplicity or severity of style' in a design world dominated by 'ornament piled on ornament'.¹⁵ Moorcroft, though, was different. Notebooks and diaries of this period record constant reflection on design, form, colour and decoration, inspired by his reading or his observations in museums. A notebook from 1900 contains thoughts about the structure of ornament: 'Where growth is suggested, give the pattern proper room to grow', and another series of notes, on a sheet of paper dated 4 May 1900, refer to ornament in relation to the object it adorns. A recurrent theme is its integration with form, without which it can have neither purpose nor justification:

When ornament was applied to anything, it should support the construction.
The mere application of ornament is not decoration.
No ornamentation can be tolerated that is merely used for ornament.
No piece of pottery can be called good, unless it have a perfect balance of parts.

Moorcroft saw the purpose of ornament to accentuate form, not to draw attention to itself. Just as he favoured decoration which was of a piece with the body rather than

¹⁴ 'Something New and Beautiful', *PG* (February 1899), 194–95 (p.194).

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

applied to its surface, so too he conceived form and ornament as inseparable elements of design.

This principle was embodied in the way he worked. Design jottings from this period include many sketches of decorated shapes, the relationship of form and ornament clearly more important at this stage than the detail of the ornament itself which is often indicated in its simplest outlines. The same is true of many surviving sketches in watercolour.



Fig. 8 William Moorcroft, Experiments in the harmony of form and ornament. Vase with Violets and Butterflies (c.1900), 22cm; Urn with Narcissus (c.1900), 21cm; Knopped vase with Daisy and Cornflower (c.1898), 16cm. CC BY-NC

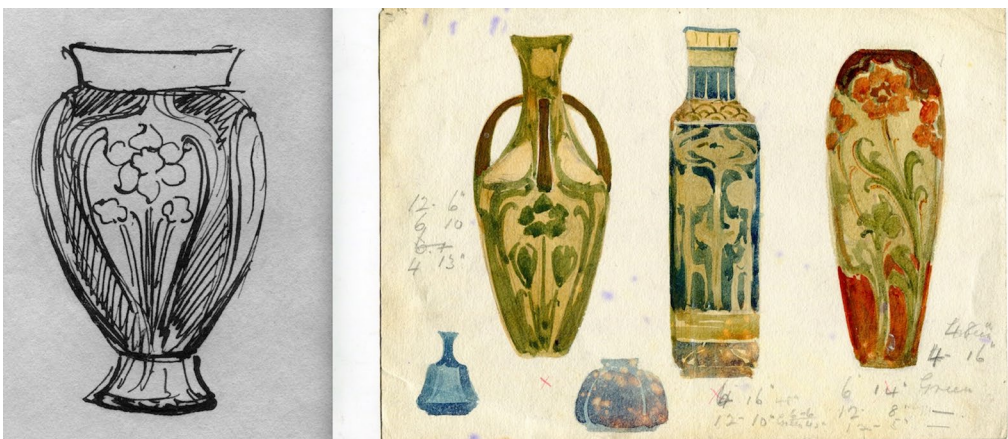


Fig. 9 William Moorcroft, Early design sketches, including versions of the Narcissus urn and Peacock sleeve vase illustrated in Figs 8 and 7 above. 'Personal and Commercial Papers of William Moorcroft', Stoke-on-Trent City Archives, SD 1837. CC BY-NC

Indeed, the numbers written on the base of his pots in the early years, all prefixed by the letter M (for Moorcroft), often indicated the unity of a given pattern on a given shape, inseparable from each other in the one defining, individual reference.



Fig. 10 William Moorcroft, Base of vase with gilded floral motifs (Fig. 5 above), showing incised initials, M number, and the Florian Ware stamp. CC BY-NC

This integrated conception of design was clearly reflected in his work. Formal academic training as practised in South Kensington consisted largely in learning the principles of ornament, tried and tested in the past; design was seen as a skill to be mastered, not to be re-invented, and certainly not as a vehicle for individuality. Ralph Wornum's *Analysis of Ornament*, a central part of the official syllabus, was categorical: 'We have not now to *create* Ornamental Art, but to *learn* it; it was established in all essentials long ago'.¹⁶ Moorcroft, however, took inspiration as much from nature as from museums, adapting the organic growth of plants to the curves and contours of a thrown pot. The first Florian designs were registered in September and October 1898, the registration number referring to particular flowers or combinations: violets, dianthus, cornflower and butterflies, poppy, iris, forget-me-nots and butterflies. What these numbers did not indicate, however, was the extensive variety in Moorcroft's adaptations of each motif. Just as he was free to modify his shapes at will, so too, without the constraint of transfers, he could vary the decorations he created. Retail orders specified 'Florian', but never a particular flower or pattern; the selection was very often left, and explicitly so, to Moorcroft himself. This was a living range, rarely repetitive, always fresh; to order 'Florian' was to order the product of a particular moment's inspiration, and this is what was despatched.

This individuality of design was both preserved and accentuated by his method of transferring the pattern to each pot. Pottery decoration was traditionally applied either with prints, by moulding, or by freehand drawing; Gesso Faience had used the technique of stencilling, the surround of the stencilled pattern acting as a resist to

16 R.N. Wornum, *Analysis of Ornament* [1860]; 3rd edition (London: Chapman & Hall, 1869), p.21.

the applied layer of coloured slip. Moorcroft's method, though, was quite different. He personally drew the decoration directly on each different shape, after which a tracing was made of it, divided into sections, which was used to apply the outline of the pattern onto each pot; decorators (known as tube-liners) then followed this outline with a thin line of slip. The creation of a tracing meant that each individual decoration could be reproduced more faithfully than freehand copying would do. And yet this process was not mechanical; each act of tracing and tube-lining was inevitably unique, each piece was re-created afresh.



Fig. 11 Variations on the Poppy motif, dated (in Moorcroft's hand) between August and November 1899. 'Personal and Commercial Papers of William Moorcroft', Stoke-on-Trent City Archives, SD 1837. CC BY-NC

Fig. 12 William Moorcroft, Vase with Poppy design (c.1900), 14cm. CC BY-NC

There was scope, too, for the paintresses to display their skills. The different areas or compartments were not simply filled with flat colour, but were treated in lighter or darker washes, or with dabs of different colours, added at the decorator's discretion. This was no automatic exercise, but required the sensitivity and technique of a watercolourist, who could make her own individual contribution to the pot. It was all the more skilful, given that the paintress was working with oxides, not with enamels; the final colours would only emerge after firing, both in the biscuit oven and in the glost kiln. This method of production preserved the integrity of the designer's vision, but it enabled the creative contribution of thrower and turner, tube liner and paintress to the realisation of each piece. Each pot was the collaborative rendition of a design, but it was also, always, individual, the exact replica of none other.

What is striking, though, is that Moorcroft signed or initialled the ware produced in his new department, in some cases discreetly incised, but most often written plainly on the base, W. Moorcroft (or W.M.) des.



Fig. 13 Early examples of Moorcroft's signature or Initials. CC BY-NC

He was identifying himself as the designer, but he was identifying himself, too, with each particular article. For Moorcroft, design was not about the creation of a template, but about the realisation of an object, each one unique. In his own department, he oversaw production of each piece from clay to kiln, and it was to each one that he put his name, literally, affirming his presence at the end of the process as at the beginning. It is doubtless for this reason that Aurelian ware, decorated by transfers taken from his designs, but created in a different department and finished with enamel colours, was not signed by him; he may have designed the ornament, but he had little or no hand in its manufacture, each example more or less identical to the last. Not so Florian ware, which in its individuality, integrity and quality of production, stood out from other contemporary forms of art pottery. It would not be long before this was noticed.

5. Public Attention

Within eighteen months of his arrival at Macintyre's, Moorcroft was attracting the attention of the press. Shortly after the registration of his first designs in September 1898, the *Pottery Gazette* published a report on Macintyre's latest display in the showroom of their London representatives; Moorcroft's three new ranges were on show. The speed with which he had created them was in itself remarkable, but what struck the reviewer above all was the originality (and variety) of both style and technique: 'These are entirely different styles of ornamentation, different not only from each, but also from any previous series of decoration'.¹⁷ Although not singled out explicitly, it was Florian ware which attracted particular attention, its 'very absence of uniformity' clearly distinguishing it from the standardised ware of industrial manufacture. Its individuality was attributed in part to the 'free hand of the artist', but also, significantly, to its designer, identified by name; this was not the anonymised output of a factory, but the creation of an artist:

¹⁷ PG (October 1898), p.1248.

On the occasion of our visit, Mr Moorcroft, from the works, happened to be at the London rooms. We understand that most of the designs are his. There is abundance of originality, this will be evident when we say that each piece is unique [...].¹⁸

This was the first published review of Moorcroft's work; it would not be the last. Within three months, it was the subject of an article in one of the leading art journals of the time. If the *Pottery Gazette* review had focussed largely, if silently, on Florian Ware, the *Magazine of Art* did so explicitly. Comparing it with the generality of 'so-called "art pottery" that has almost become a term of reproach', the critic identified in Moorcroft's 'ceramic art' a distinctive 'mark' which set it apart and gave each piece its character and its life:

But to us, one of the most interesting features of this ware is that it bears indelibly the mark of the artist and the skilful craftsman. All the designs are the work of Mr W.R. Moorcroft; every piece is examined by him at each stage, and is revised and corrected as much as is necessary before being passed into the oven. The decorative work is executed by girls, [...] and, while the design of Mr Moorcroft is followed as closely as possible, any individual touches of the operators are seldom interfered with if they tend to improvement. It thus happens that no two pieces are precisely alike.¹⁹

Each object drew its individuality from the combined sensitivities of clayworkers and decorators, working in harmony with the artist. It was the perfect collaboration of craft and art, and it could not fail to appeal:

Messrs Macintyre, who are the manufacturers, are to be congratulated on their success in placing before the public a ware that really exhibits evidences of thoughtful art and skilful craftsmanship.²⁰

It was very gratifying for Macintyre's to be congratulated on securing the services of an acclaimed designer, and in this particular journal. But it was a significant triumph, too, for Moorcroft, prominently identified as the originator of this ware.

6. Commercial Promise

The display at Macintyre's London showroom attracted considerable attention from retailers, including some of the most prestigious of the age. One of Moorcroft's notebooks from 1898 recorded contact with Thomas Goode & Co., London's foremost tableware dealer which counted Queen Victoria and the Tsar of Russia among its customers: 'They will be glad to receive a lot sufficient to make a show, and promise to make a very attractive display, and further promise repeat orders'. An entry in another notebook listed a meeting on 18 October 1898 with Alwyn Lasenby, a Director of Liberty & Co.,

18 Ibid.

19 'Florian Ware', *Magazine of Art* (March 1899), 232–34 (p.233).

20 Ibid., p.234.

the same month as the *Pottery Gazette* review of Macintyre's London display. Liberty's was one of the country's most influential and fashionable stores, commissioning and retailing work by progressive designers. They were clearly promoting art pottery at this time, announcing their 'representative and extensive Collection of English Art Potteries' in a full page advertisement placed in the *Magazine of Art*, November 1896. To be retailed by Liberty's was to be at the forefront of elegance, style and modernity. A letter of 24 May 1899 indicates an increasingly close collaboration with Lasenby:

Mr Lasenby is attracted by the rough sketches you forwarded for him to see, and is of opinion that if you produce a few examples on the lines of those he has marked with a red cross (X), he can then better judge their merits, and would be pleased to discuss same with you.

Within two years, Moorcroft had developed an association, both commercial and personal, which would be one of the closest and most creative of his professional life.²¹

But Moorcroft's work also caught the attention of an international market, and at the highest level. An early notebook records 'sample vases' prepared for Tiffany & Co. of New York, jeweller to royal families throughout Europe and beyond, and purveyors of luxury goods to some of the most illustrious families in the US, from the Astors to the Vanderbilts. By 1900, this relationship, too, was flourishing. Moorcroft's diary noted a visit in April from Arthur Veel Rose, Tiffany's chief buyer for pottery and porcelain, and a notebook from the same year records further collaborations based on new, bespoke designs for lamps and vases. And he was being noticed, too, in France. He accompanied Watkin to the Exposition Universelle of 1900, which defined a vibrant new style for the new century, epitomised by the flowing lines of Guimard's Métro entrances or Loïe Fuller's Serpentine dance. Macintyre's had no display at the Exhibition, but Moorcroft, with the firm's support, was taking every opportunity to promote his own designs. His diary for 1900 recorded visits to some of the leading decorative arts galleries of the time: Emile Bourgeois, whose luxurious Grand Dépôt catered for the taste of a fashionable elite; Georges Rouard's gallery, A la Paix, which became a centre for *art nouveau* decorative arts in France; Louis Damon, artist and entrepreneur, whose gallery, 'Au vase étrusque', stocked the finest work of Gallé, Daum and other leading decorative artists; and Clain & Perrier, whose studio gallery also promoted the work of Daum and Gallé. To do so was a sign of his confidence in the distinctive quality of his own art; that confidence was well-founded, and it was shared. A Directors' meeting on 5 November 1900 recorded high hopes for Moorcroft's decorative ware, and there was clearly a desire to encourage him:

It was reported that the Managing Director, accompanied by Mr Moorcroft, designer, paid a visit to the Paris Exhibition during the last week in October. With the Florian ware,

21 Alwyn Ernest Lasenby was the cousin of Arthur Lasenby Liberty, founder of the store (Lasenby's father and Liberty's mother were siblings). Some studies of Moorcroft erroneously state that his friendship was with the latter, not the former.

5 calls resulted in opening accounts with 5 of the best Houses in Paris, and there appears every reason to suppose an important fancy trade can be cultivated. A visit once a year by the designer would probably be a good investment, directly and indirectly.

This widespread appreciation of Moorcroft's ware coincided with a steady improvement in Macintyre's sales performance. Receipts in 1897–98 rose by nearly 40% on the previous year, and this progress continued during 1898–99, with a Minute of 30 January 1899 recording 'gratification [...] at the continued increase in the sales'. These figures covered the sales of the firm as a whole, but it is clear that the Directors recognised the contribution made by Moorcroft, both in terms of what he produced and of his active role in marketing it. At the same meeting of 30 January 1899, Moorcroft's salary was increased by ten shillings per week. Orders were flowing in, and the Directors were very aware of the need to increase output. On 3 February 1899, steps were taken to expand the factory space devoted to production of this ware, and three months later, on 8 May 1899, Moorcroft's appointment was renewed 'at a remuneration of £3/10 (three pounds and ten shillings) per week'. In the course of two years, his pay had risen by nearly 40% to £182 p.a., much closer to the salary of £220 initially earned by Barnard; and Moorcroft was considerably younger. For all the range of Macintyre's production, it was Florian ware which attracted the public's attention and fuelled orders; the Directors clearly recognised this with gratitude. On 12 June 1899, little more than five weeks after his re-appointment on an increased salary, they approved another remuneration of Moorcroft's success with sales: 'a commission of 1% upon gross sales from his department, to date from January 1st 1900'. Throughout 1899, Minutes recorded the success of Florian and its consequences for the firm. Within a year of his appointment to direct the design and production of ornamental ware, Moorcroft had contributed to a quite exceptional rise in Macintyre's turnover; his art pottery was making its presence felt, on the factory floor as well as on the balance sheet. The need for more employees and more space continually increased, to the extent that, on 13 July 1899, the Directors decided to limit its promotion in new markets abroad until the firm was in a position to meet the expected demand. At this same meeting, sales for the year-end 1898–99 were recorded as £34,376, a further increase of 13%. Florian ware had taken Macintyre's by storm.

The firm was now enjoying great commercial success. A schedule of outturns since the formation of the limited company in 1893 listed deficits of £2,125, £664 and £1,972 in the years 1894–95 to 1896–97; in the following two years, however, profits were recorded of £304 and £2,484. And this pattern continued. On 10 December 1900, a Minute reported 'the most successful year's trading since the formation of the Company', adding that the Directors had 'every reason to believe the current year will be equally prosperous'. Such success was spectacular; it was also exceptional. In the *Pottery Gazette*, Louis Bilton, a decorator at Doulton Burslem since 1892, commented on the commercial gamble which was art pottery:

The production of artistic pottery, apart from absolute utility, has almost always proved a hazardous enterprise. Even when encouraged by Government patronage and subsidies, as in France, it has rarely succeeded financially for a lengthened period. [...] Art industries should stand or fall on their own merits, artistic and financial alike.²²

It is certainly the case that by the end of the century the market for art wares was reducing. Two years after Henry Doulton's death in 1897, his son turned the firm into a Limited Company; in 1898, Halsey Ricardo dissolved his partnership with William de Morgan, as the firm's financial difficulties increased; and in 1900, the six-year old Della Robbia factory merged with a religious statuary firm, run by Emile de Caluwe (a Belgian sculptor), in a bid to balance its books. Macintyre's had taken that gamble, however, and Moorcroft had produced a ware which brought them a financial return on their act of faith. Florian was work of truly distinctive quality, and it was being singled out, rapidly and at the highest level, in both the art and the trade press, and in countries which were acknowledged leaders in the world of decorative arts, France and the US. In his prize-giving address at the Wedgwood Institute in 1895, Taylor had stressed the economic and artistic importance of encouraging creative design:

You must give opportunity for the growth in your midst of a free artistic spirit, which shall primarily make those possessing it, whether manufacturers or workmen, better men and better workmen, each having the opportunity for developing his own individuality and its expression, and these conditions are most conducive to the best interests of both capital and labour.²³

Woodall and his Directors had recognised this 'free artistic spirit' in Moorcroft; as a new century dawned, the future looked promising indeed.

7. Conclusions

Moorcroft's career as a potter could not have had a more auspicious start. Macintyre's encouragement of his creativity was characteristic of a firm which was, in its own way, individual and forward-looking. Promoting the values of handwork, its art pottery department was creating wares which were immediately recognised as different from the uniform products of a factory. But at the same time, it was avoiding the increasingly evident failures of many enterprises inspired by the Arts and Crafts movement, which seemed destined to produce unaffordable luxuries, 'art for a few',²⁴ a position which Morris had repudiated. Moorcroft's ware had the individual quality of exclusive objects, but their method of production allowed for more numerous, more varied and less expensive wares; it did not depend on the skill of a single artist-craftsman, but was

22 Louis Bilton, 'Some notes on the decoration of pottery', *PG* (February 1900), 205–07 (p.207).

23 Wedgwood Institute Burslem: Schools of Science, Art and Technology, Twenty-seventh Annual Meeting, 13 March 1895, p.13.

24 W. Morris, 'The Lesser Arts' [1877], in *The Collected Works of William Morris*, XXII (London: Longmans, 1914), 3–27 (p.26).

adapted to serial production. Florian was retailed by some of the most prestigious and fashionable outlets throughout the world, but it was not simply bought by a privileged elite; it sold to a wider public, and it sold well. It was the perfect integration of art and industry.

It is significant too that, in the spirit of the Arts and Crafts movement, Macintyre's were ready to identify their designer as the originator of his wares. Less than ten years since the first exhibition of the Arts and Crafts Exhibition Society, this was still an uncommon (and enlightened) position, as Crane implied in his article 'Of the Arts and Crafts Movement'. What he said about the artisan applied equally to the designer:

It is to the commercial interest of the firm to be known as the producer of the work, and it must be therefore out of good nature or sense of fairness, or desire to conform to our conditions, when the name of the actual workman is given [...].²⁵

Macintyre's did not exhibit at Arts and Crafts exhibitions, but their sanctioning of Moorcroft's signature, an indelible feature of each object he produced, was a telling sign of their appreciation of his art and of their confidence in him. No such privilege had been accorded to Barnard. And this suited Moorcroft perfectly, for his was a very individual art. Florian was created at a time when British ceramic design was seen to have lost its way, perceived as historicist, derivative, 'at the mercy of every wind of fashion that blows'.²⁶ Critics, and the public, doubtless appreciated Moorcroft's implied allusion to an English decorative tradition long since lost, a modern, refined variant on the old slip-decorated pottery of the pre-Wedgwood age, with a much more sophisticated use of colour. If the sinuous sensuality of *art nouveau* was too extravagant and ornamental for British taste, little more than 'wild and whirling squirms'²⁷ in Crane's uncompromising evaluation, Moorcroft's designs were more restrained in their treatment of natural motifs.

But what distinguished this work above all was its personal quality, that distinctive 'mark' discerned by the *Magazine of Art* in 1899. In notes dating to 1900, Moorcroft reflected on the affective nature of design, both the creator's emotional investment in it and its impact on the observer:

[...] we 20th century potters must be careful to put in our work our own thoughts and emotions, and do our share in building up our civilisation. There is no craft that will be more likely to do this than the art of the potter.

From the very start of his career, Moorcroft conceived pottery as a form of personal language. As he looked back less than six years later to the start of his career at Macintyre's, he evoked his ambition as an artist and its early fulfilment at the Washington Works:

25 W. Crane, 'Of the Arts and Crafts Movement', *Ideals in Art* (London: George Bell & Sons, 1905), 1–34 (p.23).

26 'Something New and Beautiful', *PG* (February 1899), 194–95 (p.194).

27 Crane, 'Thoughts on House Decoration', *Ideals in Art*, 110–170 (p.128).

It was after long dreaming of what was possible in this direction, that in 1898 I was first able to express my own feeling in clay.²⁸

This was not the kind of vocabulary to be found in theoretical or practical manuals of design, but it would be the foundation and driving force of Moorcroft's career as a potter.

28 F. Miller, 'The Art Pottery of Mr W. Moorcroft', *AJ* (1903), 57–58 (p.57).

2. 1901–04: The End of the Beginning

I. New Directions in Design

As the new century dawned, the need for fresh initiatives in pottery design was widely recognised. Techniques and materials were becoming increasingly globalised, and competition from abroad, particularly from Germany and the US, was increasing. In 1903, William Burton regretted that the Staffordshire potter, ‘content to work on his old traditional lines’ had fallen far behind the innovative work of potters in Europe.¹ And in 1904, the *Pottery Gazette* ran a series of articles on ‘The Present Position of Pottery among the Crafts’, which lamented, as so often, the continued reliance on transfer printed decoration; the conclusion was uncompromising: ‘the bulk of the decorated pottery made in England today is entirely spurious and commercial’.²

If the refined *pâte-sur-pâte* decoration perfected by Marc-Louis-Emmanuel Solon at Minton was accorded ‘the post of honour among the artistic porcelains of the nineteenth century’,³ it is clear that for many potters, both industrial and individual, the future of ceramic art lay elsewhere. Several potteries were following the lead of French potters, conducting advanced research on glazes, with a view to mastering ancient techniques and making them commercially viable. John Slater, Charles Noke and Cuthbert Bailey worked together at Doulton Burslem to re-create Oriental flambé effects suitable for industrial production; they commissioned the help of Bernard Moore, one of the country’s leading ceramic chemists, who had developed reduction firing to produce his own ‘novel and wonderful effects by the use of metals other than copper’.⁴ The fruits of nearly three years of experiment were displayed at the Louisiana Purchase Exhibition in St Louis in 1904, where they won two *Grands Prix*. William Howson Taylor’s high-fired glazes won a *Grand Prix* at the Exhibition of Modern Decorative Art in Turin in 1902, and were welcomed in the *Pottery Gazette* of January 1903 as

1 W. Burton, ‘The Pottery Trade and Protection’, *Pottery Gazette and Glass Trade Review* [PG] (October 1903), 1028–29 (p.1029).

2 PG (November 1904), 1248–49 (p.1248).

3 W. Burton, *A History and Description of English Porcelain* (New York: A. Wessels, 1902), p.183.

4 *Ibid.*, p.187.

a 'new kind of artistic pottery'.⁵ Owen Carter was producing reduction-fired lustre wares at Carter & Co. from 1901; from 1902, Sir Edmund Elton was making crackled lustre ware; and Burton's own research at Pilkington into crystalline, opalescent, eggshell and transmutation glazes culminated in a special exhibition at the Graves Gallery in June 1904. In a review, Lewis Day acknowledged that 'the most recent advances in ceramic art have been [...] in the direction of artistic effects due entirely to the science of the potter'.⁶ Pilkington also introduced a range of pottery under the name 'Lancastrian', using decorative schemes by leading artists or designers such as Walter Crane, Lewis Day and C.F.A. Voysey. And other firms sought a modern look by adopting the European fashion for *art nouveau*. In 1902, Minton launched Secessionist ware, designed by Léon Solon and John Wadsworth, and at Doulton Lambeth, Eliza Simmance introduced designs in a similar style.

From the start of the new century, Moorcroft was experimenting, too. He clearly did not have the facilities of Doulton or Pilkington to conduct his own elaborate glaze experiments, but nor did he simply follow the fashionable path of *art nouveau*. Continuing to explore the relationship of form, ornament and colour, he produced in these years some of his most creative and original work. Leaving behind the more formal designs of early Florian, Moorcroft moved towards a sparer style of floral decoration, setting off the lines of stem and flowerhead against a plain white ground. Such designs were closer in spirit to the contemporary art glass of Daum, having the fluidity of *art nouveau*, but simplified; space became just as important as ornament. Notebooks dating from this period reflect new thoughts and guiding principles:

Consider the need of greater simplicity.

To be simple in decoration is always to be in good taste.⁷

Of a quite different style was a floral design which he would refer to in a notebook from 1902 as 'Florian cloisonné'; it was registered in January 1903. Far removed from the shaded colouring of Florian, it created stylised designs from solid blocks of colour, starkly juxtaposed. It was produced in different palettes, most notably Green and Gold, Blue and Gold, and a Blue, Salmon and Red with Gold, subsequently called Alhambra. Quite different again (and requiring particular skill from the decorators) were designs which set the distinctive outline of Honesty seedheads (or, occasionally, other flowers) against a stippled ground, focussing attention not on colour, but on line and texture.

But Moorcroft's design experiments were by no means confined to the world of flowers. By the spring of 1902, he had produced the first of his landscape designs, a motif which he would revisit and modify throughout his career. It was explored in different palettes, with contrasting effects of blue on blue (with occasional touches of yellow or pink), of green on green, or of green on white. And it clearly attracted the

5 'Ruskin Pottery', *PG* (January 1903), p.53.

6 L.F. Day, 'The New Lancastrian Pottery', *The Art Journal [AJ]* (1904), 201–04 (p.202).

7 All unpublished documents referred to in this chapter are located in William Moorcroft: Personal and Commercial Papers, SD1837, Stoke-on-Trent City Archives [WM Archive].



Fig. 14 William Moorcroft, Examples of more open, flowing designs in blue on white. Harebell (c.1904), 20cm; Poppy (c.1902), 24cm; Cornflower (c.1902), 17.5cm. CC BY-NC



Fig. 15 William Moorcroft, 'Florian cloisonné' in three distinct palettes: Narcissus in Green and Gold (1904), 24cm; Tulip in Blue, Salmon and Gold, 'Alhambra' (1903), 7.5cm; Narcissus and Tulip in Blue and Gold (1903), 15cm. CC BY-NC



Fig. 16 William Moorcroft, Designs on stippled ground. Honesty (c.1903), 22.5cm; Tulip (c.1903), 20cm. CC BY-NC

attention of Liberty's. An order, dated 15 April 1902 included 'the new ware with trees [in] a variety of forms'; the design was not officially registered until September 1902.



Fig. 17 William Moorcroft, Sketches for Landscape designs in notebooks. 'Personal and Commercial Papers of William Moorcroft', Stoke-on-Trent City Archives, SD 1837. Two early examples of the design: Hyacinth vase with blue landscape (1902), 18cm; vase with green landscape (c.1903), 10cm. CC BY-NC

At the start of 1903, he was experimenting with toadstool motifs. Notebooks from this time contain many sketches of fungi of different sizes and aspects, as well as comments about treatment. It was in this design that he expanded his palette of colours, introducing different shades of red and orange. A notebook records what would eventually become one of his most distinctive effects: 'The necessity of a more harmonious combination, a softer bleeding of colour'. This 'bleeding' of colour would create a strikingly ethereal air, at the opposite pole to the clean lines and stark contrasts of Wadsworth's Secessionist wares. By the end of the year, the design was in production; on 21 November 1903, his diary recorded the despatch of 'first package Toadstool decoration' to Liberty's.



Fig. 18 William Moorcroft, Sketches for toadstool designs in notebooks. 'Personal and Commercial Papers of William Moorcroft', Stoke-on-Trent City Archives, SD 1837. Bowl in early version of the design (1903), 10cm. CC BY-NC

It was in early 1903, too, that he created the first of his fish designs. Produced in very small numbers, and with an implied allusion to Gallé's celebrated carp vase, exhibited at the Paris World's Fair in 1878 and bought the following year by the Musée des arts décoratifs, it was clearly intended as a collector's piece. He would include it in his exhibit at the Louisiana Purchase Exhibition in 1904.

It is significant that several of these experiments were attracting the attention of Liberty's, whose reputation was founded on their involvement in innovative design. The store would become particularly associated with two of the most original of these designs, Tree and Toadstool, which they retailed under their own distinctive names, Hazledene and Claremont. Their Yule-Tide Gifts catalogue of 1902 included a full-page picture of Hazledene pots, under the heading 'Burslem Ware'. The accompanying text promoted the artistic qualities of this ware, which combined 'great beauty of form with originality and quaintness of decoration'. And Claremont featured in their Bric-a-Brac catalogue of c.1905: 'The motif [...] and the name were suggested by a peculiar kind of fungi growing in the woods on the estate of the Duchess of Albany.' The statement tellingly underlined the fact that the design was inspired by nature; this was ceramic art for the modern age, breaking free from the stiff historicism of the previous century. And it suggests, too, an early sign of Moorcroft's creative collaboration with Alwyn Lasenby, who lived in Esher, the location of the Duke and Duchess of Albany's Claremont estate.

But Liberty's interest did not end here. During 1904, they commissioned Moorcroft to produce an exclusive floral design; a diary note on 11 March 1904 records work on 'Tudor Rose', a pattern registered in April 1904. It was to be a more traditional motif, but in a quite new palette set on a distinctive jade ground; and Moorcroft would use it to experiment with variants on the running glaze effects which were beginning also to characterise 'Toadstool'. And in 1904, too, he was creating pieces for Liberty's new range of Tudric ware, launched in 1902 and made for them by Haselers of Birmingham. Noted for its avant-garde designs, many by Archibald Knox, Tudric brought modern style and quality of finish within the reach of a much wider market than the Arts and Crafts Guilds were able to do. Moorcroft was recognised as a designer working very much in the same spirit, his diary for 2 February 1904 noting a meeting with Lasenby to discuss 'the application of pottery to mounting in pewter'. Liberty's interest in Moorcroft's modern designs was wide-ranging, and their collaboration was bringing both aesthetic and commercial rewards; an order dated 1 June 1904 was characteristic of many:

£100 Tudor Rose design in Vases, Pots and Bowls
 £50 in Toadstool design (Claremont), shapes as suggested
 £25 in Tree design (Hazledene), shapes as suggested

In his review of the Turin exhibition of 1902, Crane expressed concern that *art nouveau* had become no more than a decorative style, an 'aesthetic rhetoric, with little or no



Fig. 19 'Burslem Ware', in Liberty & Co., 'Yule Tide Gifts' catalogue (1902). 'Personal and Commercial Papers of William Moorcroft', Stoke-on-Trent City Archives, SD 1837. CC BY-NC



(L) Fig. 20 William Moorcroft, Early examples of 'Hazledene' (1902), 25cm; and 'Claremont' (c.1903), 10cm. CC BY-NC



(R) Fig. 21 William Moorcroft, 'Tudor Rose' (1904), 12.5cm. CC BY-NC

thought or meaning behind it', imitated and thereby degraded 'for purely trade purposes'.⁸ Against this background, Moorcroft's new designs stood out, and they were noticed, not least by imitators. Lasenby wrote to him on 13 February 1903; a London firm was selling copies of his ware, albeit without his signature, and he advised Moorcroft to adopt a robust response:

[...] you appear to me to be practically helpless, unless you are prepared to tell them that in view of the totally unjustifiable position which they have assumed, having committed a wrong on you, that you prefer to thrash out the case in court, as a warning not only to them but to others who may desire to pirate your goods.

If not the most welcome form of flattery, such plagiarism nevertheless confirmed Moorcroft's status as a designer already, and firmly, in the public eye.

2. Making A Name

Moorcroft's energy and creativity continued to attract the attention of the art world. His diary of 5 March 1901 noted a meeting with Charles Holme, founding editor of *The Studio*, and he was approached in January 1902 by William Jervis, Stoke-born potter and author now resident in the US, who wished to include Moorcroft in a commissioned *Encyclopedia of Ceramics*. A surviving draft of Moorcroft's reply, dated 28 January 1902, gives a unique insight into how he saw his vocation as a potter at this time, underlining, as so often, its primary purpose as a means of expression:

[...] I will do my best to give a short account of what has mainly led to my great desire of expressing with as much humanity as possible my thoughts in clay. The potter and his art have charmed me from my earliest days [...], and my desire increases to make an effort to carry forward the fine spirit which was manifest in the early workers of centuries ago [...].

Jervis's article appeared first in *Keramic Studio*, a journal founded in 1899 by the pioneering potter Adelaide Alsop-Robineau. He gave a detailed account of Moorcroft's distinctive production technique, portraying a designer who retained the individuality of handcraft within the constraints of commercial production:

[...] it is all made by the old process on the potter's wheel and the turner's lathe, [...] on purpose that as far as is practicable in a commercial project, the individuality of the designer should be preserved, nor is there any use made of other mechanical aids, such as printing the outline, each piece being entirely done by hand.⁹

This individuality was identified, too, in Moorcroft's skills as a ceramic chemist. The range of colours available for underglaze decoration may once have seemed limited,

8 W. Crane, 'Impressions of the First International Exhibition of Modern Decorative Art at Turin', *AJ* (1902), 227–30.

9 W.P. Jervis, 'Florian Ware', *Keramic Studio* (April 1902), 260–61 (p.260).

but at the end of the article praise of Moorcroft's palette took Jervis to the limits of language:

Our illustrations will give a good general idea of the forms and decoration, but the unsurpassably beautiful colors with their iridescence and charm, their hidden depths revealed by the fire of the furnace, can only be imagined.¹⁰

Jervis, writing as a potter, understood the significance of Moorcroft's methods of production, and he recognised, too, that this work was innovative, and personal. It was not just a question of technique, but also of design; William Moorcroft was creating work 'of such a high order of merit as to justify us in classing his work as a distinct advance in ceramics, charming alike in thought and execution'. Florian was, he concluded, 'the inspiration of an artist'.¹¹ Even in 1902, Moorcroft's project as a potter came across as something remarkable. Unlike earlier reviewers, Jervis did not pass comment on the commercial value of this work; what was most significant was its distinctive artistry.

The *Encyclopedia of Ceramics* was published later in 1902.¹² It contained significant entries on some of the leading English potteries, such as Doulton, Minton, Pilkington, Wedgwood, as well as articles on individual designers or potters, past and present: Thomas Allen (retired Art Director, Wedgwood), Léon Arnoux (retired Art Director, Minton), Walter Crane, William Burton, Charles Binns, Taxile Doat, Sir Edmund Elton, the Martin brothers, Bernard Moore, Frederick A. Rhead, Marc-Louis-Emmanuel Solon and George Tinworth were all included. With little more than four years' experience, Moorcroft's inclusion in this volume says much about his status as a designer and the immediate impact of his work. Added to which, the *Encyclopedia* carried illustrations of seven pieces of Florian ware, more images than for any other designer. But most striking of all is the fact that the article was listed under Moorcroft's own name; he was identified not as the employee of Macintyre's, but as a designer in his own right.

This explicit focus on Moorcroft as an individual designer was soon repeated in the British art press. A substantial article by Fred Miller, author of 'Pottery-Painting' (1885), clearly distinguished his work from the 'torpid uniformity [...] of manufactured art'; it was pottery 'once more expressive of our higher aspirations'.¹³ An extensive quotation from Moorcroft focussed above all on the individuality of his wares, made possible precisely by the production methods adopted; to work by hand, on the unfired clay, brought the artist in direct contact with the material itself:

'Perhaps no other material is so responsive to the spirit of the worker as is the clay of the potter, and my efforts and those of my assistants are directed in an endeavour to produce beautiful forms on the thrower's wheel, the added ornamentation of which is applied

10 Ibid., pp.260–61.

11 Ibid.

12 W.P. Jervis, *The Encyclopedia of Ceramics* (New York, 1902).

13 F. Miller, 'The Art Pottery of Mr W. Moorcroft', *AJ* (1903), 57–58 (p.57).

by hand directly upon the moist clay. This, I feel, imparts to the pottery the spirit of the art-worker, and spontaneously gives the pieces all the individual charm and beauty that is possible, a result never attained by mechanical means.¹⁴

Moorcroft's use of the term 'art-worker' tellingly evoked the Art Workers' Guild, a forerunner of the Arts and Crafts Exhibition Society, and it underlined his conception of production as a collaborative exercise, the designer and his 'assistants' working in harmony. It was to this spirit of a shared and focussed project that Miller attributed the energy and naturalness which he identified in Moorcroft's work, and which expressed perfectly the vitality of the designs:

Mr Moorcroft has apparently trained his staff to good effect, for the lines on some specimens I have examined have a nice swing about them, and flow with a certain nervous freedom which is too often absent in pottery.¹⁵

This was quite different from the vision of modern industrial practice painted by Crane, where the division of labour was seen to depersonalise all aspects of production: 'The effect of this is to throw the designer out of sympathy with the use and material of his design [...], while it turns the craftsman or mechanic into an indifferent tool.'¹⁶

But Miller understood that the distinctiveness of this work lay not just in its execution, but in its design. Like critics before him, he drew attention to Moorcroft's integration of ornament and object, a quality whose absence was often lamented in industrial ware.¹⁷ And he stressed, too, his skill as a ceramic chemist. Moorcroft understood the composition of glazes as well as he judged the harmony of colours; his ware was characterised by its subtlety, not its brashness. This was art pottery with a difference, art for the discerning eye:

The glaze of Moorcroft ware is as hard as salt-glazed ware, and the palette is therefore restricted, there being few metallic oxides that will bear the high fire to which this ware is subjected; but this is no drawback where harmony of colour is aimed at, as the limited palette helps to secure this, and the commonness, almost vulgarity, of much 'art' pottery is avoided by this enforced reticence.¹⁸

And behind all this, he discerned what Crane called 'the spirit of the artist', that desire 'not merely to produce but to express'.¹⁹ He did not examine particular designs, but he implicitly likened their conception and impact to that of poetry, alluding to

14 Miller, 'Art Pottery', p.57.

15 Ibid.

16 Crane, 'Design in Relation to Use and Material', p.103.

17 Cf. Crane, 'Design in Relation to Use and Material', *The Claims of Decorative Art* (London: Lawrence & Bullen, 1892), 90–105.

18 Miller, 'Art Pottery', p.58.

19 Crane, 'Art and Industry', *The Claims of Decorative Art* (London: Lawrence & Bullen, 1892), 172–191 (pp.173–74).

Shakespeare's evocation of poetic inspiration in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, V.1. 12–17:²⁰

[...] the reproductions of a few examples of 'Moorcroft' ware accompanying these notes will enable the reader to gain some slight idea of what this 'fine phrenzy' becomes when it has 'a local habitation and a name'.²¹



Fig. 22 William Moorcroft, Florian designs illustrated in Miller's article which exemplify the harmony of form, ornament and colour: 4-handled vase with Narcissus design (1902), 12.5cm; Crocus (1902), 17.5cm. CC BY-NC.

In both design and its realisation, the presence of Moorcroft was to be found, which is doubtless why Miller could refer in the article to 'Moorcroft ware'; the designer was given an entirely separate identity from the manufactory which produced his work. It is quite significant that there was just one reference to the 'Washington China Works', and no mention at all of J. Macintyre & Co., Ltd.; William Moorcroft was making a name for himself, and not just metaphorically.

20 The poet's eye, in fine frenzy rolling,
Doth glance from heaven to earth, from earth to heaven.
And as imagination bodies forth
The forms of things unknown, the poet's pen
Turns them to shapes, and gives to airy nothing
A local habitation and a name.

21 Miller, 'Art Pottery', p.57.

He was clearly delighted with the article, and sent copies to his most important retail contacts, not least Arthur Liberty and Arthur Veel Rose of Tiffany. Rose visited him just a few weeks later, and in December 1903 he published in the American journal *China, Glass and Pottery Review* an article, 'Florian Art Pottery'. Its opening clearly situated Moorcroft's ware at the forefront of English art pottery:

While visiting the English potteries last spring, few of them interested me as much as Messrs McIntyre's [sic] Washington China Works at Burslem, Staffordshire, where W. Moorcroft has entire charge of their art department. He is an artist-craftsman of high order and a chemist of exceptional ability [...].²²

Rose drew much of his material from Miller's article, but what he underlined, too, was the enterprise of a designer who dared to be original:

Each succeeding year has seen marked improvement in his productions, and today he is producing one of the most original and charming art potteries in the market, daring in its boldness, yet with a harmony of color and design that stamp him at once an artist of rare ability.²³

If much contemporary pottery was marketed as 'art pottery', that categorisation was seen to be rarely merited. Moorcroft's ware, though, was breaking new ground in technique, colour and design, and this was recognised both at home and abroad. Rose's conclusion was categorical: 'Florian art pottery is a chemical and artistic triumph, and Mr Moorcroft's work must be classed with the finest of modern ceramic productions.'²⁴

The following year brought another significant article devoted to Moorcroft's ware, published in the main British trade journal, the *Pottery Gazette*. The journalist, William Thomson, commented first on the electrical porcelains for which Macintyre's were clearly well known, but it was Moorcroft's name that was destined for the history books:

Messrs. Macintyre make a large number of electrical and other specialities [...]. But the company have another very important department devoted to the production of artistic ceramics. This branch is under the personal superintendence of Mr William Moorcroft, an artist who has already made a name for himself, which, whatever now happens, will in the future be classed with the most famous art potters of the country.²⁵

Like Miller, Thomson sought to explore what gave this ware its distinctive quality. It was not just a question of being 'novel', of being different from the ware of other firms, nor was it the inevitable result of a replicable technique:

I understand most of the designs are registered, but Mr Moorcroft has neither patented nor registered his method of producing his beautiful effects. He lets you see him do the

22 A.V. Rose, 'Florian Art Pottery', *China, Glass and Pottery Review*, 13:5 (December 1903), n.p.

23 Ibid.

24 Ibid.

25 'A Short Visit to the Potteries', *PG* (October 1904), 1114–15 (p.1114).

primary, and most essential, part of the work, and tells you how it is completed. But you cannot 'go and do likewise'.²⁶

The unique qualities were seen to be the result of human intervention at each stage of production. Thomson gave an account of Moorcroft's distinctively varied roles as designer, artist and chemist, each requiring the sensitivity of a craftworker; none was susceptible to mechanisation, each was marked by personal touch:

[...] the artist-potter himself adds the outline of the design intended in white 'slip'. The only 'secret' process (in addition to the inimitable skill of the artist) occurs at this stage, and lies in the chemicals employed to secure the marvellous coloured results after firing the ware at the high temperature required to give the necessary density to the body.²⁷

It was in this context that Thomson drew attention to that other distinctive quality of Moorcroft ware, the handwritten signature on the base of each piece. It was a guarantee of authenticity, but it was the final sign, too, of the designer, implicit in every stage of production and explicit now in the mark of his hand:

Every piece of Florian ware bears Mr Moorcroft's signature, and if it did not, each piece carries with it the impress of his skill. Each design is absolutely the work of his own hand, while the decorative detail is carried out by trained artists under his personal supervision. He examines the work in its various stages, and passes each finally before it is fired.²⁸

Moorcroft was applauded as a ceramic chemist, his manipulation of colours winning the same kind of approbation as the glaze effects of Burton, Howson Taylor, Noke or Moore. But he was admired above all as a designer. These articles did not assess the ware as a commercial commodity, they sought instead to understand what made it both unique and inimitable. It was ware which defied description, but it was commanding attention.

And it was selling. The interest of critics was clearly reflected in the retail world, as Moorcroft's ware continued to attract commissions from leading stores. A diary entry for 28 February 1902 marked the beginning of one of his most exclusive relationships; it was with F. & C. Osler, retailers of ornamental glass whose store on Oxford Street was one of the most majestic (before the arrival of Gordon Selfridge in 1909). E.W. Watling wrote on 5 April 1902 to discuss the name of ware which Moorcroft would make exclusively for them, with its own distinctive palette of blues and pinks; the range would become inseparably associated with the firm:

As to the name for these things, I am still at a loss as to what to suggest. How does 'Hispalian' strike you? (taken from the name of an old Persian city). Or Hesperian, from the Garden of Hesperides? [...] Please let me know what you think.

Moorcroft's diary on 3 May 1902 recorded the final outcome: 'Hesperian'.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Ibid., p.1115.

²⁸ Ibid.



Fig. 23 William Moorcroft, Daisy design in Hesperian palette for F. & C. Osler (1902), 12cm. CC BY-NC

And despite growing competition in the export market, Moorcroft won the attention of fashionable retailers abroad. In 1901, he made contact in Paris with another major dealer in exclusive china and glass ware, Ernest-Baptiste Lèveillé, owner of an elegant showroom at 140 Faubourg Saint-Honoré; and he supplied wares to Louis and Marthe Demeuldre-Coché, one of the leading porcelain producers and dealers in high-quality tableware in Brussels. His reputation in the US also continued to grow, and he was now dealing with some of the most select retailers and importers of the age. His diary for the spring of 1901 recorded a number of contacts in New York: Tiffany & Co., Ch. Ahrenfeldt (major importers of Limoges and other china), and Ovington Brothers (celebrated china importer). His ware was actively promoted, too, by Jervis, who wrote enthusiastically on 23 February 1902:

I have had pleasure in speaking of Florian to several, or rather many, good houses in the trade, and I quite think you will derive considerable benefit from the same. Louis Reizenstein, Allegheny, Pa will probably see you in the course of the next 3 or 4 weeks. [...] Commercially, I class him as one of the best judges of ceramics in America.

The Charles Reizenstein Co. was an internationally renowned glass and china importer, and Louis, son of the founder, was a recognised authority in these areas; this was another major contact for Moorcroft, and it was followed up. By 1903, he was dealing with a wide range of outlets, both specialist and departmental, his diary for that year noting orders from, among others, Spaulding & Co., Chicago (goldsmiths, with a Paris branch at 36, avenue de l'Opéra, next door to Rouard), Marshall Field & Co., Chicago, John Wanamaker, Philadelphia, and A. Stowell & Co., Boston (retailers of gold clocks, silverware and jewellery). These contacts, and many others like them, were all the more remarkable as they were made at a time of declining exports to the US, and the prominence of native potteries, not least that of Rookwood, whose international reputation continued to grow. In an interview with the *Pottery Gazette*, the potter John Ridgway offered this blunt assessment of the market:

As things stand at present, the States have shut out practically everything in the way of English pottery which they cannot make for themselves. The stuff they have not shut out is stuff they want, because they cannot manufacture it themselves.²⁹

Moorcroft's ware was too individual to be manufactured by US potters, but it was self-evidently 'stuff' which the American market wanted.

3. Recognition and Reward

Moorcroft's development and promotion of his ware was undertaken in an environment which was clearly both harmonious and supportive. The death of William Woodall in 1901 marked the end of an era, but Moorcroft continued to work very productively with Henry Watkin, at a personal as well as a professional level. Time spent together was of significant enough note to warrant entries in his diary:

8 April 1901: Mr Woodall died, early morning. Walked across Downs at Barlaston with Mr Watkin.

31 March 1902: Drove round Orme's Head with Mr Watkin, morning, and walked over Little Orme in afternoon.

27 December 1903: Spent day with Mr Watkin.

And in May 1902, he went to London with Watkin to deliver a Coronation mug to the King; their professional and social lives intersected in harmony.

This personal encouragement was echoed, too, at an institutional level. Following Woodall's death, the Directors gave Moorcroft a memento of their highly respected Chairman, a sign of the value they placed on their designer's association with the firm. And on 29 January 1902, Henry Woodall asked him to show his brother-in-law 'some of your lovely things'. Moorcroft's department benefited too from practical support. On 29 July 1902, a Minute reported an increase in the allocation of money for advertising, and on 24 October 1902, Minutes of a Directors' meeting recorded the preparation of a new catalogue. Moorcroft's achievements in his department were recognised, too, at a personal level. On 4 December 1902, Minutes noted two resolutions which rewarded past endeavours, and offered firm encouragement for the future: 'a cheque for £25 at Xmas', and an increase to 2% of his sales commission. Such was their appreciation of his work that, at a meeting of 17 February 1903, the Directors agreed to reproduce the reviews first published in the *Magazine of Art*, dated 1899 and 1900, and 'other articles of a similar character'; they recognised the benefit they derived from Moorcroft's growing reputation, and their support was unequivocal.

At the end of 1903, the *Pottery Gazette* drew attention to this fruitful collaboration. Stressed again was the fact that Moorcroft had complete control and oversight of

²⁹ 'Mr John Ridgway on the Fiscal Question', *PG* (February 1904), 193–96 (p.194).

production. This unusual level of involvement for a designer implied as much about Macintyre's confidence in him, as it did about Moorcroft's conception of his role; the firm's ideals were inseparable from Moorcroft's own. The result was seen to be work of clear commercial and cultural value, broad in its appeal and in its benefit:

[...] dealers should assist manufacturers in still further improving the public taste. The increased sale of useful art ware, such as Messrs Macintyre and others are producing at reasonable prices, will contribute largely to that improvement.³⁰

This was a perfect partnership, and it coincided with growing financial success for Macintyre's. A Minute for the Annual General Meeting of 25 January 1901, Woodall's last meeting as Chairman, recorded 'satisfaction [...] at the continued increase in the profits'. And results in 1902–03 were even better. At a meeting of 5 January 1903, figures reported for half-year sales showed growth of 9.5% over the same period in 1901–02, and growth of 11% over the equivalent quarter-year period. It was minuted that these figures represented new sales records for the Company, and from this date Monthly Returns were systematically recorded in the Minutes, the total sales figure subdivided into 'General' and 'Electrical'. The Minutes of 23 July 1903 noted a very satisfactory performance for 1902–03, showing a 6.7% increase in turnover, 'the highest turnover we have ever made'. Such was the success that, at a meeting of 26 August 1903, a 5% dividend was paid to shareholders; this was without precedent. The proportion of sales from Moorcroft's department covered by 'General' is not recorded, but figures show that non-electrical sales constituted 44% of the total sales figure for the year, and that in the first half-year of 1902–03, results in this category had grown by 8.2% and those in 'Electrical' by 10.5%. The electrical business was clearly flourishing, but other ceramic production was not far behind. At a time of increasing competition from Europe and the US, this was a significant achievement.

The firm's participation at the Louisiana Purchase Exposition in 1904 was the natural culmination of this success. Nationally, the Fair was seen as a valuable opportunity for the pottery industry to counter the erosion of British exports to the US, and the Government was prepared to offer subsidies to that end. In a Minute of 19 January 1904, the Directors agreed to submit '2 cases of Florian ware', a move supported by Gilbert Redgrave, a Macintyre Director and member of the adjudicating committee of the Exhibition. The decision paid dividends. Macintyre's were ineligible for a manufacturer's award, given the participation of Redgrave on the jury, but a Gold Medal, the highest award for an individual, was awarded to Moorcroft and also to Watkin, who had submitted a new design of pyrometer. In the official report on the British Section, compiled by Sir Isidore Spielmann and published in 1906, Moorcroft featured prominently in the Ceramics category. The account of his ware highlighted its 'refinement in design and colour', and implied the ideal partnership of designer

30 PG (December 1903), p.1220.

and manufacturer: 'Fifty-seven pieces of pottery, designed by and executed under the direction of Mr W. Moorcroft, were exhibited by Messrs James Macintyre & Co.'³¹

Success at St Louis was a significant moment for both Macintyre's and Moorcroft, the culmination of their first seven years of association. But as it was happening, economic conditions continued to deteriorate in the country at large, as recession took hold in the wake of the Boer War. The profits of 1902–03 were not to be repeated in 1903–04, and as financial pressures increased, the Directors discussed on 15 March 1904 the need to reduce selling prices, clearly aware that this would mean 'a reduction in wages' for the staff. Growing concern about the expense of advertising was noted on 18 April 1904, and a Minute of 26 July 1904 reported a decline of 13.2% in sales. It was decided at the same meeting to close the works during Wakes week 'owing to slackness of trade'. There seemed to be little anxiety, though. Writing to Watkin on 7 November 1904, Gilbert Redgrave offered his 'best thanks' for the 'highly satisfactory' balance sheet. Fresh from St Louis, it may well have been that Redgrave saw the future benefits of the Fair. Macintyre's art pottery was attracting serious attention, and both Moorcroft and Watkin had won international recognition. It was a powerful and harmonious combination, and the future looked bright. But it was not to be.

5. Conclusions

This was a highly productive period for Moorcroft. His experiments in both technique and design were taking him in new directions, and his ware was winning appreciation in both artistic and commercial circles, at home and abroad. This creativity was complemented, and to some extent shaped, by two significant relationships.

His association with Liberty's was of inestimable value. The store was not just an effective retail outlet for his wares, it was a sounding board for ideas about design, taste, and market conditions. In the commercial art world of the new century, Liberty's continued to be at the forefront of design initiatives. Their interest in Moorcroft was a resounding endorsement of his energy, creativity and artistic enterprise; his interest in them showed his ambition to make his mark in the world of art pottery as it emerged from the Victorian age. This collaboration was as significant in the development of Moorcroft's art as it was in the growth of his sales.

And he was developing, too, with his employer, J. Macintyre & Co., Ltd., and with Henry Watkin—an ideal designer/manufacturer relationship. Macintyre's were wholly committed to producing 'art pottery', and appreciated the efforts which their young, enterprising designer was making. The Directors clearly recognised the value of what he produced, both commercial and artistic, and allowed him his individual identity as designer. The decision to re-print reviews of his work was made in the

31 I. Spielmann (ed.), *St Louis International Exhibition 1904. The British Section* (Royal Commission, 1906), p.329.

same month as Miller's *Art Journal* article, which, in its very title 'The Art Pottery of Mr W. Moorcroft', had explicitly focussed on Moorcroft as designer. And they clearly sanctioned the absence on wares made for Liberty's (and for Osler's) of any mark indicating the firm's name, leaving only the retailer's stamp and the designer's signature. This was in itself remarkable, especially as other pottery retailed by this store did customarily carry a manufacturer's mark alongside their own stamp. For Liberty's, clearly, the individuality of Moorcroft's ware was what distinguished it above all; it was the very antithesis of industrial manufacture.



Fig. 24 William Moorcroft, Signature and retailer's mark on base of pots made for Liberty & Co., and F. & C. Osler. CC BY-NC

Macintyre's support was unequivocal; it was also uncommon in the pottery world. A very different picture of the designer's lot was painted by Crane in his *Moot Points*: 'I maintain that an artist—say, a designer—having his living to get, must either be prepared to meet the demands of trade, the caprice of fashion—whatever you like to call it—or starve.'³² And in an article published in the *Pottery Gazette*, the manufacturer's preoccupation with profit was seen to stifle good design. Yet art, it was argued, was the safest route to commercial survival in these difficult times:

[...] manufacturers should recognise the fact that art and pottery are inseparably connected, and that it is only by an all-round improvement in art up to the highest level of the market that they can expect to survive in the long run [...]³³

At a time when craftsmen, both in the UK and in Europe, were exploring ways of achieving larger scale production of high-quality craft wares, setting up collaborative enterprises such as the Alliance Provinciale des Industries d'Art in Nancy (1901), the Guild of Handicraft in Chipping Campden (1902), or the Wiener Werkstätte in Vienna

32 W. Crane, *Moot Points: Friendly Disputes on Art & Industry between Walter Crane and Lewis F. Day* (London: Batsford, 1903), p.34.

33 'The Present Position of Pottery among the Crafts', *PG* (August 1904), 898–99 (p.898).

(1903), Macintyre's had achieved a quite different model for the commercialisation of art. Moving beyond the increasingly uneconomic production of expensive art wares, such as Solon had created at Minton, or George Owen at Worcester, they supported a craft studio based on the work of a single designer which operated on quasi-industrial lines. And this had led to neither trivialised design, low production quality, nor financial difficulty, as early reviews were quick to point out. Nor did it require the adoption of machinery; quite the reverse. Ashbee would eventually fail, in part because he could not produce wares cheaply enough to compete with the avant-garde designs machine-produced by Haselers on behalf of Liberty's. Not so Macintyre's; Moorcroft's work could not be reproduced by mechanical means.

At the turn of the century, the quest for novelty was seen to define the design ambitions of industrial artists; this was the new commercial virtue. But for Crane, it was a life of hard labour, not of creative freedom: 'The designer is perhaps kept chained to some enterprising firm. Novelties are demanded of him—something 'entirely new and original' every season [...].'³⁴ Moorcroft's relationship with Macintyre's was quite different, and so was his ambition as an artist. Far from being 'chained', what was stressed in early reviews was his absolute control over the department he ran, and his freedom to create. His conception of art pottery was not defined by its quest for new-season 'novelty', but by the quality of its design and of its realisation, by its art and its craft. On 29 March 1904, a journalist wrote to Moorcroft proposing an article on Florian ware; significantly, he treated him not as a designer whose ambition was commercial success, but as an artist whose work expressed a creative outlook which he was keen to understand:

I would very much like to go on with 'Florian Ware' and I would like to combine with the article something of the manufacture which to my mind is the most interesting. I would also like to have your own opinion of the influences and ideas which you have in designing, as it is only in this way that I can write a proper article on your ware.

Even at this early stage in his career, Moorcroft was being taken very seriously. The end of Jervis's article in *Keramic Studio* recognised in his work an originality and quality of great significance:

Mr Moorcroft is as yet but a young man, but this initial effort with which his name has been associated leads us to hope for yet greater things. For over one hundred and fifty years no added precious secret in ceramics has been discovered. Florian ware suggests the question to our thoughts as to whether the man and the time have arrived.³⁵

The economic climate was challenging, but Moorcroft's working environment was stimulating and he was full of ideas. An order from Liberty's, dated 11 March 1904, listed items in his new designs, 'Tudor Rose', 'Tree decoration' and 'Toadstool

34 W. Crane, 'The Importance of the Applied Arts and their Relation to Common Life', *The Claims of Decorative Art* (London: Lawrence & Bullen, 1892), 106–122 (p.115).

35 Jervis, 'Florian Ware', p.261.

decoration', and, at the end, other pieces in 'Old Decoration'. Above this, in Moorcroft's hand, is the annotation, 'Florian ware'. Already, just weeks before the St Louis Exhibition which would bring him his first international award, Florian belonged to the past. Later that year, the *Pottery Gazette* used the term 'Burslem Ware' to describe Moorcroft's new work, picking up the expression used in Liberty's YuleTide catalogue of 1902.³⁶ But the article ended on a different note, introducing a new name for the ware which focussed explicitly on its creator: 'A hundred years hence connoisseurs of pottery will have reason to be proud of the possession of a signed piece of Moorcroft faience.'³⁷ The next chapter of Moorcroft's career was about to begin.

36 'A Short Visit to the Potteries', *PG* (October 1904), p.1115.

37 *Ibid.*

3. 1905–09: Experiment and Adversity

1. Crisis and Creativity

If it had been hoped that the St Louis Exhibition would boost British trade, there was little immediate sign of it; industrial unrest and a continued flood of cheap imports, not least from Germany, led to a significant decline in sales both at home and abroad. Manufacturers of art pottery were particularly vulnerable to these pressures, however successful they had been in the past. Minton were on the verge of collapse throughout the period, and although the demand for tableware sustained Doulton's Burslem factory, their Lambeth art pottery was drastically reduced in scale. Many firms stopped trading altogether. In 1904, the Leeds Fireclay Company ended production of its once highly prized Burmantofts pottery; in 1906, the Della Robbia factory closed down completely; and in 1907 William de Morgan withdrew from pottery manufacture and devoted himself to writing novels.

The period did see positive initiatives, however. Some potters continued to experiment with glaze effects: Owen Carter's lustre wares at Carter & Co. were seen by *The Art Journal* [AJ] as comparable to the work of both de Morgan and Lachenal;¹ Bernard Moore, described by G.W. and F.A. Rhead as 'a potter in the truest sense of the word' set up a small-scale art pottery where he developed reduction and other transmutation glazes;² and William Howson Taylor, whose high-fired flambé wares were winning international acclaim, produced a catalogue in 1905, a clear sign of his ambition to create a market for this new ceramic art. The aesthetic and commercial potential of glaze chemistry was indeed widely celebrated, and R.A. Gregory doubtless spoke for many when he applauded this collaboration of art and science in a discussion following William Burton's lecture on crystalline glazes to the Society of Arts:

1 W. Rix, 'Modern Decorative Wares', *AJ* (1905), 113–118 (p.114).

2 G. W. & F. A. Rhead, *Staffordshire Pots & Potters* (London: Hutchinson & Co., 1906), p.371.

[...] if all industrial matters were in the hands of men with the scientific knowledge and progressive spirit that Mr Burton possessed, the position of British industry would be made secure against the competition of other nations.³

There were developments, too, in ornamental design. In 1904 A.J. Wilkinson began production of art pottery under a newly appointed Art Director, John Butler, and in 1907 A.E. Gray opened a decorating studio in Hanley, employing designers trained at the local Schools of Art; two decades later, the careers of Clarice Cliff and Susie Cooper would be launched from these firms. At Pilkington, Gordon Forsyth, Chief Artist since 1905, formed a highly creative design studio for Lancastrian ware, using patterns by both internal and external designers, applied freehand in lustre. And Wedgwood, under their new Art Director John Goodwin, introduced freehand decoration in collaboration with Alfred and Louise Powell.

Moorcroft's new work in these years was strikingly diverse. Some designs clearly responded in different ways to a prevalent nostalgia for Georgian style. The *Pottery Gazette* commented on the fashion for 'correct reproductions of Chippendale, Sheraton, Hepplewhite', and its consequences for pottery design: 'the artistic taste of the day requires that suitable vases shall be displayed on these sideboards, cabinets and 'what-nots'.⁴ It was a market which Moorcroft was obliged to exploit in these troubled economic times, referencing eighteenth-century taste in designs based on floral garlands or bouquets. Such motifs were themselves quite traditional, but Moorcroft's designs were notable for their studied integration of ornament and form, and for the refinement of their decoration.

Alongside such work, though, he continued to develop and innovate. Without the facilities of larger firms, his capacity for glaze trials was more limited, but he was achieving particularly successful results with lustre from 1907. Applied over a range of designs, from 'Tree' and 'Toadstool' to finely drawn floral motifs, these glazes attracted attention both at home and abroad. Liberty's submitted substantial orders, rarely specifying a design, leaving the selection of pieces to Moorcroft himself. And on 30 November 1907, Arthur Veel Rose expressed delight at the latest shipment of pieces for Tiffany which was 'selling remarkably well'.⁵ At the end of the decade, this success had not diminished, a letter of 8 April 1909 from Christian Dierckx, a major New York importer of china and glassware, declaring that Moorcroft's ruby lustres 'will prove a winner'.

As for design, Moorcroft's more formal floral patterns were developed alongside a series of experiments in form, ornament and decorative technique. His toadstool designs, for instance, already an opportunity to explore non-repeating motifs and combinations of colour, were reworked on (often) radically innovative shapes. He also

3 'Crystalline Glazes and their Application to the Decoration of Pottery', *Pottery Gazette and Glass Trade Review* [PG] (February 1905), 178–80 (p.179).

4 'Buyers' Notes', PG (December 1904), 1334–35 (p.1334).

5 All unpublished documents referred to in this chapter are located in William Moorcroft: Personal and Commercial Papers, SD1837, Stoke-on-Trent City Archives [WM Archive].



Fig. 25 William Moorcroft, Designs featuring rose motifs: Eighteenth Century (1905), 7.5cm; Rose Garland (1906), 6.5cm; Floral Spray (c.1907), 7cm. CC BY-NC



Fig. 26 William Moorcroft, Decorated designs with lustre glaze: Grape with bronze-purple lustre (c.1908), 13.5cm; Narcissus with yellow lustre (1907), 23cm; Wisteria with greenish-yellow lustre (1907), 12.5cm; Toadstool with ruby lustre (1907), 21cm. CC BY-NC



Fig. 27 William Moorcroft, Experiment in decoration and form: Claremont (1906), 8cm. CC BY-NC

created more stylised designs, sometimes echoing floral motifs but more abstract in their realisation, and often etched into the sides of the vessel.

The most striking of such designs, though, was 'Flamminian'. Registered in the spring of 1905, it echoed 'Tudor Rose', his 1904 design for Liberty's, but it reduced the flower to a simple, stylised roundel. In the context of contemporary art pottery, this design stood out, focussing attention on the form of the pot and the surrounding glaze. It was radical; it was also highly successful. Economical to produce, it required much less input from tube-liners and painters than floral decoration, and its simplicity of form suited it perfectly to a wide range of objects; it was versatile, and it was timeless. It sold to retailers in Europe and the US, including Tiffany and Shreve, and it attracted many orders from Liberty's over a long period and in a range of items. A substantial order on 9 January 1906 included a request for '[...] pen trays, inkstands, flat bedroom candlesticks, household jugs in 3 sizes'. Another, on 14 March 1907, ended with the instruction, 'Hurry forward all Flamminian pots and bowls'; and another, dated 13 September 1909, itemised 'vases, Honey pots, trinket trays, ring stands, pen trays, muffins, morning sets, inkstands, clock frames, biscuit jars, sardine boxes, candlesticks, and midget vases, all in either red or green or both'. Throughout this intensely creative period, Liberty's were clearly an active and appreciative outlet for Moorcroft's experiments. An order from 20 September 1904 included '£20 worth of pottery in new designs and glaze effects', and another, dated 9 January 1906, ended: 'We shall be pleased to see you with any new samples you may have produced'. Moorcroft evidently exchanged ideas about glazes and decorations with Alwyn Lasenby, and diary entries record many discussions, one involving Arthur (Lasenby) Liberty himself, a clear sign of the value placed on this collaboration. Liberty's were an ideal sounding board for the commercial potential of his new designs; at a time of increasing economic pressure, this association could not have been more valuable or productive.

2. Recognition Abroad

Moorcroft's appeal was not limited, though, to Liberty's, nor to the home market; he was equally popular in North America. In a context of intense competition, prohibitive tariffs and shrinking export markets, commercial and artistic success was hard won. He was clearly under pressure to offer goods at cheap prices, a consequence of heavy import duties; in a letter dated 27 November 1905, Spaulding & Co. expressed confidence in doing 'a splendid business' in Moorcroft's latest wares, but there was a clear proviso: 'To get the best results, they must be sold to the consumer at a moderate price. I want to get to rock bottom before starting'. His ware was stocked by some of the most exclusive retailers in the country. On 11 June 1905, he received a substantial order from Shreve & Co., of San Francisco, one of the most highly regarded US silversmiths of the time. The designs chosen included Blue Florian, Hazledene, Red and Green



Fig. 28 William Moorcroft, Designs with incised decoration: Forget-me-not panels (c.1905), 22cm; Roundels and swags (c.1905), 24cm. CC BY-NC



Fig. 29 William Moorcroft, Examples of Flamminian ware: Green with misty red streaks (1906), 13cm; Rippled red (1906), 10cm. CC BY-NC



Fig. 30 William Moorcroft, Toadstool design, with silver overlay by Shreve & Co. (1906), 20cm. CC BY-NC

Claremont, and Flamminian in bowls, dessert dishes, vases, candlesticks, plates, and tea sets. The order ended: 'All pieces to be named 'Shreve & Co, San Francisco', viz the name signed on the clay, as arranged when at your works.' The exclusive nature of these orders was enshrined in the ware, personally dedicated by the designer. And it was evidently appreciated. Writing on 12 April 1907, the store gladly consented to receive a larger shipment than they had originally ordered; for all the devastating effects of the San Francisco earthquake less than a year earlier, they were quite prepared to invest in his pottery:

Yours of the 12th ultimo, advising us that in making up our order, you had a few extra pieces which you would like to forward in some future shipment. Unless the number is very large, we think it would be perfectly satisfactory.

He enjoyed an equally high reputation with Tiffany. He was on the visiting list of their ceramics buyer Arthur Veel Rose on his regular trips to England, and in the first week of December 1907, the store ran a box advertisement in the *New York Times* entitled 'Suggestions for Christmas Gifts'. Moorcroft's ware was mentioned prominently, alongside potteries leading the way in the art of ceramic science:

In the Pottery and Glass Department are the finest products of the noted English Potteries: Minton, Copeland, Doulton, Crown Derby; also unique and artistic effects in Moorcroft Luster pottery, Lancastrian and Ruskin wares, remarkable Doulton crystalline glazes, authentic Royal Copenhagen signed pieces, rare National Sevres vases [...]

His work was no less successful in Canada. Ryrie Bros, a leading Toronto jeweller's, wrote on 6 October 1909, confident in the market for his ware:

This week we are showing a window of it as well as a large display case in the centre of the store. The coloring certainly seems to have been very well selected, and if the line does not sell, it certainly will not be your fault.

Such was the impact of this display, it attracted the attention of the *Canadian Pottery and Glass Gazette* that same month; this was true art pottery, high in quality but low in price:

Early this month a window display was made of Moorcroft's pottery [...]. This ware gets its name from the artist William Moorcroft, who ranks high among the great ceramic artists of Europe. The ware is not expensive as yet, but it will become more and more so as time goes on, for it has the quality of individuality, which will always keep it apart from any of Mr Moorcroft's contemporaries.⁶

Moorcroft was also building up his market in Europe. His latest designs were stocked by Demeuldre-Coché in Brussels; an order dated 3 October 1908 included 'New Florian' vases, and his diary for 21 July 1909 noted another 'good order' following a personal visit by Mme Demeuldre-Coché to Moorcroft's works. His diaries also

6 Transcription in WM Archive.

recorded two trips to Paris. In August 1905 he had meetings with Georges Rouard and his agent, H. Luyckx. The trip elicited an invitation to exhibit at the Salon d'Automne in 1906, an annual event inaugurated in 1903 to promote the equal status of the decorative and fine arts, and of which Rouard was a co-founder. Moorcroft's diary of 1906 noted on 10 April the despatch of 'vase and plate', and in August a trip to Paris for meetings with Rouard. Such was his reputation that he featured in the gallery's Christmas advertisement for 1907, published in the fashionable magazine *L'Illustration*; it depicted a 'Parisienne élégante' shopping for Christmas presents among some of Europe's most celebrated decorative artists, individuals and larger firms alike: Bing and Grøndahl, Décorchemont, Despret, Gallé, Decoeur. It is striking that Moorcroft was the only British designer mentioned in this illustrious list, but even more striking is that, once again, he was singled out in his own name. In France, as in the US and Canada, his ware was not seen to be the production of an industrial manufacturer, James Macintyre & Co., it was the work of a ceramic artist, William Moorcroft.



Fig. 31 Rouard's advertisement in *L'Illustration* (December 1907). CC BY-NC

3. A Personal Voice

Moorcroft's experiments in design and glaze were bringing him increased recognition and publicity. On 31 March 1905, Veel Rose invited him to write an article for the recently launched *American Pottery Gazette*; he was keen to attract contributions from potters of international standing, and Moorcroft fell into that category:

Mr Solon contributed to our first issue, and Mr William Burton is giving us an art notice in the coming number [...]. Now I am anxious for you to write us something on pottery, either on your own, or on any subject that you are best conversant with. I can assure you that I shall greatly appreciate anything you may contribute [...].

It was a valuable commercial as well as artistic opportunity, and Moorcroft worked rapidly on the project; a typescript exists dated 19 April 1905, and the article itself was published in the issue dated May 1905.⁷

Moorcroft made no direct reference to his own work in the article, but his personality and aesthetic principles were evident throughout. He wrote from an Arts and Crafts perspective, stressing the inspiring influence of nature and, above all, the expressive quality of the objects produced—this was the art of pottery:

There is no craft so ancient, more human, more artistic, or more widely used than that of the potter [...]. The clay responds to every emotion of the potter, and records the most subtle feelings of his mind, nature always being his inspiration, her notes are echoed and re-echoed in colour and form.⁸

Moorcroft had spoken from the start of his career of his desire to ‘express [...] his thoughts in clay’, but what he evoked now was the ‘pleasure’ and ‘aesthetic enjoyment’ which such works brought to their owners, what Morris had called ‘a joy for the maker and the user.’⁹ Moorcroft saw the creation of this effect not simply as a consequence of the potter’s art, but as the responsibility of the artist:

[...] just as the greatest of our buildings afford pleasure and aesthetic enjoyment, and influence our mind in the street, so the potter’s art in form and colour unconsciously influences our mind in the home. It is the duty of the potter to be true to his material, and to combine truth and beauty in his work.¹⁰

Truth to materials was a guiding principle for Morris and for his followers; Moorcroft implicitly linked it to the integrity and value of the object produced.

He touched, too, on some principles of design, focussing primarily on form and colour as means of expression, saying nothing of decoration. Simplicity was his watchword, a quality contrasted with the extravagance and artificiality often seen to characterise nineteenth-century decorative art:

He should always begin his forms in a direct and simple way. The old Chinese and Japanese potters constructed forms with simplicity, and perfect balance, and the study of their work has had largely to do with the revival of true art in the west.¹¹

7 W. Moorcroft, ‘The Potter and his Art’, *The American Pottery Gazette* (May 1905), n.p.

8 Ibid. Cf. Crane, ‘Figurative Art’, *The Claims of Decorative Art* (London: Lawrence & Bullen, 1892), 20–30 (p.21): ‘art is a language, not only for the expression of particular moods and phases of nature, or portraiture of human character, but also for the conveyance of the higher thoughts and poetic symbolism of the mind’.

9 W. Morris, ‘The Beauty of Life’ [1880], in *The Collected Works of William Morris*, XXII (London: Longmans, 1914), 51–80 (p.58).

10 Moorcroft, ‘The Potter and his Art’.

11 In an essay published the same year as Moorcroft’s article, Crane celebrated similar qualities of ‘harmony, proportion, balance, simplicity’, while noting their rarity in the modern world (‘Of the Influence of Modern Social and Economic Conditions on the Sense of Beauty’, *Ideals in Art* (London: George Bell & Sons, 1905), 76–87 (p.83)).

What mattered for Moorcroft was coherence, and when he did consider ornament, he stressed the importance of creating a unified object, developing ideas he had first considered in his jottings of 1900. Not for the only time, he would imagine the harmony of form and ornament in musical as well as visual terms: ‘In adding ornament to a form, we should always support construction, and add a note in the same key as is struck in the shape itself, and never more than that which accentuates the form.’¹² His views echoed those of Crane, who favoured ‘organic’ ornament over that which was merely ‘superadded [...], unrelated to the object, use, and material’.¹³ But they also reflected his practice, and this unity of design was a quality which commentators were already identifying in his work.

Moorcroft also emphasised the importance of handcraft, not least in the throwing of a pot on the wheel, the only sure means of creating a shape which was natural, faithful to the material, the perfect association of man and clay. It was this collaboration which lent authenticity and integrity to the forms created:

Pressed or moulded work, so much of which is unnecessarily used today, is responsible for the inartistic appearance of much modern pottery. By its means, forms are copied which are entirely unsuitable for production in the material, and it is this lack of proper construction that so largely degrades the potter’s art in these times, and robs it of that human touch which adds beauty to life.¹⁴

Moorcroft’s promotion of true manufacture, creation by hand, was uncompromising. Belief in its expressive value was implied in his ware; it was now made explicit in his words.

What is remarkable about this article is not so much that its underlying principles were situated in an Arts and Crafts tradition, but that it was written by a designer who was putting them into practice in an industrial environment. Tellingly, Moorcroft made no reference at all to commerce, profit or fashion, completely reconfiguring the aim of the designer and his relationship with the public. Good design was not a matter of marketability, but of authenticity; its prime purpose was to express the designer’s sensitivity, not to make money. If one met those criteria, he implied, commercial success would follow. It was a view which Crane had defined as the spirit of the artist:

The very spirit and meaning of the word ‘artistic’ implies something harmonious; something in relation to its surroundings; something arising out of the joy of life, and expressing the delight of the artist in his work, however arduous; something personal, the expression of one mind [...]. Not a mere system of guess-work, beginning with the designer who makes a guess at the sort of thing that may possibly ‘take’ rather than what he personally likes and has a feeling for.¹⁵

12 Moorcroft, ‘The Potter and his Art’.

13 Crane, ‘Design in Relation to Use and Material’, *The Claims of Decorative Art* (London: Lawrence & Bullen, 1892), 90–105 (p.103).

14 Moorcroft, ‘The Potter and his Art’.

15 Crane, ‘Design in Relation to Use and Material’, p.173.

These were qualities, too, which were already being recognised in his work.

In February 1906, the *American Pottery Gazette* published a short article entitled 'Flamminian Ware'; the text was attributed to Veel Rose, but surviving drafts among Moorcroft's papers show that he (Moorcroft) was the author. It was quite consistent with Rose's desire to promote innovative pottery design that he should invite Moorcroft to reflect on its significance, and it is quite clear from the introductory sentence (which was doubtless written by Rose) that 'Flamminian' had made an impact:

Mr W. Moorcroft, the art director for Messrs James Macintyre & Co., Ltd., of Burslem, England, is responsible for another artistic triumph, even greater than his Florian Art Pottery, which last caused such favourable comment by connoisseurs and collectors of ceramics.¹⁶

Moorcroft was drafting the account in the course of 1905, his diary of that year containing a description of 'Flamminian' and an explanation of its name. An undated, typed draft developed this statement, picking up ideas evident already in his earlier article for the *American Pottery Gazette*. What he highlighted in the first instance was the distinctive quality of the glaze:

The beautiful iridescent colour is in the body of the ware, the whole elements being in perfect fusion, and is obtained entirely by direct action of flame upon the surface, hence the name Flamminian ware. The fire plays its notes upon the pottery, and leaves its expression in thousands of different forms, as varied and infinite as nature herself. At one moment one sees results echoing the beauty of crystals, as seen in frozen snow under the searching light of the sun. At another moment is depicted the spirit of the sea shore, as seen in the beautiful lines left by the waves on the sand. Indeed nature is seen in all her moods in one form or another. [...] The whole suggests endless possibilities, and should appeal to all lovers of ceramics.¹⁷

At one level, Moorcroft situated his work in the tradition of the chemist potter, his richly metaphorical language echoing Burton's introduction to the Pilkington's exhibition catalogue of 1904, or his paper 'Crystalline Glazes and their Application to the decoration of Pottery'. Burton was developing glazes which had their own individuality, countering the characterless uniformity associated with industrial production, what the 1904 catalogue had described as the 'false ideal of mechanical perfection':

While the problem of the potter ordinarily is to produce glazes which are uniform in texture and in tint, we have striven to produce a series of glazes which should develop layers, streaks, or patches of opalescent, feathered or clouded colour. [...] the resultant glazes have been compared by different observers to all kinds of beautiful natural products: to finely grained and highly polished woods, to polished serpentine, agate and

¹⁶ A.V. Rose, 'Flamminian Ware', *The American Pottery Gazette* (February 1906), p.37.

¹⁷ This text is reproduced verbatim in A.V. Rose, 'Flamminian Ware', p.37.

jasper; to the feathery moss in a running stream, and to the lightest cirri in the summer sky [...].¹⁸

Moorcroft was doing likewise; but his purpose was aesthetic as well as scientific. This was the most striking example of the simplicity he had promoted in his earlier article, its affirmation here both conscious and confident:

Simplicity, the Alpha and Omega of all great effort, is the main characteristic of this ware. It is in marked contrast to the so-called New Art, which has carried its influence over all Europe, and which is seen in extravagant twirling lines, running rampant in wall papers, fabrics, and all kinds of furniture, so much so that one wearies of such restless expression and longs for repose.¹⁹

Flamminian took a quite different direction from the flourishes of *art nouveau*; Moorcroft was not afraid to go his own way. This was a design for the modern age, reduced in ornament but coherent in conception, an individual response to the times, reflecting, in Crane's terms, the artistic spirit, 'something personal, the expression of one mind':²⁰

This is an original Pottery, restrained in form and design, combining some of the best traditional qualities with the spirit of the present age. The whole is conceived and controlled by one mind which results in a perfect cohesion in all parts.²¹

4. Critical Reception

Moorcroft's pottery continued to attract the attention of both art and trade journals. Writing on 'modern decorative wares' in 1905, Wilton P. Rix, the (retired) Art Director of Doulton Lambeth, included among his illustrations several examples of both Hazledene and Claremont, versions of the landscape and toadstool designs which Moorcroft made for Liberty's. At the end of the article, he made explicit reference to the 'very skilful treatment of fungoid growths in raised outline by Mr Moorcroft'.²² Moorcroft was mentioned by name, too, as the creator of 'true ceramic work' at the end of G.W. and F.A. Rhead's *Staffordshire Pots and Potters*.²³ And in another (three-part) article on 'British Pottery' published in 1908 by J.A. Service, glass designer and later Manager at Thomas Webb & Sons, Moorcroft was identified as a leading figure:

For many years now, the firm of James Macintyre & Co., Ltd., of Burslem, whose principal business is the prosaic one of manufacturing ordinary pottery for electrical purposes, have sought outlets for their enterprise through the skill of Mr W. Moorcroft,

18 PG (February 1905), p.178.

19 A.V. Rose, 'Flamminian Ware', p.37.

20 Crane, 'Art and Industry', *The Claims of Decorative Art* (London: Lawrence and Bullen, 1892), 172–191 (p.173).

21 A.V. Rose, 'Flamminian Ware', p.37.

22 W.P. Rix, 'Modern Decorative Wares', *AJ* (1905), 113–18 (p.118).

23 G.W. & F.A. Rhead, *Staffordshire Pots & Potters* (London: Hutchinson & Co., 1906), p.371.

an art potter, in the making of decorative pottery of graceful form and with simple and appropriate colour ornament.²⁴

Once again, the work was assessed on aesthetic grounds, appreciated for its simplicity and restraint, but, above all, for its 'fitness' of ornament and form, what Moorcroft had called 'cohesion'. This was a quality clearly uncommon in contemporary pottery:

Simplicity is the characteristic feature of these productions, features equally apparent in the subjects of the decorative schemes and in the forms upon which they are applied, and in combination there is a fitness about them, a repose, restraint, and restfulness which is quite refreshing.²⁵

Nor was it just in England that Moorcroft's work was attracting critical attention; it was the subject of reviews in both Europe and North America. An article in *Le Monde Industriel* by E. Hardouin began with a general section on the history of Macintyre's before turning to Moorcroft's qualities as an artist. Once again it was his practical involvement in the manufacture of his ware which attracted the critic's attention; Moorcroft may not have made each pot with his own hands, but he represented for Hardouin the fusion of skilled craftsman and exceptional designer [*un praticien des plus experts que double un artiste fort distingué*], the embodiment of the Arts and Crafts ideal:

*Les pièces qui sortent de cette fabrique, marquées au coin d'un goût qui sent et qui sait, sont appelées au plus légitime succès. Ce ne sont plus des œuvres impersonnelles du machinisme moderne, mais des créations élégantes décelant l'empreinte personnelle de l'artiste qui les travailla.*²⁶

[The pottery produced at this factory, characterised by its fine and discerning taste, is destined to be truly successful. These are not the impersonal products of modern machinery, but elegant artworks, bearing the personal imprint of the craftsman who created them.]

There was a significant article, too, in the *Canadian Pottery and Glass Gazette*. This article, like that in *Le Monde Industriel*, began with a section on Macintyre's, and it, too, implicitly situated Moorcroft in the Arts and Crafts tradition, committed to the design and creation of functional objects which are a joy to use:

Five years ago they commenced the manufacture of useful and ornamental pottery for domestic purposes. Their aim was to supply high-class goods for general use. They placed this branch of their business under the management of William Moorcroft. This gentleman happened to be an artist as well as a potter—the very person to carry out the

24 J.A. Service, 'British Pottery II', *AJ* (1908), 129–37 (pp.131–32).

25 *Ibid.*, p.132.

26 E. Hardouin, 'La Poterie et Porcelainerie James Macintyre, de Burslem', *Le Monde Industriel*, 10 mai 1905, 124–25 (p.125). [Translation mine].

desire of the firm. [...] In producing wares designed for use in the dining-room, breakfast room or kitchen, Mr Moorcroft considered beauty as well as utility.²⁷

This perspective also characterised reviews of Moorcroft's work in the British trade press. In a *Pottery Gazette* article of 1906, attention was paid particularly to the least expensive of his wares, Aurelian and Dura, whose transfer-printed or simplified slip designs dated back to the very start of Moorcroft's career nearly ten years earlier. Production of these ranges was clearly much less costly than that of Florian, but cheapness did not come at the expense of good design, nor of aesthetic appeal:

In common with all true artists, Mr Moorcroft thinks artistic beauty should be combined with utility. The presence of beautiful ware on a breakfast table cannot fail to have a refining influence on those who use it. There is no reason why artistic beauty should not be found in even cheap goods.²⁸

Moorcroft was an artist with a true sense of vocation, dedicating his art to the benefit of the public; what he had affirmed as the artist's responsibility in his article of 1905 was now clearly recognised in his practice.

What is striking about the *Pottery Gazette* reviews of this period, however, is not just what was written about Moorcroft, but what was written about Macintyre's. In an article published in 1907, the harmony of beauty and utility, seen the previous year to be the mark of Moorcroft's artistic vision, was attributed now to Macintyre's, the identity of Moorcroft anonymised in the term 'originator':

In these high-class ceramics of Messrs Macintyre, we have useful pottery which at the same time is artistic. Each piece has the artistic feeling of the originator impressed on it. [...] Messrs Macintyre are placing within the reach of all a refining influence on our lives in the combination of artistic beauty with utility.²⁹

When the beauty of the functional ware was evoked again in 1908, Macintyre's were (again) made the subject of the sentences, implicitly responsible for both design and production:

Messrs Macintyre are showing us that there is no reason why a useful cup should not be a pretty one. They are producing a large variety in tea ware with artistic ornamentations by hand at reasonable prices.³⁰

27 'The Art of William Moorcroft Applied to Ceramics', *The Canadian Pottery and Glass Gazette* (August 1908), 6–8 (p.7).

28 *PG* (March 1906), 330–31 (p.331). Crane lamented the general absence of just these qualities in his essay, 'Of the Social and Ethical Bearings of Art', *Ideals in Art* (London: George Bell & Sons, 1905), 88–101 (p.97): 'I hope that we shall not be content as a people to remain satisfied with so little of the refining influence of art and beauty in our daily lives. We are beginning to realise the immense loss and deprivation their absence causes [...]'.
29 *PG* (March 1907), 323–24 (p.324).

30 *PG* (March 1908), 329–30 (p.329).

And an article published the following year began with a full and celebratory account of Macintyre's other output: 'James Macintyre & Co., Ltd., Washington China Works, Burslem are extensive manufacturers of many descriptions of pottery, and they are specialists in each'.³¹ When Moorcroft's name was mentioned, it was soon eclipsed; it was the manufacturer, not the designer, who was given credit for production, and even for design:

The company are well known as manufacturers of specially designed high-class ceramics, not only for purely ornamental purposes, but for everyday use. [...] In the company's 'Dura', 'Florian', 'Aurelian', 'Hesperian' and other designs, we have tea and breakfast ware, dessert sets and trinket sets on strictly artistic lines and at reasonable prices.³²

By the end of the article, Moorcroft had disappeared from the text; his achievements were now given no originator, his identity lost in a more nebulous collectivity:

In purely artistic productions, great advances have been made, particularly in new colour schemes, on classical and other artistic forms. Effects that are new since my last visit to the works are shown on original forms of great beauty. The colour schemes are bright, yet restful. In some there is perfect harmony, in others effective contrast. They illustrate forcibly the advances made in experimental work by the company's artists.³³

If reviews at the turn of the century had implicitly, or explicitly, underlined the enlightened vision of Macintyre's, whose open recognition of their designer's individuality distinguished them from the generality of pottery manufacturers, it was not so now. In these reviews, Moorcroft's identity was increasingly anonymised, his creativity appropriated by his employer; it implied a different kind of relationship, one which Crane and others had so vigorously campaigned against:

We must no longer be content with the vague, however convenient, designation of authorship, or rather proprietorship—So-and-So & Co.—now commonly affixed to works of art or industry in our exhibitions; but we should require the actual names of the contrivers and craftsmen whose actual labour, thought and experience produced what we see.³⁴

It was the tell-tale sign of a growing tension at the heart of the firm.

5. Tension at Macintyre's

The future of Moorcroft's department was first raised in a Minute of 18 May 1905, just months after the Louisiana Purchase Exhibition: 'The proposal to abandon Moorcroft's department was again considered [...]'. The 'proposal' had been tabled

31 PG (May 1909), p.562.

32 Ibid.

33 Ibid.

34 Crane, 'Art and Industry', *The Claims of Decorative Art* (London: Lawrence and Bullen, 1892), 172–191 (p.188).

by the Managing Director, and clearly not for the first time. But the Chairman and Secretary of the Directors, Corbet Woodall and his son Corbett W., were evidently not convinced by the report, and requested further information. The matter was resumed at a meeting of 20 June 1905, and Watkin was asked again to provide more detail of 'the cost of production in comparison with the selling price'. At the next meeting, 11 September 1905, there was more discussion, but no resolution: 'It was decided to deal with the matter more fully at the next meeting'. That there should have been discussion about the future of Moorcroft's department at this particular time is certainly puzzling. Not only was his national and international reputation in the ascendant, the trading year 1904–05 was very successful. At the Annual General Meeting of 11 September 1905, the financial health of the firm was not in doubt: a 5% dividend was paid to shareholders, and the meeting ended with a vote of thanks to the Officers 'for the successful conduct of the business'. Indeed, the Directors clearly did not see the logic of Watkin's proposal, and it is significant that in the Minutes of the 'next meeting', on 8 December 1905, no further discussion of Moorcroft's department was recorded. Nor did the matter arise in the Minutes of any meeting during the following financial year.

The issue was raised again, though, when mid-year figures for 1906–07 were tabled by Watkin at a meeting on 21 February 1907:

Surprising figures were submitted in reference to Moorcroft's and Cresswell's departments. After some discussion, the matter was postponed pending further particulars promised by the Managing Director.

Discussion continued on 1 May 1907:

The Managing Director submitted an interesting and detailed report in reference to Moorcroft's and Cresswell's departments, both of which, he maintained, showed a considerable loss in the year's working.

The wording of these Minutes implies uncertainty on the part of the Woodalls at Watkin's report and its conclusions. The extent to which Moorcroft's (and Cresswell's) departments were, in fact, losing money, cannot be known. However, sales figures appended to the Minutes for seven out of the first ten months of the financial year 1906–07 indicate that whereas Electrical sales had fallen by 25% on the equivalent months of 1905–06, 'General' sales (which must include those of Moorcroft's department) showed a 7.7% increase on the 1905–06 figures. What is more, the sales for Electrical totalled £6,720 for this period, and those for 'General' £6,860; this was the first time that 'General' had come even close to matching the sales figures of Electrical. Viewed in this context, it is no surprise that the Directors found what Watkin 'maintained' about the (un)profitability of Moorcroft's department 'surprising'. On 11 June 1907 Watkin submitted 'further particulars', but this clearly led to no substantive decision. The issue, nevertheless, remained live. It arose again on 21 January 1908, the focus, by implication, on sales, and the value of unsold stock. It is noticeable, though, that the Minutes envisaged not the end of Moorcroft's department, but a 'more satisfactory

system'; whatever the Managing Director's view, the Directors collectively sought 'cooperation' not closure:

The position of the Decorating Department was further considered, and it was decided that the Managing Director explain the matter to Mr Moorcroft and endeavour to enlist his cooperation in establishing a more satisfactory system.

Moorcroft evidently took care to maintain a close relationship with the Woodalls during 1908. He sent to Corbett Woodall a copy of Service's article in *The Art Journal*; it was the latest sign of his growing reputation, and Woodall responded on 27 May 1908. Against the background of increased scrutiny, Woodall's encouraging words spoke volumes: 'I am delighted to learn your department continues to make good progress, nothing could give me greater pleasure than to see it a very great success.' Woodall's comment in the same letter that he was in regular contact with Lasenby and that he expected 'to be seeing quite a lot of him during the summer' implied another gesture of reassurance; Liberty's commercial interest in Moorcroft's ware was of real significance. But for all this discreet support from the Woodalls, it is clear that by 1908, Moorcroft's working relationship with Watkin had become very tense. On 2 April 1908 he recorded in his diary that items had been sold at prices 30% and 50% lower than those originally agreed. He did not speculate about how this could have arisen, but the negative impact on his department's profit margin needed no further elaboration: 'Re. toast racks. Found the same had been sold @ 6d [pence] (3 bars) and 8d [pence] (5 bars), when price plan was 8½d [pence] and 1/4d [1 shilling and 4 pence] respectively'. At the end of this diary, a further note recorded a reduction of 15% on the price of another item.

By 1909, the challenging economic conditions were having an effect, and a Minute dated 26 May 1909 caught the mood of commercial pessimism. J. Ravenscroft, one of the Company's travellers, 'reported trade was so bad, he doubted if it was worthwhile continuing the South Coast journey.' Since 1907, Macintyre's had been exploring lucrative openings in the supply of 'Leadless Glaze insulators' for the Post Office, 'patent Bottle Stoppers' for the Associated Whisky Manufacturers, and 'Rigging Insulators' for the Admiralty. But on 6 October 1909, a trading loss was recorded for the year 1908–09, the first since 1897; no dividend was paid. The pressures on Moorcroft did not ease, but he was clearly adamant that his department was viable. He was evidently confiding in Lasenby, who, in a letter dated 2 February 1909, sketched out how Moorcroft might bring his concerns to the attention of the Woodalls. The draft is a clear indication of Lasenby's support at this time, and of the strain under which Moorcroft was now working:

The following is somewhat what I feel as regards your circumstances, put in a rough letter, viz:

Dear Sirs,

I have, as you are aware, now for some years been devoting my brain and time to the development of the commercial and artistic part of your works (that I am more or

less responsible for). I think you will agree that on the artistic side, I have been fairly successful, and found an appreciative market. On the other hand, I am convinced that my department (debited only with its legitimate charges) will show a satisfactory profit. [...] if I am to have my future associated with your firm, I must have control of my own working expenses [...]. Failing your being able to do this, I shall make other arrangements. I am sorry to trouble you with this letter, but I have at all times so appreciated the consideration of some of the members of your Board. [...] I should not have felt it honourable on my part to have gone my own way without first letting you know what I felt about the way things may have been represented to you.

Moorcroft evidently believed that the figures presented by the Managing Director gave a misleading view of the profitability of his department; the Minutes themselves had called them ‘surprising’. His work was selling well, and he wished to demonstrate that it was profitable; but control of his own budget was his only means of achieving that. Whether the letter was ever sent, though, is doubtful. The situation declined further, and Moorcroft’s diary for 1909 recorded continued tension and disagreements. A note dated 27 May concerned the cancellation of his customary visit to Paris in 1908:

H.W. accused me of not going to Paris when he requested. As a matter of fact, last year when it was mentioned, he replied it would not be worthwhile, and even complained about the cost of photographs to obtain orders.

And at the end of the diary, he made other disheartened notes:

H.W. proceeds to introduce figures of wages paid in dept. and endeavours to show there is deficit in the amount of work done. After examination, it is found he has not included the work done by half of the staff. This is an example of the figures he brings before his directors. And at a time when there is no means of verifying.

Re. Ginger Box. H.W. insists that no more must be made unless enlarged. This order is given against wishes of customer. At same time he charges me with producing without profit. Yet he proceeds to increase costs by making larger. This action, if allowed to proceed, will result in losing trade. Without doubt, the boxes, of which we have sold thousands, are one of our best lines.

For all that a worsening economic situation and Macintyre’s increasing concentration on electrical porcelain might explain close scrutiny of Moorcroft’s department from 1908, it does not account for the proposal to close it down entirely in early 1905. It is quite clear, though, that this proposal originated with the Managing Director, and that it had no corporate assent. Throughout this period, the Woodalls remained unconvinced by the evidence and arguments presented to them by Watkin; they recognised, as they had since 1897, the artistic and commercial success of Moorcroft’s work, and they continued to support him. Nevertheless, the once fruitful and collaborative relationship Moorcroft had enjoyed with Watkin had clearly come to an end. And it is in this context that the increasingly prominent references to Macintyre’s in *Pottery Gazette* articles, and the corresponding reduction in direct references to Moorcroft, might be understood. It would later emerge that proofs of these articles had been

sent to Watkin (at his insistence) and had been subject to his direct intervention and revision. The department may not have been closed down, but the profile of its Art Director was being curtailed.

6. Conclusions

This was a period of extensive and varied experiment for Moorcroft, and his reputation, both at home and abroad, continued to grow. It is ironic, though, that he should have achieved so much in these years when his circumstances at the Washington Works were increasingly tense. The success of art pottery departments was often attributed to the foresight, encouragement or commercial backing of the manufacturer. The first part of Service's *Art Journal* article focussed on the defining impact of such support for some of the most celebrated ceramic artists of the past:

This cooperation between the manufacturer and the artist is as desirable as it is essential, and has given us wares that neither could have produced alone, wares stamped with refinement, taste and individuality, and successes from every point of view. It is almost impossible to imagine, for instance, that the beautiful *pâte-sur-pâte* work of Mr Solon, or the incised stonewares which Miss Hannah Barlow made at Doulton's, could have been made by those artists working alone.³⁵

And in a substantial article on Pilkington in the *Pottery Gazette*, the remarkable success of Lancastrian Pottery was ascribed to the perfect combination of enlightened firm and inspired individuals given the freedom to develop their work:

I have always considered this beautiful art ware as the outcome of a series of fortunate circumstances. The company were fortunate in having two such skilled chemists in charge of their tile works. The Burtons were equally fortunate in being associated with a strong company, willing to give them such a free hand in carrying out their plans.³⁶

No less creative were the relationships of Charles Noke and John Bailey at Doulton, John Goodwin and Alfred Powell at Wedgwood, or Owen Carter and James Radley Young at Carter & Co. Such firms actively promoted the work of their designers during these years. In 1904, Pilkington launched Lancastrian Pottery at the Graves Gallery in London; in 1905, Wedgwood exhibited at the Paterson Gallery in Old Bond Street pieces decorated for them by Alfred Powell and William Lethaby; and in 1906, Doulton's promoted its most recent flambé wares at the New Dudley Gallery, Piccadilly. No such promotion was given to Moorcroft's ware. Nor did Macintyre's exhibit at any of the international events where other leading potters were winning acclaim: Milan in 1906; the 8th Arts and Crafts Exhibition Society exhibition in 1906; Christ Church, New Zealand in 1906; the Franco-British exhibition in 1908; the

35 J.A. Service, 'British Pottery', *AJ* (1908), 53–57 (p.54).

36 *PG* (October 1909), 1154–57 (p.1155).

Imperial International Exhibition in 1909. If Macintyre's had once seemed to embody enlightened manufacturing, creating the perfect environment to produce art pottery in an industrial setting and to foster the individuality of their designer, this was no longer the case.

Nevertheless, tensions at the Washington Works did little to diminish the distinctive, personal quality of Moorcroft's designs, which critics continued to identify and appreciate. Tiffany's advertisement of December 1907 referred openly to 'Moorcroft Luster pottery'; and the expression 'Moorcroft Lustre Ware' was used in an advertisement for his American agent Christian Dierckx published in the *American Pottery Gazette* of April 1909. The author of the article in the *Canadian Pottery and Glass Gazette* raised the subject explicitly, and had no difficulty in explaining its appropriateness:

A few years ago, Mr Moorcroft developed the production of ornamental pottery, and now, without in any way restricting the manufacture of useful goods on true art lines, he is producing art forms [...] to which the distinctive name of 'Moorcroft Ware' is given. It is in no spirit of vanity that this name is used. No more appropriate name could have been chosen. He is a skilful potter, with a pronounced artistic individuality, and he succeeds in imparting that individuality to every piece of ware produced under his direction. That is to say, the finished piece, as we see it, is just what the artist-potter intended it to be. That his supervision is actual and not nominal is vouched for by the fact that each article bears his signature, indicating that he passed that piece before it was fired.³⁷

Moorcroft's ware had never been marketed under that name, but it was evidently adopted by critics and retailers on both sides of the Atlantic. Moorcroft may design in an industrial setting, but his work was not seen as the impersonal output of a manufacturer; it had its own distinctive individuality, like that of the leading independent potters of the time, the Martin brothers, Sir Edmund Elton, William de Morgan, whose names were unhesitatingly applied to their work. But the practice clearly caused tension with the General Manager. When the *Pottery Gazette* journalist, William Thomson, proposed another article to Moorcroft on 27 June 1908, he evoked the term which he had himself first used in less troubled times in his article of 1904, but he recognised now that circumstances had changed: 'I want, if you will allow me, to contribute a special article on 'Moorcroft Faience', but I suppose I must not call it that.' Moorcroft, too, nurtured and valued that personal quality of work 'conceived and controlled by one mind', as his comments on Flamminian ware for the *American Pottery Gazette* made plain.³⁸ And it was in these years, and most likely as early as 1905, that he stopped adding the abbreviation des. to his signature on the pots. If his earlier practice might have implied that his role was limited to that of designer, and that he had no hand in manufacture, he now underlined his involvement in all stages of

³⁷ 'The Art of William Moorcroft', p.7.

³⁸ A.V. Rose, 'Flamminian Ware', p.37.

production, identifying himself fully with each individual object, created by the team of decorators he had personally trained.

As tensions at the Washington Works developed, his relationship with Liberty's was becoming increasingly significant; Moorcroft had clearly won their support as both a commercial and artistic collaborator. He was able to experiment, knowing that Liberty's were prepared to experiment, too; both believed that quality of design did not have to have a high cost, but also that quality of production made wares as marketable as those with a low price. On 22 December 1909, Moorcroft wrote to Lasenby with great excitement about new experiments in design and colour:

I am delighted with the colour impressions you gave me yesterday during our conversation. Yes ! we will put into our Western pots some of the luxuriance of the East. You have fanned into flame a keen desire to obtain luxurious colour. We will hope our material will not be a too serious combative force. I do not feel it will be.

At the beginning of 1909, Moorcroft had clearly considered a move from Macintyre's, but it would be four more years before the separation came. As the year drew to a close, a quite different journey was about to begin; he was on the threshold of his most ambitious work to date.

4. 1910–12: Approaching a Crossroads

1. Brussels 1910

The Exposition Universelle et Internationale de Bruxelles of 1910 was not just another World's Fair, it marked the beginning in Great Britain of much greater government support for industrial exhibitors, both financial and logistical. A new department of the Board of Trade, the Exhibition Branch, was charged with the organisation of the British exhibits; it was these changes which doubtless persuaded Macintyre's to participate.¹ The pottery section was one of the highlights of the Exhibition. A report in the *Pottery Gazette* highlighted the range of pieces, from 'domestic wares that combine beauty and utility' to 'priceless and unique specimens for the museum or the connoisseur's cabinet'.² This was the golden age of industrial ceramics:

The Ceramic Court occupies a splendid position right in the centre of the British Industrial Hall [...]. Here are grouped a series of cases containing a truly magnificent collection of pottery and glass of all kinds for which our manufacturers are famous, and in which they maintain a world-wide trade.³

Moorcroft's exhibit attracted the journalist's attention, his floral designs in blue on white praised particularly for their restraint and restfulness:

The colouring in soft greyish blue is soothing to the eye. The shapes are very graceful, and their gentle curves and those of the decorations suggest the best characteristics of the 'art nouveau' with none of its extravagance.⁴

The Fair was a great success for Moorcroft, although he, like many others, lost all his exhibits in the fire which completely destroyed the Belgian and British Sections on the night of 14 August 1910. For the *Pottery Gazette*, the accident was 'little short of a national calamity', the economic and cultural loss almost incalculable.⁵ The trade fought back, though, and all but three of the exhibiting firms sent new pieces for the

1 After initially declining to take part, the Directors reviewed their decision on 6 December 1909, and agreed to exhibit 'two small cases'.

2 *Pottery Gazette and Glass Trade Review* [PG] (August 1910), 887–96 (p.887).

3 Ibid.

4 Ibid., p.891

5 PG (September 1910), p.1003.

re-located British Section which opened in the Salle des Fêtes on 15 September 1910. Moorcroft was no exception. His diary contained no reference to the fire, but just over three weeks later, on 8 and 9 September, he recorded without further detail the despatch of his replacement exhibit.⁶ The *Pottery Gazette* of November 1910 carried a photo of his display, which included vases, jugs and bowls in Toadstool, Floral Spray, and Eighteenth-Century designs, and a variant of Cornflower in a palette of yellow and blue.

British potteries won great acclaim. *The Times* of 15 September 1910 listed six winners of the *Grand Prix*, both large and well-established companies (Doulton, Wedgwood and Minton) and smaller, more recently founded firms (Pilkington, Bernard Moore and William Howson Taylor's Ruskin Pottery). Macintyre's were awarded the *Diplôme d'honneur*, and Moorcroft his second contributor's Gold Medal. These successes attracted the attention of the new King and Queen, who invited leading firms to submit examples of their ware for inspection at Buckingham Palace. This initiative was widely reported in the national press, and the *Pottery Gazette* commented on the 'magnificent collection of perfect pieces' which resulted.⁷ Macintyre's was one of the firms selected, and a Minute of 30 December 1910 recorded the royal interest:

It was reported as a result of the Exhibition at Brussels, a requisition to forward samples for Queen Mary's inspection had been received. The samples were duly forwarded and a letter subsequently received intimating that both the King and Queen had inspected and greatly admired them.

Moorcroft's success was Macintyre's success. To be included in this select group of manufacturers was to be well placed at the threshold of what promised to be a period of prosperity. The new Queen had rapidly shown herself to be an active and discerning supporter of British industry, not least the pottery industry, and the *Pottery Gazette* report expressed a widely held feeling of optimism as 1911 dawned:

Even in the present unsettled state of politics, the commercial outlook is more promising than it has been for some time. [...] Her Majesty has given that 'Royal lead' which her subjects are always eager to follow [...]. There has not been such interest taken in high-class British pottery for many years, and that fact alone leads us to anticipate a good trade in 1911.⁸

2. New Designs

For Moorcroft, the new decade saw the introduction of some of his most distinctive and technically challenging designs. In 1910 he launched two exotic decorative schemes: 'Pomegranate', a design which, in its various guises, would remain popular for the

6 All unpublished documents referred to in this chapter are located in William Moorcroft: Personal and Commercial Papers, SD1837, Stoke-on-Trent City Archives [WM Archive].

7 *PG* (January 1911), p.88.

8 *Ibid.*, p.49.



(L) Fig. 32 William Moorcroft, Variant of Cornflower design exhibited in Brussels 1910: 25cm. CC BY-NC

(R) Fig. 33 William Moorcroft, Designs in 'luxurious colour': Vase with Pomegranates and Berries (1911), 23cm; Lidded jar in Spanish (1911), 8cm; Chalice with Cornflower (dated 1911), 14cm. CC BY-NC



(L) Fig. 34 William Moorcroft, Tall vase with Wisteria (1912), 30cm; 2-handled vase with Pansy (1912), 22.5cm. CC BY-NC

(R) Fig. 35 William Moorcroft, Claremont design with running glaze (c.1910), 18cm; Narcissus in Green on Green (dated 1912), 15cm. CC BY-NC

next twenty years, and 'Moorish' (later known as 'Spanish') a stylised floral design. The distinctively rich palette of 'luxurious colour' which Moorcroft had announced to Alwyn Lasenby in 1909, and which characterised the earliest versions of these designs would be applied too to Cornflower with equally striking effect.

The following year, he introduced 'Pansy' and 'Wisteria', two designs in which floral motifs represented with the utmost delicacy stood out against a white or light cream background; they were a striking contrast to the lush, luminous effects of 'Pomegranate' and 'Spanish'. For all their evident differences, these new designs had a sophistication quite without parallel at the time; they highlighted Moorcroft's art both as a designer and glaze chemist, but they demonstrated too the exceptional craft of his tube-liners and painters. They were available in both functional and decorative items across a wide price range, but they were evidently more expensive to produce than earlier styles, which were also still in demand. A letter dated 16 September 1912 from H. Luyckx, Moorcroft's agent in France, gives a valuable insight into comparative prices: 'For Mr Rouard's guidance, I told him prices of Florian, stating 'wisteria' would be about 20% more.' They nevertheless attracted much critical and commercial attention.

Pomegranate, the most innovative in terms of its subject matter, first appeared in a tube-liner's ledger for the week ending 14 August 1909, and it was certainly in production by June 1910. A special order from Liberty's to the value of £400 was dated 26 June 1910, and four days later Moorcroft's diary recorded their 'general satisfaction' with the 'new Pomegranate ware'; the store would sell this design under the name 'Murena'. Significant orders came from the US for both Pomegranate and 'Old Spanish' vases, and Pansy, too, was much admired. A note dated 10 March 1911 recorded early success in Canada, and in a handwritten postscript to a letter of 11 April 1912, William Prentice, director of Cassidy's, the Montreal-based china importers, added this personal appreciation: 'The new Pansy treatment. The shipment has just come in and opened up. I am delighted with it.'

At the same time, Moorcroft continued to develop existing designs, exploring new palettes or styles. Some of his most striking pieces were adaptations of the Claremont design, realised on innovative forms, but now with a quite particular 'bleeding' of colour; this created a distinctive, dream-like atmosphere, on the boundary of representation and abstraction. In contrast, and in much smaller quantities, he also produced a series of designs using a single colour, an exercise in ceramic minimalism in which ornament, almost like a watermark, was perceptible in the body of the vessel, echoing its outline, but focussing attention on tone and form.

Alongside orders for these high-quality wares, Moorcroft was also receiving, and responding to, requests for bespoke items, some to be produced in quantity, others clearly not. He was commissioned through Liberty's in the spring of 1911 to make specially designed Coronation mugs for the 2nd Baron Norton. The mug was decoratively simple, incorporating the four national emblems—rose, daffodil, thistle and shamrock—and a four-verse patriotic hymn, plus refrain. It was an important commission, made with care and at short notice, just weeks before the Coronation.



Fig. 36 William Moorcroft, George V Coronation mug made for Lord Norton, 1911: design and realisation, 11.5cm. 'Personal and Commercial Papers of William Moorcroft', Stoke-on-Trent City Archives, SD 1837. CC BY-NC

A more personal commission came from Kate Reed, interior designer of the grand hotels and mountain lodges built by the Canadian Pacific Railway along its East-West route. Moorcroft's diary recorded with evident delight the receipt of a letter from 'Mrs Hayter Reed' on 6 May 1912, 'expressing her keen admiration' for his Pansy decoration. The tea set he made for her in this design was particularly fine in its treatment, and she would become one of his most sensitive advocates.



Fig. 37 William Moorcroft, Cup and Saucer in Pansy design, 'Made for Mrs Hayter Reed' (1912), 6.5cm. CC BY-NC

A larger-scale commercial initiative was the introduction of heraldic ware. Moorcroft created items for many of the Oxford and Cambridge colleges, and such articles clearly caught the attention of agents abroad. H. Martens wrote from Germany on 17 July

1911, asking for samples bearing the city arms of Hamburg, and on 2 October 1911, he replied to a letter from Cassidy's about a commission from McGill University:

We have the jars already made with the shield in the same form we are now supplying to Oxford and Cambridge. So we now propose to engrave the latest crest you enclose and place it on the inside of the cover. The arms alone being incorporated with the design on the outside of the cover. By this means the cover will have a twofold interest.

More specific was a request from John Taylor of Stoke on Trent on 27 January 1912:

I enclose herewith sketch of tobacco jar, height 5 inches, diameter 5 inches. The jar in question is for cigars. It must have a screw top such as you use on your 965 shape covered jar, or something as practical, so that the cover will fit tightly on the base. There is no knob on the top. [...] Kindly let me have the best price on two thousand in plain colour such as 2863 decoration [...] Also other suitable patterns that Mr Moorcroft might suggest. [Emphasis original]

Moorcroft was clearly seen as a potter whose work was of the highest quality, in both functionality and look, as well as design and execution, whatever the particular object might be; and he was clearly willing to work to his customers' needs. In an age of increasing competition from abroad, flexibility and reliability were the keys to commercial success, as was pointed out in the *Pottery Gazette*:

[...] there are some British manufacturers enterprising and capable enough to supply practically any class of ceramic goods, while their known thoroughness and the reliability of their products render it quite worthwhile for buyers in distant lands to be at some pains instructing them as to the special requirements of their particular locality.⁹

Such examples are characteristic of the personal approach which would define Moorcroft throughout his career. He gave to the design of these bespoke functional items the same care and thought he gave to decorative wares, and dealers recognised their distinction and appeal. This was the kind of individualised service which again set Moorcroft in an Arts and Crafts tradition, outside the category of industrial mass production, but no less commercially viable for all that.¹⁰

3. Cultivating Commercial Networks

For all the optimism at the start of the new reign, economic conditions were still challenging; a miners' strike and riots in Tonypany in 1910, strikes by railway workers and dockers in 1911, and further disruption in 1912, both at home and abroad, all

9 *PG* (April 1913), p.385.

10 Cf. Crane, 'Art and Handicraft', *The Claims of Decorative Art* (London: Lawrence & Bullen, 1892), 62–73 (pp.64–65): 'Instead of things useful, each with their own constructive and organic beauty [...] being produced at the will and pleasure of the artist or craftsman, with a view to the actual requirements of particular people, things both of use and so-called ornament are now [...] produced wholesale [...], made by a species of guess-work, and apparently on the assumption that, being made for no one, or no place, in particular, they will do anywhere, or fit any one, or everyone but sometimes end in suiting no one.'

created an atmosphere of unrest and uncertainty. This context gave Moorcroft's continued promotion of his work additional purpose and value. His relationship with William Prentice of Cassidy's, the china importers, was particularly fruitful. A diary note on 1 April 1910 recorded an order for £700, and in a letter dated 11 April 1912, Prentice asked for photographs of his new designs; there was a strong market for Moorcroft's work in Canada, and he was actively developing this. This association was of real commercial significance, and increasingly so. At the back of his 1911 diary Moorcroft transcribed the announcement of an amalgamation of some of Canada's biggest distributors of china and glassware, to be known as Cassidy's Ltd., with a capital stock of \$5,000,000; its President was to be William Prentice. The entry ended on this optimistic note: 'Under the able guidance of Wm Prentice, this should and doubtless will grow into a very powerful organisation.' And so it did.

Moorcroft was developing markets, too, in South America, via Mappin and Webb, and if the *Pottery Gazette* had noted of the market in the US that 'there is no "life" in the trade there at all',¹¹ for Moorcroft, the opposite was the case; his work was increasingly in demand, and in the most exclusive sectors. A letter from Shreve, forwarded by R. Hostombe & Sons, 6 April 1910, shows the clear commercial value of their association with Moorcroft, and they were keen to take full advantage of it: 'With reference to the shapes and designs in Moorcroft Pottery that you specially executed for us, we would like to ask that we be given special control of these in San Francisco.' He was in regular contact with Arthur Veel Rose of Tiffany, and he was doing good business, too, with the china importers Bawo & Dotter, who were optimistic about the prospects of trade, writing on 6 April 1911:

We are glad to hear that you are in a position to fill all the orders which we sent you so far at the time specified, and we shall try to get some more orders for you for delivery during the months of July, August and September.

A letter from Mary G. Bramblett dated 12 March 1912, expressed with telling simplicity the essence of Moorcroft's appeal. There is nothing to indicate whether the writer was a retailer or a private individual, but the force of the message remains the same: Moorcroft's pottery was unique, and compelling: 'Your pottery is beautiful. I have never seen anything like it in America'.¹²

Moorcroft's European links were also flourishing. Demeuldre-Coché of Brussels wrote on 27 April 1912 with a significant order; his new designs were clearly popular, not least his larger, more expensive pieces:

I would like you to send me a little invoice of your vases about 300 francs. I would like to have the decoration pansy, the pomegranate very dark (rather the larger pieces in that decoration), a bit Red Spanish, a few mushrooms. Do not send me very small vases of 2 or 3 sh—begin by rather larger ones of 4 sh. (Put a few large bonbonnières in pansy or cornflower)

¹¹ PG (March 1911), p.311.

¹² Moorcroft was still in contact with this correspondent thirty years later.



Fig. 38 William Moorcroft, Goblet in Spanish design, retailed by Demeuldre-Coché (c.1912), 17.5cm.
CC BY-NC

Rouard, too, had a particular interest in the wisteria design, a letter from Moorcroft's agent, H. Luyckx, dated 16 September 1912, enclosing their latest order:

I herewith have pleasure of sending you an order on 'wisteria' pattern [...] I tackled Mr Rouard with the small vase, shape 30, in 6", at 4/3, who found the vase very good [...] The whole he found well finished and thereupon wished to order [...]. [Emphasis original]

And at home, Moorcroft's commercial relationship with Liberty's continued to prosper. An order of 15 June 1912 gives an idea of the extent of their custom; totalling 800 pieces, it covered the full range of his most recent work, from the simplicity of Red Flamminian and Lichen Green to the luxuriance of Murena and Claremont (to which a note was added, 'cheerful colours'). But such a relationship was no trivial conquest, and was founded on the outstanding quality of his ware. Liberty's, like other exclusive retailers worldwide, only dealt in products of real distinction. Orders were by no means a matter of course, and the ware supplied had to meet their exacting standards; if not, it was returned for replacement, as letters of the period indicate:

13 October 1911: We have received the Bara Tea Ware for special order as mentioned in your letter, and should be glad if you would make two more of the cups and saucers to replace the two which we find are slightly curved at the top.

Throughout this period, Moorcroft was working tirelessly to win orders and to develop contacts. He was more than just a designer, he was an energetic and astute promoter of his work, and orders were coming in from across the world, as his diaries recorded:

1 April 1910: Mr Prentice and Mr Stuart called. Left order, £700.

7 July 1910: Special order from Shreve & Co.

8 July 1910: Order from Liberty & Co.

16 August 1910: Mr Harris, Marshall Field & Co. called and left order.

4 April 1911: Mr John Connelly called 3.30. Left 7.30. Ordered Pomegranate and Spanish, 2947.

30 April 1912: Mr Van Roden called, left order, about 120 pieces. Mr van Roden expressed his desire to meet me owing to his late partner's (Mr Tyndale) friendship. Wrote to Mme Demeuldre, and Ryrie Bros.

26 July 1912: Left Stoke 1.14. Euston 4pm. Met Mr Rose, Mappin & Webb. Received order, £60

9 September 1912: Met Mr Knight. Received order, 1100 pieces of Pomegranate. Met Knippendorff. Discussed prospects of foreign trade. Opened account with firm in Dresden.

The extent of his sales activity, and of his success, is striking, but so too is the fact that he was recording so many of the details in his diary. As the period progressed, it became more and more important that he should do so.

4. Building a Name

William Moorcroft's commercial success was growing rapidly at this time; so too was his esteem as a designer. In 1910, he was commissioned to make a vase for Lilleshall Hall, the Shropshire estate of the Duke and Duchess of Sutherland. The Duchess was an active campaigner for improved working conditions in the pottery industry, and patron of the North Staffordshire Arts Society, of which Moorcroft was a Committee member.



Fig. 39 Committee of the North Staffordshire Arts Society in 1910. Back row, left to right: [possibly] A.W. Harrison (Chairman), Frank Wedgwood, Thomas Twyford. Second row: William Moorcroft, Charles Noke, Edward Raby, [unidentified], George Cartlidge. Third row: Francis Arthur Edwardes, [unidentified]. In front: George C. Haité, [unidentified], Duchess of Sutherland, William Rothenstein, [possibly] Albert Wenger. 'Personal and Commercial Papers of William Moorcroft', Stoke-on-Trent City Archives, SD 1837. CC BY-NC

Her founding of the Cripples Guild of Handicrafts exemplified her commitment to social welfare and her patronage of the arts and crafts. She clearly admired Moorcroft's work, and Moorcroft clearly identified with her sense of vocation. In a draft letter, undated but written at this period, he recognised in her campaigns the same principles which guided his art—to improve the quality of life for this and future generations:

I shall take a particular pride and pleasure in the execution of the piece of pottery ably and kindly and so well suggested for Lilleshall. [...] One has long learned to love and admire the devotion of your Grace to all that has for its purpose the handing forward to posterity the better spirit of our age.

His diary records her satisfaction with the commissioned vase: '9 June 1910: Duchess phones her appreciation of vase. Promises to call at an early date.' This was a meeting of minds.

His work attracted the attention, too, of Lewis Hind, sometime Deputy Editor of *The Art Journal* and co-founder of *The Studio*:

10 February 1911: Met Mr Lewis C. Hind at tea in his house, 19 North St, Westminster, with Mr Yockney, the Editor of the Art Journal. [...] Mr Hind promised to motor to the works, and expressed a wish to write an article upon my work.

Hind may not have written the article, but the relationship certainly developed. In an undated document from this period, he noted a conversation with Hind about the creation of 'special pieces' in the Pomegranate design; Moorcroft was developing ideas all the time, and was always ready to experiment:

Re. the colour of pomegranate and vine; the question of background. Mr Hind thinks the background might be in the purplish colour, or in a yellowish colour re-echoing some of the colour in the pomegranate. Mr C. Lewis Hind re. matching plate with red border; matching tea caddy cover; reproducing natural fruits; the making of special pieces for Mr Hind.

In 1911, he was included in an article, 'Some Modern Pottery', written by Hilda Mary Pemberton, decorative designer and artist, and published in *The Art Journal* [AJ]. She welcomed the increasing availability of practical training courses for potters, and envisaged a world where the art of pottery might develop outside the confines of factory production. Her focus was not on industrial ware, but on pottery which had its own individual quality:

The attention of the reader is directed rather to the work of a few artists whose work is conspicuous individually, artists who put as much care and thought into a pot as into a picture, whose work reaches a standard of excellence which dignifies and combines the art and craft of pottery.¹³

13 H.M. Pemberton, 'Some Modern Pottery', *AJ* (1911), 119–26 (p.124).

In this category, she included the work of Gordon Forsyth, Richard Joyce and William Mycock, three of the leading artist/decorators at Pilkington, of William Howson Taylor, and of Moorcroft. Like other critics, Pemberton underlined Moorcroft's close involvement in production as well as design, representing him as a craftsman in his own right, and not just as an industrial designer. In this, he was no different from Forsyth, Joyce and Mycock who realised their own designs. But unlike these artists, explicitly described as 'for some time [...] working for Messrs Pilkington & Co.', Pemberton made no mention of Macintyre's; Moorcroft's work was seen to be the expression of its originator, not the product of a firm:

Some examples are illustrated of interesting work by Mr William Moorcroft. The pattern is drawn by a raised slip outline, the colouring obtained by rich soft glazes which give a very pleasing effect. Mr Moorcroft has a great command over his craft, and a style which he is making quite his own [...].¹⁴

Of all the designers employed in industry at this time, William Moorcroft was the one most frequently represented as an artist in his own right. It was this individuality which underlay the appeal of his ware to collectors and retailers alike. When, on 15 June 1912, Sir William Crookes wrote in appreciation of the 'valuable and interesting' exhibit of pottery at the Royal Institution the previous evening, it was to Moorcroft that he wrote, not to Macintyre's. And it was as an artist that he featured in a report published in the *Pottery Gazette* on the famed ceramics collection of Albert Wenger, supplier to the pottery industry of underglaze and onglaze colours. Alongside works by the foremost independent potters of the age, William de Morgan, William Howson Taylor, Bernard Moore, and Sir Edmund Elton, were listed 'specimens [...] of W. Moorcroft's art pottery';¹⁵ Moorcroft's individuality as a potter was simply self-evident.

5. Deepening Tensions

At one level, Moorcroft's ever-growing reputation was acknowledged and supported by Macintyre's. The firm's advertisements during 1910 in the *Pottery Gazette* gave significant publicity to his wares, featuring 'High-class ceramics', as one of three highlighted areas, alongside Stationers' Sundries, and Pottery Specialities.¹⁶ Corbet Woodall wrote on 20 August 1910, just days after the fire, to congratulate Moorcroft on 'our' exhibit at Brussels: 'It is gratifying indeed to have your report of our own show and its appreciation by the Jurors. I hope to be able to congratulate you on a very favourable official recognition.' The letter implied a positive spirit of collaboration, striking a comfortable balance between individual achievement and corporate success; Moorcroft's subsequent award of a contributor's Gold Medal was noted at a meeting of

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p.125.

¹⁵ 'Wenger's Collection of Ancient and Modern Pottery', *PG* (March 1912), 291–92 (p.292).

¹⁶ *PG* (June 1910), p.617.

Directors on 18 December 1911, and Watkin 'was requested to convey to Mr Moorcroft congratulations'.

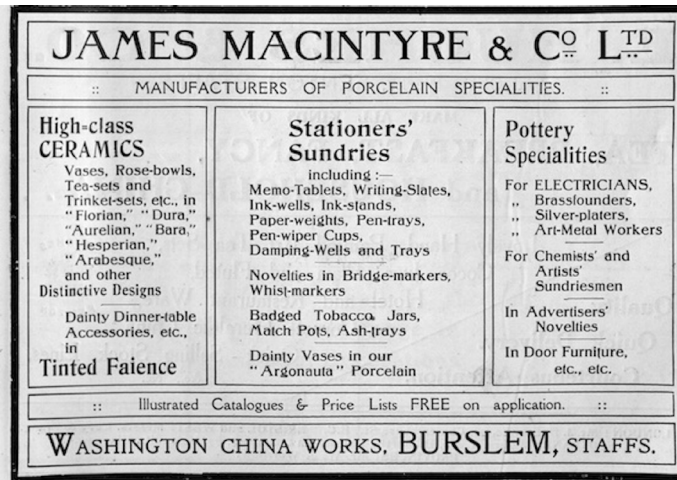


Fig. 40 J. Macintyre & Co. Ltd., Advertisement in the *Pottery Gazette* (June 1910) 'Personal and Commercial Papers of William Moorcroft', Stoke-on-Trent City Archives, SD 1837. CC BY-NC

Clearly improving financial results doubtless strengthened this support. In 1910, the Company was performing very well, a Minute of 20 July 1910 recording significant sales growth at the end of the financial year. The following year was even more successful. A Minute of 7 October 1910 noted a further increase in sales, commenting that the factory was 'busier than for several years', and at the year-end the Directors agreed to pay a dividend to shareholders; it was the first time for three years. Moorcroft was even exploring the possibility of buying shares in Macintyre's. Writing to him on 23 March 1910, Woodall was by no means discouraging, although the idea clearly needed approval of all Directors: 'I would gladly sell you some of my mine, if my colleagues were agreeable. Come and see me when next you are in Town, and we will talk matters over.' And yet, behind the scenes, relations between Watkin and Moorcroft were deteriorating; the increasing success of Moorcroft's department was not alleviating the tensions—it was making them worse.

For all Woodall's support, there is evidence to suggest that Watkin was actively seeking to minimise the attention which Moorcroft's ware was attracting. He made no secret of the fact that he did not wish the Brussels exhibit to be considered for an award; Moorcroft noted in his diary on 4 July 1910: 'Forwarded form for Jurors, Brussels Exhibition. H.W. declines to fill in. Asks jurors not to include exhibit.' And a draft letter from Watkin to the Board of Trade, undated, corroborates this:

In reply to yours of 28th ult. [...] unless you have any serious objection to our taking that course, we would prefer our goods not to be for competition.

Similar (but as yet unattributed) pressure was being exerted on the *Pottery Gazette*. In a letter to Moorcroft of 12 April 1910, William Thomson revealed that he had been instructed by the journal's Editors to modify the balance of his comments:

About two years ago, they referred to one of my notices of 'Moorcroft Faience', and said: 'We think, Mr Thomson, we should give Messrs Macintyre & Co. more credit for the wares they manufacture than we have done in this notice. All the credit is given to their art-potter and decorator, Mr Moorcroft. Please mention Macintyre & Co more prominently another time.'

Thomson did not speculate where this instruction originated, and he had clearly included 'prominent' comments on Macintyre's in subsequent reviews. But he also made clear his conviction that credit for Moorcroft's ware was due unequivocally to Moorcroft himself, rather than to his employer:

I said it would not be honest to write of these beautiful wares without referring to the artist who had not only designed them, but had personally trained the artist-workers who were now producing them, and who alone was responsible for the marvellous developments in the production of high-class ceramics at Washington Works.

Most striking, though, is that even Moorcroft's initiatives to develop commercial contacts for his ware were met with increasingly blatant obstruction. His 1910 diary recorded difficult meetings with Watkin:

15 June 1910: H.W generally attacks position. Instigation due to my having taken important orders. [...] 16 June 1910: H.W. says he will violate any arrangement I may make with my clients. After my submitting returns, showing the excellent progress of my department, he was annoyed [...].

These conversations took place just days after Moorcroft had taken a significant order from Spaulding & Co., Chicago, one of the most celebrated and exclusive goldsmith's and jewellers in the US. Moorcroft noted in his diary on 1 June 1910: 'Mr Greene, Spaulding & Co. called 10 o'clock, left 12.40. Left order. Most important one of all during the visits paid me by this firm.' His 1910 diary also recorded difficulties obtaining room in the firm's kiln for the firing of his ware:

[undated]: When asked for ware to be placed, reply: We are instructed [...] to place all ordered ware, and to make up with yours if any room left. An example of difficulty.

26 September 1910: Oven. Ware left out [...].

Whether such problems were the result of Watkin's pledge to 'violate' Moorcroft's orders cannot be known, but their consequences were inevitable, and Spaulding's order was significantly delayed. The agent, Samuel Buckley & Co, wrote to Moorcroft on 26 October 1910, expressing both incomprehension and irritation:

The writer is very much surprised to learn that you have not yet completed our order for Messrs Spaulding & Co. [...] It seems to the writer that the delay in executing this order

is beyond reason [...]. There must be some explanation as to why you have not been able to despatch the bulk of the order placed with you. We are quite certain that the matter is giving our client considerable annoyance.

Moorcroft was becoming increasingly concerned about conditions at the works, as the draft of a letter (almost certainly) to Lasenby, written on an envelope dated 18 June 1910, made plain. The more he did to secure orders, the more hostility he seemed to arouse:

What is wrong? It is most difficult to understand why I should be subject to unjust attacks when I make more than usual efforts to meet with success. [...] Recently I have taken over £1000 of orders.

In another fragment, he sought a meeting with Woodall. He clearly felt that he was not being fairly represented, and that the situation was deteriorating:

May I presume to ask you for a few moments when next I am in London? In your last letter, which afforded me great delight, you say you cannot understand why my department does not grow. [...] a brief opportunity of at least showing, in justice to my staff, in justice to you whom I have the honour to serve, in justice to myself, some of the reasons the department does not grow.

A letter from Woodall dated 9 July 1910 picked up some of these issues. It is clear, though, that he was anxious not to become involved in his Managing Director's running of the firm:

I am delighted to know such good news of the prospects of your department. You must do your utmost to work amicably with the powers that be. Neither the Chairman or I have now much say in the management.

But amicable relations with 'the powers that be' were more easily said than done. At the end of his 1910 diary, on the eve of his launch of Pansy and Wisteria, and at a time when his Pomegranate and Spanish designs were attracting significant orders, he recorded Watkin's threat of closure: '10 January 1911. H.W. states there is no new pattern and complains. As usual, threatens to discontinue.' And entries in the 1911 diary itself evoke Watkin's criticism of some of his most significant commercial contacts, not least William Prentice and Liberty's:

7 April 1911: H.W. attacks re stock, immediately after my informing him of important enquiry from Wiley & Co (Mr Prentice). The usual disposition. An exhibition of extreme unkindness [...].

22 April 1911: H.W. refers to Liberty orders being only £500. When he requests one to design a small badge for the Delhi Durbar which he imagines will produce £1000. Imagines. He suggests cynically that this is a piece of greater value than all my other work in the year. The usual cynicism regarding L & Co. Had to remind him that our orders for the same pottery were £1500 at least.

None of this tension was surfacing, however, in the Company Minutes; any concerns expressed by Watkin to Moorcroft were not being voiced at an official level. But by the autumn, this had changed. Moorcroft noted in his diary on 2 October 1911 a request from Woodall 'to submit a report regarding the future prospect of my department.' A draft letter to Woodall expressed surprise at the suggestion that his department was not profitable, and he gave an account of his successes in winning orders for his ware; he was clearly at a loss to know what else he could be expected to do:

During the year 1910–11, quite outside my usual work, I sold £1720 worth of pottery; it was quite a record [...] And in doing so established new businesses in each instance with companies whose records are of the best/excellent, whose payments are the most prompt. Indeed a much sounder investment than one usually finds with the average country china dealer.

The report was written and submitted to the Directors by early November 1911. A Minute of 9 November 1911, the first explicit mention of Moorcroft during this period, noted cryptically that 'a communication from Mr Moorcroft [...] was considered but no definite steps decided.' Corbet Woodall wrote to Moorcroft the same day, still sounding supportive, and keen to maintain, and strengthen, the department:

I am sure he [Watkin] shares my keen desire that your interesting Department should be put under conditions that will make it profitable to the Company and at the same time pleasant and agreeable to all associated with it.

But it is clear, too, that the charge of unprofitability had not gone away, and Moorcroft was still preparing his financial case at the end of the month, noting in his diary for 23 November 1911 the need to itemise the 'amount of orders taken personally' since 1906–07. A Minute of 18 December 1911 recorded 'a satisfactory interview with Mr Moorcroft' and a provisional reprieve: '[...] it was decided to let matters remain as they are for the present.'

1912 opened very positively at Macintyre's. A Minute dated 20 February 1912 recorded satisfaction on all fronts, 'the sales having considerably increased, the liabilities decreased, and the credit balance improved'. But difficulties lay ahead. The thirty-seven day coal miners' strike of 1912 brought the pottery industry to a standstill in March and April, and the *Pottery Gazette* reported gloomily on a crisis 'more momentous' than anything in 'the long and varied history of the British pottery and glass industries'.¹⁷ To make matters worse, Moorcroft was struck down with appendicitis on 2 March 1912, just two days into the strike. The condition was serious, not least because surgical intervention was as yet neither customary nor dependable, notwithstanding the successful operation on King Edward VII in 1902. Woodall followed developments closely, writing with evident concern on 10 March 1912: 'I am distressed to hear that you have been unwell, and sincerely hope that you are now

¹⁷ PG (April 1912), p.373.

better: if I can have a word from you it will be very welcome.' The following day, on 11 March 1912, Moorcroft wrote a will, leaving an individual legacy to each of his tube-liners and paintresses. It was an eloquent act. It revealed his acknowledgement that he may not survive this illness, but also his awareness of how vulnerable his staff were, and not just on account of the colliery strike. Even with Moorcroft at its head, the future of his department was uncertain; without him, he must have realised, its fate would be sealed:

I give the sum of Thirty pounds to each of my following assistants at Washington Works, Burslem, namely A. Causley, F. Morrey, K. Price, L. Chadwick, D. Plimbley, L. Ball, M. Baskeyfield, M. Stone, J. Leadbeater, and A. Lindop. The sum of Twenty pounds to each of the following of my assistants: G. Parton, R. Stubbs, E. Turner, A. Wordley, M. Lawton, R. Davies, N. Beech, L. Watson, F. Hankinson, and Minnie Hewitt. The sum of Ten guineas to my assistant A. Brindley. The sum of Five pounds to each of the following of my assistants, M. Cartwright, E. Evans and—Hewitt.

What is most striking about this legacy, however, is its generosity: the figures represented for each individual the equivalent of between six and nine months' earnings. Significantly, at just this time, donations were being sought for the Mayor's Potteries Relief Fund, and the names of contributors were listed in the *Pottery Gazette*. At the head of the list were gifts of demonstrative munificence from an aristocratic family and two highly successful firms in the bullion and banking sector:

Lord Harrowby, £250; Johnson Matthey & Co. Ltd., £250; N.M.Rothschild & Sons, £200; Mayoress and Mayor of Stoke, £75.¹⁸

Moorcroft's bequest to his assistants totalled just over £525; Macintyre's donation to the Mayor's Fund was £10 and 10 shillings.

After ten anxious days, Moorcroft had turned a corner, and Woodall wrote again on 20 March 1912, tentatively optimistic: 'I shall be very glad to hear that you are making progress.' Moorcroft's recovery assured the (provisional) survival of his department, but it had another, even more significant consequence. In the course of his convalescence, he made the acquaintance of Florence Nora Fleay Lovibond, an Inspector of Factories since 1907 who was already making an impact on the improvement of industrial working conditions, especially for women and children. Mentioned by name in Adelaide Anderson's memoir *Women in the Factory*, she was associated with the introduction in 1911 of regular monitoring of mechanical ventilation systems, an 'important step [...] in the field of dangerously dusty processes.'¹⁹ The couple would become engaged to be married in October 1912. As tensions at Macintyre's increased, Florence would have a defining influence on Moorcroft's future.

18 PG (April 1912), p.411.

19 A.M. Anderson, *Women in the Factory: An Administrative Adventure 1893–1921* (London: J. Murray, 1921), p.111. Adelaide Anderson served as HM Principal Lady Inspector of Factories from 1897 to 1921.

6. Conclusions

For all the success of British potteries at the Brussels Fair, concerns which had been voiced since the Great Exhibition and before were still in the air at the dawn of the new Georgian era. When William Rothenstein opened the 14th Exhibition of the North Staffordshire Arts Society on 21 June 1910, he focussed in his address on a widening gulf between industry and art:

[...] the world was more or less divided into two hostile camps—the camp of ideas and the camp of commerce. These had to be bridged. On the one hand, artists had to be less conceited, and realise they were in the world to reconcile people to the ordinary facts of life. [...] They knew perfectly well most commercial articles were bad, and only a few very good. [...] It was their duty to make ordinary things as well as they could and as beautiful as they could.²⁰

The same sense of a division was expressed, too, in the Commissioners' report on the International Exhibitions at Brussels, Rome and Turin, 1910 & 1911, reviewed in the *Pottery Gazette*:

The restrictions of commercialism on the one hand, and the leaning towards dilettante specialism in the higher walks of ceramics on the other hand has sharply divided the industry into two opposite camps, widely different in their organisation, methods, aims and aspirations. The higher kinds of pottery made in this country are mainly produced in what may be termed 'studio' potteries and are made primarily for the virtuoso.²¹

T.C. Moore, the report's author, placed the work of Bernard Moore and Howson Taylor in the latter category. Glaze chemists may have won international recognition for their wares, but the work produced was implicitly seen to be too expensive and too specialised to have more than a limited market. No less clear-cut, albeit viewed from the opposite perspective, was the distinction drawn by the craft potter Charles Binns:

On the one hand there is the manufactory, teeming with 'hands' and rotary wheels, turning out wares by the thousand and supplying the demand of the many; on the other hand, there is the artist-artisan, who labours at his bench in sincere devotion to his chosen vocation.²²

Writing explicitly for 'the Studio and Workshop', Binns contrasted the 'artist-artisan's [...] sincere devotion to his chosen work' and the deadening, repetitive labours of an industrial worker, reduced (ironically) to a 'hand'. His distinction recalled Morris, but it had none of the latter's reforming zeal. Binns accepted as inevitable and unchangeable the separation of the manufacturer and the craftsman, the one committed to profit, the other to art:

²⁰ *Staffordshire Sentinel* (21 June 1910); press cutting in WM Archive.

²¹ 'British Pottery at International Exhibitions', *PG* (April 1913), 418–20 (p.420).

²² C.F. Binns, *The Potter's Craft: A Practical Guide for the Studio and Workshop* [1910], 2nd Edition (New York: D. van Nostrand, 1922), xiv–xv.

Both these conditions are necessary. The craftsman cannot supply the need of the people, and the manufacturer has no time or thought for disinterested production.²³

There was a growing perception, too, that the Arts and Crafts movement was drifting away from a mission to influence industrial design and production towards an ambition to create individual (and inevitably costly) items for a much smaller market, 'a world within a world, a minority producing for a minority' as Crane had expressed it.²⁴ This was reflected in the growing number of independent potters establishing themselves tellingly far from Staffordshire. In 1909, Reginald Wells set up his Coldrum Pottery in Chelsea, and the following year George Cox began production at his own Mortlake Pottery, in south London; at just this time, too, William Staite Murray began attending pottery classes at Camberwell. If art and industry were seen to be separate, so too it seemed were art and affordability. Binns admitted openly that craft work was inherently expensive: 'His work is laborious and exacting, he can make but a few things and for them he must ask a price relatively high.'²⁵ And the same assumption informed an obituary of Walter Martin. Martin was characterised as an 'enthusiast in the production of artistic pottery rather than a commercial potter', not just on account of an inevitably smaller and more costly output than that of a larger firm, but also because the potter's art was at odds with, and in advance of, the public taste of the time: "'Martin Ware" is an artistic and not a commercial commodity, and will without doubt be more highly appreciated a hundred years hence than it is today.'²⁶

But as these distinctions were re-surfacing, a different source of inspiration for pottery design was being suggested. In May 1910, just weeks after the opening of the Brussels Fair, an exhibition of Early Chinese Pottery and Porcelain at Burlington House brought to public attention the strikingly simple, unornamented pottery of the T'ang (618–907) and Song (960–1279) dynasties, quite different from the more sophisticated blue on white or polychromed enamelled porcelains, or the rich *sang de boeuf* glazes of the later Ming (1368–1644) or Qing (1644–1912) dynasties, much imitated in Europe. Writing on 'Oriental Art' in *The Burlington Magazine*, Roger Fry saw in these early wares a quality missing from much jaded Western design:

[...] we are more disillusioned, more tired with our own tradition, which seems to have landed us at length in a too frequent representation of the obvious or the sensational. To

23 Ibid., p.15.

24 Crane, 'Of the Influence of Modern Social and Economic Conditions on the Sense of Beauty', *Ideals in Art* (London: George Bell & Sons, 1905), 76–87 (p.86).

25 Binns, *The Potter's Craft*, p.xv. Cf. Crane, 'Of the Revival of Design and Handicraft', *Arts and Crafts Essays* (London: Rivington, Percival & Co., 1893), 1–21 (p.18): 'we appeal to *all* certainly, but it should be remembered that cheapness in art and handicraft is well-nigh impossible, save in some forms of more or less mechanical reproduction. In fact, cheapness as a rule, in the sense of low-priced production, can only be obtained at the cost of cheapness—that is the cheapening of human life and labour.'

26 'Walter Fraser Martin', *PG* (April 1912), 423–24 (p.424).

us the art of the East presents the hope of discovering a more spiritual, more expressive idea of design.²⁷

The opposition of different cultural traditions would shape much debate about the aesthetics of pottery in the decades to come. Interestingly, it was anticipated in a much less publicised discovery of early Peruvian pottery. In a talk to the Manchester Literary and Philosophical Society on recently uncovered vessels of the pre-Inca period, Sir William Bailey contrasted the ‘art’, ‘individuality’ and ‘intellectual liberty’ of these unglazed ceramic figures with the ‘serfdom of habit and custom and tradition’ which characterised Egyptian pottery.²⁸ In a critical letter to *The Manchester Guardian*, published the following day, William Burton asserted the technical and aesthetic superiority of glazed Egyptian wares; what Bailey called ‘individuality’, he characterised as ‘primitive’, what Bailey dismissed as ‘serfdom’, he identified as ‘restraint’.²⁹ The exchange caught Moorcroft’s attention, prompting him to write a private letter to Bailey:

As a potter, one begs to thank you for bringing before us so many excellent examples of Peruvian Pottery. Without examining the technical quality of this pottery, one is at once charmed by the delightful touch of the spirit of a people so long ago. How truly artistic. What repose! [...] Yes, such art will ever live. Indeed, no modern work in my opinion equals the marvellous restraint of the pieces illustrated in yesterday’s *Guardian*. In my own humble way, I endeavour as a potter to hand forward to posterity some of the spirit of our age.

Moorcroft’s intervention was not just about the qualities of Peruvian pottery, it was about the increasingly divergent priorities of potters in the modern age. If technical sophistication was a defining quality for Burton, for Moorcroft it was expressiveness, the capacity to speak of and beyond its time. And what was true of this Peruvian ware, was true also of his own. His too was an individual conception of pottery, one which affirmed the beauty of nature and the enduring value of manual production in an industrial age.

Individuality was a quality frequently admired in Moorcroft’s work, distinguished from the lifeless uniformity of mass-produced pottery, just as he was himself increasingly represented as an artist in his own right, independent of Macintyre’s. William Prentice’s reaction to the new Pansy wares in his letter of 11 April 1912 said it all; this was not simply a design, it embodied all that William Moorcroft stood for, and it was irresistible: ‘It is actually yourself. Please accept my congratulations. It is a beautiful and most wonderful production.’ At a time when the rhetoric of artists, craft potters and government reports all seemed to imply from their different perspectives the increasing separation of art and industry, Moorcroft was moving in the opposite direction. His ambition as an artist was to bring pleasure to the lives of more than just

27 ‘Oriental Art’, *The Burlington Magazine* (April 1910), p.3. [quoted in J.F. Stair, ‘Critical Writing on English Studio Pottery 1910–1940’, unpublished PhD thesis, Royal College of Art, 2002 (p.96)].

28 ‘Important Discovery of Ancient Peruvian Pottery’, *The Manchester Guardian* (9 March 1910), p.5.

29 W. Burton, ‘The Discovery of Peruvian Pottery’, *The Manchester Guardian* (10 March 1910), p.5.

a privileged few; it was this which inspired his energetic promotion of his ware, and its undoubted commercial success. And the ambition was clearly recognised. In a letter dated 25 February 1910, Thomson told Moorcroft of his wish to write an article for the *Pottery Gazette* on his 'beautiful, useful' tableware: 'I should like to see useful tableware more frequently artistic; there is no reason why it should not be, and you have shown us that it can be.' In the article itself, he singled out the same distinctive qualities of design and execution in all of Moorcroft's wares, functional and decorative alike. For all the instruction to prioritise the role of Macintyre's, Thomson clearly implied the achievement of Moorcroft himself, and of his co-workers:

The individuality of the worker is always in evidence, hence the perpetual interest in this pottery. The ornamentations are therefore unique; the scheme of decoration, of course, is the same, but each piece has the individual characteristics of the artist who produced it. [...] Mr Moorcroft has produced [...] several charming, restful effects, beautiful studies in harmony and restraint. [...] The same care and attention has been bestowed on these as on the more imposing pieces, with the result that they are beautiful in the spirit of loveliness and in daintiness of execution.³⁰

Moorcroft was characterised here as uniting art and industry. It is all the more ironic, therefore, that even as he succeeded in bridging this seemingly unbridgeable gap, he should find himself increasingly isolated within the very firm with which he had collaborated so productively for over a decade.

As internal pressure was building on Moorcroft's department, the *Pottery Gazette* commented on the public's growing dissatisfaction with the output of a production line:

There is certainly evidence that a public is arising that will not be so completely influenced by cheapness and uniformity, who will be willing to pay a fair and reasonable price for an article that bears the impress of individuality [...] Manufacturers may find that having perfected their systems and completed their automatic organisation, they will have to scrap the machine.³¹

Moorcroft's vision depended entirely on the individual, hand-crafted nature of his wares; he had defended it throughout his time at Macintyre's, and its value, both aesthetic and commercial, was increasingly appreciated. In a telling analogy, the writer imagined a different function for the designer, one whose creativity was harnessed and expressed through the talent of his workforce:

But the onus of responsibility primarily rests on the designer or art director. He stands in the dual positions of the conductor of an orchestra and the composer of the music. To him we must look to develop individual talent—and to use it to blend into a harmonious

30 *PG* (May 1910), p.551.

31 'Individuality in Pottery', *PG* (June 1912), 650–51 (p.650).

whole without losing its peculiar and valuable quality. Otherwise we get the effect of the street piano in place of the orchestra.³²

The analogy captured the essence of Moorcroft's creative collaboration with his 'assistants', which critics such as Thomson and Pemberton had already clearly seen. Moorcroft was approaching a crossroads, and as circumstances at Macintyre's became ever more constricting, his commitment to his art and to his team was as strong as ever. The *Pottery Gazette* article imagined a 'better time' for potters who were prepared to be themselves and to seize the moment:

[...] this new tendency (call it distinction, individuality, or what you like) is the most promising feature that has appeared on the dark horizon for a long period. It heralds a better time. And those who take the fullest and quickest advantage of it will be those who will benefit the most. Difficulties there are, no doubt, but in these swift-moving times the old truism is more than ever applicable, 'that he who hesitates is surely lost'.³³

That moment was coming, and Moorcroft would not hesitate.

32 Ibid., p.651.

33 Ibid.

5. 1912–13: Breaking with Macintyre's

I. Winning Time

When Macintyre's Directors met on 4 October 1912, it was reported that the new financial year had started well, and that there had been 'an improvement in every direction'. But such improvement evidently did not include Moorcroft's department; giving less than three months' notice, the decision was taken to close it down:

A letter having been read from Mr Moorcroft, the Secretary was instructed to inform him that the Balance Sheet shows his Department to be unremunerative, and in consequence the Directors were reluctantly resolved to close down the Department at the end of the year [...].¹

A letter written the following day from Corbet Woodall, Chairman of Directors, confirmed the financial motive for the Directors' decision: the Department was 'unproductive of profit', and the consequence, therefore, 'inevitable'. Woodall's expectation was doubtless that Moorcroft would find employment in another firm, as Harry Barnard had done nearly twenty years earlier, and he implicitly acknowledged that Moorcroft may not have been adequately appreciated, or rewarded, at the Washington Works:

[...] I have learned to esteem not only your work but yourself so highly that I find it difficult to express, parting with you will be a real sorrow. I am comforted in one respect that I am assured that you have given us your services at a rate of remuneration decidedly below that which they would command elsewhere. I hope this will prove so and that the future before you is one of increasing distinction and prosperity.

Moorcroft's note in his diary for 7 October was ironically matter-of-fact: 'Received letter from Mr Woodall re department.' But this was a devastating blow, and on 12 October, he drafted his reply. The extent to which the Directors' decision was, in fact, a surprise is not clear, but his disappointment was palpable; and he would fight back:

¹ All unpublished documents referred to in this chapter are located in William Moorcroft: Personal and Commercial Papers, SD1837, Stoke-on-Trent City Archives [WM Archive].

‘The decision of your Board came as a great surprise. There is something wrong, and the future I feel will reveal this.’

Moorcroft did not agree with the verdict that his department was ‘unremunerative’. Nor, perhaps, did Corbett Woodall, son of the Chairman, who, in a letter of 2 November 1912, stopped short of endorsing a view which he attributed explicitly to Henry Watkin: ‘The Managing Director is fully convinced that the department is run at a serious loss, and, I think, that it always has been (That is, I believe Mr Watkin is of opinion that it has always been a loss).’ Woodall’s position was both regretful and supportive; Moorcroft’s department may be on the point of closure at the Washington Works, but he had no desire to see the end of Moorcroft’s pottery. In a subsequent letter, Woodall gave him the option of taking with him his staff and all essential equipment. Moorcroft understood the significance of this gesture, but if he was to continue production, he needed not just his staff, he needed time: to create a viable plan, to find a site to relocate, and to secure financial support. He wrote to Woodall on 16 November in anticipation of the next Directors’ meeting. To win an extension of time beyond December 1912, he had to persuade them that he was not simply seeking to pursue his own interests at their expense. He sketched out a proposal in which they might be profitably involved, but without financial investment: ‘I would very much like to build on your land at the back of the present works on any terms agreeable to you.’ A draft paper, headed ‘Re. Dept’, gave further details. Moorcroft would buy clay from Macintyre’s, share the services of the firemen, and even rent space at the Washington Works for the clay and decorating shops; but he would have his own financial and administrative independence, and his own kilns. The proposed firm was not even given the Moorcroft name; it would be called ‘James Macintyre 1912’.

But he also needed to counter the perception that his department was loss-making; the Directors would never agree to delaying its closure, if to do so would simply increase a deficit on their balance sheet. Moorcroft’s many surviving drafts of his letter of 16 November 1912 all underlined his belief in the department’s economic viability, as yet not fully realised:

My evenings have been spent in finding new outlets for the production and during the last few years I have made sales to the value of some four thousands of pounds. Chiefly for abroad. There would be found in England an opportunity for a great output. I have much evidence that would confirm this opinion, and also that would explain the causes of a stultified development.

This line of argument took Moorcroft down a particularly hazardous path. One draft implied very strongly that the Managing Director had not in fact always believed, as Woodall clearly thought, that Moorcroft’s department was unprofitable. Quite the reverse:

May I further add, one can recall proposals of some years ago which convince me it has not always been the opinion of the Managing Director that the department was unremunerative. The fulfilment of the suggestions then made depended entirely upon the successful working of that which is now called in question.

And an earlier draft of this same section, written significantly in Alwyn Lasenby's hand, even refers to arguments ('passages') with Watkin about these 'suggestions':

I am precluded from believing otherwise by my very clear recollection of some passages between myself and Mr Watkin a few years ago which conveyed to me from Mr Watkin suggestions for joining [in] independent action with him which would have rested upon the character of my work as its justification. [...] the lack of success, if such there has been, in my efforts for the Directors has not arisen from the character of my work or its inadaptability to a market.

What kind of 'independent action' Watkin may have proposed to Moorcroft, and when, is not recorded, but it was clearly a source of dispute between them, and Moorcroft evidently declined to pursue it. If an explanation was sought for the 'stultified' development of his department, he was implying, it was not to be found in the unprofitability of his ware.

The James Macintyre 1912 project is not mentioned in any other surviving documents, but Moorcroft's letter had the desired effect; Woodall wrote to him on 21 November to record an extension of the deadline. It was a concession of enormous practical significance, but it implied too, at some level, a belief in Moorcroft's ware as a worthwhile, and viable, enterprise. On 25 November, he drafted another letter to Woodall. He recognised the exciting potential of his own independent works, but he was conscious, too, of the challenges ahead:

I have to find the capital which I roughly estimate at £10,000, and follow with the building. It is my hope to erect a modern works complying with all the new conditions just now demanded by the Home Office. [...] I am risking all I have to keep together the workers who have been specially trained during the 16 years. It is in their interest as well as my own I beg for your special consideration.

Moorcroft needed the support of the Woodalls, but he also needed financial backing; without it, there could be no future.

2. The Search for Funding

It is not certain when Moorcroft first had the idea of approaching Liberty's, but he had clearly done so by the time of his letter to Woodall of 16 November 1912:

On Tuesday afternoon, I met three of the directors of Messrs Liberty & Co. [...] I had given them no previous intimation of my visit or the object of my visit, but they met me very courteously and I was requested to put before them a statement of the probable cost of building a modern works and the amount of capital necessary with as little delay as possible, and to submit the same to their secretary who is also their legal adviser. At such short notice, I am grateful for their action.

Over the following weeks, Moorcroft and Harold Blackmore, the Company Secretary (and Arthur Liberty's nephew by marriage), exchanged letters about sales, costs and turnover. Drafts of Moorcroft's letters emphasise the financial potential of his project. A

move to his own modern works would create a more economical mode of production, increased output and, it was implied, more effective marketing. But he was clearly under pressure from Liberty's to keep the costs down. In a letter of 16 December, Blackmore summarised Moorcroft's estimates for set-up and initial running costs which were already 20% lower than the figure of £10,000 he had indicated in his letter to Woodall just three weeks earlier:

I am in receipt of your letter of the 14th inst., which seems to confirm the figures we got out the other day [...] So that up to this point you would want:

For the factory	6000
For three months working expenses	1000
For credit purposes on your books and general reserve	1000
Total	8000

And this pressure was sustained. Moorcroft instructed Reginald Longden,² the architect of the new works, to scale down his initial scheme for a building with three ovens and two kilns. On 20 December he was sent a revised estimate of £4,850; the cost had been cut by a further 20%, and the provision reduced to two ovens and one kiln. Blackmore wrote again on 23 December; Liberty's Directors were prepared to invest about half of the estimated costs, but before proceeding, Blackmore needed a meeting with the Macintyre Directors to scrutinise the finances. His letter was fair and unambiguous:

We are particularly anxious not to lead you astray by this letter. The only position which we really can take up at the moment is that we are quite disposed to look further into the whole thing and if all our enquiries result in satisfactory answers, then our Board would be prepared to consider a definite financial proposal on the lines that I discussed with you. [...] We must leave it to you to decide whether you think it worthwhile to go further into the matter with us on the chance of our joining in with you [...].

That Moorcroft had persuaded Liberty's to go this far says much about the reputation of his work, but there was still some way to go. Blackmore left him the chance to look for support elsewhere, but Moorcroft had very little choice; if Liberty's did not agree, he had no alternatives in play.

At the start of the New Year, knighthoods were conferred on both Corbet Woodall and Arthur Liberty. Moorcroft wrote to Woodall on 1 January 1913 expressing the hope that this coincidence may prove to be 'a happy augury for the proposed amalgamation'; he wrote the next day to Liberty. The Woodalls shared this hope. On 2 January, Woodall reported very positively on a recent meeting (on 31 December 1912) with Liberty's, and when Sir Corbet Woodall wrote on 6 January to thank Moorcroft for his letter, he added his own wish to see 'a settlement, entirely satisfactory to you,

2 Reginald T. Longden (1879–1941) was a prominent architect in north Staffordshire, and an active member of the Council for the Preservation of Rural England.

of your professional career'. But when, on 9 January, a meeting brought together Liberty's Directors, Woodall and Watkin, the outcome was a disaster. Blackmore wrote to Moorcroft that same day, ending their association before it had even begun:

We have seen Mr Corbett Woodall and Mr Watkins [sic] today and they have given us certain figures which they are prepared to verify from the books. Messrs Macintyre's financial year finishes in July, in each year, and the figures for last year are so very much below your estimates that we are afraid it will put an end to our Board entertaining the matter.

Watkin's figures (and their accuracy) cannot be verified, but the message they conveyed was unequivocal: Moorcroft's pottery was unprofitable. With a grim irony, on 10 January, the day after Blackmore's letter, Longden wrote to report that 'the plans for your factory are now well in hand'.

Moorcroft's project was in shreds, but he took immediate action. He arranged a meeting with Liberty's (for 13 January 1913), and on the same day he wrote to Corbett Woodall, requesting an interview. On 15 January, Blackmore wrote again, giving a more nuanced explanation for the decision to withdraw from the project:

We have, rightly or wrongly, formed the opinion that when you actually come to break off with Macintyre's, a good many obstacles will be put in the way of the transaction going through smoothly, and we very much doubt whether the true benefit of the goodwill of that part of the business which you are to take over will fall to your share, and it is partly on this account that we have decided to stand out.

Liberty's misgivings were clearly not just related to the (disputed) profitability of Moorcroft's department, they also concerned the cooperation of Macintyre's. If his plans were to be revived, Moorcroft would have to devise an even smaller-scale business model, but he also had to persuade Liberty's that Macintyre's were committed to the smooth transfer of his department to a new factory. The Woodalls were quick to react. In a letter of 16 January, Moorcroft thanked Corbett Woodall for his undertaking 'to assist [me] to regain their confidence', and on 21 January Sir Corbet wrote after a meeting of Directors, explicitly allaying the fear of 'obstacles' voiced by Blackmore:

If it is of service to you, you are quite at liberty to tell Messrs Liberty & Co. that the Directors of James Macintyre & Co. will put no obstacle in the way of the transfer of the Florian Department.

Woodall also repeated the Directors' undertaking not to continue production of art pottery at the Washington Works after Moorcroft's departure. Curiously, there was no record of this resolution in the Minutes; what was recorded, however, stood in stark contrast to Woodall's letter:

It was decided to advise customers that the manufacture of Florian ware was abandoned, and to offer £5 lots at reduced prices to clear stocks.

To announce, before any plans for continuation had been established, that the production of Florian ware was 'abandoned', and to sell off old stock, would scarcely facilitate the successful transfer of Moorcroft's department, but it might easily hasten its demise. Blackmore's concerns were doubtless well founded.

On 25 January 1913, Moorcroft wrote to Lasenby, hoping to build on Woodall's affirmation; and he instructed Longden to reduce by a further two-thirds his costing for the new building. Two days later, Longden had drawn up a revised estimate for a much smaller factory, comprising:

Potter's shop, clay decorating, one Hot house divided for both the latters' use, Office, one 10 feet oven to be used alternately as bisque and glost, Rooms 16 feet square for the purpose of bisque and glost warehouses, dipping, decorating, and male and female Mess-rooms and lavatories, respectively. There will also be one kiln and small shed.

An undated paper, headed 'Summary' lists items in this new scheme, including both building and running costs; provision for building had been cut from £6,000 to £1,400, estimates for working expenses more than halved, and the total capital needed reduced by nearly three quarters. On the same day as Longden's letter (27 January), Woodall wrote again to offer support at a further meeting with Liberty's; such assistance implied his unshaken confidence in Moorcroft's project, if not a tacit acknowledgement that Watkin's attitude was not his own. The following day, just fifteen days after receiving Blackmore's letter, Moorcroft wrote to Lasenby, hoping to persuade Liberty's with his new plan. He considered Watkin's financial picture to be misleading and obstructive, and he was determined to counter this:

My present proposal will overcome all the difficulty unhappily presented by the Managing Director, and the outlook is brighter following his attempt to stifle the development.

The plan was discussed by Liberty's Directors on 11 February; the next day, Blackmore wrote to propose a deal. On 13 February, Moorcroft simply noted in his diary: 'Received letter from Liberty re. new works.' It was a remarkable reversal of fortune. To recover from the seemingly irrecoverable failure of his first scheme, to move from a large project (requiring immediate capital of nearly £7,000) to a small one (which needed just short of £2,500) in just over six weeks, shows determination, vision, and clear self-belief. But it also implied the assistance of others. There is evidence of interventions from both Lasenby and the Woodalls, and one senses too, although there is no archival trace, the decisive support of Florence.

3. Growing Tensions at the Washington Works

With funding in place, the next step was to build the new factory; Liberty's, with its major investment in the project, would be actively involved. The plan of the factory itself had been drawn up; the last element was the land. The original plan to build on land behind the Washington Works was clearly abandoned, and when Blackmore

wrote to Moorcroft on 14 February 1913, he referred to a new site, owned by the Sneyd Colliery. Longden sent plans on 20 February, but the next day the land deal fell through; marl had been discovered in the soil, its high moisture content making it quite unsuitable for building. Within days, Moorcroft was inspecting other sites, and by 3 March, he had settled on an alternative plot, writing to R. Bygott, clerk to the Sandbach School Foundation, with a request that he 'sell about three thousand three hundred yards of the land now and give to us the option to purchase the remainder of the suggested plot in the near future.' On the same day, appropriately, Moorcroft took another decisive step forward, signing a contract of employment with James Newman, his thrower; his project was taking shape. But the 30 June deadline was now little more than sixteen weeks away. On 10 March, Blackmore wrote to Woodall with news of the new site, but hinting that completion may be delayed. Moorcroft's relationship with Macintyre's was by this time, and for quite different reasons, under considerable strain; the prospect of a delay did not help to defuse the tension.

The land site was ideal, but at an agreed price of two shillings per yard, it was nearly 14% higher than Moorcroft's original estimate (of one shilling and nine pence), thus increasing the pressure to keep building costs to an absolute minimum. In a letter to Longden of 17 March 1913, he stressed that 'every possible economy must be enforced'. Ending with a personal postscript, the strain was clear: 'I beg you to help me to get a building that will be well worth the money expended. I am putting my all into this scheme'. To make matters worse, the sale transaction was painfully slow. On 12 April, just seven weeks from the end of June, Moorcroft wrote again to Longden; he had a contingency plan, but he was keen to avoid it at all costs:

We must be in a position to move into the building by the end of June, or earlier. Could we occupy a portion with any satisfaction, we could work without the oven for a time. In case of doubt, we shall be compelled to take the Ducal Works and have the same put in some state of repair. This expense we must avoid if possible.

On 14 April, Bygott confirmed that a draft agreement of the land sale had been sent to Blackmore; but Blackmore was reluctant to incur building expenses before the sale had been completed. Writing to Moorcroft on 6 May, he revealed an enduring concern that Watkin might yet seek to undermine the plans; it was a remarkable admission:

As far as I can judge, the only way in which the Governors of the School Foundation could now get out of the sale would be by persuading the Board of Education to refuse their consent to the sale. I do not know how far this local body would be likely to be influenced by anything that Mr Watkin might say or do [...].

But by 9 May, Moorcroft had instructed Longden to proceed. The contract with Joseph Cooke, the builder, was dated 13 May, the cost set at £1,400, and completion within nine weeks; this put back the termination date to 15 July, more than two weeks beyond the date agreed with Macintyre's. The land sale was not finalised, however, until the 30 May, delaying completion, then, by a total of four weeks.

The collapse of the Sneyd Colliery land sale inevitably put pressure on Moorcroft's relations with his employers; this was significantly increased when a notice was published in the *Pottery Gazette*, reporting the proposed transfer of his department. When Moorcroft wrote to Woodall on 1 March 1913, informing him of the failure of the land purchase, he told him of a forthcoming announcement in the *Pottery Gazette*:

A fortnight ago, a journalist from the P.G. called at the works on his usual annual round, and I explained the position [...] that when he came next year he would find a change, and he has included a short paragraph in this month's issue. I have not seen a copy, but will send you one if I am able to obtain it.

Moorcroft was anxious to give notice of the transfer to customers, not least in order to counter the earlier announcement of its discontinuation and the ready availability of cheap stock. He had no reason to fear that the Directors might object, since he knew that all press notices were sent in draft to Watkin for his approval or amendment. But this notice caused a storm:

'Moorcroft Faience' is highly appreciated in the trade, and by commission and under the new arrangement it will be produced even more extensively. Mr Moorcroft is having new works built with the most improved modern arrangements, and he hopes in a few months to have them in perfect working order. There will be no cessation in the production of the art ware, as Macintyre & Co. will continue it until Mr Moorcroft opens his new factory, which will be in Burslem.³



James Macintyre & Co., Ltd., Washington China Works, Burslem, are making an important change in their business. The company are world-famous as manufacturers of porcelain specialities for all trades, and particularly of pottery for electrical purposes. They have also acquired a reputation for high-class ceramics, including dainty table accessories. The electrical branch of their business is increasing to such an extent that they have decided to direct their efforts most exclusively to its development. With this object in view they have made an arrangement with their art potter, Mr. William Moorcroft, under which he will take over the whole of their artistic business. Mr. Moorcroft has for many years had the sole control of that branch, and has been responsible for many unique artistic productions, for which Macintyre & Co., Ltd., are now so well known. "Moorcroft Faience" is highly appreciated in the trade, and by commission and under the new arrangement it will be produced even more extensively. Mr. Moorcroft is having new works built with the most improved modern arrangements, and he hopes in a few months to have them in perfect working order. There will be no cessation in the production of the art ware, as Macintyre & Co. will continue it until Mr. Moorcroft opens his new factory, which will be in Burslem. We heartily wish Mr. Moorcroft every success in a venture for which he is so especially qualified, and we congratulate Macintyre & Co., Ltd., upon the development of their electrical and general trade specialities, which has rendered the contemplated change necessary.

Fig. 41 Announcement of the new factory in the *Pottery Gazette* (March 1913). 'Personal and Commercial Papers of William Moorcroft', Stoke-on-Trent City Archives, SD 1837. CC BY-NC

3 *Pottery Gazette and Glass Trade Review* [PG] (March 1913), p.277.

The statement that Macintyre's would continue production of art ware 'until Mr Moorcroft opens his new factory' clearly implied that their support of Moorcroft's interests was unconditional. But against the background of the failed Sneyd Colliery land sale just four days earlier, it inadvertently implied a commitment which was not only one-sided, but open-ended. Woodall replied to Moorcroft's letter on 3 March: 'There is a most extraordinary article in the *'Pottery Gazette'* dated 1st March, which is so incorrect I feel sure it cannot have emanated from you.' In this context, Blackmore's letter to Woodall of 10 March, announcing the imminent land deal with Bygott, but preparing the way for a possible delay in the completion of the transfer, could not have come at a more inopportune moment. Woodall may have been accommodating at the meeting in early February, when the Sneyd Colliery land deal was imminent, but since then the situation had changed. Blackmore's re-statement of Woodall's helpful assurances must have seemed inappropriately unconcerned, even exploitative:

[...] although we are in hopes that the new factory will be up and in working order by the end of June, it is just possible that there will be, as you know there often is, a certain amount of delay, and if that is the case, we may have to ask the indulgence which you were so good as to say that you would afford us.

Moorcroft established that a proof of the *Pottery Gazette* notice had not on this occasion been sent to Watkin for his approval, a result of the journalist's sudden illness. The impression remained, however, that he had acted independently. Moorcroft drafted a letter to Woodall on the 24 March 1913, assuring him that he had played no part in the writing of the notice, and revealing at the same time a telling side to Watkin's proof-reading practice:

I had never known what would be published until I had seen the paper. Past experience confirms this, as the censorship of Mr Watkin has been a very severe one. In one instance I recall it was so drastic that the Editor of the Art Journal declined to publish the matter. [...] The Editor returned Mr Watkin's proof to me, stating he could not publish as the content was so contrary to their opinion [...] Mr Watkin struck out my name in every paragraph.

On 28 March, a special meeting of the Macintyre Directors was called 'for the purpose of considering Mr W. Moorcroft's position and the attitude the Company should adopt in dealing with Messrs Liberty & Co. and the *Pottery Gazette'*. This was not just about the publication of an announcement; it was about Moorcroft's relationship with Macintyre's, and Macintyre's relationship with his new project and with his powerful sponsor. The impression had unintentionally been given that their support was being taken for granted, and the Directors were naturally keen to set down its limits. It was decided that no further extension to the end of June deadline would be granted, and that Woodall would inform Blackmore of this; curiously, he did not do so until 24 April, nearly four weeks later. As for the *Pottery Gazette*, it was agreed to make a public

statement in the journal, underlining the termination of Moorcroft's engagement and with only a passing reference to his independent future:

We are requested by Messrs James Macintyre & Co. Ltd. of Washington Works, Burslem, to state that the paragraph relating to their business which appeared in our March number was inserted without their knowledge; and they wish it to be understood that Mr Moorcroft who is leaving their employment and intends to commence business on his own account will not in future have any connection with their firm or be entitled to use their name for any purpose whatever.

But this was not all. Problems arising from Moorcroft's participation at the Ghent Universal Exhibition were coming to a head in the same month of March. Moorcroft had always seen the value of international exhibitions, but he had failed to persuade Watkin to apply for space at Ghent. At the same Directors' meeting of 4 October 1912 which agreed the closure of his department, a Minute recorded the firm's decision not to participate. As a result, Moorcroft applied to exhibit independently, as a means of promoting ware which would soon be manufactured in his own name. But then, at a meeting of 21 November 1912, the Directors reversed their earlier decision not to exhibit. This put Moorcroft in a delicate position, his twin status as employee of Macintyre's and (soon to become) independent potter now brought uncomfortably into tension. Tension became opposition when, at the Directors' meeting of 28 March 1913, Watkin announced his decision to withdraw:

It was reported that the Board of Trade had allotted two cases out of the four applied for: when asked for a reason for the reduction of the number, the explanation was so unsatisfactory the Managing Director decided to withdraw entirely and to exhibit nothing.

Whether the 'so unsatisfactory' explanation offered by the Board of Trade included reference to the space already allocated to Moorcroft's independent exhibit is not documented, but it cannot have strengthened the case of his (not yet) former employer; and it would certainly have increased the impression that Moorcroft's actions were adversely affecting their plans. This perception may well have prompted Watkin to reject Moorcroft's request to buy stock for display in his own name, and on 4 April, Moorcroft drafted a letter to T.C. Moore at the Board of Trade, withdrawing from the Exhibition: '[I] deeply regret that owing to unforeseen delay in the transfer and in building operations, I fear it will not be possible to make the pottery in time to exhibit at Ghent.' Within days, though, his diary recorded a new solution: wares would be supplied from Liberty's stock.

These two disputes added to the pressure Moorcroft was already under from the immediate, practical issues of buying land, designing a factory and negotiating terms with Liberty's. Both originated in his desire to advertise his new venture, to win orders and to effect, as smoothly as possible, the transfer of his business. How much of the increased tension with Macintyre's was due to misunderstanding, and

<p>JAMES MACINTYRE & CO. LTD. Manufacturers of HIGH-CLASS CERAMICS. New and distinctive designs on original shapes.</p> <p>DAINTY TABLE ACCESSORIES. Hygienic Salt and Pepper Sprinklers, Coquetiers and Mullineers, etc. Many Shapes—Choice Colourings.</p> <p>COAT OF ARMS WARE. School, College and Town Arms on Tobacco Jars, Ash Trays, etc.</p> <p>NOVELTIES FOR ADVERTISERS. Well-displayed Advertisements on useful Articles, attractively decorated.</p> <p>Also of PORCELAIN SPECIALITIES FOR ALL TRADES. Lists or Quotations Free.</p> <p>WASHINGTON CHINA WORKS, BURSLEM, STAFFS.</p>			<p>JAMES MACINTYRE & CO. LTD. HIGHEST GRADE ELECTRICAL PORCELAINS.</p> <table border="1"> <tr> <td> <p>High Class TABLE ACCESSORIES— Cruet Sets; Broth Sets; Luncheon Sets; Early Morning Sets; Egg Frames; "HYGIENIC" Salt, Pepper and Sugar Shakers; Coquetiers & Mullineers; Teapots, Sugars, Creams, Etc. In our well-known TINTED FAÏENCE.</p> </td> <td> <p>High Class POTTERY NOVELTIES for ADVERTISERS. Attractive Announcements on Articles of every day utility. Samples, Illustrations and Quotations on application.</p> </td> <td> <p>High Class "ARMS" WARE— SCHOOL COLLEGE, OR TOWN "ARMS," on Tobacco Jars, Match Pots, Ash Trays, and other useful articles. LISTS FREE.</p> </td> </tr> </table> <p>SPECIALITIES FOR ARTISTS' & STATIONERS' SUNDRIESMEN.</p> <p>WASHINGTON CHINA WORKS, BURSLEM, STAFFS.</p>			<p>High Class TABLE ACCESSORIES— Cruet Sets; Broth Sets; Luncheon Sets; Early Morning Sets; Egg Frames; "HYGIENIC" Salt, Pepper and Sugar Shakers; Coquetiers & Mullineers; Teapots, Sugars, Creams, Etc. In our well-known TINTED FAÏENCE.</p>	<p>High Class POTTERY NOVELTIES for ADVERTISERS. Attractive Announcements on Articles of every day utility. Samples, Illustrations and Quotations on application.</p>	<p>High Class "ARMS" WARE— SCHOOL COLLEGE, OR TOWN "ARMS," on Tobacco Jars, Match Pots, Ash Trays, and other useful articles. LISTS FREE.</p>
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Fig. 42 J. Macintyre & Co. Ltd., Advertisements in the *Pottery Gazette* March & April 1913. 'Personal and Commercial Papers of William Moorcroft', Stoke-on-Trent City Archives, SD 1837. CC BY-NC

TELEPHONE NO. 3038. TELEGRAPHIC ADDRESS: "MACINTYRE, BURSLEM."

*Washington China Works,
Burslem, 27th June, 1913*

Memorandum
From *James Macintyre & Co. Ltd.*
To Miss F. Morrey.,
Burslem.
London Offices: 4, Thavies Inn, Holborn Circus, E.C.

You are requested to take notice that your services will not be required after Thursday, July 31st, 1913.

Per Pro. **JAMES MACINTYRE & Co. Ltd.**
Fanny Morrey
Managing Director.

TELEGRAPHIC ADDRESS: "MOORCROFT, BURSLEM."
MANAGING DIRECTOR: WILLIAM MOORCROFT

*Moorcroft Works,
Burslem,
Staffordshire.
17th July 1913*

Dear Sirs,
Owing to the development of the Electrical Fitting side of the business of Messrs. James Macintyre & Co. Ltd., of Burslem, and the consequent need for space, they have decided to discontinue the production of the Faience and Decorative Potteries called Florian Ware, which they have for many years past been manufacturing according to the design and under the supervision of Mr. William Moorcroft.

He has earned a well deserved reputation for the quality and artistic merit of his work at Messrs. Macintyres, as is evidenced by the Gold Medals awarded at the Brussels and St. Louis Exhibitions for examples of his Pottery, and it therefore seemed most desirable that the good work which he has established should be continued.

Arrangements have accordingly been made, with the cordial good wishes of Messrs. James Macintyre & Co. Ltd., under which this class of Pottery will be manufactured by us at Cobridge, Burslem.

Mr. Moorcroft will act as the Managing Director, and the production will be under his direct control, with the services of the same artists and workpeople who have hitherto been employed under him.

We should be much obliged if you would, on and after 31st July 1913, send all orders for Florian Ware direct to us at this address.

Trusting to be honoured with your orders, and assuring you that no effort will be spared to meet your wishes, we beg to remain,

Your faithful and obedient servants,
W. Moorcroft

(L) Fig. 43 Notice of dismissal sent to Fanny Morrey, one of Moorcroft's most senior decorators. 'Personal and Commercial Papers of William Moorcroft', Stoke-on-Trent City Archives, SD 1837. CC BY-NC

(R) Fig. 44 Official announcement of the new works. 'Personal and Commercial Papers of William Moorcroft', Stoke-on-Trent City Archives, SD 1837. CC BY-NC

how much to conscious misrepresentation, cannot be known, but by the end of March 1913 good relations had broken down completely. This was most tellingly reflected in the changing text of Macintyre's advertisements in the *Pottery Gazette*. In March the Company name had been followed with the statement 'Manufacturers of High-Class ceramics. New and distinctive designs on original shapes'. In April, though, even this anonymised reference to 'High-Class ceramics' had been removed, its place taken by 'Highest Grade Electrical Porcelains'. All trace of Moorcroft's department had been erased.

Ironically, these disputes were taking place on the eve of the much heralded visit of the King and Queen to Stoke on the 22 and 23 April 1913; at its meeting of 28 March, the Directors had agreed that ware from Moorcroft's department should be sent for inspection by the Queen, including 'one choice piece for her acceptance', a tacit recognition of its quality even as the firm edged closer to its closure. On 24 April, Moorcroft wrote to Sir Corbet Woodall, informing him that the Queen had accepted the gift of two [sic] pieces of his ware, 'a quaint teapot with pansies on a white ground and a pot pourri jar with a design of pomegranate and vine'. On the same day, Woodall (finally) wrote to Blackmore the letter agreed at the Directors' meeting of 28 March, confirming that the June deadline for Moorcroft's departure would not be extended. Blackmore replied the next day, calmly pointing out the importance of keeping the workforce together:

[...] it is very doubtful whether we shall be able to get the buildings sufficiently forward by the end of June to actually go into occupation, and you will realise the difficulty in which we shall be placed in keeping the workers together if we have nothing for them to do.

Blackmore's use of 'we' was eloquent and assertive. Liberty's were fully invested in this project; to make life difficult for Moorcroft was to make it difficult for them, and they would have none of it:

Had we not felt perfectly certain from your statements to us on more than one occasion that the parting with Mr Moorcroft was to be carried out in such a manner as to give those who were prepared to finance him every opportunity of keeping the business together, we should have never entertained the proposal for one moment.

Blackmore's letter was persuasive. When the Directors met on 29 April 1913, an extension was agreed to the end of July. Moorcroft met Corbett Woodall at the works that same day, the day before his wedding to Florence, recording in his diary a flexible attitude: 'Met C.W. Woodall at works. He agreed to our working to the end of July and a little more if necessary.' Sir Corbet Woodall's letter to Blackmore, though, was more categorical. Writing on 30 April, he implied no further flexibility in the date, and added a condition:

As I have told you on many occasions, the Board have no desire to do anything but act in a friendly spirit, and with a view to falling in with your wishes, will arrange to extend the

period by one month, which will, we hope, be sufficient for your purpose. This further concession is made on the understanding that the whole of the stock made for you, and which is, of course, of no use to us, shall be taken at an early date.

Blackmore's reply of 1 May openly declined to acknowledge the 'concession', and pointedly conceded nothing with regard to the stock. Tension was now clearly building, too, between Liberty's and Macintyre's:

We are obliged for your letter of the 30th April, and felt that when we explained the circumstances to you, you would realise the awkward position to which your proposed action was putting us. As regards the stock, [...] we have little doubt that some arrangement could be made in regard to that, though at the moment we do not know what it comprises.

And yet, despite all the obstacles to a smooth transition, Moorcroft's work continued to be appreciated. As early as 6 February 1913, Mr Ravenscroft, one of Macintyre's travellers, reported that the (provocative) announcement of his department's closure, agreed by the Directors on 16 January, had provoked widespread expressions of support for Moorcroft:

[...] without exception, they all say how pleased they are and will support you. The clinch of it all is, though, they won't order now (only small) and prefer to wait and to help Moorcroft Ltd along. It is very gratifying in a way and a compliment to both of us.

And even the offer of cut-price stock did not override a sense of loyalty, a telling sign of the very personal way Moorcroft had conducted his business. Marks, a leading Manchester retailer, was uncompromising in his view:

Marks [...] showed me a letter Mr W wrote them which is only one more proof of your contention that he blocks the department all he can. [...] They would not have it from him even if he went round himself and offered it at half price. [Emphasis original]

And the same was true of customers abroad. Writing with an order on 21 July 1913, William Sandover, Australian importer, pointed out the importance of Moorcroft's name for new business:

I notice that we have received today, from Macintyre's, an invoice of your vases, but I notice it does not mention your name. Now, I want to make a speciality of these, and I ought really to have some showcards with your name on such as 'Moorcroft ware'. I am quite certain this will be the way to sell them best [...].

Even in such difficult times, Moorcroft's name promised to take him a long way.

What was true of the retail sector was true, too, in the world of art. Moorcroft exhibited again at the Royal Institution on 30 May 1913, his display attracting a review in *The Connoisseur*. When Reginald Grundy confirmed the notice in a letter of 31 May, he was clearly aware of the tensions at Macintyre's, and his letter corroborated Moorcroft's perception that Watkin took every opportunity to anonymise his work:

Are you on your own yet? In the notice in 'The Mail', I did not venture to mention that you were setting up for yourself, as your former firm might probably have protested [...]. I may say (*entre nous*) that the notes they sent to be written up did not mention your name and barely alluded to your work, and that in a manner to give no clue whatever to the identity of the maker.

Grundy's notice appeared in July 1913; it situated Moorcroft's pottery at the forefront of contemporary ceramic art, and emphatically so:

These show a marked originality of treatment, more especially as regards the coloration, which is never glaring or obtrusive, but always characterised by refinement and restraint. To single out any special piece for preferment is rather difficult, but in some of the representations of conventionally treated pansies on a white ground, and rich combinations of red pomegranates and purple grapes with green, some of the most beautiful effects which have been produced by modern ceramic art were attained.⁴

4. The Summer of 1913

The summer months of 1913 saw both the building of the new factory and ever-increasing tensions at the Washington Works. On 24 June, notices of dismissal were issued to Moorcroft's staff; this was nearly two weeks after the Directors' meeting of 11 June when it had been decided to issue the notices 'at once', but, perhaps not coincidentally, it was a day when Moorcroft was absent from the Works, attending the second Board meeting of his new Company in London.

The retention of Moorcroft's trained workforce was as essential to the successful transfer as the building of the factory and the maintenance of the business. If they were dismissed before the new works were ready, they could only be kept together if the department moved into a temporary site, or if they were paid to do nothing. This increased the financial pressure on Moorcroft, but it put pressure, too, on his staff. When Moorcroft returned from London, he wrote at once to Sir Corbet Woodall, drawing attention to an announcement on the factory gates which stated that 'only workpeople who have received formal notices will be affected by the discontinuance of the Florian Department'. This statement implied a choice between Macintyre's and Moorcroft; to opt for the former was to ensure continued employment at the Washington Works, to opt for the latter was to face certain dismissal, and (it was implied) an uncertain future with an employer whose new factory was still little more than a building site. It is clear that Moorcroft's staff had already been confronted with this stark choice:

Workmen who have worked many years for the firm in connection with my department have been [...] questioned as to their intentions of transferring their service to Moorcroft [...]. There is much strong feeling roused in the matter, and this appears to be quite contrary to the idea of 'transfer' named in your letter as the word 'discontinuance' conveys

4 R. Grundy, 'Current Art Notes', *The Connoisseur* (July 1913), p.206.

a false idea, contrary I feel sure to the wish of the Board as a whole, by intimidation of men and women [...] without whose services the transfer could not take place.

The letter was sent on 26 June 1913; Woodall replied the next day. He re-affirmed his wish that 'the transfer of your department should be carried out without friction and with every consideration for your interest', but he was either unwilling or unable to intervene: 'I am distressed to have your letter of the 26th but cannot see my way to interfering between the Managing Director and yourself.'

Ironically, the notices were served on the very day the Directors of W. Moorcroft Ltd. approved the wording of a formal announcement of the new Company. The text bore the scars of the past few months; it began factually, tactfully focussing on the business plans of Macintyre's:

Owing to the development of the Electrical Fitting side of the business of Messrs. James Macintyre & Co. Ltd., of Burslem, and the consequent need for space, they have decided to discontinue the production of the Faience and Decorative Potteries called Florian Ware [...].

The finality of 'discontinue' was deftly countered in the next sentence, the decision to 'continue' Moorcroft's work being attributed, implicitly, to both parties, strengthening an image of productive collaboration:

He has earned a well-deserved reputation for the quality and artistic merit of his work at Messrs Macintyre, [...] and it therefore seemed most desirable that the good work which he has established should be continued.

The impression created was of a seamless and harmonious transition, the contentious issue of timing, still very acute, being adroitly avoided. It was a masterpiece of diplomatic and marketing rhetoric:

Arrangements have accordingly been made, with the cordial good wishes of Messrs. James Macintyre & Co. Ltd., under which this class of pottery will be manufactured by us at Cobridge, Burslem. Mr Moorcroft will act as the Managing Director, and the production will be under his direct control, with the services of the same artists and workpeople who have hitherto been employed under him.

The ambivalent relationship of Macintyre's and Moorcroft caused other problems at Ghent, where the exhibit of W. Moorcroft Ltd was initially awarded a Gold Medal. On 7 July 1913, T.C Moore, a member of the jury, wrote to explain the background to this award. It had been judged that W. Moorcroft Ltd. was a new firm, quite distinct from J. Macintyre & Co., Ltd.; new firms, by convention, were not considered for the higher awards. Invited to appeal, Moorcroft argued that, for all that the two firms were indeed distinct, the pottery exhibited by Macintyre's at Brussels and by W. Moorcroft Ltd. at Ghent was created by the same designer and his assistants; the one was, therefore, a seamless continuation of the other. It was ironic that he should have to make this argument against the background of a far from seamless transition, but

it was a successful appeal, and on 26 July, his award was increased to the *Diplôme d'honneur*. Just five days before his departure, it was a fitting end to his career at the Washington Works, an acknowledgement of his defining role in pots officially produced in Macintyre's name.



Fig. 45 William Moorcroft, Part of his exhibit at Ghent 1913. 'Personal and Commercial Papers of William Moorcroft', Stoke-on-Trent City Archives, SD 1837. CC BY-NC

But the month ended neither smoothly nor harmoniously. On the official last day, 31 July 1913, Moorcroft noted simply in his diary: 'Staff left 6 pm. Watkin looked over department and was again unusually bitter.' The staff had left, but Moorcroft had not cleared his office, and tensions increased as Watkin instructed the firm's solicitor to deny him further access to his (now former) place of work. A week later, though, on 7 August, his attention was fixed on the new factory, and he recorded the first significant step towards production; his sixteen years at the Washington Works were over, and a new chapter was beginning:

New works with Mr Lasenby. Thrower made first bowls which were to be signed and described as the first pieces made. Met Newman, Barlow H., Barlow, (Jnr), Greatbatch, Hawley, Plimbley, Tudor, K. Newman, Hassall (Engineer).

5. The Contract with Liberty's

Blackmore's letter of 12 February 1913, which first proposed the terms on which Liberty's would consider an investment in Moorcroft's yet-to-be-born company, was perhaps the most important document in his career. Although its terms would be

radically re-written fifteen years later, this proposal both ensured and enhanced his independence as a potter.

Liberty's were prepared to invest two thirds of an initial capital sum of £3,000, against Moorcroft's one third; but there were conditions. All of Moorcroft's investment was to be in shares, whose value would be determined by the fortunes of the Company; three quarters of Liberty's money was in the form of debentures, and therefore safeguarded against failure. Added to which, Liberty's claimed entitlement to a full half share of distributable profits, and a voting power 'in excess of' Moorcroft's. The uneven distribution of risk and benefit was evident, and Blackmore made no secret of it:

We feel bound to point out to you that [...] if the Company is not successful, although we might retrieve the whole or portion of our capital secured by the Debenture, the resulting loss would, in the main, fall upon yourself; and also that the fact of our holding a Debenture puts us in the position of a creditor of the concern and consequently in a stronger position than yourself. In effect, you really place yourself unreservedly in our hands.

In addition, Blackmore proposed a fixed time limit of ten years on this investment, clearly setting out two possible outcomes at the end of this period:

We must also have the right at the expiration of ten years to withdraw our capital, or if you are not inclined to pay us out at par, to wind up the concern and realize it to the best advantage.

Survival beyond February 1923 depended, then, on the commercial success of the Company, and Moorcroft's ability to buy Liberty's out within ten years. But the next stipulation was perhaps the most significant of all:

You must of necessity enter into an agreement with the new Company to give your services to it for your life, or so long as the Company may require your services.

Liberty's were not so much co-financing a company as investing in William Moorcroft, and in pottery designed and produced by him; his personal involvement was the indispensable condition of their financial support. Blackmore recognised that such terms, clearly designed to protect Liberty's capital, could not be accepted lightly. And yet the fact that they were drawn up at all implied a shared belief that the project had commercial potential, and they were prepared to invest the time and resource to make it succeed. It was a lifeline, with strings attached no doubt, but a lifeline nevertheless. Moorcroft's letter of acceptance was dated that same day, 12 February:

I beg to thank you for your proposals regarding the new works. I am grateful for your interest, and agree entirely with all you suggest. Under the conditions now proposed, I believe a fuller development of the business is assured.

The signing of the Articles of Association took place on 21 April 1913, just nine days before Moorcroft's wedding, and two days before the royal visit to Stoke. The

Agreement documents codified and clarified many of the clauses in Blackmore's letter. Moorcroft was entering into a relationship with W. Moorcroft Ltd.; the Company bore his name, but it was a separate entity. His appointment as its Managing Director was fixed for 'a period of 9½ years from 1st July 1913'; authority to renew was in the hands of the Company, as was authority to dismiss. In such circumstances, the issue of voting power was thus potentially crucial. The Memorandum attributed 1,250 A shares to Moorcroft, and 650 B shares to Lasenby; with the enhanced voting power of the B shares, ultimate control rested, therefore, with Liberty's. Given that Lasenby was Liberty's Director on the Board, the risk of confrontation was minimal; but the theoretical possibility of being outvoted by the B shareholders was built into the agreement. Such terms may have enshrined Liberty's effective power to terminate Moorcroft's appointment, but this is not where the focus of the contract lay. Quite the reverse. The contract created an independent company, but it also underlined the indispensable role of Moorcroft within it. Ownership of his designs was assigned to the Company, and he was required, too, to keep written records of his glaze and other recipes. The clauses sought to protect the Company (and Liberty's investment) against a future without Moorcroft's input; but they were based on a clearly flawed belief that the quality and impact of his work could be reduced to, or replicated by, a pattern or a chemical formula.

Such terms put Moorcroft in a different, and better position than he had enjoyed with Macintyre's. The contract may have been unequal, but it was not one-sided, and Moorcroft stood to benefit greatly, and in many ways, from the association. It gave him access to the legal and commercial expertise of a leading London retailer, but, more significantly, he had the freedom to run his own works, to be himself in ways which had hitherto been impossible. He may have been reliant on Liberty's financial support, but he had the means, and the incentive, to buy them out. Writing on 14 February 1913 to acknowledge his acceptance of the terms, Blackmore added in a postscript:

What do you think would be the best name for the new Company?:

W. Moorcroft, Limited

Moorcrofts Limited

Moorcroft & Co., Limited

W. Moorcroft & Co., Limited.

The options proposed by Blackmore confirmed Liberty's focus on William Moorcroft at the heart of the new firm; and in his choice, Moorcroft underlined the same priority, selecting the option which most clearly focussed attention not on the Company, but on the man. This same principle would be reflected, too, in the continuation of his distinctive practice of signing his ware; his name impressed on the base of pots was the trademark of the Company which produced them, but what truly defined them as Moorcroft ware was this manuscript mark of his personal association with each individual piece.

6. Conclusions

A desire to concentrate on the production of electrical porcelain was doubtless one reason why Macintyre's Directors agreed to close Moorcroft's department, but it seems certain that this alone was not enough to explain the decision. Nor is the alleged unprofitability of his work, an argument which the Woodalls never wholeheartedly endorsed, and which clearly did not dissuade Liberty's from investing in its future. Moorcroft's growing international reputation as a ceramic designer was evidence enough of the success of his ware, and the Woodalls celebrated it. It was quite characteristic of the enlightened industrial view praised by the *Pottery Gazette*:

Most of the best firms in our industries are proud of the work of their artists, and are always willing to give them credit for their skill.⁵

And even after the decision had been taken, their encouragement continued; indeed, without the support of the Woodalls for an artist they clearly valued highly, the production of Moorcroft ware would not have continued beyond 1912. The fact that they allowed him to take his staff, and to claim ownership of designs created while their employee, was a gesture of decisive significance; the terms of his contract with Liberty's were not nearly as permissive in this respect. It is clear, though, that Macintyre's Managing Director, for his own reasons, was unwilling to facilitate Moorcroft's success, and he was able to persuade the Woodalls that closure of the department was in the best interests of the Company as a whole. It is possible that, in other circumstances, Moorcroft might have made his career as Art Director with this firm, but it is by no means certain. As he developed his distinctive identity as an artist, he clearly began to envisage the greater opportunities which independence would bring him; the deterioration of working conditions at the Washington Works doubtless merely accelerated a separation which, one way or another, was bound to happen.

These months would certainly have been far less troubled if he had simply sought work as a designer in another firm, as Woodall, in October 1912, doubtless thought he might. But for Moorcroft, design led naturally and inevitably to production, and from there to the satisfaction of his customers. This was all part of a single creative process which he had been able to direct in his department at the Washington Works, but which was not the standard role of the Art Director in other firms. Only in his own works would he be able to find the same kind of freedom to be himself, and he would do anything to achieve it. And his staff were no less essential to this project. Without his thrower, turner, tube-liners, painters or firemen there could be no Moorcroft ware; these were his 'assistants' as he tellingly called them in his will, specially trained by him to realise his designs, extensions of his own self to whom he felt absolute loyalty. And the reverse was also true. On the occasion of his wedding to Florence Lovibond, he received a greeting from 'The Girls of your Departments' dated 18 April 1913; just

⁵ 'The Arts and Crafts Exhibitions', *PG* (February 1913), 186–87 (p.187).

over two months away from the closure of the department, and with, as yet, no factory to go to, this was a significant vote of confidence, solidarity and trust:

We hope that you will accept this as an expression of good wishes for your future happiness, health and prosperity.

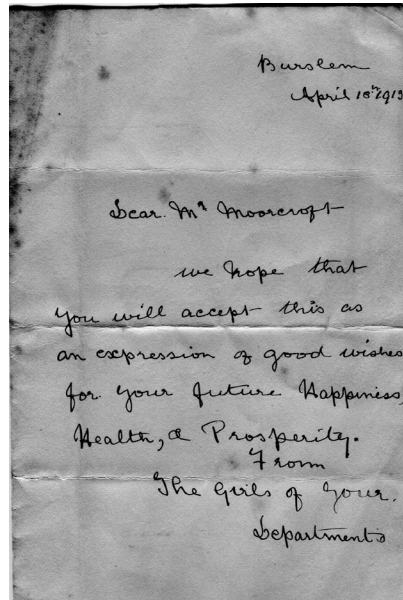


Fig. 46 Note to Moorcroft, 18 April 1913, 'From the Girls of your Departments'. 'Personal and Commercial Papers of William Moorcroft', Stoke-on-Trent City Archives, SD 1837. CC BY-NC

When Moorcroft wrote to Arthur Liberty to congratulate him on his knighthood on 2 January 1913, he pointedly echoed Crane's affirmation of man's right to the 'possession of beauty in things common and familiar';⁶ he saw in Liberty's a commercially successful firm, but one not driven by commercial values alone:

May one offer you one's congratulations and also express the hope that you will be long spared to continue your wonderful work of making the common things in life beautiful, as well as adding beauty to the rarest.

He used the same phrase with respect to his own enterprise just seven weeks later, when he returned the proof of the ill-fated *Pottery Gazette* notice on 19 February. His new association with Liberty's was not just the result of a personal friendship with one of the firm's Directors, nor was it pure expediency on his part. He saw in their future collaboration a shared ambition: to beautify everyday life:

6 W. Crane, 'Of the Revival of Design and Handicraft', *Arts and Crafts Essays* (London: Rivington, Percival & Co., 1893), 1–21 (p.13).

[...] we shall be indeed grateful for any assistance you can afford us in directing attention to our efforts to produce pottery such as will show that it is possible to make common things beautiful.

But crucially, this ambition was not conceived at the expense of commercial success; quite the reverse. At stake was the retention of Liberty's support (and perhaps, too, the prospect of buying them out), but also, equally, Moorcroft's own self-belief. It had been repeatedly asserted by Watkin that his department was unviable, and Moorcroft was determined to prove it had the potential it had been denied. He believed in his ware, and he believed that it would sell, and sell well; beauty and commerce were not incompatible. His proposal for expansion, in his last report to the Macintyre Directors, had already implied this belief, as did an undated draft letter to Watkin, clearly written in this period:

The other day, Waddington of Keighley, was telling me how he first heard of the firm. He was visiting a house in Harrogate and saw two 'Aurelian' vases. They attracted his attention and led to his writing to the works for a collection to be sent. Since that time, he informs us he has not missed re-ordering in any year. But more, he paid us this tribute that the goods were so distinct that they had brought the best people in Keighley to his shop, and had helped him to develop a better class business. In my humble opinion, there are hundreds of such people in the country, who are waiting to be shown our productions.

At the end of his letter to Woodall on the 16 November 1912, as he sought more time to make his plans, he gave powerful expression to his vision for the future:

In conclusion may one add that one has long and fondly hoped and yet hopes to establish at Washington Works a production unequalled and one that would make a reputation world-wide. I feel so very deeply a force both within one and without, shaping a future that will find in its fulfilment ones wishes realised.

Now, nine months later, he was in a position he might not have dared imagine then, with his own modern, purpose-built factory, the freedom to create, and access to the commercial network of a leading London retailer. He had ten years to prove himself. And he would.

PART II

CREATING A STUDIO

6. 1913–14: A New Beginning

1. The Challenges of Freedom

The throwing of two pomegranate bowls by James Newman on 7 August 1913 inaugurated Moorcroft's new factory; full-time production, though, was still some weeks away. Already on 5 August 1913, Moorcroft was writing to Harrison's about problems with his first batch of clay, 'contaminated with some hard material', and there were difficulties, too, with the fabric of the works.¹ At the back of his diary, he recorded 'water running through badly' into the Engine House and Workroom.; on 11 August 1913 he indicated general unease with 'faulty construction', and on 6 September 1913, he wrote to Reginald Longden, architect of the building, itemising the major deficiencies:

The steel work in one room has given way, the floors which are, as I thought, intended to be impervious, you will find can be swept up and at the rate the floors are crumbling away, we shall want the same renewed in a short time.

If problems with the fabric of the new works caused initial setbacks, full-scale production was hampered too by the fact that Moorcroft had just a single oven, which had to serve both biscuit and glost firing. The accumulated delays intensified the commercial pressure; every week of non-production reduced the income from sales, and increased the backlog of orders. In Moorcroft's weekly account sheets, the first entry under sales does not occur until week 5, week ending 19 September 1913, and by the end of September 1913, less than £25 had been recorded, all from stock brought from Macintyre's. Writing to Alwyn Lasenby on 9 October 1913, two days after the first biscuit firing, he made no secret of the initial problems: 'The last few weeks have been very anxious ones. [...] There are difficulties in the way of working in the economical way we anticipate at once.' The first glost firing took place on 20 October, and the effect on revenue was almost immediate; in the following two weeks, recorded sales totalled more than £248.

Moorcroft's problems, though, were not confined to the functioning of his new works; practical difficulties were exacerbated by continued disagreements with Henry

¹ All unpublished documents referred to in this chapter are located in William Moorcroft: Personal and Commercial Papers, SD1837, Stoke-on-Trent City Archives [WM Archive].

Watkin. An extended dispute arose over Moorcroft's delay in vacating his office at the Washington Works, and this was followed by damaging quarrels over the purchase from Macintyre's of moulds and unfinished wares. One such concerned the valuation of wares stamped Liberty, which the store had agreed to buy from Macintyre's, subject to Moorcroft's inspection. The goods were sent to the new works, but the invoices sent direct to Liberty's, with a request for immediate settlement. Harold Blackmore refused to pay for goods not yet inspected, and it soon became clear to Moorcroft that the invoiced prices were quite inappropriate. But to question each detail required time and attention which he did not have. He had been in the new works for nearly eight weeks, and was still not ready for the first biscuit firing; writing to Blackmore on 25 September 1913, his frustration was clear:

The prices are hopelessly wrong. It will be impossible for me to pass the invoice for moulds or of any pottery without the closest inspection. And for the present one's whole effort is directed in a constructive way.

These problems continued into the following year, and intensified. Still disputing the value of the goods he bought from the Washington Works, Moorcroft did not settle Macintyre's invoices. For him, the issue was clear: the prices charged were unreasonable, and with his new works still finding its way towards profitable production, he could not afford to be overcharged; to accept such terms would be to incur an inevitable and substantial loss. On 9 January 1914, however, Watkin instructed his solicitor to submit a final demand, with the threat of court proceedings. To add public insult to private injury, an advertisement placed in the February edition of the *Pottery Gazette* invited trade visitors to visit Macintyre's stand at the British Pottery and Glass Fair which was offering for sale at discounted prices wares produced in their (now discontinued) art department.²

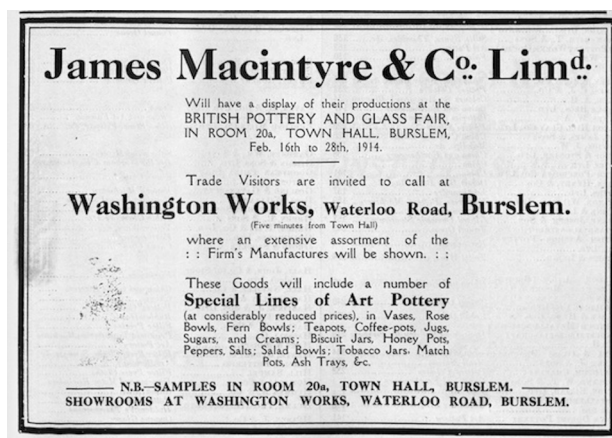


Fig. 47 J. Macintyre & Co. Ltd., Advertisement in the *Pottery Gazette* (February 1914) 'Personal and Commercial Papers of William Moorcroft', Stoke-on-Trent City Archives, SD 1837. CC BY-NC

2 *Pottery Gazette and Glass Trade Review* [PG] (February 1914), p.137.

The advertisement was placed again in March and April 1914. Watkin's willingness to sell at 'considerably reduced prices' wares which he had been offering to Moorcroft at a much higher rate made little economic sense, but it implied one last, undisguised attempt to weaken Moorcroft's commercial position.

In the course of these months, Moorcroft tried unsuccessfully to enlist the help of the Woodalls. Corbett Woodall returned, unread, Moorcroft's correspondence with Watkin over the pricing of the moulds, and as legal action loomed, both he and his father declined to intervene. Writing on 13 January 1914, Sir Corbet rather curiously distanced himself from the firm of which he was still the Chairman of Directors: 'I will not be beguiled into taking any further part in the dispute between yourself and James Macintyre & Co.', and the same detachment was implied by his son in a letter of 6 March 1914:

While I am exceedingly sorry that you find it impossible to settle your differences with Messrs Macintyre & Co., it is for the reasons I have so many times explained unwise for myself or the Chairman to interfere.

The fact that the Woodalls sought to dissociate themselves from James Macintyre & Co., Ltd. clearly suggests some discomfort with Watkin's actions, but also an unwillingness to question his authority to act in the name of the Company. That such an intervention could be described as 'unwise' implies a relationship with the Managing Director no less complex, perhaps, than Moorcroft's own.

These disputes were a significant distraction; they extended for nearly twelve months beyond Moorcroft's departure from the Washington Works and compromised the success of his first year at the new works. By the end of July 1914, his sales receipts totalled just short of £2,718, and new orders had been received to a value of £2,950. The figures were some way short of the £4,000 estimated in February 1913, but given that production had not begun until the end of October, nearly four months into the trading year, they were not out of proportion with the original estimate. The sales income corresponded to 91% of what nine months trading might have brought in, and the new orders were 98% of the same estimate. At a meeting of Directors on 8 October 1914, a net profit of nearly £50 was recorded; the sum was not huge, but under the circumstances it was little short of miraculous.

2. A Modern Studio

If Moorcroft's move to his own, purpose-built works brought with it serious practical and commercial challenges, it also represented a unique opportunity at a moment of radical change in the world of pottery manufacture. The 'Regulations for the Manufacture and Decoration of Pottery', enacted on 2 January 1913, marked a watershed in industrial reform. Based on the findings of a Committee chaired by Sir Ernest Hatch, set up by the Home Secretary in 1910 to 'consider the dangers attendant to the use of lead in the various branches of the manufacture of china and earthenware', they

prescribed increased regulation of manufacturing processes and conditions of labour.³ The cause of lead-related illness in the industry was thought to be the ingestion of dust; its elimination in the working environment was at the very centre of Regulations dealing with the cleanliness of floors, ventilation of workplaces, and provision of mess rooms. Other clauses in the Regulations related to the lifting and carrying of materials, particularly by women and young people. Coincidentally, but fittingly, the same issue of the *Pottery Gazette* which announced the creation of W. Moorcroft Ltd., published 'An Analysis of the Regulations Governing the Manufacture of Pottery in the British Isles', written by William Burton, a member of the Hatch Committee. It was a critical moment, as Burton would note:

The success of these Regulations in improving the health of pottery workers [...] depends absolutely on the active and willing cooperation of all concerned—employers, managers, and workpeople alike [...].⁴

There was no doubt that compliance would require considerable expense and adaptation, not least in the older nineteenth-century factories. So much better, then, to be designing a workplace from scratch. Reginald Longden worked from specifications drawn up by Moorcroft himself and Florence, whose experience as a Factory Inspector related particularly to working conditions. The resultant building was in no way typical of a Potteries factory.⁵ It was spare in its design, a consequence no doubt of Moorcroft's limited budget, and consisted of a potting shop with clay cellar and drying rooms, a large workroom, warehouses for bisque and glost ware, a dipping house, a single oven and placing shed, small office, lavatories, mess-room, and mould store. Its construction was designed to maximise efficiency. A vault under the Office housed a coke-fired heating system and was used for drying; pipes fed radiators in the potting shop and heating was supplemented with cast-iron stoves. Glaze materials were delivered via a door on the southern side, and direct into the dipping room. At the rear of the building, on the west frontage, was an entrance to the potting shop, and stairs just inside the door led down to the clay cellar. The doors themselves were considerably wider than in nineteenth-century factories. Its most distinctive feature, though, was its construction on a single storey. No factory in the Potteries had such a structure, although some purpose-built works elsewhere in England, such as Pilkington and Pountney, did. Its benefits were clear, enabling Moorcroft to create a safer and more efficient working environment. It removed the risk of dust filtering into work spaces from upper rooms, and it had obvious advantages for the carrying of materials and wares, minimising the risk of damage or injury on stairs and obviating the need to install hoists or lifts. It also

3 Quoted in A. Meiklejohn, 'Health Hazards in the North Staffordshire Pottery Industry, 1688–1945', *Journal of the Royal Sanitary Institute*, 66 (1946), 516–525 (p.519).

4 William Burton, 'An Analysis of the Regulations Governing the Manufacture of Pottery in the British Isles', *PG* (May 1913), 563–581 (p.563).

5 For full details, see D. Baker, *Potworks: The Industrial Architecture of the Staffordshire Potteries* (London: Royal Commission on the Historical Monuments of England, 1991), pp.101–03.

facilitated innovation in the lighting, making possible the use of skylights, which were fitted along the length of each shed, thus maximising the flow of natural light. This construction also enabled ventilation, both from the skylights themselves and from slatted vents in the roof. As for the floors, the Regulations stipulated that they should be solid and impervious; Moorcroft's floors were concrete, slanting, and with gutters and drainage grids, so constructed as to facilitate the daily wet wash now required by law.

Moorcroft's commitment to compliance in his working practices is evident in the surviving Records of Inspection. It was Florence who undertook the inspections in the opening months of production, before withdrawing on maternity leave.⁶ She was ideally placed to meet Regulation 27 (of the Pottery Regulations), its assumption of gender notwithstanding:

A person or persons shall be appointed who shall see to the observation, throughout the factory, of the Regulations [...] Each person so appointed shall be a competent person fully conversant with the meaning and application of the Regulations in so far as they concern the departments for which he is responsible.⁷

The earliest Record book for the Clay rooms survives, and most of the weekly inspections, signed off by Florence, were satisfactory. Where problems were noted, these related particularly to dust, a consequence no doubt of the early problems with crumbling floors:

W.b. 4 October 1913: Dust bad from insufficient swilling. Immediate instruction, and Mr Moorcroft saw work rightly done.

W.b. 29 November 1913: Dust bad when sweeping. Mr Moorcroft himself saw workers re-moistening more thoroughly.

Another record book related to the Dipping House, an area of particular sensitivity. Inattention to the Regulations was infrequent, but it was scrupulously recorded and rectified:

W.b. 13 September 1913: Woman worker came before we were quite prepared and wore her own apron. Overalls sent for and worn forthwith.

W.b. 14 February 1914: Found Dipper's overall was being taken home, as was his custom formerly. Marked overalls. Arranged for new laundry, as old one was calling too irregularly. Arranged for ware cleaner, Mrs Tudor, to send laundry and have same fetched regularly. Also towels to be changed by her. 1 doz. small towels provided.

W.b. 21 February 1914: Complaints by Sanitary Inspector of lavatories on Men's side. Warehouseman instructed. Basins cleansed. Clean towels put in, and whole thoroughly cleaned. Dipper keeps his own towel.

6 A daughter, Beatrice, was born in August 1914; a son, Walter, followed in 1917.

7 *PG* (May 1913), p.580.

This was Florence's last entry; the remaining records in the Register were kept by Moorcroft himself. Dust remained a preoccupation, with consequences not only for the workers, but for the wares, too:

W.b. 14 March 1914: Nil. Owing to the high standard required in our production, we instructed the sweeper to be most careful to avoid dust.

Moorcroft's compliance with the Regulations was total, and tireless. In this he was typical of many manufacturers, committed to ensuring the health and safety of those in his employ. For many, the new Regulations heralded a long-awaited modernisation of the industry, a decisive move away from the poor conditions and antiquated working practices of the Victorian era. The *Pottery Gazette* looked ahead to the dawn of a new age, associated as much with new manufacturing methods as with a healthier working environment:

Much that is quaint and old-fashioned in the buildings and appliances will be cleared away and replaced by smart up-to-date structures and apparatus. All this will be in keeping with the progressive character of the industry, and is, indeed, necessary if our manufacturers are to hold their front rank place in the markets of the world.⁸

Moorcroft's works were efficient, compliant, but they were not like other purpose-built factories which had been attracting press attention over recent years. Pilkington's factory at Clifton Junction, designed by Burton himself, was still, after nearly twenty years, regarded as a model of modern factory design, visionary in its provisions. No less impressive was that built by Pountney in Bristol, reviewed in the *Pottery Gazette*:

Pountney & Co., Ltd., Bristol, are to be counted amongst the limited number of English pottery-producing houses whose operations are essentially and in every way conducted in a spirit of modernism.⁹

The modernity of Moorcroft's works was of a different kind. He did not believe that commercial success depended on mechanisation, and his works were designed to create not just a healthy working environment, but a peaceful studio atmosphere where workers could enjoy their craft.

The works were strikingly small, and not just on account of the budget. Moorcroft did not need to house extensive machinery, multiple ovens or a large staff; he was not creating an assembly line, either mechanical or human. The buildings themselves occupied less than a third of the land on which they were sited, allowing for expansion, but also engendering a sense of space; Moorcroft would have trees and shrubs planted to enhance its special atmosphere. Strategically placed close to a railway line and a colliery, it was nevertheless some distance from the principal pottery factories in Burslem, and it was on higher ground.

8 'Old and New in the Potteries', *PG* (January 1914), p.41.

9 *PG* (October 1914), p.1163.



Fig. 48 Aerial photo of Moorcroft's works taken in the early 1920s, trees lining the lower half of its triangular site. Cobridge Station and Cobridge Park can be seen to the left. 'Personal and Commercial Papers of William Moorcroft', Stoke-on-Trent City Archives, SD 1837. CC BY-NC

Nor was it just the buildings or the setting which created this distinctive atmosphere; it was also the people. The principal clay and kiln workers, James Newman (thrower), Henry Barlow (foreman and turner), William Powell (turner), Jack Tudor (fireman and glost placer), William Greatbatch (warehouseman) came with Moorcroft from the Washington Works; all but one of his fourteen tube-liners, and all but three of his paintresses, had also worked with him at Macintyre's, some for at least ten years. The design of the works placed Moorcroft at the centre of things, and not just physically. His Office led straight to the decorating room, where he did most of his designing, and it was adjacent to the Oven. Ledgers itemising the weekly work of the clay department throughout 1914 are all in his hand; he did not just oversee the working conditions of his staff, he shared in them.

Moorcroft's system of payment was equally forward-looking. His decorators were not paid at piece rates, as they had been at Macintyre's; they were paid pro-rata for a full 48-hour week. This was not a trivial difference. In her final Factory Inspector's report of 1912, Florence had drawn attention to the negative consequences of a piece-rate system of payment, a point picked up by the *Pottery Gazette*:

Miss Lovibond, who personally investigated most of the cases, reports: [...] High pressure was contributory in one case where an over-willing girl tried to do the work of two in the absence of her friend. There is little doubt that the piecework rates are such as to tend to force the pace in the cheaper work, so that the same care is not taken as where better work is dealt with.¹⁰

¹⁰ 'The Factory Acts in 1912', *PG* (August 1913), 925–28 (p.927).

A regular wage reduced pressure on the workers, and contributed in its own way to the safety of the working environment and the quality of the work produced. And Moorcroft's rates compared favourably with those in the industry as a whole. The *Pottery Gazette* would subsequently refer to the pay of women at this time: 'Before the War women were employed as: Decorators and transferers. Average wages 11s to 12s [shillings] [...].'¹¹ The average weekly wage for Moorcroft's twelve tube-liners was twelve shillings and nine pence, eight of whom earned twelve shillings or above, and only one less than eleven shillings, the least experienced in the department. Rates of pay in 'Colour' were lower than those in 'Line', but the average wage for experienced paintresses was twelve shillings and three pence, the lowest paid earning eleven shillings. The remaining decorators (seven in all, out of twelve), were all clearly trainees, and earned between seven shillings and two shillings and six pence, an average of four shillings and three pence.

The distinctive character of Moorcroft's new works was underlined in a report in the *Pottery Gazette*. For all its compliance with the new Regulations, this was clearly not an industrial environment:

The factory is of a type which, in a sense, is remote from any of its neighbours, inasmuch as it has been constructed on lines resembling a pottery studio rather than typical of an average "pot bank". The buildings have been designed on the most approved lines, and with every modern comfort. Everything is on the ground floor.¹²

What aroused particular interest was the proximity to a railway and to a park. This setting captured the essence of Moorcroft's ambition as a potter: to communicate his love of nature to the outside world:

A further feature of real interest is that the situation of the factory has been judiciously chosen, for, in the first place, it is directly on the side of the North Staffordshire Railway line, which is obviously advantageous. In fact, it is so near to the station, as to be almost considered a part of it, and, in the second place, the position withal is very pleasant, overlooking a small public park.¹³

This was in every sense a joint effort, a works conceived to reflect the social and aesthetic values of Moorcroft and his wife. Writing to Blackmore on 9 February 1942, nearly thirty years later and in quite different circumstances, Moorcroft evoked their shared commitment:

During the first year, and afterwards, my wife, whose service was of great value, gave her service without pay. And so eager were we that in order to reach the works early, we walked three miles to get an earlier train than was possible from our own station.

11 'Women in Pottery Works', *PG* (October 1915), 1106–07 (p.1107).

12 *PG* (October 1913), 1147–49 (p.1147).

13 *Ibid.*

And it was a works which soon bore their imprint, and which members of staff would recall with fondness. On 2 December 1940, Janie Hammond, a former employee now living in Toronto, wrote to Moorcroft; time and distance had not dulled her happy memories of the works and of the wares she helped to create:

My dear Mr Moorcroft, [...] I am always delighted and pleased to hear from you, as it takes my mind back to those very happy days, on which I like to think back and remember, and love. I also am very pleased to read where you are still carrying on with your beautiful work [...]

And Nellie Beech, a paintress who had moved to the new works from Macintyre's and was still there at Moorcroft's death, looked back many years later to the early days of the factory. She remembered particularly the defining presence of Florence, and a day when she had come to the works with her young daughter:

She always talked to you. [...] They brought white lilac and Mrs Moorcroft said it was a shame that the girls should be indoors in such lovely weather, when the flowers were so lovely. She put flowers on every table. It was not like any other works, who would expect this from the wife? They all felt they belonged.¹⁴

What mattered above all, for Moorcroft and for his staff, was the making of beautiful things in relaxing and comfortable conditions; this was a place where profit was the consequence but not the object of their work. It was indeed a factory 'of a type [...] remote from any of its neighbours', purpose-built to suit his vision for pottery production, personal, small-scale, individually crafted; he was ready to make his own distinctive mark.

Moorcroft's works were certainly different from modern factories, but this alone did not make them unique. Other enterprises had been set up to be different from the model of industrial mass production, focussing on handcraft production. But the Moorcroft works was different from these, too, both in conception and structure. It was clearly different from art pottery studios such as those at Doulton Lambeth, Wedgwood, or Pilkington, which were part of a larger industrial enterprise, enjoyed cross-subsidy from these, and worked with teams of designers, some independent, others employed by the firm. The same was true of autonomous manufactories, such as Gray's decorating studio. In such cases, the Art Director brought together individual artists, each free to create more or less at will, thereby lending great variety to the output; the unifying element was the name of the firm itself. William Moorcroft, though, was different. He was not a manager, fostering the creativity of others. He was at the very centre of his works, the sole designer, glaze chemist and manufacturer, he and his assistants united by a single purpose, to realise his designs. It was a fusion of roles for which there was no equivalent at the time. In structure, he stood midway between independent potters such as Sir Edmund Elton, the Martin brothers, or Reginald Wells, and those working

¹⁴ Recorded interview with Beatrice Moorcroft, in WM Archive.

with a team of designer-decorators, like Bernard Moore, or C.H. Brannam. He had the freedom of an independent potter, but a means of production on a larger scale than he would have been able to achieve if he had worked alone. It is what Liberty's had understood, and clearly encouraged. In this respect, Moorcroft's project was quite different, too, from that of William Morris at Merton Abbey, which also brought together collaborating artists. But in one respect, and a crucial one, he was very much in the Morris mould: the 'studio' atmosphere evoked in the *Pottery Gazette* report and recalled by former employees was a modern realisation of the working environment described by Lewis Day in his article on Morris in *The Art Journal* [AJ]:

There is nothing of the modern 'factory' about his 'mills'; an old-world air clings to the place, an atmosphere of quiet and of some leisure, in which the workers, not harried to death, have space to breathe, and to enjoy something of the repose and beauty of the world.¹⁵

3. Artist and Manufacturer

Moorcroft's first year in his new works was not just about settling into a productive rhythm, it was also about promoting his pottery, its originality and its ambitions; his new status as an independent potter gave him the freedom, and the need, to do so. An early, high-profile opportunity to exhibit his ware was the British Pottery and Glass Fair which opened in Burslem on 16 February 1914. Organised by Herbert Baily, editor of *The Connoisseur*, it built on the growing appreciation of British pottery inspired by the royal visit to Stoke in 1913. *The Connoisseur* saw it heralding 'a new era for the English potting industry', and a report in *The New Witness* quoted Baily's description of it as 'the most complete, varied and representative epitome of the arts of modern potting and glass making that has ever been collected together'.¹⁶ Moorcroft was keen to take full advantage of this opportunity, inviting Baily on 10 January 1914 to 'honour us with a visit at our new works' and looking forward to the opportunity to show him 'pottery absolutely distinct from all other potters'.

Even in these difficult early months, Moorcroft continued to develop old designs and create new ones, often exploring bolder contrasts of colour. Some versions of Cornflower dating from this time juxtaposed flowers in rich purple and yellow, while others consisted of purple flowers alone, standing out against the paler ground. Similarly striking in their contrasts were some versions of Pomegranate, still characterised by luxuriance of colour but sparer and more stylised in conception. And it was at this time, too, that Moorcroft introduced a speckled blue colouring which would be the background of several designs over the next decade. He produced objects both functional and decorative, some with simple decoration in reserved white panels, others with ornament in a ruby lustre.

¹⁵ L.F. Day, 'William Morris and his Art', *AJ* (1899), Extra Number (Easter Art Annual), 1–32 (pp.5–6).

¹⁶ 'The Fair in the Potteries', *The New Witness* (26 February 1914), 539–40 (p.540).



(L) Fig. 49 William Moorcroft, Cornflower design in new palettes: Yellow and Purple (dated 1914), 20cm; Purple (1914), 14.5cm. CC BY-NC

(R) Fig. 50 William Moorcroft, Variant on Pomegranate design (dated 1.1914), 29cm. CC BY-NC



Fig. 51 William Moorcroft, Designs on Powder Blue ground: Lidded jar with Forget-me-not panels (1914), 15cm; 2-handled vase with Prunus under Ruby Lustre glaze (dated 1914), 10cm. CC BY-NC



Fig. 52 William Moorcroft, Early examples of Persian design: 2-handled vase (1914), 15cm; knopped vase (1914), 22.5cm; hyacinth vase (1914), 15cm. CC BY-NC

His most ambitious design of this time, however, was known as 'Persian'. It was a sinuous floral motif which exploited the rich and varied tones of red, blue and green developed in his Pansy and Wisteria designs, and which displayed the ever more sophisticated decorating skills of his staff. It was clearly unsuitable for manufacture in any quantity, its decoration almost certainly restricted to his most experienced painters; it was designed to be exclusive, and it was.

Moorcroft included an example of 'Persian' in a selection of pieces sent to illustrate an article on his ware in *The Connoisseur*, 'A Magazine for Collectors'. In his covering letter of 21 March 1914, he asked for its early return: 'it is the only piece we have made so far and we should like to compare with it our later examples'. Moorcroft was evidently keen to promote it as soon and as widely as possible. He went to the additional expense of commissioning a colour insert for the article in which 'Persian' was illustrated alongside three other designs, contrasting in style but all equally rich in colour: Pansy, Pomegranate, and heraldic ware.



Fig. 53 Moorcroft's pottery illustrated in *The Connoisseur* (May 1914). 'Personal and Commercial Papers of William Moorcroft', Stoke-on-Trent City Archives, SD 1837. CC BY-NC

The article appeared in May 1914 with the following commentary:

An idea of the rich colouring of the ware can be gathered from the coloured plate which appears in this issue. The centre vase, as can be seen in the illustration, is companion to the bowl which is entirely covered with a conventional design of pansies, while the vase itself is embellished with a floral decoration on a cream ground, in keeping with the bowl. The vases on each side are entirely different in shape, colour and decoration. The cup-shaped vessel on the left displays this firm's ability in embellishing pottery with heraldic devices in tasteful form, while the other on the right, is an example of the excellent manner in which their designers artistically combine a flower and fruit decoration.¹⁷

17 C. Vernon, 'Staffordshire Pottery', *The Connoisseur* (May 1914), 59-69 (pp.60-61).

The insert provided a striking image, and Moorcroft wrote appreciatively to Baily on 2 May 1914; he was less content, though, with the notice itself. From his perspective, the review showed little appreciation of the distinctiveness of each design. To equate Persian with Pansy was to confuse a delicate, mimetic style of ornament with a more stylised one; and to characterise Pomegranate as a design of ‘Flower and Fruit’ was to misrepresent the nature of the motif, and to underplay its exotic quality. What concerned him above all, though, was the use of the term ‘designers’, which implicitly attributed the broad range of designs to the inspiration of multiple artists. These four contrasting pieces were all Moorcroft’s own work, a clear sign of his diversity as a designer; it is what made his ware distinctive, and it is what the journalist had failed to appreciate:

[...] the writer is almost entirely wrong regarding the character and means of production.
 [...] as you know, this pottery is entirely an individual production, yet your writer states that the firm’s designers artistically combine etc etc. This is a serious mis-statement, as the individual character of the production is a matter of great value.

Baily took the comments to heart, and another notice was published in the following issue of the journal, describing in more detail the techniques employed in this ware. As Moorcroft began his independent career, he was keen to explain the originality of a production method which underlay both the physical distinctiveness and aesthetic quality of his pottery. The second notice was headed ‘Moorcroft Ware’, and stressed that this pottery was ‘thoroughly homogeneous’, its constituent elements indivisibly combined by firing at ‘an excessively high [temperature] which would cause ordinary pigments to fly’.¹⁸ Stressed above all were Moorcroft’s skills as a potter and ceramic chemist. Mastery of colour and glaze effects were implicitly taken to be the ultimate criterion of excellence in modern pottery, and Moorcroft was placed on an equal footing with potters widely celebrated for their technical accomplishment. Even without the benefits of a flambé kiln, his ability to create colours of unusual depth and richness was clearly appreciated: ‘his pieces, in the harmony and perfection of their chromatic arrangement, vie with any examples of modern ceramic art.’¹⁹

The distinctive quality of Moorcroft’s pottery was already widely established, and he was recognised as both a craftsman and a designer. In August 1913, *Pottery and Glass* published a notice headed ‘Art Pottery Line Changes Hands’ which welcomed Moorcroft’s new works and the continued production of a unique range of art pottery: ‘He will have the services of the same artists and workmen as were heretofore employed under him. The ware [...] shows a marked originality of treatment, and is decidedly distinctive.’²⁰ And in a long report on the Ghent Fair, *The British Architect* focussed on Moorcroft as the designer of ware whose artistic and technical qualities

18 ‘Moorcroft Ware’, *The Connoisseur* (June 1914), 116.

19 Ibid.

20 ‘Art Pottery Changes Hands,’ *Pottery and Glass* (August 1913); press cutting in WM Archive, n.p.

set it apart; even in line drawings, without the benefit of colour, the 'special character' of Moorcroft's designs was evident:

Refinement of drawing, following very suitably the shapes of the pieces, and softness and richness of colour, characterise the distinctive pottery produced under the personal direction of Mr William Moorcroft. [...] Our sketches suggest the special character of this beautifully-produced ware.²¹



Fig. 54 Pots from Moorcroft's exhibit at Ghent illustrated in *The British Architect* (12 September 1913). 'Personal and Commercial Papers of William Moorcroft', Stoke-on-Trent City Archives, SD 1837. CC BY-NC

An article, published in the *Canadian Mail* explored the quality of 'personality' which distinguished his work, a quality which was indescribable, but unmistakable nevertheless:

A visit to Mr Moorcroft's workshops is a lesson in the degree to which individuality and personality can be introduced into potting. All 'Moorcroft' ware is handmade, and each separate piece bears the signature of its maker. To Mr Moorcroft belongs the credit for the design, and to him and to the band of skilled workers he has gathered together at Burslem belongs the credit for the wonderful perfection of colouring and finish which his ware possesses.²²

This individual quality was the source of its appeal, having the immediacy (and inimitable uniqueness) of personal expression. Its artistic value was self-evident, and its monetary value could only increase. This is what the collector understood:

21 'The Ghent Exhibition', *The British Architect* (12 September 1913), 183–97 (p.195).

22 'Art and Personality: "Moorcroft ware" and the Desires of the Collector', *Canadian Mail* (Supplement, 7 March 1914), n.p.

Already, in fact, something of a 'Moorcroft' cult has arisen, for the output of the ware, individually treated as each piece is, is necessarily small, and is limited moreover to the life of the artist, and to the expert staff working under his direction. 'Moorcroft' ware, therefore, is sought after by the collector with an eye to the future, and [...] will undoubtedly in the course of time rank with those rare products of past masters which are the showpieces of the collector's cabinet.²³

Moorcroft was not explicitly distinguished from a commercial designer, but there was no need to do so; it was widely recognised that industry had quite different priorities. In August 1913, the *Pottery Gazette* argued that the public's nostalgia for familiar styles of the past was inevitably the focus of modern production: 'the business of the industrial potter is only to follow the public taste'.²⁴ The issue arose again a few months later; the commercial disadvantages of originality were seen to be self-evident, particularly for small firms: 'they cannot afford to keep a designer capable of turning out more or less original work, and, what is more, they cannot afford to wait for the public to appreciate and buy it'.²⁵ But this had not been Moorcroft's experience at Macintyre's, nor was it his ambition at his new works. When he stressed the originality of his pottery, he was affirming that individuality of design could be just as broadly appealing, and commercially viable, as revivalism.

Moorcroft was not the only one to set up a craft studio at this time, nor was his pottery unique in being distinguished from the uniformity of industrial ware. Just weeks before he moved into his new works, Roger Fry founded the Omega Workshops in Bloomsbury. In some ways modelled on Morris & Co., Fry's enterprise involved fine artists in decorative arts design, producing painted furniture, murals, stained glass and textiles as well as pottery. In a letter to Bernard Shaw on 11 December 1912, Fry lamented the derivative nature of English design: 'Since the complete decadence of the Morris movement, nothing has been done in England but pastiche and more or less unscrupulous imitation of old work.'²⁶ And in his 'Prospectus' he promoted the distinctive qualities of decoration by hand, contrasting 'our peculiar national worship of mechanically perfect finish' with 'the more vital beauty of artistic handling', the one implying work made for profit, the other work made for pleasure.²⁷ This distinction was echoed in *The Times*, which noted particularly the intention of the Workshops to sell direct to the public:

The artist who designs objects sold in the ordinary shop must design according to the demands of the shopman, not according to his own ideas; and this, no doubt, is the reason why most commercial art is modish rather than beautiful.²⁸

23 Ibid.

24 'Reproductions', *PG* (August 1913), 889.

25 'Designs and their Ownership', *PG* (January 1914), 66–67 (p.67).

26 Roger Fry, 'Omega Workshops Fundraising Letter', *A Roger Fry Reader* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 196–97 (p.196).

27 Roger Fry, 'Prospectus for the Omega Workshops', *RFR*, 198–200 (p.200).

28 'A New Venture in Art. Exhibition at the Omega Workshops', *The Times* (9 July 1913), p.4.

For all its apparent similarities, however, Moorcroft's project was very different in crucial ways. The Omega Workshops were more concerned with decoration, the application of art to objects, than with the creation of the object in its entirety; the 'Prospectus' made this clear:

[...] they undertake almost all kinds of decorative design, more particularly those in which the artist can engage without specialised training in craftsmanship.²⁹

And it was the decorative aspect of the Omega products which attracted attention; for one critic in *The Observer*, the art, for all its quality, was applied, additional, even unnecessary:

The impression derived from all of them is merely surface decoration—often superfluous—and not substance or structure. Things are not decorated, but disguised [...].³⁰

For Moorcroft, though, the creative act was not confined to decoration, it involved the design and creation of the object as a whole. In its review of the British Pottery and Glass Fair, *The New Witness* included a paragraph on Moorcroft's exhibit, all the more striking as it provided no detailed comments on any other individual display. It identified as the defining characteristic of Moorcroft's ware its integrity of design:

Moorcroft ware is known as 'homogeneous' pottery, for the reason that it is all of a piece. The designs on a Moorcroft vase are under glaze. They are not laid on by an artist's brush. The vase appears from the furnace perfectly formed. And the colours are practically indestructible.³¹

Such qualities had been identified before in Moorcroft's work, but they took on a new significance now. Whether consciously or not, the report underlined the difference between Moorcroft's ware and that of the Omega Workshops; his was not 'surface decoration', merely applied, its art was integral to the object, 'homogeneous'.

But there was more. For the *Observer* reviewer, the objects created at the Omega Workshops had lost their functionality under the weight of the applied art, they were objects 'to be looked at, not to be used'.³² The assessment carried a certain irony, given that Fry had identified the 'making of objects for common life' as the objective of his Workshops.³³ In his review of the exhibition of Early English Earthenware in 1914, he singled out the inalienable social responsibility of the potter, at all times and in all places:

[...] pottery is of all the arts the most intimately connected with life, and therefore the one in which some sort of connexion between the artist's mood and the life of his contemporaries may be most readily allowed. A poet or even a painter may live apart

29 Roger Fry, 'Prospectus', *RFR*, p.199.

30 'Post-Impressionism in the Home', *The Observer*, (14 December 1913), p.8.

31 'The Fair in the Potteries', *The New Witness* (26 February 1914), 539–40 (p.540).

32 'Post-Impressionism in the Home', p.8.

33 Roger Fry, 'Preface to the Omega Workshops Catalogue', *RFR*, 201.

from his age, and may create for a hypothetical posterity; but the potter cannot, or certainly does not, go on indefinitely creating pots that no one will use. He must come to some sort of terms with his fellow-man.³⁴

But if his own pottery may not have fallen into this category, the same was not true of William Moorcroft. Since the beginning of his career, ‘joy for the user’ was as important a goal as ‘joy for the maker’. His advertisement in the catalogue for the Burslem Fair expressly included both functional and decorative objects in the same composite category ‘Pottery for every Household’. He was creating individual art works, but also objects whose quality of design enriched the practices of daily life.

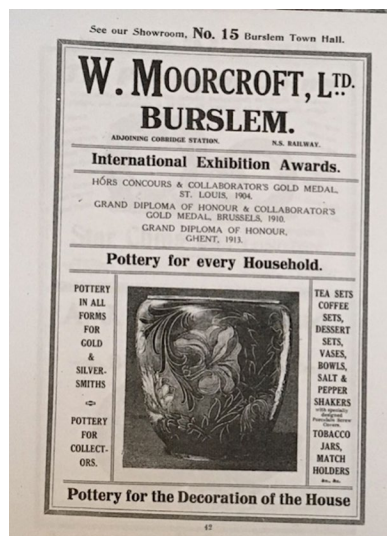


Fig. 55 Moorcroft’s advertisement in the Catalogue of the British Pottery and Glass Fair, Burslem 1914. ‘Personal and Commercial Papers of William Moorcroft’, Stoke-on-Trent City Archives, SD 1837. CC BY-NC

And this is what the reporter in *The New Witness* clearly recognised; his was an art produced not simply for his own pleasure, but for a wider public:

Mr Moorcroft is a manufacturer, but he is also an artist. While realising that it is necessary to live, he thinks that it is even more necessary to live beautifully. So he has set himself to the production of objects of utility which have a correspondingly artistic value.³⁵

Unlike the Omega Workshops, Moorcroft distributed his work through retail outlets, but this clearly did not imply that it was considered ‘modish rather than beautiful’. Far from it.

This approach was significant. Less than a month after the opening of the Burslem Fair, Cologne hosted the inaugural exhibition of the Deutscher Werkbund,

34 Roger Fry, ‘The Art of Pottery in England’, *The Burlington Magazine* (March 1914); in *RFR*, 202–04 (p.202).

35 ‘The Fair in the Potteries’, *ibid.*, p.540.

a progressive, state-sponsored association of designers and manufacturers, keen to increase the competitiveness of German manufacture. Originally inspired by the Arts and Crafts movement, it applied its principles of good design to modern industrial production. It was anticipated in familiar terms in *The Times*:

The exhibition as a whole will illustrate [...] the application to every sort of material and object, however common, of taste in design and honesty in workmanship. As such, it should be a worthy object of pilgrimage for all lovers of the beautiful in everyday life.³⁶

It was Moorcroft's aim, too, to appeal to 'all lovers of the beautiful in everyday life', as he made clear in his advertisement for the Burslem Fair. His pottery 'for every household' not only covered the range from expensive to affordable, but dissolved distinctions between the functional and the decorative; it was designed to bring pleasure in its use. In the course of this turbulent year, he introduced a range of teaware created very much in this spirit. It was classically simple in its forms, unadorned yet distinctive in its colouring. Twenty years later, in a quite different aesthetic climate, it would be hailed as a triumph of modern design. It was Powder Blue.



Fig. 56 William Moorcroft, Cup and Saucer in Powder Blue (1914), 6cm. CC BY-NC

4. Conclusions

As Moorcroft moved into his new works, the world of pottery manufacture was changing. William Burton's three Cantor lectures delivered at the Royal Society of Arts in April and May 1914 discussed modern developments in casting, tile making and firing; the *Pottery Gazette* summarised their import:

[...] modern pottery manufacture was being rapidly transformed from an industry in which handicraft was all-important [...] into an industry organised on the large scale, in which the technical chemist and the engineer would play the most important part.³⁷

36 'Cologne Exhibition, 1914', *The Times* (10 March 1914), p.5.

37 'Cantor Lectures on Recent Developments in the Ceramic Industry', *PG* (June 1914), 706–08 (p.706).

Moorcroft is unlikely to have felt comfortable with that analysis, and certainly not as it applied to his own ambitions. He had placed himself in quite a unique position: he was both designer and manufacturer, and was free to make his own decisions, to elaborate his own priorities, to exact his own standards. In this, he came close to the model of William Howson Taylor, possibly the only other example of an independent craft potter working with a small team and whose work was displayed and sold in retail outlets as well as in galleries and private exhibitions. Moorcroft's was an enterprise which retained the very craft of pottery which Burton saw declining in the industry, but it was doing so in a way which was innovative and almost certainly unique: a studio environment creating both functional and decorative objects for retail sale, and where the whole production system reflected the values and the personality of the artist himself.

In a letter written to Moorcroft on 23 February 1914, his European traveller, C.W.A. John, lamented the delayed dispatch of some ordered items; ironically, he saw Moorcroft's dual role as designer and manufacturer as the cause of the problems, imagining that the manufacturer's sense of good business practice had been swamped by the artist's (reputed) unconcern with practicalities:

You know very well that I do admire your artistic goods, and I know to sell them, but if I come to think of the more or less un-business-like way you choose to go on, I think that I have to abstain from offering your goods any further. You are too much of an artist to consider how difficult it is, from the point of a merchant, to go on with an artist, the same being his own manufacturer.

Unaware, no doubt, of the problems which had hounded Moorcroft in the opening months at his new works, John dismissed as a weakness the very quality which gave Moorcroft's ware its individuality. It was the sign of Moorcroft's artistic integrity, but it was also a commercial strength. This point was clearly implied in a letter to Moorcroft from Mary G. Phillips, dated 16 May 1914, who commented on the unique power of his personalising signature:

I hope when you have a stamp made, it will be one in your own handwriting. It is a novelty from the usual printing, and the personal touch adds to the value. People have already commented on it, and seem to like it.

Significantly, Moorcroft would not do this. For him, the personal touch had to be just that, personal; signing his ware was not a gimmick, or a look, it was the confirmation of his presence at the very heart of production.

Writing to *The Times* on 26 January 1914, May Morris (daughter of William Morris and English artisan in her own right) pointed out the enlightened and collaborative attitude to the decorative arts implied by the state support for the forthcoming Cologne Exhibition of the Deutscher Werkbund. She lamented the absence of a similar commitment in Britain, her letter culminating in a rousing profession of faith:

Will art pay? I answer, Yes, in the long run. In truth, if one had not the passionate belief of the founders of the society I speak of that the matters with which they busied their lives would in the far future 'pay' very well indeed, one would not think it worthwhile to go on living at all.³⁸

Moorcroft, too, was setting out to prove that art 'pays', to demonstrate that commercial success was not incompatible with originality or artistic quality, and he was doing so not with government funding, but with the financial backing of Liberty's and the moral support of his wife. It was a project not without risk or challenges, but his sense of purpose, and his self-belief, were evident, and were captured tellingly in a portrait by the celebrated London photographer Hay Wrightson, taken at about this time.

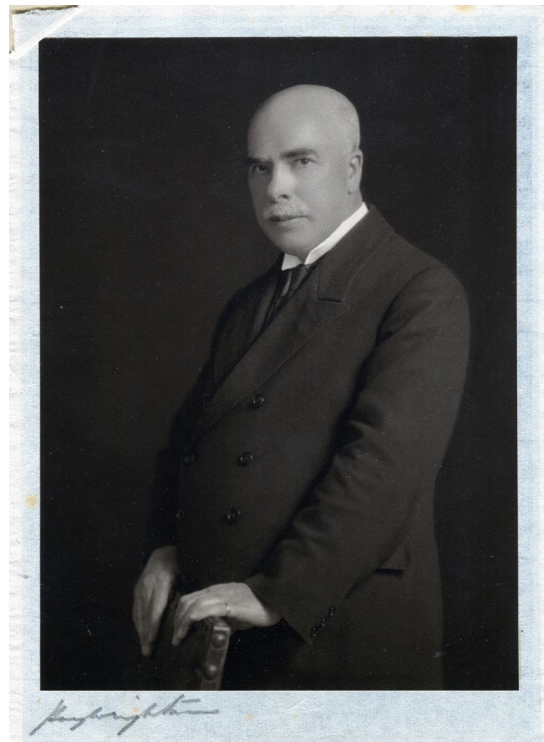


Fig. 57 William Moorcroft, portrait by Hay Wrightson, c.1914. Photograph. Family papers. CC BY-NC

At the end of a difficult year Moorcroft had established the foundations of his independence, and he may well have been looking forward to a period of more peaceful creativity. It was not to be.

³⁸ May Morris, 'Arts and Crafts', *The Times* (26 January 1914), p.6.

7. 1914–18: The Art of Survival

I. Negotiating the Start of War

On 3 August 1914, Moorcroft sent his first end-of-year accounts to Harold Blackmore; on the following day, war was declared on Germany. The surge of volunteers in the early months had an immediate impact on the industry, the *Pottery Gazette* reporting in November 1914 that a ‘majority’ of firms were working no more than three days a week. Moorcroft’s workforce, however, remained remarkably stable; of the ten men listed in the wage book in July 1914, all were still there in January 1915. Clearly looking forward, he planned the installation of a second oven, and started to develop new monochrome lustres. He wrote in exultant mood to Alwyn Lasenby on 6 December 1914: ‘The results are better than I expected. [...] The copper lustre will be greatly improved later, but now it appeals to all who see it.’¹ He saw himself at the threshold of a new epoch; in a draft letter to his step-mother of 6 December 1914, he expressed great hope for the future, when daily life would again be beautified by art:

This European upheaval must be a prelude to a Renaissance greater than ever before. We feel this trial is the shaking away of some of our modern evils. What will the new birth be like; shall we find a happier people; will commerce be a more beautiful force? [...] The great things in life must be shaped in our common pursuits, and that art must be greatest that is found in every simple thing, in every home.

This attitude was reflected, too, in his first major advertisement, used in the course of 1915. It made use of extracts from reviews in the London press, prominently displayed in an inserted box. Significantly, the selection included none from the many favourable reviews he had received in the *Pottery Gazette*, and focussed on his reputation outside the world of the Potteries. The publications consisted entirely of art journals—*The Magazine of Art*, *The Art Journal*, *The Studio*, *The Connoisseur*—and London newspapers—*The Standard*, *The New Witness*. One extract, from a review in *The Standard* of his exhibit at the British Pottery and Glass Fair, was explicit about the status and impact of his ware:

1 All unpublished documents referred to in this chapter are located in William Moorcroft: Personal and Commercial Papers, SD1837, Stoke-on-Trent City Archives [WM Archive].

A visit to the exhibit is like a sudden transference from the world of commerce to the world of Art. Mr Moorcroft is an artist. Each piece has been carefully sheltered from the potter's wheel to the furnace, all its changing moods carefully studied, until it comes out in its finished beauty, worthy to carry the signature of Moorcroft. Collectors the world round are already being attracted by Moorcroft ware.²

W. MOORCROFT, LTD.
POTTERS,
BURSLEM.

Works adjoining
 Cobridge Station,
 N. S. Railway.

Telegrams:
 "MOORCROFT,
 BURSLEM."

Telephone:
 CENTRAL 133.

MOORCROFT WARE, entirely HAND MADE, has achieved the following awards:
 HORS CONCOURS AND COLLABORATORS GOLD MEDAL, ST. LOUIS, 1904. || GRAND DIPLOMA OF HONOUR AND COLLABORATORS GOLD MEDAL, BRUSSELS, 1910.
 GRAND DIPLOMA OF HONOUR, GHENT, 1903.

The following are short extracts from reviews by the London Press:—
 A ware that really exhibits evidences of thoughtful Art and skilful craftsmanship.
 In the pottery executed by W. Moorcroft, we have an instance that merits attention on the part of those who would see the arts that minister to our every-day wants once more expressive of our higher aspirations.
 The most interesting work in pottery executed entirely on clay.
 The exhibition of a fine group of pieces of "Moorcroft" Ware at the Royal Society, Albemarle Street, included some of the most beautiful effects which have been produced in modern ceramic art.
 Mr. Moorcroft is a manufacturer, but he is also an artist. So he has set himself to the production of objects of utility which have a corresponding artistic value.
 Collectors the world round are already being attracted by Moorcroft Ware.

MAGAZINE OF ART, 1899 and 1900.
 THE ART JOURNAL, 1901, 1902, 1903, and 1911.
 THE STUDIO, 1900.
 THE CONNOISSEUR, 1913.
 THE NEW WITNESS, 1914.
 THE STANDARD, 1914.

WE CORDIALLY INVITE BUYERS VISITING STOKE-ON-TRENT TO HONOUR US WITH A VISIT TO OUR SHOW ROOMS AT THE WORKS AND TO INSPECT OUR ORIGINAL AND INEXPENSIVE PRODUCTIONS.
 Works adjoining Cobridge Station. North Staffordshire Railway.

Fig. 58 Moorcroft's advertisement in the *Pottery Gazette* (February 1915), 'Personal and Commercial Papers of William Moorcroft', Stoke-on-Trent City Archives, SD 1837. CC BY-NC

Confident about the quality and appeal of his work, Moorcroft continued to promote it. On 5 January 1915, he wrote unsolicited to Thomas Webb & Sons, proposing that they share a travelling representative in the provinces. Webb's enjoyed an international reputation both for lead crystal and for fine cameo glass; they had a similar target market to Moorcroft's own, and he wrote to them on equal terms: 'The pottery we make is entirely hand production and made by the best workmen, each piece being the best possible individual effort. We realise that your glass is the very best.' On 12 January 1915, they accepted the proposal, offering in addition the use of a small showroom in London; by the end of January, Moorcroft was writing to the most exclusive retailers in any particular town, informing them of the imminent visit of their (now) joint representative. One such was Preston's of Bolton, the most prestigious jeweller outside London, whose unique, four-storey premises had opened the previous year. Writing on 21 June 1915, they foresaw 'a very big business together'. Consolidation of the home market was complemented by growth in his export trade. Moorcroft's business with major Canadian outlets was already strong, and it was thriving. Ryrie Bros, Ltd., an elegant Toronto jewellers, wrote appreciatively on 15 September 1915; Moorcroft's ware was selling well, and they needed more:

We received your shipment a few weeks ago, and I am very glad to say that it promises to have a ready sale with us, particularly the Red Spanish. I am enclosing a repeat order for a number of lines [...].

2 *Pottery Gazette and Glass Trade Review* [PG] (February 1915), p.158.

And on 16 August 1915, he heard from W.D. Barlow, an agent in Florida, who wished to open up new markets in South America:

I really believe that there should be a good future for your goods, especially in the Argentine where they have an educated taste, and they only have to be shown to be sold.

The demand for Moorcroft ware was buoyant, and this, the world over.

Of particular significance, however, in this first year of war, was Moorcroft's exhibit at the inaugural British Industries Fair (BIF), organised by the Board of Trade. Moorcroft saw the commercial and artistic value of this opportunity, and Liberty's actively supported him, offering on 14 April 1915 to supply furnishings which would help distinguish his stand. It was the perfect collaboration of artist and promoter, and the effect achieved was the effect sought. The *Pottery Gazette* placed particular emphasis on Moorcroft as a producer of uniquely distinctive art ware:

It is always a trifle difficult to deal with superlative adjectives, [...] but no one will complain of this particular compliment, because they will recognise that in the case of the Moorcroft ware a class of goods was being shown unlike any other ware that the Fair embraced. It is difficult to show off to advantage purely artistic wares except in an artistic setting. This Mr Moorcroft, as an artist, had recognised and provided for.³



Fig. 59 Part of Moorcroft's exhibit at the 1915 British Industries Fair. 'Personal and Commercial Papers of William Moorcroft', Stoke-on-Trent City Archives, SD 1837. CC BY-NC

Moorcroft was recognised as an artist, but this did not make his ware any less commercial; quite the reverse. Trade may have been sluggish across the industry as a whole, but Moorcroft's pottery continued to be noticed, and by significant new clients. A representative for James Shoolbred of the Tottenham Court Road, the celebrated high-end retailer of furniture and accessories for interior design, wrote back to his firm on 21 May 1915, impressed by what he had seen: 'I made a point of seeing Mr

³ PG (June 1915), p.658.

Moorcroft. I think his productions are very artistic.' And, the most significant sign of his success, the stall was visited by the Queen on the opening day. Moorcroft noted in his diary for 10 May 1915: 'Moorcroft stand visited by the Queen who explained to the Board of Trade officials and to her friends where the pottery was made.'

The British Industries Fair was a trade fair, but Moorcroft was also making an impression in artistic circles. A letter of 19 June 1915 from the editor of *Drawing, An Illustrated Monthly Magazine devoted to Art as a National Asset*, enclosed a copy of the June issue, 'which contains a reference to the excellence of your manufactures'. And the editor of *The Connoisseur* added this note to a letter of 12 June 1915: 'I am very glad to see the very beautiful show that Messrs Liberty are giving to your work in Regent St. Last night when passing I thought it was really very fine.' Liberty's certainly provided invaluable support throughout this first year of the war. In addition to the promotion of his ware, they brought Moorcroft the benefit of their business experience, checking the credit worthiness of new customers, and offering legal advice in his dealings with contractors. In return, the store enjoyed preferential terms for its orders, and exclusive rights on certain designs. It was a relationship of clear mutual benefit, inspired not simply by a common self-interest, but also, above all, by a shared desire to deal in ware of the highest artistic quality, and to promote it worldwide. Liberty's supported his presentation at the British Industries Fair; they also supported, morally and financially, the move to expand his factory. At a meeting of Directors on 11 August 1915, a loan, secured by debentures to the value of £1200, was agreed. On 18 September 1915, planning permission for an Oven and Placing Shed was approved; less than four months later, on 5 January 1916, Moorcroft recorded in his diary the first firing of his new Glost oven.

Moorcroft may have prospered in these early months of the war, but the effects of the conflict were nevertheless beginning to make themselves felt. The image of calm creativity projected by his display at the 1915 BIF stood in stark contrast to the growing tensions in the world outside. Within the space of just a few weeks during the summer of 1915, the price of many key materials—fuel, firebricks, colour, clay—was significantly raised, soon to be followed by a 7.5% increase in wages 'to meet the extra costs of living occasioned by the war'.⁴ These rises, and others, translated immediately into higher production costs and selling prices. The *Pottery Gazette* calculated the average increase to be nearly 33%; this was 'phenomenally high', but the hope was expressed that retailers would understand its inevitability.⁵ It was not so in reality. H.G. Stephenson, Manchester, suppliers of catering equipment then at the height of their growth, wrote on 5 August 1915 to query Moorcroft's invoices: '[...] we think there must be an error in the price charged. The general range of prices strikes us as being higher than the impression we got from the quotations given at the Fair.' And the same was true of Liberty's, writing on 28 October 1915:

4 PG (July 1915), p.782.

5 Ibid., p.780.

We are in receipt of the consignment of Autumn tint pottery and find that the prices are much higher than before. We do not think this will help the sale of same and therefore ask you to give the matter your attention.

Such pressures had other, more permanent, consequences. Bawo and Dotter, china importers with whom Moorcroft had been doing business for several years, were forced into receivership, and the collaboration with Webb's, so enthusiastically initiated at the start of the year, had come to nothing by the summer.

In this first year of war, Moorcroft was working in increasingly severe economic conditions, yet determined to maintain the highest quality. And all this in the knowledge that if he failed, his business would not survive. A retrospective article published in the *Pottery Gazette* traced the brief history of the Linthorpe Pottery, celebrated for its artistic innovation and quality of production, which had closed in 1889 after just ten years. Its fate was succinctly described, a grim reminder of Moorcroft's precarious position: 'Linthorpe art pottery was a gallant attempt to found a fresh and original style of pottery. Artistically it was a success, commercially a failure.'⁶ Developing trade in pottery 'for every household', at home and abroad, was just one route to survival in a time of war, and Moorcroft quickly understood that it would not suffice on its own. Equally significant were military contracts; these did not just generate income, they also offered protection against the conscription of male staff. On 6 November 1914, less than two months after the declaration of war, he contacted the Director of Army Contracts, sending a copy of the *Connoisseur* article on his ware published the previous year. He won orders for inhalers at an early stage; many more would follow.

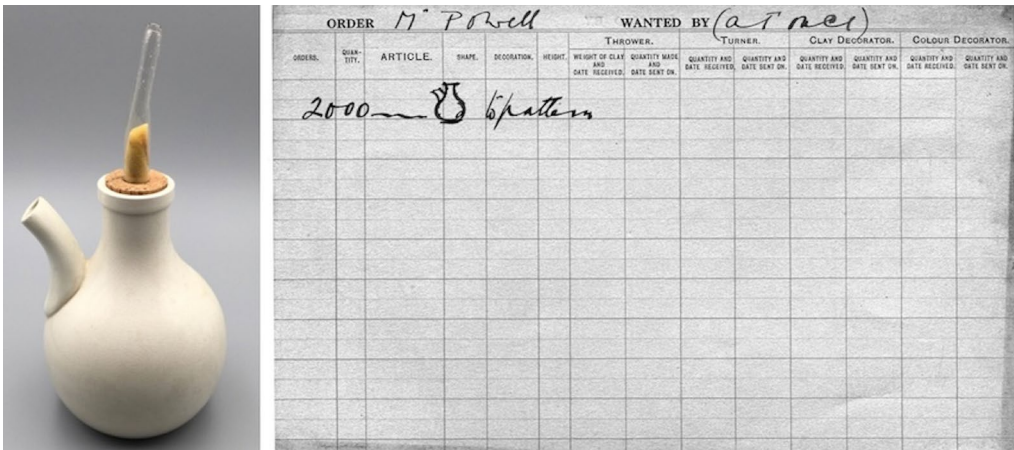


Fig. 60 William Moorcroft, Inhaler (c.1916), 20cm. Turner's work card. 'Personal and Commercial Papers of William Moorcroft', Stoke-on-Trent City Archives, SD 1837. CC BY-NC

6 'Linthorpe Art Pottery', *PG* (August 1915), 849–53 (p.853).

The first year of the war was clearly difficult, and the year-end outcome was awaited with some concern; Lasenby wrote on 16 September 1915: 'I am (and I know you are) very anxious to learn the result of the past fourteen months trading.' The results, though, were good. At the second AGM, 6 October 1915, a net profit of nearly £327 was declared.

2. Popularity and Deteriorating Conditions

As the war entered its second year, the cost of labour continued to increase, and so too did its shortage. Without manpower, firms could not function. For Moorcroft, though, the most serious blow to his workforce was not the result of conscription, but the unexpected death in December 1915 of James Newman, his sole thrower. A craftsman of quite exceptional ability, he had worked with Moorcroft from his earliest days at Macintyre's. Miraculously, Moorcroft managed to secure the services of Fred Hollis, recently retired; without him, the factory would almost certainly have had to close.

Shortage of labour was severely affecting production in the region. In January 1916, the *Pottery Gazette* appealed to dealers and retailers to show 'a spirit of benevolent patience' in view of the 'stupendous' problems faced by manufacturers.⁷ Some of Moorcroft's customers did so, but many more adopted a different, hectoring, reproachful tone. In a letter of 22 June 1916, F.C. White of Ilfracombe were quite clear about the consequences of a missed deadline, for them and for Moorcroft:

When the order was placed, I specially ordered delivery in May or the latest 1st week in June—this time was fixed to catch the Whitsuntide people. [...] As we have now lost these sales, and the coming season promises to be a very bad one, we cannot now accept delivery, only on sale or return. [Emphasis original]

And on 9 September 1916, Jordan Marsh Co., the first department store in the US, wrote in uncompromising terms at the end of an exchange of letters on the subject of a delayed despatch:

If you will refer to our letter, you will find that we asked you for a definite delivery date and informed you that we had to cable a reply to Boston, which we cannot do from your letter of yesterday. Please let us have by return without fail a positive date upon which you promise to make shipment.

The store's request for a precise and guaranteed date of delivery had evidently been answered by a letter from Moorcroft expressing good intentions, but offering no pledges. The exchange exemplified what was an ever-deepening gulf between past and present, the old normal and the new. Beneath the retailer's response to what he saw as a manufacturer's evasiveness was an attempt to find stability in a world which now had none. In the current conditions, where costs were rising, supplies of raw

⁷ 'Notes from the Potteries', *PG* (January 1916), 78–80 (p.79).

materials were uncertain, and labour was short, one could not foresee the future; one could no longer give one's word. Unreliability of production was not the sign of a manufacturer's inefficiency, indifference or loss of moral integrity; it was the consequence of an unsettled, and unsettling, world at war.

In this increasingly turbulent, imperfect world, retailers and their customers clung to a comforting memory of flawless quality, of how things used to be, in their eyes at least; the (at times tetchy) disappointment expressed in letters to Moorcroft reveals just how much such quality was associated with his ware. Some lamented the simplification of his styles which inevitably accompanied more restricted war-time production. Collinge & Co., St Annes-on-Sea, wrote on 5 July 1916 about a consignment of Pomegranate ware, dismayed that it contained no pieces decorated with open fruit, a more time-consuming variant of the design:

We have received the selection of ornaments today, all these appear full pomegranate, one which we received from our Burnley house was much more broken in the design and more green intermixed with the red. [...] Please say by return if you have anything similar to our description.

And both retailers and customers clearly found something reassuring about the designer's personal signature on the base of his pieces; a paper label, introduced at this time, was not quite the same. 'The Crockery', Letchworth, writing on 19 October 1916, thought fit to point this out: 'We prefer your name on the pottery in preference to the label.' [Emphasis original] Trade in high-end goods may have been slowing down, but Moorcroft's ware continued to be appreciated.



Fig. 61 Rectangular label introduced c.1915. CC BY-NC

Pressures felt within the industry as a whole were particularly acute in a small enterprise which depended so much on a single man. As Liberty's well knew, without William Moorcroft there could be no W. Moorcroft, Ltd., and on 16 September 1915, Lasenby wrote (and not for the first time), encouraging him to employ an assistant:

I feel strongly (and I know Mrs Moorcroft is with me) that it is unfair to your health to continue as you are without any change; at the same time I appreciate that in building up a business of so personal a character, the great importance of keeping one's finger on all the points, and watching the working costs very closely.

Lasenby understood very well the challenges, and the risks, of Moorcroft's project: to retain the individual quality of a studio pottery while operating on a larger scale, on an international stage. Moorcroft's vision was difficult to realise at the best of times; by the second year of the war, times were anything but the best.

In early 1916, the situation declined further. The first Military Service Act, passed in March 1916, introduced conscription for unmarried men aged 18 to 41, and exemptions originally granted to the pottery industry were coming under renewed scrutiny. The *Home Office and Board of Trade Pamphlet on the substitution of women in industry for enlisted men*, dated March 1916, encouraged firms to concentrate their efforts on government contracts, and then on exports. To conform to such priorities, though, was not just a question of patriotism, it was a matter of commercial survival. As pressure mounted to supply the army with men, it was these activities alone which kept the Tribunals at bay. Such was the growing concern in the industry, exhibitors at the 1916 BIF made representations to the President of the Board of Trade. In all these circumstances, the very fact that the Fair took place at all may have seemed anomalous. And yet, significantly, Moorcroft created an impressive display. It is clear from the Fair report in the *Pottery Gazette* that he was producing 'a large variety of articles', from vases and bowls to ink stands, candlesticks, morning sets and dessert sets. But what impressed the reporter above all was not the commercial potential of this functional ware, but its sensitivity, restraint and peacefulness; the tone of his report was markedly different from that given to others:

If there was anything in the whole Fair which appealed definitely to one's aesthetic nature it must surely have been the stand of this firm, the atmosphere surrounding which was one of quiet, dignified artistry.⁸

By the summer of 1916, the shortage of men both at the Front and in war service elsewhere was critical, and a second Military Service Act extended conscription to married men aged 18 to 41. Orders were now beginning to falter, and there was a perceptible change in mood. This Act had a major impact not only on pottery manufacturers, but on retailers, too. And as labour became scarcer, firms feared that workers may leave to seek better terms elsewhere; the risk was not just of loss to the army, but of loss also to competitors. It is clear, though, that Moorcroft was regarded highly as an employer, and male employees not eligible for military service remained on his books. On 17 August 1916, he drew up a renewal contract for his foreman, Henry Barlow, the terms of which included, significantly, the guarantee of a specified wage.

8 PG (April 1916), p.390.

But the situation continued to deteriorate. Barlow's renewal contract was drafted on the same date as the 'Letter to Employers of Labour in No.6 District' from the Head of Recruiting, chilling in its courteous but uncompromising tone:

[...] as the head of recruiting in this District, it is my duty to emphasise the necessity for providing men for the Army in that steady flow, without which all other efforts are wasted. Recruiting officers and other specially selected gentlemen have received instructions to cause an inspection of the lists of your workpeople [...]. I am anxious that this systematic inspection should be carried out in a friendly and sympathetic manner [...].

Commercial and military pressures were combining with fearsome force, and coming ever closer to home. The *Pottery Gazette* recorded the (eventually successful) appeal of William Howson Taylor to be dispensed from military service.⁹ The two potters had much in common: both ran a small pottery, both played multiple roles crucial to the success of the enterprise. Moorcroft was more fortunate: aged 44 in May 1916, he was (just) three years above the limit for conscription. But he had also been very astute: his production included a wide range of functional items, he had developed a flourishing export trade, and he had secured significant government contracts.

In August 1916, commercial stagnation throughout the industry prompted this gloomy assessment in the *Pottery Gazette*: 'The London trade is dead; the provincial trade has fallen off quite perceptibly; and foreign orders, generally speaking, are nothing to crow about'.¹⁰ For Moorcroft, though, the picture was quite different. The continued appeal of his pottery in such depressed market conditions was reflected most strikingly in an article on his ware published in the *Pottery Gazette*; it was seen to offer a 'permanent delight' to those 'fortunate enough to become possessed of specimens of it', an effect increasingly appreciated in these uncharted, unsettling times.¹¹ But difficult trading conditions had other consequences, too. If retailers had to absorb the effects of delayed deliveries and of rapidly increasing prices, manufacturers had to manage the non-payment of accounts. W.J. Davis of Ilfracombe, writing on 18 July 1916, acknowledged their dire situation which neither reminders from Moorcroft nor their own good will could improve:

I apologise to you in not replying to your repeated applications to settle your account, I have not been able to do so; so little business being done, last season was very quiet, and up to now, this season is no better. Will you please favour me in waiting a little longer to settle the balance of your account? I have enclosed a cheque for £5, and will endeavour to send you more, as soon as possible.

And Moorcroft was not always insistent. George Humphrey, Dumfries, wrote very apologetically on 10 June 1916, acknowledging his patience: 'I am ashamed at

⁹ 'Recruiting Tribunal Appeals', *PG* (April 1916), 406–09 (p.409).

¹⁰ *PG* (August 1916), p.856.

¹¹ *PG* (July 1916), p.720.

having kept you waiting for this account so long [...] Many thanks for your kindly consideration in not pressing for payment.' But notwithstanding all these difficulties, he still completed a successful financial year. At the third AGM, 25 October 1916, the profit announced had increased to nearly £870, which, together with the balance brought forward from 1914–15 left a healthy surplus of just short of £940. For all Lasenby's concern in the course of 1916, it was clear that Moorcroft was doing very well indeed.

3. Looking Beyond the Depths

By the start of 1917, conscription was taking its toll, and, to make matters worse, earthenware manufacture was re-designated a 'non-essential' occupation. In this context, the 1917 BIF was clearly a defiant, political statement, boldly affirming the 'essential' quality of the industry. The *Pottery Gazette* understood what was at stake:

[...] it needed a great deal of courage on the part of both the authorities and the traders to organise and patronise in these troublous times an exhibition devoted chiefly to 'non-essential' industries.¹²

The Fair was significant too, though, in another way. The *Pottery Gazette* report drew attention to the emergence of two contrasting styles of stand design, the one open, the other enclosed. Such terms, it was implied, did not simply describe the physical attributes of the stands, but reflected, too, divergent attitudes to business and its future:

Opponents of the open stands alleged that they tended to encourage imitations and the disclosure of business secrets, and also seemed injudiciously to invite retail traffic; while their supporters acclaimed them as being far more effective as advertisements and as an expression of their holders' contempt for competition and copying. On the whole, however, the closed stands were in the majority.¹³

If the enclosed style was 'in the majority', Moorcroft's stand was not; he presented as a modern figure, moving away from more traditional Staffordshire instincts, alongside such progressive firms as Carter & Co. and Gray & Co.:

W.Moorcroft, Ltd., Cobridge, Burslem, are fortunate in being manufacturers of a class of ware which is eminently adapted for exhibition purposes. They occupied an open stand in a corner position, and their display was of a most attractive character [...].¹⁴

This analysis was telling. The open stand was a mark of confidence in the value of one's wares; it displayed work made to be seen by all, of a quality which could not be imitated. This was Moorcroft's position, and it was shared by Liberty's. Lasenby,

¹² *PG* (April 1917), p.359.

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p.370.

writing on 5 January 1917, encouraged him to think big, spatially, commercially, and artistically. The display would be Moorcroft's triumph, but it was clearly a collaborative venture:

Re the show at S.K. 20 ft will be a much better frontage if you can fix up for that. [...] I think there is good business to be got there this year, and no doubt you are looking out some of your best samples of each decoration.



Fig. 62 Moorcroft's stand at the 1917 British Industries Fair. 'Personal and Commercial Papers of William Moorcroft', Stoke-on-Trent City Archives, SD 1837. CC BY-NC

Another sign of Moorcroft's enterprise was his display of lamps, anticipating the modern era of domestic electricity, a characteristic blend of functionality and elegance. Their intended effect in a home was enacted in the exhibit; the lamps both illuminated the stand and drew the eye as beautiful objects: 'The interior was lighted by electric lamps of Moorcroft ware, the light being softly reflected from the lucent glazed surfaces, some of mauve lustre, others pink, and others green, and all fitted with appropriate shades to match.'¹⁵ This fusion of the practical and the decorative, so often pointed out in Moorcroft's ware, was underlined again in this review. But what was noticed particularly was that its distinctive quality of good design and careful production characterised all his work, and not just the most expensive items:

A fine old oak dresser bore a miscellany of useful and ornamental articles in 'Celadon' ware. [...] We fell in love especially with a biscuit box and a little lidded tea caddy, for, like a true artist, Mr Moorcroft bestows equal care on small articles as on great ones.¹⁶

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Ibid.



Fig. 63 William Moorcroft, Biscuit box with Pansy design on celadon ground (c.1915), 15cm. CC BY-NC

To read the report, one might not realise that a war was on, and that the resources of factories, Moorcroft's included, were beyond full stretch. The quality of his work was the focus of attention, and he was presented as 'one of the great hierarchy of artist potters'. For his royal visitors, though, the pressures on the manufacturer were as keenly appreciated as the achievements of the artist. In a diary entry for 6 March 1917, he noted visits by the King and Queen, and by the Director of the Victoria and Albert Museum [V&A]:

His Majesty King George called and inspected exhibit, followed later by Her Majesty the Queen and Princess Mary, in company of Sir Cecil Harcourt Smith. His Majesty enquired regarding men employed, and expressed approval of exhibit.

Indeed, by 1917, shortage of staff was so widespread, it had become normality. Edith Harcourt-Smith, wife of Sir Cecil, wrote understandingly on 1 May [1917]: 'Please do not worry about the porridge bowls etc—they can come when it is convenient to you, for I know you are short-handed.' But this was quite an understatement. Not only was shortage of skilled labour decreasing production, but the pressure of conscription created an inordinate amount of additional work for Moorcroft, such as the gathering of statistics, completing forms, attending Tribunals. Much time was spent in 1917 seeking to retain his small, but essential, skilled male staff. In a completed form DR17, which included a 'Statement of all male employees of 16 years of age or over', he listed just thirteen men, of whom seven were under the age of forty-one, subject therefore to conscription unless he could make a case. To lose these would have been to lose his dipper, slipmaker, handler, jollier, fireman, mould maker, two of his three turners and all of his three placers.

DEFENCE OF THE REALM REGULATION 41A. D.R.

Form of Statements required to be conspicuously posted up on the premises where the persons included in the list are employed.

TABLE No. 1.—STATEMENT OF ALL MALE EMPLOYEES OF 16 YEARS OF AGE OR OVER.

Name and Address of Employer W. Moorcroft, Ltd., Burslem.

(a)	(b)	(c)	(d)	(e)	(f)		(g)	(h)	(i)	(j)	(k)	(l)
					M.	N.						
Name and Initials	Check No. (if any)	Present Address	Badge Number (if any)	Other Id. of employee (if any)	M. Married	S. Single	Age	A. At work	Date of Exemption from present Regulation	Previous Exemption from August 1914	New employee or not	Degree of Skill (over 16 years) (if any)
Hill, J.S.	✓	19, Bowden St. Burslem.		Certificate of Tribunal.	M		28	A	1918			Assistant Fire Dipper & Placer
Ashley, F.	✓	40, Wharf St. Burslem.		do do	M		33	A	1913			Slipmaker, Handle
Foulkes, T.	✓	354, Waterloo Rd. Burslem.		do do	M		37	A	1918	Turner		Turner
Tudor, J.F.	✓	63, Charles St. Cobridge.		do do	M		40	A	1913			Fireman & Placer
Barlow, W.H.	✓	14, Rushton Rd. Burslem.		do do	M		38	A	1913			Bliscuit & Glaze
Barlow, H.	✓	14, Rushton Rd. Burslem.			M		62		1915	Foreman		
Coxon, E.	✓	66, Louise St. Burslem.			M		51		1918	Turner		Turner
Greatbatch, W.	✓	87, Derwent St. Hanley.			M		44		1913			Warehouseman
Holloway, H.	✓	140, Hot Lane, Burslem.			M		37		1917			Oldman & Sagger
Merry, F.	✓	11, Hawthorne St. Cobridge.			S		20					Packer Discharge
Hollis, F.W.	✓	Aston, Nr. Stone.			M		64					Thrower
Houlton, T.	✓	6, Schofield Street Vets.			M		24			Looker to use		Discher
Lodley, P.S.	✓	33, Crawford St. Fenton.		Certificate 3476 A.	M		28	A	1918			Turner
Clarke, B.	✓	363, Waterloo Rd. Hanley.			M		56					Polisher.

If a Controlled Establishment insert Number

Fig. 64 Completed form, Defence of the Realm Regulation 41A, listing Moorcroft's male workforce in 1917. 'Personal and Commercial Papers of William Moorcroft', Stoke-on-Trent City Archives, SD 1837. CC BY-NC

In the summer of 1917, the case of Tom Foulkes, one of his turners, was being assessed. It was reported in the *Pottery Gazette*, revealing the effort and ingenuity Moorcroft had to display to argue his case. He clearly negotiated an arrangement whereby 'one man was enabled to perform work which customarily calls forth the services of three men', a position strengthened by the fact that 'the man for whom exemption was claimed was engaged on War Office contracts'.¹⁷ Moorcroft's argument prevailed, and Foulkes featured in wages ledgers until the end of the war. But there were other battles to fight with respect to Fred Ashley and Jack Hill, his only handler and dipper respectively, who had been given exemption, only for this to be revoked. On 17 September 1917, he wrote to the Clerk to the Local Tribunal on the subject of Hill, applying for a re-hearing of the case; four days later, his exemption was increased to three months. Such cases were by no means unique in the industry, and required tireless commitment; Moorcroft's engagement was such that he successfully retained every eligible man on his staff.

In January 1918, the *Pottery Gazette* looked back at the pressures under which the industry had 'suffered grievously' in the past year, itemising 'shortage of raw materials, scarcity of labour [...], difficulties of delivery, heavy expenses, reduction of revenue, and official interference'.¹⁸ Moorcroft had survived the year, however, with a flourishing export trade, and astute applications for military contracts. On 17 May 1917, he noted in his diary an order for 6,000 inhalers, and on 7 June, the War Office (Contracts Department) accepted tenders for numerous other items: 1,000 broth

¹⁷ PG (July 1917), p.698.

¹⁸ PG (January 1918), p.31.

basins with cover and stand; 1,700 5-pint beer jugs; 4,000 milk jugs; 500 3-pint jugs; 800 1½-pint jugs; 800 1-pint jugs; 4,000 inkwells, all to be delivered within twenty-eight days. Such contracts brought him little profit, but they enabled him to keep his factory working, and to take advantage of his overseas orders. At the end of 1916–17 he recorded a profit of just over £858, a sum almost identical to that of the previous year. Once again 5% interest could be paid on the debentures, and a 5% dividend on the share capital.

4. The End of the Tunnel

In the last year of the war, conditions got worse before they got better. Under the terms of the Military Service Act 1918, exemptions held on occupational grounds were withdrawn, and this applied to ‘every man born in or after the year 1875’. This was followed, almost inevitably, by further wage increases; with such a shortage of labour, the workers were in a very strong position. For all this, though, Moorcroft continued to develop his art and his image, devoting much time and effort to the British Industries Fair. The *Pottery Gazette* notice on his 1918 exhibit was a publicity triumph. His lustre ware was a particular success, their plays of colour stretching the reporter’s command of language:

To mention the several shades of red, bronze, blue, green, mauve and yellow is utterly futile in regard to conveying any idea of the entrancing interchange of light and colour through a myriad elusive tints—colour glowing with light and light breaking up into colour perpetually, so that the eye is never weary of gazing, but continually finds fresh beauties in each successive masterpiece.¹⁹

Pansy and orchid motifs were on display; but it was not just the design which was noticed, it was the ‘depth of tone, the delicacy of shading and the velvety texture of the surface’.²⁰ These were pieces which commanded attention, to be looked at and to be held. The exceptional impact of this exhibit was reflected too in the fact that the review, which occupied seventy-two lines, was nearly twice as long as any other in the report as a whole: forty lines were given to Gray & Co., thirty-seven to Wedgwood, and just nineteen to Doulton. And this was all the more striking, given that art ware was selling less well than it once did, a result, in the words of the *Pottery Gazette* reporter, of the ‘changed social conditions of the present time, the more cultured classes being poorer’.²¹ For Moorcroft, though, artistic acclaim was matched by commercial success; on 22 March 1918 he noted in his diary a total sales figure of £5,000, a value more

19 *PG* (April 1918), 309–10 (p.310). This report stood in stark contrast to that devoted to the lustres of Birks and Rawlins, for which a standard vocabulary of colour was quite adequate: ‘On one side [...] was some pierced ware, delicately coloured in turquoise, cream and gold, really a quite recherché line; and on the other were a few exquisite lustre vases, yellow, green and mottled’ (Ibid.).

20 Ibid.

21 *PG* (April 1918), p.303.

than twice that of 1917 (£2,000), and greater than that of the preceding three Fairs combined.

In the final months of 1918, the pressures of war did not abate. On 25 July 1918, following further revision of the Military Service Act, Moorcroft had to apply for exemption himself. On 29 July 1918, Ivor Stewart-Liberty, who had succeeded Arthur Liberty as Managing Director on the latter's death in 1917, wrote to him, seeking 'assurance that there is no danger of your being called up, and that you are protected!' And he continued to take on army contracts, confirming a tender for inhalers on 1 May 1918, and on 17 June 1918 for 1,700 sugar bowls. In a letter of 10 September 1918, Lasenby looked forward to the return of peace, when 'we can settle down to work and produce things to cause pleasure in our homes, instead of what has been done these four years'. But this was wishful thinking. As the world entered the final months of war, conditions seemed destined to become bleaker, not better; there would be no miraculous return to the world of 1914. The shortage of labour had brought high wages and full employment, creating unique (and unsustainable) conditions of economic prosperity. Looking forward in January 1918, the *Pottery Gazette* outlined very clearly the difficulties which would face countries 'under a crushing load of debt'; trade would struggle, and decorative ware would be one of the most vulnerable commodities:

The spending power of the nation will shrink most seriously [...]. Those branches of our trade that supply necessary articles—dinner, toilet, breakfast and tea ware—will continue, and the cheapest will be most in demand. They are indispensable, but what of the demand for high-class useful ware? Will it be strong and flourishing? I doubt it; and still more do I doubt whether there will be any market for highly decorated goods. Will not a reign, and a long one, of severe simplicity set in, and economy of the most trenchant character prevail?²²

For Moorcroft, particularly, this outlook was bleak, touching both his business and his aesthetic values. If there had been prosperity during the war, this had been enjoyed on borrowed time. And the editorial clearly foresaw problems of unemployment, and growing social unrest. Moorcroft's ware would have to appeal to a shrinking market, or else he would be finished.

But despite all the turmoil, commercial and aesthetic, Moorcroft continued to look ahead. In June 1918, he applied to register his name as a trademark, and just ten days after the Armistice, on the 21 November 1918, the Industrial Property Department of the Board of Trade gave notice that the application had been successful. He was thinking, too, about the terms of his association with Liberty's. In 1918, exactly halfway through his agreed ten-year contract, a period dominated by the constraints of war on his plans for development, he was keen to ensure that this relationship did not, inadvertently, hold him back. A draft letter dated 18 August 1918 suggested changes to two clauses in the Agreement between him and W. Moorcroft Ltd.: specifically, the

22 'Overseas Trade after the War', *PG* (January 1918), 57–58 (p.57).

clause which committed Moorcroft to serve the Company 'so long as he shall live', and the clause which conferred ownership of the trademark to the Company, for all that this may consist of Moorcroft's name or signature. Moorcroft's proposal was to eliminate the first, and to limit the validity of the second to the period of his personal involvement in the Company. For all his commercial success, he was as keen as ever to retain what, for him, defined his enterprise as a potter: his own individuality and autonomy. For Moorcroft, the trademark Moorcroft designated a person above all, not a firm or a brand, and he wished to protect his association, practical, metaphorical, vital, with what was produced in his name. This was more than an issue of intellectual property, it was about the right to his own identity. Ironically, Liberty's understood that need better than anybody: it was William Moorcroft who made W. Moorcroft Ltd. what it was.

At the AGM of 26 November 1918, a small loss on the year of just over £53 was reported. The Minutes recorded no discussion, but there were clearly no distributions of dividend. Challenging times lay ahead, but Moorcroft was ready. On 12 November 1918, he noted in his diary the need to recruit new staff, and recorded a fresh communication from an agent in Canada; the future was beckoning: 'Advertise for Turners and Placer. Mr Prentice called.'

5. A Changing World

The military struggle with Germany ended in victory; a commercial struggle, which predated the war, engendered tensions within Britain which would continue long after the Armistice. As war raged in 1915, a number of prominent retailers, craftsmen and designers wrote to Hubert Llewellyn Smith, Permanent Secretary at the Board of Trade, urging him to organise an 'Exhibition of German and Austrian articles typifying successful design'. Their letter drew attention to the 'remarkable expansion of German trade, achieved largely at the expense of our own', and attributed its success to 'the intelligent cooperation of artists, educationists and manufacturers (assisted by such organizations as the Deutscher Werkbund)'.²³ The exhibition was held in March 1915 at the Goldsmith's Hall, and was warmly received by *The Times*; its review ended with a stark warning:

If the artist and the tradesman both wish to do as well as they can do, they will come together; if the artist wishes only to be artistic and the tradesman only to be commercial, they will remain apart.²⁴

In May that year, the Design and Industries Association [DIA] was formed, its goal to improve the quality of industrially manufactured goods. Its founding members

²³ 'Education and Industry', *The Times* (22 February 1915), p.5.

²⁴ 'Industrial Art of Germany', *The Times* (3 April 1915), p.3.

recognised that the Germans had understood more quickly than the British the applicability of Arts and Crafts principles in the modern industrial age. An article in *The Times* presented the DIA as ‘A New Body with New Aims’; craft was seen to be the basis of good industrial design, which in turn was the basis of commercial success:

[...] modern industrial methods and the great possibilities inherent in the machine demand the best artistic no less than the best mechanical and scientific abilities. Hitherto our mistake in all the arts of design has been to suppose that there is some incompatibility or inevitable conflict between artistic and mechanical or scientific or commercial abilities [...].²⁵

The improvement of quality would derive from the close collaboration of the designer and manufacturer, ‘makers’ working with shared aims and values, and not merely following the whims of the public:

[...] if things are to be well made and well designed, they must be made and designed according to the taste of the maker, who because he is a maker, knows what is good. And he must trust in his taste and in his effort to do as well as he can to sell his products. But this confidence of the makers in themselves can only be produced by cooperation between them.²⁶

This spirit of collaboration extended, too, to the retailer. It was implicit in the proposal that quality of design and manufacture would always sell; an enlightened retailer would help create an enlightened public, as *The Times* report acknowledged:

What they need to guide them is a determined and organised effort to sell them articles well-made and well designed; and this effort can only be made by the cooperation of everyone concerned in making and distributing. That cooperation is the aim of the Design and Industries Association.²⁷

The Association found limited support among pottery manufacturers, who remained committed to the production of decorated wares popular with a public broadly conservative in its tastes, and it was viewed with suspicion by the Art Workers’ Guild, who viewed craft as an end in itself, and not as the starting point of design for industrial production. These tensions came to the fore at the Eleventh Exhibition of the Arts and Crafts Exhibition Society in 1916, which included a display of household pottery submitted by the DIA; looking back in 1936, the designer Noel Carrington described the impact of an exhibit where ‘fitness for purpose’ was the overriding criterion of selection:

The ware it chose was all stock in trade, chosen for purity of line, utility and simplicity rather than for virtuosity or decoration. The exhibit caused a stir because it seemed so

²⁵ ‘Art and Trade’, *The Times* (17 May 1915), p.11.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Ibid.

unusual. In the Potteries it caused a row. They did not like to see their Cinderellas chosen for honour.²⁸

The opposition was one of principle, but it also implied a regional tension. Staffordshire potters were not inclined to have their work judged by an external London body.

No less significant was a joint initiative of the Boards of Trade and Education to create an Institute of Modern Industrial Art. Hubert Llewellyn Smith and Cecil Harcourt Smith (Director of the V&A) recognised the commercial and aesthetic importance of improving industrial design, and the educational value of promoting its best examples. Harcourt Smith was keen to include select pieces in the V&A's holdings, an approach very much in the spirit of the original Museum of Manufactures, established after the Great Exhibition to achieve, in the terms of its first Director, Henry Cole, 'the betterment of the public's taste'. In his 'Proposals for a Museum and Institute of Modern Industrial Art' dated 29 April 1914, he argued against the distinction between fine and industrial art:

The very terminology of today which discriminates between 'Fine Art' (as embracing Painting, Sculpture and, possibly, Architecture) and 'Decorative' or 'Industrial' art, is an unfortunate misnomer of purely modern origin.²⁹

And he sought to establish links with leading manufacturers, hosting the British Industries Fairs of 1916 and 1917.

Moorcroft embodied many of the principles underlying these initiatives. For him, good design was born of practical experience of making, not always the case with industrial designers; and he represented, like few others, a perfect collaboration of artist and manufacturer (as the *New Witness* of 1913 had observed), free to produce precisely those wares which he, as designer, wished to do. Added to which, his association with Liberty's already enacted the enlightened collaboration of manufacturer and retailer which the DIA and the Werkbund were trying to promote. Unlike the generality of Staffordshire potters, seen as being too driven by commercial considerations to pay attention to design, William Moorcroft was recognised as being different, one whose sense of design combined with an experience of manufacture, an artist as well as a maker. His growing association with Cecil Harcourt Smith, whom he first met at the 1916 BIF, brought his work to the attention of leading figures at the Board of Trade. And his work attracted, too, the attention of Ambrose Heal, one of the most forward-looking designer/retailers of the age and a founding member of the DIA, who wrote to him on 16 June 1916, less than four months before the exhibition of the Arts and Crafts Exhibition Society at which the DIA was to have its first display:

28 N. Carrington, '21 Years of DIA', *Trend in Design* (Spring 1936), 39–42 (p.39).

29 Quoted in M.T. Saler, *The Avant-Garde in Interwar England: Medieval Modernism and the London Underground* (Oxford: OUP, 1999), p.70.

We called at your old London address on Tuesday, hoping to see a selection of your pottery. We were sorry to find that you at present have no London agent. We are anxious to see examples of your wares, can you help us in the matter?

And yet, for all the apparent conjunction of Moorcroft's practice and the underlying principles of the DIA, his conception of design and manufacture was in other respects fundamentally different. For him, quality was a matter of craft as well as art, of individuality as well as design. Significantly, he applied on 14 September 1916, but too late, to exhibit in his own name at the Arts and Crafts Exhibition Society. There is no record of the wares selected for the DIA's exhibit,³⁰ but if Moorcroft's work was included in it, he was evidently keen to display, too, decorated wares which he, if not they, had selected. The following year, the *Pottery Gazette* re-printed a letter from Moorcroft to *The Times Imperial and Foreign Trade Supplement* of September, in response to a letter published the previous month which had commented favourably on industrial design in Europe:

SCIENCE AND ART IN MODERN POTTERY

[...] It is completely surprising that your correspondent should venture to write so much regarding German and Austrian production at the present time—when many would prefer to forget both it and its baneful influence. May the writer state that he inspected the exhibits of German and Austrian work referred to, and he failed to see anything but what has been—and is—in the judgement of many experts—surpassed by British potters? Such exhibits of German and Austrian work show to us mainly what to avoid, and are so far only good.³¹

To see German and Austrian design as examples of 'what to avoid' implied a wry allusion to Henry Cole's notorious (and short-lived) 'Chamber of Horrors', a gallery in the newly opened Museum of Manufactures of 1852 which exhibited 'Examples of False Principles in Decoration' among British manufacturers. Moorcroft was now affirming that the best of British pottery was of superior quality to modern European wares, which he consigned to a similar Chamber. But in doing so, he was not suggesting unconditional support for modern British industrial production. Far from it. What he promoted was individuality rather than slavish imitation, whether of European styles or of indigenous ones. This same spirit inspired his commitment to craft, and his implied objection to the principle of standardisation inherent in an industrialised mode of production. And it fuelled above all his resistance to any external imposition of values in matters of taste or design; William Moorcroft would not be dictated to.

30 The *Catalogue of the Eleventh Exhibition 1916* of the Arts and Crafts Exhibition Society simply notes: 'The aim of the Design and Industries Association is to improve the quality and fitness of goods on sale to the general public through the usual channels. The articles in this section are not on sale in the Exhibition. The maker's name is affixed to each, and these goods should be asked for under the maker's name at the ordinary shops.' (p.105).

31 'A Timely Rebuke', *PG* (November 1917), 1053.

It was individuality which characterised Moorcroft's wartime designs. Revisiting many of his earlier motifs, he gave expression to the spirit of a war-torn age, suggesting its complex mix of nostalgia, grief, reverence, even hope. A series of designs referred to as 'New Florian' looked back to an era rapidly and irreversibly receding. Motifs of pansy, wisteria, cornflower or pomegranate, presented in 'luxurious' tones at the dawn of a new Georgian age, were shrouded in more subdued colouring. Peacock or landscape decorations were given the most sombre of treatments, emerging eerily from the darkest of grounds. And the orchid, presented in shades of purple against a dark green ground, embodied a discreet expression of mourning.

Among such designs, his treatment of the poppy was particularly notable. One of his earliest floral motifs, it was revived in ochre, accompanied by dark forget-me-nots set against an inky background; launched at a time when McCrae's poem 'In Flanders Fields' had put the poppy in everybody's mind, the design could not have been more poignant.

Moorcroft's solemn tones attracted the critical attention of Alwyn Lasenby in a letter of 17 August 1916: 'I do not care so much for the very dark ground you have on the last delivery of Pomegranate ware, and much prefer our usual colouring.' But Moorcroft, taking up the subject on 1 December 1916, noted its significance and its appeal:

We have been supplying large quantities of this design in many countries and we have found the dark ground appreciated and requested. Personally I like the lighter ground, but the dark ground also appeals to one.

One may see commercial astuteness here, but also, above all, sensitivity; such designs embodied that quality of 'dignified artistry' picked out by the *Pottery Gazette* in 1916. And it clearly struck a chord at a time when so much English design was seen to be imitative or superficial, lacking character or meaning, 'doomed to weakness and failure' in the words of the *Pottery Gazette*.³² Moorcroft's designs were themselves the subject of imitation,³³ but he remained himself. Writing on the 16 March 1918, Frederick Rhead urged him to join the newly formed National Society of Ceramic Designers, which stood against European models of design:

Men like yourself, for example, ought to be represented, not only on the local education boards, but on the advisory committees of the Boards of Trade and Education. We want the men who have achieved something, and not the men who talk (more or less intelligently) about it.

³² 'Some Thoughts on Pottery Designs', *PG* (April 1918), 317–18 (p.317).

³³ Some of Charlotte Rhead's designs for Wood & Sons clearly took inspiration from Moorcroft's wares: the pomegranate and dark ground of Arras (1917), or the large ochre poppies of Seed Poppy (1919). And similarly sombre tones were sought from 1917 in the Morris Ware of George Cartlidge, Art Director of Sampson Hancock & Sons.



(L) Fig. 65 William Moorcroft, Designs in distinctive wartime colours: (clockwise) Spanish (c.1916), 18cm; Orchid (c.1917), 22.5cm; Landscape (1916), 17.5cm; Cornflower (1915), 8cm; Peacock (1917), 13cm. CC BY-NC

(R) Fig. 66 William Moorcroft, Ochre Poppy with Forget-me-nots (c.1917), 12cm. CC BY-NC



Fig. 67 William Moorcroft, Pre-war and wartime Pomegranate: (left) dated 1914, 12.8cm; (right) c.1917, 12.5cm. CC BY-NC

But Moorcroft declined; admired by different sides, he maintained an independent position.

What was praised in his work was the fact that it represented the individuality of craft in a world whose trend towards standardisation was viewed by many with suspicion. This quality was singled out by the *Pottery Gazette*:

In its production everything in the nature of mechanical manipulation is rigidly eschewed, [...] whilst every separate process is so dovetailed, as it were, into the next that the whole production when complete is a composite admixture of wonderful texture, without any lines of demarcation, the colour, the glaze and the clay being so fused together as to be thoroughly homogeneous and indestructible.³⁴

The analysis implicitly distinguished this work from industrial production, not just by underlining its manufacture on the wheel, but by stressing its unity of conception and realisation; each piece was seen to issue not from a series of disparate processes on a production line, but from a unified creative act. And what was true of his manufacturing methods was true, too, of his design principles; his work was characterised by its integrity of form and decoration:

The main feature that strikes one in inspecting a piece of 'Moorcroft Ware' is that in no case does the decoration create the impression that it has been merely applied, but that, on the other hand, it is an integral part of the piece itself, a stage in the creation of the piece instead of a mere afterthought.³⁵

And it was this quality which made him a 'pottery artist', and not, it was implied, an industrial designer.³⁶

And yet, for all that, his was not ware destined for connoisseurs alone. On the contrary. The review stressed its suitability for normal commercial distribution, affirming that any china dealer without 'a collection of 'Moorcroft Ware' in his complement' would have a stock 'lacking in completeness'. To the extent that it was subject to serial production and distribution through retail outlets, it was the work of a manufacturer, not of a small-scale potter; but it had that quality of individuality lacking in the products of mass production. His was not a streamlined, mechanised model of production, it was one characterised by its diversity, but unified by the personal mark of its originator:

Wm Moorcroft Ltd., are now making quite a large variety of articles, some of them strictly ornamental, others both useful as well as decorative, but in every case the embodiment of refinement, and every piece, it should be remembered, certified by the signature of Mr Wm Moorcroft himself.³⁷

34 *PG* (July 1916), 720–721 (p.720).

35 *Ibid.*

36 *Ibid.*

37 *Ibid.*

The *Pottery Gazette* saw in such wares that integrity of both conception and manufacture which the DIA had identified as an essential element in modern industrial design. It was pottery not made simply as a commercial commodity, and yet whose quality could not fail to appeal. *The Times* report on the launch of the DIA identified this telling order of priorities in Germany: ‘In German industrial art there has been an immense effort to do the best possible, not merely an effort to capture trade; and that is why they have captured trade.’³⁸ The same outcome was foreseen by the *Pottery Gazette* of Moorcroft’s work:

Our illustration shows a choice selection of modern ‘Moorcroft Ware’ which we feel sure will be bound to arrest the sympathetic attention of every china dealer who is not too much engrossed in pottery dealing as a matter of mere pounds, shillings and pence to be oblivious of the aesthetic virtues to be discovered in potting as a handicraft.³⁹

It was a prediction clearly validated in his balance sheets.

6. Conclusions

Many firms struggled during these years of war: Wedgwood worked short-time for much of the period, Pilkington substantially reduced their production of decorative ware, and Howson Taylor came close to closure as a result of staff conscription. One might have supposed that Moorcroft’s enterprise would have been particularly vulnerable to the pressures and restrictions of wartime: a small and highly skilled workforce, a costly decorative product, and limited administrative support. The costs of war were certainly reflected in his accounts. His total outgoings practically doubled over these four years, his wages bill rising by 72%, even though the number of employees remained remarkably constant, and his expenses and running costs increasing by 176%. But sales income showed an increase of 119% over the same period, and net profits were recorded in all but the last year of war. That this was so is undoubtedly due to the gritty determination of Moorcroft and his workforce, but also to the high quality and commercial appeal of his ware.

The end of the war did not mark a return to the world of 1914. Symbolically, these years witnessed the death of several figures closely associated with a rapidly receding past: in 1915, Walter Crane, one of the foremost designers and theorists of the Arts and Crafts movement, and in 1917, William de Morgan, one of the movement’s leading ceramic artists. The obituary of Thomas Allen, Art Director at Wedgwood for more than twenty years, distinguished his work from ‘the mainly technically produced decorations of the present keen, competitive age’, and noted with some regret: ‘The times have, indeed, changed’.⁴⁰ In some ways, Moorcroft may have seemed to belong

³⁸ ‘Art and Trade’, *The Times* (17 May 1915), p.11.

³⁹ *PG* (July 1916), pp.720–21.

⁴⁰ *PG* (November 1915), p.1211.

to this past age, not least in his commitment to thrown ware which he maintained even after the death of Newman in 1915. Casting was associated with modern industry, a matter of commercial priorities, allowing for inexpensive and exact reproduction; it implied that design, rather than realisation, was the ultimate measure of artistic quality. Throwing, conversely, was seen to represent a much more individual, expressive mode of creation. The *Pottery Gazette* explicitly linked the demise of the thrower to the disappearance of a national style of potting and lamented what was close to being a lost world:

[...] it may be that a national style of pottery will evolve. It may be, we say, but it is doubtful, as the great security for a true and national style of potting has disappeared. The 'thrower' is no more. His place has been taken by plaster and iron machines, which turn out his work at a quarter of the price, but without his individuality and sense of line.⁴¹

But Moorcroft's commitment to craft was not born of nostalgia. As the Arts and Crafts movement inspired, paradoxically, two opposite ambitions, the reform of industrial design, and the preservation of craft as an end in itself, Moorcroft sought a different pathway for craft in the modern world: to create handmade objects which might be enjoyed by more than a handful of connoisseurs, to bridge the widening rift between studio and factory. It was a unique position, coherent but unclassifiable. For the *Pottery Gazette*, Moorcroft's exhibit at the 1918 BIF epitomised the fusion of art and industry:

[...] the whole of Mr Moorcroft's work is of the greatest use in keeping alive in this country the spirit of industrial art, the extinction of which would be one of the most disastrous losses war could inflict.⁴²

But this was 'industrial art' of a very particular kind, quite different from the model of standardised production emerging in Europe. And it was characterised, significantly, by its 'vitality', a quality already identified by Bernard Rackham in the pre-industrial pottery of England,⁴³ and whose broad appeal sprang from the individuality of its manufacture: 'no more convincing example of the vitality and vigour of the craft of the artist potter in this country could be imagined.'⁴⁴ Moorcroft's ware was clearly appreciated, but his project was not without risk in a world of increasing competitiveness. The forming of the DIA implied at one level the recognition that the (true) manufacturer could not hope to compete with industry, for want of capital, size or business expertise; Moorcroft was setting out to disprove this, and to carve out a viable place for craft in a modern industrial world.

41 'Some Thoughts on Pottery Designs', *PG* (April 1918), 317–318 (p.317).

42 *PG* (April 1918), 309–310 (p.310).

43 'The exhibition reveals in the ceramic craftsmen of our country a vitality and inventiveness, in design and technique alike [...]', 'Early English Earthenware and Stoneware at the Burlington Fine Arts Club', *The Burlington Magazine* (February 1914), 265–79 (p.265) [quoted in J.F. Stair, 'Critical Writing on English Studio Pottery 1910–1940', unpublished PhD thesis, Royal College of Art, 2002 (p.144)].

44 *PG* (April 1918), 309–310 (p.309).

The end of the war did not bring quite the Renaissance for which Moorcroft had hoped in 1914, nor did it bring a more beautiful form of commerce. Major challenges faced potters in the new post-war world: rising prices, deteriorating economic conditions, different, evolving models of factory relations, increasing pressure for change in production practices, changing attitudes to design style. But for all these pressures, Moorcroft remained committed to the underlying principle of that optimistic statement of 1914: 'that art must be greatest that is found in every simple thing, in every home.' He still maintained his ambition to create works of beauty which were both functional and decorative, and which would find a place in the home as well as the museum. Like the modern design reformers, he believed that art and industry could be reconciled, but he sought to do so through individual craft, not industrial design. A factory which in 1913 had epitomised the new world of safe and responsible pottery manufacture embodied, in 1918, a different statement: an act of faith in the unique quality of individualised, handmade ware, it was an act of defiance even.

8. 1919–23: A Lone Furrow

1. Peace and its Aftermath

The months immediately following the Armistice seemed to promise much. Retailers were desperate for stock, and the *Pottery Gazette* of April 1919 recorded a ‘phenomenal’ post-war boom, weakened only by the difficulties of keeping up with demand.¹ But for all these signs of economic vigour, the situation was inherently fragile, and the rising cost of raw materials and of labour was pricing manufacturers out of the international market. By the autumn of 1920, trade was stagnating. The declining value of European currencies made imports unanswerably cheap, and exports prohibitively expensive; the spectre of foreign competition loomed large. Added to which, a miners’ strike in 1920 reduced pottery production by almost three quarters, and another, in 1921, brought many manufacturers to their knees. By mid-1921, the *Pottery Gazette* reported an industry at rock bottom: ‘It would be difficult indeed to recall a time in the history of the present generation when the pottery trade was rendered more inactive than it is at the present moment.’² The economic boom had lasted for less than three years; the post-war general public was buying now by price not quality. To retain prices at their high level meant fewer orders and shorter working hours; but to reduce prices meant smaller profit margins and lower wages. At a time of rising inflation, this was a stern test for industrial relations, and for manufacturers of better quality wares the dilemma was particularly acute. The route to commercial survival seemed to lead, inevitably and irreversibly, towards the mass production of cheap wares; modernisation and mechanisation were becoming the watchwords. Peace had brought depression, not prosperity.

Like many others, Moorcroft struggled in the months following the Armistice to keep up with orders; the demand for his ware was relentless. Treeby & Bolton, Keswick, wrote on 16 April 1920, eager for stock, any stock:

1 ‘After the Fair’, *Pottery Gazette and Glass Trade Review* [PG] (April 1919), 339–341 (p.339).

2 ‘Notes from the Potteries’, *PG* (June 1921), 940–942 (p.940).

We are really getting desperate, we have nothing but small trays of your ware left [...] We want everything, large and small, decorated, vases, bowls etc. As I told you before, we have sold nothing else but 'Moorcroft' this Easter, consequently it is finished. [Emphasis original]³

This demand continued well into 1921 and beyond, when the industry as a whole had begun to experience a slump. The situation at the Army and Navy stores described by Edith Harcourt Smith in a letter of 22 November 1921 was typical:

[...] the buyers of the China and Pottery at the Army and Navy stores are in a condition of despair at not having received cups and saucers in the blue from you. They have to refuse orders daily, and say they could sell hundreds if you would let them have them. Far greater sale for these than anything else as the public crave for them ! [...] They say there is nothing so popular as your pottery!

Moorcroft's export markets were no less buoyant. In Australia, J. Walch and Sons, Hobart, wrote enthusiastically on 20 September 1919, after a shipment of 'Orchid' and 'Poppy' designs. Whatever Moorcroft made would sell well:

We made a special display in our window, and sold half the Orchid ware on the first day. Nothing so beautiful has been seen in Hobart, and on all sides we have flattering remarks about it.

And from the U.S. John Davison, Inc., wrote on 22 October 1920, requesting 'a good supply of pieces in the Light Green and Ruby Lustres', 'a good supply of bowls in all lustres' and 'some good shipments of Blue Flambé, Pomegranate, Pansy and Wisteria'.

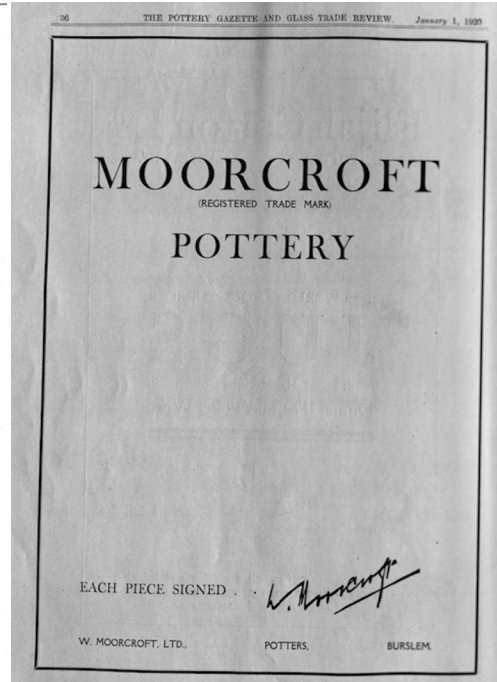
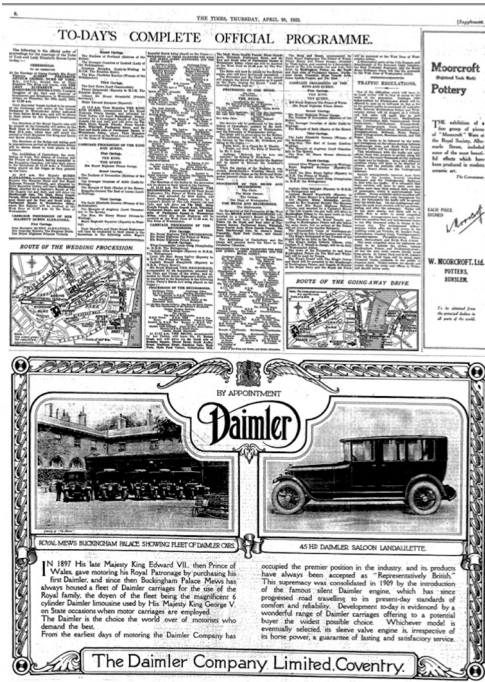
For all the general stagnation in exports, Moorcroft's ware was clearly an exception, and new markets were opening up all the time. On 4 May 1920, British Products Supply Ltd., Lisbon, wrote to him about representation in Portugal, recognising that his ware was 'something altogether out of the common'. An agent's letter dated 28 May 1920 remarked that 'a good market could be established for your goods in South Africa'; and agents for Ree & Cie in Manchester approached him on 23 September 1921 to supply an exclusive hotel in Brazil: 'The hotel in question is being fitted on the lines of the finest hotels in Europe, and only high class goods with the designs of the very best taste are required.' Moorcroft's exhibits at British Industries Fairs [BIF] attracted extensive international interest, and following the Fair of 1920, he sent Claude Taylor at the Department of Trade a list of his orders, which included sales to France, Belgium, Holland, Spain and Sweden; Canada and the US; S. Africa; Australia; Ceylon [Sri Lanka]; Chile and Brazil. The appeal of his ware extended the world over, and when other firms questioned the commercial benefit of attending the Fair, as the miners' strike took its toll, Moorcroft exhibited as before. Taylor wrote to him on 16 June 1921, grateful for the continued support of 'a really whole-hearted supporter like yourself.'

3 All unpublished documents referred to in this chapter are located in William Moorcroft: Personal and Commercial Papers, SD1837, Stoke-on-Trent City Archives [WM Archive].

To survive in this post-war world, Moorcroft did not choose the route of economical mass production; he kept faith with high-quality ware, and built on the reputation it had earned over the past twenty years. Advertising was an important part of this strategy, and it was wide-ranging. He promoted his work both in fashionable lifestyle publications such as *Country Life* or *Vogue*, and in the newly launched *Our Homes and Gardens*, which had a growing middle-class readership; he advertised, too, in art magazines such as *The Connoisseur* or *the Journal of the Royal Society of Arts*. Advertisements were regularly placed in prominent positions. *Country Life* wrote to him on 10 May 1920, promising a ‘very nice top right hand position in the early pages’; the *Journal of the Royal Society of Arts* offered him on 12 June 1920, ‘the same special position facing first page of reading matter’; his advertisements in *The World’s Work* were all on the Table of Contents page; and an advertisement appeared too on the front cover of the *Industrial Art Journal*. He showed particular enterprise in placing advertisements at moments of national significance. *The Court Journal* wrote to him on 14 March 1919, confirming an arrangement to ‘do something for you’ in a special issue marking the signing of the Treaty of Versailles, and he advertised conspicuously in the weeks leading up to the wedding of the Duke of York (the future King George VI) and Lady Elizabeth Bowes-Lyon. On 29 March 1923, *Vogue* confirmed his request for space in the issue devoted to the royal occasion, and on the day of the wedding itself, 26 April 1923, he advertised in *The Times*, taking space alongside the half page devoted to ‘Today’s Complete Official Programme’, a page which every reader of *The Times* could be guaranteed to look at that day. It was a confident and ambitious move; the only other publicity on that page was placed by Daimler, Royal Warrant holders since 1902. Moorcroft’s advertisement prominently displayed the heading ‘Moorcroft Pottery’, the affirmation ‘Each piece signed’ (followed by the signature), and an extract from a review in *The Connoisseur* which identified in his pottery ‘some of the most beautiful effects which have been produced in modern ceramic art’.⁴ The advertisement was designed to appeal to those with a taste for luxury; the target market was imperial, even global, as readers were reminded in one final statement of the quality and availability of the ware: ‘To be obtained from the principal dealers in all parts of the world’. Its concise, incisive style was characteristic of Moorcroft’s advertisements, although it was clearly at variance with current thinking about successful marketing copy. The orthodox view was that ‘more attention should be given to the commodity than the name’,⁵ but Moorcroft took the opposite line, and did so fearlessly. Some advertisements were strikingly spare, even minimalist, offering the reader neither images nor descriptions of his designs; they gave prominence instead to the name Moorcroft, all that was needed to convey the qualities of the ware.

4 *The Times* (26 April 1923), *Supplement*, p.ii.

5 W.H. Smedley, ‘Advertising as an Asset’, lecture to the Art Section of the Ceramic Society, reported in *PG* (March 1923), 446–47 (p.446).



(L) Fig. 68 Moorcroft’s advertisement in *The Times* (26 April 1923). ‘Personal and Commercial Papers of William Moorcroft’, Stoke-on-Trent City Archives, SD 1837. CC BY-NC
 (R) Fig. 69 Moorcroft’s advertisement in the *Pottery Gazette* (January 1920), ‘Personal and Commercial Papers of William Moorcroft’, Stoke-on-Trent City Archives, SD 1837. CC BY-NC

Much more effusive was the promotion of his pottery by retailers. In Canada, his ware featured in an advertisement by Stanley Mills & Co., Ltd., Hamilton, Ontario, dated 21 July 1920; its scarcity merely intensified its already distinctive appeal:

Moorcroft Ware has arrived, our first shipment in six years. Words fail us when we attempt to describe it. No ware made any place in the wide world is anything like it. [...] Once seen, your sense of the beautiful will never allow you to forget Moorcroft Ware.

And on 29 September 1920, the Robert Simpson Company (one of Canada’s leading department store chains) placed an advertisement in Toronto’s *The Globe*. Moorcroft’s pottery was credited with a transformative power; it was not just functional, it was life-enhancing:

There is a fascination about fine china that is not found elsewhere. It makes the breakfast room a radiant place; it turns a brew of tea into pure ambrosia; it stirs up the latent artistic sense. [...] Witness Moorcroft ware. The man himself is an artist, an idealist. [...] Each piece is handmade, no two can be alike. Each, you can realise, has had individual care and attention, and each is signed by the old craftsman himself.

Moorcroft was now, both literally and metaphorically, a household name; and that name was his. The impact of the ware was attributed directly to his personal involvement in

production; it was work with individual character, it was not the standardised output of a firm.

Celebration of Moorcroft's pottery extended to publications of wide national circulation. It featured in an article published in the *Daily Mail*, its adaptability to different decors an essential part of its appeal:

Nothing, for instance, could give one a greater sense of satisfaction at breakfast time than a set of cups and saucers in the deep lapis lazuli blue of some of the Moorcroft pottery, with which either a dark oak or polished mahogany table forms an equally happy contrast.⁶

It was successful because it suited a wide range of tastes, but also because it was both functional and beautiful; its place was in the modern home, and not just the collector's cabinet. It was chosen for a display by the court florist Edward Goodyear, catching the eye of the Hon. Mrs C.W. Forester, celebrated fashion journalist, in an article published in *The Daily Telegraph*. The elegance of a shop window could be replicated, it was implied, in the home of the reader:

The modern window dresser is an artist. [...] This week, for instance, Goodyear, in one of his attractive corner shops at the Bond Street end of the Royal Arcade, fills a window with innumerable sizes and shapes of old-gold Moorcroft pottery to hold various yellowish-brown species of spring flowers.⁷

Such popularity was particularly significant at a time when pressures were increasing on manufacturers of high-quality wares. For all the shrinking market, Moorcroft's sales remained buoyant. In 1918–19, income grew by just over 35%, an improvement which more or less matched the increase in his wage bill for the year. The following year, growth was even more striking, a rise of nearly 73%. If trade was stagnating in the industry as a whole during 1921, Moorcroft's sales rose a further 15%; this did not completely offset a 26% rise in working costs, but it represented nevertheless a vigorous response to the economic challenges of the year. Sales grew by a further 20% in 1921–22; and in 1922–23, as trading conditions continued to deteriorate, they increased again, albeit by a modest 1%. At the end of this year, his trading income stood at £23,760; since the end of the war, it had increased more than threefold.

Moorcroft was no less vulnerable to financial pressures than other factories, far from it; his wage bill more than doubled in the first three years of peace, even though his workforce over this same period increased by less than 20%. But as the industry as a whole suffered a decline in worsening economic conditions, the smaller size of Moorcroft's factory (and the resourcefulness of Moorcroft himself) allowed him to negotiate these pressures. He was one of very few manufacturers to keep his works functioning full-time during the colliery strikes of 1920 and 1921, using wood to fire

6 'Hand-made Pottery in the Home', *Daily Mail* (22 March 1922), p.15.

7 C.W. Forester, 'Fashions and Fancies', *The Daily Telegraph* (7 March 1923), p.9.

the kilns when coal supplies were exhausted. And his thriving sales underpinned a consecutive run of profits. In 1918–19, a profit of more than £1,704 was declared, a significant improvement on the loss of the previous year; in 1922–23, his profit was £7,895, an increase of more than four and a half times. Even in 1920–21, the year of the miners' strike, he made a profit of £670. In the challenging conditions, this was a significant outcome, and it had a significant consequence. Shortly after the AGM, on 28 September 1921, Harold Blackmore wrote to Moorcroft with a proposal; summarising the terms on which the firm had been established in 1913, he clearly recognised the progress Moorcroft had made:

Then we were concerned to see that we had absolute control and as much security as possible. Today, with an established business, we are quite willing that you should have equal voting power with us, and we are also willing that our capital in the business shall rank on the same footing as yours, that is to say, that it shall be shares and not debentures.

Such was Blackmore's confidence in Moorcroft's enterprise, he saw no serious risk to Liberty's investment, describing a re-organisation on this basis as 'perfectly fair and straightforward'. It was the ultimate vindication of Moorcroft's belief in his ware; but this restructuring was all the more significant for being undertaken at a time when economic conditions were far from stable. By the end of 1922–23, the commercial outlook had reached a new low, and the *Pottery Gazette* reported that business everywhere 'is of a hand-to-mouth kind'.⁸ In this context, Moorcroft's record year-end profit was a triumph. Ten years almost to the month since the start of independent production, and in spite of hostile conditions for the greater part of this period, his situation had never been better; it would never be quite as good again.

2. Design and Commerce

Moorcroft's commercial success had a particular significance at a time when there was increasing concern about the quality and competitiveness of British pottery production. In a talk to the National Pottery Council, Gordon Forsyth, former Art Director at Pilkington, founding member of the Design and Industries Association [DIA], and newly appointed Superintendent of Art Instruction in Stoke-on-Trent, argued that the key to successful trade was not competitive price, but better design: 'He looked upon art as a trade [...]. Fortunes were made from original ideas rather than from following or copying.'⁹ The ambitions of the British Institute of Industrial Art [BIIA] were represented in similar terms by *The Times*:

The idea behind the movement is the encouragement of art for commercial purposes, the persuasion of the manufacturer that it pays to put on the market goods that are not only useful but also artistically acceptable.¹⁰

⁸ PG (June 1923), p.1018.

⁹ 'Art: Its Effect upon the Pottery Industry', PG (August 1921), 1219–22 (p.1221).

¹⁰ 'Art in Common Life', *The Times* (4 May 1921), p.8.

Already, in 1919, the newly formed Art Section of the Ceramic Society organised a vetted Exhibition of Contemporary Pottery, selection of the exhibits falling to Robert Anning Bell, Professor of Design at the Royal College of Art, and William Dalton, Principal of Camberwell School of Arts and Crafts. The event met with limited support from the conservative Staffordshire potters; few manufacturers were prepared to have their work judged by London-based designers, whose criteria of selection, they argued, were insufficiently attuned to the real world of commerce. Moorcroft also declined to exhibit, but his reasons were his own. Writing on 7 January 1919 to Cecil Harcourt Smith, who had clearly encouraged him to participate, he expressed his artistic (rather than commercial) ambitions as a potter:

Your letter is an enormous incentive to put more energy, and yet more energy, in an endeavour to produce some object or objects that shall give a little pleasure, and that shall possibly reflect something good of the age in which we live.

Original design was, for William Moorcroft, a matter of personal expression not of commercial strategy, and now, less than two months after the Armistice, he saw in pottery a means of restoring beauty, moral value even, to the world. Its success was not for a committee to evaluate:

With regard to the Ceramic Society's Art Section Exhibition, the reason I am not exhibiting is first, I am not a member of the Ceramic Society, and secondly that personally I feel public opinion which represents all is likely to offer a better judgement in regard to what is produced.

This was a challenging comment at a time when the education of public taste was widely seen to be an essential stage in the improvement of industrial art.¹¹ But Moorcroft was confident in his ware, and in its appeal to the public; his commercial success clearly vindicated that.

What continued to be stressed at this time was the need for closer collaboration between manufacturers and designers, 'the first essential in sound production' according to Forsyth.¹² Progressive firms such as Wedgwood, Gray & Co. or Pilkington worked creatively with both new and established designers, and Carter, Stabler & Adams, established in 1921 significantly distant from the Potteries, came to exemplify pottery manufacture more suited to the needs and decorative tastes of the post-war age than individualised wares in an Arts and Crafts tradition. Items exhibited at Regent House, Kingsway WC2 were praised for their practicality and modern appeal:

[...] the pottery that was at one time made by Carter & Co., Ltd., of Poole, which was always reminiscent of the arts and crafts basis, and, if we may say so, hardly commercial,

11 Cf. *The Times* (17 January 1922), in a notice anticipating the Exhibition of Present-Day Industrial Art organised by the BIIA: 'What was wanted was a change of values, both in the spiritual and material sense. [...] The manufacturers must be shown that artistic quality was in itself a commercial asset, and the public must be educated into insisting on a high standard of artistic excellence in everything that they bought.' (p.8).

12 'Art: Its Effect upon the Pottery Industry', *PG* (August 1921), 1219–22 (p.1220).

is now being supplanted by a range of pottery that is soundly practical and that is likely to experience a strong demand wherever pottery is sold.¹³

Many Staffordshire manufacturers opposed this trend, however, and a vigorous correspondence took place in the *Staffordshire Sentinel* in January 1919 following Anning Bell's report on the wares submitted to the Selection Committee, in which he praised their technique, but was critical of their design. The Editor of the *Staffordshire Sentinel* supported the view, but then added:

One gentleman, by the way, who has not appeared in print, but whose artistic productions are sincerely respected and admired by everybody, said to me that 'art' apart from 'potting' seemed to him a rather ridiculous distinction; and pushed to extremes, there may be something in that, of course.¹⁴

That 'gentleman' was William Moorcroft.¹⁵ His response, however, was not that of a manufacturer, resisting the pressure to employ a designer, but of a craftsman for whom design and making were inseparable.¹⁶ Moorcroft declined to participate in subsequent exhibitions, too, his detachment becoming more critical and more outspoken. When it was proposed to hold the 1921 Ceramic Society exhibition in the Hanley Museum, he reacted publicly:

Mr W. Moorcroft, the celebrated handicraft potter, has expressed the view that the museum is not a fitting place for the holding of exhibitions that are of a purely commercial type. He considers that 'The museums should be reserved only for the best, and the utmost care should be taken to avoid anything merely fashionable, and unlikely to stand the test of time.'¹⁷

For Moorcroft, commercial pottery was of no lasting value; it was designed to sell, the outcome of economic ambitions, not the expression of artistic ones. And the distinctiveness of his own enterprise was clearly recognised; he was not categorised as a manufacturer, but as a 'handicraft potter'.

He did, nevertheless, participate in exhibitions organised by the BIIA, both in London and the provinces. Incorporated in 1920 under the auspices of the Boards of Trade and Education, the BIIA was the first government body to concern itself specifically with modern industrial design. Its founding committee included representatives of the Arts and Crafts Exhibition Society and the Design and Industries Association [DIA], but it struggled to resolve an ambivalent attitude to the place of craft in industrial manufacture. Its first exhibition, 'Modern British Crafts and Manufactures', announced

13 'An Exhibition of Poole Pottery', *PG* (February 1922), 245–46.

14 'The Pottery Exhibition', *Staffordshire Sentinel* (31 January 1919).

15 Alongside the cutting in a family scrapbook is a note in Moorcroft's hand: 'W.M. to Editor of *Sentinel*, M. Barrett Green. A good piece of pottery is inseparable from art.'

16 Quite coincidentally, a young Clarice Cliff applied to Moorcroft for a job as decorator in these early post-war years; unsurprisingly (in retrospect), her application was unsuccessful.

17 *PG* (October 1921), p.1536.

in *The Times*, included both unique pieces and those intended for serial production, and it clearly understood by ‘manufacture’ all work designed for reproduction irrespective of method: ‘It will have two sections, one for manufacturers (including in that term manifold production by hand as well as by machine), and the other for the work of artist-craftsmen.’¹⁸ The exact relationship of craftsman and manufacturer was not explored beyond a vague aspiration to encourage collaboration between the two:

The craftsmen’s work will be on sale, and it is hoped to create a direct market for it, as well as to bring craftsmen’s influence to bear on industry itself. Lists will be made of designers who show competency and of manufacturers who wish for designers’ services.¹⁹

This very open structure brought together manufacturers large and small, from Doulton Burslem and Wedgwood to Pilkington and Gray & Co., as well as the work of smaller craft potteries, such as those of William Howson Taylor, Bernard Moore and Dora Lunn. Moorcroft exhibited teaware, bowls and vases, often in Powder Blue.

The most significant of their exhibitions in this period was the third, ‘Industrial Art of Today’, held at the Victoria and Albert Museum [V&A] and reported in *The Times*, 8 September 1923. The catalogue reiterated the aim to show ‘the best productions of both craftsmen and manufacturers in design, material and workmanship’, and many leading manufacturers were represented.²⁰ Pieces were described as ‘designed and executed’ by the firm in question, implying the kind of seamless collaboration of designer and manufacturer which the exhibition sought to promote, but anonymising the designer. Significantly, though, the exhibition also included independent potters, several of whom were former pupils (or instructors) at the Camberwell School of Arts and Crafts and were established in studios in or around London: Alfred Hopkins, William Staite Murray, Reginald Wells, Charles and Nell Vyse, Gwendolen Parnell, Dora Lunn, Denise Wren, William Dalton. Also included was the work of Bernard Leach, who had returned to England from Japan in 1920, and set up a pottery with Shoji Hamada in St Ives, and of Katharine Pleydell-Bouverie, one of his first pupils. The inclusion of so many craft potters in an exhibition entitled ‘Industrial Art’ was telling. It implied a role for practising potters in the improvement of industrial design, and even the wording of their catalogue entries implied an analogous production practice, each piece described as ‘designed and executed’ by the potter concerned. An impression of equivalence was created between factory and studio, the only evident distinction between the two being that of a corporate identity (Gray & Co., A.J. Wilkinson Ltd.) and an individual (W. Staite Murray, R.F. Wells). In this context, it is significant that Moorcroft’s exhibits were attributed to him in his own name, and not in that of the firm; in this gathered field of manufacturers (many producing handcrafted pieces) and independent craftsmen, it was as a craftsman that he was viewed.

¹⁸ *The Times* (26 January 1920), p.9.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰ ‘Prefatory Note’, *Exhibition of Industrial Art Today* (1923), n.p.

3. A Very Individual Pottery

For all Moorcroft's commercial success, it is clear that his working practices distinguished him from the modern manufacturer. With little more than eighty employees in 1923, his works were considerably smaller than 'a medium-sized factory', estimated by Forsyth to have a staff of four to five hundred.²¹ But it was not just a matter of physical size; it was a question, too, of priorities. As manufacturers began after the war to introduce more economical means of production, tunnel ovens or gas-fired kilns, Moorcroft enlarged his capacity for further experiment, installing a flambé kiln, a lustre oven and a glost oven, all coal-fired. Significantly, these actions coincided with his (brief) employment of a works manager, William T. Lockett, doubtless at the insistence of Alwyn Lasenby. On 25 October 1919, after seven months in his job, Lockett wrote a detailed and critical analysis of the works as he saw them. Viewed from his perspective, Moorcroft's investment in research and development made no economic sense; Lockett's vision for the immediate future was bleak: 'Building, or capital outlay of any kind in these days is not justifiable unless there is going to be some return, and I cannot see much immediate prospect under present arrangements.' This approach to the management of the works set streamlined output and cost-efficiency as the guiding principles; it was a view in line with modern thinking, but it accorded ill with Moorcroft's plans for the development of his art. Lockett argued, too, that Moorcroft's personal involvement in all aspects of production, from design to sales, was unsustainable in this post-war world:

I have no doubt that as you have in the past been able to do everything yourself, it is difficult for you to unload your burden; but if you are going to develop on the lines you are laying out, you will have to seriously consider the question [...].

But for Moorcroft, initiatives which for others implied greater efficiency—mechanisation, delegation, expansion—were for him steps towards a more impersonal mode of working. And this was not his way.

Moorcroft's works were the very opposite of an anonymised manufactory; their atmosphere and their administration were characterised by a more informal individuality. A letter from a schoolteacher in Birkdale, 12 February 1920, paints a vivid picture of a man who took time to help others:

We are endeavouring to train pupils who shall produce original and artistic work, and who will be able to pass on to be fitted for pottery designing as an occupation in such a firm as yours. In the meantime, the pupils are quite new to the work and rather young. [...] I am most grateful to you for consenting to help us by firing the clay work [...].

And the very personal way in which he conducted his business was reflected in a letter dated 10 June 1922 from F. Schmidt of Brinsmaid & Co., Des Moines, Iowa, telling Moorcroft of the sudden death of his wife: 'I am giving you this information simply

²¹ 'Art in the Pottery and Glass Industries', *PG* (April 1922), 576–78 (p.577).

because I feel I know you as a feeling friend and not only a business man.' Both in his professional dealings, and in his designs, William Moorcroft stood out in his sensitivity. And this was widely appreciated. As his balance sheets demonstrated, commercial success and art were not incompatible; nor were business and human kindness.

This individuality was reflected, too, in Moorcroft's treatment of his staff. As economic pressures intensified, two nationally agreed wage cuts were reported in the *Pottery Gazette*, one of around 20% in May 1922, and another of around 10% in May 1923, a total reduction of 28% of the 1920–21 level. Moorcroft applied neither of these. The earnings of his female staff were unchanged throughout 1922 and 1923, and where there were cuts in the wages of the men, these were significantly smaller than those recorded across the industry as a whole: the wages of Jack Tudor, a warehouseman, were reduced by 9%; those of Fred Ashley, a handler, by 5%; and those of Fred Hollis, Moorcroft's thrower, remained constant. In a speech to the annual luncheon of the North Staffordshire Chamber of Commerce, reported in the *Pottery Gazette* of November 1923, the industrialist Lord Leverhulme, defending the cuts, noted that wages for pottery workers still stood some 66.67% above their pre-war levels.²² With Moorcroft, though, an increase of more than double over this period was more often to be seen. By year-end 1922–23, the wages of a tube-liner were 2.8 times higher, and of a paintress nearly 2.3; the fireman's wages were 2.6 times higher, the thrower's 2.2, and the handler's also 2.2. Moorcroft's independent practice was clearly exemplified in his non-membership of the British Pottery Manufacturers' Federation, formed in 1919 to counter the risk of unilateral price-cutting which had been so damaging before the war. As pressure increased to reduce prices and wages during the miners' strike, the *Pottery Gazette* underlined the importance of solidarity, encouraging the Federation 'to make a serious effort to get hold of the few firms who still remain outside the combination'.²³ Moorcroft clearly felt different (and distant) from manufacturers, whose ware, and manner of production, bore little resemblance to his own, and with whom he doubtless did not feel in competition. He did not exploit his position on the margins to seek commercial advantage, but he did use his independence to maintain his own levels of pay; trading success was not achieved at the expense of his staff.

This independence attracted the attention of the press. A substantial article on 'The Moorcroft Pottery' was published in the *Pottery Gazette* just weeks after Liberty's re-alignment of their relationship. Its focus, significantly, was not just on the ware itself but on the unique environment in which it was produced:

There is a factory at Cobridge—strange to say, one of the newest factories in the 'Five Towns', since it has not been erected more than about eight years—which, to the mind of the writer, seems to stand out from the ordinary run of Staffordshire manufactories in most of the essential points.²⁴

22 *PG* (November 1923), p.1830.

23 *PG* (May 1921), p.794.

24 'The Moorcroft Pottery', *PG* (November 1921), 1664–66 (p.1664).

The journalist contrasted Moorcroft's working practices in his 'art craft pottery' with the industrial trend towards economical and rapid modes of production; they were recognised as individual, bold in their conception, and visionary in their success:

[...] the tenor of this particular pottery is merely a counterpart of the spirit of its founder, who, in spite of his hesitation to accept with open arms every new idea in connection with pottery production as it comes along, has yet built up for himself and his products a reputation that will not easily be effaced, either in our time or later.²⁵

Of particular note was the sense of spaciousness and tranquillity, evident both in the physical surroundings and in the working spirit; it was a far cry from a manufactory. Significantly, the article attributed this congenial atmosphere to the practice of handcraft. Moorcroft was seen to have created an environment dictated above all by natural rhythms, with no haste and no accelerated processes; its effect on the workforce was plain for all to see:

We wish on the present occasion to emphasise how different is the spirit in which it is produced from that associated with the manufacture of ordinary utility lines of pottery. There is no working against time; no elaborated system of artificial drying (sun drying is preferred all the time); there are no scientific short cuts to standardised repetition work.²⁶

The same image was conveyed in an article published in *The World's Work*. From its predominantly business perspective, Moorcroft was singled out as an enlightened employer, an artist who cared for his staff as well as his art:

It is a point for remembrance that Moorcroft Pottery, admired and purchased by many famous patrons, including Her Majesty, Queen Mary, is produced in praiseworthy workrooms, making for the health and happiness of the workers.²⁷

Reference to healthy surroundings and the satisfaction of the workforce implicitly recalled the visions of Ruskin or Morris, but it also had a very topical resonance. Just months after the end of the miners' strike, at a time of increasing anxiety about prices, wages and competition, Moorcroft was presented as one whose response to the challenge of commercial survival was to produce high-quality ware in the most salutary environment for his employees. His works represented an eloquent response to the tense relations of the contemporary industrial world:

It is impossible to come into personal contact with Mr Moorcroft without feeling and knowing that he is absolutely determined to produce what is best in decorative pottery. It is quite true to say of him, that rare ability as an artist is supplemented by extraordinary enthusiasm and determination, attributes which make him a real helper of his fellow-men.²⁸

25 Ibid., p.1665.

26 Ibid., p.1666.

27 'A Master Potter', *The World's Work* (February 1922), 203–04 (p.204).

28 Ibid.

Another article, in the *Overseas Daily Mail*, also emphasised the very personal quality of Moorcroft's works:

The originator of the famous 'Moorcroft Pottery' has [...] built his own pottery studio, fashioning it after his own heart, and herein he has rounded off, softened and perfected his creations.²⁹

The journalist's choice of term—'studio', not 'factory'—was both deliberate and telling. It was widely recognised that Moorcroft was not in the business of mass production, that his employees were not simply cogs in a machine, and that his works were the site of collaborative artistic endeavour. But the use of the term implied too, consciously or unconsciously, an affinity with the independent potters whose work was beginning to attract attention and to whom the term 'studio potter' was increasingly attributed. The image of a pottery functioning in open space was a recurrent motif in articles on Dora Lunn's Ravenscourt Pottery, dubbed 'The Pottery in a Garden' by *Woman at Home* in September 1918, and praised in the *Sunday Pictorial*, September 1919, for its beneficial effects on the health of the employees. Unlike Lunn, Moorcroft was established in Burslem, at the very heart of the Potteries, and yet he was clearly distinguished from the industrial manufacturer. His works may well have been large in comparison, but their individual spirit was seen to be closer to that of a potter's studio than of a commercial workplace. The journalist from the *Pottery Gazette* depicted an enterprise motivated by the pleasure of craft, not the quest for profit; commercial success was a consequence, but it was not its aim:

Although scramble and rush, and the clank of the sorting tool, may be a common experience when viewing the Potteries as a whole, there are factories, a few at all events, where the conditions prevailing are exactly the reverse, where quiet, unhurried handicraft stands out as the all-important thing, and where commercialism only seems to exist in so far as it grows out of idealism.³⁰

4. Creating a Ceramic Art

Moorcroft's pottery of this time struck a chord with the public. Just four months after the Armistice, as the country was reflecting on effective means of commemoration, he was already giving form to dignified remembrance. At the end of the 1919 BIF, he left an example of such work for Edith Harcourt Smith; she wrote on 9 March 1919, her reaction more than just individual:

I wonder if you realise the intense delight you give everyone with your art. [...] When one looks back on these years of war, one wonders how we ever lived through them, the agony was such that I believe it can only have enriched and purified our souls; surely

²⁹ 'Ideal Art Productions', *The Overseas Daily Mail* (September 1923).

³⁰ *PG* (November 1921), p.1664.

this is so. Therefore these ornaments you have given me mean such a tremendous lot, in every sense.

That term 'mean' was not trivially meant; Moorcroft was making pottery which expressed a feeling, his own, but which communicated with the public for which it was destined. His success might be quantified in sales figures, but its significance was much deeper, embodied in an ability to capture and convey the spirit of the times. Such was the impact of his commemorative ware that it was selected for a Memorial exhibition at the V&A, prompting a letter of appreciation from the author and ceramics expert Mrs Willoughby Hodgson. Moorcroft replied on 16 August 1919; he wrote not as a man of business, but as an artist aware of his moral responsibility: 'I felt that it was almost a duty to symbolise in an indestructible material the period dating from August the 4th 1914 to the signing of the Armistice on the 11th of November 1918'.

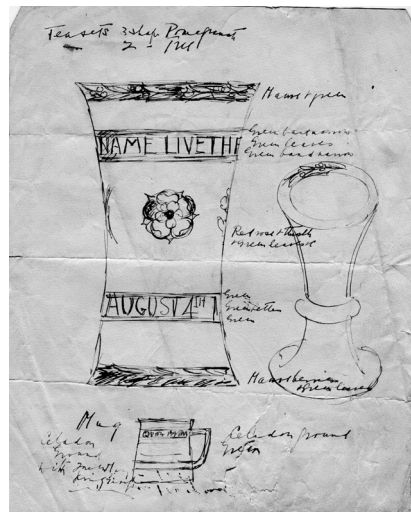


Fig. 70 William Moorcroft, Sketches for designs to commemorate the Armistice. 'Personal and Commercial Papers of William Moorcroft', Stoke-on-Trent City Archives, SD 1837. CC BY-NC

But Moorcroft was looking forward as well as back, and these immediate post-war years witnessed a phase of experiments in colour and innovative glaze effects, made possible by his new kilns. Charles Noke at Doulton Burslem, and William Howson Taylor, were continuing their experiments in glaze chemistry which had characterised the most advanced industrial art pottery since the turn of the century; Moorcroft followed this same exploratory route. It was his technical skill which was noted particularly in one report on his stand at the 1920 BIF; this was modern ceramic art at its best:

The crackle glazes, due to natural formation in the process of firing, are interesting alike in their sort of 'Jack Frost' pattern, and their subtle colour; and the texture glazes, particularly the orange-vermilion, present a strong note of pleasant colour.³¹

31 *Staffordshire Sentinel* (27 February 1920).

He also developed his lustre glazes, which had remained popular since their introduction in 1907. Decorated lustres such as Pilkington's Royal Lancastrian ware, or Daisy Makeig Jones' Fairyland lustres for Wedgwood, continued to be popular; Moorcroft, though, was focussing on unornamented wares. The *Pottery and Glass Record* commenting on his high-temperature examples:

This firm's lustres, impregnated in the glaze, are of rare beauty and of every colour. The dull lustres produced by extreme heat, the wonderful bronze which in some lights is pure gold, in others pink and green, and the lovely purple full of iridescence, which seems to echo the spirit of a rose garden, are all used on a body of the finest texture.³²



Fig. 71 Moorcroft's stand at the 1920 British Industries Fair. 'Personal and Commercial Papers of William Moorcroft', Stoke-on-Trent City Archives, SD 1837. CC BY-NC

What is striking is that many such wares, for all their absence of ornament, were seen to evoke the beauty of the world at large. If the journalist at the *Pottery and Glass Record* was reminded of a rose garden, Edith Harcourt Smith was transported further afield in a letter of 25 October 1920, as she beheld another experimental piece:

The vase which has just arrived reminds me of southern seas and skies, so refreshing in the midst of mist and darkness. We all are enjoying it to the full, it being on the hall table for the moment to enable everyone to continually see it. However did you find such a wonderful blue, inside as well as out. It's too delicious for words, and I thank you from my heart.

More new glaze effects were exhibited at the 1921 BIF; once again, Moorcroft's ware stirred the imagination of the observer, its pure suggestive power likened to fine art at the very edge of representation:

³² *Pottery and Glass Record* [PGR] (March 1920), p.183.

There is an indefinable charm and fascination that is part and parcel of them, something that is too subtle to find expression in a mere critique. One of the effects, secured by purely chemical means, reminded one, for instance, of a Whistler nocturne, with the stars shimmering in a purple background. It was a really wonderful effect.³³

These evocative effects culminated in a figurative design launched at the 1922 BIF, and illustrated in the *Pottery Gazette*. Returning to his constantly evolving studies of landscape, Moorcroft created a nocturnal scene, 'Green and Blue Tree', widely referred to as 'Moonlit Blue'. It embodied an atmosphere of tranquillity which would remain popular for more than a decade, offering a quiet contrast to the vibrant designs of the Jazz Age.



Fig. 72 William Moorcroft, 'Green and Blue Tree' (c.1923), 15cm. CC BY-NC

No less significant were his first flambé glazes, the subject of a short notice in *The Connoisseur*; once again, Moorcroft was represented as a potter whose mastery of technique put him at the forefront of ceramic art:

In fashioning these pieces, Mr Moorcroft not only utilises his own designs, but also mixes his own colours, and, by dint of careful experimentalising, has evolved a method by which he is able to produce *sang-de-boeuf* of the finest order.³⁴

These wares were noticed, too, in the trade press, the *Pottery Gazette* categorising some examples as 'purely collectors' pieces'. But for all the variety of his output, what was seen to unify Moorcroft's pottery was its enduring, almost haunting appeal; this distinctive quality characterised all he produced:

33 *PG* (April 1921), 600–01 (p.600).

34 'A New Departure in Moorcroft Pottery', *The Connoisseur* (May 1922), p.56.

[...] Mr Moorcroft's productions are such as will be thought of more and more as the history of English pottery develops. [...] those of the general public who have already been fortunate enough to become possessed of a specimen of Mr Moorcroft's handiwork know better than anyone else that Mr Moorcroft's pots are such as can be lived with indefinitely; for their beauty is not of an evanescent kind, rather does it grow upon one the longer one is associated with them. The writer speaks from experience, for he has amongst his worldly possessions a much-treasured Moorcroft tobacco jar.³⁵

A piece as obviously functional as a tobacco jar had, for this journalist, the same impact as an artwork. This was art for the everyday. But it was clearly seen, too, as art for the future; its appeal was not a matter of fashion, and its quality would endure.

Moorcroft's exhibit at the 1923 BIF was a triumph, and the attention paid to it by the King and Queen was given particular prominence in the press:

W.Moorcroft, Ltd., Cobridge, occupied what many people regarded as the stand of honour in the Pottery Section. Certainly quality and dignity were written all over the stand and its contents. [...] Queen Mary honoured Mr Moorcroft by purchasing a lustre bowl in various tones of green with a reflection of mauve and purple, and Their Majesties shook hands with Mr Moorcroft and congratulated him heartily upon his attainments in a beautiful craft.³⁶

That same year, an article in the *Pottery and Glass Record* depicted him explicitly as a potter like no other, outstanding both in his technical skills and in his artistic sensitivity:

[...] Mr Moorcroft is different to others, different in his knowledge of colour merging and grouping, different also in the innovations in the colour schemes he employs, which he carries through so successfully, different also in his knowledge of the blending qualities of the various colours, and the harmonising of colour effects.³⁷

This difference extended too to the nature of his success. This was a trade journal which recognised the commercial appeal of Moorcroft's ware, but it recognised, too, the unique way in which it was achieved. It was not the kind of ware which simply followed the fashions of the moment, nor did it require a reform of public taste; it was ware whose appeal was seen to be direct, spontaneous, even irresistible:

There is a charming freshness also about every new line he introduces, each demonstrating the originality of conception which appeals so strongly to the beauty-loving individual. It is no wonder then that Moorcroft ware has been so extensively purchased, by those most able to judge of its beauty and merit, and who reside in all parts of the world, and for which we know there is a steady increasing demand.³⁸

Such analysis was quite different from that given to works of industrial manufacture; it did not (simply) focus on commercial potential, but examined the potter's craft and

35 *PG* (February 1923), p.251.

36 *PG* (April 1923), p.660.

37 'Potters of Today, No.9: Mr W. Moorcroft', *PGR* (November 1923), 656–58 (p.657).

38 *Ibid.*

art. His status as an artist potter was confirmed in a review in *The Court Journal* which placed his work in the most revered of traditions:

[...] Baron Hayashi, the Japanese Ambassador, on purchasing two Flambé vases, expressed the opinion that the Moorcroft vases were so like early Chinese work that had Mr Moorcroft's name not been on, experts would find it difficult to note the difference. Early Chinese pottery is in such demand by collectors all over the world that that compliment to Mr Moorcroft's work is one that is highly valued, for it is, indeed, a striking tribute to the ideals of art in pottery which Mr Moorcroft endeavours to express with such skill and distinction.³⁹

This was particularly significant at a time when independent potters were establishing themselves literally and metaphorically far from the world of the Potteries, re-kindling debate about the nature of ceramic art.

At the start of this period, particular critical attention was being paid to the work of Bernard Leach and Shoji Hamada. Leach promoted his project, significantly in the *Pottery Gazette*, as the antithesis of mass-manufacture, 'a small private one, and not an industrial concern',⁴⁰ setting up polarities of hand and machine, artwork and commercial commodity, which would shape much debate for the next two decades. If the DIA and the BIIA were, in different ways, looking to imagine a collaboration of craft and mechanical production, Leach emphasised their opposition; the potter was an artist, not an industrial designer:

Mr Leach expressed the opinion that in such art the machine was a good servant, but a very bad master, and as one coming from the East he was impressed that there seems to be so little pottery in England that comes under the true heading of art.⁴¹

And his work was attracting the attention of critics. Charles Marriott, reviewing an exhibition of Leach's pottery at the Cotswold Gallery in *The Times*, stressed its functionality, but also its qualities of production:

All the pieces are for practical use [...] and should bear ordinary domestic handling. They are remarkable for dignity of shape, depth of colour, and quality of surface. [...] it is a pleasure to come upon pottery so artistic and yet so professional in the right sense of the word.⁴²

The same emphasis on craft characterised responses to Hamada's two exhibitions at the Paterson Gallery in Bond Street, in May and November 1923. Reviewing the first in *The Spectator*, William McCance emphasised the individuality of each piece, the unique expression of its creator like a work of fine art:

39 *The Court Journal* (2 March 1923), p.83.

40 'An Art Pottery in Cornwall', *PG* (December 1920), p.1661.

41 *Ibid.*

42 'Leach Pottery', *The Times* (14 November 1923), p.17.

It has that individual quality which comes through being handled reverently, from beginning to end, by a craftsman who not only loves but understands his craft. Each pot is as unique as a good piece of sculpture is, and is directly associated with the artist.⁴³

This was not the critical vocabulary applied to wares from industrial potteries, but it was (and had been) used in reviews of Moorcroft's work. In both cases, what was identified was the presence of the potter as craftsman, devoted to his work, individual in his expression; these were qualities which distinguished such work from the more standardised, impersonal products of modern manufacture. The article on Moorcroft in *The World's Work* presented him above all as a 'Master Potter':

Those who are acquainted with the work of Mr W. Moorcroft, artist and potter, will agree that his devotion to his calling, from an early age, and his marked success in producing many meritorious works of art, have earned for him the title which we have ascribed to him here. For his work is full of character, and his standards high. He thoroughly understands his craft [...].⁴⁴

And what was true of the potter's craft was true, too, of his art. McCance singled out in Hamada's work a harmony of decoration and form:

[...] his designs form, not a decoration adorning the surface, but an integral part of the form to which they have been applied. For this reason Mr Hamada usually refrains from the use of over-glaze decoration which, except in rare cases, destroys the integrity of the shape.⁴⁵

A review of the 1921 BIF in *The Connoisseur* represented Moorcroft in similar terms, as an artist potter whose three-dimensional vision matched ornament to form:

Mr Moorcroft [...] is an artist of great ability and originality, possessing that instinctive knowledge of the technical possibilities of his ware which ensures that all decoration shall be thoroughly congruous to the piece to which it is apportioned. Thus in all the examples shown, there was a harmonious unity of colour, form and decoration, combined under the same guiding spirit to form a work of art marked by a beautiful appropriateness in all its parts [...].⁴⁶

The differences of both aesthetic and production method between Moorcroft and the potters of St Ives are self-evident, but both were nevertheless seen to exhibit analogous characteristics—ceramic skill, individuality, integrity, a life beyond the immediate present—which set them apart, conceptually and qualitatively, from industrial production. Moorcroft's status as a ceramic artist was tellingly reflected in the selling

43 W. McCance, 'The Pottery of Mr Shoji Hamada', *The Spectator* (26 May 1923), p.886.

44 'A Master Potter', p.203.

45 W. McCance, 'The Pottery of Mr Shoji Hamada', *The Spectator* (26 May 1923), p.886.

46 'W. Moorcroft Ltd.', *The Connoisseur* (April 1921), p.246. Strikingly similar comments were made in *PG* as early as July 1916 (p.720): 'The main feature that strikes one in inspecting a piece of 'Moorcroft Ware' is that in no case does the decoration create the impression that it has been merely applied, but that, on the other hand, it is an integral part of the piece itself, a stage in the creation of the piece instead of a mere afterthought.'

prices of wares displayed at the 1923 exhibition of the BIA. The most expensive work exhibited by Carter, Stabler & Adams and Dora Lunn was for sale at £4, that of Howson Taylor at £10, and of Leach at £12. Some of Moorcroft's ware, however, was priced at £18; only Staite Murray, at £29, displayed vases with a higher ticket.⁴⁷

5. Conclusions

The World's Work characterised Moorcroft's achievement as the fulfilment of a destiny to be a 'Master Potter', a man of business but also, above all, an artist. Accompanying the article was a photograph of him examining a piece of lustre ware.



Fig. 73 Photograph of William Moorcroft published in *The World's Work* (February 1922), 'Personal and Commercial Papers of William Moorcroft', Stoke-on-Trent City Archives, SD 1837. CC BY-NC

It captured the very personal dimension to his work which was widely recognised and appreciated, both in the way he conducted his business and in the pots he produced. He was not seen as an industrial designer, but as a potter creating work which expressed his own personality. Writing to him on 21 March 1921, the Editor of *The Court Journal* saw this as the very reason for his success: 'I always feel about yourself that you are doing the work in life you would choose above all others, and that is why everything you send out has such an appeal.' For many, this quality was the hallmark of an artist potter. In a lecture given to the Art Section of the Ceramic Society, Bernard Rackham,

⁴⁷ Details quoted in R. Gotlieb, 'The Critical Language and Aesthetic Criteria of Art-Pottery Manufacturers and Studio Potters, 1914–1934', unpublished M.A. Thesis (RCA/V&A Course, History of Design and Decorative Art) [1987], p.24.

Keeper of the Department of Ceramics at the V&A, identified in craft ware a capacity to inspire a personal response which transcended fashion:

Hand-made pottery [...] awakened our sympathy precisely because it established, as it were, a contact between our own personality and that of their very human makers.⁴⁸

But he concluded that such work could not be commercially viable in this competitive, post-war world, and that it must inevitably remain the province of the fortunate few: ‘The artist potter might safely be left to himself—indeed, he must be so left, for to attempt to commercialise him was simply to destroy him as an artist.’⁴⁹ And yet this was precisely the challenge Moorcroft had set himself. And he was achieving it, creating pottery whose very sensitivity was at the heart of its widespread appeal and commercial success. It was an economic feat at a time of stagnating trade, but it was an achievement, too, of aesthetic and cultural significance, the realisation, in a quite unique way, of the underlying ambitions of the BIIA: to create affordable art for the modern home.

It was this personal dimension which made Moorcroft’s work successful; it is also what made him different. His working practices represented a quite unique fusion of pottery manufacturer and artist potter, just at the time when pottery production was dividing increasingly starkly into two opposing camps, the industrial and the studio. William Moorcroft brought to industrial manufacture the personal investment of a ceramic artist, at home in his craft and expressing himself through design; and he extended the individualised craft of the studio potter beyond the limited market of the connoisseur. He was an artist potter working at the heart of the industrial Potteries, and his anomalous distinctiveness was clearly recognised. Significantly, though, amid the constant flow of statements, reports and reviews about industrial and studio pottery, Moorcroft did not seek to theorise his own position. What mattered to him was not how his practice conformed (or not) to the ambitions or orthodoxies of others, it was the integrity of his work on its own terms; with that quality, he was confident it would appeal to the public. And that confidence was vindicated. His wife, Florence, wrote to him on 27 February 1920, understanding perfectly the significance of the acclaim he was receiving at the British Industries Fair: ‘It is a triumph for you, for good methods of production, and for the justification of the view that the public appreciates good work.’ Deeds mattered to him more than words, and he let his work speak for itself. At the end of the article on Moorcroft in the *Pottery and Glass Record*, the writer highlighted this attitude as his defining characteristic: ‘*Facta non verba* is a Latin quotation aptly fitting to the temperament of Mr Moorcroft’.⁵⁰

It was quite consistent with this belief that he supported the attendance of the general public at British Industries Fairs, even though official policy was to limit entry

48 B. Rackham, ‘English Pottery: its place in ceramic history’, *PG* (December 1921), 1797–99 (p.1799).

49 *Ibid.*

50 ‘Potters of Today, no.9: Mr W. Moorcroft’, *PGR* (November 1923), 656–58 (p.658).

to trade visitors only. Writing to the Board of Trade, 17 February 1921, he expressed an alternative view:

We have always [...] welcomed the many visitors who have not been direct buyers, as we have felt that their interest, indirectly, has been extremely valuable. This larger view appeals to us, and we spare no effort to give a publicity as wide as possible to our effort to make objects for everyday use, pleasant to look at and pleasing to live with [...].

Just as Moorcroft's designs were praised for their integration of ornament and form, so too did they embody the principle that art was not something distinct from everyday life. For him, functional objects, like decorative ones, should be of equivalent quality, both in design and production; they should be distinguished by their use, not by their quality. It is significant that he used neither the term 'art' nor 'design' in his statement, terms already laden with associations. But a review of his exhibit at the 1921 BIF had no such hesitation: 'Mr Moorcroft seems to be one of those artists who, by his quiet, steady, solid achievements, endeavours to show what art is rather than to explain it in public debate.'⁵¹ It was a position echoed in a letter of 10 June 1922 from F.Schmidt of Brinsmaid & Co., a glass and china retailer in Des Moines, Iowa: 'Everybody in the house thinks not in terms of merchandise but in terms of art when it comes to your product'. Moorcroft's balance sheets doubtless suggested a firm with a successful commercial strategy, but his relationship with his public transcended that of the economic transaction; he was not (just) creating a marketable product, he was bringing pleasure to people's lives.

Significant too, though, was not just Moorcroft's artistic integrity, but his boldness, his determination to be himself. He had not compromised his individuality, either by seeking employment in a firm, or by following the design fashions of the moment; he had created his own pottery, prepared to take risks for a project he believed in. He was producing ware which was completely distinctive, both in design and manufacture, and he was doing so in deteriorating economic conditions; he defied the orthodoxy of business practice, but he was determined to make it succeed. And the gamble was paying off: he was admired in both the trade and the art press, he had consolidated the confidence of Liberty's, and his ware was selling well the world over. The article in the *Pottery and Glass Record* understood this:

At the outset he ploughed a lone furrow, but has reaped a rich harvest therefrom, [...] rich in the manifest appreciation of a multitude of admirers and patrons. He risked a lot in embarking upon what was considered a precarious proposition. He has, however, met with a commensurate and gratifying return.⁵²

In the years to come, as the economic depression deepened, that courage and those artistic principles would be tested again, and again.

⁵¹ *PG* (April 1921), p.600.

⁵² *PGR* (November 1923), p.657.

9. 1924–25: Recognition of the Artist Potter

1. The British Empire Exhibition 1924

As economic conditions continued to deteriorate, many pottery manufacturers remained resistant to calls for design reform. At the conference following the Exhibition 'Industrial Art Today', organised by the British Institute of Industrial Art [BIIA], H.J.Plant (of R.H. & S.L. Plant) distinguished categorically between the potter and the artist; one truly understood the secret of commercial success, the other did not:

[...] there was a good deal of difference between a potter and an artist. An artist very often had ideals which were not commercial; but a potter was a man who had to make his living out of the making and selling of pots [...].¹

It was such sentiments which doubtless contributed to the lack of interest among manufacturers for the British Empire Exhibition.' A Minute of the General Purposes Committee of the British Pottery Manufacturers' Federation of 13 June 1923 recorded the 'exceedingly small number' of firms intending to exhibit.² Moorcroft, however, was committed to the project from the start. The Director of UK Exhibits was Sir Lawrence Weaver, advocate of contemporary architecture and founder of the Ashted Pottery, set up to provide work and training for disabled war veterans, and an exemplar of collaboration between potters and modern designers (such as Phoebe Stabler and Charles Herrick). Weaver welcomed Moorcroft's support, inviting him on 6 June 1923 to join the organising committee. He saw in him 'one of the few people with vision' among British potters, and promised him in the Palace of Industry 'a most prominent position commensurate to the beauty of your work'.

Moorcroft's stand, a model of modern exhibition design by Edward Maufe, provided the ideal backdrop for his pottery. In a letter to Weaver of 3 April 1924, he expressed great confidence in his exhibit, sure to 'surpass in quality anything we have hitherto shown'. Moorcroft's conception of his display was reflected in the wording of

1 'British Institute of Industrial Art. Conference on Pottery', *Pottery Gazette and Glass Trade Review* [PG] (December 1923), 1976–78 (p.1976).

2 All unpublished documents referred to in this chapter are located in William Moorcroft: Personal and Commercial Papers, SD1837, Stoke-on-Trent City Archives [WM Archive].

the advertisement for an assistant he placed in *The Times*; this was pottery raised to the level of art:

Lady (refined), reasonably accomplished linguist, required to receive British, Colonial and Foreign visitors at important art exhibit (pottery of world-wide repute) at and during the Wembley Exhibition.³

And so it proved. The stand, with its length of fifty feet (15.25 m) and four oval alcoves housing wares of exhibition proportions, was illustrated in the *Pottery Gazette*. Nothing in the review suggested a manufacturer's stall; this was a total work of art:

W.Moorcroft, Ltd., Cobridge, have a spacious and dignified stand, which provides a perfect setting for the wares displayed. It is not a comprehensive collection of everything which is produced at the Moorcroft pottery which is to be found here, but a restrained selection of pieces displayed in such a way that each individual piece has a chance to convey its own message and exert its own appeal.⁴

Moorcroft appointed two assistants to supervise his exhibit: D.C. Honey, a war veteran and Liberty's employee, and Hilda Brownrigg, a former army nurse, who had responded to the *Times* advertisement. Their regular reports paint a vivid picture of daily life at the Exhibition, and capture the esteem in which Moorcroft's ware was held. At a time when the public mood was low, his pottery was seen to have a uniquely engaging effect, even from a distance, even on those who had not encountered it before. In a report dated 7 July 1924, Brownrigg noted the reaction of visitors: 'A tremendous number of people come and say that this is the only really beautiful exhibit at Wembley, and as passers-by stop and look this way, one can see their lips forming the word 'beautiful'.' And for many others, it was clearly the stuff of collections, even in these straitened times:

People from Australia, Canada, New Zealand and South Africa have come in and said that they collect your pottery. Lady McGregor of Camberley was here on Wednesday with a party of friends, and is coming again to get some of the pottery.

The display attracted the attention of prominent public figures who wished to include pieces in personal collections. Charles Pellew, the 7th Viscount Exmouth, was President of the New York Society of Craftsmen, and in a report dated 21 July, Brownrigg recorded the admiration of Lord and Lady Exmouth for Moorcroft's distinctive effects of colour:

Lady Exmouth spent about half an hour looking at the flambé vases, and went off to fetch Lord Exmouth, who came and spent another half hour admiring the vases in the front three cases, and finally ordered two. One of them Lady Exmouth especially fell in love with, a beautiful mottled one with some beautiful moss green tints in with the red. [...] Lord Exmouth is intensely interested in the things, and wants to take the two pieces to New York to show them there how lovely the best English pottery is.

3 *The Times* (16 February 1924).

4 *PG* (July 1924), 1196–98 (p.1196).

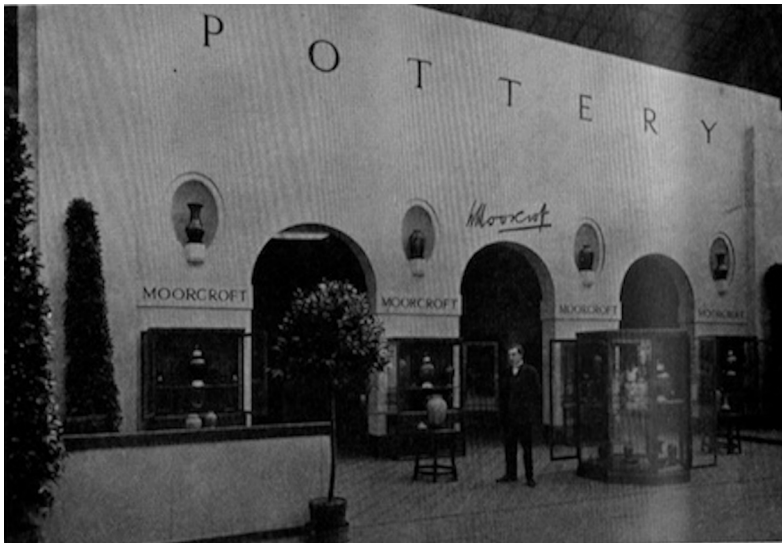


Fig. 74 Moorcroft's stand at Wembley, illustrated in the *Pottery Gazette* (July 1924). 'Personal and Commercial Papers of William Moorcroft', Stoke-on-Trent City Archives, SD 1837. CC BY-NC

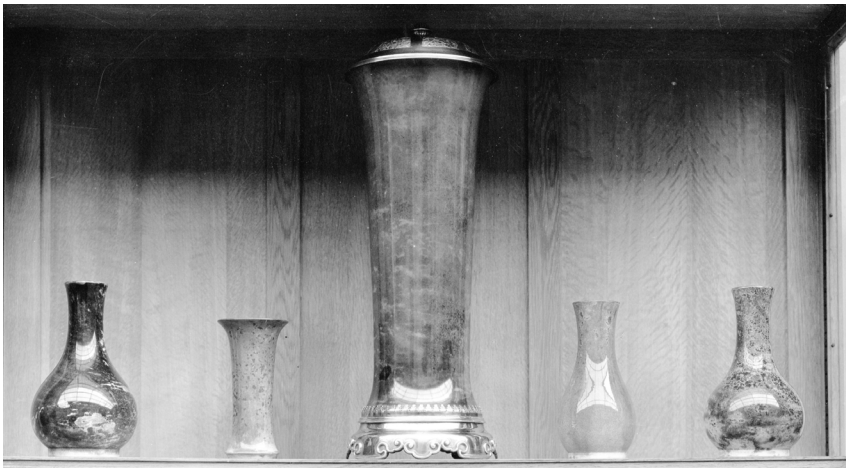


Fig. 75 Contemporary photograph of flambé vases included in Moorcroft's exhibit at the 1924 British Empire Exhibition. 'Personal and Commercial Papers of William Moorcroft', Stoke-on-Trent City Archives, SD 1837. CC BY-NC

And on 4 June, Honey recorded a visit from Sir John Sulman, leading Australian architect and President of the National Art Gallery of New South Wales. Moorcroft's ware was to be found in museums the world over:

I learned from Sir John that previous to him coming to Mr Moorcroft's stand he had visited the Palace of Arts and seen Mr Moorcroft's pottery. [...] Sir John also stated he had told Major Longden what amount of money he was prepared to spend on pieces of pottery, including Mr Moorcroft. Sir John stated to me that he very much admired the pottery and would like several pieces.

Moorcroft's Wembley display clearly inspired interest worthy of the 'art exhibit' he had envisaged in his advertisement. It is significant, therefore, that he should have decided to participate, simultaneously, at the British Industries Fair [BIF] that year. Normally planned for February, the Fair was re-scheduled to begin a week after the opening of the Empire Exhibition, a change of timetable designed to enable those exhibiting at the BIF to benefit from the influx of visitors to Wembley; the assumption was that no individual enterprise would choose to exhibit at both. And for good reason: a display at Wembley entailed considerable expense for a period of several months; to exhibit also at the BIF would incur yet more cost, as well as creating the need for a second display. The leading (larger) factories confined their efforts to just one exhibit, at Wembley; there was no mention of Minton, Doulton, Wedgwood, A.J. Wilkinson, Cauldon, Copeland, George Jones or Pilkington at the 1924 BIF. But Moorcroft exhibited there, one of just five potteries to feature in *Pottery Gazette* reports on both fairs, the other four being Gray & Co., Pountney, Upchurch, and Carter, Stabler & Adams. That he attended both says much about his ambitions, and about how he saw himself in relation to other firms. The Wembley exhibition gave him a high-profile stage for his finest exhibition pieces, but he would not neglect the main trade fair of the year; his aspirations as an artist potter were not met at the expense of his commitment to a broader public. And this was noticed in the press. *The Overseas Daily Mail* referred to both exhibits, confirming Moorcroft's excellence in the seemingly distinct fields of art and commerce:

A number of superb pieces are shown, distinguished by perfect potting, the best of shapes, which come from throwing on the wheel, and seductive colour and glaze effects. Specially fine are the ranges of flambé and sang-de-boeuf glazes, and there are some wonderful deep, translucent blues. [...] There is an equally fine show, more comprehensive in range, of Moorcroft ware at the British Industries Fair, and these two magnificent exhibits enhance the already high reputation of Mr Moorcroft as artist and potter.⁵

If H.J. Plant had starkly distinguished 'artist' and 'potter', Moorcroft was seen to unite them.

2. Paris 1925

Concern about the competitiveness of British industry was sharpened further the following year, on the occasion of the Exposition Internationale des Arts Décoratifs et Industriels Modernes in Paris. Explicitly excluding work which reproduced historical styles (still very popular in Britain), it aimed to celebrate the new materials, techniques and design motifs of a modern industrial age, the sinewy lines of nature and *art nouveau* giving way to a more angular and abstract world of the machine. The BIIA took responsibility for the selection of British exhibits, but interest among

⁵ *The Overseas Daily Mail* (22 August 1924).

pottery manufacturers was limited. For many, the more conservative Empire markets offered greater prospects of commercial success than Europe, where design taste was more progressive and unfavourable trade tariffs made it more difficult to compete. Moorcroft's attitude to the Exhibition was ambivalent. His work sold well in Europe, but in the spring of 1925 he withdrew his agreement to take part; it was not because of a disinclination to participate, but because he was unwilling to have his exhibits selected by the BIIA. On 11 May 1925, the Department of Overseas Trade attempted to reassure him of the Selection Committee's support; their letter was a clear sign of Moorcroft's reputation at this time:

[...] your absence from the pottery exhibit at Paris will be nothing less than misfortune, and I very much hope that in the interests of our national reputation for producing pottery of the very highest character, you will see your way to reconsider your previous decision [...].

The Exhibition displayed some of the most radical ceramic design of the age, including many examples of collaborations between artist designers and industry in both Scandinavia and Europe: Wilhelm Kåge for Gustavsberg, Jais Nielsen for Royal Copenhagen, Jean Gauguin and Axel Salto for Bing & Grøndahl, Gio Ponti for Richard-Ginori, René Buthaud for the Atelier Primavera, and Jean Luce for Haviland. The event revived trade rivalries with France, but it also highlighted disagreements among British manufacturers, artists and retailers about the aesthetic and commercial value of modern design. For some, it was no more than a passing fashion, and unlikely to win a solid market, least of all in Britain and the Empire. A report in the *Pottery Gazette* of July 1925 was clearly wary of the innovative exhibit of Gray & Co. (which included the first designs of the recently appointed Susie Cooper):

[...] we doubt very much whether, from a business-getting point of view, their efforts to conform to the original instructions issued by the exhibition authorities will recoup them to the same degree as if they had come forward with some of the types of patterns which they have shown at previous exhibitions.⁶

Gordon Forsyth, conversely, thought the British exhibits to be too conservative. In a lecture to the Art Section of the Ceramic Society, he deplored the absence of innovative energy, a criticism too, by implication, of the BIIA: 'The British ceramic section was badly set out, dull and uninteresting, and one would have liked to see more enterprise and artistic attack on the material.'⁷ In October 1925, *The Times* published a letter from Sir Lawrence Weaver. He recognised how the trading strength of both European and Scandinavian countries had been increased by their modernisation of industrial design, and his letter began with a provocative criticism of British manufacturers, characterised as unimaginative, out-of-touch, and, in consequence, increasingly uncompetitive:

⁶ PG (July 1925), p.1092.

⁷ 'Modern Development in Pottery Design', PG (December 1925), p.1863.

Can British industry afford, without grave results, to ignore the pulse of modernity which is throbbing throughout those European industries, and they are many which rely for their success on the Arts?⁸

Weaver's argument was economic, and founded on a valid perception: that designs modelled on historical styles had a limited and diminishing market in the Empire. The road to commercial success lay in a more creative and global view of both design and trade, not a nostalgic and narrowly imperial one:

Is it not the fact that the very few British manufacturers and distributors who see not Bolshevism, but a fresh and logical outlook in the modern manner, are prospering? Yet they have dared to turn from a sole devotion to reproductions, and to develop as though 1925 were really 1925, and not 1825, or 1725, or 1625.⁹

The letter encapsulated the modern view of industrial design, as befitted a future President of the Design and Industries Association [DIA], and it inspired a number of supportive responses. But it provoked, too, a reaction from Moorcroft whose attitude diverged significantly both from Weaver's and from the manufacturers whose attitude his letter had criticised.

Moorcroft drafted his response on 5 October 1925; his letter, abridged, was published on 7 October. He clearly shared Weaver's belief in the importance of design originality, but he could not reconcile this with Weaver's promotion of 'the modern manner':

But, to go with the idea of becoming obsessed with the 'pulse of modernity' as stated in Sir Lawrence's letter, would be somewhat unfortunate. If we are to succeed in the markets of the world, it will be mainly by being ourselves, and to ever remember that England is England.¹⁰

The notion of a national tradition had been explored the previous year by Bernard Rackham and Herbert Read in their landmark study, *English Pottery*; the authors, both employed in the Ceramics Department at the Victoria and Albert Museum, traced the demise of an expressive, native pottery in the wake of a fashion for neo-classicism popularised by Josiah Wedgwood. They argued that an external culture cannot be grafted successfully onto an indigenous one, while recognising that such influences may sometimes be irresistible:

Wedgwood must be excused; the circumstances were too much for him. In the same way in these days of new revelation of the Far East and Negro Africa circumstances are apt to be too much for those with no strong traditional instincts.¹¹

8 'Modern Art in Industry. Lessons of Paris Exhibition', *The Times* (3 October 1925), p.6.

9 Ibid.

10 'Modern Art in Industry', *The Times* (7 October 1925), p.10.

11 B. Rackham & H. Read, *English Pottery, its Development from Early Times to the End of the Eighteenth Century* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1924), p.124.

Moorcroft saw the same tension at work, now as then, between native and European aesthetics; to adopt the tropes of a modern European style would be no less stifling of individual creativity, he implied, than it had been to follow the neo-classical trend. His letter was a provocative declaration of intent. By re-stating the importance of being oneself, Moorcroft re-configured Weaver's polarised opposites: the aesthetic choice facing designers was not between modern and traditional, but between stylistic imitation and creative independence:

To copy or to follow modern notions as expressed in France or in any other country, would be in some degree injurious to our success in industry. If on the Continent as stated in Sir Lawrence's letter, they put aside traditional tendencies, will it not be to our advantage to have a sane regard for tradition? And, so let its silent influence govern in some degree our expression in colour and form.¹²

Moorcroft implicitly situated his own output in an indigenous, pre-industrial tradition, not because of any similarity of style, but because he associated native English pottery with work of individual character rather than with a more uniform, industrialised look. He was determined to defend this principle, no less creative or vital than the 'pulse of modernity' celebrated by Weaver. And if Weaver's argument was conducted largely on commercial grounds, Moorcroft's response re-affirmed his long-held belief that good design was determined above all by aesthetic criteria. His own works did not reproduce a 'look', modern, historical or otherwise, but they invariably caught the eye; and it was this quality of individuality which underlay their success, both artistic and commercial.

The second page of Moorcroft's draft response was omitted from *The Times*. It developed the idea of national tradition as the basis of good (and therefore competitive) design; it was not a matter of style, but of self-expression:

If the workshops of England are to be kept fully employed, will it not be mainly by expressing ourselves as workers of England should, in a purely English form, bearing in mind the importance of tradition. If we are to allow the work as seen on the Continent to interfere with our indigenous art, it will increase competition and make things much the worse for us.

Moorcroft's intervention highlighted a tension between two aesthetics, but even more was at stake. The Paris exhibition had celebrated the close collaboration of designers and manufacturers in the production of industrial art; the work of the emerging studio potters in Britain was coming to represent quite different conceptions of ceramic art and of its relationship with industry. Terms such as 'workshops' and 'expressing ourselves' were not in the vocabulary of a manufacturer engaged in mass production; Moorcroft spoke as an artist potter, defending his own distinctive principles and practice.

12 *The Times* (7 October 1925), p.10.

3. Revisiting the Relationship of Art and Industry

A distinction between 'Art' and 'Industry' was enshrined in both the Wembley and the Paris exhibitions, both of which divided exhibits into these two categories. For the *Pottery Gazette*, the nature of work in the Palace of Arts was clear, and clearly different from that in the Palace of Industry: 'if one is interested in pottery and glass from the aesthetic point of view, as distinct from the commercial aspect, there is a good deal to see, and much to interest one.'¹³ The journalist distinguished pottery designed for reproduction and sale in quantity, and pottery made as individual items, each piece to be appreciated on its own terms. But there was more. From the industrial perspective of the *Pottery Gazette*, there was a distinction, too, at the level of technical quality; studio pottery might be more expressive, but it lacked finish, an inevitable consequence of its being made by hand:

In the same gallery we also came across numerous specimens of work by well-known studio potters, but in many cases we should regard these as being more artistically attractive than they are good technically—which, however, is perhaps as it should be in a Palace of Art.¹⁴

For others, though, technical perfection was not in itself a virtue. Rackham and Read contrasted the vitality of thrown ware with the coldness of the mass-produced:

Forms capable of being multiplied without variation from a single original model cannot but have a much smaller interest than those in which each individual piece is the direct expression of the potter's instinct.¹⁵

As debate continued about the need to make pottery more competitive, the distance between studio and factory increased. If the Paris exhibition had celebrated the results of modern industrial design, Paul Konody, reviewing the work of William Staite Murray and Reginald Wells in *The Observer*, implied a fundamental difference between work made for trade and work made to express the artist:

[...] modern English potters are at the present moment exhibiting the products of their taste and skill, and demonstrating the aesthetic possibilities of china-clay, earthenware and stoneware when the manipulation of these materials is left to the initiative of individual artists, instead of being ruled by commercial concerns [...].¹⁶

Studio pottery was seen to have an authenticity of conception absent from industrial wares, designed to meet 'commercial concerns'. Written just weeks after Moorcroft's letter to *The Times*, Konody's review also celebrated the freedom of the potter to use his own initiative, to be himself.

¹³ *PG* (August 1924), p.1353.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p.1354.

¹⁵ Rackham & Read, *English Pottery*, p.129.

¹⁶ P.G. Konody, 'Modern English Ceramics', *The Observer* (22 November 1925), p.17.

Moorcroft was as committed to craft as the studio potters around him. In a tradition extending back to Ruskin and Morris, he defended the individuality of true manufacture against the uniformity of the machine. Just a month before his letter to *The Times*, he was in correspondence with the Canadian retailer Ryrie Birks who, on 10 September 1925, had requested a refund for a batch of pots which, they claimed, were imperfect. In a terse conclusion, they suggested that Moorcroft may have given more attention to the selection of his exhibition pieces for Paris than he had to his retail wares, implying that he cared more for his reputation as an artist than he did for the satisfaction of his customers. The allegation was provocative, and it provoked a response. Moorcroft's reply, dated 2 October 1925, is one of very few of his business letters to have survived; it is an invaluable statement of his principles as a potter. After a strenuous denial that he would allow the despatch of imperfect ware, he set out what distinguished his pottery from industrial production. Categories of first and second quality were doubtless appropriate for wares which reproduced a template design, and from which deviations might be construed as imperfections. With ware made entirely by hand, however, the notion of quality was to be understood differently:

The pottery we send at a special rate, which we do not admit as 'seconds', has some feature in it that we consider reduces the value of the piece, from our point of view. As you know, each object we make is created on the wheel, and entirely handmade. We have no actual duplicates. And in making pottery that is so entirely human in nature, it is impossible to get all pieces, or even any pieces to suggest a mechanical standard.¹⁷

His criterion of quality was not simply technical, as it was for industrial ware, it was also aesthetic; each piece was individual, and was judged on its own terms. His letter finished with a flourish. Moorcroft knew the value of his pottery, and he distinguished between the perfection of the machine-made pot and the enduring appeal of the handmade; one was impersonal, the other was alive:

If you were to examine the pottery in any famous collection, you would find that some of the most treasured pieces have the faults that you now complain of in a much more serious form. The real value is found in the difference between an entirely human production and a machine made product. The created article is always one possible to live with, while the mechanical product always becomes wearisome to live with. Moorcroft Pottery is entirely creative. There are no mechanical means used in making it.

This was the voice of a potter venturing where it was thought a craft potter simply could not survive, in competition with industrially manufactured wares. The challenge was not just economic, that of producing hand-produced ware in sufficient quantity to be cost-effective, it was a question too of perception. Moorcroft's experience with Ryrie exemplified what could happen when the criteria of industrial production were

¹⁷ Brownrigg clearly understood this principle, reporting from Wembley on 10 September 1924: 'People often come and ask me for 'seconds' to take away as souvenirs, but I say that there are no such things in Moorcroft Pottery. That is right, isn't it?'

used to evaluate works made by hand; his response was to defend it with the criteria of an artist.

4. Pottery as Art

For all that the work of British studio potters was included in the Wembley and Paris exhibitions, many also held exhibitions of their pottery in galleries, prompting reflection on the nature of ceramic art. Rackham and Read contributed much to the identification of pottery as a vehicle for artistic expression; while recognising its origins in function, the authors stressed above all its sculptural qualities:

Sculpture, whether glyptic or plastic, had from the first an imitative intention, and is to that extent less free for the expression of the aesthetic sense than pottery, which may be regarded as plastic art in its most abstract form.¹⁸

Read's essay, 'English Pottery: an Aesthetic Survey', took this further. He gave to studio pottery an identity quite separate from that of industrial wares, distinguishing clearly between 'Formal values' associated with both medieval and contemporary craft ware, and the 'Utilitarian and commercial values' of nineteenth-century industrial production; expressiveness was associated with studio pottery, and functionality with industry.¹⁹ Staite Murray who, significantly, exhibited alongside artists and sculptors Paul Nash, Winifred Nicholson and Jacob Epstein at the Lefevre Galleries shortly before the opening of the Paris Exhibition, noted the revival of pottery as a vehicle for self-expression in an article of 1925,²⁰ and Rackham observed the same quality in the work of Wells; this was the mark of an artist:

Several artists have begun to find in clay as a material and the kiln as an auxiliary agent a sympathetic means of self-expression. Among these artist-potters is Mr Reginald F. Wells [...].²¹

Significantly, the expressiveness of ceramic art was not directly associated with ornament. On the contrary. Rackham and Read were critical of figurative ornament, implicitly distancing themselves from the classical aesthetic of the Grecian Urn, and of its industrial revival by Wedgwood:

[...] a 'leaf-fringed legend' about its shape is likely to detract attention from the essential properties of that shape. [...] Pottery is, at its best, an abstract art, and its decoration should be in harmony with its abstract nature.²²

18 Rackham & Read, *English Pottery*, p.4.

19 H. Read, 'English Pottery: an Aesthetic Survey', *Apollo* (December 1925), 318–23.

20 W. Staite Murray, 'Pottery from the Artist's Point of View', *Artwork* (May-August 1925), 201–05 (p.201): 'Pottery as a means of expression in Art has in the last few years been re-established'.

21 B. Rackham, 'The Pottery of Mr Reginald F. Wells', *The Studio* (December 1925), 359–63 (p.359).

22 Rackham & Read, *English Pottery*, p.7.

And if industrial design tended to focus on ornament rather than form as the key to commercial success (or failure), Read, writing later, had no doubt that it undermined an object's artistic quality:

In short, any decoration can only be justified in so far as it serves to accentuate or enhance the form of the pot. As a matter of fact, we shall find that in general, especially in England, the decorative elements have been allowed almost complete sway in the historical development of the craft; but this has always been to the detriment of real aesthetic values.²³

From this perspective, it followed that the best pottery was the creation of a craftsman; it was not a matter of creating a design for others to realise in clay, it required a potter's sensitivity to form and to the particular qualities of his materials. For Staite Murray, practical skill (rather than an aptitude for graphic design) was the essential prerequisite of ceramic art:

Of all the arts pottery demands the highest technical knowledge, and however great the urge, the artist cannot express himself through pottery until he has acquired by very hard work a knowledge of his materials and their chemical reactions.²⁴

Hence the value attached to control of glaze, for example. In his article on Wells, Rackham underlined again the predominant importance of form, but clearly saw colour as another vehicle of artistic expression:

But strength and beauty of form are not the only values that can be realised in pottery. Only second in importance is colour, especially the colour obtainable in the process of glazing. In this sphere the Chinese have been the great masters [...].²⁵

If industrial design tended to favour novelty of decoration over appropriateness, it was attention to the relationship of form, ornament and colour which was seen to characterise ceramic art. Marriott's review of Staite Murray's second exhibition at the Paterson Gallery, singled out the 'consistency' of its constituent elements:

The glazes, in a sober range of grey, blue, and brown, with variations which could only be described by 'fancy' names, are technically perfect, and all decoration is by way of comment on shape or surface. Above all, there is the consistency between shape, colour and texture—and implied weight—which makes a piece of pottery a work of art.²⁶

Such qualities had often been identified in the work of Moorcroft, and his status as a ceramic artist was affirmed in an article published in the *Daily Graphic* by the paper's editor J. Fraser, writing at the height of the British Empire Exhibition. Fraser implicitly situated Moorcroft's pottery in a medieval English tradition, describing his skill as a

23 Read, 'English Pottery: an Aesthetic Survey', p.318.

24 Staite Murray, 'Pottery from an Artist's Point of View', p.201. Not coincidentally, Murray's appointment to the RCA in 1925 would lead to his training of artist potters rather than of industrial designers.

25 Rackham, 'The Pottery of Mr Reginald F. Wells', p.359.

26 C. Marriott, 'The Work of the Potter', *The Times* (13 November 1925), p.10.

potter in pre-industrial guild terms, and his work as that of a master craftsman. This was pottery for collectors, certain to survive into posterity. McCance had described Hamada's pottery as 'tradition in the making';²⁷ Fraser saw in Moorcroft 'the old master of tomorrow':

Such a master potter is William Moorcroft, an artist of the most distinguished gifts, whose work may be seen in the Palaces of Industry and of Art at the British Empire Exhibition. His technical equipment is superb. The master of today is the old master of tomorrow, and the discerning connoisseur does not lose sight of this fact. Moorcroft Pottery will be the quest of collectors of future generations, for it is the perfect expression of the potter's art, of that inherent beauty which 'is a joy for ever', whose 'loveliness increases.'²⁸

Just as Rackham would do in his review of Wells, Fraser drew attention to Moorcroft's skill in his control of glazes and his sensitivity to colour. His technical accomplishments were equated with those of the finest oriental potters, Fraser pointedly recalling Ambassador Hayashi's reaction to his ware:

In design, harmony, delicacy and richness of colouring this stands unique among ceramic ware of today. Baron Hayashi, the Japanese Ambassador, in purchasing two Flambé vases last year, said the Moorcroft vases were in every way the equal of early Chinese work—a very great compliment indeed.²⁹

But Fraser stressed, too, the expressive quality of this pottery. Each piece was considered on its own terms, as an individual work of art; whether ornamented or not, each was seen to engage the attention of the onlooker, the creation not just of a potter but of an artist:

Stall 464 M in the Palace of Industry provides a real feast of beauty. Take, for example, the vase with oxydised silver lid and base, entitled 'Moonlit Tree', a nocturne in blue and old gold, with foliage of blue-grey and pale gold against deep dark blue, and misty blue hills encircling the base. It is a masterpiece. Or the magnificent Rouge Flambé vase, richly mottled in translucent reds, purples, greys and greens, subtly toning into shades of black; or the tall vase, 'Autumn Tree' on a black carved ebony stand, with its splendid sunset effect behind the trees, its valley and winding paths. Only a great artist, a great colourist, could produce these. There is, too, a delightful beaker, mounted in oxydised silver, of a rich opal, flecked with golden, feathery cloudlets, and melting into purple and russet towards the base. It is the work of a poet.³⁰

This was a significant article, published in a newspaper of national circulation. Moorcroft's ware was situated far from the world of industrial production, for all that the pots described were exhibited in the Palace of Industry. Fraser made no mention of functionality, nor of fashion; his focus lay entirely on the impact of his wares. The article

27 W. McCance, 'The Pottery of Mr Shoji Hamada', *The Spectator* (26 May 1923), p.886.

28 J. Fraser, 'A Potter of Genius', *Daily Graphic* (28 June 1924).

29 Fraser, 'A Potter of Genius'.

30 Ibid.

was noticed, and prompted Weaver to write on 9 July 1924: ‘Mr Fraser’s appreciation of your work makes very pleasant reading, and must be to you a real reward for the splendid work you have done in your craft.’ And it was quoted in full in the *Pottery and Glass Record* of July 1924 under the heading ‘Justifiable Praise’. This perception of Moorcroft’s pottery as work of enduring beauty was appreciated even in the trade press; he was recognised as a potter quite like no other.



Fig. 76 William Moorcroft, Tobacco jar in the ‘Autumn Tree’ design (c.1924), 14cm. CC BY-NC

If Moorcroft’s work was silently distinguished from commercial wares, Fraser made no reference either to studio pottery. Moorcroft’s aesthetic principles were clearly different, but in both approaches to the art of pottery an equivalent expressiveness was sensed; Rackham and Read analysed pottery in terms of its sculptural qualities, Fraser likened Moorcroft’s work to poetry. Their comparable eloquence is perhaps most strikingly suggested in evidence of a much less public nature. Marriott’s review of Staite Murray’s exhibition at the Paterson Gallery in 1924 described not just the objects but the effect they produced:

To say that the stoneware pottery by Mr W.S. Murray [...] is a delight to the eye is to understate its appeal, because it conduces to a satisfaction—a sort of peace that passes understanding—in which several senses are engaged [...]. His pieces—bowls, dishes, vases, bottles, and jars—have a consistency in form, colour, surface, substance, and weight, for which ‘holiness’ in the original meaning, is hardly too strong a word.³¹

In this published review, Marriott explored how a perception of unity and balance in Staite Murray’s pottery induced in the onlooker an experience of stillness. In a private

31 C. Marriott, ‘Stoneware Pottery’, *The Times* (19 November 1924), p.7.

letter to Moorcroft dated 6 July 1924, the journalist Lillian Joy described (via Mary Baker Eddy) a response to his pottery of equal intensity:

I must tell you in conclusion that the things came at a moment when I had been having a very difficult and trying time, and it was simply wonderful the sense of happiness they seem to bring with their beauty. It made me realise what a great thing people who are making really beautiful things are doing for the world. My favourite writer says 'beauty typifies holiness'. Well, thank you ever so much.

Writing in quite different circumstances, and about quite different styles of pottery, both journalists nevertheless found in the same term a means of conveying an experience of harmony both physical and spiritual in its force.

5. Art and Manufacture

If the Paris exhibition celebrated the collaboration of designers and manufacturers, studio potters in Britain operated in a more splendid isolation. In a review of Leach's exhibition at the Paterson Gallery in 1925, Marriott acknowledged the 'problem' of creating affordable, well-designed and well-made functional pottery; he surmised a role for craft pottery in its solution, but he had no clear vision of how it might be effected:

The Leach Pottery does not touch directly the problem of an inexpensive artistic pottery for domestic use, but, indirectly, it is bound to have a good influence upon manufacture by setting a high standard of design and execution.³²

And although in his article on Wells, Rackham suggested that studio ware was already influencing industrial design, he offered little evidence of it:

We can only be glad of the progress that has been made in this country since the war in appreciation of such wares as those of Mr Wells. They are valuable not only for their own sake, but also for the wholesome stimulus they give towards the improvement of pottery made for useful purposes on purely commercial lines.³³

Studio potters and manufacturers may have shared the same exhibiting spaces, but there was little practical collaboration; even the more progressive manufacturers still looked to artists rather than potters for their designs.

For all that the difference between studio and industrial ware seemed categorical, Rackham and Read sought nevertheless to elaborate criteria for judging pottery irrespective of its means or period of manufacture. Blending art history and design theory, their *English Pottery* covered both sides of pottery production, craft wares and the mass-produced output of Josiah Wedgwood and beyond; it sketched out the

32 C. Marriott, 'Chinese Art and English Pottery', *The Times* (9 June 1925), p.9.

33 Rackham, 'The Pottery of Mr Reginald F. Wells', p.360.

parameters of a beneficial influence of pre-industrial pottery on modern industrial design:

Our chief purpose in writing this book has been to treat the subject from a critical point of view, and to introduce standards which may be helpful, not only to collectors [...], but also to designers and craftsmen whose aim it is to develop the English tradition in the future.³⁴

The Introduction was as prescriptive as it was historical, clearly echoing the spirit of the DIA as it linked good functionality to pleasing form:

The form of an earthenware vessel should in the first place be strictly appropriate to its use. It may be unfailingly demonstrated that all departures from utilitarian form, when the intention is utilitarian, weaken the aesthetic appeal.³⁵

It praised the value of ‘symmetry or some more subtle balance’, and drew again on the notion of vitality, a quality as evident in a pot’s design as in its execution:

In addition to symmetry or balance, a good vessel possesses vitality, a quality due to the instinct of the potter. [...] The eye registers and the mind experiences in the contemplation of energetic lines and masses a sense of movement, rhythm, or harmony which may indeed be the prime cause of all aesthetic pleasure.³⁶

The book made a case for judging all pottery from the same aesthetic perspective, without reference to fashion or commercial considerations. The implication was that good work would sell; it was the view of Moorcroft from the beginning:

[...] a manufactured article must be judged by aesthetic standards which are entirely independent of ethical and economic considerations; an object is appropriate and beautiful on the evidence of its obvious qualities, and all other questions are irrelevant to our enquiry.³⁷

No distinction was made between pottery made by hand or by machine, but Read, in his later article, saw a greater sensitivity to form in the work of some studio potters than in the products of modern designers:

Only in modern times, particularly in the hands of Mr W.S. Murray and Mr Bernard Leach, has there been a revival of that sense of formal values which we must persist in regarding as the essential quality of the potter’s art.³⁸

If all pottery was best judged by the same criteria, then industrial design failed to meet them. Against the background of the Paris Exhibition, this was a telling conclusion.

34 Rackham & Read, *English Pottery*, p.vii.

35 *Ibid.*, p.6.

36 *Ibid.*, p.7.

37 *Ibid.*, p.8.

38 Read, ‘English Pottery: an Aesthetic Survey’, p.320.

It was this gap between studio and factory wares, though, that Moorcroft was seen to be bridging. Fraser implicitly recognised this when he situated Moorcroft in the Burslem tradition of pottery production which, significantly, included both individual potters and industrialists, both Toft and Wedgwood. But it was more than this. What was repeatedly noted was that all his wares, whatever their cost or status, had the same quality, and the same effect on the customer. This was exemplified at an exhibition of his ware at Jenner's, the exclusive Edinburgh retailer, in the weeks following the British Empire Exhibition; Hilda Brownrigg once again supervised the exhibit and wrote regular reports to Moorcroft. Expensive exhibition pieces and more affordable wares clearly inspired the same delight; this was ware whose quality was not simply appreciated by connoisseurs (or Japanese Ambassadors), but by a general public eager to own even a small example of the potter's art. Brownrigg's report of 19 December 1924 captured this effect:

Your pottery has been most tremendously admired here, and has sold very well [...] The big beautiful flambé vases have caused a great sensation. Unfortunately there are no people wealthy enough to buy them. The two lovely little flambé bowls that you sent last, sold immediately, and also the flambé tobacco jar and fruit dish. [...] The decorated is selling well all the time. The small flambé bowls at about 25s [shillings] or 30s would sell over and over again.

The exhibition attracted a review in the *Edinburgh Evening News*. The appeal of Moorcroft's work was clearly recognised, but it was implicitly distinguished from the attraction of a fashionable object; it was deeper and more lasting in its effect:

Mr William Moorcroft, who is responsible for the majority of these lovely objects, is more than an artistic potter—he is a potter who is a great artist. He has stabilised a type in British pottery, and has spared no time and effort to make these ornaments in every minute detail a 'joy for ever'.³⁹

What was stressed (again) were the qualities of beauty, permanence, individuality; he was creating fresh and original effects, some using ornament, others not, but all engaging the attention of the observer:

The 'Autumn Tree' conjures up all the golden joy of such harvest days as we would like to see, but seldom do; while the haunting fascination of a summer's night is embodied in the subtle allure of one he calls 'Moonlit Tree'. I am told that many artists have expressed great admiration for this beautiful fantasy in clay; I do not wonder. It is almost impossible to describe the newest of Mr Moorcroft's achievements—the Rouge Flambé pottery; it is so utterly different from anything already created in that line. It is almost like iridescent marble, so brilliant, yet with so much depth and warmth of colour.⁴⁰

39 J. Januck, 'The Potter's Art: Some Lovely Things from Wembley', *Edinburgh Evening News* (2 December 1924), p.3.

40 Ibid.

Januck identified in Moorcroft's work the same qualities appreciated by Fraser in his *Daily Graphic* article. But if Fraser had presented to his national readership a collector's potter above all, Januck offered her more local readers the promise of a more affordable art. Whether decorative or functional, exclusive or more moderately priced, the special quality of Moorcroft's pieces was not compromised:

Silver being a particularly fitting accompaniment to such beauty, several of the larger jars have base and charged caps of this princely metal. The largest of these (it costs £135) was much coveted at Wembley by certain German connoisseurs, who were very anxious to take it to a collection of fine arts in Dresden. Very naturally we are not looking for anything just about that price in our Christmas list, but I dare say the fact that articles in Moorcroft ware may be had from 3s 3d [three shillings and three pence] will prove a useful little bit of information if you elect to give china on the 25th.⁴¹

The difference between art works fit for museum collections and smaller domestic pieces was not quality of design or of execution, it was a matter of elaboration (and consequent cost); one was not an industrialised version of the other, neither made by machine to look handmade, nor designed to a new machine aesthetic. If manufacture was moving slowly towards standardisation of design and production, Moorcroft's ware offered individuality as standard.

Even his tableware inspired a similar delight, and not just in the rhetoric of journalists or retailers; it was the spontaneous response of the owners themselves. The *Pottery Gazette* had warned starkly of the consequences of post-war depression:

Food and drink, the prime necessities of life, are just as palatable and nourishing when served in plain blue and white or W. & G. earthenware as in the finest china; vases and ornaments come to be regarded only as 'something more to dust' in a household that is short of domestic labour.⁴²

But Moorcroft's ware continued to appeal, not to fashion, whether retrospective or contemporary, but to instincts, emotions and needs more deep-seated, more enduring. For Edith Harcourt Smith, writing on 6 December 1923, its effect was transformative: 'You have been so kind in making the pottery which we all enjoy all the time. One's food tastes quite different, believe me.' [Emphasis original] And in her letter to Moorcroft of 6 July 1924, Lillian Joy expressed the perspective of a much less affluent market. Even a humble tea set could inspire the kind of appreciation normally reserved for a decorative object; useful ware was not just used, it was treasured:

Journalist as I am, I do not find it easy to find just the language which shall convey to you the enormous amount of pleasure that your gift of lovely Moorcroft pottery has given me. [...] A cup and saucer I actually bought once, and then thought that it had been rather extravagant as I could have done without it, and gave it, with much reluctance, to my sister as a Christmas present ! [...] I love the shape of the sugar basin too, and do not

41 Ibid.

42 'The Trend of Public Taste in Pottery, *PG* (September 1924), p.1499.

think I have ever seen it before, though I always seize an opportunity of looking at the pottery whenever I see a display of it. And I think the way that little edge of white shows in all the things is so charming. [Emphasis original]

Moorcroft's special appeal both to collectors and to domestic households, with both decorative and functional wares, was being noticed. In a continuation of its report on the Paris exhibition, the *Pottery Gazette* distinguished the two categories of 'industry' and 'art' in the starkest terms, seeing in the first 'what is produced as an article of commerce under industrial conditions' and in the second 'what is produced merely as a studio creation'.⁴³ It was the difference between mass-produced and individually made wares, those made as a trading commodity and those made as a means of expression, the predominantly functional and the predominantly decorative. The distinction was clear, and yet, for all that, the critic recognised that neither of these two categories adequately covered the work of some potters:

We realise, of course, that at times it is extremely difficult to know just where to draw the line between the two types of productions, particularly as a number of our best-known firms of potters are largely actuated by the studio spirit, and are rather inclined to foster the studio atmosphere on their works, or, at least, in certain sections, if not throughout the entire factory. We have in mind at the moment three or four concerns of repute, such as W. Moorcroft, Ltd., Carter, Stabler & Adams, Ltd., and Mr W. Howson Taylor, all of whom are rightly placed in the commercial section. In these particular instances, however, pottery is produced on an industrial scale, although art may be said to be the dominating factor.⁴⁴

The three firms mentioned were all much smaller in size than the leading manufacturers, but they were also very different from each other. Howson Taylor continued to attract attention for his glaze effects, and Carter, Stabler & Adams for their collaborations with modern decorative designers, both Truda Carter and commissioned artists. Moorcroft's work, however, inspired a different kind of analysis; the report on his exhibit focussed neither on technique nor on design, but on the integrity and expressiveness of his wares:

Of all the exhibits presented in the ceramic section of the Grand Palais none could be regarded as being more stimulating than that of W. Moorcroft, Ltd., of Cobridge, whose displays always powerfully exemplify, to our way of thinking, how art in relation to pottery production can become a cogent and articulate thing. There is nothing vapid or imitative about the creations of Mr Moorcroft; the art that is in them is evolved from within, and is part of the actual creation, as distinct from a mere added element. It is this which, during the last twenty years, has brought Mr Moorcroft right to the forefront of English ceramic art potters.⁴⁵

43 'Pottery and Glass at the Paris Exhibition of Decorative Arts', *PG* (September 1925), p.1397.

44 *Ibid.*

45 *Ibid.*, pp.1397-98.

It is significant that his work was analysed as much in terms of what it was not, as of what it was; if much contemporary pottery might have seemed ‘vapid’ or ‘imitative’, Moorcroft’s had its own distinctive voice. And its defining quality of integrity, wholeness, was seen to extend back to the potter’s first international triumph at St Louis, in those very different days of 1904; the decorative idiom had clearly changed, but the underlying coherence of design remained a constant. This was a quality which critics identified in studio pottery, but here, crucially, it was seen to characterise the whole of William Moorcroft’s output, both his collector’s pieces and his more modest functional objects:

His creations are always sound and substantial; whilst they are essentially works of art, they are intensely practical, and they seem to combine all that is true and best in a concentrated form. [...] Included amongst the pieces shown are many choice specimens which will doubtless find their way ultimately into museums and private collections. We have heard that, at Wembley last year, a hundred pounds was offered for a single piece of Moorcroft ware, but, although this may be very interesting as indicating how highly some of Mr Moorcroft’s creations are appraised by connoisseurs, we are just as much comforted by the thought that even a simple and tolerably inexpensive piece of Moorcroft ware is regarded by thousands of people as a priceless possession.⁴⁶

The anecdote of the German connoisseur and the expensive flambé vase was particularly significant. The journalist reviewing the Wembley exhibits of studio pottery in the *Pottery Gazette* had commented wryly on the high price asked of some pieces, evidence, it was implied, of a discrepancy between the potter’s view of their value and that of the market:

Many of the pieces exhibited by the studio potters have a certain value put upon them in the catalogue—and, if we may say so, not a small value at that. [...] However, art is always a trifle difficult to evaluate in terms of hard cash. [...] the value of any given article is probably largely determined by the keenness of the desire that there is to become possessed of it, and we are not all equally keen.⁴⁷

The elevated sum associated with the Moorcroft vase was offered, not requested; it was the market’s valuation of his ware, not the artist’s own. But the journalist made clear, too, that the value of Moorcroft’s work was not simply a function of its price. If integrity of design and individuality of execution were the hallmarks of art ware, Moorcroft invested the same qualities in all his pieces, whatever their size or function or cost; even his most down-to-earth tableware had qualities which enriched people’s lives. For this critic, Moorcroft had achieved something quite exceptional, the alliance not only of the artist and the potter, but of artistic integrity and commercial success:

Our own view with regard to ‘Moorcroft Ware’ can be summed up very briefly. It represents that coordination between art and handicraft which is the ideal of every potter,

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p.1398.

⁴⁷ ‘Pottery and Glass at the British Empire Exhibition’, *PG* (August 1924), p.1354.

but which is accomplished with exceptional rarity, and then very often only by men whose temperament is unsuited to commerce. In Mr Moorcroft the present generation has an artist and a potter, who is practising successfully in commerce. The combination is remarkable, for it is one that is seldom met with.⁴⁸

6. Conclusions

At the end of 1925, Moorcroft was at one of the summits of his career. For all the demanding economic conditions, he reported profits of £6,210 in 1923–24, and of £5,823 in 1924–25. But his achievement was not to be measured simply by the figures in his account books. More significant was his unique fusion of two roles which were, in theory and in practice, moving further apart: the artist-potter and the manufacturer. His method of production had changed little since his years at Macintyre's, but as the relationship between studio and factory, art and commerce, came under increasing scrutiny, Moorcroft's practice became particularly significant. He had established a craft workshop, creating art works for more than an elite few without compromising either quality or financial viability. The quality of his work was recognised by critics, and affirmed in private correspondence; commercial success was not its primary aim, but it was its inevitable consequence.

What is striking is that this success came with designs which made little reference to fashionable motifs. Moorcroft would not turn his back on nature in an age when abstraction was coming more into prominence, and he continued to explore the expressive power of ornament, colour and form. His designs often harked back to the past, but it was a past viewed through the present. 'Moonlit Blue' revisited his blue landscape designs of 1903, softening the outlines, simplifying the details, adding new touches of colour to create an atmosphere of subdued calm; 'Autumn Tree' (later known as 'Eventide') was an expression of hope and renewal, the palette of his wartime poppy designs applied now to a landscape at peace. By contrast, his return to Wisteria and Pansy introduced brighter colours, illustrated in a review of his work in *The Country House and Estate* of late 1925. But in these troubled times, where the aftermath of war was still keenly felt, his sombre-toned Pomegranate design still had something to say, as Brownrigg noted in her Wembley report of 1 October:

Of the decorated pottery, artists always prefer the 'Moonlit Tree', and their second choice is the 'Autumn Tree', or the Wistaria [sic]. The general public nearly always go straight to the pomegranate, and say that they much prefer it to all the rest.

Moorcroft's work was praised for its integrity of design. His ornament was expressive, significant, working in complete harmony with form and colour. If Rackham presented Staite Murray's work as the result, and even the embodiment, of a struggle with the properties of clay and fire, Moorcroft was for many the potter poet, master of his art,

⁴⁸ PG (September 1925), p.1398.

engaging the viewer's imagination with the power of his own. In a post-war world exploring ways out of economic depression, the effect of his ware was little short of inspirational; writing on 29 December 1925, Edith Harcourt-Smith put this into words:

I must add you are the kindest of friends for you ever give me great pleasure in having near me your interesting and delicious pottery which soothes one with its beauty and form. No one in your profession achieves as you do. A thousand grateful thanks.

And this was a style which, however varied, was irreducibly personal. On 14 October 1925, he was approached by Cicely H. Burton (daughter-in-law of Joseph Burton), who as Cicely H. Jackson had worked for Bernard Moore. Moorcroft clearly stood out as an artist potter, unlike her current employer (not identified):

I am writing to put my name before you, should a vacancy occur as an artist on your works. I have been accustomed to high class work—as for several years I was with Bernard Moore of Stoke, designing and painting in glazes and lustres. I am at present engaged in designing for fancies at a well-known firm in the Potteries, but often feel I would like to get back to the really artistic pottery.

Her name does not appear in Moorcroft's wage books, and she subsequently won recognition for her freelance designs in the modern style. Moorcroft had no need (nor wish) to employ a designer; the individuality of his work was his, and his alone.⁴⁹

By making a clear distinction between the studio potter and the industrial designer, Read's article underlined the ambivalent position Moorcroft occupied. Like the craftsman-designer, he created models as the basis for serial production, but he did not set out to produce exact copies of a template, as he explained in his letter to Ryrrie Birks. He exemplified neither modern industrial production methods, nor a modern design style, and yet he was seen to represent all that was best in English pottery manufacture of the time, his participation encouraged and facilitated at two of the most important Exhibitions of the decade. And at the same time, he was celebrated as a ceramic artist as well as a manufacturer, his work admired by critics, collectors and the general public alike for qualities which were being praised, too, in studio ware. He was an artist potter competing successfully in an industrial world.

As the worlds of craft and industry moved further apart, Moorcroft's individuality became his defining quality, while making it impossible to situate him in existing categories. His work showed little trace of the ongoing debate between manufacturers and designers about the importance of design reform, a debate conducted largely on commercial grounds. And he remained distant, too, from the sharpening opposition of craft pottery and industrial production. It was this self-belief that doubtless impelled him to respond to Weaver's plea for a modern style in the aftermath of the Paris Exhibition. What mattered for Moorcroft was not style but expression, integrity of

⁴⁹ Moorcroft was approached on 11 May 1925 by the Coda Werkstätte, a design studio in Frankfurt, offering him a range of contemporary designs. No copy of Moorcroft's reply (if he sent one) has survived, but one can imagine its content.

design and individuality of production; such qualities accounted for the impact of his work, and its success with the public. It was by being himself that he communicated with others through his art; and it was this quality, too, which underlay the expressiveness of the English pottery tradition which critics were even now beginning to rediscover.

10. 1926–28: Re-negotiating the Future

I. Personal Tragedy

1926 began positively for Moorcroft. Unlike many established firms, he exhibited at the British Industries Fair [BIF], earning the praise of the trade and other press. For the *Pottery Gazette* his exhibit stood apart in its quality, the reviewer remarking once more on the expressiveness of his ware; this may have been a trade fair, but Moorcroft's display was 'the product of an artistic mind'.¹

One of his new designs was another variant on the landscape theme. Entitled 'Dawn', it introduced for the first time a decorative border, framing a simple scene of stylised hills and extensive sky. With its bold contrasts of blue and white under a matt glaze, it was a striking departure from his more richly coloured creations, a new stylistic beginning for the modern age.

What attracted particular attention, though, were his flambé glazes, not least those applied to enrich the tones of landscape designs. William Moorcroft was an 'adventurous ceramist', taking his art into new territory:

One of the chief recent successes of Mr Moorcroft is to be seen in the production of what might be regarded as a pair of companion effects in rouge flambé, the one being suggestive of eventide and the other the arrival of the dawn. Executed in subtle tones, by the most delightful means at the disposal of the adventurous ceramist, pieces such as these can only be regarded as real creative triumphs, and with these and other pieces of similar spirit, Mr Moorcroft certainly succeeded by his exhibit at the B.I.F. this year in furthering his fame as one of our leading artist potters.²

Such was his reputation that even a brief (and general) report on the Fair published in the *Daily Express* included specific comment on his display; no introduction was needed, it was safely assumed in the national press that this was a known name:

The visitor who enters Section G from Wood Lane station strikes at once one of the wonders of the Fair, the pottery show. Moorcroft's stand is on the right. 'Magnificent!', I

1 *Pottery Gazette and Glass Trade Review* [PG] (April 1926), p.606.

2 *Ibid.*



Fig. 77 Moorcroft's stand at the 1926 British Industries Fair. 'Personal and Commercial Papers of William Moorcroft', Stoke-on-Trent City Archives, SD 1837. CC BY-NC



Fig. 78 William Moorcroft, 'Dawn' (1926), 15cm. CC BY-NC



Fig. 79 William Moorcroft, 'Dawn' under partial flambé glaze (c.1926), 23cm. CC BY-NC

said, involuntarily. ‘We have to do our best for our country,’ said Mr Moorcroft. His best, on the authority of the highest expert in the country, ‘equals the early Chinese’.³

Similar praise was voiced by Sir Lawrence Weaver. Describing the exhibit as ‘perfectly splendid [...], easily the most notable feature of the whole Fair’, he urged Moorcroft to exhibit at the Sesqui-Centennial International Exposition in Philadelphia later that year: ‘I think you would be very well advised to put up a show there. [...] America only wants the best, and everybody has the money to pay for it.’⁴ Now Chair of the Design and Industries Association [DIA], Weaver’s encouragement was significant. Moorcroft’s work was appreciated as the very best of contemporary British pottery, exceptional in quality and of indisputable commercial appeal. This opinion was confirmed in a letter from his agent Vandersteen on 22 February 1926, who offered exceptional terms, if he would agree to exhibit:

Sir Lawrence Weaver joins me in the great desire to have you as an Exhibitor in the British Section, and agrees with me that your goods would be the outstanding feature of the British Section.

But this period of success would be brutally interrupted. On 16 June 1926, at the height of the extended miners’ stoppage which followed the nine-day General Strike in May, Moorcroft’s wife, Florence, died after a short and sudden illness. It was a devastating blow, as he confided to Edith Harcourt Smith the following day:

Without her gentle movement, it will be difficult to carry on. The last ten days will have been like years. The parting is very painful, but one can but feel that it is a natural movement. My wife’s work is finished here.

Florence’s influence was unseen, largely undocumented, and ultimately unmeasurable; but its effect was real. Her involvement in the design of Moorcroft’s works was self-evident; no less so was her contribution to its unique atmosphere, where workers were treated as individuals rather than as human cogs in an industrial machine. The local press listed the principal floral tributes at her funeral, which included separate wreaths from the four major departments at the works: Office Staff, Works Staff, Clay Department, Art Room. The reporter noted too how many employees attended the service, an eloquent sign of the devotion she inspired: ‘The mourners included a large number of workpeople from Moorcroft Pottery, by whom the late Mrs Moorcroft was held in sincere esteem and affection.’⁵ Of the thirty-eight people listed, many had worked for Moorcroft from the opening of his factory, and the pall bearers were four of his longest-serving members of staff—W.H. Barlow, T. Foulkes,

³ *Daily Express* (25 February 1926).

⁴ All unpublished documents referred to in this chapter are located in William Moorcroft: Personal and Commercial Papers, SD1837, Stoke-on-Trent City Archives [WM Archive].

⁵ *Staffordshire Sentinel* (19 June 1926).

F. Ashley, and J. Hill. Such was his close relationship with his workforce; life and work were intimately connected at this moment.

The *Staffordshire Sentinel* obituary ended with a telling reference to Florence's significance for Moorcroft's work: 'all hearts go out to Mr Moorcroft, whose happy home was so profound an encouragement and inspiration to his genius as a distinguished potter.'⁶ And a letter dated 3 December 1926 from Arthur Birnage, Editor of *Public Opinion*, sought to describe a delicacy which he identified in his pottery and which he attributed to the couple's shared sensitivity; he could not isolate it in words, but he sensed it nonetheless:

It is plain to see that she stood and lived for only the things that are worthwhile, and was a great stand-by and influence for good in your work. I think I can understand now that subtle, elusive something in your art [...].

Another letter of condolence, from Dorothy Cornforth, a neighbour at Trentham, expressed the hope that 'this deplorable sadness may stimulate and not retard your creative work'. And so it was. Some pieces, made in very limited numbers, such as black landscapes as desolate as those produced ten years earlier in the depths of war, suggest a purely personal expression of mourning. But his more public creativity was imaginative, ambitious, even radical, and bravely, defiantly so; he drew inspiration, as so often, from nature, finding there a harmony and sense of purpose which he sought to recover in his life and to embody in his designs.

2. A New Creativity

The death of Florence inaugurated a period of extensive creativity. At the 1927 BIF, Moorcroft's exhibit again earned the praise of the press; a review in the *Pottery Gazette* took it as axiomatic that he was pushing boundaries all the time:

It has always been the aim of Mr Moorcroft to do things well, and it is a fact everywhere recognised that he has never yet made a display at any exhibition which has not been an advance upon its predecessor. [...] There were many entirely new creations, clearly showing that Mr Moorcroft has not yet ceased to experiment in the field of ceramic effects.⁷

It is characteristic of this perception of Moorcroft's work that the press tended to focus on his skills as a potter, and on his sensitivity to line and colour. The *Staffordshire Sentinel* offered an analysis of his new work which stressed, like reviews of studio pottery at this time, its 'perfect shapes', the result of being thrown rather than moulded. And this quality was complemented by his distinctive glaze effects; this was the work of an artist-craftsman, immediate and lasting in its appeal:

⁶ *Staffordshire Sentinel* (19 June 1926).

⁷ *PG* (April 1927), p.640.

Such wares, under the scientific and artistic direction of such a craftsman as Mr Moorcroft develop continually in beauty, comparable as they are with the products of the ancient Chinese, and unsurpassed by modern manufactures. Many of the pieces shown this year are veritable poems in colour and glaze effects. No wonder the finest of them were eagerly bought on the opening day [...]. Such things of beauty are a perennial joy to the collector and the person of taste.⁸

Not for the first time, Moorcroft's ware evaded simple description, its expressive effect conveyed in metaphors taken from other art forms. In a review of Staite Murray's exhibition with the Nicholsons at the Beaux Arts Gallery in 1927, Marriott had described his pottery as having 'the music of sculpture'.⁹ The *Staffordshire Sentinel* critic's choice of 'poems in colour' implied a different dominant effect, colour rather than form, but in both cases the pottery was seen to engage the onlooker's eye and to appeal to the senses. This was not the lifeless work of a production line, this was pottery which spoke.

The complementarity of Moorcroft's experiments in form and colour and those of the studio potters implied in such reviews was reflected, too, in a range of pots which he had been developing since the summer of 1926, pieces not finished on the turner's lathe, but which preserved imprints of the thrower's fingers; this would become known as 'ribbed' or 'natural' ware. Rackham's article on Wells made explicit reference to its visible traces of the potter's hands: 'the pressure of the shaping hand on the yielding but outward-thrusting clay as it whirls on the wheel, shows itself clearly in all his productions.'¹⁰ A review in the *Pottery Gazette* of Moorcroft's exhibit at the 1927 BIF drew particular attention to a lamp, a striking combination of simplicity and sophistication, of craft and functionality:

We were particularly struck by a new effect in a green stone lustre. A handsome lamp in this particular style occupied a position of honour near the front of the stand, and it was fitted with a silk shade to harmonise. One of the beauties of this large and impressive piece was the retention in it of the circular wreaths formed by the fingers of the thrower in drawing up and squeezing down the plastic clay in the process of arriving at the final form which the piece was intended to take.¹¹

Such pieces may suggest a response to growing financial pressures, requiring only minimal intervention from the turner; and they may also reflect the arrival of a new thrower, Harry Bailey, whose predecessor, Fred Hollis, had been with Moorcroft since 1916. But they implied, too, a dialogue with the work of studio potters. If their pottery was associated with the collector's cabinet, Moorcroft was affirming that his own hand-thrown ware was made for use.

8 *Staffordshire Sentinel* (February 1927).

9 C. Marriott, 'Beaux Arts Gallery', *The Times* (21 April 1927), p.10.

10 B. Rackham, 'The Pottery of Mr Reginald F. Wells', *The Studio* (December 1925), 359–63 (p.359).

11 *PG* (April 1927), p.640.



Fig. 80 William Moorcroft, Decorated wares under rouge flambé glaze: Banded Peacock (c.1927), 22.5cm; Cornflower (c.1927), 11cm. CC BY-NC



Fig. 81 Moorcroft's stand at the 1928 British Industries Fair. 'Personal and Commercial Papers of William Moorcroft', Stoke-on-Trent City Archives, SD 1837. CC BY-NC



Fig. 82 William Moorcroft, Designs reconfigured with restrained modernity: Cornflower (c.1927), 12cm; Honesty (1927), 22.5cm; Pomegranate (c.1926), 14cm. CC BY-NC

Moorcroft's exhibit at the 1928 BIF, in a stand re-designed and extended, was, for many, the high point of this period. The report in the *Pottery and Glass Record* underlined the originality of this latest display, his undecorated glaze effects attracting particular attention:

It was in the fifth window that there was the most strikingly novel ware. [...] Their iridescent tones had a subtle charm, and as Mr Moorcroft himself described the effect to our representative, it has a suggestion of sunlight reflected on a blue sea.¹²

The expressive force of these pieces was seen to derive entirely from their colour, the potter's skill combining with the artist's eye to capture a transient moment of natural beauty. The result was an exhibit which earned widespread admiration, as was noted in the *Pottery Gazette*:

Mr Moorcroft received many congratulations from connoisseurs and lovers of the truest type of pottery art, and he was well rewarded in receiving visits from Their Majesties the King and Queen, and H.R.H. Princess Mary. The King warmly shook hands with Mr Moorcroft, and spoke in appreciative terms of what has been achieved [...].¹³

But for other observers, what characterised Moorcroft's pottery at this time was not (just) its timeless quality, but the fact that it could be appreciated and enjoyed now, and not just by those of means. *The Overseas Daily Mail* confidently affirmed the artistic quality of Moorcroft's ware, even of the humblest bowls or vases:

It may be said without fear of contradiction that the pottery made by William Moorcroft will increase in value as time goes on, and will be as much sought after in the future as are the best pieces of Greek or Chinese pottery today [...]. Bowls and vases of very great beauty and very varied design and ornamentation are produced [...], and while these are of varying value to suit purchasers of all types, the lower-priced items owe their cheapness only to simpler design and lower cost of manufacture, and lack nothing in artistic merit which it is possible for the producers to achieve.¹⁴

For this reviewer, Moorcroft's pottery had qualities independent of fashion or function; and, crucially, such qualities were evident in every piece, however modest. This was art for all, not just for the connoisseur, pottery made for use and not just for the cabinet. Its immediate appeal was reflected in reviews of wide national circulation, the *Sunday Pictorial*, for instance, telling its readers:

If your table furnishings are very simple, a grapefruit set in Moorcroft ware will enrich them. You can buy a variety of designs, noticeably the pomegranate and the fungus, that only need the background of old oak or mahogany to set them off to advantage. You can buy a set that might depict eventide or an Eastern sunrise that looks equally well on any polished table.¹⁵

12 *Pottery and Glass Record* [PGR] (April 1928), p.67.

13 PG (April 1928), p.626.

14 'Artistic Pottery', *The Overseas Daily Mail* (31 December 1927).

15 *Sunday Pictorial* (15 April 1928).

And for the journalist writing in *The Fancy Goods Trader*, this expressive quality translated naturally and inevitably into widespread appeal:

This delightful ware—'poems in pottery' we have heard it called—appeared to be irresistible, for there was scarcely a moment of the day when Mr W. Moorcroft and his assistants were not busy with a continuous succession of customers.¹⁶

Both practical and decorative, affordable yet with the potential to increase in value, if anything could weather the growing economic storm, this was it.

This perception of Moorcroft's ware was particularly significant at a time when the gulf separating artistic and commercial pottery was deepening. In February 1928 the Newport Pottery launched 'Bizarre', designed by Clarice Cliff; characterised by its bold contrasts of colour, it was immediate, inexpensive, and joyously different. The *Pottery Gazette* recorded its official launch at the British Industries Fair; the fashion for bright colour and novelty may not have been timeless, but it was undeniably intense: 'in viewing this type of pottery decoration one has to remember that there is a demand in the realm of modern furnishing for, shall we say, extravagant colouring.'¹⁷ Cliff's designs would be a remarkable commercial success, retailed by many leading London stores, including Harrods, Selfridge's, Waring and Gillow, and Liberty's. They created a popular style of modernity which many other manufacturers sought to follow, simple, spirited, uncompromising. Moorcroft's designs, however, were very much his own. Although he gestured towards abstraction in his simplified variants of motifs such as Honesty or Pomegranate, sometimes interrupted by concentric bands, he retained the underlying references to nature. His colours, too, were controlled, even muted. His 'Dawn' was a telling example of his very personal expression of the times. Modern design was making much of the Sunburst motif, the sun transformed into a potent geometric icon of power in the new industrial age. In Moorcroft's design, however, the rising sun was implied rather than explicit; it suggested renewal rather than energy, the reassuring cycle of nature, not the headlong immediacy of the modern.

Most significant, though, is that he did not alter his decorative techniques. As economic conditions worsened, on-glaze freehand decoration was becoming widespread. It was more flexible and cost-effective than lithographs or transfer prints, and arguably of better quality; simplified designs required less graphic skill, and allowed decorators to work quickly enough to keep up with demand. In 1926 Wedgwood opened a handcraft studio, overseen by Millicent Taplin, to paint decorative and functional wares designed by Alfred and Louise Powell; in 1927, the Newport Pottery did the same for wares designed by Cliff. In comparison, tube-lining and decoration on the unfired clay was more skilled, time-consuming and expensive. It was partly adopted in 1926 by Burgess & Leigh, but only for limited ranges of Charlotte Rhead's designs. It was at the heart of Moorcroft's production, however, and

¹⁶ *The Fancy Goods Trader* (March 1927).

¹⁷ *PG* (March 1928), p.445.

he remained committed to the technique, and to the skilled staff who carried it out. His colours, of a depth and permanence regularly pointed out in reviews, were a direct consequence of this. For all the economic pressures, Moorcroft was holding fast to his principles. It was a commercial gamble, but one he was prepared to take.

3. Commercial Survival

As the decade progressed, trade continued to decline and unemployment to rise in the pottery industry. Many leading potteries were absent from the 1926 BIF, including Doulton, Minton, Wedgwood, Pilkington and William Howson Taylor. By the early summer, the General Strike and the extended stoppage by the miners were crippling industrial production. A report published in the *Pottery Gazette* just a few weeks into the dispute painted a bleak picture of closures and unemployment. The number of pottery workers laid off had risen from 7,000 to 32,000 in just two months, a more than three-fold increase on the equivalent figure for the previous year.¹⁸ Nor did the consequences of the miners' strike end with the return to work; its impact was felt in the increasing cost of fuel and the inevitable rise in the price of goods produced. More absentees were noted from the 1927 BIF, and a year later the *Pottery Gazette* stated the inescapable truth; the economic depression was global, and there was little prospect of an imminent revival in trade: 'The hard cold fact is that trade in North Staffordshire is bad; the manufacturers know it, the workers know it too'.¹⁹

The asking price of some studio pottery still remained high. Eric Milner-White, Dean of King's College, Cambridge, bought a pot entitled 'Cadence' for 100 guineas at William Staite Murray's exhibition at the Paterson Gallery in 1927, and a review in *Apollo*, December 1927, saw such prices as quite justifiable: 'an austere beauty in many of them which one will find nowhere else amongst modern pottery [...] makes us less willing to scoff at the prices of 25, 30, even 100 guineas.'²⁰ Charles Marriott, too, did not see the need for studio pottery to be affordable by the general public; not intended for reproduction or for general sale, its purpose was rather to be an example. But this was a moot point. In the same year as Staite Murray's exhibition, Reginald Wells concluded his only published article with a grim warning; selling art pottery was easier said than done:

But do not imagine there is a living in so-called artistic pottery—*there is not*. The success of all pottery, all, depends on one little word: sales. [...] There is no flaw in that argument. It is definite, precise, and has been proved by many unfortunate potters.²¹

18 *PG* (August 1926), p.1257.

19 *PG* (August 1928), p.1297.

20 'Mr W. Staite Murray's Stoneware, Pottery and Drypoints at Mr William Paterson's Gallery', *Apollo* (December 1927), p.283 [quoted in J.F. Stair, 'Critical Writing on English Studio Pottery 1910–1940', unpublished PhD thesis, Royal College of Art, 2002 (p.267)].

21 R.F. Wells, 'The Lure of Making Pottery', *The Arts & Crafts* (May 1927), 10–13 (p.13).

And he was not alone. Both Bernard Leach and Michael Cardew were struggling to stay afloat, and Howson Taylor, whose staff numbers had reduced to just ten by 1926, was beginning to experiment with crystalline glazes which required fewer firings and were thus less expensive.

Moorcroft was not immune to such pressures, but he maintained a reputation for affordable quality. *The Daily News* painted a picture of vibrant export trade despite high import tariffs, mentioning Moorcroft by name as an exemplar of inexpensive excellence:

With products that are their own travellers, at prices that are cheaper but which themselves have not been cheapened, British pottery manufacturers, especially the Moorcroft firm, have been busy coping with buyers from the United States and Buenos Aires, places that still have money to spend on quality goods.²²

But the truth was more complicated and less rosy. The 1925–26 year-end results reflected the difficult conditions both in trade and production, exacerbated by the General Strike and its aftermath. Sales had dropped by 21%, but the associated production costs showed a decrease of just 3%, a telling indicator of the steady rise in the price of raw materials. Added to which, overdue accounts were becoming an increasingly significant entry on the balance sheet, causing problems for the cash flow of the business. These factors translated starkly into lower profit margins: gross profits were down 40%, and the net profit had decreased by nearly 60%. Significantly, though, there was a reduction of just 3% for wages; orders may have declined, but Moorcroft was not putting his employees on short-time.

Cash flow continued to be of concern during 1926–27. And to make matters worse, Moorcroft had to contend with another case of plagiarism, this time from Shelley; it was a clear sign of the popularity of his ware, but an indicator, too, of the difficulties caused by manufacturers prepared to imitate and mass produce the designs of a craft potter. S. Lines, glass and china buyer at the Birmingham branch of Liberty's, wrote on 26 April 1927:

[...] I really felt so indignant when quite a stranger came along this morning with a so-called new line of pottery he pressed upon us, which is so near a replica of your pomegranate as it would be possible to make, without actually copying it. The only difference being that a pear or apple substitutes the actual pomegranate. The finish, of course, is not so good [...].

At the end of the year, though, results had improved significantly. Sales had risen by nearly 8% and gross profits by 18%, yielding a net profit of £3,102, a rise of 31% from 1925–26.

But such progress was reversed the following financial year. Trading conditions continued to deteriorate, and as the year end approached, overdue payments again

²² *The Daily News* (25 February 1926).

loomed large in exchanges with Mr Pasco, Moorcroft's book-keeper at Liberty's. The situation was a sign of the times, but it was aggravated by the unique combination of small-scale infrastructure and large-scale business which characterised Moorcroft's enterprise; the more testing the conditions, the greater the pressure on his time as both designer and manufacturer. Pasco wrote on 18 June 1928, his tone characteristically solicitous:

I know you are very fully occupied in the production part of your business, and that you have not a large staff of clerks to take these matters up properly, [...] but if you would only give me the names of the accounts you have no 'respect' for, and let me get our solicitors to give them a letter, you would see good results.

In terms of trade, this was Moorcroft's most difficult year to date. Sales fell by over 24% from the previous year, and gross profits stood at just £4,004, a fall of over 48% from 1926–27, and just 37% of the figure recorded in 1924–25 at the height of his commercial success. The net balance was a loss of £1,495. Alwyn Lasenby wrote on 17 August 1928 about the outcome. He could see Moorcroft's rationale for keeping his staff on normal wages, even when trade was poor; this was a highly skilled workforce, which he sought to keep together in anticipation of better times to come. But it was a gamble, albeit a calculated one:

The loss of £1500 is disappointing, but from all one hears of other manufacturers, many of them are in the same boat. The decrease in returns without any corresponding drop in Workers' wages accounts in the main for the fall in ratio of gross profit, but I know the value of keeping the staff together for when trade improves again, if the depression is not likely to last very long.

Moorcroft would have shared Lasenby's disappointment, this being only the second time in fifteen years that he had recorded a net loss. It was a stark reminder of the ever-worsening economic crisis, but it was a sign, too, of the particular challenges facing a craft potter occupying the uncharted ground between studio and factory which was, in these years, attracting increasing attention.

4. Bridging the Gap Between Studio and Factory

As economic conditions deteriorated, the relationship between studio and factory was more and more actively discussed. Harry Trethowan, a Director of Heal's and Manager of the store's Pottery and Glass department, advocated a much closer relationship of artist-craftsman and manufacturer such as was seen in Europe, implicitly seeing craft as the basis of industrial design rather than of production. He argued that the main obstacle was not one of conceptual difference, but of attitude, a 'false pride of position on both sides':

Until the industry is capable of appreciating the talent that is spent ineffectively too often by the studio potter (so-called) and until the studio potter realizes the worth of providing industry with such talent, so long will there be waste in both spheres.²³

Such collaboration was important for industry, and essential, he argued, for the potter, who could neither compete with industry, nor, he implied, survive on the creation of art wares alone.

But this view was not widely shared. Both Gordon Forsyth and Charles Marriott, writing from opposite perspectives, saw little possibility (or even desirability) of effective collaboration. In his report on the Ceramic section of the Paris Exhibition, Forsyth argued that industry set the standard for both technique and design, and suggested that studio pottery had little to offer:

Studio Pottery is in its infancy in England. Although great hopes are entertained for its future development, at the present moment it cannot be said that it has yet contributed much to the history of English Pottery. It is yet lacking in virility and it is inclined to be affected or to err on the 'pretty-pretty' side.²⁴

Improved industrial design would come from the collaboration of manufacturers with artists (rather than craft potters), and he dismissed the argument often advanced by advocates of studio pottery that good design was compromised by the need to be commercial: 'In the hands of an artist, commercial limitations become not a hindrance, but a help, and this fact might as well be recognised by every potter, large or small.'²⁵ An example of creative collaboration was seen in the work of the Powells for Wedgwood; technical skill was the domain of the manufacturer, and decorative design that of the artist:

The work of Alfred and Louise Powell is not, in the strictest sense of the term, 'studio' pottery, as their productions are made by Messrs Josiah Wedgwood & Sons, of Stoke-on-Trent. However, this appears to be a very happy and sensible solution of the problem of producing fine pottery. Wedgwood's make excellent pottery and Mr and Mrs Powell are excellent artists.²⁶

For Marriott, conversely, studio pottery represented the best of ceramic art, from which industry could profitably learn. In his review of the exhibition organised by the British Institute of Industrial Art [BIIA] in 1927, he distinguished it completely from the everyday wares of industrial manufacture:

It leaves us unmoved that the wares of such potters as Mr W. Staite Murray and Mr Bernard Leach [...] have to be produced at prices prohibitive to most of us; they serve

23 H. Trethowan, 'Potters and Pottery of Today in England', *The Arts & Crafts* (May 1928), 82–85 (p.83).

24 G. Forsyth, 'Pottery', in *Reports on the Present Position and Tendencies of the Industrial Arts as indicated at the International Exhibition of Modern Decorative and Industrial Arts, Paris, 1925*, 127–38 (pp.133–34).

25 *Ibid.*, p.129.

26 *Ibid.*, p.134.

their purpose as ‘museum pieces’ and the pottery trade will ultimately benefit by their example, as the world benefits by ‘cloistered virtues’.²⁷

But as Marriott situated studio pottery in the collector’s cabinet, Leach argued that the craft potter should also be producing functional wares of equivalent quality for a wider public. In March 1927, he held two concurrent exhibitions, artistic stoneware at the Paterson Gallery (his first Bond Street exhibition) and practical slipware at the Three Shields Gallery in Holland Park. In an accompanying note, he emphasised the craftsman’s social responsibility, responding, implicitly, to Forsyth’s criticism of studio pottery as ‘pretty-pretty’; he sought to bridge the ‘gulf’ which isolated the craft potter from ‘national life’:

There is a need to escape from the atmosphere of the over-precious; and not only have the new craftsmen to prove that they can be creative, but as ‘artist-craftsmen’ they must if only for the sake of their art, contribute to national life. A growing public wants to enjoy the use of its crockery, and that can only be if it is inseparably practical and beautiful. [...] There is a profound and urgent need for attempting to bridge that gulf soon.²⁸

He returned to this theme in his pamphlet, ‘A Potter’s Outlook’, which accompanied a second dual exhibition in 1928 of ‘Stoneware Pottery’ at F. Lessore’s Beaux Arts Gallery, Bond Street, and ‘Stoneware for Daily Use’ at Mairret’s New Handworkers’ Gallery. It was an assault on what he saw as the two irreconcilable extremes to which pottery was currently being taken: the exclusive creation of expensive art wares for individuals, and the mass production of cheap functional wares for a popular market. Leach sought to position himself between these two extremes, and to re-establish a link with ‘ordinary life’; this was the potter’s natural role, a role usurped, and perverted, by an industry driven by commercial motives: ‘Having become a potter in Japan, a land still new to the affair of industrialism, I did not realise the chasm which a century of factories had torn between ordinary life and handcrafts such as mine.’²⁹

The principal challenge was that of increasing output. Leach saw craft as essential to the making of pottery with ‘a nature of its own, a soul’, but without serial production, he could not produce wares in sufficient quantity, or cheaply enough, to be viable.³⁰ He had identified a problem, but he was not close to resolving it. He sought to distinguish his ware from the ‘museum pieces’ celebrated by critics, and yet he was exhibiting in London art galleries; the extent to which his pottery might actually reach a non-collecting public was not discussed. Marriott saw little future in this project; without economies of scale, the production of such wares simply did not pay:

[...] Mr Leach cannot produce for less than 5s [shillings] the cup and saucer that the factory can produce at 3s. On these terms there can be no competition between the private

27 C. Marriott, ‘British Pottery’, *The Times*, 30 September 1927.

28 Text reproduced in Stair, ‘Critical Writing’, Appendix.

29 B. Leach, ‘A Potter’s Outlook’ [1928]; text reproduced in C. Hogben (ed), *The Art of Bernard Leach* (London: Faber & Faber, 1978), 189–91 (p.189).

30 Ibid.

kiln and the factory in wares 'for daily use', and the line of progress would seem to be the gradual absorption of the artistic potter into the factory—in a relationship which it would need an expert to determine.³¹

The nebulous 'absorption' of the craft potter into industry gestured towards a European model, but it was not Leach's vision. His aim was not to create designs for mechanised production, but to establish craft production on a larger than studio scale. And he realised the difficulties he faced:

It may seem to some critics that craftsmen like myself can serve the most useful purpose, and incidentally be a great deal happier, by remaining free in our crafts, and not attempting tasks which they would probably describe as foredoomed to failure. Though they may be right as far as immediate success is concerned, I beg to differ. Instead I ask for support for a tentative and difficult undertaking.³²

Leach was not alone, nor was he the first, to consider this 'tentative and difficult undertaking'. For many, the relatively new firm of Carter, Stabler & Adams embodied a creative fusion of studio and factory, where manufacturer and designer(s) collaborated in the serial production of craft wares. Forsyth highlighted their 'entirely hand-made' production in his Paris report, and later that year, Marriott's review of their work at the BIIA exhibition recognised their distinctive structure, occupying 'an intermediate place between studio and factory production'.³³ Adams himself had explored this challenge in an article of 1926, identifying potters who were achieving the serial production of handmade wares:

There are a number of potters who see the problem, [...] and who work out the ideals of the ceramic artist while using works organization and facilities. The pioneer in this field was Mr Howson Taylor, whose first pieces were produced over twenty years ago. About the same time were originated the Pilkington lustres and Moorcroft wares; and since the war the Poole-painted pottery with entirely fresh and modern designs.³⁴

Craft was at the heart of all four enterprises, but they were not a homogeneous group. Two (Pilkington and Carter, Stabler & Adams) were collectives based on an industrial model of collaboration between Manager, Art Director and designer(s), and both were subsidiary companies of (as it happens) tile manufacturers. Only Howson Taylor and Moorcroft had established production around their own individual creativity as potters.

It was as a craft potter that Moorcroft continued to be seen. A review of *Handcraft Pottery for Workshop and School* by Henry and Denise Wren, founders of the Oxshott Pottery, explicitly categorised him in this light:

31 C. Marriott, 'Mr Bernard Leach', *The Times* (6 December 1928), p.21.

32 Leach, 'A Potter's Outlook', p.191.

33 C. Marriott, 'British Pottery', *The Times* (30 September 1927), p.8.

34 J. Adams, 'Modern British Pottery', *Architectural Review* (January-July 1926), 190–93 (p.190).

The best of our modern craft potters like William Moorcroft, for instance, are so busy making and evolving designs which delight and fascinate us, that they have little time [...] to become instructors in the art of producing good pots, other than by the most direct means of the workshop itself.³⁵

He was not even seen as bridging a gap between studio and factory; he was described unequivocally as a ‘craft potter’, with a ‘workshop’. He may not have created each piece single-handed—an assumed characteristic of the studio potter—but he continued to design both its form and ornament, create his own colours and glazes, and train the decorators, as he had done since the start of his career. And critics continued to emphasise this close involvement with production: a review of 1928 recognised particularly his ‘special, personal interest in every piece of pottery which he designed’, an interest epitomised in his practice of signing each piece by hand.³⁶ No other potter did so when he began his career, and thirty years later, it was still the case; even studio potters tended to use an impressed stamp. And the individuality which defined his practice, was seen to characterise his designs as well; critics sensed in his work the mark of his personality. The *Pottery Gazette* journalist recalled his predecessor William Thomson, ‘a man of keen perception’, whose articles had celebrated Moorcroft’s distinctive ware in the Macintyre years:

[...] his first thought on examining Mr Moorcroft’s creations was how perfectly ornamentation harmonised with form, the result of shape and decoration emanating from the same artist. ‘The artist’, he said, ‘has succeeded in impressing his individuality on every piece.’³⁷

In other respects, though, Moorcroft did not operate like a studio potter. He did not exhibit in London galleries which, almost by definition, did not deal in wares destined for serial production; Moorcroft’s craft was of a different kind. If the studio potter catered largely (and inevitably) for a market of collectors and connoisseurs, Moorcroft’s reach was recognised as being much wider. Adams identified tableware as the most immediate sign of a potter’s contribution to national life, although he implied that this may require a more mechanised production:

The greatest need is for simply designed and thoroughly well-made table wares, and this immediately brings in the question of the right use of machinery. It can only be dealt with successfully by combining modern factory organisation with the utmost refinement of taste, and skill in ceramic decorative technique.³⁸

In his select group, only Moorcroft was producing such wares in any quantity, as well as other functional or decorative pieces. And he was doing so using craft techniques, and at a viable price. Price lists for Powder Blue dating from this period list a Cup and

35 ‘Handcraft Pottery’, *PGR* (August 1928), p.203.

36 *PG* (May 1928), 771–73 (p.771).

37 *Ibid.*, pp.771–73.

38 Adams, ‘Modern British Pottery’, p.190.

Saucer for two shillings and three pence, or sixteen shillings a dozen, prices which compare very favourably with the three shillings proposed by Marriott as the average price for industrial ware.



Fig. 83 Price list for Powder Blue tableware. 'Personal and Commercial Papers of William Moorcroft', Stoke-on-Trent City Archives, SD 1837. CC BY-NC

When Marriott borrowed John Milton’s term ‘cloistered virtue’ to describe the qualities of studio pottery, it was to imply a difference from the products of industrial design: its distance from the commercial world was seen as its claim to superiority. For Milton, ironically, such remoteness was a weakness, not a strength: ‘I cannot praise a fugitive and cloistered virtue, unexercised and unbreathed, that never sallies out and sees her adversary’.³⁹ And Moorcroft would doubtless have agreed; he took his pottery into the world of commerce, defending the virtues of artistic integrity in both design and production against the temptations of commercial gain, or of fashion.

In his Paris report, Forsyth did not explicitly situate Moorcroft in the middle ground between studio and factory, but the wares he drew attention to exemplified his identity as the creator both of art wares and of pieces for daily use. He was presented as a craftsman whose mastery of ceramic art was comparable to that of Asian potters:

Mr William Moorcroft is a potter whose productions have a distinct individuality of their own, although his finest pieces closely follow the shape, colour and glaze effects of the Chinese Potters. Several noble pieces of this type were shown in the Exhibition [...].⁴⁰

But Forsyth noted too Moorcroft’s exhibit of Powder Blue, teaware fit for purpose in the finest traditions of modern industrial art, and whose form, like the best studio pottery, assured its ‘artistic appeal’:

39 John Milton, *Areopagitica* (1644).
40 Forsyth, ‘Pottery’, p.132.

He also showed in the entrance hall of the British Pavilion a very interesting breakfast set in blue slip. This exceedingly effective set was quite plain and undecorated, relying solely upon the beauty of the shapes for its artistic appeal. This group was extremely sound and sensible for utilitarian ware.⁴¹

Paradoxically, Moorcroft's enterprise enacted the project Leach sketched out in 1928, the creation of craft pottery, everyday and practical, affordable by more than a privileged few. Leach described it as a 'tentative and difficult undertaking';⁴² Moorcroft had been realising it since 1913.

Howson Taylor, Leach and Moorcroft were all, in their different ways, seeking to bridge the gap between studio and factory. Neither Howson Taylor nor Leach was, properly, doing so; Howson Taylor produced relatively little ware for everyday use, and Leach had not yet begun to solve the logistical challenges of his ambition. Moorcroft, however, had already achieved a distinctive synthesis, retaining his identity as an individual potter, creating in larger than studio quantities work of his own design. He was committed to craft, but also to the craftsman's responsibility to serve a wider public than an artist might target. The distinctive nature of his enterprise was appreciated (in part) by Adams and Forsyth; it would be recognised, however, in two quite different ways in the course of 1928, one very public, the other unadvertised.

5. A New Status

The patronage of Moorcroft's pottery by the royal family, and by Queen Mary in particular, had been noted by the press for nearly fifteen years. One (unsourced) review of his exhibit at the 1926 BIF alluded to her personal interest in his ware: 'The Queen [...] has a fine collection of Moorcroft's artistic pottery, and rarely fails to give attention to their stand.'⁴³ By 1928, however, royal esteem had reached a new level. Writing to his daughter Beatrice from the British Industries Fair on 21 February 1928, Moorcroft described the royal visit to his stand:

The King shook hands and told me how much he admired my new work, and the Queen also shook hands as she arrived and purchased two vases [...]. Today both the King and Queen were very pleased with the pottery, and both again shook hands with me when leaving. Their Majesties have just bowed when leaving hitherto, but today they doubly honoured me.

These protocols were significant, and suggested a level of appreciation reserved for a select few. Shortly after the Fair Moorcroft approached a member of the Queen's Household. Awards of the Royal Warrant were made (or declined) in response to an application, and Moorcroft was seeking advice. The reply was dated 15 March 1928:

41 Ibid.

42 Leach, 'A Potter's Outlook', p.191.

43 Press cutting in WM Archive.

I had a long talk the other day with Mr Martin Richards on the subject of the Royal Warrant, and I have every reason to think that if you make an application for it, you will be successful. [...] No one will be more delighted than I shall be to see you using it, and its being of value.

Moorcroft submitted his application the next day, and within a week, on 19 March 1928, the Palace wrote with news of his success. A Memorandum accompanying the letter set out the conditions:

The Warrant of Appointment granted by the Lord Chamberlain to The Queen confers on the persons named therein the privilege of making use of a representation of Her Majesty's Arms in connection with their business, provided that the words 'By Appointment' appear in every instance immediately underneath the same. The Warrant, however, does not carry with it the right to fly Her Majesty's Standard, to use the word 'Royal', or to make use of the Arms as a Trade Mark. It is strictly personal, and will become void upon the Death, Retirement, or Bankruptcy of the persons named therein [...]

The award, significantly, was 'strictly personal', and coterminous with his activity as a potter; it recognised William Moorcroft's essential role in the creation of his distinctive pottery, and implicitly saw the one as indispensable to the other. It was an expression of faith, but not without a note of caution: the Warrant would be terminated in the event of bankruptcy. In the middle of his most challenging financial year so far, this condition would not have gone unnoticed; it was more important than ever to succeed.

For the press, this was the culminating point of Moorcroft's career, the official endorsement of his quality as a very individual potter. In the *Pottery Gazette* of May 1928, the distinction of the award was celebrated, as was its justice:

Shoals of congratulations have already reached Mr Moorcroft from the firm's customers and from admirers of the Moorcroft creations, and there is no doubt that the pottery trade, as a whole, will derive satisfaction from the knowledge that so talented a potter, and one of such fine susceptibilities in connection with his life's work, has received the official recognition of our Royal Family, an honour which many men in business would be inclined to regard as the highest tribute they could wish to receive [...].⁴⁴

A Royal Warrant was, under any circumstances, a rare honour, but it had all the more significance coming from a monarch whose own refined taste was widely appreciated, and had been the subject of a series of articles in *The Connoisseur* the previous year. But this patronage was an endorsement, too, of ware which deserved the attention of a wider public. It was in just these terms that royal support was presented in the *Woman's Pictorial*:

H.M. the Queen has frequently purchased specimens of the 'Moorcroft' art. On one occasion, Her Majesty bought a lustre bowl in different tones of green; at another time a vase, part of which, to use her own words, 'was like a raven's wing'. And where the

44 PG (May 1928), p.771.

Queen has chosen to lead, you may follow, for there are many articles well within your pockets.⁴⁵

Potter for the connoisseur, and potter for a wider public; there could be no more eloquent recognition of Moorcroft's distinctive identity. In the months which followed, it would be complemented by another expression of appreciation, more private this time, by Liberty's.

At the end of 1927, an incident, trivial in appearance, prompted a substantial review of Moorcroft's relationship with Liberty's. The retailer accepted a contract to design a stand for Doulton's, who were exhibiting at the 1928 BIF after an absence of some years. For Moorcroft, this represented a conflict of interests, all the more unsettling as economic pressures were increasing in 1927–28. Writing to Blackmore on 21 December 1927, he tactfully pointed this out, underlining the perfect complementarity of their skills:

You leave to me entirely the question of production, and one rightly or wrongly looks to you for assistance in every possible way outside that. [...] It would have made all the difference to us if our competitors had gone elsewhere for the building of their stand. In my humble opinion, their doing so would have left us alone with a stand as only yourselves build.

What was at issue were the relative obligations of each party to W. Moorcroft Ltd. In a letter of 15 May 1928, Moorcroft argued that the Articles of Association, which provided for the distribution of dividends and profits, were a sufficient statement of their agreed relationship. What he questioned was the contract he had signed in 1913 which bound him to the Company for the duration of his working life. Although it effectively denied him the freedom to design outside the firm which bore his name, this did not in practice constitute any kind of artistic constraint; he and W. Moorcroft Ltd were, in that respect, one and the same. But it did cede ownership of his designs, glaze recipes and even his name (in the form of the Company's trade mark) to the Company. What concerned him were its possible consequences when, for whatever reason, his association came to an end.

The terms of the contract (and the need for it) occupied Moorcroft and Blackmore during May and June 1928. Moorcroft wrote again on 12 June 1928, disputing its justice:

In my suggesting a resolution that the agreement of May 9th 1913 becomes null and void, I am so hoping to end an agreement which in no way helps anyone, and is as unnecessary as it is unfair. Is it reasonable to ask anyone to sign an agreement to serve a company for the whole of his life?

Blackmore replied on 14 June 1928. Noting that Liberty's had, in 1921, quite voluntarily converted their debentures into shares, and foregone what had originally been a majority voting power, he then turned to Moorcroft's question:

45 J. Erskine, 'From the Potter's Wheel', *Woman's Pictorial* (7 April 1928).

‘Is it reasonable to ask anyone to sign an Agreement to serve for his whole life?’ My reply to that is ‘Yes! certainly, when the man’s personal influence upon the business of the Company is really the foundation of the Company, and necessary to its continued success’. In this particular case, your entering into that contract was the original inducement to Liberty & Co. to put their money in, and without it they would not have done so.

Blackmore’s response was unequivocal, and unconditional. Liberty’s investment in the Company was quite simply an investment in William Moorcroft, no more and no less; fifteen years after the original contract, that had not changed. Their uncompromising confidence in his work was both the strength and the weakness of his position. It gave him complete creative freedom, and provided an invaluable commercial infrastructure; his exchanges with Pasco at this very moment were clear evidence of the extent to which he benefited from their help. But it also implied an indissoluble link between Liberty’s investment in W. Moorcroft Ltd., and Moorcroft’s association with that firm. For Moorcroft, this discussion was not (just) about the present, but also about the future; for Liberty’s, though, it was the present that mattered, and William Moorcroft was essential to that.

Moorcroft replied on 15 June 1928, evoking again the incident of the Doulton stand. His own commitment to the firm, with or without a contractual obligation, was self-evident; it was theirs, he asserted, which had recently been drawn into question:

In my humble opinion, you have less reason to ask me to sign an agreement to serve the company for life than I have to ask you to serve the company for life. And incidentally, by your action of erecting a stand at the British Industries Fair in 1928 to compete with us, [...] you actually have made difficulties which I have had to fight against.

Liberty’s clearly wished to retain their association with Moorcroft, and it is striking how much they were prepared to concede, and how quickly. Minutes of a meeting of the Directors of W. Moorcroft Ltd. on 27 June 1928 recorded Moorcroft’s proposed new contract:

The Chairman proposed that the Agreement of May 9th 1913 should be cancelled and that in lieu thereof he should give an undertaking not to compete with the Company’s business in the future, either directly or indirectly, and that a similar undertaking should be entered into by Liberty & Co. Limited.

On 28 June 1928, Blackmore sent Moorcroft a draft agreement on just those lines.

Liberty’s commitment to William Moorcroft, and their belief in his art, was unwavering; at no stage did they raise the possibility of withdrawing their financial support. For all the deteriorating economic conditions, they were receiving a good return on their investment, and since 1921 they had been prepared to make many concessions to keep this association. Except one: they needed to be assured that their investment was in Moorcroft himself. It was an endorsement of his art no less categorical than the Royal Warrant. The revised contract did not significantly change his relationship with Liberty’s, nor did it resolve the uncertainty about their eventual interest in W. Moorcroft Ltd. without William Moorcroft. But it did change his

relationship with the firm. Gone were the clauses which assigned to W. Moorcroft Ltd. ownership of his designs and of his name in the form of the trademark. The focus was no longer on the rights of the firm as an independent entity, but on Moorcroft's defining identity at its centre. It is significant that the letterhead designed after the award of the Warrant should prominently display the name Moorcroft, and place a much more diminutive W. and Ltd at either side. What mattered was not the Company's name, but the family's, and not even just his own. It was a name, and a tradition, which implicitly included his own parents, and which would extend, Moorcroft may well have hoped already, to his children.



Fig. 84 Company letterheads pre- and post-1928. 'Personal and Commercial Papers of William Moorcroft', Stoke-on-Trent City Archives, SD 1837. CC BY-NC

Both these events, so different in appearance, recognised Moorcroft at the very heart of his Company; the Warrant was awarded to the potter, and Liberty's underlined their investment in the man. At a time when the relationship of individual potters and larger enterprises was being actively discussed, this was very revealing. Moorcroft may have been operating on a larger than studio scale, but his work remained the expression of his individuality as a potter. It was this defining role, and the very personal quality of his enterprise, which was recognised to the point of taking precedence over the firm. But both events recognised, too, the broad reach of his wares. This was not pottery for a limited market, it was making a contribution to the life of the nation, a commercial as well as artistic success.

6. Conclusions

In a letter of congratulation dated 2 April 1928, S.H. Price of the Burslem teapot manufacturers, Price Brothers, recognised in Moorcroft a potter who had remained true to his principles, and whose achievements had now been given the acknowledgement they deserved:

Hearty congratulations on your appointment. You have ploughed a unique furrow against great odds, and can now rejoice that you have public recognition from a most exclusive quarter, which you can couple with the private appreciation that you must have known you already enjoy from those who have followed your efforts.

Moorcroft was never afraid to go his own way. His designs of these years were not those of a potter producing fashionable wares, simply to make a profit; his response to the challenges of the times was to create wares he believed in. In an outspoken letter to the *Pottery and Glass Record* on the subject of modern design, he sketched out his vision of a national art, informed by honesty in both design and execution:

Your article on Decorative Art and Modern Industry in your July Journal leaves one wondering why it is left to extremists to say what is best for the English craftsman to do or not to do. The sound English craftsman maintains his position only by being himself, and above all by remembering his great traditions, and showing in his everyday work that England is England.⁴⁶

It was a profession of faith in the values of integrity and individuality, and an implied rejection of the commercial priorities of modern manufacture.

By the end of 1928, Moorcroft had come into his own, his unique fusion of studio and factory winning recognition at every level. In a review of his work in the *Pottery Gazette*, the journalist saw Moorcroft's distinguished status as the inevitable outcome of his highly individual work, a success which had been predicted by Thomson more than twenty years earlier, when he was still working at Macintyre's:

On another occasion, the same writer observed [...] 'Mr Moorcroft has already made for himself a name which, whatever may now happen, will in the future be classed with the most famous art potters of the country'. [...] That writer of many years ago was not destined to live to see Mr Moorcroft operating in his potteries; he only knew, in his own mind, that there was something inherent to the Moorcroft creations which was bound to be irrepressible.⁴⁷

And yet Moorcroft continued to look ahead. The untimely death of Florence was a powerful reminder of life's uncertainty. It replayed his father's experience, whose wife died when William was just short of nine years old, the same age as his own son, Walter, in 1926; and, as he could not have forgotten, Thomas himself died little more than three years later. Paradoxically, the very terms of the Royal Warrant which recognised the distinction of his work while envisaging its eventual end, were a potent reminder of that fragility. From this high point, it was inevitable that he should reflect on the future. In October 1928 he remarried. His second wife was Hazel Lasenby, Alwyn Lasenby's niece.

The times were changing. Economic conditions continued to decline, and by the end of the decade a new generation was reaching adulthood in this post-war world.

46 PGR (August 1927), p.206.

47 PG (May 1928), p.773.

Many of the designers coming to prominence were born around the turn of the century, and appealed to those of their age: Clarice Cliff, Susie Cooper, Millicent Taplin, Eric Slater. Moorcroft, though, was no less sensitive to the spirit of the times. Writing to his daughter, Beatrice, on 30 October 1928, shortly after his marriage and the conclusion of his negotiations with Liberty's, he expressed a renewed delight in the world around him:

One must be ever grateful for the joys of life, life with all its fascination, a fascination that keeps us ever young. The spirit of the child with her simple yet beautiful understanding is with all those who seek beauty in life. Love and Life are synonymous.

Moorcroft would continue to keep faith with what he believed in. It was the reaction of an artist, of one not content simply to follow the market, to play safe. In September 1928, he sat for a new portrait photograph by Hay Wrightson, his expression direct, alert, determined.

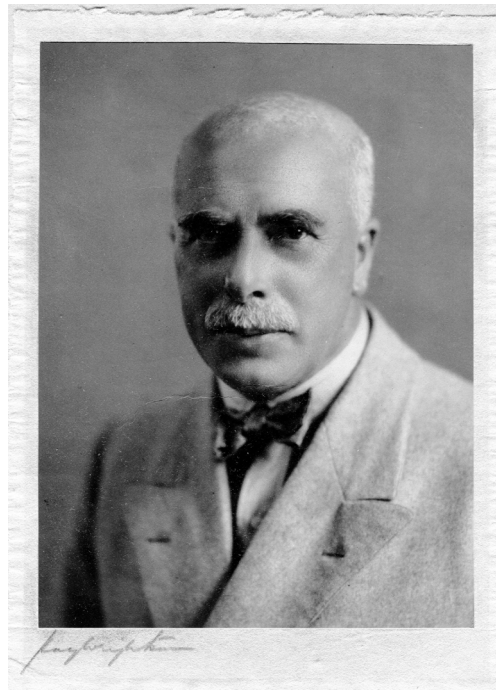


Fig. 85 William Moorcroft, portrait by Hay Wrightson (1928) Photograph. Family papers. CC BY-NC

And in another letter to Beatrice, dated 7 November 1928, he described his day firing the flambé kiln, a job he entrusted to no other:

I have been working on a gas oven today; it is somewhat tiring. The chief danger is absorbing carbon monoxide. It is a cumulative poison. But then we should seldom achieve much in life if we took no risks. A safe risk is always permissible.

A period which began with a setback which might have finished his artistic life, closed with the emergence of a potter increasingly sure of his identity and authority, ready to face the challenges of the future. The Royal Warrant may have represented, in one sense, the culmination of his career; it did not, in any sense, mark its end.

PART III

EXPRESSING A VISION

II. 1929–31: No Ordinary Potter

I. A Creative Response to the Depression

Moorcroft's Royal Warrant could not have been awarded at a more challenging economic moment. The pottery industry was struggling to compete with cheap wares produced in Germany, Czechoslovakia and Japan, unemployment was high, and firms were facing closure. The *Pottery Gazette* captured the prevailing mood of despondency among manufacturers 'beginning to speculate as to whether [...] a renewed bout of prosperity will ever come their way'.¹ And worse was to come. The Wall Street crash of October 1929 caused a global collapse, and a year later the Depression had become more than just an economic metaphor: 'morbid depression has become almost an epidemic in North Staffordshire'.² The *Pottery Gazette* of June 1931 published statistics which brought home the extent of the decline: in the three years since 1929, unemployment had very nearly trebled. Increased output and reduction of costs (including cuts in workers' wages) were 'imperative' if factories were to remain in business.³

In response to these growing economic pressures, Moorcroft continued to experiment and innovate. The *Pottery Gazette* underlined the originality of his exhibit at the 1929 British Industries Fair [BIF], his first since the award of the Royal Warrant:

How Mr Moorcroft manages to keep on adding triumphs to his long list of past achievements, one really cannot explain, except that he is, by nature, a creative potter, whose mind is never content unless it is evolving something new, something better.⁴

It is significant that the review did not situate Moorcroft's display in the context of contemporary industrial pottery, but evaluated it against different standards: his own. He continued to attract attention for his skill as a potter, creating glaze effects of the highest quality. In an article entitled 'An Art Achievement in Pottery', a critic drew attention to a highly publicised appraisal of his latest work:

1 *Pottery Gazette and Glass Trade Review* [PG] (August 1929), p.1290.

2 PG (September 1930), p.1469.

3 PG (June 1931), p.866.

4 PG (April 1929), p.610.

The most interesting art event of the week at the British Industries Fair was the tribute paid by the Official Lecturer on Ceramics at the Victoria and Albert Museum, who described a Moorcroft peach bloom vase as the greatest achievement in modern pottery. [...] The tribute is not surprising [...]. Moorcroft pottery stands supreme as being not only comparable in beauty to the finest examples of the past, but with the added virtue that it is entirely modern in inspiration and execution.⁵

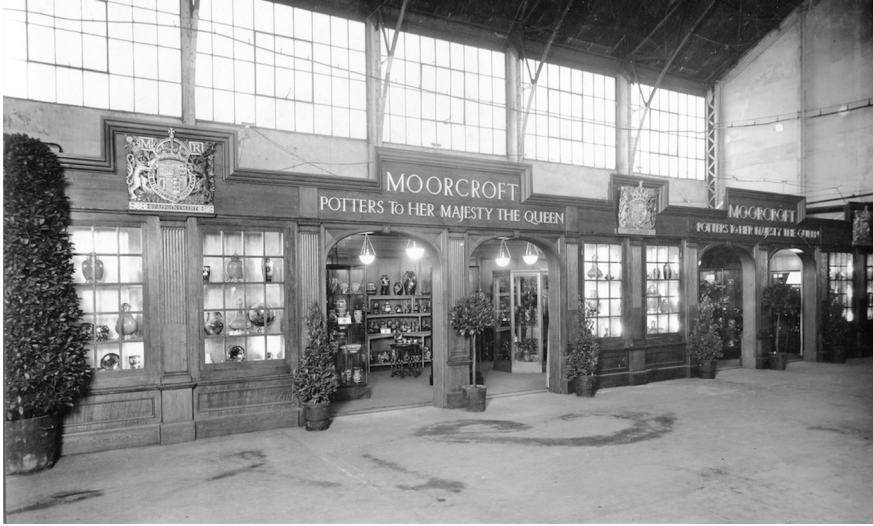


Fig. 86 Moorcroft's stand at the 1929 British Industries Fair. 'Personal and Commercial Papers of William Moorcroft', Stoke-on-Trent City Archives, SD 1837. CC BY-NC



Fig. 87 William Moorcroft, New designs in grey and fawn, with matt glaze: Fish (1931), 20cm; Poppy (1931), 11cm; Landscape (1931), 23cm; Leaf and Berries (1931), 17.5cm. CC BY-NC

5 Unsourced press cutting in William Moorcroft: Personal and Commercial Papers, SD1837, Stoke-on-Trent City Archives [WM Archive].

This phase of creativity culminated in his exhibit at the 1931 BIF, particularly notable for its range of new, non-floral designs, featuring landscapes, fish, and leaf and berry motifs, each presented in different tones. The *Pottery and Glass Record* commented particularly on his new matt effects, setting them in the context of pre-industrial pottery:

Very interesting was the revival of the use of salt glaze by Mr William Moorcroft, this being a method of glazing which made Staffordshire pottery famous in the 18th century all over the world. But, indeed, the whole Moorcroft exhibit this year was strikingly fresh—still typically Moorcroft, but quite different, in the predominating colours of the ware [...], from the display last year. [...] Then, instead of the rich reds of last year, the prevailing colours were different shades of grey, blue, jade green and yellow [...].⁶

These consciously muted tones stood in sharp contrast to the predominantly bright colours in much industrial production, and brought him closer to the more ‘sober’ palette of Shoji Hamada, ‘ranging through brown, russet and grey to a grey-blue of beautiful reserved quality’, in his 1929 exhibition at the Paterson Gallery.⁷

Indeed, as so often before, Moorcroft’s stand at the British Industries Fair had the status, and impact, of an artist’s exhibition, attracting high-profile attention. The unsourced review listed visitors to his stand in 1929, including two serving Cabinet ministers and the wife of the Prime Minister, Stanley Baldwin:

This year the exhibit contained many new objects which were admired by thousands of visitors. The Queen [...] visited the stand and purchased two vases and a jar, and as Her Majesty is recognised as a connoisseur the world over, this fact speaks for itself. The stand was also visited by the Prince of Wales, Prince George, Mrs Baldwin, Sir W. Joynson-Hicks, Sir Arthur Steel-Maitland, and the Brazilian Ambassador.

It was the same story the following year. What caught the attention of the press was not the appeal of his pottery to commercial clients, but its appreciation by prominent figures coming to applaud him:

Mr Moorcroft was, according to his custom, personally in attendance, and a busy man he was, for one after another, visitors of note called upon him, usually to express their congratulations upon his achievements. [...] Another distinguished visitor to the stand was the Prime Minister, Mr Ramsay MacDonald, who, though he confessed to being a busy man, said he would like to know something as to the methods by which Mr Moorcroft’s charming decorative effects were secured in rouge flambé and other individualistic styles.⁸

This was a moment of particular significance, being the first visit to the Fair of a serving Prime Minister since its inception in 1915. Such was Moorcroft’s prestige that appreciation of his ware had become an indicator of fine judgement.

6 *Pottery and Glass Record* [PGR] (March 1931), p.69.

7 C. Marriott, ‘A Japanese Potter’, *The Times* (24 May 1929), p.12.

8 *PG* (April 1930), p.612.

Moorcroft was clearly seen as an artist potter, his ceramic skills and aesthetic sensibilities drawing the attention of critics. After the 1929 BIF, he sent a vase to T. Frederic Wilson, the lecturer at the Victoria and Albert Museum [V&A] whose accolade had attracted press attention. Wilson's reply, dated 1 May 1929, confirmed the impact his pottery was having in 'the world of art': 'I am giving an 'At Home' to a few who really matter in the world of art and reason next Tuesday 'To meet a Vase'. With very kind thoughts.'⁹ And a review of his exhibit at the 1930 BIF focussed particularly on its distinctiveness:

If, however, Mr Moorcroft never evolved anything in pottery beyond what is represented by his present achievements he would, at least, have the satisfaction of knowing that he has proved how pottery, as a plastic medium, can be used to express the finer susceptibilities, just as literature or poetry is chosen by some to attain the same ends. Moorcroft pottery is no ordinary pottery; it stands in a class by itself and has to be viewed from that standpoint.¹⁰

Moorcroft's pottery was seen to have the expressive quality of art; it was a judgement very similar to that of Charles Marriott in a review of William Staite Murray's work:

[...] Mr Murray has now made of pottery a complete form of emotional expression [...]. Each of his pots, vases, bowls or dishes is moulded to a mood, none the less real for being indescribable in words [...].¹¹

Moorcroft's Royal Warrant was seen to confirm this status. If Moorcroft was no ordinary potter, the Queen was no ordinary patron; royal approbation was rare, and was awarded only to work of exceptional quality. An article entitled 'The Queen's Potter' summarised this sequence, excellence followed by recognition:

Mr William Moorcroft, who owns a small one-man factory at Burslem, near here, is spoken of in the Potteries as the world's master potter. Experts say that for beauty and distinctiveness, Mr Moorcroft's work approaches the brilliant products of the ancient Chinese. The Queen has bought dozens of pieces of his work, and has bestowed the honour of 'Potter to the Queen' on him.¹²

And the qualities recognised by Queen Mary were clearly appreciated, too, the world over; Moorcroft was an artist potter whose work was commanding the highest sums: 'Members of Royal Families in Europe and American millionaires are his chief customers. Yearly he sends thousands of pounds' worth of his china to the Far East.'¹³

But what continued to be stressed in reviews was that Moorcroft's output appealed to more than wealthy connoisseurs alone, and that it was affordable by more than a narrow elite. His best pottery was fit for the finest collections, but the same qualities

9 All unpublished documents referred to in this chapter are located in WM Archive.

10 Ibid.

11 C. Marriott, 'Stoneware Pottery', *The Times* (3 November 1928), p.17.

12 'The Queen's Potter', *Sunday Dispatch* (24 March 1929).

13 Ibid.

were recognised too in his functional ware or more modest decorative pieces. A review of his work in the *Woman's Pictorial* moved seamlessly from one to the other:

Experts have said that there are pieces in this ware which rival the early Chinese work for which fabulous sums are paid. There is nothing more lovely in the home than a Moorcroft dessert set. The colouring is marvellous. As the Queen said when she purchased a vase: 'The blue is the colour of a raven's wing', and the colour of the fruit in the pattern is the work of an artist.¹⁴

This consistent quality underlay the appeal of Moorcroft's work to a distinctively broad range of potential buyers, from those seeking objects to treasure to those seeking items to use. Written just weeks after Leach's 'A Potter's Outlook', this endorsement had particular resonance; this was not just pottery for the museum, it was art for the home. The practicality of his ware was emphasised, too, in *The Industrial World*, February 1929:

Moorcroft pottery is designed for use, and not merely for ornament. It is astonishingly durable, and is admirably adapted for everyday use in the home, the cups and saucers in deep lapis lazuli blue being particularly attractive against the background of a dark oak table. Bowls and vases of Moorcroft pottery, filled with flowers, bring gaiety and life to any room [...].¹⁵

What attracted particular attention at the 1931 BIF was Moorcroft's launch of decorated dinner ware, enthusiastically welcomed in the press for its 'sound craftsmanship and high artistry'.¹⁶ Characteristically, this was tableware quite like no other. Moorcroft did not simply apply floral motifs to white ware, nor did he adopt the increasingly popular style of banded decoration; instead he created a complete integration of colour and ornament.¹⁷ And its appeal was widespread. If it won public approval in the Staffordshire press, it was no less warmly appreciated in London circles. Writing to Moorcroft on 12 March 1931, Edith Harcourt-Smith conveyed the enthusiastic appreciation of the Japanese Ambassador: 'The Ambassador [...] adored the autumn dinner service! [...] He bought, he told me, some of those dessert plates you gave me—dark blue with coloured fruits, which he thought marvellous, as we do!'

As debate continued about how best to improve the design of functional objects, Moorcroft's ware was regularly highlighted. His was pottery which brought pleasure, both in use and as an object of contemplation. An article in *Town and Country News* made just this point:

14 'The Charm of Pottery in the Home', *Woman's Pictorial* (12 January 1929), p.13.

15 M. Brandon, 'A Home of Artist-Potters', *The Industrial World* (February 1929), 26–27 (p.27).

16 *Staffordshire Sentinel* (17 February 1931), p.4.

17 His designs did not fit into the categories identified by Pevsner, *An Enquiry into Industrial Art in England* (Cambridge: C.U.P., 1937): 'However, good or bad, Banded or Floral, English earthenware is by now modern (or modernistic) in appearance. It was about eight or ten years ago that commercial Modern Floral forced its way into the British market. Banded patterns came a little later, about 1930' (p.75).

The renaissance of English ceramics owes much to the genius of W. Moorcroft, a potter who has succeeded in striking a happy compromise between the manufacturing needs of today and the claims of art. In this compromise, the claims of art have been superior; it is no mere figure of speech that Moorcroft pottery will be valued by future generations as typical of the finest ceramic art of the early twentieth century.¹⁸

Marfield's emphasis was significant. Moorcroft's functional objects were seen to be the creation of an artist potter, and their unique appeal derived from that. Viewed from this perspective, it meant that all of his pieces could be considered artworks, as was suggested in the *Pottery and Glass Record* review of his exhibit at the 1929 BIF:

What distinguishes a display of Moorcroft pottery is that there is never a piece among it which is not truly beautiful. [...] This is another way of saying what has often been said that 'every piece of Moorcroft pottery is a collector's piece'.¹⁹

And for some owners, Moorcroft's pottery was not simply an object of collection, it had a defining role in their domestic surroundings; the article in *The Industrial World* suggested that it was often the centrepiece of a room, 'the key note of a whole scheme of decoration.'²⁰ And this was no simple figure of speech. It was a transformative effect expressed, too, in Wilson's thank-you note to Moorcroft of 1 May 1929: 'I have had to change the colour of my walls and paint to harmonise with the vase, the more I see of it, the more it grows on me.' And for one, the appeal extended further still. In a letter to his daughter, Beatrice, on 29 November 1931, Moorcroft recounted one customer's exultant reaction to a piece of his ware; it was more than a decorative object, it was the foundation of her well-being. A rhetorical flourish, of course, but eloquent nonetheless: 'A visitor from Australia told her husband that she would prefer to live in an orange box with a piece of Moorcroft than to be without it.'

For many critics, Moorcroft's ware could not fail to weather the economic storm. It was affordable by more than just collectors of ceramic art, and its appeal was evidently increased by the Queen's high-profile patronage. When the Canadian paper *The Morning Post* reported on the strategies of one buyer visiting the 1931 BIF, it was taken as self-evident that a royal purchase conferred 'added value in the eyes of her American customers'; for this reason, 'this clever Canadian buyer was careful to buy [...] Moorcroft pottery with the new fish pattern.'²¹ And an article in *Public Opinion* referred to royal purchases of Moorcroft ware as an inducement to buy with confidence; there could be no better, nor more attainable, aspiration than to show the same taste as the Queen:

Wherever it has been shown, Moorcroft pottery has won the highest praise from connoisseurs. Mr Moorcroft was some years ago appointed potter to the Queen, and

18 E. G. Marfield, 'The Revival of Ceramic Art. A British Master Craftsman and His Creations', *Town and Country News* (15 August 1930), 24–25 (p.25).

19 *PGR* (April 1929). Moorcroft would adopt that phrase in some of his publicity material.

20 Brandon, 'A Home of Artist-Potters', p.27.

21 P. Scott, 'The Woman Buyer comes to London for Ideas', *The Morning Post* (23 February 1931).

her Majesty, whose judgement and taste in such matters is well known, has repeatedly purchased pieces. Those who give Moorcroft pottery this Christmas may be sure that the friends will possess perfect specimens of British craftsmanship at its best.²²

Moorcroft's distinctive blend of art and functionality was widely recognised, both at a local and a national level. In a letter to Moorcroft of 6 May 1931, Sir Francis Joseph, chair of the Staffordshire Chamber of Commerce, expressed 'the indebtedness to yourself of the district for the lifting and making of earthenware from mere utility to an enviable level of artistic merit', and on 5 June 1931, he was invited by Hubert Llewellyn Smith to become a Fellow of the British Institute of Industrial Art [BIIA]. The appeal of his ware was seemingly irresistible. So much so that the article in *Public Opinion* openly re-appropriated Wilson's praise of Moorcroft's technical and artistic achievements, using it now as a comment on their commercial potential: 'Moorcroft pottery is one of the great achievements of modern British industry'.²³ The reality, though, was not quite so simple.

2. Art and Commerce

For all that Moorcroft's pottery was widely appreciated, this did not translate effortlessly into profitable trading in the deteriorating economic conditions. Nevertheless, at the end of his first full year as the Queen's potter (1928–29), he recorded a profit of just over £518, overturning the significant loss of the previous year. Sales had increased by 6.2%, but money owed from unpaid invoices had risen by nearly 15%, and Moorcroft found himself operating on a steadily increasing overdraft. Throughout the following year, he worked actively to promote his ware. In the wake of the Wall Street crash of 29 October 1929, many firms were absent from the British Industries Fair which was moved in 1930 to the newly built Empire Hall at Olympia. Moorcroft, however, adopted the opposite strategy, reserving a site of particular prominence at the new venue. He worked to develop his position, too, in the European market, exhibiting at the Leipzig Trade Fair, although, as reported in the *Pottery Gazette*, the commercial benefits were 'generally poor'.²⁴ And he took positive steps to control the steep decline in his US sales, which had fallen by 33% from 1928 to 1929.²⁵ Within months of the Wall Street crash, he tried to circumvent the prohibitive duties on imported goods, arguing in a letter to the United States Treasury Department that his wares should qualify for the exemption accorded to works of art. But what US customs understood by art was clearly different from Moorcroft's conception of the term (and that of many reviewers of his work). A reply, dated 1 March 1930, quoted a ruling of the United States Court of Customs

²² 'A Christmas Hint', *Public Opinion* (11 December 1931).

²³ *Ibid.*

²⁴ *PG* (April 1930), p.637.

²⁵ Letter from Pasco, 17 July 1930.

Appeals; a defining characteristic of an art work was deemed to be non-functionality, excluding at a stroke so much of Moorcroft's pottery. Ironically, if Moorcroft had wished to reduce the price of his export wares, he would have needed to deny their 'utilitarian purpose', the very quality which gave his work its broad appeal. But there was still clearly a market for his ware in the US. A letter from an importer, Roy Treloar, dated 21 March 1930, expressed confidence that 'a big business can be done in the States', and so it proved. Moorcroft's year-end outcome was a loss of just £20; in the year following the collapse of the US market, this was a remarkable result.

But it was not to last. Trading conditions were stifling, orders were falling, and his bank deficit increasing to alarming levels. Loeffler Inc., a firm of New York importers, wrote on 29 January 1931, describing a market now completely governed by price:

I am sorry to say conditions are terrible here, and there is no improvement at all. Christmas trade was very bad all around, [...] and since Christmas there are sales everywhere of pottery and china etc, which makes it very difficult indeed to sell expensive and exclusive articles such as yours. We are passing through one of the worst crises in the history of this country.

Pressure was increasing to cut back his costs, but Moorcroft would only go so far. His innovative exhibit at the 1931 BIF was a defiant demonstration of his commitment both to his design and production principles, and to his workforce. But by the end of the financial year sales had fallen by nearly 40%, and he was left with his third loss in four years. He had reduced the level of money owed by 30%, but it was still a very significant sum: without it, his sales income would have increased by nearly 50%, turning the eventual deficit of £2,201 into a profit of almost equivalent size. By the start of the new financial year, the firm's overdraft had exceeded the £2,000 limit agreed with the Bank. Moorcroft wrote on 31 August 1931, explaining that the deficit was the result of unpaid accounts and his own efforts to protect the jobs of his staff. But it was a losing battle. As sales fell in the course of the year, the prospect of redundancies loomed larger; he wrote gloomily to Beatrice on 4 June 1931:

The effect of the world's trade depression appears to be more and more far-reaching. [...] We are feeling it just now on the works, and it is a problem how to keep everyone fully employed, a big problem.

By early September, concessions had become inevitable; it was a painful blow, as a letter from Edith Harcourt Smith on 9 September 1931 made plain: 'How could you help allowing your men to go on the dole! Impossible. You made superhuman efforts to prevent it, yet there comes a time when one must give in, much as one objects.'

But this was not the only concession Moorcroft had to make to the economic pressures. As the Bank sought additional financial guarantees against its loan, Moorcroft was faced with a stark choice: to use the deeds of his works as security, or to reduce the overdraft. On 12 November 1931, he wrote to Liberty's, expressing confidence that trade was now improving, and sales did indeed rise; by 31 December

1931, income was very nearly 50% higher than the year-to-date figure a year earlier. But these improved figures were not the result of a change in the economic climate, quite the reverse; Moorcroft had just sold a large quantity of his imperfect stock to Eaton's at a heavily discounted rate.

Special Selling Moorcroft Pottery Less Than Half Usual Price

Here is an unusual and rare opportunity to buy the well-known Moorcroft pottery at prices which bring this beautiful specimen of the English potters' art within the reach of everybody. In connection with this shipment to EATON'S the potter, Mr. Moorcroft, writes: "I have gone over each object and the collection is as good, or I should say, in many cases, better than we can usually find. The pieces are full of interest and in many cases exceptional."

Included in this Sale are Moorcroft's most popular and distinctive patterns including: "Pansyrose"—"Winter"—"Poppy"—and "Autumn Leaves." Sketched above are a few typical examples of signed Moorcroft pieces offered in this great Pre-Christmas Sale. All sizes given represent approximate height in inches, except P and U, which are width measurements.

A—approx. 10 1/2"	\$3.95	E—approx. 2 1/4"	\$1.45	K—approx. 2 3/4"	35c	Q—approx. 2 3/4"	\$2.95	T—approx. 7 1/2"	\$1.45
B—approx. 14 1/2"	\$9.75	F—approx. 5 1/4"	98c	L—approx. 4"	35c	P—approx. 7"	\$1.95	U—approx. 9 1/2"	\$2.45
C—approx. 6"	98c	G and H—approx. 4 1/4"	each 72c	M—approx. 11 1/4"	\$5.45	R—approx. 8"	\$2.45	W—approx. 8 1/4"	\$3.95
D—approx. 8 1/4"	\$5.45	J—approx. 6 3/4"	\$1.95	N—approx. 8 1/4"	\$2.95	S—approx. 12 1/2"	\$5.75	X—approx. 12 1/2"	\$5.75

Also Obtainable at EATON'S - College Street
 Phone AD. 8511 or AD. 8511
 —EATON'S—Bathurst—College—and City Sts.—Third Floor

Fig. 88 Advertisement for sale of Moorcroft's pottery, *Toronto Daily Star* (7 December 1931). 'Personal and Commercial Papers of William Moorcroft', Stoke-on-Trent City Archives, SD 1837. CC BY-NC

The benefit to the balance sheet was immediate, but it was an act of desperation. In 1929, an article published in the *Sunday Dispatch* presented Moorcroft as one whose commitment to quality outweighed purely commercial motives: 'if he had made money his god, he could have accumulated a great fortune.'²⁶ A manufacturer might judge the success of his work with reference to his sales, but Moorcroft was seen to have quite different criteria, uncompromisingly expressed in his own words; the ultimate arbiter of value was not the public, but he himself:

My work is the revelation of what I consider to be beauty. To get the desired colouring effects, I have to be most careful in watching the temperature of the ovens, and the running of one colour into another. If the result is not as I wish, the pottery is useless to me and is laid aside.²⁷

But as commercial pressures increased, it was more and more difficult to justify setting aside imperfect pieces which might be sold at reduced prices, still less those which, to other eyes, might have seemed without flaw. In 1929, this was precisely what Moorcroft had been doing:

Mr Moorcroft showed me four rooms stacked ceiling high with beautiful pieces of china, but to him they were only so much waste. Either in the colouring or design there was a fault in each, although it would need the eye of an expert to discover it.²⁸

26 'The Master Potter', *Sunday Dispatch* (24 March 1929).

27 Ibid.

28 Ibid.

By the end of 1931, however, he could do so no longer. Wares he had described two years earlier as 'useless' and unsuitable for sale, he must now accept as a marketable commodity; commercial necessity had finally overridden his artistic ideals. But his reluctance was clear. Writing to Beatrice on 6 November 1931, he revealed that he had, as always, overseen what left the factory; even in these conditions, there were limits to what he would countenance being sold in his name:

I determined to dispose of a lot of pottery, some thousands of pieces, and the packing out of this has been a great strain. Each piece had to finally pass my supervision. That is apart from the fact that each piece had passed through my hands at an early stage.

Worsening trading conditions underlined the fact that Britain needed both cheaper products and better design to compete in the world markets. In 1929, just weeks after the Wall Street crash, the BIIA held an exhibition of Industrial Art for the Slender Purse at the V&A; price took its place alongside design as a criterion of value. Its aim, quoted in *The Times*, was 'to give practical proof that beautiful things need not be costly'.²⁹ Many manufacturers were controlling the cost of their decorated wares by adopting simple designs which could be applied freehand and at speed by teams of more or less skilled decorators; painting with on-glaze enamels facilitated the correction of mistakes and reduced the number of losses. Some firms employed art school trained designers, such as Charlotte Rhead, Clarice Cliff, or Eric Slater; another, Susie Cooper, left Gray & Co. in 1929 to set up her own factory. Many firms struggled, but the Newport Pottery was on the crest of a wave. The exuberant, innovative and affordable designs of Clarice Cliff's Bizarre series appealed to a growing market of young post-war couples. For many, they epitomised commercial design, for better or worse; eclectic in inspiration, they were immediate in appeal, and quick and cheap to produce. The *Pottery Gazette* noted its remarkable success more than two years after its launch, and for all its bold extravagance:

Never before had such powerful and intensive colourings been applied en masse in flat brushwork effects. [...] the designs and colourings struck one as being so unlike anything previously attempted, and so revolutionary in character as to be likely to prove short-lived. [...] but experience has proved that any such fears were unfounded.³⁰

Other firms, however, looked to fine artists. There was growing concern about the low status of the industrial designer, and a desire to encourage more artists to collaborate with industry. In the autumn of 1930, Frank Brangwyn exhibited at Pollard & Co., Oxford Street, a series of designs in pottery (made for Doulton) and other media; the event was reviewed in *The Times*. It was a collaboration intended to create not individual artworks, but items for industrial production:

29 "'For slender purses". Industrial Art Exhibition', *The Times* (9 November 1929), p.9.

30 PG (June 1930), p.941.

The exhibition is modern without displaying any of the irritating qualities of much recent modern household equipment and furniture. It is strong and virile in design, and is intended for mass reproduction at a commercial price.³¹

For some, the most successful examples of collaboration between art and industry were to be found in Europe and Scandinavia. The Stockholm Exhibition of Arts and Crafts and Home Industries, reviewed by Marriott in an article entitled, significantly, 'Art and the Machine', represented the new wave in Europe, 'the boldest and most consistent exhibition of what one is compelled to call 'functionalist' design in terms of its own characteristic beauty that we have yet had'.³² Marriott saw among the exhibits 'things of quite extraordinary beauty, for daily use and at moderate prices'; these were the defining virtues of modern industrial art, identified by the organisers of the BIIA exhibition. The event inspired an exhibition of Swedish Industrial Art at Dorland Hall in 1931, which brought to prominence qualities of simplicity, functionality and easy replicability in the pottery and glass of leading designers such as Ewald Dahlskog and Simon Gate. And it underlined, yet again, the value of close collaboration between high-quality designers and enlightened manufacturers, strikingly rare in Britain. As *The Times* review noted:

What distinguishes the present exhibition is not so much the evidence of superior talent in design, or technical efficiency, or business enterprise as isolated factors, as the evidence of a relationship, as close as it is easy, between all three; a cheerful association of talents and experience for the common welfare.³³

Later that year, Marriott was in no doubt that the best industrial pottery was currently being made in Europe and Scandinavia, not in Staffordshire:

[...] the person who wishes to obey the injunction to 'buy British' in factory-produced domestic wares must be prepared to sacrifice his taste in doing so. He can easily get something that is technically sound, but [...] his artistic preferences would be better pleased by something from Sweden, Germany or Czechoslovakia.³⁴

Even as economic pressures threatened to compromise the commercial success of Moorcroft's ware, critics were reflecting on the most appropriate measure of its worth. For many, as indeed for Moorcroft himself, it was not to be found in balance sheets, although some expressed it still in monetary terms. *The Overseas Daily Mail* argued that his finest work would continue to appreciate in value:

Firms like the Moorcroft Potteries, who are engaged exclusively in the production of the highest quality work, can reasonably claim that [...] the collectors' pieces which

31 'Art and Household Decoration', *The Times* (8 October 1930), p.12.

32 'Art and the Machine. The Achievement of Stockholm', *The Times* (18 June 1930), p.15.

33 'Swedish Art', *The Times* (18 March 1931), p.17.

34 'Art Exhibitions', *The Times* (29 October 1931), p.10.

are purchased from them at the present day will change hands in future generations at increasingly high figures.³⁵

In the depths of the Depression, this analysis of Moorcroft's work as a sound financial investment had a clear pertinence. But it had a further significance. It ascribed to his pottery an enduring quality which was appreciated not only at the present time, but whose appeal seemed certain to last long into the future. It was a virtue identified in the finest oriental wares, and attributed, too, to some contemporary studio pottery:

Chinese pottery will answer to any interior, and for that reason may be claimed as a universal pottery, in a sense that Staffordshire or slipware can never be. For that reason, too, the modern stoneware potters who start from the Chinese have the best chance of making an art of to-day and, what is more, an art for to-morrow.³⁶

Moorcroft's ware, neither a slave to the past nor a plaything of fashion, was clearly seen in this same category. For *The Industrial World* of February 1929, even his most inexpensive functional pieces would inevitably acquire the status of art objects, such was their intrinsic and enduring quality; it was the trajectory from home to museum which had been evoked in analyses of pre-industrial wares since the end of the previous century:

Although Moorcroft pottery is sold at prices which make it possible for anyone to acquire some of the smaller pieces, there can be no doubt that it will be eagerly sought by collectors in the years to come, and that many pieces will find their way into the museum. Authentic pieces, bearing the signature of the artist, will inevitably become rarer, since so many will be broken in daily use [...].³⁷

In the course of these years, Moorcroft was forced to reduce his staff numbers and to sell wares he considered imperfect, but he would not compromise on his designs or production techniques, simply to lower his costs. In a review of a Leach exhibition at the Little Gallery, Marriott concluded that handmade functional objects could not be commercially viable, or compete with the moulded, mass-produced wares of industry:

What Mr Leach is trying to do, in short, is to push the resources of the small private kiln, staffed by two or three people, as far as they will go to meet factory production. It is not a case of attempted competition—hand-thrown can never compete economically with moulded wares—but an attempt to narrow the gulf between the two kinds in artistic quality.³⁸

Moorcroft, though, held a different view; it was a position which set him apart from the manufacturers among whom he worked.

35 'British Pottery Industry', *The Overseas Daily Mail* (27 December 1930).

36 W.A. Thorpe, 'English Stoneware Pottery by Miss K. Pleydell-Bouverie and Miss D.K.N. Braden', *Artwork* (Winter 1930), 257–65 (p.257).

37 Brandon, 'A Home of Artist-Potters', p.27.

38 C. Marriott, 'Art Exhibitions', *The Times* (29 October 1931), p.10.

3. A Potter Apart

It was widely recognised that Moorcroft was a potter like no other in these desperate times, neither in the work he produced nor in the manner of its creation. *The Industrial World* drew attention to the working environment he had created, pointedly commenting on its difference from a factory:

Although the Moorcroft pottery is actually produced in what may be called a factory, it bears only a very slight resemblance to those which are devoted to the manufacture of the ordinary pottery of commerce. It is really much more a home of workers where each one does his or her part to contribute to the making of forms that are as beautiful as possible and in colours that are directly appealing. It was planned by Mr W. Moorcroft, the artist-potter, is pleasantly situated on a hill, with wide views over open country, and is surrounded by trees and shrubs. The aesthetic sense of the workers is developed by an artistic environment, and their physical well-being is assured by the hygienic conditions under which they work.³⁹

For all that it was located in the Potteries, this was clearly not a place of industrial production, it was the site of collaborative artistic endeavour; Moorcroft was not seen as a manufacturer, but as an 'artist-potter'. His 'factory' was described in terms which recalled an Arts and Crafts workshop where the quality of the wares produced and the working conditions of the craftspeople were of equal importance. The point had been made in the first reviews of Moorcroft's works, but it had added significance now, nearly twenty years later, when the gulf between industry and studio was increasingly discussed. This unique atmosphere was noticed too by a visitor to Moorcroft's works in a letter of 9 November 1930:

Although I had been going periodically to Stoke for some years, this was my first acquaintance with the inside of a pottery. I realise that your works are hardly typical: the personal touch which I found so much in evidence can scarcely be common elsewhere in these days of mass-production; it is a pity it should be so.

Moorcroft's distinction, and distinctiveness, as a potter was underlined when he was invited in May 1930 to write an article on pottery for the national paper, *The Daily News and Westminster Gazette*, on the occasion of the bicentenary of the birth of Josiah Wedgwood. It was published on 19 May 1930, Moorcroft's photograph appearing opposite that of Princess Mary, who had opened the celebrations that day.

Coming just months after the Wall Street crash, it was hoped that this anniversary would focus attention on the long tradition of pottery manufacture in Staffordshire and inspire a commercial revival; Moorcroft's article, however, took a quite different line. A brief editorial introduction presented him as 'one of the most individualistic potters of his time', and the article itself, significantly entitled 'How Pottery Should "Grow"', was written from the perspective of a craft potter, taking a detached and

³⁹ Brandon, 'A Home of Artist-Potters', p.26.

implicitly critical view of contemporary industrial manufacture. Moorcroft's opening remark focussed on the practice of pottery as a process of creation, as organic as nature itself:

In the making of a piece of pottery, it should first grow naturally, just as a plant from the earth, being a part of the earth, and any colour given to the pot should be an inherent part of it, as much so as the colour of a natural flower is an inherent part of it.⁴⁰

Such metaphors underlined his commitment to thrown ware, a value he shared with studio potters. Staite Murray had written in 1925 of the 'rhythmic plastic growth' of the pot on the wheel,⁴¹ and in his review of a Leach exhibition at the Paterson Gallery, Marriott used a similar analogy: 'You rear a pot as you might rear a plant.'⁴² But these images had a particular resonance now, implying a discreet but unmistakable distance from the popular, if impractical, angularity of many moulded forms, such as Cliff's Conical range, introduced in 1929. No less critical of contemporary industrial practice were his comments on the use of bright, on-glaze colours; what he saw here was impermanence and superficiality, the very opposite of colour in nature:

Unless fashions in pottery are the outcome of a natural growth they will not give satisfaction. To apply a colour compound upon a fired and glazed pot is no less offensive than it would be to paint the bark of a tree.⁴³

Moorcroft wrote as a potter, one whose mastery of glaze effects had been publicly admired as triumphs of the potter's art. The firing of onglaze colours in a low-temperature enamel kiln required much less ceramic skill than was needed to achieve the different atmospheric conditions for the creation of high-fired colours in clay stained with metallic oxides.

But it was not just on the grounds of technique that he distinguished himself from industrial manufacture, there was a difference, too, of principle. For William Moorcroft, the potter's art was not simply a commercial activity, it was a moral one, its aim to create beauty for others, not profit for oneself:

If our future pottery work were done with a spiritual and physical regard for the materials used in making the pot, we should give a real joy to the world. There would be no hard mechanical lines, no harsh ornament.⁴⁴

Beneath this profession of faith, Moorcroft's criticism of modern manufacture was as trenchant as that of Leach.⁴⁵ He acknowledged the popularity of ware made to satisfy tastes of the day, but he saw in it an exercise in commercial opportunism. And even as

40 W. Moorcroft, 'How Pottery Should "Grow"', *The Daily News and Westminster Gazette* (19 May 1930).

41 W.S. Murray, 'Pottery from the Artist's Point of View', *Artwork* (May-August 1925), 201-05 (p.201).

42 C. Marriott, 'Stoneware Pottery', *The Times* (21 April 1926), p.20.

43 Moorcroft, 'How Pottery Should "Grow"'.
44 Ibid.

45 Leach, 'A Potter's Outlook', p.189: 'the shapes are wretched, the colours sharp and harsh, the decoration banal, and quality absent'.

he himself was feeling the economic pressures, it is striking that he should express so keenly his belief in the value, both artistic and monetary, of work produced according to more enduring principles:

It is difficult to combine commerce and art. Art, well considered and thoughtfully applied, is the greatest capital when dealing with the clays and metals of the earth—it is useless to say the public do not want real, thoughtful work. Too often the commercial man in his ignorance prevents the public from having what is their birthright—the opportunity to choose.⁴⁶

In the quest for commercial survival, Moorcroft's response was to maintain the basic principles of the potter's art, respect for his materials, integrity of design; all else, he implied, followed from this, not least the appeal to the public. It was a powerful, personal statement, and a controversial one. Significantly, the article ended with his signature, which had become by this time the unmistakable mark of the man, and the emblem of his authority.



Fig. 89 William Moorcroft, "How Pottery Should "Grow"", *The Daily News and Westminster Gazette* (19 May 1930). 'Personal and Commercial Papers of William Moorcroft', Stoke-on-Trent City Archives, SD 1837. CC BY-NC

Moorcroft's distance from industrial manufacturers came to the fore in his display at the Exhibition of Modern Pottery, organised by the British Pottery Manufacturers' Federation (BPMF) to accompany the bicentenary events. The *Pottery Gazette* described this project as 'the most comprehensive Exhibition of modern pottery which has ever

⁴⁶ Moorcroft, 'How Pottery Should "Grow"'.

been staged',⁴⁷ and most of the major Staffordshire firms were represented. A review in the *Pottery Gazette* singled out in Moorcroft's exhibit its range from 'masterpieces of technical and artistic execution' to simpler designs, but all distinctively his: 'even in the less involved decorations there was that purity of line and grace of form which, in conjunction with perfectly balanced ornamentation, is a feature of Mr Moorcroft's creations'.⁴⁸ Moorcroft clearly promoted, and the review underlined, his royal patronage. What provoked dispute, however, was his inclusion in the exhibit of a card from Frederick Wilson, lecturer at the V&A, which repeated his much publicised endorsement of a vase with peach-bloom glaze first exhibited at the 1929 BIF: 'The greatest achievement of the modern potter'. When Moorcroft wrote on 20 June 1930 to Sidney Dodd, secretary to the BPFM, a dispute had been rumbling for some time:

In reply to your letter of the 19th of June, I have a witness of the statement you made in the King's Hall with regard to the card I was showing in my case. You expressed the view that the written statement of the Expert of the Victoria and Albert Museum was 'mere puff'. When you made the statement, you also told me that your committee had met and demanded a withdrawal of the card from my case.

The BPFM had doubtless taken the view that Moorcroft's display of Wilson's comment implied the technical and artistic superiority of his own work, at the expense of the other exhibitors; for Moorcroft, their objection implied a disparagement of his achievement as a potter. Edith Harcourt Smith, writing in the aftermath of the exhibition, had no doubt about the cause of the dispute, and the conclusions to draw from it, bluntly suggesting in a letter of 8 June 1930 the radically different priorities which distinguished Moorcroft from Staffordshire potters in general, and which his article had eloquently made plain:

[...] it was just you, thoughtful to a degree, full of beautiful ideas and hopes, my husband thought the same. It was very kind of you condescending to write it, for all those men down there are full of jealousy, and you returned good for evil. Yet remember, you're on a different plane altogether, and they know it!

The quarrel, in itself trivial, nevertheless indicated a significant tension between Moorcroft and the BPFM. It was no doubt exacerbated by the fact that Moorcroft had not paid his levy to the Federation since first joining in 1926; Dodd had much correspondence with him on this subject too. But its causes lay almost certainly deeper, arising from Moorcroft's distinctive approach to pottery manufacture at the heart of the Potteries, all the more unpalatable as he was clearly admired both in the trade press and in London, and appeared to be weathering the economic storm. Ironically, at the height of the dispute, on 2 July 1930, Claude Taylor wrote to inform him that he looked likely to be awarded the *Grand Prix* at the International Exhibition at Antwerp:

⁴⁷ PG (December 1929), p.1960.

⁴⁸ PG (July 1930), p.1133.

‘It is excellent to find that they have recognised your work and propose to give you the highest award possible’. If his work provoked dispute in the Potteries, it was winning acclaim in Belgium.

Shortly before Moorcroft’s article, Marriott alluded again to the possibility of bridging the gap between studio and industrial production in a review of a Leach exhibition at the New Handworkers’ Gallery:

The difficulty of linking up studio and factory pottery so as to retain the high quality of the one and secure the practical advantages—of rapid production and low cost—of the other is now an old story. Many attempts have been made to bridge the gulf [...].⁴⁹

The review ended with a reference to a ‘special exhibit’, a ‘standardised tile fireplace, composed of tiles made in quantity by semi-mechanical means and decorated with conventional animal, bird and plant forms’. The example was significant, introducing the two elements which Marriott (and many others) saw as the basis of a successful collaboration between craft and industry: standardised design and mechanised production. It was the model he would subsequently applaud at Stockholm later that same year; it was the way of the future. Moorcroft, though, had a quite different conception of his identity as a potter, and his article, written just weeks after Marriott’s review, and on the occasion of a major industrial bicentenary, was the defiant affirmation of his practice of (true) manufacture, making by hand. He was bridging the gap between studio and factory, creating craft wares on a larger than studio scale, and defying the commercial pressures in the process. In an article published in the *Sunday Dispatch*, he was seen to place himself at the very centre of production:

No machinery is used in the execution of my work, Mr Moorcroft said today. I use only the potter’s wheel, an instrument that has been in existence for 4,000 years or more. Many people have asked me why I mix my own chemicals, why I design and mould all my own work; but my only answer is that I am the creator. To leave this to other people would be to destroy my greatest joy.⁵⁰

He was, in the words of the article, a ‘one-man factory’.

What distinguished Moorcroft above all from manufacturers, either from Staffordshire or Sweden, was not simply his close personal involvement in both design and production, but his principled opposition to mass production. Large-scale replication implicitly sited the quality of an object in its design; this was increasingly seen as the new art, art for the modern age of mechanical reproduction. Marriott identified this ambition in his review of the Stockholm Exhibition: ‘its primary object may be supposed to be to present the artistic possibilities latent in standardisation and mass production methods. Its motto might be ‘How to civilize the machine’.’⁵¹ For Moorcroft, however, manufacture was about individuality, not uniformity. Even his

49 C. Marriott, ‘Stoneware Pottery’, *The Times* (31 March 1930), p.12.

50 ‘The Master Potter. Art Objects for the Queen. One-Man Factory’, *Sunday Dispatch* (24 March 1929).

51 ‘Art and the Machine’, *The Times* (18 June 1930), p.15.

dinner ware, significantly, was not intended for production in industrial quantities. Writing to his daughter, Beatrice, on 20 November 1930, he recounted his meeting with 'a keen commercial mind in the form of a buyer from the United States of America':

He suddenly expressed a keen admiration for my new service plates. So he imagines I shall require an enlarged works. It is not really the case, as I do not want mass production. I feel there is a need for interesting, individual things. Something with individual thought expressed therein.

His objection was closely connected to how he viewed himself as a potter. He did not seek to create standardised wares, easily reproduced by means of moulded forms, printed decoration, or freehand copying; he was defending the individuality of craft. But he was defending too a very personal conception of design, which was not simply a response to the requirements of market forces, function, or mass production, but which was, above all, a means of expression.

4. Nature and Self-Expression

Moorcroft's public interventions frequently voiced a critical attitude to the commercial motivation of modern industrial design. For him, design was much more personal, a response to the world around him. He often gave expression to this belief in the letters he wrote, at least once a week, to his teenage daughter, Beatrice, at school in Buxton. A recurrent theme in these letters is the inspiration he found in the contemplation of nature. Writing on 12 October 1930, he described a sunset he had witnessed on his way home from a visit to Buxton:

The sunset was very charming, the massive rocks made a majestic foreground. In parts there were beautiful turquoise blue clouds behind the dark purple hill, and in other places there were the rich glowing clouds that suggested the fire of the sun. [...] These beautiful scenes carry our thoughts both before and beyond our time. How delightful it is to live and to think of worlds beyond, of all that is infinite [...].

Moorcroft's sensitivity to colour is evident here, but so too is his active engagement with the experience. This was a spectacle not simply to be enjoyed, but to be read; in it he saw and celebrated the wonder of creation. Just as he had sought in some earlier designs to capture natural scenes in the light of the evening sun, or the risen moon, he was inspired by such moments as this to create a series of striking landscapes, their impact enriched by their glaze effects; these were pieces made in very small numbers, but they were not just technical experiments, they expressed a gratitude for life, a sensitivity to the magnificence of the natural world.

He was no less sensitive to leaves than to landscapes. Recurring frequently in his designs over the next decade, they embodied Moorcroft's delight in the simple as well as the majestic, and inspired a motif developed in pieces large and small. In a letter of 23 November 1930, he was already reflecting on the rich and varied colours of the leaf in autumn:

Recently I have been making pottery and obtaining colour in it resembling autumn leaves. [...] There are leaves of a golden yellow with veins of a red sunset colour merging into a luscious green, somewhat like the green leaves we see in the woods in the autumn intermingled with the morning dew lying on the ground. There is a charm in such colour, like the charm one finds in the singing of the birds and in the running river. A charm one finds in all that is Pure [...].

As he sought to express in words the correspondence of sight and sound in this rich synaesthetic experience, he endeavoured too as a potter to embody in colour, form and texture the beauties of the world he observed. It was a significant statement. In his catalogue essay for Staite Murray's exhibition earlier that month, Herbert Read had evoked pottery as self-sufficient form, 'pure art', with no representation either explicit or implicit.⁵² Moorcroft's conception of 'pure' ceramic art was more expansive, it was pottery in the service of nature.

Moorcroft's responsiveness to the natural world was evident too in another of his new decorative motifs, fish, admired by the Queen at the 1931 BIF. The motif coincided with the installation of a fishpond in his garden at Trentham. What enthused him most about the fish were their sinuous movements and iridescent colours in the sunlit water. Even as his dispute with the BPFM was gathering momentum, Moorcroft delighted in these impressions in a letter of 8 June 1930:

This afternoon we sat reading in the garden with the fountain playing. The fish were leaping up to kiss the sun, as it were, and the colour was charming. I had no idea how wonderful goldfish are in colour when they leap out of the water. They resemble a combination of rubies, gold and silver, each element appearing to be more supreme than another.

Such comments shed light on Moorcroft's creative process. He did not seek designs in books of decorative ornament, or in contemporary trends, he consulted the world around him. And he clearly found it both stimulating and refreshing to do so, respite from the preoccupations of everyday life which (he felt) stifled his creativity. He wrote wearily to Beatrice on 29 November 1931; nature alone could enliven the spirit:

There is too little time to see the beautiful country, and without nature's teaching we become torpid, dull, inanimate. So often one feels with the poet who wrote: Oh for the wings, the wings of a dove, far, far away would I roam. And yet one's imagination helps one to survive.

The reference to Mendelssohn's anthem, made famous in Ernest Lough's iconic recording of 1927, did not just indicate sympathy with the yearning of the text, but implied, too, a recognition of the reviving power of beauty in a troubled world; he expressed its value in a letter of 12 November 1929: 'Nature ever abounds with interest. And one's imagination is quickened thereby. And nature sometimes outdoes even the

⁵² H. Read, 'The Appreciation of Pottery', reprinted as 'Art without Content: Pottery' in *The Meaning of Art* (London: Faber & Faber, 1931), 32–33 (p.33).

pressures of work.' It was this energising, restorative influence which inspired him as an artist, and which he sought to capture in his pots. The transforming effect of his imagination is evident in variants of toadstool or landscape designs created at this time, pieces which evoke moments in the natural cycle from vitality to repose, their expressive power enhanced by the intensity of colour beneath the rich flambé glaze. Even in the depths of 1931 he was moved by nature's beauty; it did not simply provide a means of escape from the increasing commercial pressures, it represented all that was real, all that truly mattered:

This is a day of glorious sunshine, the trees and flowers are together joyous with their new life. The green of the leaves was never more beautiful and the flowers seem to have risen in a night to throw out their spirit of thankfulness for such an awakening.⁵³

At this time of exceptional economic, political and social uncertainty, Moorcroft's preoccupation with the beauty of the natural world had a particular resonance. On 9 June 1929 he contrasted what he saw as the haste and commercialism of modern life with the tranquillity and expansiveness of nature:

Motor cars, petrol pumps and hideous advertising are like an ugly dream as we walk in the country. With such restlessness it will be difficult to create great literature or great architecture or any great art. To do great work, we somehow yearn for spaciousness, for the great breadth of the hills and plains, for the gentle, continuous flowing river.

For William Moorcroft, nature embodied a completely different, more peaceful and more authentic rhythm of life. It was this that he yearned for as the post-war world entered its second decade; writing on 15 October 1930, he expressed the belief that a new era of calm would soon succeed the turbulence of the present:

In these days, it is more than ever necessary to make things as appealing as possible. Sometimes I think we are about to change from a period that has been conspicuous for its unrest [...], to another period of extreme restfulness. Then we shall find restraint in thought and speech, in our great arts, in music, in painting, in sculpture, and in all the minor arts. Once again we shall avoid mass production and we shall all strive and we shall all seek for beauty and truth in all things.

It was a defiant response to the modern age. On that very day, *The Times* had reported Marriott's lecture to the Anglo-Swedish Society, in which he saw in the Stockholm Exhibition the dawn of industrial design:

It was [...] a frank and calm acceptance of things as they are, and an attempt to make the best of them artistically on their own lines; and as reflecting the Swedish combination of idealism and common sense, it cleared the way for the future.⁵⁴

No 'calm acceptance', though, from Moorcroft; he had a different vision to express.

53 Letter to Beatrice, 10 May 1931.

54 'Mr C. Marriott on Stockholm Exhibition', *The Times* (15 October 1930), p.10.



Fig. 90 William Moorcroft, 'Autumn Leaves and Berries' (c.1930), 6cm. CC BY-NC



Fig. 91 William Moorcroft, early fish designs under flambé glaze (1931): (left) 15cm; (right) 17.5cm. CC BY-NC



Fig. 92 William Moorcroft, experiments with flambé glaze: (left to right) Landscape (c.1931), 23cm; Toadstools (c.1930), 20cm; Landscape (c.1930), 20cm. CC BY-NC

His prediction was unfounded, but his very personal designs continued to speak to the times. Critics often noted in his work a quality of restfulness, recognised as unique in contemporary design. A review of his 1930 BIF exhibit sought to explore its distinctive character:

W. Moorcroft, Ltd., Burslem, once more presented an exhibit which, to lovers of the beautiful in pottery form and decoration, provided a real resting place for the eye. [...] Somehow, each individual pot seems to have some quality which is personal, and belongs to no other pot in quite the same degree. In short, there is a soulfulness about every individual piece of 'Moorcroft' ware which can be associated only with pottery which reflects in no uncertain degree individualism in its production.⁵⁵

Particularly striking was the critic's emphasis on the effect of Moorcroft's ware. This was pottery which was serene, expressive, personal, qualities quite different from those found in industrial manufacture; the critic's reference to its 'soulfulness' echoed, consciously or not, Leach's 'A Potter's Outlook': 'who has ever seen a factory-made pot with a nature of its own—a soul? How should it have one, except it were breathed into it by the love of its maker?'⁵⁶ This was precisely the quality Moorcroft sought in his work, and in whose expressiveness he had such confidence. Significantly, even his Powder Blue was experienced in a similar way. Introduced in 1914, its purity of line, harmony of form and colour, and unobtrusive functionality were qualities which anticipated in many ways the modernist aesthetic coming increasingly to the fore. And yet, for all its absence of ornament, it exuded that same stillness so frequently identified in Moorcroft's ware at this time, as Edith Harcourt-Smith noted in a letter of 17 September 1929:

You are so often talked of in this house by us and those who come. Your tea service is in use daily, giving untold delight all round. One never tires of the hue of blue, restful as well as cheerful, which is what one requires.

In a letter to Beatrice of 24 February 1929, Moorcroft recalled the visit of the Prime Minister's wife to his stand at the British Industries Fair: 'On Wednesday, Mrs Baldwin called to see our pots. She was charmed, so she said, and chose a special piece for the Prime Minister.' On the day before this visit, 19 February 1929, Baldwin had faced (but narrowly avoided) defeat in a Commons vote on proposals for compensation to be paid to Irish loyalists. Mrs Baldwin's purchase of a 'special piece' for her husband that day may well have been another, unobtrusive endorsement of the calming qualities of Moorcroft's art.

Pottery brought Moorcroft close to the earth, both literally and figuratively. On 24 October 1930, he imagined working with his daughter, enjoying the wonder of creativity:

⁵⁵ *PG* (April 1930), p.612.

⁵⁶ Leach, 'A Potter's Outlook', p.189.

I am longing for the day when you will be with me at the works, making beautiful things, good forms, good colour and thrilling design. The joy of expressing oneself in a material that has been already millions of years in the forming is inexpressible. To enter upon it with a reverent regard for its possibilities is some way towards success.

This was not just (or even at all) an anticipation of the future, it was a profession of faith. His focus was not on creating designs which might be profitable, but on those which embodied a personal sense of beauty, a tribute to the earth; this was the 'success' he evoked. In these desperate economic conditions, when commerce and art were increasingly difficult to reconcile, Moorcroft was formulating afresh his reasons for creating, expressing the enduring significance of his ware, even when his balance sheets might have implied that it had no value, and nothing to say.

5. Conclusions

As economic conditions continued to deteriorate, Moorcroft began his new career as holder of the Royal Warrant with a defiant commitment to individuality both of design and of production. It was a commitment upheld in the face of conventional commercial logic, or necessity. The focus of his efforts was not simply, and perhaps not even predominantly, the balance sheet, it was on the expression of beauty as a response to the times, and on the benefits which this might bring. Writing to Beatrice on 27 February 1931, in the year which saw his most significant trading loss to date, he noted with evident pleasure the continued appreciation of his ware. Pottery was not simply a commercial exercise, it was an act of service:

The concentrated work of some months has found its reward. [...] Many times, visitors have been thrilled and found words only too inadequate to express their admiration and their love for Moorcroft pottery. It is gratifying to find that one is able to give joy to someone.

In happier times, this attitude had brought significant trading success; now, there was a growing tension between (his) art and commerce.

It is clear, though, that his work continued to speak to the times, in a language beyond words. From his earliest years at Macintyre's, Moorcroft had voiced the ambition 'to express with as much humanity as possible my thoughts in clay'; for him, this was not a matter of finding a distinctive style, but of giving form to a philosophy of life, a vision of the world. And to do so required both the ceramic skill of a potter and the sensitivity of an artist, each applied to the best of his ability; he wrote to Beatrice on 30 October 1929:

Natural science and physics are both subjects full of interest, and [...] only as we realise the mystery and beauty of nature's way do we make good things. [...] There is a definite charm in putting one's thoughts into a material that is practically indestructible. And when one has such a responsibility, that of using a material that is so lasting, it is necessary to express ourselves with immense care.

What he envisaged was an art which had an enduring value, all the more significant in these turbulent and uncertain times. It is perhaps no coincidence that he expressed this view on the very day *The Times* reported an event which took the world into uncharted economic territory: 'Wall Street record. Nearly 17,000,000 shares sold [...] There has never been such a day of liquidation on the stock markets as this.'⁵⁷

Paradoxically, Moorcroft's self-expression was akin to self-effacement; his aspiration to the highest quality was his tribute to the beauty of the natural world: the warm harmonies of sunset, the luxuriance of autumn, the joyful freedom of fish in their element. In a letter of 4 March 1930, he described his sense of responsibility to complement nature, not to compete with it:

Just now I have been thinking how to make pots to hold iris and tulips, and blue and red anemones. [...] As God gives us such beautiful flowers, it is a sacred trust, that of attempting to display them. To put charming fairy-like flowers into crude vessels of either glass or pottery seems almost a crime. Only the best of one's imagination should be used in finding a counterpart for the flowers to rest in.

And his work was a tribute, too, to the materials with which he worked, as he wrote to his daughter on 7 December 1930: 'why should not we do our utmost to make beautiful things, something worthy of the materials God provides us with?' The personality of the designer was expressed in the pieces he fashioned; but the focus remained on the objects themselves. The article in the *Sunday Dispatch* provided a rare glimpse of the man behind the pots, his achievements all the more compelling for being so understated:

Meet Mr William Moorcroft. He is an unassuming little man with a softly modulated voice. When he speaks of himself, it is in a tone of depreciation, but in the Potteries district he is regarded as the master potter of the world.⁵⁸

But if there was humility in Moorcroft's art, there was also self-belief. At a time of extreme economic pressure, he continued to experiment. On 17 October 1930, as he worked on the designs he would launch to such critical acclaim at the 1931 BIF, he gave expression to a defiant spirit, drawing strength from his past as he confronted the present, and the future:

[...] these days one has more to do than usual owing to difficult economic conditions. It is useless to take things as though all was normal. I feel that difficult times are with us, to force the best out of us. We do better work when we are faced with something to fight against.

⁵⁷ *The Times* (30 October 1929), p.14. On 28 and 29 October 1929, the Dow Jones index fell in value by more than 23%; the Wall Street crash is seen to mark the start of the Great Depression, the longest and most widespread period of recession in the twentieth century.

⁵⁸ 'The Master Potter', *Sunday Dispatch* (24 March 1929).

He was widely seen to be creating a ware which was distinctively his and which could not truly be imitated. In a world where standardisation was the watchword of modern industrial manufacture, Moorcroft continued to affirm the very personal quality which had defined his art since the start of his career. It was in this spirit that in the spring of 1930 he explicitly, and pointedly, submitted his exhibit to the International Exhibition in Antwerp in his own name, and not that of the firm which bore his name.



Fig. 93 Part of Moorcroft's 'personal' exhibit at Antwerp 1930. 'Personal and Commercial Papers of William Moorcroft', Stoke-on-Trent City Archives, SD 1837. CC BY-NC



Fig. 94 Photograph of Moorcroft's works, and the amended version sent to *Town and Country News* in 1930. 'Personal and Commercial Papers of William Moorcroft', Stoke-on-Trent City Archives, SD 1837. CC BY-NC

To exhibit as a firm might imply that his work was no more than a commercial commodity, lacking 'soul' both in its inspiration and its making; he wished to stress, on the contrary, that his exhibit was 'a personal one', as a letter from R.E. Moore dated 1 October 1930 made plain:

I have already pointed out to the Belgian authorities that your exhibit is a personal one, and have ascertained that on their records the entry is simply 'W. Moorcroft, Esq.' I hope therefore that the diploma will be correctly inscribed [...].

There could be no more emphatic way of asserting his commitment to craft over design, of individuality over uniformity. More telling yet were the photographs of his works supplied to *Town and Country News* for Marfield's article of 15 August 1930. If the sign board actually carried the name of his firm, W. Moorcroft Ltd., the photographs submitted had been consciously altered, the letters 'Ltd.' blacked out to leave visible simply his name. A small but eloquent transformation of manufacturer to potter.

By the end of 1931, Moorcroft had introduced a stamp to mark his Royal Warrant.



Fig. 95 Labels and stamp used to indicate Moorcroft's Royal Warrant. CC BY-NC

A gold foil label, embossed with the Royal Arms and the formula 'By Appointment to H.M. the Queen', had been applied to pieces in the months immediately following his award, but it almost always became detached from the wares. It was soon superseded by a paper label, which added to the wording 'By Appointment...' the title first granted in 1765 to Josiah Wedgwood by Queen Charlotte to record her admiration for his ware: Potter to H.M. the Queen. It was a personal tribute, significantly singular. The design was completed with Moorcroft's signature, the unmistakable emblem of his individual investment in each piece. The stamp, though, was more eloquent still. Unlike a label, it fixed the very personal nature of his Warrant in the body of his ware, the one henceforth indissociable from the other. But it also, tellingly, took the place of the upper case stamp 'Moorcroft', for more than a decade the trademark of his firm: the potter's affirmation of his individuality was imperishable, unequivocal and uncompromising.

12. 1932–35: Individuality and Industrial Art

I. Economic Stagnation

In 1932, economic conditions were still bleak. A 'Buy British' campaign attempted to counter the influx of cheap imports, but protectionist tariffs in Britain made exports more difficult for manufacturers, as other countries took retaliatory action. Self-destructive price-cutting was widespread, and part-time working inevitable; in the winter of 1932–33, over a quarter of the working population was unemployed.

With high costs and low output compared with larger firms, Moorcroft was particularly vulnerable to these pressures. On 11 January 1932, the *Toronto Evening Telegram* advertised another 'sensational' sale of his ware at Eaton's, 'thousands of pieces of this world-renowned pottery' at 'less than half usual prices'.

SPOT LIGHT SALE

Moorcroft POTTERY

Less than half usual prices!

Thousands of Pieces of this World-Renowned Pottery in a Sensational Sale, Tuesday

Recently EATON'S advertised a tremendous special selling of signed Moorcroft pottery and the entire quantity was sold before sundown. TUESDAY'S SPOTLIGHT OFFERS AN EVEN BIGGER SELECTION — BETTER VARIETY OF PATTERNS AND DESIGNS — GREATER QUANTITY EVERY PIECE IN THE SELECTION BEARS W. MOORCROFT'S SIGNATURE AND IS MARKED AT MUCH LESS THAN USUAL PRICE.

Included are such patterns as "Pompadour", "Fruit", "Floral", "Honey", "Powder Blue", "Fairy", "Sunset" and "Fountain". Shaded above are a few of the shapes, all signed by W. Moorcroft. Many are obtainable in different sizes. Remember! The last sale we sold out by midnight — and immediate disappearance took place — was early. If ordering by telephone — call AD. 5011 or AD. 5011 and ask for price wanted by telephone.

Limited Quantities of the stock on hand.

No. 1, approx. 7 in.	1.45	No. 12, approx. 12 1/2 in.	6.45	No. 24, approx. 6 1/2 in.	1.20
No. 2, approx. 7 in.	1.45	No. 13, approx. 12 in.	5.45	No. 25, approx. 10 in.	2.25
No. 3, approx. 8 in.	1.45	No. 14, approx. 8 in.	.75	No. 26, approx. 10 1/2 in.	2.25
No. 4, approx. 6 in.	.50	No. 15, approx. 7 1/2 in.	.75	No. 27, approx. 10 1/2 in.	2.25
No. 5, approx. 6 in.	.50	No. 16, approx. 2 1/2 in.	.75	No. 28, approx. 12 1/2 in.	2.25
No. 6, approx. 6 in.	.50	No. 17, approx. 4 in.	.75	No. 29, approx. 7 in.	2.25
No. 7, approx. 6 1/2 in.	.50	No. 18, approx. 2 1/2 in.	.75	No. 30, approx. 7 in.	2.25
No. 8, approx. 14 in.	9.75	No. 19, approx. 2 1/2 in.	.75	No. 31, approx. 7 1/2 in.	2.25
No. 9, approx. 14 in.	9.75	No. 20, approx. 2 1/2 in.	.75	No. 32, approx. 7 1/2 in.	2.25
No. 10, approx. 14 in.	9.75	No. 21, approx. 2 1/2 in.	.75	No. 33, approx. 7 1/2 in.	2.25
No. 11, approx. 10 1/2 in.	5.45	No. 22, approx. 2 1/2 in.	1.25	No. 34, approx. 10 1/2 in.	2.25
		No. 23, approx. 2 1/2 in.	1.00	No. 35, approx. 10 1/2 in.	2.25

T. EATON CO. LIMITED

Fig. 96 Advertisement for sale of Moorcroft's pottery, *Toronto Evening Telegram* (11 January 1932). 'Personal and Commercial Papers of William Moorcroft', Stoke-on-Trent City Archives, SD 1837. CC BY-NC

The sale brought immediate financial benefit, but it also put strain on Moorcroft's relationship with other outlets. Cassidy's wrote indignantly on 12 January 1932,

complaining of 'this flow of 'Moorcroft' pottery at half price', and others commented on its damaging impact on the status of his work. In a letter dated 3 October 1932, W.J.F. Mallagh, a stationer in Toronto, was clear about the consequences: 'all this price cutting is bound to have its effect on art lovers, and it seems to me altogether too bad that your artistry is being cheapened in this fashion'.¹ The market for full-price wares was clearly shrinking, and yet, after the experiment with Eaton's, Moorcroft deliberately avoided undertakings which cheapened his ware, either literally or metaphorically. In 1933, Bournvita commissioned Wedgwood to design and manufacture jug, beaker and stand sets, available to the public in exchange for wrappers and coupons; in the same year, a similar proposal came to Moorcroft, from another source, but he declined. For all the financial benefits it might have brought, he would not turn his ware into a marketing gimmick, as he admitted in a letter to Claude Taylor, 7 July 1933:

I am battling to withstand the force of mass production. I recently refused orders from a Tobacco Company who were anxious to give my pots for a collection of cigarette cards. But I find historic houses such as Etruria Wedgwood are giving the pots to anyone that collects a number of covers from various food tins or cases. Am I wrong in refusing to so keep my workers employed? I do not think so.

Moorcroft wished his pottery to be chosen and appreciated on its own terms, and not simply acquired indirectly, at minimal cost. This approach also informed his very selective sales strategy. Extensive correspondence from 1934 with a new travelling representative in the south of England, Grace Garton, is particularly revealing in this regard. Garton appreciated the high quality of Moorcroft's work, telling him on 29 September 1934, 'I shall never place your pottery in any unfit shop for the sake of money'. Moorcroft saw his ware as more than a commercial commodity, and for all the difficulties of the times he was not prepared to sell it at any price. He was defending his own integrity, and that of his staff.

But this was an increasingly difficult line to follow. On 14 February 1933 he wrote to the Editor of *The Times*, requesting a notice of his display at the British Industries Fair [BIF]:

At the present time, pure individual craftsmanship is affected owing to the tendency to buy mass-produced things, and my workers are only able to work for a very limited time each week. I am showing, as I have always done, a collection of my pottery at the B.I.F. and [...] any reference to my efforts to produce good things would help us to continue our work.

His reference to working short-time was no exaggeration, and the consequences were serious; it was in the course of this year that he lost one of his longest-serving tube-liners, Fanny Morrey, to Charlotte Rhead's newly-formed department at A.G. Richardson. Financial results in the tax year 1931–32 had improved markedly on the previous year, with sales showing an increase of 7%, and a substantial net profit of over £2,300; it

1 All unpublished documents referred to in this chapter are located in William Moorcroft: Personal and Commercial Papers, SD1837, Stoke-on-Trent City Archives [WM Archive].

was the result of the sales to Eaton's, no doubt. Thereafter, trading was difficult and, as the Depression deepened, balanced books were a measure of his success. After the strong result in 1931–32, the following year saw, unsurprisingly, a fall in income of nearly 30%; in the following two years, though, sales grew modestly, by 6% in 1933–34 and by 3% in 1934–35. Levels were now barely 50% of those achieved in Moorcroft's last significant year of 1929–30, the year of the Wall Street crash, but he had arrested further decline. Nevertheless, with increasing running costs, debts and wages, net profits were falling steadily; the high point of 1931–32 was followed by consecutive falls to £444, £356, and £12. At the Directors' meeting of 12 September 1933, it was agreed to suspend payment of the Directors' fees to Moorcroft and Alwyn Lasenby; an identical resolution would be passed in September 1934 and again in September 1935.

2. Re-Thinking Industrial Design

Against this background of economic contraction, the competitiveness of modern industrial design was being discussed with ever-increasing urgency. In the summer of 1932, Lord Gorell's Committee on Art and Industry, set up in 1931, published its report. It stressed the necessity of improving the quality of British industrial production, and proposed exhibitions of affordable, well-designed wares as a means of refining public taste. It recommended that the 'advancement of industrial art' should become the responsibility of the Board of Trade, and that a new Council for Art and Industry (CAI) be formed, replacing the British Institute of Industrial Art (set up jointly by the Board of Trade and the Board of Education). Established in 1934, its Chair was Frank Pick, newly-appointed Chairman of the London Passenger Transport Board. Pick saw the mission of the CAI to educate consumers, to reform the training of designers, and to encourage closer collaboration of artists and industry, areas where the leading countries of Europe were seen to be much further advanced and consequently more competitive.

Many pottery manufacturers resisted these conclusions, maintaining that sales figures were a more relevant (and reliable) measure of success than the more shadowy concept of good 'taste', all the more suspect for its origins outside the world of industry. It was in this spirit that the achievement of Josiah Spode was evaluated in the bicentenary year of his birth. In a lecture by John Thomas, 'Josiah Spode: his times and triumphs', it was his popularity (and his balance sheet), rather than his designs, which defined his greatness:

The final arbiter on Spode and Spode Ware was not the art director, the director of a museum, the art collector, or the connoisseur, but the public. [...] He was a plain, blunt Staffordshire business manufacturer, out to sell Spode ware and to make a commercial success of it.²

2 'Josiah Spode: His Times and Triumphs', *Pottery Gazette and Glass Trade Review* [PG] (November 1933), 1341–45 (p.1345).

It was a view expressed, too, by Colley Shorter at a meeting of the North Staffordshire branch of the Society of Industrial Artists. The spectacular success of Clarice Cliff at the Newport Pottery exemplified and affirmed its validity: 'the ideal designer was he or she who could produce designs which would sell by themselves.'³

For others, though, popularity was not a reliable measure of design quality, nor was it a guarantee of international competitiveness, not least because British taste was seen to be very conservative. Already in preparation before publication of the Gorell report, the exhibition of British Industrial Art in Relation to the Home at Dorland Hall in 1933 was inspired by the successful exhibition of Swedish Industrial Art in 1931. Organised by Christopher Hussey of *Country Life*, in association with the Design and Industries Association [DIA], it sought to highlight collaborations of designer and manufacturer to match the Swedish examples. On 19 June 1933, the day before the opening, Gorell and Hussey wrote to *The Times*, confidently affirming that 'Modern British design now takes its place beside that of Sweden, France and Germany'.⁴ Its focus lay on functionality, and on the close integration of design and means of production; these were the qualities which defined modern European industrial art: 'Everything exhibited illustrates the principle that our needs today are most aptly supplied by designs evolved from industrial technique and the natural properties of materials.'⁵ It was an exhibition of moderated modernity, bringing together some of the most forward-looking industrial potteries of the time. Many of the exhibits were (still) hand-decorated, but several manufacturers were displaying wares made in collaboration with progressive designers, and using modern methods of decoration. Wedgwood exhibited the first sculptural and unornamented designs of Keith Murray, as well as hand-decorated tableware designed by Millicent Taplin and Harry Trethowan; Carter, Stabler & Adams displayed some of John Adams's modern functional wares with banded decoration applied with an aerograph technique; A.J. Wilkinson exhibited Clarice Cliff's 'striking new designs of daring impulse' which continued to experiment with new decorative effects,⁶ many applied to distinctive angular shapes; and Susie Cooper attracted particular attention for the sleek lines of her Kestrel shape, and her simplified, at times abstract, decorative designs. A review in *The Times* praised its 'close attention to contemporary needs and conditions',⁷ and, writing three years later, Pevsner saw it as 'the best survey of modern and well-designed objects which has so far been held in England'.⁸

A different perspective on the relationship of art and industry was offered by the exhibition 'Modern Art for the Table', held at Harrods in 1934, which featured china, pottery and glass decorated with designs commissioned from twenty-seven of the

3 'What the Pottery Manufacturer expects from the Designer', *PG* (April 1933), p.499.

4 'The Modern Home. A British Exhibition', *The Times* (19 June 1933), p.10.

5 *Ibid.*

6 *PG* (July 1933), p.844.

7 'British Industrial Art', *The Times* (20 June 1933), p.14.

8 N. Pevsner, *An Enquiry into Industrial Art in England* (Cambridge: C.U.P., 1937), p.170.

country's leading artists; it was the initiative of two of the most commercially successful firms in the Potteries at this time, E. Brain & Co., and A.J. Wilkinson (together with the Stourbridge glass manufacturer Stuart and Sons). Intended, no doubt, to demonstrate the appeal of designs by established artists across a range of styles, this high-profile collaboration of artists and manufacturers, promoted at a fashionable London store, made commercial success its focus and benchmark. The outcome, though, was mixed. Few of the commissioned artists had experience of industrial manufacture, and their designs were often ill suited to the wares they decorated, or to adaptation for mass production. The most popular were a series of circus scenes by Laura Knight, but many others were criticised for their high price or limited appeal. For its critics, the Exhibition demonstrated the consequence of (mis)understanding design simply in terms of ornament, with little regard to form, functionality or means of production; the critic William Gaunt described the decoration as merely 'grafted on to the pottery', having 'no essential connection with it'.⁹ But Gordon Forsyth was more pragmatic. He saw ornament as essential to commercial success, and commercial success was clearly the ultimate criterion: 'the store in question was highly delighted with the exhibition, since it led to good sales. That, surely, was what the pottery industry wanted.'¹⁰

Moorcroft was involved in neither of these initiatives. Whether he submitted wares for consideration by the Selection Committee of the Dorland Hall exhibition is not documented, but it is likely that the focus on mass production will have discouraged him from doing so. As for the Harrods exhibition, his critical response was stark. Writing to his daughter, Beatrice, on 28 October 1934, less than a week after the opening, he lamented the aimlessness of contemporary industrial design and its detachment from the natural world:

Nature, with its magnificent simplicity, is the whole time striving to show us the way to better things. But we somehow miss the mark. We choose to think of a circus, or some crude artificial interpretation of life. We form our ideas in an atmosphere that is unnatural, and we wonder what is wrong.

His own tableware captured a modern spirit in his own distinctive way, some of his most striking pieces decorated with the simplest of motifs. A peacock design was reduced to the eye (a motif which recalled, but with even starker simplicity, the roundels of Flamminian ware, introduced more than thirty years earlier), and a yacht motif (based on an idea of his daughter, Beatrice) focussed on the outline of sails, a not quite straight-sided triangle which gave to geometrical form a suggestion of movement and life. His most striking new tableware, though, was Sunray, introduced in 1933. The name, doubtless not accidental, carried its own ironic provocation. It had been used by two of the leading commercial designers for patterns which captured the bright angular world of the twenties: Clarice Cliff's stylized cityscape introduced

⁹ W. Gaunt, 'The Artist in Industry', *PG* (January 1935), 81–86 (p.85).

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p.86.

in late-1929, and Eric Slater's black and yellow sunburst motif for Shelley, launched in 1930 and one of his most successful designs. By contrast, Moorcroft incorporated no ornament into his design; he did not represent the sun, simply its warming effect, through a distinctively ochre glaze. It was very well received. Edith Harcourt Smith wrote on 4 January 1934, delighted at the set Moorcroft had sent her for Christmas: 'I simply adore the yellow tea set, and shall keep it entirely for my own use, for it is so soothing and restful.' And it had lost none of its appeal two years after its launch, highlighted in an article in *The Sunday Times*; this was more than just teaware, it was a breath of fresh air:

May I make a suggestion for a wedding present? Still at Liberty's, I saw an ideal gift—the new Moorcroft morning tea set. It is called Sunray, and is in a wonderful shade of golden yellow; it reminds one of summer mornings, so full of sunshine that one almost feels the day will burst with it. And that is a reminder worth its weight in gold at 7.45 on a winter morning with a London fog drifting in through the window.¹¹



Fig. 97 William Moorcroft, Vase in 'Sunray' (c.1934), 12.5cm. CC BY-NC

This critical appreciation came from an influential source. Muriel Beckwith, daughter of the 7th Duke of Richmond, was something of a free spirit; for all her privileged upbringing, fondly recalled in her memoir *When I Remember*, she was one who 'adapted herself very easily to the social changes of the last thirty years'.¹² Her endorsement, in a Sunday paper of national circulation, confirmed both the quality of Moorcroft's ware and its perfect attunement to the modern age.

But against the background of urgent debate about the relationship of art and industry, Moorcroft continued, defiantly, to behave like a potter. In his commitment to the primacy of craft, he was distancing himself from industrial designers or

11 M. Beckwith, 'Ideas for Entertaining', *The Sunday Times* (27 January 1935), p.20.

12 *Times Literary Supplement* (19 December 1936), p.1047.

manufacturers who explored more mechanised forms of production; he appeared ever closer to the studio potter.

3. Affirming Singularity

It was a sign of the concern about industrial design that even reviews of studio pottery considered its potential for commercial adaptation. In a notice on William Staite Murray's exhibition at the Lefevre Galleries just a few months after the publication of the Gorell report, Charles Marriott not only noted the absence of functionality in his wares, but questioned the very concept of pottery as fine art:

[...] in his enthusiasm for form and colour in the abstract, he has lately been in some danger of forgetting that a pot is after all a pot. Not that the pot is limited to base utility, but that beyond a certain point its artistic aspirations are better absorbed in actual representation.¹³

And his review of an exhibition by Bernard Leach at the Beaux Arts the following year implicitly favoured his creation of functional wares over purely decorative pieces, on the grounds of their potential influence on industrial design:

Behind all his work is felt the desire to push individual pottery as far as it will go without loss of quality towards 'commercial' production. This is well because, apart from the advantage to lean purses, 'the trade' is more likely to respond in quality to such an approach than if the individual potter stood aloof with museum pieces.¹⁴

Conversely, the artistic status of modern industrial design was implied in the growing practice of some firms to exhibit not just in trade fairs, but in galleries. Carter, Stabler & Adams displayed their latest designs at the Arlington Gallery, Old Bond Street, shortly after the Dorland Hall event. Although the work still retained a significant element of craft, Marriott's review focussed on its potential for industrial production, 'the thing to be aimed at in present circumstances'.¹⁵ And in November 1933, a display of Keith Murray's Wedgwood designs was held at John Lewis in Oxford Street, followed in 1935 by an exhibition at the Medici Gallery of his work in pottery, glass and silver. Reviewed in *The Times*, his work was praised above all for its sculptural qualities, ascribed to his training as an architect. This was pottery analysed in terms of form, but unlike Staite Murray's work it satisfied the emerging criteria for good modern design: functionality, affordability, adaptability to mass production, and appeal to the general public:

[...] though some of the pieces are 'unique', the majority are of a kind that can be mass produced, *the requirement*, of all others, for the gradual civilisation of contemporary surroundings and the improvement of the public taste.¹⁶

13 C. Marriott, 'Lefevre Galleries', *The Times* (7 November 1932), p.9.

14 C. Marriott, 'Mr Bernard Leach', *The Times* (5 December 1933), p.12.

15 C. Marriott, 'Poole Pottery', *The Times* (13 September 1933), p.13.

16 C. Marriott, 'Glass, Pottery, and Silver', *The Times* (24 June 1935), p.19.

Mass production was not seen to cheapen good design by making it more widely available at an affordable price; on the contrary, it increased its beneficial influence.

Against this background, reviews of Moorcroft's work are particularly revealing. Singled out in a report on his display at the 1932 BIF were its personal, expressive qualities:

The more that one sees of Mr Moorcroft's creations the more one is impressed by the fact that he is an idealistic potter, a worker in clay who, above all else, puts soul into his efforts and pours out, in the pursuit of his calling, all the finer inner impulses of which he is capable.¹⁷

He was presented neither as a manufacturer nor as an industrial designer; he was a potter above all, and the value of his work was not measured with reference to its affordability, or its capacity for mass production. Written just before the publication of the Gorell report in May 1932, this review saw Moorcroft's wares as an inspirational example:

In many ways, Mr Moorcroft's exhibit this year, as so often has been the case in years gone by, lifted the mind far above the level of the materialistic, and caused one to reflect that there is a sense in which the calling of the potter can be one of the most dignified and uplifting, and at the same time result in the spread of culture and refinement.¹⁸

Questions of commercial potential were not raised, Moorcroft's work could be neither described nor assessed in such terms; its value was seen to transcend the taste of the moment. This was an approach more characteristic of reviews of studio pottery. For all Marriott's later misgivings about Staite Murray's pottery, he had spoken approvingly of its beneficial effect in a review of his exhibition at the Lefevre Galleries in 1931:

[...] there can be no question that Mr Murray's pots do enrich and make lovely the space in which they are set. We are the better for them, as when we hear good music.¹⁹

Moorcroft's ware, however, was seen to embody this quality in decorative and functional wares alike; this was the difference:

There is one thing we would like to say in regard to Mr Moorcroft's more recent efforts; he is clearly seeking to provide, not merely in high-priced goods for ornamental purposes, but in wares suitable for daily use, pots which people can live with and remain happy.²⁰

Moorcroft's most sophisticated work was still considered to be the stuff of museums and private collections. In a letter of 18 June 1932, the philanthropist Sir George

17 PG (April 1932), p.495.

18 Ibid.

19 C. Marriott, 'Two Potters', *The Times* (10 November 1931), p.12.

20 PG (April 1932), p.495.

Roberts,²¹ whom Moorcroft had first met earlier that year, indicated the esteem in which his work was held in the art world:

It is a subject of admiration to all the connoisseurs who see it; amongst others, a friend of mine, the art dealer who selected and purchased for me the treasures that are in the case in the Lounge. He, seeing the vase on the top of the case, took it in hand and remarked that modern potters could indeed sometimes turn out fine specimens, a very high compliment, coming from one of the world's experts.

He was approached, too, by the British Institute of Industrial Art on 24 January 1933 to submit pieces to an exhibit of modern British china, pottery and glassware to be displayed in the Royal Museum of Art and History at Brussels, and the new Centenary Museum of Ceramics in Mons. Moorcroft's work continued to be seen, quite literally, as being of museum quality. And he included equivalent wares in his exhibits at British Industries Fairs. One such piece generated particular interest:

[...] the Duchess of York purchased a vase—the first one produced of its kind, and one which, previous to the Royal visit, had been sought after by a well-known collector. We were interested to hear from Mr Moorcroft that a number of pieces from his present season's display have been specially selected for certain prominent museums.²²

If Marriott had begun to see the 'museum piece' as a more aloof form of pottery production, reviews of Moorcroft's ware enthusiastically noted this quality. Nearly twenty years to the month since his move to Burslem, an article in *The Daily Dispatch* underlined his status as an artist potter of international standing:

His ceramic masterpieces are, in fact, to be found in palaces all over the world, for he is the acknowledged creator of a new type of pottery art. Collectors come to Mr Moorcroft's 'Art School of Pottery' from all parts of Great Britain and Europe in their search for something different.²³

This was ceramic art, certain to give pleasure, and certain, too, to be a sure investment. In the *Pottery and Glass Record*, he was cited as the kind of potter whose wares could only increase in value, if collected now: 'Many people buying art pottery today, such as the beautiful Moorcroft art pottery, are laying the foundation of collections which will provide fortunes for unborn generations.'²⁴ In a modern industrial world, the quality of permanence implicit in this observation was fundamentally counter-commercial; in a discussion following a talk by Forsyth to the DIA, the manufacturer A.E. Gray openly resisted such language:

21 Roberts made many charitable donations under the pseudonym 'Audax', including 100,000 guineas (£105,000) to the King Edward's Hospital Fund in 1929 as a thanks offering for the King's recovery from a near fatal bout of septicaemia.

22 *PG* (April 1933), p.473.

23 'Pottery in a Garden', *The Daily Dispatch* (28 October 1933).

24 *Pottery and Glass Record* [*PGR*] (August 1934), p.208.

What potters were expressing today was for today, and they would scrap it tomorrow when the world thought differently. We did not want to get the museum idea of our work being permanent [...].²⁵

For Moorcroft, however, the opposite was true, as he suggested in his response of 23 April 1935 to a questionnaire from the CAI about the training of designers:

The greatest possible care should be used in an art school to avoid fashion as it is called. The art school should look into the shop window not for inspiration, but to learn what to avoid.

In the months leading up to the Dorland Hall exhibition, Moorcroft quite consciously promoted himself not as an industrial designer, but as an artist potter whose ware was distinguished by its timeless ceramic qualities. He was developing his own quite distinctive flambé glazes, achieving an exceptional range of colours, often associated with his highly successful Leaf designs. Equally sophisticated, and of quite remarkable variety, was the range of effects achieved with designs based on Fish motifs, where, as so often, ornament, form and colour, the eye of the artist and the skills of the potter, were brought together in richly inventive ways. It was this aspect of his work that he stressed in his letter to the Editor of *The Times* of 14 February 1933:

Last year in the autumn, the Art Gallery in Toronto included in their permanent collection a group of my pottery, and only as recently as the International Exhibition in Antwerp in 1930 I was awarded a *Grand Prix*. [...] In view of the abnormal difficulty in selling works of art including pottery, I should be intensely grateful for any helpful note upon my work.

No notice was published, but the opportunity to promote his ceramic art came later that year, at the Fifth Triennial Exhibition of Modern Decorative and Industrial Arts and Architecture, held for the first time in Milan. On 3 October 1933, Moorcroft was informed that Mussolini had bought a flambé vase from his exhibit; the very next day, an announcement was published in the *Staffordshire Sentinel*:

His Excellency Signor Mussolini has purchased a vase by Messrs W. Moorcroft Ltd., Burslem, shown at the Fifth International Exhibition of Modern Decorative and Industrial Arts, Milan. [...] It is a simple and very dignified thrown shape, and the colours—obtained by a purely natural development—range from primrose to rich reds, with here and there sensitive touches of violet. Signor Mussolini's appreciative recognition of Staffordshire pottery as exemplified in this specially fine example is a cause for very much gratification.²⁶

Mussolini's act of appreciation was particularly significant at a time when the radical, Futurist ceramics of Tullio d'Albisola and the Aeroceramisti with their bright colours,

25 G. Forsyth, 'The Pottery Designer: What the Industry Needs', *PG* (April 1932), 513–17 (p.516).

26 *Staffordshire Sentinel* (4 October 1933).

irregular shapes and abstract designs celebrated the fast-moving, mechanised world of the future; even in this context, the natural intensity of Moorcroft's flambés was as compelling as ever.



Fig. 98 William Moorcroft, Leaf designs under a rich flambé glaze: Leaf and Berries (c.1933), 16cm; Leaf and Blackberries (c.1933), 17.5cm. CC BY-NC



Fig. 99 William Moorcroft, Fish designs under rich flambé glazes: (left), c.1934, 15cm; (right), c.1935, 15cm. CC BY-NC

For all this success, however, Moorcroft was clearly concerned that his hand-crafted pottery might seem out of place in an exhibition of industrial art. Writing to Longden on 27 October 1933, he expressed this anxiety:

My pottery is not commercial pottery and could not be more individual. These points are not generally understood by people that deal entirely in mass-produced pottery. I know you understand. But I have fears when left to the mercy of the men who do not or will not understand.

Judged by the criteria of modern industrial design which favoured suitability for mass production, Moorcroft feared that the individuality of his ware may be regarded as deficient or irrelevant and result in a lower award from the adjudicating jury than he had received at Antwerp in 1930. He requested that his name should not appear in any published list of awards, lest this imply a decline in quality, and have a detrimental effect on his appeal to retailers. But despite his concerns, the individual nature of Moorcroft's work continued to be appreciated. An article in the *Pottery Gazette* included a photo of his decorating room, explicitly to account for 'the exceptional character and quality of Mr Moorcroft's activities':

The contrast between the conditions here depicted and those of the average mass-production pottery can at once be measured. The individual touch permeates the whole atmosphere. How privileged the workers must feel to be able to operate in such surroundings!²⁷

With his focus on the working conditions, the individuality of each hand-made piece, and the skilled, attentive creativity, the critic set Moorcroft's works yet again in the tradition of an Arts and Crafts studio. But he also implied that, for all the contemporary emphasis on mechanised mass production, the art and craft of a potter was still appreciated in Europe as in the anglophone world. Moorcroft's success in Milan made that plain:

[...] as a result of Mr Moorcroft's exhibit at the Milan Exhibition just about to conclude, a charming example of his handiwork has been purchased by Signor Mussolini. This will bring the name and fame of Mr Moorcroft, as a specialist potter of our times, into yet one more of the world's highest places.²⁸

Moorcroft continued to publicise this success, once more approaching *The Times*. He sent the Editor a vase similar to the one acquired by Mussolini, prompting a short notice on 29 January 1934:

We have received from Mr William Moorcroft of Moorcroft Limited, Burslem, a vase which is a replica of a piece presented by him to Signor Mussolini. [...] the piece sent to this office might well explain a remark said to have been made by Baron Hayashi, when Ambassador here, in buying two Moorcroft pieces—that they were in every way the equal of early Chinese work. The form of the vase is full bellied, curving suavely up to a widish mouth; and the colour is a red of an inexhaustible depth [...]. The quality of its beauty may perhaps best be described by saying that the vase is a work of consummate art [...].²⁹

This notice was significant, not least in the context of Marriott's review of Leach's exhibition at the Beaux Arts in 1933, which had noted the potter's emphasis on functional

27 'Moorcroft Potteries', *PG* (November 1933), pp.1319–21.

28 *Ibid.*, p.1321.

29 'A Moorcroft vase', *The Times* (29 January 1934), p.15.

wares: 'Such Oriental flavour as Mr Leach preserves is Japanese rather than Chinese, which means that his pots approach more closely to domestic uses.'³⁰ By submitting this particular piece, Moorcroft was clearly signalling his difference not simply from industrial manufacturers, but from this trend among studio potters. His own functional ware was already appreciated for its high quality of design and manufacture. But he was producing, too, work of 'consummate art', of a kind appreciated by connoisseurs. If Leach's work recalled a Japanese tradition of unadorned functionality, Moorcroft's was compared with the refinement of the Chinese, and by the Japanese Ambassador.

Milan awards were announced in the early spring of 1934; Moorcroft was awarded the *Diplôme d'honneur*, a grade lower than his Antwerp *Grand Prix*. A list was published in the *Staffordshire Sentinel*, in which, as requested, his name did not appear. For all his misgivings, Moorcroft's *Diplôme* was a very significant success; it placed his ware just behind that of Wedgwood, whose modern designs were at the heart of their exceptional resurgence, and at the same level as Copeland whose exhibit had included work by the innovative Norwegian designer, Eric Olsen. Significantly, this list was published beneath a report of Ambassador Tsuneo Matsudaira's visit to the 1934 BIF:

At the Olympia Section of the British Industries Fair, Messrs W.Moorcroft Ltd., potters, Burslem were honoured by a visit from His Excellency the Japanese Ambassador Tsuneo Matsudaira, G.C.V.O. He expressed the greatest admiration for Moorcroft pottery, and purchased fourteen pieces for his ceramic collection.³¹

The possibly detrimental effect of Moorcroft's absence from the published list of Milan awards was amply countered by this piece of more individual publicity. It recorded authoritative admiration from another Japanese Ambassador, eleven years after the much publicised comment of the Baron Hayashi to which *The Times* had recently drawn attention. His purchase of fourteen pieces exceeded that of his predecessor. And at a time when the dangers of cheap Japanese imitations of British pottery had been raised in the House of Commons by Ida Copeland, M.P. for Stoke,³² the Ambassador's purchases had a second significance: Moorcroft's ware was clearly of a quality which could not be imitated.

Moorcroft's continued determination to present himself as an individual potter, not as a manufacturer, was tellingly revealed in this context. A copy of the *Staffordshire Sentinel's* announcement, pasted in a family scrap book, carried a manuscript amendment in Moorcroft's distinctive hand. The reference to 'Messrs W. Moorcroft Ltd., potters, Burslem, were...' was changed to read: 'Mr W. Moorcroft, potter to H.M. the Queen, Burslem, was...' That same emphasis on the man, not the firm, was incorporated in the paper's announcement of Moorcroft's Milan award a few days later, on 13 March 1934, doubtless at Moorcroft's request:

³⁰ 'Mr Bernard Leach', *The Times* (5 December 1933), p.12.

³¹ *Staffordshire Sentinel* (9 March 1934).

³² 'Japanese Competition', *PG* (January 1934), pp.85–86.

Milan Exhibition Honour. Mr W. Moorcroft, of Burslem, has been awarded by the International Jury a *Diplôme d'honneur* for his exhibit of pottery at the fifth Triennial International Exhibition of Modern Decorative and Industrial Arts, Milan, 1933.

And this stipulation extended as far as the Milan jury itself. Moorcroft exhibited in his own name, not in that of W. Moorcroft Ltd., just as he had done three years earlier at Antwerp, and his *Diplôme* (initially inscribed to the firm) was subsequently re-issued. On 9 April 1934, E.R. Eddison of the Department of Overseas Trade (DOT) wrote in response to Moorcroft's specific request:

I have looked into the question about which you wrote to me on the 27th March, and if you would care to return the two diplomas we will ask the Italian Exhibition Authorities whether they would be willing in the circumstances to issue fresh diplomas to you in your name and not in the name of your firm.

At this time of debate about the nature (and limitations) of pottery as art, Moorcroft was thinking more explicitly about how to define himself. He was distancing himself from the world of modern industrial manufacture, increasingly characterised as it was by its fashionable designs or mechanised decoration. By affirming his identity as an individual potter, he was underlining the difference between his irreducibly personal work and the impersonal mass production of a firm. Collaborations of manufacturer and artist were still relatively rare, reluctant, and producing work often seen to lack artistic integrity; Moorcroft, however, remained at the very centre of design and production, working as one with his team of decorators to give expression to his designs.

Less than two weeks after his letter to the DOT, he wrote to *The Times*, responding to a letter from John Jacoby, embroidery and lace manufacturer.³³ While defending the value of 'works of art produced by machinery', Jacoby argued that collaborations of manufacturer and artist would only be fruitful if the manufacturer, too, had artistic sensitivity. Moorcroft agreed:

For some years I have been a member of the British Pottery Manufacturers' Federation, and at a meeting called to consider the question of art in industry, to which I was invited, I was told by the chairman, who is also the Chairman of the British Pottery Manufacturers' Federation, that the reason I had not been invited to assist on any committee, including that of the Arts and Designs Committee, was due to my being, in the chairman's opinion, an artist. It is true that I design all my pottery, and in the making of it I have to be a physicist, a chemist, a draughtsman, a potter and the Managing Director of the Moorcroft Potteries. I was informed by him that it was industrialists they required, and it was in vain that I tried to persuade him that I preferred to be regarded as an industrialist. As long as there is this lack of understanding as to the true value of art in industry, there can be, in my opinion, little opportunity for real progress.³⁴

33 'Taste in Industry', *The Times* (5 April 1934), p.6.

34 W. Moorcroft, 'Taste in Industry', *The Times* (7 April 1934), p.6.

The letter was a significant indicator both of how Moorcroft was seen by his contemporaries, and of how he saw himself. It was certainly true that his values, size of operation and methods of manufacture suggested different priorities from those of industry; he was openly averse to mass production, and to a notion of design as a commercial strategy. Conversely, he was often seen to be an idealist in his artistic principles, wholly committed to craft production in the face of increasing mechanisation. The perception of Moorcroft as an artist, held by the British Pottery Manufacturers' Federation [BPMF], was, to that extent, neither surprising nor unfounded. But nor was Moorcroft's repudiation of the term, which had connotations in the context of pottery which were quite alien to his values and practice. The notion of pottery as art was increasingly applied to non-functional ware, targeting an elite market of collectors because it was both too expensive and too limited in output to reach a broader market. Equally, in the wake of the Gorell report, the term was implicitly, if not explicitly, associated with the fine artist, one who had little or no experience of pottery as practice; it was a characteristic, and a shortcoming, which would be expressed particularly after the Harrods exhibition in October 1934. From this perspective, nothing was more different from how Moorcroft was, and how he presented himself.

Moorcroft's letter was a telling contribution, too, to the debate about the relationship of art and industry. Its real issue was not the designation, it was the polarised categories themselves. By repudiating the classification, Moorcroft was not implicitly endorsing the validity of the distinction between industrialist and artist; on the contrary, he was seeking to show how inappropriate it was to make these two categories mutually exclusive, and to adopt either to account for his practice which, from the outset, had sought to bring them together. In a letter to *The Times*, Llewellyn Smith had voiced the urgent need to change 'the whole outlook and objective of industrial art', adding:

The alternative is that, instead of getting closer together, art and industry will drift farther apart, industry becoming more and more brutalised, and art, divorced from the only conditions which can keep it healthy, degenerating into a mere servant of the whims of a small but wealthy clique.³⁵

If the BPMF still separated industry and art, Moorcroft did not. He was recognised as a maker of functional wares, of affordable decorative items, and of museum pieces, but diverse as such wares might be in size, function or sophistication, they were all seen to display, in the words of one of his earliest reviewers, 'thoughtful art and skilful craftsmanship'.³⁶ Moorcroft saw his role (and responsibility) as a potter to make such work accessible to more than 'a small but wealthy clique'. This synthesis was enabled by his working practices, and exemplified in the unique, multi-tasking identity he outlined in his letter, '[...] draughtsman, potter and Managing Director'. And it characterized, too, the work he created, which embodied the view expressed in the

³⁵ H. Llewellyn Smith, 'Art as an Ally of Industry', *The Times* (30 December 1933), p.11.

³⁶ 'Florian Ware', *Magazine of Art* (March 1899), 232–34 (p.233).

Gorell report (and quoted approvingly by Herbert Read in his *Art and Industry*) that art was ‘an essential and organic element’ in an article and not ‘something superficial and extraneous to be ‘applied’’.³⁷ By designating himself an industrialist, Moorcroft was, paradoxically, emphasising that ‘thoughtful art’ characterised all his work, and implying that a term so often seen as its opposite could, and should, incorporate it.

No less important was the very personal nature of this production. When Doulton introduced at their Nile St works an electricity-powered rotating circular oven, the *Pottery Gazette* noted how temperature could now be much better regulated:

The ‘fireman’ of this kiln is a small red needle that is set at the required temperature, which is maintained by a most ingenious arrangement. [...] It can be seen that over-fired or under-fired ware is an impossibility—in short, Doulton & Co., Ltd., have produced a kiln that is ‘fool-proof’.³⁸

In a modern industrial world, the coal-fired bottle oven was a relic of the past, unpredictable and expensive; in this respect, Moorcroft’s twenty-year old factory may well have seemed out of date. And yet, unashamedly, provocatively, a photograph of Moorcroft with his placer, standing in a bottle oven, appeared in *The Daily Mirror* of 22 September 1934; beneath it was the caption:

Mr William Moorcroft, potter to the Queen, superintending the stacking of ‘saggars’ of pottery inside a potter’s oven at Burslem, Stoke-on-Trent. The entrance in which he is standing is bricked up and the oven then heated to a temperature of between 2000 and 3000 degrees Fahrenheit.³⁹

No small red needle here, but the Potter to the Queen, at the very heart of production. At the end of this year, just days after the appearance of Read’s *Art and Industry*, Moorcroft floated the idea of a book-length study of his work in a letter to F. Lewis (Publishers). Lewis responded enthusiastically on 13 December 1934:

Your footnote interests me immensely: ‘I hope someday to have a book published on my pottery, illustrating its development’. [...] I should say that such a book entitled WILLIAM MOORCROFT—POTTER would be of more value to you than large amounts spent in advertising. [...] I am definitely interested as this seems a book which [...] I could do justice to [...] it is a book which should go well.

This project may well have been part of a strategy to negotiate the economic crisis, but it was further evidence of Moorcroft’s desire to promote more widely the nature and significance of his work in these rapidly changing times. The proposed subtitle was eloquent—neither artist nor industrialist, neither designer nor firm, but potter. It was a project which never materialised.

37 H. Read, *Art and Industry* (London: Faber & Faber, 1934), p.134.

38 *PG* (April 1933), p.491.

39 *The Daily Mirror* (22 September 1934), p.5.



Fig. 100 Photograph of Moorcroft with his plater, *The Daily Mirror*, 22 September 1934. 'Personal and Commercial Papers of William Moorcroft', Stoke-on-Trent City Archives, SD 1837. CC BY-NC

At a practical level, Moorcroft's multiple roles were taking their toll; the fusion of design and manufacture came at a price. He drew his inspiration from nature, but the daily pressures of running the factory reduced his opportunities to do so. He wrote to Beatrice on 6 November 1934:

I find it is rather difficult to do much as I would wish to do. One's ideals too often shattered by the usual routine one finds in work. [...] This is partly owing to my not going away to see things that would possibly form a reciprocal part. There is always some happy form waiting for sympathy, some suggestion that tends to make a cheerful design [...].

He was not prepared to lose contact with design; to do so would be to compromise the very principles of integrity and self-expression on which his work had been based. The only way he might contemplate that would be via his own family, and in the course of these crucial years, he clearly began to think to the future.

In 1933 the bicentenary of the birth of Spode focussed attention on pottery dynasties. For John Thomas, in a lecture to the Ceramic Society, this was one of his defining achievements: 'next to his founding of a flourishing pottery business himself, one of Spode's greatest triumphs was the training of such a fine disciple as his son, who followed in his father's footsteps and improved and extended the business'.⁴⁰ The idea that his daughter might one day join the firm was sketched out in Moorcroft's letters to Beatrice. Women pottery designers such as Truda Carter, Clarice Cliff, Susie Cooper, Charlotte Rhead or Millicent Taplin had risen to prominence in recent years,

40 J. Thomas, 'Josiah Spode: his times and triumphs', *PG* (November 1933), p.1342.

and he encouraged her to submit designs, writing on 5 November 1933 to discuss her idea for what would become the Yacht pattern:

Your designs will work out quite well. The Sheringham one will be useful as a pattern on teacups, in green and blue lines, and the sails in blue green lines.

Pieces with this decoration were included in the inventory of pots sent to the 1934 BIF; Moorcroft wrote to her on 19 February 1934, with news of another success:

The first pot I sold today was yours: the wind and the grass. I placed it rightly in a prominent position, and quoted a reasonable price for it. I felt you would be pleased to learn of this.

By the end of that summer, however, it is clear that Beatrice had chosen a different career path, joining H.M. Factory Inspectorate as her mother had done; but Moorcroft's son, Walter, would join his father. On 30 September 1935, Edith Harcourt-Smith wrote, hopeful for the future:

I am glad too to hear your son will join you soon in the works. This ought to mean relaxation to a small degree for you!

4. Burlington House, 1935

Conceived in the wake of the Gorell report, the Exhibition of British Art in Industry at Burlington House set out to promote the importance of collaboration between manufacturers and artists. But if good industrial design for the Gorell Committee was a matter of 'fitness for purpose', for the twin sponsors of this Exhibition, the Royal Academy and the Royal Society of Arts, its ambition was captured in the title of the anthology of articles published to accompany the Exhibition: *The Conquest of Ugliness*. In his contribution to that volume, the President of the Royal Academy, William Llewellyn, made no distinction between a fine artist and an industrial designer, and presented 'art' as a separable ingredient of almost limitless benefit to industrial production:

[...] many would be surprised at the commercial results achieved through its aid, results which would be even greater if art were more encouraged and more ably applied, with consequent advantage to employers, employees and the country at large.⁴¹

Llewellyn's conception of the designer came inadvertently close to that of 'an individual external to industry, a talented humanist to whom the manufacturers come for a little culture and refinement' which Read had scornfully rejected in *Art and Industry*.⁴² The implication was that the machine could (or should) serve the designs of artists, not that

41 W. Llewellyn, 'Art and Daily Life', J. de la Valette (ed.), *The Conquest of Ugliness. A Collection of Contemporary Views on the Place of Art in Industry* (London: Methuen, 1935), 12–19 (p.14).

42 Read, *Art and Industry*, p.136.

artists might learn to design for the specific qualities of the machine. For all the talk of collaboration, the familiar hierarchy (and separation) of industry and art informed Llewellyn's vision:

But the promoters of the Exhibition believe that the mechanisation of industry, if properly managed, is not opposed to art, and that if artists and manufacturers work together in making machines and raw materials serve the requirements of good taste, all kinds of articles for our daily needs can be produced in this country [...].⁴³

Nowhere was this more evident than on the front page of the Catalogue, which displayed the full title of the event: Royal Academy Exhibition of British Art in Industry. There could be no doubt about the focus.

Announced in *The Times* just three months before the Dorland Hall exhibition, this was clearly intended to be a high-profile event, its aim 'to arouse [...] a world-wide respect for British designers and manufacturers'.⁴⁴ Significantly, the announcement did not explicitly require exhibits to have been made by mechanical processes; its criterion was simply one of excellence, 'the best that British industry can produce'. From this perspective, it attracted Moorcroft from the outset. He had doubtless noted its difference from the aims of Dorland Hall, which had focussed on industrial design for mass production rather than on 'Beauty'; and from the industrial focus of the Milan exhibition, which had prompted his letter to Longden on 27 October. He saw this event as a reaction against the exuberant designs of the 1920s, writing to Beatrice on 12 November 1933:

I believe there will be a determined effort to suppress the wild orgy that has been so much in evidence in so-called Modern Art. The object of the Exhibition is to make Beauty and Quality the chief elements in the things we use and live with.

Moorcroft saw in it an opportunity to win recognition of his own distinctive, hand-wrought work as ceramic art, both at home and abroad.

In a special issue of the *Architectural Review*, reviewed in *The Times* of 11 July 1933, Gorell had written (perhaps with some apprehension) of the 'particularly onerous responsibility' borne by the Royal Academy in organising this exhibition,⁴⁵ and for many that responsibility was not fulfilled. Read criticised it in *The Burlington Magazine* (February 1935) for ignoring the 'essential criteria of modern machine production—namely, simplicity, economy and precision'; and Paul Nash, President of the Society of Industrial Artists, writing in *The Times*, argued that selection should have focussed much more on 'the production of common practical things instead of expensive flummery'.⁴⁶ For all that he was a member of the General Committee, Frank Pick, Chair of the CAI, was also clearly uncomfortable with the result. At pains to strike

43 Llewellyn, 'Art and Daily Life', pp.17–18.

44 'Art in Industry', *The Times* (2 March 1933), p.17.

45 'Industry, Art and the Home', *The Times* (11 July 1933), p.12.

46 P. Nash, 'Art and Industry', *The Times* (18 February 1935), p.8.

a positive note in a letter to *The Times*, he recognised that the selection of exhibits reflected (too much) an artist's vision of industrial manufacture, but he presented this as an important first step in the re-conception of design for mass production: 'from the movement now started fresh action and clear direction may be taken to lead it away from merely British art in industry into a truly British industrial art.'⁴⁷ For him, the industrial designer of the future was one with both artistic sensitivity and practical experience of manufacture, an artist and a technician.

It was characteristic of the Selectors' approach to modern design that the teaware and tableware exhibited included many first displayed in 1934 at the Exhibition of Modern Art for the Table. By contrast, Moorcroft's Powder Blue was a service of the utmost simplicity and purity of line, which, ironically, came much closer to the modern ideal of industrial design than many of these more exclusive ranges, for all that it was unashamedly handmade. It won praise from the modernist critic W.A. Thorpe, one of the members of the Dorland Hall Selection Committee, for its fusion of practicality and style; author of a critical review of the Exhibition (in *Artwork*) for its lack of mass-produced functional wares, his comments were all the more significant:

In the services perhaps the most interesting problem is the vegetable dish, a great opportunity for producing a service vessel with some of the quality of a free pot. [...] Mr Moorcroft (No.22) demonstrates this very effectively with a lovely pot curve (and a good spoon-resist), interrupted but not broken by an ivory-white rim line. I sometimes find Mr Moorcroft's glazes a bit rich, but this deep speckled blue has great dignity.⁴⁸

His teaware, retailing for £1.10s (one pound and ten shillings) for a twenty-one piece set (for six people), and £2.15s.6d (two pounds fifteen shillings and six pence) for a forty piece set (for twelve people), was clearly situated in the middle of the market. The price of other exhibits ranged from £4.17s (four pounds and seventeen shillings) for a Wedgwood set, to 14s.6d (fourteen shillings and six pence) for a Clarice Cliff design, with the median price falling at £2.7s.6d (two pounds seven shillings and six pence). Designed neither for a mass market, nor for an exclusive elite, its broad appeal was undoubtedly a lifeline in these difficult times. And it remained constant. Significantly, Moorcroft had not increased his prices for these items for more than a decade.

For a critic in *The Fancy Goods Trader*, however, it was Moorcroft's achievement as an artist potter, rather than as a designer, which was stressed. For all the appeal of his Powder Blue, it was his flambé pieces which were the highlight:

There are some magnificent pieces from the pottery of the most noted modern master potter—a scientist as well as an artist in ceramics—William Moorcroft, of Burslem, one of the most striking being a huge vase, made by hand on the wheel, and decorated in rich rouge flambé flecked with gold [...].⁴⁹

47 F. Pick, 'Art in Industry', *The Times* (9 February 1935), p.8.

48 W.A. Thorpe, 'A Personal Impression of the Pottery', *PG* (February 1935), 219–23 (p.221).

49 *The Fancy Goods Trader* (January 1935).



Fig. 101 Display of Moorcroft's Powder Blue exhibits at the Royal Academy Exhibition, 1935. 'Personal and Commercial Papers of William Moorcroft', Stoke-on-Trent City Archives, SD 1837. CC BY-NC

His display attracted the attention, too, of the French art world. On 13 February 1935, *The Times* published a report on the visit to the Exhibition of Alfred Laprade, Inspecteur Général des Beaux Arts in Paris; a month later, on 13 March 1935, the *Revue Moderne* invited Moorcroft to send material for a special article on his work. And yet, for all this acclaim, Moorcroft was disappointed with the selection, writing on 11 January 1935 to G.K. Menzies, Secretary of the Royal Society of Arts, less than a week after the opening:

I have done my best, however inadequately, to place in the show specimens of the best possible. But I regret that none of my pottery with pattern was selected, with the exception of one small piece.

The selection of his flambé wares was, nevertheless, revealing. These were works which demonstrated the exceptional skills of the potter, and yet they were available at all price levels. If one was looking for ceramic art affordable by more than the few, this was it.

In a *Times* review of J.A. Milne's lecture to accompany the Exhibition, the journalist commented on Llewellyn's introductory remarks:

He asked his hearers to be careful not to confuse the exhibition at the Royal Academy with an arts and crafts exhibition. It was an exhibition of the results of factory and machine work, not the products of the artist-craftsman's workshop. [...] The purpose was to show that things produced in great quantities could be of good design [...].⁵⁰

50 'Industrial Art', *The Times* (12 January 1935), p.10.

For Moorcroft, this distinction, however obvious, did not apply; it was his ambition to create in series while retaining the individual qualities of an 'artist-craftsman's workshop'. He was unable to persuade the Selection Committee to include examples of his decorated wares, but he did succeed in marking the difference between his pottery and that of a factory producing quantities of identical objects, whether by machine or by hand. Most catalogue entries named separately the designer and the manufacturer of an exhibit, a model applied to designers working for major firms (such as Victor Skellern, Keith Murray, and Millicent Taplin for Wedgwood, or John Adams, Dora Batty and Truda Carter for Carter, Stabler & Adams), and even to Susie Cooper, who directed her own firm: 'Dinner Set d[esigned]. Miss S.V. Cooper, m[ade]. & e[xhibited]. The Susie Cooper Pottery'.⁵¹ It was not the case, though, with Moorcroft. No distinction was made between his identity as designer and as manufacturer; his exhibits were presented as those of an individual, not of a firm: 'Vase, porcelain, made on thrower's wheel. d[esigned]., m[ade]. & e[xhibited]. W. Moorcroft'.⁵²

5. A National Pottery

If the Burlington House Exhibition sought to promote the role of fine art in industrial design, it also had a distinctly nationalist agenda. For some, British design had fallen far behind that of Europe; Read was categorical in his assessment of its current state:

The artistic quality of manufactured goods, especially in those countries influenced by the Bauhaus ideas of Professor Gropius, is undoubtedly higher than in Great Britain.⁵³

Pottery manufacturers, however, largely governed by the conservative tastes of the public, resisted, and resented, outside influence. An article in the *Pottery Gazette* argued that a European style was not appropriate for an English market: 'it is useless to foist on the British public designs which have been created to suit the Continental temperament'.⁵⁴ That spirit was shared by the organisers of the Exhibition. *The Times* announcement of 2 March 1933 emphatically restricted entry to British designers and manufacturers, and in a joint letter to *The Times* by Llewellyn and J.A. Milne, the Exhibition's political, as well as aesthetic and commercial, ambition was affirmed: to expose the 'fallacy [...] that it is necessary to go outside our own country for good design'.⁵⁵ The organisers sought to differentiate British design from a European model, and to promote its own (and by implication, superior) aesthetic. John de la Valette's Introduction to *The Conquest of Ugliness* was more explicit, describing Germany's post-war design as 'an outburst of mechanised art, well attuned to the predilections of its

51 Catalogue of the *Royal Academy Exhibition of British Art in Industry* (1935), p.31.

52 *Ibid.*, p.17.

53 H. Read, 'Explanations and Acknowledgements', *Art and Industry*, p.1.

54 'Modern Art. Can you "educate" the public?', *PG* (February 1934), p.218.

55 W. Llewellyn & J.A. Milne, 'British Industrial Art', *The Times* (27 December 1934), p.5.

people, but entirely alien to the spirit of either the English or the French'.⁵⁶ It was a provocative position, and increasingly so as the arrival of refugees from the Bauhaus was being welcomed as a possible benefit to English design, not least that of Walter Gropius in October 1934. The quality of 'ugliness', a term which recalled William Morris's indictment of Victorian taste and industrial production, was applied now to the modern European aesthetic. It was a critical attitude identified by Paul Nash in *Room and Book* (1932), and seen as characteristically English:

There exists in the English character an extraordinary sentiment which, baldly stated, is that everything new is ugly and everything old is beautiful.⁵⁷

In pottery, an indigenous English tradition was widely associated with slipware. When Charlotte Rhead moved to Richardson's in 1932, it was to set up an ornamental department producing wares with slip decoration. And in the same year, Michael Cardew expressed his ambition to 'continue (and, if possible, enlarge) the slipware tradition in English pottery'.⁵⁸ In a review of Cardew's work, Marriott applauded this renewal of 'the pre-Wedgwood tradition of English slipware', implicitly contrasting this native style with the later import of neo-classicism.⁵⁹ Moorcroft, too, was frequently associated with an English pottery tradition. It was doubtless inspired in part by his status as Potter to H.M. the Queen, and by the much-publicised admiration of his ware by the royal family; there could be no more persuasive evidence of its English appeal. The significance of this appreciation was underlined at the 1934 BIF, when the Queen made a purchase reported in the *Staffordshire Sentinel*:

The first exhibit to be inspected was that of W. Moorcroft Ltd. Her Majesty greatly admired the beautiful wares, and purchased a vase and a bowl of rare qualities of colour and tone. These were similar to the piece which Signor Mussolini recently acquired from Messrs Moorcroft.⁶⁰

The Queen's choice implicitly re-nationalised Moorcroft's European reputation; this was a potter not only of international repute, but recognised too at the highest level in his own country. His status as an English potter was enhanced further by the association of his ware with the Silver Jubilee of the King's accession in 1935, and two royal weddings. On 14 November 1934, he sent a full seventy-nine piece breakfast and tea service in 'blue Moorcroft China' to the Duke of Kent. The gesture reflected Moorcroft's undeniable patriotism, but it was also a shrewd commercial move; royal wedding presents were put on prominent, public display. A letter of appreciation of

⁵⁶ *The Conquest of Ugliness*, p.7.

⁵⁷ P. Nash, *Room and Book* [1932]; in *Paul Nash: Writings on Art*, ed. A. Causey (Oxford: O.U.P., 2000), p.94.

⁵⁸ M. Cardew, 'Slipware Pottery. Following the English Tradition', *Homes and Gardens* (May 1932), 548–49 (p.548).

⁵⁹ C. Marriott, 'Two potters', *The Times* (10 November 1933), p.12.

⁶⁰ *Staffordshire Sentinel* (23 February 1934).

27 December 1934 from Harold Whates expressed delight at this royal endorsement of his own taste; Powder Blue was truly democratic in its appeal:

I was charmed with your wedding present to the Duke and Duchess of Kent. That you should have selected that pattern of tea set for a Royal household delightfully flattered our humble judgement. For years we have used and admired at home a tea-pot of the same powdered blue design.

But Moorcroft's conception of himself as an English potter implied an aesthetic, even philosophical, ambition too. In its review of his exhibit at the 1934 BIF, the *Pottery and Glass Record* referred explicitly to his aspirations to develop an English tradition:

Mr Moorcroft told our representative that he is striving to develop a purely English style, putting both practical potting and imagination into his ware, as was done in the best English ware of the 13th, 14th, and 15th centuries.⁶¹

Moorcroft's sense of an English tradition did not reference a particular style, but it suggested particular qualities of art and craft individualised by the imagination of each creator. The reviewer noted that 'there has never been a year when there have been more new designs at this stand', singling out examples of Flambé, Sunray, Leaf and Berry, Wisteria, Pansy, and the Yacht design. And yet the exhibit as a whole was described as both 'characteristically English' and 'individually Moorcroft',⁶² distinguished by its underlying integrity of design and execution: 'The whole effect is a sense of rest and peace, symbolic of a typical English home'.⁶³ Such qualities may have been represented as 'English', but for Moorcroft they were not narrowly national in their appeal. The continued appreciation of his ware in Europe had been most recently demonstrated by his successes at Antwerp and Milan; it would be confirmed again at this Fair.

On 26 February 1934, the *Birmingham Post* reported the particular attention paid to Moorcroft's exhibit by representatives of the Deutsches Museum von Meisterwerken der Naturwissenschaft und Technik [*German Museum of Masterpieces of Science and Technology*] in Munich:

They came to study British craftsmanship in the pottery section. For the Deutsches Museum they acquired several pieces of porcelain made in Burslem by Mr W. Moorcroft, the Queen's potter. Although each piece of Moorcroft ware is a collector's piece, signed by the originator, products of this pottery are comparatively inexpensive. The Deutsches Museum is essentially a 'folk' museum, and acquisitions such as this need to conform to a double standard of artistic excellence and popular use.⁶⁴

What was noted in Moorcroft's work was its fusion of the decorative and the functional, 'artistic excellence' and 'popular use', as well as its affordability, the very qualities which were sought, too, in modern design. The article recorded Moorcroft's reaction

61 *PGR* (March 1934), p.58.

62 *PGR* (March 1934), p.58.

63 *Ibid.*, p.59

64 *Birmingham Post* (26 February 1934).

to this purchase. If the potentially beneficial influence of Germany on industrial design was being promoted in some quarters, Moorcroft was demonstrating that British craftsmanship could win equivalent acclaim in Germany. If there was to be an improvement in the quality of English pottery, Moorcroft had no doubt where it would originate:

Mr Moorcroft accepts this tribute from German connoisseurs as confirmation of a long-cherished belief that applied art in this country is reacting vigorously from a period of debasement. He sees possibilities of a new classic era that may come to be known as Pure English Style, not only in pottery, but in all branches of artistic endeavour. Recognition abroad of a distinctive British school of artist-craftsmanship is a stimulus to original work.⁶⁵

Just weeks after Mussolini's appreciation of his ware had been publicised in *The Times*, Moorcroft was once more countering the claim that English pottery was not appreciated in Europe; or his English pottery, at least. And that view was shared. In its review of his exhibit, the *Pottery Gazette* identified in his work an outlook which transcended nationalist polarities. Pointedly alluding to a different and, by implication, more enlightened era of German aesthetics, it saw an anticipation of Moorcroft's art, inspired by an individual sensitivity, irreducible to a particular style:

We hear a lot these days about art and its canons, but we are reminded in this connection of Goethe's cryptic observation: 'You will get more profit from trying to find where beauty is than in anxiously enquiring what it is. [...] art remains undemonstrable—as when we behold the works of all feeling artists; it is a hovering, shining, shadowy form—the outline of which no definition holds.' That is just the sort of feeling that we entertain as we have before us a picture such as the one that was taken by our photographer at the stand of Mr Moorcroft.⁶⁶

The interest of the Deutsches Museum in his work was further proof of this. Moorcroft was creating English pottery of a more truly international reach. Neither revivalist or nostalgic, it celebrated the inspiration of nature and the beauties of the potter's craft.

The concept of a national pottery tradition was taken up in 1935 by the Victoria and Albert Museum [V&A] and the CAI in a jointly organised exhibition, 'English Pottery Old and New'; its aim was 'to illustrate modern industrial art in its relation to English traditional styles'. Opened shortly after the Burlington House exhibition, the preface to the Exhibition booklet clearly stated its governing premise:

English pottery has always been distinguished by the devotion of its makers to utility as the prime reason for the existence of their wares; the virtues of these wares are generally the outcome of an intelligent use of their materials with this end in view, rather than any deliberate aim at decorative effect.⁶⁷

65 Ibid.

66 *PG* (April 1934), p.463.

67 *English Pottery Old and New*, Exhibition held at the Victoria and Albert Museum 1935 (Board of Education, 1936), p.5.

Decoration was clearly not seen as a prerequisite of good design; the focus on functionality gave precedence to form.

Medieval wares were exhibited, as were examples of Chinese and Korean pottery. And among contemporary exhibits were pieces from leading firms, including Wedgwood, Carter, Stabler & Adams, Doulton, Minton, and Gray & Co., some undecorated, others decorated with either banded or floral designs, either hand-painted or transfer printed. Studio pottery was exhibited too, with bowls and vases by Leach, Murray, Nora Braden, Katharine Pleydell-Bouverie, William Dalton, and Michael Cardew. Added to which were industrially produced wares in a studio style, designed by Harry Trethowan or John Adams for Carter, Stabler & Adams, and Vera Huggins or Reco Capey for Doulton. Marriott reviewed the exhibition on 15 April 1935. Tracing an English tradition back to the Middle Ages, he noted an interruption to its natural 'flow' in the more studied elegance of Josiah Wedgwood, but welcomed signs of its resurgence in modern industrial manufacture; it was a development he attributed to the influence of Song dynasty Chinese wares via modern studio pottery:

[...] the exhibition shows that, for all its concentration upon forms adapted to mass production, the marked recent improvement in English commercial pottery is a recovery of rather than a departure from tradition. There is more affinity between the latest and the earlier wares than there is between the latest and those of the middle period.⁶⁸

The Exhibition created a seamless narrative, bringing together studio and industrial pottery, the medieval and the modern, into one (English) tradition.

Moorcroft's work was represented by his tableware, but, once again, to the exclusion of his decorative pieces. The selection was unsurprising given the governing principle of the exhibition, but it did underline the difference between Moorcroft's conception of an English pottery tradition and that of the organisers. He wrote in April 1935 to Bernard Rackham at the V&A:

I wish it had been possible to have displayed some of my flower vases and other decorative objects. Although I do not describe myself as a studio potter, there is no pottery more individual in character than mine.

He refrained from classifying himself as a studio potter (although the term had been applied to him in the past), but his reference was nevertheless significant. What he identified as their common ground was clearly neither the aesthetic nor the range of their pottery, it was their commitment to craft. For Moorcroft, it was individuality, rather than functionality, which characterised an English tradition, a free spirit which gave its own character to each piece. And this quality inspired Moorcroft's irrepressible desire to experiment, creating original colour palettes or glaze effects alongside his highly sophisticated flambé wares, and new, often sparer designs alongside familiar motifs.

68 'English Pottery', *The Times* (15 April 1935), p.11.



Fig. 102 William Moorcroft, Simplified variants of familiar motifs: Peacock Eye and Tulip (c.1935), 28cm; Falling Leaves (c.1933), 17.5cm. CC BY-NC

He doubtless objected, too, to the implication that there was just a single English tradition, to be judged by a single set of criteria. It was a view which had been expressed already by W.B. Honey who, in his *English Pottery and Porcelain*, questioned the validity of adopting Song dynasty Chinese ware as the benchmark of ceramic excellence:

Nowhere is the single standard in criticism that seeks a common measure more misguided than in the ceramic art. It implies a single 'ideal pottery' towards which all the diverse types are assumed to aspire. The ideal pottery is, I believe, a linguistic fiction.⁶⁹

Revisiting the subject matter of Rackham and Read's *English Pottery* of ten years earlier, Honey assessed the different styles and traditions of pottery on their own terms; it was honesty which gave work its validity. He praised seventeenth-century slipware for its 'sincerity and freedom from fashionable affectations', but was more critical of its modern revival, in which he identified a predominance of style over authenticity: 'the sophisticated productions, made for a luxury market, must lack the economic necessity which made the craftsmanship of the old potters so genuine a thing in its day'.⁷⁰ For Moorcroft, too, Englishness was not defined by style or technique, it was a matter of integrity. Speaking at de la Valette's talk to the North Staffordshire branch of the Society of Industrial Artists in 1934, he picked up the speaker's references to the value of authentic self-expression: 'If they would but centre upon an English tradition and, as had been suggested, 'be themselves', much good would accrue. How rarely they were themselves!'⁷¹ It was a view he had held throughout his career. If the CAI's

69 W.B. Honey, *English Pottery and Porcelain* [1933], 4th edition (London: A & C Black, 1949), p.2.

70 *Ibid.*, p.32.

71 'Modern Conditions and Contemporary Design', *PG* (April 1934), 485–95 (p.491).

exhibition attempted to create a coherent national narrative which saw a modern industrial aesthetic as the natural continuation of a once vibrant English tradition, Moorcroft saw Englishness in terms of individuality, craft and, above all, of sincerity, design as self-expression rather than as commercial strategy. And this, demonstrably, if paradoxically, had an international appeal.



Fig. 103 William Moorcroft in 1935. Photograph. Family papers. CC BY-NC

6. Conclusions

William Moorcroft's commitment to craft might seem to imply nostalgia for a pre-war age now irretrievably lost, a loss underlined by the death in these years of potters or designers who, in different ways, had all intersected with his career: Frederick Rhead and Harry Barnard in 1933; and in 1935, Bernard Moore and William Howson Taylor. The closure of Howson Taylor's factory, reported in the *Pottery Gazette*, December 1933, was already a telling sign of the times. In a note to Moorcroft dated 2 December 1933, Howson Taylor tersely summarised the world as it now seemed to him: 'I felt it was about time. [...] The export trade is practically gone [...]. Everybody wants cheap rubbish now at six pence. Quality is a thing of the past.' His death less than two years later, at the age of just fifty-nine, was announced in the *Pottery Gazette*, October 1935; four years younger than Moorcroft, the impact on him must have been great.

In different ways, Moorcroft seemed far distant from the modern design movement coming to prominence in this decade. He had always seen design as an organic process, affirming to the author of an article on his work in *The Daily Dispatch*: 'unless fashions in pottery are the outcome of natural growth, they will never give satisfaction.'⁷² Nothing

⁷² 'Pottery in a Garden', *The Daily Dispatch* (28 October 1933).

was further from the modernist model of design as construction, developed by Gropius from his architectural training, and outlined in a review of an exhibition of his designs at the headquarters of the Royal Institute of British Architects: ‘architecture in present-day conditions must consist largely in designing in combinations of standardised units of form’.⁷³ For Gropius, the design model, the ‘standard’, was a ‘simplified practical exemplar’, a response to the needs of functionality, shorn of ‘the personal content of their designers and all otherwise ungeneric or non-essential features’; this was a far cry from Moorcroft’s conception of design as personal expression. Moorcroft would certainly have agreed with Read’s differential analysis of thrown and moulded pottery in *Art and Industry*, but if Read had very even-handedly argued for their equivalence, Moorcroft held to the view that pottery should embody truth to nature, not truth to the machine.

But for all these differences, Moorcroft’s guiding principles brought him closer to the modern spirit of the times than many commercial potters. He maintained his belief that the work of designers trained in art schools was inferior to that of potters with artistic sensitivity; without experience of making, their art could only ever be ‘applied’. The importance of understanding manufacture was one of the defining principles of Pick’s Council for Art and Industry. In a survey sent out to all manufacturers, one question asked about the technical experience of its designers; Moorcroft’s response was characteristically terse: ‘It must be difficult to work without a thorough love of the material used.’ For Moorcroft, design could only grow from within the manufacturing process; for advocates of modern industrial design, the same fundamental principle applied. More generally, Moorcroft, like Pick, held the view that art was an essential and enriching part of everyday life, and not something separate, or exclusive. In the same spirit as Morris’s repudiation of ‘art for a few’,⁷⁴ it inspired Pick’s description of art as ‘something vital and essential to the fullest life, [...] something which will restore grace and order to society’.⁷⁵ And it underlay Moorcroft’s recognition, from the start of his career, that ‘the potter’s art [...] unconsciously influences our mind in the home’.⁷⁶

For Moorcroft, as for leading industrial designers, design was a matter of integrity rather than opportunism, of responding to inner conviction rather than to fashion. It was this distinction, as much as that between modern and traditional, or machine and hand, which shaped design debates at this time. Harry Trethowan, founding member of the Design and Industries Association [DIA], who designed for Wedgwood and Carter, Stabler & Adams, stressed the importance of this quality in a lecture to the North Staffordshire branch of the Society of Industrial Artists:

73 ‘Professor Walter Gropius’, *The Times* (16 May 1934), p.14.

74 W. Morris, ‘The Lesser Arts’ [1877], in *The Collected Works of William Morris*, XXII (London: Longmans, 1914), 3–27 (p.26).

75 W. Gropius, *The New Architecture and the Bauhaus*, trans. P. Morton Shand, with an Introduction by Frank Pick (London: Faber & Faber, 1935), pp.7–8.

76 ‘The Potter and his Art’, *The American Pottery Gazette* (May 1905), n.p.

For the potter to stamp the clay with his own character, and real character always, would win in the long run. It might be a long run; those living might not see the end of it, but it would triumph ultimately.⁷⁷

And the same principles were voiced, too, by Keith Murray, who argued that designers should not allow commercial pressures to dictate their work:

[...] though it was his duty to his manufacturer to try and satisfy the needs of his business, he must not let himself become frankly commercial. He must comprehend the sales atmosphere, [...] but he must retain his faith in what he conceived to be beautiful, which was a duty to himself which no one else could be expected to look after.⁷⁸

Like Murray, Moorcroft saw the need for commercial awareness, but he strove above all to maintain his artistic self-belief. It was an absence of natural expression that he lamented above all in much contemporary design, a tendency to favour style over character. He himself sought to produce ware that had vitality, 'soul', and he was confident that its value would be appreciated. And it was. For many observers seeking (or struggling) at this time to characterise Moorcroft's work, the quality they often identified was its 'truth', a quality associated not simply with its means of production, but also, and perhaps above all, with its design principles; his pottery had genuineness of expression, it was not simply a commercial commodity. A review in the *Pottery Gazette* made explicit this distinction:

If all that we had to do was to give a very short definition of Moorcroft pottery, our task would be simplicity itself; we should content ourselves by saying that Moorcroft pottery is *true* pottery. And, certainly, that is something which could not be said of some of the commodities which are to be found at the present time on the shelves of many china shops.⁷⁹

The report carried a picture of a ginger jar with New Florian ornamentation and a vase decorated with fish among weeds; neither design was brand new, but this only emphasised their enduring quality. What mattered was their integrity, not their novelty. This is how Moorcroft saw his ware, and how it was seen:

It would appear as though, whenever Mr Moorcroft applies himself to the creation of a new piece of pottery, he keeps constantly in front of him that old injunction: 'To thine own self be true...', and thus it is that there results a perfectly delightful pot, which anyone who is aesthetically inclined could not fail to treasure.⁸⁰

And it is this quality which took potential buyers beyond considerations of mere cost. Moorcroft's pottery may have been more expensive than mass-produced wares, but its

77 H. Trethowan, 'The Relations between Manufacturers, Designers and Retailers', *PG* (March 1933), 333–40 (p.338).

78 'Art in Industry', *PG* (April 1935), p.532.

79 *PG* (June 1932), p.731.

80 *Ibid.*

value was inestimable, and not just in economic terms; it was seen to provide an almost spiritual pleasure, an ‘uplift’, which took it beyond price. Another review in the *Pottery Gazette* spelled this out:

As judged by present-day standards, Moorcroft pottery is not cheap; by its very nature, it could not be that, for it represents the best in thought and effort that can be put into pottery; it is the real thing, which stands out in marked contrast to the artificial and spurious. Its purpose is to please and at the same time to uplift; and invariably, a Moorcroft pot does succeed in rising to the full height of that purpose. At the same time, for what it is and stands for, Moorcroft pottery is by no means expensive. It is full value for money, and that is something which, in the ordinary affairs of life, one often fails to get.⁸¹

This quality lay deeper than any particular aesthetic choices. It was recognised in Moorcroft and, it may be surmised, it was one of the reasons why his ware was respected so widely, from Edith Harcourt Smith to W.A. Thorpe, from Queen Mary to Mussolini. His ware transcended apparently distinct boundaries of art and industry, modern and traditional, decorative and functional. It had been his hallmark in earlier times; it defined him still.

81 *PG* (November 1934), p.1323.

13. 1936–39: Pottery for a Troubled World

I. Functional Pottery

By the mid-1930s, Moorcroft's tableware had become a model of modern design. On 6 December 1937, he was invited by Frank Pick to donate to the Victoria and Albert Museum [V&A] examples of his Sunray teaware which would 'further the general improvement of industrial design'.¹ Of particular prominence, though, was Powder Blue. In April 1936, it was singled out in an article by Nikolaus Pevsner in the inaugural issue of *Trend in Design*, published by the Design and Industries Association [DIA]. Using terms which would acquire almost iconic status, Pevsner drew attention to its forms which anticipated by some twenty years the modern taste for elegant functionality. This was Moorcroft's art in a nutshell; transcending fashion, it appealed in equal measure to two quite different worlds, at either end of the king's reign:

[...] changes of shape occur less frequently than changes of pattern. [...] One of the best contemporary sets, W. Moorcroft's famous Plain Blue, was designed in 1913 and is, in spite of that, as 'modern' as anything created now, and as 'modern' as Josiah Wedgwood's sets, i.e. undatedly perfect.²

For Pevsner, modern design was not (just) a matter of style, but of conception, and Powder Blue exemplified this. An illustration of selected pieces shared a page with an illustration of Bauhaus wares by Otto Lindig. This pairing was significant. In his article, Pevsner explicitly distinguished pottery of the Bauhaus from that of Josiah Wedgwood; for all the technical accomplishment of the latter, it remained a product of its age:

The Bauhaus pots and cups may be less perfect than some of Josiah Wedgwood's, but they express one quality which Wedgwood of necessity could not bestow upon his object—the spirit of the twentieth century.³

1 All unpublished documents referred to in this chapter are located in William Moorcroft: Personal and Commercial Papers, SD1837, Stoke-on-Trent City Archives [WM Archive].

2 N. Pevsner, 'Pottery: Design, Manufacture, Marketing', *Trend in Design* (Spring 1936), 9–19 (p.19).

3 Ibid.

No such qualification was necessary for Powder Blue, which could stand without difficulty beside the work of Lindig. Pevsner's endorsement was particularly significant in an article highly critical of much contemporary pottery production. Moorcroft's forms clearly stood out from the many (unattributed) 'new shapes' which had characterised commercial tableware for the last decade, almost all 'thoughtless in design' and 'hardly meant to be of lasting value'.⁴ And his unequivocal praise of its undecorated simplicity contrasted with his more tempered evaluation of the 'floral patterns of a pleasant rustic type', designed by students of Gordon Forsyth in the Staffordshire Schools of Art.⁵

Further evidence of Powder Blue's status among advocates of modern design was its inclusion in *The Flat Book*, a guide to home furnishing co-written by the architects Sadie Speight and Leslie Martin.⁶ Writing to Moorcroft on 5 August 1937, Speight noted that the book would contain illustrations of 'only goods of the best design', the criteria of which were based on the timeless values of 'convenience' and 'cleanliness'. The section on 'Minor Equipment' brought out the modern relevance of Moorcroft's potting principles; the understated simplicity of Powder Blue continued to appeal, even as the popularity of Clarice Cliff and her imitators had begun to decline:

Perhaps more than in any other field of design, the craze for novelty, tawdriness and unsuitable decoration has found an outlet in these smaller items of house equipment. [...] Earthenware is very suitable for most purposes. It should have a good strong glaze, and if coloured, the colour is most practical if it is in the body of the material, and not just in the glaze alone. [...] Effective pouring from the teapot should be tried out before purchasing; handles should be comfortable to hold [...].⁷

The section included examples of wares by some of the most prominent designers of the modern age: vases and bowls by Keith Murray; beer mugs by Carter, Stabler & Adams; tableware by Susie Cooper; and two illustrations of 'Dark speckled blue porcelain by William Moorcroft', showing tea pot, coffee pot, hot water jug, morning set, breakfast set and tea set.

Powder Blue had the functionality, quality and style which appealed to design critics of the new generation; like Pevsner (born in 1902), both Speight (born in 1906) and Martin (born in 1909) were children of the twentieth century and advocates of a modern, international style. But the ware was displayed, too, in Muriel Rose's Little Gallery, Chelsea, an important outlet for studio pottery, where Bernard Leach, Shoji Hamada, Nora Braden, Katharine Pleydell-Bouverie and Michael Cardew had all exhibited. An icon of industrial design, it had prestige, too, in the world of craft. And its longevity of appeal was widely celebrated when Queen Mary visited the

4 Ibid.

5 Ibid., p.14.

6 J.L. Martin & S. Speight, *The Flat Book* (London: Heinemann, 1939).

7 Ibid., p.166.



(L) Fig. 104 Powder Blue illustrated in *Trend in Design* (Spring 1936). 'Personal and Commercial Papers of William Moorcroft', Stoke-on-Trent City Archives, SD 1837. CC BY-NC

(R) Fig. 105 Queen Mary, Moorcroft and Powder Blue at the 1939 British Industries Fair. 'Personal and Commercial Papers of William Moorcroft', Stoke-on-Trent City Archives, SD 1837. CC BY-NC

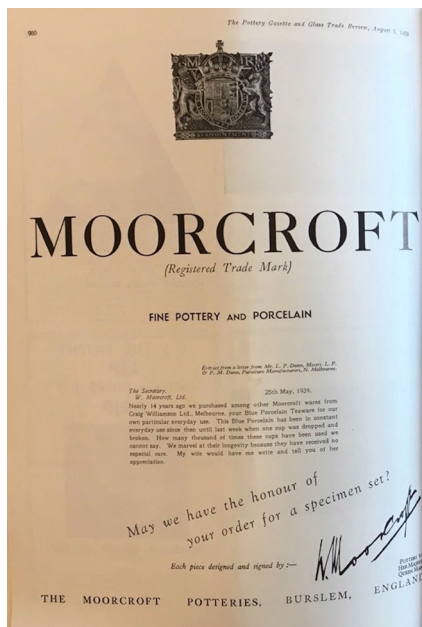


Fig. 106 Moorcroft's advertisement in the *Pottery Gazette* (August 1939). 'Personal and Commercial Papers of William Moorcroft', Stoke-on-Trent City Archives, SD 1837. CC BY-NC

1939 British Industries Fair [BIF] and bought 'A morning set in blue porcelain'.⁸ A photograph showing Moorcroft, the Queen and the set was published in the London evening newspaper, *The Star*, 21 February 1939, and in the *Staffordshire Sentinel*, 22 February 1939. The image was subsequently used to open the full BIF report in the *Pottery Gazette*.⁹ It was the perfect advertisement for modern industrial art, bringing together affordable, functional ware, high-profile designer and distinguished patron. Dating back twenty-five years, the Queen's continued advocacy enacted now, coincidentally or not, Pevsner's observation in his *Enquiry* that there were 'great possibilities of support for the Modern Movement in connection with the royal family'.¹⁰

This public endorsement was mirrored in private correspondence. A letter from Horace Jones, 19 October 1937, confirmed in no uncertain terms that Moorcroft's tableware was fit for purpose:

Mrs Jones was delighted with the tea service, and it certainly looked most distinctive and in tune with the room when set out on the table. She considers the tea pot excellent because it pours well, and the handle does not become too hot. She considers the 'feel' of the pieces beautiful. She is planning now to add more pieces.

Its well-designed functionality was a selling point as significant as its visual appeal. In August 1939, Moorcroft introduced an imaginative variant on his regular monthly advertisement, replacing Pevsner's timeless accolade, regularly used since 1936, with a much more informal expression of approval from an Australian retailer, L.P. and F.M. Dunn, Furniture Manufacturers, N. Melbourne:

Nearly 14 years ago we purchased among other Moorcroft wares [...] your Blue Porcelain Teaware for our own particular everyday use. This Blue Porcelain has been in constant everyday use since then until last week when one cup was dropped and broken. How many thousands of times these cups have been used we cannot say. We marvel at their longevity because they have received no especial care. My wife would have me write and tell you of her appreciation.¹¹

Moorcroft understood the impact of the unconventional, and this bold departure from the orthodox advertising technique of a memorable catchphrase arrested the eye; the carefully wrought phrase of a design specialist was replaced by the spontaneous appreciation of a user. The text still emphasised the timelessness of the ware, but in terms of its practicality rather than its look; it embodied the qualities of modern design heralded in the Editorial of *Trend in Design*: 'The movement for better design in

8 *Pottery Gazette and Glass Trade Review* [PG] (March 1939), p.392.

9 PG (April 1939), p.523.

10 N. Pevsner, *An Enquiry into Industrial Art in England* (Cambridge: C.U.P., 1937), p.229.

11 PG (August 1939), p.980.

everyday things is really moving at last. It is a move from inefficient things, pretentious, counterfeit and ugly things, towards things that work'.¹²

Moorcroft had clearly designed Powder Blue without reference to a European aesthetic of functionalism, but in keeping with his often-expressed principles of natural simplicity in design; the two overlapped, without being identical. His position was explored in a letter to *The Times* following the launch on 1 September 1936 of the first (and only) postage stamps featuring King Edward VIII. An Editorial of 27 August 1936 welcomed its 'clear-cut directness', a design 'true to the spirit of the age', but its stark simplicity aroused animated debate.¹³ Moorcroft's intervention followed an exchange of letters by Frank Pick (on 16 September) and Eric Gill (on 22 September). Pick saw 'vacuity', not simplicity, in the design, the sign of a 'modern fear of decoration' evident too in the 'witlessness of modern architecture'.¹⁴ In response, Gill welcomed its 'plainness', which respected the 'conditions of industrialism' and offered a release from 'the banalities of imitation hand-engraving and stupid ornamentation'.¹⁵ Published on 24 September 1936, Moorcroft's letter used the stamp as the pretext for a much more general statement. Unlike either Pick or Gill, he did not see the design as characteristic of modernist functionalism (for worse or better); on the contrary, he praised its difference from that aesthetic. His point of comparison was not the ornamented stamp designs of earlier reigns, but the angularity of modern art:

When seeing the stamp for the first time, I was greatly impressed by the charming balance of colour and sense of English design. It came as a happy relief following the strained harsh lines as seen in much so-called modern art. [...] this simple design of the new postage stamp will instinctively appeal, owing to its spring-like freshness.¹⁶

Moorcroft's modernity was conceived in terms of the natural cycle, not of industrial (re) production; it was a matter of renewal, not repetition. Colour mattered to Moorcroft as much as form, and what he admired in the stamp, he identified too in his own pottery:

I only venture to express this opinion after having spent almost the whole of my life in seeking the best possible balance in colour and form as applied to pottery.¹⁷

This was the aesthetic of Powder Blue, and of Sunray. But for all its high reputation and commercial potential, Moorcroft's teaware did not represent the whole of his output. And for all that it was giving him a place at the forefront of modern design, he continued to be appreciated, too, as an artist potter whose wares, in quite different ways, were speaking to the times.

12 *Trend in Design* (Spring 1936), p.5.

13 'The New Postage Stamps', *The Times* (27 August 1936), p.13.

14 F. Pick, 'Modern Fear of Decoration', *The Times* (16 September 1936), p.8.

15 E. Gill, 'New Postage Stamps', *The Times* (22 September 1936), p.15.

16 W. Moorcroft, 'The New Stamps', *The Times* (24 September 1936), p.8.

17 *Ibid.*

2. Experiments in Ceramic Art

As Powder Blue and Sunray were winning the praise of design critics, Moorcroft did not stop trials of new decorative ideas. The autumn of 1936 was characterised by extensive experiment, inspiring in the *Pottery Gazette* excited expectation of 'bigger changes in this year's samples of 'Moorcroft' pottery than have been witnessed at any previous [British Industries] Fair.¹⁸ Some new designs gave greater prominence to line than to colour, gesturing back to his early use of slip as the principal medium of ornament. This sparer style was clearly undertaken in part for economic reasons, but it was characteristic, too, of Moorcroft's creative approach that he should experiment with a more modern, graphic style of design, translated into the world of slip decoration.

The *Pottery Gazette* illustrated an example of Windswept Corn, the caption describing it as 'an excellent example of art, craftsmanship and technique in happy relationship.'¹⁹ The motif, based on an idea by his daughter, Beatrice, was introduced in 1934, often in strongly coloured or flambé treatments. Reworked now with slender, arching lines and discreet colours, on a vase with an unturned, lightly ribbed texture, it was an expression of natural simplicity. Applied, too, to other designs, this reduced decorative approach attracted serious attention at the 1937 BIF, and not just by those in search of less expensive ware; it was also 'much admired by connoisseurs and critics', as reported in the *Pottery Gazette*.²⁰ One such wrote on 10 July 1937 about a vessel with a fish motif, similarly restrained in its conception:

I am prompted to write and tell you how much personal pleasure I have already derived from a piece of your pottery that my husband gave me only three days ago. It is a globular shaped vase, white. On one side swims an angel fish in bluish shading, and on the other side of vase are twin fish. I have placed this in front of a mirror where the twin fish are seen in reflection, and the effect is beautiful. [...] As an artist, I thought you might be interested to hear that some of your good pieces find homes where beautiful things are appreciated.

The writer was Dora J Owen, whose book *We Built a Home* (1936) offered a quite different conception of the home from *The Flat Book*; its purpose was not simply 'efficient' living, but the provision of a 'retreat', a place offering 'sustenance for refreshment of both body and soul'.²¹ Moorcroft's work clearly spoke to that environment. He may have been simplifying his designs, but the artistic quality remained, and it continued to be appreciated.

But Moorcroft's output in these years was not confined to these more economical designs. He continued experiments with colour, and by 1937 was returning to floral motifs, for the first time in some years. Some were produced for export to the growing

18 PG (February 1937), p.252.

19 Ibid., p.223.

20 PG (April 1937), p.554.

21 D.J. Owen, *We Built a Home* (Oxford: Alden Press, 1936), p.9.



Fig. 107 William Moorcroft, Experiments in line and colour: Windswept Corn (c.1936), 32cm; Willow Tree (c.1936), 22.5cm; Toadstool (c.1936), 10cm. CC BY-NC



Fig. 108 William Moorcroft, Floral designs for an export market: Protea (c.1937), 20cm; Orchid (c.1937), 7.5cm; African Lily (c.1937), 18cm. CC BY-NC



(L) Fig. 109 William Moorcroft, Variations on the Freesia/African Lily design: on celadon ground (c.1937), 24cm; under flambé glaze (c.1937), 19cm. CC BY-NC

(R) Fig. 110 William Moorcroft, Design and glaze experiments of the late 1930s: Peacock Eye under drip glaze (c.1937), 9cm; Stylized Leaf under a partial flambé glaze (c.1937), 21cm; Fish under matt smear glaze (c.1937), 10cm. CC BY-NC

market in South Africa, including Protea and African Lily, both set against a rich ochre background.

Moorcroft introduced other designs, too, featuring Spring Flowers, Anemone, and the Orchid, a project eagerly anticipated in a letter from a retailer, dated 19 October 1937:

I am looking forward with the greatest interest and enthusiasm to your treatment of the medium to create the orchid in 'nature's colours'. [...] I am sure that accomplishment will be the wonder and marvel of the potters' world and art.

These pieces required the sensitivity of his finest decorators, and they were immediately noticed at the 1938 BIF; Moorcroft's skills as a potter had produced, once more, 'specimens of colour such as have not been seen before', and the decorations were 'so well conceived that they merged into the material like the colour in a flower, forming a charming, homogeneous whole'.²²

Some of his most remarked upon pottery, though, created its impact with its glazes. The *Pottery Gazette*, reporting on his exhibit at the 1936 BIF, noted pieces in a new celadon glaze which 'vied with the more imposing flambé treatments for the notice of the discerning buyers on the look-out for pottery of an individualistic kind'.²³ Moorcroft's experiments with oriental glazes dated back nearly twenty years, but they attracted particular attention in the context of the International Exhibition of Chinese Art, held at the Royal Academy over the winter of 1935–36. Following by just eight months the end of the British Art in Industry exhibition, it illustrated a quite different approach to ceramics. Pieces displayed by Moorcroft at the 1936 BIF were explicitly likened to the finest works of the Chinese, still on view at the Royal Academy:

But there was a glamour of its own in the Flambé pieces, caught in the flash of triumphant technique, difficult to describe in detail, but consummate like Chun Chou Sung types seen at Burlington House, and the result of their producer's own built-up technique.²⁴

The technical accomplishment and artistic appeal of these pots was captured in a widely publicised anecdote about the visit of Chinese officials to Moorcroft's stand. Once again, he was admired for work comparable in quality to that of the Chinese; it was the ultimate accolade for a potter, reported thus in the *Pottery and Glass Record*:

The Chinese Acknowledge a Masterpiece. Among the many interesting incidents occurring at the British Industries Fair, the story is told of how Chinese experts visiting the Moorcroft stand noticed an unusually fine piece closely resembling ancient Chinese art. It is said that the Chinese visitors took it for an example of old Chinese of unusual quality, and bowed before it, acknowledging its importance. That certainly should be a tribute to the skill of Moorcroft design and decoration.²⁵

22 *PG* (April 1938), p.553.

23 *PG* (March 1936), p.542.

24 *Pottery and Glass Record* [*PGR*] (March 1936), p.60.

25 *PGR* (March 1936), p.72.

The story was reported, too, in the *Pottery Gazette* and the *Overseas Daily Mail*. Moorcroft was recognised as a potter of real distinction, his mastery of glazes winning the appreciation of connoisseurs of ceramic art, across nations, across epochs. If critical evaluation of modern pottery was often made with reference to models from the Song dynasty, these accolades were particularly significant; it was not just studio pottery which stood comparison with the finest oriental wares.

What characterised Moorcroft's output in these years was its creative energy. For all the commercial pressures, he did not stop experimenting with both design and glaze, some of his most innovative pieces being made in only very small quantities. He continued to support the British Industries Fair, but he was also submitting pieces to exhibitions of art works. His ware was displayed at selected events at the Royal Institution, as it had been for many years, and he began to exhibit, too, at the Autumn Exhibition of the Liverpool Walker Art Gallery, an annual event dating back to 1871 which displayed contemporary painting and sculpture. The *Liverpool Daily Post*, 15 October 1937, published a photograph of selected exhibitors at the opening of the Preview that year; Moorcroft was to be seen in a group of fine artists and members of the Royal Academy.



Fig. 111 Preview of the Autumn Exhibition at the Liverpool Art Gallery; Moorcroft is second on the left in the main group: *Liverpool Daily Post* (15 October 1937). 'Personal and Commercial Papers of William Moorcroft', Stoke-on-Trent City Archives, SD 1837. CC BY-NC

He exhibited again in 1939, the *Pottery Gazette* illustrating four of his pots, described as 'pottery of real character and distinctiveness'.²⁶ Particularly striking was the varied nature of these pieces: two floral designs on contrasting grounds, a ribbed vase decorated with a running glaze, and an imposing vessel with red flambé glaze,

²⁶ *PG* (February 1939), p.241.

its depth of colour intensified by pewter mounts. These works epitomised the very different strands of his decorative output at the end of this decade, highlighting the eye of the designer, the craft of the decorator, and the expertise of the glaze chemist.

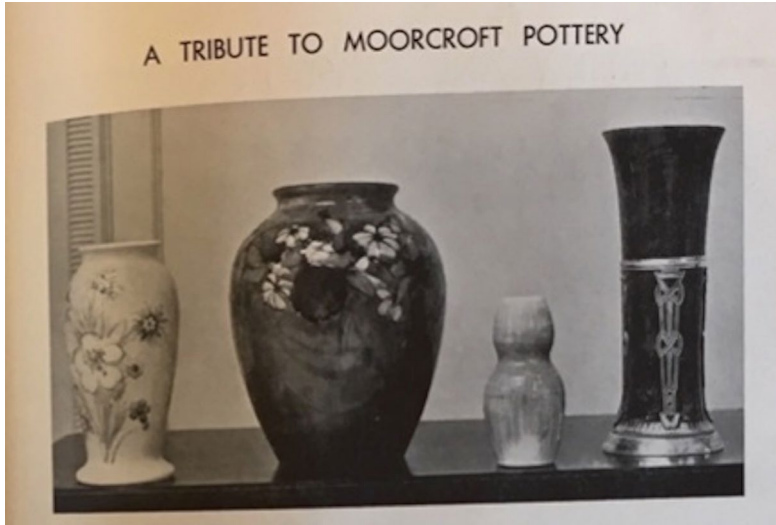


Fig. 112 Pottery exhibited by Moorcroft at the Walker Art Gallery (*Pottery Gazette*, February 1939). 'Personal and Commercial Papers of William Moorcroft', Stoke-on-Trent City Archives, SD 1837. CC BY-NC

Moorcroft's decorative ware was also attracting the attention of the French press. C. de Cordis, Editor of *La Revue Moderne Illustrée des Arts et de la Vie*,²⁷ wrote and published an article on his pottery in early 1937. The review carried photographs of four pieces covering over ten years of production: an unornamented vase in Powder Blue, a design with Leaf and Berries under a flambé glaze, a Moonlit Blue with silver mounts, and a vase in the Windswept Corn design. The designs were (again) strikingly varied, from the unadorned simplicity of Powder Blue to the fluent movement of Windswept Corn, from the quiet serenity of the mounted Moonlit Blue to the deep and varied tones of the flambé. William Moorcroft was represented as an artist potter, the pride of his country:

L'Angleterre qui s'est toujours prévalu de la facture hautement artistique des céramiques réalisés par ses anciens maîtres, [...] peut à juste titre s'enorgueillir actuellement des travaux d'art exécutés par W. Moorcroft en matière de poterie.

27 This journal took pride in an independent critical position, set out in its inaugural volume, 15 January 1920: 'nous reparlerons de l'Art qui embellit la Vie, du Bien que l'on peut faire, du mal que l'on devrait éviter. Pas plus qu'hier, nous ne connaissons pas de chapelle, de coterie, d'école, de parti, pas même de frontière, le Bien et le Beau n'en doivent point avoir.' [we shall return to the subject of Art which beautifies Life, of the Good we can do, of the evil we should avoid. No more than in the past shall we align ourselves with any particular sect, clique, school, party, nor even recognise boundaries, the Good and the Beautiful should have none]. [Translation mine] (quoted in Yves Chevrefils Desbiolles, *Les Revues d'art à Paris 1905-1940* (Paris: Ent'revues, 1993), p.211).

[England, which has always prided itself on the highly artistic workmanship of the pottery made by its master craftsmen [...] can be justifiably proud today of the art works executed in clay by W. Moorcroft.]²⁸

De Cordis stressed the cosmopolitanism of Moorcroft's education, and the international reputation of his pottery, reminding the reader of his successes at World's Fairs from St Louis (1904) to Milan (1933). But he underlined, too, its enduring appeal. If Pevsner praised his 'undatedly perfect' Powder Blue, de Cordis situated his work in the quite different, ageless tradition of the artist potter. Although clearly not a child of the twentieth century, he was represented, explicitly, as one whose art continued to speak to the modern age:

*William Moorcroft qui va allègrement vers ses soixante-cinq ans a conservé toute la verdeur de la jeunesse, et ses œuvres en témoignent.*²⁹

[William Moorcroft, who is cheerfully approaching his sixty-fifth birthday, has retained all the verve of youth, and his works bear witness to this].

The critic attributed this enduring quality to the integrity of Moorcroft's designs, but also (and perhaps above all) to his handling of colour:

*Puis il y a la couleur, cette couleur merveilleuse, variée, diverse, toujours éclatante et précieuse. Et si l'on songe qu'il faut pour l'obtenir atteindre des températures de 2000 à 3000 degrés Fahrenheit, qu'il suffit d'un rien, d'un abaissement ou d'une élévation quasi-insensible de la température pour compromettre irrémédiablement l'effet recherché, on est bien obligé de conclure à la maîtrise de l'artiste qui a créé tant de chefs-d'œuvre.*³⁰

[Then there is the colour, that marvellous colour, rich, distinctive, always arresting and lovely. And if we consider that to obtain it, one has to reach temperatures of 2000 to 3000 degrees Fahrenheit, that it would take next to nothing, a barely noticeable reduction or rise in temperature, to compromise irreversibly the desired effect, we have to conclude that the artist who has created so many treasures is indeed a master].

De Cordis echoed observations by Paul Valéry, whose 1930 essay 'De l'éminente dignité des arts du feu', written for an exhibition at the Galerie Rouard, reflected on the unique qualities of art forms subject(ed) to the capricious will of fire. Moorcroft was presented as one who could control the fire, a true master potter whose art was the expression of his skill, not the result of chance. The review ended, significantly, with a reference to the Japanese ambassador's appreciation of his art in 1923, an accolade which had lost none of its currency since it was first reported, and which had been corroborated more than once in subsequent years. Moorcroft's accomplishments as a ceramic artist were undisputed:

28 C. de Cordis, 'La Poterie', *La Revue moderne* (28 February 1937), 24–25 (p.24). [All translations mine]

29 Ibid., p.25.

30 Ibid.

*Moorcroft est l'égal des plus grands artistes potiers de la vieille Chine.*³¹

[Moorcroft is the equal of the greatest artist potters of ancient China].

This ringing endorsement of Moorcroft's reputation in France was the perfect prelude for the World's Fair to be held in Paris later that year. His path to this event, though, would not be quite so smooth.

3. Paris, 1937

The Exposition Internationale des Arts et Techniques dans la Vie Moderne brought out tensions between the pottery industry and the Council for Art and Industry [CAI], the body responsible for selection of the British exhibits; but it highlighted differences, too, between how Moorcroft was seen and how he saw himself. Members of the Selection Committee visited his exhibit at the 1936 BIF, inviting him to submit examples of Sunray tableware. On 19 March 1936, however, Moorcroft wrote to the CAI, declining the invitation; he disputed that the members of the committee had the necessary experience to appreciate, or the correct criteria to select, his best work:

You will understand, after working practically the whole of my life learning through constant work something of physics, the chemistry and the design of my pottery, that I scarcely feel happy in submitting my pottery for judgement to men who could not have had a long experience. The experience required for decorating pottery superficially or of buying it for the trade is almost useless when considering the complete homogeneous action of the clay, the glaze, the colour and the high temperature say of 2000 to 3000 degrees F.

Given its growing reputation at the forefront of modern design, it is no surprise that Moorcroft's tableware attracted the Committee's attention. For Moorcroft, though, this selection overlooked work which demonstrated a much more sophisticated engagement with the art and craft of pottery; it diminished his achievements as a potter, which were widely appreciated elsewhere. The presence on the Committee of manufacturers (Josiah Wedgwood V, Cyril Carter, Ronald Copeland), and of a designer/retailer (Harry Trethowan), implied an approach which evaluated (and valued) sales potential before ceramic qualities. It was not that he did not rate his tableware, nor that he dissociated artistic merit and commercial success, but he did not regard this functional ware as his most original, or significant, or expressive, work. Notwithstanding Moorcroft's reluctance to participate, members of the Selection Committee returned the following year to his exhibit at the 1937 BIF, again requesting the submission of Sunray ware. They commissioned one other piece, a vase in the Windswept Corn design, to be made specially for the exhibit. This was not enough to satisfy Moorcroft, however, and in the spring of 1937 he made an additional, and independent, submission of pottery for exhibition in the International Pavilion. Edith

31 Ibid.

Harcourt Smith applauded his initiative, in a letter of 17 June 1937: ‘Glad you have sent pottery to Paris. Shows you stand alone and ignore the distinguished men who select. What a position for men like you.’

The opening of the British Pavilion caused furious controversy. On 7 July 1937, *The Times* published a letter from Alfred Bossom, MP for Maidstone, who decried the poor standard of the British articles selected. Moorcroft responded the same day, in the same spirit, his letter recounting how his own wares had been chosen. He told a tale of misguided values and dogged insensitivity, no less pronounced in 1937 when the Committee visited his BIF exhibit a second time:

A year later, Mr Pick, Chairman for the Council for Art in [sic] Industry, with his selection committee visited a show of my pottery, and once more selected a few small pieces which were entirely unrepresentative. However, Mr Pick did select one large piece, but not without saying that he would like me to alter the foot. And these pieces were sent to Paris.³²

The reference to Pick’s request for a modified example of the Windswept Corn vase added a further touch of irony; caricatured for its lack of judgement, the Committee was presented as interventionist, authoritarian, and deluded:

It appears to me unusual, after spending fifty years of my life, first as an art worker and later as chemist and physicist, researching for the best means to make good pottery, to then be visited by the Council for Art in [sic] Industry who not only made an inadequate selection of pottery for Paris, but tried to advise me before sending it, how to make it. After long experience, I feel that unless there are found men with sound understanding of their work and less influenced by the fashions which are now known as ultra-modern, there will be little hope for better things.³³

The uncompromising tone of Moorcroft’s letter struck a chord with others. Ellis Smith, M.P. for Stoke, alluded to the ‘letter in *The Times* from a well-known potter’ in his questions to the Secretary of the Department of Overseas Trade [DOT] on 26 July 1937, recorded in Hansard.³⁴ And on 27 September 1937 Moorcroft was invited by J.F. Price to address members of the North Staffordshire branch of the Society of Industrial Artists who were planning to visit the exhibition: ‘[...] as they wish to see what they ought to see, and not to waste energy, your views would be extremely valuable. [...] If you would do us this service, we should be honoured’.

Moorcroft may have been thought to speak for the generality of the pottery industry in his assessment of the Committee, but the reasons for his dissatisfaction were fundamentally, and tellingly, different. Criticism of the British exhibit in the trade press was essentially commercial. The industry regarded the Exhibition as a trade fair, and resented what they saw to be a predominance of (uninspiring) studio pottery. The *Pottery Gazette* review was categorical:

³² ‘Paris Exhibition. The British Pavilion’, *The Times* (9 July 1937).

³³ *Ibid.*

³⁴ House of Commons, *Hansard’s Parliamentary Debates* (26 July 1937), vol. 326, cols. 2648–649.

The ordinary low-priced commercial china and earthenware is not represented in anything like the proportion of its selling capacity. It is difficult to see what influenced the selectors in their choice and their display, but the result is not happy. As to choice, the colours are mostly drab and brown, with a little dull green.³⁵

Moorcroft outlined his own position in a letter to the *Pottery Gazette*, responding to their review. He echoed the reporter's dismay at the poor selection and display of exhibits, but his criticism was that the CAI's choice gave prominence to mass-produced wares at the expense of true exhibition pieces. Characteristically forthright, he decried the display of his Windswept Corn vase, the very piece Pick had commissioned:

To my disappointment I found that the large vase I made specially, 20 inches high, was placed on the floor away from the pottery groups, and was being used to assist the display of some fabrics. The vase was filled with dust-spattered artificial flowers, which, together with the fabrics, covered the greater part of it. On the other hand, the same Council displayed mass-produced articles in the front line, on special stands. These were of a type which one would not expect to take up valuable space in the British Pavilion.³⁶

His letter ended, provocatively, with the suggestion that responsibility for this inadequate exhibit could be traced back to the industry itself:

Mr Trethowan [...] tells us, in his letter to you, that six out of nine men on the Paris 1937 committee were directly connected with the pottery industry. So it may be seen that the existing committee, which is responsible for the present show, has, in fact, a two-thirds majority of members engaged in the industry.³⁷

If the view of industry was that commercial wares had been inadequately represented, Moorcroft's view was that the committee had given too much consideration to sales potential, and not enough to true artistic quality.

Moorcroft's decision to submit exhibits of his own selection to the International Pavilion was no trivial undertaking, inevitably incurring additional and substantial expense of both money and time; that he did so, suggests just how important it was to him to exhibit wares which reflected the true extent of his activity as a potter. His action may have called to mind the double exhibitions of Leach in 1927 and 1928, but Moorcroft's motives were quite different. He was not distinguishing functional and decorative wares (a distinction he would not recognise), but he sought to correct the narrow official view of what mattered in (his) pottery. For him, the art of the potter was not simply to design useful wares suitable for large-scale production, it was to create objects of beauty which displayed the potter's skill and brought pleasure to the owner. The International Pavilion opened on 27 July, and Moorcroft's exhibit was soon attracting attention. Writing from Paris on 30 July 1937, the journalist John Thomas congratulated him on 'such a magnificent, royal Moorcroft display', noting that it was

35 *PG* (September 1937), p.1213.

36 *PG* (October 1937), p.1382.

37 *Ibid.*

‘much admired and commented upon by all at the International Pavilion’. And on 13 August 1937, less than three weeks after its opening, the *Revue Moderne* sent Moorcroft proofs of an article devoted to this exhibit; it appeared two months later.

The article, written by R. Serlanges, carried an engraved portrait on the first page, and a heading which focussed on Moorcroft the ceramic artist:

*Les Céramiques d’art. William Moorcroft. Potier de sa Majesté la Reine.*³⁸

[Art pottery. William Moorcroft. Potter to Her Majesty the Queen]

Included were photographs of selected items in the exhibit: the evocative, and still very popular, Moonlit Blue; his latest floral designs; examples of his much sparer decorative world, represented by Windswept Corn and Angel Fish on a plain cream ground; a series of marred pots, one with a fish design and others undecorated. Serlange’s focus was made clear from the start; it was Moorcroft’s independent exhibit which did justice to the remarkable range of his output:

*C’est au Pavillon International du Champ de Mars que le plus célèbre artiste céramiste d’Angleterre a dû rechercher un cadre vaste pour y présenter un ensemble d’œuvres qui fût digne de son magnifique talent.*³⁹

[It was in the International Pavilion on the Champ de Mars that England’s most famous artist potter sought out a suitably spacious setting to display a body of work worthy of his magnificent talent.]

The critic noted the purity of line and depth of colour which had impressed de Cordis in his article of March 1937, but he soon turned his attention to Moorcroft’s ornamented ware, characterised by its unassuming subject matter, and its harmony of form, decoration and colour. He was not assessing the commercial potential or the functionality of this pottery, he was paying attention to its detail:

*Quant à l’ornementation, elle est inspirée des éléments de la flore choisis souvent à dessein parmi les plus modestes, beaux épis d’or, lourdes grappes élégantes, feuilles aux découpures harmonieuses ou humbles fleurs des champs; parfois aussi des poissons aux silhouettes originales.*⁴⁰

[As for the decoration, it is inspired by flowers often deliberately chosen from among the most unassuming, beautiful golden ears of corn, elegant clusters of buds, leaves with the most delicate shapes, or humble meadow flowers; fish too, sometimes, striking in their outline.]

It was these qualities of design which were seen to underlie the broad appeal of Moorcroft’s work, and its ability to engage critics of all aesthetic persuasions:

38 R. Serlanges, ‘Les Céramiques d’art. William Moorcroft, Potier de Sa Majesté la Reine’, *La Revue moderne* (15 October 1937), 2–4. [All translations mine]

39 *Ibid.*, p.2.

40 *Ibid.*, p.3.

*Les plus illustres collectionneurs du monde entier, les critiques formés par toutes les cultures ont rendu hommage à la valeur exceptionnelle de ses créations.*⁴¹

[The most distinguished collectors in the world and critics of all cultural backgrounds have paid tribute to the exceptional value of his creations.]

Moorcroft was represented as a potter for the times, appreciated the world over. It was an image of modernity, reflected, too, in the etched portrait which featured on the opening page of the article and for which Moorcroft had sat on 21 July 1937, less than a week before the opening of the International Pavilion. The portraitist was Edgar Holloway, a rising star in the art world whose work had been displayed in the V&A, the British Museum and the fashionable XXI Gallery, and who counted among his sitters some of the leading figures in the world of modern art and letters: Herbert Read, Stephen Spender and T.S. Eliot.

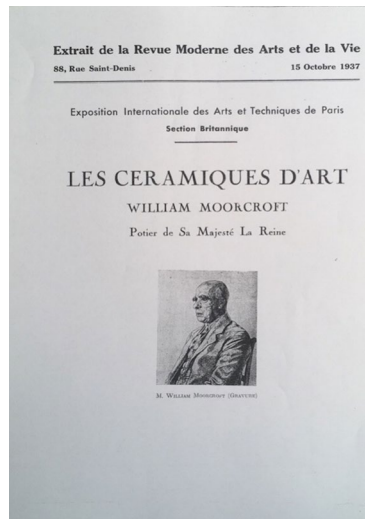


Fig. 113 Portrait of Moorcroft by Edgar Holloway, *Revue Moderne* (15 October 1937). CC BY-NC

Moorcroft sent offprints of the article to many people, including Frank Pick, who replied on 1 December 1937:

It must indeed be pleasing to you to find that the French show a just appreciation of your pottery, as there are so many good French potters with whom you may be regarded as in competition.

Pick's response revealed his priorities. To see Moorcroft's work 'in competition' with French pottery was to adopt the perspective of commerce, where success might be measured in trading figures and compared with those of a rival; from the viewpoint of an artist, such a perception would have seemed misplaced, even incomprehensible. The *Pottery Gazette* published extracts of this review, and a photograph of his display

41 Ibid., pp.3–4.

which included two marred pots, and two fish pots.⁴² It was this same issue of the *Pottery Gazette* which carried Moorcroft's letter describing his impressions of the British pavilion; the juxtaposition brought out even more clearly the difference between an art critic's assessment of Moorcroft's work and that of a government committee.

Moorcroft's reaction to the selection of his wares by the CAI was arguably more than just personal, or aesthetic; it was also political. As totalitarian states began to politicise their culture, Moorcroft questioned the authority of a committee to dictate what represented Britain at its best. He may well have imagined in its interventions the early signs of a cultural authoritarianism already far advanced in Germany and Russia, and whose two imposing pavilions confronted each other so ominously at one end of the Pont d'Iéna, within sight of Britain's controversial pavilion at the other. Moorcroft's aesthetic position was not that of a nationalist; his ceramic politics were more sensitive, and more far-reaching, in their scope.



Fig. 114 View of the Pont d'Iéna facing south. The British pavilion is the low rectangular building on the far side of the river. Séeberger frères, *La Tour Eiffel et Fontaine du Trocadéro* [1937] [*detail*], Wikimedia, https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/thumb/a/a6/Exposition_Internationale_des_Arts_et_Techniques_dans_la_Vie_Moderne_15.jpg/2560px-Exposition_Internationale_des_Arts_et_Techniques_dans_la_Vie_Moderne_15.jpg, Licence Ouverte 1.0

4. Politics and Pottery

1936 saw a rapidly changing and increasingly unstable political landscape in Europe and beyond: the outbreak of Civil War in Spain, Hitler's occupation of the Rhineland, Mussolini's annexation of Ethiopia, and the start of Stalin's purges in Russia all contributed to the worsening economic depression. In Britain, the year had begun

42 PG (October 1937), p.1361.

with the death of the much-loved George V, but the stability of its monarchy was not questioned. Confidence in the new king was absolute; it was given expression in the *Pottery Gazette* just weeks, ironically, before the abdication crisis:

While Spain is in the grip of a civil war, and Dictators dictate, we in Britain, fortunately, maintain a calm which is characteristic of our race. [...] The British race loves simplicity, and abhors ostentation—it worships its King.⁴³

The abdication had potentially serious consequences for firms which had already begun the manufacture of Coronation wares, but for Moorcroft the events of late 1936 inspired different considerations; his commemorative pottery had a still relevant message to convey. He wrote to Queen Mary on the day following Edward VIII's broadcast to the nation; the Queen's Private Secretary responded on 14 December 1936:

I have had the honour to submit to Queen Mary your letter of December 12th, together with the two souvenirs of your ware of the reign of King Edward VIII. In reply [...] I am to assure you that Queen Mary very much appreciates the kind message of sympathy conveyed to Her Majesty at this time of sorrow and anxiety for Herself and the whole Nation.

Moorcroft's gesture was eloquent. To send the Queen examples of his (now obsolete) Coronation ware was to commemorate the promise of the king's reign, and to imply the national grief at its untimely end; it was a sensitive expression of support at a time when the stability of the royal family had been so dramatically shaken.

Moorcroft's Coronation ware for the new king George VI attracted press attention. Some pieces were exhibited at the 1937 BIF, others were reviewed in the *Pottery Gazette*. Moorcroft took this opportunity to describe the distinctive qualities of his pottery; like the monarch and his subjects, ornament and body were inseparably, and harmoniously, bound together:

Mr Moorcroft [...] prides himself upon the fact that the whole of the elements which go to compose his finished pottery are absolutely homogeneous [...] the decorations are not merely applied to the ware [...] but part and parcel of the pottery itself [...]. This point cannot be overstressed, and it will be appreciated to the full by lovers of pottery of the truest type.⁴⁴

To associate qualities of authenticity with royal ware was to make a political point. In a world increasingly shaped by ideology and dictatorship, the humanity of a royal family was most appropriately celebrated in pottery characterized by its individuality, integrity and personal touch; this was not the soulless product of a machine. And it captured the mood of the nation. It featured prominently in a television programme on 17 April 1937, entitled 'Coronation Ware', presented by John Thomas. His wife, A. Longton Thomas, wrote to Moorcroft on 19 April 1937, giving an account of the broadcast; his ware had not just been discussed in the programme, it was given

⁴³ *PG* (October 1936), p.1345.

⁴⁴ *PG* (June 1937), 795–96 (p.795).

prominence in the opening credits, setting the tone for what was to follow: ‘Your pottery ‘televised’ very well indeed, and at night, instead of showing the Television hostess on the screen, the Moorcroft Bowl was used to introduce the Talk in a most effective manner.’

But for Moorcroft, pottery and politics did not simply intersect at the level of national pride. He demonstrated this in his response to the interest of the Deutsches Museum in his work, first expressed at the 1934 BIF. This was no ordinary museum. An article in *The Times* noted its apolitical approach to acquisitions, all the more striking as Hitler’s power in Germany increased, and nationalist propaganda was becoming more widespread:

The name Deutsches Museum is in a way a misnomer, as it might suggest that the institution is devoted to the achievements of the German nation only. This is not the case, since the technical and scientific progress of all periods and races is represented [...].⁴⁵

The Museum had written on 6 July 1934, informing him that they no longer had the funds to buy the items selected from his exhibit. Moorcroft undertook to donate examples of his work, as he explained on 19 March 1936 in a letter to the CAI, responding to their invitation to lend pieces to the V&A. For a museum collection, he argued, only the very best was good enough; this was particularly true of a German museum in such troubled times, and of this museum above all:

[...] I have so far delayed sending these pieces as I am very anxious that this Museum should have only the very best I can make. In these days there is such a deluge of make-belief, that one is more than ever restrained and anxious to make something worthwhile.

For Moorcroft, the arts spoke eloquently across national boundaries, offering an example of harmonious and creative exchange which politicians were struggling to replicate. It was a familiar sentiment. On 17 March 1937, *The Times* reported in detail ‘Germany’s Gift to London’: 2,600 books from the German government to the Institute of Historical Research, University of London. The gift, presented by the newly appointed German Ambassador, Joachim von Ribbentrop, was clearly nationalistic in substance—it included the *Monumenta Germaniae Historia*, and a copy of *Mein Kampf*—and political in intention, reflecting Germany’s desire at this time to broker an alliance with Britain. But it was accepted by Lord Macmillan, perhaps disingenuously, as the gift of ‘an even more important country, the republic of letters, a country which had no frontiers to dispute, and no economic problems to solve’, and whose ambition was ‘to foster the spirit of international good will.’⁴⁶ Shortly afterwards, von Ribbentrop visited Moorcroft’s stand at the 1937 BIF. In a letter of 27 March 1937 to Ralph Cory, Librarian at the Royal Institution, Moorcroft gave a brief account of the meeting, where he had clearly spoken of the inspirational value of cultural exchange, be it German music or, it was implied, his own pottery:

⁴⁵ ‘A Storehouse of Science. The Museum in Munich’, *The Times* (1 June 1935), p.15.

⁴⁶ ‘Germany’s Gift to London’, *The Times* (17 March 1937), p.18.

Recently I met Herr von Ribbentrop, the German Ambassador, and he much admired my work, and I told him that the wonderful music of Germany so soothed one that it enabled one to visualise colour and form.

Moorcroft sent his gift to Munich, with a covering letter dated 26 June 1937; his pieces reflected the trans-political spirit evoked by Lord Macmillan. In their diversity of design, decoration and glaze effect, they all embodied the natural art of the potter: a ribbed vase decorated with *sang de boeuf* glaze, and another in Peach Bloom, a straight-sided vessel in a Windswept Corn design, and a shallow bowl with Leaf motifs, its colours enriched by a flambé glaze. This work, and the gesture of giving it, was all the more eloquent, though, in the context of two major exhibitions which opened in Munich little more than three weeks after its dispatch: the Grosse Deutsche Kunstausstellung in the recently opened Haus der deutschen Kunst, celebrated German art for a new era; and the exhibition of Entartete Kunst at the Institute of Archaeology assembled examples of decadent art to be swept away by the new age. *The Times* was clearly wary of these growing signs of a cultural purge:

It is held that by destroying individualism and Liberal, Bolshevik, Jewish and Marxist influences, and by applying the principles of 'authoritarianism' and extreme nationalism, German art and culture which, according to Herr Hitler, were in a pitiful state of degeneracy and corruption a few years ago, have been redeemed.⁴⁷

For Moorcroft, though, art had a quite different function, and a quite different message to convey. His covering letter focussed on pottery as an expression of nature, a source of inspiration common to all and controlled by none:

The objects are all made without moulds and sculptured out of the material, and the colour is obtained by a purely natural process through the fusion of the earths and metals directly in the material. [...] I feel it is a great privilege to be able to offer some of my work to your famous Museum.

The Museum wrote to Moorcroft on 29 September 1937, acknowledging receipt of his pieces. Their welcome of the gift, and their pledge to display his wares in a place of honour, in a museum just one mile away from these two heavily politicised exhibitions, clearly reflected their more open political position, and their appreciation of Moorcroft's art without borders. Keen to publicise this response, Moorcroft sent the text of the Museum's letter to *The Times*; it was published a week later:

W. Moorcroft, Potter to Her Majesty the Queen, Burslem. It is with the greatest pleasure that we acknowledge the arrival of the four pieces of pottery which you so very kindly presented to us, and which have arrived in perfect condition. We thank you very warmly for giving these outstandingly beautiful pieces; they will be put in the middle case of our room of ceramics, and they will form a centrepiece of our ceramic exhibits. A card will be put with the pieces with the name of the donor. With our deepest respect.⁴⁸

⁴⁷ 'House of German Art. Opening by Herr Hitler', *The Times* (19 July 1937), p.13.

⁴⁸ W. Moorcroft, 'German Tribute to British Pottery', *The Times* (6 November 1937), p.8.

The letter was noticed. Bruce Watson, Rector of Upham, wrote the same day as Moorcroft's letter was published:

I congratulate you on the very delightful letter you have received from the Deutsches Museum [...]. Such kindness will do more to make the Germans friends and friendly than many acts of Parliament.

And it was reported too in the *Pottery Gazette* which pointedly commented on the 'high appreciation' of Moorcroft's ware in both Germany and France.⁴⁹ Just a few months later, similarly high appreciation was again associated with figures in the political limelight. A review of the 1938 BIF reported a visit to his stand by the Emperor of Ethiopia, who 'expressed his intense admiration for the Moorcroft pottery', and later sent 'a special message of thanks'.⁵⁰ Haile Selasse had been in exile in England since the annexation of Ethiopia by Mussolini in 1936, an act which the British government had not opposed. Moorcroft's art, neither ideological nor nationalistic, but seeking above all to embody the harmonious beauty of nature, must have seemed all the more relevant and precious in these unsettled times.

Significantly, as political tensions increased in Europe, the *Revue Moderne* published a third review of Moorcroft's work. It carried illustrations of pieces exhibited at the Walker Art Gallery in the autumn of 1938: two versions of a Spring Flowers design, a vase with Orchid motifs, and another decorated with a running glaze. Its opening underlined the international reach of Moorcroft's reputation as the *maître incontesté de la céramique anglaise* [undisputed master of English ceramics], and the French reader was reminded of his two triumphant exhibits in Paris.⁵¹ Serlanges identified an essential selflessness in Moorcroft's work, manifested both in his choice of subject matter, and in the manner of its representation; it was a quality which gave this ware not just its universal appeal but also a moral value:

*La nature seule est à la base de ses compositions décoratives ; tout son savoir, toute son expérience lui ont servi à acquérir une grande humilité et à ne pas prétendre concurrencer les créations naturelles par la recherche de la beauté. Cette nature, il la sert plus qu'il ne se sert d'elle, en proposant ses exemples à l'admiration de tous. C'est là l'indice éclatant d'une valeur morale qui apparait manifestement dans tous ses travaux.*⁵²

[Nature alone is the basis of his decorative designs; all his knowledge, all his experience have inspired in him a great humility which does not set out to compete with nature's creations in its search for beauty. He serves nature, he does not make use of it, holding up examples of its loveliness to be admired by all. This is striking proof of the moral value clearly evident in all his work].

What is striking about this review is its clear engagement with Moorcroft's work. Serlanges did not describe the pottery, he did not even describe its effect; he sought

49 *PG* (January 1938), p.63.

50 *PG* (April 1938), p.553.

51 Serlanges, R., 'La Céramique', *La Revue moderne* (15 March 1939), 19–20 (p.19). [All translations mine]

52 *Ibid.*, p.20.

instead to understand its meaning, and its value. Significantly, he referred to the letter sent by the Deutsches Museum; as tension in Europe increased, the importance of Moorcroft's work was appreciated with ever greater intensity, and urgency. At a time of nationalist politics and politicised aesthetics which threatened centuries of culture in Germany, Russia, China and elsewhere, Serlanges recognised in Moorcroft an artist whose work had an integrity which spoke across national frontiers. It was a powerful statement at this time of turmoil:

Ceux-ci acquièrent, de ce fait, une force éducatrice, car ils relèvent l'esprit des masses; en même temps ils échappent à l'influence de toute doctrine d'école, ou des fantaisies d'une mode passagère, et c'est pourquoi ils s'imposent dans le présent à l'estime générale des hommes de toute culture, comme ils s'imposeront par la suite à l'admiration des générations à venir; ils portent, en effet, la marque de l'art véritable: celui qui est universel et éternel.⁵³

[His creations take on, in this way, an inspirational force, because they lift the spirits of ordinary people; moreover, they are not influenced by aesthetic doctrines, nor by the whims of transient fashion, which is why they enjoy widespread appreciation today, across all cultural boundaries, and why they will be admired too by future generations; they are stamped with the hallmark of true art, that which is universal and lasts forever.]

Moorcroft's art was seen to replace restlessness with tranquillity, assertion with contemplation, ideology with a quiet, humble morality; it was an eloquent gesture of calm in a world increasingly characterised by a strident rhetoric of regeneration, purification and strength. The most expressive pieces of all in this context were perhaps the marred pots, some decorated some not, exhibited in Paris, and later at the Walker Art Gallery. They were very much of the moment, focussing on colour and form, but on a form which was collapsing, an imperishable embodiment of man's limitations and nature's power, an unwitting nod to Valéry.



Fig. 115 William Moorcroft, Marred pot with Fish design (1937), 18cm. CC BY-NC

These qualities of Moorcroft's art, recognised in France, were appreciated, too, at home. It was the tranquillity of his ware which was anticipated by the *Pottery Gazette* in advance of the 1938 BIF:

When the visitor has toured the Section [...], he can pause awhile at the Moorcroft stand and experience there something of a spirit of restfulness. After all, there is nothing in the Section quite like the 'Moorcroft' pottery. [...] The buyer who appreciates real truth in pottery, soulful expression shall we say?, knows that he can get it here.⁵⁴

And what was true of published reviews was reflected also in private letters. A letter from Margaret Macintyre of 12 September 1938 acknowledged the uplifting effect of a recently acquired flower bowl: 'Believe me I shall always treasure it [...]. Such beautiful colourings will brighten the dull days of winter'. And the same appreciation was expressed in a letter from Edith Harcourt Smith, dated 30 October 1938, as she told him of her pleasure to see his vases filled with flowers around her house: 'First, let me say you are specially in our conversation these days, for your beautiful vases decorate the rooms, being full of yellow and dark chrysanthemums [...], and they look too lovely in the vases.' As the Munich Agreement seemed increasingly frail, and the threat of war in Europe continued to loom, the pots and the tranquillity they embodied put such crisis in perspective; they could not quench the anxiety, but they brought some measure of comfort: 'Your views on life are so exalted and fine, just what we all should be contemplating. Peace in mind and life is really the only thing to find, more and more does one realise the uselessness of anything else.'

5. The Potter's Art

On 3 December 1937, less than a month after the publication of his letter from the Deutsches Museum, Moorcroft was approached by Cecil Hunt, the newly appointed London editor of Blackie & Son, inviting him to write a book:

For many years I have been an admirer of your art, and determined, if ever I returned to publishing, [...] to ask you to consider the possibilities of your writing a book. In these sadly mechanised days, a book under some such title as 'The Potter's Art' would be not only interesting but a service to the community, and of infinite value to the craft you serve.

Moorcroft accepted the idea, and Hunt wrote again on 14 December 1937. His proposal was for a book with high production values, and ample illustrations of Moorcroft's work:

My own feeling is that it should be a book fairly heavily illustrated, and if possible with some coloured plates. This, of course, puts it in the 12s.6d to 15s [twelve shillings and 6 pence to fifteen shillings] range, but to my mind these would be an essential part of the book [...].

⁵⁴ PG (February 1938), p.250.

Hunt clearly envisaged a volume significantly more luxurious than recently published books by two of the most experienced teachers of the time: Gordon Forsyth's *20th Century Ceramics* (1936), and Dora Billington's *The Art of the Potter* (1937). And significantly different, too. Both these books had explored in different ways the relationship of the studio potter and the manufacturer, both associating studio pottery with individual pieces of decorative art, and industrial pottery with mass-produced functional wares. Forsyth noted a 'wholly artificial gulf' between the two, but his was clearly a view from the Potteries; studio potters were placed in inverted commas, a telling sign of their marginality, both geographical and conceptual:

In Great Britain, Staffordshire remains the unchallenged pottery metropolis. [...] There are, of course, many other factories in the North, in Scotland, and scattered in the South-West. These are mostly small, and a considerable number of 'studio potters' work in the South of England.⁵⁵

He saw the future of studio pottery 'within mass production concerns',⁵⁶ but the 'reconciliation between artist and manufacturer' which he noted already in the Potteries was clearly identified not with potters, but with a new generation of Art School trained designers, some of whom had exhibited at the Royal Academy exhibition of 1935. Billington wrote from the opposite perspective. Her vision was of the studio potter working alongside (rather than within) industry, but, like Leach and Cardew, she underlined the importance of their making functional wares, albeit on a studio scale. It was not a matter of competition with the factory, but of recognising the potter's social role:

The studio potter cannot, and should not, attempt to compete with mass production on its own lines, but there is no reason why he should be too reserved and precious to take his place in the life of the community both through his own productions and the help he can give to trade production. Only thus will his art become really vital and valuable.⁵⁷

She implied that there might be some beneficial influence of such work on industrial design, but her vision was hypothetical, and doubtless idealistic; Cardew's collaboration with Copeland's in 1938 was short-lived and unsuccessful:

If beautiful pots were available for everyone who could appreciate them, what a vitalizing influence this would have on the mass-produced article!—and studio potters can only justify the making of pottery for the sake of its beauty if thereby they can bring beauty into the whole industry.⁵⁸

55 G. Forsyth, *Forsyth, G., 20th Century Ceramics: An International Survey of the Best Work Produced by Modern Craftsmen, Artists and Manufacturers* (London: The Studio Ltd., 1936), p.28.

56 Forsyth facilitated the appointment of Anne Potts as Manager of a newly opened Pottery Studio at Buller's in 1934, and he would help Grete Marks find work at Minton in 1937.

57 D.M. Billington, *The Art of the Potter* (Oxford: O.U.P., 1937), p.112.

58 Ibid. In his autobiography, Cardew recalled Staite Murray's 'emphatic and memorable' dismissal of this plan: 'You can't make love by proxy'. (*Michael Cardew: A Pioneer Potter* (London: Collins, 1988), p.98).

It was telling, but inevitable, that Moorcroft was not discussed by either Forsyth or Billington, for both of whom a clear line separated the studio potter and the manufacturer; he fell into neither of those polarised camps. It was evidently clear to Hunt, however, that Moorcroft, celebrated both for his functional wares and for his decorative pottery, would be able to offer a broader (and doubtless more outspoken) vision than theirs of the art of pottery in the modern world. A list of Chapter Headings, sent for his consideration in a letter of 20 March 1939, gives a clear idea of the range he wished to cover, a mixture of technical explanation, ceramic history and personal reflection, an assessment of the art and craft of pottery, past, present and future:

The Potter's Wheel throughout the Centuries
 The Development of the Potter's Art
 The Main Influences and Schools of Thought
 Personalities of Pottery
 The Potter's Philosophy
 The Potter in the Machine Age
 The Technical Processes of Pottery, from the Conception in the Artist's mind to the Appearance of the Finished Piece.
 Personal Reminiscences of Occasions and Personalities, Changed and Contrasting Conditions etc.
 Famous Contemporaries.
 Notable Successes and Influences Governing their Design.
 A Survey of the Future Trend, and the Possible Return to Crafts and Simplicity.

A number of undated notes and jottings have survived which relate almost certainly to this project. As Moorcroft responded to ever more challenging commercial, political and aesthetic pressures, he wrote above all as a potter. One fragment sketched out his sense of vocation. That Hunt should have wished to include a section on 'The Potter's Philosophy' was in itself significant; for William Moorcroft, pottery was far more than a business, and Hunt had recognised that:

There is no more human, more fascinating nor appealing work than that of the Potter. The Potter has for his use the foundation of the earth itself, with all its clays and metals formed during millions of years. The Potter is happy in finding himself with this boundless, infinite, thrilling, vivacious, joyous gift from God. [...] With such a sacred trust there can be only one aim, that is the utmost for the Highest.

The lines echoed the opening of his 1905 article in the *American Pottery Gazette*, but the spiritual dimension was now developed. He saw the creation of pottery as a deeply personal collaboration with the very materials of creation, an act of joy and veneration; to do so through mechanical means would have been a travesty. But he stressed, too, his sense of moral responsibility not just to his public, nor to himself as artist, but to 'the Highest'. The phrase echoed the motto often attributed to the Victorian artist G.F. Watts, quoted most recently in the Obituary of his widow, Mary Seton Watts, published in *The Times*:

During some 30 years she drew strength from the past and kept alive a great tradition. 'The utmost for the highest' had always been his aim. She fought with vigour against any attack on the beauty of Nature [...].⁵⁹

For Moorcroft as for Watts, the integrity of art was what mattered above all. And he represented the potter's creative journey in almost allegorical terms, a quest to produce work worthy of its precious material, while resisting the lure of fashion:

This can only be achieved by sacrifice, by conscientious work, and by leaving entirely alone the miserable temptation to listen to the charlatan, the uninformed man who is always ready to talk without an understanding of the deeper values of the craft.

Unlike Forsyth or Billington, Moorcroft did not divide potters into the categories of studio and industrial, he distinguished between those who had a sense of vocation and those who thought no further than profit, and produced superficial ware as a result. To describe the potter driven by commercial motives as a 'charlatan' was both revealing and damning; the charlatan was a deceiver, his products fraudulent, and his success based on his salesman's 'prattle' (*ciarla*), not on the quality of his wares. The fragment ended with Moorcroft's own version of the struggle between conflicting aesthetic and moral values in the interwar years:

During the debased art as seen in many things during the last 20 years, we were working without true guidance. The men who could do things were driven out by the more commercially minded men. And the true men were alone, pining in their caves, as it were, waiting for the dawn of a new era. May we all pray for deliverance from an ugly phase.

Not politicised, as it was in Europe, Moorcroft's account opposed the integrity of art and the emptiness of wares made simply to sell. He did not foresee imminent progress, but he could visualise its qualities: in the 'new era', 'true' art would be freed of its commercial straitjacket. And it would be, above all, an expression of the self. Any form of imitation, be it industrial plagiarism or anglo-orientalism, fell short of this:

[...] we must seek through the wonderful material we use as potters truth and beauty.
[...] Plagiarism is so common, and life so short. In our short life, we cannot wisely spend our time following Greek or Roman models, or French, or Chinese. We should not forget [...] to be true to ourselves and to our work. This alone will justify our existence.

Moorcroft's book was never completed, and no extended drafts have survived; they were probably never written. In the years of increasing commercial and economic pressures, when Moorcroft's ware was as diverse and expressive as it had ever been, writing cannot have been his priority. On another scrap of paper he made the telling observation that he had time only to create pottery, not to reflect on it: 'I fear that I am not much known, as I have never had time to spare to attend meetings, or to talk about my pottery. My motto has been, and almost without choice, *Facta non verba*.' But it was not just a matter of time, it was a matter, too, of principle (and temperament).

⁵⁹ 'Mrs G.F. Watts, An Appreciation', *The Times* (10 September 1938), p.12.

Moorcroft was not by nature a man of (written) words, and for all that he felt the need to promote and explain his art, he was doubtless much more effective doing so informally as he showed visitors around his works than he was in documents which required more careful drafting. Leach spent much time in the late 1930s writing *A Potter's Book*; Moorcroft spent these years making pots. It was a clear sign of his status and celebrity that he should have been approached by Blackie to commit to paper his own potter's outlook, but in a sense, the book was not necessary. For all Moorcroft's anxiety about not being understood, the uniqueness, quality and value of his pottery were there for all to see. And many did, from heads of state to members of the public, from East to West.

6. New York, 1939

The New York World's Fair of 1939 promised to be a less contentious occasion for Moorcroft to exhibit his wares than the Paris exhibition of two years earlier. Memories of that controversy were implied in a letter of 7 April 1938 from Sir Edward Crowe, who had retired as Comptroller-General of the DOT in 1937:

To me, the word Moorcroft has become synonymous with beautiful pottery, and I hope and trust that you will have health and strength [...] to give to the world these masterpieces for many years to come; and I hope particularly that at New York you will have an opportunity of displaying your goods.

The same implied criticism of the CAI was expressed publicly in a letter to *The Times* by Cecil Harcourt Smith, responding to a notice on Moorcroft ware: 'If British pottery of today is to have due recognition at the New York World's Fair, I trust that, for the credit of our handicraft, Moorcroft pottery may be given the position it deserves.'⁶⁰ The British Commissioner General to the Fair, Sir Louis Beale, met Moorcroft in February 1938, inviting him to participate. A letter from Moorcroft dated 26 July 1938 implied that he had been left free to select his own wares, and he clearly relished this opportunity to exhibit the very best of his work:

I believe it will be possible with your help to make a display that will be original, yet breathing with life, something at once appealing, something undateable, something that will be a pleasant oasis in this often restless age.

He was describing an ambition to produce works of ceramic art, but echoing too Pevsner's assessment of Powder Blue; as ever, the same quality characterised all he made, functional or decorative. Using a metaphor already familiar in reviews of his work, he evoked works of timeless beauty, distinct and distinguished, vital and yet restful, works to transcend the troubles of the age.

And yet, in the course of the autumn, Moorcroft made enquiries about the possibility of exhibiting in his own right (just as he had two years earlier in Paris). On

⁶⁰ 'Moorcroft Pottery', *The Times* (8 March 1939), p.12.

14 November 1938 he wrote again to Beale, repeating his desire to display his finest art; Beale, it was now implied, had different priorities:

In my case, you will understand that the pieces are purely exhibition pieces, and not commercial. The impression I formed when we first met, when you asked me to give you something exceptional and outstanding, was not to think how much I could make out of it, but how much I might be able to contribute to the exhibition in the form of the finest possible of pottery and porcelain.

As in Paris, he was making a very clear distinction between wares which were designed for replication in quantity, and those which exemplified the very best of his designs and the skills of his staff. He conceived his display, then, not as a trade catalogue, but as an artist's exhibit; it was in this spirit that he had participated at Wembley fifteen years earlier:

My desire at that exhibition was to contribute something that would be worthy of English pottery, but I believe I was alone in my decision not to sell things there, but to show something that would add to the prestige of English pottery in the Great Empire Exhibition. [...] My feeling towards your British Government Pavilion remains the same [...].

It is almost certain that Moorcroft did not, in the end, exhibit separately; economic pressure was doubtless too strong. But there is evidence that, once again, he was unhappy with the final selection made of his exhibition pieces. With an art which was so personal, Moorcroft was uncomfortable leaving selection to others. An undated draft to Beale, clearly written after the opening of the Fair, broached this subject. He was proud of the pieces he had originally submitted, and certain of their appeal; for all the commercial pressures, he had not lost faith in his work:

I did over a year's special work in producing specimens as requested by you, [...] but Captain Baynes was only able to select a few of these pieces, as he said owing to lack of space. I feel sure these objects would interest thousands of people in the United States, if they could be seen.

He pointedly enclosed a copy of the third review of his work by the *Revue Moderne*; the value of his pottery was eloquently appreciated in France, if not by the British Commissioner General.

The outcome of this request is not known, but Moorcroft's exhibit caught the attention of the British press. On 7 June 1939, *The Times* published a series of photos of the Fair, including views of the Maritime Hall, of the main entrance, and of the Hall of Metals which displayed in the foreground one of the supreme examples of British automotive engineering: the 7-ton Thunderbolt in which Captain Eyston had broken the World Land Speed record the previous year. The only item with a picture of its own, however, was an Orchid vase by Moorcroft, with the caption: 'The centre picture shows one of the notable pottery exhibits, the work of Mr W. Moorcroft of Trentham, Staffordshire.'⁶¹

61 'The British Pavilion at the New York World's Fair', *The Times* (7 June 1939), p.20.



Fig. 116 *The Times* (7 June 1939). 'Personal and Commercial Papers of William Moorcroft', Stoke-on-Trent City Archives, SD 1837. CC BY-NC

The individualised focus on Moorcroft's ware among these more general views of the Fair is striking in itself; his was an exhibit seen to be of world-class significance. Perhaps more striking, however, is the fact that he was presented as an individual, located by his place of residence; for the reader of *The Times*, William Moorcroft was first and foremost an artist, not a firm. That same month, the *Pottery Gazette* published a report on 'China at the World's Fair in New York'; it ended with a Stop Press:

As we go to press, we also learn that there are on view at the World's Fair several magnificent specimens of 'Moorcroft Ware'. Of two of these specimens, noble-sized vases, showing 'Moorcroft' craftsmanship at its best, we have pleasure in reproducing photographs.⁶²

The photos were of an undecorated vessel with a running glaze, and of a vase with an Orchid design. Thirty-five years after Moorcroft's success at St Louis, he was exhibiting again in the US, and to equal acclaim.

7. Trade

At the end of the 1930s, Moorcroft's reputation was at its peak, both as a designer of tableware fit for the modern home and as a ceramic artist of international significance. But reputation alone did not guarantee commercial success. 1935–36 saw sales fall by 5.3%, against a rise of 8.4% in workers' wages, and of 27% for other costs; this left a gross profit lower by 32% on the previous year, and a net loss of £808 after working expenses had been factored in. Moorcroft wrote to Alwyn Lasenby on 1 September

⁶² 'Some Moorcroft Triumphs', *PG* (June 1939), p.789.

1936, disappointed by the outcome; he hoped, though, that his son's arrival at the works would give him more time to increase sales: 'It is not easy to obtain the right type of salesmen, but with Walter to help me, I look forward after many years to giving more personal attention to this side of things.'

In the following year, he cleared some stock in a bulk sale to Beard Watson & Co. Ltd., a fashionable Sydney retailer who posted a large advertisement in *The Sydney Herald* of 24 November 1936 headed 'Pottery by W. Moorcroft. Special London Purchase'. Its wording, significantly, promoted both the functional and decorative qualities of this pottery, simultaneously 'the quest of collectors' and a solution to 'every home need':

Moorcroft pottery—by reason of its unusual and practical design—will be the quest of collectors of future generations. It is the perfect expression of the potter's art. [...] There are shapes and sizes for every home need [...].

Moorcroft also exploited his popularity in Canada, exhibiting again at the Canadian National Exhibition, 1936; his participation was welcomed in Toronto's leading newspaper, *The Globe*.⁶³ His exceptional reputation in Canada was confirmed in a letter of December 1936 from Herbert C. Merry, a pottery buyer for Eaton's: 'The people here love your work, and now that things are coming back to normal in a financial way, there should be a grand market for 'Moorcroft' again.' But conditions remained difficult, particularly in the home market. A letter from a traveller in the Liverpool area, dated 22 April 1937, tellingly captured the deepening Depression:

Since collecting my samples, I have been out each day, working intensively, to make a success of Moorcroft sales. To date I have opened 4 new a/cs, travelled about 350 miles, and the net result is—that I have not earned the expenses of the car.

By the end of 1936–37, sales had increased by a modest 3%. The balance sheet still left a loss, but it was just £101; it was not spectacular progress, but it was progress.

The year 1937–38 was no easier. Writing on 22 October 1937, shortly after Moorcroft's return from the Paris Exhibition, Mr Harris, who had succeeded Pasco as his book-keeper at Liberty's, expressed confidence that commercial benefit would follow his artistic success there, but by the spring of 1938, following Hitler's annexation of Austria on 12 March, political uncertainty was taking its toll. The *Pottery Gazette* painted the bleakest of pictures from the 1938 BIF; this was trade truly in the doldrums:

On quite a number of days, the corridors of the Pottery and Glass Section were almost empty, except for groups of the manufacturers' representatives, many of whom [...] were bitterly complaining that they might have been doing better on their own particular territories.⁶⁴

At a personal level, too, Moorcroft was under intense financial pressure. He drafted a letter to the Canadian Pacific Railway Company on 7 January 1938, giving an account

⁶³ *The Globe* (6 August 1936), p.9.

⁶⁴ *PG* (April 1938), p.543.

of his ill-fated investment in the Company; in its stark account of relentless economic decline, it offers a telling insight into the art of the potter and the resilience of the man:

My work in life is mainly personal, and my success depends largely upon my own health. [...] Now I have nothing left but 1,464 shares in your company for which I paid some £16,000, which today are worth about £2,196.

The tranquil beauty of pots which had won such significant acclaim in France and Germany just weeks earlier was not the expression of an artist untouched by the political and economic turmoil; on the contrary, it was an act of will, an act of faith.

By the end of the year 1937–38, sales had fallen again, by 6.5%. The AGM, the Company's 25th, was held on 7 September 1938; the Directors' fee was foregone once more. Political tensions continued to make trade very difficult, and even the Munich Agreement brought no discernible improvement in confidence. As the year-end approached, there looked to be no end to the uncertainty. In the *Pottery Gazette*, W.J. Kent, president of the North Staffordshire Chamber of Commerce, was uncompromising in his assessment: 'There can be no definite improvement in trade so long as this menace of world war threatens'.⁶⁵ And as political tensions increased, so too did the economic pressure. A report from the British Pottery Manufacturers' Federation of 20 May 1939 discussed 'A.R.P. [Air Raid Precautions] on Factories. Prevention of Glare from Pottery Ovens'. All factories were required as a matter of urgency to make provision for ensuring a total and immediate blackout on their sites:

Since it is probable that this country may get little or no warning of the outbreak of war—in fact, the first notification might take the form of an actual air raid—the Committee feel that manufacturers should definitely take steps to screen their ovens immediately.

For all this increasing pressure, though, Moorcroft's sales in 1938–39 rose by 15.8%, leaving a gross profit of £3,200. A net loss remained, but it was just £48; it was his best outcome for four years.

These figures tell the story of a constant struggle against challenging conditions, each financial year ending in a net loss. And yet, over this period, the extent of that loss was reducing steadily, from just over £800 in 1935–36 to just under £48 in 1938–39. This modest success was all the more notable given an increase in production costs of 17% over these four years. It was due in part to a reduction in the wages bill, lower by 10.5% in this period, a sign of a shrinking workforce and the increasing proportion of undecorated wares being produced; but it was due also, and significantly, to an increase in sales, which stood in 1938–39 11.6% higher than in 1935–36. For all the constraints in the economy, Moorcroft ware was still finding a market, and increasingly so. In manuscript notes for his report to directors at the AGM, he expressed confidence that the tide was turning:

⁶⁵ PG (May 1939), p.686.

The year's work. Its uncertain outlook, its development regardless of this. A demand for better things. A gradual reaction from useless values. Good production is accepted as the best investment. [...] Our sales are nearly 15% higher than a year ago. While the demand in London is less than a year ago, the demand from U.S.A. is higher. The advantages of the New York World's Fair, without any charge for space.

The AGM took place on 28 August 1939. Six days later, on 3 September 1939, Britain was once again at war.

8. Conclusions

As economic conditions continued to deteriorate amid growing political tension, Moorcroft's commitment to his production methods was increasingly exceptional. At a meeting of the Design and Industries Association [DIA] and the Society of Industrial Artists, the Pountney designer J.F. Price acknowledged that underglaze decoration produced the most authentic ceramic effects, but affirmed that it was simply unviable in a challenging economic climate; the modern manufacturer had to be pragmatic: 'If the ware must be decorated at all, he would like it to be decorated on the glaze, where any mistakes could be wiped out and the work done over again'.⁶⁶ Decorated pottery of any kind was clearly seen to be a gamble in the current conditions, and Price noted that 'most potters have arrived at a common-sense view of industrial art'.⁶⁷ Not so William Moorcroft. For him, art was irreducible to common sense, and his introduction of new, finely decorated floral designs, so successful in Paris and New York, was another clear sign of his bold individuality. He was not one to compromise his values, a position which led to more tension with the BPFM. A Minute from the Federation's General Purposes Committee dated 27 February 1936, recorded a proposal to introduce greater uniformity of stand design at the 1937 BIF, to which 'practically the whole of the exhibitors in the four central blocks of the Pottery Section' had agreed. Moorcroft, however, contacted Sir Edward Crowe at the DOT on 19 October 1936, clearly contrasting his own individual practice with that of a manufacturer. He resisted uniformity at all costs, and his letter, temperate, courteous, deferential even, nevertheless communicated strongly held views:

Would not it be possible for me to be something of an oasis in the desert? Even a flower in a green field is a relief to the eye, and could not my stand with its carefully thought-out lighting prove to be a happy relief to the uniform stream line as suggested?

Moorcroft's was not the individuality of a competitor, intent on survival at the expense of others; it was that of a potter defending his right to be himself. He would not be dictated to by a committee, as he reminded Crowe:

⁶⁶ *PG* (July 1936), p.938.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

[...] the Chairman of the Council for Art and Industry might be well qualified to control the underground railway, but I hope always to remain in a position to determine how to display my pottery without the intervention of any other council.

In 1937, Moorcroft resigned from the Federation.

This resignation appeared to confirm the view that Moorcroft was not a 'pottery manufacturer', but on 27 January 1939 he wrote to Sidney Dodd, secretary of the Federation, in response to a comment made to a visiting importer from Czechoslovakia:

[...] after your Federation recommended certain firms, Mr Hohenberg asked you a question, 'What about Moorcroft', and it would appear that you amused him by telling him that I was not a merchant, but an artist [...].

Moorcroft's very public repudiation of the designation 'artist' in his letter to *The Times* of 7 April 1934 had clearly had no effect on the attitudes of the BPMF. Dodd's comment was all the more inappropriate, and provocative, given Moorcroft's unbroken record of attendance at the British Industries Fair, the industry's main trade fair; indeed, such support was by no means common among Staffordshire manufacturers, who increasingly regarded it as uneconomic. Moorcroft's objection was doubtless inspired by concern at the potential loss of business, but it reflected, too, his continued dislike of being categorised as an 'artist'. He recalled his exchange with the Chairman of the BPMF in a letter of 11 April 1938 to the Secretary of the Royal Society of Arts, K.W. Luckhurst, on the subject of the RSA's creation of the title, Designer for Industry, for which, Moorcroft contended, the qualifying criteria implicitly valued commercial success above aesthetic quality. He added a reminiscence omitted (or perhaps cut) from his letter to *The Times*:

I thanked them for this reference, and explained that I felt no special compliment was paid to me; and I reminded the meeting of one Sunday evening when leaving my hotel in Paris, of some charming creature quite unexpectedly taking my arm, telling me she was an artist; and I left her as quickly almost as she had addressed me, telling her I was not.

Moorcroft's anecdote, characteristically witty, carried a telling irony. The 'artistic' qualities displayed by the 'charming creature' in Paris, and which Moorcroft so categorically disclaimed, were those he identified with much modern industrial design: the art of providing whatever the public might be thought to desire. Design created simply for commercial motives was not part of Moorcroft's conception of his art, nor of his practice.

By the end of the 1930s, in a world increasingly preoccupied by commerce and competition, Moorcroft stood out, and appeared to stand alone. Writing to the Royal Institution on 27 March 1937, in response to an invitation to exhibit, he expressed the fear that his work was not fully appreciated for what it was. The first of the *Revue Moderne* articles had been published less than a month earlier, but his experience with the CAI over the Paris Exhibition was still very fresh in his mind: 'My means of working are little known, but in some future era I am hopeful that the result of a life's

work will be better understood.’ But his uniqueness was appreciated, if not by the BPMF. Blackie’s book commission reflected interest in a potter whose practice could not be reduced to a single generic term, and Moorcroft’s individuality was recognised, too, in the *Pottery Gazette*; truth to his principles was all the more noteworthy when economic pressures to compromise might have seemed irresistible:

Mr Moorcroft was good enough to show us [...] a number of new decorations and colourings which he will be exhibiting at Olympia this year for the first time. They are, it is almost needless to add, pottery of the truest type; for, assuredly, nothing less than this would satisfy Mr Moorcroft. It is certainly greatly to the advantage of the pottery trade that there are still a few individuals here and there who hold indomitably to their principles [...].⁶⁸

This same exhibit (at the 1939 BIF) caught the attention, too, of Marriott, who published a notice in *The Times*.⁶⁹ It was, at one level, a recognition of Moorcroft’s reputation that his pottery should attract the attention of a critic who, for over ten years, had been reviewing the work of leading studio potters. Marriott clearly recognised that Moorcroft could not be classified in either of the customary categories; his work differed from both studio and commercial pottery, both in its design and manufacture:

In kind, this pottery which Mr William Moorcroft has been making at Burslem for the last 40 years, is distinct. It differs from the work of our leading ‘studio’ potters in being practically without Oriental reference, and from ordinary factory production in that all the pieces are ‘thrown’ on the wheel and not moulded.⁷⁰

The observation that Moorcroft’s pottery was ‘practically without Oriental reference’ took no account of the flambé wares which had been admired for nearly twenty years, but it revealed Marriott’s critical standpoint. Unlike Serlanges, who read Moorcroft’s pottery on its own terms, Marriott viewed it through the lens of contemporary studio pottery. But for all the obvious differences between the two aesthetics, and for all Marriott’s undisguised preferences, he still recognised in this work the art of a skilled potter:

The large ornamental vases in flambé and turquoise, richly decorated with flowers naturalistically drawn, are not to our taste, but they serve very well to illustrate technical methods and the intensity of colour that can be produced by purely potting means.⁷¹

Like Pick and Pevsner, however, he was entirely convinced by the tableware, judged, significantly, in terms not of its functionality, but of its artistic qualities, form and colour:

Wholehearted praise can be given to the tea, coffee, dinner and cider sets in jade white and porcelain blue—of the stippled ‘powder’ variety [...]. The forms are well considered,

⁶⁸ *PG* (February 1939), p.252.

⁶⁹ *The Times* (4 March 1939), p.10.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

⁷¹ *Ibid.*

with all the curves flowing together, and the semi-matt surface of the jade white is particularly pleasing.⁷²

It was this appreciation of Moorcroft's industrial design that led Marriott to liken his aesthetic to that of Josiah Wedgwood:

Speaking generally, the work of Mr Moorcroft inclines to the classical tradition of the original Wedgwood, with symmetry and purity of form as the aim, rather than the balance and fluency which charm us in pre-Wedgwood English pottery and in the modern revival.⁷³

Marriott had recognised the individuality of Moorcroft's practice, but he did not explore how he brought together studio and factory, art and industry; he resorted instead to the familiar, if rudimentary, categories of pre-industrial and industrial ware. His conclusions may have been questionable (and were questioned), but the fact that he considered the issue at all was a mark of Moorcroft's reputation as a potter at the end of this troubled decade; it was all the more significant for the fact that Marriott had not reviewed any pottery in *The Times* for more than two years.

The notice prompted an immediate response from Cecil Harcourt Smith. In a letter to *The Times*, published under the revealing heading 'Commerce and Art', he picked up the polarised categories within which both the BPMF and Marriott had attempted to classify Moorcroft. He clearly implied that a notice by Marriott confirmed Moorcroft's status as an artist potter, and not simply as a manufacturer, and he began to explore ways in which the potter's practice collapsed this distinction:

We are today realising more and more that commerce and art are to their mutual advantage allies, and it is encouraging to find that you, Sir, are prepared to give this outstanding British production the distinction of a special notice.⁷⁴

He saw evidence of this fusion in the broad range of people who appreciated Moorcroft's work, the ordinary observer and the connoisseur, at home and abroad:

Moorcroft pottery has for some years been recognised abroad as standing in a class by itself among the modern products of ceramic art. [...] It is not without reason that every important specimen issuing from his works bears his signature, for his individuality asserts itself in every piece; but one can almost always rest assured that the handling of the material, form and decoration will give pleasure, not only to the amateur, but to the expert and the scientist who know the problems which confront any potter who is not merely a commercial provider.⁷⁵

Significantly, neither the word 'artist' nor 'manufacturer' was used to describe Moorcroft, categories which (alone) could not contain the particularity of his work.

72 Ibid.

73 Ibid.

74 *The Times* (8 March 1939), p.12.

75 Ibid.

But the term 'individuality' was applied, occurring again in his response to Marriott's comparison of Moorcroft and Wedgwood:

Both styles, it is true, aim at symmetry and purity of form, but whereas Wedgwood was obsessed with his interpretation of the then new range of classical models, with the consequent limitations involved, Moorcroft has drawn upon an infinitely wider field of inspiration, which imparts to his work movement and naturalness that are human and individual.⁷⁶

Harcourt Smith understood very well the unique diversity of Moorcroft's production. His inspiration was not to be found in pattern books, or decorative traditions; he did not copy a look, or a style, he expressed through form, colour and design his personal response to nature. This was the work of an individual, of one unafraid to be himself, and whose practice brought together in his own distinctive way the poles of commerce and art.

Just four months earlier, Pevsner had been revisiting a similar polarity on the occasion of the fiftieth anniversary of the Arts and Crafts Exhibition Society. Writing in *The Studio*, he situated the origins of industrial modernism in the Arts and Crafts movement, for all that this legacy was claimed, too, by those committed to handcraft.⁷⁷ Pevsner saw the Arts and Crafts spirit in terms of design principles rather than means of production, a spirit which accepted the artist's social responsibility to improve the quality of life:

A designer, like an architect, is not a free artist. Both must believe in the moral value of serving, serving clearly defined purposes in their individual works, and serving the community in the whole of their activity.⁷⁸

Different in its aesthetic and its practice, Moorcroft's fusion of art and industry was nevertheless conceived in like spirit. Writing to his daughter, Beatrice, on 14 February 1930, as he prepared for the British Industries Fair, he had made this profession of faith:

If only the people in the world would concentrate upon making all things beautiful, and if all people concentrated on developing the arts of Peace, what a world it might be, that is, would not the common things of life made beautiful be more in keeping with the great gift of God to man, the beautiful Earth itself. We have a sacred trust when we have the opportunity to live, yet how many of us fail in our trust.

At the end of the decade, his commitment to these values had not diminished; the world, however, was set on a different course.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ N. Pevsner, 'Fifty Years of Arts & Crafts', *The Studio* (November 1938), 225–231.

⁷⁸ N. Pevsner, *An Enquiry into Industrial Art in England* (Cambridge: C.U.P., 1937), p.199.

14. 1939–45: Adversity and Resolution

I. Negotiating the Restrictions of War

War brought restrictions and challenges of all kinds: escalating costs, fuel rationing, loss of labour to the armed forces or to munitions factories. The Limitation of Home Supplies (Miscellaneous) Order 1940 placed limits on sales to the home market of articles ‘commonly used but not essential’. The Concentration of Industry scheme, introduced in the early part of 1941, aimed to consolidate the production of wares for export or for government contracts in as few ‘nucleus’ factories as possible, each working at full capacity; smaller firms were to be absorbed into larger enterprises, their staff redeployed and their premises used for storage. For the *Pottery Gazette*, the inevitable consequences of this ‘drastic curtailment of production’ were plain to see: ‘manufacturers who are not fortunate enough to be transacting an appreciable amount of export business are literally staring ruin in the face’.¹

Moorcroft’s factory was particularly vulnerable: it was too small to qualify for nucleus status, and the specialised nature of its production methods made it unsuitable for absorption by a larger firm. On 19 August 1941, the Board of Trade announced that his factory had been classified as a non-nucleus establishment, requiring him ‘to take immediate steps to transfer your production to a nucleus firm’.² If concentration of resources promised survival for the country as a whole, it spelled doom for Moorcroft, whose staff faced re-deployment and his works closure. His response was immediate, and quite unorthodox. On 22 August 1941, he applied for nucleus status, basing his case both on his substantial output for export and for government contract, and on the artistic quality of his work. Boldly re-appropriating the term ‘nucleus’, he argued that his works did conform to the new criteria, even though in its size and its activity it was the very antithesis of what the government was envisaging: ‘It is now 44 years ago since the nucleus of my pottery began. [...] We are not manufacturers in the ordinary sense, but much more nearly a school of research.’ The argument was disingenuous,

1 ‘Concentration of Industry’, *Pottery Gazette and Glass Trade Review* [PG] (May 1941), p.389.

2 All unpublished documents referred to in this chapter are located in William Moorcroft: Personal and Commercial Papers, SD1837, Stoke-on-Trent City Archives [WM Archive].

but Moorcroft was not prepared to lose sight of the real significance of his work. His export revenue was sizeable, but he linked this, crucially, to the uniqueness of his ware; his was not just any small-sized firm, and its economic value to the country was contingent on its independence:

The works here have been specially built to make Moorcroft pottery, and it could not be produced in any other works. I wish to appeal to you to allow me to continue making my original pottery as we are doing, in conjunction with pottery we are making for the Ministry of Works. [...] The demand for my pottery, largely in the United States and Canada, forms 90% of our turnover.

Aesthetic arguments had little traction in times of war, and the application failed. Moorcroft appealed, and his case was referred to Sir Cecil Weir, the Business Member of the Industrial and Export Council, responsible for the concentration of the pottery industry. On 9 September 1941, Weir confirmed the Board of Trade's decision, but offered Moorcroft an alternative, if highly uncertain, option: to continue production in his own works, and to 'take your chance against the Ministry of Labour taking all your labour away or the Factory Control requisitioning your premises'. By now, seventy factories had been designated 'nucleus', sixty had been absorbed, and seventy-five more had been closed. Faced with closure or concentration, which, given the specialised and individual nature of Moorcroft's production, would have been closure in all but name, Weir's third option was Moorcroft's one chance of survival. He had won a stay of sentence, but only that; for the next four years, he would work under the constant pressure of a diminishing workforce, and the ever-present threat of losing his premises to government use.

Not for the first time in his career, commercial survival did not hinge on the quality of his work, but on his ability to negotiate economic conditions and political pressures; it was not enough to be a potter, he had to be strategist and campaigner as well. Draft letters to Weir reveal his constant efforts to keep his works afloat. In one, he pleaded for support to retain his specialist staff, underlining the economic value of what he produced; in another he argued for the aesthetic, even moral worth of the beauty he created, unquantifiable but beyond measure:

Now there is too little left that gives perpetual joy, and we are told again and again that it is our privilege to give this service in life. We are non-competitive and a small band of workers, a real nucleus, as a heart beating towards real strength. I would not ask this privilege if I could see we were able to help the country in a better way than we are now doing.

And elsewhere he underlined the importance of the work he was doing for the Ministry of Works, another argument for protecting his enterprise:

[...] we are constantly making articles for hospital use. [...] To prove that we make these things economically, may I quote one instance of a visit we received from a War Office accountant, who asked to see our costings of a certain article. He found our price was

lower than that quoted by a large mass-producing firm, and at the same time the article we supplied was of a much higher standard of production.

Moorcroft's point was characteristically double-edged; he stressed his contribution to the war effort through the fulfilling of government contracts, but he implied, too, that for all its small size, his works could compete with larger enterprises protected by their nucleus status. But no arguments could withstand the government's insatiable need for labour. In a list of thirty-eight employees dated 10 November 1941, there were just six men under the age of fifty, and of the fifteen decorators listed, nearly half (six) were seventeen or younger. At the start of 1942, Moorcroft had lost more than a quarter of his already depleted workforce, and the pressure continued, and increased. By mid-1943, he had lost two of his three turners, and on 12 July 1943, he was pleading for a replacement: 'we are unable to produce more domestic ware owing to the lack of a turner, and the only turner we have left is now on the verge of a collapse.' The appeal was unsuccessful.

Moorcroft's most urgent, and ultimately forlorn, mission was to retain his son, Walter. On 7 December 1939, he wrote to the Ministry of Labour, making the most strategic of arguments; Walter was essential for the production of government orders: 'This man Walter Moorcroft is the only Manager and Foreman we employ, and he is responsible for the production of all orders for the Ministry of Supply.' This was enough to defer enlistment, but by the spring of 1941, the situation had deteriorated. The age of exemption for those in reserved occupations was raised to thirty; Walter, the only male under the age of thirty-seven at the works, was twenty-four. Moorcroft somehow managed to keep conscription at bay for two more years, but by early 1943 the battle was finally lost; Walter was called up in May 1943, and Moorcroft worked alone until the end of his life, two and a half years later. Even VE Day brought little respite as he continued to plead for his son's release from military service. He wrote to the Stoke M.P., Ellis Smith, on 25 August 1945, just seven weeks before his death. His account of his multiple roles in the works, once the proud explanation of what made his pottery so distinctive and personal, read now as a litany of increasingly unendurable burdens:

I am working entirely upon original work for export, mainly for the U.S.A. and Canada, and I have an unusual demand for my production. [...] at present, with a much depleted staff, I produce about £10,000 (ten thousand pounds) worth of pottery per annum. [...] My present turnover is achieved without my having either a manager or a foreman. I am my own chemist, designer, I make each working drawing, I produce my own colours through my long experience as a physicist. I fire my special ovens. I have to train my own workers. My son was taken from me, and he is the only man qualified to carry on my work. It is only by the grace of God that I can do all my work in my 74th year. [...] If you could help me to obtain his release, this would be a practical way of helping the country, in at least a small way.

Moorcroft painted a bleak picture, but for a small enterprise to have survived independently during the war years was a quite remarkable achievement; by the end

of the war, more than two thirds of potteries had either closed or been absorbed into the remaining larger nucleus firms.³ Surviving letters from Olive Cotton, the works' secretary, give an insight into conditions in the last months of Moorcroft's life: a letter of 13 June 1945 depicted a small, exhausted but dedicated workforce, facing more orders than they had the capacity to satisfy:

I am sorry I did not answer your letter by return. I have not been too well, but I am better now. [...] Jones hasn't [taken] the Blue Porcelain from around the oven, but I will have this attended to. Joan and Olwyn are working very well together. [...] We had an urgent cable from Birks, Ellis, Ryrie this afternoon, as follows: 'Badly need assortment Vases, all sizes, including a few larger sizes, teapots, sugars and creams, cigarette boxes, ashtrays, candy boxes, bowls etc'. [...] Shall I send the pottery from the oven this week to Birks Ellis Ryrie, or do you wish it packed for Hy Birks, Montreal?

Such was his shortage of staff that even when he was away from the office, Moorcroft was still directing affairs; he would do so to the end.

2. Design in Wartime

Wartime constraints created one further challenge to Moorcroft, both as manufacturer and designer: the proscription in 1942 of sales of decorated pottery both at home and (with the exception of North America) abroad, and the restriction of production for the home market to white, undecorated Utility ware in shapes approved by the Board of Trade. The aim was to focus industrial resources on essential needs, but the potential consequences of these curbs caused widespread concern among manufacturers. Speaking two years after the introduction of Utility ware, in a lecture reported in the *Pottery Gazette*, John Adams noted its stifling effect on creativity:

Manufacturers and retailers are heartily tired of the bleak utility ware, and look forward to the time when they will be permitted to try to regain unique qualities of design and technique laboriously built up during generations of effort. [...] for those who produce work of a more individual and progressive character, the break with tradition has been disastrous.⁴

One might imagine that Moorcroft, for whom colour and ornament were essential elements in his designs, would have been seriously unsettled by this limitation. It was not so. On the contrary.

For many designers, the Utility scheme boded well for the future of modern industrial art. A debate about its benefits was prompted by a letter to *The Times* from J.P. Blake, Chairman of the London County Council, who celebrated this 'unparalleled

³ *Industrial Reference Service*, vol.3, pt.8:2 (September 1945), p.1.

⁴ J. Adams, 'The Potter's Art', *PG* (June 1944), p.322.

opportunity to put good designs into nearly every home in England.⁵ James Hogan, Chief Designer at James Powell & Sons, responded in similar vein on 16 September 1942, welcoming the inevitable focus on form rather than ‘mere decoration’.⁶ It is no surprise that Moorcroft should have felt impelled to intervene. He wrote to *The Times* on the very day Blake’s letter appeared; his comments were published on 18 September 1942:

The question raised by the Chairman of the London County Council on design in pottery and glass leaves me as a designer and maker of pottery, grateful for his directing attention to the great value of living with things as perfect in form as possible. But as a ten-thousandth part of an inch determines purity of line, it would be no easy task to reach this ideal. Form exquisitely balanced, pure in tone and texture, is as refreshing as early morning in the country, with the song of the bird. But the maker of pottery alone can eliminate the fault in shape that so easily destroys beauty and truth. If the order for simplicity which the Board of Trade has been compelled to enforce can lead to this high ideal, then a great advance will have been made through the influence of adversity.⁷

Moorcroft, like other correspondents, appreciated the virtues of simplicity in form, but in a quite different way. If for some it was a desirable prerequisite of design for machine production, for Moorcroft its virtues were more natural, even organic. His synaesthetic comparison of form with birdsong suggested its capacity for unmediated expression, but it allowed him, too, to affirm that man ceded nothing to the machine; just as a trained ear might pick up the slightest deviation from perfect harmony, so too the potter’s eye could detect the merest divergence from a perfect line. Precision was not a quality unique to products of the machine. Nor could he resist the temptation to question (once more) the aesthetic sensitivity of a government committee; if ‘the maker of pottery alone’ could identify and correct imperfections in form, intervention by the Board of Trade would be superfluous at best, and at worst... Moorcroft did not elaborate.

The letter engaged with the machine aesthetic of modernism, implicitly affirming the value of human agency, even when the focus was on simplicity and precision. But it engaged, too, implicitly, with Leach’s *A Potter’s Book*, published in 1940, whose opening chapter ‘Towards a Standard’ had provocatively contrasted the qualities of pottery made by hand and by machine, and identified in Song ware the one universal standard of value, dismissing all other industrial or craft traditions. Moorcroft’s Austerity Ware had none of the craft look of Leach Standard Ware, but it sought in its own way to bring together craft and design for serial production. Giving form to the principles outlined in his letter to *The Times*, he invested the starkest of pottery designs

5 J.P. Blake, ‘Designs for Glass and Pottery’, *The Times* (11 September 1942), p.5.

6 J. Hogan, ‘Design and the State’, *The Times* (16 September 1942), p.5.

7 W. Moorcroft, ‘Design of Glass and Pottery’, *The Times* (18 September 1942), p.5.

with a human spirit. If Leach reaffirmed the polarisation of industrial design and craft ware, Moorcroft sought a synthesis of reason and intuition.



(L) Fig. 117 William Moorcroft, Vase in Austerity ware (1942), 12.5cm. CC BY-NC

(R) Fig. 118 Moorcroft's Austerity ware illustrated in *Architectural Review* (January 1943). 'Personal and Commercial Papers of William Moorcroft', Stoke-on-Trent City Archives, SD 1837. CC BY-NC

Moorcroft sent a sample to R.M. Barrington Ward, the newly appointed Editor for *The Times*; his reply, dated 17 September 1942, set it explicitly in the context of his letter:

Your little set of china [...] is displayed on a table in my room. It bears out most admirably the doctrine represented in your letter. [...] I have good reason to welcome a correspondence which has [...] brought me a sample of the response to war necessities which is both delightful to the eye and full of encouragement.

On the same day as Moorcroft's letter, *The Times* published a short notice on his Austerity ware. It was seen to combine the qualities of efficient functionality and skilled craftsmanship, simplicity and grace; Moorcroft's theory and practice were given national endorsement:

The Times has received [...] examples of a tea-service designed by Mr William Moorcroft to meet the Board of Trade's austerity requirements. The shapes have all been 'thrown on the wheel' and great care has been taken to make the balance and symmetry as perfect as possible. [...] They are just a shade warmer than white, glazed, and quite without ornament. The service seems very practical, each piece standing firmly, so as not easily to be upset. Yet it has a comely look, almost amounting to elegance, and shows how pleasing a well-planned simplicity can be.⁸

Moorcroft's letter attracted much attention. It was quoted extensively in the *Pottery Gazette*, October 1942, its author identified as one 'who certainly knows what beauty in pottery means',⁹ and he received many responses both approving his views and

8 'Austerity Crockery. A Simple Tea-Service', *The Times* (18 September 1942), p.7.

9 'Design in Pottery and Glassware', *PG* (October 1942), 567-71 (p.567).

also, crucially, placing an order for the tea set; Moorcroft's artistic principles, and his ware, were striking a chord. On 21 September 1942, he heard from Alfred Talbot Smith, book illustrator and *Punch* cartoonist: 'I am interested in your letter and the Austerity Crockery paragraph in *The Times* of 18 September 1942, because I am an artist and a member of the DIA.' And in a similar vein, Arthur L. Humphreys, bookseller and former proprietor of Hatchard's, wrote on 19 September 1942; he too recognised the aesthetic sensitivity of its content: 'That was a very good letter of yours in *The Times*, and only a real artist could have written it'. His Austerity ware also attracted widespread acclaim in official quarters. The Board of Trade wrote on 23 November 1942, clearly in response to a gift from Moorcroft; his ware was a powerful vindication of its policy: 'we shall treasure it as an example of how your firm adapted themselves to the Order necessitated by war-time needs'. The Ministry of Information saw its potential, too, Harry Trethowan noting in a letter of 24 March 1943 that they wished 'to purchase your utility wares to send on exhibition to the USA'. And Sylvia Pollack of the government-funded Council for the Encouragement of Music and the Arts, wrote on 6 April 1943, keen to include Moorcroft's ware in an 'Art for the People' exhibition, organised as part of the Ministry of Information's scheme of War-Time Support for the Arts: 'I agree entirely with the *Times* that these pieces are extremely elegant'.

Throughout 1943, even as he faced Walter's imminent departure to military service, Austerity ware attracted widespread attention, not just as a solution to wartime restrictions, but as an example of modern design at its best. In an article, 'Utility or Austerity', published in the forward-looking *Architectural Review*, Nikolaus Pevsner expressed doubts about the first fruits of utility furniture, but he had nothing but praise for utility pottery, singling out Moorcroft as one of its leading designers. The article included a picture of 'Moorcroft's Ivory Porcelain, one of the best utility sets that have appeared', and commenting on the 'contrast between the grace and beauty of these articles of pottery and the uninspired though soundly designed and soundly constructed utility furniture'.¹⁰

An article in *Great Britain and the East* emphasised its perfect harmony of form and functionality:

The teapot and milk jug are modern without being modernistic, and have a beauty of line to please the connoisseur. [...] Yet while approaching such perfection, the designer fits a practical lid to the teapot which will not fall off.¹¹

And it featured, too, in an article on 'Utility Pottery' in *The Studio*, by Harry Trethowan, who argued that wartime restrictions released the designer from the insidious temptation to follow fashion, leaving him 'free from the clamour of the distributor, [...] free to work his will'.¹² The article illustrated twenty-two items of Austerity ware, of which sixteen were the products of just three firms: Wedgwood, Carter, Stabler,

10 N. Pevsner, 'Utility or Austerity', *Architectural Review* (January 1943), 3–4 (p.4).

11 'Britain's Pottery Industry', *Great Britain and the East* (30 January 1943), p.29.

12 H. Trethowan, 'Utility Pottery', *The Studio* (January 1943), 48–49 (p.49).

& Adams, and Moorcroft, who had six examples illustrated. No less significant than Trethowan's comments was the journal which published them, as the writer was quick to point out:

Through its long and famous history, *The Studio* has fostered and encouraged good design. [...] its pages are free only to the best; it gives praise to the pioneer [...] In this particular connection, by giving space to the Utility wares here illustrated, *The Studio* looks beyond the present, and sees in the present the future prospect.¹³

Moorcroft was clearly seen as one such 'pioneer'.

But its success was not just a matter of its design, it derived, too, from the fact that it was hand thrown. A feature in the *East Fife Observer*, commenting on a display of Moorcroft's pottery, recognised in this ware the skill of an artist-craftsman who understood the practical as well as the aesthetic requirements of good design:

He is the last of the real potters, and these examples show how pleasing a well-planned simplicity can be. [...] All are original pieces and, having examined them, one is struck with the elegant shape of the jug, the beautiful balance of cup, and the extreme neatness in the finish of tea-pot, truly the work of a real artist.¹⁴

Its significance was noticed too by Herbert Read, to whom Moorcroft sent a set in the autumn of 1943; Read responded on 23 September 1943: 'The purity and simplicity of these wheel-thrown shapes is a perfect joy, and the paste and glaze are so clean and cool. Thank you very much. My appreciation will grow with constant use.' The combination of beauty and functionality was perfectly expressed in this response; this was ware to be used, and appreciated. But what Read appreciated, too, was its appeal as much to the senses as to the mind. Simplicity was a source of joy, its use both a visual and a tactile pleasure; the qualities of modern industrial design and craft production were in perfect harmony. Read's reaction was particularly significant, coming as it did in the year he, with Misha Black and Milner Gray, founded the Design Research Unit, a London-based consultancy whose manifesto clearly affirmed its place at the cutting edge of modern, machine-based design:

The machine is accepted as the essentially modern vehicle of form. Our designs will therefore be essentially designs for mass production, but at the same time we hope to rescue mass production from the ugliness and aesthetic emptiness which has so far characterised the greater part of its output.¹⁵

In Moorcroft's Austerity Ware, Read clearly saw none of that 'ugliness and aesthetic emptiness'. On the contrary, he recognised in it that very fusion of reason and intuition which Moorcroft had sketched out in his letter to *The Times*, and which Read himself had pointed out in his review of Leach's *A Potter's Book* in the *New English Weekly*, 11 July 1940:

13 Ibid., p.48.

14 *East Fife Observer* (11 February 1943).

15 *Design Research Unit 1942-72*, ed. M. Cotton (Koenig Books, 2011).

He sets up an opposition between intellect and sensibility, which does indeed exist. But art is not the exclusive product of any one faculty of the human mind. At its highest, it is a synthesis of all—of reason, intuition, feeling and sensation.¹⁶

What Read appreciated in Austerity ware, he identified, too, in Powder Blue; means of manufacture was as important as design. He wrote to Moorcroft on 2 June 1943 for permission to include a picture of the morning tea set in his new edition of *Art and Industry*. Like Pevsner, he admired its purity of line, but he discerned in it a unique quality attributable to its production by hand. Writing again on 12 June 1943, he put this appreciation into words:

[...] I am very glad to have your description of the Blue Porcelain, and of the way it is made. It explains why, though your shapes are so perfectly functional, they retain a quality, or rather a 'personality' not found in wholly mechanical production.

Even without recourse to ornament, Moorcroft's individuality was clearly evident in his work.

Moorcroft's functional ware remained an object of critical appreciation in the final years of the war. When the illustration of Powder Blue appeared in the second edition of Read's *Art and Industry* in 1944, it replaced an image of industrially produced ware made by Sphinx Kristal, Maastricht, but the caption retained the same description of its qualities. Powder Blue was adopted as an example of forward-looking industrial design, and Moorcroft as its designer:

Dark, speckled blue porcelain. A morning set designed by William Moorcroft and made by W. Moorcroft Ltd., Burslem. Modern pottery embodying the tradition of simplicity, precision and the appeal of pure form.¹⁷

The same was true of Austerity ware. In an article published in *Picture Post*, Misha Black stressed the need for good design and high production values in a competitive post-war world; he included an illustration of Austerity ware, above the caption:

Good Design: Utility Tea Service in Traditional Style. It is designed in the eighteenth-century shapes which have proved their convenience. But subtle changes give it a modern character.¹⁸

Moorcroft clearly appreciated the reference, but he published a significant clarification the following month:

In your very admirable journal of January 6, you kindly referred to my designs of domestic pottery as being examples of *good design*. [...] May I say that I designed these shapes about forty years ago, but seldom a day passes without my trying to find a finer

16 *New English Weekly* (11 July 1940), p.143 [quoted in J.F. Stair, 'Critical Writing on English Studio Pottery 1910–1940', unpublished PhD thesis, Royal College of Art, 2002 (p.428)].

17 H. Read, *Art and Industry*, 2nd edition (London: Faber & Faber, 1944), p.71.

18 M. Black, 'The Problem of Art in Industry: Design in Everyday Things', *Picture Post* (6 January 1945), 14–17 (p.15).

purity of line as the pottery is being formed. This is possible as no moulds are used. The shapes are entirely designed by me, and remain Moorcroft of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, and not the eighteenth century.¹⁹

Moorcroft was keen to clarify that the designs were his, and not simply a re-appropriation of eighteenth-century models, but the implications of his statement extended much further. His design may be described as having a modern 'character', but this was not the result of a search for a particular style to reflect a new age of industrial production; Moorcroft's search had been for a perfect form for his functional wares. And this, he pointed out, was a constantly evolving process, made possible precisely because it was undertaken in the studio of the craftsman, free of the constraints, both economic and practical, of production in moulds. It was a remarkable achievement that ware made by hand, to designs first elaborated more than thirty years earlier, should be seen to look forward to the future of design in the post-war world. It was a telling endorsement of his skill as a designer, and of his ability to bridge the gulf between craft and industrial production so starkly laid bare by Leach.

If Black implicitly associated Austerity ware with an aesthetic of modernity, others saw in it the fundamental characteristics of Moorcroft's pre-war pottery. For all its absence of colour and ornament, it nevertheless had the ability to enhance the pleasure of living. A feature written by the children's poet, Frida Wolfe in *The Lady* openly quoted the *Revue Moderne* in support of her assessment of this ware:

The skill, knowledge and experience that have gone into the making is not so apparent to the casual observer; yet the reaction to good design on the table, day in day out, is bound to have its effect. As a Frenchman writing about the Moorcroft pottery says: 'These works uplift the mind and thus have an educative value [...].' In other words, the value of living with things that are perfect as possible fixes a standard; you can thus recognise the good thing when you see it, undazzled by mere novelty or a delightful pattern.²⁰

Indeed, even as Moorcroft's production of decorated pottery was confined to a very limited export market, he continued to represent for many the future of a quite different aesthetic. At the same moment as Trethowan's review in *The Studio*, *The Spectator* published an article by Cecil Harcourt Smith; it began by deploring the recently introduced restrictions, and spoke out against pure functionality as an exclusive condition of good design: 'Usefulness need not always connote austerity. Even the simplest object can be decorated suitably at trifling cost'.²¹ Writing from a distinctly nationalist perspective, he argued for the importance of decoration in the future of design. It was in this context that he evoked Moorcroft, whose ornamented ware was seen to display an integrity and originality which would always command a wide

19 W. Moorcroft, 'Good Design in Pottery', *Picture Post* (3 February 1945), p.3.

20 F. Wolfe, 'The Shape of Things: Ceramics', *The Lady* (17 May 1945), p.301.

21 C. Harcourt Smith, 'Post-War Design', *The Spectator* (15 January 1943), p.52.

market: 'In Moorcroft [...] we possess an artist-potter whose wares are upholding the supremacy of British production both at home and overseas'.²²

An article published in *Empire News* focussed on just this aspect of Moorcroft's work. While his Austerity ware was earning critical attention at home, his decorated ware, the very embodiment of his commitment to craft and individuality, had lost none of its appeal:

Still turning out craft pieces for export is William Moorcroft, the royal potter, who has his works at Cobridge. Hating mass production, Mr Moorcroft works to no pattern book. 'Each article I make', he told a reporter, 'is an original piece. I will not make the same thing by the thousand. I believe that the British potter can hold his own anywhere, and at any time, with creative work.'²³

Such ware was appreciated, even in an age of austerity. And not just abroad. Announcing her appointment as Director of the Auxiliary Territorial Service on 4 December 1943, the front cover of *Illustrated* carried a photograph of Dame Leslie Whateley in her office. Behind her on the mantelpiece, filled with flowers, stood a Moorcroft vase with Fish decoration. The design itself was more than ten years old; its appeal, though, was evidently undimmed.

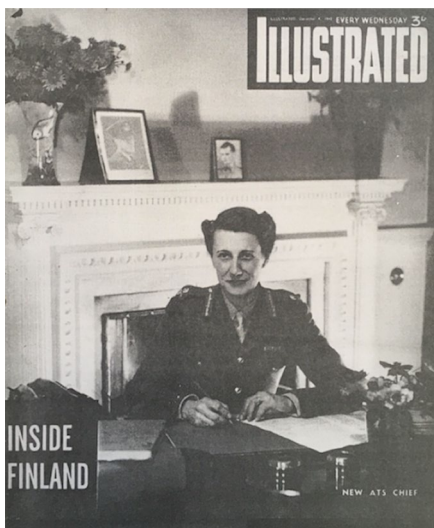


Fig. 119 Front cover of *Illustrated* (4 December 1943). 'Personal and Commercial Papers of William Moorcroft', Stoke-on-Trent City Archives, SD 1837. CC BY-NC

For Read, too, decorated ware clearly had its place. In a lecture delivered at the Burslem School of Art, he explored the differential aesthetics of machine-made and handcrafted wares, underlining the validity of both. It was a view he had expressed before, but it may well have implied on this occasion an acknowledgement of Moorcroft's

²² Ibid.

²³ 'Potters keeping trade going for export', *Empire News* (6 February 1944).

distinctively diverse output; he had been staying with Moorcroft during his visit, and he had doubtless heard his views on decorative pottery:

The danger we ran, in a machine age, was that we sacrificed altogether one set of values, the personal, symbolic and decorative values, and confined art to an intellectual preoccupation with form and function. We might as well try to hop through life on one leg.²⁴

3. Commercial Pressures

The conditions of war brought many pressures on both the production and sale of goods. To compensate for declining demand and rising costs, firms were steadily increasing their selling prices, but Moorcroft sought to resist this. He was prepared to take the long view, forgoing immediate benefit for the sake of retaining a solid commercial foundation; it was the strategy of a man with an eye to the future, a gamble, albeit calculated. He explained his reasoning to Alwyn Lasenby in a letter of 13 November 1939:

During the last war, we remained firm and sacrificed immediate profit, and we found that this policy in the long run paid us, as our busiest time appeared after the war, for several years, and at a time when other manufacturers were without orders, or at most very little trade.

1939–40 was indeed a more difficult year than 1938–39 had been, not helped by the suspension of the British Industries Fair for the duration of the war. The early months of ‘phoney’ war were marked by widespread stagnation in home trade. Writing on 14 March 1940, Lasenby summarised its first effects; what was true for the retailer, was no less true for Moorcroft: ‘This curious war has upset so many things and lives! It is difficult to see what the next moves are likely to be, and people feel so uncertain’. In this context, it is not surprising that the year-end figures showed a decline from the previous year. Sales revenue was down by just over 10%, while wages had increased by nearly 9% and purchases by 7%. Gross profit was reduced by more than 60%, and this produced a net loss of over £1,120, nearly £1,000 more than in the previous year.

At the start of 1940–41, pressure from the Bank was increasing. A letter of 22 August 1940 spelled out their position: they were not prepared to finance an overdraft of more than £2,500 without more substantial collateral, namely the deeds of the Company. They wrote again on 9 April 1941 with a stark message; the recent run of trading losses was seriously eroding the Company’s capital. Viewed from a commercial perspective, Moorcroft was caught in a downward spiral, and however much his designs were appreciated, this was overridden by the economic reality of increasing costs, shrinking profit margins and a stagnating market. The Bank Manager juxtaposed the two

24 ‘Beauty and the Machine’, *PG* (December 1943), 661–64 (p.663).

perspectives, aesthetic and economic, but in the current climate, it was the balance sheet which prevailed:

I would like to say how much I admire your various productions [...], and I know my Directors are only too anxious to assist so long as the borrowing is placed on a proper basis. It would however be foolish for me to ignore the results appearing on paper, which are intended as an indication of the progress the Company is making.

The threatened collapse of the Company was chillingly reflected on the national scene, where the relentless bombardment of London and the provinces was taking its toll. Flinn & Co, jewellers and goldsmiths in Broadgate, Coventry, wrote on 27 November 1940, after the devastating raid which destroyed most of the city centre; they had lost their stock, and simply could not promise future orders. This was the vulnerability of Moorcroft's ware in this violent world: 'Our immediate problem is to get some temporary premises to carry on with. [...] One does not know whether it is safe to restock with Pottery at the moment.'

The 1940–41 figures did nevertheless show an improvement on 1939–40. Sales revenue rose by nearly 26%, but outgoings had also continued to increase: wages had risen by more than 17%, purchases by more than 35%, and insurance had soared by nearly 50%. Gross profit was higher by 33%, and although the net result was another loss, of just over £800, this was a reduction of nearly 30% on the previous year's out-turn. In draft notes for his report to the AGM on 27 October 1941, Moorcroft reported on the new threat to the survival of the firm: the Concentration scheme. Under increasing pressure from both economic stagnation and government policy, he was nevertheless determined to carry on as an independent entity; he would brook no compromise:

Your company, under the provisions of concentration, were given a month's notice to close their premises, as both their factory space and their workers would be required for munition work. We were offered accommodation by several well-known firms, but I had, as tactfully as possible, to accept their sympathy and to decline their offer.

The Company had been saved, but it was on a knife edge, subject to pressures largely outside Moorcroft's control. Continued production was contingent on the availability of labour and materials, and although he could work to increase his sales, profit might easily be eroded by escalating costs. Such factors had already diminished the benefit of improved sales in the financial year just ended, as the figures clearly bore out. In these circumstances, short-term commercial survival depended on the sale of existing stock; Moorcroft had neither the resources nor the staff to increase productivity. He forecast improved turnover in the coming year, but with the Blitz still a very present memory, nothing could be certain:

From now on, we shall gain largely from our stocks, which will have a greatly increasing value. And providing we do not lose our premises through enemy action, we are establishing a stronger export trade which will grow to an extent that I hope will help us to again pay a dividend next year.

Moorcroft spoke here as a Company chairman, decisive and assured in his response to pressures. But he spoke also as an artist. It was design, ultimately, which would lead them out of trouble; his work was popular abroad, and his export market was growing:

May I refer to a brighter side, that is our growing trade with the U.S.A. We are making many special things in which I am putting stronger constructive work than I have ever done, and for which there is a growing demand. Apart from fighting the provisions of concentration in industry, we are deeply concentrating in giving the world the best possible production.

Moorcroft's positive forecast for 1941–42 proved accurate, and the accounts showed his first profit for seven years. Outgoings had continued to increase: wages by another 10%, fuel by more than 64%, and repairs almost six-fold. But sales soared by over 45%, leaving a gross profit more than 84% higher than the previous year, and a net profit of £916. Harris wrote warmly on 18 September 1942, acknowledging 'what a trying time you have had' and recognising 'what a tremendous amount of work it must have entailed to obtain this result'. Much of the increased sales revenue came from stock. The prospect of an embargo on the sale of decorated and coloured ware from the summer of 1942 had prompted retailers to acquire as much as possible while they still could. A letter from Peter Jones, 15 April [1942] starkly juxtaposed a familiar, but receding, world and the impending new:

Thank you so much for the marvellous lot of pottery you have sent to us. All the stores are delighted with it, and indeed the glowing colours make a lovely, alive spot in the departments. It will come as a great shock to you to learn that the government are stopping all manufacture of coloured bodies and decorated ware, and after, I believe, August 1st, nothing can be sold except plain white, at a fixed price. [...] If you have any more decorated ware that you can let me have, I would like another £200 worth sent to Peter Jones, and will send an order in hopes.

By the start of 1942–43, staff shortages were clearly acute, and conditions continued to deteriorate. But Moorcroft remained optimistic. In the early months of 1943, even as the prospect of losing Walter to military service seemed inevitable, references to his work in *The Studio* and *The Spectator* testified to its high reputation among critics of widely different aesthetic positions. Writing to Lasenby on 26 February 1943, he looked to the future with renewed confidence:

If there should be another Fair, and I think it is probable, I should prefer an entirely different stand. Something as far removed from it as possible. [...] I am looking forward to a greater extended demand for our pottery all over the world. Unsolicited press publicity just now is an indication of our strength.

The 1942–43 AGM was held on 29 October 1943; it was the 30th meeting of the Company. The tide seemed to be turning in the war, and the same must have seemed true of the Company's economic fortunes. Moorcroft's report began on a high note:

The figures before you, I do not think they call for a detailed explanation from me. Naturally, our difficulties have not grown less during the year, but in spite of these we have increased slightly our carry-forward.

The sales results were indeed positive, rising by 1% on the already impressive figure of 1941–42. But other expenses had increased significantly: wages by 11.7%, and working expenses by a huge 44.4%. Nevertheless, gross profits stood 16% higher, and a resultant net profit was recorded as £1,296, an increase of 41% on 1941–42.

This was the last of Moorcroft's high points, and the difficult times would get worse in 1943–44, not least following the departure of Walter. Moorcroft continued to market his ware at every opportunity, writing to the Chairman of the British Council, Sir Malcolm Robertson, on 3 November 1943. For all his success and celebrity as a designer of Austerity ware, he clearly regretted that the home market no longer saw his decorated pots:

I should like to be allowed to send you a few pieces of my original pottery which are unlike any other made in this small world for inclusion in your overseas exhibits. I am told that I am better known in the U.S.A. and Canada than in Stoke-on-Trent.

The popularity of his ware in North America was undiminished, and he was managing to keep supplies going. A letter of 4 May 1944 from Stanley Rose at Birks, Montreal, eloquently expressed Moorcroft's reputation overseas, and the appreciation of his endeavours:

You certainly give me a shock when you say you are nearly 73 years old, I think it is absolutely marvellous that you can carry on as you are doing. [...] We all thoroughly appreciate the wonderful efforts you have made to keep us supplied. We have your pottery in the most prominent part of the Department, and no one can help seeing it as they come up the steps. The only trouble just at present is that we have only about six pieces left!!!

He was also selling ware to American military personnel who had seen it in England. A letter from Capt. Mary Bramblett, U.S. Army nurse, dated 9 April [1944] responded to an evident invitation to look round his works, and reveals again the enduring appeal of his decorated ware:

[...] another nurse and I will be so delighted to enjoy your pottery with you. [...] Please do make it possible for me to bring home a pre-war vase. They are so outstandingly beautiful; their colourings are exquisite. [Emphasis original]

Such ware was now effectively unobtainable on the home market, restricted to limited quantities of export rejects, available only under special licence. A letter from Vigurs Harris, of Harris & Sons, Plymouth, 22 April 1944, was characteristic of many others. In the absence of decorated pieces, he was more than happy to order Austerity ware; its aesthetic was different, its quality was not:

I was afraid that you could get no licence to distribute your beautiful decorated ware. We shall be very glad to have the Ivory Porcelain; we appreciate its quality and beautiful glaze.

And yet, for all that, a trading loss was recorded for 1943–44. Sales had fallen by just over 14%, and outgoings had continued to rise: wages by 3.6%, purchases by 38%. The result was a drop of 55% in the gross profit, and a net loss of £1,494. For all the continued appreciation of his ware, conditions of war denied Moorcroft the commercial benefits of this popularity. In the last year of his life, it was all he could do to keep the business afloat. At the bottom of a letter from Harris, 21 February 1945, Moorcroft commented on the demand for his ware in the USA, which he was simply unable to satisfy under current conditions:

We have in hand 20 times more than our limited staff can make. My pottery was never in greater demand, I believe because the U.S.A. are so eager to mass produce, they eagerly seek my pottery for a little rest and a quiet spiritual tonic.

His ware was as popular as it had ever been, but the economic pressures he faced were increasing by the year, as he suffered the consequences of a depleted staff. Artistic and commercial success were now completely uncoupled; this was the reality of war.

4. Tensions with Liberty's

The pressures of war put strain not only on Moorcroft's works, but also on his relationship with Liberty's. In a letter to Lasenby of 13 November 1939, he noted, pointedly, what he perceived to be dwindling support for his latest work:

Some months ago I designed some new dinner ware which has been bought by some of the keenest buyers of dinner ware, both overseas and in this country, but I have not been fortunate in securing an order from yourselves.

More significantly, though, he suggested that Liberty's selling prices were impeding sales, alluding to one particular item in their latest catalogue; if he was resisting the pressure to raise his wholesale price, he expected Liberty's to do likewise on the shop floor:

[...] if you could support us in our effort to keep prices firm, such action will enable us to remain firm for a longer period than would be otherwise possible. [...] We do not know if this is our bowl or not, we make a bowl identical to this which we have recently sold to you at 4/6d. I imagine that 12/6d must include the bowl with flowers, or otherwise the price would handicap the sale of the pottery.

It was a matter of commercial strategy: lower prices would keep at bay the risk of cheaper imitations. But it was also a question of equity; for Liberty's to buy at Moorcroft's uninflated wholesale price and to sell at the current inflated rate was effectively to add to their own profit the profit which Moorcroft was deliberately forgoing.

This tension was particularly evident in the spring of 1942. As retailers were buying stocks of decorated ware before the embargo came into force, the respective interests of Moorcroft and Liberty's sharply diverged. Liberty's were keen to secure his wares at the most competitive price they could, Moorcroft needed to maximise his sales income; collaboration drifted into conflict. On 30 April 1942, Liberty's cancelled orders for both 'seconds' and new stock whose dispatch had been delayed. Moorcroft wrote to William Dorrell in frustration; he clearly felt that Liberty's no longer understood, or were prepared to understand, the economic and production pressures he was facing:

We sent a quantity of your order from stock, and we have used the best means possible to make the large remainder. We have lost for a time members of our staff that were necessary to the things you ordered, and we cannot avoid delay. The demand for domestic pottery is so large that whatever we do, we cannot meet the demand at present.

And as for the discount rate which Liberty's had been seeking on the 'seconds', this was no longer viable:

Your order for seconds was placed by you at a rate of 25% of our 1921 prices. We could only send you pottery at this rate that would not be in keeping with the name of Liberty. Since your visit, we have sold no pottery at a less rate than 20% above pre-war prices, and establishment costs to the war, with a constant rising in the cost of material and wages, makes it impossible for us to do so.

Liberty's felt let down, but the feeling was mutual. Dorrell's unwillingness to pay the asking price for his wares increased Moorcroft's misgivings about Liberty's spirit of collaboration. A draft letter to Lasenby put these concerns into words:

I have been conscious that for some years we have not had the support from Liberty in the selling of Moorcroft pottery that we might expect. We have offered you an entirely original pottery, and you have only sold a relatively small amount of it.

By this time, however, a more protracted and serious dispute had arisen about Liberty's role as the firm's book-keepers. After the serious trading loss of 1940–41, Moorcroft needed to increase his turnover, all the while facing the possibility of losing his labour, or his premises, to the needs of the war. Liberty's had acted as the firm's book-keepers since the foundation of the Company in 1913, a service which gave Moorcroft invaluable administrative backing; but as economic pressures increased, its financial implications were coming to the fore. When Liberty's proposed making a charge to the Company for this service, Moorcroft would not comply; it was not only a matter of cost, it was a matter of principle. If Liberty's were to be paid, it would radically change the basis on which they operated together; collaboration and shared commitment would become just another commercial deal. But as financial pressures and labour shortages affected Liberty's too, the dispute was not to be easily or swiftly resolved. A month later, on 8 December 1941, Blackmore spelled out the position of the store; they had no choice but to cut back:

Voluntary reductions of staff in the first place in an endeavour to lessen the heavy loss at which we are working, and the present compulsory reductions, have brought the subject of your accounts before our Board, and have resulted in the decision to which they have come.

But what would have relieved the pressure on Liberty's staff would simultaneously have created an administrative and financial pressure for Moorcroft, just at a time when his own balance sheet was under strain. Moorcroft argued that his staff shortages were no less (and probably more) damaging to his business than those Blackmore had described. But he implied, too, in a letter of 5 December 1941, that Liberty's had some obligation to contribute to the Company, whatever their situation, not least on account of their financial entitlements set out in the Articles of Association of 1913:

I cannot happily accept your extremely restricted share in the work of the Moorcroft Potteries, especially in view of the Articles of Association, the terms of which give you an important share. It only seems reasonable that if you withdraw almost entirely from giving any service to us, there should be some modification of the Articles of Association [...].

The question was arising as to what each was contributing to the firm, and how its value might be measured. Moorcroft did not put a price on his different roles in the Company—in design, production, marketing, distribution—they were all part of a single integrated vision of his identity and activity as a potter. And for the past thirty years, the relationship with Liberty's had worked along similar lines, their own uncostered collaboration focussed on the area in which their contribution was most valuable—the accounting side of his business. Now, though, wartime restrictions were forcing Liberty's to consider the financial cost of their contribution; and if they were to do this, Moorcroft felt justified to do likewise. The issue was all the more sensitive at a time (late 1941) of increasing political, as well as economic, pressures, when Moorcroft, faced with the threat of Concentration, was fighting for the survival of his firm.

Moorcroft's report to the AGM of 23 September 1942 referred to his correspondence with Blackmore over this period; the continued tension was clear, as he looked back to the foundation of the Company:

I regret that since our last annual meeting, there has been prolonged correspondence between the legal representative of B shareholders and myself. [...] Actually, the sum of money your shareholders invested is negligible, and in the beginning you only took up 650 ordinary shares, while I put into the Company all I had, just twice as much. Your B shareholders advanced a further sum, but not in ordinary shares. You remained mortgagees until you found the business safe. And only when it was a safe concern did you venture to convert your mortgage into ordinary shares. But the same privilege was not offered to the owner of A shares, although the owner placed in the business all the real capital, that is his skill as a chemist, physicist, and potter.

It was erroneous to claim that Liberty's initial financial contribution was less than his in absolute terms, although it was undoubtedly true (and acknowledged by both

Moorcroft and Liberty's from the outset) that he had a larger investment in unsecured shares and was thus taking a greater risk. What he underlined now, though, was the essential value of his artistic contribution; it may not have been measurable in pounds, but it was 'all the real capital'. And Moorcroft's argument prevailed. At this same meeting, a resolution was passed that no more charges would be made to the Company in respect of book-keeping.

Of all the pressures of this period, the dispute with Liberty's was potentially the most destabilising. Moorcroft must have sensed, one way or another, that this thirty-year association had reached a crossroads. And it was not just to do with the pressures of war; by 1942, Moorcroft was seventy years old, and Lasenby seventy-four. It is clear that both hoped for a continuation of this collaboration beyond their own personal involvement. In August 1942, nearly fifteen years after the last serious review of the relationship, Moorcroft proposed to Lasenby that Walter should be appointed to the Board of Directors. On 14 August 1942, Lasenby replied in full support, but pointing out that the original balance of Directors should be maintained. He enclosed a draft revision of the Articles of Association which included a new Article 17A:

17A: The holders of the A shares issued by the Company and the holders of the B shares issued by the Company shall each at all times be entitled to be represented on the Board of the Company by two Directors. [...] The holders of the A shares issued by the Company shall also have the right to nominate the Chairman of the Board.

Writing to Moorcroft on 4 September 1942, Lasenby saw in this new Article a mechanism for continued collaboration, evoking discreetly a time beyond his and Moorcroft's involvement:

The rights of the respective shareholders must [...] be incorporated into the Articles, as otherwise they would not be binding in the future, and if either I or you dropped out, it is essential that the balance on the Board should be maintained.

The change introduced some stability for the future, but it also heralded an inevitable, and irreversible change from the past. Moorcroft's relationship with Liberty's had succeeded above all because of his close collaboration with Lasenby; it was not a business relationship alone, but one based on personal friendship and shared artistic values. Its creativity was not due to the administrative balance of the Board, but to the personalities and priorities of the two Directors; to retain the structure for the next generation was not (necessarily) to replicate the relationship of its representatives.

Walter and Dorrell were appointed Directors on 18 January 1943, but the disputes did not end here. At the end of the 1942–43 financial year, P.N. Plaistowe, Chief Cashier at Liberty's who had audited Moorcroft's accounts since 1936–37, resigned from this role. Liberty's did not appoint a successor; they were understandably keen to shed a task which cost money, and which was much more difficult to fulfil in conditions of acute labour shortage. Moorcroft, equally understandably, was not keen to take on the extra expense of appointing an external auditor, and refused to do so. The apparent

subject of the dispute had changed, but the underlying quarrel about the nature of their original undertaking, the moral obligations of the present, and, one may surmise, the vision of the future, remained the same. For Moorcroft, the matter was simple; Liberty's had taken it upon themselves to audit the Company accounts in 1913, and he saw this as an undertaking to do so from then on. He spelled this out in a letter to Harris on 23 December 1943:

When you say that Mr Plaistowe resigned from the post of auditor, it seems only to infer that Liberty & Company decline to accept the work of auditing, which has been done by them since the inception of the Company. I maintain that there is an obligation on the part of Liberty & Company to perform this duty, as was originally arranged by them.

The dispute continued, unresolved, until Moorcroft's death two years later; in consequence the accounts for both 1943–44 and 1944–45 were left unaudited, and no AGM was held in either year.

It might appear that this dispute marked the inevitable divergence of the artist and the retailer, but this would be to simplify. Writing on 17 December 1941, as he looked back to the founding of the Company, Blackmore recalled the act of faith in Moorcroft which underlay Liberty's original decision to collaborate. They had recognised the value of his art, unquantifiable as it was, and despite the claims of Henry Watkin. Their involvement may have been financial, but it implied, too, an aesthetic judgement:

I entirely agree that Liberty & Co's interest was, and was always intended to be, mainly financial, [...] but at the time that Liberty & Co. started to finance, the only record of results was the opinion of Macintyre's foreman that it was a source of loss to them, and there were no assets beyond your brains and ability, which are an intangible kind of asset that most banks do not take into consideration.

And Moorcroft's art had clearly profited as a result. High-profile promotion of his ware was not only the basis of substantial trade, but also a commercial endorsement of each new creation. It was a virtuous circle:

Our sales of Moorcroft Pottery were, I imagine, a mutual benefit: you got a substantial and steady basis for production, and some considerable advertisement, and we got our ordinary retailer's profit.

But a relationship which for thirty years had seen a convergence of artistic and commercial interests on both sides was struggling now to withstand the pressures of their more immediate survival, and to negotiate the paradox of Moorcroft's widespread critical acclaim and his declining trade. Taken on their own terms, the exchanges with Liberty's suggest a narrative of non-communication, disintegration, and a rather jaundiced view of the achievements of the past. Beneath them, though, was another, more fundamental question: how was Moorcroft's work to be valued?

5. Pottery and Value

The war exacerbated the tensions between art and commerce which Moorcroft had sought to resolve throughout his career. He had never judged the worth of his ware in purely monetary terms, any more than his public had done. But now, as he faced increasing pressures from government departments, the Bank, and Liberty's, he found himself constantly having to make a case for the value of what he was doing. In a letter of 8 December 1941, at a particularly low point in the dispute with Liberty's, Blackmore ventured to suggest that the declining trade in Moorcroft's ware was attributable in part to a lack of new material:

We pushed your pottery to the best of our ability, but changing conditions in home decoration and, I am told, the lack of fresh designs gradually militated against the popularity of your pottery, and our Regent Street account dropped substantially [...].

In his reply of 10 December 1941, Moorcroft explicitly rejected this judgement of his art by the criteria of the balance sheet. Referring indirectly to the favourable reviews which his work had received both at home and abroad in the late 1930s, he reaffirmed his refusal simply to follow fashion; to remain true to his artistic principles represented a more solid basis for commercial success. He might also have said, but he did not, that this originality was the very basis of Liberty's faith in him as a designer:

But regardless of your unnecessarily expressed point of view on design, my designs secured, during the time you mention, world-wide recognition with the highest honours. I find at times that the commercial mind flings its arrows too often at the poor artist to whom he is very greatly indebted. Again, with regard to design, as a matter of principle I firmly resisted the temptation, and it was a great temptation, to be caught in the web of modern fashion. [...] I feel that it will interest you to know that today we find an increasing demand for our wares, for this simple reason that we retain our classic standards and were not misled.

Revealingly, on the back of a Liberty's envelope postmarked 9 December 1941 (which may well have contained Blackmore's letter), Moorcroft jotted down thoughts on the seventeenth-century potters, the Elers brothers, doubtless with his book for Blackie's still in his mind. His account of their achievements, and their destiny, implied a bleak allegory of his own:

Two of the recent potters, the brothers Elers [...] gave to England a new standard. [...] They made their objects on the potter's wheel [...], turned their pottery with great skill and refinement. And before the clay was dry, they applied on the moist clay often charming ornamentation. A century later, Wedgwood and others began to make pottery on a large scale, and from that time the peaceful indigenous potter was to some degree overlooked. Art was industrialised, and so gradually human skill was controlled by commerce, and that unfortunate greed for money, the making of money, was responsible for the impoverishment of innate beauty.

Moorcroft's pottery, like that of the Elers, was 'peaceful', of 'innate beauty', the product of 'human skill', qualities which Moorcroft saw himself fighting to defend, as the pressures of war made commercial success the only criterion of value.

This fight characterised Moorcroft throughout these years. In a war-torn world where human life and its cultural treasures were treated as expendable commodities, he would not stop producing objects of beauty. And this spirit was recognised and appreciated the world over; William Moorcroft, both the man and his pots, represented for many a defiant expression of individuality, humanity and freedom in the face of totalitarianism. A letter from Lightolier, the pioneering American electric lighting company based in New York, eloquently expressed this perception. Max Daum wrote on 4 January 1940, acknowledging the safe arrival of a shipment:

I was more than touched by your kind message of well wishes for the New Year. It arrived during our annual convention of our salesmen, and I felt privileged to be able to read your cablegram to the men, together with the announcement that the most recent shipment of Moorcroft vases had just been confirmed from Halifax, where the ship carrying the consignment was towed into port after being damaged by enemy action.

In the midst of these hostile conditions, Daum expressed his appreciation of Moorcroft's personal touch, a timely and reassuring reminder of the world as it once was, and, it was hoped, would be again:

With all the disturbing and jarring news of destruction of which we read daily in our newspapers, your cablegram comes as a reminder that we once had normal conditions, when such niceties were thought of and cables were used for other purposes than terse official communications. Indeed, since your message did penetrate through all the disturbance, it is doubly appreciated.

As Moorcroft fought through the commercial challenges, he retained his determination, courtesy, humanity. This was the real value of the business he transacted, and it was appreciated:

Please [...] permit me to add that we all have the keenest admiration for the manner in which you continue to produce articles of beauty in a world of ugly destruction and mounting handicaps.

At the end of that year, after the devastating fire-bombing of London on 29 December 1940, he wrote to Geoffrey Dawson, Editor of *The Times*. He enclosed, characteristically, a gift of his work, a lidded box whose beauty was immediately appreciated. Dawson replied on 11 January 1941:

I am more grateful than I can say for your remembrance of us, and for the beautiful specimen of your handcraft. It was intended, no doubt, for cigarettes, but my wife, who is enchanted with it, already shows signs of annexing it for other purposes.

A few days earlier, on 31 December 1940, a photograph 'St Paul's Survives' by Herbert Mason was published on the front page of the *Daily Mail*. In its depiction of the

cathedral, illuminated by fires and surrounded by the smoke of burning buildings, it would become an iconic image of the nation's determination to survive the onslaught. Dawson implied something of the same spirit in Moorcroft's continued production: 'It is comforting to know that you keep the arts alive in these unpropitious times. Thank you again, and good fortune to you.'

For the owners of Moorcroft's 'articles of beauty', such pieces had a value beyond price. A letter dated 12 November 1944 from Arthur Rowland Churchwell III, Technical Sergeant, Air Corps, exemplified the appreciation of many for the qualities of the man and the pots:

This is to inform you that the pottery you crated for me arrived in California complete and in excellent condition. [...] Needless to say, I had an immediate market for the things when they arrived. I could have sold them for as much as eight times what I purchased them for. But I consider them, each and every one, works of Art, and shall keep them in the family. [...] Thank you for the wonderful service you have given me.

So widespread was this appreciation that it was expressed, too, in fictional form, in *The Undeclared*, a novel by Arnold Bennett's nephew, George Beardmore (aka Wolfenden). Written at a time when Britain's freedom was still in peril, a piece of Moorcroft ware was invested with almost talismanic value by the narrator's father:

Also he carried with him a beautiful little Moorcroft vase that he liked to stroke sensuously with his thumb, for the appeal of its rich ruby-tinted texture. One day, it jumped from his fingers and a tiny chip was knocked out of its neck. Now he abominated anything chipped, [...] but he had a pretty filigree cap of silver fitted to the neck, and the vase remained in his pocket.²⁵

6. Conclusions

On 15 August 1945, the day of Japan's surrender and just a few weeks before his death, Moorcroft wrote to Edith Harcourt-Smith. On the threshold of peace, his tone was weary rather than jubilant; he saw a world where the freedom to be oneself seemed more threatened than ever:

There is much talk of freedom in these days, but I never remember a time when we had less freedom. There are controls everywhere. And we appear to be part of a machine. Naturally, I resist being a part, I realise that man's greatest gift is the power to choose. [...] To be true to ourselves means so much. [...] Not only are we like sheep that have gone astray, unfortunately there are too many like sheep that merely follow [...].

But for all that he may have felt that independence in whatever context was now part of the past, it was in the very creativity of potters such as Moorcroft that the future of post-war pottery design was widely seen to lie. If the revival of industrial production

25 G. Wolfenden, *The Undeclared* (New York: Greenberg, 1941), p.112.

was conceived in terms of large, mechanised factories, modern designers argued that it was in the smaller enterprise, free from the constraints of mass production, that the most original ideas would again be found. Adams, writing in the *Pottery Gazette*, included Moorcroft in a select list of potters whose small-scale establishments had produced work of distinctive quality, and whose 'pioneering spirit' would be needed in the post-war world:

William and Joseph Burton, and Forsyth, at Pilkingtons, Moorcroft, Susie Cooper, Gray, and Poole, have all helped considerably to advance the reputation of British craftsmanship and good taste at home and abroad. Yet at this difficult time, as never before, the small quality-producing units need a just consideration of their contributions to British pottery in the past, if they are to survive the war and play their part in the future. [...] we shall surely need the pioneering spirit of certain of the small units again after the war. Their first aim has always been fine, fresh work, not profits.²⁶

Moira Forsyth took a very similar line in a report on 'Design in the Pottery Industry', summarised in the *Pottery Gazette*:

With very few exceptions, even amongst the firms with great traditions, the pioneer and initiator is found amongst the small producers, and it is in the interests of the industry as a whole to maintain his existence. Mass production on a large scale leads inevitably to a narrowing and standardisation of production on 'safe' lines.²⁷

Josiah Wedgwood V, the forward-looking Managing Director of the firm, had, over the last decade, overseen the creation of Wedgwood's new Barlaston factory, hailed as the model for enlightened, high-quality industrial production. Nevertheless, in a lecture at the Burslem School of Art, he underlined the value of a quite different model:

There was certainly a definite room for the man who was an artist, a technical man, and a 'bit of a born genius', a man who, if he wished, could have a 1-man to a 50-man factory and do extremely well. We could all of us think of examples in the district of highly individual small firms which, if carried on in future in the way they had been before the war, should certainly survive.²⁸

In its evocation of the small firm, built around an innovative designer of 'genius' and 'individuality', Wedgwood's comment almost certainly referred to William Moorcroft; it would be for his son, Walter, to show how prescient it was.

William Moorcroft died on 14 October 1945; he had suffered a stroke just over three weeks earlier.²⁹ His importance was recognised in the many tributes and obituary notices, published and private, but it was not easily summarised; the diversity of

26 'Future of the Pottery Industry. Importance of Design and Planning', *PG* (December 1942), 687–89 (p.687).

27 'Design in the Pottery Industry', *PG* (March 1944), 135–41 (p.137).

28 'Future of the Pottery Industry', *PG* (May 1943), 269–73 (p.271).

29 Walter Moorcroft, *Memories of Life and Living* (Shepton Beauchamp: R. Dennis Publications, 1999), p.38.

perspectives on his significance and legacy was a telling sign of his individuality. For some, it was Moorcroft's accomplishments as a potter which distinguished him. A notice in the *Overseas Daily Mail* set him in the long tradition of chemist potters, whose work brought together ceramic expertise and artistic sensitivity:

All down the history of potting there has been the enthusiastic work of the master-potters who have added to their craftsmanship in the handling of the clay, a wide knowledge of art and science, and have thereby been enabled to effect valuable improvements in practice and effect. The work of the late William Moorcroft will long remain an inspiration to succeeding workers [...].³⁰

Moorcroft's mastery of colour and of firing techniques was equated with that of William Burton, Charles Noke, Bernard Moore or William Howson Taylor, all of whom were celebrated for their innovative work in the chemistry of glazes. The *Pottery Gazette* took a similar line. In so doing, it implicitly set him apart from the manufacturer; his prime object was to create works of ceramic beauty, not to make a commercial commodity:

Moorcroft ware of this description stood out in any exhibition of pottery or in window or store display, by virtue of its quality of unusual richness in colour, colour which could only have been attained by a master potter, enthusiastic in his craft and fortified with a profound chemical knowledge of the artistic possibilities of the materials used.³¹

Charles Marriott's Obituary in *The Times* also recognised Moorcroft's accomplishments as 'an experienced chemist', but it was his achievement as a designer of functional ware which was seen to set him apart. For Marriott, this was the least well-known of Moorcroft's successes, but nevertheless the most significant:

But his interest went beyond mere colour, as the artistry of his domestic ware, fashioned under the austerity ban on colour, emphasised in outstanding style. [...] It was in the less spectacular domestic wares—tea, coffee, cider and dinner services—which, being generally relegated to 'trade shows' escape critical attention, that Moorcroft pottery was to be seen at its best artistically. It was designed with strict attention to utility, but with purity of form and subtlety of curve, and the semi-matt glazes in jade white, ivory and porcelain blue were charming to both sight and touch. In fact there can be little doubt that if the light of exhibitions had been thrown on Moorcroft's useful rather than his ornamental pieces, his artistic reputation would have gained.³²

Writing very much from a modernist perspective, he implied that to emphasise William Moorcroft's accomplishments as a potter was to undervalue his importance as a designer. The *Pottery & Glass Record* also focussed on his domestic wares; his name was inseparably associated with Powder Blue, and its significance in the history of design was seen as axiomatic:

30 *The Overseas Daily Mail* (29 December 1945).

31 'William Moorcroft. The Passing of a Great Potter', *PG* (November 1945), p.643.

32 'Mr W. Moorcroft. Potter to Queen Mary', *The Times* (16 October 1945), p.7.

Many of Moorcroft's domestic wares are perfect examples of the ceramic art, exhibiting great purity and beauty of form and line, and revealing ideal properties in service. His 'porcelain blue' which won international fame and honours represents one of the highest attainments in the history of potting.³³

What writers found more difficult to analyse was the decorated ware, for all that it was seen to be, for better or worse, the best known part of his output; in 1945, however, little had been available on the home market for more than three years. The *Pottery Gazette* notice looked back to Moorcroft's designs of the early 1930s, seen to exemplify his artistic vision and its immediate, inspiring effect:

This characteristically 'Moorcroft' ware, inspired by the natural form and colouring of fruit, autumn leaves and flowers, and the delightful harmonies they suggest, had a wide popular appeal, and its decorative and enlivening qualities were quickly recognised.³⁴

For Marriott, ornamental motifs were transient in their appeal, and his own implicit preference for the starker aesthetic of early Chinese wares clearly coloured his view of Moorcroft's decorative pottery:

Ornamental objects are more subject to changes in taste than are objects of utility and, rightly or wrongly, since Moorcroft started potting, preference has gone to the more sober colours of the earlier Chinese wares. Like Bernard Moore, the Martin Brothers, and the other individual potters who were established by the end of the nineteenth century, Moorcroft inclined to the brighter glazes, such as flambé and turquoise, of eighteenth-century Chinese porcelains. His style of decoration, too, with flower and fruit motives, was rather too boldly naturalistic for modern tastes.³⁵

His assessment of the success of Moorcroft's later decorated ware was not borne out by its critical reception at the time, but it is notable that Marriott described his motifs as 'boldly' naturalistic. Although clearly preferring the unornamented teaware, he acknowledged a distinctive independence in Moorcroft's decorative art. In this sense, too, he was appreciated as an 'individual potter', his work recognised as the expression of one man's sensitivity, not the impersonal output of a firm. Marriott's contrast of two styles of oriental pottery, the 'brighter glazes' of eighteenth-century wares and the 'more sober colours' of early Chinese pottery implied another distinction, however: that between Moorcroft and (unnamed) studio potters. To do so was to raise a question of classification which other notices, too, would consider.

Several writers situated Moorcroft's pottery outside the confines of commercial production, drawing attention to the status of his decorative work as an object of collection by both individuals and museums. The *Pottery Gazette* emphasised his contribution to the nation's cultural heritage; its quality was enduring and recognised worldwide:

33 'William Moorcroft', *Pottery and Glass Record* [PGR] (October 1945), p.21.

34 *PG* (November 1945), p.643.

35 *The Times* (16 October 1945), p.7.

In 1912 [1913], he was established in his factory at Cobridge, which he specially designed to suit the production of those well-known and fine ceramics, examples of which were to win a distinctive place in pottery history, and also to find an honourable place in public museums throughout the world and to become amongst the proud possessions of discerning connoisseurs.³⁶

In this context, royal appreciation of Moorcroft's ware was recognised as the distinguished achievement it was; for all its publication in a trade journal, this obituary valued Moorcroft as an artist rather than as a commercial potter:

Their Majesties Queen Alexandra, King George V and Queen Mary, and other members of the Royal Family, have all bought examples of Moorcroft ware, and in 1928 Moorcroft was appointed potter to Queen Mary, an honour of which he was justifiably very proud in view of Her Majesty's well-known and discriminating love of good pottery.³⁷

But what was noted, too, was the broad appeal of this ware, not the least of Moorcroft's achievements. A notice in the *Staffordshire Sentinel* stressed his place in history, but it finished on this most significant of points; Moorcroft's was pottery which was appreciated by all, by celebrities and ceramic specialists but also by the writer (and, it was implied, by the readers) of this notice:

Mr Moorcroft won a distinctive and distinguished place in the world of ceramics. [...] He made outstanding shows at the British Empire Exhibition and at every British Industries Fair, and his work was appreciated by Royalty and other famous personages. All this was honour; but the most important fact was that his work was original; and the best of it will endure. His shapes, the results of throwing on the wheel, were the best in modern pottery. His colour qualities, integral in the ceramic materials, were quite individual. His pottery is a happy thing to live with—which is the test.³⁸

For all this exceptional diversity of output, some notices did try to identify a category into which he might be placed as a potter. The *Pottery Gazette* linked the qualities of the work to those of the man; his ware was special because it bore the stamp of an individual: 'Throughout his whole life he was associated with the pottery craft, and his work, individualistic in character, bears the impress of a personality whole-heartedly dedicated to the pottery craft.'³⁹ The same term occurred in *The Times* which stressed above all the distinctiveness of each piece, the result of its creation by hand:

All Moorcroft's work was individual in character, thrown on the wheel by hand and not moulded or turned on the lathe. He signed all important pieces, but employed a small number of assistants, and spoke feelingly of keeping them going in the face of mass production.⁴⁰

36 *PG* (November 1945), p.643.

37 *Ibid.*

38 *Staffordshire Sentinel* (20 October 1945).

39 *PG* (November 1945), p.643.

40 *The Times* (16 October 1945), p.7.

It is notable that Moorcroft's concern for his staff was picked up here. But particularly significant, not least in the context of the growing opposition of artist potter and industrial manufacturer, was the allusion to Moorcroft's rejection of mass production. A similar implication was embedded in the *Pottery Gazette* notice, which explicitly referred to Moorcroft's works as a 'studio pottery':

Although, under the Concentration of Industry scheme, Mr Moorcroft was successful in retaining the entity of the Moorcroft factory at Cobridge, the difficulties of adapting such a specially constructed studio pottery to meet the requirements of wartime utility production caused a heavy burden to be placed upon him [...].⁴¹

The *Pottery & Glass Record* went furthest, though, into the question of categorisation. Recognising that the individuality of Moorcroft's work and of his working practice took him outside familiar categories, the writer located him between the studio and the factory, in the tradition of William Morris but succeeding, where Morris had not, to reach a larger and a wider public with his handcraft:

He was essentially the studio potter, a man of rare sensibility who chose to exercise and display his creative talents through the medium of clay. He was a 'post-Morrisite', a disciple who excelled his master and forged an ideal link between the craft and the industry of potting.⁴²

Nearly a year after Moorcroft's death, a second notice appeared in the *Pottery & Glass Record* which set out, once more, to assess his significance as a potter; it was written by Geoffrey Bemrose, curator of the Stoke-on-Trent Museum, Hanley. Moorcroft's career was seen to be characterised by its inexhaustible creativity; constantly evolving, it did not lend itself to simple summary:

William Moorcroft (1872–1945) was a great Staffordshire potter. Although he achieved the psalmist's allotted span, those who knew him best could never convince themselves that he was anything but a young man, young in those qualities that inspire the envy of middle-age, in confidence, enthusiasm and a high idealism. Great as were his triumphs in those happy days before the first World War, they were but a prelude to the rich success of his period of maturity which came after 1920.⁴³

Bemrose, like Marriott in *The Times*, stressed the boldness of William Moorcroft's designs, and his refusal to be distracted by the fashions of the time; he was a potter who followed his own vision. The result was an irreducibly personal art, characterised by its tireless experiments in style, colour, form:

In the restless interwar years when almost every conceivable style was applied to the decoration of pottery, Moorcroft proceeded on his way, untroubled by the latest craze and indifferent to the newest aesthetic theories. [...] His career was a singular example

41 *PG* (November 1945), p.643.

42 *PGR* (October 1945), p.21.

43 J. Bemrose, 'William Moorcroft, A Critical Appreciation', *PGR* (June 1946), 29–33 (p.29).

of evolutionary development. Never content to rest upon past achievements, he was constantly experimenting towards an ideal.⁴⁴

As one might expect from a museum curator, and one writing with the benefit of a year's reflection, this was the most considered assessment of Moorcroft's significance. He did not seek to place Moorcroft in a category, but he had no doubt about the artistic status of his work:

In these days when we have come to accept the potter as an artist in his own right, it is well to remember how much Moorcroft did to bring this about. Before his day, pottery was regarded as a mere commodity; it had little or no exhibition value. [...] Nothing approaching the West End Art Exhibition, so beloved of the Victorian aesthete, was attempted in pottery until Moorcroft and de Morgan began to show their work. Small but choice gatherings of recent work were a means that Moorcroft employed, not only in his own interest, but also to educate the public in what he felt to be a distinct art form.⁴⁵

Bemrose did not compare Moorcroft with studio potters, nor comment on the status of their work as ceramic art. He noted instead Moorcroft's exhibits at the Royal Institution, his larger displays at international Fairs, and his presence in museums, another sign that the permanent value of his pottery had been recognised. If some earlier obituaries had identified Moorcroft's modern teaware designs as his enduring achievement, for Bemrose it was his decorative ware:

In America his wares were eagerly sought by discerning collectors, but what pleased him most was the recognition he received from the Far East. Indeed, he would often remark, half humorously, that to see his best work one had to travel abroad. Several American museums possess representative collections of Moorcroft ware, and before the war, good displays were to be seen at Vienna, Brussels and, I believe, Tokio [sic].⁴⁶

And yet, for all this, Bemrose recognised that his conclusion could only be provisional; such was the irreducible diversity of Moorcroft's work, one might recognise its distinction, but one could not yet do it justice:

It is, as yet, too early to appraise him satisfactorily; time alone will decide. To some he will appeal most strongly as a great colourist; to others his superb drawing in clay on clay will make the most lasting impression. In any event, the statement made at the beginning of this article is surely valid. He was a great potter.⁴⁷

44 Ibid.

45 Ibid., p.31.

46 Ibid., p.33.

47 Ibid.

Conclusion: Individuality by Design

I. Manufacturer and Artist

It is a telling sign of William Moorcroft's individuality that he was compared at different times with both Josiah Wedgwood and William Morris, figures who for many represented irreconcilable extremes of factory and studio production, commerce and art. Wedgwood was seen, in the interwar years particularly, as the ideal industrial designer, one whose work combined 'fitness for purpose' with 'undeniable beauty of line'.¹ Nikolaus Pevsner saw in Powder Blue the same qualities, and Charles Marriott singled out in Moorcroft's designs a 'symmetry and purity of form' he associated with the 'original Wedgwood', explicitly distinguished from the spontaneous vitality of medieval or modern studio pottery.² Such ware was seen to exemplify the best industrial art, good design made available in larger than studio quantities; the achievement of one Potter to HM the Queen was recognised in another.

Such comparisons paid tribute to Moorcroft's skill as a designer, and to the popular success of his functional wares; they implied, too, a perception of him as a manufacturer. For all that his scale of operation was much smaller than that of Wedgwood, or of most of Moorcroft's contemporaries in the Potteries, he did practise a division of labour which for many, from Leach to Gropius, was the defining difference between industrial and studio production.³ But if he was a manufacturer, he was no ordinary one; division of labour may have increased production beyond that of a studio, but it did not standardise it. William Moorcroft's pottery was thrown, not moulded, and even Powder Blue, designed for production in large quantities, retained, in the words of Herbert Read, a 'personality not found in wholly mechanical production'.⁴ Unlike

1 B. Rackham & H. Read, *English Pottery, its Development from Early Times to the End of the Eighteenth Century* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1924), p.125.

2 C. Marriott, 'Moorcroft Pottery', *The Times* (4 March 1939), p.10.

3 Cf. W. Gropius, *The New Architecture*, p.54: 'subdivision of labour in the one and undivided control by a single workman in the other.'

4 H. Read, letter to W. Moorcroft, 12 June 1943, William Moorcroft: Personal and Commercial Papers, SD1837, Stoke-on-Trent City Archives [WM Archive].

Wedgwood, he did not seek to turn his decorators into machines 'as cannot err',⁵ and if design was the watchword of manufacture, for Moorcroft it was individuality. It was a distinction recognised implicitly in 1930 when, on the occasion of Wedgwood's bicentenary, he was pointedly described in *The Daily News and Westminster Gazette* as 'one of the most individualistic potters of his time',⁶ a striking contrast to the manufacturer being commemorated.

Moorcroft's method of production was very much in the spirit of the Arts and Crafts architect John Dando Sedding, who saw architecture as an art of collaborative creation:

[...] the architect uses the best faculties of his fellow craftsmen as well as his own, much as the musical composer secures the services of the best soloists and the best chorus and orchestra to render his oratorio.⁷

Sedding's analogy of music was particularly appropriate to Moorcroft's practice, which came close to that of a performance art. Unlike an architectural drawing, which represents in exact detail a single object to be realised, Moorcroft's designs were more akin to a musical score, brought to life multiple times and whose every enactment was subject to infinite variations—on the potter's wheel, in the decorating room and in the kiln—just like a live performance, every one different, none definitive. It is not to say that he approved everything which emerged from the kiln, but each piece was judged on its own terms, and not simply with reference to a template. The same individuality characterised his designs, adapted and redrawn for each different shape, and whose colour palette was often customised for particular retailers, allowing them to stock wares which were exclusive. As a result, very few pieces were made in large quantities, with the same decoration, on the same shape, in the same colours. His pieces were created in series, but each had its own identity, like flowers of the same species, their design familiar, their detail unique. It was a characteristic noted in some of the earliest reviews of his pottery:

All the schemes are the conceptions of an artist, they are carried out by artists, and no pieces can be exactly alike. As in nature, so in art; there is always infinite variety, both in form and color.⁸

This fusion of design and individuality was tellingly enacted on the base of his wares. One of Wedgwood's defining innovations was to mark each pot with a factory stamp rather than a written sign in 'the time-honoured manner of the old faience potters',⁹ its unvarying appearance mirroring the pot's perfect replication of a given design. From the start of his independent career, Moorcroft, too, impressed his name (the registered

5 J. Wedgwood, letter to Bentley, 7 October 1769.

6 *The Daily News and Westminster Gazette* (19 May 1930).

7 J.D. Sedding, *Art and Handicraft* (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner & Co., 1893), p.165.

8 *Canadian Pottery and Glass Gazette* (August 1908), p.8.

9 Rackham & Read, *English Pottery*, p.98.

trademark of his firm) on the base of his pots, but this was most often accompanied by his signature (or initials), personally applied. To do so was not just to identify himself as the designer of a template, but also to associate himself with the individuality of a particular object. This distinction of his work from industrial production was underlined in the 1930s, when he replaced the firm's stamp with a stamp of his signature and the words 'Potter to H.M. the Queen', the (doubtless conscious) allusion to Wedgwood accompanied by an affirmation of his own individuality; this stamp was itself accompanied, more often than not, by his own hand-written sign. It was an eloquent declaration, at a time when industrial standardisation, often explicitly traced back to Wedgwood, was becoming the new orthodoxy.

Moorcroft's practice enacted an aesthetic principle, but it had a social dimension, too. At the end of his *Story of the Potter*, Charles Binns commented darkly on the working conditions of decorators in the pottery industry:

That he [the modern decorator] is in some sort reduced to the level of an automaton is more his misfortune than his fault, for in the rush and whirl of competition the demons of speed and cheapness rule. Strong, indeed, must be the manufacturer, and wealthy the capitalist, who can follow the bent of an artistic mind in the production of pottery for the people [...].¹⁰

Moorcroft never lost sight of his decorators, and even at the end of his career he was designing pieces which gave them scope to show their skills, both in tube-lining and painting. Binns' book was published in 1898; Moorcroft would combat the 'demons of speed and cheapness' for the next five decades, resisting the model which had defined the practice of Josiah Wedgwood and continued to characterise modern factories.

When Moorcroft was described in 1913 as 'a manufacturer but also an artist',¹¹ the writer clearly perceived his fusion of these two models. So, too, did the author of the obituary in the *Pottery and Glass Record* who described him as a 'post-Morrisite',¹² a telling remark at a time when the legacy of Morris was itself being identified in the radically opposed worlds of factory and studio. Pevsner included him in his *Pioneers of the Modern Movement*, and significantly used his words as the epigraph to his *Enquiry*: 'What business have we with art at all, unless all can share it?'¹³ For Leach, conversely, what defined Morris was his opposition to industrial production, which culminated in 'the individual, or artist, craftsman'.¹⁴ Moorcroft's was a distinctive variant on these two perceptions of the Morris legacy. He explored a path between factory and studio, individualising a process of serial production to create what the *Pottery and Glass Record* called an 'ideal link between the craft and the industry of potting';¹⁵ it was one of the foundations of his commercial success.

10 C.F. Binns, *The Story of the Potter* (London: Hodder & Stoughton [1898]), pp.238–39.

11 *The New Witness* (26 February 1914), p.540.

12 *PGR* (October 1945), p.21.

13 W. Morris, letter to the *Manchester Examiner* (14 March 1883).

14 *A Potter's Book*, p.14.

15 *PGR* (October 1945), p.21.

While Crane described the craft revival as 'a world within a world; a minority producing for a minority',¹⁶ and potteries such as de Morgan or Della Robbia, closely associated with Morris's principles, struggled to remain viable, Moorcroft brought 'common things made beautiful' to a wider market than individual makers were able to achieve. It is a sign of its broad reach that it was more widely marketed than most craft wares, available in (high-end) stores. In a review of the Omega Workshops, *The Times* noted that an artist's work made for sale in retail outlets was designed 'according to the demands of the shopman, not according to his own ideas', characterising the result as 'commercial art [...] modish rather than beautiful'.¹⁷ This was clearly not the case with Moorcroft, whose relationship with Liberty's exemplified his artistic autonomy. The store was long associated with the commercialisation of modern decorative art, famously scorned by C. R. Ashbee as 'Messrs Novelty, Nobody & Co.',¹⁸ for selling under their own name work commissioned from leading Arts and Crafts designers and factory-produced to appear individually made. Art was anonymised and craft reduced to a 'look', for the commercial benefit of the retailer. Not so Moorcroft's pottery. This was neither mechanised nor concealed under Liberty's name; it was made by Moorcroft, sold in his name, and appreciated on its own terms. For more than thirty years the store were investors and partners in his firm, but their relationship was not simply a financial one; it provided a high-profile gallery for some of his most adventurous and innovative designs.

The success of Moorcroft's ware may be observed in its distribution and quantified in his accounts, but the reasons for its appeal are to be found in other evidence of its reception, in reviews or private correspondence. Even retailers did not regard it simply as a commercial commodity, as one explained in a letter to Moorcroft of 28 December 1943:

Your pottery has just arrived, it is exquisite! and I am sure Keats makes it very clear to us that with a thing of beauty, its loveliness increases. I shouldn't like just anyone to buy your ware who simply has money (as is so often the case these days), I want to sell it only to a person who can appreciate the fineness.¹⁹

This was not just pottery which sold well; it was pottery which struck a chord.

2. Pottery for People

Given the scale of Moorcroft's works, his ware was never intended for a mass market. But the breadth of his output, from the functional to the decorative, from small items of everyday pottery to works of exhibition quality, implied a target market ranging

16 W. Crane, 'Of the Influence of Modern Social and Economic Conditions on the Sense of Beauty', *Ideals in Art* (London: George Bell & Sons, 1905), 76–87 (p.86).

17 'A New Venture in Art. Exhibition at the Omega Workshops', *The Times* (9 July 1913), p.4.

18 C.R. Ashbee, *Craftsmanship in Competitive Industry* (Camden: Essex House Press, 1908), p.155.

19 All unpublished documents referred to in this chapter are located in WM Archive.

from those of modest means to wealthy connoisseurs. It was a noted characteristic of his ware, however, that each piece, whether destined for the kitchen or the collector's cabinet, was designed and created with the same attention to detail. The *Pottery Gazette* compared his exhibition pieces at the Liverpool Walker Art Gallery, with items to be seen at the British Industries Fair:

[...] although his forthcoming exhibit at the Fair will contain many styles of decoration which are not beyond the reach of people of only modest means, this same high quality will be evidenced. We cannot doubt this, for we know it to be Mr Moorcroft's aim, in whatever he makes, so to imbue his creations with human appeal that they carry with them a sense of joy of possession.²⁰

And this is how his pottery was received. His Powder Blue teaware inspired 'joy of possession' in owners across a wide social and aesthetic spectrum. Its popularity long predated its public appreciation by Pevsner, or its presentation as a high-profile gift for a royal wedding, and it continued throughout and beyond the heyday of Clarice Cliff's influential modern style. Its appeal could not be theorised by the many who bought and enjoyed it, but it was indisputable, widespread, and enduring. A letter of 14 January 1936 from one customer captured its impact; the pleasure it gave transcended fashion—it was not to be discarded, but to be replaced:

You were good enough to tell me that I might write to you for replacements of my powder blue service when these were necessary. I love my service, and treat it with every care consistent with using it, but have come to the point when I should be ever so glad if I might purchase some pieces [...]

There is abundant material evidence, too, that many of Moorcroft's other functional objects—tableware, tea caddies, biscuit boxes, jardinières, scent bottles, vases, lamps, candlesticks, inkwells, tobacco jars—were a part of their owners' lives, and were used, damaged, and even repaired.

Purely decorative wares—vases clearly ornamental rather than practical in design, cabinet plates, decorative cups and saucers, miniatures—inspired similar responses; they were, for many, an essential and inseparable part of their owner's domestic environment. An (undated) letter from the later months of 1940, is characteristic of many Moorcroft received, describing a relationship with his pottery which extended back at least thirty years:

[...] apart from our table pottery which was all Powder Blue, we had all our rooms furnished with the ware that suited the other colourings: from sang-de-boeuf to Murena and then on to more recent designs such as the Orchid, we had pieces of all of them. It became a recognised thing in the family for presents to be a piece of Moorcroft for some particular spot in the house.

20 *Pottery Gazette and Glass Trade Review* [PG] (February 1937), p.252.

It was axiomatic that even Moorcroft's least sophisticated pieces were appreciated for their beauty, and some functional objects were clearly never put to use, their value as decorative objects being value enough. This was everyday art, designed to be practical and/or ornamental, but always, above all, to bring joy to the owner.

For many, though, the pleasure it provided was more than simply 'joy of possession'. Correspondents did not always have the vocabulary to describe the impact of this ware, but its intensity, and immediacy, were beyond doubt. Moorcroft's pottery did not simply beautify a room, it compelled its owner's attention. This effect was tellingly expressed in a letter to Moorcroft from Austin Reed Ltd., dated 24 April 1935, acknowledging receipt of a vase ordered for their (relatively) new headquarters. What may well have been bought as a decorative item clearly had an impact which took the writer by surprise: 'The only trouble I find with this creation of yours is that it is impossible to stop looking at it. It expresses a masterpiece, and we are very happy with it.' It was this haunting quality which was often picked up in reviews, from the start of his career when it was likened to poetry, to the 1930s when the character of 'soulfulness' was discerned in it. As one review succinctly put it, 'Moorcroft pottery is no ordinary pottery'.²¹ It is doubtless for this reason that he was often described as an artist, and why his work was presented in the interwar years in terms similar to those used in reviews of studio pottery. What Marriott said of William Staite Murray in a review of 15 November 1926 was equally true of Moorcroft: 'these pots are not to be described; they are to be experienced.'²²

The nature of this quality is suggested in a letter of 19 August 1943, written by Frank C. Ormerod, a celebrated ENT surgeon, to a patient who had sent him a particularly fine Moorcroft vase as a thank-you gift:

Thank you very much indeed for the extraordinarily fine piece of Moorcroft you sent me. I feel it is quite absurdly out of proportion for merely offering you a little advice, which happened to turn out right. Nevertheless, I am very grateful and appreciate very much all the kind thought which went into choosing for me what is indeed a museum piece. My wife's father, the late William Burton, was a very distinguished potter, and she considers herself no mean judge of a pot. She asks me to thank you on her behalf too, and to say that she considers it the finest piece of Moorcroft she has ever seen, and that she values it very greatly as an addition to our collection.

Moorcroft's pottery was at the centre of this exchange, the language through which deep feelings could be expressed and recognised. For the donor, the vase was clearly intended to enrich the life of its recipient, just as the medical advice had evidently made a life-changing difference to him. And Ormerod read this message perfectly; to appreciate the quality of the vase was to appreciate the depth of the patient's gratitude. It is a sign of the esteem in which Moorcroft's ware was held that it could be guaranteed to achieve this purpose; its recognition as a work of art by the daughter

21 PG (April 1930), p.612.

22 C. Marriott, 'Stoneware Pottery', *The Times* (15 November 1926), p.19.

of William Burton, one of the great ceramic chemists of the age, underlined the validity of that reputation. But functional ware, too, inspired similar responses. For an American customer writing on 13 June 1942, Moorcroft's ware was both eloquent and inspirational:

I now have 161 pieces, counting cups and saucers as one, and broth cups and saucers as one. A very nice little cupboard full. However, I am interested in setting a table with Moorcroft not only for breakfast, luncheon or supper, but for dinner also. [...] I note your remark, 'Making objects that will help to awaken a joyous interest in life.' We are of one thought [...]. You make beautiful porcelain which adds greatly to the joy of eating [...]. Some folks walk so aimlessly thru life, they see no beauty, they see nothing of interest, they wonder why they were born, and they wonder what it's all about. [...] Don't ever let that kind of life be ours. You keep right on making your beautiful blue porcelain. [...] That Moorcroft is simply beautiful. [Emphasis original]

Such reactions corresponded exactly to how Moorcroft conceived of his vocation from the very beginning of his career. At the end of his 1905 diary, he transcribed a comment from an essay on the music of Richard Strauss; this was what his pottery was all about, whatever its apparent function:

It is one of the functions of music to make us feel, another to make us think. The greatest masters are [ever] those who make us both feel and think in one vivid moment.²³

And for one correspondent writing on 23 September 1944, less than a year before Moorcroft's death, this was precisely the effect of his ware: 'I love the beauties of nature, and so mentally and spiritually I absorb Moorcroft.' When Marriott suggested in his Obituary notice that Moorcroft's decorative work had gone out of fashion, this was very misleading. Partly because its absence from the marketplace was entirely the result of wartime restrictions, not of declining popularity; but partly, even principally, because Moorcroft's pottery was never really 'in fashion' at all, and never sought to be. The 'joy of possession' implied in correspondence was not the comfort of the familiar, or the pleasure of owning a fashionable object; it was a much deeper and more enduring engagement with the ware.

The many letters written to Moorcroft testify to this impact of his pottery; the fact that he preserved so many of them suggests that this was (at least) as important to him as its financial success. This was a relationship of artist and public which was not simply commercial, but implied a closer integration, an affinity of the kind described by Walter Crane:

Appreciation and sympathy are [...] enormously stimulating to artists. [...] If they are understood at once, then the artist knows he is in touch with his questioner, and that he speaks in a tongue that is comprehended [...].²⁴

23 James Huneker, *Overtones: A Book of Temperaments* (New York: Ch. Scribner's Sons, 1904), p.50.

24 W. Crane, 'Of the Social and Ethical Bearings of Art', *Ideals in Art* (London: George Bell & Sons, 1905), 88–101 (p.99).

Moorcroft's language was indeed understood, and it was an exchange as enriching for the potter as for the owner of his ware. As he wrote in a letter to his daughter, Beatrice, of 10 March 1929, it made his life worthwhile:

[...] it has been my good fortune to at least have made a few things that have found appreciation. If only one is able to do one small thing that will perpetually give happiness to someone, then one has not lived altogether in vain.

For Ida Copeland, an active campaigner for social reform and former MP for Stoke, writing to Moorcroft on 22 March 1945, the effect of his ware transcended the aesthetic and touched on the moral; it was a quality of the pots, but it was seen also, significantly, as a quality of the man:

[...] One thing is certain, beautiful objects created with love in one's heart will remain an inspiration and lead many to seek the good and beautiful in the years to come. So be of good heart. I rejoice to have had the pleasure of meeting you and seeing your work on life's journey.

3. Individuality

Moorcroft was more comfortable, and arguably more effective, expressing himself in clay than in words. His personal motto—*Facta non verba*—paradoxically said it all; what he made meant more than words, and he believed that a good pot needed no other advocacy than itself. Reactions to his ware clearly confirmed this belief. And yet, although he never systematically developed his ideas in public (and never completed the projected book on his work), he did express informally, in letters to family, friends, customers, or in diary jottings, some of the values and ambitions which motivated his work.

The very act of making pottery had the deepest significance for Moorcroft. Clay took the potter back to the origins of life, and was the perfect medium for expressing his reverence for the created world. His pottery was not simply an object, it was a statement. This was manifested in the creation of his distinctive ceramic colours, highlighted in reviews throughout his career. Like studio potters he deprecated the use of onglaze enamels, describing it as 'no less offensive than it would be to paint the bark of a tree',²⁵ but unlike them he did not limit himself to the natural oxides in the clay.²⁶ For Moorcroft, ceramic chemistry unlocked the hidden beauties of the earth, brought to light, and to life, by the fire of the kiln. To discover new colours was to uncover new dimensions in nature, a source of delight which he shared with his daughter in a letter of 25 October 1927: 'how glorious it is to find that the Earth has

25 'How Pottery Should "Grow"', *The Daily News and Westminster Gazette* (19 May 1930).

26 Cardew explicitly distinguished himself from the ceramic chemist in his article 'Slipware Pottery. Following the English Tradition', *Homes and Gardens* (May 1932), 548–49: 'A potter's processes should be as far as possible in imitation of natural processes, not of the unnaturally pure procedure of the experimental chemist.'

hidden within it treasures of colour that it is impossible to fully imagine, however quick or alive one's imagination may be.' And what was true of colour was true, too, of design. In a letter of 1 March 1943, to Henry Strauss, Parliamentary Secretary to the Ministry of Town and Country Planning, he explained the importance of nature as his inspiration, but experienced directly, not mediated by past traditions:

[...] we must think naturally, and look neither to the distant past nor to Greece or Rome for inspiration, but to the gentle influence of the riverside, or to the budding trees in springtime. [...] The line we see in the flowing river, in the bird in flight, and the colours we see will give us the material and the spiritual motive to design.

His aim was not mimetic representation, but to express through line, form, and colour the harmony and permanence of nature. Moorcroft expressed this sense of vocation in a letter to the author George Beardmore, on 13 August 1943; it was one of his most comprehensive, and fervent, affirmations:

Each object I make is an original piece, and is developed with the ever constant feeling that each atom comprising the piece is a part of the beginning of things. In each piece there are the same elements that form us. And with such material, one feels that one has a sacred trust in using the material. I obtain my results by and through the application of physics and the chemistry of metals, added to my drawing from Nature, where pattern appears. The pattern then is a part of the piece, and not merely applied. Each molecule is in complete fusion, and the elements all form a happy reunion, and are a part of that beginning.

It was from the perspective of a potter that Moorcroft conceived his art. It was not about the decoration of a clay vessel, it was about creating a ceramic object, its constituent elements all of a piece, literally and figuratively. The result was work often noticed for its integrity, a quality equivalent to what Pevsner called 'an indivisible ('individual') unity of soul, mind and hand' in the single craftsman,²⁷ and what a review of his display at the Ghent Exhibition called 'cohesion':

Moorcroft Ware is designed and executed entirely under the personal direction of William Moorcroft. [...] The forms, the colour schemes, and all added ornament are wholly conceived by the originator. This imparts to Moorcroft Ware a sense of cohesion so often lacking in modern pottery. It is in the combining of rare colour with form that one's interest is at once awakened [...], but there is also an individuality that places this pottery in a class distinct from all other types.²⁸

Moorcroft's pottery was individual because it was different, and because it was the conception of a single mind; but it was individual too because it was personal. It had little in common with the formal neo-classicism of Wedgwood, nor with Morris's pre-industrial vision in his 1882 lecture, 'The Lesser Arts of Life', with its preference for a 'workmanlike' finish. Nor was his aesthetic close to the medievalism of either

²⁷ *An Enquiry into Industrial Art in England*, p.188.

²⁸ Unsourced press cutting in WMArchive.

de Morgan or the Della Robbia factory, both of which sought to recreate the styles or techniques of an earlier age. What mattered to William Moorcroft, above all, was integrity, as he expressed in a letter to Beatrice on 14 October 1927: 'how joyous it is to work. How wonderful it is to have the power to express oneself, and how important it is that the expression should be true. As Shakespeare says: To thine own self be true'. This conception of his art doubtless prompted the frequent references to him in reviews as an individual rather than as a firm, and even his categorisation in the *Pottery and Glass Record* as a 'studio potter'.²⁹ For all that his production technique distinguished him from studio pottery practice, he was, like a studio potter, the sole designer of his ware. This was relatively rare at the start of his independent career; by the end of the 1930s, it was almost unparalleled, as was implied by Forsyth in a talk to the Ceramic Society: 'no firm could exist with a full measure of success on the work of one designer, however good, any more than a conductor could exist on producing the works of one composer.'³⁰ The result was a very personalised output, the expression in every respect of Moorcroft himself; he was, in the words of one review of 1929, a 'One-Man Factory', not so much the head of a firm as its defining spirit.³¹

This personal quality was evident, too, in the way he ran his business. Like a manufacturer, he supplied retail outlets both direct and via distributors, but he also, and quite atypically, dealt direct with individual buyers. A reply from Moorcroft himself to the speculative enquiry of one customer, evidently a complete stranger, elicited this (undated) response. It was clearly a business practice quite out of the ordinary:

I am extremely grateful to you for your postcard dated October 22nd; it was particularly kind of you to find time to deal with my inquiry yourself. [...] it was only as a last resort that I ventured to write direct to you, and it was beyond my best expectations that I should receive so favourable a reply.

Equally distinctive was his willingness to show individuals round his works, and not just commercial buyers. One correspondent, evidently a collector of Moorcroft's decorative ware, recalled in a letter of 14 January 1936 the way his works were run; his door was always open:

As I look round my lounge every evening at my treasured Moorcroft vases, I often wish I were back in the days of Stoke, when I could visit your works and go through your storerooms with their amazing stock of wonderful pieces; but in the end it is probably all for the best, because I should be tempted at every turn, and probably spend more than I ought to!

This was an astute commercial strategy, but it was also, and, one suspects, above all, a reflection of Moorcroft's vocation as a potter. To see how his pottery was made, was

²⁹ *PGR* (October 1945), p.21.

³⁰ 'Design in the Pottery Industry', *PG* (March 1937), p.399.

³¹ *Sunday Dispatch* (24 March 1929).

to increase the pleasure it provided. Another letter, dated 19 October 1937, shows how effective this was:

The vases look beautiful and are a constant daily delight to both of us. Now that I have seen your medium before the enormous heat mixes and determines the colours, it has increased greatly my admiration and interest in your art.

Unlike either Wedgwood or Morris, Moorcroft did not present himself as either a pioneer or protester; he was a potter with a vocation, but he was not on a crusade. Such was his irreducible individuality, that he could not be imitated; as one review of 17 September 1926 put it: 'What will happen when Moorcroft dies, I don't know. [...] They've tried all over the world to copy his particular glaze and raised flower design, but can't.'³² But this personal dimension was intimately connected with his sense of engagement with his times. In different ways, his designs suggested his own discreet response to the age: the muted tones of many wartime designs expressing his persistent faith in the enduring beauty of the natural world even in the darkest times; his landscape scenes of moonlight, evening or dawn an oasis of calm in a turbulent post-war world; his fish designs of the 1930s, lively and unfettered, playfully resisting the angularity of the modern machine world; his last floral decorations embodying one final defiant celebration of nature in the face of impending war. In a letter to Beatrice of 20 November 1930, he had voiced this sense of purpose in his art:

I feel there is a need for interesting, individual things. Something with individual thought expressed therein. We want pleasant things to live with. Not extreme, not fashionable, but things that will be the outcome of careful thought, things built with the spirit of love in every part of them. Life will be more worth living when we seek such means of expression.

In his *Individuality*, Voysey used this term to describe what he saw as a defining quality of the true artist, one whose work was neither modish nor eccentric, but which had its own integrity, personal but not self-regarding:

We must first and foremost demand from the artist that he be sincere; his own temperament and sense of proportion he cannot get away from—they must influence his work at every turn, but should not be his motive for addressing us. [...] And to create beauty for others is a joy that must subdue the desire for self-assertion.³³

It was in this way that Moorcroft conceived of his vocation, true to himself in the service of others. Just as his signature changed significantly over nearly fifty years, yet remained the unmistakable mark of its originator, so too his work, for all its different styles, retained its individual spirit, and its enduring appeal. Writing towards the end of Moorcroft's career, on 29 April 1939, one correspondent was categorical about the distinctiveness of his ware: 'All the pieces are very beautiful and as usual easily

³² Unsourced (Australian) newspaper review, WMArchive.

³³ C.F.A. Voysey, *Individuality* (London: Chapman & Hall, 1915), p.75.

distinguishable as your work; I think I should know it anywhere, for there is none other like it, and is always a joy to the eye.'

The very particular nature of this individuality and its impact is powerfully conveyed in two letters written to Moorcroft more than twenty years apart, by writers of very different cultural and social background, yet united in their response to his ware. The first was written from Montreal on 9 August 1923 by Kate Reed, interior designer for Canadian Pacific Railways, for whom Moorcroft had made a pansy tea set before the war. Reed had never met Moorcroft, and yet she clearly sensed his presence in his ware:

I pass Birks's window many times in a month and always gaze at your work, and feel a peculiar nearness to it, and you. [...] Some day I hope we will look into each other's faces, and shake each other's hands, and I will say to you with sincerity: 'You have made the world better, for you have put beauty into it!'

The second, dated 25 August 1944, was written by a resident from the neighbouring town of Hanley, thanking him for showing her round his works. At the centre of her experience was (once again) Moorcroft himself, but in person this time, animating his works and the pottery he created:

I feel I must write and thank you for the lovely gift you made me this afternoon. I am such a lover of colour, and your colours are so beautiful that I shall cherish your vase all my life. It was indeed a privilege to go round your factory. I was struck by the happy spirit that seemed contained therein. Your work is your life, I can feel that. Please go on. It is work such as yours that will live when we are long forgotten. I am proud to have a piece of your handicraft in my possession. Thank you for your generosity.

In many respects, the two letters could not be more different. One describes his ware in a retail environment, the other at its place of origin. One exemplifies its international reach, the other expresses its local impact. One is inspired by pottery of wide-ranging design experiment at a time of post-war prosperity, the other dates from a time of wartime restrictions and a much more limited output of decorated ware. One writer was a successful designer, the other, neither critic, retailer nor artist, was a member of the public reacting instinctively to his work. But beneath these differences, the similarity of the two reactions is all the more striking. Neither letter, significantly, describes a commercial transaction, but a deeper and more significant experience: a sense of delight at the sight of Moorcroft's pottery; an instinctive perception of beauty which inspires a more reflective consideration of its value, extending beyond the immediate present and beyond the appreciation of the writer; and, above all, a recognition of the potter's personal investment in his work and the joyful spirit which radiates from it, vital in its force, enduring in its effect. Both writers clearly felt the need (like so many other correspondents) to communicate the effect of this pottery upon them. And both captured, in their quite different ways, and as well as any subsequent obituary, the individual spirit of William Moorcroft and the unique appeal of his art.

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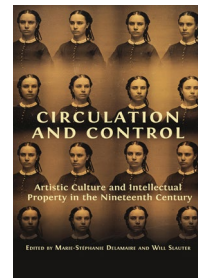


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William Moorcroft, Potter

Individuality by Design

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This comprehensive, scholarly and multi-disciplinary life of the great Stoke-on-Trent potter William Moorcroft offers us a new account of design, ceramic production, and international aesthetics in the first half of the twentieth century. By approaching Moorcroft as an inheritor of the William Morris tradition, Mallinson's work successfully explores the tension between art pottery and industrial design – and Moorcroft's pioneering role within both traditions between the wars. From Buckingham Palace to Liberty's, from the Royal Academy to the New York World's Fair, Moorcroft was a global figure of design excellence, whose place within modernism, ceramic art and the history of the Potteries has now been so compellingly told.

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Jonathan Mallinson gives an entirely convincing account of my grandfather's importance as a potter, whose individuality in both design and production technique set him apart from his contemporaries. But he explores too the courage, integrity and kindness of a man whose sense of vocation, evident both in his pottery and in his dealings with others, won him respect and admiration the world over. Drawing extensively on correspondence, ledgers, and other archival material assembled by my aunt Beatrice, and with over a hundred illustrations of his pottery and associated documents, this book reminds us, as never before, why William Moorcroft was celebrated in his lifetime as one of the foremost ceramic artists of his age.

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