# 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

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# 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.


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> [...] 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 paintresses 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]

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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 portraitures 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]

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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.