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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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.

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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 paintresses. 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 <u>two thousand</u> 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 Tonypandy 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.

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'.

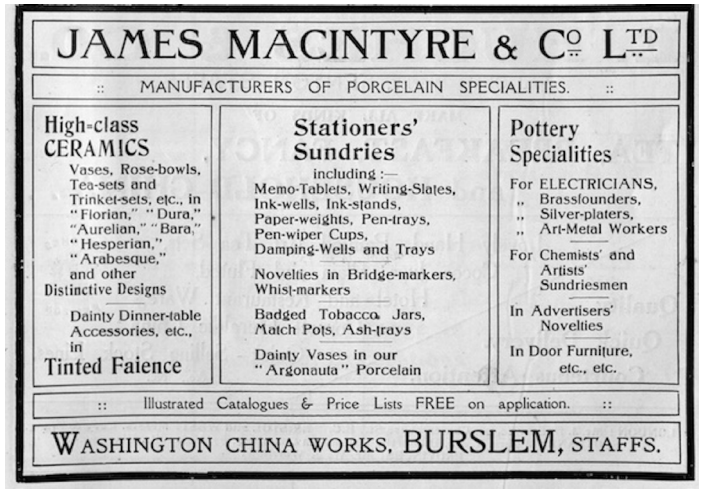

Fig. 40 J. Macintyre & Co. Ltd., Advertisement in the *Pottery Gazette* (June 1910) 'Personal and Commercial Papers of William Moorcroft', Stoke-on-Trent City Archives, SD 1837. CC BY-NC

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:

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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 who 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.