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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PART II

CREATING A STUDIO

6. 1913–14: A New Beginning

1. The Challenges of Freedom

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

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

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

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

1 All unpublished documents referred to in this chapter are located in William Moorcroft: Personal and Commercial Papers, SD1837, Stoke-on-Trent City Archives [WM Archive].

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

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

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

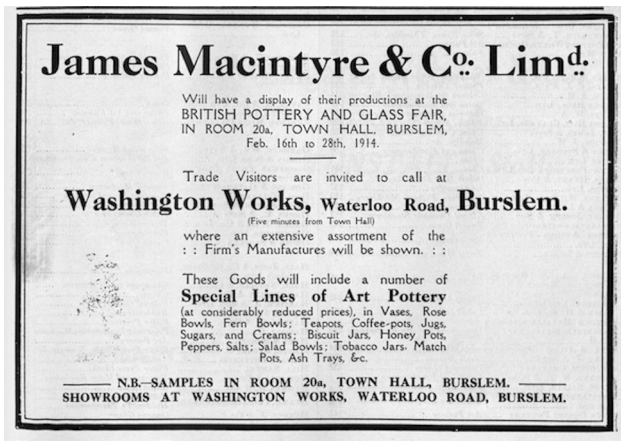


Fig. 47 J. Macintyre & Co. Ltd., Advertisement in the *Pottery Gazette* (February 1914) 'Personal and Commercial Papers of William Moorcroft', Stoke-on-Trent City Archives, SD 1837. CC BY-NC

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

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

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

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

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

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

2. A Modern Studio

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

6 A daughter, Beatrice, was born in August 1914; a son, Walter, followed in 1917.
7 *PG* (May 1913), p.580.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

8 'Old and New in the Potteries', *PG* (January 1914), p.41.
9 *PG* (October 1914), p.1163.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

11 'Women in Pottery Works', *PG* (October 1915), 1106–07 (p.1107).
12 *PG* (October 1913), 1147–49 (p.1147).
13 Ibid.

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

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

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

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

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

Moorcroft's works were certainly different from modern factories, but this alone did not make them unique. Other enterprises had been set up to be different from the model of industrial mass production, focussing on handcraft production. But the Moorcroft works was different from these, too, both in conception and structure. It was clearly different from art pottery studios such as those at Doulton Lambeth, Wedgwood, or Pilkington, which were part of a larger industrial enterprise, enjoyed cross-subsidy from these, and worked with teams of designers, some independent, others employed by the firm. The same was true of autonomous manufactories, such as Gray's decorating studio. In such cases, the Art Director brought together individual artists, each free to create more or less at will, thereby lending great variety to the output; the unifying element was the name of the firm itself. William Moorcroft, though, was different. He was not a manager, fostering the creativity of others. He was at the very centre of his works, the sole designer, glaze chemist and manufacturer, he and his assistants united by a single purpose, to realise his designs. It was a fusion of roles for which there was no equivalent at the time. In structure, he stood midway between independent potters such as Sir Edmund Elton, the Martin brothers, or Reginald Wells, and those working

14 Recorded interview with Beatrice Moorcroft, in WM Archive.

with a team of designer-decorators, like Bernard Moore, or C.H. Brannam. He had the freedom of an independent potter, but a means of production on a larger scale than he would have been able to achieve if he had worked alone. It is what Liberty's had understood, and clearly encouraged. In this respect, Moorcroft's project was quite different, too, from that of William Morris at Merton Abbey, which also brought together collaborating artists. But in one respect, and a crucial one, he was very much in the Morris mould: the 'studio' atmosphere evoked in the *Pottery Gazette* report and recalled by former employees was a modern realisation of the working environment described by Lewis Day in his article on Morris in *The Art Journal* [*AJ*]:

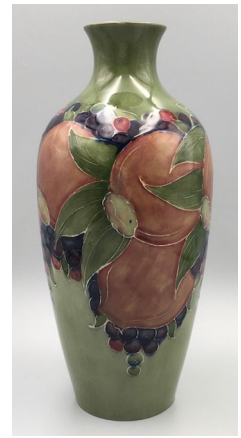
> There is nothing of the modern 'factory' about his 'mills'; an old-world air clings to the place, an atmosphere of quiet and of some leisure, in which the workers, not harried to death, have space to breathe, and to enjoy something of the repose and beauty of the world.[15]

3. Artist and Manufacturer

Moorcroft's first year in his new works was not just about settling into a productive rhythm, it was also about promoting his pottery, its originality and its ambitions; his new status as an independent potter gave him the freedom, and the need, to do so. An early, high-profile opportunity to exhibit his ware was the British Pottery and Glass Fair which opened in Burslem on 16 February 1914. Organised by Herbert Baily, editor of *The Connoisseur*, it built on the growing appreciation of British pottery inspired by the royal visit to Stoke in 1913. *The Connoisseur* saw it heralding 'a new era for the English potting industry', and a report in *The New Witness* quoted Baily's description of it as 'the most complete, varied and representative epitome of the arts of modern potting and glass making that has ever been collected together'.[16] Moorcroft was keen to take full advantage of this opportunity, inviting Baily on 10 January 1914 to 'honour us with a visit at our new works' and looking forward to the opportunity to show him 'pottery absolutely distinct from all other potters'.

Even in these difficult early months, Moorcroft continued to develop old designs and create new ones, often exploring bolder contrasts of colour. Some versions of Cornflower dating from this time juxtaposed flowers in rich purple and yellow, while others consisted of purple flowers alone, standing out against the paler ground. Similarly striking in their contrasts were some versions of Pomegranate, still characterised by luxuriance of colour but sparer and more stylised in conception. And it was at this time, too, that Moorcroft introduced a speckled blue colouring which would be the background of several designs over the next decade. He produced objects both functional and decorative, some with simple decoration in reserved white panels, others with ornament in a ruby lustre.

15 L.F. Day, 'William Morris and his Art', *AJ* (1899), Extra Number (Easter Art Annual), 1–32 (pp.5–6).
16 'The Fair in the Potteries', *The New Witness* (26 February 1914), 539–40 (p.540).



(L) Fig. 49 William Moorcroft, Cornflower design in new palettes: Yellow and Purple (dated 1914), 20cm; Purple (1914), 14.5cm. CC BY-NC

(R) Fig. 50 William Moorcroft, Variant on Pomegranate design (dated 1.1914), 29cm. CC BY-NC

Fig. 51 William Moorcroft, Designs on Powder Blue ground: Lidded jar with Forget-me-not panels (1914), 15cm; 2-handled vase with Prunus under Ruby Lustre glaze (dated 1914), 10cm. CC BY-NC

Fig. 52 William Moorcroft, Early examples of Persian design: 2-handled vase (1914), 15cm; knopped vase (1914), 22.5cm; hyacinth vase (1914), 15cm. CC BY-NC

His most ambitious design of this time, however, was known as 'Persian'. It was a sinuous floral motif which exploited the rich and varied tones of red, blue and green developed in his Pansy and Wisteria designs, and which displayed the ever more sophisticated decorating skills of his staff. It was clearly unsuitable for manufacture in any quantity, its decoration almost certainly restricted to his most experienced paintresses; it was designed to be exclusive, and it was.

Moorcroft included an example of 'Persian' in a selection of pieces sent to illustrate an article on his ware in *The Connoisseur*, 'A Magazine for Collectors'. In his covering letter of 21 March 1914, he asked for its early return: 'it is the only piece we have made so far and we should like to compare with it our later examples'. Moorcroft was evidently keen to promote it as soon and as widely as possible. He went to the additional expense of commissioning a colour insert for the article in which 'Persian' was illustrated alongside three other designs, contrasting in style but all equally rich in colour: Pansy, Pomegranate, and heraldic ware.

Fig. 53 Moorcroft's pottery illustrated in *The Connoisseur* (May 1914). 'Personal and Commercial Papers of William Moorcroft', Stoke-on-Trent City Archives, SD 1837. CC BY-NC

The article appeared in May 1914 with the following commentary:

> An idea of the rich colouring of the ware can be gathered from the coloured plate which appears in this issue. The centre vase, as can be seen in the illustration, is companion to the bowl which is entirely covered with a conventional design of pansies, while the vase itself is embellished with a floral decoration on a cream ground, in keeping with the bowl. The vases on each side are entirely different in shape, colour and decoration. The cup-shaped vessel on the left displays this firm's ability in embellishing pottery with heraldic devices in tasteful form, while the other on the right, is an example of the excellent manner in which their designers artistically combine a flower and fruit decoration.[17]

17 C. Vernon, 'Staffordshire Pottery', *The Connoisseur* (May 1914), 59–69 (pp.60–61).

The insert provided a striking image, and Moorcroft wrote appreciatively to Baily on 2 May 1914; he was less content, though, with the notice itself. From his perspective, the review showed little appreciation of the distinctiveness of each design. To equate Persian with Pansy was to confuse a delicate, mimetic style of ornament with a more stylised one; and to characterise Pomegranate as a design of 'Flower and Fruit' was to misrepresent the nature of the motif, and to underplay its exotic quality. What concerned him above all, though, was the use of the term 'designers', which implicitly attributed the broad range of designs to the inspiration of multiple artists. These four contrasting pieces were all Moorcroft's own work, a clear sign of his diversity as a designer; it is what made his ware distinctive, and it is what the journalist had failed to appreciate:

> […] the writer is almost entirely wrong regarding the character and means of production. […] as you know, this pottery is entirely an individual production, yet your writer states that the firm's designers artistically combine etc etc. This is a serious mis-statement, as the individual character of the production is a matter of great value.

Baily took the comments to heart, and another notice was published in the following issue of the journal, describing in more detail the techniques employed in this ware. As Moorcroft began his independent career, he was keen to explain the originality of a production method which underlay both the physical distinctiveness and aesthetic quality of his pottery. The second notice was headed 'Moorcroft Ware', and stressed that this pottery was 'thoroughly homogeneous', its constituent elements indivisibly combined by firing at 'an excessively high [temperature] which would cause ordinary pigments to fly'.[18] Stressed above all were Moorcroft's skills as a potter and ceramic chemist. Mastery of colour and glaze effects were implicitly taken to be the ultimate criterion of excellence in modern pottery, and Moorcroft was placed on an equal footing with potters widely celebrated for their technical accomplishment. Even without the benefits of a flambé kiln, his ability to create colours of unusual depth and richness was clearly appreciated: 'his pieces, in the harmony and perfection of their chromatic arrangement, vie with any examples of modern ceramic art.'[19]

The distinctive quality of Moorcroft's pottery was already widely established, and he was recognised as both a craftsman and a designer. In August 1913, *Pottery and Glass* published a notice headed 'Art Pottery Line Changes Hands' which welcomed Moorcroft's new works and the continued production of a unique range of art pottery: 'He will have the services of the same artists and workmen as were heretofore employed under him. The ware […] shows a marked originality of treatment, and is decidedly distinctive.'[20] And in a long report on the Ghent Fair, *The British Architect* focussed on Moorcroft as the designer of ware whose artistic and technical qualities

18 'Moorcroft Ware', *The Connoisseur* (June 1914), 116.
19 Ibid.
20 'Art Pottery Changes Hands,' *Pottery and Glass* (August 1913); press cutting in WM Archive, n.p.

set it apart; even in line drawings, without the benefit of colour, the 'special character' of Moorcroft's designs was evident:

> Refinement of drawing, following very suitably the shapes of the pieces, and softness and richness of colour, characterise the distinctive pottery produced under the personal direction of Mr William Moorcroft. […] Our sketches suggest the special character of this beautifully-produced ware.[21]

Fig. 54 Pots from Moorcroft's exhibit at Ghent illustrated in *The British Architect* (12 September 1913). 'Personal and Commercial Papers of William Moorcroft', Stoke-on-Trent City Archives, SD 1837. CC BY-NC

An article, published in the *Canadian Mail* explored the quality of 'personality' which distinguished his work, a quality which was indescribable, but unmistakeable nevertheless:

> A visit to Mr Moorcroft's workshops is a lesson in the degree to which individuality and personality can be introduced into potting. All 'Moorcroft' ware is handmade, and each separate piece bears the signature of its maker. To Mr Moorcroft belongs the credit for the design, and to him and to the band of skilled workers he has gathered together at Burslem belongs the credit for the wonderful perfection of colouring and finish which his ware possesses.[22]

This individual quality was the source of its appeal, having the immediacy (and inimitable uniqueness) of personal expression. Its artistic value was self-evident, and its monetary value could only increase. This is what the collector understood:

21 'The Ghent Exhibition', *The British Architect* (12 September 1913), 183–97 (p.195).
22 'Art and Personality: "Moorcroft ware" and the Desires of the Collector', *Canadian Mail* (Supplement, 7 March 1914), n.p.

> Already, in fact, something of a 'Moorcroft' cult has arisen, for the output of the ware, individually treated as each piece is, is necessarily small, and is limited moreover to the life of the artist, and to the expert staff working under his direction. 'Moorcroft' ware, therefore, is sought after by the collector with an eye to the future, and [...] will undoubtedly in the course of time rank with those rare products of past masters which are the showpieces of the collector's cabinet.[23]

Moorcroft was not explicitly distinguished from a commercial designer, but there was no need to do so; it was widely recognised that industry had quite different priorities. In August 1913, the *Pottery Gazette* argued that the public's nostalgia for familiar styles of the past was inevitably the focus of modern production: 'the business of the industrial potter is only to follow the public taste'.[24] The issue arose again a few months later; the commercial disadvantages of originality were seen to be self-evident, particularly for small firms: 'they cannot afford to keep a designer capable of turning out more or less original work, and, what is more, they cannot afford to wait for the public to appreciate and buy it'.[25] But this had not been Moorcroft's experience at Macintyre's, nor was it his ambition at his new works. When he stressed the originality of his pottery, he was affirming that individuality of design could be just as broadly appealing, and commercially viable, as revivalism.

Moorcroft was not the only one to set up a craft studio at this time, nor was his pottery unique in being distinguished from the uniformity of industrial ware. Just weeks before he moved into his new works, Roger Fry founded the Omega Workshops in Bloomsbury. In some ways modelled on Morris & Co., Fry's enterprise involved fine artists in decorative arts design, producing painted furniture, murals, stained glass and textiles as well as pottery. In a letter to Bernard Shaw on 11 December 1912, Fry lamented the derivative nature of English design: 'Since the complete decadence of the Morris movement, nothing has been done in England but pastiche and more or less unscrupulous imitation of old work.'[26] And in his 'Prospectus' he promoted the distinctive qualities of decoration by hand, contrasting 'our peculiar national worship of mechanically perfect finish' with 'the more vital beauty of artistic handling', the one implying work made for profit, the other work made for pleasure.[27] This distinction was echoed in *The Times*, which noted particularly the intention of the Workshops to sell direct to the public:

> The artist who designs objects sold in the ordinary shop must design according to the demands of the shopman, not according to his own ideas; and this, no doubt, is the reason why most commercial art is modish rather than beautiful.[28]

23 Ibid.
24 'Reproductions', *PG* (August 1913), 889.
25 'Designs and their Ownership', *PG* (January 1914), 66–67 (p.67).
26 Roger Fry, 'Omega Workshops Fundraising Letter', *A Roger Fry Reader* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 196–97 (p.196).
27 Roger Fry, 'Prospectus for the Omega Workshops', *RFR*, 198–200 (p.200).
28 'A New Venture in Art. Exhibition at the Omega Workshops', *The Times* (9 July 1913), p.4.

For all its apparent similarities, however, Moorcroft's project was very different in crucial ways. The Omega Workshops were more concerned with decoration, the application of art to objects, than with the creation of the object in its entirety; the 'Prospectus' made this clear:

> [...] they undertake almost all kinds of decorative design, more particularly those in which the artist can engage without specialised training in craftsmanship.[29]

And it was the decorative aspect of the Omega products which attracted attention; for one critic in *The Observer*, the art, for all its quality, was applied, additional, even unnecessary:

> The impression derived from all of them is merely surface decoration—often superfluous—and not substance or structure. Things are not decorated, but disguised [...].[30]

For Moorcroft, though, the creative act was not confined to decoration, it involved the design and creation of the object as a whole. In its review of the British Pottery and Glass Fair, *The New Witness* included a paragraph on Moorcroft's exhibit, all the more striking as it provided no detailed comments on any other individual display. It identified as the defining characteristic of Moorcroft's ware its integrity of design:

> Moorcroft ware is known as 'homogeneous' pottery, for the reason that it is all of a piece. The designs on a Moorcroft vase are under glaze. They are not laid on by an artist's brush. The vase appears from the furnace perfectly formed. And the colours are practically indestructible.[31]

Such qualities had been identified before in Moorcroft's work, but they took on a new significance now. Whether consciously or not, the report underlined the difference between Moorcroft's ware and that of the Omega Workshops; his was not 'surface decoration', merely applied, its art was integral to the object, 'homogeneous'.

But there was more. For the *Observer* reviewer, the objects created at the Omega Workshops had lost their functionality under the weight of the applied art, they were objects 'to be looked at, not to be used'.[32] The assessment carried a certain irony, given that Fry had identified the 'making of objects for common life' as the objective of his Workshops.[33] In his review of the exhibition of Early English Earthenware in 1914, he singled out the inalienable social responsibility of the potter, at all times and in all places:

> [...] pottery is of all the arts the most intimately connected with life, and therefore the one in which some sort of connexion between the artist's mood and the life of his contemporaries may be most readily allowed. A poet or even a painter may live apart

29 Roger Fry, 'Prospectus', *RFR*, p.199.
30 'Post-Impressionism in the Home', *The Observer*, (14 December 1913), p.8.
31 'The Fair in the Potteries', *The New Witness* (26 February 1914), 539–40 (p.540).
32 'Post-Impressionism in the Home', p.8.
33 Roger Fry, 'Preface to the Omega Workshops Catalogue', *RFR*, 201.

> from his age, and may create for a hypothetical posterity; but the potter cannot, or certainly does not, go on indefinitely creating pots that no one will use. He must come to some sort of terms with his fellow-man.[34]

But if his own pottery may not have fallen into this category, the same was not true of William Moorcroft. Since the beginning of his career, 'joy for the user' was as important a goal as 'joy for the maker'. His advertisement in the catalogue for the Burslem Fair expressly included both functional and decorative objects in the same composite category 'Pottery for every Household'. He was creating individual art works, but also objects whose quality of design enriched the practices of daily life.

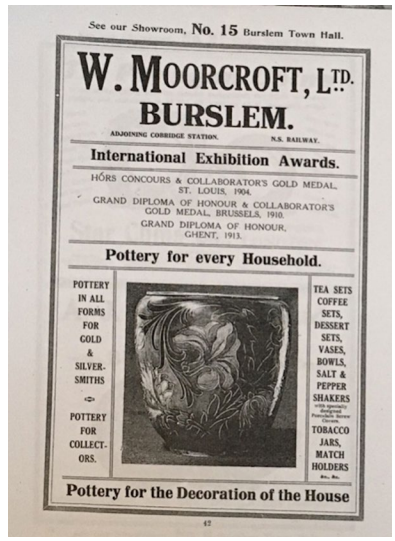


Fig. 55 Moorcroft's advertisement in the Catalogue of the British Pottery and Glass Fair, Burslem 1914. 'Personal and Commercial Papers of William Moorcroft', Stoke-on-Trent City Archives, SD 1837. CC BY-NC

And this is what the reporter in *The New Witness* clearly recognised; his was an art produced not simply for his own pleasure, but for a wider public:

> Mr Moorcroft is a manufacturer, but he is also an artist. While realising that it is necessary to live, he thinks that it is even more necessary to live beautifully. So he has set himself to the production of objects of utility which have a correspondingly artistic value.[35]

Unlike the Omega Workshops, Moorcroft distributed his work through retail outlets, but this clearly did not imply that it was considered 'modish rather than beautiful'. Far from it.

This approach was significant. Less than a month after the opening of the Burslem Fair, Cologne hosted the inaugural exhibition of the Deutscher Werkbund,

34 Roger Fry, 'The Art of Pottery in England', *The Burlington Magazine* (March 1914); in *RFR*, 202–04 (p.202).

35 'The Fair in the Potteries', ibid., p.540.

a progressive, state-sponsored association of designers and manufacturers, keen to increase the competitiveness of German manufacture. Originally inspired by the Arts and Crafts movement, it applied its principles of good design to modern industrial production. It was anticipated in familiar terms in *The Times*:

> The exhibition as a whole will illustrate [...] the application to every sort of material and object, however common, of taste in design and honesty in workmanship. As such, it should be a worthy object of pilgrimage for all lovers of the beautiful in everyday life.[36]

It was Moorcroft's aim, too, to appeal to 'all lovers of the beautiful in everyday life', as he made clear in his advertisement for the Burslem Fair. His pottery 'for every household' not only covered the range from expensive to affordable, but dissolved distinctions between the functional and the decorative; it was designed to bring pleasure in its use. In the course of this turbulent year, he introduced a range of teaware created very much in this spirit. It was classically simple in its forms, unadorned yet distinctive in its colouring. Twenty years later, in a quite different aesthetic climate, it would be hailed as a triumph of modern design. It was Powder Blue.

Fig. 56 William Moorcroft, Cup and Saucer in Powder Blue (1914), 6cm. CC BY-NC

4. Conclusions

As Moorcroft moved into his new works, the world of pottery manufacture was changing. William Burton's three Cantor lectures delivered at the Royal Society of Arts in April and May 1914 discussed modern developments in casting, tile making and firing; the *Pottery Gazette* summarised their import:

> [...] modern pottery manufacture was being rapidly transformed from an industry in which handicraft was all-important [...] into an industry organised on the large scale, in which the technical chemist and the engineer would play the most important part.[37]

36 'Cologne Exhibition, 1914', *The Times* (10 March 1914), p.5.
37 'Cantor Lectures on Recent Developments in the Ceramic Industry', *PG* (June 1914), 706–08 (p.706).

Moorcroft is unlikely to have felt comfortable with that analysis, and certainly not as it applied to his own ambitions. He had placed himself in quite a unique position: he was both designer and manufacturer, and was free to make his own decisions, to elaborate his own priorities, to exact his own standards. In this, he came close to the model of William Howson Taylor, possibly the only other example of an independent craft potter working with a small team and whose work was displayed and sold in retail outlets as well as in galleries and private exhibitions. Moorcroft's was an enterprise which retained the very craft of pottery which Burton saw declining in the industry, but it was doing so in a way which was innovative and almost certainly unique: a studio environment creating both functional and decorative objects for retail sale, and where the whole production system reflected the values and the personality of the artist himself.

In a letter written to Moorcroft on 23 February 1914, his European traveller, C.W.A. John, lamented the delayed dispatch of some ordered items; ironically, he saw Moorcroft's dual role as designer and manufacturer as the cause of the problems, imagining that the manufacturer's sense of good business practice had been swamped by the artist's (reputed) unconcern with practicalities:

> You know very well that I do admire your artistic goods, and I know to sell them, but if I come to think of the more or less un-business-like way you choose to go on, I think that I have to abstain from offering your goods any further. You are too much of an artist to consider how difficult it is, from the point of a merchant, to go on with an artist, the same being his own manufacturer.

Unaware, no doubt, of the problems which had hounded Moorcroft in the opening months at his new works, John dismissed as a weakness the very quality which gave Moorcroft's ware its individuality. It was the sign of Moorcroft's artistic integrity, but it was also a commercial strength. This point was clearly implied in a letter to Moorcroft from Mary G. Phillips, dated 16 May 1914, who commented on the unique power of his personalising signature:

> I hope when you have a stamp made, it will be one in your own handwriting. It is a novelty from the usual printing, and the personal touch adds to the value. People have already commented on it, and seem to like it.

Significantly, Moorcroft would not do this. For him, the personal touch had to be just that, personal; signing his ware was not a gimmick, or a look, it was the confirmation of his presence at the very heart of production.

Writing to *The Times* on 26 January 1914, May Morris (daughter of William Morris and English artisan in her own right) pointed out the enlightened and collaborative attitude to the decorative arts implied by the state support for the forthcoming Cologne Exhibition of the Deutscher Werkbund. She lamented the absence of a similar commitment in Britain, her letter culminating in a rousing profession of faith:

> Will art pay? I answer, Yes, in the long run. In truth, if one had not the passionate belief of the founders of the society I speak of that the matters with which they busied their lives would in the far future 'pay' very well indeed, one would not think it worthwhile to go on living at all.[38]

Moorcroft, too, was setting out to prove that art 'pays', to demonstrate that commercial success was not incompatible with originality or artistic quality, and he was doing so not with government funding, but with the financial backing of Liberty's and the moral support of his wife. It was a project not without risk or challenges, but his sense of purpose, and his self-belief, were evident, and were captured tellingly in a portrait by the celebrated London photographer Hay Wrightson, taken at about this time.

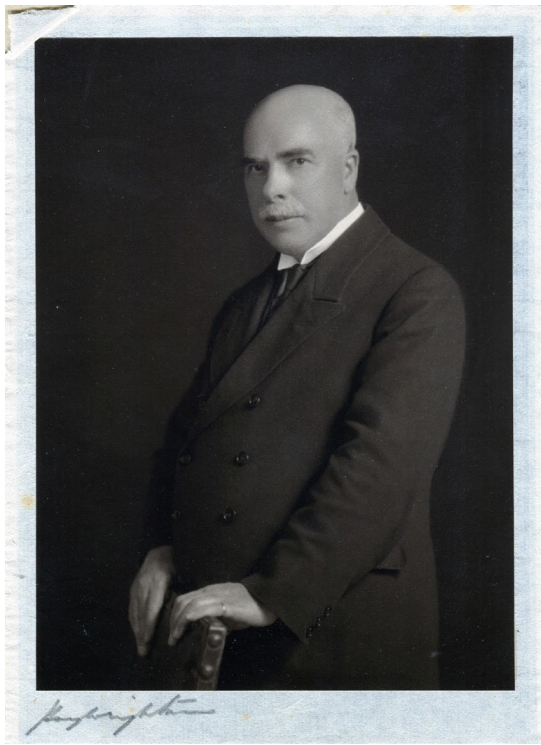


Fig. 57 William Moorcroft, portrait by Hay Wrightson, c.1914. Photograph. Family papers. CC BY-NC

At the end of a difficult year Moorcroft had established the foundations of his independence, and he may well have been looking forward to a period of more peaceful creativity. It was not to be.

38 May Morris, 'Arts and Crafts', *The Times* (26 January 1914), p.6.