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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8. 1919–23: A Lone Furrow

1. Peace and its Aftermath

The months immediately following the Armistice seemed to promise much. Retailers were desperate for stock, and the *Pottery Gazette* of April 1919 recorded a 'phenomenal' post-war boom, weakened only by the difficulties of keeping up with demand.[1] But for all these signs of economic vigour, the situation was inherently fragile, and the rising cost of raw materials and of labour was pricing manufacturers out of the international market. By the autumn of 1920, trade was stagnating. The declining value of European currencies made imports unanswerably cheap, and exports prohibitively expensive; the spectre of foreign competition loomed large. Added to which, a miners' strike in 1920 reduced pottery production by almost three quarters, and another, in 1921, brought many manufacturers to their knees. By mid-1921, the *Pottery Gazette* reported an industry at rock bottom: 'It would be difficult indeed to recall a time in the history of the present generation when the pottery trade was rendered more inactive than it is at the present moment.'[2] The economic boom had lasted for less than three years; the post-war general public was buying now by price not quality. To retain prices at their high level meant fewer orders and shorter working hours; but to reduce prices meant smaller profit margins and lower wages. At a time of rising inflation, this was a stern test for industrial relations, and for manufacturers of better quality wares the dilemma was particularly acute. The route to commercial survival seemed to lead, inevitably and irreversibly, towards the mass production of cheap wares; modernisation and mechanisation were becoming the watchwords. Peace had brought depression, not prosperity.

Like many others, Moorcroft struggled in the months following the Armistice to keep up with orders; the demand for his ware was relentless. Treeby & Bolton, Keswick, wrote on 16 April 1920, eager for stock, any stock:

1 'After the Fair', *Pottery Gazette and Glass Trade Review* [*PG*] (April 1919), 339–341 (p.339).
2 'Notes from the Potteries', *PG* (June 1921), 940–942 (p.940).

https://doi.org/10.11647/OBP.0349.08

> We are really getting desperate, we have nothing but small trays of your ware left […] We want everything, large and small, decorated, vases, bowls etc. As I told you before, we have sold nothing else but 'Moorcroft' this Easter, consequently it is finished. [Emphasis original][3]

This demand continued well into 1921 and beyond, when the industry as a whole had begun to experience a slump. The situation at the Army and Navy stores described by Edith Harcourt Smith in a letter of 22 November 1921 was typical:

> […] the buyers of the China and Pottery at the Army and Navy stores are in a condition of despair at not having received cups and saucers in the blue from you. They have to refuse orders daily, and say they could sell hundreds if you would let them have them. Far greater sale for these than anything else as the public crave for them ! […] They say there is nothing so popular as your pottery!

Moorcroft's export markets were no less buoyant. In Australia, J.Walch and Sons, Hobart, wrote enthusiastically on 20 September 1919, after a shipment of 'Orchid' and 'Poppy' designs. Whatever Moorcroft made would sell well:

> We made a special display in our window, and sold half the Orchid ware on the first day. Nothing so beautiful has been seen in Hobart, and on all sides we have flattering remarks about it.

And from the U.S. John Davison, Inc., wrote on 22 October 1920, requesting 'a good supply of pieces in the Light Green and Ruby Lustres', 'a good supply of bowls in all lustres' and 'some good shipments of Blue Flambé, Pomegranate, Pansy and Wisteria'.

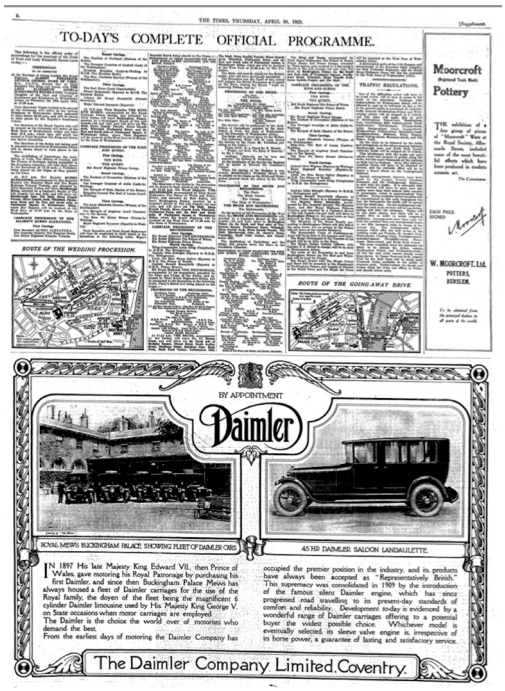
For all the general stagnation in exports, Moorcroft's ware was clearly an exception, and new markets were opening up all the time. On 4 May 1920, British Products Supply Ltd., Lisbon, wrote to him about representation in Portugal, recognising that his ware was 'something altogether out of the common'. An agent's letter dated 28 May 1920 remarked that 'a good market could be established for your goods in South Africa'; and agents for Ree & Cie in Manchester approached him on 23 September 1921 to supply an exclusive hotel in Brazil: 'The hotel in question is being fitted on the lines of the finest hotels in Europe, and only high class goods with the designs of the very best taste are required.' Moorcroft's exhibits at British Industries Fairs [BIF] attracted extensive international interest, and following the Fair of 1920, he sent Claude Taylor at the Department of Trade a list of his orders, which included sales to France, Belgium, Holland, Spain and Sweden; Canada and the US; S. Africa; Australia; Ceylon [Sri Lanka]; Chile and Brazil. The appeal of his ware extended the world over, and when other firms questioned the commercial benefit of attending the Fair, as the miners' strike took its toll, Moorcroft exhibited as before. Taylor wrote to him on 16 June 1921, grateful for the continued support of 'a really whole-hearted supporter like yourself.'

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

To survive in this post-war world, Moorcroft did not choose the route of economical mass production; he kept faith with high-quality ware, and built on the reputation it had earned over the past twenty years. Advertising was an important part of this strategy, and it was wide-ranging. He promoted his work both in fashionable lifestyle publications such as *Country Life* or *Vogue*, and in the newly launched *Our Homes and Gardens*, which had a growing middle-class readership; he advertised, too, in art magazines such as *The Connoisseur or the Journal of the Royal Society of Arts*. Advertisements were regularly placed in prominent positions. *Country Life* wrote to him on 10 May 1920, promising a 'very nice top right hand position in the early pages'; the *Journal of the Royal Society of Arts* offered him on 12 June 1920, 'the same special position facing first page of reading matter'; his advertisements in *The World's Work* were all on the Table of Contents page; and an advertisement appeared too on the front cover of the *Industrial Art Journal*. He showed particular enterprise in placing advertisements at moments of national significance. *The Court Journal* wrote to him on 14 March 1919, confirming an arrangement to 'do something for you' in a special issue marking the signing of the Treaty of Versailles, and he advertised conspicuously in the weeks leading up to the wedding of the Duke of York (the future King George VI) and Lady Elizabeth Bowes-Lyon. On 29 March 1923, *Vogue* confirmed his request for space in the issue devoted to the royal occasion, and on the day of the wedding itself, 26 April 1923, he advertised in *The Times*, taking space alongside the half page devoted to 'Today's Complete Official Programme', a page which every reader of *The Times* could be guaranteed to look at that day. It was a confident and ambitious move; the only other publicity on that page was placed by Daimler, Royal Warrant holders since 1902. Moorcroft's advertisement prominently displayed the heading 'Moorcroft Pottery', the affirmation 'Each piece signed' (followed by the signature), and an extract from a review in *The Connoisseur* which identified in his pottery 'some of the most beautiful effects which have been produced in modern ceramic art'.[4] The advertisement was designed to appeal to those with a taste for luxury; the target market was imperial, even global, as readers were reminded in one final statement of the quality and availability of the ware: 'To be obtained from the principal dealers in all parts of the world'. Its concise, incisive style was characteristic of Moorcroft's advertisements, although it was clearly at variance with current thinking about successful marketing copy. The orthodox view was that 'more attention should be given to the commodity than the name',[5] but Moorcroft took the opposite line, and did so fearlessly. Some advertisements were strikingly spare, even minimalist, offering the reader neither images nor descriptions of his designs; they gave prominence instead to the name Moorcroft, all that was needed to convey the qualities of the ware.

4 *The Times* (26 April 1923), *Supplement*, p.ii.

5 W.H. Smedley, 'Advertising as an Asset', lecture to the Art Section of the Ceramic Society, reported in *PG* (March 1923), 446–47 (p.446).


TO-DAY'S COMPLETE OFFICIAL PROGRAMME.

ROUTE OF THE WEDDING PROCESSION.

ROUTE OF THE GOING-AWAY DRIVE.

Moorcroft Pottery

W. MOORCROFT, Ltd. POTTERS, BURSLEM.

BY APPOINTMENT

Daimler

ROYAL MEWS BUCKINGHAM PALACE, SHOWING FLEET OF DAIMLER CARS

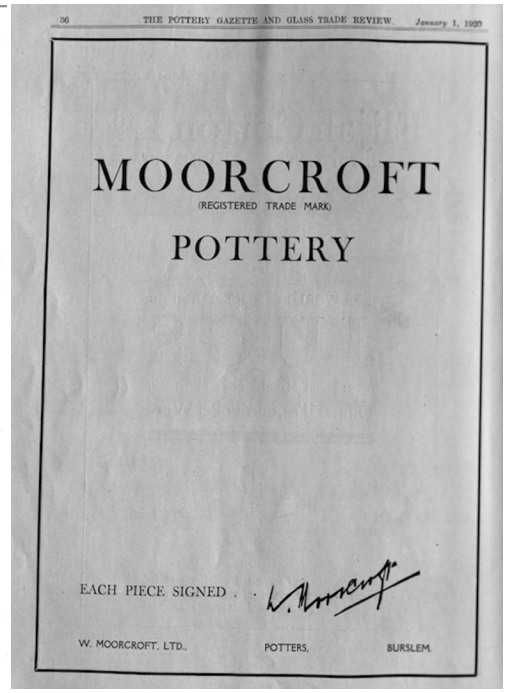
45 HP. DAIMLER SALOON LANDAULETTE.

IN 1897 His late Majesty King Edward VII., then Prince of Wales, gave motoring his Royal Patronage by purchasing his first Daimler, and since then Buckingham Palace Mews has always housed a fleet of Daimler carriages for the use of the Royal family, the doyen of the fleet being the magnificent 6 cylinder Daimler limousine used by His Majesty King George V. on State occasions when motor carriages are employed.

The Daimler is the choice the world over of motorists who demand the best.

From the earliest days of motoring the Daimler Company has occupied the premier position in the industry, and its products have always been accepted as "Representatively British." This supremacy was consolidated in 1909 by the introduction of the famous silent Daimler engine, which has since progressed road travelling to its present-day standards of comfort and reliability. Development to-day is evidenced by a wonderful range of Daimler carriages offering to a potential buyer the widest possible choice. Whichever model is eventually selected, its sleeve valve engine is, irrespective of its horse power, a guarantee of lasting and satisfactory service.

The Daimler Company Limited, Coventry.



(L) Fig. 68 Moorcroft's advertisement in *The Times* (26 April 1923). 'Personal and Commercial Papers of William Moorcroft', Stoke-on-Trent City Archives, SD 1837. CC BY-NC

(R) Fig. 69 Moorcroft's advertisement in the *Pottery Gazette* (January 1920), 'Personal and Commercial Papers of William Moorcroft', Stoke-on-Trent City Archives, SD 1837. CC BY-NC

Much more effusive was the promotion of his pottery by retailers. In Canada, his ware featured in an advertisement by Stanley Mills & Co., Ltd., Hamilton, Ontario, dated 21 July 1920; its scarcity merely intensified its already distinctive appeal:

> Moorcroft Ware has arrived, our first shipment in six years. Words fail us when we attempt to describe it. No ware made any place in the wide world is anything like it. […] Once seen, your sense of the beautiful will never allow you to forget Moorcroft Ware.

And on 29 September 1920, the Robert Simpson Company (one of Canada's leading department store chains) placed an advertisement in Toronto's *The Globe*. Moorcroft's pottery was credited with a transformative power; it was not just functional, it was life-enhancing:

> There is a fascination about fine china that is not found elsewhere. It makes the breakfast room a radiant place; it turns a brew of tea into pure ambrosia; it stirs up the latent artistic sense. […] Witness Moorcroft ware. The man himself is an artist, an idealist. […] Each piece is handmade, no two can be alike. Each, you can realise, has had individual care and attention, and each is signed by the old craftsman himself.

Moorcroft was now, both literally and metaphorically, a household name; and that name was his. The impact of the ware was attributed directly to his personal involvement in

production; it was work with individual character, it was not the standardised output of a firm.

Celebration of Moorcroft's pottery extended to publications of wide national circulation. It featured in an article published in the *Daily Mail*, its adaptability to different decors an essential part of its appeal:

> Nothing, for instance, could give one a greater sense of satisfaction at breakfast time than a set of cups and saucers in the deep lapis lazuli blue of some of the Moorcroft pottery, with which either a dark oak or polished mahogany table forms an equally happy contrast.[6]

It was successful because it suited a wide range of tastes, but also because it was both functional and beautiful; its place was in the modern home, and not just the collector's cabinet. It was chosen for a display by the court florist Edward Goodyear, catching the eye of the Hon. Mrs C.W. Forester, celebrated fashion journalist, in an article published in *The Daily Telegraph*. The elegance of a shop window could be replicated, it was implied, in the home of the reader:

> The modern window dresser is an artist. […] This week, for instance, Goodyear, in one of his attractive corner shops at the Bond Street end of the Royal Arcade, fills a window with innumerable sizes and shapes of old-gold Moorcroft pottery to hold various yellowish-brown species of spring flowers.[7]

Such popularity was particularly significant at a time when pressures were increasing on manufacturers of high-quality wares. For all the shrinking market, Moorcroft's sales remained buoyant. In 1918–19, income grew by just over 35%, an improvement which more or less matched the increase in his wage bill for the year. The following year, growth was even more striking, a rise of nearly 73%. If trade was stagnating in the industry as a whole during 1921, Moorcroft's sales rose a further 15%; this did not completely offset a 26% rise in working costs, but it represented nevertheless a vigorous response to the economic challenges of the year. Sales grew by a further 20% in 1921–22; and in 1922–23, as trading conditions continued to deteriorate, they increased again, albeit by a modest 1%. At the end of this year, his trading income stood at £23,760; since the end of the war, it had increased more than threefold.

Moorcroft was no less vulnerable to financial pressures than other factories, far from it; his wage bill more than doubled in the first three years of peace, even though his workforce over this same period increased by less than 20%. But as the industry as a whole suffered a decline in worsening economic conditions, the smaller size of Moorcroft's factory (and the resourcefulness of Moorcroft himself) allowed him to negotiate these pressures. He was one of very few manufacturers to keep his works functioning full-time during the colliery strikes of 1920 and 1921, using wood to fire

6 'Hand-made Pottery in the Home', *Daily Mail* (22 March 1922), p.15.
7 C.W. Forester, 'Fashions and Fancies', *The Daily Telegraph* (7 March 1923), p.9.

the kilns when coal supplies were exhausted. And his thriving sales underpinned a consecutive run of profits. In 1918–19, a profit of more than £1,704 was declared, a significant improvement on the loss of the previous year; in 1922–23, his profit was £7,895, an increase of more than four and a half times. Even in 1920–21, the year of the miners' strike, he made a profit of £670. In the challenging conditions, this was a significant outcome, and it had a significant consequence. Shortly after the AGM, on 28 September 1921, Harold Blackmore wrote to Moorcroft with a proposal; summarising the terms on which the firm had been established in 1913, he clearly recognised the progress Moorcroft had made:

> Then we were concerned to see that we had absolute control and as much security as possible. Today, with an established business, we are quite willing that you should have equal voting power with us, and we are also willing that our capital in the business shall rank on the same footing as yours, that is to say, that it shall be shares and not debentures.

Such was Blackmore's confidence in Moorcroft's enterprise, he saw no serious risk to Liberty's investment, describing a re-organisation on this basis as 'perfectly fair and straightforward'. It was the ultimate vindication of Moorcroft's belief in his ware; but this restructuring was all the more significant for being undertaken at a time when economic conditions were far from stable. By the end of 1922–23, the commercial outlook had reached a new low, and the *Pottery Gazette* reported that business everywhere 'is of a hand-to-mouth kind'.[8] In this context, Moorcroft's record year-end profit was a triumph. Ten years almost to the month since the start of independent production, and in spite of hostile conditions for the greater part of this period, his situation had never been better; it would never be quite as good again.

2. Design and Commerce

Moorcroft's commercial success had a particular significance at a time when there was increasing concern about the quality and competitiveness of British pottery production. In a talk to the National Pottery Council, Gordon Forsyth, former Art Director at Pilkington, founding member of the Design and Industries Association [DIA], and newly appointed Superintendent of Art Instruction in Stoke-on-Trent, argued that the key to successful trade was not competitive price, but better design: 'He looked upon art as a trade [...]. Fortunes were made from original ideas rather than from following or copying.'[9] The ambitions of the British Institute of Industrial Art [BIIA] were represented in similar terms by *The Times*:

> The idea behind the movement is the encouragement of art for commercial purposes, the persuasion of the manufacturer that it pays to put on the market goods that are not only useful but also artistically acceptable.[10]

8 *PG* (June 1923), p.1018.
9 'Art: Its Effect upon the Pottery Industry', *PG* (August 1921), 1219–22 (p.1221).
10 'Art in Common Life', *The Times* (4 May 1921), p.8.

Already, in 1919, the newly formed Art Section of the Ceramic Society organised a vetted Exhibition of Contemporary Pottery, selection of the exhibits falling to Robert Anning Bell, Professor of Design at the Royal College of Art, and William Dalton, Principal of Camberwell School of Arts and Crafts. The event met with limited support from the conservative Staffordshire potters; few manufacturers were prepared to have their work judged by London-based designers, whose criteria of selection, they argued, were insufficiently attuned to the real world of commerce. Moorcroft also declined to exhibit, but his reasons were his own. Writing on 7 January 1919 to Cecil Harcourt Smith, who had clearly encouraged him to participate, he expressed his artistic (rather than commercial) ambitions as a potter:

> Your letter is an enormous incentive to put more energy, and yet more energy, in an endeavour to produce some object or objects that shall give a little pleasure, and that shall possibly reflect something good of the age in which we live.

Original design was, for William Moorcroft, a matter of personal expression not of commercial strategy, and now, less than two months after the Armistice, he saw in pottery a means of restoring beauty, moral value even, to the world. Its success was not for a committee to evaluate:

> With regard to the Ceramic Society's Art Section Exhibition, the reason I am not exhibiting is first, I am not a member of the Ceramic Society, and secondly that personally I feel public opinion which represents all is likely to offer a better judgement in regard to what is produced.

This was a challenging comment at a time when the education of public taste was widely seen to be an essential stage in the improvement of industrial art.[11] But Moorcroft was confident in his ware, and in its appeal to the public; his commercial success clearly vindicated that.

What continued to be stressed at this time was the need for closer collaboration between manufacturers and designers, 'the first essential in sound production' according to Forsyth.[12] Progressive firms such as Wedgwood, Gray & Co. or Pilkington worked creatively with both new and established designers, and Carter, Stabler & Adams, established in 1921 significantly distant from the Potteries, came to exemplify pottery manufacture more suited to the needs and decorative tastes of the post-war age than individualised wares in an Arts and Crafts tradition. Items exhibited at Regent House, Kingsway WC2 were praised for their practicality and modern appeal:

> [...] the pottery that was at one time made by Carter & Co., Ltd., of Poole, which was always reminiscent of the arts and crafts basis, and, if we may say so, hardly commercial,

11 Cf. *The Times* (17 January 1922), in a notice anticipating the Exhibition of Present-Day Industrial Art organised by the BIIA: 'What was wanted was a change of values, both in the spiritual and material sense. [...] The manufacturers must be shown that artistic quality was in itself a commercial asset, and the public must be educated into insisting on a high standard of artistic excellence in everything that they bought.' (p.8).

12 'Art: Its Effect upon the Pottery Industry', *PG* (August 1921), 1219–22 (p.1220).

> is now being supplanted by a range of pottery that is soundly practical and that is likely to experience a strong demand wherever pottery is sold.[13]

Many Staffordshire manufacturers opposed this trend, however, and a vigorous correspondence took place in the *Staffordshire Sentinel* in January 1919 following Anning Bell's report on the wares submitted to the Selection Committee, in which he praised their technique, but was critical of their design. The Editor of the *Staffordshire Sentinel* supported the view, but then added:

> One gentleman, by the way, who has not appeared in print, but whose artistic productions are sincerely respected and admired by everybody, said to me that 'art' apart from 'potting' seemed to him a rather ridiculous distinction; and pushed to extremes, there may be something in that, of course.[14]

That 'gentleman' was William Moorcroft.[15] His response, however, was not that of a manufacturer, resisting the pressure to employ a designer, but of a craftsman for whom design and making were inseparable.[16] Moorcroft declined to participate in subsequent exhibitions, too, his detachment becoming more critical and more outspoken. When it was proposed to hold the 1921 Ceramic Society exhibition in the Hanley Museum, he reacted publicly:

> Mr W. Moorcroft, the celebrated handicraft potter, has expressed the view that the museum is not a fitting place for the holding of exhibitions that are of a purely commercial type. He considers that 'The museums should be reserved only for the best, and the utmost care should be taken to avoid anything merely fashionable, and unlikely to stand the test of time.'[17]

For Moorcroft, commercial pottery was of no lasting value; it was designed to sell, the outcome of economic ambitions, not the expression of artistic ones. And the distinctiveness of his own enterprise was clearly recognised; he was not categorised as a manufacturer, but as a 'handicraft potter'.

He did, nevertheless, participate in exhibitions organised by the BIIA, both in London and the provinces. Incorporated in 1920 under the auspices of the Boards of Trade and Education, the BIIA was the first government body to concern itself specifically with modern industrial design. Its founding committee included representatives of the Arts and Crafts Exhibition Society and the Design and Industries Association [DIA], but it struggled to resolve an ambivalent attitude to the place of craft in industrial manufacture. Its first exhibition, 'Modern British Crafts and Manufactures', announced

13 'An Exhibition of Poole Pottery', *PG* (February 1922), 245–46.
14 'The Pottery Exhibition', *Staffordshire Sentinel* (31 January 1919).
15 Alongside the cutting in a family scrapbook is a note in Moorcroft's hand: 'W.M. to Editor of *Sentinel*, M. Barrett Green. A good piece of pottery is inseparable from art.'
16 Quite coincidentally, a young Clarice Cliff applied to Moorcroft for a job as decorator in these early post-war years; unsurprisingly (in retrospect), her application was unsuccessful.
17 *PG* (October 1921), p.1536.

in *The Times*, included both unique pieces and those intended for serial production, and it clearly understood by 'manufacture' all work designed for reproduction irrespective of method: 'It will have two sections, one for manufacturers (including in that term manifold production by hand as well as by machine), and the other for the work of artist-craftsmen.'[18] The exact relationship of craftsman and manufacturer was not explored beyond a vague aspiration to encourage collaboration between the two:

> The craftsmen's work will be on sale, and it is hoped to create a direct market for it, as well as to bring craftsmen's influence to bear on industry itself. Lists will be made of designers who show competency and of manufacturers who wish for designers' services.[19]

This very open structure brought together manufacturers large and small, from Doulton Burslem and Wedgwood to Pilkington and Gray & Co., as well as the work of smaller craft potteries, such as those of William Howson Taylor, Bernard Moore and Dora Lunn. Moorcroft exhibited teaware, bowls and vases, often in Powder Blue.

The most significant of their exhibitions in this period was the third, 'Industrial Art of Today', held at the Victoria and Albert Museum [V&A] and reported in *The Times*, 8 September 1923. The catalogue reiterated the aim to show 'the best productions of both craftsmen and manufacturers in design, material and workmanship', and many leading manufacturers were represented.[20] Pieces were described as 'designed and executed' by the firm in question, implying the kind of seamless collaboration of designer and manufacturer which the exhibition sought to promote, but anonymising the designer. Significantly, though, the exhibition also included independent potters, several of whom were former pupils (or instructors) at the Camberwell School of Arts and Crafts and were established in studios in or around London: Alfred Hopkins, William Staite Murray, Reginald Wells, Charles and Nell Vyse, Gwendolen Parnell, Dora Lunn, Denise Wren, William Dalton. Also included was the work of Bernard Leach, who had returned to England from Japan in 1920, and set up a pottery with Shoji Hamada in St Ives, and of Katharine Pleydell-Bouverie, one of his first pupils. The inclusion of so many craft potters in an exhibition entitled 'Industrial Art' was telling. It implied a role for practising potters in the improvement of industrial design, and even the wording of their catalogue entries implied an analogous production practice, each piece described as 'designed and executed' by the potter concerned. An impression of equivalence was created between factory and studio, the only evident distinction between the two being that of a corporate identity (Gray & Co., A.J. Wilkinson Ltd.) and an individual (W. Staite Murray, R.F. Wells). In this context, it is significant that Moorcroft's exhibits were attributed to him in his own name, and not in that of the firm; in this gathered field of manufacturers (many producing handcrafted pieces) and independent craftsmen, it was as a craftsman that he was viewed.

18 *The Times* (26 January 1920), p.9.
19 Ibid.
20 'Prefatory Note', *Exhibition of Industrial Art Today* (1923), n.p.

3. A Very Individual Pottery

For all Moorcroft's commercial success, it is clear that his working practices distinguished him from the modern manufacturer. With little more than eighty employees in 1923, his works were considerably smaller than 'a medium-sized factory', estimated by Forsyth to have a staff of four to five hundred.[21] But it was not just a matter of physical size; it was a question, too, of priorities. As manufacturers began after the war to introduce more economical means of production, tunnel ovens or gas-fired kilns, Moorcroft enlarged his capacity for further experiment, installing a flambé kiln, a lustre oven and a glost oven, all coal-fired. Significantly, these actions coincided with his (brief) employment of a works manager, William T. Lockett, doubtless at the insistence of Alwyn Lasenby. On 25 October 1919, after seven months in his job, Lockett wrote a detailed and critical analysis of the works as he saw them. Viewed from his perspective, Moorcroft's investment in research and development made no economic sense; Lockett's vision for the immediate future was bleak: 'Building, or capital outlay of any kind in these days is not justifiable unless there is going to be some return, and I cannot see much immediate prospect under present arrangements.' This approach to the management of the works set streamlined output and cost-efficiency as the guiding principles; it was a view in line with modern thinking, but it accorded ill with Moorcroft's plans for the development of his art. Lockett argued, too, that Moorcroft's personal involvement in all aspects of production, from design to sales, was unsustainable in this post-war world:

> I have no doubt that as you have in the past been able to do everything yourself, it is difficult for you to unload your burden; but if you are going to develop on the lines you are laying out, you will have to seriously consider the question [...].

But for Moorcroft, initiatives which for others implied greater efficiency—mechanisation, delegation, expansion—were for him steps towards a more impersonal mode of working. And this was not his way.

Moorcroft's works were the very opposite of an anonymised manufactory; their atmosphere and their administration were characterised by a more informal individuality. A letter from a schoolteacher in Birkdale, 12 February 1920, paints a vivid picture of a man who took time to help others:

> We are endeavouring to train pupils who shall produce original and artistic work, and who will be able to pass on to be fitted for pottery designing as an occupation in such a firm as yours. In the meantime, the pupils are quite new to the work and rather young. [...] I am most grateful to you for consenting to help us by firing the clay work [...].

And the very personal way in which he conducted his business was reflected in a letter dated 10 June 1922 from F. Schmidt of Brinsmaid & Co., Des Moines, Iowa, telling Moorcroft of the sudden death of his wife: 'I am giving you this information simply

21 'Art in the Pottery and Glass Industries', *PG* (April 1922), 576–78 (p.577).

because I feel I know you as a feeling friend and not only a business man.' Both in his professional dealings, and in his designs, William Moorcroft stood out in his sensitivity. And this was widely appreciated. As his balance sheets demonstrated, commercial success and art were not incompatible; nor were business and human kindness.

This individuality was reflected, too, in Moorcroft's treatment of his staff. As economic pressures intensified, two nationally agreed wage cuts were reported in the *Pottery Gazette*, one of around 20% in May 1922, and another of around 10% in May 1923, a total reduction of 28% of the 1920–21 level. Moorcroft applied neither of these. The earnings of his female staff were unchanged throughout 1922 and 1923, and where there were cuts in the wages of the men, these were significantly smaller than those recorded across the industry as a whole: the wages of Jack Tudor, a warehouseman, were reduced by 9%; those of Fred Ashley, a handler, by 5%; and those of Fred Hollis, Moorcroft's thrower, remained constant. In a speech to the annual luncheon of the North Staffordshire Chamber of Commerce, reported in the *Pottery Gazette* of November 1923, the industrialist Lord Leverhulme, defending the cuts, noted that wages for pottery workers still stood some 66.67% above their pre-war levels.[22] With Moorcroft, though, an increase of more than double over this period was more often to be seen. By year-end 1922–23, the wages of a tube-liner were 2.8 times higher, and of a paintress nearly 2.3; the fireman's wages were 2.6 times higher, the thrower's 2.2, and the handler's also 2.2. Moorcroft's independent practice was clearly exemplified in his non-membership of the British Pottery Manufacturers' Federation, formed in 1919 to counter the risk of unilateral price-cutting which had been so damaging before the war. As pressure increased to reduce prices and wages during the miners' strike, the *Pottery Gazette* underlined the importance of solidarity, encouraging the Federation 'to make a serious effort to get hold of the few firms who still remain outside the combination'.[23] Moorcroft clearly felt different (and distant) from manufacturers, whose ware, and manner of production, bore little resemblance to his own, and with whom he doubtless did not feel in competition. He did not exploit his position on the margins to seek commercial advantage, but he did use his independence to maintain his own levels of pay; trading success was not achieved at the expense of his staff.

This independence attracted the attention of the press. A substantial article on 'The Moorcroft Pottery' was published in the *Pottery Gazette* just weeks after Liberty's re-alignment of their relationship. Its focus, significantly, was not just on the ware itself but on the unique environment in which it was produced:

> There is a factory at Cobridge—strange to say, one of the newest factories in the 'Five Towns', since it has not been erected more than about eight years—which, to the mind of the writer, seems to stand out from the ordinary run of Staffordshire manufactories in most of the essential points.[24]

22 *PG* (November 1923), p.1830.
23 *PG* (May 1921), p.794.
24 'The Moorcroft Pottery', *PG* (November 1921), 1664–66 (p.1664).

The journalist contrasted Moorcroft's working practices in his 'art craft pottery' with the industrial trend towards economical and rapid modes of production; they were recognised as individual, bold in their conception, and visionary in their success:

> [...] the tenor of this particular pottery is merely a counterpart of the spirit of its founder, who, in spite of his hesitation to accept with open arms every new idea in connection with pottery production as it comes along, has yet built up for himself and his products a reputation that will not easily be effaced, either in our time or later.[25]

Of particular note was the sense of spaciousness and tranquillity, evident both in the physical surroundings and in the working spirit; it was a far cry from a manufactory. Significantly, the article attributed this congenial atmosphere to the practice of handcraft. Moorcroft was seen to have created an environment dictated above all by natural rhythms, with no haste and no accelerated processes; its effect on the workforce was plain for all to see:

> We wish on the present occasion to emphasise how different is the spirit in which it is produced from that associated with the manufacture of ordinary utility lines of pottery. There is no working against time; no elaborated system of artificial drying (sun drying is preferred all the time); there are no scientific short cuts to standardised repetition work.[26]

The same image was conveyed in an article published in *The World's Work*. From its predominantly business perspective, Moorcroft was singled out as an enlightened employer, an artist who cared for his staff as well as his art:

> It is a point for remembrance that Moorcroft Pottery, admired and purchased by many famous patrons, including Her Majesty, Queen Mary, is produced in praiseworthy workrooms, making for the health and happiness of the workers.[27]

Reference to healthy surroundings and the satisfaction of the workforce implicitly recalled the visions of Ruskin or Morris, but it also had a very topical resonance. Just months after the end of the miners' strike, at a time of increasing anxiety about prices, wages and competition, Moorcroft was presented as one whose response to the challenge of commercial survival was to produce high-quality ware in the most salutary environment for his employees. His works represented an eloquent response to the tense relations of the contemporary industrial world:

> It is impossible to come into personal contact with Mr Moorcroft without feeling and knowing that he is absolutely determined to produce what is best in decorative pottery. It is quite true to say of him, that rare ability as an artist is supplemented by extraordinary enthusiasm and determination, attributes which make him a real helper of his fellow-men.[28]

25 Ibid., p.1665.
26 Ibid., p.1666.
27 'A Master Potter', *The World's Work* (February 1922), 203–04 (p.204).
28 Ibid.

Another article, in the *Overseas Daily Mail*, also emphasised the very personal quality of Moorcroft's works:

> The originator of the famous 'Moorcroft Pottery' has [...] built his own pottery studio, fashioning it after his own heart, and herein he has rounded off, softened and perfected his creations.[29]

The journalist's choice of term—'studio', not 'factory'—was both deliberate and telling. It was widely recognised that Moorcroft was not in the business of mass production, that his employees were not simply cogs in a machine, and that his works were the site of collaborative artistic endeavour. But the use of the term implied too, consciously or unconsciously, an affinity with the independent potters whose work was beginning to attract attention and to whom the term 'studio potter' was increasingly attributed. The image of a pottery functioning in open space was a recurrent motif in articles on Dora Lunn's Ravenscourt Pottery, dubbed 'The Pottery in a Garden' by *Woman at Home* in September 1918, and praised in the *Sunday Pictorial*, September 1919, for its beneficial effects on the health of the employees. Unlike Lunn, Moorcroft was established in Burslem, at the very heart of the Potteries, and yet he was clearly distinguished from the industrial manufacturer. His works may well have been large in comparison, but their individual spirit was seen to be closer to that of a potter's studio than of a commercial workplace. The journalist from the *Pottery Gazette* depicted an enterprise motivated by the pleasure of craft, not the quest for profit; commercial success was a consequence, but it was not its aim:

> Although scramble and rush, and the clank of the sorting tool, may be a common experience when viewing the Potteries as a whole, there are factories, a few at all events, where the conditions prevailing are exactly the reverse, where quiet, unhurried handicraft stands out as the all-important thing, and where commercialism only seems to exist in so far as it grows out of idealism.[30]

4. Creating a Ceramic Art

Moorcroft's pottery of this time struck a chord with the public. Just four months after the Armistice, as the country was reflecting on effective means of commemoration, he was already giving form to dignified remembrance. At the end of the 1919 BIF, he left an example of such work for Edith Harcourt Smith; she wrote on 9 March 1919, her reaction more than just individual:

> I wonder if you realise the intense delight you give everyone with your art. [...] When one looks back on these years of war, one wonders how we ever lived through them, the agony was such that I believe it can only have enriched and purified our souls; surely

29 'Ideal Art Productions', *The Overseas Daily Mail* (September 1923).
30 *PG* (November 1921), p.1664.

> this is so. Therefore these ornaments you have given me mean such a tremendous lot, in every sense.

That term 'mean' was not trivially meant; Moorcroft was making pottery which expressed a feeling, his own, but which communicated with the public for which it was destined. His success might be quantified in sales figures, but its significance was much deeper, embodied in an ability to capture and convey the spirit of the times. Such was the impact of his commemorative ware that it was selected for a Memorial exhibition at the V&A, prompting a letter of appreciation from the author and ceramics expert Mrs Willoughby Hodgson. Moorcroft replied on 16 August 1919; he wrote not as a man of business, but as an artist aware of his moral responsibility: 'I felt that it was almost a duty to symbolise in an indestructible material the period dating from August the 4th 1914 to the signing of the Armistice on the 11th of November 1918'.

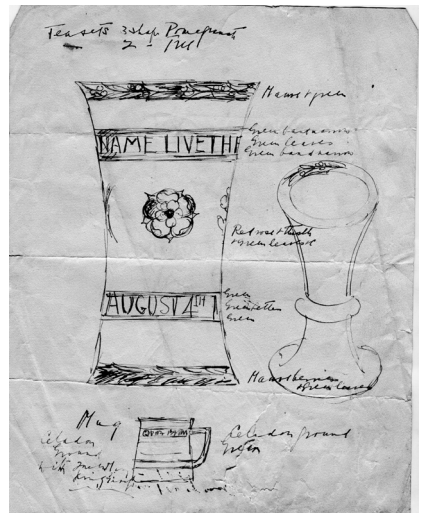


Fig. 70 William Moorcroft, Sketches for designs to commemorate the Armistice. 'Personal and Commercial Papers of William Moorcroft', Stoke-on-Trent City Archives, SD 1837. CC BY-NC

But Moorcroft was looking forward as well as back, and these immediate post-war years witnessed a phase of experiments in colour and innovative glaze effects, made possible by his new kilns. Charles Noke at Doulton Burslem, and William Howson Taylor, were continuing their experiments in glaze chemistry which had characterised the most advanced industrial art pottery since the turn of the century; Moorcroft followed this same exploratory route. It was his technical skill which was noted particularly in one report on his stand at the 1920 BIF; this was modern ceramic art at its best:

> The crackle glazes, due to natural formation in the process of firing, are interesting alike in their sort of 'Jack Frost' pattern, and their subtle colour; and the texture glazes, particularly the orange-vermilion, present a strong note of pleasant colour.[31]

31 *Staffordshire Sentinel* (27 February 1920).

He also developed his lustre glazes, which had remained popular since their introduction in 1907. Decorated lustres such as Pilkington's Royal Lancastrian ware, or Daisy Makeig Jones' Fairyland lustres for Wedgwood, continued to be popular; Moorcroft, though, was focussing on unornamented wares. The *Pottery and Glass Record* commenting on his high-temperature examples:

> This firm's lustres, impregnated in the glaze, are of rare beauty and of every colour. The dull lustres produced by extreme heat, the wonderful bronze which in some lights is pure gold, in others pink and green, and the lovely purple full of iridescence, which seems to echo the spirit of a rose garden, are all used on a body of the finest texture.[32]

Fig. 71 Moorcroft's stand at the 1920 British Industries Fair. 'Personal and Commercial Papers of William Moorcroft', Stoke-on-Trent City Archives, SD 1837. CC BY-NC

What is striking is that many such wares, for all their absence of ornament, were seen to evoke the beauty of the world at large. If the journalist at the *Pottery and Glass Record* was reminded of a rose garden, Edith Harcourt Smith was transported further afield in a letter of 25 October 1920, as she beheld another experimental piece:

> The vase which has just arrived reminds me of southern seas and skies, so refreshing in the midst of mist and darkness. We all are enjoying it to the full, it being on the hall table for the moment to enable everyone to continually see it. However did you find such a wonderful blue, inside as well as out. It's too delicious for words, and I thank you from my heart.

More new glaze effects were exhibited at the 1921 BIF; once again, Moorcroft's ware stirred the imagination of the observer, its pure suggestive power likened to fine art at the very edge of representation:

32 *Pottery and Glass Record* [*PGR*] (March 1920), p.183.

> There is an indefinable charm and fascination that is part and parcel of them, something that is too subtle to find expression in a mere critique. One of the effects, secured by purely chemical means, reminded one, for instance, of a Whistler nocturne, with the stars shimmering in a purple background. It was a really wonderful effect.[33]

These evocative effects culminated in a figurative design launched at the 1922 BIF, and illustrated in the *Pottery Gazette*. Returning to his constantly evolving studies of landscape, Moorcroft created a nocturnal scene, 'Green and Blue Tree', widely referred to as 'Moonlit Blue'. It embodied an atmosphere of tranquillity which would remain popular for more than a decade, offering a quiet contrast to the vibrant designs of the Jazz Age.

Fig. 72 William Moorcroft, 'Green and Blue Tree' (c.1923), 15cm. CC BY-NC

No less significant were his first flambé glazes, the subject of a short notice in *The Connoisseur*; once again, Moorcroft was represented as a potter whose mastery of technique put him at the forefront of ceramic art:

> In fashioning these pieces, Mr Moorcroft not only utilises his own designs, but also mixes his own colours, and, by dint of careful experimentalising, has evolved a method by which he is able to produce *sang-de-boeuf* of the finest order.[34]

These wares were noticed, too, in the trade press, the *Pottery Gazette* categorising some examples as 'purely collectors' pieces'. But for all the variety of his output, what was seen to unify Moorcroft's pottery was its enduring, almost haunting appeal; this distinctive quality characterised all he produced:

33 *PG* (April 1921), 600–01 (p.600).
34 'A New Departure in Moorcroft Pottery', *The Connoisseur* (May 1922), p.56.

> […] Mr Moorcroft's productions are such as will be thought of more and more as the history of English pottery develops. […] those of the general public who have already been fortunate enough to become possessed of a specimen of Mr Moorcroft's handiwork know better than anyone else that Mr Moorcroft's pots are such as can be lived with indefinitely; for their beauty is not of an evanescent kind, rather does it grow upon one the longer one is associated with them. The writer speaks from experience, for he has amongst his worldly possessions a much-treasured Moorcroft tobacco jar.[35]

A piece as obviously functional as a tobacco jar had, for this journalist, the same impact as an artwork. This was art for the everyday. But it was clearly seen, too, as art for the future; its appeal was not a matter of fashion, and its quality would endure.

Moorcroft's exhibit at the 1923 BIF was a triumph, and the attention paid to it by the King and Queen was given particular prominence in the press:

> W.Moorcroft, Ltd., Cobridge, occupied what many people regarded as the stand of honour in the Pottery Section. Certainly quality and dignity were written all over the stand and its contents. […] Queen Mary honoured Mr Moorcroft by purchasing a lustre bowl in various tones of green with a reflection of mauve and purple, and Their Majesties shook hands with Mr Moorcroft and congratulated him heartily upon his attainments in a beautiful craft.[36]

That same year, an article in the *Pottery and Glass Record* depicted him explicitly as a potter like no other, outstanding both in his technical skills and in his artistic sensitivity:

> […] Mr Moorcroft is different to others, different in his knowledge of colour merging and grouping, different also in the innovations in the colour schemes he employs, which he carries through so successfully, different also in his knowledge of the blending qualities of the various colours, and the harmonising of colour effects.[37]

This difference extended too to the nature of his success. This was a trade journal which recognised the commercial appeal of Moorcroft's ware, but it recognised, too, the unique way in which it was achieved. It was not the kind of ware which simply followed the fashions of the moment, nor did it require a reform of public taste; it was ware whose appeal was seen to be direct, spontaneous, even irresistible:

> There is a charming freshness also about every new line he introduces, each demonstrating the originality of conception which appeals so strongly to the beauty-loving individual. It is no wonder then that Moorcroft ware has been so extensively purchased, by those most able to judge of its beauty and merit, and who reside in all parts of the world, and for which we know there is a steady increasing demand.[38]

Such analysis was quite different from that given to works of industrial manufacture; it did not (simply) focus on commercial potential, but examined the potter's craft and

35 *PG* (February 1923), p.251.
36 *PG* (April 1923), p.660.
37 'Potters of Today, No.9: Mr W. Moorcroft', *PGR* (November 1923), 656–58 (p.657).
38 Ibid.

art. His status as an artist potter was confirmed in a review in *The Court Journal* which placed his work in the most revered of traditions:

> [...] Baron Hayashi, the Japanese Ambassador, on purchasing two Flambé vases, expressed the opinion that the Moorcroft vases were so like early Chinese work that had Mr Moorcroft's name not been on, experts would find it difficult to note the difference. Early Chinese pottery is in such demand by collectors all over the world that that compliment to Mr Moorcroft's work is one that is highly valued, for it is, indeed, a striking tribute to the ideals of art in pottery which Mr Moorcroft endeavours to express with such skill and distinction.[39]

This was particularly significant at a time when independent potters were establishing themselves literally and metaphorically far from the world of the Potteries, re-kindling debate about the nature of ceramic art.

At the start of this period, particular critical attention was being paid to the work of Bernard Leach and Shoji Hamada. Leach promoted his project, significantly in the *Pottery Gazette*, as the antithesis of mass-manufacture, 'a small private one, and not an industrial concern',[40] setting up polarities of hand and machine, artwork and commercial commodity, which would shape much debate for the next two decades. If the DIA and the BIIA were, in different ways, looking to imagine a collaboration of craft and mechanical production, Leach emphasised their opposition; the potter was an artist, not an industrial designer:

> Mr Leach expressed the opinion that in such art the machine was a good servant, but a very bad master, and as one coming from the East he was impressed that there seems to be so little pottery in England that comes under the true heading of art.[41]

And his work was attracting the attention of critics. Charles Marriott, reviewing an exhibition of Leach's pottery at the Cotswold Gallery in *The Times*, stressed its functionality, but also its qualities of production:

> All the pieces are for practical use [...] and should bear ordinary domestic handling. They are remarkable for dignity of shape, depth of colour, and quality of surface. [...] it is a pleasure to come upon pottery so artistic and yet so professional in the right sense of the word.[42]

The same emphasis on craft characterised responses to Hamada's two exhibitions at the Paterson Gallery in Bond Street, in May and November 1923. Reviewing the first in *The Spectator*, William McCance emphasised the individuality of each piece, the unique expression of its creator like a work of fine art:

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39 *The Court Journal* (2 March 1923), p.83.
40 'An Art Pottery in Cornwall', *PG* (December 1920), p.1661.
41 Ibid.
42 'Leach Pottery', *The Times* (14 November 1923), p.17.

> It has that individual quality which comes through being handled reverently, from beginning to end, by a craftsman who not only loves but understands his craft. Each pot is as unique as a good piece of sculpture is, and is directly associated with the artist.[43]

This was not the critical vocabulary applied to wares from industrial potteries, but it was (and had been) used in reviews of Moorcroft's work. In both cases, what was identified was the presence of the potter as craftsman, devoted to his work, individual in his expression; these were qualities which distinguished such work from the more standardised, impersonal products of modern manufacture. The article on Moorcroft in *The World's Work* presented him above all as a 'Master Potter':

> Those who are acquainted with the work of Mr W. Moorcroft, artist and potter, will agree that his devotion to his calling, from an early age, and his marked success in producing many meritorious works of art, have earned for him the title which we have ascribed to him here. For his work is full of character, and his standards high. He thoroughly understands his craft [...].[44]

And what was true of the potter's craft was true, too, of his art. McCance singled out in Hamada's work a harmony of decoration and form:

> [...] his designs form, not a decoration adorning the surface, but an integral part of the form to which they have been applied. For this reason Mr Hamada usually refrains from the use of over-glaze decoration which, except in rare cases, destroys the integrity of the shape.[45]

A review of the 1921 BIF in *The Connoisseur* represented Moorcroft in similar terms, as an artist potter whose three-dimensional vision matched ornament to form:

> Mr Moorcroft [...] is an artist of great ability and originality, possessing that instinctive knowledge of the technical possibilities of his ware which ensures that all decoration shall be thoroughly congruous to the piece to which it is apportioned. Thus in all the examples shown, there was a harmonious unity of colour, form and decoration, combined under the same guiding spirit to form a work of art marked by a beautiful appropriateness in all its parts [...].[46]

The differences of both aesthetic and production method between Moorcroft and the potters of St Ives are self-evident, but both were nevertheless seen to exhibit analogous characteristics—ceramic skill, individuality, integrity, a life beyond the immediate present—which set them apart, conceptually and qualitatively, from industrial production. Moorcroft's status as a ceramic artist was tellingly reflected in the selling

43 W. McCance, 'The Pottery of Mr Shoji Hamada', *The Spectator* (26 May 1923), p.886.
44 'A Master Potter', p.203.
45 W. McCance, 'The Pottery of Mr Shoji Hamada', *The Spectator* (26 May 1923), p.886.
46 'W. Moorcroft Ltd.', *The Connoisseur* (April 1921), p.246. Strikingly similar comments were made in *PG* as early as July 1916 (p.720): 'The main feature that strikes one in inspecting a piece of 'Moorcroft Ware' is that in no case does the decoration create the impression that it has been merely applied, but that, on the other hand, it is an integral part of the piece itself, a stage in the creation of the piece instead of a mere afterthought.'

prices of wares displayed at the 1923 exhibition of the BIIA. The most expensive work exhibited by Carter, Stabler & Adams and Dora Lunn was for sale at £4, that of Howson Taylor at £10, and of Leach at £12. Some of Moorcroft's ware, however, was priced at £18; only Staite Murray, at £29, displayed vases with a higher ticket.[47]

5. Conclusions

The World's Work characterised Moorcroft's achievement as the fulfilment of a destiny to be a 'Master Potter', a man of business but also, above all, an artist. Accompanying the article was a photograph of him examining a piece of lustre ware.

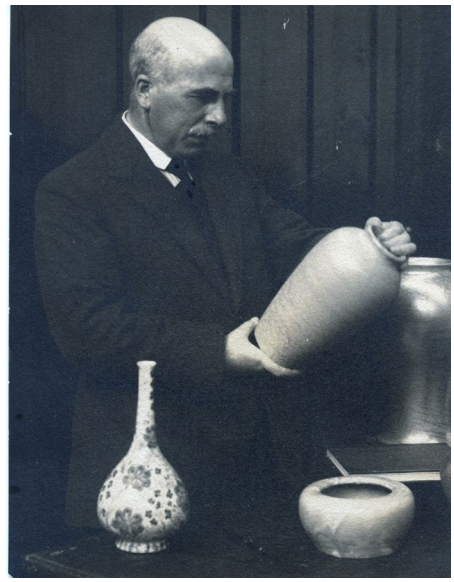

Fig. 73 Photograph of William Moorcroft published in *The World's Work* (February 1922), 'Personal and Commercial Papers of William Moorcroft', Stoke-on-Trent City Archives, SD 1837. CC BY-NC

It captured the very personal dimension to his work which was widely recognised and appreciated, both in the way he conducted his business and in the pots he produced. He was not seen as an industrial designer, but as a potter creating work which expressed his own personality. Writing to him on 21 March 1921, the Editor of *The Court Journal* saw this as the very reason for his success: 'I always feel about yourself that you are doing the work in life you would choose above all others, and that is why everything you send out has such an appeal.' For many, this quality was the hallmark of an artist potter. In a lecture given to the Art Section of the Ceramic Society, Bernard Rackham,

47 Details quoted in R. Gotlieb, 'The Critical Language and Aesthetic Criteria of Art-Pottery Manufacturers and Studio Potters, 1914–1934', unpublished M.A. Thesis (RCA/V&A Course, History of Design and Decorative Art) [1987], p.24.

Keeper of the Department of Ceramics at the V&A, identified in craft ware a capacity to inspire a personal response which transcended fashion:

> Hand-made pottery [...] awakened our sympathy precisely because it established, as it were, a contact between our own personality and that of their very human makers.[48]

But he concluded that such work could not be commercially viable in this competitive, post-war world, and that it must inevitably remain the province of the fortunate few: 'The artist potter might safely be left to himself—indeed, he must be so left, for to attempt to commercialise him was simply to destroy him as an artist.'[49] And yet this was precisely the challenge Moorcroft had set himself. And he was achieving it, creating pottery whose very sensitivity was at the heart of its widespread appeal and commercial success. It was an economic feat at a time of stagnating trade, but it was an achievement, too, of aesthetic and cultural significance, the realisation, in a quite unique way, of the underlying ambitions of the BIIA: to create affordable art for the modern home.

It was this personal dimension which made Moorcroft's work successful; it is also what made him different. His working practices represented a quite unique fusion of pottery manufacturer and artist potter, just at the time when pottery production was dividing increasingly starkly into two opposing camps, the industrial and the studio. William Moorcroft brought to industrial manufacture the personal investment of a ceramic artist, at home in his craft and expressing himself through design; and he extended the individualised craft of the studio potter beyond the limited market of the connoisseur. He was an artist potter working at the heart of the industrial Potteries, and his anomalous distinctiveness was clearly recognised. Significantly, though, amid the constant flow of statements, reports and reviews about industrial and studio pottery, Moorcroft did not seek to theorise his own position. What mattered to him was not how his practice conformed (or not) to the ambitions or orthodoxies of others, it was the integrity of his work on its own terms; with that quality, he was confident it would appeal to the public. And that confidence was vindicated. His wife, Florence, wrote to him on 27 February 1920, understanding perfectly the significance of the acclaim he was receiving at the British Industries Fair: 'It is a triumph for you, for good methods of production, and for the justification of the view that the public appreciates good work.' Deeds mattered to him more than words, and he let his work speak for itself. At the end of the article on Moorcroft in the *Pottery and Glass Record*, the writer highlighted this attitude as his defining characteristic: '*Facta non verba* is a Latin quotation aptly fitting to the temperament of Mr Moorcroft'.[50]

It was quite consistent with this belief that he supported the attendance of the general public at British Industries Fairs, even though official policy was to limit entry

48 B. Rackham, 'English Pottery: its place in ceramic history', *PG* (December 1921), 1797–99 (p.1799).
49 Ibid.
50 'Potters of Today, no.9: Mr W. Moorcroft', *PGR* (November 1923), 656–58 (p.658).

to trade visitors only. Writing to the Board of Trade, 17 February 1921, he expressed an alternative view:

> We have always [...] welcomed the many visitors who have not been direct buyers, as we have felt that their interest, indirectly, has been extremely valuable. This larger view appeals to us, and we spare no effort to give a publicity as wide as possible to our effort to make objects for everyday use, pleasant to look at and pleasing to live with [...].

Just as Moorcroft's designs were praised for their integration of ornament and form, so too did they embody the principle that art was not something distinct from everyday life. For him, functional objects, like decorative ones, should be of equivalent quality, both in design and production; they should be distinguished by their use, not by their quality. It is significant that he used neither the term 'art' nor 'design' in his statement, terms already laden with associations. But a review of his exhibit at the 1921 BIF had no such hesitation: 'Mr Moorcroft seems to be one of those artists who, by his quiet, steady, solid achievements, endeavours to show what art is rather than to explain it in public debate.'[51] It was a position echoed in a letter of 10 June 1922 from F.Schmidt of Brinsmaid & Co., a glass and china retailer in Des Moines, Iowa: 'Everybody in the house thinks not in terms of merchandise but in terms of art when it comes to your product'. Moorcroft's balance sheets doubtless suggested a firm with a successful commercial strategy, but his relationship with his public transcended that of the economic transaction; he was not (just) creating a marketable product, he was bringing pleasure to people's lives.

Significant too, though, was not just Moorcroft's artistic integrity, but his boldness, his determination to be himself. He had not compromised his individuality, either by seeking employment in a firm, or by following the design fashions of the moment; he had created his own pottery, prepared to take risks for a project he believed in. He was producing ware which was completely distinctive, both in design and manufacture, and he was doing so in deteriorating economic conditions; he defied the orthodoxy of business practice, but he was determined to make it succeed. And the gamble was paying off: he was admired in both the trade and the art press, he had consolidated the confidence of Liberty's, and his ware was selling well the world over. The article in the *Pottery and Glass Record* understood this:

> At the outset he ploughed a lone furrow, but has reaped a rich harvest therefrom, [...] rich in the manifest appreciation of a multitude of admirers and patrons. He risked a lot in embarking upon what was considered a precarious proposition. He has, however, met with a commensurate and gratifying return.[52]

In the years to come, as the economic depression deepened, that courage and those artistic principles would be tested again, and again.

51 *PG* (April 1921), p.600.
52 *PGR* (November 1923), p.657.