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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10. 1926–28: Re-negotiating the Future

1. Personal Tragedy

1926 began positively for Moorcroft. Unlike many established firms, he exhibited at the British Industries Fair [BIF], earning the praise of the trade and other press. For the *Pottery Gazette* his exhibit stood apart in its quality, the reviewer remarking once more on the expressiveness of his ware; this may have been a trade fair, but Moorcroft's display was 'the product of an artistic mind'.[1]

One of his new designs was another variant on the landscape theme. Entitled 'Dawn', it introduced for the first time a decorative border, framing a simple scene of stylised hills and extensive sky. With its bold contrasts of blue and white under a matt glaze, it was a striking departure from his more richly coloured creations, a new stylistic beginning for the modern age.

What attracted particular attention, though, were his flambé glazes, not least those applied to enrich the tones of landscape designs. William Moorcroft was an 'adventurous ceramist', taking his art into new territory:

> One of the chief recent successes of Mr Moorcroft is to be seen in the production of what might be regarded as a pair of companion effects in rouge flambé, the one being suggestive of eventide and the other the arrival of the dawn. Executed in subtle tones, by the most delightful means at the disposal of the adventurous ceramist, pieces such as these can only be regarded as real creative triumphs, and with these and other pieces of similar spirit, Mr Moorcroft certainly succeeded by his exhibit at the B.I.F. this year in furthering his fame as one of our leading artist potters.[2]

Such was his reputation that even a brief (and general) report on the Fair published in the *Daily Express* included specific comment on his display; no introduction was needed, it was safely assumed in the national press that this was a known name:

> The visitor who enters Section G from Wood Lane station strikes at once one of the wonders of the Fair, the pottery show. Moorcroft's stand is on the right. 'Magnificent!', I

1 *Pottery Gazette and Glass Trade Review* [*PG*] (April 1926), p.606.
2 Ibid.

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Fig. 77 Moorcroft's stand at the 1926 British Industries Fair. 'Personal and Commercial Papers of William Moorcroft', Stoke-on-Trent City Archives, SD 1837. CC BY-NC

Fig. 78 William Moorcroft, 'Dawn' (1926), 15cm. CC BY-NC

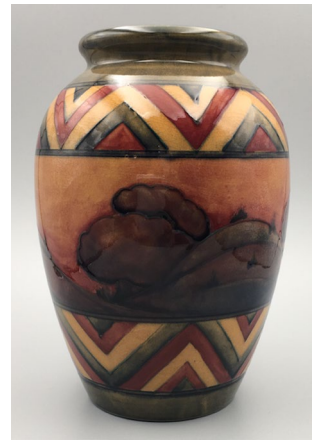

Fig. 79 William Moorcroft, 'Dawn' under partial flambé glaze (c.1926), 23cm. CC BY-NC

> said, involuntarily. 'We have to do our best for our country,' said Mr Moorcroft. His best, on the authority of the highest expert in the country, 'equals the early Chinese'.[3]

Similar praise was voiced by Sir Lawrence Weaver. Describing the exhibit as 'perfectly splendid […], easily the most notable feature of the whole Fair', he urged Moorcroft to exhibit at the Sesqui-Centennial International Exposition in Philadelphia later that year: 'I think you would be very well advised to put up a show there. […] America only wants the best, and everybody has the money to pay for it.'[4] Now Chair of the Design and Industries Association [DIA], Weaver's encouragement was significant. Moorcroft's work was appreciated as the very best of contemporary British pottery, exceptional in quality and of indisputable commercial appeal. This opinion was confirmed in a letter from his agent Vandersteen on 22 February 1926, who offered exceptional terms, if he would agree to exhibit:

> Sir Lawrence Weaver joins me in the great desire to have you as an Exhibitor in the British Section, and agrees with me that your goods would be the outstanding feature of the British Section.

But this period of success would be brutally interrupted. On 16 June 1926, at the height of the extended miners' stoppage which followed the nine-day General Strike in May, Moorcroft's wife, Florence, died after a short and sudden illness. It was a devastating blow, as he confided to Edith Harcourt Smith the following day:

> Without her gentle movement, it will be difficult to carry on. The last ten days will have been like years. The parting is very painful, but one can but feel that it is a natural movement. My wife's work is finished here.

Florence's influence was unseen, largely undocumented, and ultimately unmeasurable; but its effect was real. Her involvement in the design of Moorcroft's works was self-evident; no less so was her contribution to its unique atmosphere, where workers were treated as individuals rather than as human cogs in an industrial machine. The local press listed the principal floral tributes at her funeral, which included separate wreaths from the four major departments at the works: Office Staff, Works Staff, Clay Department, Art Room. The reporter noted too how many employees attended the service, an eloquent sign of the devotion she inspired: 'The mourners included a large number of workpeople from Moorcroft Pottery, by whom the late Mrs Moorcroft was held in sincere esteem and affection.'[5] Of the thirty-eight people listed, many had worked for Moorcroft from the opening of his factory, and the pall bearers were four of his longest-serving members of staff—W.H. Barlow, T. Foulkes,

3 *Daily Express* (25 February 1926).
4 All unpublished documents referred to in this chapter are located in William Moorcroft: Personal and Commercial Papers, SD1837, Stoke-on-Trent City Archives [WM Archive].
5 *Staffordshire Sentinel* (19 June 1926).

F. Ashley, and J. Hill. Such was his close relationship with his workforce; life and work were intimately connected at this moment.

The *Staffordshire Sentinel* obituary ended with a telling reference to Florence's significance for Moorcroft's work: 'all hearts go out to Mr Moorcroft, whose happy home was so profound an encouragement and inspiration to his genius as a distinguished potter.'[6] And a letter dated 3 December 1926 from Arthur Birnage, Editor of *Public Opinion*, sought to describe a delicacy which he identified in his pottery and which he attributed to the couple's shared sensitivity; he could not isolate it in words, but he sensed it nonetheless:

> It is plain to see that she stood and lived for only the things that are worthwhile, and was a great stand-by and influence for good in your work. I think I can understand now that subtle, elusive something in your art [...].

Another letter of condolence, from Dorothy Cornforth, a neighbour at Trentham, expressed the hope that 'this deplorable sadness may stimulate and not retard your creative work'. And so it was. Some pieces, made in very limited numbers, such as black landscapes as desolate as those produced ten years earlier in the depths of war, suggest a purely personal expression of mourning. But his more public creativity was imaginative, ambitious, even radical, and bravely, defiantly so; he drew inspiration, as so often, from nature, finding there a harmony and sense of purpose which he sought to recover in his life and to embody in his designs.

2. A New Creativity

The death of Florence inaugurated a period of extensive creativity. At the 1927 BIF, Moorcroft's exhibit again earned the praise of the press; a review in the *Pottery Gazette* took it as axiomatic that he was pushing boundaries all the time:

> It has always been the aim of Mr Moorcroft to do things well, and it is a fact everywhere recognised that he has never yet made a display at any exhibition which has not been an advance upon its predecessor. [...] There were many entirely new creations, clearly showing that Mr Moorcroft has not yet ceased to experiment in the field of ceramic effects.[7]

It is characteristic of this perception of Moorcroft's work that the press tended to focus on his skills as a potter, and on his sensitivity to line and colour. The *Staffordshire Sentinel* offered an analysis of his new work which stressed, like reviews of studio pottery at this time, its 'perfect shapes', the result of being thrown rather than moulded. And this quality was complemented by his distinctive glaze effects; this was the work of an artist-craftsman, immediate and lasting in its appeal:

6 *Staffordshire Sentinel* (19 June 1926).
7 *PG* (April 1927), p.640.

> Such wares, under the scientific and artistic direction of such a craftsman as Mr Moorcroft develop continually in beauty, comparable as they are with the products of the ancient Chinese, and unsurpassed by modern manufactures. Many of the pieces shown this year are veritable poems in colour and glaze effects. No wonder the finest of them were eagerly bought on the opening day [...]. Such things of beauty are a perennial joy to the collector and the person of taste.[8]

Not for the first time, Moorcroft's ware evaded simple description, its expressive effect conveyed in metaphors taken from other art forms. In a review of Staite Murray's exhibition with the Nicholsons at the Beaux Arts Gallery in 1927, Marriott had described his pottery as having 'the music of sculpture'.[9] The *Staffordshire Sentinel* critic's choice of 'poems in colour' implied a different dominant effect, colour rather than form, but in both cases the pottery was seen to engage the onlooker's eye and to appeal to the senses. This was not the lifeless work of a production line, this was pottery which spoke.

The complementarity of Moorcroft's experiments in form and colour and those of the studio potters implied in such reviews was reflected, too, in a range of pots which he had been developing since the summer of 1926, pieces not finished on the turner's lathe, but which preserved imprints of the thrower's fingers; this would become known as 'ribbed' or 'natural' ware. Rackham's article on Wells made explicit reference to its visible traces of the potter's hands: 'the pressure of the shaping hand on the yielding but outward-thrusting clay as it whirls on the wheel, shows itself clearly in all his productions.'[10] A review in the *Pottery Gazette* of Moorcroft's exhibit at the 1927 BIF drew particular attention to a lamp, a striking combination of simplicity and sophistication, of craft and functionality:

> We were particularly struck by a new effect in a green stone lustre. A handsome lamp in this particular style occupied a position of honour near the front of the stand, and it was fitted with a silk shade to harmonise. One of the beauties of this large and impressive piece was the retention in it of the circular wreaths formed by the fingers of the thrower in drawing up and squeezing down the plastic clay in the process of arriving at the final form which the piece was intended to take.[11]

Such pieces may suggest a response to growing financial pressures, requiring only minimal intervention from the turner; and they may also reflect the arrival of a new thrower, Harry Bailey, whose predecessor, Fred Hollis, had been with Moorcroft since 1916. But they implied, too, a dialogue with the work of studio potters. If their pottery was associated with the collector's cabinet, Moorcroft was affirming that his own hand-thrown ware was made for use.

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8 *Staffordshire Sentinel* (February 1927).
9 C. Marriott, 'Beaux Arts Gallery', *The Times* (21 April 1927), p.10.
10 B. Rackham, 'The Pottery of Mr Reginald F. Wells', *The Studio* (December 1925), 359–63 (p.359).
11 *PG* (April 1927), p.640.

Fig. 80 William Moorcroft, Decorated wares under rouge flambé glaze: Banded Peacock (c.1927), 22.5cm; Cornflower (c.1927), 11cm. CC BY-NC

Fig. 81 Moorcroft's stand at the 1928 British Industries Fair. 'Personal and Commercial Papers of William Moorcroft', Stoke-on-Trent City Archives, SD 1837. CC BY-NC

Fig. 82 William Moorcroft, Designs reconfigured with restrained modernity: Cornflower (c.1927), 12cm; Honesty (1927), 22.5cm; Pomegranate (c.1926), 14cm. CC BY-NC

Moorcroft's exhibit at the 1928 BIF, in a stand re-designed and extended, was, for many, the high point of this period. The report in the *Pottery and Glass Record* underlined the originality of this latest display, his undecorated glaze effects attracting particular attention:

> It was in the fifth window that there was the most strikingly novel ware. [...] Their iridescent tones had a subtle charm, and as Mr Moorcroft himself described the effect to our representative, it has a suggestion of sunlight reflected on a blue sea.[12]

The expressive force of these pieces was seen to derive entirely from their colour, the potter's skill combining with the artist's eye to capture a transient moment of natural beauty. The result was an exhibit which earned widespread admiration, as was noted in the *Pottery Gazette*:

> Mr Moorcroft received many congratulations from connoisseurs and lovers of the truest type of pottery art, and he was well rewarded in receiving visits from Their Majesties the King and Queen, and H.R.H. Princess Mary. The King warmly shook hands with Mr Moorcroft, and spoke in appreciative terms of what has been achieved [...].[13]

But for other observers, what characterised Moorcroft's pottery at this time was not (just) its timeless quality, but the fact that it could be appreciated and enjoyed now, and not just by those of means. *The Overseas Daily Mail* confidently affirmed the artistic quality of Moorcroft's ware, even of the humblest bowls or vases:

> It may be said without fear of contradiction that the pottery made by William Moorcroft will increase in value as time goes on, and will be as much sought after in the future as are the best pieces of Greek or Chinese pottery today [...]. Bowls and vases of very great beauty and very varied design and ornamentation are produced [...], and while these are of varying value to suit purchasers of all types, the lower-priced items owe their cheapness only to simpler design and lower cost of manufacture, and lack nothing in artistic merit which it is possible for the producers to achieve.[14]

For this reviewer, Moorcroft's pottery had qualities independent of fashion or function; and, crucially, such qualities were evident in every piece, however modest. This was art for all, not just for the connoisseur, pottery made for use and not just for the cabinet. Its immediate appeal was reflected in reviews of wide national circulation, the *Sunday Pictorial*, for instance, telling its readers:

> If your table furnishings are very simple, a grapefruit set in Moorcroft ware will enrich them. You can buy a variety of designs, noticeably the pomegranate and the fungus, that only need the background of old oak or mahogany to set them off to advantage. You can buy a set that might depict eventide or an Eastern sunrise that looks equally well on any polished table.[15]

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12 *Pottery and Glass Record* [*PGR*] (April 1928), p.67.
13 *PG* (April 1928), p.626.
14 'Artistic Pottery', *The Overseas Daily Mail* (31 December 1927).
15 *Sunday Pictorial* (15 April 1928).

And for the journalist writing in *The Fancy Goods Trader*, this expressive quality translated naturally and inevitably into widespread appeal:

> This delightful ware—'poems in pottery' we have heard it called—appeared to be irresistible, for there was scarcely a moment of the day when Mr W. Moorcroft and his assistants were not busy with a continuous succession of customers.[16]

Both practical and decorative, affordable yet with the potential to increase in value, if anything could weather the growing economic storm, this was it.

This perception of Moorcroft's ware was particularly significant at a time when the gulf separating artistic and commercial pottery was deepening. In February 1928 the Newport Pottery launched 'Bizarre', designed by Clarice Cliff; characterised by its bold contrasts of colour, it was immediate, inexpensive, and joyously different. The *Pottery Gazette* recorded its official launch at the British Industries Fair; the fashion for bright colour and novelty may not have been timeless, but it was undeniably intense: 'in viewing this type of pottery decoration one has to remember that there is a demand in the realm of modern furnishing for, shall we say, extravagant colouring.'[17] Cliff's designs would be a remarkable commercial success, retailed by many leading London stores, including Harrods, Selfridge's, Waring and Gillow, and Liberty's. They created a popular style of modernity which many other manufacturers sought to follow, simple, spirited, uncompromising. Moorcroft's designs, however, were very much his own. Although he gestured towards abstraction in his simplified variants of motifs such as Honesty or Pomegranate, sometimes interrupted by concentric bands, he retained the underlying references to nature. His colours, too, were controlled, even muted. His 'Dawn' was a telling example of his very personal expression of the times. Modern design was making much of the Sunburst motif, the sun transformed into a potent geometric icon of power in the new industrial age. In Moorcroft's design, however, the rising sun was implied rather than explicit; it suggested renewal rather than energy, the reassuring cycle of nature, not the headlong immediacy of the modern.

Most significant, though, is that he did not alter his decorative techniques. As economic conditions worsened, on-glaze freehand decoration was becoming widespread. It was more flexible and cost-effective than lithographs or transfer prints, and arguably of better quality; simplified designs required less graphic skill, and allowed decorators to work quickly enough to keep up with demand. In 1926 Wedgwood opened a handcraft studio, overseen by Millicent Taplin, to paint decorative and functional wares designed by Alfred and Louise Powell; in 1927, the Newport Pottery did the same for wares designed by Cliff. In comparison, tube-lining and decoration on the unfired clay was more skilled, time-consuming and expensive. It was partly adopted in 1926 by Burgess & Leigh, but only for limited ranges of Charlotte Rhead's designs. It was at the heart of Moorcroft's production, however, and

16 *The Fancy Goods Trader* (March 1927).
17 *PG* (March 1928), p.445.

he remained committed to the technique, and to the skilled staff who carried it out. His colours, of a depth and permanence regularly pointed out in reviews, were a direct consequence of this. For all the economic pressures, Moorcroft was holding fast to his principles. It was a commercial gamble, but one he was prepared to take.

3. Commercial Survival

As the decade progressed, trade continued to decline and unemployment to rise in the pottery industry. Many leading potteries were absent from the 1926 BIF, including Doulton, Minton, Wedgwood, Pilkington and William Howson Taylor. By the early summer, the General Strike and the extended stoppage by the miners were crippling industrial production. A report published in the *Pottery Gazette* just a few weeks into the dispute painted a bleak picture of closures and unemployment. The number of pottery workers laid off had risen from 7,000 to 32,000 in just two months, a more than three-fold increase on the equivalent figure for the previous year.[18] Nor did the consequences of the miners' strike end with the return to work; its impact was felt in the increasing cost of fuel and the inevitable rise in the price of goods produced. More absentees were noted from the 1927 BIF, and a year later the *Pottery Gazette* stated the inescapable truth; the economic depression was global, and there was little prospect of an imminent revival in trade: 'The hard cold fact is that trade in North Staffordshire is bad; the manufacturers know it, the workers know it too'.[19]

The asking price of some studio pottery still remained high. Eric Milner-White, Dean of King's College, Cambridge, bought a pot entitled 'Cadence' for 100 guineas at William Staite Murray's exhibition at the Paterson Gallery in 1927, and a review in *Apollo*, December 1927, saw such prices as quite justifiable: 'an austere beauty in many of them which one will find nowhere else amongst modern pottery [...] makes us less willing to scoff at the prices of 25, 30, even 100 guineas.'[20] Charles Marriott, too, did not see the need for studio pottery to be affordable by the general public; not intended for reproduction or for general sale, its purpose was rather to be an example. But this was a moot point. In the same year as Staite Murray's exhibition, Reginald Wells concluded his only published article with a grim warning; selling art pottery was easier said than done:

> But do not imagine there is a living in so-called artistic pottery—*there is not*. The success of all pottery, all, depends on one little word: sales. [...] There is no flaw in that argument. It is definite, precise, and has been proved by many unfortunate potters.[21]

18 *PG* (August 1926), p.1257.
19 *PG* (August 1928), p.1297.
20 'Mr W. Staite Murray's Stoneware, Pottery and Drypoints at Mr William Paterson's Gallery', *Apollo* (December 1927), p.283 [quoted in J.F. Stair, 'Critical Writing on English Studio Pottery 1910–1940', unpublished PhD thesis, Royal College of Art, 2002 (p.267)].
21 R.F. Wells, 'The Lure of Making Pottery', *The Arts & Crafts* (May 1927), 10–13 (p.13).

And he was not alone. Both Bernard Leach and Michael Cardew were struggling to stay afloat, and Howson Taylor, whose staff numbers had reduced to just ten by 1926, was beginning to experiment with crystalline glazes which required fewer firings and were thus less expensive.

Moorcroft was not immune to such pressures, but he maintained a reputation for affordable quality. *The Daily News* painted a picture of vibrant export trade despite high import tariffs, mentioning Moorcroft by name as an exemplar of inexpensive excellence:

> With products that are their own travellers, at prices that are cheaper but which themselves have not been cheapened, British pottery manufacturers, especially the Moorcroft firm, have been busy coping with buyers from the United States and Buenos Aires, places that still have money to spend on quality goods.[22]

But the truth was more complicated and less rosy. The 1925–26 year-end results reflected the difficult conditions both in trade and production, exacerbated by the General Strike and its aftermath. Sales had dropped by 21%, but the associated production costs showed a decrease of just 3%, a telling indicator of the steady rise in the price of raw materials. Added to which, overdue accounts were becoming an increasingly significant entry on the balance sheet, causing problems for the cash flow of the business. These factors translated starkly into lower profit margins: gross profits were down 40%, and the net profit had decreased by nearly 60%. Significantly, though, there was a reduction of just 3% for wages; orders may have declined, but Moorcroft was not putting his employees on short-time.

Cash flow continued to be of concern during 1926–27. And to make matters worse, Moorcroft had to contend with another case of plagiarism, this time from Shelley; it was a clear sign of the popularity of his ware, but an indicator, too, of the difficulties caused by manufacturers prepared to imitate and mass produce the designs of a craft potter. S. Lines, glass and china buyer at the Birmingham branch of Liberty's, wrote on 26 April 1927:

> [...] I really felt so indignant when quite a stranger came along this morning with a so-called new line of pottery he pressed upon us, which is so near a replica of your pomegranate as it would be possible to make, without actually copying it. The only difference being that a pear or apple substitutes the actual pomegranate. The finish, of course, is not so good [...].

At the end of the year, though, results had improved significantly. Sales had risen by nearly 8% and gross profits by 18%, yielding a net profit of £3,102, a rise of 31% from 1925–26.

But such progress was reversed the following financial year. Trading conditions continued to deteriorate, and as the year end approached, overdue payments again

22 *The Daily News* (25 February 1926).

loomed large in exchanges with Mr Pasco, Moorcroft's book-keeper at Liberty's. The situation was a sign of the times, but it was aggravated by the unique combination of small-scale infrastructure and large-scale business which characterised Moorcroft's enterprise; the more testing the conditions, the greater the pressure on his time as both designer and manufacturer. Pasco wrote on 18 June 1928, his tone characteristically solicitous:

> I know you are very fully occupied in the production part of your business, and that you have not a large staff of clerks to take these matters up properly, [...] but if you would only give me the names of the accounts you have no 'respect' for, and let me get our solicitors to give them a letter, you would see good results.

In terms of trade, this was Moorcroft's most difficult year to date. Sales fell by over 24% from the previous year, and gross profits stood at just £4,004, a fall of over 48% from 1926–27, and just 37% of the figure recorded in 1924–25 at the height of his commercial success. The net balance was a loss of £1,495. Alwyn Lasenby wrote on 17 August 1928 about the outcome. He could see Moorcroft's rationale for keeping his staff on normal wages, even when trade was poor; this was a highly skilled workforce, which he sought to keep together in anticipation of better times to come. But it was a gamble, albeit a calculated one:

> The loss of £1500 is disappointing, but from all one hears of other manufacturers, many of them are in the same boat. The decrease in returns without any corresponding drop in Workers' wages accounts in the main for the fall in ratio of gross profit, but I know the value of keeping the staff together for when trade improves again, if the depression is not likely to last very long.

Moorcroft would have shared Lasenby's disappointment, this being only the second time in fifteen years that he had recorded a net loss. It was a stark reminder of the ever-worsening economic crisis, but it was a sign, too, of the particular challenges facing a craft potter occupying the uncharted ground between studio and factory which was, in these years, attracting increasing attention.

4. Bridging the Gap Between Studio and Factory

As economic conditions deteriorated, the relationship between studio and factory was more and more actively discussed. Harry Trethowan, a Director of Heal's and Manager of the store's Pottery and Glass department, advocated a much closer relationship of artist-craftsman and manufacturer such as was seen in Europe, implicitly seeing craft as the basis of industrial design rather than of production. He argued that the main obstacle was not one of conceptual difference, but of attitude, a 'false pride of position on both sides':

> Until the industry is capable of appreciating the talent that is spent ineffectively too often by the studio potter (so-called) and until the studio potter realizes the worth of providing industry with such talent, so long will there be waste in both spheres.[23]

Such collaboration was important for industry, and essential, he argued, for the potter, who could neither compete with industry, nor, he implied, survive on the creation of art wares alone.

But this view was not widely shared. Both Gordon Forsyth and Charles Marriott, writing from opposite perspectives, saw little possibility (or even desirability) of effective collaboration. In his report on the Ceramic section of the Paris Exhibition, Forsyth argued that industry set the standard for both technique and design, and suggested that studio pottery had little to offer:

> Studio Pottery is in its infancy in England. Although great hopes are entertained for its future development, at the present moment it cannot be said that it has yet contributed much to the history of English Pottery. It is yet lacking in virility and it is inclined to be affected or to err on the 'pretty-pretty' side.[24]

Improved industrial design would come from the collaboration of manufacturers with artists (rather than craft potters), and he dismissed the argument often advanced by advocates of studio pottery that good design was compromised by the need to be commercial: 'In the hands of an artist, commercial limitations become not a hindrance, but a help, and this fact might as well be recognised by every potter, large or small.'[25] An example of creative collaboration was seen in the work of the Powells for Wedgwood; technical skill was the domain of the manufacturer, and decorative design that of the artist:

> The work of Alfred and Louise Powell is not, in the strictest sense of the term, 'studio' pottery, as their productions are made by Messrs Josiah Wedgwood & Sons, of Stoke-on-Trent. However, this appears to be a very happy and sensible solution of the problem of producing fine pottery. Wedgwood's make excellent pottery and Mr and Mrs Powell are excellent artists.[26]

For Marriott, conversely, studio pottery represented the best of ceramic art, from which industry could profitably learn. In his review of the exhibition organised by the British Institute of Industrial Art [BIIA] in 1927, he distinguished it completely from the everyday wares of industrial manufacture:

> It leaves us unmoved that the wares of such potters as Mr W. Staite Murray and Mr Bernard Leach [...] have to be produced at prices prohibitive to most of us; they serve

23 H. Trethowan, 'Potters and Pottery of Today in England', *The Arts & Crafts* (May 1928), 82–85 (p.83).
24 G. Forsyth, 'Pottery', in *Reports on the Present Position and Tendencies of the Industrial Arts as indicated at the International Exhibition of Modern Decorative and Industrial Arts, Paris, 1925*, 127–38 (pp.133–34).
25 Ibid., p.129.
26 Ibid., p.134.

> their purpose as 'museum pieces' and the pottery trade will ultimately benefit by their example, as the world benefits by 'cloistered virtues'.[27]

But as Marriott situated studio pottery in the collector's cabinet, Leach argued that the craft potter should also be producing functional wares of equivalent quality for a wider public. In March 1927, he held two concurrent exhibitions, artistic stoneware at the Paterson Gallery (his first Bond Street exhibition) and practical slipware at the Three Shields Gallery in Holland Park. In an accompanying note, he emphasised the craftsman's social responsibility, responding, implicitly, to Forsyth's criticism of studio pottery as 'pretty-pretty'; he sought to bridge the 'gulf' which isolated the craft potter from 'national life':

> There is a need to escape from the atmosphere of the over-precious; and not only have the new craftsmen to prove that they can be creative, but as 'artist-craftsmen' they must if only for the sake of their art, contribute to national life. A growing public wants to enjoy the use of its crockery, and that can only be if it is inseparably practical and beautiful. [...] There is a profound and urgent need for attempting to bridge that gulf soon.[28]

He returned to this theme in his pamphlet, 'A Potter's Outlook', which accompanied a second dual exhibition in 1928 of 'Stoneware Pottery' at F. Lessore's Beaux Arts Gallery, Bond Street, and 'Stoneware for Daily Use' at Mairet's New Handworkers' Gallery. It was an assault on what he saw as the two irreconcilable extremes to which pottery was currently being taken: the exclusive creation of expensive art wares for individuals, and the mass production of cheap functional wares for a popular market. Leach sought to position himself between these two extremes, and to re-establish a link with 'ordinary life'; this was the potter's natural role, a role usurped, and perverted, by an industry driven by commercial motives: 'Having become a potter in Japan, a land still new to the affair of industrialism, I did not realise the chasm which a century of factories had torn between ordinary life and handcrafts such as mine.'[29]

The principal challenge was that of increasing output. Leach saw craft as essential to the making of pottery with 'a nature of its own, a soul', but without serial production, he could not produce wares in sufficient quantity, or cheaply enough, to be viable.[30] He had identified a problem, but he was not close to resolving it. He sought to distinguish his ware from the 'museum pieces' celebrated by critics, and yet he was exhibiting in London art galleries; the extent to which his pottery might actually reach a non-collecting public was not discussed. Marriott saw little future in this project; without economies of scale, the production of such wares simply did not pay:

> [...] Mr Leach cannot produce for less than 5s [shillings] the cup and saucer that the factory can produce at 3s. On these terms there can be no competition between the private

27 C. Marriott, 'British Pottery', *The Times*, 30 September 1927.
28 Text reproduced in Stair, 'Critical Writing', Appendix.
29 B. Leach, 'A Potter's Outlook' [1928]; text reproduced in C. Hogben (ed), *The Art of Bernard Leach* (London: Faber & Faber, 1978), 189–91 (p.189).
30 Ibid.

> kiln and the factory in wares 'for daily use', and the line of progress would seem to be the gradual absorption of the artistic potter into the factory—in a relationship which it would need an expert to determine.[31]

The nebulous 'absorption' of the craft potter into industry gestured towards a European model, but it was not Leach's vision. His aim was not to create designs for mechanised production, but to establish craft production on a larger than studio scale. And he realised the difficulties he faced:

> It may seem to some critics that craftsmen like myself can serve the most useful purpose, and incidentally be a great deal happier, by remaining free in our crafts, and not attempting tasks which they would probably describe as foredoomed to failure. Though they may be right as far as immediate success is concerned, I beg to differ. Instead I ask for support for a tentative and difficult undertaking.[32]

Leach was not alone, nor was he the first, to consider this 'tentative and difficult undertaking'. For many, the relatively new firm of Carter, Stabler & Adams embodied a creative fusion of studio and factory, where manufacturer and designer(s) collaborated in the serial production of craft wares. Forsyth highlighted their 'entirely hand-made' production in his Paris report, and later that year, Marriott's review of their work at the BIIA exhibition recognised their distinctive structure, occupying 'an intermediate place between studio and factory production'.[33] Adams himself had explored this challenge in an article of 1926, identifying potters who were achieving the serial production of handmade wares:

> There are a number of potters who see the problem, [...] and who work out the ideals of the ceramic artist while using works organization and facilities. The pioneer in this field was Mr Howson Taylor, whose first pieces were produced over twenty years ago. About the same time were originated the Pilkington lustres and Moorcroft wares; and since the war the Poole-painted pottery with entirely fresh and modern designs.[34]

Craft was at the heart of all four enterprises, but they were not a homogeneous group. Two (Pilkington and Carter, Stabler & Adams) were collectives based on an industrial model of collaboration between Manager, Art Director and designer(s), and both were subsidiary companies of (as it happens) tile manufacturers. Only Howson Taylor and Moorcroft had established production around their own individual creativity as potters.

It was as a craft potter that Moorcroft continued to be seen. A review of *Handcraft Pottery for Workshop and School* by Henry and Denise Wren, founders of the Oxshott Pottery, explicitly categorised him in this light:

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31 C. Marriott, 'Mr Bernard Leach', *The Times* (6 December 1928), p.21.
32 Leach, 'A Potter's Outlook', p.191.
33 C.Marriott, 'British Pottery', *The Times* (30 September 1927), p.8.
34 J. Adams, 'Modern British Pottery', *Architectural Review* (January-July 1926), 190–93 (p.190).

> The best of our modern craft potters like William Moorcroft, for instance, are so busy making and evolving designs which delight and fascinate us, that they have little time […] to become instructors in the art of producing good pots, other than by the most direct means of the workshop itself.[35]

He was not even seen as bridging a gap between studio and factory; he was described unequivocally as a 'craft potter', with a 'workshop'. He may not have created each piece single-handed—an assumed characteristic of the studio potter—but he continued to design both its form and ornament, create his own colours and glazes, and train the decorators, as he had done since the start of his career. And critics continued to emphasise this close involvement with production: a review of 1928 recognised particularly his 'special, personal interest in every piece of pottery which he designed', an interest epitomised in his practice of signing each piece by hand.[36] No other potter did so when he began his career, and thirty years later, it was still the case; even studio potters tended to use an impressed stamp. And the individuality which defined his practice, was seen to characterise his designs as well; critics sensed in his work the mark of his personality. The *Pottery Gazette* journalist recalled his predecessor William Thomson, 'a man of keen perception', whose articles had celebrated Moorcroft's distinctive ware in the Macintyre years:

> […] his first thought on examining Mr Moorcroft's creations was how perfectly ornamentation harmonised with form, the result of shape and decoration emanating from the same artist. 'The artist', he said, 'has succeeded in impressing his individuality on every piece.'[37]

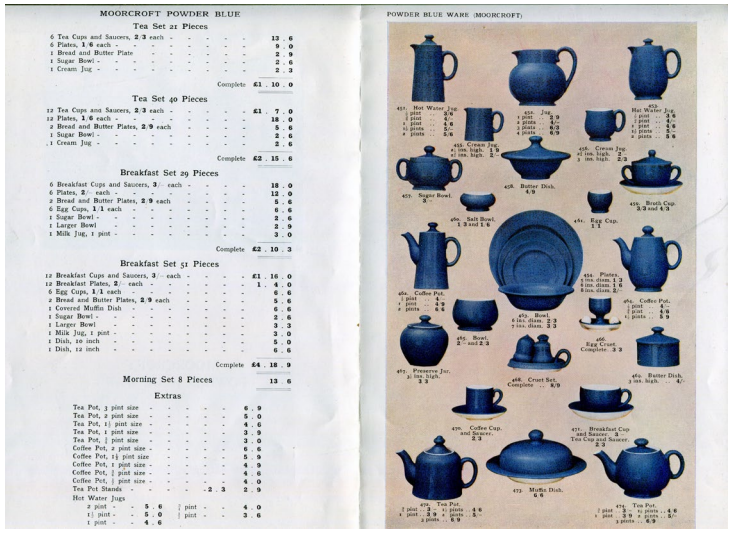
In other respects, though, Moorcroft did not operate like a studio potter. He did not exhibit in London galleries which, almost by definition, did not deal in wares destined for serial production; Moorcroft's craft was of a different kind. If the studio potter catered largely (and inevitably) for a market of collectors and connoisseurs, Moorcroft's reach was recognised as being much wider. Adams identified tableware as the most immediate sign of a potter's contribution to national life, although he implied that this may require a more mechanised production:

> The greatest need is for simply designed and thoroughly well-made table wares, and this immediately brings in the question of the right use of machinery. It can only be dealt with successfully by combining modern factory organisation with the utmost refinement of taste, and skill in ceramic decorative technique.[38]

In his select group, only Moorcroft was producing such wares in any quantity, as well as other functional or decorative pieces. And he was doing so using craft techniques, and at a viable price. Price lists for Powder Blue dating from this period list a Cup and

35 'Handcraft Pottery', *PGR* (August 1928), p.203.
36 *PG* (May 1928), 771–73 (p.771).
37 Ibid., pp.771–73.
38 Adams, 'Modern British Pottery', p.190.

Saucer for two shillings and three pence, or sixteen shillings a dozen, prices which compare very favourably with the three shillings proposed by Marriott as the average price for industrial ware.


MOORCROFT POWDER BLUE

Tea Set 21 Pieces

6 Tea Cups and Saucers, 2/3 each - - - - - - 13 . 6
6 Plates, 1/6 each - - - - - - - - 9 . 0
1 Bread and Butter Plate - - - - - - - 2 . 9
1 Sugar Bowl - - - - - - - - - 2 . 6
1 Cream Jug - - - - - - - - - 2 . 3

Complete £1 . 10 . 0

Tea Set 40 Pieces

12 Tea Cups and Saucers, 2/3 each - - - - - £1 . 7 . 0
12 Plates, 1/6 each - - - - - - - - 18 . 0
2 Bread and Butter Plates, 2/9 each - - - - - 5 . 6
1 Sugar Bowl - - - - - - - - - 2 . 6
1 Cream Jug - - - - - - - - - 2 . 6

Complete £2 . 15 . 6

Breakfast Set 29 Pieces

6 Breakfast Cups and Saucers, 3/- each - - - - - 18 . 0
6 Plates, 2/- each - - - - - - - - 12 . 0
2 Bread and Butter Plates, 2/9 each - - - - - 5 . 6
6 Egg Cups, 1/1 each - - - - - - - - 6 . 6
1 Sugar Bowl - - - - - - - - - 2 . 6
1 Larger Bowl - - - - - - - - - 2 . 9
1 Milk Jug, 1 pint - - - - - - - - 3 . 0

Complete £2 . 10 . 3

Breakfast Set 51 Pieces

12 Breakfast Cups and Saucers, 3/- each - - - - - £1 . 16 . 0
12 Breakfast Plates, 2/- each - - - - - - - 1 . 4 . 0
6 Egg Cups, 1/1 each - - - - - - - - 6 . 6
2 Bread and Butter Plates, 2/9 each - - - - - 5 . 6
1 Covered Muffin Dish - - - - - - - - 6 . 6
1 Sugar Bowl - - - - - - - - - 2 . 6
1 Larger Bowl - - - - - - - - - 3 . 3
1 Milk Jug, 1 pint - - - - - - - - 3 . 0
1 Dish, 10 inch - - - - - - - - - 5 . 0
1 Dish, 12 inch - - - - - - - - - 6 . 6

Complete £4 . 18 . 9

Morning Set 8 Pieces 13 . 6

Extras

Tea Pot, 3 pint size - - - - - - 6 . 9
Tea Pot, 2 pint size - - - - - - 5 . 0
Tea Pot, 1½ pint size - - - - - - 4 . 6
Tea Pot, 1 pint size - - - - - - 3 . 9
Tea Pot, ½ pint size - - - - - - 3 . 0
Coffee Pot, 2 pint size - - - - - - 6 . 6
Coffee Pot, 1½ pint size - - - - - - 5 . 9
Coffee Pot, 1 pint size - - - - - - 4 . 9
Coffee Pot, ½ pint size - - - - - - 4 . 6
Coffee Pot, ½ pint size - - - - - - 4 . 0
Tea Pot Stands - - - - - - 2 . 3 2 . 9
Hot Water Jugs
2 pint - - 5 . 6 ½ pint - - 4 . 0
1½ pint - - 5 . 0 ½ pint - - 3 . 6
1 pint - - 4 . 6

POWDER BLUE WARE (MOORCROFT)

Fig. 83 Price list for Powder Blue tableware. 'Personal and Commercial Papers of William Moorcroft', Stoke-on-Trent City Archives, SD 1837. CC BY-NC

When Marriott borrowed John Milton's term 'cloistered virtue' to describe the qualities of studio pottery, it was to imply a difference from the products of industrial design: its distance from the commercial world was seen as its claim to superiority. For Milton, ironically, such remoteness was a weakness, not a strength: 'I cannot praise a fugitive and cloistered virtue, unexercised and unbreathed, that never sallies out and sees her adversary'.[39] And Moorcroft would doubtless have agreed; he took his pottery into the world of commerce, defending the virtues of artistic integrity in both design and production against the temptations of commercial gain, or of fashion.

In his Paris report, Forsyth did not explicitly situate Moorcroft in the middle ground between studio and factory, but the wares he drew attention to exemplified his identity as the creator both of art wares and of pieces for daily use. He was presented as a craftsman whose mastery of ceramic art was comparable to that of Asian potters:

> Mr William Moorcroft is a potter whose productions have a distinct individuality of their own, although his finest pieces closely follow the shape, colour and glaze effects of the Chinese Potters. Several noble pieces of this type were shown in the Exhibition [...].[40]

But Forsyth noted too Moorcroft's exhibit of Powder Blue, teaware fit for purpose in the finest traditions of modern industrial art, and whose form, like the best studio pottery, assured its 'artistic appeal':

39 John Milton, *Areopagitica* (1644).
40 Forsyth, 'Pottery', p.132.

> He also showed in the entrance hall of the British Pavilion a very interesting breakfast set in blue slip. This exceedingly effective set was quite plain and undecorated, relying solely upon the beauty of the shapes for its artistic appeal. This group was extremely sound and sensible for utilitarian ware.[41]

Paradoxically, Moorcroft's enterprise enacted the project Leach sketched out in 1928, the creation of craft pottery, everyday and practical, affordable by more than a privileged few. Leach described it as a 'tentative and difficult undertaking';[42] Moorcroft had been realising it since 1913.

Howson Taylor, Leach and Moorcroft were all, in their different ways, seeking to bridge the gap between studio and factory. Neither Howson Taylor nor Leach was, properly, doing so; Howson Taylor produced relatively little ware for everyday use, and Leach had not yet begun to solve the logistical challenges of his ambition. Moorcroft, however, had already achieved a distinctive synthesis, retaining his identity as an individual potter, creating in larger than studio quantities work of his own design. He was committed to craft, but also to the craftsman's responsibility to serve a wider public than an artist might target. The distinctive nature of his enterprise was appreciated (in part) by Adams and Forsyth; it would be recognised, however, in two quite different ways in the course of 1928, one very public, the other unadvertised.

5. A New Status

The patronage of Moorcroft's pottery by the royal family, and by Queen Mary in particular, had been noted by the press for nearly fifteen years. One (unsourced) review of his exhibit at the 1926 BIF alluded to her personal interest in his ware: 'The Queen [...] has a fine collection of Moorcroft's artistic pottery, and rarely fails to give attention to their stand.[43] By 1928, however, royal esteem had reached a new level. Writing to his daughter Beatrice from the British Industries Fair on 21 February 1928, Moorcroft described the royal visit to his stand:

> The King shook hands and told me how much he admired my new work, and the Queen also shook hands as she arrived and purchased two vases [...]. Today both the King and Queen were very pleased with the pottery, and both again shook hands with me when leaving. Their Majesties have just bowed when leaving hitherto, but today they doubly honoured me.

These protocols were significant, and suggested a level of appreciation reserved for a select few. Shortly after the Fair Moorcroft approached a member of the Queen's Household. Awards of the Royal Warrant were made (or declined) in response to an application, and Moorcroft was seeking advice. The reply was dated 15 March 1928:

41 Ibid.
42 Leach, 'A Potter's Outlook', p.191.
43 Press cutting in WM Archive.

> I had a long talk the other day with Mr Martin Richards on the subject of the Royal Warrant, and I have every reason to think that if you make an application for it, you will be successful. [...] No one will be more delighted than I shall be to see you using it, and its being of value.

Moorcroft submitted his application the next day, and within a week, on 19 March 1928, the Palace wrote with news of his success. A Memorandum accompanying the letter set out the conditions:

> The Warrant of Appointment granted by the Lord Chamberlain to The Queen confers on the persons named therein the privilege of making use of a representation of Her Majesty's Arms in connection with their business, provided that the words 'By Appointment' appear in every instance immediately underneath the same. The Warrant, however, does not carry with it the right to fly Her Majesty's Standard, to use the word 'Royal', or to make use of the Arms as a Trade Mark. It is strictly personal, and will become void upon the Death, Retirement, or Bankruptcy of the persons named therein [...]

The award, significantly, was 'strictly personal', and coterminous with his activity as a potter; it recognised William Moorcroft's essential role in the creation of his distinctive pottery, and implicitly saw the one as indispensable to the other. It was an expression of faith, but not without a note of caution: the Warrant would be terminated in the event of bankruptcy. In the middle of his most challenging financial year so far, this condition would not have gone unnoticed; it was more important than ever to succeed.

For the press, this was the culminating point of Moorcroft's career, the official endorsement of his quality as a very individual potter. In the *Pottery Gazette* of May 1928, the distinction of the award was celebrated, as was its justice:

> Shoals of congratulations have already reached Mr Moorcroft from the firm's customers and from admirers of the Moorcroft creations, and there is no doubt that the pottery trade, as a whole, will derive satisfaction from the knowledge that so talented a potter, and one of such fine susceptibilities in connection with his life's work, has received the official recognition of our Royal Family, an honour which many men in business would be inclined to regard as the highest tribute they could wish to receive [...].[44]

A Royal Warrant was, under any circumstances, a rare honour, but it had all the more significance coming from a monarch whose own refined taste was widely appreciated, and had been the subject of a series of articles in *The Connoisseur* the previous year. But this patronage was an endorsement, too, of ware which deserved the attention of a wider public. It was in just these terms that royal support was presented in the *Woman's Pictorial*:

> H.M. the Queen has frequently purchased specimens of the 'Moorcroft' art. On one occasion, Her Majesty bought a lustre bowl in different tones of green; at another time a vase, part of which, to use her own words, 'was like a raven's wing'. And where the

44 *PG* (May 1928), p.771.

> Queen has chosen to lead, you may follow, for there are many articles well within your pockets.[45]

Potter for the connoisseur, and potter for a wider public; there could be no more eloquent recognition of Moorcroft's distinctive identity. In the months which followed, it would be complemented by another expression of appreciation, more private this time, by Liberty's.

At the end of 1927, an incident, trivial in appearance, prompted a substantial review of Moorcroft's relationship with Liberty's. The retailer accepted a contract to design a stand for Doulton's, who were exhibiting at the 1928 BIF after an absence of some years. For Moorcroft, this represented a conflict of interests, all the more unsettling as economic pressures were increasing in 1927–28. Writing to Blackmore on 21 December 1927, he tactfully pointed this out, underlining the perfect complementarity of their skills:

> You leave to me entirely the question of production, and one rightly or wrongly looks to you for assistance in every possible way outside that. [...] It would have made all the difference to us if our competitors had gone elsewhere for the building of their stand. In my humble opinion, their doing so would have left us alone with a stand as only yourselves build.

What was at issue were the relative obligations of each party to W. Moorcroft Ltd. In a letter of 15 May 1928, Moorcroft argued that the Articles of Association, which provided for the distribution of dividends and profits, were a sufficient statement of their agreed relationship. What he questioned was the contract he had signed in 1913 which bound him to the Company for the duration of his working life. Although it effectively denied him the freedom to design outside the firm which bore his name, this did not in practice constitute any kind of artistic constraint; he and W. Moorcroft Ltd were, in that respect, one and the same. But it did cede ownership of his designs, glaze recipes and even his name (in the form of the Company's trade mark) to the Company. What concerned him were its possible consequences when, for whatever reason, his association came to an end.

The terms of the contract (and the need for it) occupied Moorcroft and Blackmore during May and June 1928. Moorcroft wrote again on 12 June 1928, disputing its justice:

> In my suggesting a resolution that the agreement of May 9th 1913 becomes null and void, I am so hoping to end an agreement which in no way helps anyone, and is as unnecessary as it is unfair. Is it reasonable to ask anyone to sign an agreement to serve a company for the whole of his life?

Blackmore replied on 14 June 1928. Noting that Liberty's had, in 1921, quite voluntarily converted their debentures into shares, and foregone what had originally been a majority voting power, he then turned to Moorcroft's question:

45 J. Erskine, 'From the Potter's Wheel', *Woman's Pictorial* (7 April 1928).

> 'Is it reasonable to ask anyone to sign an Agreement to serve for his whole life?' My reply to that is 'Yes! certainly, when the man's personal influence upon the business of the Company is really the foundation of the Company, and necessary to its continued success'. In this particular case, your entering into that contract was the original inducement to Liberty & Co. to put their money in, and without it they would not have done so.

Blackmore's response was unequivocal, and unconditional. Liberty's investment in the Company was quite simply an investment in William Moorcroft, no more and no less; fifteen years after the original contract, that had not changed. Their uncompromising confidence in his work was both the strength and the weakness of his position. It gave him complete creative freedom, and provided an invaluable commercial infrastructure; his exchanges with Pasco at this very moment were clear evidence of the extent to which he benefited from their help. But it also implied an indissoluble link between Liberty's investment in W. Moorcroft Ltd., and Moorcroft's association with that firm. For Moorcroft, this discussion was not (just) about the present, but also about the future; for Liberty's, though, it was the present that mattered, and William Moorcroft was essential to that.

Moorcroft replied on 15 June 1928, evoking again the incident of the Doulton stand. His own commitment to the firm, with or without a contractual obligation, was self-evident; it was theirs, he asserted, which had recently been drawn into question:

> In my humble opinion, you have less reason to ask me to sign an agreement to serve the company for life than I have to ask you to serve the company for life. And incidentally, by your action of erecting a stand at the British Industries Fair in 1928 to compete with us, [...] you actually have made difficulties which I have had to fight against.

Liberty's clearly wished to retain their association with Moorcroft, and it is striking how much they were prepared to concede, and how quickly. Minutes of a meeting of the Directors of W. Moorcroft Ltd. on 27 June 1928 recorded Moorcroft's proposed new contract:

> The Chairman proposed that the Agreement of May 9th 1913 should be cancelled and that in lieu thereof he should give an undertaking not to compete with the Company's business in the future, either directly or indirectly, and that a similar undertaking should be entered into by Liberty & Co. Limited.

On 28 June 1928, Blackmore sent Moorcroft a draft agreement on just those lines.

Liberty's commitment to William Moorcroft, and their belief in his art, was unwavering; at no stage did they raise the possibility of withdrawing their financial support. For all the deteriorating economic conditions, they were receiving a good return on their investment, and since 1921 they had been prepared to make many concessions to keep this association. Except one: they needed to be assured that their investment was in Moorcroft himself. It was an endorsement of his art no less categorical than the Royal Warrant. The revised contract did not significantly change his relationship with Liberty's, nor did it resolve the uncertainty about their eventual interest in W. Moorcroft Ltd. without William Moorcroft. But it did change his

relationship with the firm. Gone were the clauses which assigned to W. Moorcroft Ltd. ownership of his designs and of his name in the form of the trademark. The focus was no longer on the rights of the firm as an independent entity, but on Moorcroft's defining identity at its centre. It is significant that the letterhead designed after the award of the Warrant should prominently display the name Moorcroft, and place a much more diminutive W. and Ltd at either side. What mattered was not the Company's name, but the family's, and not even just his own. It was a name, and a tradition, which implicitly included his own parents, and which would extend, Moorcroft may well have hoped already, to his children.

Fig. 84 Company letterheads pre- and post-1928. 'Personal and Commercial Papers of William Moorcroft', Stoke-on-Trent City Archives, SD 1837. CC BY-NC

Both these events, so different in appearance, recognised Moorcroft at the very heart of his Company; the Warrant was awarded to the potter, and Liberty's underlined their investment in the man. At a time when the relationship of individual potters and larger enterprises was being actively discussed, this was very revealing. Moorcroft may have been operating on a larger than studio scale, but his work remained the expression of his individuality as a potter. It was this defining role, and the very personal quality of his enterprise, which was recognised to the point of taking precedence over the firm. But both events recognised, too, the broad reach of his wares. This was not pottery for a limited market, it was making a contribution to the life of the nation, a commercial as well as artistic success.

6. Conclusions

In a letter of congratulation dated 2 April 1928, S.H. Price of the Burslem teapot manufacturers, Price Brothers, recognised in Moorcroft a potter who had remained true to his principles, and whose achievements had now been given the acknowledgement they deserved:

> Hearty congratulations on your appointment. You have ploughed a unique furrow against great odds, and can now rejoice that you have public recognition from a most exclusive quarter, which you can couple with the private appreciation that you must have known you already enjoy from those who have followed your efforts.

Moorcroft was never afraid to go his own way. His designs of these years were not those of a potter producing fashionable wares, simply to make a profit; his response to the challenges of the times was to create wares he believed in. In an outspoken letter to the *Pottery and Glass Record* on the subject of modern design, he sketched out his vision of a national art, informed by honesty in both design and execution:

> Your article on Decorative Art and Modern Industry in your July Journal leaves one wondering why it is left to extremists to say what is best for the English craftsman to do or not to do. The sound English craftsman maintains his position only by being himself, and above all by remembering his great traditions, and showing in his everyday work that England is England.[46]

It was a profession of faith in the values of integrity and individuality, and an implied rejection of the commercial priorities of modern manufacture.

By the end of 1928, Moorcroft had come into his own, his unique fusion of studio and factory winning recognition at every level. In a review of his work in the *Pottery Gazette*, the journalist saw Moorcroft's distinguished status as the inevitable outcome of his highly individual work, a success which had been predicted by Thomson more than twenty years earlier, when he was still working at Macintyre's:

> On another occasion, the same writer observed [...] 'Mr Moorcroft has already made for himself a name which, whatever may now happen, will in the future be classed with the most famous art potters of the country'. [...] That writer of many years ago was not destined to live to see Mr Moorcroft operating in his potteries; he only knew, in his own mind, that there was something inherent to the Moorcroft creations which was bound to be irrepressible.[47]

And yet Moorcroft continued to look ahead. The untimely death of Florence was a powerful reminder of life's uncertainty. It replayed his father's experience, whose wife died when William was just short of nine years old, the same age as his own son, Walter, in 1926; and, as he could not have forgotten, Thomas himself died little more than three years later. Paradoxically, the very terms of the Royal Warrant which recognised the distinction of his work while envisaging its eventual end, were a potent reminder of that fragility. From this high point, it was inevitable that he should reflect on the future. In October 1928 he remarried. His second wife was Hazel Lasenby, Alwyn Lasenby's niece.

The times were changing. Economic conditions continued to decline, and by the end of the decade a new generation was reaching adulthood in this post-war world.

46 *PGR* (August 1927), p.206.
47 *PG* (May 1928), p.773.

Many of the designers coming to prominence were born around the turn of the century, and appealed to those of their age: Clarice Cliff, Susie Cooper, Millicent Taplin, Eric Slater. Moorcroft, though, was no less sensitive to the spirit of the times. Writing to his daughter, Beatrice, on 30 October 1928, shortly after his marriage and the conclusion of his negotiations with Liberty's, he expressed a renewed delight in the world around him:

> One must be ever grateful for the joys of life, life with all its fascination, a fascination that keeps us ever young. The spirit of the child with her simple yet beautiful understanding is with all those who seek beauty in life. Love and Life are synonymous.

Moorcroft would continue to keep faith with what he believed in. It was the reaction of an artist, of one not content simply to follow the market, to play safe. In September 1928, he sat for a new portrait photograph by Hay Wrightson, his expression direct, alert, determined.

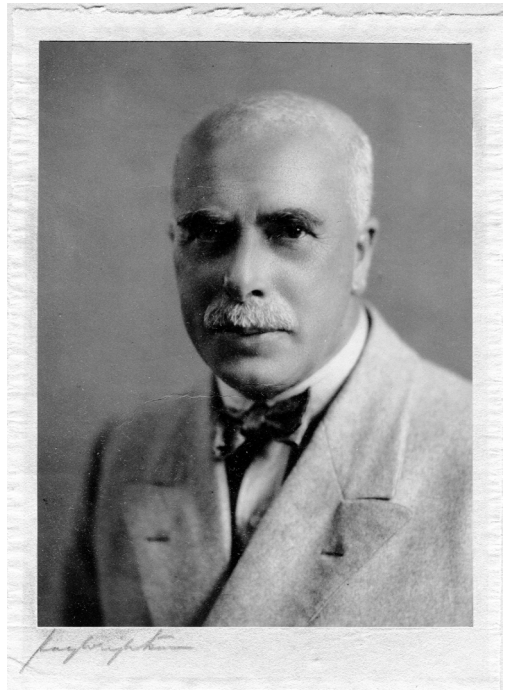


Fig. 85 William Moorcroft, portrait by Hay Wrightson (1928) Photograph. Family papers. CC BY-NC

And in another letter to Beatrice, dated 7 November 1928, he described his day firing the flambé kiln, a job he entrusted to no other:

> I have been working on a gas oven today; it is somewhat tiring. The chief danger is absorbing carbon monoxide. It is a cumulative poison. But then we should seldom achieve much in life if we took no risks. A safe risk is always permissible.

A period which began with a setback which might have finished his artistic life, closed with the emergence of a potter increasingly sure of his identity and authority, ready to face the challenges of the future. The Royal Warrant may have represented, in one sense, the culmination of his career; it did not, in any sense, mark its end.