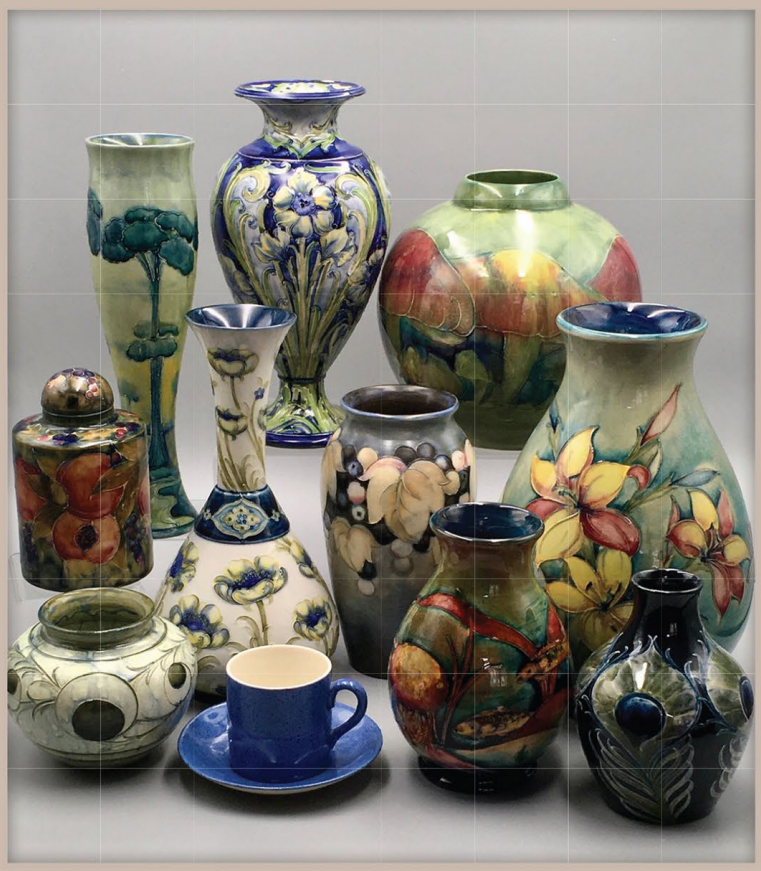
William Moorcroft, Potter

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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12. 1932–35: Individuality and Industrial Art

1. Economic Stagnation

In 1932, economic conditions were still bleak. A 'Buy British' campaign attempted to counter the influx of cheap imports, but protectionist tariffs in Britain made exports more difficult for manufacturers, as other countries took retaliatory action. Self-destructive price-cutting was widespread, and part-time working inevitable; in the winter of 1932–33, over a quarter of the working population was unemployed.

With high costs and low output compared with larger firms, Moorcroft was particularly vulnerable to these pressures. On 11 January 1932, the *Toronto Evening Telegram* advertised another 'sensational' sale of his ware at Eaton's, 'thousands of pieces of this world-renowned pottery' at 'less than half usual prices'.

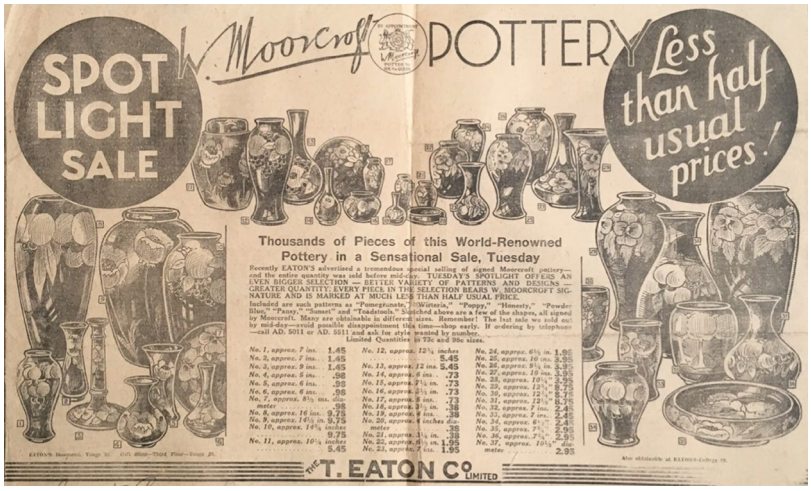

Fig. 96 Advertisement for sale of Moorcroft's pottery, *Toronto Evening Telegram* (11 January 1932). 'Personal and Commercial Papers of William Moorcroft', Stoke-on-Trent City Archives, SD 1837. CC BY-NC

The sale brought immediate financial benefit, but it also put strain on Moorcroft's relationship with other outlets. Cassidy's wrote indignantly on 12 January 1932,

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complaining of 'this flow of 'Moorcroft' pottery at half price', and others commented on its damaging impact on the status of his work. In a letter dated 3 October 1932, W.J.F. Mallagh, a stationer in Toronto, was clear about the consequences: 'all this price cutting is bound to have its effect on art lovers, and it seems to me altogether too bad that your artistry is being cheapened in this fashion'.[1] The market for full-price wares was clearly shrinking, and yet, after the experiment with Eaton's, Moorcroft deliberately avoided undertakings which cheapened his ware, either literally or metaphorically. In 1933, Bournvita commissioned Wedgwood to design and manufacture jug, beaker and stand sets, available to the public in exchange for wrappers and coupons; in the same year, a similar proposal came to Moorcroft, from another source, but he declined. For all the financial benefits it might have brought, he would not turn his ware into a marketing gimmick, as he admitted in a letter to Claude Taylor, 7 July 1933:

> I am battling to withstand the force of mass production. I recently refused orders from a Tobacco Company who were anxious to give my pots for a collection of cigarette cards. But I find historic houses such as Etruria Wedgwood are giving the pots to anyone that collects a number of covers from various food tins or cases. Am I wrong in refusing to so keep my workers employed? I do not think so.

Moorcroft wished his pottery to be chosen and appreciated on its own terms, and not simply acquired indirectly, at minimal cost. This approach also informed his very selective sales strategy. Extensive correspondence from 1934 with a new travelling representative in the south of England, Grace Garton, is particularly revealing in this regard. Garton appreciated the high quality of Moorcroft's work, telling him on 29 September 1934, 'I shall never place your pottery in any unfit shop for the sake of money'. Moorcroft saw his ware as more than a commercial commodity, and for all the difficulties of the times he was not prepared to sell it at any price. He was defending his own integrity, and that of his staff.

But this was an increasingly difficult line to follow. On 14 February 1933 he wrote to the Editor of *The Times*, requesting a notice of his display at the British Industries Fair [BIF]:

> At the present time, pure individual craftsmanship is affected owing to the tendency to buy mass-produced things, and my workers are only able to work for a very limited time each week. I am showing, as I have always done, a collection of my pottery at the B.I.F. and [...] any reference to my efforts to produce good things would help us to continue our work.

His reference to working short-time was no exaggeration, and the consequences were serious; it was in the course of this year that he lost one of his longest-serving tube-liners, Fanny Morrey, to Charlotte Rhead's newly-formed department at A.G. Richardson. Financial results in the tax year 1931–32 had improved markedly on the previous year, with sales showing an increase of 7%, and a substantial net profit of over £2,300; it

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

was the result of the sales to Eaton's, no doubt. Thereafter, trading was difficult and, as the Depression deepened, balanced books were a measure of his success. After the strong result in 1931–32, the following year saw, unsurprisingly, a fall in income of nearly 30%; in the following two years, though, sales grew modestly, by 6% in 1933–34 and by 3% in 1934–35. Levels were now barely 50% of those achieved in Moorcroft's last significant year of 1929–30, the year of the Wall Street crash, but he had arrested further decline. Nevertheless, with increasing running costs, debts and wages, net profits were falling steadily; the high point of 1931–32 was followed by consecutive falls to £444, £356, and £12. At the Directors' meeting of 12 September 1933, it was agreed to suspend payment of the Directors' fees to Moorcroft and Alwyn Lasenby; an identical resolution would be passed in September 1934 and again in September 1935.

2. Re-Thinking Industrial Design

Against this background of economic contraction, the competitiveness of modern industrial design was being discussed with ever-increasing urgency. In the summer of 1932, Lord Gorell's Committee on Art and Industry, set up in 1931, published its report. It stressed the necessity of improving the quality of British industrial production, and proposed exhibitions of affordable, well-designed wares as a means of refining public taste. It recommended that the 'advancement of industrial art' should become the responsibility of the Board of Trade, and that a new Council for Art and Industry (CAI) be formed, replacing the British Institute of Industrial Art (set up jointly by the Board of Trade and the Board of Education). Established in 1934, its Chair was Frank Pick, newly-appointed Chairman of the London Passenger Transport Board. Pick saw the mission of the CAI to educate consumers, to reform the training of designers, and to encourage closer collaboration of artists and industry, areas where the leading countries of Europe were seen to be much further advanced and consequently more competitive.

Many pottery manufacturers resisted these conclusions, maintaining that sales figures were a more relevant (and reliable) measure of success than the more shadowy concept of good 'taste', all the more suspect for its origins outside the world of industry. It was in this spirit that the achievement of Josiah Spode was evaluated in the bicentenary year of his birth. In a lecture by John Thomas, 'Josiah Spode: his times and triumphs', it was his popularity (and his balance sheet), rather than his designs, which defined his greatness:

> The final arbiter on Spode and Spode Ware was not the art director, the director of a museum, the art collector, or the connoisseur, but the public. [...] He was a plain, blunt Staffordshire business manufacturer, out to sell Spode ware and to make a commercial success of it.[2]

2 'Josiah Spode: His Times and Triumphs', *Pottery Gazette and Glass Trade Review* [*PG*] (November 1933), 1341–45 (p.1345).

It was a view expressed, too, by Colley Shorter at a meeting of the North Staffordshire branch of the Society of Industrial Artists. The spectacular success of Clarice Cliff at the Newport Pottery exemplified and affirmed its validity: 'the ideal designer was he or she who could produce designs which would sell by themselves.'[3]

For others, though, popularity was not a reliable measure of design quality, nor was it a guarantee of international competitiveness, not least because British taste was seen to be very conservative. Already in preparation before publication of the Gorell report, the exhibition of British Industrial Art in Relation to the Home at Dorland Hall in 1933 was inspired by the successful exhibition of Swedish Industrial Art in 1931. Organised by Christopher Hussey of *Country Life*, in association with the Design and Industries Association [DIA], it sought to highlight collaborations of designer and manufacturer to match the Swedish examples. On 19 June 1933, the day before the opening, Gorell and Hussey wrote to *The Times*, confidently affirming that 'Modern British design now takes its place beside that of Sweden, France and Germany'.[4] Its focus lay on functionality, and on the close integration of design and means of production; these were the qualities which defined modern European industrial art: 'Everything exhibited illustrates the principle that our needs today are most aptly supplied by designs evolved from industrial technique and the natural properties of materials.'[5] It was an exhibition of moderated modernity, bringing together some of the most forward-looking industrial potteries of the time. Many of the exhibits were (still) hand-decorated, but several manufacturers were displaying wares made in collaboration with progressive designers, and using modern methods of decoration. Wedgwood exhibited the first sculptural and unornamented designs of Keith Murray, as well as hand-decorated tableware designed by Millicent Taplin and Harry Trethowan; Carter, Stabler & Adams displayed some of John Adams's modern functional wares with banded decoration applied with an aerograph technique; A.J. Wilkinson exhibited Clarice Cliff's 'striking new designs of daring impulse' which continued to experiment with new decorative effects,[6] many applied to distinctive angular shapes; and Susie Cooper attracted particular attention for the sleek lines of her Kestrel shape, and her simplified, at times abstract, decorative designs. A review in *The Times* praised its 'close attention to contemporary needs and conditions',[7] and, writing three years later, Pevsner saw it as 'the best survey of modern and well-designed objects which has so far been held in England'.[8]

A different perspective on the relationship of art and industry was offered by the exhibition 'Modern Art for the Table', held at Harrods in 1934, which featured china, pottery and glass decorated with designs commissioned from twenty-seven of the

3 'What the Pottery Manufacturer expects from the Designer', *PG* (April 1933), p.499.
4 'The Modern Home. A British Exhibition', *The Times* (19 June 1933), p.10.
5 Ibid.
6 *PG* (July 1933), p.844.
7 'British Industrial Art', *The Times* (20 June 1933), p.14.
8 N. Pevsner, *An Enquiry into Industrial Art in England* (Cambridge: C.U.P., 1937), p.170.

country's leading artists; it was the initiative of two of the most commercially successful firms in the Potteries at this time, E. Brain & Co., and A.J. Wilkinson (together with the Stourbridge glass manufacturer Stuart and Sons). Intended, no doubt, to demonstrate the appeal of designs by established artists across a range of styles, this high-profile collaboration of artists and manufacturers, promoted at a fashionable London store, made commercial success its focus and benchmark. The outcome, though, was mixed. Few of the commissioned artists had experience of industrial manufacture, and their designs were often ill suited to the wares they decorated, or to adaptation for mass production. The most popular were a series of circus scenes by Laura Knight, but many others were criticised for their high price or limited appeal. For its critics, the Exhibition demonstrated the consequence of (mis)understanding design simply in terms of ornament, with little regard to form, functionality or means of production; the critic William Gaunt described the decoration as merely 'grafted on to the pottery', having 'no essential connection with it'.[9] But Gordon Forsyth was more pragmatic. He saw ornament as essential to commercial success, and commercial success was clearly the ultimate criterion: 'the store in question was highly delighted with the exhibition, since it led to good sales. That, surely, was what the pottery industry wanted.'[10]

Moorcroft was involved in neither of these initiatives. Whether he submitted wares for consideration by the Selection Committee of the Dorland Hall exhibition is not documented, but it is likely that the focus on mass production will have discouraged him from doing so. As for the Harrods exhibition, his critical response was stark. Writing to his daughter, Beatrice, on 28 October 1934, less than a week after the opening, he lamented the aimlessness of contemporary industrial design and its detachment from the natural world:

> Nature, with its magnificent simplicity, is the whole time striving to show us the way to better things. But we somehow miss the mark. We choose to think of a circus, or some crude artificial interpretation of life. We form our ideas in an atmosphere that is unnatural, and we wonder what is wrong.

His own tableware captured a modern spirit in his own distinctive way, some of his most striking pieces decorated with the simplest of motifs. A peacock design was reduced to the eye (a motif which recalled, but with even starker simplicity, the roundels of Flamminian ware, introduced more than thirty years earlier), and a yacht motif (based on an idea of his daughter, Beatrice) focussed on the outline of sails, a not quite straight-sided triangle which gave to geometrical form a suggestion of movement and life. His most striking new tableware, though, was Sunray, introduced in 1933. The name, doubtless not accidental, carried its own ironic provocation. It had been used by two of the leading commercial designers for patterns which captured the bright angular world of the twenties: Clarice Cliff's stylized cityscape introduced

9 W. Gaunt, 'The Artist in Industry', *PG* (January 1935), 81–86 (p.85).
10 Ibid., p.86.

in late-1929, and Eric Slater's black and yellow sunburst motif for Shelley, launched in 1930 and one of his most successful designs. By contrast, Moorcroft incorporated no ornament into his design; he did not represent the sun, simply its warming effect, through a distinctively ochre glaze. It was very well received. Edith Harcourt Smith wrote on 4 January 1934, delighted at the set Moorcroft had sent her for Christmas: 'I simply adore the yellow tea set, and shall keep it entirely for my own use, for it is so soothing and restful.' And it had lost none of its appeal two years after its launch, highlighted in an article in *The Sunday Times*; this was more than just teaware, it was a breath of fresh air:

> May I make a suggestion for a wedding present? Still at Liberty's, I saw an ideal gift—the new Moorcroft morning tea set. It is called Sunray, and is in a wonderful shade of golden yellow; it reminds one of summer mornings, so full of sunshine that one almost feels the day will burst with it. And that is a reminder worth its weight in gold at 7.45 on a winter morning with a London fog drifting in through the window.[11]

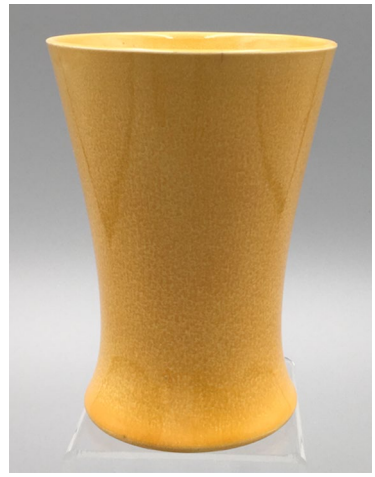

Fig. 97 William Moorcroft, Vase in 'Sunray' (c.1934), 12.5cm. CC BY-NC

This critical appreciation came from an influential source. Muriel Beckwith, daughter of the 7th Duke of Richmond, was something of a free spirit; for all her privileged upbringing, fondly recalled in her memoir *When I Remember*, she was one who 'adapted herself very easily to the social changes of the last thirty years'.[12] Her endorsement, in a Sunday paper of national circulation, confirmed both the quality of Moorcroft's ware and its perfect attunement to the modern age.

But against the background of urgent debate about the relationship of art and industry, Moorcroft continued, defiantly, to behave like a potter. In his commitment to the primacy of craft, he was distancing himself from industrial designers or

11 M. Beckwith, 'Ideas for Entertaining', *The Sunday Times* (27 January 1935), p.20.
12 *Times Literary Supplement* (19 December 1936), p.1047.

manufacturers who explored more mechanised forms of production; he appeared ever closer to the studio potter.

3. Affirming Singularity

It was a sign of the concern about industrial design that even reviews of studio pottery considered its potential for commercial adaptation. In a notice on William Staite Murray's exhibition at the Lefevre Galleries just a few months after the publication of the Gorell report, Charles Marriott not only noted the absence of functionality in his wares, but questioned the very concept of pottery as fine art:

> [...] in his enthusiasm for form and colour in the abstract, he has lately been in some danger of forgetting that a pot is after all a pot. Not that the pot is limited to base utility, but that beyond a certain point its artistic aspirations are better absorbed in actual representation.[13]

And his review of an exhibition by Bernard Leach at the Beaux Arts the following year implicitly favoured his creation of functional wares over purely decorative pieces, on the grounds of their potential influence on industrial design:

> Behind all his work is felt the desire to push individual pottery as far as it will go without loss of quality towards 'commercial' production. This is well because, apart from the advantage to lean purses, 'the trade' is more likely to respond in quality to such an approach than if the individual potter stood aloof with museum pieces.[14]

Conversely, the artistic status of modern industrial design was implied in the growing practice of some firms to exhibit not just in trade fairs, but in galleries. Carter, Stabler & Adams displayed their latest designs at the Arlington Gallery, Old Bond Street, shortly after the Dorland Hall event. Although the work still retained a significant element of craft, Marriott's review focussed on its potential for industrial production, 'the thing to be aimed at in present circumstances'.[15] And in November 1933, a display of Keith Murray's Wedgwood designs was held at John Lewis in Oxford Street, followed in 1935 by an exhibition at the Medici Gallery of his work in pottery, glass and silver. Reviewed in *The Times*, his work was praised above all for its sculptural qualities, ascribed to his training as an architect. This was pottery analysed in terms of form, but unlike Staite Murray's work it satisfied the emerging criteria for good modern design: functionality, affordability, adaptability to mass production, and appeal to the general public:

> [...] though some of the pieces are 'unique', the majority are of a kind that can be mass produced, *the* requirement, of all others, for the gradual civilisation of contemporary surroundings and the improvement of the public taste.[16]

13 C. Marriott, 'Lefevre Galleries', *The Times* (7 November 1932), p.9.
14 C. Marriott, 'Mr Bernard Leach', *The Times* (5 December 1933), p.12.
15 C. Marriott, 'Poole Pottery', *The Times* (13 September 1933), p.13.
16 C. Marriott, 'Glass, Pottery, and Silver', *The Times* (24 June 1935), p.19.

Mass production was not seen to cheapen good design by making it more widely available at an affordable price; on the contrary, it increased its beneficial influence.

Against this background, reviews of Moorcroft's work are particularly revealing. Singled out in a report on his display at the 1932 BIF were its personal, expressive qualities:

> The more that one sees of Mr Moorcroft's creations the more one is impressed by the fact that he is an idealistic potter, a worker in clay who, above all else, puts soul into his efforts and pours out, in the pursuit of his calling, all the finer inner impulses of which he is capable.[17]

He was presented neither as a manufacturer nor as an industrial designer; he was a potter above all, and the value of his work was not measured with reference to its affordability, or its capacity for mass production. Written just before the publication of the Gorell report in May 1932, this review saw Moorcroft's wares as an inspirational example:

> In many ways, Mr Moorcroft's exhibit this year, as so often has been the case in years gone by, lifted the mind far above the level of the materialistic, and caused one to reflect that there is a sense in which the calling of the potter can be one of the most dignified and uplifting, and at the same time result in the spread of culture and refinement.[18]

Questions of commercial potential were not raised, Moorcroft's work could be neither described nor assessed in such terms; its value was seen to transcend the taste of the moment. This was an approach more characteristic of reviews of studio pottery. For all Marriott's later misgivings about Staite Murray's pottery, he had spoken approvingly of its beneficial effect in a review of his exhibition at the Lefevre Galleries in 1931:

> [...] there can be no question that Mr Murray's pots do enrich and make lovely the space in which they are set. We are the better for them, as when we hear good music.[19]

Moorcroft's ware, however, was seen to embody this quality in decorative and functional wares alike; this was the difference:

> There is one thing we would like to say in regard to Mr Moorcroft's more recent efforts; he is clearly seeking to provide, not merely in high-priced goods for ornamental purposes, but in wares suitable for daily use, pots which people can live with and remain happy.[20]

Moorcroft's most sophisticated work was still considered to be the stuff of museums and private collections. In a letter of 18 June 1932, the philanthropist Sir George

17 *PG* (April 1932), p.495.
18 Ibid.
19 C. Marriott, 'Two Potters', *The Times* (10 November 1931), p.12.
20 *PG* (April 1932), p.495.

Roberts,[21] whom Moorcroft had first met earlier that year, indicated the esteem in which his work was held in the art world:

> It is a subject of admiration to all the connoisseurs who see it; amongst others, a friend of mine, the art dealer who selected and purchased for me the treasures that are in the case in the Lounge. He, seeing the vase on the top of the case, took it in hand and remarked that modern potters could indeed sometimes turn out fine specimens, a very high compliment, coming from one of the world's experts.

He was approached, too, by the British Institute of Industrial Art on 24 January 1933 to submit pieces to an exhibit of modern British china, pottery and glassware to be displayed in the Royal Museum of Art and History at Brussels, and the new Centenary Museum of Ceramics in Mons. Moorcroft's work continued to be seen, quite literally, as being of museum quality. And he included equivalent wares in his exhibits at British Industries Fairs. One such piece generated particular interest:

> […] the Duchess of York purchased a vase—the first one produced of its kind, and one which, previous to the Royal visit, had been sought after by a well-known collector. We were interested to hear from Mr Moorcroft that a number of pieces from his present season's display have been specially selected for certain prominent museums.[22]

If Marriott had begun to see the 'museum piece' as a more aloof form of pottery production, reviews of Moorcroft's ware enthusiastically noted this quality. Nearly twenty years to the month since his move to Burslem, an article in *The Daily Dispatch* underlined his status as an artist potter of international standing:

> His ceramic masterpieces are, in fact, to be found in palaces all over the world, for he is the acknowledged creator of a new type of pottery art. Collectors come to Mr Moorcroft's 'Art School of Pottery' from all parts of Great Britain and Europe in their search for something different.[23]

This was ceramic art, certain to give pleasure, and certain, too, to be a sure investment. In the *Pottery and Glass Record*, he was cited as the kind of potter whose wares could only increase in value, if collected now: 'Many people buying art pottery today, such as the beautiful Moorcroft art pottery, are laying the foundation of collections which will provide fortunes for unborn generations.'[24] In a modern industrial world, the quality of permanence implicit in this observation was fundamentally counter-commercial; in a discussion following a talk by Forsyth to the DIA, the manufacturer A.E. Gray openly resisted such language:

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21 Roberts made many charitable donations under the pseudonym 'Audax', including 100,000 guineas (£105,000) to the King Edward's Hospital Fund in 1929 as a thanks offering for the King's recovery from a near fatal bout of septicaemia.

22 *PG* (April 1933), p.473.

23 'Pottery in a Garden', *The Daily Dispatch* (28 October 1933).

24 *Pottery and Glass Record* [*PGR*] (August 1934), p.208.

> What potters were expressing today was for today, and they would scrap it tomorrow when the world thought differently. We did not want to get the museum idea of our work being permanent [...].[25]

For Moorcroft, however, the opposite was true, as he suggested in his response of 23 April 1935 to a questionnaire from the CAI about the training of designers:

> The greatest possible care should be used in an art school to avoid fashion as it is called. The art school should look into the shop window not for inspiration, but to learn what to avoid.

In the months leading up to the Dorland Hall exhibition, Moorcroft quite consciously promoted himself not as an industrial designer, but as an artist potter whose ware was distinguished by its timeless ceramic qualities. He was developing his own quite distinctive flambé glazes, achieving an exceptional range of colours, often associated with his highly successful Leaf designs. Equally sophisticated, and of quite remarkable variety, was the range of effects achieved with designs based on Fish motifs, where, as so often, ornament, form and colour, the eye of the artist and the skills of the potter, were brought together in richly inventive ways. It was this aspect of his work that he stressed in his letter to the Editor of *The Times* of 14 February 1933:

> Last year in the autumn, the Art Gallery in Toronto included in their permanent collection a group of my pottery, and only as recently as the International Exhibition in Antwerp in 1930 I was awarded a *Grand Prix*. [...] In view of the abnormal difficulty in selling works of art including pottery, I should be intensely grateful for any helpful note upon my work.

No notice was published, but the opportunity to promote his ceramic art came later that year, at the Fifth Triennial Exhibition of Modern Decorative and Industrial Arts and Architecture, held for the first time in Milan. On 3 October 1933, Moorcroft was informed that Mussolini had bought a flambé vase from his exhibit; the very next day, an announcement was published in the *Staffordshire Sentinel*:

> His Excellency Signor Mussolini has purchased a vase by Messrs W. Moorcroft Ltd., Burslem, shown at the Fifth International Exhibition of Modern Decorative and Industrial Arts, Milan. [...] It is a simple and very dignified thrown shape, and the colours—obtained by a purely natural development—range from primrose to rich reds, with here and there sensitive touches of violet. Signor Mussolini's appreciative recognition of Staffordshire pottery as exemplified in this specially fine example is a cause for very much gratification.[26]

Mussolini's act of appreciation was particularly significant at a time when the radical, Futurist ceramics of Tullio d'Albisola and the Aeroceramisti with their bright colours,

25 G. Forsyth, 'The Pottery Designer: What the Industry Needs', *PG* (April 1932), 513–17 (p.516).
26 *Staffordshire Sentinel* (4 October 1933).

irregular shapes and abstract designs celebrated the fast-moving, mechanised world of the future; even in this context, the natural intensity of Moorcroft's flambés was as compelling as ever.

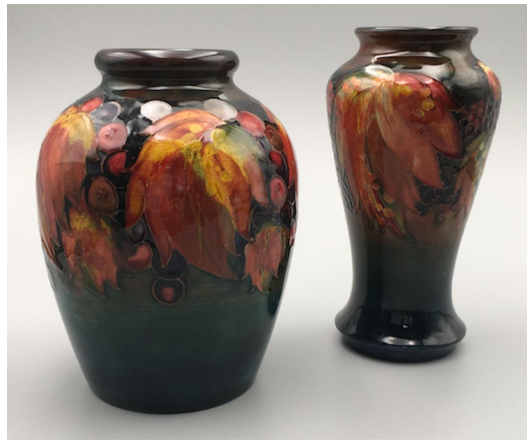


Fig. 98 William Moorcroft, Leaf designs under a rich flambé glaze: Leaf and Berries (c.1933), 16cm; Leaf and Blackberries (c.1933), 17.5cm. CC BY-NC

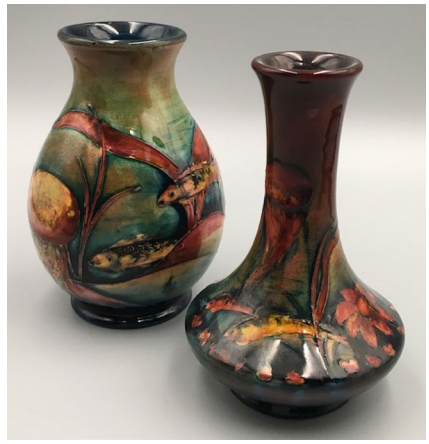


Fig. 99 William Moorcroft, Fish designs under rich flambé glazes: (left), c.1934, 15cm; (right), c.1935, 15cm. CC BY-NC

For all this success, however, Moorcroft was clearly concerned that his hand-crafted pottery might seem out of place in an exhibition of industrial art. Writing to Longden on 27 October 1933, he expressed this anxiety:

> My pottery is not commercial pottery and could not be more individual. These points are not generally understood by people that deal entirely in mass-produced pottery. I know you understand. But I have fears when left to the mercy of the men who do not or will not understand.

Judged by the criteria of modern industrial design which favoured suitability for mass production, Moorcroft feared that the individuality of his ware may be regarded as deficient or irrelevant and result in a lower award from the adjudicating jury than he had received at Antwerp in 1930. He requested that his name should not appear in any published list of awards, lest this imply a decline in quality, and have a detrimental effect on his appeal to retailers. But despite his concerns, the individual nature of Moorcroft's work continued to be appreciated. An article in the *Pottery Gazette* included a photo of his decorating room, explicitly to account for 'the exceptional character and quality of Mr Moorcroft's activities':

> The contrast between the conditions here depicted and those of the average mass-production pottery can at once be measured. The individual touch permeates the whole atmosphere. How privileged the workers must feel to be able to operate in such surroundings![27]

With his focus on the working conditions, the individuality of each hand-made piece, and the skilled, attentive creativity, the critic set Moorcroft's works yet again in the tradition of an Arts and Crafts studio. But he also implied that, for all the contemporary emphasis on mechanised mass production, the art and craft of a potter was still appreciated in Europe as in the anglophone world. Moorcroft's success in Milan made that plain:

> [...] as a result of Mr Moorcroft's exhibit at the Milan Exhibition just about to conclude, a charming example of his handiwork has been purchased by Signor Mussolini. This will bring the name and fame of Mr Moorcroft, as a specialist potter of our times, into yet one more of the world's highest places.[28]

Moorcroft continued to publicise this success, once more approaching *The Times*. He sent the Editor a vase similar to the one acquired by Mussolini, prompting a short notice on 29 January 1934:

> We have received from Mr William Moorcroft of Moorcroft Limited, Burslem, a vase which is a replica of a piece presented by him to Signor Mussolini. [...] the piece sent to this office might well explain a remark said to have been made by Baron Hayashi, when Ambassador here, in buying two Moorcroft pieces—that they were in every way the equal of early Chinese work. The form of the vase is full bellied, curving suavely up to a widish mouth; and the colour is a red of an inexhaustible depth [...]. The quality of its beauty may perhaps best be described by saying that the vase is a work of consummate art [...].[29]

This notice was significant, not least in the context of Marriott's review of Leach's exhibition at the Beaux Arts in 1933, which had noted the potter's emphasis on functional

27 'Moorcroft Potteries', *PG* (November 1933), pp.1319–21.
28 Ibid., p.1321.
29 'A Moorcroft vase', *The Times* (29 January 1934), p.15.

wares: 'Such Oriental flavour as Mr Leach preserves is Japanese rather than Chinese, which means that his pots approach more closely to domestic uses.'[30] By submitting this particular piece, Moorcroft was clearly signalling his difference not simply from industrial manufacturers, but from this trend among studio potters. His own functional ware was already appreciated for its high quality of design and manufacture. But he was producing, too, work of 'consummate art', of a kind appreciated by connoisseurs. If Leach's work recalled a Japanese tradition of unadorned functionality, Moorcroft's was compared with the refinement of the Chinese, and by the Japanese Ambassador.

Milan awards were announced in the early spring of 1934; Moorcroft was awarded the *Diplôme d'honneur*, a grade lower than his Antwerp *Grand Prix*. A list was published in the *Staffordshire Sentinel*, in which, as requested, his name did not appear. For all his misgivings, Moorcroft's *Diplôme* was a very significant success; it placed his ware just behind that of Wedgwood, whose modern designs were at the heart of their exceptional resurgence, and at the same level as Copeland whose exhibit had included work by the innovative Norwegian designer, Eric Olsen. Significantly, this list was published beneath a report of Ambassador Tsuneo Matsudaira's visit to the 1934 BIF:

> At the Olympia Section of the British Industries Fair, Messrs W.Moorcroft Ltd., potters, Burslem were honoured by a visit from His Excellency the Japanese Ambassador Tsuneo Matsudaira, G.C.V.O. He expressed the greatest admiration for Moorcroft pottery, and purchased fourteen pieces for his ceramic collection.[31]

The possibly detrimental effect of Moorcroft's absence from the published list of Milan awards was amply countered by this piece of more individual publicity. It recorded authoritative admiration from another Japanese Ambassador, eleven years after the much publicised comment of the Baron Hayashi to which *The Times* had recently drawn attention. His purchase of fourteen pieces exceeded that of his predecessor. And at a time when the dangers of cheap Japanese imitations of British pottery had been raised in the House of Commons by Ida Copeland, M.P. for Stoke,[32] the Ambassador's purchases had a second significance: Moorcroft's ware was clearly of a quality which could not be imitated.

Moorcroft's continued determination to present himself as an individual potter, not as a manufacturer, was tellingly revealed in this context. A copy of the *Staffordshire Sentinel*'s announcement, pasted in a family scrap book, carried a manuscript amendment in Moorcroft's distinctive hand. The reference to 'Messrs W. Moorcroft Ltd., potters, Burslem, were…' was changed to read: 'Mr W. Moorcroft, potter to H.M. the Queen, Burslem, was…' That same emphasis on the man, not the firm, was incorporated in the paper's announcement of Moorcroft's Milan award a few days later, on 13 March 1934, doubtless at Moorcroft's request:

30 'Mr Bernard Leach', *The Times* (5 December 1933), p.12.
31 *Staffordshire Sentinel* (9 March 1934).
32 'Japanese Competition', *PG* (January 1934), pp.85–86.

> Milan Exhibition Honour. Mr W. Moorcroft, of Burslem, has been awarded by the International Jury a *Diplôme d'honneur* for his exhibit of pottery at the fifth Triennial International Exhibition of Modern Decorative and Industrial Arts, Milan, 1933.

And this stipulation extended as far as the Milan jury itself. Moorcroft exhibited in his own name, not in that of W. Moorcroft Ltd., just as he had done three years earlier at Antwerp, and his *Diplôme* (initially inscribed to the firm) was subsequently re-issued. On 9 April 1934, E.R. Eddison of the Department of Overseas Trade (DOT) wrote in response to Moorcroft's specific request:

> I have looked into the question about which you wrote to me on the 27th March, and if you would care to return the two diplomas we will ask the Italian Exhibition Authorities whether they would be willing in the circumstances to issue fresh diplomas to you in your name and not in the name of your firm.

At this time of debate about the nature (and limitations) of pottery as art, Moorcroft was thinking more explicitly about how to define himself. He was distancing himself from the world of modern industrial manufacture, increasingly characterised as it was by its fashionable designs or mechanised decoration. By affirming his identity as an individual potter, he was underlining the difference between his irreducibly personal work and the impersonal mass production of a firm. Collaborations of manufacturer and artist were still relatively rare, reluctant, and producing work often seen to lack artistic integrity; Moorcroft, however, remained at the very centre of design and production, working as one with his team of decorators to give expression to his designs.

Less than two weeks after his letter to the DOT, he wrote to *The Times*, responding to a letter from John Jacoby, embroidery and lace manufacturer.[33] While defending the value of 'works of art produced by machinery', Jacoby argued that collaborations of manufacturer and artist would only be fruitful if the manufacturer, too, had artistic sensitivity. Moorcroft agreed:

> For some years I have been a member of the British Pottery Manufacturers' Federation, and at a meeting called to consider the question of art in industry, to which I was invited, I was told by the chairman, who is also the Chairman of the British Pottery Manufacturers' Federation, that the reason I had not been invited to assist on any committee, including that of the Arts and Designs Committee, was due to my being, in the chairman's opinion, an artist. It is true that I design all my pottery, and in the making of it I have to be a physicist, a chemist, a draughtsman, a potter and the Managing Director of the Moorcroft Potteries. I was informed by him that it was industrialists they required, and it was in vain that I tried to persuade him that I preferred to be regarded as an industrialist. As long as there is this lack of understanding as to the true value of art in industry, there can be, in my opinion, little opportunity for real progress.[34]

33 'Taste in Industry', *The Times* (5 April 1934), p.6.
34 W. Moorcroft, 'Taste in Industry', *The Times* (7 April 1934), p.6.

The letter was a significant indicator both of how Moorcroft was seen by his contemporaries, and of how he saw himself. It was certainly true that his values, size of operation and methods of manufacture suggested different priorities from those of industry; he was openly averse to mass production, and to a notion of design as a commercial strategy. Conversely, he was often seen to be an idealist in his artistic principles, wholly committed to craft production in the face of increasing mechanisation. The perception of Moorcroft as an artist, held by the British Pottery Manufacturers' Federation [BPMF], was, to that extent, neither surprising nor unfounded. But nor was Moorcroft's repudiation of the term, which had connotations in the context of pottery which were quite alien to his values and practice. The notion of pottery as art was increasingly applied to non-functional ware, targeting an elite market of collectors because it was both too expensive and too limited in output to reach a broader market. Equally, in the wake of the Gorell report, the term was implicitly, if not explicitly, associated with the fine artist, one who had little or no experience of pottery as practice; it was a characteristic, and a shortcoming, which would be expressed particularly after the Harrods exhibition in October 1934. From this perspective, nothing was more different from how Moorcroft was, and how he presented himself.

Moorcroft's letter was a telling contribution, too, to the debate about the relationship of art and industry. Its real issue was not the designation, it was the polarised categories themselves. By repudiating the classification, Moorcroft was not implicitly endorsing the validity of the distinction between industrialist and artist; on the contrary, he was seeking to show how inappropriate it was to make these two categories mutually exclusive, and to adopt either to account for his practice which, from the outset, had sought to bring them together. In a letter to *The Times*, Llewellyn Smith had voiced the urgent need to change 'the whole outlook and objective of industrial art', adding:

> The alternative is that, instead of getting closer together, art and industry will drift farther apart, industry becoming more and more brutalised, and art, divorced from the only conditions which can keep it healthy, degenerating into a mere servant of the whims of a small but wealthy clique.[35]

If the BPMF still separated industry and art, Moorcroft did not. He was recognised as a maker of functional wares, of affordable decorative items, and of museum pieces, but diverse as such wares might be in size, function or sophistication, they were all seen to display, in the words of one of his earliest reviewers, 'thoughtful art and skilful craftsmanship'.[36] Moorcroft saw his role (and responsibility) as a potter to make such work accessible to more than 'a small but wealthy clique'. This synthesis was enabled by his working practices, and exemplified in the unique, multi-tasking identity he outlined in his letter, '[…] draughtsman, potter and Managing Director'. And it characterized, too, the work he created, which embodied the view expressed in the

35 H. Lllewellyn Smith, 'Art as an Ally of Industry', *The Times* (30 December 1933), p.11.
36 'Florian Ware', *Magazine of Art* (March 1899), 232–34 (p.233).

Gorell report (and quoted approvingly by Herbert Read in his *Art and Industry*) that art was 'an essential and organic element' in an article and not 'something superficial and extraneous to be 'applied''.[37] By designating himself an industrialist, Moorcroft was, paradoxically, emphasising that 'thoughtful art' characterised all his work, and implying that a term so often seen as its opposite could, and should, incorporate it.

No less important was the very personal nature of this production. When Doulton introduced at their Nile St works an electricity-powered rotating circular oven, the *Pottery Gazette* noted how temperature could now be much better regulated:

> The 'fireman' of this kiln is a small red needle that is set at the required temperature, which is maintained by a most ingenious arrangement. […] It can be seen that over-fired or under-fired ware is an impossibility—in short, Doulton & Co., Ltd., have produced a kiln that is 'fool-proof'.[38]

In a modern industrial world, the coal-fired bottle oven was a relic of the past, unpredictable and expensive; in this respect, Moorcroft's twenty-year old factory may well have seemed out of date. And yet, unashamedly, provocatively, a photograph of Moorcroft with his placer, standing in a bottle oven, appeared in *The Daily Mirror* of 22 September 1934; beneath it was the caption:

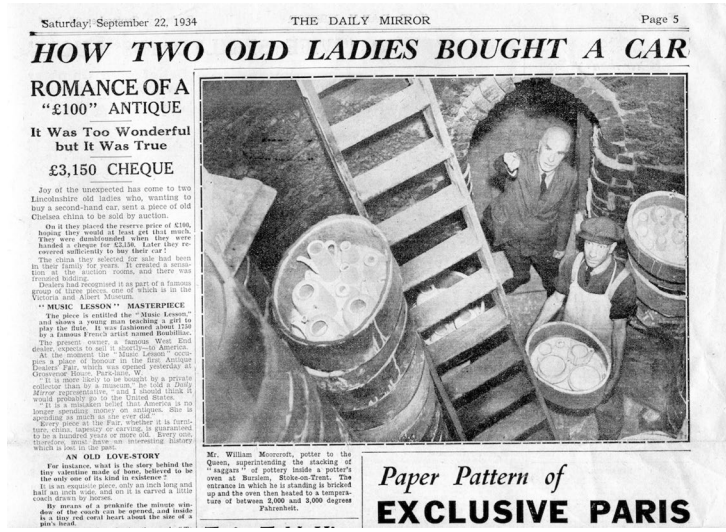
> Mr William Moorcroft, potter to the Queen, superintending the stacking of 'saggars' of pottery inside a potter's oven at Burslem, Stoke-on-Trent. The entrance in which he is standing is bricked up and the oven then heated to a temperature of between 2000 and 3000 degrees Fahrenheit.[39]

No small red needle here, but the Potter to the Queen, at the very heart of production. At the end of this year, just days after the appearance of Read's *Art and Industry*, Moorcroft floated the idea of a book-length study of his work in a letter to F. Lewis (Publishers). Lewis responded enthusiastically on 13 December 1934:

> Your footnote interests me immensely: 'I hope someday to have a book published on my pottery, illustrating its development'. […] I should say that such a book entitled WILLIAM MOORCROFT—POTTER would be of more value to you than large amounts spent in advertising. […] I am definitely interested as this seems a book which […] I could do justice to […] it is a book which should go well.

This project may well have been part of a strategy to negotiate the economic crisis, but it was further evidence of Moorcroft's desire to promote more widely the nature and significance of his work in these rapidly changing times. The proposed subtitle was eloquent—neither artist nor industrialist, neither designer nor firm, but potter. It was a project which never materialised.

37 H. Read, *Art and Industry* (London: Faber & Faber, 1934), p.134.
38 *PG* (April 1933), p.491.
39 *The Daily Mirror* (22 September 1934), p.5.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HOW TWO OLD LADIES BOUGHT A CAR

ROMANCE OF A "£100" ANTIQUE

It Was Too Wonderful but It Was True

£3,150 CHEQUE

Joy of the unexpected has come to two Lincolnshire old ladies who, wanting to buy a second-hand car, sent a piece of old Chelsea china to be sold by auction.

On it they placed the reserve price of £100, hoping they would at least get that much. They were dumbfounded when they were handed a cheque for £3,150. Later they recovered sufficiently to buy their car!

The china they selected for sale had been in their family for years. It created a sensation at the auction rooms, and there was frenzied bidding.

Dealers recognised it as part of a famous group of three pieces, one of which is in the Victoria and Albert Museum.

"MUSIC LESSON" MASTERPIECE

The piece is entitled the "Music Lesson," and shows a young man teaching a girl to play the flute. It was fashioned about 1765 by a famous French artist named Bouillitte.

The present owner, a famous West End dealer, expects to sell it shortly to America.

As a piece of honour in the first Antique Dealers' Fair, which was opened yesterday at Grosvenor House, Park-lane, W.

"It is more likely to be bought by a private collector than by a museum," he told a *Daily Mirror* representative, "and I should think it would probably go to the United States.

"It is a mistaken belief that America is no longer interested in antiques. She is spending as much as she ever did."

Every piece at the Fair, whether it is furniture, china, tapestry or carving, is guaranteed to be a hundred years or more old. Every one, therefore, must have an interesting history which is lost in the past.

AN OLD LOVE-STORY

For instance, what is the story behind the tiny valentine, made of bone, believed to be the only one of its kind in existence?

It is an exquisite piece, only an inch long and half an inch wide, and on it is carved a little coach drawn by horses.

By means of a penknife the minute window of the coach can be opened, and inside is a tiny red coral heart about the size of a pin's head.

Mr. William Moorcroft, potter to the Queen, superintending the stacking of "saggars" of pottery inside a potter's oven at Burslem, Stoke-on-Trent. The entrance in which he is standing is bricked up and the oven then heated to a temperature of between 2,000 and 3,000 degrees Fahrenheit.

Paper Pattern of EXCLUSIVE PARIS

Fig. 100 Photograph of Moorcroft with his placer, *The Daily Mirror*, 22 September 1934. 'Personal and Commercial Papers of William Moorcroft', Stoke-on-Trent City Archives, SD 1837. CC BY-NC

At a practical level, Moorcroft's multiple roles were taking their toll; the fusion of design and manufacture came at a price. He drew his inspiration from nature, but the daily pressures of running the factory reduced his opportunities to do so. He wrote to Beatrice on 6 November 1934:

> I find it is rather difficult to do much as I would wish to do. One's ideals too often shattered by the usual routine one finds in work. […] This is partly owing to my not going away to see things that would possibly form a reciprocal part. There is always some happy form waiting for sympathy, some suggestion that tends to make a cheerful design […].

He was not prepared to lose contact with design; to do so would be to compromise the very principles of integrity and self-expression on which his work had been based. The only way he might contemplate that would be via his own family, and in the course of these crucial years, he clearly began to think to the future.

In 1933 the bicentenary of the birth of Spode focussed attention on pottery dynasties. For John Thomas, in a lecture to the Ceramic Society, this was one of his defining achievements: 'next to his founding of a flourishing pottery business himself, one of Spode's greatest triumphs was the training of such a fine disciple as his son, who followed in his father's footsteps and improved and extended the business'.[40] The idea that his daughter might one day join the firm was sketched out in Moorcroft's letters to Beatrice. Women pottery designers such as Truda Carter, Clarice Cliff, Susie Cooper, Charlotte Rhead or Millicent Taplin had risen to prominence in recent years,

40 J. Thomas, 'Josiah Spode: his times and triumphs', *PG* (November 1933), p.1342.

and he encouraged her to submit designs, writing on 5 November 1933 to discuss her idea for what would become the Yacht pattern:

> Your designs will work out quite well. The Sheringham one will be useful as a pattern on teacups, in green and blue lines, and the sails in blue green lines.

Pieces with this decoration were included in the inventory of pots sent to the 1934 BIF; Moorcroft wrote to her on 19 February 1934, with news of another success:

> The first pot I sold today was yours: the wind and the grass. I placed it rightly in a prominent position, and quoted a reasonable price for it. I felt you would be pleased to learn of this.

By the end of that summer, however, it is clear that Beatrice had chosen a different career path, joining H.M. Factory Inspectorate as her mother had done; but Moorcroft's son, Walter, would join his father. On 30 September 1935, Edith Harcourt-Smith wrote, hopeful for the future:

> I am glad too to hear your son will join you soon in the works. This ought to mean relaxation to a small degree for you!

4. Burlington House, 1935

Conceived in the wake of the Gorell report, the Exhibition of British Art in Industry at Burlington House set out to promote the importance of collaboration between manufacturers and artists. But if good industrial design for the Gorell Committee was a matter of 'fitness for purpose', for the twin sponsors of this Exhibition, the Royal Academy and the Royal Society of Arts, its ambition was captured in the title of the anthology of articles published to accompany the Exhibition: The Conquest of Ugliness. In his contribution to that volume, the President of the Royal Academy, William Llewellyn, made no distinction between a fine artist and an industrial designer, and presented 'art' as a separable ingredient of almost limitless benefit to industrial production:

> [...] many would be surprised at the commercial results achieved through its aid, results which would be even greater if art were more encouraged and more ably applied, with consequent advantage to employers, employees and the country at large.[41]

Llewellyn's conception of the designer came inadvertently close to that of 'an individual external to industry, a talented humanist to whom the manufacturers come for a little culture and refinement' which Read had scornfully rejected in *Art and Industry*.[42] The implication was that the machine could (or should) serve the designs of artists, not that

41 W. Llewellyn, 'Art and Daily Life', J. de la Valette (ed.), *The Conquest of Ugliness. A Collection of Contemporary Views on the Place of Art in Industry* (London: Methuen, 1935), 12–19 (p.14).

42 Read, *Art and Industry*, p.136.

artists might learn to design for the specific qualities of the machine. For all the talk of collaboration, the familiar hierarchy (and separation) of industry and art informed Llewellyn's vision:

> But the promoters of the Exhibition believe that the mechanisation of industry, if properly managed, is not opposed to art, and that if artists and manufacturers work together in making machines and raw materials serve the requirements of good taste, all kinds of articles for our daily needs can be produced in this country [...].[43]

Nowhere was this more evident than on the front page of the Catalogue, which displayed the full title of the event: Royal Academy Exhibition of British Art in Industry. There could be no doubt about the focus.

Announced in *The Times* just three months before the Dorland Hall exhibition, this was clearly intended to be a high-profile event, its aim 'to arouse [...] a world-wide respect for British designers and manufacturers'.[44] Significantly, the announcement did not explicitly require exhibits to have been made by mechanical processes; its criterion was simply one of excellence, 'the best that British industry can produce'. From this perspective, it attracted Moorcroft from the outset. He had doubtless noted its difference from the aims of Dorland Hall, which had focussed on industrial design for mass production rather than on 'Beauty'; and from the industrial focus of the Milan exhibition, which had prompted his letter to Longden on 27 October. He saw this event as a reaction against the exuberant designs of the 1920s, writing to Beatrice on 12 November 1933:

> I believe there will be a determined effort to suppress the wild orgy that has been so much in evidence in so-called Modern Art. The object of the Exhibition is to make Beauty and Quality the chief elements in the things we use and live with.

Moorcroft saw in it an opportunity to win recognition of his own distinctive, hand-wrought work as ceramic art, both at home and abroad.

In a special issue of the *Architectural Review*, reviewed in *The Times* of 11 July 1933, Gorell had written (perhaps with some apprehension) of the 'particularly onerous responsibility' borne by the Royal Academy in organising this exhibition,[45] and for many that responsibility was not fulfilled. Read criticised it in *The Burlington Magazine* (February 1935) for ignoring the 'essential criteria of modern machine production—namely, simplicity, economy and precision'; and Paul Nash, President of the Society of Industrial Artists, writing in *The Times*, argued that selection should have focussed much more on 'the production of common practical things instead of expensive flummery'.[46] For all that he was a member of the General Committee, Frank Pick, Chair of the CAI, was also clearly uncomfortable with the result. At pains to strike

43 Llewellyn, 'Art and Daily Life', pp.17–18.
44 'Art in Industry', *The Times* (2 March 1933), p.17.
45 'Industry, Art and the Home', *The Times* (11 July 1933), p.12.
46 P. Nash, 'Art and Industry', *The Times* (18 February 1935), p.8.

a positive note in a letter to *The Times*, he recognised that the selection of exhibits reflected (too much) an artist's vision of industrial manufacture, but he presented this as an important first step in the re-conception of design for mass production: 'from the movement now started fresh action and clear direction may be taken to lead it away from merely British art in industry into a truly British industrial art.'[47] For him, the industrial designer of the future was one with both artistic sensitivity and practical experience of manufacture, an artist and a technician.

It was characteristic of the Selectors' approach to modern design that the teaware and tableware exhibited included many first displayed in 1934 at the Exhibition of Modern Art for the Table. By contrast, Moorcroft's Powder Blue was a service of the utmost simplicity and purity of line, which, ironically, came much closer to the modern ideal of industrial design than many of these more exclusive ranges, for all that it was unashamedly handmade. It won praise from the modernist critic W.A. Thorpe, one of the members of the Dorland Hall Selection Committee, for its fusion of practicality and style; author of a critical review of the Exhibition (in *Artwork*) for its lack of mass-produced functional wares, his comments were all the more significant:

> In the services perhaps the most interesting problem is the vegetable dish, a great opportunity for producing a service vessel with some of the quality of a free pot. [...] Mr Moorcroft (No.22) demonstrates this very effectively with a lovely pot curve (and a good spoon-resist), interrupted but not broken by an ivory-white rim line. I sometimes find Mr Moorcroft's glazes a bit rich, but this deep speckled blue has great dignity.[48]

His teaware, retailing for £1.10s (one pound and ten shillings) for a twenty-one piece set (for six people), and £2.15s.6d (two pounds fifteen shillings and six pence) for a forty piece set (for twelve people), was clearly situated in the middle of the market. The price of other exhibits ranged from £4.17s (four pounds and seventeen shillings) for a Wedgwood set, to 14s.6d (fourteen shillings and six pence) for a Clarice Cliff design, with the median price falling at £2.7s.6d (two pounds seven shillings and six pence). Designed neither for a mass market, nor for an exclusive elite, its broad appeal was undoubtedly a lifeline in these difficult times. And it remained constant. Significantly, Moorcroft had not increased his prices for these items for more than a decade.

For a critic in *The Fancy Goods Trader*, however, it was Moorcroft's achievement as an artist potter, rather than as a designer, which was stressed. For all the appeal of his Powder Blue, it was his flambé pieces which were the highlight:

> There are some magnificent pieces from the pottery of the most noted modern master potter—a scientist as well as an artist in ceramics—William Moorcroft, of Burslem, one of the most striking being a huge vase, made by hand on the wheel, and decorated in rich rouge flambé flecked with gold [...].[49]

47 F. Pick, 'Art in Industry', *The Times* (9 February 1935), p.8.
48 W.A. Thorpe, 'A Personal Impression of the Pottery', *PG* (February 1935), 219–23 (p.221).
49 *The Fancy Goods Trader* (January 1935).

Fig. 101 Display of Moorcroft's Powder Blue exhibits at the Royal Academy Exhibition, 1935. 'Personal and Commercial Papers of William Moorcroft', Stoke-on-Trent City Archives, SD 1837. CC BY-NC

His display attracted the attention, too, of the French art world. On 13 February 1935, *The Times* published a report on the visit to the Exhibition of Alfred Laprade, Inspecteur Général des Beaux Arts in Paris; a month later, on 13 March 1935, the *Revue Moderne* invited Moorcroft to send material for a special article on his work. And yet, for all this acclaim, Moorcroft was disappointed with the selection, writing on 11 January 1935 to G.K. Menzies, Secretary of the Royal Society of Arts, less than a week after the opening:

> I have done my best, however inadequately, to place in the show specimens of the best possible. But I regret that none of my pottery with pattern was selected, with the exception of one small piece.

The selection of his flambé wares was, nevertheless, revealing. These were works which demonstrated the exceptional skills of the potter, and yet they were available at all price levels. If one was looking for ceramic art affordable by more than the few, this was it.

In a *Times* review of J.A. Milne's lecture to accompany the Exhibition, the journalist commented on Llewellyn's introductory remarks:

> He asked his hearers to be careful not to confuse the exhibition at the Royal Academy with an arts and crafts exhibition. It was an exhibition of the results of factory and machine work, not the products of the artist-craftsman's workshop. [...] The purpose was to show that things produced in great quantities could be of good design [...].[50]

50 'Industrial Art', *The Times* (12 January 1935), p.10.

For Moorcroft, this distinction, however obvious, did not apply; it was his ambition to create in series while retaining the individual qualities of an 'artist-craftsman's workshop'. He was unable to persuade the Selection Committee to include examples of his decorated wares, but he did succeed in marking the difference between his pottery and that of a factory producing quantities of identical objects, whether by machine or by hand. Most catalogue entries named separately the designer and the manufacturer of an exhibit, a model applied to designers working for major firms (such as Victor Skellern, Keith Murray, and Millicent Taplin for Wedgwood, or John Adams, Dora Batty and Truda Carter for Carter, Stabler & Adams), and even to Susie Cooper, who directed her own firm: 'Dinner Set d[esigned]. Miss S.V. Cooper, m[ade]. & e[xhibited]. The Susie Cooper Pottery'.[51] It was not the case, though, with Moorcroft. No distinction was made between his identity as designer and as manufacturer; his exhibits were presented as those of an individual, not of a firm: 'Vase, porcelain, made on thrower's wheel. d[esigned]., m[ade]. & e[xhibited]. W. Moorcroft'.[52]

5. A National Pottery

If the Burlington House Exhibition sought to promote the role of fine art in industrial design, it also had a distinctly nationalist agenda. For some, British design had fallen far behind that of Europe; Read was categorical in his assessment of its current state:

> The artistic quality of manufactured goods, especially in those countries influenced by the Bauhaus ideas of Professor Gropius, is undoubtedly higher than in Great Britain.[53]

Pottery manufacturers, however, largely governed by the conservative tastes of the public, resisted, and resented, outside influence. An article in the *Pottery Gazette* argued that a European style was not appropriate for an English market: 'it is useless to foist on the British public designs which have been created to suit the Continental temperament'.[54] That spirit was shared by the organisers of the Exhibition. *The Times* announcement of 2 March 1933 emphatically restricted entry to British designers and manufacturers, and in a joint letter to *The Times* by Llewellyn and J.A. Milne, the Exhibition's political, as well as aesthetic and commercial, ambition was affirmed: to expose the 'fallacy [...] that it is necessary to go outside our own country for good design'.[55] The organisers sought to differentiate British design from a European model, and to promote its own (and by implication, superior) aesthetic. John de la Valette's Introduction to *The Conquest of Ugliness* was more explicit, describing Germany's post-war design as 'an outburst of mechanised art, well attuned to the predilections of its

51 Catalogue of the *Royal Academy Exhibition of British Art in Industry* (1935), p.31.
52 Ibid., p.17.
53 H. Read, 'Explanations and Acknowledgements', *Art and Industry*, p.1.
54 'Modern Art. Can you "educate" the public?', *PG* (February 1934), p.218.
55 W. Llewellyn & J.A. Milne, 'British Industrial Art', *The Times* (27 December 1934), p.5.

people, but entirely alien to the spirit of either the English or the French'.[56] It was a provocative position, and increasingly so as the arrival of refugees from the Bauhaus was being welcomed as a possible benefit to English design, not least that of Walter Gropius in October 1934. The quality of 'ugliness', a term which recalled William Morris's indictment of Victorian taste and industrial production, was applied now to the modern European aesthetic. It was a critical attitude identified by Paul Nash in *Room and Book* (1932), and seen as characteristically English:

> There exists in the English character an extraordinary sentiment which, baldly stated, is that everything new is ugly and everything old is beautiful.[57]

In pottery, an indigenous English tradition was widely associated with slipware. When Charlotte Rhead moved to Richardson's in 1932, it was to set up an ornamental department producing wares with slip decoration. And in the same year, Michael Cardew expressed his ambition to 'continue (and, if possible, enlarge) the slipware tradition in English pottery'.[58] In a review of Cardew's work, Marriott applauded this renewal of 'the pre-Wedgwood tradition of English slipware', implicitly contrasting this native style with the later import of neo-classicism.[59] Moorcroft, too, was frequently associated with an English pottery tradition. It was doubtless inspired in part by his status as Potter to H.M. the Queen, and by the much-publicised admiration of his ware by the royal family; there could be no more persuasive evidence of its English appeal. The significance of this appreciation was underlined at the 1934 BIF, when the Queen made a purchase reported in the *Staffordshire Sentinel*:

> The first exhibit to be inspected was that of W. Moorcroft Ltd. Her Majesty greatly admired the beautiful wares, and purchased a vase and a bowl of rare qualities of colour and tone. These were similar to the piece which Signor Mussolini recently acquired from Messrs Moorcroft.[60]

The Queen's choice implicitly re-nationalised Moorcroft's European reputation; this was a potter not only of international repute, but recognised too at the highest level in his own country. His status as an English potter was enhanced further by the association of his ware with the Silver Jubilee of the King's accession in 1935, and two royal weddings. On 14 November 1934, he sent a full seventy-nine piece breakfast and tea service in 'blue Moorcroft China' to the Duke of Kent. The gesture reflected Moorcroft's undeniable patriotism, but it was also a shrewd commercial move; royal wedding presents were put on prominent, public display. A letter of appreciation of

56 *The Conquest of Ugliness*, p.7.
57 P. Nash, *Room and Book* [1932]; in *Paul Nash: Writings on Art*, ed. A. Causey (Oxford: O.U.P., 2000), p.94.
58 M. Cardew, 'Slipware Pottery. Following the English Tradition', *Homes and Gardens* (May 1932), 548–49 (p.548).
59 C. Marriott, 'Two potters', *The Times* (10 November 1933), p.12.
60 *Staffordshire Sentinel* (23 February 1934).

27 December 1934 from Harold Whates expressed delight at this royal endorsement of his own taste; Powder Blue was truly democratic in its appeal:

> I was charmed with your wedding present to the Duke and Duchess of Kent. That you should have selected that pattern of tea set for a Royal household delightfully flattered our humble judgement. For years we have used and admired at home a tea-pot of the same powdered blue design.

But Moorcroft's conception of himself as an English potter implied an aesthetic, even philosophical, ambition too. In its review of his exhibit at the 1934 BIF, the *Pottery and Glass Record* referred explicitly to his aspirations to develop an English tradition:

> Mr Moorcroft told our representative that he is striving to develop a purely English style, putting both practical potting and imagination into his ware, as was done in the best English ware of the 13th, 14th, and 15th centuries.[61]

Moorcroft's sense of an English tradition did not reference a particular style, but it suggested particular qualities of art and craft individualised by the imagination of each creator. The reviewer noted that 'there has never been a year when there have been more new designs at this stand', singling out examples of Flambé, Sunray, Leaf and Berry, Wisteria, Pansy, and the Yacht design. And yet the exhibit as a whole was described as both 'characteristically English' and 'individually Moorcroft',[62] distinguished by its underlying integrity of design and execution: 'The whole effect is a sense of rest and peace, symbolic of a typical English home'.[63] Such qualities may have been represented as 'English', but for Moorcroft they were not narrowly national in their appeal. The continued appreciation of his ware in Europe had been most recently demonstrated by his successes at Antwerp and Milan; it would be confirmed again at this Fair.

On 26 February 1934, the *Birmingham Post* reported the particular attention paid to Moorcroft's exhibit by representatives of the Deutsches Museum von Meisterwerken der Naturwissenschaft und Technik [*German Museum of Masterpieces of Science and Technology*] in Munich:

> They came to study British craftsmanship in the pottery section. For the Deutsches Museum they acquired several pieces of porcelain made in Burslem by Mr W. Moorcroft, the Queen's potter. Although each piece of Moorcroft ware is a collector's piece, signed by the originator, products of this pottery are comparatively inexpensive. The Deutsches Museum is essentially a 'folk' museum, and acquisitions such as this need to conform to a double standard of artistic excellence and popular use.[64]

What was noted in Moorcroft's work was its fusion of the decorative and the functional, 'artistic excellence' and 'popular use', as well as its affordability, the very qualities which were sought, too, in modern design. The article recorded Moorcroft's reaction

61 *PGR* (March 1934), p.58.
62 *PGR* (March 1934), p.58.
63 Ibid., p.59
64 *Birmingham Post* (26 February 1934).

to this purchase. If the potentially beneficial influence of Germany on industrial design was being promoted in some quarters, Moorcroft was demonstrating that British craftsmanship could win equivalent acclaim in Germany. If there was to be an improvement in the quality of English pottery, Moorcroft had no doubt where it would originate:

> Mr Moorcroft accepts this tribute from German connoisseurs as confirmation of a long-cherished belief that applied art in this country is reacting vigorously from a period of debasement. He sees possibilities of a new classic era that may come to be known as Pure English Style, not only in pottery, but in all branches of artistic endeavour. Recognition abroad of a distinctive British school of artist-craftsmanship is a stimulus to original work.[65]

Just weeks after Mussolini's appreciation of his ware had been publicised in *The Times*, Moorcroft was once more countering the claim that English pottery was not appreciated in Europe; or his English pottery, at least. And that view was shared. In its review of his exhibit, the *Pottery Gazette* identified in his work an outlook which transcended nationalist polarities. Pointedly alluding to a different and, by implication, more enlightened era of German aesthetics, it saw an anticipation of Moorcroft's art, inspired by an individual sensitivity, irreducible to a particular style:

> We hear a lot these days about art and its canons, but we are reminded in this connection of Goethe's cryptic observation: 'You will get more profit from trying to find where beauty is than in anxiously enquiring what it is. [...] art remains undemonstrable—as when we behold the works of all feeling artists; it is a hovering, shining, shadowy form—the outline of which no definition holds.' That is just the sort of feeling that we entertain as we have before us a picture such as the one that was taken by our photographer at the stand of Mr Moorcroft.[66]

The interest of the Deutsches Museum in his work was further proof of this. Moorcroft was creating English pottery of a more truly international reach. Neither revivalist or nostalgic, it celebrated the inspiration of nature and the beauties of the potter's craft.

The concept of a national pottery tradition was taken up in 1935 by the Victoria and Albert Museum [V&A] and the CAI in a jointly organised exhibition, 'English Pottery Old and New'; its aim was 'to illustrate modern industrial art in its relation to English traditional styles'. Opened shortly after the Burlington House exhibition, the preface to the Exhibition booklet clearly stated its governing premise:

> English pottery has always been distinguished by the devotion of its makers to utility as the prime reason for the existence of their wares; the virtues of these wares are generally the outcome of an intelligent use of their materials with this end in view, rather than any deliberate aim at decorative effect.[67]

65 Ibid.
66 *PG* (April 1934), p.463.
67 *English Pottery Old and New*, Exhibition held at the Victoria and Albert Museum 1935 (Board of Education, 1936), p.5.

Decoration was clearly not seen as a prerequisite of good design; the focus on functionality gave precedence to form.

Medieval wares were exhibited, as were examples of Chinese and Korean pottery. And among contemporary exhibits were pieces from leading firms, including Wedgwood, Carter, Stabler & Adams, Doulton, Minton, and Gray & Co., some undecorated, others decorated with either banded or floral designs, either hand-painted or transfer printed. Studio pottery was exhibited too, with bowls and vases by Leach, Murray, Nora Braden, Katharine Pleydell-Bouverie, William Dalton, and Michael Cardew. Added to which were industrially produced wares in a studio style, designed by Harry Trethowan or John Adams for Carter, Stabler & Adams, and Vera Huggins or Reco Capey for Doulton. Marriott reviewed the exhibition on 15 April 1935. Tracing an English tradition back to the Middle Ages, he noted an interruption to its natural 'flow' in the more studied elegance of Josiah Wedgwood, but welcomed signs of its resurgence in modern industrial manufacture; it was a development he attributed to the influence of Song dynasty Chinese wares via modern studio pottery:

> [...] the exhibition shows that, for all its concentration upon forms adapted to mass production, the marked recent improvement in English commercial pottery is a recovery of rather than a departure from tradition. There is more affinity between the latest and the earlier wares than there is between the latest and those of the middle period.[68]

The Exhibition created a seamless narrative, bringing together studio and industrial pottery, the medieval and the modern, into one (English) tradition.

Moorcroft's work was represented by his tableware, but, once again, to the exclusion of his decorative pieces. The selection was unsurprising given the governing principle of the exhibition, but it did underline the difference between Moorcroft's conception of an English pottery tradition and that of the organisers. He wrote in April 1935 to Bernard Rackham at the V&A:

> I wish it had been possible to have displayed some of my flower vases and other decorative objects. Although I do not describe myself as a studio potter, there is no pottery more individual in character than mine.

He refrained from classifying himself as a studio potter (although the term had been applied to him in the past), but his reference was nevertheless significant. What he identified as their common ground was clearly neither the aesthetic nor the range of their pottery, it was their commitment to craft. For Moorcroft, it was individuality, rather than functionality, which characterised an English tradition, a free spirit which gave its own character to each piece. And this quality inspired Moorcroft's irrepressible desire to experiment, creating original colour palettes or glaze effects alongside his highly sophisticated flambé wares, and new, often sparer designs alongside familiar motifs.

68 'English Pottery', *The Times* (15 April 1935), p.11.

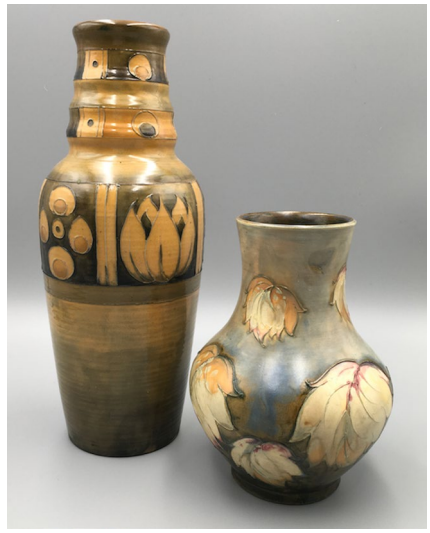

Fig. 102 William Moorcroft, Simplified variants of familiar motifs: Peacock Eye and Tulip (c.1935), 28cm; Falling Leaves (c.1933), 17.5cm. CC BY-NC

He doubtless objected, too, to the implication that there was just a single English tradition, to be judged by a single set of criteria. It was a view which had been expressed already by W.B. Honey who, in his *English Pottery and Porcelain*, questioned the validity of adopting Song dynasty Chinese ware as the benchmark of ceramic excellence:

> Nowhere is the single standard in criticism that seeks a common measure more misguided than in the ceramic art. It implies a single 'ideal pottery' towards which all the diverse types are assumed to aspire. The ideal pottery is, I believe, a linguistic fiction.[69]

Revisiting the subject matter of Rackham and Read's *English Pottery* of ten years earlier, Honey assessed the different styles and traditions of pottery on their own terms; it was honesty which gave work its validity. He praised seventeenth-century slipware for its 'sincerity and freedom from fashionable affectations', but was more critical of its modern revival, in which he identified a predominance of style over authenticity: 'the sophisticated productions, made for a luxury market, must lack the economic necessity which made the craftsmanship of the old potters so genuine a thing in its day'.[70] For Moorcroft, too, Englishness was not defined by style or technique, it was a matter of integrity. Speaking at de la Valette's talk to the North Staffordshire branch of the Society of Industrial Artists in 1934, he picked up the speaker's references to the value of authentic self-expression: 'If they would but centre upon an English tradition and, as had been suggested, 'be themselves', much good would accrue. How rarely they were themselves!'[71] It was a view he had held throughout his career. If the CAI's

69 W.B. Honey, *English Pottery and Porcelain* [1933], 4th edition (London: A & C Black, 1949), p.2.
70 Ibid., p.32.
71 'Modern Conditions and Contemporary Design', *PG* (April 1934), 485–95 (p.491).

exhibition attempted to create a coherent national narrative which saw a modern industrial aesthetic as the natural continuation of a once vibrant English tradition, Moorcroft saw Englishness in terms of individuality, craft and, above all, of sincerity, design as self-expression rather than as commercial strategy. And this, demonstrably, if paradoxically, had an international appeal.

Fig. 103 William Moorcroft in 1935. Photograph. Family papers. CC BY-NC

6. Conclusions

William Moorcroft's commitment to craft might seem to imply nostalgia for a pre-war age now irretrievably lost, a loss underlined by the death in these years of potters or designers who, in different ways, had all intersected with his career: Frederick Rhead and Harry Barnard in 1933; and in 1935, Bernard Moore and William Howson Taylor. The closure of Howson Taylor's factory, reported in the *Pottery Gazette*, December 1933, was already a telling sign of the times. In a note to Moorcroft dated 2 December 1933, Howson Taylor tersely summarised the world as it now seemed to him: 'I felt it was about time. [...] The export trade is practically gone [...]. Everybody wants cheap rubbish now at six pence. Quality is a thing of the past.' His death less than two years later, at the age of just fifty-nine, was announced in the *Pottery Gazette*, October 1935; four years younger than Moorcroft, the impact on him must have been great.

In different ways, Moorcroft seemed far distant from the modern design movement coming to prominence in this decade. He had always seen design as an organic process, affirming to the author of an article on his work in *The Daily Dispatch*: 'unless fashions in pottery are the outcome of natural growth, they will never give satisfaction.'[72] Nothing

72 'Pottery in a Garden', *The Daily Dispatch* (28 October 1933).

was further from the modernist model of design as construction, developed by Gropius from his architectural training, and outlined in a review of an exhibition of his designs at the headquarters of the Royal Institute of British Architects: 'architecture in present-day conditions must consist largely in designing in combinations of standardised units of form'.[73] For Gropius, the design model, the 'standard', was a 'simplified practical exemplar', a response to the needs of functionality, shorn of 'the personal content of their designers and all otherwise ungeneric or non-essential features'; this was a far cry from Moorcroft's conception of design as personal expression. Moorcroft would certainly have agreed with Read's differential analysis of thrown and moulded pottery in *Art and Industry*, but if Read had very even-handedly argued for their equivalence, Moorcroft held to the view that pottery should embody truth to nature, not truth to the machine.

But for all these differences, Moorcroft's guiding principles brought him closer to the modern spirit of the times than many commercial potters. He maintained his belief that the work of designers trained in art schools was inferior to that of potters with artistic sensitivity; without experience of making, their art could only ever be 'applied'. The importance of understanding manufacture was one of the defining principles of Pick's Council for Art and Industry. In a survey sent out to all manufacturers, one question asked about the technical experience of its designers; Moorcroft's response was characteristically terse: 'It must be difficult to work without a thorough love of the material used.' For Moorcroft, design could only grow from within the manufacturing process; for advocates of modern industrial design, the same fundamental principle applied. More generally, Moorcroft, like Pick, held the view that art was an essential and enriching part of everyday life, and not something separate, or exclusive. In the same spirit as Morris's repudiation of 'art for a few',[74] it inspired Pick's description of art as 'something vital and essential to the fullest life, [...] something which will restore grace and order to society'.[75] And it underlay Moorcroft's recognition, from the start of his career, that 'the potter's art [...] unconsciously influences our mind in the home'.[76]

For Moorcroft, as for leading industrial designers, design was a matter of integrity rather than opportunism, of responding to inner conviction rather than to fashion. It was this distinction, as much as that between modern and traditional, or machine and hand, which shaped design debates at this time. Harry Trethowan, founding member of the Design and Industries Association [DIA], who designed for Wedgwood and Carter, Stabler & Adams, stressed the importance of this quality in a lecture to the North Staffordshire branch of the Society of Industrial Artists:

73 'Professor Walter Gropius', *The Times* (16 May 1934), p.14.

74 W. Morris, 'The Lesser Arts' [1877], in *The Collected Works of William Morris*, XXII (London: Longmans, 1914), 3–27 (p.26).

75 W. Gropius, *The New Architecture and the Bauhaus*, trans. P. Morton Shand, with an Introduction by Frank Pick (London: Faber & Faber, 1935), pp.7–8.

76 'The Potter and his Art', *The American Pottery Gazette* (May 1905), n.p.

> For the potter to stamp the clay with his own character, and real character always, would win in the long run. It might be a long run; those living might not see the end of it, but it would triumph ultimately.[77]

And the same principles were voiced, too, by Keith Murray, who argued that designers should not allow commercial pressures to dictate their work:

> [...] though it was his duty to his manufacturer to try and satisfy the needs of his business, he must not let himself become frankly commercial. He must comprehend the sales atmosphere, [...] but he must retain his faith in what he conceived to be beautiful, which was a duty to himself which no one else could be expected to look after.[78]

Like Murray, Moorcroft saw the need for commercial awareness, but he strove above all to maintain his artistic self-belief. It was an absence of natural expression that he lamented above all in much contemporary design, a tendency to favour style over character. He himself sought to produce ware that had vitality, 'soul', and he was confident that its value would be appreciated. And it was. For many observers seeking (or struggling) at this time to characterise Moorcroft's work, the quality they often identified was its 'truth', a quality associated not simply with its means of production, but also, and perhaps above all, with its design principles; his pottery had genuineness of expression, it was not simply a commercial commodity. A review in the *Pottery Gazette* made explicit this distinction:

> If all that we had to do was to give a very short definition of Moorcroft pottery, our task would be simplicity itself; we should content ourselves by saying that Moorcroft pottery is *true* pottery. And, certainly, that is something which could not be said of some of the commodities which are to be found at the present time on the shelves of many china shops.[79]

The report carried a picture of a ginger jar with New Florian ornamentation and a vase decorated with fish among weeds; neither design was brand new, but this only emphasised their enduring quality. What mattered was their integrity, not their novelty. This is how Moorcroft saw his ware, and how it was seen:

> It would appear as though, whenever Mr Moorcroft applies himself to the creation of a new piece of pottery, he keeps constantly in front of him that old injunction: 'To thine own self be true...', and thus it is that there results a perfectly delightful pot, which anyone who is aesthetically inclined could not fail to treasure.[80]

And it is this quality which took potential buyers beyond considerations of mere cost. Moorcroft's pottery may have been more expensive than mass-produced wares, but its

77 H. Trethowan, 'The Relations between Manufacturers, Designers and Retailers', *PG* (March 1933), 333–40 (p.338).
78 'Art in Industry', *PG* (April 1935), p.532.
79 *PG* (June 1932), p.731.
80 Ibid.

value was inestimable, and not just in economic terms; it was seen to provide an almost spiritual pleasure, an 'uplift', which took it beyond price. Another review in the *Pottery Gazette* spelled this out:

> As judged by present-day standards, Moorcroft pottery is not cheap; by its very nature, it could not be that, for it represents the best in thought and effort that can be put into pottery; it is the real thing, which stands out in marked contrast to the artificial and spurious. Its purpose is to please and at the same time to uplift; and invariably, a Moorcroft pot does succeed in rising to the full height of that purpose. At the same time, for what it is and stands for, Moorcroft pottery is by no means expensive. It is full value for money, and that is something which, in the ordinary affairs of life, one often fails to get.[81]

This quality lay deeper than any particular aesthetic choices. It was recognised in Moorcroft and, it may be surmised, it was one of the reasons why his ware was respected so widely, from Edith Harcourt Smith to W.A. Thorpe, from Queen Mary to Mussolini. His ware transcended apparently distinct boundaries of art and industry, modern and traditional, decorative and functional. It had been his hallmark in earlier times; it defined him still.

81 *PG* (November 1934), p.1323.