



# Wedgwood Society of Boston, Inc

## NEWS-LETTER

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### The Art of Icing: Harry Barnard and the development of trailed slip decoration in the work of Frederick Rhead, William Moorcroft ... and a few others

by Jonathan Mallinson

**T**he Art of Icing: Harry Barnard and the development of trailed slip decoration in the work of Frederick Rhead, William Moorcroft... and a few others was presented on January 16. His unedited lecture follows.



1 Th. Toft, charger (c.1680)

At the end of the nineteenth century, trailed slip decoration was identified with the pre-industrial Staffordshire pottery of Thomas Toft and others [1], where, in the words of chemist and collector Arthur Church, creamy slip was 'dropped, or trailed, from a spouted vessel upon the surface of the piece to be decorated.' (English Earthenware [1894]) Church compared it to the 'complex sugar ornaments on bride-cakes', an analogy which clearly conveyed its decorative effect, but which was less appropriate as a description of its application. For at least half a century, modern cake icing had been piped, not poured, a technique 'capable of performing wonders with men of genius' in the words of the celebrated confectioner George Read (*The Confectioner* [1842]). By the turn of the century, a similar squeeze-bag technique had been adopted by pottery designers, inspiring a revival of trailed slip decoration which developed particularly in Staffordshire, and spread, too, to the US. This paper will focus on a key figure in its introduction to Staffordshire, and on two potters who were central to its development: Harry Barnard, Frederick Alfred Rhead, and William Moorcroft.

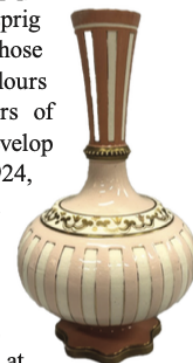
Harry Barnard joined Doulton Lambeth in 1880. Many of his designs use a combination of applied ornament and sgraffito [2], and although early



3 Washington Faience (c.1894)

examples of trailed slip decoration (by Eliza Simmance) have survived, it is not known whether Barnard himself devised or used the technique. It is almost certain, though, that he introduced it to Staffordshire, following his appointment to the firm of James Macintyre & Co., in January 1895. Macintyre's were producing two kinds of ornamental pottery at this time, Washington Faience [3], a

variant of moulded sprig decoration, and Taluf ware [4], whose simple patterns of contrasting colours were created with different layers of tinted slip. Barnard's brief was to develop a decorative slipware. Writing in 1924, Frederick Rhead credited him with introducing 'a raised line process on vases and other fancy articles' ('Tiles, their history', *Cox's Potteries Annual* 1924), and in an unpublished memoir, written at the end of his life, Barnard described the originality of his 'Gesso Faience', and the technique he devised to create



4 Taluf Ware (c.1894)

it: 'It was one that I made for myself to introduce a new type of design, and a process which I had invented. [...] nothing like it had been seen before.' ('Personal Record'[c.1931]) Patterns in tinted slip were stencilled on the surface of a vessel; dots or sweeping lines were then applied in trailed slip to add decorative interest [5] (pictured next page).



2 H. Barnard or Doulton Lambeth, stoneware vase (1881)

The series had immediate success. At a meeting of the firm's Directors on 1 November 1895, it was noted that 'the plastic decoration

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introduced by Mr Barnard promised to be commercially successful', and action was taken 'to provide immediate increased accommodation for additional hands'. (Stoke-on-Trent City Archives, SD1837) Within two years, though, Barnard's appointment was under scrutiny. On 22 April 1897, the Directors decided to 'continue his services provisionally at a reduced salary', and in June it was noted that this reduced salary was to be shared between Macintyre's and Wedgwood, for three days' work a week at each place. On 14 September 1897, Barnard left Macintyre's for good: 'Mr Harry Barnard was reported a complete failure, and it was decided to relinquish all claims on his services in favour of Messrs Wedgwood & Sons, Etruria.'

Barnard's dismissal may have been attributed to unsuccessful design by the Macintyre Directors, but there is no verifiable evidence of this. And it was clearly not the view of Wedgwood who, under Thomas Allen, had been expanding the range of their art wares. Allen was doubtless interested in the potential of this new decorative technique, and saw an opportunity, perhaps, to compete with Doulton. Barnard was appointed, as he recalled in his memoir, to 'work out a new type of ware and start a department of my own.'

There is no comprehensive record of Barnard's Wedgwood designs, but he used trailed slip on several different kinds of ware. The squeeze bag enabled the application of decorative script [6], and in this example [7], slip is exploited alongside gilt and piercing, both to create stylised floral decoration and to accentuate the vessel's sculptural form. This is clearly not a functioning vase, it is an exhibition of craft. Some of Barnard's most

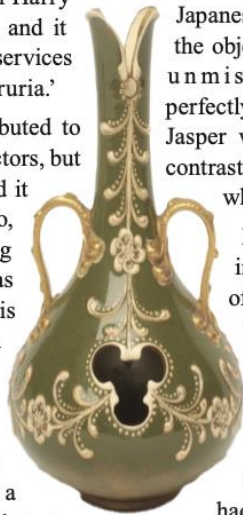
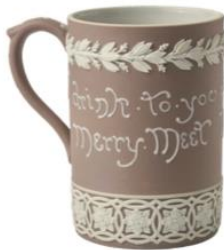


5 (Left) H. Barnard for Macintyre's, Gesso Faience (1896)

6 (Below left) H. Barnard for Wedgwood, mug (1900)

7 (Below center) H. Barnard for Wedgwood, pierced vase (1899)

8 H. Barnard for Wedgwood, jardinière (1899)



striking designs were on Jasper ware [8]. Here, the flower heads, with their incremental, concentric structure, have the delicacy of Japanese art, yet the object remains unmistakably, perfectly Wedgwood Jasper with its artless contrast of blue and white.

Barnard's trailed slip motifs, almost rococo in their swirls and scroll work, are triumphs of low-relief ornament, designed to be noticed like the icing on a cake. This was decoration quite different from anything Wedgwood had produced during the previous decade, and markedly more sophisticated, too, than Barnard's earlier work at Macintyre's. But it was short-lived. By 1900, his department had been closed, and Barnard transferred to

Wedgwood's tile department (where he applied the same technique). And in 1902, this department too was closed, and he was appointed manager of Wedgwood's London showroom; he did not return to Etruria until 1919. Meanwhile, however, the use of trailed slip would develop in quite different ways in the hands of two other distinguished designers.

One of these was Frederick Alfred Rhead. Employed at Mintons in the early 1870s as an assistant to Marc-Louis Solon, the celebrated master of low-relief slip modelling known as *pâte-sur-pâte*, he moved in 1878

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to Wedgwood, where he introduced his own *pâte-sur-pâte* designs [9]. From 1881, he was Art Director in a succession of different potteries, including the firm of E.J.D. Bodley, where he filled the void left by the premature death of Thomas Moorcroft in 1885. In 1897, he joined Wileman's, where he remained until 1905. His early designs were suited to commercial

production, not least his highly successful *Intarsio* ware [10]; they did not involve trailed slip. But in 1902, as Rhead recalled twenty years later, he was approached by Barnard 'to find some employment for this staff of girls, as the process was being abandoned at Wedgwoods' (Cox's *Potteries Annual* 1924).

Several of Rhead's subsequent designs incorporated trailed slip. In later versions of *Urbato* ware [11], it was used to outline floral motifs around blocks of tinted slip, a simple process quite appropriate for serial production. On other occasions [12], he used it, as Barnard had done, as an integral element of the pattern. This example is notable, too, for its modernity, its motif of a stylised cyclamen and its emphasis on line offering clear echoes of art nouveau design.

The technique was adopted by Rhead's son, Frederick Hurten Rhead, both at Wardle's, where he was Art

- 9 (Top left) F.A. Rhead for Wedgwood, plaque (1879)
- 10 (Above right) F.A. Rhead for Wileman's, *Intarsio* ware (1900)
- 11 (Above left) F.A. Rhead for Wileman's, *Urbato* ware (c.1904)



12 F.A. Rhead for Wileman's, *Urbato* ware (c.1904)

Director from 1899, and in the US. In this floral design [13], made for the Roseville pottery where he worked from 1904 to 1908, a single line of trailed slip draws the eye upwards, from leaves to a flower head, conceived in a geometrical, Secessionist style. Its purity of conception brings the natural, unsophisticated look of Elizabethan slipware into the twentieth century; its focus is modernity, not craft, as had been the case in Barnard's work.



Trailed slip decoration was developed, too, at Doulton Lambeth. In this design of Eliza Simmance [14], slip is used to trace stylised art nouveau motifs. But its lines also create compartments to be filled with enamels, like the wires in a *cloisonné* design, an application often termed 'tube-lining'. Unlike the intricate icing of Barnard, slip is functional as well as decorative, form and colour as important as line.



A similar impression was created in the Secessionist ware of John Wadsworth and Leon Solon, launched at Mintons in 1902 [15]. Immediately striking are the bold contrasts of colour and the symmetrical abstraction of organic motifs, clearly defined by dark lines of slip. This range was not conceived as

- 13 (Above right) F.H. Rhead for Roseville, *Aztec* ware (c.1905)
- 14 (Above) E. Simmance for Doulton Lambeth (dated 1903)
- 15 (Right) J. Wadsworth for Mintons, *Secessionist* ware (c.1905)



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exclusive ceramic art, it was a matter of look as much as technique. The visual effect of low-relief outline was often created by moulding rather than application by hand, much less time-consuming or costly. Beset with financial problems at the turn of the century, one of Mintons' routes to survival was a series of affordable, fashionable wares. Designed to be commercial, Secessionist ware remained in production until 1914.

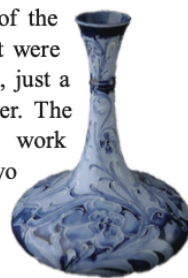
Trailed slip clearly recurred in ceramic decoration of the new century, but in designs requiring little of the sophistication which had characterised Barnard's work. When Rhead left Wileman's in 1905, his daughters Charlotte and Dollie left Wardle's, where they had been working as slip decorators under the direction of their brothers. They moved to Keeling & Co., but there was no work for them as tube-liners, only as enamellers. On 10 December 1906, Rhead approached another Staffordshire potter: 'I have two daughters who are expert at 'tubing' and are good enamellers. [...] Could you find them any work? [...] I cannot think of any other firm where they could be so suitably employed.' (Stoke-on-Trent City Archives, SD1837) The number of potteries using trailed slip decoration was already in decline. In one factory, though, the opposite was true, and the designs of its Head of Ornamental Ware were acclaimed throughout the world: the factory was James Macintyre & Co., the designer William Moorcroft.

Moorcroft and Rhead went back a long way; it was at the firm of E.J.D. Bodley, twenty years earlier, where Rhead was Art Director, that a young William Moorcroft had learned the potter's art after the death of his father. And Moorcroft went back a long way, too, with Barnard. Appointed as a designer at Macintyre's in March 1897, the two overlapped for six months, until Barnard moved to Wedgwood. Like Rhead a few years later at Wileman's, Moorcroft inherited at Macintyre's a team of decorators with experience of creating Barnard's designs. But Moorcroft's Florian ware, launched in 1898, took Barnard's technique in quite new directions.



For a brief period at the end of the century, Barnard and Moorcroft were both designing with trailed slip, just a mile and a half from each other. The distinctive qualities of their work can be seen if we compare two objects, both made around 1900.

Barnard's design [16] has a striking simplicity, its focus the silhouette of floral motifs created by sgraffito, the white engobe exposed in bold strokes beneath the surface blue. Trailed slip edges the outline of the flower heads and adds delicacy to the more prominent areas of white; in a different tone of pale blue, it offers a discreet contrast to the darker ground. Moorcroft's design [17] has a more varied use of slip. If it provides additional embellishment in Barnard's vessel, it is used here both to trace the fine detail of floral motifs, and to create compartments stained by metal oxides. Its tonal palette is also more restrained. There are contrasts of dark and pale blue, but no strong juxtapositions of colour; different shades are evident everywhere. It is a skilful rendition, requiring delicate manipulation of the squeeze bag, and a painteress capable of applying pigment in controlled, graduated doses.



But beneath their radical differences of technique, both objects exhibit a striking confidence in the potter's art at the dawn of a new age. Barnard's urn looks back to Josiah Wedgwood's First Day's vase [18], that bold claim to greatness captured both in words and in its depiction of Hercules taking possession of the immortality-granting



16. (Top left) H. Barnard for Wedgwood, urn (1900)

17 (Top right) W. Moorcroft for Macintyre's, Florian ware (1900)

18 (Above) J. Wedgwood, First Day's Vase (1769)

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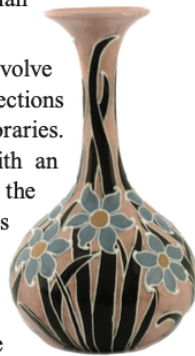
apples of the Hesperides. Barnard's vessel has a similar assurance. Behind its classic look of Jasper ware is a modern, organic floral decoration, embellished with his own distinctive technique, an expression of Wedgwood's living tradition at the turn of the century. Moorcroft, by contrast, references the ship's decanter, emblem of sophistication in the heyday of English naval supremacy a century earlier; usually made of high-quality, decorated glass, it was both functional object and status symbol. Moorcroft's vessel makes no pretence to be functional, but it does command our attention, its swirling ornament a metaphorical echo of its once fluid content and a demonstration of the decorator's craft. And in its transition from decanter to decorative object, from one age to another, it celebrates, too, the appropriation of glass by clay, a statement no less eloquent (or triumphant) than Josiah Wedgwood's Portland vase.

Moorcroft's use of slip continued to evolve in the new Edwardian age, in directions quite different from his contemporaries. A comparison of a 1904 design with an example of Rhead's Urbato ware of the same time reveals something of this originality. In Rhead's piece [19], trailed slip outlines a striking motif of narcissus flowers and stems. For all its appearance of tube-lining, the slip has clearly been applied after the coloured ornament, ensuring that it stands out sharply,

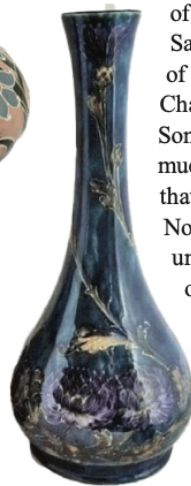


19 (Above right) F.A. Rhead for Wileman's, Urbato ware (c.1904)

20 (Above) W. Moorcroft for Macintyre's, Florian ware (1904)



and that the tonal contrasts of decoration and background remain intact. Moorcroft's vessel [20] also creates a contrast of flower heads, stems and background, each characterised by a dominant colour. But the application of the technique, and its impact, are completely different.



22 G. Cartlidge for Sampson Hancock, Morris Ware (c.1920)

21 (Right) F.A. Rhead for Wood & Sons, Elers Ware (c.1913)



Moorcroft's flower heads consist not of a few simplified cells, but multiple segments, each one filled not with a single flat colour but a much more graduated mix. Where there is simplicity of line and tone with Rhead, Moorcroft's design is more elaborate in its rendering of leaves, buds and flower head, requiring a more intricate application of slip than anything seen elsewhere.

Trailed slip continued to be used in pottery decoration long after Rhead's departure from Wileman's in 1905. It was highlighted in Elers wares [21], created by Rhead for Wood & Sons (whom he joined in 1912 after a brief spell in the US), designs characterised by their Secessionist lines, bright colours and decorative flourishes. It continued, too,



23 W. Moorcroft, Pansy (1918)

after the war, in the work of George Cartlidge for Sampson Hancock, and of Rhead's daughter, Charlotte, for Wood & Sons, but the style was much less obviously that of the art nouveau.

Not infrequently, the underlying look was that of William Moorcroft, now inseparably

associated with trailed slip designs. Cartlidge's Morris Ware [22], introduced in 1918, echoed in its palette and decorative structures many of Moorcroft's wartime designs [23], and Charlotte Rhead's Pomona

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24 C. Rhead for Wood & Sons, Pomona (c.1922)

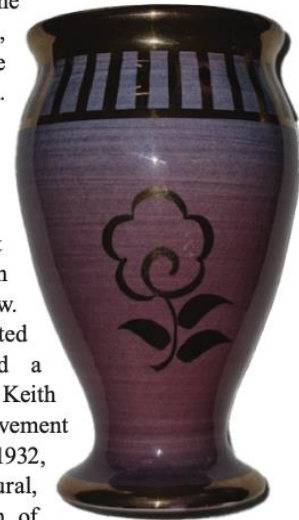


25 W. Moorcroft for Macintyre's, Pomegranate (1910)

[24] recalled and refashioned Moorcroft's highly successful Pomegranate designs of 1910 [25]. Both Cartlidge and Rhead used a very similar technique to Moorcroft, with genuine tube-lining applied before colour, but their focus was different. Slip was often more visible, its lines simple and sharply defined, and colours were more uniform or opaque, in many cases applied in enamels. If the spirit of Moorcroft lay in the background, these designs were conceived as less expensive variants. Cartlidge stopped designing in the early 1920s, but Rhead would continue, like Moorcroft, for another two decades.

By the start of the 1930s, trailed slip was rarely used; it had become increasingly uncommercial, relying as it did on the skill of individual decorators. But as he looked back on his career in 1931, at a time of economic and aesthetic turbulence, Barnard was clearly still proud of his slip designs for Wedgwood, and the expertise of his staff: 'I was able to train a new set of girls [...] whose dexterity was really marvellous. This I say over 30 years afterwards when I was showing some of their work to the younger generation of Managers who are amazed at their technical skill. [...] I am really amazed at the quantity

and variety of work (all new to them both in design and technique) I was able to produce. ('Personal Record') The reaction of this 'younger generation' of Wedgwood managers is not surprising. Barnard's designs recalled a world where craft was still the defining characteristic of art, and not (yet) incompatible with commercial success. In the immediate aftermath of the Wall Street crash, nothing will have seemed more impressive, nor more remote. A quite different approach to design was in evidence at Wedgwood now. The Powells' hand-decorated Veronese ware [26] had a stylised simplicity, and Keith Murray, whose first involvement with Wedgwood dates to 1932, was creating work of sculptural, Scandinavian purity, shorn of all applied ornament [27].



But if it is not surprising that trailed slip decoration seemed in the 1930s to belong to a pre-war (and not just to a pre-Wall Street) world, one may still wonder why it was not developed at Wedgwood beyond 1902. Short-lived trials of decorative techniques were certainly not unknown at this firm. Pâte-sur-pâte, introduced by Allen in 1878 following the appointment of Frederick Rhead, was discontinued a year later; and experiments with lustre glazes, begun by William Burton in



26 (Above right) A. & L. Powell for Wedgwood, Veronese ware (c.1933)

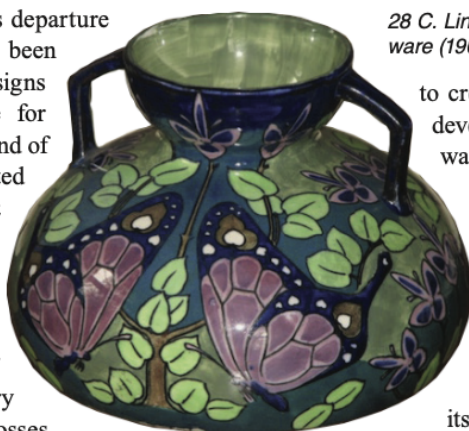
27 (Above) K. Murray for Wedgwood, bowl (c.1933)

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1887, were not pursued after his departure in 1893. There may also have been financial reasons, Barnard's designs being considered too intricate for commercial production. At the end of the century, the newly incorporated firm of Josiah Wedgwood & Sons, under the control of Cecil, Frank and Kennard, was under serious economic pressure, doubtless exacerbated by the Boer War and the absence of Cecil and Frank on military service. The firm made record losses in 1901 and 1902, leading to the closure in October 1902 of the ailing tile department, shortly after the return to Etruria of the two Directors. But it is also possible that Barnard's designs did not suit the modern taste of Kennard, left in sole charge in 1899. And if Doulton and Mintons used trailed slip to tread a path to New Art, Kennard's commissioning in 1901 of Lindsay ware [28], decorated with printed floral patterns and enamels, suggests a quite different conception of commercial art nouveau.

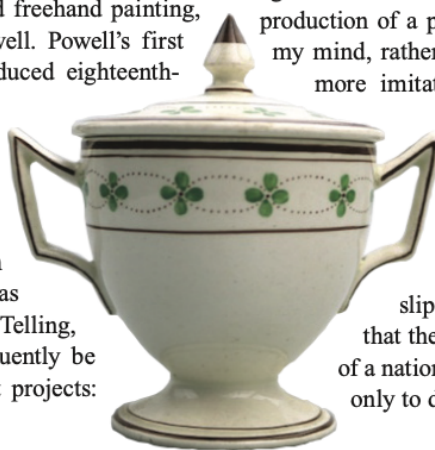
Wedgwood were moving towards their own version of modernity. Shortly after Barnard's transfer to London in 1902, the firm revived freehand painting, in collaboration with Alfred Powell. Powell's first designs date to 1903, and reproduced eighteenth-century tableware from old Queen's Ware pattern books, also hand-decorated [29]. There was no place for slip here, nor for the New Art of Europe. Wedgwood were looking back to their own past, their own techniques; this was their conception of the future. Telling, then, that Barnard would subsequently be re-deployed on equally revivalist projects:



28 C. Lindsay for Wedgwood, Lindsay ware (1901)

to create more Portland vases, and to develop different colours for Jasper ware.

The closure of Barnard's department was significant too, though, in other ways. At the end of the century, there was widespread concern that English ceramic design was too imitative, that it had lost its identity. For many, it was in early English slipware that an authentic national style was to be found. Frederick Rhead saw in it 'the germ of a great national type of ceramics', and applauded the Tofts and other slip decorators, whose pottery 'had something to say, and said it with strength and directness.' (*Staffordshire Pots and Potters* [1906]) But the revival of trailed slip at the dawn of the twentieth century evidently did not guarantee the creation of a distinctively English pottery. Many designers, Rhead included, used the technique to translate into clay the look of European modernity. It was an irony not lost on him. Writing in 1922, he recognised that the English tended to be reactive in matters of style: 'the production of a purely British type of pottery is, to my mind, rather difficult. [...] We Englishmen are more imitative than creative. We are rather better as craftsmen than we are as artists.' ('A pottery designer's views on art', *Pottery Gazette* [January 1922]) Wedgwood, however, adopted a different strategy. Their closure of Barnard's slip department implied a perception that the firm was itself an established part of a national identity; to be English, it needed only to draw on its own rich tradition.



29 A. Powell for Wedgwood, loving cup (c.1905)

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But this approach carried its own irony. If the pottery of Toft and others was often characterised as essentially English, its distinctive expressiveness was also perceived as the antithesis (and victim) of Wedgwood’s organised approach to large-scale production. For Arthur Church, the narrative was clear: ‘Individuality was lost. [...] The marks of human handiwork became unrecognisable. A tendency to aim at mechanical perfection and mere finish was developed at the expense of higher qualities.’ (Josiah Wedgwood [1894]) And it was an enduring view. Writing nearly thirty years later, Rhead argued that Wedgwood’s commercial genius had stifled the creativity of English pottery design: ‘Great man as he was, Wedgwood switched the Staffordshire potters off the track of originality, and made them copyists of the Greeks.’ (‘Decoration as applied to clay ware’, *Pottery Gazette* [November 1921]) One might say that when Barnard’s department was closed, trailed slip was, for a second time, sacrificed to Wedgwood’s different model of design and production. Barnard was clearly dismayed; Rhead was doubtless unsurprised.

When Barnard wrote his memoir thirty years later, the issue of national identity was again very much to the fore, as the influence of European modernism was felt, and resisted, in England. When Charlotte Rhead moved to AG Richardson in late 1932, she introduced



30 C. Rhead for A.G. Richardson, *Stitch* (1933)

trailed slip designs whose reductive simplicity blended the directness of Elizabethan slipware and the abstractions of a more modern aesthetic [30]. This ware was commercially successful; at a time of relentless economic pressure, Richardson’s were one of very few potteries to thrive.

At the start of the 1930s, Moorcroft, too, continued to innovate. In some designs, he used trailed slip, like Toft,



31 W. Moorcroft, *Fish* (1931)



32 W. Moorcroft, *Leaf & Berry* (1931)

as a means of decorative drawing, eye-catching in its detail [31]. But in others, slip was more or less invisible. In this vessel with leaf and berry motifs [32], colour above all captures our attention; yet the art of the slip decorator remains essential, even as it is effaced. Neither self-sufficient nor the clear marker of borders, slip interacts with form, colour and design in an exhibition of the decorator’s craft, the skill of the ceramic chemist, and the vision of the artist. But in its fluent lines and nuanced tones, its harmony of form and ornament, of art and nature, the object celebrates, too, the beauty of creation, vital, individual, and all the more eloquent in an age when the uniformity of

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machine production was a guiding principle of much ceramic design. Just as Rhead had remarked of early slipware, Moorcroft's work had 'something to say'; but this was not (just) the art of icing, this was the poetry of pottery.

And this personal, expressive quality was consistently identified in Moorcroft's designs. He used trailed slip quite differently from Toft, or Barnard, or Rhead; he did not seek to imitate or re-create, but to be himself. It was a fact recognised by the *Pottery Gazette* in October 1904: 'Mr Moorcroft has neither patented nor registered his method of producing his beautiful effects. He lets you see him do the primary, and most essential, part of the work, and tells you how it is completed. But you cannot 'go and do likewise.' What distinguished Moorcroft's work was not the fact that he used slip, but what he did with it. And Barnard recognised this, too. As he looked back on his career, he made no mention of Rhead, neither father nor his two designer children; but he did recall Moorcroft. And even as he insisted that his former colleague had adopted a decorating tool

which he, Barnard, had devised, he recognised (and applauded) the originality of Moorcroft's art: 'He [...] started a little pottery on his own, where he has done marvellously well. [...] I do not grudge him his success in the least – he deserves it for all his hard work, but I do know that he has to thank me for his start.' ('Personal Record') We may wonder how Barnard himself would have developed over this period, had circumstances been different. As he wrote these words, he was no doubt asking himself the very same question.

### *The 2026 WSB Program Schedule*

*For your long-range planning,  
mark your calendars.*

*We have an outstanding line-up for  
the next program year as follows:*

**Sunday, March 15, 2026, at 2:00 P.M.**

Sandy Olubas, collector:  
"Wedgwood and Wine"; to be held via Zoom

**Sunday, May 17, 2026, at 2:00 P. M.**

The Elizabeth Chellis Memorial Lecture: Leslie Grigsby, Curator, Winterthur: "Ceramic Vases and Floral Ornament"; and "Annual General Meeting";  
to be held via Zoom

**Sunday, July 19, 2026, at 12:00 pm.**

Members and Guests Participation:  
"Fourth Annual Summer Social"; venue t/b/d

### *Save The Date*

#### **2026 WEDGWOOD INTERNATIONAL SEMINAR**

We will go to Barlaston, England,  
April 19 - 25, 2026, for exciting lectures  
and factory tours. Our program will include  
a few pre-Seminar days in London,  
where we'll see the Wedgwood collections at  
the Victoria and Albert and British Museum.

We'll also enjoy a special reception at  
Bonhams London and a private,  
behind-the-scenes tour of the Wedgwood  
collection at Windsor Castle.

We look forward to seeing you there!

***Mark your calendars now!***

DETAILS COMING SOON

*This News-Letter is being  
published, in part,  
with a generous grant  
from Lettie J. Whitcomb.*