

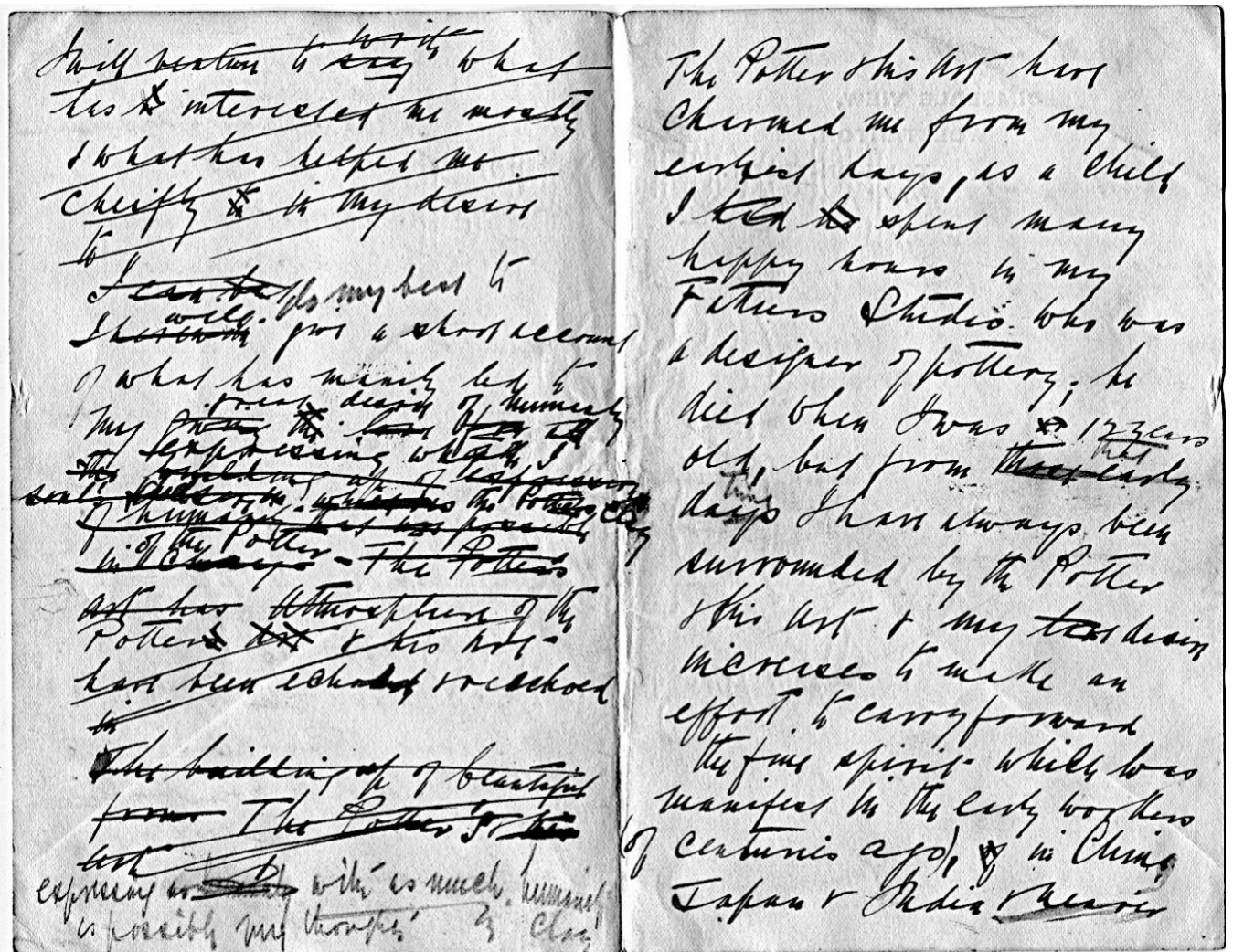
Online Supplement 3
to
William Moorcroft, Potter. Individuality by Design

Miscellaneous published and unpublished writings on pottery

- 01 Draft letter to W. Jervis [28 January 1902].
- 02 Draft letter to F. Miller [1903].
- 03 'The Potter and his Art', *The American Pottery Gazette* (May 1905), n.p.
- 04 'Science and Art in Modern Pottery', *The Pottery Gazette* (November 1917), 1053.
- 05 Letter to Ryrie Birks, Ltd., Toronto (2 October 1925).
- 06 'Modern Art in Industry', *The Times* (7 October 1925), 10.
- 07 'Decorative Art and Modern Industry', *The Pottery and Glass Record* (August 1927).
- 08 'How Pottery should "grow"', *The Daily News and Westminster Gazette* (19 May 1930).
- 09 'Taste in Industry', *The Times* (7 April 1934), 6.
- 10 'The New Stamps', *The Times* (24 September 1936), 8.
- 11 'Paris Exhibition. The British Pavilion', *The Times* (9 July 1937), 12.
- 12 'The British Pavilion in Paris Exhibition', *The Pottery Gazette* (October 1937), 1382.
- 13 Jottings on pottery, commerce and the Elers brothers [December 1941].
- 14 'Design of Glass and Pottery', *The Times* (18 September 1942), 5.
- 15 Draft letter to Edith Harcourt Smith (19 December 1944).

01 Draft letter to W. Jervis, [28 January 1902].

Personal and Commercial Papers of William Moorcroft, Stoke-on-Trent City Archives, SD 1837. CC BY-NC.

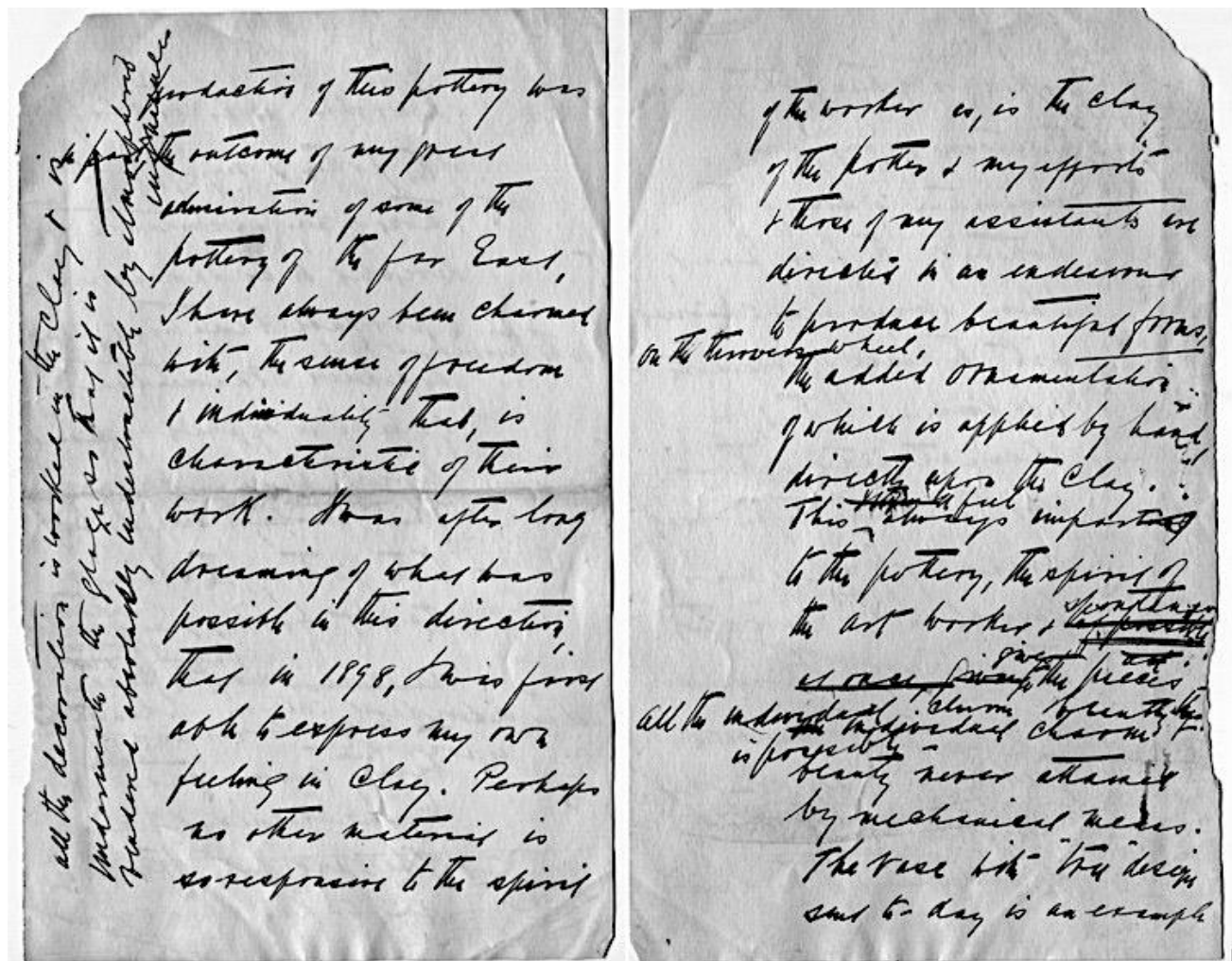


I will do my best to give a short account of what has mainly led to my great desire of expressing with as much humanity as possible my thoughts in clay.

The Potter and his Art have charmed me from my earliest days, as a child I spent many happy hours in my Father's Studio who was a designer of pottery; he died when I was 12 years old, but from that time I have always been surrounded by the Potter and his Art, and my desire increases to make an effort to carry forward the fine spirit which was manifest in the early workers of centuries ago, in China, Japan and India.

02 Draft letter to F. Miller [1903].

Personal and Commercial Papers of William Moorcroft', Stoke-on-Trent City Archives, SD 1837. CC BY-NC.



Production of this pottery was the outcome of my great admiration of some of the pottery of the Far East, I have always been charmed with the sense of freedom and individuality that is characteristic of their work. It was after long dreaming of what was possible in this direction that in 1898 I was first able to express my own feeling in clay.

Perhaps no other material is so responsive to the spirit of the worker as is the clay of the potter, and my efforts and those of my assistants are directed in an endeavour to produce beautiful forms on the thrower's wheel, the added ornamentation of which is applied by hand directly upon the clay. This we feel always imparts to the pottery the spirit of the art worker and spontaneously gives the pieces all the individual charm and beauty that is possible, beauty never attained by mechanical means.

The vase with 'tree' design sent today is an example, all the decoration is worked in the clay and is underneath the glaze, so that it is rendered absolutely indestructible by atmospheric influence.

THE POTTER AND HIS ART

Written by WILLIAM MOORCROFT, of Burslem, England
Especially for *The American Pottery Gazette*

There is no craft so ancient, more human, more artistic, or more widely used, than that of the potter, and none perhaps more interesting to the historian. Whether it be pottery made in Babylonia or ancient Egypt, or vases made in the distant past in Peru for the storing of grain, the potter's art has always been of the greatest value in connecting the spirit, as it were, of one world with another, owing to those human qualities, and its imperishable material, which make the art the most important of all the crafts.

From prehistoric times there has been engraved in this plastic material, in some form or other, the impression of the individual, and likewise we have recorded the highest culture both of the East and the West. The clay responds to every emotion of the potter, and records the most subtle feeling of his mind; nature always being his inspiration, her notes are echoed and re-echoed in color and form.

With the invention of the potter's wheel began illimitable possibilities in the creation of form, indeed, almost infinite, like nature herself. Form is the first consideration of the potter, and just as the finest of our buildings afford pleasure and aesthetic enjoyment, and influence our mind in the street, so the potter's art in form and color unconsciously influences our mind in the house. It is the duty of the potter to make the most of his material, and to combine truth and beauty in his work. He should always build his forms in a direct and simple way.

The old Chinese and Japanese potters constructed forms with simplicity and perfect balance, and the study of their work has had largely to do with the revival of true art in the West.

In adding ornament to a form, it should always support the construction, and add a note to it in the same key as is struck in the shape itself, and never more than that which accentuates the form.

Pressed or moulded work, so much of which is unnecessarily used today, is responsible for the inartistic appearance of much modern pottery. By its means forms are copied which are entirely unsuitable for production in the material, and it is this lack of proper construction that so largely degrades the potter's art in these times and robs it of that human touch which adds beauty to life.

The historian has to thank the Asiatic potter for the many facts that were hidden and recorded thousands of years ago, which, had it not been for the potter, would have perished with time; and also the Greek with his powerful contribution to this art, in the

painting of pottery, illustrating many of their great achievements and their dresses and customs; the colors they used were principally red and black.

The Italian majolica of the fifteenth century exhibits wonderful draughtsmanship, both direct and powerful. The materials were excellent in quality and the body was hard and of light color. Yellow was a color much used in the background of their decorations, and the ornament was principally in blue, white and green.

04 'Science and Art in Modern Pottery', *The Times Trade Supplement* (September 1917); reprinted in *The Pottery Gazette* (November 1917), 1053.

SCIENCE AND ART IN MODERN POTTERY

To the Editor of 'The Times.'

Sir, - With the idea of preventing an injustice to the British Potteries and potters through the publication of the note in the August number of 'The Times Imperial and Foreign Trade Supplement,' headed 'Science and Art in Modern Pottery,' I venture to utter a protest. Your correspondent cannot be wholly aware of the pottery that is produced, or he would be less dogmatic in his comment upon British work. It is completely surprising that your correspondent should venture to write so much regarding German and Austrian production at the present time – when many would prefer to forget both it and its baneful influence. May the writer state that he inspected the exhibits of German and Austrian work referred to, and he failed to see anything but what has been – and is – in the judgement of many experts – surpassed by British potters. Such exhibits of German and Austrian work show to us mainly what to avoid, and are so far only good.

Your obedient servant,
W. MOORCROFT

05 Letter to Ryrie Birks, Ltd., Toronto (2 October 1925)

I beg to acknowledge your letter of the 10th inst, and also the receipt of the two vases that you returned to us. With these decorative pieces, crackling of the glaze is difficult to avoid, although we use the utmost means to do so. I assure you that the very utmost care is taken in the selection of the pottery to your order. Each piece is examined by me personally before it leaves the works, and under no circumstances would a piece be allowed to pass if it had the least indication to crazing. I would use even greater care in selecting the pottery to your order than one would even in sending to an exhibition; because, on the one hand you leave to me the selection, and accepting the honour you place with me, greater care is used, if possible, than would be in any other circumstances.

Re. Department Stores

We do not send any pottery to anyone that is crazed, or that gives an indication of crazing. The pottery we send at a special rate, which we do not admit as 'seconds', has some feature in it, that we consider reduces the value of the piece from our point of view. As you know, each object we make is created on the wheel, and entirely handmade. We have no actual duplicates. And in making pottery that is so entirely human in nature, it is impossible to get all pieces, or even any pieces to suggest a mechanical standard. I hope it will be possible for you to honour me with a visit the next time you are in Europe, when you would see all our methods of production. I greatly value your personal interest in our work, and I feel sure that we shall come to a good understanding on this question. [...] Although I have made this pottery for thirty years, this is the first time we have had such a complaint as the one you send to us. We have had occasional pieces, but only rarely that have been reported to us. The crackle of the glaze is due to pieces having failed to reach a certain temperature during firing. This is not noticeable until sometimes several months afterwards.

May I again assure you that the greatest possible care shall be taken to avoid this. If you were to examine the pottery in any famous collection, you would find that some of the most treasured pieces have the faults that you now complain of in a much more serious form. The real value is found in the difference between an entirely human production and a machine-made product. The created article is always one possible to live with, while the mechanical product always becomes wearisome to live with. Moorcroft Pottery is entirely creative. There are no mechanical means used in making it.

With kindest regards, I beg to remain,
Yours sincerely,

W. Moorcroft.

MODERN ART IN INDUSTRY

It is somewhat surprising that Sir Lawrence Weaver should consider the Paris Exhibition of great importance to British manufacturers. Certainly it would be well if we could all spare the time to visit the Exhibition and so to learn what to avoid. But to go with the idea of becoming obsessed with the 'pulse of modernity,' as stated in Sir Lawrence's letter, would be somewhat unfortunate. If we are to succeed in the markets of the world it will be mainly by being ourselves and by remembering ever that England is England. To copy or to follow modern notions as expressed in France or in any other country would be in some degree injurious to our success in industry. If on the Continent, as stated in Sir Lawrence's letter, they put aside traditional tendencies, will it not be to our advantage to have a sane regard for tradition? And so let its silent influence govern in some degree our expression in colour and form.

Mr. W. MOORCROFT,
Burslem,
Stoke-on-Trent.

DECORATIVE ART AND MODERN INDUSTRY

To the Editor, The 'Pottery and Glass Record'

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

If we are to succeed and to attract the buyers of the world we must leave other countries and their ideas alone, or at least avoid their modern types of art. Why should we be asked to follow this extreme modern expression which is recognised as little less than a disease, merely shimmering on the surface of tradition. May one suggest that we still keep a sane regard for tradition and avoid the mere shriek of those who endeavour to impress the public with that which is false. If our critics would produce something rather than merely use words, possibly England would gain a little more both economically and nationally.

I am, dear sir,
Your obedient servant,

W. MOORCROFT
Moorcroft Potteries,
Burslem, Stoke-on-Trent.

08 'How Pottery should "grow"', *The Daily News and Westminster Gazette* (19 May 1930).

How Pottery should 'Grow'.
Fathoming the Earth's Secrets. What the Public Wants

The writer of the following article, Mr William Moorcroft, is one of the most individualistic potters of his time. He seeks to embody in his finished ware the colours and textures which are inherent in the materials from which his pottery is fashioned.

In the beginning of things there were those elements that through the ages, and now, give us the material with which we make the pottery of today.

In the making of a piece of pottery, it should first grow naturally, just as a plant from the earth, being a part of the earth, and any colour given to the pot should be an inherent part of it, as much so as the colour of a natural flower is an inherent part of it. To have pots so made would be as great a fascination as the trees are in the springtime. We need not go to the Greeks or the Romans for our inspiration, or to the remote East or to the remote West where is found the pottery of 10,000 years ago.

Unless fashions in pottery are the outcome of a natural growth they will not give satisfaction. To apply a colour compound upon a fired and glazed pot is no less offensive than it would be to paint the bark of a tree. Too often we talk of patterns which, when applied, are not in sympathy with the material, and unfortunately many are compelled to live with these. This type of pattern is like a disease, spreading its influence regardless of our feelings.

In the clay of the potter and in the metals found in the same clay or earth, we have infinite possibilities. If our future pottery work were done with a spiritual and physical regard for the materials used in making the pot, we should give a real joy to the world. There would be no hard mechanical lines, no harsh ornament.

On the potter's wheel is evolved a form well balanced and perfect in symmetry, in a material as precious as any we know, being a part of the foundation of all things. Since the Great War, there has been a tendency to carry forward the same cataclysmic influence as was seen through the war in the decoration of our houses. Pottery here and there shows this debased influence. We find forms contrary to the laws and accepted principles of construction, and pattern equally regardless of a sane understanding.

But, regardless of all these things, Staffordshire pottery is sought after the world over. With more thinking, and a better understanding, there are great possibilities ahead of us. It is difficult to combine commerce and art. Art, well considered and thoughtfully applied, is the greatest capital when dealing with the clays and metals of the earth – it is useless to say the public do not want real, thoughtful work. Too often the commercial man in his ignorance prevents the public from having what is their birthright – the opportunity to choose.

W. Moorcroft

TASTE IN INDUSTRY
TO THE EDITOR OF THE TIMES

Sir, - I read with much interest a letter from the Chairman of the Advisory Committee on Embroidery of the City and Guilds of London Institute in *The Times* of April 5, and in view of this I felt that my actual experience as a pottery manufacturer may be of interest in supporting your correspondent's point of view.

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. And the more the commercial machine is used, so much the more it should be controlled by men with imagination and men keenly sensitive to the need of art in its fullest sense in industry.

Yours sincerely,

W. MOORCROFT, Potter to her Majesty the Queen.
Burslem

10 **'The New Stamps', *The Times* (24 September 1936), 8.**

TO THE EDITOR OF THE TIMES

Sir, - As one interested in design (it is over 40 years since I attended a course of lectures on the subject by Lewis F. Day at South Kensington, now known as the Royal College of Art) and in view of the correspondence on the question of the new postage stamp, I would ask you to forgive me for my intrusion in offering my impression.

When seeing the stamp for the first time I was greatly impressed by the charming balance of colour and sense of English design. It came as a happy relief following the strained harsh lines as seen in much so-called modern art. I humbly hope that for a long time this English sense of design will continue to be appreciated and helpful. While a symbolic design may appeal to the imagination and be wholly admirable, this simple design of the new postage stamp will instinctively appeal, owing to its spring-like freshness. I only venture to express this opinion after having spent almost the whole of my life in seeking the best possible balance in colour and form as applied to pottery,

W. MOORCROFT,
Trentham, Staffordshire.

11 'Paris Exhibition. The British Pavilion', *The Times* (9 July 1937), 12.

TO THE EDITOR OF THE TIMES

Sir, - In view of Mr Bossom's letter in *The Times* of today, will you allow me to state briefly my personal experience of how the selection of pottery was made. In February 1936, the selection committee spent some time looking over the best of my pottery, and after doing so selected a few entirely unimportant specimens, and unfortunately the least valuable of anything I have made. It was quite clear to me that the selection was made without a due regard for the physical properties of the material. When I was requested to send these few pieces for further consideration to South Kensington, I declined, stating that they would not and could not represent me.

A year later, Mr Pick, chairman for the Council for Art in Industry, with his selection committee visited a show of my pottery, and once more selected a few small pieces which were entirely unrepresentative. However, Mr Pick did select one large piece, but not without saying that he would like me to alter the foot. And these pieces were sent to Paris.

My aim in writing this letter is to show clearly one possible reason why objects in the British Pavilion are so unsatisfactory, as Mr Bossom points out in his letter. It appears to me unusual, after spending 50 years of my life, first as an art worker and later as chemist and physicist, researching for the best means to make good pottery, to then be visited by the Council for Art in Industry, who not only made an inadequate selection of pottery for Paris, but tried to advise me before sending it how to make it. After long experience, I feel that unless there are found men with sound understanding of their work, and men less influenced by the fashions which are now known as ultra modern, there will be little hope for better things. At previous International Exhibitions, including the British Empire Exhibition, I was always allowed to make my own selection.

I am, Sir, your obedient servant,

W. Moorcroft, Potter to Her Majesty Queen Mary.
Trentham,
Staffordshire

THE BRITISH PAVILION IN PARIS EXHIBITION
TO THE EDITORS OF 'THE POTTERY GAZETTE AND GLASS TRADE REVIEW'

Sirs,- I was much interested in reading your report on the Paris Exhibition in the September issue, and after spending some time in the British Pavilion I found your views largely confirmed by visitors, as I sat reflecting upon the almost colourless show of pottery.

In the first place, I went to Paris to learn why none of my pottery selected for the British Pavilion could be seen by inquiring visitors; and it was found that all the labels giving catalogue numbers had been removed.

To my disappointment, I found that the large vase I made specially, 20 ins high, was placed on the floor away from the pottery groups, and was being used to assist the display of some fabrics. The vase was filled with dust-spattered artificial flowers which, together with the fabrics, covered the greater part of it.

On the other hand, the same Council displayed mass-produced articles in the front line, on special stands. These were of a type which one would not expect to take up valuable space in the British Pavilion.

Mr. Trethowan, in his letter to you, suggests 'a Council of picked men from within the industry who could be trusted always to handle the products of the industry entirely without prejudice.' But he also tells us, in his letter to you, that six out of nine men on the Paris, 1937, committee were directly connected with the pottery industry. So it may be seen that the existing committee, which is responsible for the present show, has, in fact, a two-thirds majority of members engaged in the industry.

Will you allow me to point out that His Majesty's Government, through the Board of Trade, have given the utmost satisfaction in the past with their own method of selection?

Yours etc.,

W. MOORCROFT,
Trentham, Staffordshire.

13 Jottings on pottery, commerce and the Elers brothers, written on the back of an envelope from Liberty & Co., postmarked 9 December 1941.

Personal and Commercial Papers of William Moorcroft, Stoke-on-Trent City Archives, SD 1837. CC BY-NC.

There would be no paper to place or record their work
but the atmosphere they would generate is influencing on
work to-day. That great unknown silent influence
that belongs to Elers. We cannot claim as our
own the things he did make if we are fortunate in being
born with a gift from the beginning. Things then he can
look from this beginning. In the beginning was God
& from & only from this source can we achieve
anything worth while. ~~From~~ of the Pottery of Centuries ago
went to Bore Green & Rows for their inspiration &
so thereby their expression was limited otherwise
they found their inspiration through Babylon &
China. Two of the ~~modern~~ ^{old} potters were the brothers Elers
I was the word recent having in mind the work of
many centuries past to England & New Zealand
they found a beautiful red clay in the borders of
Burslem. They made their shapes on the potter's
wheel you can visualize them throwing a well prepared
clay on the revolving disc & by working their
up & down gradually shaping with the hands
finger the inside & outside of the piece. This is
the potter the most durable pottery. After the shape has
dried a little it was ready for turning & the Elers
turned their pottery with great skill & refinement.
And before the clay was dry they applied a thin
clay often churning or marbling. A century
later bed wood & others began to make pottery
on a large scale & from that time the peasant
in his potter found was to come down
perhaps overlooked. And was industrial
& so gradually human skill was controlled by
commerce & that in fact the price for money
the making of money was representative
for the improvement of man
beauty. ~~They~~ They developed a
highly technical proficiency
& this has been
in the past

There would be no purpose to place on record their work, but the atmosphere they would generate is influencing our work today, that great unknown, silent influence that belongs to Eternity.

We cannot claim as our own the things we make. If we are fortunate in being born with a gift from the beginning of things, then we can work from this beginning. In the beginning was God, and from and only from this source can we achieve anything worth while.

Potters of centuries ago went to Greece and Rome for their inspiration, and so thereby their expression was limited. Others found their inspiration through Babylon and China. Two of the recent potters, the brothers Elers – I use the word recent, having in mind the work of many centuries – gave to England a new standard. They found a beautiful red clay in the woods at Burslem. They made their objects on the potter's wheel, you can visualise them throwing a well-prepared lump of clay on the revolving disc, and by working this up and down, gradually shaping with the thumb and fingers the inside and outside of the pot. This process gives the potter the most durable pottery. After the object has dried a little, it was ready for turning, and the Elers turned their pottery with great skill and refinement. And before the clay was dry, they applied on the moist clay often charming ornamentation.

A century later, Wedgwood and others began to make pottery on a large scale, and from that time the peaceful indigent potter was to some degree overlooked. Art was industrialised, and so gradually human skill was controlled by commerce, and that unfortunate greed for money, the making of money, was responsible for the impoverishment of innate beauty. There developed a highly technical profession [...]

DESIGN OF GLASS AND POTTERY
TO THE EDITOR OF THE TIMES

Sir, - The question raised by the Chairman of the London County Council on design in pottery and glass leaves me as a designer and maker of pottery grateful for his directing attention to the great value of living with things as perfect in form as possible. But as a ten-thousandth part of an inch determines purity of line, it will be no easy task to reach this ideal.

Form exquisitely balanced, pure in tone and texture, is as refreshing as early morning in the country with the song of the bird. But the maker of pottery alone can eliminate the fault in shape that so easily destroys beauty and truth. If the order for simplicity which the Board of Trade has been compelled to enforce can lead to this high ideal, then a great advance will have been made through the influence of adversity.

Your obedient servant,

W. Moorcroft, Potter to Her Majesty Queen Mary.
Moorcroft Works,
Burslem,
Stoke-on-Trent.

15 Draft letter to Edith Harcourt Smith (19 December 1944)

My dear Lady Harcourt-Smith,

I have sent today a small box which I hope will appeal to you. You are often in my thoughts, and I retain very happy memories of our many meetings. When shall we meet again ?

Walter is I believe in Holland, he cannot tell us. I am left to carry on originating new things, working as a chemist, art-worker, potter. The material we use was a part of the beginning, that went into space at a speed incalculable as we left the sun. In my work, I combine the metals and clays which were a part of the sun, millions of years ago, at a temperature between 2000° to 3000° F. I find a happy reunion. At this temperature the metals give the illimitable colours found through the sun.

It would appear that there is always a resurrection, a reunion of the elements. We are made of the same elements as the clays we use. Aluminum, silica, oxygen, magnesium, calcium, potassium, sodium, hydrogen etc. So we are nearer to each other than we may think.

May I wish you a very happy New Year, and all happy days.

Ever Yours,

W. Moorcroft

I am working now as I did 30 years ago.