

# **A Passion for Pots**

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The W.A. Ismay Collection  
and the British Studio Pottery  
Movement 1955–2001

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## ***Abstract***

This thesis examines the role and impact of collectors and collections of post-war British studio pottery, focusing on the prolific collector W.A. Ismay M.B.E. (1910–2001). Published research about the role collectors held in the British studio pottery movement is sparse and of varying quality, ranging from amateur writing to strong critical studies. Ismay was active at the centre of the studio pottery world for more than 40 years and his first-hand experience offers new information that contributes to this gap in knowledge.

Whilst creating his collection of pots, Ismay also assembled a vast archive of supporting documentation, which, along with testimony of those that knew Ismay, was the primary source for this research. Ismay's archive is unique in its coverage, containing the correspondence he exchanged with a wide range of contacts (from potters, to collectors, to curators); research for his own writing on the subject and documentation on all aspects of his purchases (receipts, price lists, photographs of exhibitions, potters' workshops and more).

The archive provides new insights into Ismay's early life, allowing understanding of how crucial this period was in enabling him to develop the knowledge and transferrable skills necessary to complete his rapid rise to prominence as a collector of British studio pottery. Ismay's archive reveals how his significant early acquisitions helped to raise his profile, cementing his position and facilitating important, long-lasting and mutually beneficial relationships. He offers a well-documented example of the valuable contribution collectors made to the British studio pottery movement, financially and emotionally. Ismay's hard-fought battle to both keep his collection intact and secure its legacy provides insight into some of the issues public museums and galleries face when dealing with large bequests during times of economic, cultural and political uncertainty.

The significance of this research lies in the attention it draws to a rich and unstudied archive and collection that offer a wealth of opportunities for uncovering new knowledge about the British studio pottery movement.



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W.A. Ismay at private view in 1975. Photograph John Anderson.





I-1 W.A. Ismay's kitchen at 14 Welbeck Street, Wakefield, in 1982. Photograph Eileen Lewenstein.

## **INTRODUCTION**

*"The house is so congested by now that it is all very difficult"<sup>1</sup>*

The quote above is from a letter written by the prolific collector of post-war British studio pottery, William Alfred Ismay MBE (1910–2001). Ismay was struggling to locate several pots in his small terraced house that he had agreed to loan to an exhibition. The sense of being overwhelmed by objects is no doubt familiar to curators at most UK museums and galleries, whose storerooms are full to bursting with collections gathered over decades if not centuries. Though free from institutional rules and regulations, Ismay suffered many of the same difficulties and constraints as a public collection, acting, perhaps unconsciously, as a curator, making acquisitions, facilitating loans, receiving visitors, documenting and caring for his collection in the best way he could.

Ismay was the most prolific collector of studio pottery in post-war Britain, gathering over 3,500 pieces by approximately 500 potters between 1955 and 2001. Compared with similar collections from the post-war period, none come close to equalling it in breadth or scale. For example, Anthony Shaw began collecting in 1973 and currently has over 800 ceramics (though his collection is still growing). Whilst the collection of Henry Rothschild (founder of the gallery *Primavera*), which was amassed between 1949 and 2009, contains some 500 pots.

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1 Letter from W.A. Ismay to Eric James Mellon (potter), dated 21 February 2000. In the collection of the Crafts Study Centre, Farnham.



I-2 W.A. Ismay attending the private view at the Craftsman Potter's Shop in 1969. Photograph John Anderson.

The W.A. Ismay Collection offers the opportunity for a greater understanding of post-war British studio pottery as it encompasses the work of both well-known and more obscure potters. It offers a broad overview from one collector's perspective, showing the development of potters and their work over a numbers of years. It is supported by a vast archive of information gathered by Ismay throughout his lifetime, which provides context for the collector and the objects he acquired.

During the first few years of collecting, Ismay's acquisition of a number of strong and important pots increased his profile as a collector. His determination to learn about all aspects of pottery production (historical and contemporary) and the British studio pottery movement resulted in him becoming an important figure in the world of British studio pottery. Ismay shared his knowledge and supported potters through the many articles and exhibition and book reviews he wrote over the years he was actively collecting. Pieces from his collection were seen in many key exhibitions and publications during the following forty years.



Ismay's house could be considered an antithesis of Le Corbusier's idea: '*Une maison est une machine-à-habiter*' (A house is a machine for living in).<sup>2</sup> As he filled up his house with pots, he adapted it to suit his needs, altering furniture to hold the collection and building new furnishings as required. It combined a number of functions: storage, museum, office, library and living quarters. His home became legendary, particularly his kitchen table which was covered in pots apart from one strip at the end where he would write and eat. His home was a space he shared with his family of pots and one in which he could entertain the many potters, students, curators, writers and other collectors who wrote, desperate to visit.



I-3 W.A. Ismay's kitchen table at 14 Welbeck Street Wakefield 1990s. Photograph Janette Haigh.

Since Ismay's death in 2001, there has been growing interest in his collection, and a desire for physical and intellectual access to it. This research will help meet that need by publicizing the collection and highlighting the archives to reveal their importance and value.

This historiographical research is the first to take place using Ismay's personal archive. It examines the journey of a private collector, from the awakening of his interest, to the development of his knowledge and taste; and the collection from its foundation to its final destination in a public museum. It adds to the small existing body of knowledge about collecting post-war British studio pottery, addressing this

<sup>2</sup> Le Corbusier (1931). *Towards an Architecture*, J. Rodker, London (first published 1923).



I-4 Pottery by Lucie Rie.

gap in literature. Many recent publications on British studio pottery give histories of the movement, establishing links with modernism and the return to traditionalism as inspired by oriental ceramics and English medieval wares (Clark, 1995; Harrod, 1999; Jones, 2007). This research looks at the specific types of pottery being collected by Ismay, the combination of gentler, functional wares alongside avant-garde work, and provides new insights into one type of collecting happening in post-war Britain.

The research will also consider British studio pottery from a museological position, looking at the contemporary role of collectors in museums. York Art Gallery is an appropriate example to study, having historically and recently acquired material from private collectors of studio pottery. Also considered are the changing curatorial practices resulting from collaborations with creative practitioners including artists, collectors, ceramists and subject specialists; and the public outcomes they generate in the form of exhibitions.

When I began this research, I was interested in *how* Ismay created his collection, but as the research progressed, I have also wondered *why* he collected. This is harder to define because whilst it may have been a deliberate decision for Ismay to start a collection, the resulting activity and outcomes were more organic and, to some extent, out of his control. My first task when I was appointed at York Museums Trust in 2004 was to unpack and catalogue Ismay's collection, over 90 per cent of which had been in

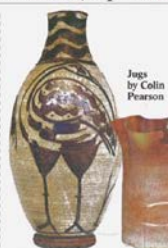
# You'd have to be daft as a brush not to visit this Yorkshire gallery

The generosity of philanthropists is behind York Art Gallery's stunning £8 million makeover, reports **Nancy Durrant**

What can you get for £8 million? A hell of a lot, if York Art Gallery's fabulous redevelopment is anything to go by. With an increase of more than 60 per cent in gallery space, which strikes me as exceptional value, this transformation of the neoclassical 1879 building, by Ushida Findlay Architects, with the conservation specialists Simpson & Brown, is creative conservation architecture at its best, bringing a difficult historic building back to life.

Astonishing though it seems, gazing up from the original entrance to the skylights high above, the ceiling space has always remained unused. Now it is resplendently visible the moment you walk in: an artfully constructed mezzanine reveals just the top of a fabulous new installation of 10,000 pots by the contemporary artist Clare Twomey, which instantly attracts your interest from below.

Where there were two galleries on the ground floor, now there are three, thanks to the relocation (after several years of heated debates) of the



Jugs by Colin Pearson

archives. The walls separating the entrance from these spaces are glass and enclose a corridor — as you cross it, the hubbub ebbs away to peaceful silence. These lower galleries have state-of-the-art environmental controls and high security so, according to the senior curator, Laura Turner, they will be able to attract better loans and touring exhibitions. The first of these, in the spring, will be *Truth and Memory*: British Art of the

First World War, from the Imperial War Museum, followed by *Flesh*, an art historical show on the body, for which a Rembrandt loan has been secured. The opening exhibition showcases Italian Old Masters from the Lycett Green collection. Spanning the 14th to 19th centuries, the collection was bequeathed to the gallery on March 8, 1995, by the industrialist PD Lycett Green. He had originally offered it as a loan, but on seeing the grand exhibition that the gallery's curator Hans Hess put together, Lycett Green announced on the spot that he would leave it to York as a permanent gift.

Among the beautiful works is the gallery's oldest painting — a glittering c145 altarpiece panel of St Zenobius, recently reattributed to Bernardo Daddi. Domenichino's intense, intimate *Portrait of Monsignor Agucchi* from 1610 is also newly attributed. Look out too for Bernardo Cavallino's suitably shocking St Agatha (c1645), her eyes raised in both piety and pain, the bleeding wound that remains of her breasts just visible above her mantle.

Dotted among the Old Masters — and throughout the gallery displays, which include a room focusing on



I-5 Article in *The Times*, 31 July 2015.

storage since it arrived in York in 2001 following Ismay's death. As I progressed with the project, I became more aware of what an incredible learning experience the collection offered and how valuable the supporting archive was in providing context for the objects. I have interpreted the collection through a number of displays, exhibitions, talks and articles: exploring the archive and testing how that can be used in a museum and gallery setting. By demonstrating the value of the collection and archive, its status within York Museums Trust has risen, resulting in the contemporary studio ceramics collections being at the heart of the £8 million capital redevelopment of York Art Gallery between 2013 and 2015, helping to leverage crucial funding needed to complete the project. The Centre of Ceramic Art (CoCA) was founded on the strength of collections gifted by private collectors and has received great critical acclaim, leading to York Art Gallery being finalists in the Art Fund Museum of the Year 2016 and the European Museum of the Year 2017, as well as winning the Kids in Museums Family Friendly Museum Award 2016.

Evidence of the importance of Ismay's legacy for York Art Gallery can be seen in a number of ways. The suggestion of the potential for doctoral research that the collection and its archive offered was first raised by Alex McErlain (Senior Lecturer, Manchester Metropolitan University, 1976–2010) whilst researching the exhibition *Firing Thoughts: Exploring the relationship between ceramics and drawing* (Manchester Metropolitan University, Special Collections, 2007). Having worked on cataloguing the collection since 2004, I felt uniquely placed and began doctoral research part time in 2008. Carrying out this research on the W.A. Ismay Collection has given me some academic weight and has resulted in the opportunity to attend and present papers on Ismay at some of the important ceramics and art conferences held in recent years and to take advantage of having that platform to also promote and raise awareness of York Art Gallery's collections and the plans to develop the Centre of Ceramic Art.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>3</sup> I presented papers at The Association of Art Historians Conference (Royal College of Art) 2015; Ceramics in the Expanded Field (University of Westminster) 2015; International Ceramics Festival (Aberystwyth Arts Centre) 2015; The Non-Maker in Craft (Shipley Art Gallery) 2016.





I-6 Matthew Darbyshire: *The W.A. Ismay Collection* exhibition at The Hepworth Wakefield, 2013–2014. Photograph Bob Collier.

This research itself reveals how beneficial it is to have an interested curator to champion a collection, one willing to explore and use it to its full potential, raising its status within the institution and for visitors. The increased research activity has encouraged more interest from other academic institutions, such as The University of York, who in 2012, commissioned author Tanya Harrod to undertake research and produce a report on the feasibility of them creating a *Centre of Ceramic Studies*. In her recommendations submitted in 2014, Harrod concluded that there was great potential for undergraduate and postgraduate teaching and the University are currently embedding ceramics into existing teaching programmes whilst they investigate ways in which the Centre of Ceramic Studies could be funded.<sup>4</sup> The research of Ismay's collection and archive has led to a number of exhibitions, including: *W.A. Ismay: A Passion for Pots*' at Wakefield Art Gallery, 2005; *3 Collectors* at York Art Gallery, 2009; the exhibition *Matthew Darbyshire: The W.A. Ismay Collection* at The Hepworth Wakefield, 2013-2014; and an online exhibition through the Google Cultural Institute and their Google Arts & Culture platform in 2014 (<http://goo.gl/DmkTNH>).

4 Harrod, Tanya (2014). *Ceramics at York: a discussion document*, commissioned by the University of York, April.



I-7 The Centre of Ceramic Art (CoCA), York Art Gallery. Photograph Giles Rocholl.

From a curatorial perspective, the pots are the heart of the collection as they are the physical objects that go on display to the public. However, as a result of this research, the archives have assumed an equally important role, as they provide the context for the objects existing together in a public museum. Ismay's archive is a magnificent, monumental and unique creation, which could be viewed as the most important ceramic archive held by York Art Gallery. Other archives, such as the one relating to the internationally important Milner-White collection of pioneering studio pottery, do not have the depth of Ismay's, nor do they offer the extensive view of a collector and of his life. As the value of his archive has become clear, it has enabled me to argue that York Museums Trust's *Collection Development Policy* should encompass the collection of archival material relating to our ceramics collections as a specific aim. In 2015 this enabled us to acquire the archive relating to collectors Alan and Pat Firth. The Firths were friends of Ismay and whilst we have acquired one ceramic from their collection, without the changed view of the value of archives, we would not have been able to accept such a large archive on the basis of one single displayable ceramic. The creation of CoCA and the ambition for it to become an advocate for new research gave added purpose to the acquisition.



## ***Contribution to knowledge***

This research uses the W.A. Ismay Collection and its supporting archive as its primary source material, which, until now, has been unstudied. The research aims to address the acknowledged lack of critical writing on the private collecting of post-war British studio pottery (Cooper, 2007; Harrod, 2014) by using Ismay and his collection as a case study and highlighting the range of future research avenues the collection can facilitate. The W.A. Ismay Collection offers many opportunities to generate new knowledge about British studio pottery, individual ceramists and subsets of artists within the movement, of economics and value, the changing marketplace, social aspects such as the development of potters' camps, material culture, private and public collecting, private and public display, museology, curation, art history and many more aspects of this marginalized and understudied area of British modernism.



**I-8** Moulded flat bottle, 1963, Shoji Hamada.  
(York Museums Trust)



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| 53                                      | SALT GLAZE HAB<br>BOTTLE | HAMADA            |       |   |   |              |   |   | 25    | - | - |
| 153                                     | ASH GLAZE T. BOWL        |                   |       |   |   |              |   |   | 15    | - | - |
| Purchased for the Sum Received Opposite |                          |                   |       |   |   |              |   |   | 40    | - | - |

To:-  
 Signature Ismay <sup>less 5%.</sup> (Mr., Mrs., Miss) 38 - -

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 exclusive

I-9 Receipt for Ismay's purchase of pots by Shoji Hamada in 1964.

Ismay's archive offers a wealth of unstudied primary source material and a broad selection will be critically interpreted and contextualized, to shed new light on how the Ismay collection was formed. The archive reveals the variety of complex relationships formed between Ismay and potters/ceramists, collectors, gallery owners, curators, writers, academics and students. By studying the archives we can decipher not only the biography of a collector and his role in a wider studio pottery movement, but also the biography of the objects he collected, from their creation to moment of purchase and beyond. This interpretation of a private archive, to consider its origins and its impact, adds weight to the argument that an important role of archive material is questioning the past and future (Derrida, 1995). This research will demonstrate that in a public museum or gallery context, archives offer a valuable source of new information that can be transformed into new knowledge for its audience.

This study of the W.A. Ismay Collection provides new, contemporary insights into the issues surrounding the acquisition by a public museum of a large private collection and archive, at a time when storage and display space is at a premium and public museums and galleries have to justify their existence and in many cases become self-supporting charitable businesses. This research springs from one institution's experience of managing the practicalities of embedding private collections into public collections and reveals the transformative effect it has had on both curatorial practice and the ambition of a regional public institution.

It is a timely piece of research, which comes at a point when more private collectors of studio pottery are looking for homes for their collections or disposing of them at auction. At a time when ceramics courses in further and higher education have dwindled to their lowest point and new ways of formal and informal training are desperately being sought, there has been a tremendous surge in support and interest. Public museums and galleries across the UK have begun re-investing in new permanent gallery spaces (Victoria and Albert Museum; Shipley Art Gallery), programming exhibitions of this part of their collections (MIMA; Gallery Oldham) and showing the work of new artists working with the medium (TATE St Ives; The Hepworth Wakefield). Television and radio programmes have begun highlighting ceramics in their schedule, with the BBC's *Great Pottery Throw Down* being commissioned for a second series and Radio Four including more craft material such as Grayson Perry's Reith Lectures in 2013 and a report about Lucie Rie on *Woman's Hour* in 2016.



I-10 Casserole, 1960, Lucie Rie. (YORYM:2004.1.2253)

## ***Research question and methodology***

This research aims to answer the question: *What is the role and impact of collectors and collections on the post-war British studio pottery movement and its legacy?* As part of this I will explore the factors leading Ismay to become a collector, how he created his collection, what the relationship was between Ismay and the studio pottery movement and what Ismay's ambitions were for the future of his collection when it was transferred to public ownership.

The aims of the research are to:

1. Establish the importance of Ismay's collection and archive.
2. Explore Ismay's character and background to determine why he became a collector.
3. Explore how Ismay created his collection and in doing so examine the unique scholarly nature of the archive.
4. Examine the impact of decisions taken when transferring the collection from private to public ownership.

The objectives of the research are to:

1. Interpret and contextualize extracts from Ismay's archive, demonstrating the significance of the collection.
2. Present the archive as a valuable contextual tool in a museum setting.
3. Create a bibliography of Ismay's published writing to show the extent of his impact on the critical discourse surrounding post-war British studio pottery.
4. Demonstrate the important role Ismay played in the British studio pottery movement.





I-11 W.A. Ismay in his kitchen at 14 Welbeck Street, Wakefield, 1990s. Photograph Janette Haigh.

This historiographical research explores primary source material from an unstudied archive. Analysing the content of the archives will allow me to interpret it and contextualize it. This will result in evidence that reveals the complex narratives that surround the collector, his pots and his activity. The archive offers a multifaceted body of evidence, which disseminates not only Ismay's opinions and views, but also those of the people and institutions he came in contact with. This is supplemented by additional information provided by people who knew Ismay and were willing to share their knowledge, in the form of interviews and correspondence and in some cases, consented to be filmed (transcripts of these interviews are included in Appendix v).

Chapter 1 offers a literature review of key texts that provide the context for this research, positioning this research within existing knowledge. It introduces the British studio pottery movement and key figures involved in it. Considering the activity of collecting, it places Ismay in context amongst other collectors of this type of material. Attention is given to public collecting and presentation of British studio pottery by museums and galleries, with regards to the acquisition of collections from private collectors. The significance of a supporting archive and the added value of such material will be considered. Finally, the role of exhibitions and the way they are used to interpret collections and archives like Ismay's will be explored, revealing the diversity of responses employed by museums and galleries.

Chapter 2 makes use of material in Ismay's archive relating specifically to his early life and family. By uncovering his background, it explains how this shaped his character and positioned him to begin collecting. It reveals new knowledge about Ismay's ambition to be a writer and poet in the 1930s. New evidence is presented to demonstrate his self-confidence and how he developed skills and knowledge that would become invaluable when he took up collecting. It will offer insights into his family life and experiences during World War One and World War Two, and how they affected his political opinions and his personal life. Finally, it will explain how, in 1955, Ismay was perfectly positioned and well prepared to take on the role of collector.



I-12 'W.A. Ismay M.B.E.', 2015, Peter Meanley. (York Museums Trust) Photograph Peter Heaton.

Chapter 3 concentrates on the years that Ismay was actively involved in collecting British studio pottery, 1955-2001, using his archive to reveal new knowledge about his activity. It considers the evidence of his rapid rise to prominence as a collector and how important his early acquisitions were. It focuses on his relationships with key characters of the British studio pottery movement to demonstrate how his views were valued. It considers the role of his writing and how he disseminated his views and knowledge and used his increasingly important position to assist the British studio pottery movement. We examine the way in which Ismay used his home to both store and display his collection, the responses of visitors and the value of visiting. Most importantly, this chapter reveals Ismay's thoughts and feelings on his collection and those of the people who came into contact with it and him.

Chapter 4 explores the journey Ismay's collection made from private to public ownership. The value of his archive will be demonstrated again by the use of extracts providing the primary source evidence. Correspondence, reports, minutes and other types of archival papers relating to the years of discussions and negotiations between Ismay, his trustees and supporters with the Yorkshire Museum (and the other public museums and galleries he had also considered as potential homes for his collection), along with his Last Will and Testament, are used to reveal Ismay's intentions for the

future of his collection and the issues he encountered during this process. This will enable a proper understanding of why he chose the Yorkshire Museum as the future home of his collection. Public museums and galleries are often criticized for only being able to display a small percentage of their collection, so when a private collector offers to give them a large collection on the scale of Ismay's, it provokes much soul-searching. This chapter will disclose the issues (internal and external) that the museums were dealing with and how they ultimately reconciled them to accept the gift of the W.A. Ismay Collection.

The Conclusion draws together the results of the investigation to present answers to the research question and also makes suggestions for future areas deserving of further research.

### ***Limitations of the research***

The sheer size and scale of the primary source material contained within the W.A. Ismay Collection (objects and archive) gives this research tremendous scope for uncovering new knowledge. However, the limitations of time and the constriction of a doctoral research project have meant that only a fraction has been covered. During the latter years of this research, two significant amounts of archival material relating to Ismay were handed over to York Museums Trust, to be added to the existing material. Though I have gone through the material and have included some in this research, the late arrival of a large amount of material made it impossible to study it with great depth. Certain aspects, such as Ismay's correspondence with school and university friends, remain, mostly, untouched and offer great potential for future research. The archive is currently being catalogued onto York Museums Trust's collections database. When this is complete, there is the tantalizing possibility of strong narratives emerging allowing specific elements to be found and studied more easily than riffling through files of papers and ephemera. The acquisition by York Museums Trust in 2016 of the archive of the collectors Alan and Pat Firth (contemporaries of Ismay) has opened up the possibilities of comparative study, which time has made unfeasible. Additionally, more people who knew Ismay have come forward throughout the process to share their knowledge, but it has not been possible to include them all in this research project. Whilst this is disappointing, these can be viewed as exciting opportunities for investigation and recommendations for future research projects have been noted in the conclusion.



During the research, the methodology and direction have changed considerably in response to various external influences. What started out as a purely historiographical written piece of research on the importance of one collector and his collection, transformed into a practice-based project when the opportunity of exhibiting the Ismay collection at The Hepworth Wakefield arose. During the course of the development of the exhibition an artist was invited to contribute to the design and the focus on Ismay began to be diluted. The decision to abandon the practice-based direction in order to regain the primary focus on Ismay and his archive was a difficult one, resulting in loss of the time spent pursuing that direction. However, extending the time spent on the research allowed it to contribute to developments at York Art Gallery for the new Centre of Ceramic Art.

It should be noted that the terms British studio 'pottery' and British studio 'ceramics' are used throughout this research. This may initially appear indecisive, but in each instance the choice of term relates to the context of what is being discussed. For example, early 20th century studio pottery was never referred to as ceramics, this is a term that became more commonly used in the late 20th century. Similarly, when describing artists, the choice of 'potter', 'ceramist', 'ceramicist', 'maker' or 'artist' is used in accordance with how they describe themselves. The W.A. Ismay Collection is referred to as a collection of 'studio pottery' throughout as this is how Ismay described it.

All of the personal archives relating to Ismay used in this research (unless otherwise referenced) are in the possession of York Museums Trust. They are currently in the process of being catalogued and digitized to make them more accessible for future research. As this is an active process, none of the documents have catalogue numbers or specific locations.



1-1 W.A. Ismay at an exhibition private view in 1990. Photograph John Anderson.



## CHAPTER 1 — Literature Review

A recent search for ‘pottery’ on an online book retailer revealed in excess of 20,000 results, whilst ‘collecting’ gave more than 26,000 titles. It is indicative of a wide body of knowledge but one that is, however, of varying quality and content. This literature review offers a survey of published research relating to a number of areas including: Ismay, British studio pottery, education, collecting and archives.

### 1.1 William Alfred Ismay MBE (1910–2001)

Ismay produced lots of writing on the British studio pottery movement himself (see Appendix i for a bibliography of his published articles and Appendix ii for selected examples) and these can offer many clues as to what he was interested in, what his personal taste was and what exhibitions he was attending. There are many publications from the late-1950s onwards containing illustrations of Ismay’s pots; amongst these are *The Craft of the Potter* (Casson, 1977), *The Art of Bernard Leach* (Hogben, 1978) and *Geoffrey Whiting* (Whiting, 1989). These act as a strong signifier for the high regard authors and curators held Ismay’s collection in and his generosity in loaning pots to exhibitions and producing photographs for publication at little or no cost.

However, little has been published about Ismay as a person or a collector. Therefore much of the knowledge in circulation during his lifetime and after his death came from anecdotal sources, such as the accounts of people who knew him, spent time with him and visited his home. An MPhil creative writing thesis written by Daniel Manning (1995) provided an account of visiting Ismay’s home. However, though generous with his knowledge and access to his collection, Ismay was a very private man and would never agree to be interviewed by journalists, despite numerous requests. For example, historian Tanya Harrod wrote to Ismay in 1987 attempting to arrange an interview with him for *The Spectator*, but was refused.

There are the beginnings of a number of articles about the development of his collection written by Ismay in his archives and these all seem related to the article he eventually published in 1982 for the journal *Ceramic Review*.<sup>1</sup> The publication of this article followed shortly after Ismay was made an honorary lifetime member of the Craftsman Potters Association in 1981 and the recipient of an MBE in 1982 for: ‘services to the study of ceramics.’<sup>2</sup> In a letter to Ismay in 1992, Murray Fieldhouse (potter and former editor of *Pottery Quarterly* journal) asked Ismay why he had never written the article on collecting that he had requested in 1973, especially as he had

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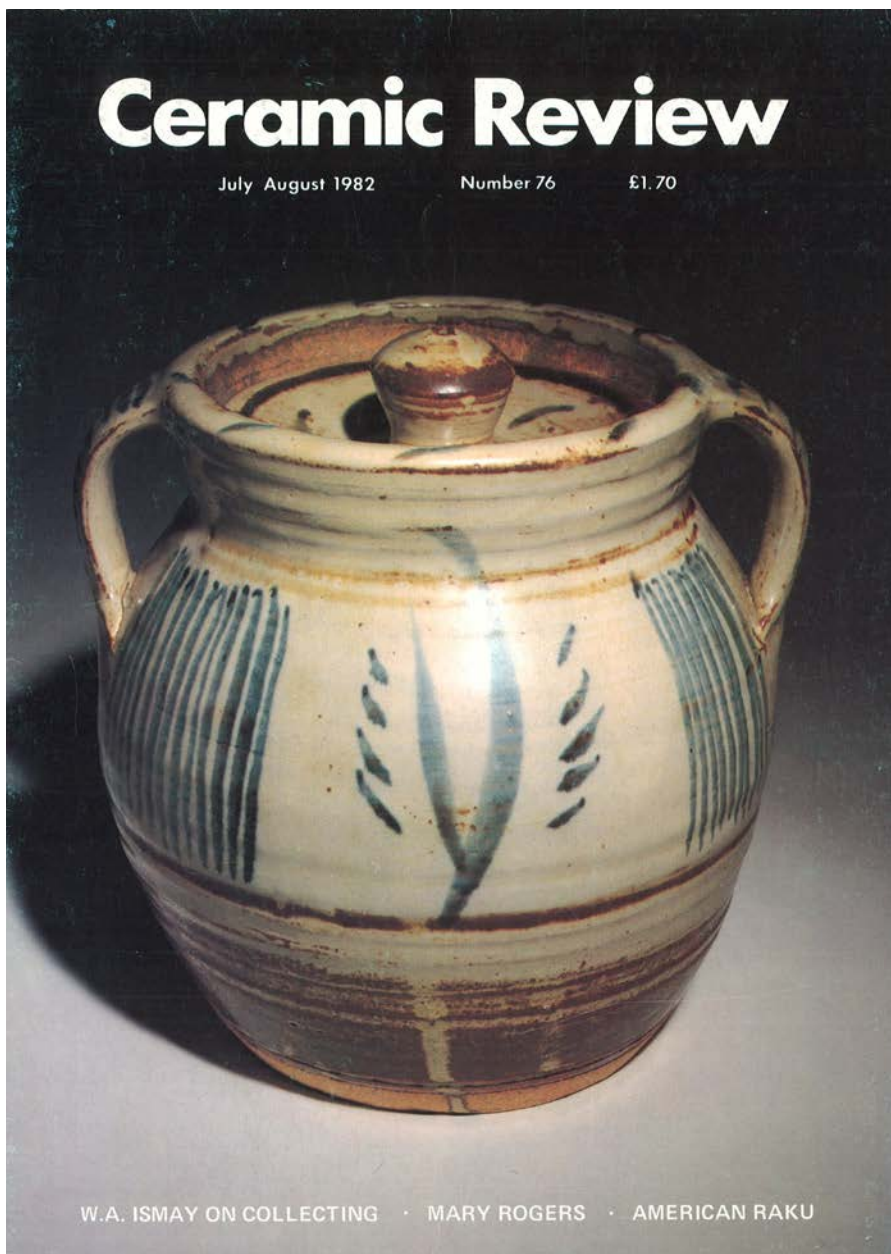
1 Ismay, W.A. (1982b). ‘Collecting Studio Pottery’, *Ceramic Review*, No. 76, Jul/Aug.

2 Supplement to *The London Gazette*, 31 December 1981, p. 14.

written something similar for *Ceramic Review* ten years later. In his reply, Ismay wrote that Fieldhouse: 'rather blew it by sending an elaborate schedule of how I should write it, which naturally annoyed me!'<sup>3</sup>

Writing specifically on the collecting practices of Ismay is confined to obituaries and a small number of articles following his death. In an obituary in *The Independent*, Emmanuel Cooper (2001) briefly mentioned aspects of Ismay's personal life (parents, education, World War Two) but concentrated on his role in the post-war British studio pottery world.<sup>4</sup> He highlighted particular aspects such as the beret and magnifying glass, being first to arrive at private views, his house full of pots, the honour potters felt if included in his collection, his meticulous writing style and idiosyncratic obsessions such as trying to collect an A to Z of potters. Appearing in the national press, Cooper's obituary was the most widely read published material about Ismay, creating a specific image for him that persisted.

Other articles that appeared in specialist publications shortly after Ismay's death had a smaller audience and offered different views on his importance. In Paul Vincent's article in *Ceramics in Society* (formerly *Studio Pottery*), he writes of the dedication and support Ismay gave to the British studio pottery world, describing him as: 'a dedicated patron – whose motives were utterly above suspicion.'<sup>5</sup> However, he then goes on to highlight the collection of Lisa Sainsbury, who had recently presented the University of East Anglia with her collection of studio pottery, along with a Norman Foster designed museum to house them in. The flavour of the article changes and it becomes



1-2 Issue of *Ceramic Review* featuring article on collecting written by W.A. Ismay in 1982.

3 Draft letter from W.A. Ismay to Murray Fieldhouse (potter and editor of *Pottery Quarterly*), dated 28 February 1992.

4 Cooper, Emmanuel (2001). 'Obituary – W.A. Ismay', *The Independent*, 7 February.

5 Vincent, Paul (2001). 'The collector's lot', *Ceramics in Society*, Summer.

a comment on value as he compares the financial resources of each. Ismay comes off worse, his collection being ‘an inconvenient side-affect of purchase’ whilst Sainsbury’s is ‘a highly cultured statement.’<sup>6</sup>

Alongside Vincent’s article was an appreciation written by potter Sebastian Blackie.<sup>7</sup> Blackie’s article presents his recollections of visiting Ismay’s home and is much more insightful than Vincent’s as he highlights the scholarly nature of Ismay’s interest, his gentlemanly behaviour and importance, commenting that Ismay: ‘had accumulated a wealth of anecdotes yet, although deeply observant, he avoided negative comment’ and ‘it is the totality of the collection that makes it both remarkable and unique.’<sup>8</sup>

David Briers (2002) wrote an article on Ismay’s achievements for *Ceramic Review*, titled ‘Friend of the Earth’. Concentrating on Ismay’s reputation, Briers provides a well-balanced overview of his activity as a collector. He suggests that part of the value of Ismay’s collection was in the way that his acquisitions (modest but frequent) supported potters. Briers mentions visits to Ismay’s home but positions them as more exclusive occasions with visitors having to prove their worth before an invitation was extended. The importance of Ismay’s domestic environment and how he lived alongside his pots is emphasized by Briers when he comments on the display of part of the collection at the Yorkshire Museum opened after Ismay’s death: ‘inevitably, the display of pots from Ismay’s collection is now otherwise divorced from its erstwhile domestic context, and has relinquished its inclusive character of sheer volume and proximity.’<sup>9</sup> Although he does not explore Ismay’s background in any great depth, he does make one particularly astute comment on his character, writing:

*[...] what might seem to be the signs of mild eccentricity are really the archetypal traits of a bookish heterosexual bachelor, adhering to a firmly held scale of personal priorities. Though a private man, he was not a recluse. He would talk warmly about pots, but became elusive as soon as personal matters were broached.*<sup>10</sup>

Though reluctant, Ismay was on a few occasions persuaded to talk in public about his views on pottery and his collection. For example, in 1959 Ismay agreed to officially open an exhibition of pottery at Wakefield Art Gallery and gave a long speech (see Chapter 3, Section 3.3 and Appendix iii). On another occasion, Ismay agreed to deliver a lecture in 1975 to a group of members of the Northern Ceramic Society. Ismay showed

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6 Ibid.

7 Blackie, Sebastian (2001). ‘W.A. Ismay (1910-2001) An appreciation’, *Ceramics in Society*, Summer.

8 Ibid.

9 Briers, David (2002). ‘Friend of the Earth’, *Ceramic Review*, No. 194, March/April.

10 Ibid.

slides of items from his collection and had also brought some pots along for the audience to handle. The lecture, titled *Modern Pottery*, took place at Temple Newsam, near Leeds. Members of the Northern Ceramic Society were mainly interested in historical factory produced ceramics and in a review of Ismay's talk, the author commented that it was less well attended than some of their other lectures, and suggested that was due to a 'distrust of the subject.'<sup>11</sup>

Since the collection moved into the public domain following Ismay's death and was catalogued and made more accessible, it has begun to be used more in exhibitions. Through studying the collection to produce interpretation for exhibition, a number of articles have been published on different aspects of Ismay and his collection (Walsh, 2009b; 2013). I have also published a number of articles since beginning this research, offering glimpses into aspects of his character or giving overviews of his activity (Walsh, 2009a; 2012; 2014; 2015).

## **1.2 The British studio pottery movement**

The British studio pottery movement has strong connections with the Arts and Crafts movement and the resolve that objects produced by hand were superior to mass-produced factory wares. Potter Edwin Beer Fishley (1832–1912) took over the family Fremington Pottery in North Devon in 1860 and his continuation of North Devon traditional pottery was to prove a source of inspiration for studio potter Michael Cardew, who had visited the pottery as a child on holiday. The move from traditional country pottery to art pottery began with unconventional potters such as Sir Edmund Elton, a Baronet who developed an interest in pottery in 1880 and invented his own range *Elton Ware*. The Martin Brothers very distinctive salt-glazed stoneware pottery produced from 1873 to 1923 was another example of individual handmade work that inspired interest from collectors. The practices of individual artist potters and their studio assistants during the late 19th and early 20th centuries was further added to by the art pottery produced in the late 19th century by potters in a factory setting, such as Royal Doulton's. Whilst such wares were later rejected by studio potters, who thought they lacked sincerity, they provided the element of individual experimental design that was missing from mass-production.<sup>12</sup>

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11 Darlington, Diana (1976). *Modern Pottery: Lecture Notes*, The Northern Ceramic Society, Newsletter No. 18, Jan, pp. 3–5.

12 Clark, Garth (1995). *The Potter's Art: A Complete History of Pottery in Britain*, London, Phaidon Press.





1-3 Jar, 1930, Charles Vyse. Vyse copied a Chinese example he had seen in George Eumorfopoulos's collection. (York Museums Trust)

A renewed interest in oriental handmade ceramics was stimulated by the excavations of Song pottery in early 20th century China, and an exhibition of this type of ceramics at Burlington Fine Arts Club in 1910 further inspired early studio potters, such as Reginald Wells, Charles Vyse and others, to experiment with Eastern forms and to try to replicate glazes. Influential collectors of Chinese ceramics from this period, such as George Eumorfopoulos (1863–1939), were drawn to the work of these potters who provided a new, Western version of oriental style ceramics.



1-4 Plate, 1962, Michael Cardew. (YORYM:2004.1.771.1)

As Ismay wrote in an article in 1987, 'Studio Potter' is Bernard Leach's own term and: 'the Oxford English Dictionary has credited the first or definitive use of the term to BL in 1940.'<sup>13</sup> It is perhaps for this reason that Leach became known as the '*Father of studio pottery*' (though the origins of who gave him the title remain unclear). Leach was strongly influenced by oriental ideas following his training in China and Japan. He adopted an oriental approach in his pottery, which he combined with an interest in traditional English wares such as medieval jugs and post-medieval slipware. Both Leach and Michael Cardew gave the British studio pottery movement a firm historical base for their students and followers to build upon, though it was Cardew who arguably remained closer to the English pottery tradition and did more to further its popularity than Leach.

The result of these influences could be seen affecting the interest of collectors of studio pottery too. For example, the collection of pioneering studio pottery gathered by Eric Milner-White between 1925 and 1962 has an unmistakably Eastern aesthetic, yet Milner-White was also fascinated by the influence of English pottery traditions on

13 Ismay, W.A. (1987) 'Bernard Leach among the British studio potters', *Ceramic Review*, No. 108, Nov/Dec, pp. 32-33.

A SHORT LIST OF FURTHER READING IN ORDER OF TEXTUAL RELEVANCE.

- The Art of the Potter*, W. B. Honey (Faber and Faber).  
*The Creative Craftsman*, John Farleigh (Bell).  
*What Happened in History*, Gordon Childe (Penguin).  
*Early Steps in Human Progress*, Harold J. Peake (Sampson-Low).  
*Pots and Pans*, H. S. Harrison (Howe).  
*Greek Pottery*, Arthur Lane (Faber & Faber).  
*Handbook of the Pottery and Porcelain of the Far East*, R. L. Hobson,  
 (British Museum).  
*The Ceramic Art of China and other Countries of the Far East*,  
 W. B. Honey, (Faber & Faber).  
*The Book of Tea*, Okakura Kakuzo, (Foullis).  
*A Guide to the Islamic Pottery of the Near East*, R. L. Hobson,  
 (British Museum).  
*European Ceramic Art*, W. B. Honey, (Faber & Faber).  
*Style in Pottery*, Arthur Lane, (Oxford).  
*Pottery and Porcelain*, Warren E. Cox, (Crown, New York).

1-5 Bibliography from *Pottery* written by Murray Fieldhouse in 1952.

Eastern potters. Milner-White's collection is underpinned by substantial holdings of work by Bernard Leach, Shoji Hamada and William Staite Murray. His strong support of Leach and Leach's status and title ('*Father of studio pottery*'), combined with Milner-White's church vocation, may also have been one of the reasons Murray gave him the unofficial title '*Spiritual Father of the studio potters*'.<sup>14</sup> This early 20th century interest in collecting work inspired by historical ceramics of the East and West, filtered down to later collectors who were able to see pioneering collections (such as Milner-White's) displayed in public institutions.

Early collectors were also influenced and guided by the few books on studio pottery that began to appear by the mid-20th century, ranging from 'how to' books, to ones offering advice on types of work to collect by presenting the history of ceramics as a background, with their style held up as an ideal standard. Dora Billington (1863–1939), taught at the Central School of Art and her book *The Art of the Potter* (1937) was based on the lectures she delivered to her students on the history of pottery, practical techniques and the contemporary trends.<sup>15</sup> William Bowyer Honey wrote *The Art of the Potter – a book for the collector and the connoisseur* (1945) as the first to be aimed at collectors, his status as a Keeper at the Victoria & Albert Museum underlining the importance of its authorship. *The Modern Potter* (1947) by Ronald G. Cooper provided a history and overview of contemporary British ceramics. *Style in Pottery* (1948) was a tiny publication written by Arthur Lane (1948), who was

14 Green, Richard (1990). 'Foreword', in Sarah Riddick, *Pioneer Studio Pottery: The Milner-White Collection*, Lund Humphries, London..

15 Colman, Marshall (2015). 'Dora Billington: From Arts and Crafts to Studio Pottery', *Interpreting Ceramics*, Issue 16.



the Keeper of Ceramics at the Victoria & Albert Museum. George Wingfield Digby published *The Work of the Modern Potter in England* (1952) which was an extensive and scholarly book based on knowledge of collections and Digby's own experience as a collector and in his job at the Victoria & Albert Museum. *Pottery* (1952) was written by the potter Murray Fieldhouse and fell into the 'how to' category. The short bibliography he included gives an indication of how little material was available at the time (see image 1-5).

### **1.3 The early days of the British studio pottery movement – Bernard Leach and William Staite Murray**

W.A. Ismay viewed the potters Bernard Leach (1887–1979) and William Staite Murray (1881–1962) as undoubtedly the founding fathers and the driving force behind the British studio pottery movement, saying in 1987 that with the benefit of being able to look back over seventy years: 'it appears now that the whole edifice of twentieth-century British pottery is primarily founded on the work of these two men'.<sup>16</sup> Despite Leach, and to a lesser extent Murray, being viewed as crucial to its development, they had opposing visions of how handmade pottery should be viewed.

In her important catalogue of the Milner-White collection of pioneering British studio pottery, Sarah Riddick (1990) wrote that Murray's ambition was to raise the status of pottery to allow it to be viewed as an art form on a par with painting and sculpture. Stating that: 'pottery may be considered the connecting link between Sculpture and Painting, for it incorporates both', Murray viewed his own pots as works of art, exploring the use of form in an anthropomorphic way as well as treating his pots as three-dimensional canvases for his painted, inlaid and incised decoration.<sup>17</sup> His work, more than any other ceramic artist in the early 20th century achieved the status of art during his own lifetime. In 1961, celebrating having spent fifty years as a potter, Bernard Leach highlighted the gulf between pottery skills and artistry, writing: 'So far, too few of the potters have been artists and too few of the artists (including Picasso) have been potters. The disciples of fire and clay have been absent.'<sup>18</sup> Such recognition of pottery as art and potters as artists was not seen until the late 20th century and beginning of the 21st century with the work of Andrew Lord (1950–) and Grayson Perry (1960–), who deliberately positioned their work in the fine art domain and outside of commercial craft venues.

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16 Ismay, W.A. (1987) 'Bernard Leach among the British studio potters', *Ceramic Review*, No. 108, Nov/Dec, pp. 32–33.

17 Murray, William Staite (1923–1924). 'Pottery and the Essentials in Art', *Arts League of Service Bulletin*, p. 11.

18 Leach, Bernard (1961). 'Belief and Hope', in *Bernard Leach: Fifty Years a Potter*, Arts Council, 1961, p. 15..





Pot and Potter  
Old Chinese Pots.  
The Bridge.  
Soong Painting.  
Morning Glory.  
Musing.



1-6 Cover of William Staite Murray's poetry manuscript.

By exhibiting regularly alongside important painters such as Ben Nicholson (1894–1982), Christopher Wood (1901–1930) and others, Murray embedded himself within the fine art community. He was admired by London's art critics, who regularly reviewed his work in newspapers including: *The Times*, *The Morning Post*, *Yorkshire Gazette*, *The Observer* and *The Daily Mail*, as well as specialist interest journals including: *The Studio*, *Apollo*, *Country Life* and *The Architectural Review*. Academic and author Jeffrey Jones (1999a) states that the articles and reviews published in these journals, by notable critics such as Charles Marriott, P.G. Konody, Bernard Rackham, Ernest Marsh and others, comprise some of the earliest published critical writing on British studio pottery. Jones (1999a) also argues that the inclusion of potters such as Murray

and Leach within these publications, particularly *The Studio* (a major forum for the development of modern art), underlines the importance of studio pottery at the time. Jones suggests that the period from the 1920s to 1955 should be regarded as 'the first stage in the written history of the studio pottery movement'.<sup>19</sup>

There was every reason to believe that Murray would go on to have a great and positive impact on the future course of British studio pottery; however, in 1939 aged 58, he went on a trip to Rhodesia and finding it difficult to return to Britain during World War Two, settled there. He gave up pottery and only returned to the UK for the last time in 1957 to make arrangements for one final exhibition in 1958, at which he sold the last pots he had made in the late 1930s. Whilst Murray gave up making pots, he retained an interest in them, as illustrated by his unpublished manuscript of poems with titles including *Pot and Potter* and *Old Chinese Pots* written 1952–1953.<sup>20</sup>

19 Jones, Jeffrey (1999a). *Studio pottery in an age of modernism 1920–1955*. PhD Thesis, University of Wales, Aberystwyth, p. 36.

20 William Staite Murray's poetry manuscript forms part of the archives of the Milner-White Collection, housed at York Art Gallery.

Due to his career ending prematurely and his disappearance from the British art scene, Murray did not have the sustained, embedded presence Leach did. However he was thought to be an inspirational teacher whilst he held the post of Head of Pottery at the Royal College of Art. His legacy lived on in the work of his pupils Sam Haile (1909–1948), Robert Washington (1913–1997) and others such as Gordon Baldwin (1932–), who discovered Murray through seeing his work.<sup>21</sup> A retrospective exhibition was held at the Cleveland Crafts Centre in the 1980s and a supporting catalogue with essays published, bringing him to the attention of a new generation of potters.<sup>22</sup> Murray's personal and professional relationships with Ben Nicholson, Winifred Nicholson (1893–1981), Christopher Wood and Alfred Wallis (1855–1942) was examined in a touring exhibition and supporting catalogue (Nicholson and Stair, 2013).<sup>23</sup>

In contrast to Murray's vision of an artist working alone, Bernard Leach's ideal was a team of potters working together in a workshop.<sup>24</sup> His team would produce an affordable range of standard ware for everyday use and a range of high quality exhibition pieces to be sold at a higher price level. Leach had spent twelve years in Japan training in an environment in which potters enjoyed a significantly higher status in society than they did in the UK. When he returned to England in 1920, it was with the romantic vision of creating a similar situation, producing the style of work he had learnt from his Japanese teachers. Potter and author Edmund de Waal (1964–) describes his monograph on Leach as the first book to challenge Leach's doctrine and controversially pointed out that Leach did not speak Japanese and that the potters he spent time with in Japan were Western educated rather than peasant potters. In her research on what she terms *Leachian Ideology* [sic], Wendy Tuxill further points out that Leach's writing was not underpinned by critical theory.<sup>25</sup>

Leach established his pottery in St Ives, Cornwall, with the help of potter Shoji Hamada who had come with him from Japan to help. The first years were hard. St Ives was not the obvious place to start a pottery, the natural resources such as fuel for the kiln, materials for glazes, even clay, were scarce. Successful pots from these early years are rare as losses during the kiln firing were high. Leach's most important written work *A Potter's Book* first published in 1940 outlined both the practical and philosophical aspects of setting up a pottery. In his preface, Leach describes the book as being primarily for potters, but also for: 'students and teachers, for lovers of good pots

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21 Haslam, Malcom (1984). *William Staite Murray*, Crafts Council.

22 Ibid.

23 The exhibition *Art and Life: Ben Nicholson, Winifred Nicholson, Christopher Wood, Alfred Wallis, William Staite Murray, 1920–1931* was shown at Leeds Museums and Galleries, Kettle's Yard and Dulwich Picture Gallery, Oct 2013–Sep 2014.

24 Jones, Jeffrey (1999b). 'Listening to Bernard Leach: Exploring the testimony of a studio potter', *Oral History*, Vol. 27, No. 2, Autumn, pp. 68–76.

25 Tuxill, Wendy (2010). *A Re-Conceptualisation of Contemporary Sculptural Ceramics Practice From A Post-Minimalist Perspective*, PhD Thesis, University of Hertfordshire, p. 45.

# A POTTER'S BOOK



BERNARD LEACH

and sound craftsmanship, and finally for those to whom the cultural meeting of East and West is the prelude to a human society.<sup>26</sup> Matthew Tyas (2015) has completed research on potential digital applications for standard ware, and as part of that studied what he terms the iconic Leach Pottery tableware range.<sup>27</sup>

Leach's Anglo-oriental aesthetic would continue to underpin British studio pottery throughout the 20th century. Writer and curator Glenn Adamson argues that Leach's great influence was due to his writing: 'precisely because his writings so fully exemplify the idealism of the studio pottery movement, it is unlikely they will ever go completely out of fashion.'<sup>28</sup> Leach's iconic *A Potter's Book* contains his first articulation of his belief that good pottery was made from start to finish by one artist: 'one hand, one brain.'<sup>29</sup> *A Potter's Book* became a key text for potters and collectors alike,

1-7 *A Potter's Book* by Bernard Leach, 1940.

being reprinted time after time. Even those that rejected Leach's Anglo-oriental dream were affected by his prose.

At the same time that Leach was establishing his pottery in the 1920s, collectors of oriental ceramics became more active. In 1921 *The Oriental Ceramics Society* was founded and they began publishing their first *Transactions* in 1923. The society's members, collectors including Percival David (1892–1964) and George Eumorfopoulos, also became more interested in pottery in the Anglo-oriental style made by living artists. Their interest encouraged by articles in newspapers such as *The Morning Post* and *The Times* and art journals including *Apollo* and *Burlington Magazine*.

26 Leach, Bernard (1940). *A Potter's Book*, Faber & Faber, London, p. XXV.

27 Tyas, Matthew J. (2015). *Designing 21st Century Standard Ware: The Cultural Heritage of Leach and the Potential Applications of Digital Technologies*, PhD Thesis, Falmouth University.

28 Adamson, Glenn (ed.) (2010). *The Craft Reader*, Berg, Oxford and New York, p. 177.

29 Leach, Bernard (1940). *A Potter's Book*, Faber & Faber, London, p. 2.



In the early 20th century, England's native pottery traditions, from the medieval period through to the country potter, were dismissed by influential figures such as George Wingfield Digby, who authored one of the early texts on studio pottery. However, Bernard Rackham and William Bowyer Honey (keepers at the Victoria & Albert Museum) were promoting English medieval pottery as having the same quality and beauty as early Chinese wares. Digby was vehemently opposed to this opinion, finding no merit in the work of the artist-potters that emerged from factories such as Royal Doulton's.<sup>30</sup> Digby preferred to place the emerging British studio pottery movement as a revolution kicked off primarily by Leach, who he thought was: 'a genius, a man of extraordinary powers'.<sup>31</sup> Almost ten years after Digby's book, Rackham wrote his seminal book on English medieval pottery as he felt: 'it was a subject that had never been treated as it deserved to be from the point of view of pottery as an art.'<sup>32</sup> Rackham was delighted that Bernard Leach introduced his book to the Japanese potter Kawai Kanjiro (1890–1966) who, after reading it wrote: 'what a good sleep he had after looking at these such splendid expressions of man.'<sup>33</sup>

In recent years, two strong bodies of doctoral research have been completed which highlight Murray as a significant figure in the studio pottery movement. The first, by academic Jeffrey Jones, studies studio pottery in the age of modernism and argues that whilst there was no academic research as such, studio pottery was in fact extensively theorized and written about in the form of articles, exhibition reviews and criticism.<sup>34</sup> The potter Julian Stair produced a thorough body of research focusing on critical writing about early studio pottery. Based on the literature he studied, Stair argues that the early 20th century was a missed opportunity and that the loss of interest in studio pottery from notable art critics such as Charles Marriot, who had been so influential in raising its profile, contributed to the collapse of critical writing on studio pottery. Stair also suggests that Leach, though an important champion, contributed to its demotion from modernist art form to craft.<sup>35</sup> Similarly Jones states that the Leach tradition was so strong that there was little attempt to critique it.<sup>36</sup> It is not the intention of this research to repeat their examination of such resources, but rather to use it as a background to understanding the development of the British studio pottery movement and how we can consider Ismay's activity, as many of the publications Jones and Stair reference are ones that Ismay studied or had in his personal library.

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30 Wingfield Digby, George (1952). *The Work of The Modern Potter in England*, John Murray, London, p. 24.

31 Ibid.

32 Letter from Bernard Rackham (author and former keeper at the Victoria & Albert Museum) to W.A. Ismay, dated 18 May 1961.

33 Ibid.

34 Jones, Jeffrey (1999a). *Studio pottery in an age of modernism 1920–1955*, PhD Thesis, University of Wales, Aberystwyth.

35 Stair, Julian (2002). *Critical Writing on English Studio Pottery 1910–1940*. PhD Thesis, Royal College of Art.

36 Jones, Jeffrey (1999a). *Studio pottery in an age of modernism 1920–1955*, PhD Thesis, University of Wales, Aberystwyth.



## 1.4 Post-war modernism in pottery

The Anglo-oriental aesthetic, which dominated the British studio pottery movement from the 1920s to the 1960s, was criticized by David Queensberry, former Professor of ceramics at the Royal College of Art, as being outside our cultural heritage. He thought much of the work produced in this faux genre was: 'repetitious, mediocre and stereotyped' and that it was best that it fall out of fashion, to make way for a more experimental form of work.<sup>37</sup> This domination of the East can be seen in Ismay's post-war collection, which has a clear bias towards functional, domestic ware and he admits in a letter to potter Michael Cardew that his collection was 'avowedly based on Leach.'<sup>38</sup>

Advising caution with regards to fashions in ceramics, in an exhibition leaflet produced to support the exhibition of *The Art of the Potter* at Wakefield Art Gallery in 1959, critic Hugh Gordon Porteus reinforces the trend for looking to the past for inspiration (particularly oriental ceramics), and positions Chinese Sung wares as the standard against which modern pottery should be judged:

*We must always be patient in attending the pendulous swings of fashion: they are useful, yet as we admire each exciting novelty, we may feel that there are Sung pots which still stand as a rebuke to every form of excess.*<sup>39</sup>

Four years later, Ismay echoes this sentiment in an introduction he wrote for *An Exhibition of Stoneware and Water Colours by Geoffrey Whiting*, but also suggests that inspiration does not only have to come from the past.<sup>40</sup> He wrote:

*A good pot is not subject to fashion – it is timeless and may survive to declare itself responsive hundreds of years hence, as pots now already centuries old do to us. Thus it is right for a modern potter to feel free to be the heir of all the ages and to derive whatever inspiration becomes valid for him, whether from the earth and air around him, from the recent past, or perhaps from seeing and handling the products of potters long since dead, whose surviving work still speaks to us of the vitality of which they were once the privileged channels.*<sup>41</sup>

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37 Queensberry, David (1991). 'Plastic Art in its Most Abstract Essence', *Ceramic Review*, No. 127, Jan/Feb, pp. 14–15.

38 See Appendix iv for transcript of W.A. Ismay's Cardew correspondence.

39 Porteus, Hugh Gordon (1959). *The Art of the Potter*, Wakefield City Art Gallery.

40 Ismay, W.A. (1963). 'Foreword', in *An Exhibition of Stoneware and Water Colours by Geoffrey Whiting*, Malvern Public Libraries, 30 Nov–21 Dec 1963.

41 Ibid.

The tendency for early British studio potters to look towards historical culture and techniques for inspiration, as opposed to contemporary concerns, led historian Tanya Harrod to conclude that: 'the 20th and 21st century studio ceramics phenomenon (strongest in Britain and North America) is atypical in terms of ceramic production.'<sup>42</sup>

Catastrophes such as war, author Werner Muensterberger argues, provoke a shift in priorities and generate new outlooks.<sup>43</sup> The post-war period was such a time of change both in society and for the British studio pottery movement. The 1951 *Festival of Britain* was organized by the British government to foster a sense of national recovery in the aftermath of war and celebrated the country's contribution to sciences and arts. The two World Wars were a period of great hardship for traditional potteries across the UK, with many going out of business due to wartime austerity.<sup>44</sup>

But from the 1950s, the British studio pottery movement carried on, changing and adapting to new circumstances, gaining momentum thanks to a new sense of pride and interest in design and craft spreading across Britain.<sup>45</sup> The *Festival of Britain* led to a new emerging audience for crafts such as pottery.<sup>46</sup> A new generation of potters began exploring modernism and abstraction alongside function, rejecting Leach's Anglo-oriental tradition.<sup>47</sup> It was at this point of change that Ismay began collecting, positioning him at the heart of an evolving movement.

From the 1950s, there was less interest in studio pottery from critical journals such as *The Studio*. The emergence of journals specifically on ceramics and crafts such as *Pottery Quarterly* in 1954, *Ceramic Review* in 1970 and *CRAFTS* in 1973, took over, offering features on makers, articles on technique and exhibition reviews, often written



1-8 Mare Jar, 1928–1931, William Staite Murray. (York Museums Trust)

42 Harrod, Tanya (2014). *Ceramics at York: a discussion document*, commissioned by the University of York, April..=

43 Muensterberger, Werner (1994). *Collecting – An unruly passion*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, New Jersey, p. 166.

44 Harrod, Tanya (1999). *The Crafts in Britain in the Twentieth Century*, Yale University Press.

45 Conekin, Becky E. (2003). *The Autobiography of a Nation: The 1951 Festival of Britain*, Manchester University Press.

46 Harrod, Tanya (1999). *The Crafts in Britain in the Twentieth Century*, Yale University Press.

47 Queensberry, David (1991). 'Plastic Art in its Most Abstract Essence', *Ceramic Review*, No. 127, Jan/Feb, pp. 14–15.



1-9 Bottle, 1956, Hans Coper. (York Museums Trust)

by collectors such as Ismay. Jones argues that during this period, discussion on studio pottery became internalized and this 'left a critical vacuum, which is only now belatedly being acknowledged.'<sup>48</sup> Peter Dormer, a theorist on craft, put the lack of structured critique of crafts such as pottery down to the fact that craft was still a young subject.<sup>49</sup> Adamson also writes that: 'craft history is harder to locate.'<sup>50</sup> However, in his book *The Craft Reader* he successfully brings together a wide selection of writing on the subject, from William Morris, Bernard Leach, Tanya Harrod, Walter Gropius and Grayson Perry.<sup>51</sup>

New commercial galleries exhibiting ceramics and craft aimed at a domestic setting began to emerge from the 1920s. Muriel Rose's (1897–1986) Little Gallery operated from 1928 to 1939<sup>52</sup> and Henry Rothschild's (1913–2009) *Primavera* opened in 1945.<sup>53</sup> By the

1960s, Leach's voice had drowned out Murray's legacy and fine art galleries began looking on pottery disdainfully. The attitude at the time was summed up by potter Gordon Baldwin's experience in the 1960s when the *MacRobertson Tunnard Gallery* in London asked him to submit work based on photographs they had seen in *The Painter and Sculptor* journal. When Baldwin brought pieces to show them, they exclaimed in horror 'Oh my God, they are pots!', and went on to suggest his work might be acceptable if cast in bronze.<sup>54</sup>

The post-war period was a good time to set up a pottery business in the UK as the only industrial pottery available at the time was plain white-wares with all decorative

48 Jones, Jeffrey (1999a). *Studio pottery in an age of modernism 1920–1955*, PhD Thesis, University of Wales, Aberystwyth, p. 40.

49 Dormer, Peter (1994a). *The Art of the Maker: Skill and its Meaning*, Thames & Hudson, London.

50 Adamson, Glenn (2008). 'Look Here', in Anjali Gupta, *Unpacking the Collection: Selections from the Museum of Contemporary Craft*, Museum of Contemporary Craft, p. 10.

51 Adamson, Glenn (ed.) (2010). *The Craft Reader*, Berg, Oxford and New York, p. 177.

52 Olding, Simon; Vacher, Jean and Brassington, Linda (2006). *Muriel Rose: A Modern Crafts Legacy*, Crafts Study Centre.

53 Greg, Andrew and Harrod, Tanya (1995). *Primavera: Pioneering Craft and Design 1945–1995*, Tyne and Wear Museums, Newcastle Upon Tyne.

54 Gordon Baldwin interviewed by Matthew Partington, 5 March 2009, video, *Recording the Crafts* archive, UWE Bristol.



production being reserved for export, which created an opportunity for studio potters to fill a gap in the market (Harrod; 1999). This situation helped potteries such as Leach Pottery and Crowan Pottery, as well as many struggling individual makers (Harrod; 1999). The fashion for handmade pottery also led to an emergence of studio lines by industrial potteries like Josiah Wedgwood and Sons, Denby Pottery Company Ltd and Hornsea Pottery in the 1960s. Harrod's (1999) history of the British crafts includes sections on new patrons and shopping for craft, including the collecting done by education authorities and public museums and galleries, and the commercial galleries selling studio pottery.

### **1.5 Popularity from the 1970s**

Historian Tanya Harrod argues that the post-war period also saw a shift from private to public patronage, with local education authorities embarking on new post-war building projects being important new patrons.<sup>55</sup> In a short essay written for the catalogue of the Rufford Ceramics exhibition in 1982, Ismay acknowledged that since the 1960s the British studio pottery scene had been transformed by the proliferation of potters, the increased number of retail outlets and a greater number of customers willing to buy the results of potters' experimentation with materials and methods.<sup>56</sup> From the late 1970s, the cost of work by key potters like Hans Coper (1920–1981) began to increase substantially, the result being that some types of studio pottery were less attainable for collectors with modest budgets.<sup>57</sup>

In 1971 the Crafts Advisory Committee (CAC) was formed and was chaired by conservative minister Lord David Eccles (1904–1999), who had written his own book on collecting a few years earlier in 1968.<sup>58</sup> Their remit was to advise the government: 'on the needs of the artists craftsmen and to promote a nation-wide interest and improvement in their products.'<sup>59</sup> Following a decade of exploratory activity including regional *Meet the craftsmen* tours, exhibitions and encouragement of craft in education, the CAC became the Crafts Council in 1979. The Crafts Council began developing its own collection of craft in 1972 (whilst it was still the CAC) and the collection now numbers over 1,600 objects, with a further 700 objects designated as a handling collection.<sup>60</sup>

In the 1970s, studio pottery hit the mainstream and was popularized through *The Craft of the Potter* a BBC series fronted by potter Michael Casson (1925–2003). First transmitted in April 1976, episodes included: '*Handbuilding*', '*Throwing*', '*Decoration*',

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55 Harrod, Tanya (1999). *The Crafts in Britain in the Twentieth Century*, Yale University Press, p. 244.

56 Ismay, W.A. (1982a) 'Bill Ismay on Ceramics', in *Ceramics 82*, Rufford Craft Centre, Nottinghamshire County Council, pp. 7–8.

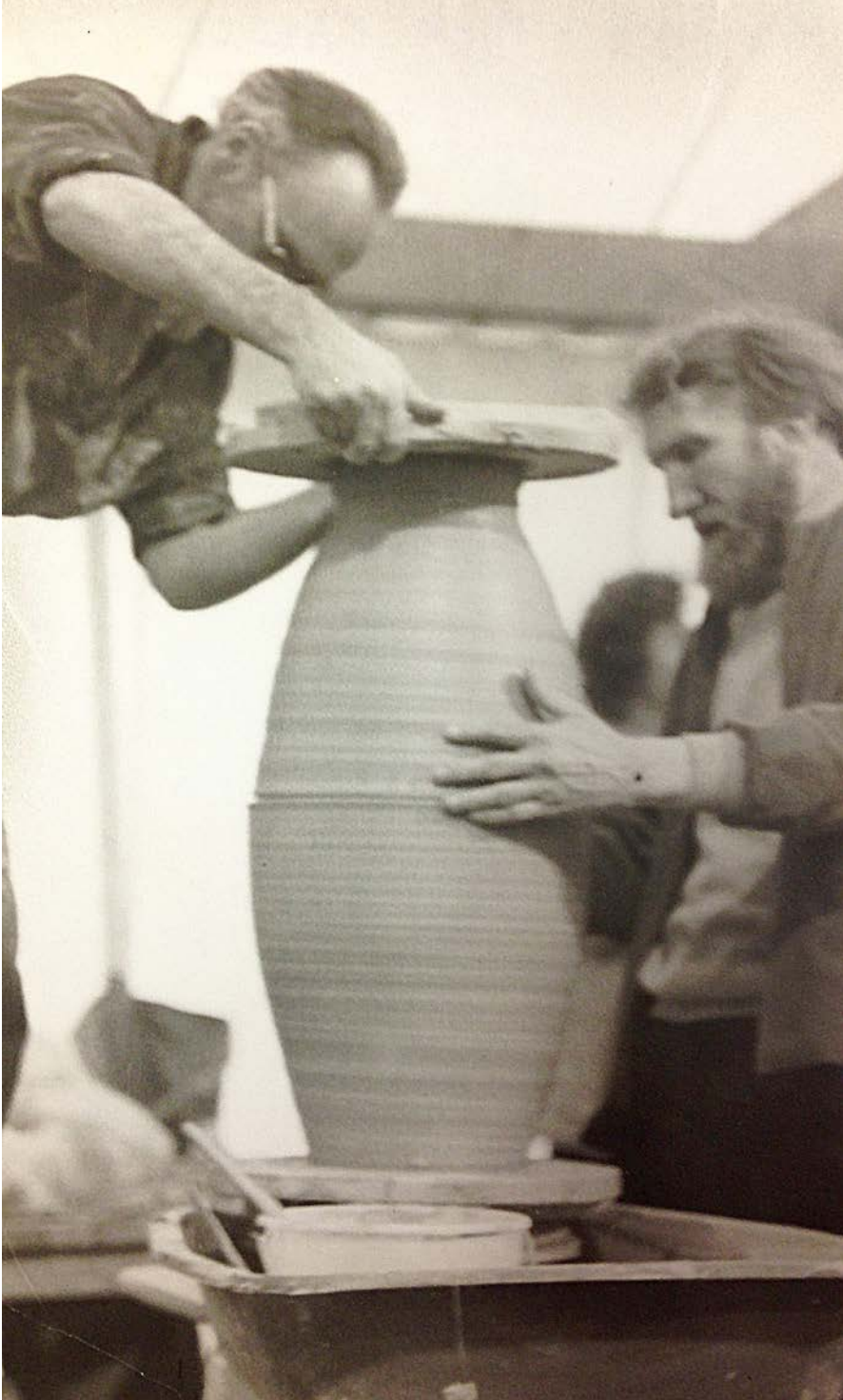
57 Bennett, Ian (1980). 'Do I hear £1000?' *CRAFTS*, No. 43, Mar/Apr, pp. 32-35.

58 Eccles, Lord David (1968). *On Collecting*, Longmans, Green and Co., London.

59 'History Of The Crafts Council –Crafts Council'. *Craftscouncil.org.uk*. N.p., 2017. Web.

60 'About The Collections'. *Crafts Council Collections Online*. N.p., 2017. Web.





1-10 Michael Casson (right) assisting Ray Finch (left) with a demonstration at the CPA potters' camp, 1973.

'*Glaze and Fire*' and '*Talking about pots*'. In '*Talking about pots*' Casson gathered together a group of people, including collector John Catleugh (1920–2009), gallery owner Pan Henry and potters Michael Cardew and Victor Margrie, to discuss why people liked pots. The popularity of the series led to an accompanying book being published in 1977. Harrod holds Casson up as one of the great popularizers of pottery, not only because of the BBC series and accompanying book, but also through his contribution to the Craftsman Potters Association (CPA) and the key role he played organizing the CPA potters' camps, which began in the 1970s.<sup>61</sup>

The Craftsman Potters Association was established in 1958 (renamed Craft Potters Association in 1990) as a national body representing potters. Selling members' work was fundamental to the CPA's remit and in 1960 they opened their first shop in Lowndes Court, London. A programme of unselected group and individual exhibitions of members' work gained a loyal customer base, of which Ismay was one. The breadth of variety

of work produced by members can be seen through Ismay's reviews in the CPA's magazine *Ceramic Review*, launched in 1970.<sup>62</sup> *Ceramic Review* emerged from the CPA's newsletter, which began in 1957. It went on to become the UK's most respected journal on British ceramics. The CPA initially welcomed all members but within a few years the committee came to the realization that the CPA shop would not survive commercially unless they enforced a standard of work to display and sell. Ismay himself commented in a letter to Michael Cardew in 1960 that 'a good deal of junk is passing through the CP Shop, some of it lingering there, although a great deal of it is sold!'<sup>63</sup> The painful decision

61 Harrod, Tanya (1999). *The Crafts in Britain in the Twentieth Century*, Yale University Press, p. 262.

62 See Appendix i for a bibliography of W.A. Ismay's written work.

63 Extract from a draft letter from W.A. Ismay to Michael Cardew (potter), undated but likely 1960. See Appendix iv for transcript of Cardew correspondence.

was taken to become selective about what was shown in the shop and therefore who was allowed membership. Other regional potters' associations followed, including the Northern Potters Association, which was founded in 1977, Scottish in 1974, Midlands in 1980, Anglian 1983, West Country in 1993, to name a few. A characteristic of many of these regional groups is that unlike the CPA they also retained unselected display and selling opportunities for their membership.

Geoffrey Whiting (1919–1988), who experimented with pottery as a child, before taking it up seriously at the end of World War Two, wrote to Ismay in 1979, describing himself as: 'once rather vocal in craft affairs and a considerable participant in the "movement"'.<sup>64</sup> He continued his letter expressing his concern for the future of the British studio pottery movement, writing:

*I am afraid of the future. Every movement contains the seeds of its own destruction. Pottery is becoming over-popularized and it is outstripping its lines of security. The crafts, particularly pottery, have enjoyed a steadily increasing notice over the past 30 years. Of these, I think the first twenty had some basis in real (or what I take to be 'real') values. But, since then, I sense the intrusion of considerations which I can only liken to the manifestations of the pop-music world.*<sup>65</sup>

## **1.6 Film, audio, media and exhibition**

There are currently more than 700,000 films on pottery on the Internet site YouTube, which is indicative of the interest in the subject and the amount of material existing on pottery in this medium. The post-war British studio pottery period is ripe for research as the information is out there to be accessed, not only in the form of private collections made public such as Ismay's, but also in the form of participants. There is a vast array of audio, film and digital archives featuring records of activity. There are also numerous artists, gallerists, curators, authors, critics, collectors, teachers and students to be interviewed and recorded to add to this body of knowledge.

The British Pathé newsreel film archive contains films of many aspects of British culture dating from the end of the 19th century up to the current day, covering a wide range of subjects, from Royal visits to ceramics factories, to films of potters such as Bernard Leach working in St Ives in 1959.<sup>66</sup> The BBC's *Omnibus* series began in the 1960s and covered a wide range of cultural subjects. The attention they devoted to marginalized

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64 Letter from Geoffrey Whiting (potter) to W.A. Ismay, dated 28 May 1979.

65 Ibid.

66 Pathé; 'Newsreels, Video, Archive, Film, Footage, Stills – British Pathé'. *Britishpathe.com*. N.p., 2017. Web.



1-11 Isaac Button. Photograph John Anderson.

areas positioned subjects, such as pottery, on a level playing field. One example of a pottery *Omnibus* was *Big Ware*, a programme about George Curtis's Littlethorpe Pottery in Ripon, Yorkshire made in October 1974. A year later in 1975, the BBC's *Omnibus* presented *The Art of the Potter*, a film of Bernard Leach. In 1976, the Arts Council funded a film by Alister Hallum of Michael Cardew, titled *Mud and Water Man*. The BBC's film of Bernard Leach, *The Rock of St Ives*, was broadcast in 1982. Film showing artists, particularly potters throwing pots on a wheel, has proved mesmerizing to the public, as evidenced by the famous and memorable BBC Interlude showing a potter's hands. The Yorkshire Film Archive now holds the much-loved film *Isaac Button – Country Potter* which was produced by John Anderson and Robert Fournier and first shown in 1965.<sup>67</sup>

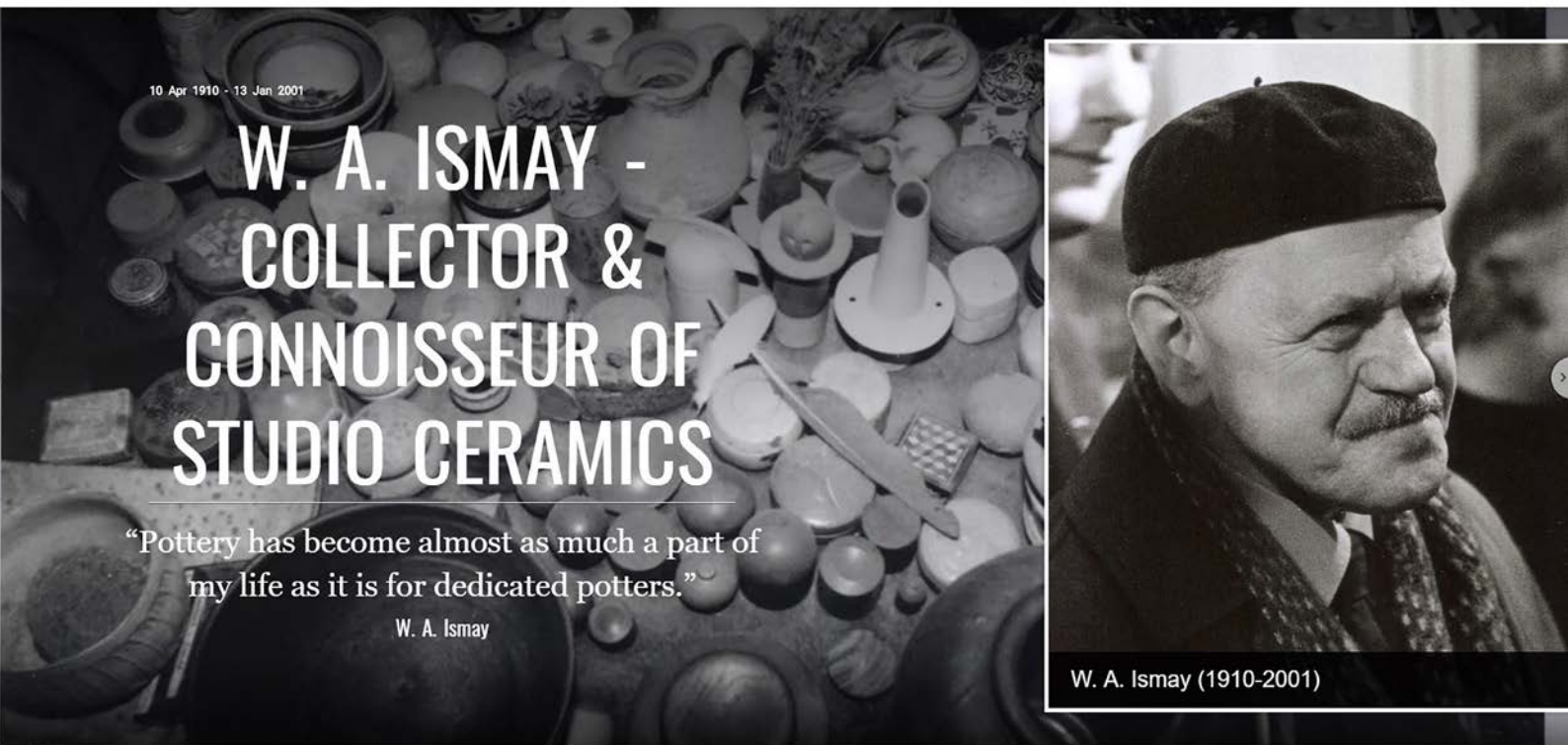
The British Library holds an oral history archive *National Life Stories: Craft Lives* which features interviews with potters such as Gordon Baldwin, Ursula Mommens (1908–2010), Ray Finch (1914–2012), Janet Leach (1918–1997) and many more.<sup>68</sup> The Victoria & Albert Museum ran a project called *Ceramic Points of View* capturing on film the reactions to objects from their collection from participants such as potter Alison Britton (1948–) and curator Oliver Watson.<sup>69</sup> *NEVAC – The National Electronic and*

67 'ISAAC BUTTON - COUNTRY POTTER | Yorkshire Film Archive'. *Yorkshirefilmarchive.com*. N.p., 2017. Web.

68 'National Life Stories: Crafts' Lives | Projects | The British Library'. *The British Library*. N.p., 2017. Web.

69 'Ceramic Points Of View - Victoria And Albert Museum'. *Vam.ac.uk*. N.p., 2017. Web.





1-12 An online exhibition about W.A. Ismay through the Google Cultural Institute.

*Video Archive of the Crafts* now renamed *Recording the Crafts* was set up in 1992 and has developed a collection of video and audio recordings with craftsmen, including potters, collectors and curators.<sup>70</sup> In 1994, potter and academic Alex McErlain (1950–) wrote to Ismay asking him to consider giving a recorded interview to NEVAC, but Ismay refused.<sup>71</sup>

Film of Ismay is rare and I am aware of only two instances, one piece of footage taken at a private view of potter Jim Malone's (1946–) exhibition at the Harlequin Gallery in Greenwich by McErlain, which shows Ismay standing in the gallery in conversation with a group of others and features the sound of Ismay's distinctive laughter. It also captures him walking out through the door and peering into the gallery window. The other was film of a demonstration by potter Eric James Mellon (1925–2014) taken in the 1980s, which shows Ismay in the audience. I was shown this footage on a VHS player by Mellon and half way through the tape was destroyed in the machine. My recollection was of Ismay seated in the audience, arms folded across his chest with an expression that said he was delighted to be there and enjoying seeing the audience engage with Mellon and ask him questions, though he never asked any questions himself. As pottery has become so well documented during the post-war years, there may be more examples to be uncovered that capture Ismay on film.

<sup>70</sup> 'Recording The Crafts - Home Page. *Uwe.ac.uk*. N.p., 2017. Web.

<sup>71</sup> Letter from Alex McErlain (potter and academic) to W.A. Ismay, dated 14 June 1994.



In 1989, academic Moira Vincentelli wrote to Ismay requesting to interview Ismay and make a film and audio recording of it for their archive at Aberystwyth University.<sup>72</sup> Though Ismay agreed to chat with her and allow her to make notes, he refused to be recorded or filmed. On the recommendation of gallery owner Anita Besson and auctioneer and author Cyril Frankel, Richard Alwyn from the BBC's Music & Arts department wrote to Ismay in 1990 about a film on contemporary ceramics he was making with reporter Kate Adie, asking to meet him. Ismay is firm in his reply, writing that he would be: 'quite unwilling to be seen or heard on TV.'<sup>73</sup> In 1991 an American potter, Elmer Craig, wrote to Ismay encouraging him to record his knowledge, but Ismay responded that he was: 'quite allergic to doing this by audio, tape or photography- it would be a pointless exercise which I have always had to discourage, as I could not possibly be natural in such circumstances!'<sup>74</sup>

In 2013, York Museums Trust commissioned six short films about Ismay in support of an exhibition being held at The Hepworth Wakefield as part of York Art Gallery's interim programme during the capital redevelopment 2012–2015. The films consisted of interviews with six key people who had known Ismay in different contexts (potters, collectors, curators) and also contain extracts from his archives.<sup>75</sup> The films can be viewed on [www.youtube.com](http://www.youtube.com)<sup>76</sup> The films were also used as part of an online exhibition produced on the Google Cultural Institute platform. The exhibition shared the films, along with images and interpretation about some of Ismay's pots which were linked through to York Museums Trust's collections database. It also shared items from Ismay's archives such as photographs, correspondence and other ephemera, highlighting the potential of the archive to the wider world through the Internet (<http://goo.gl/DmkTNH>).

In recent years, collectors of studio pottery have begun to receive more attention from public museums and galleries. The Shipley Art Gallery in Gateshead launched a touring exhibition and catalogue (Greg and Harrod, 1995), entitled *Primavera: Pioneering Craft and Design 1945–1995*, which celebrated Henry Rothschild who founded the commercial gallery Primavera. Rothschild also advised public museums and galleries on acquisitions and collected personally, donating objects to public collections, including York Art Gallery.

Ex-Cambridge academic Luke Herrmann exhibited his collection at Monnow Valley Arts in *British Studio Pottery: The collection of a discerning academic*. Interestingly,

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72 Letter from Moira Vincentelli (curator, Aberystwyth University) to W.A. Ismay, dated 21 July 1989.

73 Draft letter from W.A. Ismay to Richard Alwyn (BBC Music & Arts), dated 12 March 1990.

74 Draft letter from W.A. Ismay to Elmer Craig (potter), undated but in reply to Craig's letter of 6 November 1990.

75 Interviews took place with Craig Barclay (curator); Alan Firth (collector); Jane Hamlyn (potter); Jim Malone (potter) and Alex McErlain (potter and academic). See Appendix v for transcripts of the interviews.

76 'Youtube'. *Youtube.com*. N.p., 2017. Web.

Herrmann retained his anonymity in the exhibition and it was left to the accompanying catalogue (Renton and Whiting, 2009) to explore the relationships between the pots in the collection, without the personality of the collector. This desire for anonymity echoes the way in which Henry Rothschild initially exhibited his collection under the pseudonym Eagle Collection.

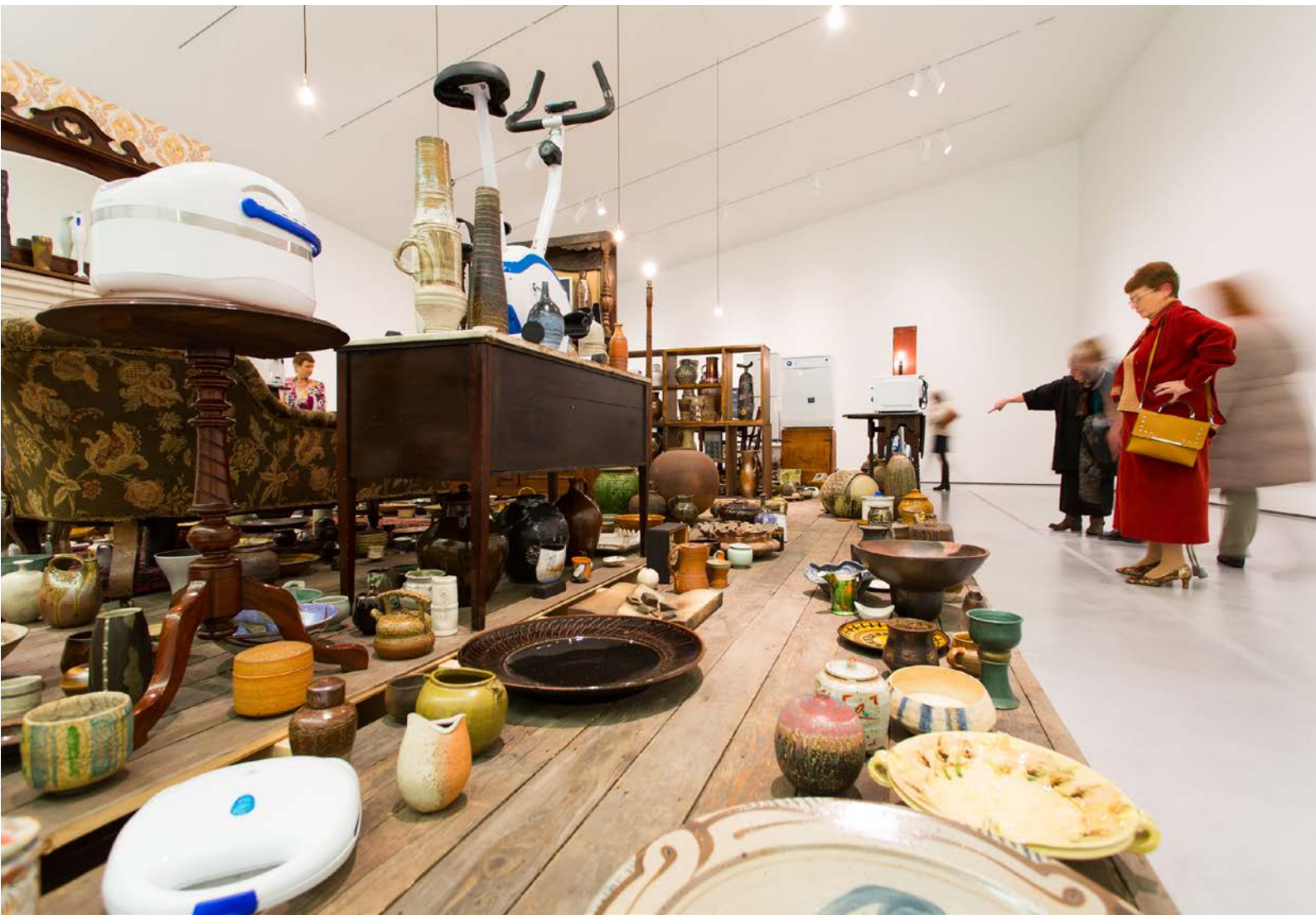
In 2009–2010 York Art Gallery held the exhibition *3 Collectors*, which explored collections of studio pottery donated to York Art Gallery and the Yorkshire Museum. The exhibition focused on each collector and their taste, paying special attention to their favourite makers and relationships developed through their collecting. An accompanying catalogue (Walsh, 2009b) provided information on the works shown, using the collector's own words to establish context.

*Collecting Contemporary Ceramics*, an exhibition at Ruthin Crafts Centre, looked at contemporary collecting from the perspective of the public museum or gallery. The catalogue (Dames, 2006) sheds light on the issues such public organizations struggle with when making new acquisitions and reinforces the importance of contemporary collecting for public studio pottery collections. In another example, the British Museum, not primarily known for contemporary pottery, produced the exhibition and catalogue *Contemporary Treasures – Collecting the 20th Century* (1992), highlighting their contemporary collecting.

It is only since the beginning of the 21st century that a small number of 'potters,' such as Grayson Perry and Edmund de Waal, have begun to make inroads into the world of fine art. This challenge to the status of clay was highlighted by *A Secret History of Clay: From Gauguin to Gormley*, an exhibition at Tate Liverpool in 2004, curated by Simon Groom (Head of Exhibitions), which threw light on the role of ceramics in modern and contemporary art practice, with a catalogue containing essays by Groom and de Waal (2004). *CERAMIX: Art and ceramics from Rodin to Schütte* was described as: a mega exhibition about the use of ceramics by artists of the 20th and 21st century' and was curated by Camille Morineau and Lucia Benetton.<sup>77</sup> It was shown at the Bonnefantenmuseum, Maastricht, then toured to Paris where it was shown split between Cité de la céramique (Sèvres) and la Maison Rouge 2015–2016. Containing the work of over 100 international artists, it comprised vessels, sculpture and installations and was supported by an extensive catalogue (Morineau and Pesapane, 2015).

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77 'Bonnefantenmuseum Maastricht - Ceramix - Ceramics And Art From Rodin To Schütte'. *Bonnefanten.nl*. N.p., 2017. Web.



1-13 Matthew Darbyshire: *The W.A. Ismay Collection* at The Hepworth Wakefield, 2013. Photograph H. Webster.

An example of a contemporary artist working on the display of a private collection of studio pottery was *Matthew Darbyshire: The W.A. Ismay Collection* at The Hepworth Wakefield (2013). Darbyshire (1977–) recreated the ground floor of Ismay’s home and filled it with pots from the collection, positioning cheap contemporary white plastic kitchen appliances around the space to highlight the contrast of handmade and mass-manufactured objects. Tate St Ives has previously exhibited studio pottery and exhibitions have included *Simon Carroll* in 2005; *Bernard Leach and his Circle* and *The Apse: Lucie Rie* in 2009. In 2017, their exhibition *That Continuous Thing: Artists and the Ceramics Studio, 1920–Today* contains curated elements and new work from the contemporary artists Jesse Wine (1983–) and Aaron Angel (1987–). The increase in activity positioning clay and the potters or artists using it on the contemporary art stage, inviting their curatorial contribution, is evidence of the acceptance of and interest in ceramics.

## **1.7 The role of education**

Country potteries found in rural locations producing household functional pottery to supply their local area, flourished in the UK from 1700 until the early 20th century, when they were sent into decline by the two World Wars. At that point, art schools began to play an increasingly important role in the British studio pottery movement, as potters began to attend art school to develop ideas of how to revive flagging country potteries and build new markets. From the 1930s, when William Staite Murray was Head of Pottery at the Royal College of Art, through to the 1950s and beyond, many significant artists supported or supplemented their pottery activity through paid teaching work. By the 1980s, degree shows became fertile hunting ground for collectors interested in discovering new talent. Ismay attended degree exhibitions and was thrilled to spot new potters who would go on to justify his interest in them, such as Jim Malone. Ismay first met him at his degree show at Camberwell College of Art in 1976 where he purchased a piece of work.

The studio pottery course at Harrow College of Art (now the University of Westminster) was one of the longest running specialist studio pottery courses in the UK and emerged from the perception that education had a vital role to play in supplying the workforce for an expanding market. It was set up in 1963 by the potters Victor Margrie and Michael Casson with the aim of producing skilled production potters ready to run their own studios and supply pots for a thriving new market. Training in all manner of practical skills from kiln building to throwing was part of the course and many of today's most respected artists emerged from it: Walter Keeler (1942–), Janice Tchalenko (1942–), Jane Hamlyn (1940–) and Micki Schloessingk (1949–), to name a few. Harrow's reputation grew to one of international standing, yet by the 1980s the world had moved on and the market for handmade tableware lessened as fashions changed. The Harrow/Westminster course and other pottery courses around the UK adapted as best they could and continued to produce skilled graduates. The origins of the course have been the subject of two exhibitions with supporting catalogues, the first was *The Harrow Connection* at the Northern Centre for Contemporary Arts (Margrie and Casson, 1989). More recently, academic Tessa Peters curated *Tradition and Innovation: Five Decades of Harrow Ceramics* at the Contemporary Applied Arts gallery in London, which was part of the University of Westminster's AHRC research project *Ceramics in the Expanded Field* (Brown, Houston, Margrie and Peters, 2012).





1-14 Pot, Michael Casson, 1964. (YORYM:2004.1.486)



1-15 Vase, 1964, Michael Casson. (YORYM:2004.1.817)

The Further and Higher Education Act instigated by Kenneth Clarke in 1992 allowed polytechnics to become universities and award degrees. Prior to that there had been a difference in what they had been aiming to do, with universities teaching serious subjects such as the sciences, whilst polytechnics (formerly art schools) had been producing skilled workers for local industries. Clarke's 1992 Act was supposed to bring them together, unifying them all under the title University. By taking on the name University, polytechnics applied a much more academic outlook to their departments and the courses they offered. Diplomas became degrees, raising the status of training. Arguably this has led to more opportunity for academics to study British studio pottery and for artists to carry out practice-based research in this area and to begin to build the missing academic framework for it to sit within. The serious decline of the teaching of ceramics in academia in the 1990s and at the beginning of the 21st century has resulted in many studio-based ceramics courses either to merge with other materials or be completely closed. In 2014 Alison Britton, potter and professor in the Department of Ceramics at the Royal College of Art, stated the stark fact that from 140 courses, only two remain offering ceramics as a stand-alone subject.<sup>78</sup>

Ceramics and the applied arts have remained on the periphery of the academic teaching of art history and the body of published research has reflected this. Despite the high esteem that art schools were held in, ceramics and the applied arts have been seen as a sub-category of art history. In recent years however, more occasions have arisen when research of specific areas of art have included ceramics. In the exhibition *A Rough Equivalent: Sculpture and Pottery from the Post-war Period* studio pottery from York Museums Trust's collection was brought together with sculpture from the Henry Moore Institute to illustrate the research produced by academic Jeffrey Jones (2010). Pottery was placed within a modernist sculptural discourse by the Royal Academy's exhibition *Modern British Sculpture* curated by Penelope Curtis and Keith Wilson (2011).

Whilst ceramics may have been let down by the lack of academic research happening until the turn of the 20th century, it has certainly been championed by journals carrying extensive research by non-academics, amateur enthusiasts, curators, students and, importantly, collectors. The *Journal* and *Transactions* of the Northern Ceramic Society (founded in 1972 by a group of enthusiastic collectors) are fertile ground for well researched articles on most types of ceramics, industrial to handmade. Since 1972, studio pottery has featured in articles, exhibition and book reviews, and also lecture notes (including the notes from a lecture delivered by Ismay in 1975).

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78 Workshop held at the Victoria & Albert Museum, London, organized by Tanya Harrod and the University of York, 21 February 2014.

In 1975 the Decorative Arts Society was formed and began publishing its *Journal* in 1977. That same year, 1977, the Design History Society was formed, though it did not begin publishing its *Journal of Design History* until 1988. Each had a different view of the area. The Decorative Arts Society tended to look more towards objects and their makers and collectors from the year 1850 onwards. In contrast, the Design History Society was interested in the social or cultural aspects of production. Most of the regional potters' associations use newsletters as a vehicle for communication and they can be sources of valuable information about activity happening across the UK.

*Interpreting Ceramics* launched in 2000 as a refereed electronic journal ([www.interpretingceramics.com](http://www.interpretingceramics.com)) to debate the subject of ceramics, and is a joint collaboration between University of Wales Institute, Cardiff, the University of Wales, Aberystwyth, and the University of the West of England, Bristol. Seventeen journals have been published since its launch, a number of symposiums have emerged and many valuable articles covering subjects such as Michael Cardew's life and legacy, and the development of the Craft Potters Association have been published. They have now published a book of collected essays, *Interpreting Ceramics, selected essays*, which demonstrates the diversity of subjects covered by writers since the journal was founded in 2000.<sup>79</sup>

In 2013, the University of York began exploring the potential of setting up an MA in Ceramics in response to York Museums Trust's collections and the imminent opening of the Centre of Ceramic Art (CoCA) at York Art Gallery. They commissioned Tanya Harrod to do some research and consultation workshops in 2014 with interested parties in the North of England and in London. At the London workshop, Dame Rosalind Savill (former Director of the Wallace Collection) spoke of the problem of interesting students in researching the decorative arts and cited the lack of introductory texts as one explanation.<sup>80</sup> A reason for this may be the breadth of areas, materials and time periods encompassed. Emphasizing this breadth, at the London workshop, Harrod posed the question 'Is ceramics a subject?' to which curator Oliver Watson replied 'It's dozens of subjects.'<sup>81</sup>

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79 Jones, Jeffrey and Dahn, Jo (2013). *Interpreting Ceramics*, Wunderkammer Press.

80 Workshop held at the Victoria & Albert Museum, London, organized by Tanya Harrod and the University of York, 21 February 2014.

81 Ibid.



## 1.8 Academic research on ceramics

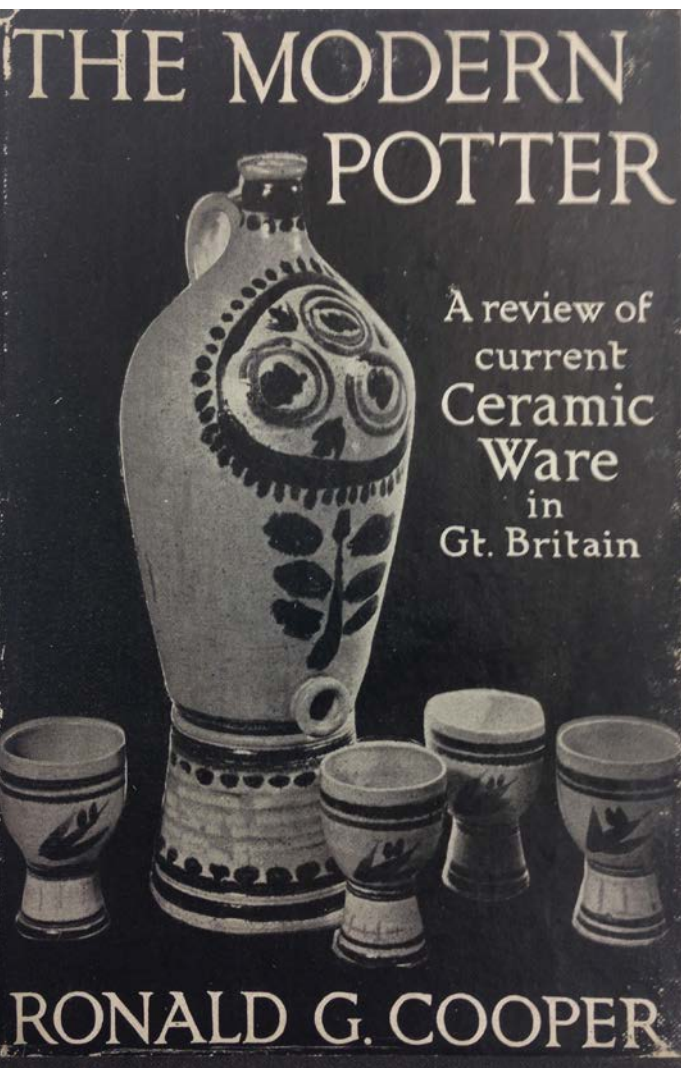
British studio pottery is a relatively young art movement and a new area of museum and gallery collecting. As public collections can often encourage and facilitate new research through access to collections, studio pottery is undoubtedly under-researched academically and marginalized in art history teaching (Cooper, 2007; Harrod, 2014). However, in recent years interest from an academic research perspective has emerged. Students have begun to turn their attention to the subject, addressing the broadening array of dialogues. Recent doctoral research considers studio pottery and/or ceramics in the context of: modernism (Jones, 1999a); early 20th century critical writing on ceramics (Stair, 2002); early 20th century collectors (Jordan, 2007); ceramic disciplines (Shaw, 2007); oriental glazes (Cartlidge, 2008); 20th century Italian ceramics (Hockemeyer, 2008); printed ceramics (Scott, 2010); sculptural ceramic practices (Tuxill, 2010; Gray, 2013); 21st century standard ware (Tyas, 2015); responses to museum collections and historical ceramics (Cushway, 2015; Breen, 2016).

When the British studio pottery movement began evolving during the first part of the 20th century, it had no institution of academic research to position itself within. In art history literature, decorative arts (such as ceramics) were seen as supporting fine art and references to them were hidden away in footnotes. In her report on the potential of a ceramics teaching centre that was proposed by the University of York, historian Tanya Harrod (2014) outlined the history of teaching ceramics. She noted how it had been investigated by art historians from a materials and processes perspective or from historical contexts, but more recently by positioning it as part of modernist sculpture. However, as Harrod notes, the functional nature of pottery also sits with design history teaching, which emerged in the 1970s. Positioning it within design history could be considered as moving away from a handmade aesthetic, towards *hands off* factory manufacturing processes and, as Ismay noted in 1959, such mechanization of ceramics was the antithesis of art.<sup>82</sup>

Academic research on ceramics did not begin until the second half of the 20th century. It was limited in scope and done from a material science or archaeological viewpoint. The transformation of polytechnics into universities opened up potential of postgraduate research into ceramics and as a result there was significant growth in doctoral research in ceramics from the 1990s. As we have seen in Section 1.2, published books containing writing on studio pottery were scarce and did not appear until the 1940s, with the exception of some instructional books on how to make pottery. However, critical writing, though mainly limited to newspapers and journals, was extensive

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<sup>82</sup> Lecture delivered by W.A. Ismay at the opening of the exhibition *The Art of the Potter* at Wakefield City Art Gallery on Saturday 20 June 1959. See Appendix iii for a transcript of the speech.



1-16 *The Modern Potter* by Ronald G. Cooper, 1947.

of Bernard Leach (Hogben, 1978) or the catalogue and exhibition at the Barbican highlighting Lucie Rie and Hans Coper (Coatts, 1997). In recent years, however, critical biographies of artists from the British studio pottery movement have become more prevalent. Potter and curator Emmanuel Cooper authored a number of biographies of artists in Ismay's collection, which included the potters Bernard Leach (2003), Janet Leach (2006) and Lucie Rie (2012). Cooper underlines the lack of research, arguing that what little published work exists deals with the 'how to' of studio pottery, but not the 'why'.<sup>83</sup> One of the leading writers to explore the 'why' is Tanya Harrod, who published a critically acclaimed biography of potter Michael Cardew (2012), which adds to the knowledge presented in the two books that Cardew himself wrote in 1971 and 1988. Harrod's research underlines the importance of personal archives, as in her research she consulted Cardew's archives. Cardew's archives were acquired from his son Seth in 2004 by the V&A Archive of Art and Design and are now accessible to researchers.

and valuable as it treated studio pottery seriously in the same way that painting and sculpture was considered.

As a number of researchers (Jones, 1999a; Stair, 2002; Scott, 2010) point out, published research on British studio pottery tends to fall within specific categories. There are the *how-to* books offering advice on techniques and materials by a range of authors (Billington, 1937; Casson, 1977; McErlain, 2002; Taylor, 2011). Compendium books offered a guide to the British studio pottery movement, highlighting key figures and styles in roughly chronological order (Cooper, 1972; Clark, 1995; Rice and Gowing, 1989; Jones, 2007). Monograph publications on key leading artists tended, until the 1990s, to be produced in accompaniment to exhibitions. These include a catalogue for the Victoria & Albert Museum's retrospective exhibition

83 Cooper, Emmanuel (2007). 'Off Centre', *Ceramic Review*, No. 226, Jul/Aug, p. 82.

Published work by potters on British studio pottery, was dominated by Bernard Leach for much of the 20th century, but from the 1980s, more authors have emerged to widen the critical debate (Dormer, 1990 and 1994b; Greenhalgh, 2002; De Waal, 2003). Ceramic artists also began to be encouraged to write about themselves and about their views on the world of contemporary craft. In 2013, potter Alison Britton produced an anthology of her published writing, from exhibition reviews to catalogue essays dating from 1982 to 2012. The collection offers an insight into the breadth of issues being talked about.

Published research on studio pottery has become increasingly important to building knowledge academically, but Jones (1999a) argues that it has also always been important from the perspective of collectors. Whilst would-be collectors are encouraged to handle pottery to experience their physicality fully, ultimately: ‘the appreciation of studio pottery is built on the foundation of words and photographs.’<sup>84</sup>

### **1.9 Private and public collecting**

Collecting is an activity that encompasses a variety of participants and material. The critic Walter Benjamin (1931) spoke about the personal and intimate relationship between a collector and his objects, commenting that each collection was different, each collector unique as, in each case, the motivations for collecting vary along with acquisition methods.<sup>85</sup> John Potvin and Alla Myzelev (2009) state that historically, in the field of collecting, research into the decorative arts is relatively obscure in comparison to fine or *high* art. Historically, decorative art has been viewed as the poor relation of fine art, with ceramics having, in most cases, a market value significantly lower than painting or sculpture. As a result, collecting this type of material can be seen as an accessible hobby for ordinary folk with average incomes because it is more affordable than fine art.<sup>86</sup> In 1925, Bernard Rackham, who was then the Head of Ceramics at the Victoria & Albert Museum, tried to encourage collectors with ‘*sporting instincts*’ to collect handmade pottery by living makers rather than expensive antiques or factory wares, suggesting perhaps that it offered more of a challenge.<sup>87</sup> Rackham, himself a collector, was one of a small group who had discovered studio pottery as a new and exciting area to collect in.

Collectors like Rackham were important patrons of early 20th century studio potters and encouragement from a small number provided much needed encouragement as

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84 Jones, Jeffrey (1999a). *Studio pottery in an age of modernism 1920–1955*, PhD Thesis, University of Wales, Aberystwyth.

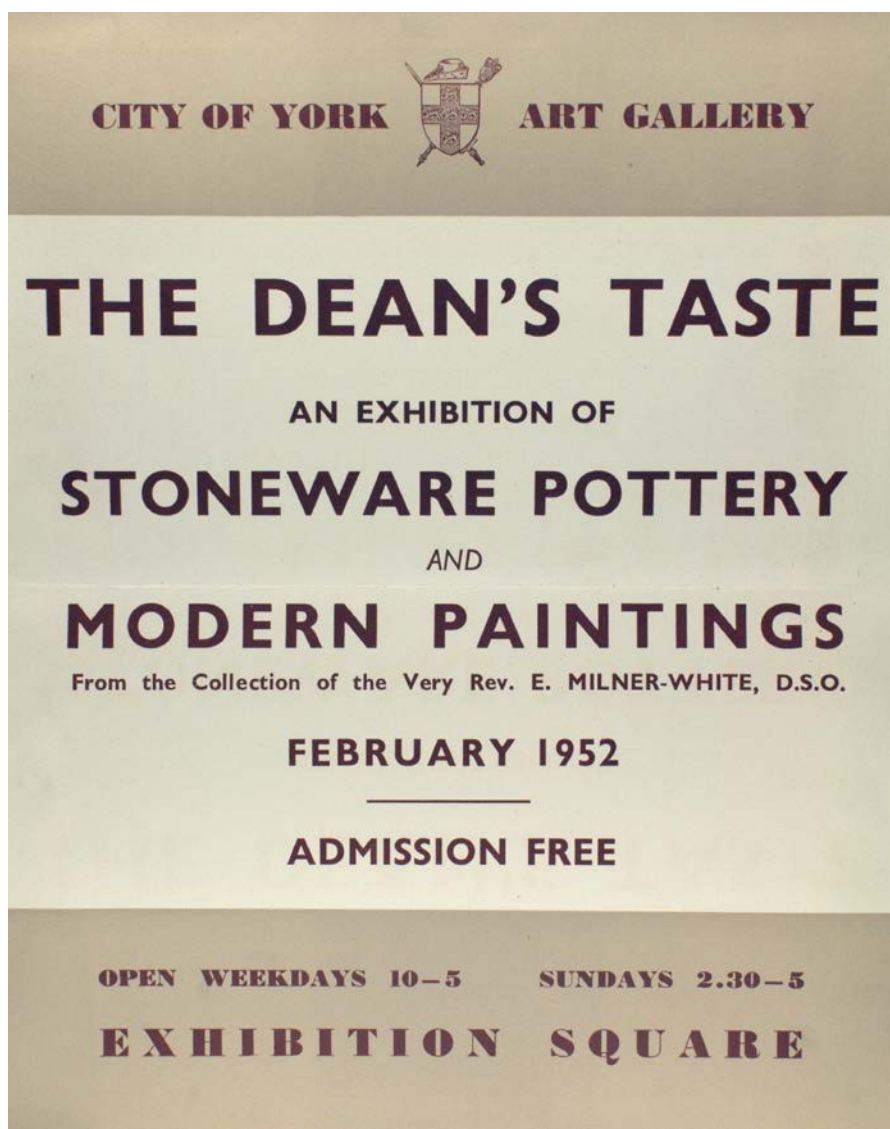
85 Benjamin, Walter (1977). ‘Unpacking my library’, in *Illuminations*, Verso, London (written in 1931).

86 Potvin, John and Myzelev, Alla (eds) (2009). *Material Cultures, 1740–1920: The meanings and pleasures of collecting*, Ashgate Publishing, Farnham.

87 Rackham, Bernard (1925). ‘The Attraction of Pottery’, *The Morning Post*, 3rd January.

well as financial and moral support. Eric Milner-White was one of the most important collectors of that period as he had the financial means to acquire what he described as: 'the biggest and best' pots he could find on the London commercial gallery scene (Riddick; 1990). The Milner-White collection was first shown on public display in York Art Gallery temporarily in 1952. Disdaining the gap emerging between fine art and decorative art, Milner-White's pots were shown alongside some of his collection of paintings, which reflected the way they were shown in the commercial galleries he acquired them from. Milner-White gave his collection permanently to York Art Gallery between 1958 and 1963.<sup>88</sup> A new gallery space was created to house them and initially the pots were shown on open display, before some thefts and damage resulted in the pots being secured in cases. Milner-White's collection became one of the earliest private collections of studio pottery to be acquired by a public gallery and have its own dedicated exhibition space. This helped to promote collecting in this area both among the curatorial staff at the gallery and to visitors.

Sarah Riddick's (1990) important catalogue on the collection of Eric Milner-White places him as a collector and discusses his character and motivations. By using his archives, Riddick was able to present the relationships between Milner-White and the potters whose work he collected, giving evidence of the importance of patronage and formation of friendships between collectors and collected. Further research using Milner-White's archives to provide a broad overview of Milner-White was carried out by Ruth Bulmer (1976) and Melissa Garnett (1981). All three studies demonstrate the usefulness of archives as source material.



1-17 Poster for the first public exhibition of the Milner-White Collection at York Art Gallery in 1952.

<sup>88</sup> The building opened in 1879 to house the Yorkshire Fine Art and Industrial Exhibition. It was taken over in 1880 by the City of York Council and renamed York City Art Gallery. In 2002 when York Museums Trust took over its management its name was shortened to York Art Gallery.





1-18 Display of the Milner-White Collection at York Art Gallery in 1959.

Christopher Jordan's (2007) doctoral research on Ernest Marsh (1843–1945), collector of Martin ware and other early British studio pottery, examines how Marsh affected public taste in applied arts through his activity as a private collector. In this research, Jordan also comments on the relationships between Marsh and other collectors. Other early collectors of studio pottery have been the subjects of research, though not specifically relating to their interest in this area. George Eumorfopoulos collected Chinese ceramics and made his collection accessible to studio potters in his London home, buying the pots they made inspired by his collection (Hobson, 1939–1940; Board of Education, 1963). His collection was eventually split between the British Museum, the Victoria & Albert Museum and a few regional museums and galleries.

Very little critical research has been carried out on individual post-war collectors of British studio pottery and what does exist is an eclectic mix, taking many different approaches to the subject. Little has been written about the impact of individual collectors on British post-war studio pottery. The few collectors who are referenced tend to be early collectors rather than post-war collectors, though contemporary collectors are becoming more proactive in sharing their stories in specialist journals and exhibitions. A small number of catalogues on individual collections have briefly

touched on the collecting scene and some exhibition publications also include essays written by collectors about their own collecting motivations and experiences. Cyril Frankel's (2000) study of Lisa Sainsbury, who began collecting in the 1950s, is not as in-depth as Riddick's on Milner-White, but does shed light on how her collection developed and to some extent, the relationships between Sainsbury and the potters she supported. A theme that emerges is her interest in the potters Hans Coper and Lucie Rie and how this led her to buy work by their students. The desire to encourage and support potters through her collecting is something she shares with other collectors, including Ismay.

Apart from those already mentioned, a small number of public museums and galleries have published catalogues of their studio pottery collections: Victoria & Albert Museum (Watson, 1990a), Paisley Museums and Art Galleries (Rock, Saunders and Rothschild, 1984) and University College of Wales in Aberystwyth (Vincentelli, 1979).

The Potteries Museum and Gallery in Stoke-on-Trent houses the collection of 520 pieces of British studio pottery collected by Robert Pinchen. Pinchen, like Ismay, was loyal to Yorkshire makers and interested in student work. He also lived in Wakefield, working in local government as an accountant. A review of the first exhibition of the collection in Stoke was published by Harrod (1994b), and was followed by an article by potter Josie Walter (1998). In the review Harrod compares the collection unflatteringly to Henry Bergen's collection which was gifted to Stoke-on-Trent in 1948. Harrod refers to the Pinchen Collection as a 'poisoned chalice' for the museum, seeing him as an uncritical collector who chose small, insignificant pieces not the big important pieces by acclaimed makers. She suggests it be viewed as a social history collection, as if that were an inferior classification and that the collection could have a deleterious effect on the public's perception of British studio pottery.

A book by Jim Ede (1983), the collector of 20th century art and crafts, gives a very personal account of collecting and living with a collection. Ede lived with his collection carefully placed within his Cambridge home, *Kettle's Yard*, allowing visitors in to view. The book provides an unusual study of a collector, comprising text in the form of descriptions, reflections, thoughts, quotes and poems put together by Ede in response to photographs of the objects and the vistas he has created within his home. Though including the personal recollections of Ede, these are not supported by evidence as in the Milner-White book by Riddick. The American collector Richard Jacobs's (2007) book is a record of the relationship between Jacobs and the studio potter Christa Assad, whose work he collected. Containing 40 letters, it is not about how his collection developed or how their relationship impacts on it, but rather a series of discussions on

the nature of beauty and the artist. The catalogue of another American collector Ivor Noel Hume (2001) considers the relationship between collector and pots in terms of the collector learning from his pots. Tony Birks (1990) collaborated with the collectors George and Cornelia Wingfield Digby to produce a book focusing on Bernard Leach and the potters Leach had taught and worked with, using the Digbys' own collection.

In 1997 the Yorkshire and Humberside Museums Council published a report on public collections of decorative arts in those specific regions, including information on holdings of contemporary material. By the 1990s, the potters Robert and Sheila Fournier had concluded there were enough public collections of studio pottery in the UK that a guide to their locations was required (1994). A dictionary providing information on 170 potters working in the UK was produced by Pat Carter (1990) and followed on from the regular publication of membership directories by many of the regional potters' associations. Further assistance for collectors came in the form of the *British Studio Potters' Marks* (Yates-Owen and Fournier, 1999), which helped in the identification of pots and provided some background information on potters. Collector and teacher Alistair Hawtin (2008) has written a guidebook on starting a collection of studio pottery. It includes several interviews with contemporary collectors, but these are short and not especially revealing.

The majority of written work on post-war studio pottery collectors is confined to essays written by some of the collectors themselves. *Ceramic Review* commissioned interviews with a range of collectors about their motives for collecting, their interests and experiences (Ismay, 1982b), commercial gallery owners (Rothschild, 1983) and curators of public museums and galleries (Graves, 2003). *CRAFTS* ran a similar series on collectors and these include articles about private collectors (Whiting, 2004), artists who collect (Brownlee, 2008), commercial gallery owners (Hoggard, 2008) and curators (Julius, 2007). The journal *Studio Pottery* has similarly published articles about collectors (Niblett, 1993; Riddick, 1993). *Burlington Magazine* has covered the phenomena of collecting studio pottery (Watson, 1990b), as has *Apollo* (Gilding, 2011). Auction houses managing sales of collections of studio pottery have occasionally included background information about collectors in sales catalogues (Bonhams, 1995; Christie's, 1998). More recently, commercial fairs like 'Collect' in London and 'SOFA' in the USA have produced guides that include essays about collecting.

Much has been written on the phenomena of collecting as a private hobby or pastime and as a public activity through museology. Many of these texts about collecting are biased towards fine art (Rheims, 1961; Getty, 1966; Alsop, 1982; Buck and Dodd, 1991; Altshuler, 2005; Buck and Greer, 2006; Lindemann, 2006; Saatchi, 2009), though some

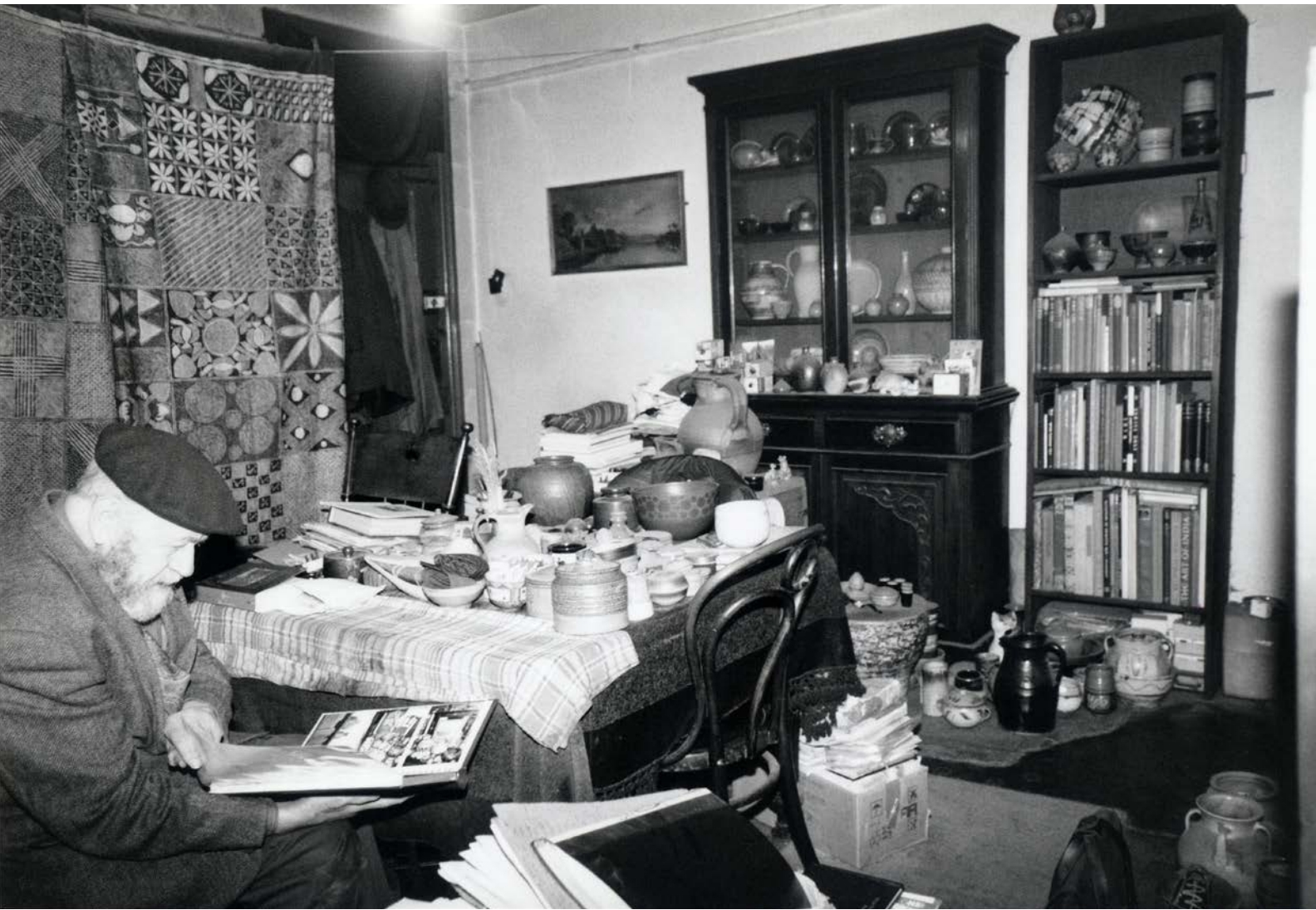
extend the breadth of discussed material to include antiquities and crafts and more ordinary material (Eccles, 1968; Miller, 2001; Herrmann, 2002; Blom, 2003). Several of these texts discuss collecting in psychological terms. Research into the phenomena of collecting by Pierre Cabanne (1963) suggests that it is a neurosis that anyone can become a victim of, a view echoed by Muensterberger (1994), who attempts to enhance understanding of the psychology of collecting by likening it to a hunger or obsession, instinctive and uncontrollable. This is certainly a sentiment that Ismay mentions often himself, as he experiences the feeling that his collection is out of his control (see Chapter 3, Section 3.1). More recently Louisa Buck and Judith Greer (2006) pick up on the idea that collectors are driven by compulsion and desire. John Elsner and Roger Cardinal (1994), Russell Belk (1995), Jean Baudrillard (1996) and Michel Foucault (1973) examine the idea that collections, created through personal circumstances, choice and taste, are a reflection of the self. The belief of many researchers studying collecting, is that it has its roots in childhood (Pearce, 1992; Muensterberger, 1994; Miller, 2001). Ismay first began collecting as a child, so this is a theory applicable to him.

Sociological theories advanced by Pierre Bourdieu in his work *Distinction: A social critique of the Judgment of Taste* (1984) can be applied to Ismay and his collecting decisions. Bourdieu's view of self-classification, of having a sense of one's place socially and particularly the notion that how one presents one's space to the world is what differentiates you from everyone else, resonates with the uniqueness of Ismay's home and lifestyle. Simon Stewart's (2010) study of culture and class draws on Bourdieu's (1986) theory on capitals which argues that individuals gather up social, economic and cultural experience to help them establish their position in the world. This is evidenced by Ismay whose experience of collecting encompassed all of those elements.

David Chaney (1996) argues that the term 'lifestyle' is a modern label that describes a pattern of actions distinguishing individuals. James Deetz (1977) points out that material culture is a key area that man can shape for his own purpose, whilst Susan Pearce (1992) argues that society, as we understand it, cannot exist without objects. Clearly, material objects can be seen as important markers for social interaction.

Daniel Miller's (2001) study of possessions reveals that the material objects within the house transform it into a home, and Adrian Forty (2000) extends this by saying the objects become the evidence of what happens inside a home. Ismay's home should be considered from this perspective, as it became a container of material objects in relation to Ismay's collection and his archives, and the experiences recounted by visitors are evidence of its use.





1-19 W.A. Ismay in his kitchen. Photograph Janette Haigh.

Much of the research on collecting has been from a museum standpoint, though museology is a relatively new academic discipline (Pearce, 1992). Tony Bennett's (1995) research looks at the development of what he terms the modern museum in relation to forms of entertainment like fairs. Robert Hewison's *The Heritage Industry* (1987) has become a key museum studies text, exploring the relationship between the explosion of modern museums in the 1970s and the postmodern preoccupation with preserving the past. Harrod's (1999) view that the 1970s saw a similar interest in saving past industries, like pottery, appears to fit in well with this. Bruce Altshuler's (2005) study of museums collecting contemporary works, restates the fact that a museum's purpose is to preserve the past, with contemporary collecting being largely guesswork with a strong element of risk attached to it.

## 1.10 The nature of archives

Archives have been described as ‘places and sources of inherited knowledge’ by Georgia Yiakoumaki, whose research puts archives within a curatorial context and contributes to the re-evaluation of the nature and value of archives seen in recent years.<sup>89</sup> Ilya Kabakov argues that the concept of ‘archive’ has changed over time and that: ‘traditionally the records stored in archives fulfilled a legal function. However, over time archives changed from being legal depositories to being institutions of historical research.’<sup>90</sup> Jacques Derrida (1995) argues that archives, though historically used to question the past, can also be used to question the present and the future. Material in Ismay’s archive can be used in this way, establishing facts about him as a collector and about his collection, but can also be used to advance theories about his legacy, showing how issues affecting British studio pottery during the 20th century have led to current positions.

While Ismay’s archive contains evidence of his activity, it is not a perfect record and as Sven Spieker contends, archives do not record experiences: ‘they mark the point where an experience is missing from its proper place, and what is returned to us in an archive may well be something we never possessed in the first place.’<sup>91</sup> The way in which Ismay created and used his archive and the way in which researchers engage with it is a reciprocal process, as Yiakoumaki suggests:

*Through this complex process of interaction with the material, one rotationally receives information and deposits thoughts and interpretations back into the archive. The archive is permeable to its users. It is lending itself to the researcher, thus ‘offering’ a share of authorship through inviting interpretation.*<sup>92</sup>

Tom Nesmith (2002), in his restating of Derrida, explains the authorship of archives as being not only the activity of the person creating the archive, but also those who later grant access to it and interpret it to researchers.<sup>93</sup> Nesmith encourages researchers to look at archives with fresh eyes, reminding us that archives are sources of neutral information, offering records of primary source material that have a special integrity and allow access to the past. However neutral the information, its interpretation is coloured by external factors and Nesmith argues that whilst archivists should remain

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89 Yiakoumaki, Georgia Nayia (2009). *Curating Archives, Archiving Curating*, PhD Thesis, Goldsmiths, University of London, p. 21.

90 Kabakov, Ilya (2008). ‘Sixteen Ropes’, in Sven Spieker, *The Big Archive: Art from Bureaucracy*, The MIT Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts, p. xii.

91 Spieker, Sven (2008). *The Big Archive: Art from Bureaucracy*, The MIT Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts, p. 3.

92 Yiakoumaki, Georgia Nayia (2009). *Curating Archives, Archiving Curating*, PhD Thesis, Goldsmiths, University of London, p. 28.

93 Nesmith, Tom (2002). ‘Seeing Archives: Postmodernism and the Changing Intellectual Place of Archives’, *The American Archivist*, Vol. 65, Spring/Summer, p. 32.

neutral, in fact often they act as mediators, shaping the way knowledge in archives is perceived.<sup>94</sup> He goes on to argue that:

*A hallmark of the postmodern view of communication is that there is no way to avoid or neutralize entirely the limits of the mediating influences which, thus, inevitably shape our understanding. Our understanding, then, is not simply affected by such mediations, but is a product of them.*<sup>95</sup>

This underlines the important position archivists, or curators (in the case of collections such as Ismay's), have in interpreting and presenting the knowledge contained within.

External factors that affect the formation and nature of a collection also affect how it is interpreted. This is a key argument made by Derrida (1995) whose aim was broadening the understanding of the archive. For Derrida, text in archives was complex, often puzzling and contradictory. It never revealed the whole truth but was affected, unconsciously, by context. He also argued that the written word is more revelatory than the spoken word, because the meaning of the spoken word could be elaborated on or explained and therefore its meaning is continually shifting, whereas the written word stands alone as a record of a specific thought at a particular moment. In his defence of the valuable role of archives in relating history, Arthur Marwick (2001) argues that history: 'must be seen to be based on evidence and not mere speculation or a prior theorizing.'<sup>96</sup> Like Derrida, Marwick recognized the challenge of interpreting historical documents:

*No document can tell us more than what the author of the document thought – what he thought had happened, what he thought ought to happen, or perhaps only what he wanted others to think he thought or even only what he himself thought he thought.*<sup>97</sup>

Derrida believed that even by deconstructing the archive, its meaning would still remain unclear, it shelters within the archive and as a consequence is concealed.<sup>98</sup> Foucault felt Derrida's theory was obscure. He agreed that interpretation of information was affected by context and subject to change, but argued that this came from

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94 Nesmith, Tom (2002). 'Seeing Archives: Postmodernism and the Changing Intellectual Place of Archives', *The American Archivist*, Vol. 65, Spring/Summer, p. 24.

95 Nesmith, Tom (2002). 'Seeing Archives: Postmodernism and the Changing Intellectual Place of Archives', *The American Archivist*, Vol. 65, Spring/Summer, p. 26.

96 Marwick, Arthur (2001). *The New Nature of History: Knowledge, Evidence, Language*, Palgrave Macmillan, p. xiii.

97 Marwick, Arthur (2001). *The New Nature of History: Knowledge, Evidence, Language*, Palgrave Macmillan, p. 161.

98 Derrida, Jacques (1995). *Archive Fever*, The University of Chicago Press.





1-20 John Leach demo at NPA camp. Photograph W.A. Ismay.

unconscious rules, or, in other words common sense.<sup>99</sup> Nesmith explains the external factors affecting the archivist as:

*[...] their personal backgrounds and social affiliations, and their professional norms, self-understanding, and public standing, shape and are shaped by their participation in this process. As they selectively interpret their experience of it, archivists help fashion formative contexts for their work, which influence their understanding of recorded communication and position particular archives to do particular things. This contextualizing of records and roles subtly directs their principal goals and functions. It governs their selection of archival material; determines how they describe or represent it to make it intelligible and accessible; prompts their commitment to its indefinite retention and the special measures they take to preserve it over the long term; and, more openly now in the computer age than before, it drives their growing desire to influence the actual conception, literal or physical inscription, and management of records long before they enter archival custody.<sup>100</sup>*

99 Foucault, M. (1973). *The order of things*, Vintage Books, New York.

100 Nesmith, Tom (2002). 'Seeing Archives: Postmodernism and the Changing Intellectual Place of Archives', *The American Archivist*, Vol. 65, Spring/Summer, pp. 30-31.



Derrida describes archivists as *archons*, as the guardians of documents, stating they ‘have the power to interpret the archives.’<sup>101</sup> Nesmith also underlines that their role is active rather than passive, arguing that: ‘contrary to the conventional idea that archivists simply receive and house vast quantities of records, which merely reflect society, they actually co-create and shape the knowledge in records, and thus help form society’s memory.’<sup>102</sup> In the same way that curators use their judgment to acquire new works for a public collection, archivists use their judgment to make decisions on what should be acquired, preserved or disposed of in an archive, thus shaping its content and what research can be produced from it.

Other powers are assigned to archivists by Jones (1999a), who points out that whilst there is a body of published sources relating to the roots of the British studio pottery movement, much of it can only be accessed in archives such as the Milner-White archive which is also held by York Art Gallery alongside the Ismay archive.<sup>103</sup> The implication being that it is protected, guarded by archivists. Unlike museum and gallery collections, which exist to be preserved in perpetuity and displayed publicly, archives have traditionally never had that display as a primary function. Barriers preventing access include: gaining permission to view them; the often delicate physical condition of the material; and navigating the complex ways in which they are catalogued. Yiakoumaki points out that archive material is often inconsistent and the cataloguing systems in place can be unhelpful, meaning the archivist becomes an invaluable ally to the researcher in helping them navigate them and as a result, they can influence the shape and outcome of the research.<sup>104</sup>

There is however a recognition, certainly within York Museums Trust, of the value and potential of these types of archives, and a push to publish them and make them accessible to encourage research on all levels, from amateur to academic. The archive material gathered by Ismay alongside the creation of his pottery collection is a key source of primary information in this research and reveals much about his life, activity and interaction with the world around him. Recently, more material from his archive has come to light which relates to his life before he began collecting pottery and adds to existing knowledge and has contributed to this research.

The archives extend the scope of Ismay’s collection and are another physical symptom of his activities. By keeping correspondence, he has preserved experiences, conversations and relationships. His photographs act as visual memories and other

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101 Derrida, Jacques (1995). *Archive Fever*, The University of Chicago Press, p. 2.

102 Nesmith, Tom (2002). ‘Seeing Archives: Postmodernism and the Changing Intellectual Place of Archives’, *The American Archivist*, Vol. 65, Spring/Summer, p. 27.

103 Jones, Jeffrey (1999a). *Studio pottery in an age of modernism 1920–1955*, PhD Thesis, University of Wales, Aberystwyth, p. 24.

104 Yiakoumaki, Georgia Nayia (2009). *Curating Archives, Archiving Curating*, PhD Thesis, Goldsmiths, University of London, pp. 31–32.

ephemera became souvenirs. The information captured in this material is a record of his learning and transforms what could be considered a hobby, into scholarly documentation and evidence. The age of gathering the type of correspondence-based archive of primary source material on the scale of Ismay's may have passed with the advent of digital and virtual communication: however, the information they contain was developed within recent history and its dissemination will provide valuable contemporary insights.

Archival documents are a traditional source of information for historians: however, Steven Lubar and W. David Kingery describe archives as a 'species of artefact', arguing that archival documents are increasingly being viewed as artefacts, as objects of aesthetic value to be displayed in museums or galleries.<sup>105</sup>

On embarking on cataloguing Ismay's archive in 2004, advice was solicited from the Borthwick Institute for Archives (part of the University of York) to ensure the material was dealt with according to best practice. The notion of *archive* was somewhat foreign in context, as museums and galleries generally contain objects, things that are displayed for visitors to look at. At York Art Gallery, the type of material contained in Ismay's archive would have been treated in the same way as the archive relating to Eric Milner-White's pottery collection, which was kept as documentation in object history files, as paperwork to be used and looked at during the course of research. However, the sheer volume of material contained within Ismay's archive necessitated more consideration, initially in terms of storage, as it would not fit neatly into a few drawers in a filing cabinet like the archive of Milner-White. Borthwick archivists advised that the items should be catalogued individually and that they be listed in the order that they had been acquired, as it was important to preserve the relationship between individual items that had been placed alongside each other either consciously or unconsciously by Ismay. Nesmith highlights this as being a key tenet of archival practice, writing:

*Archivists not only attempt to acquire primary (or original) sources, or records, which are thus thought to have special (even unique) integrity as means of access to the past; they believe that providing information about the records' origin and respecting the original order of their creation are essential to ensure that archiving is a neutral means of communication of the recorded past.*<sup>106</sup>

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105 Lubar, Steven and Kingery, W. David (1993). *History from Things: Essays on Material Culture*, Smithsonian Institution Press, Washington and London, p. ix.

106 Nesmith, Tom (2002). 'Seeing Archives: Postmodernism and the Changing Intellectual Place of Archives', *The American Archivist*, Vol. 65, Spring/Summer, p. 27.

Derrida describes the archive as a transitional space, writing: ‘the dwelling, this place where they dwell permanently, marks this institutional passage from the private to the public, which does not always mean from secret to nonsecret.’<sup>107</sup> This could be read as meaning that the depositing of an archive within a public institution is only the first step on disseminating it to a wider audience and that there remain many decisions still to be made regarding the revelation of secrets.

When Ismay died, his trustees and curatorial staff, in accordance with his Will, viewed the pottery as being the most important aspect and the archive was removed from the house in the most expedient way. He had not prepared his trustees about the amount of material, nor to the personal and sensitive nature of the archives. This left them in the difficult position of having to make decisions on what was important or relevant. During the pre-sorting of the archive done by the trustees, prior to it being passed on to the Yorkshire Museum, some material in very poor condition and items that were not seen to have any relation to pottery or intellectual merit were destroyed.<sup>108</sup> Some of the remaining archival material was taken to be stored and sorted by trustees prior to it coming to York and this has recently been transferred to York Museums Trust. As Ismay had his archive stored all over his home, removing it from that context meant that relationships were lost. The pre-sorting, reorganizing and disposal of elements by trustees created further disarray, as did the way it was subsequently stored when arriving at the museum.

The position of archive material in a museum and gallery environment offers the potential of putting it on display. Referencing the growing popularity of exhibiting archives, Spieker writes:

*In late twentieth-century art and art criticism, the archive became the trope of choice for a dazzling variety of activities. Still, there seems to be little consensus as to what an archive is, how it might be distinguished from other types of collections, and, most importantly, how its relationship with earlier twentieth-century art, most notably with the historical avant-gardes, might be framed.*<sup>109</sup>

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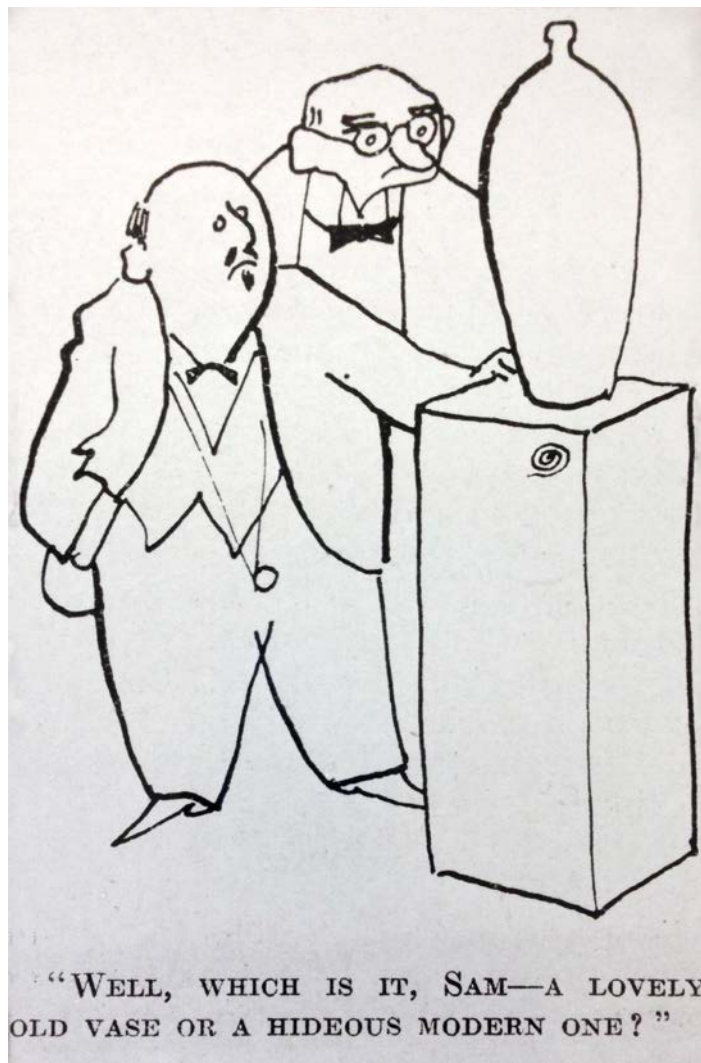
107 Derrida, Jacques (1995). *Archive Fever*, The University of Chicago Press, pp. 2–3.

108 Mentioned to Helen Walsh by former Ismay trustees Janette Haigh and Jane Hamlyn on a number of occasions between 2006 and 2017.

109 Spieker, Sven (2008). *The Big Archive: Art from Bureaucracy*, The MIT Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts, pp. 4–5.

In Yiakoumaki's (2009) research on curating archives, she examines the role of archives in curatorial practice to show how curators working with archival material change both the archive and subsequent interpretations of it. Putnam's research on artists using museum collections as a medium in their work, references the exhibition curated by Andy Warhol (1928–1987) at Rhode Island School of Design in 1969, as the first example of an artist taking on the role as a curator as part of their working practice.<sup>110</sup> Since then, using artists as guest curators has become an accepted model of practice in museums and galleries, as institutions recognize the value of the artists name and method of interpretation in attracting an audience. Institutions have also recognized the value of bringing in an alternative viewpoint to raise interest in neglected areas of collections, such as archives, and also to generate new creative ways of displaying collections or providing the means by which

an artist can develop and produce new bodies of work. In this way of working, curators become facilitators or enablers, trying to ensure archives are treated respectfully, ethically and in a way that engages audiences. In his paper for the *Ceramics in the Expanded Field* conference at the University of Westminster, Alun Graves, curator at the Victoria & Albert Museum, questioned whether museums and galleries can continue to take the role of passive recorders given that artistic collaboration is so prevalent, suggesting they should embrace the opportunity to become agents of change.<sup>111</sup>



1-21 Unattributed cartoon found in the Milner-White archive, early 20th century.

110 Putnam, James (2001). *Art and Artifact: The Museum as Medium*, Thames & Hudson, London, p. 18.

111 'Alun Graves, GB | Ceramics In The Expanded Field'. *Ceramics-in-the-expanded-field.com*. N.p., 2017. Web.



## 1.11 Summary

The way in which the activity and output of the British studio pottery movement has been viewed, by participants, academics and critics has continually changed throughout the 20th and 21st centuries. This speaks volumes about the nature of material and how it defies attempts to label and pigeonhole it as merely craft or as fine art. In 1959, art critic Hugh Gordon Porteus gave his opinion on how fine art achieved a high status, writing: 'to put it another way, an art becomes Fine when – technological obsolescence having deprived it of any utilitarian excuse for existence – it is able to cultivate charm and personality', suggesting that industrialization has enabled craft practices, such as pottery, to die and re-emerge, phoenix-like, as art. He writes:

*The only big difference between a sport or craft and a fine art lies in the degree and complexity of the skill required. The fine arts all involve in some way both the sense and the intellectual faculties as well as great deftness of hand and eye. Pottery lies on this fascinating borderline. For it is one of those crafts, which, like printmaking bridge the 'hand made' and its etymologically identical forerunner and practical successor the 'manufacture'. In this country the Industrial Revolution liquidated a large number of such crafts, which so far from disappearing merely went underground to emerge fresh as Arts.<sup>112</sup>*

Clay has been used by most human civilizations as a medium for producing functional items for use in daily life, or for the production of aesthetically pleasing or spiritual objects. It possesses a contrary combination of fragility and longevity. The title of Zuravleff's 2005 novel *The Bowl is already Broken* implies that it is a ceramic object's destiny to be smashed, yet ceramics have a robust quality that enables sherds to survive for thousands of years, making it one of the main ways of providing dating material in archaeology. The versatility of the material, what critic Herbert Read referred to as 'plastic art in its most abstract essence', enables it to be moulded to embody the spirit of the artist, the method of production and the context in which it was made.<sup>113</sup> This versatility has meant that in a museum and gallery collection and in the context of academic research, it has struggled to find a permanent niche, being classified as: social history, archaeology, material culture, decorative and applied art, design history, craft, folk art, fine art or sculpture. Yet this versatility should also be seen as its most exciting asset, allowing it to be interpreted across a broad range of subject areas. The familiarity of handmade pottery, functional or not, may breed contempt amongst some, but when displayed in an art gallery context, pots often offer audiences with no art

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112 Porteus, Hugh Gordon (1959). *The Art of the Potter*, Wakefield City Art Gallery.

113 Read, Herbert (1968). *The Meaning of Art*, Faber & Faber, London (written in 1931), p. 42.

historical knowledge, an accessible and non-threatening route into the complicated concerns explored in some painting, sculpture and conceptual art.

The breadth of literature and sources covered by this chapter reflects the multiple disciplines that the subjects of ceramics and collecting can fall within. The variety of types and standards of literature, from critical theory-based doctoral research to amateur texts aimed at the hobby market demonstrate the diversity of participants engaging with this area.



York Museums Trust

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York Art Gallery



## CHAPTER 2 — W.A. Ismay – The formative years

This chapter analyses material contained within Ismay's archive relating specifically to his background and formative years. It explores the issues that helped shape his character and his future interest in collecting pottery. His archive reveals his family background and childhood, his experience as a university student, his political beliefs, ambitions to be a writer, the effect of World War Two, his career as a librarian and how all this experience fed into his activity as a collector. As well as considering material that pre-dates the start of his pottery collection, it also considers Ismay's own written reflections on his early life. The investigation of Ismay's extensive archive for the first time has uncovered new information about his life and how and why he began collecting.

### ***2.1 It is awfully lucky I know your name because I should never be able to read it from your signature!<sup>1</sup> — Interpreting W.A. Ismay's archive***

The above quote forms the beginning of a letter Helen Kapp (Director of Wakefield City Art Gallery and Museum) sent to Ismay in 1961 and highlights one of the issues affecting the interpretation of Ismay's archives – his handwriting. In common with many archives, Ismay's handwriting (and the handwriting of some of his correspondents) can be difficult to read, particularly the scrawled draft letters he wrote before writing up a copy in 'best' to post (though recipients often wrote of also having difficulty reading his final versions). When Ismay was at university, he got a typewriter and sometimes used that in an effort to make his letters more legible. It was a laborious task for him though, as he typed one-handed whilst holding a magnifying glass to see.<sup>2</sup> He wrote of his difficulties in a letter to the potter Eric James Mellon:

*I am beginning this on the typewriter which for me is apt to be slower than hand (so I don't often attempt it) but more legible: I rubbed out just then after hitting a g instead of a t (and again then after another obvious error), but to save time will just XXX-out and then continue, if I go wrong later.*

*Sorry for all the mistakes- some still to be caught up by hand- the trouble is I don't really see too well, and my besetting sins are to hit a neighbouring letter to the one intended, or to be too far ahead of myself and start typing another word before the previous phrase is completed.<sup>3</sup>*

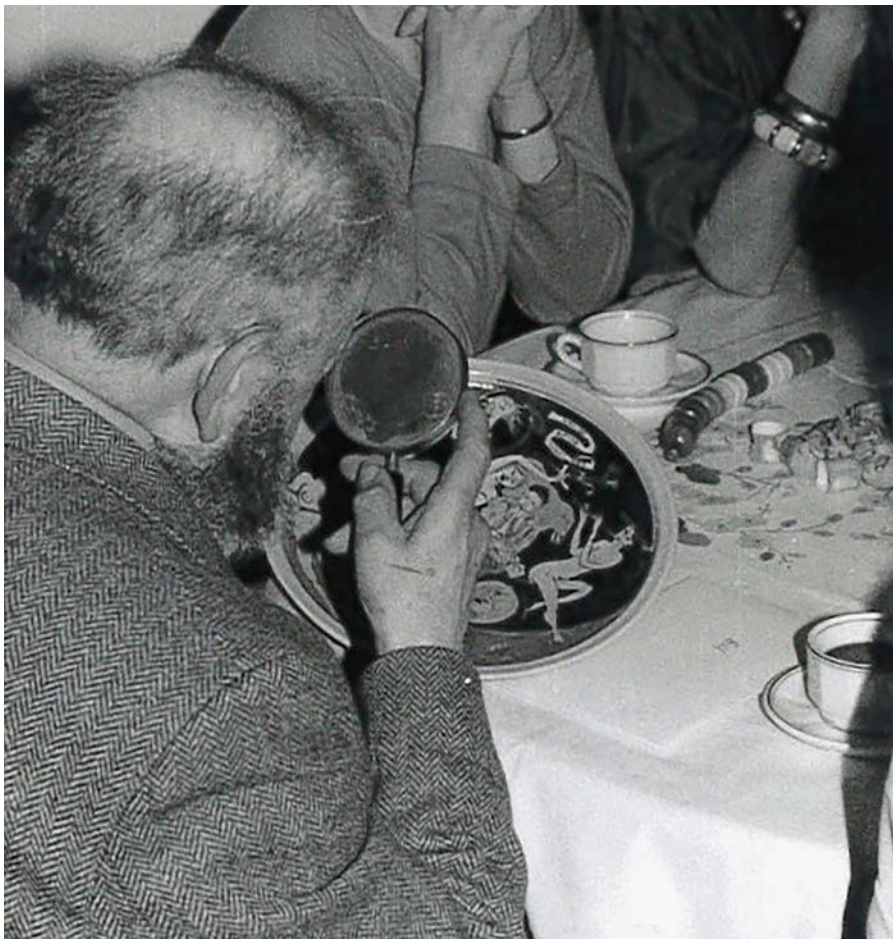
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1 Extract from a letter from Helen Kapp (Director of Wakefield City Art Gallery and Museum) to W.A. Ismay, dated 3 March 1961.

2 Alex McErlain asked W.A. Ismay if he was a two fingered typist like him and Ismay replying; 'no I am a one fingered typist as I need to hold the magnifying glass in the other hand'. Conversation between Alex McErlain and W.A. Ismay recounted to Helen Walsh, March 2013.

3 Extract from a letter from W.A. Ismay to Eric James Mellon (potter), dated 5 October 1990. Part of the Eric James Mellon archive now in the Crafts Study Centre, Farnham.

Other characteristics of Ismay's writing style were his extremely long sentences and his excessive use of brackets. He would often use numerous sets in a sentence, sometimes setting brackets within brackets, which made sentences long and difficult to follow. Draft letters and articles were scrawled on whatever scrap of paper he had to hand, from flyers to old library cards, to cereal boxes or dust jackets of books. When reaching the bottom of the page the text continued up the margins and forgotten text was added between lines or written separately and linked in by way of references such as 'insert section 'A' here'. Nevertheless, writer David Whiting described Ismay's writing as having great clarity: 'despite sentences that seemed to vie with Henry James in their protracted length'.<sup>4</sup>



2-1 W.A. Ismay using his magnifying glass on the occasion of his 80th birthday in 1990. Photograph Tony Hill.

This chapter considers Ismay's interest in literature and attempts at a writing career. Extracts from his archives in the form of examples of his writing are as revelatory as the information contained within, uncovering his life before he began collecting. After spending a long period of time studying Ismay's archives, I have begun to find it easier to understand his writing; however, some words and phrases remain indecipherable and when quoting his writing directly, these are clearly marked as such in this research by the insertion of /XXX/.

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4 Described in David Whiting's presentation at Ismay's memorial day held at the Yorkshire Museum on 8 September 2001.



1356  
common - or the right number

Dear Mr. Leach,

Very kindly

Suggested that I should write to you  
as a reminder of my request for  
one of your tall jugs (in the manner  
of the ~~one illustrated in the Arts Council  
Catalogue No. 164~~ that I  
illustrated as Plate 164 in the  
Catalogue No. 164  
in the Catalogue of the Arts Council  
exhibition).

I have ~~been~~ advised

what I take to be some of  
the best of these jugs (Hamada also  
does very English looking ones - with  
has done at least one photograph -  
enclosed) since ~~my~~ my first sight  
of one of <sup>the specimens</sup>, whether spigged or combed,  
they seem happier with either salt  
glaze (as Hamada's) or the <sup>type</sup> kind of  
raw glaze you have been using  
- in the case of ~~the one~~ No. 164 above I  
~~particularly~~ liked <sup>as combination features</sup> the ~~flow~~ flow of the  
glaze and <sup>its</sup> the green rather than  
greenish- or brownish-yellow colour,  
within <sup>a few</sup> ~~about three~~ minutes of the  
doors opening of the Hamada  
exhibition (Crafts Centre) I was on my

... with the exhibition...  
... which...  
... main character...  
... with the...

2-2 Draft letter from W.A. Ismay to Bernard Leach.



# CEASE UPON MIDNIGHT

# THE MIDNIGHT

by SIMON TROY

# SIMON TROY'S NEW THRILLER

manage to do it ~~for~~ - there's also an exhibition by Janet Jackson and Ruth Drexler at the Crafts Centre which has the PV today: why they have to have it on the most expensive day for travel I don't know - may be this later!

Reading to you either and what you think about 'job as investment' - I am sure you are right in what you say. Quite apart from this being <sup>in my view</sup> a very <sup>good</sup> reason for buying jobs (or indeed any work of art) it's (a) a bid in which one can win one's profit if not very well advised by someone who's really interested, and (b) at present I would say the ~~best~~ <sup>best</sup> ~~idea~~ <sup>idea</sup> ~~to~~ <sup>to</sup> ~~buy~~ <sup>buy</sup> ~~the~~ <sup>the</sup> ~~art~~ <sup>art</sup> ~~market~~ <sup>market</sup>.

I went a few weeks back to another prestigious exhibition <sup>(I don't see why they had to go to St James's - the catalogue was fine Art in St James's - the <sup>catalogue</sup> was <sup>simply</sup> <sup>brilliant</sup>)</sup> - so, what was suggested by a director who I went in, who makes to produce me with a copy ("on pleasure!"): like the similar offerings from Sotheby's and Christie's, this is not because they think it's a bit in each <sup>can be</sup> <sup>tempted</sup> <sup>to</sup> <sup>sell!</sup> (Having bought my first Hans Coper for under £4, my first Julie Rie for under £), and never having exceeded £100 even for a major piece by <sup>Hans Coper</sup> <sup>Julie Rie</sup> <sup>or</sup> <sup>Coper</sup> <sup>1950</sup>

CEASE UPON MIDNIGHT

GOLLANZ

2-3 Part of a draft letter written by W.A. Ismay on a book dust jacket.





2-4 Alfred Ismay, W.A. Ismay's father.



2-5 Sarah Elizabeth Ismay (née Pilkington), W.A. Ismay's mother.

William Alfred Ismay was born in 1910 in Wakefield, a Yorkshire city eight miles south of Leeds. He lived in Wakefield and worked in or near to the city all of his life, apart from time spent in the forces during World War Two. His parents married, after a long engagement, at West Parade Chapel, Wakefield in 1907. His father, Alfred Ismay (age 32) was a Cloth Presser and his mother, Sarah Pilkington (age 29) an Elementary School Teacher. Ismay was their only child and when he was around one year old, the family moved into the newly built small terraced house in Wakefield. 14 Welbeck Street was directly next door to his maternal grandparents who lived at number 16.<sup>5</sup> The jobs held by his parents indicate that there was some family money on his mother's side, which would have helped them to acquire the house. Ismay later recalled that his parent's marriage was unusual at that time, as his father's status was improved by having a wife who taught his employers' children and later their grandchildren.<sup>6</sup>

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5 <http://ismay.one-name.net/pedigrees/web/family54/pafg04.htm#1602C> a one-name study on the name Ismay, retrieved 2015.

6 Mortimer, J.K. 'A Childhood in Wartime', unpublished manuscript, 1939-1941, p. 5. See Appendix ii for full manuscript.

The houses on Welbeck Street were well appointed residences with provision made upstairs for a bathroom. However the developer ran out of money during the fitting out of the houses and the rather grand bathtubs (roll-top with the inside painted to resemble marble) were delivered to each residence for the householders to install themselves. The bath at 14 Welbeck Street remained in its wooden housing in the kitchen and eventually became a convenient extra area of shelving for pots.



2-6 The roll-top bathtub in W.A. Ismay's kitchen at 14 Welbeck Street.

A former childhood neighbour from Welbeck Street, Edith Pettinger, recalled *Willie* (as Ismay was known then by family and friends) as a normal happy child and in a letter to him, reminds him of one specific occasion when he stole his mother's broom and charged up and down the street shouting *yow-oo yow-oo* as he pretended to be a cowboy.<sup>7</sup>

At the beginning of World War Two (between 1939 and 1941), Ismay wrote a thinly disguised biographical story titled 'A Childhood in Wartime' under the pseudonym J.K. Mortimer (see Appendix ii). The origins of his pseudonym remain unclear but further research of his archives may shed light on his reasons for selecting that name. The format, two initials and a surname, fits with how he chose to title himself as a collector and has a literary link, as it was the way in which some of his favourite authors, such as H.G. Wells, signed their names.<sup>8</sup>



2-7 W.A. Ismay as a child.

Ismay's short story contains new revelations about his childhood in detailed reminiscences of growing up during World War One. It begins at his birth and he recalls details recounted by his family, but also very vivid early recollections of his own:

7 Letter from Edith Pettinger (former neighbour) to W.A. Ismay, dated 17 August 1988.

8 Letter from W.A. Ismay to Stephen Feber (Director of the Castle Museum), dated 4 November 1997.





2-8 Ismay family portrait. W.A. Ismay can be seen on the right, with his parents in the centre, 1931.

*My first persistent recollection is of sitting on the permanent table in our living-room, on the lid which, lifted, reveals a bath, and watching my father affix a wooden window-box, containing earth and plants, amongst which I recall what are geraniums, to the back, ground-floor window-sill of the house where we still live. This box has long since crumbled away and been demolished, and I have no notion whatever of its appearance as seen from outside the house. It had been transported from our first address on the western side of our town, to this more desirable dwelling south of the river, on our removal in September 1911, and was fixed in its new position soon after arrival. At the date of this isolated first remembrance, accordingly, I was, roughly, a year and five months old.<sup>9</sup>*

Ismay's ability to recall details or information is an aspect of his character that emerges repeatedly in his correspondence and in the recollections of those that knew him later in life. For example, potter Jane Hamlyn recalls how Ismay helped her identify the source of the phrase 'Venus Observed', which she wanted to use as the title for an article she was writing about the work of potter Philip Eglin. In his reply to her, Ismay writes in extensive detail about the play *Venus Observed* and its author Christopher Fry.<sup>10</sup>

9 Mortimer, J.K. 'A Childhood in Wartime', unpublished manuscript, 1939–1941. See Appendix ii for full manuscript.

10 Letter from W.A. Ismay to Jane Hamlyn (potter and trustee of the W.A. Ismay Collection), dated 9 August 1993.

14 Wellbet Street, Wakefield, West Yorkshire, WF1 5LD

7th August 1993

Dear Jane

I reply to your letter yes, so far as one can judge from photographs, Philip's work is lively, elegant and creative, and shows great skill in the handling of clay.

You are quite right in your conjecture about "Venus Observed" - I recognised this as the title of a play in verse by Christopher Fry (b. 1907). Fry made a great impact on the London theatre in 1949 with his "Springtime Comedy", "The Jolly" and "Not for Burning" (starring John Gielgud), and a great deal was said and written in the 1950s about a "revival" of verse drama.

Other people got in on the act and Lawrence Olivier commissioned Fry to write his "Autumnal Comedy" "Venus Observed" in the following year, which later still a "Winter Comedy" ("The Duke's Night") which (Iona Paisant theme) was written for East Angles. (What happened to "Steamer" I am not sure.) "Venus Observed" as I recall it was set on a rural estate, and the point of the title was that the play dealt with affairs of the heart, and that the Duke was an amateur astronomer who had a night-sky observatory in his park. What I can't say for certain is whether Fry just invented the title, or whether it's a quotation from an earlier (possibly eighteenth-century) poet - I seem to see it as "Venus Observed" which would be the eighteenth-century way of putting it. (Fry has written pieces which are 20th century in date of action, but a good many are set in earlier periods, and I'm not sure of the date of action of "Venus Observed".) The amusing thing is that I quite think I have a copy of the play somewhere in the house but can I find it? - I'm as swamped with books as with pots, and my instinct to have everything in order has been long thwarted in W. Th. cases by the lack of enough shelf space to make this possible. If I am right and

Other information recalled in his short story provides details of the environment he grew up in, such as visits to his grandparents' house next door, which had the opposite layout to his home: details such as the difference in proportions and the feeling of stiffness of a home belonging to an older generation, the smell of old carpets and horse hair stuffed furniture.<sup>11</sup> Memories of physical experiences such as falling downstairs, textures and tastes of food that prompt the recollections of events and people. Ismay recalls that his mother's younger unmarried sister, Edith, looked after him whilst his parents worked and would often take him next door to his maternal grandparents' house via a stile connecting the two back yards. In those early formative years, the main figures in his life were his Aunt Edith and his Grandpa and Grandma. His father left for work before breakfast, not returning until after bedtime, whilst his mother only appeared at mealtimes. This led Ismay to refer to them as 'marginal figures' during his childhood.

Ismay describes in detail the pre-war domestic environment: the Victorian grandeur of dark wooden furniture, vases, still life oil paintings and family portraits by local artist J.W. Mills and china dogs on the mantelpiece. He wrote:

*This rich environment remains for me the type par excellence of the pre-war domesticity of our class. After 1914, all this must have faded rapidly, its essence evaporating, until early in the twenties, little but the shell of it remained.*<sup>12</sup>

Ismay's family was affluent enough to be able to afford summer holidays away from home and these were usually spent on the Lancashire coast. In 1914, World War One started whilst he and his mother were on holiday alone in Lytham St Annes without his father. Even though Ismay was a very young child, he remembers in detail the panic as everyone scrambled onto the trains and rushed through Victoria station in Manchester trying to get home.

In 'A Childhood in Wartime', Ismay reveals how his personal view of war and conflict was formed by his childhood experience, only later to be turned on its head by the approach of World War Two. At school he and the other children were shielded from war and its related propaganda. Ismay's father had been turned down when repeatedly attempting to enlist due to suffering from hammer toe and varicose veins, so it was through his father's younger brother, Thomas, that Ismay learnt about war. His Uncle Thomas volunteered in August 1914 and enlisted in the Royal Field Artillery as a shoeing smith. Uncle Thomas was Ismay's favourite male relative, because he took the time to write personal letters to him:

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11 Mortimer, J.K. 'A Childhood in Wartime', unpublished manuscript, 1939-1941. See Appendix ii for full manuscript.

12 Ibid.



*These letters from the front, on thin, pink paper, sometimes four or five sheets of it- ill written and ill spelt, for he was no scholar, even by the standards of those days, but what was that to me? – were like nothing else in my life [...] A simple goodness shone through what he wrote, and from his face and in his handclasp when we met. It goes without saying that his death affected me deeply. I carried his last letter [...] until it wore thin and tattered at the folds.<sup>13</sup>*

The death of Uncle Thomas in French Flanders in August 1918 was a horrible blow and, as Ismay wrote: ‘added a personal note to the loathing of war which gradually filled me, and which made me in my teens declare myself a pacifist and potential conscientious objector.’<sup>14</sup> By the advent of World War Two though, his stance shifted as he decided that: ‘to fight, though with few if any illusions of glory, was better than to lose, for oneself and for the new generation, all that made life fine and outstanding.’<sup>15</sup>

## **2.2 He was beyond doubt the best school librarian I ever had<sup>16</sup> — W.A. Ismay’s school years**



Ismay attended the Queen Elizabeth Grammar School in Wakefield from 1921 to 1929 and had a very successful school career. Ismay’s Classical and English Master, Mr Perks, wrote a testimonial for Ismay in 1933 to support his applications for teaching jobs. Perks was fulsome in his praise for his former student, describing him as the best school librarian he’d had, as well as speaking highly of Ismay’s organizational skills in this area, mentioning his perseverance, determination, loyalty and public spiritedness.

**2-10** W.A. Ismay at the Queen Elizabeth Grammar School, Wakefield.

13 Mortimer, J.K. ‘A Childhood in Wartime’, unpublished manuscript, 1939–1941. See Appendix ii for full manuscript.

14 Ibid.

15 Ibid.

16 Testimonial for W.A. Ismay written by Mr M.T. Perks MA, B.Litt (Senior Classical and English Master at Wakefield Grammar School), dated 21 May 1933.



Copy of testimonial received from Mr.M.T.Perks, M.A.,B.Litt.,  
now Headmaster of Gillingham Grammar School, Dorset.

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The Grammar School,  
Gillingham,  
Dorset.

May 21st. 1933.

Mr.W.A.Ismay was a pupil of mine for several years when I was VI Form and Senior Classical and English Master at Wakefield Grammar School. During the whole of that time I found him most hard-working, careful and accurate in his work, of excellent character and exerting a good influence on the younger members of the form and very public spirited and ready to help in all forms of service. He was beyond doubt the best school librarian I ever had during the ten years in which I managed the school library and showed very real interest and power of organisation in that capacity. He was a very determined boy and I always admired his perseverance. I always got on with him personally extremely well and I am sure he would be a very loyal useful and popular member of any school staff.

(Signed) M.T.Perks, M.A., B.Litt.,  
(Oxon.)

H.M. Gillingham G.S.,Dorset.

2-11 W.A. Ismay testimonial dated 1933.

A further testimonial dated 1935, from the Headmaster of Wakefield Grammar School, echoes Perks opinion and the extent of Ismay's success as a student. Mr Spilsbury reveals that when Ismay left school, he was not only school librarian, but also head boy and editor of the school magazine.<sup>17</sup> In a further testimonial in 1937, Mr Spilsbury adds that Ismay was also Senior Prefect in his final year and remarks with uncanny foresight: 'I had always prophesied that he was marked out as a Librarian!'<sup>18</sup>

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17 Testimonial for W.A. Ismay written by Mr Spilsbury (Headmaster of Wakefield Grammar School), dated 18 September 1935.

18 Testimonial for W.A. Ismay written by Mr Spilsbury (Headmaster of Wakefield Grammar School), dated 21 September 1937.



2-12 W.A. Ismay's glasses.

Ismay's time at school was marred only by problems with his eyesight and his archive reveals new information concerning one of his use of a magnifying glass, which was one of his most memorable affectations:

*In my late teens (late nineteen twenties) (still at school) I began to have attacks lasting several hours which were not blindness exactly as I could see light alright! But everything around me went into dazzling revolving spirals so that I could no longer distinguish shapes or know where I was. The occurist said it was astigmatism and I had to wear glasses (which I was supposed to keep on all the time). After about six months I found I could see much better without these glasses than with them and gradually left them off (but I suppose they did their job and enabled the eye structure to adjust itself slightly). (I still get flashes of this effect in a minor form when my eyes are very tired.) I suppose it is this knowledge of how glasses alter one's eyes which is behind my avoidance of reading glasses and use of a magnifying-glass instead. I am sure spectacle wearers who suddenly adopt 'close' glasses late in life lose their long sight as a side-affect, which I would be very sorry to do.<sup>19</sup>*

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19 Extract from a letter from W.A. Ismay to Eric James Mellon (potter), dated 25 June 1985.

Clearly very intelligent, Ismay would go on to win an Oxbridge place, which he was unable to take up due to the expense.<sup>20</sup> Instead, he lived at home and studied Classics at the University of Leeds, 1929–1932. According to documentation in his archive, his ambition at that point was to be a teacher. After graduating in October 1932, Ismay completed a teacher training course at the university. As part of the course he studied the theory, history and principles of education and psychology, as well as taking classes in hygiene and drawing. He qualified as an elementary school teacher in September 1933, but despite showing great promise in his studies, surprisingly Ismay only managed to achieve a Third Class Honours Degree.<sup>21</sup> This was a source of great disappointment to him and his tutors. A testimonial from his Professor of Latin, Paul S. Noble, sheds light on what happened:

*This result was a great disappointment to me for Mr Ismay is of much better mental caliber than his degree would indicate. Unfortunately he suffered a great deal in health in his second and third years and it is to that fact that must be ascribed his failure to justify in the final examination the high hopes which his early performances held out.*<sup>22</sup>

The nature of his illness at this time is unclear, but may be related to his earlier eye problems. He had later told his friend Janette Haigh that his ambition had been to become a university librarian, but that his disappointing exam results had made that impossible to pursue.<sup>23</sup> The evidence in his archives however, suggests he had originally wanted to follow in his mother's footsteps as an elementary schoolteacher.

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20 Described in David Whiting's presentation at Ismay's memorial day held at the Yorkshire Museum on 8 September 2001.

21 Letter from the Board of Education to W.A. Ismay, dated 27 September 1933.

22 Testimonial for W.A. Ismay written by Professor Paul S. Noble MA (Professor of Latin, University of Leeds), dated 25 April 1933.

23 Described in David Whiting's presentation at Ismay's memorial day held at the Yorkshire Museum on 8 September 2001.



### **2.3 As a youngster I started a widely-based but fragmentary private natural history “museum”<sup>24</sup> — The young researcher and collector**

In 1986 Ismay was contacted by his cousin Ann. She was doing research into the Ismay family history and she asked him if he thought there was any truth to the family legend that Bruce Ismay was a cousin of their grandfather.<sup>25</sup> Ismay is an unusual name and is most associated with Bruce Ismay, the Chairman and Director of the White Star Line of steamships. Bruce Ismay became notorious as the highest-ranking official to survive the sinking of the *RMS Titanic* in 1912. Ismay replies that he has no proof: “The “Bruce Ismay” legend I know only as legend- I have no evidence but it is perfectly possible I imagine, in all the family reunification.”<sup>26</sup> Ismay goes on to reveal that after graduating from university in 1933, aged 23, he conducted some genealogical research into his family, tracing it back to 1800.<sup>27</sup> The research he carried out is an example of Ismay’s skill at gathering and organizing information, finding a subject of interest and exploring it in great depth, as he would later do with pottery.

Ismay’s research of his own family tree led him to look into the background of Charles Waterton (1782–1865) a naturalist, explorer and pioneering conservationist born at Walton Hall in Wakefield. It seems he may have been looking for evidence of a family connection to Waterton through his maternal line, the Pilkingtons. Ismay’s grandfather, William Pilkington, came from Sandal Magna, which was an ancient settlement predating the Domesday Book and, by the 19th century, was a fashionable suburb of Wakefield. The Pilkington Baronetcy of Stanley (near Wakefield) was created in 1635 and the names William, Thomas and Henry were common. Further genealogical research is required to establish if there is a connection with the Lancashire Ismays, the Lancashire Pilkingtons or the Pilkington Baronetcy. With regard to Charles Waterton, Ismay’s research into the Waterton genealogy revealed that there was a marriage between Rosamund Waterton and John Pilkington in 1576.

As part of his research, Ismay also constructed a drawing of Waterton’s family tree, which amongst others included Roman Catholic landowners, saints and English royalty, a number of whom Ismay annotated as being buried in a cemetery in Sandal near Wakefield, which was where he had traced his maternal line to. Ismay’s research was not solely related to genealogy, as he also gathered together copies of all Waterton’s

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24 Draft article written by W.A. Ismay, titled ‘What makes collectors collect?’, undated.

25 Letter from Ann Crabtree (W.A. Ismay’s cousin) to W.A. Ismay, dated 12 May 1986.

26 Draft letter from W.A. Ismay to Ann Crabtree (W.A. Ismay’s cousin), dated 12 May 1986.

27 Draft letter from W.A. Ismay to John Helliwell (W.A. Ismay’s cousin), 1972.

essays, along with cartoons and articles printed in newspapers. The scholarly nature of his activity, the reading and gathering of information to create a body of archival research, demonstrates the nature of his enquiring mind at an early age and is behaviour that can be seen repeatedly in the various projects he did throughout his life and particularly in his collecting. For example, Ismay attempted to gather copies of all of the written material produced by the potter Michael Cardew, to support the pots he had collected by him (see Chapter 3). Waterton published essays outlining his experiences as a traveller and as a collector. They reveal his enthusiasm and commitment to his subject and his desire to encourage others.<sup>28</sup> As a child, Ismay may have been inspired by the exciting and dynamic example set by Waterton, to begin collecting shells: ‘As a youngster I started a widely-based but fragmentary private natural history “museum”.’<sup>29</sup> Part of Ismay’s collection still exists alongside his archive at York Museums Trust and consists of several boxes of shells. Each specimen is individually bagged and accompanied by a label with published reference.



2-13 W.A. Ismay’s shell collection.

<sup>28</sup> Charles Waterton had assembled a large natural history collection, which he left to his former school, Stonyhurst College in Lancashire, though it is currently on loan to Wakefield Museum.

<sup>29</sup> Draft article written by W.A. Ismay, titled ‘What makes collectors collect?’, undated.



Letters should be addressed to :—  
THE DIRECTOR AND SECRETARY.

VICTORIA & ALBERT MUSEUM,  
SOUTH KENSINGTON, LONDON, S.W.7.

Telegraphic Address : VICALBUM. LONDON.

Telephone No. : KENSINGTON 6371.

24 February, 1937.

Dear Sir,

I beg to inform you that the numerous applications which we have received in connection with the appointments as Cataloguer in this Museum have been carefully examined, and a short-list of candidates have been selected to appear before the Selection Board.

I regret to say that you are not amongst those chosen.

Yours faithfully,

*Eric Maclagan*

Director and Secretary.

W.A. Ismay, Esq.



## 2.4 Full of ideas, but empty of achievement<sup>30</sup> — Job-hunting in the 1930s

After leaving university, Ismay began looking for work, hence the need for a number of testimonials from his former teachers. Three of the testimonials mention his appropriateness for a teaching career, so it is clear that this was initially where he had focused his job search. He struggled to find work though and wrote of his despair to his former school friend John Gledhill in 1935: 'I'm almost beginning to give up hope of getting a job, in the ordinary sense at any rate. I'm fed up to the teeth of applying for 'em.'<sup>31</sup> As well as looking for teaching roles, he began broadening his search and considered work in libraries and museums, applying for positions across the UK at Leicester Municipal Libraries, Museum and Art Gallery; the Brotherton Library at University of Leeds; University of Cambridge; the Victoria and Albert Museum; and even as far away as the Royal School Dungannon in Northern Ireland. This indicates his willingness and perhaps even a desire to leave Wakefield.

He found work in 1936 after being recommended by Mr C.L. Berry, the Director of Education in Wakefield, for the post of tutor to the 12-year-old son of a medical doctor; there is no record of how long the post was for.<sup>32</sup> Ismay also found work in February 1936, working as Secretary to the Wakefield British Friendly Approved Society and stayed in post for twelve months.<sup>33</sup> Ismay's archive includes documentation relating to Ismay's early life, such as letters written to friends and letters exchanged with relatives throughout his life and whilst the limitations of this research have meant I have only been able to study a small sample, there is great research potential there.



2-15 Inside cover of W.A. Ismay's 1934 scrapbook.

30 Draft letter from W.A. Ismay to John Gledhill (friend from school and university), dated 20 July 1935.

31 Ibid.

32 Letter from Mr C.L. Berry (Director of Education, City of Wakefield Education Committee) to W.A. Ismay, dated 20 July 1936.

33 Testimonial for W.A. Ismay written by Harry Hatton (Chairman of the Committee of Management, Wakefield British Friendly Approved Society), dated 11 February 1937.

A sample of these letters, dating from the 1930s, reveal that whilst looking for work, Ismay was: 'occupied spasmodically with various literary projects.'<sup>34</sup> The seriousness of his attempts to pursue a literary career has remained hidden and undocumented until this biographical research. Ismay was constantly reading and writing, compiling typed and handwritten text relating to his various cultural interests, which included poetry, literature, theatre, film and politics. He sometimes constructed scrapbooks with this material, such as one he completed in 1934. Inside the front cover he pasted images of writers he admired, these included: David Garnett from the Bloomsbury Group who wrote the curious novella *Lady into Fox*, Ernest Hemingway, poets W.B. Yeats and S.T. Coleridge, the music critic Ernest Newman and the author and poet Stella Benson.

In 1934 he wrote to Mr Ernest Rhys, Editor of Everyman's Library proposing that he would like to write a critical anthology of English sonnets. The Everyman's Library was founded by J.M. Dent and Company in 1906 with the aim of creating a 1,000 volume library of world literature that was affordable for everyone. In reply to his proposal, he received a letter saying Mr Rhys was very interested in the idea and asked that he send them a more detailed scheme:

*Would you, for instance, confirm your estimate that you could get Catullus, Propertius, and Juvenal in completely, as well as an Ovid selection, in one Everyman volume of, say, 384 pages? Would you also indicate a little more fully what translators you would make use of for these poets? And, as a test case, how would you deal with Ovid?*<sup>35</sup>

The letter goes on to caution that they understood that Ismay was concerned about being paid for any work and that their volumes may not be worth his while commercially, as they could only offer a fee of £25 (approximately £1250 in today's money).<sup>36</sup> They also express their reservations about entering into a commitment with a new writer and so the volume was never commissioned. Ismay enquired about work writing reviews for *News Chronicle*, but they turned him down, saying they got contacts from new writers every day and just didn't have the space to print them.<sup>37</sup>

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34 Draft letter from W.A. Ismay to John Gledhill (friend from school and university), dated 20 July 1935.

35 Extract from a letter from J.M. Dent (Editorial Department, Everyman's Library), dated 29 October 1934.

36 [http://www.moneysorter.co.uk/calculator\\_inflation.html](http://www.moneysorter.co.uk/calculator_inflation.html) accessed to establish amounts in December 2016.

37 Letter from Robert Lyons (*News Chronicle*) to W.A. Ismay, dated 10 December 1936.

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LESQUARE LONDON

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IN YOUR REPLY REFER  
TO

Editorial Dept.

W.A. Ismay Esq.,  
14, Welbeck Street,  
WAKEFIELD,  
YORKS.



October 29th 1934.

Dear Sir,

We must first apologise for the superfluous letter that we sent following the card. This was due to the fact that although your letter had been acknowledged the fact had not been noted on your letter.

We were retaining your letter until Mr. Ernest Rhys, the Editor of Everyman's Library, came in, when we would take the opportunity of discussing your proposal. Mr. Rhys came in last Friday, and, as we thought, he was very interested in your idea - so much so that he would be glad if you would submit a more detailed scheme. Would you, for instance, confirm your estimate that you could get Catullus, Propertius, and Juvenal in completely, as well as an Ovid selection, in one Everyman volume of, say, 384 pages? Would you also indicate a little more fully what translators you would make use of for these poets? And, as a test case, how would you deal with Ovid?

The disadvantages of which we spoke in our last letter <sup>were</sup> ~~were~~ not intended to convey a suggestion that we were "letting you down lightly," but are these. Firstly, an Everyman volume could never be worth your while from a purely commercial point of view - and we gather that this part of the question is very much in your mind. The editorial fees we are able to afford on these cheap issues are generally round about the £25 mark. Secondly, we are greatly concerned at the moment with securing a number of modern books for the Series, and although they do not preclude the possibility of our adding others you will appreciate the fact that we are not anxious to enter into additional commitments for the type of book you suggest just now; we already have quite a number that remain to be fulfilled, and these would normally receive precedence over a newcomer.

Yours truly,

J.M. DENT & SONS LTD.



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## VICTOR GOLLANCZ, LTD

14 Henrietta Street, Covent Garden, W.C.2

LONDON

17th September 1936.

Mr. W. A. Ismay,  
14, Welbeck Street,  
Wakefield, YORKS.

Dear Sir,

Very many thanks for your post card. I am afraid that there are not many particulars to give about the proletarian competition. The only details which are available are that the competition is open to any man or woman of British nationality, and the novel must reach us before August 1st 1937. For the winning novel the sum of £250, an advance on royalties, will be paid on the day of publication. Any book dealing sympathetically with the working classes is eligible.

Yours very truly,



In 1936 he had enquired about the *Proletarian Competition* organized by Victor Gollancz Ltd, which was open to any British author with a prize of £250 offered for the winning novel that dealt 'sympathetically with the working class'.<sup>38</sup> The prize, equivalent to £12,000 today, would have been attractive to an aspiring writer.<sup>39</sup> It is unclear whether Ismay entered the competition or not, but it seems likely as he certainly submitted a number of short stories for publication. One went to *The London Mercury* in 1936, who replied that they had read it with interest but didn't think it was suitable for their publication.<sup>40</sup> Around the same time he sent a story to the editor of *New Writing*.<sup>41</sup> The following year, 1937, Ismay again submitted work, poems this time, to *The London Mercury and Bookman*, with no success.<sup>42</sup> He also tried again with *New Writing*, sending them his short story titled 'A Private Universe'.<sup>43</sup> Ismay even tried his hand at writing a ghost story which he titled 'The Cheque', using his pseudonym J.K. Mortimer, which was submitted to and rejected by *Lilliput*.<sup>44</sup>

During Ismay's search for paid employment, he registered with Gabbitas Thring & Co. Ltd in London, one of the UK's most respected agencies for the recruitment of schoolmasters. The agency was founded in 1873 and had an impressive list of prospective teachers that included Evelyn Waugh, H.G. Wells and Sir John Betjeman.<sup>45</sup> The self-confidence demonstrated by Ismay applying and being accepted into such a respected agency is impressive and is in evidence throughout his life, not least when corresponding with significant figures from novelist and poet Cecil Day-Lewis to the potter Bernard Leach.

It was through his interest in poetry that Ismay came to correspond with Cecil Day-Lewis (1904–1972), who was a member of the Communist Party and would later be appointed Poet Laureate 1968–1972. A small group of letters from Day-Lewis to Ismay survive in Ismay's archive and date from 1934 to 1936.

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38 Letter from Victor Gollancz Ltd to W.A. Ismay, dated 17 December 1936.

39 [http://www.moneysorter.co.uk/calculator\\_inflation.html](http://www.moneysorter.co.uk/calculator_inflation.html) accessed to establish amounts in December 2016.

40 Letter from R.A. Scott-James (editor of *The London Mercury*) to W.A. Ismay, dated 2 December 1936.

41 Letter from John Lehmann (editor of *New Writing*) to W.A. Ismay, dated 21 December 1936.

42 Letter from R.A. Scott-James (editor of *The London Mercury and Bookman*) to W.A. Ismay, dated 9 March 1937.

43 Letter from John Lehmann (editor of *New Writing*) to W.A. Ismay, dated 6 April 1937.

44 The W.A. Ismay archive contains a typed manuscript of 'The Cheque' by J.K. Mortimer, with a rejection slip from the Editor of *Lilliput*, undated.

45 Letter from Gabbitas Thring & Co. Ltd to W.A. Ismay, dated 1 October 1936.

wednesday

4/4/35  
BOX COTTAGE,  
BAFFORD LANE,  
CHARLTON CROSS,  
GLOS.

Dear Ismay,

you must forgive me if this letter seems curt; it is only because I am so very busy at present and I have'nt time to write to anyone properly. Now, as to ~~our~~ setting up a correspondence: the trouble with me is the opposite of yours - I have too much to do. I teach in a school here, and the trying to carry on two occupations at once keeps me chasing about like a demented ant. Honestly, I could'nt undertake anything like a regular correspondence from the time reason alone - and apart from that I am a bad one; I never write to Auden and Spender, for instance, who are old friends of mine - except to make appointments or to exchange an occasional insult. I'm just plumb lazy, I'm afraid, and never think about poetry unless I happen to be writing it or get bullied into writing an article or something.

CHARLTON CROSS  
11 APR 1935  
This perhaps sounds a little arrogant to you - but it's not really 'frigid bluster', as Hopkins described the way of talking of Browning and Kingsley and the later Tennyson; it's just a fact. This does'nt mean that if you have some particular point in poetry you want discussed, I would'nt do my best to discuss it: I would: but my best would be meagre and probably unpunctual. But a Lamb and Coleridge correspondence - no; I am no Coleridge, and anyway he did'nt spend all his day teaching in a school !

I've not got under way with anything new since the last - having a rest: but I've got something just showing up over the horizon, which so far has the expression ( but not the feet, if you take me ) of Piers Plowman.

Do write freely to me if you like to - I shall like getting them, but don't expect anything better in return than this ridiculous assortment of dry-biscuits.

Yrs,  
Cecil Day-Lewis.



CONTINUING THE SERIES OF ARTICLES ON FREEDOM

WHAT IS FREEDOM?—4

WORKING AND LIVING

By Cecil Day Lewis

WHAT we mean by the word "freedom" depends in the last resort upon our own situation in life.

Up to a point this is true. The writer can work his own hours; he is not at the beck and call of a boss; he may, if he wishes, disregard the conventions.

has less freedom to criticise public figures and institutions than was given to the writers of a hundred years ago.

But he is not absolutely free. There is, now, and never has been, absolute freedom.

I BELIEVE that if the rabid idealists and the gross self-seekers do not between them succeed in destroying us, mankind can in the course of centuries achieve this absolute freedom.

this can be achieved, there is a great deal of work to be done—and some of it is work that will not appeal to the fastidious.

The English writer today, even though the shades of the concentration camp have not closed around him, is only relatively free.

He is bound, if he is a serious writer, by the self-imposed discipline of his own art. Serious writers always have been and always will be.

system under which he is living.

"Perfect freedom," someone said once, "is reserved for the man who lives by his own work and in that work does what he wants to do."

No, we must consider freedom first and foremost as the sanity of the man whose heart is in his work because his work satisfies the deepest needs of his heart.



under some strong social or religious bond. Even Shelley, the poet of revolt, wrote of "That sweet bondage which is freedom's self."

THE irresponsibility which sees freedom only in terms of a temporary anarchy is the result, I am convinced, of our modern conditions.

WHAT is essential is that both the burden on children as a too rigorous discipline. For freedom, carried beyond a certain point, may turn into its exact opposite, into the most lunatic tyranny.

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2-19 'Working and Living' article by Cecil Day-Lewis published in News Chronicle, 6 July 1939.

All of these letters are on the subject of Day-Lewis's writing; however, one more known letter from Day-Lewis to Ismay suggests a shared interest in Communism, as Day-Lewis addresses Ismay as Dear Comrade and signs off yours fraternally.

For Ismay, the main focus for their correspondence was poetry rather than politics. Again, demonstrating great confidence, he writes to Day-Lewis as an equal, claiming understanding of how he works and perhaps even a similarity in their styles.

46 An undated letter in the possession of David Whiting.
47 Draft letter from W.A. Ismay to Cecil Day-Lewis (writer and poet), undated but written in 1936.
48 https://www.theguardian.com/books/2009/feb/28/day-lewis-poetry retrieved January 2016.

## ON THE TWENTIETH ANNIVERSARY OF SOVIET POWER

By C. Day Lewis

TWENTY years ago  
That iron door of history slammed in the face  
Of all the proud oppressors, the men whose profit  
Had turned to mankind's loss; and still, more widely,  
The reverberations of that clanging hour  
Like an October gale pulse through the world,  
Stripping dead wood from Time's forest, and ripping  
The disguise from the faces that so falsely smiled  
To work us mischief.

We remember now  
Lenin. His mind like an oxy-acetylene flame  
Sheared through the crust of centuries, laid bare  
History's secret plans and the full regalia  
Of man's long-exiled love. He was loved by the people.  
With him, we remember those to whom his words were  
"Go hungry, work illegally, be anonymous";  
Who in no comfortable bed conceived  
Our future, but in agony and contempt.  
Today we look towards the red flag waving  
Over millions, our living comrades, and over many  
Whose unregarded bodies paved the way  
Into a better time, whose hopes firm-rooted  
Are shade and avenue for our marching feet.

Twenty years have passed  
Since a cry, All Power to the Soviets! shook the world.  
We have seen new cities, arts and sciences,  
A real freedom, a justice that flouts not nature,  
Springing like corn exuberant from the rich heart  
Of a happier people. We have seen their hopes take off  
From solid ground and confidently fly  
Out to the mineral north, the unmapped future.  
U.S.S.R.! The workers of every land  
And all who believe man's virtue inexhaustible  
Greet you today: you are their health, their home,  
The vision's proof, the lifting of despair.  
Red Star, be steadfast above this treacherous age!  
We look to you, we salute you.

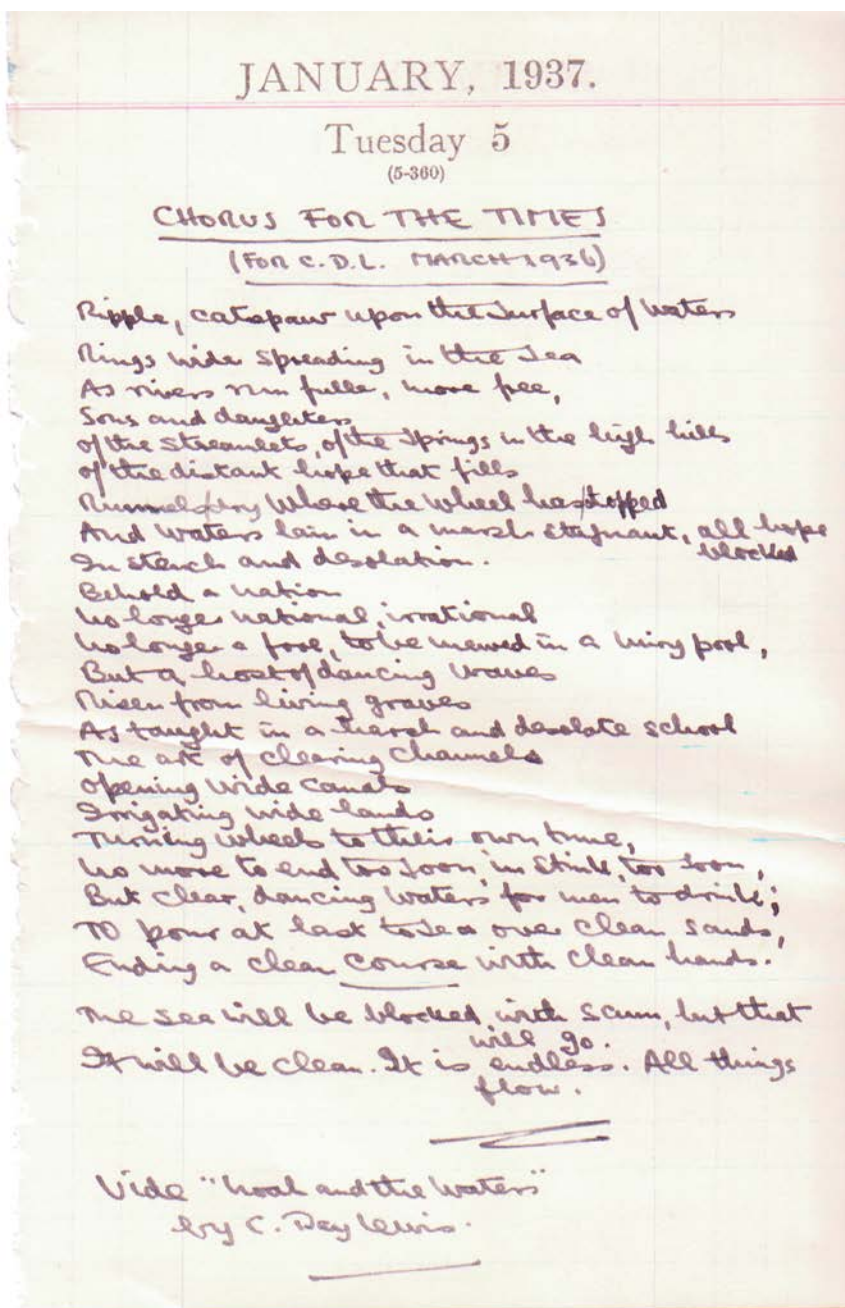
There are others—  
Fear's evil eye, the twitching hand of reaction—  
Pointed your way. And, let us now declare it,  
Your republic, Soviet Russia, is not contained  
Between the Arctic floes and sunny Crimea:  
Rather, its frontiers run from the plains of China  
Through Spain's racked heart and Bermondsey barricades  
To the factory-gates of America. We say,  
Wherever instinct or reason tells mankind  
To pluck from its heart injustice, poverty, traitors,  
Your frontiers stand, where the batteries are unmasked  
Of those who would shatter Life sooner than yield it  
To its natural heirs, your frontiers stand: wherever  
Man cries against the oppressors "They shall not pass,"  
Your frontiers stand. Be sure we shall defend them.



I sent these as a sort of miniature birthday present, not because I thought they were worth very much, but because it occurred to me you might be interested to see the effect of being unemployed and employed, and of reading poetry and hence turning to politics. Prior to having the thing brought home to me by my own predicament, I'd been vaguely "left" ("liberal", I suppose) in politics, but had had most of my time, apart from such work and refueling as was necessary, taken up in the pleasant pursuits of reading (and scribbling a bit in a dilettante sort of way), listening to music, looking at pictures, walking on the moors and arguing with friends – mainly about aesthetics, and morals-up-in-the-air.<sup>49</sup>

Ismay wrote hoping to strike up a correspondence on the subject of literature and poetry, however Day-Lewis appears to have written back on only a few occasions and in one particular letter he acknowledges that he is a bad correspondent (see image 2–18). To Ismay, the reciprocal exchange of letters was *quid pro quo*, and replying to a letter he received or sent was good manners and expected (in letters to family, he often refers to it being his turn to write). The intermittent responses from Day-Lewis, which were mainly short letters, may explain the short period of their correspondence.

In 2011 Day-Lewis's son, actor Daniel Day-Lewis, gave his father's archive to the Bodleian Library in Oxford. The archive is not yet accessible but an initial search by archivists employed to catalogue it has not found any further correspondence between Ismay and Day-Lewis.<sup>50</sup>



2-21 'Chorus for the times', poem by W.A. Ismay, 1936.

49 Draft letter from W.A. Ismay to Cecil Day-Lewis (writer and poet), undated but written in 1936.

50 Email enquiry from Helen Walsh to Susan Thomas (Digital Archivist/Project Manager at the Bodleian Library, Oxford), 2 April 2013.



The worldwide depression caused by the Wall Street Crash in 1929, during the decade leading up to World War Two, was a period of great hardship in the UK. It was during this decade that the Labour Party came to power for the first time, though in a period of high unemployment they soon made themselves very unpopular by cutting unemployment benefit. Smaller political parties emerged offering radical solutions to the country's problems, one of which was the British Communist Party. They were one of the more successful parties, going on to gain a seat in Parliament in 1935. The Spanish Civil War and rise of Fascism during that period, alongside what appeared to be the failure of Capitalism in comparison to the little understood Soviet Union, were amongst the main issues that led to the movement of people to the political left. Curator and writer David Whiting described Ismay as having a strong social and political conscience and convictions, and this is in evidence throughout his life.<sup>51</sup>

No record of Ismay's name (nor his pseudonym) has so far been found in the membership lists of The Communist Party of Great Britain. However evidence of Ismay's interest in Communism can be seen in letters regarding the books he was buying in the 1930s from The Workers Bookshop Ltd in London (an outlet of Victor Gollancz Ltd, a publisher with interest in left-wing and socialist writing). Their titles included *Freud and Marx* by R. Osborn and *The Condition of Britain* by G.D.H Cole.<sup>52</sup> Ismay became a member of the Left Book Club, which was launched by Victor Gollancz, Stafford Cripps and John Strachey in 1936, and issued books monthly and a magazine for discussion at meetings across the UK. In 1937 he applied to transfer his membership to the Wakefield branch of the Left Book Club.<sup>53</sup> Ismay attended meetings in Wakefield and convened some of the sessions and led discussions. For example, in 1937 Ismay was due to lead a discussion of Arthur Koestler's book *Spanish Testament* (a description of experiences in the Spanish Civil War) but had to withdraw due to illness.<sup>54</sup> Ismay's friend Peter Rosenfield stepped in to lead the discussion on his behalf. They were both involved in the Yorkshire Joint Committee for Spanish Relief and the pair remained friends for many years. Further research of his early archive, particularly his correspondence with friends made at university, may reveal more of his political life and opinions, but literature does appear to have been at the heart of his activity in this area.

Ismay's career in libraries began in 1938, when he joined the West Riding County Library Service as part-time librarian-in-charge at Stanley, just three and a half miles north of Wakefield. His library career was only interrupted by the advent of World War Two, when he was called up for service on the 5 March 1942 and released on 22 June 1946. He served for four years in the Royal Corps of Signals and, according to

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51 Described in David Whiting's presentation at Ismay's Memorial Day held at the Yorkshire Museum on 8 September 2001.

52 Letter from the Workers Bookshop Ltd to W.A. Ismay, dated 30 March 1937.

53 Letter from the Workers Bookshop Ltd to W.A. Ismay, dated 19 August 1937.

54 Letter from Peter Rosenfield (friend) to W.A. Ismay, dated 11 January 1938.

his officers, his performance was exemplary and they praised him for his efficiency, accuracy and intelligence. The potters Rosemary Wren and Peter Crotty recounted a story Ismay had told them relating to his role in the Royal Signals, which offers justification for the praise he received:

*During the last war he was in the Signals, attached to GHQ in India. He of course had to know all the top secret code words, and one of his favourite stories concerned the memorable day when the message 'Mousetrap!' came through. He duly reported this to – was it Allenby? who was in command. But neither he nor anyone else appreciated what this meant, and Bill, sworn to secrecy, was unable to enlighten them. So for some time, until the appropriate command arrived, our Bill was the only man in all India to know that the War in Europe was over!<sup>55</sup>*

RELEASE LEAVE CERTIFICATE Army Form X 202/A

Army No. 23860217 Present Rank SGT

Surname (Block Letters) ISMAJ

Christian Name/s William Alfred

Unit, Regt. or Corps R Signals

Date of: \*Last enlistment.....

\* Calling up for military service..... 1. 1. 1914

\* Strike out whichever is inapplicable.

(a) Trade on enlistment..... Lithographer

(b) Trade courses and trade tests passed..... operative litho 2 class

(c) Service Trade..... operative litho 2 class

(d) Any other qualification for civilian employment..... any approved trade

Military Conduct: excellent

Testimonial: Some holiday has served in my Unit for over three years & has performed various clerks jobs extremely efficiently of which the lacks none. He is a steady worker, is smart and has a good character. His military conduct has been exemplary for a position of responsibility and intelligence.

Place..... GHQ Date 20 APR 1946

Officer's Signature..... [Signature]

Signature of Soldier..... [Signature]

\* Army Education Record (including particulars under (a), (b), (c) and (d) below).—  
This Section will not be filled in until the receipt of further War Office Instructions.

|                     |             |                                 |                            |
|---------------------|-------------|---------------------------------|----------------------------|
| (a) Type of course. | (b) Length. | (c) Total hours of instruction. | (d) Record of achievement. |
| (i)*                |             |                                 |                            |
| (ii)*               |             |                                 |                            |
| (iii)*              |             |                                 |                            |
| (iv)*               |             |                                 |                            |

\* Instructors will insert the letter "I" here to indicate that in their case the record refers to courses in which they have acted as Instructors.

Signature of Unit Education Officer.....

POSITION OF SOLDIER ON TERMINATION OF RELEASE LEAVE

1. A regular soldier with Reserve service to complete will be transferred to the Royal Army Reserve, and will receive Reserve pay until his period of Reserve service has been completed. If on that date the Emergency still exists, he will cease to draw Reserve pay, and will then be transferred to Army Reserve Class "Z" (unpaid).

2. A regular soldier who has completed his Colour and Reserve service engagement will be transferred to Army Reserve Class "Z" (unpaid).

3. All other soldiers will be transferred to Army Reserve Class "Z" or Class "Z" (C).

SPECIAL NOTE—Army Reservists are liable to recall to the colours, if necessary, during the continuing period of the Emergency.

Notes: (i) Further details of service and of medals to which entitled may be had on application to O/c Records, accompanied by the applicant's A.B.54, Part I.

(ii) If this certificate is lost or mislaid, no duplicate can be obtained.

(iii) Any alterations of the particulars given in this certificate may render the holder liable to Prosecution under the Seamen's and Soldiers' False Characters Act, 1906.

THE ABOVE-NAMED MAN PROCEEDED ON RELEASE LEAVE ON THE DATE SHOWN IN THE MILITARY DISPERSAL UNIT STAMP OPPOSITE.

N.B.—A certificate showing the date of transfer to the appropriate Army Reserve (A.F. X 202/B) will be issued by the Officer i/c Record Office.

Military Dispersal Unit Stamp.  
No. 2  
22 JUN 1946  
YORK

2-22 W.A. Ismay release document which is stamped 22 June 1946.

<sup>55</sup> Letter from Rosemary Wren (potter) and Peter Crotty (potter) to the trustees of the W.A. Ismay Collection, dated 4 September 2001.





2-23 W.A. Ismay in the Royal Signals in 1943.

After demobilization Ismay was based at the West Riding County Library Service headquarters in Wakefield from 1948 until 1951. Alongside working as Assistant Librarian, he studied for and took Library Association examinations and was awarded his Associate membership of the Library Association (ALA) in 1950. Ismay was apparently very irritated that in order to become a librarian he had to take an examination, as he felt his university degree should be enough.<sup>56</sup>

In 1951, Ismay was promoted to Branch Librarian at Featherstone, six miles east of Wakefield, remaining there until 1955 when he was appointed Branch Librarian at Hemsworth, seven and a half miles south east of Wakefield, where he stayed until he retired in 1975. Hemsworth's main industry until

the 1980s was coal mining and it was said that support for the Labour Party was so strong that at elections, their votes were not counted but weighed.<sup>57</sup>

In an interview with local press on the occasion of his retirement, his ambition and passion for creating the best possible library service for the local community is clear:

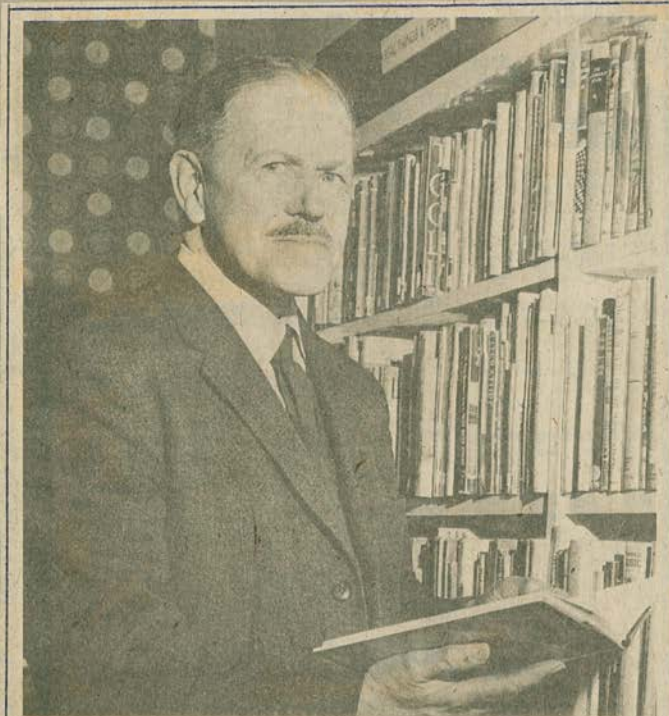
*Mr Ismay's biggest disappointment over the years has been the failure of the authorities to provide a larger building. 'We have 17,000 books here, but we can't house these books in the way we would like. And we have only inadequate reference facilities. When I first came here, I was promised that within ten years we should have a specially designed building, but then funds were never available.'*<sup>58</sup>

56 Conversation between Alex McErlain and W.A. Ismay, recounted to Helen Walsh, 5 January 2016.

57 [http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/english/static/vote2001/results\\_constituencies/constituencies/311.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/english/static/vote2001/results_constituencies/constituencies/311.stm) retrieved on 5 January 2016.

58 Article in the *Hemsworth & South Elmsall Express*, 10 April 1975.





Mr W. Ismay.

(984)

From the Hemsworth & South Elmsall  
Express - 10th April 1975

## Spent his working life among books

A familiar face will be missing from the Hemsworth scene after this week. Mr W. A. Ismay, Branch Librarian at Hemsworth, retired yesterday.

Mr Ismay, who lives in Wakefield, was educated at Wakefield Grammar School and took a degree in Classics at Leeds University. He joined the West Riding County Library Service in 1938.

Beginning his library career at Stanley, he spent four years in the army during the war, then returned to Stanley after demobilisation.

He then moved to Library Headquarters at Wakefield before being appointed Branch Librarian at Featherstone in 1952. He moved to Hemsworth as Branch Librarian in 1955.

Mr Ismay's biggest disappointment over the years has been the failure of the authorities to provide a larger building. "We have 17,000 books here, but we can't house these books in the way we would like. And we have only inadequate reference facilities.

"When I first came here, I was promised that within ten years we should have a specially-designed building, but then funds were never available." He now views the library facilities at Kinsley with some envy. "Kinsley and Fitzwilliam are a smaller community, but they have better library facilities.

### Biggest shake-up

When asked about the changes he has seen in the last 20 years, Mr Ismay is quick to concede that the biggest change was the reorganisation of last year, but he is not yet certain whether it was a good change or not.

"It was the biggest shake-up of all, but it's going to be some time before we can see the result of it."

He makes the point that, while the problem for most people in the reorganisation was that the service got bigger, for libraries it was just the opposite. "We used to be part of the full County Library, now we are part of the smaller Wakefield District."

"Hemsworth is supposed to be the centre of an area, but the Hemsworth headquarters is still housed at Wakefield."

Mr Ismay's successor is Mrs Helen Hill, aged 23. She was educated at Selby Grammar School and in the department of librarianship at Leeds Polytechnic. Her previous appointment was as school librarian at Hope High School, in Salford.

2-24 Article on W.A. Ismay's retirement published in the *Hemsworth & South Elmsall Express*, 1975.

Ismay was an important and well-respected figure professionally, as J.L. Feiweles (Chief Librarian for Wakefield Metropolitan District Council) wrote following Ismay's retirement:

*I feel sincere thanks for such long, devoted and conscientious service must be put on record, particularly since in your case it spans the lifetime of at least two authorities. The West Riding County Library was, of course, a library service with the highest national, and even international, reputation. The esteem in which it was held by its users and by the onlooker was in no small measure due to the skill, and above all, to the enthusiasm and application of people like yourself.. I can assure you that you can look back to a good job well done which has contributed considerably to enlightenment and pleasure of many readers.<sup>59</sup>*

59 Letter from J.L. Feiweles (Chief Librarian for Wakefield Metropolitan District Council) to W.A. Ismay, dated 10 April 1975.

The importance of literature to Ismay is undeniable. During World War Two, whilst serving as a signaller in the Royal Signals, he wrote to his parents asking them to send him reading material if they can, suggesting that they send:

*[...] unbulky, light things with a fair amount of print in, such as the "World's Classics" series- and not off my own shelves, please, as they'll have to be passed on after reading, and even in my hands can't be kept very clean; also the Penguin New Writing No.16 onwards.<sup>60</sup>*

Ismay also kept himself entertained and his mind sharp whilst away by taking part in quizzes, at which he excelled. His team, the *Quiz Bees*, made it to the final twice but were knocked out on both occasions. The second time it happened, Ismay wrote to his parents, outraged, because the opposing team had been given their own questions to answer but didn't own up to it.<sup>61</sup>

Coincidentally, Cecil Day-Lewis joined the Royal Corps of Signals in March 1941, reporting to Catterick Barracks in Yorkshire, though after only one day, he was called back to London. Ismay did not sign up until 1942, so their paths did not cross at that point. Ismay's first overseas posting in the Royal Signals was to India and before he left, his mother wrote to him on his birthday:

*Last year I was unable to write to you, or see you, or send you a gift on April 10<sup>th</sup>. This year I can do all three, but under such sad circumstances that I don't know what to say and can only pray that God's richest blessing may rest upon you and that he will guide you and keep you in the right way of guard from all evil. At the moment everything looks very dark and dreary, but we shall have to meet it as bravely as we can and trust that much brighter and happier days are in store. And now my son, best wishes for the coming year. And if we have to be separated, as so many are these days, try to keep up a good courage and come back to us a better man if that is possible, after your ordeal. Best of love from both father and mother, who will try not to fail you.<sup>62</sup>*

Within days of Ismay leaving, his father became ill with appendicitis. He was taken into hospital for an operation and, after some days of deterioration, passed away on 16 April 1943. Ismay's mother wrote to him to break the news:

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60 Letter from W.A. Ismay to his parents, dated 22 November 1942.

61 Ibid.

62 Letter from Sarah and Alfred Ismay (Ismay's parents) to W.A. Ismay, dated 9 April 1943.

*My dear Will,*

*I don't know how to tell you the dreadful news, but I have wired twice to try and get in touch with you, once on wed, when your father was taken worse, and again yesterday when he passed peacefully away. I can only say to you as I am saying to myself, 'May God help us to bear this great sorrow.' It is an awful experience to feel so much alone. It would have been easier to bear if we could have been together, but we shall just have to look forward to the time when we can meet again. I am desolate indeed and what I should have done without Aunt Edith I don't know.*

*Father passed quite peacefully away and the last words he said were 'Lily'. I said 'Do you want to kiss me' and he said 'yes'. So I kissed him. The he said 'Willie' and I kissed him for you. So you were his last thought.*

*Just keep us both in your thoughts and I will pray for you in your sorrow as you must for me in mine.*

*Yours Mother.<sup>63</sup>*

By this time, Ismay was on a troop ship heading to India and he did not receive the letter until 19 July 1943, more than three months later. His mother sent him a further seven letters trying to find out if he had received her news. The letters are a heartrending record of her distress and grief. She was growing increasingly upset at not having a response and in her concern that her letters would reach him out of sequence, repeated her sad news in each one. In her letters she makes reference to him being her reason to carry on and how much she longs to hear from him. She writes that she has had a photo of him enlarged and it helps her feel less alone. Ismay received all of her letters on the 19 July 1943 and numbered each one and annotated each with the date they had been posted and the date he received them. In one letter, his mother describes the funeral (and encloses a newspaper cutting), informing him that it was a large one and showed what great respect his father was held in. The Special Constabulary formed a guard of honour from the cemetery gates and many wreaths were left.

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63 Letter from Sarah Ismay (Ismay's mother) to W.A. Ismay, dated 17 April 1943.



The loss of her husband whilst Ismay was away had been extremely difficult for his mother, making her cling to her only son, as their small, close family unit was irreparably damaged. At the end of the war, Ismay returned to 14 Welbeck Street, to live with her and support her whilst continuing his career as a librarian. Any thoughts of moving away and looking for work elsewhere were forgotten.

War, particularly World War Two, had an enormous impact on Ismay. His time in the Royal Signals was punctuated by the loss of his father, but also by fear from the situations he was thrown into. In a letter to potter Eric James Mellon, he recounts the experience of leaving Liverpool in a convoy of troop ships, which was then ambushed:

*We had to go round the Cape, as passage via the Mediterranean was not possible at the time, but were located by a U-boat pack and made it out, from the time elapsed that we must have been pretty well over to America, taking evasive action, instead of proceeding down the coast of Africa. Some ships were sunk, but we never knew what or how many.<sup>64</sup>*

Unsurprisingly, he was disturbed by the outbreak of the Gulf War in 1990 and was particularly incensed by the nature of the media coverage it received and the public reaction, which was so different from his experience in World War Two:

*"I am being driven up the wall in the last couple of weeks, not so much by the Gulf War as by the media and public reaction to it. I have lived through two much wider spread wars and taken part in the second one, without experiencing manic behaviour of this kind. I can only put it down to the proliferation of the media."<sup>65</sup>*

In a further addition to his letter a few days later he vents his frustration again:

THE DEATH took place last Friday of Mr A. Ismay, of 14, Welbeck Street, at the age of 65, following an operation for appendicitis, at the Clayton Hospital. The interment took place at the Wakefield Cemetery, on Tuesday afternoon. Mr Ismay had been a member of the Wakefield Special Constabulary throughout the present war, and had a fine record of attendance. Sergt. Quinn and other members of the Special Constabulary, in uniform, bore the coffin, and Inspector Curtis represented the City Police Force. Mr Ismay had been Treasurer of the Wakefield Liberal Association for many years, and Mr J. A. Yonge, M.A., J.P., represented that Association at the funeral. Mr Ismay was connected with the Wakefield British Friendly Union Society, being secretary of the Approved Society and Steward of the Parent Society for 35 years. There were many beautiful wreaths. He leaves a widow and a son. The latter (in H.M. Forces) was on leave when his father was taken ill, but was recalled to his unit, and it proved impossible to get in touch with him when Mr Ismay had a relapse a few days after the operation.

DEATH OF MR. H. S. BAYLIE.

2-25 Newscutting about Alfred Ismay's funeral.

64 Extract from a letter from W.A. Ismay to Eric James Mellon (potter), 3 March 1994.

65 Letter from W.A. Ismay to Eric James Mellon (potter), 22 January 1991.

*It's both horrible to listen to and seems all wrong (unless it's mostly lies anyway), as on the face of it, it is instant top secret war news available to the enemy, which in earlier days the military would have gone to all lengths to conceal until the action was determined. Also, it seems a more sensible idea to maintain morale by having everything as normal as possible, in between reasonable bulletins where real information could be given. But according to Radio 4's main channel, nothing except the war is happening, and the slightest rumour is newsworthy and to be discussed frantically by "experts" who constantly contradict each other.<sup>66</sup>*

When Ismay made mention of his experience during World War Two, particularly the time he spent stationed in India and China, it is clear he enjoyed spending his spare time exploring and he was often reprimanded by his officers for spending too much time with the locals.<sup>67</sup> On one occasion in India he went on a tiger hunt with locals, his role being to shine a torch in the tiger's eyes if they found one (he was understandably very pleased they didn't encounter one on that occasion). Another time he recalled staying in a hut in a village and not discovering until the morning that there was a basket of snakes beneath his bed.<sup>68</sup> He also credits this period as the beginnings of his interest in handmade pottery.



2-26 W.A. Ismay and his Royal Corps of Signals unit.

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66 Ibid.

67 Recollection of Eric James Mellon (potter) of conversations with W.A. Ismay in the 1990s, recounted to Helen Walsh in 2009.

68 Ibid.

**2.5 I think it might be rather fun for both of us if we started a book-of-the-month club with a selection committee of one and a membership of one<sup>69</sup> — Romance and relationships**

Ismay remained a bachelor, despite his mother's hopes that he would eventually marry their neighbour, Edith Pettinger. Pettinger wrote to Ismay when they were both 78 recalling this:

*I often wondered why you never married. I believe at one time your mother and mine were hoping you and I would make a 'go' of it!!! That's a long time ago. I remember you once wrote me a letter. I think you were a bit sweet on me at one time! But I hated boys then!<sup>70</sup>*

Although Ismay never married, in 1941 he developed strong feelings for the singer, striptease artiste and actress Phyllis Dixey (1914–1964), who billed herself as the 'girl the Lord Chamberlain banned.'<sup>71</sup> In an attempt to illustrate how big a star Dixey was at the time, Ismay's trustee Alan Firth described her as: 'the Madonna of the day'.<sup>72</sup> Dixey was credited with bringing American burlesque performances to the UK to entertain the troops. She sang, danced, appeared in two films and later rented Whitehall Theatre and set up her own company, where she choreographed and appeared in most of the performances. She received lots of press coverage and a short lifestyle film portraying a day in her life was made by British Pathé, titled *Meet Phyllis Dixey* (released 10 October 1944).<sup>73</sup>

Ismay's archive includes correspondence between him and Dixey which first came to light when his trustees cleared his house following his death in 2001. None of his trustees or social circle were aware of this aspect of his early life, though he mentioned



2-27 Photograph of Phyllis Dixey, autographed To W.A.I.

69 Draft letter from W.A. Ismay to Phyllis Dixey (singer, striptease artiste and actress), undated but probably early 1940s.

70 This was how Phyllis Dixey billed herself on advertising for her stage shows in the 1920s and 1930s.

71 This was how Phyllis Dixey billed herself on advertising for her stage shows in the 1920s and 1930s.

72 Conversation between Alan Firth (collector and trustee of the W.A. Ismay Collection) and Helen Walsh, 4 August 2011.

73 <http://www.britishpathe.com/video/meet-phyllis-dixey/query/meet+phyllis+dixey>



# WHITEHALL THEATRE

Grand Continuous Revue

Direction: ALFRED ESDAILE

ALFRED ESDAILE  
(For Esdaile Productions, Ltd.)  
presents

PHYLLIS DIXEY

in

## New Spectacular Glamour Revue "STEP OUT with PHYLLIS!"

Devised and Staged by Phyllis Dixey and Alfred Esdaile  
Lyrics and Music arranged by Jack Tracy  
Additional Songs, adaptation by Richard Young, Ken Bennett  
Ensembles by Marianne Silver

- 1 **"STEP OUT WITH PHYLLIS!"**  
Into the Land of Enchantment! Prologue spoken by  
KEN BENNETT  
SALUTE TO PARIS—Dance by ANDREIEVA BALLET  
(Principal Dancers—REYMOND & SETON)  
"STEP HIGH, STOOP LOW," JOAN WAYNE and  
THE WHITEHALL "STEP-OUT" LOVELIES  
THE WHITEHALL ENCHANTRESSES introduce  
THEMSELVES  
"BOW BELLS" Swinging BROADWAY MELODY  
Red Head VERA BRADLEY  
("Britain's Dancing Daughter")  
Xylophone Virtuoso ... CON STEWART  
HIGHLAND RHAPSODY ... ANDREIEVA BALLET
- 2 **CLIFF and MORENY** Comedy Acrobatics
- 3 **"SNUFFY" JACK TRACY**  
Assisted by ROSALIE EDWARDS  
CRAZY, BUT PAY NO ATTENTION!
- 4 **A SNOWLAND SERENADE**  
"A SNOWFLAKE IS A LONELY HEART."  
Sung by KEN BENNETT  
(Lyrics and Music by Ken Bennett)  
THE SNOWMAIDENS  
The WHITEHALL "STEP-OUT" LOVELIES  
SNOW GARLANDS  
The Dancing Skaters ... ANDREIEVA BALLET
- 5 **MARIORA** The Amazing Girl Juggler

During the interval visit the fully Licensed Bars in the Stalls and Circle

- 6 **"SNUFFY" JACK TRACEY** and his  
TROMBONE  
"A Musician"—Pure and Simple!
- 7 **PHYLLIS DIXEY**  
"England's Queen of Glamour"  
(1) "HUSBANDS"  
(2) "MINISTRY OF LABOUR"  
(3) "LADDER OF FAME"  
(4) "GOOD-NIGHT"

INTERVAL

- 8 **THE SENSATIONAL MURRAY**  
(AUSTRALIAN ESCAPOLOGIST)  
"Colossus of Mystery"
- 9 **THE "W.I.F.F.S" and the "W.A.A.F.S."**  
"SNUFFY," Vera Bradley, D. Harris, Joan Wayne
- 10 **THE RETURN OF 'SHE'**

Presentation by Phyllis Dixey, inspired by Rider Haggard's Return of "SHE."  
The Story is of a beautiful Queen who reigned for 2,000 Years, and remained forever beautiful. She found the secret of Eternal beauty by dancing in the flames. But, alas, in the end, the Flame God claimed the Beautiful Queen.

THE QUEEN ... PHYLLIS DIXEY  
The Dancing Slaves ... ANDREIEVA BALLET  
Bearers of the Treasures  
The WHITEHALL "STEP-OUT" LOVELIES  
The Sutor ... KEN BENNETT  
(Narrative adaptation by KEN BENNETT—Music by  
LEO T. CROKE)

**THE RETURN OF "SHE" TO THE CAVES**  
Pillar of Flame ... PHYLLIS DIXEY  
Dance of the Flames by ANDREIEVA BALLET

- 11 **D. HARRIS presents Mrs. 'ARRIS**  
The Whitehall Charlady
- 12 **"Dr. SNUFFY"—JACK TRACEY**  
(Assisted by ROSALIE EDWARDS)  
"QUACK! QUACK!"

- 13 **THE DRESDEN DOLL**  
An 18th Century Romance  
THE LOVER'S INTRODUCTION—PHYLLIS DIXEY  
The Dancing Dolls Minuet  
THE ANDREIEVA BALLET and  
The WHITEHALL "STEP-OUT" LOVELIES  
THE DRESDEN DOLL—PHYLLIS DIXEY  
THE LOVER'S FAREWELL  
Au Revoir—LAND OF ENCHANTMENT  
"STEP OUT WITH PHYLLIS"

END OF THE SHOW

Something New!

### "PHYLLIS IN CENSORLAND"

The story, in humorous verse and exquisitely coloured photographs, of Phyllis Dixey versus the Censor in her struggle for fame.

Send 3/- to include postage, etc., to:  
THE CAMERA STUDIES CLUB,  
31, King Street - - London, W.C.2.

WHITEHALL THEATRE ORCHESTRA  
under the direction of Martin Kett

Microphones supplied by Bishop Sound Corpn. Ltd.

|                                |             |  |
|--------------------------------|-------------|--|
| House Manager ...              | For Esdaile | WOOLF SAUNDERS   |
| Press Representative ...       | Productions | H. C. G. STEVENS   |
| Musical Adviser ...            | Ltd.        | MARK DEMBINA   |
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| Chief Engineer ...             |             | C. F. ASHMAN   |
| Box Office: WH1tehall 6692 ... |             | A. R. BRITTEN  |

The management reserve the right to alter or change items in this programme at their discretion, or by reason of circumstances beyond their control.

#### THE MAGAZINE PROGRAMME

Owing to the paper restrictions order, we are compelled to suspend our usual Magazine features, but they will be resumed as soon as normal publication becomes possible.  
Grantley & Co., Ltd., 63/65, Piccadilly, London, W.1.

In accordance with the requirements of the Lord Chamberlain.—1.—The public may leave at the end of the performance by all exit doors and such doors must at that time be open. 2.—All gangways, passages and staircases must be kept entirely free from chairs or any other obstruction. 3.—Persons shall not in any circumstances be permitted to stand or sit in any of the gangways intersecting the seating, or to sit in any other of the gangways. If standing be permitted in the gangways at the sides and rear of the seating, it shall be strictly limited to the numbers indicated in the notices exhibited in those positions. 4.—The safety curtain must be lowered and raised in the presence of each audience.

March 16th, 1943.

#### AFTERNOON TEA

A Special Service of Tea (freshly made for each order) is served at Matinees in all Saloons and in the Auditorium

To Facilitate Service  
Visitors are Kindly Re-  
quested to Order in  
Advance

#### ASK AT THE BAR for

**Schweppes**

SODA WATER

TONIC WATER

GINGER ALE, etc.

Table Waters of distinction  
since 1790

2-28 Whitehall Theatre programme.

on rare occasions a woman his mother would never have approved of.<sup>74</sup> Ismay's trustee, potter Jane Hamlyn referred to the correspondence in a tribute to him on his memorial day, suggesting he fell in love with Dixey not realizing she was married and broke off the correspondence when he found out she was.<sup>75</sup>

Ismay was interested in the subject of censorship, particularly in relation to stage nudity. He often attended theatre

<sup>74</sup> Conversation with Alan Firth (collector and former Ismay trustee) and Helen Walsh in 2013.

<sup>75</sup> 'A Tribute to Bill Ismay' delivered at the Yorkshire Museum by Jane Hamlyn (potter and trustee of the W.A. Ismay Collection), 8 September 2001.

There comes a time  
in every performer's life  
when he or she must realise that

**ENVY IS IGNORANCE**  
and  
**IMITATION IS SUICIDE**

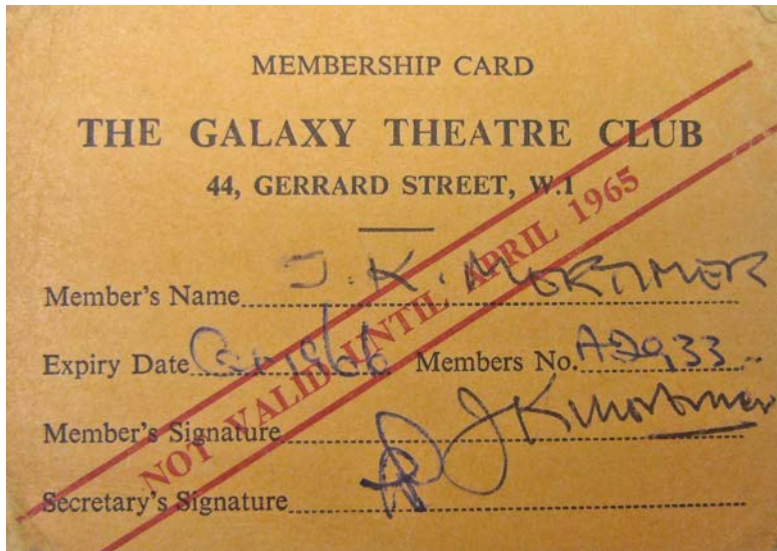
There is ONLY ONE

**PHYLLIS  
DIXEY**

UNTIL FURTHER NOTICE  
WHITEHALL THEATRE, W

2-29 Advert for Phyllis Dixey at the Whitehall Theatre, 23 July 1942.

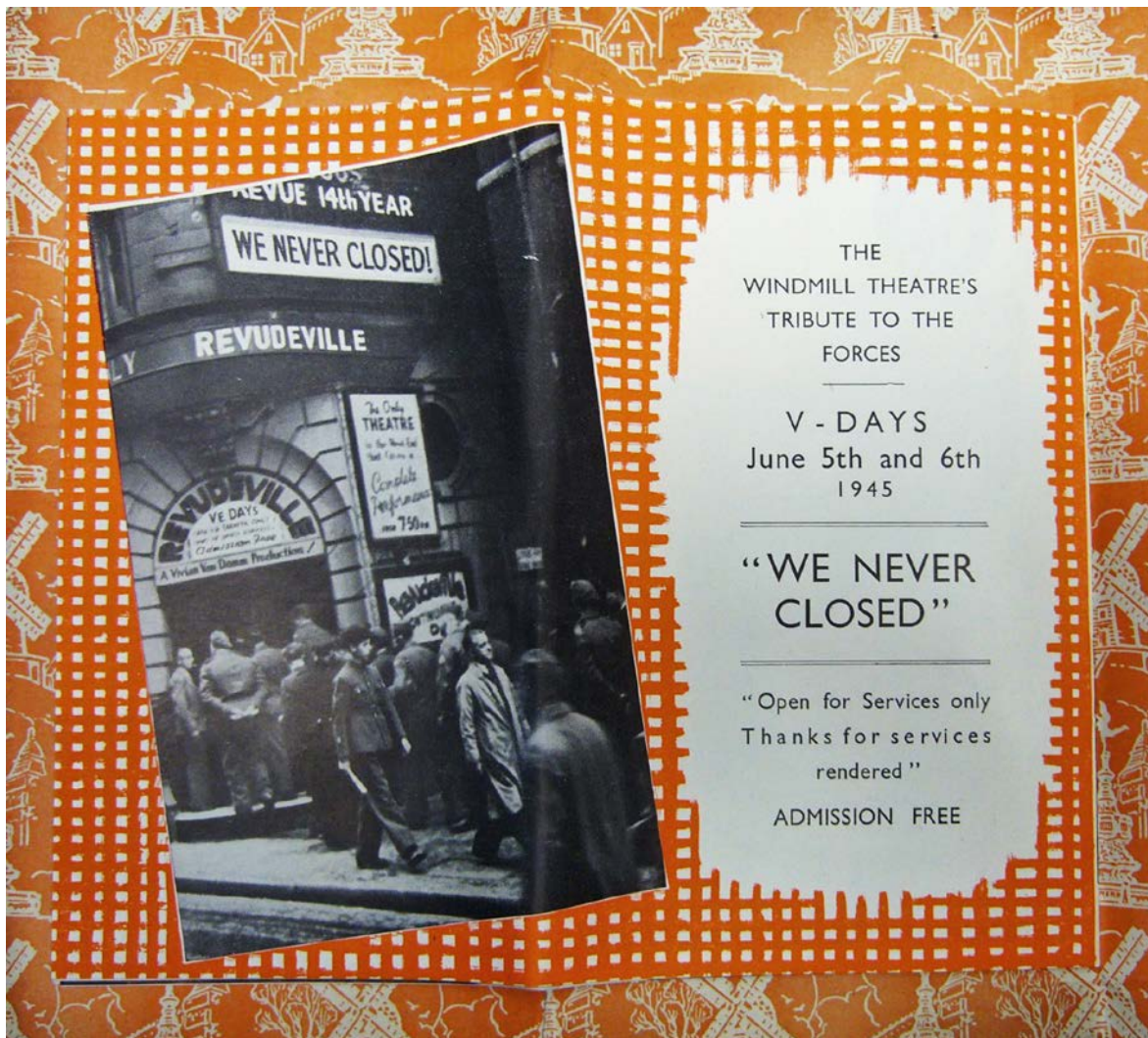




2-30 J.K. Mortimer's membership card.

clubs, becoming a member of a number of them from the 1940s to the 1960s. His archive contains a small collection of brochures from establishments in Leeds and London, for example the Raymond Revuebar Club, Vues from Revues, Panama Theatre Club and the Windmill

Theatre. There are also a number of membership cards to such clubs, some of which bear the name 'J.K. Mortimer' clearly written in Ismay's distinctive handwriting.



2-31 Programme for the Windmill Theatre in 1945.



Drafted in the 'bus,  
leaving Leeds.

15/5/41.

Miss Phyllis Dixey,  
City Palace of Varieties,  
Leeds.

Dear, delicious Phyllis,

What poor words  
can I find to express the delight with  
which I witnessed your <sup>appearances</sup> ~~performances~~ this  
evening at the City Varieties? I have  
been closely interested in the problems  
of stage nudity - though not by any means,  
believe me, in the spirit of the Public  
Morality Council - for a number of years -  
ever since there was any stage nudity here  
to be interested in - and had long ago  
decided that what was wrong with most of  
the uncomfortable dishes labelled "daring",  
and the chilly ones labelled "artistic",  
was the element of shame - the element that  
puts a self-conscious <sup>involuntary</sup> ~~titter~~ in the place  
of natural laughter. But not ~~until~~ I saw  
you could I say, and know I was right,  
that supreme ~~chastity~~ <sup>modesty</sup> can only derive from  
absolute innocence (which is perhaps  
humanly impossible) or from absolute  
sophistication.

All this sounds  
very solemn and perhaps absurd - but  
anyway, bless you! - The warmest wishes  
for your happiness. *a grand show and a  
grand artiste.*

2-32 Draft letter from W.A. Ismay to Phyllis Dixey, 15 May 1941.

Ismay first saw Dixey perform in 1941 at the City Varieties in Leeds. After seeing her performance, he wrote a letter to her expressing how exhilarated he was, marking it as 'Drafted in the 'bus leaving Leeds' and addressing her as 'Dear, delicious Phyllis'.<sup>76</sup> This letter was never posted, however he did write her another letter which he did post, asking to meet her before one of her performances whilst she was in Leeds.

<sup>76</sup> Letter from W.A. Ismay to Phyllis Dixey (singer, striptease artiste and actress), dated 15 May 1941.



During 1941 and 1942, they corresponded (though Ismay wrote more often than Dixey) and Dixey would often send him tickets to her performances so they could meet in person backstage. In one letter, Ismay wrote a spirited rebuttal of criticism Dixey had received in the *Daily Telegraph*:

*It was "The Telegraph", of course, which led the busy-body field in March-April 1940, when I collected some prime specimens for my annotations on English hypocrisy. Vulgar and ignorant abuse is not criticism, and merely betrays that the writer has a dirty, diseased or at best immature mind.<sup>77</sup>*

Ismay's opinion was that Dixey's performances portrayed: 'delicacy, wit and superb dignity and poise', compared with the glamour and daring he confesses he was already bored of.<sup>78</sup> Referring to differences in outlook with his family, he writes:

*I say nothing about all the people, including a near relative of mine, in whom a more innocent, though deep, prejudice persists, because in some sense they were brought up to deny life: outside the family circle they at least mind their own business.<sup>79</sup>*

From Ismay's written comments to Dixey on stage nudity, it seems he does not see his interest as something to be ashamed of, but as an aesthetic admiration of beauty. Later on in his life, the subject came up again in relation to a dish that had been commissioned from potter Eric James Mellon to celebrate Ismay's 80th birthday by some of his close friends. The dish depicted Ismay surrounded by pottery and some of the models he had met at the life drawing classes that were part of Mellon's Slindon Summer School. Mellon was very proud of the dish and wrote asking Ismay to give him permission to write an illustrated article about it for the journal *Ceramic Review*, Ismay replied:<sup>80</sup>

*As regards possibly publishing it- I don't disguise that I have a certain residual feeling of caution, that I'd like it to be seen only by those who I know will understand and appreciate it. But you are entitled to wider credit for doing it, so if you feel decidedly that you'd like to go ahead re CR, I won't be obstructive, and you can tell CR you have cleared it with me. I can see that it's possible some who are not our friends might mutter "dirty old man" (meaning me) or (like your acquaintance at the time of your Chichester show) "pornography" (meaning you) but such people one can perhaps afford to ignore. Or the feminist*

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77 Draft letter from W.A. Ismay to Phyllis Dixey (singer, striptease artiste and actress), dated 5 November 1941.

78 Ibid.

79 Ibid.

80 Whether an article was written and submitted is unknown, if it was it was not published.



2-33 W.A. Ismay's 80th Birthday Bowl by Eric James Mellon. (YORYM:2004.1.698)

*camp might be up in arms, but if so, there are contrary arguments. All I can say is use your judgment, and if on balance you'd like to go ahead, I'll stand to it.<sup>81</sup>*

Ismay and Dixey discovered a mutual interest in books and in one draft letter Ismay wrote: 'I think it might be rather fun for both of us if we started a book-of-the-month club with a selection committee of one and a membership of one.'<sup>82</sup> Though it was Dixey's idea that Ismay send her books, as he reveals in another draft letter:

*It pleases me to recall that it was your unsolicited suggestion that I drop you a line from time to time about new or newish books worth reading. These probably won't be "best sellers", or not necessarily so, but something rather more discriminating and accountable – a good many "best sellers" are quite fantastic on the whole the standard is rising though.<sup>83</sup>*

81 Letter from W.A. Ismay to Eric James Mellon (potter), dated 30 April 1990.

82 Draft letter from W.A. Ismay to Phyllis Dixey (singer, striptease artiste and actress), undated but probably early 1940s.

83 Draft letter from W.A. Ismay to Phyllis Dixey (singer, striptease artiste and actress), 3 November 1941.

Ismay selected and sent Dixey books to read (such as *Chad Hanna*, a novel written in 1940 by Walter Dumaux Edmonds) and included his critiques of them. It seems that their mutual interest in literature also acted as encouragement for Ismay's own writing ambitions. In one letter however, he refers to his desire to write a book about Dixey:

*In the last three weeks or so, going on to four now, I've written you, but for an obvious reason not posted, one longish letter, and the considerable beginnings of several even longer ones, which perhaps, if I can hammer them into shape – time is the difficulty – will turn eventually, with disguised personalities, a sort of novel.<sup>84</sup>*

It is clear that meeting Dixey was an important moment for him and, in effect, she became his muse, as he writes:

*Let it serve for the moment if I say that something unprecedented and (to me) important happened when I first saw you in May, and that our meeting, which despite its incoherence is one of my happiest memories, only served to confirm my guesses at what lay behind the stage façade – that, in short, you've set me a new standard of womanhood, and quickened whatever modicum of imaginative power as a writer I already possessed.<sup>85</sup>*

Charges to pay \_\_\_\_\_ s. \_\_\_\_\_ d.  
 RECEIVED

CT ISMAY 14 DIXEY + No 211

OFFICE STAMP  
 WAKEFIELD  
 7 OCT 41  
 YORKSHIRE

TELEGRAM

Prefix. Time handed in. Office of Origin and Service Instructions. Words.  
 84 5/6 LEEDS UHX 36

From \_\_\_\_\_ To \_\_\_\_\_

PRIORITY W A ISMAY 14 WELBECK ST WAKEFIELD =  
 = MANY THANKS FOR BOOK AND LETTER STILL VERY BUSY  
 BUT IF YOU CARE TO COME THURSDAY BETWEEN SHOWS  
 WOULD BE GLAD TO SEE YOU THEN REGARDS =  
 PHYLLIS DIXEY

W.C. 9/23/11337. 75,000 Pads. 5/41. J.D. & Co. 51-160

For free repetition of doubtful words telephone "TELEGRAMS ENQUIRY" or call, with this form at office of delivery. Other enquiries should be accompanied by this form, and, if possible, the envelope. B or C

2-34 Telegram from Phyllis Dixey to W.A. Ismay, 7 October 1941.

84 Ibid.

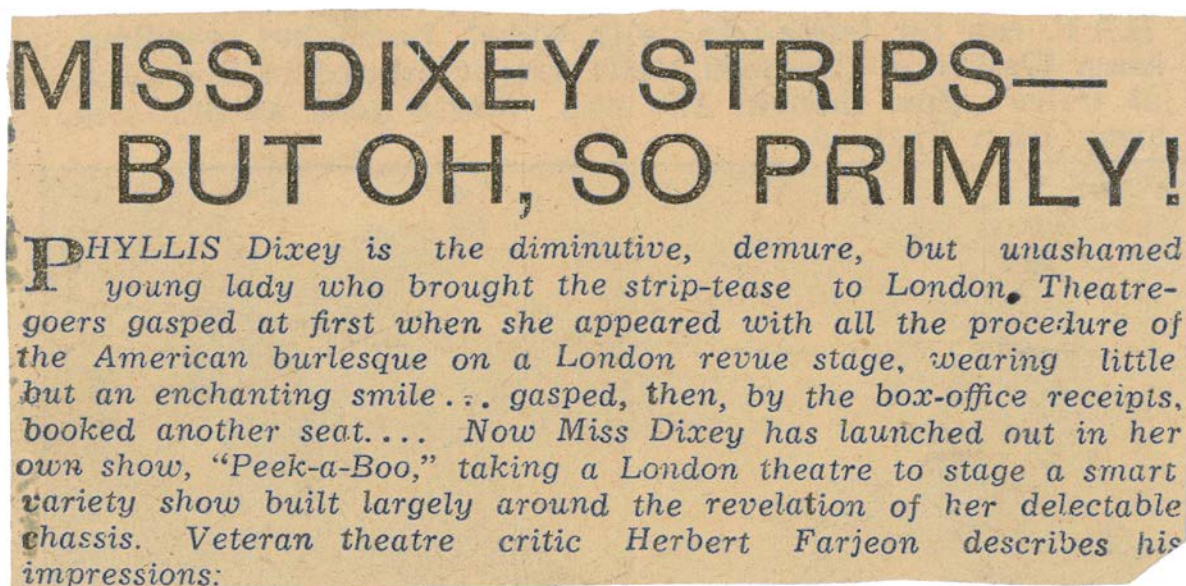
85 Ibid.



Ismay wrote numerous draft letters to Dixey and whilst it is unclear how many he actually posted, it would seem to be many as he became frustrated by her failure to respond (as he had with Cecil Day-Lewis). In one draft letter to Dixey he writes of his concern at not hearing from her and lists the reasons he thinks may be responsible for this:

*(1) that you're just naturally stony-hearted (which I find difficult to believe); (2) that you're friendly-disposed, but just naturally not a letter-writer, much less a habitual scribbler like the undersigned; and (3) that there is interference at this end with my mail, which could easily be so, as I'm away from home a great deal. (The position here is not easy to explain in a sentence: what it boils down to is that my attitudes towards life in general are so little sympathized with, or even comprehended at home, that I am driven very much into going my own way.)*<sup>86</sup>

His suspicion that his mail was being tampered with by family is based on previous examples of his parents checking his mail when he was a schoolboy, and are an indication again of tension with his family. It seems Dixey felt bad at not writing regularly though and in a letter some months later, she attempted to explain by writing the reason: 'Just as much as you like it and are good at letter writing, I dislike it and am not good at it.'<sup>87</sup>



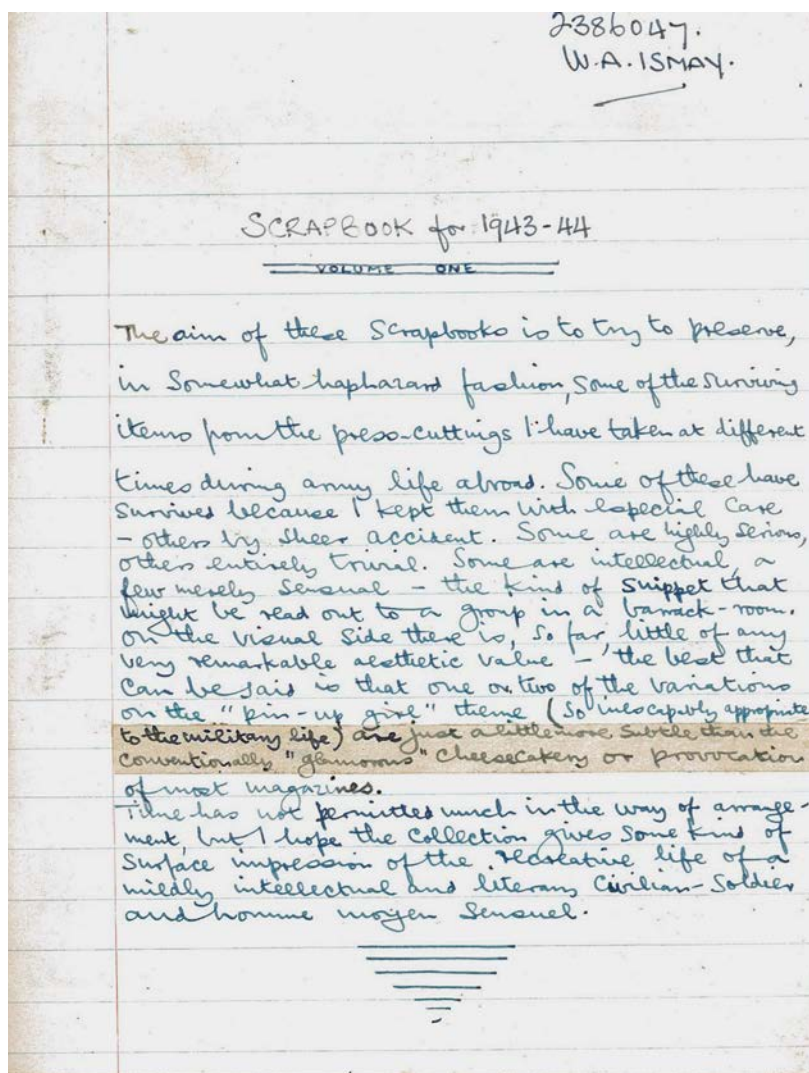
2-35 Phyllis Dixey newspaper review.

86 Draft letter from W.A. Ismay to Phyllis Dixey (singer, striptease artiste and actress), dated 14 February 1942.

87 Letter from Phyllis Dixey (singer, striptease artiste and actress) to W.A. Ismay, dated 15 August 1942.

Material in his archive indicates that Ismay never revealed his true feelings to Dixey, though he drafted a number of letters, such as this undated one in which he writes:

*This is a hard letter to write, but I must try to write it, and try to make it less involved than some of the long ones I wrote months ago (which never reached the post-box) trying to explain my way of life and the strange inner radiance which meeting you had given to it. Now I have to pay for my cowardice and irresolution in neither sending these when they were written, nor telling what I had to ask and say, whilst there was opportunity.<sup>88</sup>*



2-36 Introduction to W.A. Ismay's scrapbook for 1943-44.

There is no evidence that he followed through and posted this or any of the more personal letters and, as he routinely kept all of his correspondence throughout his life, it is unlikely he disposed of any correspondence with Dixey. In the few replies he received from her, there is no evidence of a romance on her part, just warm language such as addressing him as *Bill dear*,<sup>89</sup> or the coquettish *Please forgive me - - Do you?*<sup>90</sup>

In press material she is presented as a curious combination of demure, modest lady despite stripping on stage and posing nude. For example, one critic wrote: 'one seems to be in the presence of a very prim, very proper, very philanthropic Samaritan with the mildest of manners and the weeniest of voices, who has decided, for the benefit of mankind, to take her clothes off.'<sup>91</sup> Whilst she was known professionally as *Miss Phyllis Dixey*, she had in fact been married since 1938. That their correspondence tailed off in October 1942, could be seen as a moment of heartbreak when Ismay discovers Dixey

88 Draft letter from W.A. Ismay to Phyllis Dixey (singer, striptease artiste and actress), undated but probably 1942.

89 Letter from Phyllis Dixey (singer, striptease artiste and actress) to W.A. Ismay, dated 5 September 1942.

90 Letter from Phyllis Dixey (singer, striptease artiste and actress) to W.A. Ismay, dated 15 August 1942.

91 Unidentified press clipping dated 10 April 1942.





**BRIDAL** array provides Phyllis Dixey with another costume. But this, too, is stripped quickly and decorously

## Her Home

**H**APPILY married for five years, domesticated and a first-class housekeeper, when Miss Dixey leaves the stage door of the theatre after a hard day's work—three shows a day, six days a week—she ceases to be the glamorous figure of allure who makes audiences squirm and wriggle and yell for more.

Instead, she becomes a shy, happily married woman with a comfortable little home of her own which she likes to look after on the one day of the week she can call her own, Sunday. An excellent cook, she looks forward to weekends when she can prepare a meal for herself and friends as she really likes it.

Though known as Britain's Number One Glamour Girl, Phyllis Dixey is ambitious and is not content to rest on her past and present triumphs, but hopes one day to get away from the rather narrow restrictions of variety to become a more lofty star.



**COOKING** is an art at which she excels. And here she is in the kitchen of her flat. She is making sure that the meal will come up to the high standard she sets herself

2-37 Lifestyle article about Phyllis Dixey in Ismay's scrapbook.

is married, but is more likely due to him tiring of a one-sided correspondence, or the fact that he was posted out of reach on a troop ship in 1943 to 1946, travelling to India, Malaysia and Ceylon.<sup>92</sup>

Whilst he was overseas Ismay collected press-cuttings which he later compiled into scrapbooks which he hoped: 'gives some kind of surface impression of the recreative life of a mildly intellectual and literary civilian-soldier and *homme moyen sensual*', an average man with average tastes and appetites.<sup>93</sup> The scrapbooks reveal some of the papers and journals Ismay was reading at the time, publications which mostly had left-wing, liberal views such as: *The New Statesman and Nation*, *John O'London's Weekly*, *Picture Post*, *The Sunday Pictorial*, *Lilliput*, *News Chronicle*, *The American Mercury*, *The Illustrated Weekly of India*, *Leader Magazine* and *The Geographical Magazine*. Amongst the cuttings Ismay painstakingly collected, trimmed and pasted into the books, was

<sup>92</sup> Letter from W.A. Ismay to Eric James Mellon (potter), dated 3 March 1994. Part of the Eric James Mellon archive now in the Crafts Study Centre, Farnham.

<sup>93</sup> Introduction to W.A. Ismay's scrapbook for 1943-44.



# PHOTOGRAPHY

AUGUST  
1952

2/-

Beach Beauty

Peter Peck

•

In the Dolomites

Leslie H. Baker

•

The Work of  
Federico Vender

Harold Lewis

•

The Wye Valley

OUR COVER:

by

Pietro Donzelli  
(Milan)

Vol. 7 No. 8



2-38 *Photography* magazine, August 1952.

a lifestyle piece on Phyllis Dixey depicting her as a respectable and happily married housewife and career woman, with photos of both sides of her life (for example making tea for husband on one page, then opposite posing as a bride wearing only a veil). This article, which makes public her status as married woman, may be another reason that Ismay didn't attempt to restart their correspondence after the end of World War Two. He had a strong sense of moral behaviour and corresponding with a married woman would have been wrong in his eyes.



2-39 Business card advertising photography studio and models for hire in Leeds.

In the early 1950s, evidence appears in Ismay's archive of another hobby, photographing life models. It is unclear how he learnt to take and also develop photographs but, like his other interests, he threw himself into the process and became very knowledgeable. The Wakefield Camera Club has been in existence since 1891, and there would have been opportunity for Ismay to join or to attend meetings without becoming a member. Publications such as *Photography* (a monthly magazine for amateurs, copies of which can be found in Ismay's archive) provided a range of helpful information for the enthusiast. For example, the August 1952 edition included Peter Peck's article 'Perfect Holiday Portraits' which offered advice on taking photographs of ladies on the beach, whilst an overview of the career and work of Italian humanist photographer Frederico Vender was provided by Harold Lewis.



2-40 W.A. Ismay's photograph album from February to March 1953.



The first evidence of photographic material in Ismay's archive is a continuation of his interest in censorship in relation to the female figure as seen in tableaux or striptease performances. A collection of ten albums reveal that Ismay was hiring studios and models in Leeds and in London and taking series of photographs of them. These photographs were in an artistic classical style, often featuring the model in the process of undressing or draped in fabric. Each album includes an introduction in which Ismay positions the activity in an academic framework, discussing issues such as aspects that prompted censorship, the juxtaposition of photographs in the album, or the type of film and lens used. He mentions the model's name and background, humanizing them rather than treating them as objects.



2-41 Naughty or 'rude' postcard from Ismay's archive.

In the 1960s, Ismay also collected an album of what he described as: 'Naughty or "Rude" Postcards', the type of which could be found in most British seaside resorts in the 20th century. In 1941 author George Orwell wrote about the work of Donald McGill, one of the most prolific postcard artists of this genre:



*Their existence, the fact that people want them, is symptomatically important. Like the music halls, they are a sort of saturnalia, a harmless rebellion against virtue. They express only one tendency in the human mind, but a tendency which is always there and will find its own outlet, like water. On the whole, human beings want to be good, but not too good, and not quite all the time.*<sup>94</sup>

In 1954 Donald McGill famously fell foul of the Obscene Publications Act of 1857, and was prosecuted and fined. His postcards have since become very collectible.



2-42 20th century Chinese bowl, purchased by Ismay during World War Two. (YORYM:2004.1.2756)

Despite being a traumatic period, Ismay's time in the forces during World War Two also had a positive impact on him. It gave him the opportunity to travel and brought him into contact with different cultures where he witnessed craft objects being made by hand. This experience of travel providing cultural enlightenment is something that other collectors have experienced and highlighted as important in their development of taste. For example, collector Anthony Shaw had travelled widely with his parents as a child and credits that experience as making him more aware of the diversity of visual culture and value. Collector and gallery owner Henry Rothschild also travelled in World War Two, particularly in Italy where he saw many traditional craftsmen and women at work. He was encouraged by the knowledge he had gained to start his gallery and to bring together examples of such high quality work from overseas and from across

<sup>94</sup> Orwell, George (1941). 'The Art Of Donald McGill', *Horizon*, London, September. [http://www.orwell.ru/library/reviews/McGill/english/e\\_mcgill](http://www.orwell.ru/library/reviews/McGill/english/e_mcgill) Retrieved December 2016.

the UK to exhibit in his London gallery. Whilst Ismay was overseas in the forces, he purchased examples of these local arts and crafts he saw: carved wood batiks and a few pots from Malaya and Indonesia in 1945 to 1946.<sup>95</sup> Ismay was fascinated by what he witnessed during that period, describing the experience in his article on collecting:

*I certainly picked up a great deal during the war, in India, by watching village potters at work, and by buying and using as water-coolers a succession of beautifully-thrown unglazed earthenware bottles, majestically shaped and narrow-necked; and by seeing (particularly at Singapore) the kind of inexpensive contemporary vessels which Chinese people used daily and of which I bought examples.<sup>96</sup>*

Ismay was not very close to his remaining family of cousins, though they exchanged letters about family history, cards at Christmas and occasionally visited each other. Despite never marrying, he had a number of close lifelong friendships formed whilst at school and university: Jack Spink, John Gledhill and Peter Rosenfield. He exchanged many letters with them over the years, spent Christmases with them and their families and attended events such as their children's weddings. His archives contain many packets of correspondence from Ismay's friends, particularly Spink and Gledhill, and in-depth examination of them may reveal more answers to questions about Ismay's early life.

By the 1950s however, Ismay had lost a number of friends and he wrote later that collecting studio pottery had helped fill the gap and provided support on the loss of friends:

*I gradually discovered that my social life recently diminished by several deaths could also pleurably re-expand by knowing personally all or most of the makers of the pots I began to collect, and by contriving to make acquaintance also of other non-makers who shared my tastes.<sup>97</sup>*



2-43 Portrait of Ismay taken shortly after demobilization in 1946.

95 Undated draft article written by W.A. Ismay, titled 'What makes collectors collect?'

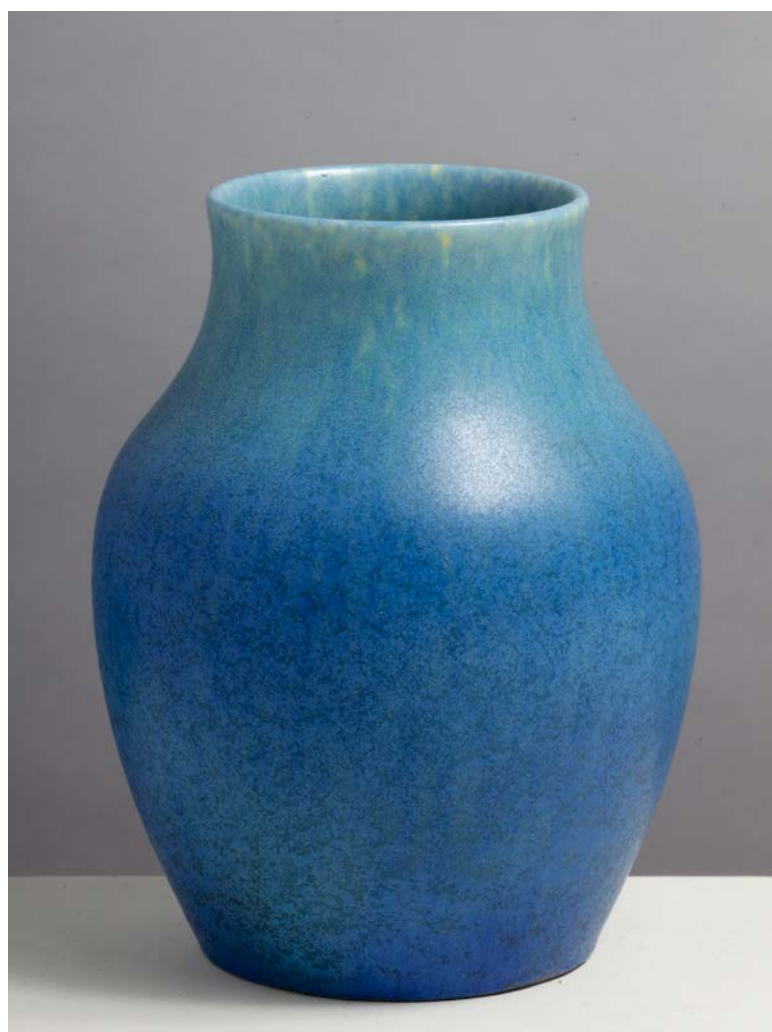
96 Ismay, W.A. (1982b). 'Collecting Studio Pottery', *Ceramic Review*, No. 76 July/August, pp. 4-7.

97 Ismay, W.A. (1982b). 'Collecting Studio Pottery', *Ceramic Review*, No. 76 July/August, p. 4.

## **2.6 The prescriptively more highly-regarded decorative wares in the house were almost uniformly dreadful<sup>98</sup> — W.A. Ismay's taste**

In his one published article on collecting, Ismay confessed that there was no history in his family of using anything other than mass-produced factory ceramics or very utilitarian country pottery, writing: 'What we used on the table were mass-produced items, and the prescriptively more highly-regarded decorative wares in the house were almost uniformly dreadful.'<sup>99</sup> When his mother died in 1956, he discarded most of the household pots, though he did retain a few ceramics inherited from his parents and family. These consisted mainly of kitchen wares and included: four pancheons, a salt-glazed jelly mould, various pie dishes, plant pot, coffee pot and a 'brown betty' teapot complete with lid-locking device.<sup>100</sup> He also kept two jars that he had bought as gifts for his mother in the 1920s; a Hillstonia Ware jar made by the Moira Pottery Co. Ltd and a blue glazed jar made by Pilkington's Royal Lancastrian Pottery, which would have not been easy to come by in the 1920s Wakefield. He may have chosen the Pilkington's piece as it bore the maiden name of his mother, but perhaps it also shows his personal taste too as it is far removed from the elaborate high Victorian taste of his grandparents, which he mentioned in his short story reflecting on his childhood.<sup>101</sup> It also bears a resemblance to some of the traditional glazed forms he purchased from potter Barbara Cass when he began collecting pottery in 1955.

In Ismay's *First Rough Catalogue* of his collection he includes the early pieces bought in the 1920s and the pieces he inherited from his family in the 1940s in the numerical list of his collection alongside his studio



2-44 Pilkington's Royal Lancastrian Pottery jar.  
(YORYM:2004.1.2982)

98 Ismay, W.A. (1982b). 'Collecting Studio Pottery', *Ceramic Review*, No. 76 July/August, pp. 4-7.

99 Ibid.

100 W.A. ISMAY COLLECTION: Handlist compiled by Mr Ismay, 1995-2000.

101 Mortimer, J.K. 'A Childhood in Wartime', unpublished manuscript, 1939-1941. See Appendix ii for full manuscript.



| * <del>TOP SECRET</del> POTTERY <del>SECRET</del>  |   |
|--|---|
| 34 W. A. ISMAY. (FIRST ROUGH CATALOGUE.)   |   |
| From No. 1 to No. 180 the order is <del>irregular</del> that of acquisition into is often <del>conventional</del> . From No. 181 the order is strictly that of acquisition, i.e. |   |
| 1  | HULLSTONIA Ware (early 1920's). <sup>Stronger</sup> Vase (height 4")  |
| 2  | ROYAL LANCASTRIAN Ware (early 1920's). Vase with <sup>irregular</sup> blue glaze  |
| 3  | CHINESE (from 1920's Singapore) (20th century) <sup>Earthenware</sup> Food bowl with <sup>irregular</sup> blue glaze and brush decoration in blue |
| 4  | " (unknown) 20c. (small) <sup>A very similar bowl with</sup> underglaze body or higher-fired and white porcelainous                               |
| 5  | 35c. (small) " <sup>Plate with pale grey glaze</sup> and brush decoration in blue   |
| 6  | 1921- BARBARA CASS: Small <sup>flared</sup> vase (height 2 1/2")  |
| 7  | 1921- BARBARA CASS: Small <sup>but deep</sup> bowl with brush decoration (height 2 1/2", diam. 3 1/2")  |
| 8  | 1921- BARBARA CASS: Small vase with <sup>cut</sup> sides (height 2 1/2")  |
| 9  | 1921- BARBARA CASS: Small globular vase with <sup>incised</sup> through green glaze to brown slip below (height 3")                               |
| 10   | 1916- \$1-5-0 IRWIN HOYLAND: Stone ware pedestal bowl with deep matt black band inside rim (height 4", diam. 5")                                  |
| 11   | 1921- \$1-5-0 BARBARA CASS: Grey plate (height 1 1/2", diam. 8 1/4")  |
| 12   | 1921- BARBARA CASS: Bowl decorated with iron wash and radial scratches (height 2 1/2", diam. 8 1/4")  |
| 13   | 1921- JOAN HOTCHIN:   |
| 14   | 1921- JOAN HOTCHIN:   |
| 15   | 1916- \$2-2-0 IRWIN HOYLAND: Stone ware bottle with vertical incised decoration through horizontal brown wash (height 10")                        |
| 16   | 1921- JOAN HOTCHIN:   |
| 17   | 1921- JOAN HOTCHIN:   |
| 18   | 1921- BARBARA CASS: Bowl of <sup>returning</sup> shape with brush decoration in iron by John Jayton (height 5", diam. 6 1/2")                     |
| 19   | 1921- BARBARA CASS: Pale blue bottle (height 9") (diam. 6 3/4")   |
| 20   | 1921- BARBARA CASS: Blue plate (height 1 3/4", diam. 9 1/4")  |
| 21   | 1921- JOAN HOTCHIN:   |
| 22   | 1921- JOAN HOTCHIN:   |
| 23   | 1921- JOAN HOTCHIN:   |

pottery. However, in the catalogue he wrote in 1995 to 2000 when he was preparing to transfer the collection to the Yorkshire Museum, he separated them out into a section at the end, which he titled his *X Series* or *Ancestor Pots*.

According to Alex McErlain, it was a comment from his mother that led Ismay back to collecting. After the end of World War Two, aged 36, Ismay returned to the family home to live with his mother and come to terms with the reality of losing his father and continue with his career as a librarian. McErlain clearly remembers Ismay saying that his mother had told him that he needed a hobby and that the collection had its origins in that comment.<sup>102</sup> According to Tony Hill, a close friend of Ismay's and a former trustee of the collection, Ismay had come to the conclusion that he wasn't physically attractive and so probably wouldn't marry and with that in mind, he had begun to look for alternative ways to fill his personal life.<sup>103</sup> When writing about the reasons people collect, he makes reference to marriage:

*It is perhaps more the unmarried, the married but childless, or those whose family has grown up a little so that they have more time and space to themselves, who are likely to revive (later on) the accumulative instinct and, particularly if their tastes are for arranging and studying objects, to become collectors in the more specialized sense.*<sup>104</sup>

His reasoning on marriage in this sense was perhaps justified by some examples of other collectors he had come across over the years, such as Alan and Pat Firth who were childless and began collecting when they reached their forties.

Whilst collecting studio pottery became his main hobby, the practice and process of photography was another interest that stayed with him throughout his life. He used it to record his collection and the experience of visiting exhibitions and potters' studios, providing photographs for potters, for borrowers and for use in publications at minimal cost. His interest in photographing life models in the early 1950s was also resurrected during the summer of 1988 when he began attending the Slindon Summer School, which was organized by potter Eric James Mellon. Ismay was able to construct albums of photographs that were backed up by Mellon's pots featuring nudes. Mellon recalled that Ismay would never try his hand at drawing during the classes, despite his encouragement, preferring to photograph the class in its entirety.<sup>105</sup>

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102 Conversation between Alex McErlain and W.A. Ismay, recounted to Helen Walsh, March 2013.

103 Conversation between Tony Hill and Helen Walsh, 2010.

104 Ismay, W.A. (1982b). 'Collecting Studio Pottery', *Ceramic Review*, No. 76 July/August, p. 4.

105 Recollection of Eric James Mellon (potter) of conversations with W.A. Ismay in the 1990s, recounted to Helen Walsh in August 2011.



## **2.7 In fact perhaps the real mystery and certainly a source of regret is that it was not until I was forty-five years of age that ceramics began to become of conscious and absorbing interest to me<sup>106</sup> — How W.A. Ismay discovered British studio pottery**

Ceramics had been of interest to Ismay as a child and pottery made by hand became a source of fascination during World War Two. But it was not until the mid-1950s that all the earlier interests (functional kitchen ware and the act of making by hand), combined with his pragmatic reasoning had led him to his new hobby: 'I discovered that present-day ceramics was a field in which relatively low prices made it possible for a person of modest means to make a varied collection.'<sup>107</sup> Having been disappointed by the lack of creativity offered by his earlier forays into collecting, he viewed the move into collecting handmade and therefore unique pottery as an advancement, writing: 'it is perhaps an unofficial graduation of a kind if one moves on to a field (painting, sculpture or handmade ceramics) where each object is unique, and tries to create one's own harmony among selected objects which potentially can be very diverse.'<sup>108</sup>

Reading inevitably played an important role in helping Ismay start his collection of British studio pottery, as well as developing his knowledge as the collection grew. Ismay named three books published in the 1940s and 1950s as crucial in helping him develop his knowledge of pottery when setting out on his new hobby.<sup>109</sup> The first was *The Modern Potter* written by Ronald Cooper, brother of Francis Cooper, a potter who taught in Sheffield. In this book, published in 1947, the author writes of a revival of work by the studio potter that began before the war, writing of the modern potter that:

*He believes that a consciousness has been re-awakened in this Century and is confident of being able to push further ahead in the quest for form, style of decoration and glaze based on the continuation of past tradition.*<sup>110</sup>

Cooper then gives background information on a number of contemporary potters and their methods of working in an attempt to show the meaning behind the revival.

The second book Ismay highlights is *The Work of the Modern Potter in England* by George Wingfield Digby, published in 1952. This was a more substantial, academic book written by a curator of the Victoria & Albert Museum, who was also a collector and art historian. The first chapter begins with a very romantic description of a bowl

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106 Ismay, W.A. (1982b). 'Collecting Studio Pottery', *Ceramic Review*, No. 76 July/August, pp. 4–7.

107 Abandoned introduction to Ismay, W.A. (1982b). 'Collecting Studio Pottery', *Ceramic Review*, No. 76 July/August, pp. 4–7.

108 Ibid.

109 Ismay, W.A. (1982b). 'Collecting Studio Pottery', *Ceramic Review*, No. 76 July/August, p. 4.

110 Cooper, Ronald G. (1947). *The Modern Potter: A review of current ceramic ware in Great Britain*, John Tiranti Ltd, London, pp. 5–6.



by Bernard Leach, which urges would-be collectors to use all their senses to experience studio pottery:

*But even the most utilitarian and simple pottery forms, in the right hands, can be given quality and beauty. Take, for example, the fruit-bowl illustrated in Plate I. Why is this bowl such a pleasure to pick up, to handle? Its full, open curve, its sense of generous capacity, its hard stone-like material which rings with a clear sustained note when struck, the matt oatmeal-coloured interior softly reflecting the light and the variegated metallic rust-browns of its outer surface – these qualities are perceived directly, without the laboured effect a written description of them gives. And yet these qualities are surely antitheses. A stone-like substance (it is hard like stone), yet a form moulded with grace, even perhaps with tenderness. A warmly glazed interior yielding softly to the play of light, yet a metallic ringing note. If now the bowl is placed on a table and filled with fruit, other qualities are instinctively demanded of it: does it stand well? Is the curve of the rim satisfactory? Is it attractive in use as well as being well suited to its purpose? Does it stand firmly yet not have a foot so ponderous as to destroy its copious bowl-like character? What of the decoration inside; is it obvious, stereotyped, or has it an element of surprise and charm?<sup>111</sup>*



2-46 Example of a fruit bowl from 1952 made by Bernard Leach. From the Milner-White Collection. (YORAG:935.76)

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111 Wingfield Digby, George (1952). *The Work of the Modern Potter in England*, John Murray, London, p. 11.



2-47 'Anubis' jar by William Staite Murray.  
(YORYM:2004.1.472)

Such an expressive description of the experience of handling a simple bowl with its emphasis on the tactile and functional nature of pottery must have been captivating for Ismay given his great admiration for the skill of writers. Wingfield Digby's book is aimed specifically at collectors and includes a chapter on learning to distinguish good pottery in which the author uses images of pots from a variety of periods, countries and makers, to illustrate his opinions. In the Introduction, Wingfield Digby advises that: 'To understand pottery, especially hand-made pottery, some knowledge of the processes involved in making it is extremely helpful', this is advice Ismay took to heart and is evidenced in later years through his confident, knowledgeable writing on the subject.<sup>112</sup>

The third and most important book for Ismay was Muriel Rose's *Artist-potters in England*, published in 1955. It was the first book to present studio pottery as a defined movement and the book is described on the dust jacket as: 'especially valuable to the would-be purchaser, helping him in his search for pots which are likely to give him lasting satisfaction.'<sup>113</sup> Rose was a leading advocate for 20th century craft in Britain and was a driving force behind the creation of the UK's first museum for modern craft, the Holburne Museum in Bath (the collection was relocated to the Crafts Study Centre, Farnham, in 2000). Rose managed the *Little Gallery* in London during the 1930s and 1940s, carefully displaying high quality handmade craft items by British makers in designed room settings.

The first letter Ismay wrote to Rose is a draft of one he sent to her in 1966 and is in reply to a letter of introduction she had sent him. In the draft Ismay refers to meeting her at various pottery functions and informs her that her book: 'was probably one of the prime influences, following those from Cooper and Digby.'<sup>114</sup> The reason why they began corresponding was that Rose had wanted to see Ismay's collection and potentially select pots to photograph for the publication of the second edition of

112 Wingfield Digby, George (1952). *The Work of the Modern Potter in England*, John Murray, London, p. 9.

113 Rose, Muriel (1955). *Artist-potters in England*, Faber and Faber, London.

114 Draft letter from W.A. Ismay to Muriel Rose (author and commercial gallery owner), dated 1966.



2-48 'Han' jar by Denise Wren. (YORYM:2004.1.2445)



2-49 Pot by Ruth Duckworth. (YORYM:2004.1.1241)

her book. Replying to her letter of introduction, he is very respectful of her status, writing: 'I've often wished that my active interest in pots and subsequent operations as a collector had begun earlier (e.g. In your "Little Gallery" days).'<sup>115</sup> Rose visited Wakefield to see his collection and they discussed the new edition of her book. Although four pieces from his collection were included in the book ('Anubis' by William Staite Murray; 'Han' jar by Denise Wren; pot by Ruth Duckworth; dish by Ian Auld), he was deeply disappointed that none of his pots were included in the colour plate section.<sup>116</sup>

It is probable that Ismay used these three books as a guide to who to collect when he was starting out, as many of the potters listed in them found their way into Ismay's collection: for example, he commented on coming across the work of Norah Braden in print before seeing it in the flesh, in 1957:

*Norah Braden has started throwing pots again- those I have seen and of which I have acquired one sample, being unglazed plant pots quickly decorated on the wheel with a comb-like implement. So this is something at any rate from the hand of yet another of the people who have hitherto only been names to me.*<sup>117</sup>

115 Draft letter from W.A. Ismay to Muriel Rose (writer and gallery owner), dated 21 May 1966.

116 Described in David Whiting's tribute at the WA Ismay memorial day at the Yorkshire Museum, 8 September 2001.

117 Extract from a draft letter from W.A. Ismay to Barbara Cass (potter), dated 25 March 1957.





2-50 Dish by Ian Auld. (YORYM:2004.1.555)

## **2.8 My original idea was to form a small collection of pots made in Yorkshire<sup>118</sup> — The roots of W.A. Ismay's collection**

From his earliest days of collecting British studio pottery, meeting the potters in person and understanding how they produced their work was very important to Ismay. The first practising potter he met was Barbara Cass (1921–1992) an émigré from Germany who had a studio and shop on The Shambles in the heart of York's tourist area. Ismay became aware of her and her work when she exhibited at Wakefield Art Gallery in the 1950s. He visited her studio in York, purchasing nine pots by her during his first year collecting. He acquired numerous more in the following years and Cass was fourth in the list of potters he collected the most pieces by. Ismay and Cass exchanged letters over the years and using his photography skills he took a series of black and white photographs of the interior and exterior of her studio, showing her at work and presented the images in an album with additional images of her pots on display at *The Great Yorkshire Show* in 1956. This activity is an early example of Ismay's desire to record potters and their environments and the experience of collecting. It is also a demonstration of him adapting his earlier hobby of photography to his new passion for collecting pots. The photographs in Ismay's archive are the only known visual record not only of Cass's time working in York, but also of the adaption and use of a property by a potter in this historic street.

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118 Ismay, W.A. (1982b). 'Collecting Studio Pottery', *Ceramic Review*, No. 76 July/August, p. 4.



2-51 Barbara Cass. Photograph W.A. Ismay.



2-52 Jar by Barbara Cass, the first piece Ismay bought. (YORYM:2004.1.1189)

In line with his initial aim: 'to form a small collection of pots made in Yorkshire', Ismay purchased the work of only three potters during 1955.<sup>119</sup> There were the pieces by Cass and also seven pieces by Joan Hotchin (a former pupil of David Leach) from her studio in Pudsey near Leeds. Ismay made a photograph album recording her workshop, which also contained a newspaper article about her. Again, the photographs of Hotchin in Ismay's archive are the only known visual record of her activity. The third potter whom he collected two pieces by was Irwin Hoyland who taught ceramics in Sheffield alongside Francis Cooper.

<sup>119</sup> Ismay, W.A. (1982b). 'Collecting Studio Pottery', *Ceramic Review*, No. 76 July/August, p. 4.



In 1955, Ismay was transferred to Hemsworth as Branch Librarian. Hemsworth Library was located on Market Street in a chapel, which had been converted in 1953. Whilst storing some of his collection at work in 1955/1956, he took the opportunity to make a display of his pots on the central island in the library in 1956. Titled *The Potter's Wheel*, it highlighted books available to borrow on the subject of pottery.<sup>120</sup> An earlier display in 1955, titled *Fun with Flowers*, includes a number of vases with flower arrangements positioned around the library, though it is unclear whether that display was also instigated by Ismay or includes pieces from his collection. I am unaware of any research into the history of public libraries producing exhibitions such as these and further research of this would be beneficial in discovering the role played by libraries in exhibiting as a way of encouraging interest and learning opportunities.

Ismay's modest initial purchases in 1955, the eighteen pots by the three artists listed earlier, were overshadowed in 1956 when he collected sixty-five pots by sixteen artists. The year 1956 was a very significant one for Ismay personally, as he lost his



2-53 Joan Hotchin photograph album. Photographs W.A. Ismay.

120 Photographs of the display featuring identifiable pots from Ismay's collection, in the collection of York Museums Trust.





2-54 Hemsworth Library. Photograph courtesy of Wakefield Libraries.

mother following a series of strokes. It was a traumatic and drawn out experience which he later recalled in a letter to potter Eric James Mellon on hearing of the death of Mellon's mother:

*I am grieved to hear today via Mabel of your mother's death. I have an idea how you will have felt and feel and from personal knowledge have every sympathy, as I've been through the whole thing myself- although this was as long ago as 1956 when my mother was 75 and I was 46. After earlier symptoms I found her semi-paralysed after a stroke in her bed. It took some days to get her into hospital and she died about three months later.*

*I have never forgotten that when my mother went from here, she clutched at the door-post with her still usable hand, wept, and exclaimed "nothing ever will be the same again".<sup>121</sup>*

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121 Extract from a draft letter from W.A. Ismay to Eric James Mellon (potter), dated 17 August 1983.



2-55 *Fun with Flowers* display in Hemsworth Library. Photograph courtesy of *Wakefield Express*.

After settling his mother's estate in July 1956, Ismay now had ownership of 14 Welbeck Street and effects totalling £2,545. 8s. 9d.<sup>122</sup> This was a large sum of money, equivalent to £44,400 today.<sup>123</sup> Whilst dealing with the illness and death of his mother and its aftermath, Ismay distracted himself by widening his search for studio pottery and headed to London in search of pots and, in his words: 'ceased to impose territorial boundaries' on his collection.<sup>124</sup> During a trip to London early in 1956, Ismay visited the *Crafts Centre* in Hay Hill, where he bought one piece each by Katharine Pleydell-Bouverie and David Leach. Later on that year he bought eleven pieces by Bernard Leach, five by Hans Coper and six by Lucie Rie. He spent between 7s 9d and £6 on pots by Bernard Leach, between £2 and £12 on pieces by Lucie Rie and between £3 and £15 on the pieces by Hans Coper. He was spending significant amounts of money on these early pots, in comparison to today's money, the equivalent of £260, when the average weekly wage was only £175.<sup>125</sup> The information on his inheritance from his mother explains how Ismay was able to raise his collecting ambitions and purchase work from London exhibitions and galleries. In 1956 he also collected four pieces by

122 Probate Central Registration (Somerset House). Sarah Elizabeth Ismay of Welbeck St. Wakefield, widow, died 22 May 1956 at Sandal Grange Hospital Wakefield.

123 [http://www.moneysorter.co.uk/calculator\\_inflation.html](http://www.moneysorter.co.uk/calculator_inflation.html) accessed to establish amounts in December 2016.

124 Ismay, W.A. (1982b). 'Collecting Studio Pottery', *Ceramic Review*, No. 76 July/August, p. 4.

125 <http://hansard.millbanksystems.com/commons/1956/feb/21/industrial-wages> retrieved September 2016.





2-56 *The Potter's Wheel* display in Hemsworth Library. Photograph W.A. Ismay.

Waistel Cooper and one each by Douglas Zadek, Henry Hammond, Helen Pincombe, Geoffrey Whiting, Graham Burr and Ludwig Van Der Straten.<sup>126</sup>

The activity in 1956 demonstrates his developing taste and knowledge, as he moved into collecting the work of significant figures in the studio pottery movement. He was interested in the work of very important artists whose metropolitan environment and access to the gallery scene in the capital was very different to the Yorkshire artists he had previously met. He still retained his interest in Yorkshire potters though, purchasing a further fifteen pieces by Barbara Cass, a further thirteen pieces by Joan Hotchin, two more by Irwin Hoyland and three by Michael Skipwith, a Yorkshire potter new to his collection. He continued to collect most of the potters he had purchased from in 1956 during the following years, building up significant holdings that allow an overview of their development in style and skill and of Ismay's personal taste. In a letter to potter Joan Hotchin, he writes about the work of Lucie Rie and Hans Coper:

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126 W.A. Ismay imported his pot made by Ludwig Van Der Straten from Denmark.





2-57 Bowl by Lucie Rie. (YORYM:2004.1.41)

*The Lucie Rie bowl is as usual an extremely accomplished piece of work but I was irritated as often by her mannerism of deliberately distorting the shape of the pot so as to make it asymmetrical in form. Hans Coper, a younger potter who shares a studio with her, produces very dissimilar work- he characteristically produces a rather rough and heavy stoneware, where even the stoneware tends to be about as thin-walled and metallically fragile-looking as her porcelain- but they both share this trick of distorting form. I have seen superb work by both, but have a prejudice myself in favour of pots which are asymmetrical in decoration or glaze or both but in which the underlying form is just as it left the wheel.<sup>127</sup>*

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127 Draft letter from W.A. Ismay to Joan Hotchin (potter), undated but probably 1956.

Despite his mother's recommendation that he get a hobby, he appears to have concealed from her the extent to which he had been bitten by the collecting bug. Alex McErlain recalls a conversation with Ismay and the Liverpool-based collector Dr Len Ratoff. Ratoff told them about taking his pots to work and keeping them on his desk so that he would not get told off at home. Ismay admitted that he used to do the same, hiding them from his mother. And, perhaps, using them in the exhibition he curated at Hemsworth Library also legitimized the collection, making it less of a guilty secret.<sup>128</sup> Ismay thought his mother would have been alarmed at the increasing rate at which he was acquiring pots and his expenditure on his hobby. His annual rate of acquisitions continued to rise during the first five years. From eighteen pieces in 1955, sixty-six in 1956, eighty in 1957, eighty-three in 1958, and an incredible one hundred and twelve in 1959, making a total of three hundred and fifty-nine pots in his collection at that point.

Ismay maintained a notebook in which he created a catalogue of the collection throughout its development, carefully recording each pot in the order he had bought it, and apparently taking the notebook with him for easy reference. Collector Pat Firth recalled one occasion when the notebook made an appearance following her husband Alan's retirement in 1990. The Firths had spent more than ever on their collection that year and Pat was worried. When she mentioned her concern to Ismay, he apparently laughed and got out his book containing records of his own acquisitions. He shuffled through the pages to 1975 and then proceeded to read aloud the list of things he had bought the year of his retirement, which at one hundred and seventy pieces, took quite some time.



2-58 Bowl by Hans Coper. (YORYM:2004.1.640)

128 Conversation between Alex McErlain and W.A. Ismay, recounted by McErlain to Helen Walsh, March 2013.



2-59 Early display of pots on top of W.A. Ismay's piano. Photograph W.A. Ismay.

The manner in which he dealt with the material in his collection, his application of classification, numerical and alphabetical order, was closely linked to the skills he gained from his occupation of librarian. His role of collector was not so far removed from that of a curator in relation to his pots, or archivist in relation to the ephemeral material. Evidence of his transferral of museum skills can be seen in early 1957, when he first displays the collection in his home, assigning locations to objects. Ismay had come to terms with the loss of his mother and began to lay claim to the whole of what was now legally his house. In a draft letter to potter Barbara Cass he describes liberating his collection from work and from the confines of his bedroom:

*So now I have at home all the pots (116) collected to date! I have bought them all into my two downstairs rooms now, where they occupy most of the available surfaces where they are out of harms way- from shelves of a glass-fronted bookcase, the top of a piano and the mantle shelf in the back room, a two tier sideboard, a two tier table, a mantle piece and over mantle, the top of two bookcases and some floor space in the bay window. I was amused last night to find whilst checking the catalogue that (without counting) I had contrived to put 58 in each room!<sup>129</sup>*

In this letter Ismay shares a particularly profound moment in his life, a moment of moving on from loss. By distilling this moment down to numbers, the letter offers a

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129 Extract from a draft letter from W.A. Ismay to Barbara Cass (potter), dated 25 March 1957.





2-60 Living room at 14 Welbeck Street. Photograph Eileen Lewenstein.

glimpse not only of Ismay's character, but also a glimpse into 14 Welbeck Street during the period that his collection began. There are only a few photographs of the inside of his home that date to the late 1950s, these were taken by Ismay and record groups of his earliest purchases. These include a group of his Yorkshire pots arranged in a dresser, and also photographs of pots by Hans Coper and Lucie Rie which he arranged on top of his piano.

Ismay had played the piano, which was situated in the front room, as a youngster. By the time he began collecting it was no longer used and following his mother's death in 1956, he got rid of it, his priority being the display of his collection of pottery. In the letter to potter Barbara Cass in 1957, he offers it to her saying:

*Mention of the piano reminds me that you may still want one, although whether my old dust-collector would serve your time is another matter. But my piano learning as a child never "took" and so it's unlikely now that I shall use it. I was thinking of replacing it with a display rack or room divider type of construction which would take up less space than the piano and yet would provide more shelf room for books and pots.<sup>130</sup>*

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130 Draft letter from W.A. Ismay to Barbara Cass (potter), dated 25 March 1957.





2-61 W.A. Ismay in the kitchen at 14 Welbeck Street. Photograph Janette Haigh.

Most impressions of his home come from recollections of people who visited him, from photographs taken in 1982 by Eileen Lewenstein (potter and co-founder of *Ceramic Review* magazine) to accompany his article on collecting for *Ceramic Review* and from a set of photographs taken in the 1990s by his close friend Janette Haigh. The overriding impression gained from the two later sets of photographs is of a house packed full of pots. Craig Barclay, the curator at the Yorkshire Museum who was involved in the acquisition of the collection, described his impression of entering the house:

*You walked through that corridor into the kitchen and your mind was blown, because the kitchen was just a room of pots – pots everywhere, pots peeking out from behind the screen of dust – a tiny table in the middle of the room covered in pots. Chairs covered in pots or copies of Ceramic Review. It was, for someone interested in ceramics, heaven, it was just a wonderful experience.*<sup>131</sup>

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<sup>131</sup> Interview with Craig Barclay (former curator of numismatics and decorative arts at the Yorkshire Museum) in 2013. See Appendix v for transcript.



2-62 Kitchen dresser in the 1950s.



2-63 Kitchen dresser in the 1990s.

With only the end results to see in photographs and visualize from descriptions, it is easy to forget that the collection was built gradually over the course of forty-six years. It was alive and items moved around as new acquisitions arrived and others went on loan, as Ismay himself describes:

*I have several times expressed a feeling that there would be something wrong with a new acquisition if, fairly soon, everything else did not as it were move round a little to make room for the newcomer. A collection should remain alive, and would ossify from the point of view of the person forming it, if it were not caused to move around fairly regularly in this way.<sup>132</sup>*

In some areas, the remnants of Ismay's early displays could still be seen almost forty years later. For example, comparing the two photographs above of one of Ismay's dressers, one from the late 1950s, the other from the 1990s (by which point he had removed the wooden cornice from the top of the unit), some pots have not moved but have been joined by others of a later date.

132 Ismay, W.A. (1982b) 'Collecting Studio Pottery', *Ceramic Review*, No. 76 July/August, p. 6.



During the first five years that he was collecting, Ismay's reputation grew as quickly as his collection. In order to acquire such a large number of pots by significant potters, he had to attend many private views and exhibitions, particularly in London at commercial galleries such as the *Berkeley Galleries*, *Primavera*, *Crafts Centre* and the *Craftsman Potter's Shop*.<sup>133</sup> These were the main London venues that Ismay described as important to him.<sup>134</sup> Frequenting them raised his profile and brought him into contact with key figures in the pottery world at that time, including curators, gallery owners, collectors and potters. Ismay also made the effort to get in touch with potters whose work interested him and arranged to visit them in their workshops, often beginning a long lasting correspondence with them, ensuring he was invited to future events and opportunities. This contributed to his knowledge of the materials, processes and techniques involved in the production of handmade pottery. It also provided him with the vocabulary and language enabling him to converse easily with potters and embed himself into their world.



2-64 W.A. Ismay's beret and magnifying glass (YORYM:2004.1.308-3184)

133 Ismay, W.A. (1982b) 'Collecting Studio Pottery', *Ceramic Review*, No. 76 July/August, p. 6.

134 *Ibid.*

## 2.9 Summary

The biographical information in Ismay's archives reveals a great deal about his life and about his character. He was an intelligent boy from a lower middleclass background, whose parents both worked and were well respected by their community. He was brought up surrounded by family, particularly his mother's family who lived next door and shared caring for him whilst his parents were at work. The family had enough income to take him away on annual holidays and to provide him with pocket money to try childhood pursuits such as collecting shells and stamps. He was encouraged to study hard at school and to embrace reading and to have a strong moral code, sense of responsibility and good manners.

Attending university and studying Classics was very unusual for someone from Ismay's background and would have set him apart, perhaps even alienated him from his childhood friends, family and neighbours. Whilst he was unable to leave home to study, attending university in Leeds liberated him from his family and opened up a whole new world of cultural and societal possibilities for him. Despite his poor exam results due to ill health, Ismay had aspirations; teaching, writing, poetry, libraries, but they were not financially focused, as he had suffered neither extreme poverty nor wealth.

Ismay adopted an avant-garde uniform of overcoat, tightly fitting beret and, later in life, a William Morris-style beard, with the addition from a very early age of the magnifying glass instead of glasses, all of which make him stand out as unusual, as does his interest in marginal pursuits. His interests in the 1930s, 1940s and early 1950s reveal him as trying to be a bohemian but not quite managing to pull it off. He wants to be a libertine but doesn't quite know how to go about it. Instead, in his words, he settles on being: 'a mildly intellectual and literary civilian-soldier and *homme moyen sensual*', an average man with average tastes and appetites.<sup>135</sup>

Writing poetry, and later stories, was a hobby that preoccupied most of his life since he was a student. Making it into his career was something he strived for during the 1930s and though he never managed to make it his full-time occupation, writing always held an important role in his life. Corresponding with family, friends and acquaintances made through his various hobbies allowed him to fine-tune his skills and it is clear from the draft letters in his archive that he put lots of time and thought into crafting his letters.

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135 Introduction to W.A. Ismay's scrapbook for 1943-44.

Ismay's interest in marginalized culture such as the fan-dancing and tableau performances of Phyllis Dixey and his practice of hiring studios and models to photograph, both of which combined classical art-like elements, suggest he was searching for a notion of beauty. However, he was looking for them in lower-class, low culture activities and environments, which was unusual. His collection of comic postcards by Donald McGill and the like, which George Orwell described as 'overpowering vulgarity'<sup>136</sup> are further examples of this and reveal Ismay's sense of humour. He justified his interest in these areas by looking intellectually at the related issue of censorship, which provided him with a socially acceptable academic framework. In these interests and later with pottery, Ismay was autodidactic, carrying out extensive research to build his knowledge. He was not interested in popular high status art, which was out of his reach financially, though he enjoyed attending a range of exhibitions by fine artists (for example Marc Chagall, Eugène Delacroix, Henri Matisse, Stanley Spencer). British studio pottery was accessible and affordable and its marginalized position offered the challenge of discovering a new area of cultural activity. The social mix of participants, which included highly educated people such as Michael Cardew and Bernard Leach, fitted in with the variety of people he had encountered during these formative years (for example Cecil Day-Lewis). Ismay was a liberal humanist, he was culturally focused as opposed to financially or politically motivated. Whilst his political leanings were to the left, he was a fellow traveller and more concerned with the people he encountered along the way.

At the time Ismay became interested in British studio pottery it could be considered counter-culture, socially marginalized and, as with his other interests, he wanted to show that it was culturally significant. He was ambitious for the potters he supported and attention or praise given to his collection belonged to the potters, not to him. Like many collectors he wanted to be part of the artistic sphere, but unlike many collectors embarking on their hobby, he had transferrable skills and experience. He was motivated and self-confident entering the pottery world and very quickly made an important place for himself within its society. He actively engaged with events rather than passively observing, finding a place to belong.

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136 Orwell, George (1941). 'The Art Of Donald McGill', *Horizon*, London, September. [http://www.orwell.ru/library/reviews/McGill/english/e\\_mcgill](http://www.orwell.ru/library/reviews/McGill/english/e_mcgill) Retrieved December 2016.



## **CHAPTER 3 — Creating the Collection**

This chapter focuses on the period during which W.A. Ismay was actively collecting British studio pottery, between 1955 and 2001. By the end of the 1950s he was building not only his collection and knowledge, but also his reputation and social life. Using Ismay's archives and the recollections of people who knew him, this chapter explores key parts of his collection, social life and relationships with potters, collectors and galleries. It aims to show how he developed his knowledge and collection and as a result, was able to provide support for the British studio pottery movement.

Within only a few short years of him beginning his collection, he was becoming recognized as a collector with a significant and rapidly growing collection. This was due to the effort and time he devoted to learning about the subject through both reading the books mentioned in Chapter 2, Section 2.7, and journals such as *Pottery Quarterly*. Joining societies such as the Red Rose Guild and the Midland Group of Artists gave Ismay access to newsletters offering details about the latest exhibitions to visit. By immersing himself in this new world and particularly by attending private views at galleries across the UK, he had the opportunity to meet potters, gallery owners and other collectors. It also brought him to the attention of professional curators, who were interested to meet a new, passionate and knowledgeable collector who was purchasing important works that they could potentially have on loan for future exhibitions.

### **3.1 The process is more like being possessed than possessing<sup>1</sup> — How Ismay viewed the role of a collector**

Collecting seems to fly in the face of the views of left-wing politics, particularly Communism. In his book *Utz*, author Bruce Chatwin suggests that Marxist's advocating that all property should be publicly owned, never came to a conclusion about whether or not collecting art makes one an enemy of the Proletariat.<sup>2</sup> Engels argues that Communism is not about preventing the ownership of property, but rather preventing the subjugation of others to acquire property.<sup>3</sup> Ismay was uncomfortable with some of the implications of owning art and the suggestion that he was a 'Patron' as: 'potters are not people to be patronized.'<sup>4</sup> He appeared to have reconciled his role as a collector with his left-wing beliefs by positioning himself as a temporary custodian or caretaker of a collection, rather than its owner. In a draft piece of writing he produced about collecting, he further suggested that his collection was not under his control and had, in fact, enslaved him:

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1 Draft article written by W.A. Ismay, titled 'What makes collectors collect?', undated.

2 Chatwin, Bruce (1988). *Utz*, Jonathan Cape Ltd.

3 Marx, Karl and Engels, Friedrich (2010). *The Communist Manifesto*, Vintage Books, London (originally published 1848).

4 Draft article written by W.A. Ismay, titled 'What makes collectors collect?', undated.



3-1 Bernard Leach and W.A. Ismay at an exhibition private view in the 1960s.

*It is very easy to condemn such acquisition as selfish and such attachment to objects as philosophically deplorable, but actually the process is more like being possessed than possessing, and I have never regarded myself as a possessor but only as a temporary user and custodian.<sup>5</sup>*

Ismay's archive illustrates that the social side of his activity was as important as the objects he collected. The people he met ranged from potters, collectors, curators, gallery owners, writers, students and academics from a wide variety of social backgrounds. He rapidly cultivated a new social circle and became a celebrity at the heart of the post-war British studio pottery world. His knowledge and enthusiasm for the subject guaranteed him a position of importance in this particular world of collecting. Ismay was from a generation when men were expected to wear hats. Ismay was photographed wearing a fedora hat in the 1940s, which were fashionable after the end of World War Two (see image 2-43 in Chapter 2), but in the 1960s, as menswear began to change following 150 years of tailored, somber, plain clothing, he adopted a tightly fitted wool beret. This accessory stayed with him for the rest of his life, giving him a somewhat eccentric appearance that was sometimes accompanied by a moustache and, later, a William Morris style beard: when combined with his use of a magnifying glass to scrutinize pottery, they made him completely memorable to all who came across him. Curator Barley Roscoe compared this side of Ismay to the fictional character *Inspector Clouseau*.<sup>6</sup>

5 Draft article written by W.A. Ismay, titled 'What makes collectors collect?', undated.

6 Interview with Barley Roscoe (curator) in 2013. See Appendix v for transcript.

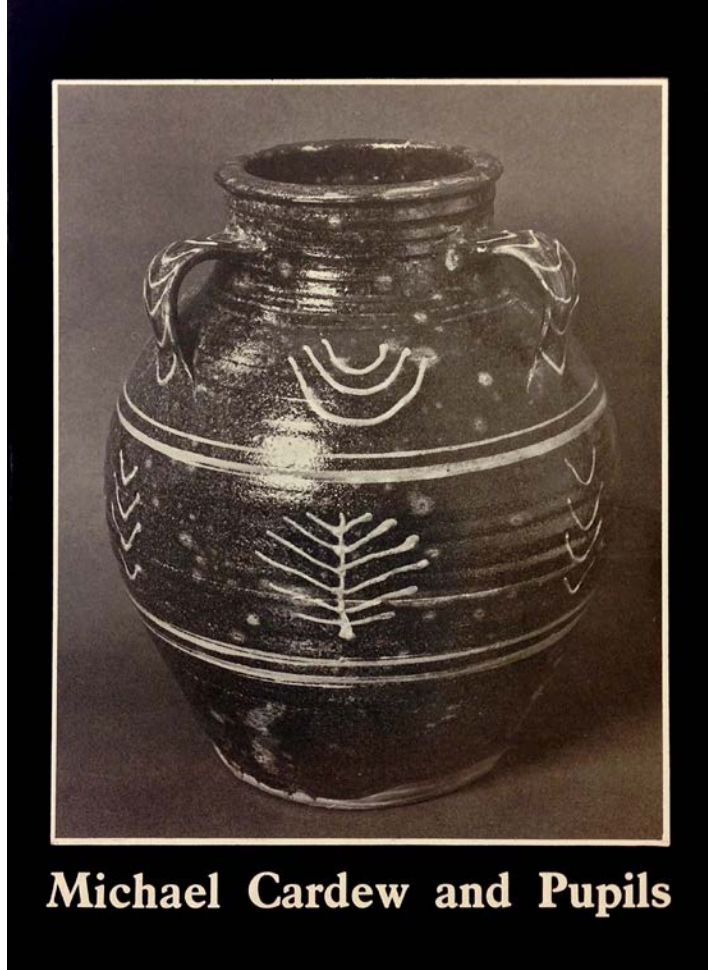


3-2 Photograph taken at the Craftsman Potter's Shop on Marshall Street, London, in the 1970s. W.A. Ismay can be seen on the left at the back. Photograph Philip Sayer.

Chapter 2 explored how Ismay's character was formed, with his strong morals and sense of right and wrong. This revealed itself as gentlemanly behaviour in his collecting and is exemplified on numerous occasions that are evidenced through his archive. One published example was an encounter with Eric Milner-White (Dean of York) in 1962. Milner-White was a much admired and respected collector who had begun collecting British studio pottery in the early 1920s at a time when it was not well-known or popular. In 1962 when the encounter took place, Milner-White was in the midst of transferring his collection to York Art Gallery, so was coming to the end of his collecting years and he passed away in 1963. Ismay on the other hand was relatively new to collecting, having only begun in 1955. He was full of enthusiasm and competitiveness, having gained a reputation as a serious collector during the seven years he had been active.



In the catalogue of the exhibition *Michael Cardew and Pupils* at York Art Gallery in 1983, to which he loaned many pieces from his collection to be displayed alongside pieces from Milner-White's collection, Ismay shared his experience of encountering Milner-White at an exhibition at the Berkeley Galleries. The Berkeley Galleries (on Davies Street, London) were founded by William Ohly, a collector of art and ethnography. He operated the gallery from 1950 until his death in 1955, when his son Ernest Ohly took over until the gallery closed in 1977. Ismay and Milner-White had both been allowed early entry to an exhibition of pottery by Michael Cardew and his students from Cardew's Abuja Pottery in Nigeria:



3-3 Catalogue for the exhibition *Michael Cardew and Pupils*, 1983.

*I had business at the Berkeley Galleries and there also found the Dean, enthroned on a chair in the middle of the floor, with Abuja pots all around him. It was obvious that the Dean liked (as I immediately did) the great water-pot by Halima. To divert his attention, I ventured to point out that Ladi Kwali had taken up his earlier suggestion of incorporating a praying mantis among her water-pot decorations – I may have put it as crudely as ‘I see Ladi made your praying mantis pot’. The Dean was quite aware of what I was up to – he gave me a rather dry, sideways look and observed, ‘I see – you imply there is a... Moral Obligation?’ Somewhat abashed, I nevertheless said yes, I did rather feel so. Little more was said, but it was tacitly and amicably agreed that he was to put the Ladi pot on his list and I the Halima on mine. The Dean comes out of this well-behaved with charitable restraint, and since I have tried (not always successfully) to emulate him.<sup>7</sup>*



3-4 Ladi Kwali. Photograph W.A. Ismay.

7 W. A. Ismay, quoted in Tessa Sidey (1983). *Michael Cardew and Pupils*, York City Art Gallery.

This one encounter offers not only evidence of Ismay's competitiveness, nerve and bravery in challenging such an important and iconic collector, but also evidence of the responsibility he felt that collectors owed to the potters they supported. He was aware that Milner-White had suggested to Ladi Kwali that she try out different decoration on her work, she tried it and the results were not successful. Ismay's opinion was that Milner-White should own up to holding some responsibility for that and show his support by acquiring the work. It is telling that in all of Ismay's articles and reviews, he never ventures to make specific suggestions to potters on how they should develop their work in such an explicit fashion and restrains himself to supportive and constructive criticism of what they have done. Perhaps he learnt that from Milner-White's mistake in 1962.



3-5 Water Pot by Halima Audu, purchased by W.A. Ismay at Berkeley Galleries in 1962. (York Museums Trust)





3-6 Water Pot by Ladi Kwali, purchased by Eric Milner-White at Berkeley Galleries in 1962. (York Museums Trust)

The idea of collecting with *charitable or gentlemanly restraint* is something that Ismay took to heart. Collecting is by its nature, a competitive activity but in the early days when Ismay began collecting studio pottery, there were unspoken rules regarding behaviour. Rules such as queuing to enter a private view and then again when making a purchase (sometimes strict rules would apply such as only one pot being bought at a time, and then you would return to the back of the queue to wait and make the second purchase and so on). Ismay approved of this formality and of the order it provided. He often used it to his advantage by arriving hours before the private view opened to ensure he was first in the queue or perhaps he even had the good fortune of the gallery owner recognizing him peering through the window and inviting him in for an early look to make his selection. As a result he gained a reputation with other collectors for always managing to get the best piece in an exhibition. The collector Jon Catleugh commented in a letter to Ismay:





3-7 Painting in the Form of a Dish, 1976, Gordon Baldwin. (York Museums Trust)

*I got to the Baldwin exhibition on the Tuesday after it had opened and in the course of conversation with one of the ladies (Jocelyn?) said that the thing I really wanted was the dish just by the door. She then told me that you had bought it and predicted my reaction!<sup>8</sup>*

An element of humour was in evidence when he purchased his first piece by potter Ian Godfrey in 1968. He and another unnamed collector were both keen to purchase a particular lidded pot by Godfrey with two animal figures on the lid. It seemed neither were willing to back down about who had seen the pot first, so they tossed a coin for the right to purchase it and Ismay won.<sup>9</sup> Another collector, Simon Fox (a relative of the potter Michael Cardew) recalled one occasion at an exhibition private view when Ismay had come over to talk to him and, at the same time, mischievously inserted himself in front of Fox in the queue of purchasers.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>8</sup> Letter from Jon Catleugh (collector) to W.A. Ismay, dated 20 May 1976.

<sup>9</sup> Draft letter from W.A. Ismay to unidentified recipient. Undated.

<sup>10</sup> Recollection of Simon Fox recounted to Helen Walsh, 2008.



3-8 Lidded Pot, 1968, Ian Godfrey. (York Museums Trust)

Acquiring pots was not always a ruthless and cut throat activity though and whilst competitive, Ismay often demonstrated great generosity to his fellow collectors, particularly if they were committed and passionate about the work. In 1975 Ismay attended an exhibition of work by Hans Coper at Kettle's Yard, Cambridge, with fledgling collectors Alan and Pat Firth, whom he had only met the year before but had become close friends with. Alan Firth recalled that:

*Pat had been saving a small amount each month for the past year in order to buy a personal piece at the Kettle's Yard show. She and Bill had discussed their preferences – each had come up with the same two pots; Bill gave Pat the first choice!<sup>11</sup>*

On another occasion however, there was a more fraught incident between Ismay and the Firths at a private view at the Bluecoat Display Centre, Liverpool, which caused a row between them. Ismay wrote to the Firths shortly after the event to explain why he had lost his temper:

*I'm sorry we got at cross purposes over the little Ward pot at the Bluecoat. A situation developed there (although I believe so far as we three were concerned there were very quickly no hard feelings) which is just what I most dislike, ie, no queue, but just a mob, with poor Elisabeth hardly knowing what she was doing! I was right at her elbow but kept quiet so as not to make things worse. I had just two numbers on the back of my catalogue- 55 and 252- having decided I couldn't afford the Batterham bottle, and heard that Jim Malone wanted the Batterham teapot (although it was Jane Hamlyn who finally bought it!)- and believed I had made no secret of my preferences. Knowing there was competition for my first choice, although I'd very much have liked it, I was prepared to concede on this to a friend. So when you gave in 55 over my shoulder, Alan, I just kept quiet still- but when you then went on to ask for my little no.2 as well, it seemed a bit much- would have left me with no serious purchase.<sup>12</sup>*

Pat Firth wrote back immediately:

*At Bluecoat we had 3 items on our list – Joanna, the hanging & Elizabeth's John Ward, when that was unavailable Alan switched to the little one (which was by the way the best one) having no idea that you had earmarked that one. You did right to shout up, we had got our first choice which we are delighted with & the hanging looks really well. No hard feelings at all Bill... any upset about the John Ward was quite unintentional, am pleased you got it.<sup>13</sup>*

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11 McErlain, Alex (2015). 'From Humble Beginnings: the extraordinary collection of Alan and Pat Firth', in *Studio Ceramics, Modern and Contemporary Design: The Alan and Pat Firth Collection*. Adam Partridge Auctioneers and Valuers, 2015.

12 Letter from W.A. Ismay to Alan and Pat Firth (collectors), dated 18 December 1980.

13 Letter from Pat Firth (collector) to W.A. Ismay, dated 22 December 1980.



The Firths had been close friends with Ismay since they first contacted him in 1974 and they often helped him out by giving him lifts to exhibitions and delivering pots to his home if they had purchased things from the same show. Evidence of a more good-natured and gentle competitiveness between the Firths and Ismay can be seen in the correspondence they exchanged over the years, where they got into the habit of sharing the total number of pots they had purchased over the year. Ismay always won, but his comments when admitting his annual totals were very revealing, with phrases such as ‘willy-nilly’, ‘frenzy’ and ‘addict’ suggesting his hobby was out of his control:

*My attempt to keep to “one a week” didn’t succeed, and in fact I’ve been tempted to the point of being presently in the red (partly on “futures” however, ie, on the items I hope to catch up with next year). But I’ll also next year have to make some serious attempts to get rid of unwanted stuff, get some more shelves up, etc, etc- otherwise this place will become not only unvisitable but unliveable in.<sup>14</sup>*

*I determined to go slow this year but have willy-nilly notched up three- all Jim Malone, from various sources.<sup>15</sup>*

*I seem to added 61 pots in 1985 (am still paying for the last 3 which were an extravagance). (However this compares with 89 in 1984, 99 in 1983 and 104 in 1982, so I’m moderating the frenzy a bit- I need to do, as it’s quite mad!) None so far in 1986. My “targets” will have to be fewer anyway this year I think.<sup>16</sup>*

*I’ve restrained myself to 47 pots so far this year (inside my ration). Last year it was 60. (But I’m still an addict I fear- however it’s more fun than some addictions.)<sup>17</sup>*

*1994 has been a year in which I missed a good many of the events I’d earlier have gone to- have been mainly to local events, but still seem to have acquired 45 more pots!<sup>18</sup>*

Ismay kept a record of his purchases and from this created his ‘W.A. ISMAY COLLECTION Handlist compiled by Mr Ismay’ in which he details: ‘alphabetical listing under individual potters giving accession numbers and abbreviated descriptions.’<sup>19</sup> (This document is discussed in Chapter 4, Section 4.5 of this research.) The list only includes acquisitions he made up until 1995, as ill health meant he was unable to add the further 600–700 purchases he made between 1996 and his death in 2001. Ismay’s

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14 Letter from W.A. Ismay to Alan and Pat Firth (collectors), dated 16 December 1978.

15 Letter from W.A. Ismay to Alan and Pat Firth (collectors), dated 25 February 1979.

16 Letter from W.A. Ismay to Alan and Pat Firth (collectors), dated 26 January 1986.

17 Christmas card from W.A. Ismay to Alan and Pat Firth (collectors), dated 1991.

18 Christmas card from W.A. Ismay to Alan and Pat Firth (collectors), dated 1994.

19 ‘W.A. ISMAY COLLECTION Handlist compiled by Mr Ismay’, 1996–2001.

handlist of his acquisitions enables us to gain an overview of his activity. Specific years can be picked out and considered alongside the context of what was happening that year using Ismay's archive. For example, highlighted below, 1975 stands out as he acquired more pots that year than any other, by a large margin. His archive reveals that this was the year that he retired and so had his retirement lump sum to spend, along with the spare time to travel and purchase from potters and exhibitions:

| Year | Pots | Year        | Pots       | Year | Pots | Year | Pots |
|------|------|-------------|------------|------|------|------|------|
| 1955 | 18   | 1966        | 36         | 1977 | 68   | 1988 | 52   |
| 1956 | 66   | 1967        | 50         | 1978 | 79   | 1989 | 51   |
| 1957 | 80   | 1968        | 43         | 1979 | 101  | 1990 | 50   |
| 1958 | 83   | 1969        | 44         | 1980 | 104  | 1991 | 47   |
| 1959 | 112  | 1970        | 57         | 1981 | 109  | 1992 | 39   |
| 1960 | 78   | 1971        | 80         | 1982 | 104  | 1993 | 44   |
| 1961 | 39   | 1972        | 77         | 1983 | 99   | 1994 | 44   |
| 1962 | 64   | 1973        | 79         | 1984 | 89   | 1995 | 41   |
| 1963 | 51   | 1974        | 97         | 1985 | 61   |      |      |
| 1964 | 102  | <b>1975</b> | <b>177</b> | 1986 | 51   |      |      |

Ismay's handlist is a valuable document and one that he himself studied. As his collection grew he became interested in the patterns that developed. One way in which he used the patterns was to develop his annual 'quota' which became increasingly important to him as he became older. He had noticed that he had a habit of purchasing at least 52 pots per year, which was a pot per week. This became a benchmark for him, a sign it was healthy and growing. His quota was mentioned in correspondence with the Firths, when he shared his annual totals with them. That he usually exceeded his quota is clear from the handlist, but is also evidenced in a letter the Firths enclosed in a Christmas card in 1977, when they tease him: 'I wonder by how many you exceeded your quota of pots for 1977 and what new rules you have made for 1978?'<sup>20</sup> In the early 1990s however, he began to fall behind on his target due to being ill and undergoing a number of hospital stays. Alex McErlain recalled a conversation during that period when he and his wife had visited Ismay when he was home recovering from illness:

*Bill was more concerned that it had rather put him behind with potting activities. He said 'I am behind with my quota'. When questioned about this he said he now liked to average a pot a week coming into the collection so 52 pots per year should have been purchased but I think he had only managed around 30 during that year.*<sup>21</sup>

<sup>20</sup> Letter in a Christmas card from Alan and Pat Firth (collectors) to W.A. Ismay, dated December 1977.

<sup>21</sup> Recollection of Alex McErlain recounted to Helen Walsh, March 2013.

ACCESSION NUMBER SEQUENCES - GIVING KEY TO YEAR OF ACCESSION

| <u>NUMBERS</u> | <u>YEAR</u> | <u>NUMBERS</u> | <u>YEAR</u> |
|----------------|-------------|----------------|-------------|
| 1 to 18        | 1955        | 1952 to 2060   | 1981        |
| 19 to 84       | 1956        | 2061 to 2164   | 1982        |
| 85 to 164      | 1957        | 2165 to 2263   | 1983        |
| 165 to 247     | 1958        | 2264 to 2352   | 1984        |
| 248 to 359     | 1959        | 2353 to 2413   | 1985        |
| 360 to 437     | 1960        | 2414 to 2464   | 1986        |
| 438 to 476     | 1961        | 2465 to 2530   | 1987        |
| 477 to 540     | 1962        | 2531 to 2582   | 1988        |
| 541 to 591     | 1963        | 2583 to 2633   | 1989        |
| 592 to 693     | 1964        | 2634 to 2683   | 1990        |
| 694 to 760     | 1965        | 2684 to 2730   | 1991        |
| 761 to 796     | 1966        | 2731 to 2769   | 1992        |
| 797 to 846     | 1967        | 2770 to 2813   | 1993        |
| 847 to 899     | 1968        | 2814 to 2857   | 1994        |
| 890 to 933     | 1969        | 2858 to 2897   | 1995        |
| 934 to 990     | 1970        | 2898 to        | 1996        |
| 991 to 1070    | 1971        |                |             |
| 1071 to 1147   | 1972        |                |             |
| 1148 to 1226   | 1973        |                |             |
| 1227 to 1323   | 1974        |                |             |
| 1324 to 1500   | 1975        |                |             |
| 1501 to 1599   | 1976        |                |             |
| 1600 to 1667   | 1977        |                |             |
| 1668 to 1746   | 1978        |                |             |
| 1747 to 1847   | 1979        |                |             |
| 1848 to 1951   | 1980        |                |             |

"X" SERIES

|            |  |
|------------|--|
| X1 to X2   | 1920s                                      |
| X3 to X5   | 1946                                       |
| X6 to X67  | Between 1956 and 1982<br>(no exact record) |
| X68        | 1983                                       |
| X69 to X70 | 1984                                       |
| X71 to X74 | 1988                                       |
| X75 to X79 | 1989                                       |
| X80 to X89 | 1990                                       |
| X90        | 1991                                       |
| X91 to X92 | 1992                                       |
| X93        | 1994                                       |
| X94        | 1995                                       |



Hans COPER (Continued from previous sheet)

- 319 Large flat bottle with circular centre
- 421 Diabolo-shaped black pot on stem
- 422 Black pot on stem, spinning-top shape
- 750 Waisted beaker (white, dark top) on stem
- 751 Small tall-globular pot with horizontal disc top
- 752 Globular pot on stem (horizontal disc top)
- 753 Small wide-based vase with flared funnel top
- 829 Pot with globular base and elliptical top
- 835 Beaker on stem foot, narrowed elliptical top
- 891 Slender pot on point, elliptical above, globular below, round pedestal
- 892 Tall-globular bottle with ridged shoulders and horizontal disc top
- 989 Tall "bulb-glass" shape with slender stem and broad base
- 1261 Elliptical beaker with dimpled sides, on round stem
- 1275 Black spade-shaped pot on round stem
- 1369 Cycladic form (white) on point, with round pedestal
- 1446 Squared flower-holder on stem, metallic black glaze
- 1459 " " " " , white glaze with manganese inlay and glaze-accidentals

Trevor CORSER

- 1917 Globular bottle with white inlay
- 2032 Small hakeme bowl
- 2064 Small shallow bowl
- 2065 Slightly smaller shallow bowl
- 2066 Bowl, tenmoku with cross-pourings

Suzi CREE

- 1897 Porcelain bowl with quiet cobalt brushwork
- 1898 Slipware plate
- 1957 Large-bellied slipware jug
- 1958 Slipware teabowl with sprigs, green
- 2020 Teabowl
- 2069 Teapot with side handle (of "twisted-rope" appearance), green

Lewis CREED

- 2439 Stoneware mug, white glaze with painted fishes

Dianne CROSS

- 2029 Vase with altered top and decorated with rim-trimmings
- 2030 Cylinder with indented sides, ash glaze
- 2031 " , indented sides and altered top, ash glaze
- 2261 Lidded pot

Peter M. CROTTY

(See also Rosemary D. WREN with whom he collaborated)

- 1043 Raku teabowl
- 1044 " "
- 1095 "My Mother was a Cat" (figurative piece in porcelain)
- ~~XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX~~
- 1096 "Trilateral Quadruped" ( " " " )
- 1106 "Tall Elephant" (raku)
- 1146 Small stoneware cat ) (1146 has elongated tail)
- 1147 " " " )

Andrew CROUCH

- 2858 Cup and saucer

Keith CROUCH

- 2721 Box

The organization of his collection into an alphabetized list arranged by potter and year of purchase also allowed him to impose an impersonal hierarchy on the collection. Though often asked, Ismay found it impossible and undesirable to choose either a favourite pot or potter. He got around this question by using the completely unemotional criteria of the number of pots bought by each potter, so the more pots he bought, the more he liked them. He then went further and imposed three parameters: if he saw some signs of promise in a potter's work he would buy a piece, if the potter continued to intrigue him and became good, they would progress into double figures, and a potter achieved true greatness in Ismay's mind if he had bought 30 pieces of their work or more. In a draft article he listed 31 names of potters in his collection that he had been most often tempted to buy to the point that he owned over thirty pieces by each. He writes of the remaining pots:

*There follow more than a score of names with entries still in double figures, then a further sequence with ten pots each, or less, dwindling down finally to a list of around a hundred potters who (so far) are represented by a single pot.<sup>22</sup>*

The result is a list of names in an order that offers one collector's very personal reflection on how value and importance are attributed to a potter and their work. Of course it is not a true reflection of how Ismay rated the pots he collected, as he was constrained by what he could afford and what was available. For example, Ismay thought Sam Haile was an extremely important potter, but Haile had died young and Ismay never had the opportunity to buy a piece of his work. Similarly, he recognized potter Shoji Hamada as a key figure but Hamada rarely had exhibitions in the UK and Ismay was only able to acquire five pots, so Hamada did not make it to double figures.

N<sup>o</sup> 8584

THE CRAFTS CENTRE OF GREAT BRITAIN  
16-17 Hay Hill, London, W.1. HYDe Park 4471

Sale by Mo Date 27.2.64

The following works:-

| No. | Article                  | Name of Craftsman | Price |   |   | Purchase Tax |   |   | Total                                   |   |   |
|-----|--------------------------|-------------------|-------|---|---|--------------|---|---|---|---|---|
|     |                          |                   | £     | s | d | £            | s | d | £                                       | s | d |
| 53  | SALE GLAZE LAB<br>Bottle | HAMMOND           |       |   |   |              |   |   | 25                                      | - | - |
| 153 | ASH GLAZE T. BOWL        |                   |       |   |   |              |   |   | 15                                      | - | - |
|     |                          |                   |       |   |   |              |   |   | Purchased for the Sum Received Opposite |   |   |
|     |                          |                   |       |   |   |              |   |   | 40 - -                                  |   |   |
|     |                          |                   |       |   |   |              |   |   | 2 - -                                   |   |   |
|     |                          |                   |       |   |   |              |   |   | £ 38 - -                                |   |   |

To: Mr B/S  
Signature: Ismay (Mr., Mrs., Miss)

"I understand that prices are  of carriage and/or postage." exclusive

W.Ltd.-BA 1029

3-11 Receipt for purchase of pots by Shoji Hamada from The Crafts Centre of Great Britain, 1964.

22 Draft article 'Mad about pots', undated.



3-12 Salt-glazed Bottle, 1963, Shoji Hamada. (York Museums Trust)



However, using this method of sorting his collection to consider the list of the potters who made it into the top section of his hierarchy is an interesting one and offers an accurate reflection on the character of the collection:

| <b>Hierarchy</b> | <b>Potter</b>     | <b>Pots</b> |
|------------------|-------------------|-------------|
| 1                | Jim Malone        | 80          |
| 2                | Eric James Mellon | 68          |
| 3                | Richard Batterham | 64          |
| 4                | Harry & May Davis | 63          |
| 5                | Michael Casson    | 62          |
| 6                | Michael Cardew    | 57          |
| 7                | Rosemary Wren     | 54          |
| 8                | Denise Wren       | 53          |
| 9                | Barbara Cass      | 52          |
| 10               | Jane Hamlyn       | 41          |
| 11               | Seth Cardew       | 40          |
| 12               | Geoffrey Whiting  | 40          |
| 13               | David Lloyd Jones | 39          |
| 14               | David Leach       | 36          |
| 15               | Bernard Leach     | 34          |
| 16               | Mal Magson        | 32          |
| 17               | Ray Finch         | 31          |
| 18               | Walter Keeler     | 31          |
| 19               | Hans Coper        | 30          |

It is clear from this list of potters that the type of pots Ismay was most drawn to were functional domestic pots. Objects he could use and experience everyday as part of his life.

### **3.2 I really do not know any employment of money more productive of an enhancement of one's daily life than that of buying good pots for daily use<sup>23</sup> — Building a functional collection**

Potter Jane Hamlyn describes the late 1950s and 1960s as Ismay's heyday.<sup>24</sup> He had inherited his home (with no mortgage remaining to be paid) and a significant sum of money £2,545. 8s. 9d. (which is the equivalent of £44,400 today) from his mother's estate. He also had a regular income from his job as a librarian and was in the comfortable position of being able to spend much of his inheritance and his income on building his collection. This financial resource and the knowledge about pots that he was rapidly building enabled him to buy significant pots, important pieces by the pioneer studio potters. These included the work of Bernard Leach and William Staite Murray, W.B. Dalton and Charles Vyse, and would become items he would later refer to as the 'foundation stones' of his collection.<sup>25</sup>



Though many of the pots he bought during his early years of collecting were oriental in style, there were also many items that had a more traditional English character. Ismay's taste in pottery was diverse, he wrote: 'If the work pleases me, I am prepared to be interested in pots made and fired by any means.'<sup>26</sup> Though he did purchase works of a sculptural nature by potters including Gordon Baldwin and Hans Coper, at heart, his is a collection of functional domestic pottery. Ismay enjoyed being able to use pieces in his everyday life from arranging them in his home to eating his meals from them:

**3-13** Jar, 1930s, Charles Vyse. (York Museums Trust)

23 Ismay, W.A. (1979). 'Richard Batterham: stoneware including saltglaze', *Ceramic Review*, No. 60, November/December, p. 11.

24 Interview with Jane Hamlyn (potter) in 2013. See Appendix v for transcript.

25 Draft letter from W.A. Ismay to Carol Hogben (Acting Keeper of Regional Services, Victoria & Albert Museum), 12 February 1977.

26 Ismay, W.A. (1982b). 'Collecting Studio Pottery', *Ceramic Review*, No. 76 July/August, pp. 4-7.



3-14 Coffee Pot, 1992, Jim Malone. (York Museums Trust)

*I really do not know any employment of money more productive of an enhancement of one's daily life than that of buying good pots for daily use – they are so agreeable to handle that even washing-up becomes a pleasure rather than a chore!<sup>27</sup>*

Ismay viewed his move into collecting handmade pottery in 1955 as a kind of unofficial graduation from his earlier childhood collections of natural history and stamp collecting, as each object is unique and offered more of a curatorial challenge in putting objects together to form some sort of order, whether it was an aesthetic order or a theme or meaning.<sup>28</sup> A collector can be compared to other creative practitioners:

27 Ismay, W.A. (1979). 'Richard Batterham: stoneware including saltglaze', *Ceramic Review*, No. 60, November/December, p. 11.

28 Draft introduction to W.A. Ismay's article 'Collecting Studio Pottery', *Ceramic Review*, No. 76 July/August, pp. 4–7.





3-15 W.A. Ismay using coffee pot made by Jim Malone. Photograph Janette Haigh.

‘collecting in a special sense is a creative art, and as expressive of personality as handwriting or brushwork.’<sup>29</sup> In a conversation with curator and writer David Whiting, Ismay hints at this creativity by making an architectural comparison, stating: ‘when you build a cathedral, you don’t then start taking away the stones from the base.’<sup>30</sup> This comment was a response when asked why he did not dispose of some of the less significant items in his collection.

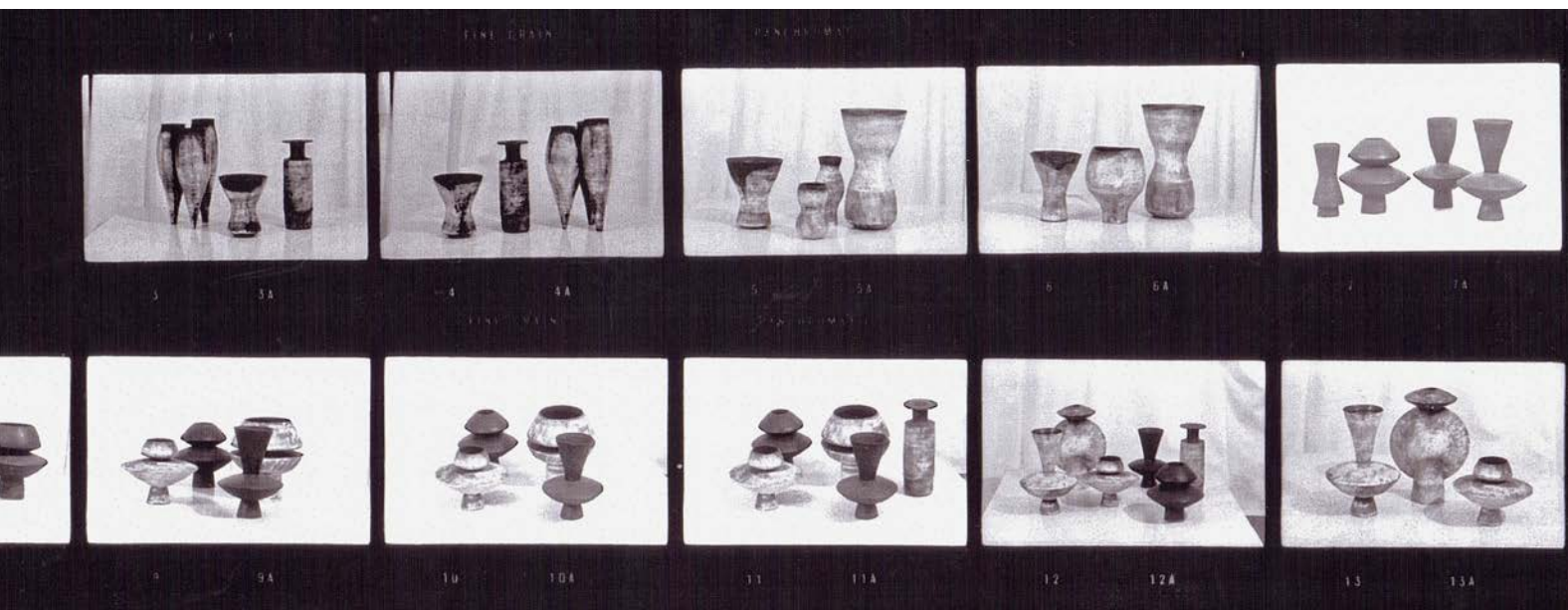
Central to Ismay’s activity was his respect and support for the potters and he remained conscious of what he saw as his good fortune at being accepted into their society: ‘As a collector I am not (even in a small way) a “patron of the arts” (potters are not people to be patronised) but primarily a man who is pleasing himself and enriching his own life.’<sup>31</sup> He thought his role was that of supporter and admirer. Evidence of Ismay’s support can be seen in the case of Hans Coper’s exhibitions between 1956 and

29 Haggard, Reginald (1950). *English Country Pottery*, Phoenix House Ltd.

30 Conversation with W.A. Ismay as recalled by David Whiting, recounted to Helen Walsh in 2012.

31 Draft article written by W.A. Ismay, titled ‘What makes collectors collect?’, undated.

1965, when he purchased pieces in bulk: five in 1956, three in 1957, five in 1958, three in 1960, four in 1965. He was very aware of the importance of his support and what it meant for a collector to be demonstrating serious interest in Coper's work by buying. Ismay later remarked that he made a special effort financially to purchase works then because: 'if he [Coper] doesn't sell any, he might not make any more.'<sup>32</sup> At that time, the only serious collectors interested in Coper's new modernist style of work were Ismay and J.M.W Crowther.<sup>33</sup> Unfortunately, Crowther later had a psychotic episode in which he smashed all of his Coper pots. Fortunately Ismay had visited Crowther before that happened and in 1961 photographed the collection, so there remains a record of the pieces in Ismay's archive, some of which were published in Tony Birks book about Coper.<sup>34</sup> The destruction of so many of the pots Coper produced in the 1950s makes the ones in Ismay's collection, along with his photographs of the Crowther pots in his archive, extremely important examples of his work from that period.



3-16 Contact sheet of photographs taken by W.A. Ismay in 1961 of J.M.W. Crowther's collection of pots by Hans Coper.

32 Mellon, Eric James and Foster, Paul (2007). *Decorating stoneware: Ash glazes and the art of the British*, University of Chichester, p. 49.

33 Birks, Tony (1983). *Hans Coper*. Sainsbury Centre for Visual Arts, University of East Anglia.

34 Ibid.

### ***3.3 In our time there has come to be a definite cleavage between the art of the potter and the industrial production of pottery<sup>35</sup> — Ismay's rapid rise in status as a collector***

The growth of Ismay's status and reputation as a collector was illustrated in 1959, a mere four years since he began collecting. He was contacted by Helen Kapp (then Director of Wakefield City Art Gallery and Museum) about loaning some of his pots for exhibition in the gallery that summer. It was an ambitious exhibition featuring almost 150 works by practising potters and Kapp was keen to take advantage of having an important collection on her doorstep to borrow from. Correspondence between Ismay and Kapp reveals that, at the time, his home was in chaos in the aftermath of engineers changing his energy supply from gas to electric. He was intending to take the opportunity to redecorate and build new shelving for his pottery collection, which, by the beginning of 1959 numbered 247, which would be joined by a further 112 pots during 1959. However he was being held up due to a delayed delivery of timber and as a consequence, all of his collection of pots was packed away for safekeeping. To enable Kapp to view his collection meant unpacking them all and disrupting his plans to carry out maintenance work and redecorate his home.<sup>36</sup> Despite this inconvenience, he was clearly very keen to support a local exhibition, so he agreed to get all the pots unpacked as soon as possible for Kapp to come and view. Photographs taken after the house was cleared in 2001 show the remains of a decorating scheme that pre-dates the 1950s by a number of decades, so it seems that Ismay never managed to find time to reignite his decorating plans. As his collection continued to grow and fill up his house, the longer he left it, the more impossible it became.



**3-17** Photograph of interior of 14 Welbeck Street after W.A. Ismay's death in 2001.

<sup>35</sup> Lecture delivered by W.A. Ismay at the opening of the exhibition *The Art of the Potter* at Wakefield City Art Gallery on Saturday 20 June 1959. See Appendix iii for a transcript.

<sup>36</sup> Draft letter from W.A. Ismay to Helen Kapp (Director of Wakefield City Art Gallery and Museum), undated but in reply to Kapp's letter of 6 April 1959.



Ismay's willingness to support loan requests would become a feature of his activity during the next forty years. It enabled his collection to become widely known and built his reputation as a generous supporter of the British studio pottery movement. Even though loans could be an inconvenience to him, Ismay very rarely turned down loan requests (unless a piece was already committed elsewhere). Until 1975 he was working full time as a librarian and his spare time was taken up in numerous ways: attending private views and exhibitions across the UK, travelling to collect new pots he had purchased, allowing access to his collection to visitors (visits could often take several hours), not to mention keeping on top of his correspondence.

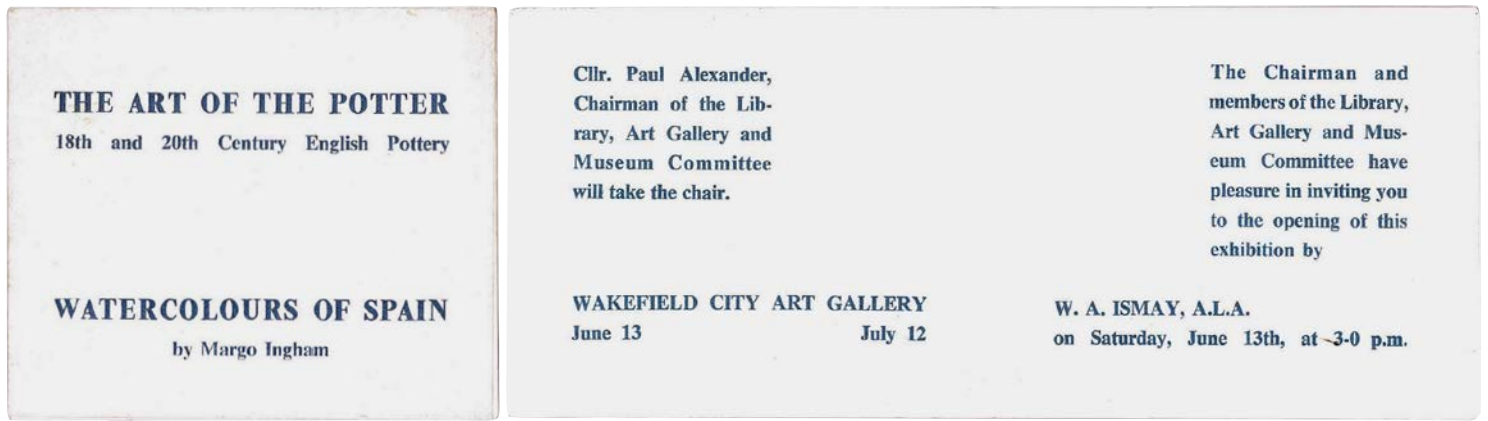
For her exhibition, Kapp selected a total of thirty-four pieces from Ismay's collection: ten pieces by Hans Coper, one by Marianne Haile (de Trey), two by Lucie Rie, four by Irwin Hoyland, nine by Waistel Cooper and eight by Graham Burr. She had also arranged to show a further one hundred and twenty pots by five other practising potters. In his reply, Ismay reveals how he is developing his own personal tastes, both likes and dislikes. He comments on the exhibitors, mentioning with pride how many pieces he has by each potter and that he knows three of them personally:

*Of the modern potters whom you name, only Estella Campavias is new to me. I'm afraid I've never liked anything by James Tower or Paul Brown well enough to buy it, but the remaining four are in my collection in varying degrees- the three whom I know personally, fairly strongly: Barbara Cass by 38 pieces (including some small or early ones which she would deprecate), Hans Coper (whom you particularly mention) by 13 and Lucie Rie by 10 and Frank Cooper (whom I've not met) inadequately by 3.<sup>37</sup>*



3-18 Bottle, 1956, Hans Coper. (York Museums Trust)

37 Draft letter from W.A. Ismay to Helen Kapp (Director of Wakefield City Art Gallery and Museum), undated but in reply to Kapp's letter of 6 April 1959.



3-19 Invitation card to the private view of *The Art of the Potter* at Wakefield Art Gallery, 1959.

Ismay had impressed Kapp with his knowledge and passion for his collection during the time she had spent selecting pieces for the exhibition, so she asked him to officially open the exhibition at its formal private view. He described himself as: 'somewhat taken aback, though greatly honoured' by Kapp's request.<sup>38</sup> He accepts somewhat nervously, writing:

*I have little experience as a public speaker and am inclined to be a hesitant one. After anxious reflection however, I would be willing to undertake the task, provided you agree to my keeping my remarks brief and confining them mainly to the pots.<sup>39</sup>*



3-20 Bowl, 1958, Hans Coper. (York Museums Trust)

<sup>38</sup> Draft letter from W.A. Ismay to Helen Kapp (Director of Wakefield City Art Gallery and Museum), undated but in reply to Kapp's letter of 9 April 1959.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*

In an accompanying exhibition leaflet, the influential London-based art and literature critic Hugh Gordon Porteus (1906–1993), wrote: ‘Pottery is, for those of us who have never made pots, as strange as a mediaeval mystery or a branch of nuclear physics.’<sup>40</sup> Perhaps Ismay’s ambition was to dispel some of that mystery, as, what he had stated would be brief remarks, turned into a nine page lecture lasting twenty minutes.<sup>41</sup> He reveals his extensive knowledge of pottery, not just regarding the type of pottery in his collection but also of historical ceramics. For example, he discusses what he terms Sunday teapots, pieces brought out on special occasions in a similar way to Sunday best clothes worn at church. He describes them as being produced in the 18th and 19th centuries and unrepresentative of what most households use every day, but collected by museums. This set the scene for the type of handmade pottery he collects and uses. He speaks extremely confidently on modern pottery, going into perhaps too much detail for his audience of non-specialists, explaining the different properties of clays, firing temperatures and the importance of the kiln in determining the outcome of a potter’s work. He holds up William Staite Murray and Bernard Leach as the two main figures in the British studio pottery movement during the forty years preceding the exhibition, using the opportunity to highlight the Milner-White collection, recently put on permanent display at York Art Gallery, as the best tribute to their work.



3-21 *Wakefield Express*, 20 June 1959.

<sup>40</sup> Porteus, Hugh Gordon (1959). *The Art of the Potter*, Wakefield City Art Gallery.

<sup>41</sup> Lecture delivered by W.A. Ismay at the opening of the exhibition *The Art of the Potter* at Wakefield City Art Gallery on Saturday 20 June 1959. See Appendix iii for a transcript.



Ismay's speech is revelatory of in many ways. He devotes only one paragraph to the exhibition of watercolours, two paragraphs to the historical ceramics and for the remaining eight and a half pages talks about modern pottery, admitting: 'perhaps it is only my prejudice to state that in the modern part of the show the aesthetic average, so to speak, is on a somewhat higher level.'<sup>42</sup>

At this gathering of people interested in art and culture in a small northern city, in the company of members of the local council (his employers), Ismay bravely gave voice to his left-wing beliefs of the value of work created by an individual craftsman as opposed to a soulless machine. His rhetoric speaks of his confidence at airing such views in public and echoed the views of figures such as the socialist William Morris, who railed against the industrialization of craft and subsequent loss of skills. One particular opinion of Ismay's grabbed the attention of his audience and was quoted in articles in both *The Yorkshire Post* and *The Wakefield Express*:

*In our time there has come to be a definite cleavage between the art of the potter and the industrial production of pottery. This is because mass-production methods have now been applied with full force to the manufacture of pottery for everyday use – that is, the forms are shaped mechanically so far as possible, and the successive processes are split up between different workers, so that no one pair of hands is responsible for any complete production.'*<sup>43</sup>

In Ismay's view, this is a negative as he comments that the aim of mechanization in the ceramics industry is: 'mechanical perfection and uniformity which is surely the very antithesis of a work of art.'<sup>44</sup> In the exhibition leaflet however, Porteus takes a different view, arguing that the Industrial Revolution could be seen to have had a mutually beneficial role:

*It was in the Eighteenth Century that the first attempts at mass-production began; and in the Twentieth that pottery for-its-own-sake really arrived. The gains have been mutual. The factory freed the humble workshop potter to do what he pleased; his more intensive work has in turn given the manufacturer better designs and techniques, to the benefit of everyone concerned.'*<sup>45</sup>

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42 Lecture delivered by W.A. Ismay at the opening of the exhibition *The Art of the Potter* at Wakefield City Art Gallery on Saturday 20 June 1959.

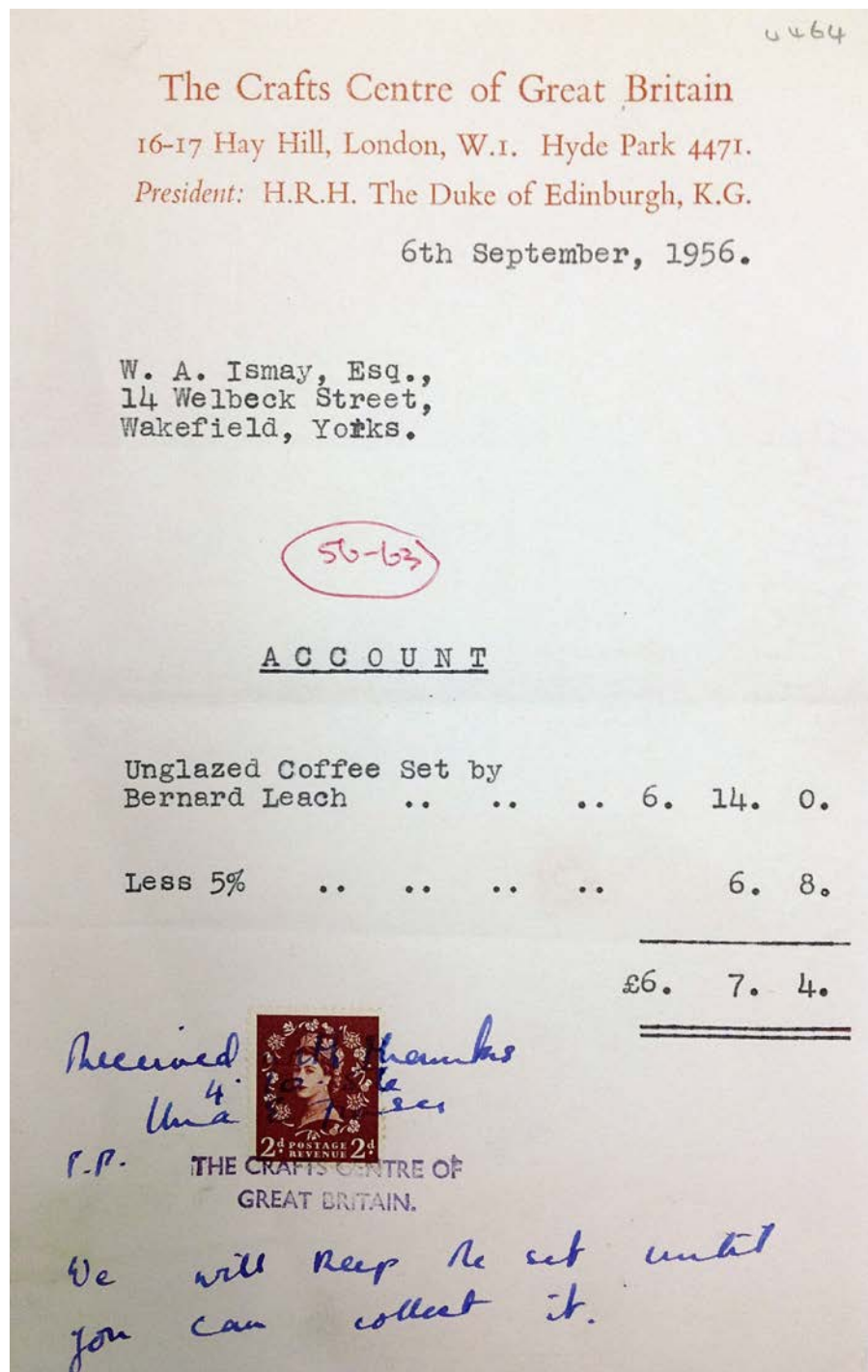
43 Ibid.

44 Ibid.

45 Porteus, Hugh Gordon (1959). *The Art of the Potter*, Wakefield City Art Gallery.

Ismay spoke about the oriental influence on modern British pottery and the danger that imitation can be harmful. However, he concentrates on the positive influence he has viewed in work and the English character he sees emerging in it, which is something that was of particular interest to Eric Milner-White, whose collection was on view at York Art Gallery and was much admired by Ismay. Ismay's opinion was formed from viewing and buying during the previous four years, but was also combined with his knowledge of Chinese ceramics gained during World War Two.

Concluding his speech, Ismay picks out a question raised by Porteus in the exhibition leaflet, and asks it of his audience: 'Ought we to take heed, or not, of the sentence, in the leaflet which has been written for this exhibition by Hugh Gordon Porteus, about Sung pots standing as a rebuke, as we admire each exciting novelty?'<sup>46</sup>



3-22 Statement of account relating to a coffee set by Bernard Leach purchased by W.A. Ismay.

46 Porteus, Hugh Gordon (1959). *The Art of the Potter*, Wakefield City Art Gallery.

### **3.4 Your personal collection is regarded as being of totally exceptional importance<sup>47</sup> — Professional respect for Ismay's collection**

Ismay's collection became known as one of the largest and most significant collections of post-war British studio pottery in the UK, partly due to the important purchases made during his first few years collecting, and the rate at which his collection was growing, but also due to the loyalty he demonstrated to the potters he supported. Loyalty and support was evident in the way in which he formed large collections of work by some potters over a number of years. The value of his support was rewarded time and again as he was offered the best pieces and preferential buying terms. The strength of his collection and respect it received led to him being approached for loans for exhibitions from the late 1950s. Though he was only in the early stages of forming his collection, he had already been very shrewd in what he bought.

It was during the crucial year of 1956, the year of his mother's death and his subsequent inheritance, that he was able to extend the limits of his collection and invest heavily in important pieces. The piece that was proven over the years to Ismay as being of the greatest importance, was his coffee set made by Bernard Leach. It was so important in fact that he described it as follows: 'This set of BL's (along with Staite Murray's tall pot "Anubis") was one of the early foundation stones of my collection, once I'd decided to extend it beyond "made in Yorkshire".<sup>48</sup> Its importance, in Ismay's opinion, is derived for a number of reasons, which are revealed through his archive.

In a letter to potter Geoffrey Whiting, for example, we learn that Leach himself regarded it as something special and almost unique:

*I well remember talking to BL in 1959 about a coffee set of his which I'd bought in 1956. At first he said (not exactly disparagingly but with a dismissive manner) that what I was talking about "sounded like something from the standard production". But when I went into more detail he said "Ah, that sounds like something much more personal" and it eventually emerged that he'd only ever made two sets of the kind and that the other was in Japan. In 1961 he borrowed this set (and 3 other pieces) for his Arts Council retrospective exhibition. The potters then at St Ives (to whom it was new) were fascinated and wished that something like it could go into standard production. This was never done because it was too personal to BL- only he or just possibly Bill Marshall could have done more than a travesty of it.<sup>49</sup>*

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47 Letter from Carol Hogben (Acting Keeper of Regional Services, Victoria & Albert Museum) to W.A. Ismay, dated 28 September 1976.

48 Draft letter from W.A. Ismay to Carol Hogben (Acting Keeper of Regional Services, Victoria & Albert Museum), dated 12 February 1977.

49 Draft letter from W.A. Ismay to Geoffrey Whiting (potter), undated but in reply to Geoffrey Whiting's letter dated 21 June 1974.





3-23 Photograph of the complete coffee set, published alongside a 1956 review in *Pottery Quarterly* of a Bernard Leach exhibition at Liberty's.

The functional nature of the coffee set implies it is part of the *Standard Ware* range designed by Leach and his son David and produced as a commercial enterprise from 1937 until Leach's death in 1979. *Standard Ware* emerged from Leach's preoccupation with standards in process, material and form in pottery. As well as generating much needed income for the Leach Pottery, it was used as a way for apprentices at the Pottery to learn by doing and repetition. The production of *Standard Ware* gave financial stability to the Leach Pottery, whilst the production of a more expensive range of exhibition pieces provided a creative outlet. Ismay, and apparently the potters working at the Leach Pottery, believed that Ismay's set was so special that only Leach himself could repeat its production. Ismay gave his opinion about its special characteristics as follows:

*My own admiration for this (after noting the splendid choice of body and glaze for the concept) springs firstly from the magnificence of the coffeepot itself, which is slightly larger, darker and also more rigorously-made and strongly-fired than its companion pieces; secondly from the way this milder companion piece (which is clearly the milk-jug) supplements and sets off the greater quality of the other; and thirdly from the excellent way in which the form of the cups consorts with that of the jug (the sugar bowl is well-shaped and functional but /XXX/).<sup>50</sup>*

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50 Draft letter from W.A. Ismay to Carol Hogben (Acting Keeper of Regional Services, Victoria & Albert Museum), dated 3 February 1977.

Another very important aspect of the coffee set's value for Ismay relates to the moment at which he purchased it and the doors it opened for him as a collector. Though the coffee set was made in 1949, it was seven years later in 1956 when Ismay bought it. At the time, he was on one of his early trips to London in search of pots, following his decision to extend his collection beyond Yorkshire. He had made an appointment to visit the workshop of the potters Lucie Rie and Hans Coper at Albion Mews (a converted stable near Hyde Park). He arrived in London early and so filled the time by visiting the Crafts Centre at Hay Hill. Ismay provided a full background explaining the circumstances that led to its purchase, in 1977 when he agreed to loan it to the retrospective of Bernard Leach at the Victoria & Albert Museum:

*With reference to the information sought for your records, the coffee-set (proposed catalogue entry number 124) was in BL's exhibition at Liberty's in 1956 (which I was not able to see) and then consisted of 9 pieces (there were originally 6 cups); for a photograph of the complete set see Pottery Quarterly 10, plate 6; although much admired there it was withdrawn unsold (I have always believed that this was because one of the cups was either broken or stolen, but have never been able to confirm this); the set reappeared with five cups at the Crafts Centre shortly afterwards and it was my good fortune to have an early sight of it and to be able to buy it as my first significant BL purchase.<sup>51</sup>*

Having put down his deposit on the set, Ismay continued on to Albion Mews for his first meeting with Rie and Coper. As Ismay was relatively new to collecting, Rie and Coper were initially unsure of how genuine his interest was and he recalls them initially as being: 'welcoming but reticent.' However Ismay credits the coffee set as changing the whole tone of his visit:

*The atmosphere changed and warmed when I was asked what else I had been doing in London, and replied that I had just come from the Crafts Centre (Hay Hill) where I had reserved immediately, on having the good fortune to see it being unpacked, a coffee set by Bernard Leach, my first purchase of his work. Lucie turned to Coper in excitement and exclaimed, "Hans, he's bought my coffee set!" It appeared that she had so greatly admired it that BL had offered it as a gift, but she had declined in confusion saying it was "too much".<sup>52</sup>*

After he returned home, Ismay immediately wrote to them:

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<sup>51</sup> Draft letter from W.A. Ismay to Carol Hogben (Acting Keeper of Regional Services, Victoria & Albert Museum), dated 3 February 1977.

<sup>52</sup> Ismay, W.A. (1995) 'Collecting Lucie Rie', *Ceramic Review*, No. 154, Jul/Aug, pp. 14–15.

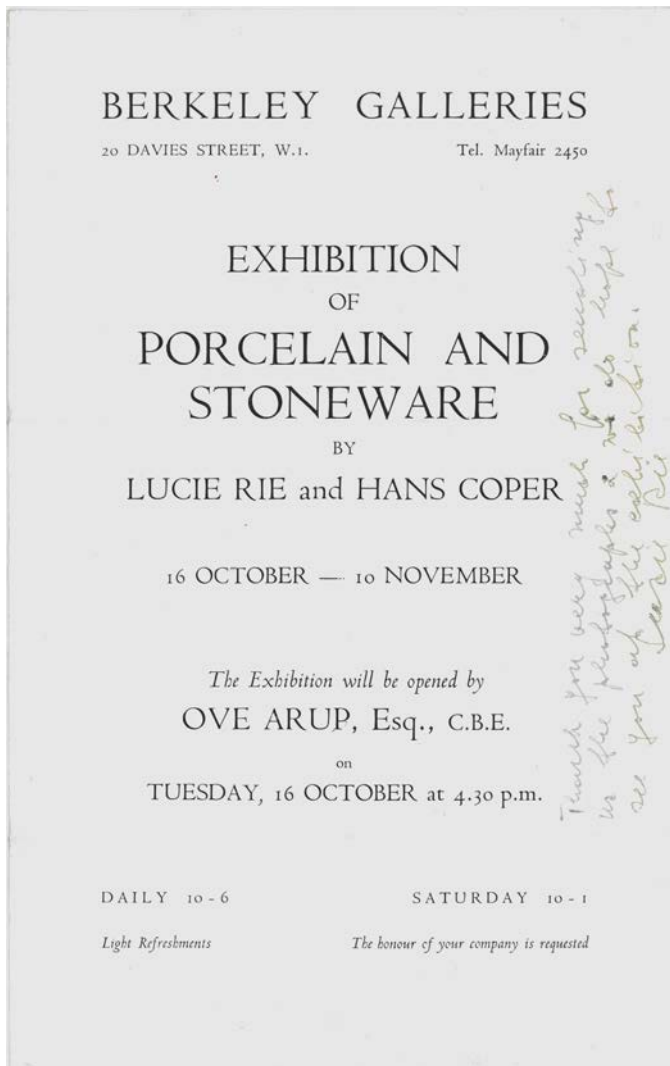
*The Bernard Leach Coffee Set at the Crafts Centre which you commended was irresistible! I couldn't carry that too and have still not been able to collect it, but its on reserve for me! The coffee pot itself in particular is best.*<sup>53</sup>

This visit was the first of many, as shortly afterwards, he received an invitation to the private view of an exhibition of Rie and Coper's work at the Berkeley Galleries, on which Rie included a handwritten note expressing her hope that he would attend.

Ismay later learned that Leach had made a replica of the coffee pot which Rie accepted as a gift and used regularly for the rest of her life; Ismay recalls that it was always present when he visited her.<sup>54</sup>

This first visit to Albion Mews made a deep impression on Ismay which he later recounted in a letter to potter Barbara Cass: 'It was an exciting experience to see, I suppose, some hundreds of pots all at once.'<sup>55</sup> This effect is not dissimilar to what visitors to his own home experienced later on in his life (see Section 3.9). Ismay remained in contact with Rie and Coper for the rest of their lives and there is no doubt that he credited the purchase of the coffee set as facilitating their relationship with him.

That the coffee set was held in such high regard by Ismay was underlined again in 1961 when it became the focus of disagreement between him and the potter Paul Brown, whom Ismay had first met during 1959 when Brown was included in *The Art of the Potter* exhibition at Wakefield Art Gallery, which Ismay had opened. Before that exhibition, Ismay had been less than keen on Brown's work, writing: 'I'm afraid I've never liked anything by James Tower or Paul Brown well enough to buy it.'<sup>56</sup> However, on seeing examples of his new work in the exhibition, Ismay's opinion was changed and he purchased an example, and in his speech opening the exhibition said:



3-24 Invitation to the private view of an exhibition of work by Lucie Rie and Hans Coper.

53 Draft letter from W.A. Ismay to Lucie Rie and Hans Coper (potters), undated but probably 1956.

54 Draft article about Lucie Rie, written after her death in 1995.

55 Draft letter from W.A. Ismay to Barbara Cass (potter), undated but probably 1956 following his first visit to the workshop of potters Lucie Rie and Hans Coper.

56 Draft letter from W.A. Ismay to Helen Kapp (Director of Wakefield City Art Gallery and Museum), undated but in reply to Kapp's letter of 6 April 1959.



*Paul Brown's upright pots, here, stand up as Murray's must have stood when they were first exhibited, each saying with no uncertain voice that it claims to be judged in its own right as a work of art, and has no other use or value apart from that.<sup>57</sup>*

Brown published an article in 1959 in the journal *Pottery Quarterly*, in which he controversially challenged Bernard Leach's *A Potter's Book*, upsetting many potters and positioning himself as anti-establishment. Ismay was a great admirer of Leach and found Brown's opinions difficult but remained open-minded and willing to talk to Brown:



*Paul Brown has a certain antipathy to B.L's work, whilst recognising the latter's importance in giving impetus to a new movement towards living potters. (You may recall P.B's "Towards a New Standard" in Pottery Quarterly 23 (not very lucid I thought), to which B.L replied in the following issue.) I think my collection shook him a little – he went so far as to admit that the physical presence of so many pots by younger potters, the validity of which he recognised, in a collection avowedly based on Leach, possibly meant that he was wrong and needed to revise his ideas. I was quite prepared I think at one time to dislike him and find him supercilious, but he is so much more likeable beneath the surface on nearer acquaintance that it is impossible to do so.<sup>58</sup>*

**3-25** Noctuidae II, 1959, Paul Brown.  
(York Museums Trust)

<sup>57</sup> Lecture delivered by W.A. Ismay at the opening of the exhibition *The Art of the Potter* at Wakefield City Art Gallery on Saturday 20 June 1959.

<sup>58</sup> Draft letter from W.A. Ismay to Michael Cardew (potter), undated but probably written in early 1962 following Paul Brown's visit to see Ismay's collection in December 1961.

Brown himself wrote following a visit to view Ismay's collection with some of his students (he was at that time teaching at Leeds College of Art) for the first time in December 1961: 'I am interested in what you have to say about Leach's coffee set; the coffee pot still seems ugly to me, but I am very prepared to revise my opinion in the light of your own feelings about it.'<sup>59</sup> Ismay seems genuinely perplexed by Brown's dislike of the set, particularly as they had agreed on their mutual admiration for Denise Wren's work. Ismay expresses his confusion in his reply to Brown:

*I like it for its strength and /XXX/ earthiness, powerfully acted upon by the flames in the kiln (incidentally it makes good coffee, and the feel of it in one's hands when hot with coffee is a massively sensuous experience). These are visual and tactile qualities which I also find in much of Mrs Wren's work, and I am still rather puzzled that anyone who likes that should dislike this.'*<sup>60</sup>



3-26 Lidded pot, 1960, Bernard Leach. As illustrated in the Victoria & Albert Museum's 1977 exhibition catalogue.

59 Letter from Paul Brown (potter and teacher at Leeds School of Art) to W.A. Ismay, dated 12 December 1961.

60 Draft letter from W.A. Ismay to Paul Brown (potter and teacher at Leeds School of Art), dated 14 January 1962.



Given the importance of this coffee set to Ismay, the context of its purchase, the high regard Bernard Leach held it in and the admiration it received from potters, it is perhaps understandable that he also felt he had a great responsibility in protecting how it was interpreted and displayed when on loan or reproduced in print. In 1976, Carol Hogben of the Victoria & Albert Museum wrote asking to see the Bernard Leach pots he had in his collection, as he was interested in the loan of pieces for a retrospective exhibition in celebration of Leach's 90th birthday in 1977. Hogben wrote that: 'your personal collection is regarded as being of totally exceptional importance. I am most anxious that with your agreement we should be able to signify this in our selection.'<sup>61</sup> Ismay is modest in his reply: 'your informants may have painted too flattering a picture of what I have here', but he nevertheless invites Hogben up to see his collection.<sup>62</sup> After the visit, Hogben requested the loan of the coffee set and a pot with a pagoda shaped lid Ismay had purchased in 1960. Ismay was very supportive of the exhibition and agreed to the loan.



3-27 Coffee pot, 1949, Bernard Leach. (York Museums Trust)

After the loans had been taken to the Victoria & Albert Museum, Ismay happened to visit whilst photographs were being taken for the catalogue. On receiving details of the catalogue description for his approval, he became very anxious as the catalogue entry included the milk jug masquerading as the coffee pot, along with the sugar bowl and three of the five cups. Whilst concerned that the *whole* set might not be included in either the catalogue or the exhibition, it was the possibility of passing off the milk jug as the coffee pot which Ismay found too awful to contemplate. He wrote to Hogben immediately about his concern:

61 Letter from Carol Hogben (Acting Keeper of Regional Services, Victoria & Albert Museum) to W.A. Ismay, dated 28 September 1976.

62 Draft letter from W.A. Ismay to Carol Hogben (Acting Keeper of Regional Services, Victoria & Albert Museum), dated 4 October 1976.





3-28 Milk or hot water jug, 1949, Bernard Leach. (York Museums Trust)

*When I called at the museum at an earlier stage what I actually saw there of the set (unless my memory is deceiving me) was the milk-jug, sugar bowl and three cups, but I took it at that time that the coffee-pot and other cups were perhaps elsewhere for photographic purposes. Now, reading the catalogue-entry sent to me and my mind suddenly jumping back to that retained and apparently forgotten visual image, I am suddenly possessed by the (to me) quite horrible idea that what I then saw is what is to be shown, with the milk-and-water jug passed off as BL's concept of the coffee-pot.<sup>63</sup>*

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<sup>63</sup> Draft letter from W.A. Ismay to Carol Hogben (Acting Keeper of Regional Services, Victoria & Albert Museum), dated 3 February 1977.



3-29 Coffee pot, mug and sugar bowl, 1949, Bernard Leach. As illustrated in the Victoria & Albert Museum's 1977 exhibition catalogue.

Ismay offers to come to London to discuss his concerns but concludes with the threat to withdraw the set if they refused to agree to his wishes:

*I really could not condone a watering-down of BL's concept of this set, as this would be to play fake to my whole impulse of admiration for his pots and I could not live with the action: if this matter is beyond any reconsideration I would prefer, with regret, to withdraw the set.*<sup>64</sup>

Hogben immediately contacted Ismay by telegram to rectify the misunderstanding, and Ismay replied:

*I do hope you will understand that my letters were not written in any unfriendly way, as I saw it I had to protect the pots and the potter's intention from what seemed to me misrepresentation- and I must admit I also had some thought for my own reputation.*<sup>65</sup>

88

Part of coffee set: coffee pot, hot-milk jug (not shown), sugar bowl and one of five cups, stoneware, with a speckled brown unglazed body, and the insides glazed with speckled grey. Made at St Ives, about 1956

Greatest height 15.5cm./6 $\frac{1}{8}$ in. Mark: BL, block letters in rectangular seals; SI, in circular seals; impressed.

Collection: Mr W A Ismay

In the published catalogue, whilst not all parts of the coffee set were included and acquisition date was given as the production date, the coffee pot was shown and correctly captioned. This episode is a demonstration of the sense of responsibility Ismay felt for his collection and his willingness to act as a responsible owner.

3-30 Coffee pot, mug and sugar bowl, 1949, Bernard Leach. As captioned in the Victoria & Albert Museum's 1977 exhibition catalogue.

64 Ibid.

65 Draft letter from W.A. Ismay to Carol Hogben (Acting Keeper of Regional Services, Victoria & Albert Museum), dated 12 February 1977.



### **3.5 He really understood pots a lot better than some potters I've known, actually!<sup>66</sup> — The growth of Ismay's knowledge**

By forming friendships with makers, Ismay was able to develop his own knowledge of the processes involved in creating pottery. His vocation of librarian provided him with the skills and resources necessary to expand his own knowledge through reading. He shared this knowledge through the many articles, book and exhibition reviews he wrote for various publications and these covered the whole range of studio pottery-related subjects from the development of potters' camps to how to use the *Ceramic Review* Index he painstakingly compiled each year, often using photographs of items from his collection to illustrate his opinions.<sup>67</sup>

As revealed in Chapter 2, reading played an important role in Ismay's early life. It was an important skill he used as a collector, enabling him to gain an understanding of the British studio pottery movement, the artists, the methods and materials associated with this particular niche of collecting. His reading was not solely confined to pottery though and his literary interests were broad and varied. In photographs of his home, hidden amongst his pots, stacks of books can be seen, hinting at this background interest. Titles identifiable from the photographs include:

- *The Story of Art*, E.H. Gombrich, 1950
- *English Painting*, Reginald Howard Willenski, first published 1933
- *The Pilgrim's Progress*, John Bunyan, first published 1678
- *The Green Letters*, Miles J. Stanford, 1964
- *Sons of Zulu*, Aubrey Elliott, 1978
- *The People of Kau*, Leni Riefenstahl, 1976



3-31 Some of the many books in Ismay's home in 1982. Photograph Eileen Lewenstein.

66 Interview with Jim Malone (potter) in 2013. See Appendix v for transcript.

67 See Appendix ii for an example of Ismay's *Ceramic Review* Index.



- *Indian Art*, Roy C. Craven, 1976
- *Orpheus 1 and Orpheus 2*
- *Sculpture of Primitive Man*, Werner Muensterberger, 1955
- *Figure Drawing*, Iain McNab, 1936
- *Classical & Byzantine, Oriental & African Literature*, D.R. Lang and D.M. Dudley, 1969

As with his pot acquisitions, Ismay also kept lists of the books he read, which is more evidence that reading had the same important status in his life as collecting. The extent of his reading was revealed in a letter he wrote to potter Eric James Mellon. In reply to Mellon's request for help identifying the provenance of a particular quote, Ismay replied: 'I've read 40-odd books this year so far (and 760 in 1993) so the search is too wide, but if I do come up with it somehow, I'll let you know.'<sup>68</sup> Mellon and Ismay also exchanged books and discussed titles they were reading, for example in this letter, Ismay told Mellon about two books he was reading:

*The first is a volume of remarkable short stories called 'The poisoned kiss and other short stories from the Portuguese' (which are no more translations than were Elizabeth Barrett Browning's 'Sonnets from the Portuguese'), however they are apparently to an extent from dreams and she ascribes them to an imaginary writer Fernandes de Briaio, author of an imaginary book 'Azulejos' and regards them as springing from an aspect of her personality to which she does not have full access. The other is 'Mysteries of Winterthorn' (even in a chunky paperback in a 'library' plastic jacket, a fairly solid looking tome of 482 large and small printed pages) which takes the form of a trio of 'gothic' whodunits set in the nineteenth century!*<sup>69</sup>

Ismay's book collecting also reveals evidence of the intense scrutiny he applied to this activity. Ismay is an atypical book collector. He amassed an enormous collection of books, but for the most part these were cheap paperbacks or copies of Reader's Digest, as his money was mostly ring-fenced for buying pots and the related costs of travelling. Only for pottery books would he pay extra for hardback editions, often paying to have soft backs hardbound and sometimes buying numerous editions of the same title if they included extra or different images. In the case of a book about the *Tamba Pottery* in Japan, he purchased two copies and inside the front cover of the newer edition,

<sup>68</sup> Letter from W.A. Ismay to Eric James Mellon (potter), dated 3 March 1994.

<sup>69</sup> Letter from W.A. Ismay to Eric James Mellon (potter), dated 14 November 1988.

The justification for having this in addition to the 1970 ed. is that the reproduction of the black-and-white illustrations of pots is here greatly improved in size and (by using glazed paper) in quality. The size improvement is achieved within the same number of pages by rearrangement and by omitting a few of the photographs – the original title-page and chapter-heading drawings are omitted, perhaps because they would not print well on the different paper or conflicted with the new styling.

3-32 Typed inscription by W.A. Ismay, glued inside a book cover.

attached a piece of paper upon which he typed a justification for having a second copy.<sup>70</sup>

With this label he reveals his extensive knowledge of book design, printing and photography. By going to the effort of typing this insertion for the book he shows the pleasure he gained not only from reading them but from physically evaluating books, studying them as objects as well as absorbing the knowledge they contained. The way he treated them was very much the same as he treated his pots, admiring them as objects and using them according to their function.

Though a bibliophile, he did not have the obsessive qualities Belk (2010) associates with avid book collectors, such as the desire to keep copies in pristine condition to retain and increase their value.<sup>71</sup> As with his pots, Ismay's books were for using and enjoying and he would often make notations in them or correct misspellings or grammar in both pen and pencil – anathema to the true bibliophile.

One exception to this and an example of him developing a subsidiary collection was his support of the Huddersfield-based Fleece Press, a one-man operation producing hand woodblock printed books. Ismay became a subscriber in the early 1980s, taking a copy of each book produced (generally two or three per year). He appreciated the skill and craftsmanship that went into producing by hand, high quality woodblock prints, letter setting and bindings. He also became friends with the owner Simon Lawrence, who, on becoming aware of Ismay's interest in studio pottery, gifted him with a tea bowl by Jim Malone in 1993 (image 3-33).

Further evidence of Ismay being viewed as a person of knowledge to learn from came in 1978, when he was invited to deliver a three-day block of teaching at the Royal College of Art. Ismay was very surprised at the request and wrote to potter Michael Cardew:

70 Rhodes, Daniel (1983). *Tamba Pottery*, Kodansha America Inc.

71 Belk, Russell (2010). 'Collectors and Collecting', in Chris Tilley et al., *The Handbook of Material Culture*, Sage, London.



3-33 Teabowl, 1983, Jim Malone. (York Museums Trust)

*Have had a rather astonishing letter from the Royal College which you may know about (re visits to look at students work): that experienced potters can do a useful service in this way is obvious but that I can is less so and I am wondering whether I have the nerve to say yes!<sup>72</sup>*

Ismay did agree and the teaching eventually took place in 1981. At the time, students included Julian Stair and Jennifer Lee. Stair recalls that Ismay delivered a slide show about his collection and then students were invited to sign up for tutorials with him. Stair was interested in Ismay and his collection and spent time with him over the three days, but none of the other students took up the opportunity of a tutorial with Ismay. Stair recalled that Ismay's collection was far removed from the type of work the students at the Royal College of Art were interested in at that time.<sup>73</sup>

Ismay had often visited the Crafts Study Centre at the Holburne Museum in Bath, but became more importantly and officially connected in 1982. He was approached by the potter Henry Hammond (who was a founding Trustee of the Crafts Study Centre) and asked to be a Ceramics Adviser and attend meetings of the Acquisitions Committee, to give opinions on acquisitions for their collection. Barley Roscoe was

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<sup>72</sup> Draft letter from W.A. Ismay to Michael Cardew (potter), undated but probably 1978. (See Appendix iv for transcript of Cardew correspondence).

<sup>73</sup> Telephone conversation between Julian Stair (potter) and Helen Walsh, 22 June 2010.



Research Assistant, then Assistant Curator before becoming the Director in 1986. She commented on Ismay's importance at the meetings:

*Bill was hugely helpful to the Craft Study Centre on its Acquisitions Committee, and in helping to shape its collections. And also in terms of being a very good ambassador for it, because he was the archetypal networker, before the word networking came in. [...] He was very generous indeed with his opinions and with information that he would supply to sort of backup an opinion of whether a piece should or should not be included. [...] He would never, or very seldom be the first to volunteer information. But when his opinion was asked and he'd heard what other people had to say about a particular piece, or whatever, he would just quietly put in his own word or two, whether in favour or against. But again if he was against something, there would be a cogent reason to back it up.<sup>74</sup>*

Alongside having a direct impact on the Holburne Museum's collection, Ismay also contributed to exhibitions, not only as a lender but in an advisory role too. In 1983 he assisted curator Margot Coatts with the selection of the exhibition of pottery *The Oxshott Pottery: Denise and Henry Wren* held at the Crafts Study Centre, Bath, in 1984. Coatts wrote thanking him and praised his judgment: 'Your advice and discernment on the Wren exhibition has been invaluable because you both knew the pots and were able to be ruthless. I am now confident we can do the subject justice.'<sup>75</sup>

When Ismay retired as a librarian in 1975, following the stress and upheaval of the local government reorganization of local councils, some potters (such as Lucie Rie) were hopeful that they would see more of him.<sup>76</sup> However, perhaps fearful that he would stop being as active as a collector and commentator on pottery, potter Michael Casson wrote of how much he was needed and that his experience was valued: 'I don't think there has ever been a point in Craft history (recently) that has needed so much-people with experience and informed eyes.'<sup>77</sup> Needless to say, Ismay did not retire from collecting, as by that point he was only 1,500 pots into his collection, which would eventually number 3,600 pots.

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74 Interview with Barley Roscoe (curator) in 2013. See Appendix v for transcript.

75 Letter from Margot Coatts (gallery owner) to W.A. Ismay, dated 19 January 1984.

76 Letter from Lucie Rie (potter) to W.A. Ismay, dated 7 October 1974.

77 Letter from Michael Casson (potter) to W.A. Ismay, dated 27 April 1975.

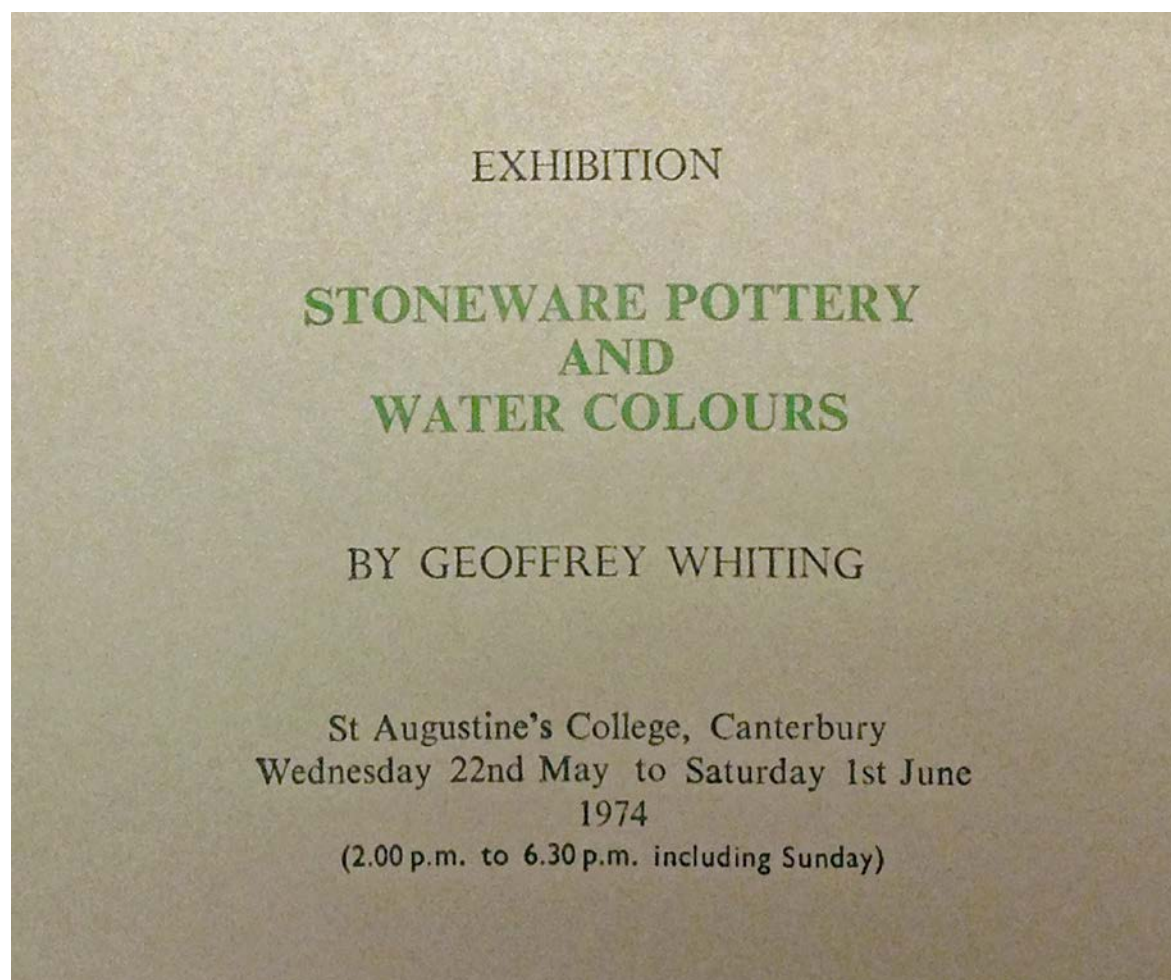


3-34 Bowl, 1975, Michael Casson. A gift to W.A. Ismay on his retirement as a librarian. (York Museums Trust)

### **3.6 I would not like you to become a false God<sup>78</sup> — Writing about pots and potters**

Ismay wrote more than 90 reviews and articles for pottery journals whilst collecting (see Appendix i for a bibliography of Ismay's written work). The earliest appears to be a review of the exhibition *Modern Ceramics 1971* held at Cartwright Hall, Bradford, which was published in *Ceramic Review*.

In May 1974, Ismay received an invite to the private view of the exhibition *Stoneware Pottery and Water Colours by Geoffrey Whiting*. On the reverse Whiting wrote: 'I agree with Michael Cardew, at Chichester a year or so ago, that exhibitions are a menace since they promote wrong views! So I am having one!!! – the best collection of pots that has ever happened to me.'<sup>79</sup> The exhibition was to be held in the 14th century Abbey, which Whiting described as: 'Not good for avant garde pots but pretty good



3-35 Invitation to a private view.

78 Letter from Geoffrey Whiting (potter) to W.A. Ismay, dated 21 June 1974.

79 Invitation to a private view of *Stoneware Pottery and Water Colours by Geoffrey Whiting*.



for us old fuddy-duddies!’<sup>80</sup> Ismay attended the private view and on returning home, received a letter from Whiting requesting that: ‘If you are asked to do so, write a good but HONEST bit for “CR” [*Ceramic Review*].’<sup>81</sup> Ismay gained a reputation for fair reviews and rarely got into conflicts over what he had written, unless they were subject to clumsy editing. However, at this time Whiting and Ismay had fallen out over the role of art critics and reviews. Whiting lost his temper with Ismay over comments Ismay had made in a letter, mentioning the similarity between Whiting’s work and the produce of the Leach Pottery and Winchcombe Pottery. Ismay had clearly touched a nerve and Whiting wrote to him:



3-36 Lidded pot, 1960, Geoffrey Whiting. (YORYM:2004.1.2322)

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80 Letter from Geoffrey Whiting (potter) to W.A. Ismay, dated 16 May 1974.

81 Letter from Geoffrey Whiting (potter) to W.A. Ismay, dated 3 June 1974.

*You shall think what you think. But it is amazing to me that you – who so many think to be a discerning person – have become converted to the idea that only by leaning over backwards to do something new at any cost, can we justify our existence. I was known as ‘Leach Reproductions’ before you even came on the pottery scene (sorry). But Bernard said to me once what a delight it was to see someone producing better ‘Leach’ pots than anyone who had been in their workshop!*<sup>82</sup>

Ismay was under a great deal of pressure at work as the restructuring of local government was causing stress to staff operating public services such as libraries. To receive such a critical letter from Whiting on top of that caused deep hurt and came out of the blue. In a long reply, he explained how shocked he was at the attack and suggestion that he was self-important:

*What hurt particularly was the savage sarcasm with which you (apparently) assumed me to be so naïve as to suppose myself the discoverer of likenesses to St. Ives and Winchcombe in some of your work (which to put it bluntly is nonsense: this has been common ground for many years and we’ve actually discussed it!)*<sup>83</sup>

Ismay goes on to mention their previous discussions on the subject of reviews of exhibitions and works, recalling Whiting asked that:

*[...] if I could be kind in anything I wrote, fair enough, but if not... /XXX/ you have written since (more than once) insisting that anything I said should be HONEST (your capitals). (This is itself on reflection is really less than flattering!)*<sup>84</sup>

So he was particularly incensed by Whiting name-dropping writer Herbert Read and sculptor Henry Moore into the argument and implying art critics were parasites:

*I tried to argue with my erstwhile cousin Herbert Read – sometimes when Henry Moore was there. We agreed that all art critics gradually become engaged by the importance of their occasion. There comes a time when criticism completely defeats its purpose & the critic becomes a parasite on the poor chap who ‘unluckily made it’. They usually make more money out of it than the other chap. Bill, go back to basics. I would not like you to become a false God like Peter Dingley in Warwick, who started off a shop to sell ‘crafts’, shoot their mouths off about ‘Craft’, then gradually (unknowingly) lower their standards. He is now exhibiting the most frightful stuff – how are the mighty fallen!*<sup>85</sup>

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82 Letter from Geoffrey Whiting (potter) to W.A. Ismay, dated 21 June 1974.

83 Draft letter from W.A. Ismay to Geoffrey Whiting (potter), undated but in reply to Geoffrey Whiting’s letter dated 21 June 1974.

84 Ibid.

85 Letter from Geoffrey Whiting (potter) to W.A. Ismay, dated 21 June 1974.

St. Augustine's College,  
Canterbury.  
Thursday.

Dear Bill,

Yes, of course your letter  
"clears the air" — but I can  
never resist picking about in  
other peoples' arguments! \* It  
will not be vain to say I am  
my own, severest critic! Sorry  
if it has taken up so much time  
and caused hurt.

As T.S. Eliot said in "Little  
Gidding" " — — — the end of all  
exploration is to arrive where we  
started."

I don't mind what you or  
anybody else says about my pots;  
but they are made in a spirit of  
truth (inner compulsion to make  
beauty — that's how I interpret it).

So let us be friends again &  
observe the "Quality which has no Quality"

Yours ever (and with great  
affection)

Geoffrey.      ↘ over,

I think someone, one day, will have to collect and edit your  
manuscript letters & make a book — SARCASM!!!!  
Blow you, Geoffrey.

\* Through not Yorkshire by birth, I come from  
Six generations of them — on both the staff & farm  
distaff sides. So it is silly to  
cast aspersions.

P.S.



Ismay's reply, in which he also defended his comments, seemed to diffuse the situation and Whiting replied a few days later to say that the letter from Ismay had cleared the air. Whiting apologized for any hurt he had caused but cannot resist a gentle dig about the length of Ismay's letters (see image 3–37).<sup>86</sup>

When Ismay's review of Whiting's exhibition was published, it included the comment: 'he can be termed a follower of Bernard Leach.'<sup>87</sup> However, by that point they had resolved their disagreement and Whiting wrote to thank Ismay for writing: 'a very satisfactory review.'<sup>88</sup>

Ismay was clearly upset by the conflict with Whiting, so the following year, when Garth Clark wrote an article in *Ceramic Review* bemoaning the lack of critical reviews, describing the state of pottery criticism as an incestuous situation of 'you-write-mine-I'll write-yours' with no one daring to deliver 'rude truths', Ismay took the criticism personally and responded.<sup>89</sup> He wrote a letter to the editor of *Ceramic Review* which was published, outlining his philosophy about reviews and explaining that he had never claimed to be a critic and that he understood a review to be: 'an account of things seen with special emphasis on anything pleasurable.'<sup>90</sup> He argued that criticism should come from experienced, practising potters with specialist knowledge and no axe to grind, but went on to explain:

*I don't see it as any kind of potter's chauvinism if a potter (of whatever standing) can take pleasure in having his or her work looked at attentively and with some evident degree of appreciation by one of the enthusiastic amateurs who have seen, handled and used a great many pots and have a special feeling for pottery.'*<sup>91</sup>

By 1979, following a number of experiences of bad editing which resulted in the distortion of his meanings, it seems that Ismay was beginning to feel very pessimistic about reviews and was questioning what use they were. In a letter to Geoffrey Whiting in which he sympathizes with Whiting's loathing of private views, he wrote:

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86 Letter from Geoffrey Whiting (potter) to W.A. Ismay, dated 28 June 1974.

87 Ismay, W.A. (1974). 'Geoffrey Whiting- Stoneware and Watercolours, St Augustine's College, Canterbury, May-Jun 1974', *Ceramic Review*, No. 29, Sep/Oct, p. 19.

88 Letter from Geoffrey Whiting (potter) to W.A. Ismay, dated 23 September 1974.

89 Clark, Garth (1975). 'Off Centre. A column of dissent', *Ceramic Review*, No. 32, Mar/Apr, p. 17.

90 Ismay, W.A. (1975) 'Off centre criticism', Letter to the Editor, *Ceramic Review*, No. 33, May/Jun, p. 20.

91 Ibid.

*Another matter besides the “private view” problem has concerned me of late- whether “reviews” are of any use and to what extent, what is printed really (a) says what the writer intended of (b) is read by anyone other than in a lazy sort of way / XXX/... I have suffered myself in the past mainly from printers’ distortions of what I actually wrote, or from editorial removals of whole paragraphs so that what is left is mutilated and out of balance.<sup>92</sup>*

Whiting responds, telling Ismay how much he appreciates Ismay’s style of reviews, encouraging him not to give up: ‘Well, its all very discouraging. But please Bill – I know how “feeling” you are, don’t give up your reviews, provided you select them. You are one of the few – very few – which write the kind of sense which is uncluttered by Art-Critic pseudo “psychology”.<sup>93</sup> Ismay’s crisis of confidence about writing reviews appears to have lasted a few years and in 1982, Whiting again writes him words of support:

*About reviews and your saying your own efforts seem to have come to an end. A great pity, to my mind: but, in another sense, you may consider yourself well out of it! Twenty years ago my late cousin, Herbert Read said to me ‘I’m afraid art criticism has itself been made a creative art’.<sup>94</sup>*

As previously mentioned, the unsolicited editing of Ismay’s articles caused him much annoyance and consternation, particularly when his meanings were misconstrued. On one occasion in 1972, he made reference in a letter to such an occurrence, which damaged relations between him and the gallery owner and collector Henry Rothschild:

*I feel I should say that relations between myself and Henry Rothschild (normally amicable, and we have known each other since the fifties) are a little strained at present through the mischance of an (originally) very appreciative review I wrote of his Primavera exhibition at Cambridge having been abbreviated editorially through pressure on space into some inconsistency and even an appearance of hostility, with a critical remark left unqualified and unbalanced by a final paragraph of detailed appreciation. I sent him the full text to show that my intention had been distorted but so far he has not acknowledged this and may still feel affronted.<sup>95</sup>*

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92 Draft letter from W.A. Ismay to Geoffrey Whiting (potter), dated 16 May 1979.

93 Letter from Geoffrey Whiting (potter) to W.A. Ismay, dated 28 May 1979.

94 Letter from Geoffrey Whiting (potter) to W.A. Ismay, dated 3 January 1982.

95 Draft letter from W.A. Ismay to John Thompson (Director of Bradford City Art Gallery and Museums), dated 14 October 1972.



3-38 Teapot, 1976, Geoffrey Whiting. (YORYM:2004.1.2473)

The majority of Ismay's articles and reviews were published in *Ceramic Review*. As *Ceramic Review* was edited by the practising potters Emmanuel Cooper and Eileen Lewenstein, with the exception of instances such as the one above, he had a much friendlier and happier relationship with them. He apparently fell out with *CRAFTS* magazine in the 1970s over editing and shared his scathing opinion of them in a letter to potter Eric James Mellon. His use of capital letters emphasized his annoyance:

*I quite agree that CRAFTS has become TOTALLY HORRIBLE in its styling (has been so for some time now- the rot began to set in when they changed their page size in November/December 1982). Typically this was not at the beginning of a year (or of a volume). (They have been out-of-kilter and limping to the extent ever since they planned to put out No.1 in January 1973 and then this was delayed which / XXX/I have expressed my views forcibly but to nil effect, and don't know what (short of dynamite) will shift this Peter Dormer & co. Self-opinionated establishment- the complaints have been widespread and continued over a long period, but no notice is taken. By now it is so bad I find it UNREADABLE, but am stuck with it having paid an advance subscription at a cheaper rate some time back. I no longer contribute to it- that is too long a story to tell now.<sup>96</sup>*

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96 Letter from W.A. Ismay to Eric James Mellon (potter), dated 12 September 1985.





3-39 Teapot, 1986, Geoffrey Whiting. (YORYM:2004.1.945.1)

In 1976 Ismay demonstrated his diplomatic skills in a show of great support for Whiting, after he wrote to Ismay, outraged, suspecting that an article he had written about making teapots had been copied and published in *Ceramic Review*:

*I wonder if you have made a close comparison between David Winkley's 'Making Teapots' and my article of the same title in 'P.Q' years ago, No doubt you have, in which case you may be having, vicariously, some of the thoughts that I've been having! I have been trying to adopt a 'let it pass' attitude but I'm afraid the matter will not leave me alone. He has just taken my text, point by point & merely paraphrased it. I grant some small differences – even improvements, but they do not add up to much. I don't think this sort of thing is really quite good enough (does he think I've died, I wonder?). As one who is very much of the potters' world, yet standing slightly aside in that you do not actually pot, would you care to write a suitable bit in the letters column?*

*I would like it very much if you could. I may say something myself, but it would come better from someone in your position.<sup>97</sup>*

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97 Letter from Geoffrey Whiting (potter) to W.A. Ismay, 19 February 1976.

# Letters

Correspondence welcomed but the right is reserved to edit letters unless contributors state they must be published in full or not at all. Pseudonyms may be used but names and address must be supplied.

## Making Teapots

Making a good teapot is generally agreed to be probably the most difficult task for the maker of domestic pottery. Having been pre-occupied when CR 37 came out with re-reading the previous twelve issues to make an index, I have come rather late to the reading of David Winkley's "Making Teapots" article — which is admirable, and in some places familiar, so that curiosity has sent me back to Geoffrey Whiting's article with the same title in Pottery Quarterly 21 years ago (PQ7, 1955). The similarity of outlook is remarkable! although I think David has thought the thing through perhaps even more fully on paper and added some refinements of his own. I am not suggesting conscious plagiarism, but rather that Geoffrey's precepts and practice over the years have been so quietly pervasive and so much repeated by others that they must have entered into the thinking of anyone tackling the same problems in a practical way. Geoffrey himself has not updated or republished his article, but has been content to incorporate refinements into his practice: he was making fine teapots in 1955 but has gradually come to make even better ones since. David's teapots I have not yet had the opportunity of handling but they look handsome in photographs and should work well by these precepts.

Perhaps some ceramic historian can tell us where and when the earliest recognisable teapots were made and how they compare with those of today. One would expect them to be Chinese, since it is in China that tea has the longest history. W.B. Honey's "Ceramic Art of China" distinguishes the "Chinese" tea-ceremony (with tea made in a pot, but a personal one for each individual) from the alternative "Japanese" tea-ceremony methods, and speaks as if teapots made at the beginning of the 16th century were early ones; Basil Gray's "Early Chinese Pottery and Porcelain" which goes to the end of the Yuan period has no reference; Soame Jenyns's "Ming Pottery and Porcelain" quotes A. Brankston about a teapot of the Yung Lo period (1403-24) as "the first important potter of the teapots". The earliest teapots used in Europe (reputedly attractive in use) apparently came from China with the tea when it was first imported in the 17th century.

W.A. ISMAY, Wakefield, West Yorkshire.

Ismay agreed, but diplomatically suggested that his letter to the editor should be a gentle pointing out of the similarities and questioning of the practice of making teapots:

*Have made no accusations (in fact have disclaimed the intention) as I'm sure unpleasantness would do your reputation no good- but have made it clear whom I think to have been (by longevity) first in the field, and have backed this up by sending the editors a photocopy of your 1955 article in case they don't have one on tap.<sup>98</sup>*

Ismay also went a step further by writing directly to David Winkley. As well as pointing out the issues, his letter was also a courtesy to warn Winkley of the content of the letter he had sent to the editor of *Ceramic Review* and to give Winkley the opportunity to respond. His letter to Winkley read:

*I have now felt compelled to write to CR pointing out that many of the points made were communicated by Geoffrey Whiting 21 years ago in Pottery Quarterly. I'm not suggesting conscious "cribbing"- Geoffrey's ideas have gradually become common property- but it does seem to me that he should have some credit for setting many of them down quite sometime ago. He's 56 now and at the height of his powers and making better teapots than ever. I enclose a copy of his 1955 article (misprints and all!) and believe you will recognise a great similarity of outlook.<sup>99</sup>*

Whiting wrote to thank Ismay for standing up for him and conceded that his more diplomatic response was the more advisable way to respond: 'I'm sure your "approach" to the matter is right and proper.'<sup>100</sup>

Another example of Ismay's willingness to disagree with what he considered to be unfair reporting happened in 1997 when he submitted a letter to Paul Vincent (editor of *Studio Pottery* journal) about an exhibition review by Victor Margrie:

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98 Draft letter from W.A. Ismay to Geoffrey Whiting (potter), dated 23 March 1976.

99 Draft letter from W.A. Ismay to David Winkley (potter), dated 23 March 1976.

100 Letter from Geoffrey Whiting (potter) to W.A. Ismay, dated 26 March 1976.



*I am enclosing a letter for your consideration for possible inclusion in Studio Pottery 26.*

*As I have kept it short, I believe it's reasonable for me to stipulate that you should please print it as written, or reject it. It would not be acceptable to me to have an abbreviated or altered version appear over my name, instead of being accorded freedom of speech.*

*No hard feelings I hope, as it is not a matter of provable right or wrong, but of personal opinion. If I fail to attempt to express my own, I would feel disloyal to one of the potters whom I hold in particular regard, and my view of whom I have seen no reason to vary.*

*Bill.*

**The letter reads:**

*I paid two visits to Richard Batterham's exhibition at Oxford last October, and have now read and re-read VM's review of it in Studio Pottery 25 with growing disbelief that we could have seen the same pots. Clearly VM has the same right as myself or anyone else to hold and express an opinion. It is less clear to me that he has a right to invoke the authority of BL and MC who cannot speak for themselves, and to imply in however roundabout or oblique a way that they would have agreed with him. He (or rather Howard Hodgkin) may be right about Matisse, but I can only demur at what is said or implied about the three potters named.*

*There are other active potters of whose development I have myself had doubts. Here, the report of my senses was first that the pots, collectively fresh and lively, some exceptionally so, were recent results of a still creative experimentation (which has been making progress in a consistent direction for more than thirty years now) by a dedicated and particularly self-critical potter. And RB's obvious pleasure in the best of his pots has always seemed to me essentially impersonal and not self-regarding in kind- a delight in the responsiveness of earthy materials and a modest acceptance of the gifts which the kiln can give to pots and to the potter, gifts which tend rather towards warmth than towards mere technical perfection. One cannot foresee the future, but I regret being too old already to have a good prospect of viewing RB's mature pots in the event (which I hope for) of his still being active as a potter in 2016 or later.<sup>101</sup>*

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101 Draft letter from W.A. Ismay to Paul Vincent (editor of *Studio Potter* journal), dated 7 February 1997.

Such strong and passionate defence of a potter would have no doubt been very welcome, especially as it was unsolicited by the potter involved. Ismay was often asked to write reviews by potters, demonstrating the value placed on his opinion (for example in 1988, potter Kyra Cane asked him to write a review of her exhibition and offered him one of her pots in payment).<sup>102</sup> Despite his prolific output, he did not say yes to every request and refused commissions if he felt he did not have the required knowledge or the time to gain it. In 1988 for example, potter Michael Casson asked Ismay to write an essay for the exhibition catalogue *The Harrow Connection*, taking an overview of the development of British studio pottery from 1963 to 1988, with final comments of the contribution made by the Harrow School of Art and its students.<sup>103</sup> Ismay declined as he felt he had missed out on much during that period due to working full time and that he would be unable to write with any conviction on the subject and writer Tanya Harrod was later commissioned to write the piece.<sup>104</sup> When approached to write exhibition reviews, Ismay was at pains to make it clear that he would be honest regarding his opinions: 'If these at times sound unkind, they are not meant to be so. In a review for publication I usually aim at emphasising the good and encouraging points, but a private opinion is pointless if not frank.'<sup>105</sup>



3-41 Michael Casson. Photograph W.A. Ismay.

102 Letter from Kyra Cane (potter) to W.A. Ismay, dated 2 March 1988.

103 Letter from Michael Casson (potter) to W.A. Ismay, dated 26 August 1988.

104 Draft letter from W.A. Ismay to Michael Casson (potter), dated 3 September 1988.

105 Draft letter from W.A. Ismay to Mr/s White, dated 25 August 1973.

### **3.7 Of all the remarkable men and women whom I've met and who are no longer with us in the flesh, he is the one I miss the most<sup>106</sup> – Ismay's friendships with potters**

The friendship that grew between Ismay and potter Michael Cardew is an example of the mutually beneficial relationship that developed between Ismay and some of the potters in his collection. Cardew is viewed as a key potter in the British studio pottery movement and was Bernard Leach's first apprentice (after Shoji Hamada) at the Leach Pottery in St Ives. He enjoyed the country potter lifestyle of making pots for use in everyday life. Cardew was one of the main potters mentioned in the literature Ismay used to guide him when he began collecting (see Chapter 2, Section 2.7).

Ismay first met Cardew in 1958 at his Wenford Bridge Pottery in Cornwall. On that visit Ismay bought his first pot by Cardew, a large and handsome bottle with a screw top lid (see image 3-42). They struck up a correspondence and friendship that would last until Cardew's death in 1983. The earliest surviving piece of correspondence between Ismay and Cardew in the archives predates November 1960. There is no sense that the earliest letters are of an introductory nature, so more letters may yet emerge in the archive.

Later in 1958, Cardew was having an exhibition of pots he had made at his Abuja Pottery, at the Berkeley Galleries in London. Cardew was appointed to the role of Pottery Officer, in the Department of Commerce and Industry, by the Nigerian Government in 1951. He developed a pottery training centre in Abuja, which he operated until his retirement in 1961. The exhibition in 1958 was the first exhibition in the UK of pots made by Cardew and the work of some of his Nigerian students.



**3-42** Screw top bottle, 1956, Michael Cardew. (York Museums Trust)

106 Ismay, W.A. (1988) 'Foreword', in Michael Cardew, *A Pioneer Potter*, Collins.





3-43 Mariel and Michael Cardew with W.A. Ismay at an exhibition private view.

Ismay began collecting Cardew's pots in earnest at the Berkeley Galleries exhibition in 1958.<sup>107</sup> He purchased four pieces made at the Abuja Pottery, a soy sauce bottle, two-handed jar, coffee pot, three-handed jar and a bowl made at Wenford Bridge Pottery. During the thirty years that Ismay collected Cardew's work, he acquired fifty-two pieces in total, making Cardew one of only nine potters of whose work he acquired more than fifty pieces.<sup>108</sup> The Cardew pieces Ismay bought were amongst the largest and most significant in his collection, for example his Grain Jar (1962), Stool (1970), Basket Bowl (1970). He was buying at such a level that he was in competition, not just with other collectors, but also with some public museums and galleries. For example, he lost out on a black glazed bowl by Cardew, which he had desperately wanted but which was acquired by Bristol Museum.<sup>109</sup>



3-44 Stool, 1970, Michael Cardew. (York Museums Trust)

<sup>107</sup> Cardew arranged the exhibition of his and his Abuja students work at the Berkeley Galleries in London in his summer leave of 1958. It was a sell-out exhibition, attracting coverage in the British press.

<sup>108</sup> The nine potters from whom W.A. Ismay acquired more than fifty pots were: Richard Batterham, Michael Cardew, Barbara Cass, Michael Casson, Harry and May Davis, Jim Malone, Denise Wren and Rosemary Wren.

<sup>109</sup> Draft letter from W.A. Ismay to Michael Cardew (potter), dated 16 January 1966.



3-45 Basket bowl, 1970, Michael Cardew. (York Museums Trust)

Ismay was keen to build a strong Michael Cardew collection and, as Cardew updated him on his latest work and experimentations with glaze and design, Ismay was keen to acquire examples to illustrate the new developments. In 1958 he acquired his first soy sauce pot from *Primavera*, having come across it on the floor in the basement, covered in dust with a label so dirty the price was illegible. Ismay recalls the shop assistant told him it was by an overseas artist, probably from America or Canada. At that time, Ismay was not familiar enough with Cardew's work to be confident in his identification until he took it upstairs into the light and wiped it to reveal the maker's mark. He purchased a second one in 1959, which he particularly liked for its glaze, and was keen to acquire more:

*(Incidentally, the "tenmoku-kaki" effects on the 1959 soy sauce pot – and the 1960 Leach bowl – are "glossier" than I seem to have noticed earlier!). The forms (part way between the earlier ones and those of the soy sauce pots) are intriguing: the milled runs of the caps make for easier handling both when filling and using. All sorts of colour complexities in the new glaze under strong light. I am very glad (and as a mere stay-at-home feel privileged) to have examples, and in fact would like some more.<sup>110</sup>*

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110 Draft letter from W.A. Ismay to Michael Cardew (potter), dated 9 August 1961.



3-46 Bowl, 1981, Svend Bayer. (York Museums Trust)

He added a third version in 1962, though he appears to have selected it purely for the glaze as it was: ‘a second, because the spout is stopped with glaze, so it is quite useless! – unless I can fix it which is a tricky job – but a wonderful colour and texture.’<sup>111</sup> Each one of his soy sauce pots represents a different glaze on the same basic form and he displayed them on a shelf at home, lined up in order of the date of production.

Ismay would often ask Cardew to send him parcels of good examples of pottery whilst he was away at his Abuja Pottery in Nigeria. This gives an indication of how much Ismay trusted Cardew to choose on his behalf and give him a fair price. This method of acquisition would continue throughout their friendship, reflecting their respect for each other’s judgment and taste.<sup>112</sup> One of the last pieces Ismay acquired in this fashion was a dish made in 1981 by the potter Svend Bayer. Cardew wrote to him offering to sell it to him:

*The Svend show was very fine, his best yet, by a long way. And I was so carried away I bought (for £20) a v.fine dish with a rather Islamic bird & a v.well done, rather Islamic in inspiration border. Then I realized I don’t normally buy pots (having too many already) but this one was so cheap, & not yet bought, (surprisingly) & the best of a group of 3. Now I think it was a v.g inspiration to buy it because you if you like it & approve my choice, can have it for £20.<sup>113</sup>*

111 Draft letter from W.A. Ismay to Michael Cardew (potter), dated 21 October 1962.

112 One other example of Ismay trusting friends to choose work to add to his collection happened towards the end of his life. He was too ill to go to an exhibition of Jim Malone’s pots and asked Alex McErlain and Jim Malone to choose a piece on his behalf.

113 Letter from Michael Cardew (potter) to W.A. Ismay, dated 30 July 1981.





3-47 Above and right: Three soy sauce pots, 1958-1962, Michael Cardew. (York Museums Trust)

Knowing how highly Cardew rated the bowl made Ismay value it more, in a similar way that the provenance of his Bernard Leach coffee set enhanced his pleasure in it (see Section 3.4).

Cardew would sometimes send Ismay extra items as gifts, such as African printed textiles, a shirt and in one crate in 1961, Ismay was surprised by two gifts from Cardew:

*The little tiny pepper pot was a left over 'Runt' from 1959 which I found and put in as I thought it might amuse you. The grey sugar caster by Tanko Ashada was put in to fill up the box.<sup>114</sup>*

Michael Cardew's grain jar, made in 1962, is one of the largest and most impressive pieces in Ismay's collection and one that collector Rollo Ballantyne coveted, writing: 'how I envy you that Ali Baba jar.'<sup>115</sup>

It is also an example of an acquisition that Ismay had to work hard over a number of years to get. He had first seen it in Cardew's exhibition at *Galerie La Borne* in Paris in 1962, when it was marked 'NOT FOR SALE'. Ismay wrote to Cardew enquiring about it in 1963:

*I am not quite sure how to interpret what you say about the no.1 pot from Paris now being "NOT FOR SALE" – but I hope it means I still have a residual interest in it when the price is decided and my finances have recovered!<sup>116</sup>*

114 Letter from Michael Cardew (potter) to W.A. Ismay, dated 3 August 1961.

115 Letter from Rollo Ballantyne (collector) to W.A. Ismay, dated 20 May 1980.

116 Draft letter from W.A. Ismay to Michael Cardew (potter), dated 17 February 1963.



Ismay had been hoping to acquire a large piece of Cardew's work for some time and suggested the grain jar or alternatively a wine jar with screw-top lid. Cardew replied writing that they were the best he'd made: 'Though the wine jar with creature has a better quality glaze, I don't quite like the shape – not so much as the jar anyway.'<sup>117</sup> Pressing further for an opportunity to buy, Ismay suggested Cardew submit it to the Craftsman Potter's Shop exhibition of storage jars in 1966, writing:

*I've been wondering whether it has occurred to you that the Paris jar (which so far as I know has not been seen publicly in England, which seems a pity) might very well qualify for inclusion in the forthcoming C.P.A "storage jar" exhibition (June) – if the idea has occurred to you or appeals to you, this I hope can very well be done without prejudice to my prospect of acquiring the pot – all classes of members have in the past frequently sent pots marked N.F.S to the previous four "theme" exhibitions in successive years (on teapots, casseroles, plant-pots and coffee pots respectively).<sup>118</sup>*



3-48 Pepper pot (the runt), 1959, Michael Cardew. (York Museums Trust)

Cardew replies that it had occurred to him to show it in exhibition, but he 'didn't like the idea of having to be in London to carry it there!!!'<sup>119</sup> Such exertion was to prove no barrier to Ismay and despite its size (a height of 77cm and diameter of 35cm), he managed to carry it home in a suitcase in 1966, four years after first setting eyes on it.

Ismay's interest was not only limited to Cardew's pottery and that of his students, but also his writing. He mentions in a letter that he has started to compile a bibliography of written work by Cardew.<sup>120</sup> By the early 1960s, this included an early article Cardew had written on

117 Letter from Michael Cardew (potter) to W.A. Ismay, dated 24 January 1966.

118 Draft letter from W.A. Ismay to Michael Cardew (potter), dated 16 February 1966.

119 Letter from Michael Cardew (potter) to W.A. Ismay, dated 28 February 1966.

120 Draft letter from W.A. Ismay to Michael Cardew (potter), undated.



3-49 Galerie La Borne in Paris photographed by W.A. Ismay in 1962.

Bernard Leach in 1925 for *The Studio*, the preface for an edition of Bernard's *A Potter's Book*, lecture notes, and Cardew's contributions to *Pottery Quarterly*, *Athena*, *Africa South* and *Nigeria Magazine*.

In the many letters exchanged by Ismay and Cardew, Ismay would keep Cardew up to date on what was happening on the studio pottery scene, particularly regarding exhibitions and events. Ismay attended as many private views as possible and lots of his draft letters contain descriptions of these events, not just of the work on show and his opinion of it, but also of who attended, what was said and what he bought. This is an extract from a detailed description of the private view for one of Shoji Hamada's rare exhibitions in the UK at the Crafts Centre, London, in 1963:<sup>121</sup>

*The Hamada caused more excitement than anything else this year I suppose- a sizeable queue down Hay Hill towards opening time and the place jam-packed in ten minutes. Some pots I didn't like, but then I have yet to see a show in which I like everything, thank goodness! That'll be the day! [...] A memorable opening, with B.L and then Hamada speaking. H very approachable, and delighted potters by his simple and frank replies to questions on matters of technique.*<sup>122</sup>

121 See Appendix iv for transcript of Cardew correspondence.

122 Draft letter from W.A. Ismay to Michael Cardew (potter), dated 18 December 1963.





3-50 Grain jar, 1962, Michael Cardew. (York Museums Trust)



# Michael Cardew comes to view and talk pottery

MICHAEL CARDEW, regarded as the foremost potter working in Britain, is in Yorkshire for the opening of his 75th birthday retrospective exhibition at Leeds Art Gallery today.

He also hopes to cast an eye over a collection of 20th century pottery assembled by Bill Ismay, a former librarian and a private collector in Wakefield.

The men first met when Mr. Ismay arrived at Cardew's Cornish studio in 1959, during one of the rare periods when the potter was not working in West Africa.

The years between 1942 and 1965 were mostly spent in the Gold Coast colony and Nigeria, where Cardew was running potteries and teaching in colleges.

He now lives in Wenford Bridge, Cornwall, and says he hopes to make more pots before he finally retires, though he concedes that "as you get older you expect more and you get less" from your physical resources.

Technique improves with age and in a sense he feels his best work has come in later life — "but you have to learn to live with your own limitations," said Michael Cardew, who will talk about pottery this morning at the gallery.



Michael Cardew, the potter, with a giant teapot he has made: it pours beautifully, he says, but has never made tea in it.

Ismay also felt confident enough of his views to give constructive criticism on the design and usefulness of Cardew's pots. In a letter to Cardew in 1960, he comments on his pepper pot, writing that it is: 'a trifle copious for a European taste when the pepper is fine and dry, but would probably be about right in more humid conditions.'<sup>123</sup> In his reply, Cardew is grateful for the comments:

*How v.nice to get your letter, & especially to hear about the salt pepper & mustard pots in use. I now want to go ahead and make more of all: the salt pot needs a slightly larger opening at the top (for the Abuja rainy season anyway!) & as you say, the pepper pot needs smaller holes. Also I think the screw cap should be taller to prevent 'leaking'. This presents a slight problem in form but not unsurpassable.*<sup>124</sup>

Ismay would also often offer moral support and encouragement, such as on this occasion when he commiserates with Cardew over his lack of success in making large pots, encouraging him not to give up with some carefully explained Yorkshire humour;

*I'm sorry your more recent efforts in this line have so far been disastrous- but I don't take too seriously your assertion that you are past it and finished! To use a Yorkshire expression, 'I feel that you will come again, like parkin' (this is a stiff oatmeal and treacle cake which can be kept in store for a considerable period, after a while it will go stale, but then subsequently becomes good eating again).*<sup>125</sup>

In 1977, Cardew was due to give a talk at Leeds Art Gallery whilst they were showing a retrospective of his work. In an interview with the local press, he mentioned his plans to visit Ismay whilst up in the north.

As a visit to look at pots could take several hours, Cardew stayed overnight at 14 Welbeck Street. And, as much of his home was taken over by pots, on the rare occasion that a visitor did stay over, Ismay very generously let them have his bed and he slept on the floor. A few days after the visit, Cardew wrote to Ismay upset as he had left some important items behind:

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123 Draft letter from W.A. Ismay to Michael Cardew (potter), undated but probably 1960.

124 Letter from Michael Cardew (potter) to W.A. Ismay, dated 19 November 1960.

125 Draft letter from W.A. Ismay to Michael Cardew (potter), undated.



*I knew I'd leave something behind: I failed to collect my 2 precious little pocket knives. They were (I think) on top of books (Rowlandson, Pepys, or other paperback) beyond the v.comfortable bed I slept in. One /XXX/ thin "silver" penknife, very precious, made in People's Rep of CHINA, cost about 10p in a shop in Barnes, about 7 years ago. This is the first time I've 'lost' them. Also the even more ancient razorblade holder, v.thin and worn. I use this about 5 times a day when its in my pocket & the Chinese knife abt 20 or 30 times a day, mostly for scraping pipe [...]*<sup>126</sup>

Tanya Harrod, author of a biography of Cardew published in 2012, has been researching Cardew for a number of years.<sup>127</sup> Accounts of Cardew's character imply that he could be very volatile, often prone to flying off the handle and Harrod once commented that Cardew was a member of the 'awkward squad.'<sup>128</sup> We have seen evidence of Ismay's self-confidence when dealing with a variety of characters from different backgrounds in chapter 2. Ismay and Cardew would have viewed each other as intellectual equals, as they had both studied Classics at university (Ismay in Leeds and Cardew in Cambridge). As Cardew wrote frequently in reply to Ismay's letters, sharing news and opinions freely, Ismay would have seen him as the perfect pen pal. Harrod came across a quote from Cardew in which he refers to Ismay as being a bore. She thinks it has something to do with occasions when Ismay would invite himself to stay before the Camelford shows and that may have slightly irritated Cardew. Cardew spent quite a lot of time with people who, unlike Ismay, shared his passion for pots but little else. Harrod commented that Cardew loved to be admired and Ismay was clearly an admirer.<sup>129</sup> As Cardew's letters to Ismay were long and friendly, Harrod believes that although they did not have what she would call a deep friendship, it was a durable one.<sup>130</sup>

That their friendship was more than just fan mail from Ismay, is revealed in 1965. Ismay had remained close to his school friend John (known as 'Jack') Spink and his sudden death in 1965 was a bitter blow.<sup>131</sup> Like Ismay, Spink was a bachelor and lived with his invalid mother (as Ismay had before his own mother's death in 1956). In the years leading up to Spink's death, they had gone on summer holidays together, travelling to Ireland, Scotland and the south coast of England. They also ventured into Europe, in 1957 travelling to Denmark, visiting Copenhagen, Ronne and Bornholm. In 1960 they travelled to Amsterdam and visited attractions such as the *Rijksmuseum*, the *Diamond Polishing Works (A. Von Moppes & Zoon)* and the *Zoölogisch Museum*. Ismay had introduced Spink to studio pottery and they had gone down to Wenford Bridge

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126 Letter from Michael Cardew (potter) to W.A. Ismay, dated 17 March 1977.

127 Harrod, Tanya (2012). *The Last Sane Man: Michael Cardew: Modern Pots, Colonialism, and Counterculture*, Yale University Press New Haven and London.

128 Harrod, Tanya (1994). 'Writers & Thinkers – Michael Cardew', *CRAFTS*, Jan/Feb, pp. 18–19.

129 Conversation between Tanya Harrod and Helen Walsh, 2010.

130 Ibid.

131 Spink is often mentioned in W.A. Ismay's letters to Michael Cardew. See Appendix iv for transcript of Cardew correspondence.

Pottery together to see Cardew a number of times, stopping at other potters on the journey. Spink had even formed his own small collection of pots by Cardew and some of his pupils. Ismay wrote to Cardew of his shock and despondency at Spink's death and Cardew replied with a surprisingly sensitive letter, which would have meant a lot to Ismay:

*Life is never quite the same again, time passes and one thinks one is forgetting & a lot of the time one can forget, but inside, it is actually impossible to forget & one feels the loss for the rest of one's life. When my favourite brother Philip died in 1960 I felt like that & I still do. The old feeling of 'confidence' never comes back.<sup>132</sup>*



3-52 Jar, 1964, Dan Arbeid. (York Museums Trust)

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132 Letter from Michael Cardew to W.A. Ismay, dated 20 May 1965.



### **3.8 It is a great honour for my work to find a place amidst your splendid collection and I am more proud of that than anything else<sup>133</sup> — The value of being in the Ismay collection**

Having a piece of work in Ismay's collection was something many potters aspired to and were proud of. A letter from Henry Rothschild regarding an exhibition of pottery by Dan Arheid at Rothschild's Primavera gallery sums this up:

*I am sorry you are unable to come to the exhibition. I know how very disappointed Dan Arheid will be, as he specially hoped you would come, and we talked about you only yesterday. I believe he values being in your Collection more than any other.*<sup>134</sup>

Alex McErlain was in Switzerland in 1991, filming the potter Patrick Sargent as he unpacked his kiln following a firing and recalled:

*I caught on film Patrick taking finished pots from the kiln and pulling out a particularly fine deep bowl which he declared 'was to go to Bill Ismay'. The pot did end up in the collection but I don't know if Bill had requested he look out for a good pot or whether Patrick wanted his best work to end up there.*<sup>135</sup>

It turned out that Ismay spotted the bowl without being prompted and Sargent wrote to him in appreciation, pleased that a favourite piece had found a good home:



**3-53** Patrick Sargent photographed by Ismay whilst demonstrating at the Northern Potters Association Camp, Bretton Hall, 1990.

133 Letter from Magdalene Odundo (potter) to W.A. Ismay, dated 22 August 1982.

134 Letter from Henry Rothschild to W.A. Ismay, dated 11 February 1963.

135 Recollection of Alex McErlain recounted to Helen Walsh, March 2013.





3-54 Bowl, 1991, Patrick Sargent. (York Museums Trust)

*Also a big thank you for visiting my show in Exeter and buying the pots. The brown bowl with slip trailing and chun over glaze is possibly the best pot to come out of the fourth firing of my kiln in Switzerland. I am in pain to see it go, but the healing is knowing where it is going to.<sup>136</sup>*

Support with real conviction was something potters really valued and is behaviour that Ismay exhibited with many potters in his collection. Ismay met potter Magdalene Odundo in 1976 when she was a student at the West Surrey College of Art & Design. It was on the occasion of her BA Hons degree show and she was showing the coiled pots she had made which were heavily influenced by the traditional pots of her African birthplace. Ismay purchased three of these types of pots by her between 1976 and 1978.

When she began producing the fine burnished vessels she is now known for, Ismay purchased three between 1982 and 1984. His final purchase of her work was made in 1984 from the exhibition *Individual Eye* at the Craftsman Potters Association shop in London. It had a retail price of £400 and even with a very generous 40 per cent discount, reducing the cost to £290, Ismay had to stretch his finances to afford it, but his effort was greatly appreciated by Odundo. The piece he purchased in 1982 was a red and black burnished vase with off-set neck from her Royal College of Art show, costing £140. He paid a deposit of £70 on the day and then sent her a cheque later for a further instalment and Odundo replied, writing:

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136 Letter from Patrick Sargent (potter) to W.A. Ismay, dated 1 April 1991.

*Please don't worry yourself as to when you should send the check and so forth. I can wait for the next installment until you are able to pay it. Don't deprive yourself of buying other pieces because you feel my check is urgent... It is a great honour for my work to find a place amidst your splendid collection and I am more proud of that than anything else. I have seen the collection and thus know that I am honoured.<sup>137</sup>*



3-55 Jar, 1982, Magdalene Odundo. (York Museums Trust)

137 Letter from Magdalene Odundo (potter) to W.A. Ismay, dated 22 August 1982.



3-56 Pot, 1977, Magdalene Odundo. (York Museums Trust)

Ismay was unable to afford to purchase any further pieces by Odundo due to their increasing price, however he remained in contact with Odundo, exchanging letters and cards. Odundo valued Ismay's supportive presence at her exhibitions whether or not he made a purchase. This experience highlights how rapid rises in the prices of pots during the 1980s affected Ismay's ability to collect. The marketplace developed from the late 1960s and throughout the 1970s, the number of people collecting British studio ceramics was on the rise and as a result prices rose too.



In a short essay written for the catalogue of the Rufford Ceramics exhibition in 1982, Ismay acknowledged that the British studio pottery scene had been transformed by the proliferation of potters, the increased number of retail outlets and a greater number of customers willing to buy the results of potters' experimentation with materials and methods.<sup>138</sup> This growth in participation and value led to studio pottery being seen as an investment, with interest from auction houses and commercial dealers with an eye to profit. This was anathema to Ismay and in his eyes brought out the very worst quality of collecting. In 1984, Ismay writes of his outrage at some of the behaviour exhibited at the time that particularly offended him, using one particular dealer as his example:

*[...] I pretty well disapprove of PR's pottery activities! I went once (right at the beginning) to see what he was up to, and have not been since...The basic grounds for my dislike is the very strong impression I have of a jackal prowling round a feast, and that whatever feeling he has for pots and potters come a very long way second to his search for financial profit for himself. From what I saw myself and have heard from others, he sometimes puts on 'exhibitions' of a potter's work without that potter's prior knowledge and is quite prepared to put in good, bad and indifferent things (anything he has got cheaply from collectors who are hard up, more casual purchasers or any other source seems included) without regard to advancing the potters reputation... (He once went to a pottery show for a children's charity to which potters had donated pots (and for which I wrote a catalogue introduction), was first in the queue, bought up any big name pots which the charity organisers had offered to put in at relatively bargain prices, and promptly resold items inflated for his own profit- nothing illegal of course!)*<sup>139</sup>

The monetary value of his collection was never the priority for Ismay and he certainly never purchased items with an eye to them being a financial investment, because he had no intention of selling them. Monetary considerations were centred on how much he could afford to spend and how far he could stretch himself to afford new acquisitions. Following his retirement year when he received his lump sum and collected a record 177 pots, he had to re-evaluate his financial position and came to the conclusion that he would have to practise more restraint now that he was living on his pension and didn't have a regular wage coming in:

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138 Ismay, W.A. (1982). 'Bill Ismay on Ceramics', in *Ceramics 82*, Rufford Craft Centre, Nottinghamshire County Council, pp. 7-8.

139 Letter from W.A. Ismay to Eric James Mellon (potter), dated 20 July 1984, in the collection of the Crafts Study Centre, Farnham.



3-57 Pot, 1959, Hans Coper. (York Museums Trust)

*I found I'd bought 177 pots last year wh. is a record and quite ridiculous! Having scrutinised my bank balance and the future modest rate of replenishment I realise I must retrench- but I seem automatically to acquire around the basic "pot a week" and have notched up 9 for 1976 so far.<sup>140</sup>*



3-58 Colin Pearson demonstrating at CPA camp.

Not viewing the financial value of his pots as important did not mean that Ismay was unaware of this aspect of British studio pottery however. As a known collector, Ismay was usually sent catalogues by auction houses when they had a studio pottery sale coming up. He was uninterested in purchasing through auctions though, as the direct contact with potters was something he valued. He also liked to know that the price he paid was going directly to the potter rather than an auctioneer's coffers. His fellow collectors Alan and Pat Firth were seasoned auction attendees and in 1981, Ismay wrote to them about a forging scandal that had hit the auction market:

*Had you heard about the BL forgeries made by inmates at Featherstone Prison near Wolverhampton? Elisabeth has sent me cuttings. Apparently these were thrown pieces made in the prisoner's pottery workshop, provided with BL and St. Ives seals (which as I've been pointing out for years are the easiest things in the world to forge, so that a seal mark in itself is no proof of authenticity) and smuggled out (not even that, really, as prisoners could "buy" pots at a nominal price of 30p to send to relatives and friends!) to be sold at auction- Sothebys, Christies, Phillips, Bonhams and Lawrence of Crewe are all involved. The prison authority and Home Office comments are rather nice:- "Pottery is a normal part of the educational programme in prisons" - "The standard here can be quite high because the hobbies here are of a high standard generally".<sup>141</sup>*

Alan worked as a probation officer at HM Prison Whealstun near Wetherby, and Ismay (tongue-in-cheek) suggested he investigate whether anything similar was going on there. Auction catalogues offered a good indication of the resale market, often revealing which private collectors had bought items Ismay might have seen for sale in exhibitions as well as which collectors were shedding items.

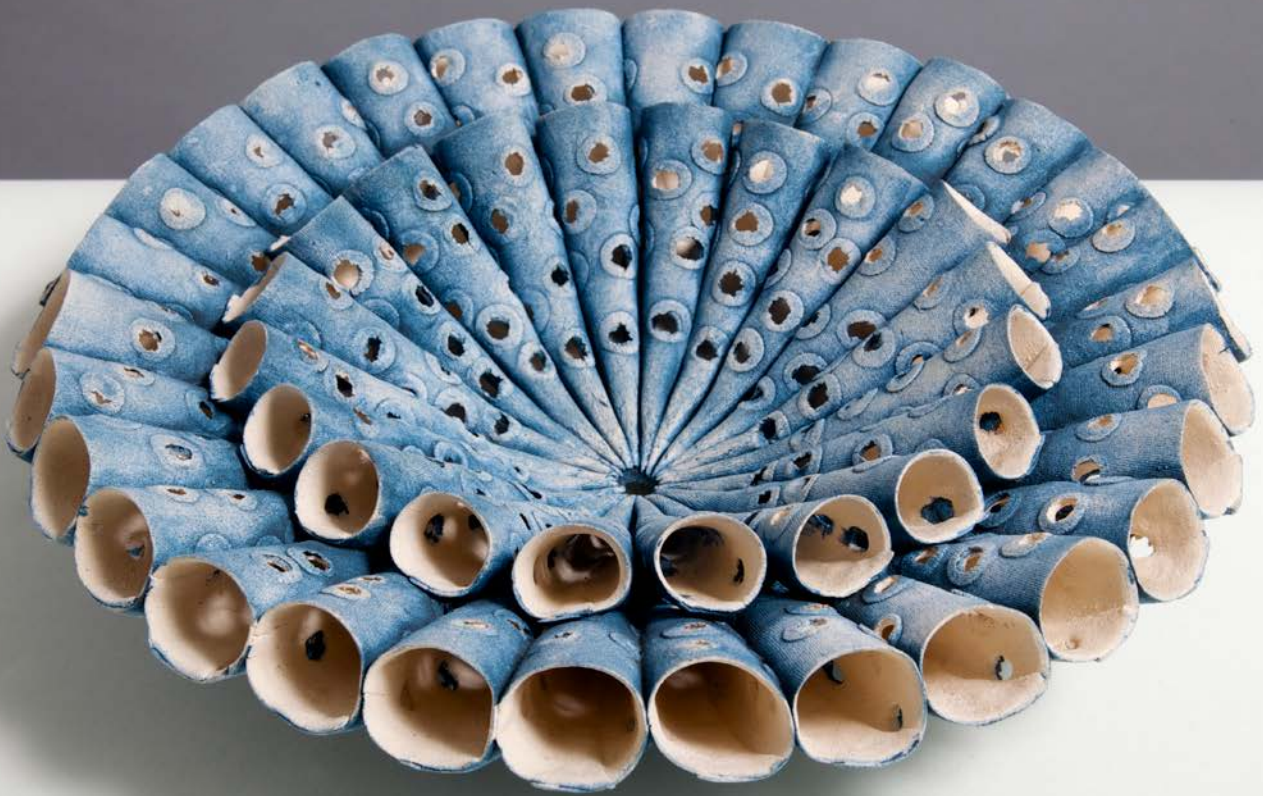
140 Letter from W.A. Ismay to Alan Firth (collector), dated 9 March 1976.

141 Letter from W.A. Ismay to Alan and Pat Firth (collectors), dated 22 January 1981.





3-59 Jug, 1992, Colin Pearson. (YORYM:2004.1.716)



3-60 Blue spotty cone, 1995, Lisa Ellul. (YORYM:2004.1.505)

In 1983 Ismay spotted a large Hans Coper pot, which was almost identical to his in an upcoming sale at Sotheby's. In the sale it reached a hammer price of £9,500 and in subsequent letter to Alan and Pat Firth, he mentioned it to them:

*PPS. What do you think about the near-twin of my big HC (with "minor chip") fetching that huge price at Sotheby's, as someone showed me in a newspaper cutting at Oxford?<sup>142</sup>*

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142 Letter from W.A. Ismay to Alan and Pat Firth (collectors), dated 2 May 1983.

Ismay had purchased his pot in October 1959 at a cost of £10 (equivalent to £162 today) from the Midland Group of Artists exhibition *Seven Artist-Craftsmen*, which also included work by Lucie Rie and James Tower.

The rising cost of some potters' work made it difficult for Ismay to continue to show support by buying work throughout the entirety of their careers, as evidenced by Magdalene Odundo. His collection was also affected by changes of direction and style. Some changes Ismay appreciated and supported, others he was less keen on. For example, Ismay collected the work of Colin Pearson (1923–2007) from 1961 to 1995 and during that period Pearson's work developed from functional domestic pots, to thick, roughly thrown and glazed pots, then to sculptural pots with wings and jugs with elaborate curled handles and strong glazes. Ismay appreciated all these developments and purchased many examples. He was less keen however on the direction taken by William Levi Marshall (1969–), whose original style of rustic pottery Ismay had liked and purchased, but after Marshall had returned from studying at Alfred University (USA), he had adopted a brightly coloured style of work that Ismay hated.<sup>143</sup>

Although he had a taste for functional pots, Ismay retained a curiosity about the different ways in which potters used the material, and purchased examples. They include pieces by potters who would go on to develop their work sculpturally in ways that moved them away from Ismay's aesthetic, but the fact that he acquired early pieces shows he had spotted something in their work to admire and invest in. Examples include: a green pot made in 1969 by Gillian Lowndes (1936–2010); Glenys Barton's (1944–) bone china sculpture from 1972; eight pieces by Ewen Henderson (1934–2000) between 1972 and 1983; six porcelain pieces by Edmund de Waal (1964–) from 1991 to 1996. These items can now be viewed as markers for the changing concerns of the studio pottery movement as it developed during the post-war period and Ismay's continuing engagement in new work. He was not just collecting the same things but was interested in new directions taken by established artists such as Pearson, and also new graduates such as Lisa Ellul. The pieces, which may appear to sit on the edges of Ismay's collection, provide context and indicate the limits of his taste and financial resources.

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143 Recollection of Alex McErlain recounted to Helen Walsh, 25 February 2017.



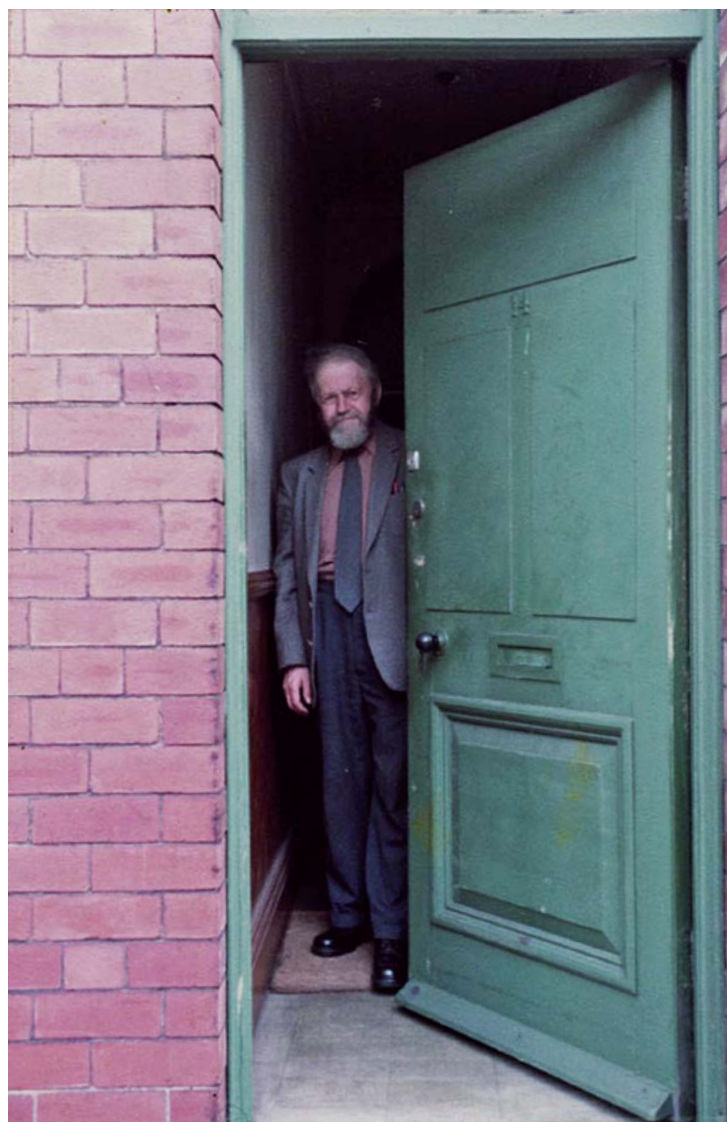
### **3.9 It was mind-blowing, and the thing that I remember was that he enjoyed that, he enjoyed blowing my mind<sup>144</sup> — Visiting Ismay's collection**

Ismay was generous in allowing potters, students, academics and other collectors to visit his home to view his collection. To him, allowing access to interested people was an integral part of being a collector, a responsibility and a pleasurable outcome of owning a collection: 'Such a collection can become more than self-indulgence if in addition to pleasing the collector, it can also become of use and pleasure to practitioners or students of whatever art or craft is involved.'<sup>145</sup>

The memory of visiting Ismay's pot-packed house remained etched on the memories of those who visited: from curators experienced in working alongside important objects and collections, to potters confident of their skills, or students who had only seen examples of many of the works in books, it was an experience never to be forgotten. Collector Alan Firth described it as mind-blowing, saying: 'I was just staggered at what I saw. It was mind-blowing, and the thing that I remember was that he enjoyed that, he enjoyed blowing my mind, absolutely.'<sup>146</sup> After spending 6–7 hours at 14 Welbeck Street looking at Ismay's collection in 1975, potter Michael Casson wrote:

*All through this time I had a strange feeling (it might have been that I caught a very bad cold after it – but I don't think so!) It was a feeling of something in the background, something hanging over me. I know it was the presence of 'vibrations' of all those pots, coming in one vast lump, at your house. I've tried to tell various people about it – David Canter for one – but can't convey the experience.<sup>147</sup>*

Rarely were visitors negative about seeing the collection; however, potter Patrick Sargent found the experience very uncomfortable. Alex McErlain recalls the visit they made together in 1990–1991:



3-61 W.A. Ismay answering his door. Photograph Oliver Watson.

144 Interview with Alan Firth (collector) in 2013. See Appendix v for transcript.

145 Ismay, W.A. (1982b). 'Collecting Studio Pottery', *Ceramic Review*, No. 76 July/August, pp. 4–7.

146 Interview with Alan Firth (collector) in 2013. See Appendix v for transcript.

147 Letter from Michael Casson (potter) to W.A. Ismay, dated 27 April 1975.

*One visit to Welbeck St in the company of Patrick Sargent was a bit unusual. We went to the house and began to look around, going into the front room to show Patrick the Hamada pots which he was so fond of. Surprisingly Patrick would not hold the Hamadas even when Bill and I tried to pass them to him. He later confessed to being really intimidated by them.<sup>148</sup>*

Securing an invitation to visit 14 Welbeck Street to see Ismay's collection was the first hurdle and involved a written letter of request. Most of the applicants included a recommendation from one of Ismay's acquaintances. In potter Jane Hamlyn's letter of introduction in 1976, she mentioned that she had been given Ismay's address by

Pan Henry, manager of the Craftsman Potters Association shop in London, from where Ismay bought many pots.<sup>149</sup> Potter Jack Kenny wrote asking to arrange a visit for Edmund de Waal and himself to see Ismay's collection. He introduces both of them as recent apprentices of Geoffrey Whiting and says they are particularly interested in seeing Ismay's collection of pots by Whiting.<sup>150</sup> This was then followed by the to-and-fro of letters confirming dates, times and directions, as Ismay did not have a telephone. The ultimate tests however came during the visit and comprised Ismay establishing visitors' credentials by testing their knowledge and passion for pots. Alex McErlain recalls his first visit in the 1980s:



3-62 Pot, 1959, Robert Washington.  
(York Museums Trust)

148 Recollection of Alex McErlain recounted to Helen Walsh, March 2013.

149 Letter from Jane Hamlyn to W.A. Ismay, dated 13 July 1976.

150 Letter from Jack Kenny to W.A. Ismay, dated 14 August 1988.

*I remember the classic visit which many visitors experienced, beginning in the back room, where we probably had a cup of tea in a pot of our own choosing, then progressing past his bicycle in the hallway to the front room where the questions of identification became a bit more demanding as he discovered the extent of our knowledge. I got stuck on a tall slim pot positioned close to the doorway and was guessing wildly then Bill proffered a clue 'think of American Presidents' it was R.J. Washington!<sup>151</sup>*

Potter Jim Malone also recalls Ismay's sense of humour materializing on one visit when he played a trick on Malone with a test:

*Actually what he did to me once was he handed me a bowl which I didn't recognize, but I liked it, and he said what do you think of that? I said oh I like that, who is it by? He said 'it's one of yours!' One that he'd bought years ago.<sup>152</sup>*



**3-63** Breakfast cup and saucer, 1960, Harry Davis. (York Museums Trust)

151 Recollection of Alex McErlain (potter) recounted to Helen Walsh, March 2013.

152 Interview with Jim Malone (potter) in 2013. See Appendix v for transcript.



Some visitors found the tests more stressful than others; curator and writer David Whiting recounts:

*Bill's great hospitality, usually punctuated by a visit to his local pub for lunch, was slightly offset by terror once you realized that he was going to test you. 'Who do you think made this?' he would say handing you an obscure piece whose provenance would quite escape you. As your brain searched feverishly and hopelessly, his gaze got keener. But if you were attentive, you could almost see the name being formed on his lips. However it was far more likely that you would nervously splutter the wrong answer and he would correct you a bright glint in his eye and that low purring chuckle.<sup>153</sup>*



3-64 Tea bowl, 1963, Shoji Hamada. (York Museums Trust)

153 Mentioned in David Whiting's presentation at the W.A. Ismay Memorial Day held at the Yorkshire Museum in 2001.

Dan Manning visited Ismay in 1995. He was interested in studio pottery and gained an introduction to the subject through friendship with collector Lewis Creed. Creed had become aware of Ismay through attending exhibition private views. In 1995, after dropping many subtle hints, Lewis Creed finally received his coveted invitation to visit and see his collection. Manning gained entrance by acting as driver to Creed and potter Jonathan Chiswell Jones, who had one piece in Ismay's collection. Manning recalls the visit and the tests:

*'What do you make of this, young man?' The see-what-you're-made-of game began. The only unspoken rule of this parlour game is that the player is not permitted to turn the pot over to examine its tell-tale marks until registering a claim to its authorship.*<sup>154</sup>

After the test came the reward, which was described as Ismay's *Yorkshire Tea Ceremony* by Maureen Bampton (Director of the Bluecoat Display Centre, Liverpool, from 1986).<sup>155</sup> This was the opportunity to choose a pot from Ismay's collection in which to drink tea or coffee. Potter Dave Roberts and Alex McErlain both chose a tenmoku glazed breakfast cup and saucer by Harry Davis. Jim Malone worked his way through a number of tea bowls starting with Shoji Hamada and then moving on to Bernard Leach. Potter and author Edmund de Waal also chose the Shoji Hamada tea bowl when he visited Ismay.<sup>156</sup>

Ismay also became a source of guidance for other aspiring collectors. They would carefully watch him at private views, paying attention to which pots he picked up to examine closer and pouncing on the pieces he lingered over and then put down regretfully.<sup>157</sup> Those collectors who were willing to approach Ismay, and request to see his collection, had to prove they were serious. Even after he retired, Ismay's free time was valuable and he carefully protected his privacy. When Alan Firth first began collecting, he approached Ismay and asked if he could visit, Ismay wrote back and seemed to imply that he wanted to 'vet' him first:

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154 Manning, D.L. (1995). *From Hand to Mouth*, MA Thesis, Essex University, p. 28.

155 Email correspondence from Maureen Bampton (former Director of the Bluecoat Display Centre, Liverpool) to Helen Walsh, dated 13 June 2013.

156 Conversation with Edmund de Waal related to Helen Walsh by Ian McIntyre, 2015.

157 Recollection of Ifan Williams recounted to Helen Walsh in 2010.

*When it's possible I look forward to a talk about pots- perhaps I could see what you have so far (no need to be apologetic about this as my own knowledge and collection of pots were at the stage you say yours is now, not so many years ago), and show you the pots here when I have had a little time to make the place less of a shambles than it is at present- it's not too fair to pots or potters to show anyone things in disarray and smothered in dust, and when one has as little time as I've had lately this is really quite a problem.<sup>158</sup>*

Firth arranged to meet Ismay at a private view in the White Rose Gallery in Bradford and, as Ismay did not drive, offered him a lift home. On the way they stopped off at the Firths' home and Ismay saw the beginnings of their collection. Then Ismay returned the favour after Alan took him home. Alan recalled how much he and his wife, Pat, gained from those visits:

*It was extraordinary, after that first shock, it kind of mellowed a little bit, because I'd spent time at home, talking to Pat, my wife. She was looking forward to going, she was excited about it, and each time we went things got a little better in terms of we didn't feel so much barebones amateurish and we got more at ease with Bill, and more at ease with the handling, or talking about a pot, or asking a question, personal question perhaps. But it was lovely, and each time there was something new or extraordinary. Of course, when he'd been on his own 'fishing' trips to buy pots, he always had something new to show us.<sup>159</sup>*

Firth said he had also learnt a lot from just being with Ismay in an exhibition and watching what he did, how he looked at pots, handled them, interrogated them:

*Simply being with him, being by him when he was buying, watching the intense way that he would go about interrogating a piece. He would pick it up. Normally, although he was a small guy, he was kind of standing straight up, but when he was intense, his shoulders would come forward a little bit, his head would drop, the magnifying glass would be between him and the object he was interrogating, and I knew never to disturb him at that stage, let him get on with it.<sup>160</sup>*

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158 Letter from W.A. Ismay to Alan Firth (collector), dated 23 February 1974.

159 Interview with Alan Firth (collector) in 2013. See Appendix v for transcript.

160 Ibid.



The experience of visiting Ismay's collection and spending time with him examining and handling the pots and hearing his opinion of them proved extremely valuable to collectors. The opportunity to see such a wide array of artists' work in one place and have such access was rare and often challenged their opinions or preconceptions. In one particular case, Ismay was able to challenge one collector's perception that the Leach Pottery in St Ives was the best source for quality contemporary work. Collector Frank Whalley visited Welbeck Street in 1980 and the letters he wrote to Ismay following the visit demonstrate the impact the collection, and spending time discussing it with Ismay, had on him, describing the visit as: 'one of the most remarkable experiences of my life.'<sup>161</sup> He found it enabled him to fully understand the attraction of work by Hans Coper and Lucie Rie and importantly he writes in a letter following his visit:

*[...] you opened my eyes to the quality of potters working outside Cornwall, people like Michael Casson, Jim Malone, and Mak Yee Fun.<sup>162</sup>*

The following month, Whalley wrote to Ismay again, telling him about his recent activity and how he was spurred on by Ismay's recommendation, and visited the Bluecoat Display Centre, where he purchased work by Jim Malone, after seeing the examples in Ismay's collection. He also tells of pursuing the connection further and going to visit Malone in Wales. He finishes his letter by pinpointing two of the most important aspects, for Ismay, of having a collection:

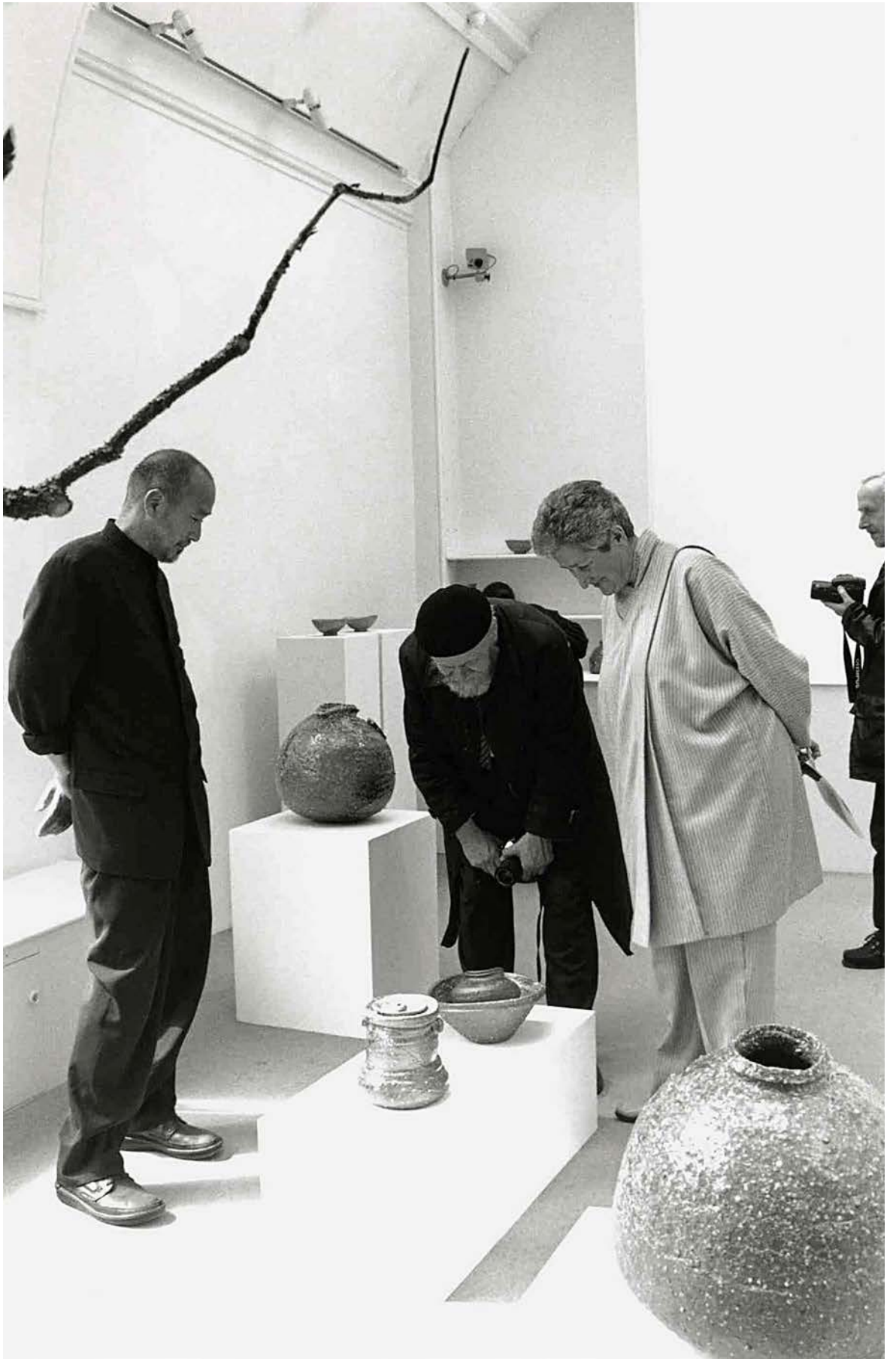
*So you can see that visiting you has set me off in all sorts of directions. That must be one of the pleasures of having a collection like yours: there is all the fun of building it and, perhaps, the satisfaction of watching it inspire others.<sup>163</sup>*

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161 Letter from Frank Whalley (collector) to W.A. Ismay, dated 8 July 1980.

162 Ibid.

163 Letter from Frank Whalley (collector) to W.A. Ismay, dated 28 August 1980.



3-65 W.A. Ismay at Galerie Besson in 1994 with Shiro Tsujimura and Anita Besson. Photograph Anita Besson.

### 3.10 Summary

Ismay used the skills and strengths he had honed during his formative years, applying them in ways that benefited the British studio pottery movement and ensured his rapid rise to importance. As seen in Chapter 2, literature and writing were elements that strengthened Ismay's activity as a collector. His research skills enabled Ismay to gain knowledge that not only allowed him to talk comfortably with potters and other experts, but also allowed him to teach them. Whilst he did not *make* pots he knew how they were made, what they were made of, why they were made and how they were used. He handled them every day and learnt much from that tactile experience. He recognized and understood the value of knowledge and context in relation to his collection and his archive is the proof.

What Ismay valued about the pots he collected was the character, skill, creativity and determination that went into their production. Having them in his home enabled him to use them and to share that experience with visitors. Ismay summed up the importance of this haptic engagement of handling pots, in a draft article, writing:

*But even a photograph in colour cannot tell the whole truth about a pot: I sometimes think that the best pots are the least susceptible of being photographed, whilst others can sometimes deceive by presenting their good face. What one needs is to put the pot itself in a person's hands: a good pot should stand the test of being handled and turned over: it should satisfy the hand as well as the eye in every way.<sup>164</sup>*

Ismay welcomed the friendship he experienced from the British studio pottery community and valued the knowledge they shared with him. He repaid them by providing support in many different ways, becoming much more important and influential than other collectors active at the same time. Ismay was a collector, customer, supporter, user, curator, photographer, writer, teacher, fount of knowledge, librarian, archivist, benefactor, critic, advocate, friend, confidant, diplomat and defender of the British studio pottery movement.

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164 Ismay, W.A. (1984). 'What is a good pot?', unpublished article for *Artists Newsletter*.



## **CHAPTER 4 — The Journey of The Collection from Private to Public Ownership**

Ismay had devoted over forty years to building his collection. A key point of principle for him was that all items were of equal importance, and purchases, even if they later turned out to be mistakes, were kept as evidence of the potter's development of skill and the collector's taste. He recognized the value of his collection as a complete body of work and wanted to keep it together as a whole. However, this was difficult for public museums to facilitate, as the size of the collection would put an enormous amount of strain on storage and display space.

This chapter follows the process Ismay went through when looking for a home for his collection, the negotiations undertaken and the issues faced by the museum that eventually acquired the collection. It explains how the museum aligned its plans with Ismay's to achieve the outcome he wanted for his collection.

### **4.1 You'll say I'm foolish not to have had this cut and dried in advance<sup>1</sup>— Ismay begins securing the future of his collection**

In 1988, Ismay's friends Jim Robison and Sally Shrimpton (Chair and Vice Chair of the committee of the Northern Potters Association) approached Ismay about the delicate question of what would happen to his collection when he died. It was a subject that even his few remaining living relatives had not managed to raise, as became clear in a letter following Ismay's death in 2001:

*The news on Saturday was a shock and we were faced with the situation which we had long dreaded but which we had never succeeded in effectively providing for, of dealing with the affairs of a reclusive man who confided little in us despite Audrey's repeated attempts to mother him. Our visits to Bill were usually brief and normally evolved as a meal in a restaurant where confidences were not easily exchanged and the hard question of what do we do when you die was never reached.<sup>2</sup>*

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1 Letter from W.A. Ismay to Eric James Mellon (potter), dated 10 April 1989.

2 Letter from Peter and Eileen Copson (W.A. Ismay's cousins) to Jim Robison (potter and trustee of the W.A. Ismay Collection), dated 23 January 2001.

The lack of confidence Ismay had in his relatives regarding his collection, was expressed by him in a letter to potter Eric James Mellon in which he outlined his wish that his collection remained intact and was not dispersed for the delight of his next of kin, writing: 'I have nothing at all against my cousins, but they are not competent in this pottery matter! And my aims and objects would not be served at all.'<sup>3</sup>

Ismay was grateful to Robison and Shrimpton for urging him to start seriously thinking about the future, admitting that at the age of 78, it was more than time he began to make arrangements.<sup>4</sup> Whilst accepting their offer of help, Ismay remained determined to be in control and keep his options open, writing:

*I know you will understand that this house (this rather chaotic house!) is my living space as well as housing the collection, that to an extent I have to reserve my privacy, and that I can't make any prior commitment to accept suggestions and recommendations without reserve.*<sup>5</sup>

Ismay, Robison and Shrimpton met in June 1988 at Ismay's home, surrounded by the collection, to talk about all possible options. Robison's informal minutes from the meeting highlighted the following key issues raised:

- The idea of setting up a museum of ceramics that would incorporate the W.A. Ismay Collection and potentially other private collections. The challenge with this idea was seen to be raising money to finance a purpose built-building for such a project.
- They should look at other arrangements made for displaying private collections of studio pottery (the collection of Rollo Ballantyne which was on display at the National Trust's Sudbury Hall property, was mentioned as a potential model).



4-1 W.A. Ismay's sitting room in the 1990s. Photograph Janette Haigh.

3 Letter from W.A. Ismay to Eric James Mellon (potter), dated 2 August 1988.

4 Letter from W.A. Ismay to Jim Robison (potter and trustee of the W.A. Ismay Collection), dated 13 May 1988.

5 Ibid.



4-2 W.A. Ismay in his kitchen at 14 Welbeck Street, Wakefield, in 1982. Photograph Eileen Lewenstein.

- Concerns that if no plans were made, the W.A. Ismay Collection could be sold off without concern for its collective nature.
- The risk that the collection would end up packed away in boxes in a museum basement.
- It was underlined that the strength of the W.A. Ismay Collection was the pleasure gained from the shared viewing of objects.
- The ideal solution was seen to be a study centre established with much, if not all, of the works on view.
- Ismay stated the desire that more acquisitions would be added to the collection to keep it up to date.
- It was proposed that Robison and Shrimpton, as representatives of the committee of the Northern Potters Association, would endeavour to establish a Charitable Trust incorporating the collection and outlining W.A. Ismay's wishes for its future use.





4-3 W.A. Ismay's kitchen table. Photograph Janette Haigh.

Ismay's collection was not the first private collection of British studio ceramics to be offered as a gift to a public institution: for example, the Bergen Collection was given to The Potteries Museum & Gallery, Stoke on Trent, in 1948, and the Milner-White collection began to be transferred to York Art Gallery in 1959. The W.A. Ismay Collection was however the largest and therefore most challenging. The Ballantyne Collection, which was seen as a potential model for finding a permanent home for Ismay's pots, offered an indication of the challenges involved, with the process of securing its future taking more than 20 years.

Ismay had been acquainted with collector Dr Rollo Ballantyne (1917–1998) since 1980, when Ballantyne visited Ismay to see his collection. Ismay had previously commented about the arrangement Ballantyne had for his collection, in a letter to potter Eric James Mellon:

*Dr Rollo Ballantyne I find (in CR 8, may/june 84) says the collection at Sudbury hall was established in 1978 (but that this had taken 6 years of negotiation to fix up) (it is a reg charity with trustees). (Currently (1986) he is still borrowing back items of his 'semi permanent loan' from time to time and taking them others in exchange – it seems a fairly flexible arrangement, also not all that is there can be shown at once, and there are always some things in store).<sup>6</sup>*

6 Letter from W.A. Ismay to Eric James Mellon (potter), 22 June 1987.

Such flexible arrangements (long-term loans and gifts with terms and conditions attached) can be problematic of course, sometimes resulting in conflict between the donor and the museum. The collector has the upper hand, and unless they have their heart set on a particular institution, they have the option of taking their collection elsewhere. The museum can find themselves in a difficult position, investing public resources in the care of a private individual's collection that they do not own and/or tied into an agreement they find difficult to abide by. One notorious example was the donation of Alexander and Gabrielle Keiller's collection of 667 ceramic cow creamers presented to The Potteries Museum & Gallery, Stoke-on-Trent, in 1963, on the condition that at least two thirds were permanently on public display. Ultimately the collection has become a draw for visitors due to the novelty value of the items and the small size of the objects has not impacted too heavily on displays. The UK's Museums Association has been publishing and updating their 'Code of Ethics' since it was first created in 1977. One of their key pieces of advice concerns collecting and stewardship, and stresses the need for museums to: 'Accept or acquire an item only if the museum can provide adequate, continuing long-term care for the item and public access to it, without compromising standards of care and access relating to the existing collections.'<sup>7</sup> This is easily said but much more difficult to abide by as the museum's desire to preserve and protect material heritage and culture collides with demanding donors, decreasing budgets and bulging storage and crowded displays.

In the 1984 article, referred to by Ismay in his letter to Eric James Mellon, Ballantyne wrote that he and his wife began in 1972 to consider what would happen to their collection in the future.<sup>8</sup> Ballantyne's brother David Ballantyne (1913–1990), who taught ceramics at Bournemouth College of Art 1950–1978, put them in touch with one of his former students, John Hodgson. Hodgson was then the curator of Sudbury Hall, a National Trust property in Derbyshire. After six years of negotiations between the Ballantynes, the National Trust, East Midlands Arts and Derbyshire County Museums Service, an agreement was reached that part of their collection would be: 'given and part lent to Sudbury Hall, on condition that the whole collection would ultimately be housed there.'<sup>9</sup> Ballantyne wrote that by 1984 the collection had become a Registered Charity and plans were underway to extend the display and develop a Study Centre along the lines of the one at the Holburne Museum in Bath (which would later form the Crafts Study Centre in Farnham, Surrey).<sup>10</sup> However, behind the scenes, negotiations still continued about the collection's future. In 1981, the Ballantynes decided they wanted to sign over the collection permanently to Sudbury Hall, but the National Trust refused to accept. The

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7 Museums Association (2016). *Code of Ethics for Museums*, London, p. 14.

8 Ballantyne, Dr Rollo (1984). 'Sudbury Hall Pots', *Ceramic Review*, No. 87, May/June, pp. 4–5.

9 Ballantyne, Dr Rollo (1984). 'Sudbury Hall Pots', *Ceramic Review*, No. 87, May/June, p. 5.

10 *Ibid.*

main reason for their refusal was the feeling it didn't fit with the property and, in their opinion, with its role as a house and children's museum.<sup>11</sup> Negotiations continued over the next few years, whilst activities based on the collection were held at Sudbury (a touring exhibition titled *Domestic Pottery*; workshops; films; lectures; seminars; kiln-building events). In 1989 the collection was re-displayed, photographed and catalogued.<sup>12</sup> The Study Centre however remained an under-used facility and concerns were raised about how to make more acquisitions to add to the collection.<sup>13</sup>

In October 1989 the National Trust confirmed they no longer wanted to house the collection and a new home had to be found as soon as possible.<sup>14</sup> Derbyshire College of Higher Education was chosen as it

had the facilities to provide a gallery and handling area and provided access for students of their ceramics department; the collection moved there in 1992.<sup>15</sup> Unfortunately, like the National Trust, they were reluctant to enter into a formal agreement to safeguard the future of the collection, which left it homeless and at risk again.<sup>16</sup> Eventually, three years later, a permanent home was found at Nottingham City Council's Castle Museum and agreement was also reached with Derbyshire County Council that they would long-term loan their Schools Loans Collection of studio pottery too. It had been the Ballantynes' wish to donate their remaining pots following their deaths: however, as the collection had now moved out of Derbyshire, this was no longer seen as an option

JANE HAMLYN  
SALTGLAZE  
MILLFIELD POTTERY  
EVERTON, Nr. DONCASTER  
S. YORKSHIRE, DN10 5DD  
TEL: RETFORD (01777) 817 723

1<sup>st</sup> January '89.

Dear Bill,

I feel very honoured that you should ask me to be a trustee of your collection & of course I accept, although I hope it's a job I won't have to undertake (sorry about the pun!) for many, many years!

Yours is a very special collection, acquired, it seems to me, for all the 'night' reasons, & your encouragement & support has been of incalculable value to so many potters. I think the greatest tribute to your collection is that it has helped potters when they most needed it — while they are alive, but I do believe that it's important that as a collection, it should continue to do good after you & I & the rest of us aren't around anymore. Funny isn't it,

11 Email from Joisie Walter (potter, writer and former trustee of the Ballantyne Collection) to Helen Walsh, dated 25 April 2016.

12 Ibid.

13 Ibid.

14 Ibid.

15 Ibid.

16 Ibid.



to think of our pots being around when we're  
not?

Anyway yes, of course & certainly.... but I  
would like to talk to you in a bit more  
detail about the nitty-gritty & have a  
bit clearer idea of your own hopes & fears for  
the future outcome of 'your' pots.

Are you very busy at Easter, this year?

Would you like to come & stay here for a  
few days then? Alternatively, the SALTGLAZE  
exhibition at Rufford opens on MON March 6th pm.  
Perhaps we could pick you up at the station in  
Dawcotes, go to the show together & put you up here  
that night & have a proper chat. We don't seem  
to have had time for a good talk for ages — &  
you haven't seen Ted's new paintings yet!

What do you think?

With much love from us both,

Jim & Ted.

and in June 1995, the remaining 103 pieces from the collection were sold at auction through Bonhams in London.<sup>17</sup> Though it was a long and drawn out process, the majority of the Ballantyne Collection had eventually found a good home, enabling the Ballantynes' wishes for it to be fulfilled.

The experience of the Ballantyne Collection demonstrated the difficulty in finding homes for large collections and, comparatively speaking, this collection was a fraction of the size of Ismay's. His understanding of the Ballantynes' experience, though positive in 1989, changed when he later became aware of the difficulties being faced in this case. He wrote to potter Eric James Mellon about his concern that pieces from Ballantyne's collection were to be sold: 'I am quite amazed that "trustees" for the conservation

of a collection can behave like this, and find it difficult to believe that RB could consent to such a U-turn.'<sup>18</sup>

Ismay's hopes for his collection were similar to Ballantyne's in many ways. He wanted it to remain intact, to grow and to operate as a study centre, encouraging the continuity of craft skills and the passing on of knowledge. Ismay's main aim in 1988 was to establish a charitable trust to inherit the collection and: 'seek by whatever means are possible to maintain it as a unit, continue it, and make it available for viewing and study.'<sup>19</sup> At the meeting held in June 1988, Ismay, Robison and Shrimpton agreed that Robison would approach Barnsley-based solicitor Harry Eyre for advice in drawing up a Will that would outline Ismay's intentions. At the time Eyre was working

17 Bonhams (1995). *Contemporary Ceramics. The Rollo and Marion Ballantyne Private Collection of Dame Lucie Rie, Hans Coper and others*, catalogue for an Auction Sale held on 22 June, Knightsbridge, London.

18 Letter from W.A. Ismay to Eric James Mellon (potter), dated 19 December 1994.

19 Letter from W.A. Ismay to Jim Robison (potter and trustee of the W.A. Ismay Collection), dated 15 July 1988.

for the National Union of Mineworkers, but had a personal interest in studio pottery and Robison had met him at the exhibitions he had held at his Booth House Gallery in Holmfirth. Eyre offered his help and advice and was taken to Wakefield to meet Ismay and see his collection. He immediately realized the collection was an important resource. Eyre helped and advised Ismay at that early stage, though the bulk of the legal arrangements were handled by Geoffrey Markham, Raley & Pratt Solicitors, Barnsley.

Ismay and Eyre discussed setting up a Trust to care for the collection and initially the most attractive option was for the Northern Potters Association to facilitate that. In effect, Ismay would gift his collection to them to hold in trust for nominated beneficiaries. In theory this was entirely legal and possible: however, not without challenges. Ismay was not a rich man. All his wealth was tied up in his collection and house, the latter of which was in a rundown state and needed modernizing and repair. Whoever took the collection would need funding to care for and maintain it into the future. There would be a cost involved in cataloguing the collection to make it accessible without Ismay there to identify the individual pieces. Finally there was the aim to make the collection available for an audience to view through exhibitions. The Northern Potters Association was an organization of members managed by a voluntary committee all of whom gave their time freely and Eyre recalled that Ismay was: ‘concerned that his generosity could in fact burden the Northern Potters Association with responsibilities that the Association could not afford.’<sup>20</sup>

The 1989 Will underlines the deep affection Ismay felt towards the Northern Potters Association. The Northern Potters Association had been founded following an open meeting at the Bowes Museum, Castle Barnard, in September 1977. Ismay attended that meeting and became a member as soon as applications opened and in 1980 he was made their first *Honorary Lifetime Member* in recognition of his support. The Northern Potters Association was set up with the aim of supporting potters by providing opportunities for them to learn, get together socially, and to generate opportunities to exhibit and sell their work. The first 20–25 years of the Northern Potters Association were arguably its heyday, with numerous successful exhibitions of members’ work held, regular newsletters and a variety of events from demonstrations and lectures, to the numerous well-attended potters’ camps. Ismay was an ardent supporter of all their activities and purchased many examples of members’ work to add to his collection.<sup>21</sup>

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20 Email from Harry Eyre to Helen Walsh, 13 April 2016.

21 The role of voluntary potters’ associations in the British post-war period of the 20th century has received little attention from academia but is an area that would benefit further research in order to establish the extent of their activities and influence. There is much evidence in W.A. Ismay’s archives of activity and involvement, but in the case of the Northern Potters Association in particular, the committee provided the prompt that encouraged Ismay to put in place safeguards for the future of his collection.



Ismay appointed five trustees for his collection that he trusted would carry out his wishes and execute his Will. He selected people he had known for a number of years, who were involved in the studio pottery world in different ways and who were based in or near Yorkshire and so would be able to act immediately should he become incapacitated. His trustees included Jim Robison (potter and owner of Booth House Gallery, Holmfirth), Tony Hill (teacher, collector and potter, Wakefield), Jane Hamlyn (potter, Nottinghamshire), Alan Firth (collector, Leeds) and Janette Haigh (potter, Wakefield).

In Ismay's 1989 Will, section 4 specified the following five actions that he wished to be put in place to safeguard his collection following his death:

*[1] To make the same available for the public for charitable (educational) purposes as hereinafter defined and in that respect to preserve my said Collection as far as possible as a total entity.*



4-5 W.A. Ismay attending a Northern Potters' camp in the 1980s. Photograph Tony Hill.

*[2] In particular to make the said Collection available for the education and instruction of potters, students of pottery and of persons concerned with the historical interest of the said Collection in relation to the period or periods which it covers or otherwise and of persons concerned with the aesthetic interest of the said Collection.*

*[3] To carry out such objectives so far as appropriate as hereinafter mentioned in conjunction with an organisation known as The Northern Potters Association.*

*[4] The Trustees in conjunction with the said Association will make all arrangements for the management, safekeeping and public display of the said Collection and for the appointment of persons to carry out duties incidental to those objectives and also so far as they think fit to make available items from the said Collection for inclusion on loan in public exhibitions organised by other bodies and in museums and educational establishments.*



*[5] It is my intention that the Trustees shall carry out these arrangements in conjunction with the Northern Potters Association as far as my Trustees in their absolute discretion consider appropriate and possible but shall also be entitled to do so in conjunction with any other association, organisation, body or person if they in their absolute discretion consider that any such course is preferable in accordance with my intentions.*

In section 5, Ismay specifies what constitutes his Collection as: ‘not only objects which are clearly of that nature but also all other objects in my possession which are relevant to Ceramics in any way including blown glass, books, magazines, catalogues, prints and written documents, paintings, drawings, graphic prints, photographic prints, slides and negatives and the furnishings in which the said items are housed or accommodated’.<sup>22</sup> Section 6 concerns his house in Wakefield, suggesting the house may be used to store and display the collection or alternatively be sold or leased to support the collection. Section 7 grants the trustees the power to make charges for the exhibition, administer loans and the management of the collection. Following on from that, section 8 states that a Secretary should be appointed as required to keep minutes of meetings, and that a book of accounts should be kept.

Sally Shrimpton (who by then had become Chair of the committee of the Northern Potters Association) was well aware of the generosity of Ismay’s offer, as well as the enormity of the task Ismay was presenting them with and wrote to him that: ‘my breath is rather taken away with the responsibility of it all, but I would like to say thank you for having such trust in us.’<sup>23</sup>

Ismay described the arrangements outlined in his 1989 Will as: ‘no more than a stop-gap attempt to try to prevent the collection simply being dispersed when I’m no longer around’.<sup>24</sup> Clearly his ambition involved a large amount of material and activity requiring a substantial amount of financial support and commitment, which was beyond the capacity of the Northern Potters Association. So, with Ismay’s ‘stop-gap’ Will protecting the collection from dispersal now in place, his attention turned to finding an achievable and appropriate future home.<sup>25</sup> During these initial investigations looking at potential solutions, it became clear to Ismay that his wish to preserve the collection intact could best be achieved with the assistance of those experienced in such situations:

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22 The Last Will and Testament of W.A. Ismay, 1989.

23 Letter from Sally Shrimpton (potter and chair of the Northern Potters Association) to W.A. Ismay, dated 17 April 1989.

24 Letter from W.A. Ismay to Eric James Mellon (potter), dated 10 April 1989.

25 Ibid.

# NORTHERN POTTERS ASSOCIATION

Supported by Northern Arts, Yorkshire Arts and North West Arts.



'Serendipity'  
Marston Road  
Tockwith  
York YO5 8PR

April 17th 1989

Dear Bill,

Just a note with my official NPA hat on to let you know that Jim brought a copy of your Will to our last committee meeting. My breath is rather taken away with the responsibility of it all, but I would like to say thank you for having such trust in us. I will do everything I can to ensure that that trust is justified.

I think it an excellent idea to have created a group of Trustees. I have dropped each of them a note to establish some communication between us.

Lastly I am very aware of the need for discretion about your collection not least for the sake of your own privacy. I would like to reiterate that this remains a priority with the NPA committee.

As you are already aware if I can help you in any way I will willingly do so. You have only to get in touch with me. The same applies for NPA.

With very best wishes,

Sally Shrimpton  
Chairwoman

*Received  
11.5.89!*

All agreements entered into are subject to the terms and conditions as stated within the articles of the organisation as held at York AGM 1981

4-6 Letter from Sally Shrimpton, Chairwoman of the Northern Potters Association, to W.A. Ismay, dated 17 April 1989.



4-7 W.A. Ismay's sitting room in the 1990s. Photograph Janette Haigh.

*I am now convinced that the only hope of keeping the collection together is for it to be taken over by a large local authority which has many existing buildings in its possession, including one capable of conversion to show and store ceramics.<sup>26</sup>*

It is perhaps surprising that Ismay, a lifelong resident of Wakefield, did not consider Wakefield Art Gallery as a potential home for his collection, especially as it was through the gallery that he first came across the work of Barbara Cass which sparked his interest in studio pottery. However in 1988, Wakefield Art Gallery was housed in a Victorian townhouse on Wentworth Terrace and had no hopes of being able to house such a large collection. There is no correspondence in Ismay's archive giving evidence of Ismay investigating such a possibility, but as Ismay knew the gallery well, being a member of their Friends group, regularly visiting and loaning to exhibitions, any discussions would likely been carried out informally and not recorded. Had *The Hepworth Wakefield* (opened 2014) been in existence, the collection may well have found a permanent home in Wakefield. (Although given The Hepworth's focus on sculpture

<sup>26</sup> Letter from W.A. Ismay to Wolf Böwig (owner of Keramik-Galerie Böwig, Hannover, Germany), dated 18 February 1991.



and contemporary art, York would have been a serious challenge due to its strong historical and contemporary ceramics collections, which Ismay greatly admired.)

At the time Ismay was looking for a future home for his collection, his friend the collector and gallery owner Henry Rothschild was doing the same. He recommended Ismay seek professional advice from the Association of Independent Museums (AIM), the Museums & Galleries Commission and the National Art Fund and sent Ismay information on them. There is no evidence of correspondence between Ismay and these organizations in the archives, though he did join AIM as an individual member, writing to Rothschild that it was ‘an excellent suggestion.’<sup>27</sup> During 1989, Rothschild wrote a number of letters to Ismay about the locations and institutions he was considering and made suggestions about places Ismay should consider. Rothschild’s suggestions included Abbot Hall in the Lake District, the museums in Sheffield and Manchester City Art Galleries.

Rothschild also suggested that they join forces and each give part of their collection to the Yorkshire Sculpture Park, which is quite close to Wakefield. Rothschild had visited and met with the Director, Peter Murray, and was very impressed by their philosophy, writing to Ismay that what appealed to him was: ‘the open-mindedness of the Yorkshire Sculpture Park Management and the fact that the artificial barriers between crafts and art would be non-existent in this context.’<sup>28</sup> Rothschild’s suggestion was that he would be: ‘happy to part with a sizeable part of my collection, hopefully including not only ceramics, but also textiles, wood and glass, though I have much less of these. I wonder if such a proposition would appeal to you, particularly as, by chance, it is in your home area.’<sup>29</sup> Ismay replied to Rothschild saying that whilst the Yorkshire Sculpture Park held great attraction due to its location, the fact he knew it well (having attended Northern Potters Association potters’ camps there) and being acquainted with Jim Robison who had taught ceramics at Breton Hall, which was part of the park, he had misgivings:

*My principal doubt in the matter is whether they would have the facilities to “take over the whole thing”. It would obviously be easier to “place” the more important items at the expense of letting the rest be dispersed, whereas my basic idea is to keep the collection together in a way which enables lesser pots by the more important potters, and probably lesser potters, to help to explain the whole scene to the student.<sup>30</sup>*

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27 Draft letter from W.A. Ismay to Henry Rothschild (gallery owner and collector), undated.

28 Letter from Henry Rothschild (gallery owner and collector) to W.A. Ismay, dated 27 April 1989.

29 Ibid.

30 Draft letter from W.A. Ismay to Henry Rothschild (gallery owner and collector), dated 12 May 1989.

This demonstrates that Ismay was not oblivious to the challenge the size and contents of his collection presented to museums. Nothing further came of Rothschild's suggestion that they join forces and by 1990 he had reached an understanding with the Shipley Art Gallery in Gateshead to loan them his collection until death, when it would be bequeathed to them permanently.

Ismay continued looking for an institution willing to take his collection in its entirety. In June 1989 he received an unsolicited approach from Richard Gray (Acting Director of Art Galleries, Manchester City Art Galleries) who boldly suggested Manchester would make a bid for it if Ismay had not decided to break up his collection. Gray had visited Ismay a number of times over the years, to negotiate loans from the collection for the gallery. On paper, his proposition seemed to meet all Ismay's requirements. Gray wrote that he was just about to begin a development proposal for Heaton Hall, a large neoclassical country house remodeled by James Wyatt in 1772, set in a large park four miles north of the city. The city had purchased the estate and Hall (minus its contents) in 1902 and had since run it as a municipal park. The west wing of Heaton Hall was, at that time, derelict and Gray wanted to develop a study centre primarily for their ceramics collections, which in his opinion were: 'the third best collection of pottery in the world, after the V. & A. and Cambridge.'<sup>31</sup> Gray made a point of stating in reference to Ismay's collection that: 'for what its worth, my opinion is that it would be a catastrophe to break up such a unique and large collection of pots.'<sup>32</sup> He expands on this opinion in later letter, writing: 'there are many cases of gifts and bequests to Manchester being dispersed or selected from, and to my mind this has always been disastrous. Therefore, I think Manchester would prefer to have an entire collection rather than bits of it.'<sup>33</sup> Ismay appeared to be willing to consider the offer, but having twice made appointments to visit which fell through (the first due to Ismay attending the funeral of Henry Hammond, the second due to a rail strike), no third attempt seemed to be emerging and in a letter to Henry Rothschild, Ismay speculated that Gray had moved on as his post was only an acting one (I have been unable to establish whether this was true). This demonstrates the important role played by museum staff in such situations. Though their time with collections is finite, their impact on them is not.

It was not only public museums that were approaching Ismay now, as illustrated in 1991 by a letter he wrote to Wolf Böwig (a collector and owner of the Keramik-Galerie Böwig, Hannover, Germany). Böwig approached Ismay with the suggestion that Ismay's house, 14 Welbeck Street, be made into a public museum, capitalizing on the

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31 Letter from Richard Gray (Acting Director of Art Galleries, Manchester City Art Galleries) to W.A. Ismay, dated 2 June 1989.

32 Ibid.

33 Letter from Richard Gray (Acting Director of Art Galleries, Manchester City Art Galleries) to W.A. Ismay, dated 19 June 1989.

24 Wilberforce Road, Cambridge CB3 0EQ Telephone 0223 69469

27th April 1989

W.A. Ismay Esq.,  
14 Welbeck Street,  
Wakefield  
Yorks WF1 5LD

Dear Bill,

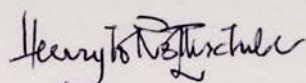
I promised that I would be in touch with you if there was a new development. I have just returned from a trip to the Northwest, the North and Yorkshire. Two weeks ago Peter Murray, Director of the Yorkshire Sculpture Park came to Cambridge with Robert Hopper of the Henry Moore Foundation. We had a talk and this we continued when I visited him in Wakefield this week. I have come to the conclusion that their plans for exhibition area, studios and public area which they will be building, would be ideal if a Museum for the Crafts could be incorporated into their plans.

I would be happy to part with a sizeable part of my collection, hopefully including not only ceramics, but also textiles, wood and glass, though I have much less of these. I wonder if such a proposition would be of interest to you, particularly as, by chance, it is in your home area. Peter Murray would be happy to show you the Park and discuss his project. He would also like to see your collection, the existence of which he was aware, but which he has never seen.

What particularly appeals to me is the open-mindedness of the Yorkshire Sculpture Park Management and the fact that the artificial barriers between the crafts and Art would be non-existent in this Context.

Please let me have your reaction.

Yours sincerely,



4-8 Letter from Henry Rothschild (gallery owner and collector) to W.A. Ismay, dated 27 April 1989.

unique nature of the domestic interior created by him, the collector. He proposed that items from the collection be sold to finance it. Ismay's reply was a firm no, qualified by arguments against specific suggestions from Böwig. He explained that he was still very involved in the collection, writing:



18 Feb 1991.

Herr Wolf Böwig,  
Keramik-Galerie Böwig,  
Am Rathaus,  
Friedrichstr. 2a,  
3000 Hannover,  
Germany.

14 Welbeck Street,  
Wakefield,  
West Yorkshire,  
WF1 5LD,  
England.

Dear Wolf, First of all, my apologies for not having written sooner to thank you for your ideas and generous offer, put to me by Maggie some weeks ago, regarding the future of my ceramic collection. It has been a bad winter and I have not been very well - and now that I am over 80, everything I do happens slowly, in any case!

I have thought about the matter a good deal and will try to put my conclusions in as few words as possible. Please, when you read the following, do not think me ungrateful for your ideas and offer.

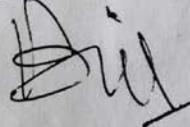
(1) I am not yet ready for anything to be done with the collection, as I have a very great deal to do with it here, myself, if time is allowed to me - making it more accessible here, and cataloguing it. Also, I very much live among my collection, and value my privacy. Also, every time I have visitors here which is quite often, it is very pleasant, but cuts into the time I have for making progress with the necessary work. I quite realise that I could fall seriously ill (or die) at any time, and have tried to cover this so far as I can by making a will which in that event will set up a trust (with local trustees) to take over from me, and also link up the Northern Potters Association with the future care of my collection .

(2) About financing its future, I remain very much ~~opposed~~ opposed to the idea of selling part to finance keeping the residue together, as this (necessarily parting with the best) would defeat my whole object. This feeling is made stronger by what I see about the cost of new buildings - the examples I have monthly are the escalating costs of even the smallest and simplest new library buildings, as detailed in the library journals which I still receive. It seems to me that so much of the collection would have to be sold that the operation would be self-defeating, and that there would be so poor a residue as not to be worth preserving as an entity.

(3) I am convinced that the only hope of keeping the collection together is for it to be taken over by a large local authority which has many existing buildings in its possession, including one capable of conversion to show my store ~~more~~ ceramics. \* Negotiations are in progress with two such authorities, but the possible projects are at such a tentative and confidential stage that I am unable to give details.

I do hope you will understand my position and that I am deeply grateful for your interest.

All good wishes!



(W. A. Ismay)

I think it may be that students could see all of them.

4-9 Letter from W.A. Ismay to Wolf Böwig, dated 18 February 1991.

*I am not yet ready for anything to be done with the collection, as I have a very great deal to do with it here, myself, if time is allowed to me - making it more accessible here, and cataloguing it. Also, I very much live among my collection, and value my privacy.<sup>34</sup>*

<sup>34</sup> Letter from W.A. Ismay to Wolf Böwig (owner of Keramik-Galerie Böwig, Hannover, Germany), dated 18 February 1991.

Ismay was very opposed to selling items from the collection, seeing its value as a body of work, not the individual pieces. His argument against sales in this case underlines his knowledge of market values of ceramics at the time as well as an awareness of the likely cost of making his home habitable as a museum:

*“About financing its future, I remain very much opposed to the idea of selling part to finance keeping the residue together, as this (necessarily parting with the best) would defeat my whole object. This feeling is made stronger by what I see about the cost of new buildings – the examples I have monthly are the escalating costs of even the smallest and simplest new library buildings, as detailed in the library journals which I still receive. It seems to me that so much of the collection would have to be sold that the operation would be self-defeating, and that there would be so poor a residue as not to be worth preserving as an entity.”<sup>35</sup>*

The suggestion of retaining 14 Welbeck Street as a public museum was coincidentally repeated by Jane Hamlyn, one of his trustees, who wrote that it: ‘might be possible to retain your collection intact and keep it in your house, with a curator, to be open to the public at certain times, possibly by appointment, rather like Kettle’s Yard, Cambridge.’<sup>36</sup> She suggested that if they were able to raise an endowment of £¾ million, they could appoint a young potter or academic to take on the duties of a curator in exchange for a wage and workshop space nearby.<sup>37</sup> In his reply to Hamlyn, Ismay quoted the arguments he had made in his reply to Böwig.<sup>38</sup>

In 1992, another speculative approach came from an architect David Bye (partner in Brewster Bye Architects, Pudsey), who wrote: ‘I am wondering if anybody made progress with a suitable long term home for your collection, as I have an idea.’<sup>39</sup> His proposal was to build a new museum in Batley, Yorkshire to house both Ismay’s collection and the quilting collection of The Quilters’ Guild, thus creating an interesting combination of ‘hard and soft.’<sup>40</sup> Bye mentions that Kirklees Council have £7 million from the City Challenge Fund which they need to spend within four years and that he has raised his idea with their Chief Planning Officer (retaining Ismay’s anonymity), who is very interested. Ismay did not follow up this idea and later wrote to one of his trustees, potter Jane Hamlyn, that he was well aware that Bye’s main interest was in an architectural commission.

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35 Ibid.

36 Letter from Jane Hamlyn (potter and trustee of the W.A. Ismay collection) to W.A. Ismay, dated 10 March 1991.

37 Ibid.

38 Letter from W.A. Ismay to Jane Hamlyn (potter and trustee of the W.A. Ismay collection), dated 18 March 1991.

39 Letter from David Bye (partner in Brewster Bye Architects, Pudsey) to W.A. Ismay, dated 9 September 1992.

40 Ibid.



4-10 Wine jar, 1962, Bawa Ushafa. (YORYM:2004.1.765)





4-11 Bottle, 1964, Isaac Button. (YORYM:2004.1.557)

## 4.2 I seemed to have almost a duty to help to redress this imbalance<sup>41</sup> —

### Why Ismay chose York

In 1989, Ismay used a combination of the latest published book on studio pottery and his own knowledge of institutions gained as a collector, to gain an overview of the UK in terms of studio pottery in public collections. In yet further evidence of his fascination with classification, he created a league table of places to consider, writing:

*I made a kind of league table of public holdings of studio pottery throughout the country, on the basis of the latest public figures I know of, those in Christopher Gowing's appendix to Paul Rice's "British Studio Pottery in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century" (1989). Stoke, Paisley, London, Aberystwyth, Bath and Liverpool already stood high, and Yorkshire and the North-East generally, relatively low. I seemed to have almost a duty to help to redress this imbalance.<sup>42</sup>*

York Art Gallery was the institution Ismay preferred, as it was home to the collection of studio pottery formed by Dean Eric Milner-White, which had an important impact on Ismay when he began collecting in the 1950s. In a speech he gave at the opening of a pottery exhibition in 1959, he remarked: 'we in Yorkshire are particularly fortunate, now that the Dean of York has deposited the bulk of his superb collection of stoneware with York Art Gallery', going on to encourage his audience to visit saying: 'I would strongly urge anyone who has any special feeling for pottery not to let the short distance between here and York stand between him or her and a great aesthetic experience.'<sup>43</sup> Ismay again wrote of his great admiration for Milner-White in 1991: 'It is beyond doubt that many of his choices were outstanding, and that his collection is a permanent landmark in the history of twentieth century pottery.'<sup>44</sup>

Until the mid 1990s, two separate bodies, the City of York Council (CYC) and North Yorkshire County Council (NYCC), ran local government in York.<sup>45</sup> NYCC were in charge of the more costly elements of the city's budget, such as schools, roads and social services, which involved high income, whilst CYC were in charge of leisure, parks, parking and the Castle Museum and the York Art Gallery, all of which were low income.<sup>46</sup> The Castle Museum brought in a profit for CYC whilst York Art Gallery, which

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41 Draft letter from W.A. Ismay to Kathy Niblett (Senior Assistant Keeper of Ceramics, City Museum & Art Gallery, Stoke-on-Trent), dated 14 November 1993.

42 Ibid.

43 Speech delivered by W.A. Ismay at the opening of the exhibition *The Art of the Potter* at Wakefield City Art Gallery on Saturday, 20 June 1959

44 Ismay, W.A. (1991). 'Pioneer Studio Pottery, by Sarah Riddick', *Ceramic Review*, No. 128, Mar/Apr, pp. 31-32.

45 Conversation between Helen Walsh and Brian Hayton (County Museums Officer, North Yorkshire County Council, 1987-1995) on 2 August 2016.

46 Ibid.

Public Collections of British Studio Ceramics in the U.K.

| Collection      | Value | Collection           | Value | Collection      | Value |
|-----------------|-------|----------------------|-------|-----------------|-------|
| <del>3782</del> |       | <del>3782</del>      |       | From:           |       |
| 80              |       | 150                  |       | British         |       |
| Aydon 230       |       | 200                  |       | Studio          |       |
| 20              |       | 50                   |       | Ceramics        |       |
| 49              |       | 70                   |       | in the          |       |
| Bawl 500        |       | 70                   |       | 20th            |       |
| 25              |       | 40                   |       | Century         |       |
| 80              |       | 13                   |       | (Royal Comm)    |       |
| 37              |       | 181                  |       | (1981)          |       |
| 50              |       | 120                  |       | [over 200]      |       |
| 75              |       | 10                   |       | Stoke 800       |       |
| 96              |       | 70                   |       | Parsley 800     |       |
| 50              |       | 20                   |       | Vault A 250     |       |
| 100             |       | 25                   |       | Aberystwyth 200 |       |
| 15              |       | 60                   |       | Bawl 500        |       |
| 65              |       | Stoke 800            |       | Juvenat 450     |       |
| 23              |       | Swainby 272          |       | Craig 350       |       |
| 70              |       | 85                   |       | Council         |       |
| 100             |       | 25                   |       | (Don't know)    |       |
| 40              |       | 14                   |       | Scotland 277    |       |
| 30              |       | 15                   |       | Edinburgh 230   |       |
| 30              |       | York 190             |       | Jewell 250      |       |
| 40              |       | Edinburgh 230        |       | Edinburgh 200+  |       |
| 84              |       | Glasgow 200+         |       | Wales           |       |
| 60              |       | 10                   |       | York 190        |       |
| Jewell 200      |       | Parsley 300          |       |                 |       |
| 11              |       | 46                   |       |                 |       |
| Juvenat 450     |       | Aberystwyth 200      |       |                 |       |
| Craig 350       |       | 50                   |       |                 |       |
| Vault A 750     |       | 180                  |       |                 |       |
| <del>3782</del> |       | <del>3782</del> 8398 |       |                 |       |

4-12 W.A. Ismay's league table of UK public collections of British studio ceramics.

was free entry, was seen as a necessary evil.<sup>47</sup> The Yorkshire Museum had been off-loaded to NYCC in 1975, as it was seen as shabby and a bit of an oddity.<sup>48</sup> However, by 1985, its fortunes had improved. Investment and development of blockbuster exhibitions from 1976 onwards had steadily increased visitor figures in the 1980s and 1990s, attracting lots of attention from politicians and the press and, in 1991, enabled the museum to organize the most successful fundraising campaign by a non-national museum and purchase the Middleham Jewel for £2.5 million.<sup>49</sup> The Yorkshire Museum's growing success, combined with the opening in 1975 of the National Railway Museum (the world's largest railway museum), followed in 1984 by the groundbreaking Jorvik Viking Centre, began to attract large numbers of visitors, who would previously have gone to the Castle Museum. This impacted on profits at the Castle Museum, which was suffering from a lack of investment.<sup>50</sup> This put the two councils in competition over tourists. In the early 1990s, the next stage of local government reform pitted local authorities against each other and exacerbated the combative situation between CYC and NYCC.<sup>51</sup> It is against this background that the acquisition of the Ismay collection must be viewed.

47 Ibid.  
 48 Ibid.  
 49 Ibid.  
 50 Ibid.  
 51 Ibid.



### **4.3 I do not see this collection generating sufficient popular interest<sup>52</sup> —**

#### **Making the case for support**

The process of reaching an agreement to bring the W.A. Ismay collection to York was far from easy and took a number of years. Initial discussions on the home for the collection focused on York Art Gallery, a public art gallery owned by the City of York Council (CYC). The Milner-White collection of studio pottery was already there on permanent display, so it seemed the logical choice. The curator of York Art Gallery, Richard Green, had been aware of the existence of the collection for a number of years, having had loan of works for the *Michael Cardew and Pupils* exhibition held there in 1983, and he would later request loans from Ismay for the David Lloyd Jones exhibition held there in 1996. Green had also had dealings with Ismay in 1984 during the short-lived pottery subscription scheme set up by the Friends of York Art Gallery, who had invited Ismay to select ceramics to acquire for the Gallery's collection. Ismay chose two jars made by Richard Launder, which were on display at York Art Gallery as part of a selling exhibition of work by the Northern Potters Association. The two jars were purchased for £28 each and gifted to the Gallery by the Friends of York Art Gallery.

Green, whilst interested in Ismay's collection, was not keen on accepting it in its entirety and preferred to select pieces to fit in with the existing collection, as there was no space in the gallery to store or display it. He later remarked that a collection of that size was not a gift but a problem and questioned its overall quality.<sup>53</sup> Indeed, in 1992 he wrote a memo to Paul Chesmore (Head of Leisure Services at CYC, whom Green had nicknamed '*Mr Leisure*<sup>54</sup>') in which he expresses his major reservations about the collection:

*The very first question to be addressed is the status and quality of the collection. The Ismay pots are legendary but it should not necessarily be assumed that a collection of nearly 3,000 pots at present virtually filling a small terrace house would readily transfer to a museum. My impression from conversations with museum colleagues over the past years is that there are certainly a number of 'star items' which museums would give anything to have but that many of the other pots are not actually museum pieces and the problem of storing and curating them in such quantities would be a nightmare. Whilst it might be true that Mr Ismay has been courted by major museums and galleries for a selection of his finest pieces,*

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52 Letter from Paul Chesmore (Director of Leisure Services, City of York Council) to Ifan Williams (at the time Chair of the Friends of York Art Gallery), dated 16 November 1992.

53 Conversation between Richard Green (former curator of York Art Gallery) and Helen Walsh, 24 March 2016.

54 Conversation between Helen Walsh and Brian Hayton (County Museums Officer, North Yorkshire County Council, 1987–1995) on 2 August 2016.



4-13 Pair of lidded jars, 1980-4, Richard Lauder. (York Museums Trust)

*I do not think there will be serious competition for taking on his entire collection intact.*<sup>55</sup>

In his memo, Green goes on to compare the Ismay collection unfavourably with the Milner-White collection. Green admitted that he was severely handicapped in making a judgment about the collection having not visited the collection in person. He had attempted to arrange to see the collection in Wakefield in 1992, but CYC had requested that he postpone visiting at that time. Seeing the collection and spending time with Ismay would have enabled him to understand its scope and breadth, preventing his misconception that it was: 'unlikely to provide the in-depth coverage of certain major figures which is such a conspicuous feature of the Milner-White collection.'<sup>56</sup>

Chesmore was very sensitive to the views of the rest of his colleagues at CYC, most of whom thought that museums were not profitable or worth investing heavily in (as demonstrated by the Castle Museum which was in decline at that time). Chesmore and Green were seen as the main obstacle to the collection coming to York Art Gallery by Ifan Williams, who was Chair of the Friends of York Art Gallery and a crucial figure in getting the Ismay collection to York. Williams wrote to Ismay in 1992 summing up his frustration with Chesmore and Green:

<sup>55</sup> Memo from Richard Green (curator of York Art Gallery) to Paul Chesmore (Director of Leisure Services, City of York Council), date 28 April 1992.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid.

*I know that York, in common with the other local authorities, is in dire financial straits but I am afraid that a large part of our problem lies in the characters of our two main contacts, Paul Chesmore and Richard Green. Paul is waiting for the right time to put a proposal to the Councillors and the right time never comes. For Richard the do nothing option is always the most attractive. Paul gets excited by high finance and political manoeuvres, but I'm doubtful whether he has a real interest in ceramics. I don't understand why he hasn't sought an opportunity to see the collection.<sup>57</sup>*

In January 1992, in an effort to gain a full understanding of the costs and work involved, CYC had commissioned their architects department to complete a feasibility study to look at a number of options for housing the collection. Options to be considered included York Art Gallery, the De Grey Rooms, York St Mary's Church and the Assembly Rooms. The Friends of York Art Gallery were also keen to pursue a scheme first raised in 1984, of opening up the roof void at York Art Gallery and creating a link through to the existing Milner-White gallery. (This is the space that would later be transformed into CoCA, the Centre of Ceramic Art in 2013–2015.) Following this exploration of options, Chesmore's suggestion to Ismay was that they would take the collection and store it in the basement of the Red House.<sup>58</sup> He made no promise that it would be made accessible in its entirety beyond parts being used in exhibitions at York Art Gallery. This of course was one of the results Ismay had feared back in 1988, when initially discussing his aims for his collection, and was completely unacceptable to him.<sup>59</sup>

By that time, supporters of Ismay's collection coming to York were beginning to lose hope and in a final attempt to get the curator onside, Williams wrote to Green:

*Bill has a warm regard for the City of York and would be very pleased to know his pots were in due course to be displayed with the Milner-White collection. His offer to York remains open, though I think you should know that he has recently had two approaches with proposals which involve other local authorities. These new approaches make it even more important that Bill should be convinced that York values the collection which he has offered to the city not just as a munificent gift but as an unrivalled record of studio pottery in Britain since the mid-1950s and as an educational and research resource which could make York a national and international centre in this field.<sup>60</sup>*

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<sup>57</sup> Letter from Ifan Williams to W.A. Ismay, dated 25 September 1992.

<sup>58</sup> The Red House is a Grade II listed 18th century townhouse on Duncombe Place, round the corner from York Art Gallery. It has operated as an antiques centre for over 26 years.

<sup>59</sup> Conversation between Helen Walsh and Brian Hayton (County Museums Officer, North Yorkshire County Council, 1987–1995) on 2 August 2016.

<sup>60</sup> Letter from Ifan Williams to Richard Green (curator of York Art Gallery), dated 10 October 1992.



However CYC were coming to the conclusion that they were unable to comply fully with Ismay's wishes in respect of York Art Gallery due to the following issues:

- Capital costs – complying with Ismay's wishes would mean capital work and/or relocation of galleries
- Running costs
- Ismay was not in a position to provide an endowment to support the collection and the council had neither a suitable building nor the finances to convert one to house the collection
- Collecting Policy and lack of curatorial support. Green questioned whether studio pottery would be the preferred curatorial choice for seeking revenue money for the Gallery to expand, and suggested a print room for their works on paper collection would be more beneficial.



4-14 Bowl, 1969, Bernard Leach. (YORYM:2004.1.1880)

Chesmore maintained the only way CYC could raise the funds required was to sell a significant amounts of real estate, but as the market was so low at that time, this was seen as unwise. Along with many other local authorities, CYC were facing the probability of budget capping and were concerned at incurring penalties that would put at risk existing collections.<sup>61</sup> The lack of financial support at the time was a significant barrier, lottery funding did not begin until 1994 and there was no support (other than goodwill) from the Crafts Council. The Director of the Crafts Council at that time, Tony Ford, visited Ismay and saw the collection in 1992 and wrote to Chesmore expressing the view that the collection was important: 'there is a gripping story here with an intense focus', and that even from a short visit he saw 'enough to say that there are some real gems amongst the collection.'<sup>62</sup> Despite this, Ford was concerned about the scale of Ismay's ambition for his collection, writing: 'Mr Ismay is clearly intent on keeping the collection together to be used as a resource but I am not sure that he realises the likely capital but more particularly revenue implications of his ideas.'<sup>63</sup>

There was a lack of confidence in the popularity of studio ceramics expressed by Ford, who questioned whether the collection would draw in an audience large enough to justify the capital costs of creating display and storage space to house it. Green had also been openly sceptical about the potential audience for the collection, writing: 'pottery of this kind is of intense interest but to a very limited audience.'<sup>64</sup> This lack of confidence combined with the lack of space to house the collection and no funding solution in sight, led to Chesmore withdrawing York Art Gallery's and CYC's interest in Ismay's collection. In a letter to Williams in November 1992, Chesmore wrote:

*I also share your sense of disappointment that his collection may well be destined for another town. However, taking the wider view, I am heartened that someone appears to have the resources to meet so closely Bill Ismay's quite exacting demands for the future disposal of his collection.'*<sup>65</sup>

At that point all seemed lost: however, the solution turned out to be literally just round the corner.

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61 Letter from Paul Chesmore (Director of Leisure Services, City of York Council) to Ifan Williams, dated 16 November 1992.

62 Letter from Tony Ford (Director of the Crafts Council) to Paul Chesmore (Director of Leisure Services, City of York Council), dated 27 August 1992.

63 Ibid.

64 Memo from Richard Green (curator of York Art Gallery) to Paul Chesmore (Director of Leisure Services, City of York Council), dated 28 April 1992.

65 Letter from Paul Chesmore (Director of Leisure Services, City of York Council) to Ifan Williams, dated 16 November 1992.



4-15 W.A. Ismay's sitting room in the 1990s. Photograph Janette Haigh.



#### **4.4 We are unanimous in our opinion that the Yorkshire Museum would be an ideal location for the collection<sup>66</sup> — Negotiating his gift to the museum**

In an article about the potter Jim Malone written by Alex McErlain at the beginning of 1993, Malone is quoted as saying:

*Sometimes you get a real push forward, like when I saw those jugs, those medieval jugs in the vaults of the Yorkshire Museum. That was really an illuminating experience for me. It was the nearest thing I've had to enlightenment in my life.<sup>67</sup>*

Dorothy Williams, who together with her husband Ifan, had campaigned tirelessly to try and get the Ismay collection to York Art Gallery, saw this article and the mention of the Yorkshire Museum caused her to have her own moment of enlightenment.<sup>68</sup> She had the foresight to suggest approaching Brian Hayton, who was the County Museums Officer for North Yorkshire County Council (managing the Yorkshire Museum and another Museum in Hawes), and Craig Barclay who was the curator of Numismatics and Decorative Arts (based at the Yorkshire Museum). The Yorkshire Museum was the one place in the city of York which had so far not been considered a possibility, perhaps as it was run by NYCC and was not part of CYC's holdings. A meeting followed in which the Williamses showed Hayton and Barclay the article by McErlain and told the story of the six-year long and ultimately futile battle to find a home for the collection in York. They later sent photocopies of articles written by Ismay to give him the *flavour of the man* and lent their own copy of the catalogue of the Victoria & Albert Museum's studio ceramics collection to show the type of artists and works held by Ismay.<sup>69</sup>

Both Barclay and Hayton were immediately interested to see the collection, seeing it as potentially a good fit with the Museum's existing ceramic collections, which covered all periods from prehistory to the start of the 20th century. Arrangements were made through Williams to visit Wakefield on 19 March 1993, to meet Ismay and view the collection. In a note to Barclay prior to the visit, Hayton cautioned him about the importance of the visit and first face-to-face meeting, writing:

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66 Letter from Brian Hayton (County Museums Officer, North Yorkshire County Council) to W.A. Ismay, 21 April 1993.

67 McErlain, Alex (1993). 'Jim Malone Potter', *Ceramic Review*, No. 140, Mar/Apr, p. 18.

68 Note by Ifan Williams in his personal archive of correspondence relating to the W.A. Ismay Collection, dated 19 February 2014.

69 Watson, Oliver (1990a). *British Studio Pottery: The Victoria and Albert Museum Collection*, Phaidon, Christie's Limited..

Brian J. Hayton, Esq.,

30<sup>th</sup> May 1993.

Dear Mr. Hayton, many thanks for your reaction on the 25<sup>th</sup> and I was suitably impressed by what you showed me.

You won't expect me to make a snap decision, but I'm hoping to get my potential trustees together as a committee and to come to ~~some~~ a ~~decision~~ judgement on what to do, reasonably soon.

Thanks also for the ~~letter~~ <sup>illustration</sup> of the Middleham Jewel and for your message.

I have had a trip to Jordan and Reading since I was at York - saw the final exhibition of Aldermaston Pottery before the close-down (and earmarked two good bits by pottery new to the collector). (I find that Alan Cazes found himself to keep the workshop in as a personal work-place.) I also saw the PV of "Form and Function" at Contemporary Applied Art in Jordan on the way home.

*I am told he is capable of falling out with people on philosophical and artistic grounds so we better be a little cautious as to how we proceed. We could easily 'blow it' at the first meeting! Moreover it seems that Bill has not lost confidence in either York or local government as a result of his experiences so at least that is one hill we do not have to climb.<sup>70</sup>*

Hayton, Howard and Barclay visited Ismay with Williams. Hayton became convinced of the importance of the collection after the visit, recalling the experience: 'I was astonished by its size, richness and academic/display potential for York. Bill gave us lunch in his kitchen (as the rest of the house was full to bursting with the collection) and we had soup, bread and coffee, all served up on items from the collection. Bill commented on each bowl and plate's provenance as we were eating from it.'<sup>71</sup> Immediately after the visit, Hayton gave a confidential report to the Yorkshire Museum Sub-Committee and the Libraries, Archives and Museums Committee of NYCC to request authorization to proceed with negotiations.<sup>72</sup> Only a few short weeks later on 21 April 1993, an astonishingly short period of time to make such a momentous decision in museum terms, Hayton wrote to Ismay that following a meeting at the Yorkshire Museum with his colleagues and stakeholders: 'we are unanimous in our opinion that the Yorkshire Museum would be an ideal location for the collection.'<sup>73</sup> He then formally requests that Ismay consider the Yorkshire Museum as a potential home for his collection. In the same letter, the idea of using the collection to establish a *National Centre for the Study of Studio Ceramics* in the city is mentioned for the first time, as is the suggestion of using St Mary's Lodge for the storage and study centre.<sup>74</sup> In the letter Hayton also reveals evidence of their bravery in taking on the collection, writing:

*The Yorkshire Museum has had a very large ceramic collection since the 1920s. However, it is almost exclusively concerned with the 17<sup>th</sup>, 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries. There is virtually no 20<sup>th</sup> century ware in the collection and certainly no studio pottery.<sup>75</sup>*

In one acquisition, they were adding a hundred years on to the collection's life, bringing it right up to date and opening the doors to contemporary collecting, an

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70 Internal note from Brian Hayton (County Museums Officer, North Yorkshire County Council) to Craig Barclay (Curator of Numismatics and Decorative Art, Yorkshire Museum), dated March 1993.

71 Email from Brian Hayton to Helen Walsh, dated 31 October 2016.

72 Ibid.

73 Letter from Brian Hayton (County Museums Officer, North Yorkshire County Council) to W.A. Ismay, dated 21 April 1993.

74 St Mary's Lodge was built in 1470 as the gatehouse to St Mary's Abbey. After the Abbey's dissolution in 1539, it was used as a courthouse until 1722, then became the Brown Cow public house until 1840. It was then restored and transformed and used as a home by John Phillips, a geologist and the first curator of the Yorkshire Museum, which opened in 1830.

75 Letter from Brian Hayton (County Museums Officer, North Yorkshire County Council) to W.A. Ismay, dated 21 April 1993.



important shift in their collecting policy. Hayton also admitted that they had no expertise in the area, writing: 'if you do decide to donate the collection to us, it will be curated by Craig Barclay, whom you met. Neither of us is a specialist in studio ceramics although Craig will wish to build up that expertise over a period.'<sup>76</sup> This again demonstrates remarkable bravery and trust in the opinions of others from outside their institution about the importance of the collection, which included the University of York, York Civic Trust and York Archaeological Trust, each of whom had given opinions about the collection during the preceding years.<sup>77</sup>

Ismay's letter formally agreeing to consider the offer presented by the Yorkshire Museum to the exclusion of all other offers, was joyfully received by Hayton, who replied: 'we are honoured that you have chosen to pursue negotiations with us over its long-term future.'<sup>78</sup> Ismay wrote to his solicitor informing him his decision was made: 'on the grounds of convenience, local patriotism and the wish to keep the collection within the area of the Northern Potters Association, the choice has fallen on the Yorkshire Museum.'<sup>79</sup>

According to correspondence in the archive, it appears that all were keen to get the collection to York as soon as possible. However, Hayton believes that Ismay had always intended that the pots would remain with him until death as he wanted to continue working on the collection, using the pots and, importantly, continuing to acquire new works.<sup>80</sup> This opinion appears to be backed up by Ismay in correspondence in his archive, for example in a letter to Hayton in which he writes: 'I am too involved with pots to deprive myself totally: also, the pots on practical use here for storing, preparing, serving and consuming food and drink are all from the collection!'<sup>81</sup> However, it appears that the option of beginning the transfer of the collection sooner was kept open. Ismay's solicitor, Geoffrey Markham, seized upon this option suggesting that it might allow him to try the Yorkshire Museum out before fully committing:

*A phased hand-over may lend itself to a trial period, which could possibly enable you to satisfy yourself that the arrangements were conforming with your intentions before you were irreversibly committed.*<sup>82</sup>

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76 Ibid.

77 Letter from Ifan Williams to Brian Hayton (County Museums Officer, North Yorkshire County Council), dated 20 May 1993.

78 Letter from Brian Hayton (County Museums Officer, North Yorkshire County Council) to W.A. Ismay, dated 20 September 1993.

79 Letter from W.A. Ismay to Geoffrey Markham (Raley & Pratt Solicitors, Barnsley), dated 12 November 1993.

80 Conversation between Helen Walsh and Brian Hayton (County Museums Officer, North Yorkshire County Council, 1987-1995) on 2 August 2016.

81 Letter from W.A. Ismay to Brian Hayton (County Museums Officer, North Yorkshire County Council), undated

82 Letter from Geoffrey Markham (Raley & Pratt Solicitors, Barnsley) to W.A. Ismay, dated 10 December 1993.



4-17 Bottle, 1969, Waistel Cooper. (YORYM:2004.1.478)

In 1994, Ismay replied to Markham expressing his disquiet over changing the status of his pots from them being a gift to being a loan:

*Although I realise your arguments about this are precautionary, I find I am even more doubtful than before whether they would undertake the project in the way I would wish, on the basis of sendings of pots from here which were designated as “loans”. (This is an idea not previously mentioned in the negotiations and not I think envisaged at all by the Museum – or for that matter by me – so that to introduce it now I think is quite awkward and even in doubtful faith on my part.) Is it not rather the case that they would be more likely to fulfill my wishes and to spend substantial sums irreversibly on the means of displaying twentieth-century pots and setting up a study centre if they were certain of permanency? What is involved is not only special display and study facilities but publicity, catalogue-publication and the use of their computer – a substantial change in direction or new branching-out for the Museum.<sup>83</sup>*

This clarifies Ismay’s intentions and reluctance to behave in a way that might be considered to be in poor faith and further supports his character as a forthright Yorkshireman and gentleman collector. It also underlines his understanding of the change of direction his collection offered the Yorkshire Museum.

Ismay sent the Yorkshire Museum a copy of his 1989 Will to study as it outlined his key wishes for the collection. Hayton showed the Will to NYCC solicitors and confirmed to Ismay that they had no problem abiding by the wishes set out in it. He did however suggest some revisions of the text may be needed, such as defining the role of Ismay’s trustees so they were not in conflict with the trustees of the Yorkshire Museum. Over the next year, work began on updating Ismay’s 1989 Will. The new Will was finally signed off and lodged in June 1994, the solicitor Markham humorously writing to Ismay: ‘please sign your name with a signature which is fairly legible!’<sup>84</sup>

Ismay’s new Will outlined eight key wishes regarding his collection:

- To make the collection available for the education and instruction of potters, students and others interested in it
- To keep the collection safe and secure; to house it so as to make it accessible; to preserve it as far as possible as a total entity

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83 Letter from W.A. Ismay to Geoffrey Markham (Raley & Pratt Solicitors, Barnsley), dated 21 January 1994.

84 Letter from Geoffrey Markham (Raley & Pratt Solicitors, Barnsley) to W.A. Ismay, dated 22 July 1994.



- To publicly display a section of the collection in a suitable manner in the museum
- To prepare, complete and publish a catalogue of the collection according to national documentation standards
- To make items available for loan
- To enable appropriate items to be added to the collection
- To manage the collection in accordance with standards laid down by the Museums & Galleries Registration Scheme
- To publicize the existence of the collection.

In comparison to Ismay's first Will (see Section 4.1), these wishes were more concise and in keeping with the purpose of a public museum. They retained Ismay's two most important aims of preserving the whole collection and making it accessible to potters. Hayton was a member of the Museums and Galleries Commission's National Registration Committee and assisted with the wording of the eight key wishes, ensuring that Ismay's and the Yorkshire Museum's interests were protected by ensuring the Will fitted in with best practice.<sup>85</sup>

From a legal perspective, the main points of the agreement were that the Yorkshire Museum was Ismay's beneficiary (unless he changed his Will). The museum could not be forced to accept the bequest at his death, nor be under any obligation to accept material during his lifetime. Ismay was free to withdraw the offer at any time and the Yorkshire Museum similarly able to withdraw acceptance of it. After accepting the bequest, the Yorkshire Museum may only dispose of it if it were demonstrated to the trustees of the Museum and the Charity Commissioners that they could not fulfil the requirements of the bequest: for example, if funding was not achieved to cover the costs of maintaining it as Ismay wished.

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85 Email from Brian Hayton to Helen Walsh, dated 31 October 2016.



4-18 Pot, 1972, Ruth Duckworth. (YORYM:2004.1.1316)

#### **4.5 I have an illogical but unavoidable dislike of the name William<sup>86</sup>— How museum protocols were applied to Ismay’s collection**

With the agreement in place, Ismay’s attention now turned with great enthusiasm to the fine detail of the agreement, as he corresponded with Hayton and Barclay over issues such as what the collection should be called. Though a modest man, he was proud of what he had achieved by building his collection and, whilst not wanting fame during his lifetime, he did wish the collection to bear his name and be known by that name after his death. Throughout his life he was greatly bothered by his given name and the way in which it was altered or shortened without his permission. Being aware of his sensitivity in this area, he wrote to Stephen Feber in 1997, explaining his feelings regarding his name:

*I have an illogical but unavoidable dislike of the name William (which I think dates back to my long sufferings as a child when everyone insisted on reducing this to Willie). As soon as I could with any effect make my wishes felt, I tried to alter this to Will, but it didn’t work. So I tried Bill which did work, with the eventual result that all my surviving relatives and friends call me so, I sign myself so informally, and I am known as Bill Ismay to a wide circle of potters, have no objection at all to this, and indeed am often so introduced or introduce myself to new acquaintances. I continue to dislike William, William Ismay, William A. Ismay and (since B. is not my initial) B. Ismay. (My middle name Alfred which I don’t like either, is useless except as providing a middle initial, since no-one has ever called me by it).<sup>87</sup>*

With his love of classification and extensive knowledge of language, designating the nature of the material in his collection with a title was something Ismay put great thought into, as demonstrated in a lengthy letter to Hayton:

*I have been aware of the word “studio” (used as an adjective) coming into descriptions of my collection, and don’t think this originated from me, although I may have appeared to condone it by copying your letter headings at the head of my own. It is arguably applicable, as it originated in this sense with Bernard Leach and has been widely used to distinguish handmade and individual claywork from factory wares, but I am not entirely “sold” on it, and am sure many potters whom I admire and whose work I have bought would prefer “workshop”. At the head of your letter to which I’m replying however I see “studio ceramics”. The latter word I definitely would wish to avoid as a general description, as it and its analogues have*

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86 Letter from W.A. Ismay to Stephen Feber (Director of the Castle Museum), dated 4 November 1997.

87 Ibid.





4-19 Bottle, 1974, Sam Herman. (YORYM:2004.1.388)

*been so much used of late to suggest that non-functional claywork (not all of it admirable) is fine art and on a different plane altogether from functional claywork: this is a proposition I don't agree with. I have always thought of what I collected as pottery (even when some of the items were clay figures or other forms without practical function) – and all the makers whom I particularly admire have referred or refer to themselves and their fellow workers as potters. This is in line with all the most justly celebrated relevant book titles, with the catalogues of the Milner-White and V.&A. collections and with your catalogue of the Museum's medieval holdings.<sup>88</sup>*

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<sup>88</sup> Letter from W.A. Ismay to Brian Hayton (County Museums Officer, North Yorkshire County Council), dated 21 January 1994.

Hayton's reply to Ismay was concerned with the Yorkshire Museum's visitors and how they would interpret the title and what they would understand it to mean. There is no precedent of potters referring to what they did as 'Workshop Pottery' and whilst agreeing to the use of 'pottery' instead of 'ceramics', he wrote that he was less convinced about the use of 'workshop':

*'I think there is a danger we might misrepresent the quality of the collection in the popular mind by its use. What I fear is that the person in the street will view 'workshop pottery' as carboys, insulators and other industrial ceramics. That would, of course, be the antithesis of what your collection is about, and a misrepresentation of its great beauty and appeal.'*<sup>89</sup>

Another aspect of giving his pots into the care of a museum, which Ismay found troubling, was the issue of marking the objects with an accession number. The marking or labelling of museum objects is viewed as an essential and important part of best practice:

*Every item in a museum collection must carry its identity number at all times, so that it can be linked to the information a museum holds about the object. If this bond between the object and its documentation is broken, the consequences may be serious. At best, time will be wasted because of the need to track down documentation and re-establish the link. At worst, the object will lose its provenance and other associated information for all time.'*<sup>90</sup>

Hayton raised the issue of marking the pots with him in 1994, but Ismay was very much against his pots being marked in any visible way and made a very strong case to back up his reasoning:

*My long-felt aversion from museum markings of the 19<sup>th</sup> century cruder kind derives from the experience over many years of seeing museum objects which had been insensitively and intrusively marked for identification by earlier generations of curators, and virtually destroyed and invalidated aesthetically in the process.*

*Many items of notable aesthetic potential were ruined in this way, and even at the humblest level one could no longer see the object as its makers and users saw it – it had become a "specimen", with provenance and identification more important than the object itself and the skills and perceptions which had gone into its making.*

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<sup>89</sup> Letter from Brian Hayton (County Museums Officer, North Yorkshire County Council) to W.A. Ismay, dated 1 February 1994.

<sup>90</sup> Collections Trust (2008). *Labelling and Marking Museum Objects* booklet, Collections Trust, p. 2.



4-20 Roman triple cup 120 to 225. (YORYM:H46.1)

*I have deliberately avoided marking pots here even with labels because these would have interfered with domestic use and pleasurable handling, even when there was a reasonably “hidden” area where a label could be affixed.*

*When a potter or pottery-appreciator handles a pot, he or she naturally looks at it all over, and can often see the “signature” of the maker, i.e., not the maker’s mark as such which he or she may have impressed, incised or painted, but his or her individual handling, in part from the foot of the pot which is not normally seen when it is a glass case.<sup>91</sup>*

His reasoning is based on the desire to protect the aesthetic nature of the objects. Many examples of what he describes as ‘insensitively and intrusively’ marked pottery can be seen in the Yorkshire Museum’s archaeology collection of English medieval jugs, which Ismay was well acquainted with. They offer evidence of how ceramics, particularly medieval jugs, were viewed by curators and academics during the 19th century, which was as Ismay indicated, archaeological ‘specimens’ not beautiful objects in their own right. It also underlines how important it is to him that his pots were made available to be handled.

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<sup>91</sup> Letter from W.A. Ismay to Brian Hayton (County Museums Officer, North Yorkshire County Council), dated 29 August 1994.





4-21 Jar, 1974, William Marshall. (YORYM:2004.1.1435)

Marking museum objects is often viewed by those outside the profession (and by Ismay initially) as a deterrent against theft. However, museum objects are usually marked with their accession number in as permanent a way as possible without damaging the object. As the method used is *not* permanent and therefore reversible, a mark could be removed. Ismay suggested that the objects might be marked invisibly by UV methods or with some method that could be scanned, but when the reasons for marking were properly explained to him he remarked that the *joke was on him* for not understanding that the marks would need to be visible to the eye in order to function in

a museum setting. Ismay may have been thinking about the issue from his perspective, imagining how he would operate and manage the collection in the museum in the same way he did in his home. He of course knew the pots intimately and knew where each was placed, whereas in the museum, the curator lacked that knowledge and there was a need to preserve the link between the object and its history in a way that would be accessible in perpetuity.

Though he conceded that some marking of the pots was necessary, Ismay designated seven categories of pots which should not be marked and they included: 'ritual' pots; sculptures; pots decorated all over; pots with small bases; small pots; low-fired pots and thin porcelain pots. For these he suggested tie-on labels or some system of linking them to a specific location that in turn would connect to the object's history, such as drawing round the base of the object on the shelf (perhaps an idea born out of the dust rings left by pots on his shelves) or photographing each shelf to provide a visual record of what was kept on it. By August 1995, Barclay reached agreement with Ismay on a workable system that was:

*[...] based around establishing a full photographic record of the pots and their individual marks. As an additional safeguard, where it is possible to do so discreetly and without adversely affecting the aesthetic appeal of the pot, it would seem logical to mark it with an accession number, either directly or by use of a small tie-on label.<sup>92</sup>*

The cataloguing of the pots was another aspect of the gift that Ismay had a particularly keen interest in, given his background as a librarian. His understanding of the documentation systems, notably computer technology, was limited though. He had retired from the library service over twenty years earlier and his comments on the cataloguing of his collection by the Yorkshire Museum were based on his experience of recording books in index cards or paper catalogues: 'I remain somewhat obsessed by the "book" idea of having the information in concisely descriptive form which gives a picture in human terms.'<sup>93</sup> Hayton recalled that whilst physically frail, Ismay was still *compos mentis* and as with discussions on what to call his collection and how to mark the pots, he applied great thought to how objects might be catalogued in a museum context. Discussions between Ismay and Barclay considered issues such as the name of each object and also what 'an object' consisted of. For example, Ismay was concerned that a cup and saucer should be considered a single entity, despite it being possible

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<sup>92</sup> Letter from Craig Barclay (Curator of Numismatics and Decorative Arts, Yorkshire Museum) to W.A. Ismay, dated 15 August 1995.

<sup>93</sup> Letter from W.A. Ismay to Craig Barclay (Curator of Numismatics and Decorative Arts, Yorkshire Museum), dated 15 February 1996.



4-22 Cup and Saucer, 1993, Joanna Constantinidis. (YORYM:2004.1.868)

for them to be displayed apart (unlike a teapot and lid), so that their connection to each other was not lost. This goes to the heart of museum practice and is entirely possible by creating a record for one item and then adding 'parts' to it. For example, YORYM:2004.1.868 consists of a cup and saucer made by Joanna Constantinidis in 1993. YORYM:2004.1.868.a is the cup, YORYM:2004.1.868.b is the saucer. They are permanently connected together by having the same stem number of 868. The cup and saucer are recorded separately so that they could be shown apart if required, whilst an object such as a teapot, which would never be shown without its lid, would be catalogued with a single record, but noted as having two 'bits'.

In an effort to encourage consistency in the documentation of the collection and to make the process more streamlined, Barclay sent Ismay a bundle of 500 template sheets upon which Ismay could fill in the basic information required for museum documentation purposes. However, Ismay found these sheets troublesome to use, as they contained small spaces for filling in details and his handwriting, never the most legible, was deteriorating. Using his typewriter to type the information into the sheet was also difficult for with poor eyesight, he was further handicapped by having to hold his magnifying glass. As he himself noted, he was most comfortable with the notion of a book format and thought this was the most logical way for him to usefully catalogue his collection, so he continued with the work he had begun in 1994 which was an alpha-numeric catalogue listing of all his pots.<sup>94</sup>

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94 The catalogue contains listings of his acquisitions up to 1996, c. 2,898 pieces in total.





4-23 Teapot, 1978, Jim Malone. (York Museums Trust)

In Ismay's catalogue, he gave each of his pots his own version of an accession number relating to the year he purchased the piece. He worked mainly from the listing he had started in 1955 and continued throughout his collecting career. Potters were listed alphabetically by surname and the pots listed with an accession number and brief description. The brief descriptions vary from the very brief to the very elaborate.

For example, in two consecutive listings for pieces by Jim Malone, Ismay describes the first, a teapot (4-23), as: 'Teapot (incised fishes, turned foot, flush lid, cane handle).' By highlighting particular characteristics in great detail, he differentiates it from over 100 other teapots in his collection. Ismay could have made identification of the next item in his catalogue, 'Porcelain dish' (4-24), easier by highlighting its Chinese influenced shape with scalloped edges, something that sets the dish apart from all the others he acquired by Malone. Though a valuable document that enabled the cataloguing of



4-24 Dish, 1978, Jim Malone. (York Museums Trust)

the collection by the museum to be quite straightforward, Ismay's lack of consistency with listings made identification of some pieces tricky and some items still remain unidentified. This reflects Ismay's own experience, as he himself was unable to identify a small proportion of his collection. Rather than finding this bothersome, however, Ismay used it to his advantage and created his 'X' Series, which he defined in various categories as follows:

*Pots from various sources, not identifiable to a personal maker. The older items may be designated "ancestor pots".*

- *Bought in the 1920s.*
- *Bought at Singapore in 1946.*
- *Retained from family sources in 1956, when other previous household pots were discarded.*
- *Bought or received as gifts from 1956 onwards.*

The unidentifiable pots that fell outside his neat alphabetical listing, enabled him to fill the troublesome gap created by his inability to find a potter whose name began with 'X', enabling him to complete his A-Z of potters.



4-25 Pot, 1976, Ewen Henderson. (YORYM:2004.1.1377)



#### **4.6 I have never made promises that this could be done quickly<sup>95</sup> — Deciding when the collection should be transferred**

It seems that much as Ismay liked the idea of seeing the pots in York and also the fact that they would be properly catalogued and accessible in a way he had always hoped for, the physical effort required, necessary invasion of his home and prospect of being parted from his collection, was less than attractive now that he was in his 80s and in poor health. However, throughout the correspondence between him and the Yorkshire Museum during the 1990s, there is constant reference to planning the potentially imminent but extremely sensitive matter of the transfer of the collection to the Yorkshire Museum. In 1993, Ismay had expressed doubts about how he would cope with the reality of his collection leaving his home, writing: 'I am also intellectually convinced but emotionally reluctant over my own preparation of at least starting to hand over the collection to a future home in my lifetime instead of leaving a hopeless chaos to be sorted out by others.'<sup>96</sup> Ismay cautioned Hayton in 1994 that: 'I have never made promises that this could be done quickly, but I hope it will be possible for pots to be packed here by myself and friends and made available for collection.'<sup>97</sup> He went on to explain that: 'there will be a need at first to work "box to box" until a suitable stack is assembled. Things do not get any easier as although I have slowed down I am still acquiring pots and have added 31 this year so far...'<sup>98</sup>

The new 1995 Will appeared to have settled his nerves to some extent. The Yorkshire Museum felt able to begin the planning process and to establish what resources were required to proceed with transferring the collection, cognizant of the fact that funding needed to be sought to make it possible for them to live up to their obligations to the collection. In fact, Feber seemed of the opinion that the transfer was going ahead within weeks, writing to Williams:



4-26 Lidded pot, 1976, Jim Malone. (YORYM:2004.1.936)

<sup>95</sup> Letter from W.A. Ismay to Brian Hayton (County Museums Officer, North Yorkshire County Council), dated 24 October 1994.

<sup>96</sup> Letter from W.A. Ismay to Eric James Mellon (potter), dated 22 July 1993.

<sup>97</sup> Letter from W.A. Ismay to Brian Hayton (County Museums Officer, North Yorkshire County Council), dated 24 October 1994.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid.

*We have agreed to begin the process of transferring the collection from Bill's house to the Yorkshire Museum within the next three weeks and I have further agreed with Bill that we have a meeting in York of the Trustees of his collection to determine how we move forward. The Council have agreed the strategy and the only impediment to making a public announcement is the safe transfer of the collection to the Yorkshire Museum. I expect this process will take several weeks and needs to be handled sensitively because as you know the pots very much represent Bill's life and we need to be attentive to his needs. I am quite convinced having seen the collection that it is as wonderful and significant as you suggested, there are many splendid pieces and I am confident that we can make an international centre for ceramics in York over the next two to three years.<sup>99</sup>*



**4-27** Fracture pattern pot, 1975, Elizabeth Fritsch. (YORYM:2004.1.967)

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99 Letter from Stephen Feber (Director of the Castle Museum) to Ifan Williams, dated 28 July 1997.

Mr J.W. Robson,  
3 Bilton House,  
Holehouse,  
Huddersfield, HD7 1QA

7306  
Most Recent  
will 1974

14 Helbeck Street,  
Wakefield,  
West Yorkshire,  
WF1 5LD.  
17th August 1998.

Dear Jim, N. A. Ismay Collection

I had been under the impression that when I revised my "last will and testament" in June 1994 I circulated a copy of the revised version to each of my Trustees. It has since appeared from enquiry that this was not done and that the only copy sent out was to the Yorkshire Museum: it was from this copy and mine that quotation was made at the November 1997 meeting of Trustees in York. This omission to circulate I am now making good: the original is deposited with Raleys Solicitors (5 Regent Street, Barnsley), and the copy herewith is a photocopy from my own photocopy.

It is ironic that the two executives with whom the greater part of the negotiations about the Yorkshire Museum's acceptance of the collection were conducted have now both left York - however, the conclusions reached remain valid. The long negotiations were begun when the Museum was still under the North Riding authority and were conducted with Brian J. Hayton who was County Museums Officer, and in effect, Curator of the Museum. He did not stay on when the local government change took place which eventually put the Museum under the York authority, but when he moved to another post he wrote and told me of his plans. He was replaced by Stephen Feber whose title was Assistant Director of Museums (the nominal Director being a Council official, I believe), but who in effect was the professional director. Since I last saw him, he too has left York for another appointment, and when he did so, neither he nor anyone else wrote to tell me so - I had to confirm it, after hearing it as a rumour, by a telephone call to Craig Barclay at the Museum: so far as I have heard, no-one has yet been appointed in Stephen Feber's place.

This leaves us dealing with two members of the Museum staff, Paul Howard who has now been elevated to Curator (this is confirmed in the list of those present at the November meeting of Trustees in York, although his name has not yet been seen to fill the space left for

(See Sheet 2)

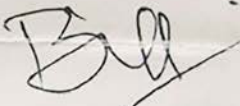
4-28 Letter from W.A. Ismay to Jim Robison (potter and trustee of the Ismay Collection), dated 17 August 1998.



"Curator" on the York-styled new letter-heading for the Museum), and Craig Barclay (whose official title is Keeper of Numismatics and Applied Art, but the latter includes ceramics). Both these have several times been here, both spoke at the November meeting, and it was these two who came here late last year to make the colour-slide and video record of the pots as seen here which the Museum needed for its records.

I had originally hoped to begin the transfer of pots to the Museum last summer but events did not move quickly enough to permit this. I expressed justifiable doubts whether this could be begun in winter, and in fact my state of health this year and the cold weather (no central heating here) have prevented any <sup>effective</sup> start as yet. I am still hoping <sup>that</sup> a start can be made before the summer ends, and that I may later be able to call on those of you who have free time to give some help when there is a little more room to move - at present everything is too absurdly congested to leave room for anyone but myself.

Best wishes!



(W. A. Ismay.)

~~Handwritten scribble~~



4-29 Europa bowl, 1979, Eric James Mellon. (YORYM:2004.1.1773)

Feber had big plans for York's museums and the Ismay collection was one part of a big Heritage Lottery Fund project he was working towards. Getting the collection to the Yorkshire Museum and being able finally to go public about the gift could only help with the application and open up opportunities of other sources of funding. Ismay encouraged the expectation of a transfer later that year by requesting packing material from the Yorkshire Museum in October 1997. By July 1998 however, no pots had been moved and offers made by Barclay to help with packing had been: 'politely but firmly refused' by Ismay.<sup>100</sup> Yet contradicting this was a letter to Jim Robison (potter and trustee) in which Ismay wrote that: 'I had originally hoped to begin the transfer of pots to the Museum last summer but events did not move quickly enough to permit this.'<sup>101</sup>

As the prospect of beginning the transfer of the collection to York became imminent, concern grew amongst staff about the emotional impact on Ismay and his psychological reaction to a 'rapid stripping out of his house.'<sup>102</sup> Chesmore wrote to Williams seeking opinions on how best to proceed:

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100 Internal memo from Craig Barclay (Curator of Numismatics and Decorative Art, Yorkshire Museum), dated 21 July 1998.

101 Letter from W.A. Ismay to Jim Robison (potter and trustee of the Ismay Collection), dated 17 August 1998.

102 Letter from Paul Chesmore to Councillor Cyril Waite, dated 13 August 1997.

*I think we are in an unusual situation here: not only are we taking the product of his life-times interest away from him while he lives, because of the extent of that obsession, if I may call it that, we are leaving him with precious little else. Perhaps that is enough for him, I don't know. But I think we have an obligation to him morally, if not financially, to see that he is OK in himself in the future.<sup>103</sup>*

After speaking with Williams, plans were made to ensure Ismay was fully involved in the transfer. These included transferring the collection at a rate that suited Ismay's emotional well-being; taking advantage of his mental acuity to involve him in documenting the collection; arranging to collect Ismay and bring him to York regularly to see the collection. Ismay was quite open about the fact he was still adding pieces to his collection and often mentioned purchases in correspondence to the museum, in one letter he comments on his current rate of collecting, writing:

*The rate of acquisition I used to say was "one a week", but though it has slowed down since pots became more expensive, on average it is still faster than that, over seventy a year over the whole period.<sup>104</sup>*

Chesmore speculated that as Ismay was still actively collecting, he might focus on that activity instead, as a distraction from not having his collection to hand:

*Mr Ismay is obviously still collecting! I don't know how long it took to fill his house, but perhaps he will try and do it all over again! Bureaucratic anxieties begin to appear here, which I shall suppress!<sup>105</sup>*

We have to backtrack at this point in order to explain the reappearance of 'Mr Leisure', Paul Chesmore, in 1997. Though all appeared to be progressing smoothly, the acquisition was again put in jeopardy when a local government reorganization took place between 1994 and 1996. CYC was separated from NYCC to become a unitary authority, a process which was long running and very contentious. As part of this reorganization, CYC took over management of the Yorkshire Museum from the NYCC. This brought the acquisition back under the scrutiny of 'Mr Leisure', Paul Chesmore (though he would retire shortly) and resulted in the Yorkshire Museum having to gain permission from CYC to continue negotiations with Ismay and to ask for permission

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103 Letter from Paul Chesmore to Ifan Williams, dated 5 August 1997.

104 Letter from W.A. Ismay to Brian Hayton (County Museums Officer, North Yorkshire County Council), dated 23 April 1994.

105 Letter from Paul Chesmore to Councillor Cyril Waite, dated 13 August 1997.





4-30 Shadow cat, 1982, Rosemary Wren. (YORYM:2004.1.970-1)

to apply for external funds to establish what was now being referred to as a 'centre of excellence' for the collection. Hayton was keen that Ismay should remain oblivious to this new threat given his declining health and the battle he had gone through to get to the current position of understanding with a museum in York. At the end of 1995, Hayton left the Yorkshire Museum for a new job and Paul Howard (Curator of Biology at the Yorkshire Museum) took on Hayton's role. So between 1995 and 1997 a delicate line was being trod, with negotiations on fine detail of the collection with Ismay on one hand, and on the other, the fight for permission to continue with plans that had been to all intents and purposes agreed in Ismay's Will.

All involved in the campaign to bring Ismay's collection to York recognized the significance of the collection, referring to it as nationally important and seeing the research opportunities it offered. Support was offered by the University of York in 1995, when a meeting was held with staff from the Yorkshire Museum and the University of York to discuss exploiting the research potential of the Ismay collection. All agreed that the best course of action was to create a lectureship post and research-led Centre for Ceramics with a postgraduate programme.<sup>106</sup>

In order to get agreement to move forward with plans, Stephen Feber, the Director of the Castle Museum, presented a report to CYC's Heritage Sub-Committee at a meeting on the 17 July 1997. The report was based on a previous 'secret' report put together by Hayton in 1995, shortly before he left the Yorkshire Museum.<sup>107</sup> It is a valuable record of efforts taken to secure the collection for York Art Gallery between 1988 and 1992, showing the reasoning behind decisions. It presented a new proposal focused on the Yorkshire Museum, a new addition to the CYC's portfolio in 1995, outlining the valuable opportunities offered. The proposal included the conversion of St Mary's Lodge, a 15th century gatehouse in the Museum Gardens to house the collection and allow access to objects and archive. Funding would also help with the badly needed refurbishment of the existing ceramics gallery within the Yorkshire Museum. These two projects would then fuel the University of York and Yorkshire Museum's collaboration to establish a 'Centre for Ceramics' with a research-led programme for master's and doctoral students, positioning York at the forefront of ceramic studies in the UK. It was proposed that two new academic posts would be created, Lecturer and Research Assistant, employed by the University but with honorary titles at Yorkshire

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<sup>106</sup> Notes from a meeting between Brian Hayton and Craig Barclay (Curator of Numismatics and Decorative Arts, Yorkshire Museum), David Peters Corbett (University of York) and Ifan Williams, dated 21 July 1995.

<sup>107</sup> Conversation between Helen Walsh and Brian Hayton (County Museums Officer, North Yorkshire County Council, 1987-1995) on 2 August 2016.



4-31 Pot, 1984, Julian Stair. (YORYM:2004.1.942)



Museum. Primary curatorial control of the W.A. Ismay collection would remain with the Yorkshire Museum. The University of York had agreed to establish the posts subject to initial external funding.<sup>108</sup> The primary outcome for the posts would be teaching but also the creation of the definitive *catalogues raisonnés* of the collection.

Feber's report proposed that the Yorkshire Museum should apply to the Arts Lottery Fund for the initial start-up costs (estimated at £400k) for their ambitious plans. Discussions with the Crafts Council indicated that in their opinion the project would meet with approval and that the Crafts Council, in their role as advising on the distribution of funds for crafts, would be enthusiastic in their support of it. Enquiries had suggested that the Arts Lottery Fund would consider funding the academic posts if they were fixed-term and integral to the scheme. After the initial three years, the University of York would take on full financial responsibility for the two academic posts (subject to two financial reviews). There was a certain amount of time pressure alluded to in the report, as the University wanted to enrol students in 2000 and required the funding to be in place by October 1998, allowing time to recruit staff and set up the course. Further pressure was applied by mentioning the serious competition from two other UK sites to establish a centre for ceramics: Stoke-on-Trent in Staffordshire and Bideford in North Devon. At the time, Stoke-on-Trent was home to the largest public collection of studio pottery and had also been the main competitor for acquiring the W.A. Ismay Collection.

The research side of the proposal from the Yorkshire Museum was seen as key, as at that time, research output was an important part of their activity, for example they had recently published a catalogue of their medieval pottery collection. The potential geographic impact of academic interest in the collection was backed up by figures from the University of York, who had identified thirty-one UK universities and colleges providing BA courses in studio ceramics, in addition to a smaller number of design-related undergraduate courses. They also demonstrated that few institutions, other than the Royal College of Art and V&A, provided opportunities for the study of design at postgraduate level, whilst the opportunity to study ceramic design in the UK at a higher level was virtually non-existent. International ambition was expressed by outlining the breadth of awareness of British studio ceramics internationally (in USA, Japan, Germany, Australia and New Zealand) and that York would attract overseas students as well as those from the UK.

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<sup>108</sup> The University of York agreed (subject to initial external funding) to establish the posts of Lecturer and Research Assistant at a meeting of the University Planning Committee held in July 1996.

#### **4.7 Without the Ismay pots we have no case<sup>109</sup> — Understanding the importance of the collection to York**

Ismay had insisted that no formal announcement should be made publicly about the acquisition of his collection, until it was physically transferred. He was worried about the security of his collection whilst it remained in his home in Wakefield. He was more concerned about the threat of break-ins resulting in careless vandalism rather than theft, as his home had previously been attacked. Towards the end of 1997, there was an attempted break-in and Barclay and Howard suggested that the Museum would pay for a burglar alarm to be installed that would be linked to his local police station, but this never happened.<sup>110</sup>

Ismay was also keen to protect his privacy from the notoriety and press interest he feared would be generated by his gift. Williams wrote to Ismay in December 1994 suggesting that it would be appropriate for the University of York to mark Ismay's generosity and achievement with the award of an honorary degree. Aware of Ismay's desire for privacy, he acknowledges it would necessitate a formal, public announcement, but nevertheless felt it would be a good move strategically as it would: 'encourage the University to look seriously at the potential of the collection in the context of its own developing interest in Cultural History and the History of Art.'<sup>111</sup> Ismay however refused this honour, preferring to protect his privacy.

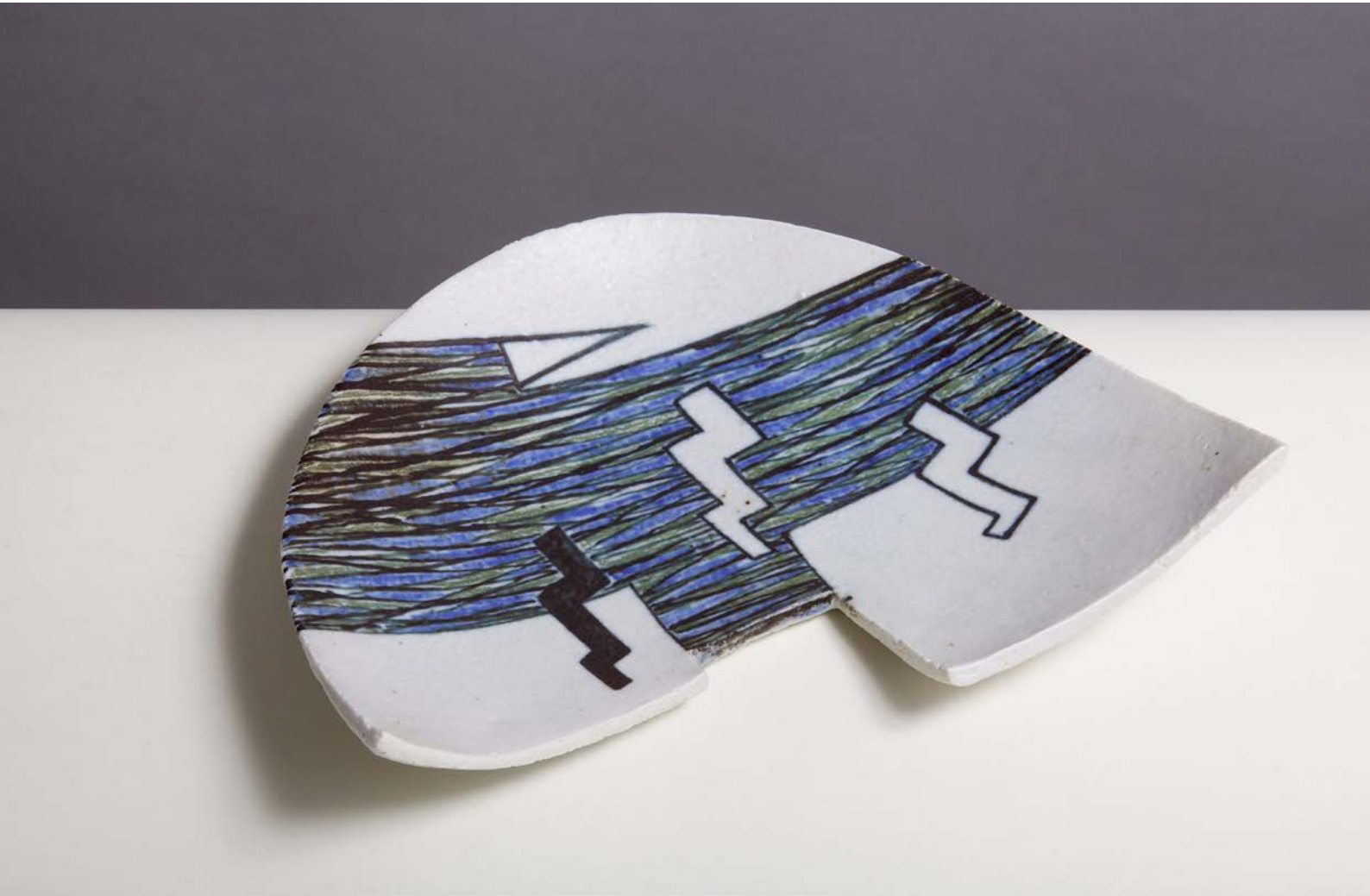
Many people had been involved in the battle to get the collection to York though and were waiting expectantly for news and for action in the form of pots arriving in York. Ismay's request for no publicity until the collection was transferred left the Yorkshire Museum effectively gagged, unable to share news of the acquisition until they had first gained the permission of CYC to proceed and then physically brought the collection to York. News of the Heritage Sub-Committee meeting had spread and brought about a new wave of concern which was expressed in letters from people in York afraid that they were at risk of losing the collection for a second time. In advance of the Heritage Sub-Committee meeting Feber received letters from representatives of the University of York, York Civic Trust and the Friends of York Art Gallery. Letters were also received from June Lloyd Jones (widow of potter David Lloyd Jones), potter Sally Shrimpton (who had played a role in prompting Ismay to consider the future of his collection back in 1988) and from potter Peter Dick who wrote of Ismay's importance: 'there are many collectors but most specialise in particular areas. Bill, however, stands apart from the

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109 Letter from Ifan Williams to Stephen Feber (Director of the Castle Museum), dated 7 July 1997.

110 Letter from Craig Barclay (Curator of Numismatics and Decorative Arts, Yorkshire Museum) to W.A. Ismay, dated 5 December 1997.

111 Letter from Ifan Williams to W.A. Ismay, dated 19 December 1994.



4-32 Cut dish, 1983, Derek Davis. (YORYM:2004.1.1249)

others with his breadth of knowledge of the entire field of British ceramics'. He goes on to urge acceptance of the collection, writing: 'this is a magnificent opportunity for York which must be grasped without delay.'<sup>112</sup> Ifan Williams wrote in support of the collection also, afraid that a great opportunity was about to be lost again:

*Of all the benefits we may miss if the City of York Council does not take early action to secure the future of the Ismay collection, the most significant is the opportunity to make York the national centre for ceramics. With the Ismay pots and the collections in the City Art Gallery and the Yorkshire Museum, backed up by the enthusiastic participation of the City and the University, the York Archaeological Trust and the thriving Northern Potters Association, we have by far the strongest case to become the national centre. Without the Ismay pots we have no case.<sup>113</sup>*

112 Letter from Peter Dick (potter) to Stephen Feber (Director of the Castle Museum), dated 7 July 1997.

113 Letter from Ifan Williams to Stephen Feber (Director of the Castle Museum), dated 7 July 1997.





4-33 Teabowl, 1981, Suzi Cree. (YORYM:2004.1.1302)

Feber replied to all the correspondents, explaining that the silence had been due to the transfer of management of the Yorkshire Museum to CYC, which had not been straightforward. They had not wanted to cause Ismay any unnecessary concern and had also been abiding by his request for no publicity. Feber underlined that even after the Heritage Sub-Committee had reached a decision, no public announcement could be made due to Ismay's request for privacy. He reassured them all that there was sufficient enthusiasm for the collection and they were already working on funding applications.<sup>114</sup>

The Yorkshire Museum was granted permission to proceed with acquiring the W.A. Ismay Collection at CYC's Heritage Sub-Committee on 17 July 1997. Feber wrote to Tony Ford at the Crafts Council about the outcome and advised him that they planned to send curatorial staff and a photographer to Wakefield shortly to assist Ismay with cleaning, recording and packing up the collection, though he cautioned that: 'we are all aware that the collection very much represents his life's work and it is likely we will not make

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114 Letter from Stephen Feber (Director of the Castle Museum) to Peter Dick (potter), dated 15 July 1997.



4-34 Teabowl, 1986, Takeshi Yasuda. (YORYM:2004.1.1536)

a complete transfer immediately.<sup>115</sup> Feber raised the somewhat surprising opinion that the application to the Heritage Lottery Fund: ‘opens up a new opportunity for a new contemporary ceramics gallery, not at the Yorkshire Museum but in the Art Gallery whose principal purpose would be to house the Ismay material.’<sup>116</sup> This was an about-face for CYC as, whilst the lack of available funds was one of the issues preventing the acquisition of the collection five years earlier, there was also the unwelcoming attitude of Richard Green, curator of York Art Gallery, whose concerns about the collection’s quality and scale had not changed in the intervening years. However, Hayton had stated his opinion back in 1995, that there may come a time when good sense prevailed and the logic of displaying the collection with the Milner-White collection at York Art Gallery would be accepted.<sup>117</sup> Until that moment arrived, the existing plans for fundraising for housing the collection at the Yorkshire Museum pressed ahead.

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115 Letter from Stephen Feber (Director of the Castle Museum) to Tony Ford (Director of the Crafts Council), dated 29 July 1997.

116 Ibid.

117 Conversation between Helen Walsh and Brian Hayton (County Museums Officer, North Yorkshire County Council, 1987–1995) on 2 August 2016.



4-35 Jar, 1991, Phil Rogers. (YORYM:2004.1.1529)



Feber indicated that in 1998, an exhibition from the collection, selected by Ismay, would take place at the Yorkshire Museum. This appeared destined never to happen though, as Ismay had always been resistant to being put in the position of being selective about his collection, be it choosing a favourite pot or a favourite potter. As an example, in 1978, Liz Robison (wife of potter Jim Robison) wrote to Ismay asking if he would consider curating an exhibition of his favourite pieces from his collection. His reply explains his feelings regarding the idea of selecting from the collection:

*I am not yet ready for any kind of exhibition (for reasons which I'll try to explain) in so far as I /XXX/ the point which I have to communicate to you is that this is not by any means the first fairly concrete suggestion for an exhibition of the kind or of some kind and that in response to overtures from a large local authority I finally agreed (after I'd been under fire from two of their representatives for some time) that although I was not ready yet, I'd in principle put them at the head of the queue. So I can't engage for any kind of earlier exhibition (especially locally) without going back on my word. The reason I'm not "ready" is that the collection is so far not properly organized here- I've never even myself seen it all accessible at once and am not sure I myself properly comprehend it. I thought when I "retired" three years ago that it would all be plain sailing but so much else has happened and time goes by so incredibly quickly that it has not turned out so.<sup>118</sup>*

It is unclear which local authority Ismay had promised his first curated exhibition to, but further research of the archive may reveal more. This letter is interesting as Ismay also explains very coherently how he views his collection and what he has tried to create:

*I've never tried to buy "masterpieces", but rather, representative pots which interlock to illustrate what I like about contemporary pottery. So the collection only really works when one sees all of it, and I feel myself that making it properly accessible here to potters is really more important than showing just a selection which might be seen (less intimately) by more people. (In a sense, the collection doesn't really fully exist yet and a selection from it would be a very hit and miss affair!).<sup>119</sup>*

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118 Draft letter from W.A. Ismay to Liz Robison, dated June 1978.

119 Ibid.

He states the value of the whole body of objects containing a narrative to be read that is of great value. It also implies that the collection is incomplete and in some sense will always remain incomplete. There is also a sense of futility in that Ismay feels he has not yet comprehended it, having never seen it all together, though he desperately wants to have it accessible for visitors to see, enjoy and learn from. However, it is a self-fulfilling prophecy as, to paraphrase, he continued to collect himself into a corner, buying more and filling any free space in his house.



4-36 Store jar, 1996, Clive Bowen. (YORYM:2004.1.550)

#### **4.8 Until legal ownership is actually with the museum we are not able to grant aid work for the collection<sup>120</sup> — Transferring the collection to the Yorkshire Museum**

Whether the collection arrived before or after Ismay's death, it was clear that funding was needed to cover the costs involving in delivering it to York. Structural work was required at St Mary's Lodge in order for the Study Centre and Storage to be created. Investment was required in the display space in the Yorkshire Museum to allow displays from the collection to take place.

The Yorkshire Museum were well aware that the fact that the collection was not owned by them or physically in their possession was a severe handicap in terms of submitting funding applications. The potential for the collection to become a lifetime gift instead of a loan was suggested in November 1997.<sup>121</sup> This realization contributed to Ismay being more open to physically transferring the pots to York, as discussed earlier in Section 4.6 of this chapter. There was no move to change the status of the gift legally though. Concerns over access to funding were justified the following month when Richard Kilburn (Assistant Director of the Yorkshire and Humberside Museums Council) wrote expressing the opinion that any application made to them regarding Ismay's collection, would be viewed as ineligible as they could only fund material belonging to the museum, writing: 'until legal ownership is actually with the museum we are not able to grant aid work for the collection.'<sup>122</sup> The Yorkshire and Humberside Museums Council also expressed the opinion that any scheme (such as the one they had proposed) which included revenue support for a university project or the costs associated with setting up a 'niversity course, was destined to fail and also would not be considered by the Arts Lottery Fund.<sup>123</sup>

In May 1998, Barclay wrote to Dr Charles J. Meyers (Senior Program Officer, Getty Grants Program, Los Angeles, USA) enquiring about the grants they offer towards the cataloguing of collections. He proposes the museum's desire to raise £390,964 to cover the cataloguing of the Ismay collection.<sup>124</sup> A reply from Meyers the following month explains that they only award grants of £100,000 to £150,000 and that competition is stiff so he could not comment on how likely it was that the application would be

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120 Letter from Richard Kilburn (Assistant Director of the Yorkshire and Humberside Museums Council) to Paul Howard (Curator of Biology, Yorkshire Museum), dated 2 December 1997.

121 Meeting at the Yorkshire Museum attended by W.A. Ismay, Craig Barclay (Curator of Numismatics and Decorative Arts, Yorkshire Museum), Paul Howard (Curator of Biology, Yorkshire Museum) and Ismay's trustees, dated 9 November 1997.

122 Letter from Richard Kilburn (Assistant Director of the Yorkshire and Humberside Museums Council) to Paul Howard (Curator of Biology, Yorkshire Museum), dated 2 December 1997.

123 Internal memo written by Craig Barclay (Curator of Numismatics and Decorative Arts, Yorkshire Museum), dated 21 July 1998.

124 Letter from Craig Barclay (Curator of Numismatics and Decorative Arts, Yorkshire Museum) to Dr Charles J. Meyers (Senior Program Officer, Getty Grants Program, Los Angeles, USA), dated 29 May 1998.





4-37 Pots in the cellar of Ismay's home in the 1990s. Photograph Janette Haigh.



4-38 Bowl with side handle, 1993, Elspeth Owen. (YORYM:2004.1.507)

successful.<sup>125</sup> A year later, in May 1999, Howard submitted an application to the Getty Grant Program for a grant of £55,284 towards the production of a catalogue of Ismay's collection.<sup>126</sup> The ambition was to produce something similar to the catalogue of the Milner-White collection produced by York Art Gallery and much admired by Ismay. However, Meyers wrote back swiftly saying that:

*Unfortunately, we are unable to proceed with the review of the application at this time because it is not clear from the application if the W.A. Ismay collection is legally owned by CYC. I am afraid we are not able to consider a grant application for a collection that is not legally owned by the applicant institution.<sup>127</sup>*

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125 Letter from Dr Charles J. Meyers (Senior Program Officer, Getty Grants Program, Los Angeles, USA) to Craig Barclay (Curator of Numismatics and Decorative Arts, Yorkshire Museum), dated 18 June 1998.

126 Letter from Paul Howard (Curator of Biology, Yorkshire Museum) to Dr Charles J. Meyers (Senior Program Officer, Getty Grants Program, Los Angeles, USA), dated 20 May 1999.

127 Letter from Charles J. Meyers (Deputy Director of the Getty Grant Program) to Paul Howard (Curator of Biology, Yorkshire Museum), dated 9 June 1999.





4-39 Pots in the cellar of Ismay's home in the 1990s. Photograph Janette Haigh.

With all Feber's attempts at funding the plans coming to nothing, he left York to take up a job as Director of the Pilkington Glass Museum in St Helens, Lancashire.

There was hiatus following Feber's departure, with Sandra Bicknell taking over as Director of the Castle Museum and her attention being focused on laying the foundations for setting up York Museums Trust. Nothing more could be done regarding Ismay's collection until after his death. However plans were in place for when that happened. There was an acknowledgment of the scale of the task and the need to act quickly to move the collection from its vulnerable position in Ismay's house (with no alarm or security provision) to a place of safety.





4-40 Shelves in the cellar of Ismay's home in the 1990s. Photograph Janette Haigh.



Ismay's health further deteriorated during 2000, though he continued attending exhibitions and acquiring pots. Following one last trip to Bognor Regis to visit his friend, potter Eric James Mellon, Ismay fell ill and on returning to Wakefield was taken into hospital. He passed away on 13 January 2001 at Pinderfields Hospital, Wakefield.

After Ismay's death, his trustees did an initial sweep of the house, removing private or personal items and archival material deemed not relevant to be sorted and potentially disposed of. Earlier notions of filming the house to show the collection in-situ at the end of Ismay's life were abandoned in the urgency of removing the pottery as quickly and safely as possible. A team consisting of curatorial staff from the Castle Museum and the Yorkshire Museum were tasked with packing and removing the collection. With the assistance of some of Ismay's trustees and the catalogue he had prepared, they systematically recorded all the objects, photographed and packed them. Overnight security was hired and objects were transported back to York in batches and stored



4-41 Shelves in cellar of Ismay's home in the 1990s. Photograph Janette Haigh.



4-42 The W.A. Ismay Collection awaiting unpacking



4-43 14 Welbeck Street, Wakefield, 2015.



4-44 Blue plaque awarded by Wakefield Civic Society in 2014.

at the Yorkshire Museums' off-site store. Removing the collection took more than six weeks and once it was completed, the house was sold.

Ismay's Bequest to the Yorkshire Museum was finally made public in the summer of 2001. An exhibition highlighting the collection was installed in the balcony gallery of the Yorkshire Museum, featuring approximately 200 pots.<sup>128</sup> Interpretation in the exhibition was taken from Ismay's article on collecting from 1982, introducing the collection to a new audience in his own words.<sup>129</sup> On 8 September 2001, a Memorial Day was held to celebrate Ismay's life and achievements. Amongst the speakers were Jane Hamlyn, Tony Hill, Janette Haigh, David Whiting, Emmanuel Cooper, Craig Barclay and Janet Barnes (then Head of the Crafts Council, but later to become the chief executive of York Museums Trust).

Ismay's trustee Janette Haigh, and her husband Arthur, arranged for Ismay's ashes to be buried in Wakefield Cemetery in November 2001. Wakefield Cemetery backs onto Welbeck Street and his ashes were buried close to his parent's graves, in the corner that backed on to their home at number 14. No marker was placed on his grave, but in 2014, a blue plaque commemorating his achievements (paid for by the Northern Potters Association) was placed above the door of 14 Welbeck Street by Wakefield Civic Society.

<sup>128</sup> The remainder of the W.A. Ismay Collection stayed in storage waiting cataloguing, a process that was delayed due to staff changes resulting from the development of York Museums Trust. The cataloguing of the collection began in 2004 when the post of Assistant Curator of Decorative Arts was created.

<sup>129</sup> Ismay, W.A. (1982b) 'Collecting Studio Pottery', *Ceramic Review*, No. 76, July/August.



## **4.9 Summary**

This chapter reveals the long and difficult process of securing a permanent home for Ismay's collection and ensuring that it would be cared for and used in such a way that Ismay's wishes were met. The negotiations included a wide range of parties within York and were difficult and almost failed. The debate about the importance of the collection highlights the range of views held about the value of British studio pottery, particularly a collection containing not only significant pots by important artists, but also less highly valued pots and the work of unknown potters. Ismay's insistence that the collection stay together presented a huge challenge to the public museums and galleries who were interested in acquiring it, not least because of the amount of space and resources needed to house it and look after its long-term care. For the curator of York Art Gallery, the requirement to take all of the collection was an unacceptable challenge to the gallery's policy of collecting work of important artistic merit. In comparison, the Yorkshire Museum saw it as an opportunity to broaden their collecting policy and include a new type of material and to embrace the potential of contemporary collecting.

The support the acquisition received and the continued interest in it provide evidence of the significance of W.A. Ismay as a collector and the value attached to his collection.



4-45 W.A. Ismay at a private view in 1979. Photograph John Anderson.

## CONCLUSION

The intention of this research was to examine the role private collectors held in the post-war British studio pottery movement, using the example of the collector W.A. Ismay MBE (1910–2001). Ismay's collection of pottery and his archive have only been in the possession of York Museums Trust since 2001 and the cataloguing of his pottery was not completed until 2008. The cataloguing and digitization of Ismay's archives is a bigger job that will take several more years to complete. As a result, Ismay and his collection have not been studied critically before. This investigation of the archive has interpreted and contextualized extracts from Ismay's archive and has uncovered new information about Ismay and his activity. This new knowledge has demonstrated the important and influential role he held in the British studio pottery movement. It has also established the archives as a significant and valuable resource for research, demonstrating the scholarly way in which Ismay documented his collection. The research was carried out whilst I worked with the collection in a curatorial role, during a period of time when York Art Gallery was undergoing great transformation in the form of an £8million capital development project which resulted in the creation

of the Centre of Ceramic Art (CoCA). This research has undoubtedly benefited my role of curator, enabling me to take a more critical and informed view of the collections during the transformation of York Art Gallery.

Establishing the context for this research using literature revealed the vast amount of material produced on ceramics due to the transient and fluid nature of how it has been viewed by researchers. Despite continual attempts, ceramics remain either delightfully versatile or impossible to pin down, depending on your point of view. There has been so little critical and academic research carried out on collectors of studio pottery that it was necessary to look outside of the subject area at other types of collectors. The array of texts on collecting covers a range of styles, subject matter and criticality, meaning they are



C-1 W.A. Ismay at the Peter Dingley Fournier Private View, October 1971.





C-2 W.A. Ismay at the opening of the exhibition *The Art of the Potter* at Wakefield Art Gallery in 1959.

sometimes an uncomfortable fit with the context of this research. This research has contributed to filling this gap in knowledge.

Ismay was a private man who shied away from the spotlight and preferred that his collection of pottery was the focus of attention. As a result, the extraordinary nature of his activity, his eccentricity, unique characteristics and quirks became a focus. The lack of critical writing about Ismay and his unwillingness to be interviewed has led to the passing on of stories, which become embellished and have the potential to skew perception, creating a caricature of the man. By studying his archives, I have been able to focus attention back on him as a person based on facts and evidence from his archive, rather than urban myths and recounted legends.

Archives relating to Ismay's formative years have proved particularly helpful with this. Material that may be viewed by some as irrelevant to pottery has in fact helped to build a picture of Ismay's character, revealing interests, skills and experiences that allow us to understand how he was able to become such an important collector. This is indicative of the *grey area* that such archival material occupies, particularly in institutions for whom archives that do not appear to have direct relevance to a collection are not necessarily regarded as an important resource.



C-3 W.A. Ismay at a private view in 1963. Photograph John Anderson.

In his obituary for Ismay, Emmanuel Cooper wrote that: ‘there was little in his early life to indicate the extent of his interest in and commitment to pots.’<sup>1</sup> I would argue that the information revealed in Chapter 2 offers evidence of many ways in which Ismay’s collecting character was beginning to emerge. These range from specific examples, such as: his recollections and opinions of ceramics seen in relatives homes when he was a child; the pots he bought his mother as presents; and the significant impact of seeing potters at work whilst serving overseas during World War Two. More broad evidence of an interest in art and culture was: his university education; his creativity in writing poetry and stories; the ferocious appetite for reading and corresponding; and his interest and taste for marginalized areas of art such as fan-dancing, tableau performances and photographing still-life models.

The most important evidence revealed by Chapter 2, explains how he was able to advance so quickly and confidently in the British studio pottery world. This includes: his self-confidence in dealing with important and high status figures (such as Cecil Day-Lewis); the scholarly way in which he researched his area of interest and his capacity for retaining and recalling information. Practical evidence such as the discovery of the extent of his financial inheritance following his death, explains how he was able to make important, expensive early acquisitions that raised his profile and cemented his position as a collector.

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1 Cooper, Emmanuel (2001). ‘Obituary for W.A. Ismay’, *The Independent*, 7 February.

Chapter 2 also corrects some of the misconceptions about his personal life and political views. After Ismay's death, certain aspects of his early private life were uncovered, such as his connection to the singer, striptease artiste and actress Phyllis Dixey. This led to speculation about the relationship, which we can now see attached a greater significance than was justified. Similarly, Ismay's correspondence with Cecil Day-Lewis was misunderstood due to the one published reference to a letter in which Day-Lewis addressed Ismay as '*Dear Comrade.*' This led to the misconception that Ismay was a Communist. In reality, though he held left-wing views, there is no evidence that he was a member of the Communist Party. The correspondence between Day-Lewis and Ismay was short-lived and, whilst Ismay occasionally shared his views of social and political climate at the time, their correspondence centred on poetry. Whilst Ismay's passion for reading and his writing on pottery are well-known, this has perhaps been ignored and viewed as a side effect of his career as a librarian. This research reveals the importance of Ismay's early writing and his ambitions to be published as a poet and novelist, which have not previously been acknowledged.



C-4 W.A. Ismay with Colin Pearson at a private view in 1979. Photograph John Anderson.



The archives enable us to reach conclusions about the important impact that World War Two had on him. We discover that when he was a teenager, the loss of a favourite uncle in World War One made him adopt pacifist views and reject conflict. However, by the time World War Two began, Ismay was in his late twenties and had a university education behind him and a broader understanding of society and politics. His views changed and he enlisted, becoming a competent and valued member of the Royal Signals Corps. The loss of his father during that time changed his relationship with his mother, bringing them closer and making her much more reliant on him, leading him to set aside his plans to move away from the family home. One positive aspect of World War Two was the opportunity it gave him to travel and, as a result, see pottery being made by hand and used by locals in the countries he was stationed in. This experience undoubtedly focused his interest in pottery.

Ismay's activity as a collector of British studio pottery between 1955 and 2001 is a more visible part of his life, as it is documented through his published writing on the subject, evidenced by his collection of pottery and through the recollections of the people he came into contact with. Chapter 3 comprises an investigation of his archives from that period in order to examine his position and influence as a collector. The bibliography of his published writing (Appendix i) presents the extensive amount of writing he did on a wide variety of pottery themes. The archival material studied provides new evidence of the strong personal opinions he held, which were not as forcefully expressed in his published articles. The information disseminated from the archive shows the development of his personal taste and his growing self-awareness about what his preferences were. Unpublished material in the form of draft articles and correspondence reveal his likes and dislikes more succinctly than the carefully refined and constructive reviews he wrote and published. The drafts of his articles and conversations recorded in correspondence with potters reveal how he developed and refined his knowledge, sharing it through his activity and applying it to his collecting.

Chapter 4 discloses how Ismay applied his skills and knowledge to securing the future of his collection and ensuring his legacy. Due to the sensitivity surrounding confidential negotiations with institutions about the bequest of his collection, much of the complexity of this has remained undisclosed. This gave rise to frustration amongst many interested parties, who could not understand why the transfer of the collection was taking such a long time to be agreed. There was the belief that it was purely due to the bureaucracy of the museum. Ismay's archives and the documentation in museum files reveal a much more complex situation, with disagreements amongst individuals and institutions about the value of the collection, played out against a backdrop of uncertainty during local government reorganization. Added to this was Ismay's desire



C-5 W.A. Ismay with camera. Photograph Tony Hill.

to retain his privacy and insistence that no official announcement was made, which exacerbated fears that the future of his collection was at risk. Chapter 4 sheds light on some of the key figures who played important roles in pushing for the collection to come to York. The process of negotiating the agreement allows further understanding of Ismay's character; demonstrating his patience in allowing discussions to take place at their own speed; and how he worked with the museum to come to an agreement that suited both of their ambitions. Ismay's patience, and understanding of the museum's position, was no doubt partly due to his experience of dealing with museums since the late 1950s and having an understanding of the way in which they operate. Evidence of his wish that his collection not become a static thing, that it continue to grow and be used to offer future generations the opportunity of a haptic experience, underlines his belief in the value of the collection as a *'living'* thing.

This research has benefited from having access to almost all of Ismay's archives. Had Ismay's trustees interpreted his Will differently, much of the material predating 1955 would have been considered to have little relevance to pottery and would have been disposed of, resulting in a disastrous loss of knowledge. The exploration of Ismay's collection using his archive has brought about a new awareness of the value and importance of the archive to York Museums Trust, raising its status in a museum and gallery context and changing institutional policy about collecting in this area. It raises questions about what unstudied archival material may be held in other museums and galleries and encourages a reevaluation of how this type of material is viewed in this context.



C-6 W.A. Ismay using magnifying glass. Photograph Tony Hill.

This thesis demonstrates the research potential offered by Ismay's collection and archive to contribute to the canon of knowledge about the post-war British studio pottery movement and also about the important role collectors held as both active participants and in preserving the evidence for future dissemination. The limitations of this research and the extent of Ismay's archive have meant that there remain many unanswered questions and future avenues of research that would benefit from future study.

The research potential of Ismay's archive has implications for how similar archives in museums and galleries are acquired, viewed, used, preserved, catalogued, displayed and disseminated. Encouraging study of the different approaches taken by archivists and curators in caring for and using archival material may facilitate new ways in which they can be made more accessible. Raising the profile of archives as collections can increase understanding of their value.

This research has highlighted some of the relationships Ismay had with different types of figures from the British studio pottery movement, such as the long correspondence with potter Michael Cardew (see Appendix iv) and his relationship with the collectors Alan and Pat Firth which is well documented both in Ismay's archive and the Firth's archive which was acquired by York Art Gallery in 2016. However, there are many more documented examples of relationships that require study, including those



with students, commercial gallery owners, curators and other potters and collectors. Further research in this area will provide a deeper understanding of Ismay's role and will add to our understanding of how the post-war British studio pottery movement functioned.

Ismay's role as a writer producing many exhibition and book reviews and articles on various aspects of studio pottery has been considered as part of this research. However, there remains a need to study his writing and the writing of others during the post-war period of the British studio pottery movement, to assess the nature of critical writing produced and how it has affected opinions of pottery.

Ismay's archive contains a lot of material relating to some key potters associations, including the Red Rose Guild, the Crafts Potters Association, the Northern Potters Association and others. The development of these national and voluntary regional groups of potters and enthusiasts merits further investigation in order to establish the extent of their influence.

Ismay had a very active role in the social side of the British studio pottery movement, attending many of the events such as potters' camps and festivals, which became popular from the early 1970s. His draft article on the development of potters' camps, written in 1987 for the Northern Potters Association Newsletter, offers a strong starting point for researching these phenomena. Research could investigate how fairs and festivals have flourished and now range from exclusive international events such as SOFA in USA and *Collect* in London, to regional events such as *Potfest in the Pens* in Cumbria and *Earth and Fire* at Rufford in Nottinghamshire. This investigation could also examine how, for some potters, they have become one of the main ways in which they sell their work.

The role of commercial galleries and dealers in the British studio pottery movement deserves further study, in particular regarding how they have adapted to changes in the market and driven financial values. Changes to the way commercial galleries operate include the opening of Barrett Marsden Gallery (now Marsden Woo Gallery) in 1998, when they controversially signed up artists on exclusive contracts. Since 1999, when eBay launched in the UK, there has been a proliferation of opportunities to purchase pottery online through the secondary market of auctions and first hand through online dealers and potters' own websites. This research has highlighted the importance of the active role played by collectors like Ismay during the late 20th century, in attending private views, forming relationships and showing real support to potters and gallery owners. Further research on the status of collectors and how their

role and the process of collecting have changed may help inform the future development of retail markets.

Ismay's archive contains records of the purchases he made, but also price lists for exhibitions he attended from 1955 to 2001. The limitations of this research did not allow for interrogation of the development and changing financial value of ceramics during this period.

This research has noted the important role education has played in the British studio pottery movement, particularly with regard to providing an environment in which potters can be creative, develop their own interests, encourage students and pass on knowledge, with the security of a steady income but without the pressure of having to make purely commercial work. Teaching at institutions such as the Central School of Art and Camberwell School of Art allowed Gillian Lowndes

the opportunity to develop her work in ways that were not appreciated commercially by collectors in the 1980s and 1990s. Gordon Baldwin's role teaching ceramics and sculpture from the 1960s to the 1990s similarly offered him a secure environment in which to follow his own artistic interests. The trend for so many ceramics courses to be closed or to merge with other materials-based subjects has resulted in the loss of opportunities for future artists to develop work in the way that Lowndes and Baldwin did. Research into this type of studio practice will help establish understanding of its value and encourage its preservation.

This research provides greater understanding of Ismay's interests beyond studio pottery but there is still potential for further research on archives relating to his life leading up to 1955 when he began collecting; particularly the extensive correspondence that took place between him and his friends during the 1930s when he was attempting



C-7 W.A. Ismay and Maggie Barnes. Photograph Tony Hill.

to establish himself as a poet and author. His unpublished writing from this period deserves consideration from a literary perspective. Similarly, his activity as a photographer hiring models during the 1940s and 1950s offers potential for research as evidence of middlebrow culture and art.

In 2016, a study day was held at the University of York to consider the different aspects of the life and interest of Eric Milner-White (Dean of York and pioneering collector of British studio pottery). Papers considered: his church career; his time ministering to the forces during World War Two; his role in founding the University of York; the decorative art he purchased for York Minster; his work on the stained glass in York Minster and the collections of pottery and paintings he left to York Art Gallery. The event, which considered the entirety of his activity, led to a much greater understanding of Milner-White's character and significance. Further research of the different facets of Ismay would offer the opportunity for a comparable event to share new knowledge of his various interests.

The Ismay collection is a resource to track this post-war period of change. Ismay's experience of collecting covers a period of 46 years, offering firsthand experiences of all the factors that affected the British studio pottery movement: from the early days when private views were polite affairs in which visitors queued up to buy items and were only permitted to buy one at a time, to the *free-for-all* experience that Ismay hated towards the end of the twentieth century. In considering the evidence presented in this research, Ismay's activity can be viewed as an example of Bourdieu's (1986) theory of capitals, as it demonstrates how Ismay used his social, economic and cultural resources to position himself at the centre of the British studio pottery movement.

## Bequeathed by expert Bill

LIBRARIAN Bill Ismay was a familiar sight at art shows and exhibitions with his trademark beret and magnifying glass.

Over 45 years Bill invested his librarian's wages in buying studio pottery - and by the time he died aged 90 earlier this year some of his finds were worth as much as £100,000 each.

His massive collection included pots by such highly-sought after artists such as Hans Coper, Lucie Rie and Michael Cardew, whose works regularly make huge sums in the world's salerooms.

Bill, from Wakefield, always worried that his collection would be broken up when he died - so he bequeathed all 3,000 pieces - along with his house - to the Yorkshire Museum in York.

The pots - one of the finest collections of studio pottery ever assembled - has now gone on show at the museum. It is expected to attract thousands of visitors in the coming weeks.

Bill's obsession began in 1955 when he bought his first pot from a workshop in York's famous Shambles. After that he visited exhibitions all over the country, meeting some of the world's best-known artists.

In 1982 he was awarded the MBE for services to studio pottery. By then pots filled virtually every inch of his home.

Curator of Decorative Arts at the museum, Craig Barclay, said, "We are delighted to be able to exhibit this unique and extensive collection. The huge number of different potters represented makes it unique."

**Unique display:** Part of the amazing hoard of pottery collected by Bill Ismay and donated to the museum



C-8 Press cuttings about the gift of the W.A. Ismay Collection to the Yorkshire Museum.



Although Ismay's collection offers only one man's personal taste and interest, it bears witness to the changes that happened during that period. His archive is rich in material that sheds light on how studio pottery was marketed, displayed, priced, bought and reviewed, and the artists who rose to fame or fell to obscurity. Historians, academics and curators have stated that the study of ceramics can lead researchers to a range of unexpected places. This research signposts some of the many destinations that deserve visiting through the W.A. Ismay Collection.



C-9 W.A. Ismay in his kitchen in 1990s. Photograph Janette Haigh.

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**Appendix i**  
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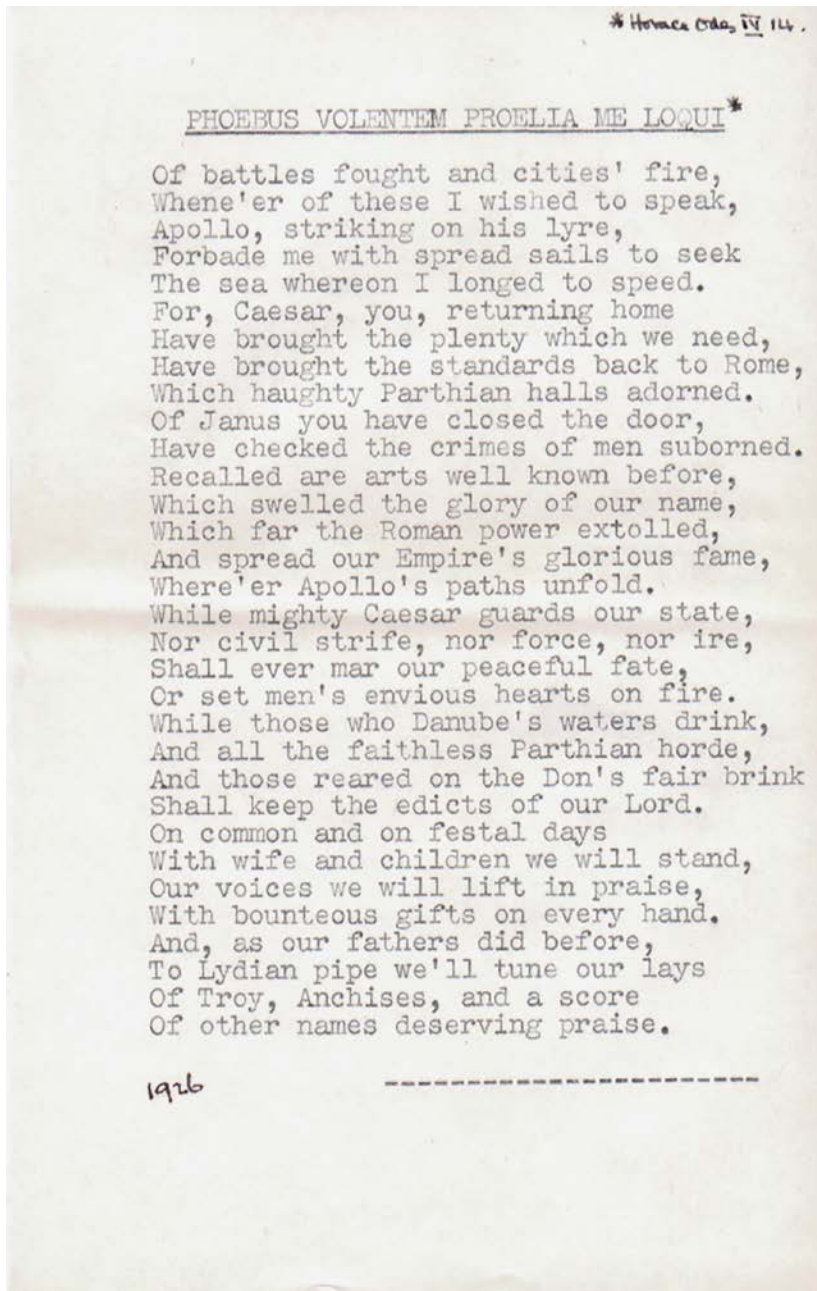
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## Appendix ii

### Examples of published and unpublished writing by W.A. Ismay



Aii-1 1926 *Phoebus Volentem Proelia Me Loqui*; unpublished poem

J. K. MORTIMER  
*A SENTIMENTAL JOURNEY THROUGH  
LEEDS AND LOFTHOUSE*

The uniformed attendant was looking at him expectantly, so he said he'd have twopennyworth. Coins clinked, thank you, thank you, and he received a clean towel folded small.

As he propped his rucksack against the white-tiled wall, and took off his coat and cap and hung them up, he was thinking again of his old superstition about things he anticipated never happening (so that his life was a succession of surprises, though he was beginning, on the whole, to be disillusioned about himself, and about things in general). That old idea of his worked both ways: you could ward off unpleasant things by making yourself think they would happen, but on the other hand, the pleasures of anticipation stole away from you, as often as not, the pleasures of performance. This one was rather a new sort of case: the proposition he'd put up to himself was he came across the square, was that if he went straight on, grimy with fog as he felt himself, with a smut on his nose it might be, and a crumpled collar, she'd be there; but if he spent twopence and spruced himself up, she wouldn't. He wanted her to be there, rather badly; but here he was swilling water gingerly on to his face, to save his collar, and taking out most of his twopence on the towel, in front of the mirror.

When he went into the station, he was wearing the rucksack, which seemed more natural and less noticeable than carrying it swinging by the straps, as he often did when it was not full. It was still half-an-hour before train time, but he wanted to find out first whether she was on the station, anywhere, and then watch the barrier and make quite sure of her. It was not going to be easy: he'd been watching girls' faces for a week, in the streets, in buses, everywhere: her face was blurred and misty, though for that matter, when he tried hard to throw an image of someone he knew well on his mental screen, he couldn't, he found, do much better. In that film he'd seen earlier in the week, the hero had met the heroine once, and kept a clear picture of her in his mind, except that he wasn't quite sure about her eyes. How futile that seemed: how many people he knew well could he describe in detail, or even say for certain on which side they parted their hair?

The station hall was echoing, dank and chill, and great swirls of fog and smoke blew among the draughty spaces up above. It was as he went across it for the first time that the thing happened - before he'd ever had time to look everywhere, as he'd intended to. There were two of them, sitting on the end of the row of seats, next the indicator. One profile was like, he thought, very like; and it was just as he was thinking this that she looked his way, and he was sure from the way she looked that she recognised him. She was dressed in brown, not blue, with a different hat. He glanced away, half-startled, and when he looked again, she was leaning to whisper to her companion.

He went on and on, the full length of the hall, like a soldier on sentry-go, with people watching him; only it was more like walking down the field during break, years ago, at school, and solemnly raising one foot to the wall before turning back. He didn't actually do that, but it reminded him of doing it. Then he turned round



and came all the way back, and as he passed them he was sure they were looking at him, and whispering about him. When he passed them for the third time he hardly cared to look: but when he had passed the indicator he turned at right angles behind it, instead of going right on, and walked to the back wall, by the fruit machine. Then when he got to the bookstall again, all closed up long ago, he stood and pretended to read one of the posters along the bottom. Finally he turned, and stood looking at them, with his feet a bit apart, and his shoulders hunched. They were definitely looking at him now, both of them, and he felt himself getting hotter and hotter. This, and especially having a companion, was nothing he had ever visualized. Before it had been mysterious, but sweet, fresh, simple: that half-tittering movement of the head to the other girl had a quality of discomfort that chilled him, down inside, even whilst the blood mantled his cheeks. Still, he must do something: if he kept his distance, the bottom would fall out of everything.

Abruptly at last he went across to them. Without any formal salute - all you can do with a cap, when you aren't sure of yourself, is touch it, with a kind of servility - he stopped a yard away, and said with an effort at casualness, "You must think I'm an awful fool, but haven't I met you before?"

He understood her to say "Yes", and asked her if she minded if he sat down. She said "No", and he sat down, unslinging his rucksack, but she was talking at the same time to the older girl, and he couldn't make out what it was about. And even as he sat down, his heart was sinking, the illusion fading. There were the delicate profile, the smooth complexion, the small, very red mouth, the dark, symmetrical brows, owing something of their symmetry to art, he could see from about a foot away. But there was something subtly wrong. There too as she smiled at him were the little, square, very white teeth, but one tooth round towards the side was decayed, showing up vividly against the whiteness. And was her hair - bunched loosely behind her hat as she turned to her companion - as near to black as he had thought? All these were details, it was something more than these that was wrong. Still, he found himself asking her with something of urgency whether she had got his letter. And at this point again he couldn't make out for several moments whether she said "Yes" or "No", because she was saying something to her companion about having missed the train before the one they were waiting for. This haziness about the mental contact he was trying to make was in startling contrast to the vividness with which he was seeing every little detail of her physical presence. The physical fog about them was void of effect in the high electric lights, but the fog within his mind was gross and stupefying. He made out, with a little shock of dismay, that she meant "No", and managed to say something about he didn't know what could have happened to it. His brain was whirling madly with surprise and disappointment: he kept staring glumly in front of him, and then turning and trying to keep the conversation going. But most of it seemed to be between the two of them, and he couldn't follow it, only they both kept smiling at him, the older girl brightly and a bit quizzically, the other, nearer to him, with invitation and a touch of coquetry. And then things began to sort themselves out a little and become - comparatively - clearer.

"I think you must be making a mistake," she said.



"I don't know," he said, a trifle grimly. "I'm not certain."

"Were you expecting to meet someone here?" she asked him.

"Well, yes, I was rather."

"And was it somebody that looked like me?"

"Yes - only - I'm not quite certain about it."

"That's an army bag, isn't it?" the older girl asked

brightly.

He brushed this aside, because the other girl was asking him what the person he'd expected to meet was called. And this was rather important, because he knew at once that this was a point he mustn't concede. Least of all must he pull out that second letter, with the name on the envelope - the surname, which was all he knew - no matter how much his lips hesitated. "Suppose you tell me your name?" he said, taking a grip of things.

"Well, but if you told me the name I should know whether it was right."

"Where do you live?" he asked.

"Why, where was the person supposed to live? You must know the address, if you say you wrote to her."

He told her the name of the town - a place farther down the line than his own station, which was where you changed - there seemed to be no harm in that, though his mistrust was growing, he was going deeper into his shell. This was the shallowest coquetry, where in those few minutes before had been depth and simplicity. He heard her saying, no, she didn't live there. "It's funny," she said, "but I was expecting to hear from someone."

"Haven't you ever seen me before?" he asked, getting a bit desperate.

"Well, yes, I might have seen your face somewhere. Where was this meeting supposed to be?"

"Here - that is, on this line." He wasn't going to particularize. He'd been assuming all along that they were going by his train, but they hadn't definitely said so, though they'd asked him what train he was waiting for. He sat there getting steadily more sardonic and gloomy, answering an increasing catechism from two voices in curt monosyllables, where did he live, where was he going to now, was his business at so-and-so, did he travel up and down a lot; meeting the still quizzical ~~look~~ look of the older girl with a gaze more and more sardonic, still scrutinizing with minute particularity, and increasing puzzlement, the face of the nearer girl. He got up abruptly and went and asked the ticket-collector ~~if~~ whether the train was in. He came back and told them it was. Leisurely, they got up. Surprisingly, the older girl said "Cheerio!" - and he touched his cap with a travesty of a grin. He sat and watched them walk away, doubting again if her hair were dark enough, and whether her ankles were too thin. His emotions were very confused.

They went past the barrier, and round out of sight on to the wrong half of the ~~platform~~ platform. He sat on glumly and inertly. Then they came back, strolling, and went round on to the right side with the most fleeting of sidelong glances. After a bit he got up and followed them.

He went all along the train, looking in all the ~~compartments~~ compartments, and hoping against hope. He saw them all the

time, along the platform in front of him. They got into the very front compartment, next the engine, and he went past and along a deserted part of the station. Then he came back, and went past without looking in, and looked carefully again in all the other compartments, and finally got in one at the back, and sat down, withdrawing himself, and closed his eyes.

The train started, and he thought of them in their front carriage, discussing him, and felt somehow a tinge of triumph. But mostly he thought of a dream a week old that was now shattered, and felt glad that a letter in his pocket was not being read and would never be read by someone pretty and desirable but oddly cheapened who was on the train. And still deep down in him a minute hope persisted. And then the train stopped for the third time at a station, and moved on again, and in the light of a waiting-room ~~door~~ door he saw for a second a profile raised, looking for him, and an arm nudging a companion, and the beginning of a giggle, and knew for certain that he had made a fool of himself.

Two stations later he alighted, one of two or three passengers, and once again walked the length of a platform, looking at the few people on the seats, and in the ill-lighted corners. When he came back, still searching, everybody else except one or two elderly people had gone. But in the darkness and loneliness of a place now sacred to a memory, to a lovely face dimmed so that he could not quite see it, he felt oddly comforted.

He left the station, and finding he had <sup>just the</sup> a penny and a halfpenny amongst his change, he stopped at the post-office, and posted a letter.

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*Its further implications were genuine*







## “EYELESS IN GAZA”

To the Editor of THE LONDON MERCURY AND BOOKMAN

SIR,—I read Miss Phyllis Bentley's article on “The Structure of Eyeless in Gaza” with great interest, and on reading the book myself, made a similar analysis for my own purposes. My results seem to show that it is more strictly accurate to speak of six periods than of four. The presence of four calendar intervals, of which the shortest exceeds two years, can be made a criterion to give us five periods; and both the content and arrangement seem to suggest that we should mark a further division between February and April 1934, even though the calendar interval is so much shorter. There is now one striking feature of this division into six periods, which the division into four obscures, and which I am not certain Miss Bentley has observed—if not, then because her methods of research, despite their advantages in detail, have conspired to conceal it from her. Imagine the chapters in these six groups as lying like cards in six piles, with the contents of each pile in chronological order, the earliest dates being at the top. The novel can then (with the obvious proviso) be shuffled in five movements into its published form, by interlocking the first pile with the second, the third with the resulting pile, and similarly with the remaining three, so that the order of chapters within each pile is not disturbed, even though chapters from other piles have been inserted between them. That the arrangement of the chapters is not a random shuffling of fifty-four cards is sufficiently obvious without list-making, though the spectacle of a reader trying to demonstrate just why each chapter is where it is might afford Mr. Huxley some amusement: I prefer for the moment to make use of Miss Bentley's suggestions in private: but twenty minutes' work with pencil and paper can produce what seems the definite evidence of the six sequences, in favour of a structure essentially formal.

The time-scheme of the simplest kind of narrative may be represented by an unbroken line. But such simplicity is so comparatively rare, and so unnatural to longer narrative, into which artistic selection immediately enters, that it is only found in a percentage of short stories or narrative sketches; and in longer works, where it is deliberately and rigorously and self-consciously adopted by the writer. The first stage is to affect the continuity of the narrative, without affecting its sequence, by the suppression of incidents of lesser significance. A simple stock method of juggling with the sequence, and still a very effective one, is to begin near the end of the line, then jump back to the beginning, and then finish off the bit remaining at the end. The point is that this juggling with continuity and sequence is so common in novels and films that we only notice it, suddenly, when a writer makes the pattern more complex than usual. I would venture to suggest that *Eyeless in Gaza*, so far from being jumbled in its structure, is of a more calculated formality than is usual: we can represent it by six portions of line, of varying length and intensity, separated by five breaks, also of varying length. We begin at the beginning of the fifth portion, jump to the beginning of the sixth portion, go back and travel a bit more of the fifth, jump to the beginning of the first, then to the beginning of the third, and so on. The portions are not visited in rotation, but each visit to a portion takes us one stage farther on an ordered progress through it.

Yours, etc., W. A. ISMAY

14, Welbeck Street, Wakefield

EXCURSION BILL

The world turns, and each man is a point  
Fixed, round which it all goes travelling.  
So many millions of circling universes,  
So many millions of wavering, fixed points  
Having position but no magnitude.  
And time is a line (having, we are told,  
length but no breadth)  
Along which the points travel, or, the  
points being immobile,  
Which travels past the points, its length  
being only determined  
By the widely- or the scarcely-opened  
conscience  
Of the surveying eye  
Each in his narrow cell for ever laid  
For ever and for ever and for ever  
Giving to fantastic time the lie.  
So many lives going on and on together  
Must on the law (catch phrase) of averages  
Run somewhere at an 'even' space apart  
And parallel straight lines, etcetera,  
Meet, so they say - and so on - ad  
infinitum -

Monk Frystone, Burton Salmon, Sherburn,  
Fenton,  
Tell travellers they approach the spot  
they're bent on.  
The wheels clank slow. Sudden the hiss of  
steam -  
Before a joy proposed, behind, a dream.

1936

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A CHILDHOOD IN WARTIME

The time was about eight-thirty in the evening on the second Sunday in April, at the end of the first decade of the century. The place was an upstairs room in a smallish, brick house, at the end of a row of smallish, brick houses. The event, important to a few, but of everyday occurrence, and to others as unknown as most events of the kind, was the birth of a child, who (it follows) was to be four years old when the first World War broke upon an astonished England.

The midwife in attendance - the second stage of the Midwives Act of 1902 had been current law for some ten days - balanced the child in her experienced palms, and nodded in satisfaction over her estimate of seven-and-a-half pounds. Later, she brought up a glass of milk stout for my mother, 'just to build you up, my dear,' she told her - an unaccustomed beverage which was very little to the taste of the recipient. It is a fair comment that I do not claim to remember, myself, either the balancing, or the stout.

Indeed, my first persistent recollection is of sitting on the permanent table in our living-room, on the lid which, lifted, reveals a bath, and watching my father affix a wooden window-box, containing earth and plants, amongst which I recall what are recognisably geraniums, to the back, ground-floor window-sill of the house where we still live. This box has long since crumbled away and been demolished, and I have no



notion whatever of its appearance as seen from outside the house. It had been transported from our first address on the western side of our town, to this more desirable dwelling south of the river, on our removal in September 1911, and was fixed in its new position soon after arrival. At the date of this isolated first remembrance, accordingly, I was, roughly, a year and five months old. Of what had happened to me before that I, of myself, in common with most people, recall nothing with full consciousness; and a like blankness covers the greater part of my first five years.

I clearly remember lying one day on my stomach, on top of a pile of carpets which had been beaten in the yard, and which now (I can still smell them) lay alongside the tall bookcase, between the yard door of the living-room, and the door to the passage and staircase; and kicking my heels in the air and chanting on a monotonous, melancholy cadence the phrase, "Oh, deary me," time and time again. (This cadence merges in dream into the ineffable melancholy of the striking clock in our siesta-deserted village, years later, on a warm, summer's afternoon - scene of our wartime holidays in the country, perhaps twenty miles from home.) The memory too (which includes an awareness of the presence, up the stairs, of my mother's younger sister, E., who came to look after the house whilst my mother taught at school) itself merges into a mythical incident (whether fact or fantasy I do not know, though again, E. is there, as a sort of presence off stage) in which I fall head-over-heels from top to bottom of those

carpeted and rodded steps: this links up again with what was certainly a dream, about being bitten by a fox on the stairs. It is a part of my vague, indefinite, personal tradition, rather than an established or demonstrable fact, that I was three years old at the date of the first-recorded incident of pleasurable melancholy.

I remember E. as slim, youthful (or so my mental picture seems to me now) and pleasant, though a rather strict disciplinarian. She was three years younger than my mother, and would then be about twenty-eight. I would sit on the top of the 'copper' whilst she washed my face, hands and knees with a damp flannel or sponge, and scrubbed them with a towel: the smell of all these sank deeply into my consciousness. Then we would go round by the back yards to the house next door, where my mother's parents lived. In those days there was an old-fashioned stile between the two yards, where later a gate was placed, when my grandparents became more infirm. E. would climb over this, and I would scramble through it. The memory of sitting on the 'copper' shifts backward and forward, from our house to this house next door, where everything was the same - except for small differences of proportion, and a curious, contrasted feeling of stiffness, like horsehair instead of plush - only the other way round, with occasional discrepancies, as that the staircase door of the kitchen was hinged so as to go back against the outer wall, instead of coming out, like ours, into the room. Here they had a loofah, which we never had at home. Here on baking-day we partook of small delicacies - raisins, bits of left-over dough or pastry baked into little, flat

cakes, and the fat 'crackling' of meat, half-melted in a blackened tin in the oven, and sprinkled with salt before eating.

Later, I remember very dimly the first time I went to school - not my mother's but one nearer home - which I believe was when I was five, or nearly five. The head mistress, Miss C., a white-haired, elderly lady, showed me, or suggested to me, how to skip along on alternate feet, in time to a piano, as we entered and left the schoolroom in single file. I think it was fairly early in my school career that, one day, there was heavy snow, into which I sank to above the knees as I went down the street. My mother, watching from the gate, saw me struggle half-way down - rather pleased than otherwise by the novelty of the experience - and then called me back, and kept me at home that day.

When I was born, my father was thirty-two, and my mother twenty-nine. They had been married in 1907, after what seems by some modern standards a long and frugal engagement - one of those, on the surface, oddly-assorted unions which in our part of the world, the industrial West Riding, are not infrequent, and, on the whole, oddly successful. She taught in school, in the same quarter of the town where he worked laboriously in a textile mill - staggering over an uneven floor, beneath unscreened shafting, with immense 'pieces' of cloth, packed with metal sheets and sheets of 'press paper' (a species of tough cardboard), to



a cyclopean hydraulic press. The prime, social result was to enhance my father's prestige, as the husband of one (and school-teachers, particularly good ones, were looked up to) who taught the children of his seniors and contemporaries, and was later to teach some of their grandchildren. It was these circumstances however which from the point of view of a young child made his parents figure less largely than is usual during what are called the formative years: father was someone who went out long before breakfast and often came home after bedtime; and mother was someone who came in briefly for hasty meals. Also, of course, my early idea of my parents is overlaid by years of later impressions. The big figures in those early years were Grandpa, Grandma (tall and handsome, but how offended she was when in an access of youthful priggishness I once addressed her as "Grandmother") - Grandpa, Grandma and Aunt E.

Earlier on, when I was a child in arms, things had been different - but this is a period of which, in the nature of things, I have little personal recollection. My mother used to go for afternoon walks with me in some sort of pram or other conveyance. Photographs suggest that I was a pretty child - a favour or fault which I later grew out of: I was also a friendly one, who attracted the attention of passers-by, including, according to my mother's account, a burly miner in his pit-dirt at whom I gurgled engagingly, and who presented me with his blessing and a penny. But before long, and in the period of my first clear recollections,

my parents became marginal figures. There was one day in the week, Wednesday, after I began going to school, when my mother stayed at her school all day, and I went for dinner (a mid-day meal with us and all our milieu) to the house next door. The table-appointments and the food itself, particularly the hot, herb-flavoured minced beef, and the way in which this particular meal revolved about my own person, made it the highlight of my week, eclipsing even Sunday dinner, with its setting of Sabbath solemnities. At these Wednesday meals, a major rôle was played by Grandpa - a small, mild, bearded man of Christ-like appearance and manner, with twisted, capable hands - he was an underpaid and at times hard-driven master-tailor - good at talk, but better still at silence, which is harder; and with a properly grave understanding of children's games.

Of my paternal grandparents' home my recollection begins less early, though the nucleus of it cannot date much later than my fourth birthday, as my paternal grandmother - a stout, comfortable waterfamilias - died in 1914. The atmosphere here, despite the undoubted personality of the mother, was much more patriarchal and heavier, albeit more robust - my grandfather's characteristic attitude was hands in trouser-pockets and legs apart, across the hearth. I remember a high-Victorian front-room, furnished in mahogany, with heavy vases on the sideboard, adorned with pendant, elaborately-bevelled prisms and other shapes of cut glass, and with oil paintings by local artists on the walls, including a dish of fruit painted in

1897 by one J. W. Mills, which we now in piety have at home, and family portraits painted, I believe by the same artist, earlier in the nineties, showing my grandparents as a handsome married couple, my father and his two next-oldest brothers as growing lads, and the younger members of the family as children. My youngest uncle, at the date of my early visits about or approaching twenty, kept rabbits or guinea-pigs near the house door - then came an elongated passage through a sort of scullery, the home of a little, oblong stool, painted green, which I regarded as my personal prerogative, before one got to the house proper. In the inner sanctum of the front room (there was another door straight to the street from here, but this was in those days hardly ever opened) I recall Christmas gatherings, at which chocolate smoking sets were distributed to my cousins L. and J. - sons of my father's eldest brother, who, though the younger - I mean that my father himself was the eldest of all - had married earlier, so that the boys were three years and a year my senior, respectively - and to me. We would solemnly suck the chocolate cigars in imitation of our elders, puffing out imaginary smoke, before coming to earth and treating them as one should treat chocolate. The taste of chocolate cigarettes, chewed or sucked through the paper, I particularly recall, but the tobacco-pouch was a comfortable slab of chocolate which one could treat as such from the start. As we romped, in the relaxed atmosphere of a family festival, the glass prisms on the sideboard jingled together with a little, metallic sound, and the waxed fruit



under glass, standing on little, wool mats, and the round-eyed china dogs on the mantel-piece, took on their most festal air. This rich environment remains for me the type par excellence of the pre-war domesticity of our class. After 1914, all this must have faded rapidly, its essence evaporating, until early in the twenties, little but the shell of it remained. In the new, post-war homes, a new atmosphere and family flavour could be distinguished even by the least percipient.

Our earliest family holidays away from home were on the west coast - I recollect the ridged and pebbled beach of St. Anne's-on-Sea, and a white windmill at Lytham which is now no more; in days before these places and Blackpool had a practically continuous sea-front. And the actual outbreak of war in 1914, since mother and I were at St. Anne's at the time, means for me the noise and bustle of unprecedentedly crowded railway stations, as everyone sought to get home at once; means sitting on a green tin trunk on a station platform, and trotting beside it whilst a young married couple who befriended us carried it through the echoing subways at Manchester and at our destination, and mother came behind with the rest of our luggage. After that, home for some months, I suppose, and a Christmas of sorts, and then the beginnings of my schooling.

Of my very early schooldays my memory is curiously dim. I recall the head mistress clearly, though in part from later days, but not my first teacher. I remember skipping to the piano on that first morning; various incidents on the way to and from school - and then the next thing that comes up definitely is the feeling of being enormous and very old one

minute, as I waited in the babies' room, as it chanced, for the mistress who would transfer me from Standard I in the infants' to Standard IIb in the junior school; and then tiny again the next minute, as I was led off to - who knew what? After that, recollection is copious - but none of it had anything to do with the war. It is a whole, different chapter of my life. Even our games were seldom in any sense war games; and I recall no propaganda, as we should at once call it now - a big, Empire Day parade which I took part in belongs to a year after the war: the name of Jack Cornwell was added in 1916, after Captain Scott's, to the list of heroes we began to hear about in school, and we brought our pennies for some sort of fund associated with his memory, as later we brought eggs to school for wounded soldiers in hospital - but this was as far as junior school lessons went in linking up with contemporary affairs. Almost my whole recollection of this school, my stay at which was approximately bounded by the period of the war, seems wholly a private and personal matter, and not to cohere at all with outside events.

What did stick in my memory about the war was the food situation. I was old enough to be aware of the difference which there soon came to be in the colour, texture and taste of our daily bread; old enough to feel the monotony which came upon our meals, and to note the new items which crept into and became staple in our diet. Particularly lentils, which I had never tasted before, had too much of then, and have never tasted and barely seen since. I

could appreciate as a great if slightly grim joke the threadbare jest about S.O.S. meaning "Short of sugar." I could see the point when taking turns at eking out the butter ration by 'churning' milk plus a little butter in a Lyle's Golden Syrup tin with the lid jammed on tight. And I shall perhaps never taste any chocolate like that thick, coarse-textured stuff of rare flavour which we made very occasionally from cocoa and coco-butter (apparently not then rationed, and obtainable), plus hoardings of sugar added to a spoonful at a time. I still have, somewhere, the flimsy sheets of my 1918 ration-book, enclosed in a stout dark-green cloth folder with a grocer's advertisement lettered on in dim gilt. In the earlier thirties, this was a curiosity - something out of a dimming past.

The one thing (but in a child's way, not an adult's way, be it remembered) which did bring me right up against the war - since my own father, after repeated examinations, was always turned down on account of hammer toes (an injury at work), and varicose veins - was the history of my father's youngest brother but one, my favourite uncle. He volunteered in August 1914, was enlisted in the Royal Field Artillery, had nearly four years in France, and was killed in action in 1918, aged twenty-seven. I had liked him earlier: in uniform as I saw him on leave I admired him: what clinched the matter was that he was my only relative who, child though I was, wrote me long letters, about nothing in particular, but addressed exclusively to me, which established a peculiarly personal



relationship. These letters from the front, on thin, pink paper, sometimes four or five sheets of it - ill written and ill spelt, for he was no scholar, even by the standards of those days, but what was that to me? - were like nothing else in my life. He spoke of the war as one might speak of the weather, and devoted the bulk of his space to my childish affairs and games: my toy soldiers (for in my private games I was war-minded to this extent), and my pet rabbit, loomed far larger than the field-grey guns, the sweat and filth, the wheel-ruts, mud, the shattered houses, trees and men, which at times were a part of his daily business. His life at the front was represented for me only by a soldier's button and an R.F.A. badge. A simple goodness shone through what he wrote, and from his face and in his handclasp when we met. It goes without saying that his death affected me deeply. I carried his last letter ("Hoping this finds you, as it leaves me, in the pink...") until it wore thin and tattered at the folds; and afterwards kept it for years in an envelope marked: "The last letter of Thomas Henry Mortimer (killed in action, 1918) to his nephew, J. K. Mortimer" - until at length I destroyed it, in I know not what whim of anti-sentimentalism. I also went with my parents to visit his 'young lady,' and was old enough by that time to be romantically impressed by this near-at-hand tragedy of bereavement. She did not weep, which I, not seeing that our meeting was for her no actual impact, found odd; but did not marry anyone else for many years, and then it was a man much older than herself. Her lover's marriage-savings and

effects reverted to a father grown grasping in his early sixties; and the man himself had a grave somewhere in France.

It was the loss of one so peculiarly my friend which added a personal note to the loathing of war which gradually filled me, and which made me in my teens declare myself a pacifist and potential conscientious objector, "if there should be another war" - an attitude which the movement of events in my twenties, with myself at first vaguely "on the left" in politics, compelled me to abandon, as it became more and more obvious that to fight, though with few if any illusions of glory, was better than to lose, for oneself and for the new generation, all that made life fine and outstanding.

My nearest to a completely personal contact with the war of 1914-18 was one night when a zeppelin passed over our town and dropped bombs not far away. My parents left me soundly asleep in bed, and went out themselves to see the monster, caught in searchlights "like a big, silver cigar." Their account of this event so vividly impressed my imagination that for many years I firmly believed I had myself witnessed the visitation - as, in these days of cinemas, one may be uncertain whether or not one has actually seen a giraffe or a crocodile - until in conversation it came out that my belief had no foundation in fact.

It is a commonplace by now that this present war of 1939 and onwards is coming home much more nearly to

everyone here, children included. A minority of those of English birth who are now children have had their lives permanently altered by migration to one of the Dominions, or to the United States: a much larger minority are spending, it may be, some years of their early lives, still in their own country, yet in an environment quite different from that which would otherwise have been theirs: many have experienced, and many have survived and in some degree remember, the alarms and terrors of total war. We have as a neighbourly document of our age such a record as that of Dirk van der Heide. But commonplace though it may be, I do not think the fact is yet completely and essentially realised. Even last time, most of those whose personalities were then fully developed, and who are now still alive, were either fighters, or the wives, sweethearts or brothers of fighters; and these associations are carried forward into the present. The home events of this war, dire and violent as they have sometimes been, are perhaps exaggerated in scale in people's minds (we say we are 'all in the front line' - yet make a contrast, for most of us up to now a marked one, with any front where land forces also are closely engaged); but the quietness of our home front in the last war is perhaps compensatingly minimised. The emotional impact of a more horrible violence over a greater part of the world's surface is slower than physical event in taking its deepest effect. Yet slight, in a sense, by comparison, as was the impact of 1914-18 on my own young life, it none the less had a fundamental effect upon me. Can the effect upon those born in the



thirties be fundamental for them, one wonders, in strict proportion to their greater nearness to the struggle - or will some compensating mechanism, which we cannot visualise, intervene? It is arguable that the further from the struggle, the less of physical contact with it one has, the greater, not the less, is the liability to nervous tension. In one of William Saroyan's early stories (and there is only two years between us) he tells how a mob of rather older boys, with himself (or his persona at least, the 'I' of the story) in shamed but fascinated attendance, assaulted and beat up an inoffensive German lad. This was around 1917, away out to the west, in California. It reads rather like a description of the baiting of a young Jew by young Nazis. This was the sequel to long discussions (even "all the three-year-olds," he says, "wanted to chop off the Kaiser's head") on the theme of Kaiser-punishment and Kaiser-torture, in the crudest vein of so-called retributive justice - though Saroyan himself, even then, was keenly aware of the essential beastliness of all this. I can recall nothing at all like it: we should perhaps have booed him in the cinema if we had seen him, even though the Kaiser was not for us a figure whose name had blared from headlines through a preparatory six years, whose voice had dissonantly vibrated loud-speakers in our own homes, whose speaking image we had seen on the screen; but the most I can recall is the derisive verse in "Inky-pinky-parly-voo," which announces that "The Kaiser's got the Spanish flu, And

Little Willie's got it too..." So children in general, to-day, react to Hitler with derision rather than with hatred.

They seem here, deep down, as placid as we were - interested but only partly-comprehending spectators of a drama in which they can as yet play no resounding or spectacular rôle, but which will condition the future in ways, some of which we cannot yet foresee.

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June 1939.  
August 1941.

## Exhibition Reviews

Michael Casson Pots  
Craftsmen Potters Shop, Marshall Street, London W.1.  
November 1973

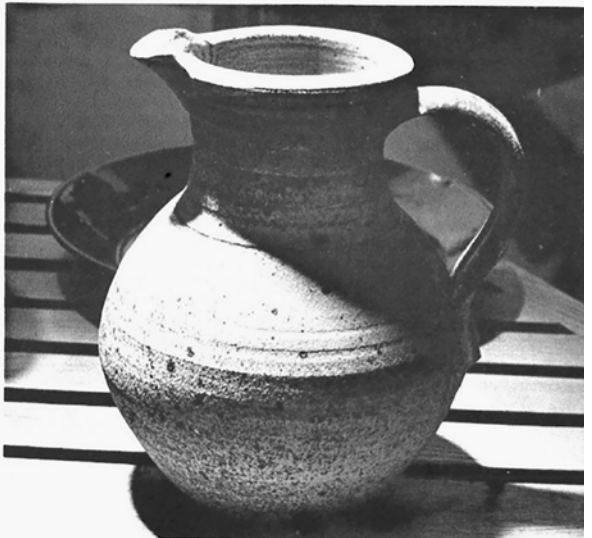
Michael Casson's exhibition awaited since 1964 was originally planned on a truly epic scale but when this became impracticable it was replanned in two parts. Last year at the Crafts Centre we saw the first part which, with a section of individual pieces, mainly displayed his domestic wares in great variety. A year later we have now had the sequel, designed to be mainly of individual pieces—made during the relatively short period for which he has again been a full-time potter. Paradoxically this included a lesser number of basic forms than previously, with concentration on bowls, dishes, storejars and perhaps pre-eminently jugs—but with each form explored intensively. Glazes were much as before plus at least one new one (shino, from a Japanese source, appearing as a creamy feldspar with a reddish-brown irradiance from underlying iron): in decoration the innovation was a return with more discipline to a technique previously explored in a more facile way eight or nine years ago, that of added clay.

The bowls, of all sizes and with great variety of rim but mostly of deep and generous form, are decorated externally in two main ways, by poured or brushed dry ash and slip glazes enlivened by wiping and scratching, or in relief by applied clay straps or swags, the added clay often unified with the background by incising which cuts into both clays. Several large and extra-deep bowls form containers for large foliage displays. The plates and dishes are either landscaped with glaze in similar ways (sometimes using wax resist) or are relief-decorated by throwing a disc, cutting it off the wheel and inverting it, applying relief landscaping in rolled and pressed added clay, and then coiling-and-throwing on to it a rim and a foot. Lidded jars (in all sizes down from immense) are of four or five main kinds: tall stew-jar shapes widening from a small foot, broad-based jars tapering to a shoulder and then narrowing further, squared and square-lidded jars (all these with side handles and knobbed lids)—then squared ones with square domed covers which have strap handles, and finally beaten or partly-squared ones, some relatively broad and squat, others relatively tall and slender, which have circular, knobbed lids showing the body at the rim. I was fascinated by three slender jars together, one in shino, one in an iron glaze with wax resist decoration, and the third magnesium glazed over iron brushwork, the lid of each of which had a knob of different shape and prominence exactly suiting the particular pot: as with his placing of brushwork this now seems instinctive rather than calculated. From among the splendid bold-lipped jugs, the broad-based form which last year seemed to be becoming classical was absent (the shape surviving only among the storejars); instead there was a further development of the tall, slender shape (each jug a subtle and complex variation on the cylinder form with the slightest of shoulders) glazed in tenmoku over red slip, and either vigorously combed on the upper part or paper-resist

From the exhibitions, *BELOW* Peter Lane—Hill, reduced stoneware 12½" long. *RIGHT* Helen Wilmer—Pots, reduced stoneware

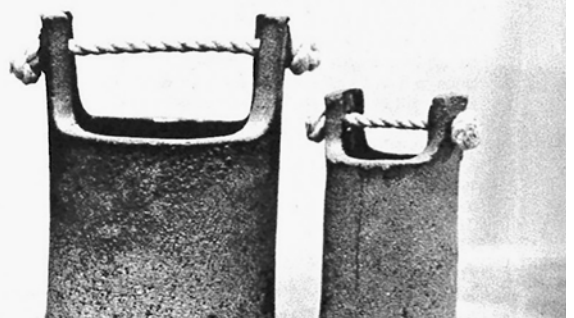


Michael Casson, *ABOVE*, Bowl, porcelain 4" high, *BELOW* Jug, stoneware, dry Ash glaze 9" high.



decorated with chequer-board, a diamond pattern or wavy horizontal shapes: a new handle also appeared, with a round concave seal at the base. But the most frequent form (in many sizes) was a round-bellied one surmounted by a cylinder neck and accented rim. Occasionally landscaped, this handsome and cheerful shape seemed at its best in the plainness of ash glaze over iron. Three very large, splendidly-thrown versions had been made, one relatively slender-necked, the others (one ash, one tenmoku) broader, with supplementary handles low in front. Even so they seemed for a giant's use if anyone's, but would nobly decorate a large room.

W A Ismay





## Off Centre Criticism

*Sir*, J.D.H. Catleugh's calculatedly provocative remarks under the heading "Off Centre" in C.R. 31 were clearly addressed to potters and one was glad to see that in the following issue, those provoked were headed by Michael Cardew. Garth R. Clark's comments in the same series in C.R. 32 seem more widely-addressed: I for one was interested in his view that craftsmen potters are in need of searching criticism, and that in the earlier decades of the century they received it. My impression had been that in earlier years pottery exhibitions were either not noticed at all, or were noticed as an added chore by critics more used to reviewing painting and sculpture. This is a matter difficult to check up on, since even in these days of micro-film the locating of items in old newspapers is no easy task, whilst even monthly magazines such as *Studio* or *Apollo* are not very generally available in long runs or bound volumes. Some of the most pertinent comment seems to have come from potters: I have notes however of worthwhile articles by J.P. Hodin, Ernest Marsh, David Lewis, A.C. Sewter, John Gould Fletcher, Patrick Heron and George Wingfield Digby among others, and wonder which of these names Mr. Clark would accept, and what other names or references he has on record from his own studies.

As one of a number of enthusiasts who currently write reviews for a specialised readership I can only speak for myself: I do not claim to be a critic, and understand by a review an account of things seen with special emphasis on anything pleasurable. If I can relate the exhibition to what else I know of the potter I try to do so: if a potter's work fails to give pleasure I usually say so but not necessarily in print: where it is possible to suggest tentatively that one line of work seems more fruitful than another I try to do this. But root and branch criticism I think should come from an experienced potter: even so, this could be negative if the critic is in fact wholly out of sympathy with everything the potter criticised is trying to do: I believe that fortunately we have potters with a sufficient breadth of outlook to be able to give advice to the less experienced, perhaps painful to the recipient at the time, which is so given as ultimately to be salutary and unresented. Total lack of appreciation on the other hand can lead to potters who might possibly have done good work simply giving up (though some would say no loss, if the dedication is insufficient).

I don't see it as any kind of potter's chauvinism if a potter (of whatever standing) can take pleasure in having his or her work looked at attentively and with some evident degree of appreciation by one of the enthusiastic amateurs who have seen, handled and

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used a great many pots and have a special feeling for pottery — similarly a novelist might not take it amiss to have his novel read and commented on by a reader who had read right through a great many novels of all kinds (including those he was reviewing) and who had a special interest in or knowledge of the fictional field. It might be splendid (or could be traumatic) to have the pots looked at by a super-critic capable of relating them to the whole of art, or the novel read by a super-critic capable of relating it to the whole of literature — but on a more mundane and modest level there is perhaps some usefulness in having someone report what pleasures an exhibition held, whether the novel was a good read, and in either case of what kind.

I realise I have left quite untouched some topics of Mr. Clark's remarks on which I hope others will comment.

W.A. ISMAY, Wakefield, Yorkshire.

# Collecting Studio Pottery by W.A. Ismay

Collecting studio pottery has become an established part of the 'ceramic scene', with a blossoming of private collectors and pots being sold at the great auction houses. In this new series we will present articles on different aspects of collecting. In this first one, W.A. Ismay describes how he first came to collect pots and how his collection continues to grow over the years.

When I originally sat down to write on this theme of "collecting", I began by setting out a lengthy general paragraph on "why people collect". With the deadline for this contribution to a series a few days away, I have just torn this up to shorten it, because really it is perfectly obvious that "collecting" springs from a kind of jackdaw impulse in human nature. We all collect as children and adolescents (often then simply following fashion): in later life most people find other outlets for their energies — starting a family, doing a job, hopefully in other ways being actively creative. They have too many other interests for any hobby collection they may make to be other than on a small scale: they have to live in a way as little cluttered by material objects as possible (particularly as each member of the family needs personal possessions), and it is a more human and perhaps a more spiritual way to live. Certainly obsessive collectors are likely to have many "attachments" to material objects, although if they collect works of art they can maintain with some reason that the qualities of the objects of their interest are not merely material ones. And it is this form of collection (not of objects which were manufactured in multiple, but of paintings, sculpture or handmade pots, each of which is unique) that is the most adventurous — seeking to make one's own harmony among selected objects which can be very diverse. It is perhaps more the unmarried, the married but childless, or those whose family has grown up a little so that they have more time and space to themselves, who are likely to revive (later on) the accumulative instinct and, particularly if their tastes are for arranging and studying objects, to become collectors in the more specialised sense. Such a collection can become more than self-indulgence if in addition to pleasing the collector, it can also become of use and pleasure to practitioners or students of whatever art or craft is involved.

Why for my own part I chose ceramics is ultimately a mystery. In earlier life I had little personal contact with what I now mean by pots — a sprinkling of kitchen wares were different (and I still have them), but what we used on the table were mass-produced items, and the prescriptively more highly-regarded decorative wares in the house were almost uniformly dreadful. It is now obvious that pots enter into all our lives more frequently and intimately than any other form of art or craft, that the most "humble" pots which are well made can have great quality and be perennially fascinating to look at and handle, and that anyone who fails to eat and drink from vessels of individual character and have these always around is missing one of the great pleasures of life: anyone who has this knowledge given in childhood is fortunate. I think I must have had a predisposition towards the appreciation of pottery proper and some instinctive feeling for it, since as a schoolboy, seeking anniversary presents for my mother, I bought flower containers which I still like and which I conjecture are quite distinct from what must have been the general pottery supply available locally in industrial Yorkshire in the nineteen-twenties. I certainly picked up a great deal during the war, in India, by watching village potters at work, and by buying and using as water-coolers a succession of

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beautifully-thrown unglazed earthenware bottles, majestically-shaped and narrow-necked; and by seeing (particularly at Singapore) the kind of inexpensive contemporary vessels which Chinese people used daily and of which I bought examples. In fact perhaps the real mystery and certainly a source of regret is that it was not until I was forty-five years of age that ceramics began to become of conscious and absorbing interest to me — and I gradually discovered that my social life recently diminished by several deaths could also pleausurably re-expand by knowing personally all or most of the makers of the pots I began to collect, and by contriving to make the acquaintance also of other non-makers who shared my tastes.

The questions I am most usually asked about collecting pots are, what effectively made you start? when did you start? what is the principle on which you collect? where do you look for pots? and how far have you got now? These questions I will try to answer.

What made me start, around 1955 or a little earlier, was (a) meeting my first individual potter in England: this was Barbara Cass (now at Stratford-upon-Avon), at whose York workshop in the Shambles I became a regular visitor; and (b) reading several seminal post-war books (a natural approach, since I was a librarian) published from the late forties to the middle nineteen-fifties — Ronald G. Cooper's "The Modern Potter" (1947), George Wingfield Digby's "The Work of the Modern Potter in England" (1952) and (decisively) Muriel Rose's "Artist Potters in England" (1955). I soon began in a modest way to buy work also by a handful of other potters then in Yorkshire — Joan Hotchin (a pupil of David Leach at Loughborough and who had worked with John Shelly at Bath); Irwin Hoyland and Ronald Cooper's younger brother Francis ("Frank"), both teaching at Sheffield; Michael Skipwith, then fairly recently a student at Leeds; and Frank and Janet Hamer (whom I did not then meet, although the others I did encounter quite early). My original idea was to form a small collection of pots made in Yorkshire (although Isaac Button and George Curtis were still for a while beyond my ken). Then at my first visit to the Crafts Centre, then in Hay Hill, (1956) I bought pots by Katharine Pleydell-Bouverie and David Leach, and afterwards ceased to impose territorial boundaries — soon afterwards importing a few pots from Denmark and Bornholm.

The main and simple principle on which I collect is to like the pot I am acquiring (for reasons based on the handling of thousands of pots previously) and to be able (sometimes only by stretching resources) to afford it: this automatically rules out anything above a certain price-level, but working to a limited budget without ever having been affluent, and achieving any minor extravagance by simply going without other things, is not without its rewards as well as its limitations: collecting should not be too easy. When I abandoned the territorial restriction to Yorkshire however, it did not occur to me to impose on myself any other kind of limitation in lieu, and I feel that in the result I have brought together without conscious pre-intention a blend of items from bonfire pots to porcelain which does not seem at all incongruous: if the work pleases me, I am prepared to be interested in pots made and fired by any means.

Eric Milner-White, the Dean of York, (1884–1963), the early collector of Staite Murray, Leach, Hamada, T.S. Haile and a few others, did not limit himself territorially, but did limit himself from the beginning to stoneware: hence (since during the main period of the Dean's collecting, Michael Cardew was a slipware potter) the Dean did not have any Cardew until his late flurry of renewed collecting

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*Barbara Cass – stoneware bowl*



*Katharine Pleydell-Bouverie – stoneware dish*



*John Ward – stoneware bowls*



*Walter Keeler – saltglazed dish and jug*



*Harry and May Davis – stoneware*

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*Denise K. Wren – stoneware pots*



*Bernard Forrester – porcelain beaker with lustre*



*Mo Jupp – stoneware figure*



*Shoji Hamada – saltglazed jar*



*Geoffrey Whiting – stoneware store jar*



*Takeshi Yasuda – stoneware bottle*



ABOVE Lucie Rie – stoneware jar h.7” BELOW Hans Coper – stoneware pot h.12½”



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activity in the early nineteen-sixties, when stoneware had been coming from Africa and had been intermittently made at Wenford Bridge for some time. I do not feel the museum curator's obligation to represent, so far as they can within their budget, everything which made its mark at a particular period, whether they like it themselves or not. Clay however is one of the most versatile of materials in its uses, and my tastes as indicated are fairly catholic – this means that a new acquisition may seem far removed from its immediate predecessor if they are juxtaposed too harshly. However, there will be something somewhere in the collection to which it can relate, and so be related by degrees to the whole.

I have several times expressed a feeling that there would be something wrong with a new acquisition if, fairly soon, everything else did not as it were move round a little to make room for the newcomer. A collection should remain alive, and would ossify from the point of view of the person forming it, if it were not caused to move around fairly regularly in this way. Very occasionally it appears eventually that there has been an earlier misjudgement, but if so I keep the pot as salutary and informative, since it suggests to me that both the potter concerned and my own taste have since moved on: to this limited extent I participate in the “museum” principle of recording what happened, mentioned earlier. I have if anything a prejudice in favour of a pot which pleases me and which is also useful (or rather, which in part pleases me for this reason) – but I am prepared to be interested in anything which seems to me a lively use of clay, although the result may be only notionally useful, or purely sculptural. This makes the collection contain much more variety than it is possible to suggest in only a few pictures. And it has been a pleasure to me that when Muriel Rose was asked by her publisher in the late nineteen-sixties to revise her book (the second edition appeared in 1970), I was one of the people whom she visited, and that pots I had chosen were then illustrated (including one by Denise K. Wren, a potter previously omitted from the survey which the volume made); that pots of my choice were also illustrated in other books and in a slide series, and appeared in various exhibitions; and that I have had the opportunity to write reviews and other pieces which I hope have helped to “spread the gospel” which I am still in the slow process of learning.

I look for pots anywhere I can find them and am able to travel. At exhibitions there is a good chance of seeing pots which the potters believe to be among their better work, but I also scan the stocks of craft shops and visit potters' own showrooms and workshops when I can. In my early days the galleries most important to me were Primavera (where I saw work by a great many potters), the Berkeley Galleries (Cardew, the Wrens, Rie, Coper), the original Crafts Centre, for Leach and Hamada (twice), among others, and the Craftsmen Potters Shop from its beginnings in Lowndes Court for the growing membership of the Craftsmen Potters Association.

How far have I got now? The main collection of work by known twentieth-century potters is moving through its twenty-first hundred and in some degree “represents”, at the current count, 354 potters. (If one includes the much smaller supporting collection of pots from makers unknown by name, the 2,100 mark is already passed.) This smaller collection ranges rather rapidly from a tiny Attic wine-cup (6th century B.C.) to a Mexican modelled group of father and small son twelve centuries later, then to a small Sung pot of about 1100, two bellarmines and a pair of Dutch tiles, and via unidentified country pottery items formerly in the possession of my grandparents and a few of our old cooking and storage pots, to a Zambian cooking pot imported

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by Ian Auld, a pottery horse from modern Peru, and "standard wares" from present-day potteries, the actual makers of which cannot be named. In the main collection, the earliest potter is W.B. Dalton (1868–1965), whilst the most recent have birth-dates close to a century later: the earliest dated pot (by Charles Vyse) is of 1931, but this is an isolated item – most are from the nineteen-fifties onwards. The potters who, it appears, most often tempted me to acquire their work are, in alphabetical order, Richard Batterham, Michael Cardew, Barbara Cass, Michael Casson, Harry and May Davis (basic tableware), Denise K. Wren and Rosemary D. Wren, closely followed (again in alphabetical order) by Svend Bayer, Graham Burr, Isaac Button, Joanna Constantinidis, Waistel Cooper, Hans Coper, Peter Dick, Raymond Finch, Gwyn Hanssen, Joan Hotchin, David Lloyd Jones, Walter Keeler, Bernard Leach, David Leach, Janet Leach, Mal Magson, Jim Malone, William Marshall, Eric James Mellon, Colin Pearson, Lucie Rie, Mary Rogers, Peter Starkey and Geoffrey Whiting. (Here appears in part the reason for some of the choices within the limited range of illustrations: I have also tried to show pots not illustrated elsewhere.) There follow more than a further score of names with entries still in double figures – then a further sequence with nine pots each or fewer, dwindling down to a list of close on a hundred potters who (so far) are each represented by a single pot. In the later stages there are many instances where a relatively small representation arises rather from

lack of opportunity than from any other reason – cases in point are W. Staite Murray (who ceased work as a potter before the war, later lived overseas, and from his residue only afforded later collectors a single exhibition), and Shoji Hamada who only had two later English exhibitions (one of them very small, consisting only of the pots his son Atsuya was able to bring with him): the only potter whose non-inclusion I especially regret however is T.S. Haile – the fatal road-accident which sadly ended his career in his forties took place seven years before I began to collect.

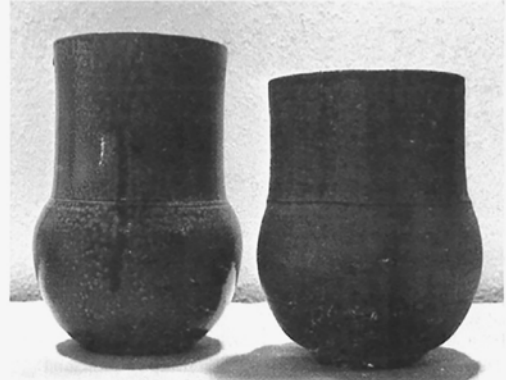
A "short list" of favourite pots is impossible – it would be rather a long one. One's favourites are not necessarily showy or spectacular but may be modest – I think of my breakfast coffee duo consisting of a small, globular teapot with a stem handle by Richard Batterham (which makes excellent coffee and just the right amount) and a cylinder-mug (ashglazed and salted) with comfortable ring-handle by Denise Wren. Mugs need not be "boring" (quotation) – I also have favourite ones by Michelle Doherty, Ruth Franklin, Ladi Kwali and John Leach – and other favourite drinking-vessels (tea bowls) by Mike Dodd, Jim Malone, William Marshall, Geoffrey Whiting and Takeshi Yasuda. And the sight of a Y reminds me that the alphabetical roster begins with Adrian Abberley and ends (the only missing letter is X) with two names beginning with Z – Douglas Zadek and Elsa Zerkowitz.

## Michael Casson

### New Pots Casson Gallery

73 Marylebone High Street  
London W1 May

*Wood fired stoneware and porcelain pots*





## English Potters in Germany

An 'English Potters Seminar' (the fourth of a successful annual series organised by Marianne Heller) took place at Sandhausen near Heidelberg (West Germany) in June. Frau Heller is an amateur potter who read Bernard Leach, then met English potters during visits here, admired and bought English handmade tableware for her own use, and then, wishing to do more, in 1978 started a gallery for English pottery in her home, and from 1982 onwards has promoted these seminars (for the first and second of which, see CR 77 35, CR 84.14). Last year the demonstrators were Mick and Sheila Casson, Wally Keeler and Frank Smith: this year we had David Leach (making a return visit), John Maltby, and for the first time a German potter, Horst Kirstan from Kandern (Schwarzwald). The seminar was preceded and accompanied by a well-mounted exhibition of work by some twenty representative English potters (with 'guest' Horst Kirstan) in the Old Synagogue, an impressive building in the centre of the town. The seminar itself, attended by around 300 potters and enthusiasts, was in the nearby Festhalle, a modern building with a large, well-lit room in which a working arena was created within banks of raised seating and flocks of chairs – and which also, in the next room, has an effective cafeteria-restaurant.

Each of the demonstrators began with a short slide-talk about his own characteristic work and ideas as a potter – then at later intervals, David Leach showed the Fournier/Anderson films of himself and Isaac Button (much appreciated), Horst Kerstan (who works with a wood-fired climbing kiln) showed a long series of slides from his visits to Japan (including a visit to Hamada, and many tea-ceremony and Bizen-type vessels) and John Maltby slides of objects (not all ceramic) from his collection which illustrated his attitudes to making. In the arena, David worked in porcelain, making among others a fluted bowl and teapot, a bowl with a sideways-turned, eight-pointed, combed rim, and a tall bottle; Horst

and John in stoneware, the former making bowls and a long series of bottle-vases, the latter bowls, a slab dish, boxes and ovalled cylinders, and showing among others his decorative techniques with cut paper and finger-applied layers of (white or pigmented) ball clay plus molochite. In the many discussions (which often had to be interpreted) the most excitement (a nice change from functional versus non-functional) was generated by general ideas on a pottery aesthetic, John deliberately expressing the extreme view that what the materials and the kiln wanted to do should often be accepted, others sponsoring the totally opposed view that everything must at all times be under the potter's control. (It appears that what potters admire is not always what in practice they do: Horst yields to none in his evident admiration for the more vigorous wares in the Japanese tradition, but although his own shapes are influenced by Bizen wares and the subtle asymmetries of fruit-forms, his ideas on "finish" are more German.)

The terminal proceedings included a raffle for local charities of the bulk of the unfired pots – a note for future historians of a possible source for some familiar pot-forms in perhaps unfamiliar glazes.

W.A. Ismay

*John Maltby demonstrating*



## Books

**William Staite Murray** by Malcolm Haslam  
Crafts Council/Cleveland County Museum Service £8.95  
paperback.

William Staite Murray (1881–1962) is a potter of high reputation whose peculiar fate it was (after a three-year break in his potting time for war service during the first war) to be stranded overseas by the second war, when approaching 58, for so long that in the event he made no more pots: he died of cancer at 80, predeceased by the two elder (Heber Mathews and Sam Haile) of his best-known pupils. (The contrasting fortune of his contemporary Bernard Leach – despite the eventual affliction of blindness – was to have thirty and more additional years of creativity and influence, and to be survived by active and talented descendants and by many of the good potters who were his one-time pupils.) In noting this variety of fortune one does not at all mean to decry BL's achievements, but merely to suggest that being out of the news is a reason why WSM's centenary had already gone by, before he received the accolade of a separate publication about him, and of a retrospective exhibition, shown first at the Cleveland Gallery in Middlesbrough, and more recently at the Victoria and Albert Museum.

Of two candidates for the honour of presenting this compilation, it is art-historian Malcolm Haslam (sponsored as above) to whom we are indebted also for the selection of the exhibition, to which the book serves additionally as catalogue. (The other, Reggie Hyne, architect, part-time potter and collector, contributes information and photographs to the book and the loan of pots to the exhibition, but reasonably reserved the right to present his own researches in a talk at Aldeburgh last autumn and in an article in CR. 92) Haslam's small book brings between two covers for the first time an amount of detail about WSM's life and career which is remarkable for a volume of less than 100 pages including the illustrations (for which latter in the catalogue sections a policy has been followed of individual museum-type record photographs – in the one exception, the tall pot "Kwan Yin" (plate 30) has become ghostlike: in the other parts of the book, one, and that an early, exhibition photograph and two workshop photographs are featured). The book gives us access to the appreciative comments on WSM's exhibitions by contemporary critics, and suggests that Muriel Rose's verdict on his work may be insufficiently generous. One could wish that the budget for producing the volume and researching for the exhibition had been generous enough to allow more space for specific comment and criticism, and for an even wider search. One has heard of (e.g., from accounts of the now-dispersed Cyprian-Williams collection) – or remembers from the 1958 Leicester Galleries exhibition – a number of fine pots, the location of which now seems unknown: from 1958, besides smaller pieces, one recalls two very tall pots ("Bodhisattva" and "Standing Buddha"), portrayed in Pottery Quarterly 20, Plate 2b) and the tremendous "Ra" (dating back to 1931). So one hopes that this book, useful though it is, will not be the last word on WSM, as one feels that (except perhaps when Henry Hammond is writing about him) one has not yet come, imaginatively, at all fully face-to-face with the man who made these, whom Hammond found such an inspiring teacher, whose twenty-year-old work brought to light in 1958 so excited potters and others who had not previously viewed an exhibition of his, and whom Michael Cardew reported as remarking (apropos of industrial pottery) that "one can't make love by proxy". Anyone holding workshop or exhibition photographs, or aware of the present location of important pots

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*William Staite Murray – bottle, thrown, 1927. 140 mm high. Illustrated in 'William Staite Murray' published jointly by the Crafts Council and the Cleveland Gallery*

not in this catalogue, would greatly help students by reporting these (I would suggest) to the Crafts Study Centre, Holburne Museum, Bath.

W.A. Ismay

**Lost Innocence, Folk Craft Potters of Onta, Japan** by Brian Moeran  
University of California Press £27.50

Readers of *Ceramic Review* will be familiar with Dr. Moeran's experiences of the Folk Craft movement in Japan through 'Yanagi, Morris and Popular Art' CR 66 and 'Onta and an Aesthetic Standard' CR 77. Two years spent in the small pottery community of Sarayama (Onta) in the southern island of Kyushu, enabled Dr. Moeran to observe and study the interdependence of pottery and farming in the way of life of a small rural hamlet unchanged for centuries until the Folk Craft boom following the Second World War. Dr. Soyetsu Yanagi, friend of Bernard Leach and Shoji Hamada, praised Onta potters for remaining true to the ideals of the Mingei (Folk Craft) movement i.e. being close to nature, using locally available materials, spurning mechanical aids etc. He saw them making pots as a way of life rather than as a way of making money. Onta's reputation was further enhanced by Bernard Leach's visit in 1954.

Dr. Moeran's interest is that of an anthropologist who also has a real feeling for pottery. In 'Lost Innocence' he provides a picture of the community as it once was: of necessity co-operative, interdependent and its members, therefore, comparatively equal in their share of natural resources and the fruit of their labours. He records its history and the changes that have taken place since the folk craft boom, showing how the interest generated by the Mingei movement has given the potters a hitherto undreamt of prosperity. But in its turn this prosperity has caused the

Bernard Leach was born one hundred years ago. Ceramic Review celebrates the event with a special 12 page supplement which pays tribute to his unique contribution to the world of studio ceramics. As Lucie Rie has said "without Bernard Leach we would not be here today". A special issue of stamps promoting Studio Pottery has marked the occasion and the choice by the Post Office of a pot by Bernard Leach for the 1st Class mail's 18p basic letter rate can be seen as recognition of his outstanding contribution to the world of ceramics. To further celebrate the man, his life and his work the Craftmen Potters Shop is holding a special exhibition 'The Leach Tradition – A Creative Force': Ceramic Review has invited a number of potters represented in the show to write of his influence on them and their work.

Bill Ismay provides an introduction, setting Bernard Leach among British Studio Potters whilst Oliver Watson writes about the special exhibition being held at the Victoria and Albert Museum and considers the importance of Leach's seminal chapter in 'A Potter's Book' <sup>4</sup> Towards a Standard.

An underlying theme of these contributions is both the importance of the man, his work and ideas and the difficulty even now, eight years after his death, of adequately assessing and acknowledging his greatness.

The final chapter of 'A Potter's Book' is called 'The Potter's Outlook'. First published in 1940 it is still relevant today. We quote the last sentence.

*"In a machine age, artist-craftsmen, working primarily with their hands, represent a natural reaction valid as individual expression, and they should be the source of creative design for mass-production whether they work in conjunction with industry or not. The machine has split the human personality. It has brought humanity within sight of safety and leisure for the first time in history, but at this moment fear of a universal disaster is upon us all, and the only leisure is of the unemployed, and of the rich and idle, because we have not learned how to use art, science, leisure or real wealth. Instead, we increase the tempo of industrial slavery, and, refusing to distribute money equal in value to saleable goods and madly pursuing escapist pleasure, we allow under-consumption to be described as over-production, and as a consequence the sheer technique of living has overwhelmed life itself. Under such conditions of national life artists and craftsmen are obliged to live and work parasitically or precariously because they have no recognized function. Evidence admitted by observers on all hands points to the end of an age. Whether we shall emerge into a time of plenty and a unification of cultural values after violence, or by slower stages of decay and recrudescence, it is not for me to say. Not improbably those who seek the meaning and beauty of life through art may suffer an eclipse, but meanwhile let us 'bring out weight and measure in a year of dearth,' as William Blake urged amidst the blindness and apathy of early industrialism."*

## Bernard Leach Among the British Studio Potters by W A Ismay

"Studio Potter" is Bernard Leach's own term – although many have fought shy of it – Muriel Rose preferred artist-potter, Michael Cardew would never agree he was an artist and thought he was a craftsman, whilst there were others who thought of "workshop" rather than "studio". However, the fourth supplementary volume (1986) to the Oxford English Dictionary has credited the first or definitive use of the term to BL in 1940, and defines "studio potter" as "a potter (freq. one of a small group) who works in a studio producing hand-thrown pottery, hence studio pottery". The entry is worth consulting for the supporting quotations which it adds. Later (in the pamphlet, "The Leach Pottery 1920-1946") BL wrote: "... at St Ives, at the outset, we based our economics on the studio and not on the country workshop or the factory. Hamada and I regarded ourselves as being on the same basis as Murray in London, Decoeur in Paris and Tomimoto in Japan".

Whether this reference to William Staite Murray was partly hindsight or whether BL already thought this in the 1920s is not certain, but it appears now that the whole edifice of twentieth-century British pottery is primarily founded on the work of these two men, and there have been interplays too complex for easy indication. Like potters for many centuries they were both impressed by the qualities of oriental pots, particularly now that exciting examples from earlier periods were coming to light from archaeological sources. And one reason for WSM's initial contact with BL and Hamada, besides the discussion of kilns, was for him to learn the use of the oriental brush. It was later WSM's ironic fate to be in Rhodesia at the outbreak of war in 1939, never to make any more pots, and only to return to England once and briefly (to arrange the famous "late" exhibition of 1958) before his death in 1962. Personal relationships between BL and WSM were to

break down after the latter's 1926 appointment at the RCA (for which BL was to a degree a candidate). BL later wrote ruefully in his memoirs, "Eventually the friendship broke up – we were doomed to become rivals". From the 1920s onwards, the work of WSM, BL and Hamada was being commended by the art critic of the Times, and (despite his attachment to BL and Hamada) Michael Cardew was a deep admirer of WSM's pots (as he was later of those of Sam Haile). In 1948, BL in a lecture was to say of WSM: "More than anyone else he is responsible for raising the standard of artistry in pots, both directly by the creative character of his best work, and indirectly by teaching younger potters". Speaking of Sung stoneware he thought that "it would be a mistake to conclude that the artist potter today is only adding a chapter to the story of Chinese influence on European ceramics. Many other stimuli are affecting us simultaneously. We craftsmen have, for the first time, the whole world and all history to draw upon". He then praised Michael Cardew's slipware at Winchcombe as "recreative and essentially English".

BL's primary teachings were that pots should be made from living, freshly-prepared clay (and perhaps one physical evidence of the persistence of his direct tradition is when one sees a potter, vigorously but in a relaxed way, preparing the clay in the manner taught at St Ives), and that the ways of making should have deep roots in all that had been discovered about clay and the forms which could be made from it by the best potters over centuries and millennia. He also believed that knowledge of clay and pot forms should be so deeply felt that creativity could at times take place unconsciously under the potter's hands. (He wrote as early as 1914, "The last stage of self consciousness is self unconsciousness".)

What we call destiny seems to have played a part in pottery affairs – it was following an intuition of the kind



which he felt should not at any cost be resisted that BL first went to Japan (not the least result of which was that he met Hamada), whilst Cardew later was to feel a similar compulsive intuition about a destiny in Africa. BL was particularly fortunate (as they in him) in his early pupils (who from this beginning with Michael Cardew, Katharine Pleydell-Bouverie and Norah Braden were to include both men and women) and in some of his later ones. In the case of his own sons, David and Michael, BL was particularly anxious that they should not be stifled by too close and continued a contact with him: each of them needed to establish his own pottery before being able to develop his particular potential to the full. (Later, John Leach's training was to include work both with his father David and with his grandfather, before founding Muchelney, and developing in his own way). Janet Leach (well advised by Hamada) is a major potter with her own terrain. Henry Hammond (WSM pupil) had close friendships with the earliest St Ives group and rightly claims Cardew as his later teacher. From Cardew were to spring Winchcombe (with Ray Finch), Wenford Bridge, Volta and Abuja; Harry and May Davis were to establish themselves at Crows; from Wenford Bridge came (among others) Svend Bayer; from association with Cardew and work with Michael Leach came Clive Bowen; via Abuja (and work with Ray Finch at Winchcombe) Peter Dick set up at Coxwold.

There has perhaps been some misunderstanding (based on the 1914 quotation above), on his admiration for the unselfconscious qualities of folk pottery, and on his sponsorship of the English version of "The Unknown Craftsman" (Yanagi's ideas rather than BL's) of the latter's attitude to the expression of personality in pots: he decidedly did think the pot should express its maker. Listen to him on Dorothy Kemp (in his memoirs): "She worked humbly but assiduously at repetitive designs. One day I came round and saw a board of twenty cream-jugs which, though standard ware, were also Kemp; the lesson was learnt and the character of the maker apparent." Some may think of this as condescension but I don't read it so – he was recognising she had found creativity. At the highest creative level, I heard Hamada, asked publicly why he did not sign his pots, say simply "I think a pot should be signed all over". This makes one think of Richard Batterham (once a Leach Pottery student and now in his early fifties widely known as an individual potter) whose vigorous work has a nobility which needs no

embellishments, and whose work modestly and unspokenly makes this claim.

The factor which helped to establish the uniqueness of BL was his ability by his writings to make himself more understood by those with whom he was already in some personal contact, and also to reach out beyond that to a wider circle. My first copy of *A Potter's Book* is a 1955 printing, and this was already the ninth impression of its second edition: the revised paperback of 1976 was the sixteenth printing and is still being reprinted. It is a statement of his beliefs, plus the first practical manual of its kind with a generous sharing of information. (The first edition must be a rare book now, as the copies probably eventually saw much use.) There is a widespread and well founded belief that it played a part in moving many younger people in the direction of making pottery their way of life. In the tributes to BL by a dozen potters after his death, Ray Finch, Michael Casson, Emmanuel Cooper and Gordon Baldwin (who said "I never met him though he was my first teacher") at once referred to it, and Michael Casson described the way in which (although not formally one's teacher) he "could criticize hard, even tough, but always ending on a gentle note" – he had the capacity to stimulate self-criticism. And there are good potters (not personally taught by BL) who have accepted, for themselves and their work, basic standards similar to those which he chose. Geoffrey Whiting of an earlier generation is one, Mike Dodd and Jim Malone of a later are others. They reach back to English and oriental sources in the way he did, but the pots they make are their own, and their warmth and originality come from the personalities of their makers. There are younger potters who show signs of working promisingly in the same way.

Into the realm of Lucie Rie and Hans Coper, BL also extends a hand. It was before the war (at Dartington) that LR first consulted him – they were friends, and he frequently visited Albion Mews, as later did Janet Leach. It was his friendship as well as the understanding and support of Hans Coper which helped Lucie Rie to develop with resolution her distinctive style. Both LR and HC deeply admired BL's pots. And it is not perhaps merely fanciful to envisage Hans Coper as (wittingly or not) following BL's prescription in his own way by sending down the roots for his own creativity deeply into the early Mediterranean world.

## Bernard Leach – Potter and Pioneer by Oliver Watson

To mark the 100th anniversary of Bernard Leach's birth, the Ceramics Department has put on display the whole of the Victoria and Albert Museum's collection of his work. These are now on show in Room 138 and they will remain there into 1988 (but check with the Chief Warder for possible gallery closures before setting out on a visit). A few of his most important pieces will remain in the 20th Century Gallery. Oliver Watson writes about the collection and the contribution of Bernard Leach to contemporary studio potters.

Bernard Leach's stature as a potter is enormous – his is the only really household name. He exerted a formidable and formative influence on the whole development of the studio pottery movement, world-wide as much as in the UK. However, he was not just a potter, but also a campaigner for a new social, spiritual and moral life that

he saw as necessary for modern society at large. His work as a potter is closely linked with articulate and forcibly expressed views on aesthetics, the nature of society, the spiritual and moral stance of the artist and craftworker, and the "true" values that should be sought in ceramics. This adds a complex and somewhat controversial dimension to his work and makes an appreciation of his significance all the more difficult. However, in the post-war period his message was taken up with enthusiasm by a generation shaken by that trauma, and the country-wide establishment of rural domestic potteries as a direct result of his own teaching example. That this potting scene is so strong today pays ample testimony to his influence and the attractiveness of his message.

It does not diminish Leach's position that his style of potting is not at present the most fashionable. The work of any artist undergoes evaluation and re-evaluation over the

# INTRODUCTION

No one who ever met Michael Cardew and savoured the qualities of his personality and his later life-style (and of the slipware pots he made at Winchcombe and the equally warm and vibrant and more durable stonewares from Africa and Wenford Bridge) is ever likely to forget him. For my own part I would say that of all the remarkable men and women whom I've met and who are no longer with us in the flesh, he is the one I miss the most. Hence I found enthralling this incomplete account of what he himself called his 'potter's progress'.

That it is incomplete is due I think to an optimism on Michael's part about his prospects of longevity, which was not unreasonable in view of his vigour at eighty. It was the sudden stroke which in a few days ended his life at eighty-one which has robbed us of what we would much have liked to have, his own retrospective view of Abuja and Wenford Bridge and the later travels. Yet in a curious way it is not inappropriate that what we do have is a kind of skeleton key to his enigma, written with an at times bleak and ferocious honesty about his motivations and his mistakes, glancing almost obliquely at what went right, and ending in mid-story with an interlude after what seems a disaster at Vumë. Yet this was an essential part of the 'progress' – nor should it be forgotten that there were triumphs too in these earlier days, and that a selection of his best work needs pots from Winchcombe and Vumë to be truly representative.

What people and particularly his fellow-potters, his family and his neighbours thought of him in later days was evident whenever any assembly of them came together to look at his pots or to hear him talk and see him demonstrate, as I saw for myself in several countries, and it is clear that the same happened further afield. So others have written and will write about those later days. We already have *Pioneer Pottery*, and film and video of him moving and talking, and many briefer writings as yet uncollected – yet nothing else perhaps so intimate and revealing as what we have here.

W. A. Ismay, Wakefield, August 1987

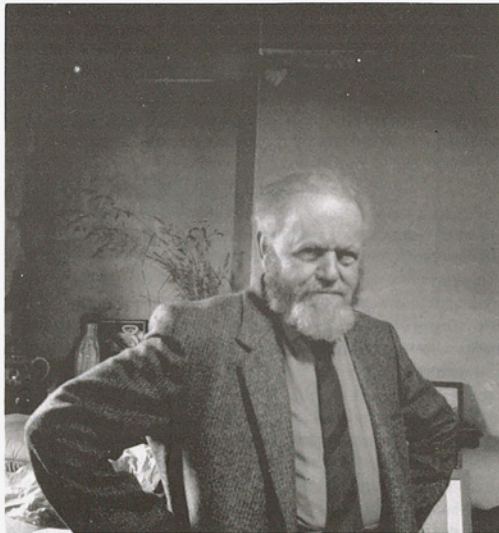


# Finding Your Way in Ceramic Review

W. A. Ismay has prepared indexes for *Ceramic Review* which are comprehensive and cross-referenced. He has recently been engaged in bringing up to date a procedure originally begun some years ago, that of processing his own set of *Ceramic Review* issues into a fully accessible state. He reports his findings and makes some comments.

I modestly believe *Ceramic Review* is a little unusual, having a fuller index than the majority of magazines, which are often content at most with a periodic index of contributors and titles. When I was first approached in 1971 about the possibility of providing an index, it seemed to me that *Ceramic Review* already contained such a wealth of information on technical matters and on the activities of potters (with the promise that this would continue to expand), that it needed to have its contents made more fully accessible. One could say that I exceeded my original brief, but the response from the editors and from readers has been such that I have not regretted doing so, although the work has had to be pursued with some rigour through the increasing complexities of the magazine-content. I was fortunate in happening early upon a formula which has remained viable, that of replacing an index of titles with a Subject Index which itself (for greater ease in use and to save printing space) is subdivided into two sections headed General and Technical, and Individual Potters. Under the former of these, up to a couple of dozen sub-headings became standard, which collected under themselves a substantial part of the material to be referenced, any matters which did not align themselves in this way being treated as separate items and finding their place in the general alphabetic sequence. In technical matters I sought to place each reference in the most

W. A. Ismay



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appropriate context, but in case of doubt was prepared to place it in more than one context, in the hope that a searcher would then find what was needed in the place first thought of, without needing to search further. Similarly in the more nebulous matter of general ideas about pottery and ceramics, I tried to furnish more than one approach to each item, to quote any catch phrase which would draw the attention of a searcher to something half-remembered, and to suggest pursuit of the ramifications of similar ideas through adjacent references.

Despite the complexity of the indexes, since some practical limit always had to be drawn, they are not exhaustive in the sense of automatically recording every mention of a name, and still less are they so in the sense in which a Biblical or Shakespearean concordance is exhaustive. However, one small item may often be traceable under several references, for example a photograph of a pot may be referenced under its maker (or each of its makers, if a collaboration), under the exhibition (if a collective one) in which it was shown, if from overseas or of an earlier period under country of origin, and perhaps also under the periodical in which the picture first appeared. And the index sometimes corrects a spelling or some other detail known to be wrong in the text, although I'm aware of one instance where an attempted correction which was more speculative than firmly based turned out to be itself wrong. An article (published in May 1983 CR 81.26-9 on Picasso's ceramics) mentioned on page 28 ceramic work by Jean Van Dongen. This was rather too summarily conjectured to be an error for Kees Van Dongen and so entered in the 1983 index. However, nearly five years later (CR 113.4), a further reference to this article established that Kees did have a lesser-known brother named Jean, hence correct at last in 1988, and Kees should be corrected back to Jean in 1983.

Nor, as just indicated, can I claim that the indexes are one hundred per cent accurate, the more so since I am sadly aware of other minor blemishes (one letter wrong here, a dropped reference there, punctuation not quite as intended elsewhere), and on a larger scale of three places where the main alphabetic sequence has become disorganised. These blemishes were sometimes my fault because I perpetrated them, or got them right but then failed to correct a misprint in the proof, and sometimes where errors of the press which remained so in spite of correction, or which I first saw in the final printing. However, I think that collectively they are disappointments to the indexer who hoped that all would be perfect, rather than serious impediments to the effective usefulness of the indexes, particularly as they are not irreparable. In the very first index (1970-71), two portions of the centre column in the Index of Contributors were in the final move-around inserted in the wrong alphabetical sequence, although it is easy to see what is wrong. In the 1986 index, five lines on kilns were similarly misplaced to a lower position in the second column on the second page (more difficult to sort out, see a letter about this at CR 106.4). And in the recently-published 1988 index (CR 116.53), the entries under *Ceramic Review* should strictly be between Casson Gallery and Ceramics (an uncharacteristic slip of my own which I spotted before it was printed but evidently too late for correction). These misplacements (especially the one about Kilns) can be

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corrected by carefully identifying what is misplaced, running a line round it and arrowing it to its correct position – or a photocopy can be made, from which portions can be carefully cut out and pasted over in the correct sequence. Keen eyes may already have seen two other blemishes in the 1988 index: there is a dropped reference under Badgers, near the beginning of the Subject Index, which should be 111.35PD, and just before Individual Potters, Wrecchlesham Pottery through pressure on space has moved up to join the previous item, instead of having a line of its own as intended.

In last year's July issue (CR 112.5), Derek Clarkson enquired how readers keep track of the indexes and how they deal with them. A prerequisite of dealing with and then using the indexes is to have the magazines themselves in findable sequence: this is more and more necessary as the number of them increases. They can be kept in sequence in a vertical file, the simplest form of which can use wine-bottle boxes of suitable size. Or one can keep them in order on a shelf by partitions, or by making slip-cases of stout cardboard (or of wood and hardboard), each holding, I would suggest, not more than twelve issues. But with any of these methods and their possible variations, one needs continually to sort back the magazines into order, each time one uses them. After a thorough trial, I can strongly recommend the virtues of the standard Ceramic Review binders: it is only after bringing one's magazines together in this way that one can fully enjoy the luxury of extended browsing through an ordered set, and have full facility of using the magazines for reference.

There are now fourteen indexes in all, to date. Each of the first five of these (1970-71, 1972-3, 1974-5, 1976-7 and 1978-9) is a two-year or twelve-issue index. They were printed separately from the magazine, and circulated as loose inserts in the magazine, as available. This means that for those who still have them, they are ready for use as wished, but that many copies may have been misplaced, lost or actually thrown away before their possible value was realised. The remaining nine (1980-88) are one-year or six-issue indexes, and each was printed and circulated as part of a later magazine issue. This means that they are less likely to be lost, but that they need a location reference before they can be used, or that they need to be detached with precautions from the magazine (or duplicated) before they can be relocated for use. The issued locations of these nine are:- 1980 (61-66) at CR 68.50-51, 1981 (67-72) at 75.49-50, 1982 (73-78) at 80.49-50, 1983 (79-84, but wrongly headed 79-83 which should be corrected) at 87.47-48, 1984 (85-90) at 94.47-48, 1985 (91-96) at 99.47-48, 1987 (103-108) at 111.51-52 and 1988 (109-114) at 116.53-54, whilst 1986 (97-102) (included in CR 105) was (exceptionally) printed on tinted paper, unpagged, placed inside the back cover, and coupled to an order form for magazines and for pottery books placed inside the front cover: if this form has been torn rather than cut out for use, the index may now be loose. The indexes have continued to reflect the increasingly generous content of the magazines, and latterly have been kept to the size of two magazine pages by being set in a larger form and then photographically reduced in size. Comparing 1988 with earlier ones, and finding that carefully-corrected punctuation is now barely perceptible in reduction, even viewing the result through a magnifier, I venture to query whether this process has not now reached or gone beyond its limit.

One method of using the indexes would be to collect them all (either as originals or as photocopies) in a single folder, preferably linked together in permanent order. I don't recommend this – too much wear-and-tear and needless

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*Volume is just comfortably full and no more, and there is room for the one or*

frustration over finding the right index each time. I think the proper place for an index is immediately at the end of what is indexed, although for evident reasons it can't in the case of a periodical be published in that position. Hence in using the binders, I have placed each index at the end of its material, made conspicuous and able to withstand wear-and-tear by being in a manilla folder. The first index is printed on both sides of a single sheet, so (using two copies, or one side could be photocopied) I pasted it to the inner faces of the folder. Each of the other four is on a double sheet, the index in three cases occupying three pages with the first page as title, and in the final example occupying all four pages. I came to the conclusion that it was adequate to put them in the binders, each loosely inside a manilla folder, held by one of the springy steel rods, and with the folder as protection against the pull of this rod. In early days there were one or two more than a dozen of these rods in the bundle of them with each binder – latterly there seems to be just a dozen, of which more later. And this brings me to some facts about the binders which may be helpful to anyone who has not yet tried them but would like to do so.

The standard Ceramic Review binder was evidently first designed to take twelve or more magazines, with some allowance for the possibility that the average issue would gradually become more generous, with more pages. This worked well for eight years, four binders. Towards the end of the tenth year, problems started – would twelve issues (49-60) go in yet again? Uncomfortably and with great difficulty they just did. But acquiring a sixth binder with the next twelve magazines already present, it was evident they were too plump to do so, that the only way seventy-two issues would fit six binders was by abandoning the labelling of early binders as two-yearly ones, and moving back one or two additional magazines, irregularly, into each of them. I decided not to do this, as it would just postpone the problem, but to see whether each binder would from now on accept ten issues – which it did, and so similarly up to date. (The only compromise at the transitional point which I later made was when I found that even the index folder which I wanted to add would not fit in to the overfull fifth binder. So I relabelled the fourth ~~to~~ fifth, and moved CR 49 back into the fourth which now has thirteen magazines, and the fifth eleven. This had the rather pleasing result that the special 50th issue now starts a volume.) From CR 61 onwards, the sequence by volumes is now in round tens which carries certain advantages. Each two index folders needed per volume in their due sequence. With round tens it is possibly easier by issue number to find a particular issue, the special 100th issue satisfyingly concludes a volume, and there are again spare steel rods with which to fasten in the index folders.

Reverting to the indexes themselves, for those who are not using binders I would suggest that the five early indexes nevertheless be kept, each with the last issue to which it refers. Neat ways of doing so would be, in the case of the first single sheet to add a strip of paper on the left to provide a stub, make a fold inside the back cover with the stub against the margin of page 3, re-pin, and neatly paste down the stub. The next four could be inserted by the same method but without needing a stub, one half of the double sheet being inside the front and the other inside the back cover.

From the beginning of the 1980s, with the indexes included in the magazines but not where they can most easily be found, there is a choice of methods. One can leave them where they are, and add a label to the cover of each Nov.-Dec. issue, indicating the location of the index for that year. One can leave them where they are and make

*On the left cut page with temporary, insert the magazine to insert the page.*

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good photocopies for use elsewhere. Or if one prefers the originals, one can detach them from their places, as hinted earlier with suitable precautions. It is best to unpin the magazine temporarily and extract the double page. Then one can see whether there is enough margin to leave a working strip at the edge of the index (remember to look on both sides) and still leave a stub to refasten the linked page. If so, rule a line along which one can cut with scissors, then reassemble the magazine with the other part of the sheet back in place, and paste down the stub – I suggest this both for added security and to prevent anyone else from seeing the projecting edge and thoughtlessly tearing it off. However, if the index is too close to the margin for this, one needs to take the whole page, in which case the previously-linked page from the front of the magazine will need a stub added to fasten it by, before the magazine is re-assembled. One can then re-locate either photocopies or the excerpted originals in terms of whatever personal

plan or method one has used for the earlier indexes.

If one is really sybaritic about one's magazines, one could have them permanently bound in annual or biennial volumes, but it would be expensive to have this well done and disastrous and destructive to have it done less well. The standard binders provide for a fraction of the cost of permanent binding a do-it-yourself method of making one's copies available for luxurious browsing or for ready reference, whilst still retaining the possibility of extracting any magazine at need for separate use, and subsequently replacing it. And I have demonstrated to my own satisfaction that eleven binders will house a complete twenty-year set from CR 1 of January 1970 to (prospectively) CR 120 of next November, and that a ten-year half-set from CR 61 of January 1980 (an easier project for newer readers who may despair of a full set) can be housed in six binders. Perhaps I should qualify this by saying that it is not yet fully demonstrated in the case of the last binder, but it looks likely. Enjoy your magazines! ●

## Potters' Tips



Readers are invited to submit their favourite tip – long or short, with or without photographs and diagrams. £5 is paid for those published. Contributions to Potters' Tips, Ceramic Review, 21 Carnaby St., London W1V 1PH

### From Chester – Micro Glazes

I always keep my glazes in 4-litre ice cream containers, and after they have been standing a while some glazes settle at the bottom and are very difficult to mix up again, so I pop the whole lot into the microwave and warm it up for a few minutes and then it mixes up quite easily.

**Maureen Standing**

### From London N10 – Crack Pots

In common with most potters, I inevitably accumulate seconds. I abhor waste, preferring to give those pots away to help raise money for causes dear to my heart, rather than smash them up lest they reproach my 'reputation'.

I used to destroy cracked pots. Cracks occurring before bisque or glaze firing seem to worsen during the firing, and pots inadvertently knocked thereafter were deemed too fragile to pass on.

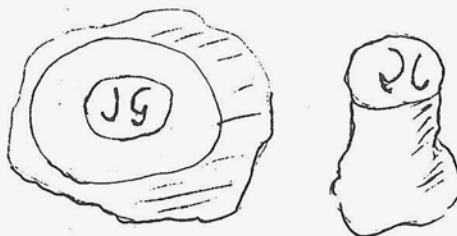
However, I recently tried re-firing filigree planters with hair-line cracks incurred during careless wrapping, and to my delight, they emerged ringing true.

Obviously pots on the verge of falling apart should not be re-fired in case they collapse and damage other ware – but it's worth experimenting with less acute cases.

**Susan Bennett**

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### From Emsworth – A Potters Stamp



An easy way to make your own potters stamp. Incise your initials in firm clay as you would like them to eventually appear, either in relief or the reverse, slightly larger than you will require. Allow the clay to dry then press a piece of fresh clay into the mould leaving neat edges. This should then be dried and fired. Several can be made at once.

**Judy Glanville**

### From London NW1 – Back Problems

When Anna Lambert mentioned a dicey back (in her 'Potter's Day'), I felt a sympathetic twinge. In order to remind herself to stop and stretch hourly, may I suggest that she keep an oven timer (with a quiet tick) near her and, after each alarm, to reset it for another hour *before* doing her stretch. If her activities might take her out of earshot, may I recommend one of those timers that hangs around the neck.

May I also pass on one of the most useful things I ever learned on a potting course – when John Solly feels the tension rising in his back, he gives a firm vigorous rub at the point of contraction (in the small of the back in both his and my case). It's wonderful how it loosens the knot and prevents a muscle spasm rising.

**Jerry Stovin**

P.S. I learned many other useful things from John.



*Correspondence welcomed but the right is reserved to edit or not published in full or not at all. Pseudonyms may be used.*

### Finding Your Way in Ceramic Review

I am a little disconcerted to find (besides minor errors) two omissions which create nonsense in the text of my article as above in CR118. On page 36, second column, five lines from the end of the second paragraph, there is an incomplete and hence cryptic sentence, 'Each two index folders needed per volume in their due sequence.' The explanation is that sixteen words which occupied a line of typescript are omitted after the first word of this, and the sentence should read, 'Each *volume is just comfortably full and no more, and there is room for the one or two* index folders needed per volume in their due sequence.'

Beginning on the sixth line of the next paragraph there is, equally baffling to the reader, a further omission of fourteen words in the same way, between 'make a fold' <sup>on the</sup> left at page width, temporarily unpin the magazine to insert the page inside the back cover. . . ' (and so on).

I would be glad if readers could re-insert the word 'in' before the second line of the first paragraph of the article ('unusual *in* having'), could correct 'where' to 'were' ('sometimes *were* errors of the press') in the ninth line of the last paragraph on page 35, and six lines above the first omission could correct 'fourth to fifth' (which can misleadingly suggest an exchange) to what I wrote, which was 'relabelled the fourth *and* fifth' (that ~~it~~, I wrote new labels in respect of their now altered content).

W.A. ISMAY Wakefield, West Yorkshire

The original and 'inside the back cover' copy reads, '...make a fold'



## Finding Your way in Ceramic Review

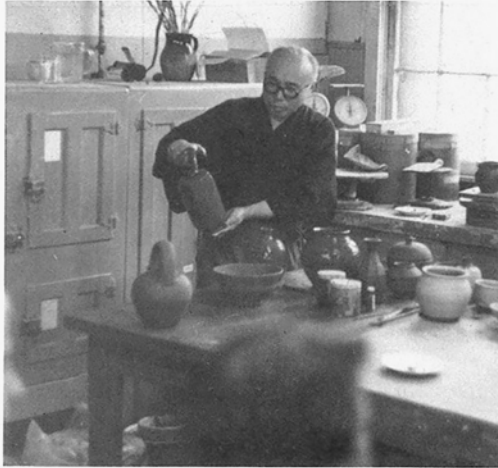
For inclusion in the last issue I sent a letter (CR119.4) which attempted a precise correction of printing omissions from my article under the above heading in CR118. I can scarcely believe it when I see that the second paragraph of this correction is itself in turn marred by omission in the same way as the article, so that it too fails to make sense (it embodies the correction but does not make it lucid). The compositor's eye, or the computer, or whatever it is, has jumped again and omitted twelve words and various punctuation marks.

The paragraph was written as two sentences, not one, and what is missing is the end of the first sentence and the beginning of the second. It seems impossible to correct the omission lucidly without repeating the paragraph, so can I do so? The two sentences should read:— Beginning on the sixth line of the next paragraph there is, equally baffling to the reader, a further omission of fourteen words in the same way, between 'make a fold' and 'inside the back cover'. The original copy reads, '*...make a fold on the left at page width, temporarily unpin the magazine to insert the page inside the back cover...*' (and so on).

In the last line but one of the previous letter, 'that it' should please be read as 'that is'.

W.A. ISMAY Wakefield, West Yorkshire.

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Shoji Hamada

interest, said that in another gallery in Bond Street was an exhibition of pots by an artist craftsman of whom he thought even more highly. I went there picking up a Murray.

"The people interested in the work of Wells, Murray, Leach in the 1920s could be counted on the fingers of one hand – Eumorfopoulos, Charles Marriott the Art critic of the Times, Bernard Rackham head of the Dept of Ceramics at the V & A, and that young and poor and unknown clergyman who was myself."

But I must add a word about the collection and the impact it has had upon this and earlier generations of studio potters. The Castle Museum became a Mecca for studio potters because of it. There are few British studio potters of experience and standing who do not know of it or have not gained inspiration from it. I am one.

In particular the Staite Murrays (Milner-White's first enthusiasm) were brought to my fuller attention. Out of a total of 173 pots, there are 36 Murrays, 34 Leachs, 25 Hamadas, 16 Vyses, 6 Pleydell-Bouveries and a few others. Out of these some are outstanding, including Staite Murray, Persian Garden, Cardew, Screw Stopped oil jar and Bernard Leach, Vase.

My father's Leaping Salmon vase was said to be Milner-White's favourite as indeed it has been mine since the day my heart missed a beat when I drew this pot myself from the top of the third chamber of our wood fired kiln in 1936. It had been an abnormally long and tiring firing in the course of which I had been watching the progress of this and other similar bottles as white hot flames carrying wood ash licked around the pots at 1300°C. Then all cones down and a quiet finish; clamping up the kiln – the long overnight anticipatory cool before all hands gathered eager for first sight. Comes the moment of first withdrawal; the reaction, an awed silence, a cold sweat down the spine, looking into each others faces and finding the mutual assessment of approval! Can heartless industrial mass production give you that?

**Pioneer Studio Pottery: The Milner-White Collection by Sarah Riddick Lund Humphries £27.50 (hardback) £14.95 (paperback).**

The end of 1990 may well be remembered as the period of the studio pottery catalogues. A little earlier we had the Victoria and Albert Museum's record of its holdings in this field, shortly followed by the book of the Wingfield Digby

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Staite Murray decorating – photograph courtesy John Webber

pots. Now, from York, has come the catalogue of the earliest and most influential of the private collections.

The Very Reverend Eric Milner-White (1884-1963) was Dean of York Minster from 1941 until his death, having previously been Dean of King's College, Cambridge for a similar period. He was a man of wide-ranging interests who played a prominent part in public life and was an authority on stained glass who oversaw the restoration of the Minster windows. One of his most cherished private interests (one which began for him "by pure chance" about 1925 when he accidentally saw in London an exhibition by Reginald Wells, and soon afterwards was introduced to the work of Staite Murray) was in studio pottery. Although he bought from Wells, W. B. Dalton, the lonely pioneer Frances Richards and from Charles and Nell Vyse, he quickly came to the conclusion that William Staite Murray, Bernard Leach and Shoji Hamada were the outstanding potters of his period, and it is work by them which forms the heart of his collection, although he added pots by a sprinkling of others (Katharine Pleydell-Bouverie, Norah Braden, Helen Pincombe, Sam Haile), a group of Martinware, a few from France and Scandinavia, and towards the end of his life, work by Michael Cardew (hitherto excluded under Dean's self-imposed rule of "stoneware only") and by his African pupils. It is beyond doubt that many of his choices were outstanding, and that his collection is a permanent landmark in the history of twentieth-century pottery.

Sarah Riddick (with the advantage of the Dean's notes and records, but adding a good deal) has done excellent work in recording the Dean's pots. The 173 items now at York are all portrayed and described (there are 203 illustrations, including 32 in colour) and there is also a verbal record of the 47 pots which the Dean gave to Southampton Art Gallery (the city of his birth), the two (which at one time could have been more) which he gave to the Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge, of the ten out on permanent loan via his executors, and the twelve items sadly known to be missing from the collection. All the pots were gifts by the Dean in his lifetime, although a proportion remained in his house until his death. The catalogue is enlivened by facsimiles of exhibition invitations, of the Dean's notes and invoices, and not least, of letters to the Dean from Frances Richards, and from Leach, Hamada, Vyse and Cardew.

Libraries and galleries will perhaps prefer the hardback, but many potters, students and collectors will be happy with the large, strongly-covered paperback (10½" x 8½"), made handsome by its surprisingly three-dimensional photograph of Staite Murray's *Persian Garden*, which strongly suggests the presence of one of the Dean's most striking pots.

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**Appendix iii**  
**Transcript of a speech delivered by W.A. Ismay at the**  
**opening of the exhibition 'The Art of the Potter' at**  
**Wakefield City Art Gallery on Saturday 20 June 1959**

Mr. Chairman, Ladies and Gentlemen:

May I begin by thanking you, Mr Chairman, for your introduction, and the powers that be, here, for honouring me by their invitation to come here today? Also, by expressing the hope that no one will mind too much if I prop up what might otherwise be my fumbling progress by means of a script. I'm afraid I know only too well my own limitations as a public speaker on any complex or critical topic, if I attempt to rely only upon speaker's notes.

This exhibition, like many which are held here, is of a dual or of a varied nature. Let me first say something by way of preface to the paintings which it includes. These are watercolours by Margo Ingham, a Manchester artist, and were mostly produced during a recent period of residence in Mediterranean Spain. They are vivid observations of Spanish landscape, architecture and street- and crowd- scenes. They seem to me to be set down with great freshness and immediacy and to show a striking combination of strength of line and delicacy in the use of pigments. They are reflections of encounters and atmospheres, of shape and colour and movement and the play of light, which excited and stirred the artist when she experienced them, and some of the landscapes in particular, like all honest and true works of art, will reveal more of their nature to the observer, the more deeply he looks into them. I think they will give you great pleasure.

The other sections of the exhibition consist of English pottery of two different periods. First we have a selection of pots of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Then, after a considerable interval in time, we come by way of contrast to a selection of pots by some of the younger generation of artist potters.

The earlier pots, those of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, which you will find in the glass cases in the entrance hall, are representative in many instances of the earlier stages of factory or semi-factory pottery production. The exhibition is called "The art..." rather than "The craft of the potter": some of the pots in the cases are of shapes intended for use, but they are, so to speak, Sunday teapots and jugs of the period, the taste of which they represent, rather than everyday ones: other pieces, the pottery figures for example, are simply decorations, or are portraits, or make some kind of comment on events. Although these are the products of a time of increasing industrialisation, one can see evidence that some of them come from environments in which there was still room for individuality, for English vigour and directness, and for English humour and the touch of satire.

On going in to see the twentieth-century pots on the other hand, which are arranged on open stands, there is a complete change of atmosphere, although here again, whilst many of the pots are capable of serving a useful purpose, the main emphasis is on the pot as a work of art. I think there is only one pottery figure in the more conventional sense, but some of the pottery moves towards the condition of sculpture in more ambitious ways of which I hope to say more a little later. Perhaps it is only my prejudice to state that in the modern part of the show the aesthetic average, so to speak, is on a somewhat higher level. Partly this is because all the pots are the work of artist-craftsmen who carry out the whole process of making their pots as individuals- and the effect is enhanced by having a substantial group of work by each potter, so that a strong impression is received of each personality.



In our time there has come to be a definite cleavage between the art of the potter and the industrial production of pottery. This is because mass-production methods have now been applied with full force to the manufacture of pottery for everyday use- that is, the forms are shaped mechanically so far as possible, and the successive processes are split up between different workers, so that no one pair of hands is responsible for any complete production. The same is true in principle even though to a lesser extent, of more expensive wares for special occasions, and of decorative wares, the aim in each case being a mechanical perfection and uniformity which is surely the very antithesis of a work of art.

A very condensed comment on the difference between the terms earthenware, stoneware and porcelain which appears in the catalogue, may help to throw a further light on the position of the artist potter. These three terms are broad descriptions, in terms of their material, of types of pottery made from progressively varying kinds of admixtures of the basic earthy materials, and fired at progressively higher temperatures, of which even the lowest are reckoned in hundreds of degrees centigrade. When the clay or clay mixture used for earthenware is fired, the substance of the clay is transmuted: it becomes permanent, but remains porous, and will let water through unless covered with a layer of impermeable glaze. Some earthenware clays can become tight and hard-fired (although still to some extent porous, unless glazed) at temperatures reaching up from, say, 950 towards 1100 degrees centigrade. This, although it already sounds alarming, is still a "red" heat only, but if the firing were taken too far in any particular case, the pots would melt and collapse, being unable to stand the strain. But the real fierceness is yet to come:

Stoneware is derived from clay or clay mixtures with a higher melting-point, which will permit firing to higher temperatures at or approaching "white" heat without collapse, and on being fired to a predetermined level which according to the particular characteristics of the clay may be somewhere between 1200 and 1400 degrees centigrade, the clay vitrifies and becomes impermeable even if it is left unglazed. True porcelain which is made from a special, pale-coloured clay plus stony admixtures, may mature within the same temperature range or at an even higher level, and will then be very hard, white in body and so vitrified as to be translucent. Industrial production of pottery is in the main limited to earthenware, on the other hand, porcelain and porcelain approximations of types which avoid so far as possible the main additional difficulties in forming, decorating and firing these high-fired wares. In stoneware, for the most part only useful, undecorated wares with simplified glazes are industrially produced. The reason is that the percentage of losses, especially during firing and cooling in the kiln, is apt to be so high as a result of any more adventurous use of these high-fired techniques of stoneware and porcelain that they are not a commercial proposition. The result is that this field, which is precisely the one in which the finest possible results in pottery are to be achieved, is left mainly to the artist potters, since only they have the hardihood to attempt them. It follows that it is the artist potters alone who have revived and who keep alive many decorative and other techniques, the use of which would otherwise have been lost.

Much more could be said in more detail, if time permitted, of the arduous nature of the work which artist potters undertake- of arduous in particular, that is since in their case the whole complex is being carried through by one pair of hands- the preparation and calculation of materials, the forming of shapes on the wheel (which although in a sense a simple piece of mechanism does not mechanise the result, since the form is received directly and plastically from the potter's hands), or, alternatively, the building or adaption of shapes by hand methods un-assisted by the wheel; the endless complexities of glazing and decoration; the skill required in placing a large number of pots safely and yet economically in the kiln; the knowledge and experience needed in gradually building up the kiln temperature to the desperate levels often required, and then subsequently, after long, overnight hours of watchfulness have elapsed, in cooling the kiln down again at the right speed to avoid, so far as possible, the many

disasters to the work which may occur- meanwhile throughout the firing controlling also the kiln atmosphere, the chemical nature of which has an important bearing on the result. Finally, one may speak of the resolution which is necessary to endure the many losses which will all too often occur, for the sake of the smaller number of successes. Nor are all the losses sometimes in the kiln- potters often have cause to lament a fine shape marred by a lapse of judgement whilst adding the decoration, or a fine glaze effect bestowed on a pot ultimately seen to be weak in form.

My time is dwindling away rapidly and this forbids my trying to trace, other than in sketchy outline, the course of this movement from scattered beginnings in the last century, and its developments during the last forty years. Passing over the names of a number of precursors of this period, let me at least mention those of the definitive originators of it, and the work, independently of each other, of William Staite Murray and Bernard Leach. Now both in their seventies, the former living in retirement in Southern Rhodesia, and the latter still actively making pots in Cornwall. Murray placed his main emphasis on the status of the potter as an artist and on the pot as a pure work of art: Leach was interested in producing tableware which would be of daily practical use and yet of warm humanity and obvious aesthetic appeal- showing us that from his point of view what we call a "simple" object of everyday use (meaning sometimes, a subtle one) can also and at the same time be a work of art. This did not however prevent him, why should it? From producing individual, large and small pots, which rivalled Murray's. Perhaps the best service and tribute I can pay both of them here is to say what many of you may know already but what may be news to some of you, that we in Yorkshire are particularly fortunate, now that the Dean of York has deposited the bulk of his superb collection of stoneware with York Art Gallery, where the authorities have finely and permanently displayed the pots in a separate, long room which has the effect of an inner sanctum. Here we have one man's discriminating choice of some of the finest stoneware pots of the period (roughly) 1920 to 1940, dominated by three great groups representing respectively Murray, Leach and Leach's Japanese associate, Shoji Hamada. There are also a few pots by predecessors and some by contemporaries and pupils of theirs. I would strongly urge anyone who has any special feeling for pottery not to let the short distance between here and York stand between him or her and a great aesthetic experience. It is amazing that the work of these potters could have reached such heights, mainly in the relatively short interlude between the two world wars.

These originators had, of course, pupils, followers and imitators. Much of the pottery, since it was based on the standards of the Sung dynasty potters of China, showed an unmistakable oriental influence, but in much of the work of the originators themselves and their best pupils, an Englishness derived from craft traditions since medieval times was either predominant or showed its presence. I think it is true that some of the imitators copied the outer form of oriental models to the best of their ability without assimilating their inner spirit, and so at times created confusion which in some quarters harmed the reputation of their betters. There are still however one or two younger potters, working in the "Sung standards" tradition in a way outwardly recognisable, in whose work a valuable synthesis of oriental and native English influences still seems to me to be emerging. Henry Hammond's recent show in London (he was the youngest potter actually to be a pupil of Staite Murray) is an example of what I mean. And we now have with us a whole second generation of artist potters who are producing work of great variety and who make strong claims upon our attention.

It is the work of some of these potters which is represented here today. Many of this generation owe a personal or implicit debt to Leach in particular, but it underlies rather overlies rather than shows overtly in their work, in which each speaks out in his or her distinctive voice. It would be invidious on my part to try to evaluate the respective merits of each, particularly as some of them are potters of whose fine quality I have for some time felt great assurance, whilst with the work of others I have only in the last few days made my first at all extensive acquaintance. You will naturally form your own

opinions of each and follow your own preferences.

May I perhaps say a few words about the challenging work of Paul Brown, whose pots may perhaps startle any of you who are by way of being allergic to modern art. I made my first real acquaintance with them this week: they shock me occasionally, not by their general appearance, but by an odd instance of apparent indifference to the principle that what is in fact an added part should be given, in clay, the appearance of growth from the rest. It did occur to me on seeing them however that there was a certain parallelism between these pots and some of Staite Murray's. This suggestion must not be pushed too far: I do not mean to imply either any direct resemblance or any necessary similarity of stature. What the two potters, forty years apart in birth date, seem to me to have in common is a certain uncompromising attitude of mind as applies to some portion of their work: Paul Brown's upright pots, here, stand up as Murray's must have stood when they were first exhibited, each saying with no uncertain voice that it claims to be judged in its own right as a work of art, and has no other use or value apart from that. Murray gave his pots names, and I have been told that he used to say, "Let the pot speak and it will tell you its name". His own choice of names only served to confirm the conclusion to which I think one would have naturally come, that his sources of inspiration were often religious or mythological ideas or personifications: the tall, pale pot which guards the entrance at York is Kwan-Yin, the Chinese goddess of mercy. Paul Brown's names of pots similarly confirm that one of his leading interests is in natural forms- he calls some of his pots by the scientific family-names of animal, plant or geologic orders. His world as represented here seems to be a rather twilit or nocturnal one- even when he enters the urban scene. His "Metropolis" suggests a great city at night.

The affinities with sculpture-in-other-materials, a matter which I mentioned earlier, in these pots and in those of two other potters conveniently shown in the same room will, I am sure, not escape you. One of these incidentally is one of those potters whose quality, through long acquaintance, I am already well assured; but with Paul Brown I am still at the stage of first impressions. Ought we to take heed, or not, of the sentence, in the leaflet which has been written for this exhibition by Hugh Gordon Porteus, about Sung pots standing as a rebuke, as we admire each exciting novelty?

You have now given me a patient hearing for perhaps a longer time than I should have ventured to occupy. It only remains for me to invite you to look, or to go on looking, or to look again, at the paintings and the pots assembled for you- we hope, assembled for your pleasure. Thank you.



**Appendix iv**  
**Transcripts of letters exchanged between W.A. Ismay**  
**and Michael Cardew (potter), 1960–1983**

**NOTE: All spellings, slang and abbreviations are the authors' own. Indecipherable words and sentences are replaced with /XXX/.**

**Undated letter**

Dear Michael Cardew,

I hear from friends in the Craftsman Potters' Association that you are unexpectedly in England now instead of next spring. Many thanks for your letter from Abuja, I was just thinking about a Christmas greeting to you, which would have to go off around now to reach you! Now, I am hoping to hear the talk on traditional West African pots, which I understand you are to give us next month.

I am wondering whether you have brought any pots with you (i.e. your own and pupils) and if so, where they will be on view- perhaps next spring at the Berkeley Galleries.

I meant to say when I wrote last that both John Spink and I have your condiment pots in daily use- I have the three, salt, pepper and mustard, and Spink has the pepper and mustard, and hopes to get a salt if you do any more. Spink is the mustard man- my mustard pot usually only gets used when I have a visitor- and he says it's the most useful and practical pot for it he's ever used. We have both found that the screw-top pots work excellently- the thread leaks condiment only to the extent of showing a powdering of it around the outer rim: it doesn't come through copiously enough to spill. So we have not needed to devise washers. The pepper pot is a trifle copious for a European taste when the pepper is fine and dry, but would probably be about right in more humid conditions: the flow can easily be moderated by putting a bit of stiff paper with smaller holes, inside the lid.

Another good year of pots- especially the Bernard Leach show which I told you of, Raymond Finch's show in Aug at Craftsman Potters' Shop, and the Wren and Lucie Rie shows at the Berkeley Galleries. I think my earlier comments about Mrs Wren were based on the show at a shop in the Burlington Arcade, late last year. Now that I have seen more besides the B.G. show she has had one at the C.P. Shop – my opinion is confirmed. Many of her pots are heavy to the point of clumsiness, but I find that her failures repay study, and that her best pots are very fine indeed: I'm sure she's a good potter and has the real thing in her. I wish you could see some of her best work- what is left to be seen at the shop now is likely to be the remnant.

A good deal of junk is passing through the C.P. Shop- some of it lingering there, although a great deal of it is sold! But I have also seen some very good pots indeed there, though these don't seem to stay very long! Several potters have told me this year, both here and at their own workshops, that they think the public for the better pots is on the increase.

I am telling John Spink of your presence in England, but don't need to await his reply to know that he will wish to be remembered to you, and please remember both of us to Mrs Cardew.

All the best, Bill (W.A. Ismay)

**19 November 1960**

Dear Bill,

How v.nice to get your letter & especially to hear about the salt pepper & mustard pots in use. I now

want to go ahead and make more of all: the salt pot needs a slightly larger opening at the top (for the Abuja rainy season anyway!) & as you say, the pepper pot needs smaller holes. Also I think the screw cap should be taller to prevent "leaking". This presents a slight problem in form but not unsurpassable. At Abuja, I now have sugar casters & tea caddies on the same general idea but bigger. Alas, I had to leave Abuja with only one day to pack my bag for the aeroplane, so I was able to bring nothing.

And I had to postpone the next Abuja exhibition to 1962 (probably May). I am going back at the end of December, so I shall have to be away for the whole of 1961, returning I hope in April 1962.

The Abuja kiln has been giving us some nice things, but most of them had to be sold in Nigeria for one reason or another, e.g. Independence Celebrations. We now have 2 very good 'once fired' glazes, the "coffee & tenmoku" of the soy pots, and another with grass ash, quite lively. And I made a lot of big things with lids, mostly for these glazes, but they were not fired when I left.

It is nice to be home, but no potting to be done here in such a short time.

Give my greetings to Spink. Mariel will be coming down here for the Christmas holidays.

Yours sincerely, Michael Cardew.

### ***31 December 1960***

Dear Bill

A Happy New Year to you. I am off tomorrow to London, recording with B.L. for the B.B.C. on Mon & flying on Tues back to W Africa.

I will keep additional cruets for you if I get good ones, & tea caddies & sugar castors. I might send some by parcel post? – Carefully packed.

Ladi Kwali's understudy is called Halima from Idon Kasa (abt. 25m from Abuja & abt. 12-15m from Kwali). There are some differences in her traditional shapes from those of Ladi, as well as a different touch in the decoration- Her pots have slightly more sloping shoulders. A chief difference is here (line to sketch) & she uses a lot of cross hatch dec. here instead of or as well as a roulette.

As for Winchcombe pots by me, your worst enemy will be Mariel- she won't let them go!

In haste, I am packing, or supposed to be.

Yours sincerely Michael C

### ***Undated letter***

Dear Michael,

How agreeable it was to have that New Year letter from you, written whilst you were packing for London and then Nigeria. I very much appreciated getting it, although one might not think so from the length of time it has taken me to reply. However I thought at first that I would wait until seeing the BL exhibition and hearing the broadcasts, then the latter took longer than I expected and I have since been so busy that all letter writing plans have gone overboard.

I managed to make two flying visits to London for the BL exhibition, the first on the opening day and the second, the following week, on the day of the Craftsmen Potters Association's member's party held at the Arts Councils premises. I also saw it again at Bradford and yet again at Newcastle before its / XXX/ came to an end.

The ceramic part of it was not BL's "150 best pots" (or intended to be) although there were some very fine things. What I appreciated most about it were first the opportunity of seeing (in my case mostly for the first time) some honestly representative early pots and of tracing forms and motifs over a long

period, and second, the fine qualities of the most recent pots. Some silly woman was going around with a parrot phrase “of course, his best work was done in the 1920s”, I’m afraid I was rather rude to her, as it seemed to me so evident to me that the best work was done in 1960, with every prospect that better work still (“D.L.” as BL would say) would be done in 1961. There was a wonderful supplementary show of new work at Primavera – so much of it that it filled the Primavera space twice over, and I was deeply regretful that it proved not possible for me to go down again and see the second half, practically warm from the kiln. In the Arts Council show, one of the pots which aroused a great response in me was a broad-based tall jug, sprigged and raw-glazed (no. 160 and plate III if you have the catalogue) which Miss Muriel Rose had spoke for before the show opened. I mentioned this to BL and by early April he had made and sent me a jug of this type, which I think is even better (bearing out my expectation). From the show itself I got a little tenmoku and kaki tea bowl of great warmth, and from Primavera a white bowl of heavy opaquely glazed porcelain, brush decorated with a flying bird inside.

At the party, BL was very relaxed and in great form. There was a buffet meal, wine poured copiously from great jugs, and a rectangular “tin-glazed” birthday cake, with a slip trailed greeting in Japanese, surrounded by candles set in Oxshott clay: BL blew out the candles, cut the cake with great dexterity (it turned out to be a tipsy cake dark with fruit and various things out of bottles), and addressed us informally. In general, everyone talked themselves hoarse in great good humour (which infected even the Arts Council staff who were kept on duty far longer than the party was supposed to go on, and who had to get us moving in the end by dimming out the lighting).

John Read’s film about BL at present-day St Ives, “A Potter’s World” was shown on BBC television on the 23rd January. I don’t often see T.V. and have no set, but on this occasion went out of my way to see the programme at a friend’s house. It was a great delight – visually appealing and with a soundtrack of BL’s own voice, not directly commenting on the visual images but speaking in counterpoint to them as it were, more occasionally he spoke directly from the screen, or as an actor in a drama. This was a programme much appreciated not only by enthusiasts, but to my own knowledge, by many who saw it accidentally and found their attention strongly held by it.

“A Potter in England”, the sound recording of BL talking to and answering you and John Lowe was broadcast twice in the third programme on the 18th January and on the 27th February. I was very impressed by the tough minded questioning and the lucid, frank and honest responses – it was /XXX/ and about as remote as can be from the glibness and shiftiness of much political discussion which one hears.

Adverting to your very welcome letter, it would be wonderful if you could, as you suggest, send us */remainder of letter missing/*

**03 August 1961**

Dear Bill,

Your letter arrived at a very opportune moment as the kiln was firing and there were salts, peppers etc., in it. So I waited to see how they turned out. Well in spite of the most appalling wet weather I’ve ever known in Abuja & various other handicaps, the kiln turned out quite well & I am pleased with them. But they are not like the one you had before, so don’t think you’ve got to keep them if you’d rather wait for others. I have given up that old very dark body- too brittle at high temps; & the chün glaze sometimes does its stuff & sometimes it doesn’t. This is the new “slip glaze” or “once-fired” glaze i.e. no biscuit firing. It is just on the border between an iron glaze & an ultra dark celadon - the Fe<sub>2</sub>O<sub>3</sub> in it must be just at the limits of solubility - do sometimes it is tenmoku & sometimes clear; & sometimes a hint of chestnut brown or Guinness brown which I rather like for a change. However you’ll see what you think. The parcel left my hands into the P. Office today but won’t leave Abuja till Mon 7th & then



takes about 5 weeks I think to reach you. I hope to goodness they arrive safe. The little tiny pepper pot was a left over "Runt" from 1959, which I found and put in as I thought it might amuse you. The grey sugar caster by Tanko Ashada was put in to fill up the box. None by me in this kiln. Also no "mustard pots" made yet. Do you want some? I'll have to make them if so. (I only get a chance to make pots at weekend really.) By the way, the prices: Abuja 7/6 = 21/- roughly at [Berkeley /XXX/] 3/9 = 10/6. etc. I expect the P.O. will make you pay P.T. on them.

I was v. interested in your letter. Yes, how I agree with you that BL's best work is "1960 and on"; [& that the /XXX/ is in] the parrot phrase was an ass; she was not the same one who turned up (improbably) here, the other day, & said the same thing. She keeps some kind of ghastly shop in Portobello Rd called the Centaur Gallery. I hated her.

The thing is, Life is short & Art is long; so one is likely to do ones best work in old age; especially a potter, the "goodness" of whose work depends partly on the efficiency of his "instrument" - by which I mean his workshop; & it takes years & years to build that up. (Incidentally, that's why I didn't come back to UK. I love Wenford & sometimes feel sick with wanting to be back there, but as a productive instrument it would take me too long to perfect it; whereas Abuja is functioning admirably & I more & more feel it would be a crime to abandon it).

O, I see on rereading your letter that you would like mustards as well, so I will make some. I have sent the parcel to the County Library Hemsworth as you suggest.

I wish I had been able to see the BBC television film of BL at St Ives. Several people (arriving here having just returned from leave in the U.K.) told me about it enthusiastically; & so it even did Abuja pottery some good among the local /XXX/ (who on the whole tend to care for none of these things.)

To tell the truth I found the other broadcast (BL with J Lowe /XXX/ & me) a bit of a bore. But I am glad it turned out all right after editing. We gassed for about 1½ hour as far as I remember (& all the time I was hopping to get onto the Kano aeroplane!)

We shall not be firing again until late Sept owing to wet wood etc. But if you like the "raw" glaze, the mustards should be ready to go in by then. In about a week, I've got a young man coming out from England for 6 months to learn pottery here - Peter Bruce Dick. He sounds all right but I've never met him. My plans at present are: Exhib. at Berkeley Galleries May or June 1962; also May or June 1962, Exhib at Galerie La Borne, 13 Rue Durantin, Montmartre (if Nigeria & France are not quarrelling) I hope to reach London about the 20th April and to be back at home for about 3 months. My friend Kofi Athey, a Ghanaian potter, my pupil since 1942, will be staying with me I hope & I also hope he will spend at least 6 months in U.K.

It has begun to rain again - Excellent weather for throwers!

My greetings to Spink. As ever Michael.

**09 August 1961**

Dear Michael,

I have just finished my first week back at work after a holiday tour of Eire in company with Jack Spink. Your very welcome letter I had had before leaving, and on my return to Hemsworth the box of pottery was already awaiting me having made a good journey inside a month. But I have had a strenuous six days and have had to hang on until the weekend before sitting down to begin a letter to you.

You'll be glad to hear that the pots, beautifully packed, arrived quite intact (and no purchase tax charged upon them even!) - so all in all it was a very joyous transaction and I am most grateful for all your trouble. I don't think I'd have had any inkling, without being told, that the body has been

changed – in the salt and peppers where the fired clay is visible in the thread for the screw caps it shows a little drier-looking and lighter in tone, but there is no difference to be seen in the foot-ring of it in this, far from it. As for the glaze, my first impression was of its shininess (particularly with the 1959 example – a delightful little imp of a pot by the way! – in the box to compare with). In terms of the jargon of photographic paper-surfaces, the 1961 glaze is “smooth glossy” where the 1959 ones are “smooth lustre” or even “fine lustre”. So it had to overcome a certain initial prejudice on my part in favour of “lustre” (photographically speaking) or semi-matt surfaces the ceramic over-glaze. But I also simultaneously had the impression of a very handsome group of pots (not forgetting the Tanko Ashada contribution) and now that I’ve become used to them with the others, I like them very well indeed.

(Incidentally, the “tenmoku-kaki” effects on the 1959 soy sauce pot - and the 1960 Leach bowl – are “glossier” than I seem to have noticed earlier!). The forms (part way between the earlier ones and those of the soy sauce pots) are intriguing: the milled runs of the caps make for easier handling both when filling and using. All sorts of colour complexities in the new glaze under strong light. I am very glad (and as a mere stay-at-home feel privileged) to have examples, and in fact would like some more. Could you let me have at least the following when you have fired again?

1 saltcellar with screw cap

3 mustard pots

2 tea caddies w screw caps

2 sugar casters w screw caps

Also at your discretion anything else that turns out well, which you can spare, and which is small enough to send conveniently – especially anything which gives a fuller idea of the variations possible from the new glaze.

I will try to photograph a composite group of 1957 – 1959 – 1961 small pots and let you have a copy of the result.

Spink (who sends his good wishes) and I had an agreeable time in Eire, touring around in a small hired car, mostly in the coastal areas, in rather mixed weather. We especially liked the little Vale of Glendalough (30-odd miles south of Dublin), on the west coast of the Dingle peninsula (which we traversed in pouring rain to be rewarded by sunshine at Sleah Head and a good view of the Blasket Islands). Parts of Galway and Donegal, and most especially Connemara. The living crafts in Ireland seem to be weaving and to a lesser extent woodcarving. The best Irish pots I saw were the prehistoric hand-built ones in the National Museum in Dublin – largish funeral urns and smaller food vessels both from slab enclosed graves! The former are for some reason usually found not containing ashes, but inverted over the pile of bones resulting from a partial cremation, the latter either as additions to the /XXX/, or alone beside the skeleton in an ordinary inhumation. A number of them were noble in form, as was well brought out by the skilful lighting in which they were shown, although this care was belied by the description cards, which designated them as poorly fired and crude wares – which was beside the point. There was also museum evidence of the production at several places during the last century of homely, pleasing ash-glazed or partly-glazed red ware, the pieces shown being mainly largish jugs and handled bottles – and craft shop evidence, alongside the textiles and carvings, of a contemporary production of rather stodgy slipware and “majolica”. The only well known ceramic product of Ireland seems to be the (on the whole) rather horrible Belleek porcelain, of which older and rather more pleasing examples are seen in antique shops, and newer and less pleasing ones in quality, in the ordinary souvenir shops, along with the phoney black marbled Shillelaghs, the Colleen dolls and the “bog-oak” bric-a-brac. Not to dismiss Eire on this note, we found a great affection architecturally

for the round towers, which survive in various places from the eighth and ninth centuries.

/XXX/ was due at the end of the month but I understand has been postponed; and the Wrens (I heard earlier, but no details yet, have another show at the Berkeley Galleries later in the autumn. The CPA Potter's Day in October takes the form of a visit to the Friars at Aylesford, where Colin Pearson is working.

I look forward to April/June and hope I shall have a chance also of meeting Athey – you may recall I have two jugs of his, which I acquired at Wenford Bridge in 1959. Hope the throwing season has gone well and that you have a good firing.

Yours as ever, Bill.

2a Probably the new clay is not just this year and you have kept using various clays or clay mixtures from time to time. The colour of the fired body can be best seen in the flat or rather concave-footed pots with no turned foot-ring, among the smaller pots of this kind, my 1957 soy-sauce pot is in the very dark body, but the 1959 one is an even lighter body than the 1961 tea caddy and sugar caster.

P.S. (a) I might add that the purchase of a large pot was followed by an anxious period of some weeks (extending into 1960) over the problem of how to convey it, undamaged, from Nottingham to here. I have no mechanised transport of my own, and there is seldom anyone in here to accept a delivery during normal business hours. At one stage through a failure in liaison, a carrier /XXX/ bought the pot to my door in my absence, and then took it on with him to Newcastle, and back to Nottingham.

P.S. The Coper small bottle has now been joined on my short list of regretted pots by Michael Casson's stoneware lidded pot with small bird knob, for which I understood you also made a beeline. This is the only stoneware one I've seen which succeeded to the same degree as the two best earthenware ones – the black, red and grey with the "two flying birds" knob, and the white one with the "three young birds" knob – both of which I have. I now think of them as a trio with one missing! In fairness one should say that but for Pan Henry this new one would not have been in the show, as to the potter himself thought it was overshadowed by the "one" and the "puffin" lidded pots which I thought inferior to it. It was one of the owl knobbed pots which was carried off to be photographed for P.Q at the end of the show – but I have seen M.C. again since, and he has now come round to agreeing with us.

### **27 September 1961**

Dear Bill,

Thank you v.much for the postal orders & your long letter. Here is a thing called "Revenue Collection Receipt", hang on to it like grim death & keep it safely!! Because I find to my distress that several of our best customers have later had Bills /XXX/ them for accounts long ago paid or for accounts not even theirs! (This I am afraid is due to the clue-lessness & inefficiency of our post office & not to any funny business!)

Thank you for your "esteemed" order. Yes, sorry, I see you wanted Mustards too in the 1st order, but I haven't made any yet. I will try too before the "season" is over. Also the other things if I possibly can. But, we have been having a series of misfortunes this Rainy Season. Twice the old & big pottery building (mud built in 1951-2) has collapsed. We have been kept desperately busy trying to shore up & save the remainder, propping & buttressing & wiring down the roof. No surplus funds for emergencies of this kind, so it all has to be done by "direct labour" i.e. I have to divert 9/10ths of our potters time & labour to being amateur builders (which every good Northern Nigerian is anyway!) including of course my own. And to top off it all we have 3 or 4 impending Bogies!

(1) The Governor & Lady Bell (firm friends of the pottery anyhow) are coming on 23rd Oct & in



accordance with unalterable law & protocol, we have to divert more labour to while waiting, apron cutting & cleaning up!

(2) On 13th Oct I have to send 2 of my best potters to Lagos with clay (& pots) for a demonstration week at Kingsway shop.

(3) Sometime in Oct we've got M.Gills apprentice coming\* on a 6 month scholarship (\*from Uganda)- we don't even know his name yet!

(4) London, June 1962 and Paris, May 1962 (Galerie La Borne, 13 Rue Durountin, Paris L8); which means the pots for these must be packed & off by end Feb at latest, also the preparation of a brochure in French, photographs & "words".

So I am beginning to feel a little harassed & you must not mind if your small & really quite easy order takes ages to get to you – if all else fails I'll try to bring them with me privately in April.

Apart from the little troubles mentioned above, everything in the Abuja garden is lovely, though at the moment Halima the 2nd woman potter, "Ladi's Understudy", is down with severe jaundice. Peter Bruce Dick, my new European "Apprentice", is a very nice chap & is liking Abuja & is a great help (unpaid!) to me as you can imagine [Age 25, just home from Work-yr-way-round-the-world. Took up with pottery in New Zealand & heard of Abuja from the Stichbury's there, who were here for 8 months in 1958-9]

We have been making some very big "Rose Bowls", same shape as the "Winchcombe" one on page 36 of B. Leach's potters book, but a bit deeper, & of course not the same decoration (& will be quite a different colour naturally). The glaze is a "new" technique, which has given us 2 or 3 rather stunning pots already: "one-fire" slip glaze on the "black hard" pot, decorated sgraffito to the body while still wet. Then soft biscuit fired & glaze-dipped in the chün glaze, over the slip glaze. Result, a very rich & various deep greenish glaze, occasionally a rather startling chün opalescence! Definitely not very austere, but undeniably exciting!

About the new body, it is really quite different. Its great merit over the old one is it's a much tougher & stronger & less brittle material. Some of our old pots are technically an absolute disgrace!

Yes, I had the C.P.A Newsletter the other day – very good value.

Well no more for now. I must go and take Halima her medicine (calomel, poor girl!!) & pick up Peter B.D. Greetings to Spink. As ever Michael

Ireland sounds lovely. I haven't been over since 1933 (Cork & the S.W. mountains)

### ***Undated letter***

Dear Michael,

Many thanks for your letter – yes, those official receipts are impressive documents! And reminders of Indian commercial and official paperwork.

I was very sorry to hear that your illness had been more serious than your previous letter suggested. But I am hoping that your "happy convalescence" has continued in good order, even if it has been slow. And am very interested to hear how your convalescence was being occupied: I had no idea previously that the Wenford "lectures had been circulated in duplicated form, and probably this is not widely known outside the circle of those attending the course, but I shall be glad (now there are to be some) to wait for your second thoughts. My M.C bibliography is not very extensive at present and probably very incomplete: it includes your early article on B.L in the Studio (1925); your preface to "A Potters Book"; your introduction to exhibitions (some very good stuff in little room there); your contributions to Pottery Quarterly (perhaps not quite all of these as I never caught up with nos.1-4); and fairly recent

essays in Athena (on raw materials) and in Africa South (on West African Pottery). I have yet to find out the original purpose of your 1926 drawing (used for the new Wenford notepaper) of which “the Ditchling Press still had the block” – for notepaper, even then, or for some publications?

Have still heard nothing from Kofi, but possibly he will write from Ghana, and there has not been time yet for him to get turned round there and for a letter to come. I remembered to send Mariel the additional copy of the Berkeley Galleries photograph and when she returned from her tour she wrote to acknowledge it, and said that Kofi hadn't written whilst she was on the move but had sent a charming letter just before leaving.

I'm not sure that I agree that it's a “funny collection” of pots at Wenford – they're clearly not all there for the same reasons, some because of their associations, others because someone liked them for themselves, others for these reasons initially perhaps, but also or specially because they are broken and repaired pieces, others because they were seconds from the kiln but still domestically useful; it was clear too that some rather special things would be packed away for safety until the house not in continual occupation. But they all seemed pleasant things to live with and congruous together.

I have nothing by Fishley Holland either: I've seen little of his works and the only chance I had to buy anything was several years ago when at the Great Yorkshire Show, the Rural Industries Bureau had some of his jugs: they were not very exciting in form and insipidly decorated, so I left the alone.

Mention of the Wenford notepaper reminds one to say that Vume and especially Abuja have been exciting and profitable adventures (I don't mean financially!) but that Wenford seems to me an adventure incomplete and still awaiting fulfilment: in some ways I would be very glad to see this instrument which you set down (and which could be fully under your own control) taken up and used again, instead of kept in play in a desultory and tantalising way.

I am grateful for the information of the whereabouts of the “ex Paris” pots, but my finances are so chaotic at the moment that I daren't set off down south in pursuit of them! I remember with particular pleasure the big lidded pot (no.1), but have no at all immediate prospect of being able to pay for it: probably someone else will nip in before me (or may even whisk it away in a car for £30, which would really upset me!) The pots I did get are paid for by now, thank goodness, except the Bawa Ushafa! Which rather worries me. The reason is not complete financial incapacity, but that (not being very business-like, it seems to me) the La Borne people have still not sent the bill, although asked 3 times now to do so. The Paris things were in three lots- I paid for some before I took them, and then sent a second lot of money by post (in French notes). This turns out to have been a risky proceeding (and incidentally receipt was never acknowledged), as under the currency regulations such a despatch could be confiscated in transit and a fine imposed as well. So I wanted to send the larger sum for the Bawa by banker's draft in the official way – but the powers that be are a bit sticky it seems about money going to a non-commonwealth and non-economic union country, and won't proceed without an invoice being put in.

I think the only bit of pottery news I have are first that I went to a C.P.A meeting recently – the “winter gathering”, held at the Arts Council premises (as in 1960, when the B.L show was on), but this time to see the Arts Council selection from Miss Kewper's collection of ancient Peruvian pottery and textiles. Some splendid things! The owner was unable to be there, but C.A. Burland from the British Museum gave an informal introduction to and commentary on each room – a tremendous squash of us milling around the cases. Then an equally informal meal, of which the main features were homemade bread, cheeses (arranged in splendour for one to help oneself) and wine.

Second, on the same trip, I saw a handful of pots on view upstairs at the Crafts Centre, which seemed to be from Kofi's firing. One or two modest jugs marked C.K.A and W.B. underneath – the rest mainly

mugs and a couple of casseroles, with Wenford Bridge but no personal seals (whose work I don't know, though your designs, but some looking a bit tired after possibly standing unfired for some time and not very excitingly glazed.) (It was Saturday morning and near closing time, so I had no chance to look for more in the basement- where most of my finds are made!) I remember good things from 1959, so perhaps these few were not the best sample of 1962 – in any case, things would be v.different if the kiln were fired at more normal intervals.

No H.H. on this trip, but I did meet him accidentally on a previous flying visit to town (since Richmond) and had lunch with him, then we went looking at pictures together (Courtauld Institute).

Must bring this to a close to catch the post. When I heard from you, I'd just the day before sent off to you a short letter accompanying some photographs (which came out larger and heavier than originally intended, so set off by sea). Goodness knows when you will get them – but I have caught sight of a date list on a post office wall today from which it appears that I just caught the Christmas despatch by sea previously and can just catch the Christmas air despatch with this. So they may arrive about the same time. As I haven't got as far as Christmas cards yet, this will have to serve to convey all good wishes for Christmas and the New Year.

All the best! As ever, Bill

### ***Undated letter***

Dear Michael Cardew,

This is a much-postponed reply to your letter of the 28th October! I was horribly busy before Christmas, but made strenuous efforts to get a letter away to you in November, having previously made up my mind that when I wrote I must enclose after prints of my September photographs. For some reason best known to myself. First of all I got it firmly fixed in my noodle that your departure date was the 27th. On the 23rd I made a push and had a printing session. I sat down to write a covering letter, only to find that the departure date was the 23rd. This discouraged me so much that I desisted and once having missed the boat or rather the plane, I really let things slide, as work swallowed me up again, hence the date of this!

First let me say that I've been very glad to keep the useful boxes about which I wrote to you but which you kindly said you could spare- and that if any of my pots take a long journey in the future, they will do so under distinguished auspices.

I think there is general agreement that whilst 1957 and 1958 were both rich years in the pottery field and 1959 was even more so. For me (though there were some things I missed) I think the highlights were Henry Hammond's show, yours, Janet Leach and William Marshall, the salt glaze work of the Wren's at Oxshott, and perhaps most of all because least expected the outpouring of new work by Mrs Wren. I'd marked her earlier as a good potter on the strength of three or four flawed but exciting pots which she'd kept in her own possession. I gather however that it's something like twenty years since she made much of a public appearance as a potter: now (1959-60), after a long period of kiln experimentation and theoretic work she's suddenly in full production, with amazing vigour and spontaneity, with her salted ash and iron glazes, and her experiments in finding glaze materials which will accept and combine with salt and others which are impervious to it, and then using the two types

\*There was also one porcelain lidded pot (not large but tall in shape) about which he had a special feeling. The decoration was parallel, vertical /XXX/ of brush-tip dots in iron, gradually fading in size. He said he had done this directly after sorting some sea shells, on one of which the decoration was based, and that it was the only occasion he could recall when he'd used something from nature immediately- usually the material had had to be assimilated for months or years.



*/section of letter missing/* of focus (a professional photographer would call it 'soft focus' and would have done it deliberately) but managed the best likeness and the nearest to what I might have done could I use a pencil. They are however, very much inferior to the completely un-posed and */XXX/* characteristic photographs which Helen Pincombe got during the progress of the Wenford course and copies of which I hope to be able to get. */remainder of letter missing/*

### **Undated letter**

Dear Michael,

I know quite well that I am about a fortnight too late by now with my Christmas greeting, but there is still some slight hope that this may reach you by New Year! I haven't replied earlier to your welcome letter of late September, simply because I have been so busy at work that I have hardly had a moment to call my own, or so it seems – although it can't be literally true, as I appear to have found at least one day a month over the last four months for pottery visits to the Friars at Aylesford where Colin Pearson and his Portuguese colleague are working, to Oxshott, and to the Wrens' show at the Berkeley Galleries. I also had a visit here from Paul Brown (head of the Pottery Dept. at the Leeds College of Art) and his students.

The Casson/Margrie show was very well contrasted, Casson's jars of various sizes, cylinders, bowls, lidded pots (from bread crocks to small boxes), jugs, teapots, coffeepots etc., being vigorously thrown and decorated mainly in strong curves (it was his first all-stoneware show, 150 pieces quite a number large), and Margrie, delicate and porcelain thin in a refined stoneware body with mostly creamy glazes, and sparse, angular "geometric" decoration, sometimes brightly-coloured, sometimes subdued, with a concentration on teapots, small storage jars and flat dishes.

At Aylesford the pottery already producing stoneware on an impressive scale had a new and larger kiln at an advanced stage of construction by the potters (I gather Raymond Finch has had much to do with its design, so probably you know about it), and with this they hope to tackle even larger pieces than they do at present. I won't attempt to describe the remarkable community part brethren, part laity, of which it fills one corner. The Portuguese potter who answers to Manuel (I don't know his full name) small, spruce but very muscular gave a striking demonstration of large throwing, weighing out matured clay, very stiff, preparing it by kneading it with his hands and full weight in the bench, repeatedly cutting the mass into two with the edge of the hand and reforming it and finally making a hard well which he rapidly centred and opened. The clay was as nearly dry as it could be and still be workable! He created the form with the hand inside, but with a stiffish flat piece of wood with rounded edges on the outside, using remarkably little water, notably those present were astonished that he could throw so "dry" without the clay sticking or dragging.

At Oxshott, Mrs Wren still continues her series of experiments in the combination of ash and crude ore and "volcanic" glazes constituents with salting during the high-temperature soaking. Her best results are to my eye superb, but the kiln losses must be high, although apparent failures are sometimes bought to life at a second or third firing. Rosemary Wren was working for some time in "straight" salt-glaze, but has now reverted to glazes deriving from ash or from various minerals or a combination of the two – including Alderney seaweed ash, nepheline syenite, granite dust, an opalescent blue from colemanite and barium coloured with ½ of red iron oxide, and olivine. Of her more conventional pots (which included a range of teapots from 2-cup to 50-cup) a series of flattened bottles were outstanding. She also of course makes animal and bird forms, beginning with a pinched pot and coiling on; and for this show had produced one or two "abstracts" four pottery forms piled together with the topmost bowl cut into horns and added */XXX/* of clay lower down (very African in feeling) and two tall pots nearly four feet high, adorned with knops and spikes and seaweed ash glazes. (they probably sound horrid but

actually were really very exciting!)

Paul Brown has a certain antipathy to B.L.'s work, whilst recognising the latter's importance in giving impetus to a new movement towards living potters. (You may recall P.B.'s "Towards a New Standard" in Pottery Quarterly 23 (not very lucid I thought), to which B.L. replied in the following issue.) I think my collection shook him a little – he went so far as to admit that the physical presence of so many pots by younger potters, the validity of which he recognised, in a collection avowedly based on Leach, possibly meant that he was wrong and needed to revise his ideas. I was quite prepared I think at one time to dislike him and find him supercilious, but he is so much more likeable beneath the surface on nearer acquaintance that it is impossible to do so.

Many thanks for all your Abuja news. I am sorry that Halima was ill and hope she is recovered. Will there be any of her work in the 1962 exhibition? This is the next event I think to which we are all looking forward. The big rose-bowls sound splendid. The one thing I shall look for is a good thrown pot (just a small one would be enough) by Ladi Kwali – there were interesting ones in each of the last two shows which I missed through not finding them soon enough. As for my "esteemed order" for the screw-capped series (and mustards!) I shall be quite happy if this is dealt with as and when you conveniently can.

All the best (belatedly!) for Christmas and for 1962.

Yours as ever Bill.

***10 July 1962 [hand written on Berkeley Galleries leaflet for "Exhibition of Stoneware by Michael Cardew & Pupils from Abuja, Northern Nigeria" 14 June - 7 July 1962]***

Dear Bill,

The Paris exhibn is extended to 20th July. Kofi & I are going on 18th - 19th via Southampton - Harve. I will try to bring back your pot & eventually leave it at /XXX/ CPA 3 Lowndes Ct (We return from Paris via Southampton to Cornwall, avoiding London).

About the Tea Caddy, I remember now. It had a minute crack in the cover, not visible exc. from inside, but I relegated it to Seconds & excluded it from the exhibn. It has now turned up among the other "private" pots I bought back home from Abuja (teapots by Kofi, sugar casters by ditto etc.) Would you like it at £2.2- It is in the brown (kaki as opposed to "Guinness" slip glaze with sgraffito decoration, rather bigger than the Guinness-brown ones. Made in 1960. I could send it by parcel post; or wait till I get to London again (end Aug. I think)

What a pity I didn't find it that morning you were at 1 Grenville Rd Richmond! You c'd have had it right away!

Yours Michael.

PS Ladi Kwali's other engagements & tour of the West were all a huge success. She flew back on 6th; Kofi & I are now recovering!

**15 July 1962**

Dear Michael,

Glad to have your letter and to hear that Ladi's tour was so generally successful – although its not surprising, as I don't see how anyone with any feeling for either pots or people could fail to respond to her! I made another flying visit to the Berkeley Gallerie show before it closed and met Raymond Finch there who told me of Ladi's visit to Winchcombe. I wish I could have followed up more of her tour, however I am very thankful to have seen as much as I did.

The extension of the Davis show suggests that more interest must eventually have been aroused there although it has taken time for the news to spread – perhaps there won't be much left there either!

I'd better say what has happened to date about my own small purchases there. You may recall that I took away (and paid for) two of the small Ladi/Halima dishes at 60 francs /XXX/ each and also bought away (not paid) a Peter Kuna Bute teapot (at 70 francs /XXX/). I actually reached home with 60 new francs still in my possession! As it seemed stupid to sell these back at a loss and then get a bank draft, what I did was to buy another 10-franc note and send the notes. I have since discovered that this was not *comme il faut* as regards the currency regulations & although as all foreign currency purchased is recorded in ones passport, I can't see myself that it makes any financial (still less, more) difference whether one spends one's travel allowance whether actually abroad (I could never afford to spend it all anyway!), or retrospectively in this way. I hope the sum arrives safely – it hasn't been acknowledged yet. In the accompanying letter I gave the 3 Galerie La Borne people my Hemsworth address, and asked them to send the Bawa Ushafa pot on there at the end of the exhibition and bill me for it including packing and postage.

You will now presumably see them again before it is dispatched. It is very kind of you to offer to put it in with anything you are bringing yourself – please do as you think best but I don't want it to be an inconvenience (or expense) to you.

Yes, please I would like to have the tea caddy, but there is no urgency about sending it. I did think that if I could manage it and it wouldn't be a nuisance to you, I might try to get the odd day down in Cornwall some time in August, just to see you again (and any pots that are still around!); if this should come off, I could pick up the caddy (and the B.U jar, if it does travel with your things) myself.

I am still trying to find time for a printing and execution session on the Ladi Kwali photographs. Those I attempted to take at the C.P.A demonstration were done under conditions of considerable technical severity (so much so that I was made envious of the Winchcombe opportunity of taking photographs by daylight in the open air) - however, my negatives although far from ideal are quite printable, and it is very annoying that (entirely through my own fault!) there is a gap in the series caused by an accident I had with the film whilst at Richmond. Partway through the C.P.A demonstration, I realized that one film (36 frames!) was going to be quite inadequate, so I hastily loaded a second camera body with an old, out-dated film which had been in my bag for some time (actually, it performed quite well). Then when the first film finished I switched to the second body and continued, meanwhile putting the first body on the floor with the intention of winding the film back at the first opportunity. I was so carried away that I both forgot to do this, and forgot to check afterwards – hence the accident the following day when I opened the camera back, supposing the film to be wound back into the light trapped cassette, only to find it was still on the open spool with part of it exposed to the incoming light. (I shut the camera back again in considerably less than a second I imagine, but a fraction of a second is more than enough!)

The colour transparencies attempted at the Berkeley Galleries earlier on the day of the C.P.A demonstration were done in cloudy sky conditions of such rapidly changing light that most of the exposures are "out" in one direction or another, and I don't think there is even one frame which is up to the average of the colour record made in 1959. A few of the Paris ones are better than London (right at the beginning, when for a few minutes there was some bright sunshine getting partway in by the front door), but they tail off rather dismally, so at my final visit to the Berkeley Galleries I tried a rapid, black-and-white record as in Paris (results not yet seen).

I know Spink very much enjoyed his London trip. Best wishes from both of us to you and Mrs C and to Kofi! Bill.



**26 July 1962**

Dear Michael,

Many thanks for your letter written just before you went to France again. I didn't reply at once, as I didn't know for how long or how briefly you would be in touch with the Galerie La Bonne and I don't know now whether you will be back at Wenford Bridge- but it seems fairly likely by this time.

About the slides- my experience is that commercial copies are seldom much like the originals in colour. I already do my own colour processing, and am trying to equip myself to do my own colour copying. But in the /XXX/ I have several duplicate originals which you can have with pleasure- one at least from 1959, and 2 or 3 from Paris this year. And I have just had another go at colour-photographing (in duplicate: not yet processed) the very satisfactory ascending series of three which I now have here (all different decorations- the smallest, "cylinder-seal" only, the middle one with practically all Ladi's incised and inlaid motifs put on one pot with no division into panels, and the biggest (by Halima) in panels, with flying lizards.)

The Berkeley Galleries black-and-whites are reasonable looking negatives- not yet printed.

I am very busy at work, and shall be tied to my job practically all my waking hours for the middle part of August, in the absence of a colleague on holiday. At home I am on with some house painting, and have photographic jobs in progress (both very interrupted) and I have all of at least two lots of visitors during August. Which ought to be finished as soon as possible. So it begins to look less and less likely that I can get down to see you again. If my Bawa Ushafa pot from Paris has come with your things, I suggest leave it and the caddy at Wenford Bridge until I can collect. I am on holiday for a fortnight in September with no plans made as yet, may have some use of motorised rather than rail transport at that time, and am v.interested in Kofi's firing plans- will write to him about this. And if I am not able to bring the slides (and possibly, b and w prints also) I will send them before you leave.

I meant to say in my last that we have had a V. and A. travelling exhibition of British Studio Pottery in Wakefield for several weeks, later it will be at Bradford for the better part of two months. (Some Winchcombe slipware, including an earthenware prototype (green of yours for with several small handles round the shoulder /XXX/ galena-glazed jar with brushed slip decoration; an enlarged photograph of you at the wheel in 1928 and the earliest of the first to come to Europe, and still one of the rest of the Abuja funnel necked /XXX/ or wine bottles). Interesting and informative on the early period (Martin Brothers, Wm. De Morgan, Pilkington Factory, Bernard Moore etc.), pretty good from the 1920s onwards, tails off rather in the most recent period with a few surprising inclusions and even more surprising omissions- I don't feel the V. and A. have been very perceptive about anything not yet "in the book"!

All the best, Bill.

**13 August 1962**

Dear Michael

Many thanks for your letter and all the details about the La Borne pots. I'm very regretful not to be seeing you again before you travel on, but I am so busy (probably you are, too) that it proved impracticable. I shall be tied up all the rest of this month. At any rate, one way or another (London, Paris, London, Richmond!) I managed to contact you more often this visit than at any previous one since our first meeting.

Yes, indeed, I like the notepaper!

I have rounded up and slide-mounted eleven transparencies (all duplicate originals which I could spare

without prejudice to my projected copying experiments) which you may like to see. You could keep any or all of these, which you wanted permanently. There is one 1959 photograph (of the */remainder of letter missing/*

**14 August 1962**

Dear Michael,

Yes I had another go last night, am going to find this morning that there are one or two bad prints which perhaps stuck together whilst washing, and hence retained unavoidable chemicals which are producing a yellow-brown stain. No time to do more now, if it recurs on any you want, let me know which and I will replace.

I've realised that (so far as I can recall) I never in so many words said thank you for your trouble in bringing the B.U wine jar from Paris for me, so do so now!

I'm still not very happy about having been persuaded to put prices on the photographs. At least take the personal ones of you and Ladi, and offer Kofi the ones of him (if he wants them!) with my compliments (There were two negatives of him alone. I printed the one which looked sharper but it turned out "wooden", I think the one printed now is a bit more relaxed.)

Hope this reaches you before you leave. Letter from Spink this morning who sends good wishes. All the best! Bill.

**22 August 1962**

Dear Bill,

I arrived here last night. I am gradually coping w. reams of mostly rather dull correspondence here. This is just a small cheque for the photos; I make out the bill somewhat like this:

27 photos of London (excluding special ones of Kofi etc.) at 16 x 39 = £2.18.6

+12 ditto of Pans (excluding personal etc.)

6 slides at 2/- =12-

Viewer 5/- =5-

£3.15.6

I don't really need the other 5 slides and have left them at Wenford in the office – at least I hope so! They may be at Richmond – what a muddle, I'm sorry.

It was a very good thought of yours to send me the Viewer: I do hope you don't mind my appropriating it for Africa!!

Let me know how much more I really owe you on the photos.

Good news on the mustard pot front. I find I left instructions (& a specimen) for Hassan Lapai to make some in my absence, & they are here, lovely ones, (dozens of them actually!) They are marked 2/3d each (!). How many shall I send? [If I send one, postage will multiply the 2/3 by about 5 or 6; but 6 would prob go in a 10/- parcel] Let me know.

I hope you will get down to Wenford before Kofi leaves. He can put you up in the house – give him a day or 2 to get the bed aired!

Ass that I am, I left all your photos behind in Richmond by mistake, having carefully sorted those I wanted for Nigeria!! The slides I left on purpose. The climate here is too bad for them.

All well here. The new woman potter ASIBI seems rather good – a great powerful peasant matron. Ladi

Kwali is in fine form.

As ever M.

***Undated letter***

Dear Michael,

Glad to hear you are all well at Abuja; thanks for your letter (and the cheque which is ample!) You will already have had, I expect, the letter I sent to Abuja in reply to your last one from Wenford.

Mustard pots: yes, please send 6, also anything else on the small side which would further justify the parcel without boosting the price more than a couple of pounds or so: yet another good caddy by anyone would be welcome, or an L.K beaker, or a small jug or a mug by Hassan Lapai or "GB" of the resonant name! I append my "parcels" address again;

COUNTY LIBRARY

MARKET STREET

Hemsworth

Pontefract

Yorkshire, England

I don't know if it matters much that the slides you intended to return were left at Richmond by mistake as I have a duplicate in each case. And I suppose your family will be able to send on the prints which were left behind? But if I can help out at all please let me know.

Glad to hear of your new recruit!

Spink and I will be on holiday from the 10th September to the 22nd, our arrangements such as they are have been very last minute ones. Last year you remember, we were in Eire with a hired car, this time, he has just acquired a second-hand car of his own, primarily to enable him to give some weekend recreation to his mother who is turned 80. We are taking her on holiday to visit relations near Peterborough first, then have about 10 days on tour before going back to pick her up again. Our first call is back north about 50 miles to the Lincolnshire coast to visit an old school friend. Then Winchcombe I hope (I have never yet been there!) and Wenford. I don't know whether you realised there might be two of us when kindly suggesting that I could stay in the house if I managed to get there? At any rate, I have written tentatively to Kofi to see what he says, but have made it clear that we are not to be a nuisance or burden to him in any way.

We might be lucky and just hit the firing if it is early (the actual dates of my holiday I had to fix some time back). But what I rather expect is that we might have to leave in the middle, or that it will be taking place whilst on my way home, as so recently returned to work as to be unable to go again. But if it is late (late Sept or early Oct) I might be able to go again by train on my own for it.

Greetings from Spink and myself, As ever, Bill.

***21 October 1962***

Dear Michael,

I have been trying to get a letter off to you since my return from holiday – but have been so busy at work that my own affairs have had to take a back seat. A letter from me is now all the more overdue since I received your letter last week (written 9th, postmarked 11th and received 16th October), and also (despite what you thought about the pots probably not arriving until long afterwards) by the arrival of the potters box also only two days later (postmarked 26th September received at Hemsworth 18th



October)! (All safe and intact: more on this later).

I was very sorry to hear of your being ill and hope you've made or will shortly make a good recovery. But it is not really a surprise to hear of you possibly saying goodbye to Nigeria fairly soon, after seeing the electrical work in progress at Wenford. In a way I rather regret the passing of your pressure lamps but there can be no doubt that electricity is a much more convenient and less laborious way of getting light just where you want it, particularly in the pottery, of having a constant supply of hot-water, and possibly of preparing clay and glazes – although I can't quite see you electrifying either your kiln or your living-room fireplace!

Our holiday tour with potters was a very pleasant affair indeed. We took Jack's mother down to stay with relatives of hers at Ramsey (near Peterborough) – then went back to Boston (Lincs) to stay with an old school friend. Wonderful old Guild Hall there, with the Medieval kitchens still intact: the museum upstairs has locally excavated medieval pots and tiles, 17th century salt-glaze and a case of successful pots, kiln wasters, kiln fragments and photographs illustrating the local experiments in from replica of a Romano/British kiln.

Then across to Winchcombe; then Hampton Lovett for Geoffrey Whiting; then Somerset for Waistel Cooper who lives on the edge of Exmoor above Porlock, in a former game keepers cottage, a couple of miles off even the main road, up a cliff track, through trees, never intended for cars, but we made it. Finally to Wenford (where Kofi was welcoming indeed and we had a marvellous time). We were there from Monday morning to Thursday of our second week.

At Winchcombe of course beside Ray Finch and his other colleague we met Peter Bruce Dick, who showed us his own quarters behind the old pottery in your original pottery house, currently adorned with Nigerian fabrics, African sculpture and Abuja and other pots. It was a great pleasure to see all this for the first time though a rather melancholy one to see the old pottery so belatedly. At Wenford it was equally pleasurable but more lively to be among all the Cardew family things, with the family heights recorded on the wall and so on, and your honourable country pottery origins visible in the pots by George and E.B Fishley, the harvest jug in the kitchen, and then pots of your own of all periods (except perhaps Vume but a fine pot by Kofi from there): the only notable omission seemed to be Fishley Holland, unless indeed the royal-arms slip-trailed dish is this – but I could be quite wrong about that.

By the way, I collected my Bawa pot of course and the caddy (now used for coffee) – also, from the glass-fronted case, a nice coffee-pot and a soy-sauce pot (a second, because the spout is stopped with glaze, so it is quite useless! – unless I can fix it which is a tricky job – but a wonderful colour and texture like the ones in the little back room in Paris which I missed from not seeing them until the last minute). Jack (Spink) got a jug by Kofi and we both got eggcups. Also the slides which you wanted to return where at Wenford, Kofi remembered and produced them, as we were leaving, from the desk in the office.

When our stay at Wenford came to an end all too soon, we made for Ramsey again to collect Jack's mother, and then all go north. On the way across, we routed via /XXX/ where we had heard of a gallery (the Branson Studio or alternatively "At the sign of the bleeding horse"!) run by one R.V Branson (a sculptor). Here in addition to paintings and sculpture by a wide range of artists, we were agreeably surprised to find the most discriminating semi-permanent exhibition of pots by craftsmen potters, all available for purchase, which I have yet seen in this country. Startling to come upon it in a small and rather out-of-the-way place – more like Denmark than England!

Three disappointments: first the pots from Davis had not reached Wenford when we were there; second we did miss the firing as I had a premonition would be the case (our holiday having to be fixed before we knew of the possibility it turned out that the firing was set to begin the very day we had to be back at work after holiday and hence the least chance in the world of being in Cornwall for it); and

third, due to a mechanical fault in my camera, not perceptible at the time, I find on doing my processing that a number of key photographs are so marred by a shutter aberration to be useless – notably, in colour, a sequence of Fishley pots and of yours, and Mrs Cardew's (I take it) portrait of Ladi. Only consolation, I may possibly get another chance. (I shall hold this letter up for a day or two, in the hope of being able to include some small prints of photographs (b and w) which did come out.) [Although I had a faint hope at one time of going back to see the results, so much work had piled up at Hemsworth that the hope soon failed.]

Reverting to the box of pots from Abuja – the HLP versions lack the finesse of their originals! But that does not prevent them from being very potterly, and you have picked me a wonderful range of glaze variations which I take it are all from the same or a similar mix, but different parts of the kiln. And I am delighted with the Ladi beakers – especially the handled one, which is a good form and decoration and has glaze quality like the PKG teapot from Paris.

Twelve pots in the box so slight discrepancy of one pot between the paper free with your letter (done from “memory”) and the pots as packed and the box lid. Both agree with 6 mustards and lids @ 2/3d each, tea caddy @6/-, 4 beakers @ 3/- each, box 4/-, postage £1-0-6d – but the paperwork has “2 beakers w. handles @ 3/9d” and there is only one. A bill which you roughed out on the box lid (under the customs label – I found it by accident when floating off the stamps which someone wanted, when the label came off as well) ends up with “1 beaker w. handle @ 5/d”. 7/10d is all right for the beaker w. handle which is a particularly good one, so my remittance corresponds with the paper bill. There are some personalia on it so I hope it is all right that I have kept it instead of returning it – the reference is 02/263 of 9th October.

It is very kind of you to say that the blue stripe shirt is a present – thank you very much!

Hope you are better. Jack may have written to you himself, but in case not, all good wishes from him also! As ever Bill.

### ***Undated letter***

Dear Michael,

I thought when I did finally get the opportunity of doing some prints; I might as well do them bigger, although the original idea was to do some small ones to go in my letter.

The ones at Wenford are self-explanatory – the other three were by the ornamental water in the park at Bodmin.

Hope you are fit again. All good wishes, Bill.

The photograph of you and Kofi at Bodmin with the large urn in the foreground is a “degraded” print (technically I mean only! The whites have gone grey) but no chance to do another. These are from b-and-w of which only one each print so far done and these are going to Michael (front of the house, living room dresser, ghost kiln general view and close-up of kiln mouth) but there can be more I hope later. Only person with no prints so far is, as usual, me. Look inside the beaker when you get it for the slide (souvenir of your work at Ulverston), which I forgot to give you before you left here.

### ***17 February 1963***

Dear Michael,

Many thanks for your air letter late December (from which, although you don't actually say so, I was glad to gather that you were much fitter than at the time of your previous writing). And I am grateful for the additional information about your publications on pottery, and the further news of the “ex-Paris” pots.

I wrote off to Andre Deutsch & co, who have replied that they expect to publish A CHRONICLE OF ABUJA sometime this month (February). They say "we are now working in close association with AUP (African University Press Lagos) the first indigenous publishing house in independent Africa, the foundation of which was announced in Nigeria in April 1962. The greater part of AUP's output will be educational books chosen to answer the needs of Nigerian schools and colleges, it has however, a journal list as well. Books on this list likely to readers outside Nigeria are published simultaneously by us. Along with the ABUJA book (at the same price as in Nigeria 9/6d) are to appear REFLECTIONS (an anthology of Nigerian writing) and AN AFRICAN NIGHTS ENTERTAINMENT (folk-tale-based stories for children by Cyprian Ekwandi), at 5/6d each.

I am also writing to Lagos about back numbers of the Nigeria Magazine (no.s 52, 67 and 70, that is); to the Galerie La Borne again; and to your sister-in-law. I intended to have done all this and replied to you much sooner but have been terribly busy and had much time wasted by bad traveling, luck and water difficulties etc., due to the bad weather. I note you say that Nigeria Magazine no. 39 is out of print: if you can still spare a copy at some convenient time, I'd be very glad to have one, or just the loan of one would do, as I can photo-copy the article purely for my own use without breach of copyright! I am letting your sister-in-law know that I waive any claim I may be said to have to the two soy pots! I already have one from each of the three glaze batches which have reached Europe – so any further one (and one for Spink) could very well be from a later lot, as you assure me there'll be more (As good fish in the sea etc.) I am not quite sure how to interpret what you say about the no.1 pot from Paris now being "NOT FOR SALE" – but I hope it means I still have a residual interest in it when the price is decided and my finances have recovered!

Yes I do have the New Zealand Potter publication on B.L, and if I omitted to list your "Recollections" there published, it was an oversight on my part.

I think my only pottery news is of a brief visit to an exhibition of stoneware by Dan Arbeid at Primavera, some very "Japanese" narrow-necked flower jars, and big dishes, of which the best was bought by Gwyn Hanssen! I've not yet seen her to say how much Spink and I enjoyed the remains of a fruit pie she made for Kofi (in a beautiful Winchcombe pie dish too!) in September at Wenford. On the same trip I finally carried home a very big teapot by Alan Caiger-Smith, which, I bought back in June, but which went into the exhibition we sent to Coventry. There is also a new pottery shop ("anschel") at 33 King's Road, Chelsea, not far from Primavera, a big batch of stuff from St Ives, pots by BL, JL, Bill Marshall and Kenneth Quick (who has been back with BL but has just left for Japan), also by Johnnie Leach, David's son, a third generation potter, or could one say ninth Kenzan?

If you feel able in the spring to let me have another little batch of Abuja pots I'd be very glad to see what is on the go – but only if it is not a nuisance to you to arrange such a dispatch. Also the "belima pots" draperies I have here at present are all Japanese /XXX/ batiks, but it would be good to have Nigerian fabric, either woven or tie-dyed or both, with the Abuja ones. But perhaps there will be some at your next coming, which I can try to see before they are all spoken for.

I have had a letter from Kofi! On a very gay blue decorated colours of red, yellow and green, plus a yellow stamp with a /XXX/, air letter form. He said he has been quite ill (from the "unbearable" heat) over Christmas and New Year, but that by the grace of God he is now [end of January] coming to his normal state of health. He rather wishes he could have wintered in England, but I feel that would have been a case of out of the frying pan into the deep-freeze, as he was already shivering a bit in September (admittedly a year of poor weather). I hope you will get him to Abuja soon as your blackbird wanted, and that we shall see him in England again.

Hope you are well; all the best (and best wishes from Spink)! Bill.



**12 May 1963**

Dear Michael,

Your air letter was here when I returned from a short visit to a friend at Exeter, and the then simultaneously packets borrowed on the 3rd or 4th May (I had them on the 5th), many thanks for all!

I have been so pushed for time this week (in fact it has been a general state since Christmas) that I've not yet been able to sit down and read "A Chronicle of Abuja". (As for letter writing, that usually has to wait for a Sunday, whilst last weekend I had to be at a professional meeting that even included Sunday). But I have had a quick preliminary run-through the pottery section and my first impression of the book as a whole is that whilst I agree that it's a good little book in content, I agree hardly at all with your new severe structures on its format! The cover is gay but not at all vulgar to my eye, typographically clean and the reverse of crude (though it is on the flimsy side in material), and I like the page layout with the wide margins and the marginal paragraph headings and line drawings. Even the attempt to print photographs and all, lithographically on letter press paper instead of resorting to interlaying of "art" paper (in several respects a horrid material which I shall be glad to see diminishing in general use when this becomes technically possible.) It also seems a bit severe to say the book is full of misprints though I see one or two things which would normally have been caught at proof stage which with this method of printing /XXX/ corrected on the printing plates themselves and one or two which have not been caught at all (e.g. Impossible page references from marginal drawings, which probably survive from the /XXX/ stage and have not been adapted to the printed version. On the whole it seems to me pretty creditable, technically imperfect perhaps but right in idea, which is surely better than "technically perfect but lifeless and wrong!" In the outer pocket, the battered copy of the magazine with /XXX/ I must copy just as it came from /XXX/ I began a letter to you before Easter which remains a fragment and was scrapped once I had */remainder of letter missing/*

*/undated fragment of letter/*

Something new from you to reply to. This /XXX/ reporting that the three A.U.P bowls (in /XXX/ in the Abuja one) failed to appear here in February as expected but that during March my eye had been caught by a photograph in the "Bookseller" of Andre Deutsch (on a visit to Lagos) presenting copies of them to the Nigerian Minister of Education on the occasion of their Nigerian publication on December last. Along with this was a paragraph headed "Book Exports for Nigeria" which made it clear that the edition for here was to be wholly "made in Nigeria." "A small but significant landmark in Nigerian History" is Mr Andre Deutsch's description of some parcels on a ship now at sea between Lagos and London. They contain books; the first three titles to be exported from that much exported to country, all three of them. Written by Nigerians and wholly manufactured in Nigeria, They were published in Lagos in November last, receiving a tremendous welcome from the press. In Great Britain this will appear towards the end of May. (Then about twice as much again about the foundation of the A.U.P and about its joint imprint arrangements with Andre Deutsch and Sweet & Maxwell.)

Have been interrupted in the writing of this. So to get this on the way, I will just say rapidly that of course I respect your wish to keep the large lidded pot yourself, but that I don't abandon my hopes of one day having a big pot of yours! I'm sorry your more recent efforts in this line have so far been so disastrous, but I don't take too seriously your assertion that you are past it and finished! To use a Yorkshire expression, "I feel that you will come again, like parkin" (this is a metaphor from a stiff oatmeal and treacle cake which can be kept in store for a considerable period: after a while it will go stale, but then subsequently becomes good eating again.)

I shall be very glad if you are able to send a parcel of pots again some time in the summer and many thanks for what you say about the textile prospects at the year-end. Its good to have news of the folk at

Abuja and of future plans. Please remember me to Kofi (if as I hope he's re-joined you or will shortly do so) and to L.K. I will try to write again soon about all the pottery events there have been here. I think I did say something earlier about the first of these, the Dan Arbeid show, but there has been much more since! Did I say I had seen Peter Bruce Dick again and he had some idea of working in Yorkshire? But probably you know more of this than I do.

All good wishes, As ever, Bill.

**18 December 1963**

Dear Michael,

Very glad to have your air letter which reached me almost ten days ago now, and I hope you had a reasonably good journey and that all went well- although it could do to be warmer for a spell where you are than it is in Yorkshire at the moment, until you become acclimated! I don't know where you will be for Christmas, but I am taking a chance on Wenford Bridge – if I am wrong, this will reach you eventually I suppose and indicate at least my good intention to greet you.

I saw both the exhibitions (Leach and Hamada), which I mentioned in the tone of my last. A good range of things from B.L. – everything from small pale celadon porcelains, some of them undecorated (pure form and texture) to almost pure decoration (painted tile). And two biggish stoneware jars which seemed to me very fine, and jugs tall and small (including a tall raw-glazed one) and one or two very agreeable coffee pots. Other things too- too numerous to mention- however not a large show, but great and vigorous variety.

The Hamada caused more excitement than anything else this year I suppose- a sizeable queue down Hay Hill towards opening time and the place jam-packed in ten minutes. Some pots I didn't like, but then I have yet to see a show in which I like everything, thank goodness! That'll be the day! And more than enough vitality around even so, to pull me down to see it again, and enjoy it more the second time. A memorable opening, with B.L. and then Hamada speaking. H very approachable, and delighted potters by his simple and frank replies to questions on matters of technique. He attributed the character of his work to the Mashiko clays and to the few and "simple" glazes of local materials he uses- all the variations are due to different combinations of one glaze over the other. The qualities of his work seem to me to arise from spontaneity and no fiddling and a sort of relaxed and sure-handed self-restraint. Occasionally it seems to me that the thing goes wrong and he still fires it, or it goes wrong in the firing and he still keeps it- occasionally to my eye he over-decorates which is very surprising- but his best things are treasures!

All good wishes to the whole family! Bill.

**12 January 1964**

Dear Michael,

Many thanks for your letter and greetings, your various news and the message from Kofi. But I am very sorry to hear of your son's accident of which of course I previously knew nothing. It sounds rather serious that he is still non-mobile after three months or so, but I hope in fact he is making good progress.

Yes, I can confirm that Hamada in late 1963 looked identically as he appears in the Dartington Hall photograph of 1952 published in B.L.'s "A potter in Japan", and that B.L. himself is not much changed and was vigorous, lively and full of vim at approaching 77. About Hamada's age there is a slight mystery – officially (in the Japanese books) he was born in 1894 and BL at the Hamada exhibition said he was 69. However this is at variance with B.L.'s 5 earlier recorded impressions in 1946 in "The Leach Pottery, 1920-1946" that in 1920 "Hamada was 28 I think and I was 33". I think this sort of recollection from an

age at which the amount of an age offers? Is more significance may have some weight. Mrs Muriel Rose in her Faber monograph volume says 1892 for Hamada (perhaps from the /XXX/). But the birthdays are 5th January (BL) and 9th November (SH) (the latter obtained from Atsuya Hamada), so for the greater part of 1920 BL would be 33 but Hamada to be 28 would have had to be born in 1891. So he may be 72! I managed to snatch one or two photographs of SH towards the end of the private view (one, talking to Henry Hammond), but the light was very unfavourable and the negatives are thin and have not yet had a chance to put in print. (BL had posed with great equanimity with SH earlier on the official Japanese photographs, but one couldn't bother him again and in fact I've never managed to get a worth while photograph of him (of my own I mean).

I am trying to get a letter off to Mme Piotrowski! – In simple English (possibly more illegible than was French).

Did you know that "A Chronicle of Abuja" was belatedly and rather briefly reviewed in the first Times Literary Supplement in 1964? In case you've not seen it I send it along – the whole page in fact as there's also a longer review of William Fagg's new book (under a rather journalistic heading which is rather at variance with the usual dignified style of the TLS – although a book by the American novelist William Burroughs which disturbed the reviewer was recently noticed under the heading "Ugh!")

Please tell Mariel that I'm at least as erratic a letter writer as she makes herself out to be – as I'm pretty sure I never replied to a letter of hers in January last (in response to my 1962 Christmas Greeting), which has just come to my hand again in sorting out a pile of correspondence.

All fond wishes to both of you, Bill.

**26 January 1964**

Dear Bill,

Well I hope you didn't expect to find some interesting photos or other documents inside this "important" looking envelope, which I only use because it gives me a feeling of luxury.

I haven't much to contribute to the problem of Hamada's age, except that in 1923 when I first went to St Ives, I was told – I don't know who by – that he was 29, so I guess the Japanese official records are probably right. Anyhow I always thought of him as being 7 years older than me, a sort of very senior elder brother.

Thanks awfully for sending the short review of the Chronicle of Abuja. I cut it out from your cutting and sent it on, approximately, to the Emir of Abuja. I liked the review of W. Faggs book – (another book by him!) I hope to see it later on in the Jos Museum Library in Nigeria.

The other day I received a wad of 70 photos (not all of them good) of the traditional pots in the "Leith Ross" Collection, a special gallery at the Jos Museum: (I left a list of abt 80 which I thought should be photographed.) So now, very soon I must get down to writing 2 or 3 thousand words about the traditional pottery because the Museum is getting out an illustrated book – a catalogue really – of the collection, & they want me to write the technical - & - art introductory section. It will be published in Nigeria. I'll let you know when it is out. My part in it will, I'm afraid, be largely a re-hash of stuff I've already written on the subject.

Here I am really trying to get down to completing at least the MS of "Pioneer Pottery", but it will be so long that no publisher will want it. However the great thing is to get the words (100,000 of them?) on paper, then later on it might be easier to swallow ones pride & go through with a blue pencil & cut out ¼ or more of it. But I shall try to make them swallow the whole book first.

Yours ever Michael.

**01 February 1964**

Dear Bill,

This came back to me because (Believe It Or Not) I wrote on the envelope-

“14 Welbeck St, Halifax, Yorks” !! (I see Halifax is quite a long way from Wakefield!!)

Do you remember in 1962 you sent me a plastic viewer for slides, price 5/-, which you kindly allowed me to keep? Can you tell me where you got it, because Ladi Kwali wants one & I promised to get her one if poss. It is much the cheapest, simplest & the nicest to use – it doesn't tire yr eyes. But I don't know where to go to buy it. Any suggestions gratefully received.

Yours Michael.

**Undated letter**

Dear Michael,

Very glad to hear that my dispatches all reached Wenford whilst you were still there, and that there were things you liked. And many thanks for the exhibition leaflets, which are particularly welcome additions to my accumulation of pottery documents.

Yes, by all means retain the small viewer. I have come back to this simple one which is about the cheapest, as being also the most effective of the light ones which don't take up much room – the more expensive ones all have faults in one or another of three ways, either (a) very surprisingly, they make the elementary mistake of having a plexi-glass or plastic diffusing screen behind the slide which is so coarse ground as to show up distractingly in use, or (b) the eyepiece and focal distance are so cramped that after about 6 slides one is pot-eyed from trying to focus, or (c) they are made collapsible so as to go in the pocket and this usually means that they have to be held different ways up for horizontal and vertical slides, and are apt to disintegrate in use so that the slide ends up broken on the floor. Yes, also the slides should fit any properly standard 2" x 2" projector (they are just the same in format as those projected at the 1960 Ladi Kwali meeting), the only reservation is that I have come across projectors of American origin which are apparently only made for use with slides in card mounts, and which hence won't take slides in glass, which are too thick for them, and jam.

I see from an earlier letter that you know about the possibility of “funguses” (or at any rate, moulds) forming on slides in the tropics, a warm humid climate is v.bad for them, and people on expeditions have to pack films in sealed containers with silica gel, although I believe this is only a temporary and “in transit” possibility. I imagine termites would eat the binding paper at least! And of course the other thing is exposure to light, which would prematurely fade the dyes. A transparency after processing is just dye substances or a transparent base, deposited by chemical colour /XXX/ of dye materials in proportion as the 3 layers of emulsion, with different colour-sensitivity which it contains were affected by light reflected from the subject. The remnants of purely photographic (light-sensitive) substances in the film which are intermediately only /XXX/ processing, including the yellow filter layer needed for colour corrections and the anti-halation blue backing, but the dyes themselves could be /XXX/ if too constantly exposed. I don't think anyone really knows yet how permanent or impermanent modern slides will yet prove to be, even in optimum conditions.

Will send Mrs Cardew another family photograph when I am able to have another session. At the moment I am on with painting the house outside, whenever I get a little free time and the weather will let me.

All good wishes, remember me to L.K ! Good wishes also from Spink. Bill.

**08 February 1964**



Dear Michael,

I was very glad to hear from you again (and to know that I'm not the only one who occasionally does peculiar things on envelopes: not so long since, I sent off an urgent letter and got it back myself the following day, because I'd put a library address and then Hemsworth, instead of the name of the other one I'd intended!)

I have been making enquiries about the Pullin "Instant" daylight slide viewer you mentioned and am sorry to find that like most reasonably priced but useful things, it has ceased to be made! And that no one in Wakefield has one left in stock. The other two modestly priced English ones of comparable type which were of some merit (the original model Paleon /XXX/ slide viewer and container and the Corfield "Preview") are also now not being made. I may get into Leeds next week and will see if I can run across a Pullin there, if not, I still have one, although it is a bit worse for wear with scratches on the "ground glass" (which is actually some kind of plastic I think) which show when using it. Ladi would be welcome to this as a small present, with apologies for its condition and will send this or whatever I find. If I can I'll get a new one. I still have examples (also now a bit scratched up) of both the other types mentioned (having tried 'em all in my time), and these are adequate to the job I mainly need this type for, which is checking at the different stages of making up slide that it is properly masked, free from dust between the cover glass etc., before sealing it up with the binding tape.

The smaller and simpler pocket viewers now generally available (three or four brand names but all West German and quite similar to each other, at prices from 7/6d- to 10/ or so) are all pretty rough on the eyes - the eye piece is so small and the barrel (from the lens to the fixed slot for the slide) so short that I for one can't see a slide in focus in one of them - with the Pullin, I need to use the furthest away if the three slots. I keep thinking I'll make myself a more efficient one; it could be done with a little fiddling, out of plywood, a bit of paper ground or opal glass and almost any modest lens giving some degree of imagination. It is rather astonishing in what quantity and what variety one can now get in the shops the bulkier and heavier hand-viewer with battery illumination, at prices from 21/- to start - after that one starts with projectors. This "market" is like a miniature of the motorcar market - there are a few simple and solid ones (Ilford do a good compact and good-looking one at 21/-), but most of them (British, Italian, French, German, even some from America) are pretentiously and even extravagantly styled. They have all the gimmicks - "status symbol", /XXX/, and the one which doesn't appear in the /XXX/, obsolescence" - most /XXX/ gimcrack moving parts /XXX/ not very robust arrangement of /XXX/ springs, metal strips, machine /XXX/, to switch on the light when /XXX/. Most are heavy enough with batteries in them and yet flimsy enough to smash irreparably if crashed (i.e. if one drops them). I know only one novelty, a viewer light and open-fronted box or a conventional shape with /XXX/ arch in miniature. The slides are in a slot above the /XXX/ arch (where there is an arrangement of lenses), but what one actually sees through the open front below is a projected slight enlargement of the slide on the mirror in the back-drop position. There are no batteries - the device uses light falling on the slide from an outside source, so that one can view the slide brilliantly by positioning oneself with ones back to a window or open sky in daylight or to a room light after dark. The device is light but is not very portable as taking up a four /XXX/ But it strikes me as a useful way of viewing without fuss in the home.

I didn't intend to go on like this and you are probably bored stiff! May I say best of luck with the book (and a publisher for it), also with the /XXX/ catalogue which I am very interested to hear of. Incidentally, I am still not at all clear what the set up at /XXX/ is (as regards the new potters, I mean) - and I never did hear whether Ladi's proposed West German trip came to anything.

I have seen (all too briefly) a library copy of "Nigerian Images", and hop to get a copy when & if I can afford it! It deserves a good review and has since had another one. My Mrs Margaret Howell in "Man"

(of which W.F. himself is Hon. Editor, incidentally, but it would have been quite /XXX/ for a book of this significance not to be noticed in "Man", and the matter would certainly be dealt with impartially not the Hon. Assistant Editor or one of the Hon. Editorial Advisers. I will try to send a typed-out copy of this.

I wrote to Mme Piotrowski again but probably not as promptly as I should have done – I found it extraordinarily difficult to explain this complicated matter in simple language! I put an international reply coupon in, as I have done before – too soon yet to expect a reply. I am still worried about this business – the sum was 150 NF, which I make to be between £11 and £12, which I still owe to someone!

You may be amused to learn that I am also still engaged in correspondence over a better sum (but nothing on my conscience), arising out of my enquiries about back issues of Nigeria Magazine. International and Commonwealth reply coupons do not cover airmail, so when I wrote to Lagos originally I enclosed a P.O. for 1/3d and asked for a mail reply. They replied by sea mail (which took ages) to the effect that one of the three I wanted was out of stock, but two were available at 2/- plus 8½d postage each. They enclosed a formidable schedule in duplicate under an impressive reference setting out that I could obtain these by returning one coupon of the schedule with lower part completed by me, and a remittance of 5/5d. This I sent off. Shortly /XXX/ someone found my 1/3d P.O. and /XXX/ another equally impressive schedule /XXX/ kind of form, saying I could have /XXX/ by sending 4/2d to make a /XXX/ I naturally just let go. Then came an airmail letter apologizing for not replying sooner to my enquiry. Finally (or so I thought) I received the magazines.

Subsequently however, someone found the second lot of schedules un-replied to and embarked on a patient campaign to extract 4½d! It occurred to me belatedly that the best way out would have been to send 4½d and get a second set of the magazines - but it was obviously too late to do that once I'd started to explain! However, I had kept and have now the elaborate receipt for 5.5d (their equivalent of the documents you warned me to keep carefully in potters transactions with Abuja / and I hope to settle the matter by quoting the number and date of this.

I don't know what my chances are of seeing you this trip. I can't contemplate a trip to Cornwall as I am /XXX/ too busy and too impecunious – and I /XXX/ that you'd be welcoming, but, /XXX/ prefer not to be disturbed. I /XXX/ suppose either that you'll get up to /XXX/ though you'd be very welcome if /XXX/ So I suppose it depends on /XXX/ anything in London changes to attract both of us in the next few weeks. I have got the review copy done so will try to send this with the viewer. */remainder of letter missing/*

**12 February 1964**

Dear Bill,

I was absolutely enthralled by your discourse on Viewers. What a pity the good simple ones aren't made (because presumably they don't pay?) I will also, when I get to London (if I do!) look in shops for the Patesson Slide Viewer & Container & the Corfield "Preview" as well as the "Pullin". No, please don't part with your own "Pullin". After all Ladi doesn't possess her own slides (not yet: at least I don't think so) & has probably forgotten about it by now. I suppose I ought to get a projector some time: but no electric light at Abuja is a bit off putting for that sort of gadget. I think the 29/6 one with a Proscenium sounds just the thing for the Tropics. Perhaps that w'd be the one for me. I'll look out for it in shops.

Yes, the Jos set up is funny isn't it! There is Jos Museum (art & archaeology) & a special annexe or gallery, very beautiful, partly open air & all open to the air with a lovely garden called the "Pottery Museum" – which houses (what I call) the Leith Ross Collection – all traditional Nigerian pottery. (Worth a visit to Jos, seriously!) Then there is also (now) a "Jos Museum Pottery" i.e. a small pottery to be manned by

Kofi & Gugong Bong & by a European too if we can get one, built with funds from a nice old Mrs Spruyt of USA who had a windfall and sent Bernard Fagg £1400 to build a pottery; supplemented by UNESCO who have promised to get us all the machines (£870) but they haven't come yet. This will make stuff like Abuja, mostly I hope Domestic Ware.

I am fed up with Mme Piotrovski. I think it genuinely is that she still hasn't settled with the Douane, but I don't know. I give it up, really, & only hope the N. Nigerian /XXX/ will forget that they have never been paid for the pots. I know that's very wrong of me, but I shy away from the idea of a prolonged postal wrangle in French. Priceless about the Nigerian Magazine chaps in Lagos. Rather typical really as a minor consequence of "Complete Africanisation", an alteration between being un-business like & then suddenly too efficient.

I've got to go to Stoke before I leave England but the longer I stay at Wenford the less I want to go anywhere else.

Yrs Michael.

**13 February 1964**

Dear Michael,

More research into slide viewers in Leeds yesterday morning, then I was otherwise occupied for the rest of the day. Today I reach home with the idea of scribbling another letter to go in a small parcel and find your letter awaiting.

No luck in Leeds with Pullin or Preview. In deference to what you say I won't for the time being send the Pullin I have here, but it is gladly available if you don't obtain satisfaction in some other way. But I can send a Preview as I have just found I have two of this type in the house (I must have bought a pair as I did with the Pullin) although I'd quite forgotten I did so at any rate I came and /XXX/). When it first came out it seemed to me a sensible and sturdy design for mass production (it can also be used as a /XXX/ for other purposes). My main criticism was that the "opal" plastic was too coarse grained and that this showed through the thin parts of some of the slides- in this respect as in latitude of slide position the Pullin was an improvement. (In addition the Preview now sent is more or less scratched up in /XXX/ when /XXX/ as are all those [for some time] have had in use.

The Paterson is still being made after all I find, but not in the simple form in which I originally bought it. It has been further streamlined and is only available now with a battery-and-bulb attachment which pushes on behind the slide - retailers say this was at first an optional extra but that they can now only get the whole thing complete, to sell at 18/6d. This makes it the most compact and about the cheapest of the battery, illuminated viewers, with the advantage that it doesn't become useless if the batteries fail, as one can take the battery part off and use the front part only, by holding up to available light - or use it in this way from preference, when conditions are suitable. The Patterson differs from the other two in that its compactness derives from making the barrel only deep enough to cover the transparent part of a slide - the slide frame being accommodated and held in the right position by a metal holder which slides out at right angles a little way from the body when in use, and pushes back for carrying. This is a bit fiddly and the one I have has this fitting broken so that the slide has to be held with the finger the little knob of plastic, which acted as stops for the metal fitting having broken off. But in fairness I should say that this only happened as some use and clumsy handling by friends to whom I showed slides and that the current ones seemed to an improved form of this fitting.

The only modestly priced English (non-illuminated) pocket viewer still in the shops seems to be the "Kodeslide" which in the north at any rate is available almost everywhere (7/6d). This is exceptionally pocketable as it is in folding /XXX/ - a small shall tray with a mounted lens hinged or rather pivoted

to it at one end, and a slide-holder and diffusing screen at the other – both pressing back into the tray for carrying. One can certainly see a slide without noticeable eyestrain but I would say the “illusion of reality” is /XXX/ was inferior to that experienced with a boxed in viewer.

What I dubbed the “proscenium-arch” having just seen one again I am not at all sure that my description of it was very accurate. The slot for the slide and the optical arrangements figure lower down and more prominently on the front than my description suggested and the viewing opening is more like a letter-box slit than the open front of a stage – but the principle of the thing is as I gave it. It is called the Haminnex and is an American patent, but the supplies for this country are made in Australia under US finance.

Many thanks for the details about Jos. It sounds fascinating and I wish I could come see it!

Yours as ever, Bill.

### ***Undated letter***

Dear Michael,

I hope you won't think this is photographs! I just haven't had time to do any lately. My letter to Mme. Piotrovski has had an unexpected result. Finding herself first post this morning before being able to understand my letter in sufficient detail later to frame a reply to my enquiry, she has consigned “le dossier concernment l'exposition de Monsieur Cardew” to my care for onward transmission to you. (And I must say I love the bit about “le plus rapidement possible”!)

For obvious reasons I haven't investigated this formidable looking further envelope and can only hope that you will eventually bless rather than curse my intervention! Doubtless if the contents thrown any light on my bit of the transaction you will let me know.

As I have never had anything in writing about my purchases (and the labels were off when I received the pots) I unfortunately can't quote the exhibition numbers, but I bought four pots, viz-

1 Shallow dish by Ladi (60nf)

2 ditto by Halima (60nf)

3 Teapot by Peter Kuna Bute (70nf)

(took this with me and sent payment (rather chancily and in fact illegally) in French notes by post after my return- this remittance never acknowledged)

4 Screw-top wine jar by Bawa Ushafa (150nf)

(This stayed in the exhibition to the end and you took it to Wenford for me where I eventually collected it) I decided this had better be paid for in orthodox fashion via my bank but have never succeeded in getting a bill for it – though I started asking for the bill before I'd had the pot! And you too have asked at least once for it to be sent) */remainder of letter missing/*

### ***22 February 1964***

Dear Bill,

Well you can do what I have failed to do all this months: splendid! Monique Pitrowski even says she owes me NF1.718.41 (which I make to be about £125 or £124) after paying all the perfectly exorbitant costs of the exhibition! Including a fine of NF250 for False Declaration to the customs, which I really didn't see why “We” have to pay since it was foolish Monique who made that mistake. And Heartless of those horrible douanies! When it was really only an Error in Description. But Hell I'm not going to start arguing about all that again.



About your bottle NF150 still unpaid for. I also have unfortunately left my Dossier Definitif of the Paris exhibition at Abuja, so until I can get at my lists in that, I also can't tell you the No. of yours, & whether M. Piotrovski is now paying for it (under the impression you have long ago paid). But if it has just been omitted from her lists I'll let you know; & you can pay me & I'll hand it over to my Long Suffering Ministry. But no harm in waiting another 2-3 months after so long delay. I'll write & let you know what I find.

So now I am waiting to see whether £124.10 arrives at Lloyds Bank Bodmin during the next 2 weeks.

Thanks! Your letter to M. Piotrovski did nothing but good.

Yours Michael.

**28 February 1964**

Dear Michael,

I can't really claim any credit for my accidental bit of catalyst (metaphorically speaking) in the Galerie La Borne affair, the operative factor possibly being merely that I wrote in English! All I was actually trying to get Mme P to do was (a) to confirm that the earlier item in my own account were cleared, and (b) then either to send a bill for the Bawa pot to confirm that is some way she'd charged this up to you. I see the latter item is still /XXX/, when you can see what happened please don't hesitate to bill me yourself for it as I obviously am still in debt for it.

However, I am very glad to hear that the famous "dossier" is, on the face of it, and despite the many changes and the villainies of the douane which are deplorable, a relatively welcome document rather than the headache for you I'd feared it might be. As you say it remains to be seen whether an actual financial settlement will result. I take it you have acknowledged the receipt of the document to Mme P and that at the risk of her thinking me impolite it would probably be better for me not to chip in further.

I am conscious that as most of my letter writing is done in haste, a number of things, which you've mentioned in letters, have had no response from me. e.g. I meant to say I liked your design for a /XXX/ teapot without cane handle. The arrangement with a side handle and then a second handle on the shoulders between lid and spout, to steady a heavy pot whilst pouring has been tried before, but normally the added handle is a bit perfunctory so that one either doubts it will take the weight, or can't grip it without burning ones knuckles. It should be as solidly functional as the main handle, and one ought to be able to get two fingertips in without the knuckles being pressed against the pot. Your handle looks reasonably generous. */remainder of letter missing/*

**Undated letter**

Dear Michael,

Very belatedly greetings! Your last [for which many thanks] (postmarked Abuja 8a.m. 14th June) found on my door-mat exactly four days later to the hour, which struck me as pretty good going - but it has taken me a long time to get off the ground with even this poor reply, although the envelope for it was written weeks ago! Main reasons are that I am tied hand-and-foot at work (very long(?), and short-staffed through illness) (and when I get home around 9p.m. about the last thing I feel like is writing letters) - and the realisation that my potters news which would form the staple of a letter to Abuja, is probably (as it perhaps does at any time!) reaching you more efficiently through other channels. You probably walked into the middle of things at Wenford as I heard Gwyn had a big firing in the offing. Only pottery events I know of since early June were the Janet Leach show at Primavera and the under-30s at the Crafts Centre - you probably were able to see these yourself. (Oh, have my now seen samples of [better?] glazes from Wenford - including a nice green one on sample jugs, bowls and a teapot.)

I look forward to exhibitions by Richard Batterham and Joanna Constantinidis (formerly Connell) in October and later to the one at the Molton Gallery of which you sent me advance notice. Was very glad to hear a few weeks back from Michael Casson that B.L. (as has now been made public) had consented to be associated with the C.P.A.- the potters worth considering who remain outside are now very few! Saddened however by Richard Jenkin's death - we can ill afford such a loss after those of Kenneth Quick and John Chappell.

Have still not written to Kofi (must do so). I managed to get an odd Saturday free and went to Fulford near York to see a potter, David Lloyd Jones who'd been potting up here for several years, but whose work I only saw for the first time this year (such has my ignorance become of even some relatively local happenings). He claims Helen Pincombe as his throwing instructor and I like his thrown and slab-built forms and his glazes (he uses a self-built oil-fired kiln), tho' I have not yet had the chance of getting one of his best pots; he'd just had an exhibition in York of which I only heard belatedly. He knows Peter Bruce Dick and said he was taking his time over kiln-building, etc.; up at Coxwold, but was not yet "in production" - intends to begin with earthenware. So I hope to get up there after he starts potting.

I have an entitlement to and some vague anticipation of achieving some time off work next month but in the present staffing position have not been able to make any plans. I could do just to devote some time to cleaning up, painting etc.; here - place is just a dirty run-down shambles and I rarely see it in daylight.

All fond wishes to all the Cardews and anyone else you're in touch with who knows me. Bill.

### **16 August 1964**

Dear Bill,

Your letter of 18th Feb '64.

I have still not succeeded in extracting a 1d from Mme. Piotrovski, But have just written to M.Breuil (her sponsor in a way) to find out what's up & Francine Del Pierre, a Paris potter, friend of B.Leach & of me, has promised to help.

I've looked through the lists here trying to identify the Bawa Ushafa wine bottle you bought. It seems to be no 177, price 150fr (= £10.8.s roughly, acc. to my calcs.) But don't pay her!!! Wait yet again, until we know the effect of my last demarche, then if she pays we can refund her the 150 fr. & you can pay us (Just of N. Nigeria) £10.8 - No.177 is included in her lists as if all paid for by purchasers. In practice, when in time is right you pay £10.8 to me & I pay it over, locally, K N Nigeria Just.

I hope you are well & flourishing. O.K. here. Kofi came from Ghana w. wife & 2 children, & is settling in Jos to run the new pottery there. Gwyn Hanssen is working at Wenford.

I might be home next June & July.

Yours Michael

PS Kofi, although set to work in Jos for the next 2-3 yrs, nevertheless is still dead set to come back to UK in 1967 /XXX/ for at least a 2-year potting time, (in Wenford, if Allah Wills)

### **Undated letter**

Dear Michael,

I'm sorry to have been so silent this year (since February in fact!). I've been so busy that letter writing hasn't had much of a look-in.

Many thanks for your letter of last month, I am now out of the rush for a time (on holiday in Scotland with Spink) and am taking the chance to catch up on some of my correspondence. We are in the south

west corner this time (less ambitious than last year however) – hope to go to Avon tomorrow. But the weather has been poor, rain every day, and in fact seldom half-an-hour fine at a time. And we were told today when we booked that the Avon ferry might stop running if the weather doesn't change.

Sorry Mme P. is still proving difficult! I'll be glad to clear my part of the debt via you when you give the word, incidentally, I think £10-8-0 is a bit under, as I made it about £11-10-0 at the rate of exchange at the time and thought of sending £12 if I paid in English currency.

I seem to have had to miss a good many of the pottery events during the year – but among those I did see, I recall particularly Gwyn Hanssen's show at Primavera, mainly of the pots she made at La Bourne (some of the best, including several tall jugs, were spoken for before the show opened, but I got a good small jug and a good medium sized bowl together with a teacup and soup pot – very vigorous stuff indeed, I hope you saw some of these). Then there was the Leach show at the Crafts Centre (standard ware and individual pieces by all the potters now or recently at St Ives, including an "in memoriam" selection by Kenneth Quick: some good things as usual by B.L, but I thought the outstanding ones were by Janet and KQ; Wm Marshall appeared rather too consciously imitating Hamada, I hope he'll work back to his own style. Finally a show by Rosemary Wren at C.P.A, everything from down-to-earth store-pots to all kinds of birds and animals, but the display dominated I thought by cider jars, one of 'em enormous and done with great gusto! The under-30s show at the Crafts Centre I couldn't get to at all, but saw some of the things arriving, and Peter Bruce Dick had sent two biggish screw-stopped jars (done in a style of his own) which I liked very much. And Colin Pearson has a first show with Ian Auld at the moment at the Crafts Centre which being up here I have not got to see.

Glad all is well at Abuja and Kofi settled at Jos. Spink joins me in good wishes and we hope to be seeing both of you again at some future date. Bill.

### ***Undated letter***

Dear Michael,

I'm sorry not to have written for so long, I think I said in my last that I hoped to write again soon and say what had been happening here in the pottery line, but I have had such a busy time at work that letter-writing has been at a minimum. Also, I've had nothing else from your end to reply to!

Let me say first that I read "A Chronicle of Abuja" properly, soon after my last letter and found I recall rather more misprints than I'd seen before (but mostly of the one of the misplaced or missing letter variety), but that I still felt much as before about its merits of presentation as well as content. But you must have written off one or two of my earlier comments as just stupid, I didn't realise so until I saw another copy, neatly is it done, that the corrections on p.48 are MS ones in my copy. I thought at most that they were corrections on the printing plate done by the same techniques as the Editors signature. Oh, and I also obtained from Lagos nos. 67 and 70 of Nigeria Magazine, but found that no. 48 was out of stock so I still lack this – possibly I can make a photo-copy sometime.

Thirdly (which is still on my conscience!) that incredible as it may seem I still haven't managed to pay for the Bawa pot, as the La Borne people just don't reply to me. I strongly suspect that they regard it as paid for in some way, probably by you! I am very sorry to have taken advantage of your generosity to the point of being the unwilling and indeed unwitting cause of this mix up – perhaps we shall get it sorted out in the end!

Any survey of pottery events which I now attempt recess /XXX/ is of the most cursory kind. I wrote nothing down at the time, and have been too busy to avoid having to miss a great deal. The things which seem to have stuck most in my memory are, first, three successive Primavera shows; Dan Arbeid (which I believe I've already referred to: the dish I seem to remember mentioning is portrayed, but

not very adequately, in P.Q.29 which may have reached you); Caiger-Smith (Maiolica and Lustre: an exhibition dominated by jugs and bowls, though a few small jars in lustre (all of which I was too late to have a chance at) had fired particularly gorgeously, and Janet Leach (some upright shapes which looked to me too severe and contrived, but many pieces in a freer, more asymmetric style which were very congenial- jars and a large bowl with poured glaze decoration and some flat dishes of very subtle colouring and texture). At the latter show I particularly liked a sort of hot plate on raised feet, which was "not for sale" (I was glad to find subsequently that it had been lent by J.L.'s neighbour, the sculptor Barbara Hepworth, a fellow Wakefieldonian by birth). I got a squared jar with cut or scored decoration and the very runny, greenish raw-glaze which B.L. himself enjoyed using. I was glad to have the chance of meeting B.L. and J.L. again for the first time since the Arts Council exhibition (Spring of '61). Janet said that Ladi had had an invitation to Western Germany and that the main difficulty had been to find an interpreter who spoke Hansa and German! But she was quite vague about the date of this, so if it finally became "on", it may already have happened or be still in the future. I have heard nothing from any other source. B.L. intimated that he'd have liked to discuss the C.P.A. with me and the next question of "to select or not to select," but the occasion was too crowded a one. This whole manner of selection came up again at the last A.G.M. (rather bedevilled again, as it was in '62 when you were there, by a general confusion between the separate ideas and functions of selecting members and selecting pots) Position still not well-defined, but in practice selection is quite effectively taking place now in one means and another and the influence of the C.P.A. is growing, whilst it now includes most potters of importance except the Leach group, which is in a rather special category, Lucie Rie and Hans Coper who are notorious non-joiners if anything (apart from a one-time flirtation with the Red Rose Guild) and Geoffrey Whiting (who has been guest speaker at a meeting).

It was a shock to hear recently of the death of Kenneth Quick in Japan (bathing accident). At 32 he had already produced some fine pots and we all had great hopes of him.

The other pottery events I recall are mostly C.P.A., especially three lively evening meetings at Queens Square, two on ash-glazes and one on pottery decoration (earthenware) (Michael Casson and Alan Caiger-Smith). Saw Peter Bruce Dick at one of these, and he said rather mysteriously that he might start his own pottery in Yorkshire! But I have heard no more. Among the C.P.A. shows I would mention the casserole shows, Colin Pearson, Gwyn Hanssen, /XXX/ being, but after it had ended all the out-of-the-way corners of the building were stuffed with red-spotted pieces awaiting collection and unlike most people he had been so /XXX/ and sent so much that the member's room was still full of good stuff which had not had time during the brief show to find purchasers. Such abundance was very good to see.

I met David Leach again at the A.G.M. He has been making some bigish thrown-and-coiled pots (the largest approaching 30" high), which are a taller shape than are L.K., but have quite a suggestion of Nigeria in the upper part (photograph of a medium-sized one enclosed).

Spink and I went to Scotland in mid-September, as this year's badly-needed holiday. Kicked off at Bamburgh in Northumberland, then to Edinburgh, up the east coast to the north coast in Sutherland (missing out Caithness), then down the west side including a trip to Skye. Weather not too kind, but we had an enjoyable trip in spite of this.

Jack S joins me in best wishes to Kofi, Ladi, and of course to you! As ever, Bill.

### ***Undated letter***

Dear Michael,

It seems a long time since we had any real two-way communication! I last heard from you about the



middle of last year. I had an air letter to which I can't now find to which I finally replied rather belatedly in September whilst on holiday in Scotland with Spink. Then I wrote again very briefly by way of a "Christmas" greeting which would certainly not reach you for Christmas! On my side the lack of epistolary here has been due mainly to being horribly busy at work. And it is possible of course that you failed to receive what I did send or that something from you has miscarried.

In any case I'm rather ashamed of letting so long go by without sending any remittance for the Bawa pot, now so long ago! I've had half an excuse in that you implied I shouldn't do so until you actually gave the word. However I must now do what I should have done long since and get some postal orders (probably easier to deal with than a money order) from the post office.

As a result of being so busy, my pottery contacts so far this year have been very few. I went again to see Isaac Button near Halifax to collect a few last pots: he finished as a potter at Christmas, having had back trouble which hindered him in the heavy work he has been doing all alone for years, beginning with digging his own clay and preparing it, then making all kinds of earthenware (including big pieces thrown in one from 70lbs of clay and slipped and hand-glazed by hand-dipping), then firing in a big coal-fired kiln. I also made one flying visit to London to see a joint exhibition at Primavera by Marianne de Trey (Marianne Haile) and John Reeve. She had her new range of very "correct" thrown stoneware (beautifully done) and also some v.interesting hand built forms in gourd and seedpod shapes. John Reeve, mostly useful pots strongly thrown and "straight from the wheel," as unfiddled-with as the better Hamada.

From 1964 the things I recall with most pleasure were the Gwyn Hanssen show (including her La Borne pots), the complete Leach Pottery shows and Rosemary Wren, in the early part of the year (on which I believe I've already commented.) (Have not been in contact with Gwyn whilst at Wenford or seen her work from there. This year she was at the opening of the de Trey/Reeve show which I had to see later, and bought John Reeve's best jug.) Then later in 1964 came the Ian Auld/Colin Pearson show at the Crafts Centre, austere slab-built pots and sculpture from the former, and from Colin a lively variety mostly or all from one firing, vigorous throwing (some of it big), plus pressed and slab-built dishes; in glazes, the closest approach I've yet to see to an Abuja-like richness, with mingled tenmoku/chün effects etc. Then Ruth Duckworth (also Crafts Centre), very sculptural. One big footed dish which was sculptural rather than functional, had a wide kiln-crack through the thick part which improved it sculpturally! So she put it prominently in the show at a handsome price. Justified I thought, it's failed forms left in a show rather than "technical" faults, which I particularly deprecate; anything which is a complete shambles should be smashed of course, but one often gets some exceptional or exciting pots with disability of some kind which its other qualities override.

Then came an "American" show at Primavera, mostly pots made in England (at John Reeve's pottery), by Warren Mackenzie and Glenn Lewis. Rough but lively by the latter, working in a much more related way than at St Ives and a magnificent set of brush decorated dinner plates by the former which I was v.annoyed to miss by about five minutes. Next, Richard Jenkins and Scott Marshall (now in partnership at the Boscean Pottery) at the C.P shop, good jugs and bowls and a big teapot. Then Richard Batterham, a show at Oxford, rather marred by a monotony of types; he has started porcelain as well as stoneware, but the porcelain shown consisted of numerous rather similar bowls mostly rather dead, with an occasional livelier one. But he makes beautiful stoneware teapots and lidded jars. Then Helen Pincombe at Primavera, coiled and slab-built pots (some of them largish) as well as thrown ones, and a fascinating small group of sawdust-fired earthenware. Finally two more shows by young potters who can "throw big": Michael Casson at the C.P shop and David Eeles (stoneware and porcelain, at Liverpool). The Casson show also had beautiful table and ovenware by Sheila Casson (wife). M's stoneware in a full range from small (but strong) decorative pieces to staggering great

bowls, and two or three-piece "tall pots" of almost Staite Murray proportions. The new development was an almost rococo style of surface decoration in relief on some decorative pots, applied with added unglazed clay in sweeps and swirls, on an otherwise glazed surface. David Eeles, I may be wrong about this, but I have an idea he may be the potter who said he was going to stoneware because he wasn't a good enough craftsman to do earthenware! He's a good thrower, but I usually found his slipware too treacly, to use your own expression. His stoneware however is, at its best, very fine. The forms of his oven-dishes, lidded pots and cider jars still have a strong flavour of Cardew/Finch, but some powerful rather squat jugs are individual. He is also starting porcelain, mostly fairly simple shapes such as small flower jars.

About the Bawa pot, I'm putting in £12 in postal orders, and as I've forgotten how you told me to how you told me to fill these out before when paying for pots sent by post from Abuja (and in any case this might not be appropriate in the present instance), I'll have to leave 'em blank I think and take a chance on having 'em go astray.

Peter Bruce Dick told me long ago when I met him once in London that he hoped to come to Yorkshire to pot and I've heard several vague reports that he has done so but I can't find out where. (Must write to Ray Finch who can perhaps tell me).

Any chance of another little box of pots from Abuja? However, only think about this if it could be done without trouble, and forget it, if there will be another show of Abuja pots in England. (Textiles? I never heard whether there were any, last time from you)

Hope you are all well at Abuja, also Kofi at Jos. Do you think he could consign a pot or two to me from there some time?

I enjoyed your suggestions (published by the C.P.A) for a title for the C.P.A periodical. I haven't heard that they've adopted one yet, my own plain but factual suggestion was just "Pots and Potters".

I keep wondering how you fared over finding a publisher for your work. (But this is getting more and more disjointed, so no more for now.)

All good wishes, Bill.

**24 April 1965**

Dear Bill,

Behold the wonderful power of MONEY, I have been knowing for a long time that I owed you a letter or 2 & always putting it off but with receiving your postal order I am bound to write at once & acknowledge & enclose the receipt by which you see you have a credit balance of 30/-. I could send you a little parcel of oddments? Let me know what you lack.

I enjoyed your resume of experiences & reactions at pottery shows & was esp. interested in your comments on the Ruth Duckworth bowl with a big crack. Yes, with reservations I can accept your 'doctrine' on the subject. I have just been having the same debate with myself over some 'stools' or occasional tables I made last year- slight contraction- cracks raise the question, should they be exhibited? It is true a really illumined pot can redeem technical faults if those faults don't actively interfere with the aesthetics of the thing or its function (if it has one!!!); and the need not to insist that every pot in an exhibition has got to be of 'Olympic' standard as regards its physical perfection. But it is still very difficult, in a show, wh. is a sort of gallery in which beauty is the point, for the deformed, crippled and 'handicapped' to make the grade, in such a way that its beauty of expression is so telling that it makes one forget about, or even can make a kind of virtue of, its physical deformities.

Besides that, I always have the feeling that a doctrine of this kind is too dangerous for the health of

potters, because it lays us all wide open to the scorns and scoffs of the industrial potters who, (usually unable by the nature of their case to achieve beauty of expression) seize the chance to laugh at us for trying to make a virtue out of our technical imbecility or incompetence, or (more often) to discredit our whole message by saying this proves us to be dishonest charlatans.

But yes, a 1000 times yes, in an Art Exhibition it might all be better to include one or 2 doubtful 'cripples' & to exclude an empty still-born this wh happens to be free from obvious technical faults... The philosopher said, according to his disciple, "I hate the damned lest it be mistaken for the grain, I hate the 'reddish blue' lest it be mistaken for vermilion, I hate etc., etc., and I hate the good careful men of the villages lest they be mistaken for the truly virtuous". He said the good careful men of the villages were "the thieves of virtue": their whole village calls them good & virtuous... their actions have a semblance of right mindedness & uniformity... if you would object to them you can find nothing in their conduct to object to, etc., etc., and yet!

I hope to be home in July. Yes, I'm pining to see what sort of pots Wenford has produced this in the hands of Gwyn. A Mr. who is art corresp of Sunday Telegraph is organising an African exhibition at the MOLTON Gallery, S. Molton St, W1 & has invited me & others. It is to be 'ART' rather than useful craft: i.e. he wants big things or else v.special ones. I'll give Kofi your message. He has just had his 1st firing, & is now busy repairing kiln- a usual sequence in West Africa, where all pulling up has to be done by means of own shoestrings. His address is C.K. ATHEY, c/o Dept. of Antiquities, Jos Museum, Jos, Nigeria. As ever Michael.

1 P.S. Let me know what you need. Postage might be 11/9, box 2/- & this leaves 16/3 for pots!! M.

2 P.S. I leave here on 19 June '65.

3 P.S. P. Bruce Dick is at COXWOLD just S. of the Hambleton Hills, N. of York.

4 P.S. My Book. Yes. Faber & Faber. They never wavered; it seems, in spite of my long delay!

### ***Undated letter***

Dear Michael,

I was very glad to have your letter, and would probably have got going on a reply several days ago, but for the fact that I've been knocked endways and my thoughts preoccupied all week by the bad news, which reached me at the same time as your letter, of the sudden death of my friend Jack Spink. You will remember him of course at Wenford and in London, and Kofi and Henry Hammond also knew him as a Wenford /XXX/ with which I was pleased, photographs of him recall I and Spink handing up Ladi's Wenford pot to Kofi to go in the kiln in '62 and I believe you would see this.

He had a serious operation in the 1940's and then a bad heart attack in 1953 from which he made a remarkable recovery. However he had to take a daily draft of drugs to control his blood pressure and never got back from paralysis the full movement of his fingers suddenly had to change his job in consequence. There were some days when, already handicapped by having lost the top joint of his thumb in an accident in childhood, he could not properly hold a razor or a pen and had to resort to an electric shaver and stiff-handed typing. Many things however (including driving a car) he continued to do well, and in general his gallant attempt to lead a completely normal life was successful that one tended to forget that he was walking continually nearer to the edge than most of us. The sad communication I have had (from his mother who is a friend also) does not go into detail but to say "very suddenly" so I take it that he must have had another heart attack without warning. This could have been fatal in minutes, failing a properly equipped doctor actually at hand.

I last saw him at Christmas and had hoped to see him again at Whitsuntide. Had not heard from him

in many weeks, but this was not really abnormal, as although he was a great letter writer when in the mood, the difficulties in the way of carrying out his intentions I think is something that made him shun the effort until it was practically necessary. (I know the same is often true of me with far less excuse.)

I had your letter and this very unwelcome news about Jack on my return from the only overnight trip from home I've made this year. This was a three-day trip to London to see a six-potter exhibition at the C.P shop and attend the C.P.A annual party (held this time at the new Commonwealth Institute (the South Kensington successor, alongside Holland Park, to the old Imperial Institute). A lively show by potters, at least five of whom you know: Katharine Pleydell-Bouverie, Dennis Moore and Michael Buckland, Paul Barron, Henry Hammond, and Audrey Blackman. The party seemed a rather pale echo of earlier C.P.A parties, and was chiefly memorable to me for seeing Henry Hammond again for the first time in too long. I missed him at the show, as I wasn't able to be at the private view. In the show, it was particularly pleasant to see Henry in action again as a potter after several years of teaching and administration, some fine ash-glazed and brush decorated bowls (especially the small ones which were "not for sale"!) and beautiful tenmoku tea-bowls and jars.

On the vexed question of pots with "technical faults" or in some way "crippled," it seems to me that factory potter producers achieve their "technical excellence" largely by working with amenable and predictable materials (over-refined and have debased) and hence (especially when the product is "economic") produce pots which can be functional but, which are uninspiring and lacking in any character and that craftsman potters (who are making something really quite different) are asking a lot, and perhaps too much of themselves /XXX/ if they seek at applying the same "standards" in a livelier products made in /XXX/ with livelier and less predictable materials. One can think of pre-industrial or what one might term para-industrial products to which it would be just silly to apply modern factory standards (e.g. the salt-glazed Bellarmine or Bartsmankrug). This characteristically is asymmetric or askew, and has irregular dents in the form and/or scars on the surface due to the way the pots were piled in the kiln. Of course there are good, middling and bad Bellarmines, but the best of them have these "blemishes" which do not interfere with the practical usefulness, and which seem a part of the character of the pot and its aesthetic attraction.

However, we are really talking about glazing "defects" such as kiln-cracks or glaze-crawl. I think in the last analysis, each individual case has to be judged on its merits (particularly if a piece is being thought of in "exhibition" terms). (Certainly few young potters can resist including a magnificent failure, "not for sale" in an early exhibition, and potentially can often be better assessed from this than from less ambitious efforts, as a collector who gets to know potters fairly well, I've actually one or two such pieces!) The strict, puritanical approach would be to smash and throw away anything "faulty"\* (\*a criterion which the industrial potter has to apply, since his faulty piece has no quality!) this leads in logical conclusion (as happened in one case I can think of), to the potter stopping making pots and going round smashing up as much previous work as could be got at. The actual practice of craftsman potters varies greatly. Perhaps Isaac Button (who produced pots to be useful\* (\*about the only exception was his puzzle jug (of which he was perhaps one of the last producers), and even this had to "work" in its tricky way. (This was inscribed: "From mother earth I take my birth / I'm made in joke for man / now I am here filled with good cheer / come taste me if you can") came pretty close to the puritanical approach. Anything cracked was rejected, the old lorry used for transporting clay used to stand in a loading bay at the bottom end of his range of buildings when not in use and the rejects were thrown into it, in the case of smaller barely cracked ones such as even a large bowl, it seems. He also frowned on: (a) failed glazes (by which he meant anything turning out differently from the normal. Though I sometimes liked 'em); (b) glaze accidental, which sometimes seemed to me an enhancement, and (c) (particularly) glaze crawls. (He would sometimes see (a), (b) and (c) (if only slight), with deprecation



and as seconds, provided the usefulness was not impaired). He greatly disliked parting with (what is rejected) big wine jars or crocks which had gone wrong, and would sometimes have one in the stock room, but apart from the rest. They were often of particularly magnificent appearance, if one admired one however he would say dismissively "Oh, that's a cracked one," and it would go on to the lorry eventually, and help fill up a worked-out hole in his clay-digging hinterland.

The characteristic heavy and thick foot of many a Staite Murray pot has a wavy, deep kiln-crack underneath it. Pots with this crack (invisible unless one turned the pot up, not affecting the stability of the pot or its ability to hold liquid and left unrepaired), were exhibited and sold, and apparently did not affect the price.

One or two distinguished living potters have exhibited "important" pots with visible cracks conspicuously repaired (e.g. with a cement of contrasting colour such as red, or with the transparent and glasslike cement called araldite (attention additionally drawn in catalogue in catalogue and account taken in the price), in most cases I thought the preservation and often for sale justified). Finally we get to the extreme case mentioned in my last of a kiln-crack, which improved the sculptural quality, being left as it was and by implication\* (\*since she has also acted in other cases as in the previous para), made a virtue of, I thought this justified and several potters I saw concurred, not possible to discuss with the potter as she had already left for a teaching year in America.

I'm not very impressed by the arrangement that one shouldn't exhibit anything with a "technical fault" lest one let down the side, vis-à-vis factory potters. As I've already suggested, it seems to me that on the two sides of the fence, products are being made which are essentially different in kind, so why should artist craftsmen accept for themselves standards dictated by the factories? I have a feeling that any industrial potter who once had a parting of the ways to choose and who has not blinded himself really knows in his heart that the work on which he is engaged lacks the vital spark.

At the C.P.A party I got into an argument with someone who declaimed in favour of the idea which had been mooted in certain quarters of a union between the Crafts Centre and the Design Centre, claiming it would give craftsmen "parity with industrial designers". I couldn't resist retorting that I could see no future in claiming points with something inferior. More seriously, it is rather with painters and sculptors that artist potters should be claiming parity with. Perhaps they are too modest, you yourself somewhere describe pottery as "a minor art." A higher status than this has never been claimed to it in the Far East, and is being increasingly given to it on the continent of Europe.

Another kind of "cripple." Of course there is also the case of pots, which came "perfect" from the kiln but have been chipped or broken subsequently, what does one do with them? (I believe B.L himself has been known to repair such a piece, which someone particularly wanted to have.) There is a long oriental tradition of repairing a fine but broken piece conspicuously, often using a precious material such as gold for the repair, not to mention the European tradition of putting a rivet in broken porcelain. (This, Janet Leach once told a group of people at some potters gathering, of B.L bringing back from a trip a group of especially fine tea-bowls by Hamada which were supposed to go in a glass case he has. From time to time one gets broken, then B.L mends it and puts it in the glass case!) Museums often exhibit: (a) pots in a broken or incomplete state wasters from kiln sites; (b) pots pressed together from fragments; (c) pots with missing parts replaced in a conspicuously different material, or; (d) pots reconstructed from significant fragments with most of the form filled in with new material. I think all these are justified if something can thereby be shown or put on record which could not otherwise be shown or put on record, and that (particularly under (a)) there is often also aesthetic justification. (These practices only concern "ancient" primitive, pre-industrial and sometimes modern individual pots, the factory pots which are not unique and in ready supply they are inappropriate.)

Finally, about your "little parcel of oddments" (I'd better put another pound at any rate into the kitty now so think there can be some content to the parcel, and if it came to a bit more. Still, eventually, I could always remit further to the appropriate quarter (even if I heard of the necessity after you yourself were on the move).

I find I have 40 Abuja pots here! Though more still from one or two other places, St.Ives, Oxshott, York, of this number, half are yours, then 8 L.K, 5 Hassan Lapai, 2 each Halima and Kofi, one each Bawa, Tanko Ashada, Peter Kuna Bute. Useful things like little store jars (screw cap, or to take a cork) are always welcome, or anything, really, which appeals to your fancy. I have a fondness for more than just one pot by a potter, and if possible a tidy even number of pots, so if there is anything which would make my ones into twos, or my five into a six, that would be fine, or a couple of little pots by someone new to me. It will be sad not being able to share with Jack as with the previous packages, his small collection, mostly things he regularly used, was about 90% Abuja. I have cheered myself up a bit (even through part of this melancholy reading) by these unoriginal scribbling's, but cannot but keep feeling a wave of despondency and recollection.

Hope you are all well. Best wishes, Bill.

Of yours, what I most lack is something brush-decorated (like the dish with the bird at G. la B.) but that will have to wait to another occasion.

P.S. will write to Kofi and try to visit Peter Bruce Dick, but don't know when! Hope to see you this year, haven't done so since Richmond June '62. Glad about your book being settled with a good publisher.

**20 May 1965**

Dear Bill,

Just got your long letter and the £1 postal order. Well that is indeed a bitter blow to you, to lose Jack Spink, and in fact to any who like myself, only met him 3 or 4 times in all, yet on those occasions his character immediately made its nice mark, so that it is hard to believe he is gone.

For yourself, yes, that is so isn't it? Life is never quite the same again, time passes and one thinks one is forgetting & a lot of the time one can forget, but inside, it is actually impossible to forget & one feels the loss for the rest of one's life. When my favourite brother Philip dies in 1960 I felt like that & I still do. The old feeling of 'confidence' never comes back.

It is too late to send a parcel of pots by post. They would prob arrive after me & and I hope to travel this time actually with all my luggage & pots (but am not sure of this). So I will let you have £1 worth after my arrival at Wenford. (But you might have to remind me about this).

Well my criterion about 'pots with flaws' is simply this: Pottery is a 'fine' art and also necessarily, a useful one. (Divorce it from use & it dies immediately). If the fault interferes too seriously with its use, the pot has to be rejected (obviously too, if it really interferes with its beauty.) Otherwise I accept all you say. Except abt Pottery being a 'Minor' art. Sorry I said that really. Anyone who thinks pottery is NOT a minor art, who thinks it's a 'major' art like architecture or music, has obviously abandoned all sense of proportion (that keystone of all arts). But to say it's 'a minor art' is rather the same kind of tiresome irrelevance as e.g. debating whether Mozart or Bach is the greater composer, or if someone is a 'minor' or 'great' poet. Comparisons of this kind in the arts are odious. Irrelevant to the essential, which is the significance of an art, its power of expression. (Is the organ greater than the flute? Hell, I hate that sort of question, its relevant) Hope to see you later this year.

As ever Michael.

**29 May 1965**

Dear Michael,

Many thanks (and not just as conventional please) for your letter. I don't know whether this will have time to reach you before you are on the move, but I just wanted to say how much I appreciate those deeply felt sentences of yours about the loss of a comrade. Jack's life seems to have touched mine at so many points that many things I took for granted have acquired poignancy, and I am constantly being reminded that nothing will ever be the same.

I managed a flying visit to London last Saturday (although for the most part I was so tired at work that I seldom got far), the occasion being a Louis Hanssen exhibition at Primavera, and saw Gwyn for the first time since she has been at Wenford. Didn't have the opportunity for talk with her which I'd have liked, but apparently she has been having an exciting (and busy) time, however I still have only seen a small sprinkling of work emerging in London which is identifiably from Wenford, a few simple jugs and some soup-pot, similar in form to those from La Borne but not as yet with the La Borne qualities of glaze. Louis has had from the beginning an enviable technical facility which is not merely facile but bound to worthwhile purposes, and his show was remarkable for its variety, "traditional" work on oriental lines, modern tableware (some of it white-glazed stoneware) and some thoroughly experimental pieces (some large) in "moulded and coiled" or "moulded and thrown" techniques. Those I particularly liked included a deep, oval punch-bowl, ochre glazed and superbly resonant, a rectangular flat rimmed dish with striped glaze (and a wafer-thin beautiful form), and a large, asymmetric but "balanced" coiled pot like a flat seed-pod (or an inverted slab /XXX/) set on its edge. Also a large, heavy, cut-sided bowl. Then there were garden pots for large plants or small trees, and some items aimed at ecclesiastical use, a standing bowl over 4' high, large enough for a font, and candlesticks: an austere one 2' high flowing out and up from a queer /XXX/ foot to four points enclosing a bowl to hold the candle /XXX/; and one fired in five parts and about 9' high when assembled, which the pattern of the ash-glaze happily coating /XXX/ the whole "pot," so big a thing that many visitors simply failed to see it! Helen Pincombe was busy taking colour photographs so you may see some of these in due course.

Yes, I quite agree that arguments like whether Bach or Mozart is the "greater" would be futile, one is just glad to have both of them in one's pantheon. And you misunderstand me if you think I am claiming an exaggerated status around the area of pottery, I am just not content to see it dismissed out-of-hand as it so often is, because in my view a pot, just something one can hold in one's hand and use, may embody as many elements of beauty and as much power of expression as (for example) many a work of sculpture. I cannot swallow whole the assumption that there is something designated "fine art" (one definition of which is to be completely useless except as art) i.e. aesthetically and other (lesser) somethings designated "applied" or "decorative" or "vague" /XXX/ arts. (Incidentally neither architecture nor music which you mention as "major" is strictly speaking a "fine art," music is often /XXX/ religious /XXX/ in inspiration and character whilst architecture has obvious connections with both /XXX/ religious and lay usefulness.) The arts are so interrelated, and so interpreted with elements of utility and our attempts to control our environment, as well as with our idea of beauty that I don't think one can usefully categorise them in this way. A more valid distinction would be between the kind of art which is the product of one man's thought and handiwork (and it is when this, e.g. in the case of pottery, is replaced by a mass-produced factory product that one finds something lacking), and the kind of art which by its nature necessitates collaboration by several or often a large number of people. The true /XXX/ examples of the latter kind are music, architecture, dramatist (or in some cases dramatist & composer or composer & choreographer), but /XXX/ the help of executants, craftsman and technician either /XXX/ direction, or, following his written directions) to bring the work to /XXX/, and literature is now a slightly in-between case, what began as the storyteller telling his story or the poet reciting or saying his poem, now needs the help of papermaker, printer (perhaps artist and block-

maker) and binder (or of radio or television technicians) to reach the modern audience.

One point omitted: /XXX/ is not a criterion (organ/flute). (I must admit that in pottery one responds with warmth to anything well done which demands to be and is on a generous scale! But one can also have a special fondness for the pottery miniature which is equally /XXX/ well done.)

I am content not to have dogmatic views on the tricky question of the relation between the beauty of art and the beauty of nature, animals, birds, fishes, insects, trees, plants, flowers and landscape and all its constituents including (particularly where the animal is human, modification by artifice is the rule, and its increasingly rare for landscape not to be less so.) And what of the relation between artefacts and such objects as bones, tree-roots, tree-branches, shells (the exto and exo skeletons of formerly living creatures) and flint nodules, fossils, weathered rocks and water-worn pebbles?

About the proposed parcel of pots which I see there won't be time for: you originally suggested this is a means of utilising the "credit balance" which you (or someone) awarded me out of the £12 I sent for the Bawa pot. I wasn't very happy about this "credit" as it seemed to me that 150 new francs at (as I remember it) 1 franc = 1/6d. Or slightly more ought to have been more like £12 (especially after all that time!) than the £10+ which you mentioned. So I suggest we just scrub around that and I'll be happy to claim a quid's worth for my later remittance at some suitable occasion, as you'll be bringing treasure with you.

As you say, hope to see you later this year.

All the best! Bill

**13 June 1965**

Dear Bill,

Just a hasty & rather in a /XXX/ line to thank you for your double-barrelled air letter of 29th May. When I was in Jos, about that time, Kofi was very sad to hear of Jack's death. Both he and I love & treasure some of those v.good photos that you & he took at Wenford, Sept. 62.

I was very interested to hear about the Louis Hanssen show, the big things sound v.nice but I'd like to see them, the proof of all puddings is in the eating.

A gentleman called Edwin Mullins (Art Critic of Sun Telegraph) is planning an Art Pottery exhibition next Nov. Dec. at the Molton Gallery, Sth Molton St. W1 (which is a new name to me). He asked me for 6-8 things (BIG) & no doubt I'll be able to see some of the L. Hanssen things then. Funny he exhibited a stool! This past season I've been making a few here and I thought it was "my own invention," it just shows, no patents in art or science! I'm bringing 3 of mine home but I prefer some more recent ones I made. They unfortunately won't be glaze fired yet for a long, long time & over ten are extremely unlikely to reach the shores of Britain, since there is now a huge greedy gobbly market for all our products here in Nigeria (This market recently augmented by a huge influx of U.S. people, mostly very nice, young teachers etc. called "Peace Corps") Their "average" of art consciousness is far, far higher than the corresponding types from Britain (very odd & yet the U.S. educational standard is often lower than ours). O yes! How I agree about this Fine Arts V. Trade Arts distinction. What harm the Renaissance Italian & then the French did to introduce this purely snob conception! But of course it was inevitable at the time.

Yours Michael.

**Undated letter**

Dear Michael,



I ought to have written before now to thank you again for your hospitality the other week to an unannounced visitor, but I was back in the thick of it straight away at work on my return, /XXX/ of the one day free from work which I've had 16 hours (6.45 am to 10.45pm) were spent on the awkward cross-country journey to Ulverston (Lancashire) and back (by train or rather a succession of trains) to visit Jack's friend in Ulverston whilst I was away, asking me to go as soon as I could to go through some of Jack's things, as she'd decided to move out of her over-large house and disburden herself of some of the more cumbersome family possessions, now that she's the only survivor. [Incidentally, I bought back with me a stoneware beer mug of yours which I once gave to Jack and the jug of Kofi's which Jack got at Wenford in '62, his mother wanted me to have all of the things from the house, but I was happy with these and one or two books as keepsakes.]

It was really good to see you (and Wenford) again. I seemed to have little heart for a holiday this year, and when I finally after a late start pushed myself off into the blue on a bicycle to give myself a change of scene my plans were indefinite. However, after a few days it became clear what my objective was and I pushed on towards it despite the intimations en route that you were perhaps still in London and that Gwyn had probably finished her work, so that there might be no one there. Considered as a "cycle tour" the trip was not being successful perhaps! I soon discovered there's a vast difference between the age of 29 when I last went on a push bicycle for any considerable distance, and that of 55. I originally had the general idea of being at my /XXX/ out at the middle weekend and having most of the second week to get back in. Once I'd fallen one or two days behind through mechanical troubles, weather and cracking up my right hand, it became obvious that I must admit a measure of defeat and go partway back at least by train. However, I visited five potters, saw Coventry Cathedral at last, and still feel a certain sense of achievement by having propelled myself from Yorkshire to Cornwall by my own efforts.

I had an uneventful journey to Paddington and found in London on Friday (24th Sept) that I was just in time for a very worthwhile exhibition of stoneware at the CP shop by Fay Russell (who used to work with Gwyn) and Emmanuel Cooper's mostly useful wares! I also unexpectedly met Ray Finch again, he having had to bring someone to London at short notice to catch a plane. At this stage I still had some idea of riding the bicycle home from London (which in the 1930s I once did in the day between early breakfast and late night tea). However all day Saturday the rain belted down, I spent most of the day in the British Museum except for a trip to the Berkeley Galleries which were unfortunately closed and on Sunday I quietly went home by train. So I only rode the bicycle across London, and home from the station in Wakefield.

I look forward to the Molton Gallery exhibition (and hope the opening will not be on a day impossible for me!) Also, more remotely, to the book! And if you are ever able to visit Yorkshire, please do let me know!

Remember me to Mariel! Yours as ever, Bill.

**05 January 1966**

Dear Bill,

Thanks for your long letter of 18th Dec. I regret to say I didn't see the [Molton G] exhib. Nor the Hans Coper at the Berkeley. I'm gradually coming round to seeing what he is saying, but find it v.v.difficult. (I saw the remnants at the Berkeley G, waiting to be collected by purchasers.) Sorry you could not buy my Black bowl-with-a-spot-of-chün. No! When you were here. I was up in the kiln-shed loft. I bought it home in 1964. Well if it is unsold at the end of the MG show you shall have it at a more reasonable price i.e. half (£16.10) (but they tell me most of my bowls are sold.) Yes that was, on the whole, an irritating notice by Fiona McCarthy & betrays her want of interest in pottery, her concluding remarks about industrial design are plain stupid (just selling ideas which most people went out and dismissed 20-30

years ago!)

I've just had a letter from Michael Casson; he's in a stew about this Mod. Pottery Picture Book he's doing for Tiranti, because he only has 3 by me & wants 6 or 8. I can't help him because all my photos of pots by me (plenty by others e.g. Bawa Ushafa etc.!) have melted away in one fashion or another; & I never had many (of my own, I mean). I have suggested he might come to use the Bird plate which appears in the MG Catalogue & which I sent them, as it was my last presentable photo of a pot by me! I didn't know it was by you! I apologise for no acknowledgement! (Incidentally it was also used by one of the Paris papers or magazines in 1962.) Would you let him use this? If he needs it, he will probably be writing to you. The other excellent photos (Paris & Berkeley G. 1962) by you are mixed lots. So not at all suitable.

I have also suggested to him that you possibly have in your own collection some of my fairly recent work (there is v.little of it & practically no real recent work, in existence anywhere!) e.g. Wine jars with screw stoppers?

I wonder how much stuff by me is in the York Museum? Rev E. Milner White bought a lot by me in his last years but I dunno what happened to it when he died? If there's anything by me in York Mus., which M Casson could use, no doubt the museum could take photos for a moderate fee. Did I hear a number that part of the Milner White Collection went to Southampton? Or am I dreaming about something else?

(Its funny what happens to old pots. One rarely sees them again (most get broken, of course) I wonder who bought the ones at Ohly's! One of them was not too bad I thought (1938). Nice handle. (Must be fairly nice because it is v.rare that one can like a handle after 27 years!) Oh, here is a bit of Interim Statement of Account! Ought to have taken these 3 pots to London last Nov. but the van was a bit loaded then.

Yrs Michael.

**14 January 1966**

Dear Michael,

Very glad to have your letter. (Have since heard from Michael Casson about this Tiranti book and his need for more photographs of your pots.)

Yes you are quite right in thinking that the pots of the late Dean of York\*, pottery collection went to Southampton, but as regards pots of yours, the short answer is that I saw about five of yours at York last year but have no knowledge that any of yours went to Southampton. I was there too in '65 and only a proportion of the pots were then on view but these were all from the original batch that went there ten years or more ago. In more detail, the story as I know it is that about 23% of the pots are now at the Southampton Art Gallery and most of the rest are at the York Art Gallery (not the Museum); (2) that in his main period of collecting (between the Wars) he acquired mainly work by Wlm Staite Murray, Bernard Leach and Shoji Hamada (with a sprinkling only of pots by others), and had none of yours because he limited himself to stoneware; (3) that he was attracted down to London for more Staite Murray's when the residue of the latter's pre-war work was shown at the Leicester Gallery in 1959, and also bought a few more by Katharine Pleydell-Bouverie who had an exhibition on at the same time. (I last saw him '62 at the Berkeley Galleries with pots all around him on the floor, to the despair of Mr Ohly who was trying to get the exhibition ready for opening); and (5) that he felt the need for some later pots by BL and commented to me in '61 that he'd missed some pots he'd have liked, through not knowing in time that there would be any pots for sale in the Arts Council exhibition.

The pots at Southampton (his birth place) were given in his lifetime and in fact some time back (I first saw them in 1956), thirty-odd pots mainly by Staite Murray, Vyse, BL and Hamada, with smaller numbers by Kawai, Pleydell-Bouverie and Sam Haile, and one each by Frances Richards (only pot of

hers I've seen) and James Dring.

Again by seeing the Rotterdam catalogue, I remember you particularly liked a Sam Haile pot from which I'd made a colour slide and the same pot went to Rotterdam and was pictured in the catalogue. I believe he also gave a few odd pots elsewhere (e.g. A Staite Murray to the Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge). Then the rest of the collection (100-odd pots) went to York in 1959 on their undertaking to lay out a special gallery for them /XXX/ pots Staite Murray, BL and Hamada and small numbers (down to single pots) the Martin Bros, Emile Decoeur & Reginald Wells, Vyse, Kawai, Pleydell-Bouverie, Braden, Davis, Seraphin Soudbinine, Sam Haile, James Dring, one PS/XXX/ The 1959 Staite Murray's went just about straight in to this handed over group, and were followed soon after by his first Ladi Kwali. This was the only Abuja pot I saw there in his lifetime, though there were various changings about, and we heard rumours of breakages and thefts: two pots by BL are now shown in a repaired state and the pottery gallery which was at first an "open access" later had the wicker gate of the gallery locked; and later still a trellis was added to the dangerously open space above the /XXX/ (key available from the office on request). Have been to York twice since his death, first time the pottery gallery was closed, being used to store the removed contents of a neighbouring gallery during a special exhibition, second time, got in, and there were (I think) 5 pots by you added: 1959 wine jar, large dish and 2 soy sauce pots and a 1962 plate. The smaller pieces I can parallel here but I am telling Michael Casson about the large dish (along with all else I know of). I've no knowledge of any additional pots being sent to Southampton; and the 1962 hand-built pots by Ladi Kwali and Halima which he got in '62 have not yet shown up at York. What else of yours he got I never knew.

The trouble with my photographs of your pots is that they've mostly not been pottery photographs as now needed, but rapidly-made photographic memoranda (in "available" and often photographically unsuitable light) of exhibitions as they were set up and hence as you say including a mixed lot of pots in most groups. I've never had the opportunity of photographing any pot of yours individually in photographically good light, except for those here and these (having the pots) I've not yet photographed! And I never did feel that either the Dean or I (though the pots are well worth having) had acquired the real cream of what came from Abuja. I have a Wenford Bridge bowl and screw stoppered bottle, then from Abuja, in addition to about /XXX/ I have of yours: a biggish wine jar, a 12" dish and an 11" plate, two open vase jars (one with 2 handles and a tall one with 3) and a flock of small things; a mug, 2 coffee-pots, 3 soy sauce pots, a sugar caster, 2 screw cap store jars, 2 salts, 3 peppers, a mustard and a teapot, big jar with lid by /XXX/! Add to these the heron dish still at the Molton Gallery and the pots still at Wenford.

Many thanks for sending on the "interim statement." I think the pricing most generous (to me!) and for saying you'll get the pots as far as London when you /XXX/. These items won't come out of this month's budget as I've just paid for the M.G. dish, but I'll send a cheque quite soon. Either the C.P. shop or the Lonsdale road address would be fine, whichever is most convenient to you and to the temporary /XXX/. (Oh, is the Lonsdale Road address in /XXX/, now London address? I gathered she had moved, but never knew where to.) And many thanks also for the offer to put the black bowl in my way should it still be there after the 15th Jan. (I can't see that it will be, but if it should I'll accept the offer with gratitude.)

Will let this rest /XXX/ for a day or two now and then add to it, as I am hoping to get down to London on the night train tomorrow, so as to see the Molton Gallery pots again on Saturday morning before these are dispersed and if possible take some photographs which was impossible at the private view, in the crush!

*/Continuation of above letter on 16 January 1966/*

Yes, I managed that hasty trip as planned, but was disappointed to find that some of the pots were

already dispersed (including several by B.L. which I particularly wanted a record of, and at least 4 of yours). The original arrangement was so broken up that it was not possible to get any general shots to give an idea of what it looked like when complete. So I got as many individual photographs of pots I liked as I could in available time and as well as I could in the rather awkward lighting, but it is "available light" stuff again and might not turn out at all well. By the way I have now come to like the stools, which I was a bit half-hearted about at Wenford, not pots perhaps, but ceramic and v.interesting things. Then at 1pm I collected the bean dish (the other one went to /XXX/!) and have now sent word to Michael Casson, all information I can think of on what I have in hand, also a hasty /XXX/ of the photographs in existing books of pots by you: I take it he'll want to avoid duplication. Winchcombe, Wenford Bridge, even Vume are quite well illustrated already but so far as I can trace no book yet has a photograph of an Abuja pot. Did anyone think of the photographs used to illustrate your exhibition prospectuses? (e.g. In the 1958 prospectus is a very acceptable photograph of the big oil-jar which yesterday I was only able to photograph mostly through the window). If the original photograph is not available I could produce a glossy print by making a new negative from the prospectus (there might be a question of copyright however). But perhaps M. Casson already has this photograph?

The black bowl went to Bristol Art Gallery (old rivals of mine!) (Incidentally they have a v.good Winchcombe large bowl which has not been photographed so far as I know. I told M. Casson about this as he's not yet made it clear whether he wants work of any period or only recent work (say, the last decade.)

I am wondering whether you feel like transferring your black bowl offer to me to the blue bowl ("pro rata" of course, the M.G. price for this was more), which was the only one left. I like this (even though on a free choice I'd have had the black one and I hope Bristol got the later for the same reason and not just because it was less expensive!) and would be very glad to have it if I had the chance. Or, I might be even more ambitious if I had the opportunity, and try a last fling at the big fellow from Abuja. I know or think I know of 3 unsold ones: (a) the oil-jar, (b) the grain store-jar with lid, and (c) the "trough" with handles. I take (b) to be the big jar from Paris. It was included in the list on the wall alongside the pots at the Molton Gallery but did not appear in the exhibition. The oil-jar, which consequently was not priced apparently, standing in for it. It may be that you have firmly decided to keep (a) and (b) for yourself. At any rate, think about it and quote me for any of the four above that you'd be willing to part with, pricing in terms of my paying over a (not too long) period (I'm still in debt at the moment!) Then I'd let you know quickly if I want to take up any offer I get (or which, if I have a choice).

All good wishes once again, Bill.

**16 February 1966**

Dear Michael,

Many thanks for your letter of the 3rd February (how time goes), and I am very glad to hear that (so far as you know at present) I can have a sort of option on the Paris jar and the remaining blue bowl. As I believe I said before, I have one or two earlier bills still to pay first, but I will start taking up the option as soon as I possibly can.

I've been wondering whether it has occurred to you that the Paris jar (which so far as I know has not been seen publicly in England, which seems a pity) might very well qualify for inclusion in the forthcoming C.P.A "storage jar" exhibition (June), if the idea has occurred to you or appeals to you, this I hope can very well be done without prejudice to my prospect of acquiring the pot. All classes of members have in the past frequently sent pots marked N.F.S to the previous four "theme" exhibitions in successive years (on teapots, casseroles, plant-pots and coffee pots respectively).



I'm now enclosing some prints of the photographs I hastily took at the Molton Gallery on the last Saturday morning of the show (15th January). Most of these (plus photographs of some of the pots I have here) have gone or are going to Michael Casson. (The teapot is the green one, the blue one and several other pots had already gone away). The simple letter-of-the-alphabet references on the back (with an added number, as C(1), C(2), etc. Where there is more than one photograph of the same pot) are in the case he (Casson) refers to you for any point of glaze description or dimensions. The M.G episode that morning was so rushed, gallery due to close down for the weekend, at lunch time, quite a lot of people milling around, some of the pots already dispersed and the residue of the arrangement being demolished under our eyes by the staff, that it was impossible to note down catalogue details or do more than jot the rough dimensions of 5 pots.

My attempts on the "heron" wine jar I have just called 1, 2 and 3 since for obvious reasons, these have not gone to Casson. And my attempted photographs through window glass of the Yanyawa jar (of which a photograph already exists) and of the other stool, are hardly worth printing.

I'll send prints (probably in a small form, just for reference) of the photographs of the pots I have here when I've had another printing session, then you can see what I have.

Yours as ever, Bill.

***/Fragment of above letter dated 16 February 1966/***

rough dimensions of a few pots. I seem only to have managed to photograph 3 of the bowls (I was unsure of the black one which seemed improbable to photograph in that light and which I had three separate goes at), C is definitely the black one, but on a black and white negative it is tantalizingly difficult to distinguish the effects of light shine from that of chün paleness, so D(1) and D(2) are only tentatively identifies as different views of the same (brown, slightly smaller) bowl and E as the blue one. (Though the decoration and shallowness from seen right).

***/Undated fragment of a letter/***

L.K pot which the Dean of York then bought) which I think exists as a duplicate because I repeated it thinking there had been camera shake, but both were all right. Then there are six from Paris this year, which I deliberately took in duplicate. Finally, there are two which I took of the V and A pots of yours in the travelling exhibition and two from recent attempts at recording the L.K and Halima pots which I have here. The latter photographs have turned out disappointingly so I must try again, too "warm" and I failed to realise the extent to which the glaze would pick up the reflection of the batik on which the pots were standing- but you may as well see them. (The photograph of the third pot I have the most unsatisfactory of the three, and the 1959 photograph is a better record of a similar pot so I have omitted the third new slide).

(Yes, I rather agree about the V and A travelling show. In the earliest of the three sections which was adequate so far as I could judge, there was only one pot (by the Martin Brothers) which seemed a good pot per se, in the middle section (which I think I said was "quite good" – rather modified praise – there are some good pots but in a number of cases the wrong pots by the right people. In the final section (where again, there were few good pots) I feel nevertheless that in places they had not only the wrong pots, but the wrong potters. However I am very glad to see any exhibition which gives some idea of what is going on, and has some good pots in it, travelling around).

I have also been burning the midnight electricity a little, producing black-and-white prints of the London photographs, the few at the B.G opening, the rapid photographic notes of the exhibition, and three shots from the Queen's Square record (ones showing David Canter's offer of honorary membership to L.K, just David's hands expounding, whilst you and L.K listen, then you translating to L.K.) finally, her

delighted reaction, by which time I'd managed to get the camera turned horizontal on the tripod, so as to include David. There were 72 (!) originally of the "L.K in action series (diminished by five or six leaving a gap, by the accident I had with one of the films). A good many of these are still unprinted even as small proofs, but I thought you would like to see these three.

These slides and prints will be posted today if I can manage it, otherwise you'll not see them before you leave. I ran short of photographic paper last night before reaching the Paris series, if I can get more paper by tonight I'll rush them through and send them off tomorrow at about the last chance, failing that, I'll send the original proofs which you saw.

Prices (since you are insistent on this); AI think 2/- each for slides and 1/6d each for prints on whole plate paper. But let me make it clear that anything you don't want to retain (or the lot for that matter!) can come back (please leave any "returns" at Wenford Bridge for me with my pots, they'll save me making other copies later for my own use)

(Many of the "notes" of the exhibition are not "good photographs", but just what can be got quickly in the existing (usually awkward) lighting.) On the other hand in case of any additional copy needed later, negative references are on back of prints. (Insert B) Incidentally the reason why in three cases, Berkeley Galleries groups are photographed in two halves (overlapping, but the overlap necessarily from two differing points and probably not quite on the same scale) is that the room or passage-way where the pots were was too small to get the camera far enough away to put the whole group on one negative).

Unless there is any objection to this which you know of, could you please pass on an L.K. portrait to her with my compliments as a small gift? (Insert C) In case you have no convenient means of looking at slides, I will put in a small hand viewer. You could either keep this if useful to you or put it with my pots for return to me.

In Paris, you kindly said you had plenty of spare copies of earlier exhibition invitations and could let me have a copy of each for my records. I only have, so far, the last three B.G ones (1962 of course, 1959 and (I think) 1958). If your stocks are at Wenford Bridge and you have time to leave copies for me with Kofi, would be very grateful for them!

Did you ever locate the fragments of the broken L.K pots (195a)? It would be fascinating if a little macabre, to try to reconstruct one!

Must stop and get this off. Best wishes for your journey, and greetings to Kofi, to whom I hope to write later.

As ever yours, Bill.

(Insert A) (Incidentally, I still owe you for a Nigerian garment as well as for the caddy)

**24 January 1966**

Dear Bill,

Many thanks for your letter written on 13th & 16th Jan. Well, of course, if you decide to go for one of the blue chün bowls (at ½ the Molton Gallery price + freight) I should be v.pleased. But I don't know which it is yet, not having had any news yet from the gallery.

Or any of the 3 big things, on same terms, easily the best of them in my opinion & the best I've made anywhere, is the tall pot w. lid & 4 handles (yes, the Paris 1962 one). Thought the wine jar with creature has a better quality glaze, I don't quite like the shape, not so much as the jar anyway.

Yes 317 Lonsdale Rd is Mariel's permanent London address. She has scraped the bottoms of all

available barrels (& touched all possible friends for help!) acquired boldly the freehold. I am delighted because I hope it will bring to an end her up-to-now rather recurrent crises of flats. It is a nice little house (although bottom floor is permanently occupied 1 "statutory" tenant), right on the river, looking across at miles & miles of "open country" (i.e. civil service playing fields etc.)

Well thanks for all the information re Dean of York's collection. I think perhaps what would best meet the case would be if you could take 2 or 3 good photos, of good (i.e. large), pots by me in your collection, which is considerable.

I have sent Casson 2 photos recently taken here (not specially wonderful ones!) (1) Big blue chün teapot Abuja 1965. (2) "Tang" granary or rather brazier, made at Winchcombe 1938ish, inspired by a Tang model of a granary in Cheltenham Museum. Quite unlike any of my other Winchcombe things & I think, not bad. And also 3 old 1950 photos (excellent photos) taken by the C.o.I.D before I went to Nigeria. Wenford bowls, plates, cider jar, wall pots mostly "sepia on white." But he says he needs more.

I could not face the expense of having portraits made of the Molton G. lot\* (except for the fat screw-stoppered oil jar ("small," not the huge one) which I asked Edwin Mullins to get a photo of specially for the ch VII of my book (section on handles) \*because I am in the process of ruining myself collecting photos for Pioneer Pottery (if it ever gets published!!) The local photographer who took 8 or 9 here is disastrous both in price & results & I shall have to try a rival firm & be more careful myself too. These photos of course are not of my own work but old things: Fremington, Chinese peasant pots & ginger jars, Nigerian pots.

The Nigerian news is baffling and depressing. I don't think it will affect Abuja Pottery, but I am a bit uneasy for Kofi, being a stranger in what has become (since 1957-60) a foreign land! Of course he has the sense to keep away from politics, but in the North everyone (all northerners) think he is an Ibo (& even Ibo's think he is an Ibo & address him in Ibo!) Well if the North began a civil war that could be damned awkward for him. But I hope they won't have a civil war, or that if they do Kofi will escape to peaceful England for a change.

I feel Nigeria has killed its best or only chance of unity. But I might be wrong. One does not prophecy about Africa!

Yours ever Michael.

***Undated letter***

Dear Michael,

Many thanks for your letter and yes, I do agree about the respective merits of the big pots. I like all the three I know of well enough to welcome the opportunity of getting any one of them, but of the three, my free choice would be the four-handled lidded jar, which so took my eye in 1962. So if I can finally have this I'd be very happy about it. You may recall I wrote to you at Abuja about it late in 1962 but you were inclined to say NFS (there is some slight mystery about it as although Mr Capon (I think it is) at the Molton Gallery admitted it was chez Mallins, and although it was listed at the M.G exhibition, yet so far as I know it never actually appeared there, the 1958 big screw-stoppered jar acting as stand-in, so perhaps someone else has his eye on it?) If someone else is able to put up the money for it promptly than I can I'll have to give way, but I hope to have one of these three. And would it be too greedy to want a blue bowl as well? The one left at the M.G was £42 there I think, so the Wenford price of this wouldn't break me in the long run. At any rate, I'll try to begin sending some money as soon as my existing debts at C.P.A and elsewhere are cleared. In the meantime I am sending the money for the 3 pots on your enclosed interim statement. (If convenient could I have this document back later please? As it's agreeable and rather uncommon to have a proper invoice description by the potter of the pot

one acquires for one's collection.)

I remember seeing the brazier (in the room you call I think the schoolroom) perhaps in '59 but more probably in '62 when Jack and I stayed with Kofi. Can't visualise it as there in '65 but perhaps I was just unobservant. It fits together from separate parts as I remember it. I don't think I realised it was Winchcombe although perhaps I should. It emerges from what you say about photographs that something potentially awkward may have happened regarding the photographs or rather photographs (as there were two different positions of the pot) wh. Mr Mullins had had done professionally (and rather well) of the (relatively) small screw-stoppered jar with bird decoration in the M.G exhibition whilst I was trying to take my own photographs on the last morning of the show. Casson (I think this is right) showed me these prints, and I recognised at once that I couldn't do as well with the pot myself in their lighting, although of course I tried. Well Michael Casson had rather naturally been enquiring at the Gallery after any available photographs, and the chap there seemed to have a vague idea that these photographs he had might be for Casson! (The true story only became clearer when I heard from you the other day.) I've since heard from Casson again and he has evidently now seen this picture and liked it, it is possible to infer from what he says that he was hoping to use it in the Tiranti book, but I can't make out whether through a misunderstanding a print was actually passed over to him! If so, after hearing of your trials and tribulations over the Pioneer Pottery photographs, I can well imagine your annoyance if someone has walked off physically with good photographs on which you were counting – also your possible annoyance at the idea of someone wanting first use of what you /XXX/ as an original to P.P (The Tiranti final deadline is now in about two months time, I gather.) Not I hope rushing in in this matter where angels fear to tread, I've thought it best to advise Casson that he ought not to make use of this ever if he does have it written permission. (Your own copyright in the photographs is quite clear and definite.)

It makes me miserable to hear of your paying the earth for photographs, which may eventually be of no use! Not for the first time I've been feeling that if only I'd had photographic gear with me in September I might have been of some help. But as a matter of sheer logistics (so to say), I did find it impossible to convey such a combination of clear weight and fragility on a bicycle!

I'd attempted some photographs of the pots of yours here even before I heard from you, but they are not yet to the print stage. Will try to send prints to you as soon as I can as well as some to Casson, also prints of any of the M.G efforts, which turn out passably.

All good wishes once again. Yours as ever, Bill.

**03 February 1966**

Dear Bill,

Many thanks for your letter & the £8 cheque (here is the invoice 66/83 receipted!), and for mentioning about the wine jar photograph. Yes, Edmund Capon mentioned he had given one of the prints to M. Casson & I have written to M. Casson to say Don't use it in the Tiranti book. E. Capon seems to have persuaded himself that if you took the same pot from the other side it becomes a different photo. Well yes of course it does; but its still BORING to use the same pot twice & I want it for P.P. & to Hell with the Tiranti book!

All right: I am practically sure no one bought the big "Paris" jar. I think it was left out because of space & because when they saw the "YANYAWA" (wild west African fox) wine jar, they opted for its better glaze quality & more "enterprising" design? (Nothing was said I was even not sure whether the Yanyawa jar was going into the show, the arrangements were not full tied up when I left London in Nov.) And of course you can still have the unsold bowl from the Molton Gallery at £21. I see from my list it is the best



of those I sent in (anyway the best of the chün blues).

I wonder where they are now. Probably at Mariel's new "house" (flat really, her ground floor flat is permanently occupied by "statutory tenants") at 317 Lonsdale Rd, SW13. Yes instalment payments are OK by me.

Going back to that photo by A.C. Cooper Ltd of the 31cm (12 ¼") wine jar. Well, yes it is of course good in a humdrum mediocre sort of way, 1st-class-competent-proficient-put-on-photographers stuff. But quite uninspired e.g. A purely profile view, the commonest fault of all is photos of pots. One never draws a pot like that & one never sees a pot like that (unless one makes a special effort & shuts one eye & goes down on one knee.) Still I suppose it illustrates my handle adequately & that is what I primarily wanted it for. So I'll try to accept it! But I bet you will make better ones for Casson's Tiranti book, even if you don't have such facilities! Good luck with them anyway.

Wish you could see the wild snowdrops here by the river. Yesterday I went with /XXX/ (an angler) I watched 4 or 5 enormous salmon in the river.

Yours MC

I'll bring these 3 to London next time I'm there (March I think if not sooner) & leave them at Craftsman Potters Shop\*? (Suitably bundled up in newspaper etc.) (\*Or at 317 Lonsdale Rd. SW13?)

**22 February 1966**

Dear Bill,

Very many thanks for the good photos of my pots at the Molton Gallery. The oval dish is particularly successful. Also the stool which I like v.much. The ones of the teapot (the best yet of this type. I have 2 others here, not so good) & of the bowls which are always such a difficult subject.

Yes the same idea (that the "Paris" grain jar will be eligible for the C.P.A. storage jar exhibition) had occurred to me but I didn't like the idea of having to be in London to carry it there!!! Also I have lost or thrown away the announcement, which gave the date of that exhibition. Yes I'm sure they would not mind having it marked N.F.S. (or even "SOLD", why not!)

Yes your identification of the 3 bowls agrees with mine!

Thank you very much for feeding these photos to M Casson. I was in a fix not being able to give him any decent photos. I hope he uses the one of the stool!

Yours Michael.

**28 February 1966**

Dear Michael,

Just a short note to say, glad to have your letter, and that I'm enclosing as mentioned earlier a photographic non-verbal catalogue in little of the 23 pots of yours (2 Wenford, 21 Abuja) which I so far have here. (The figures on the back are negative references: where there is a letter of the alphabet reference as well, this means that a photograph of the pot or group of pots has also gone to Michael Casson.) I've also had pots here by seven of the Abuja potters (21 more pots in all) and must do a photographic check of these sometime.

I managed to squeeze out a pale little print of the St Ives store (photographed through the window glass at M.G.) (I am not sure I added a "Casson" reference to the first stool photograph, this should be R). Don't bother to acknowledge, but it would be nice to hear later, when you will again be (or have been) in London. (Did you know of the exhibition detailed on the enclosed card? I can't go to the opening but I hope to see the show later). The C.P.A storage jar exhibition dates are 13th-20th June & initial

information about this was enclosed with newsheet no.) They said then that an entry form for the exhibition would be circulated shortly to all members, but I've not had this yet. If the Paris grain jar is still (and can remain) in London, possibly I could try to escort it to the C.P.A, as a stage in the process of getting it to Yorkshire! That is, if I can manage to arrange a free day at the right time. It is quite easy as a rule to do a day trip to London from here, if one can get the appropriate day free for it. I don't think I can manage either of the next two C.P.A meetings as they are on "busy" Friday.

Yours as ever, Bill

**06 March 1966**

Dear Bill,

Thank you very much for sending prints of all the pots by me in your collection. What a lot there are when you come to count them up! I remember well that batch of large Wenford jars (66/8/9 & 66/8/8L) the first I ever made with screw-stoppers (a great moment!!) 1953 or 1954 I fancy, biscuit fired about 1957 and finally glaze fired in the 1959 firing (I used to fire about once in 3 years here!) (while I was in Nigeria that is.) I also remember the big Abuja bottle with strong W.African influence in neck, handle & decoration! I hope M. Casson uses that one in the Tiranti book. Two other special "old friends," the small flower-jar with two handles, green chün and a sort of soup plate shape (Q) (66.9.14) I also like the larger of the 2 coffee pots, the one on the right in 66/10/19, spout quite successful. You've no idea how difficult it is to get shape, spout, handle & lid all looking just right. The smaller one is not bad, but I find the spout a little heavy. This coffee pot shape is about the first thing I am planning to make again when I eventually start making pots here. There is quite a demand for the larger sizes, 2 pints, 3 pints and perhaps even a bit more.

I am making "mushroom moulds" for dishes, 3 shapes, 2 sizes, 8 or 9 of each. Then pan rings for firing them.

Two mill machines are here but not installed yet, waiting for the mason & the electrical expert! Ball mills not arrived yet, so I can't make any "body" yet. No clay yet, but its coming.

I plan to be in London about 24th-29th March i.e. after Birmingham (which is 21st 22nd March.) I am bringing a little collection (24 pots, mostly small) of stuff made at Abuja by George Sempagala of Uganda (about 1960), for the C.P.A. who will give him a little show sometime. Very nice craftsmanship, curiously finer edged the work of my Nigerians.

I don't know how the C.P.A. will react to the idea of having the "Paris" storage jar in their show. It's rather BIG perhaps! I will ask them.

Yes Beano Pleydell-Bouverie (whom I had lunch with on the way back from Birmingham about 8 days ago) had the Sparks exhib. card. I don't know the work of any except B.L & Lucie Rie (Not keen on Scandivegia!)

Cornwall is at its most beautiful, wild daffodils & a lot of primroses dominating the scene before the nettles and docks etc. take charge!

In haste – I have a young niece staying.

Yours ever Michael.

**Undated letter**

Dear Michael,

Once again, a bit more towards it! I'd hope it would be £20 this time (to take me more than halfway with this bill) but it wasn't quite optimistic, and as it is I'm earlier than intended, waiting for someone

else's cheque to clear. What it is to be such an unaffected member of our allegedly affluent society in the middle of an economic crisis!

The Paris jar is still with the C.P.A. as they said it was the only pot of yours they'd ever had there and asked to keep it on view longer. I realise I'll be responsible for moving it to Yorkshire in due course. The George Sempagala pots I didn't see all of as an exhibition as it was quite impossible for me to get down then- however, I chanced my arms with reserves on a dish (No.15) and a jug (No.45) by /XXX/ as a result of a telephone conversation, and later added a chün teapot (No.1) and a lidded sauce boat (No.7), from what I was told were the residue seen at a flying visit I was able to make later. Was just congratulating myself on the surprising success of this foray when (rather sickeningly) a letter came saying there was an error over the nice teapot, which had in fact been sold (though not marked as so) before I saw it. (In fairness I should say that this type of mix-up is untypical and in fact almost unheard of at the C.P. shop) so I have rather to spoil my little group and take the teapot back!

Very busy here, and the usual troubles due to staff illnesses and other vagaries. Hope all is going as well as you would wish at Wenford.

As ever, Bill.

**20 March 1966**

Dear Michael,

I intended to send a line or two in reply to your last (6th March) before you were on the move. In the preparation for, execution and aftermath of National Library Week activities have kept me more frantically busy than normal (which I wouldn't have thought possible). Incidentally, I'm still baffled about Birmingham, which you mention as if I'd know all about it! In fact I don't know what is afoot there in the coming couple of days, or why you would make a preliminary trip there last month, can I make some guesses, but don't know which if any of them has substance.

I was very interested in your comments on the pots of yours I have (as re-seen by you in the little photographs), and particularly to hear that the Wenford jars (bottles?) were the first with screw stoppers. (Were the soy-sauce pots the first with screw caps?) However, the history of that batch must have been more various than you thought, you suggested you had made them 1953 or 4, biscuit fired about 1957, glaze fired 1959, but I've had them since 1957 at least and possibly 1956! The pointers to an earlier date are (a) that in the numbered list of pots (which earlier failed to record dates) it is no. 84 (whilst the next of yours, the two-handled and three-handled jars, first soy-sauce pot and the coffee pot you liked bought 1958) are no. 183-186); (b) that when I came across it (on the floor in the basement at Primavera, rather dusty and with a label so grimy that only the price was legible) it was at a date when I did not know your work well enough to recognise it confidently enough (an unhappy state of affairs which was /XXX/ well by 1958 and probably earlier, an assistant who was with me and saw my interest said it was "from an overseas potter" (American or Canadian she thought!), and it was not until I took it to the light and saw the marks that I was sure about it; (c) that I remember it in the living room here at a time when the few Lucie Rie/Hans Coper pots I then had, bought 1956, were still on a piano (since given away to a friend who needed it more than I did) and yours was on top of a grocer's box temporary bookcase: the present shelves here, I made in 1957; and (d) that I saw the 1959 glaze-fired batch when Jack and I were at Wenford on the Saturday the Wenford "course" ended- at that time the form was quite familiar to me and the glaze on those had turned out quite differently from that on the one I have. Oh and the 1958 2 handled store-jar (I regret, though I like it) isn't green but two shades of grey and iron-brown. I missed the beautiful green ones which were so prolific in 1959, and came again in 1962, because I couldn't afford one at the time, on top of the wine-jar and two hand-built pots by Ladi (one in each decorative style) which I got in '59, or on top of my trip to Paris and the big

Halima pot I got in '62. The "sort of soup-plate shape" (Q) is green chün however. By the way, I noticed that one pot of yours, which I have here missed being photographed – this is the tiny pepper pot you sent from Abuja.

I saw the John Sparks exhibition \* This firm intention to keep a constant small stock of modern large European pots as a supplement to this regular stock of Chinese ceramics (which turned out to have pots from only three countries of origin, England, Sweden and Denmark). Pleasant and agreeable (except that the "dim religious light" in which it was shown was a bit irritating) and occasionally exciting. Also a bit old. I realised eventually that what was peculiar was that (apart from on B.L jug with an obvious Englishness) everything else seemed to have been hand-picked so as to include nothing which in form or texture might offend the prejudices of the regular customers (i.e. everything was to Tang, Sung or (eschewing elaborate decoration but with a wide variety of pastel colour) Ming or Ch'ing standards). I thought the pots by B.L and Lucie Rie much the best; the Scandinavians (mostly late Chinese!) rather cold; but with Stig Lindberg (Sweden) the liveliest. Alan Spencer-Green forms are "elegant" I suppose but are so much thrown that they have no "life": one bowl of his which was simply thrown and glaze-dipped seemed so much livelier than the rest that one wonders why he persists in throwing the vitality out of his pots to obtain "purity" of form.

*/Continuation of above letter on 25 March 1966/*

The above was broken off perforce and I intended to have it with me on the train to finish it off there when I made a quick trip down to see B.L's exhibition at Primavera on the 21st, but left it behind. What a man! (B.L I mean); he's already (in his 80th year) sent batches of pots to two mixed exhibitions (Molton and Sparks), now here he was with 90 more new pots (old friends done better and fresh inspiration), and he's off to South America for the British Council (40 more new pots already sent in advance), and he was going back to St Ives to decorate pots in time for a firing!

I couldn't have got this off much earlier to any purpose as you'd be in transit, but I think I'll now take a chance on catching you in London with this.

Looking forward to the fruition of your Wenford plans! Remember me to Mariel, and very best wishes to both of you. Bill.

P.S. I'm still rather in a tizzy over a threat to my pots of a kind, which I believe you are not yet "modern" enough at Wenford to suffer from. We are much plagued here by teenage destructive hooliganism and amateur housebreaking. (A recurrent nightmare is either a break-in whilst I am away at work by someone who might ignorantly turn over and smash what he found queer, or simply a wanton stone through a window). Well I had a spot of both some days ago or a very near miss, found the main damage one night after work when I reached home, but it was a day or two more before I was at home sufficiently in daylight to notice the other tracks and guess at the full story. Apparently someone tried to get in at the front, by the ground floor window without avail, then after lifting a fist he smashed the front cellar window in a recess below ground level, and found himself faced by a mass of pots on the "cellar stone", a sort of brick and concrete platform intended as a larder. These stopped him (not, I suppose, that he respected them, but it would have made a great noise to throw or push these aside, and this is a terrace house.) Then apparently he went to the back (clumsy marks of a screwdriver beside the latch, but I had a bolt on as well); foiled again he backed off (must have been the same person) and in revenge, through two stones at my back windows. Bedroom window smashed and glass all over the place, but miraculously no pot touched. Downstairs, he hit and chipped the copingstone, then scarred the large, top plane badly, left of centre, without penetrating. An inch lower, disaster! Have had two previous warnings, the same pane starred right at the edge a few years back by a boy throwing carelessly at birds, and more recently, in a gale, a flock of slates from someone's roof hit the front of the house with



a crash which jerked me out of bed, stone and woodwork scarred, glass missed by a fraction. And high winds again this weekend, so now I'm thinking once more in terms of protection. Wire screens would be the most thorough things, but these are ugly, awkward and attract attention. More /XXX/ less noticeable, more expensive and less effective would be what I've thought of before, aluminium style Venetian blinds. As usual, it boils down to a matter of time and opportunity and money!

Bill.

**31 March 1966**

Dear Bill,

Excuse dirty paper! I'm just back from my 'Safari'- Birmingham. I was 'Examining' if you can believe it, at the School of Training Art Teachers. B'ham University, the Winchcombe, Cheltenham, Oxford (photos of Cretan & Nubian pots), London, The Boat Race (a large pond in Mariel's new house). I delivered your big storage jar to the C.P.A. shop in my old van (they are quite happy to have it in their 'Storage Jar' special show) & also your teapot, coffee bowl & gin flask (all paid for by you about 1st Feb 1966) packed in a cardboard carton. So you will get them someday I hope.

What a worry abt Broken Windows etc in Wakefield. I don't know how long Wenford will be immune, our hooligans so far are abt age 7-8 but I tremble to contemplate what they'll be capable of when grown up!!! About the windows etc. evidently all that sort of thing is work of Experts. My only amateur do-it-yourself-the-cheap-way solution would be to fix a stout grade of polythene or Perspex or Plexiglas behind the glass windows so the rocks don't actually penetrate into the room. It seems hard that Pots should suffer like this but of course like glass windows they are horribly vulnerable.

Yes of course you're quite right abt the dates of those big screw stoppered jars made at Wenford. They were all made at same time (abt 1953 I think) but fired in different years.

When I was in the C.P.A. shop they said have you seen the BL show? So I said NO! What show? (Mariel got a card but didn't send on to me!) So Ennis (& son) & I went along there to Sloane St. Lovely, a few of them almost the best B.L.'s I've ever seen. What glaze quality. (Hats off also to Janet Leach who keeps the Leach Pottery going, without a pottery (& it takes 20-30 years to make one) a potter can't do much. That place has been in production since 1921, it'll be having its 'jubilee' soon!

No more. I'm still catching up with masses of correspondence. Yours M.C.

**12 August 1966**

Dear Bill,

Many thanks for the £15 (documents enclosed!) So glad you were able to take the big pot home but what a suitcase to be carrying. I can't understand why it hasn't got the MC mark. I thought I put it on all that batch (of which this was the best). Possibly I did seal it using the largest (but not very large) of the seals I had at Abuja & then it might have got obliterated during the operation of slip glazing, which with that ultra-slippery slip glaze was always apt to be a bit of a wrestling-match. But it is odd. It isn't under the lid by chance? Sorry about it! I rather believe in signing pots for much the same reason as you set forth yourself. Yes, the big oval dishes were sort of anonymous, being moulded (the original model was made by me about 1958 or 7), but any that I decorated or comb decorated I usually signed with a brush at the bottom. (Yes, the 'Roman' NIGERIA stamp was originally made for the 1960 independence pieces (mostly ashtrays!) I used them on dishes (only)).

I sent the revised & finished version of my final chapter (ch XII) to K. Pleydell-Bouverie & I've just had her very good suggestions & also some from Norah Braden, v.useful. It's amazing how many slips & mistakes one can make & then miss over & over again. But I am delighted that both of them liked it

v.much both in form & substance. Now there's some retyping to be done of a good many sheets & then I shall get a Photostat copy of the whole thing; then send the original to Faber's & see what they say I do.

Forgive hasty scrawl, students are down again to 2, but I am still v.busy. Both ball mills working at last.

A friend took me to the new Cornwall County Hall at Truro the other day & we looked at the v.fine BL pots they've got there- big 18 inch things holding their own in a vast & fundamentally foreign environment!

Harrow: I didn't see the show of that at C.P.A. but I had one of their students, Douglas Phillips, here for 4 weeks, very keen. He has been experimenting with the red clay used by the old Donyatt Pottery near his home in Somerset, with slight modification it seems to be very good clay for dark stoneware. It has never before been used for anything but the 900-1100 earthenware's they used to make.

As ever Michael.

**11 October 1966**

Dear Bill,

Many thanks for the £15. I enclose the account receipted up to date!

I've got your chün bowl safely here & will bring it up to London next time I come, and leave it at the C.P.A. if they don't object.

I had a first try at the red glaze, using the specialised materials available here (viz. North Cape Nepheline Syemite, potash feldspar, Etruria Marl) but it is a failure in the little electric kiln at Fellover, all blistered. Ray Finch tells me Nepheline Syemite does blister in glazes. I suppose something to do with the elaborate 'beneficiation' they do to it. Our Ghana Nepheline Syemite (which of course was not 'beneficiated') always behaved all right. Anyhow I'd like to hang on to the Asibi bowl for the present, as a standard to go by & I'll go on trying (e.g. roast the Nepheline Syemite & then regrind it).

Yes Nigeria seems to be in a new mess. I hope Kofi is all right. He never writes. The last news of him (in a letter from Michael O'Brien) was good. (September or August, before the new trouble began).

All going well here. I'm hoping to have first firing before Christmas! Lots of visitors, Inc. Ray Finch last week, and very good weather.

Excuse a hasty scrawl- its long past bedtime.

Yours ever, Michael.

**20 November 1966**

Dear Bill,

Thanks very much for your cheque for £15, which completes the transaction.

I now begin to see that a firing before Christmas is unlikely! As things take so long to dry out this time of year, & the glaze chamber will be mostly be raw-clay things, so I'll have to wait for them. I'm still at the throwing stage! I'll let you know how it turns out.

Yes! Sorry I missed David Leach's show. I must go and visit him one day. It isn't too far from here. BL's 80th Birthday on 5th Jan will be quite a celebration. Janet tells me he is enjoying himself in Japan, they are making a biographical film about him.

I had a letter from Kofi at last. "The worst part of it was that on 29/10/66 round about 3am we were attacked. Unfortunately I was having £50 with me in the room. It was money I took out of the bank against payment (of wages) and for firewood (for the kiln), we were completely confused, I shouted I am not Ibo but a Ghanaian, back came the question how can you prove it, I said only by passport so

I did, with my shaky hands I took the passport to show, by doing so I dropped the wallet unknown. I was left free, before I came back to normal strength the wallet had gone with the money. He says 7 or 8 hundred were killed in Jos alone, and 'seeing dead bodies in every street I was unable to eat for a whole 3 weeks'.

It was certainly an extremely lucky escape; an angry crowd of 200 people don't usually stop to examine passports. Of course I've written to him to say for God's sake come to England for a year or so until things settle down; but I don't suppose he will.

Before this, the only news I had from Bernard Fagg on 26th Oct which said all the Ibos (those that hadn't been killed) had left to Jos Plateau, so I had hoped the worst was over. I wonder now whether there is more to come.

Yours Michael.

**13 December 1966**

Dear Bill,

Just a line to wish you a very Happy Christmas and New Year! Don't worry about Lectures in the North for me! I'm a bit too full up with talks and requests for talks already & now that potting is getting on series at last, it's more & more difficult to leave here, & really, making pots is more important! Also, the Leicester University idea seems to have fallen through. I've had no reply from the organiser of that 'festival' so I have mentally cancelled the whole thing.

We have at last begun to set the kiln; so I am hoping to fire soon after Christmas, mostly 'green' ware slip-glazed.

Oh yes, the Ladi Kwali pot is waiting here in the kiln shed loft; but can't go in this time because no big saggars to take it, it'll be in the 2nd firing I hope. This time I am putting in a nice pot made by Kofi while here, a sort of thrown 'imitation' of Ladi K's 'built' shape (but smaller). I'm giving it a very thin 'Abuja- chün' glaze, the decoration 'inlaid' with the same glaze much thicker. I hope it'll turn out all right\*. They began doing that kind of glazing just after I left Abuja & I've been kicking myself for not having thought of it myself!

As ever, Michael.

\*But I'm afraid it was made of that 'bad' body which tends to bloat.

**17 September 1969**

Dear Michael,

My booksellers let me down badly over supplying a copy of 'Pioneer Pottery' (kept saying "not yet received from publishers" until I quite began to believe that you'd sold so many copies overseas as to exhaust the first printing)! Finally (end of July!) I gave them the sack and got a copy from the C.P.A. shop as I could have done many weeks earlier, but for /XXX/ to do it the orthodox way. Since then I've not had enough patches of free time in one piece to get solidly through it, but have been in to it enough to feel an immense admiration for your arduous achievement in this fact-crammed volume. I'm expecting it to increase greatly my understanding and appreciation of pottery- whilst to potters (as is confirmed by what I hear on all sides) it must (like "the Pickwick, the owl and the Waverley pen" in the red advertisements) come as a /XXX/ and a blessing. I was particularly struck by Mick Casson's writing that being laid up for a time by a back injury he'd had one good result- he'd been able to read "P.P." solidly- and by his /XXX/ that although he's had a go earlier himself at most of the books in your booklist, there were many things which had always puzzled him on which he could see light for the first time through your expositions. Its also one of the few books /XXX/ in which I can see the point of

and respond to all the pots illustrated. (And I see with pleasure that of the /XXX/ pots shown I have one – the chün bowl). I reluctantly had to decide the book was too hefty to cart around with me on my present brief holiday (incidentally I was at Winchcombe earlier today, but don't think I shall make it down to Cornwall this trip as I have to be back at the weekend) so will get back to the book (and to other, not all equally welcome news!) at that time.

There is some bibliographical evidence that the publishers, extraordinary as this seems, they have made a contribution to the slowness with which the book got into circulation in some quarters- although by what I can hear it is now selling well. There are now places where new books in the UK are recorded for the information of the trade and of libraries- Whitaker's Cumulative Book List and the British National Bibliography. The former begins life as a weekly list at the bookseller – the lists being /XXX/ monthly in the last issue of each month, and then /XXX/ further (quarterly, /XXX/ five early) as W.C.B.; the Bookseller also previews new books (often long in advance) in two enlarged special issues (February and August) called the spring and autumn export numbers and lists the following week's books, briefly each week under "Books Forthcoming", in cases where the publisher has supplied a firm publication date. In the spring export number this year there was a displayed advertisement for "P.P."- However, it never made an appearance in "Books Forthcoming" and was not listed as published in the main list until the 14th June (though it was then marked as having appeared in April)! The B.N.B comes out at the same intervals and /XXX/ in the same way but is from the beginning just a catalogue and index of new books (though it gives much more detail than W.C.B.L and is in fact the definitive record). Its entries are done from the statutory deposit copies in the British Museum. The copy of "P.P." must have been late received, as it wasn't recorded until 13th August; until that date the only Cardew entry for 1969 in B.N.B. had been that Cornelius was credited as editor of the English edition of "Concert Guide" by Gerhart Von Westerman.

This scribble in the train may conceivably interest you (or just as conceivably may merely bore you)! In either case, I'll come to an end for now. Best wishes as always, Bill.

### **18 September 1970**

Dear Bill,

Excuse and also very hasty note. So glad you like Rose Bowl & the others (vapour dish, stool). I am marking them all as sold. I hope to take them all up to London on about 16th or 17th Nov (on my way to Manchester to lecture to 'Friends of the Whitworth Gallery.' Margaret Pilkington Grande dame of the M'chester' crafts world; & I'll leave them either at Mariel's flat, 137 Lonsdale Rd, Barnes, SW13. She has a few nice pots (Inc. this v.big jar with wild creatures from the 1959 Abuja exhibition) & her telephone no is 01 876 8535, or at CPA shop, but I feel CPA shop might be feeling a bit tired of me dumping pots on them? Perhaps I am being too sensitive. Anyhow I will certainly leave the big bowl you bought (plain yellow, brown inside) at the CPA on 16th or 17th Nov.

It was great to see you, so unexpectedly, on Wed- so unexpected, & Cornish air had dis-wrinkled you so much I thought at first it could not be you & must be someone who looked very like you.

As ever Michael C.

### **04 November 1970**

Dear Bill,

Thanks very much for cheque for £23 for items 34 & 61 (on the "1500" invoice of 18 Sept 70). I have duly marked them PAID & there now remains the problem of getting them to Wakefield (or Hemsworth). I hate the idea of risking them on B.R.S. & perhaps I hate still more the effort & mental strain /XXX/ & distress involved in packing them & wondering whether EVEN SO the transport men would find a way



to break them.

On the other hand, the idea of actual motoring to Yorks terrifies me (esp. since seeing recently an AA publication describing what happens on M1 & at some appalling M5-6-7 inter-crossings N of Birmingham. In winter, in the Dark, such places are a real nightmare, & in Summer, another kind of nightmare, suffocation by CO. fumes in a /XXX/ if road version of intestinal stasis.

Anyway, the dimensions are-

\*Rose bowl      Height 9 ½ inches Diam. 16 inches

\*Dish              Length 14 ¾ inches Width 10 ¾ inches

\*Stool             Height 13 ¼ inches Diam. 15 ½ inches

(\*Dish does not (dammit) go inside the rose bowl!)

Meanwhile I will \*leave ALL 3 at c/o Mariel, 317 Lonsdale Rd, Barnes, SW13.

(Take No 9 bus fr. Hammersmith to Barnes Bridge, then get out & walk back in opp way to direction of bus you were on, until you see 317 Lonsdale Rd.)

Yes I enjoyed that 'film festival' & only regret I did not press-gang Svend Bayer into seeing it by forcing a ticket on him & telling him it's compulsory. Todd Piker the American boy enjoyed it, though as he rightly said some of them were just AWFUL (e.g. most of the Vallauris one, all exc the terrifying but good frontal views of Picasso!) Mariel enjoyed it too & is I believe helping K.P.B. in her article on it. Worst thing about it was what wasn't there! E.g. a v.g film of Japanese pottery & another on kiln building, Japanese, wh we saw at Dartington 1952, & a good little one of ONDA, Japan, 8mm, by an American which I saw in Oregon in 1968.

(\*When I go up to London on 16th Nov).

Yours Michael C.

#### **14 December 1970**

Dear Bill,

Many thanks for the £16. I enclose receipt, to keep it up to date. Excuse this hasty note. I have just got back from 2 weeks in Greece w. Marianne Haile. We went to advise on a pottery project, which Francis Noel Baker is contemplating in Northern Euboea. Very interesting. We were very busy seeing people & investigating materials etc. but managed a few visits to museums as well & the weather was a nice change from here- actually we had 3 gorgeous hot days.

Mariel is hoping to see you on Wed 16th then she comes here for a bit.

Svend Bayer & Todd Piker are both away for Xmas- Svend to Denmark & Todd to New York but they'll be back. Meanwhile I have 3 of the grandchildren & their pa 'n ma. Now I've got to write on Euboea, quite a job!

Michael (good abt Ian Auld)

#### **28 December 1970**

Very interested & sympathetic, to read abt tour adventures getting the stool etc. home to Wakefield.

Did I send you one of the leaflets abt Nigerian Pottery? I've just received a copy from Neuchatel, at last! Waited 6 years for this book.

Michael Cardew.

#### **12 January 1971**

Dear Bill,

Thanks awfully for cheque for £20- all complete now.

The Nigerian Pottery book is very good, in spite of the clever-clever, modern look, fancy, lets-be-different-at-any-price typography wh. no doubt most people will find perfectly Normal. Fabulous photography- but being a (chiefly) Ethnographical publication they have left out some of my favourite pots (too ordinary I suppose!) & put in several w. fur & knobs /XXX/ wh. I hate!! I swear I like fur & knobs /XXX/ to be 'ceramic' i.e. to contribute to the making of a good pot not just to be there because they are something to do with juju & magic & the general theory of village life & the freaks & quirks of village religion.

Michael Cardew.

P.S. In the end they printed every word of my introduction & didn't cut out any. Also NO MISPRINTS-remarkable in this day & age.

**29 July 1971**

Dear Bill,

Many thanks for yr cheque, wh. is correct! You should not have worried, no trouble caused to anyone at any point!

About collecting, I thought Mariel said she cld take yours (as well as Henry Rothschild's pots) to 317 LONSDALE RD, BARNES, SW13. when she has to back in mid August. So the pots are all standing by ready for that & I'm sure you cld collect them there on one of your London visits. But ring her first as she is often out. (on) 876 8535.

Yes, thanks awfully for the 2 African Pottery guides from the B.M. Harry Davis came last Thurs when we were in a whirl of cleaning up the Wadebridge show & stayed till Sun morning - the firing was just finishing when he had to leave. It was v.good to see him & have a proper good talk. He is very stimulating, just what I, we, need.

I'm flat w the aftermath of a sort of tummy-upset & can scarcely write!

Yours Michael C.

**03 August 1974**

Dear Michael,

I am becoming a little worried at hearing no details of the possible movements of your guest from Ghana (whose name /XXX/ Emmanuel's, I heard once but never got onto paper and so have not retained). He will be very welcome to come here if he can make it, but there are times at which it would be difficult for me to play host at short notice. I have two days at home now (3rd-4th) and am due to have another one on Wednesday (7th) but I work five days in each week, with one day (Saturday and Wednesday alternatively) free each week. Sundays I'm free; even on a working Wednesday I can rush home during the afternoon; on a Friday or working Saturday I can reach home by early evening. But on other days (Mon, Tues, Thurs) I am away from here upwards of 12 hours. If he is not able to come when I am free, I'd be willing and probably able to take a day or so of annual leave, but to do this I'd have to give 3 days notice to my HQ and arrange to be relieved of public duties- if he were to ring up from Stoke hoping to come later that day or even the next day it could be awkward. I should have explained this when with you, but it seemed /XXX/ to explain and too /XXX/ to /XXX/ in any case the /XXX/ to be in a bit of a dream when translated so suddenly and completely from ones own environment as I am in making a hasty trip to Wenford!

M.O'B may have misunderstood my jokingly given /XXX/. I meant 28th pre-Wenford & 7 Wenford/ Camelford & 3 Battle. */remainder of letter missing/*

**18 November 1975**

Dear Bill,

Got your letter this morning. Garth left here for London yesterday morning 17th. So I expect you'll hear from him. He said, while he was with me, that he would be going up to you very soon. I hope he strikes a lucky day & does not give you too much inconvenience!!

Many thanks for extract from 'Countryman At Work' (T Hennell) a text full of trivial inaccuracies which don't really matter but are cumulatively irritating: although he was very far from irritating, as a person, while he was "on live" (as Malory or Chaucer say). Mariel is convinced that we have (HAD) the book: & I do realise now that I had read the Winchcombe bit once before. But memory is vague, because I only saw the book (I suppose) in 1948 when I was bristling with other ideas & had little patience with, or time for, that kind of amiable nostalgia. All the same, at this distance, I can see that the whole book is a touching tribute to a departing phase of English civilisn, & feel v.proud to have been picked out as having been a small component in it. I especially like the bit he says on p.39 about useful pots.

Well good luck with Garth C. Yours Michael.

**17 March 1977**

Dear Bill,

Thank you again for a wonderful day & evening. I hope your day has gone well. By this time (8pm) I daresay you are back in 14 Welbeck St (which I have at last seen!)

I knew I'd leave something behind: I failed to collect my 2 precious little pocketknives. They were (I think) on top of books (Rowlandson, Pepys, or other paperback) beyond the v.comfortable bed I slept in. One /XXX/ thin "silver" penknife, very precious, made in People's Rep of CHINA, cost about 10p in a shop in Barnes, about 7 years ago. This is the first time I've "lost" them. Also the even more ancient razorblade holder, v.thin and worn. I use this about 5 times a day when it's in my pocket & the Chinese knife abt 20 or 30 times a day, mostly for scraping pipe.

2x 6½p stamps enclosed in the hope you will be able to find them where I left them & post them to me.

It was a good train journey & continued as well as the 1st part. I had a nice luxury lunch later on.

All well at Wenford.

Many thanks for your support in Leeds on the 15th!

Yours ever, Michael.

**07 December 1977**

Dear Bill,

When your letter came I searched round feverishly in my mind trying to find somebody or something on which to put the blame for you not receiving your invitation to the Danlami exhibition. But at every point I was driven back again onto blaming myself. I am so sorry. Many people asked after the Camelford Exhibition, kept asking me that they wanted invitations to it but I didn't make any systematic LIST & so in the end the most obvious name & address was left out.

I missed you at the Pte View on 30th Nov. Alas, the gallery only wanted 80 pots (although they allowed us to count 6 plates & 6 cups & saucers, etc. as one item.) & the best ones, as always, went v.quickly. Danlami tells me he plans to spend Xmas at Wenford, so I will try to persuade him to make some more.

Let me (or him) know if there are any special, particular ones wh. you'd like him to make again. It should be possible, he is young after all!

Seth & I were so loaded in my little car taking his pots up that we had to leave all sorts of smaller consignments behind, for a future trip, including your 3 pitchers (2 Seth, one Martin) which are safe here, waiting for next trip. (I'll let you know when they reach Mariel at 317 Lonsdale Rd.) I myself caught a very virulent cold in London wh. I am still in the grip of. So I'm out of the potting business again, for the present.

Yours Michael.

***Undated letter***

Dear Michael,

How are things at Wenford? And would you have room for me if I were to come down next Saturday evening for Svend's exhibition? I don't really need a bed as I have a sleeping bag I can bring (which I used last weekend on a trip to Pantasaph (North Wales) for Patrick Adamson's exhibition at Bala).

You may remember that last year I missed out on Svend's exhibition because your house became "full-up" (but I was going to go to Camelford)- then the final /XXX/ was that the "Cornishman" train was completely booked up for the essential Saturday. I thought the same thing had happened this year, as when I went down to the station to enquire, after having the date confirmed by an invitation card which reached me (from Sally Holden I think) all the Wakefield block of seats had already gone. However, the whole train wasn't booked as last year- there are bigger blocks of seats from Leeds and Bradford and I have just obtained a reservation by going to Leeds which can be taken up at Wakefield.

Have had a rather astonishing letter from the Royal College which you may know about (re visits to look at students work): that experienced potters can do a useful service in this way is obvious but that I can is less so and I am wondering whether I have the nerve to say yes!

Best wishes to all, Bill.

***26 June 1978***

Dear Bill,

Terrible haste! [I want to catch mail w. this and have been delayed]

Somehow we will find a "bed" (sleeping place) for you, though house is fuller than ever before. There is also the office etc., but bed is bad.

Sorry it will be a bit chaotic. You see Mariel comes here [for peace & quiet!!] about 1st Aug of 30 July & also the long expected grandchildren fr. London.

But we'll prop the old broken camp bed in the office on a box or something.

Michael.

***15 August 1980***

Dear Bill,

Many thanks for the kind offer of the catalogue of BL's Retrospective in Tokyo. But no, long ago Janet L. promised me a copy when her copies had arrived; but she has been away (in Vienna of course!) & is going to send a copy on to me as soon as she can. I have seen it already, Wingfield Digby had a copy in April, a very splendid production w. many interesting things one had not seen before.

Yes of course we (at the moment it is only Wink & me: sudden change from overflowing crowds to near solitude are the rule at Wenford this summer. Mariel left\*. John Cook & Annemarie left, very



suddenly. The 2 grandchildren left, very suddenly. Theibaut has left on motorbike to go to Vosges Mtns. for holiday w. his parents (they live there, father being a native thereof: mother is from Savoie) are looking forward to seeing you again. We've just unpacked a v.g.firing.

Give my best greetings to Henry Hammond.

Yours Michael

\*to go to see her sudden new granddaughter in Monaco! She may or may not be back around September.

***Undated letter***

Dear Bill,

Your letter re pots for Hong Kong. Yes of course you have my agreement! I am not exactly "against" the exhibition – but merely think it is impertinent and irrelevant. However, as to that, no doubt the Chinese girl knows best about H-Kong & China.

I write in terrible haste because Ursula Mommens is here & Janet Leach & her friend "Boots" are here. So I am scribbling this on my knee; but I suddenly realize the pots for Hong Kong have a "deadline" in early October.

Yours ever M.C.

P.S. Sorry NOTHING here is fit to send to H.K., all went into the Camelford show. Affectionate greetings from Janet L and from Ursula M & of course from here (Thiebaut) and me. (Wink is back in Farnham)

***09 October 1980***

Dear Bill,

You are a real hero! Your pots will be handled safely & are well insured by the Hong Kong people.

I am in a muddle: are the Creeds with whom Mak Y-Fun works, the married name of Suzie Curtis? How difficult all this name changing is. (At least potters don't get kicked upstairs into the H of Lords which is the principal means of disguising your past & covering up your tracks by assuming an alibi.) The other day we had a charming U.S. couple who have potted for 10 yrs. in Pondicherry of all places. They just called themselves "Sue and Andrew" (or something). But the result of that is that I can't now remember what their names are - might as well be "Jack & Jill". I suppose we are stuck with this patriarchal or male-ascending cushion of girls having to "change their name", but if I were a girl (which all gods forbid!) I should resent it: as I still do on behalf of Ursula (Darwin-Trevelyan now Mommens) who was here on a weekend visit the other day.

The egg coddler w. locking lid, mark ND, is by Nairn Dunlop, (now in USA again) about 1972-3, a very good potter when he was "sober" (i.e. not on a "trip"). Yes of course: about your 1980 (Camelford) pots, Seth, or even I, can easily get them up to London. Or (& this may be better still? Let me know), I can certainly get them as far as BATH (Holburne Museum, Beano's Retrospective, November 20th 1980, quite soon now) or could probably leave them with Barley Roscoe there, or at Beano's house. Let me know if this is better.

"Institut fur Keramische History" is a front for Garth Clark (he hoped it would save him trouble, perhaps it does!) Its probably a false Californian (in the sense = Casual) kind of organisation, but its a wonderful idea of his (Garth Clark) & will no doubt help to promote his numerous books on ceramic history (inc. his book on me). At Wichita, Kansas, I have to speak to "National Council for Education in Ceramic Arts" (NCECA), a KEYNOTE address. Last March the Keynote address was by Harry Littleton the glass man & most of us went to sleep. Somehow I must try to keep the audience awake in 1981! Garth Clark's "Retrospective of MC" will I gather be quite a small affair compared w. Boymans Museum, 1976, & its

enterprising of him to be putting it on at all; & he is v.grateful to those who agreed to lend things.

Yours Michael.

**30 July 1981**

Dear Bill,

Your 1st letter arrived just as I returned from London last Friday, so I hastily sent off the message before I had unpacked & realized later it was much too late!

Yes, do come for the Yasuda pte view on 23 Aug and for 6th Sept too if you can bear so much travel! (Bring sleeping bag as usual if possible. The place is apt to fill up around that time w. various relatives)

The Svend show was very fine, his best yet, by a long way. And I was so carried away I bought (for £20) a v.fine dish with a rather Islamic bird & a v.well done, rather Islamic in inspiration, border.

Then I realized I don't normally buy pots (having too many already) but this one was so cheap & not yet bought (surprisingly) & the best of a group of 3. Now I think it was a v.g.inspiration to buy it becos you if you like it & approve my choice, can have it for £20 (I being very poor this year what with 2 ½ months absence mostly writing, mostly in Los Angeles – chapters 27, 28 & 29! - & Seth being away etc. etc.) Anyway you can see it when you come.

In haste now, I have to go 100 x 2 miles to a funeral tomorrow, sister-in-law Joan, widow of my oldest brother (who dies in 1977?)

Yours Michael.

**21 October 1981**

Dear Bill,

Your letter arrived this am. Yes, the Sept firing came very well. I sent 20 pots by myself\* to join the Exhib. at Camelford on 18 Sept 81 & a lot by Rupert.

\*They were Bread pots, 2; 9 ½" dish bowls 4, 11 inch bowls, one oval dish w. poured slip, 5 "Flasks" (5 inch and 3 ¾") at £5.50, x 6; Honey pot w. lids, 2 at £6. All sold. But I still have one or 2 of the "flasks".

I don't know what you saw & fancied "in the raw." I don't remember you telling me? There are one or 2 of the (smaller) 9 ½ inch bowls still here but nearly all are ordered & now it is getting a bit cold for throwing in kiln shed.

Yes the pots you bought at Camelford are here, namely-

RS tea bowl 4.50

RS tea cup w. handle & saucer £4.50

No.53

No.138. Thiebaut Chague bowl, painted £25

No.161 Thiebaut Chague store jar £12.50

No.7 Stem Cup, M.C £18

and I will bring them to Mariel next time I go up to London (i.e. certainly before 17 Nov 81) UNLESS this Tony Whats his name, can't-read-your-writing(!!) can be persuaded to take it, as I'm sure he can be (if he comes !! ?? )

So glad your big grain jar (Abuja 62) is to be in that exhib "The Makers Eye". Yes, C.Council is funny; very uneven!

Now then, those pots you so generously & unsuspectingly lent to Garth Clark's "Institute of Ceramic History," I sympathize, Mariel having received the same communication fr. the packers & shippers. I am amazed by the moderation of tone in your comments on this. I have just posted a severe, Samuel Johnsonian Rebuke to G. Clark re his little "Institute" & said as one who had always considered himself a friend, I felt confident he reimburses his victims. Meanwhile, I recommend you do the same I've done, namely, send Hartrodt their £23.16 (but not, in your case, the £25 for transportation) & I have asked them to send both consignments, yours as well as ours, to Mariel at 317 Lonsdale Rd. I have sent money for the transportation of our lots, and I hope they will send yours as part of ours, yours not being very large.

I did not try to "scold" G. Clark, one can no more scold a jellyfish (which he is) than one can punish a delinquent cat. I only indicated to him how the colour of the water will change if he persists in running his Institute so irresponsibly. His latest venture out there is The Garth Clark Gallery, Wilshire Blvd, Los Angeles; both of these ventures are rather pathetic attempts to establish himself in U.S.A; he being S. African born has not much other place to go.

I don't know who else was involved beside Mariel, my brother Alexander, you and me. Perhaps Seamus Obrien, or rather Mary Obrien?

All very demeaning & wrong. How unlike the conduct of the Boijmans Museum & CAC in 1976-77!

Yours Michael.

**02 December 1981**

Dear Bill,

No, you don't owe me anything. I only paid the carriers for our own pots (Wenford and Mariel & my brother Alexander.

I had a letter fr. G. Clark full of injured innocence. Its possible after all that (as K.P-B suggested at first) the real villain in this is not G. Clark but the carriers, but since Hartrodt Lock were recommended by Janet, & must have done decades of overseas packing etc. for the Leach Pottery, that seems unlikely.

The moral seems to be To Hell with Retrospective Exhibn in Remote Places. (The V&A was right after all!) Yours M.C.

**20 July 1982**

Dear Bill,

A very hasty note I'm afraid! Welcome to Wenford if you can find any means of transport on the 24th.

And in any case, let's hope there will be trains (or something) for you to be here for Clive Bowen's opening on Aug 8th (or is it perhaps Aug 15th? I haven't got the "timetable" of Sally's gallery here)

And of course / or Sat 11th Sept for the Wenford opening. We'll hope to see you on some or all of these occasions!

I am dropping w. sleep & past bedtime.

Hope to see you. The schoolroom is unoccupied on those dates I think. If it is, we'll squeeze you in.

Best wishes from all here,

Michael.

P.S The Clive Bowen date is Aug 8th, you were quite right.

**07 March 1983**

Dear Bill,

How very kind of you to write & to come all that long way for Michael's funeral, & it evidently meant quite a lot of organising. I think it was awfully good of you & I do hope it was worth it for you. I must say I felt it was a fitting service & the Rev. Sargissa did all possible to make it so & therefore memorable. Not easy, seeing M's views of church etc. were decidedly negative; but I was & am grateful both for his efforts & for the affection & honour shown to M by all his friends that turned up. The firing took place last week & Ara & /XXX/ unpacked the kiln yesterday & the pots came out very well, and quite a nice few of Michael's – almost his last ones – so now we enter a totally new phase in all our lives & who knows how it will work out. Very different from the last 49 years!

Gratefully Mariel.

PS. Leaving without farewell on such an occasion needs no apology, but thank you all the same & I'm glad & grateful that you came.



**Appendix v**  
**Transcripts of film interviews with acquaintances**  
**of W.A. Ismay carried out in autumn 2013**

**CB** Craig Barclay (interviewee); curator

**HW** Helen Walsh (interviewing)

**JW** Jonny Walton (filming)

JW OK Craig, tell me about it

CB Well, it's very strange to be back in the store here, it's been 11 years since I last visited. Things have changed so much, but other things haven't changed so it's lovely to see these pots because in a very real sense, they are old friends. So much of my life has been tied up with working with Bill, speaking to Bill, visiting Bill, and then after Bill passed away, packing his pots and making sure they got here safe. To see them like this again is really rather wonderful and tugs a bit at the heart strings. I suppose it's time to go for a wander and see what we can find.

Michael Cardew – gosh so much Michael Cardew's – so nice to see it altogether. Nice screwtops, never worked out quite how he managed to do that.

Shoji Hamada – again wonderful, we had no Hamada at Durham and it was one of the things that I had to address when I got there. We couldn't have a collection where it wasn't represented.

Jim Malone – gosh that really does take me back, right back to the beginning of my relationship with Bill - this probably anymore than any other pot. It is very strange to hold this. Many, many years ago, more than I care to imagine, I was at a show at Maggie Barnes' gallery in Knaresborough. There was this wonderful pot, bowl with a fish decoration on it. And I thought I need that, I'm going to take that home and I'm going to use that, it's ideal for porridge. So I bought it, there was another one, which was slightly nicer, but it had a red sticker so I couldn't get that one. This of course is the slightly nicer one with the red sticker. But Maggie told me that I'd bought the slightly inferior twin to a piece that had been bought by Bill Ismay. At that time, Bill's name didn't mean a great deal to me, but that all changed over the years that passed. Erm – always wanted that one!

JW Looking at this what are your thoughts?

CB Looking at Jim Malone's pottery reminds me of the journey which I've taken in terms of appreciation and interest in ceramics, and how that is a journey I would not have taken had it not been for Bill.

When I first met Bill, my interest in ceramics could, perhaps, be summed up by looking at this rather wonderful jug produced by Jim Malone, but inspired by medieval ceramic traditions. It's a very English piece. That's one of the wonderful things about Jim Malone's pots and I think, one of the things Bill recognized in them, that he was a man who was comfortable working in a whole range of styles, media, and working to a whole range of influences. And this is where I started, but through my time with Bill and with Bill's collection, I came to look at pots rather differently. I came to broaden my horizons in a way that Jim Malone's were/are very broad. I began to look increasingly to the East and, I suppose, this piece also by Jim represents where I've come to now, because my career progressed from working in York to curating the Oriental Museum in Durham. Today my world is taken up with pieces like this, with Sung

dynasty pottery, which I absolutely adore. This is wonderful because I'm not sure, had I not met Bill, I would have learnt to love this type of material, and if I hadn't learnt to love this type of material, where would I be today? So Bill sort of guided my whole life.

JW So what have we got here then, Craig?

CB Here we have a series of pots which really take me back to Bill's house, both during Bill's lifetime and after Bill's death. In Bill's kitchen there was a family cluster of pots by Hans Coper and there are many, many old friends to be seen in this drawer. They are wonderful pieces, but it's really strange to see them so clean and shiny, because of course in Bill's house they were covered in dust. Every pot had a little clear patch into which it slotted on the shelving – the dust being thick all around. (A bit like all the snow at Christmas!) But these were in his kitchen, his kitchen was his working space. The space where he sat with his typewriter in the one little space available, tapping away and reading things through his magnifying glass. They take me back, they transport me there, although the absence of dust is welcome.

This piece is one which I have particular terrifying memories of, so delicate, so precious, so exquisitely beautiful, and of course, so horrifyingly dangerous and difficult to transport because you don't want to break something like that – I'm pretty well scared to pick it up! But my goodness it's a wonderful thing, my goodness. Bill collected on a librarian's salary, he collected on a budget, but he had such a good eye and he managed to acquire internationally significant pieces on a local authority/public service salary. He's just wonderful, his collecting was wonderful, it was discriminating. He knew beautiful things, just look at that!

HW Could you introduce yourself?

CB My name's Craig Barclay, I'm Curator of University Museums at Durham University.

HW Would you like to say a bit about looking after the collections at York?

CB In a previous life I was Curator of Decorative Arts at the Yorkshire Museum and was, I suppose, Bill's first point of contact in working with the Museum Service in York.

HW Can you describe Bill for us, physically, character and mannerisms, paint a visual picture?

CB A visual picture of Bill Ismay? Crikey! Santa Claus in a beret springs to mind, a man of wit, a man of charm, a man with a cheeky smile and a streak of mischief in his character that you don't expect in a librarian. A man of passion, a man of knowledge, a man who was always supportive of potters, of scholars, and a man who had a family of pots and a family of potters, who he loved, cherished and developed.

HW Do you want to tell us how you first met Bill?

CB My first encounter with Bill came about as a result of the work of Ifan Williams, who was very keen to ensure that Bill's collection should find its ultimate home in Yorkshire and through Ifan, and Brian Hayton, who was then County Museums Officer in North Yorkshire, contact was established with Bill. So Brian and I went to visit Bill at his house in Wakefield. He opened the door and you stepped into a two up two down Yorkshire terrace. The hallway had a coat stand, with mac and berets. There was a bicycle. There was nothing remarkable.

Then you walked through that corridor into the kitchen and your mind was blown, because the kitchen was just a room of pots – pots everywhere, pots peeking out from behind the screen of dust – a tiny table in the middle of the room covered in pots. Chairs covered in pots or copies of *Ceramic Review*. It was, for someone interested in ceramics, heaven, it was just a wonderful experience.

- HW You've answered all our questions, is there anything else you'd like to add?
- CB I hope I've done him justice!
- HW Perhaps something about his legacy, to end the film?
- CB When Bill started collecting, he started collecting Yorkshire pots, and Yorkshire was initially central to his field of interest. But as his collection developed he cast his net wider.
- Today, Bill's collection is central, in my opinion, to the culture of Yorkshire, it is one of the most important collections to be found in the region. Indeed, I think I undersell it there because Bill's collection was cast wider, and Bill's collection is a fantastic asset for not just Yorkshire but for the whole of the country and for potters, students of studio pottery and people who love beautiful things, from all over the world.
- Bill in his life collected a fantastic family of pots. Bill's family lives on and it lives on to inspire and it lives on to excite, and it lives on to thrill, and I am enormously honoured to know the man who had the vision to create such a wonderful legacy. Bill Ismay, he truly was a special man.
- Bill loved Yorkshire and that was reflected in his original area of collecting interest, but even after his collection's scope expanded, he was still a Yorkshireman. Whenever I visited Bill, there was a ritual to our lunch, and lunch involved going to his local pub, where we would have a half pint of local Yorkshire bitter, and that would be to accompany a Yorkshire pudding with onion gravy. Strangely, although he drank a half pint, there was always room for a second half pint.
- AF Alan Firth (interviewee); collector and trustee of the W.A. Ismay Collection**
- HW Helen Wash (interviewing)**
- JW Jonny Walton (filming)**
- HW: Would you like to introduce yourself?
- AF: Yes I will Helen, I am Alan Firth a long time friend of Bill Ismay and subsequently bought pots.
- HW: The next question is about us painting a visual description of Bill, so describe him for us physically, what his character was like, what special mannerisms he had...
- AF: When I first met Bill the first thing that struck me was his ordinariness, he was a small man, plainly dressed, perhaps Spartan even. But there was something that was really memorable, he had a beret tightly pulled on to his head, almost like a skullcap and oftentimes you would see him he was sporting a magnifying glass, using that to really interrogate a piece of pottery that he was looking at.
- JW What do you think was curious about that magnifying glass, did you find anything curious about the way he looked?
- AF Well, occasionally you'd see people using things to read, say, something below a picture ... that was the thing, being an art gallery, somebody would be trying to read what was being said about the painting. But to see somebody hold something and really ponder and scrutinize it, that was exceptional, especially with this beret.
- (Off conversation asking if it was being filmed)
- HW Just tell us a bit about how you met Bill, had you heard of him before?
- AF I hadn't heard of him before a telephone call that I made. I was following up an advertisement

I'd seen in *Ceramic Review*. It was Rosemary Wren and we'd had our chat about the pot I was interested in, the work I was pursuing. She knew I was from Leeds and took it for granted that I knew Bill Ismay. Well Bill Ismay didn't mean a thing, nothing at all and she encouraged me to write to Bill, a very important man, been a collector for years, gave me his address, said that he wasn't on the 'phone at that time. What happened, there was an exchange of letters, and subsequently we arranged to meet at a gallery, I think it was called White Rose Gallery, a relatively new gallery in Bradford, and we went to a PV, and that is when I saw him for the first time, this seemingly ordinary looking bloke, with the extraordinary beret and the magnifying glass – quite something.

JW When was that?

AF 1973

JW Would you mind putting that into some sort of a sentence?

AF And that was in 1973...

HW You told me once that when you got in touch with him and met him for the first time, you wanted to go and see his collection but he was testing you, trying to work out whether you were serious or not.

AF Well that was subsequent to the contact that I had made at the White Rose Gallery. He didn't have a car and I lived between him and Wakefield, where he lived. I offered to take him home and we'd stop at our place and have a cuppa, and then I'd get him back to Wakefield and that's what happened. So he saw our place and, in effect did a vetting, you know commented and looked at things that we had, the old things, ceramics and the one or two modern things that we had, and that was it. And then when we went home with Bill that night, I was just staggered at what I saw. It was mindblowing, and the thing that I remember was that he enjoyed that, he enjoyed blowing my mind, absolutely.

HW So what was it like going to visit Bill then?

AF It was extraordinary, after that first shock, it kind of mellowed a little bit, because I'd spent time at home, talking to Pat, my wife. She was looking forward to going, she was excited about it, and each time we went things got a little better in terms of we didn't feel so much barebones amateurish and we got more at ease with Bill, and more at ease with the handling, or talking about a pot, or asking a question, personal question perhaps. But it was lovely, and each time there was something new or extraordinary. Of course, when he'd been on his own 'fishing' trips to buy pots, he always had something new to show us.

HW So you were kind of learning about collecting from him? Was he advising you or teaching you about new things or ... ?

AF Well there wasn't anything in the way of formal teaching, but certainly we were learning a lot. Simply being with him, being by him when he was buying, watching the intense way that he would go about interrogating a piece. He would pick it up. Normally, although he was a small guy, he was kind of standing straight up, but when he was intense, his shoulders would come forward a little bit, his head would drop, the magnifying glass would be between him and the object he was interrogating, and I knew never to disturb him at that stage, let him get on with it. But he would always talk, and perhaps he'd be spelling out why he'd done this, why he'd done that. He'd point out a little bit of alteration in the glaze, perhaps, and mutter the word 'chun' and slowly but surely you got to know what he was about.



- JW Is 'chun' something we should explain?
- HW It's a bit of glaze.
- AF It's a bit of glaze, yes – I mean all the people that are there on the opening night will know what it is!
- HW When you went to see him, did you have to do the choosing your mug to drink from?
- AF That must have been a pretty regular thing, I guess quite a few people have gone through that. There was always a bit of a tease when you got there, if you looked as a certain thing, and he was realizing that we were looking at it, he would ask us to identify it. Or he'd get something new that he'd brought in and could we identify that, tell me who that is, and there was this little gentle tease going off. But also, the bit about the picking your tea bowl, 'Choose your tea bowl' he'd say, and there you'd be, say, with the work of an up and coming maker, alongside some famous guy like Hamada or Bernard Leach, but pick what you like. And then he'd take like what seemed like a grubby duster, give it a wipe inside, and then you'd get your tea or your coffee.
- HW The legacy is quite a hard question, but it is just trying to give people some sense of what you got out of knowing him.
- AF Can we just stop there for a second  
(Nothing of consequence on 3rd recording – AF reading notes)
- HW Would you like to tell us a bit about what you got out of knowing him?
- AF The longstanding thing was really about patience. Be patient, give time to look, to talk, to think about things. Rather than just being impressed by something that caught your eye, perseverance, you know, stay with it, don't just walk away, say, after I'll come back to an exhibition a second time. Scrutinize, have a look, look, look, see what was there, don't just let a fleeting glance impress you. Certainly put yourself about and talk to people, galleries, talk to gallery owners, talk to collectors, visit studios, it was about getting it all together, being with it. Putting yourself into it and doing the lot.
- It's interesting, there's a little instance here, it might seem odd and obtuse, but when he was first making coffee he'd put about 3 or 4 dessert spoonfuls of coffee in his coffee pot, and I'd cringe you know, 'what's this', and his quip was, you know you can't make coffee without coffee. And in a sense that's how he dealt with his pots, you know 'you can't collect pots without collecting all the experiences around the pots'. He just wanted to be there and be at it all the time.
- Another quirky example is that on a couple of occasions, I remember that we were queuing and I might be at the front of the queue and he might be a few places down. The first instance was when I was wanting to buy a second piece and a voice from the back 'Hey you can't do that!' and incredibly he was monitoring what people were buying and picking up, so I didn't buy two pieces on that day. But I've seen that happen on other occasions, he'd pipe up from later in the queue, to contest what someone was doing at the front. And here again he never stopped he was doing it all, not just looking, appreciating, evaluating, if someone got in the way he was getting round it if he could. The next extraordinary incidence is to do with a very famous actress, Phyllis Dixey, she was a notable stripper and entertainment entrepreneur, of the 1940s and '50s, and, incredibly, when we were looking through the house and clearing the house after his death, we came across communications from Phyllis Dixey. And he'd obviously

had a passion for this woman. There'd been contact, he'd gone and seen her at her shows and made a personal contact with her. And here again, it was nothing but the best, he'd picked a star performer. I don't think anything came of this at all, but it was extraordinary and it just fits in with the way this guy went about things. Bill was a gem.

HW Would you like to talk a bit about your background and how you became interested in collecting?

AF We were both born in the 1930s, poor working-class families, there were no frills at home. We experienced the wartime austerity, but some kind of a bonus was that we were beneficiaries of the 1944 Education Act. We were the first time intake to our respective grammar schools, from kids who did not pay. I subsequently left grammar school as a 14 year old, when mother died, and I had to earn a crust. And subsequently I worked both in a drawing office and in an iron foundry with engineering firms. And then, it was National Service came along and I went into the Air Force and stayed in the Air Force for 12 years. I can't say that I was flying aeroplanes, I spent life underground. It was the Cold War period and I was a radar operator keeping an eye on what the Russians and East Germans were doing. One of the nice things about both the grammar school and the Air Force was that they had libraries and I guess that is where I first got the art interest, simply seeing pictures, and for years it was always at one remove. But as I got older, and certainly when I came out of the Air Force, we started looking round, putting things together for a home. We were renting unfurnished places and had to buy furniture, so it was a bit of this, a bit of that, second hand. But eventually it led to us buying new studio pots, although I didn't know they were studio pots. And then things I'd had from that, got know what a studio pot was, then got to know Bill Ismay, and here we are today, slightly different though, sadly, Pat died, she's no longer with us.

It has not just been my adventure – Pat, my wife and I were both enthusiasts and have both collected.

HW Would you like to talk a bit about the pot you have chosen?

AF This is a piece by Hans Coper, made in 1975.

This to me is just a very impressive piece of work. It is something that works for me in two or three different ways. As a visual thing, and it suggests something else, it suggests silence, and it suggests humanity. The echoes that it has of the early Cycladic sculptural is just uncanny, I don't know if Hans was after that effect or it's something that came up by chance, but just as a striking visual thing it has poise, it looks complete, it's as if nothing else needed to be added, nothing needed to be taken away. And it also has colour. In the catalogue of Bill's he refers to it as a white pot, and this is quite understandable, I think people generally refer to Hans Coper's pots as being white or black. But the beauty of an object like this is that daylight is changing throughout the day, it picks up blues and pinks and subtle greys, it's quite an impressive thing. I think it is completely beautiful, I wish it was mine.

**JH Jane Hamlyn (interviewee); potter and trustee of the W.A. Ismay Collection**

**HW Helen Walsh (interviewing)**

**JW Jonny Walton (filming)**

HW Would you like to tell us a bit about the pot?

JH Bill bought this pot directly from me. He came to a show and bought it from one of our exhibitions held every year. I suppose it is typically one of my pots, you could not mistake it

for anybody else's. These are my particular colours, but I think I only made one quite like this. I'm quite known for these curly handles, but these are quite extravagant. They are really quite thin and not entirely practical. But pots can express all sorts of different things. I think when you look at it, it is quite pretty, it's quite feminine, even a little bit frivolous! But although it's fun it isn't silly, I think. You could make a cup of tea in it. The handle at the front and the handle at the back help the balance, when pouring the tea. One of the things about it, which I didn't subsequently do, was that the curls, which I like in themselves, have a sort of, I don't know if it's sculptural, but they have a nice quality of almost sort of textile, which I think quite a lot of my pots have, a sort of like stitching, a pattern that looks like braid, and looks like curly ribbon. But actually if you hold it very tight and press, like a trigger, that would break, so I suppose it isn't entirely practical. In that sense, it's quite an interesting pot for Bill to have bought. But I think he perhaps liked that sort of thing, of the riskiness, the danger in it, maybe, if he realized that at the time. I think he probably wasn't going to use it to make tea in, so in that sense it wasn't an important factor. But the fact that it's a functional pot, which is also fun, but still functional, I think that was one of the things he must have liked about it, really.

(missing section of audio recording)

... affectionately Bill thought about potters and they about him. It's amazing that he kept them, I'd forgotten I'd written them all. And he kept some of the receipts for things that he bought from me. Letters about the books we exchanged, these are obviously telling him about how much I enjoyed the books he sent me and he obviously responded to that.

One of the letters, I think is about an article I was going to write about Phil Eglin for the magazine *Ceramics, Art and Perception* and I asked him – I wrote, 'I write to ask your help as a literary buff. I am writing an article on Phil Eglin. Do you know his work? I think he's very good and I want the title to be "Venus Observed". I'm sure this is a quotation from somewhere or the title of a play. But I can't find any reference to it, even in the *Oxford Dictionary of Quotations*. Can you help? I don't know where else to look but am loathe to drop it as it seems such an apt title for my piece. Ever hopefully yours, with love Jane.'

And sure enough he had the book, so wasn't that good, he was really a very clever man, a very well educated and interesting man. Good old Bill!

HW Would you like to introduce yourself?

JH My name's Jane Hamlyn and I am a potter.

HW Would you like to tell us about how you first met Bill?

JH The first time I found out about Bill was when I was a student in London. I was living in London, a student on a studio pottery vocational course at Harrow. We used to go to openings, I think it was at an opening at the British Craft Centre. Somebody said to me 'See that old guy in the corner with a beret and carrying a great big bag, do you know who he is?' I said 'No' and they said that's a guy called Bill Ismay and he is a really famous, well known collector, who never ever goes to an exhibition or visits a potter without buying something. So that was really quite surprising. I think Bill liked to be inconspicuous at openings, so he could be allowed to go around and look at things. On the other hand of course, people wanted to know him, and he was always spotted.

I suppose also, at that time, it must have been in about 1974, and I suspect he'd already retired. He was already quite an old man by the time I got to know him.

I think the first time he bought something of mine was roundabout 1986, and I think that was

from the Casson Gallery in London, and he bought a set of plates. He really liked functional pots and, of course, it was an endorsement of my career, and the possibility of my being somebody to watch as I developed. I told people that Bill Ismay bought some of the pots at my show. And, although he liked functional pots, and mostly bought functional pots, he was a single man, so I don't suppose he ever had a chance to use them all.

HW Do you want to tell us now about some of your experiences on visiting Welbeck Street?

JH When we moved up here in 1975, I found out that Bill lived in Wakefield, which isn't very far. I also found out that you could go and visit him, you could go and look at his collection, he was quite happy to do that, but you always had to make an appointment. You had to write a letter. Bill did have a phone, but he only ever used it for outgoing phone calls, and never, ever gave anyone, until very late in his life, his phone number.

So I wrote him the letter and Ted and I turned up about 11 o'clock in the morning and Bill made coffee, real coffee, Bill liked his food and he liked his drink and I noticed that he used to keep his bread pot and things, at the top of the stairs, between his main living room/kitchen, and going on down to the cellar. I noticed that he had good stuff, he had Lapsang Souchang and Earl Grey, shortbread biscuits and so on. He wasn't austere in his life.

Anyway we arrived there and he said you can choose any pot you like to drink from. I think I chose a Geoffrey Whiting cup and saucer, which I think was part of a tea set, which was displayed quite prominently on the side, above where the fireplace had been. We must have looked at every pot in the house. The house was absolutely stuffed with pots, upstairs and downstairs, in the cellar, under the tables, the front room was full, all the floor and furniture was covered in pots. Great big pots, I remember a pot by Barbara Cass, a great big pot, because he started off by buying Yorkshire potters' pots, and a magnificent pot by Ladi Kwali, made in Nigeria.

Upstairs, we went up these very narrow steep stairs to the front bedroom, which was a spare bedroom, which you couldn't get in passed the door, there was a bed with stuff underneath, stuff on top, I think he even had a chamber pot made by somebody, maybe Michael Cardew. And his proudest thing he pointed out was in the corner on a washstand there was a very large bowl and jug which was used by Michael Cardew himself, who stayed there overnight, when he came up to Leeds for his retrospective in Rotterdam in 1977.

We left finally, it was amazing, we looked around, we were allowed to pick things up so you could feel them. He really liked it if you could identify the potter, and he'd mumble something, but he did mumble a bit, he talked quite quietly, I think he'd lost quite a few of his teeth, so it wasn't always possible to understand what he was saying. But when you'd finished and you'd put the pot back, he'd put his hand out and turn it so that it was in exactly the right position. And he knew exactly where to put it because there was a circle of non-dusty area where the pot went. Ted says we left at 2 o'clock in the morning, it was an incredible experience to see all those pots, wonderful pots. We did go to the pub for lunch and he said do you want to go back, and of course we said yes of course we do. It was great because we sort of, I suppose I thought that was when he thought I was worth his trouble in showing me the things and I thought he was interesting and he thought I was interesting too and I knew my onions, so to speak!

HW Could you describe Bill, his character and his mannerisms?

JH Well when you look at the picture of Bill as an old man that goes along with the exhibition, it's tempting to call him a bit of a character, but I think he would have hated that. I think it



always sounds a bit of a putdown. He was a very intelligent, well educated, thoughtful, clever man. He really didn't like being made fun of, I mean he did have a sense of humour, but he didn't like being made fun of. He also didn't like to be called a collector, he used to say that he'd accumulated pots, he was a man who bought pots but he wasn't always an old man. I think that's one of the things that people need to understand. He wasn't always an old man. His glory days were in the '50s and '60s when he was still working as a librarian, and he had a salary. He spent most of his salary on large important pieces, especially the Michael Cardews and the Hans Copers. Buying pots was exciting in his heyday, and he travelled, he travelled all over the place. He travelled all round the country, he travelled to London; he went to Paris and Amsterdam for the Michael Cardew shows and bought some very, very key pieces that you have in the collection. He told me once that the Hans Coper that he bought, which had cost almost a month's salary, was delivered when he was at work and the postman left it in the outside loo. Well Bill only had an outside loo, so he only discovered it when he came back from work. But he was an observer, he was quiet, not demonstrative, he had an endearingly childish sense of humour, sort of along the lines of the elephant in the custard sort of thing. Although he did have a pretty solitary sort of life, I don't think he was lonely. He was an avid reader, obviously, as a librarian. He and I often exchanged books, usually novels. I think at that time and until he died, really, one of his best friends was a potter called Eric James Mellon, who was an expert in ash glazes and painted his pots with naked ladies. And a woman called Elizabeth Zuckerman who used to work at the Bluecoat Gallery in Liverpool. He always used to complain that she drove very, very, very slowly on the motorway. As he became older he was befriended by two local amateur potters, Janette Haigh and Tony Hill, who really helped him with shopping and what to wear, and chauffeured him to exhibitions, and took care of him, and laughed with him. I think they became good friends to him, so I don't think he was a lonely person.

HW Would you like to talk about what you value most about knowing Bill? What would his legacy be?

JH Well his legacy, I don't know that I thought what his legacy would be, I suppose he'd think his legacy would be his pots. And in fact, I think it a bit weird that he was having an exhibition, and you're so interested in Bill himself. I think he'd think that people shouldn't be watching this film, they should be there looking at the pots.

The thing is potters have a living to make and they need people to buy their stuff and Bill Ismay understood that very well because he didn't always have a lot of money himself, having had a lot of trouble getting a job when he came back to Britain after the war. I remember once, at a private view, we saw him wandering around with his magnifying glass, and I went up to him and said 'how are you doing Bill, are looking for glaze faults?' and he said 'No, I'm trying to see the price, to see if I can afford it.'

Pots became the love of his life and as he went by and time went by, his pots became his family. Although that might seem a funny thing to say, there is something profoundly human about pots. They have a body language – you talk about the lips and the neck and the throat and the belly, and the breasts and the handles and the feet. I think he recognized that, I think he responded to the human quality that they have.

And yes he loved pots, but he was also interested in potters, he was interested in us, he was interested in our idealism, how potters actually make things, how they survive and I think one of the things that we valued, and I certainly think happened, I think Bill decided to support potters. It must have been interesting to – I mean lots of people who like pots like to get to

know the potters. He used to visit potters and obviously kept on buying pots, which is a very important reason why people like other people who buy their pots.

But I don't know, it was – one of the things he did was he began to buy a pot from every new member of the Craft Potters Association as they became elected members. And he was seen at exhibitions, I've seen him on many occasions talking to other people, who happen to be at the shows, trying to persuade them to buy pots too.

He went to many potters' camps, he visited potters and watched them demonstrating, and he became increasingly knowledgeable and perceptive, and wrote reviews. He wrote reviews of shows and he wrote a really nice review of a show of mine.

He kept on buying pots all his life, even when he was a pensioner. And, in time, he was repaid for this commitment because, for the rest of his life, his love of pots made him friends, and his family of pots, in his house, kept him company.

**JM Jim Malone (interviewee); potter**

**HW Helen Walsh (interviewing)**

**JW Jonny Walton (filming)**

HW Do you want to introduce yourself?

JM I'm Jim Malone, I'm a potter. I've been making pots for 40 years.

HW Can you describe Ismay to us?

JM Bill Ismay, Bill was, of all the people I have known who collect pots, who loved pots, Bill was definitely the most knowledgeable. In fact I sometimes wondered exactly how he had the amount of knowledge that he did, he understood making processes, he understood glazers, the theory and technology. He understood the firing, he really understood pots a lot better than some potters I've known, actually!

He was a very intelligent – he was a librarian professionally, extremely intelligent man, extremely sensitive man, slightly idiosyncratic man. I'm proud to say that, apart from buying my pots, we actually became friends. He became a friend of the family, my wife loved him, my children loved him and he visited often.

HW Is there anything you want to say about his mannerisms? He's quite a recognizable character...

JM Shall I describe him physically? Bill was a small man, actually I have to say that he was in his 60s when I met him. He was a small man with a beard, a beret – his trademark beret – which he wore and of course could always be seen at exhibitions with his magnifying glass, which he used to scrutinize the pots. There's Bill, what can you say more about Bill!

He was a real traditionalist, and he was – I'll tell you an interesting story actually – he was a professional Yorkshireman! And I think we became friends, partly because once he realized that I was actually born in Yorkshire, which I was, he took a lot more interest in me after that. I remember Alex and I going to visit him in Wakefield, which we did many times actually. We went out to the pub for lunch. Alex did the right thing because he ordered the Yorkshire pudding and onion gravy. I made the mistake of ordering a baked potato with tuna filling. When it came to the table, Bill looked at me disdainfully and said 'I see you're into foreign food, are you?'

HW Would you tell us a bit about how you met him?

JM Well, I met Bill when I was a student, he came to our degree show, I was a student at Camberwell

College of Art in South London. I didn't know it at the time but Bill made a habit of visiting student shows to look for potential potters that he would like to buy from in the future. I knew I'd heard of Bill Ismay, I knew who he was because there are many pots photographed in various books, which are captioned 'in the collection of W.A. Ismay' so I knew about him, knew who he was, but I'd never met him at that time, so I didn't know what he looked like.

During my degree show, he came over and looked at my pots, I didn't know who he was, and he bought the first pot that I sold, that was my first sale to Bill Ismay. It was obvious to him that I didn't know who he was so he took the pot and he wrote a cheque out and he presented it to me in such a way that said 'you know, you really should have known who I was' so that was my first meeting with Bill.

So after that, he came – as soon as I left Camberwell I set up a workshop in North Wales and he came to visit often. He didn't drive so he used to be ferried around by Elizabeth Zuckerman, who used to run the Bluecoat Centre in Liverpool, they were friends. Very often, they'd come for lunch and he'd buy a pot. And as I said before, he got to know the family well, the children loved him, everybody loved him.

HW Tell us what it was like visiting Welbeck Street.

JM Well, Bill's house at Welbeck Street was a tiny terraced house with a living room and a kitchen and a cellar, actually, which is important because every conceivable space in that house had a pot in it. When you walked in through the front door you had to step over pots in the hallway. He always offered you a cup of tea, but you had to move pots on the table, on the kitchen table to make a space to have your tea on. You know, there was no other place. The curtains were always drawn so that nobody could see in the house. There was an Aladdin's cave of pots, it was. I don't know where he slept because the bed was covered in pots and the cellar. I think, when I first got to know him, he'd just put shelves in the cellar, because there was nowhere else left in the house for him to put pots.

I don't know how many pots he had, but this tiny terraced house was absolutely packed with pots, literally every conceivable space – floor space, shelf space, tables.

Every pot had its position and if you were handling pots, walking round the house picking them up, putting them back down, he'd follow you around, and if you didn't put it back in exactly the right place, with exactly the right side facing then he'd just adjust it so it was correct.

Towards the end I got quite concerned about him, actually, because there was serious maintenance work that needed doing. There was electrical sockets in the kitchen which was hanging off the wall with bare wires and, you know, this was when he'd got very old actually.

I can't remember how many times I went, but everybody, every potter that is anybody at all visited Bill's – I mean if you hadn't been to Bill's house to see the collection then you weren't really, you know, interested in pots. He had more pots I believe, 20th century studio pots, than the V&A.

HW Other people have mentioned him trying to test their knowledge of whose the pots were, did he try to catch you out?

JM Yes, he very often would do that, he'd hand you a pot – actually, what he did to me once was he handed me a bowl which I didn't recognize, but I liked it, and he said what do you think of that? I said, oh I like that, who is it by? He said 'it's one of yours!' One that he'd bought years ago.

HW What is his legacy?

JM As I said earlier the very first pot I ever sold, I sold to Bill Ismay. By a strange circumstance, the very last pot that Bill bought was one of mine. I do remember it was at an exhibition in the Oakwood Gallery in Nottingham, just outside Nottingham (Edwinstone, where Robin Hood was apparently born). Anyway, the exhibition was there and I remember he was so ill at the time, he had cancer, that we allowed him to come in before the exhibition opened and I do remember that he was so weak that we had to put a chair out for him. He sat there and I brought the pots to him, he pointed at the ones he wanted to look at and I brought them over for him to handle and look at properly. He picked the one he wanted, but sadly he died, he never actually got to collect it, because he died before the exhibition finished.

I want to say as well, was that the remarkable thing about Bill was that he always bought the best pot in an exhibition, without fail he always bought the best pot. He had such an incredibly good eye for pots. And he would make a beeline – and it would be the best pot every single time.

HW What do you think was his legacy, the bigger picture perhaps?

JM Well, I think that, you know, Bill's collection, without a doubt, is probably the best private collection of 20th century studio pottery in the world, without doubt. And because he had such a good eye for pots, and he always bought, you know, the very best pot from an exhibition, or if he visited a potter's studio, he would always go for the very best pot. Infallible, you know, and because of that this is a very, very important collection of pots, because it represents the very best work, going right back to the 1950s, is it?, when he started collecting British studio pots.

HW Do you want to tell us something about these pots?

JM The thing about a visit to Bill's was that after you'd had a look round the pots, for several hours, he would ask if you would like a cup of tea. Then he would ask you to pick a pot that you would like to drink your tea from. A couple of my favourites were, of course, the couple of Hamada teabowls that he had, of which this is one. I've drunk tea out of this, and I shudder to think how much this pot I'm handling now would be worth if I dropped it. I mean, we're talking about thousands.

This is a lovely teabowl, it's typical of Hamada, it's been combed incised into the clay with a wooden comb, whilst it's rotating on the wheel. It's glazed on the outside with, what I think, Hamada called his Ame glaze, which is a high iron based glaze. The inside is a simple wood ash glaze, probably I'm guessing wood ash and feldspar, maybe some clay. It's been fired as was Hamada's custom, on seashells, so during the firing they more or less burn away to nothing but they leave a scar, an imprint, on the foot, which is much appreciated by the Japanese. I think we've a lot to learn about aesthetics still, of pots. Another thing I love about this bowl is the way that the rim is not exactly, not perfectly symmetrical, it has a wave, which gives a feeling of movement along the top of the pot. I think in the West, you know, we're conditioned by industrial ceramics. You know, we expect everything to be perfectly symmetrical, and light, and white. They have a completely different aesthetic in Japan. That's a lovely teabowl, beautiful pot.

This one here, I was told by Bill that this was the very last pot that Bernard Leach made in his life. And he was going blind at the time, or he was virtually completely blind so it is a little clumsy. This white slip which he tried to brush on the outside, I think, clearly he couldn't see very well and he's missed most of the pot, just caught a bit round the rim. But I drank tea out of this too, and that was a very moving experience, not because I think it's a particularly brilliant



bowl, but because it was the very last pot that Bernard Leach made in his life.

So you know – fond memories.

JM You know reading stuff that you wrote – it's slightly embarrassing, that you wrote years and years ago.

HW Did he write to you a lot?

JM Yes I've still got them somewhere in a file. We corresponded, in fact, usually after a visit or if I'd seen him at an exhibition he would normally write to me. I'd get a letter and I'd answer him. And of course, he bought over his lifetime, I think, 60 pots of mine. I think there were 60-odd, so I think there are 60-odd letters somewhere in a file.

I don't know what to say about these ...

It does say here 'I thought you might like to know that ...'

[Oh there was eight of us, I must have taken some students to see the collection. I was teaching with Mike Dodd at Carlisle, or maybe... this was 1983, yes I moved up to Carlisle in '82.]

... so I said he 'might like to know that he had convinced eight people, that would be the students, that in a world where values would appear to have gone crazy, there's a house in Wakefield, West Yorkshire, where sanity still prevails'.

**AM Alex McErlain (interviewee); potter and academic**

**HW Helen Walsh (interviewing)**

**JW Jonny Walton (filming)**

HW Would you introduce yourself.

AM I'm Alex McErlain, I'm a retired academic, having spent 30 years or more teaching the subject of ceramics in Manchester at the university. But I started out as a potter and I trained as a potter at Winchcombe Pottery and my passion is for pottery and making pots, and I've continued to make pots all my life, and do lots of other things but actually I suppose I should be categorized as an academic who is now retired, two years into retirement.

HW We want to talk about Ismay and get people to describe, to form a mental picture of him, what he looked like, what sort of person he was...

AM Bill was very distinctive looking, you would recognize him even if you'd never met him, from others' memories or descriptions, or even from the odd photograph. Everybody will talk about the beret, he always had this beret on. At first, I wondered whether he was completely bald underneath it, because you never know if somebody wears a cap all the time or a hat. It was a surprise to discover that he wasn't, he lost more hair later on. He would always have a jacket on, but if it was outdoors he would have a big coat on, mac or something like that, belted up, all done up, like a lot of people of that generation. If it was a more informal situation he'd still have a jacket on, he was very smart, a gentleman, sometimes a sports jacket, but I don't think I ever saw him without his jacket on. He was a very gentlemanly person, he would greet you in a slightly formal way, shake hands 'Hello, and how are you?' and pose a question in a very formal kind of way, cocking his head 'What do you think of the exhibition today?' or 'Have you made a purchase?' Or 'Do you know this artist's work?' It was that kind of a conversation, as opposed to, I suppose we have more casual conversations that ask the same questions but in a more casual way. That was Bill, he was not very tall, I suppose I'm quite tall so I always notice somebody else's height, I suppose. He had a particular gait as he walked, which was

distinctive. And when he spoke, the older he got the more 'mumbly' he seemed to get, his lips were very closed and you never knew whether he had any teeth! With his mouth being fairly closed, and it got harder later on to pick out the questions, but early on he was much more clear, and I guess that slight mumbling was a characteristic. Another thing he did later on was echo his own words so you'd be in the house, playing the game of 'Can you identify the potter?' I was quite good at that so he would put me on the spot and test me. I liked it when I got it right and then he sometimes had to give me clues, very famously the piece that was behind the door in the front room, he caught me out on a big, tall pot in the style of William Staite Murray. It was R.J. Washington and I didn't know the work, so he said 'Think of American presidents'. I didn't know any American presidents, so I failed miserably. But in asking the question, getting the answer he would say 'R.J. Washington, R.J. Washington' the kind of little echo would come, often with little comments he would make. Not quite sure why, but that little echo of a comment 'Interesting pot, Interesting pot'. Bill, yes, distinctive character.

HW Is there anything else you would like to add to that or should we carry on talking about when you first met him? Whether you'd heard about him beforehand?

AM Yes – this is interesting, this caused me to think quite a lot about when I first encountered him and how I knew about him. I certainly knew about him before I met him. I think Derek Emms at Stoke, who was my teacher would have talked about him. But I'm pretty sure I never met him then, although a lot of people did come to Stoke who were well known, to see Derek and you'd meet them, but I don't think Bill came. And when I was at Winchcombe, Ray Finch would talk about him. Ray went and stayed with him, but I don't think I met him there either. So I'd probably heard people talking about him. I'd seen his name in publications, W.A. Ismay, and thought that was a bit strange to sign yourself W.A. Ismay, it seemed of another era, especially in *Ceramic Review* which was supposedly fairly modern in its outlook. It was distinctive to sign himself like that.

But I think I can remember when I met him, and that was certainly at an exhibition of the Red Rose Guild in probably 1977 or 1978. It was held in the Undercroft Gallery at what was then Manchester Polytechnic. I'd been involved in setting the exhibition up, and administering it, I was involved with the Guild. My memory is of going to talk to him, perhaps introducing myself at the Exhibition. I can remember exactly where I was at the Exhibition, at the far doorway talking to him, and trying to think of something to ask him. I said 'Have you bought something today?' knowing that he probably would have. And he said 'Yes' and I kind of waited for him to expand on that, which he didn't, so I said 'Whose work have you bought?' and he said 'I've bought work by two hitherto unrepresented potters.' And that was it, and one of them was me, and he never said that it was my work that he'd bought. And that was it, we had a little more conversation and off he went.

Now it's just possible that I could have met him a year earlier than that, because there was another Red Rose Guild Exhibition, held at the Whitworth Art Gallery. I'd just been appointed at the University and they said what are you doing over the summer before you start work, and I said nothing really. They said there's this exhibition which needs stewarding, so I stewarded a show at the Whitworth Art Gallery all summer. He's bound to have been to that exhibition, but I can't remember meeting him there. He must have been to that show, it's very important and Bernard Leach, Lucy Rie, all the well known names of the day were exhibiting there. So I think it was the year after, when the exhibition moved from the Whitworth down to the University, and I was more involved with it. And that was my, I'm pretty sure that was my first meeting with him. I've met him many times after that and I visited him. I was making

little notes yesterday, trying to remember the visits. The visits were distinctive, so I could remember them.

I remember going with Jim Malone, talking about his exhibition. I can remember going with Chris Jenkins, who was a teaching colleague at Manchester. I remember that visit. It was perhaps the first visit to Bill's house, but I remember that mostly because it was so cold and Chris's teeth started chattering loudly when we were down in the cellar, looking at the pots. And I was still intrigued to get through all these pots and Chris was frozen, and his teeth were chattering away so loudly. I don't think Bill noticed them really, we were so busy with the potting. But he was keen to get out really, because he was so cold.

I went with students. I was talking last week with Rosemary Cochrane, Rosemary Hook as was, she was an undergraduate with me. And I took her and Stephen Darlington on a visit. She recalled that visit. I can remember that as a distinct thing. That was a bit more of a teaching thing, showing them the history of studio pottery, before their eyes. And them being allowed to handle these things, extraordinary. You could handle anything, and be encouraged to do so, which was a wonderful experience.

There was a visit with Patrick Sargent which was memorable for its oddness. We went on Patrick's motorbike, me on the back, and arrived at Bill's house. And we were in there a very short time and then went off to the pub for lunch as usual. And then came back and had a little bit more time, but it was a very short time. Patrick was really uneasy, he was uneasy, he explained later, he was uneasy by being confronted with some of his hero's work. I always would pick up the Hamadas in the front room of Bill's house. It was so rare to be able to handle Hamada pots, I would always pick these up. They had so influenced Patrick Sargent and I can recall picking one up and talking to Bill about it and passing it to Patrick, thinking that he'd grab it with enthusiasm to inspect, and he wouldn't pick it up, he wouldn't have it. He didn't like the experience of being confronted with those works. Very strange, not quite sure why.

Bill was puzzled as well, he was puzzled that we left so soon, because usually a visit to Bill's house lasted a long time and everyone was exhausted at the end of it. But that was very quick, and back on the motorbike and home.

Other visits, visits with the family – the memory there, little odd memories, my mum had baked a cake and we took it across to Bill. And he had a sweet tooth, and he liked his cake and we thought he might, you know make a cup of tea and have a slice of cake. Oh no, no, no, he put the cake very quickly at the top of the cellar steps, which is where he kept some of his food to keep fresh, and didn't offer us any cake. That was going to be for him, but we did have a cup of tea.

I have no memory of being worried about the children walking around the house in all these pots – they were fine. And I asked our youngest daughter Rachel, who would have been one of them, I can't remember how many we took, we've got three. And she can kind of vaguely remember being there but couldn't remember anything about the visit.

There were others, I've been noting down all these different visits. They all have particular memories. The one I talk about often is going with Jim. The first time I'd gone across to Bill's, he said in the letter, you had to make the arrangements by letter, and he'd said well we could have a little bit of a snack here but it would be difficult, tricky, camping style I think he said, or we could go to the local pub. I said we'd go to the local pub and we walked down the hill to the pub and went in. Jim's a vegetarian, so he was having a look at what was on the menu and Bill, I discovered he did this all the time, he said the Yorkshire Pudding with Onion Gravy is

very good – in a way that implied you ought to try Yorkshire Pudding with Onion Gravy. Oh I'll have that Bill! Yes I'm having that, and Jim said I think I'll have some quiche. Bill looked at him 'Do you like foreign food?' he said. Quiche was definitely foreign food to Bill, I think. That stuck in our memory. The visits with Jim were really good, we're both passionate about pots and learning from handling pots, and the opportunity to do that was relished.

I must have gone more than once with Jim there. Once connected with Jim's retrospective, once when we were hearing about Bill's collection going to York. In fact we met Bill first of all in York and were shown by a chap called Craig Barclay, he showed us the space that he thought the collection might go into. Then we must have been in a car so probably my car, so drove back to Bill's house and spent some time there with him.

But those visits, me and Jim, are good together in an exhibition, because we both want the same things. Sometimes you go round an exhibition, or a house with somebody, and they are not quite as passionate about things as yourself and find it very strange that you want to spend 10 minutes looking at the underside of a Bernard Leach dish, which we invariable would, discussing the finer merits of it. I think Bill liked that, he likes that commitment, that seriousness about the pots, and the communication to be had from them. The visits to Bill's with Jim were always going to be the best ones. It will be interesting to see what Jim has to say about his memories of Bill.

I liked the question 'Describe the experience of visiting Bill' going to visit him. First of all it was a curious thing – you had to write to him because he had no telephone until quite late in his life. In fact, when he got a phone, I noticed it in the hall, on the way out of that visit. 'Oh you've got a telephone, Bill', 'Oh yes, yes I needed to get a telephone.' 'Could I have your number then I can ring you up?' 'Not sure about that, as long as you don't give it to anybody else!' he said. So I took his telephone number and a month or so later I rang him up, and he answered the phone 'Yes'. 'Is that Bill?' 'Yes – how did you get this number?' 'You gave it to me!'

Anyway, I digress, a visit to Bill's, for most of my life, you had to arrange by letter or postcard. So when you rolled up you weren't quite sure, but you hoped he'd be in but you had no way of telling, you'd made this arrangement earlier on and it was quite foreboding, in a way, walking up to this house, the dark curtains, the net curtains up to the window and the dark green door. And you had to bang on the door and wait, and nothing seemed to happen, then you'd hear some noises, and the undoing of the bolts – he had several bolts – behind the front door, or latches. It would open slowly and he'd peer out 'AHH!' and then you were in. As you walked into the slightly gloomy hallway, always noticed the bike, for a long time I'd puzzled about this bike, and a long time later discovered that he rode it for most of his life, all over the place. Down to Cornwall, London – amazing not just local around Wakefield. Then through to the kitchen, and everybody enjoyed the experience of emerging from the hallway into the kitchen and seeing pots everywhere. Just enough room to walk round the distinctive table with its small strip, and a bit of tablecloth on, where he ate. There was a couple of chairs. Nearly always you'd stand up on arrival, it was only when you had a cup of tea, perhaps, that you'd sit down. You'd stand up and immediately, it seemed to me, you'd be into conversation about the pots.

I can't really remember it ever being the case that you would talk about something else. It was always straightaway into the pots. Quite often looking at the pots on the table first, because they were the focal point of the room. And then looking around you, the pots on the big racks probably caught everybody's attention first of all, because there was this huge Coper right on the top and then a whole array of other people's work there. And I was drawn to the bottom shelf because there were loads of Jim Malone's and by that time I'd become a collector myself,



and I was always interested in Jim's work.

At some point, you would be taken into the front room, and I don't think they were the best pots particularly put in the front room, in the way that some collectors might have the best pots in the best room. But it certainly had some stonking good pots in there and you'd spent your time, you'd done the kitchen more or less, you'd go into the front room. It may have been that we'd had a cup of tea before we went into the front room, that was always a treat, because he said 'What would you like to drink from?' which was a treat because it was amazing – you could choose what you drink from. Inevitably, I almost always chose a Harry Davis cup and saucer, tenmoku glazed cup and saucer. He had a complete set on the fireplace, and I'm passionate about this potter, who few people really know about. He's an obscure potter, nowadays, but a real pioneer. But he made such wonderful tableware, still rings true. You've used some today, there's some on my table and I liked it. So I would often choose that, some people would often choose a Hamada teabowl, or Bernard Leach. So they can then say they've drunk out of it. But I've done that in other places as well, so it was the Harry Davis always for me, a beautiful cup and saucer.

I can't remember what Bill used to drink out of, if it was coffee, it was proper coffee, in a Richard Batterham coffee jug. But usually it was tea and he would surprise you by saying 'What sort of tea, Indian...' and you had a choice of tea, which you know you kind of expected it to be Yorkshire Tea that was it, and no, he was keen on his teas. And if it was a special tea, and you asked for milk ... [tape inaudible at this point] ... having milk in this lovely drink. So anyway, you'd have a cup of tea and it was lovely and you might sit down whilst you did that. Bill always at his seat by his part of the table where he ate and worked and lived really. And then there was a couple of other chairs which you could carefully squeeze on to, and you'd have that conversation.

And then you'd go in the front room, it always seemed special going into the front room and special partly because the Hamadas were there. I don't think the Hamadas were anywhere else in the house. But there were Hamadas amongst other things on this rack. And you had to lean over an old battered couch full of books that you had to lean across to pull these pots out from. And then a whole lot of pots around on the floor. There was a Bernard Leach fireplace, where the fireplace was, leaned up against it. He told the tale of how he acquired that, somewhere in Cornwall, and had it brought up, because it had a concrete back attached, it was very, very heavy. My pots were on the floor, the pots that he owned of me. There was a whole array of pots on the floor of all different sizes. There were pots on the floor everywhere but I was always quite proud of seeing my pots amongst these and felt rather self-conscious about picking one of my own pots up amongst all these other pots. And then from the front room, up the stairs into the front bedroom and that was very difficult as time went on because there were pots out. As years went by it was mostly filled with boxes with pots in that hadn't yet been unpacked and I can remember that he wouldn't mind you unpacking one, having a look if there was something you wanted to see, that wasn't a problem. But there was not really anywhere to put anything. And the latter visits I can recall it being so difficult, that you just would look into there and not have much conversation there.

And I think on the stairwell there were lots of books stacked up. This may be a false memory but I seem to recall there were lots of cowboy books there, novels which surprised me. There was a conversation once about reading books and how much he enjoyed it. And him setting himself the task of reading a book a day for a year, and I could not comprehend how you could read an entire book in a day. But he sat there and did it, and tried to do it. It was one of the little

curious quirks that he had, that he would set himself little tasks.

So then back downstairs and to the cellar, which, I loved the cellar. In the first instance, he would say 'I'd better go down the cellar steps first, because the light switch at the bottom is a bit wonky.' And it was, you might get a shock from this light switch that was located at the bottom of the cellar steps. As you went down the steps there were pots stacked on the steps, fabulous pots and stacks of plates and dishes. The odd time I would look into some of them and there would be a set of dishes and he'd say, 'the third one down's the best', and they were all arranged in a particular way. Down in the cellar it was always very cold down there, and there was a great big table in the middle and it smelt very musty, but there were some really big pots, and very early Mick Casson's were down there. And stacks and stacks of pots on this table, that you'd lift up to try and have a look, big dishes, have a look at what else was in there. But there was nowhere to pass one to unless you passed it to whoever you were with, to hold that one whilst you had a look at the next one. The sense of frustration at not being able to look at them all – there was no way I could have looked at all the pots, but I would have wanted to.

Then back up to the kitchen area, ready for departure. I only ever once used his loo, which was out in the yard. And it was – I must have remembered to go to the loo before I went to visit, and maybe others did. I once went to use his loo, which was an outside loo, which I'd not encountered for years. We used to have them, Carol's family had an outside loo, we were familiar with that situation. And then a chat and departure, and he stood in the doorway waving 'Cheerio' – yes, lovely times.

I was talking in a way about the legacy of Bill and his influence on me on thinking about collecting and what collecting means. So I thought I'd talk about this, just a little bit. This is the first ever pot that we bought, collected. I was still a student, it's made by a chap called Harold Thornton, and it was in an exhibition in King Street, in Manchester, the Northern Craft Centre.

We got an invite to the private view, because Derek Emms was one of the exhibitors and that was the first exhibition we ever went to. There was Harold, and Derek Thornton, his son, Derek Emms, and two other potters whose names elude me for the moment. And I found I really enjoyed the experience of being in this exhibition, this private view. Bill might well have been there, who knows. And I don't know why, but we wanted to acquire something, the passion to acquire something was strong.

We were talking to Harold Thornton, he was the key point of the exhibition, because he taught all of the other potters. He taught Frank Hamer as well, interestingly. Anyway, Harold Thornton made great big pots and they were a lot of money and we couldn't afford one of those. But there were five of these little pots which I loved the shape of and they were fifteen shillings each, that was a lot of money but we committed ourselves and bought one. It was the first experience and we've kept it, we still love it, this little pot of very oriental inspired tenmoku glazed pot. So that was our introduction to collecting pots.

Now a little while later, this is where we might have met Bill. There was an exhibition at Bolton Museum and Art Gallery and it was about Welsh potters, and Jim Malone was one of them. This was very early in his career. Alan and Pat Firth were there and we'd gone along deciding to buy a pot. We'd saved some money up, and we knew we were going to spend some money, we knew we were going to buy a pot. Quite excited by that and this was our introduction to being a collector or collectors among other collectors at the private view. I'm sure Bill must have been there. I can't remember him, but I remember talking to Alan and Pat, what they might buy. Rather naively, we were taking our time talking openly about what we might buy and one of

the things we might buy, Alan and Pat went and bought, which was the first time we'd realized we had to be careful about who you said what to if you were going to buy something, because they might think that's a good mark of approval and buy it instead.

Anyway we bought this – a bashed bottle as Jim Malone would call it, very, very beautiful thing, and we still have enjoyed it very much indeed. But the experience of being in the exhibition at the private view with some money to spend, acquiring something that we really loved, having a choice of things, and being part of that group of collectors, that were there, as well as the artists, was an interesting one. I've still got the catalogue to that show and must pick it out and show you.

Now we move forward many years now, and in between times I'd got to know Bill and talk about collecting. We'd got to the point where we had been specializing in our collection because we'd not room to house them and we'd never wanted to have 3,500 pots in here, so we couldn't move. Our family are our children and grandchildren, not a family of acquisitions.

But we still buy things, we keep saying we're going to stop, but we still have that acquisition impulse and this is a piece that Bill might not have bought. He certainly never owned any of this artist's work, this is Susan Hall's. Perhaps it's because she's of a younger generation. I don't know what she was making while he was still alive. But he might have been intrigued by this, because it's all thrown, every part of this modelled lady on a goat is thrown, and then manipulated and raku fired. He would have been intrigued I think by the fact that the goat's legs were thrown on the potter's wheel and then attached, and its neck and head were manipulated and even the hair on the lady is thrown and squished and the tail on the goat. The base it stands on is the most obvious bit of a thrown pot. And then put into the raku fire, because I know he was interested in the theatricality of raku firing, it was something that many practitioners communicated with their audience via something that had been started by Bernard Leach, communicating with visitors through raku firing, and it took him back to his introduction to pottery. But I'm still drawn sometimes – I've just got to have that and I saw this in a way that Bill would never have seen it on the Internet, I saw it being made. I saw it first of all, this was made in Hungary, this summer during August. The artist was at a studio called Keskuemet and she went to draw goats at this lady's farm and posted some pictures of the drawings. I wanted one of those drawings, I've still not got them, they are beautiful. She draws incessantly and then starts to make, and I saw her making some goats and thought, 'hmm, I'd quite like one of these.' And then we saw a lady rider on a goat appear in the studio, unfired, and then we saw some images of it being fired. And eventually it came via Ryanair to Manchester Airport, where we met up and she was on her way back to America. Money exchanged hands and we got a goat with a lady rider, and we're thrilled with it. And I guess Bill also felt that same way about acquiring a piece and taking it home and living with it.

I'm really pleased you've found this Red Rose Guild catalogue of 1978, because this must be when I met Bill. The time when he bought a teapot, so let's just see in here. Yes, there it is and he's annotated 'teapot, side handle £6.50 (Blimey £6.50!) Grey celadon over light stoneware body, glaze fired'. And it's in here, you've brought it, how exciting. I remember him saying an unusual glaze, and it was a college glaze. When I started work at Manchester, they had some standard glazes for the students to use. (Rustling) And here it is, look at this, more goodies in there I see. I didn't use many of the glazes, but this is a matt celadon, which was unusual, and Bill commented about it being unusual. And now I see on his annotations, 'it's breaking on the throwing lines where it's slightly thin', breaking an iron-brown, something like that which he must comment on. He would comment to me for a few years about the influence of

Winchcombe. He would say, 'I see you have not quite shaken the influence of Winchcombe off yet.' And at first I was a bit – not offended, but I thought surely it's not been that influential on what I made. But it had – and there's a direct influence at Winchcombe, the lid's been fired off the pot and stood on the shelf and there's no glaze on the bottom edge. Whereas Derek Emms had taught me to fire the lid on the pot with no glaze round there. I got into trouble at Winchcombe once, terrible, because I was setting the kiln up, one of our jobs and you were supposed to set all the teapots like that and I forgot and did what I normally did with teapots, and set it like that and of course all the lids stuck. Six teapots all with their lids stuck on solid, useless. Anyway obviously I carried on using that Winchcombe technique. Not a bad teapot actually, we should have made a brew in it, shouldn't we?

You've brought something in here which I spotted straight away, this is Harry Davis cup and saucer, or rather Crowan Pottery. Wow that's fabulous, look at that, the glaze is so rich and so thinly potted. I love that he really used tenmoku, when it's thinner will go this brown colour. And this will go a particularly rich, rust thin edge to this saucer and to the cup, so they really marry. I love that, trying to get that. But he's really used that to effect by keeping the back slightly thinner. He also was such a skilled maker that there's hardly any of the clay left showing, and it's so risky doing that, in case the glaze runs slightly, especially with the tenmoku, which has to be on thicker in order to be effective and black, and have that lustrous surface. This is beautiful, I always used to love drinking out of these. I'm sorry Helen, I can't help but put my tea in there and try it one more time. It's so .... You can just put your hand round it, it is so satisfying. The proportions are good, look at how your finger, quite fattish fingers just sitting there nicely. It's designed so that you can get your finger underneath there very well. That's one of the problems with cups and saucers, and this is slightly higher proportioned and on that foot ring, so that your finger does not interfere with the saucer when you're getting hold of it. By making the form curve inwards, that means it will hold its form. If it's straighter the pull of the handle at such high temperature will often result in the cups going oval, and yet if you make it curve inwards that will often result in you getting your nose stuck in the cup whilst you're drinking from it, so it's a fine balance in between. That's so good, tell you what, you can take that back with you and leave this one here. I love the proportions of the saucer as well to the cup. And when he pulls the handles it's that softening to the edge there – really, really good. And you know that it's been used and been around a long time. If I rang it when it was empty it would ring like a bell. His pots are rare in that instance that they will keep their ring because the fit of the glaze to the clay is absolutely spot on. He was such a technical perfectionist.

Bernard Leach, of course, wasn't too keen on that technical perfection that he had, but it was incorporated into spirited making and design. And that's why I think the pots are so good.

**BR** **Barley Roscoe (interviewee); curator**

**MF** **Martin Fell (interviewing)**

**JW** **Jonny Walton (filming)**

MF Perhaps you could introduce yourself and tell us a little bit about yourself.

BR I'm Barley Roscoe. I'm the former Director of the Holburne Museum and Craft Study Centre. I was involved with the Craft Study Centre almost from its inception; not quite as early as Bill, 'cos just looking at some of the papers that you brought with you today, I see that he was receiving correspondence from them from as early as 1972. But I was actually the initial research assistant for them and I was appointed in early 1975, so just a few years later, and that



was before it actually had a home within the Holburne Museum and I've got a little postcard that was sent to Bill much later, in 1987, which actually shows the Holburne. Part of my job was going round visiting many of the crafts people and educationalists who were involved with the Study Centre and cataloguing the work that was going to come to the collection when it was actually opened, and had a home in Bath. Subsequently I moved to Bath in the mid seventies to set it up and subsequently became the Assistant Curator there and then in 1986 the Director. And was there until 2000, when the Craft Study Collection was moved to Farnham, which is where it is today. And so I had a couple of years in Farnham, but for the last 10 years I've been a freelance curator and also do a bit of writing and lecturing.

MF So how did you first meet Bill? How did you meet him?

BR I met him, I think I met him in the late seventies when he first visited the Craft Study Centre at Bath. It wasn't really until the following decade or early '80s that I actually went to his own house.

MF And in that intervening period what was your impression of him?

BR Well, he was a wonderfully benign presence. I think the thing that really sums him up is to call him a dear, because that was the sort of overall impression that he gave. I mean physically he was shortish, he was smaller than me, I'm tall, I'm 5ft 10. He was quite roundy, I mean you wouldn't say fat, but equally he wasn't you know a little pin figure and he was bearded, but it was really the accoutrements that he had with him that one thought of, as part of him. So I very, very seldom saw him without his famous beret, which I'm sure everyone is going to refer to, and he very often, whatever the weather, seemed to be wearing a grey, belted gabardine-style mac. And then he also from one of the many pockets within the mac or jacket, whatever it was, had an enormous magnifying glass that would be pulled out and used to inspect. You know if he couldn't read a label because the type was too small, or he particularly wanted to look at, I don't know, the mark on a pot or whatever it might be, out would come the magnifying glass. And it would be a very sort of Mr Clouseau inspection that would then ensue.

MF Were his mannerisms quite consistent?

BR Yes, I think they were, he very seldom volunteered any information unless it was about pots. So he was a very private sort of person, but when you did get him talking, actually – well prior to getting him talking, after the first greeting, if he was standing, then he very often did a little sort of knees bend and almost gently buzzing noise. So you'd have this little sort of knees bend up and down, and a smile and a bit of a buzz. At least that's what I remember. But the thing most clearly was definitely the gentle knees bend and slight sway.

MF As a person with expertise in studio pottery and ceramics was his opinion – was he a high opinion?

BR Very high opinion indeed, I mean there are few people who can have travelled around England so widely in search of studio pottery, indeed I don't think I can think of anyone else really, who [did so] in pursuit of their particular dedicated interest, and so he not only knew many of the potters personally, but both the well known ones and the lesser known ones as well. And you know he was visiting not only the big galleries, the known collections and openings, but also if a small craft gallery was perhaps having an opening, he would make a point of going there. So I mean the magnifying glass was a really good sort of image to have for him, because he was seeking out all these new pots all the time, with which to extend his collection.

MF Do you think it was very important that he was supporting working artists along the way?

BR Yes, I do. I think it made a tremendous difference to very many people to know that, I mean, if Bill was at your private view and he actually made a purchase, that was a sort of seal of approval in some ways – you were going to be on your way, I suspect. And I never heard him say a nasty thing about anybody actually, which is quite an achievement, as well! So he was not a sort of gossipy, unkind person in any way at all, so that's what I meant about him earlier when I talked about him as a benign presence.

MF So a bit more about your professional relationship with him, can you talk about that?

BR Yes – well, I've actually got, I was very pleased again in the archive to see that there is my original letter to him, sort of saying, this is dated 26th January 1982, I write:

'I was very pleased to hear from Henry (that's Henry Hammond the potter, who was a great friend of his) that you are prepared to assist him as a Ceramics Adviser for the Craft Study Centre. It is very good of you indeed.' And I enclosed an agenda and papers.

So really, I can say it was from the early '80s that I got to know him a bit better and I'll be talking a little bit more about the Katharine Pleydell-Bouverie Exhibition, which the Craft Study Centre mounted in 1980/81, which prompted my first and only visit to him in Wakefield. But I would say that over, well for more than a decade, Bill was hugely helpful to the Craft Study Centre on its Acquisitions Committee, and in helping to shape its collections. And also in terms of being a very good ambassador for it, because he was the archetypal networker, before the word networking came in. I mean people started to speak about networking 20 years ago as if it was a hugely new concept. But actually, Bill was – that what he was – he was very generous indeed with his opinions and with information that he would supply to sort of backup an opinion of whether a piece should or should not be included. I mean, we did not have huge funds, we hardly had any funds in the Craft Study Centre with which to purchase work, but when work was offered he would never, or very seldom be the first to volunteer information. But when his opinion was asked and he'd heard what other people had to say about a particular piece, or whatever, he would just quietly put in his own word or two, whether in favour or against. But again if he was against something, there would be a cogent reason to back it up.

MF So was he quite candid with his opinions about pottery, and drawing on his experience in having a sort of authoritative voice?

BR Yes, I mean when Bill spoke, people listened, because they knew that it was based on very good, sound and extensive knowledge.

MF So you mentioned in there your visit to Welbeck Street, in Wakefield, where Bill lived. Could you tell us a bit about that experience, and the run-up to it?

BR Yes, well I think this was – I was trying to remember the year, the exact year and time when I went to Wakefield to meet him at his house. I've concluded from some of the paperwork that you've brought, that it must have been actually returning the pots that he had lent for the Katharine Pleydell-Bouverie Exhibition, which the Study Centre put on. This was a big retrospective from 1980 to 1981.

So I think it was in '81 that I delivered the pots back to him. And I remember arriving, and it was difficult because he didn't have a telephone at all. So there was no question, if you got lost you couldn't just ring the telephone up and say 'I'm going to be just a little bit late' or whatever it might be. And anyway, I arrived fairly on time at the right street and stopped in front of No. 14 or near No. 14 and got out and had a look, and thought this can't be the right address. I mean

the house looked completely shut-up or certainly not as if somebody was behind the half-drawn curtains, the certainly unwashed windows. And it reminded me very much actually, from that front view, of when I was a child, I used to have to pass a derelict house, well I say derelict, but it had somebody living in it. But this was a slightly scary house and we pretended, when I was about seven that a witch lived in it. Well, it wasn't quite the witch's house, but it was jolly nearly that. And I thought this can't be right and I checked the number, and then I went round, I thought I'll have a look round the back and see if perhaps, it looks different. I went round the back and actually, if anything, it looked rather worse. The grass, there was a sort of meadow round the back, I seem to remember high grass and curtains at the window.

Anyway I thought it must be right, and I'd better pluck up courage and knock on the door. So I knocked on the door and sure enough it opened and there was Bill, smiling welcome. And it was a tiny house, it was really two up two down. There was hardly any room to get into the house because it was a passageway, hallway, and it was piled high with boxes, I seem to remember, and labelled from all over, almost all over the world, I was going to say for the exhibitions that Bill had lent pots to. And I certainly remember that there were some boxes from the exhibition of Michael Cardew's, which had started at Rotterdam at the Van Boymans Museum, and then toured. So anyway, there were those boxes, and I squeezed passed these and was ushered into the kitchen.

And I have never seen so many pots in one kitchen in my life. It was absolutely packed, and there was a single light bulb hanging from the centre of the room over a rectangular table, which was absolutely stuffed with pots, and it had a cloth on the table, you could just see the cloth between the pots. And then there was, literally, one dinner plate's width worth of space at one end of the table, which was clear, which evidently was where Bill ate. Then the room was fairly dark and, as I say, there were pots all round the sides of the wall, not only on shelves but also on the floor. So I was absolutely terrified that I might kick a pot or trip over something, or whatever as I went round the room. In one corner there was a stone sink, and a little sort of like a primus on the sideboard, where he brewed up coffee or whatever.

Anyway there was Bill over by the sink and the primus, offering a cup of coffee, and saying would I like to choose a mug to drink from. And I'm very ashamed that I can't remember the mug that I chose. I think it was probably because I was so nervous about breaking anything. I also realized that it was a bit of a test as well, because you felt that, you know, whichever mug you chose to drink out of was – you know – he was going to assess your taste from it. It was also rather alarming because all the pots, mugs rather, were rather dusty and not of the cleanest, so that was another consideration, choosing one that perhaps wasn't too, you know hadn't got too many old grounds still left in the bottom of it.

Anyway, we had coffee and a bit of a chat, and then evidently the pot I chose passed the test, and was then taken on a guided tour and I have never, ever seen so many pots in such a small space, I don't think.

I remember, for instance, going into what would have been the sitting room and I seem to remember a chaise longue, is that possible, I'm not sure, but anyway it wasn't a chaise longue for sitting on, it was a chaise longue for the pots. There were pots on the mantelpiece, pots on the shelves, but pots over everything else. But there were actually books, but truthfully it's the pots that I really remember, it's the impression of so many of them.

He also had a little sort of cellar type area, which I can't in my memory see where it was, but presumably it was off the kitchen. I seem to remember him, well we both had to bend down a

bit, to get into it. It wasn't, you know it was a walk-in cellar, but it wasn't an easy, easily walked-in cellar.

But it was wonderful having this tour with him and you know, he would just pass a few comments about different pieces. And the astonishment of seeing so many Hans Copers and Lucy Ries, it was a really wonderful experience.

MF Did you get from Bill his passion, did that come across in his persona, when he's giving you the guided tour, or was it just like you were taking it all in?

BR There was always a slight stepping back with him in terms of – you know he wasn't somebody to plunge in with both feet at all. What he did was, he lived passion rather than expressed it, if that makes any sense at all, perhaps it doesn't. But I mean again today, people talk a lot about doing things with passion, but I think that Bill was the last person who would have talked about collecting with passion. In fact I think he would have been rather embarrassed by the thought of it. But actually as an example of how he lived his life there is no better example of somebody pursuing their interest with a passion than Bill.

MF Did that strong passion make him easy to work with professionally? Or did that cause problems?

BR No, I think he was, I don't remember there ever being a difficulty in working with him, I can honestly say that. I think it was because he was a very modest person and I mean, for instance, he got his MBE in the early '80s but I don't think he ever referred to it as such.

Funnily enough, just going back to the letter asking him to be a member of the Acquisitions Committee, I did not know whether he was an MBE or an OBE. Evidently I put the wrong one, I see he just gently sort of corrected it with a red biro, to MBE rather than OBE. But I don't remember him making a big thing of that to me, at all. No a very sympathetic character really.

MF What do you think his legacy is from his life as a collector and the collections that he's made with people interested in studio ceramics?

BR Well, I think in terms of, I can't imagine, I don't think there is another single person who spent so many years of their life, travelling so widely within Britain, and making such a fabulous collection, which now the York has in toto. I mean that will actually be his legacy, for many, many people.

For me personally though, the legacy is what I've spoken about earlier. Of that example of doing something with passion and being prepared to give up a lot for your collecting. I mean he was getting up very early in the morning, as early as 4 am, or whatever, to be on the first train out of Wakefield, if need be, to get down to the far reaches of Cornwall or whichever corner of England he was going to, to ensure that he was going to be first on the spot at a gallery opening and would have first pick of the best pots, in order to, I mean he wasn't a wealthy man at all, as a retired librarian, by the time I knew him. Inevitably, he hadn't got masses of disposable income to indulge his passion and so he went without in other respects. He liked plain, simple food, and he didn't have an expensive car, or fine wines, or whatever it might be. All his disposable income went into following his chosen pursuit.

MF What have you got there?

BR I've got this postcard that I had to send Bill, about one of the meetings. And it was that it had been cancelled at short notice. And this is actually the proof that Bill didn't have a phone, even in 1987, in October, because instead of just being able to pick up the phone and call him and



say the meeting's off, I've actually had to write to him and so – it's actually I'd normally would do it in a letter, but as it's at short notice I've written him this card which just said 'Very many apologies, but the Acquisitions Committee has had to be cancelled.'

MF Can you tell me about the pieces of pottery that you have here?

BR Yes, these are two pieces by Katharine Pleydell-Bouverie, who was in fact, one of the very first people that Bill began collecting. I hadn't quite appreciated that until I was doing a little more reading, reminding myself about him. Although Barbara Cass and Jim Malone were amongst his first, apparently he went to the Craft Centre at Hay Hill in 1956, so he'd really only just started collecting and bought some of Katharine Pleydell-Bouverie's work and also David Leach. I just love seeing these again, and I say again because the reason that I chose these was not only because I feel they are rather like Bill himself – you know if Bill was a pot he'd probably be a Katharine Pleydell-Bouverie pot, functional and unassuming and no nonsense, and very dear, actually. I've used the word dear about him several times.

But she was actually the first female student potter to work with Bernard Leach, at the Leach Pottery in St Ives in the 1920s, but whereas Cardew picked up on the slipware as his particular line of interest, she picked up on stoneware and ash glazes, and was fascinated by the oriental ash glazes.

I got to know her through the Craft Study Centre, and she was actually on the Advisory Committee for the Study Centre. She was tremendously generous and gave a huge body of her work to the Craft Study Centre and also copied out her glaze recipe notebook for us, which was a wonderful gift.

In 1980 we put on a retrospective exhibition of her work, happily she was still alive, she didn't die until 1985. But apart from the work that we had in the Craft Study Centre collection itself, we were borrowing from a number of key collectors. Of course, Bill was one of them. So actually he collected and he lent us seven pots for the show, and these are two of my particular favourites.

The selection was made by Henry Hammond, because Henry and I were working jointly on this exhibition. What is lovely from your Archive is having found this little drawing and notes made by Henry from a visit that evidently he made in the summer of 1980, prior to the opening of the exhibition. He suggested which pots we should borrow and these two pieces are both from the 1950, both 1958, this lovely, lovely crackled glaze, very simple pot as lovely inside as it is out, almost eggshell quality about the glaze, a sturdy piece. What one can always find with her work is not only her mark KPB, but also the incised number which refers to the clay body, and then sometimes you can find a brushed roman numeral which will refer to the glaze. Now if it had a brushed roman numeral VII on it, it would be a boxwood glaze, that's the only one I know off by heart, otherwise it's a case of actually having to go back to the Glaze Recipe Notebook to find out. This is a lovely greeny celadine, again you can see her mark impressed and also the incised number on the foot. What you will notice about both pieces is there is no brush decoration on them at all. Really the only, I'm not sure decoration is the word, but you can see that it is faceted here and she'll just have done that with a knife, cutting the segments, so that you end up with a piece that is rather like a seedpod perhaps, and what is lovely is that you get the glaze breaking over the ribs so that they are highlighted, and it's just a really simple no nonsense piece. I think it's interesting when Bill talked about the sort of particular pots that he liked, he always had a preference for functional pots, so again it seems rather appropriate to choose those. Of the seven pots, as I said, those are my favourites.

Subsequently, the exhibition led on to a book, which came out with the Crafts Council and Craft Study Centre as a joint publication, in the year after she died. So from this little group of work, it's taking me right back to a really fruitful period and really happy memories of Bill.

M What was Bill's take on loaning out his pottery? Did he relish the work was being seen by the public?

BR Yes, I think he did and, in a way, it provided him with a complete readymade social life, as well. In terms of, of course, he would be invited as one of the key guests to the private views. He was very good at making a point of coming to them and meeting his old friends and also checking that his pots were appropriately displayed. It was always nice to see him.

M Was he quite particular about the way pots were displayed and handled, as part of his collection?

BR I would imagine that he would be, but I'm happy to say that he never voiced any dissent about the way we showed them at the museum. Certainly I remember him being very appreciative of this particular exhibition which had 168 exhibits, 158 of Katherine Pleydell-Bouverie's own work and then some by Norah Braden and Peter Mason. So it was a large show and a wonderful opportunity to see pots throughout her life, right from when she'd been firing with wood to these pieces which were actually fired in an oil-fired kiln and subsequently from 1960 she fired in an electric kiln. So you were getting those three distinct phases. I enjoy these particularly as an interim period, it was the shortest period that she was firing with oil. But you're getting the qualities of the wood fired glaze and wood ashes that she is using.