In the Beginning was the Word: Bernard Leach and Australian Studio Pottery from 1940-1964

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Abstract

The post war years in Australia brought increased scope for leisure, work and education. Greater numbers of people than ever before became involved, as participants or audience, with activities in the cultural sphere. A notable feature of this time was a resurgence of interest in the manual arts. These traditional skills, reconfigured within contemporary society as creative hobbies or art related activities, became part of a movement known as the Crafts.

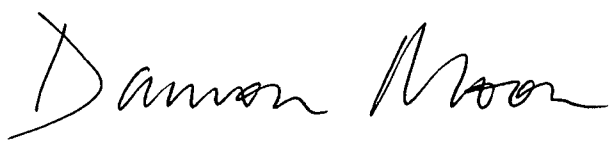
Nowhere was this more noticeable than with hand-made pottery in its transition from an essential trade to a redundant but nonetheless widely practised craft and in the attendant social, aesthetic and theoretical shifts necessary to accommodate these changes in value, status and intent. Of all the activities coming within the ambit of the crafts, pottery garnered the most public interest. More people made pottery, more was written about pottery, more galleries exhibited pottery and more people bought pottery than any of the other crafts. Pottery was taught in almost every school and it often was the only hand-craft taught at a tertiary level.

In examining the transformation of Australian ceramics during this time one can isolate many factors that played a part, but underpinning much of this activity was a remarkably influential book, Bernard Leach's 1940 publication *A Potter's Book*. Building on a legacy of cross-cultural borrowings, Leach may be credited with establishing Japan as the site of craft authenticity in the imagination of countless potters. Added to this is the significance of *A Potter's Book* as an invaluable technical aid, at a time when there was little practical information specifically tailored to the needs of the studio potter.

The years between 1940 and 1964 constitute a significant period in the growth of ceramics as part of the burgeoning Australian Crafts Movement. By concentrating on this crucial phase of Australian pottery and linking it to what was the most influential text in the field, a framework is created to assess the depth and variety of practice. Looking at Australian pottery through the structures and arguments set forth in *A Potter's Book,* an assessment of the impact of this important work on Australian ceramics can be made that extends beyond the anecdotal. Despite the importance of Leach's text and the unprecedented vitality of Australian pottery at the time, no significant analysis of the degree of connectivity between the two exists. This thesis hopes to contribute to a fuller understanding of this area of Australian craft history.

Signed Declaration

I declare that this thesis does not incorporate without acknowledgement any material previously submitted for a degree or diploma in any university and that to the best of my knowledge it does not contain any materials previously published or written by another person except when due reference is made in the text.



Damon Moon September 2006

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Introduction

This thesis examines the influence of Bernard Leach and his seminal text *A Potter's Book* on the development of Australian ceramics.

Leach is a protean figure and *A Potter's Book* is arguably the most influential book published about craft in the twentieth century, a towering work in a relatively narrow field. The assertion made in this thesis is that Bernard Leach's theory of ceramics, as contained in *A Potter's Book,* had a profound impact on the development of Australian pottery from the time of its publication in 1940 until 1964, thus establishing a time frame and a location for this research.

To those with an awareness of the development of the crafts in Australia the statement that Leach's book was significant may seem self-evident. It is here that the problem lies, because a lengthy examination of the detail, range and scope of its actual impact, as opposed to its presumed impact, on Australian ceramics has never been attempted. The most important text in the history of Australian pottery sits idle, at least in terms of Australian scholarship.

In the last decade a number of international writers have begun to reevaluate Leach and his contribution to ceramics, in texts that extend beyond biography and panegyric to offer a meaningful critique. Given Leach's nationality it is understandable that the majority of this work originates in the United Kingdom, with the English potter and researcher Edmund de Waal warranting special mention for his prolific contributions to the developing field of Leach studies. De Waal's critical assessments form a useful basis for positioning Leach, in the process allowing for a measure of reevaluation of de Waal's own contribution to the field, but there has

been no similar body of work to appear within an Australian context. The specificities of post-war Australian ceramics demand their own interpretation of Leach and it is here that the absence of our own scholarship is most keenly felt.

When Leach's name is mentioned in the context of Australian ceramics, often in conjunction with the term Anglo Oriental pottery and Japanese ceramics, the assumption is that the reader is cognizant of the historical facts and associations regarding Bernard Leach's career, the publication of *A Potter's Book* and of the subsequent implications for Australian ceramics over the decades. If this is so, the information must only exist on an individual basis and be communicated by word of mouth, because there is no one text that seeks to compile, quantify and examine this information in a scholarly manner. Perhaps the Australian curator and writer Peter Timms comes closest, in his draft catalogue essay for an unrealized project on the Leach tradition in Australia to be called 'The Great Exchange', an edited version of which was subsequently published in the journal *Craft Victoria* as the catalogue essay for the exhibition *The Hamada-Leach Tradition in Australia.* However, even Peter Timms' considerable skills and knowledge in this area are constrained to an essay of approximately fifteen-hundred words, and there remains much more to be said.

There are considerable differences between the way Leach was seen in an Australian context to that of his position in the British crafts. For example, Australian potters began to be aware of Leach during a later period than their British counterparts. Although Leach was active in Japan as early as 1914 and then in Britain from 1921, there was almost no awareness of Leach in Australia until *A Potter's Book* first became available in 1940. In this country Leach was essentially a post-war phenomenon, his growing presence neatly coinciding with the rise of the Crafts Movement. Because Bernard Leach did not make pottery in Australia and his

work was seldom seen here, most Australian potters knew of Leach primarily through his books. Unlike in Britain, there were no regular exhibitions of Leach's pottery in Australian galleries, nor could you easily buy the 'standard ware' range of pottery in shops. His age, fame and nationality conspired to distance him from a local audience, thus giving his writing even greater prominence.

In addition, the connections established by Australian potters to Japan developed quite differently in Australia than in England. Australian potters formed stronger ties to Japan in the post war period than did English potters, and this allowed Australians to contrast their own experiences of Japan with Leach's persuasively argued but highly subjective view of Japanese pottery.

Australia had strong historical associations with Britain, ties that continued to be keenly felt in the 1940s, the 1950s and into the 1960s. During this time aspects of English pottery impacted very powerfully on Australian ceramics and although many of these influences can be traced back to Leach, other, substantially different approaches to ceramics were experienced by Australian potters who worked in England. There are also parallels, coincidences and connections to be explored in the way Australia's neighbour, New Zealand, forged its own ceramic history, which in turn impacted meaningfully on the development of Australian pottery.

In 1977 Carl McConnell, one of Australia's influential post-war potters, wrote in his short review of *A Potter's Book* for the magazine *Craft Australia* that:

> I first read this book in 1946. It changed my whole outlook to clay work and gave me a new direction. I started firing with wood and discovered the beautiful effects from this and also the hard work. It introduced me to the use of various plant and wood ashes in glaze composition but more than anything it made possible the transition for me from earthenware to stoneware and later to porcelain. Before reading it, I worked only in lead-glazed earthenware and used an electric fired kiln. ... In the first chapter he deals with standards in a very

> provocative way with which I am sure, all who read it will agree. Other chapters deal with technique ... and last but not least, the workshop. ... In my humble opinion, it is the best book ever written on pottery and to me a constant source of reference and inspiration in every page. I have for years recommended this book to all interested in the potter's craft and again emphatically do so here.[1]

This passage embodies the enthusiasm for Leach's book and outlines some of the changes it wrought on Australian ceramics, neatly summarising all but one of the areas of influence attributed to *A Potter's Book.*

McConnell notes the impact on technique, which resulted in the all important shift from earthenware to stoneware. Typical low temperature glaze compositions, often bought commercially and 'ready made', were eschewed in favor of mixtures of feldspars, clays and other minerals, sometimes modified by the addition of 'natural'[2] materials like wood ash or rocks, designed to melt at high temperatures. This was accompanied by changes in the clay from porous earthenware to vitreous stoneware and porcelain. Leach's book provided a practical technical manual enabling the aspiring stoneware studio potter to explore this idiom at a time when such information was very scarce. This is one facet of *A Potter's Book.*

McConnell mentions that Leach deals provocatively with the issue of standards or aesthetics, and it is this first chapter of Leach's book, appropriately titled 'Towards a Standard', that has come to represent what is in fact a book in several parts, many of which are not at all provocative. This is the polemical aspect of *A Potter's Book,* and prior to its publication the passionate advocacy of hand made pottery embodied in

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[1] McConnell, C. 'The Critical Eye', *Craft Australia,* 2, 1977, p. 57

[2] Neither craft nor industrial ceramics utilise synthetic materials, instead relying almost entirely on extremely commonly available minerals. The term 'natural', as applied by Leach and as is commonly understood within ceramics circles, relates to both the level of refinement of some of these minerals, where craft pottery may use relatively un-processed clays and other minerals, and also to the use of materials like wood ash, which were eschewed by industry due to the variability of the materials.

'Towards a Standard', with its relentlessly argued and highly opinionated aesthetic agenda, had never before appeared in a book of this type.

And then there is McConnell's opening sentence: 'It changed my whole outlook and gave me a new direction.'[3] This is what *A Potter's Book* was designed to do and what it often achieved throughout communities of potters from England to Australia. There is only one aspect of *A Potter's Book* that McConnell does not touch on, concerning Leach's arguments, made in *A Potter's Book,* positing certain Asian ceramic traditions as being of paramount importance to contemporary ceramics. Leach's constant reference to the pottery of Sung and T'ang Dynasty China, together with his promotion of Japan as a contemporary nation where his own ideals of pottery came closest to fulfillment, combined to establish a new aesthetic paradigm, that of Anglo Oriental pottery. Therefore, it can be seen that *A Potter's Book* initiated a radical alteration of technique in studio pottery, explicated an aesthetic paradigm, argued for a philosophy of making craft in an industrial age and posited Japan as the contemporary society where ceramics was practised in accordance with the precepts laid out in the text. It was an ambitious book.

Leach's ceramic ideology, as expressed in *A Potter's Book* and other texts, has proved to be controversial. No other writer on ceramics has been critiqued to the same extent, perhaps because no other writer on ceramics offered their opinions so forcefully, so persuasively or so often as Leach. Indeed, one of the difficulties in assessing Leach's contribution as an author is his almost complete dominance of the field. The English commentator, John Houston, has written that:

> As descriptive draughtsman, eclectic potter, and anecdotal commentator he tirelessly illustrated his own pilgrim's progress with the physical gusto of an

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[3] McConnell ibid

> Edwardian explorer. *A Potter's Book* is his credo. If the seven technical chapters are the maps of Leach's progress, then 'Towards a Standard' explains the reasons for setting out on that journey.[4]

This passage raises a salient point that anyone conducting research around Leach's contribution must take into account. Houston's inference that Bernard Leach was an Edwardian is literally true. He was born in Hong Kong in 1887 and his attendance at London art schools between 1903 and 1909 places him at the centre of Empire during the reign of King Edward VII.[5] When *A Potter's Book* was published during the Second World War, Leach was already fifty-three years old. By the time he visited Australia in January, 1962 he was in his mid-seventies. Bernard Leach continued to write books and articles and to communicate his thoughts about pottery to the countless visitors that made their way to his home at St. Ives in Cornwall until his death in 1979, at the age of ninety-three. His last and most personal set of reflections, '*Beyond East & West: Memoirs, Portraits and Essays*'[6], was published in 1978 and it is this very longevity that presents difficulties when assessing Leach's contribution to ceramics. Bernard Leach's life spanned not only cultures but epochs, and many of the opinions and attitudes he later translated into print were formed in a different world to the one in which we now live.

Similarly, Australian society and the crafts movement have undergone many changes since *A Potter's Book* was published in 1940. Education, travel, the economy, technology and aesthetics all impacted on Australian ceramics and Leach's influence must be assessed in the light of these changing circumstances. Therefore, it is not my aim to offer a critique of Leach based on contemporary approaches to ceramics, but instead to situate Leach within the world of Australian craft as it existed following World War II and into the first years of the 1960s.

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[4] Houston, J. *Crafts Classics Since the 1940s* p. 18
[5] King Edward VII reigned from 1901 to 1910.
[6] Leach, B. *Beyond East and West: Memoirs, Portraits and Essays* Faber and Faber 1978

As such, I would characterise this thesis as craft history. Somewhat paradoxically, it is the relative youth of the Australian ceramics movement and the limited scale of the activity during this period that makes such a broad evaluation of the field possible. There were only limited numbers of people involved in ceramics, and the same may be said about relevant publications, teaching institutions and exhibitions of pottery, all of which need to be assessed. This was the time when the framework of the Australian crafts movement was still being built and the relatively small scale of the enterprise allows Leach's presence to be accurately located within the field.[7]

For the purposes of this research, I assert that Leach's presence in Australian ceramics was manifested in two, though not always distinct, ways. One was through the agency of *A Potter's Book* and the other is through diverse forms of personal contact, either direct or indirect, including the one brief visit he made to this country in 1962. To reiterate, given that Leach did not exhibit his pottery in Australia and very few of his pots were seen in this country, the most obvious mechanism through which his influence on ceramic practice might have derived, that of potters coming into contact with his pottery, was diminished as compared with other forms of contact and in particular with the power and of his texts. This thesis will consider all of these modes of transfer and their ramifications for Australian ceramics.

Before moving on to outline the general structure of this thesis, it is necessary to position my self in relation to the topic. I am a potter, as well as being someone who has an interest in tracing the history and theory of ceramics. My father, Milton Moon, is a potter, one of that post war group of practitioners who helped to establish the foundations of contemporary Australian ceramics. He was born in Melbourne in 1926

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[7] see Cochrane, Dr. G. 'Organising for Change: 1964 –1972, *The Crafts Movement in Australia: a History* p. 97 – 143 et al

and began his professional life as a potter in Brisbane around the time of my birth in 1959. As such, I grew up in the milieu of the crafts. Part of my upbringing involved several extended stays overseas, following my father as he studied pottery, first in 1966 when as a recipient of an inaugural Churchill Foundation award he spent a year in North America, England, Europe, Scandinavia and the Middle-East, and then in 1974 when he was awarded a Myer Geijutsu Foundation grant for a years study in Japan. During this time we visited many potters, artists, architects and craftspeople, as well as galleries, museums, factories, studios and workshops.

In 1977 we revisited Japan and then travelled on to England, during which time I met Bernard Leach. The English art historian Edward Lucie Smith, in his book *World of the Makers*[8], describes interviewing Leach in 1975 in his apartment overlooking the ocean at St. Ives where he listened to him speak seriously, passionately and volubly about ceramics, art, craft and more. My memories of Bernard Leach are of an old man, rather blind, sitting in a sunlit upstairs room, surrounded by the pots he collected over a lifetime. Despite his failing eyesight and advanced years he was alert, engaging and impressive and I came away from the experience knowing I had been in the presence of someone of considerable authority and yet humanity, a highly subjective impression which remains clear to this day. Nonetheless, it took another several decades for me to read Leach and there certainly was no sense of a continuing fascination with his philosophy or his ceramics. By the late 1990s when I began to seriously study Leach's books, his influence had waned amongst the ceramics community. Always a controversial figure, his status had gone from being that of a ceramic demigod supported by a band of respectful followers, to being

[8] Lucie-Smith, E. *World of the Makers* Paddington Press Ltd. 1975

openly reviled by some [9] and discounted as irrelevant by others. This has, however, led to a useful period of critiquing Leach's work and of reevaluating the Leach legacy. I therefore offer this thesis as research which has a certain currency and which breaks new ground in situating Leach within the ongoing history of Australian ceramics.

[9] An example of the kind of virulent attack on Leach's credibility that came to be mounted can be found in John Britt's web-article 'The Unknown Craftsman is Dead'. http://www.criticalceramics.org/articles/unknown.htm accessed 1 August 2006

Literature and Interviews

Literature

As previously stated, I am unaware of any substantial Australian work dedicated to the topic of Leach's relationship to this formative stage of Australian pottery. Although several books and articles encompass aspects of the development of Australian pottery in the post-war years,[10] I am only aware of one doctoral thesis, Dr. Grace Cochrane's *Truth or Trap: the Australian contemporary crafts movement's pursuit of art ideals,*[11] which considers this period in any detail, and then only as a small part of the Australian crafts movement in its entirety.

Given this, very few of the texts I call on are academic in nature, and a separate chapter where the published findings of other academic papers are interrogated in the light of my own research would be inappropriate. However, a limited number of academic works have been particularly helpful. I have already noted the thesis by Dr. Grace Cochrane,[12] and without this critical analysis of the history of the Australian Crafts Movement and the companion text, Cochrane's 1992 *the Crafts Movement in Australia: a History*[13], this research would have been considerably more difficult. In her thesis, Cochrane states that: '... the most important eventual influence on the crafts in the postwar years was that of British potter, Bernard Leach'.[14] She gives an overview of his formative period in Japan between 1909 and 1920, his relationship to the Mingei Movement and the philosophical and aesthetic influences that shaped his

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[10] Dr. Grace Cochrane gained her PhD from the University of Tasmania in 1999 with her thesis *Truth or Trap: the Australian contemporary crafts movement's pursuit of art ideals* in which she examines aspects of Australian ceramics in the post-war years. Similar issues are explored in her 1992 *The Crafts Movement in Australia: a History*. See Cochrane, G. *The Crafts Movement in Australia* chapter 3, et al.

[11] ibid

[12] ibid

[13] Cochrane, G. *The Crafts Movement in Australia: a History* New South Wales University Press 1992

[14] Cochrane, G. op. cit. p. 61

approach to pottery.[15] Similarly, Cochrane's book on the history of the Australian Crafts Movement cites Leach on various occasions[16] in regards to his influence on, and connections to, Australian ceramics, but although informative these instances are not substantial, again occupying approximately a thousand words of text. Whereas Cochrane's works are essentially encyclopedic in nature, this thesis focuses on Leach and his relationship to Australian ceramics during a crucial period in its development.

An academic work which has been valuable to my research has been Joanna King's 1982 Masters of Arts degree thesis, *Yanagi Soetsu and the Folk Craft Movement.*[17] In this work, King establishes Leach's role in the development of the Japanese Folk Craft, or Mingei, Movement. King was primarily a student of the Japanese language, thereby having recourse to a wealth of material unavailable to researchers unable to read Japanese. Her work is therefore both authoritative and little known and its value in elucidating this important facet of Leach's life cannot be underestimated. In chapter two of this thesis I deal extensively with Bernard Leach's time in Japan and his relationship to the Mingei Movement, and I refer to King's paper extensively in this part my research.

The overwhelming majority of the texts that I call on are published books and magazines, with the expected addition of web-based materials. I have purposely sought to make extensive use of the material available to the craftspeople working at the time, much of which is in the form of specialised ceramics journals and magazines. These provide a record of the activities of most – although not all – of the main protagonists, and an analysis of the articles they contain paints a revealing

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[15] ibid p. 61, 62
[16] Cochrane, G. *The Crafts Movement in Australia: a History* p. 33, 72, 73, 81, 87, 92, 101, 106, 112, 113, 131 et al
[17] King, J. *Yanagi Soetsu and the Folk Craft Movement* Monash University 1982

picture of the concerns and opinions held by many of the leading figures in Australian craft.

The journal *Pottery in Australia,* first published in 1962 by the Potter's Society of New South Wales, was the only nationally available, Australian based ceramics magazine and it features prominently in this research. It remains the main – often the only - source of articles highlighting the concerns of Australian potters working in the early 1960s that was written contemporaneously with the practice of Australian ceramics. *Pottery in Australia* includes a valuable record of the activities of Australian potters as regards exhibitions, publications, lectures, prizes, travel, awards, acquisitions and materials, the sum of which describes the world of professional pottery at the time. As such, *Pottery in Australia* not only provides a vital source of data but is extensively critiqued within this thesis in the light of the arguments surrounding Leach's influence on Australian pottery, since many of these debates occurred within the pages of this journal. Similarly, the venerable though little known British magazine *Pottery Quarterly* provided a forum for discussion during the 1950s and 1960s, and, despite centering on British pottery, it includes a substantial number of articles of use to this research. The journal *New Zealand Potter* provides insights into New Zealand ceramics and has enabled me to establish hitherto unexplored connections between the worlds of English, Australian, Japanese and New Zealand pottery. The special anniversary publication *10 Years of Pottery in New Zealand,* edited by Helen Mason, expands on material contained in the *New Zealand Potter* and gives a concise overview of the development of pottery in that nation, and as such has been a valuable aid to my research.

At the centre of this thesis is Bernard Leach's 1940 *A Potter's Book* and as such this book and all of Leach's other writings and public utterances have been important to this research. Leach was a prolific author of texts that were often autobiographical,

discursive, polemical and yet thoroughly, often chronologically ordered. This has been of great assistance to me as it must have been to other researchers dealing with Leach's career, in that he situates himself temporally and geographically as well as philosophically. Two of Leach's books are notable in this respect. *Beyond East and West: Memoirs, Portraits and Essays*[18] was published in 1978 and in this book Leach recounts his experiences over the past ninety years of his life. It includes a chronology written by Leach himself (the best kind) and takes the reader from his early days as an art student in London to his final years at St. Ives. Importantly, this book also includes Leach's own brief account of visiting Australia in 1962.

By contrast, *A Potter in Japan* deals exclusively and in exhaustive detail with a period Leach spent in Japan from 1952 – 1954, his third extended period of stay in that country and his first visit to post war Japan. The book is essentially a diary of Leach's experiences and impressions of Japanese life and Japanese craft and in this book it is possible to follow Leach's movements on an almost daily basis. Whereas Leach's memories of his first period of residence in Japan between 1909 and 1920 are purely a matter of history, his descriptions of Japan in the 1950s may be usefully contrasted against the experiences of Australian, American, New Zealand and British potters who began arriving to work in Japan in the late 1950s and early 1960s.

Discussion of these texts leads me to focus on that most famous of Leach's publications, *A Potter's Book*[19]. Published in 1940, *A Potter's Book* should really be considered as two books, because it is in the combination of the two distinct parts that its unique character lies. *A Potter's Book* begins with an 'Introduction: Leach in Japan'[20] written by Leach's long time friend and supporter, the Japanese theorist

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[18] Leach, B. *Beyond East and Wes: Memoirs, Portraits and Essays* Faber and Faber 1978
[19] Leach, B. *A Potter's Book* Faber and Faber 1940
[20] Yanagi, S. 'Introduction in Japan' in Leach, B. op cit pp. xvii - xxi

Soetsu Yanagi. Next is a short 'Preface'[21] by Leach's most famous student, the British potter Michael Cardew an authors preface[22] and 'Acknowledgements'[23]. This is followed by Leach's seminal and controversial essay on the philosophy of craft in 'Towards a Standard'[24] and it is this first section that *A Potter's Book* establishes its unique voice within ceramic literature. Analysis of the qualitative and subjective arguments as presented by Leach in 'Towards a Standard' will be ongoing throughout this thesis.

By contrast, the second section of *A Potter's Book* conforms largely to the pattern of the ceramic literature with which it was contemporaneous, in that it begins with a short historical section and then continues on to canvass the technology and practice of studio pottery. In this respect, the second section of *A Potter's Book* differs from the existing literature only in detail and not in the order or even the type of information it presents, yet these differences in detail were to be of fundamental importance to the studio potter. This second part of Leach's book begins with a chapter 'Raku – English Slipware – Stoneware – Porcelain'[25], and then discusses 'Clays'[26], 'The Making of Clay Shapes'[27], 'Decoration'[28], 'Pigments and Glazes'[29], Kilns[30] and 'The Workshop'[31] finishing with an 'Appendix'[32] and 'Index'.[33]

I have evaluated Leach's book against similar publications – books written by potters for potters which include information on how to make pottery – spanning a period of

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[21] Cardew, M. 'Preface' ibid pp. xxiii - xxiv
[22] Leach, B. 'Authors Preface' ibid pp.xxv - xxvi
[23] Leach, B. 'Acknowledgements' ibid p. xxvii
[24] Leach, B. 'Towards a Standard' ibid pp. 1 - 27
[25] Leach, B. ibid pp. 28 - 42
[26] ibid pp. 43 - 62
[27] ibid pp. 63 - 100
[28] ibid pp. 101 - 126
[29] ibid pp. 127 - 177
[30] ibid pp. 178 - 213
[31] ibid pp. 214 - 283
[32] ibid pp. 261 - 283
[33] ibid pp. 284 – 294.

sixty years, from the 1898 Charles Binns' *The Story of the Potter*[34] to Daniel Rhodes' 1958 book *Clays and Glazes for the Potter*[35] which I assess to be the first publication to match the usefulness of *A Potter's Book* as a technical manual. This research has involved collecting and evaluating over thirty books of this kind, many of which are rare or unobtainable in libraries and have had to be sourced from second-hand and antiquarian book-dealers. Where this literature is known to have been used by Australian potters it appears in the thesis, and the details of all these books are in the bibliography.

In addition *The Report of the International Conference of Craftsmen in Pottery & Textiles* organized by Bernard Leach and held at Dartington Hall, Devon in 1952 provided a valuable resource, which to my knowledge has never been utilised in Australian research. The transcripts of this conference, held by the Leach archive at High Cross House at Dartington, give an intriguing view of the international debates in the craft world at the time. The conference was attended by the Australian potter Ivan McMeekin and the New Zealand potter Helen Mason, demonstrating the complexity and international nature of the influences being brought to bear on Australian craft practice.

Full details of all material consulted during this research appear in the Bibliography.

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[34] Binns, C. F. *The Story of the Potter* George Newnes, Ltd. 1898
[35] Rhodes, D. *Clays and Glazes for the Potter* Sir Isaac Pitman & Sons 1958

Interviews

The second strand of data used in my research has, where possible, come from interviews, correspondence and conversations with Australian potters who were active during my research timeframe. Although my investigations end in 1964 I have been able to gain valuable first-hand accounts of Australian ceramics in the 1950s and 1960s from several practitioners - including Milton Moon, Peter Rushforth and Les Blakebrough – all of whom occupy a prominent position in the history of Australian pottery. Susie McMeekin, as a practitioner and the daughter of the late Ivan McMeekin, has been able to furnish valuable insights into her father's highly influential career. For example, Ivan McMeekin's reluctance to embrace Japanese pottery and culture, at a time when many Australian potters were becoming enamoured by the image of Japan as presented by Leach in *A Potter's Book* and later in *A Potter in Japan,* is a matter that is overlooked in a reading of Australian craft history that conflates all of those who were influenced by Leach with Japan. McMeekin was to pass on his reservations about Japan to his first Australian student, the eminent potter Gwyn Hanssen Pigott (then Gwyn John). Thus, when the Melbourne potter Christopher Sanders states, in his review of Gwyn Hanssen Pigott's 2005 retrospective exhibition at the National Gallery of Victoria, that:

> Pigott shares a similar background with a number of other notable ceramists of her generation, having travelled to Japan in the nineteen-fifties to study what was then seen as the source of fine ceramics.[36]

he is recounting a simplified but commonly held view of Australian ceramic history, while being wrong both in fact and interpretation. Only one Australian potter may have visited Japan in the nineteen-fifties and then at the very close of that decade and it was 1964 until numbers of Australian potters traveled to Japan. In addition

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[36] Sanders, C. http://www.craftculture.org/review/sanders1.htm accessed 25 August 2006

Pigott, in 1957, would have not have been encouraged to visit Japan by her mentor, Ivan McMeekin. That many Australian potters of that generation did travel to Japan is true, and Sanders article presents an accurate picture in general terms, but it is only in assembling a detailed and accurate history that a true impression is gained of Australian ceramics at the time.

A further interview carried out was with the Australian potter Cecily Gibson. In this thesis, I establish that Gibson was the first Australian potter to visit Japan and that both her gender and her length of stay, amounting to approximately three years from the end of 1959 to1963 was unparalleled in the history of the exchanges between Australian and Japanese potters until the 1970s. Gibson is an entirely overlooked figure in Australian ceramic history and this thesis establishes her place at the forefront of a particularly important part of that history. Although knowing of her existence from traces of evidence found in the early literature, her actions in writing an autobiography of her life, including her time in Japan, allowed me to locate her book on the website of a small Canberra publisher and thence to obtain her address. As of 2006 I have been the only researcher to have interviewed Gibson about her experiences.

The American potter Doug Lawrie lived in Japan from 1963 to 1987 during which time he knew many of the Australian potters who visited Japan. Lawrie's voluminous letter recounting his twenty-five years in Japan serves to underline the importance of the 'resident foreigners' to 'visiting foreigners' in facilitating and directing the activities of visitors to Japan. These figures played a very prominent role in the interactions between Australian and Japanese pottery and this thesis establishes this often overlooked facet of Australian ceramic history.

Structure

Although this thesis situates Leach within Australian ceramic practice from the time his book became available in 1940 until 1964, forming an understanding of the background to these events is a vital component of this research. This includes examining the cultural and historical settings that informed the writing of *A Potter's Book* and the Australian environment into which the book arrived. Therefore, the first part of this thesis comprising chapters one, two and three will, in general, deal with events leading up to the date of publication of Leach's book in1940, whereas the second part of the thesis from chapter four to chapter ten will deal with events after 1940. Therefore, this thesis is arranged, to some extent, chronologically. I will now give a brief outline of the content of the chapters that form the body of the text.

Chapter One examines some of the larger issues of theory that frame and inform this research. It introduces the theories associated with the English Arts and Crafts Movement and the reception of Oriental art and ceramics in nineteenth and twentieth century Britain. Interpretations of craft theory are canvassed in both contemporary terms and through examples of the discussions that occurred within Australian ceramics in the early 1960s. The issue of Bernard Leach as a theorist is raised. This leads to a discussion of the contemporary theory of Orientalism and how this reflects and incorporates a historical understanding of the field of Oriental studies. Issues of Post-Colonialism are discussed in relation to Japan.

Chapter Two focuses on Leach's early career. In the first part of this chapter I trace Leach's childhood in the East and his experiences as an art school student in London in the first decade of the twentieth century, during which time he resolved to travel to Japan to pursue a career teaching art. I then move on to examine Leach's life in Japan from 1909 to 1920 during which time he became a potter and formed the

theoretical basis of his practice. The third section of this chapter follows Leach on his return to England in 1920 where he established his pottery at St. Ives at Cornwall and made connections to the Dartington Hall school. The chapter ends on the eve of the publication of *A Potter's Book* in 1940.

Chapter Three shifts the geographic location to Australia in the period prior to 1940. Colonial and early twentieth ceramics are examined as well as the topic of Orientalist aesthetics in nineteenth and early twentieth century Australia. This leads into a discussion of Australian studio pottery prior to 1940. In the second part of the chapter I examine two specific events that occurred in Australia in the first decades of the twentieth century. The first is the formation of the influential Kent collection of Oriental ceramics at the National Gallery of Victoria in the 1930s. The second is the presence in New South Wales of one of the leading Western experts on Japanese art and culture, Professor A. L. Sadler and his role in promulgating an understanding of Japanese art through his activities in Sydney. These two events may be contrasted to reveal how matters of potentially valuable opportunities are subject to the vicissitudes of timing.

Chapter Four serves as an Interregnum between two major sections of the thesis. It serves as an introduction to the post World War II period of Australian ceramics and touches on styles, practitioners, collections and publications.

Chapter Five focuses on the state of Victoria post 1940, contrasting the careers of Harold Hughan, generally acknowledged to be the progenitor of Leach influenced or Anglo Oriental stoneware studio pottery in Australia and the earthenware ceramics of the Boyd's, and particularly the ceramics of David and Hermia Boyd. These two streams represent the opposites of Australian studio pottery in the 1950s and in many ways establish the boundaries within which future developments take place.

Chapter Six concentrates on the figure of the Australian potter Ivan Mc Meekin. The first section of the chapter traces his discovery of Chinese ceramics in China and then in London in the 1940s and his early training in pottery in England in the late 1940s and 1950s. The second sections deals with his return to Australia in the 1950s and the establishment of the Sturt ceramics workshop in New South Wales.

Chapter Seven examines the experiences of Australian potters who studied in England in the late 1950s and early 1960s and how these experiences informed the development of Australian ceramics. The second part of this chapter introduces Japan as a theme by analysing the experiences of the first Australian potter to study ceramics in Japan, Cecily Gibson.

Chapter Eight introduces a discussion of the increasingly complex connections between Australian and international ceramics and examines the previously overlooked role New Zealand played in this history. In the second section of the chapter these and other issues are framed within discussions that occurred in international conferences. The third section posits the role the British potter John Chappell played in Japan in fostering the links between Australia and Japan.

Chapter Nine looks at the parallel development of Australian studio pottery in the smaller states, firstly in Queensland, where a contrast is drawn between two influential practitioners, Milton Moon and Carl McConnell, in their varying responses to the Leach tradition. The second section examines pottery in South Australia where a diversity of practice is revealed and instances of early responses to the Leach tradition are cited.

Chapter Ten begins with a discussion of Bernard Leach's visit to Sydney in 1962. It

then progresses to examine the experiences of a group of Australian potters in Japan in 1963 and their reactions to Japanese ceramics as discussed in the literature of the time. This was the defining year of the burgeoning relationship between Australian and Japanese potters and their responses portray the earliest moments of this history. The second section in this chapter and the final section in the body of the thesis notes the first instance of a Japanese potter visiting Australia in 1964, thus completing the chain of events that underpin the relationship of Bernard Leach, Japan and the development of Australian studio pottery in the period from 1940 to 1964.

Chapter 1: Feet of Clay

> '...the foot is a ringing symbol, here do I touch the earth, on this I stand, my Terminus.'[37]

One of the first things a potter will do after picking up a pot is to turn it over to examine the base or the foot.[38] [Plate 1] The English potter, Bernard Leach, commenting on this in *A Potter's Book*, wrote that:

> It is interesting to see an Oriental pick up a pot for examination, and presently carefully turn it over to look at the clay and the form and the cutting of the foot. He inspects it as carefully as a banker a doubtful signature - in fact, he is looking for the bona-fides of the author.[39]

A foot may serve as a cultural marker. In European traditions a turned foot was often absent, even when a lot of care had gone into other aspects of the work. By contrast, Oriental pottery often rested on a hollow turned foot, and, as an artefact of rice-cultures where the bowl form dominates, this makes perfect sense. If a bowl is to possess a smooth, continuous curve, invariably there will be excess clay between the wheel-head and the base of the pot as it is thrown. After the pot has hardened sufficiently a tool is used to cut away some of this excess clay, leaving a foot. This both removes unnecessary weight and serves an ergonomic purpose, as if a bowl is held in one hand while eating a foot may also act as a handle. This is clearly

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[37] Bernard Leach, quoted Edmund de Waal *Ghosts in the Kiln: the Language of Authentic Pottery* www.ceramicartswa.asn.au/archives/dewaal.html last accessed 18 August 2006

[38] A personal observation based on experience.

[39] Leach, B. *A Potter's Book* p. 23

demonstrated in the performance of *cha-no-yu*[40], the Japanese tea ceremony, when the manipulation of prized *cha-wan*[41] or tea bowl leaves no room for accidents, even given the yielding nature of the *tatami*[42] floor. The hollow-turned foot allows the (minds) eye to transit the uninterrupted curve. According to Roger Fry, the English painter, poet, critic and sometimes potter:

> ... looking at a Sung bowl; we apprehend gradually the shape of the outside contour, the perfect sequence of the curves, and the subtle modification of a certain type of curve which it shows; we also feel the relation of the concave curves of the inside to the outside contour, we realise that the precise thickness of the wall is consistent with the particular kind of matter of which it is made, its appearance of density and resistance; and finally we recognise perhaps how satisfactory for the display of all their plastic qualities are the colour and dull lustre of the glaze...the pot is the expression of the idea in the artist's mind.[43]

Fry, writing in 1919, was expressing an enthusiasm for a type of Chinese pottery that was still not widely known in Europe. Unlike the ornate late-Ming or Qing dynasty Chinese ceramics or Japanese Imari[44], this earlier Chinese pottery of the Sung and T'ang[45] Dynasty relied less on lively decoration and more on simple forms and the

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[40] Literally 'hot water for tea' the term always refers to the 'tea ceremony'. As the Australian poet and long-time resident of Japan, Harold Stewart, observed in the preface to his 1969 book of Japanese haiku *A Chime of Windbells* 'due to vast differences in construction and vocabulary, a word-for-word translation from the Japanese can only be done into pidgin English.' Stewart, H *A Chime of Windbells* Charles E. Tuttle 1969 p. 10

[41] Tea bowl.

[42] Woven straw matting.

[43] Fry, R. in Grey, B. 'The Development of Taste in Chinese Art in the West 1872 to 1972' *Transactions of the Oriental Ceramic Society 1971 – 1972, 1972 – 1973* No. 39 Oriental Ceramic Society 1974 p. 26, 27

[44] Arita and Imari are both terms describing a type of highly decorated, Japanese porcelain that was widely exported to Western markets, especially throughout the 18th and 19th centuries. Arita refers to the name of the town on the Japanese island of Kyushu around which early production was centred, and Imari is the name of the nearby port from where it was exported. Also see *World Ceramics* Charleston, R. J. ed., p. 65 – 68 et al

[45] The T'ang Dynasty (North and South China) lasted from 618 to 906 AD. The combined Sung dynasties of North and South China spanned the years 960 to 1279 AD, with the interregnum

beauty of monochrome glazes. [Plates 2 & 3] Making its mark on a limited but influential group of curators (or 'keepers' as they were known then) collectors, artists, critics and craftspeople, the appreciation of these ceramics can be seen as the extension of a generalised nineteenth century interest in the Orient.[46]

This curiosity about Oriental ceramics, lacquer, woodblock prints, furniture and fabrics, contributed to the fashion of Japonisme[47] that swept through European society, impacting on architecture, the decorative and fine arts. These enthusiasms were even manifested in far-flung corners of the world, with many Australians expressing great interest in Japanese *object d'art* while simultaneously regarding their originating cultures with suspicion.[48] In London, Paris, Boston, and, by the 1930s in Melbourne, influential collections of Oriental ceramics were assembled in museums. Scholarship continued to grow, as Western countries engaged more and more with Asia and the long history of Oriental ceramics began to be seen in its entirety. The complexities of the North-Asian ceramic tradition[49] began to be understood as China was separated from Japan and Korea from the both. Basil Grey, in his George de Menasce lecture to the Oriental Ceramic Society[50], points out

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between the two from 907 to 960 being known as the Five Dynasties period. Following the Sung Dynasty was the Jin from 1115 to 1234 AD and the Yuan from 1279 to 1368. The Ming Dynasty lasted from 1368 to 1644 and is divided into the reigns of fifteen emperors. The Quing Dynasty which followed lasted from 1644 to 1911, at which point Republican, and then People's Republican Chinese history begins. From Woods, N *Chinese Glazes* Craftsman House 1999 p. 272

[46] See Chapter One this thesis for a discussion of Orientalism.

[47] See Lucie-Smith, E. *The Story of Craft: the Craftsman's Role in Society* Phaidon Press 1981 p. 217, 224, 225, 241.

[48] For a generalised discussion of Orientalism in an Australian context see Broinowski, A *The Yellow Lad: Australian Impressions of Asia* Oxford University Press 1992

[49] This is a term I have constructed to describe the Chinese ceramic tradition and its derivatives in China, Korea and Japan. It is also possible to speak of certain South East Asian ceramic traditions as deriving from this source.

[50] Grey, B 'The development of taste in Chinese Art in the West 1872 – 1972' *Transactions of the Oriental Ceramic Society1971 – 1973* Vol. 9 pp. 19 - 41

that before 1914 Chinese art was rarely considered independently of Japanese art[51], although some scholars had already discerned important differences in the ware of these three nations. The unparalleled scope of Chinese trade ceramics was more fully appreciated with fine and early examples of Chinese pottery being discovered in Southern Asia and throughout the Muslim world. A new chapter was being written into the long history of the cultural interchange between East and West and ceramics was at the forefront of this dialogue.

At the same time, around the end of the nineteenth and the early twentieth century another cultural shift was taking place. Felt throughout the Western world, but perhaps most particularly in England, the Arts and Crafts movement, with its emphasis on the haptic and a general dislike for industrial processes, found resonance with artists and intellectuals who championed the qualitative, philosophical and even spiritual worth of traditional crafts. Building on the momentum generated in the mid 1800s by protagonists like the English architect A.W.N. Pugin, John Ruskin, William Morris and others would elucidate a parting of the ways, where one road led to industrial design and the other to the craft movement as we know it today.[52] Ruskin's arguments, as set forth in his treatise *The Stones of Venice*[53], echoed down the years, influencing generations of craftspeople. His three rules for craft were as follows.

1. Never encourage the manufacture of any article not absolutely necessary, in the production of which Invention has no share.

2. Never demand an exact finish for its own sake, but only for some practical or

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[51] ibid p.21
[52] Lucie-Smith, E *The Story of Craft* et al
[53] John Ruskin's treatise on the architecture of Venice was first published in three volumes between 1851 and 1853. Ruskin, J. *The Stones of Venice* Vol's I, II & III Da Capo Press 1985

noble end.

3. Never encourage imitation or copying of any kind, except for the sake of preserving records of great works of art.[54]

It is easy to see how this philosophy was at odds with industrial processes. Almost a hundred years later, Bernard Leach, in his essay 'Towards a Standard'[55], was voicing many of the same concerns regarding the place of craft in an industrial age. Machines, he argued, might make things more quickly, cheaply and accurately, but what they made was not necessarily better than the product of traditional craft.[56] There was a danger that in an industrial setting where 'designing' and 'making' were sundered, human values would be lost.

> The distinction between them [designing and making] lies in the relegation of the actual making not merely to other hands but to power-driven machines. ... the artist-craftsman (sic), since the days of William Morris, has been the chief means of defense against the materialism of industry and its insensibility to beauty. ... the work of the individual potter or artist-potter ... belongs to one aesthetic category, and the finished result of ... mass production, to another and quite different category.[57]

In promoting these ideals the language of craft moved away from the notion of trade or industry and closer to art. Some crafts flourished in this environment while others fell by the wayside, but few continued on unchanged. Of these crafts, ceramics survived and then prospered, and with these changes in status a new practitioner was born, the studio potter. Neither factory owner or factory worker or traditional

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[54] Lucie-Smith op. cit p. 209
[55] Leach, B. 'Towards a Standard' *A Potter's Book* 1940 pp. 1 - 27
[56] ibid p. 2,3
[57] Leach, B. *A Potter's Book* p. 1,2

village potter, this new craftsperson was 'by force of circumstances'[58] an 'artist-craftsman'[59], using clay to make worthy artifacts on the perimeters of art. Operating in a territory bordered by the fine arts, industry and the trades, the new craftsperson followed an agenda almost entirely of their own invention.

A strategy adopted in the process of defining the modern crafts, one that has particular resonance in the history of pottery, involved referring to international or extra-cultural models. Some of the most persuasive arguments of the modern crafts movement were arrived at in this fashion, often with little regard for the important differences in history and identity that defines and separates nations. Japan, due in no to small measure to Leach's influence, became the focus of much attention, an entire nation posited as an example of ceramic rectitude. This confluence of two powerful streams, a growing awareness of Oriental aesthetics and the emergence of the modern crafts movement, would have great ramifications for the future of ceramics in Australia.

That the rise of the studio potter occurred in large and powerful nations, with the necessary time, money, leisure and the requisite curiosity to reconfigure tradition for the sake of change is not surprising. In order to demonstrate this fact one need look no further than China, where, despite a legacy of extraordinary achievement in the field of ceramics, history dictated that the individual artisan had very limited scope for personal advancement. In many ways this exactly mirrors the situation in pre-industrial Europe, where outside of guilds and patronage the individual craftsperson was the exception rather than the rule.

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[58] ibid
[59] ibid

In the West and in countries like Japan the great changes wrought by industrialisation meant that the scope for individual rather than collective action tended to increase over time. At the same time, the truly hand-made object was fast becoming a rarity, replaced by an ever increasing variety of industrially produced goods offered to the general public at decreasing prices. Through these technological advances and economic pressures the supply of hand-made objects diminished and the bulk of consumer needs were met by industry. Handcrafted objects began to be seen as specialist rather than consumer goods. The crafts were less a continuation of a living tradition – Leach's 'necessary pots'[60] - instead becoming identified with the fine arts, insofar as the structures associated with the production and consumption of hand made pottery were often similar and sometimes identical to those surrounding the fine arts. Often produced within a rural environment, pottery was generally dependant on the city for support. In this environment, craft, as both an activity and as a description of the objects derived from that activity, was seen as a nostalgic, even picturesque pastime, where the hand-made object offered the promise of function mingled with sentimentality. In an urban context, the same genre of objects might find themselves exhibited as art, or considered within the context of interior design. Depending on the object and the setting, pottery spanned the range from art to kitsch, from city apartment to country cottage, from the fashionable gallery to the 'Olde Worlde' craft shop.

Australia took most of its queues in this enterprise from England. Culture disembarked at Circular Quay and if America, France or Japan had nascent craft movements in the early 20th century, the effect on this country was negligible. Part of

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[60] Leach, B. quoted de Waal, E. *Bernard Leach: St. Ives Artists* p. 43

our national story tells how this situation began to alter after the Second World War and it is here, in the immediate post-war period and on into the 1960s, the time-frame is established for this thesis. A combination of diverse factors such as the imposition of post-war import restrictions, easier foreign travel, growing affluence and increasing amounts of leisure-time all played a part in the growth of the Australian crafts movement. If it is true to say that similar movements only occurred in countries with large and established middle-classes, then post-war Australia provided an ideal setting for the growth of such a movement. Into this fertile ground a seed was dropped, one that was to rapidly grow into the studio pottery movement.

1.2 Bernard Leach and Craft Theory

As recently as 2000, Suzi Attiwill, in her essay *Craft Theory*,[61] noted that 'the practice of craft theory in Australia has a relatively short history. She quotes David Walker, who in 1992 wrote that Australian craft theory is:

> ... almost virgin territory where only a few have made tentative excursions around the peripheral shores, and even fewer have penetrated into the interior. The maps drawn have scarcely been taken up by any followers and this has prompted official recognition of the need to stimulate action in the area of craft writing.[62]

Attiwill goes on to state that the impetus behind the call for craft theory in the early nineties:

> ... had to do with the inclusion of craft within a cultural context not only as an object or product but as part of the critical knowledge of a culture. Up until the nineties writing on craft was mainly informational or promotional - and was either biographical or descriptive of techniques or media. The focus was mainly on the object and the maker.[63]

The word 'mainly' is key here, because there were earlier writers with an interest in the crafts who looked beyond what Attiwill succinctly describes as the informational and promotional, to question the relevance of craft practice in articles that often were both challenging and widely read. In Australia and elsewhere, many of these theoretical debates included consideration of the role of the crafts in education. Some commentators posed challenging questions regarding the role of craft in modern

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[61] Attiwill, S 'Craft Theory' *Artlink* Vol 20 No. 3 pp. 33 - 36
[62] ibid p. 34
[63] ibid

society. The Sydney-based architect, Tom Heath, began his review of the 1962 Sturt Workshops annual ceramics exhibition in New South Wales by writing:

> It is by no means ridiculous to ask whether the crafts have any real place in society today, whether they are not, like heraldry and the upper houses of parliament, a vestigial appendix-like remnant of a once vital function.[64]

He goes on to mention William Morris and the Bauhaus, before concluding that the crafts did indeed have a real value in education, offering as they did:

> ... a more gradual introduction to the mysteries of significant form than either the dusty disciplines of academic draftmanship or the rudderless "free for all" of expressive painting.[65]

Reading the issue of *Pottery in Australia* in which Heath's review appears offers an interesting perspective on what constituted craft commentary at the time. In her editorial to this second issue of what would become Australia's longest running craft magazine, the potter Wanda Garnsey speaks of the need to balance the technical with the aesthetic, the local with the international, extending the magazines contribution beyond 'our own small but vital Potters' Society'.[66]

Following Garnesey's editorial, the magazine begins with a technical article by the potter Ivan Englund titled 'The Bumbo Latite; a useful igneous rock for potters'[67], in which Englund discusses the merits of using this locally available rock to construct

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[64] Heath, T 'Sturt Workshops Annual Exhibition' *Pottery in Australia* Vol 2 No. 1 p. 10
[65] ibid
[66] Garnsey, W. 'Editorial' *Pottery in Australia* Vol. 2 No. 1 p.1
[67] Englund, I. 'The Bumboo Latite: a useful igneous rock for potters' *Pottery in Australia* Vol. 2 no. 1 p. 2

stoneware glazes. There are some geological notes, chemical analyses, glaze calculations according to the Seger method[68] and recipes for glazes suitable for both raw and bisque application. Information of this kind was not readily available in Australia in 1963 and articles such as Englund's provided an invaluable fund of knowledge for those potters who noted Leach's comments regarding the superiority of unrefined materials and wished to employ local or 'natural' materials in their work. Ivan Englund made a significant contribution to the understanding of the ways in these materials could be used by Australian potters. In 1962 he was awarded the Fellowship of the East Sydney Technical College for a thesis titled 'The Application of the Igneous Rocks of the Illawarra Region to Stoneware Glazes in Studio Pottery'[69], and this research eventually led him to publish a book on this subject in 1983.[70]

The next article in the magazine is by Mei Chien-Ying of the Ceramic Department, Central Academy of Industrial and Handicraft Arts in Peking (Beijing), 'Pottery in the New Stone Age of China.'[71] The tenor of this article is archaeological and its inclusion stems from a meeting between Wanda Garnsey and Chien-Ying in Beijing in April 1962. From the beginning, *Pottery in Australia* offered a forum to publish on various traditional ceramic traditions. Within a short period articles on Chinese, Japanese, Persian, American, English, New Zealand, English, Melanesian, African, New Guinea and Thai pottery were published, mostly authored by Australian potters or ceramic researchers visiting the countries concerned.

Following Heath's review of the Sturt exhibition is an article by the potter Ian Sprague

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[68] A method of glaze calculation named after its inventor, Hermann Seger.
[69] Englund, I. *The Application of the Igneous Rocks of the Illawarra Region to Stoneware Glazes in Studio Pottery* Post-graduate thesis, National Art School, Sydney 1962
[70] Englund, I. *Rock Glazes* privately published 1983
[71] Chien-Ying, M 'Pottery in the New Stone Age of China' *Pottery in Australia* Vol. 2 No. 1 p. 7

titled 'A Day at Mashiko'.[72] Sprague's article may be thought of as representing a sub-genre in the reports furnished by Australian potters travelling overseas, describing the Japanese study-tour.[73] Sprague's account of visiting Mashiko and of meeting with Bernard Leach's long time collaborator Shoji Hamada describes an experience amounting to one of a pilgrimage for many Australian potters. In the first four issues of *Pottery in Australia*, spanning the years 1962 to 1963, Ivan Englund, Peter Rushforth, Les Blakebrough, Cecily Gibson, Robert Hughan and Ian Sprague all wrote articles about traveling in Japan.[74] In addition, there were reports covering many other aspects of Japanese pottery and of the visits by Japanese potters to Australia. The combined numbers of these articles far outweighed any other international focus. This is clearly demonstrated in the October 1963 number of *Pottery in Australia* Vol. 2 No. 2[75], which I term 'the Japan issue'. It is worthwhile quoting Wanda Garnsey's editorial in full, as it is clearly demonstrates both the importance of Japan to Australian potters and the pivotal role of Bernard Leach in promulgating the idea of Japan as a 'ceramic culture'. Garnsey also echoes Leach's sentiments regarding the benefits to be gained by an increasing interaction between East and West points key to the reception of Leach in Australia. She writes:

> In this issue emphasis is on the work of Japanese potters. Their problems may parallel the dilemma facing most artist potters in Australia today. Here, we live with no real roots of tradition but our English heritage, we live in a Western civilisation which inevitably has to make closer contacts with its neighbours in

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[72] Sprague, I. 'A Day at Mashiko' *Pottery in Australia* Vol. 2 No. 1 p. 13

[73] see chapter 10 in this thesis for an analysis of articles written by Australian potters describing their experiences in Japan.

[74] Sprague, I. 'A Day at Mashiko' Vol. 2 No. 1, May 1963 p. 13; Englund, I. 'Does Tradition help?' Vol. 2 No. 2, October 1963 p. 2; Rushforth, P. 'Impressions of Folk Art and Mashiko' Vol. 2 No. 2, October 1963, p. 9; Blakebrough, L. 'Onda' Vol. 2 No. 2, October 1963 p. 11; Gibson, C. 'Bisen Yaki of Imbe' Vol. 2 No. 2, October 1963, p. 14; Ghughan, R. R. 'A Visit to the Government Industrial Research Institute at Nagoya' Vol. 2 No. 2, October 1963, p. 15; Higgs, J. 'Impressions' Vol. 2 No. 2, October 1963 p. 28.

[75] *Pottery in Australia* Vol. 2 No. 2 Potter's Association of New South Wales 1962

the orient.

> The enormous difference in outlook in East and West - personal, economic and artistic - presents a challenge to our understanding and our expansion. This challenge has been partly met by Western potters who have spent some time in Japan and have accepted these differences, no doubt more readily through the influence of Bernard Leach's philosophy. They have discovered for themselves a point of contact, with a craft as old as man himself.
>
> Japan, not long ago feudal, influenced by China and Korea in its wares and in its art, is now precipitated into part-acceptance of Western attitudes and technology. Her dilemma is how to absorb the Western industrial concept without losing her age -old spiritual values.
>
> By sharing a little of one another's strength, East and West may survive side by side, in art as in all else.[76]

It is apposite to note Garnsey's description of Japan as being a 'point of contact' for Australian potters who have been influenced by Leach's philosophy, but not necessarily by his pottery. In just under two hundred words, Garnsey demonstrates the power of Leach's text and the scope of his vision, as she retraces the territory pioneered by Leach almost point by point. Her comments regarding Japan's dilemma of modernisation - this at a time when Japan was about to become Australia's main trading partner and a world economic leader - the lack of 'roots'[77] to be found in new world countries like America and Australia, are wholesale reiterations of Leach's views, scarcely disguised by the Australian accent.

There were however dissenting Australian voices. One such opinion is expressed in an article titled 'Pottery - a Personal View',[78] written by the Queensland potter Milton Moon. Like Englund, Garnsey and many others who wrote for the early issues of *Pottery in Australia,* Moon was involved in ceramics education as a Senior Instructor

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[76] Garnesy, W 'Editorial' *Pottery in Australia* Vol. 2 No. 2 p. 1
[77] see Chapter 8 for a discussion of the concept of 'roots' within Leach's philosophy.
[78] Moon, M. 'Pottery: a Personal View' *Pottery in Australia* Vol. 2 No. 1 p. 25

at the Central Technical College in Brisbane.[79] Moon's article is both wide-ranging and polemical, augmenting Heath's challenge to craft orthodoxies. He begins by citing Leach's famous essay 'Towards a Standard',[80] together with an article written as a response to Leach's essay by Paul Brown, published in the English journal *Ceramic Quarterly,* titled 'Towards a New Standard'[81], and then, in a subsequent edition of the same journal, Leach's response to Brown.[82] Taking this exchange as a starting point, Moon draws on examples from both the fine-arts and pottery, arguing that the mere repetition of pre-existing models, whilst sometimes admirable in terms of the skill involved or necessary from a commercial point of view, can 'hardly be called a creative work'[83], citing the example of potters who follow Leach's dictums too literally by copying Sung or T'ang pottery. Moon reinforces his point by quoting the Australian art critic Robert Hughes, who in an typically pithy aside aimed squarely at the Anglo Oriental school of studio pottery, parodied a popular song-title with the quip 'I think I've seen that Sung before.'[84] Moon's article refers to the debates surrounding Leach taking place in overseas publications and contributes an Australian perspective.

The final article, 'Teaching Pottery in Australian Schools',[85] is jointly contributed by Gillian Grigg and Mollie Douglas. In the article Grigg outlines the advantages of slip-trailing as a decorative technique suited to ceramics programs in schools and Douglas explains what is involved in firing an electric kiln. Changes over time in

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[79] see Chapter 9 for discussion of Moon
[80] Leach, B. 'Towards a Standard' *A Potter's Book* p. 1 - 27
[81] Brown, P 'Towards a New Standard' *Pottery Quarterly* Vol. 6 No. 23 p. 79
[82] Leach, B. 'In reply to Paul Brown' *Pottery Quarterly* Vol. 6 No. 24 p. 121
[83] Moon, M. ibid
[84] ibid
[85] Grigg, G and Douglas, M. 'Teaching Pottery in Australian Schools' *Pottery in Australia* Vol. 2 No. 1 p. 28 - 33

health and safety issues are starkly demonstrated by noting that while Grigg does make mention of the poisonous nature of lead, recipes using lead are included in an article designed for schools.[86] She finishes with the statement that:

> Homely slipware is not to everybody's taste, but it is great fun and invites experiment, and, above all, is a sound basis for learning the essentials of good potting.[87]

Slipware, of the type that had once been common in English country potteries but which had almost died out by the 20th century , was written about by Leach as being a tradition worthy of emulation, an English equivalent to Japanese folk-craft pottery. Because of Leach's dislike for industrial pottery much of the technical information included in *A Potter's Book* pertaining to the production of low-fired ware, was, while being of historical interest, quite unsuitable for contemporary use. His glazes were also primarily based on raw lead compounds, at first galena[88] and then litharge[89], a practice which had long been phased out of industry due to the health risks posed by the use of these materials for both the potters and end-users of the product.

The magazine ends with the 'Exhibitions and Lectures' listing, a feature which *Pottery in Australia* included from the very beginning and which remains as useful a resource to the contemporary researcher as it no doubt was to potters of the day. It includes twenty-three mentions of acquisitions, exhibitions, lectures, commissions, travel and related matters of interest to the Australian ceramic community.

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[86] An alternative, though more expensive approach, would be to use commercial 'frits', essentially pre-fired and re-ground glazes formulated to strict standards in accordance with safety regulations, as the basis for these low-temperature glazes.
[87] Grigg, G ibid
[88] Lead sulphide
[89] Lead monoxide

This overview of a magazine situated at the very centre of Australian studio pottery offers a view of the debates occurring in craft circles at the time. There are articles that are informational and promotional as well as material that offers unexpected challenges to orthodoxies, including those seen to be associated with Leach. It also highlights the problems encountered by commentators who, when giving an overview of Australian ceramics, fail to identify the plethora of approaches taken by different potters. An example is this entry by the ceramic historian Dr. Noris Ioannou, when he writes:

> 1950s: Leach Anglo-Oriental influence inspires and dominates in [the] ensuing explosion of studio pottery. Functional stonewares dominated by an oriental aesthetic based on natural qualities of ceramic materials and subjugation of self. A few of the potters prominent early in the movement include: Peter Rushforth, Reg Preston, Eileen Keys, Les Blakebrough, Col Levy, Alex Leckie, Carl McConnell, Milton Moon and Ivan McMeekin ...[90]

While it may be reasonable to categorise 'studio pottery' as being dominated by the Anglo-Oriental aesthetic, any attempts at self-subjugation must be seen from a contemporary perspective to have been failures, given the readily identifiable oeuvre of those potters identified by Ioannou. It should also be noted that the popularity and commercial viability of earthenware was far from over, with some potters simultaneously making both types of work. It is also true that rather than there being a neat divide between earthenware potters and those that chose to follow the path of Leach-derived (inspired) stoneware, by the early 1960s the range of work made by Australian potters spanned the range of techniques and styles. Nonetheless, the simplicity of a historical view based around a well-defined earthenware/stoneware divide, whilst being difficult to prove when considering the work of Australian potters

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[90] Ioannou, N. '200 Years of Clay Culture - a Ceramic Chronology of Australia: 1788 - 1988'

as whole, did have a firm basis in the opinions expressed by certain makers, many of whom were affiliated with the Potter's Society of New South Wales. Milton Moon, speaking about his 1962 exhibition at Rudy Komon's Sydney gallery, recalls that:

> It wasn't only the technical aspects of the glazes that caused irritation, it was the seeming impertinence of defying 'tradition'. ... according to some of those who held court at the time, in the tight Sydney craft-community. ... I didn't share their sources of inspiration which came from the pots of the Orient, particularly China and Japan, or to an English fusion of these influences which had come via Bernard Leach and his peers. Of course, at that time Bernard Leach was the only 'god' they knew, and whatever he said, or wrote, was akin to holy catechism.[91]

[91] Moon, M. *The Human Art, The Useful Art* unpublished memoirs p. 60, 61

Leach the Theorist

Much of the impact of Bernard Leach's most influential publication, *A Potter's Book,* lies in the fact that it was a powerful and effective theoretical text. No historical treatise, collection of glaze recipes or philosophical tract alone could have had a comparable effect. *A Potter's Book* was more than the sum of its parts.

Edmund De Waal, citing concerns expressed by the American academic Henry Bergen to Leach during the writing of *A Potter's Book*, states that 'Leach the writer has profoundly muddled up the art-historical, the social theory, the purely aesthetic, to end up with the polemic.' [92] This comment, meant as a criticism, neatly describes a text that draws on several discourses to assemble a theory. It also reveals a weakness in de Waal's critiques of Leach. De Waal's deconstruction of Leach and his identification of the numerous inconsistencies which accrued during Leach's long and public career belie the fact that Leach's strength – not a subject de Waal dwells on - lay in his ability to combine theory, practice and belief rather than in his particular skills in any one of these areas. *A Potter's Book* may indeed have been polemical, in that it was discursive and challenged the 'orthodoxy' of its time, and there is no doubt that Leach wrote passionately about pottery and presented his opinions as facts, however these qualities do not automatically render theory into cant, just as they do not diminish the seriousness of the ideas expressed.

Theory is that which surrounds and informs a practice and it has adopted different guises at different times because its constituent parts are not fixed. Theory utilises discourses, and what helps identify *A Potter's Book* as a complex theoretical text is

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[92] de Waal, E. *Ghosts in the Kiln; the Language of Authentic Pottery* http://www.ceramicartswa.asn.au/ accessed June 2003

its multi-discoursal character. Drawing on the discourses of art history, social theory, aesthetics, cross-cultural studies and an intimate knowledge of technique, Leach presents a powerful theory of studio pottery.

Grace Cochrane has expressed a desire to develop a specific discourse of craft, because craft is often seen to be interpreted through second-hand discourses, borrowed mostly from art. (This is a point of some resentment, and underpins much of the art/craft debate, which has been with us so long it may be a discourse). Art is seen to have its own language, whereas craft does not.

> We have been asking for a new terminology through which to address objects that are functional, ceremonial, decorative or ornamental - as well as those that might be termed personally expressive. In fact, what we have been doing is asking for a retrieval of the language that was displaced in the wake of art ideas. We have been reacting against the value and meaning being defined by art and literary language and need instead to work with the terms that directly apply to crafts and design histories.[93]

Here, Cochrane calls for a special craft based discourse, inclusive enough to span all crafts yet specific enough to be craft centred. However, Norris Ioannou writes there that already exist:

> ... subjective and/or spontaneous narratives exploring the links between memory and craft artefacts; semiotic analyses of the significance of craft in urban settings; ethnographic accounts of contemporary makers and their contexts; comparative exhibition commentaries; aesthetic discourse, art-historical analyses; objective and descriptive discourse, sometimes technical, of the processes of craft production and its infrastructures; qualitative studies of the social contexts and systems of operations of craftspeople; historical narratives and overviews; cross-cultural studies; ideological manifestos; and so

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[93] Cochrane, G. from *Craft and Contemporary Theory* edited Rowley, S Allen and Unwin 1997 p. 56

on ...[94]

This variety of approaches would seem to offer more than enough choice, however it is possible to make still further suggestions. According to Paul Carter:

> It has sometimes occurred to me that craft's intermediate role in negotiating a place for us in the environment is overlooked not simply because of [the] hegemony of the eye ... but because of our ignorance of poses, our cultural indifference to the importance in human communication of what Laban called choreutics or, broadly, the language of poses ... Craft mediates between ourselves and our surroundings; ... attempts to monumentalise ...or aestheticise it [craft] ... miss these facts.[95]

Or, finally, as Octavio Paz writes in his essay 'Seeing and Using; Art and Craftsmanship':

> Craftsmanship is a mediation; its forms are not governed by the economy of function but by pleasure ... Made *by* hand, the craft object bears the fingerprints, real or metaphorical, of the person who fashioned it. ... Made by hand, the craft object is made *for* hands. Not only can we see it; we can also finger it, feel it. We see the work of art but we do not touch it.[96]

This last method of situating craft might be termed a haptic discourse. Whereas painting is apprehended solely by eye, craft - handicraft - constantly refers to the hand. Not solely to the specifics of fabrication or material, or the suggestion of utility,

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[94] Ioannou, N. 'After the Art/Craft Debate: critical writing into the 1990s' *Artlink* Vol. 12 No. 2, 1992 p. 28

[95] Carter, P 'Peculiar to the Night; the Knowledge of Craft' *Knowledge Makers* Craft Victoria 1997, p. 11, 19

[96] Paz, O 'Seeing and Using: Art and Craftsmanship' *Convergences: Essays on Art and Literature* Bloomsbury 1987 p. 58, 59

but a combination of all these qualities.

The history of craft theory may be seen as being the logical outcome of a time in which craft was rapidly evolving, trying to keep its place in a world where other, non-craft technologies had in large measure done away with the very necessity of craft. Yet, throughout the ages craft represented practices and technologies contemporaneous with its manufacture, just as modern industrially produced wares represented the technical capacities and economic realities of the modern world. At one time there was no craft and industry, as craft was industry. However, in the twentieth century craft became an anachronism, albeit with specialized exemptions for which no industrial alternative to the hand-made object was available, or where the industrial alternative was seen as being aesthetically or functionally inferior.[97] In England and Australia the notion of quality in ceramics was firmly associated with the products of the great manufactories of Wedgwood, Minton or Spode. Hand-made pottery was considered to be crude and rudimentary and for a typical article of twentieth century studio pottery to suddenly appear within an industrial culture was akin to the root stock reasserting itself from the base of a rose. To quote Edmund De Waal, it was the 'ghost in our kiln'.[98]

The Arts and Crafts

Bernard Leach's project is often seen as a logical extension of the British Arts and Crafts Movement and it is true that many of his ideals were similar to those expressed by the original theorists associated with that movement, embodying resistance to industry, truth to materials and the democratisation of craft practices. As

[97] The luthiers craft is a good example of this.
[98] de Waal op cit

Edward Lucie-Smith notes:

> Mackmurdo, for example, founded the Century Guild in order to 'restore building, decoration, glass-painting, pottery, wood-carving and metal to their rightful place besides painting and sculpture'.[99]

A hundred years later, John Houston expands on this notion in his introduction to *Craft Classics*, when he writes of Leach and his role in:

> ... inventing a tradition: a consciously developed hybrid of pre-industrial substance and post-industrial sensibility ... (which) ... lent the movement social, as well as aesthetic conviction. ... As industrial design became the new crafts ... the hybrid artist-craftspeople scattered in their separate searches for the new authority of their own traditions, their own aesthetics. [100]

This is an argument which sees the Crafts movement as arising directly from the Arts and Crafts movement and which attributes the arrival of studio pottery, together with all the other modern crafts, to the fragmentation of a more cohesive and unified vision. Its philosophical origins are located nineteenth century England though its development continues unabated after the turn of the century. At its core is an ideal regarding the moral and aesthetic value of hand craft and, Leach, reacting against mechanisation in the age of the machine, Leach strikes a defensive pose:

> Factories have practically driven folk-craft out of England; it survives only in out of the way corners even in Europe, and the artist-craftsman, since the day of William Morris, has been the chief means of defense against the materialism of industry and its insensibility to beauty.[101]

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[99] Lucie-Smith, E *The Story of Craft* p. 213
[100] Houston, J 'Introduction' *Craft Classics Since the 1940s* p. 7,8
[101] Leach, B. *A Potter's Book* p.1

Here, Leach clearly demonstrates a fundamental trait of the Arts and Craft Movement, namely the perception of threat. The enemy of craft is the factory; materialistic, brutal and insensible to beauty. Craft has been driven to the point of extinction, barely surviving in remote places. Unable to defend itself, its hopes rest with the artist craftsman, with Morris and, by inference, with Leach himself. Leach's statement, introduced so early into *A Potter's Book*, would seem to indicate his position in no uncertain terms. However, when again referring to Morris and the movement he founded, Leach continues on to say that:

> Beginning in protest against the irresponsible use of power, it came to an end in pseudo-medieval crafts little related to national work and life. Thence has arisen the affirmation of the mechanical age in art - functionalism. This, through let us say, Picasso, le Courbusier and Gropius of the Bauhaus, is having its effect on all crafts.[102]

Leach is making it very clear that as far as he is concerned the Arts and Crafts movement is not only over, but it ended badly. He draws a firm line between his own endeavors and those of Morris and his contemporaries. The only commonality Leach admits to is the legacy of a type of maker, someone who is both artist and craftsperson, someone like himself. Leach's conviction regarding the role of the artist-craftsman grew over time. By 1960, in a letter to his grandson, John Leach, he would write:

> This is the day of the artist-craftsman and not of the journeyman potter. That means that any young person taking up a craft today as a vocation only justifies himself (or herself) by finding something to voice or say. ... Formerly this was

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[102] ibid p. 14, 15

> not the case but today it is. We want from the potter the same sort of quality which we expect from a good author, poet, painter or composer. The journeyman potter's place has been taken by the factory.[103]

This last statement reinforces the point, made in the 'Introduction' to this thesis, regarding the difficulty of assessing Leach's views over a period of approximately seventy years and highlights the importance of evaluating the entirety of Leach's output. In this last section I have sought to demonstrate that Leach, whilst identifying with certain facets of the Arts and Crafts movement, was by the time he wrote *A Potter's Book* careful to delineate himself from this earlier movement.

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[103] Leach, B. 'A Letter to his Grandson' *Craft Classics since the 1940s* p. 71

1.3 Colonialism and Orientalism

At first glance, it would seem that Bernard Leach had impeccable Orientalist credentials. He was born in 1887 into a world of colonial privilege, the son of a barrister in the British Colonial Office in Hong Kong. Following the death of his mother he was sent to live with his grandparents who were missionaries attached to the first Christian University in Japan, the Doshisha University in Kyoto. At the age of four he rejoined his father, who had been appointed a judge in Singapore, then part of the British Colony of Malaya. Leach remained with his father until he was ten, at which time he was sent to complete his education at a Jesuit College. Reflecting on his childhood, Leach would credit his childhood experiences in the East as having shaped his life.[104] In 1909 at the age of twenty-two, Leach returned to Japan where he would spend the next eleven years. He maintained close connections to Japan throughout his life and these associations with Japan fostered his subsequent career. This section will seek to position Leach within the field of Orientalism and colonialism.

As Leela Gandhi points out in her critical introduction to postcolonial theory,[105] although the addition of this discourse to the study of the humanities has generated an enormous body of writing, 'post-colonialism' remains a nebulous term.[106] The

> ... theoretical contestation (over post-colonialism,) manifests itself in an ongoing debate between the competing claims of nationalism and internationalism, strategic essentialism and hybridity, solidarity and dispersal ....'[107]

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[104] Leach first wrote of this in 1928 in his pamphlet *A Potter's Outlook* Leach, B. *A Potter's Outlook* reprinted in *Studio Potter* No. 7 February/March 1994 pp. 54 - 66

[105] Gandhi, L. *Postcolonial Theory: a Critical Introduction* Allen & Unwin 1998

[106] ibid viii

[107] ibid ix

Having noted the somewhat mutable nature of the field, it is possible to characterise the condition of post-colonialism as that which occurs when a state of colonialism is lessened, modified or withdrawn, and the discourse of post-colonialism as being an interpretive tool, through which the effects of colonial influence on the history and development of nations, groups or regions is assessed. [108] This scrutiny should not be entirely in one direction, since the act of colonialism often establishes shared boundaries across which both the colonised and coloniser mingle. This is the notion of hybridity, which suggests a blurring or melding of disparate elements, resulting in new, 'hybrid' forms.[109] Early evidence of this process of cultural osmosis is often manifested in shifts in the way things look or taste or sound and is a phenomenon much evidenced in the field of ceramics. An important mechanism by which hybridity is facilitated is trade, with pottery having been tradeded across cultural and geographic boundaries for thousands of years. Historical developments in ceramic form and technology are an outcome of this process; it is the reason that porcelain is known colloquially as 'China' in the West, but not in China.

A key concept underpinning postcolonial discourse is Orientalism, as elaborated by Edward Said in his influential book of the same name.[110] Gayatri Spivak, in an enthusiastic endorsement of Said's work, wrote in 1993 that 'the study of colonial discourse, directly released by work such as Said's, has ... blossomed into a garden

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[108] Although it is tempting to divide the field into three states, those of pre-colonial, colonial and post-colonial, it is obvious that for many societies these neat categorisations are problematic and not necessarily indicative of reality.

[109] ibid 130 – 131, 135 – 136, 138 - 139

[110] Said, E *Orientalism: Western Conceptions of the Orient* Pantheon 1978

where the marginal can speak and be spoken, even spoken for ...'.[111] Said's concept of Orientalism, expounded in the trilogy of books *Orientalism (1978),*[112] *The Question of Palestine (1979)*[113] and *Covering Islam (1981)*[114], posits and then explores an historically imbalanced relationship between the world of Islam, the Middle East and Asia and that of Europe and America. Said's influence is widely acknowledged,[115] so although the arts are not central to his texts it is not surprising to see his work referred to in contemporary commentaries on the visual arts. An example of this is found in the catalogue to the 1998 Art Gallery of New South Wales exhibition *Orientalism: from Delacroix to Klee*,[116] where the authority mentioned most frequently is not a specialist art historian but Said, a cultural critic whose presence promotes a reading of the works as Orientalist narratives.[117] The influence of Asian ceramics on Western potters could equally be interrogated through a contemporary Orientalist discourse, yet it is in this arena of craft and the decorative arts that basic assumptions of Orientalism become problematic and unstable.

Said's original focus was quite specific:

> Unlike the Americans, the French and the British – less so the Germans, Russians, Spanish, Portuguese, Italians and Swiss – have had a long tradition of what I shall be calling Orientalism, a way of coming to terms with the Orient that is based on the Orient's special place in European Western experience.[118]

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[111] Spivak, G *Outside in the Teaching Machine* Routledge 1993 p 56
[112] see footnote 5
[113] Said, E *The Question of Palestine* Vintage 1980
[114] Said, E *Covering Islam* Knopf 1981
[115] Windshuttle, K 'Edward Said's "Orientalism Revisited"' *The New Criterion* Vol 17 # 5 January 1995 & www.newcriterion.com/archive/17/jan99/said.htm accessed 20 August 2006
[116] Benjamin, R *Orientalism: from Delacroix to Klee* Art Gallery of New South Wales 2002
[117] ibid. also see Benjamin, R *Orientalist Aesthetics: Art, Colonialism and French North Africa 1880 to 1930* University of California Press 2003
[118] Said, E *Orientalism* p.1

It should be emphasised that Said is making a distinction between the history of American attitudes to the Orient, and those of Britain and France, writing: 'Americans will not feel quite the same about the Orient, which for them is much more likely to be associated very differently with the Far East ...'[119], a distinction I would also extend to Australia. He establishes a connection between a contemporary, academic discourse of Orientalism and an older discipline, that of Oriental Studies, a field which gathered momentum in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. An important component of Said's thesis is that this previous scholarship provided the means by which Western expansion was accomplished: 'Colonial rule was justified in advance by Orientalism, rather than after the fact.'[120] Following this logic, the formation of the great collections of Oriental ceramics in institutions like the British Museum and the Museum of South Kensington[121] in London, the Musée Guimet in Paris or the Pergamon Museum in Berlin, together with the body of scholarship that developed around these collections, was all part of a pattern of colonisation. This posits objects as trophies, a useful and highly aesthetic adornment to a composite area of scholarship that included philology, linguistics, ethnography and the interpretation of culture through the recovery, compilation and translation of texts and artefacts. This interest in the Orient naturally extended beyond academia and into the public domain. An example can be seen in the way the Arts and Crafts movement, influenced by contact with the Japanese artefacts housed in museum collections and their national displays in international trade fairs, metamorphosed into the commercially successful 'Aesthetic' or 'Art' style. An exhibition of Japanese applied art had been seen in London as early as 1854 and the

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[119] ibid
[120] Said, E quoted Windshuttle, K *Orientalism Revisited*
[121] Later named the Victoria and Albert Mueum

discovery of Japanese art, in the shape of Hokusai's *Manga* sketchbooks by the French designer Felix Bracquemond, had powerful repercussions on both sides of the channel. [122]

> The 1860s saw the beginning of a powerful new fashion, stimulated by ... interest in Japanese art – Japan itself having been opened to commerce by Commodore Perry's expedition of 1854. All the leading English commercial manufacturers took to Japonisme ...[123]

By the last decade of the nineteenth century, comprehensive exhibitions of Japanese art, often as part of larger International Expositions, had been seen in London (1862), Paris (1867), Dublin (1865), Vienna (1873), Philadelphia (1876) and again in Paris in 1876, 1878 and 1889, by which time Oscar Wilde was declaring: 'the whole of Japan ... a pure invention ...simply a mode of style ... and exquisite fancy of art.'[124]

A scant thirty-six years after the Americans had sent a naval expeditionary force to Japan, that hitherto reclusive nation had become fashionable, providing at first French and then English-speaking critics with a new term, 'Japonisme'. By the turn of the century there was a widespread fascination in all things Japanese with its roots in the artefacts and popular visual culture of the Edo period.[125]

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[122] Ewick, D 'The Emergence of Japan as a Western Text' *themargins.net* 2003 accessed 18 July 2004: also see Gabriel, 'Felix Bracquemond and Japonism' *Art Quarterly#* 32, 1969 p. 57 – 68

[123] Lucie Smith, E *The Story of Craft* Phaidon 1991 p 217

[124] Wilde, O 'The Decay of Lying' 1889 in *De Profundis and Other Writings* Penguin Classics 2006

[125] Gabriel Weisberg contends that the first use of the term 'Japonisme' was in in May 1872 article by the French collector Phillipe Burty *La Renaissance litteraire et artistique*. See Yamada, C, ed 'Philippe Burty and a Critical Assessment of Early "Japonisme"' in *Japonisme in Art: an International Symposium* Kodansha 1980 p. 116

Extending Said's thesis, if the authentic or original artefacts held in museums represented a specialized study of otherness, the appropriation of these Eastern forms, designs, symbols and techniques into art and design was symptomatic of Orientalism. This is not difficult to identify in the fine-arts, as there exists an entire school of nineteenth century Orientalist painting, from Ingres to Gerome, specialising in stereotypical depictions of Oriental subjects, on which the publishers of the 1995 Penguin edition of *Orientalism* drew to select Ludwig Deutsch's painting *A Guard with a Zither Player in an Interior*[126] for the cover of the book. However, a similar Orientalist reading of ceramics is absent and the question remains as to whether the Orientalising reflex, so prominently on display in nineteenth century painting, is similarly present in the ubiquitous 'willow-pattern' crockery or in twentieth century studio pottery, with its wholesale and unrelenting borrowings from Asian traditions. [Plate 4]

Leach's initial contacts with Japan may be seen to follow a well-established pattern of European cultural appropriation. I would argue, however, that the nature of Japanese society dictated that for Leach, as for the Australian potters who would go on to be influenced by Japan, simplistic notions of Orientalism are often inappropriate. As Yuko Kikuchi wrote in *Hybridity and the Oriental Orientalism of Mingei Theory,*[127]:

> Orientalism is not a rigid one-way phenomenon projected on to the Orient from the Occident. It is an infectious phenomenon, given to appropriation by 'others', at least in the case of modern Japan. ' [128]

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[126] Ludwig Deutsch was a Viennese born artist who worked in Paris in the late nineteenth century. The painting as acknowledged in the 1995 Penguin edition of *Orientalism* is undated.

[127] Kikuchi, Y 'Hybridity and the Oriental Orientalsim of *Mingei* Theory' *Journal of Design History* Vol. 10 # 4, 1997, p. 343 – 353.

[128] ibid

A more orthodox view is expressed by Rosen in his paper *Japan as Other: Orientalism and Cultural Conflict,* [129] when he states that:

> Interpretations of Japan, as well as other Asian cultures, often carries an implicit assumption that the West is rational (and superior) whereas the East is bound by ancient traditions (and is inferior).' [130]

If Western potters had conformed to Rosen's paradigm, Leach would have looked on Japanese culture as being inferior, yet everything we read suggests that the opposite was true, as Leach and those who followed him found much to admire in Oriental traditions. He may indeed have been guilty of a 'mis-seeing of the other through a veil of interpretations of reality' [131], although this criticism is really too generalised to be meaningful. Specifically, and in direct contradiction to Rosen's generalisations, the large numbers of Australian potters who visited Japan as a direct or indirect consequence of Leach's writing went in search of a culture in advance of their own, at least insofar as ceramics were concerned. This is a crucial point in the argument regarding Orientalism and the relationships of Western studio potters to the Asian ceramic tradition, and many commonly held suppositions pivot unexpectedly on encountering this fact. Before moving on to examine Leach's background and his time in Japan, it is useful to conclude juxtaposing some key aspects of Leach's life against a contemporary reading of Orientalism.

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[129] Rosen, S *Japan as Other: Orientalism and Cultural Conflict* http:// www.immi.se/intercultural/nr4/rosen.htm viewed 10 December 2001
[130] ibid
[131] ibid

Bernard Leach, unlike all but a few Western artists of his time, actually visited Japan. Second and even more unusual was his length of stay, which, at eleven years on the first occasion and perhaps fifteen years in total, indicates an engagement with Japan that extends beyond the facile. Leach's initial tenure in Japan was certainly aided by favourable personal circumstances and his timing was also fortunate, in that Japan was actively looking to the West at the beginning of the twentieth century. Edmund de Waal asserts that for Leach there was 'unbounded possibility for as with other men of his class and circumstances ... the East is a career',[132] a statement that while being essentially correct is also overly simplistic. De Waal's inclusion of this quote from Benjamin Disraeli's 1847 book *Tancred*, presumably only known to a contemporary readership through its prominent positioning at the very beginning of Said's *Orientalism,* would seem to offer rhetorical support to an argument that typecasts Leach as the archetypal colonial. However, as I will show, a mid-nineteenth century understanding of the colonial imperative is misplaced in the context of the early twentieth century relationship between Japan and the West.

Orientalism, as it existed in Leach's youth, was a recognised discipline of academic research that sustained involvement with a broad cultural domain. Western attempts to bridge the cultural gap occurred largely within these paradigms, and whilst it is helpful to remark on the perceived failings of this discourse in the light of contemporary knowledge, Leach's actions must be assessed within the framework of the attitudes that existed at the time.

Leach's original intention of earning his living in Japan by teaching Western techniques of art might be seen as a typical example of a Westerner seeking to

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[132] De Waal ibid p. 8

impose his authority in a foreign land. Conversely, his eventual authority would rest on a willingness to eschew his initial role of a teacher and to become instead a student, to open himself to the transformative potential of a different culture.

Chapter 2: A Natural Child of the East

Childhood and Art School in London - 1887 to 1909

In the previous chapter I outlined Leach's early years in Hong Kong, Japan and Singapore and his return to England at the age of ten, where he was to finish his education and prepare for entrance into the Hong Kong and Shanghai Bank. With both sides of Leach's family having made their careers working in the East it was expected that he too would do the same, however the manner in which he would fulfil these early expectations was quite unexpected.

At the age of sixteen, Leach convinced his father to allow him to study at the Slade School of Art. As he would later write: 'To me this was sheer joy. Life had begun to take on some meaning.' [133] [Plate 5] After two years he fulfilled a promise to his ailing father, leaving art school to study for his entry to the Hong Kong and Shanghai Bank. Leach hated the world of commerce and compensated by taking rooms in 'the art world of Whistler's Chelsea'[134] where he became acquainted with a circle of young artists with connections to the Bloomsbury group. He first exhibited through their 'Friday Club',[135] where his watercolour of the hills of North Wales was favourably mentioned by the art critic from *The Times.*[136] Despite the concerns of his family, Leach was inexorably drawn back to the world of art and in 1907 he resigned his

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[133] Leach, B. *Beyond East and West* Faber & Faber 1978, p. 23
[134] ibid p. 30
[135] The 'Friday Club' was started by the artist Vanessa Bell and her art school friends. It was named in reference to a group pf writers and intellectuals, including Clive Bell and John Meynard Keynes, who would meet on Thursday afternoons at the house of Vaneesa Bell's brother, Toby Stephen. See http://www.tate.org.uk/archivejourneys/bloomsburyhtml/group_members.htm accessed 24 July 2006
[136] ibid p. 31

position at the bank, this time enrolling at the privately run London School of Art, headed by the eminent English artist Sir Frank Brangwyn.[137] It was during this period that he decided to return to Japan.

There seem to have been several factors contributing to this decision. Japan had a prominent place in the imagination of Edwardian society, where art with a Japanese flavour found a ready audience amongst London's artistic circles. For a young art student, the paintings of James McNeill Whistler and the French and English impressionists provided ample evidence of the possibility of incorporating Japanese devices within European forms. Leach would later write about Whistler:

> From him I must have caught some dream of Japan. What Whistler held for me and for many other artists was an unfamiliar asymmetrical oriental sense of composition and a highly refined taste. [138]

Particularly for a printmaker, for that by now was Leach's speciality, the impact of Japanese woodblock prints on turn-of-the-century European art was pronounced. The enthusiastic reception of this particular Japanese art form rested on its palatability to a Western audience. As John Clark notes:

> It is a great irony of art history that ... the momentum for change should have been provided by contact with a foreign artform, the Japanese woodblock print. When impressionist artists in Europe made contact with the landscape prints of Hiroshige or Hokusai in the 1860s to 1870s, they did so with a particular sub-discourse of Japanese art which had been revised by contact with certain

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[137] Sir Frank Brangwyn was an accomplished British artist and teacher. He trained with the famous designer William Morris, then at the Royal College of Art. He was well-known as a painter and a printmaker, completing several large-scale commissions. Brangwyn also worked as a designer of furniture, jewellery, textiles and stained-glass. There is a museum dedicated to his work in his birthplace of Bruges, Belgium, and his work is represented in many major museums.

[138] ibid, p. 32

European forms for at least 180 years.[139]

Wishing to make facsimile copies of a famous fourteenth century Chinese scroll, the British Museum had hired a group of Japanese woodblock artists to carry out the task. In 1909[140], one of these artists, Mokuchu (given name Yoshijiro) Urushibara arrived in London, the same year that saw Leach depart for Japan. 1919, the year before Leach's return to England, Urushibara and Sir Frank Brangwyn, Leach's teacher, collaborated on a portfolio of ten woodblock prints, titled *Bruges,* and, in 1924, Urushibara produced a lavish portfolio of woodblock prints titled *Ten Woodcuts by Yoshijiro Urushibara after designs by Frank Brangwyn.* [141] Given his teachers obvious interest in Japanese art, it is curious that Leach never refers to this in his accounts of the two years he spent studying with Brangwyn in London. Leach's habit of failing to make mention in his texts of other Westerners who shared an interest in Japanese art and culture will reappear throughout this thesis.

Another important factor to consider in the interaction of Japanese and Western art was the wider nature of the relationship that existed between Japan and the West, which was substantially different to that existing between, for example, England and

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[139] There is a considerable amount of scholarship on the impact of Japanese art in general and woodblock prints in particular on Western art in the second-half of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th century. For a general discussion see Jackson, A. *Imagining Japan: The Victorian perception and Acquisition of Japanese Culture* The Journal of Design History Vol. 5 No. 4 1992. For an analysis of Japanese art of late 19th century European painting and other matters see Spate, V., Bromfield, D., Hickey, D., Mabuchi, A., Inaga, S. *Monet & Japan* National Gallery of Australia 2001. For discussion of the reciprocal effects of European art of Japan see Clark, J. *Modern Asian Art* Craftsman House 1998

[140] according to http://www.hanga.com/kancho-e/urushibara/ Urushibara was born in 1888 and travelled to England at the age of 19 – according to http://spectacle.berkley.edu/~fiorillo/texts/shinhangatexts-pages/urushibara3.html Unrushibara travelled to paris then arrived in London in 1910. both pages accessed 16 April 2006

[141] http://www.hanga.com/kancho-e/urushibara/ accessed 15 April 2006

China or England and India.[142] The Anglo Japanese relationship exhibited a far greater degree of social, economic and military parity than was usual, which, in turn, impacted on the nature of cross-cultural exchanges.

At various times in its history Japan had sensitive to the dangers posed by foreign influences, so much so that sensing a growing likelihood of religious and political interference in its domestic affairs, the first phases of European contact had been decisively terminated by the mid 1600s.[143] For the next two hundred years, a period during which European countries infiltrated the far corners of the globe, Japan maintained this state of isolation, its dealings with the outside world mediated through a strictly controlled number of Dutch traders, through whom they nonetheless were able to assemble a picture of European society and technology.[144] The consequence of this national reclusion was that by the time the American naval commander, Commodore Perry, anchored his small flotilla of gunboats off the Japanese coast in 1853 the era of European colonial and territorial expansion was coming to an end.[145]

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[142] The lack of any foreign colonial dominance of Japan until the end WW2 significantly differentiates Japan from other comparable Asian nations in its interaction with the West. see Beasley, W. G. *The Modern History of Japan* Weidenfeld and Nicholson 1963

[143] Portuguese sailors are recorded as having first arrived on the Japanese island of Tanageshima in 1543. Over the succeeding decades relations between Japan and the West increased. The rising influence of Catholicism in Japan was seen as a political threat by Tototomi Hideyoshi, Japan's ruler. In 1587 he issued his first edict expelling Christian missionaries, and by 1597 Hideyoshi was had increased sanctions against the practise of Christianity, executing 26 Japanese and foreign Christians by crucifiction. Following his death in 1598, his successor, Tokugawa Ieyasu, continued sanctions, and by 1614 a nationwide ban on Christianity was imposed. Following Tokugawa's death in 1616 the ban continued, and in 1634, 1635, 1636 and finally in 1639 a series of edicts enforcing a policy of sakoku (national seclusion) were imposed, which remained effective until 1842. During this period Japan effectively closed its borders to foreigners, although limited trade with the outside world still occurred under strictly controlled conditions, where foreigners were restricted to the man-made island of Dejima in Nagasaki harbour. See Hasaka, G. editor in chief *Kodansha Encyclopedia of Japan*, Kodansha America 1987

[144] For discussion of the interaction of Western and Japanese art from the 16th century onwards see Clark, J. *Modern Asian Art.*

[145] Increasing pressure was applied to Japan throughout the first part of the 19th century by foreign interests wishing to re-establish trade. Whilst Japan resisted these approaches, the internal economy had stagnated, bringing social unrest and instability. In 1842-43 Britain leased Hong Kong, increasing the foreign presence near to Japan's borders. Japan's right to seclusion began to be

Japan, of all Asian nations, entered into dialogue with the West under fairly unique terms.

Perhaps because of this, by the late 1800s it was not uncommon to find Japanese students studying at prestigious European universities and colleges. During his time at the London School of Art, Leach had formed a friendship with a young Japanese student, Kotaro Takamura, a sculptor who had already trained in Japan and in America, and who would go on to work in the Rodin studio in Paris before returning to Japan in 1909, the same year that Leach travelled to Japan.[146] Through their friendship, Leach gained an insight into Japanese life that extended beyond the somewhat insulated world of his childhood. It was Takamura who first introduced Leach to the theory of Zen Buddhism[147], although it is important to stress that Leach, in his own spiritual life never formally adopted the practice of Buddhism, instead becoming a follower of the Bahá'í faith[148] Takamura would later provide Leach with letters of introduction which greatly assisted Leach in his early days in Japan. The tenor of their discussions might be judged from this account in Leach's essay 'The

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increasingly questioned in the West. The opening up of the American West led to a commensurate reliance on Pacific ports to access foreign markets, including those near to Japan, which lay on the shipping route from San Francisco to Shanghai. In 1852 America publicly announced that a United States of America naval expeditionary force, under the command of Commodore M. C. Perry, would be sent to Japan. In 1853 Perry sailed to Japan in a convoy of four ships and delivered an ultimatum to the Japanese government, with the aim of establishing trade and diplomatic relations. In February of 1854 Perry returned to Japan with eight ships, and by March of that year a treaty between America and Japan had been signed. See Beasley, W. G. *The Modern History of Japan* op. cit., also *Japan from Tokugawa to Meiji* www.fsmitha.com/h3/h48Japan.htm accessed 21 March 2006

[146] Takamura, Kotaru was a Japanese poet and scholar. The son of Takamura Koun, also a sculptor in the Western idiom, he studied at the Tokyo School of Fine Arts, graduating in 1902. In 1906 he spent a year in America with the Art Students League, travelling to London in 1908, where he met Leach whilst a fellow student at the London school of Art. In 1909 he travelled to Paris and spent time working in the Rodin studio, before returning to Japan in 1909. see Leach, B. *Beyond East and West* p. 294 also www.artfact.com/features/viewArtist.cfm?aID=47964 accessed 21 March 2006

[147] Leach, B. *Beyond East & West* p. 36

[148] see Weinberg, R editor *Spinning the Clay into Stars: Bernard Leach and the Baha'I Faith* George Ronald 1999

Integration of the Craftsman'[149], given as an address to the International Conference of Craftsmen in Pottery and Textiles, held in Dartington, England in 1952.[150] It also gives an indication of the frustrations felt at the time by Japanese students studying abroad with the condescending and Orientalising stereotypes with which they were labelled. In this poignant and revealing passage, Leach remembers:

> My first Japanese friend I made in London before I went out to Japan in 1909 was a sculptor. He was a sharp critic, and a good poet. And when he came back to Japan a year after I got there he said 'Why do you English insist on calling us plucky little Japs (sic)? Do you think we like being called plucky little Japs. (sic)?' It was at the time of the Anglo-Japanese alliance. I said – 'Well, I'm sorry about that.' He said 'I suppose you do that because our conscripted soldiers are beating the Russian conscripted soldiers in Manchuria and Korea. Do you know that in every household in Japan at that same moment the Japanese people are reading Tolstoy? It was Tolstoy who won the war because he conquered our hearts.'[151]

A further influence on Leach was more a literary than a visual one, in that he was much taken with the image of Japan as depicted by the novelist Lafcardio Hearn. As he would later recall in *Beyond East and West:*

> The books written by that stylist who first described Japanese life and culture in sensitive English – Lafcardio Hearn – had aroused in me the desire to return to the East where I was born .'[152]

This motivation is confirmed by Soetsu Yanagi in his Introduction to *A Potter's Book.*

> Enchanted with the memories of childhood in the East, and fascinated by the magic of Lafcardio Hearn's prose, Leach came to Japan at the age of twenty-

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[149] Leach, B. 'The Integration of the Craftsman', paper presented at The International Conference of Craftsmen in Pottery & Textiles, Dartington Hall, Totnes, Devon, July 17 – 27, 1952.
[150] For a fuller discussion of the Dartington conference, see pp. 161 - 166
[151] Leach, B. *Beyond East & West* p. 206
[152] ibid p. 36

one, full of dreams and wonder.[153]

Hearn was a popular writer and the many books he wrote about Japan during the thirteen years he lived there, from 1890 until his death in Tokyo in 1903 presented a poetic, perhaps nostalgic vision of a country undergoing profound change. Like his fellow countryman, Ernest Francisco Fenellosa,[154] Hearn was fascinated by traditional, pre-Western Japan. To some extent Hearn was for Leach what Leach would later be to others, a cultural interlocutor between Japan and the West, a writer who offered a view of Japan that was as attractive as it was subjective. An example of this can be seen in this passage from Leach, where he describes a tea ceremony he attended on his third trip to Japan in 1953.

> I watched the ritual with great enjoyment. The implements were really good. One bowl was old Corean [sic] and the other, used alternately, was a 'Doninu' black Raku. The room had that diffused light which falls through Japanese paper alone. A young woman entered, serious, silent, to make and serve; she knelt to pull the sliding door towards her, stood, passed through, knelt and closed it again noiselessly. I watched the trim grace of her foot and hand movements. White cottoned feet, cleft between the small and the big toes. Poise and economy of movement. A phrase from Hearn came to me, 'the cleft grace of a fawn.'[155]

In summary, Leach was drawn to Japan by a combination of his family background and the contemporary artistic climate in which he was suffused. He had become

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[153] Yanagi, S. 'Introduction' in Leach, B. *A Potter's Book* Faber & Faber 1940, p. xvii

[154] Ernest Francisco Fenollosa was born in America in 1853, the same year Perry's first expeditionary force arrived in Japan. He lived in Tokyo for 14 years teaching political economy and philosophy and studying Japanese culture. Whilst in Japan he took the Buddhist name Tei-Shin and the Japanese name Kano Yeitan Masanobu. On his return to America he became a leading oriental scholar and oriental art curator at the Boston Museum of Fine Arts. He spent another three years in Japan from 1897 to 1900, before returning to America, where he spent his last years writing and lecturing on Japanese and Chinese art and culture. His literary executor was Ezra Pound. www.searchbiography.com/print_record.pl?id+14691 accessed 21 March 2006

[155] Leach, B. *A Potter in Japan* Faber & Faber 1960, p. 51

friendly with at least one Japanese artist even before he set out for Japan and Brangwyn, as his teacher seems likely to have played a significant role in determining Leach's future direction. The death of his father provided Leach with a financial legacy, giving him a measure of security and the freedom to travel. He also had close family connections in Japan, although they are seldom mentioned by Leach.[156]

Leach's choice to travel to Japan was also a choice to leave England. It seems that even at this early stage he felt the desire to separate himself from the mainstream of activity, leaving his growing circle of contacts in London and embarking instead on a course which ultimately would lead to him to world prominence in a field of artistic activity which he, at least in part, invented.

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[156] A feature of Leach's accounts of his early years in Japan, the most detailed accounts of which are found in his last and most autobiographical work *Beyond East and West,* is the paucity of information they contain regarding his associations with other foreign residents. Whilst Leach availed himself of connections made through his aforementioned association with Takamura Kotaru in London, any help provided to him by other Westerners resident in Japan passes without remark. Although it is possible that Leach worked largely independently of other foreigners, it is known that for much of the period he was in Japan his wife and family lived in Tokyo. The expected patterns of establishing 'in country' connections, which are often aided by utilising the 'local' knowledge and introductions of other resident foreigners are absent from all of Leach's accounts. De Waal, however, notes that Leach's early period in Japan was spent between two worlds, including associations with the wealthy expatriate community to which his grandparents belonged. He also notes that this conventional world is seldom mentioned in his autobiographical writings. See de Waal, *Bernard Leach* p.9

Leach in Japan - 1909 to 1920

Bernard Leach arrived in Tokyo in 1909 at the age of twenty-two. His original intention had been to teach etching and to this end he had taken a printing press with him. He had a useful contact in the Japanese art world through Takamura Koun, the father of Leach's fellow student at the London School of Art. Koun was a sculptor attached to the Imperial household, and in the highly structured and class-conscious Japanese society, Leach's prospects depended on him having well placed contacts. An introduction to the head of the Imperial Art School, Baron Iwamura (at the time the Japanese system of titles, the Kazoku, was based on the English peerage[157]) and his assistant Kamenosuke Morita, provided Leach with suitable accommodation, tuition in the Japanese language and a position teaching English at a girls high school . An indication of Leach's enthusiasm for his new home can be seen in his decision to ask his future wife, his cousin Muriel[158], to travel out from England to join him. He was also delighted to discover:

> the astonishing fact that a house of modest but sufficient size could be built for less than two hundred pounds! I arranged for some of my capital to be realised.[159]

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[157] Beginning in 1869, the kuge (the court nobility of Kyoto) and the daimyo (the feudal lords) were merged into a single aristocratic class. This system of kazoku had five rankings based on the British peerage with Japanese titles taken from Chinese nobility. In order from highest to lowest they were Prince or Duke, Marquis, Count, Viscount and Baron. Some members of this class gained automatic places in the 'House of Peers'. The system ended in 1947. http://en.wikepedia.org/wiki/Kazuko accessed 7 April 2006

[158] It is often over-looked fact that Edith Muriel Evans Leach (nee Hoyle) was the daughter of the Director of the National Museum of Wales, an association which doubtless added to Leach's artistic credentials.

[159] Leach, B. *Beyond East and West* p. 44

This speaks not only of Leach's liking for Japan but also gives an insight into his financial position, since two hundred pounds was a considerable sum of money, the equivalent of around four years of the average yearly wage in Britain.[160] Leach quickly settled into his new life. His level of confidence is demonstrated by the fact that within a month of arriving in Japan, he published an article (in translation) in a Japanese magazine entitled *The Introduction of Etching into the Art World of Japan,*[161] where he opined that Japanese art was characterised not by dynamism but the development of the requisite decorative concept and therefore '... the technique of etching, basically an art of appreciation of various lines ... must be of great interest for young talented artists to learn.'[162]

It seems that Leach was unaware that etching had been practised in Japan as early as the late 1700s through the limited transference of European techniques to Japan by the Dutch, who, as was noted previously in this chapter, provided the only conduit of European knowledge into a largely closed society.[163] Leach, of course, could hardly have been expected to be aware of this. There is no evidence in his writings that he made a serious study of Japanese art whilst still in London; but rather that he witnessed the integration of certain elements of Japanese art within a contemporary Western idiom. What is evident, however, is his willingness to comment on Japanese art within a month of his arrival in the country, an early manifestation of what would become a lifelong habit of committing his opinions to print.[164]

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[160] Bowden, S. & Mills, J. Sheffield Economic Research Paper Series, University of Sheffield, 2003. www.shef.ac.uk/content/1/c6/03/91/70/SERP2003009.pdf viewed 16 February 2006

[161] de Waal *Bernard Leach: St. Ives Artists* p. 8

[162] ibid

[163] see Clark, J. *Modern Asian Art* Craftsman House 1998, p.36-38

[164] The Sano Kenzan controversy, where Leach gave an opinion regarding the authenticity of a 'find' of a group of several hundred ceramics, supposedly made by the first Kenzan towards the end of his life at a location called Sano, drew Leach into the complex world of the attribution of Japanese

In his first years in Japan Leach moved at will between a coterie of educated, Western-oriented Japanese and the expatriate community to which he still had ties. Leach may have been young, inexperienced and unknown as an artist in England, but he soon found himself in demand in Japan. This early success speaks of his ease with Japanese society and a certain confidence in his own abilities. Leach's quick acceptance was also partly due to an official Japanese government policy which privileged Western techniques and therefore favoured those Westerners who could convey this knowledge to the Japanese. This can be seen in the regulations of the *Kobu Bijutsu Gakko,* the Fine Art School of the Japanese Ministry of Works, which stated that importance would be given to:

> ...bringing recent European techniques to replace the former Japanese professional practices so as to aid and supplement our techniques ... teaching students how to apply them in practice, in so doing making up for the shortcomings in our countries art. By studying the styles for depicting reality afresh the Art School shall raise its level to one equivalent to the best Art Schools in Europe.[165]

The influential American teacher, Ernest Fenellosa, had played a crucial part in establishing this curricula,[166] and in the decades that followed Western art continued to be taught at various levels in Japan. The teaching of Western art in these newly established institutions, which themselves were modelled on Western universities, led to the situation where talented students, including Leach's colleague Takamura,

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ceramics. In a culture where 'copying' was a widely accepted and long-standing practice, and where the pots concerned – if genuine – were worth a great deal of money, the risks involved in giving an opinion on the matter were considerable. Leach regarded the pots as genuine, others did not. For a brief discussion of the matter see Mulder, W.Z. *Pottery in Australia* Vol. 7 No. 2, 1968, p. 35

[165] Clark, J. op. cit. p. 158

[166] ibid p. 159

had travelled abroad to further their study of aspects of Western arts and design. Leach's first Japanese artistic collaborator, Tomimoto Kenkichi, had travelled to London in 1908 where he had spent: 'days sketching metalwork, glass and ceramics at the Victoria & Albert Museum.[167]

In Japan, Western prints and books demonstrated the latest developments in painting and sculpture, novels and plays were being translated and Western classical music was performed.[168] Japan was absorbing foreign influences at a furious rate and it was in this way, when demonstrating etching techniques to Japanese artists, that he was to make a connection that ultimately would alter the development of twentieth century pottery.

[167] De Waal, op. cit. p. 10
[168] Through Yanagi and his circle, Leach was to experience this phenomenon at first hand. See following chapter.

2.2 A Meeting of Minds

> *...aesthetics, like religion, is a subject many people avoid discussing and it was not until Bernard Leach published A Potter's Book that we had a little conception of the Japanese attitude to the subject.*[169]

In the audience attending Leach's lecture on etching was a young Japanese art critic, Soetsu Yanagi. He was two years younger than Leach, the son of an upper-middle class family with ties to the military. By the time Yanagi attended Leach's Tokyo lecture, he had already immersed himself in the study of languages, literature, aesthetics, religion and philosophy. At school he had studied under the eminent Buddhist scholar Daisetsu Suzuki, who would later be credited with introducing Japanese Buddhism, and especially Zen Buddhism, to the West.[170] In addition to reading Whitman, Emerson and Nietzsche, Yanagi had published essays on the Russian philosopher Mechnikoff and had organised for a small exhibition of Rodin sculptures to be seen in Tokyo.[171] Yanagi was a highly sophisticated, literate young man at the cutting edge of contemporary Japanese culture, and he felt an instant empathy towards Leach.

As Yanagi would later write in the introduction he furnished to Leach's *A Potter's Book:*

> At the time when he [Leach] came to Japan our young artists were in the midst of their 'Wanderjahre' in quest of their artistic light. It was the period when the

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[169] Rushforth, P. 'The Japanese Connection' *Pottery in Australia* Vol. 27 No. 2 May 1988 p. 10

[170] Daisetsu Suzuki was a famous Japanese scholar of Buddhism with a particular interest in Zen Buddhism. He taught for five years at Columbia University in America fro 1952 to 1957. Many of his books were translated into English, including the series credited with introducing Zen Buddhism to the West, *Essays in Zen Buddhism* Volume One, Grove Press 1927; Volume Two and Volume Three, Samuel Weiser, 1953. His *Zen and Japanese Culture* Pantheon Books, 1959, is one of the most widely read books on Zen Buddhism. See www.en.wikipidea.org/wiki/daisetz_Teitaro_Suzuki#Bibliography

[171] King, J. ibid

work of such artists as Rodin, Van Gough and Cezanne were introduced for the first time in this country and made such a stir and such a sensation amongst us, playing an important part in the renewal of our cultural life.

I first met [Leach] one evening when he was giving a lecture in his new house in Tokyo, the first lecture ever given in Japan on the art of etching. ... I was one of the audience who listened to a talk in which the name of Augustus John was repeated over and over again. I remember the moment even now, when he showed us a fine portrait of a gypsy girl by John, which he later presented to us.

After that I often met him again at an exhibition of modern Western art which was held in Tokyo. We were drawn to each other silently and irresistibly; I think we realized instinctively that our characters were necessary to each other.'[172]

The two young men had much in common. Yanagi's fascination with Western art was mirrored by Leach's increasing exposure to Japanese art, gained mainly through his contact with Yanagi and other members of the *Shirakaba*[173] or White Birch Movement of which Yanagi was a founding member. This small group of artists, intellectuals and poets had studied together at the Peers School and the Imperial University. They were:

... privileged young men of the same mould as Leach: passionate, discursive and often enthusiastically muddled. ...it's members defined themselves as "the rising generation", as a "New Japan" that would bring together the best parts of an increasingly threatened Japanese culture. The *Shirakaba* movement saw itself as a counterbalance to the endemic industrialization that had swept Japan in the latter part of the *Meiji* era (1868 – 1912).[174]

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[172] Yanagi, S. in Leach, B. *A Potter's Book* xviii

[173] The *Shirakaba* Group had its foundation in a literary magazine of the same name, published by Yanagi and some of his friends and fellow students from the *Gakashuin* School. The first issue was published in April, 1910. See King, J. op. cit. p. 12; also see Mortimer, M *Meeting the Sensei: the Role of the Master in Shirakaba Writers* Brill Academic Publishing 2000 et al.

[174] de Waal, E. *Bernard Leach* Tate Gallery Publishing 1997 p. 9

De Waal's proposition that *Shirakaba* arose partly as a reaction to industrialisation, might convey the impression that the group was analogous to the British Arts and Crafts movement. This would be an over-simplification of the philosophical leanings of a group that were deeply interested in all aspects of the Western tradition. The content of the movements journal, edited by Yanagi, was:

> remarkable for the complete absence of writing on Japanese art, and notable for the inclusion of highly individual figures of Western art; Whitman, Blake, Rodin and van Gogh.[175]

In a period of a few decades Japan had gone through a process of change that had taken Europe several hundred years.[176] These changes encompassed almost every aspect of Japanese society, often conflicting with previous social, economic and political patterns of behaviour. The eminent historian of Japanese history, W.G. Beasley, has written that many Japanese studied the West not merely because it was a source of wealth and strength – and thus felt compelled to do so - but also because the West was the home of 'civilisation and enlightenment' *(bummei'kaika)*[177], a concept which rendered industrial civilisation a stage of development to which all societies should aspire, a view of modernity somewhat at odds with the misgivings of the English Arts and Crafts Movement regarding the pernicious effects of industrialisation. All these manifestations of change in Japanese society – constitutions, conscript armies, factories, the interest in Western-style novels and art – were related phenomena. [178]

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[175] ibid
[176] see Beasley, W. G. *The Modern History of Japan*
[177] ibid p. 154
[178] ibid. It could be seen in the fashion, current during Leach's first tenure in Japan, for *haikaru* clothing the expression given in the first decades of the twentieth century to the many urban

Seen in the light of the changes occurring within Japanese society, the mood of the Japanese avant-garde, for that is what the *Shirakaba* represented, was likely to be mixed. Joanna King has traced the shift in Yanagi's philosophies[179] through an analysis of the numerous essays he published during this turbulent era. It is obvious that during the first years of his friendship with Leach, Yanagi's ideas were evolving quickly. An initial concern with individualism would soon shift to one which advocated a negation of the self. It was Leach who in 1913 introduced Yanagi to William Blake's *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* [180], suggesting that Blake was in profound harmony with Post-Impressionism and the poetry of Walt Whitman.[181] Yanagi's newfound enthusiasm for Blake is amply demonstrated by the fact that by November of the following year he had written and published a seven-hundred and seventy page volume of translations, entitled *Viriamu Bureiku*[182] (William Blake), a book which he in turn dedicated to Leach. Leach provided a cover illustration for the eponymously named journal of the Shirakaba group, a woodcut based on the lines from a Blake poem, *Tiger, Tiger, Burning Bright.* Here we see an early example of how the interests of Leach and Yanagi would coincide in an ongoing cycle of affirmation and reaffirmation. As King states:

> [A] fundamental aspect of ... folk-craft theory can be traced directly to Blake. This was Yanagi's concept of *chokkan* – intuitive recognition, where beauty is appreciated not through knowledge or analysis, but through *chokkan,* or direct experience[183]

Japanese who adopted Western styles of dress, including the high, starched collars of the men's suits. Also see de Waal, op. cit. p. 23

[179] King, J. *Yanagi Soetsu and the Folk Craft Movement* M.A. thesis, Monash University 1982
[180] first published 1790 - 1793
[181] de Waal, ibid p. 10
[182] see King, J. op. cit. p. 204
[183] King, J. p 28 - 30

It meshed well with Yanagi's and Leach's interest in spirituality, however:

> ... accompanying the universal, eternal elements in Blake's philosophy is also a hint of anti-modernism ... Blake sways Yanagi in the direction of anti-modernism, which eventually becomes another important aspect of his folk-craft theory. ... Blake was also an introduction to the art and craft of the Middle-Ages, the spirit of which Yanagi [and Leach] greatly revered.[184]

Building on this period of exploration, Leach and Yanagi formulated the basis of a philosophy of making that although bearing many similarities to the English Arts and Crafts movement, had at its centre a fusion of disparate elements of bewildering complexity and cultural attribution.

The First Pots

Leach's initial involvement with the practical aspects of Japanese art owed much to another young, Western-educated Japanese artist, Tomimoto Kenkichi. Tomimoto had studied architecture and design at the Tokyo School of Fine Arts and in 1908 he had gone to Britain to study stained glass, where he became familiar with the collections of metalwork, glass and ceramics in the Victoria & Albert Museum.[185] During his time in London he became familiar with the work of William Morris, thus providing another link in a complex chain of influences. Because Tomimoto had spent time in England and spoke English well, he was an ideal companion with whom Leach could extend both a growing interest in design and his practical involvement in Japanese art.

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[184] ibid
[185] King, J. op. cit. p. 120

In 1911, accompanied by Tomimoto, Leach made a visit to the first independent art gallery in Tokyo, the *Gahosha* in central Tokyo. The gallery was known for exhibiting the work of young artists and both Leach and Tomimoto were offered the chance to exhibit there.[186] This led to an invitation to attend a party, where they discovered some thirty young artists, writers and actors involved in painting designs on pottery. Leach was very impressed, later recalling that the interior of the house reached the high-water mark of Japanese taste. As he would later write:

> In this large, most beautiful tea-room, brushes, pigments and unglazed pottery lay about ... Someone who spoke English asked me if I would decorate one of them, and for the first time I considered what was appropriate to put on a pot. ... The pots were placed around the top of a portable kiln no bigger than a studio stove ...one by one they were placed into the inner chamber ... About three-quarters of an hour later ... the red-hot pots were taken out one by one and placed on tiles on the ground to cool off. ... After another quarter-hour or so, my dish was returned to me, not too hot to handle, in a piece of cloth. Enthralled, I was on the spot seized with a desire to take up the craft.'[187]

Leach had been introduced to the ceramic tradition of Raku, an art born out of the practice of the tea ceremony and one that continued to have strong links with the lives of connoisseurs and amateur artists.[188] Within the milieu of high-class society, Raku was a social accomplishment similar to the performance of chamber-music or the painting of water-colours in Edwardian England. Moreover, since the tradition of Raku did not necessarily involve the use of the potter's wheel, the shaping of the vessel was often no more than a matter of forming the clay in the hand, therefore

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[186] Leach, B. *Beyond East and West* p. 55
[187] ibid p. 56
[188] Raku owed its origins to the aesthetic philosophy of the tea master Sen no Rikyu, who, in his search for tea wares that accorded with his own tastes, commissioned a ceramic tile-maker, Chojiro, to fashion a tea bowl that was then subjected to a rapid, low temperature firing.

obviating the necessity for the practitioner to learn a time-consuming technique. Raku also had the advantage - highly unusual in ceramics - of immediacy, where the vessels, once decorated, could be fired within the hour, to be returned for the delectation of a sophisticated and leisured audience.

Wishing to study more, Leach was introduced to an elderly potter, Urano Shigekichi, who was also known by his adopted title of Kenzan VI.[189] [Plate 6] It was from Shigekichi that Leach, soon to be joined by Tomimoto, would learn the fundamentals of pottery. It was also from Shigekichi that, within a scant two years of his first touching clay, Leach would receive the *densho* (recipes) that traditionally constituted the sealed proof of succession of master to student.[190]

It must be noted that the transference of the title of Kenzan VII upon Leach, after a period of study that in normal circumstances would barely have seen a Japanese apprentice graduate from performing basic workshop chores, is highly unusual, even more so when one considers that Leach was a Westerner who spoke only limited Japanese. However, within two years of being introduced to the medium Leach was exhibiting his ceramics along side his etchings, drawings and oil paintings in Tokyo. Soetsu Yanagi, in his catalogue essay accompanying the exhibition, commented on Leach's love for 'primitive folk art'[191] as having given a 'naïve power'[192] to Leach's ceramics, perhaps a tactful reference to Leach's relative amateurism as a potter. A mitigating factor was provided by the existence of certain Japanese aesthetic codes that, under some circumstances, accepted imperfections or irregularities as being

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[189] Leach, B. *beyond east and West* p. 48 et al
[190] ibid p. 58
[191] de Waal, E. op. cit. p. 15
[192] ibid

acceptable, even beneficial, to the work.

It can be seen that Leach's introduction to pottery was influenced by a tradition of making that posited the craftsman as an artist. Leach was, by training, an artist, and the ceramic tradition to which he was first introduced was one which specialised in producing limited numbers of wares for collectors and connoisseurs of pottery. No matter what involvement Leach would later have with studio pottery, or what influence his writing would have on others, from the very beginning he would afford himself the authority of the artist.

In 1914 Leach travelled to China. He had become interested in the work of a Dr. Alfred Westharp, a Prussian Jewish writer living in Bejing whose articles he had read in the *Far East* magazine, to which Leach had also contributed articles. Leach knew Westharp was interested in the teachings of Confucius but he was unaware of Westharp's more radical philosophies, based partly on the writings of the Italian educationalist Montessori and partly on the theory of eugenics. Leach visited China on three occasions, but rather than the meeting of minds envisioned by Leach, where two Western thinkers sought a synthesis of Oriental and Occidental philosophies, he was treated as a potential acolyte by Westharp. Leach was given the unenviable task of typing up the manuscript of Westharp's *China Anti-Christ*[193], an undertaking which he did not relish. In 1915 Leach and his young family returned to the relative normalcy of Japanese life. Muriel Leach and their three children returned to the house that they had built in Tokyo and to the security of the expatriate community. Leach moved in with Soetsu Yanagi and his wife, who lived in the small artists colony of Abiko twenty-five miles away on the outskirts of Tokyo. The transition from the

[193] Publication details unknown.

privations and disappointments Leach experienced in China to the picturesque surrounds of Abiko was pronounced. The atmosphere in this small community is well described by J. Robertson Scott, a writer who travelled throughout Japan during this period. Having journeyed to Abiko to meet with Yanagi, he explained:

> [I]...found my prophet in a cottage ... overlooking rice fields and a lagoon. From the Japanese scene outdoors I passed indoors to a new Japan. Cezanne, Purvis de Chavannes, Beardsley, Van Gough, Henry Lamb, Augustus John, Matisse and Blake ... hung within sight of a grand piano and a fine collection of European music.[194]

Yanagi's furnishings also included a small figure by Rodin, *Standing Man,* which had been given to the *Shirakaba* group following the organization of the exhibition of Rodin sculptures in Tokyo.[195] During the week Leach lived at Abiko, returning to Tokyo to spend the weekends with his wife and children. During this period Leach purchased a kiln and had both it and a small pottery studio erected on land owned by Yanagi at Abiko. This final phase of Leach's life in Japan was to be immensely productive, if not uneventful. Following a workshop fire that resulted in the loss of a good deal of work and of all of his notes, Leach was invited by a Viscount Kouroda[196]

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[194] Robertson Scott, J W *The New Foundations of Japan* John Murray 1922 p. 98

[195] de Waal, ibid p. 16

[196] In a demonstration of the interconnectedness of the ceramic world, or maybe just of coincidence, Leach notes that Viscount Kourada was the descendent of a member of the Kouroda family who, in the 17th century, had been instructed by the warlord Toyotomi Hideyoshi to finance the building of a sub-temple at the famous Zen temple complex of *Daitoku-ji* in Kyoto. In *Beyond East and West,* Leach describes visiting this sub-temple, the *Ryukoin,* on a trip to Japan in 1961, in order to view two famous scrolls by the 13th century Chinese painter Mu-chi (in Japanese 'Mokkei'). The meeting with the Abbot of the temple, Kobori Sohaku, is described in some detail. Further research has shown that the Abbot Kobori Sohaku was also known as Kobori Nanrei (Kobori is a name that is given to each Abbot of the *Ryukoin*) and it was with Kobori Nanrei that the Australian potter Milton Moon studied Zen Buddhism at the *Ryukoin* at *Daitoku-ji* in Kyoto in 1974, when he lived in Japan with his family, which includes the author of this thesis. See Leach, B. *Beyond East and West* p. 272 - 274

to build a new workshop and kiln in Tokyo. This was duly constructed and staffed with a trained potter and an assistant. Leach would later write that:

> ... the trustworthy and experienced potter who managed my new workshop and kiln so admirably, demonstrated by his behaviour the right relationship between artist and artisan[197]

This comment reinforces Leach's view of his own skills and status and set the pattern for a life's work, as he would never again work alone. It was around this time that Leach was to make another important Japanese contact, with the entry of Shoji Hamada into his life.

In summarising this first phase of Leach's experiences, several relevant points emerge. The first is seemingly obvious, but nonetheless needs to be restated. Leach was introduced to pottery in Japan and not in England. He had showed no interest in pottery whilst an art student in England and his appreciation of pottery as a medium of personal creative expression was situated firmly within a Japanese understanding of the medium, only later expanding to encompass traditions he and his colleagues found worthy of merit. A striking example of this can be found in Leach's introduction to English slip-ware, which occurred not in England but rather in Japan, when Tomimoto bought a copy of Lomax's *Quaint Old English Pottery*[198] from a Tokyo bookstore.

Secondly, there is the fact that Leach's philosophies and personality were as much shaped by these early Japanese experiences as the pottery he would later make.

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[197] De Waal op. cit. p. 23
[198] Lomax, Charles J. *Quaint Old English Pottery* 1909 publisher unknown

Arriving in Japan as a young man straight out of art school he had neither a great deal of professional or life experience. Yet, very quickly after his arrival, Leach begins to exhibit, to write and simply to be noticed to an extent that would have been difficult had he remained in London. It might be surmised that the considerable attention and the relative lack of criticism Leach enjoyed during this first decade of his professional life, instilled a level of self-confidence that would later emerge in *A Potter's Book* and elsewhere, in the guise of pronouncements on the history and future of pottery. In short, by the time Leach left Japan he was used to being asked his opinion and to having what he said taken seriously. The only real difficulties he had faced during the eleven years he was away from England were associated with his experiences in China, and thereafter Leach's predilection for things Chinese remained firmly located in the past glories of the Sung and T'ang dynasties, rather than in the turbulent realities of contemporary Chinese life. Finally, and notwithstanding his considerable talent, Leach had the knack of being in the right place at the right time. As he would later write, 'On the whole I have been extraordinarily what is called "lucky"'.[199]

The importance Leach attached to these formative experiences may be seen in the way he continued to foster relations with Japan on his return to England. Doubtless there was a genuine fondness for Japan and for what it had given him, but there were also practical reasons for him to continue this association. For the next twenty years, in the period leading up to the publication of *A Potter's Book,* Leach's career in England would continue to rely on his success in Japan.

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[199] Leach, B. op. cit. 117

Shoji Hamada

Shoji Hamada came into Leach's life at a crucial moment. Leach's artistic relationship with Tomimoto was under increasing strain, with the additional complication of certain tensions having developed between Tomimoto and Yanagi.[200] Leach was in need of a new colleague, one who would allow him to extend his range as a potter whilst accommodating his stance as a creative artist. He could not have found a better person to aid him in this endeavour than the young Hamada.

In 1916 Hamada travelled up from Kyoto to meet with Leach at Abiko, and the two men struck up an immediate friendship. [201] There were obvious similarities in their aims and philosophies, and synergies to what each might bring to any collaborative endeavours. Hamada had studied ceramic chemistry in Tokyo and thus possessed a technical knowledge far in advance of Leach, or indeed of Leach's teacher, Urano Shigekichi. Hamada already knew through scientific theory what Leach could only establish by repeated trials and many errors.[202] In turn, Hamada admired what Leach and Tomimoto had already achieved as creative artists in the medium of ceramics. Having once harboured ambitions to be a painter, Hamada also possessed the aesthetic vision to complement his technical knowledge. It was here that the foundations were laid of what was to become one of the most powerful creative and cultural partnerships in twentieth century craft, that of Bernard Leach, Shoji Hamada and Soetsu Yanagi, the holy trinity of Anglo Oriental ceramics.

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[200] Faulkner, R 'Quiet Beauty: cultural identity and Japanese studio ceramics' www.asianart.com/exhibitions/quietbeauty/intro.html accessed 30 May 2006
[201] Leach, B. *Beyond East and West* p. 119
[202] De Waal *Bernard Leach* p 24

During his final years in Japan, an invitation was extended to Leach to start a pottery in England. A decade after he had set out from England he had come to the decision, as had his father some twenty years before, that his children needed to be educated in England. Hamada requested that he be allowed accompany Leach to England and in June of 1920 the Leach family and Shoji Hamada departed the port of Yokohama aboard the *Kamo Maru.*

Despite the future stature both men would attain, in the early stages the relationship between Leach and Hamada was not one of equals. An indication of this can be gleaned from Leach's comments that in allowing Hamada to accompany him to England he would be provided with a 'good Japanese assistant.'[203] This was partly due to the manner in which Leach had become accustomed to working and also because Leach had already gained a reputation as an exhibiting artist, whereas Hamada had yet to embark on his own career. Certainly, during his last year in Japan, Leach's production of exhibition ware had been greatly facilitated through the assistance of Japanese artisans. A review of his final exhibition in Tokyo notes the 'marked development ... [in] the artist's technique [which] has improved with the experience acquired with assiduous practice.'[204] It also notes that more than two thousand pots had been 'turned out from Mr. Leach's kiln ... since his last show was held.'[205]

It is evident from both the quantity of work produced, as well as from the marked improvement in the quality of his pottery, that this alteration in the manner of production, from that of sole maker to one where he employed assistants to throw

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[203] Leach, B. *Hamada Potter* p 96
[204] 'Bernard Leach Show Attracts Many Visitors' *The Japan Advertiser* 4 June 1920
[205] ibid

pots according to his designs, afforded him many advantages. By his own admission, Leach was never a natural thrower. This arrangement allowed him far greater time to concentrate on the decoration of pots, a task to which he was eminently suited. It also meant he could spend more time fulfilling the many other commitments that would take him out of the workshop. Leach would continue to work in this way at St. Ives, as would Hamada when he returned to Japan to establish his workshop in Mashiko. Indeed, it is inconceivable that Leach could have found the time to write and travel had he attempted to undertake all the tasks associated with running a pottery as a sole enterprise. This next phase of Leach's life would establish his reputation as a studio potter in his home country, and ultimately around the world.

2.3 The Mingei Movement and Religion as a Discourse in the Evaluation of Leach

Clay in man, clay on the wheel
Spinning like the earth and the stars,
Man spinning the clay into stars.
Life spinning man – LIFE.[206]

At this point a description of the history and nature of the Mingei or Folk Craft Movement must be given. Although the Mingei Movement, or *minshuteki kogei* [207] only officially began after Leach had returned to England he is inextricably linked to its formation and any discussion of Mingei must take into account the activities of Leach and Yanagi in the period between 1909 and 1920. It is also necessary to highlight the philosophical dimensions of Mingei and its roots in Buddhist thought. Religion is a powerful discourse and any analysis of Leach which did not consider the role of religion in shaping his actions would be deficient.

It has already been noted that the interests of Bernard Leach and Soetsu Yanagi coincided in a remarkable and fortuitous manner, with their meeting sparking a period of intense exploration of Eastern and Western art and philosophy. However, as has already been discussed in this chapter, even before Leach's arrival in Japan, Yanagi was investigating both Western and Eastern forms of thought and of art. It has been previously stated that as well as studying languages and the arts at the *Gakashuin,* Soetsu Yanagi had been instructed in Buddhist philosophy by one of the twentieth centuries pre-eminent Buddhist scholars, Daisetsu Suzuki.[208] For Leach as well, this

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[206] Leach, B. *Spinning the Clay into Stars* Japan 1962 Weinberg, R. ed *Spinning the Clay into Stars: Bernard Leach and the Baha'I Faith.* George Ronald 1999.
[207] *minshuteki* 'common, popular, everyday' *kogei* crafts see King, J. op. cit. p. 51, 239.
[208] See footnote 6

phase of his life was marked by a growing interest in Buddhism and what might be termed the philosophy of spirituality. As he would later write:

> I have become increasingly aware that in the background of my life there have been two vocations. The first began at six when I became aware of a persistent love of drawing, nor did I ever waver in my desire to become an artist. The second, from about the age of seventeen, after reading William Blake, was the search for truth, which grew stronger in the Buddhist background of Japan. There was even a question whether the latter might not swallow up its predecessor.[209]

Both Leach and Yanagi were interested in the connection of spirituality to philosophy, science and the arts and in questioning established dogmas. In the early period of their friendship William Blake was key, and just as Blake saw his accomplishments in both poetry and the visual arts as companions in a unified spiritual endeavour[210] Yanagi and Leach sought synthesis and unity in art, philosophy and spirituality.

Blake's famous stanza, quoted by Leach in *Beyond East and West*:

> *To see a World in a Grain of Sand,*
> *And a Heaven in a Wild Flower,*
> *Hold Infinity in the palm of your hand,*
> *And Eternity in an hour.*[211]

is echoed in Yanagi's employment of the concept of *sokunyo,* which Joanna King states was probably an abbreviation arrived at by Yanagi of the term *shikisoku*

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[209] Leach, B. *Beyond East and West* p. 304
[210] See Marshall, P. *William Blake: Visionary Anarchist'* Freedom Press 1988 et al
[211] Blake, W *Poems* ed. Rossetti first published 1863

nyorai, meaning 'oneness or non-duality'.[212] In a 1918 essay by Yanagi titled '*Sokunyo*',[213] he draws a parallel between the act of perceiving beauty and a momentary loss of ego or self. This is the loss of duality[214], a concept deeply rooted in Buddhist teachings, but it also has strong resonances of Blake. Yanagi explains the concept of *sokunyo* by writing:

> One cannot regard *sokunyo* as an object of knowledge. *Sokunyo* grasped through knowledge is not *sokunyo* at all. *Sokunyo* is an 'Intangible cloud' like that appreciated by people of the Middle-Ages ... This is probably what Pascal called 'religion through the heart.[215]

However, an interest in spirituality and modern art do not obviously lead to the formation of a folk craft movement. At approximately the same time that Bernard Leach was in China in 1914 and 1915, Yanagi's interests began to deviate from the other members of the *Shirakaba* group. There is perhaps an element of a nascent nationalism in Yanagi's growing disillusionment with modernity, which, as we have seen, was strongly equated with the West.[216] King notes[217] that Yanagi was also unusual amongst Japanese intellectuals of the time in shifting towards – or returning to – Eastern philosophy so early in his career. What is clear is that Yanagi's emerging religious philosophy was mirrored in a growing interest in Oriental crafts, and specifically in Korean ceramics of the Yi Dynasty[218]. Korean celadons and

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[212] King, J. op. cit.. 206
[213] King, J. op. cit. p. 33
[214] Bernard Leach recounted a meeting with Daisetsu Suzuki in New York, where Leach was 'struck with the Rod of Zen'. In answer to Leach's query of Suzuki, as to why he had shifted his attention from Zen Buddhism to the school of Jodo Buddhism, Suzuki answered by saying that 'If you think there is a division you have not begun to understantd – there is no dualism in Buddhis.' Leach, B. op. cit. p. 289
[215] ibid. p.34
[216] See Beasley, W. G. op. cit et al
[217] King, J. ibid
[218] ibid.

punch'ong [219] [in Japanese *hakeme*] wares had long been admired and collected in Japan. This process had seen simple Korean rice bowls transformed through the aesthetic judgements of generations of Japanese tea masters into revered and valuable treasures. In 1962, Leach writes of seeing:

> At Tottori, in the Mingei Museum, forty Korean rice bowls of the Yi Dynasty ... laid out by Dr. Yoshida for me to see. All were good, some inexpressively beautiful with the gentle simplicity of a sea breeze. These were the unaffected products of normal man and of normal Korean society, easy and unlaboured. It is we who are difficult and out of balance.'[220]

Perhaps the most famous statement ever made about a pot was that made by Yanagi in *The Unknown Craftsman: A Japanese Insight into Beauty*[221] where he describes first seeing the *Kizaemon*[222] tea bowl or *cha-wan,* an anonymous sixteenth century Korean rice bowl that had first been used for the performance of tea in Japan in the seventeenth century, and that had continued to grow in stature and value to the point that it was designated a Japanese National Treasure in 1950. This often quoted passage, about a bowl considered to be amongst the finest tea bowls in Japan [I will only quote part of the relevant passage here]:[223]

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[219] The term *punch'ong* derives from the terms *pun* meaning white slip, or liquid clay, and *ch'ong* meaning celadon, referring to the glaze which covers the work. See Brabd, M and Roberts, C *Earth, Spirit, Fire* Powerhouse Publishing 2000, p. 27 This is a somewhat misleading definition, and it is more accurate to think of these ceramics in terms of a darker clay body partially covered either by brushing or dipping with a white, porcelain clay slip, which is then often incised in a pattern to reveal the darker clay underneath, and is then covered with what effectively is a clear glaze. The ware varies greatly in type and sophistication depending on the use to which it was to be put and the initial value of the pot.

[220] Leach, B. op. cit. p. 269

[221] Yanagi, S. *The Unknown Craftsman: a Japanese Insight into Beauty* adapted by Leach, B. Kodansha International 1972

[222] The bowl was named after an Osaka merchant *Kizaemon* who once owned it.

[223] Yanagi states 'This single tea bowl is considered to be the finest in the world ...' Yanagi, S. op. cit. p. 191

> When I saw it, my heart fell. A good tea bowl, yes, but how ordinary! ... It is just a Korean food bowl ... that a poor man would use everyday. A typical thing for his use; costing next to nothing ... used carelessly by its owner; bought without pride; something anyone could have bought anywhere and everywhere ... The kiln was a wretched affair; the firing careless; sand had stuck to the pot, but nobody minded; no one invested the thing with any dreams. ... But that was as it should be. The plain and the unagitated, the uncalculated, the harmless, the straightforward, the natural, the innocent, the humble, the modest: where does beauty lie if not in these qualities. ... More than anything else, this pot is healthy. ... Emerging from a squalid kitchen, the Ido [Kizaemon] bowl took its seat on the highest throne of beauty. The Koreans laughed. That was to be expected, but both laughter and praise are right, for had they not laughed they would not have been the people who could have made such bowls ... The Koreans made rice bowls; the Japanese masters made them into tea bowls.[224]

is singled out for criticism by Edmund de Waal in his essay *Ghosts in the Kiln: the Language of Authentic Pottery.*[225] De Waal views it as being indicative of the craftsman posing as ethnographer, separated from their subjects by class, knowledge, power and often by nationality, a search for the 'authenticity' doubling as a form of cultural discrimination.[226] Both Yanagi and Leach, by virtue of their class, education, status and even their nationality, conform to these stereotypes, but de Waal, whilst offering a useful criticism, doesn't seek to examine the motivating forces behind their actions, which I would argue are fundamentally tied to Leach's and Yanagi's religious views. For Yanagi, the beauty of anonymous wares represent a spiritual world beyond individualism or ego, a concept garnered from Buddhist teachings. He felt he could link the character of these objects with his own religious convictions, and, despite the fact that in this early period of the development of his

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[224] ibid
[225] de Waal, E. *Ghosts in the Kiln: The Language of Authentic Pottery* 1999 www.ceramicartswa.asn.au/archive/dewaal.html
[226] ibid

philosophy of Mingei he is more involved with craft than religious philosophy, his religious beliefs were in fact an essential element of his advocacy of folk crafts.[227]

In the years following Leach's departure for England, Yanagi combed the Japanese countryside, researching a variety of interests including the devotional sculptures made by an eighteenth century itinerant Buddhist monk, Shonin Mokujiki. It was during one of these trips, accompanied by the potters Kanjiro Kawai and by Shoji Hamada, who had recently returned from Leach's pottery at St. Ives in England, that:

> ... a discussion on what the Kyoto market women referred to as *getemono* (everyday, common wares) led to the coining of the word *mingei,* an abbreviation of *minshuteki kogei* (popular crafts). The next fortnight – while staying at the mountain monastery of Saizenin on Mt. Koya – is hailed as the beginning of the Mingei Movement.[228]

It is interesting to reflect on this scene in January 1926, with the three men staying[229] at the remote and beautiful temple complex at Mt. Koya in central Japan, home to the esoteric Shingon Buddhist sect of Buddhism.[230] Japan was enjoying a period of unparalleled growth and prosperity, yet the process of urbanisation and industrialisation that fuelled this growth was rapidly changing the face of the country, and especially the urban centres.[231] Yanagi's commitment to the preservation of traditional Japanese folk crafts was motivated by his conviction of the aesthetic value of these objects and their symbolic embodiment of moral worth. As King states: 'It

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[227] King, J. op. cit. p. 35
[228] King, J. op. cit. p. 51
[229] Many Japanese temples offer lodgings (*shukubo*) to paying guests.
[230] The Shingon sect of Buddhism was introduced into Japan in 806 AD, pre-dating the introduction of Zen Buddhism (1191) by several hundred years. There are several other schools of Buddhism practised in Japan.
[231] Beasley, W. G. op. cit. et al

was if his perceptions of the last fifteen years all culminated to be revealed in one concept – Mingei.'[232]

Shoji Hamada's moment of epiphany occurred during the time he spent with Leach in England:

> ... associating with a few good working artists who lived simple lives, built their own furniture, wove their own clothes, made shoes, and grew most of their own food. Impressed and admiring, he decided to try to live in the same manner when he returned to Japan. Hamada's ... decision was that these were good values, values worth keeping, and that societies would be better for perpetuating them.[233]

In 1929, Hamada returned to England, this time accompanied by Soetsu Yanagi. Leach was appraised of the developments of Mingei in Japan, the first of many occasions when the three would come together to consider the direction of craft. At the same time, Leach was becoming involved with the Dartington School and with Leonard and Dorothy Elmhirst,[234] the benefactors who would eventually finance Leach's second extended stay in Japan in 1934 and 1935, during which time he was intimately involved with the extension of the Mingei project.

The period from 1926 to 1945 would define Mingei. Under Yanagi's leadership, the original Mingei-kai (Folk Craft Society or Folk Craft Movement) would grow in power, significantly contributing to the cultural life of the nation. In 1934, Bernard Leach, Shoji Hamada, Soetsu Yanagi and Kanjiro Kawai travelled through Japan, collecting samples of folk crafts to be displayed in the soon to open Folk Craft Museum.

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[232] King, J. Op. cit. p. 52
[233] Peterson, S *Shoji Hamada: A Potter's Way and Life* Kodansha International 1974 p. 28, 29
[234] Leach, B. op. cit. p. 161 et al

Importantly, Yanagi had convinced the larger department stores to introduce folk crafts as items of stock, and on this same trip 20,000 objects were purchased to be sold through the Takashimaya Department Store in Tokyo and Osaka, who had also financed the trip.[235] Mingei was no longer just an item for a curious and educated elite, but had begun to successfully reconfigure itself within a modern economy.

The Mingei-kan, or Folk Craft Museum, opened in Tokyo in October of 1936. The next years were a period of consolidation, and, even during World War II, Soetsu Yanagi continued to travel throughout Japan and as far as Manchuria, Korea, Okinawa, the Chinese mainland and Taiwan.[236] In the post-war years the Mingei Movement continued to grow, albeit with some difficulties, although the devastation that had been visited on many Japanese cities had less of an impact on the production centres associated with Mingei, given their predominantly rural nature.

In 1952 Yanagi and Hamada were financed by the *Mainichi* newspaper to travel to Europe. In England, Yanagi addressed the International Conference of Craftsmen in Pottery and Textiles which had been organised by Leach. Yanagi's speeches to the conference, which will be further discussed in chapter six, often refer to the aesthetics of craft within a Buddhist framework. Following the conference, Yanagi, Hamada and Leach then toured throughout America, lecturing to thousands of potters across the country.[237] As Leach recalls, throughout the journey: 'The Buddhist aesthetic expounded by Yanagi held audiences of craftsmen and craft lovers: this philosophy was demonstrated by Shoji Hamada without many words.'[238] Yanagi's

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[235] Leach, B. op. cit. p. 190
[236] King, J. op. cit. p. 79
[237] See Leach, B. op. cit. pp. 229 – 252.
[238] Leach, B. op. cit. p. 245

preoccupation with Buddhist aesthetics were to find a ready audience in the West, where the interest in Zen Buddhism and its relationship to craft became a key element in Western potters interpretation of Japanese ceramics throughout the 1960s and beyond. Soetsu Yanagi died in 1961 and although he was relatively well-known amongst Western potters, it would not be until the publication of *The Unknown Craftsman: A Japanese Insight into Beauty,* adapted from Yanagi's writings by Leach and published in 1972, that his name would become synonymous with the Mingei Movement the world over, ironically at a time when Mingei had moved away from its founders initial vision.

As a final note on the importance of spirituality in the craft philosophies of Bernard Leach and Soetsu Yanagi, mention must be made of Leach's own spiritual path following the years that he spent in Japan, as I believe that it exercised a profound but hitherto unexamined influence on *A Potter's Book* and subsequent texts.

Although Leach was keenly interested in Buddhism and acquired a knowledge of the various forms of Japanese Buddhism through his contact with Yanagi, Suzuki and other scholars, he never formally adopted the practice of Buddhism. On his return to England, isolated from the presence of Buddhism, Leach maintained his general interest in religion and spirituality, without committing to a faith. It was at Dartington school, established with the advice of the Indian poet and philosopher Rabrindranath Tagore, that Bernard Leach would encounter the religion that would shape the remainder of his life.

At Dartington, Leach met the American artist Mark Tobey, who later would gain an international recognition as a painter of abstractions influenced by Oriental

calligraphy. Tobey had converted to the Báha'í faith following the end of the First World War and he was drawn to the atmosphere of cross-cultural exchange fostered by the Elmhursts at Dartington. Tobey introduced Leach to Báha'í, a religion with its roots in the Muslim world that promoted itself as an inclusive world faith. The Báha'í religion echoed Leach's concerns regarding the necessity of drawing Eastern and Western thought and traditions closer together and it was to provide him with the formal spiritual base he had been seeking. At first Leach resisted, writing that:

> (Tobey) spoke of a Persian philosopher, Bahá'u'lláh, who declared Himself in 1863 in the garden of Ridvan in Baghdad ... after my loss of faith at about the age of eighteen ... this was more than I could take. Yet I read the books Mark gave me, and often went to meetings of the Bahá'is. I was deeply challenged. Buddhist thought and life in Japan, and ten years inter-religious thought through Mitrinovic in London (not to mention the writings of mystics in both east and West) had certainly widened my mind.[239]

Leach's acceptance of the Bahá'í faith was gradual. It was not until after he had returned to Japan, accompanied by Tobey, that he became convinced, 'almost against [his] will'[240], of the veracity of his faith. 'A door opened, not only between Buddhism and Christianity, but between East and West.'[241] According to the chronology Leach supplies in *Beyond East and West,*[242] 1940 marked his complete acceptance of the Bahá'I faith. It was also the year *A Potter's Book* was published, and if *A Potter's Book* at times seems dogmatic, I suspect one reason may be found in this coincidence of timing. Leach's journey as a craftsperson was parallelled by his own spiritual development, forged within the esoteric worlds of Japanese Buddhism and alternative spirituality and resolved in his acceptance of Bahá'í. It is therefore not

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[239] Leach, B. op. cit. p.164
[240] ibid p. 165
[241] ibid
[242] ibid p. 311 - 317

surprising that subsequent generations of Australian potters would find the world of Japanese ceramics, as read within the pages of Leach's texts, brought with it an interest in the aesthetics of Buddhist thought. As the Australian potter Peter Rushforth would write in his article 'The Good Pot':

> One soon realised that woven into the Japanese ceramic tradition were thousands of strands, and weaving it together was the influence of the Tea-masters and Zen Buddhism. ... Bernard Leach and Dr. Suzuki have written superbly on the concepts that have influenced Japanese craftsmen – human qualities expressed in the things we make, tranquillity expressed by the character *jaku* "to be quiet" or "to be lonely," often having spiritual significance, transcending birth and death. The idea of *sabi* is suggestive of age, a search for harmony, gentleness, of suchness, of naturalness. ... Concepts that many activities can be art, for art takes place in man, from which everything radiates and to which everything returns. As Mariani has pointed out, "for the Zen masters art is never decoration, embellishment; instead it is a work of enlightenment, illumination, salvation. Art is a technique for acquiring liberty."[243]

[243] Rushforth, P. 'The Good Pot' *Pottery in Australia* Vol. 18 No. 1, 1979 p. 5

2.4 The Mermaid of Zenor - Bernard Leach at St. Ives

When Bernard Leach returned to England in the summer of 1920 the practice of studio pottery was in its infancy. The plethora of makers and workshops, craft societies and associations, magazines, shops and galleries familiar to the post war potter were almost unknown. In Britain as in Australia, ceramics was conducted almost entirely as an industrial enterprise. The vast manufactories of Stoke on Trent, Sèvres and Dresden produced goods of a truly extraordinary technical sophistication, from the finest tableware to the bricks, tiles and pipes on which the building trades relied. In this market hand-made pottery was rapidly becoming obsolete, the province of small workshops mostly catering to the lower end of the market. Some items of household and garden ware continued to be made, often in locations where the costs of transport or the limitations of a smaller market still rendered this approach economic, but, in general, pottery and the factory were synonymous. [244] These vestigial rural workshops would come to have a powerful symbolic value for Leach and his followers.

A third strand to that of industry or the rural pottery was to be found in the manufacture of art pottery associated with the Art Nouveau movement.[245] The beginnings of this style can be traced to France and the work of Ernest Chaplet (1835-1909). Chaplet was born and trained in Sèvres where he had become expert

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[244] This was not quite the situation in Australia, where, although a great deal of industrially made ware was imported, a certain amount of 'fancy-ware' – vases and ornaments - were produced locally, as well as bread-crocks and pickle jars, terra-cotta garden ware, bricks and building products. This point will be expanded on in a discussion on the history of Australian pottery, but, generally speaking, Australia was content to import higher quality pottery from European (and later Japanese) factories, whilst making cheaper domestic ware for the home market in manufactories that still relied to a large extent on techniques of handicraft.

[245] Wakefield, H 'Artist Potters from 1860' in *World Ceramics* Charleston, R. J. ed. Hamlyn 1986 p. 309 – 325

in all facets of the craft. Like Leach, Chaplet was greatly influenced by Japanese and Chinese pottery, having first encountered these wares in the Paris exposition of 1878. He explored the possibilities of stoneware - the French *grès* [246]- and became fascinated with the then unknown processes by which Oriental potters had achieved the classic monochrome glazes, the green and grey-blue celadons and the red-toned reduced copper effects which the French named *flambé* and *sang de boeuf* (ox-blood). Although the European ceramic industry had long ago mastered the techniques of underglaze and overglaze enamel and lustre decoration and the making of porcelain, which had in its own time been inspired by Oriental pottery - in particular the export wares of both China and Japan - the subtle and sometimes wilful stoneware glazes which reached perfection in Sung and T'ang Dynasty China [618 – 1279 AD] remained both a mystery and a challenge to potters. It was through the International Exhibitions and in the limited numbers of works that were beginning to enter the collections of museums that pottery of this type first came to the attention of Western potters.

The aesthetic impact of these works was considerable, not the least because in both surface and form these pots seemed to adhere to an entirely different aesthetic paradigm to that which characterised European taste. [247] The challenge it posed to the prevailing aesthetic may be seen in the comment of another critic, who, referring

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[246] The French word for stoneware, 'grès'.

[247] Some potters, like Chaplet's successor Auguste Delaherche (1857-1940), were much inspired by this radical aesthetic, developing a vocabulary of ribbed and faceted forms over which the glazes would break and run. Many art potters accepted that in seeking out the 'secrets' of oriental glazes a level of imperfection merely added to the desired effect. As a contemporary commentator wrote'some modern specimens of Japanese pottery are curiously and intentionally deformed – crooked, twisted, or bulging like a sack of potatoes – and, nevertheless, in the most refined taste.' De Waal *20th century ceramics* p26, 27 et al

to an exhibition of pottery by another Frenchman, Paul Jeanneney, wrote 'it is impossible to judge the work of the *orientalists* in the absence of any criteria.'[248]

In England, the Omega workshops of the artists Roger Fry, Duncan Grant, Vanessa Bell and Whydam Lewis, again largely influenced by classical Chinese and Japanese ceramics, sought to diminish the gap between the crafts and fine art. Bell wrote in 1914 that 'no one ever doubted that a Sung pot or a Romanesque church was as much an expression of emotion as any picture that ever was painted.'[249]

It was into this milieu that Bernard Leach returned from Japan, his ideas formed not by the displays of Oriental ceramics in the International Exhibitions, but by a prolonged and intimate contact with the culture from which these traditions had originated. His ceramic ideal was as distinct from Wedgwood as it was from the majority of art potters. He wanted pots to reflect local, vernacular traditions, whilst borrowing from what he saw as the best of Oriental ceramics. Perhaps more importantly, he sought to preserve the distinctly hand-made quality of pottery, eschewing 'suave' finishes and the accuracy of industry.[250] [Plate 7]

The establishment of the pottery at St. Ives was Leach's first attempt to reconcile his philosophy of making with the realities of the market, yet even in this enterprise benefaction played its part. This assistance was provided by the incorporation of the new pottery 'as an independent branch of the St. Ives Handicraft Guild, by myself, in

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[248] ibid
[249] ibid p. 47
[250] Leach does acknowledge, in both the 1928 *A Potter's Outlook* and in the later 1940 *Towards a Standard,* the first wave of French art potters as being amongst a group of practitioners whose work was inspired by the 'simplicity and restraint of Sung potters'. However, the later essay infers that better work is being done in England and Japan than in France, or indeed Holland, Germany, Austria, Scandinavia or America. See Leach APB p13

partnership with Mrs. Horne, to whom the Guild belongs.'[251]

The Hornes were to be Leach's first 'sleeping' partners, investing £2,500 into the pottery, with Leach adding 'at least as much again from legacies and so forth.'[252] Despite this not inconsiderable sum the pottery was almost immediately in financial trouble, and it would not be until the early nineteen-thirties that some measure of security was achieved.[253]

Financial matters aside, Leach found a ready audience for his work, although the best of his pottery was only made available to wealthy collectors rather than to a mass audience. As Leach recounts:

> We only turned out two to three thousand pots a year between the four of us, and of these not more than ten percent passed muster for shows. Kiln losses in those days were high – quite twenty percent, so the best pots had to be fairly expensive. What was left over was either sold here or went out on that usually unsatisfactory arrangement of 'sale or return' to furnish craft shops up and down the country. Nevertheless our work became known, students arrived, critics were kind, my Japanese friends held repeated exhibitions of my pots and drawings and sent all the proceeds to help establish this pottery in my own country.[254]

From the outset, the St. Ives pottery accepted a hierarchy of production; all pots were not created equal, and these aesthetic differences were reflected in pounds and yen. This manner of working was justified by the theoretical and practical amalgamation of two distinct modes of production, that of the artist on one hand and of the craft worker on the other. Leach states that the conclusion was reached by Hamada and

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[251] Leach, B. quoted *St. Ives Times* 17 August 1923
[252] Leach, B. *Beyond East & West* p. 144
[253] See de Waal, E. 'Necessary Pots' *Bernard Leach: St. Ives Artists* p. 26 - 51
[254] ibid p. 143

himself that:

> making and planning around the individuality of the artists was a necessary step in the evolution of the crafts. ... we based our economics on the studio and not on the country workshop, or, for that matter, the factory.[255]

With successful exhibitions of pottery in London galleries Leach began to extend his network of supporters. One of the first was the American academic Henry Bergen who later would serve as an advisor to Leach during the writing of *A Potter's Book.*[256] Bergen was knowledgeable about Japanese art and an associate of key figures in British museums. Through Bergen, Leach met R.L. Hobson of the British Museum and Bernard Rackham of the Victoria & Albert Museum. He also met the great European collector of Oriental ceramics, George Eumorfopoulos, who began to purchase his work. Given that the collections of Oriental ceramics in the British institutions had been assembled at a remove, as no British curator had yet visited Japan in an official capacity, Leach's first-hand knowledge of the field accorded him immediate expert status. [257] As de Waal writes, 'At this point Leach was not above emphasising the unimpeachable authority he had – his direct involvement with the true fount of Oriental ceramics.'[258]

Indeed, the decade Leach had spent in Japan, his ongoing and significant contacts

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[255] ibid p. 139

[256] De Waal states that Bergen was Leach's editor, however some care must be taken with this term, as Bergen's role was unofficial and not that of an editor retained by the publishers, Faber and Faber. De Waal, E. *Bernard Leach* Tate Gallery Publishing 1997 p. 48, 50

[257] For a history of the formation of the collections of oriental ceramics in Britain see Rousmaniere, Nicole Coolidge *A. W. Franks, N. Ninagawa and the British Museum: Collecting Japanese Ceramics in Victorian Britain* Orientations, Vol. 33 #22, February 2002, p.26-34, also Gray, Basil, *the First George de Menasce memorial Lecture: The Development of Taste in Chinese Art in the West 1872 to 1972,* Transactions of the Oriental Ceramic Society, Vol. 39, 1971-1973, p. 19-41

[258] De Waal, E. op, cit. p. 37

with Japanese practitioners, and the fact that he was the only British potter to have a career as an exhibiting potter in Japan, lent considerable authority to his statements. Unlike the European-based community of curators and collectors, Leach could – and did - comment on how the ancient traditions of Oriental pottery were adapted to contemporary Japanese life. How this might be translated into a Western idiom was a project in which he saw himself as playing a pivotal role. His ambition to position himself at the very heart of a new chapter in cross-cultural exchange was coming to fruition.

That this project might be hastened through words as well as deeds can be seen in his first attempt – if one discounts translations of his essays published whilst he was in Japan - at elaborating his position in text, when in 1928 his essay *A Potter's Outlook* was published by St. Dominic's Press as part of a small series of pamphlets on the crafts. Here, Leach sets out his thoughts on the philosophical, aesthetic and practical problems of making craft pottery in a Western, industrialised society. What strikes one immediately is the similarity to *Towards a Standard,* written over a decade later.[259] Despite being a much shorter essay than *Towards a Standard*, many of the themes that were to preoccupy Leach in his later writing were already present. He writes about the perceived lack of a fixed 'standard' by which to judge pottery, the relationship of the potter to the artist on one hand and to industry on the other, and he rails against the paucity of good design in factory-produced ceramics and of the difficulties of competing in price with industrial products. It is in this pamphlet that Leach first writes of Chinese ware of the Sung and T'ang periods, together with English slip-ware, as being work that provides a worthy template against which the

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[259] Leach, B. 'Towards a Standard' *A Potter's Book* p. 1 - 27

modern potter should judge their wares.[260] Leach begins his essay:

> When it was first suggested to me in 1921 to write a personal statement with regard to my own work, I resented the idea, feeling a potter's business was to get on with his job, and leave writing to those who make a profession of it ...[261]

Apparently Leach felt no such constraints when living in Japan, and he would go on to spend much of the next fifty years in writing a series of works that were intensely personal, documenting his experiences and opinions in considerable detail. This small essay was a harbinger of things to come.

In 1923 Leach took on his first and in many ways his most important apprentice, Michael Cardew. As a boy during family holidays in Devon, Cardew had worked with Edwin Fishley at Fremington, whom Leach dubbed as 'probably the last vital peasant potter left in England'.[262] Cardew, despite having later read classics at Oxford University, retained an interest in craft pottery. His early experiences with Fishley and the vernacular traditions of English slipware married well with Leach's inclination to resurrect this style of pottery, positing it as a true expression of an English *mingei* or 'folk-craft'. That this pottery also found favour with the Japanese *cognoscenti* only reinforced these predilections, with Yanagi having commented to Leach regarding his 1925 Tokyo exhibition that:

> It is awfully [sic] pity that you did not send us more of your yellow galena [lead-glazed slip-ware] of pure English quality. You must understand how much we like it. ...I myself prefer your well-digested English galenas to the pieces of a

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[260] Leach, B. *A Potter's Outlook* Handworkers Pamphlets No. 3, 1928
[261] ibid
[262] Leach, B. *Beyond East & West* p. 148

Sung pattern. Because they are born-pottery, not made pottery.'[263]

Cardew would go on to become a highly influential potter in his own right, not the least in Australia where his interest in 'pioneering pottery' would find resonance with Australian potters who either had limited access to materials and equipment, or who simply wanted to be self-reliant. Cardew's 1969 book, *Pioneer Pottery*[264], joins the 1940 *A Potter's Book* and Daniel Rhodes' 1957 *Clays and Glazes for the Potter*[265] as standard post-war texts for the studio potter. Cardew's influence on Australian pottery through his contact with the Australian potter Ivan McMeekin in England in the 1950s shall be dealt with more thoroughly in chapter six of this thesis. Other students would pass through St. Ives in the early years, notably Katherine Pleydell-Bouverie and Norah Braden, followed in 1930 by Leach's own son, David, but it would not be until Harry Davis joined the St. Ives pottery in the early 1930s that another direct link between the St. Ives pottery and Australia would be established.

As previously stated Leach had been introduced to the philanthropists and educationalists Leonard and Dorothy Elmhirst,[266] who, motivated by the philosophies of the Indian poet and artist Rabindranath Tagore,[267] sought ways to incorporate elements of Eastern philosophy into Western culture. According to Tagore's suggestion, 'a craft-school (should be opened to) be sure that your weavers and potters always keep in touch with your artists.'[268] Accordingly, Leonard Elmhirst wrote to Leach in 1931, stating that: 'We would love it [pottery] to find its natural place as

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[263] De Waal *Bernard Leach: St. Ives Artists* p. 35
[264] Cardew, M. *Pioneer Pottery* Longman 1969
[265] Rhodes, D. *Clays and Glazes for the Potter* Greenberg 1958
[266] Leach, B. *Beyond East and West* p. 161
[267] for discussion of Tagore see Clark, J *Modern Asian Art* pages 81, 83, 84, 186 et al
[268] Leach, B. *Beyond East & West* p. 162

an art, a science and a utility as well as in the educational scheme as an introduction to form and design.'[269]

Dartington reflected the interests of a middle-class intelligentsia who sought an alternative education for their children. This alliance between the crafts and education would be echoed in Australia in the establishment by Winifred West of Frensham School in 1941 and the subsequent growth of the Sturt craft workshops within that framework. Given the pivotal importance to Australian pottery of the ceramic component of Sturt, established as it was by McMeekin following a period of study with Cardew in England, the parallels between the role of Dartington in the English crafts movement and that of the Sturt workshops in Australia are striking.

In 1934, acting on an invitation from Yanagi and again funded by the Elmhirsts, Leach availed himself of the opportunity to visit Japan. During Leach's absence, his first son, David, elected to study industrial methods of ceramic manufacture in Stoke on Trent. This was done against Leach's wishes, who wanted David to follow his example in spending a period of time in Japan, or, alternately, for reasons which are not as readily apparent, to spend time studying in Denmark. [270] However, the skills that David learnt during this time meant that on Leach's return to England he did not have to be involved in the day to day running of the St. Ives pottery. Instead, after a time Leach moved to Dartington, where, as well as teaching, he was able to concentrate on the writing of *A Potter's Book*.

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[269] De Waal, E. op. cit p. 44

[270] Leach, in a letter to the Elmhirsts, wrote that the decision to send David to 'that commercial scientific graveyard ... will do him more essential harm than good.' In reply to this, Leonard Elmhirst stated that ' with some justice David argues that it would be difficult to get the elements of a science either in Danish or Japanese. BLA 5952, 24 August 1934, Bernard Leach to Leonard Elmhirst.

The outbreak of war in 1939 had a great effect on all aspects of life, and for the pottery this meant that the market for expensive collector pieces dwindled. Leach later considered that this had a beneficial or grounding effect, with a change in emphasis to the production of 'standard ware' tying the pottery more closely to the general public, but at the time the decision to alter production in favour of affordable and useful ware was one of strict necessity. [271] That it took a war to convince Leach of the worth of producing affordable pots meant for everyday use is somewhat at odds with the arguments expressed in *Towards a Standard,* where the casual reader might assume that the production of such work was always central to Leach's endeavours. However, by 1940 the reality had begun to match the rhetoric; 'necessary' pots had become just that, and his new range of 'standard ware' could embody the ideals so eloquently expressed in his writing. It is surprising just how little is recorded by Leach about the process of writing *A Potter's Book.* Forty years later, when dealing with his motivations in *Beyond East and West*, he writes of a growing awareness in the years following his return from Japan of the 'need of a book which might help the students who had come to study with me.'[272] Having read what books were available on the subject, he found little information regarding 'either the ideals or methods of Oriental potters.'[273] This was a gap which he felt he might fill, with a book covering:

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[271] Leach noting that 'because of the shortage of manpower in the potteries etc., distributors in London were selling hand-made pots for use; thus conditions of war to some extent caused us to change course. The relative demands of necessity won the argument, at any rate for the time being, and we began to make more of the standard ware which we introduced before the war. 'He went on to note that although the lower prices of such ware necessitated an increase in production, he considered, at least in retrospect, the changes to have been 'healthy ... because it preserved a useful connection with the demands of life itself.' B. E&W, pages 221/222

[272] Leach, B. *Beyond East & West* p. 216

[273] ibid

not only ... techniques, but also the Oriental approach, in contrast to that which we had inherited from our industrial past. ... I saw the need for interpretation, and with the hope of assisting young English potters, began to write *A Potter's Book.*[274]

[274] ibid

Chapter 3: Early Days - Pottery in Australia prior to 1940

Introduction

A fundamental part of understanding the impact Bernard Leach had on post-war Australian pottery lies in forming a view of what constituted Australian ceramics at an earlier time. Since this early antipodean activity pre-dated the studio pottery movement, analysis of this earlier period will be confined to the type of industrial ceramics made, or used, in Australia at the time.

Following this first period, an intermediate phase, beginning in the early 1900s, saw the beginning of a type of Australian studio pottery, that although being antithetical to the Leach aesthetic, provided the groundwork for much of the post-war activity in Australian ceramics. This type of work persisted into the 1950s and the ramifications of this second strand of studio pottery, made concurrently with pottery derived from the Leach tradition, will be examined in chapter five. The focus of the present chapter is to trace Australian pottery from its colonial beginnings and into the 1930s.

Given Leach's reliance on Oriental archetypes, consideration will be also given to the extent to which Oriental aesthetics, styles and techniques permeated ceramics and other areas of the decorative and visual arts. Although mainly concerned with the Australian experience, many of these trends had their beginnings in England, and were subsequently transferred onto the local scene. Issues covered will include Australian practitioners, education, styles, techniques, modes of production and the contributions of key figures to an understanding of ceramics as an important area of Australian cultural life.

Attention will be given to the influence of Orientalism, the Japanese presence in the late nineteenth century Intercolonial Exhibitions, modernist trends in pottery, and the formation of the Kent collection of Chinese pottery at the National Gallery of Victoria, which established a focal point around which later Leachean-derived theories could be tested. The presence of A. L. Sadler, Professor of Oriental Studies at the University of Sydney from 1922 to 1948, ranks as perhaps the greatest missed opportunity for Australian potters to gain an appreciation of facets of Japanese pottery then unknown in this country. Sadler will be mentioned briefly as a counterpoint to the prevailing trends of the time.

The colonial period - pottery in Australia pre 1900

In the days before the use of plastics, the range of objects made from clay was much larger than it is today. Affordable pottery was in great demand, and early Australian ceramic production emphasised the need for mass-produced utilitarian wares, more often than not fashioned after English items and styles. These wares spanned the range from construction ceramics (bricks, pipes, tiles etc) to the pots designed for everyday use: the bread crocks, bottles and ink wells which may still be found in abundance in antique and bric-a-brac stores today, and one only has to make a study of these wares to encounter a great variety of objects which have been superseded in modern times.[275] [Plate 8]

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[275] If there is one difference that may be identified by a comparison of colonial Australian ceramics with those of European origin, it is to be found in the numbers of locally manufactured ceramic vessels designed to facilitate the preservation of foods and liquids in a hot climate. In the days before the invention of mechanical refrigeration, ceramic butter and water coolers were an absolute necessity to the settler population of Australia, where spoilage could occur much more rapidly than in the English climate. Such objects were at their best when made in an un-glazed form and fired at

Small and medium-sized potteries had sprung up in all states to meet the needs of the local population. The large bottle-kilns would be filled with glazed and un-glazed wares, from garden pots to glazed crocks and bottles, stacked according to the temperature needed to finish the ware. [276] Most of the glazes were based on 'raw' (un-fritted) lead formulations, although higher temperature wares might utilise the zinc or 'Bristol' type glazes, or even simple lime/feldspar fluxed recipes based on imported 'Cornish-stone' or the local 'glaze-stone' equivalents, such as the rock mined near Mt. Torrens near Adelaide.[277]

The workshops were positioned according to their proximity to population centres and the availability of suitable raw materials. Access to clay is an obvious necessity, but a pottery also needs water for processing the raw materials and to aid in the forming of products, as well as considerable quantities of fuel to fire the kilns. At the other end of the production process, fired pottery is prone to breakage if not packed and transported carefully, which, in the case of very cheap utilitarian wares, may mean that the costs of transport outweighed the original price of the goods.[278] For example, many early potteries in South Australia were established to the east and

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lower temperatures (the porous nature of the clay aiding in the cooling mechanism) and therefore were relatively easy to produce and cheap to buy.

[276] Bottle kilns of an up-draft design were the standard kiln design in commercial potteries from colonial times until the middle of the twentieth century. Because of the wide range of temperatures experienced throughout the setting, it was not unusual for glazed and unglazed wares to be fired together, utilising a temperature variation that could span several hundred degrees.

[277] See Ioannou, N. 'First Firings – the Brickmakers' p. 3 – 11; 'First Firings – the Potters' p. 12 – 18; 'The Early Magill Potters' p. 58 – 81; 'The Hindmarsh Pottery; Salt Glazed Stonewares and the Terra Cotta Revival' p. 82 – 102; ;Nineteenth century Brickmaking in South Australia' p. 103 – 128; 'Holford – Journeyman Potter from Staffordshire' p. 129 – 146; 'The Koster Family Pottery' p. 147 – 160 et al. All *Ceramics in South Australia 1836 – 1986* Wakefield Press 1986

[278] For a discussion on the way transport costs have shaped Australia. see Blainey, G. *The Tyranny of Distance* Sun Books 1966

north-east of the town of Adelaide, where a variety of clays were available, water flowed in the creeks most of the year round and plentiful timber was available on the slopes of nearby hills.[279] Some of these potteries survived into the twentieth century with a number were still operating well into the 1950s, when the pressures of increasing urbanisation, the use of alternative materials for containers, and the availability of cheap ceramic imports forced most of them to close.[280]

Some of these early potteries also specialised in higher-priced decorative items, the fancy ware or art pottery made in earthenware with coloured lead-glazes.[281] This pottery closely followed European trends, where Orientalist and neoclassical forms were decorated with fluid and colourful patterns and glazes which owed much to the fashion of Art Nouveau. This type of decorated earthenware would provide the technical basis for the first generation of studio potters in the 1930s.

The finest and most expensive pottery was imported from Europe, mostly from England. A wealthy Australian family at the turn of the century might buy a Wedgwood or Doulton porcelain or bone-china dinner service, or a slightly less expensive alternative could be found in the lower-fired earthenware productions of similar manufactories. There was no real Australian equivalent, and, despite the availability of suitable ceramic materials in Australia for the manufacture of porcelain having been identified from an early time, the economies of scale dictated against the

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[279] Refer footnote six this chapter.
[280] Ioannou, N. op cit; also Ford, G. *19th Century South Australian Pottery* p. 78 et al.
[281] Ioannou, N. op cit p. 246 - 274

establishment of a local tableware industry.[282] It has been argued that there was an element of the 'colonial cringe' at work that constituted:

> ...something of a social aspect to Australian pottery. Those who could afford fine furniture and silver made by nineteenth-century craftsmen in Australia were not those who would normally purchase local pottery made by local workers. If they did, it was relegated to the kitchen or the scullery and not used in the dining-room of master and mistress. A hostess of 1879 would hardly consider that an Australian vase would add elegance to her 'exquisite black and gold drawing room suite as made by Messrs. Rocke of Melbourne'.[283]

As the historian David Dolan notes:

> ...just as trade with Asia was a major factor in the development of European ceramics, so trade with Europe and particularly England both directed and limited the development of the Australian ceramics industry in the nineteenth century. This emphasis on trade is appropriate because ceramic production in Australia in the ... eighteenth ... century was predominantly an industry rather than an art or individual craft practice – so much so that the word "commercial" in the phrase "Australian nineteenth century commercial ceramics" is redundant.[284]

Another factor which must be mentioned pertaining to the development of Australian pottery, is the absence of any indigenous ceramic tradition. When Europeans first settled in Australia they might have been surprised to find that Aboriginal Australians did not make or use any objects made out of fired clay. The examples of pots that have been found and are presumed to pre-date European contact are invariably associated with the Macassan traders who travelled to Australia every year to

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[282] Callister, R.C. 'Australian Clays in the Manufacture of White Pottery Wares' *Institute of Science and Industry Bulletin* No. 27, Commonwealth of Australia, Melbourne, 1924.

[283] *Australian Antiques: First Fleet to Federation.*. The Golden Press in Association with the National Trust of Australia (N.S.W.) Women's Committee, 1977. p.95.

[284] Dolan, D. 'Australian Nineteenth Century Commercial Ceramics' in *Delinquent Angel – Australian Historical, Aboriginal and Contemporary Ceramics* Pascoe, J. (Ed.) Centro Di, 1995

harvest *beche de mere*. Berndt and Berndt undertook anthropological research in north-eastern Arnhem Land in 1946 and 1947 under the auspices of the Australian National Research Council and the Department of Anthropology at Sydney University.[285] They recorded references in Aboriginal song-cycles indicating the possible use of pottery by Northern Australian Aboriginal people in earlier times, as well as the possibility that Aboriginal peoples had aided in the manufacture of these goods. All shards that were excavated related to known sites of itinerant Macassan fishers. Aboriginal songs associate the cooking of rice with pottery, further strengthening the connections between the use of pottery in pre-European Australia and the interaction of Australian Aboriginals with itinerant Asiatic cultures with established expertise in ceramics.[286] However, to all intents and purposes Australia, almost uniquely amongst the continents of the world, was a ceramic *tabula rasa*.

To summarise, Australian colonial ceramics centred around the production of utilitarian pottery and products for the building industry. This kind of pottery, while being valued for its utility, did not contribute in any substantive way to the extension of ceramic practice that was to later take place and become the studio pottery movement. Higher quality wares were imported, with no serious attempt to replace this pottery with an Australian made equivalent. Around the turn of the century, many of the smaller Australian potteries supplemented strictly utilitarian wares with more decorative pieces, although the techniques used to make this pottery were still compatible with the production of the pre-existing range. Before 1900 the manufacture of studio pottery was, to all extents and purposes, unknown in Australia, just as it was only in its infancy in Europe. It is not until well into the twentieth century

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[285] Berndt, R. M. & Berndt, C. 'Discovery of Pottery in North East Arnhem Land' *Pottery in Australia* Vol 3 # 1, 1964. p. 2 - 5

[286] ibid

that we find sufficient numbers of individuals or small collectives of potters, working at far enough of a remove from industry, that it becomes possible to speak of an Australian studio pottery movement, albeit one that was very different in character from that which would emerge in later years.

Orientalism and Aesthetics in pre-Federation Australia

Although Australian colonial potters were limited in their ambitions, this does not mean that ceramics of a more sophisticated nature did not make their way to this country.[287] It has already been noted that high quality table and decorative wares were imported from Europe to Australia and it is possible to discern the powerful technical and aesthetic merging which has characterised the development of ceramics throughout the centuries. In much the same way as Bernard Leach merged elements of Chinese, Japanese and rural English pottery, European porcelain had developed in emulation of Oriental ware and retained many of its characteristics. European porcelain had, from the outset, incorporated Oriental and Western traditions, with the porcelains of late-Ming China and the Japanese Imari[288] export wares so thoroughly assimilated into the European consciousness that a kind of ceramic morphing had taken place, whereby it could be difficult to determine the actual country of origin of a piece of pottery without recourse to a manufacturers stamp.[289]

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[287] In some ways, the utilitarian wares of colonial Australia, the butter-coolers and demijohns, were more European in character than the finer porcelains, which often demonstrated a marked Oriental influence.

[288] Also known as Arita ware

[289] See Jourdain, M and Soame Jenyns, R. *Chinese Export Art in the Eighteenth Century* Spring Books 1967; Shire, H. 'Some Comments on Late Ming, Transitional and Ch'ing Wares' *Transactions of*

That this assimilation occurred at all, speaks of the regard in which Chinese and Japanese ceramics had been held for several centuries. Mimicry is a form of flattery, an example of obvious admiration for this aspect of Oriental culture by European society. Indeed, although by the mid-eighteenth century European nations had thoroughly mastered the techniques of porcelain, they never exceeded the standards set by China and Japan. At important international gatherings and expositions, such as the great World Fairs of the late nineteenth century, where manufacturing nations competed for technical and aesthetic mastery, Japanese ceramics were singled out for their virtuosity.[290] This was particularly the case in the America, where critics emphasised the way in which the Japanese objects appeared to destroy the European claims to cultural supremacy. Anna Jackson, in her article 'Imagining Japan: the Victorian Perception and Acquisition of Japanese Culture'[291], notes that an American critic attending the 1876 *Philadelphia Centennial Exhibition*, reported that:

> Japan outshines the most cultivated nations of Europe in arts with workmanship which rivals and excels the marvels of Italian art at its zenith ... after the Japanese collection everything else looks in measure commonplace, almost vulgar.[292]

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the Oriental Ceramic Society Vol. 38, 1969 – 1971, The Oriental Ceramic Society, pp. 45 – 50; Smith, L. 'Japanese Porcelain in the first half of the nineteenth century' *Transactions of the oriental ceramic Society* Vol. 39, 1971 – 1973, pp. 43 – 70; Kerr, R. 'A Passionately Immoderate and Incurable Addiction to Buying Porcelain – the Collection of Augustus the Strong at Dresden' *Orientations* Vol. 32, No. 9, November 2001, pp. 39 – 44; Ayers, J. G. *World Ceramics* op. cit. p.67, 68, 195;et al.

[290] For a discussion of this and other matters see 'Art for trades sake: Japan at the 1875 Melbourne Intercolonial Exhibition' by Montana, A. *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Art*

[291] Jackson, A. 'Imagining Japan: The Victorian Perception and Acquisition of Japanese Culture' *Journal of Design History* Vol. 5 No. 4 1992, The Design History Society, p.246.

[292] ibid

At the time of the 1875 *Melbourne Intercolonial Exhibition* there was much interest in Japanese art in Australia. There had been a Japanese presence at the 1869 *Ornamental and Fine Arts Exhibition* in Melbourne, which included objects lent by the Trustees of the Melbourne Public Library and key Melbourne figures. Sir Redmond Barry, President of the 1875 exhibition panel of commissioners, was fully cognisant of the need to include a strong Japanese showing, as part of a dialogue intended to ensure 'the reciprocal advantages of trade between the 35,000,000 who inhabit (Japan) and the loyal and dutiful subjects of our Queen in Australia'.[293] Through negotiation with British representatives in Japan, it was arranged that 'specimens of Japanese art, such as lacquer, porcelain, enamel, fans and other small articles' be sent to Melbourne. [294] Interestingly, the Japanese delegates to the exhibition were accompanied in Australia by a Mr Robert Page, a former resident of Adelaide living in Japan, who acted as guide and translator for the party. The Japanese exhibit was installed in the National Gallery of Victoria, with further space annexed in the Melbourne Public Library, making a display of Japanese decorative arts on a scale 'unprecedented in the Australian colonies.'[295]

The importance of the exhibition was not lost of contemporary commentators. The *Australasian Sketcher* framed the Japanese merchandise as rarities for female consumption, while praising the Japanese Court as a successful business venture from which colonial Victoria could learn much.[296]

> Two ladies in the pursuit of knowledge and vertu have strayed into the Japanese Court, and from the insinuating manner in which the Oriental

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[293] Montana, R op. cit. p.17
[294] ibid p. 14
[295] ibid p.16
[296] ibid

> shopman is offering his wares for inspection ... the probabilities are strong that their drawing rooms will ere long be ornamented with some fantastic lacquer ware of the far east ... It is of the highest importance to the commercial greatness of Victoria that we should encourage intimate business relations with the people of Japan. We might, as traders, sit at the feet of these mysterious strangers and learn lessons in the art of money making that would bring great wealth to this nation.[297]

The *Argus* commented on the artistry and skill of the Japanese exhibits, comparing the ceramics favourably with the productions of Sèvres, Dresden and Staffordshire. The *Age,* perhaps seeing beyond the dominant rhetoric of Japan as an idealised and mysterious culture, focused on the exhibits as being the products of a Japanese industry made to some extent to suit the tastes and needs of a Western market. This observation was quite prescient, as Japan faced something of a financial crisis throughout the 1870s and desperately needed to generate foreign currency to help fund its expansion and industrialisation. It saw that the export of high value-added goods like pottery was a way of achieving this end, with participation in International Trade Fairs being an important part of this process.[298] The strategy was to prove so successful that by the turn of the century ceramics, along with products like tea and silk, formed an important part of the Japanese economy as both a domestic consumable and important export commodity.[299]

Later exhibitions of Japanese wares proved similarly popular. The *Sydney International Exhibition* of 1879 to 1880 attracted over a million visitors, with its large Japanese exhibit receiving high praise. *The Herald* wrote of the Japanese Court in the subsequent 1880 to 1981 Melbourne International Exhibition in these terms:

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[297] ibid p.17
[298] Moeran, B. 'A Survey of Modern Japanese Pottery' *Ceramics Monthly* Vol.30 No. 8 p.30 - 32
[299] For a thorough study of Japan's economic and political history see Beasley, W.G. 'The Modern History of Japan', Weidenfield and Nicolson, London. 1963.

> ... there is probably no court which will prove more interesting to the intelligent visitor to the exhibition than that of Japan. Two years ago in Paris the Japanese Court was admittedly the gem of the Exposition, and although, of course, far smaller here, the court of that country promises to be a highly interesting one ...[300]

Japanese wares were well received in late nineteenth-century Australia, whether seen in large exhibitions, or through the efforts of individual collectors who were able to source work either directly in Japan or through the secondary market. Some collectors displayed a level of connoisseurship and discrimination, differentiating between contemporary factory-produced items and 'antique' wares from the pre-Meiji period. The Melbourne-based Tallerman collection, formed with the assistance of J.H. Brooke, was assembled in Japan and comprised swords, wood-block prints, lacquer, porcelain and screens, as well as extensive photographic records of Japanese life, produced by the well-known photographer Felice Beatto.[301]

This specialised interest in Japanese art was reinforced by a more generalised or popular appropriation of Japanese ornament and design into the mainstream of Western fine and decorative arts. In Europe, America and Australia, influential designers, artists and architects, found in Japan an aesthetic culture of considerable sophistication, one that offered unique design solutions that might be gainfully employed in the West. The English furniture designer Edward Godwin was a strong proponent of what became known as the 'Anglo-Japanese' style. Godwin was deeply influenced by the Japanese exhibits at the 1862 International Exhibition in London,

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[300] Keefer Bell, E *The Japan Inspiration: Influence in Craft and Design* Art Gallery of Western Australia, 1997

[301] J.H. Brooke left Melbourne to live in Japan at the end of 1866. See *Australian News for Home Readers,* 20 December 1866, p.2

incorporating Japanese references into a number of building and design projects.[302] The influential English designer Christopher Dresser extended his personal interest in Japan by travelling there in 1877, his trip sponsored in part by the Japanese government who sought his advice on design and manufacturing. Dresser documented his travel and acquisitions with notes, drawings, prints and photographs, and later published them in London as *Japan: Its Architecture, Art, and Art Manufactures.*[303] This book was to serve as an important introduction to Japanese material culture for the West.[304]

Australia was no different in this respect, and, though the scale of the cross-cultural interactions was smaller, Japanese influences came to this country both directly from Japan and via England. The parallels to the later aesthetic *ménage* between Leach, Japan and Australia are striking. Alison Broinowski writes of how the Australian artists Mortimer Mempes, returning to London from Japan in 1887, 'described enthusiastically to Whistler the technique of the painter Kawanabe Kyosai, who had been Hokusai's pupil.'[305] A porcelain plate that Mempes decorated while he was in Japan, *Japanese Girl Plate* 1896 in the possession of the Art Gallery of South Australia, marks the first instance of an Australian participating in a ceramic related activity in Japan.

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[302] Lucie Smith, E *The Story of Craft* Phaidnon, 1981. p. 217

[303] Dresser's book was originally published by Longman's, Green and Co in 1882. A facsimile copy was re-published in 1977 by Garland Publishing Inc, New York.

[304] Keefer Bell, E. *The Japan Inspiration: Influence in Crafts and Design* Art gallery of Western Australia 1997

[305] Broinowski, A. *The Yellow Lady: Australian Impressions of Asia* Oxford University Press 1992, p. 40

The First Generation: the Beginnings of Australian Studio Pottery

As Peter Timms points out in his introduction to *Australian Pottery 1900 to 1950*, whereas:

> European painters and watercolorists in Australia were able to adapt the styles and traditions of their homelands in depicting the native landscape ... pottery is in a somewhat different position. Unlike the painter, the potter needs some fairly complex tools and equipment to carry out his work. ... In addition, the wares produced by the potter must compete on the market with commercial pieces which are generally cheaper and more readily available.[306]

Timm's assertion goes to the heart of what makes a regional, or national, ceramic style, and raises the question as to what elements, and in what combination, might serve to create a local ceramic identity?

This was a central theme in *A Potter's Book*, with Leach addressing the issue of how pottery might reflect the needs and the social climate of a place, in that it might be 'born not made'[307]. Was it to be in an as yet unfulfilled collaboration of artist, designer and industry, the proposition outlined in 'Towards a Standard', or would the future lie with the resurgence of traditional craft values, which, although lost from many modern societies were still to be found in pockets of rural England and in the reinvigorated contemporary crafts movement of Japan? Or might it be a function of the materials used, an approach adopted in Australia by Ivan McMeekin following his return from England to Australia in the early 1950s, a matter which will be addressed at some length in Chapter Six of this thesis?

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[306] Timms, P *Australian Pottery 1900 – 1950* Shepparton Arts Centre 1978
[307] De Waal, E. op. cit. p. 35

According to Leach, what made pottery 'local' or vernacular was both the materials used and the length of time during which it had been manufactured, and given enough time a tradition would become closely associated with a location.
Given Leach's arguments regarding the importance of a long ceramic history, Australia was not well-placed to begin the development of its own strand of studio pottery. There would be no slow evolution of a vernacular tradition into a craft-based art, as was the case when Leach argued for the merits of English slipware. Water-coolers and demijohns were not seen to be aesthetic, but rather functional, and the early practitioners of Australian studio pottery probably agreed with Dolan's fictitious Victorian housewife in the consignment of such home-grown wares to the scullery. However, in the early 20th century a strand of local ceramics developed that was unmistakably Australian. It is therefore ironic that this style of ceramics represented the very antithesis of the Leach Anglo Oriental school.

Australiana : Pottery before 1940

Perhaps the name most closely associated with the early days of Australian studio pottery is that of Merric Boyd. [Plate 9] Boyd was born in Melbourne in 1888, and spent his youth between Australia and England:

> ... growing up in a confortably well-off atmosphere suffused by his father's ideal liberalism and his mother's religious mysticism, both of which were to have a profound effect on his thinking.[308]

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[308] Timms, P ibid p. 19, 20

Merric Boyd is perhaps as famous for being the founder of an Australian artistic dynasty - he is the father of Guy, Arthur, Lucy, Mary and David Boyd - as he is for being an artist in his own right. Yet, Merric Boyd's contribution to Australian ceramics cannot be overestimated. In his role as founder of the *Open Country* workshop at Murrumbeena in suburban Melbourne, he would provide training to many important figures active in Australian pottery; his sons David, Arthur and Guy, as well as Hatton and Lucy Beck (nee Boyd), John Perceval, Carl Cooper and others.

Boyd worked exclusively in earthenware, as was usual for all of the pre-war studio potters. He began making pottery around 1908, at Yarra Glen outside Melbourne, before establishing his first studio in the family home in Murrumbeena in 1911. From the first, Boyd's work showed a strong sculptural inclination. Further training in England, following his war service, enabled him to incorporate elements of the Australian landscape into his work. Boyd's faux-naïve style proved popular, and throughout the 1920s and 1930s his work met with considerable acclaim and success.

There are odd parallels in the life of Merric Boyd and Bernard Leach. They were close in age, grew up in similar upper-middle class environments and had early contacts with the arts. Boyd, however, gave no hint of any attachment to the East, instead seeking to make apparent the landscape he experienced at first hand through the medium of clay. This was not to be done in an abstract way or through a continuing local tradition of folk art, but by incorporating the animals and plants he saw around him into the fabric of his work. His pottery was colourful, sculptural, playful, and, in the eyes of many of the later Leach-inspired stoneware potters, the exact opposite of what pottery should be. It was Australiana.

Merric Boyd continued to make pottery over a period of several decades. He was aided in later years by his wife Doris Boyd, who was responsible for much of the decoration on his later work, numerous assistants and members of his extended family. In the 1940s Merric Boyd would be known, if not as a teacher in the formal sense of the word, then certainly as someone around whom a great deal of pottery was made.

Merric Boyd was not by any means the only proponent of such an approach to ceramics. Other potters, like Gladys Reynell, F.E. Cox, William Ricketts and the painter Margaret Preston - who worked from time to time with clay - sought an Australian identity for their work by literally embedding the bush in their pots. It was as if by placing a 'kookaburra on the old gum tree', and then somehow turning the whole tableau into a coffee pot, the unmistakable sense of place thus evoked would begin to amount to a national style. This was nothing new, as Australian decorative arts had long been replete with icons of indigenousness, most spectacularly found in the silver and gilt centrepieces or Epergnes[309], which often incorporated representations of Aboriginal people and artefacts and native fauna and flora, notably the giant native tree ferns. In this respect, ceramics was no different.

For all of his influence, Merric Boyd was in many ways a naïve artist. Margaret Preston, Gladys Reynell and the expatriate artist Anne Dangar were no artistic novices, but well-trained painters and experienced travellers. In late 1916 and early 1917 following time spent in France and Ireland, the women studied ceramics at the

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[309] Epergnes were decorative centrepieces, often made out of glass or silver, and sometimes incorporating unusual items like ostrich or emu eggs.

Camberwell School of Art in London. It appears some of the impetus for this decision may have come from Reynell's brother, a neurologist working in England, who suggested that the handcrafts had great therapeutic value in the rehabilitation of soldiers wounded in the First World War. Similarly, Harold Hughan would discover pottery via his wife's experiences as a nurse at the Mont Park Rehabilitation Hospital in Melbourne during the Second World War. The Camberwell School of Art in London had established a pottery course in 1914, and, of the two women, it seems it was Gladys Reynell who felt an immediate affinity for clay. Whilst Preston would remain a full-time painter and only an occasional potter, Reynell would continue to work in this medium for the rest of her artistic career.[310]

Reynell's enthusiasm was such that she even had clay shipped to England from Kangaroo Island, judging that the very material might give a quality of Australian-ness to her work. Preston and Reynell travelled to Cornwall in 1918 and worked in a local pottery, eventually leaving to return to Australia a year before Leach arrived in Cornwall on his return from Japan. This surely is one of the odd coincidences in the history of Australian pottery; had the women met Leach in Cornwall, the direction of Australian ceramics may have been altered.[311]

Returning to Australia they exhibited both pottery and painting before Preston's (nee McPherson) marriage and relocation to Sydney. Reynell went on to establish the Reynell Potteries, in the grounds of her family's vineyards and winery in Reynella, a village to the south of Adelaide. In 1922 she married her collaborator in this endeavour, George Osborne and the couple moved to Ballarat, where they continued

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[310] Cochrane, G. op. cit p. 46, 47
[311] Ioannou, N. op. cit. p. 297 – 301

to make pottery for several years, until George Osborne's health deteriorated, due to lead toxicity from the glazes they used.

The kind of approach to ceramics, common amongst many of these early practitioners, is shown in Margaret Preston's article 'Pottery as a Profession', printed in *Art in Australia* magazine in July 1930.[312] In her article, the term 'pottery' is interchangeable with that of earthenware, as this was seen to be the only viable alternative for the potter who worked outside of industry. She recommends the use of a wood burning kiln, for reasons both of economy and the beneficial results that are to be obtained from this method of firing, stating that 'building a kiln is no bother, this article being written from experience'.[313] Again, this statement emphasises an experience of ceramics limited to low temperature techniques, since designing and building a kiln capable of attaining high temperatures is considerably more difficult than designing an earthenware kiln. When Preston does mention stoneware, she displays a considerable ignorance of the subject.

> The next process will depend on the type of ware that is wanted. If stoneware, there is no need for a glaze, or second firing. The pots will be placed in the kiln, brought to about 2000 centigrade, then through an opening expressly arranged for, salt is thrown in, dissipates in the intense heat, and glazes the pots. Magnificent examples of stoneware were made some years ago by the three brothers Martin ... [and] ... their faultless creations can be seen in the Victoria & Albert Museum, London.[314]

Preston finishes by remarking that:

> ... there are few craft potters working even now in Australia, but the tendency is to lean too much towards commercial work. It is perhaps useless to point out

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[312] Preston, Margaret. 'Pottery as a Profession', Art and Australia, June-July 1930, No. 32.
[313] ibid
[314] ibid

> that no good can come of the awful approbation of repetition. Leave well alone. Australia has its own right to individuality. Only original work should receive applause in such a young country. There's plenty of clay in Australia. Just get to it, someone, and originate.[315]

Since Preston's article is one of the few contemporary written accounts by an Australian artist who made pottery, it remains an important text. It neatly summarises many of the prevailing attitudes towards ceramics, both of technique, and the direction that Australian ceramics as an art form should be following. Her article also demonstrates an almost total lack of understanding of ceramic technique, and highlights the contribution Leach's *A Potter's Book* would have a decade later in redressing this lack of knowledge amongst Australian potters is paramount.

Ironically, Margaret Preston was surrounded by ceramic workshops, both in Australia and in England, any one of which could have corrected and clarified her statements. She infers that stoneware pottery is unglazed and salt-glazed, a contradiction in terms. Stoneware pottery is certainly not fired to 2,000 degrees centigrade, a temperature so high, that, if it could be reached, would reduce both kiln and contents to molten slag,[316] and, although repetition may well be tedious, repeated practice in the techniques of making pots on the wheel remains the only way to acquire the skills necessary to make well formed and balanced pots, a quality which Preston's forms manifestly lack. Preston wanted to make clear distinctions between 'commercial' pottery and 'art' pottery, therefore avoiding any study of the technicalities of the craft. A ceramic professional reading her article would have been immediately aware of her ignorance, but, since the article appeared in *Art and Australia,* a journal given over to

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[315] ibid

[316] The upper limit of firing pottery is employed for certain porcelain formulas, and rarely would exceed 1400 degrees C.

the fine arts and presumably one to which Preston had access by virtue of her standing as a painter, the editorial staff seems to have taken her at her word. The reactions of the readership remain unknown.

This kind of approach, according to the American historian of ceramics Garth Clark, is a direct echo of the Arts and Crafts movement's attempt to rescue ceramics and other handcrafts from the anonymity of industry and return it to the individual artist.[317] As he points out:

> The bulk of the work was still done by nameless 'labourers' who did the 'dirty crafts – they mixed clay, threw pots and fired the kilns – activities not comparable with the image of a Victorian gentleman-artist.[318]

Clark's observations might well be applied to many of the early artist-potters in Australia and they have great resonance when applied to the way these potters were trained. This division of labour, where all the basic manufacturing, the clay-making, the throwing etc, was carried out by hired labour, but the design and decoration remained under the control of the artist, reinforced notions of the fundamental difference between craft, design and art. This hierarchy of labour, borrowed from the ceramic industries,[319] was often reinforced along gender lines, where female students of ceramics decorated pieces that were invariably thrown for them, and under their direction, by males. This ensured that many of those who would claim authorship of a finished piece often had little idea of the processes by which is was made and then

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[317] Clark, G. *Shards* p. 453
[318] ibid
[319] For a study of gender division in the British ceramic industry see Jones, M. *Potbank: A social enquiry into life in the potteries.* Secker and Warburg, London 1961

glazed and fired, a situation which remained the case at many Australian art schools as late as 1960.[320]

In summary, Australian studio pottery in the first four decades of the twentieth century was always earthenware, mostly decorated and usually colourful. It often incorporated Australian motifs, sometimes leaning towards Modernism or Art Nouveau. The Australian pottery industry, such as it was, continued to manufacture their traditional range of garden pots and demijohns, at times adding to the repertoire by producing colourful, glazed pots, again made in earthenware and influenced by Art Nouveau and Art Deco styles. During this period, two events stand out as establishing a lineage of knowledge that contained the promise of sustaining and influencing a later generation of Australian potters, for whom Leach would become the leading philosophical figure. That one of these opportunities was lost remains a historical curiosity, the examination of which nonetheless contributes to our knowledge of the terrain upon which studio pottery was established in this country. This is the presence of one of the world experts on Japanese culture, A.L. Sadler as professor of Oriental Studies at the University of Sydney from 1922 to 1948. The other matter continues to be of significance to this country, and that is the presence of the Kent Collection of Chinese ceramics at the National Gallery of Victoria. Consideration of both of these matters form the basis of the following chapter.

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[320] As late as the early 1960s, whilst an instructor at the Central Technical College in Brisbane, Milton Moon tells the story of a 'class-revolt' led by an irate student, who was used to ordering a shape to be made by the instructor, which she would then be able to decorate. Faced with the prospect of having to learn how to throw or model the shapes herself, she was so offended that she instigated a class walkout.

3.2 The Formation of the Kent Collection at the National Gallery of Victoria and A.L. Sadler at the University of Sydney

> Examples of work are the most direct source of communication, and to me the magnificent Oriental Collection in the National Gallery of Victoria was a source of inspiration. It was a breath of fresh air ...[321]

As Leonard Cox writes in his history of the National Gallery of Victoria 1861 to 1968, it was in 1921 and 1922, prompted by the bequest of Dr George Ernest ('Chinese') Morrison, that a policy of collecting Oriental works of art was adopted.[322] Public institutions of Australia were still relatively young and the development of core collections, and especially those demonstrating the major Western art movements, were a priority. Acquisition policies were focused mainly on European and Australian works in both the decorative and the fine arts, or of antiquities of unquestionable importance. For example, in 1929 the gallery purchased a marble statue *Aphrodite,* attributed to Greece in the second or third century B.C.; Australian paintings by Orpen and Longstaff were acquired; furniture was added to the decorative arts collection and a substantial gift was made by a Mr John Connell of 'a collection of old English 'China', a term demonstrating the depth of cultural associations regarding the influence of Oriental ceramics on the West.'[323]

Although the additions to the collection by way of Morrison, were, in the main, not a success, this did not diminish Hall's ambitions for the gallery to improve its holdings

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[321] Rushforth, P. 'The Japanese Connection' *Pottery in Australia* Vol. 27 No. 2 May 1988 p. 10

[322] That the bequest proved to be disappointing in quality is also recorded, with most of the collection being of recent make and dubious prevenance, with little of it fit for exhibition. Cox, L. *The National Gallery of Victoria 1861 to 1968: A Search for a Collection* The National Gallery of Victoria 1970, p. 95

[323] Cox, L ibid. p.117

of Chinese art. [324] There were further difficulties when the Chinese collection came under attack in the press, after Mr Frank Godden, a Melbourne art-dealer, had asserted that many of the ceramics were not genuine[325], yet the resolution of this affair would ultimately benefit the gallery. At the time there were no 'reference' works of established provenance in Australian collections and making a comparison of a work of proven quality to another piece - for example a work under consideration for purchase – was difficult. This attack on the gallery's collection had little chance of satisfactory resolution in Australia, so it was decided that sixteen pieces should be sent from Melbourne to the British Museum, where they could be examined by the keeper of the Department of Ceramics and Ethnography, R.L. Hobson. Hobson was an acknowledged expert in the field of Chinese art and his book, *Chinese Art,* [326] published in 1927 (and revised in 1954 by Hobson's successor R. Soames Jenyns) only added to his authority.

In 1929 the appreciation of early Chinese ceramics, from the early Dynasties of the Bronze Age (approximately 2000 BC to 200 BC) to its apotheosis in the Sung Dynasty (960 to 1279 north and south combined), was approaching its zenith in England. Major collections had been formed at the British Museum and the Victoria & Albert Museum and the level of scholarship in this area was increasing exponentially. Of the first exhibition of Chinese art held at the Burlington Fine Arts Club, Sir Hercules Read, Keeper of the British Museum from 1896 to 1921, had written:

> It is hard to remember so fundamental a revolution in the opinion of the world of art as the marked change of attitude towards Chinese art among the leaders of

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[324] It has been speculated that Hall, himself a painter of note, felt comfortable with objects that presented no challenge to his own standing as a professional artist. Cox, L. ibid. p. 95

[325] Cox, L. ibid p. 117

[326] Hobson, R. L. *Chinese Art* originally published 1927, re-published 1954 Spring Books, London

> aesthetic thought ...(to) our present knowledge that an intrinsically grand art had existed in China.[327]

There was a general agreement amongst the leaders of the curatorial profession and connoisseurs alike that the Sung period of China had such reached a standard of excellence it could be counted amongst the golden ages of art throughout recorded history. In this atmosphere, Bernard Leach's constant references to Sung pottery as the standard about which all potter's could agree was in accord with the prevailing opinions of the day.

The works in question were dispatched to London.[328] Of the sixteen pieces sent, fourteen were seen to have been correctly attributed, one was mislabelled and one was from a later period than originally thought, thus establishing the veracity of the Australian gallery's collection. There was, however, a price to pay for this reassurance, with six works being damaged in transit.[329]

In 1937 the National Gallery of Victoria would gain an expert in Chinese art, with the return to Melbourne of Herbert Wade Kent. Kent had developed a passion for the East as a boy, and having decided in 1907 that was where his future lay, he travelled to China where he rose to prominence in the world of shipping. Although Kent's interest in Chinese art had originally been sparked by the decorated export wares of the later periods, in China he had developed a 'scholar's taste' for the quieter and

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[327] Grey, Basil *The Development of Taste in Chinese Art in the West 1872 to 1972* Transactions of the Oriental Ceramic Society 1971 to 1973 vol. 39 p.24
[328] Date unknown. See Cox, L. ibid p. 117
[329] ibid

more subdued ceramics of the classical periods.[330] Following eighteen years in China, Kent spent a further twelve years living in Japan, arriving in 1925, where he became known as one of the leaders of the British community. He was a discriminating buyer with impeccable taste, who bought Chinese ceramics, as he would later recount ' ... because of their beauty ...'.[331] In Japan, the art of the Sung Dynasty had been appreciated and collected ever since its manufacture, and he was able to amass an extraordinary collection of ceramics, especially from the T'ang and Sung dynasties.[332]

Kent's association with the National Gallery of Victoria pre-dates his return to Melbourne. As early as 1930 he had corresponded with Bernard Hall regarding the possibility of lending his collection to the gallery on a temporary basis. Hall had responded with enthusiasm, but the collection, duly dispatched from Japan, was turned back on the Melbourne docks, apparently due to the non-payment of a considerable import tax.[333] Nonetheless, good relations were maintained between the two men, and on Kent's retirement and permanent return to Melbourne, the gallery, in the words of the present curator of Asian Art, Anna Mae Pang, 'got a second chance.'[334]

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[330] The appreciation of the typical Sung wares has long been associated, in China, with the 'scholar', a member of the literate classes to whom appreciation of ceramics, poetry and the like was a prerequisite to social acceptance. Thus, the use of the phrase 'scholar's taste' refers not only to Kent's own scholarship, but the history of connoisseurship of such objects within China.

[331] Pang, Mae Anna *Herbert Wade Kent – Collector of Chinese Art* Apollo no. 118, December 1983, p. 486

[332] see Medley, M. July 13, 1972 Transactions of the Oriental Ceramics Society

[333] As a shipping professional, it seems strange that Kent was unaware of nature and amount of duties and taxes owing. However, since the sum was over £300, it seems that neither Kent nor the Trustees wished to bear this additional financial burden.

[334] ibid p.486

In 1937 Kent arranged an exhibition of 129 objects from his collection at the National Gallery of Victoria. This included ceramics from the Neolithic period to the eighteenth century and works in bronze, jade and lacquer, furniture and paintings. The exhibition was an enormous success, hailed by the critic Basil Burdett as the most stimulating and important exhibition seen in Australia for years. Kent attended the exhibition constantly, speaking with visitors, and transmitting his enthusiasm and knowledge about Chinese art.[335]

The Kent family were so moved by the response to the exhibition that they decided to present it to the people of Victoria, in the care of the gallery. In his letter to the Premier of Victoria, Kent expressed his belief in the educational value of the collection and his hopes that it would stimulate the trustees to acquire a truly representative collection of Chinese art. The Premier gratefully accepted the gift, with Burdett ranking Mr and Mrs Kent as benefactors worthy of comparison with Alfred Felton, John Connell and James McAllen.[336]

In 1938 Kent was made a Trustee and became the first Curator of Oriental Art. In view of the limited funds available, he decided to concentrate on the ceramics of the classical period, those of pre-Han, Six Dynasties, T'ang, Sung and Yuan periods. In July, 1938 Kent secured the support of the Felton Bequest Support Committee to purchase works of art in England, thereby taking advantage of what has been called a golden age for collecting Chinese art.[337]

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[335] Cox, L. op cit p. 160
[336] Pang, Mae Anna *Album of Chinese Art from the National Gallery of Victoria* National Gallery of Victoria, p. 18
[337] Cox p. 160

The success of the 1935-1936 exhibition of Chinese art at the Royal Academy in London had cemented the place of Chinese art of the classical and early Ming periods within the English art world.[338] Basil Grey, in his address to the Oriental Ceramics Society in 1973, noted that the influence of the exhibition, to which many past-members of the Society had contributed, was consolidated by the passing of a large part of their collections to museums. This included the George Eumorfopoulos Collection, one of the greatest private collections of Chinese art in the world. At the same time, the level of interest generated by the display of work of such high calibre ensured that a constant flow of ceramics was coming onto the market; ceramics which, in later years, would become unobtainable, or at least unaffordable.[339]

Working in conjunction with Hobson at the British Museum, Kent was able to acquire forty-five ceramics for the National Gallery at the modest cost of £1,500, at the same time increasing his number of contacts in the world of Chinese art. In 1946, and again in 1951, he returned to London, continuing to buy works of increasing diversity. By the end of the 1930s the Kent Collection at the National Gallery of Victoria was well-known, well-displayed and of a high standard.

It is unlikely that Kent would have envisaged the impact his work would have on the development of Australian pottery, yet his timing was perfect. *A Potter's Book* would be published in 1940 and Harold Hughan would be introduced to Leach's book and the Kent collection in that same year. For many Australian potters in the years to come, the Kent collection would reify Leach's message regarding the Sung standard.

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[338] Grey, B 'The Development of Taste in Chinese Art in the West 1872 to 1972' *Transactions of the Oriental Ceramic Society* 1971 – 1973 Vol. 39, p. 30

[339] ibid p. 32

A.L. Sadler and The Book of Tea

If Melbourne in the 1930s had benefited from the formation of a world-class collection of Asian art in it's midst, Sydney was to be less fortunate in this respect. However, although lacking a publicly accessible collection of the standard of the Kent collection, Sydney did possess an important intellectual asset in the person of A.L. Sadler, the Professor of Oriental Studies at Sydney University from 1922 to 1948. If Kent's interests focused on the collection of Chinese artefacts, even while he was a resident in Japan, Sadler's focus was Japan itself; its history, culture, language and art. The breadth of his interests can be seen in the books he published during those years. These include *The Ten Foot Square Hut and Tales of the Heike* (1928)[340], *The Influence of Japanese Culture and Tradition on her Foreign Relations* (1935)[341], *The Life of Tokugawa Ieyasu* (1936)[342], and *A Short History of Japanese Architecture* (1941).[343] One book, however, more than any other, established Sadler's credentials as one of the most pre-eminent cultural observers of Japan, and that is his 1933 publication *Cha-no-yu: The Japanese Tea Ceremony*[344], a book which remains one of the most scholarly and detailed analyses of this topic ever written in English. [Plate 10]

Sadler wrote this book in Sydney in the early 1930s. During this time he was lecturing on the subject of Asian culture and promoting an appreciation of Asian art through

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[340] Sadler, A. L. *The Ten Foot Square Hut and Tales of the Heike* Charles E. Tuttle, first published 1928

[341] Sadler, A. L. 'The Influence of Japanese Culture and Tradition on her Foreign Relations' in Clunies Ross, I. Ed., *Australia and the Far East: Diplomatic and Trade Relations* Angus and Robertson, Sydney in conjunction with the Australian Institute of International Affairs, 1935

[342] Sadler, A. L. *The Life of Tokugawa Ieyasu* Charles E. Tuttle, originally published 1941

[343] Sadler, A. L. *A Short History of Japanese Architecture* Charles E. Tuttle, originally published 1941

[344] Sadler, A. L. *Cha-no-yu: The Japanese Tea Ceremony* Charles E. Tuttle 1933

the display of his own collection of artworks, yet the impact on Australian art seems to have been negligible. The pictorial lessons of wood-block prints had already been assimilated and most Australian artists were content to absorb Japanese influences via England and the Continent. Considering what Sadler's impact might have been on the world of Australian ceramics, his discriminating knowledge of Japanese ceramics and the aesthetics of the tea ceremony were not able to be utilised by Australian potters. Pamela Bell asks raises this issue in her essay on Sadler, regarding the extent to which his considerable knowledge of Japanese life and customs 'extended to art and if so, what was the resulting effect on the Australian art scene?'[345] Unfortunately, the answer would, at least for Australian potters, appear to be almost none.

Sadler arrived in Sydney in 1922, accompanied by his Anglo-Japanese wife, Eva. He had been educated at Dulwich College in London where he would had considerable exposure to art, with the Dulwich Picture Gallery, attached to the college, being the first purpose-built art gallery in England. Studying at Oxford, he developed an interest in Japanese art and architecture through reading the pioneering work on Japanese architecture by the influential American writer E.S. Morse.[346] After leaving Oxford, Sadler had travelled to Japan, where he continued to study Japanese culture and lectured in English and Latin at the Peers School in Tokyo, the same school that Soetsu Yanagi had attended some years earlier. Sadler would spend ten years in Japan, his stay partly coinciding with Leach's period of residence. That the two men knew each other is certain; Sadler's book, *The Art of Flower Arrangement in*

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[345] Bell, Pamela *A.L. Sadler (1882 – 1970), Professor of Oriental Studies at the University of Sydney 1922 – 1947: His Ideas and Influence* web document

[346] Morse wrote the first book on Japanese architecture that was widely available in the West, *Japanese Houses and their Surroundings* in 1889. Morse, E. S. *Japanese Houses and their Surroundings* Dover Books, 1961

Japan[347], which was published in 1933, the same year as his book on the tea ceremony, is dedicated 'to the Artist Potter Bernard Leach'.[348]

Sadler was only the second professor of Oriental Studies (now called Asian Studies) at Sydney University, following the founding of the Chair by the Commonwealth Government in 1918. Sadler found the environment supportive; he soon expanded the courses in Oriental history and Japanese language; made the history component of the course available to non-language students and introduced general courses dealing with Indian, Chinese and Japanese culture. He was a popular lecturer, who kept a suit of Samurai armour in his rooms, together with a fearsome Japanese mask. Sadler willingly shared his large collection of Japanese ceramics, furniture, prints, and other objects with students and visitors to his house. He would entertain by serving tea in a Japanese tea-house built in the garden at Rivenhall, his house at Warrawee in the northern suburbs of Sydney. [349]

It must be emphasised that Sadler's preoccupation with Japan, the serving of tea and the collecting of artefacts, was not that of the dilettante Orientalist dressed up in a kimono and swishing a fan, possessed of no more certain knowledge of Japan than its approximate location. Sadler was an expert and his book on the tea ceremony remains a standard text, alongside Okakura's 1906 *The Art of Tea,*[350] or Denis

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[347] Sadler, A. L. *The Art of Flower Arrangement in Japan* Country Life Ltd., London 1933

[348] The details of Sadler's relation with Leach, either in Japan or England, are difficult to establish, but this would prove an interesting subject for future research. The Leach archive at High Cross House, Dartington have no record of any correspondence between Sadler and Leach.

[349] Bell, P. ibid

[350] Okakura, K *The Art of Tea* originally published Fox, Duffield & Co., New York, 1906.

Hirota's recent *The Wind in the Pines: Classic Writings on the way of Tea as a Buddhist Path.*[351]

Sadler's interests encompassed not only the traditional aspects of Japanese art but its relationship to modernism, particularly in the field of architecture. Perhaps with Morse's work in mind, Sadler compared aspects of Japanese architecture to recent developments in Western architectural theory and practice, citing the work of Le Corbusier amongst others. In the 1930 edition of *Studio* he compared Japanese and Western interiors, asserting that the similarities between Japanese traditions and European Modernism were too close to have occurred by coincidence. As he wrote in the Introduction to *Cha-no-yu:*

> Simplicity in both East and West may spring from the same cause, but there is so much in the details of this Modernism that it identical with what has long been characteristic of Japanese idiosyncrasy that it might not unsuitably be described as the Rikyu style...[352]

In all these matters, Sadler traced the distillation of Japanese forms to the performance of tea, as can be seen from his mention of the 'Rikyu style'.[353] That Sadler was acutely aware of the ceramics associated with the tea ceremony and their centrality to its performance is evident in his writings. In addition, anyone who lived in Japan for a decade, as Sadler did, could not fail to note the importance of ceramics in the cultural life of the country.

Public knowledge of Sadler's interest in Japan was not wholly confined to the intellectual and artistic circles in which he moved. The famous photographer, Harold

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[351] Hirota, D *The Wind in the Pines* Asian Humanities Press 2003
[352] See Sadler, A. L. *Cha-no-yu* p. viii
[353] See Sadler, Okakura et al.

Cazneaux, made a series of photographs of Sadler's home for the influential magazine *The Home*[354], published by Sydney Ure Smith, with whom Sadler was acquainted. A series of these photos, with explanatory captions, published in 1926, show numerous Japanese objects in Sadler's collection. These same photos were re-published in at least two architectural journals, and, in 1934, the *Sydney Morning Herald* published pictures of Sadler's home, together with those of two of his colleagues at the University, including a Professor Waterhouse, who also had a tea-house built in his own garden. [355]

Sadler's familiarity with Sydney's artistic community can be seen in his involvement in an exhibition presided over by Ure Smith, held in 1929. Sadler was invited to decorate two rooms in 'Japanese style' at Burdekin House in Macquarie street.[356] He used his own furniture and objects for the display, with the result again being photographed by Cazneaux. The names associated with the exhibition committee, of which Sadler was a member, read like a roll-call of the prominent artists of the time. The exhibition manager was Roi de Maistre; Thea Proctor, John D. Moore, Basil Burdett and Ellioth Gruner were all involved, as was J.S. MacDonald, the Director of the Art Gallery of New South Wales. Exhibition rooms were decorated by Sadler, Adrian Feint, Leon Gellert, Hera Roberts, Thea Proctor and Roy de Maistre.

When Charles Condor painted *A Holiday at Mentone* in 1888, he perhaps had more right than most Australian artists to reference Utamaro. His cousin, Josiah's Condor, was retained by the Japanese Ministry of Technology to teach architecture at Tokyo

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[354] 'Professor A. L. Sadler shows Japanese prints to Miss Thea Proctor' *The Home* Ure Smith, July 1926

[355] It is unknown whether Sadler had designed this structure, but it seems likely.

[356] *The Burdekin House Exhibition Catalogue* 1929 Sydney

University in the late 1800s, during which time he also wrote books on Japanese gardens and on flower arrangement.[357] Japanese graphic art continued to influence Australian artists into the 1900s, with Blamire Young, a colleague of Charles Condor's, drawing heavily on a Japanese pictorial trope for his image *The Bridge* c.1927,[358] a subject which several Australian artists were to explore in a quasi-Japanese style. Jessie Traill completed a series of etchings depicting the building of the Sydney Harbour Bridge and her 1930 *Building the Harbour Bridge V: Going Up*[359] is a sophisticated example of a Japanese pictorial device being referenced to depict a very local event. Japanese art and design had impacted on Australian artists, designers and architects, and seen in this light Sadler's contributions were a continuation of a lively, if secondary, thread in the development of Australian aesthetics. However, in the field of ceramics Japanese or Oriental influences were only evident in industrial wares, and then at the level of pastiche. It would take the publication of Leach's book to alter the situation.

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[357] Boroinowski, A op. cit. p. 43
[358] ibid p. 44
[359] ibid p. 45

Chapter 4: Interregnum

If Australian pictorial art prior to World War II was much altered by the graphic power of Japanese prints, the post-war years would see Japanese ceramic traditions utterly change the face of Australian studio pottery. A great deal of what we now think of as typifying Australian studio pottery simply did not exist before *A Potter's Book* came to Australia and its publication in 1940 acts as a fulcrum around which Australian ceramic history turned.

The previous chapters have given the historical and theoretical context through which Leach's book came to be written. The last chapter narrowed the field to Australia, in order that this history might inform our understanding of how Leach's text was received in this country. The chapters that follow will situate *A Potter's Book* within the world of Australian pottery as it existed in the 1940s into the early 60s, when the necessary foundations had been laid upon which it could grow. I will look at the experiences of individual practitioners as well as factors that had broader implications for the development of Australian ceramics. Education, travel, public interest, the marketplace and institutional support all played a part, elevating pottery from its hobby status and instead offering the possibility of a career in this branch of the crafts. However, it should be remembered that many of the pioneers of post-war pottery, like Harold Hughan, worked in other professions and continued to do so for a number of years after taking up pottery. School teaching provided many potters with a valuable source of income, as did the few positions that were available in higher education, a trend that increased markedly into the 1970s as the numbers of full and part-time teaching positions in art schools increased markedly.

In the early years following World War II there was only a small number of practitioners involved in Australian studio pottery, with the likelihood being that most potters in each of the states would know each other, or at the least know of each other. There were only a few galleries and shops specialising in pottery and perhaps a single tertiary college where a student could study ceramics. Unlike in America, where the teaching of ceramics was often through universities, or in Britain, where it was allied with schools of art and design, ceramics in Australia was often taught in technical or teachers training colleges as a component of a more generalised arts course. Examples were the three year Secondary Teachers Certificate (Arts and Crafts) through Melbourne Teachers College (later Melbourne State College) and the ceramics course offered at the Central Technical College in Brisbane. In Melbourne, the Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology (RMIT) had instituted a three year pottery certificate in 1949 which was upgraded to Diploma status in 1950, to my knowledge the first ceramics course in the country to achieve that status.[360]

Peter Rushforth, originally from Sydney, had trained at RMIT as a returned serviceman. In 1951 he returned to Sydney to head what would arguably become the most influential ceramics department in Australia, then part of the Design and Crafts course at the National Art School, more commonly referred to as East Sydney Technical College. [Plate 11] As Rushforth recalls:

> It took the potters thirteen years to convince the department that ceramics should be a serious full-time course ... I tried to play the part of a coordinator in allowing a group of teachers to impart their skills ... during the 1950s and 60s the Technical College was thrown open to summer schools run in conjunction with the [New South Wales] Potter's Society. ... Those were the days, of course, when someone like Ivan McMeekin returning from England [1953] with even just a few slides could fill a theatre with enthusiastic viewers. We were so

[360] Cochrane, G. *The Crafts Movement in Australia* p. 90 - 93

keen to find out everything we could.[361]

Many of the Australian potters who would go on to work in art schools and even to run departments in art schools had no formal qualifications in ceramics. Neither Milton Moon, who headed the ceramics department in Queensland from 1961 to 1968 before moving to South Australia to head the ceramics department at the South Australian School of Art from 1969 to 1974, or Harry Memmott, who would become head of the ceramics department at Prahan Technical College in Melbourne in the 1970s, had either certificates or diplomas. Gwyn Hanssen Pigott, although graduating with a Bachelor of Fine Arts from Melbourne University in 1954, learnt about pottery by first working with other potters, moving from workshop to workshop in an apprenticeship role, and then by establishing her own practice. Contemporary approaches to professionalism, where the attention is on establishing a career path legitimised by formal qualifications at a higher degree level, was certainly not a feature of the early crafts movement.

The stoneware potter in Australia was a pioneer, a maverick and an experimenter. It helped to be an amateur engineer (in Heath Robinson style) with a basic knowledge of geology and chemistry. The wealth of equipment and materials available to contemporary potters was simply not available. Ceramics in these early days required flexibility, inventiveness and a certain amount of luck. Potters made their own kilns, a practice which still occurs today, but many also made their own wheels, something which rarely happens now. Harold Hughan worked on a wheel he had made from the crankshaft of a wrecked car. Mollie Douglas' father, a naval engineer,

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[361] Cochrane p.91

made her wheel[362] and the Adelaide potter and medical student, Frank Weston, built a wheel with such a powerful electric motor that it reputedly interfered with radio reception for some considerable distance, a problem since the time he would spend throwing pots on a Saturday afternoon coincided with the broadcast of sporting events.[363] There were no local ceramic supply stores and the only pre-packaged materials were fritted low-temperature glazes and the colours for painting underglaze and enamel decoration, known as 'China paints'. The materials that would be of use to the stoneware potter – for example feldspars, limestone, dolomite, talc and clays - were commonly used in various industries, but were often only available in large quantities. Knowledge was mostly gained through a process of trial and error and the numbers of books dealing with ceramic techniques was limited not only in number but in scope. Most of the the texts that did exist, for example Dora Billinton's *The Art of the Potter* (1937)[364], Divine and Blanchford's *A Manual on Pottery Craft* (1939)[365], William Ruscoe's *A Manual for the Potter* (1948)[366] or Turoff's *How to Make Pottery* (1949)[367] concentrated on earthenware techniques and simple forming procedures and were more suitable for a school than the professional potter. The one Australian contribution to the field before the advent of the magazine *Pottery in Australia* in 1962, was Irene Landale Beetson's *A Potter's Note Book.*[368] Beetson was associated with the ceramics component of the design course at East Sydney Technical College, and her small book, published in 1949, accurately portrays the technical proclivities of Australian potters at the time. Beetson does include three recipes for high temperature glazes, two of which rely on the potter making complex frits which then

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[362] Cochrane, G. conversation with the author, 25 March 2006.
[363] Weston F conversation with the author, 2004.
[364] Billington, D. *The Art of the Potter* Oxford University Press 1937
[365] Divine, J & BlanchFord, G. *A Manual on Pottery Craft* Frederick Warne & Co, 1939
[366] Ruscoe, W *A Manual for the Potter* Alec Tiranti Ltd. 1948
[367] Turoff, M *How to Make Pottery* Crown Publishers 1949
[368] Beetson, I. L. *A Potter's Note Book* The Shakespeare Head 1949

form a component of recipes containing lead. One recipe, however, called an 'Unfritted Porcelain Glaze'[369], is a workable glaze containing feldspar, calcium, clay and flint, of the type that would be familiar to potters working today, although almost no studio potters working in Australia in 1949 had access to the kilns able to achieve the temperatures necessary to mealt such a glaze.

Because there was very little studio pottery in the major galleries, photographs, often small and in black and white, in magazines like *Ceramics Quarterly*, or of a better quality and occasionally even in colour, as in *A Potter's Book* or in Muriel Rose's 1955 *Artist Potter's in England*[370] (which, helpfully, if confusingly, included French and Japanese pottery), provided vital clues to the direction international pottery was taking.

Most state galleries had only just began collecting pottery and, aside from the Kent collection, the ceramics collections that did exist tended to consist of highly decorated and ornate European porcelains, from Dresden and Wedgwood, Sèvres and Spode, objects as far removed from the approach of the studio potter as it was possible to be. As late as 1960 the Queensland Art Gallery had only three pots in their collection, all purchased in the late 1950s; a David and Hermia Boyd, a Carl McConnell and a Milton Moon. Kenneth Hood at the National Gallery of Victoria was the first Australian curator to promote studio pottery and his contribution to the field was vitally important in fostering talent. In 1947 the National Gallery of Victoria had purchased pottery by Allan Lowe and Klytie Pate, which, although earthenware, was both Australian and contemporary. This was probably only the second occasion an

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[369] Beetson p.58
[370] Rose, M *Artist Potters in England* Faber & Faber, London 1955

Australian gallery had purchased locally-produced studio pottery, following the acquisition between 1927 and 1929 by the Art Gallery of New South Wales of pottery by Violet Mace and others.[371] Nonetheless, it took many years to build collections, and it would not be until the late 1960s that any state gallery could boast a substantial collection of locally made studio pottery.

Rather than residing in permanent collections, most Australian studio pottery was seen in temporary exhibitions. Harold Hughan's ground-breaking Georges' department store exhibition in Melbourne in 1950[372] is famous as the first exhibition of Australian stoneware, and it was made under the direct influence of Leach and the Kent collection. Very few significant collections of overseas ceramics were shown in Sydney. The Cooper collection was displayed at David Jones Art Gallery in the 1940s[373], but it would not be until 1961 and what has become known as the 'Loan Exhibition' – so-called because all the works were on temporary loan from private collections – that a significant collection that included Sung ceramics as well as pottery by Leach, Hamada and Cardew was seen in Sydney.[374] In September of 1960[375], the Potter's Cottage staged the '20 Potters' exhibition, opened by Professor Joseph Burke, an influential figure in the Melbourne art world.[376]

Travel, too, was more difficult, and an overseas trip represented a major undertaking. When Australian potters visited London, as a number of them did in the late 1950s,

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[371] Cochrane, p. 43
[372] Exact date unknown
[373] Exact date unknown
[374] Cochrane, G. op. cit. p. 87
[375] Cochrane, G. op. cit. p. 70
[376] Professor Sir Joseph Burke was the first Herald Professor of Fine Arts and Professor of the department of Fine Arts, University of Melbourne, from 1948 to 1979. Home Page, *Melbourne Art Journal,* Department of Fine Arts, University of Melbourne, 2005, http://melbourneartjournal.unimelb.edu.au/MAJ/ viewed 8 January 2006

the journey alone took five weeks. As a result, people tended to travel less frequently and to stay longer where they visited. Even within Australia, travel was far more restricted than it is today. Some of these factors worked in the potter's favour. The camaraderie of a small fraternity of makers, sharing the lessons learnt by trial and error in the new and exciting field of stoneware pottery was amplified by the more parochial lifestyle of the 1950s. There were other factors too, that whilst being harder to quantify, played an equally important role.

Australia in the 1950s was a very different country to what it is now, both culturally and economically and, although the history of the crafts is most often viewed through the prism of culture, economics played a major part in the equation. The making of pottery is inextricably linked to its consumption and in the post-war years Australian patterns of consumption were very different. The kind of economy that is seen to operate in the world of art is one of disposable income, a point that may seem self-evident and yet it is often overlooked when considering how artists and craftspeople were able to pursue their profession at a time when government subsidies, through grants and other measures, simply did not exist. However, if Australian consumers in the 1950s had less money to spend they also had less to spend their money on, and pottery was well positioned in this respect.

The first years of stoneware pottery in Australia in the 1950s was seen to be the growth of a new art form, so different was its aesthetic from that of most of the earthenware that was being made. Stoneware pottery quickly established affiliations to the art world, which at the time mainly consisted of a number of dealer galleries. Earthenware had associations of commerciality, bright colours garish or kitsch decoration, whereas stoneware was often more muted and subtle in surface and

tone. This echoed trends in other fields, where in architecture and furniture design the faux-surfaces and colours typical of the 1950s were giving way to the use of 'natural' materials and muted tones. Many Australian architects were closely involved with the crafts movement; in Sydney the architects Tom Heath and Don Gazzard made significant contributions and, as Cochrane notes, "it is significant that there were architects on the committees of almost all the Craft Associations when they were formed later in the 1960s".[377] In Brisbane, the architects Jim Birrell (who would go on to design the New Guinea parliament building), John Dalton, Bob Collins, Graham deGruchy would all be active supporters of the arts and of ceramics. Dr. Carl Langer, a lecturer in architecture at Queensland University and his wife Gertrude were part of the influx of Viennese émigré intellectuals to Australia following World War Two. Carl Langer also maintained a successful private architectural practice while Gertrude Langer, an art historian, wrote for the Brisbane Courier Mail. Graham deGruchy was another member of the architecture faculty at Queensland University, and together with Joy deGruchy established the influential *Craftsman's Market* in Brisbane in the late 1950s, the first design store in that city and one of the first stores in Australia to sell Scandinavian furniture and home-wares.

In this environment, exhibition openings, studio visits, lectures, slide nights and day and evening ceramics classes were well attended, but, perhaps most importantly of all, people bought studio pottery. In Melbourne, Kenneth Hood would take a stool and sit outside Harold Hughan's Glen Iris home, to be first in line for the 'kiln-openings' that Hughan favoured as a way to sell his work.[378] According to Les Blakebrough, the owners of the Macquarie Galleries in Sydney would resort to handing out tickets to

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[377] Cochrane, p.61
[378] Cochrane, G. op. cit. p. 86

those patrons queued outside before the exhibition opened, to ensure some fairness in the sales.[379] Exhibitions often sold out, encouraging dealer galleries to exhibit more pottery, and pots were also sold in shops, as objects of interior design, as handicrafts or simply as crockery. An Australian potter working in the 1950s had many choices as to what outlets they would use to market their work, depending on whether the pots were 'exhibition' wares or standard lines, a situation which persists to this day.

To summarise, both the social and economic aspects of the early pottery movement played a role in its success. In the 1950s ceramics had become accepted by many of the best galleries in the country and much of the pottery they exhibited sold very well. Potters formed a small but growing community, making significant gains in professionalism with each passing year. And, if a discussion concentrating on the importance of the marketplace seems somewhat removed from the Anglo Oriental philosophy of Bernard Leach, it should be noted that although Leach begins *A Potter's Book* with philosophy, he ends it with commerce. In the final pages of *A Potter's Book* there are sections on 'Pricing and Stocktaking' and 'The Year's Budget', together with a recommendation that the workshop and showroom be sited 'at a good pause on an important motoring road, or at some focus of local interest, possibly combined with a tea-room run by a partner', sound if unremarkable advice which has proved its effectiveness on many occasions.[380]

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[379] Blakebrough, L. interview with the author 4 December 2001
[380] Leach, B. *A Potter's Book* p. 214, 255

Chapter 5: A Family Affair - Harold Hughan and the Birth of Stoneware Studio Pottery

The beginning of the story of stoneware studio pottery in Australia begins in Melbourne during the Second World War, with Harold (Buzz) Hughan and his son Robert Hughan. Harold Hughan was born in 1893 and was therefore of the same generation as Merric Boyd, the pre-eminent figure of pre-war Australian studio pottery. Merric Boyd and Harold Hughan lived within a short distance of each other in Melbourne, but their careers, their approach to ceramics and even the milieu in which they created their work were very different, a matter that will become obvious when the Boyd's contribution to Australian ceramics is examined in the next section of this chapter. Harold Hughan made pottery that embodied the Leachean approach and his rise to prominence, from the 1940s to his first retrospective exhibition at the National Gallery of Victoria in 1963, echoes a major narrative in the development of Australian studio pottery.

Harold Hughan was forty-three years old before he began to make pottery. Prior to the First World War, Hughan had trained in both mechanical and electrical engineering. Like many of his generation he saw service overseas and upon his discharge from the army in England he received further training in both mathematics and electrical design, assembling a formidable range of practical skills and theoretical knowledge upon which he was later able to draw for his own self-education in ceramics. Harold Hughan's son Robert inherited his father's interest in pottery, later combining his work as a glaze chemist with that of a maker of sculptural ceramics.

It was through Robert that Harold Hughan was first introduced to pottery in approximately1936. Robert Hughan had read an article about pottery by Marguerite

Mahood in *The Herald Home Handyman.*[381] With a history of involvement in the arts and crafts as family hobbies and spurred on by Mahood's article, a simple kiln was made out of an up-turned flowerpot and the first experiments in ceramics were undertaken. In 1939 while working at Mont Park hospital Harold Hughan's wife Lily Hughan met the potter F.E.Cox, who was teaching remedial crafts to the patients. Lily Hughan shared her son's enthusiasm for pottery and she learnt about ceramics from Cox, who, in turn, had worked closely with Merric Boyd in the 1930.[382] The interest in pottery became a family affair, with Harold, Lily and Robert making earthenware pottery under Cox's guidance. Cox had no interest in throwing pottery on the wheel, but Harold Hughan had obtained a copy of C.F. (Chas) Binns' influential book *The Potter's Craft*[383], first published in 1910 and he set about expanding his knowledge of ceramic techniques.

Although now associated with American pottery, Binns was born in England in 1857.[384] He spent the years 1872 to 1897 working for the Royal Worcester Porcelain Works in England, where his father Richard William Binns was art director and co-managing director.[385] Royal Worcester's involvement in the 1893 Chicago Worlds Fair led Charles Binns to America where he accompanied the factory's exhibits. Although fully professionally engaged In England, Binns began to write regular columns for an American magazine, *Ceramic Monthly,* and in 1897 he moved to

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[381] Dr. Marguerite Mahood was an earthenware potter, active in both the pre and post war periods, who contributed a number of articles on art and related subjects to publications of the time, including articles on practical pottery for *Home Beautiful* between 1929 and 1945. see Cochrane p. 48 and Timms p.42

[382] For details of Hughan's early career see Hood, K. *Harold Hughan; a retrospective exhibition in honour of his ninetieth birthday* National Gallery of Victoria 1993 et. al

[383] Binns, C F *The Potter's Craft* Constable & Co., London 1910

[384] Carney, M. *Charles Fergus Binns: the Father of American Studio Pottery* Hudson Hills Press, New York 1998, p. 75

[385] ibid

America permanently. At this time, the response to the display of American ceramics at the Worlds Fair highlighted perceived shortcomings in American ceramics, with a critic reacting to the American exhibits by writing: 'Of the art of the potter in the United States there is not much to be said.'[386] It was a fortunate time for Binns to be seeking work, and following several years extensive travel throughout America he was appointed the inaugural director of what was only the second ceramics training institution to be founded in America, the New York State School of Clay-Working and Ceramics at Alfred University in New York State.[387]

Together with Taxile Doat, a leading French ceramist who similarly had made the move to America around the turn of the century, Binns was interested in both porcelain and stoneware, being of the opinion that the latter was particularly suitable for the production of studio pottery. Binns was a pioneer in this area and his findings were published in numerous papers and articles, as well as in his own books, *The Story of the Potter*[388] published in 1898, and *The Potter's Craft* of 1910. *The Potter's Craft* is a historically significant publication and although now completely overshadowed by *A Potter's Book* it was a groundbreaking text. It conveyed a sense of ceramic history together with straightforward instructions for making many different types of pottery, including high-fired wares, in a manner designed to be of use to the individual or studio potter. Through its series of illustrations, Binns' book enabled Harold Hughan to teach himself to throw pottery on the wheel. Importantly, this text, whilst concentrating on fritted and low-temperature glazes, included a recipe for a simple stoneware glaze made with easily obtainable ingredients, that if correctly fired would exhibit the soft, semi-matt, opaque surface of classic Chinese stoneware.

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[386] ibid p.86
[387] The first school had been founded in 1895 by Edward Orton Jr. at Ohio State University. Ibid p. 87
[388] Binns, C F *The Story of the Potter* George Newnes, Ltd. 1898

Together with Taxile Doat's slightly earlier *Grand Feu Ceramics,*[389] Binns' *The Potter's Craft* was the first generally available text to include such information. Doat's *Grand Feu Ceramics,* to which Binns also contributed a chapter, is even more detailed in its description of stoneware glazes. However, it was – and remains – a rare text and its availability in Australia would have been limited.

Lily Hughan, writing in 1963, remembers that Hughan made his first feldspathic glazes around this time and the family remembers ' HRH [Hughan] earnestly throwing his first pots with Binns propped up in front of him'.[390] Binns' simple stoneware glaze, consisting of 42% feldspar, 27% flint, 18% limestone and 13% kaolin, represented a significantly different approach to glaze-making for the Australian studio potter.[391] It did not rely on hazardous materials like raw lead, complex procedures involving fritting glaze materials or the purchasing of pre-prepared commercial formulations, instead utilising common, inexpensive industrial minerals. The drawback to this technology lay in the firing, as this glaze needed high temperatures to melt and would benefit from 'reducing' conditions, then an unknown quantity to studio potters and not a technique favoured by industry. It would not be until 1946 that Hughan had a kiln capable of realising the potential of these glazes.

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[389] Doat, T *Grand Feu Ceramics* Keramic Studio Publishing Company 1905

[390] Lily Hughan, written note c1963, Powerhouse Museum research file. See also : Cochrane, G. 'Harold Hughan' Simpson, A Ed. *Australian Art Pottery 1900 – 1950* Casuarina Press, 2004

[391] I have altered this recipe to a percentage formula from the original. Richard Zakin notes that Binn's original formula, which I have given above, as published in *The Potter's Craft* does not accord with Binns own workshop notes. It seems the glaze Binns' used at Alfred differs significantly in the amounts and number of ingredients. For the record, Binns' 'Alfred' glaze is potash feldspar 54%, limestone 25, calcined kaolin 11% and raw kaolin 5%. The flint is omitted altogether from this recipe. See Zakin, R 'Technical Aspects of the Work of Charles Fergus Binns' *Charles Fergus Binns: the Father of American Studio Ceramics* Carney, M. Ed. Hudson Hills Press, 1998 p. 112 - 118

In late 1940 Robert Hughan purchased a copy of *A Potter's Book,* having first encountered it through Cox. This meant that the Hughan's, armed with Leach's and Binns' books, were in possession of two of the most sophisticated treatises on the making of studio pottery available at the time. Harold Hughan later recalled:

> "I think it was Leach's book that gave us the idea of getting away from hand-building and going on to stoneware which seemed to be an advance on coil-built pottery ... the whole thing just grew and I was fortunate that I had built a wheel out of scraps; wheels were hard to get. Its no use making stoneware unless you could make it on a wheel." Hughan's wheel, built from the crankshaft and flywheel of a wrecked car inserted in a wooden frame, is now in the collection of the Powerhouse Museum, Sydney.[392]

An interesting aspect of Hughan's statement is his conflation of throwing with stoneware, a technique of forming clay with a technique of firing clay. Strictly speaking, there is no correlation between the two. Hughan uses the term stoneware to indicate a style of pottery, one which he considers to be superior to earthenware. This statement of Hughan's illustrates the perceived rather than the actual differences between stoneware and earthenware, in that for many potters who read *A Potter's Book* stoneware was more than a technique, it was a style and even became an aspiration. Earthenware was equated with a certain amateurism, as is seen in Hughan's reference to hand-building techniques[393] and it is true that many 'hobby' potters, and even some professional potters like Cox, simply could not throw on the wheel. It was not unknown for teachers at the time to base their instruction on various hand-building techniques, a fact which is well-illustrated in many of the books published on ceramics and which serves as another point of difference separating *A Potter's Book* from the majority of other publications of its type.

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[392] Cochrane, unpublished research notes. Also see www.phm.gov.au/collections/database/?=150295 accessed 5 August 2006

[393] ibid

Hughan's desire was to engage more fully with the Oriental traditions that Leach espoused. This was reinforced by reading Binns, who, some thirty years earlier than Leach, began his book by commenting on the trend back from the industrial to the hand-made, 'a natural swing of the pendulum'. In the chapter 'Art Versus Beauty – What Constitutes Art'[394], Binns explores complex arguments around the aesthetics of the hand-made and the relationship of hand-made objects, like pottery or furniture, to art. In Chapter Three, Binns comments that: 'The finest (Chinese) porcelains date from the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries and these are the ideals towards which every modern potter looks.'[395] Although Binns' dates belong to the Yuan and early Ming periods, there can be no doubt as to the work he was describing. It was the same work written about by Leach and it was the same work on display in the Kent collection, only a short train ride away from Hughan's Glen Iris home. It is the Sung standard of which Leach wrote.

In hospital recovering from a bout of tuberculosis, Hughan made plans for a two chamber wood and coke fired stoneware kiln, based on information in *A Potter's Book.*[396] Robert and Harold Hughan built the kiln in 1946 in the back garden of the house at Glen Iris. In 1950 it was converted to oil, and was used for almost twenty years, until, in 1968, Robert Hughan built a catenary-arch[397] kiln, fired with LPG.

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[394] Binns, C.F. 'Art Versus Beauty – What Constitutes Art?' *The Potter's Craft* Constable & Company, London. 1910 p. 11 -31
[395] Binns, Chas F. ibid p.32
[396] Leach, B. 'Kilns' *A Potter's Book* pp. 178 - 213
[397] A self-supporting arch.

Technically and stylistically, Harold Hughan's pottery was in the mainstream of the Leach tradition and the pots in the Kent collection at the National Gallery of Victoria epitomised this aesthetic. Lily Hughan wrote:

> Sung pots were his chief love with their simple and unassuming shapes made for utilitarian purposes, their quiet tones and refinement, even their slight aloofness and sometimes austerity ... they corresponded to much in his own nature. It is their abstract qualities which he has tried to use as a standard in his own work, whilst ever searching to perfect shapes that reflect our modern living.[398]

Whether he ever achieved this is debatable, since his shapes might have also suited the lifestyle of a hundred years before. Harold Hughan made work that conformed to everything Leach had espoused and he never sought to go beyond those self-imposed boundaries. His pottery met with almost immediate acclaim. [Plate 12]

In 1950 Hughan would again make Australian ceramic history, by exhibiting his pottery at George's department store in Melbourne, the first major exhibition of stoneware by an Australian studio potter. Writing in the catalogue to the retrospective exhibition of Australian ceramics *Delinquent Angel,* Kenneth Hood, then Deputy Director of Collections at the National Gallery of Victoria, and a long-time supporter of Hughan's, observed that:

> It was the deceptively simple forms of the Chinese ceramics with their celadon, temmoku and off-white feldspathic glazes that Hughan found so inspiring and he immediately set about experimenting with clays and glazes to emulate them. As with so many other potters of the time, Bernard Leach's influential work *A Potter's Book* provided him with both the technical information and a philosophy. The importance of this book to Australian ceramics cannot be overestimated. ... Harold Hughan showed the first stoneware in Australia ,,, in 1950 and it was immediately acclaimed and collected. The debt to oriental ceramics was clear but from the first the pots had an individuality and a

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[398] Cochrane, G. ibid

uniquely Australian character.[399]

This sentiment had been expressed earlier and with great vehemence by Patrick McCaughey, the Director of the National Gallery of Victoria, in his catalogue introduction to the 1983 Harold Hughan retrospective exhibition, curated by Kenneth Hood:

> More than any other Australian ceramist Harold Hughan has been able to absorb the feel and colour of that landscape into his own practice and so returned something authentically and familiarly Australian to us.[400]

This is a statement which must be questioned very seriously. On any objective reading, Harold Hughan's pottery is not identifiably Australian, even if that ambiguous stylistic territory might be fully explained and mapped. As has been mentioned earlier, the establishment of a national identity in ceramics is not as easily achieved as in many other art forms, particularly when the practitioner in question is working well within the mainstream of a modern, hybrid, Anglo Oriental style. A faceted temmoku tea-pot with a cane handle remains identifiable only as a piece of contemporary stoneware, which may have originated in any one of a number of countries sometime in the second-half of the twentieth century.

Perhaps McCaughey more accurately describes Hughan's position when he wrote that:

> He was his own man from the start and joins that illustrious company of Australian artists who have brought the lessons of the old world to bear on the promise of the new, who have grounded European visions in Australian

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[399] Hood, K. in *Delinquent Angel* p. 53

[400] McCaughey, P. in Hood, Kenneth *Harold Hughan: a retrospective exhibition in honour of his ninetieth birthday,* National gallery of Victoria 1983, p.3

realities.[401]

McCaughey's and Hood's comments should be interpreted as the summation of a discourse about Australian pottery, which seeks, as did Margaret Preston's comments at an earlier time, to establish a national identity in all areas of art and design, including ceramics. Preston's words are at least in some accord with her ceramics, which, with their pastiche of aboriginal motifs and English modernism, offer the possibility of 'Australian-ness'. However, the assertion that Hughan is constructing an authentic Australian vision through his pottery, we see this appeal to a nationalist aesthetic raised to the level of obfuscation.

Later in his catalogue essay, Hood gives a more detailed analysis of Hughan's influences, which according to Hood are Chinese pottery, of the type in the Kent collection, especially in the glazes, English country pottery, of the type made by Harry Davis and Cardew and, most recently, Japanese pottery of the folk-art tradition. He also notes that Hughan's signature brushwork decoration has included a brushed calligraphic representation of three-leaves, which he had been using for thirty years.[402]

This list of influences is impeccable for its allegiance to Leach's philosophy and practice. Davis and Cardew were both Bernard Leach's pupils, Japanese ceramic folk-art was promulgated through Mingei and the presence of Chinese ceramics – the Sung standard - underpins the entire enterprise. In 1953 Hughan made a trip to England and visited Leach at St. Ives, where he was able to study at first hand what he had only read about some thirteen years before. This trip only reinforced the path

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[401] ibid
[402] ibid

he would follow for the rest of his career with an unwavering persistence. Kenneth Hood finishes his catalogue essay by writing that '[Hughans] pots are of the first importance in the story of pottery in Australia and one of its most notable achievements.[403]

Harold Hughan, perhaps of all the potters included in this analysis, followed the course of pottery, as described by Leach, with little or no deviation. Rather than being an identifiably Australian potter – claims which were made about him, rather than by him – he was instead resolutely internationalist, in deed if not in word. During the early period of the development of Australian pottery he worked at his craft part-time, only taking up pottery full-time upon his retirement from work at the age of seventy in 1963. Although his Georges exhibition was undoubtedly a milestone in Australian pottery, his next exhibition wasn't held until many years later. During that time, Hughan's pots were sold from his home, effectively short-circuiting the nexus of dealers, critics and careerism. His first retrospective at the National Gallery of Victoria in 1968, which guaranteed his stature in the world of ceramics, was held at a time when he had only recently begun to exhibit more widely throughout Australia.

Hughan's career is remarkable in many ways. It clearly demonstrates the Leach influence on Australian pottery, but it is as much in how his career developed as in the pots he made that the changes in Australian ceramics over the years are made evident. It is unimaginable that a potter working today would be able to progress to a retrospective exhibition at a major state gallery, while engaging with the critical and institutional world of the arts in such a casual fashion. It speaks of the enthusiasm

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[403] ibid

with which this new work was received, and, especially in Hughan's case, of the close personal ties between major institutions and practitioners.

5.2 Delinquent Angels: the Boyds at Murrumbeena and the Earthenware Tradition

While Australian ceramic history was being made in 1950 with Harold Hughan's Georges department store exhibition of stoneware pottery, the vast majority of the pottery being made in Australia was not associated with stoneware techniques, Bernard Leach or the Sung pottery in the Kent Collection of the National Gallery of Victoria. A great deal of pottery was certainly being made and market conditions favoured Australian potters due to the post war restrictions placed on imported wares, but almost all of this pottery was earthenware. It was decorated, colourful and aimed to appeal to the mass-market.

As Grace Cochrane writes:

> Parallel to the development of hand-made studio or art pottery was the significant emergence during the 1950s of a large number of semi-commercial potteries producing domestic wares, sometimes by throwing pots, but also through mechanical means, such as slip-casting and moulding. These potteries produced functional earthenware ... in mix-and-match colours, and often decorated with painted illustrations. Popular forms included coffee sets, sets of single-handled ramekins, dinner sets, and boomerang-shaped ashtrays and savoury dishes. ... Significant amongst these potteries in Sydney alone were the Leura Pottery, Studio Anna, Modern Ceramic Products, Pate's Pottery and the Martin Boyd Pottery.[404]

The situation outlined by Cochrane was much the same in every state in Australia. In Queensland throughout the 1950s Harry Memmott and Milton Moon would collaborate on a series of commercial ceramic projects centred on the production of decorated earthenware, while beginning to explore the new stoneware techniques in

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[404] Cochrane, G. p.66

their spare time.[405] South Australia, Western Australia and Tasmania all had a number of small commercial potteries, although, once again, the larger, more traditional manufactories maintained their distance from this new style of work.[406] In Victoria, much of the activity was centred around the Melbourne suburb of Murrumbeena. Initially associated with the Boyd family potteries at least two other potteries were established nearby, one by Carl Cooper in Omana road, Murrambeena and another by F.E.Cox, the Jolliff [also Joliffe or Jolliffe] Studio on Neerim road, also in Murrumbeena.[407]

Of all the earthenware potters working in Australia, the work produced by the various workshops run by the Boyds came closest to reaching the artistic status and recognition that would be accorded to many of the stoneware potters. The artistic heritage of this family stretched back several generations to David Boyd's grandfather, Arthur Merric Boyd Snr., an artist of note whose paintings hung in the National Gallery of Victoria, and to Arthur Merric's wife, Emma Minnie (nee a'Beckett) Boyd, a highly accomplished painter whose pictures are actively sought today. Both artists had exhibited at the Royal Academy in London before their move [back] to Australia in 1893. Of their sons, Martin Boyd became a prominent writer and Penliegh Boyd established himself as one of the country's most promising painters, in a short career from the end of World War I until his death in 1931.[408],[409] Another son, William Merric, known simply as Merric, following a short period of study at an

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[405] See chapter nine this thesis for a discussion of Queensland pottery.
[406] The history of Australian commercial ceramics is typified by an almost total alienation of those artists and designers who knew how to produce populist work, to the very industry which may have nurtured a domestic ceramic production on a larger scale.
[407] Timms, P. *Australian Pottery 1900 to 1950* Shepparton Arts Centre 1978, p. 26
[408] Vader, John *The Pottery and Ceramics of David and Hermia Boyd* Mathews/Hutchinson 1977, p. 18
[409] Penliegh Boyd's son Robin Boyd would become one of Australia's most distinguished modern architects.

agricultural college and unsuccessful attempts at farming, also decided at the age of twenty to become an artist. Initially studying drawing at the National Gallery School he turned to sculpture, and it was during a trip to a commercial pottery to purchase modelling clay that he was asked if he wanted to try his hand at throwing a pot. It is recorded that he threw a perfect pot at his first attempt, an event that has possibly been subject to some exaggeration over the years, but he undoubtedly demonstrated an affinity for clay.[410] He decided to become a maker of 'art' pottery, working from a studio/cottage on a block of land the family had purchased for him at Murrumbeena, (then) on the outskirts of Melbourne. In 1912, Merric Boyd – and here there is a parallel to Harold Hughan - also became a part of ceramic history, by holding the first one-man exhibition of ceramics in Australia, at Centreway, a gallery in Collins Street in Melbourne. By the time he left for the war in 1917 he was already a highly respected potter.[411]

In 1915 Merric Boyd had married Doris Gough, a fellow art student from the National Gallery School. Doris Boyd would go on to work on many of Merric Boyd's ceramics, decorating many of the pots he produced over the next twenty years. Following his service in Europe, Boyd spent a year studying at the Wedgwood factory in Stoke-on-Trent, financed by a Commonwealth Rehabilitation Grant. On his return to Australia the Boyd's resumed potting at Murrumbeena, where they met with some success. In the years before the Depression, Boyd's work was fetching up to sixty guineas for a major piece, a considerable sum at the time. However, although Boyd's pottery could fetch high prices, the relatively small amount of work he was able to sell meant that he depended on a private income to supplement sales of pottery, living in 'an

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[410] Vader, J. op cit p.18
[411] see Timms, Peter *Australian Pottery 1900 to 1950* Shepparton Arts Centre, Victoria 1978, p.21,22

indefinable, vaguely Bohemian style of aristocratic poverty.'[412] Merric Boyd was an artist potter, the first one Australia had seen.

It is interesting to compare Boyd's prices with those of Bernard Leach and William Staite Murray, two of the most successful English artist-potters. Staite Murray, the Head of Ceramics at the Royal College of Art in London, had always considered his pots to be individual art-works, and they were priced accordingly. Oliver Watson, Senior Curator of Ceramics and Glass at the Victoria & Albert Museum, notes that according to a sales catalogue of the time a 1930 exhibition of Staite Murray's included a 'Madonna' vase for 60 guineas, 'an astonishingly high price'.[413] Similarly, Leach, in the first decade at St. Ives, relied heavily on the sale of expensive exhibition works to finance the pottery, and consequently:

> ... his few successful pots, and some cracked ones that were mended in the Japanese manner with an imitation gold lacquer, were expensive. In 1928 at his exhibition at the Beaux Arts Gallery his highest price was thirty guineas ... and other pots were twenty guineas. These were prices "only within the range of the collector of rare gems of the potters art".[414]

All of the Boyd children - Arthur, David, Guy, Mary and Lucy - had learned the elements of pottery from an early age as helpers in the family business. [Plate 13] As well as pottery, painting, sculpture and music were an everyday part of life at Murrumbeena. All of the children would go on to follow distinct artistic paths, but pottery remained a constant in the lives of all the Boyd's. For most of them it was a secondary creative activity, supporting their primary artistic ambition. For Arthur Boyd this was painting, but he found that ceramics also offered a certain degree of

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[412] Niall, B. *The Boyds: a family biography* Melbourne University Press, 2002.
[413] Watson, O www.vam.ac.uk/collections/ceramics/points_of_view/transcripts/wast/ vaccessed 9 January 2006
[414] de Waal, Edmund *Bernard Leach* Tate Gallery Publishing, publication date not listed, p. 39

creativity, combined with the possibility of financial rewards, especially in the post World War II climate. Following his discharge from the army in 1944 he established a workshop next to his father's now unused 'Open Country' pottery, which, with his friend and business partner John Perceval, they named the Arthur Merric Boyd Pottery. (The nomenclature is somewhat confusing). Together with the Viennese émigré Peter Herbst, Arthur Boyd and John Perceval manufactured goods for the Ministry of Labour and National Service, as well as individual 'art' pieces.

During the 1940s Open Country Cottage became a haven not only for the Boyd family but also their friends, 'becoming more and more a loose colony of artists and intellectuals – one of the very few enclaves ... to offer protection to radical modernists'.[415] A similar enclave had assembled around John and Sunday Reid, at Heide, a farmhouse located in the outlying Melbourne suburb of Heidleberg. There was some interaction between the two groups, with Albert Tucker, Joy Hester and Sydney Nolan – names closely associated with the Reeds - all visiting Murrumbeena.[416] As well as the members of the Boyd family, John Perceval, Peter Herbst, Carl Cooper, Hatton Beck and Tom Sanders all worked at the Murrumbeena pottery at various times. Cooper would later become well-known for his pottery using Aboriginal motifs. Hatton Beck, who was married to Lucy Boyd, moved to Brisbane, where he taught at the Central Technical College for fourteen years until his retirement in 1961, a position subsequently filled by Milton Moon. Tom Sanders also worked with David and Hermia Boyd in Sydney, before establishing his own studio in Melbourne. Peter Herbst would later work with David and Hermia Boyd in England, before Herbst returned to Australia in 1961, becoming Professor of Philosophy at the

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[415] Cochrane, p.70

[416] Haese, R *Rebels and Precursors: the Revolutionary Years of Australian Art* Penguin Books 1981 p. 217 - 219

Australian National University. The Arthur Merric Boyd pottery would formally continue until 1958, producing earthenware for the mass-market and allowing the artists involved the freedom to explore the possibilities of clay.

David Boyd had initially studied music at the Melbourne Conservatorium. In 1945, following the families predisposition to the visual arts, he transferred his Commonwealth Retraining Grant to the National Gallery School where he enrolled to study drawing under William Dargie. He disliked it, and left within the year.[417] His brother, Guy, had already moved to Sydney to study sculpture under Lyndon Dadswell at the National Art School. In 1946 David helped him establish a pottery in Neutral Bay, and when he returned to Sydney in 1947 they began to work in partnership, making ceramics in the Boyd style. This colourful, fashionable, earthenware pottery was sold throughout Sydney under the name 'Martin Boyd Pottery'. ('Martin Boyd' was purely a trade-name, as David's uncle had no contact with the pottery.)

In the period between David's initial stay in Sydney and his return there in 1947, Guy Boyd had employed some fellow students from the college to work at the pottery. One of these students was Hermia Lloyd-Jones, who had begun by studying drawing and then had transferred to Dadswell's sculpture course, where she subsequently had met Guy Boyd. Hermia Lloyd-Jones also had some contact with the ceramics component at East Sydney Technical College which at the time was being taught by Irene Lansdale Beetson and then from 1946 by Mollie Douglas. Douglas would later go on to become one of the key figures in the New South Wales pottery movement,

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[417] This again emphasises the importance of the Commonwealth retraining grants for returned servicemen in the post-war development of the arts.

but Hermia Lloyd-Jones contact with the department predates the arrival of Peter Rushforth, with his preference for Leach- inspired stoneware pottery, and the ceramics department still worked exclusively in the earthenware idiom. Although the work produced by Beetson and Douglas was competent, the Boyds' pottery was enlivened by a formidable artistic flair which, in David's case, combined with an easy familiarity with the ceramic medium gained through a lifetime of contact– it is doubtful if Hermia Lloyd-Jones, soon to be Hermia Boyd, could gather anything from East Sydney that she could not learn with the Boyds. [418],[419]

When Tom Sanders, a friend of the Boyds from Melbourne who had previously worked at Murrumbeena, arrived in Sydney with the intention of studying at the National Art School, he proposed a new ceramic partnership with David and Hermia Boyd. They moved premises and began to produce work which they marketed under the name of 'Hermia' ware. After a few months Sanders returned to Melbourne, where he would continue working at the Merric Boyd pottery in Murrumbeena until 1950, at which point he left to establish his own studio in Eltham.[420] David and Hermia began work on a group of ceramics primarily intended for exhibition, and in 1949 these works were shown at the Little Gallery in David Jones department store, with the painter Sali Herman exhibiting in the main gallery space. The *Daily Telegraph's* art critic wrote of the exhibition:

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[418] Mollie Douglas would go on to work in stoneware, and go on to make a significant contribution to the studio-pottery movement in Australia.

[419] In many respects, she had a similar childhood to the Boyd's; both in her family's relationship to the arts, in the generally 'progressive' political outlook, and in their upper-middle class social standing. Her father, Jonah Lloyd-Jones, had studied art at the Julian Ashton School in Sydney. Her mother, Erica, had modelled for Norman Lindsay, as had her mother's sister Mabel, who was married for a time to Unk White, a well known cartoonist who worked for the Bulletin. Both Hermia and her sister Clytie had started painting at an early age, and such was Hermia Lloyd Jones talent that she was accepted into the National art School at fourteen.

[420] Cochrane, G. op cit p. 148, 149

> It is rare to find produced in this country works of art which may, in both technical and aesthetic achievement, be judged by world standards. In the pottery of David and Hermia Boyd that distinction is reached. ... Apart from their merit as a splendid décor, the technical perfection, while by no means machine-like, is astounding. ... It is a show not to be missed by collectors and those who are interested in the beginning of an epoch in Australian art.[421]

David Boyd was twenty-four and Hermia Boyd just seventeen years old.

At this juncture, it is interesting to compare the two exhibitions, one held by the Boyds in Sydney in 1949 and the other by Harold Hughan the following year in Melbourne. It is here that we see the beginning of a fundamental difference in approach that would divide the Australian ceramic world for some time.

The Boyds were very young, the progeny of an Australian artistic dynasty. Their background emphasised artistic invention and a certain disregard for convention and their circle of contacts represented the cutting-edge of contemporary Australian art. For the Boyds, pottery was not only a commercial enterprise but another medium which could be explored through an already highly developed artistic vocabulary. Despite the whimsical nature of some of their work, pottery was not a diversion but an occupation and the two young artists relied on sales to finance their day to day existence.[422]

By contrast, Harold Hughan, despite having a prior interest in weaving and painting as well as pottery, was nonetheless a full-time engineer, whose first exhibition of pottery was held when he was already approaching sixty years of age. For Hughan,

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[421] Vader, J. p. 27, 27

[422] In Vader's biography of the Boyds it is evident that they relied on the sales of pottery to generate their income. See Vader, J. op cit

pottery would remain a hobby, albeit a serious one, until he retired at the age of seventy and only then would he became a full-time potter. The Hughans were solid, middle-class professionals, who, whilst having some contact with the Boyds through their associations with Cox, were not part of the Murrumbeena artistic milieu. Although it was only a few kilometres from Glen Iris to Murrumbeena, a gulf separated the differing approaches to ceramics being explored at these two locations.

It could be argued Hughan was making pottery that was deeply rooted in classical conventions and that by conquering the technological problems encountered by working in stoneware his work was in some ways more adventurous than that of the Boyds. This point is key, in that much of the avant-garde quality of stoneware, its appeal as something new, rested in the technology, an understanding of which led to the subdued and muted colours and surfaces achieved through a combination of high temperatures and the availability of 'reduction' atmospheres. These qualities, where restraint was preferred over flamboyance and tradition was a matter to be taken very seriously indeed, were argued for constantly by Leach. The seventh of Leach's 'useful constructional ideas', as they appear in *Towards a Standard*, is that: '[e]nduring forms are full of quiet assurance. Overstatement is worse than understatement' [423].

By comparison, the Boyds' approach was to employ a well-known and easily manageable set of materials and techniques and then to utilise these in an experimental manner. Not only was their imagery unusual for Australian ceramics but they employed unexpected combinations of materials and techniques, all the time

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[423] Leach, p. 24

keeping within the basic constraints of the earthenware range. An example is their use of raw manganese oxide applied to the surface of commercially obtained glazes before firing, and in the deliberate over-firing of commercial glazes. Although some of the resulting ceramics were indeed understated, eschewing decoration and with a range of subtle and modulated effects from a skilful manipulation of technique, the kind of dictums laid down by Leach simply had no place in the Boyd's oeuvre. Kenneth Hood, in his 1961 survey of Australian pottery, wrote that: '...many of his pots are extravagant in form for he considers that whilst balance and shape are timeless, simplicity itself can become a mannerism'[424]. I note that Hood's comments in referring to 'his pots' should state 'their pots' as the Boyds worked very much in partnership.

An anomaly encountered in considering the influence of stoneware in Australia, as promulgated through texts like *A Potter's Book,* was that Leach himself owed a great deal of his inspiration to traditional European earthenware. As has been noted previously, Leach's Japanese supporters considered his 'English galena' – painted, decorated earthenware – to be more authentic than his essays in Chinese inspired stoneware, 'born not made'.[425] This reinforces the essentially hybrid nature of Leach's project, throwing into sharp relief the problematic nature of the subsequent interpretation of that message, in Australia and elsewhere. For David and Hermia Boyd, immersed as they were in the narrative power of the painted image and with a background of ceramic invention based around the decorative and sculptural potential of clay, the muted palette and technical challenges of stoneware posed no real attraction. [Plate 14]

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[424] Hood, K. *The Arts in Australia: Pottery* Longmans, 1961, p.30
[425] De Waal, E. *Bernard Leach* Tate op. cit p. 35

It is not possible to know what Leach would have thought about the Boyd's ceramics, although it is not hard to speculate. It is, however, possible to ascertain the Boyds' impressions of the contemporary English stoneware made by Leach and others as, in November 1950 David and Hermia Boyd, as so many other Australian artists had done before them, arrived in England. At that time in order to sell pottery it was necessary to obtain a license from the Board of Trade, which was issued through the Crafts Council of Great Britain. Bernard Leach had been involved in the English crafts bureaucracy during the war, including the establishment of the Crafts Council of Great Britain. A decade on, his authority in English craft circles was unquestioned. In addition, the war had been the catalyst for Leach to develop his 'necessary pots', in the guise of the Standard Ware range. Argued along the lines of wartime contingency, Leach's approach was to make a line of affordable utilitarian wares, 'to use the ideas and image of utility to an advantage.'[426] These pots had become the reification of the Leach philosophy of craft, a public declaration in temmoku and celadon. As Edmund de Waal writes: 'The Sung standard set out so forcefully in *A Potter's Book* was made palpable within standard ware.[427]

The Boyds' very different approach to ceramics met with an enthusiastic reception from minor officials at the Crafts Centre. They were, however, unable to meet with the chief officer, Heber Mathews, and so made their way to the Victoria & Albert Museum to view the annual exhibition of the Arts and Crafts Society. As David Boyd recounts:

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[426] ibid p.52
[427] ibid, p.52

> ... I would be seeing the great British studio pottery, the work of Leach and Cardew of whom I had heard so much. It came as a great disappointment to see a collection of fairly boring pots that at first glance looked much the same, expressing, as I was to learn, a certain proficiency in a recently evolved tradition. ... Most pots were as heavy as lead ... Yet many pieces were by highly respected British potters – although there were ... some excellent pieces.[428]

A meeting was arranged with Mathews in order that he might view the work ahead of issuing a manufacturing license. Heber Mathews, although relatively unknown today, had impeccable credentials in – to use Boyd's words - the 'recently evolved' English stoneware tradition. He had studied with Staite Murray at the Royal College from 1927 to 1931, and started his own workshop in 1932.[429] Although information about him is scarce, he is credited with having exhibited work in Europe, the U.S.A. and Canada as well as in England, where his work was purchased by the Contemporary Art Society. He was a council member of the Arts and Crafts Exhibition Society, and the Crafts Centre of Great Britain. The illustrations of his work[430], reproduced in the 1947 book by Ronald Cooper, *The Modern Potter,* show stoneware bowls, vases, cups and flasks of a rather undistinguished nature, although his inclusion in this publication, along with Norah Braden, Michael Cardew, Harry Davis, Thomas Samuel Haile, Henry Hammond, William Staite Murray, Katherine Pleydell-Bouverie, Lucie Rie, Marrianne de Trey and Bernard Leach, positions him in the mainstream of contemporary British ceramics. Cooper acknowledges both Bernard Leach and Heber Mathews for their help in compiling the book.[431] David Boyd remembered Mathew's reaction to their work as being:

> .. one of horror. Ignoring Hermia's delightful decorations and imaginative

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[428] Vader, p.36
[429] Cooper, R. 'Index to Illustrations' *The British Potter* John Tiranti Ltd. 1947 p. iii
[430] ibid pp. 27 - 32
[431] Cooper, Ronald G. *The Modern Potter – Le Potier Moderne* John Tiranti Ltd. 1947

illustration, he picked up a pot, looked at its base, and exclaimed: "It's not turned!" He meant of course that the piece had no base ridge or foot, which can easily be formed when the pot is leather-hard. ... I said, "Well, a badly thrown pot may require a foot, but in my opinion not all pieces need them." "But a pot is not a pot unless it has a foot on it!", he replied. I explained that a large bowl, as that piece was, would not need a foot on it if it sat flat enough not to wobble ... and it was not necessary to carve large chunks out of the bottom if the pot had been properly thrown. I pointed out that apart from the functional point of view, it was aesthetically preferable to make a pot without a foot which would not, in any case, be seen. "Oh, I always can tell by looking", he said. So I asked him to pick out pots that did have a foot and he chose a couple. Like all the other pots, they were footless.

Heber Mathews was quite crestfallen and suddenly apologetic, as if we had expected his approval and he could not possibly give it. He suggested by his manner that the pots were badly thrown.

'I can take it that you don't approve of our pottery and that you will refuse us the licence?'

'I'm afraid that it is so ... you can't call it pottery with drawing like that ...'

'What about majolica and pots throughout history that often have lots of decoration?'

Heber Mathews said that there shouldn't be decoration, only a "little embellishment". Then he made a marvellous remark when asked what sort of pottery should be made to get a license.

'Look closely at Bernard Leach's work. If you can make a pot like Bernard Leach and as well formed as yours are, I'm sure we could give you a license.'[432]

Although this episode occurred in England, it nonetheless accurately depicts the way in which Leach's writings were becoming an orthodoxy.

Having gained their approval to trade, the Boyds embarked on a successful career. Despite the failure of their work to conform to the Leach ideal, the six years spent working in England and France had brought them commercial success and, following an exhibition at Barlings Gallery in Mayfair, artistic recognition. The British trade journals *Pottery and Glass* and *Pottery Gazette* featured their work as did British

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[432] Vader, p. 37 – 39.

Home Beautiful and *Vogue* with the Melbourne *Herald* and *Woman* magazine carrying articles in Australia.[433] A piece was also purchased by Professor Falk, who had established a significant collection of traditional Asian and Western ceramics in Oxford.[434] In 1956 the Boyds returned to Australia.

Over the next few years the Boyds would have several exhibitions in Melbourne, Sydney and Brisbane. Their work was well received, with Alan McCulloch, art critic for Melbourne newspaper *The Herald,* reporting that the pottery was: ' ...quite exquisite in design, shape, finish, and in fact much superior to anything of the kind that has been shown here.'[435]

Merric Boyd's influence on Victorian pottery was evident in a 1957 survey held at the National Gallery of Victoria. Included were Arthur Boyd, David Boyd, Stanislav Halpern, Tom Sanders, Lawrence Daws, Carl Cooper, Alan Lowe, Matcham Skipper, Klytie Pate, Neil Douglas and John Perceval. John Vader cites Alan McCulloch as having written:

> Last, but by no means least of these artist potters is Merric Boyd from whose attractive exhibit one can discern in embryo those influences which have spread throughout the whole prolific Boyd family.[436]

In 1961 David Boyd, who had resumed painting part-time some years earlier, won an Italian government travelling art prize. Although David and Hermia Boyd would continue to make ceramics in England throughout much of the 1960s, their Australian

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[433] Vader does not include citations for any of these articles nor dates enabling me to establish accurate citations at this time.
[434] The Exhibition was not reviewed in *Pottery Quarterly.*
[435] Vader, p.114
[436] ibid, p. 125,126

ceramic career effectively ended at this time.

In assessing the ceramic legacy of the Boyds within the framework of Leach's influences on Australian pottery several factors become immediately apparent. The first is that David and Hermia Boyd were not affiliated with the ceramic department of an educational institution or members of any ceramic societies.[437] At a time when nascent groupings like the Potter's Society of New South Wales was gathering around the influential figures of Peter Rushforth and Ivan McMeekin and Leach's writings were becoming ever-more influential, David and Hermia Boyd were already moving into the final phase of their ceramic production in Britain.[438] When Gwyn Hanssen Pigott, following Ivan McMeekin's advice, travelled to London in 1958 to visit Cardew and Leach, the Boyds had already made their own successes in Britain and had come to their own conclusions about the Leach inspired pottery being produced there. Despite all their successes, a combination of frequent changes of location, together with an approach to pottery disapproved of by those who adhered to Leach's dictums, ensured they were absent from the next phase of Australian ceramic history, the focus of which now shifted to New South Wales.

Peter Rushforth, asked about his impressions of the ceramics produced by David and Hermia Boyd in the 1950s, stated that he thought their work was old-fashioned, perhaps influenced by *art nouveau* or *art deco,* while Merric Boyd's pottery was 'a

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[437] From an extensive exhibition list, only one exhibition is recorded as being held at a ceramics-specific venue, they exhibited at the *Potters Cottage* in Warrandyte, a collective exhibition space for pottery formed by Phyl Dunn, Reg Preston, Gus McLaren, Arthur Halpern and Charles Wilton.

[438] David and Hermia Boyd left Australia at the end of 1961 and continued to make pottery in Britain until 1967. They returned to Australia in 1968 but did not make any more ceramics. See Vader, J. op cit p. 134, 135

Rococo type of thing decorated with Australian natives.'[439] While Rushforth's assessment of Merric Boyd's pottery, with its reliance on emblems of Australiana made executed in a high keyed earthenware palette, is understandable, his dismissal of David and Hermia Boyd's ceramics is harder to comprehend. Rushforth is describing the moment of bifurcation in Australian pottery, when the old approach of earthenware pottery was giving way to the new, stoneware tradition, which often was based on an Anglo Oriental model derived directly from Bernard Leach. One of the main Australian agents of that change was Ivan McMeekin and his career will be examined in the following chapter.

[439] Rushforth, P. Interview with the author 25 October 2001

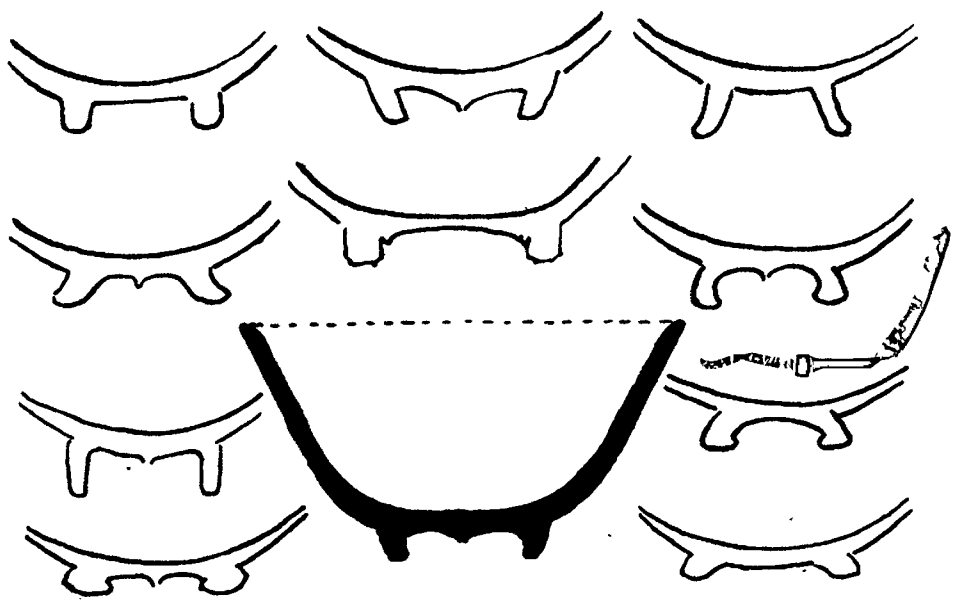

Plate 1. Types of Cut Feet. Bernard Leach, *A Potters Book*, p. 86.



Plate 2. Korean Porcelain Bowl.

Bernard Leach, *A Potters Book*, p. 86.

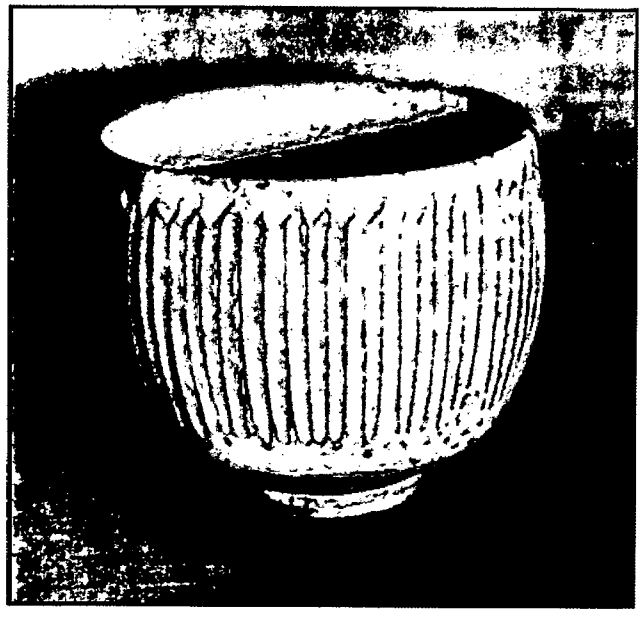

Plate 3. Chinese Fluted Stoneware Bowl.

Bernard Leach, *A Potters Book*, p. 86.

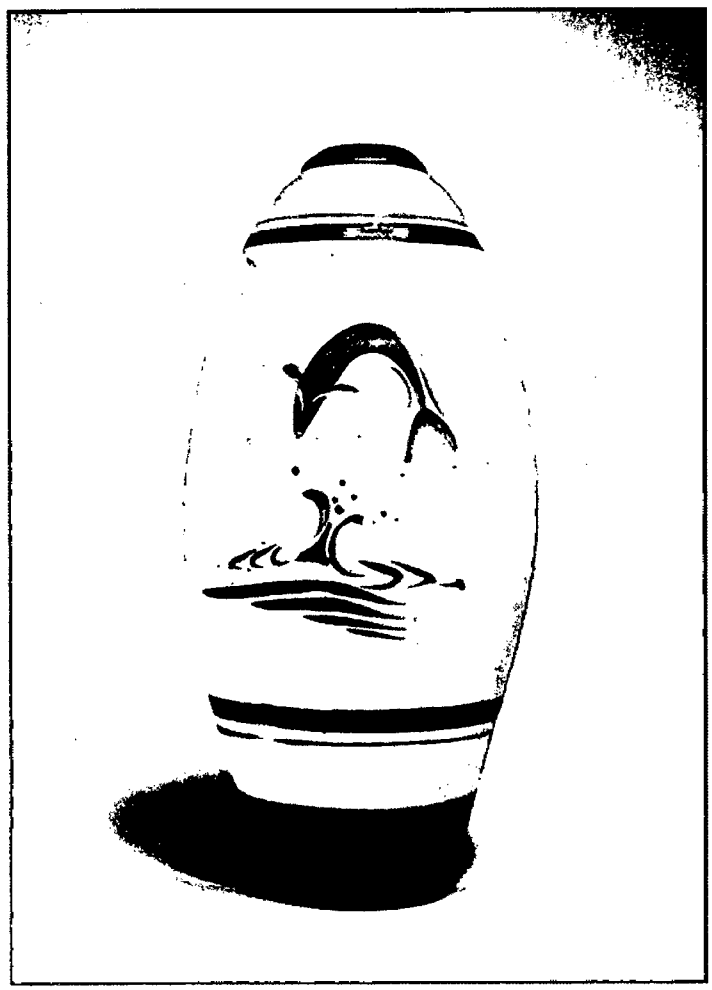

Plate 4. Bernard Leach, Leaping Salmon Vase, 1931.
Stoneware, h. 32.7 cm.



Plate 5. Bernard Leach, Self-portrait, 1914.
Soft-ground etching, 14.9 x 19.9 cm.



Plate 6. Bernard Leach, Kenzan VI. Soft-ground etching, 1924.



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Plate 7. Mermaid of Zenor.

Handbill Advertisement for St. Ives Pottery.



Plate 8. Terracotta water bottles, Trewanack, ca. 1860s.
H. 30.2 cm & 23.4 cm.



Plate 9. Merric Boyd throwing at Murrembeena in the 1920s.

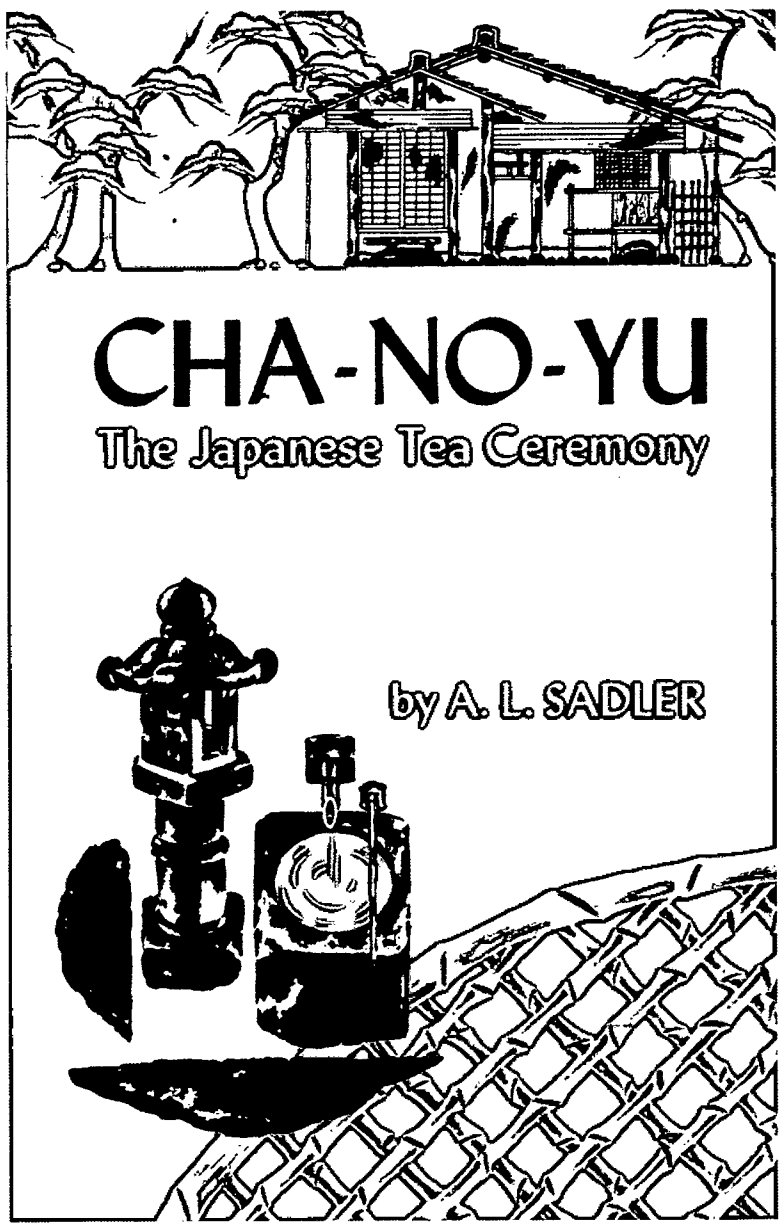

Plate 10. Book cover, A.L. Sadler, *Cha-No-Yu, The Japanese Tea Ceremony*, 1962. Charles E. Tuttle Company Inc. Rutland, Vermont.



Plate 11. Peter Rushforth at East Sydney Technical College, 1954.

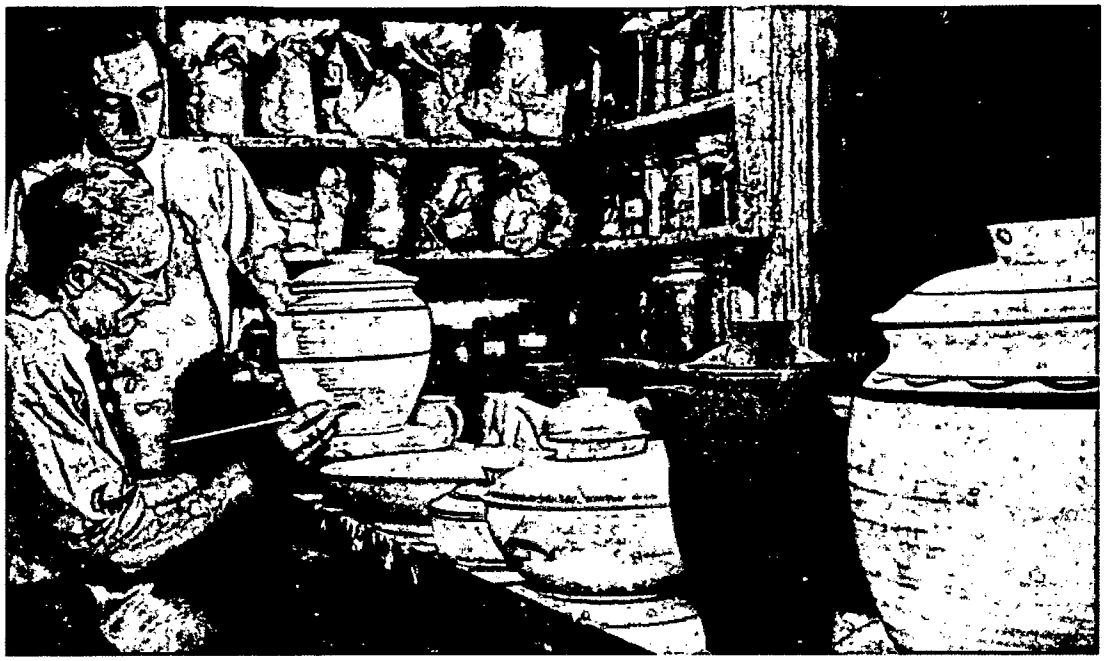

Plate 12. Robert & Harold Hughan in their studio, 1953.



Plate 13. At Merric Boyd's Open Country house, 1951. from l. to r.: rear: Hatton Beck, Merric Boyd, david Boyd; centre: Yvonne & Jamie Boyd, unknown, John Perceval, Mary Boyd, Lucy Boyd with child, Guy Boyd; front: Joy Hester, Arthur Boyd & Doris Boyd.



Plate 14. David & Hermia Boyd, Murrembeena, 1959.

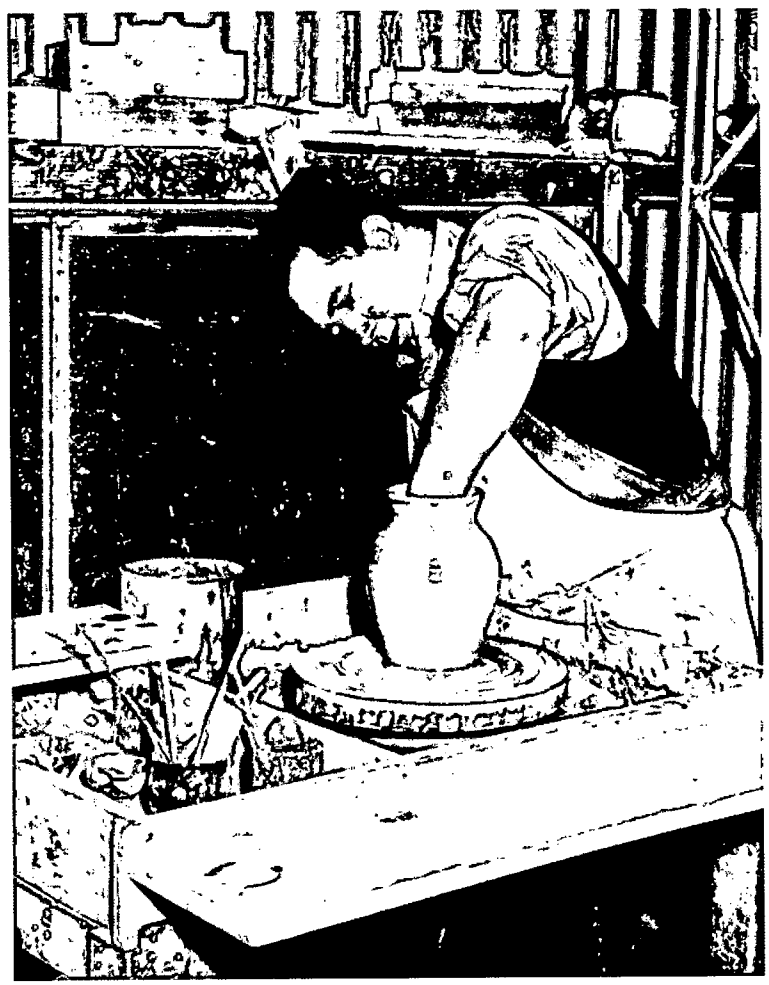

Plate 15. Ivan McMeekin, Sturt Pottery, Mittagong, 1955.

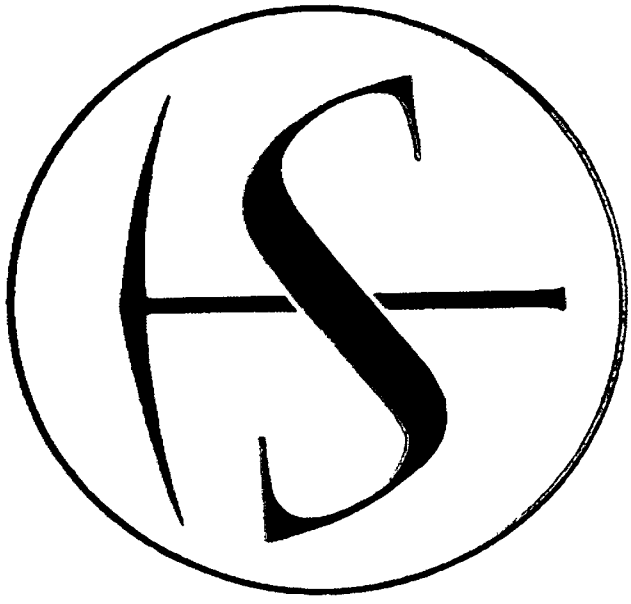

Plate 16. Sturt ceramics workshop logo, 1954.



Plate 17. Les Blakebrough, Sturt Pottery, Mittagong, October 1959.



Plate 18. Cecily Gibson in Mashiko (background, top right), 1960.



Plate 19. Cecily Gibson in Canberra, late 1960s.

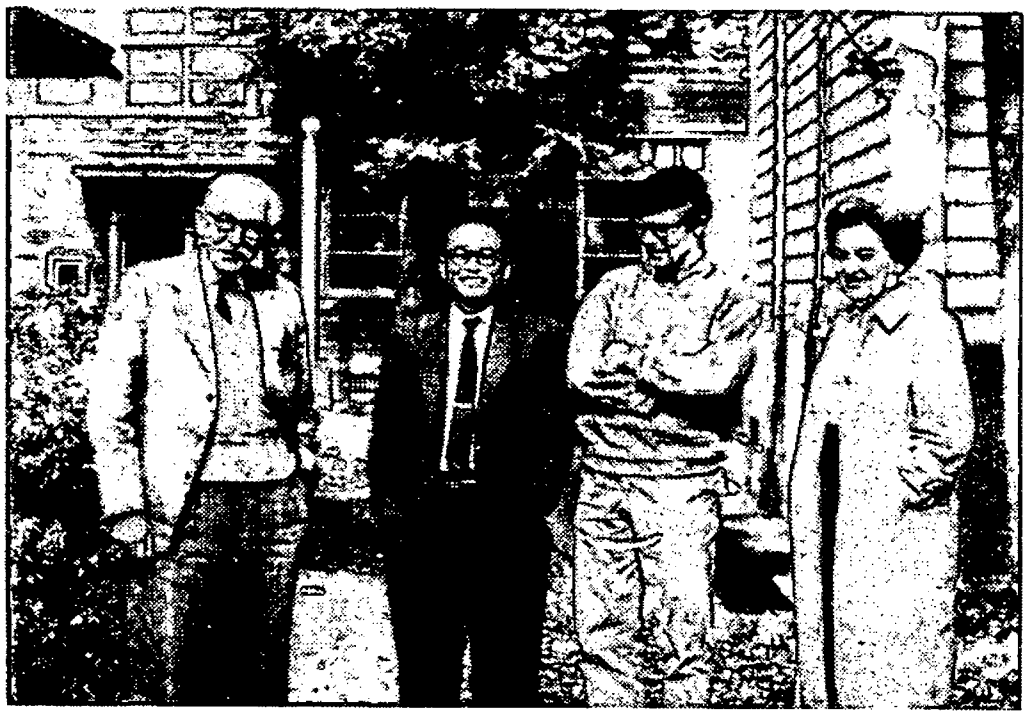

Plate 20. Bernard Leach, unknown, Mirek Smisek & Cecily Gibson, Kyoto, 1961.



Plate 21. John Chappell in Japan, 1963.

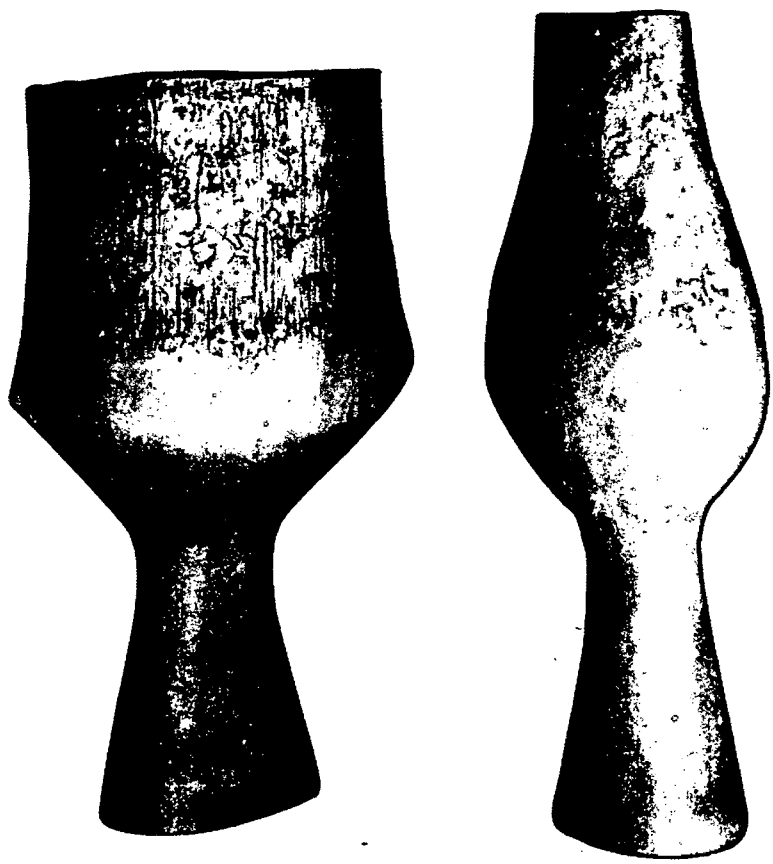

Plate 22. Marea Gazzard, Containers, earthenware, 1959.
H. 54 cm & 59 cm.

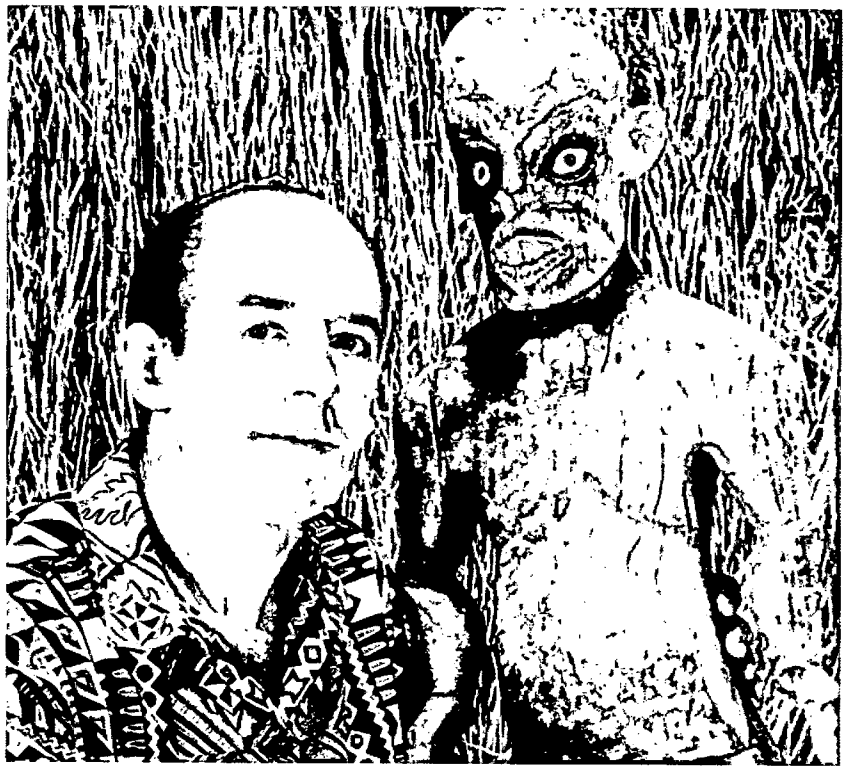

Plate 23. Dr. Terry Barrow (left), ca. 1960.



Plate 24. Harry & May Davis on their arrival in Wellington, N.Z., 1962.



Plate 25. Milton Moon, Brisbane, 1962. Photo: John McKay.

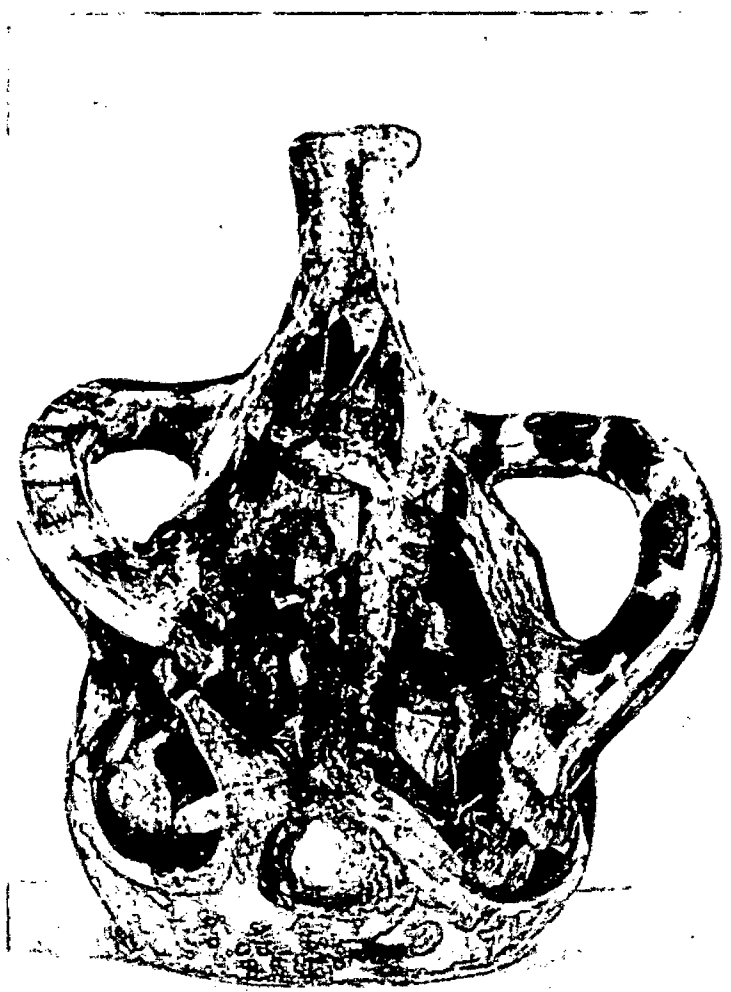

Plate 26. Milton Moon, earthenware bottle, 1962. H. 30 cm.



Plate 27. Carl McConnell, Queensland Art Gallery, 21 July 1961.



Plate 28. Bernard Leach, Peter Rushforth, Harold Hughan & Ivan Englund, Sydney, 1962.

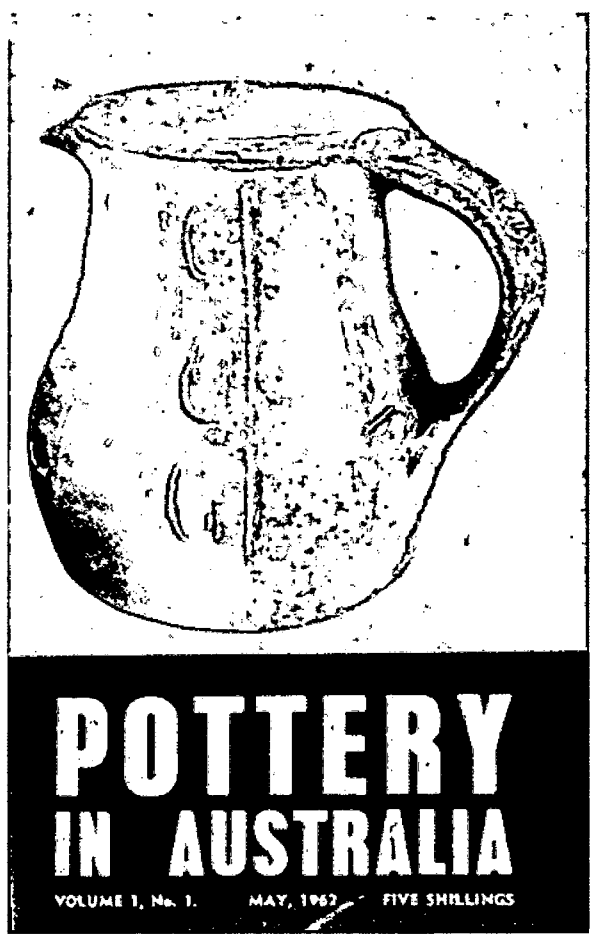

Plate 29. Salt-glazed jug by Bernard Leach, cover, Pottery in Australia magazine, Vol. 1, No. 1, May 1962.



Plate 30. Fred Olsen, Les Blakebrough, Takeichi Kawai & John Chappell (l. to r.) on the balcony of the Hungry Horse Gallery, Sydney, 1964.

Chapter 6: Ivan McMeekin and the China Run

Ivan McMeekin was born in 1919 and grew up in Sydney. He joined the Royal Australian Navy at the outbreak of the war, where he served for a period as an intelligence officer. Following the Japanese invasion of Singapore McMeekin was discharged in Sydney in 1940, where he spent six months living in a basement apartment at Merrioola, a boarding house in Edgecliff Road in the suburb of Woolhara.[440] Merioola was a well-know as a gathering place for the Sydney arts community, including the painters Donald Friend, Justin O'Brien, Francis Lymburner, Jean Bellette and the set designer Loudon Sainthill. Although there are superficial similarities to the Melbourne-based group gathered around the Reeds at Heide, the Sydney artists, with the Swiss émigré Paul Haeflinger at their centre, were very different in character. Rather than basing their art in gritty, urban, social-realism, the Sydney group (sometimes termed the 'charm-school') were comprised of men and women who:

> felt more European than Australian and for whom war meant forced domicile in alien territory. ... (who found) ... support and solace in Sydney society, a world depicted by photographer Alec Murray as a "playground for sophisticates"[441].

Whilst living at Merioola, McMeekin had taken up the cello and it was through his teacher, Gladstone Bell, that he was introduced to the young musician Colleen Holmes, who would later become Colleen McMeekin. After six months in Sydney, McMeekin decided to return to sea, joining the Seaman's Union in May, 1941. The

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[440] Haese, R. *Rebels and Precursors – the Revolutionary Years of Australian Art* Penguin Books, Australia. 1981. p. 236 - 238

[441] ibid. p. 238

bohemian lifestyle and artistic decadence of Merioola would soon be left far behind, playing no obvious part in the development of McMeekin the potter.

As a merchant seaman, McMeekin sailed between Australia and China and although at first he continued to be based in Sydney he became increasingly enamoured of travel, and especially of China. He developed a strong interest in Chinese culture, studying the language, history and customs and in this way was introduced to Chinese ceramics:

> ... from T'ang times up to the present day and, from talking to Chinese collectors, to become aware of the depth and significance of Chinese feeling for their ceramics. Some of it brushed off on me and I started to collect for myself. But a third mate's salary doesn't take you far with a collection of Chinese pots, and in any case I knew that possessing these objects would not satisfy me. I wanted to get right into it, to find out how that particular beauty was achieved, and to do it myself.[442]

For three years McMeekin based himself in China, and his knowledge of the language and people would prove valuable, when, during the turmoil of the revolution, he negotiated with the fledgling Peoples Liberation Army for safe passage of his fellow crew and their vessel out of port. In a conversation with the author, the Australian potter Susie McMeekin, Ivan Mcmeekin's daughter, confirmed that her father's observations of the Japanese occupation of China[443] combined with his experiences as a wartime intelligence officer mitigated against any future contact he might have with Japan. Although he had cordial relations with Japanese potters on an individual basis, McMeekin, unusually for an Australian potter of his generation, would never visit Japan.

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[442] McMeekin, I. 'In His Own Words', *Ceramics, Art and Perception,* No. 13, 1993, pp. 61 - 65
[443] Beasley, W. G. *The Modern History of Japan* Weidenfeld and Nicholson, London. 1963. et al

Originally he had intended to study pottery in China, but the revolution forced him to change his plans and he decided instead to go to Paris. In making this decision McMeekin may well have been influenced by the attitudes he encountered at Merioola, where members of the Sydney Group of artists were enamoured of the French theorist Elie Faure[444]: 'Paris, to Australian students, was the Mecca of the visual arts.'[445] McMeekin quickly found that he did not like the ceramics being made by the French artist potters, only spending a few weeks in France before moving on to England, arriving in June or July of 1949. There also was an element of home-sickness at work, as after many years living abroad he wanted to be somewhere where he could hear his own tongue spoken and, as he would later write, get 'bacon and eggs for breakfast.'[446] He quickly took advantage of the wealth of collections of Chinese ceramics in London, visiting the collections at the Victoria & Albert Museum and the British Museum. He also frequented the galleries of specialist dealers such as Bluett and Spinks, where he could handle the work and discuss their attributes.

At an exhibition of T'ang and Sung porcelain, staged by the Oriental Ceramic Society, McMeekin made the acquaintance of the well-known scholar of Chinese ceramics, A.L. Heatherington. Heatherington had just published the second edition of his book *Chinese Ceramic Glazes,* which was then, and remained for many years, the most substantial treatise on the physical nature of the glazes associated with classic Chinese ceramics.[447]

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[444] Haese, R. op cit p. 237; *Plus ça change, plus c'est la même chose.*
[445] ibid
[446] McMeekin, I. op cit p. 61
[447] Heatherington, A. L. *Chinese Ceramic Glazes*, originally published Cambridge University Press 1937 second revised edition P. D. & Ione Perkins, South Pasadena 1948

Unlike *A Potter's Book* which dealt with the subject of glaze formulation in an empirical fashion, Heatherington's text was quite scientific in its approach, using molecular formulae based on analyses of shards, an approach that would accord with McMeekins own, as yet unrealised, scientific bent. Responding to McMeekin's enthusiasm, Heatherington informed him that there was 'only one man in Europe with the practical knowledge (he) needed, and that was Bernard Leach.'[448] McMeekin was hesitant to approach Leach, but Heatherington assured him that a shared interest in China would ensure him of a warm welcome at St. Ives.

At the time, McMeekin was enrolled in part-time art classes and he discussed the possibility of visiting Leach with Richard Baker, then head of Ceramics and Glass at the Royal College of Art. Baker not only repeated Heatherington's assurances, he provided McMeekin with an itinerary from London to St. Ives, which included many small potteries of interest to visit on the way. With only enough money to keep himself for a year in England, McMeekin was anxious to make the most of his time, so he took his bicycle and set off for St. Ives. As predicted, on his arrival three days later he was given a kindly reception, but there was no immediate possibility of a place at the pottery. However, it was suggested that one of Leach's sons, Michael, who taught ceramics at the nearby Penzance Art School and had his own pottery, could provide McMeekin, 'who had never so much as touched a lump of clay'[449], with the necessary tuition. To continue his progress in ceramics during the summer holidays, David Leach, another of Leach's sons who was by then running the St. Ives pottery, suggested that McMeekin go on to see Michael Cardew at his Wenford Bridge Pottery. Cardew was about to undertake the first firing of a new kiln, and, as

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[448] McMeekin, I. ibid p. 62
[449] ibid

David Leach put it to McMeekin, he ' ... doesn't want an assistant but he certainly needs one.'[450] This meeting would mark the beginning of a significant chapter in Australian ceramic history.

At this point, it is necessary to retreat a number of years, in order to give context to the significance of the relationship between McMeekin and Cardew. Michael Cardew, a volatile ex-classics student with a passion for traditional English slip-ware pottery, had been one of Bernard Leach's first students at St. Ives. He trained with Leach from 1923 to 1926 before establishing his first pottery at Winchcombe in Gloucestershire. Cardew worked for a period of some thirteen years at Winchcombe, often in adverse conditions, perfecting and redefining the tradition of low-fired English country pottery. In 1939 he had moved back to Cornwall, converting a former ale-house called the Wenford Inn into the Wenford Bridge Pottery.[451]

In 1940, during a period of considerable financial difficulty for Cardew and his family, he was paid what turned out to be a propitious visit by a fellow ex-student of Bernard Leach. Harry Davis had probably been one of Leach's most gifted students, often running the St. Ives pottery during Leach's long absences. In 1938 Davis, together with his fellow-potter and wife May, whom he had met in 1936 whilst she was studying at St. Ives as a paying student, had travelled to the colonial outpost of Ghana (then the Gold Coast) in West Africa to establish a pottery in a newly-founded Achimota College. The college would teach a range of manual arts, with the aim of training the local population ahead of their hoped-for independence following the war. Goods made from clay – pottery and building products - were sanctioned for

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[450] ibid

[451] for a history of Cardew up until 1948 see Cardew, M. *A Pioneer Potter: an Autobiography* Oxford University Press 1989 et al

manufacture by the British government, in the hope of supplying troops stationed in Africa. It was an ambitious scheme and technically quite outside of the indigenous traditions based around un-glazed and low-fired cooking pots. Nonetheless, from 1938 to 1942 the Davis' had some considerable success in establishing the basis of a ceramic industry.[452]

In 1940, whilst on leave from Achimota, Harry and May Davis travelled through England. They were researching the raw materials used in English stoneware production in the hope that the knowledge might be applied to their work in Africa, since it was impossible to import clays and glaze minerals from England during wartime and therefore all materials had to be locally sourced. The area around Cornwall has historically supplied much of the clays and 'Cornish Stone' used in English ceramics and Harry Davis was using this excursion in Cornwall to increase his general knowledge of the geology of clays and ceramic minerals.

The visit was to have several consequences. Firstly, it reawakened Cardew's interest in the possibility of combining the type of traditional earthenware forms and designs he had been working with for much of his life with the undoubted technical superiority of stoneware clays and glazes. This was an idea he had been musing on for some years, and Harry and May Davis' work in Africa was tackling some of these problems head on. Secondly, Cardew envied the adventurous nature of the project, supported as it was by the security of a regular wage. The Cardews had three children by now and their living conditions, with no sanitation or running water, were primitive. There was no possibility of making a living from the pottery he was making, it was wartime

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[452] As well as bricks and tiles, one of the first items Davis manufactured were water-coolers, in much the same way as the early Australian potteries had done. See Davis, M *May* Crewenna Press 1990 p. 37 - 48

and his pacifist leanings had put him under suspicion by the local community. Even the occasional visits from the academic Henry Bergen, who at that stage had just completed advising Leach on the text of *A Potter's Book,* were viewed suspiciously by the local community - Bergen was 'foreign' - and Cardew and his family were subject to occasional police attention.[453]

Given his circumstances, a letter from the Colonial Office in 1941 saying that Achimota College was about to lose its resident 'ceramist'[454] provided an opportunity for Cardew to escape the privations of wartime England, at the same time earning an income and gaining the opportunity to tackle some large scale ceramic challenges without having to finance the endeavour himself. Cardew applied and was accepted for the posting. This began his long association with Africa and with 'pioneer pottery', the subject of which would furnish the title for the book with which Cardew's name is now forever linked, the 1969 *Pioneer Pottery.*[455]

Cardew spent six years on his first African sojourn, by his own account mostly unsuccessfully tackling the problems involved in establishing what effectively was a medium-scale ceramic industry with little equipment, no trained staff, no readily available materials and no similar production facilities within several thousand kilometres. The lessons Cardew learned in Africa were applied to his own pottery when he returned to England in 1948 to resume potting at Wenford Bridge. There would also be strong echoes of this African experience in Ivan McMeekin's later attempts with Cardew to establish ceramics within Aboriginal communities in the

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[453] Cardew, M. ibid p 114-115

[454] The quotation marks emphasising the term ceramics are Cardew's, and the inference take from this is that he found the term either unusual or inappropriate in some way. See Cardew, M. *A Pioneer Potter* Oxford University Press, 1989. p. 119

[455] Cardew, M. *Pioneer Pottery* Longman Group, Ltd 1969

Northern Territory of Australia. Although falling outside of the timeframe of this research, the work done by McMeekin and Cardew in the Northern Territory would provide a fruitful avenue for future research.

Soon after arriving in London in 1949 Ivan McMeekin had renewed his acquaintance with Colleen Holmes, who was also living in England. They married in January 1950 and, with the birth of their first child due later that year, McMeekin was looking to establish a base from which he could both continue to learn about pottery and raise a family. At first he doubted that he could learn anything from Cardew, as he only knew of him as the potter who had revived English slip-ware traditions, whereas McMeekins':

> ...head was still full of Sung celadons ... But it was a meeting that changed my life. We got on instantly, finding shared interests in Chinese pottery and Chinese pottery and literature. [456]

The two men shared an instant rapport, with Cardew inviting McMeekin to stay for the firing. Several months later McMeekin was still at Wenford Bridge and, following Cardew's appointment in 1951 as a 'Pottery Officer', this time to the Nigerian government, he found himself running the Wenford Bridge as a junior partner, a pattern that continued for the next three years. It was during this time that McMeekin gained the experience he would later use to establish ceramics at the Sturt workshops.[457] As he later wrote:

> ... the main formative influences on my potting were oriental pots, particularly

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[456] McMeekin, loc. sit, p. 62

[457] It also marked the beginning of a pattern of correspondence that would last several decades.

> Chinese, Korean and Thai stonewares; traditional English slipware, and two people: firstly, Bernard Leach for building a bridge between the Sung dream and the practicalities of making pots with similar qualities of beauty and significance in the 20th century and for introducing me to a second person: Michael Cardew. Cardew was my real master, having introduced me to the many practical skills that potting demands, to its complex technology, its joys and sorrows and, above all for having enabled me to gain some insight into the real nature of the art.[458]

It is important to note here the absence of Japan amongst McMeekin's and Cardew's influences. Michael Cardew, like McMeekin, did not share Leach's enthusiasm for Japan. The shift in emphasis, where Leach is cited only for his evocation of Chinese ceramics, 'the Sung dream'[459] and not of Japanese pottery, illustrates the diversity of approaches within the Leach derived Anglo Oriental school of ceramics. It should be noted that McMeekin would pass on these prejudices to his first Australian apprentice, Gwyn John (Hanssen Pigott), prejudices which she would only overcome after contact with Leach at St. Ives in the early 1960s.[460]

In 1952 and with Cardew back in England for a brief period, Ivan McMeekin took leave from the pottery to attend the *International Conference of Craftsmen in Pottery and Textiles*, held at Dartington Hall in Devon.[461] This conference, organised by Leach, was perhaps the first truly international gathering of craftspeople held in modern times, prefiguring similar events that took place in the second half of the 1960s as part of formalisation of the crafts through bodies like the Worlds Craft Council. Delegates attended from England, Europe, Scandinavia, America, Africa and Japan and there was an impressive list of speakers addressing a variety of

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[458] McMeekin, loc. sit
[459] ibid
[460] See Hanssen Pigott, G. 'Autobiographical Notes' *Studio Potter* Vol. 20 No. 1 1991 pp. 46 - 50
[461] McMeekin, I loc cit

matters to do with craft. The conference was Leach's brainchild and although putatively given over to discussion of both ceramics and textiles, the former dominated. Shoji Hamada and Soetsu Yanagi attended the conference and in both Leach's and Yanagi's addresses discussion of the crafts was suffused with Mingei fundamentalism, the relationship of Buddhism to Japanese notions of beauty and the 'role' of the craftsman in modern society. McMeekin attended as did Cardew, who, eschewing philosophy, gave a paper on 'The Craftsman's Use of Scientific Development'.[462]

It might have been expected that the conference would be overwhelmed by Mingei ideology and the formidable triumvirate of Leach, Yanagi and Hamada, but the diversity of speakers reflected the impossibility of dictating and controlling the development of the crafts within any one intellectual framework, no matter how persuasive.

The Austrian/American potter Marguerite Wildenhain, already at odds with Leach's views, gave a paper entitled 'The Potter in the New World'.[463] From the outset, she interrogated her topic, remarking on the '... picturesque and quaint little villages to which one looks back with envious sympathy but in which one would not like to live any more...'[464], an observation seemingly designed to reinforce her oppositional stance since Leach, like Cardew and many other of Leach's students, chose to live in just such 'Old World' quaint, little villages. Ironically, Wildenhain had already established her own Pond Farm Pottery in rural California and so presumably her

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[462] Cardew, M. 'The Craftsman's Use of Scientific Development' *The Report of the International Conference of Craftsmen in Pottery and Textiles* Dartington Hall, Totnes 1952 pp. 61 - 70
[463] Wildenhain, M 'The Potter in the New World' ibid pp.44 - 52
[464] ibid. p. 44

biases were not towards the countryside per se, but only quaint villages. It might be speculated that Wildenhain, a European émigré, found in the American culture and American landscape a pleasing combination of beauty without the constraints of tradition.

Kurt Ekholm gave a paper on contemporary potters in Finland and Sweden[465], examining the very different relationship of potters to the ceramics industry that existed in Scandinavia as compared to England. Agnes Laur spoke about the 'Organization of the Swiss Heimatwerk'[466], the Spanish artist-potter Josef Lorens Artigaz, long time collaborator with Miro in his ceramic work, attended the conference, as did Partick Heron, the English painter. Heron, who had worked for a time during the World War II with Leach at the pottery in St. Ives, delivered a paper entitled 'The Crafts in Relation to Contemporary Art'[467].

Bernard Leach, as well as giving the opening address, presented two papers, 'The Contemporary Potter'[468] and 'The Integration of the Craftsman'[469], in which he developed ideas similar to those set down in *A Potter's Book*. However, the philosophical discussion was dominated by Yanagi, who spoke on three occasions, presenting two lengthy papers entitled 'The Japanese Approach to the Crafts'[470] and

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[465] Eckholm, K. 'Contemporary Pots and Potters in Finland and Sweden' ibid pp. 53 - 55
[466] Laur, A. 'The Organisation of the Swiss Heimatwerk' ibid pp. 116 - 121
[467] Heron, P. 'The Crafts in relation to Contemporary Art' ibid pp. 56 - 60
[468] Leach, B. 'The Contemporary Potter' ibid pp. 12 - 18
[469] Leach, B. 'The Integration on the Craftsman' ibid pp. 137 - 142
[470] Yanagi, S. 'The Japanese Approach to the Crafts' ibid pp. 19 - 24

the 'Buddhists' Idea of Beauty'[471] and also delivering the 'Summing-up'[472], which also included a contribution from Artigaz.[473]

The conference featured an exhibition curated by Leach, which brought together a selection of crafts displaying qualities to which the contemporary craftsperson might aspire. Shown first at Dartington and then in London at the New Burlington Galleries, it did not meet with universal acclaim. The display of historical pottery featured only three types of work; English medieval, nineteenth century English slipware and Oriental stoneware, hardly a surprising selection given Leach's ceramic predilictions. The contemporary display was dominated by Leach's own work and that of Hamada's, prompting Robert Melville, writing for *Architectural Review,* to comment that:

> ... the general effect is that of an ethnographical exhibit of the remains of a lost civilisation, of a village and market town community of highly aesthetic peasants ... Only the stoneware of Hans Coper and the porcelain of Lucie Rie remains outside the prevailing atmosphere of rural quietism ... They alone make the point that the whole exhibition was intended to make. They show that the artist-craftsman is not necessarily an anachronism in our time, that it is not impossible for him or her to be, so to speak, with us. [474]

Evidently, some were seeking an alternative to Leach and Cardew's traditionalist approach and this was being found in new work from the urban centres, ceramics made by practitioners like Coper and Rie whose antecedents did not lie in a hybrid

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[471] Yanagi, S. 'Buddhist's Idea of Beauty' ibid pp. 78 - 98
[472] Yanagi, S. 'Summing-up' ibid pp. 143 - 146
[473] ibid
[474] de Waal, E. *Bernard Leach,* op. cit, p.57

Anglo Oriental approach, but in a range of diverse influences from Cycladic figures to contemporary art and design.[475]

McMeekin's recollection is somewhat different and he describes there having been three separate exhibitions at the conference. The first was of leading English and Japanese potters from 1920 to 1952, an event undoubtedly dominated by the presence of Leach and Hamada; the second was a large exhibition of pottery from delegates to the conference; and there was:

> ... a little exhibition of Chinese pots from the Sung and Ming Dynasties, only some 15 or 20 pots. These Chinese stoneware and porcelain pots, for me, simply sang. Pure lyrical colours, finely articulated strong yet graceful forms, and beauty of material ... It was the same with a collection of 100 slides presented to us by Hamada with Bernard Leach translating. These again did not contain a 20th century single artist potter's pot. ... They brought the house down and were, for many of us, the best part of the conference.[476]

At this point, McMeekin was the only the second Australian potter to have studied in England with Leach or one of his students.[477] Although Harold Hughan would visit Leach on his journey to England in 1953, doubtless gaining valuable insights from the experience, the combination of McMeekin's contact with Chinese and other Asian pottery gained *in situ* during his time in China, combined with the opportunity to become acquainted with the great British ceramic collections, together with the practical experience he gained during a rigorous training[478] with Cardew, gave him a

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[475] de Waal, E. *20th century ceramics* Thames and Hudson 2003 p.124, 125, 151
[476] McMeekin, op. cit
[477] Ruth Ainsworth, a teacher at Frensham school in Mittagong, had studied with Leach in the 1930s. see Cochrane, G. op cit p. 72
[478] McMeekin, S. Interview with the author 20 December 2005

depth of knowledge unparalleled amongst Australian potters. It only remained for him to return to Australia and put this knowledge into practice.

6.2 Digging Deep: Ceramics at the Sturt Workshops

Ivan and Colleen McMeekin might have remained with their growing family in Cornwall, running Michael Cardew's pottery at Wenford Bridge during his prolonged absences in Africa or striking out on their own, but periods of ill-health dictated a return to Australia. Colleen McMeekin and her sisters had been educated at Frensham School in Mittagong, so an approach was made through Colleen McMeekin's eldest sister Bette Holme to Winifred West, the founder of Frensham School, whose responsibilities now encompassed the Sturt craft work shops. This approach was greeted favourably, resulting in Ivan McMeekin being invited to establish the ceramics component of the Sturt workshops the following year. Several connections already existed between Frensham school, Dartington and Leach's pottery at St. Ives. Ruth Ainsworth, Frensham's art mistress, had gone to England in the 1930s and worked with Leach, returning to Australia in 1939 with a pottery wheel, some spinning wheels and a loom.[479] According to Les Blakebrough:

> Ainsworth had a connection with [Rudolf] Steiner, and got involved in England with, for example, Ethel Mairet and Roger Fry as well as Bernard Leach ....[480]

There were similarities between individuals and institutions interested in promoting progressive models of education, as Leonard and Dorothy Elmhirst were attempting at Dartington or Winifred West at Frensham, and artistic and cultural activities,

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[479] Although many people had associations with Leach and the St. Ives pottery, the exact nature of the interaction is often difficult to assess. Thus, although it is reasonable to report that Ainsworth 'worked with Leach', the depth of the connection is unknown. Certainly, the late 1930s was a time of great upheaval in Leach's life, and he spent much time away from the pottery, living a peripatetic life, travelling, writing and lecturing.

[480] Cochrane, G. *Crafts Movement in Australia* p.72

including the crafts, certainly featured in this educational agenda. The Sturt craft workshops had been established in late 1941 as a training facility for a small number of students who were leaving the nearby Mittagong Public School.[481] From the outset it was a manual crafts school, teaching spinning and weaving to the girls and carpentry to the male students,[482] existing not only as part of a private school system but as an 'access workshop' for the local community. Adult participants in the workshops gained membership to Sturt, which in itself was run by an elected executive council, including representatives of each craft discipline.[483] These labyrinthine levels of management all ultimately answered to Winifred West, something McMeekin would discover over time.

In late 1952 the McMeekins arrived back in Australia and, in the interim between relocating to Mittagong from Sydney, Ivan McMeekin began to gather together his knowledge of pottery. In England he had made the transition from student to apprentice to workshop manager, but despite his proficiency he still had less than three years experience of producing ceramics; now he was attempting to establish a pottery from the ground up, a much more difficult task. For Ivan McMeekin, true to his training with Cardew as well as to his own inclinations, this meant doing everything himself. During this preparatory period he worked at a pottery in Turramurra, slip-moulding commercial earthenware that represented the antithesis of the pottery he

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[481] For non Australian readers, public schools in Australia are government schools, as opposed to private schools, which are fee paying, and of which Frensham school is an example.

[482] In 1948 the Sturt Association was formed, and in 1955 Sturt Workshops were brought within the jurisdiction of Winifred West Schools Ltd., a company which included Frensham, a secondary girls boarding school; Gib Gate, a preparatory school; and Holt Farm. Each group, whilst being separately managed, were represented on the Board of Governors of Winifred West Schools Ltd.

[483] West, W. 'Introduction' *Sturt Workshops 1962* Ure Smith, Sydney 1962

had been involved in making in England and that he was determined to make at Sturt.

In December of 1953 Ivan McMeekin arrived in Mittagong.[484] Each craft discipline at Sturt was represented by an emblem or trademark, consisting of the letter 'S' intersected by a tool. For weaving it was a shuttle, for carpentry a mallet and for pottery the symbol was a pick. [Plate 16] This choice, whilst perhaps not being an obvious one, is symbolic of the approach Ivan McMeekin would bring to his task. The workshop building had been erected earlier in the year and it needed to be equipped with wheels, shelves and benches, all of which were to be made by the Sturt carpentry workshop. McMeekin began to build a wood-firing kiln, and, following the dictum that an extensive use of local materials would lend an unmistakable identity to the work,[485] he searched the surrounding district for the clays and other minerals he needed to formulate both bodies and glazes. [Plate 15]

The philosophical basis for this approach certainly had its origins in Leach, who, drawing on his observations of rural Japanese workshops and then incorporating these production methodologies within a overarching craft philosophy, argued for the necessity of using what lay close to hand. The advantages to be gained by using locally-sourced materials run throughout Leach's writings. For example, Leach stated that:

> There is no comparison between the satisfaction of finding one's own local clay

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[484] He had spent five weeks at Sturt earlier in the year discussing arrangements with West and others.

[485] Blakebrough confirms that the philosophy of sourcing local materials was a central part of McMeekin's approach to ceramics. It was transmitted to McMeekin through Cardew, whose own interpretation of parts of Leach's philosophy was amplified through his experiences of self-sufficiency in Africa.

> bed and that of buying the ready-made article. Although more trouble may be involved in obtaining first-hand knowledge of the geological resources of one's own locality ... the attempt should not be abandoned lightly.[486]

Or here, quoted by McMeekin some forty years later:

> Contact with the source in nature of his clay, pigment and glaze materials gives a potter more control and scope for the taking advantage of the variations which nature always offers. He should not want to standardise, or to depend entirely upon those reliable but uninteresting substances, which the potter's merchant offers to the trade.[487]

The reality, however, was that Leach adopted a pragmatic approach to sourcing the materials he used and although the Leach Pottery made their own clay bodies and glazes the majority of the raw ingredients were already prepared and sorted. The bags of Pike Bros. siliceous ball clay from Devon, Varcoe's No.1 china clay (most probably mined in Cornwall), Varcoe's water-ground feldspar and Wenger's 471P water-ground quartz, were all bought from the same suppliers that provided materials to the industry in Stoke-on-Trent.[488] Leach would then blend these clays and minerals to obtain the results he desired, and he made no secret of this, including lists of recipes, ingredients, maufacturers and suppliers in *A Potter's Book*. There were substantial differences in the methods employed by Leach compared to those of the large ceramic manufactories; when he began to add iron back into a porcelain body he was certainly departing from accepted industrial practice, as iron contamination in clay was anathema to industry, a stain to be removed at all costs. Nonetheless, it is clear that Leach was willing to utilise industrially prepared minerals as the raw

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[486] Leach, B. *A Potter's Book* p.46
[487] ibid
[488] ibid p.61

material from which many of his clay bodies and glazes were derived. By the time *A Potter's Book* was published the St. Ives pottery had already left behind wood-firing in favour of oil as a fuel and Leach had expressed a desire to obtain electric wheels, as soon as they were of 'sufficient quality'.[489]

From an economic point of view, Leach's attitude to sourcing materials was a sensible one. In a country where the minerals had already been found, the quarries established, the machinery put in place and the product tested, the only point in setting out, spade in hand, to see what lay under the ground was one of curiosity, scientific enquiry or simple pleasure. As an ongoing proposition, the man-hours spent winning clay and rock from a landscape already replete with mines producing high-quality ceramic materials was not a viable proposition. Leach accepted the reality of the situation and acted accordingly.

Michael Cardew, McMeekin's mentor, had faced an entirely different set of challenges in establishing his African potteries. He simply had no choice but to source his own clay and glaze materials, however, although he did not have access to pre-prepared minerals, he was able to install a large ball-mill and several other machines which enabled him to crush and grind whatever materials he did find thus rendering them useful. In addition, he had many assistants on whom he could call for labour, and all of these factors had obvious implications for his working methods. It is unlikely that many other potters would have recommended the use of ground kiln-clinker as a glaze ingredient, or the virtue of travelling great distances by river or on

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[489] It is a matter of some legend that Leach established a wood-firing kiln in an area of England where wood supplies were notoriously difficult to obtain.

rutted bush-tracks to gather materials, unless faced with a similar situation.[490] Meeting the realities of his own situation in Africa, Cardew acted accordingly, in the process gaining a good deal of knowledge about the challenges and pitfalls of establishing a production pottery in such circumstances.

The choice McMeekin faced was an interesting one. New South Wales already had established ceramic industries, making a range of products from porcelain insulators to terra cotta garden pots utilising a full range of ceramic materials. In addition to this, many raw materials associated with ceramics, from feldspar to kaolin and limestone, were readily available from industrial suppliers. Leach's approach, as practised at St. Ives, would have been to take full advantage of the ready availability of these materials but Ivan McMeekin, spurred on by his knowledge of Cardew's work in Africa, chose another path. He took a pick - hence the workshop logo - and a shovel, some geological survey maps, and went prospecting. As Gwyn Hanssen Pigott described:

> The kiln was small and we didn't have sophisticated machinery. No blunger, no crusher, no mechanical digger, no mechanical grinder, or pugmill, or mechanical sieve. ... those days of pounding rocks, and the weeks of getting samples from a hand driven post-hole digger, testing every six inches of depth, closely noting all the differences ...[491]

This decision was to have consequences for his own future and for that of the workshops. The first was that McMeekin began a life-long interest in the utilisation of Australian materials in studio pottery, an interest which eventually – as it did with Cardew – would lead to McMeekin writing a widely read and respected book on

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[490] Cardew, M. *Pioneer Pottery* Longman 1969, p. 142 and elsewhere
[491] Hanssen Pigott, G. *Ceramics, Art and Perception* Vol. 13, 1993. p. 94

Australian clays, *Notes for Potters in Australia.*[492] The second was that it would result in him leaving Sturt, although this event would not occur until 1959.

McMeekin was very fortunate, in that in his first year at Sturt he was joined by an apprentice who, although having no immediate experience of ceramics, had a great determination to succeed in the life of the potter. Gwyn John was a young fine-arts student from the University of Melbourne. Inspired by the Kent Collection and the few examples of contemporary studio pottery by practitioners like Leach, Cardew and Hughan in the National Gallery of Victoria, as well as by reading *A Potter's Book,* she had persuaded the university to allow her third year thesis to be based on the seemingly obscure topic of Australian studio pottery. During her research, as a result of advice given to her by Harold Hughan and others, she travelled throughout Victoria and New South Wales meeting potters and formulating her ideas. As she later recalled, she was searching for 'the liveliness Leach spoke of; I wanted to find the beauty I'd felt in the Sung wares, here, right now, alive.' [493] In New South Wales, she found the McMeekin's home was full of such pots – 'the wonderful bowls we ate from, the lively pots he had made, exuberant Cardew pots, and the Chinese and South-East Asian pots he had collected.'[494] On her return to Melbourne, she wrote several times to McMeekin asking to be taken on as his apprentice, a proposal to which he eventually agreed.

In McMeekin, Gwyn John had found the direct conduit to the Oriental stoneware tradition she so admired. In John, McMeekin gained an assistant entirely in accord

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[492] McMeekin, I. *Notes for Potters in Australia: raw materials and clay bodies* New South Wales University Press 1985
[493] ibid
[494] ibid

with his own working methods, someone who could relieve him of his more burdensome duties and allow him time to continue the protracted business of sourcing and testing raw materials, a process which he would continue, in one way or another, for the rest of his life.

Ivan McMeekin persisted in his experiments with materials at Sturt and within two years work of a sufficiently high standard was being made that it was exhibited at the Arts Festival held in association with the 1956 Melbourne Olympic Games. The following year, the first exhibition was held by members of the newly formed Potter's Society of New South Wales at the 1957 Royal Easter Show, where a kick-wheel from Sturt was displayed (Gwyn Hanssen Pigott recalls the 'thick tulipwood heads'[495]) and demonstrations in its use were given by various members of the Potter's Society.

A small teaching workshop was established at Frensham School, where Gwyn John taught children from the school during the day and adult students at night, thus leaving the main workshops at Sturt 'free for testing and production'[496]. This teaching studio, operating both day and evening classes, used terra cotta clay, fired in an electric kiln, to make simple wheel-thrown and hand-built pottery. During this period John also translated the famous letters of the eighteenth century French Jesuit monk Pierre d'Entrecolles, in which he detailed his observations on the materials and techniques of Chinese porcelain production at Chien te Chen in 1722. In 1957 Gwyn John left for England to further her studies. She would in turn move from the Leach pottery at St. Ives to Ray Finch at Winchcombe Pottery and to Cardew at Wenford Bridge, before establishing her own London workshop in 1961. It was here, taking

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[495] Hanssen Pigott, G. loc. cit.
[496] *Sturt Workshops* 1962

classes with Lucie Rie at Camberwell, that she was exposed to the myriad influences of a great urban centre, and that she first allowed a modernist, European sensibility to modify her work.

Having ably demonstrated the value of an apprentice, John was replaced in June of 1957 with another, equally capable student. Les Blakebrough, a young English art student who had settled in Australia after the war, had the advantage of having several years training in ceramics gained with Peter Rushforth at the East Sydney Technical College. Blakebrough was employed as a workshop assistant at Sturt, and in 1958 he was joined by Col Levy, a part-time ceramics student and then part-time teacher at East Sydney Technical College, who, as a qualified school teacher, could continue the teaching duties previously undertaken by Gwyn John. This left McMeekin and Blakebrough free to establish the workshop and begin production, a task they were aided in by Levy when time allowed. [Plate 17]

Whereas McMeekin was focused almost entirely on Chinese ceramics as the model defining his own aesthetic and technical approach, both Blakebrough and Levy were interested in a wider range of ceramic possibilities. By 1957 they were aware of the pottery of David and Hermia Boyd and were interested enough in the Boyd's experimental and innovative approach to earthenware that, after hitch-hiking from Sydney to Melbourne, where they also saw the Kent collection, they would visit the Boyd's at Murrumbeena. Blakebrough defined the Boyd's approach a being 'pretty avant-garde' remembering being 'quite taken with what he saw'.[497] In comparing the Boyd's approach to that pursued by Peter Rushforth at East Sydney, Blakebrough was aware of the way the background and training of the artists influenced their work.

[497] Blakebrough, L. Interview with the author, 4 December 2001.

> ... they did wild, crazy things, but then they came from a background that encouraged that ... I suppose in that in a way one got locked in to that [Anglo Oriental] sort of aesthetic. ... it had been the prevailing sort of thing at East Sydney ... that's what people were interested in, that's what Rushforth was interested in, and what was being taught, and what Levy and I sort of got caught up in ... certainly Leach's writing was pretty much swallowed whole ...[498]

During his time at Sturt, Ivan McMeekin was constantly called on to give demonstrations and lectures, but the strains of reconciling his own vision with those of the Sturt management gave rise to 'problems of creative co-operation and human relationship(s) which led to strong differences.'[499] The wood-firing kiln McMeekin had constructed, a smaller version of Cardew's Wenford Bridge pottery design, often took a great deal of time to reach temperature and was inefficient. Although some production pottery was successfully being made, the £7,000 that had been invested in the pottery workshop by the Frensham management – an expenditure that had precluded expansion of the other craft workshops – proved an overwhelming burden. In October 1959, aware of the possibility of moving to the University of New South Wales and with tensions rising with the school management, McMeekin resigned the management of the ceramics workshop.[500] Les Blakebrough, at the time considering a move back to England to continue his training, was urged by Winifred West to remain at Sturt, and to take over the role of workshop head.[501]

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[498] ibid
[499] West, W. *Sturt Workshops 1962*
[500] Jonathon Holmes gives a detailed account of the events leading up to McMeekin's departure from Sturt. See Holmes, J. *Les Blakebrough: Ceramics* Craftsman House 2005 pp. 16 – 32
[501] Blakebrough, L. conversation with the author 19 June 2006

The move back to Sydney served to bring Ivan McMeekin into closer contact with the New South Wales Potter's Society, of which he had been a founding member. Peter Rushforth, writing in the first issue of *Pottery in Australia* in 1962 stated that:

> Ten years ago, the number of people in Sydney who were practising studio potters were few .. those of us who were establishing workshops or studios found that we were confronted with common problems in the use of local materials. It was felt too that the isolation of individual potters working in their separate studios did not always promote the stimulus that is necessary for the development of creative work.[502]

In many ways, this short article by Rushforth, acting as an introduction to the Potter's Society newly published journal, *Pottery in Australia,* sets out the ground-rules for how pottery would – or should – develop within an Australian context. Further to the technical problems of materials and kilns, there was a wish to 'raise the standards of individual potting'[503], and to address the paucity of ceramics in major collections by:

> ... contemporary potters who were expressing attitudes stemming from Morris, the Bauhaus, Leach and the Craft Movements of the East ... (which) were nowhere to be seen.[504]

The tone was generous and inclusive, yet it cannot be denied that many members of the society saw the potential of clay as an expressive medium as occurring within definite boundaries and that those boundaries were described by Leach. Within only a few years of its inception, those limits were to be tested.

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[502] Rushforth, P. 'The Potter's Society of New South Wales', *Pottery in Australia,* vol. 1, no. 1, 1962 , pp. 2-3.
[503] Ibid.
[504] ibid

Chapter 7: Not all Brown Pots - Australian Potters in Europe

From the inaugural meeting at Peter Rushforth's Beecroft home in 1956, attended by Ivan McMeekin, Ivan Englund, Mollie Douglas and Rushforth, the membership and scope of the New South Wales Potter's Society[505] grew rapidly. As the only formal association of studio potters in Australia's most populous state, it attracted many practitioners who wished to increase the level of professionalism of their craft. That these were often the same people who were in a position to exercise an influence on the development of ceramics can be seen in the original make-up of the society. Peter Rushforth and Mollie Douglas were both employed as teachers of ceramics at East Sydney Technical College in Sydney, Ivan McMeekin was charged with establishing the ceramics workshop at Sturt and Ivan Englund, who had returned to New South Wales from teaching art at the Canberra Technical College, held another of the scarce full time ceramics teaching positions in Wollongong. In 1958 the first exhibition of members work was opened by Denis Winston, Professor of Town and Country Planning at the University of Sydney, at the Macquarie Gallery in Sydney.[506]

East Sydney Technical College continued to provide many of the members of this growing circle of craftspeople. Bernard Sahm had originally encountered ceramics whilst studying painting at the college following the war. He had also gained experience in industrial design and worked for a period at the Martin Boyd Pottery during 1949. During his time at East Sydney Technical College this interest in design led him to the illustrations of European ceramics in the pages of the *Studio* magazine and yearbooks. Later, he would explore this modernist idiom by spending six months

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[505] Cochrane, G. *Crafts Movement in Australia* New South Wales University Press 1992 p. 79,80

[506] Rushforth, P. 'The Potter's Society of N.S.W.' *Pottery in Australia* Vol. 1 No. 1 Potter's Society of New South Wales p. 3

in 1956 working at the Gutenhalde Pottery in Germany[507], following which he spent a year with Bernard Leach's ex-apprentice Harry Davis at his Crowan Pottery in Cornwall, thus also gaining experience in the Leach-derived tradition of pottery in England.[508] The sum of these quite different experiences meant that when Sahm returned to Sydney in 1958, he was possessed of a somewhat wider view of ceramics than was usual at the time.

Marea Gazzard studied pottery full-time in 1954 under Rushforth and Douglas at ESTC, during which time she was introduced to Leach's book. For Gazzard, the value of Leach's message was found in his handling of materials. She was impressed by his 'directness of approach',[509] where often the clay was left exposed, the glazes went unadorned by unnecessary decoration, or that when decoration was present it did not seek to dominate the form. Unlike Leach, Gazzard was also deeply interested in Modernism, an interest shared on a professional level by her husband, the architect Don Gazzard. There would seem to be little common ground between Modernism and Leach's philosophies, in that whereas Modernism whilst perhaps valuing the past had no wish to recreate it, the degree of nostalgia exhibited within the Leach philosophy meant that it constantly approached aesthetic luddism. Michael Cardew, writing of Leach's pots, had remarked that:

> ... one or two of them in a fairly large room produce ... a wealth and charm of decoration which could hardly be got in any other way. The proper background for them is probably a small country house of Old English character, and they look their best with white walls or in combination with oak; in fact they are as necessary to the interior decoration of such a house as Romney Green

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[507] The Gutenhalde pottery near Stuttgart in Southern Germany employed up to one hundred staff, making modernist-inspired commercial pottery typical of the time. It closed in 1958.
[508] Hood, K. & Garnsey, W. *Australian Pottery* Macmillan 1972, p. 136
[509] France, C. *Marea Gazzard: Form and Clay* Craftsman House 1994 p. 27

furniture and the Mairet textiles.[510]

The rural idyll of English country pottery, of slip-glazed beer mugs and oak-lined parlours was not the intellectual or aesthetic archetype Marea Gazzard sought.[511] When Marea and Don Gazzard left for Europe in 1955, the vision they were pursuing was that of Gropius, Le Corbusier and Niemeyer, whilst Marea Gazzard's Mediterranean background would also lead her to the ancient forms of Cycladic pottery and sculpture. Arriving in London she soon met with Lucie Rie, who's work Gazzard had initially seen reproduced in architecture magazines in Australia. Gazzard's biographer, Christine France, wrote of her relationship with Rie that:

> This common background (an interest in modernism) did not result in stylistic similarities in the work of Rie and Gazzard ... what they share is an almost ethical belief in modernisms search for form and simplicity as a means of expressing mood and meaning.[512]

Gazzard also made contact with Hans Coper, and, if France suggests that her admiration of Rie's ceramics did not result in overt stylistic similarities, it is obvious that in the ceramics of Hans Coper's she found a powerful shared sensibility. [Plate 22] Based around carefully controlled, hand-built, unglazed surfaces and symmetrical, totemic forms, these ceramics seemed to occupy a transitional space between Modernism and the monumental simplicity of pre-Hellenistic art. In 1956 as the Potter's Society of Australia was first forming and as Ivan McMeekin and Gwyn

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[510] Cardew, M. 'The Pottery of Mr. Bernard Leach' *The Studio* 14 November 1925

[511] It is a coincidence that Don Gazzard's brother, the artist Barry Gazzard, spent many years living in Japan, eventually becoming an ordained Buddhist priest of the Shingon sect. On his departure from Japan, the tenancy of his rented house in Kyoto was passed on to the visiting Australian potter Milton Moon, and then to the American potter and long time resident of Japan, Doug Lawrie.

[512] France, C. op. cit. p. 30

Hannssen Pigott were crushing rocks and digging for clays in the Southern Highlands of New South Wales, Marea Gazzard enrolled at the London Central School of Arts and Crafts for a two year full-time course in ceramics.

At the time, the ceramics department of the Central School was run by Dora Billington and Gilbert Harding-Green. Billington was a well-known potter and educator, the author of the 1937 book *The Art of the Potter*[513], which, although being in no way as comprehensive as *A Potter's Book*, had preceded it by three years.[514] Billington was active both as a writer and teacher, and despite her use of a Bernard Leach pot as the frontispiece of her book by the 1950s she regarded ceramics as an 'open ended activity for which there were no fixed standards or preferred methods of making,'[515] a very different approach to that espoused by Leach.

In a 1953 article for *The Studio,* 'The Younger English Potters'[516], Billington, writing about ceramics by Rie, Kenneth Clark and other 'young English potters' made clear her frustration, if not with Leach - at the time, he was a figure so imposing in the world of English ceramics as to be almost above reproach – but certainly with the aesthetic for which he stood, which she acerbically characterised as 'stoneware gone stale'.[517] With Rie teaching at Camberwell and Coper at the Royal College, a considerable urban counter-movement to the Leach aesthetic was taking hold in London art schools and the Central School was at the forefront of this trend. Apart

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[513] Billington, D. *The Art of the Potter* The Little Craft Books 1937
[514] Leach refers to Billington's book. See Leach, B. *A Potter's Book* p.26 footnote 1.
[515] J. Jones, 'In Search of the Picassoettes', *Interpreting Ceramics,* issue 1, Interpreting Ceramics: Research Collaboration (ICRC), http//:www.uwic.as.uk/ICRC/issue001/Picasso.htm, viewed 11 February 2006
[516] Billington, D. 'The Younger English Potters' *the Studio* vol. Cxlv, no. 720 March 1953 p. 79
[517] ibid

from Dora Billington, Nicholas Vergette and Kenneth Clark[518] also taught ceramics, whilst Eduardo Paolozzi lectured in the sculpture department. There was a good deal of interaction between these craftspeople and contemporary artists, with Victor Passmore, Kenneth Martin and Eduardo Paolozzi showing decorated ceramics alongside Nicholas Vergette, William Newland and Margaret Hine at the prestigious Redfern gallery in London in 1952.[519]

Of all Gazzard's tutors in ceramics, Nicholas Vergette was involved in the most experimental work.[520] A member of the group which has been described (in retrospect) as the Picassoettes [521], Newland, Hine and Vergette worked on decorated ceramic tiles, sculpture, decorative items and functional pottery for the coffee-shops and boutiques that were transforming London in the 1950s, that transitional decade between wartime austerity and the swinging sixties. Using brightly glazed and decorated earthenware and often employing the *maiolica* technique [522] of decoration on a white tin-glazed ground, their work was the antithesis of Leach's style. It is apposite to note that this was a similar style to that pioneered in Australia by David and Hermia Boyd, an approach which the Boyd's then continued working in London

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[518] an expatriate New Zealander. See Chapter 11

[519] de Waal, E. *Twentieth Century Ceramics* p. 146

[520] Vergette's decorations in late 1950 for the 'Moo Cow bar' in Victoria st, London, included brightly-coloured modelled ceramic cow's heads wall-mounted alongside cowhide squares.

[521] A complex argument exists around the coining of the phrase 'Picassoettes', the epithet attached to Hine, Newland and Vergette, who were otherwise known as the 'Bayswater' group after the address of a shared studio in that London suburb. It is said to derive from Leach's reference, first made in an address to the Royal Society of Arts in 1948, to French imitators of Picasso's ceramics as 'Picassiettes', a pun which plays with on the name 'Picasso' and the French word for 'assortment' or 'plate' *assiette*. Although Newland, Hine and Vergette worked in an manner which may have been stylistically identified with some aspects of Picasso's ceramics, and it is true that Leach had some considerable antipathy towards work of that type, there is no record of him using this term about the three potters. See Jones, J 'In Search of the Picassoettes' *Interpreting Ceramics No. 1* www.uwic.ac.uk/icrc/issue001/picasso/picasso.htm

[522] The term '*majolica*' also '*maiolica*' derives from the Spanish island of Majorca. It is a technique that had its origins in the Arab world and was eventually practised throughout much of Europe. The Dutch Delft ceramics and Italian '*faience*' are derivatives of this technique.

and France in the early 1950s at the very time that Vergette, Hine and Newland were travelling to Spain, where they experienced the decorative potential of *maiolica* ware at first hand.

The Mediterranean quality of this work referenced a type of folk-art quite different to that called upon by Leach. The colours were bright, the designs tended towards the naïve and it owed little obvious debt to either the North Asian stoneware tradition or to traditional English pottery. Rather, it belonged to the great lineage of decorated tin-glazed ware that had spread from the Arab world throughout the Mediterranean basin, to Europe and eventually to Russia. Surprisingly, given its breadth of practice and historical weight, this was a tradition for which Leach held no obvious affection, and which passed almost without consideration in all his writings. In much the same way as he dismissed Picasso's ceramics as being those of an artist who works, not as a potter does starting 'from (the) clay up', but instead 'from the painting down'[523], the *istoriato*[524] tradition, which seemed to privilege decoration over form, did not gain a place in Leach's pantheon of the ceramic arts. Nonetheless, Janet Leach, writing about Leach in the obituary published in *Ceramic Review,* states that he was 'primarily a decorator and a superb draftsman' [525], a skill acquired during his initial training in painting and drawing, and Leach would often stress the decorative surface to the extent that decorated panels and single tiles were a mainstay of his output.

This is not to say that Leach dismissed all decorated European earthenware, with *A Potter's Book* reproducing a painted 16th century Spanish 'peasant-ware' plate and a

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[523] Leach, B. *A Potter in Japan* p.203

[524] *Istoriato* is a term used to describe a form of ceramic decoration that reached its zenith in renaissance Italy, whereby specialist decorators applied complicated painted scenes to ceramics derived from the pictorial art of the day.

[525] Leach, Janet. *Tribute to Bernard Leach* Ceramic Review No. 58, p. 20

large Hispano-Moresque bowl, the brushwork of which 'Hamada spoke of as ... the best in Europe'.[526] Nonetheless, the European tradition to which *faience* and *maiolica* belonged remained at odds with Leach's own practice and views. It might be speculated that its very 'European-ness' removed it from his grasp, either as inherently English, and thus available to him by right of nationality, or as part of the Asian traditions to which he claimed privileged access.[527]

Gazzard experienced an even more adventurous approach to clay in the work of the Argentinean Italian artist Lucio Fontana, to which many of her early organic forms owe an obvious debt. Fontana's sculptural handling of the ceramic medium was unlike anything that had been seen in Australia and his refusal to be defined by material – the *Cocetto Spaziale* title was applied across all the media he used[528] – discarded any references to ceramic's history of utility. Working with the expertise of his long-time collaborator, the leading Futurist ceramicist Tullio d'Albisola, Fontana, like Juan Miro in Spain, Asger Jorn in Denmark and Karel Appel in the Netherlands, was interested in pushing clay beyond its traditional boundaries and Marea Gazzard was well placed to observe these trends. Returning to Australia in 1960 she would quickly situate herself within both the practice and the politics of ceramics while being fully cognisant of the evolving nature of craft in a world context, its potential as a medium for art and its newly-defined status within the developed West.

The English potter Derek Smith had migrated to Australia in 1956. He had studied

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[526] Leach, B. *A Potter's Book* plate 62, caption and plate 63.

[527] In studying examples of *faience* type pottery mentioned favourably by Leach, the brushwork has a primarily linear, graphic - or indeed 'calligraphic' – quality, which perhaps aligns it with oriental archetypes. Certainly, Leach does not include and of the more 'painterly' *istoriato* works, where pictorial devices deriving from European painted traditions – the modelled form, accurate perspective etc - predominate.

[528] De Waal, *op. cit.* p.144

art, design and teaching at Loughbrough and Leicester Colleges in Britain between 1947 and 1955, during which time he also gained some experience of industrial ceramics. On arriving in Australia, Smith settled in Bowral, where he taught at the local high school and established his own ceramics studio. In 1962 he moved to Hobart, establishing the ceramics course at the Tasmanian School of Art. His exhibition at Domain House in Hobart in 1963 was the first exhibition of stoneware studio pottery held in Tasmania. It is noted that Smith utilised 'local materials' in the production of that work.

Another potter who experienced the London ceramics scene in the 1950s was Joyce (Joy) Warren. Warren had initially studied painting at the Julian Ashton school in Sydney, followed by a year of textile design at East Sydney Technical College in 1949 and 1950. Travelling to England in 1951 with her artist husband Guy Warren, whom she had met whilst he was studying at the same college under a Commonwealth Reconstruction Training Scheme, Warren enrolled in ceramics at Camberwell from 1952 and 1955. At the time she described the 'Japanese ethic' promulgated by Leach as being:

> ... a total reaction – people were realising the superficiality of their lives; they needed more spiritually-based attitudes. Leach fitted with the mood of the time ... the post World War II crafts renaissance was like a rebirth; it was a time to look at new things, and other philosophies. Lucie Rie started teaching there just after that, and Ruth Duckworth was at the Central School; Marea (Gazzard) was there too.[529]

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[529] ibid

An article written by Warren some years later, commissioned by the Crafts Board of the Australia Council entitled *Australian Studio Ceramics – Historical Notes*[530], notes the 'spiritual potential in work achieved by "head, heart and hand" ... which virtually swept Australian studio potters, in one generation, into accepting the first truly satisfying aesthetic presented to them since the country first began.[531]'

By the early 1960s The Australian potter Gwyn Hannsen Pigott [Gwyn John] was in London following training with Ivan McMeekin at Sturt. On her arrival she spent several years working in rural English potteries, including with Ray Finch at his Winchcombe Pottery in Gloucestershire, Harry and May Davis at Crowan, Michael Cardew at Wenford Bridge and with Bernard Leach at St. Ives. She describes her time at the Leach Pottery, where with fellow apprentices from around the world:

> *Zen and the Art of Archery* changed hands, dog-eared. Yanagi's philosophy was discussed: new words (for me) slipped into our conversation – *yunomi,* Mingei, and (ah) *shibui.* I could no longer ignore Japan.[532]

In London, Gwyn Hanssen embarked on making functional pottery. Of her exhibition at the Primavera Gallery in 1962, it was noted that her pots:

> ...are completely acceptable. ... Coming from Australia with a sense of dedication to what she considered to be one of the sources of good pottery, she soon recovered from the inevitable qualifying of the far-away-commonwealth-shining-bright-images ... settling down to do some hard work with some of our best potters. She married and came to London, and it seemed only a matter of weeks before she was setting up her own workshop. ... Her work is Zen style, poured slips and glazes cut and combed. ... The Hanssen's work more or less summarises the Leach-Cardew-Davis_Finch field, and in this

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[530] Warren, J. 'Australian Studio Ceramics – Historical Notes' *Pottery in Australia* Vol. 19 No. 1 1980
[531] ibid p. 38
[532] Hanssen Pigott, G. 'Autobiographical Notes' *The Studio Potter* Vol. 20 No. 1 p 46

respect is similar to the Mackenzies in the U.S.A. and McMeekin in Australia.[533]

However, for many Australian potters the focus was now beginning to shift from England towards another ceramic culture, one that would have a profound and unparalleled effect on Australian ceramics in the years to come. Following the map drawn by Leach in *A Potter's Book*, Australian potters, to paraphrase Hanssen Pigott, could no longer ignore Japan.

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[533] Fieldhouse, M. (ed) 'Exhibitions' *Pottery Quarterly* Vol. 7 No. 28 p. 146

7.2 The Little Japanese Pot

In 1955 a young Australian nurse named Cecily Gibson, recently returned from a working holiday in England and Europe, transferred to the Royal Canberra Hospital to resume her nursing career. In her leisure time she pursued many cultural and sporting activities and she was introduced to pottery when, at a friend's suggestion, she enrolled for a part-time ceramics class at the Canberra Technical College. In an interview conducted with Gibson at her Canberra home in 2001, she recalled that her first ceramics instructor was Ivan Englund.[534] McCulloch states that Ivan Englund was the pottery instructor at the Canberra Technical College during 1953 and 1954 and then headed the Art Department at Woolongong Technical College in 1955.[535] Given the date at which his successor, Henri le Grand, began teaching at the Canberra Technical College, it seems that Englund continued teaching in Canberra for a short period at the beginning of 1955.[536] Gibson stopped attending classes after a term, but would soon be reintroduced to clay in a manner that would set the pattern for what became a defining feature of Australian ceramics. Cecily Gibson would become the first Australian potter to study in Japan.

Around 1957[537] Gibson made the acquaintance of a patient at the hospital who was the wife of an official at the Japanese Embassy in Canberra. She subsequently received an invitation to lunch at an embassy residence where she recorded having her first glimpse:

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[534] Gibson, C. Interview with the author. 21 October 2001
[535] McCulloch, S. *Encyclopaedia of Australian Art* Allen and Unwin, Sydney 1994 p. 238
[536] see Menz, C. 'Henri le Grand – Potter and Teacher' *Pottery in Australia* Vol. 27 No. 3, Ausgust 1998, p. 27
[537] The exact date is not recorded, therefore this is an estimation based on Gibson's own writing and my interviews with the subject.

> ... of a Japanese way of life – the space in the room, the kimono, the food and the flower arrangement. And then: I was casually handed a small Japanese vase. I took that little pot in my hands and immediately felt an overwhelming sense of exhilaration, impression and enchantment. For the first time in my life I felt I was holding a pot for which the potter knew what was truly 'right' for the clay. It was just a lovely simple pot, but for me its effect evoked in me a profound desire to become a potter.[538]

Gibson's reaction warrants further consideration. On reading her account it is obvious that the experience of holding the 'little pot' occasioned a moment of certainty, the realization that she wished to be a potter. As she says: 'It set everything up for me.'[539] Nonetheless, it must be remembered that her first teacher, Ivan Englund, had been inculcated into the Leach philosophy through his time at East Sydney Technical College and Gibson may well have been introduced to the virtues of Japanese pottery by Englund, as an ideal if not a reality. She also remembers reading Leach's *A Potter's Book* before setting out for Japan (it is unknown whether this was at either Englund's or le Grand's urging) but that it 'didn't make me want to be a potter. I only read that, I suppose, because it was at tech college, or I got it from the library'[540]. In addition, Gibson had seen ' ... a lot of his [Bernard Leach] pots in England'[541], and had 'quite liked it [them], but it didn't turn me on like the little Japanese pot did.'[542]

Cecily Gibson was aware of at least one other facet of Australian pottery in the ceramics of the Boyd family. Through her nursing in Canberra she had met Dr. Mary Hoyle, whose sister, Phyllis Boyd, was married to Guy Boyd. Gibson recalls that

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[538] Gibson, C. *The Gift of Fire and Clay* Ginninderra Press 2000 p. 93
[539] Gibson, C. Interview with the author, 21 October 2001
[540] ibid
[541] ibid
[542] ibid.

' ... every now and then she had a bit of pottery of Merric Boyd. Yes, and I liked it, but it never did anything to me.'[543]

The day after Gibson's lunch with her Japanese hostess, she contacted the Canberra Technical College and re-enrolled in pottery classes on the two nights a week that she had free from nursing. This time, instead of treating the classes as a hobby she was determined to learn as much as she could about pottery.[544] Ivan Englund had by then returned to New South Wales and a new teacher had taken up the position, the Dutch émigré potter Henri le Grand.

Whilst being, as Christopher Menz notes 'one of the lesser-known potters and teachers working in Australia during the 1950s and 1960s'[545], Henri le Grand was nonetheless a highly trained potter and an influential teacher, who was intimately involved in the formative stages of what is now the Canberra School of Art. Le Grand was born in 1921 in Amsterdam and studied art and ceramics at the prestigious Instituut voor Kunstnijverheidsondernijs te Amsterdam (Amsterdam Institute of Applied Art), before further training with the potter Emile Regout in Maastricht and at the Goedewagen factory in Gouda.[546]

Henri le Grand had trained in an environment where art, ceramics and industry were not as clearly differentiated as they were in Leach's view of the world. His training and work experience in Europe was not in the craft revivalist Anglo Oriental model of

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[543] ibid
[544] Gibson, C. *The Gift of Fire and Clay* p.94.
[545] Menz, C. loc.cit. p. 27
[546] The Regout porcelain company, based in Maastricht, was originally founded in 1834 by Petrus Regout, and passed on through several succeeding generations into the 20th century. It was a very large producer of ceramics, exporting its wares throughout Europe.

espoused by Leach, but encompassed design and industrial processes. The aftermath of war ensured that Le Grand, like so many others, would seek to leave his homeland to begin another life, which he did, arriving in Australia in 1949.[547]

In 1954 Henri le Grand joined the Department of Technical Education in New South Wales and in May of 1955 he was appointed to the Canberra Technical College. At that time the department consisted of 'one broken wheel, a broken-down kiln and a collection of plaster moulds, all housed in a single room.'[548] He set about revitalising the department, bringing his background in functional, high-fired stoneware and European design to bear on a ceramic world that was still largely reliant on pre-prepared materials and decoration characterised by 'Aboriginal motifs and gumnuts'[549] Athough there is no doubt that this description might be applied to some of the pottery being made in Australian colleges at the time, it does call into question the contribution of Ivan Englund during his tenure in Canberra and may be a generalisation rather than a balanced view of the departments activities.[550] There is no doubt that Henri le Grand brought a European-influenced aesthetic and a technical breadth to his ceramics that was uncommon amongst Australian potters at the time. He began to mix his own clays, to develop glazes and to source the equipment necessary for the production of stoneware studio pottery. It was during this period of growth that Gibson returned to begin a serious study of ceramics. Such

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[547] Menz, C. loc. cit.
[548] ibid
[549] ibid
[550] At the time, it was not uncommon for ceramic departments to be primarily focused at part-time or 'hobby' classes. Many of the students attending such classes were interested in making items that, whilst according with the general taste of the day, may not have accorded with the interests and ambitions of the teachers employed to run these classes. Nonetheless, in this setting the teachers were often regarded as a resource to facilitate the fulfilment of the students ideas and ambitions, rather than a teacher might introduce new ideas, aesthetics or techniques. Moon, M. Conversation with the author, 14 April 2006

was her enthusiasm, she was urged by Le Grand to consider pottery as a career. Although finding this a 'revolutionary idea'[551], she began to consider the possibility of moving to Sydney or Melbourne to further her studies. She explained:

> Henri dismissed these ideas and said that I had to go overseas, as pottery was fine for hobby potters but not yet developed enough in Australia for serious potters; as I had real potential, I should make it my life's work, and go to a country where it was noted for its tradition in that field. I asked where he thought I should go and he immediately said 'Japan'. I was startled, and then I realised that this had all been ... serendipity ... , ever since I had held that small Japanese pot in my hands the year before.[552]

However, Les Blakebrough, who knew Le Grand in Sydney and had some contact with him in Canberra, states that Le Grand had become estranged from the New South Wales pottery world.

> Nothing much emulated out of ... Canberra as far as ceramics were concerned ... because of this bust up with Henry (Le Grand) who wanted to ... go home, and left everyone to it. ... I know he and McMeekin were like that' [starts with hands together then moves them in opposite directions] 'and I don't think Ivan Englund was much better. So what ... Henry may have had going on in Canberra was like a closed shop. You just didn't know about it ... [553]

The result of Le Grand's decision to remove himself from participating in the developments in New South Wales ceramics would also have an impact on Gibson's career. Rather than encouraging her to go to Sydney, where she may have made her own connections to the world of Australian pottery, she was encouraged to travel straight to Japan, at a time when despite her undoubted commitment and enthusiasm

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[551] Gibson transcript of interview with the author
[552] Gibson, C. op. cit. p. 93
[553] Blakebrough, L. Transcript of interview with the author. 4 December 2001

she was still relatively inexperienced. This would began a pattern of behaviour which ensured Gibson remained outside the wider Australian ceramic world for the rest of her career.

Having made the decision to go, Gibson began to prepare herself for the journey. Her three main objectives were to save enough money for a lengthy visit, to learn some of the language and to arrange a place to live and study pottery after she arrived. It was an ambitious project. No Australian potter had visited or studied in Japan, and many Australians still regarded Japan with suspicion a scant thirteen years after the war. If, in the late 1950s, Peter Rushforth had wished to travel to Japan with the intention of spending a lengthy period of time studying pottery, his connections would undoubtedly have ultimately been made through Leach. Le Grand, despite his encouragement of Gibson, was not in a position to assist her with introductions to the world of Japanese pottery, but Cecily Gibson, through her friendship with the staff at the Japanese Embassy, had contacts of her own.

She began to learn Japanese from a Mrs. Hatakana and gained assistance from another Japanese official who had family connections in Utsunomea, a Japanese town that was near to a village which Gibson was told 'specialised in pottery'[554]. In this way it was arranged that Gibson would travel to this village to study the traditional 'techniques and values'[555] of Japanese pottery. In a remarkable coincidence, in a country where there are hundreds of centres specialising in pottery, the village turned out to be Mashiko, the home of Shoji Hamada and the epicentre of

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[554] Gibson, C. Interview with the author op. cit
[555] ibid, p. 95

the growing nexus between Japanese and Western craft pottery. Gibson marshalled her resources and in late 1959[556] she departed for Japan.

At this point it is worth considering the value of Gibson's contacts and the role they played in facilitating her experiences in Japan. In a similar manner to Bernard Leach's arrival in Tokyo in 1909 with introductions to influential artists associated with the Imperial household,[557] Gibson was aided by well-placed contacts. She was met at Tokyo airport by some of her friends from the Japanese embassy in Canberra who: '... zoomed ... through customs and into a waiting chauffeur-driven car'[558]. She was introduced to the staff at the Australian Embassy and two weeks after arriving in Tokyo she set out for Mashiko, where it was arranged that she would work with a potter named Kuno-san in the Tsukamoto pottery workshop.[559] [Plate 18]

The presence of Hamada had transformed the small village of Mashiko into an international ceramic Mecca, a place of ceramic pilgrimage which, whilst being attractively rural had the virtue of being readily accessible from Tokyo. By 1960 the post war Japanese 'Mingei boom'[560] was gaining strength, and many visitors travelled to known folk craft destinations like Mashiko where they would buy pottery by Hamada and his ever-growing number of apprentices and emulators. In fact, Mashiko pottery was becoming so successful that Bernard Leach, on his 1961 visit to Japan, spoke to an audience at the pottery centre of Matsue where he 'dared to attack the prevalent use of the term Mingei to describe what is no longer folk-art but 'Mingei-style' produced by educated modern Japanese who are not simple or religious-

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[556] The exact date is unknown, and it may have been slightly earlier than this, or as late as early 1960.
[557] See thesis chapter *Leach in Japan*
[558] Gibson op. cit. p.97
[559] ibid. p. 101
[560] King, J. 'Soetsu Yanagi and the Folk Craft Movement' MA thesis, Monash University 1982

minded like their forebears'[561]. This was a problematic argument in many ways, and not the least because it was through their associations with, and appropriations of, folk-craft styles, that both Leach and Hamada had developed successful careers as artist potters. Leach felt by this date that

> ... there should now be a counterbalance to the now widely used word mingei, for the age of folk-arts is over ... We have launched into another world of individualism ... and we cannot go back.[562]

In many ways Mashiko remained a manufacturing centre that, whilst perhaps not 'traditional' in the sense to which Leach alluded, maintained traditional patterns of labour and workshop hierarchies. In this system a workshop would be controlled by a master or *sensei* under whom might work a small number of full-time apprentices. For example, Shoji Hamada's son Atsuya worked in Hamada's workshop in Mashiko as well as spending time with Leach in St. Ives. Another of Hamada's early apprentices, the potter Shimaoka would later become famous in his own right and would go on to have considerable contact with Australia, both through his visit to this country in 1972[563] and by his acceptance of numbers of Australian 'guest potters' in Mashiko.[564] The full apprenticeship period may have lasted a decade or more, during which time the apprentice was firmly inculcated into the 'workshop style', only gradually being allowed some degree of self-expression in his or (much less often) her own work. The rewards for this dedication could be significant. Apprentices

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[561] ibid

[562] *Beyond East and West* p.270

[563] See Peascod, A. & Sprague, I. 'Tatsuzo Shimaoka' *Pottery in Australia* Vol. 11 No. 2, 1972 pp. 35 - 38

[564] During the mid 1970s the Australian potter Andrew Halford spent two years working with Shimaoka in Mashiko. He records that on his arrival in Mashiko he found himself one of nine foreign potters who had come there to train. Tory, N. 'Andrew Halford' *Pottery in Australia* Potters Society of Australia, Vol. 20 no. 1 p. 42

gained skills and achieved credibility by way of their association with a recognised master, a valuable commodity in the highly politicised world of Japanese ceramics. Other non-apprenticed employees were specialists, either attached to a single workshop or working as freelance contractors to a variety of potteries. This group of workers might include throwers, kiln-builders, glaze-makers or decorators.

This rigid system seldom applied to foreigners, in a similar way as it had not been applied to Leach himself when he had studied in Japan some five decades earlier.[565] While Gibson notes that 'as the only woman there, and as a foreigner, she did not go unnoticed'[566] with even the Japanese press taking an interest in her progress,[567] what she does not comment on are the extraordinary freedoms she was afforded in comparison with the Japanese workers around her. Although she adhered to the same pattern of work as her Japanese colleagues, working for approximately the same number of hours in the day and days of the week, the substance of her work was different and this was manifested through the making of pots that did not conform to the workshop style. Another striking difference in Gibson's position was her presence as a woman potter within the male-dominated world of Japanese pottery. Although many Japanese women played an important part in the day to day production process their roles were constrained by the traditions and social mores of the society. Women never gained prominence in a Japanese ceramic world which was totally dominated by older male potters and cultural arbiters. Leach, on his visit to Japan in 1934 and 1935 may have celebrated the contribution of 'last genuine

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[565] As time went on, the influx of considerable numbers of foreigners who wished to be trained in 'traditional' workshops, meant that more Western potters were subjected to the same disciplines that applied to Japanese students. Also, see the Chapter 'Leach in Japan' for an overview of Leach's training in Japan.

[566] Gibson ibid.

[567] ibid, p. 103,104

painter of Mashiko patterns, Masu Minagawa'[568], a woman who worked as a specialist pottery decorator, he revealingly states that the conversation he had with her, during which she demonstrated her repertoire of calligraphic skills, was, 'I dare say the only such meeting and exchange which has ever taken place'[569]. This reinforces Edmund de Waal's assertion that Leach constructed his authority in the West by capitalising on his relationships with Japanese craftspeople and closely fits the pattern of craftsman as ethnographer as described by de Waal: '... images of Western craftsmen as ethnographers, the gatherers of data as to the process of making, the interviewer and recorder of conversations'[570].

Gibson would have been aware of the position of Japanese females within the world of Japanese ceramics simply by observing what happened around her. In the following passage she indicates her awareness of the peculiarity of her own situation.

> ... I had an interesting insight into Japanese male thinking when a noted American potter and his wife came to Kyoto. The Japanese gave them a welcome dinner the first night and, like most of the other guests, I met and liked the potter and his wife; everyone seemed to enjoy the evening. Therefore, I was surprised when, on subsequent gatherings, I noticed that the potter's wife was not present at the functions her husband attended. I said to one of Japanese male friends, "Where is the potter's wife? I haven't seen her since the first night." "Oh, she is not invited, She is a woman." He said. Amazed, I said, "Why, then, do you invite me? I'm a woman too." He looked astonished, and said, "You are invited in your own right. She is just a wife."'[571]

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[568] Leach, B. *Beyond East and West* p. 175
[569] ibid p. 176
[570] de Waal, E. 'Homo Orientalis: Bernard Leach and the Image of the Japanese Craftsman' *Journal of Design History* Vol. 10 No. 4 1997; de Waal, E. 'Ghosts in the Kiln: the language of authentic pottery' www.ceramicartswa.asn.au/archives/dewaal.html
[571] It is likely that the potter she was referring to was Daniel Rhodes. Rhodes was one of America's most senior potters and wrote sevral important books on ceramics. He spent time in Japan on a Fulbright Scholarship during 1962/63, thus coinciding exactly in time and location with Gibson. ibid p. 123

The complexities of accepting the presence of foreign potters to study within a traditional setting were still evolving, but during the time Gibson was in Mashiko the combination of her foreignness and her gender assured her of a privileged position. Six months after her arrival, she noted that:

> ... there was another kiln in which I had a number of pots of many shapes and glazes, as I was experimenting all the time. ... I was greeted with cries of "Minna subarashi" – all excellent. ... We were amazed, too, that they were all quite different from the pots made by the Japanese around me. My Japanese friends repeated "You are using the same clay and glazes and firing, and yet they are not like our pots..." ... The painters thought my painting really fine, and the glazing masters were full of praise for my glazes.[572]

A comment might be made here regarding the possibility, that Gibson misinterpreted well-intentioned expressions of encouragement with a serious critical appraisal of her work, especially across the kind of cultural gulf which she undoubtedly faced. Nonetheless, she spent approximately eight months in Mashiko in a period of intensive and genuine study and there is no doubt that her skills at the end of this period would have been on a par with many Australian studio potters. [Plate 20]

Gibson, however, considered her time in Mashiko to have been 'an initiation to Japan, its pottery, people and customs.'[573] From Mashiko she moved to Tokyo, where she rented a small apartment and enrolled to study at the Tokyo University of Fine Art under Professor Hajimi Kato, who would be designated a 'Living National Treasure' (otherwise 'Intangible Cultural Property') for his mastery of the Iro-e Jiki technique of overglaze enamel decoration on porcelain in 1961.[574] Kato was one of

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[572] ibid, p. 110
[573] ibid, p. 112
[574] www.e-yakimono.net/html/living-natl-treasures.htm accessed 22 August 2006

Japan's most senior potters but his work was quite unlike that of Hamada's; it was fine, labour intensive, painstaking and precise. Although Gibson did not attempt to learn Kato's techniques her exposure to an ever-widening field of Japanese styles would increase her knowledge of Japanese ceramic traditions. It was during this time that Gibson also made the acquaintance of several other foreign students of pottery, all of them women.

She records that 'out of the blue'[575] three potters made contact with her; Helen Sadur from South Africa and two American potters, Jan Jones and Marie Woo. This group also included the Mexican potter Graziella Diaz de Leon. [576] Meeting them, Gibson recalls that they were:

> ...very pleased with my work; they spoke of new, interesting directions, and there and then invited me to join them in an exhibition they were having, with sixteen Japanese men and women working in different fields, called JYD (Japan Youth Designers) at the Shirokiya gallery in Tokyo ... I agreed.[577] Gibson also states that "At the time we were the only foreigners studying pottery in the whole of Japan"'.[578]

The accuracy of this last assertion is difficult to establish, given the paucity of dates in Gibson's accounts, but working backwards from the date of her final exhibition in Tokyo held in December 1963 – an event that will be examined later in this chapter – a reasonable estimation places Gibson in Tokyo in the first half on 1960. Given this, the British potter John Chappell was already living in Japan as was the American potter Donna Nichols, whom Gibson would meet in due course. The American potter

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[575] ibid
[576] Marie Woo still practises ceramics and is a member of the International Academy of Ceramics.
[577] ibid, p. 112, 113
[578] ibid

Frederick Olsen would arrive in Japan in mid 1961 following his studies in ceramics at UCLA in Southern California, to begin studies at the Kyoto Fine Arts college.[579] Before this, the American potter Janet Darnell (later Janet Leach, Bernard Leach's third wife) had studied in Mashiko and then in Tamba during 1953 and 1954.[580] During her stay in Japan, Darnell also assisted Leach with his manuscript of *A Potter in Japan,* and in 1955 would travel to England, where she married Leach and assumed many of the responsibilities for the day to day running of the St. Ives workshops. In 1960 no less than four New Zealand potters visited Kyoto, and although none of them stayed for an extended period Helen Mason would play a key role in ensuring John Chappell would visit Australia in 1961 on his way to New Zealand the same year.

In 1962 two more foreign potters would arrive in Japan, the Australian potter Les Blakebrough who was on leave from the Sturt Worshops and the American potter Doug Lawrie. Blakebrough, Chappell, Lawrie and Olsen, together with the Japanese potter Takeichi Kawai, the nephew of Leach's colleague, Kanjiro Kawai, would all go on to play an important role in fostering the relation between Australian and Japanese pottery and this contribution will be examined in forthcoming chapters of this thesis. If Cecily Gibson was unaware at the time of other foreign potters studying in Japan, there is some indication of a later awareness of their presence, when she states:

> They (foreign potters) seemed to spend perhaps a month or so with a different master. Rather than ... to be shown and taught by them [Japanese potters] down at Mashiko was absolutely marvellous. Well, they [foreign potters] weren't interested in that sort of thing. I sensed that they were full of life as it was, and I

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[579] Both American and Japanese colleges follow the Northern hemisphere academic year.
[580] Leach, B. *Beyond East and West* p. 253, 254

didn't mix much ... I never have.[581]

Following the success of this initial exhibition an invitation was extended by the prestigious Mitsukoshi Gallery for the same group of foreign women potters, joined by a Japanese woman potter named Kyo Tsuji[582], to exhibit under the auspices of the *Asahi Shinbun*, one of the major Japanese newspapers. The privilege of exhibiting at the Mitsukoshi Gallery[583] was normally reserved for Japanese potters of many years experience and accepted seniority. According to a newspaper report of the time[584], this *International Tokyo Women's Exhibition* was sponsored by the Japan Society for International Cultural Relations with the cooperation of Fujio Koyama, the noted potter, scholar, author and member of the Japan Cultural Properties Commission.[585] Fujio Koyama was one of the most powerful cultural brokers in Japan and his involvement suggests the exhibition served a purpose beyond that of aesthetics.[586]

Perhaps because of the intervention of Koyama, several of the women had access to the leading Japanese potters of the day. Marie Woo worked with Toyo Kaneshige, the leading exponent of Bizen ware, and a 'Living National Treasure.'[587] Cecily Gibson was soon to have a similar experience with another one of the stars of the Japanese ceramic firmament.

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[581] transcript of interview
[582] Kyo Tsuji and her husband Semei Tsuji both became well-known Japanese potters.
[583] Mitsukoshi Gallery was part of the Mitsukoshi department store. Many larger Japanese department stores, like Daimaru, Mitsukoshi and Takashimaya maintained prestigious galleries.
[584] The press clipping does not included publication details. The by-line is Vera Hirschberg, Staff Writer for 'S&S'. Gibson archive.
[585] The Japan Cultural Properties Commission was responsible for assessing people, objects and places for inclusion on the register of what is popularly known as National Treasures.
[586] A useful biography of Koyama can be found at www.e-yakimono.net/html/koyama-fujio-jt.html
[587] ibid Gibson archive

Having previously visited Kyoto, Gibson decided that she would like to relocate there. She: ' ... wanted to get to know the wondrous city ... its beauty and history, and for all its artistic manifestations to sink into my being.'[588] Kyoto was a smaller city than Tokyo and it had largely escaped damage during the war, therefore preserving its rich cultural and built heritage. The city was home to many famous exponents of the traditional Japanese arts and had been an active pottery centre for over four hundred years.[589] What was unknown to Gibson, and indeed to all other Australian potters at the time, was that it also was the centre of some of the most radical developments to take place in Japanese ceramics in the twentieth century. As with the ground-breaking work occurring on the west coast of America and in avant-garde European ceramics, this work challenged any preconceptions as to the unchanging traditional nature of Japanese craft and fell completely outside the reportage of commentators like Leach.[590] Thus, Leach could travel throughout Japan from 1952 to 1954 and again in 1961 and 1962, journeys which he writes about in *A Potter in Japan* and *Beyond East and West,* and yet the extraordinary developments in Japanese ceramics, demonstrated so tellingly in the International Exhibition of Ceramic Art held in Japan in 1964 go unmentioned. His response to similar movements in American ceramics may either be read as was a cry of regret or even mild annoyance[591], but his response to the radicalisation of Japanese clay was to ignore its existence, at least in text.

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[588] Gibson, C. op. cit. p. 114, 115

[589] Cort, L. A. 'Crawling through the Mud: Avant-Garde Ceramics in Postwar Japan' 2003 Perkins Lecture, Schein Joseph International Museum of Ceramic Art, New York State College of Ceramics at Alfred University ceramicsmuseum.Alfred.edu/perkins_lect_series/cort/corttalk.html accessed 5 April 2006

[590] At least two recognised groupings of avant-garde ceramic artists were based in Kyoto in the 1950s and 60s. Best known is the Sodeisha group based around figures such as Kazuo Yagi and Osamu Suzuki, with Yagi's 1954 *Mr Zamusa's Walk* often cited as an early seminal work. A second grouping was that around Sango Uno, the Shikokai (Society of Four Harvests). Other figures associated with this group were Hayashi Yasuo, Shimizu Uichi and Kimura Morikazu. See Cort, L. A.

[591] Leach, B. *Beyond East and West* pp. 237 - 242

In Kyoto, Gibson bought a motor scooter and rented rooms in a house that was located in the grounds of a temple. She was fortunate in that the house had belonged to a potter who had recently relocated to America and as a consequence it had a small ceramics studio attached. She began working on her own, and when the time came to fire her pots she rented space in a large communal kiln, a common practice amongst urban potters.[592] 'Most Gojozaka [593] potters did not own their own kilns but rented space in a cooperative kiln. Specialists fired the kilns, while other businesses supplied the firewood, clay bodies and glaze materials.'[594]

She soon made the acquaintance of Donna Nichols, an American potter who had come to Japan to study in 1959.[595] In early 1961 Nichols was studying with Hiroaki (Tamei) Morino, a traditionally-trained potter who was beginning to extend his practice into more contemporary forms.[596] In the early 1960s, American potters were well represented amongst the nationalities of potters visiting Japan. Partly this was to do with the history of the immediate post-war period, in that many troops 'discovered' Japan through service in the armed forces. Doug Lawrie, an American potter who arrived in Kyoto in 1962, refers at the beginning of a letter outlining his 25 year stay in Japan to the history of the exchange between American and Japanese potters.[597] Lawrie, like many American potters at the time, had made his way to California in the

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[592] Gibson, C. p.118

[593] Most ceramic workshops in Kyoto are clustered on the hills to the east of the city, in the districts known as Awata and Gojozaka. Court, L. A.

[594] Court, L. A. ibid

[595] Nichols recalls knowing Gibson in Kyoto, and has written an account of her time in Kyoto in *Studio Potter*

[596] Hiroaki Morino had trained at Kyoto University under Kenkichi Tomimoto. His father, Morino Kako, was a well-know potter and a member of the Nitten group. In 1961 or 1962 Hiroaki Morino travelled to America, where he taught at the Chicago Art Institute for several years. He subsequently returned to Japan.

[597] Lawrie, D. Letter to the author 26 December 2002

late 50s, where the ceramics departments of the major art schools were being reinvigorated by a new generation of artists who were working in a highly experimental way with clay.[598] Initially he had visited Japan whilst on leave from the army where he was stationed in Hawaii in the mid 1950s, an island that had a significant and long-standing ethnic Japanese presence [599] which brought many Americans into contact with aspects of Japanese culture.

Lawrie's initial training had been in architecture, an interest he pursued on his first trip to japan, but he also records having bought a Kazuo Yagi pot in Kyoto and being impressed with the prominence of ceramics in Japanese culture.[600] Partly as a result of this trip to Japan, Lawrie writes of being 'turned on' [601] by ceramics. In 1960 he enrolled in a Master of Fine Arts degree in ceramics with Paul Soldner at Claremont Graduate College in California 'at a time when American ceramics were very strongly influenced by Japanese ceramics.'[602] From the late 1950s important Japanese potters were visiting America, and the vibrant ceramic departments of the West Coast universities welcomed both traditional and avant- garde approaches to clay. Toyo Kaneshige, a Living National Treasure, visited the United States from Bizen[603] as did members of the experimental Sodeisha group.[604] Lawrie remembers the Californian exhibition of Sodeisha ceramics as being rather weak when compared with the monumental and powerful work being achieved by American ceramic artists like Peter Voulkos and John Mason. He explained '...in hindsight ... I realize that with

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[598] see de Waal, E. *20th century ceramics* Thames and Hudson, 2003. 'Post War America' p. 154 & 'Peter Voulkos and Otis' p. 156

[599] By 1923 the largest ethnic group amongst Hawaii's multi ethnic population was Japanese. http://rs6.loc.gov/learn/features/immig/Japanese2.html accessed 30 March 2006.

[600] Lawrie, D. Letter to the author, dated 26/12/02

[601] ibid

[602] ibid

[603] Kaneshige visited America in 1956. Court, L. A. op. cit.

[604] Lawrie op cit

such a powerful, traditional ceramic monkey on your back it probably wasn't easy to break away and look for a new voice ...'[605] He goes on to write that:

> ... probably in Australia as well as America, Leach and his *A Potter's Book* were the single most influential factor introducing the Japanese aesthetic and a glimpse into the Japanese pottery world. Perhaps also it was really the only publication available to us that touched on the subject and it became our major source book. ... Later of course many other books became available, but in the mid/late 1950s there wasn't much else and it tended to make us think that the only Japanese pottery was folk-pottery and Hamada and we didn't know much about the other wonderful traditions.[606]

Lawrie details the early networks that formed around foreign potters in Japan, and cites the Englishman John Chappell as being 'surely the most knowledgeable foreigner about Japanese pottery at the time'[607]. These interconnections between foreigners and Japanese workshops, especially in Kyoto, would have a significant impact on Australian pottery. They established valuable ties between foreign potters resident in Japan and Australian potters visiting Japan and influenced which Japanese potters would visit Australia and who Australian potters would meet when they visited Japan. The importance of these foreign residents as cultural intermediaries is often overlooked in all areas of cultural exchange.

If this process was soon to influence Australian pottery, Cecily Gibson was content to work outside the networks. After establishing herself in Kyoto she enrolled in the University of Fine Arts in Kyoto, where Tomimoto Kenkichi, Leach's original Japanese colleague and fellow student, was in charge of the ceramics department.

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[605] ibid
[606] ibid
[607] ibid

Tomimoto had been awarded the inaugural title of Living National Treasure in 1955[608] for his contribution to Japanese culture through his 'rediscovery' of the ceramic traditions of the Mino area[609], the same year as the potters Ishiguro Munemara, Hamada Shoji and Ararkawa Toyozo. He was one of Japan's most senior potters, and by 1962 was still one of only six Living National Treasures to be honoured in the field of ceramics.[610] During her initial interview with Tomimoto, Gibson states that he advised her against enrolling at the university, instead issuing an invitation to become his private student, 'an invitation beyond my wildest dreams.'[611] Although this doubtless was a privilege and an opportunity, it also closed another avenue for her to make connections with the foreign potters working in Kyoto and to interact with a wider cross-section of Japanese potters.

For a period of two and a half years, until his death in June of 1963, Gibson spent two days a week working with Tomimoto at his studio. During this time she was introduced to porcelain, which for many years had been Tomimoto's material of choice. Under his guidance she learnt to work with this clay and to refine her decorative skills carried out in an underglaze blue. Though modest in scale, the few small works from that time still in her possession demonstrate her capacity to work with these refined materials.

Gibson continued to travel, visiting Japanese and Korean pottery centres and even venturing as far as Hokkaido, Japan's northernmost island. An article by Gibson,

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[608] www.e-yakimono.net/html/living-natl-treasures.htm accessed 22 August 2006
[609] Particularly shino, ki-seto and seto-guro. See Barriskill, Janet *Visiting the Mino Kilns* University of Sydney South East Asian Series No. 9, Wild Peony Press 1995
[610] Gibson inaccurately states that at the time she met him, Ararkawa was the only Japanese potter to have been honoured with the title of 'inT'angible national treasure'. See Gibson, C. p. 121
[611] ibid p. 121

'Bisen Yaki of Imbe'[612], appears in the October, 1963 issue of *Pottery in Australia,* in which she briefly details the traditions and techniques of Bizen, again demonstrating a quite detailed knowledge of a highly specific Japanese tradition regarding the terms used for the typical decorative effects left by the process of firing on the unglazed clay. It is unknown whether this article was written soon after her return to Australia or at the end of her stay in Japan. Gibson's authorship of this article is the only instance I am aware of regarding contact between Gibson and the influential Potter's Society of New South Wales, the publishers of *Pottery in Australia.*

Interestingly, while working in Japan, Gibson developed a style of pottery which in some respects was similar to Bizen. Bizen pottery, which has been made for hundreds of years in the Imbe region of Japan, is a well-recognised and unmistakable style of traditional Japanese pottery. The pots are placed into the *nobori-gama* (multi chambered 'climbing' kiln) without any glaze, where they are subjected to a prolonged firing using timber as fuel. Depending on the placement of the pots in the kiln they often emerge partially glazed, through exposure to the particles of ash and volatile gasses from the burning timber interacting with the clay surface. Most characteristic of this type of ware is a clay surface that displays streaks, 'flashes' or diffuse marks of muted to intense colours, ranging from orange and red to a smoky blue-grey.[613] Much of this ware was associated with the tea-ceremony, therefore being somewhat removed from the folk-art idiom.[614] Perhaps for this reason, Leach never makes mention of Bizen in *A Potter's Book,* although he

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[612] Gibson, C. 'Bisen Yaki of Imbe' *Pottery in Australia* Vol. 2 No. 2, 1963 p. 14

[613] Effects from the firing are collectively known as '*yohen*', but individual marks have particular descriptive terms in the Bizen tradition.

[614] This is not to say that 'folk art' ware could not find a place in the tea ceremony, but that folk art or mingei pottery was made primarily with everyday usage in mind, whereas other traditions had become more associated with the needs of the tea ceremony.

would certainly have been aware of its existence. Bizen is one example of a discrete Japanese tradition which, although not mentioned by Leach, was 'discovered' during the subsequent interactions between Japanese and Western potters. When Cecily Gibson made a range of similar unglazed work in Japan, it was made outside of the pottery centre normally associated with the manufacture of such work, which was Imbe. When her shapes and forms differed from those associated with Bizen ware, the work fell also outside of tradition, even whilst exhibiting some of the qualities of traditional ware. In the course of the interview I conducted with Gibson, she described the reaction to this ware in Japan, saying:

> ...the Japanese called that 'Gibson-teki'. They gave it a name. 'Teki' means "characteristic of" and they thought it was marvellous. So I was in this lovely position. I could look and admire, and if I wanted to, take so much as I admired.
>
> Moon: Which is not necessarily a freedom that the Japanese have?
>
> Gibson: No.[615]

The culmination of Gibson's time in Japan came when Tomimoto suggested the possibility of a one-person exhibition. It seems that it was originally intended to be held at another gallery, but an invitation was extended to Gibson, through Tomimoto[616], to exhibit at the Mitsukoshi Gallery in Tokyo where she had already participated in her previous group show, for a date later that year. Gibson was cognisant of the scale of the project. The honour given to a foreigner of a one-person show at such a prestigious gallery was almost unprecedented. Gibson writes that to her knowledge she was the first Australian artist, working in any medium, and only

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[615] Op. cit. Interview with author

[616] It was an accepted practice in Japan for the gallery to contact the master or sen-sei to ask permission to approach their student.

the second foreign potter, to be extended the honour.[617] It seems likely that the first assertion is accurate. If one assumes that Gibson is somehow excluding Leach from her reckoning – as by 1963 Leach had been exhibiting in Japan consistently for forty years – then she is referring to another, unnamed, foreign potter. Doug Lawrie has stated that John Chappell had exhibited in Japan before this date[618], and corroboration of this is found in an account by the New Zealand potter Helen Mason. Writing about her second trip to Japan with fellow New Zealand potters Helen Dawson and Elsie Inkersell, they (Mason and Dawson) 'met up with Doreen Blumhardt [another New Zealand potter] at John Chappell's exhibition at the Matsuxy [sic] Store on the Ginza in Tokyo.'[619]. The store was the Matsuya department store on the Ginza in Tokyo, which, like many other Japanese department stores, including Mitsukoshi, operated a gallery within the store.[620]

Soon before the Tokyo exhibition was due to open, Kenkichi Tomimoto died. Gibson carried on with the arrangements and the exhibition was opened by the Australian ambassador, Sir Lawrence McIntyre, in December 1963.[621] In the invitation, McIntyre refers to the growing interest among Australian artists in Oriental arts and particularly in Japanese pottery, commending Gibson's project as one which served to foster closer cultural relations. It was a cultural exchange that, like so many others carried out by Australian potters in that period, cost the Australian government nothing.

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[617] op. cit. p. 127
[618] Lawrie, D. correspondence with the author 26 December 2002
[619] Mason, H. *10 Years of Pottery in New Zealand* New Zealand Potter 1968, p. 12
[620] At the time, this would not have seemed unfamiliar to Australian potters who could make the comparison to David Jones department store and gallery in Sydney, which, throughout the 60s was one of Australia's most prestigious venues.
[621] From exhibition invitation, Gibson archives.

The final accolade came when Her Highness Princess Chichibu attended the exhibition and extended an invitation to Gibson to visit her at the palace. The Princess had heard of Gibson through the press and also through Hajime Kato, Gibson's professor from the University of Fine Arts in Tokyo, who gave private ceramics tuition to Chichibu's husband, the brother of the Japanese Emperor. Gibson attended the meeting accompanied by the wife of the Australian ambassador and presented the Princess with a gift, a 'small vase of character, in a subdued brown glaze.'[622] Soon after, Cecily Gibson returned to Australia.

Gibson's only further contact with Japan would be when she was invited to contribute work to the International Exhibition of Contemporary Ceramic Art in 1964/65, staged by the National Museum of Modern Art in Tokyo, the Ishibashi Art Gallery, Kyushu, the National Museum of Modern Art, Kyoto and the Aichi Art Gallery, Nagoya.[623] This large exhibition included many of the current and future luminaries of the ceramics world, and included traditional vessel-based work alongside the most experimental ceramics being made around the world. Amongst the large American contingent were Robert Arneson, Sam Francis, Karl Martz, John Mason, Otto Nazler, Daniel Rhodes, Jerry Rothman, Paul Soldner, Peter Voulkos and Franz Wildenhain. British artists Dan Arbeid, Hans Coper, Ruth Duckworth, Lucie Rie and Bernard Leach exhibited alongside European ceramists of the calibre of Lucio Fontana, Jose Llorenz Artigas and Ingeborg and Bruno Asshoff. Hellen Sadur from South Africa and Graziella Diaz de Leon from Mexico, both of whom were associated with Gibson in Japan, also exhibited work. Despite the numbers of New Zealand potters who had visited Japan, this country was not represented. Four Australian potters were included; Cecily

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[622] Gibson, C. *Gift of Fire and Clay* p. 129

[623] From Certificate of Participation presented to Gibson by the exhibition committee, 1965. Gibson archives.

Gibson, Alex Leckie, Milton Moon and Bernard Sahm.[624] It marked an important opportunity for Australian potters to exhibit amongst their international peers in the 'home' of ceramics, Japan. As would be expected, the Japanese presence at the exhibition exceeded all other exhibits in size with no less than one hundred and four potters represented. The October, 1964 issue of *Pottery in Australia* featured the Adelaide-based Scottish potter Alex Leckie's entry to the exhibition on the cover.[625] This large, swelling vessel form with an intricately carved surface, titled *Destroyed City*,[626] perhaps as a reference to the destruction of the Japanese cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki by the atomic bomb, had been selected by the Potter's Society of New South Wales, as were the entries by Milton Moon and Bernard Sahm. However, the exhibition announcements in this issue of the magazine do not list Gibson as a participant in the Tokyo exhibition, an indication of the professional distance that already existed between her and the mainstream of Australian ceramics.[627] Nonetheless, Gibson did exhibit, as is attested to by the certificate of participation issued in 1965, her inclusion the result of a direct invitation from the organisers. Given her tenure in Japan her inclusion is not surprising, although Moon remembers the unexpected inclusion of Gibson in the exhibition being discussed by other Australian potters.[628] Gibson exhibited a bowl with a blue-glaze (of a similar type to one remaining in her possession) a small and restrained piece when compared to the work of the other Australian potters. This bowl is now in the collection of the National

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[624] From the catalogue, *International Exhibition of Contemporary Ceramic Art* 1964 publisher unknown
[625] *Pottery in Australia* Vol. 3 No. 2 October 1964, cover
[626] ibid, 'contents' page
[627] ibid p. 39
[628] conversation with the author, 8 April 2006

Museum of Modern Art in Kyoto, a gift from Gibson to the gallery in 1964, part of their permanent collection.[629]

Gibson's return to Canberra was marked by extensive press coverage, as is attested to by the many newspaper articles and radio and television interviews.[630] In Canberra, she bought land and built a house, studio, display room and a kiln. She exhibited numerous times over the next six years in various Canberra venues, including the Australian Sculpture Galleries and at the Macquarie Galleries Canberra venue, and her work attracted considerable local publicity. In 1967 she was awarded a Churchill fellowship to study the ceramic history of Mexico.[631] Gibson never exhibited outside of Canberra, and seemingly only taught on one occasion, when in January of 1967 she tutored in ceramics at a summer school in Hobart.[632] A fellow tutor, lecturing on international relations, was a Professor J.I. Ackroyd, then of Queensland University and formerly of the Faculty of Oriental Studies at the Australian National University in Canberra. Ackroyd was a long-time supporter of Gibson's. He served as a referee for her Churchill Trust application and had arranged for her to give a public lecture on Japanese art soon after her return to Canberra, perhaps the only lecture she gave on the subject.

The late 1950s and early 1960s was a time of intense interest in Japanese ceramics, during which Australian potters began visiting Japan and Japanese potters, as well as non-Japanese potters resident in Japan, began visiting Australia. However Cecily

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[629] see correspondence from Museum of Modern Art, Kyoto dated 4 February 2002, possession of the author

[630] archives Gibson, copies archives Moon

[631] Milton Moon was awarded a Churchill Fellowship to study ceramics in 1966, and peter Rushforth was also awarded a Churchill Fellowship in 1967, the same year as Gibson.

[632] documentation archives of Cecily Gibson, copy archives of the author.

Gibson, the Australian potter who had travelled there first, who had stayed the longest time and who had met with the most acclaim during her stay, played no further part in fostering the ongoing relationship between Japanese and Australian potters. [Plate 19]

Postscript

Writing of his first Japanese friend, the poet and sculptor Kotaro Takamura, whom he had met as a student in London in 1908, Bernard Leach remembered an occasion in 1973 on his last visit to Japan, when:

> I was invited to a small intimate afternoon tea-party given by Crown princess Chichibu who herself made pots, and was a patroness of the arts. There were only eight people present, and at one point she was talking to me alone; incidentally, she said that she loved the poetry written by my old friend Takamura, and astonished, I turned to her and said: 'He was my first Japanese friend in London when we were both students. I do not read Japanese as you know, but a couple of lines come to my mind:
>
> *Chichibu oroshi no samui kaze*
> *Konkororin to fuite koi*
>
> (Cold winds blow fierce
> From the wilds of Chichibu.
> Konkororin is the sound of their voice.)
>
> She turned to me in astonishment. I do not know who was more surprised. For once my memory was accurate, and how strange for Takamura to use the name of her province – Chichibu.[633]

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[633] Leach, B. *Beyond East ad West* p. 294-295

Chapter 8: The New Zealand Connection

While Cecily Gibson's period of residence in Japan may not have had an impact on the Australian ceramic world, by the end of 1963 at least six other Australian potters had visited Japan, for periods ranging from several weeks to almost a year. Of these Australian potters, including Ivan Englund, Jean Higgs, Robert Hughan, Peter Rushforth and Ian Sprague, the name of Les Blakebrough is foremost in this respect. More than anyone else, Blakebrough's experiences in Japan went beyond the personal to resonate within the Australian ceramic community. However, before examining Blakebrough's pivotal role in furthering the ties between Australian and Japanese potters shall be in the second half of this chapter, it is necessary to establish some of the preconditions leading up to his visit.

The focus here shifts to New Zealand. In an important but overlooked facet of Australian ceramic history, it was a network of personal connections between New Zealand, Australia and England that would lead Blakebrough to Japan. At the centre of these events is to be found the influential figure of the British potter John Chappell.

Les Blakebrough's first connection to Japanese ceramics was through reading Leach's *A Potter's Book* as a student at East Sydney Technical College when he was studying under Peter Rushforth. Initially embracing Leach's text, Blakebrough's views would later alter, when he was able to compare Leach's accounts of Japanese pottery with his own experiences of the Japan, as can be seen from this exchange between the author and Blakebrough.[634]

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[634] Blakebrough, L. Transcript of interview with the author 4/12/2001

Moon: When did you first become aware of the traditions of Japanese pottery? At East Sydney?

Blakebrough: In as much as ... Leach's writings were pretty much swallowed whole.

Moon: So the philosophical basis which had developed around the writings of Bernard Leach and the transmission of that tradition through Leach and Cardew to McMeekin in the early days at Sturt ...?

Blakebrough: Oh hugely! And I've always been – I got to be pretty questioning about Leach and his philosophy fairly early in the piece.

Moon: When?

Blakebrough: Certainly from Japan on. Because what I discovered in Japan was that Leach was only telling a very small part of the truth ... so I got pretty leery about Leach's grandstanding.[635]

This progression of events as described by Blakebrough, which began with the discovery of Leach's book and ended with the experience of visiting Japan, established a pattern that would be repeated over and over again by Australian potters in the 1960s.

The chain of events that would ultimately lead Les Blakebrough to Japan begins with the visit of the New Zealanders Helen Mason, Helen Dawson, Elsie Inkersell and Dr. Terry Barrow to Japan in 1960. Following the Second World War, New Zealand studio pottery had developed in very much the same way as Australian pottery and by the 1950s the Anglo- Oriental influence of Leach and his followers was readily apparent in New Zealand. As in Australia, restrictive tariffs imposed on imported ceramics encouraged local production; however, in contrast to the Australian situation, these tariffs remained in force much longer and were pronounced in their

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[635] ibid

effect.[636] Although favouring the large industrial ceramic concern of Crown Lynne[637], these conditions also ensured that New Zealand provided a receptive domestic market for local studio potters to sell their wares. The Australian potter Peter Rushforth, who worked with Barry Brickell in New Zealand for a short time in the early 1970s, commented of New Zealand in the 1960s that:

> [A] kiln opening was ... well, the community would come and see it and buy things almost immediately, and here was the philosophy really working. There were tea pots and drinking vessels and plates, and when New Zealand lifted its import restrictions and particularly with this flood of Asian work, now there are only a handful of potters who are able to earn a living, which is rather sad. So for a time the philosophy was working rather well, where the best, the very special things were put aside for exhibitions, and I think a lot of us worked in that direction for a while.[638]

These remarks highlight several important points. The common practice of New Zealand potters of dividing their output between exhibition work and another stream which might be termed production ware was a commonly adopted strategy. The delineation would differ from potter to potter, but the expectation would be that exhibition ware was higher-priced and would be sold through galleries, with other work being sold through shops, markets or often directly from the pottery. As Rushforth observed, several New Zealand potters had successfully implemented this strategy in the 1960s when the import restrictions worked to great effect, but the steadily increasing amount of imported pottery coming into New Zealand in the 1970s had rendered this approach less viable. The situation was similar in Australia, but differed in degree in that the tariffs in Australia were lifted much sooner, and

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[636] New Zealand import restrictions lasted up until the 1970s. Elliot, M. communication to the author 27 April 2006

[637] Crown Lynne, based in Auckland, was the largest of three commercial potteries in New Zealand. It produced a range of ware from the crockery used by the New Zealand railways to homewares. See Blumhardt, D. & Brake, B. 'A Historical Look at Ceramics in New Zealand' *New Zealand Potters* A.H. & A.W. Reed 1976 p 7 - 18

[638] Rushforth, P. interview with the author 25 October 2001

therefore Australian potters who wished to develop the production side of their practice did so without the masking effects of tariffs.

In Australia, many potters had pursued a similar course, making a combination of production and exhibition wares. This was, of course, the model of the Leach pottery, where mainstream production was sold through the pottery outlet and a variety of shops, with Leach reserving the right to exhibit higher-priced pottery through galleries in England as well as in Japan. However, Rushforth's identification with this system: 'a lot of us worked in that direction for a while'[639], is somewhat misleading. Many of the most recognised Australian potters were, like Rushforth, fully employed as teachers and supported by full-time salaries. The vicissitudes of the market did not strongly impact on the work of these teaching potters, or did so to a lesser degree than with a potter who relied on sales to the public for all of their income. For a potter like Blakebrough at the Sturt workshops or with the Boyd pottery enterprises there was a certain pressure for the work to perform in the marketplace.[640]

There is an unintended irony in Rushforth's observations regarding the deleterious effect the influx of Asian ceramics had on the livelihood of New Zealand potters in the 1970s, as much post war studio pottery in New Zealand was dominated by the Anglo-Oriental aesthetic, which in turn can be attributed to an enthusiastic adoption of Leach's dictums. This is evident as early as 1959, when, reviewing an exhibition staged by the Napier Potter's Group, a critic was:

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[639] see footnote 7

[640] Les Blakebrough was paid a salary by the Sturt management of £12 a week on his appointment to the post of manager in 1960. Nonetheless, his ongoing employment depended on his ability to design and make a range of pottery that would sell in sufficient quantities to make a profit. See Holmes, J. *Les Blakebrough: Ceramics* Craftsman House 2005 p. 28

> ...struck by the preponderate influence of Bernard Leach in the work displayed. So much so that the derivative nature of much of the form speaks of overmuch dependence. It is here, sadly enough, that the colonial sprit of self-reliance is weakest and thinnest.[641]

These connections between New Zealand, Japan and Leach dated back to the 1940s when Ray Chapman-Taylor, having first read *A Potter's Book* in New Zealand soon after its publication, was posted to Japan at the end of the war to work as an Education Officer with the Occupation Forces. He is credited with facilitating the renewed contact between Hamada and Leach in the chaos of post-war Japan.[642] In Japan, Chapman-Taylor:

> ... used his [Leach's] book to help ... look at some Japanese pottery and to trace the whereabouts of Hamada, Kawai and Tomimoto. Tomimoto had shifted house. Kawai was ill ... but Hamada was well and producing pots when I visited him at Mashiko. My first letter to Leach was simply to give him news of Hamada. [643]

Chapman-Taylor visited Mashiko and returned to New Zealand 'with a collection of handmade pots completely different in conception from anything we had seen before.'[644] As Helen Mason writes, the gatherings at the Chapman-Taylor's flat in Wellington, with afternoon-tea served in Leach cups and on Crowan plates,[645] conveyed ' ... for those of us raised in suburbia a fantastic quality belonging to a different world. No wonder our pots at that stage had a Japanese flavour ...'[646]

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[641] Mason, H. *10 Years of Pottery in New Zealand* New Zealand Potter 1968, p. 3
[642] Cochrane, G. p. 87
[643] Chapman Taylor, R. 'A Few Lines on Bernard Leach' *Bernard Leach: Essays in Appreciation* Edited by Barrow, T. monograph issue New Zealand Potter, Wellington 1960 p. 26
[644] Mason, H. op. cit. p. 11
[645] Crowan was the name of Harry and May Davis' pottery in Cornwall.
[646] ibid

By 1957 the newly formed New Zealand Studio Potters Association was sufficiently advanced to stage the first exhibition of ceramics at the Otago Museum in Dunedin, coincidentally the same year the Potter's Society of New South Wales held their inaugural exhibition at the Sydney Royal Easter Show. The early 1960s saw Len Castle and Peter Stichbury, both of whom had studied with Leach at St. Ives, return to work in New Zealand, with Stichbury also having spent time with Michael Cardew in Nigeria. Another very influential connection with English studio pottery came with the emigration of Harry and May Davis from England to New Zealand in 1962. The Davises had both worked at St. Ives, with Harry Davis being perhaps the most talented apprentice Leach ever had.[647] The couple's work in Africa preceded the arrival of Cardew[648] on in Africa and they had also run a successful pottery in Cornwall before becoming disillusioned with Britain, where they were active in the early stages of the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament.[649] Another reason for the move, according to May Davis, was her husband's:

> ... need for a challenge. Crowan was a success, economically and in terms of being recognised. When things got easy, he got restless. His attitude seemed epitomised in a remark he made when he was told that in New Zealand "electricity is available almost everywhere." He replied "Oh, I expect we shall be able to find some valley without it."'[650]

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[647] Leach, B. *Beyond East and West* p.216

[648] Despite Cardew's reputation as a 'Pioneer Potter', May Davis, writing of the establishment of the pottery at Achimota in Gahna by Harry Davis and herself, noted its subsequent decline under Cardew's stewardship. Davis, M. *May* Crewenna Press 1990 p. 37

[649] They attended the first anti-nuclear rally at Aldermaston in 1958 and May Davis was briefly arrested on a subsequent march. Davis, M. *May* p. 118

[650] ibid p. 125

Stopping in Sydney on their way to New Zealand, Harry and May Davis spent time with the Australian potters Bernard and Pam Sahm [651] before travelling on to Wellington, where they were 'really touched by the welcome given us by all the Wellington potters.'[652] [Plate 24] Eventually settling in the hamlet of Crewenna, near Nelson, a town situated on the Tasman Bay at the northern tip of New Zealand's South Island, they established a pottery – also named Crewenna – which would become well-known in New Zealand and overseas.[653]

Another seminal figure in New Zealand ceramics was Dr. Terry Barrow, by profession an anthropologist at the Dominion Museum in Wellington. [Plate 23] Barrow first became aware of Leach's *A Potter's Book* immediately following the war. Barrow explains:

> I was introduced to *A Potter's Book* by Elizabeth Matheson, Wellington's pioneer potter, when I went to her like so many others for advice on how to get started in pottery making. Soon afterwards I started corresponding with Leach, and managed to secure some Leach Pottery standard ware. ... After closer acquaintance with *A Potter's Book* I started to study Zen (I am glad to say before the current fad), ponder ceramic collections in museums, and generally to re-assess my mental store. Mr. Ray Chapman-Taylor soon returned from Japan with a store of ancient pottery and contemporary pottery, and ... with his daughter started to import stoneware from St. Ives. ... We could safely say that all serious potters in New Zealand have used *A Potter's Book* extensively in the development of their work. For some of us it has supplied not only technical information, but the way to a new philosophy of life and work.[654]

Barrow had travelled to England in late 1955 where he was to spend two years at Cambridge University studying for his PhD. His keen interest in ceramics is evident

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[651] see part 2 - 9
[652] ibid p. 133
[653] ibid p. 121
[654] Barrow, T. *Bernard Leach: essays in appreciation* p. 1

by his observation that: 'When I reached London I conveniently found Leach there on a visit to his friend Lucie Rie.'[655] During 1956 and 1957 Barrow visited potteries and formed friendships with several of the leading figures of British ceramics. He saw Bernard Leach on many occasions, inviting him to lecture to the newly formed Cambridge Ceramic Society which Barrow had helped establish.[656] Barrow's interests encompassed all 'things Oriental'[657], from Polynesian wood-carvings to Japanese ceramics, and, despite being an amateur potter and a full-time museum professional, his interventions in New Zealand pottery were highly significant. In 1960 he travelled extensively throughout Hawaii and the Philippines, arriving in Japan just ahead of Helen Mason and Helen Dawson – '[who] were all busting something to get to Japan in those days'[658]. The same year, Barrow edited a special monograph edition of *New Zealand Potter,* 'Bernard Leach, Essays in Appreciation'.[659] It was originally intended to be limited to the responses of New Zealand potters regarding Leach's influence on their craft, but at some point Barrow, as editor, expanded its scope by inviting contributions from 'some of Leach's English friends 'whom I knew personally'.[660] The final result was a publication with articles from three New Zealand potters – Len Castle[661], Barry Brickell[662] and Ray Chapman-Taylor[663] – as well as a preface from Barrow himself[664]. In addition there are articles from Michael Cardew,[665] Katherine Pleydell-Bouverie,[666] Murray Fieldhouse,[667] George Wingfield-Derby,[668] C. L.

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[655] ibid p. 2
[656] ibid p.3
[657] Biographical entry, author unknown, Pottery Quarterly Vol. 7 No. 27, 1962 inside cover.
[658] Elliot, M conversation with the author, * April 2006
[659] Barrow, T. ed *Bernard Leach: Essays in Appreciation* A Monograph published by the Editorial Committee of the *New Zealand Potter* Wellington, New Zealand 1960
[660] Barrow, T. *Bernard Leach: Essays in Appreciation* p. 1
[661] Castle, L. 'Photographs of the Leach Pottery' ibid p 39
[662] Brickell, B. 'The Colonial Response to Leach' ibid p 33
[663] Chapman-Talylor, R. 'A Few Lines on Bernard Leach' ibid p 26
[664] ibid
[665] Cardew, M. 'Bernard Leach – Recollections' ibid p 19
[666] Pleydell-Bouverie, K. 'At St.Ives in the Early Years' ibid p 29

Bailey[669] and no less than three essays by Leach,[670],[671],[672] together with a biographical chronology of Leach,[673] two bibliographies[674],[675] – one of Leach's writings and one of writings about Leach – and many photographs. [676] This panegyric to Leach by potters from the far corner of the Commonwealth was thought of highly enough for copies to be purchased by the British Council and the Leach pottery for subsequent distribution in Britain.[677] The debt these New Zealand potters owed to Leach is best summed up in Barry Brickell's article, tellingly entitled 'The Colonial Response to Leach'[678], in which he credits Leach with completely revitalising international pottery through achieving a true synthesis of East and West. Brickell also points out that whilst a 'Leach cult'[679] was bound to appear through the efforts of those who were destined to be copyists or followers rather than interpreters of Leach's work, the philosophy of Leach must ultimately lead to:

> ...some New Zealand pots. They must contain the spirit of New Zealand (not) copy Oriental pots or at the other extreme become individualists trying to make consciously 'original' pots.[680]

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[667] Fieldhouse, M. 'Workshop Visit – The Leach Pottery' ibid p 41
[668] Wingfield-Derby, G. 'Bernard Leach – Bridge Between East and West' ibid p 52
[669] Bailey, C.L. 'Bernard Leach in Perspective' ibid p 16
[670] Leach, B. 'Looking backward sand Forwards at 72' ibid p 10
[671] Leach, B. 'A Note on Japanese Tea Ceremony Ware' ibid p 37
[672] Leach, B. 'An Open Letter to New Zealand Potters' ibid p 6
[673] Leach, B. edited Barrow, T. 'Biographical Chronology – Bernard Howell Leach' ibid p 62
[674] Barrow, T. edited 'Bibliography – Part 1: Works by Bernard Leach' ibid p 65
[675] Barrow, T. edited 'Bibliography – Part 2: Writings referring to Bernard Leach' ibid p 69
[676] Cardew and Pleydell-Bouverie were early apprentices of Leach, Fieldhouse had studied with Harry Davis after Davis returned from Africa (where he preceded Cardew at Achimota) at the Davis' workshop in Cornwall.
[677] Mason, H. 10
[678] Barrow, T. ed *Essays in Appreciation* p. 33
[679] Brickell, B. op. cit p 36
[680] ibid p. 36

The publication of this collection in the same year as Barrow visited Japan neatly illustrates the nexus between Leach, Japan and the English-speaking, British orientated[681] countries of Australia and New Zealand. This act of literary genuflection surpasses even the placement of an image of a Bernard Leach pot on the cover of first issue of *Pottery in Australia*.

The magazine *New Zealand Potter* had originated as a pamphlet accompanying the second exhibition of New Zealand studio pottery held in Wellington in October, 1958.[682] Barrow, Mason and Doreen Blumhardt had all been instrumental in starting the magazine and it was through recognition of their involvement that Mason, Dawson and the potter Elsie Inkersell were 'able to attend'[683] the *World Design Conference* in Tokyo in 1960. Helen Mason had written to the English potter John Chappell from New Zealand prior to the conference, asking if she could meet with him in Japan, where he had been living for the past year: 'His philosophy was known to us through articles in the English magazine *Pottery Quarterly*'[684], which, in New Zealand as in Australia, was one of the major sources of information for potters working in far flung regions of the Commonwealth to keep abreast of developments in the English ceramics world. In the days before widespread publishing on ceramics such material was eagerly anticipated. According to Les Blakebrough:

> Muriel Rose's book was an important one [*Artist Potters in England* [685]], but ... *Pottery Quarterly*! Jesus Christ, did we fall on that! ... Murray Fieldhouse was the editor, and it went on for a long time. It languished eventually, but *Pottery Quarterly* was eaten up avidly.

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[681] Literally 'to face the East'.
[682] Mason, H. 'Ten Years of Pottery in New Zealand' special issue *The New Zealand Potter* New Zealand Potter 1968
[683] Mason, H. ibid p. 16
[684] Mason, H. ibid
[685] Rose, M. *Artist Potters in England* Faber & Faber 1955

Asked by the author if he first encountered *Pottery Quarterly* whilst a student at East Sydney Technical College,[686] Blakebrough responded:

> ...[P]robably, but certainly down at Mittagong with McMeekin. That was all there was![687],[688]

Helen Mason had initially heard of Chappell through the English potter Michael Gill, who she described as 'the first bearded, sandalled potter to arrive in this country (New Zealand) with the post-war outlook and a new set of values.'[689] Gill had travelled widely and he had met William Staite Murray in Africa[690] before making his way to Australia, where he worked briefly at Sturt with McMeekin,[691] possibly as early as 1954, on his way to New Zealand. This establishes a second connection to McMeekin and Sturt, since Helen Mason had first met Ivan McMeekin during his tenure with Cardew in England, when, in 1952[692] they both attended the Dartington Conference of Potters and Weavers. The connections are admittedly numerous, and somewhat confusing, but it is important to convey the level of interconnectedness within a relatively small but rapidly developing international ceramic fraternity.

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[686] Blakebrough, L. interview with the author 4 December 2001
[687] ibid
[688] Suzie McMeekin, the daughter of the late Ivan McMeekin, confirms the importance of *Pottery Quarterly* to her father. McMeekin, S. conversation with the author, 18 December 2005
[689] Mason, H. op. cit p 16
[690] ibid p 16
[691] Blakebrough, L. 'Ceramics' *Sturt Workshops 1962*
[692] Cochrane, G. op. cit. p. 113

In 1960 Helen Mason met Chappell at the World Design Conference, held in May, 1960 in Tokyo.[693] The following year, when Chappell discovered he had to temporarily leave Japan to satisfy his visa requirements, he gratefully accepted an invitation extended to him by Mason to visit New Zealand. If he 'would consider visiting New Zealand for half a year, there were potters who would help (him) out with ... fares.'[694]

It was in this way that John Chappell would first visit Australia. The journey from Japan to New Zealand required a stopover in Australia, and Mason made contact to see if Chappell could visit the Sturt workshops. Ivan McMeekin had already resigned his position and so it was Blakebrough who hosted Chappell 'for several days in December 1960',[695] a time which in many ways established the practical foundations of the Australian/Japanese exchange in ceramics, since it was at least partly through the agency of Chappell that Blakebrough could spend an extended period studying in Japan, which in turn resulted in the first of the Japanese potters visiting Australia.

Some observations regarding Leach's experiences in New Zealand should be included, as it throws further light on his notions of nationality and ceramic tradition. Writing of his 1962 trip in *Beyond East and West,* he notes that:

> New Zealand potters are geographically remote but predominantly of British stock; they live on the volcanic fringe of the Pacific Basin, closer to the pottery traditions of China, Korea and Japan. Blood, they say, is thicker than water, and the natural process, I am convinced, is for the New Zealander to make a foundation of his cultural inheritance and broaden out from it to include whatever he can absorb or digest from this new situation. The alternative, as I

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[693] Mason, H. loc. cit
Pottery Quarterly Vol 7 No. 27, 1968 p. 88
[695] Blakebrough, L. *Sturt Workshops 1962*

see it, is to be rootless ... [696]

These comments by Leach may be seen as acting as a template for Barrow's introduction to the 1962 issue of *Pottery Quarterly*, published in the same year as Leach's visit to New Zealand. In this extract, Barrow states:

> The character of our potting reflects our background. Generally speaking we work under influences from England and Japan with only secondary reference to other countries or other cultures. Some potters dislike Scandinavian or American styles, others wish to break away from the accepted conventions and approved models of the past. ... the ancestors of the Maori did not introduce the art (indigenous earthenware pottery) into New Zealand. Unfortunately, our potters of the twentieth century lost the advantage of an indigenous tradition with which they could flavour their own work. ... Our debt to Bernard Leach is obvious for *A Potter's Book* provided practical knowledge and a working philosophy ... Readers are referred to 'Bernard Leach: Essays in Appreciation', published in Wellington by the Editorial Committee of the N.Z. Potter, 1960.
>
> If Japanese influences are strong with us observers must not forget that New Zealand is on the southern fringe of the island world of Oceania which reaches out to Asia and the Pacific ... The culture and art of the indigenous Maori is oriental in basic ideas and of Asiatic origin, so modern New Zealand potters in the face of all this may look to the East for inspiration without worry that this source of too foreign in outlook. Our European heritage is stronger but an east-west synthesis of approach is appropriate.[697]

Leach certainly had extensive contact with Barrow in New Zealand. 'In Wellington', he explained:

> ... I was met by Dr. Terry Barrow, the head of the Museum, and he kindly took me by car as far in the North Island as Auckland, visiting towns on the way where I gave lectures and met the potters – many more than I expected ...[698]

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[696] ibid p. 279
[697] Barrow, Dr. T. 'Editorial' *Pottery Quarterly* Vol. 7 No. 27 p. 86
[698] Leach, B. *Beyond East and West* p. 277

Leach was impressed with the standard and the direction of New Zealand pottery, writing that he was taken:

> ... by surprise. The level of the best pots compares favourably with that in other Commonwealth countries. It was the strongest movement outside England, even if it had not, as yet, reached a definite character of its own. ... More important is the establishment of a standard or criterion of good pots corresponding to that applied in other arts such as music or literature. The fact that many show in their pots the revelation of a new sort of beauty, out of the Far East, is a strong bond.[699]

The standard was of course the 'Sung Standard', a criterion of beauty elaborated – almost patented – by Leach.[700] However, utilising an argument founded on a supposed geographical proximity to Asia to justify the adoption of Japanese ceramic traditions seems tenuous at best. The same might be said of Barrow's arguments where a so-called Maori 'Asian-ness' might influence the ceramic proclivities of Anglo Scottish immigrants to New Zealand. What Leach does not remark on are the unique and favourable conditions under which New Zealand potters worked in respect to restrictive tariffs placed on imported ceramics. As was outlined earlier in the chapter, New Zealand was almost unique in the extent to which its domestic taxes and trade arrangements fostered an environment conducive to a type of small-scale ceramic manufacturing which otherwise would have faced overwhelming competitive adversities. Leach may well have been surprised at the numbers of potters he encountered: 'many more than I expected',[701] but the explanation lay as much in governmental policy as it did in a triumph any ideology.

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[699] ibid p. 279
[700] Leach, B. *A Potter's Book* footnote p 6
[701] ibid

8.2 The Tokyo Conference and a Swedish Illusion

The 1960 World Design Conference held in Tokyo, attended by John Chappell and the New Zealand potters Helen Mason and Elsie Inkersell,[702] echoed many of the ideologies of the post-war crafts movement. This might be seen in the wording of the conference declaration, which states:

> To assume a more dignified life in the times to come, even more strongly creative activities will surely be called for. As designers, we will certainly therefore have even greater responsibilities.[703]

Discussion of these matters was very much in evidence at the earlier International Conference of Craftsmen in Pottery and Textiles, held at Dartington Hall in 1952. Leach had played a significant role in bringing the conference about,[704] and in his address to the conference, entitled 'The Contemporary Potter', he began by saying that:

> ... if I can read at all what the situation is for the contemporary craftsman, it is very much concerned with this point in history in which we are set ... I think many of us are uncertain ... of how we can function in contemporary society.[705]

The answer to Leach's questions was that craftspeople would find a variety of strategies to allow them to function and to gain the necessary economic and social support to sustain a craft practice. In Leach's own case, the support of galleries,

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[702] See Mason, H. *10 Years of Pottery in New Zealand* New Zealand Potter 1968 p. 16
[703] http://www.dnp.co.jp/gallery/gallerytalk/ggg/gt171/gt171_2_e.html accessed 7 April 2006
[704] Leach, B. *Beyond East & West* p 242
[705] Leach, B. 'The Contemporary Potter' *The Report of the International Conference of Craftsmen in Pottery and Textiles* Dartington Hall 1952 High Cross House, The Dartington Hall Trust

collectors and benefactors in both England and Japan augmented the production of less expensive 'standard ware' at St. Ives. Also, the St. Ives Pottery was atypical of ceramics workshops in the numbers of trainees that moved through the facility and, it must be stated, in the fame of its owner. The majority of craftspeople to whom Leach's comments were addressed worked as individual practitioners, historically a highly unusual situation in the production of ceramics. These craftspeople approached the question of sustainability of practice by making individual choices as to how their work was positioned within the marketplace and by using their practice to generate income by other means, often by teaching. In an Australian context this meant that in 1960, the year of the conference, all of the founding members of the Potter's Society of New South Wales – Mollie Douglas, Ivan Englund, Ivan McMeekin and Peter Rushforth[706] – were employed by educational institutions, with Ivan McMeekin having taken up a teaching post at the University of New South Wales following his tenure at Sturt.

There was, however, another solution to the problem of how the contemporary craftsperson might operate in a modern, industrialised society, with one group of countries attempting a unique approach. By the mid-twentieth century the Scandinavian countries had developed an influential and respected approach to design, so much so that the phrase 'Scandinavian design' became shorthand for quality and innovation in modern furniture, glassware, architecture, fabrics and ceramics. A fundamental aspect of the Scandinavian approach lay in the blurring of the lines between art, craft and design, an approach which was inculcated by the

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[706] Mollie Douglas was employed at East Sydney Technical College part-time from 1946 and full time from 1954 a position she held in 1960; Ivan Englund was employed full-time by Wollongong Technical College in 1960; Ivan McMeekin was employed full-time by the University of New South Wales in 1960; Peter Rushforth was employed full-time by East Sydney Technical College in 1960. see Cochrane, G. *The Crafts Movement in Australia: a History* pp. 153 - 155

training institutions.[707] This design philosophy had begun early in the twentieth century where a deliberate emphasis was placed on producing simple, well-designed and affordable pieces, rather than craftsmen choosing exotic materials and applying unnecessary and laborious ornamentation to cater for the luxury end of the market. In a seminal document published in 1919, 'Vackrare Vardagsvara' (More Beautiful Things for Everyday Use) the Danish critic and designer Gregor Paulsson wrote:

> Dear craftsmen friends! How can you expect us to go on respecting you, while this swindle continues in the name of art, and while you ignore all your obligations to the modern world? WE have no proper tumblers, plates, water-sets, spoons, knives or forks, while richer homes are flooded with trash and rubbish at fantastic prices! Think a little, and consider your obligations to make things for the delight of your fellow men in their daily life! Throw away your artists' berets and bow-ties and get into overalls![708]

Such goals are hard to achieve without a degree of industrialisation, since the process entered into by the sole 'designer-maker' or specialty workshop is unlikely to result in affordable ware when compared with similar products produced in large numbers by highly efficient means through the utilisation of intensive mechanisation. Alliances were therefore formed between those whose primary responsibility it was to design and innovate; the artists, architects, craftspeople and designers, and with the manufacturer, whose expertise lay in the fabrication of the product. As early as the 1920s the great Finnish ceramic concern of Arabia was supplying artists with their own studios on the factory premises, in return for their design input into the industrially produced ware. This arrangement continued after the Second World War, but for Leach this harmonious collaboration between industry and craft posed a threat rather than a promise. It challenged his deeply held antipathy towards industry

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[707] Leach, B. *Beyond East and West* p. 264
[708] de Waal, E. *20th Century Ceramics* p.65

which is evident throughout *A Potter's Book*. Writing in 'Towards a Standard'[709] of the industrially produced ceramics of the great English manufactories, Leach states that:

> The trouble, however, is that at a conservative estimate about nine-tenths of the industrial pottery produced in England no less than in other countries is hopelessly bad in both form and decoration. With the exception of a few traditional shapes and patterns for table-ware, and others designed by the best designers available tody and painted by the best available artists (none of whom is a potter)[710] [Leach's brackets] ... and excluding also a few purely functional and utilitarian designs, some of which are also traditional ... we meet everywhere with bad forms and banal, debased, pretentious decoration ... in which we find a crudity of colour combined with cheapness and inappropriateness of decoration and tawdriness of form that must be seen to be believed. ... This is for various extrinsic reasons, chief of which is the failure of the manufacturer to interest himself in good design[711]

Leach therefore does admit to the possibility of better rather than worse industrial ceramics, however there was a deep and seemingly unbridgeable rift between the qualities inherent in industrial ceramics:

> It is obvious that the standards of the world's best pottery, for example those of the T'ang and Sung periods in China ... Korean celadons ...Japanese tea-masters wares, early Persian ...some Delft and English slipware, cannot be well appliesd to industrial work, for such pottery was a completely unified human expression'[712]; 'In the field of ceramics the responsibility for the all-pervading bad taste of the last century and the ... ninety percent bad taste of today lies mainly with machine production...[713]

And the qualities Leach thought necessary to create great pottery:

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[709] Leach, B. 'Towards a Standard' *A Potter's Book* p 1 - 28
[710] And who remain unidentified by Leach.
[711] ibid p 3,4
[712] Leach, B. *A Potter's Book* p.4
[713] ibid p.12

> Round the question of "accidentals" and "incidentals" in pottery making revolve some of the chief difficulties we encounter in reaching a new standard. After the symmetries and microscopic precision of mass production these two words seem such mouthfuls to swallow. But if T'ang or Sung pottery is accepted as the highest achievement in ceramics they will have to be swallowed. ...the emphasis on technical precision necessitated by mechanically made products ... in which ..."accidentals" and "incidentals" have invariably been lost sight of ... has become so complex and so hidden away from sight that we no longer know good clay, good throwing, turning or brushwork ... we are constantly reminded through doing things by hand how from each part of a craftsman's job ... variations [in the object] emerge.[714]

Leach's accidentals and incidentals are the slight variations and imperfections, marks left by the hand of the maker and the qualities inherent in materials and processes which are less than perfectly refined and standardised, the sum of which constitute an aesthetic achieved only through processes of hand forming.

One potter who had unequivocal views on Scandinavian design was John Chappell. In the Spring, 1957 issue of *Pottery Quarterly,* Chappell contributed an article, 'The Swedish Illusion: a Warning', [715] the title of which does not seek to disguise it's content. This article is interesting on two accounts. Firstly, Chappell writes that he has been 'living for the past year in Sweden',[716] thus establishing his movements, if not his activities, in the interim between his involvement in Coldharbour Pottery in England and his move to Japan in 1959. This is useful, given the paucity of information on Chappell and his importance to the history of Australian pottery. Secondly, his article is notable – perhaps unparalleled - for its immoderate critique of Scandinavian design. Here, Chappell writes of his profound misgivings regarding the

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[714] ibid p. 24, 25, 26
[715] Chappell, J. 'The Swedish Illusion: a Warning' *Pottery Quarterly* Vol. 4 No. 13 p. 5
[716] ibid

proximity of Swedish (he also extends his argument to Denmark and Finland) potters to industry:

> ... the arts in Sweden are remarkable for their lack of warmth and understanding of humanity and life. ... These qualities make the work of the Swedish artist (?) [Chappell's question mark] very suitable for adaptation by commerce and well fitted to the joys of mass production. This also explains the apparent harmony between designers and producers ... in the present-day Swedish factory pottery.[717]

It is unknown whether this particular article contributed to Helen Mason's knowledge of Chappell but it is entirely logical to assume that it was read in New Zealand.

[717] ibid p. 6

8.3 Foreign Potters in Japan and Another View of Japanese Pottery – Chappell to Australia in 1960

John Chappell's journey to Japan had taken him via Vietnam. Writing about his experiences in an article for *Pottery Quarterly*. In his 'Letter from Saigon'[718], he describes going to the ceramic department of the *L'Ecole des Arts Appliques* [719]. This institution, a legacy of the period of French colonialism that would soon end in the Vietnam War, provided students with a small wage and four years of practical instruction in well-equipped workshops.[720] Its aim was to train potters who, upon graduating and being admitted to *Le Societe Co-operative Artisanat des Potiers et Fondeurs*,[721] could return to their homes throughout Vietnam where they could make ware for general use, an ambition that would have been met with approval by Leach. Chappell generally approved of the results:

> There is much I like and nothing I actively dislike .. their experiments lie more in the direction of function than style and their work shows an inner discipline and understanding of their craft, very different from the "arty-want-to-be-different" type of ceramic so prevalent in Europe.[722]

But Vietnam was only a stopover for Chappell and he ends his article writing: 'Tomorrow we sail again. Japan is just ten more days away.'[723]

In 1959, Chappell arrived in Japan. [Plate 21] He soon began working with the well-known potter Uchida Kunio in the Gojozaka area of Kyoto. As mentioned in the

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[718] Chappell, J. 'Letter from Saigon' *Pottery Quarterly* Vol. 6 No. 23, 1959 p. 97
[719] translation - School of Applied Art
[720] Chappell, J. loc cit
[721] translation - Cooperative Society of Potters and Foundry Workers
[722] Chappell, J. ibid
[723] ibid

previous chapter, Gojozaka was the centre of a Japanese ceramic renaissance of a type not mentioned by Leach. By 1960 it was home to leading figures in the ceramic avant-garde, as well as potters of more traditional leanings. Of particular importance to Australian potters was the figure of Kanjiro Kawai, his son Hiroshi Kawai especially Kanjiro Kawai's adopted nephew Takeichi Kawai. As stated in chapter two of this thesis, Kanjiro Kawai was one of the three founders, together with Shoji Hamada and Soetsu Yanagi, of the Mingei movement. However, unlike Hamada, Kawai's relationship with Leach was not one of complete accord. Leach did not like Kawai's pottery, commenting: 'Despite the fact that I seldom like the pots, I did admire the man'[724], and 'I was not happy about my own work, nor for that matter about Kawai's pots, which I seldom like.'[725] In turn, Kawai had difficulties in accepting Leach's didacticism. At a 1954 meeting of craftsmen at Utsunomea near Mashiko where Leach was addressing the gathering on the problems he felt arose when individual designs – in this case his own – were copied for use by other potters:

> Kawai jumped up and challenged me to say that my designs, or any other artist-craftsman's for that matter, belonged to me or to them in any sense of exclusive possession ... I was somewhat taken aback by Kawai's protest and, to avoid public dissension, did not pursue the argument. [726]

That Kawai would challenge Leach and do so publicly is an indication of the depth of their disagreement. Les Blakebrough's assessment of their relationship was blunt:

> Leach obviously was never on very good terms with Kawai. Kawai I discovered was a mountain of a man – and the whole argy bargy that centred around

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[724] Leach, B. *Beyond East and West* p.184
[725] Leach, B. *A Potter in Japan* p. 217
[726] ibid p. 214

Hamada was a myth I was happy to dispel.[727]

Interestingly, Hamada's reaction to a similar argument put forward by Leach regarding the widespread plagiarism of designs by Japanese craftspeople was characteristically measured. On a visit to Tokyo, Leach had accidentally come across an exhibition of pottery that was in all respects a simulacrum of Hamada's work. Leach was angry on his friends behalf, especially when he learnt that the ceramics in question were being made by Hamada's neighbour in Mashiko, a young potter who not only was copying (emulating) Hamada but who also was benefiting from Hamada's role in attracting visitors to Mashiko. Hamada's reaction was simply that since he, and therefore by inference his copyist, never directly signed his pots[728]: 'In a hundred years his best pots will go by my name and my worst his.'[729]

Kawai, like Hamada, had taken on foreign students at an early stage. Yoshiko Uchida, in her article 'We Do Not Work Alone' published in 1957[730] wrote of a young French potter, Claude Laloux, as being a student of Kawai's in the early 1950s.

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[727] Blakebrough, L. Interview with the author.

[728] Although Hamada did not sign his pots, in accordance with Japanese custom exhibition pieces were always sold with an accompanying wooden box. This box would be signed by the maker, who perhaps might also choose to record further information regarding the work, including a title or accompanying remarks, maybe even a poem. As the piece was resold, new owners might add their signatures to the box, thus establishing its importance in establishing the works provenance.

[729] Leach, B. 'The Integration of the Craftsman' *Dartington Conference*

[730] Uchida, Y. 'We Do Not Work Alone' *Pottery Quarterly* Vol. 4 No. 16 1957 p. 129 – 136; Yoshiko Uchida was an American of Japanese ancestry. In 1952 she went to Japan on a one year fellowship from the Ford Foundation to research Japanese culture. During her time in Kyoto she became acquainted with Kanjiro Kawai and his family. The book that resulted from this interaction *We Do Not Work Alone: the Thoughts of Kanjiro Kawai* was published by Kawai in Kyoto. Kawai is often credited with writing this book, but I have been unable to establish the existence of any text of this name prior to Uchida's book. It is likely that Kawai's fame has seen him credited with the authorship of this material. Uchida, Y *We Do Not Work Alone: the Thoughts of Kanjiro Kawai* Kanjiro Kawai House 1953.

Leach also mentions Laloux and notes that as early as 1954 Kawai had as many as five foreign students working with him. Leach writes that Laloux:

> ... came to me at St. Ives three years ago and asked for introductions to Japanese potters saying that, being a healthy young man, he was determined to work his passage out to Australia ... he got to Yokohama and was refused admission, not once but twice, and it was only on the third journey from Australia that he was allowed in. Then there was young Richard Heib from California who had just arrived, and who is now working quite satisfactorily with Hamada ... [731]

It is not certain how John Chappel came to first work with Uchido Kunio in Kyoto, but it is apparent that there already were a number of foreign students moving through Japanese workshops in addition to the growing numbers of foreign potters who travelled around Japan observing the craft. The American potter Doug Lawrie has observed that the machinations of the Japanese ceramics world were not always transparent, especially to a foreigner with limited language skills.[732] For example, Doug Lawrie had initially met the Hiroshi Kawai in America when Lawrie was a student at Claremont Graduate College in California in 1960. He was already familiar with the Kawai style of pottery before going to Japan, and upon arriving in Japan he supported himself teaching conversational English whilst trying to win a place in Kawai's workshop:

> ... it took about six months of mysterious wrangling (as only could happen in Japan) to get into the workshop, and it was finally with Takeichi, who was Kanjiro's nephew. At the time, Kanjiro, Takeichi and Hiroshi all had workshops more or less interconnected and located more or less next to Kanjiro's community kiln located behind the house.[733]

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[731] Leach, B. *A Potter in Japan* p. 96
[732] Lawrie, D. Letter to the author 26 December 2002
[733] ibid

One of Cecily Gibson's foreign contact's in Kyoto from 1960 to 1962, the American potter Donna Nichols, was also studying in Kyoto: 'Morino's place was next door south from Kawai's. In fact, we fired in Kawai's noborigama.'[734] At some point in 1961 Chappell also spent a period working with Takeichi Kawai, before moving south of Gojozaka to the Sennyuji area where he had a house with a workshop and a small kiln. Chappell continued to fire work in the Kawai kiln, whilst making 'functional Leach/Mingei inspired work'[735] and supplementing his income with teaching English.[736] Lawrie states that by the time of his arrival in Japan in 1962 Chappell was:

> ...surely the most knowledgeable foreigner about Japanese pottery ... he had contacts in Shigaraki, Mino, Kyushu etc and I don't know how he knew all these potters but he was very gregarious and spoke the language well and probably just visited other pottery areas and met potters. ... In those days a *gaijin* (foreign) potter would have been a rarity. John shared his contacts with me and other visitors which was very helpful. [737]

Also in 1961, the American Fred Olsen's affiliations in the world of Kyoto ceramics centred around the avant-garde ceramist and Sodeisha member Yutaka Kondo. Yutaka Kondo was the son of Yuso Kondo, a more traditional potter working in porcelain in a manner similar to Tomimoto. Yutaka Kondo:

> ...spoke English well and was a great guy and not only provided Fred with all his contacts ... (arranged for Fred to work in Tomimoto's workshop) ... but he was also an invaluable help to many foreign potters ... including Daniel Rhodes

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[734] Nichols, D. letter to the author 1 March 2002
[735] Lawrie, D. op cit
[736] Lawrie states that the ability to teach conversational English to Japanese students – a casual and flexible job that required no formal teaching or language expertise and that paid reasonably well – was probably an important factor in allowing numbers of foreigners, including potters, to spend longer in Japan than they otherwise would have been able to. ibid
[737] ibid

> who was there on a Fullbright. Kondo Yutaka was also Mitsuo Shoji's mentor at the *Bidai* (small incestuous group) [Lawrie's brackets] and opened a lot of contacts for Fred through his father who was an important member of the *Dento Kogei* or traditional potters group ...[738]

Three of these foreign potters; John Chappell, Fred Olsen and Doug Lawrie[739] would all play a role in fostering links between Australian and Japanese potters. In 1960, Les Blakebrough was contacted in Australia by the New Zealander Helen Mason:

> Listen, there's this young guy, I think you two would really get on well together, he's going to be in Sydney for ten days between when his ship arrives from Japan and when the 'Wanganella' sails from Sydney to Auckland, will you look after him? You bet![740]

Les Blakebrough drove down from Mittagong to meet Chappell's boat and immediately returned with him to 'the bush'.[741] It was a time of transition at Sturt. Blakebrough was nearing the end of his first year as workshop manager, under pressure to make the workshop 'repay it's debt to the Sturt community'.[742] For the first time a budget had been introduced to the ceramic workshop and by December of 1960, the month that Chappell arrived, under Blakebrough's stewardship this goal had been achieved,[743] therefore Chappell arrived at somewhat of a highpoint in

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[738] ibid
[739] During the twenty-five years Doug Lawrie lived in Japan between 1963 and 1987 he was able to offer considerable assistance to many visiting Australian potters. My family benefited from Doug and Joelle Lawrie's generosity during our stay in Kyoto during 1974. Doug Lawrie had achieved an uncommon degree of success in Japan and his return to the United States after spending twenty-five years in Japan is a testament to the difficulties faced by foreigners who wished to reside permanently in that country during that period in history.
[740] Blakebrough, L. interview with the author 4 December 2001
[741] ibid
[742] Blakebrough, L. in *Sturt Workshops 1962*
[743] ibid

Sturts evolution. The two men spent ten days at the workshops during which time Chappell was able to offer much needed advice on improving aspects of production. In particular he remodelled the interior of the wood-kiln, which had been built by Ivan McMeekin based on a scaled-down design of Michael Cardew's kiln at Wenford Bridge. Previously, firings of thirty-six hours duration were not unknown, but with Chappell's modifications this was substantially reduced, cutting down on the workload and saving costs in fuel.[744] Interestingly, the Australian potter Gwyn Hanssen Pigott, Ivan McMeekin's first apprentice at Sturt, recalls the behaviour of the kiln during her time at Sturt from 1954 to early 1958 somewhat differently. In her 1991 article, 'Autobiographical Notes', she recalled:

> We threw the pots on kick-wheels with thick tulip oak wheel-heads. We raw-glazed them, and fired them in a small, efficient, wood-burning kiln (an adaptation of Cardew's translation of the firebox developed by Emile Bourry for the Sèvres porcelain manufacture). [Pigott's brackets] Ivan painstakingly tested the local materials to refine the stoneware and porcelain bodies we used and to make the glazes I still wonder at – fresh now, glowing. We didn't have and sophisticated machinery and spent a lot of time digging and crushing and blunging and ladling and sieving and wedging and kneading. I still can't bear to use anything other than my hand to stir the glazes – feeling the consistency, losing my fingernails. And wood is the only real fuel.[745]

Much of the knowledge of the studio potter is gained empirically, and Chappell's experience showed. Blakebrough was similarly practical, and after McMeekin's departure he realised that the time Hanssen Pigott refers to spent 'digging and crushing and blunging and ladling and sieving and wedging and kneading,' could at least be partly ameliorated by installing some machinery, thus freeing up time to

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[744] ibid; also see Holmes, J. *Les Blakebrough: Ceramics* p. 28, 31
[745] Hanssen Pigott, G. 'Autobiographical Notes' *The Studio Potter* Vol 20 # 1 December 1991 p. 46

make more pottery.[746] It was during Chappell's 'career-defining'[747] visit to Sturt that Blakebrough first started to seriously consider the possibility of going to Japan, but it would not be until December in 1962 that Blakebrough was able to make that journey.

[746] Blakebrough, L. *Sturt Workshops 1962*
[747] Holmes, J. loc cit p. 31

Chapter 9: Out of the Mainstream

At the end of the 1950s New South Wales could lay claim to being the epicentre of Australian studio pottery and a state where the ceramic aesthetic promulgated by Leach was in the ascendency. Here, perhaps more than in anywhere else at the time, Cochrane's statement that 'the Anglo Oriental aesthetic remained dominant in Australia, supported in all the ceramics courses, potter's societies and literature'[748] was realised. For Les Blakebrough working with the legacy of McMeekin at Sturt and for the members of the Potter's Society of New South Wales, centred around Rushforth at East Sydney Technical College and Ivan McMeekin at the University of New South Wales, it was the dominant ceramic discourse. As Blakebrough wrote of his time at East Sydney Technical College, ' even a lot of the earthenware being produced was pretend stoneware.'[749] Importantly, stoneware was also popular with the ceramics-buying public. During Blakebrough's student days at East Sydney Technical College, he remembered:

> ... standing on a pavement in Bligh st. (in central Sydney) going to see a Peter Rushforth exhibition. And it was going to open at nine o'clock on Tuesday morning ... this was back in the late 50s ... and there was a queue of people – quite a long queue – and Mary Turner [a Director of the gallery] ... came out and started handing out numbers to the queue. If you were standing at the front you got number one and so on ... now you didn't have all day to make up your mind, but once the doors were open you were allowed in, number one had the first choice in the show, and very quickly number one put a red sticker on something he was in love with or something he could afford – bang! It was done. And I mean, you tell this story to people now and their mouths fall open.[750]

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[748] Cochrane, G. *The Crafts Movement in Australia* p. 106
[749] Blakebrough, L. ibid
[750] Blakebrough, L. ibid

The effect of this level of financial encouragement should not be underestimated. There were no grants available to craftspeople in 1960, and, although many of the studio potters were also employed as teachers, there was an expectation that exhibitions should sell and exhibitions of Anglo Oriental stoneware consisting of decorative items based on functional and traditional wares sold well. The commercial galleries that exhibited ceramics also relied on sales to survive. In Sydney the Macquarie Gallery, The Hungry Horse Gallery, the Rudy Komon Gallery and the Barry Stern Gallery were all examples of dealer galleries that mainly exhibited painters but also successfully exhibited studio pottery.

Similarly in Victoria, Harold Hughan's 'kiln openings' at his house in Glen Iris were highly popular. As Kenneth Hood recalls:

> ... exhibitions and sales were held following each of the firings at the Glen iris house. Although these were never advertised, buyers assembled on the day of the sale, sometimes hours before the appointed time and waited in the garden until the appointed opening time ...[751]

Aside from Harold Hughan's novel – and efficient – approach to the marketing ceramics, his work had also been exhibited at The Georges Gallery in 1950, this reputed to be the first exhibition of stoneware studio pottery in Australia[752] and as part of the 1956 Olympic Arts Festival associated with the 1956 Melbourne Olympic Games.[753] Following their return to Australia in 1956 David and Hermia Boyd also

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[751] Hood, K. *Harold Hughan: a retrospective exhibition in honour of his ninetieth birthday* National Gallery of Victoria 1983
[752] Cochrane, G. op cit p. 86
[753] ibid

exhibited their ceramics at the Georges Gallery[754] and in the Museum of Modern Arts[755], and both the Argus Gallery and Brummells Gallery provided venues for a limited number of craftspeople to exhibit ceramics.[756] At the same time, the quaintly named and very long-lived Primrose Pottery Shop[757] in Collins Street offered for sale pottery by many leading Melbourne potters and even stocked the occasional piece by Bernard Leach, perhaps the only outlet in Australia to do so. However, the late 1950s saw the centre of the Victorian ceramic world shift to the outer suburb of Warrandyte and the aptly named venue, The Potters Cottage.

A collaborative venture started by five Melbourne potters – Reg Preston, Phyl Dunn, Arthur Halpern, Gus McLaren and Charles Wilton – the gallery had been opened in 1958 in a wattle-and-daub cottage dating from the late nineteenth century.[758] Again, the enthusiasm for pottery was spurred on by the market. Reg Preston recalls their initial pottery sale:

> Gus (McLaren) put signs on the road for five miles ... people poured in; when it was all over we had a huge dish of Phyl's full of pound notes. This went on, with sale days once a year for a couple of years. Before that we put work in suitcases and took the bus or train to town – some to Edith MacMillan at the Primrose Pottery Shop ...[759]

The second issue of *Pottery in Australia,* reporting in 1962 on the 'Women Potters of Australia' exhibition held by the Potters Cottage in Warrandyte, estimated the opening day attendance at over one thousand people. It was a successful and

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[754] Vader, J. *The Pottery and Ceramics of David and Hermia Boyd* Mathews Hutchinson 1977 p. 110
[755] ibid p. 96
[756] Cochrane, G. op cit p. 85
[757] The Primrose Pottery Shop ran from 1929 to 1973. see Cochrane, G. p. 84
[758] ibid p. 71
[759] ibid p. 72

popular venue which would continue to be the focus for much of Melbourne's pottery activity for several decades.

Ceramics activity in Australia was not limited to the two larger states. Although being less populous other Australian states had their own nascent ceramic scene, with practitioners, galleries and educational institutions all playing a part in fostering the development of the crafts. Through all of this activity the influence of Bernard Leach is palpable, although, perhaps surprisingly, the smaller states also offered many alternatives to the Leach model of Anglo Oriental pottery and it is this facet of Australian ceramics that is examined next.

A Study in Difference: Milton Moon, Carl McConnell and Studio Pottery in Queensland

In the 1950s Brisbane was home to a small but active group of potters. Of those figures, several would go on to exercise considerable influence on the development of Australian pottery, as makers, teachers and authors. In examining the careers of two of these potters, Milton Moon and Carl McConnell, the diversity of approaches within contemporary Australian studio pottery may be demonstrated in relation to the influence of Bernard Leach.

Born in 1926, Moon had grown up in Melbourne and enlisted in the navy during the war. When the war ended he served on troop ships, transporting repatriated soldiers and prisoners-of-war between Australia, New Guinea Indonesia - then the Dutch East

Indies[760] - and Japan. It was in this way that he first had contact with Japan and Japanese ceramics, buying a small decorated vase of Satsuma-style[761] ware from a trader in the Japanese port of Kure, on one of his several trips to Japan during 1946 and 1947. Moon also remembers sailing through the Inland Sea between the Japanese islands of Honshu and Shikoku, and seeing the famous and beautiful 'shrine island' of Miyajima.[762]

After demobilisation in Sydney in 1947 he moved into the field of broadcasting, spending time working in copyrighting and radio in New South Wales and North Queensland, before settling in Brisbane. In Brisbane, he worked for the Australian Broadcasting Commission in radio and later at the beginning of the television era, in this way gaining a public profile that would be of benefit when he decided to pursue a career in the arts. During this period his wife, Betty Moon, together with her mother Lorna Pestell, owned and operated the 'Odds and Ends Art Shop' from premises in the Town Hall Arcade, selling the small decorator items, including ceramics, that were much in demand after the austerity of the post-war years. Australian ceramic manufacturers were still benefiting from restrictions on foreign goods and it was through involvement in selling these wares that Moon first became aware of the ceramics of the Martin Boyd Pottery, John Perceval, Carl Cooper and Alan Lowe, all of whom supplied ceramics to this shop.

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[760] Following a protracted period of civil conflict, the Dutch officially handed over rule to the new nation of Indonesia on the 27th December 1949.

[761] Made in the Satsuma style in Kyoto in the 20th Century, by the Kogyozan, 'Old Dawn Mountain' manufactory.

[762] The site of a famous Shinto shrine, the island, also named Itsukushima, is close to the city of Hiroshima

Milton Moon was first introduced to pottery by Harry Memmott, the grandson of J.T. Sandison, who had established a commercial pottery in Brisbane in the early 1900s. Like so many others mentioned in these pages, Memmott studied painting and drawing at East Sydney Technical College following his discharge from the armed services. Returning to Brisbane in the late 1940s Memmott worked as a printer and picture-framer, before beginning to produce a range of commercially oriented earthenware pottery. Memmott was aided in this venture by his association with Mervyn Feeney, the proprietor of Sandison's Pottery, where Feeney continued making traditional, utilitarian pottery of the type that was once common throughout Australia.

Moon first met Memmott in the early 1950s through a common interest in art. Moon was studying painting and drawing part-time at Brisbane's Central Technical College and also privately through a network of contemporary artists, including the painters Roy and Betty Churcher,[763] John Molvig[764] and Margaret Cilento. At the time, the expatriate English painter Ian Fairweather[765] was a reclusive resident on Bribie Island off the coast of Brisbane. Fairweather could occasionally be visited at his crude dwelling – part studio, part house – situated in the ti-tree scrub in the middle of the island, where he painted works that combined an early training in European modernism, gained in London art schools, with his experiences of living – often somewhat adventurously - throughout China and South-East Asia.[766]

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[763] Betty Churcher would later become the Director of the National Gallery of Australia in Canberra.
[764] For a history of Molvig and the Brisbane contemporary art world see: Churcher, B. *Molvig: the Lost Antipodean* Penguin Books 1984
[765] For a discussion of Ian Fairweather's see Bail, M. *Ian Fairweather*, Bay Books 1981
[766] ibid

At the time the Brian Johnstone Gallery was the focus for contemporary art in Brisbane and Brisbane's small circle of academics and artists would meet at the gallery openings where they could escape the conservatism of this 1950s Australian provincial capital. Over several years, the gallery had hosted a series bench-mark exhibitions[767] of contemporary Australian art, including Arthur Boyd's *Nebuchadnezzar* series and Lawrence Daw's *Mandala* paintings, as well as exhibitions by artists such as Lloyd Rees, John Olsen and Russell Drysdale and was considered one of the most significant dealer-galleries in Australia.[768] Architects played an important role in fostering these links and the expatriate South African architect Graeme de Gruchy and his partner Joy de Gruchy, an interior decorator, would add considerably to Brisbane's quality of life. Graeme de Gruchy worked in the architecture department at Queensland University where he was one of a new generation of Australian architects who were exploring modernist approaches to built structures, an idiom sympathetic to new design in interiors and objects, including ceramics. Joy and Graeme de Gruchy's interest in this field led to the establishment in Brisbane of the influential Craftsman's Market store, one of Australia's first retail outlets where Scandinavian furniture and other home-wares could be purchased.

Through his friendship with Harry Memmott, Moon started learning pottery informally from Mervyn Feeney. He started working with Memmott in his spare time, assisting him in the making and decorating of a range of items influenced by the commercial pottery of the day:

> Many of the designs were based on Aboriginal motifs ... In those days there was no sensitivity about these matters and what we did was not considered

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[767] Cooke, G. p. 14
[768] ibid

'appropriation'. In fact, after the war there was almost a new sense of Australian pride and many people concerned with the decorative arts used Aboriginal motifs, almost as the only way of identifying ourselves as Australian. I think that at that time, no Aboriginal was making similar articles, commercially, so there was no thought of competing with them. ... At our family art-craft shop there was a considerable amount of ware decorated in this way. I recall there was a very popular line of Carl Cooper[769] coffee sups and saucers; these were decorated in this way.[770]

Moon's comments recall the earlier incorporation of Aboriginal material within Australian fine and decorative arts. As Grace Cochrane notes:

Aboriginal imagery had been of interest to a number of people, including the artists Margaret Preston, potters Alan Lowe and Carl Cooper, and screen-printing firms of Frances Burke Fabrics and Annan[771] Fabrics. The exhibition Aboriginal Art and its Application at the David Jones gallery in Sydney in 1941, organised by the Australian Museum, included Aboriginal Art, paintings and photographs, and fifty-five exhibits lent by the Society of Arts and Crafts of New South Wales.[772]

Moon's inclination to explore ceramics as a vehicle for artistic expression resulted in him developing a range of experimental works that did not fall easily into the category of either traditional earthenware or a Leach-inspired approach to stoneware aesthetics. [Plate 26]

I think that working with Harry had convinced me that if I was to have any life as a potter, it would not be done the way he was doing it but rather it would be working in the same manner as a painter or a sculptor would, and by having exhibitions. ... I wanted to be more like an 'art' potter, even though I wasn't very sure how I could really become one.[773]

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[769] Carl Cooper was a Melbourne-based potter who was based near the Boyd's pottery in the suburb of Murrambeena. Cooper was confined to a wheelchair, and he had started making pottery as occupational therapy during the war. He used a special kiln designed for him by Hatton Beck to enable him to load the pottery on his own. Cooper became well known for his earthenware with motifs based on Aboriginal designs and Australiana. He also worked as a decorator for the Boyd pottery.

[770] Moon, M. *The Human Art* unpublished manuscript, p. 16

[771] Anne Outlaw and Nance Mackenzie designers

[772] Cochrane, G. *The Crafts Movement in Australia* p. 88

[773] ibid p. 17

Moon had contact with David and Hermia Boyd, initially through his association with Hatton Beck. The Boyds had spent considerable time in Brisbane, even considering living there at one stage, and they held one of their last Australian exhibitions at the Johnston Gallery in 1959 shortly before returning to England[774]. They had already seen some of Moon's first pots, when he had shown work in a group show of artists at a suburban shopping centre.[775] Moon's early ceramics were influenced by the Boyd's, but rather than adopt their figurative, decorative style, Moon adapted the techniques of incising and scribing lines through glaze – sgraffito[776] - highlighted with freely applied accents of colouring oxides to creating abstract designs or patterns. Given David and Hermia Boyd's background it is not surprising that their manner of working – the scribe is similar to the pencil or the etcher's tool – and their imagery was influenced by Western traditions of painting, drawing and print-making. The adoption of Asian techniques of brush decoration were derided by Hermia Boyd, who spoke of the 'Japanese squiggles or the Leach-introduced hieraglyphic [sic] for ripening corn'[777] she had seen on English pottery, decorative devices which was becoming ever more present on Australian pottery.

Moon's first gallery exhibition was at the Brian Johnstone Gallery in 1959 where he showed alongside the Malaysian painter Lee Teng Chye. Moon had been introduced to Brian Johnstone by the Boyds and his first exhibition was greeted with good reviews.[778] The Brisbane *Courier-Mail* art critic, Gertrude Langer, wrote that 'he is a

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[774] Vader, J. *The Pottery and Ceramics of David and Hermia Boyd* p. 114
[775] see Pryor, D. *Focus on Milton Moon* p. 21
[776] Pottery term for inscribed lines.
[777] Vader, J. *The Pottery and Ceramics of David and Hermia Boyd* p. 37
[778] Pryor, D. ibid p. 29

potter of no mean talent'[779], where Melville Haysom in the *Telegraph* described 'a display of pottery ranking high in technique and beauty without loss of utility. He never faults on good taste ...'.[780] Encouraged by the reception of work which was already showing 'glimpses of independence'[781], Moon, with the help of Harry Memmott, built a small gas kiln in order to experiment with higher temperature ware. He also obtained a copy of Daniel Rhode's *Clays and Glazes for the Potter,*[782] a book which was to impact considerably on his development in the coming years.

As has been discussed earlier, there was a considerable schism between potters who worked in earthenware and those who, armed with Leach's *A Potter's Book,* were inspired to attempt to recreate the classic palette of North Asian glazes. Muted grey-green celadons, treacle-brown temmoku's and an off-white to beige coloured glaze, generically known as 'oatmeal', became ubiquitous on Australian stoneware pottery that owed much of its inspiration to Leach. Influential figures like Harold Hughan, Ivan McMeekin and Peter Rushforth linked the techniques of reduction-fired stoneware to the formal and philosophical values of the Anglo Oriental school of pottery. This was the orthodox approach to stoneware and for some the allusion to religion was apt; *A Potter's Book* was known colloquially as the potter's bible not only because of its usefulness, but also because of the fervour of many of it's followers. As Dennis Pryor,[783] then a lecturer in the Classics Dept. at Queensland University was to write in 1967:

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[779] ibid
[780] ibid
[781] Moon, M. *The Human Art* unpublished manuscript p. 29
[782] The American potter Daniel Rhode's 1958 *Clays and Glazes for the Potter* was arguably the book that superseded *A Potter's Book* as a technical manual. It contained a greater variety of information and used a greater variety of materials, and it remains an extremely useful and widely used text.
[783] Pryor was married to the Norwegian/Australian potter Asse Pryor.

> *A Potter's Book* ... became a sort of bible ... it was dedicated "To all potters", and it is an admirable and influential work. But the fundamentalist devotion of some of its readers has tended to stultify originality and elevate traditional techniques to the status of holy ritual. Leach wrapped a series of eastern philosophical dicta around pottery, and his disciples went out like missionaries to convert the world from ugliness. ... Then the factories, particularly in Scandinavia, began to employ artist-potters and to produce commercial pots that were utterly acceptable. So the urgency of the artist potter began to become obsolete ...[784]

For Moon, the journey from earthenware to stoneware was not marked by desire to recreate these venerable glazes and traditional techniques, all of which required firing to temperatures that were near the limit of the technology available to the studio potter at the time.[785] Armed with a novel approach based partly on information gleaned from Rhodes book, which simply involved the addition of 10% of the mineral colemanite[786] to any stoneware glaze and then firing in light reduction, Moon began working in the so-called 'midrange temperature' between earthenware and stoneware. This resulted in a range of unexpected surfaces, often matt or dry and clay-like, where, by the addition of a strong auxiliary flux in the form of colemanite, the refractory stoneware glazes were encouraged to fuse at an earlier point, a decided advantage given the difficulties of achieving high stoneware temperatures.

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[784] Pryor, D. ibid p.42

[785] One of the biggest impediments to achieving stoneware temperatures, typically from 1260 degrees to 1320 degrees Celsius, was the ability to design and construct a kiln able to achieve this range. Electric kilns were commonly available, but whilst they were useful for earthenware firings and could easily operate at temperatures into the low 1200 degree range, unless they were specialized for industrial applications the higher temperatures remained out of their reach. Also, most of the stoneware glaze technology written about by Leach was based on the ability to fire in what was known as a 'reduction' atmosphere, where the ratio of oxygen to carbon can be controlled and altered at various times within the firing of the kiln. This is easily achieved in solid-fuel or gas-fueled kilns, but the introduction of combustible matter into an electric kiln to promote a carbon rich reduction atmosphere inevitably leads to the destruction of the heating elements of the kiln.

[786] a calcium borate mineral

Moon's preference for abstract, almost expressionistic, decoration was informed by his contact with avant-garde Brisbane artists like John Molvig and Roy Churcher. The paintings of Ian Fairweather were also an inspiration as were those of John Olsen, who Moon knew. The later assertion that Moon's work was:

> ... inspired by the abstract-expressionism of Jackson Pollock and the American School in his exploration of the qualities of clay, rough textured surfaces, distorted forms, brushed oxides and dribbled glazes [787]

is inaccurate, although understandable when looked at with the benefit of hindsight. At the time, Moon simply had not seen this American work.[788] Rather, his interpretation of natural forms, and the experimental approach he saw adopted by artists like Jon Molvig – this was the period of Molvig's aptly-titled expressionistic 'blow-torch' paintings [789]– provided ample inspiration for taking artistic risks. [Plate 25]

In May, 1961, Moon was appointed to the position of Senior Instructor at the Brisbane Central Technical College. He would work alongside the American expatriate potter Carl McConnell, and the differing approaches taken by the two to ceramics was indicative of the range of approaches possible within the field.

Carl McConnell was born in 1926, the same year as Moon. Enlisting in the United States Navy in 1943, he had been stationed in Brisbane during the war, part of a large American presence in that city. McConnell had married an Australian woman, Bernice (Bunny) Pearson in 1945. They went to America where they lived for two

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[787] Cooke, G. ibid p. 14
[788] Moon, M. conversation with the author
[789] Churcher, B. *Molvig: the Lost Antipodean* Penguin Books, Australia 1984 p 91

years, before deciding to return to Australia early in 1948. McConnell had already attended many art classes as a child in America[790] and he enrolled in further study at Brisbane's Central Technical College in 1948 under a United States training scheme offered to ex-servicemen. McConnell discovered pottery at the Central Technical College and quickly gained a great technical facility. Crucially, he had also discovered Bernard Leach. McConnell's comments regarding the significance of *A Potter's Book* have already been quoted in the introduction to this thesis, but they bear repeating here. He writes:

> I first read *A Potter's Book* in 1946. It changed my whole outlook to clay work and gave me a new direction. I started firing with wood and discovered the beautiful effects from this ... It introduced me to the use of various plant and wood ashes in glaze composition but more than anything it made possible the transition for me from earthenware to stoneware and later to porcelain. Before using it I worked only in lead-glazed earthenware and used an electric fired kiln.[791]

As the Queensland potter Kevin Grealey would later write:

> Meticulous skill and appreciation for tools and materials were already part of his [McConnell's] kit when he discovered *A Potter's Book*. He adopted its principles and preached its doctrines with the fervour of a zealot.[792]

In the ceramics department, where the only pottery made was 'lead-glazed earthenware'[793], McConnell was still able to profit from Hatton Beck's skills as a thrower. In 1952 McConnell was appointed a part-time instructor in sculpture, where

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[790] Biographical information of McConnell lists periods of four years study at the Chicago Institute of Fine Art from 1935-39, attendance at an art school in Dallas, Texas in 1940 and study at an art school in Memphis, Tennessee in 1941, by which time he was still only 16 years of age.
[791] McConnell, C. op. cit
[792] Grealey, K. 'Queensland Ceramics Then and Now' *Pottery in Australia* Vol 25 # 4 p 7
[793] see footnote 26

Cyril Gibbs, senior instructor in art at the Central Technical College, remembered him as 'having an uncanny aptitude for any technique or craft he attempted'.[794] This impression is reinforced by Moon, who observed that: 'Carl was a person of enormous talent; he had skills in many areas ...'.[795] McConnell left the college in 1954 to establish a home workshop in the suburb of Norman Park, where he also conducted private classes for a period of two years. During this time, he was experimenting with a range of techniques, including wood-fired stoneware pottery. Cooke, in his biographical notes in the catalogue accompanying McConnell's 1986 retrospective exhibition at the Queensland Art Gallery,[796] cites this as the first instance of the technique of wood-fired stoneware being used in Queensland.

The burgeoning interest in stoneware had caused a flurry of activity amongst both studio potters and companies who saw a market developing in this area. Although wood-firing had the appeal of tradition, many variants of gas, oil and electric kiln designs were tested that could withstand stoneware temperatures.[797] This technical challenge was an important part of Australian pottery in the 1950s where the sentiment was that new frontiers were available to the potter who could surmount these obstacles posed by a lack of equipment, experience and knowledge. Again, Leach's text was key in being a ready source of practical knowledge for the potter.

1961 saw both Moon and McConnell working in the ceramics section of the art department of the Central Technical College, then a ramshackle collection of buildings on the banks of the Brisbane River. The differing approach to ceramics

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[794] Cooke, G. *Carl McConnell: Master Potter* Queensland Art Gallery 1986 p. 11
[795] Moon, M. ibid p. 27
[796] see footnote 24
[797] see footnote 26 this chapter

taken by the two men was mirrored by differences in their personality. Although Moon felt comfortable mixing with other artists, and ceramics were accepted on almost equal terms to painting in the Contemporary Art Society Exhibitions',[798] McConnell chose not to exhibit or mix in this artistic milieu. Instead, in 1961 McConnell held an exhibition of his work at the Travel Inn Gallery in Brisbane. Gertrude Langer, a well known and respected art critic, commented that his works demonstrated:

> ... perfection without ostentation. ... After close examination of the exhibit, one is satisfied that there is not a single piece which shows the slightest trace of inferior craftsmanship or defect in good taste.[799]

Critical reaction to his exhibition at the Weedman's gallery the following year was even more positive:

> The craftsmanship, noble simplicity and restraint of the shapes, use of glazes, texture and decoration can be summed up in the word perfection. There we have the enduring qualities of classical serenity and stillness ...[800]

McConnell was imbued with the Leach aesthetic and he was proving himself more than able to translate that philosophy into clay. In 1962 the New South Wales potter Ivan Englund travelled to Brisbane, where he worked with McConnell on a series of experiments utilising local rocks for glazes, the findings of which would be published in *Pottery in Australia* in 1965.[801] Interestingly, this same issue of *Pottery in Australia* carried an article by Leach's ex-apprentice Harry Davis, 'In Defence of the Rural

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[798] Cooke, G. p 16
[799] ibid
[800] ibid p 17
[801] Englund, I. 'Brisbane Rock Glazes' *Pottery in Australia* Vol 4 # 1 May 1965 p 21

Workshop'[802], in which he argued for the continuing viability of hand-made pottery as a strategy for the craftsman to sell: 'his products in a normal trading way, at non-precious prices, without recourse to a teaching stipend or private means.'[803] McConnell chose to follow this advice when, in 1963, he resigned from the Central Technical College and established his own Pinjarra Pottery in Brisbane, with an emphasis on production ware. [Plate 27]

Moon's next round of exhibitions in 1962 would be much more controversial. Dennis Pryor, in referring to the success of Moon's first exhibition, commented that 'The second book is the difficult one to write'[804] and it seemed that the audience for Moon's new body of work, exhibited both at the Rudy Komon Gallery in Sydney and at the Brian Johnstone Gallery in Brisbane, agreed. Moon had been introduced to Rudy Komon, a powerful Sydney dealer, by the artists John Olsen and John Molvig, both of whom exhibited with Komon. Moon's ceramics were now pushing the boundaries of acceptability and taste, and the exhibition met with mixed reviews.

The critic Robert Hughes, then still working in Australia, was mostly unimpressed with the display 'jam packed on rickety wooden shelves covered with ragged Hessian and supported on battered bricks [giving] the gallery the look of a rather cheerless jumble sale.'[805] According to Moon, when he arrived at Komon's Sydney gallery with his pots the day before the exhibition was due to open, there were no plinths to be had, a testament to Rudy Komon's lack of familiarity with exhibiting anything other than paintings. It was only through the swift intervention of the Sydney architect Peter

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[802] Davis, H. 'In Defence of the Rural Workshop' *Pottery in Australia* Vol 4 # 1 May 1965 p 4
[803] ibid
[804] Pryor, D. p. 35
[805] Pryor op. cit p. 41

Workman[806] that any sort of display was assembled at all.[807] The general impression created by the exhibition was so foreign to perceived standards that Hughes stated, incorrectly, that, 'many of the pieces are built up, not thrown on the wheel'[808], although admitting that, 'the guttiness [sic] of the best pieces, coupled with their instinctive feel for contour, texture and informal shape, is intriguing.'[809] All the work in the exhibition had been wheel thrown but was then altered or distorted to a deliberate state of asymmetry, which paradoxically was more akin to certain precepts of classical Japanese taste than was realised at the time. The *Sydney Morning Herald* critic Wallace Thornton disliked it, finding: '... a rather indigestible mass of repellent barnacled-textured stoneware ...'.[810] However, the artist and critic, James Gleeson, was enthusiastic. 'His work is vigorous, rough, primitive, asymmetrical and exciting. ... Moon is a potter of great originality and skill.'[811]

As Pryor notes, the mixed reception was hardly surprising. The Australian potter Owen Rye recalls being taken as a young ceramics student by Ivan McMeekin to Moon's Sydney exhibition, to be shown 'what not to make'[812]. Moon's approach transgressed all of the dictums in *A Potter's Book*. Rather than classicism and a reference - or deference - to the Sung standard as espoused by Leach, Moon's ceramics were deliberately sculptural in intent, each pot seeking to redefine what vessel based ceramics might be. Yet even this experimental and challenging work was collected from the start, rapidly becoming part of the lexicon of Australian pottery. It demonstrated that within the Australian ceramics movement there was a

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[806] brother to the potter New South Wales potter Peter Workman, active 1960s
[807] Moon, conversation with the author.
[808] ibid p 42
[809] ibid
[810] ibid p 41
[811] ibid p 42
[812] Moon, conversation with the author.

growing awareness of the possibility of clay as a valid form of artistic expression, free of the constraints of received wisdom, even if that wisdom arrived from as high an authority as Bernard Leach.

9.2 Studio Pottery in South Australia and Western Australia

Previously in this chapter I described how studio pottery in Queensland centred around the activities of two potters, Milton Moon and Carl McConnell. Although larger numbers of potters were active in New South Wales and Victoria, it remains true that in all states the participation in pottery, if measured by numbers alone, was mostly confined to amateur or hobby circles. The balance between those who might be considered professional potters and those who were considered amateur potters, was further biased in this early period by the relative lack of professional opportunities for undertaking ceramics as a full-time career.

The criteria against which professionalism is established has altered over time, as has the environment in which ceramics is practised. Nonetheless, participation in teaching pottery in higher education, the exhibiting of pottery in galleries and juried prizes and a full-time commitment to making pottery for sale, are activities demonstrating a level of professionalism in the field of ceramics. Ancillary activities, for example selection to adjudicate ceramics awards, publishing articles on ceramics and giving public lectures are also factored into this complex equation. Of all these mechanisms, an involvement in teaching maximises the opportunity for the skills, knowledge and attitudes of the individual to be passed on to others and institutional employment confers a level of credibility to the practitioner, who is seen by their peers and by the public to have gained official recognition of their skills. Most, although not all, of the potters mentioned in these pages have had some involvement with teaching, to the extent that it has been their primary activity, providing the practitioner with the bulk of their income and occupying a large portion of their time. The example of Harold Hughan, who for many years worked at a profession removed

from his practice as a potter and who never formally taught, rarely wrote and spent the first decades of his career selling pottery from his Melbourne home is both rare and confined to the early stages of Australian studio pottery. Nonetheless, the late 1950s and early 1960s were a transition period in Australian pottery when the available teaching positions were severely limited. Then, as now, there were many potters amongst the ranks of amateurs who took pottery very seriously and whose activities supported the professional ranks of the craft.

South Australia

Given the South Australia's small population, the amateur pottery movement had a large and active membership which also proved to be an effective lobby group for the cause of studio ceramics. Formed in 1950 the Adelaide Potter's Club initially operated from premises in the city. At first their work was confined to hand-built earthenware, fired either by commercial potteries or by John and Mary Dulcie Dodd[813], who from 1952 operated the 'Jodol' pottery school from a converted tram-barn in the Adelaide suburb of St. Peters. Over the next three years the commitment of members of the Adelaide Potters Club saw gains being made in the club's membership, equipment and skills and the first issue of their journal, the *Ceramist,* was published in May 1955. The November 1955 issue of the same magazine contained comments regarding the need for a level of professionalism to be introduced into the teaching of ceramics in South Australia,[814] and a copy of the magazine was forwarded to Sir Thomas Playford, the Premier of the State. It had the desired effect, and by early 1956 a commitment was given by the Minister of Education that ceramics would be included in the syllabus of the South Australian

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[813] Ioannou, N. *Ceramics in South Australia 1836 – 1986* p 326
[814] ibid p. 321

School of Art, one of Australia's longest established art schools.[815] In the interim, the members 'grabbed every visitor and read everything.'[816] Amongst the earliest purchases for the club library was a copy of *A Potter's Book,* which rapidly became the 'bible'[817], a familiar appellation. By late 1951 a founding member of the Adelaide Potters Club, Mollie Vardon, produced a stoneware pot with the aid of information contained in Leach's book.[818] That this was not the first stoneware pot produced by a South Australian potter is noteworthy, given the relatively early date of manufacture. That it was preceded in this respect by a period of over twenty years is a matter of importance to the history of Australian studio pottery and will be examined in due course.

An indication of the level of interest in pottery in South Australia may be gauged by the fact that the membership of the Adelaide Potter's Club, at the time their request was being considered by the government, numbered around three hundred. Further to this a second ceramics group, the Studio Potters Guild, was formalised in 1954. By the early 1960s this second organization also counted its membership in the hundreds with both groups having developed an active programme of teaching and exhibiting.

Although the government agreed to institute a ceramics course at the South Australian School of Art, the question remained as to who would teach the course. The School of Art already had a member of staff who had some experience of ceramics, but no formal qualifications to teach in the area. Helen McIntosh had

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[815] ibid p. 322
[816] Cochrane, G. *Crafts Movement in* Australia p. 81
[817] Ioannou op. cit p. 319
[818] ibid

worked at the school since 1951 and she provided a link to both the earlier Australian earthenware tradition and the contemporary Anglo-Oriental style of stoneware. As a child growing up in Adelaide, McIntosh had known the pioneering potter Gladys Reynell[819]. McIntosh attended hand-building classes with local Adelaide potter Annie Mitchell in the 1930s,[820] and spent four years in Scotland from 1947 where she taught painting and design at the Edinburgh School of Art. During this time she travelled throughout England, visiting potteries and ultimately meeting Bernard Leach in St. Ives.[821] McIntosh returned to South Australia in 1951 with a copy of Leach's *A Potter's Book* [822] and a newfound enthusiasm for ceramics.

In 1955 the potter Alex Leckie emigrated from Scotland to South Australia.[823] As the child of a political activist he had had an unconventional upbringing, and despite having never finished his formal schooling Leckie was accepted to study art at the Glasgow School of Art. He enrolled in the newly instituted diploma course in ceramics and following his graduation completed a further post-diploma year. It was during this time that Leckie's ceramics began to develop their characteristic anthropomorphic attributes, while simultaneously revealing a solid grounding in traditional techniques. As Ioannou notes:

> Leckie's art training in Scotland occurred at a time when European potters ... had been increasingly influenced by painting and sculpture as a means of extending their personal expression in ceramics ... (producing) sculptural work with some figurative elements which always centred on the ceramic tradition of vessel making. This was of course, a departure from the mainstream direction of the British tradition of studio pottery that had developed during the wars based on English slipware and Japanese stoneware traditions and

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[819] Ioannou, N. p. 296, 297;pp. 297 – 301 et al
[820] ibid p. 322
[821] ibid
[822] ibid
[823] ibid

reinterpreted by Leach.[824]

Ioannou goes on to correctly identify Picasso's ceramics as a strong influence on Leckie and contrasts this with Leckie's habit of working in a stoneware idiom, a technique that, at the time, was closely associated with the Anglo Oriental school of ceramics.[825] Leckie's exploration of this interstitial space is of interest, again demonstrating that not all Australian studio potters working in stoneware adhered to Leach's dictums. Leckie, like Milton Moon, took elements from certain traditions and in combining them established a personal idiom. This seemingly simple observation shall be reiterated in the conclusion to this thesis, as it provides the key by which the reality of Leach's influence might be understood.

Arriving in Adelaide in 1955, Leckie gained employment as a production thrower at Bennett's Magill Potteries, a traditional manufactory equivalent to Sandison's Pottery in Brisbane[826]. The combination of an artistic training with the discipline of production or repetition throwing equipped Leckie with a formidable skill-set. Importantly, he also had qualifications from a British art school and therefore was considered the best candidate to be appointed to teach the ceramics course at the South Australian School of Art, beginning in 1956.

At the school Leckie made contact with Helen McIntosh, who shared both his interest in pottery and an experience of Scottish art schools. In 1957 they established the Ravenswood studio in a workshop built alongside McIntosh's home in suburban

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[824] ibid p 324
[825] ibid
[826] Cochrane, G. p. 41, 160

Adelaide. An important aspect of the Ravenswood approach derived from McIntosh's interest in using local materials, particularly the Pleydell-Bouverie ash-glazes as outlined in *A Potter's Book.* [827] To this end, McIntosh collected a vast array of plant ashes: 'anything that could be burnt was used'.[828] The author can attest to this fact, as in 2004 he salvaged many of McIntosh's and Leckie's materials from the site of the Raveswood studio, which had then been sitting idle for almost forty years. The materials included large quantities of labelled and sorted plant-ashes, the accumulation of which speaks of considerable dedication.

Leckie was to prove a charismatic teacher, who together with McIntosh and a coterie of dedicated students would have a considerable impact on South Australian ceramics. Although separated from the main centres of activity in Australian pottery, a community of dedicated amateur potters ensured the status of ceramics was maintained in the early years. Eileen Keys, the pioneering Western Australian potter, visited the Ravenswood pottery, finding synergies between her own research into natural materials in Perth and Leckie's and McIntosh's experiments in Adelaide. Through the influence of Leckie and McIntosh, several Adelaide 'amateur' potters, including Harry Marchant and Frank Weston, made stoneware pottery in the early 1960s which showed considerable merit. Marchant came to act as Leckie's assistant and he was employed by the South Australian School of Art as a part-time teacher of ceramics for a period prior to 1962. In 1968 Marchant, together with Julie Evans, wrote the book *Living Clay,*[829] a workshop guide aimed at the beginner potter, which nonetheless was informative and included photographs of the work of some leading

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[827] Leach, B. *A Potter's Book* p.161 - 163
[828] Ioannou, N. op cit p. 323
[829] Marchant, H & Evans, J *Living Clay: a Potter's Guide* Rigby 1968

Australian potters, including that of Alex Leckie. Dr. Frank Weston[830] was a potter who, despite a full-time commitment to practising medicine, made a range of stoneware pottery in the early 1960s that owed much to Scandinavian and European ceramics and also to the influence of Leckie. Weston exhibited at the White Studios, a gallery in central Adelaide showcasing contemporary ceramics alongside sculpture, paintings, jewellery and 'décor' and which, along with the Bonython Gallery, provided a venue for local and interstate potters to show their work.

Along with Milton Moon, Bernard Sahm and Cecily Gibson, Alex Leckie was chosen to exhibit in the 1964 Tokyo exhibition.[831] His piece for this exhibition, 'Ruined City',[832] was featured on the cover of *Pottery in Australia* magazine, and he undoubtedly was amongst the most skilled and inventive makers practising in Australia during the period.

When Leckie left the South Australian School of Art School in 1962, he was replaced by Regina Jaugetis, who had trained at East Sydney Technical College with Peter Rushforth and Mollie Douglas. The following year, the American potter Ben Kypridakis took over the position, bringing the first taste of an alternative, US-influenced approach to Australian pottery. Although he returned to America after two years, Kypridakis' presence foreshadowed the enormous impact American ceramics would have on Australia in the late 1960s, an impact that was felt particularly strongly in South Australia.

Leach's book had an undoubted significance on several of the early practitioners of

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[830] Weston never used his professional title in publications related to ceramics.
[831] *Pottery in Australia* Vol. 3 No. 2, 1964 Editorial
[832] ibid, Cover Illustration.

studio pottery in South Australia, particularly in promoting interest in the techniques of stoneware pottery and the use of natural materials such as plant ashes. However, Alex Leckie's charismatic presence, combined with his considerable technical skills and a stylistic approach at considerable variance from the Leach school, meant that this early phase of South Australian studio pottery was free from some of the orthodoxies of the Leach approach. That this was at times replaced with influences derived from Alex Leckie is to be expected.

In closing, mention must be made of a remarkable early occurrence in the history of stoneware studio pottery in Australia. Norah Godlee was born in Adelaide in 1900. She had developed an early interest in china painting, decorating glazed and fired porcelain items with enamels which would then be subjected to a further, low temperature firing. In 1920 she had been shown the work of the pioneering South Australian potter Gladys Reynell and became interested in extending her knowledge of ceramics beyond the field of china painting and in1924 she attended classes held in Adelaide at a private art school run by F. Millward Grey, an artist and teacher who had studied in London at the Central School of Arts. Millward Grey advised Godlee that the Central School of Arts included pottery in their curriculum, and in 1925 she travelled to London and enrolled in pottery classes.[833]

In 1926 stoneware had been introduced into the ceramics course at the Central School of Art by the influential teacher and potter Dora Billington, who had been appointed to head the ceramics department in 1924 following her tenure at the Royal College of Art. Under Billington:

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[833] Ioannou, N. op cit p. 310

> ... pottery classes taught the full scope of pottery making as opposed to the earlier prevailing system which had concentrated on teaching the students to decorate pottery forms thrown by a professional potter or prepared from moulds.[834]

During this time Godlee, together with a fellow student Mary Egerton, travelled widely visiting museums and viewing collections of ceramics, and on one occasion visited Bernard Leach's pottery at St. Ives.[835] In 1927 Godlee's mother travelled to England, bringing with her a sample of clay obtained from Bennett's Pottery in Adelaide. Godlee had decided to become a full-time potter on returning to South Australia and had the clay tested in England to establish its suitability for stoneware firing. Returning to Adelaide in 1928 Godlee established a studio at her home in suburban Adelaide, installing a gas-fired and later an oil-fired kiln capable of stoneware temperatures and reduction firing atmospheres. By 1928 Norah Godlee had the skills, the knowledge the materials and equipment to make stoneware studio pottery. Her glazes were true stoneware formulations, including the English mineral Cornish Stone – effectively a type of feldspar when considered as a glaze ingredient – as well as limestone and kaolin, the last of which was extensively mined on Kangaroo Island off the coast of Adelaide. Joined by Mary Egerton, who had travelled from England to work with Godlee in South Australia, the two potters produced a range of ceramics utilising a variety of techniques. In 1931 an exhibition of their work was displayed at the South Australian Society of Arts Gallery. An incised, celadon glazed stoneware bowl made at this time clearly demonstrates that the provenance of Anglo Oriental studio pottery has a history in Australia that extends beyond that which is generally acknowledged. In 1932 the decision by Mary Egerton to return to England led to

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[834] ibid
[835] ibid

Godlee closing the pottery[836] and she never returned to making this type of ware.

Kenneth Hood, writing in the catalogue celebrating the Harold Hughan 1983 retrospective exhibition at the National Gallery of Victoria[837] stated that:

> ... the neat, white-painted weatherboard house ... gives no hint that in a small workshop at the back the first, feldspathic-glazed studio stoneware in Australia was made.[838]

According to Hood's essay, Harold Hughan's first stoneware pottery was produced between 1944 and 1946 in a small wood and coke-fired kiln that had been built by Robert Hughan,[839] therefore Norah Godlee and Mary Egerton had preceded this achievement by at least fifteen years. Godlee or Egerton did not have an influence on Australian studio pottery in the 1950s and the 1960s and their achievements have been consigned to the footnotes of Australian ceramic history, but they were significant. Their contribution to Australian ceramic history must be reaffirmed as the opportunity allows, if myth is not to take the place of reality.

Western Australia

The name most associated with the early days of the studio pottery movement in Western Australia is that of Eileen Keys. Originally a New Zealander, Keys arrived in Western Australia in 1947, accompanying her husband who had been appointed

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[836] ibid. p. 313
[837] Hood, K. *Harold Hughan: a retrospective exhibition in honour of his ninetieth birthday* National Gallery of Victoria 1983
[838] ibid
[839] ibid

Principal of Scotch College.[840] She commenced her art studies in Christchurch, New Zealand before the war and studied the Montessori method of teaching, before travelling to England where she attended the Chelsea Art School in London in 1939. Although she had not yet started to work with clay, she was impressed with Cubism and Modernism and therefore had direct experience of contemporary European art of the 1930s.[841]

On her return to Western Australia, she established art classes at Scotch College and drew on her brief experience of ceramics gained in New Zealand in 1946[842] when craft was added to the school's curriculum. At the time, there were few processed clays available in Perth, so Keys began to investigate local materials in order to ascertain which clays would be of use in her classes. This was to lead to a lifetime of investigation into how the vast range of Western Australian minerals could be used in ceramics, a subject on which she would publish as early as 1964 in *Pottery in Australia* in an article 'Notes from Perth on Mineral Glazes'.[843]

Keys early work in this area stresses yet again the value of Leach's *A Potter's Book* as a technical aid. She later wrote:

> Armed with Leach's "Potter's Book" [sic] I got help around the school in building a wood kiln not realising the work involved in that. ...The brother of one of our staff ... made me a kick wheel with the help of the "Potter's Book" [sic] but I didn't know which way it kicked ... [844]

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[840] Keys, E. 'Looking Back over Thirty-five Years' *Pottery in Australia* Vol 21 # 2 p 22 - 25
[841] Cochrane, G. p 166
[842] ibid
[843] Keys, E. 'Notes from Perth on Mineral Glazes' *Pottery in Australia* Vol 3 # 1 p 12 – 13, 37 (magazine incorrectly states end page 13 'article continued on page 25')
[844] Keys, E. 'Looking Back Over Thirty-five Years' ibid

Despite Perth's relative isolation from the centres of Australian ceramic activity, Key's had heard of electric kilns being used successfully at East Sydney Technical College. She visited there as early as 1951 and met Peter Rushforth and Mollie Douglas, at a time when the ceramics department at East Sydney was still given over to earthenware techniques fired in electric kilns.[845]

Keys first exhibited in the Newspaper House Gallery in Perth in 1953, together with the weaver Hilda Stevens. The exhibition mixed styles and materials, presenting work that ranged from 'lamps, table settings, primitive weaving using Aboriginal design and a very modern section.'[846] A photograph from 1953 of a table setting consisting of two of Keys ceramics on a hand-woven tablecloth is illustrative of the 'Modern Section', and shows her drawing on the Cubist models she encountered in London.

In 1956 Keys travelled to England and Europe. She recalls:

> One of the highlights of that trip was a visit to Bernard Leach. I had a day with him during which he took me upstairs to his own private room and showed me all his treasures from Japan, and his wheel, and the lovely view of St. Ives from the window. Downstairs they were doing a firing ... Bernard was like a schoolboy, running from spy hole to spy hole.[847] ... I returned home to the pottery determined to be able to fire in a reduction atmosphere. But how? I burnt out the electric kiln once, got a better one (as I thought) with higher temperature wires, but this time the bricks melted instead of the wires. So then I hired an oil kiln, but .... Still not knowing much about reduction I melted the shelves and the pots. ... It took a year of hard work ... before I had my first mineral [glaze] exhibition [1959] ... and quite a number of pieces were bought

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[845] ibid
[846] ibid
[847] Small ports in the kiln through which the potter looks to ascertain the progress of the firing, normally used to view the array of pyrometric cones which indicate temperature.

by the Art Gallery [of Western Australia].[848]

This litany of technical disasters was not uncommon amongst the first generation of Australian potters, and Keys had no local colleagues with whom she could consult. From her comments, it is obvious that an efficient wood-fired kiln would have suited her eventual aims, yet the ease of operation of an electric kiln had prompted its use – and eventual destruction – at the school. It is here that the discrepancy between the advice available in a text, even an esteemed text like *A Potter's Book,* and the empirical knowledge on which a potter relies is demonstrated. Her exposure to Leach's text, reinforced with her experience of meeting him and witnessing a kiln firing at St. Ives, combined with an interest in the use of Western Australian minerals as glaze ingredients, dictated that her only course of action was to try to master the techniques of stoneware-firings. Without the input of experienced colleagues or an ongoing tradition on which to call, the learning curve was steep.

As Cochrane notes, despite Key's reliance on Leach's book and her experience of meeting him in England, she did not accommodate to Leach's style,[849] drawing instead on a variety of inputs, including Aboriginal art. She wrote that 'when I became interested in making pottery, I used the materials the Aboriginals did, and found myself decorating plates with oxides and ochres'.[850] Keys drew on her art training, as well as a deep involvement with the possibilities presented by the use of local materials, unconstrained by the dictums of the Leach philosophy.

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[848] Keys, E. op. cit.
[849] Cochrane p. 166
[850] Bell, R. *Eileen Keys 1950 – 86* Art gallery of Western Australia p 5

Chapter 10: Bernard Leach's Film Evening' & *Pottery in Australia*

1962 was an auspicious year for Australian pottery. It was marked by two significant events, both of which occurred in New South Wales. The first was the publication of the inaugural issue of the magazine *Pottery in Australia* by the Potter's Society of New South Wales. The second was the visit to Australia by Bernard Leach. [Plate 28]

The importance of *Pottery in Australia* in furthering the cause of Australian ceramics cannot be underestimated. It provided the only forum whereby potters from around Australia could gain any sense of community outside of their immediate circle. In its pages, they could read about the latest developments in techniques, reports of overseas trips by Australian potters, as well as perusing the all-important lists of exhibitions and announcements. These lists, compiled for the first issue by Mollie Douglas[851], the inaugural President of the Potter's Society, and then for the next five issues from November 1962 to October 1964[852] by Joan McPherson, were especially important. They gave an overview of activities occurring in the world of Australian ceramics, listing the details of exhibitions, prizes, lectures and other information relevant to potters from around the country.[853] In addition, the photographs of pots, workshops and potters, the tables of glaze recipes and plans of kilns, provided a vital source of information for Australian potters interested in working in the medium of stoneware. As was stated in the Editorial to the first issue,

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[851] Douglas, M. 'Exhibitions and Lectures' *Pottery in Australia* Vol 1 No. 1 May 1962

[852] Douglas, M. 'Exhibitions and Lectures' *Pottery in Australia* Vol 1 No. 2 November 1962; McPhereson, J. 'Exhibitions and Lectures' *Pottery in Australia* Vol 2 No. 1 May 1963; McPhereson, J. 'Exhibitions and Lectures' *Pottery in Australia* Vol 2 No. 2 October 1963; McPhereson, J. 'Exhibitions and Lectures' *Pottery in Australia* Vol 3 No. 1 May 1964; McPhereson, J. 'Exhibitions and Lectures' *Pottery in Australia* Vol 3 No. 2 October 1964.

[853] See Appendix 'Exhibitions and Lectures' *Pottery in Australia* Vol 1 No's 1 & 2, Vol 2 No's 1 & 2, Vol 3 No's 1 & 2.

> *Pottery in Australia* has been produced primarily to disseminate information among potters, and to endeavour to promote a better understanding of our problems, both technical and aesthetic.[854] This first edition, with an article on stoneware bodies, and another on the more Intangible subject of a potter's philosophy, together with photographs of pots, tries to fulfil this purpose. Acknowledging the stimulus of Bernard Leach's personality by publishing this edition following his visit to Sydney, we would yet stress the fact that the potters themselves are the mainstay of this and any future production.[855]

The debt to Leach was obvious. A photograph of a Leach pot, reproduced courtesy of the British Council,[856] was chosen for the cover of the inaugural issue of the magazine.[857] [Plate 29] It was a significant gesture, and this rather indistinct, half-tone image of a small salt-glaze jug[858], sitting astride the banner 'Pottery in Australia', left no doubt as to the debt the founders of the Potter's Society of New South Wales owed to Leach. As indicated by the Editorial[859], the choice commemorated Leach's visit to Australia earlier that year, where he 'suffered the good-natured handshakes of a multitude of people – my sympathy went out to the Royal Family'[860], at a reception held in his honour, organised by Ivan McMeekin and held at the University of New South Wales.[861] It seems Leach's allusion to a royal reception was quite apt; Les Blakebrough, who attended the event, remembers it as a slightly awkward and

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[854] Garnsey, Wanda 'Editorial' *Pottery in Australia* Vol. 1 # 1 p. 1, 1962
[855] ibid
[856] The Australian representative of the British Council was at the time a part-time ceramics student of Peter Rushforth's at the east Sydney Technical College. Rushforth, P. conversation with the author. 13 June 2006
[857] According to Peter Rushforth, the choice of the Leach pot was probably made at the suggestion of the editor, Wanda Garnsey. ibid
[858] The pot was made at St. Ives around 1960. see 'Contents' *Pottery in Australia* Vol. 1 # 1, 1962
[859] Garnesey, W. 'Editorial' *Pottery in Australia* Vol. 1 No. 1 may 1962
[860] Leach, B. *Beyond East & West* p 276
[861] Peter Rushforth recalls picking Leach up from the airport with Ivan McMeekin and taking him straight to the University of New South Wales, where he was met by an 'enthusiastic throng' of admirers. Rushforth, P. conversation with the author, 13 June 2006

embarrassing affair, with the organisers lining up attendees to be introduced to Leach one by one.[862]

The few days Leach spent in Sydney[863] are recorded in just over a hundred words in *Beyond East & West.*[864] This single paragraph establishes nothing beyond the fact that he arrived, stayed for a brief time and then left. The magazine *Pottery in Australia* is more informative, with Ivan McMeekin reporting on 'Bernard Leach's Film Evening', held before a large and enthusiastic audience at the University of New South Wales on Saturday the 20th of January, 1962.[865] Leach showed two films that night. The first film, 'A Potter's World', had been made the previous year (1961) by the B.B.C. as part of a series of documentaries on living British artists. Filmed at St. Ives, it documented the day to day running of the pottery as well as Leach's philosophy of making. Following the screening, in answer to a query from the audience concerning the attitude of craftsmen towards their materials, Leach replied that:

> ... people of the West have come ... to expect a thing is finished when it is very smoothly worked-up ... whereas in the Far East the high standard never fully accepted that. ... It [the Eastern standard] did believe, very much as the modern sculptor does, that ... rough clay, rough stone can express some of the finest emotions ... I have just had the experience in Japan of helping to bring out a collection of English medieval pitchers ... [to Japan] ... There were about five exhibitions of them while I was in Japan, and they met with warmth, admiration and love, such that no other pots out of Europe have ever received; and I am awfully proud – with my long experience of Japan, the home of potters – to be able to go back to my own country and say ; 'We had it! We had it once! Why don't we know our own values?
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> Now these pots ... are rather rough, and they do not accord with all that has happened since Marie Antionette, in fact the influence of the Courts of Europe

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[862] Blakebrough, L. conversation with the author 16 June 2006
[863] Leach stayed with Ivan and Colleen McMeekin at their home in Wavery in southern Sydney.
[864] Leach, B. 'Australia and New Zealand, 1962' *Beyond East and West* p. 276
[865] McMeekin, I. 'Bernard Leach's Film Evening' *Pottery in Australia* Vol. 1 # 1, 1962

> ... on the crafts has usually been bad; it has enhanced gold, silver, many colours and fine work. There are two broad ways of looking at crafts, including pottery; that of the countryman and that of the courtier – town and country.[866]

This lengthy quote from Leach reiterates the primacy of the Mingei aesthetic within his world view and the transmission of that message to an Australian audience. For Leach, the admirable qualities of craft resided in a particular set of aesthetic values, an appreciation of which could be derived from knowledge and experience of 'Far Eastern' culture, for which one may read Japan. Leach also ascribes these values to 'the country' and his association of a particular aesthetic with rural life is both poignant yet undefined. Although never overtly so, many of Leach's statements – such as the one cited previously - insinuate that work made of, by or in 'the country', was more wholesome than the sophisticated or decedent tastes of the city. Mention of Marie Antoinette leaves the audience in no doubt as to the kind of moral authority Leach is calling on here.

In Leach's aesthetic paradigm, objects that may be variously described as being un-refined, simple, naturalistic, unadorned or at least straightforward, were singled out as being meretricious. In Japan, those judgements were traditionally made by the tea masters in their role as arbiters of taste. In contemporary times they were joined by theorists such as Soetsu Yanagi, whose opinions as to what constituted good taste were often in conflict with the tea establishment. King writes that:

> Yanagi lists a number of qualities he considers essential for a good Tea master, the most important of which is a 'good eye' and the ability to intuitively recognize true beauty. Other characteristics that he deems necessary include: the ability to collect vessels of unified quality, even if they are made by

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[866] ibid

> unknown craftsmen [*mingei*] and not famous potters ... Yanagi points out that ... today there are very few people who possess such talents ... [which] ... is why Tea ceremony ... vessels ... have degenerated to their present abysmal state.[867]

This exhibition of medieval English pitchers may well have struck a cord with Japanese audiences, as it did with many Australian potters when shown in this country during 1965 and 1966.[868] Peter Rushforth remembers making pots directly inspired by this work[869], and Milton Moon thought these pots were impressive, when they were exhibited at the Queensland Art Gallery during September and October 1965.[870] Leach's own fondness for these medieval pots is unmistakable. When the same exhibition came to Australia, coincidentally only months before the visit to New South Wales of Shoji Hamada, the 1965 issue of *Pottery in Australia* carried a commentary on the exhibition by Leach. The significance of this timing was not lost on Wanda Garnsey, the editor of the *Pottery in Australia*, when she wrote that:

> So often has it been said that the deepest influences at work in Australian pottery stemmed from Bernard Leach in England and from the potters of the Orient, that the visit of Shoji Hamada to Australia within a few months of the Medieval Pottery Exhibition was firm confirmation for potters here of the strength of both influences.[871]

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[867] King, J. ibid p 109

[868] The exhibition 'Medieval English Pottery' was shown at the Art Gallery of New South Wales from * December 1965 to 3 January 1966. Prior to this work from the collection had been exhibited at East Sydney Technical College and at the Mosman Town Hall as part of the 1965 North Shore Festival of Arts. Peter Rushforth notes that a part time ceramics student of his at East Sydney Technical College was affiliated with the British Council, and it was in this way that the showing of the pots at the college was organised. Rushforth, P. conversation with the author 14 June 2006, also see footnote 2 this chapter. For details of Sydney venues see 'exhibitions list' *Pottery in Australia* Vol 4 # 2 p 29 and Vol 5 # 1 p 29.

[869] Rushforth, P. conversation with the author 14 June 2006

[870] Moon, M. conversation with the author 16 June 2006

[871] Garnsey, W. 'Editorial' *Pottery in Australia* Vol. 4 # 2, 1965

Leach's describes these medieval pots as being the product of a:

> ... simple community craftsmen of a healthy period for whom use and beauty were not separate ...one of those flowering periods when a release of creative energy took place ... When, as during the T'ang Dynasty in China, the deep religious purposes of life inspired the common activities of the whole community and the total somehow became greater than the sum of the parts, for 'when men and mountains meet, great things are done.[872]

If this statement seems to border on hyperbole, the remainder of Leach's piece leaves the reader in no doubt as to not only the historic significance of these pots, but their value as markers of spiritual worth. Perhaps predictably, Leach writes that the qualities of these English pots were first realised in Japan, where

> ... in Tokyo, Osaka and Kurashiki ... the reaction which I heard with my own ears was 'these were the finest pots we have seen from Europe'. Hitherto, they have been taken for granted as ungainly peasant-wares, not worthy of any high repute. But with retreat from the limiting outlook of the Italian Renaissance, and the in-general broadening of artistic values to include the primitive and the Oriental, and expansion of perception in art towards values of world scale, quite revolutionary reassessments have taken, and are taking place, and this is one of them. Almost suddenly it becomes apparent that these pots are the equivalent of our early Gothic architecture, stained-glass windows, of Gregorian music, of Chaucer's poetry and of English oak and iron and leather, and of stone carving, and that the sturdy, warm and dependable spirit of old England lives in them too. The little 'wights' who made them ... poor and downtrodden, no doubt, but full of earthy and, at the same time, reverential life ... Tied down by dogma and dirt, and poverty they were, nevertheless in some ways freer, more imaginative, and more whole than we are. We have no outlet for our inner imaginative life, nor do we know how to employ our numbers, our wealth, and our materialistic knowledge to any great spiritual end. Most of these things which they made, such as these pots, were ends in themselves and contained spirit. This is what my friends in Japan have felt and what, as an English potter, I hope others will feel.[873]

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[872] ibid
[873] ibid

These comments were recorded in 1965, and it is important, for the sake of accuracy, to separate them from the occasion of Leach's visit to Sydney in 1962. That being said, there is no reason to assume his opinion would have altered in any way over the interim. In this text, he affects a deep nostalgia for a time he knew very little about; 'I am no historian'[874], and by elevating these vessels, made 'by the homely hands of English artisans',[875] Leach is again seeking to reinforce his authority on the world of ceramics. His rediscovered pride as 'an English potter'[876] is based on the approval of a Japanese audience, and, as always, his arguments partake of the authority of a Japan for which he presumes to speak.

Yet, this Japanese other was not always in agreement with Leach, as the Australian potters Les Blakebrough and Peter Rushforth were soon to discover for themselves when they visited Japan the following year. Even that evening in Sydney, hints of the fractures and disagreements within the Japanese ceramic world were apparent. This was apparent when a second film was screened that night, the subject of which was Leach's Japanese colleague, Kenkichi Tomimoto.

Ivan McMeekin, continuing his report of the evening's proceedings, begins with a précis of Tomimoto's history and his early ties to Leach. McMeekin wrote that Tomimoto was a 'man of the town, and in the old days would have been of the Court, in contrast to Hamada who is of the countryside'.[877] The statement may well have an element of truth, but McMeekin is only acting here as a messenger. At the time he did not know either Tomimoto or Hamada, although he would later work with Hamada

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[874] ibid
[875] ibid
[876] ibid
[877] McMeekin, I op. cit

during his short visit to Australia in 1965. McMeekin never professed to have a great enthusiasm for Japanese pottery,[878] just as he had not been to Japan nor would he ever visit there. [879] Rather, it seems that Leach's appraisal of Japanese ceramics had been woven into McMeekin's text.

After the film on Tomimoto was screened to its Sydney audience, Leach answered questions regarding Tomimoto's stance and the contemporary Mingei movement. He indicated the inevitability of an opposing viewpoint to Mingei developing; ' ... no true democratic government without an opposition ...'[880] was mainly due to '... a tendency of followers of any movement to consolidate, to petrify, and to look back over the shoulder instead of looking forward'[881], thus blaming an over-adherence to a Mingei orthodoxy - by others - for any criticisms offered by its detractors. However, rather than representing a reaction to Mingei the style of pottery practised by Kenkichi Tomimoto - highly decorated, precisely made porcelain, with its 'gold, silver, many colours and fine work' - echoed not only the corrupting tastes of the 'Courts of Europe'[882] but represented a longstanding tradition within Japanese and Chinese pottery. Tomimoto's ceramics were the antithesis of Mingei, instead bearing strong similarities to the type of Japanese export porcelain that had been popular in the West as early as the middle of the seventeenth century.[883] This was not a ceramic tradition over which Leach could claim authority or exclusive knowledge, nor did it

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[878] McMeekin, S. conversation with the author 14 June 2006

[879] Ironically, at the beginning of 1962, the only Australian potter who had close contact with Tomimoto was Cecily Gibson, still in Japan and working with Tomimoto in Kyoto.

[880] Leach, B. in McMeekin, I 'Transcription of Bernard Leach's Film Evening' *Pottery in Australia* Vol 1 # 1 p 7

[881] ibid

[882] ibid

[883] The production of decorated Japanese porcelain began in 1641 near the town of Arita. Arita's geographic proximity to the small Dutch East India Company trading post at Deshima and interruptions to the supply of Chinese export porcelain ensured that these Japanese wares found a ready market in Europe. See Ayers, J. G. 'The Far East' *World Ceramics* Charleston, R. J. ed.; Hamlyn 1968, p. 67

conform to his aesthetic paradigms, and therefore Leach had excluded it from his reportage of Japanese pottery. This highly decorated and refined Japanese porcelain was Leach's elephant in the room, and his lifelong refusal to grapple with the presence of such work within the range of practice constituting the Japanese ceramic tradition was an omission that remains perplexing.

A second difficulty with Leach's arguments regarding the valour of everyday folk-wares can be discerned in his inability to reconcile the inherent tensions between the contemporary production and marketing of *getemono,*[884] or 'everyday common wares', and *jotemono,*[885] 'high class' or 'sophisticated' wares. Both Bernard Leach in the England and Shoji Hamada in Japan marketed the best of their pottery to the same coterie of collectors - and at the same high prices - as the makers of luxurious and ornate porcelain wares like Kenkichi Tomimoto.

Pottery in Australia - the Japan Issue

The contact between Australian potters and Japan, initiated by Cecily Gibson at the very end of the 1950s then encouraged by the visit of John Chappell in 1960 and Leach in 1962, was made manifest when, in 1963, Les Blakebrough, Peter Rushforth, Robert Hughan, Ivan Englund and Jean Higgs all visited Japan. The fourth issue of *Pottery in Australia,* published in October 1963, carried reports from all of these Australians on aspects of Japanese pottery. No less than six Australian potters wrote articles for this issue of *Pottery in Australia,* each one conveying their impressions of Japanese pottery. Of the six, Jean Higgs, Ivan Englund, Peter

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[884] King, J. op. cit. p. 239
[885] ibid

Rushforth and Les Blakebrough were based in New South Wales, Robert Hughan lived in Melbourne and Cecily Gibson was based in Canberra.

Jean Higgs, a mature age ceramics student at East Sydney Technical College, visited Japan for ten days in 1963 at the end of a long ceramic study tour that had seen her spend several months in America, as well as visiting England, Europe, Turkey, Israel, Korea and Thailand. Not unexpectedly, the highlight of her trip was reported to be a visit to Hamada's workshop in Mashiko, an event described in her article. She writes:

> We were fortunate ... to be taken to visit Hamada, who lives in a delightful country setting ... A charming scene greeted our arrival. Hamada was surrounded by his group of helpers as he unwrapped a special purchase he had that morning brought back from Tokyo. This was an early English slipware dish which was admired with rapt and complete concentration. The whole setting was like a great painting, which seemed to symbolise the beauty of the Japanese countryside, and their devotion to the craft.[886]

Here we find a picture of Japanese pottery rendered as if taken directly from the pages of Leach's texts. In a rural ceramic idyll the famous Japanese potter is surrounded by students with the presence of a piece of English slipware offering a silent reminder of Leach, all presented as a memorable tableau to be witnessed and reported on by an Australian potter fortunate enough to chance upon the scene. It must be noted that Hamada received both Japanese and foreign visitors constantly, which, although undoubtedly a generous gesture, also served to reinforce his stature amongst his peers. There must have been some positive advantages to workshops hosting foreign potters, because, as Les Blakebrough bluntly pointed out:

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[886] Higgs, J. 'Impressions' *Pottery in Australia* Vol. 2 No. 2, p. 32

... they're (foreign potters) a pain in the arse, really, when it gets down to it. You know, they can be embarrassing.

Moon: Why do you think ... Shimaoka and other people in Mashiko willingly accept so many foreigners?

Blakebrough: I can't tell you. I just don't know what motivates them to do it, because I'm sure they're more of a problem than an asset. ... You know, I suppose there are people in Japan who would have given their left leg to know Shimaoka, to have known Kawai, but we just took it for granted in a way.[887]

Of the Australian potters visiting Japan in 1963 and writing about their impressions in *Pottery in Australia,* only Les Blakebrough worked to any real extent in Japan. In Kyoto, he made pots in Takeichi Kawai's workshop, having been introduced to Kawai by John Chappell. He also briefly shared a nearby workshop with the American potter Doug Lawrie, as well as helping Chappell at his country workshop at Domura, a small village about half way between Kyoto and the rural ceramic district of Shigaraki. In addition, Blakebrough spent about three months working at a village pottery in Onda, which in the early 1960s was still an isolated and relatively unchanged community, where pottery making was interspersed with farming as it had been for hundreds of years. Whereas Mashiko had become famous as a folk craft centre largely because of the presence of Hamada, Onda represented the traditional face of Japanese folk craft, Mingei in its purest form. There were no famous names associated with the potters of Onda, only those of Yanagi and Leach who had praised its wares and the virtue of traditional modes of production, thus publicizing Onda's existence to the

[887] Blakebrough, Les 'Interview with the author' 4 December 2001

extent that potters from the other side of the world wished to make a 'pilgrimage'[888] to this isolated corner of Japan.[889]

Les and Sue Blakebrough travelled to Onda with a letter of introduction from Takeichi Kawai. They were accompanied by John Chappell, who would act as an interpreter and 'do the formal introductions necessary in this country (Japan).'[890] It had been arranged that the Blakebroughs would stay with Yuki Kobukuro, 'one of the fifteen farmer-potters who had the only new dwelling among the thatch-roof farm houses that comprised the village.'[891]

Blakebrough's observations, made during his stay in Onda, are instructive. He worked in the Kobukuro workshop, using the same materials and methods, producing the ware typical of the area. Unlike with Gibson in Mashiko, there was no latitude for individual expression. Rather, Blakebrough 'entered as much as possible into the flow of pottery activity'[892], finding a 'feeling of oneness with the whole potting process – the easy movement from one activity to the next, with the whole family from grandfather to the youngest daughter all directly involved.'[893] Nonetheless, Blakebrough's observations did not cloud his judgement as to the place of this kind of village pottery in the contemporary ceramic world, writing that

> ... one must observe that folk pottery in Japan is somewhat of an anachronism. In the past, country potters were never conscious of producing works of 'art', and the people they supplied were unaware of this quality also. They now

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[888] Pile, D. 'A Mecca called Onda' *Pottery in Australia* Vol. 9 No. 1 p. 24-27
[889] Leach, B. 'Onda' *A Potter in Japan* p. 194 – 213, 236;
[890] Blakebrough, L. 'Onda, a Japanese Folcraft Village' *Pottery in Australia* Vol. 2 No. 2 p. 11
[891] ibid
[892] Blakebrough, L. op. cit
[893] ibid

supply a discriminating and sophisticated market.[894]

He noted that the strength of contemporary Japanese pottery lay in its varied traditions and that while the potters of Onda had many advantages:

> ... one is not going to attempt to recreate this scene ... [although] the fact that one can come and see and observe it certainly has a broadening effect on the Westerner's individual attempts.[895]

A very different account of Japan is given by Robert Hughan, in his article 'A Visit to the Government Industrial Research Institute at Nagoya'. Hughan, as well as being the son and sometimes collaborator of Harold Hughan, and a potter and ceramic sculptor in his own right, had a professional interest in ceramic technology in his capacity as a research scientist for the C.S.I.R.O. He often used his scientific ability to give technical advice to the studio potter, and his contributions to *Pottery in Australia,* in the first years of its publication, largely concentrate on technical matters, although his 1964 report from America, co-authored with his wife, 'Impressions of the West Coast', attempts an overview of American ceramics, within the limitations of their schedule. Hughan states that it 'would be foolish to generalise about pottery teaching in ... the U.S.A. ... on the basis of brief visits to four institutions'[896], an admission which tends to reinforce the veracity of the observations he does make.

Hughan's article from Japan is purely technical in nature. He reports on the research carried out by the Government Industrial Research Institute in Nagoya on the kind of high-iron dark coloured glazes, known generically as temmoku, of interest to all

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[894] ibid p. 13
[895] ibid p. 14
[896] Hughan, R.R. & D.C. 'Impressions of the West Coast' *Pottery in Australia* Vol. 3 No. 2, p. 9

craftsmen potters working in the stoneware range of temperatures. The findings are presented, augmented by Hughan's own expertise as a ceramic chemist, and no further observations are made on Japanese ceramics.

Ivan Englund's article, 'Does Tradition Help?[897]', is far more discursive, beginning with the assertion that:

> In Australia the lack of a pottery tradition is recognised ... Pottery making was not one of those things attempted by the early settlers ... and in the intervening 175 years no lasting efforts were made, and our pottery needs were provided for by imports from England ...[898]

This was only partly true. As was discussed in this thesis, many pots had been made in Australia during the latter part of the nineteenth century, albeit the simple kinds of functional wares suited to the needs of a developing country. Englund's point is that these pots stemmed directly from the English tradition and could therefore not be considered to be an indigenous Australian ceramic tradition, although why an English pottery tradition was out of place in a settler society comprised of Anglo Saxon migrants is a moot point. Nonetheless, when he states that ' ... the legend that there were no pottery materials in Australia ... flourished',[899] this certainly would have come as a surprise to the scores of small Australian potteries that operated successfully in earlier times, and to the operators of the mines and quarries that supplied raw materials to the ceramic industry.[900]

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[897] see footnote 51 this chapter
[898] Englund, I. ibid
[899] ibid
[900] As early as 1924 the Federal government carried out extensive scientific testing through the Institute of Science and Industry on the suitability of Australian kaolins, pegmatites and feldspars for the manufacture of high quality, white-bodied dinner ware. As was stated in the synopsis of the reports

To some extent, Englund's argument is based on semantics and the definition of a 'tradition'. It seems to reflect the attitude of many of the pioneers of the post war studio pottery movement, and especially those practitioners who were closely involved with the Potters' Society of New South Wales, that a significant ceramic tradition must rest on an extended history of making in situ, an attitude reinforced by Leach's texts. However, it would have been more accurate for Englund and others to state that the pre-existing traditions of Australian pottery, which flowed directly from an English semi-industrial model, simply did not appeal to them as they did not appeal to Leach. That potters like Englund, Rushforth and McMeekin did not value these traditions is ably demonstrated by the fact that they did not associate themselves with the remaining Australian manufactories of hand thrown utilitarian pottery, choosing instead to prolong 'the legend'[901] of a lack of an Australian pottery tradition. As was canvassed in the previous chapter, both Milton Moon in Queensland, through his association with Mervyn Feeney at the Sandison Pottery, and Alex Leckie, who worked for a time at Bennett's Magill Pottery in South Australia, had strong connections to vernacular Australian pottery, and although this was not obviously manifested in their work it inculcated a less biased and more informed view of ceramic history that that promulgated by Englund.

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of their findings, Australia imported around £700,000 of this type of per annum. The report found that the quantities of suitable Australian materials were very large, but there was a need for investment in clay purification technologies if consistent high quality results were to be obtained. see Callister, R.C. *Australian Clays in the manufacture of White Pottery Wares* Institute of Science and Industry Bulletin No. 27, Commonwealth of Australia, Melbourne, 1924. Also, for a discussion on the Kangaroo island China Stone and Clay Company, see Ioannou, N. *Ceramics in South Australia 1836 – 1936* Wakefield Press 1986, p 277-9

[901] ibid

The fiction of a lack of an Australian pottery industry, encompassing a wide range of techniques, goods and materials, can be gleaned from this auction notice taken from *The Register* of 8th July 1885, issued under distraint for rent for 'Davies and Piercy's South Australian Pottery', of Magill, South Australia. The items to be sold by public auction include:

> A very large inventory of MANUFACTURED POTTERY GOODS. TERRA COTTA (WHITE AND BROWN), STONEWARE, REDWARE etc. (all sizes), comprising, - BUTTER JARS, cream jars, wine, spirit and acid bottles, cheese pans, flour barrels, jam jars, Brunswick black, ginger-beer and wine bottles, bread pans ... bird fountains, ... milk pans ... flowerpots, flowerpot stands, fern pans, Italian basket pots, mixing pans, ... water coolers, rustic pots, suspension pots, ... seed pans, ecclesiastical pots, garden ornaments (consisting of fountains, vases, urns, pedestals, etc.), ...[902]

The items included both stoneware and earthenware - 'terra cotta white and brown'[903] – glazed and unglazed, and included salt-glazed wares, which itself is an indicator of working in a stoneware temperature range.[904]

In his article, Ivan Englund also states that

> We are, in a pottery sense, still a pioneering group and we must look in whatever direction seems to us to provide some sound basis for future work. We must investigate our materials and find out what they will best do. We can learn from tradition in countries such as Japan, from their long history and their modern adaptations of traditional things. We should not be put off by the jibes of those who accuse us of being influenced by Leach or Hamada. It is no more unworthy to be influenced by Hamada than it is for Hamada to be influenced by old Koreans. Perhaps the aim should be to make things which are worthy in themselves; whether they remain functional or become contemplative or even

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[902] Ford, G. *19th Century South Australian Pottery: Guide for Historians and Collectors* The Salt Glaze Press 1985 (limited publication) p. 29

[903] ibid

[904] The temperatures needed for the interaction of the sodium vapour and clay to produce successfully glazed wares suggest temperatures that are at least in the lower ranges of stoneware firings, and also a vitreous clay body with all the necessary characteristics of stoneware pottery.

avant-garde is a matter for the individual and is largely beside the point.[905]

In answering the question implicit in the title of his article, 'Does Tradition Help?', Englund, aided by an analysis of various Japanese pottery traditions as well as non-traditional work, concludes, perhaps unsurprisingly, that Japan's long history of ceramics is indeed an aid to the Japanese potter. Englund's article ends rather inconclusively, noting the impossibility of inventing or importing a tradition 'overnight'[906], whilst again referring to Australia's geographic position 'on the edge of Asia'[907], a coded justification for the adoption of an Anglo Oriental model of ceramics and the emulation of Japanese pottery.

1963 was an important year in the development of Australia's ceramic contact with Japan. Through *A Potter's Book* and by his visit to Australia in 1962, Leach had provided a road map for Australian potters that pointed directly to Tokyo and that journey was now was being taken by increasing numbers of Australian potters and it only remained for a Japanese potter to reciprocate by visiting Australia and the chain of associations between England, Australia and Japan would be complete.

In this year, a large survey exhibition of Australian and New Zealand Pottery, organised by Kenneth Hood at the National Gallery of Victoria for circulation to all state galleries throughout 1963 and 1964 included work from thirty-one New Zealand potters and twenty-eight Australian potters. This large survey of ceramics was the first exhibition of this scale to be attempted and the roll call of Australian potters is

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[905] Englund, I. op cit
[906] ibid
[907] ibid

impressive indeed. All but five of these names - Les Blakebrough, David Boyd, Mollie Douglas, Phyl Dunn. Ivan Englund, Patricia Englund, Wanda Garnsey, Marea Gazzard, Guy Grey-Smith, Harold Hughan, Eileen Keys, Alex Leckie, Henri le Grand, Colin Levy, Allan Lowe, Carl McConnell, Milton Moon, John Perceval, Reg Preston, Rachel Roxburgh, Peter Rushforth, Bernard Sahm, Edward Shaw, Margaret Shaw, Derek Smith, Charles Swain, Margaret Tuckson and Jeffrey Wilkinson - appear in this thesis. In his 'Introduction' to the catalogue, Hood writes that:

> In neither country [Australia and New Zealand] was there a tradition on which potters could build. Isolationism and provincialism have had to be gradually overcome. The creative potters from both countries have taken their inspiration from many sources: from the work of the great Chinese Sung and T'ang artists, from English medieval pottery, from European peasant ware and, more recently, from Japanese ceramics. Potters are also beginning to discover the exhibiting possibilities of ceramic sculpture and new forms.[908]

Despite the familiar list of influences that may have been taken from the pages of *A Potter's Book* the final sentence accurately describes the reality of Australian ceramic practice in 1963. The new 'exhibiting possibilities' (an unusual turn of phrase) are not elucidated as they are varied and have no text establishing their importance in the hierarchy of ceramic traditions. There was no, nor would there be *A Potter's Book* for sculptural ceramics and Hood, even as curator, becomes mute on the subject when deprived of the authority of Leach's text. Nonetheless, despite the diversity of practice in this country, the ceramic allure of Japan remained an identifiable and powerful presence. In the final section in this ceramic history the complex linkages between Australia, England and Japan shall be completed, with the arrival in Australia of Takeichi Kawai, the first Japanese potter to visit Australia.

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[908] Hood, K. 'Introduction' *Australian and New Zealand Pottery* exhibition catalogue National Gallery of Victoria 1963

10.2 The Final Chapter

In January,1964 the Japanese potter Takeichi Kawai, the nephew of Mingei co-founder Kanjiro Kawai and by then a friend to numerous foreign potters in Japan potters, visited Australia. Takeichi Kawai, in his 'Letter from Kyoto: August 1963'[909] credits John Chappell with the suggestion that he visit Australia.[910] Kawai had been of great assistance to several Australian potters who had visited Japan, including Les Blakebrough and Peter Rushforth, and they were enthusiastic at the prospect of him visiting this country. An extract from Blakebrough's diary of his Japanese stay reads:

> Monday, 14th January. ... called in on Kawai, who made us very welcome and served us ceremonial tea, which was thick green and about as bitter as strong coffee without sugar. Beautiful house and lovely pots about the room. A Corean [sic] fire pot with handles, and a small charcoal fire on top of wood ash. ... The house is a short distance from the workshops, and the whole are in a potting district, potters workshops, kilns and houses. At Kawai's workshop is one of the largest climbing kilns in Kyoto, seven chambers, six foot high, about four wide, and about thirty feet across. An enormous kiln going up a fairly steep slope.[911]

It was hard for Australia to compete. During his extended stay in Japan, Blakebrough worked closely with John Chappell. A number of foreign potters were working in Kyoto during this time, and in addition to those figures already mentioned[912] Blakebrough would meet several of the American 'beat generation' poets who were visiting Japan. Chappell and Blakebrough became friends with the well-known American poet Gary Synder who would write several poems based on his experiences of mixing with these foreign potters. One poem describes visiting

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[909] Kawai, T. 'Letter from Kyoto: August 1963' *Pottery in Australia* Vol. 2 No. 2 October 1963
[910] ibid
[911] Blakebrough cited Holmes, J. *Les Blakebrough: Ceramics* Craftsman House 2005 p. 34
[912] See chapters seven and eight this thesis

Chappell and Blakebrough at Chappell's workshop and kiln at the village of Domura, positioned between Kyoto and the ancient ceramic centre of Shigaraki, and is particularly poignant giving the circumstances that would unfold when Chappell visited Australia the following year.

The Firing

for Les Blakebrough and the memory of John Chappell.
by Gary Snyder

Bitter blue fingers
winter nineteen sixty-three
Showa thirty-eight
Over a low pine-covered splay of hills in Shiga
west-south-west of the outlet of lake Biwa
Domura village set on sandy fans of the sweep
and turn of a river
Draining the rotten-granite hills up in Shigaraki
On a nineteen-fifty-seven Honda motorcycle model C
rode with some Yamanashi wine "St. Neige"
into the farmyard and the bellowing kiln.
Les & John
in ragged shirts and pants, dried slip
stuck to with pine-needle, pitch
dust, hair, woodchips:
sending the final slivers of yellowy pine
Through the peephole white blast glow
no saggars tilting yet and segers bending
neatly in a row –
Even their beards caked with mud and soot
firing for fourteen hours. How does she go?
Porcelain and stoneware: cheese dish, twenty cups.
Tokuri, vases, black chawan
Crosslegged rest on the dirt eye cocked to smoke –

The hands you lay on clay
kickwheeled, curling,
creamed to the lip of nothing
and coaxt to a white dancing heat that day
will linger for centuries in these towns and loams
and speak to men or beasts
when Japanese and English
are dead tongues.

Blakebrough was indebted to Takeichi Kawai for acting as such a generous mentor during his stay in Japan.[913] Anxious that the connections between Japanese and Australian potters were furthered, he consulted with Kawai and Chappell to arrange for Kawai to visit Australia in the coming year, organising exhibitions for Kawai with Betty O'Neil, the Director of the Hungry Horse gallery in Sydney and with the Argus gallery in Melbourne.[914] It was also decided that the American potter Fred Olsen would come to Australia towards the end of 1963, where exhibitions of his work were scheduled for November at the Barry Stern Gallery in Sydney and Brummel's Gallery in Melbourne.[915] John Chappell would be in Australia where he could act as an interpreter for Takeichi Kawai and then accompany him on to New Zealand, where he had been invited to visit by Helen Mason. Les Blakebrough organised a joint exhibition with John Chappell for the Macquarie Galleries in Sydney, to be held at the end of February, 1964.

This visit to Australia was to be Kawai's first to a Western country, and only his second trip out of Japan. Takeichi Kawai had been born in 1908, and became apprenticed to his uncle, Kanjiro Kawai, at an early age. Takeichi Kawai had acted as Bernard Leach's guide for three months during Leach's second Japanese trip, and in 1942 he had to travelled to China, spending one year at Hakusan in Shantung Province, and since that time had continued to work with his uncle at the Kawai family pottery in Kyoto.[916] Takeichi Kawai had served a long apprenticeship and then

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[913] Holmes, J. op cit p. 39
[914] Blakebrough, L. conversation with the author, 8 August 2006
[915] Olsen would exhibit with Robert Hughan at Brummel's Gallery in November 1963. see 'Exhibitions and Lectures' *Pottery in Australia* Vol. 2 No. 2 p. 37
[916] Kawai, T. op. cit.

acted as the workshop manager and it wasn't until the late 1959 that he had begun exhibiting in Japan. As Peter Rusforth noted:

> His training as a potter has followed the custom of long years of apprenticeship ... To many who believe in this system of training it would be considered pretentious to exhibit at an early age – Mr. Kawai had his first exhibition when he was fifty, at a time when his work and outlook had matured. ...[917]

The stark contrast between the career path of the traditional Japanese potter and their Australian counterpart is vividly illustrated here. That an Australian potter would spend over thirty years training and working under a 'master', before graduating to the status of an exhibiting artist, was - is - quite unimaginable, in an environment where three years of art school training was seen as being sufficient to pass on the skills necessary to establish a professional practice.[918] However, the corollary to the long and often rigorous periods of training entered into by Japanese potters was found in the support extended to the apprentice or young potter by the workshop. It was normal not only for the apprentice to be trained, but also to be paid, fed and given accommodation by the workshop. Over time, the apprentice would assume more responsibilities and further their own contacts through the networks established by the teacher. It was common for the first exhibition to be arranged by the 'master' or *sensei*,[919] and the apprentice might also be assisted in establishing their own studio. Added to this, was the high price that many successful Japanese potters were able to achieve for their work, far in excess of that able to be achieved by any contemporary potters working in other countries. Although the training may have been long for Japanese potters, the rewards were often considerable.

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[917] Rushforth, P. 'Takeichi Kawai' *Pottery in Australia* Vol. 3 No. 1 May 1964
[918] There was no post-graduate training available in Australian art schools until the 1970s.
[919] Teacher.

Les Blakebrough, John Chappell and Fred Olsen all arrived from Japan near the end of 1963, where they commenced working in and around Sydney.

The presence of these international potters in Australia went some way towards recreating the international pottery connections that existed in Kyoto. As the first such interchange to be held in this country, it was a sign of Australia's maturing ceramic environment. Takeichi Kawai, speaking at the University of Sydney, made the observation that :

> I have been able to meet many Australian potters, and have been struck by their enthusiasm for this craft of ours. ... before long pots will be made in Australia that will be truly and unmistakably Australian. Let us avoid at all costs the internationalisation of the art, the neutral international style. Pots are worthless, I say, if they do not reflect the culture of the country of their origin.[920]

It is interesting to reflect on these comments, made by a Japanese potter who had some experience of Australian pottery and of the many potters from Australia and elsewhere who had travelled to Japan to study. Kawai looks forward to the development of a national style, and warns against homogeneity, or the 'international style'; yet, the most obvious international influence amongst studio potters was the overwhelming adoption of the Anglo Oriental style, with Japanese pottery and the influence of Mingei potters like Kanjiro Kawai inextricably linked to this phenomenon. In many ways, the Anglo Oriental style of pottery, with its links to Japan, originally through the agency of Leach and then pursued by individual potters like Blakebrough, Chappell and others, was the new international style. The creation of an identifiable local or national style of pottery in Australia rested on the ability of

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[920] Kawai, T. 'A Potter Speaks' *Pottery in Australia* Vol. 3 No. 1 p. 33

Australian potters to make pots that 'reflected their own culture',[921] but how this could be achieved remained a conundrum. As we have seen, many Australian potters, as well as those that commented on Australian pottery, sought the answer in the use of local materials, as if the very clay would somehow lend the prerequisite character to objects that otherwise conformed to the necessary form and utility of everyday crockery; bowls, plates, teapots and cups. Thus McMeekin's hours of labour at the Sturt workshops, digging and preparing clays and rocks, or Patrick McCaughey's comments regarding the muted tones of Harold Hughan's pottery and their relationship to the Australian landscape.[922]

There was no possibility of function alone being able to establish the necessary differences, as most Western countries needed and employed similar objects for similar tasks. Only Japan, with its specialised history of wares for the tea ceremony, had a tradition of ceramics that combined function with aesthetics in such a manner, and this tradition was not transferable.

In January, 1964, Les Blakebrough and John Chappell met Takeichi Kawai on his arrival in Sydney. During the weeks Kawai was in New South Wales, he spent considerable time in Mittagong at the Sturt workshops, working with Blakebrough and Chappell and offering valuable advice on the facilities at the ceramics workshop. At the East Sydney Technical College, Peter Rushforth recounts how:

> ... under the disconcerting glare of television cameras Kawai unconcernedly demonstrated on a Japanese kick wheel before an appreciative audience of students.[923]

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[921] ibid
[922] McCaughey op. cit. *Harold Hughan: a retrospective exhibition in honour of his ninetieth birthday.*
[923] Rushforth, P. ibid

There is a remarkable photograph taken during Kawai's visit to Sydney. [Plate 30] Taken at the Hungry Horse Gallery, it shows Takeichi Kawai, Les Blakebrough, John Chappell and Fred Olsen, standing surrounded by the cast lace of the upstairs balcony of this converted terrace house. This architectural feature, so typical of turn of the century Sydney buildings, can be juxtaposed with the pottery on display inside, products of a Japanese folk-tradition that was rapidly being reconfigured within a new, hybrid ceramic style. There is also a certain sadness to the image of these four potters. Within a matter of weeks John Chappell would be dead, the result of a motorcycle accident on the Sydney Harbour Bridge while returning one night from a gathering of potters held at Wanda Garnsey's home. He was buried in Sydney.

In his summary to an obituary published in *Pottery in Australia* magazine in May that year, Les Blakebrough wrote the following words.

> ... it was with clay that his abilities were evident. His standards were high and he expected the same of other potters. He was able to practise what he preached. He followed an uncompromising way with his pots which had a peculiar way of being somewhere half way between what we have come to term Eastern and Western. He achieved this assimilation better than anyone else I can think of in an unconscious way. His pots were not Japanese and not English but unique, and an extension of himself. ... Those that saw his exhibition at the Macquarie Gallery in Sydney in February this year can decide for themselves, but to make the scene as he did in Japan, where competition is unbelievably competitive and where critics are severe, intelligent and well informed, was an achievement and the reward of a fearless, creative potter. His pots will speak for themselves.[924]

Perhaps the most eloquent epitaph for Chappell is found in another of Gary Snyder's

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[924] Balkebrough, L. 'Vale John Chappell' *Pottery in Australia* Vol. 3 No. 1 May 1964 p. 17

poems, written in 1964 on learning of Chappell's death in Sydney.

For John Chappell

Over the Arafura sea, the China sea'
Coral sea, Pacific
chains of volcanoes in the dark –
you in Sydney where it's summer;
I imagine that last ride outward
late at night

Stiff new gears – tight new engine
up some highway I have never seen
too fast – too fast –
like I said at Tango
when you went down twice on the gravel –

Did you have a chance to think
o shit I've fucked it now
instant crash and flight and sudden death –

Malaya, Indonesia
Taiwan, the Philippines, Okinawa
families sleeping – reaching
humans by the millions
world of breathing flesh

Me in Kyoto, You in Australia
wasted in the night.
black beard, mad laugh, and sadly serious brow.
earth-lover; shaper and maker.
potter, cooker,

now be clay in the ground.[925]

[925] Gary Snyder *For John Chappell* unpublished poem 1964, February March 1963, Kyoto

Conclusion

As Editor of the journals *Pottery in Australia* from 1976 to 1990 and *Ceramics, Art and Perception* from 1990 to the present day, the Australian ceramist and writer Janet Mansfield has an encyclopedic knowledge of the field. In her article 'Australian Ceramics: an Introduction' written for the Bicentennial edition of *Pottery in Australia* Mansfield stated:

Influences on Australian ceramists have come mainly from China, Japan and from England. These early influences stemmed from the work and writings of the British potter Bernard Leach, especially his *A Potter's Book* published by Faber [sic] in 1940 ... Leach's philosophy of combining beauty and usefulness in pottery and expressing the spirit of one's personality through one's work is still a persuasive argument.[926]

Janet Mansfield studied pottery with Peter Rushforth at East Sydney Technical College from 1963 to 1965 and so commenced her course of study in the year following Bernard Leach's visit to Sydney and concluded in the year that Shoji Hamada visited Australia. The world of Australian pottery to which Mansfield was introduced centred around the activities of the Potter's Society of New South Wales and was one in which Bernard Leach was the dominant international figure and *A Potter's Book* the dominant text. It is therefore understandable that although Mansfield's involvement with ceramics over the past four decades has encompassed a time of radical change, her view of Australian ceramic history is shaped by her early experiences. For Janet Mansfield, Bernard Leach, Japan and the Sung standard constitute the early influences of Australian studio pottery, or at least the part of it which she privileges.

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[926] Mansfield, J 'Australian Ceramics: an Introduction' *Pottery in Australia* Vol. 27 No. 2 p. 4,5

In this thesis, I have at some length and in detail traced Leach's history and his influences up to the time of the writing of *A Potter's Book*. Having thus formed an adequate knowledge of the authorial motivations behind the writing of this text, the focus has shifted to Australia in anticipation of the arrival of *A Potter's Book* on these shores in 1940. In doing so I have described the world of Australian ceramics both before this time and then particularly as it co-existed with Leach's book in the crucial years following the end of the Second World War, to end at a time when the links that were formed or informed by Leach were realized.

The aim of this thesis has been to situate Leach within Australian studio pottery in a manner that neither mythologised or ridiculed either but which was accurate, historically informed and even adventurous in the breadth of information it contained. Therefore, I have included accounts of matters that have largely been overlooked in Australian ceramic history. Although Cecily Gibson, John Chappell, David and Hermia Boyd or Norah Godlee do not play a large part in mainstream Australian ceramic discourse, each of their stories informs our knowledge of those other histories with which we are perhaps more familiar.

In the same manner, the intricate web of connections between Australia, England, New Zealand and Japan may be complex and difficult to comprehend, but to paraphrase Kanjiro Kawai, no practitioner works alone[927] and each interaction or journey is woven into that larger history of which both individuals and countries partake. When the New Zealand potter Helen Mason met the British potter John Chappell in Japan in 1960 the repercussions would be felt in Australia, just as when Bernard Leach met Soetsu Yanagi in Tokyo in 1911 the repercussions would be felt

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[927] Uchida, Y *We Do Not Work Alone: the thoughts of Kanjiro Kawai* op. cit

throughout the world. Similarly, a direct lineage may be established between a young Australian ceramics student working today and Bernard Leach working in Japan almost a century ago. The space between the two is the history bequeathed to the contemporary potter but with each simplification, omission or misinterpretation of that history it is diminished and becomes less available as time passes.

This thesis draws no conclusions as to the influence of Bernard Leach on Australian pottery, nor was it ever intended to do so. His influence on David and Hermia Boyd was probably negligible, on Cecily Gibson debatable and on Ivan Mcmeekin profound, yet even here we see that McMeekin assimilated only parts of Leach's message. When McMeekin writes that:

... when we examine the history of potting, we find that it has reached the greatest heights in ... Sung dynasty China or the period in England between the fourteenth and seventeenth centuries ...[928]

McMeekin is certainly quoting Leach, but he is doing so selectively. Japan is absent from this text, demonstrating that Leach's influence on Australian pottery was as various as were the individual proclivities of Australian potters. What is certain is that without a process of continued and sustained research into these matters the actual history will be lost, replaced with a version of Australian ceramic history that is no more than sloganeering and this at a time when the majority of this history is left to write.

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[928] McMeekin, I 'Introduction' *Notes for Potters in Australia* op. cit

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