

**Studio
Pottery
Prices**

**1920
to
1960**

**Andy
Moore
2022**

Introduction

This book-cum-visual essay concentrates on the prices of British studio pottery made and purchased between 1920 and 1960. All historical dates can be used as badges of convenience. In this case the period is marked at one end by the arrival of Bernard Leach and Shoji Hamada in St Ives in 1920 and, at the other, by the opening of the Craftsmen Potters' Shop in London in 1960. Neatly and conveniently the mid-point of 1940 is marked by the publication of Bernard Leach's seminal *A Potter's Book*.

The prices of six potters are considered in detail, namely Norah Braden, Michael Cardew, Shoji Hamada, Bernard Leach, Katharine Pleydell-Bouverie and William Staite Murray.

Financial information is gleaned from four sources:

- Aberystwyth University's Collection of Studio Pottery (www.ceramics-aberystwyth.com)
- the Eric Milner-White Collection in York via Sarah Riddick's *Pioneer Studio Pottery*, 1990
- the Victoria and Albert Museum's National Collection via Oliver Watson's *Studio Pottery*, 1993
- the Wingfield Digby Collection via *Bernard Leach, Hamada and their Circle* by Tony Birks and Michael Webb, 1992.

Also featured are six key galleries and six prominent collectors/individuals. A second essay will put the information in a fuller and wider context and include greater concentration on the 1950s which figure little in this first study.

Method

The focus on four main collections provides a manageable and defined area of study.

Ideally, the studio pottery collection at Stoke City Art Gallery and Museum would also have been included but prices of individual pots are not available.

304 pots have been considered. In 249 instances the price of the pots is available. Some of the pots have found their way into the collections as gifts from potters but the majority were bought directly from commercial galleries, most of them London-based. This accounts for 266 of the pots. A breakdown of galleries is provided and the six which figure most often are considered in more detail.

In the case of the Wingfield Digby Collection very limited financial information is available although there is, in *Bernard Leach, Hamada and their Circle*, comprehensive information on the gallery sources from which the pots were bought. While the Collection was accepted by HM Government in lieu of inheritance tax for a sum of £149,590 and allocated to the Tate in 2005, the Tate does not have information on the original prices paid for individual pieces by the Wingfield Digbys.

This is the equivalent of £228,000 in 2020 and serves as a reminder that the value of money changes over time and that reliable financial comparisons need to be made. The Bank of England inflation calculator has been used for this purpose. A simple chart on page 4 shows the respective values.

2020	1920	1930	1940	1950	1960
	£	£	£	£	£
£1	46	67	57	35	24
£5	228	334	286	175	118
£10	457	668	572	350	236
£20	914	1337	1145	700	471
£50	2285	3342	2862	1752	1178

Source: Bank of England Inflation Calculator

Prices by Potter	£	£	£	£	£	£	£	
	To 1.00	1.01- 5.00	5.01- 10.00	10.01- 20.00	20.01- 50.00	50.01- 100.00	100.00+	
Norah Braden	1	10	1					12
Michael Cardew	25	23	9	2	1			60
Shoji Hamada	3	16	7	3	3			32
Bernard Leach	13	20	4	11	9	1		58
Pleydell-Bouverie	1	14	4					19
Staite Murray	3	14	7	11	7	5	5	52
Other		6	5	4	1			16
Totals	46	103	37	31	21	6	5	249

Three other notable potters of the period, Lucie Rie (1902-95), Sam Haile (1909-48) and Hans Coper (1920 – 81) are represented, between them, by only 16 priced items in these collections. They are grouped together under the heading of ‘Other.’

The following two passages provide more of ‘a feel and flavour’ of contemporary matters and complement the tabulated information.

Michael Cardew in 1928

Writing in his autobiography Cardew recaps:

'A quotation I made in 1928 for a complete dinner and tea service, forty-five pieces in all, adds up to a total of £6 9s. 6d (£6.48). My 'throwing diary' for that year has accidentally survived, and tells me that I made a monthly average of 350 pots or between four and five thousand pots a year: large, medium and small; but no very big ones. The total value of these for the twelve months was £293 12s 6d (£293.63)....' *

*The equivalent of £18,850 in 2020.

(Michael Cardew, *A Pioneer Potter*, 1988, p.72)

The Wingfield Digbys in the early 1950s

Michael Webb writes of the couple in his introduction to *Bernard Leach, Hamada and their Circle*:

‘Mr and Mrs Wingfield Digby collected pottery for love and use and their interests were unusually wide...ranging from Yixing teapots, Korean porcelain, Japanese nineteenth century pottery, Chinese ‘transitional’ porcelain and Japanese porcelain from Imari to Kakiemon, as well as twentieth-century studio pottery.

On 29 April 1950 the Wingfield Digbys bought five pieces by Bernard Leach (total cost £16.11s (£16.55)) at Heffers Bookshop in Cambridge, and then on 5 June at Charles Vyse’s studio in London two large pots, a teapot and an open flower pot for £12.10s, £12.10s, £8 and £6 respectively, all by Shoji Hamada. They also bought eight pieces of Vyse’s own pottery, including a tall vase at £12, as they felt uncomfortable at appearing to be interested only in Hamada (none of the Vyse pieces are now in the Collection). During this year they bought work by Constance Dunn, William Newland, Harry Davies and, in August, a glazed earthenware bowl by Lucie Rie, also ordering from her a morning tea set and a rectangular stoneware pen-tray to be in black and white at a cost of 30 shillings (£1.50).

On 22 November 1950 at the Berkeley Galleries in London, they bought eight pieces from an exhibition of Michael Cardew’s work for a total of £37.16s (£37.80), with a top price of seven guineas (£7.35).’

Pots by decade	20s	30s	40s	50s	Total	Median
Norah Braden	3	9			12	1930
Michael Cardew	15	24	2	19	60	1938
Shoji Hamada	24	6		2	32	1925
Bernard Leach	23	15	4	16	58	1933
Pleydell-Bouverie	4	11		4	19	1930
Staite Murray	38	11		3	52	1927
Other		1		15	16	1955
Totals	107	80	6	56	249	

	Median price	Value at 2020
1925	£3.15	£196
1935	£3.15	£229
1955	£5.25	£141

It is interesting to note that, in real terms, the prices of the 1950s pots are significantly lower than those in the 1920s and 1930s.

Trends, decade by decade

The trends noted in this study are now compared, decade by decade, with comments and information provided on the growth of the V & A Collection (all taken from Oliver Watson's *Studio Pottery*, 1993).

1920s - Study

The study found that the median price of pots purchased was 3 guineas (£3.15). This 1925 figure corresponds to £196 in 2020.

1920s – V & A.

'Thirty-five pieces were acquired between 1920 and 1929, of which the majority were gifts. Ten of the pieces were by Staite Murray, ten by Reginald Wells and seven by Leach, with three by Shoji Hamada....Only six pieces were purchased – 8 gns and 7 gns were paid for two Staite Murray's, £5 and £4 for two Leach's, £7.85 for a piece by Wells and £2.75 for a bowl by Hamada.'

Note: £5 in 1925 equates to £310 in 2020.

1930s – Study

The study found that the median price of pots purchased was also 3 guineas (£3.15), equivalent to £229 in 2020.

1930s – V & A

‘Museum collecting accelerated in the 1930s. Eighty-nine pots were acquired; forty-two were purchased at an average price of about £4.70, for a total cost of £197.23. Twenty-six potters were represented: seventeen pieces by Michael Cardew, eleven by William Staite Murray and ten by Bernard Leach.....Twenty-five of the pieces cost £5 or less, and thirteen cost between £5 and £10. Of the four over £10, two were by William Staite Murray and two by Bernard Leach.’

Note: an average price of £4.70 in 1935 equates to £335 in 2020.

1940s

Purchasing was negligible during the War and its aftermath. At the V & A only 11 pieces were acquired in the 1940s.

1950s – Study

The study found that the median price of pots purchased was 5 guineas (£5.25). This 1955 figure equates to £140 in 2020.

1950s – V & A

‘Between 1950 and 1959 there is a tremendous increase in the number of pots acquired and potters represented: 168 pieces by 54 potters, of which 146 are purchases for a total of £975.91; the average price was just over £6.50.

Eighty-six of the purchases were for £5 or less, twenty-eight were between £5 and £10, twenty-eight between £10 and £20. Only five were above £20: a vase by James Tower for £22.48, two Leach’s for £30 each and Hans Coper for £36.75 (illustrated in this study) and *The Wheel of Fire* vase by William Staite Murray purchased for £94.50 from the pre-war work cleared from his studio in 1958.’

Note: the average of £6.50 in 1955 translates to £174 in 2020.

Purchases from galleries

	20s	30s	40s	50s	
Paterson's Gallery	48	11			59
Berkeley Galleries			2	31	33
Beaux Arts Gallery	3	13		5	21
Primavera			1	19	20
The Little Gallery		17			17
New Handworkers' Gallery	15	2			17
Red Rose Guild	14				14
Artificers' Guild	10	1			11
Colnaghi	11				11
Craft Centre, Hay Hill				11	11
Lefevre Galleries		11			11
Brygos Gallery		10			10
Liberty's				10	10
Heffer's, Cambridge				5	5
Leicester Galleries	2			3	5
Nat. Soc. Painters, Sculptors Engravers, Potters		4			4
Mrs Summerday		3			3
Bendick's Chocolate Shop				2	2
Cotswold Gallery	1				1
Penwith Gallery				1	1
Totals	104	72	3	87	26

Norah Braden (1901 to 2001) is represented by only 12 priced items in the present survey, ranging from £0.75 to 7 guineas (£7.35) for a 1938 stoneware bowl, now at the V & A; the 2020 equivalent of £506. The median date of these items was 1930 at a median price of £2.10 (or £140 in 2020). Purchases were spread between Colnaghi, the Little Gallery and Paterson's.

Katharine Harriot Duncombe Pleydell-Bouverie (1895 to 1985), to give her full name.

Colnaghi and Paterson's also featured in her samples, although Primavera was the gallery featuring most prominently, representing 8 of 23 purchases. The price of many pots is similar to that of her friend Norah Braden, with £7 guineas also being the highest price.

Overall, though, the pots are costing slightly more at a median of £3.15 (equivalent to £208 in 2020) in the same median year of 1930.

Shoji Hamada (1892 to 1978)

Hamada's highest price was considerably more, with 30 guineas being paid by Eric Milner-White at Paterson's for a pot in 1929, the 2020 equivalent of £2046. Most pots were sold at a much more modest level, more typically at the median price of 4 guineas in 1925 (or £260 in 2020). Paterson's was, by far, the gallery featuring most prominently, accounting for 25 of the 33 sales.

Bernard Leach (1887 to 1979)

Leach's financial profile in this study is extremely similar to that of Hamada, if sale of Leach 'Standard Wares' are ignored. There is a median price of £294 (in 2020 terms) compared with £260 for Hamada. £52.50 (50 guineas) was paid for a vase with 'The Tree of Life' motifs, the equivalent of £2250, in 1946 at Berkeley Galleries. The Beaux Arts Gallery accounts for 18 of the 74 pots followed by Red Rose Guild (12), Liberty's (10) and Primavera (10). The remaining 24 pots came from a total of 10 other galleries.

Michael Cardew (1901 to 1983)

Cardew's work, mainly in earthenware in the first half of the period, increased steadily in price as more stoneware was produced in the later years. The median price of the pots was £1.50 at the median date of 1938 (the 2020 equivalent of £103). The highest price paid, £25.75, was for an African-made pot in 1959 (£615 in 2020 terms). Cardew pieces were sold equally between fine art galleries (Berkeley Gallery and Brygos Gallery) and craft galleries (The Little Gallery and New Handworkers' Gallery).

William Staite Murray (1881 to 1962)

On the face of it, Murray presents an entirely different proposition from the other potters. He accounts for 10 of the 11 pots priced over £50 and for all 5 of the pots more than £100. Murray has by far the highest price for an individual pot, £157.50 (150 guineas) for 'Kwan Yin', made in the late thirties but bought by Milner-White at Leicester Galleries in 1958. The median price of his pots, with a median date of 1927 was £10.50 (or £670 in 2020). Oliver Watson puts a different slant on this overpage.

Price comparison – Leach and Staite Murray

‘The accepted wisdom is that William Staite Murray was an artist who charged artist’s prices, while Bernard Leach, the craftsman, wished to charge modest prices affordable by ordinary people. In the pre-war period, this is not borne out by the facts.

In an exhibition at the Beaux Arts Gallery in 1928, Leach offered for sale 123 pieces of stoneware for a total price of 925.5 guineas, an average of 7.5 guineas a pot.

William Staite Murray, at a sale in Paterson’s Gallery in 1927, offered 289 pieces for sale for a total price of 2,289 guineas, an average of 7.9 guineas a pot.’

Murray had, ‘proportionally, roughly the same number of pieces at 10 guineas or under as Bernard Leach.’ 229 of Murray’s and 95 of Leach’s were under 10 guineas. ‘In spite of the high prices for some pots he evidently earned the bulk of his money in roughly the same price range as Bernard Leach.’

(Oliver Watson, *Studio Pottery* ,1993)

'The Sung standard'

'The men and women in Leach's and Murray's circles had a sharply defined vision of what constituted studio pottery. Their elevated discourse was dominated by the act of throwing on the wheel which was granted semi-mythical status.... It was this branch of studio pottery which dominated the famous collections made by Eric Milner-White, Henry Bergen and George Eumorfopoulos and the purchases made by the Victoria and Albert Museum. The two canonical surveys of the studio pottery movement, George Wingfield Digby's *The Work of the Modern Potter in England* (1952) and Muriel Rose's *Artist Potters in England* (1955) also remained loyal to what Leach came to call in *A Potter's Book* 'the Sung standard.'

(Tanya Harrod in *The Crafts in Britain in the 20th Century*, 1999)

It was only in the 1950s with a new generation of potters, such as Ruth Duckworth (born 1919), William Newland (b.1919), James Tower (b.1919), Hans Coper (b.1920) Ian Auld (b. 1926) and Dan Arbeid (b.1928), that this prevailing aesthetic was challenged.

Having said that, the 'Leach' tradition continued through other potters born slightly later such as Richard Batterham (b.1936), John Leach (b.1939), Mike Dodd (b.1943), Jim Malone (b.1946) and Phil Rogers (b.1951), while Clive Bowen (b.1943) took up the slipware mantle of Michael Cardew.

London Galleries prominent in their support of studio pottery included:

New Handworkers Gallery, Percy Street then Fitzroy Square

This specialist gallery was set up in 1927 and run by the weaver Ethel Mairet, Philip Mairet and Gwendoleen Norsworthy. They sold a variety of craft work including textiles, weaving and ceramics and listed on their letter-heading work by Phyllis Barron, Michael Cardew, Bernard Leach, Romney Green and Ethel Mairet.

The Little Gallery, Ellis Street off Sloane Street

The Little Gallery was established in 1928 by Muriel Rose and Margaret Turnbull, two former employees of Dorothy Hutton at Three Shields Gallery. The two decided to go into partnership with some £1,000 between them. We know that Muriel Rose in 1928 paid herself £3 a week as Manager (the equivalent of £193 in 2020) and paid her assistants 27/6d (1.37). Rose called pots of £8 to £10 'very expensive' and pots at 10/6d (52p) 'cheap.'

Tanya Harrod writes 'it was a much more professional operation than the New Handworkers' Gallery. The Little Gallery had distinguished clients like Queen Mary , Gertrude Lawrence, Charles Laughton, Bridget D'Oyly Carte and Gerald Du Maurier. The stock was eclectic, taking in traditional crafts such as basketry and quilts from Durham and South Wales as well as ethnic craft from all over the world. Orrefors and Whitefriars glass and Wedgwood china (decorated by hand designs by the Cotswolds artists Alfred and Louise Powell) were shown with work by all the best modernist handworkers of the inter-war years.....After five years the Little Gallery began to operate at a profit but like many London galleries it closed in 1939 and did not re-open after the war.'

(Tanya Harrod, *The Crafts in Britain in the 20th Century*, 1999)

Paterson's Gallery, Old Bond Street

William Bell Paterson (1859 to 1952) set up the London gallery in 1900, having previously established himself in Glasgow. A fine art dealer, he had a small area where he displayed ceramics. Braden, Hamada, Leach, Murray and Pleydell-Bouverie all had involvement with the gallery.

Berkeley Galleries, Davies Street

William Ohly (1883 to 1955), a German refugee, was a painter and sculptor. He set up the Berkeley Galleries after the war, specialising in ethnographic art. Michael Cardew had close links with the gallery in the 1950s. After his death the gallery was run by his son until 1977.

Beaux Arts Gallery, Bruton Place, New Bond Street

The gallery was opened in 1923 by Frederick Lessore (1879 to 1951), portrait-sculptor and brother-in-law of Walter Sickert. In the late 1920s and early thirties, Reginald Wells, William Staite Murray and Bernard Leach were amongst those who exhibited there. When Lessore died in 1951 the running of the gallery was taken over by his wife, the artist Helen Lessore.

Primavera, Sloane Street

Henry Rothschild (1913 to 2009) had been destined for a career in the family metal business but instead he went in the footsteps of Muriel Rose and in 1945 opened his shop Primavera ...mixing vernacular basketry, high quality mass-produced textiles, studio ceramics and folk art from remote corners of Europe. He took up some of Muriel Rose's favoured exhibitors like the toymaker Sam Smith, the potters Bernard Leach and Katharine Pleydell-Bouverie and the weaver Jean Milne. Primavera moved to Cambridge in 1969.

Collectors

Eric Milner-White (1884 to 1963) who became Dean of York Minster in 1941.

‘The Milner-White collection of pioneer studio pottery is the finest of its kind. Formed between 1925 and 1962, it comprised at one time or another around three hundred pots representing the work of about forty potters. One hundred and seventy-three of these were presented to York City Gallery....

The collection at York is particularly rich in the work of three potters: William Staite Murray, Bernard Leach and Shoji Hamada, the men whom the Dean recognised as ‘the three Master Potters of the Century.’ He formed a special relationship with Murray, regarding him as the most original of the studio potters. Murray’s pots were far from cheap, but the Dean assembled an impressive number, resulting in the finest group of the artist’s work anywhere in the world.

He also recognised the importance of Bernard Leach and collected some of the best examples of his work. The ‘Leaping Salmon’ vase – arguably Leach’s most famous pot – was apparently Milner White’s personal favourite in the collection. After Murray and Leach, Milner-White bought more pots by the Japanese Shoji Hamada than by any other potter: fifty-four are listed in his MS catalogue.’

There is a telling sentence in Sarah Riddick's excellent account of Milner-White's fascination with studio pottery, from which the quotations above are also taken: 'he was not affluent until he inherited about £40,000 on his father's death in 1922.' (£2,325,000 in 2020).

George Eumorfopoulos (1863 to 1939)

Sarah Riddick continues in her introduction to the Milner-White collection: 'There were few serious collectors of pots in the early decades of this century.....George Eumorfopoulos was perhaps the most respected of them all, albeit largely because of his magnificent collection of early Oriental ceramics.' He had particularly close links with Charles and Nell Vyse, his near neighbours in Chelsea.

Sidney Greenslade (1867 to 1955)

Greenslade was an architect by training and architect of the National Library of Wales at Aberystwyth. The Davies sisters, Gwendoline and Margaret were huge benefactors of the arts in Wales through their bequest of Impressionist paintings, left to the National Museum of Wales, and through the development of the Gregynog Press in mid-Wales. In 1920 with a fund of £5000 (£228,500) to build up a collection for an Arts and Crafts Museum at Aberystwyth, they engaged Greenslade to become the Museum's buyer and 'consulting Curator.'

To quote the National Museum of Wales publication *What two sisters did for Wales, 2018*: 'He visited antique shops, galleries, exhibitions and artists' studios in London and his home town of Exeter to buy crafts for the Museum. The most important purchases Greenslade made were contemporary prints and ceramics. The inter-war period saw the rise of the British studio pottery movement, led by Bernard Leach, Michael Cardew, William Staite Murray, Charles Vyse and Reginald Wells. Greenslade knew many artists personally and he often bought work directly from the makers.' He maintained his buying for the collection until 1936 at which time the Davies sisters withdrew their funding.

Henry Bergen (1873 to 1950)

In 1948 Dr Bergen presented his collection of Chinese and Studio Pottery to Stoke-on-Trent City Museum and Art Gallery. The collection of 556 items includes many pots made by Bernard Leach, Shoji Hamada, Michael Cardew, Katharine Pleydell-Bouverie, Norah Braden and William Staite Murray – and 112 items marked H.B., Bergen's own mark.

'Dr. Henry Bergen was an American who taught Middle English (1100 to 1500) at the University of London. He was a friend of Bernard Leach and Shoji Hamada and visited St. Ives Pottery during his holidays. From the early 1930s he regularly visited Michael Cardew at Winchcombe Pottery so that he could decorate bowls and plates with his own designs of a 'fawn-like' animal. He wanted to use slipware as the medium for these pots. Bergen was not a potter but Michael Cardew threw the bowls and plates for Bergen to decorate by a resist method...' (Stoke Art Gallery and Museum)

In the Acknowledgments section of *A Potter's Book*, Bernard Leach wrote 'to Henry Bergen Ph.D., I am deeply indebted for constant revision and many details of fact.'

In 1981 Katharine Pleydell-Bouverie wrote 'he was the very best of friends to all potters; I don't think he ever had all the credit due to him for the help he gave Bernard with *A Potter's Book*.'

Dorothy Elmhirst (1887 to 1968) and Leonard Elmhirst (1893 to 1974)

Bernard Leach's first acknowledgment in *A Potter's Book* was 'without the help of Leonard and Dorothy Elmhirst I would never have been able to find time to disentangle years of pottery notes and to gather and organise the other material which has gone to the making of this book.' In fact they supported him financially while he wrote the book, much of which was written while he lived on the Dartington estate.

In 1925 the Elmhirsts purchased the neglected 14th century estate to embark on their 'Dartington experiment.' And in 1932, hoping to add a potter to the Dartington community, the Elmhirsts invited Bernard Leach to set up a workshop. The Elmhirsts collected the work of many studio potters, including all six potters featured in this study, and established close contacts with, amongst others, the Little Gallery and the New Handworkers' Gallery.

George Wingfield Digby (1911 to 1989) and Cornelia Wingfield Digby (1911 to 2001)

‘George Wingfield Digby had joined the textile department of the Victoria and Albert Museum in 1934. There was no vacancy in the ceramics department, an accident which left him free to collect pottery and porcelain without conflict of interest. The upheavals of the Second World War meant it was not until 1950 that together he and his wife Cornelia began nearly forty years of buying pottery and of growing friendships with Leach, Cardew and many other potters....the Wingfield Digbys eventually bought more than 150 pots by Leach and 35 pieces by Hamada.’

(Tony Birks and Michael Webb, *Bernard Leach, Hamada and their Circle*, 1992)

Postscript 1

Craftsmen Potters Shop

The first Craftsmen Potters Shop was at Lowndes Court, Carnaby Street and opened in 1960.

'A financial success from the day of opening, with an average of £80 a week in retail sales reported by December', the equivalent of £1885 in 2020. 'By 1967 sales averaged £327 a week' (the equivalent of £6070 in 2020).

(Studio Ceramics Today 1983)

Postscript 2

Hans Coper and Coventry Cathedral

'In 1962 Hans Coper produced the monumental candlesticks for Basil Spence's Coventry Cathedral, arguably Coper's greatest achievement, and certainly one of the most significant post-war commissions for ceramics..... the commission was confirmed in an instruction dated 13 February 1962, for 'six sanctuary candlesticks, for which you have estimated £100 each,' (the equivalent of £2180 per item in 2020).

(‘Hans Coper: Sculpture in Architecture’ article in Interpreting Ceramics 2012).

Thanks are due to Mary Greensted, formerly responsible for Cheltenham's Arts and Crafts collection, for kindly reading drafts of the two essays and making several helpful comments.

The book, bound by Ursula Jeakins, is covered in Katazome Shi Red Circles and the paper used within the book is Zerkall Ingres Tan.

Andy Moore is a Warwickshire-based calligrapher (www.andymoorecalligraphy.com).

Title page

Charles Laughton, the actor, was a noted collector of studio pottery. He is shown in his guise as Rembrandt (1936) surveying the London gallery scene, peering from behind a pot by Norah Braden which he once owned.

'Some of Hamada's finest pieces are in Dean Eric Milner-White's collection; Mr Charles Laughton also has an especially fine collection.' (George Wingfield Digby, *The Work of the Modern Potter in England*, 1952).