

**Studio
Pottery
Prices
1920
to
1960
in
context**

**Andy
Moore
2022**

Studio Pottery prices 1920 to 1960 in context

The first of these two books – cum essays - concentrated on the prices of studio pottery in four collections. It restricted itself to the work of six potters, Norah Braden, Michael Cardew, Shoji Hamada, Bernard Leach, Katharine Pleydell-Bouverie and William Staite Murray and went on to examine, briefly, six galleries and six collectors.

This second book attempts to place the first in a wider and clearer context. Both works, though, can be considered in their own right. Seventy of the potters active for at least part of the period are listed to indicate the types and range of pottery being produced. Potters like Michael Casson (born 1925) and Alan Caiger-Smith (1930) were at the start of their lengthy careers while the likes of Reginald Wells (1877) and Charles Vyse (1882) were at the end of theirs. Others such as Cardew, Hamada, Leach and Pleydell-Bouverie were active throughout the period.

In the initial study of 249 priced items in the four collections, unexpectedly, three-quarters (187) of them were made and sold in the 1920s and 1930s. A conscious attempt, therefore, is made here to correct that balance and concentrate on the second half of the period, particularly the 1950s. Consequently, five potters active in that decade are considered in more detail namely Hans Coper, Ray Finch, William Newland, Lucie Rie and James Tower. The story begins, though, with Bernard Leach as the dominant public figure of studio pottery in the period 1940 to 1960.

The Bank of England Inflation Calculator is again used for financial comparisons.

William Dalton	1868 to 1965
Francis Richards	1869 to 1931
Reginald Wells	1877 to 1951
Dora Lunn	1881 to 1955
William Staite Murray	1881 to 1962
Charles Vyse	1882 to 1971
Alfred Hopkins	1884 to 1940
Bernard Leach	1887 to 1979
Dora Billington	1890 to 1968
Sylvia Fox-Strangeways	1890 to 1975
Denise Wren	1891 to 1979
Shoji Hamada	1894 to 1978
Katharine Pleydell-Bouverie	1895 to 1985
Norah Braden	1901 to 2001
Michael Cardew	1901 to 1983
Lucie Rie	1902 to 1995
William Gordon	1905 to 1993
Dorothy Kemp	1905 to 2001
Heber Mathews	1907 to 1959
John Shelly	1907 to 2004
Helen Pincombe	1908 to 2004
Sam Haile	1909 to 1948
Harry Davis	1910 to 1986
Philip Wadsworth	1910 to 1991
David Leach	1911 to 2005
Margaret Rey	1911 to 2010
David Ballantyne	1913 to 1990
Walter Cole	1913 to 1999
Marianne de Trey	1913 to 2016
R J Washington	1913 to 1997
Ray Finch	1914 to 2012
Henry Hammond	1914 to 1989
Anita Hoy	1914 to 2000
Steven Sykes	1914 to 1999
Robert Fournier	1915 to 2008
Paul Barron	1917 to 1983
Peter O'Malley	1917 to 1995
Janet Leach	1918 to 1999
Ruth Duckworth	1919 to 2009
William Newland	1919 to 1998
James Tower	1919 to 1988
Geoffrey Whiting	1919 to 1988

Hans Coper	1920 to 1981
Paul Brown	1921 to 2000
Barbara Cass	1921 to 1992
Waistel Cooper	1921 to 2003
Kenneth Clark	1922 to 2012
Rosemary Wren	1922 to 2013
William Marshall	1923 to 2007
Colin Pearson	1923 to 2007
Nicholas Vergette	1923 to 1981
Michael Casson	1925 to 2003
Murray Fieldhouse	1925 to 2018
Eileen Lewenstein	1925 to 2005
Eric James Mellon	1925 to 2014
Ian Auld	1926 to 2000
Derek Davis	1926 to 2008
Mary White	1926 to 2013
Joanna Constantinidis	1927 to 2000
Margaret Hine	1927 to 1987
Dan Arbeid	1928 to 2010
Derek Clarkson	1928 to 2013
David Lloyd Jones	1928 to 1994
Derek Emms	1929 to 2004
Victor Margrie	1929 to 2005
Eileen Nisbet	1929 to 1990
Mary Rogers	1929 to ?
Ann Wynn Reeves	1929 to 2017
Alan Caiger-Smith	1930 to 2020
Sheila Fournier	1930 to 2000

Leach and Patronage

Just as it is generally acknowledged that William Staite Murray was the most dominant personality in the period 1920 to 1940, Bernard Leach was undoubtedly the major figure in the period 1940 to 1960. He became increasingly well-known from 1940 onwards (the year in which *A Potter's Book* was published) and his fame and reputation grew in subsequent decades, right through to his death in 1979.

Leach was the nearest thing that studio pottery had to a household name; as such it is easy to regard him as the typical potter of the post-war decades. Yet, he was atypical in that for a crucial part of his maturing life as a potter he was the recipient of two important acts of patronage, the first from Frances Horne, the second from Dorothy and Leonard Elmhirst at Dartington.

It is interesting and informative to see how Leach managed financially in his middle years from 1920 to 1940, aged 33 to 53. Leach returned from Japan to England in 1920, accompanied by Shoji Hamada, with the security of financial support to set up a pottery in St Ives. Leach had been loaned £2,500 (£114,270 in 2020) to buy the land and property as part of a handicraft project funded by Mrs Horne, a philanthropic resident of St Ives. She also guaranteed Leach an income of £250 (£11425) for three years ending in 1923. Hamada received patronage from a Japanese benefactor, Iseki Sozan, for the same three years.

(Financial information from Tanya Harrod, *Michael Cardew*, 2012, p.51)

Leach and Dartington

Dorothy Elmhirst (1887 to 1968) and Yorkshire-born Leonard Elmhirst (1893 to 1974) bought the then-dilapidated Dartington Estate in 1925 for the sum of £30,000 (or £1,865,000 in 2020 terms). Dorothy came from the wealthy American Whitney family and had come into a major inheritance at the age of 17 of \$15 million dollars (the equivalent of \$436 million dollars in 2020).

The crafts were central to the Dartington experiment. 'Leonard was very much the prime mover in one department – pots. Bernard Leach who was not famous when they first met him in 1925, started him off. He and Dorothy wanted advice about starting a pottery for the school. Leach said, 'For your students you should have a small collection of pots by living British potters and some from China and Korea and Japan.'

(Michael Young, *The Elmhirsts of Dartington*, 1982, p.196).

'It was not until 1931, with his finances at rock bottom, did he agree both to teach at the school and develop plans for a pottery department at Dartington which developed traditional slipware techniques and in 1933 a larger building was put up at Shinnars BridgeIn 1934 Leach travelled to Japan, at the expense of the Dartington Research Grants Board, in order 'to research making stoneware in larger quantities and finer quality than I have been able to achieve under purely handmade conditions at St Ives.'

(Tanya Harrod, *The Crafts in Britain in the 20th Century*, 1999, p.142).

On his return to England 'he promised no profits for the first five years and running costs of £1,310 (the equivalent of £94,000). By 1937 he had arranged a deal - £3,000 to the Leach Pottery over three years to finance experiments in stoneware. Though Leach kept a base at Dartington until 1949 his rural factory never came into being.'

(Tanya Harrod, *The Crafts in Britain in the 20th Century*, 1999, p.143).

This financial information is expanded upon in Emmanuel Cooper, *Bernard Leach*, 2003, p.203

'Perhaps the most tangible achievement that came out of the Dartington years was *A Potter's Book*, *the writing of which during 1939-40 was funded by the Elmhursts and which was fuelled by his inspirational visit to Japan in 1934.'

Dartington also enabled Leach's son, David, to study ceramic production at Stoke. This enabled him from 1937, 'to develop the standard range of well-designed tableware which made it a solvent concern after the war and allowed Leach to get on with what he was best at, producing handsome one-off pieces that functioned above all as Art.'

(Tanya Harrod, *The Crafts in Britain in the 20th Century*, 1999, p.143).

* Note

In the V & A catalogue, Oliver Watson reports '*A Potter's Book* had sold more than 100,000 copies in English editions by 1987 – 92,000 in hardback and 27,000 in paperback.'

Domestic ware

The first book concentrated on 'individual' pots but it needs to be remembered that many potters and potteries were often making domestic ware for everyday use. Some of the most prominent at the time and best-known since are:

Leach and Standard Ware 'One of the great triumphs of the Leach Pottery was the 'Standard Ware' range. This was not developed until just before the war when the first mail-order catalogue was issued and it grew into a considerable undertaking in 1950s and 1960s.' (Watson) Of the 12 priced items in the V & A Collection and made and bought between 1940 and 1950, the prices vary between £0.20 and £3.00, with the £0.20 items roughly equating to £10.00 in today's money (2020). Two of the twelve were bought from Heal's, the others directly from the pottery.

At the Dartington Conference in 1952 David Leach provided a considered and articulate analysis of the relationship between supply and demand in studio pottery workshops. In his account he confirmed that the turnover at St Ives 'is something like £5,000'. (£175,200 in 2020 terms).

(Report on the Dartington International Conference of Craftsmen in Pottery and Textiles, 1952, p.114)

Harry Davis who worked at St Ives between 1932 and 1937 'disagreed with many of Leach's attitudes about the importance of individual rather than functional pottery and was frustrated by his non business-like approach.' (Emmanuel Cooper, *Bernard Leach*, 2003, p.199). After working in Africa from 1937 he set up the Crowan Pottery in Cornwall in 1946. The pieces from the 1950s at the V & A, some bought from Primavera, are similar in price to those for Leach Standard Ware.

Cardew and domestic ware at Winchcombe. After three years at St Ives, Cardew set himself up at the old Greet Pottery in 1926 which had closed in 1915 after about 100 years of operation. In the early days he had help from Elijah Comfort (b.1863). Sidney Tustin joined in 1927, Charles Tustin in 1935 and Ray Finch in 1936.

The earlier pottery 'had in the main made farmhouse ware – bread-crocks, milk-pans, washing pans and flowerpots. Cardew reopened the pottery under the name 'Winchcombe Pottery' to continue the tradition of making domestic earthenwares. Six or more kiln loads were made each year, each of upward of 2,000 pieces though mostly of smaller household use than the earlier Greet types.'

(Oliver Watson, *Studio Pottery*, 1993).

Ray Finch and domestic ware at Winchcombe

Ray Finch took over the running of the pottery from 1939. 'Ray Finch wanted his independence and Michael began negotiations to sell the name, the goodwill and equipment for Winchcombe Pottery. He bought the business from Cardew in 1946. It took time to settle on a price but in the end, Finch handed over nearly £600 with £200 to follow.' The total amount of £800 in 1946 equates to £34,250 in 2020.

(Tanya Harrod, *Michael Cardew*, 2012, p.192).

Finch 'officially' retired in 1979 but continued potting until 2011. Running of the pottery was handed over to his son Mike. Winchcombe continues to this day. As Oliver Watson said in 1993: 'Its basic product has remained much the same – well-designed, well-crafted tableware. Finch was responsible for developing Cardew's wood-fired earthenware into a more practical stoneware product which has gained much popular success. His tableware, with that of St Ives, set the standards for standard-ware potters round the country.'

World War Two

The lead up to the war, the war itself and its immediate aftermath represented at least ten of the forty years under consideration. Inevitably, the war years affected those in the pottery field, as with everyone else. Here we touch upon the impact on twenty individuals.

Emigrants from Nazi Germany

Hans Coper was born in Chemnitz, Germany and fled to Britain in 1939. He was interned as an enemy alien and held in Canada for two years; on his return to Britain, he served as a conscientious objector in the Non-Combatant Corps.

Ruth Duckworth. Born Ruth Windmuller in Hamburg, she came to Liverpool in 1936, aged 17, as a refugee from the Nazi regime to join her sister and study at Liverpool Art School.

Lucie Rie. In 1938 she fled Nazi Austria and emigrated to England where she settled in London.

Henry Rothschild, founder of the Primavera gallery, was born in Frankfurt in 1913. 'After Hitler's rise to power in 1933 he was sent to England and read natural sciences at Cambridge. He became a British subject in 1938 and joined the Territorial Army's Signal Corps in 1939. It was Rothschild's war experience that set his life on a new path. Serving in the British army in Italy, he discovered the traditional weavers and potters of Tuscany and Bologna. On his return in 1944, he began to search out the English equivalents of the Italian crafts people he so admired.' (*Obituary by Andrew Greg in The Guardian 10 June 2009*)

Active service

Kenneth Clark enlisted in the 2nd New Zealand Expeditionary Force, but subsequently transferred to the Royal Navy. He was present during the Normandy landings and was mentioned in dispatches.

Walter Cole of Rye Pottery worked in camouflage from 1940 to 1945.

Bill Ismay, collector, was stationed in India as a signaller in the Royal Signal Corps.

David Leach. Conscripted into army 1941, serving with the Duke of Cornwall's Light Infantry.

William Newland. Born in New Zealand. When WW2 broke out, he joined the New Zealand Expeditionary Force and served in Greece and the Middle East, followed by three years as a prisoner of war in Italy and Germany.

James Tower spent the war working in camouflage, and in mapping at the Polish Ministry of Information.

Nicholas Vergette, served as an RAF pilot in Europe and Far East, 1941 to 1946.

Geoffrey Whiting. 1939 to 1948, army service in India. 'He was a budding architect but the experience of watching three generations of potters at Nurgaou near Delhi turned him into a potter, a decision given practical inspiration when he read '*A Potter's Book*'. (Harrod)

Other experiences and reactions

Norah Braden virtually ceased potting after 1939.

Michael Cardew abandoned attempts to establish his new pottery at Wenford Bridge in Cornwall and in 1942 went to Africa to run the pottery at Achimota College in the Gold Coast (now Ghana).

Ray Finch registered as a conscientious objector, working for the National Fire Service.

Sam Haile enlisted in the American Army while in USA in 1943. Transferred to the British Army in 1944. Worked as a sergeant-instructor in the Army Educational Corps.

Bernard Leach. 'Although I remained a pacifist during the First World War living in Japan and China, in this one when the threat of invasion became real, my hatred of Hitler and his gang, and the rousing voice of Churchill was too much for me, so.... I joined the Home Guard – now best known as Dad's Army.' (Bernard Leach, *Beyond East and West*, 1978)

Katharine Pleydell-Bouverie (whose brother Ted had been killed in 1914 in WW1) closed the pottery as she could not fire the kiln during the blackout. She continued living at the family home, Coleshill House, during the war but in 1940 it was requisitioned by a highly secret organisation, H.Q. Auxiliary Units.

Muriel Rose's Little Gallery like many London galleries closed in 1939 and did not re-open after the war.

William Staite Murray was stranded in Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe) at the start of the war. By then in his late 50s he settled in Africa and gave up potting altogether.

Teaching

Teaching/lecturing was a significant part of the careers of many potters of the period. For some this provided a degree of early financial security, for others it was important throughout their lives, in some cases as Heads of Department or Principals. Again, here are twenty examples, concentrating solely on the period 1920 to 1960. Others, such as Mick Casson, had prominent teaching roles in the years after 1960.

Ian Auld	Baghdad, Central and Camberwell Schools of Art
Paul Barron	Farnham College of Art
Dora Billington	Central School of Art
Norah Braden	Brighton School of Art
Michael Cardew	Achimota College, Ghana
Derek Clarkson	Bolton, Burnley and Stockport Schools of Art
Joanna Constantinidis	Chelmsford Technical College and School of Art
Harry Davis	Achimota College, Ghana
Murray Fieldhouse	Pendley Centre for Adult Education
Sam Haile	Hammersmith, Kingston and New York
Henry Hammond	West Surrey College of Art and Design
Victor Margrie	Harrow School of Art
Heber Mathews	Art School at Woolwich Polytechnic
William Newland	Art Education, Institute of Education, University of London
Helen Pincombe	Royal College of Art, Guildford and Willesden Schools of Art
William Staite Murray	Royal College of Art
James Tower	Bath Academy of Art, Corsham Court, Wiltshire
Nicholas Vergette	Camberwell and Central Schools of Art
Philip Wadsworth	Leeds and Poole Schools of Art
RJ Washington	Derby, Margate and Dewsbury Schools of Art

Festival of Britain 1951

A touch of colour was brought to post-war life in 1951 with the Festival of Britain. Henry Rothschild, for one, found the Festival 'fantastically stimulating.'

In the Homes and Gardens Pavilion craft, says Tanya Harrod, was 'co-opted as a branch of good modern design.' She cites, amongst other things, a handwoven rug by the founder of Edinburgh Weavers, Alistair Morton, bowls by David Pye and Hoptonwood stone panels with lettering cut by David Kindersley.

On pottery, she makes specific reference to the inclusion of: 'Harry and May Davis' hard-wearing Crowan pottery, further ceramics by Helen Pincombe and the Rye Pottery, a set of beakers and a jug by Lucie Rie,'

And in a room devoted to 'Entertainment at Home', designed by Robin Day there is reference to pottery by David Leach, Marianne de Trey, Steven Sykes, Hans Coper, Lucie Rie and William Gordon.

In other rooms 'handmade pottery was a popular alternative to industrial ceramics, led by the Leach Pottery, the Crowan Pottery and Lucie Rie and Steven Sykes.'

In the Lucie Rie Archive in the Crafts Study Centre there is a letter dated 23 August 1950 which informs her that 'a glazed white stoneware vase with lid, valued at £28, has been placed on the stock list' for the 'Homes and Gardens' section of the Festival. This amounts to £980 in 2020 terms.

Pottery was to take centre stage at the Dartington Conference of the following year.

Dartington Conference 1952

The International Conference of Craftsmen in Pottery and Textiles took place at Dartington from 17 to 27 July 1952. Backed by Dorothy and Leonard Elmhirst, and organised by Bernard Leach and Muriel Rose, it was attended by 123 people from 18 countries. Potters, textile specialists and other interested parties were represented in roughly equal measure. 17 of the 70 potters listed at the start of this essay were amongst the 44 potters, from all over the world, who attended the Conference.

‘The agenda was so dominated by Leach’s presence that the question ‘to Leach or not to Leach’ was asked..... The agenda of the thirty-six lectures, demonstrations and discussions were largely shaped by Leach’s definition of the craft world: the polarity between East and West, though there were wide-ranging lectures on education and material science, on Scandinavian ceramics and the Swiss folkcraft movement.’

(Edmund de Waal, *Bernard Leach*, 1997).

182 pots were featured in the main exhibition at Dartington with pots by Paul Barron, Michael Cardew, Hans Coper, Harry and May Davis, Marianne de Trey, Constance Dunn, William Gordon, Sam Haile, Shoji Hamada, Henry Hammond, Dorothy Kemp, Bernard Leach, David Leach, Michael Leach, William Marshall, Warren and Alix Mackenzie, Katharine Pleydell-Bouverie, Hugh Purdie, Kenneth Quick, Lucie Rie, Alex Sharp, William Staite Murray, James Tower and Philip Wadsworth. The exhibition moved on to the New Burlington Galleries in London.

The exhibition was discussed by the art critic Robert Melville in the *Architectural Review* of November 1952. He noted:

‘The general effect is of an ethnographical exhibit of the remains of a lost civilisation, of a village and 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.’

Lack of financial information – Ray Finch as an example

It was the Spanish potter Jose Artigas who coined the phrase 'To Leach or not to Leach.' Ray Finch, in those terms, was undoubtedly in the Leach camp, but always as a pragmatic craftsman rather than as a polemicist.

As Henry Rothschild commented:

'Under Cardew, slipware of bold and splendid quality was made but the pottery never flourished. Ray Finch went in for excellent stoneware and his standard ware particularly with tenmoku glaze was impressive, hard-wearing, well-shaped and was one of Primavera's steady selling key products. Ray Finch made a number of individual pieces, particularly fine large bowls and cider jars, well and boldly decorated.'

Finch is the subject of two authoritative and well-written accounts, *Winchcombe Pottery, The Cardew-Finch Tradition* by Roy Wheeler, 1998 and *Ray Finch, Craftsman Potter of the Modern Age* by John Edgeler, 2006. Yet there is virtually no information on the prices of individual pots in the two books.

Oliver Watson had written in 1993 that 'a thorough analysis of prices remains to be done.' He expanded '...it now becomes apparent that we know very little about a range of topics which are indispensable to a deeper understanding of the crafts. These reach beyond the lives of individual potters to a broader world in which potters work and in which pots are purchased and used. Virtually all writing to date has been concerned with the making of pots, who made what, when and in what style.' At this point Watson states in a note, 'this is the approach, for example, of the latest historical account by Paul Rice ie *British Studio Ceramics in the 20th Century*, 1989.'

Watson continues, 'The consumers and the mechanisms of marketing have been ignored; what sort of person was buying what sort of pot and for how much? How were the pots used and in what settings? What were the main outlets at different periods? What role did the private galleries have in determining individual success or popular taste...?'

The need for a different approach

Matters were taken one stage further by Tanya Harrod's magisterial *The Crafts in Britain in the 20th Century* 1999.

It is striking that well-researched and investigative work in the vein advocated by Watson and practiced by Harrod seems to concentrate on collectors and gallery owners rather than individual potters. Notable examples are:

Muriel Rose and the Little Gallery by Kate Lockwood 1989

Pioneer Studio Pottery, Sarah Riddick's book on the Milner-White Collection 1990

Primavera – Pioneering Craft and Design 1945 to 1995 by Andrew Greg 1995

Muriel Rose and the Little Gallery by Kate Woodhead 1989

Henry Rothschild and Primavera: The Retail, Exhibition and Collection of Craft in Post-War Britain, 1945 -1980 by Janine Barker. PhD Thesis 2015

A model for the type of publication that could and should be written on studio pottery in the period 1920 to 1960 (and, for that matter, subsequent decades) is provided by Adrian Clark's *British and Irish Art 1945 – 1951. From War to Festival*, 2010. One review read 'this highly original book puts the history back into the history of art.'

The kind of study I have in mind would need to take account of, amongst other things:

- archive material (eg from the Crafts Study Centre)
- contemporary exhibition catalogues
- commission rates levied by gallery owners
- levels of production of studio potters and potteries to examine the relationship between prices charged for individual pots against the number of pots produced per year. This factor needs to be borne in mind when, for example, on the next page, comparison is made with the price of paintings.

Such a study would help to build a clearer, accurate and more reliable picture of studio pottery in this part of the twentieth century alongside the many, more visual surveys.

Comparison with the price of contemporary paintings

In Book One it was noted that:

- 56 pots from the 1950s had a median price of £5.25 or £140 in terms of 2020 prices.
- this compared with an average price for 146 purchases in the V & A Collection in the 1950s of £6.50, the equivalent of £174 in 2020.
- in real terms, the prices of studio pottery in the 1950s was lower than it had been in the 1920s and 1930s.

The very low prices for studio pottery, even by the most respected potters of the time, are put into even sharper focus by comparison with prices paid for contemporary paintings. As an example, a total of 34 paintings from 1951 are itemised below. Information is gleaned from Adrian Clark's book:

David Bomberg (£300), Prunella Clough (£42 and £120), Robert Colquhoun (£250), Roy de Maistre (£750), Ivon Hitchens (£700), Augustus John (£400), L.S. Lowry (£105), John Minton (£105), Rodrigo Moynihan (£1000), Ben Nicholson (£850), William Nicholson (£100), Ceri Richards (£210), Matthew Smith (£450), Graham Sutherland (£157), Feliks Topolski (£200), Keith Vaughan (£89 and £350), Jack Yeats, 16 paintings (total of £6000).

The average price was £358 (or £11,500 in 2020) and the median price £375 (£12,045 in 2020).

Eric Milner-White, noted here for his exemplary collection of studio pottery, was also a collector of paintings, mainly by late nineteenth and early twentieth century British and French painters. Of 12 priced paintings in York City Art Gallery, three were Walter Sickerts and seven of them were bought from Roland, Browse and Delbanco. They ranged in price from £17 (£457 in 2020) to £860 (£21,000). Apparently, the latter painting, by Walter Greaves, was bought in the belief that it was a Whistler. The average price, in 2020 terms, was £5180. Thanks are expressed to Jenny Alexander of York Museums Trust for checking this information which, hitherto, was not readily available.

Lucie Rie and Hans Coper

Although the characters and pottery of Lucie Rie and Hans Coper are clear and distinct, their lives are inextricably linked in the post-war years. He had become her assistant in 1946 and shared her workshop at Albion Mews, Paddington, London until his move to Digswell in Hertfordshire in 1959 to set up his own studio. Given their later prominence and subsequent high prices it would be too easy to think that the pair were automatically attracting such prices in the 1950s, but that is not the case. For example, the purchase price of their pots in the V & A Collection are recorded as:

Lucie Rie	Source	Year	Price	2020 equivalent
Bowl	Berkeley Galleries	1950	£3.15	£110
Dish	Berkeley Galleries	1950	£3.15	£110
Bowl	Berkeley Galleries	1950	£2.10	£74
Teapot	The potter	1951	£2.10	£67
Bowl	The potter	1955	£12.00	£320
Bottle	The potter	1959	£18.90	£450
Bottle	The potter	1959	£6.00	£142
Bottle	The potter	1959	£5.00	£119

Hans Coper

Handled pot	The potter	1951	£6.50	£210
Vase	The potter	1954	£12.60	£355
Vase	Primavera	1958	£36.75	£875
Dish	Primavera	1958	£12.60	£300

A page entry in Lucie Rie's cash book for the period 1958 to 1964, part of the potter's Archive preserved at the Crafts Study Centre, records that for weeks beginning 16, 23 and 30 May 1958 she is paying Hans Coper a weekly wage of £9.50 (the 2020 equivalent of £225); not a princely sum. Nevertheless, financial information always has to be seen in a contemporary context; when Coper moved to Digswell in Hertfordshire in 1959 he took on a flat and a studio for £3 a week.

Lucie Rie and Hans Coper prices mid-1950s

Four invoices in the Lucie Rie Archive at the Crafts Study Centre in Farnham provide a broad picture of the prices being charged by the two potters in the mid-1950s. The venues were:

- 1953 British Industrial Design Exhibition, Zurich, Switzerland
- 1954 Windowshop, Cambridge, Massachusetts, USA
- 1955 Mollie Carter Contemporary Design, Vancouver, Canada
- 1955 Rohss Museum of Arts and Crafts, Gothenburg, Sweden.

Lucie Rie	No of pots	1950s total	2020 total	2020 average
Zurich	4	£23	£656	£164
Cambridge, Mass.	26	£24	£672	£26
Vancouver	84	£340	£9122	£109
Gothenburg	50	£229	£6144	£129
Totals	164	£616	£16594	£101

Hans Coper	No of pots	1950s total	2020 total	2020 average
Zurich	1	£4	£114	£114
Cambridge, Mass.	-	-	-	-
Vancouver	19	£214	£5742	£302
Gothenburg	16	£166	£4454	£278
Totals	36	£384	£10316	£286

In Book One, the prices of 56 pots from the 1950s were recorded with a median price of £140 and the 146 pots purchased for the V & A Collection had an average price of £174. It is interesting to note that the Lucie Rie prices are significantly below these yardsticks. Caution, though, needs to be extended. A good percentage of the pots sold here are everyday, functional stoneware items rather than more 'individual' pieces. And relatively few are in porcelain which attracted higher prices. And these can be regarded as wholesale prices as they are mainly bulk supplies. While the Copers are higher in price they are, in retrospect, and in comparison, with prices of just a few decades later, phenomenally low.

Lucie Rie in the 1950s – further comment

The compiler of the Lucie Rie archive, Sophie Heath, emphasises the high productivity and business efficiency of the Albion Mews studio:

‘The most forcible aspect of the Archive is the sheer quantity of pots represented over four decades of continuous making..... the documentation must represent at least 100 pots a month.....’

‘The realities Rie and Coper faced producing and selling tablewares in the 1950s are brought home by the retail trade magazines preserved in the Archive....one includes an advertisement for a mug made by Hans Coper commemorating the Queen’s coronation in 1952. This is a sufficiently clear contrast with the exhibitions Rie and Coper held contemporaneously at the Berkeley Galleries to illustrate the discipline and opportunism involved in making ends meet. As a business that had to operate on a viable financial footing the Lucie Rie Pottery provides a promising comparative study for the often chaotic and overdrawn finances of other post-war craft workshops.’

Lucie Rie and Hans Coper were exhibiting regularly abroad in the 1950s. Meanwhile at home, ‘several clients recur many times.... The Archive demonstrates that Primavera ordered from Rie throughout four decades. Heal’s provided a stylish outlet for the post-war crafts in their Craftsman’s Market section and stocked Rie’s pots from the 1950s through the 1980s. Liberty’s was another regular client.’

Primavera

Primavera is mentioned in Book One but its pre-eminent role as the foremost craft/pottery gallery in the immediate post-war period is worthy of more attention.

‘When Rothschild returned to Britain in 1945, he decided to set up his own business which would be committed to promoting ‘the best things whether handmade or machine made’ for the home, such items included textiles, ceramics, furnishings, domestic ware and toys. Primavera opened its doors in February 1946 at Sloane Street, London. The business extended from a retail space to an exhibition space in 1952 – this duality of purpose continued throughout Rothschild’s ownership of Primavera. In 1959 a second branch of Primavera opened at 10 King’s Parade, Cambridge.’ (Janine Barker’s PhD thesis).

According to Tony Birks:

‘In this era, Henry Rothschild was to the world of applied arts.....what Helen Lessore was to the first significant clutch of British painters at her Beaux Arts Gallery in Bruton Lane. I mention Helen Lessore in this context since, as with Rothschild, there was a social dimension to her and her gallery’s influence. Artists of all ages would gather there, and a diversity of artists would get the first chance to shine in what were in both cases quite modest premises.’ (Tony Birks, *Ruth Duckworth, Modernist Sculptor*, 2005).

‘Celebrity’ visitors to the shop ranged from Rudolf Nureyev to Sandie Shaw and from David Attenborough to Peter Ustinov. However, as his daughter Liz Rothschild stressed:

‘I suspect he found the gallery world quite pretentious and materialistic and only serving a narrow band of wealthy customers. He liked the broad base the shop attracted, the fact that beauty could be purchased for a pound and a lot more. He valued a wide range of objects as beautiful.... which would seldom if ever be found in a more formal gallery. He liked being on the high street and for the shop to feel accessible and varied not austere and forbidding....’

Primavera – pottery exhibitions

Between 1952 and 1960 Primavera held c.20 exhibitions in the Sloane Street premises, some three-quarters of them devoted to pottery. Summaries of several of them follow:

The 1953 show was called 'English Ceramics.' The potters represented included Michael Cardew, Ray Finch, William Newland, Bernard Leach, Lucie Rie, Hans Coper, Harry and May Davies and Henry Hammond as well as work by Rye Pottery and Royal Doulton.

In January 1957 Rothschild held a solo exhibition of Leach's work. Over 230 pieces were shown with prices ranging from £2 for a tenmoku mug up to £35 for a large vase with black slip sgraffito. More than three-quarters of the stock was sold; only forty-five of the pieces were unsold.

In March 1958 Rothschild held a second Bernard Leach exhibition. 162 pieces were on show with prices ranging from £0.25 for a small bottle-like vase to £30 for a large stoneware pot with tenmoku engraving.

In May 1958 Rothschild held his first exhibition of work by Hans Coper, containing about 100 stoneware pots, ranging in price from £1.05 for a bowl to £3 for flower and plant pots to the most expensive pieces, a large pot and a large bottle, both at £36.75.

In November 1958 Rothschild showed work by Katharine Pleydell-Bouverie and Helen Pincombe. There were more than two hundred pieces in the exhibition.... Two of Pincombe's vases were bought by the Victoria and Albert Museum, one for £4.20 and the other for £8.40.

(Information taken from Janine Barker)

Heal's

Tanya Harrod in an article in *Primavera: Pioneering Craft and Design 1945 – 1995*, edited by Andrew Greg identifies The Mansard Gallery and The Craftsman's Market at Heal's as notable craft outlets that Rothschild saw as his main competitors. Heal's had had a long history of supporting the visual arts. The Mansard Gallery continued to flourish as a commercial and artistic space until the 1970s.

'Of the large department stores it was the Mansard Gallery at Heal's which gave most encouragement to handicrafts. In the late 1920s Heal's ran a craft studio where makers worked under the direction of Jeanetta Cochraine and from 1917 Prudence Maufe ran the Mansard Gallery in Heal's specifically to show a mix of art, craft and design.'
(Tanya Harrod, *The Crafts in Britain in the 20th Century*, 1999)

'In the Thirties, Heal's was spending around £4,500 a year on advertising. The Mansard Gallery used a fair proportion of the budget – on invitations sent to customers (anything from 15,000 to 35,000) and press advertising.'
(Susanna Goodden, *A History of Heal's*, 1984)

Heal's (continued)

'In the post WW11 period, 'the lack of consumer goods made the crafts an attractive option for retailers in search of a 'New Look' in product design. Heal's, with their Craftsman's Market, took a special interest in the difficult post-war period, as did other department stores. David Leach recalls that just after the war Mrs McDermott from Peter Jones offered to buy the whole output of St Ives Standard Ware because their shelves were empty.'

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

'A series of successful exhibitions at the Berkeley Galleries, Primavera and the Festival of Britain led to a regular marketplace for Coper and Rie in the pottery department of the influential furniture store Heal's. The importance of the regular orders from Heal's in assisting their path as innovators is often overlooked. It was here that the crisp, upward-thrusting cups and smooth-profile saucers were first offered to the public at large. It was here, too, that the straight-handled jugs and ladles came into public view.... And it was to tableware at Heal's that Rie first applied the sgraffito technique of fine parallel or radiating lines which allowed her to avoid experimenting with other forms of surface decoration.'

(Tony Birks, *Lucie Rie and her work with Hans Coper in Pioneers of Modern Craft*, edited by Margot Coatts, 1997).

Alison Britton in an interview with Janine Barker recalls 'Heal's was full of new ceramics in the 50s and 60s. It was there that the Newlands (William and Margaret Hine) used to show and so did a lot of other people. I certainly remember going to Heal's shows early on, but it wasn't a gallery but felt gallery-ish, I think. And Liberty's also went in and out of doing craft shows.'

William Newland and James Tower

There are several parallels in the lives and careers of William Newland and James Tower. Both were born in 1919 and soon after returning from service in the war both undertook adult education classes under Dora Billington at Central School of Art. Both taught for much of their working lives, Newland at the Institute of Education, London and Tower, firstly at Bath Academy of Art and later at Brighton College of Art.

‘Newland was the key figure in the ‘Institute of Education Group’ which included Margaret Hine, James Tower and Nicholas Vergette. They were much stimulated by Picasso’s ceramics which caused great excitement when shown for the first time in London after the war, and by Scandinavian ceramics, which were the dominant ‘modern fashion.’ They adopted tin glazes, bright colours and a ‘modern’ style in decoration.’

(Oliver Watson, *Studio Pottery*, 1993, p.222)

As with their near contemporary, Ray Finch, there is little readily available information on the prices paid for their pots in the period to 1960.

The V & A Collection has four pots by William Newland, bought as follows:

			2020 equivalent
1950	Vase	£8.40	£300
1954	Figure of a bull	£10.50	£295
1957	Vase	£12.00	£295
1959	Four bottles	£6.00	£140

There is no financial information in the one publication devoted to Newland, Peter Dormer’s *William Newland*, published by Aberystwyth Arts Centre in 1996.

James Tower has two pots in the V & A Collection:

			2020 equivalent
1957	Vase	£18.00	£440
1958	Dish	£22.48	£535

Tower is notable for exhibiting on a regular basis at a London fine art gallery, Gimpel Fils, in South Molton Street. As mentioned in *The Ceramic Art of James Tower* by Timothy Wilcox, 2012 'Tower became one of a stable of young artists committed to various forms of abstraction and was shown alongside William Scott, Barbara Hepworth and leading continental figures such as Nicolas de Stael.' The only financial information in the otherwise informative text is a description of the first exhibition at Gimpel Fils in 1951 when 70 pieces were shown. 'There were three small sculptures, two horses and a woman with a cat, at the top price of eight guineas, the rest ranging from one to seven guineas.'

Note: The top price 8 guineas in 1951 corresponds to £275 in 2020.

Bill Ismay

The fifties is also significant for seeing the start of a large collection by the most prolific collector of studio pottery during the post-war period. Bill Ismay (1910 to 2001), a Wakefield librarian, collected 3,600 pots by more than 500 potters, starting in 1955. The collection is housed with the York Museums Trust.

As Helen Walsh says in her very readable and well-illustrated portrait of Ismay, *The Yorkshire Tea Ceremony*, published in 2021:

‘After settling his mother’s Estate in July 1956 Ismay received ownership of (the family home) 14 Welbeck Street and an inheritance totalling £2,545 8s 9d. This was a significant sum to inherit given that the average house cost £1,975 at the time..... On a London trip that year he bought eleven pieces by Bernard Leach, five by Hans Coper and six by Lucie Rie.....He spent between 7s 6d and £6 on pots by Leach; between £3 and £15 (£383) on pieces by Coper and between £2 and £12 on pieces by Rie.’

Another interesting financial snippet from the book relates to a large Hans Coper pot which was coming up for auction and almost identical to one he owned. The pot reached a hammer price of £9,500 (£32,800) at a sale at Sotheby’s in 1983. ‘Ismay had purchased his pot in October 1959 at a cost of £10 (£238) from the Midlands Group of Artists exhibition *Seven Artist-Craftsmen*, which also included work by Lucie Rie and James Tower.’

NB Equivalent prices in 2020 are shown in brackets.

Commissions

Commissions have not been mentioned in these two books, to date, with the sole exception of Hans Coper's monumental candlesticks for Coventry Cathedral in the slightly later date of 1962. 'Monumental' is not hyperbole in this case as the candlesticks are seven foot tall. Another regular commission from 1961 was for Winchcombe Pottery in Cranks' restaurants.

The most noteworthy post-war commissions, in the period up to 1960, are those for coffee bars in the 1950s through the work of William Newland, his wife Margaret Hine and their colleague Nicholas Vergette. They worked on ceramic tiles, sculptures and decorative items for a number of coffee bars in central London.

'Fun, irreverent, colourful and ephemeral, their work was perfectly suited to the coffee bar interiors. Their stylistic borrowings ranged from African tribal carvings and Mexican pottery to Picasso, Scandinavian ceramics and Italian maiolica'.
(Matthew Partington, *Interpreting Ceramics issue 6, 'Espresso, Exoticism and Earthenware,* 2013).

The Moo Cow milk bar in Victoria Street is a case in point. Partington describes the entrance area as a 'huge multi-coloured tile panel of cows by Vergette, alongside a wall of cubby holes bearing ceramic cows' heads by Newland and Hine and lined with real cow-hide.' Little wonder that Newland had said that he did not like the idea of 'sitting in Bloomsbury painting bamboo leaves on pots with a Chinese brush.'

Another husband-and-wife team, Kenneth Clark and Ann Wynn Reeves, was also involved in a wide range of pottery commissions in the period under the banner of Kenneth Clark Pottery.

Again, with all these interesting examples, it is a pity that there is a complete absence – except in the case of Coventry – of readily available financial information.

Concluding comments

It is fair to say that based on this rudimentary study, studio pottery prices in the period 1920 to 1960 were relatively low in relation to the contemporary cost of living. Their relative cheapness is even more marked if one compares them with the prices of studio pottery in subsequent or more recent decades, especially in the case of the more well-known potters.

I have purposely steered clear of the art/craft/design debate, but the following observations are pertinent. Firstly, Tanya Harrod draws attention to some of the ambiguities involved, using Michael Cardew as an example:

‘In the 1930s Cardew exhibited in the National Society of Painters, Sculptors, Engravers and Potters alongside sculptors like Leon Underwood and Barbara Hepworth. He sold at the New Handworkers’ Gallery alongside other studio potters and furniture makers. And he gave demonstrations at agricultural shows and tried to design prototypes for industry at Stoke-on-Trent.’ (Tanya Harrod, *The Crafts in Britain in the 20th Century*, 1999)

The craft historian and curator/writer Paul Greenhalgh makes a similar point, writing in 2002:

‘Straddled between an art and a design economy, craft often gets the worst of both worlds. It occupies an economic space where objects, though individually handmade, sell at mass-production prices. Lacking the prestige of high art or the ‘reproductability’ of product design – both characteristics economically viable – the craftsperson frequently is obliged to sell unique works at mass prices.’

Studio pottery prices only began to take off – certainly in the case of the ‘top’ potters - in the early 1980s with the advent of specialist auctions run by the main auction houses (Bonhams, Christie’s, Philips and Sotheby’s) and the arrival of more high-end London galleries promoting studio pottery such as Galerie Besson.

It is no coincidence that the timing mirrors the fact that the most prominent potters had either died recently (Hamada in 1978, Leach in 1979, Coper in 1981, Cardew in 1983) or were about to pop off this mortal coil (Pleydell-Bouverie in 1985, aged 90, and Lucie Rie in 1995, aged 93), death being an important factor in the supply side of the supply and demand equation.

Bibliography

A number of reference sources, both books and websites, have been acknowledged throughout the text. The most invaluable have been:

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

Oliver Watson, *Studio Pottery (Twentieth Century British Ceramics in the Victoria and Albert Museum Collection)*, 1993

Comment on the two essays

'Many thanks for this – prices are a very interesting topic and useful way to 'see history'. I only wish more publications would include them. So good for you to update and expand my first attempt!'

Dr Oliver Watson, Emeritus Professor of Islamic Art, University of Oxford, formerly Curator of Ceramics at the Victoria and Albert Museum.

Binding

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

Title page

The title page shows the Baptistery and nave windows of Coventry Cathedral. The foundation stone of the new cathedral was laid by Elizabeth II on 23 March 1956. The cathedral was consecrated on 25 May 1962. As well as the Sanctuary Candlesticks, mentioned in the text, Hans Coper made a pair of candlesticks for the Chapel of Christ the Servant as well as smaller candlesticks for the Lady Chapel and the Chapel of Gethsemane.

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