



# Mid-20<sup>th</sup> century British ceramics in Aotearoa

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## Abstract

Over 1949–1951 the Association of Friends of the Otago Museum purchased approximately 100 pieces of contemporary ceramic work described by them at the time as representing the best current English potters – work they felt would have a lasting value. Muriel Rose, the Crafts and Industrial Design Officer at the British Council, made the selection on their behalf and arranged transport. The group included work from Bernard Leach, the Leach Pottery, Michael Cardew, Katherine Pleydell-Bouverie, Steven Sykes, Henry Hammond and Margaret Leach, as well as Wetheriggs Pottery and examples of work from commercial factories, particularly Wedgwood, who employed highly regarded graphic artists. In 1951, HD Skinner suggested to Robert Falla, director of the Dominion Museum, that they share this group. This paper examines the acquisition as a whole, its background, and the logistics of the division between the two institutions.

## Keywords

Muriel Rose, HD Skinner, Otago Museum, studio ceramics, Terence Barrow, Bernard Leach, Michael Cardew

Over 1949–51, through the generosity of the Association of Friends of the Otago Museum, and the agency of English craft advocate, Muriel Rose, Otago Museum, Dunedin, purchased a substantial number of contemporary British ceramic works. Rose made the selections in Britain and arranged shipping to New Zealand. Most were by individual UK studio potters, established or then making their name, but the acquisition also included examples of domestic ware by traditional potteries, and of work from ceramic factories employing modern graphic designers. When the purchases were all together in Dunedin, H.D. Skinner, Director of the Otago Museum, seems to have felt that in total, the group included multiple examples of work by some artists, and exceeded the museum's display expectations. He considered whether some part of it could be used to free up funds to realise other acquisitions. With this in mind, he wrote to Robert Falla, Director of the then Dominion Museum (now Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa), and suggested they arrange to share this significant group of British ceramics between their two institutions. A figure for the Dominion Museum share was

set – £25 – and arrangements for the division of works by a third party were made, with the Dominion Museum reimbursing Otago Museum for the pieces they acquired.

In Otago, Skinner had an ambitious vision for the ceramics collection. He imagined being able to illustrate the history of pottery, especially glazed pottery, in the Middle East and Europe – albeit with a small number of examples – and worked towards the development of this aim. He sought assistance from Dora de Beer, who was living in London, to identify examples of Italian Renaissance maiolica and of English delftware that the Museum could purchase.<sup>1</sup> For modern British ceramics, he enlisted the aid of a relatively recent contact, British craft advocate Muriel Rose. He did so on the advice of William Bowyer Honey (1889–1956), for many years Keeper of Department of Ceramics at the Victoria and Albert Museum, London, and the author of *English Pottery and Porcelain, The art of the potter* and other volumes on aspects of European and Asian ceramics. Honey was also involved in the Victoria and Albert Museum's influential 1946 *Britain Can Make It* exhibition. Skinner described him as “the greatest living authority”.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> White 2020; Otago Museum 1951: 9.

<sup>2</sup> HD Skinner, letter to Robert Falla, 19 March 1951, Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa Archives.

## Otago Museum's ceramics collection

Skinner's aspirations for Otago Museum's ceramics collection were supported by the Association of Friends of the Otago Museum, established in 1926. Otago Museum's Annual Report for 1950 read: "The Association has proved itself a powerful factor in the development of the Museum... At present its principal aim is to strengthen the recently established Department of Ceramics",<sup>3</sup> a plan the Friends had signalled earlier in the decade when they said their collection efforts "on the European side... [would be concentrated] on Classical Greece and on Islamic arts and crafts, and will soon be moving into the field of modern West European ceramics, textiles and furniture".<sup>4</sup>

At that time, the Museum collection included ceramics from Egypt, Ur, from the Classical world (especially after the generous donation in 1948 of the Willi Fels Memorial Gift by Willi Fels' family), smaller numbers of Japanese, Chinese and Indonesian pieces, Medieval English ceramics and historic work from a number of English factories, and single or very small numbers of examples from some other ceramic traditions. Around this date, Dr Lindsay Rogers was also sending material acquired in Iraq, including a significant group of cuneiform tablets. The following year the Friends reported they would be looking for "Persian and Turkish glazed wares [and] a few examples of Italian and Spanish majolica" before moving into "British ceramics, especially present-day wares".<sup>5</sup>

Contemporary work was a new departure, and the work of named individual studio potters, was relatively new to the collection, too. The following year the Museum's annual report noted, "With the generous help of the Association of Friends of the Museum and the active co-operation in London of Miss Muriel Rose, the Museum secured an exceptionally fine group of pieces representing the best contemporary English potters, including Leach Pottery (20 pieces), Michael Cardew (7), Artist Potters (3), Steven and Jean Sykes, James Bourne & Sons, and Margaret Leech [sic]."<sup>6</sup>

The Association's Annual Report for 1950–51 said that: "Acting on behalf of the Association, Miss Muriel Rose, of the staff of the British Council, selected and dispatched to Otago Museum, a collection of about one hundred representative pieces of present-day British ceramics. They illustrate design and execution of artist potters,

traditional potters, and some of the great industrial firms. The collection will be first placed on display at the Association annual general meeting".<sup>7</sup>

## Muriel Rose (1897–1986)

Muriel Rose had co-owned and managed the Little Gallery, an immensely influential crafts space in Chelsea, London, from 1928–1939. The Little Gallery sold contemporary English and imported crafts, and modern manufactured goods. They stocked textiles from Great Britain and overseas, and ceramics, including work by Bernard Leach, Michael Cardew, Norah Braden and Katherine Pleydell-Bouverie,<sup>8</sup> all widely recognised now as pioneers of the twentieth century studio ceramics movement in England. For more than a decade Rose was the Crafts and Industrial Design Officer at the British Council. Her remit there was to "demonstrate to the world the nature and vitality of contemporary crafts in the UK".<sup>9</sup>

During her years with the British Council, Rose curated *Modern British Crafts* which toured the United States of America, opening at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York in 1942. She also curated *Rural Handicrafts from Great Britain*, an exhibition which was shown at venues in Australasia, shortly after World War Two. As design historian Tanya Harrod's work has shown, the idea of the handmade – often in the form of vernacular craft – played a significant part in propagandizing a national culture worth defending during World War Two.<sup>10</sup>

When it reached Dunedin in 1948, *Rural Handicrafts* had already been visited by approximately 80,000 people in venues further north. It opened at Otago Museum alongside the province's centennial exhibitions: a display of costumes from the previous century<sup>11</sup> and the Otago provincial industrial display. As well as its intrinsic interest, the exhibition created a point of direct contact with the British Council. Founded in 1934 and granted a Royal Charter in 1940, the Council's aim was "to create ... overseas a basis of friendly knowledge and understanding of the people of this country, of their philosophy and way of life, which will lead to a sympathetic appreciation of British foreign policy, whatever for the moment that policy may be and from whatever political conviction it may spring".<sup>12</sup> Today, the British Council identifies itself

3 Otago Museum, 1951: 7.

4 Association of Friends 1946: [1].

5 Association of Friends 1947: [1].

6 Otago Museum 1952: 11.

7 Fitzgerald 1951: [1].

8 Also known as Katharine Pleydell-Bouverie.

9 Vacher 2006: 37.

10 Harrod 1999.

11 White 2018.

12 British Council 2020a.

as “The United Kingdom’s international organisation for cultural relations and educational opportunities”.<sup>13</sup>

Rose was also a founding Trustee of the Crafts Study Centre, University of the Creative Arts in Farnham, Surrey, established in 1970. Professor Simon Olding, Director of the Crafts Study Centre, has said Rose “made a formidable contribution to the development of the crafts in a number of capacities... she knew everyone who had influence in the craft world”.<sup>14</sup> Honey told Skinner that Rose “could probably secure some gifts and could certainly secure lower prices than anyone else, and she had wider contacts than any other agent”.<sup>15</sup>

Rose’s reputation has remained high. In a recent tribute Kate Woodhead wrote that “Every one I contacted, without fail, praised Muriel Rose, especially for her integrity and kindness and the stringent application of high standards towards the crafts exhibited and sold at the Little Gallery”.<sup>16</sup> Lately, Rose has become a focus of renewed interest. She was one of the seven women textile collectors featured in the *Unbound* exhibition at Two Temple Place, London in 2020. Rose’s section included some of the textiles sold in the Little Gallery and “related ephemera – exhibition invitations, business cards and booklets”.<sup>17</sup>

## Who was in?

In May 1950, Rose sent a progress report on the acquisition to Skinner. “I have been keeping my undertaking for Otago Museum in mind and have a small group of pottery waiting to be dispatched including some examples from the Leach Pottery. I hope to increase this before it leaves, but there are not many opportunities to buy really first rate work at present – there is so much second rate craft-work about which will have no lasting value, and is not of the quality which we feel you require”.<sup>18</sup>

Which potters, then, did Muriel Rose select to represent mid-20<sup>th</sup> century English ceramics for a New Zealand – an Otago – audience? As for any such group when viewed in retrospect, it is a mixture of the pre-eminent, those known-to-enthusiasts, and the almost-forgotten. Included in the collection are works by Bernard Leach, the Leach Pottery, Michael Cardew, Katherine Pleydell-Bouverie, Nora Braden, William Gordon, Margaret Leach, Philip Wadsworth, Keith Murray (for Wedgwood), Henry Hammond, Steven and Jean Sykes, Wetheriggs Pottery, Foley tea sets decorated by Graham Sutherland, and examples of Wedgwood decorated with designs by Eric Ravilious or Edward Bawden.

Rose selected one-off and commercially-produced work, both handmade and industrial pieces, and work associated with or reflecting changing post-War lifestyles. Together they represented the first generation of 20<sup>th</sup> century British studio potters, and their students, many of whom reinvented traditional forms for a modern aesthetic, some inspired by traditional techniques, others more experimental; and the output of factories that sought the attention of a public interested in the new role ceramics were taking in contemporary life; work that was as decorative as it was functional.

## Bernard Leach and the Leach Pottery

Bernard Howell Leach (1887–1979) was born in Hong Kong, studied at the Slade School of Art, and lived in Japan from 1909–1920. He started making pottery there in 1911 and apprenticed himself to the sixth generation of Kenzan Japanese potters. Leach moved to England, with his friend and fellow potter, Shōji Hamada, in 1920 and established the Leach Pottery in St. Ives, Cornwall. There, Leach produced Asian-influenced ceramics, a style now frequently described as Anglo-Oriental. His manual, *A Potter’s Book*, published in 1940, was immensely influential for the following generation of potters, in Britain and elsewhere around the world, including New Zealand.

During the War, standard domestic wares made at the Leach Pottery included “six different kinds of jugs, two different sizes of beer-tankards, cake-dishes, porringers and egg-bakers, and even a lidded butter-ration pot” in celadon, tenmoku and oatmeal-coloured glazes.<sup>19</sup> After the War their catalogue included bowls, casserole dishes, lidded oven dishes and condiment containers, as well. To represent the work of the studio for New Zealand, Rose selected a range of forms – jugs, mugs, dishes, bowls, a casserole dish, an egg cup, butter dishes, a cruet set, a jam jar, a teapot (Fig. 1).

Over the decades, many potters with notable individual careers worked at the Leach Pottery. As well as Bernard Leach and Shōji Hamada, Matsubayashi Tsurunosuke (1894–1932) worked there from 1923 to 1924. Michael Cardew, Katherine Pleydell-Bouverie and Nora Braden were apprentices in the 1920s. A number of potters made utilitarian pottery for everyday use with the St Ives mark, often at the same time as they made pots that bore their own personal mark. New Zealander, Len Castle, was the first potter to be awarded a fellowship from the Association of New Zealand Art Societies, travelling

13 British Council 2020b.

14 Olding 2006: 7.

15 HD Skinner, letter to Robert Falla, 19 March 1951, Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa Archives.

16 Woodhead 2006: 3.

17 Williamson 2020.

18 Muriel Rose, letter to HD Skinner, 22 May 1950, Tūhura Otago Museum Archives.

19 De Waal 2003: 52.

to St Ives to work with Bernard Leach in 1956–57. In 1957, Peter Stichbury travelled to England to work at the Leach Pottery when he won the prestigious fellowship.<sup>20</sup> For years, other New Zealand potters, or pottery enthusiasts, visited St Ives while travelling, or to work there for varying amounts of time. In 1962, Bernard Leach visited New Zealand<sup>21</sup> and spent a month travelling here. Helen Mason commissioned a film documenting the visit, titled *Bernard Leach in New Zealand*, a copy of which is held by Ngā Taonga Sound & Vision.<sup>22</sup> “It is not often in a lifetime that opportunity is given to meet a legendary figure, and to New Zealand potters Bernard Leach had indeed become a legend. The depth of his influence could be gauged by the trepidation from which nearly every potter seemed to suffer at the prospect of meeting the great man during his recent visit to our country”<sup>23</sup> began the enthusiastic *New Zealand Potter* account. Shōji Hamada received an equally awestruck reception when he visited New Zealand in 1965.

Rose said “As perhaps you know, Bernard Leach directs a small stoneware and porcelain pottery which produces articles for domestic use made entirely by hand. These examples are in shapes and glazes his own choosing [sic.] based on his knowledge of early Chinese pottery techniques. It should be noted that these examples are not necessarily made by him individually”.<sup>24</sup> Shortly after the time of the division discussed in this paper, the Association of Friends of the Otago Museum “used the unexpended balance of the amount sent to her two years ago, in the purchase of four pieces of glazed ware by Bernard Leach”.<sup>25</sup>

Multi-talented Norah Braden (1901–2001) joined the Leach Pottery in 1925, having contacted Bernard Leach after seeing an exhibition of his ceramics. In 1928, she began work with Katherine Pleydell-Bouverie at the Cole Pottery at Mill Cottage, Coleshill, Berkshire. Rose said “it is much to be regretted that she virtually ceased working as a potter when she left Coleshill in 1936”.<sup>26</sup> Braden next moved to Sussex. She lectured at the Brighton School of Art, and at the Camberwell School of Art from 1936 until the late 1940s.<sup>27</sup>

Katherine Pleydell-Bouverie (1895–1985) became interested in ceramics after seeing pots made by Bloomsbury group artist and critic, Roger Fry. She enrolled in classes taught by Dora Billington at the Central School of Arts and Crafts, London, after having served with the Red Cross in France in WWI, and met Bernard Leach in



**Figure 1.** Beer tankard, Leach Pottery, est. 1930s–40s F51.49. Gift of the Association of Friends of the Otago Museum; Tūhura Otago Museum Collection. Photograph by Jen Copedo.

1923 at an exhibition at the Paterson Gallery.<sup>28</sup> She undertook an apprenticeship at the Leach Pottery in St Ives in 1924, then moved to her family home at Coleshill, Wiltshire where she established her own pottery. She is particularly well-known for the wood ash glazes she developed through much experimentation. In 1946 she moved to Kilmington Manor, Warminster. Pleydell-Bouverie was a founder member of the Craftsmen Potters’ Association of Great Britain and helped establish the Crafts Study centre at the Holburne Museum in Bath. Otago Museum’s wheel-thrown bottle-vase with flanged neck has a semi-matt glaze in which the crazing is highlighted with an oxide.

## Michael Cardew

Michael Cardew (1901–1983) worked at the Leach Pottery St Ives in the 1920s, the first of Bernard Leach’s students there, leaving to set up his own pottery at Winchcombe from 1926–1939. In the 1940s he taught and set up a pottery in Ghana, and was Pottery Officer in Abuja, Nigeria from 1950–1965. Back in England, he settled at Wenford Bridge Pottery and worked there on and off for the rest of his life. Muriel Rose described Michael

20 <https://collections.tepapa.govt.nz/topic/2262>.

21 The visit was sponsored by Crown Lynn Potteries, The Arts Advisory Council, The Japan Society of New Zealand, Auckland Studio Pottery, Seaboard Joinery Ltd. and the New Zealand Potter Magazine.

22 [https://www.ngataonga.org.nz/collections/catalogue/catalogue-item?record\\_id=296028](https://www.ngataonga.org.nz/collections/catalogue/catalogue-item?record_id=296028).

23 Mason 1962: 2.

24 Rose n.d.

25 Fitzgerald 1953: [2].

26 Rose 1970: 37.

27 University of Brighton 2020.

28 Crafts Study Centre 1975.

Cardew as “with Bernard Leach, probably our most outstanding living artist in this field”.<sup>29</sup> She acquired examples of the pottery he made in West Africa, and of work made in Cornwall for Otago. There are stoneware jugs, a teapot, soup pots, bowls and lidded dishes, in dark celadon, ash, cobalt oxide, or cream-coloured glazes, often with iron slip markings. Decoration ranges from gestural brush strokes and sgraffito lines to stylized fish, birds or flowers. Cardew visited New Zealand for the Pan-Pacific Arts Festival in Christchurch in 1968, connecting with local potters around the country, particularly Peter Stichbury, speaking and giving demonstrations. He visited again in 1981.



**Figure 2.** Lidded Bowl, 1949, United Kingdom, by Michael Cardew. Purchased 1952. Te Papa (CG000929).

## Art School graduates

Philip Smeale Wadsworth (1910–1991) studied under William Staite Murray at the Royal College of Art from 1932–36. He taught at Kingston and Leicester schools of art from 1936–40, at Leeds from 1946–9 and at Poole 1949–66.<sup>30</sup> A prisoner of war during World War Two, he made few pots after his return to England. His papers are held in the Crafts Study Centre Archives, University for the Creative Arts. Wadsworth was fairly well-known before the war, but as collector and dealer Paul Rice noted in 1989, the rarity of his work and lack of scholarly interest meant that he was all but forgotten post-War. The large, open mouthed, footed stoneware bowl at Otago has dark green glaze and indefinite red/brown painted patterning.

Margaret Leach (b. 1918) – no relation to Bernard Leach – was born in Cheshire in 1918. She studied at the

Liverpool School of Art, and joined the Leach Pottery in St Ives in 1941, staying until 1945. The following year Leach took over the disused Barnhouse Pottery at Chepstow, Monmouthshire and worked there until 1950 when her lease ran out. She stopped making pottery after marrying in 1956. Two of her yellow-glazed, press moulded platters with slip trailed design came to New Zealand, and one went to each museum. Rose’s *Rural Handicrafts* exhibition had featured the work of a number of rural potteries making slipware, and it is possible that the inspiration Margaret Leach took from that style of British vernacular pottery appealed.

Henry Hammond OBE (1914–1986) studied at the Royal College of Art from 1934–1938. His later work was popular in the post-War period, but Paul Rice noted that “Hammond was in several group exhibitions in the late 1930s, but his work did not attract as much attention as some of Murray’s other students. There is no accounting for this when seeing the quality of some of Hammond’s early work”.<sup>31</sup> After service in World War Two, he took up a position as Head of the Ceramics Department at the West Surrey College of Art and Design, where he taught until retiring in 1980. Best-remembered now for his brush-decorated stoneware, in the late 1940s he made oxidised slipware using local clays near a studio where he was working. Of Hammond and Margaret Leach, Muriel Rose noted “These are two of the younger artist potters who are producing earthenware in the slipware tradition”.<sup>32</sup> The piece acquired for Otago was a slip-decorated jug, with bands of pale yellow slip on a glossy brown glaze.

Steven Sykes (1914–1999) studied design at the Royal College of Art from 1933–36, specialising in stained glass. From 1946 to 1979 he taught at the Chelsea School of Art. He learned pottery techniques from his wife, Jean Sykes (née Judd, d. 1992), also a Royal College of Art graduate, who studied under William Staite Murray. “He soon evolved ingeniously decorated relief tiles... well represented in many pavilions of the South Bank Exhibition of the Festival of Britain”,<sup>33</sup> and made a number of tin-glazed red clay tiles for the Dorchester Hotel, London in 1952.<sup>34</sup> His later work includes the Chapel of Christ in Gethsemane, Coventry Cathedral, completed in 1959–60. Muriel Rose described the Sykes as “two of our younger potters ... working in a style of decoration which is very much their own, using applied embossed forms with tin glazes, lustres, etc.”<sup>35</sup>

The 1950 relief-decorated plate which came to Otago, *Susannah and the Elders*, signed by Steven Sykes, is captivating and unlike any other work in this large group. In cream, with pale green and blue accents, the beauti-

29 Rose n.d.

30 British Museum 2021.

31 Rice and Gowing 1989: 87.

32 Rose n.d.

33 Harrod 2011.

34 A group of these can be seen in Lewis 1955: fig. 386.

35 Rose n.d.

ful, married Susannah bathes in their garden on the right side of the plate, with foliage and a peacock, while two lustful, capped men watch her from under a sinuous tree on the left.<sup>36</sup> It is not surprising that Harrod and other writers tend to locate Steven Sykes among the ceramic artists who represented an alternative to the Anglo-Oriental aesthetic so strongly exemplified by the Leach Pottery and many of its associates. Although each is quite different, these more individual potters often had an Art School background, even if not in ceramics. They drew on a different range of more colourful artistic inspirations – figurative work, folk art, Classical Mediterranean traditions – and their output was perhaps accommodated by more metropolitan lifestyles.

William Gordon (1905– c.1993) was born in St Petersburg. His family moved to Scotland while he was young, then to London. He studied History and Languages at Oxford but, interested in salt glazed ceramics, joined the Briddon Pottery in Chesterfield in the 1930s. He later established the Walton Pottery Company. Rose described him as “a sculptor who only latterly became interested in pottery. He has, with considerable technical difficulty, revived the use of salt glaze and is now making moulded decorative figures, vases, etc. on a small mass production basis. He would welcome the opportunity of developing a market for this ware in New Zealand.”<sup>37</sup> (Fig. 3) The group contained a number of cast ornamental birds – duck, seagull, partridge and cockerel – black or white vases (Fig. 4), and a human bust in brown or grey.



**Figure 3.** Partridge by William Gordon, Walton Pottery Co., c. 1950. F51.93. Gift of the Association of Friends of the Otago Museum; Tūhura Otago Museum Collection. Photograph by Jen Copedo.



**Figure 4.** Vase, 1946–1956, Derby, by Walton Pottery Co., William Gordon. Purchased 1952. CC BY-NC-ND 4.0. Te Papa (CG000362).

### Traditional potteries

Wetheriggs Pottery, in Penrith, Cumberland (c. 1860 – c.1960s) was a traditional rural pottery, established in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century. Rose thought it was probably the last remaining in England where domestic work was made in the slipware tradition, although the examples of their work she sent were not limited to this style (Fig. 5).

There were jugs (Fig. 6) and beakers by Joseph Bourne & Son Ltd, a stoneware and earthenware manufacturer in Denby, Derbyshire. Established in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, they initially made utilitarian salt-glazed stonewares then, in the 1920s and 1930s, expanded their range, employed designers and produced more tableware. The works in this group don't fully represent their output in the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century, when they also produced a wider colour range and some more ornamental lines. They were, however, practical, more affordable than pieces from a number of the studio potters, and from a firm with a strong rural English tradition.

36 Set in Biblical times, in Babylon, the story of the beautiful and virtuous Susanna, married to Joakim but falsely accused of adultery by two elders/judges, is included in the Apocrypha. She is cleared of the charge – and her life saved – by the wisdom and courage of Daniel.

37 Rose n.d.



**Figure 5.** Wetheriggs Pottery mugs, c. 1930s–1940s. F51.47 Gift of the Association of Friends of the Otago Museum; Tūhura Otago Museum Collection. Photograph by Jen Copedo.



**Figure 6.** Jug, early 20<sup>th</sup> century, by Joseph Bourne and Son, Ltd. F51. 24. Gift of the Association of Friends of the Otago Museum; Tūhura Otago Museum Collection. Photograph by Jen Copedo.

## Factory work

The collection contained work from larger-scale industrial enterprises, too. E Brain & Co. Ltd tea sets decorated with artist Graham Sutherland’s *Green Spot* (Fig. 7) and *White Rose* designs (both represented in the V&A collections) were included. London-born Graham Vivian Sutherland OM (1903–1980) worked in glass,

fabrics, prints and portraits. He studied at Goldsmiths College and later taught at the Chelsea School of Art and at Goldsmiths College. Sutherland served as an official war artist in World War Two and after the War was commissioned to design the central tapestry in the new Coventry Cathedral.



**Figure 7.** *Green Spot* teapot designed by Graham Sutherland, E. Brain & Co. Ltd (Foley), c. 1939. F51.12. Gift of the Association of Friends of the Otago Museum; Tūhura Otago Museum Collection. Photograph by Jen Copedo.

There was also a number of Wedgwood ceramics, chosen for their modernist style. The collection included examples of Wedgwood’s *Persephone* (sometimes also called harvest festival) and *Napoleon Ivy* designs on different shapes. Items decorated with designs from the artist Eric William Ravilious (1903–1942), a British painter, designer, book illustrator and wood-engraver were also acquired (Fig. 8).

Ravilious studied design at the Royal College of Art, and taught part-time at both the Eastbourne School of Art and the Royal College of Art. In the 1930s he received a commission from Wedgwood to create ceramic designs for their use, the production of which continued into the 1950s. Most are still popular today. His watercolours and woodcuts meant his work was familiar to the British public, and his varied depictions of southern English landscapes have a charm that is both modern and evocative. Their flat-patterning worked well when translated into modernist ceramics. One writer captured a sense of the appeal when he wrote, “His delight in the world informs his work”, and quoted the scholar, Alan Powers, who said that Ravilious managed to generate happiness.<sup>38</sup> It extends to his ceramic work. A biographical documentary, ‘Eric Ravilious: Drawn to War’, was released in 2022.

Among his designs for Wedgwood were a number of transfer printed mugs – one for George VI’s coronation; one commemorating the Wedgwood factory’s move to Barlaston Potteries; and an Alphabet mug, designed as part of a set of nursery ware which matched bands of letters to images, such O above an octopus, U above an

38 Laity 2011.

umbrella, etc. The Otago purchase included examples of all these – two of the alphabet mug; one green, one yellow – and a Garden implements pattern beaker. As the selection demonstrates, modern factory pottery in Britain was diverse in its design and purpose. It was designed for children and adults, commemorated ceremonial, corporate and sporting events, and alluded to classical and recreational events, from travel to gardening.



**Figure 8.** *Boat Race Day* bowl, Josiah Wedgwood & Sons Ltd., ca. 1938. F49.6 Gift of the Association of Friends of the Otago Museum; Tūhura Otago Museum Collection. Photograph by Jen Copedo.

Various works designed by Auckland-born Keith Day Pearce Murray (1892–1981), who emigrated to England in 1906, were also included. Following an illustrious time with the RAF and the RFC during WWI, Murray enrolled in the Architectural Association School of Architecture, graduating in 1921. In the inter-War years, he worked as an industrial designer of glass – he worked exclusively for Stevens and Williams on a freelance basis from 1932–39 – and of ceramics. He worked for Wedgwood, also on a freelance basis, for a number of years until 1948. “In 1933 there was an ‘Exhibition of new Wedgwood shapes designed by Keith Murray’ at John Lewis in Oxford Street, his work appeared in the exhibition ‘British industrial art in relation to the home’ at Dorland Hall, and he was awarded a Gold medal at the 5<sup>th</sup> Triennale Milan in this same year. As well as *Britain Can Make It* (1946), his work featured in the exhibition of British Art in Industry (1935), the Paris Exposition (1937) and Design at Work (1948)”.<sup>39</sup>

The sleek shapes of Murray’s modern designs and their almost architectural Art Deco aesthetic were in marked contrast to many of Wedgwood’s earlier, more ornate patterns. Monochrome or two-tone, they featured some of the company’s recently developed glazes: moonstone, a matt straw or matt green; blue or grey. The combinations of shape, glaze, and restrained linear decoration were new, easily recognised, and appealing to the public. Commercially successful when first produced, they are also sought by collectors today. The Wedgwood Company,

through Rose, presented a teapot from their post-World War Two earthenware Commonwealth service, (Fig. 9) designed by Murray, to Otago Museum.



**Figure 9.** Commonwealth shape teapot designed by Keith Murray, c.1946–8. F51.36. Gift of Wedgwood; Tūhura Otago Museum Collection. Photograph by Jen Copedo.

The New Zealand press kept local readers acquainted with Murray’s career, as this excerpt from a 1936 article in the *New Zealand Herald* shows: “The Wedgwood Exhibition at the Grafton Galleries has an added interest for New Zealanders as the arrangement of the hall and of the delightful exhibits was entrusted to Mr. Keith Murray, formerly of Auckland, whose chaste designs for pottery, cut glass and silver are becoming daily better known. ‘In the matter of form,’ remarks the Times, ‘Mr. Murray is perhaps Messrs. Wedgwood’s most successful designer, his work being at the same time original and unaffected. His set of beer or, cider jug, with mugs, in moonstone, gives new satisfaction every time it is seen’”.<sup>40</sup> (Fig. 10)

As part of the group, the New Zealand Shipping Company also gifted a number of pieces from a dinner set specially made by Wedgwood for use on their liners, with lithograph decorations designed by Edward Bawden, A.R.A. (Fig. 11). Bawden taught at the Royal College of Art and was best known for his wood engravings. In the late 1930s, one of his students – Victor Skellern, then Art Director at Wedgwood, invited Bawden (among other artists) to submit patterns for use on the company’s ceramics.<sup>41</sup>

## Building the collection

Rose acquired the works from a number of sources. Some of the Michael Cardew pieces were purchased from an exhibition of his work, possibly at the Berkeley Galleries, and the Katherine Pleydell-Bouverie bottles, the Philip Wadsworth bowl, and many of the factory-made

39 Kutilainen 2016.

40 *New Zealand Herald*, 15 May 1936: 8.

41 Casey 2001: 183.



**Figure 10.** Moonstone beer jug, shape 3822, 3 ¼ pints, 1930s–1940s. F49.11. Gift of the Association of Friends of the Otago Museum; Tūhura Otago Museum Collection. Photograph by Jen Copedo.

works were purchased from the London gallery, Dunbar Hay, Ltd., which sold modern design. Founded in 1936 by Cecilia Dunbar Kilburn and Athole Hay, Dunbar Hay closed shortly after the beginning of World War Two and did not reopen. The building was bombed, and the residue of the stock was disposed of shortly after the War.

As well as the ceramics that Rose did purchase, it is interesting to consider whose work she didn't. There were no pieces by Lucie Rie, Hans Coper, William Staite Murray, William Newland, Margaret Hine, Sam Haile, Marianne de Trey, Dora Billington, Ray Finch, Denise Wren... Rose's admiration and support of Bernard Leach and his work has frequently been commented on but it was not to the complete exclusion of other styles or practitioners. Garth Clark, for instance, describes her as an admirer of Hans Coper.<sup>42</sup> In her own writing, albeit later than the time of the Otago Museum purchases, she noted the "elegant simplicity" of Rie's shapes,<sup>43</sup> Staite Murray's "accomplished technique"<sup>44</sup> and the admirable range and technique of his glazes, and called Sam Haile the "most notable of Murray's students",<sup>45</sup> quoting Patrick Heron writing that Haile's pots were "the first modern pots that bore any relation to contemporary



**Figure 11.** Dinner plate, 4727 shape, New Zealand Shipping Company service designed by Edward Bawden, Josiah Wedgwood & Sons Ltd, c. 1950. F51.37. Gift of the New Zealand Shipping Company; Tūhura Otago Museum Collection. Photograph by Jen Copedo.

painting".<sup>46</sup> It seems unlikely, however, that we will ever know if it was price, (un)availability or some other factor that meant work by these or other ceramic artists was not among the group sent to New Zealand. Nevertheless, it is worth remembering her comment to Skinner that there were few opportunities to purchase what she described as "really first rate work" at that time.

Whilst recognising Rose's expertise, Skinner occasionally offered a personal opinion. He had access to a small number of relevant books. Honey (1946), and Haggart (1946) are still in Otago Museum's library. He wrote mentioning two figures in Haggart's *Recent Ceramic Sculpture in Great Britain*: "Plate 5, for instance, shows a Rugby player, and would excite wide interest in New Zealand, not exclusively from ceramicists. Plate 36 in the same volume, by Freda Skinner<sup>47</sup> is a very spirited piece".<sup>48</sup> The only aspect of Rose's selections on which he expressed a negative view at the time, was to suggest there were more examples of William Gordon's work than he thought necessary. Although best and primarily known as an anthropologist and archaeologist, later in life Skinner mooted the idea of taking on the role of Honorary Curator of Ceramics after his retirement as Otago Museum's Director, and in the early 1960s he gave a group of figures made by early English ceramic factories to the Museum, in memory of his wife, Eva.

42 Clark 2003: 174.

43 Rose 1970: 45.

44 Rose 1970: 42.

45 Rose 1970: 43.

46 Rose 1970: 44.

47 HD Skinner, letter to Muriel Rose, 31 January 1951, Tūhura Otago Museum Archives.

48 HD Skinner, letter to Muriel Rose, 31 January 1951, Tūhura Otago Museum Archives.

## Too much of a good thing?

In receipt of two consignments, and with details of the third to hand, Skinner reconsidered his position. “When going round your galleries on my last visit I was much interested in your furniture and ceramics”, he wrote to Falla at the Dominion Museum, “It has since struck me that you might be inclined to share in a purchase we have made of contemporary British ceramics [which]... constitutes a good deal more than we can ever show. Do you feel like taking say £25 worth? ... And it would help our Association of Friends, who advanced the money but now feel that some of it might better have gone for ceramics from other fields”.<sup>49</sup> Falla agreed.

A discussion about how best to make the selection of work for Wellington followed. Skinner suggested that Terence Barrow (1923–2001), Curator and ethnologist at the Dominion Museum from 1948–1965, travel to Dunedin to undertake the task and also give a talk to the Association of Friends of the Otago Museum, to mark the opening of an exhibition of the ceramics: their gift. Barrow had “learnt the rudiments of potting from Len Castle”<sup>50</sup> and was a foundation member of the New Zealand Society of Potters. Barrow, however, declined the invitation, citing work stress. He suggested three people in Dunedin, all of whom he considered could give the talk: O.C. Stephens, the potter; Alan Howie, arts teacher at King Edward Technical College (a forerunner of the Dunedin Art School); and – his top pick – J.E.P. Murphy of the School of Home Science, University of Otago.

Skinner had at one time thought of asking Robert Nettleton Field (1899–1987) to open the exhibition. Field had taught at the Dunedin School of Art (DSA), studied pottery at Camberwell School of Art during a period of leave in London in the 1930s, and incorporated it as an evening school subject at the DSA on his return, but it seems that Barrow’s suggestion appealed and J.E.P. Murphy was invited to speak at the exhibition opening. Skinner wrote to Falla that he would “ask Mr. J.E.P. Murphy, of the Home Science Department, who is a practical potter, much interested in design, to represent your museum in the division of the pottery pieces. Mr. Murphy is personally known to Mr. Barrow”.<sup>51</sup>

Murphy had been appointed as Senior Lecturer in Craft & Design at the School of Home Science at the University of Otago in 1948. He was a graduate of the Leeds College of Art, and of the Slade School of Fine Art, where he gained the Slade Prize for Drawing. In his first

year in Dunedin he taught classes in the history of art and design, and craft classes in jewellery, metalwork, weaving, block printing, and interior decoration. The following year he delivered a 20-lecture course on the origins and significance of modern art for the WEA,<sup>52</sup> presented talks on Radio 4YA, and exhibited paintings with the Otago Art Society. When he departed on refresher leave in 1953 it was to spend six months at the University of Perugia, as well as study time in Rome, Florence and Milan, followed by a period working under Hugh Casson at the Department of Interior Design, Royal College of Art, London.<sup>53</sup> After some months in Italy and England, however, he resigned from his Otago position during his study time at the Royal College of Art, saying he planned to go into business in an interior decorating firm in Leeds.<sup>54</sup>

In 1951 Skinner wrote to Barrow, “J.E.P. Murphy has selected the pottery for you and I enclose a list of it, price totalling £25. 12. 3d. These I am having packed for you and will despatch, freight forward”.<sup>55</sup> The list sent with the letter comprised:

A Bernard Leach tureen  
 Four pieces by Michael Cardew: a covered bowl, a lidded soup pot, a dish and a small bowl  
 One by “K. Braden”  
 A Katherine Pleydell-Bouverie bottle  
 A group of pieces from the Leach Pottery: a flat dish, a small bowl, three jugs and a pitcher  
 An earthenware beaker by James Bourne & Son  
 An oval slipware dish by Margaret Leach  
 Two William Gordon vases, a bust, an ornamental cockerel, and a lamp base  
 And four Wedgwood pieces: a late 1930s Napoleon Ivy pattern dish (Fig. 12), a 1939 serving dish, a powder box, and a c. 1900 cup (Fig. 13)

It seems to have been a relatively even-handed division. The Cardew, Leach Pottery, Bourne & Son, and William Gordon works were apportioned between the two institutions. Dunedin and Otago each got one of the two Katherine Pleydell-Bouverie bottles, and one of the two Margaret Leach slipware dishes. The choice most open to question was to send the single Norah Braden work to Wellington. Her reputation even in 1951 was impressive – Bernard Leach is said to have described her as “the most naturally gifted of all his pupils”<sup>56</sup> – and to leave Otago with no example of her work must speak to Murphy’s lack of partiality to the province in which he then lived and worked. On receipt, Barrow noted there

49 HD Skinner, letter to Robert Falla, 19 March 1951, Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa Archives.

50 Mason 1967: 12.

51 HD Skinner to Robert Falla, 19 July 1951, Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa Archives.

52 *Otago Daily Times*, 27 April 1949: 10.

53 Anon 1953: 63.

54 Anon 1954: 79.

55 HD Skinner, letter to Terence Barrow, 21 August 1951, Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa Archives.

56 Rice and Gowing 1989: 61.



**Figure 12.** Napoleon Ivy plate, 1937–1939, England, by Josiah Wedgwood and Sons Ltd. Purchased 1952. CC BY-NC-ND 4.0. Te Papa (CG000429).



**Figure 13.** Cup and saucer, 1900s, Staffordshire, by Josiah Wedgwood and Sons Ltd. Purchased 1952. CC BY-NC-ND 4.0. Te Papa (CG000428).

were some discrepancies between the earlier list and the actual Cardew works that arrived, but said that since they seemed to be to the advantage of the Dominion Museum he was happy to let things stand. One can only speculate whether or not he would have made a noticeably different set of choices to Murphy's.

Murphy spoke on design in modern ceramics at the Association of Friends of the Otago Museum's annual *Conversazione*, on 17 October 1951. The talk was attended by about 170 guests, to whom the English ceramics were shown at the Museum for the first time.<sup>57</sup> It was Barrow who introduced a mention of local ceramic artists

to the correspondence. "New Zealand is now beginning to produce it [sic.] own artist-potters and their work is worthy of a place in museum collections", he wrote, after praising Michael Cardew's work. "Also there is a pottery in Havelock North (Hawkes Bay)<sup>58</sup> which I once worked at for some weeks, and visited during my holiday there last week, which produces a well-thrown earthenware. It is owned and worked in conjunction with an orchard by a Mr. H. Fulton and his sons. However, their merit is in a peasant-like unconsciousness which does not always run true to form, so it is necessary to select pots at first hand. I think the most promising young potter in New Zealand is Leonard Castle of Auckland. A former student of R. N. Field's".<sup>59</sup> Perhaps as a consequence of this comment – or perhaps not – the Association of Friends of the Otago Museum donated the first examples of Len Castle's work in its collection to Otago Museum in 1953: a group of salt glazed stoneware vessels and a small press moulded earthenware dish with slip decoration (Fig. 14).



**Figure 14.** Salt glazed stoneware vase by Len Castle, early 1950s. F53.232. Gift of the Association of Friends of the Otago Museum; Tūhura Otago Museum Collection. Photograph by Jen Copedo.

## Conclusion

Acknowledging the demand for contemporary ceramics in post-World War Two England, it seems Otago was extremely fortunate in the work it acquired. Rose was working on her book *Artist Potters in England* when in correspondence with Skinner, although it was not published

<sup>57</sup> Otago Museum 1952: 6.

<sup>58</sup> Te Mata Pottery.

<sup>59</sup> Terence Barrow to HD Skinner, 3 January 1951, Otago Museum Archives.

until 1955. Its first edition included chapters on Bernard Leach, the Leach Pottery, Shōji Hamada, Michael Cardew, Katherine Pleydell-Bouverie, Norah Braden, William Staite Murray and his pupils (including Henry Hammond), and Lucie Rie and Hans Coper. A second edition appeared in 1970 and included 12 new potters. In the Foreword to the second edition, Robert Charlston (then Keeper of Ceramics at the Victoria and Albert Museum) wrote that the “‘sifting process’ effected by time has done little to alter her original judgments, but her survey of work done since the original edition has led to an access of fresh masterpieces illustrated among the Plates”.<sup>60</sup>

Rose’s selections for Otago Museum’s collection are matched by those of the major institutions in England. Oliver Watson notes that in the 1940s the Victoria and Albert Museum acquired 11 pieces for their ceramics collection – including work by Norah Braden, the Leach Pottery, Ray Finch and tile panels by Bernard Leach and Dora Billington. In the 1950s, among the 168 pieces by 54 potters added were work by Bernard Leach, Michael Cardew, the Leach Pottery, Henry Hammond, Steven Sykes and William Gordon.<sup>61</sup>

Rose had a strong influence on the formation of the collection of the Crafts Study Centre at the University for the Creative Arts, in Surrey, too. Professor Felicity Aylieff (a ceramicist and Professor of Ceramics & Glass at the Royal College of Art) wrote of that collection that it “remains crucial in many ways, not least for the next generation of makers to understand whose shoulders they are standing on”.<sup>62</sup> The same could also be said of the ceramic work shipped to Otago 70 years ago.

Late in 1949, Mark Hanan, Chair of Otago Museum’s Management Committee, reported that the material selected by Muriel Rose was part of “an endeavour to obtain representative pieces tracing the development of ceramics as first manufactured in China until the present day. Besides giving people a knowledge of design and development the section [of displayed ceramics] would also act as a guide to public taste.”<sup>63</sup> It is uncomfortable to read the last apparently authoritarian part of his comments now, but that aside, he was one of a series of commentators who verbalised the idea of Otago Museum’s aim to build a representative ceramic collection. With limited budget and opportunities, it was no small ambition, but with support from experts and collectors like Muriel Rose, the Museum ultimately acquired a small but significant collection that has been augmented by subsequent acquisitions.

In 1957, Otago Museum hosted the first New Zealand Studio Potters exhibition, organised by O.C. Stephens. The Museum acquired work shown there<sup>64</sup> and those (and subsequent) pieces of New Zealand studio ceramics have

come to be of as much interest to some visitors as the 1930s and 1940s British potters were to an earlier generation.

Soon after the exhibition, Stephens wrote that Otago Museum contained “excellent study material for the potter, and when visiting Dunedin it is as well to reserve plenty of time for a thorough examination of its treasures. Though small, when compared with the great museums of the world, the ceramic collection is as representative as you would find elsewhere...”

“In December 1961, a special hall for the display of European decorative arts was opened... [which included] a chronological arrangement of English pottery from prehistoric times to the present day. This includes Medieval pottery..., tin-glazed wares, Wedgwood wares, specimens by Victorian ‘artist potters’, and contemporary work by such potters as Bernard Leach, Margaret Leach, Michael Cardew, Henry Hammond and S. and J. Sykes. There is also a group of modern commercial wares. In the New Zealand section are pieces by L.R. Castle, T.T. Barrow, Helen Mason, Patricia Perrin, Helen Dawson, O.C. Stephens and others.”<sup>65</sup>

There is a sense in which Stephens’ summary stands, though written 60 years ago. Tūhura Otago Museum currently has a ceramic collection in which more examples of work by a greater number of potters from a broader range of locations are represented, but is still a place where makers, students and members of the public can visit to see Egyptian, Greek, Etruscan, Roman or Islamic ceramics, English pottery from Medieval times to tin-glazed wares, Wedgwood, and 20<sup>th</sup> century work designed by Keith Murray or Eric Ravilious, made by Bernard Leach or Michael Cardew; New Zealand work made by Len Castle, Terence Barrow, Helen Mason, and O.C. Stephens; Madeleine Child and Jim Cooper.

The acquisition of work by British and New Zealand studio potters, since the gift discussed in this paper, has included many donations from individuals. Their interests and contacts have had an impact on the shape of the collection. Dunedin potter, Ina Arthur, for example, donated examples of work from potters she met and exhibitions she saw when travelling in the UK – her potter’s pilgrimage. Work by Kenneth Quick, Reg Southcliffe, Frank and Janet Harmer, Janet Leach, Raymond Finch, Geoffrey Whiting, and Kenneth Clarke-decorated tiles; well-known names though not necessarily major works.

The ceramic stories have altered, too. It is no longer necessarily technique, glaze recipe, material, and historic influences that spark a connection. The Museum’s exhibition of the Ralph Hotere Ceramics Collection – all Aotearoa studio ceramics – made clear that Hotere’s points of contact with, and relationship to, the makers

60 Rose 1970: 5.

61 Watson 1993: 39.

62 Bertram 2020.

63 *Otago Daily Times*, 7 December 1949: 8.

64 White 2021.

65 Stephens 1963.

were of at least equal interest to visitors, as were assessments of the individual works.

While contemporary potters may now be drawn to work that appears more cutting-edge today, the acquisition facilitated by Muriel Rose remains significant. That group has stood the test of time, viewed both from the perspective of academic and critical assessments of the individual artists and designers, not perhaps as a fully rounded view of mid-century British studio ceramics, but in its capacity to inspire new generations of potters, of enduring value to historians and collectors, and enjoyed by thousands of visitors to the gallery where many of the pieces are still on display.

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New Zealand newspaper articles were accessed through the Papers Past website, <https://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/> which is copyright to the National Library of New Zealand Te Puna Mātauranga o Aotearoa.

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