

University for the Creative Arts
Research Project Portfolios

Bernard Leach: Discovered Archives

By Simon Olding



Project Details

Name of Researcher:	Professor Simon Olding
Name of Output:	Bernard Leach: Discovered Archives
UCARO link/s:	https://research.uca.ac.uk/5549/
Output Type:	T – Other; multi-component project comprising book edited by and with contribution by researcher, and curated exhibition
Year and mode of dissemination:	<p>BOOK</p> <p>Simon Olding (ed.) (2020) <i>Bernard Leach: Discovered Archives</i>. Farnham: Crafts Study Centre. ISBN 978-1-9162971-1-1</p> <p>EXHIBITIONS</p> <p><i>The Leach Pottery: 100 Years On From St Ives</i>, Crafts Study Centre, Farnham, September 29th 2020 - November 5th, 2020 and December 1st 2020 - December 11th 2020 (impacted by Covid-19)</p> <p><i>Leach in Japan: Unpublished Etchings, Drawings and Letters</i>, Mashiko Museum of Ceramic Art (postponed until 2022 with date yet to be finalised, due to Covid-19)</p>
Key Words:	Bernard Leach, ceramics, studio pottery, archives, curation

Synopsis

Bernard Leach: Discovered Archives is a multi-component research output which consists of a peer reviewed book edited by Professor Simon Olding, an exhibition at the Crafts Study Centre in Farnham, UK, and a parallel exhibition at the Mashiko Museum of Ceramic Art in Japan, both curated by Olding.

The book considers unpublished archives, letters (between Leach and Laurie Cookes) and original artworks by Bernard Leach. The Crafts Study Centre (CSC) holds the world's most comprehensive museum archive and collection of works by the influential studio potter. The CSC acquired two major new archives in 2019, and the book reveals the content and context of these. It includes a chapter by Olding on Bernard Leach's personal collection of ceramics. This is the first comprehensive discussion in print, and is based on recently discovered archives and testimonies, as well as a new analysis of the content and purpose of the display of the collections at the

Leach Pottery. The book also includes a chapter by Olding on the unpublished Alan Bell Archive, a major private collection of etchings, drawings, memorabilia and three paintings by Leach, given by him to Alan Bell in the 1970s.

The exhibitions explore the same material through a different format. The exhibition in Farnham reconsidered the Leach collections that have been acquired by the CSC since the year 2000 when the CSC relocated to Farnham, while the Mashiko exhibition will mark the first display in Japan of materials from the Alan Bell Archive and the Laurie Cookes letters.

This portfolio outlines the project's underpinning research context, aims and methods and presents a PDF of the *Bernard Leach: Discovered Archives* book. It also includes images of the CSC exhibition. Supporting information on funding and visitor numbers is also included.



*The Leach Pottery: 100 Years On
From St Ives, Crafts Study Centre,
Farnham, 2020*



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Context

Simon Olding has long-established expertise on the subject of Bernard Leach and the Leach Pottery, in part through his role as Director of the Crafts Study Centre (CSC) since 2002. Leach was an influential early champion of the CSC and donated a substantial number of his own ceramics, including rare early pieces, to the Centre, as well as his personal study collection of East Asian and other ceramics and early English pottery.

Since 2000 Olding has maintained close associations with major donors of Leach materials with a provenance that leads directly back to Bernard Leach himself. These donors have since 2010 made a notable gift of the metal plates used by Leach for his etchings between 1908 and the mid 1920s which formed the basis for an exhibition and book by Olding, *The Etchings of Bernard Leach* (2010), published in partnership with The Leach Pottery, St Ives. Subsequently they have added the original research prints for the etchings and other archives to the CSC (2015 and 2019).

This most recent research project focuses on a new aspect of Leach through previously unexplored archival material such

as his etchings, drawings and collecting practices. The CSC exhibition focuses on a number of themes, including: works in the Leach Pottery Permanent Collection, subsequently donated to the CSC; works from Leach's Source collection; and new acquisitions of ceramics by Bernard and Janet Leach. The Mashiko exhibition includes etchings, drawings, paintings and other associated materials from the Alan Bell archive, seen in public for the first time; Laurie Cookes/Bernard Leach letters seen in public for the first time; a display highlighting Leach's interest in furniture and textile design.

The project is disseminated in the centenary year of the founding of the Leach Pottery, St Ives, and contributes to the international programme of events the Pottery has curated, lending further significance and context to Olding's insights. This has also led to further dissemination as Olding has been invited to give lectures on the topic at the Paul Mellon Centre and the English Ceramic Circle.

REFERENCES

Olding, S. (2010) *The Etchings of Bernard Leach*. Farnham, UK: Crafts Study Centre and The Leach Pottery.

Aims, Questions and Insights

Research aims:

To reconsider the Leach collections that have been acquired by the CSC since the year 2000 when the CSC relocated to Farnham and to publish new works by Leach

To share previously unexplored aspects of Bernard Leach's life and practice through the critical analysis of primary source materials

Research questions:

What can Leach's drawings, etchings and letters tell us about his studio pottery and his professional career as a 'fine artist'?

How do his private letters and archives shed new light on his practice, especially in Japan, and his contribution to Mingei ideals?

Research insights and contribution:

The book and exhibition reveal for the first time the detailed and complex linked narrative of Leach's personal collection of ceramics, its meaning and contexts. The book in particular provides new insights into the associated sales and gift made by Bernard and Janet Leach, adding newly discovered information and artefacts into the public domain and building on Emmanuel Cooper's biography of Leach (*Bernard Leach: Life and Work*, 2003). New ceramics, drawings and etchings are published for the first time, and analysed by Olding. Olding's invitation to two Japanese writers extends Anglo-Japanese research on Leach. Dr Sadahiro Suzuki's contribution extends the knowledge of Leach's trip to Japan in 1934-35 through a forensic reading of unpublished letters and establishes Leach as a figure of authority in the Mingei movement in Japan. Yuko Matsuzaki makes a new detailed comparative study of the counterbalance of Leach and Shoji Hamada's collections.

Research Methods and Process

ARCHIVAL RESEARCH

Olding articulates some of his discoveries and their meaning in a short video for the CSC: <https://youtu.be/0hfb8Gsohzc>

Olding's method of interview with players in the narrative who had personal knowledge of Leach and the Leach Pottery led to the rediscovery of archive items (the part catalogue of his collection; unseen since the mid 1970s) and their gifting to the CSC enabled research to take place on primary materials; similarly close contact with key members of the Leach family led to the discovery and publication of Leach ceramics and paintings hitherto unpublished.

Olding also used his close contacts, developed over 20 years, with Leach potters and inheritors of Leach materials in St Ives to build trust and elicit new information especially on the distribution of Leach's ceramics.

Local sources were used to underpin the research, including working at the St Ives Archives on primary materials and interviews with protagonists in the St Ives arts circle.

Olding built on his network of curators and academics in Japan, maintained for some 20 years, to enable him to commission leading scholars for the book. He also liaised closely with expert advisers to ensure the probity of bids.

CURATION

The exhibition deliberately focuses on archival and object collections that Olding has been personally associated with as curator and protagonist, ensuring their gifts into the CSC and raising funds when required for purchase. He has used his expert network of Leach scholars to support research on key objects appearing in the sale room, so that very substantial new Leach collections and archives have travelled from private to public hands during his directorship; at a time when these materials are highly sought after in the secondary market.

These particular additions include works once on show at the Leach Pottery in a 'museum' setting. The exhibition reconfigures this display, unseen for some 40 years, and presents unseen archives and artworks in a contextual narrative.

Olding's research trip to Japan in 2019 led directly to an offer from the Kawasaki City Museum to curate a section of a major new exhibition on Leach and Hamada in 2020, although this was cancelled as a consequence of the serious flooding of the museum. A subsequent offer was made by the Mashiko Museum of Ceramic Art for Olding to curate an exhibition based on unpublished drawings and archive materials and planned for November 2020. This has been postponed due to the impact of Covid-19.



— Bernard Leach: Potter

I EACH KIND TRACT goes and all other products serve...
The most useful as well as the best (and are those of a...
marriage between use and beauty) the others called about...
the construction to be made in the line of constant work...
between 'hand, heart and head', going back to the ideas...
of John Ruskin and later figures in the Arts and Crafts...
movement. He made pots for everyday use and individual...
works that stood up as works of art. He raised his practice...
to the idea of 'artistry'. (John Ruskin wrote that Leach...
'set it natural and right to seek to the perfection of...
Chinese and Japanese pottery) (The collector against which he...
measures his own achievement' although he observed, too...
that 'their original settings have made him as a potter...
of trouble among craftsmen everywhere of what they have...
left to be the permanent possession of an alien culture' (in...
all, Richard Coates, The Art of Bernard Leach, 1976).

The ceramics on show in this case reflect something...
of the history and spirit of the subject to see them...
are exhibited in a major retrospective at the Victoria...
& Albert Museum in 1977, a book with a critical but...
affectionate to the shape of the end of the 'Pots of St Ives...
in Pottery' (Other given demonstrates the influence...
of East Asian ceramics as well as the contemporary...
skill in painting on the vessel, whether scenes from a...
romanticized landscape in Japan, or the rugged Cornish...
scenery close by the site of the pottery in St Ives. He...
made pots that were both simple and worldy.

← Bernard Leach and Shoji Hamada: Early pots from Japan and St Ives

BERNARD LEACH was the owner of The Leach Pottery...
but the influence brought to bear on its construction...
and first ceramic production by Shoji Hamada (1894-...
1978) was highly important.

Leach and Hamada's first kiln at the pottery yielded 'some...
early pots that were quite good... and the last firing Hamada...
ever did in that kiln was one of the best that I (Bernard)...
remember'. They used some local china clay and fired with...
wood. But the kiln did not last long and second kiln was...
made after 1922 with the oversight of Hamada's associate...
Matsuhayashi, and has remained at the pottery, although...
has been more or less rebuilt over the years'.

A small round kiln was used for raku firings and was...
used at Thursday afternoon demonstrations of the low...
temperature wares, 'encouraging the public to come and...
decorate their plain biscuit purchases and see them...
glazed and fired while they waited'. The pottery in the...
early years 'turned out two or three thousand pots a year...
and of these not more than ten percent passed muster for...
shows'. However, Leach and Hamada held a celebrated...
exhibition together in London in 1925 just before Hamada...
returned to Japan. The Crafts Study Centre has a number...
of early works from the pottery by both Leach and Hamada...
Their output included slip-decorated earthenwares, as well...
as stonewares that reflected the influence of East Asian...
ceramics. The pots were marked with a St Ives stamp and...
each maker's personal mark.

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Research Dissemination and Recognition

Dissemination:	There were 460 visitors to the CSC during the two opening periods of <i>The Leach Pottery: 100 Years On From St Ives</i> (numbers strictly limited due to Covid-19)
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Follow-on-activities:	<p>EVENTS</p> <p>A number of associated events were planned, though due to Covid-19 not all have been realised:</p> <p>‘Beyond East and West’ the founding of British Studio Pottery, Paul Mellon Centre, London, 26 November, 2020</p> <p>Unpublished Leach, English Ceramic Circle, London, 12 December 2020</p> <p>Olding was asked to chair the Leach symposium for the Leach Pottery, 2 to 3 April 2020 [cancelled due to Covid-19]</p> <p>Leach Returned, the Annual Centre of Ceramic Art lecture, York Art Gallery, 10th October 2020 [cancelled due to Covid-19]</p> <p>PUBLICATIONS</p> <p>As a consequence of the lecture on Bernard Leach to the ECC in December, Olding has been asked to write a piece (4000 words) for their peer reviewed journal.</p> <p>An essay, on Leach’s ceramic collections, was published and commissioned by the Mingei Magazine, the Japan Folk Craft Association, for their special centenary edition in July 2020 https://www.csc.uca.ac.uk/csc-blog/bernard-leach-a-life-of-collecting</p> <p>As a result of discussions with Olding about a particular painting by Leach, Japanese curator Dr Kanae Aoki is preparing an article for a Japanese art museum newsletter.</p>
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Influence:	<p>IMPACT</p> <p>This research underpins the Impact Case Study ‘The Role of Studio Pottery in Developing the Local Economy and Changing Museum Exhibition Practices’.</p>
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Research Dissemination and Recognition

Influence of the research:

REVIEWS

A review by Rob Weinberg for the *British Art Journal* remarked that the Leach 'centenary is now being marked by two quite different exhibitions. At Farnham, the more comprehensive and informative of the shows pays fitting tribute to the history, legacy and continuing significance of the Leach Pottery, drawing on items from the Crafts Study Centre's own extensive collection. [...] Although confined to just one gallery space, the Farnham installation conveys the full gamut of Leach Pottery activity, including Leach's own experimentation with furniture design and textiles, and his connection with Ethel Mairet's Gospels workshop in Ditchling.'

The exhibition was reviewed in *Ceramics Now* (www.ceramicsnow.org/2020/10/10/bernard-leach-exhibition-marks-the-reopening-of-the-crafts-study-centre/), leading to further dissemination of photographs from the CSC Leach archive.

A review of the CSC exhibition written for the newsletter of the Allen Gallery in Alton, to which Olding has recently given expert advice for a redisplay project, stated that 'The exhibition is beautifully presented and well worth a visit. As well as the pottery, there is excellent information and an interesting variety of items, including textiles and etchings by Bernard Leach.'

The *Bahá'í World News Service* published a Leach article and review: <https://news.bahai.org/story/1458/>

COLLECTIONS

Hiroto Kanno of Koriyama City Museum of Art, Japan, has confirmed that the Leach book has been registered as a document of the museum for its insights into the 'Woodcutter'.

Research Dissemination and Recognition

Influence of the research:

COLLECTIONS

The Leach Pottery has borrowed ceramics by Leach and from his personal collection for their centenary exhibition (to note the founding of the Leach Pottery in 1920) setting these objects into a wider, independently-curated context (*Leach Pottery: Century of Connections* 9 September to 6 November 2020). Olding's writing and curation in this output has been carried out in the year 2020 as a special contribution to the range of international activities, especially in the UK and Japan, in the centenary year. Other loans by the CSC in this context include Leach ceramics for the exhibition *Kai Althoff goes with Bernard Leach* at the Whitechapel Gallery, London, 7 October 2020 to 10 January 2021.

EXHIBITION VISITOR COMMENTS

'Very interesting collection showing the range of his interests and media. Knew him only as a potter.'

'Superb exhibition – really good to see Leach's works on paper as well as pots. Beautifully curated.'

David Kendall, Bernard Leach's grandson, commented that 'it was very special - lovely pieces, beautifully curated and displayed - for me, very much filling out gaps in my grandfather's life and work.'

BOOK READER COMMENTS

David Kendall also commented of the book that 'It's a remarkable contribution to the centenary, and to the understanding of my grandfather's life and work.'

Jo Wason, one of the last potters to work at the Leach Pottery before it was closed, wrote that 'My first impression is of a great many extremely interesting pictures that I've never seen before. [...] These in your book are not just new, but very special.'



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Graphic Design:

Studio Mothership

FRONT COVER
Bernard Leach in his house in
Tokyo c. 1917–9

BACK COVER
Leach at his Barnaloft flat, St Ives
1966

