Matsubayashi Tsurunosuke  
(1894–1932)

SHINYA MAEZAKI

INTRODUCTION

Matsubayashi Tsurunosuke (hereafter Matsubayashi), a potter and a ceramic engineer from Uji, Kyoto, spent about two years in Britain between 1922 and 1924. The main purpose of his stay was to study Western art history and to research ceramic engineering. From the summer of 1923 to the spring of 1924, he worked at the Leach Pottery in St Ives, Cornwall. At the request of Bernard Leach (1887–1979), the founder of the Leach Pottery, Matsubayashi built two Japanese-style ceramic kilns at the pottery. Matsubayashi also gave practical training and lectures on ceramic production to Leach’s three students, who later became the main advocates of the Studio Pottery movement. His contribution to the development of the early Studio Pottery Movement in Britain is remarkable. Previous research has focused on Matsubayashi’s activities in relation to the Leach Pottery, but his contributions to the introduction of Japanese culture to Britain were not limited to the field of ceramics.
MATSUBAYASHI TSURUNOSUKE (1894–1932)

MATSUBAYASHI TSURUNOSUKE’S LIFE

Matsubayashi was born in Uji, Kyoto, in 1894 as the fourth son of Matsubayashi Shōsai (1865–1932), twelfth head of the Asahi kiln. Matsubayashi grew up learning traditional ceramic production techniques as a member of this prestigious potting family. In 1919, he began to study at the Kyoto City Ceramic Research Institute (Kyōto Shiritsu Tōjiki Shikenjō Fuzoku Denshōjo). The Institute was established in 1896, and the school followed three years later in 1899. Its role was to provide access to the latest scientific technologies and to conduct various experiments. Matsubayashi learned a wide range of subjects, receiving not only practical training in painting, calligraphy, sculpting and wheel throwing, but also education in English, physics, mathematics and chemistry. He developed an interest in ceramic engineering, particularly in kiln construction. He spent three years at the school; then started working in the family business. In 1922, his father agreed to his studying abroad.

Matsubayashi left Kobe on 4 August 1922 and arrived in London on 26 July 1922. In London, he met one of his mentors, Hamada Shōji (1894–1978), who had previously taught Matsubayashi at the school in Kyoto. Hamada had come to England with Bernard Leach in 1920 and together they had established the Leach Pottery in