



JOSIAH WEDGWOOD

and His Circle



ON VIEW JANUARY 24 – APRIL 18, 2008



'TRAY' of Jasper 'trials', undertaken by Josiah Wedgwood I (1730–95) during his research, in the early 1770s, to perfect a new variety of stoneware. Each 'trial' is numbered, and the number corresponds with individual entries in his Experiment Books. Other trials bear initials such as 'TTBO' (top of the biscuit oven) which indicates the firing position of each individual trial in the biscuit ovens or kilns at Etruria.

Courtesy of the Wedgwood Museum Trust, Staffordshire (England)

JOSIAH WEDGWOOD was born in the early eighteenth century into a poor family of potters from Staffordshire, a pottery center located 100 miles north of London. A self-educated scientist and innovative businessman, by his early 30s Wedgwood had emerged as the most ambitious and visionary of the Staffordshire potters. He transformed the industry through his experiments and pioneering workplace practices. He also built one of the first factories in the Western world, which featured a model community and a

healthcare system for his workers. By his death in 1795, Wedgwood's business was worth £600,000, the equivalent of \$100 million today.

Exploring experimental scientific methods to improve ceramic products, Wedgwood's technical advances set him apart from other traditional potters. Fearing theft of his innovative ideas, Wedgwood conducted his experiments in secret, working in a hidden laboratory in his basement and writing his notes in code. In 1780 he was elected into the Royal Society, Britain's premier scientific organization, for inventing a gauge that accurately measured very high temperatures.

The eighteenth century was a time of great popular interest in natural history. Many middle-class businessmen owned a pocket microscope to examine leaves and rocks, and had collections of specimens in a living room curio cabinet. From observing live flowers Wedgwood designed the floral patterns on his plates and he collected seashells, envisioning a whole dinner set in these shell forms.

Cream ware was Wedgwood's first major success. Designed to rival porcelain imported from the Far East, Wedgwood refined earthenware to improve its durability and perfect its light cream color. Cream ware was later called Queen's Ware by permission of Queen Charlotte, wife of King George III in 1765 after she herself began serving tea in it to her royal guests. A mainstay of the Wedgwood business for decades, cream ware was embraced by the middle and upper classes because this inexpensive earthenware put fine tableware within their reach. In 1773, Queen Catherine of Russia, an admirer of English

VASE, 1767–1780
Cream ware with
cloudy agate glaze
8 ¼ x 5 ½ in.
Photo: Chris Focht

CREAM COLOURED earthenware plate, hand painted central view of Castle Acre, Norfolk. Inspired by an engraving by Ellis of the 18th December 1772, after a drawing by Hearne of 1771. The border and frog crest are also individually hand painted. One of the designs originally supplied to Catherine II 'The Great' of Russia in 1774 as part of the 952 piece dinner and dessert service commissioned from Wedgwood in 1773.

*Courtesy of the Wedgwood
Museum Trust, Staffordshire
(England)*



culture, commissioned a 952-piece hand-painted setting. Each piece featured an English scene, such as a plate that depicts a child walking past a row of small houses in the countryside. Each piece featured a small green frog on the border, which referenced Queen Catherine's home at La Grenouillère—the place of frogs. The exhibition also includes a cream ware vase (1767–1780) adorned with two winged female figures in Wedgwood's popular neoclassical style.

Wedgwood's next major innovation was jasper ware. Designed as a material that would lend itself to ornamental objects, jasper ware's glasslike surface and ability to be colored in many hues was the result of more than 10,000 experiments with clay and firing temperatures. The rise of democracies in France and the American Colonies during the eighteenth century created a taste for art from ancient Greece, the first democracy. Wedgwood designed his blue jasper ware to imitate ancient classical cameos. He also created a line in black basalt that imitated Greek black-figure vases. The association of neoclassicism with the American Revolution and the ideals of democracy, along with America's close ties with England, may account for the great appeal that Wedgwood pottery had for the American public. Thomas Jefferson had Wedgwood plaques installed in the dining room fireplace of his home at Monticello.

Wedgwood kept well informed about science and business by reading and through his membership in the Lunar Society, a group of scientists and manufacturers who met once a month (when the moon was full) for discussion. It was there that Wedgwood became friends with Erasmus Darwin, who encouraged Wedgwood to invest in steam-engine power. In 1782 the Wedgwood ceramic factory at Etruria became the first British factory powered by steam. Wedgwood and Darwin families became very close. Wedgwood's eldest daughter Susannah married Erasmus Darwin's son Robert. They had a son Charles Darwin, who married his cousin, Emma Wedgwood, the granddaughter of Josiah Wedgwood and daughter of Josiah Junior.

In 1769 Wedgwood moved the manufacture of his pottery to a factory on a 350-acre estate where he also built his home and housing for workers and their families. He named the complex "Etruria" after the Etruscans whose pottery had recently been discovered in Italy. Wedgwood was involved with the building of a canal that flowed through Etruria and backed up to the door of the factory. The canal provided a smooth ride for the ceramic wares the 149 miles to Liverpool, the nearest coastal city.

ETRURIA
Photo: Chris Focht





VASE with Serpent
handles and Apollo
and Muses, late
18th century
Solid medium blue jasper
15 1/2 x 6 in.

EWER for water,
late 19th century
Majolica
17 x 8 in.

VASE, mid 20th century
Black and white jasper
dip, engine turned
8 1/8 x 5 in.

Photos: Chris Focht



As a youth Wedgwood had apprenticed in Staffordshire, where a potter typically crafted a vessel from raw clay to the final glazing. But as manager of his ever-expanding factories, Wedgwood trained workers to do only one task and become specialized throwers, molders, glazers, painters, and modelers. At Etruria he employed 150 workers in an early example of mass production. Wedgwood described his goal as “to make such machines of men that they cannot err.”

Wedgwood was a humanitarian who had faith in progress and science. As he gained wealth, he gave generously to the needy, including American prisoners of the Revolutionary War who were in jail in England, and French clergy who had been driven from their country during the French Revolution. He also made a medallion for

the Society for the Suppression of Slavery, a British abolitionist group to which he belonged. It became fashionable to wear these medallions as bracelets.

During Wedgwood's lifetime and in the centuries since, the company produced works in a wide array of other media and styles. The exhibition includes majolica, agate, basalt, pearl ware, stone ware, cane ware, drab ware, porcelain and bone china. A cup made in the 1750s imitates stone agate, a costly material prized by the upper classes, in inexpensive clay for the new middle

class in England and the New World. The sculptor John Flaxman designed the vibrantly glazed late 19th century majolica water ewer that features a garland of seaweed and the Greek god Triton holding the head of a dolphin. Decorative motifs of bamboo and flowers were also adopted by Wedgwood and his designers from Asian prototypes.

Josiah Wedgwood died in 1795 at the age of 65 and the business declined without his leadership. The rediscovery of Wedgwood jasper ware at the 1851 Great Exhibition in London returned the company's ceramics to prominence. Frank Wedgwood, the grandson of Josiah, modernized the factory and hired new designers, including Émile-Aubert Lessoré, a student of the neoclassical painter Jean Auguste Dominique Ingres. In the 1960s, Wedgwood became a public company and today it is the global corporation Waterford Wedgwood.



WEDGWOOD family portrait by George Stubbs, oil on panel, 1780. Wedgwood, his wife Sarah, and their seven surviving children are portrayed in the grounds of the family home, Etruria Hall. *Courtesy of the Wedgwood Museum Trust, Staffordshire (England)*



URN, late 18th century
Basalt, engine turned
7 ¼ x 7 in.

VASE, early 20th century
Bone china with luster
4 1/8 x 2 ½ in.

Photos: Chris Focht





The UBS Art Gallery

The UBS Art Gallery
1285 Avenue of the Americas
New York, New York 10019

This exhibition is curated by Lynn Gamwell and Lucie Nelson, organized by Binghamton University Art Museum, and sponsored by UBS

The BINGHAMTON UNIVERSITY ART MUSEUM aims to educate and enrich the lives of members of the campus and community of the State University of New York at Binghamton. The Museum houses a collection of 3,000 objects from all major periods of art history including painting, sculpture, prints, photographs, drawings, glass, ceramic, metalwork, textiles and jewelry from Egypt, Greece, Rome, Europe, Asia, Africa and the Americas. The Museum pursues its educational mission by organizing exhibitions, documenting them with publications, and hosting lectures

Binghamton University Art Museum
East Vestal Parkway
Binghamton, New York 13902
607-777-2634

<http://artmuseum.binghamton.edu>

Colin Thomson, Director of UBS Art Gallery
Linda Florio, Florio Design
Amanda Domizio, Kate Lydecker, Ruder Finn
Fine Arts & Communications Counselors

Cover:
CUP, 1750s
Agate
2 x 3 in.

AMPHORA: Ceres and
Priestesses, late 18th
century
Basalt with encaustic
decoration
18 x 18 in.

TEAPOT, early 19th
century
Drab ware
3 1/2 x 6 in.

Photos: Chris Focht