

Josiah Wedgwood (1730-1795)



Visionary potter and entrepreneur Josiah Wedgwood's advancements and inventions led to a higher quality of pottery for the time, a quality that is still being upheld to this day. Through his craft and innovations, the art of pottery grew to an industrial success.

Josiah Wedgwood was born on July 12, 1730 in Burslem, Staffordshire, into a family with a long tradition as potters. His own career as a potter began with his employment by his oldest brother, Thomas, at the age of nine. Josiah became an expert ceramist but had to abandon the position when a devastating case of small pox incapacitated his right knee in 1744. He continued his apprenticeship exploring and delving into the many applications of his craft.

Josiah's experimentation with pottery was hindered by his brother's more modest approach so in 1754 he partnered with Thomas Whieldon of Fenton. This partnership nurtured Josiah's interest in developing techniques of the use of clay and molding. It was under this partnership that he developed his method for variegated pottery.

In 1762, Josiah opened up the Brick House in Burslem, three years after going into business by himself. This workshop is associated with his success in cream-coloured ware and manufacture of useful-ware that followed the popular mid-eighteenth century style of Rococo. This style captured the attention of Queen

Charlotte of England who commanded it be renamed, Queen's ware. In the years to come, Catherine the Great of Russia would also be attracted to this style and commission Wedgwood for a large collection of useful wares.

In 1769, after forming a partnership with potter Thomas Bentley, Wedgwood opened a workshop known as Etruria, the name being homage to ancient Italian pottery that was the source of inspiration to Wedgwood's contemporaries. By 1774, all production was transferred to this location and the remaining factories in Burslem were shut down. This was the birthplace of Wedgwood & Bentley's Encaustic works, a home for the experimentation of basalts, and later ornamental ware. It was not until the death of Bentley in 1780 that Wedgwood began the production of the iconic jasper wares, which was at times referred to as china. He died on January 3rd 1795, in Etruria, United Kingdom.

The legacy of the Wedgwood tradition of potters continues to live on and is recognized as one of the great entrepreneurships that propelled the growth of consumerism in the eighteenth century. Wedgwood's increase of middle class wealth helped drive the Industrial Revolution as his transition the practice of pottery from ornamental to utilitarian products.