

Black Basalt



Experimentation with black basalt by Wedgwood and Bentley began in 1766, reaching perfection in 1768. Wedgwood's fine-grain stoneware was superior in general appearance to his contemporaries' Egyptian black ceramics. Like the black ware prior to it, it was made of reddish brown clay that turned black when fired. However, Wedgwood's black basalts owe their rich color to the introduction of manganese. The bold integrity of its color, lustrous surface, and high quality made black basalts a commercial success that has passed the test of time. As Wedgwood stated himself, "black is sterling, and will last forever."

Parallel to the production of black basalts was the useful Queen's Ware, and demand for Wedgwood and Bentley's products were at an all time high. Black basalt was used not only to for useful wares such as vases and candlesticks, but primarily for busts, portrait medallions, and cameos. With the growing market for Wedgwood products, the employment of designers also increased. Among the many designers hired by Wedgwood and Bentley was the neoclassical British sculptor John Flaxman.

John Flaxman was one of the main contributing designers whose primary focus was modeling reliefs for black basalts and Jasper. The revival of ancient Greek art heavily influenced the works of John Flaxman and the motifs employed by Wedgwood. These classical designs are evident in the narrative reliefs of the vases and antique characters chosen for busts and medallions.