

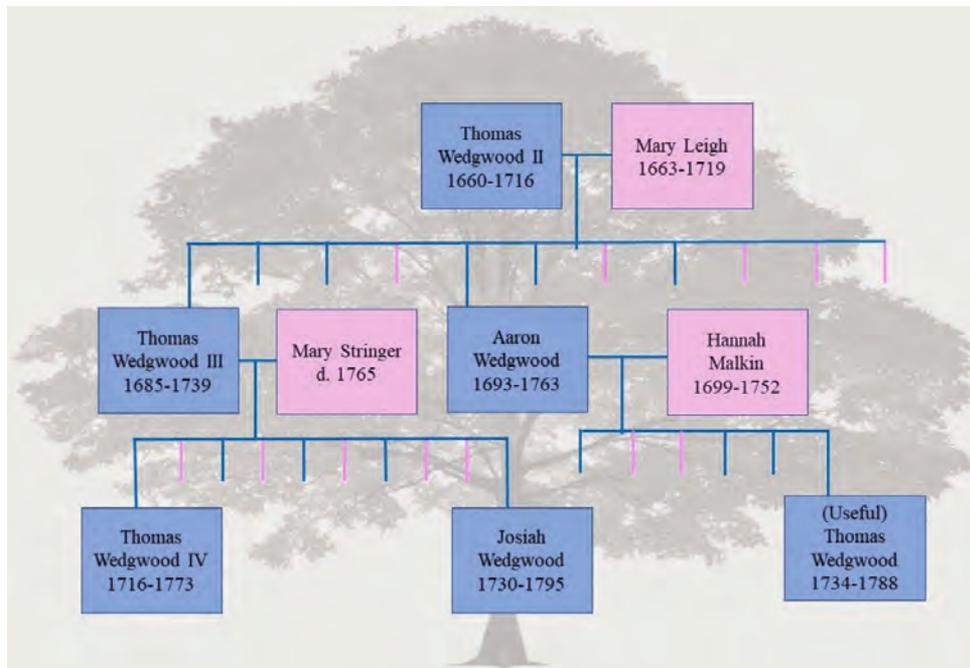
# Useful Thomas and Ralph Wedgwood – beginning a new appreciation

*A paper read by Pat Halfpenny at Kensington Central Library on 6 December 2019*

Many authors have written about Ralph Wedgwood, often dismissing him as a reluctant and inefficient potter – I am one of them.<sup>1</sup> However, with the advent of digital resources that offer access to more original source material and the emergence of an increasing number of superior ceramics with Ralph Wedgwood's marks, it seems an appropriate time to review his place in ceramic history. This paper is intended to be a starting point for that review and is presented in three main parts. First there is a brief history of Useful Thomas and Ralph Wedgwood, followed by an examination of the volume titled *W. & Co Ferrybridge – Shape & Pattern Book*, and lastly a discussion of some wares produced by Ralph Wedgwood.

*Useful Thomas and Ralph Wedgwood – pottery history*  
Even the most cursory glance at his life and work shows that Ralph's history is inextricably bound with that of his father Thomas Wedgwood, whose talents, influence, and inspiration affected the whole of Ralph's long life. To distinguish him from the many other contemporary Thomas Wedgwoods he is often referred to by scholars and collectors as Useful Thomas.

Useful Thomas was the cousin of the more famous Josiah Wedgwood. Josiah was born in 1730, the tenth and last child of Thomas Wedgwood III; Useful Thomas was born in 1734 the sixth and last child of Thomas Wedgwood's younger brother, Aaron Wedgwood (1). Josiah was apprenticed in 1744



1. Family chart showing the relationship between Josiah and Useful Thomas Wedgwood

to his oldest brother, Thomas Wedgwood IV of the Churchyard works,<sup>2</sup> and in 1748 he was joined by his cousin Useful Thomas, who trained alongside Josiah, learning the art and mystery of throwing.<sup>3</sup> Useful Thomas finished his apprenticeship in about 1755 and at that time, or shortly thereafter, he went to work in the more sophisticated environment of Worcester. It is not known where he worked in the city. There appears to be no evidence of an earthenware or stoneware pottery in mid-18th-century Worcester, so it seems most likely that he worked at the Worcester porcelain factory. That Useful Thomas was a potter in Worcester is evidenced by an agreement dated 30 December 1758 between:

Josiah Wedgwood, of the Parish of Stoke in the County of Stafford, potter and Thomas Wedgwood, journeyman now living at the City of Worcester, potter. The said Thomas engageth to serve the said Josiah Wedgwood as a journeyman from the first of May 1759 to the 11th of November 1765, and is to Receive of the said Josiah Wedgwood twenty-one [crossed out and written in] twenty-two pounds of lawfull money for every years service.<sup>4</sup>

This was not an exceptionally high wage but at the top-end of the scale for skilled potters at that time, and it was attractive enough to entice Thomas back to Burslem. Josiah was in the last months of a partnership with Thomas Whieldon when he entered into the contract with his cousin Thomas, but, like any good businessman, he was adept at forward planning and was establishing the next phase of his career before his partnership with Whieldon ended.

So, Josiah and his cousin Thomas trained and worked alongside each other, went their separate ways, gained valuable experience, and came back together in their late 20s ready to take on the world in the field of pottery production. They began potting in Burslem, and presumably made the current products of the day – the still-popular salt-glazed stoneware, a range of contemporary earthenware and the newly evolving creamware.

From Josiah's Burslem potteries they supplied fashionable ceramics to merchants far and wide. One

of those merchants was Samuel Tabor, a member of the Tabor family of brewers and merchants of Colchester. Samuel Tabor was a similar age to Josiah and Thomas Wedgwood, and in making his way in the world had moved to Rotterdam to act as an agent. In April 1763, he wrote to Josiah Wedgwood introducing himself and offering to do business. He writes that, 'if you can serve me on good terms in Black; Red & White ware I may be a considerable customer in the year, I import largely of the fine goods Lanskip-pineapple-Colleflower &c but all these must be in setts; ... if not, they won't sell here. Please to advise also the price of your gilt ware Black & green.'<sup>5</sup> He indicated that he expected an answer by return of post. Obviously, the response was acceptable, as an order followed in May of 1763 and included:<sup>6</sup> '3 Crates White flint ware ... Teapots with flat lids or rather let in lids, milk potts, Ewers Sugar basins, (not boxes) & Bowls of 12,18,24.' He went on, ordering: 'The like quantity & quality of Red & Black ware all plain as together will make 9 Crates; to these add, 2 Crates of spriggd black ... 2 crates plain Black & Red Bell fashion Teapots, 12.18.24 you will know what I mean by this description, and pray let the Red be the blackest colour you can possibly make.'

It is not possible to identify the exact forms Tabor requested, but the type of wares he ordered are typical of that produced by many potters of the period: the numbers 12, 18 and 24 indicate the sizes ordered, 12 being the largest.<sup>7</sup> In September 1763, Tabor sent a letter saying he was sending:<sup>8</sup>

[a] Red TeaKettle Teapott of the true TeaKettle fashion ... & I desire this model may always be kept by you, as I shall take a considerable quantity ... if you can but come up to the pattern in Black & Red, & please remember they must always be made as light as possible because in the Country they go to they pay duty pr. weight ... please get ready for me with all haste 20 Large Crates Red TeaKettles ...<sup>9</sup>

On 1 November 1763 Tabor writes again, and included in his order is a comment on a couple of pieces Wedgwood has obviously sent as samples.<sup>10</sup> Tabor notes:

2 plates a Common size one & a Twyfler of a straw colour & a fine glaze I sh<sup>d</sup> be glad to know the price of y<sup>m</sup> per doz<sup>n</sup> & if you can make whole Tableservices of the same consisting of 2 Tureens & dishes, 3 very Large Oval dishes, 12 others of 3 sizes 2 or 3 doz<sup>n</sup> Soop plates 4 or 6 doz<sup>n</sup> flat plates, 2 or 4 doz<sup>n</sup> Twyflers or small plates 2 Bread Baskitts hollow work 2 sallad dishes, 4 fruit baskitts & stands, 6 Candlesticks 4 Lar: Sauceboats, 4 small butter Tubs & stands, oval & a Cow on the Lid, – I beg to know the price of such a service in the above colour, or birdseye green, or Best Collyflower if reasonable & you think y<sup>o</sup> can well execute y<sup>m</sup> I may against Spring order a few services of each, but they must be made with great care & exact to the above quantity...

Tabor asks for table services in three finishes: straw colour, cauliflower, and bird's eye green (2). Very few of the required shapes are known in cauliflower, perhaps a few more are known in green; however,

all the shapes are recorded in straw or cream colour. Unfortunately, we do not have any evidence as to the exact models Wedgwood was producing at this time. Nevertheless, he must have been able to satisfy Tabor, as their business relationship continued for many years. Tabor was only one of the many merchants they supplied, and while Josiah continued to build the business, and his reputation, Useful Thomas made sure the pottery produced the goods.

What drew the two men together, we may never know. Although it is perfectly possible there was a great emotional attachment between them, there is no evidence of that in the existing records. But we have both circumstantial and concrete evidence related to Josiah Wedgwood's respect and appreciation of Thomas's expertise. He needed someone he could trust and whose skills were of the highest order. Josiah needed this person not just to work for him as a potter, but as manager of the concern when he was unable to oversee the pottery himself, either because business took him away or because of ill-health.



2. Group of plates showing typical cauliflower, bird's eye green, and straw colour finishes, makers unknown; Victoria & Albert Museum, London Arthur Hurst Bequest (C.22-1940); private collection; Winterthur Museum

Family historians Barbara and Hensleigh Wedgwood recount a number of instances when Josiah's health was compromised, usually as a result of his childhood bout of smallpox which left him lame and prone to excruciating infections in the knee of his crippled leg.<sup>11</sup> They note that these infections often required long periods of convalescence wherever he happened to be struck down. One such event was in the spring of 1762 when Josiah, traveling to conduct business in Liverpool, was riding towards the city and suffered an accident, injuring his knee yet again. He managed to get to his lodging but was laid up there for three weeks before he could travel home; luckily, he had a first-rate lieutenant in Useful Thomas.

Two men named Thomas became important to Josiah at that time, Useful Thomas Wedgwood who competently managed his pottery affairs in Burslem, and Thomas Bentley of the Liverpool merchant house Bentley and Boardman. Bentley was introduced to Josiah to offer companionship during his enforced bedrest and thus began a friendship and business partnership that forever cast a shadow over his relationship with his cousin Useful Thomas.<sup>12</sup> As a result of their meeting, Bentley and Boardman became the Liverpool merchants for Josiah Wedgwood's wares and Thomas Bentley introduced Wedgwood to a more

elegant and sophisticated lifestyle which Josiah aspired to adopt for himself.<sup>13</sup>

After four years at his first Burslem pottery, Josiah took over the lease of the Brickhouse Works. This factory belonged to a young member of the Adams family of potters and was rented out by the family on his behalf until he attained his majority (3).<sup>14</sup> Useful Thomas must have been especially useful at this time as Josiah was focussed on his future business developments and his upcoming marriage to his third cousin, the heiress Sarah Wedgwood, whom he married in January 1764.

In November 1765 the employment contract between Josiah and Thomas came to an end. This came at a crucial time for Josiah as he was already making plans for a huge expansion of his pottery-making business. We do not know what discussions ensued between the two men, but we do know that Josiah offered Thomas a partnership, which he accepted, and in 1766 they became partners in the pottery business, with Thomas receiving 1/8 of the profits.<sup>15</sup> Thomas continued conducting the pottery in Burslem while Josiah busied himself a couple of miles down the road, establishing his dream factory at Etruria. Two years later in 1768, Josiah took another partner in a separate concern. Thomas Bentley was to



3. The Brick House Works drawn from memory by Aaron Wedgwood in 1860

be a partner in the production of ornamental ware, the products to be made at his new vase works at Etruria. Their partnership agreed a 50/50 split of the profits. Robin Reilly writes that: ‘Tom Wedgwood may have found little cause to celebrate; and such feelings of disappointment or envy as he may have harboured would not have been lessened by the introduction of special “WEDGWOOD & BENTLEY” stamps with which to impress all ornamental wares.’<sup>16</sup>

Once production got underway in 1769, Bentley, not satisfied with his 50% profit on ornamental wares, and questioned how much of the ware produced by Josiah and Thomas’s Burslem partnership could be reclassified from useful to ornamental, thus relieving Useful Thomas of some of the prestigious tablewares in which he took 12½% of the profit and transferring them to Thomas Bentley’s credit, for which he took 50% of the profit. Despite being devoted to Thomas Bentley, even Josiah could see that such a plan would be to the ultimate detriment of his business. It is not known if Useful Thomas ever knew about Bentley’s suggestion, but as Robin Reilly so eloquently described, Josiah was ultimately ‘obliged by Bentley’s repeated and evidently ill-tempered questioning’ to define the roles of each partnership.<sup>17</sup> While Wedgwood wanted to keep his friendship as well as his partnership with Bentley intact, he also could not deny his reliance on the contribution made to his business by Thomas. He acknowledged this in a letter to Bentley expressing his concern that taking too much from Thomas might mean that he would no longer feel motivated to make improvements to the wares for fear they would be removed from his account. In other words, Thomas was actively involved in improving the useful ware products and Josiah did not want to deter his initiative to make further improvements.<sup>18</sup>

In determining the definitions of the partnerships, Josiah recognised that decoration could not be the arbiter of whether something was useful or ornamental. He stated that enriching useful wares did not make them less useful, and that no matter how simple or plain they made objects like vases, they remained ornamental. So, he settled on the simplest of definitions, that useful wares could be classified

as ‘such vessels as are made use of at meals’. This seems reasonable and straightforward. However, after further discussion with Bentley, Wedgwood eventually extended the ornamental partnership to include not just black basalt ornamental wares, but all black basalt including tea and coffee wares and later all bamboo-shaped caneware, this despite evidence from their customers that these were in use by the purchasers and therefore useful wares.<sup>19</sup>

There was also the matter of the mark ‘Wedgwood & Bentley’, for, while the mark ‘Wedgwood & Wedgwood’ may have had some redundancy, ‘J & T Wedgwood’ would have been appropriate for the useful ware partnership. This lack of recognition certainly denied Thomas Wedgwood his share of the credit for more than 20 years’ worth of useful productions.

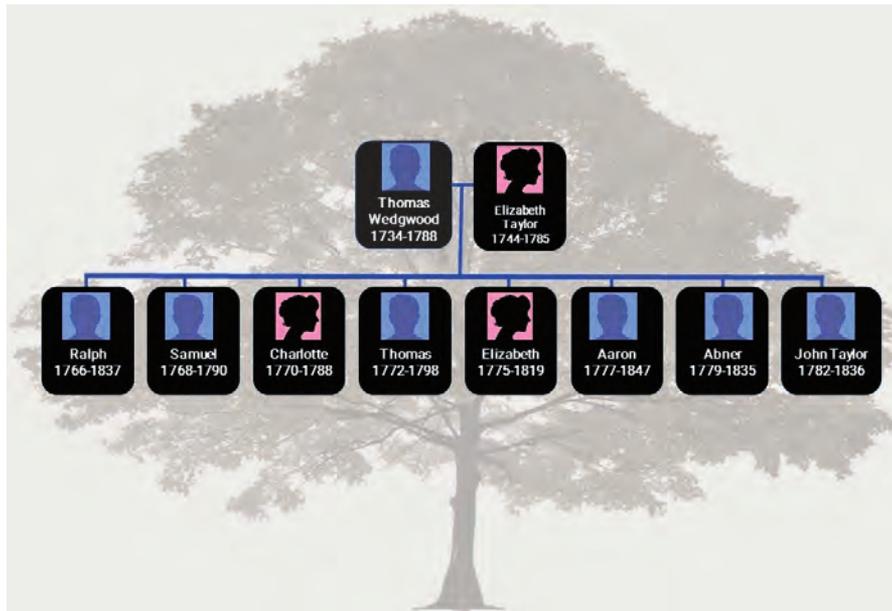
From the beginning of their 1766 partnership, Thomas must have carried a major part of the responsibility for production in Burslem. He lived and worked in the town. In July 1765 Thomas married Elizabeth Taylor.<sup>20</sup> Her father was John Taylor of Burslem, a wealthy potter who owned significant land and property in the area. Among his holdings was the Hill estate, including the Hill Pottery. Later that same year Sarah’s oldest brother, also John Taylor, married Sarah, daughter of Thomas Wedgwood of the Churchyard, who had also inherited the Overhouse Works from an uncle, making him one of the richest men in Burslem.<sup>21</sup> This Thomas was the oldest brother of Josiah, and therefore Sarah Wedgwood Taylor was Josiah’s niece by marriage and Useful Thomas’s second cousin, as well as being his wife’s sister-in-law. These complex family relationships are useful in understanding how the familial and social circles of the district’s prominent families intersected in a myriad of ways, and in this case, it is important to Useful Thomas’s story. Two years after his daughter’s marriage to Useful Thomas, John Taylor the elder died, Elizabeth and her two sisters inherited £100 each and additional goods and chattels were shared equally with their five surviving brothers. In addition, John Taylor II inherited the Hill Pottery, his younger brothers William, Joseph, and Ralph each receiving additional cash and property.<sup>22</sup>



4. The Brick House Works house drawn from memory by Aaron Wedgwood in 1860



5. Etruria Hall, enamel painting on biscuit earthenware, attributed to James Bakewell, c.1774; V&A/Wedgwood Collection (4110)



6. Family chart of Thomas and Elizabeth Wedgwood

In about 1770, when Josiah Wedgwood moved to Etruria, Useful Thomas and Elizabeth together with their young family moved into the house at Brick House Pottery (4 & 5). Two years later, in 1772, the Brick House Works and house were reclaimed by the Adams family, the young owner now grown and ready to begin business on his own account.<sup>23</sup> The production of useful ware was moved to the Etruria site and Thomas Wedgwood and his family moved there too. At that time there were three small children – Ralph, Samuel and Charlotte; a fourth

child, Thomas, was born at the end of 1772 and was followed by Elizabeth, Aaron, Abner and John Taylor Wedgwood, all born at Etruria and swelling the brood to eight children (6). It seems they were all educated in part alongside Josiah's children. This included early local schooling, some home-schooling, specialist tutors, and boarding schools. We are told that Ralph received an excellent education, mastering several languages, including Greek and Hebrew, and possessed a practical knowledge of chemistry and the physical sciences of the day.<sup>24</sup>

When he was sixteen years old Ralph began a course of scientific experiments which held him in thrall for the rest of his life. Josiah seemed to have a fond regard for this last characteristic of Ralph, and it is said that he encouraged him with the words, ‘Remember Wedgwoodykin everything gives way to experiment’.<sup>25</sup> Towards the end of his life Ralph wrote to Josiah II explaining a new project for the use of oxygen gas in potting and hoped that he may make it a success as some ‘consolation for the sins of your father in making me an experimentalist’.<sup>26</sup>

Ralph was probably not a typical young man of his time. At the age of 19, in May 1785, he visited London, during ‘the season’ and a description of the trip survives in a letter he sent to his sister Charlotte who was away at school.<sup>27</sup> After buying a map and spending the first days taking in the sights, Ralph began his visit in earnest. He was a committed Christian with strong Nonconformist leanings. On Sunday he attended church twice and commented to Charlotte about both sermons. On Monday he went to buy books by Puritan authors, went to St Paul’s and to Westminster Abbey. On Tuesday he bought more books, then went to Somerset House to see the Royal Exhibition of paintings. In the evening he was prevailed upon to go to the Royal Theatre, Drury Lane; he reported that he was ‘shocked at the vanity I beheld there.’ On Wednesday he visited family and friends, spending time with the Unwins, James Unwin being one of the leading artists in the Wedgwood factory’s Chelsea decorating studio. On Thursday he spent the day with Josiah Wedgwood and his family, accompanying Josiah to the House of Commons to hear several debates. On Friday he went to the British Museum where he had applied in advance for a ticket to attend a lecture on philosophy; he visited the King’s Laboratory at Woolwich; he then went on to Greenwich and heard an *excellent* lecture on electricity, and finally he saw Blanchard ascend in his balloon from the Barbican. On Saturday he explored some of the more popular tourist sites, including the Pantheon, a huge kind of assembly rooms, where Lunardi’s balloon was exhibited, and he enjoyed the famous Don Saltero’s coffee house and museum

of curiosities in Cheyne Walk, Chelsea. On Sunday he again went to church twice, remarking on the sermons, and the next day prepared for his journey north on Tuesday. This week of activities indicates that Ralph was not what is generally thought of as a high-spirited teenager, he was a serious, earnest young man, and as he matured his obsession with science and experimentation deepened. Rather than the uninformed, lazy and irresponsible potter we read about, he was more the archetypal ‘absent-minded professor’ focusing on science, eventually becoming oblivious to the real world around him.

Back at Etruria, while the children of both Josiah and Thomas Wedgwood were being afforded a genteel education, the manufactory continued to provide the means. Wedgwood & Bentley’s ornamental wares were the most fashionable pottery that could be purchased, and the useful wares of Josiah and Thomas found ever larger markets. Thomas continued producing some of the finest creamwares ever made, and among the most well-known is the ‘Husk Service’ made for Empress Catherine of Russia in 1770 (7). Decorated under Bentley’s direction at the Wedgwood enamel



7. Creamware plate from the ‘Husk Service’ made for Empress Catherine II of Russia, 1770, diam. 25.4 cm; V&A/Wedgwood Collection (9382)

workshop in Chelsea, this was undoubtedly useful ware and so was credited to the useful partnership, unlike the next great service. Known today as the 'Frog Service', this was also made for Empress Catherine and the crest of her La Grenouillère Palace was incorporated into the border design. The main decoration was hand-painted in monochrome, featuring topographical views of Great Britain. The service was completed to much acclaim in 1774 (8). Despite Josiah's definition that useful wares were 'such vessels as are made use of at meals' and despite his comments that decoration on such wares did not make them less useful, the service was credited to the Wedgwood & Bentley partnership. Issues such as this must have been a persistent source of irritation to Useful Thomas as the Wedgwood & Bentley bromance continued to flourish until Bentley's death in 1780.

While Thomas continued to produce the useful goods, Josiah was busy marketing them. Their first shape book was published in 1774, and despite their partnership, the only name appearing in the title was Josiah's. When Bentley died in 1780, Josiah was devastated. His nephew, Tom Byerley, stepped into

the breach, and it soon became apparent that Josiah's succession planning saw a future for Wedgwood & Byerley that did not include Useful Thomas and his boys. It must have been confirmation to Thomas that if he wanted opportunities for his sons in the Staffordshire industry, they were not going to be available at Etruria. He needed to build his independent legacy for them to inherit and perpetuate.

In early 1788 Josiah was not in good health and had gone to London to consult the distinguished scholar and physician Dr William Heberdeen.<sup>28</sup> He was secure in the knowledge that Thomas Wedgwood would continue to manage the production of useful wares in his usual exemplary manner. However, his complacency was about to be shattered. On 3 March, 1788 Josiah's second son, Josiah II, known as Jos, wrote to his father in London, saying, 'It is reported, that you & TW are going to part at Martlemas & it is said that TW is hiring the men at U [Useful] Works for himself or for his son Ralph which is much the same thing'.<sup>29</sup> He goes on to list half a dozen men who were engaged as a thrower, a turner and plate makers. Jos, who was to succeed his father in the pottery, seems shocked and surprised by Thomas's plans.

8. Creamware dish painted with a view of the lake at West Wycombe, Buckinghamshire, part of the 'Frog Service' made for Empress Catherine II of Russia 1773–74, 39.37 cm long; Victoria & Albert Museum, London, Alfred William Hearn Bequest (C.74-1931)



By 1788 Thomas was relatively prosperous, he was clearing £1,000 per year from his stake in the useful ware production at Etruria,<sup>30</sup> and additional annual income came from his rental properties, both commercial and residential in Burslem. He was 54 years old, his wife Elizabeth had died three years earlier and so he was a widower with eight children to provide for; the eldest, Ralph, was almost 22, the youngest, John Taylor Wedgwood, was only 6 years old. To secure a future for his boys, Thomas Wedgwood was about to embark on a new and exciting phase of his life, leaving Etruria to establish his own family business in Burslem. However, as Hensleigh Wedgwood so graphically describes, on Saturday 18 October 1788, Thomas, 'left the factory late on a dark evening during a heavy rainstorm, slipped into the canal and was drowned. Thomas having conveniently died before publicly announcing the dissolution of the old partnership, a certain amount of embarrassment was avoided for Josiah'.<sup>31</sup>

Thomas had planned to move back to Burslem, not to one factory, but to two. The first was at The Hill, Burslem. Formerly owned and operated by Useful Thomas's late father-in-law, John Taylor, the factory had been inherited by the oldest Taylor son, John, in 1767. On his death in 1772 it passed to his brother Thomas, who died in 1775, leaving it to the next brother William, who had his own factory and so sold the Hill Pottery to his brother-in-law, Useful Thomas Wedgwood. At that time Useful Thomas was fully occupied at Etruria and he let the Hill Pottery to William Adams. Early 1780s land tax records confirm that Thomas Wedgwood of Etruria was letting property in Burslem to William Adams & Co.

Whether Thomas Wedgwood gave William Adams notice to quit or whether William Adams decided by himself to branch out at that time and build his Greengates works at Tunstall is not known, but it is clear that Thomas intended to establish at least part of his own business at the Hill works in Burslem by Martinmas 1788.<sup>32</sup> His second factory seems to have been significantly larger judging by the land tax liability, for Useful Thomas had contracted to purchase the Churchyard house and

works. The original property deeds for the factory still exist and they tell us that Thomas Wedgwood of the Churchyard and Overhouse estates died in 1786 and left the Churchyard works to his infant son John, with Josiah Wedgwood and James Caldwell as trustees. They put the property up for sale and Useful Thomas Wedgwood of Etruria was the highest bidder at £1,300.<sup>33</sup>

Thomas Wedgwood had not expected to die in 1788, he had not made a will and of his sons, only Ralph had reached the age of majority. It has been written that the Hill Pottery was intended to provide an occupation for Thomas's second son Samuel, and that Ralph had no interest in pottery-making. But we have the evidence from Jos Wedgwood's letter to his father, that it was Thomas and Ralph who were setting up business, and on his father's death it was Ralph who filed for letters of administration, in lieu of a will, and he was cited as Ralph Wedgwood of Burslem, potter. Authors have usually omitted to mention the fact that Useful Thomas owned the Churchyard works, nor do they mention that Ralph, following the scientific inclinations recognised by Josiah, had, by 1786, already set up his own independent business. He described the premises as 'my Elaboratory', where he employed men to produce glazes and colours to his recipes.<sup>34</sup>

In July 1788, just three months before his death, Useful Thomas had received a letter from his second son, Samuel, who was then in Paris. The letter is warm, affectionate and long, about four sides of foolscap paper. After a heartfelt wish that his father would not work so hard, Samuel congratulates him 'on the great alterations you are making on the Hill Works', he wishes his father prosperity in the venture and thanks him profusely for the 'offer of taking me into partnership with you'. He goes on to discuss a visit he has made to the Sèvres factory, which he describes in great detail. He is fascinated by the enamel colours, particularly a non-metallic, gold-coloured enamel, writing: 'Here is room for experiments for Brother Ralph, which will in my opinion be worth his while for it is extremely Curious & at the same time extremely beautiful.' Later he tells his father:

I have begun to learn Italian which I now write & understand in a good measure & speak a little. I begun to learn myself but found I could not go thro<sup>h</sup> with it without a Master, so I took one by whose means in 2 or 3 mo<sup>s</sup> time shall be perfect enough. The French I speak tolerably well, & hope to be able to make some proficiency in the German before the year is out.<sup>35</sup>

This letter offers some interesting insights into the kind of business Useful Thomas was embarking upon. Samuel was not directly part of the planning process and was not intending to be back in Burslem before 1789. However, there is no doubt that Useful Thomas intended for Samuel eventually to join the new family business. The evidence suggests that Thomas was the practical, experienced potter, Ralph was proficient in the technical and scientific requirements of the business, and Samuel, with language skills, was destined to become the international salesman. Evidence that this last skill was necessary is discussed below. It seems clear from his letter that Samuel was expecting to stay in Paris until at least the end of the year, but no doubt he returned early on Thomas's demise.

At the time of his father's death Ralph's own business was doing well, and he says he was £500 in profit.<sup>36</sup> A receipt in the Wedgwood archives shows him receiving moneys for fritts, calx of zaffre and yellow enamel supplied to Josiah Wedgwood in 1788 and 1789.<sup>37</sup> It is reasonable to suppose that he had other customers in the district too. But no matter how much he was enjoying the scientific side of the pottery business, he had to give it up to take charge of his father's affairs. Whatever he had hoped or wished for his own future, Ralph found himself father and guardian to his brothers and sisters, and to support them he continued his father's endeavours to build a pottery business. In fact, he seems to have expended all his father's estate and his own money in making sure his siblings had all the benefits that their father had hoped to give them if he had lived.

Useful Thomas died before final completion of the contract to buy the Churchyard works but the property

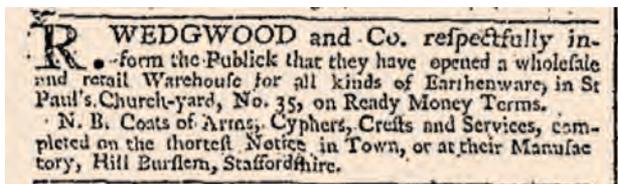
had been paid for, so Ralph inherited it along with the rest of the estate, and the transaction was completed by June 1789. He apparently took over his father's role in trying to establish his brother Samuel as a potter.<sup>38</sup> They were joined by Peter Swift, formerly employed by Josiah Wedgwood, who wrote of Swift in 1772, 'He is my Cashier, Paymaster General, and Accountant General and without him we should all be confusion at once'.<sup>39</sup> So at least there was some experienced hand at the tiller.

Although at the time of his father's death Samuel Wedgwood was not directly occupied in the pottery business,<sup>40</sup> he obviously anticipated being actively involved as a principal in the pottery. On 4 February 1789, as he was approaching his 21st birthday, he prepared a notice that suggests he intended to be seen as the most prominent of the Wedgwood brothers in the partnership.<sup>41</sup> Writing from The Hill, Burslem, on one side of the document he refers to his late father and states that, 'I have established Myself in a considerable manufactory of the same kind of ware, at this place; and that I have Taken into partnership, Mr. PETER SWIFT, who has for twenty-two years. with, unremitting care and diligence, filled a considerable department, in the said manufactory of Mr. JOSIAH WEDGWOOD, including the time my late father was in the concern'. The reverse assures potential customers that: 'We manufacture our goods in the best manner, both for fineness of quality and elegance of models, and constantly apply ourselves to the making of every improvement therein, we flatter ourselves that we shall merit the esteem of all those, who are pleased to favour us with their commands'. He goes on: 'It may not be improper for us to observe, that in order to distinguish more particularly our goods, from those of other manufacturers, they are marked Wedgwood and Co. on the bottom of each article. We take liberty to enclose a catalogue of our manufacture, with the prices and terms of dealing ...'.

The names of Mr Samuel Wedgwood and Mr Peter Swift are printed where their signatures were to be inserted, but it seems that the document was never signed or distributed. Samuel was 21 in June of 1789; within 7 months he was dead. We know

little of his unfortunate demise except that he was in Whitworth, Lancashire when he passed away. He was brought back to Staffordshire and was buried in the family plot at St John's, Burslem on 17 January 1790. So far it has not been possible to discover the circumstances of his death, nor exactly what he was doing in Whitworth, but the small town did have some eminent healers known nationally as the 'Whitworth Doctors'. Dr Aiken in his 1795 book, *A Description of the Country from Thirty to Forty Miles Round Manchester* notes that they were renowned for setting broken and dislocated bones, and for the cure of cancerous and other tumours.<sup>42</sup> Apparently more than 100 people a year took lodgings in Whitworth, hoping that the Doctors could cure them, and perhaps Samuel was one of them. His death must have been a severe blow to Ralph, who no longer had an enthusiastic potter brother to lean on. After Samuel's death Ralph parted ways with Peter Swift,<sup>43</sup> continued the business himself and appears to have been successful for the next few years. In November 1791 a number of newspapers carried the announcement that Ralph Wedgwood & Co. had opened retail premises in the centre of the ceramic trade, at 35 St Paul's Churchyard, London. They obviously did some onsite decorating, offering 'Coats of Arms, Cyphers, Crests, and Services completed on the shortest Notice, in Town, or at their Manufactory, Hill-Burslem' (9).

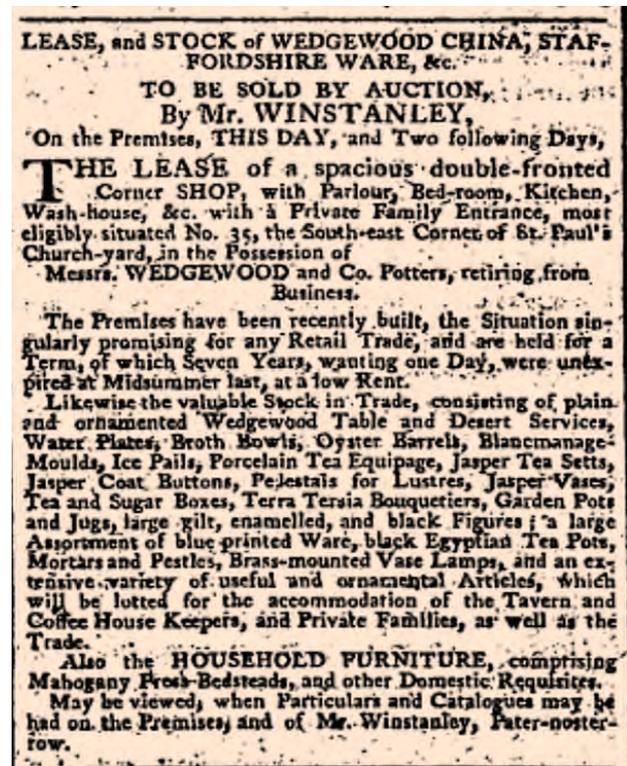
By 1793 Ralph had expanded his business, On 1 January 1793 he took out an insurance policy which named a third pottery at Swan Bank as well as 17 other commercial and residential premises.<sup>44</sup> The appraisal for insurance purposes, including potworks, workhouses, utensils and stock in his London Warehouse, totaled £4,150. Things were going well, and then in February 1793, just a month after



9. Advertisement in *The Times*, London, 23 November 1791 for opening of London shop

the insurance valuation, the military and political situation in Europe that had been gradually growing more tense over the previous couple of years, came to a head and France declared war on Britain. One of the inevitable consequences of this was that trade with Europe and with the USA was disrupted. This proved disastrous for many Staffordshire potters. Much of Wedgwood & Co.'s trade was with European merchants in cities that fell under French domination, and although America was basically neutral, both the British and the French took the view that if you are not with us, you are against us, and both countries took measures to prevent US trade with their enemy.

Ralph was in business at a time when anyone with a less than finely-honed commercial acumen would be lucky to survive. As early as April 1793 Jos Wedgwood wrote to his father in London saying, 'This country now begins to feel the distress produced by the stagnation of trade.' He goes on, 'Ed<sup>d</sup>. Bourne has failed.... Some others at Burslem are mentioned as likely to go, I believe



10. Advertisement in *The Sun*, Wednesday, 24 September 1794 for sale on closure of the London shop

too that Ralph Wedgwood is tottering. Joshua Heath and Ralph Mare are mentioned as not very stable & I dare say the other end of the Pottery [district] is as ill supported.<sup>45</sup> In the next few years there were almost a dozen bankruptcies of North Staffordshire potters listed in *The London Gazette*, and as many partnership dissolutions as manufacturers declined business before bankruptcy overtook them.

The nation's financial situation worsened, and in 1794 Ralph decided to close his London retail shop. The auction sale of his London premises was held in September 1794 (**10**), and his stock-in-trade included:

plain and ornamented Table and Dessert Services, Water-Plates, Broth Bowls, Oyster Barrels, Blancmange-Moulds, Ice Pails, Porcelain Tea Equipages,... Jasper Vases, Tea and Sugar Boxes, Terra Tersia Bouquetiers, Garden Pots and Jugs, large gilt, enamelled and black Figures, a large Assortment Of blue printed Ware, black Egyptian Tea Pots, Mortars and Pestles, Brass-mounted Vase-Lamps, and an extensive Variety of useful and Ornamental Articles.

Ralph's factories in Burslem continued as the country's financial depression deepened. Country-banks were going out of business and by February 1797 the war with France had so diminished gold reserves that the government prohibited the Bank of England from paying out in gold by the passing the Bank Restriction Act. Along with many British businesses, Ralph Wedgwood & Co. eventually went down, and in April 1797 Ralph was declared bankrupt.<sup>46</sup> Two months later his assets were put up for auction,<sup>47</sup> but in the depressed market little if anything sold. A similar advertisement followed almost a year later in May of 1798,<sup>48</sup> but included more information about the pottery equipment. The list includes: 'Copper Plates for Blue & Black printing, ... Block and Working Moulds, both useful and ornamental, a large lot of Jasper stone... together with a quantity of Ware, laid out in Lots of About ten Crates each, consisting of Desert Services, of new shell, printed, and various other patterns.'

Still the depression continued, and Ralph's premises and land were advertised again in June and for the last time in September 1798,<sup>49</sup> when his property was 'To be Peremptorily Sold'. But after the May 1798 advertisement, the pottery utensils and fixtures were no longer included in the sales notices. This may have been because they had been purchased by Messrs Tomlinson & Co. of the Ferrybridge factory, for it was about this time that Ralph's association with the Yorkshire pottery began. Recorded in Ralph's commonplace book is a list of expenses totalling £10 10s. owed to him by Messrs Tomlinson & Co., costs incurred in a 'Journey to review the state of the works'.<sup>50</sup> The account is dated September and no year is given; however, dates on the following pages strongly suggest the trip was taken in 1797. By July 1798 The Ferrybridge Pottery partners announced the new connection between themselves and 'Mr. Ra. Wedgwood late of Messrs Ra. Wedgwood & Co. of the Hill Burslem...' They mention 'the well-known abilities of Mr. Ra. Wedgwood and that various shapes models and designs of goods made by Mr. Wedgwood & Co. are adopted in this concern' (**11** & **12**).<sup>51</sup> Apparently, they wanted his ceramic expertise, access to his popular lines, and I believe they also wanted his name. That they used WEDGWOOD in their backstamp is confirmed by excavations on the site which uncovered several versions of an impressed WEDGWOOD in upper case, sometimes followed by a full stop and a numeral. There are various suggestions related to the use of these marks,<sup>52</sup> and, so far, the impressed mark 'Wedgwood & Co' has not been recovered from the site, suggesting that it cannot be attributed to Ralph's Yorkshire productions with any certainty, although the possibility remains that the mark may be found when further excavation is undertaken.

Ralph's association with Messrs Tomlinson & Co. was shortlived. Within 30 months of joining the Ferrybridge Pottery he was dismissed, ordered to quit the business, quit the premises, and remove himself from there entirely by 1 January 1801. It has been suggested that, given the seemingly adversarial nature of the termination agreement, the name Wedgwood



11. Pearlware jug painted with a scene depicting the flint mill at Ferrybridge Pottery, Yorkshire, 21.8 cm high; © National Museum of Wales (NMW A 30215)



12. Pearlware jug painted with a scene depicting the pottery factory at Ferrybridge, Yorkshire, 21.8 cm high; © National Museum of Wales (NMW A 30215)

would have been expunged from Ferrybridge. However, as late as 1805, Ralph comments in a letter to his daughter Mary that the Wedgwoods in Etruria are still sending him reproachful letters, and this has been understood to mean that they are asking him to do something about the continued use of the Wedgwood name at Ferrybridge.<sup>53</sup> It is possible that, rather than date the Wedgwood marked Yorkshire wares 1798–1800, we should be thinking more like 1798–1805.

#### *W. & Co. Ferrybridge Shape & Pattern Book*

One of the major sources of information about Ralph Wedgwood's productions is the volume in the Wedgwood Archives, entitled *W. & Co. Ferrybridge Shape & Pattern Book*.<sup>54</sup> It has been widely discussed as representing his work at Ferrybridge, but a close examination of the book suggests that the contents originated in the Burslem business. The volume has 170 pages and while previous authors have mostly concentrated on the patterns for underglaze printing,

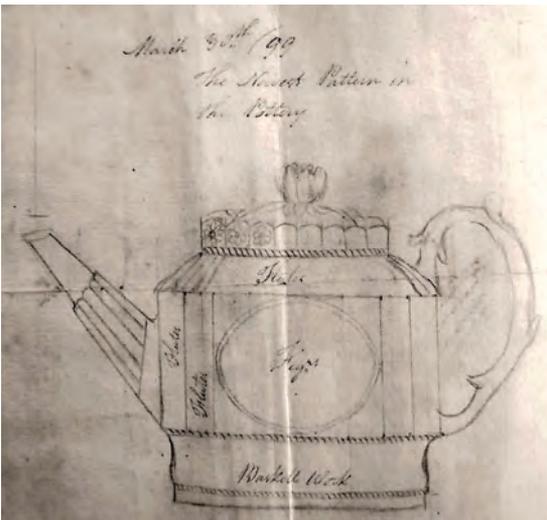
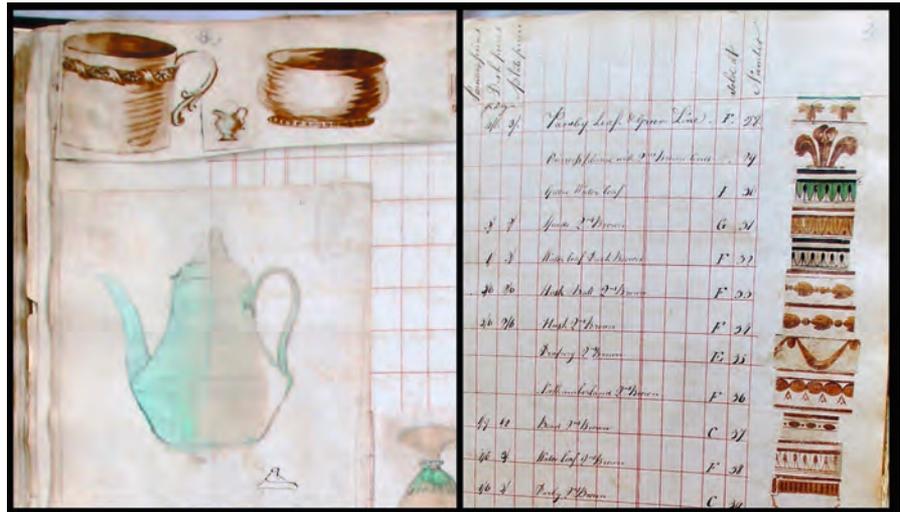
they are only a small part of the book. Almost every page has something interesting to see, including painted patterns, shapes, border designs and printed copperplate pulls,<sup>55</sup> as well as handwritten comments and descriptions.

A pencil note inside the cover tells us that the volume was rebound in 1953 at Remploy, which was a workshop for disabled people in Stoke-on-Trent. It is not known whether the name on the spine was on the original volume or is a title added at the time of rebinding. The new binding encloses the original volume, which is made up of watermarked, hand-made, laid, rag paper, undoubtedly dating to the last quarter of the 18th century (**13**). The pages are hand-gridded in red ink. They are also numbered in the top right corner in pencil; this last was probably done by an archivist, perhaps just prior to rebinding. The contents of the book are fascinating. Where there are handwritten descriptions of pots, patterns or orders, these are usually entered directly onto the gridded pages of the book, but where printed patterns, painted



13. Details of the binding of the *Shape & Pattern Book*; V&A/Wedgwood Collection, MS No. E62 -33486

14. Details from pages 18 and 21 of the *Shape & Pattern Book*; V&A/Wedgwood Collection, MS No. E62 -33486



15. Detail of drawing inserted between pages 131 and 132 of the *Shape & Pattern Book*; V&A/Wedgwood Collection, MS No. E62 -33486

designs and shapes are included most, if not all of these, are on paper which has been cut, trimmed, and pasted onto pages of the volume, rather like a scrap book (14). Some of the pages also have cuttings from printed books attached to them, perhaps from a previous pattern and/or shape book. Very occasionally the original paper attachment has disappeared, and you can see the remains of white glue-paste residue.

There are four pages that bear dates. The most discussed is a paper inserted between pages 131 and 132. It is a drawing of a design for a teapot with notations indicating fluted moulding around the sides and shoulder, a band of basketwork towards the base, and an oval panel on the body which could receive

additional applied or painted decoration (15). The drawing is inscribed 'March 30<sup>th</sup> / 99 The Newest Pattern in the Pottery'. It is reasonable to conclude that this dates from 1799 and that it was the newest pattern at the Ferrybridge factory that year. This is doubtless a design from Ralph's Ferrybridge period, but it cannot be deduced from this that all the designs in the book date exclusively from that time. Unlike almost all the other entries, the 1799 dated drawing is inserted between two pages; it is not glued down to its own page, but is attached to page 131 on one side only, using red sealing wax, and it lies over a page of printed border designs. The evidence suggests it is a later addition to the volume.

16. Pearlware jug printed with a pattern from the 'Etruscan Figures' series and inscribed 'Charles Smith 1795', faintly impressed in small letters, 'Wedgwood & Co', 21.3 cm high; private collection



17. 'Etruscan Figures' pattern, borders and written pattern description from the *Shape & Pattern Book*; V&A/Wedgwood Collection, MS No. E62 -33486

It seems most likely that this book was assembled by Ralph and is filled with copper plate pulls from engravings, and pages from pattern and shape books used at Burslem. Indeed, the other three dates in the book pre-date Ralph's association with the Yorkshire pottery. There are two entries dated 1791 and one dated 1796. In 1791 Ralph was enjoying a great deal of success and although by 1796 he was certainly struggling, he was still in business in Burslem and there is no evidence that he was at the time involved with Tomlinson & Co.

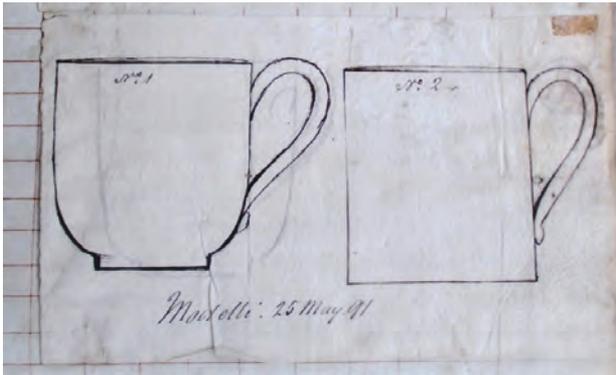
The book undoubtedly represents a selection from Ralph's Burslem shape and pattern books, which he assembled and took with him to Yorkshire, and the 1799 page was inserted while he was at Ferrybridge. He needed his Burslem reference material, because the Ferrybridge factory intended to make some of Ralph's Burslem wares, as they announced in 1798, 'various shapes models and designs of goods made by Mr. Wedgwood & Co. are adopted in this concern.'<sup>56</sup>

A jug (16) impressed Wedgwood & Co. has the inscription 'Charles Smith 1795', the date putting it

firmly in the Burslem period. The classical scene on the body of the jug, the floral garland at the neck and even the blue bands on the neck and down the back of the handle match copperplate pulls in the *Shape & Pattern Book* (17). There are written references to 'Etruscan' which likely refers to a series of classical designs, the note on page 50 lists 'Jug Etruscan Fig's Coloured border' and indeed, the printed floral garland is often seen enhanced with touches of underglaze colour. It seems incontrovertible that both the jug and the patterns in the book originated in Burslem. Unfortunately, Charles Smith is a common name, and it has so far not been possible to identify the intended recipient. 'Etruscan' pattern jugs appear to have been popular presentation pieces and examples are known with other designs in the 'Etruscan Figures' series. A presentation jug in a private collection inscribed 'Isaac & Martha Pyatt 1796', was probably made for a married couple by that name who lived not too far from the Potteries in Newbold Asbury in Cheshire (18). Another similar piece, sold in 2013, was inscribed 'W E B 1797'. The dates on all three jugs confirm the 'Etruscan Figures' series of patterns was introduced in Burslem.



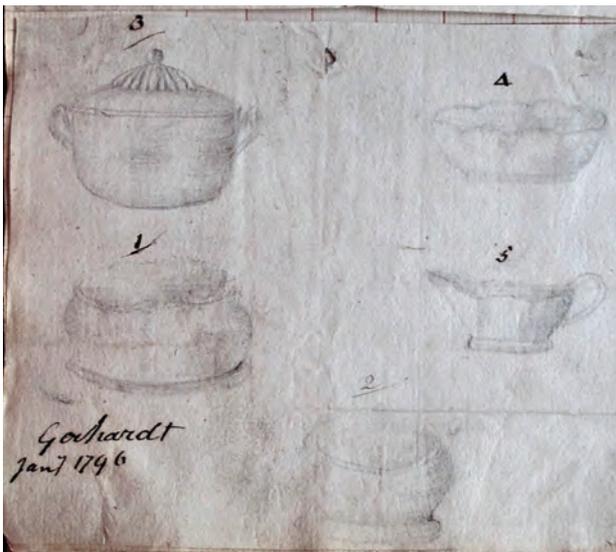
18. Pearlware 'Etruscan Figures' jug inscribed 'Isaac & Martha Pyatt 1796', with matching pull from p. 115 of the *Shape & Pattern Book*, 20 cm high; private collection, and V&A/Wedgwood Collection, MS No. E62-3348



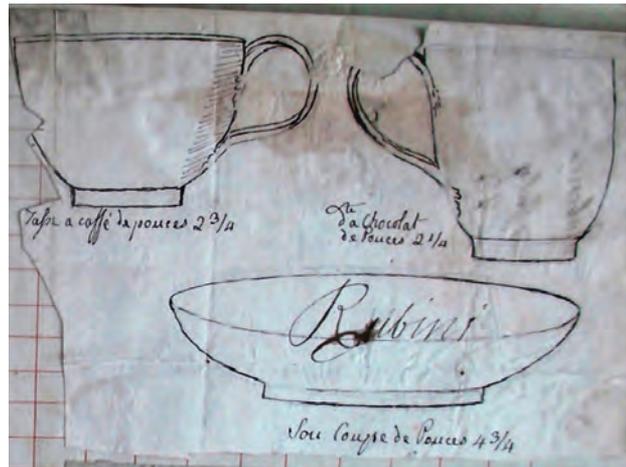
19. Detail of cup shapes annotated 'Modetti: 25 May 91'; V&A/Wedgwood Collection, MS No. E62 -33486



20. Detail of cup handles annotated vertically 'G. M Heunisch— 9 June 91'; V&A/Wedgwood Collection, MS No. E62 -33486



21. Detail of tableware shapes annotated 'Gerhardt Jan 7 1796'; V&A/Wedgwood Collection, MS No. E62 -33486



22. Detail of page showing annotations 'Rubini'; V&A/Wedgwood Collection, MS No. E62 -33486

To provide further support for the Burslem origin of the *Shape & Pattern Book*, one can look at the three examples of pages with annotations that include both names and dates. Fortunately, the names appear on orders and invoices in the Wedgwood Archives, making it possible to identify the people involved. The earliest date accompanies the design of two cups drawn on plain paper stuck to the lower half of page 169 (19). The notation below reads 'Modetti: May 1791'. The name refers the firm of Jean Baptiste Modetti, who was a merchant based in Rome. The top half of the same page has a design for a teacup with twisted rope handles and floral terminals; the drawing is again on

plain paper and stuck to the page with white paste (20). Between the top drawings is the note 'G M Heunisch 9 June 91', relating to the German merchant company of Germain Michel Heunisch, based in Schweinfurt in Lower Franconia. On page 150, at the bottom left-hand corner, are five small sketches of tableware with the handwritten script 'Gerhardt January 7 1796' (21). This references John George Gerhardt & Son, who were merchants in Gera in Upper Saxony. There are many other names in the book, but they are undated. While 'Rubini' might suggest a name for the shape or pattern of the teawares on page 146, in fact it refers to the merchants Rubini Brothers of Bolgna (22). There

is correspondence between the Etruria Wedgwood Works and these merchants as well as many other European firms, illustrating the international trade enjoyed by the Staffordshire potters. The letters and orders are usually written in either the senders' native language or in French and required translation. This offers an explanation as to why Samuel Wedgwood was so keen to tell his father about his skills in French, Italian and German. If he was to join the family firm, perhaps he was to be dealing with the European buyers. All this suggests that when Useful Thomas and Peter Swift planned to take up their Burslem business, they took the customer contacts with them and they were subsequently used by Ralph, who took not just patterns and shapes for use by his new partners in Yorkshire, but also his client list.

In addition to his father's contacts, Ralph seems to have developed his own network of merchants and some of the names appearing in the *Shape & Pattern Book* do not appear in the Etruria records. The most commonly seen name is Schintz & Traxler of Leghorn.

They occur many times throughout the book, often in conjunction with the showiest patterns (23). This was most likely the firm of Giovanni Schintz and Davide Traxler, Swiss-born merchants based in Leghorn. Leghorn is the anglicised name for Livorno, the major 18th-century duty-free trading port in Italy which served as a major commercial hub in southern Europe. It was a key port for the redistribution of cargoes in the Mediterranean region and a vial entrepôt for British trade with North America. The city had a long tradition of British influence, but during the French-British War Leghorn was captured and occupied by the French in June 1796. Schintz and Traxler survived the conflict, but the businesses of many European merchants were closed, no doubt the British suppliers were never paid what they were owed, and Ralph Wedgwood, along with many other manufacturers, suffered the consequences.

The *Shape & Pattern Book* also includes other names for whom no information has yet been found. There are references to 'Mr Foster, New York, via Liverpool', 'Mr. Bickelberger', 'Mr. Boulton', 'Mr H. Mear', 'Mr Hennig', and 'Mr Pickergill' or sometimes 'Pickersgill'. Given the broad geographical extent of Ralph Wedgwood's sales, it may be some time before they are identified.

### *Ralph Wedgwood pottery production*

The *Shape & Pattern Book* gives some idea of the wares Ralph may have made in Burslem and aspired to make in Yorkshire, and of who some of his customers might have been. But identifying a body of his extant wares is not limited to comparison with the book – we also have marked wares from both the Burslem and Yorkshire periods. When these are found on pottery with distinctive shapes or patterns, this evidence may also be used to some extent to identify unmarked wares. To promote further understanding of Ralph Wedgwood's productions this paper is limiting discussion to articles bearing a mark, or articles which match the *Shape & Pattern Book*, especially highlighting examples from previously unpublished pages of the book.

Ralph Wedgwood was in business in Burslem for almost nine years and three kinds of Wedgwood



23. Detail of pages showing patterns and annotations 'Schintz & Traxler Leghorn'; V&A/Wedgwood Collection, MS No. E62-33486



24. Ralph Wedgwood impressed marks, the top three associated with Burslem productions, the bottom mark associated with Ferrybridge



25. Pearlware figure of the suicidal heroine Lucretia, impressed 'WEDGWOOD' on the reverse, 28.5 cm long; courtesy Skinner Auctions

& Co. marks are thought to have been used by him during that time (24). The first is found on a dish which has an enamelled device commemorating George III's recovery from ill-health in 1789. The reverse carries the extremely rare impressed mark 'WEDGWOOD & CO HILL BURSLEM', all in upper case.<sup>57</sup> The second mark has two variations: they are both impressed, the first is 'WEDGWOOD & CO' in upper case, the second 'Wedgwood & Co' in upper and lower case. At one time it was suggested that the upper case 'WEDGWOOD & CO' related to the Burslem business and the lower case 'Wedgwood & Co' to the later Ferrybridge partnership. At the time of writing, no 'Wedgwood & Co' mark of any kind has been found on the Ferrybridge site, giving rise to more recent discussions about whether any 'Wedgwood & Co' mark was ever used in Yorkshire, but as so little of the site has been excavated it may be premature to make such assumptions.

The third mark is the impressed single word 'WEDGWOOD' in upper case, sometimes with a full stop. This may be found on a range of earthenware figures in various sizes from large examples almost two feet high, to standard mantelpiece-size models.

There is no evidence in the extensive factory records that Josiah ever made or commissioned earthenware figures, but newspaper notices show that Ralph had them for sale, and there is every reason to suppose he felt able to use his own surname as there was no chance of confusion with the Etruria factory (25). There are also a small number of figures impressed 'WEDGWOOD & CO' in upper case. So far as is known, figures were never made in Ralph's period at Ferrybridge, so the preponderance of opinion is that they were Ralph's work at Burslem. One mark thought to have been used only at Ferrybridge is the impressed name 'WEDGWOOD' followed by a numeral. It is the only Wedgwood mark to be excavated on the Ferrybridge site, but as so little of the area has been dug, we await further excavations for evidence of all the Wedgwood Ferrybridge marks.

There are discussions of Ralph Wedgwood's pottery in many published articles, and it seems prudent to avoid repetition of illustrations, except where a modern colour image adds to an appreciation of his work. It is possible to match many extant examples to the wares found in the *Shape & Patten Book*, and the easiest ones to identify are the printed patterns.



26. Pearlware jug with black printed imagery, including portraits of President George Washington and Dr Franklin, 14.5 cm high; collection of National Museum of American History, Smithsonian Institution (CE.62.968)



27. *Shape & Pattern Book*, pp. 51 & 167; V&A/Wedgwood Collection, MS No. E62 -33486



28. Pearlware, rectangular dish, blue printed with 'Elephant & Howdah' pattern, impressed 'WEDGWOOD & Co.', 26.2 cm long, shown with mark and matching border designs in the *Shape & Pattern Book*; private collection

A jug in the Smithsonian Collection is attributed to Ralph Wedgwood, but the brief description does not say whether or not it is marked (26). It is printed in black with portraits of George Washington and Benjamin Franklin. Copperplate pulls of these images can be found on page 167 of the *Shape & Pattern Book*, and on the same page is the classical design found beneath the lip of the jug, together with the flower and ribbon border (27). Apparently, the same print was used in blue on a plain surface; an example is in the collection of the New York Historical Society.<sup>58</sup> The portrait of Franklin is a common one with many possible print sources and it is widely used on ceramics, but the portrait of Washington is more unusual. It appears to be based on a mezzotint by Valentine Green after a painting by Trumbull, published in London in 1783.<sup>59</sup> This print has so far only been recorded on Ralph Wedgwood pieces. The inscription beneath the portrait, 'LONG LIVE THE PRESIDENT', suggests the jug was produced during Washington's presidency, which ran for two terms from 1788 to 1793.

Some of the most commonly found blue printed designs are versions of the 'Elephant & Howdah' pattern, sometimes known as the 'Processional Elephant & Howdah pattern' (28). They appear in the *Shape & Pattern Book* on many pages which illustrate different sizes and shapes of the design, as well as the associated inner and outer borders. The *Shape & Pattern Book* also includes pulls from many chinoiserie engravings with a variety of centres, borders and even vertical linear patterns for use on the spine of handles (29).

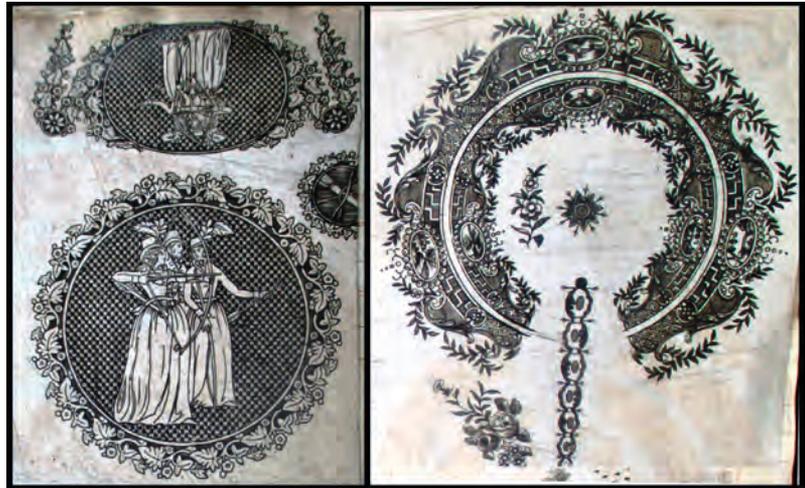
Perhaps one of the most memorable patterns attributed to Ralph Wedgwood is that often described as 'Archers' or 'Lady Archers'. It comes in sizes with or without swags at the side of the frame around the central subject. This mug (30) has an exterior rim pattern that does not appear to be in the *Shape & Pattern Book*, but the interior border design is seen in a set of engraving for the exterior, interior and handle of a mug or jug, together with images of the 'Archers' pattern (31).



29. Chinoiserie patterns from the *Shape & Pattern Book*; V&A/Wedgwood Collection, MS No. E62 -33486



30. Pearlware mug printed in brown with the 'Archers' pattern, together with details of the swagged frame of the print, and the inner rim border, 15.25 cm high; private collection



31. Printed pulls from the *Shape & Pattern Book* that match the mug in (30); V&A/Wedgwood Collection, MS No. E62 -33486

One puzzling version of the archery print is known in underglaze blue. Printed on a fluted teabowl and saucer, the pattern appears to be identical to that in the book. The design in the centre of saucer is the simple framed circular print, the cup has the swagged frame seen at the top of page of pulls, and in the base of the cup is the small circular print of a quiver and bow seen to the side between the larger printed pulls. Page 51 of the *Shape & Pattern Book* carries the notation 'Blue archers cups' (32). The puzzle is that the teabowl & saucer illustrated are porcelain! There have been

some suggestions that porcelain with printed designs found in Ralph Wedgwood's *Shape & Pattern Book*, were made at Calcutt in Shropshire.<sup>60</sup> However, there appears to be no convincing evidence to support this assertion. One, admittedly obscure, possibility is that the scientist-potter Ralph Wedgwood may have attempted to make porcelain himself. The 1780s and 90s were a key time in Staffordshire for those interested in experimenting with porcelain production. Perhaps the porcelains for sale at the London shop closure were Ralph's. Something for future research maybe.

Among the most popular prints are the shell designs. There are none illustrated in the *Shape & Pattern Book*, but there are brief descriptions on several pages, and there was the reference in the advertisement for Ralph's bankruptcy sale, to 'Desert Services of the New Shell, printed', as well as examples found with an impressed mark (33).

There are many pages of printed designs and border patterns, including the 'Angel & Eagle' border occasionally seen on plates and dishes as an alternative to the 'chintz' border commonly found with the 'Etruscan Figures' series. Although blue may have been the most popular colour, the prints were also produced in brown, often with a contrasting colour border (34).



32. Porcelain teabowl and saucer with printed decoration, together with details from the *Shape & Pattern Book*, saucer 14.6 cm diam.; V&A/Wedgwood Collection, MS No. E62 -33486; private collection

33. Pearlware dessert dishes with shell printed patterns and printed linear border, together with details from an advertisement of the sale of Ralph Wedgwood's assets, *Staffordshire Advertiser*, 5 May 1798, 21cm wide, impressed mark 'WEDGWOOD & CO'; private collections





34. Pearlware plates printed with patterns in the 'Etruscan Figures' series, the blue example with the 'Angel & Eagle' border, impressed 'WEDGWOOD & CO', 20.2 cm diam.; the brown printed centre with blue printed floral border and brown printed linear edge, impressed 'Wedgwood & Co'; the matching pulls from the *Shape & Pattern Book*; V&A/Wedgwood Collection, MS No. E62 -33486; plates, private collections



35. Tiny watercolour drawings of flower vases and covers, from page 37 of the *Shape & Pattern Book*, with the lower part of extant examples all impressed 'Wedgwood & Co', 16 cm high; private collection

A close look at some very small watercolour drawings on page 37 of the *Shape & Pattern Book* shows three flower vases and covers with pierced collars. Unfortunately, only the lower part seems to have survived in extant

versions (35). The vases were available in a range of colours, the creamware body decorated with contrasting coloured slips which are sometimes marbled to create a leaf-like design around the base.

Towards the end of the *Shape & Pattern Book* are several printed pages taken from what is usually considered to be Josiah Wedgwood's 1774 shape book, despite the fact that the company at that time was a partnership between Josiah and Thomas Wedgwood. Ralph may have felt he had some moral if not legal right to the shapes, and wrote that when he began at the Hill works, 'I aimed at the identical objects of our father'.<sup>61</sup> In December 1790 Josiah wrote to his nephew Thomas Byerley, who was in the London end of the family business, 'We have had several Potters, particularly Ralph Wedgwood send to our works for pieces, apparently intended to take moulds from to supply our customers. I apprehend something of this kind is done in your Warehouse and I wish you to be on your guard as much as you can.'<sup>62</sup> Whatever the rights and wrongs of the matter, Ralph seems to have had some success in producing pieces similar to Josiah's. In the 1774 shape book, plate 9 includes an openwork basket often referred to as a chestnut or orange basket. Ralph appears to have made a very similar product, albeit with a different knob and the addition of a stand (36).<sup>63</sup>

So far we have been able to discover only a small number of pieces that match examples in the *Shape & Pattern Book*. There must be many more extant pieces for there is a wide range of shapes and

patterns illustrated. Some of the drawings in the book are faint and sketchy, others are coloured and detailed. The ornamental and tablewares from page 17 suggest a buff-stained body was produced with decorative details in pink and turquoise (37). Was this unusual combination ever made or were these designs produced in more conventional ceramic bodies such as cane ware or black basalt? The shapes illustrated include jugs, vases, obelisks, tea and tableware. There are also pages with several hundred painted border designs, the range of colours suggesting there were both underglaze and overglaze patterns. Only a few of these have been identified and a small sample from the book is illustrated here (38).

While the *Shape & Pattern Book* undoubtedly provides an excellent source for understanding the range of pottery that Ralph made at Burslem and possibly at Ferrybridge, there is additional evidence in the surprising amount of extant marked examples. The marked wares include a full range of pottery, from creamware, pearlware, jasper and white stoneware to black basalt. Examples can be seen in many of the published articles. The surviving wares show that Ralph Wedgwood's productions were not restricted to those seen in the *Shape & Pattern Book*. He produced a wide variety of items for the elegant late 18th-century household, from candlesticks to water ewers, as well

36. Creamware openwork basket impressed 'WEDGWOOD & Co', together with a detail from page 142 from the *Shape & Pattern Book*, to which is attached page 9 from the Josiah Wedgwood 1774 shape book; Ralph has changed his model slightly and added a stand; courtesy Bonhams; V&A/Wedgwood Collection, MS No. E62 -33486





37. Page 17 from the *Shape & Pattern Book*, showing designs for table and ornamental wares in an unusual colour palette; V&A/Wedgwood Collection, MS No. E62 -33486



38. Details from six of many pages in the *Shape & Pattern Book*, showing painted border patterns for both creamware and pearlware; V&A/Wedgwood Collection, MS No. E62 -33486



39. Creamwares, all impressed 'WEDGWOOD & Co'; private collections



40. Teapot, buff-coloured earthenware, impressed 'Wedgwood & Co'; buff-coloured with reference from the *Shape & Pattern Book* that reads 'Octn buff teapots blk Heads in blue ground blk figures'; private collection; sauce tureen, cover, stand and ladle, impressed 'WEDGWOOD & Co', creamware with enamel painted decoration; © Victoria & Albert Museum, Jermyn Street collection (3583 to C-1901)

as tableware (39). His buff-coloured earthenware is less commonly seen, but served to produce more fashionable teawares than the traditional, simple, painted pearlware examples (40).

There seems little doubt that Ralph Wedgwood followed in his father's footsteps, producing fine earthenwares for British and international markets. The evidence suggests that he did this out of filial duty and a sense of responsibility to his younger siblings. After his successful and unsuccessful potting ventures, Ralph returned to his first love – science and experimentation, where he also experienced success and failure. He died in London on 6 February 1837 and was buried in the churchyard of St Luke's Chelsea.

While this may seem like a long paper, it only skims the surface of what can be discovered about Ralph Wedgwood. His family life was fascinating, from his remarkable siblings, his three wives, his relationships with his children, and his place in the wider Wedgwood family. In addition, there was his second career as an inventor, for which he is more widely known. It is hoped that in some small way this paper will encourage future researchers and writers to look more favourably on Ralph Wedgwood's earthenware and possibly porcelain productions. We may have taken the first steps towards a more complete understanding of his life and work, but there is still a long to-do list. As always in the study of ceramics – there is so much more to discover.

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#### NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Halfpenny (1995), pp. 169–72.

<sup>2</sup> V&A/Wedgwood Collection, MS No. 26845-134, Josiah Wedgwood's apprenticeship document, reproduced with special thanks to the Archive collection at The Wedgwood Museum for permission to quote from manuscripts in the V&A/Wedgwood Collection, presented by the Artfund with major support from the Heritage Lottery Fund, private donations and a public appeal.

<sup>3</sup> V&A/Wedgwood Collection, MS No. 31381-56, Thomas's apprenticeship document.

<sup>4</sup> V&A/Wedgwood Collection, MS No. 19281-27.

<sup>5</sup> V&A/Wedgwood Collection, MS No. 30343-7.

<sup>6</sup> V&A/Wedgwood Collection, MS No. 30344-7.

<sup>7</sup> The sizes of hollow ware were dictated by how many items fit on a standard ware board. As more smaller pieces fit on a board so the higher number was allocated; as a result, an item described as 12 is larger than an 18, which in turn is larger than a 24.

<sup>8</sup> V&A/Wedgwood Collection, MS No. 30348-7.

<sup>9</sup> Tabor's instructions include the number of crates to filled by each size of tea kettle, 20 crates of 12s, 5 crates of 9s and 5 crates of 18s. As the number assigned to ceramic pieces is usually based on the number of pieces that fit a ware board, 9s would be the largest size, and 18s the smallest.

<sup>10</sup> V&A/Wedgwood Collection, MS No. 30350-7.

<sup>11</sup> Wedgwood & Wedgwood (1980).

<sup>12</sup> V&A/Wedgwood Collection, MS No. 18048-25.

<sup>13</sup> Reilly (1989), vol. 1, p. 58.

<sup>14</sup> Adams (1914), p.108 and Reilly (1989), vol. 1, p. 44, endnote 16.

<sup>15</sup> V&A/Wedgwood Collection, MS No. 18322-25.

<sup>16</sup> Reilly (1989), vol. I, p. 71.

<sup>17</sup> Reilly (1989), vol. I, p. 72.

<sup>18</sup> Reilly (1989), vol. I, pp. 415–27.

<sup>19</sup> Reilly (1989), vol. I, p. 426.

<sup>20</sup> Parish register, St Peter ad Vincula, Stoke-upon-Trent, 2 July, 1765.

- <sup>21</sup> Parish register, St Peter ad Vincula, Stoke-upon-Trent, 13 December, 1765.
- <sup>22</sup> Will probated 18 October 1768, Staffordshire, Dioceses of Lichfield and Coventry Wills and Probate 1521–1860.
- <sup>23</sup> Reilly (1989), vol. I, p. 77.
- <sup>24</sup> Wedgwood (1908), p. 208.
- <sup>25</sup> Wedgwood (1908), p. 209.
- <sup>26</sup> Reilly (1989), vol. II, p. 44.
- <sup>27</sup> Wedgwood (1908), pp. 209–10.
- <sup>28</sup> Reilly (1989), vol. I, pp. 670–71.
- <sup>29</sup> V&A/Wedgwood Collection, MS No. W/M 1460.
- <sup>30</sup> V&A/Wedgwood Collection, MS No. 31421-56.
- <sup>31</sup> Wedgwood & Wedgwood (1980), p. 93.
- <sup>32</sup> Martinmas, 11 November, was the traditional quarter day for property transactions in North Staffordshire.
- <sup>33</sup> Moxon Papers, Hanley Reference Library, courtesy Rodney Hampson.
- <sup>34</sup> Letter in the Enoch Wood Scrapbook, written 18 February 1826.
- <sup>35</sup> V&A/Wedgwood Collection, MS No. 31405-56.
- <sup>36</sup> Letter in the Enoch Wood Scrapbook, written 18 February, 1826.
- <sup>37</sup> V&A/Wedgwood Collection, MS No. 19389-27.
- <sup>38</sup> V&A/Wedgwood Collection, MS No. 31405-56; for a transcript of the letter see <https://www.northernceramicsociety.org/samuel-wedgwood/> [accessed 5 April 2021].
- <sup>39</sup> Finer & Savage (1965), p. 43.
- <sup>40</sup> Letter, 4 July 1788, from Samuel to his father Thomas, Wedgwood Archives, V&A/Wedgwood Collection, MS No. 31405-56. For a full transcript of this fascinating and revealing letter see the NCS website <https://www.northernceramicsociety.org/samuel-wedgwood/> [accessed 5 April 2021].
- <sup>41</sup> V&A/Wedgwood Collection, MS No. 31420-56.
- <sup>42</sup> Aiken (1968), pp. 239–40.
- <sup>43</sup> *The London Gazette*, 7 December 1790, p. 740.
- <sup>44</sup> Edmundson (1987), p. 87.
- <sup>45</sup> V&A/Wedgwood Collection, MS No. WM 1460.
- <sup>46</sup> *The London Gazette*, 11 April 1797.
- <sup>47</sup> *Staffordshire Advertiser*, 17 June 1797.
- <sup>48</sup> *Staffordshire Advertiser*, 5 May 1798.
- <sup>49</sup> *Staffordshire Advertiser*, 22 September 1798.
- <sup>50</sup> V&A/Wedgwood Collection, MS No. E56-31532.
- <sup>51</sup> Griffin (2012), p. 406.
- <sup>52</sup> Tomlinson (2005–06, 2011, 2013).
- <sup>53</sup> Wedgwood (1908), p. 212.
- <sup>54</sup> V&A/Wedgwood Collection, MS No. E62 -33486.
- <sup>55</sup> Please note: copperplate pulls of printed patterns in the *Shape & Pattern Book* are mirror images of how they would appear when applied to the pottery. To enable the reader to better compare the designs with extant pottery, the images from the book have been ‘flipped’ horizontally.
- <sup>56</sup> Griffin (2012), p. 406.
- <sup>57</sup> Tomlinson (2011).
- <sup>58</sup> See New York Historical Society, The Dr Arthur H. Merritt Collection, at <https://emuseum.nyhistory.org/objects/12217/pitcher?ctx=161de63f5a7ddd5e6b85df0a56b3639f9f64d437&idx=3> [accessed 7 April 2021].
- <sup>59</sup> An example is in in the National Portrait Gallery, Smithsonian [https://npg.si.edu/object/npg\\_NPG.77.197](https://npg.si.edu/object/npg_NPG.77.197) [accessed 10 June 2020].
- <sup>60</sup> Edmundson (2011), p. 93.
- <sup>61</sup> Letter in the *Enoch Wood Scrapbook* written 18 February 1826.
- <sup>62</sup> Finer & Savage (1965), p. 330.
- <sup>63</sup> See <https://www.bonhams.com/auctions/24079/lot/40/> [last accessed 4 February 2021].

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