

# **The Beeson Collection of Wedgwood: Creating an American Narrative**

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## Abstract

Dwight (1903-1985) and Lucille (1905-2001) Beeson were collectors of the ceramics manufactured by the English company, Wedgwood. The Beesons themselves were both born and raised in the rural South of the United States. Mr. Beeson's job, as an executive for an insurance company, brought the couple to Birmingham, Alabama, where they were based until their deaths. It was after accruing a significant fortune that the Beesons turned their attention to collecting. In choosing Wedgwood as the focus of their purchasing activities, the Beesons were selecting a commodity which held a confirmed status as goods of taste and distinction. Their collecting began in an ad hoc fashion, where little attention was paid to quality or age; however, as they progressed the couple were introduced to the methodologies of collecting. They began to acquire the connoisseurs taste, and through their introduction to authoritative texts written on Wedgwood, exhibitions of Wedgwood material both in England and in America, and their association with numerous American collectors, they began to alter and transform their own acquisitions creating what became the finest collection of Wedgwood in the United States. The Beesons, while engaged with the history of the objects they collected, were equally motivated by the new narratives which they constructed for these objects. They became signals which communicated their own class and status, transforming the couple from provincial, Southern 'country folk' to urbane, erudite connoisseurs able to pass judgment on matters of taste. Within the setting of the Beeson's suburban home, where these objects were displayed until the 1970s, the collection communicated to visitors that this couple were engaged in discerning and sophisticated pursuits. By the mid 1960s the Beesons had made the decision to donate their collection to their local museum, and towards this end, increased the quality of their purchases. The collection was donated to the Birmingham Museum of Art in 1978, and in this role played a part in transforming the image of the community. Just as the collection had served the Beesons, these objects were now being utilised in creating an image of Birmingham as a city defined by culture. In this way, this collection can tell us about the relevance of consumer objects in the process of identity formation and about the vital role such collections had in defining a prosperous post World War Two America. The Beesons envisioned themselves as the custodians of culture and saw their wealth as an opportunity to transform and define their communities.

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Mirror, mirror on the Wall  
 Whose is the fairest of them all?  
 Where's Wedgwood-Bentley to be found?  
 Who has the Pellat and the Darwin Vases?  
 Basalts and cane ware and Flaxman  
 By cases?  
 Mirror:  
 In Birmingham's that wondrous sight  
 At the home of the Beesons, Lucille  
 And Dwight<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Ross Taggart in Mrs. Beeson's 'For the Erasmus Darwin Wedgwood copy of the Portland Vase - #12', 11 January 1967, Birmingham Museum of Art Archives.

## Introduction: Origins of the Collecting Impulse

Dwight and Lucille Beeson dedicated much of their adult lives to the acquisition, interpretation and presentation of their collection of Wedgwood ceramics. The collection, which is now housed at the Birmingham Museum of Art in Alabama, has been called ‘the finest and most important collection of eighteenth century Wedgwood outside of England’.<sup>2</sup> Dwight Moody Beeson (1903-1985) was born in Meridian, Mississippi, and graduated from Emory University in Atlanta, Georgia, after which he began his long association with the Liberty National Life Insurance Company.<sup>3</sup> (Figure 1) As an executive for the company, whose headquarters were located in Birmingham, Alabama, he was able to amass a significant fortune. Lucille Stewart Beeson, his wife, was born in South Pittsburgh, Tennessee in 1905; a ‘farm girl’ who helped to raise her younger brother and sister.<sup>4</sup> She left this rural upbringing when she moved to Georgia in order to further her education, becoming one of the first women to receive a law degree from the Atlanta School of Law and pass the Georgia bar exam.<sup>5</sup> Mrs. Beeson gave up her career at the time of her marriage and dedicated her free time to numerous organisations, clubs and collecting Wedgwood.<sup>6</sup> From its inception, the Beeson collection was a self-reflexive activity centred on the Beesons’ desire to pronounce their wealth and status to the wider community. As we can see from the photograph at the beginning of this section, the Beesons defined themselves in relation to the goods they collected. They communicate, in this image, with each other and with the spectator through their intent gaze upon the two Portland Vase copies they are pictured with.<sup>7</sup> These objects, considered to be the most prestigious in the collection, communicate to the viewer that the Beesons are knowledgeable collectors, absorbed in the study and appreciation of the objects they possess. However, before the reached this stage in their collecting

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<sup>2</sup> <http://www.artsbma.org/showgry.asp?I=D&G=Decorative-Arts:-English&A=0>

<sup>3</sup> Elizabeth Bryding Henley, ‘News From Birmingham: The Dwight and Lucille Beeson Wedgwood Collection’, *Thirty-Fourth Annual Wedgwood International Seminar*, Sponsored by The High Museum of Art and The Ceramic Circle of Atlanta, Atlanta, GA, 1989, pp. 97-99, p. 98. Now the Torchmark Corporation.

<sup>4</sup> Richard Brockman, Lucille Beeson’s long-time attorney and co-executor of her estate, recalled this family history in Clarissa Harms, ‘The Legacy of Lucille Beeson’, *Newssheet: Junior League of Birmingham*, Summer 2001, pp. 13-14.

<sup>5</sup> Clarissa Harms, ‘The Legacy of Lucille Beeson’, *Newssheet: Junior League of Birmingham*, Summer 2001, pp. 13-14.

<sup>6</sup> She was a member of a ladies’ gardening club and was active in her church.

<sup>7</sup> The Portland Vase copies produced during Josiah Wedgwood’s lifetime (as these two were) were considered by collectors at the time to be the pinnacle of Wedgwood’s artistic output. The purchase and significance of these two pieces will be discussed in Chapter three.

activities they strove to adopt the connoisseurship and the forms of erudition defined by authoritative institutions such as the museum.

The impetus to collect came in 1946 when Mrs. Beeson visited New York City for the first time. It was on that trip that she made her first purchases of Wedgwood ceramics, initiating a collection whose inspiration lay in the Metropolitan Museum of Art.<sup>8</sup> (Figure 2) Recalling the trip in a 1992 interview, Mrs. Beeson confirmed that; ‘While there, of course, one of the first things is to go to the Metropolitan Museum’.<sup>9</sup> As Mrs. Beeson indicated, the museum was an important cultural site in the American psyche and provided the visitor with overt access to collections and covert access to collecting narratives. The Metropolitan Museum of Art’s foundations lay in the surge of nationalism following the Civil War (1861-1865), which inspired the creation of new cultural institutions, including national museums. It was in Paris, however, that the museum’s story began. In 1866, at a Fourth of July gala on the Bois de Boulogne, John Jay declared that it was ‘time for the American people to lay the foundations of a National Institution and Gallery of Art’.<sup>10</sup> The French connection was significant; nineteenth-century Americans saw the Louvre as a symbol of the triumph of democracy and aimed to adopt this model in the development of their own national museum.<sup>11</sup> Yet, the American approach was significantly different, as one of the founders of the Museum of Modern Art reminds us;

We Americans have collected a little differently from other people. We were denied the historic opportunities afforded to proconsuls and viceroys... Our interests as collectors grew out of our interest as manufacturers and merchants, as promoters and organizers, and followed them into every corner of the world and every epoch and activity of man... Our art collections, like our industrial organization, are our heritage from the heroic age of American private enterprise.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Wedgwood is a British pottery firm, originally founded by Josiah Wedgwood, which in 1987 merged with Waterford Crystal to become Waterford Wedgwood. The wares produced by the firm range from eighteenth century cream-wares to modern production of the jasper stoneware for which the company is best known.

<sup>9</sup> Karla Klein Albertson, ‘Lucille Stewart Beeson shares some thoughts on the growth of her Wedgwood collection’, *Antique Review*, November 1992, no pagination.

<sup>10</sup> Howard Hibbard, *The Metropolitan Museum of Art*, (London & Boston: Faber and Faber, 1980), p.

7. John Jay was an American lawyer and grandson of the first chief justice.

<sup>11</sup> Calvin Tomkins, *Merchants and Masterpieces*, (New York: Henry Holt, 1989), p. 31.

<sup>12</sup> A. Hyatt Mayer, ‘The Gifts that Made the Museum’, *Museum Of Modern Art Bulletin*, 16(3) November 1957.

By 1870 the Metropolitan Museum's Board of Trustees, made up primarily of businessmen and financiers, had been selected to help develop the museum's stated purpose of 'encouraging and developing the study of the fine arts, and the application of the arts to manufacture, of advancing the general knowledge of kindred subjects, and to that end, of furnishing popular instruction and recreation'.<sup>13</sup> Joseph H. Choate, a founder of the Metropolitan, declared that knowledge of art would 'tend directly to humanize, to educate and refine a practical and laborious people'.<sup>14</sup> However altruistic the museum's intentions, it was the interest of wealthy Americans, especially wealthy American collectors, that the trustees sought.<sup>15</sup> The cultural developments of the era were inextricably tied to capitalism.<sup>16</sup> As one trustee put it, 'every nation that has tried it has found that wise investment in the development of art pays more than compound interest'.<sup>17</sup> At the time of Mrs. Beeson's visit, the Metropolitan Museum was not yet eighty years old but, for Americans, it had already come to represent the wealth and cultural ambitions of the nation, and also contained messages about collecting in a democratic American context.<sup>18</sup>

This period saw not only the foundation of America's museums, but its orchestras, libraries and universities.<sup>19</sup> Unlike in Europe, where many cultural institutions were at least partially funded by the state, in America they were private and financed by America's privileged citizens.<sup>20</sup> Their aims were ostensibly to educate the population, but it was a select few who ran the institutions. Joseph H. Choate, lawyer and member of the Metropolitan Museum Board, gave a speech at the inauguration of the Museum building where he rallied the wealthy with talk of the glory they could share if they would;

Convert pork to porcelain, grain and produce into priceless pottery, the rude ores of commerce into sculptured marble, and railroad shares and mining stocks - things which perish without the using - and which in the next financial

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<sup>13</sup> Hibbard, *op. cit.*, p. 7-8.

<sup>14</sup> Carol Duncan, *Civilizing Rituals: Inside Public Art Museums*, (London & New York: Routledge, 1995), p. 54.

<sup>15</sup> Hibbard, *op. cit.*, p. 8.

<sup>16</sup> Nancy Einreinhofer, *The American Museum: Elitism and Democracy*, (London and Washington: Leicester University Press, 1997), p. 14.

<sup>17</sup> Hibbard, *op. cit.*, p. 8.

<sup>18</sup> Einreinhofer, *op. cit.*, p. 19.

<sup>19</sup> Einreinhofer, *op. cit.*, p. 14.

<sup>20</sup> Einreinhofer, *op. cit.*, p. 33.



panic shall surely shrivel like parched scrolls into the glorified canvases of the world's masters, that shall adorn these walls for centuries.<sup>21</sup>

The motivations of America's wealthy elite who founded public art museums were often contradictory, a mix of personal ambition and public duty, both elitist and democratic.<sup>22</sup> By the turn of the century, the trustees of the Metropolitan were headed by the legendary financier J. P. Morgan, who admitted that 'a man always has two reasons for the things he does - a good one and the real one'.<sup>23</sup> (Figure 3) Morgan began a vigorous expansion campaign at the Metropolitan, but also introduced a new attitude towards gifts and donations.<sup>24</sup> This decision was in marked opposition to earlier nineteenth century acquisitions, typified by those of William Blodgett, the first Chairman of the Museum's Executive Committee, who in the 1870s purchased three private European collections.<sup>25</sup> While the purchase included a number of 'masterpieces',<sup>26</sup> Blodgett was buying at the beginning of the Old Master boom, a period before figures like Bernard Berenson began to make connoisseurship into a serious business.<sup>27</sup> (Figure 4) In 1906, under Morgan's direction, the museum reported that it would 'rigorously exclude all which do not attain to acknowledged standards'.<sup>28</sup> Morgan and his trustees adopted systematic programmes of acquisition, and began 'to group together the masterpieces of different countries and times in such relation and sequence as to illustrate the history of art in the broadest sense'.<sup>29</sup> A system of progressive order was imposed upon the pictures in the collection, arranged by school and chronology.<sup>30</sup> This arrangement, while purporting to fulfil the museum's educational remit, was also of symbolic import; it was meant to meet the

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<sup>21</sup> Quoted in Einreinhofer, *op. cit.*, p. 43.

<sup>22</sup> Duncan, *op. cit.*, p. 54.

<sup>23</sup> Quoted in Duncan, *op. cit.*, p. 54.

<sup>24</sup> Hibbard, *op. cit.*, p. 16.

<sup>25</sup> Hibbard, *op. cit.*, p. 9.

<sup>26</sup> It was John Taylor Johnston, President of the Museum 1870-89, who declared these works, which included Frans Hals *Malle Babbe*, Van Dyck's *St. Rosalie* and Poussin's *Midas*, 'masterpieces'. See Hibbard, *op. cit.*, p. 9.

<sup>27</sup> Hibbard, *op. cit.*, p. 9. Bernard Berenson (1865-1959) was an art historian working in America who specialised in the Italian Renaissance. He was a major figure in establishing the market for 'Old Master' paintings and often acted to authenticate pieces for collectors, many of which authentications have later been called in to question.

<sup>28</sup> Hibbard, *op. cit.*, p. 16.

<sup>29</sup> Hibbard, *op. cit.*, p. 16.

<sup>30</sup> Einreinhofer, *op. cit.*, p. 22.

needs of a new kind of visitor, one who entered the museum in search of moral and spiritual enlightenment.<sup>31</sup>

Yet, while the museum was constructing a vision of the visitor as ‘bourgeois citizen’, the forms of connoisseurship and structuring of art historical knowledge were based on a narrative through which the story of individual genius could be told. This celebration of the individual provided an attractive model for wealthy patrons in their collecting practices.<sup>32</sup> The emphasis of the Museum, which was communicated to its visitors through design elements ranging from its architecture to the labelling, was based on a systematic ordering of the history of European art, told through stories of value attributed to celebrated individuals, both the artists and the collectors who acquired the works for the benefit of the nation.<sup>33</sup>

From the museum’s inception it was reliant on wealthy Americans’ donations, which ensured that it was their notions of taste and value which were privileged in the museum space. Private collections, primarily consisting of European artworks, were acquired for the museum’s collection through purchases and gifts. Morgan negotiated the bequest of the New York department store owner Benjamin Altman’s painting collection, which included works by Botticelli, Titian, Holbein, and Vermeer. The Havermeyer family, who made their fortune through the American Sugar Refining Company, bequeathed over two thousand paintings to the museum.<sup>34</sup> The sale or donation of these private collections to the public museum often offered the collector an opportunity to display their objects as a memorial to themselves and their families. For example, Catharine Lorillard Wolfe, who in 1872 was estimated the richest

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<sup>31</sup> Duncan, *op. cit.*, p. 49. Duncan has written about the transformation of the European princely gallery into the public art museum, a transformation that ‘served the ideological needs of emerging bourgeois nation-states by providing them with a new kind of civic ritual’. See Duncan, *op. cit.*, Chapter Two.

<sup>32</sup> Einreinhofer, *op. cit.*, p. 15. See also Duncan, *op. cit.*, for the concept of the museum visitor as ‘bourgeois citizen’.

<sup>33</sup> These systems were largely determined by the Museum board of trustees, made up of a mix of wealthy New Yorkers and those with ‘art expertise’, such as painters Frederick Church, Eastman Johnston, and John F. Kensett. Collectors, such as William T. Blodgett, who offered the museum trustees their collections, were rewarded with positions of power within the Museum. After offering his collection at cost to the museum, Blodgett was made Chairman of its Executive Committee. Louis Palma di Cesnola, an Italian military man who amassed a large collection of artefacts, was invited to become a member of the board of the Metropolitan Museum and later director, when his collection, called the ‘Treasure of Curium’ was sold to the Museum in 1876. Einreinhofer, *op. cit.*, pp. 34-35 and 40-41.

<sup>34</sup> Einreinhofer, *op. cit.*, pp. 48-49.

unmarried woman in the world, turned her attention to collecting.<sup>35</sup> Shortly after becoming the only woman to subscribe to the Metropolitan's first fund-raising drive in 1870, she commissioned her cousin John Wolfe, who was considered a connoisseur, to amass a gallery of paintings for her Madison Avenue home.<sup>36</sup> The collection, which was primarily made up of the fashionable French Salon painters of the time such as William-Adolphe Bouguereau and Alexandre Cabanel, was eventually left to the Metropolitan along with an endowment of \$200,000.<sup>37</sup> While it was the first self-sufficient bequest of this kind, it was also one of the first to come with restrictions attached.<sup>38</sup> According to her will the gift was made 'upon express condition that the trustees and managers... shall provide and set apart exclusively for said collection a suitable, well-lighted fire-proof apartment, gallery or separate space, where the paintings and water color drawings herein mentioned shall be properly arranged and displayed; and provided also, that said collection shall be designated and continue to be known as 'the Catharine Lorillard Wolfe Collection'.<sup>39</sup> Similarly, Benjamin Altman (1840-1913), a wealthy merchant and founder of the department store, B. Altman & Co., began collecting when he purchased several Chinese porcelains from Henry Duveen, relative of the famous dealer Joseph Duveen.<sup>40</sup> With the Duveens' tutelage, he was soon buying Rembrandts and other acknowledged masters. He deeded his collection to the Metropolitan on the condition that it would 'provide and permanently maintain... one suitable room of sufficient size to contain all my paintings, statuary, rock crystals, Limoges enamels, and one other suitable room to contain my Chinese porcelains, said rooms to be adjoining and opening into each other'.<sup>41</sup> One critic later complained that the Metropolitan was 'not so much an institution for the instruction and the pleasure of the people as a sort of joint mausoleum to enshrine the fame of American collectors'.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> Tomkins, *op. cit.*, pp. 71-72.

<sup>36</sup> Tomkins, *op. cit.*, p. 72.

<sup>37</sup> Tomkins, *op. cit.*, p. 72.

<sup>38</sup> Tomkins, *op. cit.*, p. 72.

<sup>39</sup> Quoted in Tomkins, *op. cit.*, p. 72. All quotations utilise the original author's spellings.

<sup>40</sup> Hibbard, *op. cit.*, p. 208. Joseph Duveen (1869-1939) was a British art dealer who was renowned for buying works of art in Europe and selling them to American millionaires such as J.P. Morgan, Henry Clay Frick, William Randolph Hearst and Samuel H. Kress. With the help of Bernard Berenson, he increased the market for Renaissance paintings, and propagated the notion that buying art was a significant attribute of elite upper classes.

<sup>41</sup> Quoted in Hibbard, *op. cit.*, p. 208.

<sup>42</sup> The *New York Times*, 9 May 1925 as cited in Duncan, (1995), *op. cit.*, p. 61.

The Metropolitan Museum's Department of Decorative Art was formed in 1907 when Morgan purchased the French architect and designer George Hoentschel's collection of French decorative art.<sup>43</sup> (Figure 5) The installation of the collection was a matter of some debate among the Museum board; the Trustees and officials of the Museum were in agreement that it was 'no longer desirable or consistent with its best interests that special gifts, however valuable, should be segregated in rooms by themselves, when there [were] other objects of the same class or character in other parts of the Museum'.<sup>44</sup> Such a method of display was considered 'fatal to the systematic arrangement and organization of a museum' and produced 'vexation in the minds of those who... [came to] study the collections intelligently and seriously'.<sup>45</sup> No one, we are told, entered into this 'more heartily' than Mr. Morgan himself.<sup>46</sup>

When Mrs. Beeson visited the Metropolitan, she and her husband had already accrued wealth; it was an education in taste that the museum would grant them. On her visit to the Metropolitan Museum, Mrs. Beeson would have adhered to the museum's construction of the visitor as an 'ideal bourgeois citizen'; a self-improving individual in search of enlightenment, but also an individual with the financial power to consume luxury goods.<sup>47</sup> The museum also educated Mrs. Beeson as to what forms of Wedgwood ceramics were considered the most desirable. Of the many wares produced by the Wedgwood company over the years, it was the neo-classical jasperware which was specifically selected by the Beesons for their collection. These kinds of choices and distinctions that the Beesons made in their acquisitions will be examined in the second chapter. Yet it was the classical, ornamental wares, produced during Josiah Wedgwood's lifetime which were acquired and exhibited at museums such as the Metropolitan, and thus, for Mrs. Beeson, this was the kind of ware which would have been the most desirable for her own collection. (Figure 6)

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<sup>43</sup> Einreinhofer, *op. cit.*, p. 46. Hoentschel dedicated his career to the restoration and construction of eighteenth century and Gothic interiors. See Edward Robinson, 'The Hoentschel Collection', *Bulletin of the Metropolitan Museum of Art*, (New York, 1907), vol. II, no. 6, pp. 93-99.

<sup>44</sup> Robinson, *op. cit.*, p. 98.

<sup>45</sup> Robinson, *op. cit.*, p. 98.

<sup>46</sup> Robinson, *op. cit.*, p. 98.

<sup>47</sup> Duncan, *op. cit.*, p. 49.

Mrs. Beeson's motivations in her choice of Wedgwood ceramics are difficult to pinpoint,<sup>48</sup> however, in *The Collector's Wedgwood*, Robin Reilly commented on the significant role of American collectors in the market for Wedgwood:

More than ever before the American influence on Wedgwood design and marketing became apparent, particularly in the "Bridal" market for bone china, and this influence quickly extended into the field of collecting. With few exceptions, the finest pieces from great British collections of Wedgwood dispersed in the twenty-five years after the war were acquired for collections in North America.<sup>49</sup>

Wedgwood was promoted as a safe and tasteful option for the collector. Middle class women across America would have been familiar with modern Wedgwood productions, especially the bone china, through shops and department stores. Through exposure to museum exhibitions and texts on Wedgwood, the novice collector was introduced to a wider range of the company's products and histories. Again one can look to Robert Reilly, author of *The Collector's Wedgwood* (1980), a comprehensive two volume history of the firm *Wedgwood* (1989), and a biography *Josiah Wedgwood* (1992), who told his readers that 'For more than two hundred years the name of Wedgwood has been synonymous with quality of craftsmanship and the Wedgwood trademark has come to be recognized as a guarantee of integrity.'<sup>50</sup> For the collector who had 'no confidence in his knowledge or taste, a simple form of insurance' was 'to buy only those objects which carry an internationally accepted hallmark of quality.'<sup>51</sup> Reilly assured his reader that Wedgwood provided this hallmark while the objects provided the collector with 'an unrivalled field for the exercise of discriminating taste'.<sup>52</sup>

Mrs. Beeson recalled that when she first began purchasing Wedgwood her husband had not yet been 'bitten by the "collecting bug"'.<sup>53</sup> It was not until she read a biography of Josiah Wedgwood to her husband that his own interest in Wedgwood

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<sup>48</sup> Bourdieu and Darbel have pointed out that there exists 'A vague awareness of the arbitrary nature of admiration for works of art' which 'haunts the experience of aesthetic pleasure.' Pierre Bourdieu and Alain Darbel, translated by Caroline Beattie and Nick Merriman, *The Love of Art*, (Oxford: Polity Press, 1991), p. 108.

<sup>49</sup> Robin Reilly, *The Collector's Wedgwood*, (Huntington, NY: Portfolio Press, 1980), p. 31.

<sup>50</sup> Reilly (1980), *op. cit.*, p. 307.

<sup>51</sup> Reilly (1980), *op. cit.*, p. 307.

<sup>52</sup> Reilly (1980), *op. cit.*, p. 307.

<sup>53</sup> Elizabeth Bryding Henley, 'News From Birmingham: The Dwight and Lucille Beeson Wedgwood Collection', in *Thirty-Fourth Annual Wedgwood International Seminar*, Atlanta Georgia, 1989, p. 97.

and his wares was ignited.<sup>54</sup> Putting an artistic personality behind the pieces helped to market them to purchasers and it is significant that in the biographies written about Josiah Wedgwood, his story is told as a rise from obscurity to a life of wealth and prestige, a story which had significant resonance for Mr. Beeson. One early Wedgwood biographer wrote of the ‘disadvantages of his childhood, the terrible trials of his early sickness and the consequent injury to his bodily powers’, yet, the author told his reader, Wedgwood had ‘lived a life of self-improvement’.<sup>55</sup> According to the author, he had transformed ‘the handicraft of pottery’ from a ‘rude and empirical’ craft to the ‘condition of an art’.<sup>56</sup> Josiah Wedgwood’s biography provided a model for the ambitions of American collectors; success based on industry, commerce, democracy and capitalism. This biography provided inspiration for those Americans, like Dwight Beeson, who sought a place in history and believed in the importance of personal, as well as national, wealth as the economic foundation of an advanced culture.<sup>57</sup> The ‘self-made man’, the concept of the self as productive, which was epitomised in Josiah Wedgwood’s biography was the inspiration for Dwight Beeson’s interest in what had originally been his wife’s collecting activities. In later descriptions of the couple’s collection, authors compared Mr. Beeson to the founders of the Metropolitan, commenting that ‘once Mr. Beeson’s appetite was whetted’, he began buying ‘with a prodigality reminiscent of the epic days of carload purchasing by Morgan and Hearst’.<sup>58</sup> While Mr. Beeson was portrayed as an entrepreneurial businessman interested in acquisition, Mrs Beeson was characterised as the studious collector who appreciated ‘Wedgwood’s aesthetic achievements’.<sup>59</sup>

The awakening of Mr. Beeson’s interest in collecting marked a dramatic shift the couple’s purchasing activities. Throughout the later half of the 1940s and the early 1950s, Mrs. Beeson had purchased Wedgwood items on a relatively small scale, largely from antique shops she visited whilst in New York or New Orleans. The purchases were far from systematic and were determined largely by availability rather

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<sup>54</sup> Ibid.

<sup>55</sup> Samuel Smiles, *Josiah Wedgwood*, (London: John Murray, 1897), p. 289.

<sup>56</sup> Smiles, (1897), *op. cit.*, p. 289.

<sup>57</sup> Einreinhofer, *op. cit.*, p. 4.

<sup>58</sup> Mildred Housen, ‘A Fabulous Collection in Birmingham’, *Town & Country*, June 1967, Vol. 121, No. 4535.

<sup>59</sup> Douglas Hyland, uncatalogued introduction to the Beeson collection, Birmingham Museum of Art Archive, uncatalogued documents in the ‘Beeson File’ (hereafter BMAA).

than any conception of a purpose built collection with chosen representative objects. The majority of the objects purchased during this era dated from the nineteenth century and did not adhere to the received opinion of the finest quality pieces which were manufacture during Josiah Wedgwood's lifetime. Perhaps the most influential factor in changing patterns of acquisition came when the Beesons joined the Wedgwood International Seminar (WIS) in 1957. The WIS was an organisation aimed at American collectors and dedicated to providing them with examples of connoisseurship, which would lead to their own choice of 'sure and certified products'.<sup>60</sup> The organisation was founded in 1956 by the Wedgwood collector, Harry Buten, a figure who will be analysed in further detail in the next chapter, in order to provide a forum through which Wedgwood enthusiasts across the country could meet and share their interest. The Seminars were based around annual meetings held at museums and focused on scholarly lectures where collectors were introduced to and educated about the classification and collecting of Wedgwood. The new collector was thus introduced to more experienced collectors, museum curators, Wedgwood authors and dealers, who would guide their collecting practice, introduce them to the discourses on collecting and connoisseurship and define a canon of taste. The Beesons commented that after joining the group, their interest in making their collection as comprehensive as possible was intensified and the 'quality and scope' of their collection had 'steadily improved'.<sup>61</sup> Membership of this organisation also legitimated the Beesons' own status and class. Mrs. Beeson's presence on the WIS Board of Governors, a Board which Mr. Beeson said did not 'have many country folks on it', was utilised in order to demonstrate their 'world-prominent' role as collectors.<sup>62</sup> This clearly indicates the Beesons anxiety to leave behind any provincial remnants from their rural past. Their participation in this group, their growing connoisseurial knowledge, and their acquisition of Wedgwood ceramics were the primary pursuits used by the Beesons in transforming themselves from 'country folks' to erudite and wealthy philanthropists.

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<sup>60</sup> See Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction*, trans. by Richard Nice, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1984), p. 331, for the idea of conformity amongst collectors in the desire to adhere to quality goods.

<sup>61</sup> 'The Dwight and Lucille Beeson Wedgwood Collection', from a seminar on Wedgwood held at the Birmingham Museum of Art, January 9, 1967, BMAA.

<sup>62</sup> '...So Vast a Collection', *Birmingham*, the Official Monthly Publication of the Birmingham Area Chamber of Commerce, November, 1967, Vol. 6, No.11.

By the middle of the 1960s, the Beesons had become accepted members of the Wedgwood collecting community. This acceptance, however, was predicted on several key factors. In 1965 the Beesons travelled to the Paine Art Center in Wisconsin in order to visit an exhibition of eighteenth century Wedgwood. Visitors to the exhibition were reassured that Wedgwood was ‘a household term synonymous with purity of design and quality’.<sup>63</sup> It was at this exhibition that Mr. Beeson made the decision to focus their purchases on goods manufactured during Josiah Wedgwood’s lifetime. Around the same time he resolved that the Beeson collection should be donated to their local museum. In order for their gift to be accepted it became crucial that the couple purchase only the ‘highest’ quality ceramics. Mr. Beeson wrote of their ‘ambition to upgrade and enlarge’ their collection and his persuasion of Mrs. Beeson to ‘dispose of a number of 19<sup>th</sup> century pieces... that were run of the mill’.<sup>64</sup> Between 1964 and 1967, the Beesons purchased their two Portland Vase copies and acquired two major collections of Wedgwood previously held by Dr. Harold Klawans and Dr. Francis Vurpillat, both members of the WIS and both exhibitors at the Paine Center exhibition.<sup>65</sup> These acquisitions assured the Beesons’ position as leading collectors of Wedgwood in America. The collection was displayed in their home in Birmingham, which became a site where the Beesons introduced others to their collection and to their prosperous lifestyle.

When they decided to become collectors, the Beesons must have been motivated by the desire for the pleasure and prestige afforded to one through collecting, but their motivation extended beyond themselves to a wider community. It bound the Beesons to other collectors and they followed a philanthropic model whereby they also became benefactors to their local city. When Mrs. Beeson’s own philanthropic activities led to her provision of funds for a new building to house the Dwight and Lucille Beeson Center for the Healing Arts at Samford University in Birmingham, it was an American vision of classicism which she chose to employ in its architecture and design. (Figure 7) The Center, which features ‘a domed central rotunda..., a series of murals painted in the style of the Italian Renaissance, a bronze statue of a healing angel cast in Italy and other features of classical architecture’ won Mrs. Beeson

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<sup>63</sup> Richard N. Gregg, ‘18<sup>th</sup> Century Wedgwood at the Paine Art Center’, (Oshkosh, WI: Paine Art Center, 1965), p. 3.

<sup>64</sup> Dwight Beeson to Mellanay Delhom, April 1, 1966, BMAA.

<sup>65</sup> See Chapter three, p. 130 and 134, for discussion of these purchases.



recognition from Classical America, a national society dedicated to encouraging the classical tradition in the arts.<sup>66</sup> They presented her with the Arthur Ross Award, which was awarded annually to a patron who had ‘furthered the application of classical ideals and canons’.<sup>67</sup> A classicism based on European models was utilised for the facades and interiors of the new museums, designed by American architects who had studied in Europe.<sup>68</sup> Richard Morris Hunt, who studied at the Ecole des Beaux Arts, was responsible for the Fifth Avenue façade of the Metropolitan. This classicism had the authority of history which was employed to construct a sense of America’s place within that history.<sup>69</sup>

The primary instance of the Beeson’s philanthropy, however, remains the donation of their entire collection to the Birmingham Museum of Art. The museum offered a platform upon which the Beeson’s presented their collection to the public while simultaneously providing the couple with a venue through which to legitimise their wealth and establish their social status in the wider community. It was in this museum where I first encountered the collection and which seemed to present numerous research possibilities.<sup>70</sup> Though the collection had been catalogued by the curator of the museum, very little attention had been paid to the Beesons as collectors.<sup>71</sup> This thesis focuses on the practice and act of collecting. Collecting is understood as an activity which not only creates frameworks for understanding objects, but is also active in determining and communicating the socio-economic status of the collector. I was particularly intrigued by the ramifications of newly wealthy Americans, based in the South, choosing English goods in order to validate their prosperity. When Mrs. Beeson began collecting Wedgwood ceramics, new avenues were opened where she was able to cultivate an educated and refined persona. In doing so, she was following a well trodden path to social acceptance in

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<sup>66</sup> *The Birmingham News*, ‘News Briefs: Mrs. Beeson given Arthur Ross award’, 1 May 1990.

<sup>67</sup> ‘Classical America Honors Lucille Beeson’, *Seasons: The Magazine of Samford University*, May-June 1990.

<sup>68</sup> Einreinhofer, *op. cit.*, p. 16.

<sup>69</sup> Einreinhofer, *op. cit.*, p. 16. The appeal of classical models in American architectural styles had existed from the eighteenth century when figures such as Thomas Jefferson were proponents of the styles used by earlier British landowners. This style was meant to represent certain Enlightenment and American values: liberty, simplicity and practicality. James S. Ackerman, *The Villa: Form and Ideology of Country Houses*, (London: Thames and Hudson, 1990), p. 186.

<sup>70</sup> I am originally from Birmingham. As a student in England, I felt this study might open interesting avenues between the collecting activities of a Southern couple focussing on English goods.

<sup>71</sup> Elizabeth Bryding Adams, *The Dwight and Lucille Beeson Wedgwood Collection at the Birmingham Museum of Art*, (Birmingham: Birmingham Museum of Art, 1992).

the United States of America. The Beesons adhered to narratives which had been in the making since the late eighteenth century, but they also created new narratives for these objects, narratives which were tied to their own identity. This concept of narrative collecting will provide a methodology for the exploration of the Beesons collecting in further chapters.<sup>72</sup>

Though underpinned with a theoretical understanding of collecting, the research is largely dominated by archival material relating to the Beesons, their collecting activities and their involvement within collecting organizations such as the WIS.<sup>73</sup> This archival material is held at the Birmingham Museum of Art along with the Beeson's collection of Wedgwood. The archive includes a wide range of unpublished, and to date uncatalogued documents, such as the correspondence between the Beesons and their dealers, fellow collectors and museum staff. The archive also contains a wealth of published material in the form of WIS periodicals and seminar reports, newspaper and magazine articles relating to the Beesons and their collection, and museum publications. Alongside this primary material, the museum also houses the entire collection of texts and secondary material relating to Wedgwood, and English ceramics more generally, which were originally in the Beeson's possession. This allowed the opportunity to study the same resources which informed the Beeson's own understanding of the material they so assiduously collected for over fifty years. As illustrated in this introduction, the Beesons confrontation with these goods was largely framed within American constructions of status. The Beesons created multiple levels of narration around their collection; they related the narrative of Josiah Wedgwood's biography using the objects as texts from which this story could be read; they constructed their own ideas of identity, class and status through these objects and used them within their home; and they publicly transmitted this narrative when they donated the collection to a public museum. It was an American narrative in that the Beesons, utilising methodologies they had

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<sup>72</sup> Mieke Bal, 'Telling Objects: A Narrative Perspective on Collecting' in John Elsner & Roger Cardinal, *The Cultures of Collecting*, (London: Reaktion Books, 1994), pp. 97-115.

<sup>73</sup> Along with Bal's concept of narrative, my work has also been theoretically informed particularly by Pierre Bourdieu's sociological ideas of collecting and distinction and Jean Baudrillard's work, 'The System of Collecting' in which he examines the role of collecting in identity formation and communication. See Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction*, trans. by Richard Nice, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1984) and Jean Baudrillard, 'The System of Collecting' in *The Cultures of Collecting*, ed. by John Elsner and Roger Cardinal, (London: Reaktion Books, 1994), pp. 7-24.

learned from organizations like the WIS, altered the collection specific to their circumstances.

The structure of the thesis follows from the questions arising from the forms of knowledge which informed the Beesons understanding of these goods. In the first chapter I analyze the context of the collection, paying specific attention to the texts which narrate Josiah Wedgwood's biography and the Beesons own construction of this narrative. The second chapter builds from this narrative to analyse which objects were selected by the Beesons, and the implications the attainment of connoisseurial knowledge had for their purchases. In the third chapter I look specifically at the acquisition of the collection, the processes involved in the purchases, the Beesons relationship with dealers and the increasingly confident consumer choices made by the Beesons. Once I have established the influences which informed their purchases, I turn my attention to the display of the collection and its role in establishing ideas of identity for the Beesons. The fourth chapter considers the display of the objects within the Beesons home and the implications of the collection in socio-economic status, while chapter five examines the continuation of this process when the collection was publicly exhibited in the Birmingham Museum of Art and the forms of control exerted by the Beesons in ensuring an enduring legacy for themselves and for their collection.

## Chapter One: Creating a Contextual Narrative

When discussing the collection of Wedgwood she and her husband had amassed, Mrs. Beeson alleged that there was ‘as much interest’ for her ‘in the man’s life as in his wares.’<sup>1</sup> This statement signals that this biographical narrative was at least as important as the objects, which functioned as markers in Josiah Wedgwood’s timeline. The collection itself was intended to be a comprehensive one and has been described as a chronicle of Wedgwood’s successes through the years.<sup>2</sup> The objects in the collection were used as illustrations in Mrs. Beeson’s understanding of Josiah Wedgwood’s biography. On several occasions Mrs. Beeson presented talks to local groups about her collection and inevitably she included a short biography of Josiah Wedgwood. In these unpublished talks, where Mrs. Beeson constituted her role as a ‘world renowned authority’ on Wedgwood, Mrs. Beeson focused the biography of Wedgwood rather than the objects in the collection.<sup>3</sup> Josiah Wedgwood’s background, based in rural Staffordshire, and his subsequent accomplishments was a familiar narrative to the Beesons, who themselves had followed a similar path. These narratives both created and contributed to Mrs. Beeson’s understanding of the goods she consumed. Certain favourable attributes were conferred on Wedgwood; success through disciplined work, an inquiring and liberal mind, a prestigious consumer base and compassion for his fellow men. In relating Josiah Wedgwood’s biography Mrs. Beeson indicated many of the reasons behind her own consumption of these wares. This chapter will examine the historiography of Josiah Wedgwood, but it a history which is read through Mrs. Beeson’s own narration. She constructed this history through her readings of key texts such as Eliza Meteyard’s biography, filtering this information through her own prism of understanding.

### Wedgwood’s early life

Josiah Wedgwood was born in Burslem, Staffordshire, the youngest of twelve children. (Figure 8) Following family tradition, his father, Thomas Wedgwood was a

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<sup>1</sup> ‘...So Vast a Collection’, *Birmingham*, the Official Monthly Publication of the Birmingham Area Chamber of Commerce, vol. 6, no. 11, November 1967.

<sup>2</sup> Gail Andrews Trechsel, ‘Potter to the Queen: The Beeson Collection Chronicles Josiah Wedgwood’s Career’, *Southern Accents*, vol. 10, no. 5, September-October 1987, pp. 94-104.

<sup>3</sup> Lucille Beeson, Talk for Shades Valley Rotary Club, Nov. 26, 1968, BMAA.

potter.<sup>4</sup> In order to emphasise the improvements made in the pottery trade during the course of Josiah Wedgwood's lifetime, Mrs. Beeson characterised the pottery of 'these early times' as 'little more than a peasant craft'.<sup>5</sup> It was a trade passed from father to son, while 'the women and children in potters families were sent out with baskets full of rude pottery to visit the market place and make sales or exchanges.'<sup>6</sup> She described the region where the Wedgwood's worked, as 'a wild and isolated tract of the country' which supported 'a sparse and scattered population' who were threatened by 'wild bands of outlaws' sweeping over the countryside.<sup>7</sup> Despite this unforgiving landscape, Mrs. Beeson wrote that the young Josiah Wedgwood was already demonstrating a creative and inquisitive mind. She told her reader that as a child Josiah Wedgwood walked to school past coal miners who gave him fossils they had found with the impressions of shells, sea life, or leaves.<sup>8</sup> 'Design', she wrote, 'had begun to mean something to this child' and these objects started him 'on a life-long collection of things to use for study and to adapt to his decorations for his life's work'.<sup>9</sup> Following his father's death in 1739, when Wedgwood was nine years old, his formal education was terminated and he was sent to work in the family pot works in the apprenticeship of his elder brother, Thomas. Despite the fact that Wedgwood was in formal education for only three years, Mrs. Beeson insisted that he was not 'uneducated',<sup>10</sup> for Wedgwood, she reassured her reader, 'had a blessing many in his day did not have - he had the time to study'.<sup>11</sup> This time was granted by way of smallpox, a disease which left him with a lame knee and much time in convalescence during which Wedgwood 'applied himself to study'.<sup>12</sup> It was Mrs. Beeson's stated belief that Wedgwood 'excelled in his work as a potter as a result of his having been forced to periods of inactivity' for it was during this time that he could experiment with clay, improve glazes, and apply himself to the study of design, all of which 'his

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<sup>4</sup> Robin Reilly, *Wedgwood*, (London: Stockton Press, 1989), p. 25. Thomas Wedgwood owned the Churchyard pottery in Burslem, a small concern in the family's possession since the middle of the seventeenth century.

<sup>5</sup> Lucille Beeson, Talk to a Ceramic Hobby Club, June 26, no year given, BMAA.

<sup>6</sup> Lucille Beeson, 'Wedgwood', no date, BMAA.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid. This same story was told in Eliza Meteyard's, *The Life of Josiah Wedgwood*, (London: Hurst & Blackett, 1865). Later authors tended not to include it in their biographies, primarily because there seems to have been no documentary evidence to support it.

<sup>9</sup> Lucille Beeson, Talk to a Ceramic Hobby Club, June 26 year unknown, BMAA.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

brother did not see any need to do and... discouraged' Josiah in these pursuits.<sup>13</sup> At the end of Josiah's apprenticeship he was not taken into partnership by Thomas Wedgwood. Mrs. Beeson wrote that this was because the two brothers had not seen 'eye to eye' and while Josiah 'wanted to experiment and expand the business' his elder brother 'could not see doing this'.<sup>14</sup> According to Mrs. Beeson, Thomas wanted 'to continue making the crude pots his father and grandfather had made before him'.<sup>15</sup>

### **Wedgwood's First Partnerships**

Mrs. Beeson had demonstrated Josiah Wedgwood's burgeoning entrepreneurial spirit in her descriptions of his apprenticeship with his brother Thomas. In describing his later partnerships, such as that with Thomas Whieldon of Fenton Low begun in 1754, she similarly wrote in terms of Josiah Wedgwood's independent advancements. Mrs. Beeson reported that this partnership proved a happy one, largely because Wedgwood was granted the ownership of any of the results of experiments he made while at Whieldon's.<sup>16</sup> Whieldon was chiefly engaged in the manufacture of what Mrs. Beeson termed 'a rather cheap stoneware, an earthenware in variegated colors, which was known as "tortoiseshell"'.<sup>17</sup> (Figure 9) Quoting Wedgwood, she wrote that he had been inspired at this point '... to try for some more solid improvements as well in the body as the glazes, the colours and the forms of articles of our manufacture...[he] saw the field was spacious, and the soil good, as to promise an ample recompense to anyone who would labour diligently in its cultivation'.<sup>18</sup> Mrs. Beeson employed this quote as evidence that 'early in his work life... Josiah Wedgwood was thinking of bettering himself, his wares, and getting a good return for his efforts'.<sup>19</sup> At this time Wedgwood worked towards the improvement of a green glaze which was used on wares formed to imitate cauliflowers and pineapples. (Figure 10) The Beesons considered this stage in Wedgwood's career the preliminaries for later developments and when it came to their purchases the tea wares illustrated were three of only four green-glazed wares they owned in their collection which numbered well over a thousand.

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<sup>13</sup> Lucille Beeson, 'Wedgwood', no date, BMAA.

<sup>14</sup> Lucille Beeson, Talk to a Ceramic Hobby Club, June 26 year unknown, BMAA.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> Quoted in Lucille Beeson, Talk to a Ceramic Hobby Club, June 26, date unknown, BMAA.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

Wedgwood established his own pot-works, called the Ivy House Works, in 1759. (Figure 11) Mrs. Beeson, in her speech, celebrated the fact that this marked the period from which Wedgwood ‘was in business on his own’.<sup>20</sup> Yet it was Thomas Wedgwood, a cousin of Josiah, who served as manager of the new works while Wedgwood worked to improve the creamware, which he described as ‘a species of earthenware for the table, quite new in appearance, covered with a rich and brilliant glaze, bearing sudden alterations of heat and cold, manufactured with ease and expedition, and consequently cheap’.<sup>21</sup> (Figure 12) Mrs. Beeson described this ware as the ‘greatest contribution Wedgwood made to the English potting industry’.<sup>22</sup> She told her audience that during the eighteenth century ‘the table ware of the poor was wooden trenchers or platters’ and while some pewter was used by those who could afford it, ‘only the very well-to-do had imported porcelain’.<sup>23</sup> According to Mrs. Beeson, Wedgwood had single-handedly transformed the dining rituals of the populace, providing a material which was available to both the middle and upper classes. For Mrs. Beeson Wedgwood’s improvements in the creamware not only indicated his scientific skill in the creation of better glazes but also meant a better standard of experience for the burgeoning middle classes. These goods had clear class connotations for Mrs. Beeson, who believed that from their inception they were meant to improve the niceties of everyday life for specific sectors of society.

Mrs. Beeson wanted to emphasise that Wedgwood’s wares were consumed by the elite and one of the most important factors which she highlighted in her talks was Wedgwood’s royal patronage. After setting up business independently, she wrote that Wedgwood had ‘almost immediate success - he became potter to the Queen’.<sup>24</sup> This clear indication of quality created a lineage of prestige in which the Beesons were keen to participate. Queen Charlotte’s patronage came in 1765, when an open invitation, issued from Miss Deborah Chetwynd, was announced for an order from the court of St. James for a service of Staffordshire ware.<sup>25</sup> The potters were to enter

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> Quoted in Lucille Beeson, Talk to a Ceramic Hobby Club, June 26, date unknown, BMAA.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> Lucille Beeson, ‘Wedgwood’, date unknown, BMAA.

<sup>25</sup> See Josiah Wedgwood to John Wedgwood, 17 July 1765, Keele University Archive, E25-18073.

Deborah Chetwynd was daughter of the Master of the Mint and held an honorary appointment in the

designs for a tea set for the Queen and it was Wedgwood who earned his first royal commission. He also took the opportunity of sending the Queen samples of his other wares such as vases and his improved creamware.<sup>26</sup> The Queen approved of the goods, placed orders and conferred the title 'Potter to Her Majesty' on Wedgwood. Furthermore, she consented that the term 'Queen's Ware' could be used for the improved cream-coloured earthenware.<sup>27</sup> Josiah promptly placed an advertisement in *Aris's Birmingham Gazette*, announcing that 'Mr. Josiah Wedgwood, of Burslem, has had the honour of being appointed Potter to Her Majesty'.<sup>28</sup> He also seized the opportunity and hung a carved and gilded Royal Coat of Arms above his London showroom, which from then on was referred to as 'The Queen's Arms'.<sup>29</sup> In 1765 Wedgwood wrote to his brother in London;

I shall be very proud of the honour of sending a box of patterns to the Queen, amongst which I intend sending two setts of Vases, Creamcolour engine turn'd, and printed, for which purpose nothing could be more suitable than some copper plates I have by me. I can adapt the Vases so that the designs and they will appear to be made for each other, and intended for Royalty, nor must you hint to the contrary...<sup>30</sup>

Mrs. Beeson's suggestion that Wedgwood was sought by Royal patrons disguised the fact that it was Wedgwood who assiduously courted the patronage of the wealthy; that he was an efficient businessman, ready to adapt his wares to suit royal tastes.<sup>31</sup> As he wrote to Thomas Bentley; 'if a Royal or Noble introduction be as necessary to the Sale of an Article of Luxury, as real Elegance & beauty, then the Manufacturer, if he consults his own interests, will bestow as much pains, & expense too, if necessary, in gaining the former of these advantages'.<sup>32</sup>

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Royal Household as Seamstress and Laundress to the Queen. Wedgwood commented that he received the order because 'nobody else wd. Undertake it'.

<sup>26</sup> Gaye Blake Roberts, et al., *Wedgwood in London: 225<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Exhibition 1759-1984*, (Josiah Wedgwood & Sons Ltd, 1984), p. 9.

<sup>27</sup> Roberts, et al., (1984), *op. cit.*, p. 9.

<sup>28</sup> *Birmingham Gazette*, 9 June 1766, quoted in Brian Dolan, *Wedgwood: The First Tycoon*, (London: Viking, 2004), p. 147.

<sup>29</sup> Roberts, et al., (1984), *op. cit.*, p. 9.

<sup>30</sup> Josiah Wedgwood to John Wedgwood, 6 July 1765, Keele University Archive, E25-18080.

<sup>31</sup> Reilly, (1989), *op. cit.*, pp. 49-50.

<sup>32</sup> Josiah Wedgwood to Thomas Bentley, no date, Keele University Archives, E25-18167. The majority of the Wedgwood manuscripts are now held at The University of Keele. A portion of the letters were edited and published, originally for private circulation, between 1903 to 1906 by Wedgwood's descendant, Katherine Euphemia, Lady Farrar.



### Partnership with Thomas Bentley and the London Showrooms

In 1769 Josiah Wedgwood entered into a partnership with Thomas Bentley, a former shipping agent for cotton manufacturers and owner of a wool warehouse in Liverpool.<sup>33</sup> (Figure 13) This partnership led to some of the major stylistic shifts in Wedgwood's output, namely the move to neo-classical design.<sup>34</sup> The wares produced during this period became the preferred purchases for the Beesons and in her talks Mrs. Beeson acknowledged that Wedgwood's partnership with Thomas Bentley was a beneficial one to their trade.<sup>35</sup> She wrote that Bentley 'had the formal education Wedgwood lacked; he was widely travelled [and] he spoke several languages'.<sup>36</sup> He also 'had an interest in the classical times and knew much about the myths, history and literature of classicism'.<sup>37</sup> Bentley came from a more privileged background than Wedgwood, being the son of a minor country gentleman. He was educated at the Presbyterian Collegiate Academy near his home in Derbyshire, where he studied the classics in Greek and Latin, learned French and Italian, and practiced composition and mathematics.<sup>38</sup> It was through Bentley, Mrs. Beeson wrote, that Wedgwood met men such as Sir William Hamilton, Joseph Priestley, James Watt, Matthew Boulton, Sir Joseph Banks, Sir Joshua Reynolds 'and many famous men of the world of success and the Arts'.<sup>39</sup> This association with the renowned artists and scientists of the day established Josiah Wedgwood's own role within this society, distinguishing him from other Staffordshire potters. By soliciting the aid of such figures, Mrs. Beeson wrote,

<sup>33</sup> The partnership lasted until Bentley's death in 1780.

<sup>34</sup> See Chapter Two, pp. 19-24 for a discussion of the Beesons' purchases of pieces manufactured during the Wedgwood and Bentley partnership.

<sup>35</sup> '...So Vast a Collection', *Birmingham*, the Official Monthly Publication of the Birmingham Area Chamber of Commerce, vol. 6, no. 11, November 1967.

<sup>36</sup> Lucille Beeson, Talk to a Ceramic Hobby Club, June 26, no year given, BMAA.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

<sup>38</sup> Dolan, (2004), *op. cit.*, p. 93.

<sup>39</sup> Lucille Beeson, 'Wedgwood', date unknown, BMAA. Sir William Hamilton was a diplomat, antiquarian and archaeologist who served as Britain's ambassador to the court of Naples from 1764-1800. Hamilton published an illustrated catalogue of his collection, *Antiquités étrusques, grecques et romaines* (1766-67), which Wedgwood utilised for designs on his wares. Joseph Priestley (1733-1804) was a natural philosopher, dissenting clergyman (both Wedgwood and Bentley were dissenters themselves), political theorist and educator. Josiah Wedgwood sent some of his children to the Warrington Academy that Priestley founded. James Watt (1736-1819) was an inventor and engineer who improved the steam engine. Matthew Boulton (1728-1809) established the Soho Manufactory in 1762 in Birmingham where he manufactured decorative objects in metal. He and Wedgwood collaborated, using Boulton's cut steel as framing devices for Wedgwood's buttons, jewellery and other accessories. Sir Joseph Banks (1743-1820) was a naturalist, botanist and science patron. Sir Joshua Reynolds (1723-1792) was one of the founders and the first president of the Royal Academy.

Josiah Wedgwood furthered his attempt to perfect his wares, but it also confirmed his own status and validated the Beesons decision in collecting his wares.<sup>40</sup>

Bentley's education and his Grand Tour travels on the Continent prepared him for his role as Wedgwood's spokesman in London. Mrs. Beeson however, wrote that Wedgwood 'found that it was too much for one man to undertake' both the management of the London showrooms and the pottery in Burslem and thus 'persuaded Thomas Bentley... to become his partner'.<sup>41</sup> Bentley moved to London within weeks of the formal signing of the partnership agreement with Wedgwood, yet the business was already established in the capital where Wedgwood had had rooms for his wares since 1765.<sup>42</sup> (Figure 14) Eighteenth century London was a site of increased consumer spending, a development which has subsequently been a matter of debate among economists, sociologists and historians.<sup>43</sup> Increasingly, such analyses explore changes in demand, rather than looking solely at changes in techniques of production utilised by more traditional economists.<sup>44</sup> Having discounted population growth and increased spending power as sole factors explaining increased demand, one finds references to new attitudes towards consumer spending, changes in attitudes towards buying and underlying motivations behind consumer behaviour.<sup>45</sup> These shifting patterns in consumption have most commonly been accounted for by reference to the motive of social emulation.<sup>46</sup> More recent historians have called social emulation 'the key to consumer demand'.<sup>47</sup> In Mrs. Beeson's discussion of the Wedgwood showrooms, she indicates that social emulation and class status were the

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<sup>40</sup> Lucille Beeson, Talk to a Ceramic Hobby Club, June 26, no year given, BMAA.

<sup>41</sup> Lucille Beeson, 'Wedgwood', no date, BMAA.

<sup>42</sup> Roberts, et al., (1984), *op. cit.*, p. 7.

<sup>43</sup> For a discussion of eighteenth century consumer spending see Ann Bermingham and John Brewer, eds, *The Consumption of Culture*, (London and New York: Routledge, 1995), John Brewer and Roy Porter, (eds.), *Consumption and the World of Goods*, (London and New York: Routledge, 1993) and Campbell, Colin, *The Romantic Ethic and the Spirit of Modern Consumerism*, (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1987).

<sup>44</sup> Colin Campbell, *The Romantic Ethic and the Spirit of Modern Consumerism*, (Oxford UK & Cambridge USA: Blackwell, 1987). See Chapter two, 'Accounting for the Consumer Revolution in Eighteenth-Century England', pp. 17-35.

<sup>45</sup> Campbell, (1987), *op. cit.* Campbell cites Joan Thirsk, *Economic Policy and Projects: The Development of a Consumer Society in Early Modern England*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978), p. 23; Walter Minchinson, 'Convention, Fashion and Consumption: Aspects of British Experience since 1750', in Henri Baudet and Henk van der Meulen (eds), *Consumer Behaviour and Economic Growth in the Modern Economy* (London: Croom Helm, 1982), p. 22.

<sup>46</sup> Thorstein Veblen, *The theory of the leisure class*, (Amherst, NY : Prometheus Books, 1998).

<sup>47</sup> Harold Perkin, *The Origins of Modern English Society, 1780-1880*, (London: Routledge, 1969), pp. 96-97.

primary motivations for Wedgwood's customers. She described the London showrooms as 'a place where the well-to-do would gather, as was the pleasant custom, to meet with friends, have tea and view and talk about the latest equipages for graciously and attractively serving one's family and friends'.<sup>48</sup> Mrs. Beeson delicately ignores the commercial aspect of this display venue. The theory that social emulation, coupled with attempts by producers like Wedgwood to manipulate consumer wants, does not, however, explore changing attitudes and conduct amongst consumers.<sup>49</sup>

Along with an alleged birth of consumerism, the eighteenth century witnessed a revolution in retail practices.<sup>50</sup> As strategies for display and advertising became more sophisticated, a greater variety of goods were seen in enhanced settings.<sup>51</sup> The act of going out and encountering this world of goods became an event, even a social occasion to which Wedgwood was marketing his display. In 1767 he explained to Bentley why it was important for the business to have a large showroom;

It was not to shew or have a large stock of Ware in Town, but to enable me to shew various Table & desert services completely set out on two ranges of Tables, six or eight at least such services are absolutely necessary to be shewn in order to *do the needful* with the Ladys in the neatest, genteelest & best method. The same, or indeed a much greater variety of setts of Vases should decorate the Walls, and both these articles may, every few days, be so altered, reversed, and transformed as to render the whole a new scene, even to the same Company, every time they shall bring their friends to visit us. I need not tell you the many good effects this must produce, when business, and amusement can be made to go hand in hand. Every new show, Exhibition, or rarity soon grows stale in London, and is no longer regarded after the first sight, unless utility, or some such variety as I have hinted at above continue to recommend it to their notice.<sup>52</sup>

In the early part of the eighteenth century small domestic items were as likely to be purchased from a travelling chapman as in a local shop, but by the middle of the

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<sup>48</sup> Lucille Beeson, 'Josiah Wedgwood: Potter and Business Man', unpublished talk to the Shades Valley Rotary Club, 26 November, 1968, BMAA.

<sup>49</sup> Campbell, (1987), *op. cit.*, 36.

<sup>50</sup> See *The Birth of a Consumer Society: The Commercialization of Eighteenth-century England*, ed. by Neil McKendrick, John Brewer and J.H. Plumb, (London: Hutchinson, 1983).

<sup>51</sup> Elizabeth Kowaleski-Wallace, *Consuming Subjects: Women, Shopping, and Business in the Eighteenth Century*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997), p. 6.

<sup>52</sup> Josiah Wedgwood to Thomas Bentley, 31 May 1767, Keele University Archive, E25-18149.

century, permanent shops became increasingly magnificent in their bid to attract customers.<sup>53</sup> Daniel Defoe wrote of these shops;

It is a modern custom, and wholly unknown to our ancestors, who yet understood trade, in proportion to the business they carried on, as well as we do, to have tradesmen lay out two-thirds of their fortune in fitting up their shops. By fitting up I mean, in painting and gilding, in fine shelves, shutters, pediments, columns of the several orders of architecture, and the like; in which they tell us now, it is small matter to lay out two or three, nay, five hundred pounds, to fit up what we may call the outside of a shop.<sup>54</sup>

The increase of advertising and shops coincided with an increased diversification of goods, while domestic commodities were coordinated to ensure they created an appropriate atmosphere according to the taste of the decorator and/or owner.<sup>55</sup>

London was a site for an education in taste. According to Mrs. Beeson, even Wedgwood, following the suggestions of Bentley, would visit exhibitions when he was in London so that he might ‘study what it was that would attract the well-to-do who were beginning to want lovely things for their cabinets’.<sup>56</sup>

When Bentley began his management of the showrooms, they were located in Great Newport Street, one of eighteenth century London’s artistic centres, where fellow residents included Sir Joshua Reynolds, George Romney, Johann Zoffany and James Tassie.<sup>57</sup> (Figure 15) The main display space was situated on the first floor with the wares on open display, but there was also a locked room with glass fronted cases where the finest specimens were kept and which were shown only to privileged customers.<sup>58</sup> In 1774, the showroom was moved a short distance to Portland House, then the largest house in Greek Street, providing more spacious accommodation for the showrooms, workshops, storage and kilns.<sup>59</sup> While there are no images of the interior of the Wedgwood showrooms during the Wedgwood and Bentley period, we

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<sup>53</sup> Charles Saumarez Smith, *Eighteenth-Century Decoration*, (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1993), p. 134.

<sup>54</sup> Daniel Defoe, *The Complete English Tradesman*, (New York: Burt Franklin, 1970, orig. 1745), p. 205-206.

<sup>55</sup> Smith, (1993), *op. cit.*, p. 306.

<sup>56</sup> Lucille Beeson, ‘Wedgwood’, no date, BMAA.

<sup>57</sup> Roberts, et al., (1984), *op. cit.*, p. 7. George Romney (1734-1802) was a portrait painter noted for his pictures of Emma Hamilton, the wife of Sir William Hamilton. Johann Zoffany (1733-1810) was a German painter, active in England, who was favoured by George III and Queen Charlotte. James Tassie (1735-1799) was a gem engraver and modeller who reproduced ancient gems and executed portrait medallions of his contemporaries.

<sup>58</sup> Roberts, et al., (1984), *op. cit.*, p. 17.

<sup>59</sup> Roberts, et al., (1984), *op. cit.*, p. 10.

do have an illustration of the interior of the York Street Showrooms, which were occupied by Josiah II after the death of his father.<sup>60</sup> (Figure 16) This image of 1809 shows a lofty colonnaded room with tall windows for lighting. Customers mill about the showroom, seemingly engaged in private conversation as much as shopping. Along the walls imposing glass fronted cabinets displayed the ornamental wares, while brackets and pillars displayed the same.<sup>61</sup> The useful wares were piled on tables running down the centre of the room. An inventory of the showrooms dating from 1790 also enabled the following description;

A grand staircase, flanked with four large pedestals for urns led up to the Great Room on the first floor with its seven windows and gallery. There were many shelves with moulded edges for the display of vases, fine mahogany tables, dumb waiters and specimen cabinets. There was a special Jasper Room which had mirrors round the walls, and a Flowerpot Room containing a sideboard, pedestal, three brackets and much shelving. Elegant chairs were provided for the convenience of lady customers in the Great Room and elsewhere. If we add to it the carefully chosen colour schemes to show up the wares to their best advantage, we get the general impression of a most elegant and superior establishment: no wonder that it became a meeting place for fashionable society.<sup>62</sup>

Authors, including Mrs. Beeson, persistently refer to these showrooms as sites for the elite, where consumption and taste were validated. These processes continued when the Beesons made their own consumer choices. The opening of Portland House corresponded with the completion and exhibition of the Russian dinner service for Catherine the Great.<sup>63</sup> (Figure 17) Two hundred years later the Beesons purchased two pieces from this service which Mrs. Beeson described as ‘most important... to a collector’.<sup>64</sup> The display of the Imperial Russian Service, or the ‘Frog’ Service, has been described as one of the most important international commissions for Wedgwood and Bentley; ‘more valuable in prestige and publicity even than the orders

<sup>60</sup> Originally printed in Ackermann’s *Repository of Arts*, pl. 2, February 1809.

<sup>61</sup> Roberts, et al., (1984), *op. cit.*, p. 11.

<sup>62</sup> John and Una des Fontaines in Roberts, et al., (1984), *op. cit.*, p. 10.

<sup>63</sup> Trial pieces were made in 1773, while the finished service was shown by invitation in the London showrooms in 1774. Josiah’s connection with the Russian market dated from 1768 when, during a visit to London, he ‘spent several hours with Ld Cathcart our Ambassador [sic] to Russia.... We are to do great things for each other’. See letters of Josiah Wedgwood (Manchester: E. J. Morten Ltd., 1974), 24 March 1768 (E25-18196). The introduction to the Cathcarts had come by way of Sir William Hamilton, who was the brother of Lady Cathcart. This relationship with the Cathcarts proved to be invaluable. By 1769, four sets of tableware were being assembled for the Russian consul in London and another, presumably for official use, for the Cathcarts. Their influence led to the first order from the Empress Catherine in 1770 of the ‘Husk’ table and dessert service. See Robin Reilly, *Wedgwood*, (London: MacMillan, 1989), p. 85.

<sup>64</sup> Lucille Beeson, Talk to a Ceramic Hobby Club, June 26, no year given, BMAA.

from the King and Queen'.<sup>65</sup> Indeed it was the prestige value rather than strictly pecuniary value which determined the success of the service. The profit generated from this service was small, the price paid by Catherine figured to be approximately £2700, while Wedgwood and Bentley's costs appear to have been about £2290.<sup>66</sup> The service, which comprised some 680 pieces and a similar dessert service of 264 pieces, was decorated with paintings of English landscapes, country estates and celebrated industrial sites.<sup>67</sup> After their acquisition of the two 'Catherine' pieces, Mr. Beeson wrote that they were important for their collection because they were 'the most important commission ever undertaken by Josiah Wedgwood and his partner, Thomas Bentley'.<sup>68</sup>

The display techniques utilised in the eighteenth century certainly increased the fame of this service. When deciding whether to exhibit the service before its delivery to Catherine, Wedgwood judged that it would

bring an immense number of people of fashion into our Rooms - would fully complete our notoriety to the whole Island, & help us greatly, no doubt, in the sale of our goods, both usefull & ornamental - It would confirm the consequence we have attain'd, & increase it, by shewing that we are employ'd in a much higher scale than other Manufacturers. - We should shew that we have paid many compliments to our Friends & Customers, & thereby rivet them more firmly to our interests.<sup>69</sup>

The public was invited to see the service at the London showrooms at Portland House, but only allowed entry by ticket.<sup>70</sup> Mr. Beeson stressed that it was the nobility who 'availed themselves of the privilege' making the service 'one of the most popular

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<sup>65</sup> Robin Reilly, *Wedgwood*, (London: MacMillan, 1989), p. 271. The border pattern of each piece was decorated with a small green frog because the name of the estate where the service was intended to be used was La Grenouillière, the frog marsh.

<sup>66</sup> Reilly, (1989), *op. cit.*, p. 282.

<sup>67</sup> Subjects ranged from 'the Queen's House, St. James's Palace and Somerset House in London, Windsor Great Park (fifteen views) and Kew, Chatsworth, Blenheim, Shugborough and Tintern Abbey, through castles and cathedrals to anonymous sketches of the Thames, the Lake District, and such scenes of industrial progress as the Plymouth dockyard, a colliery and pump near Bristol and papermills at Rickmansworth'. See Reilly, (1989), *op. cit.*, p. 279.

<sup>68</sup> Dwight Beeson, 'Dish Used by Catherine the Great Important Addition to Wedgwood Collection', BMAA.

<sup>69</sup> Josiah Wedgwood to Thomas Bentley, 14 November 1773, Keele University Archive, E25-18498.

<sup>70</sup> The advertisement for these tickets was run in *The Gazette* and *The Public Advertiser*; 'Wedgwood & Bentley inform the Nobility & Gentry that those who chuse to see a Table of Dessert Service, now set out at their new Rooms in Greek Street, may have free Tickets for that Purpose, at the Warehouse in Great Newport Street, & that none can be admitted without tickets.' Drafts of 1774 Advertisement, Keele University Archive, L96-17729.

sights in London'.<sup>71</sup> The display proved to be immensely popular, yet Wedgwood was not the first to market ceramic ware in the capital in such ways. By the 1760's the quantity and range of available ceramics had greatly increased through continued importation of both Asian and Continental ceramics and the growth of English manufactories such as Chelsea (1745), Bow (1747), and Derby (1750). Much of this ceramic ware was sold at well-publicised auctions. James Christie, who began auctioneering in 1763, helped to further the connection between decorative ceramics and high society. He held receptions at the auction house with officials to prevent the 'riff raff' from entering.<sup>72</sup> Visiting the sale rooms became part of fashionable life from the mid eighteenth century onwards.<sup>73</sup>

### Wedgwood catalogues

Josiah Wedgwood advertised his wares in other methods which complimented his display in the showrooms. He regularly ran advertisements in local papers, but it was not until 1772 that he first mentioned producing a catalogue of wares.<sup>74</sup> Several other designers and manufacturers of decorative arts had preceded Wedgwood in the publications of their designs. Pattern books and catalogues were produced from around 1700, particularly by French producers based in London such as Daniel Marot. The middle of the century saw influential publications such as Chippendale's *Director* (1754).<sup>75</sup> Wedgwood issued the first edition of a catalogue of the ornamental wares in 1773, and at this stage it was only a small pamphlet. By 1774, he had released a much more imposing creamware pattern book which was described as *A Catalogue of the different Articles of Queen's Ware, which may be had either plain, gilt, or embellished with Enamel Paintings, manufactured by Josiah Wedgwood, Potter to her Majesty*, and was illustrated by nine engraved plates. (Figure 18) *A Catalogue of cameos, intaglios, medals, busts, small statues and bas-reliefs with a general account of Vases and other ornaments after the antique made by WEDGWOOD AND*

<sup>71</sup> Dwight Beeson, 'Dish Used by Catherine the Great Important Addition to Wedgwood Collection', BMAA.

<sup>72</sup> Anna Somers Cocks, 'The Non-functional Use of Ceramics in the English Country House During the 18<sup>th</sup> Century', in *The Fashioning and Functioning of the British Country House*, ed by Gervase Jackson-Stops, Gordon J. Schochet and Lena Cowen Orlin, (Washington: National Gallery of Art, 1989), p. 195-215, p. 203.

<sup>73</sup> Cocks in Jackson-Stops, et. al., (1989), p. 203

<sup>74</sup> Wedgwood suggested to Bentley a 'Printed Catalogue of the things we have'. Josiah Wedgwood to Thomas Bentley, 13 September 1772, Keele University Archive, E25-18404.

<sup>75</sup> Elizabeth White, *Pictorial Dictionary of British 18<sup>th</sup> Century Furniture Design*, (Woodbridge: Antique Collectors' Club, 1990).

*BENTLEY And sold at their room In Greek Street, Soho London* was published in 1779. (Figure 19) In the Catalogue, Wedgwood explained that the ‘variety of new articles, which many of our respectable friends have not seen, and multitudes of persons of curiosity and taste in the works of art have never heard of, render some account or catalogue of them necessary’.<sup>76</sup> The practice of issuing catalogues to advertise goods became increasingly common in the last two decades of the eighteenth century, and other potteries, including Leeds, were producing their own catalogues.<sup>77</sup> This spread of trade manuals and directories spoke to a need on the part of the merchant to codify his goods, to professionalise selling, and acted as a claim for respectability.<sup>78</sup> This desire for standardisation was highlighted by the publication of manuals themselves geared at tradespeople, such as Daniel Defoe’s *The Complete English Tradesman* (1745).<sup>79</sup>

The 1779 Catalogue made Wedgwood and Bentley’s loyalty to the fashion for the antique apparent from the title page where they chose to include quotes from both Pliny and the Comte de Caylus.<sup>80</sup> Cameos and intaglios were listed first in the Catalogue, subdivided according to subjects, such as the Fabulous Age of the Greeks, the War of Troy and Roman History.<sup>81</sup> Similarly, the bas-reliefs, medallions, cameos and tablets included representations of the poets of Greece, the heads of illustrious Romans and the Caesars with their Empresses.<sup>82</sup> Wedgwood was particularly proud of the painted Etruscan vases, which he had copied from antique vases in the publications and collections of Dempster, Gorius, Caylus and especially Sir William Hamilton.<sup>83</sup> The Catalogue also included teapots, flower-pots and ink stands, yet even these useful items were transformed by their classically inspired decoration. Wedgwood’s special position amidst the plethora of Staffordshire potters was largely

<sup>76</sup> Wedgwood & Bentley Catalogue Fifth Edition, (London, Greek Street Sale Rooms, 1779).

<sup>77</sup> Smith, (1993), *op. cit.*, p. 299.

<sup>78</sup> Kowaleski-Wallace, (1997), *op. cit.*, p. 82.

<sup>79</sup> Defoe insisted on self-discipline, advising the tradesman on every facet of trade, not only partnerships and trade fraud, but also on marriage and warning against expensive living. Defoe, (1745), *op. cit.*

<sup>80</sup> Caylus (1692-1765) was fascinated with archaeology and collecting, spending a large portion of his large income on antiquities, which he later published in the seven-volume *Recueil d’antiquités* (1752-1767). Caylus also patronized sculptors, painters and designers who embodied the classical bent. Caylus detested the French rococo style and he exercised a profound influence on the academy at mid-century, moving it toward a more intense study of antique forms. See Albert Boime, *Art in the Age of Revolution 1750-1800*, (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1987).

<sup>81</sup> Wedgwood & Bentley Catalogue Fifth Edition, (London, Greek Street Sale Rooms, 1779).

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*



indebted to his successful marketing and the promotion of his wares amongst the nobility and gentry of Britain and further afield. In an appeal to this audience, Wedgwood asserted in the introduction to the 1779 Catalogue that,

The Progress of the Arts, at all Times, and in every Country, chiefly depends upon the Encouragement they receive from those, who by their Rank and Affluence are Legislators in Taste; and who alone are capable of bestowing Rewards upon the Labours of Industry and the Exertions of Genius. It is their influence that forms the Character of every age; they can turn the Current of human Pursuits at their Pleasure...<sup>84</sup>

By focussing much of the company's output on the production of wares in the style 'of the antique', Wedgwood was able to tap into the taste of the day. One of the original aspects of neo-classical design was the conception of interior design as an expression of antique taste.<sup>85</sup> Along with the architecture and interiors, clients were encouraged to desire household objects which would adhere to this design concept and create a unified style. The decision to work in this style was understood by Wedgwood as a smart business decision; a way to exploit the prevailing taste. As he wrote to Bentley in 1779, '*Fashion* is infinitely superior to *merit* in many respects'.<sup>86</sup> The concept of taste linked with patronage was utilised by Wedgwood in an effort to denote the quality of his productions and to justify their high price in the market;

The Desire of selling much in a little Time, without respect to the Taste or Quality of the Goods, leads Manufacturers and Merchants to ruin the Reputation of the Articles which they manufacture and deal in: and whilst those who buy, for the Sake of a salacious Saving, prefer Mediocrity to Excellence, it will be impossible for Manufacturers either to improve or keep up the Quality of their Works....They [the proprietors] do not manufacture for those who estimate Works of Ornament by their *Magnitude*, and who would buy Pictures at *so much a Foot*: they have been happy in the Encouragement and Support of many illustrious Persons, who judge of the Works of Art by better Principles; and so long as they have the Honour of being thus patronized, they will endeavour to support and improve the Quality and Taste of their Manufactures.<sup>87</sup>

The Beesons chose to identify themselves with these stated concepts of taste and quality by employing classically inspired architecture in the construction of the Dwight and Lucille Beeson Center for the Healing Arts (Figure 6) and selecting the

<sup>84</sup> Ibid.

<sup>85</sup> Gervase Jackson-Stops, et. al. (eds.), *The Fashioning and Functioning of the British Country House*, (Washington : National Gallery of Art ; Hanover [NH] : University Press of New England (distributor), 1989), p. 51.

<sup>86</sup> Josiah Wedgwood to Thomas Bentley, 19 June 1779, Keele University Archive, E26-18898.

<sup>87</sup> Wedgwood & Bentley Catalogue Fifth Edition, (London, Greek Street Sale Rooms, 1779).

classically inspired designs produced by the Wedgwood company for the majority of their collection.<sup>88</sup> In her accounts of Wedgwood's life Mrs. Beeson wrote of a 'Classical Revival in England and Europe' which Wedgwood, 'being the business man', intended to 'take advantage of' by manufacturing what 'people were most interested in'.<sup>89</sup> This taste for the antique, developed in the early eighteenth century through the efforts of such figures as Lord Burlington and William Kent, was pursued in the late eighteenth century by wealthy country house owners and designers.<sup>90</sup> Knowledge of the classical past was understood as a polite accomplishment, which provided a mark of distinction for the nobility and gentry and provided them with models of architectural style.<sup>91</sup> It was this aspect of classicism - as a badge of an individual's taste - which dictated the design of interiors.<sup>92</sup> Though Mrs. Beeson insinuated that Wedgwood was directed towards classicism by his own business sense, he was in fact aided in the process by Thomas Bentley and the many acquaintances that he introduced to Wedgwood. One such figure was Sir William Hamilton (1730-1803), who in his role as His British Majesty's Envoy Extraordinary to the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies, had been present in Naples during the excavations of Herculaneum and Pompeii. (Figure 20) It was these excavations to which Mrs. Beeson attributed an interest in classicism in Britain.<sup>93</sup> Hamilton, who acquired a number of ancient vases and other antiquities, published a catalogue of his collection; *Antiquités étrusques, grecques et romaines* (1766 -1767), which served as a source book for many Wedgwood designs. A key intention of the designs reproduced in the *Antiquities* was that they should contribute to the improvement of contemporary design in England specifically by providing a model for contemporary artists and manufacturers.<sup>94</sup> Mrs. Beeson wrote that during the last quarter of the eighteenth century 'those who could afford it were filling their cabinets with vases, busts, etc... if they could locate them from the antique, but failing to do so were

<sup>88</sup> See Chapter Two for the Beesons purchases of neo-classical wares, pp. 25-27.

<sup>89</sup> Lucille Beeson, 'Wedgwood', no date, BMAA.

<sup>90</sup> Jackson-Stops, et. al., (1989), *op. cit.*, p. 51.

<sup>91</sup> Smith, (1993), *op. cit.* p. 84.

<sup>92</sup> Smith, (1993), *op. cit.* p. 84.

<sup>93</sup> Lucille Beeson, 'Wedgwood', no date, BMAA.

<sup>94</sup> Jackson-Stops, et. al., (1989), *op. cit.*, p. 60. Ian Jenkins and Kim Sloan, *Vases and Volcanoes: Sir William Hamilton and His Collection*, (London: Published for the Trustees of the British Museum by British Museum Press, 1996), p. 57.

demanding copies of the antique.’<sup>95</sup> Wedgwood, Mrs. Beeson wrote, ‘realized there was a cry for copies and he saw to it that his pottery made the finest’ thus encouraging ‘interests in the arts’.<sup>96</sup> This idea, that Wedgwood was instrumental in the diffusion of the neo-classical style, was propagated in the eighteenth century by Hamilton, who wrote that ‘a Wedgwood and Bentley were necessary to diffuse that taste so universally, and it is to their liberal way of thinking and industry that so good a taste prevails at present in Great Britain’.<sup>97</sup> Wedgwood cloaked his own commercial interests in the vocabulary of stewardship and the perpetuation of ancient works of art, remarking that his reproductions were made in order

...to preserve as many fine Works of Antiquity and of the present Age as we can, in this composition; for when all Pictures are faded or rotten, when Bronzes are rusted away, and all the excellent Works in Marble dissolved, then these Copies, like the antique Etruscan vases, will probably remain, and transmit the Works of Genius, and the Portraits of illustrious Men, to the most distant Times.<sup>98</sup>

According to Mrs. Beeson, Wedgwood ‘took full advantage’ of the ‘Neo Classical fever’ which had ‘swept England and the Continent’.<sup>99</sup> Wedgwood funded John Flaxman’s visit to Rome, where he ‘established a school where local artists would learn to design and adapt for pottery use’.<sup>100</sup> The catalogue of wares highlighted the classical source material of their goods, stating that the cameos and intaglios were ‘Taken from the finest antique Gems’.<sup>101</sup> Although this was true of many of the pieces, several others were representations of ‘illustrious moderns’, thus new depictions rendered in a classical style. Portraits included British aristocracy and political leaders, as well as American figures such as George Washington and Benjamin Franklin, leaders who were keen to make their own political connections with the classical world. Wedgwood and Bentley introduced their Etruscan wares, black basaltware decorated with red encaustic enamel design in imitation of ancient

<sup>95</sup> Lucille Beeson, ‘Josiah Wedgwood: Potter and Business Man’, unpublished talk to the Shades Valley Rotary Club, 26 November 1968, BMAA.

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>97</sup> Jackson-Stops, et. al., (1989), *op. cit.*, p. 61.

<sup>98</sup> Wedgwood & Bentley Catalogue Fifth Edition, (London, Greek Street Sale Rooms, 1779).

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid.* John Flaxman (1755-1826) was a sculptor who began his career as a modeller for Wedgwood. He provided the designs for a number of classically inspired friezes, plaques, ornamental vessels and portrait medallions.

<sup>101</sup> Wedgwood & Bentley Catalogue, (London: Greek Street Showrooms, 1779).

red figure vases, in 1768.<sup>102</sup> On the opening of their new pottery works, called Etruria, on 13 June 1769, Wedgwood and Bentley threw six commemorative vases, called the 'First Day's Vase', in this material. (Figure 21) The scene on the vase was taken from one of the engraved plates of Sir William Hamilton's vase collection, with the Latin inscription 'Artes Etruriae renascuntur' -the arts of Etruria are reborn. However, the adoption of the style was first and foremost an effective marketing strategy on the part of Wedgwood and Bentley, determined by the desire to attract wealthy and prestigious patrons. Wedgwood asserted that it was

... plain from a thousand instances that if you have a favourite child you wish the public to fondle and take notice of, you have only to make choice of proper sponcers. If you are lucky in them no matter what the brat is, black, brown, or fair, its fortune is made.<sup>103</sup>

Wedgwood's most celebrated pieces working from an ancient model, the ones which Mrs. Beeson told her reader 'Wedgwood considered... his crowning achievement'<sup>104</sup>, were his copies of the Roman cut-glass vase known as the Portland Vase.<sup>105</sup> (Figure 23) Wedgwood applied to borrow the vase with a view to copying it in jasperware when it was sold at auction in 1786.<sup>106</sup> On 10 June 1786, just three days after the auction, he signed a receipt for the vase.<sup>107</sup> Wedgwood, assisted in the modelling of the vase by William Hackwood, William Wood and Henry Webber, was not satisfied

<sup>102</sup> In November 1769, Wedgwood took out the only patent he ever applied for to protect the invention of this style. See N. Hudson Moore, *Wedgwood and his Imitators*, (London: Hodder & Sloughton, 1909), p. 48.

<sup>103</sup> Josiah Wedgwood to Thomas Bentley, 19 June 1779, Keele University Archive, E26-18898.

<sup>104</sup> Lucille Beeson, 'Josiah Wedgwood: Potter and Business Man', from a talk for the Shades Valley Rotary Club, November 26, 1968, BMAA.

<sup>105</sup> This vase, now in the collection of the British Museum, was first recorded in 1601 when it was in the collection of Cardinal Francesco Maria del Monte (1549-1627) in Italy. In 1627, on the death of the Cardinal, the vase was bought by the Barberini family with whom it remained until 1780, when Donna Cornelia Barberini-Colonna, Princess of Palestrina, sold the vase to James Byres, the Scottish antiquary living in Rome. While it was in Byres' possession, some sixty plaster casts were made by James Tassie from a mould by Giovanni Pichler, a gem-engraver. The vase was already well-known in Britain when Sir William Hamilton acquired it from Byres. Hamilton took the vase, which was to be the most famous of all objects to have passed through his hands, and a number of other objects to England to sell. He exhibited the vase at the Society of Antiquaries, of which he was a fellow, and he had G.B. Cipriani borrow the vase in order to make drawing from it. Hamilton sold the vase, along with a select group of antiquities, to the Duchess of Portland, who was an avid collector of antiquities and specimens of natural history. After the vase was deposited in the Duchess's collection, Hamilton wished to advertise the fact and did so through a series of specially commissioned engravings. The subsequent publication of these engravings was intended by Hamilton to provide a vehicle for the proliferation of Classical taste that was to dominate interior design for following decades. See Reilly, (1989), *op. cit.*, p. 664-665 and Jenkins and Sloan, (1996), *op. cit.*, pp. 187-188.

<sup>106</sup> Mrs. Beeson erroneously wrote that Wedgwood had been one of the bidders for the vase. See 'The Portland Vase', BMAA. In the same article she also wrote that when the Duchess of Portland died the vase was put up for auction 'as all personal objects are in England'.

<sup>107</sup> Jenkins and Sloan, (1996), pp. 187-188.

with the results until 1789. Although many writers on Wedgwood contend that he faithfully copied the original,<sup>108</sup> Wedgwood certainly had the desire to change the form of the vase, which he deemed ‘inelegant’.<sup>109</sup> Wedgwood hoped to apply the figural designs pictured on the vase to plaques, tablets and vases, ‘in which they might perhaps serve the arts, & diffuse the seeds of good taste, more extensively than by confining them to the vase only’.<sup>110</sup> Wedgwood also restored some of the figures on the vase which had deteriorated over time. In 1790, after Wedgwood had produced a copy which met his standards, the vase was displayed privately at the house of Sir Joseph Banks. The event was recorded in the *General Evening Post* and the *Gazeteer and New Daily Advertiser*:

On Saturday night last there was a numerous *converzationi* [sic] at Sir Joseph Banks’s, Soho-square, when Mr. Wedgwood produced the *great vase*, manufactured by himself, in imitation of that superb one about four years ago exhibited in the Museum of Her Grace the Duchess Dowager of Portland. The vase is as large as the original; the ground colour that of an emerald, embossed with white. It is most exquisitely finished, and allowed by all present, *in point of look*, to be at least equal to the original, which was valued at *two thousand five hundred pounds*. The whole of the above vase is a composition of the most beautiful transparency, and does infinite credit to the artist. He has not yet, however, arrived at the *certainty of casting* them, as several cracked in the experiment. Beside Sir Joseph and a numerous company who attended on the above occasion, there were present Sir Joshua Reynolds, Mr. Locke, the Hon. Horace Walpole and several members of the Royal and Antiquarian Societies.<sup>111</sup>

Following this private exhibition, another display was arranged at Wedgwood’s showroom at Portland House; admission was by ticket only. (Figure 23) Wedgwood waged a heavy publicity campaign for his vase, including a European tour to The Hague, Hanover, Berlin and Frankfurt. Two thousand pamphlets were produced in French to accompany the French Catalogue and one thousand prints of the vase were produced to be sent to Amsterdam.<sup>112</sup> These reproductions marked a significant accomplishment for Wedgwood and, although the monetary profit from sales of

<sup>108</sup> See for example N. Hudson Moore, *Wedgwood and His Imitators*, (London: Hodder & Sloughton, 1909), p. 62; while he mentions the restored figures, Hudson says ‘as to size, colour, polish, etc., the vase was copied exactly’. Mrs. Beeson wrote that after several years Wedgwood produced ‘a true copy’. See Lucille Beeson, ‘The Portland Vase’, BMAA.

<sup>109</sup> See Josiah Wedgwood to Sir William Hamilton, 24 June 1786, (E26-18976).

<sup>110</sup> Josiah Wedgwood to Sir William Hamilton, 24 June 1786, Keele University Archive, E26-18976.

<sup>111</sup> Quoted in Reilly, (1989), *op. cit.*, p. 673 & 675.

<sup>112</sup> Roberts, et al., (1984), *op. cit.*, p. 17.

Portland Vase copies was nominal, Josiah Wedgwood reaped enormous profits from his pottery reproductions of ancient vases from Sir William Hamilton's collection.<sup>113</sup>

### Wedgwood and 'Progress'

Philanthropy was an important aspect of the Beesons collecting activities. From the mid 1960s they had made the decision to donate their collection to their local museum, an act which they saw as enriching the cultural and educational life of the community.<sup>114</sup> The couple also provided funds for local universities, enabling the construction of a school of nursing, a law library, and the first fully endowed professorship at the law school.<sup>115</sup> It was important, then, for Mrs. Beeson to emphasise the philanthropic nature of Josiah Wedgwood. His advancements in industrial techniques, which would have enhanced profit margins, were portrayed in terms of Wedgwood's benevolent character. Mrs. Beeson recognised that Wedgwood was 'a part of the Industrial Revolution', although, she said 'he seemed not to know this'.<sup>116</sup> His combination of industry and the arts, Mrs. Beeson wrote, was 'both complimented and criticized'.<sup>117</sup> Confirmation of his participation in industrial change was provided through Wedgwood's use of James Watts' steam engine to turn the potter's wheel and his introduction of factory discipline. Mrs. Beeson explained that Wedgwood 'organized his workmen into groups, forming... an assembly line'.<sup>118</sup> (Figure 24) Specialisation was meant to improve overall quality. As Mrs. Beeson saw it, 'a potter who had made only rude pots could not be expected to know anything about the fine points Wedgwood was insisting upon'.<sup>119</sup> This process, whereby workers were divided according to specialised tasks in the process of manufacture, was something which Mrs. Beeson wrote was 'unheard of at the time in the pot works'.<sup>120</sup> Yet in introducing specialised labour at Etruria, Josiah Wedgwood was following a process already set in motion; by the mid-eighteenth century the whole of

<sup>113</sup> Jenkins and Sloan, (1996), pp. 187-188.

<sup>114</sup> One impetus towards the decision to donate their collection came through their association with fellow WIS member Mellanay Delhom who donated her collection to the Mint Museum in North Carolina. Their donation to the museum is examined in the final chapter.

<sup>115</sup> All funds were given to Samford University, based in Birmingham, Alabama. See notes from Lucille Beeson's funeral service, Jan. 11, 2001, BMAA.

<sup>116</sup> Lucille Beeson, Talk to a Ceramic Hobby Club, 26 June, no year given, BMAA.

<sup>117</sup> Lucille Beeson, 'Josiah Wedgwood: Potter and Business Man', unpublished talk to the Shades Valley Rotary Club, 26 November 1968, BMAA.

<sup>118</sup> Ibid.

<sup>119</sup> Lucille Beeson, 'Wedgwood', no date, BMAA.

<sup>120</sup> Lucille Beeson, 'Josiah Wedgwood: Potter and Business Man', unpublished talk to the Shades Valley Rotary Club, 26 November 1968, BMAA.

the potteries, together with industry in general, was moving towards increased specialisation.<sup>121</sup>

Mrs. Beeson wrote that ‘all during Josiah Wedgwood’s life he tried to improve his wares’.<sup>122</sup> Yet, she was also keen to point out Wedgwood’s improvements in his community. Her audience were informed that when Wedgwood was constructing Etruria he was the ‘first to build for his workmen and their families homes, a school and church’.<sup>123</sup> Mrs. Beeson reminded her audience that Wedgwood was ‘a good citizen’ who did not ‘neglect his civic duties’.<sup>124</sup> Evidence of his good deeds was provided by citing Wedgwood’s role in joining the Trent and Mersey rivers by canal, affording the potteries access to ports and a wider audience for their wares.<sup>125</sup> The water-way was navigable to the sea, providing, Mrs. Beeson wrote, ‘ALL the potteries in the Staffordshire districts a world market’.<sup>126</sup> Mrs. Beeson also emphasised Wedgwood’s membership in the Lunar Society and his fellowship of the Royal Society of Arts.<sup>127</sup> When the Beesons were inducted into the Royal Society, they were immensely proud of its linkage with Josiah Wedgwood’s own life. Wedgwood was also important for American heritage as he was a supporter of the American Revolution and ‘was helpful to the refugees from the American Revolution’.<sup>128</sup> He also worked, ‘sort of undercover, you may be sure, for the liberation of slaves both in England and in America’, a cause for which he manufactured a medallion known as the “Slave Medallion”, which Mrs. Beeson told her listeners did not have a hallmark for Wedgwood ‘did not wish it known that he had supplied them’.<sup>129</sup> (Figure 25) Despite this secrecy, Mrs. Beeson reminded her audience that Wedgwood ‘worked for the abolition of slavery long, long before movements were effective in America’.<sup>130</sup> For Mrs. Beeson Wedgwood was a figure to be revered, not only for the products

<sup>121</sup> Neil McKendrick, ‘Josiah Wedgwood and Factory Discipline’, *The Historical Journal*, Vol. IV, No. I (1961), pp. 30-55.

<sup>122</sup> Lucille Beeson, Talk to a Ceramic Hobby Club, June 26, no year given, BMAA.

<sup>123</sup> Ibid.

<sup>124</sup> Ibid.

<sup>125</sup> Ibid.

<sup>126</sup> Lucille Beeson, ‘Josiah Wedgwood: Potter and Business Man’, unpublished talk to the Shades Valley Rotary Club, 26 November 1968, BMAA.

<sup>127</sup> Lucille Beeson, Talk to a Ceramic Hobby Club, June 26, no year given, BMAA.

<sup>128</sup> Lucille Beeson, Talk to a Ceramic Hobby Club, June 26, no year given, BMAA and Lucille Beeson, ‘Josiah Wedgwood: Potter and Business Man’, unpublished talk to the Shades Valley Rotary Club, 26 November 1968, BMAA.

<sup>129</sup> Lucille Beeson, ‘Josiah Wedgwood: Potter and Business Man’, unpublished talk to the Shades Valley Rotary Club, November 26, 1968, BMAA.

<sup>130</sup> Ibid.

which he produced, but for the life he led and the changes he was seen to have instigated in the Potteries district, throughout England and the world.

Wedgwood had ‘advanced’ himself from a ‘peasant potter’, Mrs. Beeson wrote, to become a man who ‘was at home with other leaders, with noblemen’, who was ‘no stranger in the finest homes in England’.<sup>131</sup> For the Beesons, who desired their own place amongst the elite through their collecting, these narratives of progress confirmed their own activities. Wedgwood had also completely revolutionised the landscape and business of the Potteries. Mrs. Beeson told her audience that the last quarter of the eighteenth century, during which Wedgwood was building his business, was an era when the roads were ‘all but impassable’, where ‘cottages... usually had tamped earth floors’, where ‘sanitary fitments in a home simply did not exist’.<sup>132</sup> Mrs. Beeson wrote that Staffordshire was transformed by the time Josiah Wedgwood was fifty years old from a ‘wild and isolated’ place to ‘the most important’ district ‘in the English Isle’, supplying not only its own population but an expanding export trade overseas.<sup>133</sup> Trade had progressed from localised, family-run businesses to an industry with ‘many markets’ open to them.<sup>134</sup> While she acknowledged that this was true of all the potters in the district, Mrs. Beeson wrote that the Wedgwood name was ‘better known than any others from that day’.<sup>135</sup> Josiah Wedgwood did transform the production and marketing of pottery, yet Wedgwood was a leader in a wider market. From 1710 to 1715, the forty-two master potters of Staffordshire produced earthenware to the annual value of £6417, compared with 1785, when Wedgwood reported that upwards of 15,000 persons were then directly employed in the manufacture, and double that number in auxiliary occupations.<sup>136</sup> The Staffordshire potteries were a major force on the world market by the middle of the eighteenth century, and by the mid nineteenth century they were dominant, with Staffordshire wares dictating trends in consumer behaviour from North America to Australia.<sup>137</sup>

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<sup>131</sup> Lucille Beeson, ‘Wedgwood’, no date, BMAA.

<sup>132</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>133</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>134</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>135</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>136</sup> Frederick Rathbone, *Catalogue of the Wedgwood Museum at Etruria*, (Stoke-on-Trent: Josiah Wedgwood & Sons Ltd., 1909), pp. 16-18.

<sup>137</sup> David Barker, ‘“The Usual Classes of Useful Articles”: Staffordshire Ceramics Reconsidered’ in Robert Hunter, ed, *Ceramics in America*, (Hanover & London: Chipstone Foundation, 2001), pp. 73-93.



Yet for Mrs. Beeson, it was Josiah Wedgwood, ‘born a peasant potter’ who had become ‘a wealthy industrialist’, who had ‘established a most progressive company which had a tremendous trade’.<sup>138</sup> This story echoed the Beesons own course from rural Southerners, to Mr. Beeson’s success in business and their subsequent wealth. This narrative of success through self improvement and industrious labour held a significant attraction for the Beesons and constituted one of the primary reasons behind their collecting activities.

### Wedgwood in Literature

Shortly after Mrs. Beeson began collecting Wedgwood pottery, she began to turn her attention to the body of literature which had accrued on the subject over the past two hundred years. The information she found in these texts greatly contributed to her considerations of quality and desirability amongst the manufacture. It is crucial to understand the historiography of Wedgwood and Wedgwood collecting in order to contextualise the Beesons’ own activities. In researching Josiah Wedgwood and his manufacture, Mrs. Beeson wrote that Wedgwood’s letters revealed ‘his charm and character better than any of his biographers’.<sup>139</sup> From 1762 Wedgwood was in frequent correspondence with Thomas Bentley and from these letters one is able to construct a history of the development of the wares produced by Wedgwood along with the widening circle of ‘connoisseurs, scientists and politicians of the time, and of the artists and craftsmen he engaged to work for him’.<sup>140</sup> That these letters are available today, however, is due to the efforts of one of the first systematic collectors of Wedgwood ware, Joseph Mayer.<sup>141</sup>

Joseph Mayer created a prototype of a Wedgwood collector for future collectors, including the Beesons. Mayer was born in 1803 in Newcastle-under-Lyme, Staffordshire. He came from a mercantile background and his education, though adequate, was rudimentary.<sup>142</sup> At the age of nineteen, Mayer left the family home to

<sup>138</sup> Ibid.

<sup>139</sup> Lucille Beeson, ‘Wedgwood’, no date, BMAA.

<sup>140</sup> Arthur Lane, *Wedgwood Bicentenary Exhibition 1759-1959*, Victoria and Albert Museum, June-August 1959, (Eyre and Spottiswoode Limited, 1959), p. 5.

<sup>141</sup> Margaret Gibson and Susan M. Wright, eds., *Joseph Mayer of Liverpool 1803-1886*, (London: The Society of Antiquaries of London in association with The National Museums and Galleries on Merseyside, 1988), p. 195.

<sup>142</sup> Mayer’s father was a tanner in Staffordshire who supplied leather goods to the potteries at Etruria, Longport and the ‘six towns’ as a whole. Gibson and Wright, eds., (1988), *op. cit.*, p. 1.

serve as an assistant to his sister's husband, James Wordley, as a silversmith and jeweller in Liverpool.<sup>143</sup> (Figure 26) This trade led to Mayer's extensive travels across Europe where he was inspired to begin his collection.<sup>144</sup> Mayer represented a new kind of collector in England, and one which would later prove important for Americans like the Beesons who were not from privileged backgrounds. The field continued to be dominated by the wealthy, and while Mayer was a successful businessman, he would not have had the same access to funds as other famous Wedgwood collectors such as Dudley Majoribanks, later Lord Tweedmouth.<sup>145</sup> Indeed, restrictions on his income seem to have affected Mayer's collecting activities. Many of the items he purchased, Wedgwood among them, could have been acquired inexpensively, especially prior to the middle of the century.<sup>146</sup> Collectors like Mayer were not merely emulating the aristocratic collectors of the previous generation, however, as they opened new fields of interest, the decorative and applied arts among them. While there had been collectors, such as Horace Walpole, in the late eighteenth century who acquired decorative arts including Wedgwood wares, the interest was not sizable.<sup>147</sup> Mayer had the advantage of a more broadly European perspective, he first travelled abroad in 1828 and continued to do so regularly for the next thirty years. Continental collectors, whose taste was more catholic than the English gentry, had been affected by political and economic circumstances.<sup>148</sup> These conditions were unsettling even the most long-established collections, leading to the development of more vigorous markets in which material changed hands with greater readiness, promoting a thriving collecting scene.<sup>149</sup> While Mayer collected a range of goods, from Egyptian antiquities to Limoges enamels and arms and armour, his Wedgwood

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<sup>143</sup> Gibson and Wright, (1988), *op. cit.*, p. 2. In 1844 he ended his partnership with Wordley to establish his own shop where jewellery and objects of virtu were designed and manufactured.

<sup>144</sup> Gibson and Wright, (1988), *op. cit.*, p. 4.

<sup>145</sup> Dudley Coutts Marjoribanks, 1st Baron Tweedmouth (1820-1894), was the son of Edward Marjoribanks of Greenlands. He inherited a substantial fortune from his father and acquired considerable wealth of his own as chairman of Meux Brewery. His collection of Wedgwood was purchased in 1905 by William Hesketh Lever, first Lord Leverhulme (1851-1925), and is now housed at the Lady Lever Art Gallery in Port Sunlight, Merseyside.

<sup>146</sup> Gibson and Wright, (1988), *op. cit.*, p. 6.

<sup>147</sup> Marjorie Caygill and John Cherry, eds., *A.W. Franks: Nineteenth-Century Collecting and the British Museum*, (London: British Museum Press, 1997), p. 10.

<sup>148</sup> Unsettling conditions on the continent included the Napoleonic Wars in the early years of the century to the Franco-Prussian War of 1870. Caygill and Cherry, eds., (1997), *op. cit.*, p. 7.

<sup>149</sup> Caygill and Cherry, eds., (1997), *op. cit.*, p. 7.

collection remained a consuming and lifelong passion.<sup>150</sup> It is probable that Mayer saw in Wedgwood, whom he described as ‘living in a district where the liberal arts were almost entirely unknown’ and suffering ‘all the disadvantages of being actively engaged in business, so as to leave little time for the cultivation of taste’, something of his own pursuit of distinction.<sup>151</sup>

One of the best records we have of Mayer early in his career as a collector is his portrait by William Daniels, c. 1840. (Figure 27) This picture provides an insight not only into the objects Mayer was collecting but also his perception of himself as a collector. Here, among his classical marbles, armour and manuscripts, Mayer sits contemplating a small Wedgwood vase. (Figure 28) Several Wedgwood pieces can be identified in the portrait, given pride of place atop the mantelpiece and cabinets. On the mantel is a jasper vase with snake-entwined handles and two encaustic-painted basalt pieces.<sup>152</sup> (Figure 29) On the right side of the picture another encaustic-painted vase sits atop a jasper plinth. These objects, namely the classically inspired jasper and basalt wares, were the forms and styles of Wedgwood ware which were among the most fashionable in the second half of the nineteenth century.<sup>153</sup> In the foreground of the painting is a volume of prints which appears to be a copy of Hamilton and d’Hancarville’s *Antiquities Etrusques, Grecques et Romaines* (1766–67). The inclusion of this book illustrating Sir William Hamilton’s collection of Greek vases indicates Mayer’s awareness of and interest in documentary material

<sup>150</sup> In his breadth of collecting activities Mayer has been compared with late seventeenth and early eighteenth century collectors, their interests embracing specimens of natural history and geology, ethnographic material and pieces of antiquity. See Gibson and Wright, eds., (1988), *op. cit.*, p. 46.

<sup>151</sup> Joseph Mayer, *A Synopsis of the History of the Manufacture of Earthenware: with reference to the Specimens in the Exhibition of the Liverpool Mechanics’ Institution, 1842*, (Liverpool: Printed by Rockliff and Ellis, 1842).

<sup>152</sup> Gibson and Wright, eds., (1988), *op. cit.*, p. 196. See Lionel Burman’s chapter in this text, ‘Joseph Mayer’s Wedgwood Collection’ for a more in depth look at the objects represented in the portrait.

<sup>153</sup> Just a few years after this portrait was completed Mayer increased his Wedgwood collection through the purchase of items in the possession of a Mr. Wedderburne, who had been an employee of the Wedgwoods. When the London warehouse was closed the goods were sold by auction. It was at this time that Wedderburne purchased ‘a vast quantity of the oldest and best specimens of artistic work’. Mayer purchased from Wedderburne all he had of this stock. In the words of the curator of the Mayer collection, ‘The pieces which Mr. Mayer obtained from Mr. Wedderburne, together with those accumulated at other casual times, form an excellent representative group. The series of portraits is unusually large and the plaques, vases, etc., in jasper, basalt and pottery, contain pieces representing most of the various periods and styles of Wedgwood ware.’ So, we know that by 1845 Mayer had a large and varied collection of Wedgwood wares. C.T. Gatty, *The Mayer Collection in the Liverpool Museum Considered as an Educational Possession*, Liverpool Art Club (Liverpool, 1878), 20-1. quoted in Gibson and Wright, eds., (1988), *op. cit.*, p. 197.

related to the objects he was collecting.<sup>154</sup> Over the years he acquired a large number of cameos, portrait medallions and intaglios and also owned hundreds of trial pieces, attesting to his interest in the processes of manufacture and the technical history of the objects as well as their aesthetic merits.<sup>155</sup> Mayer's collecting was informed by a genuine interest in the history of the objects with which he surrounded himself and a conviction of their artistic and social value.

When the Beesons chose to have their own portraits painted they, like Mayer, pictured themselves with specific objects from their collection.<sup>156</sup> (Figure 30) Gone is the cluttered study of the antiquarian in favour of a bare setting focussing all the viewers' attention on the subjects and their objects. Mr. Beeson is shown with the Wedgwood Portland vase copy, the symbol of Wedgwood's highest technical and artistic achievement. Mrs. Beeson chose a yellow jasperware vase, similar to the one Mayer studies in his portrait. Both are represented seated in formal attire and while neither of them have any physical contact with the Wedgwood objects, the pieces are pushed into the foreground of the paintings ensuring the viewers' acknowledgment. The paintings are a study of possession, and of showing the owners' mastery over these objects. Like Mayer, the Beesons have expressed their assurance of the quality of these Wedgwood objects and their passion for collecting. When the Beesons donated their collection to the Birmingham Museum of Art these two portraits hung at the entrance to the galleries. Any visitor was made instantly aware that these objects were there due to the efforts and munificence of these two collectors.

For the Beesons, the exhibition of their collection was an important indication of its status. Collectors like Mayer had previously made it a custom publicly to display their collections. As early as 1842, Mayer had been contributing loans and gifts from his collection to the Mechanics' Unions in Liverpool and Newcastle-under-Lyme and a number of Mayer's pieces were included in the Art Treasures Exhibition in Manchester in 1857, eleven of which were illustrated in the review volume.<sup>157</sup> This exhibition, made up primarily of contributions from private collections, was designed to be useful to the arts in much the same way as London's Great Exhibition of 1851.

<sup>154</sup> Gibson and Wright, eds., (1988), *op. cit.*, p. 196.

<sup>155</sup> See Eliza Meteyard, *The Wedgwood Handbook: A Manual for Collectors* (London, 1875), p. 69.

<sup>156</sup> These portraits were painted by a local Birmingham artist, William Wilson.

<sup>157</sup> Gibson and Wright, eds., (1988), *op. cit.*, p. 198.

Yet the emphasis had shifted away from manufactured and industrial products of its forebear to an exhibition of the art treasures of the nation and the extraordinary richness of the country's private collections.<sup>158</sup> The inclusion of Mayer's Wedgwood in this exhibition provided an early example of Wedgwood's wares being regarded as 'an artistic treasure'. The displays of these collections were meant to inspire others to collect or, at the very least, to educate the public in matters of taste. The Executive Committee stated that one aim of the Exhibition was 'to give an educational direction to its enjoyments' and 'to promote the education not of the understanding only, but of the taste, the invention, the fancy, and the devotional and moral sympathies of the people by the force of example'.<sup>159</sup> In order to fulfil its educational purpose, the objects were classified and displayed by media, school and chronology. This systematic classification was praised by Prince Albert on his visit to the Exhibition; 'You have done well not to aim at a mere accumulation of Works of Art and objects of general interest, but to give to your collection, by a scientific and historical arrangement, an educational character'.<sup>160</sup>

While Mayer is an important figure for the study of Wedgwood collecting, his most significant contribution came in another form. In 1848, on a visit to Birmingham, he found the ledger books, correspondence and other documentary evidence which had been sold to a scrap dealer by the Wedgwood factory after the death of Josiah II.<sup>161</sup> These papers and documents, which Mayer kept in his private collection, transformed his collection into a resource for study.<sup>162</sup> He wrote three papers dealing specifically with pottery; a short *Synopsis of the History of the Manufacture of Earthenware* (1842) which was an account of the history of the subject in which Wedgwood played a significant role; an essay, 'The History of the Art of Pottery in Liverpool' (1855), and *On the Art of Pottery* (1871), which emphasised the materials and techniques of manufacture echoing contemporary ideas and values concerning ceramics.<sup>163</sup> In these publications, Mayer traced the history of ceramic production, creating a progressive

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<sup>158</sup> See *The Collectors Voice: Critical Readings in the Practice of Collecting*, ed. by Susan Pearce, et al., Vol. 3, (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2002).

<sup>159</sup> Quoted in Pearce, ed., Pearce, (2002), *op. cit.*, p. 8.

<sup>160</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>161</sup> Eliza Meteyard, *The Life of Josiah Wedgwood*, (London: Hurst and Blackett, Publishers, 1865), reprinted by Josiah Wedgwood & Sons Ltd., 1980. Vol. 1, x.

<sup>162</sup> Gibson and Wright, eds., (1988), *op. cit.*, p. 200.

<sup>163</sup> *Ibid.*

narrative from ‘the rudely fabricated article made for necessary uses, to the commencement and gradual progress of the more refined work’.<sup>164</sup> Mayer also displayed his collection in the ‘Egyptian Museum’, where one room was dedicated to the display of British pottery and ordered to illustrate the history of pottery, and in particular Staffordshire ware, including Wedgwood.<sup>165</sup> Mayer’s collection became increasingly known through references in the growing body of literature on ceramics and in several loan exhibitions. In 1869, 470 pieces were chosen under Mayer’s supervision for an exhibit at the Wedgwood Institute in Burslem and in 1879 the works of Josiah Wedgwood were displayed at the Liverpool Art Club exhibition, under the supervision of Charles Gatty, who was curator of Mayer’s collection after he donated it to the City of Liverpool.<sup>166</sup>

Mayer presented the British Museum with its first gift of Wedgwood since the receipt of the copy of the Wedgwood Portland Vase in 1802.<sup>167</sup> The donation, made in 1853, comprised of twenty-four pieces, primarily portrait medallions and plaques with subjects inspired by both the French Revolution and classical mythology.<sup>168</sup> (Figure 31) When Mayer opened his own museum in Liverpool, his stated purpose was to give his fellow-citizens, who were unable to get to London, some idea of the “glories of the past” as those displayed in the British Museum.<sup>169</sup> His aspiration was to inspire collectors to donate their objects to public museums for permanent display. There were museums in England, Mayer told his reader, ‘which, at the beginning... sprung from a single specimen, or a few specimens, and which are now the greatest pride of

<sup>164</sup> Joseph Mayer, *History of the Art of Pottery in Liverpool*, (Liverpool: T. Brakell, 1855), p. 15.

<sup>165</sup> Gibson and Wright, eds., (1988), *op. cit.*, p. 198.

<sup>166</sup> Gibson and Wright, eds., (1988), *op. cit.*, p. 201. See the Liverpool Art Club Exhibition Catalogue, *Loan Exhibition of the Works of Josiah Wedgwood*, 1879.

<sup>167</sup> This copy of the Portland Vase was give to the Museum by Josiah Wedgwood’s eldest son.

<sup>168</sup> Dawson, (1984), *op. cit.*, pp. 119-25. See also Hobson, (1903), *op. cit.*. Joseph Mayer was an acquaintance of A.W. Franks, who was appointed to the British Museum in 1851. Franks played an important role as a champion of new fields of study and collecting, from British antiquities to Oriental cultures and ethnography. Although Franks was the creator of the Museum’s European post-medieval ceramic collections, the Wedgwood now held came about through his associations with other collectors, rather than direct action on his part.

<sup>169</sup> Gibson and Wright, eds., (1988), *op. cit.*, p. 8. A number of Mayer’s pieces were included in the Art Treasures Exhibition in Manchester in 1857, eleven of which were illustrated in the review volume. The inclusion of Mayer’s Wedgwood in this exhibition provided an early example of Wedgwood’s wares being regarded as an artistic treasure. In 1869, 470 pieces were chosen under Mayer’s supervision for an exhibit at the Wedgwood Institute, Burslem, and in 1879 the works of Josiah Wedgwood were displayed at the Liverpool Art Club exhibition, under the supervision of Charles Gatty, who was curator of Mayer’s collection after he donated it to the City of Liverpool.

the metropolis.<sup>170</sup> Mayer's hope, 'for the love of art', was 'that those who themselves possess single specimens, will see how desirable it would be that they should be gathered into one grand museum.'<sup>171</sup>

Despite Mayer's donation, it was not until the London art dealer and collector, Isaac Falcke and his wife left the British Museum their collection of over five hundred Wedgwood objects in 1909 that Wedgwood was significantly represented in the museum's collection.<sup>172</sup> Falcke, like Mayer, displayed his collection at several exhibitions prior to its permanent donation; portions were exhibited at the opening of the Crystal Palace in 1856 and objects were lent to the 1862 International Exhibition in South Kensington, the 1868 Leeds Art-Treasures Exhibition and, between 1875 and 1877, to the Bethnal Green Museum.<sup>173</sup> The Falcke collection consisted primarily of 'Old Wedgwood', objects manufactured in the eighteenth century under the supervision of Josiah Wedgwood.<sup>174</sup> In a letter to Eliza Meteyard, Falcke compared the 'Old' ware with the new products being made by the company;

The same forms are issued the colours are not the same the pale lavender is colder the dark blue harsher and they do not closely rival their originals of 100-years ago inasmuch as the Moulds are worn out, and necessarily the figures are more clumsy and wanting in sharpness the biscuit is waxey [sic] & coarse and the figures are not undercut nor tooled as the old Wedgwood ware is.<sup>175</sup>

It was the display of the collections of these nineteenth century collectors which established the hierarchies of taste for the forms and bodies of Wedgwood ware which are today considered the most desirable by Wedgwood collectors.

In order to fulfil an educational purpose, Mayer's publicly displayed collection initially underwent a process of inventorying, classification and description by its first

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<sup>170</sup> Mayer, (1842), *op. cit.*

<sup>171</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>172</sup> Minor donations were made to the British Museum by Major-General A. Meyrick, who presented two early basalt plaques in 1878, Felix Joseph in 1888 and W.J. Stuart in 1880 and 1890. See Dawson, (1984), *op. cit.*, p. 7; *A.W. Franks: Nineteenth-Century Collecting and the British Museum*, ed. by Marjorie Caygill and John Cherry, (London: British Museum Press, 1997), p. 201. Franks' friendship with the Wedgwood collector Isaac Falcke proved the cornerstone of the British Museum's Wedgwood collection. Falcke and his wife made a gift of 522 pieces in 1909, nearly all of which were Wedgwood. They were principally jasperwares, basalt and some ornamental creamware.

<sup>173</sup> *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, ed. by H.C.G. Matthew and Brian Harrison, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), vol. 18, pp.962-963.

<sup>174</sup> The Falcke collection was dominated by three body types; the jasperwares, basalt and cream-ware, and they preferred the ornamental wares to the useful domestic products.

<sup>175</sup> Isaac Falcke to Eliza Meteyard, no date, quoted in Robin Reilly, *Wedgwood*, (London: MacMillan, 1989), vol. II, p. 144.

curator Henry Ecroyd Smith. In this work he was assisted not only by Mayer, but by others with a keen interest in Wedgwood, including A.W. Franks, Llewellyn Jewitt, and Eliza Meteyard.<sup>176</sup> Following Smith's appointment, the second curator, Charles T. Gatty, was to further classify the collection as a progressive chronology. As in the texts dedicated to the history of ceramics, Wedgwood wares were conceived as the culmination of this progressive development. Gatty wrote that,

The series commences with English mediaeval and later rough brown earthenwares and stonewares. From these we pass to the English Fayence or Delft wares, and thence to the earlier Staffordshire wares. Amongst this latter class must be specially noticed the very important collection of Wedgwood ware.<sup>177</sup>

To ensure Mayer's philanthropic and nationalistic ambitions it was crucial that the collection be used by craftsmen who were engaged in the production of similar wares and that the collection be arranged in historical sequence, 'so that the developments and peculiarities of each period may be made plain and studied... placing in historical groups the purest example of their kind, so that the student may see how the archaic grew into the best time, and the finest periods drooped into decadence.'<sup>178</sup> The museum that Mayer envisioned was a place 'where the admission may be daily and gratuitous; where the unoccupied artisan may go and spend his day, adding to his store of knowledge, instead of, for want of other amusement, sauntering about all day, or sitting in a beer shop to the detriment of his health'.<sup>179</sup> In this conception of the museum Mayer reflected broader themes about the museum's function as utilised in the formation of the Victoria and Albert Museum. The concern of both the Great Exhibition of 1851 and the museum was to bring together objects for the purpose of public edification.<sup>180</sup> In its first incarnation as the Museum of Manufactures at Marlborough House, the V&A was intended to be 'A Collection of specimens, which should illustrate both the progress and the highest excellence attained in manufacture', for

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<sup>176</sup> Gibson and Wright, eds., (1988), *op. cit.*, p. 201. Franks was curator at the British Museum; Meteyard and Jewitt were the first two authors to publish biographies of Wedgwood. These texts will be examined shortly.

<sup>177</sup> Quoted in Pat Starkey, ed., *Riches Into Art: Liverpool Collectors 1770-1880*, (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1993), p. 33.

<sup>178</sup> Starkey, (1993), *op. cit.*, p. 43.

<sup>179</sup> Joseph Mayer, *A Synopsis of the History of the Manufacture of Earthenware: with reference to the Specimens in the Exhibition of the Liverpool Mechanics' Institution, 1842*, (Liverpool: Printed by Rockliff and Ellis, 1842).

<sup>180</sup> *The Collectors Voice: Critical Readings in the Practice of Collecting*, ed. by Susan Pearce, et al., Vol. 3, (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2002), p. 14.



By proper arrangements a Museum may be made in the highest degree instructional. If... means are taken to point out its uses and applications, it becomes elevated from being a mere unintelligible lounge for idlers into an impressive schoolroom for every one.<sup>181</sup>

Focussing on the acquisition and display of the decorative arts was taken as evidence of the museum's commitment to public education.<sup>182</sup> It was these collections which, it was hoped, would improve the skills of artisans, raise the quality of manufactured goods, create higher standards of taste, and enhance modern life.<sup>183</sup> As early as 1835, Lord Lytton, in his *England and the English*, was celebrating Wedgwood as a specific model for the manufacturers of the nation to emulate;

There have, for some time past, been various complaints of a deficiency of artists capable of designing for our manufactures... In 1760, our porcelain wares could not stand competition with those of France. Necessity prompts, or what is quite as good, allows the exertion of genius. Wedgwood applied chemistry to the improvement of his pottery, sought the most beautiful and convenient specimens of antiquity, and caused them to be imitated with scrupulous nicety, he then has recourse to the greatest genius of his day for designs and advice. But now the manufacturers of a far more costly material, without availing themselves of the example of Wedgwood, complain of want of talent in those whom they never sought, and whom they might as easily command, if they were as willing to reward.<sup>184</sup>

The intention behind the display of such wares in the museum was to educate the public and industrialists in a taste for the production and consumption of modern goods.<sup>185</sup> Wedgwood was constructed as an archetype of Victorian principles of 'Self-Help' where the 'spirit of self-help' was the 'root of all genuine growth in the individual; and, exhibited in the lives of many... constituted the true source of national vigour and strength.'<sup>186</sup> The boy who successfully rose from humble beginnings, who overcame ill health and physical tribulations<sup>187</sup>; Wedgwood

<sup>181</sup> Department of Practical Art, *First Report of the Department of Practical Art* (London: Eyre & Spottiswoode, 1853), p. 30 quoted in Richard Dunn, 'The Future of Collecting: Lessons from the past', in *Museums and the Future of Collecting*, ed. by Simon J. Knell, (Aldershot: Ashgate, second edition 2004), pp. 62-71.

<sup>182</sup> Duncan, (1995), *op. cit.*, p. 63.

<sup>183</sup> See *Report from the select committee on Arts, and Their Connection with Manufactures*, House of Commons Reports, vol. IX.1.

<sup>184</sup> Lord Lytton quoted in Frederick Rathbone, *Catalogue of the Wedgwood Museum at Etruria*, (Etruria, Stoke-on-Trent: Josiah Wedgwood & Sons Ltd., 1909), p. 20.

<sup>185</sup> Ann Eatwell, 'The Collector's or Fine Arts Club 1857-1874. The first society for Collectors of the Decorative Arts', *Journal of Decorative Arts Society*, 1994, vol. 18, pp. 25-30, p. 25.

<sup>186</sup> Samuel Smiles, *Self-Help*, (London: John Murray, 1958), first published 1859, p. 35.

<sup>187</sup> Due to a childhood case of smallpox, Wedgwood suffered from an infected leg, which was eventually amputated, making him incapable of running a wheel to throw pots. Frederick Rathbone,

prevailed to become not just an artisan, but a scientist, a thinker, entrepreneur, and a founder of a thriving and prosperous business.<sup>188</sup> This narrative, however it increased the renown of Josiah Wedgwood, served a larger communal purpose in that it continued the belief that the arts had a moral purpose and that an appreciation of the arts could lead to a more prosperous society.

Mayer seems to have discontinued collecting Wedgwood around 1860, possibly because by this time a number of other collectors began buying Wedgwood and prices rose accordingly.<sup>189</sup> Numbers and prices of Wedgwood at auction sales increased and collectors like Sir Joseph Hooker, who started collecting in 1862, travelled to Paris as well as London to purchase Wedgwood.<sup>190</sup> By 1894 Professor Church observed that ‘not only the shops but the private dwellings of France, Germany, Italy, Holland and Belgium have been ransacked by enthusiastic collectors and eager dealers’.<sup>191</sup> Mayer remained active in further establishing the status of Wedgwood wares, however, and the cultural capital of Wedgwood objects continued to rise with the first Wedgwood Museum established in Burslem in 1863 and the publication of Eliza Meteyard’s *Life of Josiah Wedgwood* in 1865. Mayer assisted Eliza Meteyard’s research by allowing her access to the Wedgwood papers.<sup>192</sup> The resulting biography remains a fundamental work on Wedgwood.

Throughout his career as a collector, Mayer witnessed a significant rise in the value of the Wedgwood goods he collected and exhibited. The state of the trade was indicated by Frederick Litchfield in his work of 1879, *Pottery and Porcelain, A Guide to Collectors*, when he reported a considerable increase in the ‘number of dealers in old china within the last thirty or forty years’.<sup>193</sup> By the time Mayer published his third

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when discussing this amputation, called it ‘a martyrdom that was possibly a benefit to his country’. See Rathbone, (1909), *op. cit.*, p. 16.

<sup>188</sup> The frontages of the V&A museum even incorporated a statue of Josiah Wedgwood amongst 31 other great British artists, architects and craftsmen, made by some of the leading sculptors of the day.

<sup>189</sup> Gibson and Wright, eds., (1988), *op. cit.*, p. 199.

<sup>190</sup> Gibson and Wright, eds., (1988), *op. cit.*, p. 199. See Una des Fontaines, ‘The Wedgwood Collection of Sir Joseph Hooker’ Proceedings of the Wedgwood Society, vii (1968), pp. 179-80.

<sup>191</sup> Gibson and Wright, eds., (1988), *op. cit.*, p. 199. See A.H. Church, ‘Josiah Wedgwood’ *The Portfolio*, No. 3, March 1894, (London: Seeley & Co.), p. 100.

<sup>192</sup> Meteyard repaid her debt to Mayer with the publication of *Wedgwood and His Works* in 1873, in which nineteen of twenty-eight plates illustrated objects from the Mayer collection in the Liverpool Museum.

<sup>193</sup> Frederick Litchfield, *Pottery and Porcelain: A Guide to Collectors*, (London 1879). Litchfield was a dealer and a key furniture historian at the same point. Mayer and other authors writing about

book on ceramics, *On the Art of Pottery* (1871), he was able to comment that ceramics ‘in these later days, has had at least its share of attention on the part of students and writers... [in whose books], the history of the art has been patiently and conscientiously pursued.’<sup>194</sup> Writing three years after Mayer, Meteyard said of the English collectors of Wedgwood and their contribution to her books,

The difficulty has been *l’embarras des richesses*, not paucity of objects. Sufficient have been offered to fill volumes, rather than one; and necessarily, it is a question remaining with the public themselves, whether or no, by their patronage of the present, they will give encouragement to the issue of further unique examples of Wedgwood’s fine art productions.<sup>195</sup>

When Lucille Beeson wrote her biography of Josiah Wedgwood, it was to Eliza Meteyard’s texts which she referred for her source material. Copies of Meteyard’s biography were included in the donation when the Beesons gave their collection to the Birmingham Museum of Art.<sup>196</sup> These texts were of seminal importance for the couple’s understanding of Josiah Wedgwood and his wares. Eliza Meteyard began her literary career as a novelist, but she was also a prolific contributor to several weeklies such as *Howitt’s Journal*, *Eliza Cook’s Journal*, *Ladies’ Journal*, and *The Home Companion*.<sup>197</sup> In her journalism, Meteyard advocated social reform in the areas of public sanitation and art education. She became an advocate of women’s rights through her involvement with the Whittington Club serving as an active member of the club’s council and of the committee of women who vetted prospective female members.<sup>198</sup> A lifelong friend of Samuel Smiles (the author of *Self-Help*) Meteyard echoed his message of self-improvement when she related how an artisan was led, after reading her articles, to ‘self-culture and social elevation’, becoming the editor of an important provincial daily newspaper.<sup>199</sup> Meteyard engaged with the idea of writing a biography of Josiah Wedgwood in 1863, when W.E. Gladstone pronounced the need for such a work at the foundation of the Wedgwood Institute at

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ceramics at the end of the nineteenth century shared an interest in antiques and antique collecting with authors in other fields of the decorative arts. Litchfield, for example, published an *Illustrated History of Furniture* in 1892.

<sup>194</sup> Joseph Mayer, *On the Art of Pottery*, (Liverpool: D. Marples, 1871), p. 3.

<sup>195</sup> Eliza Meteyard, *Memorials of Wedgwood*, (London: George Bell & Sons, 1874), p. 136.

<sup>196</sup> Copies of the Meteyard books at the Clarence Hanson library at the Museum record this gift through bookplates.

<sup>197</sup> Fred Hunter, ‘Eliza Meteyard’, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, vol. 37, ed. by H.C.G. Matthew and Brian Harrison, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), pp. 959-960.

<sup>198</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>199</sup> *Ibid.*

Burslem, a building erected by the Chamber of Commerce and the Potters' Union with the help of manufacturers and a few rich collectors to house a free lending library, a school of art and design, a laboratory and a museum.<sup>200</sup> When the first volume of the biography was published in 1865, Meteyard quoted Gladstone's speech from that day in Burslem;

England has long taken a lead among the nations of Europe for the cheapness of her manufactures: not so for their beauty. And if the day should ever come when she shall be as eminent in taste as she is now in economy of production, my belief is that that result will probably be due to no other single man in so great a degree as to Wedgwood.<sup>201</sup>

Gladstone was a ceramic enthusiast and collector of Wedgwood at a time when the study of ceramics was still in its infancy. In a speech given at the London Institution on 'The History of the Potter's Art in Britain' Gladstone was reported as saying that 'Wedgwood [was] one of the heroes whom [he] worship[ed]'.<sup>202</sup> He recognised, to the degree of overstating, Wedgwood's contribution towards revolutionising 'the character of the fabrics' produced in Staffordshire and claimed he had 'carried the manufacture of earthenware... to by far the highest point which it has ever attained in any country in the world'.<sup>203</sup> The Wedgwood ware that Gladstone admired was the classically inspired decorative objects. He wrote that Wedgwood 'recalled into existence the spirit of Greek art' for, before him, 'the earthenware and porcelain manufacture... had never risen to the loftiness of the spirit of Greek art'.<sup>204</sup>

Meteyard embraced the task of writing the biography of Josiah Wedgwood and was greatly aided in the process by Joseph Mayer's discovery of the Wedgwood manuscript material. Meteyard credited Mayer with having 'done more than any man living for the memory of Wedgwood' in his collection and preservation of Wedgwood documentation. Although it was 'not a fashion to admire and collect the masterpieces of Wedgwood's skill', Joseph Mayer was 'led by nature's great gift - an exquisite

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<sup>200</sup> Reilly, (1989), *op. cit.*, vol. II, p. 144.

<sup>201</sup> Eliza Meteyard, *The Life of Josiah Wedgwood*, (London: Hurst and Blackett, Publishers, 1865), reprinted by Josiah Wedgwood & Sons Ltd., 1980, frontispiece. Meteyard also inscribed her life of Wedgwood to Gladstone, who was then Chancellor of the Exchequer.

<sup>202</sup> From a clipping in the 'Wedgwood Scrapbook' compiled by Isaac Falcke kept in the Department of Medieval and Later Antiquities, British Museum, incorrectly labelled 'Times May 14 1877'. Quoted in Aileen Dawson, *Masterpieces of Wedgwood in the British Museum*, (London: British Museum Publications Limited, 1984), p. 142.

<sup>203</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>204</sup> William E. Gladstone, Address at foundation of the Wedgwood Institute at Burslem, 1863.

taste'.<sup>205</sup> The title page to the first volume informed Meteyard's reader that this 'life of Josiah Wedgwood' was taken from 'his private correspondence and family papers' in the possession of Joseph Mayer, F. Wedgwood, C. Darwin, Miss Wedgwood and other original sources.<sup>206</sup> Meteyard wrote that she was ideally placed to write the biography of Josiah Wedgwood, claiming 'the names of Wedgwood and Darwin were amongst the earliest known to me... In the town where I passed my childhood were many who well remembered Mr. Wedgwood'.<sup>207</sup> *The Life of Josiah Wedgwood* was followed by *A Group of Englishmen* in 1871, *Wedgwood and His Works* in 1873, *Memorials of Wedgwood: a Selection from his Fine Art Works* in 1874, and *The Wedgwood Handbook: a Manual for Collectors* in 1875, but it was the biography which laid the foundations for all later studies of Wedgwood.<sup>208</sup> Meteyard wrote in the preface to the biography that;

A life of Josiah Wedgwood has been long a need in modern literature. The generation contemporary with him, and who could have told so much that was vivid and personal, seem to have considered no man's acts in relation to his time worthy of literary record, unless such related to diplomacy, to war, or to politics. The heroes of the Great Industries were especially unregarded; and it has been left to a later day, to men of wider knowledge, sounder judgment, and more enlarged sympathies, to write their lives, and tell a newer generation how and by what means, by what services, and often by what self-sacrifices, these Englishmen benefited their country and their kind.<sup>209</sup>

Meteyard suggested that the scant scholarly attention paid to Wedgwood during the eighteenth century was due to the lack of appreciation and foresight by his contemporaries. Wedgwood, who she called 'greater than his time', was positioned ahead of his own time and as a figure isolated from his contemporaries.<sup>210</sup> The arts, which for Meteyard included Wedgwood's productions, were seen as 'in advance of prevalent culture' and only appreciated by those few 'men endowed by nature or enriched by education and travel'.<sup>211</sup> Meteyard portrayed Wedgwood as a man driven by his own conception of beauty; to her it was a happy coincidence that his products sold well during the eighteenth century.<sup>212</sup>

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<sup>205</sup> Meteyard, (1865), *op. cit.*, p. x.

<sup>206</sup> Meteyard, (1865), *op. cit.*, title page.

<sup>207</sup> Meteyard, (1865), *op. cit.*, p. xi.

<sup>208</sup> Robin Reilly, *Josiah Wedgwood*, (London: MacMillan, 1992), p. ix.

<sup>209</sup> Meteyard, (1865), *op. cit.*, p. ix.

<sup>210</sup> Meteyard, (1865), *op. cit.*, p. xxi.

<sup>211</sup> Eliza Meteyard, *Wedgwood and His Works*, (London: Bell & Daldy, 1873), p. 9.

<sup>212</sup> Alison Kelly, *Decorative Wedgwood in Architecture and Furniture*, (London: Country Life Limited, 1965), see the introduction, p. 11.

Meteyard began the book with ‘An Introductory Sketch of the Art of Pottery in England’, where, like Mayer before her, she led her reader through the ‘indigenous character’ of British pottery from Celtic ware, through the Middle Ages and finally to the productions of Staffordshire.<sup>213</sup> This progressive narrative placed Wedgwood at the very apex of ceramic production in England. The first step was to establish Wedgwood’s status. She mentioned that ‘with so much of truth... for our guide, let us hope that many of the fictions current as to Wedgwood will pass into merited oblivion’.<sup>214</sup> Of these fictions, she cited the representation of Wedgwood as a ‘coarse, ignorant, diseased, impoverished workman’.<sup>215</sup> Meteyard informed her reader that Wedgwood was none of these; that he ‘received a good elementary education, and most certainly never knew poverty in our modern acceptance of the term, for the majority of his relatives were all persons of substance, and formed, with the Warburtons, the Palmers, the Adamses, the Mayers, and many others, the aristocracy of the Pottery villages.’<sup>216</sup> Of Josiah’s family, Meteyard wrote that it was certain ‘that the worthy and substantial class from which Wedgwood sprang were, generally speaking, as well educated as the greater portion of the gentry.’<sup>217</sup> Likewise Meteyard told her reader that royal patronage was conferred upon Wedgwood ‘not because he sought it, but because he could do work no other Staffordshire potter could’.<sup>218</sup> Meteyard highlighted Wedgwood’s aristocratic patrons, rather than the more prosaic provision of utilitarian ware to the masses and differentiated Wedgwood consumers from their predecessors. Meteyard described the wares produced in Staffordshire in the seventeenth century as ‘the very coarsest of ware’, while their owners ‘were a rude and lawless set; half poachers, half gipsies’.<sup>219</sup> A list of Wedgwood’s ornamental and useful ware, however, would be ‘of great value to the connoisseur and collector, and at the same time be a bead-roll of the English aristocracy’.<sup>220</sup>

<sup>213</sup> Meteyard, (1865), *op. cit.*, title page.

<sup>214</sup> Meteyard, (1865), *op. cit.*, p. xv.

<sup>215</sup> Meteyard, (1865), *op. cit.*, p. xv. Meteyard did not provide a source for this statement.

<sup>216</sup> Meteyard, (1865), *op. cit.*, p. xv-xvi.

<sup>217</sup> Meteyard, (1865), *op. cit.*, p. 205.

<sup>218</sup> Meteyard, (1865), *op. cit.*, p. xvi.

<sup>219</sup> Meteyard, (1865), *op. cit.*, p. 100.

<sup>220</sup> Meteyard, (1865), *op. cit.*, p. xix.

In her text, Meteyard created a hierarchy of wares where Wedgwood's 'most artistic works' were 'the cameos, intaglios, bas-reliefs, and the majority of the vases, lamps, and candelabra'.<sup>221</sup> In these 'he was a true artist; and like the sculptors of the classic age, and the great painters of the Renaissance, a fine judgment and an exquisite natural taste led him to see that the highest effects are obtained from subdued tones, and un abrupt contrasts of colour, light and shade'.<sup>222</sup> At Etruria, Wedgwood was 'educating communities through the arts which refine, and the utilities which civilise and purify'.<sup>223</sup>

Considering that he had no early instruction in geometric principles, his perception of what constituted beauty and truth of form was as marvellous as his chastened taste in ornament. Both may be accounted for on physical grounds: his descent from a long line of potters, in all of whom daily artistic labour had cultivated the eye and perfected the constructive faculty, till in their descendent, this cultivation culminated in the utmost possible genius. These great natural gifts would have availed little, but for the sound and prudential judgment and untiring spirit of industry with which they were allied. These were never at fault. They led him to as quick perceptions and sound conclusions in matters which related to his art, as to a wise and circumspect conduct of its business details. These solid and utilitarian characteristics are often allied with the highest genius; and in Wedgwood the results which arose therefrom were fraught with even more benefit to society than to himself, great as this was. He met one of the necessities arising out of the rapid growth of a great industrial period. As wealth increased, as refinement and education spread, as food became better in quality and more abundant in quantity, the necessity for good and cheap crockery was absolute.<sup>224</sup>

Meteyard saw the propagation of Wedgwood and his works through her books as beneficial for the reader and for the community; 'The effort to develop public taste, however simply exercised, may lead to important ends, and thus be productive of its own kind and degree of recompense'.<sup>225</sup> Wedgwood was used as example of Meteyard's own theories of social reform and provided the reader with a model of behaviour. Meteyard, in one instance, wrote that during his illness as a child it was

probable that the young man suffered, in this passage of his life, from the depressions and conflicts with self, which all those who aspire to do their work after the highest type to be conceived of it, only know too well: those sinkings of the heart at shortcomings, those moments when the battle seems too long and too weary; those periods of deep self-humiliation, when the result of our toil is so poor in fulfilment, and falls so immeasurably short of our ideal.

<sup>221</sup> Meteyard, (1865), *op. cit.*, p. 168.

<sup>222</sup> Meteyard, (1865), *op. cit.*, p. 168.

<sup>223</sup> Meteyard, (1866), *op. cit.*, p. 110.

<sup>224</sup> Meteyard, (1865), *op. cit.*, p. 168-69.

<sup>225</sup> Meteyard, (1874), *op. cit.*, p. 137.

Happy for us is it, and the cause of truth we serve...if, like the young man Josiah Wedgwood, we begin the conflict anew.<sup>226</sup>

Meteyard, who believed that the ‘rebirth of Wedgwood’s fame’ was ‘something more than the fashion of the hour’, left a legacy for Wedgwood collectors.<sup>227</sup> Not only did Meteyard write biographies and books for collectors of Wedgwood ware, she also lent objects to exhibitions, ‘directly aiding in the work of art education’ and helped to raise funds to ensure ‘the complete erection of the Wedgwood Memorial Institute’.<sup>228</sup> She worked to ensure the status of these objects as collectible commodities and was keenly interested in the sale prices that Wedgwood ware fetched at auction.<sup>229</sup> ‘By his more artistic works’, Meteyard wrote, ‘Wedgwood will be known to posterity; for these will be enshrined in collections and in cabinets, and be preserved with as much care as the gems of antique art.’<sup>230</sup>

Meteyard’s biography was shortly followed by a series of works on Wedgwood. The ceramic historian, Llewellyn Jewitt published his biography in the same year as Meteyard (1865). Samuel Smiles included a short narrative account of Josiah Wedgwood and his career in his *Self-Help* which he followed with a full biography in 1894. In Smiles’ work, like Meteyard’s, Wedgwood was constructed as an archetype of Victorian principles of ‘self-help’ where, ‘The spirit of self-help [was] the root of all genuine growth in the individual; and, exhibited in the lives of many, it constituted the true source of national vigour and strength.’<sup>231</sup> The boy who successfully rose from humble beginnings, who overcame ill health and physical tribulations, had prevailed to become not just an artisan, but a scientist, a thinker and an entrepreneur, the founder of a thriving and prosperous business. This nineteenth century narrative of the biography, however it strengthened the popularity of Josiah Wedgwood the individual, served a larger communal purpose in that it continued the belief that the arts had a moral purpose and that the appreciation of the arts could lead to a better

<sup>226</sup> Meteyard, (1865), *op. cit.*, p. 229-230.

<sup>227</sup> Meteyard, (1865), *op. cit.*, p. xxi.

<sup>228</sup> From an award issued to Meteyard in 1865 from The Executive Committee of the Art Exhibition, held in the archives at the University of Keele.

<sup>229</sup> The Wedgwood archives at the University of Keele hold several sale catalogues, including the sale of Gladstone’s collection in 1875, signed by Meteyard and with her annotations, namely the price each item fetched at the auction.

<sup>230</sup> Meteyard, (1865), *op. cit.*, p. 169.

<sup>231</sup> Samuel Smiles, *Self-Help*, (London: John Murray, 1958), first published 1859, p. 35. Meteyard thanked Smiles in the preface to the second volume of her *Life of Josiah Wedgwood*.



society. Meteyard frequently reminded her reader that Wedgwood began on ‘the lowest round of the ladder’.<sup>232</sup> Sir Arthur Church, FRS, Professor of Chemistry at the Royal Academy and a recognised authority on English pottery, composed a short biography for *The Portfolio* in 1894, at which point he was already citing Meteyard as an authority, and published *Josiah Wedgwood: Master Potter* in 1908. Church was especially dependent on Meteyard for biographical information concerning Wedgwood, quoting Meteyard’s story of the boy Wedgwood cutting out designs in paper as a schoolboy as early signs of his artistic temperament.<sup>233</sup> He went on to note, again on Meteyard’s authority, that before the age of nine Wedgwood collected ‘curious and beautiful things, commencing a kind of small museum in one of his father’s worksheds’.<sup>234</sup> Meteyard’s narrative, much of which has been questioned by subsequent authors,<sup>235</sup> succeeds as a projection that helps to give Wedgwood’s body of work an overarching motive. In her legacy, however, Meteyard has left the study of Wedgwood as an isolated territory, an isolation which subsequent scholars acknowledged continued to persist at least until the time when the Beesons were collecting.<sup>236</sup> Wedgwood was detached from the background of other Staffordshire potters and the works have been taken out of their original contexts, placed on display in museums and private collections. The early texts dedicated to Wedgwood established the reputation of eighteenth-century Wedgwood, whereas the wares being produced by the modern firm were largely ignored. Josiah Wedgwood was presented as an individual operating outside his historical circumstances. He was important in his role as an archetype for English craftsmen to emulate and his wares were significant in their ability to express the discrimination of those who sought to collect and admire them.

In the late nineteenth century, the organisation of Wedgwood consumption was largely dictated by one man, the dealer of ‘Old Wedgwood’ and connoisseur Frederick Rathbone. During the Edwardian period a general shift away from

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<sup>232</sup> Meteyard, (1865), *op. cit.*, p. 247.

<sup>233</sup> A. H. Church, ‘Josiah Wedgwood’ *The Portfolio*, No. 3, March 1894, (London: Seeley & Co.), p.11.

<sup>234</sup> Church, (1894), *op. cit.*, p.12.

<sup>235</sup> Frederick Rathbone wrote that Meteyard’s biography of Josiah Wedgwood was excellent, but that she was not successful when ‘speaking of his manufacture’. Frederick Rathbone, *Old Wedgwood and Old Wedgwood Ware*, (London: F. Rathbone, 1885), p. xxiii. More recent authors, such as Robin Reilly, have written that Meteyard’s ‘critical faculties were blunted by her devotion to the first Josiah Wedgwood’, Reilly, (1989), *op. cit.*, p. 7.

<sup>236</sup> Kelly, (1965), *op. cit.*, p. 11.

Victorian design marked a ‘return to a desire for elegance’.<sup>237</sup> A concurrent shift in interior design began with the adoption of a revived Sheraton style in furniture design and coincided with an Adam revival.<sup>238</sup> In the ceramic industry Wedgwood was uniquely positioned in this revival. At the 1871 Exhibition, Wedgwood & Co. were reliant upon the eighteenth century designs and their continued appeal to the contemporary market;

The purity and severity of the patterns and shapes will be found suitable to the taste of many people, who possessing furniture of the time of the Empire, seek to carry out the style consistently in all parts of their furniture. To such our reproductions of Jasper or old Wedgwood ware will... prove an attractive feature of our exhibit. The quiet unobtrusive character of the colours and surface of this well known ware render it peculiarly suitable for decorative purposes at present when brilliancy is less sought than harmony of colouring by people of taste.<sup>239</sup>

Despite this appeal to consumers, collectors preferred to purchase old Wedgwood wares rather than those manufactured by the modern company. The late nineteenth century witnessed a change in what was held to be the essential value of a collectible object; it was not enough to merely appear to be from the past, but the object itself had to be old.<sup>240</sup> In order to ensure the authenticity of an object, an increasing number of specialist dealers began to appear who often, like Rathbone, published books on their specialist subjects.<sup>241</sup> Interest in ‘Old Wedgwood’ had been stimulated by Eliza Meteyard’s texts, but it was to Frederick Rathbone that prospective buyers of Wedgwood went to acquire these goods. Rathbone advertised in an edition of *The Portfolio*, which included Professor Church’s article on Josiah Wedgwood;

Mr. Rathbone, having for the past twenty years given his chief attention to this beautiful English art, has a thorough knowledge of every variety of decorative work produced by Wedgwood and Wedgwood & Bentley during the early, middle, and best periods from 1762-1795. Collectors and amateurs interested are invited, and always welcome, to inspect his collection which usually includes some of the finest known examples.<sup>242</sup>

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<sup>237</sup> Reilly, (1989), *op. cit.*, p. 150.

<sup>238</sup> J. Mordaunt Crook, *The Rise of the Nouveaux Riches*, (London: John Murray, 1999), p. 167. Crook argues that this adoption of classical forms stemmed from ‘self-made men’ taking on ‘the protective clothing of inherited taste’. See also Stefan Muthesius, ‘Why do we buy old furniture? Aspects of the authentic antique in Britain 1870-1910’, *Art History*, vol. 11, no. 2, June 1988, pp. 231-254.

<sup>239</sup> Wedgwood & Co. notes for the Catalogue to the 1871 London International Exhibition, Keele University Archive, 29057.

<sup>240</sup> Muthesius, *op. cit.*, p. 231.

<sup>241</sup> See Frederick Litchfield, *How to Collect Old Furniture*, (1904), P. Macquoid, *A History of English Furniture*, 4 vols., (1904), and F. Roe, *Ancient Coffers & Cupboards*, (1902).

<sup>242</sup> Church, ‘Josiah Wedgwood’ *The Portfolio*, No. 3, March 1894, (London: Seeley & Co.).

Frederick Rathbone was the first dealer of Wedgwood ware to publish books on the subject. He even commented;

It may be said or thought, the cobbler should stick to his last. That one who earns his daily bread by the collection and distribution of bric-a-brac, should not venture upon any form of literary work, other than a trade circular or price list. Indeed, a knowledge of the rules of grammar or of syntax has not been considered a necessary qualification for anyone whose walk in life has been the buying and selling of works of art, for those appear to be the most prosperous and successful whose library consists mainly of auction catalogues.<sup>243</sup>

Rathbone desired to establish himself as an authority on the subject, however, and, as such, needed the academic trappings and prestige which research and publications would afford him. Like his contemporaries working in the field of antique furniture, Rathbone stressed that a great deal of experience was needed in order to ensure that the collector guarantee they were purchasing authentic goods.<sup>244</sup> In his first publication, *Old Wedgwood* (1898), he guided his reader, and prospective customer, through the other texts dedicated to Wedgwood, calling Meteyard's work the 'standard biography'.<sup>245</sup> The subject, he wrote, had not been 'at all forgotten or neglected, either by the critics of the earlier years of this century or by those of our own period'.<sup>246</sup> There were 'intelligent opinions, given in language that [could] be remembered, from statesmen, philosophers, poets, artists, and amateurs'.<sup>247</sup> Rathbone pronounced Church's book, *Josiah Wedgwood: Master Potter*, 'the best work upon Wedgwood' and mentioned the latest biography of Wedgwood by Smiles, *Josiah Wedgwood* (1894), writing that it contained 'many errors'.<sup>248</sup> To Meteyard he offered the back-handed compliment that;

One can excuse the unnecessary surmise and romance when the amount of research required to produce such a work, thirty years ago, is considered. The extraordinary amount of information and facts collected, is a testimony to the industry and application of one of the great potter's most ardent admirers. It is now prudent, when considering any Wedgwood subject, to refer to "Meteyard"...but praise cannot be given to her "Handbook for collectors of Wedgwood ware", 1895, which is so full of errors as to be unreliable.<sup>249</sup>

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<sup>243</sup> Frederick Rathbone, *Old Wedgwood*, (London : B. Quaritch, 1898), p. iv.

<sup>244</sup> Muthesius, *op. cit.*, p. 241.

<sup>245</sup> Rathbone, (1898), *op. cit.*, p. 96.

<sup>246</sup> Rathbone, (1898), *op. cit.*, p. 94.

<sup>247</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>248</sup> Rathbone, (1898), *op. cit.*, p. 97.

<sup>249</sup> Rathbone, (1898), *op. cit.*, p. 96.

Rathbone, like his predecessors, gave a short synopsis of the history of ceramics in Britain, from Anglo-Saxon pottery to the Staffordshire wares. Yet, unlike Wedgwood's early biographers, Rathbone began his book with an analysis of the marks on the Wedgwood wares and the provision of assurance of the authenticity of the goods his reader was purchasing.<sup>250</sup> Dating an object was presented as a treacherous territory, where collectors would often need the guiding assurance of the dealer. Throughout the text the reader was reminded that a dealer had written the material as someone who was familiar with the market for the wares. Rathbone perceived his reader as a private individual whose Wedgwood purchases would be used in their homes, not museum professionals acquiring objects for public collections. His reader was an amateur, and Rathbone was there to guide their decisions. Rathbone wrote about supply, demand, availability and guided the reader towards certain products;

For some reason, during the last few years, the demand for black pieces has never equalled that for the other tints - colour, rather than form, having the first consideration. The black pieces can still be obtained at a very moderate outlay, and they certainly deserve more attention, for in any scheme of decoration black has great power. For perfection of form, the latter work of Wedgwood equalled the basalt, but there is a certain and not easily defined charm and attraction in these vases. When the popular taste runs in the direction of perfect form rather than brightness of colour, the basalt pieces will be more difficult to obtain.<sup>251</sup>

In purchasing wares which had previously been ignored by collectors, Rathbone assured his reader that the risk would soon pay off;

Fashion and habitude have a greater influence upon popular taste for all ornamental work and luxuries, than have the laws of supply and demand. An energetic collector, devoting his time and means to the acquisition of some hitherto neglected art, will find, sooner or later, that he has set a new fashion and has other rivals in the same pursuit. The precious work of one age may be disowned and forgotten in the next, only to be treasured and esteemed at a later and more cultivated era, with the consequent increase in cost.<sup>252</sup>

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<sup>250</sup> Marks on pottery had been the subject of texts from William Chaffers, *Marks and Monograms on Pottery and Porcelain*, (London, 1863), and Meteyard treated the subject in *The Wedgwood Handbook: a Manual for Collectors* in 1875, yet Rathbone was the first to place a special emphasis on the marks on Wedgwood ware.

<sup>251</sup> Rathbone, (1898), *op. cit.*, p. 42.

<sup>252</sup> Rathbone, (1898), *op. cit.*, p. 69.

It was not until the second chapter that Rathbone dealt with the subject of Josiah Wedgwood's biography, providing what by this point had become a formulaic approach to this narrative.<sup>253</sup>

In 1909 Rathbone published a catalogue for the Wedgwood Museum at Etruria in which Josiah Wedgwood played a much more prominent role. In this work, Wedgwood was 'acknowledged by all civilised nations as the greatest artist in ceramics of his or any period' and it was Wedgwood who was credited with 'the extraordinary progress and prosperity of the pottery district'.<sup>254</sup> This catalogue, unlike the book published in 1898, was intended for an audience visiting a museum rather than for prospective buyers, and as such Rathbone emphasised the instructional role of the catalogue which, he hoped, would be 'considered an elementary handbook upon Wedgwood matters, worth retaining for reference'.<sup>255</sup> He said he had endeavoured to render the contents 'instructive to interested visitors' who were 'viewing a collection of English Art on the site where it was produced'.<sup>256</sup> The catalogue first introduced its readers to the Etruria Museum, which contained 'many interesting original designs, trial-pieces and other relics of England's great potter'.<sup>257</sup> For certain kinds of visitors, 'the man of science', 'the practical potter', 'the collector' and 'the thinking man', the trial pieces held by the Museum were pictures of Josiah Wedgwood's life's work.<sup>258</sup> Rathbone exhorted his readers to celebrate their national craftsman, to 'honour' their 'great men of industry, science or art', and he praised generous benefactors.<sup>259</sup>

Rathbone again situated Wedgwood scholarship, stating that much had 'been written upon this subject during the last half-century by many celebrated writers, giving unqualified testimony to the character and genius of the great potter.'<sup>260</sup> He cited Lord Lytton's *England and the English* (1835), where Wedgwood was praised for his technical advancements, his sourcing of antique models and use of advise and design

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<sup>253</sup> Rathbone, (1898), *op. cit.*, p. 21.

<sup>254</sup> Frederick Rathbone, *Catalogue of the Wedgwood Museum at Etruria*, (Etruria, Stoke-on-Trent: Josiah Wedgwood & Sons Ltd., 1909), p. 3.

<sup>255</sup> Rathbone, (1909), *op. cit.*, preface.

<sup>256</sup> Rathbone, (1909), *op. cit.*, preface.

<sup>257</sup> Rathbone, (1909), *op. cit.*, p. 3.

<sup>258</sup> Rathbone, (1909), *op. cit.*, p. 3.

<sup>259</sup> Rathbone, (1909), *op. cit.*, p. 5.

<sup>260</sup> Rathbone, (1909), *op. cit.*, p. 19.

from the ‘greatest genius of the day’.<sup>261</sup> Rathbone included an account of the various artists working for Josiah Wedgwood, but began by assuring the reader of Wedgwood’s own position; ‘As a great Commander or Captain of men indicates his power of organization and forethought in the selection of the men appointed to carry out his plans; so also does a captain of industry or head of a vast business enterprise in the choice of his subordinates.’<sup>262</sup> Rathbone quoted extensively from Gladstone’s address upon the opening of the Wedgwood Institute at Burslem in 1863, where Wedgwood became a symbol of British industry.

Civilised nations are justly proud of the art-work produced in their country. Wedgwood ceramics deserve all possible veneration by his countrymen from the fact that the art is essentially a British one; thought out and produced by a worthy native, who had never travelled beyond the limits of his country, who encouraged native artists and workmen for its production. His great work was completed without state aid, helped only by the popular appreciation of his manufacture.<sup>263</sup>

The reader was also reminded of Wedgwood’s prestigious patrons, from Empress Catharine of Russia, Queen Charlotte, and the aristocracy of France. Even in America, Rathbone wrote, every child was familiar with Wedgwood’s story.<sup>264</sup> In America, however, consumers of Wedgwood continued to purchase the modern wares rather collect ‘old’ Wedgwood, and as such Rathbone’s clients continued to be English men and women keen to establish their own collections. The marks used on the wares were not neglected in this text, stating that they were ‘of great interest to the historian, student, and collector’.<sup>265</sup> The commercial implications of these marks in determining value were cloaked in terms of scholastic interest. Rathbone noted that while Parliament passed regulation regarding the use of trademarks, penalties were not often enforced for infractions. Enforcement of these regulations upon the ‘ingenious fabricator of and dealer in spurious works of art... would bring more peace of mind to the *bona-fide* collector’.<sup>266</sup> Rathbone also created a language for the collector, including in the catalogue a glossary of technical or trade terms.<sup>267</sup> At the same time Rathbone informed the reader of his authority on the subject of

<sup>261</sup> Lord Lytton quoted in Rathbone, (1909), *op. cit.*, p.19-20.

<sup>262</sup> Rathbone, (1909), *op. cit.*, p. 36.

<sup>263</sup> Rathbone, (1909), *op. cit.*, p. 22.

<sup>264</sup> Rathbone, (1909), *op. cit.*, p. 23.

<sup>265</sup> Rathbone, (1909), *op. cit.*, p. 26.

<sup>266</sup> Rathbone, (1909), *op. cit.*, p. 27.

<sup>267</sup> Rathbone, (1909), *op. cit.*, p. 53-55.

Wedgwood. He had given his readers ‘various facts and information gained by many years’ experience of the subject’.<sup>268</sup>

The catalogue included a biographical introduction to Wedgwood where his career was traced from the early improvements made to the useful domestic wares, to the invention of creamware, and finally to the invention of the jasperware, described as the ‘most beautiful body ever adopted in ceramic art’.<sup>269</sup> Like Meteyard, Rathbone painted a picture of a community minded man who contributed to the improvements of the roads and other means of communication in the district out of civic spirit rather than business interest and, like Meteyard, he established the difference between the useful and the decorative ware, stating that ‘the collector’ fully understood ‘the meaning of “Old Wedgwood”’.<sup>270</sup> Rathbone wrote that Wedgwood ‘acquired a considerable fortune by the production and sale of his domestic ware for the civilised world; then, with the strength of his financial position, he turned his attention to the ornamental or decorative pieces’.<sup>271</sup> This emphasis on the ornamental wares was confirmed in Rathbone’s analysis of the pieces in the museum. The catalogued items included the original designs for plaques, medallions, and reliefs modelled by Flaxman, Pacetti, Webber, and other artists working for Wedgwood. Rathbone wrote that the plaques and tablets produced at Etruria had ‘Josiah’s first and continued attention’<sup>272</sup> and that the medallions and cameos were ‘in number and variety, the most important of all Wedgwood produced’.<sup>273</sup> While the Portland Vase merited a chapter of its own, the reader was told that the dejeuner cabinet pieces were probably never classed as ‘Ware’ at any time.<sup>274</sup>

Rathbone created distinctions between the ware produced by Wedgwood and that which had preceded him in the region. The ‘Old English Potter’ created ‘many original, often quaint, objects in pottery: large dishes for the dresser, vessels for wine and beer, tankards to drink from; the costrel, or bottle, for the pilgrim wayfarer or labourer... but he did not give much thought to the ornamental character of his work;

<sup>268</sup> Rathbone, (1909), *op. cit.*, preface.

<sup>269</sup> Rathbone, (1909), *op. cit.*, p. 16 & 19.

<sup>270</sup> Rathbone, (1909), *op. cit.*, p. 18.

<sup>271</sup> Rathbone, (1909), *op. cit.*, p. 19.

<sup>272</sup> Rathbone, (1909), *op. cit.*, p. 61.

<sup>273</sup> Rathbone, (1909), *op. cit.*, p. 66.

<sup>274</sup> Rathbone, (1909), *op. cit.*, p. 97.

content to repeat the time-honoured and orthodox patterns of an earlier age'.<sup>275</sup>

According to Rathbone, Josiah Wedgwood was 'the first English potter, from the Roman time to the first quarter of the eighteenth century, to produce vases for decoration alone'.<sup>276</sup> Though Wedgwood had produced objects intended for use, after the invention of jasper, new forms became possible and allowed 'for every variety of colour and relief'.<sup>277</sup> The vases in this material, Rathbone wrote, had 'always been admired and treasured, as work of so graceful a character deserves to be'.<sup>278</sup> Despite the praise for the jasper vases Rathbone considered that all of Wedgwood's vases 'from his earliest essays to his latest successes', were 'good in form, the potting perfect, the design graceful, the colour always in harmony'.<sup>279</sup> 'If Josiah ever made any vase that could fairly be called ugly, deficient in grace or beauty, the writer of these notes has yet to see-after thirty-five years' consideration of the subject-such an example'.<sup>280</sup>

Wedgwood continued to be the subject of numerous texts throughout the twentieth century, many of which later made their way into the Beesons' library on the subject. Changing tastes in collecting can be traced in these texts. N. Hudson Moore wrote in 1909 that, while Wedgwood appealed to 'lovers of the beautiful and to discriminating collectors', it was the 'more florid wares' which collectors had purchased 'content to pass by specimens of his basaltes and jasper'.<sup>281</sup> His own age had, however, 'waked to the distinguished beauty of those works sent out from Etruria and Burslem' and prices rose 'as buyers became more plenty'.<sup>282</sup> According to Hudson Moore 'most museums both in Europe and America' contained 'specimens of the "period of perfection", for the benefit of students'.<sup>283</sup> By 1953 Wolf Mankowitz was critical of the 'great collectors of the past' for whom Wedgwood ware was either blue jasper or black basalt.<sup>284</sup> While the earliest Wedgwood products, those closely related to the traditional Staffordshire pottery, had not received due attention either because they were 'rarely marked', or because they were 'not so different from the work of other

<sup>275</sup> Rathbone, (1909), *op. cit.*, p. 76.

<sup>276</sup> Rathbone, (1909), *op. cit.*, p. 76-77.

<sup>277</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>278</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>279</sup> Rathbone, (1909), *op. cit.*, p. 77.

<sup>280</sup> Rathbone, (1909), *op. cit.*, p. 76-77.

<sup>281</sup> N. Hudson Moore, *Wedgwood and his Imitators*, (London: Hodder & Sloughton, 1909), p. v.

<sup>282</sup> Moore, (1909), *op. cit.*, p. v.

<sup>283</sup> Moore, (1909), *op. cit.*, p. v.

<sup>284</sup> Wolf Mankowitz, *Wedgwood*, (London: Spring Books, 1953), p. vii.



potters', they had been 'passed over by collector and commentator alike'.<sup>285</sup> Similarly, the table-wares which Wedgwood developed out of the cream-coloured body, had been 'awarded less consideration than their virtue and significance deserved'.<sup>286</sup> Harry Barnard, manager of the Wedgwood London Showrooms from 1902 to 1919 and curator of the Wedgwood Museum, wrote *Chats on Wedgwood Ware* in 1924.<sup>287</sup> From his situation as an employee of Wedgwood and Sons Ltd, Barnard described his book as coming from 'within' Etruria.<sup>288</sup> This position allowed his work to be distinguished from the 'mass of literature' published by those who had 'given much careful study and patient research to the subject', but who received assistance 'mainly... from collectors and dealers', an assistance which Barnard suggested might taint their interpretations.<sup>289</sup> Barnard's language is strikingly familiar, however, describing how Wedgwood had 'always been preserved in the houses of the comparatively few who appreciate and recognise excellence of technique, refinement of taste, and delicacy of texture and colour'.<sup>290</sup> This select group of connoisseurs had grown and the collector then found an 'ever-widening area over which to spread the limited supply'.<sup>291</sup> Barnard said it was for this reason that his volume was 'intended to guide along safe and reliable channels those who [had] the desire to collect'.<sup>292</sup> It was his position which allowed his authority; how many, he asked, 'could when handling... ordinary hand-made pieces, such as vases or tureens, all of the same shape, design, and size, say, "This, and this, are made by one man" and "That, and that, by another?"'<sup>293</sup> The craftsman, unlike the seller or the buyer, would alone be able to differentiate whose work it was. The concept of the named, individual craftsman had become more important at the Wedgwood factory during the twentieth century with many works attributed to specific designers such as

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<sup>285</sup> Mankowitz, (1953), *op. cit.*, p. vii.

<sup>286</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>287</sup> Harry Barnard, *Wedgwood Chats*, reprint of *Chats on Wedgwood Ware* by Harry Barnard 1924, ed by Harry M. Buten, (Merion, PA: The Buten Museum of Wedgwood, 1970). Buten, who will be discussed shortly, supplemented the text with photographs of Wedgwood items on exhibition at his Museum and wrote a new Preface to the book.

<sup>288</sup> Barnard, (1970), *op. cit.*, p. 11.

<sup>289</sup> Barnard, (1970), *op. cit.*, p. 11.

<sup>290</sup> Barnard, (1970), *op. cit.*, p. 38.

<sup>291</sup> Barnard, (1970), *op. cit.*, p. 38.

<sup>292</sup> Barnard, (1970), *op. cit.*, p. 38.

<sup>293</sup> Barnard, (1970), *op. cit.*, p. 45.

Barnard, Arnold Machin and Norman Wilson.<sup>294</sup> Barnard was prepared to assert the craftsman intimate knowledge of these wares, and created an oppositional role towards dealers who were interested in more pecuniary matters. Ensuring the authenticity of the wares, important for Wedgwood writers since Meteyard, seems to have become an increasingly vital concern for buyers of Wedgwood, with authors providing assurance of their superior knowledge of the goods. Barnard adopted the language of the connoisseur, declaring that ‘experience’ was ‘the only factor that really counts’, where those used to handling pottery were able to ‘recognise “Wedgwood” at a glance, aided by touch’ and unable to transmit this information even ‘by the most elaborate written instruction’.<sup>295</sup> The rules utilised by dealers in dating objects (primarily their dependence on marks) were considered inadequate by Barnard when ‘dealing with productions of an old factory where the same marks have been used since the first Wedgwood’s time’.<sup>296</sup> This was sure to mislead ‘the slightly informed and inexperienced’.<sup>297</sup>

Interest in Wedgwood collecting was growing during this period in America, with Jean Gorely’s short book, *Wedgwood*, (1950), the first monograph on eighteenth century Wedgwood to be written by an American and published by an American firm, as testimony, Gorely claimed, to the United States’ waxing culture.<sup>298</sup> This book, aimed at ‘collectors, both beginning and advanced’, was unique in that all the pieces illustrated were from American collections.<sup>299</sup> Samuel Oster, a member of the WIS, was one of the prominently featured collectors in this book. Some of these collections had been ‘handed down in the same family from the time of their original purchase in the eighteenth century’, others were ‘acquired by museums from owners who found them in homes and shops in the nineteenth century’, while many more had been ‘obtained in recent years, following the dispersal of great English collections’ and, as such, had ‘distinguished pedigrees’.<sup>300</sup> As such America was provided with a long tradition of Wedgwood collecting; the wares had ‘made the lives of our American

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<sup>294</sup> See *Wedgwood Bicentenary Exhibition 1759-1959*, Victoria and Albert Museum, June-August 1959, (Eyre and Spottiswoode Limited, 1959). This exhibition included pieces attributed to Machin and Wilson.

<sup>295</sup> Ibid.

<sup>296</sup> Barnard, (1970), *op. cit.*, p. 46.

<sup>297</sup> Ibid.

<sup>298</sup> Jean Gorely, *Wedgwood*, (New York: Gramercy Publishing Co., 1950), p. 6.

<sup>299</sup> Gorely, (1950), *op. cit.*, p. 8.

<sup>300</sup> Gorely, (1950), *op. cit.*, p. 8.

ancestors easier and brighter by their functionalism and practicality and by the beauty of their designs and materials' while in 'countless American homes, heirloom pieces [were] still cherished'.<sup>301</sup> Although 'Wedgwood was an Englishman', for Gorely and the new American collectors 'there were no geographical boundaries for him'.<sup>302</sup>

### **Harry Buten and the Wedgwood International Seminar**

As formative as all these texts were for the Beesons' understanding of their collection, it was the WIS that was by far the most important factor in the creation of their collection. Though the Beesons had been collecting prior to the group's foundation in 1956, after their attendance at a few of the meetings Mrs. Beeson said they became aware that they 'had a long way to go to have the collection [they] hoped to acquire'.<sup>303</sup> Harry Buten, the founder of the WIS, began collecting in 1931 and, although he purchased objects ranging from Gallé glass to tongue scrapers, he claimed to have found Wedgwood 'the most satisfying of all collectibles'.<sup>304</sup> After visiting the Winterthur Museum in Philadelphia, where members of the Wedgwood family were present to answer questions concerning the ware and its history, Buten was inspired to form an organisation for Wedgwood collectors.<sup>305</sup> Spurred on by his own numerous questions concerning Wedgwood ware and its manufacture, Buten conceived of a forum where collectors could meet and exchange information. Although Buten's stated motivations for planning such an organisation for collectors were education and communication, it also ensured a more consistent application of classificatory systems of value for the objects. Although there had been a Wedgwood Club in the United States since 1933, Buten wrote that his formation of the Wedgwood Society in 1951 and the WIS in 1956 (both based in Philadelphia) constituted 'a more vital and extended movement' whose philosophy had 'stimulated the creation of the Wedgwood Society of London (organized in 1953), the Wedgwood

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<sup>301</sup> Gorely, (1950), *op. cit.*, pp. 8-9.

<sup>302</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>303</sup> Lucille Beeson, 'Catalog Now', *The American Wedgwoodian*, vol. II, no. 8, February 1968, p. 166. Mrs. Beeson is listed as a registrant at the second WIS meeting in 1957 which was hosted by the Cooper-Hewitt Museum for the Arts of Decoration in New York.

<sup>304</sup> Harry M. Buten, 'Wedgwood and Buten', in *The American Wedgwoodian*, vol. III, no. 2, February 1969, pp. 53-56. Harry Buten lived in Philadelphia where he worked in the family paint business, M. Buten & Sons. He retired fifteen years before his death in 1971 to devote himself to his museum. The Buten collection began when Buten purchased a small pitcher for his wife Nettie on their first anniversary. See Linda Dormont, 'Wedgwood: It's a Hobby, Science and a Way of Life', *The Evening Bulletin*, Friday 23 November 1973.

<sup>305</sup> Harry Buten in the Minutes of the First Wedgwood International Seminar, (Philadelphia: Philadelphia Museum of Art, 1956).

Society of New York (1955), the Wedgwood Society of Northern California (1961) and several others'.<sup>306</sup> Speakers at the first Seminar focused on Josiah Wedgwood's place in history, calling him 'the greatest potter who ever lived'; the wares themselves, with talks on body compositions and Wedgwood's 'oriental influences'; and collecting and collectors, with Mrs. Hensleigh Wedgwood speaking on the 'Great Wedgwood Collectors' and Buten opening his home for attendees.<sup>307</sup> Shortly after the first seminar, in 1957, Buten dedicated his home to the public display of his Wedgwood collection, forming The Buten Museum of Wedgwood.<sup>308</sup>

Buten not only worked to promote Wedgwood through these Seminars and his museum, but also published numerous books on the subject. The Beesons were avid and devoted readers of these texts, and donated all of the books he had written and published to the Birmingham Museum of Art in 1967.<sup>309</sup> One book, *Wedgwood ABC But Not Middle E*, included a forward written by Arthur Bryan, then Managing Director for Josiah Wedgwood & Sons, Limited, stating that Buten had 'obviously tackled this vast subject with his customary diligence and zeal' producing a book which Bryan felt sure would be 'avidly read by the many advanced students of Wedgwood and beginners alike'.<sup>310</sup> Bryan praised Buten, who he said had been collecting Wedgwood wares 'assiduously... over the past thirty years', and his museum which exhibited 'one of the finest comprehensive collections of Wedgwood in the world'.<sup>311</sup> The Butens', in their 'painstaking life of searching for unique Wedgwood wares' had helped 'us all to further the popularity of Wedgwood to-

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<sup>306</sup> Harry M. Buten, *Wedgwood ABC But Not Middle E*, (Merion, Pennsylvania: Buten Museum of Wedgwood, 1964), p. 102. The Wedgwood Society, based in Philadelphia, met at the Buten Museum of Wedgwood.

<sup>307</sup> Speakers were Alice Winchester, the editor of *Antiques* magazine, who spoke on Josiah Wedgwood's place in history; Mr. F. St. George Spendlove, curator at the Royal Ontario Museum, speaking on Oriental Influences on Wedgwood; and Mr. Hensleigh C. Wedgwood, speaking on body compositions. The 'Great Wedgwood Collectors' included Isaac Falcke whose collection went to the British Museum, Frederick Rathbone, Joseph Marryat, Joseph Mayer, and the Schreibers, whose collection went to the V&A. See *Minutes of the First Wedgwood International Seminar*, (Philadelphia: Philadelphia Museum of Art, 1956).

<sup>308</sup> *The American Wedgwoodian*, vol. III, no. 7, May 1971. Buten even had a Wedgwood plaque made for his home which told his visitors they were at the Buten Museum of Wedgwood. See Harry Buten, *Wedgwood Counterpoint*, (Merion, Pennsylvania: Buten Museum of Wedgwood, 1962), p. 5. The Beesons were life members of the Buten Museum. See the Buten Museum of Wedgwood, Annual Report 1972/1973, BMAA.

<sup>309</sup> As noted in the dedication written in the covers of the books in the Clarence Hanson Library at the Birmingham Museum of Art.

<sup>310</sup> Buten, (1964), *op. cit.*, p. ix. The deluxe edition of this book included a 'genuine Wedgwood blue and white jasper medallion inset in the outside cover'.

<sup>311</sup> Arthur Bryan in Buten, (1964), *op. cit.*, p. ix.

day'.<sup>312</sup> Buten established his purpose when he wrote that he was attempting to structure 'the Wedgwood story', where 'the man, the ware, the collector, price, status, bibliography and dating Wedgwood' were all basics for the collector to master.<sup>313</sup> Buten included a biography of 'The Man', telling the reader that while Josiah's father was 'a run-of-the-mill potter', his mother had 'supplied genetic characteristics that made for genius in Josiah'.<sup>314</sup>

While Buten was obviously interested in writing about Josiah Wedgwood and his wares, he dedicated a great deal of his written output to descriptions of the act of collecting and the behaviour appropriate for a collector. Buten believed that these objects could represent the people and times which produced them, but also granted them a more autonomous role where they were studied in themselves and fetishised.<sup>315</sup> From the 1960s, scholars have been studying object meaning, usually under the title of material culture,<sup>316</sup> yet Buten's writings pre-date collecting studies, which have found a place recently in the broader scope of cultural studies.<sup>317</sup> Buten, however, did understand collecting as a self-reflective activity where objects as components of a collection acquired a collective significance. This more subjective aspect of collecting questioned, or in the case of Buten, provided answers for, questions of motive, psychological biography and lifestyle.<sup>318</sup> Paradoxically, his first advice on starting a collection of Wedgwood was to not ask oneself why they were doing it.<sup>319</sup> Whether there was a reason or not, Buten advised the reader to start their Wedgwood collection in 'any direction' which appealed to them.<sup>320</sup> Though he wrote that, 'The first piece of Wedgwood may be fatal - you'll probably be taken with the disease known as Psycho Ceramics - the affliction of Crack Pots!'<sup>321</sup> (Figure 32) The collector should be excited about his pursuit, 'for enthusiasm' was 'particularly

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<sup>312</sup> Ibid.

<sup>313</sup> Buten, (1964), *op. cit.*, foreword.

<sup>314</sup> Buten, (1964), *op. cit.*, p. 1.

<sup>315</sup> Daniel Miller, 'Things ain't what they used to be', in *Interpreting Objects and Collections*, ed. by Susan Pearce, (London & New York: Routledge, 1994), p. 15.

<sup>316</sup> Pearce, (1994), *op. cit.*, introduction.

<sup>317</sup> Ibid.

<sup>318</sup> Susan Pearce, 'Collections and Collecting' in *Museums and the Future of Collecting*, ed. by Simon J. Knell, (Aldershot: Ashgate, second edition 2004), pp. 48-49.

<sup>319</sup> Buten, (1964), *op. cit.*, p. 58.

<sup>320</sup> Ibid.

<sup>321</sup> Ibid.

essential in presenting any facet of Wedgwood'.<sup>322</sup> 'The Wedgwood story should never be ponderous, for very few Wedgwood pieces give that effect. It is in keeping that a Wedgwood talk or book should be light, dramatic, humorous and well illustrated.'<sup>323</sup> More important than the collection itself, Buten wrote, was the public mission of 'spreading the gospel... bringing the entire world into the fold'.<sup>324</sup> For Buten, Wedgwood was 'a culture' that enriched 'not only those who collect but our entire community'.<sup>325</sup> This was the philosophy behind 'the Wedgwood Society movement, the Wedgwood International Seminar and the Buten Museum of Wedgwood'.<sup>326</sup> According to Buten, one needed to be 'born with the genes and hormones that make him a collector'.<sup>327</sup> One could not ask "What can I do with it", or say "I do not have a place to keep it"; the collector merely felt and satisfied 'the urge to acquire'.<sup>328</sup>

Buten provided a number of specific reasons for collecting Wedgwood. There was a 'great quantity of Wedgwood available to collect' because 'Wedgwood made more and better ceramics than all other potters consistently year after year for over two hundred years'.<sup>329</sup> While Buten said he was in favour of collecting 'for itself', he wrote that Wedgwood's 'aesthetic appeal' placed it 'above other collectible items'.<sup>330</sup> Because Wedgwood wares were marked they could be dated and there was an established body of literature about Wedgwood to aid the collector.<sup>331</sup> Wedgwood collections, both 'public and private' were available for 'examination and study' and Wedgwood collectors were 'organized to help one another'.<sup>332</sup> Buten included a listing of Wedgwood Societies in the book and information about the WIS, so that

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<sup>322</sup> Buten, (1962), *op. cit.*, p. 5.

<sup>323</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>324</sup> Buten, (1962), *op. cit.*, p. 101.

<sup>325</sup> Harry M. Buten, 'Wedgwood and Buten', in *The American Wedgwoodian*, vol. III, no. 2, February 1969, pp. 53-56. In 1963 Buten and his wife were invited to the White House to present the portrait medallion of Kennedy by Wedgwood. In 1964 and 1966 he was asked to present copies of his books on Wedgwood to Buckingham Palace. He was honoured as a Benjamin Franklin Fellow of the Royal Society of Arts, London, by virtue of his Wedgwood scholarship. See *The American Wedgwoodian*, vol. III, no. 7, May 1971.

<sup>326</sup> Buten, (1962), *op. cit.*, p. 101.

<sup>327</sup> Buten, (1964), *op. cit.*, p. 28.

<sup>328</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>329</sup> *Ibid.* Buten seems to be confusing the era of Josiah Wedgwood's production, and the subsequent production of the company.

<sup>330</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>331</sup> Buten, (1964), *op. cit.*, p. 29.

<sup>332</sup> Buten, (1964), *op. cit.*, p. 31. Buten wrote that while some collectors might be 'lone wolves' they would find in Wedgwood a 'means to increase [their] world of friends'.

collectors might ‘call on others’ from whom they could get assistance.<sup>333</sup> Finally, access to goods was undemanding as dealers in ‘antique’ Wedgwood were ‘plentiful’.<sup>334</sup>

Buten wrote extensively about his ‘philosophy of collecting’ which he claimed made for a ‘full and rich life’.<sup>335</sup> Collecting, a pursuit ‘so heady’ that it was ‘necessary for every collector to make a conscious effort to keep his proper place in this world’, was primarily for the person who found ‘in life a challenge’.<sup>336</sup> Through the possession of objects, the collector was able to live ‘as many lives as possible in one lifetime’.<sup>337</sup> There were five factors which might motivate one to collect according to Buten; aesthetic appeal, intellectual enrichment, economic profits, the creativity involved in selection and display, and the ‘spiritual’.<sup>338</sup> The ideal collectible item was the one which permitted the fullest development of all five aspects of collecting.<sup>339</sup> The aesthetic aspect of collecting, which Buten described as ‘the most direct cause and result of collecting’, was primarily about the arousal of the senses and Wedgwood satisfied all five senses ‘better than any other of [Buten’s] collections’.<sup>340</sup> Sight was satiated by ‘beautiful objects which have form, design and color’; touch was pleased by ‘the soft satin smoothness of a piece of fine old Wedgwood stoneware’; perfect pieces of Wedgwood gave off a ‘bell sound’ when ‘lovingly tapped’; floral arrangements had ‘a better aroma’ when ‘set in a beautiful Wedgwood vase’; and ‘the most delicious dish’ tasted ‘better when served in a Wedgwood plate of the right size, shape and color’.<sup>341</sup> The intellect was stimulated by the study of the object in three main directions, namely ‘the subjects portrayed, the people and the times involved in the production of the object and, finally, the actual making of the piece itself’.<sup>342</sup> The ‘mundane’ motivation for collecting concerned any pleasure a collector might take

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<sup>333</sup> Buten, (1964), *op. cit.*, p. 31 and Appendix.

<sup>334</sup> Buten, (1964), *op. cit.*, p. 32.

<sup>335</sup> Buten, (1962), *op. cit.*, p. 193.

<sup>336</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>337</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>338</sup> Buten, (1962), *op. cit.*, p. 194.

<sup>339</sup> Buten, (1962), *op. cit.*, p. 194.

<sup>340</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>341</sup> Buten, (1962), *op. cit.*, p. 195.

<sup>342</sup> Buten, (1962), *op. cit.*, p. 197. Buten expanded this section in the 1964 book, *Wedgwood ABC But Not Middle E*. He gave a series of questions the collector should ask when encountering Wedgwood pieces, including ‘Is it Wedgwood?’, ‘What type of ware’, ‘How old is it?’, ‘What is the subject?’, and ‘Who was the artist involved’. Buten, (1964), *op. cit.*, p. 60-61.

from the financial aspects of acquisition, from the excitement of a purchase and the discovery of ‘bargains’, to the appreciation of the value of the collection.<sup>343</sup>

Collecting allowed for personal creativity through the processes of the acquisition of objects; most collectors used ‘their collections as raw material to be used in creating something else’.<sup>344</sup> The collector had to envision an ideal collection and evaluate whether an object would ‘fit in’ to their collection, making it what they wanted it to be.<sup>345</sup> Buten called the desire and challenge of acquiring ‘all of something’ creative, yet he also advocated the pursuit of ‘comprehensive collecting’ which could never reach completion.<sup>346</sup> The majority of Wedgwood collections, Buten told his reader, were comprehensive in that the ‘average collector’ found ‘interest in many aspects of the Wedgwood story’ and thus desired representative objects from this field.<sup>347</sup> The creative nature of collecting led to a compulsion for the collector to lecture and write about their knowledge of the subject, with the ‘apex of collecting’ the creation of ‘a museum for housing, exhibiting and studying a collection’.<sup>348</sup> Finally, the spiritual aspect of collecting was connected with the personal improvements which might be imbued to the collector. According to Buten, the collector developed ‘intellectual honesty’, whereby he was not able to ‘fool himself into believing one of his items is what he’d like it to be rather than what it is’.<sup>349</sup> Any mistakes the collector made in purchasing only served as an education greater in value ‘than the loss resulting from them’.<sup>350</sup> Collecting afforded one new ‘talents’ and the opportunity to use ‘God-given’ skills, though Buten did acknowledge that one’s ‘educational background’ might help his collecting.<sup>351</sup> Because collecting was not a vocation, the collector would not permit the ‘dissipation’ of time and collecting gave the collector ‘at least one aim or interest in life and at least one reason for living’.<sup>352</sup> The more ‘deeply involved’ the collector was in the collection, the more they studied it, taught it to

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<sup>343</sup> Buten, (1962), *op. cit.*, p. 199.

<sup>344</sup> Buten, (1962), *op. cit.*, p. 202.

<sup>345</sup> Buten, (1964), *op. cit.*, p. 60-61

<sup>346</sup> Buten, (1962), *op. cit.*, p. 202.

<sup>347</sup> Buten, (1964), *op. cit.*, p. 62-63.

<sup>348</sup> Buten, (1962), *op. cit.*, pp. 202-203. Buten wrote that ‘museum founders say there is nothing like it; they give the collection and have it too’. The Beesons applied this idea of possession over a public collection when they donated their Wedgwood to the Birmingham Museum of Art.

<sup>349</sup> Buten, (1962), *op. cit.*, p. 203.

<sup>350</sup> Buten, (1962), *op. cit.*, p. 204.

<sup>351</sup> Buten, (1962), *op. cit.*, p. 204.

<sup>352</sup> *Ibid.*



others, and wrote about it, the ‘more enjoyable’ it would be found.<sup>353</sup> Buten seems to have believed that people were naturally acquisitive, and as such collecting satisfied ‘the impulse to collect’ while teaching the individual ‘self-restraint’ and the need to ‘overcome the excesses of collecting’.<sup>354</sup> Any personal obstacles were overcome in some act of collecting; if one was ‘an introvert’, he learned ‘how to speak about his collection’; if he was lazy, he learned ‘to get out early and work hard at his collection’.<sup>355</sup> The final benefit bestowed on the collector was status. Buten, in his own way, anticipated the study of collecting practice several decades later, where the analysis of objects gave way to an examination of how collecting related to the broader material world and to self identity.<sup>356</sup> ‘The collector’, Buten wrote, learned ‘that position in this world of ours’ might come ‘from the esteem and reputation befitting the collection’.<sup>357</sup> ‘Money’ alone was ‘not the only road to fame’.<sup>358</sup>

Collecting enriched the individual lives of collectors, but it also introduced individuals into a community of collectors. According to Buten, the collector was ‘willing and indeed, anxious, to pass on’ what they knew about the subject.<sup>359</sup> Through the kinds of organisations Buten had founded, collectors were ‘well organized to discuss monthly at key points and annually on an international basis many of the aspects of the comprehensive Wedgwood story’.<sup>360</sup> Collecting provided friends founded on ‘a mutual interest’, with respect amongst peers, and with ‘a better relationship with the wife, children and employees because collecting, which is usually relaxing’, permitted ‘a more objective view and consideration of others’.<sup>361</sup> Collecting with a member of the family, as the Beesons did, tightened ‘the bond in the household’.<sup>362</sup> Buten also wrote that the time, energy and concentration required in collecting would enable an appreciation of ‘the overwhelming scope of the universe

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<sup>353</sup> Ibid.

<sup>354</sup> Ibid.

<sup>355</sup> Ibid. The gendering of the collector here is Buten’s own.

<sup>356</sup> See Susan Pearce, ‘Collecting as medium and message’, in *Museum, Media, Message* ed. by Eilean Hooper-Greenhill, (London & New York: Routledge, 1995), pp. 15-23, p. 16. Although Buten opened the discussion of collection to issues of self and status, he promoted rather than analysed this facet of collecting.

<sup>357</sup> Buten, (1962), *op. cit.*, p. 204.

<sup>358</sup> Ibid.

<sup>359</sup> Buten, (1964), *op. cit.*, p. 59.

<sup>360</sup> Ibid.

<sup>361</sup> Buten, (1962), *op. cit.*, p. 205.

<sup>362</sup> Ibid.

and the magnitude, omnipotence and universality of God'.<sup>363</sup> It was a paradox, Buten wrote, 'that collecting *things*' made one 'more appreciative of [them] selves, of others and of God'.<sup>364</sup> In his role as the founder of the WIS, Buten had a profound influence on the Beesons understanding of what it meant to be a collector. Through the decades during which they were collecting they strove to comport themselves according to Buten's definitions for the 'good' collector.

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<sup>363</sup> Buten, (1962), *op. cit.*, p. 209.

<sup>364</sup> *Ibid.*

## Chapter Two: Determining the Collection

Writing about the visit to the Metropolitan Museum of Art that inspired her first purchases, Mrs. Beeson recollected that:

...they had a potter from the Staffordshire area showing how bas-reliefs were applied to a vase. I became fascinated by it because I had already known about Wedgwood and knew how lovely I thought it was, but I never thought about collecting it until I saw that.<sup>1</sup>

Beauty, then, was part of her initial attraction to Wedgwood ceramics; she found them 'lovely'.<sup>2</sup> Yet she suggested that this alone was not enough to compel her to collect these objects; a further impetus was required. When it came to purchasing objects, the Beesons were required to fix their desire upon certain objects, to determine and to ascertain what qualities they most favoured. She indicated that her fascination stemmed from a desire to understand the technical processes of manufacture, the history of Wedgwood production and the craftsmanship involved in the process. Collecting was not to be a mere act of accumulation for Mrs. Beeson, rather she adopted a more holistic meaning which encompassed every moment in the life of an object.<sup>3</sup> Collecting, for the Beesons, was bound with connoisseurship. Connoisseurship, as dictated through texts and promulgated through collecting organizations such as the WIS, became the shaping and determining force behind the Beesons purchasing decisions. The word connoisseur was adopted into the English language in the early eighteenth century, when it signified a combination of knowledge, understanding, sensibility and discrimination applied to the study of art and antiquities.<sup>4</sup> 'Thus to See, Thus Nicely to Distinguish things nearly resembling one another, Whether Visible, or Immaterial, is the Business of a *Connoisseur*', wrote Jonathon Richardson in 1719.<sup>5</sup> In the late nineteenth century, the idea of careful study as the basis of connoisseurship was narrowed down to the study of techniques for the

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<sup>1</sup> Karla Klein Albertson, 'Lucille Stewart Beeson shares some thoughts on the growth of her Wedgwood collection', *Antique Review*, November 1992, no pagination.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>3</sup> *Museums and the Future of Collecting*, ed. by Simon J. Knell, (Aldershot: Ashgate, second edition 2004), p. 17.

<sup>4</sup> Linda Young, 'Collecting: reclaiming the art, systematising the technique', in *Museums and the Future of Collecting*, ed. by Simon J. Knell, (Aldershot: Ashgate, second edition 2004), pp. 185-195, pp. 185-186.

<sup>5</sup> J. Richardson, *A Discourse on the Dignity, Certainty, Pleasure and Advantage of the Science of a Connoisseur* (London, 1719), quoted in C. Gibson-Wood, *Studies on the Theory of Connoisseurship from Vasari to Morelli*, (New York: Garland, 1988), p. 119.

attribution and authentication of artworks as practised by dealers and antiquarians.<sup>6</sup> Practitioners of this systematic attribution method included the Italian art historian Giovanni Morelli (1816-1891), who argued that informed observation of the internal evidence of an artwork was sufficient to identify its author, and Bernard Berenson, who codified the Morellian code into a hierarchy of indentificatory details.<sup>7</sup>

For the collector, connoisseurship helped to distinguish which objects should be acquired and which should be rejected or discarded from the collection. Relationships of value were created between the objects themselves and an imposed order became one of the primary attributes of a 'good' collection, where the collector controlled access to the objects and to the knowledge of these objects. One of the ways in which a hierarchy of value amongst goods was structured was to establish the reputation of specific authors and authorities on Wedgwood. The WIS, for example, often cited Eliza Meteyard and other nineteenth century texts in their journal and at seminar meetings.<sup>8</sup> Harry Buten facilitated the publication of previously out of print or hard to find texts, including many of Meteyard's works.<sup>9</sup> A body of literature was built up, helping to support and disseminate a system of value amongst collectors. Mrs. Beeson wrote that when she and her husband began collecting they 'soon found it would be wise to learn as much as possible about the subject.'<sup>10</sup> In order to fulfil this goal they 'purchased old and out of print books on Wedgwood [and] bought all the recently published books'.<sup>11</sup> Texts provided guidance and determined a canon of works. Robin Reilly, one of the acknowledged Wedgwood experts at the time the Beesons were collecting and a contact of the couple, published *The Collector's*

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<sup>6</sup> Young, (2004), *op. cit.*, p. 186.

<sup>7</sup> Young, (2004), *op. cit.*, p. 186. This practice was linked to the expansion of art historical scholarship and to the growing market for Renaissance art. Berenson published several books about the Italian Renaissance including *Florentine Painters of the Renaissance* (1896), *The Drawings of the Florentine Painters* (1903), and *North Italian Painters of the Renaissance* (1907). Morelli's work appeared in English as *Italian Masters in German Galleries* (1883) and *Italian Painters: Critical Studies of their Works* (2 vols., 1892-3).

<sup>8</sup> See for example, Elizabeth Chellis, 'Eliza Meteyard', *The American Wedgwoodian*, vol. 1, no. 4, February 1964, pp. 31 and 42-43. In this article Chellis called Meteyard 'Josiah Wedgwood's best biographer' and claimed that Wedgwood collectors were 'ever grateful for her informative, well-illustrated two-volume life of the great English potter whom she admired with the utmost adulation'.

<sup>9</sup> In *Wedgwood Trio*, Harry Buten reprinted three of Meteyard's texts, *Wedgwood and His Works*, *Memorials of Wedgwood*, and *Choice Examples of Wedgwood Art*. Eliza Meteyard, *Wedgwood Trio: Three Books by Eliza Meteyard reprinted in their entirety in one volume*, (Merion, PA: Buten Museum of Wedgwood, 1967).

<sup>10</sup> Lucille Beeson, 'Wedgwood: Introduction to Subject', no date, BMAA.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*

*Wedgwood* in 1980.<sup>12</sup> (Figure 33) This book was specifically intended to both initiate and instruct, with emphasis given to providing examples of works of the highest quality in order to enable identification of style, body type and period; in other words to promote a specific form of connoisseurship based upon perceived qualities of value.<sup>13</sup>

This form of collecting transformed consumption into a stage of communication which presupposed practical or explicit mastery of a cipher or code.<sup>14</sup> Systems of classification of objects were adopted, where attribution was implicitly based on reference to ‘typical works’, selected because they presented the qualities recognised as pertinent in this system.<sup>15</sup> This inevitably tended to concentrate on rarity, authenticity and age. Hence Reilly’s statement in his manual for the Wedgwood collector that ‘knowledge of Wedgwood wares must be founded upon an understanding of quality’.<sup>16</sup> In this case quality was demonstrated in objects ‘of great rarity’ which were ‘unlikely to be seen outside museums’.<sup>17</sup> The kinds of objects the Beesons ultimately chose for their collection, to be examined throughout this chapter, adhered to conventions of value that can be understood as opposed pairs; they preferred older Wedgwood objects to the newly manufactured ones, objects produced during Josiah Wedgwood’s lifetime, and especially during his partnership with Thomas Bentley. The decorative wares were chosen over the useful wares, and unique or ‘important’ pieces were prized over the more standard pieces.<sup>18</sup>

### “Old Wedgwood”

American collectors of Wedgwood had long been interested in the acquisition of ‘Old Wedgwood’, the pieces produced during Josiah Wedgwood’s lifetime. As early as 1909, authors on Wedgwood ware commented that there was ‘much “Old Wedgwood” in the United States’.<sup>19</sup> Ella Shannon Bowles, in her book *About*

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<sup>12</sup> Robin Reilly, *The Collector’s Wedgwood*, (Huntington, NY: Portfolio Press, 1980).

<sup>13</sup> Reilly, (1980), *op. cit.*, pp. 6-7.

<sup>14</sup> Bourdieu, (1984), *op. cit.*, p. 2.

<sup>15</sup> Bourdieu, (1984), *op. cit.*, p. 52.

<sup>16</sup> Reilly, (1980), *op. cit.*, p. 7.

<sup>17</sup> Reilly, (1980), *op. cit.*, p. 7.

<sup>18</sup> Susan Pearce, ‘Collecting as medium and message’, in *Museum, Media, Message* ed. by Eileen Hooper-Greenhill, (London & New York: Routledge, 1995), pp. 15-23, p. 18. These pairs are embedded in our inherited culture system of value creation, as described by Bourdieu (1984) and Baudrillard (2001).

<sup>19</sup> N. Hudson Moore, *Wedgwood and his Imitators*, (London: Hodder & Sloughton, 1909), p. v.

*Antiques* of 1929, acknowledged that while the firm of Wedgwood ‘continued to make beautiful wares’ after the death of Josiah Wedgwood, it was ‘genuine old Wedgwood’ that was sought by collectors.<sup>20</sup> Bowles told her reader that the ‘authentic pieces’ were ‘hard to find’ and that it was difficult ‘to tell a genuine piece’ unless one was ‘an experienced and discriminating collector’.<sup>21</sup> According to Bowles, the amateur envied the ‘expert’ who could ‘tell true Wedgwood’ and had mastered the ‘difficult process’ of authentication and dating which the casual observer could not understand,<sup>22</sup> for the Wedgwood connoisseur spoke only of ‘the “feel” when he [held] in his hand a genuine piece’.<sup>23</sup>

Long before Mrs. Beeson had learned this ‘difficult’ process of telling a ‘genuine’ piece of old Wedgwood she had made her first purchase; a pair of nineteenth century jasper vases bought on the same trip to New York where she visited the Metropolitan Museum.<sup>24</sup> (Figure 34) When Mrs. Beeson came to evaluate her first purchase in a catalogue of the collection some twenty years later she praised the vases for their ‘pale, clear blue’ colour but described the ornamentation on the objects, which included relief decorations of the muses, egg and dart moulding, and other assorted naturalistic borders, as too ornate.<sup>25</sup> Her preference had shifted towards the productions of the eighteenth century; a shift in taste which had been informed by Mrs. Beeson’s involvement in collecting organisations such as the WIS, where hierarchies of value were created, and through her study of the literature devoted to Wedgwood wares. The texts Mrs. Beeson read formed a historiography of ceramic collecting which was to affect the purchases and perceptions of the couple.

### “Old Wedgwood” in literature

Eliza Meteyard had maintained that on their first appearance, Wedgwood’s wares were ‘so admired and sought for, chiefly by the aristocratic class, that this patronage

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<sup>20</sup> Ella Shannon Bowles, *About Antiques* (1929) quoted in *The American Wedgwoodian*, February 1971, Vol. III, No. 6, p. 118.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>24</sup> See Mrs. Beeson’s catalogue of the collection, 1963, entry number 1. Elizabeth Bryding Adams, *The Dwight and Lucille Beeson Wedgwood Collection at the Birmingham Museum of Art*, (Birmingham: Birmingham Museum of Art, 1992), p. 9, illustrated p. 261.

<sup>25</sup> Beeson catalogue nos. 88 & 89, BMA 1981.251 & 1981.252.

passed into a fashion'.<sup>26</sup> Despite this declared popularity with late eighteenth century consumers, Meteyard went on to describe a waning interest in the wares produced by the company during the first part of the nineteenth century;

...It lasted but little beyond the generation which witnessed the beginning and perfection of these marvels of the potter's art; for taste and culture were not, as yet, sufficiently advanced and general for their merits to be understood except by the esoteric few; and social, economic and political causes all soon combined to bring about their disuse and comparative oblivion.<sup>27</sup>

According to Meteyard, the reason for this disfavour lay in the unrefined taste of the consumer.<sup>28</sup> Meteyard noted that 'till recent years little or no care was bestowed upon their preservation' and although some of the finest pieces of Wedgwood had been produced by the hundreds, when collectors began 'to reckon up their collections, the whole [were] reduced... and some objects [had] disappeared altogether'.<sup>29</sup> She concluded that 'the destruction of Wedgwood's finest works [had] been great; and the time [had] certainly arrived when it [became] a national as well as an individual duty to gather up and preserve the precious works of this illustrious Englishman.'<sup>30</sup> As such, it became the ambition of authors, such as Meteyard, numerous collectors, dealers and curators to re-establish the status of Josiah Wedgwood and his wares through the education of the public. It was through instruction that these authors hoped to mould the tastes and consumption patterns of their readers.

It was collectors of Wedgwood, such as Joseph Mayer, who were the first to defend and establish Wedgwood and his wares as collectible commodities. Mayer also provided later generations of Wedgwood collectors with a precedent of the Wedgwood collector as a Wedgwood educator, keen to discuss and exhibit his collection. As early as 1842, having contributed loans and gifts to the Mechanics' Unions in Liverpool and Newcastle-under-Lyme, Mayer prepared a twelve page *Synopsis of the History of the Manufacture of Earthenware*.<sup>31</sup> Mayer's intention to

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<sup>26</sup> Eliza Meteyard, *Wedgwood and His Works* (London: Bell & Daldy, 1873), p. 10. Meteyard's contention here, that consumers of Wedgwood were emulating the behaviour of their social superiors is contentious, yet outside the breadth of this thesis.

<sup>27</sup> Meteyard, (1873), *op. cit.*, p. 10.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>29</sup> Eliza Meteyard, *Memorials of Wedgwood*, (London: George Bell & Sons, 1874), p. 140.

<sup>30</sup> Meteyard, (1874), *op. cit.*, p. 140.

<sup>31</sup> Joseph Mayer, *A Synopsis of the History of the Manufacture of Earthenware: with reference to the Specimens in the Exhibition of the Liverpool Mechanics' Institution, 1842*, (Liverpool: Printed by Rockliff and Ellis, 1842).

promote collecting and to contribute to the body of knowledge on ceramics were indicated in the *Synopsis* which aimed to provide information;

whereby the traveller in other countries may be enabled to appreciate such specimens as may fall in his way, and to enlist him in the laudable endeavour... to add to our present stock of knowledge of the localities, fabric, &c., of various specimens of earthenware and terra cottas which find their way occasionally into this country, but of whose local origin, and time of manufacture, we are much in doubt, or entirely in ignorance.<sup>32</sup>

Mayer hoped ‘to encourage the young collector, who need not look upon the first beginnings of a collection with disparagement’.<sup>33</sup> While the *Synopsis* provided a cursory examination of ancient pottery, Mayer quickly transposed the reader’s attention to the production of ceramics in Britain and characterised Wedgwood as the leader and innovator in the field. Wedgwood was credited with the creation and perfection of an art, which at the beginning of his career was ‘confined to a few villages, and was only used for the making of butter pots and other coarse articles at Burslem.’<sup>34</sup> The results of Wedgwood’s labours were described by Mayer as ‘the *ne plus ultra* of terra cotta ware’.<sup>35</sup> As such it was the products produced under Josiah Wedgwood’s management that were considered the most valued for the collector.

Mayer was not unique in his presentation of ceramics as a field of study at this time. Books were published which intended to record ceramic manufacturers and classify their output, initiated by Joseph Marryat’s *History of Pottery and Porcelain from the Fifteenth to the Eighteenth Centuries* (London, 1850).<sup>36</sup> Marryat, a collector himself, acknowledged the dearth of information on ceramics prior to his publication;

When first I became a collector of china, I found great difficulty in obtaining the information I desired to aid me in the pursuit. The majority of publications on the subject were either learned disquisitions upon the mythology of the Greek classical paintings, or, on the other hand, mere technical details of the manufacture, while a knowledge of the different kinds of Pottery and Porcelain appeared limited to the dealers.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> Mayer, (1842), *op. cit.*

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>36</sup> Simeon Shaw published his *History of the Staffordshire Potteries* in 1829 and William Chaffers first published his *Marks and Monograms on Pottery and Porcelain* in 1863.

<sup>37</sup> Joseph Marryat, *A History of Pottery and Porcelain: Medieval and Modern*, (London: John Murray, second edition, 1857), p. v.



Mayer's collection featured prominently in the *History*, he having granted Marryat the right to publish reproductions of pieces from his collection.<sup>38</sup> (Figure 35) Marryat introduced Mayer in the text as having 'an extensive collection of Mr. Wedgwood's productions' and 'a large portion of his correspondence'.<sup>39</sup> The Appendices in the book show how unique Mayer was at this time in Wedgwood collecting. Marryat included a list of the private collections of china and ceramics in Great Britain; out of one hundred and fifty-four private collectors, only two, F. Streatfield and Thomas De la Rue, specialised in Wedgwood. There were only three public collections where ceramics more broadly could be viewed; the British Museum, (which, according to Marryat had collections of majolica and Medieval wares) the Museum of Practical Geology, and the Museum of Ornamental Art, the latter two of which had miscellaneous ceramic collections.<sup>40</sup>

Marryat wrote with the novice collector in mind, a collector in search of assurance of the value and authenticity of the goods he purchased. He aimed to guide the collector, 'enabling him to ascertain the nature of the specimens he possesses, and what are considered the most desirable in forming a collection.'<sup>41</sup> Throughout the book, which covers the history of European ceramics from fifteenth century Spanish wares to nineteenth century English porcelain, the collector was established as a key figure in the preservation and dissemination of knowledge of the objects. In the discussion of each nation's pottery production, Marryat included a section devoted to collections where examples could be found, many of which were in England and a great proportion of the reproductions found in the book were from private collections, including Marryat's own.

Because the study of ceramics was a relatively new field, and in order to raise the status of his and other ceramic collections, Marryat began his text by elevating pottery from its utilitarian connotations towards more symbolic functions;

Its productions, though in modern times restricted to domestic use, were employed by the ancients for higher and nobler purposes. Pottery was the medium of expressing their homage for the dead, and the prize of the victor in

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<sup>38</sup> Marryat, (1857), *op. cit.*, p. iv.

<sup>39</sup> Marryat, (1857), *op. cit.*, pp. 164-165.

<sup>40</sup> Marryat, (1857), *op. cit.*, p. 439. The Museum of Ornamental Art later developed into the Victoria and Albert Museum.

<sup>41</sup> Marryat, (1857), *op. cit.*, pp. iii-iv.

the public games. Successful cultivators of art were honoured with statues and medals, decreed to them by state, and their names were transmitted to posterity by poets and historians.<sup>42</sup>

Ceramics, Marryat told his reader, had provided an aid to historical research, had been an object for royal patronage, and were celebrated by historical characters.<sup>43</sup> In order to further attribute value to these objects Marryat provided the reader with a sample of illustrious Wedgwood patrons, Empress Catherine II and Horace Walpole among them. In his study of English pottery, Marryat, like Mayer in his *Synopsis*, presented his narrative in a progressive linear fashion, beginning with Roman and Saxon wares in Britain and moving quickly forward until he reached the Staffordshire Potteries. Of the Staffordshire manufactories, it was Wedgwood who Marryat described as ‘the most celebrated of all potters... one of those who have most contributed to advance the potter’s art’.<sup>44</sup> This celebration of Wedgwood and his production would become a common theme in nineteenth century texts on the history of ceramics. Mayer subsequently declared that pottery had ‘been a craft steadily progressive from the first... always growing more beautiful and perfect’,<sup>45</sup> while Meteyard, in similar statement, expounded that ‘Wedgwood’s productions, thus slowly ascending from the rude and unartistic to the generally perfect and artistic, gives evidence that the laws of evolution as much govern art as nature.’<sup>46</sup>

So bound became the relationship between Josiah Wedgwood and concepts of quality that the nineteenth century output from the Wedgwood company was affected.

Demand for the eighteenth century productions led to Wedgwood & Co.’s production of copies or interpretations of eighteenth century designs, while the company’s more modern products were less successful with the public. (Figure 36) Reviewers of the Great Exhibition of 1851 largely ignored the display of Wedgwood kitchen ware, Drab Ware, Rockingham and other modern pieces, instead commenting;

Etruria, the celebrated establishment founded by Josiah Wedgwood and where the knowledge of Bentley and the classic taste and genius of Flaxman,

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<sup>42</sup> Marryat, (1857), *op. cit.*, p. xxi.

<sup>43</sup> Marryat, (1857), *op. cit.*, pp. xxi-xxiv. For example, Marryat mentions the patronage of the Dukes of Urbino, Augustus the Strong, and Queen Charlotte; and Nelson collecting the china of Capo di Monte and Dr. Johnson’s interest in Chelsea.

<sup>44</sup> Marryat, (1857), *op. cit.*, p. 153.

<sup>45</sup> Quoted in Pat Starkey, ed., *Riches Into Art: Liverpool Collectors 1770-1880*, (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1993), p. 33.

<sup>46</sup> Meteyard, (1874), *op. cit.*, p. 158.

combined with his own ability, gave a world-wide reputation to its founder - has sent its quota of beautiful works through its present occupants, Messrs. Wedgwood and Brown, who have reproduced some of the best articles originally designed or executed by its famous founder.<sup>47</sup>

While Josiah Wedgwood and the wares produced during his lifetime enjoyed a renewed prestige during the second half of the nineteenth century, the factory's contemporary productions were not as well regarded, and for the majority of the Victorian collectors it was the old, eighteenth century Wedgwood, which attracted their investments.<sup>48</sup>

When the Wedgwood dealer, Frederick Rathbone, published his book, *Old Wedgwood*, he not only divided it into modern and 'old' eras of production, but also almost exclusively featured the decorative productions of the factory such as vases, tablets, and cameos.<sup>49</sup> (Figure 37) Rathbone claimed the products nearest in quality to 'Old Wedgwood' were the modern pieces produced by the company. Yet this 'modern Wedgwood', which was described as 'quite as decorative, and, of course, very much less in cost', merely served as 'an excellent guide to a knowledge of the old manufacture'.<sup>50</sup> The collector was expected to 'be able, by a careful comparison, to tell one from the other'.<sup>51</sup> The authentication and dating of old wares was presented as a covetable skill that afforded the collector a certain status. Rathbone advised the collector to adopt a method 'in their early collecting days' whereby they commenced by purchasing a 'few good specimens of the modern reproductions' and learning, 'by comparison, the desired quality of the old pieces'.<sup>52</sup> They would then

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<sup>47</sup> From *The industry of all nations, 1851 : the Art journal illustrated catalogue*, (London : published for the proprietors, by George Virtue, 1851).

<sup>48</sup> Interestingly, these collections were by and large amassed outside London by Victorians newly accruing their wealth from industry, a story which is echoed by the Beesons'. The finest collections of Wedgwood in Britain today have their origins in these nineteenth century collections, for example, those of Charlotte Schreiber, Felix Joseph and Richard Tangye which now form the nucleus of Wedgwood accumulations at the Victoria and Albert Museum, Nottingham Castle Museum, and the City of Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery. See Sharon Gater, 'A House of Long Standing' in the *Thirty-Fourth Annual Wedgwood International Seminar*, (Atlanta: High Museum of Art, 1989), pp. 143-156.

<sup>49</sup> Frederick Rathbone, *Old Wedgwood*, (London : B. Quaritch, 1898).

<sup>50</sup> Frederick Rathbone, *Old Wedgwood and Old Wedgwood Ware: Handbook to the Collection Formed by Richard and George Tangye*, (London: F. Rathbone, 1885). Rathbone, (1885), *op. cit.*, pp. xxii-xxiii.

<sup>51</sup> Rathbone, (1885), *op. cit.*, p. xxiii.

<sup>52</sup> Rathbone, (1898), *op. cit.*, p. 101.

learn the distinctions between the old and new wares and soon be able ‘to act with decision and to acquire their knowledge quickly at a moderate outlay’.<sup>53</sup>

Identification of age and maker became one of the preoccupations of authors and dealers of Wedgwood, a concern which was passed on to collectors through the texts aimed at them. One of the primary methods of identification of age was the mark on the ware. William Chaffers first published his *Marks and Monograms on Pottery and Porcelain* in 1863 and Eliza Meteyard published *The Wedgwood Handbook: A Manual for Collectors, treating of the Marks, Monograms, and other tests of the old period of manufacture* in 1875 in order to guide the collector in their purchases of ‘Old Wedgwood’.<sup>54</sup> Rathbone even assured the Wedgwood buyer that a lack of marks would not ‘trouble the old collector much’, for, if genuine, the specimen was sure to show itself as Wedgwood through ‘form, relief, or colour; or, as one enthusiastic searcher after scarce pieces said, “It is marked all over”’.<sup>55</sup> Rathbone stated that when an American collector had commissioned him to provide tutelage in the differentiation between old and modern Wedgwood he was able to find only ‘three or four modern pieces that were at all likely to be mistaken by the experienced collector for the originals’.<sup>56</sup> What Rathbone failed to provide was any information on how one became an ‘experienced’ collector. Presumably it was with the aid of dealers like himself.<sup>57</sup> Despite the supposed ease of dating, Rathbone paid significant attention to categorising and illustrating all the marks used by the Wedgwood Company in his book *Old Wedgwood* (1898). (Figure 38) Rathbone warned his reader that texts dedicated to recording ceramic marks were full of misleading inaccuracies. Jewitt’s *The Wedgwoods* apparently supplied the reader with an accurate register of these marks, but did not provide a complete list.<sup>58</sup> It was Rathbone’s intention to rectify this situation with his own publication. In a later book, *A Catalogue of the Wedgwood Museum, Etruria*, Rathbone told his reader that marks

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<sup>53</sup> Ibid.

<sup>54</sup> William Chaffers, *Marks and Monograms on Pottery and Porcelain*, (London, 1863) and Eliza Meteyard, *The Wedgwood Handbook: A Manual for Collectors, Treating of the Marks, Monograms, and other tests of the old period of manufacture*, (London, 1875). Rathbone commented on Meteyard’s work that ‘Such a book would be invaluable to a collector of Wedgwood if the statements therein made were trustworthy. Unfortunately they are not, for the book is full of misleading paragraphs from the beginning to the end.’

<sup>55</sup> Rathbone, (1885), *op. cit.*, p. xxxiv.

<sup>56</sup> Rathbone, (1898), *op. cit.*, p. 90.

<sup>57</sup> Chapter two will look at the role of the dealer in more depth.

<sup>58</sup> Rathbone, (1898), *op. cit.*, p. 15.

were used to date objects, as security against fraud, to demarcate ‘good specimens’, and to distinguish modern work.<sup>59</sup> The business of identifying marks on pottery was largely concerned with ensuring that buyers were assured of the age of the piece they were acquiring. Dating Wedgwood pieces became an established custom in texts dedicated to the wares. By the twentieth century authors such as Robin Reilly continued to include illustrations of the marks on the wares for their readers. (Figure 39) Reilly wrote that it was Josiah Wedgwood ‘who first properly understood the marketing value of marking wares’, indicating a link between age, authenticity and value.<sup>60</sup>

### **The Twentieth Century Collector and ‘Old Wedgwood’**

For the Beesons, age was inextricably linked with value, both symbolic and financial. Mrs. Beeson recollected that while Wedgwood items were cheaper when she first began collecting, they were expensive, ‘if you got the old ones - and we always tried to get the older things.’<sup>61</sup> This reminiscence was not strictly accurate. Until about 1965, Mrs. Beeson had been satisfied to purchase nineteenth century wares such as her first jasper vases. It was a visit to a Wedgwood exhibition of only eighteenth century wares, and the couple’s introduction to the collector Mellanay Delhom and dealer Ann Brodkiewicz, which altered their position.<sup>62</sup> Mr. Beeson wrote to Delhom expressing his, and his wife’s, gratitude for the ‘tremendous help’ she had rendered them in their ‘ambition to upgrade and enlarge’ their collection.<sup>63</sup> Beeson congratulated himself on finally persuading Lucille to ‘dispose of a number of nineteenth century pieces that... were “run of the mill”’, thus allowing space for ‘some of the beautiful objects’ they had recently obtained.<sup>64</sup> The classifications of value outlined in nineteenth century texts such as Rathbone’s, were upheld by museum exhibitions of Wedgwood in the twentieth century, thus influencing the purchasing patterns of the Beesons. Speaking late in the development of the

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<sup>59</sup> Frederick Rathbone, *Catalogue of the Wedgwood Museum at Etruria*, (Etruria, Stoke-on-Trent: Josiah Wedgwood & Sons Ltd., 1909), p. 28-29.

<sup>60</sup> Reilly, (1980), *op. cit.*, p. 302.

<sup>61</sup> Karla Klein Albertson, ‘Lucille Stewart Beeson shares some thoughts on the growth of her Wedgwood collection’, *Antique Review*, November 1992, no pagination.

<sup>62</sup> The exhibition was held at the Paine Art Center in Oshkosh, Wisconsin, and celebrated the two-hundredth anniversary of Josiah Wedgwood being made ‘Potter to the Queen’. See *The American Wedgwoodian*, vol. 1, no. 8, May 1965. The Beesons relationship with dealers like Brodkiewicz will be discussed in the third chapter.

<sup>63</sup> Dwight Beeson to Mellanay Delhom, 1 April 1966, BMAA.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*

collection, Mrs. Beeson explained their changing acquisition patterns, ‘You have to buy a lot before you feel that you are expert enough to buy more expensive pieces. As you develop a sense about them, you want to discard some and then refine the collection’.<sup>65</sup>

Objects that had originally been purchased to showcase a range of wares, especially nineteenth century productions, were later culled from the collection. For example, a blue sardine dish set in silver, which Mrs. Beeson purchased in 1956 finding it interesting ‘for no other reason than to show the variety of things Wedgwood made’, and which was ‘not too old – probably mid 19<sup>th</sup> century’<sup>66</sup>, had been discarded by the time she compiled her second catalogue of the collection.<sup>67</sup> Period of production and rarity were key factors in assessing which items to purchase. Eighteenth century wares were described as being of ‘particularly fine quality’, while rarity was one of the ‘features that [made] objects desirable to a collector’.<sup>68</sup> In 1959, the Chicago-based antiques dealer, Russell Button wrote to the Beesons enclosing photographs of three items, a plaque with a figural design called ‘Love Triumphant’ and two plaques modelled by Flaxman.<sup>69</sup> (Figure 40) Button noted that on the back of the frame of the Love Triumphant plaque somebody had written “Probably a trial piece” and that he had not come upon another example of its type.<sup>70</sup> Of the three pieces suggested to the Beesons, it was this piece that they purchased. Mrs. Beeson rejected the other two plaques because of other financial commitments, as they already had similar plaques in the collection, and because they felt that they ‘must not be buying too many things at this time anyway’.<sup>71</sup> However, Mrs. Beeson noted to Mr. Button that when ‘something like the little “Love” comes along, which SEEMS TO BE VERY SCARCE’ they did wish to add it to their collection, requesting in particular any pieces in yellow or black and white jasper (‘fine and old only’) or any Wedgwood and Bentley pieces.<sup>72</sup> Rarity was an attribute which increased the value and prestige of an item in a Wedgwood collection. The WIS even started a registry of unique

<sup>65</sup> Lucille Beeson, quoted in Elizabeth Bryding Adams, *The Dwight and Lucille Beeson Wedgwood Collection at the Birmingham Museum of Art*, (Birmingham: Birmingham Museum of Art, 1992), p. 9.

<sup>66</sup> Lucille Beeson 1963 catalogue, entry no. 32.

<sup>67</sup> This second catalogue was compiled in an ongoing process beginning in the late 1960s.

<sup>68</sup> Reilly, (1980), *op. cit.*, p. 300 and p. 307.

<sup>69</sup> See Lucille Beeson 1963 catalogue, entry no. 60.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*

Wedgwood, where members could submit unique items, whose image would then be published in the journal.<sup>73</sup> (Figure 41) The Beesons' growing desire for the acquisition of certain objects, especially those within the canon of Wedgwood's masterpieces, led them to purchase their first Wedgwood copy of the Portland Vase. This copy, unlike the valuable and prestigious first fifty copies made during Wedgwood's lifetime, was manufactured around 1870.<sup>74</sup> Mrs. Beeson noted that it was, 'Not so old as we'd like but this is a nice copy of the famous "Portland Vase".'<sup>75</sup> When the Beesons later purchased two early copies of the Vase, numbered copies from the time of Josiah Wedgwood's production, this vase was sold.

The Beesons' involvement in the WIS contributed to their understanding of the value of old Wedgwood pieces. The group placed a heavy emphasis on the examination and acquisition of the eighteenth century products. It was not until the WIS' twenty-second meeting in 1977 that the group opened their study to the products of the nineteenth century, an era they said had been 'dismissed or lightly considered before by connoisseurs, collectors and scholars'.<sup>76</sup> Mrs. Beeson had been collecting for some years when she became a member of the newly-founded WIS in 1956, but the organisation was to forever alter the way she perceived the collection, as she later explained;

As most of the readers know we had the beginnings of our collection before we became members of WIS. Our attendance at a few of the Seminar meetings revealed to us that we had a long way to go to have the collection we hoped to acquire; that we needed to study more, weed out and replace and generally up-grade the collection.<sup>77</sup>

A large part of this project to 'up-grade' the collection meant focussing their acquisitions on 'Old' Wedgwood. Harry Buten, founder of the WIS, wrote extensively in his books about the methods and advantages of dating Wedgwood

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<sup>73</sup> Leonard S. Rakow, 'Registry of Unique Wedgwood', *The American Wedgwoodian*, vol. IV, no. 1, March 1972, p. 11.

<sup>74</sup> Wedgwood's copies of the Portland Vase are frequently regarded as his crowning achievement. See for example Dawson, (1984), *op. cit.*, p. 112. The vase became a symbol for the company, using it as a stamp on the bone china since 1878.

<sup>75</sup> Lucille Beeson 1963 Catalogue entry no. 4, acquired from Wolf Mankowitz some time prior to 1959.

<sup>76</sup> Dean Rockwell, 'The President's Message', *The American Wedgwoodian*, vol. V, no. 4, November 1977, p. 142. Rockwell exclaimed that 'A whole new era of fresh, exciting Wedgwood study has been opened. It will remain to be seen if future Seminars use this open door to extend our vistas of study and research. Or will we go back to re-working the same old fields?' By this point the 'one-hundred year rule' for antiques would have incorporated Wedgwood objects produced in the nineteenth century.

<sup>77</sup> Lucille Beeson, 'Catalog Now', *The American Wedgwoodian*, vol. II, no. 8, February 1968, p. 166.

objects.<sup>78</sup> Dating, he told his reader, could be achieved not only through an examination of the marks on the wares, but from specialised knowledge of the objects whereby one could determine age from the style of the object, the artist or designer who created it, citations of similar objects in the Wedgwood literature, the ‘feel’, the glaze, the provenance, and most abstractly ‘the quality of the work’.<sup>79</sup> One reason Buten gave for an interest in dating objects was that when a collector had chosen a ‘certain feature’ which satisfied them, they could then locate and acquire other objects with this similar feature.<sup>80</sup> He also told his readers that dating objects had an ‘intellectual’ element in that ‘the student’ would use a piece ‘as an explanation or example of the art style’.<sup>81</sup> Buten tacitly confirmed here that the collector was expected to have accrued a considerable amount of knowledge about the objects being purchased and to have developed the connoisseur’s skills of attribution and value estimation. The tradition of connoisseurship remained strong amongst authors on Wedgwood, with emphasis placed upon the classification of wares on the basis of style and decoration.<sup>82</sup> Like the authors on Wedgwood who came before him, dating was a particularly important factor for Buten, who included the marks used on the pottery and listed the years of production for specific body types of the wares.<sup>83</sup> His general rule, which he passed on to readers, was that ‘the older a piece is, the smaller the supply and the greater the demand.’<sup>84</sup> ‘Age snobbery’, as Buten called it, did ‘wonders to prices.’<sup>85</sup> Buten drew distinctions between new, second-hand and old Wedgwood, advising collectors that while ‘second-hand’ Wedgwood was ‘cheaper than new... as soon as the aura of age [came] into the picture, then rationale and reason [flew] out the window.’<sup>86</sup> He divided the objects into three periods of production, 1759-1830, 1830-1900, and the twentieth century, and created a chart

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<sup>78</sup> See especially Harry M. Buten, *Wedgwood Counterpoint*, (Merion, Pennsylvania: Buten Museum of Wedgwood, 1962) and Harry M. Buten, *Wedgwood ABC But Not Middle E*, (Merion, Pennsylvania: Buten Museum of Wedgwood, 1964).

<sup>79</sup> Buten, (1962), *op. cit.*, p. 145.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>82</sup> A similar observation is drawn by David Barker in his wider study of the Staffordshire Potteries, David Barker, “‘The Usual Classes of Useful Articles’: Staffordshire Ceramics Reconsidered’ in Robert Hunter, ed, *Ceramics in America*, (Hanover & London: Chipstone Foundation, 2001), pp. 73-93.

<sup>83</sup> Buten, (1964), *op. cit.*, p. 39-51.

<sup>84</sup> Buten, (1964), *op. cit.*, p. 36.

<sup>85</sup> Buten, (1964), *op. cit.*, p. 35.

<sup>86</sup> Harry M. Buten, *Wedgwood ABC But Not Middle E*, (Merion, Pennsylvania: Buten Museum of Wedgwood, 1964), p. 35. Buten differentiated between ‘antique’ (1759-1830) and ‘second-hand’ (1830-1900).



listing the characteristics of each period. While the ‘fineness of detail’ for the first period was rated as excellent, in the second it was poor; the patina of the first period was ‘smooth’ while the second period was ‘somewhat rough’ and the twentieth century ‘slightly rough’; the thickness of the earthenware was thin during the first period and thick for the other two; and while the craftsmen who made the cameos had polished the edge of the objects in the first period, none of the later cameos were so polished.<sup>87</sup>

Buten’s system of dating the wares, and the consequent attribution of value, was linked to his conception that the ‘old’ wares were produced by hand, while objects produced after 1830 would have been machine made.<sup>88</sup> There were two reasons why old things were more desirable to the collector according to Buten; while the first one was ‘a natural diminution of supply’, the second reason was that the older items were hand finished and modelled.<sup>89</sup> This finish was discussed amongst Wedgwood dealers and collectors as a method of distinguishing the older wares. One New Orleans dealer advised the Beesons, ‘if you want to know the difference between old Wedgwood and new, all you have to do is to pass your hand over it and it will feel like velvet’.<sup>90</sup> Mrs. Beeson used similar language in discussing her own collection of Wedgwood;

Today there is no time for the loving care used in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, if one could be induced to spend the time who could afford them? You will just have to take my word for it that the old Jasper felt like butter or satin but I have brought a “NEW” bit of Jasper which will feel a bit like a fine sand paper as compared to the old. You will note that it could stand some undercutting too! See the places where the white extends onto the blue?<sup>91</sup>

In that same talk, Mrs. Beeson explained to members of the Ceramic Hobby Club that while Wedgwood contributed to the birth of the Industrial Revolution through the ‘use of a sort of “assembly line”’ in that ‘he had different workers undertake the different steps to complete an article’, and ‘many persons work upon an object IT IS HAND MADE!’<sup>92</sup> This echoed Buten’s contention that ‘strictly speaking, the supply of every

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<sup>87</sup> Buten, (1964), *op. cit.*

<sup>88</sup> Buten, (1964), *op. cit.*, p. 35. Post 1830 items coming in the United States were also taxed, whereas the earlier pieces were not.

<sup>89</sup> Buten, (1962), *op. cit.*, p. 145.

<sup>90</sup> Letter from P. Henry Stern, 19 August 1952, recorded in the 1963 Beeson catalogue, entry no. 5, BMAA.

<sup>91</sup> Mrs. Beeson, Talk given to the Ceramic Hobby Club, date unknown, BMAA.

<sup>92</sup> Mrs. Beeson, Talk given to the Ceramic Hobby Club, date unknown, BMAA. Mrs. Beeson’s emphasis.

Wedgwood piece is exactly one. Because of the handwork still used in the production of Wedgwood pots, each is minutely different from any other.’<sup>93</sup>

This quality of the works, the fact that they were hand made, appears to have been a key factor in establishing the desirability of these objects, yet it is a concept which seems alien to Wedgwood’s factory discipline. Josiah Wedgwood was one of the pioneers of factory organisation in England and one reason for his success was his demand for uniformity in quality and design.<sup>94</sup> The green glazed wares which were Wedgwood’s main production in the 1760’s, could not be reproduced reliably as the results were dependent on the hand of the glazer and the conditions in the kiln.<sup>95</sup> (Figure 42) This was one of the factors he took into consideration when he began experimenting with the cream-ware, hoping to produce a more consistent product. Transfer-printing provided a reliable method of decoration, with hand-painters working on borders and repeat patterns only; enamelled decoration, painted onto the cream-ware, produced more constant results.<sup>96</sup> (Figures 43 & 44) When designing his factory, Etruria, Wedgwood was determined to divide labour and separate different processes, insuring that there was little room for any individual interpretation.<sup>97</sup> The craftsmen were isolated according to task and skill, for Wedgwood believed that ‘the same hands’ could not ‘make *fine, & coarse - expensive & cheap* articles’.<sup>98</sup> The workmen were trained in one particular task and required to stick with it in order to improve the quality of the wares.<sup>99</sup> Wedgwood wrote to Bentley that he was ‘preparing some hands to work at red & black... *constantly & then we shall make them good*, there is no such thing as making now & then a few of any article to have them tolerable.’<sup>100</sup> Wedgwood gave an account of his struggles to ‘make *Artists... [of]... mere men*’<sup>101</sup> but he also sought to ‘make such *machines* of the

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<sup>93</sup> Harry M. Buten, *Wedgwood Rarities*, (Merion, Pennsylvania: Buten Museum of Wedgwood, 1969), p. 3.

<sup>94</sup> Neil McKendrick, ‘Josiah Wedgwood and Factory Discipline’, *The Historical Journal*, Vol. IV, No. I, (1961), pp. 30-55. At Etruria Josiah Wedgwood ushered in the factory system to the Potteries. He was, however, merely following a process already set in motion. By the mid-eighteenth-century the whole of the potteries, together with industry in general, was moving towards increased specialisation.

<sup>95</sup> Adrian Forty, *Objects of Desire*, (New York: Pantheon Books, 1986), p. 30-31.

<sup>96</sup> Forty, (1986), p. 31.

<sup>97</sup> McKendrick, (1961), *op. cit.*, p. 31.

<sup>98</sup> Josiah Wedgwood to Thomas Bentley, 19 September 1772, Keele University Archive, E25-18407.

<sup>99</sup> McKendrick, (1961), *op. cit.*, p. 32.

<sup>100</sup> Josiah Wedgwood to Thomas Bentley, 1 December 1769, Keele University Archive, E25-18271.

<sup>101</sup> Josiah Wedgwood to Thomas Bentley, 9 April 1773, Keele University Archive, E25-18455.

*Men as cannot err*'.<sup>102</sup> For Wedgwood, at least, variations and idiosyncrasies of the craftsman were not tolerated.

Despite the training of painters and modellers in the factory, Wedgwood did use highly paid artists, already successful in other fields.<sup>103</sup> Wedgwood's decision to commission these artists, despite the costs, was a commercial one. The craftsmen at Etruria would have been less aware of the fashions in London, and the work of an Academician had a certain cachet amongst Wedgwood's aristocratic clients.

Wedgwood wrote that designs produced at the Academy were 'less hackneyed and better in General than the plaister shops' could furnish him with, 'besides', he said, it would 'sound better to say this is from the Academy, taken from an original in the Gallery of etc. etc. than to say we had it from [a plaister cast maker]'.<sup>104</sup> Often the artists employed worked as modellers, who were responsible for the design stage of manufacture, planning the way an object would be shaped and decorated before passing on these instructions to the workmen.<sup>105</sup> Modellers were amongst the highest paid employees in the potteries; the sculptor John Flaxman, who worked freelance for Josiah Wedgwood, was paid at the rate of one guinea per day for preparing designs.<sup>106</sup> Wedgwood did not allow for complete artistic freedom even in these cases however, requiring for instance that Flaxman clothe his nude classical figures.<sup>107</sup>

Much was made of Wedgwood's use of these artists in subsequent collecting literature. One author wrote that Wedgwood had utilised 'the greatest genius of his

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<sup>102</sup> Josiah Wedgwood to Thomas Bentley, 9 October 1769, Keele University Archive, E25-18265.

<sup>103</sup> McKendrick, (1961), *op. cit.*, p. 36. McKendrick points out that Wedgwood was not the first manufacturer to employ artists; for example François Boucher provided designs for Beauvais tapestries in the 1740s and Vincennes porcelain factory employed Dodin. Some of the better known artists employed by Wedgwood included Lady Templeton, Stubbs and Flaxman.

<sup>104</sup> Wedgwood to Bentley, quoted in *John Flaxman R.A.*, catalogue of the exhibition at the Royal Academy, London, 1979, p. 47. Here Wedgwood refers to John Flaxman's father, who was a plaster-cast maker.

<sup>105</sup> Wedgwood was not unique in his use of modellers. By the 1750s there were individuals working in the Staffordshire potteries described as modellers, whose sole task was to make prototypes for the other craftsmen to work from. See Forty, (1986), p. 34.

<sup>106</sup> Forty, (1986), p. 34. See A. Young, *A Six Months Tour through the North of England, 1770*, vol. III, p. 308 and the Account Book of Josiah Wedgwood, Wedgwood archives, E2-1339. John Flaxman (1755-1826) was trained at the Royal Academy and was a frequent exhibitor there. He was employed by Wedgwood and Bentley from 1775 as a modeller of classically inspired friezes, plaques, ornamental vessels and medallion portraits, in jasper and basalt.

<sup>107</sup> Wedgwood wrote that these nude figures were 'too warm' for English society's tastes. See Josiah Wedgwood to Thomas Bentley, 28 December 1769, Keele University Archive, E25-18278.

day for designs and advice'.<sup>108</sup> Recent authors have examined the relationship between Wedgwood and George Stubbs, the painter known especially for his animal subjects who modelled bas reliefs from his 'The Frightened Horse' and 'The Fall of Phaeton' for Wedgwood. (Figure 45) Likewise Sir Joshua Reynolds' works were adapted by Wedgwood's modellers for use as bas reliefs.<sup>109</sup> Buten published a book titled *Wedgwood and Artists* in 1960 in which he compiled a list of all the artists who had inspired or created works for Wedgwood.<sup>110</sup> One early biographer, Samuel Smiles, dedicated a whole chapter to Flaxman's employment by the factory in which he stated that Wedgwood was 'fortunate, as well as wise, in associating with himself, in the production of his wares, perhaps the greatest sculptor whom England has yet produced'.<sup>111</sup> Rathbone included a portrait of Flaxman in the introduction of *Old Wedgwood* (1898). (Figure 46) Flaxman was employed by Wedgwood from 1775, long before he was made an associate of the Royal Academy in 1797, and many texts Wedgwood authors have read his later fame as an indication of Josiah Wedgwood's insight into his latent talent. Meteyard, however, was eager to ensure that the final value was granted to Wedgwood above all others working for him. She included details of the many artists who worked or supplied designs for Wedgwood, but emphasised that there could be 'no doubt that Wedgwood exercised a controlling judgment'.<sup>112</sup> 'Wedgwood's absolutely perfect vision and consummate taste' she continued, were 'obvious in a thousand things besides his art; and there is no reasonable doubt that even Flaxman's masterpieces were amenable to his judgment, and occasionally perfected in detail by his hand.'<sup>113</sup> By emphasising the designer rather than the numerous manufacturers who produced the objects, authors associated these goods with the idea of the autonomous artist. Meteyard told her readers that Wedgwood's wares were admired and sought 'not so much for the reason that they are beautiful' but 'as that they exemplify many of the best principles of pure and ideal

<sup>108</sup> Lord Lytton speaking in 1835, quoted in Frederick Rathbone, *Catalogue of the Wedgwood Museum at Etruria*, (Etruria, Stoke-on-Trent: Josiah Wedgwood & Sons Ltd., 1909), p. 20. Lytton does not name specific artists working for Wedgwood but he does say that he caused 'the most beautiful...specimens of antiquity' to be 'imitated with scrupulous nicety', thus we may assume that he refers primarily to John Flaxman who was Wedgwood's primary modeller of the classical style.

<sup>109</sup> Reynolds painting, *The Infant Academy*, (1782) was copied by modeller William Hackwood and became a popular design for Wedgwood.

<sup>110</sup> Bruce Tattersall, *Stubbs & Wedgwood: Unique Alliance between Artist and Potter*, (London: Tate Gallery, 1974) and Harry M. Buten, *Wedgwood and Artists*, (Merion, Pennsylvania: Buten Museum of Wedgwood, 1960).

<sup>111</sup> Samuel Smiles, *Josiah Wedgwood*, (London: John Murray, 1897), p. 195.

<sup>112</sup> Eliza Meteyard, *The Life of Josiah Wedgwood*, (London: Hurst & Blackett, 1865), p. xx.

<sup>113</sup> Meteyard, (1865), *op. cit.*, p. xxi.

art.’<sup>114</sup> All of this was contingent upon the consumer, however, for appreciation of Wedgwood was predicated on an audience with ‘a due amount of cultivation combined with taste.’<sup>115</sup>

The objects which were fashioned according to the designs of a particular artist were popular with the Beesons. In 1965 Mrs. Beeson purchased a set of jasper chess men; these, however, were not manufactured by Wedgwood. She wrote to the dealer from whom she had bought the set that she felt ‘rather badly about getting that when Dwight likes to spend his money on his first love, Old Wedgwood’.<sup>116</sup> Specifically, Mr. Beeson wanted a set of chessmen which Flaxman had designed in the late eighteenth century. Lucille wrote again to the dealer to keep an eye out for a Wedgwood chess set and asked her if she might allow her to ‘trade in’ the one she had because Dwight was still ‘fussing’ about the previous purchase.<sup>117</sup> In the end Mr. Beeson got the Wedgwood chess set he wanted, noting in the catalogue that Flaxman sent the drawing for it to Wedgwood in 1785 and that, although this piece was not marked, this factor merely proved that it was an early one, manufactured between 1785 and 1795.<sup>118</sup> (Figure 47) The Beesons’ conflation of design with art, and the subsequent idea that manufactured artefacts were works of art, merely served to increase the value and status of the objects in the collection.<sup>119</sup> This transformation of the object from an artefact, the product of craft, to an art object was largely effected through the selection and pricing mechanisms of the art market and demand from collectors like the Beesons.<sup>120</sup>

### **The ‘Best Period’**

Age, artistic merit, and value in Wedgwood ceramics were all bound to the period of Josiah Wedgwood’s leadership. In the history of ceramics, it is predominantly by factory that the objects are distinguished and studied, and it is the work of individuals

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<sup>114</sup> Ibid.

<sup>115</sup> Meteyard, (1873), *op. cit.*, pp. 10-11.

<sup>116</sup> Lucille Beeson to Ann Brodkiewicz, 27 June 1965, BMAA.

<sup>117</sup> Lucille Beeson to Ann Brodkiewicz, 26 July 1966, BMAA.

<sup>118</sup> Lucille Beeson 1963 Catalogue entry.

<sup>119</sup> Forty, (1986), *op. cit.*, p. 7.

<sup>120</sup> See James Clifford, ‘Collecting Ourselves’, in *Interpreting Objects and Collections*, ed by Susan Pearce, (London: Routledge, 1994), p. 262. Clifford examines the way in which the collecting system may ascribe new classifications to objects affecting both their value and their circulation in social hierarchies.

within different companies which help to differentiate objects as quality pieces. Wedgwood is distinctive in being a manufactured commodity so closely bound with an individual. In the Beesons' era, collecting Wedgwood pottery had 'increased a hundredfold' according to the author and Wedgwood employee Harry Barnard.<sup>121</sup> For that reason, Barnard wrote, it behoved 'the newly starting collector to be alert and as well informed as possible, for a great mass of Wedgwood, genuine enough from the fact that it has issued from the factory at Etruria, has come into the antique market, much of it very beautiful in colour and workmanship, but of a later period than that which is rightly understood as "Old Wedgwood", namely, pieces made during the lifetime of the Founder of Etruria, Josiah Wedgwood, F.R.S., 1730-1795.'<sup>122</sup> We see here the conflation of the product, in actuality the work of numerous hands, and the identity of Josiah Wedgwood, the idea that he himself was involved in the process and thus implicated in its perceived perfection. This modernist narrative of culture obscured the production of the goods, substituting in its place 'a history of culture focused on artistic production, individualism, originality, genius, [and] aestheticism'.<sup>123</sup> The identification of the piece with the name of Josiah Wedgwood served as a kind of brand recognition, one which was rare amongst potteries. As was pointed out at a Wedgwood exhibition held at the Victoria and Albert Museum in 1959, the potter's art was 'conducted by a team of workers, each contributing his share in a series of mutually dependent operations'.<sup>124</sup> For this reason, the curator said, 'few individual potters have left a name that has significance for the public at large; what is remembered is the name and collective personality of the factory'.<sup>125</sup> Josiah Wedgwood was one of the few exceptions.

Determining the age of a piece could assure perceived quality and value, and yet the identification of the 'best period' was contentious. For many authors, the pieces produced during the period of Josiah Wedgwood and Thomas Bentley's partnership (1769-1780) constituted the finest works. In *Investing in Pottery and Porcelain*, Hugo Morely-Fletcher commented that, 'The greatest appreciation is to be found

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<sup>121</sup> Barnard, (1970), *op. cit.*, p. 39.

<sup>122</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>123</sup> Ann Bermingham and John Brewer, eds, *The Consumption of Culture*, (London and New York: Routledge, 1995), p. 3.

<sup>124</sup> Trenchard Cox in the Foreword to the *Wedgwood Bicentenary Exhibition 1759-1959*, Victoria and Albert Museum, (London: Eyre and Spottiswoode Limited, 1959).

<sup>125</sup> Cox, (1959), *op. cit.*, foreword.

among the wares of the Wedgwood & Bentley period. There is perhaps no other mark which has so radical an effect on the value of the pieces on which it appears.’<sup>126</sup>

Buten wrote that the best pieces were made during the years of Wedgwood’s partnership with Bentley, producing ‘the world’s best ceramics’.<sup>127</sup> Yet, any objects produced during Josiah Wedgwood’s lifetime were more desirable than those made after his death in 1795, which Morely-Fletcher said marked ‘the end of the great era of production at the factory’.<sup>128</sup> Despite the fact that the cream-wares, basalts and jasper continued to be made in the nineteenth century, they were ‘mere reproductions of the earlier wares’ and ‘quality fell off considerably and the attention to the finishing of pieces was much less.’<sup>129</sup> According to Professor Church, Wedgwood was the ‘guiding spirit of his factory and best and most skilful workman in the place’ when he became an independent master-potter at the Ivy House Works.<sup>130</sup> Yet, after Wedgwood’s death,

...the loss of the master soon made itself felt. The guiding and controlling spirit was gone. Refinement of material, care in execution, and delicacy of colour were no longer demanded in the same uncompromising manner as heretofore. There soon set in a mechanical and artistic decadence from which any recovery that may have been made during the present century was never more than partial and spasmodic.<sup>131</sup>

Many of the established American Wedgwood collectors of the post-World War Two era concentrated their acquisitions on the wares of the eighteenth century. Samuel Oster, who began collecting in the 1930s, adhered to this system of value.<sup>132</sup> When describing the collection in 1966, *The American Wedgwoodian* stated that Oster had ‘learned to discriminate carefully before purchase, to confine himself to the period of Josiah Wedgwood’s workmanship, and to see the over-all design for a comprehensive

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<sup>126</sup> Hugo Morley-Fletcher, *Investing in Pottery and Porcelain*, (New York: Clarkson N. Potter, Inc., 1968), p. 52.

<sup>127</sup> Buten, (1964), *op. cit.*, p. 6.

<sup>128</sup> Morely-Fletcher, (1968), *op. cit.*, p. 50.

<sup>129</sup> Morley-Fletcher, (1968), *op. cit.*, p. 50.

<sup>130</sup> A.H. Church, ‘Josiah Wedgwood’ *The Portfolio*, No. 3, March 1894, (London: Seeley & Co.), pp. 15-16.

<sup>131</sup> Church, (1894), *op. cit.*, p. 63.

<sup>132</sup> Oster, a Wedgwood collector based in Philadelphia, was a fellow member of the WIS. Pieces from his collection that *The American Wedgwoodian* described as memorable were a plaque of a Frightened Horse designed by Stubbs, Queen’s ware monteiths and baskets, the anti-slavery medallion sent to Benjamin Franklin, and a copy of the Portland Vase. They described his collection as ‘a truly representative gathering of Josiah Wedgwood’s main concerns’. See *The American Wedgwoodian*, vol. III, no. 6, February 1971. The Beesons attempted to purchase the Oster collection at the time of Mr. Oster’s death, but were prohibited by the price his wife was asking. See Lucille Beeson to Mrs. Oster, 10 June 1971, BMAA.

collection'.<sup>133</sup> When the Beesons began the process of upgrading their collection, they made the decision to focus on the eighteenth century wares. After visiting an exhibition of eighteenth century Wedgwood at the Paine Art Center in Oshkosh, Wisconsin in 1965, Mrs. Beeson commented that she had found the 'quality of the pieces most impressive' and determined at this point to concentrate on objects from this era.<sup>134</sup> Mr. Beeson wrote that by 1966 the collection contained between one hundred and seventy and one hundred and eighty pieces of Wedgwood and Bentley and that a large percentage of their pieces were 'early, many, of course, being of the first period'.<sup>135</sup> (Figure 48) They sold off a number of their 'less desirable pieces', which Mr. Beeson wrote, were 'certainly not museum pieces'.<sup>136</sup> Despite having been offered 'some real nice pieces', Mr. Beeson began turning these objects down because they were 'in a position to really stick to first period and Wedgwood and Bentley'.<sup>137</sup> Mrs. Beeson later added that 'the serious collector' strove to obtain not only those wares produced during the 'first period' of Josiah Wedgwood's lifetime but especially sought 'Wedgwood which was produced during the twelve years, 1769-1780, that Wedgwood was in partnership with Thomas Bentley'.<sup>138</sup> She went on to remark proudly that their collection held two hundred and forty-five pieces 'bearing the Wedgwood and Bentley mark, more than any other private collectors in the nation'.<sup>139</sup> Towards the end of her life, Mrs. Beeson was able to expand this boast, for by then, she said, their collection had more Wedgwood and Bentley 'which is the best period...than any other collection in the world'.<sup>140</sup>

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<sup>133</sup> L.E. Hawes, 'The Oster Collection', *The American Wedgwoodian*, vol. II, no. 5, December 1966, p. 90.

<sup>134</sup> Elizabeth Bryding Henley, 'News From Birmingham: The Dwight and Lucille Beeson Wedgwood Collection', *Thirty-Fourth Annual Wedgwood International Seminar*, Sponsored by The High Museum of Art and The Ceramic Circle of Atlanta, Atlanta, GA, 1989, pp. 97-99, p. 97.

<sup>135</sup> Dwight Beeson to Mellanay Delhom, 15 July 1966, BMAA.

<sup>136</sup> Ibid.

<sup>137</sup> Ibid. By this point the Beesons had made the decision to donate the collection to a public museum, see Chapter 4.

<sup>138</sup> '...So Vast a Collection', *Birmingham*, the Official Monthly Publication of the Birmingham Area Chamber of Commerce, vol. 6, no. 11, November 1967.

<sup>139</sup> Ibid. See also Lucille Beeson, 'Josiah Wedgwood: Potter and Business Man', unpublished talk to the Shades Valley Rotary Club, 26 November 1968, BMAA, where Mrs. Beeson wrote that 'Collectors strive to own a few pieces marked "Wedgwood & Bentley"...May I be immodest and tell you that our collection has some 250 marked Wedgwood & Bentley pieces?'

<sup>140</sup> Karla Klein Albertson, 'Lucille Stewart Beeson shares some thoughts on the growth of her Wedgwood collection', *Antique Review*, November 1992, no pagination.



Despite the Beesons' commitment to pieces manufactured during the partnership of Wedgwood and Bentley, there were plenty of authors and authorities on Wedgwood who considered the best period to have been after Bentley's death. Many nineteenth-century writers seem to have been so concerned with emphasising the individual genius and unique contribution of Wedgwood that they downplayed the importance of Bentley.<sup>141</sup> This was in part due to the fact that the correspondence from Bentley to Wedgwood did not survive, and yet the name of Wedgwood became so dominant that other significant figures were often ignored, or at best undervalued.<sup>142</sup> Blame for this omission has been placed at the feet of Wedgwood biographers, especially Eliza Meteyard, on whom so many later authors were dependent. Although she did praise Bentley in her eulogising text<sup>143</sup>, his importance was insufficiently appreciated because he was viewed as 'little more than a distant and temporary satellite of Wedgwood's rather than as a near-equal partner, who made a very significant personal contribution to their success'.<sup>144</sup> Meteyard was not alone however, as Professor Church wrote that the products most sought after were those produced during the 'period of perfection' between 1781 and 1795.<sup>145</sup> During this period, he wrote, the factory produced its 'most beautiful medallions and plaques'.<sup>146</sup> He continued that, 'Although ornamental vases of other material had been made long before 1781, it was not until that year that Wedgwood began producing them in his jasper-paste: this was after the death of Bentley'.<sup>147</sup> Similarly Rathbone contended that the finest work was not attempted until the jasper was perfected.<sup>148</sup>

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<sup>141</sup> Fredrick Rathbone did not mention Bentley in *Old Wedgwood and Old Wedgwood Ware* (1885) and in *Old Wedgwood* (1898) he appears primarily as Josiah Wedgwood's correspondent rather than a partner with any influence. Samuel Smiles wrote that the ornamental works that Bentley would have to superintend included 'toilet furniture, elegant teachests, snauff and other boxes', thus downplaying his role in the production of vases, cameos and tablets, the more highly regarded of the decorative wares. Samuel Smiles, *Josiah Wedgwood*, (London: John Murray, 1897), p. 88.

<sup>142</sup> Neil McKendrick, 'Josiah Wedgwood and Thomas Bentley: An Inventor-Entrepreneur Partnership in the Industrial Revolution' in *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, (London: Offices of the Royal Historical Society, 1964), Fifth Series, Volume 14, pp. 1-33, p. 5.

<sup>143</sup> When Meteyard introduced the partnership between Wedgwood and Bentley she called it 'one of the noblest friendships on record... Their personal characteristics so supplemented each other, that the union was absolutely perfect; a marriage of intellect, taste, and truth.' See Meteyard, (1865), *op. cit.*, p. xvi.

<sup>144</sup> McKendrick, (1964), *op. cit.*, pp. 1-33. p. 32-33.

<sup>145</sup> Church, (1894), *op. cit.*, p. 32-35.

<sup>146</sup> Church, (1894), *op. cit.*, p. 81.

<sup>147</sup> Church, (1894), *op. cit.*, p. 62.

<sup>148</sup> Rathbone, (1909), *op. cit.*, p. 19. In November 1775 Josiah Wedgwood referred to this new material for the first time by the name Jasper, though experiments had been underway for several years. It was not until November 1777 that he declared he could make the ware with as much facility and certainty

For Mrs. Beeson, who was allegedly first attracted to Wedgwood by the application of design on the jasperware, this medium was especially suited to the distinction between craft ceramics and fine art. She wrote that if there was any one body they preferred it would have to be the jasperware, and noted that the collector looked for attention to detail in the production of 'the old, fine wares'.<sup>149</sup> She explained that the relief decoration on the jasperware was applied upon the object causing 'little bits of clay' from the mould to 'lay upon the vase in an uneven manner and make an ugly blurred line.'<sup>150</sup> (Figure 49) The decorator would then have to 'take a little tool and work over the whole decoration, be it a leaf, figure or border design.'<sup>151</sup> It was this process of refinement which required the craftsman to work as 'a sculptor'.<sup>152</sup> She called these figures on the vases and other ornamental wares 'Little Sculptures', noting that 'all the fine, early work will have been "undercut" and worked over'.<sup>153</sup> To look at these 'bas reliefs... [was] to see not imperfections but perfection'.<sup>154</sup>

In choosing the jasperwares as the large proportion of their collection, the Beesons were again following established conventions in Wedgwood collecting.<sup>155</sup> (Figure 50) Rathbone created a narrative of linear progress in which Josiah Wedgwood began his career producing useful domestic ware, moved on to the production of ornamental and decorative pieces, and culminated his career with the invention and perfection of 'that most beautiful body ever adopted in ceramic art - the "Jasper"' which made the finest work possible.<sup>156</sup> The success Josiah Wedgwood had in the manufacture of tableware 'allowed him to consider the production of decorative art-work'.<sup>157</sup> This progression ensured that, for collectors it was the 'old' ware which was the most desirable. Church wrote in 1894 that the eighteenth century jasperware was 'the most original and the most beautiful of all the ceramic materials with which [Wedgwood]

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as the black ware. Jasperware is a form of pottery that has a fine-grained stoneware body which is either white or coloured and is noted for its matte finish.

<sup>149</sup> Lucille Beeson, talk given to the Ceramic Hobby Club, date unknown, BMAA.

<sup>150</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>151</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>152</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>153</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>154</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>155</sup> The jasperware alone accounted for over half of the items in the collection.

<sup>156</sup> Rathbone, (1909), *op. cit.*, p. 19.

<sup>157</sup> Rathbone, (1909), *op. cit.*, p. 49.

worked'.<sup>158</sup> Not only was the 'smoothness of surface of this ware, as made by Josiah Wedgwood... delightful at once to the senses of touch and sight' moreover, it afforded 'one of the best criteria for distinguishing old work from new'.<sup>159</sup> Age, even of this most revered of materials, determined value. While eighteenth century jasperware was 'the most beautiful' material, the nineteenth century wares were 'granular... in appearance and rough to the finger'.<sup>160</sup> One factor in determining the value of the jasperware was that it was considered 'of so remarkable a character... so distinctly an original invention of [Wedgwood's] own - that it [demanded] separate discussion.'<sup>161</sup> Specifically, the jasperware vases, 'classic in shape, enriched with patterns and designs of greatest perfection' were 'the aim of every collector of "Old Wedgwood"'.<sup>162</sup>

### **Bentley and Neo-classicism**

Perhaps one reason the Beesons found the manufacture produced during the Wedgwood and Bentley partnership the most appealing was that it was during this stage that neo-classical design became an important element. When Wedgwood began producing pottery independently in 1759, he made the rococo-inspired 'pineapple' and 'cauliflower' wares with vivid green glazes that were common in the region. (Figure 10) The tea service he made for Queen Charlotte in 1765 was also in the rococo manner, deriving its shape from contemporary silver.<sup>163</sup> That same year Wedgwood was taking ideas from Meissen porcelain lent to him by Sir William Meredith and studying the service of Sèvres porcelain belonging to the Duke of Bedford.<sup>164</sup> Wedgwood used source material for the designs of his vases that was resolutely un-classical in its design, such as the *Livre de vases* by Jacques de Stella, (Figure 51) yet the Wedgwood that the Beesons knew and loved was defined by its 'elegance' and 'simplicity' and the rococo was positively shunned.<sup>165</sup> The stylistic shift of Wedgwood's products from the rococo to classicism was presaged in other areas of design such as architecture and furniture. Chippendale's first edition of the

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<sup>158</sup> Church, (1894), *op. cit.*, pp. 32-35.

<sup>159</sup> Church, (1894), *op. cit.*, p. 32.

<sup>160</sup> Church, (1894), *op. cit.*, pp. 32-35.

<sup>161</sup> Church, (1894), *op. cit.*, p. 31.

<sup>162</sup> Moore, (1909), *op. cit.*, p. 58.

<sup>163</sup> The tea set was manufactured in the cream ware with green enamel decoration and gilding. No example from the set survives.

<sup>164</sup> *Wedgwood Bicentenary Exhibition, op. cit.*, p. 6.

<sup>165</sup> *Ibid.*

*Director* in 1754 included rococo designs for furniture, while later editions were far more classical. In 1712 Lord Shaftesbury criticised the architecture of Wren on account of its ‘perceived stylistic licentiousness and lack of vigour’, a criticism which was shortly followed by the publication of Colin Campbell’s *Virtruvius Britannicus* (vol. 1, 1715) and Giacomo Leoni’s English translation of Palladio’s *I Quattro Libri dell’Architettura* (1715-16).<sup>166</sup> These publications have been seen to signal a new approach to architecture which centred on Palladianism.<sup>167</sup> British classicism was diversely applied, often characterised by its refusal to adhere to a strictly Italianate formulae.<sup>168</sup> This classicism, whether in architecture, furniture or ceramic design was understood as a national style aligning British culture with Augustan Rome.<sup>169</sup> In the twentieth century Wedgwood exhibitions, such as the one held at the Victoria and Albert Museum in 1959, have celebrated the move towards neo-classicism, quoting, for example, a letter in which Wedgwood suggested that his tastes were changing; ‘I am quite clearing my Warehouse of Colour’d ware, am heartily sick of the commodity and have been so long’.<sup>170</sup> His letters throughout 1767, the catalogue assured its reader, referred more and more to vases and the name he gave the new factory, ‘Etruria’, indicated the ‘direction of his thought’.<sup>171</sup> The leading characteristics of Wedgwood ceramics for the curators at the Victoria and Albert Museum were ‘clarity of outline and repose’ and ‘even the colouring’ marked a reaction ‘against the glitter and brilliance of the porcelain that had been so popular during the vogue of the rococo’.<sup>172</sup>

It was the influence of Bentley, however, which led to these new ideas for Josiah Wedgwood and the productions of the factory. It was Bentley who regularly visited ‘Old Slaughters’ coffeehouse in St. Martin’s Lane along with Sir Joseph Banks and James ‘Athenian’ Stuart.<sup>173</sup> Bentley read Winckelmann, borrowed works of the

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<sup>166</sup> Dana Arnold, *The Georgian Country House*, (Stroud: Sutton, 1998), p. 12. Lord Shaftesbury (1671-1713) composed his letter while in Italy.

<sup>167</sup> Arnold, *op. cit.*, p. 13.

<sup>168</sup> Arnold, *op. cit.*, p. 14.

<sup>169</sup> Arnold, *op. cit.*, p. 15.

<sup>170</sup> *Wedgwood Bicentenary Exhibition, op. cit.*, p. 6. The letter was dated July 1766.

<sup>171</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>172</sup> *Wedgwood Bicentenary Exhibition, op. cit.*, p. 6-7.

<sup>173</sup> Gaye Blake Roberts, et al., *Wedgwood in London: 225<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Exhibition 1759-1984*, (Josiah Wedgwood & Sons Ltd, 1984), p. 8. Sir Joseph Banks (1743-1820) was a naturalist, botanist and science patron. James ‘Athenian’ Stuart (c. 1713-1788) was an architect, archaeologist, and painter. In 1748, Stuart went to Naples to study the ancient ruins and as a member of the Society of Dilettanti also

Comte de Caylus, and won the friendship of Hamilton and Stuart.<sup>174</sup> Bentley, as assiduous with the aristocracy as he was friendly with the virtuosi, dilettanti and cognoscenti, also helped Wedgwood to win the patronage of the nobility, artists and connoisseurs.<sup>175</sup> One of the first studies to analyse the role of Bentley was Neil McKendrick's paper 'Josiah Wedgwood and Thomas Bentley: An Inventor-Entrepreneur Partnership in the Industrial Revolution', delivered at the Royal Historical Society in 1963.<sup>176</sup> In his analysis the pair played complementary roles, with Wedgwood as the inventor and Bentley as the entrepreneur. Wedgwood 'supplied the energy, the drive, the muscular determination to succeed; ... the technical knowledge in production, the inventive skill in experiment, and the industrial leadership in the factory', while Bentley 'provided many of the mercantile ideas, the commercial contacts, entrepreneurial gambits, social introductions, and knowledge of the market'.<sup>177</sup> From his location at the factory, Wedgwood developed new glazes, worked to improve the jasperware, and made notes on firing temperatures. Bentley was the urbane salesman who ran the London showrooms. McKendrick's argument is supported by Wedgwood's distinction between their roles in a letter of 20 September 1779; 'In the distribution of our employment between us the manufacturing has fallen to my lot and the sales to yours'.<sup>178</sup> For McKendrick, Wedgwood without Bentley would have been 'a technician without a salesman, an inventor without an entrepreneur, a maker without a market'.<sup>179</sup> It was Bentley's taste which moulded the style of the company's products and the trading activities, but Wedgwood who provided the new inventions and refinements in the ceramic

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travelled to Greece making measurements and drawings of the ancient ruins there. On return to London in 1755 he published his work in *The Antiquities of Athens*, (London, 1762).

<sup>174</sup> McKendrick, (1964), *op. cit.*, p. 24. Johann Joachim Winckelmann (1717-1768) was a German art historian and archaeologist who first articulated the difference between Greek, Greco-Roman and Roman art, providing an influence on the neo-classical movement. The Comte de Caylus (1692-1765) was a French archaeologist who travelled in Italy, Greece, the Levant, England and Germany, devoting much time to the study and collection of antiquities. Chief among his antiquarian works was the illustrated *Recueil d'antiquites egyptiennes, etrusques, grecques, romaines et gauloises* (6 vols., Paris, 1752-1755), which was used by designers throughout the eighteenth century.

<sup>175</sup> McKendrick, (1964), *op. cit.*, p. 22.

<sup>176</sup> McKendrick, (1964), *op. cit.*, pp. 1-33. This characterisation of the partners is reminiscent of other such partnerships in literature devoted to architecture and design. See for example John Summerson's text *Architecture in Britain, 1530-1830*, (Harmondsworth : Penguin, 1969) for the relationship between architects Nicholas Hawksmoor (1661-1736) and Sir John Vanbrugh (c. 1664-1726) and Eileen Harris, *The Furniture of Robert Adam*, (London: A. Tiranti, 1963) for the relationship between Robert Adam and Thomas Chippendale.

<sup>177</sup> McKendrick, (1964), *op. cit.*, pp. 5-6.

<sup>178</sup> Josiah Wedgwood to Thomas Bentley, 20 September 1779, Keele University Archive, E26-18925.

<sup>179</sup> McKendrick, (1964), *op. cit.*, p. 32.

industry.<sup>180</sup> In the literature on Wedgwood (and it is primarily through Wedgwood that one confronts Bentley) the two are painted as opposites attracted; ‘the dogmatic Josiah and the academic Thomas, the country potter and the city society man’.<sup>181</sup>

Bentley introduced the taste for classical forms to Wedgwood and, in most accounts of their partnership, Bentley is portrayed as the more refined and educated of the pair. At the beginning of the partnership in 1769, Bentley already had twenty-three years experience as a wholesale merchant in Liverpool and he had travelled abroad,<sup>182</sup> he spoke both Italian and French, was well grounded in the Classics<sup>183</sup>, and well-connected through both marriage and his involvement in innumerable clubs and societies.<sup>184</sup> Other designers and architects, such as Robert Adam, had also participated in the Grand Tour, where they studied classical monuments and brought these experiences back to London. Bentley’s classical training, along with his Grand Tour travels throughout Europe, placed him in a better position to speak with fashion-conscious Londoners. It was he who determined marketability and who provided connections like Joseph Priestley, Erasmus Darwin, Matthew Boulton and Sir William Hamilton.<sup>185</sup> Wedgwood himself commented that while he would have enjoyed the polite company of Bentley’s dinner parties in London, he would have to be ‘content with *fashioning my clay* at an humble distance from such company & live, breathe, & dye, amongst animals but one remove above the Earth they are teasing’.<sup>186</sup> Bentley, from his station in London, passed information to Wedgwood concerning the latest trends and fashions of the day.<sup>187</sup> He interpreted the needs of the new fashion and directed Wedgwood’s talents in the direction that would satisfy them.<sup>188</sup> It was also Bentley who directed Wedgwood away from the more rococo styles, passing on for example Hamilton’s warning of the dangers of gilding, deeming such decoration as

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<sup>180</sup> Roberts, et al., (1984), *op. cit.*, p. 5.

<sup>181</sup> Roberts, et al., (1984), *op. cit.*, p. 7.

<sup>182</sup> In 1753 he visited both France and Italy.

<sup>183</sup> He was educated at the Presbyterian Collegiate Academy near Derby, where he acquired his linguistic and classical background.

<sup>184</sup> McKendrick, (1964), *op. cit.*, pp. 10-11.

<sup>185</sup> Joseph Priestley (1733-1804), see Chapter 1. note 36. Erasmus Darwin (1731-182) was a physician and a founding member of the Lunar Society. One of his sons went on to marry Wedgwood’s daughter. The Beesons would later purchase the copy of the Portland Vase that was given to Darwin by Josiah Wedgwood. Matthew Boulton (1728-1809), see Chapter 1, note 36.

<sup>186</sup> Josiah Wedgwood to John Wedgwood, 11 March 1765, Keele University Archive, E25-18071.

<sup>187</sup> McKendrick, (1964), *op. cit.*, p. 22.

<sup>188</sup> McKendrick, (1964), *op. cit.*, p. 25.

‘offensive’.<sup>189</sup> Wedgwood was initially reluctant to adopt the sparse design ethos of neo-classicism, complaining that he did ‘not find it an easy matter to make a Vase with the colouring so natural... and the shape so delicate, as to make it seem worth a great deal of money, without the additional trappings of handles, ornaments and Gilding’.<sup>190</sup> Yet, the recommendation of Hamilton, at the source of the revival in Naples, along with that of Bentley led to the banishment of gilding, that last vestige of rococo taste, from Wedgwood’s vases.<sup>191</sup>

Another plausible reason for the enduring popularity among the wares marked Wedgwood and Bentley lies in the organisation of the factory. By the late 1760s the business was divided into two branches, the useful ware under the charge of Josiah Wedgwood’s cousin, Thomas Wedgwood and the ornamental ware, under the care of Thomas Bentley.<sup>192</sup> (Figure 52) The development of Josiah Wedgwood’s fame is often written as dependent on the shift from the fabrication of useful wares to the manufacture of decorative objects. In 1927, the Victoria & Albert Museum published a short illustrated catalogue of Wedgwood ware in which two significant events were offered as fundamental turning points in the history of Josiah Wedgwood and his career; the first was the development of ‘the more ornamental basalts and jasper wares’, while the second was the partnership with Thomas Bentley, whose ‘dilettante tastes... did much to extend the business of the firm among polite society’.<sup>193</sup> Ornamental wares, used to decorate the homes of Wedgwood’s wealthy and aristocratic patrons, were granted the veneer of a higher art form than the useful wares used in the kitchens and parlours of the middle classes. Their classical forms, Joseph Mayer wrote, reflected the ‘highest development of art’. Mayer reminded his reader that the Greeks had been ‘in the habit of raising statues to their great potters, and striking medals in their honour... the Greeks looked upon the potter’s craft, in its artistic forms, with great respect’.<sup>194</sup> However, the factor that ensured this respect

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<sup>189</sup> Josiah Wedgwood to Thomas Bentley, 11 April 1772, Keele University Archive, E25-18365.

<sup>190</sup> Ibid.

<sup>191</sup> McKendrick, (1964), *op. cit.*, p. 25.

<sup>192</sup> Moore, however, is quick to tell his reader that despite this division ‘Josiah Wedgwood was the moving spirit of both enterprises’. Moore, (1909), *op. cit.*, p. 10.

<sup>193</sup> *A Picture Book of Wedgwood Ware*, (London: Waterlow & Sons Limited for the Victoria & Albert Museum, 1927), see Introduction. The un-named author goes on to predict that it was the creamware whose reputation would last the longest, describing the neo-classical jasperware beloved by the Beesons as ‘frigid imitations of Greek art’ which showed ‘small understanding of Greek culture’.

<sup>194</sup> Joseph Mayer, *On the Art of Pottery*, (Liverpool: D. Marples, 1871), p. 21-22.

was that these vases were ‘rarely or never found to bear traces of usage’.<sup>195</sup> Rathbone illustrated the distinction between the goods made for use and those with a purely decorative purpose by directing the reader to Josiah Wedgwood’s own division of the two branches of manufacture. He quoted;

May not useful ware be comprehended under the simple definition as such vessels as are ‘*made use of at meals*’. This appears to one to be the most simple and natural line[...] I am getting some boxes made neatly, and lined with silk or some fine stuff, to keep and show the tablets in. We should use every means in our power to make our customers believe they are not The Ware.<sup>196</sup> (1770)

For Marryat, the value of Wedgwood’s creamware was ‘purely domestic and commercial’ while

Wedgwood’s more beautiful inventions, those on which his fame in the realms of art is based... are his various terracotta wares, his basalt, jasper or onyx, granite, and porphyry productions, which come under the class of stoneware. These he caused to be so exquisitely embellished, and to be moulded into forms so truly chaste and classical, that they are daily rising in estimation, and now, sixty years after his death, connoisseurs are eager to purchase them at three times their original price.<sup>197</sup>

### **Authenticity: the Copy and the Fake**

When the Beesons exhibited their collection at the Birmingham Museum of Art in 1978 they included a vitrine in what they dubbed the ‘Fun Corner’.<sup>198</sup> (Figure 53) In this display objects attempting to copy or reference Wedgwood’s jasper ware and encaustic painted basalt ware were incorporated in order to pose questions about authenticity, and to challenge the visitor’s response to them. The aesthetic pleasure to be drawn from these items was compared with the pleasure one might derive from the authentic Wedgwood products. The superiority of Wedgwood’s ceramics, as compared to the production of his peers and imitators, was reinforced in the Beesons’ catalogue of their collection. In 1971, the Beesons purchased four intaglios for the relatively nominal sum of ten dollars each.<sup>199</sup> (Figure 54) These items, in the style of Wedgwood but manufactured by a different factory, were purchased in order to

<sup>195</sup> Mayer, (1871), *op. cit.*, p. 24.

<sup>196</sup> Rathbone, (1909), *op. cit.*, p. 18.

<sup>197</sup> Marryat, (1857), *op. cit.*, p. 161.

<sup>198</sup> Chapter Four will deal with the donation and display of the collection in the museum in further detail. Buten’s Museum similarly had a gallery called the ‘Chamber of Horrors’, where Wedgwood imitators were exhibited. See Eleanor Pilling, ‘Butens’ Have Own Museum to Display 9000 Piece Collection of Wedgwood’, *Suburban West News*, Philadelphia, 26 January 1969.

<sup>199</sup> Lucille Beeson Catalogue entry nos. 1026, 1027, 1032, 1033. BMAA. Similar Wedgwood intaglios were purchased for \$50 each in 1965. See Lucille Beeson catalogue, entry no. 45, BMAA.



provide examples of imitators of Wedgwood. When referring to the four intaglios, Mrs. Beeson noted that they were ‘fairly well made but NOT as well as Wedgwood examples in our collection’ and that ‘when viewed by loop a grain-like surface is revealed... not smooth as a Wedgwood example’.<sup>200</sup> Similarly, the Beesons purchased a covered jar by the eighteenth century potter John Turner for comparison with Wedgwood pieces. (Figure 55) Mrs. Beeson’s comments on the jar included her criticisms on its colour: it had a ‘slight greenish tint’, its decoration: the handle had been applied over the relief decoration, and the use of proportion: the head of one of the figures was deemed ‘too small’.<sup>201</sup>

The Beesons, in their derision of potters working in a similar style to Wedgwood, were following an established tradition in the literature devoted to Wedgwood collecting. Meteyard was the first to isolate Wedgwood from his contemporaries;

Towering high as he did above his contemporaries in the potter’s art, by his profound insight into the relation and bearings of chemical affinities, by his exquisite taste, by a high standard of morality, which developed, as it were, every point of his great powers to the full, Wedgwood was surrounded by a host of able men, many of whom, not overburdened with principle, and quick enough to see the profit to be reaped, became unscrupulous imitators.<sup>202</sup>

According to Meteyard, any craftsman working in a similar style was deemed a copyist and it was in this way that ‘most of Wedgwood’s inventions and improvements were, as far as possible, stolen as soon as made by a worthless set of petty manufacturers’.<sup>203</sup> Meteyard hoped to assuage the threat of collectors being duped into purchasing the products of these ‘petty manufacturers’ and modern imitators with her own publication of *The Wedgwood Handbook: A Manual for Collectors* (1875). She had great hopes that its arrival, scheduled for the spring ‘sale-period’, would furnish collectors and purchasers ‘with those technical signs of “true Old Wedgwood”’, which would ‘arm them against the arts of those who now more than ever carry on a profitable trade by the disposal of vamped up specimens of the worst kind.’<sup>204</sup> These specimens included ‘a modern and prolific “get up” probably continental’ who were producing ‘worthless imitations’ as well as ‘the forgeries,

<sup>200</sup> Ibid. ‘Loop’ is spelled here in American English.

<sup>201</sup> Lucille Beeson 1963 Catalogue entry no. 2301. BMAA.

<sup>202</sup> Meteyard, (1866), *op. cit.*, p. 136.

<sup>203</sup> Meteyard, (1865), *op. cit.*, p. 137.

<sup>204</sup> Meteyard, (1874), *op. cit.*, p. 137.

foreign and English, of Wedgwood's own time' which were then being 'brought unblushingly in to the market'.<sup>205</sup> These 'worthless, and in every sense base, fabrications' were 'an insult to the fame of the great master; and to Etruria'.<sup>206</sup>

Frederick Rathbone, however, did not perceive the threat of these 'copyists' as seriously as Meteyard. He wrote that;

Miss Meteyard often mentions the subject of piracy and the care that Wedgwood took to prevent his new creations being copied by the tribe of imitators. But where are these forgeries? No one has seen them - some should remain if they were ever made. During the last thirty years the writer can only remember two instances of fraud in connection with Wedgwood.<sup>207</sup>

Rathbone acknowledged that collectors were likely to come across pieces in similar colour and style to Wedgwood productions 'in the form of inkstands, ash-trays, mustard-pots and the like in coarse blue and white stoneware', yet these examples were 'not likely to deceive any serious collector - if he is not easily pleased'.<sup>208</sup> He warned that 'all is not gold that glitters', and that much of the 'imitation blue pottery, with white reliefs' that was offered for sale was not Wedgwood.<sup>209</sup> However, the quality of the workmanship did not warrant its 'being considered as a colourable imitation'.<sup>210</sup> While Wedgwood marks had been 'forged or imitated', according to Rathbone, these forged works were of 'very little importance' as the pieces were of 'such poor quality as works of art, that no one would care to put them in the same cabinet with the genuine examples'.<sup>211</sup>

Rathbone praised Wedgwood, who he said 'did not selfishly keep all his trade secrets to himself, but gave to his brother potters in the locality and to all Europe the benefit of his experience'.<sup>212</sup> Yet he later went on to say that;

The extraordinary success of Wedgwood's useful and decorative pieces, had the natural effect of tempting other potters to copy his designs, materials, and colours. Imitation is said to be flattery, but it must have been a serious annoyance to find, that after years of experimental efforts, at unlimited

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<sup>205</sup> Ibid.

<sup>206</sup> Ibid.

<sup>207</sup> Rathbone, (1898), *op. cit.*, p. 89.

<sup>208</sup> Rathbone, (1909), *op. cit.*, p. 50.

<sup>209</sup> Ibid.

<sup>210</sup> Ibid.

<sup>211</sup> Rathbone, (1909), *op. cit.*, p. 34-35.

<sup>212</sup> Rathbone, (1909), *op. cit.*, p. 3

expense, and worry: your rivals promptly copied the perfected result, and stamp[ed] their own name upon the copy.<sup>213</sup>

Although Rathbone categorised this kind of copying as an annoyance, he validated Wedgwood's own reproductions of antique works such as the Portland Vase.

Wedgwood, Rathbone reminded his reader, considered the diffusion of the fine arts through reproductions as beneficial to mankind.<sup>214</sup>

Of course, Wedgwood himself was a copyist. Wedgwood copied not only the Portland Vase when it came to England, but also employed images and forms derived from the four-volume edition of Sir William Hamilton's *Collection of Etruscan, Greek and Roman Antiquities* (Naples, 1766-1776).<sup>215</sup> (Figures 56 & 57) Hamilton, who in his role as His British Majesty's Envoy Extraordinary to the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies had been present in Naples during the excavations of Herculaneum and Pompeii, was able to amass a large collection of ancient vases.<sup>216</sup> Through the 1780's ancient vases became sought after objects for collectors' cabinets, and this combined with the boost given to their popularity by the publication of Hamilton's collection, pushed prices to new heights.<sup>217</sup> This opened the field for Wedgwood's reproductions, which were copied from antique vases and the plates reproducing Hamilton's collection.

According to the preface of Hamilton's *Collection*, he was said to be concerned with rendering these 'precious Monuments of the Genius of the Ancients... useful to

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<sup>213</sup> Rathbone, (1909), *op. cit.*, p. 48. Rathbone listed as copyists Sèvres, Dresden, Furstenberg, Buen Retiro and in England Turner, Adams, Neale, and Palmer.

<sup>214</sup> Rathbone, (1909), *op. cit.*, p. 50.

<sup>215</sup> See Vicky Coltman, *Fabricating the Antique: Neoclassicism in Britain, 1760-1800*, (Chicago & London: University of Chicago Press, 2006). Wedgwood acquired proof sheets from Hamilton's brother-in-law, Lord Cathcart, who was one of Wedgwood's aristocratic patrons. Wedgwood seems to have met Hamilton in the early 1770s and they corresponded until Wedgwood's death in 1795. See Nancy Ramage, 'Wedgwood and Sir William Hamilton: Their Personal and Artistic Relationship', *Proceedings of the Thirty-fifth Annual Wedgwood International Seminar* (1990), pp. 71-90.

<sup>216</sup> Hamilton wrote to Wedgwood, 'You cannot conceive how very scarce the true ancient Etruscan vases are now, but one has come to my hands since I returned here, and that of no consequence. My collection at the Museum, I am sure can never be rivalled'. Hamilton to Messrs Wedgwood and Bentley, 6 July 1773, quoted in Ian Jenkins and Kim Sloan, *Vases and Volcanoes: Sir William Hamilton and His Collection*, (London: Published for the Trustees of the British Museum by British Museum Press, 1996), p. 52.

<sup>217</sup> Jenkins and Sloan, (1996), *op. cit.*, p. 52

Artists, to Men of Letters and by their means, to the World in general'.<sup>218</sup> Wedgwood had written in his catalogue of wares that;

Nothing can contribute more effectually to diffuse a good Taste through the Arts, than the Power of multiplying Copies of fine Things, in Materials fit to be applied for Ornaments; by which Means the public Eye is instructed; bad and good Works are nicely distinguished, and all the Arts receive Improvement: nor can there be any surer Way of rendering an exquisite Piece, possessed by an Individual, famous, without diminishing the Value of an Original; for the more Copies there are of any Works, as of the Venus Medicis for instance, the more celebrated the Original will be, and the more Honour derived to the Possessor. Every body wishes to see the Original of a beautiful Copy.<sup>219</sup>

Hamilton wrote to Wedgwood;

It is with infinite satisfaction that I reflect upon having been in some measure instrumental in the introducing a purer taste of forms & Ornaments by having placed my Collection of Antiquities in the British Museum, but a Wedgwood and a Bentley were necessary to diffuse that taste so universally and it is to their liberal way of thinking & acting that so good a taste prevails at present in Great Britain.<sup>220</sup>

Yet both Hamilton and Wedgwood were interested in aspects other than the improvement of taste. Hamilton, the aristocratic collector, was given the opportunity of 'superintending the Arts in England', while Josiah Wedgwood was able to tell members of the aristocratic English establishment that Sir William Hamilton had given the reproductions their original collector's stamp of approval.<sup>221</sup> Other potters might have been following Wedgwood in crafting their wares in a neo-classical style, but they did not have the same access to aristocratic collections, and thus they were denied approval of the owners of the original objects.

Mrs. Beeson wrote that Wedgwood's use of source material for his designs brought up 'much discussion' and 'criticism of the manner in which he selected portions of the ancient arts and applied and adapted them to use on his pottery'.<sup>222</sup> She reminded her reader that Wedgwood was 'a POTTER and a BUSINESS MAN' and that when he had first started his own pottery 'he used objects from nature and scenes of the

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<sup>218</sup> D'Hancarville, *Collection*, I:ii, quoted in Coltman, (2006), *op. cit.*, p. 57.

<sup>219</sup> Wedgwood & Bentley Catalogue Fifth Edition, (London, Greek Street Sale Rooms, 1779).

<sup>220</sup> Sir William Hamilton to Josiah Wedgwood, Keele University Archive, E30-22495.

<sup>221</sup> Charles Greville to Sir William Hamilton, 3 December 1775, quoted in Coltman, (2006), *op. cit.*, p. 85.

<sup>222</sup> Lucille Beeson, 'Wedgwood', date unknown, BMAA.

English country side'.<sup>223</sup> In adapting classical designs, Wedgwood was 'following the taste of the times' as a savvy entrepreneur.<sup>224</sup> Mr. Beeson did not seem to adopt this view quite as rapidly. Mrs. Beeson recounted that in 1961 she and her husband toured Greece and Rome 'visiting some of the many truly classic beauties of the world, noting the treasures in many museums and realizing that we were familiar with many of them, partly because of our study of the SOURCES used by Wedgwood.'<sup>225</sup> Mr. Beeson apparently turned to his wife on seeing these objects stating 'Why, Honey, Wedgwood was just a copy-cat!'<sup>226</sup> Mrs. Beeson admitted 'this was so' but explained that Wedgwood modified his designs, 'just as Adams and others did for the people whom they served' borrowing sections of 'one classic object and then another... to fit into the England of that day'.<sup>227</sup>

In the nineteenth century the Wedgwood factory would often reproduce the designs manufactured under the direction of Josiah Wedgwood.<sup>228</sup> These pieces, unlike the copying of other pottery manufactories, were given approval by Wedgwood authors and collectors. Meteyard commented that the works produced at Etruria were 'in all respects most admirable'.<sup>229</sup> Rathbone wrote that reproductions of ceramics 'made and sold *as reproductions* - not issued with false marks and other indications to deceive collectors' were 'legitimate and customary with many celebrated potteries'.<sup>230</sup> Additionally, it was 'the factory of origin', which, according to Rathbone, had 'the first claim to reproduce choice examples created by their ancestors'.<sup>231</sup> So 'excellent' were many of these reproductions that Rathbone told his reader that they were 'frequently offered and sold by ignorant or scheming dealers as "genuine old Wedgwood"'.<sup>232</sup>

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<sup>223</sup> Ibid.

<sup>224</sup> Ibid.

<sup>225</sup> Ibid.

<sup>226</sup> Ibid.

<sup>227</sup> Ibid.

<sup>228</sup> Rathbone praised the manufactory of 'charming cream-colour Queen's ware for table use... in the style in vogue from 1740 to 1795'.

<sup>229</sup> Meteyard, (1874), *op. cit.*, p. 137.

<sup>230</sup> Rathbone, (1909), *op. cit.*, p. 51.

<sup>231</sup> Ibid.

<sup>232</sup> Ibid. Rathbone is again guiding his reader to a knowledgeable dealer, i.e. himself, for help in distinguishing these newer pieces from the 'Old Wedgwood'.

The concern amongst authors, dealers and collectors with Wedgwood ‘copyists’, and the consequent value of these goods, continued into the twentieth century. Harry Buten devoted a chapter of his *Wedgwood ABC But Not Middle E* to ‘Wedgwood Imitators’, beginning with his one basic rule; ‘All Wedgwood is marked Wedgwood’.<sup>233</sup> Buten, however, said that the main criticism of these competitors was not the quality of the work, acknowledging that ‘many very fine pots were made by outsiders’.<sup>234</sup> The problem with these objects for Buten was that they lacked ‘the spark of genius marking an original creative work’.<sup>235</sup> In a comparison with the fine arts, Buten compared the copying of Wedgwood with the copying of ‘an original Renoir oil painting’; it could be ‘copied beautifully by a skilled technician’, but the student could tell the difference.<sup>236</sup> ‘Technical ability’ he admonished was ‘only one tool that expresses the creativity of the artist or potter’.<sup>237</sup> Rathbone made a similar distinction when writing about Wedgwood imitators;

Clever as some of these contemporary piracies are - even prompting some young collector to say: - “So and so’s ware is quite equal to Wedgwood” etc., etc.: they are, of course inferior to the originals. A clever copy of some great picture, may have the same decorative value as the original, but the power of invention and conception given to the creative genius is forgotten. It is certain that had there been no Josiah Wedgwood and his beautiful works, the imitators and copies would not exist.<sup>238</sup>

For the Beesons, other craftsmen who copied Wedgwood’s ware fell short because authenticity for the connoisseur was founded on an individual creator and his unique creation. The cult of the individual object, of the original, was implicated in the process of denoting artistic value.

### **Collecting Knowledge**

Ownership is a fundamental aspect of collecting. In his lecture at the tenth annual seminar, Harry Buten defined the neophyte collector as one who ‘has acquired at least one piece of Wedgwood and has resolved to be interested in and willing to acquire

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<sup>233</sup> Buten, (1964), *op. cit.*, p. 25. Buten wrote, ‘Many other potters copied Wedgwood’s wares... Some designs, shapes and decoration were copied without change; others were rearranged or adapted with artistry. There have been thousands of imitators but the more able and honest impressed their wares with their own names. Among the best were Adams, Copeland, Herculaneum, Minton, Neale, Turner, J. Wedgwood and Wedgwood & Co. Others did not sign their wares.’

<sup>234</sup> Buten, (1964), *op. cit.*, p. 25.

<sup>235</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>236</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>237</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>238</sup> Rathbone, (1909), *op. cit.*, p. 50.

more'.<sup>239</sup> Buten himself highlighted the fact that over a thirty-seven year period he averaged a yearly purchase of two hundred and thirty-three Wedgwood items.<sup>240</sup> According to the WIS, enthusiasm for the objects was enhanced by the acquisition of knowledge; knowledge that was gained primarily through first hand experience. The Beesons, like other WIS members, placed emphasis on direct contact with objects through ownership. They cultivated an intimate knowledge of their chosen objects' physical properties whereby it was to be enjoyed not only aesthetically, but through familiarity with the varying body types, right down to the texture and quality of colour and grain. This was the discipline of the connoisseur, the discipline of the minute, where no detail was unimportant to the collector. According to WIS president Lloyd Hawes, the ability to discriminate among objects was an enviable talent which marked out the collector.<sup>241</sup> It was a transformative process of which he wrote at length;

In Wedgwood, we can recognize the multifaceted productions of two centuries of the factory. We keep a weather eye out for the exceptional piece which has a little change which "never" has been noted before. We are sharpened down to a fine point of discrimination. In our heads, we carry a veritable computer, with the details of the pieces we own and have judged. With our built-in computer, we also need a thousand eyes as we descend the sloping, crowded streets of Portobello to smell out Wedgwood, and then capture a rarity. The eye of a fly is better than ours. His eye is a composite of black, honeycomb, little eyes; tiny telescopes, that do not move around, but each sees simultaneously with the others, a small arc in the surrounding scenery. Wedgwoodians should have been born with mosaic eyes, a thousand telescopes to focus on the contents of an antique store simultaneously. Yet only the exceptional piece of Wedgwood would reach our consciousness. Some varying detail would strike our memory. We send the visual changes through the 1000 card computer, and after a momentary re-scan of the descriptions on the cards, we receive the feedback UNIQUE. A Wedgwood collector becomes not only a specialist but enters into the domain of connoisseurship. This is a highly enviable state and it requires much study to acquire this state. Wedgwoodians as with all antique specialists, find pleasure in attaining the ability to discriminate.'<sup>242</sup>

While this attention was bound to systems of authenticity and value, it also assured a power over the object which was inaccessible to the casual consumer.

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<sup>239</sup> Harry Buten, 'Wedgwood for the Neophyte', *The Tenth Wedgwood International Seminar 1965* Williamsburg, VA., p. 181.

<sup>240</sup> Harry M. Buten, 'Wedgwood and Buten', in *The American Wedgwoodian*, Vol. III, February 1969, No. 2, pp. 53-56.

<sup>241</sup> L.E. Hawes, 'President's Message: Some Mature Reflections on the Art of Wedgwood Collecting', *The American Wedgwoodian*, vol. III, no. 6, February 1971, p. 114 & 122-123.

<sup>242</sup> Hawes, (1971), *op. cit.*, p. 114.

Frederick Rathbone stated that knowledge gained from contact with Wedgwood wares, even those of modern manufacture, would provide the collector with a far better understanding than that ‘obtained from the study of books, photographic or other illustrations’.<sup>243</sup> ‘However excellent an illustration may be’ Rathbone told his reader, it did not ‘guide the young collector, as to the quality, colour or texture of the ceramics represented’.<sup>244</sup> Church warned in 1894 that the ‘charms of colour and of tone’ of the Wedgwood wares did not ‘lend themselves readily to any available process of reproduction; the originals must be studied.’<sup>245</sup> Writing decades later, but with the same message, Robin Reilly asserted that the collector relied primarily ‘on the senses of sight and touch.’<sup>246</sup> First hand knowledge of the objects, derived from possession, was conceived as the foremost and most effective route to knowing these wares. Despite these assertions, collectors were expected to be familiar with the history of the development of the Wedgwood company, to know the artists and designers who worked there, and to have a working knowledge of the designs used on the wares, if for nothing else than to help date the objects. While possession and direct study of the objects was seen as the purest and best route to knowledge of Wedgwood ceramics, texts served a vital role in the dissemination of knowledge and provided models by which information could be organised and focused. This kind of information required that the collector look to the very written material they were told to reject. The Beesons reacted to this contradiction by applying the same systems to their acquisition of texts as they did to the objects, and as with the objects themselves, when collecting books, their acquisition policy emphasised the old and authentic. When Mrs. Beeson purchased a copy of Rathbone’s *Old Wedgwood*, she wrote that she had only been satisfied when she located ‘a good clean copy’.<sup>247</sup> They already had photocopies from a copy of the book, but, she said, having the book itself would be ‘much better’.<sup>248</sup> The collection expanded to incorporate a library that included most of the publications about Wedgwood that had appeared from the nineteenth century onward. In addition to texts dedicated to Wedgwood and English ceramics, Mrs. Beeson collected copies of many of the eighteenth-century books and catalogues

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<sup>243</sup> Rathbone, (1909), *op. cit.*, p. 52.

<sup>244</sup> Rathbone, (1909), *op. cit.*, p. 52.

<sup>245</sup> Church, ‘Josiah Wedgwood’, *The Portfolio*, No. 3, March 1894, p. 44.

<sup>246</sup> Reilly (1980), *op. cit.*, p. 300.

<sup>247</sup> Letter from Mrs. Beeson to Mr. Wasserman, 27 November 1964, BMAA.

<sup>248</sup> *Ibid.*



that Wedgwood had in his own library; books that had served as design sources, particularly for Wedgwood's jasperware.<sup>249</sup> This area of Mrs. Beeson's collecting culminated in 1990 when she purchased the library belonging to Mrs. Elizabeth Chellis, described by *The American Wedgwoodian* as the largest Wedgwood library in America. Mrs. Chellis had been a strong advocate of the importance of texts to the collector. In an article written for *The American Wedgwoodian*, she advised 'subscription to the best periodicals containing ceramic articles, membership in serious ceramic study groups, and perusal of book catalogues from the best bookshops'.<sup>250</sup> Mrs. Beeson expressed confidence in these texts as source material for information concerning Wedgwood. During her preparations for a talk she was to give at a WIS meeting, she wrote that she had consulted 'all the obvious books'.<sup>251</sup> Yet, Mrs. Beeson constructed her role as that of the student dependent upon not only texts, but also other collectors for affirmation. Mrs. Beeson wrote to the chairman of the Seminar that she would be happy to write something, but only with the chairman's advice and participation.<sup>252</sup> 'I can write something, with your thoughts in mind, and let you see if it is the sort of thing you want.' She qualified this by stating that should any effort she made not please the chairman, they were to express this and Mrs. Beeson would do it 'over and over' until she got both of their thoughts together.<sup>253</sup> Mrs. Beeson did note, however, that the books she collected granted her a wider understanding of the topic and helped to contextualise the objects; 'I learned more about mythology, English history, and decorative arts than I ever had before. I didn't realize how much I didn't know.'<sup>254</sup> This context influenced her approach to research; 'Always when I have an article to do... I read and read, this gets the jargon in ones mind, gets you to thinking in the time it is written... gives a base from which

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<sup>249</sup> Adams, (1992), *op. cit.*, p. 9.

<sup>250</sup> Elizabeth Chellis, 'America's Largest Wedgwood Library', *The American Wedgwoodian*, vol. 1, no. 2, January 1963, p. 14. Her library included correspondence of Wedgwood and his contemporaries, nineteenth century records discussing Wedgwood collections, factory documents and folios of source material. Museum and sale catalogues made up a significant portion of the library, as did biographies of Wedgwood, his family and contemporaries.

<sup>251</sup> Mrs. Beeson to Mellany Delhom, 15 January 1968, BMAA. Mrs. Beeson included '... Meteyard, Gorely, Graham and Wedgwood, Jewett, Burton, Church, etc. etc., which do have some bits and pieces... and the latest publications of 'Letters' but not the earlier one. Tho many exerpts are in Meteyard re Vase.'

<sup>252</sup> Mrs. Beeson to Mellany Delhom, 15 January 1968, BMAA.

<sup>253</sup> Mrs. Beeson to Mellany Delhom, 15 January 1968, BMAA.

<sup>254</sup> Elizabeth Bryding Henley, 'News From Birmingham: The Dwight and Lucille Beeson Wedgwood Collection', *Thirty-Fourth Annual Wedgwood International Seminar*, (Atlanta: High Museum of Art, 1989), pp. 97-99, p. 97.

to write or talk... puts you THERE!’<sup>255</sup> Books could provide a way of interpreting the objects, but they also helped to define the systems of value to which collectors adhered. Chellis wrote that the principal authors on Wedgwood included Meteyard, Church, Rathbone, Smiles, and Barnard, all of whom Mrs. Beeson owned and studied.<sup>256</sup> Along with their participation in the WIS and their visits to museums, these texts helped to create and hone the Beesons’ pursuits. They provided information on what types of objects were the most desirable and which objects would be most valued by other collectors.

As the Beesons established themselves as collectors they keenly pursued the goals of connoisseurship. The act of collecting had a structure of its own, where tangible objects were referents for less tangible concepts which the collection itself created. The objects themselves had value for the Beesons because they had been made meaningful through the process of acquiring them and acquiring knowledge about them. Mrs. Beeson herself pointed out that her participation in collecting organisations informed her acquisition policies; she learned that they had ‘a long way to go to have the collection’ they hoped for.<sup>257</sup> What she desired was a collection which was legitimised by collecting authorities, authors, and curators. In order to ensure the acceptance of the collection, she and her husband followed accepted collecting practices and worked to acquire the kind of knowledge of the objects they saw in their participation with other collectors. This kind of connoisseurial access to the objects was a rare thing, only available to those who knew the social codes and had sufficient economic power to dominate the field. When people did not conform to the ideals of the connoisseur, they were singled out and even mocked for their lack of knowledge. WIS president, Lloyd Hawes, recollected that when the group was touring the Wedgwood factory, he overheard one member ask the guide ‘...and in all seriousness...“Where do you make the Whieldon?”’<sup>258</sup> Harry Buten wrote that following a talk he had given for the WIS titled ‘The Neophyte Collector’, ‘one of the

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<sup>255</sup> Mrs. Beeson to Mellany Delhom, 15 January 1968, BMAA.

<sup>256</sup> Elizabeth Chellis, ‘Wedgwood - The Bibliographical Approach’ in *Minutes of the First Wedgwood International Seminar*, (Philadelphia: Philadelphia Museum of Art, 1956).

<sup>257</sup> Lucille Beeson, ‘Catalog Now’, *The American Wedgwoodian*, vol. II, no. 8, February 1968, p. 166.

<sup>258</sup> Lloyd Hawes, ‘Memories of Yestermonth’, *The American Wedgwoodian*, vol. III, no. 4-5, December 1969, pp. 77, 79-105. ‘Whieldon’ refers to Thomas Whieldon, who was Josiah Wedgwood’s partner from 1754-1759, and the wares produced during this partnership.

experts was approached... by a neophyte neophyte who wanted to know, “What kind of Wedgwood is neophyte Wedgwood? Does it look like Jasper?”<sup>259</sup>

Despite the fact that the acquisition of connoisseurial powers was a laborious and time consuming process, collectors and dealers strove to achieve the appearance of natural possession of these powers. Harry Buten, who claimed he was ‘born with the genes that make one a collector’, defined the collector as ‘one who has selected the right parents and was accordingly born with the genes that make him a collector.’<sup>260</sup> When Walter Benjamin wrote of his own collection of books he said that to be a collector was more than a matter of ‘money or expert knowledge alone’; the collector must also possess certain intuitive qualities when confronted with dates, place names, formats, previous owners, and the like, details which must ‘tell him something - not as dry, isolated facts, but as a harmonious whole; from the quality and intensity of this harmony’ the collector was able to recognise whether an object was ‘for him or not’.<sup>261</sup> Benjamin wrote of the bliss of the collector, who was inhabited by spirits, ‘or at least little genii’, who saw to it that ownership was ‘the most intimate relationship that one can have to objects’.<sup>262</sup> The objects did not come alive in the collector, but rather the collector lived in them.<sup>263</sup> To achieve this state, however, one had to be ‘a real collector, a collector as he ought to be’.<sup>264</sup>

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<sup>259</sup> Harry Buten, ‘Wedgwood for the Neophyte’, *The Tenth Wedgwood International Seminar 1965* Williamsburg, VA., p. 181.

<sup>260</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>261</sup> Walter Benjamin, ‘Unpacking my library’ in *Illuminations*, (London: Pimlico, 1999), pp. 61-69, p. 65.

<sup>262</sup> Benjamin, (1999), *op. cit.*, p. 69.

<sup>263</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>264</sup> *Ibid.*

### Chapter Three: Acquiring the Collection

The Beesons sought to attain connoisseurial knowledge throughout the process of acquiring their collection, however this knowledge was but one aspect of collecting interrelated with the equally important act of possession. As Harry Buten told the person new to collecting Wedgwood, to be a collector one must have ‘acquired at least one piece of Wedgwood’ and resolved ‘to be interested in and willing to acquire more’.<sup>1</sup> To define one’s role as a collector, the beginner must ‘first ... become more enthusiastic about Wedgwood [and] secondly... acquire more Wedgwood items’.<sup>2</sup> The editor of the WIS, Lloyd Hawes stated that the ‘thrill and the pride in acquisition and possession’ was ‘one underlying motivating force in any collector’s society’.<sup>3</sup> Yet this was to be tempered with ‘research into individual pieces’ and a comprehensive understanding ‘of types, periods, and decorative influences’.<sup>4</sup> On the trip to New York in 1946, where she was introduced to the techniques of manufacturing Wedgwood at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, Mrs. Beeson made her first purchases. She wrote; ‘While I was there I went down on Madison Avenue and bought my first two vases. From then on, it was just hard to turn any of it down.’<sup>5</sup>

#### Early Purchases: New York and New Orleans

This first purchase, a pair of nineteenth century jasperware vases, was made at an antique shop called Toby House.<sup>6</sup> (Figure 34) The Beesons established correspondence with the couple who owned the shop, the Rosenbergs, and in 1950 purchased two further pieces, a jasper plaque with classicised figures and a medallion depicting Benjamin Franklin.<sup>7</sup> (Figure 58) Mrs. Beeson expressed her excitement at the time of these purchases because the Rosenbergs offered them a reduced ‘collectors’ rate’.<sup>8</sup> At this early stage in collecting, however, Mrs. Beeson was unsure

<sup>1</sup> Harry Buten, ‘Wedgwood for the Ncophyte’, *The Tenth Wedgwood International Seminar* 1965 Williamsburg, VA., p. 181.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> *The American Wedgwoodian*, ‘The Eleventh Seminar’, vol. II, no. 4, September 1966, pp. 67-69.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Karla Klein Albertson, ‘Lucille Stewart Beeson shares some thoughts on the growth of her Wedgwood collection’, *Antique Review*, November 1992, no pagination.

<sup>6</sup> See Elizabeth Bryding Adams, *The Dwight and Lucille Beeson Wedgwood Collection at the Birmingham Museum of Art*, (Birmingham: Birmingham Museum of Art, 1992), page 9, illustrated p. 261. See Lucille Beeson 1963 Catalogue entry no. 1.

<sup>7</sup> Lucille Beeson 1963 Catalogue entry nos. 2 and 3.

<sup>8</sup> Lucille Beeson 1963 Catalogue entry no. 3.

of her connoisseurial skills and wrote that she was hesitant about dating both pieces, pointing out elements of the pieces in her catalogue entry which made them ‘more interesting as collector’s pieces’.<sup>9</sup> The Beesons continued to make purchases from Toby House throughout the 1950s.<sup>10</sup> By 1966, however, the relationship had changed significantly. At this time Mrs. Beeson wrote to Mr. Rosenberg;

Now to the subject of Old Wedgwood. You must have “nussed” many a collector during your day and realize, of course, that as one collects their wants change. We have now gotten together some 300 pieces, 78 of them Wedgwood & Bentley. We attended the eighteenth century showing in Oshkosh, Wisconsin last year and afterwards purchased a number of fine pieces from one of the exhibitors who was also a dealer. Then we have been trying for some time to up-grade the collection (attending the WIS when possible got Mr. Beeson into this!) and have continued to do so. We have the Dr. Proport slate blue copy of the Portland Vase and the Darwin copy which we purchased from Sir Robin Darwin this fall just past. ... So, we are trying to stick, in as far as possible, to the future selection of Wedgwood & Bentley...<sup>11</sup>

Rosenberg responded that they seldom came across Wedgwood and Bentley items and when they did the price was ‘usually prohibitive’.<sup>12</sup> Mrs. Beeson said that they were aware of ‘the prices of the Wedgwood and Bentley’ and yet she reasserted her contention that they were trying ‘NOT’ to ‘buy much else at this stage’.<sup>13</sup> Space was at a premium in their home and they had ‘many pieces’ that she said should be sold, using the money to purchase ‘better ones’.<sup>14</sup> One of the primary motivations for this upgrading of the collection was their decision by this point ‘to leave the collection to the museum’.<sup>15</sup> This decision to donate the collection increased the Beesons desire to purchase museum quality Wedgwood pieces. Several months later Mr. Rosenberg shipped a teapot to the Beesons which they returned, declining it because it was not ‘as early as it should be to go into our collection’ and after this point contact with the shop seems to have been terminated.<sup>16</sup> This correspondence illustrates the Beesons’

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<sup>9</sup> Lucille Beeson 1963 Catalogue entry nos. 2 and 3. Mrs. Beeson wrote that the medallion was ‘made somewhere prior to 19<sup>th</sup> century—we think about 1790’ and that ‘the blue’ used in the plaque was ‘in several shades—showing that this is an early piece and that blue was used as an additional wash-note also that the piece is uneven. This makes it more interesting as collector’s piece.’

<sup>10</sup> Lucille Beeson 1963 Catalogue entry no. 33, a pair of basalt cups and saucers purchased in October 1956 and entry no. 34, a jasperware cup and saucer purchased at the same time. Also entry no. 40, a black and white jasper vase purchased in February 1957, which was ‘a favourite of Dwight’s’.

<sup>11</sup> Lucille Beeson to Mr Rosenberg, 15 January 1966, BMAA. The dealer Mrs. Beeson mentions here was Ann Brodkiewicz, who will be discussed shortly.

<sup>12</sup> Mr. Rosenberg to Lucille Beeson, 26 January 1966, BMAA.

<sup>13</sup> Lucille Beeson to Mr. Rosenberg, 1 February 1966, BMAA.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid. The final chapter will examine this donation to the Birmingham Museum of Art.

<sup>16</sup> Lucille Beeson to Alva Rosenberg, 14 May 1966. BMAA.

changing acquisition policies throughout the decades of their collecting, where the early stages were characterised by a dependency upon antiques dealers and the latter stages by a more defined conception of what they wanted their collection to be.

Many of the Beesons' early purchases were made on Royal Street in New Orleans. Like the Madison Avenue location of the first purchases, this area was known throughout the country for its prestigious shops, specifically its antiques dealerships. Shopping has been identified as a realm of social action, interaction and experience which structures the practices of urban people.<sup>17</sup> In locating herself in these areas, and in negotiating with luxury goods, Mrs. Beeson was active and engaged in processes, not only of consumption, but also of identity construction. Unlike in museum or gallery environments, where a separation is enforced between the object and the spectator, in the commercial environment close encounters are encouraged.<sup>18</sup> It is distinct from a distanced, aestheticised experience. For the Beesons, both New York and New Orleans were sites associated with leisure; it was from these two cities that they embarked on cruise holidays.<sup>19</sup> Very few items were bought in their home town, where there was a limited market, but there were a few exceptions. A sardine dish was purchased at Neal's Antiques in Birmingham in 1956,<sup>20</sup> and two pieces were purchased during the Antiques Fair at the Civic Auditorium held in Birmingham in 1962, one a diced pattern jasper urn, the other a tri-colour trophy plate, purchased as an advance birthday gift for Dwight.<sup>21</sup> (Figure 59) While on holiday, the Beesons occasionally made purchases of Wedgwood. On their European tour in August of 1960 the Beesons purchased a Wedgwood pendant in Malta as well as one of their very few direct purchases in England, a Wedgwood pendant set in gold.<sup>22</sup> Acquisition of pieces for the collection was associated with pleasure, luxury and an identification of the self as a leisured consumer.

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<sup>17</sup> *The Shopping Experience*, ed. by Pasi Falk and Colin Campbell, (London: Sage Publications, 1997), pp.1-2.

<sup>18</sup> Falk and Campbell, (1997), *op. cit.*, p. 5.

<sup>19</sup> See Letter from Otto Wasserman to the Beesons, 7 October 1964, BMAA, where he mentions that the Beesons visits to his shop 'are mostly timed to coincide with your departure on one of your sea voyages'.

<sup>20</sup> Lucille Beeson 1963 Catalogue entry no. 32. This was later sold.

<sup>21</sup> Lucille Beeson 1963 Catalogue entry nos. 87 and 88. These were purchased in May 1962 from T.P. Knight during the Antiques Fair at the Civic Auditorium held in Birmingham in 1962.

<sup>22</sup> Lucille Beeson 1963 Catalogue entry nos. 72 and 73.

The Beesons had clearly defined and gendered roles in their Wedgwood collecting.<sup>23</sup> When Mrs. Beeson went to the shops on Madison Avenue after having been to the Metropolitan Museum she ‘asked permission of her husband to buy two pieces of Wedgwood.’<sup>24</sup> She told her husband she wanted ‘some Wedgwood money’ and although he advised her to buy more stock, she bought Wedgwood.<sup>25</sup> Mrs. Beeson purchasing patterns were characterised as a desire to consume, while Mr. Beeson controlled the financial ability to purchase.<sup>26</sup> Mrs. Beeson later told women interested in Wedgwood collecting to get their husbands involved by emphasising Josiah Wedgwood’s ‘business interest’, which she said ‘fascinated’ men. If a woman could ‘get her husband interested in what she was interested [in]’, Mrs. Beeson counselled, he would ‘spend more money’.<sup>27</sup> She then recounted an incident when she and her husband were in New Orleans, Mr. Beeson had warned her to ‘stay off Royal Street’ because they had spent too much money. He later interrupted her when she was ‘under the hair dryer at the beauty shop’ to tell her about a new shipment of Wedgwood from England being unpacked at a shop on Royal Street.<sup>28</sup> The Beesons were adhering to presumptions about the consumer, generally figured as a middle class woman, and the rigorous collector, gendered male.<sup>29</sup>

Although they were making small purchases while abroad, for the first few years of collecting the Beesons remained dependent upon the owners of the antique shops they visited while in New York or New Orleans. Mrs. Beeson established a number of

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<sup>23</sup> In her study of contemporary collecting practice, Susan Pearce found a divide in practice by gender. According to her study, both genders collect things traditionally appropriate to their sex. ‘Men have mechanical things and military things, women have personal things like jewellery, household things like spice jars, and ornaments. Men collect in order to organise their material, and do so at special times and special places. Women collect in order to remember, and have their material in the home around them all the time.’ See Susan Pearce, ‘Collections and Collecting’ in *Museums and the Future of Collecting*, ed. by Simon J. Knell, (Aldershot: Ashgate, second edition 2004), p. 51.

<sup>24</sup> ‘...So Vast a Collection’, *Birmingham*, the Official Monthly Publication of the Birmingham Area Chamber of Commerce, November 1967, Vol. 6, No.11.

<sup>25</sup> Judy Haise, ‘Lucille Beeson tells Southside group all about Wedgwood’, *The Birmingham News*, Wednesday 6 May 1992.

<sup>26</sup> Judy Giles, *The Parlour and the Suburb: Domestic Identities, Class, Femininity and Modernity*, (Oxford & New York: Berg, 2004), p. 102.

<sup>27</sup> Haise, (1992), *op. cit.*

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.* From a talk Mrs. Beeson gave at the Southside Shepherd’s Center luncheon, where she displayed several Wedgwood medallions and volumes I&II of Montfauçon’s *Antiquities*. The attendees included women representatives of local churches. The purchases made on the resulting trip to Royal Street included two pairs of vases, a jasperware urn, two biscuit boxes, a pitcher, and a pair of candlesticks. Lucille Beeson 1963 Catalogue entry nos. 51-57.

<sup>29</sup> See Susan Pearce, *Collecting in Contemporary Practice*, (London: Sage Publications, 1998) for an analysis of gender distinctions in collecting.

contacts among those in the antiques business, an advantage to any collector.<sup>30</sup> When something became available, these dealers would contact Mrs. Beeson, thus purchases were largely dependent upon availability rather than any active decisions on the Beesons' part.<sup>31</sup> They were not yet seeking specific items, but rather purchasing with unrestrained acquisitorial zeal. The purchases from the early 1950s tended to include several items from one shop or dealer, thus expanding the collection rapidly and often insuring lower prices. For example Mrs. Beeson noted that Rothchild's in New Orleans gave her a \$20 discount on a black and white jasper portrait medallion of Lady Banks because they were also getting a tea set and a miniature plaque.<sup>32</sup> (Figure 60) The Beesons began to increase the amount of money they were willing to spend on objects, perceiving the more expensive goods as being of better quality. In April of 1956, three items were purchased from Waldhorn Co. on Royal Street in New Orleans; a ring for \$3.50 which was 'not very good work' and of unknown date but purchased because 'of what it was and its size', a basalt seal intaglio for \$14, and an \$18 dark blue medallion with figures.<sup>33</sup> By April of 1958, the Beesons were back on Royal Street where they again purchased three items.<sup>34</sup> The amount of money spent on these items increased from under \$20 to about \$80 per item. Two of these items, a caneware pastry dish and a basalt bird are still in the collection today, whereas none of the objects from the previous purchase at Waldhorn's remain. (Figures 61 & 62) Objects which had originally been purchased to showcase a range of wares, especially nineteenth century productions, were later culled from the collection. The blue sardine dish set in silver purchased in Birmingham in 1956, which Mrs. Beeson found interesting 'for no other reason than to show the variety of things Wedgwood made' and which was 'not too old – probably mid 19<sup>th</sup> century',<sup>35</sup> was discarded from the collection. Earlier methods of acquisition were abandoned in favour of the acquisition of the rare, the 'authentic' and the valuable.

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<sup>30</sup> Karla Klein Albertson, 'Lucille Stewart Beeson shares some thoughts on the growth of her Wedgwood collection', *Antique Review*, November 1992, no pagination.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.* Mrs. Beeson said; 'When something would come up, they would let me know about it and then I would go see it.'

<sup>32</sup> Lucille Beeson 1963 Catalogue entry no. 10.

<sup>33</sup> Lucille Beeson 1963 Catalogue entry nos. 44-46.

<sup>34</sup> Lucille Beeson 1963 Catalogue entry nos. 47-49.

<sup>35</sup> Lucille Beeson 1963 Catalogue entry no. 32.



In the refinement of their tastes, and its subsequent effects on their choice of purchases, the Beesons utilised publications aimed at consumers of luxury goods. Journals and magazines such as *Antiques* helped the Beesons in establishing contacts and acquiring items. After seeing an advertisement in the January 1956 issue of *Antiques* for a pair of tripod covered urns featured by the Chicago dealer, Mr. Button, Mr. Beeson wrote to the dealer and purchased the urns by phone and letter correspondence. (Figure 63) After the purchase was confirmed, Mr. Beeson requested; ‘If you run across any old Jasperware specimens in mint condition in which you feel we might be interested, may I suggest that you send us photos of such specimens, giving clear details of the dimensions, etc? We are particularly interested in specimens with the identifying mark of Wedgwood and Bentley and we are partial to the light blue jasper, the green jasper and black and white jasper’.<sup>36</sup> Authors such as Robin Reilly would have aided in the processes of guiding the Beesons towards these products with the highest status amongst Wedgwood collectors, while also providing them information about the relationship between the collector, the dealer, and the commercial aspects of collecting.

Along with models of connoisseurship, Reilly’s *The Collector’s Wedgwood* (1980) emphasised that the monetary rewards collecting could afford demeaned the ‘true’ collector. Authors such as Reilly, whose profession depended upon the prestige derived from connoisseurship, were keen to provide collectors like the Beesons with a similar language, one which downplayed the commodity status of the objects and promoted a rigorous discipline in its place. Collecting was ‘an exercise in taste, knowledge and judgment’, while the ‘true collector’ was one whose profit was ‘derived from learning, and the pleasure, aesthetic and intellectual, obtained from the study of his subject’.<sup>37</sup> Financial gain was an ‘incidental’, though satisfying, ‘tribute to his connoisseurship’ and the ‘true collector’ would sell objects ‘only to improve his collection’.<sup>38</sup> ‘Detailed knowledge of his subject’ was essential to any collector who was ‘not content to depend entirely upon others for his collection’.<sup>39</sup> It was the

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<sup>36</sup> Dwight Beeson to P. Button, 4 January 1956, recorded in 1963 catalogue, entry no. 13 for the pair of tripod covered urns. The relationship with Button continued, as we see in the catalogue another purchase from him in 1959 of a plaque featuring the Flaxman designed ‘Blind Man’s Bluff’.

<sup>37</sup> Reilly (1980), p. 300.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*

collectors' responsibility to study extensively, and thus to gain independence from the authority posed by the dealer.

Wolf Mankowitz, the only London dealer from whom the Beesons appear to have purchased directly, owned an antique shop called Gered's and published a book on Wedgwood in 1953 in which he sought to validate the dealer's role in collecting activities.<sup>40</sup> In *Wedgwood*, Mankowitz appealed directly to the American market for Wedgwood when he acknowledged the 'invaluable work of the Wedgwood Club of America and its members, who for the past twenty years have researched with understanding and great diligence into the subject; their published papers have been of the highest value to the study of English ceramics'.<sup>41</sup> It was through the WIS that the Beesons and other American collectors came into contact with Mankowitz. The fourth annual WIS meeting in 1959 took the group to England, where Mankowitz hosted a cocktail party for them. Mankowitz explained to his reader that, to a collector, the things he collected were meant to 'mean very much more than their value in sterling or some harder currency'.<sup>42</sup> The 'expanding society of collectors with serious and informed interest in objects, and an urgent sense of their importance' were differentiated from 'traders and buyers at [an] elementary level'.<sup>43</sup> Certain dealers were aligned with the collectors who knew 'that without informed taste the objects with which they are concerned will lose every kind of value'.<sup>44</sup> The collector was required to become an expert on both the historical and technical details about the ceramic wares they collected. Primarily, the collector was meant to be informed in the estimation of 'the period of manufacture of a ware' and the 'methods and conditions of manufacture'.<sup>45</sup> This lessened the collector's dependency upon marks on the wares and thus the threat of purchasing wares produced by 'the copyist'.<sup>46</sup> Mankowitz wrote that though there were some who enjoyed the prospect of a 'dealerless and collector-less society', any 'intelligent' artist or craftsman knew they 'could

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<sup>40</sup> The Beesons bought a quatrefoil vase dated 1785 from Mankowitz in January 1957 for \$325 and a nineteenth century copy of the Portland Vase, c. 1870, from him in 1951. Lucille Beeson 1963 Catalogue entry no. 4 and no. 38. Mankowitz, *Wedgwood*, (London: Spring Books, 1953).

<sup>41</sup> Mankowitz, (1953), *op. cit.*, p. xiii.

<sup>42</sup> Mankowitz (1953), *op. cit.*, p. viii.

<sup>43</sup> Mankowitz, (1953), *op. cit.*, p. x.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>45</sup> Mankowitz, (1953), *op. cit.*, p. vii.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*

not persist for long without engaging the interest of the dealer and his client'.<sup>47</sup> If objects 'of no assessable objective worth' were to be exchanged for money, then there must be both those who were 'able to arrange the exchange and those whose taste and knowledge enabled them to determine appropriate values'.<sup>48</sup> In this activity connoisseurship was 'a code of the genuine, the warranted, the carefully and thoroughly attested' and Mankowitz dedicated his book 'to the revived connoisseurship of Wedgwood'.<sup>49</sup>

The most prominent author and dealer on Wedgwood in the early twentieth century, Frederick Rathbone, had previously classified the role of the dealer in Wedgwood connoisseurship. Rathbone was instrumental in compiling numerous Wedgwood collections for his clientele, such as the Sanderson collection. William Sanderson, a distiller based in Leith, requested that Rathbone assemble a Wedgwood collection in 1895. In just five years, Sanderson was able to exhibit the collection at The Museum of Science and Art, later the Royal Scottish Museum, in Edinburgh. It was displayed there until 1906, when the entire collection was removed to Rathbone's showrooms in London, where, on the eve of its sale at auction at Christie's, it was purchased in its entirety by the Duveen brothers at a price of over £20,000.<sup>50</sup> The collection was sent to the New York branch of Duveen's, where a portion was purchased by Dr. Frank W. Gunsaulus in the fall of 1911 and almost immediately donated to the Art Institute of Chicago, where it became the first collection of this material to be shown as a permanent exhibit in a public museum.<sup>51</sup> Rathbone also assembled the Tangye collection, for Richard and George Tangye, brothers based in Birmingham whose wealth came from the manufacture of engines and other heavy equipment. The Tangyes seem to have begun collecting with an eye to public exhibition as Rathbone suggested in his catalogue of their collection, *Old Wedgwood and Old Wedgwood Ware* (1885). Rathbone wrote that the Tangyes were not interested in simply acquiring rare pieces of Wedgwood, but rather sought 'a series of representative specimens which could be exhibited as models to show designers, working men and

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<sup>47</sup> Mankowitz, (1953), op. cit., p. x.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid.

<sup>50</sup> A note in *The Connoisseur* of August 1907 reports the fact of the last minute withdrawal. *The Art Journal* for the same month describes not only the sale, but names Duveen as the purchaser.

<sup>51</sup> Vivian Scheidemantel, "The Gunsaulus Collection' in *The Second Wedgwood International Seminar*, (New York: Cooper-Hewitt Museum for the Arts of Decoration, 1957).

others interested, beauty of form, colour, and suitable application of ornament'.<sup>52</sup> In 1881 Richard Tangye donated £10,000 to Birmingham's Museum and Art Gallery and the Tangye family donated their Wedgwood china to the institution to help in founding its collections. As a dealer, Rathbone was given a great amount of freedom to choose the objects which were purchased by his clients, who seem to have been primarily concerned that the final product could be lent to a public institution where it would glorify their names. In building a successful collection, Rathbone told his reader, one required 'capital'.<sup>53</sup> However, aside from 'a good balance at his bankers', the collector would find that 'a practical knowledge' of the objects collected would also be needed.<sup>54</sup> If the collector did not 'possess this knowledge', then he would have to 'trust to an expert' whose business it was. Though he had warned of 'unscrupulous, sometimes ignorant dealers' selling to 'collectors of limited experience', he assured the reader that there were 'experts', presumably like himself, who could be 'depended upon to act with honour and integrity'.<sup>55</sup>

### **The WIS and the Beesons Purchases**

Despite the Beesons' independent measures to contact dealers, the WIS was invaluable in linking potential purchasers with dealers. Possession was the goal of the group and, to that effect, seminar meetings, along with the lectures and events planned, would incorporate visits to dealers and their shops. In May 1957, Mrs. Beeson was in New York attending the Second International Wedgwood Seminar. She joined the scheduled visits to local antique dealerships where she made several purchases, such as a pair of light green and white covered urns from the dealer Alfred Newgerger<sup>56</sup>, a miniature Portland Vase (dated 1890) from Toby House, and a collection of jasperware medallions from Manheim's.<sup>57</sup> (Figure 64) Mrs. Beeson described Miss Manheim as 'an authority on Old Wedgwood' who had given a lecture at the Seminar, and quoted Manheim's statement that the medallions were 'rare' and manufactured at an early date.<sup>58</sup> She went on to call the objects purchased at

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<sup>52</sup> Rathbone, (1885), *op. cit.*, p. ii.

<sup>53</sup> Rathbone, (1898), *op. cit.*, p. 99.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>55</sup> Rathbone, (1885), *op. cit.*, and Rathbone, (1898), *op. cit.*, p. 99.

<sup>56</sup> Lucille Beeson 1963 Catalogue entry no. 39

<sup>57</sup> Lucille Beeson 1963 Catalogue entry nos. 78 and 79.

<sup>58</sup> Lucille Beeson 1963 Catalogue entry no. 79.

Manheim's some of her favourite pieces,<sup>59</sup> thus creating an explicit connection between Mrs. Beeson's favourite pieces and the approval of acknowledged Wedgwood 'authorities'. In 1962, when the Seminar was held at the Art Institute of Chicago, the Beesons visited Mr. Edward Wolbank of the Edwardian Antique Shop, where they purchased a basalt inkwell.<sup>60</sup> (Figure 65) After this purchase, they attended a lecture at the Art Institute, and then went back to the shop that night with Mr. Wolbank, purchasing six further items.<sup>61</sup> While in Chicago, they also paid a visit to Mr. Button and purchased portrait medallions of Lord Nelson and Sir Joshua Reynolds.<sup>62</sup> (Figures 66 & 67) In 1977 the Seminar hosted a private auction for members which was the first auction ever held in the United States to feature Wedgwood exclusively.<sup>63</sup> Dealer-members of the WIS would also visit the Beesons in their home. Fred Tongue, a WIS member and antique dealer specialising in Wedgwood, visited the Beesons along with his wife in May 1966. The visit led to the purchase of several pieces in August that same year. In this instance, however, the dealers characterised themselves as collectors; the Beesons stating that they had purchased items from 'the private collection of Fred and Mary Tongue'.<sup>64</sup>

That the WIS was so willing to incorporate dealers into the organisation, and to celebrate the processes of acquisition at their meetings, was largely determined by the founder Harry Buten's frankness concerning these issues. He wrote about the role of the dealer in collecting and the ways collectors should interact with dealers in order to ensure advantageous acquisitions. Buten himself sold pieces of new Wedgwood and texts on Wedgwood through his Buten Museum of Wedgwood, where the Beesons had purchased several pieces.<sup>65</sup> Buten wrote that his hometown of Philadelphia had 'the world's greatest stock of Wedgwood', with numerous shops and dealers which

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<sup>59</sup> Lucille Beeson 1963 Catalogue entry no. 79.

<sup>60</sup> Lucille Beeson 1963 Catalogue entry no. 90.

<sup>61</sup> Lucille Beeson 1963 Catalogue entry nos. 90-96.

<sup>62</sup> Lucille Beeson 1963 Catalogue entry nos. 97 and 98.

<sup>63</sup> Dean Rockwell, 'The President's Message', *The American Wedgwoodian*, vol. V, no. 4, November 1977, p. 142.

<sup>64</sup> Mrs. Beeson's 'For the Erasmus Darwin Wedgwood copy of the Portland Vase - #12', BMAA. Mrs. Beeson wrote 'Christmas, Birthday, Happy New Year and Fourth of July for fire works!! We purchased the wonderful pieces of the private collection of Mary and Fred Tongue and last night Fred arrived with the treasures! Dwight and I are so happy to have these over twenty pieces.'

<sup>65</sup> A copy of an autumn price list from 1975 is kept at the Hanson library at the Birmingham Museum of Art. The Beesons bought books from the Buten Museum; see invoice of 17 August 1974 where they purchased Robin Reilly's *Wedgwood Portrait Medallions* and a reprint of the three volumes of Lady Farrer's *Letters of Wedgwood*.

specialised in Wedgwood.<sup>66</sup> Other cities named by Buten as rich in ‘old Wedgwood’ were London, New York and Chicago.<sup>67</sup> Buten advised the collector to seek out the specialist dealer in Wedgwood, for the dealers who had only a few items of Wedgwood usually purchased them ‘only if the price [was] low’.<sup>68</sup> Despite the fact that they charged high prices, the specialist did so because they had ‘to pay consistently high prices to acquire large quantities of the ware’ making it ‘easy and convenient for the collector’.<sup>69</sup> The specialist dealer also offered the collector ‘the finest and rarest’ pieces available.<sup>70</sup> It was the older pieces of Wedgwood which commanded the highest prices because of the greater demand for these goods amongst collectors and their diminished supply.<sup>71</sup> Buten analysed fifty-seven selected fields of Wedgwood collecting, identifying the objects’ availability, the demand for such items, price, the status of wares based on their reputation to collectors, and future predictions of value.<sup>72</sup> Low status items included modern Wedgwood; the more functional teapots, cups and saucers; nineteenth century blue printed wares, majolica, and parian wares; and tiles and moulds.<sup>73</sup> The highest status wares were the black basalts, old jasper, cameos, intaglios, medallions, plaques, and busts, any items produced in the eighteenth century, and any items produced during Josiah Wedgwood’s partnership with Thomas Bentley.<sup>74</sup> These goods were sought by collectors who appreciated ‘paper profits’ and by the dealer who liked ‘real profits’.<sup>75</sup> The dealer, Buten told his reader, attempted to ‘make the collector want to buy the item offered’.<sup>76</sup> Thus the dealer also had to be informed about the age of the pieces which came his way, making him better able to ‘stress its antiquity’ to the potential buyer.<sup>77</sup> The collector who was active in the market learned ‘the proper technique of permitting the dealer to sell at his lowest price’ by buying in quantity, being brisk and

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<sup>66</sup> Buten, (1964), *op. cit.*, p. 32.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>71</sup> Buten, (1962), *op. cit.*, p. 147.

<sup>72</sup> Buten, (1964), *op. cit.*, p. 63.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>75</sup> Buten, (1962), *op. cit.*, p. 147.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*

fast talking.<sup>78</sup> Purchasing, Buten wrote, could be ‘the most exciting aspect of collecting’.<sup>79</sup>

Buten did advise the collector to be informed when purchasing from dealers, however, characterising the relationship as ‘generally at arm’s length’.<sup>80</sup> Specialised knowledge could ‘place the collector in a better position to recognize the rarity and value of a particular item in a person’s stock than the dealer himself or, indeed, than his other customers.’<sup>81</sup> The ‘perfect’ collector was one who could not only supply the income but was also ‘the best purchasing agent’ and a ‘public relations expert’.<sup>82</sup> Collectors should avoid overpaying, but were also encouraged to consider whether the piece would ‘be valuable at the time of eventual distribution’ by the collector.<sup>83</sup> In order for collectors to acquire knowledge of the market for Wedgwood, Buten advised that they must become familiar with other Wedgwood collections.<sup>84</sup> Each Wedgwood collection had a ‘status rating’ that was based on ‘how many other collectors would like to have the Wedgwood making up that collection’.<sup>85</sup> At the same time, ‘the monetary worth of the Wedgwood items in a collection’ helped to ‘establish its caste or status’.<sup>86</sup> Status, which also bore in good measure on the value of the collection, was thus determined ‘by the desirability of the Wedgwood wares to other Wedgwood collectors’.<sup>87</sup> This desirability was in turn enhanced by the collector when they wrote, lectured, and exhibited their pieces in Wedgwood organisations.<sup>88</sup>

The WIS, however, was supported by regional Wedgwood collecting groups across the United States, many of which did not necessarily support the frank discussion about the commercial aspects of collecting. Leonard Rakow, chairman of the board of The Wedgwood Society of New York and also a member of the WIS board, wrote of the organisation;

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<sup>78</sup> Buten, (1962), *op. cit.*, p. 199.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>80</sup> Buten, (1962), *op. cit.*, p. 205.

<sup>81</sup> Buten, (1964), *op. cit.*, p. 32.

<sup>82</sup> Buten, (1964), *op. cit.*, p. 60-61.

<sup>83</sup> Buten, (1964), *op. cit.*, p. 60-61.

<sup>84</sup> Buten, (1964), *op. cit.*, p. 62-63.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*

Its program emphasis is the instruction of its members in the understanding of Wedgwood's many forms, decorations, artists and history. It does this through a regular program format that usually includes a book review, a detailed discussion of a particular piece of Wedgwood, known as the *Piece of the Evening*, and a lecture by an outstanding authority in the field of Wedgwood or related subject. The meeting concludes with the Wedgwood Forum which involves sophisticated discussion of pieces brought to the meeting by members in order to establish age as well as authenticity.<sup>89</sup>

In October 1969, Leonard Rakow was angered when he came across an advertisement for the Wedgwood Collectors' Society, which he understood to be an independent company whose function was 'selling editions of new pieces of Wedgwood'.<sup>90</sup> What angered Rakow was that this 'sales organization' was calling itself a collectors' society, which he believed would 'confuse a good many people' who might associate the organisation with 'the Wedgwood Societies who have been studying the subject of Wedgwood, its history, its artistry and artists for many years'.<sup>91</sup> These Wedgwood Societies were 'non-commercial', Rakow pointed out, and he claimed to have found the ethics behind this organisation 'questionable', arousing 'resentment'.<sup>92</sup> He also condemned the president of the WCS as 'using this name for purposes of personal profit'.<sup>93</sup> On behalf of the WCS, Milton Aion responded;

The concept of commercialism is one which is so intermingled with the American tradition that it is no longer considered an object of disdain. Rather we should measure the commercial effort against the standard of good taste. One should not object to a group attempting to make the Wedgwood tradition a living one. Rather than defend my position I question the motives of those who protest against anyone's efforts to revive dying crafts in a chaotic era. In this age of corporate mergers, conglomerates, and the growing depersonalisation of industry The Wedgwood Collectors Society is proud to be counted among those who are struggling to bring to the public objects of beauty and classical good taste. Is it not presumptuous of a collector of antique Wedgwood to arrogate to himself the exclusive license to enjoy and savor this art form and deny this to others less informed and less affluent?<sup>94</sup>

Rakow reasserted that it was not the sale of the objects which irritated him, rather it was the associations implied by the company's name, which he called 'a commercial

<sup>89</sup> Leonard S. Rakow, 'News From the Wedgwood Societies', *The American Wedgwoodian*, vol. IV, no. 1, March 1972, p. 10.

<sup>90</sup> Leonard Rakow to The Wedgwood Collectors' Society, October 1969, BMAA.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.* Of course, these collecting organisations were commercial, as is demonstrated by the close links between dealers and collectors in group memberships.

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>94</sup> Milton Aion (The Wedgwood Collectors' Society) to Leonard Rakow, October 29, 1969, BMAA.



gimmick' intended to 'confuse and mislead' people interested in Wedgwood.<sup>95</sup> These people were at risk of associating the business with other Wedgwood societies that existed for 'the non-commercial study of Wedgwood history, artists and ceramics'.<sup>96</sup> Rakow stated that he had the backing of 'curators' and 'important collectors' from London to San Francisco, 'all of whom' thought they were 'being used':<sup>97</sup>

For two hundred years Wedgwood students and collectors have done research, written great books, and formed great collections which are housed in museums all over the world. They feel that by using the name "Wedgwood Collectors' Society" to sell your new Wedgwood, you have taken commercial advantage of all their non-commercial activities and research that helped make Wedgwood the great name it is. One man asked if buying a new Ford would qualify him as a Ford collector. For you to write to me that "I question the motives of those who protest against anyone's efforts to revive dying crafts in a chaotic era" is pompous and ridiculous. You, sir, are not reviving any dying craft! You are merely selling the product of the largest and greatest ceramic company in England, who, without any help from you, have created this great tradition of Wedgwood for the past two hundred years.<sup>98</sup>

Rakow proceeded to write to Arthur Bryan, the President of Wedgwood Ltd on behalf of all 'non-commercial' Wedgwood societies to complain of this individual who had 'stolen the good name of the Wedgwood Societies' thus giving all 'Wedgwood Societies the appearance of commercial appendages'.<sup>99</sup> They had become implicated with what Rakow called 'one itinerant peddler' and recalled 'two hundred years' of victimisation on the part of Wedgwood collectors by 'charlatans who peddled bogus pieces and sold new for old'.<sup>100</sup> In light of the 'tremendous publicity value and business value' afforded to Wedgwood Ltd by the Wedgwood Societies, Rakow suggested that Bryan discontinue the support of the Wedgwood Collectors' Society.<sup>101</sup> It did Wedgwood 'no honor' and 'spread the stigma of commercialism and profit over all the countless Wedgwood collectors and societies' that had 'done so much to publicize the beauty of Wedgwood and to honour its name, its artists and its potters for two centuries'.<sup>102</sup>

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<sup>95</sup> Leonard Rakow to Milton Aion, 17 November 1969, BMAA.

<sup>96</sup> Ibid.

<sup>97</sup> Ibid.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid.

<sup>99</sup> Leonard Rakow to Arthur Bryan, Wedgwood Ltd., 7 December 1969, BMAA.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid.

<sup>101</sup> Ibid.

<sup>102</sup> Ibid.

Rakow also wrote to the Beesons, who were ‘in concurrence’ with his position on this ‘ridiculous organization’.<sup>103</sup> Rakow urged Mr. Beeson to petition Wedgwood Ltd as well.<sup>104</sup> The Beesons’ collection, Rakow wrote, was ‘becoming the most important one in North America’ and as its fame grew, it brought ‘the name of Wedgwood to more and more people’.<sup>105</sup> It was ‘an artistic and educational effort’ which was ‘non-commercial’ and provided ‘Wedgwood with considerable amount of free unbiased publicity’.<sup>106</sup> As such the Beesons’ ‘personal disapproval of this shoddy advertising trick should most certainly carry some weight’.<sup>107</sup> The Beesons did write to Wedgwood Ltd., and received a letter stating that collectors’ interests were not damaged by the ‘promoting of Wedgwood made today’ through this agency.<sup>108</sup> Mr. Beeson explained to Rakow that he had learned long ago that ‘people in England’ did not ‘care too much for Wedgwood’.<sup>109</sup>

The WIS meetings were important for the Beesons in that they supported the growing status of their collection and provided an opportunity for future purchases. It was at the WIS meetings that the Beesons came into contact with the Klawans and Vurpillat collections, both of which they subsequently purchased. The collection of Dr. Harold L. Klawans of Chicago was purchased in 1965, while the collection of Dr. Francis Jennings Vurpillat of South Bend, Indiana, was acquired in 1967. The acquisition of these two collections was part of an ongoing process of ‘upgrading’, following Mr. Beeson’s decision that he wanted only ‘museum pieces for his collection’.<sup>110</sup> These collections helped the Beesons ‘move up in the Wedgwood “world”’.<sup>111</sup> The Klawans collection, at the time of the Wedgwood Seminar held in Chicago in 1962, where the Beesons viewed it, comprised some 375 pieces.<sup>112</sup> Most were produced prior to 1815 and the collection, primarily jasper and basalt, although there were also fine

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<sup>103</sup> Dwight Beeson to Leonard Rakow, 12 December 1969, BMAA.

<sup>104</sup> Leonard Rakow to the Beesons, 19 December 1969, BMAA.

<sup>105</sup> Ibid.

<sup>106</sup> Ibid.

<sup>107</sup> Ibid.

<sup>108</sup> Peter Williams, Managing Director of Wedgwood Ltd., to Mr. Beeson, 6 January 1970, BMAA. He also said that he had received only one other similar objection and that the Wedgwood company in neither England or in the USA had any involvement with the Wedgwood Collectors Society, other than that of a manufacturer supplying a retailer.

<sup>109</sup> Dwight Beeson to Leonard Rakow, 13 January 1970, BMAA.

<sup>110</sup> Lucille Beeson to Charlotte and Dave Zeitlin, 27 March 1966, BMAA.

<sup>111</sup> Ibid.

<sup>112</sup> ‘The Klawans Collection’ in *The Seventh Wedgwood International Seminar*, (Chicago: The Art Institute of Chicago, 1962), p. 93.

variegated vases and some old queensware, included 49 marked Wedgwood and Bentley pieces.<sup>113</sup> (Figure 68 & 69) The feature pieces were a group of plaques framed in cut steel by Matthew Boulton who, along with Wedgwood, was a member of the Lunar Society. (Figure 70) After the Beesons acquired the Klawans collection in March 1966, they wrote to important WIS members informing them of the purchase, further promoting the status of their own enhanced collection.<sup>114</sup> Dr. Vurpillat's collection was displayed at the 1966 WIS meeting shortly before his death.<sup>115</sup> (Figure 71) At the time of the Beesons' purchase *The American Wedgwoodian* reported that, 'the good doctor wanted his collection to be kept as a unit, and know he would be pleased to have it in the private hands of his Seminar friends.'<sup>116</sup> These two collections were already highly respected amongst the members of the WIS, and the Beesons' purchase of them signalled their keen ambition to gain status in the group and quickly acquire quality pieces. Mrs. Beeson wrote that the incorporation of these two 'fabulous' collections made their own 'wonderful' for 'it was really this confluence of three already sizable collections which [made] the Birmingham assemblage so significant.'<sup>117</sup> This factor contributed to their sense of stewardship over the collection and increased their desire to have the collection publicly displayed.<sup>118</sup> Of course, it was not until these acquisitions that the collection was of significant quantity and quality to constitute a museum collection; after the purchases, the Beesons wrote, their collection could 'hold up its head' anywhere.<sup>119</sup>

Perhaps the most important contact the Beesons made on the 1957 trip to New York with the WIS was Otto Wasserman, a Wedgwood dealer and WIS member who was to help the Beesons build their collection over the years. Their first purchase from Wasserman's Madison Avenue shop, for which Mrs. Beeson was excited to pay the 'wholesale price as a collector', was a *rosso antico* 'Nelson' teapot.<sup>120</sup> (Figure 72)

<sup>113</sup> Ibid. Added to their own Wedgwood and Bentley pieces, the Beeson collection now had 156 pieces.

<sup>114</sup> They wrote to Fred and Mary Tongue, Otto Wasserman, Elizabeth Chellis, the Butens', and Lloyd Hawes amongst others. See letters, dated 27 March 1966, BMAA.

<sup>115</sup> See 'The Henry Ford Museum Exhibits the Vurpillat Wedgwood Collection', in *The American Wedgwoodian*, vol. II, no. 4, September 1966, pp. 70-73.

<sup>116</sup> 'The Beesons' Collection Grows', *The American Wedgwoodian*, vol. II, no. 7, October 1967, p. 118.

<sup>117</sup> Albertson, (1992), *op. cit.*, no pagination.

<sup>118</sup> Lucille Beeson to Gilbert E. Johnston, 14 August 1974, BMAA.

<sup>119</sup> Lucille Beeson to Charlotte and Dave Zeitlin, 27 March 27 1966, BMAA.

<sup>120</sup> Lucille Beeson 1963 Catalogue entry no. 29 for Redware 'Nelson' Tea Pot.

The Beesons' burgeoning role as collectors was being determined by the market and their participation within it. Mrs. Beeson noted that this teapot was of the same form and decoration as similar pots that she had seen in the Victoria and Albert Museum and in old books on Wedgwood.<sup>121</sup> Like these museums and texts, specialist dealers, authorised by the WIS, were another sign of quality assurance for the Beesons.

Wasserman provided a declaration of authenticity and each object purchased from his shop came with information concerning it, such as the production date, provenance, and citations of like objects in the Wedgwood literature.

By 1960 the Beesons were back in New York and back in Otto Wasserman's shop where they chose several pieces, for which they paid some of the highest prices they had as yet given for Wedgwood, included a pair of jasperware vases, a pair of black jasper urns, and a jasperware tea pot.<sup>122</sup> (Figures 73, 74 & 75) In her catalogue entries for these pieces Mrs. Beeson transcribed Wasserman's invoices, which provided information on material, style, and dates in the traditional auction catalogue language. For example the black jasper urns were described as;

A fine pair of Wedgwood (marked) tall urns & covers in black Jasper dip, decorated with continuous frieze of good figures of the Muses. The shoulders with loop handles, terminating in satyr masks, and with leaf and festoon motifs, the covers with white petals. Spreading feet upon square plinths. 12" high. About 1780.<sup>123</sup>

However, Mrs. Beeson continued to include anecdotal information in her catalogue notations, stating that they were 'very proud of these, they are very beautiful' and of another pair of vases, 'This is a good addition to the collection'.<sup>124</sup> As the Beesons adopted an ideal of cultured and reflective taste, they assumed certain suppositions concerning the methodologies and approaches to collecting. A worthy collection was not only the accumulation of objects, but the product of study, perseverance, experience, and discrimination. For the Beesons, collecting became a structured activity with systems of connoisseurial knowledge; namely to promote a system of taste and thus a system of classification, not only for the object but for the classifiers

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<sup>121</sup> Ibid.

<sup>122</sup> Lucille Beeson 1963 Catalogue entry nos. 68-71. The black jasper urns were purchased for \$900, the pair of jasper vases for \$300, the teapot for \$300, and they paid \$700 for another pair of black basalt urns with enamel decoration.

<sup>123</sup> Lucille Beeson 1963 Catalogue entry no. 68.

<sup>124</sup> Lucille Beeson 1963 Catalogue entry nos. 68 and 69.

themselves.<sup>125</sup> Through dealers like Wasserman, the Beesons were learning the vocabulary of connoisseurship.

As the Beesons' confidence increased, they became more willing to refuse items from dealers. In September 1960, Wasserman delivered a canopic vase which they had previously purchased. (Figure 76) Inside the package he also included 'a small surprise' of a Wedgwood necklace and earrings.<sup>126</sup> Mrs. Beeson responded;

The earrings and the necklace with the Wedgwood are each interesting but I do not wear earrings at all and as my neck is short hardly ever wear any sort of necklace then, too, I never wear costume jewellery... Mr. Beeson has given me, from time to time, real jewellery which I enjoy so much more.<sup>127</sup>

The Beesons, in previous years, had purchased Wedgwood jewellery but, by 1960, they had become more discerning. Despite her self-deprecating language, Mrs. Beeson made clear to Wasserman her perceived limits between 'real' and 'costume' jewellery. She went on to reiterate their interests in the direction of the collection and how she wanted Wasserman to collaborate;

Mr. Wasserman, when you get in a very handsome piece, why don't you sometimes send us a photo and then let us see if it is something that we'd wish to get? We would be interested in a few Wedgwood and Bentley pieces, as you recall.<sup>128</sup>

Wasserman followed Mrs. Beeson's suggestions, taking the opportunity to send her a photograph of 'a rare and handsome lot', a pair of dice pattern urns in three colours with perforated lids.<sup>129</sup> (Figure 77) The condition of the vases was described as 'perfect', yet when the Beesons received them, they were perturbed to find that the sink pots in the vases had been mended. Mrs. Beeson wrote to Wasserman that;

In the future, if ever we ask if anything is perfect, please do not state that it is when it has obviously been mended... had these been mended in any place but this sink-pot we'd feel that we would have to return these. To tell you the truth, we were discussing whether to do so with these. The only reason we are going to keep them is that these lavender dice urns are so rare and so lovely.<sup>130</sup>

<sup>125</sup> See Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction*, trans. by Richard Nice, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1984).

<sup>126</sup> Mr. Wasserman to the Beesons, 20 September 1960, BMAA.

<sup>127</sup> Mrs. Beeson to the Wassermans, 28 September 1960, BMAA.

<sup>128</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>129</sup> Otto Wasserman to the Beesons, 17 November 1960, BMAA. Wasserman told Mrs. Beeson that a similar pair were illustrated in Meteyard's *Wedgwood and His Work*, 1873 and that an identical urn was in the Tulk Bequest at the Victoria & Albert Museum. Though the pair were unmarked, he assured her they were 'most definitely Wedgwood of the 18<sup>th</sup> century period'.

<sup>130</sup> Mrs. Beeson to Mr. Wasserman, 27 November 1960, BMAA.

Despite the altercation, the Beesons were loathe to break ties with Wasserman, who was to provide the couple with Wedgwood objects for several years to come.

### **The Purchase of the Portland Vase copies**

From 1956 to 1966 four old Wedgwood copies of the Portland Vase came onto the market, two of which the Beesons purchased. The first example sold at Sotheby's in London in 1956 for £480 (\$1,150).<sup>131</sup> The next one came up for sale at Christie's in London in July of 1963 and was purchased by WIS member, Lawrence Pucci of Chicago for 1,350 guineas (\$3,400).<sup>132</sup> In 1964, the Beesons purchased their first old copy of the vase for 2,900 guineas (\$7,300), known as the slate blue copy because of its unique colouration.<sup>133</sup> (Figure 22) The copy purchased by the Beesons had previously been described by Professor Church as being 'of unrivalled quality' bringing £399 at auction in 1902, the highest price then realised for a copy.<sup>134</sup> The high bidder at this auction was Frederick Rathbone who procured the vase for his client, Mrs. Spranger. These copies of the Portland Vase were the distinguishing feature of any Wedgwood collection, in part because of their rarity. Rathbone wrote that 'only about sixteen copies' were known to exist, and these were primarily housed 'in museums at home and abroad'.<sup>135</sup> Another author wrote in 1909, 'that only about twenty were made in [Wedgwood's] time, and not more than fifty during the period between 1789-1810.'<sup>136</sup> Whatever the number, to own one was a distinction for any

<sup>131</sup> Hugo Morley-Fletcher, *Investing in Pottery and Porcelain*, (New York: Clarkson N. Potter, Inc., 1968), p. 51.

<sup>132</sup> *Ibid.* This particular example was originally purchased by the then Duke of Marlborough from Wedgwood for 33 guineas. Just under a century later, in 1886, it came up for auction at Christie's and fetched 155 guineas.

<sup>133</sup> *Ibid.* In 1902 this vase was sold by the executors of J.L. Propert, a noted collector of Wedgwood, and was bought for Mrs. Spranger. It is not known how much Propert paid for the vase, or even precisely how he acquired it. In his sale it fetched 380 guineas. In the 60 years that then elapsed this important and unusual piece sank into oblivion, though it had been illustrated in almost every nineteenth century work on Wedgwood and was frequently exhibited while Propert had it.

<sup>134</sup> A.H. Church, *Josiah Wedgwood: Master Potter*, (London: Seeley and Co. Limited, 1908), p. 12. On top of the sale price Mrs. Spranger paid a £40 commission to Mr. Rathbone. This price was a significant increase on nineteenth century purchases of Portland Vase copies. 'In 1849 the copy in the Tulk Collection was bought in for £20; that belonging to Samuel Rogers sold for fifty guineas in the year 1856; the copy in the Purnell Collection fetched no less than £173 when that remarkable assemblage of works of art was dispersed at Sotheby's in the year 1872. A good early copy sold at Christie's in 1890 for £199 10s: it was in the collection of Mr. Cornelius Cox. The highest price yet realised for a copy of this vase was £215 5s; this was in 1892, at the dispersal of the choice series of works by Wedgwood belonging to Mr. W. Durning Holt.' Church, 'Josiah Wedgwood' *The Portfolio*, No. 3, March 1894, (London: Seeley & Co.), p. 14.

<sup>135</sup> Frederick Rathbone, *Old Wedgwood*, (London: B. Quaritch, 1898).

<sup>136</sup> N. Hudson Moore, *Wedgwood and His Imitators*, (London: Hodder & Sloughton, 1909), p. 62.

collector. Collectors were warned, however, that copies of the vase were still being made and that ‘many potters in many countries have pirated it’.<sup>137</sup> The vases produced in the eighteenth century bore no identifying mark to suggest it was Wedgwood and if a collector found a marked copy, they were told that these dated from the nineteenth century and were ‘generally of much lower quality’.<sup>138</sup>

The Beesons first showed interest in acquiring the copy of the Portland Vase after the dealer Otto Wasserman informed them of the auction at Christie’s, where the vase was to be sold. From this point the Beesons recorded and traced their purchase of the vase, conforming to a kind of ‘adventure’ narrative, where the collector appeared as clever sleuth or dashing hero tracking down and bagging their art treasure ‘like hunters or Don Juans’.<sup>139</sup> On hearing about the vase there ‘was great excitement’ in the Beesons’ home, so much so that Mr. Beeson claimed he could not eat.<sup>140</sup> That night the Beesons read through their books looking for references to this vase, awaiting the arrival the next day of the catalogue which Wasserman had mailed them, in which he included a note stating that he hoped he could be ‘of some help’ to the Beesons.<sup>141</sup> Mr. Wasserman noted that his brother-in-law, Mr. Simmons, was a buyer for Wasserman and ‘moreover, a very knowledgeable person’ who had already inspected the vase and reported that ‘the quality of the vase and the available history’ made it ‘an extremely important piece’ although it was not a numbered copy.<sup>142</sup> Wasserman suggested Simmons act as the Beesons’ agent in the London sale. He went on to gently remind the couple that the Marlborough copy of the Portland vase, sold in 1963 at Christie’s to Mr. Pucci, had fetched over \$3000.<sup>143</sup> Since the Spranger copy was a more impressive specimen and of higher quality, the Beesons could expect an even higher sale price.<sup>144</sup> Wasserman was keen to put a little pressure onto the Beesons, notifying them that competition would be high for the vase and that he had already confidentially heard that two other American parties were interested in it, one

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<sup>137</sup> Ibid.

<sup>138</sup> Morley-Fletcher, (1968), p. 52.

<sup>139</sup> Duncan, (1995), *op. cit.*, p. 1. Duncan specifically mentions the writings of J. Paul Getty and Thomas Hoving’s ‘The Chase, The Capture’ in Hoving (ed.), *The Chase, The Capture: Collecting at the Metropolitan*.

<sup>140</sup> From Mrs. Beeson’s ‘Our Story of the Beeson Portland Vase’, BMAA.

<sup>141</sup> Mr. Wasserman to Mr. And Mrs. Beeson, transcribed in Mrs. Beeson’s ‘Our Story of the Beeson Portland Vase’, BMAA.

<sup>142</sup> Ibid.

<sup>143</sup> Ibid.

<sup>144</sup> Ibid.

of whom had approached Wasserman ‘with the question whether my partner would be willing to bid on their account’.<sup>145</sup> The Beesons immediately telephoned to express their wish that Mr. Simmons represent them exclusively at the sale.<sup>146</sup>

The Beesons and Simmons began a correspondence via Wasserman, the first of which is dated 20 November 1964. Simmons wrote that he would return to Christie’s to again inspect the vase and discuss the price with the Christie’s representative, du Bouley. It was Simmons’ feeling that with ‘such a pedigree and such a colour the vase might fetch anything between £2000 and £3000.’<sup>147</sup> While assuring the Beesons he was ‘well experienced with buying on commission’ and that his ‘first concern’ was ‘the interest of the respective client or clients’, Simmons advised the Beesons that if they really wanted “‘to go” for it, their ceiling price should not be below £3000’<sup>148</sup> The Beesons responded the next day with a letter to Mr. Wasserman formally requesting that he and Mr. Simmons act as their representatives at the sale, that they act solely for the Beesons, and agreeing a ten per cent commission not to exceed \$500.<sup>149</sup>

We highly desire this piece for our collection and intend being the successful bidder and we therefore put no ceiling on the bidding beyond good judgment... We are thoroughly aware that there will be a lively interest in the number and are prepared for the possibility that the bidding could well exceed the high estimate as assumed by your brother-in-law. Even so, we still expect to be the successful bidder unless some “mad man” loses all sense of proportion and should run the bidding up in the \$10,000 to \$12,000 figure! We are expecting to “come home with the bacon”! ... Mr. Wasserman, take this letter as a high tribute to your personal integrity. As a successful business man I am not accustomed to giving any person I do not know carte blanche. In fact, this is my first venture in this direction. I do not know Mr. Simmons, your brother-in-law, but I take him on good faith because of you and Mrs. Wasserman. We want that vase, and therefore, put no limit on his bid beyond his conscientious best judgment. We would not want a few dollars to keep us from our objective! We shall expect him to act solely for us and in our interest.<sup>150</sup>

<sup>145</sup> Mr. Wasserman to Mr. And Mrs. Beeson, 18 November 1964, transcribed in Mrs. Beeson’s ‘Our Story of the Beeson Portland Vase’, BMAA.

<sup>146</sup> Ibid.

<sup>147</sup> Transcribed in a letter from Mr. Wasserman to Mr. and Mrs. Beeson, 20 November 1964, BMAA. Wasserman writes that the pound sterling was valued at \$2.80 so that £2000 to £3000 would come to \$5600 to \$8400.

<sup>148</sup> Ibid.

<sup>149</sup> Mr. Dwight Beeson to Mr. Otto Wasserman, 21 November 1964, BMAA.

<sup>150</sup> Ibid.



To reinforce his point, Mr. Beeson enclosed a cheque for a sum of \$5600, the amount Mr. Simmons had 'feared' the vase might reach.<sup>151</sup>

From this early stage Mr. Beeson was keen to establish the provenance of the vase. The Marlborough copy, purchased by Pucci in 1963, was surrounded by questions of authenticity which Mr. Beeson wished to avoid, and he therefore requested 'the complete "pedigree", which we understand goes along with the vase, as well as the books referred to in the Christie catalogue.'<sup>152</sup> He also wanted letters from Wedgwood authorities such as Sir John Wedgwood, Tom Lyth and William Billington of the Wedgwood Museum, Wolf Mankowitz, and Arthur Bryan, President of Wedgwood Ltd., 'stating [their] opinion regarding the authenticity of the vase'.<sup>153</sup> Further to these numerous requests, Mr. Beeson also asked that Wasserman have the ownership recorded 'in any papers as becoming the property of Mr. Dwight M. Beeson'.<sup>154</sup> Mr. Beeson finished his letter by saying that he hoped to hear soon that they owned 'the Beeson Portland Vase' and that Mrs. Beeson could 'hardly wait to "get her hot little hands" on it!'<sup>155</sup> Wasserman assured the Beesons that he had forwarded to Simmons their consent to buy the vase on ten per cent commission, and that upon a successful bid the Beesons need not even worry 'about technical points connected with the purchase' such as packing and shipment.<sup>156</sup>

After his inspection of the vase Simmons wrote to Wasserman again, who transferred it on to the Beesons. This letter, dated November 21, 1964, exhibited how he and Mr. Wasserman were working to allay any fears the Beesons might have concerning this purchase. Simmons wrote;

I can state that in my view this is the most important 18<sup>th</sup> century Portland Vase which I have seen coming up for sale at any time. The point, first series or not, in this case certainly is purely theoretical, because, 1) the vase is definitely 18<sup>th</sup> century, 2) it has a pedigree which cannot be surpassed... It is authentic that Josiah Wedgwood presented the vase to Apsley Pellat, and it is a fact that it was sold ex collection Dr. Propert at Christie's in 1902 for £399, which one must admit was a lot of money in those days. It was bought at that

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<sup>151</sup> Ibid.

<sup>152</sup> Ibid.

<sup>153</sup> Ibid.

<sup>154</sup> Ibid.

<sup>155</sup> Ibid.

<sup>156</sup> Transcribed in a letter from Otto M. Wasserman to Mr. And Mrs. Beeson, 20 November 1964, BMAA.

sale through the famous Wedgwood authority F. Rathbone who acted for the Sprangers... Surely a pedigree in itself. ... The vase is a most beautiful specimen of its kind... To sum up our impressions, I can say that in our view this is the rarest Portland Vase offered in our memory, probably a unique specimen, the likes of which will never come up again. If someone has got the funds, they should reckon it at least £3000. The question remains how many other collectors, especially American ones, also display this yardstick. ... I would be pleased if we got the buying order from the Beesons, but without a £3000 limit the chances might not be so good. A collection like the present one may not come up again soon or perhaps not in our life time even. It shows the great Wedgwood expert Rathbone who helped forming it in the early 1900s or before. Wedgwood collectors and buyers at this sale will bear this in mind and prices will be the highest ever paid for Wedgwood, in my view; though I hope that here I may be wrong.<sup>157</sup>

Wasserman further encouraged them with 'It seems to me that we could not have received a better and more detailed report about the object in which you are interested' while 'gladly expecting your written confirmation of the instructions given me.'<sup>158</sup>

On the 27<sup>th</sup>, Mrs. Beeson wrote to Wasserman again, reiterating their desire for the vase;

...Mr. Beeson really wants that vase! As you understand this, I hope your brother-in-law does too! I'd think from the copy of the letter he wrote which you have mailed to him that he would, but if there is any doubt in your mind about his understanding that we have placed no limit - for actually, that is what we have done, that you had better get in touch with him again and make him understand that he is to buy that vase for Mr. Beeson! For I believe he will sit right down and cry! If he does not get the vase I shall have to leave home for a few days!!!!<sup>159</sup>

In her recollections after the sale, Mrs. Beeson would say;

Some of the excitement of these days is, of course, lost as the telephone calls back and forth were electric! Our spirits would be up and then down with each exchange of information - we felt humble for being able to consider such a purchase, fearful that someone would out bid us - we counted the days, hours and almost the minutes until word could reach us! Neither of us could think of anything but the possibility that we might have this wonderful vase for our collection - but always there was the thought that we might not be successful - there are other "fool collectors"<sup>160</sup>

<sup>157</sup> Transcribed in a letter from Mr. Otto M. Wasserman to Mr. and Mrs. Beeson, 21 November 1964, BMAA.

<sup>158</sup> Ibid.

<sup>159</sup> Mrs. Beeson to Mr. Wasserman, 27 November 1964, BMAA.

<sup>160</sup> Mrs. Beeson's 'Our Story of the Beeson Portland Vase', BMAA.

The sale was held on 30 November 1964 and Simmons was successful. Wasserman telephoned the Beesons to let them know, and they quickly responded with a letter in which they said they could ‘hardly wait’ to hold the vase in their hands.<sup>161</sup> Payment was included in the letter, and Mrs. Beeson again praised Wasserman and Simmons for ‘their wonderful service’ and the pleasure they had derived from the process. Although she was quick to acknowledge debt to the services of Wasserman, the letter was headed in Mrs. Beeson’s writing; ‘SUCCESS AND HOW WE DOES IT!’<sup>162</sup>

On December 6, when the vase was en route to New York, Mrs. Beeson wrote to Simmons, personally thanking him for his services and observing that, while possession of the vase was a ‘responsibility’, it would be ‘THE piece in our growing collection of Old Wedgwood’.<sup>163</sup> By March the Beesons had the vase safely displayed in a cabinet in their home<sup>164</sup> and were working towards the publication of a booklet of reprinted documents referring to the vase. Although the Beesons had paid a record price for a copy of the Portland Vase, Simmons assured them they were ‘very lucky in being able to buy what is undoubtedly one of the finest specimen of the original Portland Vases with one of the most unusual colour grounds, and this at a price which in the long run will turn out to be on the moderate side for a specimen of such importance.’<sup>165</sup> For their entertainment he added that since their vase had come up at Christie’s and as a result of the publicity in connection with the sale, ‘the auctioneers have been flooded with Portland Vases, all of them late Victorian copies. A lot of hopes must have been dashed.’<sup>166</sup>

After the purchase of their first copy of the Portland Vase, the Beesons wrote to friends and members of the WIS to announce its arrival in their collection.<sup>167</sup> They included the sale and provenance details and informed their reader that they were both doing very little that day other than inspecting the vase and reading the most

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<sup>161</sup> Lucille Beeson to Mr. Wasserman, 30 November 1964, BMAA.

<sup>162</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>163</sup> Lucille Beeson to Mr. Simmons, 6 December 1964, BMAA.

<sup>164</sup> See letter from Mr. E. Simmons to Mrs. Beeson, 28 March 1965, BMAA, in which Simmons refers to photographs the Beesons had sent to him of the Vase displayed in their home.

<sup>165</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>166</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>167</sup> See Lucille Beeson to Mr. Byron Born, then president of the WIS, amongst others, 19 December 1964, BMAA.

interesting references concerning it. It seems Mrs. Beeson was also very busy writing letters to let people know about their purchase. The Beesons' copy of the vase did have an established history in the canon of Wedgwood productions. Rathbone said of this copy that it was 'the only one known in which the peculiar charms of the original' were 'in any satisfactory way reproduced'.<sup>168</sup> It 'surpassed' other Wedgwood copies in its unique colour which most 'closely resembled the antique' and in its application of figures, which utilised a semi-transparent layer to suggest shadowing and depth unique amongst the copies.<sup>169</sup> For Rathbone 'Every Portland vase made by Wedgwood differ[ed] in texture, colour, or modelling' and he claimed this vase was an example of Wedgwood's best work.<sup>170</sup> After the purchase, Mr. Beeson published a booklet of some of the references to their new vase,<sup>171</sup> including the proud annotation at the bottom of the title page:

PURCHASED BY DWIGHT M. BEESON  
Birmingham, Alabama  
November 30, 1964

In the preface to the booklet, Mr. Beeson focused the reader's attention on a few factors while contending that the documents included spoke for themselves. He was keen to point out that the images from the reproduced documents identified the vase as the one in their collection by attribute of a small flaw, the left foot of the Cupid is missing. He noted that this copy was a trial piece, made before the numbered copies were distributed by Josiah Wedgwood himself. Finally he pointed out that 'the "slate blue" early "trial" copy described in the reproduced documents' was 'reputed to have the closest resemblance to the original Portland Vase in both its color and in the white figures in the bas-reliefs which have a slight bluish tint, as do the figures in the original'.<sup>172</sup> In regards to comparative matters, Mr. Beeson noted;

There is an early blue Wedgwood copy of the Portland Vase in the British Museum which currently is displayed along with the original vase. In addition, there is a beautiful black "numbered" copy made by Wedgwood and a dark blue glass copy made by Tassie. Our London Agent, Mr. E.E.

<sup>168</sup> Frederick Rathbone, *Old Wedgwood*, (London: B. Quaritch, 1898), p. 8.

<sup>169</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>170</sup> See Rathbone, *Old Wedgwood*, (1898) and a reprint of the Rathbone letter in a letter from Mr. des Fontaines to Mr. Beeson, 7 June 1965, BMAA.

<sup>171</sup> *Reproductions of Documents concerning The Slate Blue Wedgwood Copy of the Portland Vase, Formally known as the Apsley Pallett, Dr. J. Lumsden-Propert, Mrs. Spranger, then the R.J.M. Spranger copy of the Portland Vase.*

<sup>172</sup> Dwight Beeson, *Reproductions of Documents Concerning the Slate Blue Wedgwood Copy of the Portland Vase*, Published for Mr. Beeson in 1965, p. 3.

Simmons, reported that prior to the Christie auction of the vase on November 30, 1964, the “slate blue” vase was taken by Mr. Morely Fletcher of Christie’s to the British Museum for comparison with the blue Wedgwood copy displayed there, and that Mr. Fletcher and the curator of the Museum, found subject vase to be “the better specimen of the two and in better condition”!<sup>173</sup>

Observing that it was usual for a copy of a Portland Vase to be identified by use of the name of the present owner, Mr. Beeson was happy to call the vase the ‘Dwight M. Beeson copy of the Portland Vase.’<sup>174</sup>

The Beesons had made their first big purchase, but the collection continued to grow with more typical objects. Despite the excitement of the purchase of the vase, by 1967 the Beesons’ relationship with Otto Wasserman was showing signs of strain. Wasserman had suggested that his commission be raised from ten to fifteen per cent, and the Beesons were handling purchases from England through another agent. Wasserman wrote to the Beesons concerning their tense situation;

...let me say right here that there can be no question of Gerda or I or Gerda’s brother [Simmons] being angry with you for what you write in connection with direct bids in England. You and Dwight who are to spend the money when you buy, must decide for yourself what and how to buy and how to remunerate certain services, and to me it seems natural that you may entrust “the new connection” to bid for you in the forthcoming London sale - or perhaps future ones - if you feel that you will be equally well served and have the service at a lesser price. So, I am not angry and I do understand, and if I were to give you my true reaction to Lucille’s letter, it would only be that I have been very much upset. But that is a far cry from any reproach to you. If I feel a certain disappointment, it will be understandable to you, and all I can say is “Why didn’t you tell me?” Ever since Mr. Simmons and I were allowed to buy for you that first Portland Vase... all of us - the Simmons and Gerda and I - have felt a special affinity for the Beeson collection, almost a responsibility, and while we knew that many other worth while offers would be submitted to you from many sources and would be accepted by you, we somehow felt that when direct acquisitions in a London sale would reoccur, we would have the obligation to advise you in time... Thus, the commission which had been our financial reward, was not just to go into the salesroom and to hold up a hand - that could have almost been done by mail - but it comprised many other imponderabilia and great personal interest, and it was from that point of view that I asked you in Williamsburg to consent to a 15 % rate - as, incidentally, is usual - instead of the 10% commission which had been stipulated in the special case of the Portland Vase.<sup>175</sup>

<sup>173</sup> Ibid.

<sup>174</sup> Dwight Beeson, *Reproductions of Documents Concerning the Slate Blue Wedgwood Copy of the Portland Vase*, Published for Mr. Beeson in 1965, p. 4.

<sup>175</sup> Mr. Wasserman to Mr. and Mrs. Beeson, 10 February 1967, BMAA.

In 1965 Dwight and Lucille Beeson visited an exhibition of eighteenth century Wedgwood wares in Oshkosh, WI. Here, through their WIS colleague, Mellanay Delhom, they met the Wedgwood dealer Ann Brodkiewicz, who divided her time between London and Chicago, where she and her husband Zygmund owned a shop called Three Centuries Antiques. Mr. Beeson, who was intent upon upgrading the collection by this point, immediately wrote to Brodkiewicz concerning the wares she had exhibited at Oshkosh. She was reluctant to break up the collection for Mr. Beeson, especially as they had ‘so many friends and collectors’ who had asked for the same pieces.<sup>176</sup> Mr. Beeson wrote that he was ‘disappointed’ that Brodkiewicz, ‘as a dealer’ could not be persuaded to part with the pieces displayed at the exhibition,<sup>177</sup> and suggested that, although he was ‘a new customer’, his position in Alabama, outside the ‘main stream’, meant that he needed ‘a little extra help in trying to catch up’ and that he needed these items ‘worse’ than any other of her customers because they had ‘so little worthwhile things’.<sup>178</sup> Brodkiewicz relented and she and Mellanay Delhom planned a trip to Birmingham, loaded with Wedgwood objects, to visit the Beesons. Mrs. Beeson wrote to Brodkiewicz, telling her how ‘anxious’ Mr. Beeson was for her help ‘in building’ their ‘growing collection’.<sup>179</sup> Mellanay Delhom had previously promised to help and advise the Beesons, and if they could ‘get a first rate dealer’ that would give them ‘an inside track’, Mrs. Beeson wrote, it would help overcome their ‘handicap of being located so far away from the “main stream of the Wedgwood World”’.<sup>180</sup> On Brodkiewicz and Delhom’s trip to Birmingham, the Beesons purchased over \$9,350 worth of Wedgwood, calling them ‘treasures’ which they would ‘love’ and care for, then ‘leave them where we think they will be most enjoyed’.<sup>181</sup> (Figure 78) Both Delhom and Brodkiewicz advised the Beesons to specialise in Wedgwood and Bentley.<sup>182</sup> Mrs. Beeson wrote to Brodkiewicz, stating that Delhom had inspired them to ‘have a story to tell’ about their collection and that they were acquiring books to help enlarge their knowledge of the wares. By selling the Beesons the eighteenth century objects, Brodkiewicz had ‘opened a whole new

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<sup>176</sup> Ann Brodkiewicz to the Beesons, 9 July 1965, BMAA.

<sup>177</sup> Dwight Beeson to Ann Brodkiewicz, 16 July 1965, BMAA.

<sup>178</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>179</sup> Lucille Beeson to Ann Brodkiewicz, 27 July 1965, BMAA.

<sup>180</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>181</sup> Lucille Beeson to Ann Brodkiewicz, 28 July 1965, BMAA.

<sup>182</sup> Lucille Beeson to Ann and Zyg Brodkiewicz, 3 April 1971, BMAA. ‘We have really about decided that we shall buy any more Wedgwood ONLY if it W&B... but remember you and Mellanay are the ones that gave us this advise years ago’

field of thought and study' for Mrs. Beeson and inspired the couple to have a collection which might 'make many people happy' and which would be 'available for study'.<sup>183</sup> The Beesons not only purchased Wedgwood from Brodkiewicz, but also sold their discarded items to her.<sup>184</sup> She brokered the deal with the Klawans family, when the Beesons purchased the collection.<sup>185</sup> Yet they also stated their demands to Brodkiewicz, requesting only Wedgwood and Bentley pieces, for they wanted to 'have the largest collection of Wedgwood and Bentley', and wares that were in 'perfect condition'.<sup>186</sup> The Beesons requested that Brodkiewicz replace Otto Wasserman's London contact, Mr. Simmons, as their London agent because they 'were not going to bid through them because it just cost too much!'<sup>187</sup> When Wasserman notified the Beesons about a Wedgwood and Bentley agateware vase, they asked Brodkiewicz to visit Sotheby's and to let them know if she thought they should bid on it.<sup>188</sup> They would take Brodkiewicz's thoughts and word on it because she was their 'gal Friday' and knew what was 'best' for them.<sup>189</sup> When the opportunity arose for the Beesons to acquire a second Wedgwood copy of the Portland Vase, they chose to contact Ann Brodkiewicz for her help and guidance.

Less than a year after they purchased the slate blue copy of the Portland Vase, the Beesons began their bid for another copy of the Vase, this time a numbered copy, the so-called #12 Erasmus Darwin copy. (Figure 79) After learning about the vase at the Tenth International Wedgwood Seminar, Mrs. Beeson contacted Raymond Smythe, President of Wedgwood Company of America inquiring after the owner of the Darwin copy of the Portland vase, then on loan to the V&A. Mrs. Beeson informed Mr. Smythe that she and Mr. Beeson had acquired the slate blue copy and that they collected 'the Old Wedgwood', attended the WIS, made it 'a practice to visit

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<sup>183</sup> Lucille Beeson to Ann Brodkiewicz, 18 August 1965, BMAA.

<sup>184</sup> Lucille Beeson to Ann and Zyg Brodkiewicz, 15 March 1966, BMAA. Mrs. Beeson wrote that Brodkiewicz would 'note that a couple of the items which we sold had no insurance on them. They were the small dark blue jug and vase which we had given Dwight's sister - when she passed away they gave them to us and we just did not add them, as they were inexpensive, to our insurance listing.'

<sup>185</sup> Dwight Beeson to Ann and Zyg Brodkiewicz, 14 March 1966, BMAA.

<sup>186</sup> Mrs. Beeson said that Mr. Beeson hated 'to have a piece that has had a repair'. See Lucille Beeson to Ann Brodkiewicz, 27 May 1966, BMAA.

<sup>187</sup> Lucille Beeson to Ann Brodkiewicz, 7 February 1967, BMAA. Simmons took a 15% commission as opposed to Brodkiewicz's agreed ten per cent.

<sup>188</sup> Ibid. See Sotheby's sale 14 February 1967.

<sup>189</sup> Ibid.

museums to see the Old Wedgwood', and gave talks on the subject.<sup>190</sup> The Beesons were attracted by the fact that the vase had been displayed for many years at the V&A, denoting its quality<sup>191</sup>, and its provenance, the vase was supposedly given to Erasmus Darwin by Josiah Wedgwood and descended through the Darwin family to the then owner, Sir Robin Darwin, Principal of the Royal College of Arts.<sup>192</sup>

The Beesons first contacted Sir Robin Darwin on 11 July 1965, informing him of their purchase of the slate blue Portland Vase and requesting any information regarding his copy of the vase. It was Mr. Beeson who made this contact, writing,

While in attendance at the Tenth International Wedgwood Seminar held in Williamsburg, Virginia, in May, one of the knowledgeable members of the Seminar informed me that you might consider selling the vase. Not knowing if this information is true I have decided to take the liberty of respectfully inquiring directly.<sup>193</sup>

He informed Sir Robin that he was trying to upgrade his Wedgwood collection 'with the thought in mind of perhaps having something worth-while to ultimately leave to our local museum'.<sup>194</sup> Mr. Beeson also hoped the arrangements of a sale 'could be made directly and without involving a sale commission to a middleman'.<sup>195</sup>

Sir Robin replied on July 13, stating his copy was 'undoubtedly one of the first perfect copies' and gave its provenance through his family from Erasmus Darwin to himself.<sup>196</sup> Darwin does inform the Beesons of some confusion in regards to the provenance of this copy.

Until the other day I thought that apart from another copy which I believe Dr. Robert Darwin bought from Josiah II, this was the only good copy in my family - there are several inferior ones. However, I found a copy in the Fitzwilliam Museum at Cambridge which was referred to as having been given by Josiah Wedgwood to Erasmus Darwin and as being the one referred to by the latter in his BOTANIC GARDEN on page 53, volume I. This, I am convinced is in fact due to confusion, for this vase was left by Erasmus

<sup>190</sup> Mrs. Beeson to Mr. Raymond Smythe, 5 June 1965, BMAA.

<sup>191</sup> After their purchase of the vase the Beesons requested a photo of it in its display case at the V&A and requested information on the length of its display there. See Letter from Mr. Beeson to Ann Brodkiewicz, et. al., 26 September 1965, BMAA.

<sup>192</sup> Mrs. Beeson's 'For the Erasmus Darwin Wedgwood copy of the Portland Vase - #12', BMAA. Whether or not this is the vase which was given to Erasmus Darwin by Josiah Wedgwood continues to be under question. The Fitzwilliam Museum in Cambridge also lays claim to the same vase.

<sup>193</sup> As transcribed by Mrs. Beeson into a brief talk given at the Wedgwood International Seminar in Dearborn, Michigan, 4-7 May 1966 (on Beeson letterhead with images of the two vases). BMAA.

<sup>194</sup> Dwight Beeson to Sir Robin Darwin, 11 July 1965. BMAA.

<sup>195</sup> Ibid. This was omitted later by Mrs. Beeson in her diary.

<sup>196</sup> Sir Robin Darwin to Mr. Dwight Beeson, 13 July 1965, BMAA.



Darwin to the daughter of his second marriage and thus descended through various Sacheverell Darwins until it was given by an Admiral of that name to his cousin, Sir George Darwin, my great uncle. This copy is unnumbered and is therefore not one of the first 30. It is, however, alleged to be so and it has a very handsome contemporary morocco case.<sup>197</sup>

Darwin had, at this time, contacted the keeper of the Barlaston Museum for any information concerning the vases. Later, when the Beesons exhibited the new purchase at the Wedgwood International Seminar in Michigan in May of 1966, they would not share this information with the audience.<sup>198</sup> In regards to selling his copy to the Beesons, Darwin wrote; 'If indeed you were serious in wishing to buy my copy, I should be perfectly willing to sell it at a proper price, for the V&A already have a copy and I don't particularly wish to keep it in my own house myself.'<sup>199</sup> The Beesons continued to correspond with Sir Robin about the provenance of this vase. On 5 April 1966, Sir Robin wrote that he was 'perfectly satisfied' with the deductions he had made in relation to the vase and enclosed for the Beesons his correspondence with the Fitzwilliam Museum and the curator of the Wedgwood Museum at Barlaston.<sup>200</sup> Sir Robin concluded that the Fitzwilliam copy was not the number 12, that Erasmus Darwin received two copies of the vase and that one was the number 12 and the other a less valuable copy, a theory based on the assumption that it was unlikely Erasmus Darwin 'would have given the superior copy numbered number 12 to the unmarried daughter of a second marriage rather than to his eldest son'.<sup>201</sup>

Mr. Beeson, however, seemed more concerned about the price of the object than its provenance;

Sir Robin, as you doubtless already know, the successful bid price for my Apsley Pallett "Slate Blue" vase was Guineas 2,900. This price included the beautiful rosewood revolving stand with glass dome, numerous supporting documents and books that established an imposing pedigree. It is my understanding that this is by far the highest price ever paid for a piece of Wedgwood. The last eighteenth century Portland sold before mine was purchased November 30, 1964, seems to have been the Marlborough Portland which was sold at Christie's July 1, 1963, for, I believe, Guineas 1,350, about

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<sup>197</sup> Ibid.

<sup>198</sup> As transcribed by Mrs. Beeson into a brief talk given at the Wedgwood International Seminar in Dearborn, Michigan, 4-7 May 1966 (on Beeson letterhead with images of the two vases), BMAA. Mrs. Beeson only told of the provenance from Erasmus Darwin through to Sir Robin.

<sup>199</sup> Sir Robin Darwin to Mr. Dwight Beeson, 13 July 1965, BMAA.

<sup>200</sup> Sir Robin Darwin to Mr. Dwight Beeson, 5 April, 1966, BMAA.

<sup>201</sup> Sir Robin Darwin to Mr. Billington of Josiah Wedgwood & Sons Limited, 13 July 1965, copied and sent to Mr. Beeson 5 April 1966, BMAA.

one-third of my bid price for the Apsley Pallett Slate Blue “trial copy”. Sir Robin, of course, R.J.M. Spranger, Esq., did not net Guineas 2,900 from the sale of his Portland in that he had to pay Christie a commission which I believe to have been about 10% - this would have netted him Guineas 2,610. Since we can handle the matter between us without involving a commission to you, Sir, would you consider a price of Guineas 2,900, the sum paid for the Apsley Pallett Blue Copy, but which would net you Guineas 290 more than that enjoyed by R.J.M. Spranger, Esq. since you would have no commission to pay?<sup>202</sup>

By early September, the deal was reaching finalisation, the export permit had been secured, and the V&A notified, but the price was still being haggled. Sir Robin was asking 3000 Guineas as he believed his copy ‘to be almost certainly the most important one extant’.<sup>203</sup>

It was at this point which the Beesons solicited the help of Ann Brodkiewicz, who was given the responsibility of inspecting the vase; if it was then considered satisfactory they would deliver the funds, 3000 Guineas.<sup>204</sup> Mr. Beeson apologised for the necessity of this inspection, requested that Sir Robin refrain from mentioning the price given for the vase, and reassured him that he and Lucille would ‘cherish the vase’ and see that it was ‘properly cared for’ after their deaths.<sup>205</sup> He assured Sir Robin that the vase would receive a place of prominence in the Beeson home, where it would be enjoyed by all their Wedgwood friends.<sup>206</sup> He also mentioned his plans to exhibit the vase at the upcoming WIS in Dearborn, Michigan and at the Mint Museum in South Carolina, where it would be referred to as the Erasmus Darwin copy.<sup>207</sup> Mrs. Beeson enclosed her own letter to Sir Robin in which she extended an invitation to visit the Beesons in their home and sent photographs of the future display location of the vase. On a visit to Birmingham, Mrs. Brodkiewicz mentioned that she would soon be taking a trip to London to visit her daughter. The Beesons told Brodkiewicz of their contact with Sir Robin Darwin and Brodkiewicz said she would be happy to bring the vase back for them.<sup>208</sup> Lucille wrote to Ann before she left for London, enclosing the cheques and packing instructions. She told Ann to use her judgement

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<sup>202</sup> Dwight Beeson to Sir Robin Darwin, 20 July 1965, BMAA.

<sup>203</sup> Sir Robin Darwin to Mr. Beeson, 1 September 1965, BMAA.

<sup>204</sup> Mr. Beeson to Sir Robin Darwin, 9 September 1965, BMAA.

<sup>205</sup> Ibid.

<sup>206</sup> Ibid.

<sup>207</sup> Ibid.

<sup>208</sup> Mrs. Beeson to the Wassermans, 31 October 1965, BMAA.

and that they should be satisfied with it, for they thought her ‘one of the most knowledgeable people’ they knew in the field.<sup>209</sup> Although Lucille said that she and Dwight would be ‘walking the floor’ and imagining the whole scene, she again reiterated that they trusted Ann’s judgement and that Ann knew their wish, ‘perhaps better than anyone else could’.<sup>210</sup> It was Brodkiewicz who received the vase from the V&A, flew with it back to Chicago, then drove the vase down to Birmingham.<sup>211</sup> The Beesons thanked Brodkiewicz, promising her a fine dinner and hoping that they might ‘inspect’ for her some day.<sup>212</sup> Brodkiewicz also took the opportunity to bring several other pieces of Wedgwood at the time, offering them for the Beesons growing collection.<sup>213</sup>

On receiving the vase on 19 October 1965, Mrs. Beeson said they ‘loved it’, they ‘just love[d] to hold it in our hands - the “feel” of it is wonderful!’<sup>214</sup> Photographs were taken at the time of the delivery at the Beeson home; ‘As you can see Mrs. Ann Brodkiewicz has just handed it over to Dwight and we are fondling it!’<sup>215</sup> (Figure 79) Sir Robin had written to the Beesons that his mother had disliked the vase and kept it stored in an old biscuit tin. Mrs. Beeson said they should ‘not tuck it away in such darkness’ and wondered if the vase would ‘miss the many who saw it daily in the V&A’.<sup>216</sup> She reassured herself that ‘they did not love it as we do - so it could be happier with us for the rest of our years!’<sup>217</sup>

When Beesons wrote to the Wassermans, informing them of their recent purchase, they related the provenance of the vase, clearing up the issue of the Fitzwilliam copy.<sup>218</sup> Wasserman congratulated them and in an attempt to re-establish his role as

<sup>209</sup> Mrs. Beeson to Ann Brodkiewicz, 9 September 1965, BMAA.

<sup>210</sup> *Ibid.* After the purchase the Beesons told Ann that she was ‘such a sweet little person you make friends feel they may request such help from time to time’.

<sup>211</sup> Mrs. Beeson’s ‘For the Erasmus Darwin Wedgwood copy of the Portland Vase - #12’, BMAA.

<sup>212</sup> Mr. Beeson to Ann Brodkiewicz, et al, 26 September 1965, BMAA.

<sup>213</sup> Mrs. Dwight Beeson to Sir Robin Darwin, 9 October 1965, BMAA.

<sup>214</sup> Mrs. Beeson’s ‘For the Erasmus Darwin Wedgwood copy of the Portland Vase - #12’, BMAA.

<sup>215</sup> Mrs. Beeson to the Wassermans, 31 October 1965, BMAA.

<sup>216</sup> Mrs. Beeson’s ‘For the Erasmus Darwin Wedgwood copy of the Portland Vase - #12’, BMAA.

<sup>217</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>218</sup> There continued to be some confusion about the Darwin copy and the Beesons were quick to correct errors they found in print. In February 1966 Mr. Beeson wrote to John Bedford concerning a comment in his recently published book, *Collectors Pieces No. 1, Wedgwood Jasper Ware*. Where the original caption had read ‘This copy is No. 12 of the first edition and was presented by Josiah Wedgwood to Dr. Joseph Priestley’, Mr. Beeson gave a revised caption, ‘This copy is No. 12, made about 1793,

their primary dealer wrote; ‘It is my feeling that in view of the growing prominence of the Beeson Wedgwood collection we should in future only offer you the best, difficult as it will be under the circumstances of a growing shortage of fine and early Wedgwood pieces.’<sup>219</sup> The flattery went some way to healing the rift and Mrs. Beeson explained to Wasserman how they had come into contact with Ann Brodkiewicz through the WIS and how she came to act for them in London;

We just thought that you two, having been the ones to get the wonderful (which is much better made, we think) “Slate Blue” Portland for us would be most interested in this one and in how we received it - as you had gone to so very much trouble in getting the other one for us across the Atlantic and through custom, etc., ... Will close now, just wanted to “show” you the new vase and tell you all over again how very much we appreciate all you did for us on the other Portland “adventure” - it was more thrilling and more fun... there was no suspense in this one... all was direct and we just had to decide if we wanted it that badly”!<sup>220</sup>

As with the first Portland purchase, the Beesons were again quick to inform other collectors of their new purchase, contacting Mellanay Delhom, Byron Born, Mrs. Chellis, Dr. Hawes and Dr. Vurpillat, amongst others.<sup>221</sup> Dr. Vurpillat wrote back, saying that he was looking forward to seeing the Beesons and their new vase at the next WIS meeting and inviting them to visit him in his South Bend home. Mrs. Beeson responded with a similar invitation for him to join them in their home and to see their collection; ‘We have been trying to upgrade it for some time now and shall not be ashamed for you to view it! When the collecting bug bites one spends all his money on that collection! My! The Wedgwood we have gotten during the period of less than a year!’<sup>222</sup> With this purchase, however, the Beesons also contacted Wedgwood groups outside the US. In November 1965 Mr. Beeson wrote to Mr. Des Fontaines of the Wedgwood Society in London (incidentally the person through whom the Beesons made contact with Sir Robin Darwin) informing him of the purchase of both Portland vase copies and including some photographs;

We had some photographs made of the Erasmus Darwin Copy No. 12, one of which clearly shows the numeral 12 written by manganese pencil in freehand. The thought has occurred that some of the members of The Wedgwood

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presented to Dr. Erasmus Darwin, and now in the possession of Mr. Dwight M. Beeson, Birmingham, AL, USA’. See Mr. Beeson to John Bedford, 24 February 1966, BMAA.

<sup>219</sup> Mr. Wasserman to the Beesons, 12 October 1965, BMAA.

<sup>220</sup> Mrs. Dwight Beeson to the Wassermans, 31 October 1965, BMAA.

<sup>221</sup> Mr. Beeson to Ann Brodkiewicz, et al, 26 September 1965, BMAA. Despite this, they did not want the amount they paid for the vase to become publicly available.

<sup>222</sup> Mrs. Beeson to Mr. Vurpillat, October 1965, BMAA.

Society might be interested in seeing this photograph and I am herewith enclosing a copy of it to be viewed by the members at the next meeting. I am also taking the liberty of enclosing a second photograph of Mrs. Beeson and me with our two Portland Vases between us.<sup>223</sup>

The WIS rewarded the Beesons for their loyal adherence to the society's collecting standards by publicising their collection. It had taken these prime and expensive purchases for the couple to be fully accepted. They displayed the vase at the Tenth Annual Wedgwood International Seminar held at Williamsburg in 1966 and shortly thereafter the vase was featured on the cover of the group's journal.<sup>224</sup> (Figure 80) At the same time, *The American Wedgwoodian* published an article detailing the Beesons' purchase of the Darwin vase. Following this debut, the April 1967 edition of *The American Wedgwoodian* featured a nine-page article on their collection and by October of the same year Mrs. Beeson was first listed as the group treasurer of the organisation. Both of their copies of the Portland Vase were displayed at the opening of the Delhom collection of ceramics at the Mint Museum in Charlotte, North Carolina.<sup>225</sup> The two objects became the 'focal point' of the collection.<sup>226</sup> Even the national press picked up the collection reporting, 'The two headliners of the Beeson collection are unquestionably their copies of the Portland Vase – one more than even the British Museum claims.'<sup>227</sup> These purchases signalled the Beesons' ascension in the eyes of Wedgwood collectors across America. (Figure 81)

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<sup>223</sup> Letter from Mr. Beeson to Mr. des Fontaines, November 17, 1965, BMAA.

<sup>224</sup> See *The American Wedgwoodian*, Vol. II, August 1965, No. 1.

<sup>225</sup> See *The American Wedgwoodian*, Vol. II, April 1966, No. 3.

<sup>226</sup> Lloyd E. Hawes, 'The Beeson Collection', *The American Wedgwoodian*, Vol. II, April 1967, No. 6, p. 103.

<sup>227</sup> Mildred Housen, 'A Fabulous Collection in Birmingham' in *Town & Country*, June 1967, Vol. 121, No. 4535.

## Chapter Four: The Home

### The Beeson Home

The Beesons' home in Birmingham, which was built according to their specifications and completed in 1958, was a relatively modest single-story red brick house with a classical portico located on a large, private and landscaped piece of property.<sup>1</sup> (Figure 82) It was the kind of suburban architecture that reflected prosperity tempered with modesty. At the same time the home enabled increased consumption of domestic commodities and was designed as a site for the display of the Beesons' growing Wedgwood collection.<sup>2</sup> Built-in and recessed bookcases were lined with the objects, which similarly adorned the mantelpieces and cabinets. (Figure 83) The editor of the WIS described the Beesons' home in the group's journal;

As soon as we entered through the columned portico, we were immersed in a virtual sea of fine Wedgwood jasper. The focus is Wedgwood - from the front hall, to the dining room entirely shelved for Wedgwood, in the two long parlors with Wedgwood in one of the fireplaces, and walls in the long connecting halls and the bedrooms. About one thousand pieces are on display.<sup>3</sup>

Along with using the objects in decorative schemes throughout the house, Mrs. Beeson also planned other furnishings around Wedgwood. The silk draperies, the painted walls (Mrs. Beeson mixed the colours herself) and the carpeting 'imported from France' were all inspired by the traditional blues of the jasper ware.<sup>4</sup>

Many of the purchases were used functionally in the home, such as a five branched combination ormolu and jasper ware Wedgwood chandelier, which the Beesons had rewired for electricity and installed in their foyer.<sup>5</sup> In using these objects and adapting them to a modern home, the Beesons were abiding by the counsel of WIS founder, Harry Buten. Buten wrote of the functionality of collecting Wedgwood, which he said could be 'used around the house' for 'decorating, floral arrangements

<sup>1</sup> Mrs. Beeson mentioned the construction of the home in the 1963 catalogue, noting that in April 1958 they had gone on holiday to avoid the building work. See entry nos. 51 and 51a.

<sup>2</sup> Judy Giles, *The Parlour and the Suburb: Domestic Identities, Class, Femininity and Modernity*, (Oxford & New York: Berg, 2004), p. 146.

<sup>3</sup> Lloyd E. Hawes, 'Wedgwoodians Visit Birmingham', *The American Wedgwoodian*, vol. II, no. 8, February 1968, pp. 142-145.

<sup>4</sup> Mildred Housen, 'A Fabulous Collection in Birmingham' in *Town & Country*, vol. 121, no. 4535, June 1967, pp. 156 & 159-60.

<sup>5</sup> Lucille Beeson 1963 Catalogue entry no. 58. Purchased at Manheims on Royal Street in New Orleans in April 1958 while the house was being constructed.

and dining' or on the person 'in the form of jewellery, decorating shoes and umbrellas'.<sup>6</sup> There was 'no end to the use of Wedgwood' for collectors, most of whom, Buten wrote, liked 'to feel that collecting is practical because something tangible is done with the collection'.<sup>7</sup> Despite these ideas of usefulness, most of the objects were 'used' in a purely decorative manner. Once a design or colour was established in a room, the Beesons attempted to purchase other pieces which would harmonise with it. When the Beesons found a pair of candelabra that complemented the chandelier in the foyer, they 'just had to have them'.<sup>8</sup> (Figure 84) Though the Beesons emphasised that the pieces were 'used in an eighteenth-century manner with busts on top of bookcases, plaques on walls, and garniture on mantels' it was often a matter of matching colours and decoration that determined which objects would be displayed alongside one another.<sup>9</sup>

The Beesons displayed their first purchase, the pair of blue jasper vases with decorations of the muses, on their mantelpiece.<sup>10</sup> (Figure 85) When Otto Wasserman offered them a plaque with a similar decoration in 'the same clear light blue'; they purchased it despite the fact that the figures were 'somewhat smaller than those in the vases on mantel'.<sup>11</sup> Finding objects produced at corresponding times was certainly not an issue in display. A pair of oval medallions, which matched the vases' relief decoration and colouration, were purchased in order to be displayed with the vases and plaque despite the fact that they were not as old as the other objects.<sup>12</sup> The Beesons were particularly proud of the display of the two Portland Vase copies in their home. Following the purchase of the first copy, which Mrs. Beeson called her 'first love'; the couple bought a cabinet specifically for its display.<sup>13</sup> (Figure 86) Once it had been installed, they photographed the vase in situ, and sent copies to Mr.

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<sup>6</sup> Harry M. Buten, *Wedgwood ABC But Not Middle E*, (Merion, Pennsylvania: Buten Museum of Wedgwood, 1964), pp. 62-63.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>8</sup> Lucille Beeson 1963 Catalogue entry no. 101. Purchased Rothschild's in New Orleans, May 1963.

<sup>9</sup> Elizabeth Bryding Adams, *The Dwight and Lucille Beeson Wedgwood Collection at the Birmingham Museum of Art*, (Birmingham: Birmingham Museum of Art, 1992), p.9.

<sup>10</sup> Lucille Beeson 1963 Catalogue entry no. 43.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.* This is the medallion set into the centre of the mantelpiece in figure three.

<sup>12</sup> Lucille Beeson 1963 Catalogue entry no. 104. One of these may be seen in figure three inset into the corner of the mantelpiece. The vases were dated by the Beesons as 'prior to 1830', the plaque to 1800, and the medallions to the mid-nineteenth century.

<sup>13</sup> '...So Vast a Collection', *Birmingham*, the Official Monthly Publication of the Birmingham Area Chamber of Commerce, vol. 6, no. 11, November 1967.

Simmons and others they thought might be interested.<sup>14</sup> This individual object, which had a distinct and prestigious social cachet, bestowed a significant status upon the collection as a whole. When attempting to acquire another copy of the vase from Sir Robin Darwin, Mrs. Beeson sent him a photograph of the cabinet in which the slate blue vase was held in order to show him where the Darwin vase would be displayed after the Beesons purchased it.<sup>15</sup>

Both Mrs. Beeson and her husband identified themselves metonymically with specific objects in the collection. They pictured and represented themselves with their favourite pieces in both publicity photos and portraits; Mr. Beeson with the Portland Vase copy and Mrs. Beeson with a yellow goblet vase. (Figures 30 & 87) Mr. Beeson's acquisition and identification with the Portland Vase has previously been discussed, but if we turn our attention to the portrait of Lucille Beeson by William Wilson we will see her with one of the prized objects in their collection. (Figure 88) Mrs. Beeson wrote in the 1963 catalogue entry for this vase that it was her favourite piece and one of the rarest in the collection.<sup>16</sup> She admired its 'transparency' and its 'very fine workmanship'. She assumed its date of production was 'prior to 1790', manufactured around the same time as a similar pair of vases housed in the British Museum and reproduced in one of Meteyard's texts.<sup>17</sup> When the Beesons first displayed this vase at the Second International Wedgwood Seminar in 1956 it received 'more admiration and was discussed more' than any other piece brought to the Seminar 'except one of the original copies of the Portland Vase'.<sup>18</sup> Interestingly,

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<sup>14</sup> See response letter from Mr. E.E. Simmons to Mrs. Beeson, 28 March 1965, BMAA. 'Many thanks for your letter of the 19<sup>th</sup> March with the colour photographs which Mrs. Simmons and I were much interested to have. We think the cabinet you bought in New Orleans is most suitable to house the Portland Vase. It sets it off nicely, it protects it and it is useful with its drawers for the various documents relating to the Vase.' Simmons was the agent who bought the vase for the Beesons from an auction in London.

<sup>15</sup> Letter from Mr. Beeson to Sir Robin Darwin, 9 September 1965, BMAA. Mrs. Beeson asked 'If I had a clear shelf the light would shine upon both vases. Would that not be attractive, Sir?'

<sup>16</sup> Lucille Beeson 1963 Catalogue entry no. 18. 'Our favorite piece of Wedgwood and probably the most rare. This transparent vase is of very fine workmanship. Has a "sink pot" in the base, and is surely made prior to 1790 at about the time the green and white pair in the British Museum were made. Meteyard illustrates one in her "Life of Josiah Wedgwood", Vol. II. This was taken to the Second International Wedgwood Seminar in New York, 1956, and when shown received more admiration and was discussed more than any other brought to the seminar, except one of the original copies of the Portland Vase! Purchased from Toby House, New York in September 1956 and paid \$250! This is so rare and so beautiful and I was offered so much for it in New York that we have realized what we have in this and increased the insurance - \$1000 (1962).'

<sup>17</sup> Lucille Beeson 1963 Catalogue entry no. 18.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.



then, Mrs. Beeson chose this object to complement her husband's choice of the Portland Vase. Rather than the established and canonical piece, the highest achievement of Wedgwood's career, Mrs. Beeson chose a more subtle option but one which represented all the elements the Beesons found desirable; it was rare, old and valuable, it was of fine quality and had connections with prestigious museum collections, and it was referenced in literature on Wedgwood and admired by other members of the WIS. In picturing herself with this object in a portrait, which she displayed within her home, consumption became implicated in processes of character confirmation.<sup>19</sup> (Figure 89) In defining their taste through Wedgwood, the couple acted within a structured and learnt system of classification and a framework for cultural propriety and personal identity.<sup>20</sup> The forms of aesthetic appreciation to which the Beesons adhered were made possible by certain social conditions which also determined for whom the experience was possible.<sup>21</sup> It was the Beesons' wealth and education which made their collecting possible and articulated a sense of identity.<sup>22</sup>

The home was not only a site for private display, but also became the platform upon which the Beesons introduced others to their objects and to themselves. Members of the WIS were invited into the home on their visits to Birmingham and after the purchase of the two copies of the Portland Vase, the Beesons invited numerous people to come and see them in their new domestic setting. The value of collectible objects is determined by social valuation and for collectors like the Beesons validation for their activities came from the participation of the people they accepted into their home. On 5 November 1965, Mrs. Beeson and her husband invited about sixty people, primarily members of the Birmingham Museum board and others connected with the Museum, to come to their home to view the vase.<sup>23</sup> She even kept a record of those who had visited in the form of a guest book.<sup>24</sup> Along with the registry of visitors, Mrs. Beeson provided descriptions of her table decoration and the food she

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<sup>19</sup> See Colin Campbell's argument for a character action approach to consumption, which serves to provide a foil to Veblen's trickle-down or emulative consumption model. Colin Campbell, *The Romantic Ethic and the Spirit of Modern Consumerism*, (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1987).

<sup>20</sup> *Consumption and Everyday Life*, ed. by Hugh Mackay, (London: Sage Publications in association with The Open University, 1997), p. 4.

<sup>21</sup> Bourdieu and Darbel, (1991), *op. cit.*, p. 109.

<sup>22</sup> Mackay, (1997), *op. cit.*, p. 4.

<sup>23</sup> Mrs. Beeson's 'For the Erasmus Darwin Wedgwood copy of the Portland Vase - #12', BMAA.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*

served, the ladies who assisted her with the party and the flowers they received from the Executive Board.<sup>25</sup> The guest book, with Mrs. Beeson's annotations, provides a record of those who attended this event and other subsequent events held in the Beesons' home. While the Beesons were active agents in creating meaning for their collected objects, they continued to use them in processes of socialisation, where they conformed to accepted definitions given to these objects and sought approval from these very meaning makers. Visitors included everyone from Ross Taggart, Director of the Nelson Museum in Kansas City, on his visit to the Birmingham Museum of Art, to members of Mrs. Beeson's garden club. A curator from the Smithsonian Museum complimented not only the 'superb collection' but also praised the couples' 'gracious hospitality'.<sup>26</sup>

Entertaining and establishing a social role for themselves within the space of the home played an important function alongside their other purpose of displaying and exposing their collection to others.<sup>27</sup> The Beesons' collecting activities and their display of the collection in their home was part of an active process through which they were able to forge identities and participate in a kind of community. Their social mobility and status was dependent on exhibiting their competence in specialised occupations such as collecting. The home was a key site for the working out of this process.<sup>28</sup> It was a place of mediation between the boundaries of private and public space. This domestic realm allowed the collection a physical presence, yet it was its very domesticity that served to separate the collection from the material world. This purpose-built display in the enclosed spaces of the home allowed these objects to be kept out of the economic circuit.<sup>29</sup> At the same time the space was organised for a viewing audience whose access was controlled and monitored by Mrs. Beeson. In inviting people into the home, where they would encounter the Beesons' narratives of

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<sup>25</sup> Ibid. 'They were the lovely fall shades of Mums which look well in our den-and a beautiful white orchid for me'

<sup>26</sup> Ibid. Dated 26 May 1966. Paul Gardner, curator of Ceramics and Glass from the Smithsonian.

<sup>27</sup> It also provided the Beesons with further opportunities for purchasing Wedgwood pieces. After an initial visit by Fred and Mary Tongue, where they commented what 'A Pleasure and a Privilege to know the Beesons and to be Exposed to this wonderful Wedgwood Collection that can now be among the "Top Ten" Collections in the Country', they returned to the Beesons' home with over twenty pieces from their personal collection of Wedgwood to sell to the Beesons. Written in Mrs. Beeson's 'For the Erasmus Darwin Wedgwood copy of the Portland Vase - #12', BMAA, 12 May 1966.

<sup>28</sup> Giles, (2004), *op. cit.*, p. 103.

<sup>29</sup> The removal of objects from the economic circuit was a defining aspect of collecting for Krzysztof Pomian, *Collectors and Curiosities: Paris and Venice 1500-1800*, trans. Elizabeth Wiles-Porter, (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1990), p. 9.

collecting, meanings were made and re-made as the narrator attempted to make sense of the collection and to construct a social and personal identity.<sup>30</sup>

### **The Home and Gendered Consumption**

Mrs. Beeson's collection was something to which she related on a material and personal level, not only in the home but also in the representation of her physical self. She often chose Wedgwood blue for her personal attire and was photographed many times wearing pieces of Wedgwood jewellery. (Figure 90 & 91) Mrs. Beeson portrayed herself as visually integrated into her domestic background, even through the clothes she wore. There was literally a close relationship between her social identity and these things. While an object's collective meaning and value were governed by social and cultural criteria, the object assumed further significance for Mrs. Beeson. The act of possession was a singular and private act which allowed for public avowal of self recognition.<sup>31</sup> Mrs. Beeson was able to personally identify with specific objects only after they had been separated from the world of material goods and been subsumed by the collection. The isolation within a domestic and personal space allowed for subsequent classifications, where narratives of identity were drawn into the object's history.<sup>32</sup>

Suburban domesticity during the era of the Beesons' collecting was a domesticity of ordered display and understated consumption in which judgments of taste and style defined social position and shared tastes defined communities.<sup>33</sup> The effects of modernity transformed domestic experience, while a consumer-oriented economy led to subsequent changes in domestic identities offered to women with specific reference to domestic commodities.<sup>34</sup> Middle-class women, as 'guardians of the domestic realm', were asked to 'play a difficult and contradictory role' which was bound to the labour of housework and the 'refinements of polite society'.<sup>35</sup> Women began to resolve this dilemma by seeking new roles and by redefining the terms of

<sup>30</sup> Giles, (2004), *op. cit.*, p. 25.

<sup>31</sup> Jean Baudrillard, 'The System of Collecting' in Elsner and Cardinal, *The Culture of Collecting*, (London: Reaktion Books, 1994), pp. 7-24, pp. 11-12. Baudrillard says that it is 'I' who possesses the article which, in turn, allows self recognition in it as 'an absolutely singular being'.

<sup>32</sup> Susan Pearce, *Collecting in Contemporary Practice*, (London: Sage Publications, 1998), p. 163.

<sup>33</sup> *Visions of Suburbia*, ed. by Roger Silverstone, (London & New York: Routledge, 1997), p. 11-12.

<sup>34</sup> Giles, (2004), *op. cit.*, p. 101.

<sup>35</sup> Alice T. Friedman, *Women and the Making of the Modern House: A Social and Architectural History*, (New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc., 1998), p. 16.

domesticity.<sup>36</sup> Women reformers of the early twentieth century were divided into two categories; one group dedicated to expanding the influence of women by concentrating on the values and pursuits traditionally associated with gentility in the home: through women's clubs, book groups, and charitable work these women shared their expertise and developed new skills as readers, public speakers and organisers; while the second group focused on higher education, professional opportunities, and political activism.<sup>37</sup> As developments in domestic technologies improved, it became increasingly accepted that consumption had become part of 'women's work'.<sup>38</sup> Women were expected to consume in a certain way which was influenced by such media as women's magazines, where consumption was to be disciplined and an exercise in restraint and good taste.<sup>39</sup> Women were positioned at the forefront of this economic shift and the 'modern' home was the place where the acquisition of goods found their most potent expression.<sup>40</sup>

Mrs. Beeson, like so many of her contemporaries, had resigned herself to the fact that the seats of economic and political power were the urban offices where men carried out their work.<sup>41</sup> Despite being one of the first women to receive a law degree from the Atlanta School of Law, Mrs. Beeson confided to Richard Brockman, her attorney, that her career in law had been short-lived.<sup>42</sup> Brockman related that Mrs. Beeson had abandoned her career because she felt overburdened by the amount of suffering her clients experienced and frustrated by her own powerlessness to change much of the sorrow in their lives.<sup>43</sup> Her frustrations were echoed in other criticisms of the post-war American dream of affluence and suburban living. By the late 1950s there was an established critique of suburbia on TV as well as in science fiction novels.<sup>44</sup> Betty Friedan published *The Feminine Mystique* in 1963 and even earlier feminists like Elizabeth Hawes were aware that domesticity could be stultifying and frustrating.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

<sup>37</sup> Friedman, (1998), *op. cit.*, p. 16-17.

<sup>38</sup> Attfield and Kirkham, (1995), *op. cit.*, p. 206.

<sup>39</sup> Attfield and Kirkham, (1995), *op. cit.*, p. 207.

<sup>40</sup> Giles, (2004), *op. cit.*, p. 101.

<sup>41</sup> Friedman, (1998), *op. cit.*, p. 16.

<sup>42</sup> Brockman interviewed in Clarissa Harms, 'The Legacy of Lucille Beeson', *Newsheet: Junior League of Birmingham*, Summer 2001, pp. 13-14.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

<sup>44</sup> Silverstone, (1997), *op. cit.*, p. 226. See specifically Phillip K. Dick's *Time Out of Joint*, which used the suburbs as a trope for the horrors of banality.

<sup>45</sup> Hawes published *Why Women Cry* in 1943 and *Hurry Up Please* in 1946.

The solution offered by early feminists writing in the 1950s was the provision of opportunities for meaningful work for women. Academic consensus has framed this era as a 'low point', a regression in women's history.<sup>46</sup> Most revisionist accounts look to the radicalism of politicised and working women to counterpoise the pervasive suburban stereotype.<sup>47</sup> The image of the suburban housewife as a de-skilled and trivialised victim of modernity and consumerism prevailed,<sup>48</sup> yet material culture was potentially an active rather than passive aspect of the formation of post-war feminine identity.<sup>49</sup> The domestic realm could provide a space of power for women like Mrs. Beeson, a place where they could exert a measure of independence. Mrs. Beeson was able to realise an occupation through collecting and used her home not as a private haven but as a site of economic relations embedded in wider socio-economic structures. She negotiated the tension between the home as a site of comfort and the home as an arena of display.

### **The WIS and Display in the Home**

In 1968 members of the WIS visited the Beesons in Birmingham to attend the opening of a new extension to the Birmingham Museum of Art.<sup>50</sup> (Figure 92) Their entertainment included dining at 'The Club' followed by a visit, in formal attire, to the Birmingham Country Club for a cocktail party hosted by the Beesons.<sup>51</sup> The following day limousines arrived at the hotel to escort members 'up the long curving drive of the Beeson estate to their crest-striding, long brick home'.<sup>52</sup> Lunch was taken at the Country Club where they overlooked 'the two extensive golf courses and the wide sunny swimming pool'.<sup>53</sup> The editor reporting the events in *The American Wedgwoodian* commented they had felt 'at home with these fine people'.<sup>54</sup> The WIS had informed the Beesons' classification of their Wedgwood wares; these shared and yet controlled classifications in turn induced and indicated categories of persons.

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<sup>46</sup> See Alison J. Clarke, 'Tupperware: Suburbia, sociality and mass consumption' in Silverstone, (1997), *op. cit.*, where she critiques Glenna Matthews, 'Just a Housewife': The Rise and Fall of Domesticity in America (Oxford, 1987) which describes the enhanced pre-war 'possibility for self-respect on the part of the housewife' as having 'dissolved by the mid-twentieth century', p. 22.

<sup>47</sup> Clarke, (1997), *op. cit.*, p. 133.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>50</sup> Lloyd E. Hawes, 'Wedgwoodians Visit Birmingham', *The American Wedgwoodian*, vol. II, no. 8, February 1968, pp. 142-145. The museum will be explored in further detail in the next chapter.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*

When the Beesons presented their collection, their home and their lifestyle to their collecting companions they were distinguishing their social relations in a hierarchical repertoire. The country club, the exclusive restaurants, and the formal attire all contributed to a formalised language used in a system of recognition as a code of ‘social standing’.<sup>55</sup> If we are to understand ‘manner’ in the way Bourdieu does, ‘as a symbolic manifestation whose meaning and value depend as much on the perceivers as on the producer’, then we can begin to understand how the consumption of symbolic goods, those associated with excellence, act as a marker of class as well as the stratification of distinction.<sup>56</sup> For collectors like the Beesons, the WIS provided a separate social sphere in which regulated fantasies centring around consumer goods could be activated and propagated. These collectors forged an active role for themselves in controlling the significations and social meanings of the objects around them and through the application of these meanings the collectors appreciated that categories of people were being generated. They were able to reveal the desired self, materialised around signs of affluence and taste.<sup>57</sup>

The WIS emphasised the position and role of the collection within domestic settings. Meetings and seminars would often involve visits to members’ homes in order to view their collections. Harriet Bougearel, a WIS member reporting on one of the Seminars, provided a typical account of these visits;

After lunch at the Blackstone, the buses came again and took us off for a lovely afternoon viewing private collections. Our first stop was the apartment of Thomas Baker and Arthur Weiner, two of our young members, both with impeccable taste. Their apartment was filled with beautiful things with some choice early Wedgwood. From there we drove to the Samuel Victors’ in Glencoe where we enjoyed a beautiful tea and viewed an outstanding collection of early Wedgwood.<sup>58</sup>

These collectors invariably reconfigured and recontextualised their purchases and in doing so created and represented images of their lifestyle to others.<sup>59</sup> The collectors created a relationship between their own ideals of self as defined through taste and an

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<sup>55</sup> Jean Baudrillard, ‘The System of Objects’, in *Jean Baudrillard*, ed by Mark Poster, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001), pp. 13-31, p. 22.

<sup>56</sup> Bourdieu, (1984), *op. cit.*, p. 66.

<sup>57</sup> Baudrillard (2001), *op. cit.*, p. 20.

<sup>58</sup> Harriet Bougearel, ‘The Nineteenth Seminar’, *The American Wedgwoodian*, vol. IV, no. 4, February 1976, pp. 81-85.

<sup>59</sup> John Brewer and Roy Porter, (eds.), *Consumption and the World of Goods*, (London and New York: Routledge, 1993), p.30.

author name which became the indice of these attributes. Wedgwood became the parameters within which collectors indicated a discourse about status.<sup>60</sup>

Through its journal, *The American Wedgwoodian*, the WIS often reported and illustrated how their members displayed their collections in their private homes. The Oster collection, described as, ‘the earliest comprehensive collection of Wedgwood in America that remains in the original collector’s home’, was highlighted in the December 1966 issue.<sup>61</sup> (Figure 93) In 1962, the journal featured a short article on the Klawans collection, which the Beesons would later acquire;

The collection is housed in their large apartment and is displayed in several cabinets and vitrines as well as framed pictures on the walls and as decorative accessories. Despite the large number of objects, the arrangement does not suggest the atmosphere of a museum but rather serves as an example of integrating a collection of antique objects into the daily lives of the family.<sup>62</sup>

While the editor of the journal conceded that a Wedgwood collection made a ‘fine display in a museum’, it became ‘elegant and colorful decoration when used more intimately in a person’s home or business quarters’.<sup>63</sup> Mrs. Beeson even credited Wedgwood’s popularity over the years to its domestic setting. She wrote that Wedgwood was ‘well known and loved by so many because for over two hundred years that factory has catered to the homemaker’.<sup>64</sup> Some of the images of private collections illustrated in *The American Wedgwoodian* show how completely collectors’ homes were taken over by Wedgwood objects. The Milestones of Pennsylvania had a marble silhouette of the Portland Vase inlaid into the flooring of their foyer and converted long passageways into vitrine lined corridors holding hundreds of pieces of the ware.<sup>65</sup> (Figure 94) The Beesons’ home and collection was featured in this manner, with reproductions not only of objects from the collection, but of their home and themselves posing with the objects.<sup>66</sup> (Figure 95)

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<sup>60</sup> Michel Foucault, ‘What is an Author?’, in Paul Rabinow, *The Foucault Reader*, (New York: Pantheon Books, 1984), p. 10.

<sup>61</sup> Lloyd E. Hawes, ‘The Oster Collection’, *The American Wedgwoodian*, vol. II, no. 5, December 1966, pp. 90-95.

<sup>62</sup> ‘The Klawans Collection’ in *The Seventh Wedgwood International Seminar*, (Chicago: The Art Institute of Chicago, 1962), p. 93.

<sup>63</sup> ‘The Wedgwood Collection of Mr. and Mrs. Milton Milestone’, *The American Wedgwoodian*, vol. II, no. 3, April 1966, p. 52.

<sup>64</sup> Lucille Beeson, ‘Wedgwood’, no date, BMAA.

<sup>65</sup> ‘The Wedgwood Collection of Mr. and Mrs. Milton Milestone’, *The American Wedgwoodian*, vol. II, no. 3, April 1966, p. 52-55.

<sup>66</sup> Lloyd E. Hawes, ‘The Beeson Collection’, *The American Wedgwoodian*, vol. II, no. 6, April 1967, p. 103-111.

Harry Buten, founder of the WIS, provided an extreme example of a domestic Wedgwood collection becoming the dominant theme within the home. Rather than donate his collection to a public institution, he turned his home into a museum dedicated to Wedgwood.<sup>67</sup> (Figure 96) Buten admitted that ‘conversion from a grand residence to a small museum, still occupied by its owner-staff’ was a decorating problem.<sup>68</sup> He did manage to create a site where over eight thousand pieces of Wedgwood were displayed, however, and, speaking in the third person, recounted the success of living with the collection;

The great growth in Buten’s happiness as a collector has largely been dependent on the participation, help, and understanding of his wife, Nettie. Besides the official post of President and Curator of the Museum, her place in the Buten World of Wedgwood is the antithesis of a nagging, non-understanding wife who makes her collector husband conceal his acquisitions or else demands that every item in the collection must have a place in the decorative scheme of the house. The person who asks: “What shall I do with it?” or, “Where shall I put it?” has flunked. He or she is not a collector.<sup>69</sup>

The collections featured in the WIS journal inevitably focused on the homes of the wealthy and in order to ensure and enhance the value of the goods, attempted to appeal to certain sectors of the population. While collecting is a process which refers back to the collector, without common codes and conventions of meaning these objects would not have the signifying power that collectors desire. For the WIS, a notion of community was of seminal importance and became part of their mission statement, yet this community was exclusive. While predicated merely on an interest in the pottery of Wedgwood, the organisation had rigidly defined socio-economic targets. Collecting was constructed as a practice available only to the wealthy; ‘Today... when Wedgwood competes with the major early porcelain factories in price, it is very difficult to embark on a collection of Wedgwood ware without a fair amount of capital to play with.’<sup>70</sup> By 1971 the president of the WIS was able to

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<sup>67</sup> This museum was opened in 1957 and contained over 8000 pieces. The home, located just outside Philadelphia, was constructed in 1900, and described by Buten as built in the ‘Normandy style’. *The American Wedgwoodian*, vol. III, no. 7, May 1971, and Harry M. Buten, ‘Wedgwood and Buten’, *The American Wedgwoodian*, vol. III, no. 2, February 1969, pp. 53-56.

<sup>68</sup> Harry M. Buten, ‘Wedgwood and Buten’, *The American Wedgwoodian*, vol. III, no. 2, February 1969, pp. 53-56.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>70</sup> Morley-Fletcher, (1968), *op. cit.*, p. 56.



comment that there was ‘no question that the formation of a collection of antique Wedgwood today [was] reserved for the wealthy’.<sup>71</sup>

For the members of the WIS, there was a satisfaction in their shared experience which provided a clear demarcation separating them from the ‘banalities’ of the masses. The president of the WIS, Lloyd Hawes commented that ‘Wedgwoodians’ enjoyed ‘a genuine satisfaction’ in the ‘ability to talk and entertain others formally and informally with tales of his own collecting’.<sup>72</sup>

How different is the conversation in a Wedgwood meeting from the banalities and forced stream of nonsense often heard at cocktail parties. At such a party, it is often more enjoyable not to talk, but to listen to the quality of the prattling tongues. There is little substance and no one is listening to another speaker. What common subject can they talk about? Certainly not Wedgwood as they do not have the training or the desire to hear about that subject.<sup>73</sup>

The collector effected this separation through the creation of systems of knowledge, and the creation of networks of communication with other collectors. Their power lay in the ability to transform collecting activities into classifying practices, that is, into a symbolic expression of class position. It is through the material world that we define our space in the world, and in turn define what is ‘other’. To collect is to adhere to and reflect wider cultural rules, rules of rational taxonomies, gender and aesthetics.<sup>74</sup> Taste, in the guise of choice in product selection, is the primary operator in this system. It functions as a sort of social orientation, ‘guiding the occupants of a given place in social space towards the practices or goods which befit the occupants of that position’.<sup>75</sup> This in turn implies a culturally understood social meaning and value for the collected object based upon its distribution in the social space.

### **American Suburbia and Class Identity**

The Beesons’ home was located in the prosperous suburb of Birmingham called Mountain Brook. It was a highly desirable property detached from the urban conurbation in a clearly circumscribed residential and upper-middle-class enclave.

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<sup>71</sup> Lloyd E Hawes, ‘President’s Message: Some Mature Reflections on the Art of Wedgwood Collecting’, *The American Wedgwoodian*, vol. III, no. 6, February 1971, p. 114 & pp. 122-123.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>74</sup> James Clifford, ‘On Collecting Art and Culture’, in *The Predicament of Culture*, (Cambridge, MA & London: Harvard University Press, 1988), pp. 215-251.

<sup>75</sup> Bourdieu, (1984), *op. cit.*, p. 466-467.

The neighbourhood has been described as ‘The home of the wealthy. The prestigious address of Birmingham’s leading citizens. That fabulous place of debutantes, parties, foreign cars, and fantastic glitter. The Promised Land. The Tiny Kingdom.’<sup>76</sup> The home, and its location, articulated social differentiation, economic status, possessive individualism, and aesthetic articulation of the self.<sup>77</sup> The landscaped garden on which the home was positioned clearly distinguished the site as a sphere of leisured aesthetic contemplation. (Figure 82) The space of the home not only inscribed and institutionalised difference; it simultaneously provided for locales where sameness and likeness were reinforced.<sup>78</sup> The Beesons allowed other collectors, dealers and museum professionals into their home; people of wealth and education who shared in the processes of identity and class construction. This sameness is witnessed in the WIS editor’s statement that they had felt ‘at home with these fine people’.<sup>79</sup> Mountain Brook, with its leafy and private streets, provided a collective identity for its inhabitants as distinct from other sectors of the city’s population, a distinction largely based on the isolation of the elite.<sup>80</sup>

The neighbourhood was established as a ‘country home community’ in the 1920s by Robert Jemison, Jr.<sup>81</sup> The development of the area was fuelled by the migratory movement of Birmingham’s wealthy citizens out of the city to what was known as the ‘Country Club district’.<sup>82</sup> Jemison & Company, agent and developers of Mountain Brook Estates, Inc., were ‘building literally a city of country estates, ranging in area from one to many acres’.<sup>83</sup> Intent upon ‘preserving the alluring native beauty of this woodland scene, landscape architects and engineers [had] planned improvements with care... adroitly [blending] the conveniences of city life into this charming rural setting.’<sup>84</sup> Mountain Brook Estates was ‘socially selective and appealed to persons of

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<sup>76</sup> Marilyn Davis Barefield, *A History of Mountain Brook, Alabama*, (Birmingham: Southern University Press, 1989), p. vii.

<sup>77</sup> *Visions of Suburbia*, Roger Silverstone, ed., (London & New York: Routledge, 1997), p. 27-28.

<sup>78</sup> Michel Foucault, ‘Of Other Spaces’, *Diacritics* 16:1, Spring 1986, pp. 22-7.

<sup>79</sup> Lloyd E. Hawes, ‘Wedgwoodians Visit Birmingham’, *The American Wedgwoodian*, vol. II, no. 8, February 1968, pp. 142-145.

<sup>80</sup> Silverstone, (1997), *op. cit.*, p. 30-31.

<sup>81</sup> Barefield, (1989), *op. cit.*, p. 70. Jemison organised Jemison & Company in 1904. He was also director of the First National Bank of Birmingham, president of the First National Bank of Fairfield, and president of the Birmingham Chamber of Commerce.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>83</sup> Jemison & Company promotional literature quoted in Barefield, (1989), *op. cit.*, p. 70.

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*

discrimination and critical taste.’<sup>85</sup> Residents were restricted to ‘white persons of the Caucasian Race’ and preference was given to the stockholders of Mountain Brook Estates, Inc.<sup>86</sup> Jemison was also selective about the kinds of businesses that could be conducted in the community. No business that produced an emission of fumes, gas, odour, dust or noise was acceptable; no hospital, asylum or sanatorium was allowed; undertakers and veterinarians could not practice there and no automotive garages were authorised.<sup>87</sup> Two private clubs were incorporated into the community, both with stables, swimming pools, tennis courts and golf courses.<sup>88</sup> When one of these, The Country Club of Birmingham, moved to Mountain Brook in 1927, more than half of its restricted membership lived within walking distance.<sup>89</sup>

### Anglo-America

The Country Club of Birmingham was designed and built as an English Tudor manor.<sup>90</sup> (Figure 97) When choosing an architectural style which would signify class and prestige, many in Birmingham followed the example set at the Country Club and chose a derivative English Tudor. Jemison selected this style when constructing the commercial area for Mountain Brook while, at the same time, a neighbouring community called English Village was established and, as the name suggests, employed this style.<sup>91</sup> (Figure 98) In this adoption of an Anglicised architectural tradition the planners and architects of Mountain Brook were following an American convention. American cultural forms are permeated with inquiries about origins, about lines of ancestry, but also about invention.<sup>92</sup> One of the hallmarks of twentieth-century American cultural debate has been the questioning of diversity and unity, difference and assimilation and of the genealogy of what is ‘America’.<sup>93</sup> In order to achieve ‘success’, upward mobility and an egotistic self-fulfilment, these middle-class Americans developed a highly competitive attitude in educational, occupational and other spheres of life. However, there were limits to the satisfaction to be gained from

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<sup>85</sup> Barefield, (1989), *op. cit.*, p. 73.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>89</sup> Barefield, (1989), *op. cit.*, p. 152.

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>91</sup> Barefield, (1989), *op. cit.*, p. 84-85. English Village was later incorporated into Mountain Brook.

<sup>92</sup> *The United States in the Twentieth Century: Culture*, ed. by Jeremy Mitchell and Richard Maidment, (Hodder & Stoughton in association with The Open University, 1994), p.1.

<sup>93</sup> Mitchell and Maidment, eds, (1994), *op. cit.*, p. 4.

this utilitarian individualism, and the 'empty self' sought to 'reconnect' with others through a commitment to a 'community of memory'.<sup>94</sup> For many in Alabama this memory was directed towards England and English cultural forms. The first sixty years of the twentieth century emphasised Americanisation, a process of assimilation into a common culture.<sup>95</sup> Many felt this meant a form of Anglo-conformity because the first substantial European migration to America was that of the English between 1607 and 1660, establishing an English character of American institutions, language and culture.<sup>96</sup>

America and its consumers have a long and involved relationship with the goods of Britain. Early American societies were colonial societies, which meant that they were economic and social extensions of Britain.<sup>97</sup> More importantly, America was a cultural province of Britain and its legal and social systems, perceptual frameworks, and social and cultural imperatives were largely British in origin.<sup>98</sup> In mapping out a developmental framework whereby the colonial process can be charted, the sequential stages began with social simplification, where people sought to manipulate their new environment while endeavouring to impose social arrangements that bore only a crude resemblance to those they had left behind.<sup>99</sup> During much of the seventeenth century the isolated American colonies were unable to access current artistic and design influences from Britain and the colonials persisted with styles and forms for many generations.<sup>100</sup> As American society became more settled they entered into the second phase, one of social elaboration, where highly creolized variants of British structures and values were articulated.<sup>101</sup> At this stage emerging elites were restructuring their societies along lines that would make them more demonstrably British.<sup>102</sup> In the final phase of social replication, the elites displayed a desire to recreate British society in America.<sup>103</sup> The material culture of the seventeenth century

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<sup>94</sup> Mitchell and Maidment, eds, (1994), *op. cit.*, p. 31.

<sup>95</sup> Mitchell and Maidment, eds, (1994), *op. cit.*, p. 19.

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>97</sup> *Colonial British America*, ed by Jack P. Greene and J.R. Pole, (Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 1984), p. 13-14.

<sup>98</sup> Greene & Pole, eds. (1989), p. 14.

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>100</sup> J.H. Plumb, *The American Experience*, (New York: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1989), p. 76.

<sup>101</sup> Greene & Pole, eds. (1989), p. 15.

<sup>102</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>103</sup> *Ibid.* This process should not be represented as harmonious with all sectors of society moving towards this increased Anglicisation.

pioneer America was swept aside for imported goods.<sup>104</sup> Figures like John Hancock and George Washington, members of an increasingly prosperous society, imported goods from Britain to decorate their homes. Indeed, it was Washington's association with his neighbours, the Fairfaxes, who were members of the British aristocracy, which enhanced his desire for distinction in clothing and domestic furnishings.<sup>105</sup>

John Adams described a visit to the home of a successful Boston merchant;

Went over [to] the House to view the Furniture, which alone cost a thousand Pounds sterling. A seat it is for a noble Man, a Prince. The Turkey Carpets, the painted Hangings, the Marble Table, the rich Beds with crimson Damask Curtains and Counterpins, the beautiful Chimny Clock, the Spacious Garden, are the most magnificent of any Thing I have ever seen.<sup>106</sup>

Alongside the importation of English goods was the circulation of architectural publications and builders' handbooks such as *Palladio Londonensis* (1748) and *British Architect* (1745).<sup>107</sup> American interiors incorporated common neo-classical elements to those used in England. (Figure 99) Designs were crafted and targeted specifically to the American market, including Wedgwood, who incorporated images of American heroes and American themes onto his transfer-printed wares.<sup>108</sup> (Figure 100)

It was the increase of affluence in both America and Britain, and the massive population rise in the former, which had a profound effect on the demand for goods and thus the development of a common culture. The commodities passing between the two created a shared language of consumption, creating a common framework of experience.<sup>109</sup> 'At all cultural levels, from the breeding of flowers or horses to natural philosophy, literature, and the arts, the two countries were almost as one.'<sup>110</sup> British products began to acquire cultural significance within communities and Americans began to define social status in relation to these commodities.<sup>111</sup> Most ceramic wares

<sup>104</sup> T.H. Breen, 'Baubles of Britain' in *Past & Present*, no. 119, 1988, p. 78. Breen noted that between 1750 and 1773 the American market for imported goods increased 120 per cent.

<sup>105</sup> Plumb, (1989), *op. cit.*, p. 118.

<sup>106</sup> John Adams, quoted in Breen, (1988), *op. cit.*, p. 79.

<sup>107</sup> Margaret Jourdan, *English Interior Decoration 1500-1830*, (London: B.T. Batsford, 1950), p. 49.

<sup>108</sup> After William Pitt vigorously denounced the Stamp Act, his popularity swelled amongst American colonists. Wedgwood wrote in July 1766, 'What do you think of sending Mr. Pitt upon crockery ware to America. A Quantity might certainly be sold there now and some advantage made of the American prejudice in favour of that great man'. Josiah Wedgwood to John Wedgwood, 18 July 1766, Keele University Archive, E25-18123.

<sup>109</sup> T.H. Breen, 'Baubles of Britain' in *Past & Present*, no. 119, 1988, pp. 73-104, p. 76.

<sup>110</sup> Plumb, (1989), *op. cit.*, p. 79.

<sup>111</sup> Breen, (1988), *op. cit.*, pp. 75-76.

found in the American colonies after 1660 were controlled by the English merchants as specified in the Navigation and Trade Acts. This, combined with the development of the Staffordshire pottery industry in the late seventeenth century, meant that virtually all imported wares were English in origin.<sup>112</sup> By the mid-eighteenth century Americans were caught up in a consumer revolution, with English ships flooding colonial markets with a variety of goods, the most common of which was Staffordshire ceramics.<sup>113</sup> Ceramics, like other British material goods were being consumed in systems very similar to those of Britain; ‘... after mid-century, there is ample evidence that Americans were as equally fascinated with the display of ceramic objects as were their European counterparts and that the techniques formulated in Europe translated well into the American home’.<sup>114</sup> In the 1790’s a French traveller observed that ‘the distribution of the apartments’ in American homes was ‘like that of England, the furniture [was] English, and, as in England, after dinner, the ladies withdr[ew], and [gave] place to drinking wine in full bumpers...’<sup>115</sup> This consumption, however, not only illustrated the cultural link between America and England, but provided one of the factors which would lead to the expansion of an American cultural core, and inevitably to their own bid for independence.<sup>116</sup>

Early American nationalism was ‘structurally and symbolically conditioned by consumer goods’.<sup>117</sup> Figures like John Paul Jones, who was portrayed on a Wedgwood medallion, were instrumental in defining the new America and its symbols and active in a new nation which was defining itself through its relations with Britain, largely through material goods. (Figure 101) It was Jones who, while in command of American ships, seized British munitions, sank, burned and captured British ships, and ‘raided’ a Selkirk mansion near Jones’ birthplace where a single plate was taken as a symbolic token. Josiah Wedgwood produced purposely politicised goods for the American market, such as the Slave medallion of which he

<sup>112</sup> Ann Smart Martin, ‘Magical, Mythical, Practical, and Sublime: The Meanings and Uses of Ceramics in America’ in Robert Hunter (ed.), *Ceramics in America*, (Hanover & London: Chipstone Foundation, 2001), pp. 28-46, p. 35.

<sup>113</sup> Greene & Pole, eds., (1989), p. 222.

<sup>114</sup> Barry A. Greenlaw, “‘More for Show Than Use’”: The Display of China in the 18<sup>th</sup>-Century House’, in *Thirty-Fourth Annual Wedgwood International Seminar*, Sponsored by The High Museum of Art and The Ceramic Circle of Atlanta, Atlanta, Georgia, 1989, p. 51.

<sup>115</sup> Ibid. The quote comes from *Travels Through the United States of North America in the Years 1795, 1796 and 1797* Vol. 4, p. 589.

<sup>116</sup> Greene & Pole, eds., (1989), p. 222.

<sup>117</sup> Brewer and Porter, eds., (1993), *op. cit.*, p.32.

sent multiple copies to Benjamin Franklin. (Figure 25) Franklin responded thanking Wedgwood for his 'valuable present of Cameos' which he distributed among his friends 'in whose countenances I have seen such marks of being affected by contemplating the Figure of the S... it may have an effect equal to that of the best written pamphlet'.<sup>118</sup> After the American Revolution, Benjamin Franklin appeared at the court of Versailles. He chose to forego the normal fashion of wearing a sword, an act which at the time was seen as formally avowing the principles of his constituents; 'commerce, not conquest'.<sup>119</sup> That these acts targeted material goods is indicative of the change which was occurring in the understanding of their function. The consumption of British goods was transformed from private consumer acts into public political statements.<sup>120</sup>

Throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries Americans chose to consume British goods, Wedgwood among them. The consumption of goods, however, communicated messages about taste rather than politics. In 1902, the Wedgwood company received an extremely important order from the White House. Like the Empress Catherine's service one hundred and thirty years earlier, the White House service for President Theodore Roosevelt was worth more in prestige than profit, but it was almost as important to the reputation of Wedgwood's bone china as the 'Frog' service had been to Queen's ware.<sup>121</sup> (Figure 102) While an 1826 Act of Congress directed that all equipment for the President's house be native to the United States as far as possible, it was not until 1917, during the administration of Woodrow Wilson, that a President purchased their dinnerware from an American supplier.<sup>122</sup> The

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<sup>118</sup> Franklin's letter was transcribed by Eliza Meteyard in archives at Wedgwood Museum, Burslem (19080.26).

<sup>119</sup> A report of this event was recorded in *The London Chronicle*, 1778, kept in archives at Wedgwood Museum, Burslem (19080.26 A).

<sup>120</sup> Brewer and Porter, eds., (1993), *op. cit.*, p.32.

<sup>121</sup> Reilly, (1989), *op. cit.*, p. 148.

<sup>122</sup> Lloyd E. Hawes, 'The Twelfth Seminar', *The American Wedgwoodian*, vol. II, no. 7, October 1967, pp. 117-125. American Presidents, even the earliest, received government funds to purchase state china. 'However, by a special clause in the appropriation bills, "decayed furnishings" could be sold and the proceeds used to buy replacements. Such "furnishings" included state china, and during the 19th century the cupboards were frequently swept clean and the contents carted off to auction. The money could then be used to order a new china service that better suited the President and his family.' See [www.whitehouse.gov/history/whtour/china.html](http://www.whitehouse.gov/history/whtour/china.html). The first American-made porcelain state service purchased by President Woodrow Wilson, features a dark blue cobalt border edged by a wide gilt rim and an inner band bearing gilt stars and stripes, with the presidential arms in raised 24-carat gold in the centre. This pattern was re-ordered during the administrations of Harding, Coolidge, Hoover, and Clinton, making it the most frequently re-ordered service in the history of the White House. See [www.philamuseum.org/exhibitions/collection/244.html](http://www.philamuseum.org/exhibitions/collection/244.html) [Accessed 03 February 2007].

Wedgwood service was ordered by the First Lady, Edith Roosevelt. As First Lady, Edith made many lasting changes to the White House, gaining congressional support for White House renovations that would separate the living quarters from the executive offices and restore the mansion to its original eighteenth-century appearance.<sup>123</sup> After the order from Wedgwood, Edith's interest in her own china fostered a curiosity about the services of previous First Ladies.<sup>124</sup> She arranged for the china from past administrations to be displayed in cabinets along a ground floor hallway where guests stood in line to meet the first couple.<sup>125</sup> This marked the beginnings of the display of Presidential china, a practice continued during the administration of Woodrow Wilson by his wife with the opening of the Presidential Collection Room in 1917, which featured the White House's growing collection of china in a room decorated in the 'English Regency style' complete with the Chippendale sidechairs used by President George Washington.<sup>126</sup> English goods were incorporated into the discussion and display of America's own heritage and material culture.

Frederick Rathbone commented on the prestige in which Wedgwood was held in America, where 'the standard reading-books of the American National Schools' included 'an account of his life and work, and every American child [was] familiar with the story.'<sup>127</sup> The enthusiasm for Wedgwood appeared to have been especially strong in those nations with strong ties to 'Mother' England.<sup>128</sup> Were it not for the import duties on Wedgwood in America and Australia, Rathbone argued, 'it would soon be difficult at home to acquire Old Wedgwood, or any English ceramics, at present prices.'<sup>129</sup> There was also interest in Old Wedgwood ware on the continent. Josiah Wedgwood & Sons, Ltd exhibited a number of eighteenth century Wedgwood vases at the 1910 Brussels Exhibition.<sup>130</sup> While Wedgwood's popularity was strong

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<sup>123</sup> <[www.americanpresident.org/history/theodoreroosevelt/firstlady/](http://www.americanpresident.org/history/theodoreroosevelt/firstlady/)> [Accessed 03 February 2007].

<sup>124</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>125</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>126</sup> [www.whitehouse.gov/history/whtour/china.html](http://www.whitehouse.gov/history/whtour/china.html) [Accessed 03 February 2007]. For another collection of Presidential china see the McNeil Collection of American Presidential China at the Philadelphia Museum, which included more than 450 wares.

<sup>127</sup> Rathbone, (1909), *op. cit.*, p. 23.

<sup>128</sup> Dean Rockwell, 'The Wedgwood Society of Australia', *The American Wedgwoodian*, vol. IV, no. 3, April 1974.

<sup>129</sup> Rathbone, (1909), *op. cit.*, p. 24. The import duty was 60% in America and 20% in Australia.

<sup>130</sup> Memo from Josiah Wedgwood & Sons Ltd, 27 May 1910 to Sir Cecil Smith, Chairman of the Loan Collection Committee, Brussels Exhibition, Keele University Archives.



internationally, Rathbone bemoaned the fact that the potter and his wares were less well regarded on his native soil;

Civilised nations are justly proud of the art-work produced in their country. Wedgwood ceramics deserve all possible veneration by his countrymen from the fact that the art is essentially a British one; thought out and produced by a worthy native, who had never travelled beyond the limits of his country, who encouraged native artists and workmen for its production.<sup>131</sup>

Rathbone lamented the fact that while ‘Other nations have fully recognised Wedgwood’s services to the ceramic industry’, he perceived a certain neglect amongst his contemporary countrymen. During the Second World War, when sales in Britain were particularly low, the Wedgwood company continued to find America an increasingly important market. Trade with America even remained strong during the war, so much so that the Ministry of Information had ideas about exports, issuing an official suggestion in 1941 that workers in the pottery industry might send ‘personal messages to America, stuck in with one or two pots’.<sup>132</sup> Workers were encouraged to make suggestions for suitable messages, some of which were sent, and a customer in Boston, Massachusetts, wrote to acknowledge receipt of a message reading, ‘For Ships, Planes and Tanks we send our Thanks’.<sup>133</sup>

We have been encouraged to view post World War II America as a pivotal historical moment when commodity culture achieved sufficient breadth and density as to define the environment within which a shaken society was to be restored and reconstituted.<sup>134</sup> In the United States the nineteenth century bourgeois ethos enjoining work, saving, civic responsibility, and a Protestant morality of self-denial, shifted during the course of the twentieth century to a new set of values sanctioning periodic leisure, spending, and a more permissive (but subtly coercive) morality of individual fulfilment.<sup>135</sup> This shift was by no means sudden or complete, and in many consumer actions, such as the Beesons’ Wedgwood collecting, we witness a muddle of calculated self-control and spontaneous gratification. Due largely to the Great Depression and New Deal, consumption, citizenship and democracy came to public

<sup>131</sup> Rathbone, (1909), *op. cit.*, p. 22.

<sup>132</sup> Quoted in Reilly, (1989), *op. cit.*, p. 234.

<sup>133</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>134</sup> Brewer and Porter, eds., (1993), *op. cit.*, p. 27.

<sup>135</sup> *The Culture of Consumption: Critical Essays in American History 1880-1980*, Richard Wrightman Fox and T.J. Jackson Lears, eds, (New York: Pantheon Books, 1983), p. 3. Fox and Lears characterise this shift as one from a ‘consumer ethic’ to a ‘producer ethic’.

light in an urgent way and political citizenship was recast as consumer behaviour.<sup>136</sup> It was a model which established the predominance of individual acquisitiveness and defined a good society through the private well-being achieved by consumer spending.<sup>137</sup> By the 1940's, the insularity and autonomy of America's commercial culture had greatly diminished. It became possible for Americans 'to pursue the consumption of politics, to form one's political thought and practice upon the model of commodity-exchange'.<sup>138</sup> For post-war American historians the key to the purported exceptionalism of the US was located in its material abundance and consumption, which for these authors was not only good historical fortune, but a critical element in American history and a distinctive and determinate trait of American society.<sup>139</sup> However, such consensus history, with its all-embracing and homogenous statements on national character, began to unravel during the political upheavals of the 1960's and 1970's.

In the volatile and segregated South, the utilisation of English cultural forms was a politicised statement. After the Civil War and during an age of massive industrialisation and mass immigration, people began to seek refuge in nostalgic visions of the past.<sup>140</sup> Southerners retreated defensively into an exclusive White Anglo Saxon Protestant heritage where America was seen as an offshoot of Old England.<sup>141</sup> The 1880's and 1890's saw the birth of scores of Sons, Daughters and other commemorative genealogical societies, with Anglo-Saxon origins a basis of membership.<sup>142</sup> These 'imagined communities' were conceived in terms of comradeship, yet at the same time established ideas of difference between this

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<sup>136</sup> *Getting and Spending*, ed by Charles McGovern & Matthias Jut, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), pp. 11 & 37. The New Deal was the title given to the series of programmes instigated by President Franklin D. Roosevelt with the goal of providing direct relief and economic recovery from the Great Depression.

<sup>137</sup> *The Sex of Things*, ed. by Victoria de Grazia, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996, p. 5.

<sup>138</sup> Brewer and Porter, (eds.), (1993), *op. cit.*, p. 32.

<sup>139</sup> McGovern and Jut, eds., (1998), *op. cit.*, p. 2.

<sup>140</sup> David Lowenthal, *The Past is a Foreign Country*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), p. 121.

<sup>141</sup> Lowenthal, (1985), *op. cit.*, pp. 121-122.

<sup>142</sup> Lowenthal, (1985), *op. cit.*, p. 122. The National Society of the Sons of the American Revolution, and its counterpart for women, the Daughters of the American Revolution, is an organization whose membership is conditional upon proof of lineal bloodline descent from an ancestor who actively supported the American Revolution. There are also organizations, such as Sons of Confederate Veterans and the United Daughters of the Confederacy, whose membership is based on descent from those who fought for the Confederate States during the Civil War.

imagined community and ‘others’.<sup>143</sup> The past, defined by Anglo-American connections, was a haven for traditional values, yet in its treatment it was invariably altered.<sup>144</sup> For some, including Governor George Wallace, an Anglo heritage validated not only traditional, but racist beliefs. In his inauguration speech on 14 January 1963 Wallace stood at the Alabama capitol in Montgomery and issued his call to arms;

Today I have stood, where once Jefferson Davis stood, and took an oath to my people. It is very appropriate then that from this Cradle of the Confederacy, this very Heart of the Great Anglo-Saxon Southland... we sound the drum for freedom... In the name of the greatest people that have ever trod this earth, I draw the line in the dust and toss the gauntlet before the feet of tyranny... and I say... segregation now... segregation tomorrow... segregation forever.<sup>145</sup>

English cultural forms and objects communicated a certain system of beliefs for consumers. Their purpose was the implicit social practice which could be ‘read’ from them.<sup>146</sup> The Beesons identified the objects, their history and the process of collecting Wedgwood in a specifically American system of circulation, while they simultaneously envisioned themselves as carrying on a grand tradition of British taste and refinement, as translating this sensibility into the American market. These objects became one of the fundamental ways in which collectors like the Beesons constructed and communicated identity. Wedgwood was a communicative tool, whose produced meaning conveyed ‘distinction’, class, status, and membership.<sup>147</sup> These definitions had been pursued from the nineteenth century, when Eliza Meteyard claimed that;

Where the beautiful objects were preserved, even though partially, the day of revival and renewed appreciation came, most probably in increased degree, for the acquired mental habitudes impress themselves on man’s organisation with sufficient force and permanence to occasion their transmission to the offspring as inborn tendencies to similar tastes and similar modes of thought.<sup>148</sup>

Harry Barnard in *Wedgwood Chats* alleged that Wedgwood had ‘always been preserved in the houses of the comparatively few who appreciate and recognise

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<sup>143</sup> This is Benedict Anderson’s term, which he applied to the nation state. See Anderson, (1983), *op. cit.*, pp. 15-16.

<sup>144</sup> Lowenthal, (1985), *op. cit.*, p. 264.

<sup>145</sup> Dan T. Carter, *The Politics of Rage: George Wallace, the Origins of the New Conservatism, and the Transformation of American Politics*, (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1995), p. 11.

<sup>146</sup> Susan Pearce, ‘Collecting as medium and message’, in Eilean Hooper-Greenhill, *Museum, Media, Message*, (London & New York: Routledge, 1995), pp. 15-23, p. 15.

<sup>147</sup> Rolland Munro, ‘The consumption view of self: extension, exchange and identity’, in *Consumption Matters*, ed by Stephen Edgell, et. al., (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1996), pp. 248-273.

<sup>148</sup> Eliza Meteyard, *Wedgwood Trio*, (Merion, PA: Reprinted by the Buten Museum of Wedgwood, 1967), p. 9.

excellence of technique, refinement of taste, and delicacy of texture and colour.’<sup>149</sup> For the Beesons, Wedgwood ware, with its austere neo-classical designs, its simple forms, subdued colours, and connections with eighteenth century England, provided a safe investment. Wedgwood ceramics had been defined as not only pleasant to use but also as embodying a ‘temperate dignity of style’.<sup>150</sup> Neo-classicism, constructed as ‘a revolt against Rococo extravagance’ and a ‘rational return to simplicity’, was envisaged in America as a ‘pure’ taste,<sup>151</sup> while English design of the eighteenth century was seen as a traditional turn away from modernism. Robin Reilly wrote that the American market had ‘bred an insistence on traditionally English design. However the case may be argued from a theoretical standpoint, the hard fact remains that Americans who buy the best English bone china do so for its prestige and quality; and for that reason they want it to be recognisably English. They do not want Scandinavian or German design.’<sup>152</sup> Similarly Victor Skellern, art director and designer for Wedgwood, wrote after a visit to the US, ‘By far the strongest impression in my mind is that above all WEDGWOOD in this market means “Quality” in a way that is not comprehended in England’.<sup>153</sup> The Beesons, and other American collectors of Wedgwood, absorbed these goods into their own constructs of cultural identity, redefining their meanings according to their own needs. In doing so they simultaneously demarcated a space around themselves with corresponding issues of taste, prestige and quality.

Collectors seized these definitions when they adopted the objects, and yet they also added more politicised elements to these meanings. In order for a class of investors to develop as envisioned, certain systems of classifying the collector were adopted. Cultural appropriation of these goods signalled a cultural orientation towards more traditional value systems. American collectors, especially those like the Beesons who had accrued their wealth in one generation, were wary of being labelled as *nouveau riche* consumers; hence their sincere attempts at connoisseurship, which was seen as a

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<sup>149</sup> Harry Barnard, *Wedgwood Chats*, reprint of *Chats on Wedgwood Ware* by Harry Barnard 1924, ed by Harry Buten, (Merion, PA: TE Buten Museum of Wedgwood, 1970), p. 37.

<sup>150</sup> *Wedgwood Bicentenary Exhibition 1759-1959*, Victoria and Albert Museum, June-August 1959, Eyre and Spottiswoode Limited, 1959, p. 5.

<sup>151</sup> W. B. Honey, *Wedgwood Ware*, (London: Faber & Faber, 1948), p. 2.

<sup>152</sup> Robin Reilly, ‘Wedgwood and the Two-Edged Sword of Success’, *Design and Industries Association Year Book 1967-68*, London, 1968, p. 52.

<sup>153</sup> V. Skellern to Josiah Wedgwood V, 10 June 1947, uncatalogued, quoted in Robin Reilly, *Wedgwood*, (London: MacMillan, 1989), p. 251.

method of legitimisation. In the early twentieth century, American collecting, especially by the newly wealthy, had been perceived at best as a form of mimicry and at worst as ruthless acquisitiveness without any understanding or appreciation.<sup>154</sup> To dispel the perception of predatory invidiousness and conspicuous consumption, collectors turned their attention to imported ideas of taste, high culture and commercial enterprise tempered by moral restraint. American collectors used these objects as a means of constructing and associating with a 'polite' society and a stable domestic base while at the same time emphasising their own status and social discrimination.

The choice of goods reflected not only personal preference, but also social identity and cultural affiliation. The WIS collector was encouraged to classify themselves by appropriating practices that were already 'classified according to their probable distribution between groups that [were] themselves classified'.<sup>155</sup> This encompassed not only identifying with like-minded collectors, but also in defining who they were not.<sup>156</sup> The foundation of a group of collectors helped to form moral delineations between, 'the people who can be trusted to handle it with sensitivity, and safe from the depredations of those who cannot'.<sup>157</sup> Their shared pursuit was perceived as a form of sensibility which demarcated them both socially and morally. President of the WIS, Lloyd Hawes, illustrated the delineation;

We cannot afford to live for the instant joys of the moment as the Hippies do, but wish to feel that what we have done today will have relevance to our past and to our future. A Hippie cannot discriminate; like a dog, he spends hours going around in circles after his own tail. For his is a life of sensation and immediate gratification of natural urges.<sup>158</sup>

This denial of lower enjoyment, the denial of the enjoyment of the taste of the senses, implied an affirmation of the superiority of those who could be satisfied with the refined. This is how cultural consumption is predisposed to fulfil a social function of

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<sup>154</sup> Rigby & Rigby, 'Lock, Stock and Barrel' 1944 in Russell W. Belk, *Collecting in a Consumer Society*, (London & New York: Routledge, 1995), p. 49. Such collecting was epitomised by the wholesale acquisitions of European antiques by J.P. Morgan.

<sup>155</sup> Bourdieu (1984), *op. cit.*, p. 482.

<sup>156</sup> Mary Douglas pointed out that consumers will often reveal their identity through consumption. Often, however, decisions about consumption are made in reaction against another social or cultural group. Consumption behaviour can thus be inspired by cultural hostility. Mary Douglas, 'In Defence of Shopping', in Falk and Campbell, (1997), *op. cit.*, p. 17.

<sup>157</sup> Reilly (1980), *op. cit.*, p. 310.

<sup>158</sup> Hawes, (1971), *op. cit.*, p. 122.

legitimizing social difference.<sup>159</sup> Wedgwood collectors justified the construction of this hierarchy through ideals of aesthetic competence. The aesthetic sense, the cultivation of connoisseurship, which collectors aspired to, was a ‘distinctive expression of a privileged position in social space’.<sup>160</sup>

### **The Collection Becomes a Community Symbol**

In the turbulent times of mid twentieth century Alabama, the Beesons and their collection became exemplary not only within Wedgwood circles, but to the wider community as the couple also represented a model which Birmingham could support publicly. Eager to shed its reputation as an industrial town, and equally eager to deflect from its racial troubles, local magazines and newspapers utilised the Beesons as a symbol of prosperity, generosity and culture. The *Birmingham News* reported in 1968 that Birmingham was joining ‘big city ranks in culture-boosting’, catching on to the ‘infallible big city formula of the art-benefiting party to do it’.<sup>161</sup> The numbers of ‘art-inspired galas’ signified for the paper that ‘the art market in Birmingham [was] bullish’.<sup>162</sup> Key to this new interest was renewed affluence and a new museum, yet the primary influence on the cultural front was ‘the broad-based ownership of art stock’.<sup>163</sup> The news writer stated that ‘exposure through museums, galleries and travel’ had produced ‘a thriving, exciting, enthusiastic and knowledgeable group in Birmingham, The Collectors’.<sup>164</sup> Foremost among the examples generated were the Beesons, who drew an ‘array of interesting people coming to Birmingham to see them and their collection’.<sup>165</sup> National magazines were also drawn to Birmingham and the Beeson collection. *Town & Country* reported that, although one would ‘hardly suspect’ it, ‘the steel-dominated city of Birmingham’ was home to ‘the largest and rarest collection of a fragile commodity known as Wedgwood’.<sup>166</sup> The journal did, however, point out that ‘the Dwight M. Beesons’ lived ‘peacefully remote from

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<sup>159</sup> Bourdieu (1984), *op. cit.*, p. 7.

<sup>160</sup> Bourdieu (1984), *op. cit.*, p. 56.

<sup>161</sup> Kitty Sutherland, ‘Art Market in Magic City is bullish, collectors many’, *The Birmingham News*, Sunday, 11 February 1968.

<sup>162</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>163</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>164</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>165</sup> *Ibid.* Sutherland specifically mentioned Sir John and Lady Wedgwood’s visit to a Beaux Arts weekend as guests of the Beesons.

<sup>166</sup> Mildred Housen, ‘A Fabulous Collection in Birmingham’, *Town & Country*, June 1967, VI. 121, No. 4535, pp. 156, 159-60.

factory blasts'.<sup>167</sup> The consumption of art works, as established by the Beesons in Birmingham, was viewed as one of the defining features of an advanced commercial society, a feature which provided uplift to social evolution and could be used as an instrument for improvement.<sup>168</sup> It also ensured the symbolic significance of display, where the Beesons indicated their membership of a particular culture which could then be celebrated by the whole of the community.

By 1967, the Beesons' home was proving too restrictive for their collection. An article about the collection at the time stated that the 'installation of this dazzling array presents a problem' and, while the Beesons had 'tried to reincarnate the atmosphere of the original milieu by arranging the pieces in a manner evocative of the 18<sup>th</sup> century: busts over bookcases, plaques on walls, and so forth', it had become too much.<sup>169</sup> Specially constructed vitrines and cabinets had been installed in every room, and according to the article 'so insidious [had] been the encroachments on habitable space that the dining room [was] almost completely sacrificed on the collector's pyre.'<sup>170</sup> The home continued to have a role to play for a short time, however, and in 1967, once the decision to donate had been finalised, Mrs. Beeson invited several visitors to attend classes to acquaint them with her Wedgwood collection 'so they might assist at the Museum in the "Wedgwood Gallery"'.<sup>171</sup> The Beesons' thoughts and aspirations had turned to the museum, where the collection would accrue a lasting legacy for the Beeson name.

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<sup>167</sup> Ibid.

<sup>168</sup> John Brewer, *Pleasures of the Imagination*, (New York: Farrar Straus Giroux, 1997), p. xix.

<sup>169</sup> Mildred Housen, 'A Fabulous Collection in Birmingham', *Town & Country*, June 1967, Vol. 121, No. 4535.

<sup>170</sup> Ibid.

<sup>171</sup> Mrs. Beeson's 'For the Erasmus Darwin Wedgwood copy of the Portland Vase - #12', BMAA. Signed July 14, 1967.

## Chapter Five: The Museum

### The WIS and the museum

The WIS helped to introduce its members, including the Beesons, to museum displays of Wedgwood material. The organisation claimed an intended audience of ‘collectors, historians, students, and museum curators’ and a balance was struck between social gathering and collectors’ forum.<sup>1</sup> The participants’ knowledge of Wedgwood was to be increased not only through lectures and panel discussions but also through ‘private discussion and comparison’.<sup>2</sup> The members ‘had fun, while learning more about their favorite hobby’,<sup>3</sup> yet a stated objective of the organisation was the ‘close cooperation between museum and collector’.<sup>4</sup> The seminars were conducted at museums; the first, in 1956, was held at the Philadelphia Museum of Art, while subsequent seminars were hosted by the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston (1958), the Art Institute of Chicago (1962), and the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York (1964). The Associate Curator of Decorative Arts at the Art Institute of Chicago, Miss Vivian Scheidemantel, was a permanent member of the board of governors of the WIS.<sup>5</sup> Scheidemantel even went on to marry the WIS president Lloyd E. Hawes. At these seminars, the curators and directors of the museums would address the audience alongside WIS members. When Mrs. Beeson presented a paper on ‘The Darwin Portland’ in 1966, she was joined on the programme by the Executive Director and the Curator of the Department of Decorative Arts of the Henry Ford Museum, where the event was hosted.<sup>6</sup> These opportunities, where the collectors were positioned on an equal standing with academics and museum professionals, provided a lasting and significant link between the collector and the public museum. This framework of a community of collectors and museum professionals secured subsequent patronage for the institutions and encouraged further collecting.

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<sup>1</sup> Byron Born, ‘What is the WIS?’, *The American Wedgwoodian*, vol. I, no. 1, August 1962, p. 2.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Elizabeth Chellis, ‘The President’s Page’, *The American Wedgwoodian*, vol. II, no. 1, August 1965. Chellis made this statement on taking over the position of president for the group. It was not, however, a new goal as she intended to uphold the practices of the previous presidents, Harry Buten and Byron Born.

<sup>5</sup> See *The American Wedgwoodian*, vol. II, no. 2, December 1965, for Scheidemantel’s article, ‘A New Gallery of English Ceramics at the Art Institute of Chicago’, where she describes the chronological display of ceramics, specifically mentioning the private collectors who gave these objects.

<sup>6</sup> See Program for the Eleventh Annual Wedgwood International Seminar, The Henry Ford Museum, Dearborn, Michigan, 1966.



In this interaction between the collector and the museum, the WIS recalled previous collecting organisations such as The Fine Arts Club, one of the earliest societies for collectors of the decorative arts.<sup>7</sup> The Fine Arts Club was instigated by the first curator of the South Kensington Museum, John Charles Robinson, where along with the education of the public and the provision of examples for craftsmen, the curators also provided tutelage for collectors and connoisseurs. The club was instrumental in facilitating the spread of interest in the decorative arts, in directing collectors' tastes and in affirming that such objects could be the subject of legitimate study and systematic academic research.<sup>8</sup> The membership of this club included almost every leading connoisseur in the country and many influential figures in London society, as well as a few museum curators and some of the more affluent members of the art and antiques trade.<sup>9</sup> While the Museum was the nominal headquarters of the society, its primary activity lay in the organisation of monthly soirees, often held at the homes of members, where works of art belonging to the membership would be on display.<sup>10</sup> These exhibitions would often provide the opportunity for viewing private collections seldom in the public eye.<sup>11</sup> It was this meeting of collectors, the viewing of private collections and the exchange of information which were the real, if unspecified, intentions behind the club's formation.<sup>12</sup>

The timing and objectives behind the formation of the Fine Arts Club were driven by schemes of both public munificence and personal ambition.<sup>13</sup> The museum needed collectors to build its collections; though founded in 1851, by 1863 the museum had just over 9,000 objects.<sup>14</sup> Loans to the museum from club members increased the volume and prestige of its exhibitions and also increased the chances of their

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<sup>7</sup> Caygill and Cherry, eds., (1997), *op. cit.*, p. 19.

<sup>8</sup> Ann Eatwell, 'The Collector's or Fine Arts Club 1857-1874. The first society for Collectors of the Decorative Arts' in *Journal of Decorative Arts Society*, 1994, vol. 18, pp. 25-30.

<sup>9</sup> Caygill and Cherry, eds., (1997), *op. cit.*, p. 19. The membership of 1857 numbered curators, connoisseurs and collectors such as the Rothschilds, A.W. Franks (British Museum), A.H. Layard, John Ruskin, Richard Redgrave, Sir Charles Eastlake (National Gallery), and D.C. Majoribanks (later Lord Tweedmouth). Charles Schreiber was elected a member in 1858, W.E. Gladstone in 1859 and Francis Sibson M.D. (who was to become an important Wedgwood collector) in 1861.

<sup>10</sup> Caygill and Cherry, eds., (1997), *op. cit.*, p. 19.

<sup>11</sup> Eatwell, (1994), *op. cit.*, p. 25.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>13</sup> Eatwell, (1994), *op. cit.*, p. 26.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*

subsequent transfer as gifts to South Kensington.<sup>15</sup> Securing the interest of collectors through the club helped to ensure patronage and assure items for the museum's collection.<sup>16</sup> One such collector was Charles Schreiber, elected a member in 1858, and while Lady Charlotte Schreiber never became a member, both were active participants of the club from the early 1860s.<sup>17</sup> (Figure 103) The Schreibers, who did not begin to collect systematically until 1865, spent much of their married life on the continent as passionate collectors and connoisseurs of china.<sup>18</sup> Their collecting patterns provide evidence for the influence of the club through the acquisition of certain approved object types.<sup>19</sup> (Figure 104) Their participation in the Fine Arts Club proved a success for the museum. Lady Charlotte first lent objects from their collection to South Kensington as early as 1866, leading to further and larger loans.<sup>20</sup> When they bequeathed their collection of eighteenth century English china to the V&A in 1884, it numbered some 1800 pieces.<sup>21</sup>

Despite the early dependence on collectors for the contributions to the museum collections, by 1913 the V&A's ceramics curator, Frank Church was asserting the role of the curator in acquisition policy. When addressing the 'Sub-Committees upon the Principal Deficiencies in the Collections', Church declared that the first principle of any good collection had to be the acquisition of masterpieces.<sup>22</sup> These alone were 'the source of inspiration', and it was by the number of its masterpieces that a collection was 'finally judged'.<sup>23</sup> It was not only the reputation of the collection which was involved, but also that of the custodian. Curators, he insisted, were 'gifted by nature to feel the difference between a masterpiece and an average work - and entitled after years of training to become heads of departments'.<sup>24</sup> Restrictive budgeting would force curators to 'fall back upon what is cheap... the fatal snare of

<sup>15</sup> Caygill and Cherry, eds., (1997), *op. cit.*, p. 19.

<sup>16</sup> Eatwell, (1994), *op. cit.*, p. 26.

<sup>17</sup> Eatwell, (1994), *op. cit.*, p. 27. The club was essentially an organisation for men; in 1867, out of a total membership of 201, only 8 were women.

<sup>18</sup> *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, ed. by H.C.G. Matthew and Brian Harrison, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), vol. 49, entry written by Angela V. John, pp. 264-267.

<sup>19</sup> Eatwell, (1994), *op. cit.*, p. 27.

<sup>20</sup> Eatwell, (1994), *op. cit.*, p. 28.

<sup>21</sup> *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, pp. 264-267, Schreiber also left her collection of eighteenth century fans, fan leaves and cards to the British Museum, where A.W. Franks worked with her in the publication of *Playing Cards of Various Ages and Countries*.

<sup>22</sup> A report of this paper is included in Robert Hunter, (ed.), *Ceramics in America*, (Hanover & London: Chipstone Foundation, 2001), p. 6-9.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*

the second-rate collector' who 'soon finds his collection déclassé'.<sup>25</sup> This attitude sought to ensure that collectors seek the approval of museum professionals in their choices. The curator was presented as the final pronouncement on the quality of the objects, even if they had been donated by private collectors.

The museum provided WIS members a space where their collections were authorised and validated by museum professionals, where established collections were presented to aspirational collectors and made visible to the public. Yet, the presence of the seminar in museums also affected exhibition and curatorial policies, with the host museums often holding corresponding Wedgwood exhibitions where members' pieces were placed on display. At the time of the 1964 WIS meeting, the Metropolitan Museum of Art arranged the 'first exhibition exclusively devoted to Wedgwood creamware ever presented by a major museum' and included significant contributions from WIS members.<sup>26</sup> The 1965 Seminar, held at the Paine Art Center in Oshkosh, Wisconsin, was described as 'one of the largest displays of 18<sup>th</sup> century Wedgwood ever held in America' and here again WIS members were contributors to the exhibition.<sup>27</sup> (Figure 105) In this way, collectors were actively building the display history of the objects in their collections and influencing curatorial decisions in the major museums across America.

While the members of the WIS were asked to participate actively in the museum setting through the seminars, the link between the organisation and the museum was further advocated in the group's journal. Authors contributing to the *American Wedgwoodian* wrote about collections in public museums in articles such as 'The Hermitage Ceramic Collection' written by a staff member from the Metropolitan Museum<sup>28</sup>, and 'The Burnap Collection of English Pottery', which examined the donation of a private collection to the William Rockhill Nelson Gallery of Art.<sup>29</sup> An article titled simply 'In the Museums' urged that 'Wherever a Wedgwoodian is

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<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> Carl Dauterman, 'Creamware Rises to Top at Metropolitan', *The American Wedgwoodian*, vol. 1, no. 5, April 1964. Byron Born lent material ranging from apothecary jugs and moulds to tableware, Elizabeth Chellis contributed armorial material, and Mellanay Delhom provided two trial plates from the Frog Service amongst many other items.

<sup>27</sup> 'Wedgwood in Oshkosh', *The American Wedgwoodian*, vol. II, no. 1, August 1965.

<sup>28</sup> Carl Dauterman, 'The Hermitage Ceramic Collection', *The American Wedgwoodian*, vol. 1, no. 2, January 1963.

<sup>29</sup> *The American Wedgwoodian*, vol. I, no. 3, March 1963.

visiting in Europe or in this country, he should visit the museums where large ceramic collections have been built up for the benefit of the visitor'.<sup>30</sup> This article provided brief descriptions of the ceramic collections held at museums in Cleveland, St. Louis and Boston, while special praise was reserved for the new display of the ceramic collection at the Smithsonian, lauded as 'a model for future museums to study'.<sup>31</sup> (Figure 106) The collection, described as 'the largest in America... equal to any in Europe', was given a new modernist interpretation where 'restraint' was shown 'in the number of pieces in each case', and 'the quiet' and the 'subdued lights' contributed to the mood of contemplation.<sup>32</sup> When curators showed an interest in expanding the collections of decorative arts they were commended by the WIS. After arranging a series of lectures and exhibits 'to arouse interest in English ceramics', the efforts of Mrs. Wallace C. Harrison, Curator of Decorative Arts at the Columbus Gallery of Fine Art in Ohio, were seen to be 'bearing fruit in an ever growing interest in Columbus in decorative arts, and particularly in English ceramics.'<sup>33</sup> (Figure 107) The article continued;

...it has become apparent to the Directors of the Gallery that more space is needed for decorative arts displays. It is now only a matter of time before an addition will be built to the Gallery to provide this much needed space. This display of Wedgwood so generously loaned by the Borns, and Mr. Buten's most informative lecture have done much to bring this about.<sup>34</sup>

Thus, for the editor of the *American Wedgwoodian*, at least, the WIS and its members were affecting direct results in the museums across America and in the homes of American collectors.

The WIS provided the Beesons with the initial contact with museums and presented opportunities for the presentation of their own collection. In 1965, just a few months after purchasing their copy of the Portland Vase, the Beesons exhibited it publicly for the first time at the Tenth International Wedgwood Seminar held in Williamsburg.<sup>35</sup> In their desire to emulate public collections, and to carve a niche for themselves in the

<sup>30</sup> 'In the Museums', *The American Wedgwoodian*, vol. I, no. 6, September 1964, p. 60.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>32</sup> Lloyd Hawes, 'The Twelfth Seminar', *The American Wedgwoodian*, vol. II, no. 7, October 1967, p. 119.

<sup>33</sup> J.A. Whieldon, 'New Interest in Ceramics in Columbus', *The American Wedgwoodian*, vol. II, no. 3, April 1966, p. 51.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>35</sup> See *The American Wedgwoodian*, vol. II, no. 1, August 1965.

WIS, the Beesons had to guarantee that the pieces in the collection were of significant quality. Ultimately, however, assurance of museum-quality came with the Beesons' purchase of the two Portland Vase copies. This was recognised by the Beesons themselves when, after the purchase of the Darwin copy of the Portland Vase, they observed that of the seventeen known 'first' copies, all but five were held in museum collections.<sup>36</sup> The Seminar where the Beesons' new vase was displayed also marked the first time Mrs. Beeson presented a paper to the WIS audience. (Figure 108) Purchasing a copy of the Portland Vase had established the Beesons, not only as collectors, but as authorities on the subject of Wedgwood. She spoke on 'The Darwin Portland' and the differences between their two Portland copies in colour, shape and relief decoration.<sup>37</sup> That this was an exercise as much about advertising the growing status of their collection as anything else was illustrated in her eager statement that 'the entire membership of Wedgwood Seminar will have seen this Vase by the time we return with it!'<sup>38</sup>

By 1966, the Beesons were already planning to leave their Wedgwood collection to the Birmingham Museum of Art. Long before the actual donation, the WIS was already praising the couple; 'It is most gratifying to have connoisseur-collectors willing to have their objets d'art enter public collections for the admiration and study of future scholars. Such a lofty purpose makes all of us admire and congratulate this gracious southern couple.'<sup>39</sup> The WIS actively encouraged their membership towards the public donation of their private collections. Harry Buten, the founder of the organisation transformed his own home into a public museum for the display of his collection.<sup>40</sup> (Figure 109) Hans Syz, who gifted his collection of porcelain to the Smithsonian, had 'established a great teaching collection for American students',

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<sup>36</sup> Lucille Beeson, 'Portland Vase' notes, BMAA. In the United States, the Boston Museum had copy #7, the Fogg Museum of Fine Arts had #9 and the Chicago Art Institute had #32.

<sup>37</sup> Mrs. Beeson's 'For the Erasmus Darwin Wedgwood copy of the Portland Vase - #12', BMAA. Mrs. Beeson commented 'Imagine having TWO Portlands to exhibit!!'

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.* Aside from the 204 registrants at the Seminar, Mrs. Beeson commented that 'many, many others saw the exhibits... and saw the Portlands'.

<sup>39</sup> Lloyd Hawes, 'Darwin-Beeson Portland Copy #12', *The American Wedgwoodian*, vol. II, no. 3, April 1966.

<sup>40</sup> Harry M. Buten, 'Wedgwood and Buten: A self-analysis by Buten not Wedgwood', *The American Wedgwoodian*, vol. III, no. 2, February 1969, pp. 53-56. Buten explained that he and his wife moved into the house in 1941 with 'four children and a ten-year-old Wedgwood collection'. 'The children grew up and out - the collection grew up and in.', see p. 55.

which was described as a ‘fine culmination of his years of collecting’.<sup>41</sup> Throughout 1967 *The American Wedgwoodian* reported on the progress of the construction of a new wing at the Mint Museum in North Carolina to display the collection of Mellanay Delhom. (Figure 110) The journal praised her ‘services to the City’ and ‘the breathtaking beauty of the display of ceramics in the new Delhom Gallery’.<sup>42</sup> Miss Delhom’s wing, which was opened in tandem with the 13<sup>th</sup> Annual Wedgwood International Seminar, included a reference library and a ‘period’ room that would showcase an Adam mantelpiece and furniture of the period.<sup>43</sup> Miss Delhom curated and had control over the display of her collection at the museum.<sup>44</sup> (Figure 111) The Beesons remembered all of these elements when they donated their own collection to the Birmingham Museum of Art in Birmingham, Alabama.

### **The Birmingham Museum of Art**

In America the first public museums that appeared in the nineteenth century were predominantly located in the northern cities where the business and banking elites were concentrated.<sup>45</sup> The 1870s saw the foundations of New York’s Metropolitan Museum of Art, Boston’s Museum of Fine Arts and Philadelphia’s Museum of Art.<sup>46</sup> From this period, museums and their associations with a wealthy, educated and prosperous populace began spreading across America.<sup>47</sup> The Birmingham Art Club, founded in 1908, provided the first impulse towards the exhibition of art for the public in Birmingham, Alabama.<sup>48</sup> The Club advocated a permanent art museum for the young city and to that end endeavoured to amass a public art collection.<sup>49</sup> The organisation’s membership was comprised of what has been described as ‘club ladies’ and art teachers, and their interests were limited to ‘non-offensive landscapes, still-

<sup>41</sup> ‘Dr. Syz’s Gift to the Smithsonian’, *The American Wedgwoodian*, vol. II, no. 1, August 1965.

<sup>42</sup> Elizabeth Chellis, ‘Pre-Seminar Events’, *The American Wedgwoodian*, vol. III, no. 1, July 1968.

<sup>43</sup> *The American Wedgwoodian*, vol. II, nos. 6 & 7, April 1967 & October 1967.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

<sup>45</sup> See the Introduction, pp. 2-4, for the link between America’s early museums and capitalism.

<sup>46</sup> Duncan, (1995), *op. cit.*, p. 49.

<sup>47</sup> The St. Louis Art Museum was founded in 1906, the New Orleans Museum of Art in 1911, the Cleveland Museum of Art founded 1913, the Museum of Fine Art in Houston in 1924.

<sup>48</sup> Birmingham Art Association, Inc. “Certificate of Incorporation”, Section III, 15 December 1954, quoted in James Pat Cather, *The Birmingham Art Association in 1969: Changing of the Guard*, (Birmingham: Cather & Brown-Books, 1991), p. 3.

<sup>49</sup> ‘History of the Birmingham Museum of Art’, <<http://www.artsbma.org/history.htm>> [Accessed 30 May 2007] The city was then only thirty-seven years old.

lifes, portraits and memorial sculpture'.<sup>50</sup> Birmingham was a new town, yet the members of the Art Club sought traditional art; the citizens who were in a position to pay for art yearned for traditional values which they felt were lacking in their own surroundings.<sup>51</sup> In a book on Alabama published in 1934, the author wrote that residents of Birmingham spent 'big sums on art but always for ultra-conservative work and usually for the second-rate'.<sup>52</sup> It was not until 1927, when a new public library was opened in the city, that the Art Club was able to display their collection while they continued their pursuit for a permanent building.<sup>53</sup> Yet during the 1930s there were much more pressing factors for the city government than the foundation of a museum. Birmingham was one of the worst hit cities during the Depression; in December of 1934 28,000 of the 56,000 families on relief throughout the state lived in Birmingham.<sup>54</sup> Just one month later, in January 1935, the county in which Birmingham is located listed 100,000 people on its relief roles, causing President Roosevelt to describe Birmingham as the 'worst hit town in the country'.<sup>55</sup> The processes of urbanisation slowed, employment rates declined and the population was weakened by debilitating sickness and illiteracy.<sup>56</sup>

Relief and renewed prosperity came in the form of President Roosevelt's New Deal followed by the economic preparation for the Second World War.<sup>57</sup> Birmingham moved from being the most depressed city in the nation to become 'the great arsenal of the South' manufacturing steel for bombs, cargo ships and other weapons of war.<sup>58</sup> Activity was increasingly centred in urban areas like Birmingham which became the twenty-seventh largest city in the nation and contained one in six of Alabama's residents.<sup>59</sup> After the war entrepreneurs were quick to capitalise on the momentary prosperity. Alabama native John M. Harbert (1921-1995) returned from service to

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<sup>50</sup> Cather, (1991), *op. cit.*, p. 3. The organisers of the club were four Birmingham artists, Willie McLaughlin, Della Dryer, Alice Rumph and Mrs. Joseph Montgomery.

<sup>51</sup> Cather, (1991), *op. cit.*, p. 3.

<sup>52</sup> Carl Carmer, *Stars Fell on Alabama*, (New York, 1934), p. 80.

<sup>53</sup> <<http://www.artsbma.org/history.htm>> [Accessed 28 May 2007] In 1935 they received a bequest of \$19,000 which they held in trust for the creation of the city art museum.

<sup>54</sup> William Warren Rogers, et. al., *Alabama: The History of a Deep South State*, (Tuscaloosa, The University of Alabama Press, 1994), see chapter twenty-seven, 'Hard Times 1930-1940', p. 476.

<sup>55</sup> Rogers, et. al., (1994), *op. cit.*, p. 476.

<sup>56</sup> Rogers, et. al., (1994), *op. cit.*, pp. 465-466.

<sup>57</sup> Rogers, et. al., (1994), *op. cit.*, p. 510.

<sup>58</sup> Rogers, et. al., (1994), *op. cit.*, p. 511.

<sup>59</sup> Rogers, et. al., (1994), *op. cit.*, p. 518.

receive a degree in civil engineering from Auburn University.<sup>60</sup> In 1949 he founded the Harbert Corporation, which is still engaged in mining, pipeline development, land development, limestone quarrying, and road construction. Harbert brought to metropolitan Birmingham a new highway, a planned community, and the state's largest shopping centre. The company ultimately made him the richest man in Alabama.<sup>61</sup> Similarly, Winton and Houston Blount returned to Alabama after the Second World War, where they began a building contractor company, but soon moved into high-technology engineering-construction projects.<sup>62</sup> During the same period Liberty National Insurance Company, where Dwight Beeson was a shareholder, was being transformed by Frank Samford, Jr. and Ronald K. Richey from a regional life insurance firm into the widely diversified national Torchmark Corporation. (Figure 1) The company won awards as one of the best managed in the industry, and its string of consecutive earnings and dividend increases after 1952 was unparalleled by any other company listed on the New York Stock Exchange.<sup>63</sup> This new generation of entrepreneurs soon contributed heavily to the state's universities and cultural resources. John Harbert provided funds to Auburn University and to Birmingham Southern College, where a building bears his wife's name. Winton Blount and his wife, Carolyn, founded the Blount Cultural Park in Montgomery, Alabama, which is home to the Montgomery Museum of Fine Arts and the Alabama Shakespeare Festival.<sup>64</sup> Blount also financed the Blount Undergraduate Initiative, a liberal arts honours programme at the University of Alabama. At the same time the Beesons were contributing not only to the Birmingham Museum of Art but also Samford University, which bore the name of Liberty National's owner. By monopolising local cultural institutions, these families legitimated their own privilege.

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<sup>60</sup> Leah Rawls Atkins, *John M. Harbert III: Marching to the Beat of a Different Drummer*, (Tarya House, Birmingham, AL., 1999). Auburn is a state university located in Auburn Alabama.

<sup>61</sup> His numerous companies evolved into Harbert Management Company, based in Birmingham with \$7.5 billion in assets as of 2007.

<sup>62</sup> Rogers, et. al., (1994), *op. cit.*, p. 520. The company worked on such construction projects as the First Avenue Viaduct in Birmingham, the Louisiana Superdome in New Orleans and Cape Canaveral's Complex 39A which launched Apollo 11. A political conservative, he was appointed the Alabama Chairman of Citizens for Eisenhower in 1952 and South-eastern Campaign Chairman for Richard Nixon's Presidential campaign in 1960. In 1964 he was appointed by Lyndon B. Johnson to the National Citizens Committee for Community Relations, to advise the White House on the enforcement of the new Civil Rights Act of 1964 even though he had doubts about the new law. He was assisted in his unsuccessful Senate campaign in 1972 by George W. Bush Sr. Winton M. Blount, *Doing It My Way*, (Greenwich Publishing Group, 1996).

<sup>63</sup> Rogers, et. al., (1994), *op. cit.*, p. 595.

<sup>64</sup> Rogers, et. al., (1994), *op. cit.*, p. 520. The donation consisted of 100 acres of land and \$21 million in 1984 to construct a theatre complex to house the Alabama Shakespeare Festival.



Contributions to these institutions indicated that these entrepreneurs were equipped with the ability to appropriate works of art, to discriminate on issues of taste and value, which empowered them to diffuse this taste to the public.<sup>65</sup>

Throughout this period the Art Club had continued to add to its collection and raise support in the press and in City Hall for the concept of a new building to house a museum. After the endorsement for the plan in the *Birmingham Age-Herald*, the City government passed an ordinance in 1950 creating the Museum Board of the City of Birmingham.<sup>66</sup> When the New City Hall was completed in 1951 space was given to the Museum Board to house the Birmingham Museum of Art.<sup>67</sup> The collections were meagre; *Life* magazine stated the museum had nothing more than a few pieces of iron from one of the area's steel plants.<sup>68</sup> The museum director, Richard Howard later recalled that though *Life* had exaggerated the museum's position, they had 'opened with a loaned exhibition of paintings from twenty museums in the Eastern United States'.<sup>69</sup> They 'owned nothing' and 'even the board hadn't the slightest idea of what a museum was all about'.<sup>70</sup> Despite this about two thousand visitors came on the first day and sixteen thousand during the first month.<sup>71</sup>

By the time a permanent building was constructed and opened to the public in 1959, Alabama had a terrible public image defined by poverty, poor schools, lack of good jobs, and racial violence. People were literally fleeing the city; between 1950 and 1970, Birmingham's population decreased from 326,000 to 301,000.<sup>72</sup> The problems stemmed primarily from the tense racial situation throughout the state. The *Brown* decision of 1954 made public school integration law, but Alabama refused to

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<sup>65</sup> Bourdieu and Darbel, (1991), *op. cit.*, p. 113.

<sup>66</sup> <<http://www.artsbma.org/history.htm>> [Accessed 28 May 2007] The first Birmingham Museum Board included Mrs. Erskine Tidmore, Mervyn Sterne, Harry J. McCormack, James A. Simpson, Harry J. White, Jack B. Smith, Robert I. Ingalls, Mrs. I. Croom Beatty, J.J.F. Steiner, Miss Vera Wilson, Dr. L. Frazer Banks, Mrs. Rosalie Pettus Price, Dr. I.F. Simmons, William A. Price and Mrs. Curtis D. Hasty. William M. Spencer was chairman.

<sup>67</sup> From a publication on the *Opening of the Oscar Wells Memorial Building* May 1959.

<sup>68</sup> 'Birmingham's Blaze of Gold', *Birmingham: Official Monthly Publication of the Birmingham Area Chamber of Commerce*, vol. 6, no. 11, November 1967, pp. 12-13.

<sup>69</sup> Richard Howard quoted in 'Birmingham's Blaze of Glory', *Birmingham*, vol. 6, no. 11, November 1967, pp. 12-13. Howard came to this position from his Directorship at the Des Moines Art Center, Iowa.

<sup>70</sup> Richard Howard quoted in 'Birmingham's Blaze of Glory', *Birmingham*, November 1967, vol. 6, no. 11, pp. 12-13.

<sup>71</sup> From a publication on the *Opening of the Oscar Wells Memorial Building* May 1959.

<sup>72</sup> Rogers, et. al., (1994), *op. cit.*, p. 545.

capitulate. By the end of 1964 only four of the state's 114 previously white school districts contained any black students and the total number of students only amounted to twenty-one.<sup>73</sup> Martin Luther King, Jr. appealed to President John F. Kennedy, calling Birmingham 'by far the worst big city in race relations in the United States.'<sup>74</sup> Protests in 1963, largely made up of child activists, were met with mass arrests, fire hoses and police dogs. As police commissioner in Birmingham, Eugene 'Bull' Connor was the head of the last all-white police force in a large American city and a strong opponent of integration.<sup>75</sup> An Associated Press photograph of a policeman holding a teenage black boy while a dog attacked him made headlines around the world.<sup>76</sup> Resolution came from Birmingham's white businessmen, fearing an economic crisis more than a crisis of conscience,<sup>77</sup> but, as these businessmen were establishing compromises to desegregate downtown stores, terrorists retaliated with a series of bombs.<sup>78</sup> The motel where King had established his headquarters was bombed, causing thousands to rush to Kelly Ingram Park. Governor George Wallace dispatched the state troopers, who stormed into the park beating anyone in sight with clubs and shotguns and triggering a riot which lasted all night.<sup>79</sup> In June 1963 Governor Wallace staged his infamous 'stand in the schoolhouse door', a protest against the integration of the University of Alabama. 1963 was also the year of the Sixteenth Street Baptist Church bombing, which led to the death of four young girls. From 1958 to 1980 the Supreme Court rendered decisions in fourteen cases involving racial issues in Alabama.<sup>80</sup>

The anxiety raised in the white, wealthy population of Birmingham by the conflicts in the city was somewhat quelled through the cultural identity defined in the museum space. The museum was seen as a positive symbol, announcing the city financially and politically and serving as but one element in a larger agenda to make the city more prosperous.<sup>81</sup> *The Birmingham News* called the foundation of the museum 'an

<sup>73</sup> Rogers, et. al., (1994), *op. cit.*, p. 548.

<sup>74</sup> Rogers, et. al., (1994), *op. cit.*, p. 556.

<sup>75</sup> Rogers, et. al., (1994), *op. cit.*, p. 555.

<sup>76</sup> Rogers, et. al., (1994), *op. cit.*, p. 558.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid.

<sup>79</sup> Rogers, et. al., (1994), *op. cit.*, p. 559.

<sup>80</sup> Rogers, et. al., (1994), *op. cit.*, p. 566. Governor Wallace saw the Supreme Court's decisions as an infringement of state rights and a continuation of Northern oppression.

<sup>81</sup> Duncan, (1995), *op. cit.*, p. 54.

achievement' which would make 'enduring contributions to the broadening, the deepening, the maturing and the enriching of life'.<sup>82</sup> Moreover, they claimed that 'more and more of us are learning that the meanings of beauty are many and urgent and rewarding in the practical business of these days'.<sup>83</sup> The museum was established with the mission to be comprehensive, its aim to provide an educational experience for the community.<sup>84</sup> The philanthropic efforts by the museum to educate were aimed at engendering feelings of civic pride and allegiance to civic authority. The pursuit of these ideals was not necessarily insincere; rather it was that these ideals were structured to advance the cause of WASP supremacy. The museum needed the wealth of the rich, but had to appear, at least to the middle class, as credible public spaces.<sup>85</sup> The board of the museum was composed of the city's wealthy elite, due at least partially to the need for financial support from the private sector.<sup>86</sup> It was a local couple, Mr. and Mrs. Oscar Wells, who provided the money for the construction of the permanent building to house the Birmingham museum; a bequest which was described by the museum director as 'an assumption of leadership on the part of local people'.<sup>87</sup> The building was later described in a publication from the Museum as 'a beautiful and lasting monument to one of Birmingham's great citizens'.<sup>88</sup> Mr. Wells had been chairman of Birmingham's First National Bank, and along with the great sum of money his wife left for the construction of the museum came a board of trustees with business acumen.<sup>89</sup> The trustees operated in a milieu where consistent interaction with people and institutions which reinforced their set of values led to a

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<sup>82</sup> Quoted in 'Birmingham's Blaze of Glory', *Birmingham*, November 1967, vol. 6, no. 11, pp. 12-13.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>84</sup> <<http://www.artsbma.org/history.htm>> [Accessed 28 May 2007]

<sup>85</sup> Duncan, (1995), *op. cit.*, p. 57.

<sup>86</sup> Einreinhofer, (1997), *op. cit.*, p. 50.

<sup>87</sup> Quoted in 'Birmingham's Blaze of Glory', *Birmingham*, vol. 6, no. 11, November 1967, pp. 12-13.

The central part of the museum is named in their honour. While senior officer at the Bank, Wells also served, by nomination of the President of the United States, as financial advisor to the Government of Cuba; a President of the American Banker's Association; Director and Treasurer of the United States Chamber of Commerce; Director from Alabama on the U.S. President's Commission on Unemployment Relief in 1931; and Chairman of the local Chamber of Commerce committee which persuaded the University of Alabama to locate its Medical College in Birmingham. He also served as director of a long list of corporations including Alabama Power Company, Woodward Iron Company, Louisville & Nashville Railroad and the Birmingham Fire Insurance Company. See the pamphlet *Published in Commemoration of the Opening of the Oscar Wells Memorial Building housing the Birmingham Museum of Art*, May 1959

<sup>88</sup> From a publication on the *Opening of the Oscar Wells Memorial Building* May 1959.

<sup>89</sup> Cather, (1991), *op. cit.*, p. 3. Membership include lawyers, contractors, insurance executives, and the like. Mrs. Wells left her estate of more than \$1,000,000 to the City of Birmingham to be used to erect the museum building.

continuation of these viewpoints in the operation of the museum.<sup>90</sup> The relationship between the nation's wealthy citizens and its public museums was encouraged by American tax laws. The Congress of the United States, beginning with the Federal Revenue Act of 1917, has allowed a tax deduction for all contributions to non-profit organisations; the giving of art work to American museums is more profitable for the donor than passing works on to family or putting works on the auction block.<sup>91</sup>

While the purpose of the museum was ostensibly to serve the community, the processes of acquisition and accession were not democratic. Any challenge to the Museum Board's authority was quickly quashed. The son of one board member wrote to his father;

I believe that we [the younger generation] are suspect because we raise our voices for change. And change is the one thing that Birmingham and its leaders fear most. Witness for instance the reaction that we got when we suggested that a certain lady get out of the presidency of the art association so that it could become an active vehicle for art and not a society plaything. We are called 'hippies', among the nicer things that were said. We were 'tearing something down'. We were radicals.<sup>92</sup>

The museum board, managed by the elite, made autocratic decisions which determined the cultural experience in the museum.<sup>93</sup> The board and trustees were less interested in the educational side of their museums than in their collecting and curatorial aspects.<sup>94</sup> The board members at Birmingham, Mr. Beeson among them, made the decision 'not to wall off the museum strictly for the art connoisseur, but rather to open its wealth to the uneducated laymen who otherwise might not ever see it'.<sup>95</sup> They appealed to this 'layman' through 'cocktail parties, teas, chamber music concerts, recitals and receptions'.<sup>96</sup> To control a museum means to control the representation of a community and its highest values and truths.<sup>97</sup> It also has the power to define the relative standing of individuals within that community, not only

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<sup>90</sup> Grace Glueck, 'Power and Esthetics: The Trustee' in Brian O'Doherty, ed. *Museums in Crisis*, (New York: 1972), p. 118.

<sup>91</sup> Einreinhofer, (1997), *op. cit.*, p. 43.

<sup>92</sup> Letter dated 23 June 1969 from Joe Simpson to James A. Simpson, a long-time member of the museum board. Quoted in Cather, (1991), *op. cit.*, p. 7.

<sup>93</sup> A survey of American museum boards published in 1972 showed that less than 20% of museum trustees were in the arts and stated that the trustees had 'an Establishment homogeneity giving critics leverage to charge them with insensitivity to community interests'. See Glueck, (1972), *op. cit.*, p. 118.

<sup>94</sup> Glueck, (1972), *op. cit.*, p. 118.

<sup>95</sup> 'Birmingham's Blaze of Glory', *Birmingham*, vol. 6, no. 11, November 1967, pp. 12-13.

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>97</sup> Duncan, (1995), *op. cit.*, p. 8.

the donors, but those who by their social, racial, and class identities are most able to confirm the museum message.<sup>98</sup> Public art museums, which reinforced the feeling of belonging for a few and exclusion for the many, could provide the elite with clear class boundaries, while simultaneously giving them an identity that was seemingly above class interests.<sup>99</sup> Even while municipal art museums could appear as unifying and democratising forces in a culturally diverse society, they reinforced social and class boundaries.<sup>100</sup>

The permanent building to house the Birmingham Museum of Art, designed by Warren, Knight and Davis, was opened to the public on 3 May 1959.<sup>101</sup> (Figure 112) The museum was located in the heart of the downtown civic quarter, close to the public library and town hall and eventually complemented by the Civic Center and the Alabama School of Fine Arts. The architecture was firmly modernist in design. Rather than looking to the ancient architectural styles of European museums which characterised the first American museums, this building was based on American models.<sup>102</sup> The commemorative booklet that accompanied the building's opening explained that;

In design and construction, the Oscar Wells Memorial Building embodies the finest of modern ideas. It is in the truest sense a functional building. The exterior of the building is extremely simple - its masses determined by interior design.<sup>103</sup>

The modernist museum was conceived as a space which fostered the education of, and use by, the general public rather than functioning as an architectural monument.<sup>104</sup> Yet, at the same, time, its very location in the civic quarter of the city spoke of its purpose as part of the machinations of local government. Education was the means to opportunity and advancement for the public, on intellectual, economic and social levels.<sup>105</sup> The museum was conceived as a service to the community; it would better

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<sup>98</sup> Ibid.

<sup>99</sup> Duncan, (1995), *op. cit.*, p. 55. Also see Bourdieu and Darbel, (1991), *op. cit.*, p. 112.

<sup>100</sup> Duncan, (1995), *op. cit.*, p. 54.

<sup>101</sup> Warren, Knight and Davis were also the architects for the Country Club of Birmingham, and many of the homes in Mountain Brook. See Barefield, (1989), *op. cit.*

<sup>102</sup> The approach to museum design dramatically shifted with the construction of the Museum of Modern Art in New York in 1939. The building, designed by Philip Goodwin and Edward Durell, was the first modernist museum building. Einreinhofer, (1997), *op. cit.*, p. 195.

<sup>103</sup> From a publication on the *Opening of the Oscar Wells Memorial Building*, May 1959.

<sup>104</sup> Einreinhofer, (1997), *op. cit.*, p. 101.

<sup>105</sup> Einreinhofer, (1997), *op. cit.*, p. 102.

citizens by uplifting morals, communicating history and teaching aesthetics.<sup>106</sup> There was no effort made, however, to display the history or the art of local or even regional peoples. The holdings in 1959 included a large portion of the Kress Collection; the art, especially fine ceramics, of Southeast Asia; English silver; eighteenth-century Continental and English porcelains; pre-Columbian art and artefacts; Remington bronzes; the Lamprecht Collection of Cast Iron Objects and a growing collection of paintings.<sup>107</sup> (Figure 113) The interior of the museum adhered to modernist principles; long white corridors with unobstructed views created a pristine space that shut out the outside world, objects were placed in ordered contexts implying a linear development, and the closed display discouraged questioning of the museum message. The path through the museum created a ritual which for the visitor was to be transformative, conferring or renewing identity.<sup>108</sup>

### **The Beeson collection of Wedgwood in the Birmingham Museum of Art:**

In November of 1967 the Birmingham Museum of Art unveiled a major new extension, built by ‘the citizens of Greater Birmingham’ for some \$220,000.<sup>109</sup> (Figure 114) Three new galleries were opened at this time; one displayed a loan exhibit from the Cloisters Collection of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, the second contained an expanded exhibition of the Pre-Columbian collection of sculpture, and the third was the new home for a portion of the Beeson collection of Wedgwood.<sup>110</sup> Though they had not yet legally donated any of the pieces to the Museum, the Beesons and their collection were celebrated in the local media, which heralded the collection as ‘the finest in private hands in America’ and as a ‘tribute to both the Beeson family and the museum’.<sup>111</sup> *Birmingham* magazine, a publication of the Birmingham Area Chamber of Commerce, adorned their November cover with one of the Beesons’ favourite pieces of Wedgwood, the yellow goblet vase.<sup>112</sup> (Figure 115) Prior to the November gallery opening, the Beesons had displayed some 115 pieces from their collection at the museum and invited Ross Taggart, Senior Curator of the

<sup>106</sup> Ibid.

<sup>107</sup> Gail Andrews, ‘Wedgwood International Seminar-1978’, *The American Wedgwoodian*, vol. V, no. 4, November 1977, p. 159.

<sup>108</sup> Duncan, (1995), *op. cit.*, p. 13.

<sup>109</sup> ‘Birmingham’s Blaze of Glory’, *Birmingham*, vol. 6, no. 11, November 1967, pp. 12-13.

<sup>110</sup> Ibid.

<sup>111</sup> Ibid.

<sup>112</sup> *Birmingham*, cover, November, 1967, Vol. 6, No.11.

William Rockhill Gallery of Art at the Atkins Museum of Fine Arts in Kansas City, MO, to speak about their Wedgwood.<sup>113</sup> The event was centred on the Beeson collection and was ostensibly meant to ‘further the collection and knowledge of Wedgwood ceramics’,<sup>114</sup> but the WIS took the opportunity to remind the city of Birmingham that they owed this couple ‘words of praise and indebtedness for their cultural activity’.<sup>115</sup>

The Beesons certainly garnered words of praise from the collectors, curators and dealers who had helped in the formation of this collection on their visit to the Birmingham Museum of Art. (Figure 116) Visitors to the opening included leaders of the WIS such as Harry Buten, Elizabeth Chellis, Lloyd Hawes, and Mellanay Delhom, the latter of whom wrote that ‘even Josiah Wedgwood would have been proud to have been so complimented’.<sup>116</sup> Dealers with whom the Beesons had established relationships also came, among them Otto Wasserman, Fred and Mary Tongue, and Ann Brodkiewicz. Mrs. Beeson was thrilled with the attention and publicity the collection had received, exclaiming ‘Great day in the morning!’ after counting up the more than 3500 people who had visited the gallery.<sup>117</sup> Over the next year the Beeson collection was visited by many others who Mrs. Beeson was careful to record. Further accolades came from the highest of Wedgwood authorities and aficionados. John Wedgwood not only wrote that the Beesons’ Wedgwood collection was ‘one of the best in the world’ but also praised the Beesons’ hospitality.<sup>118</sup> The Curator of Western European Arts at The Metropolitan Museum of Art was left ‘completely out of adjectives’ after his ‘most gracious friends’ led him through ‘an exquisite tour of a most exquisite collection’.<sup>119</sup> After his visit, Robin Reilly

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<sup>113</sup> Mrs. Beeson’s ‘For the Erasmus Darwin Wedgwood copy of the Portland Vase - #12’, 9-11 January 1967, BMAA. The ceramic collection held at the William Rockhill Gallery of Art was largely built from the collection of Mr. Burnap, with whom Taggart worked closely in the purchase of many pieces. See ‘The Burnap Collection of English Pottery’, *The American Wedgwoodian*, vol. II, no. 8, February 1968. Taggart spoke at the museum to the Birmingham Art Association on the history of the Wedgwood era, to the Rotary Club on Wedgwood the businessman, and to the Woman’s Committee Day Lecture group on Wedgwood and Bentley and the treasures of the Beeson Collection.

<sup>114</sup> Lloyd Hawes, ‘The Beeson Collection’, *The American Wedgwoodian*, vol. II, no. 6, April 1967.

<sup>115</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>116</sup> Written in Mrs. Beeson’s ‘For the Erasmus Darwin Wedgwood copy of the Portland Vase - #12’, 19 November 1967, BMAA.

<sup>117</sup> Mrs. Beeson’s ‘For the Erasmus Darwin Wedgwood copy of the Portland Vase - #12’, BMAA.

<sup>118</sup> John Wedgwood in Mrs. Beeson’s ‘For the Erasmus Darwin Wedgwood copy of the Portland Vase - #12’, 24 February 1968, BMAA.

<sup>119</sup> In Mrs. Beeson’s ‘For the Erasmus Darwin Wedgwood copy of the Portland Vase - #12’, 11 November 1968, BMAA.

commented on what a great pleasure it was to see a collection acquired with ‘such taste, discrimination, and scholarship’.<sup>120</sup> The museum had clearly conferred social distinction not only on the collection, but also on the Beesons themselves. The display of their collection in the museum had secured the Beesons a public reputation, defined them as connoisseurs, and identified them as members of an elite social network.

Despite this auspicious beginning, within a few years of this exhibition the relationship between the Beesons and the museum was to grow increasingly tense. Financial difficulties and lack of commitment on the part of the museum to ensure a permanent gallery space where the entirety of the collection could be displayed led the Beesons to consider the withdrawal of their donation. Mrs. Beeson wrote;

We have stated that we hoped, under certain circumstances, to give the Wedgwood to the Birmingham Museum of Art, have made numbers of loan exhibits in the Museum over the years, even before the old gallery was provided, and we have cooperated in every way we know how and we have yet to see a beginning for the permanent home for the Collection.<sup>121</sup>

Those ‘certain circumstances’, however, were proving problematic. Prior to his election to the Museum Board, Mr. Beeson had given the Museum funds to ensure the Wedgwood gallery would be ‘just as Lucille wanted it’.<sup>122</sup> The Beesons clearly felt that the money they gave the Museum also gave them the right to dictate how it was spent and control over the display of the objects. The money the Beesons had given, some \$40,000, ended up being far short of the \$150,000 the Museum was quoted for the gallery’s completion. When William Spencer, Chairman of the Birmingham Museum of Art (Figure 117), suggested that the Beesons make some adjustments to their plan, Mr. Beeson ensured him that ‘Lucille had it exactly the way she wanted it and wanted nothing cut out.’<sup>123</sup> It was Mr. Beeson’s feeling that a ‘provision should be made by the City to properly house the Wedgwood collection’ and he threatened that if the City did not wish to house ‘this valuable collection’ the way they thought it deserved to be housed then it was his plan ‘to consider housing it elsewhere’.<sup>124</sup> In order to back up his threat, Mr. Beeson refused to provide the Museum with any

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<sup>120</sup> Robin Reilly in Mrs. Beeson’s ‘For the Erasmus Darwin Wedgwood copy of the Portland Vase - #12’, 8 September 1971, BMAA.

<sup>121</sup> Mrs. Lucille Beeson to Mr. Gilbert E. Johnston, 14 August 1974, BMAA.

<sup>122</sup> Mr. Dwight Beeson to Mr. William H. Hulsey, 30 November 1973, BMAA.

<sup>123</sup> Ibid. Mr. Beeson’s emphasis.

<sup>124</sup> Ibid.



additional funds until the matter was settled ‘regarding the Wedgwood Room’.<sup>125</sup> In a subsequent letter, Mrs. Beeson repeated the threat to withdraw the donation of their collection should the museum not finish the Wedgwood Gallery to their specifications, and also asked that the money they had given the museum be returned to them with interest.<sup>126</sup> In her understanding the money the couple had given was committed to the display of the collection under her conditions; ‘It was because we believed that we were assured that a home for the Wedgwood was forthcoming that we decided to make a series of donations... with all such gifts requesting that the funds be earmarked.’<sup>127</sup> Mrs. Beeson chided that,

A gift to be meaningful should be joyfully given and happily accepted. Unless I could feel that this could ultimately be so I fear I should not be entirely satisfied should Dwight give the Dwight and Lucille Beeson Collection of Wedgwood to the Museum. We feel a STEWARDSHIP and must arrange that it be placed in a welcoming, permant [sic] home.<sup>128</sup>

Mr. Beeson was angered not only by the Museum, but by the City as well, because the City Councillors were planning and raising funds for the construction of a second museum when Birmingham already had an established museum that had outgrown itself and needed additional space.<sup>129</sup> Indeed, his letter of protest was sent not only to Museum staff, but also to Mayor George Seibels. Particularly galling for the Beesons was the City’s refusal to appropriate funds in order to complete the Wedgwood room which, Mr. Beeson contended, should be built to ‘house one of the best Wedgwood collections in the world’.<sup>130</sup> Mr. Beeson concluded that although it might appear that he was not interested in the museum, this was not so; ‘I want my collection to wind up at the Birmingham Museum of Art, but I want it appreciated enough to where I will get the necessary assistance to get the room to house it to be beautiful and adequate.’<sup>131</sup>

Both of the Beesons emphasised the asset that the city would be losing if it did not comply with their wishes and lost the collection. Mr. Beeson claimed that ‘with the

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<sup>125</sup> Ibid.

<sup>126</sup> Mrs. Lucille Beeson to Mr. Gilbert E. Johnston, 14 August 1974, BMAA.

<sup>127</sup> Ibid.

<sup>128</sup> Ibid. Mrs. Beeson forwarded the letter to Mayor Seibels, Mr. William Spencer, Mr. William Hulsey, and members of the City Council.

<sup>129</sup> Mr. Dwight Beeson to Mr. William H. Hulsey, 30 November 1973, BMAA. Never mind that this new museum, Red Mountain, was to be a children’s museum.

<sup>130</sup> Ibid.

<sup>131</sup> Ibid.

possible exception of the Kress Collection at the Museum... the next greatest asset would probably be the Wedgwood collection'.<sup>132</sup> Mrs. Beeson encouraged Mayor Seibels to 'recall the many other well known collectors from some of our largest cities, England and Scotland who attended the opening of the former Wedgwood Gallery to realize that this is an important one.'<sup>133</sup> The collection was presented in the Beesons' correspondence with Museum and City officials as a benefit to Birmingham and its citizens. They claimed that many people passing through Birmingham had 'expressed regret' to them that the collection was not on view.<sup>134</sup> Beyond the attraction of tourists and visitors, the Beesons also emphasised that 'visits to museums improve taste and broaden knowledge' and would thus benefit the local population.<sup>135</sup> Their stated motivation behind the proposed donation was that they had 'just been trying to do some good in the community in which [they] chose to live.'<sup>136</sup> The Beesons, who would later treat the display of their collection in the museum as a kind of donor memorial, were at this juncture emphasising that the donation was a philanthropic action. They were not merely wealthy residents, but benefactors making their collection available to the wider community on the shared understanding that it would be an educational resource.

The problem at the time that Mrs. Beeson wrote her letter seems to have hinged on the provision of funds for the salary of a curator for the collection. She questioned; 'Can it be that Mr. Spencer is doubtful as to whether or not to request the City to assist in the completion of the Wedgwood Gallery? The Mayor has told us that he would ask the City to put up \$50,000. Does he feel it should hinge upon the employment of a single curator?'<sup>137</sup> While the Beesons would not donate their collection without a curator to care for it, they would not offer any funds put towards the salary of a curator.<sup>138</sup> In their words; 'if the Museum is qualified to receive the collection it must employ [a curator].'<sup>139</sup> Mrs. Beeson continued to exert control over the situation and the collection at the museum, going so far as to suggest that she would be 'glad to

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<sup>132</sup> Ibid.

<sup>133</sup> Mrs. Lucille Beeson to Mr. Gilbert E. Johnston, 14 August 1974, BMAA.

<sup>134</sup> Ibid.

<sup>135</sup> Ibid.

<sup>136</sup> Ibid.

<sup>137</sup> Ibid.

<sup>138</sup> Interestingly the Decorative Arts curatorship at the museum has since been endowed by the Harbert family, mentioned above.

<sup>139</sup> Mrs. Lucille Beeson to Mr. Gilbert E. Johnston, 14 August 1974, BMAA.

serve' in the capacity of curator, but would not commit to serving as sole curator for a long period of time.<sup>140</sup> If this were not to be the case, she further requested that plans be made to engage a curator who would not mind her being 'an associate curator as long as I would wish to serve.'<sup>141</sup> Mrs. Beeson would 'arrange the Collection and educational exhibits' doing her best 'to make it interesting, beautiful and educational'; she would teach docents; and she would meet with any groups visiting the collection.<sup>142</sup> In other words, she would have complete control over interpretation and communication in the gallery space.

By 1975, however, the differences had been sufficiently ironed out and the portion of the Beeson collection on display at the Birmingham Museum of Art was enlarged and housed in the new purpose built gallery. Ultimately, the Beesons needed the museum far more than the museum needed their collection. The museum could ensure the objects they had collected would be transformed from profane commodities, purchased from dealers, informally displayed and with an uncertain future, into museum objects of high culture, cared for by professional staff, and held in perpetuity.<sup>143</sup> At this point the objects remained on indefinite loan to the Museum. The gallery was reopened for viewing in conjunction with the Museum Board's annual dinner for the mayor, city council, Jefferson County commissioners, and other city officials.<sup>144</sup> The donation was finally formalised on 22 December 1976, when Mr. Beeson and the Museum Board issued the receipt and acceptance of the collection.<sup>145</sup> The donation consisted of a portion of the collection with the expressed desire and intention to make future donations of the remainder of the collection over time.<sup>146</sup> The collection was to be displayed 'for the enjoyment and education of the general public' yet certain terms and conditions were imposed to 'insure the integrity, accessibility and safety of the collection'.<sup>147</sup> These stipulated that the collection be shown in its entirety as a separate collection with no reserve holdings and not in conjunction with or intermingled with any other collection; that Lucille, if she chose,

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<sup>140</sup> Ibid.

<sup>141</sup> Ibid.

<sup>142</sup> Ibid.

<sup>143</sup> Susan Pearce, *Collecting in Contemporary Practice*, (London: Sage Publications, 1998), p. 67.

<sup>144</sup> Ted Weeks, 'Beeson Wedgwood Collection Reopened', *The Birmingham News*, 28 September 1975.

<sup>145</sup> Receipt and Acceptance of the Beeson collection, issued 22 December 1976, BMAA.

<sup>146</sup> Ibid.

<sup>147</sup> Ibid.

serve as associate or honorary curator; that the Museum provide a qualified Curator of Decorative Arts who would be an authority on Wedgwood and that no other of the curator's duties take precedence over the care of the Wedgwood collection; that no item be sold or removed from the collection; that no item be loaned; that no person should be authorised to open any of the cases except Dwight, Lucille or the curator; that an inventory be carried out annually and cleaning twice annually; that the collection be monitored by a trustee, who had (and has) the power to withdraw the collection, at which point it would be delivered to Samford University, if they would accept it, and if not to a South-eastern museum.<sup>148</sup> If a suitable museum could not be found by the trustee, then and only then would the collection go to auction, the proceeds to be distributed to The Greater Birmingham Foundation or an alternative charity situated and operating in Jefferson County, Alabama.<sup>149</sup>

By donating their collection to the museum, the Beesons indicated that their collecting activities were not merely a matter of personal social ambition and class pretension; they desired something of lasting value with which their name would be identified.<sup>150</sup> Yet the conditions they insisted on imposing on the museum threatened its very credibility as a public institution. Their collection was to stand out as distinct from the other collections in the museum. It was designed to cast the visitor as an admirer of the possessions of a particular family important enough to claim a semi-private precinct in the midst of a public, presumably educational space. Until very recently the Beeson collection was introduced in the museum with two large portraits of the Beesons, each with their favourite Wedgwood object by their side. (Figure 30) Yet, for the Beesons it was 'inconceivable' that anyone who had offered 'a gift of such value and promise would be asked to enter into any sort of "contract" relating to when or how or in what manner such gift would be made.'<sup>151</sup> In the Beesons' consideration, it was the donor who received promises as to stewardship for the collections future, not the other way around.<sup>152</sup>

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<sup>148</sup> Ibid.

<sup>149</sup> Ibid.

<sup>150</sup> Duncan, (1995), *op. cit.*, p. 83.

<sup>151</sup> Mrs. Lucille Beeson to Mr. Gilbert E. Johnston, 14 August 1974, BMAA.

<sup>152</sup> Ibid.

### **Display of the Beeson Collection of Wedgwood at the Birmingham Museum of Art: 1978**

The first substantial donation occurred in 1978, when almost sixty items were given to the museum and displayed permanently in the gallery. Mrs. Beeson ensured that the gallery was not only designed to her specifications, but also actively participated in the installation of the pieces. The gallery itself was a large open space, painted blue-grey and with light blue carpet to ‘harmonise with the jasper pieces’, while also incorporating black seats with orange cushions meant to ‘complement the Wedgwood encaustic ware’.<sup>153</sup> Glass cabinets lined the walls of the gallery and several free standing cases were arranged around the space where the objects were displayed, according to the Beesons’ stipulations, ‘in a pleasing and uncrowded manner’.<sup>154</sup> (Figure 118) The objects were primarily organised by chronology and by ceramic body type; jasperware pieces were displayed together and grouped by colour, an assemblage of portrait medallions were hung together, the earliest pieces were displayed to ‘illustrate the type of wares being produced in mid-eighteenth-century Staffordshire’ while a few modern pieces were include ‘for educational purposes’.<sup>155</sup> (Figure 119) The organisation of the gallery in this way reflected similar display policies the Beesons had seen while visiting exhibitions of Wedgwood in London at the V&A and the British Museum.

In 1959 the Victoria and Albert Museum celebrated the two hundredth anniversary of Josiah Wedgwood’s manufacture begun in 1759 when he severed his partnership with the potter Thomas Whieldon and set up business independently at the Ivy House Works in Burslem, Staffordshire. The Beesons made the trip to England in that year in order to visit both this exhibit and the Wedgwood collection at the British Museum.<sup>156</sup> Both institutions held important collections of Wedgwood, acquired primarily in the nineteenth century, which were unrivalled by any public institutions the Beesons would have had access to in the United States. In their attempt to visit ‘all the museums... showing collections of Old Wedgwood’, the Beesons were drawn

<sup>153</sup> *The Dwight and Lucille Beeson Collection of Wedgwood*, published by the Museum in 1978 to coincide with the WIS visit.

<sup>154</sup> Receipt and Acceptance of the Beeson collection, issued 22 December 1976, BMAA.

<sup>155</sup> *The Dwight and Lucille Beeson Collection of Wedgwood*, published by the Museum in 1978.

<sup>156</sup> *Wedgwood Bicentenary Exhibition 1759-1959*, Victoria and Albert Museum, June-August 1959, (London: Eyre and Spottiswoode Limited, 1959). See Foreword by Trenchard Cox, p. 3.

to England, where the finest public collections were housed.<sup>157</sup> The couple subsequently used their experiences from this trip in order to compose and deliver a lecture, accompanied by photographs of the collections, on the 'Old Wedgwood' displayed in these two respected institutions.<sup>158</sup> These collections of Wedgwood, held in such high esteem by the Beesons, confirmed the value and status collectors attributed to these objects. *The American Wedgwoodian* reported the pieces in the British Museum, known to many of the WIS members from publications or their own visits, were 'superb and chosen carefully for quality and content'.<sup>159</sup> Yet the collections of Wedgwood at both the British Museum and the Victoria and Albert were less than one hundred years old and had been formed largely by the initiative of private collectors rather than distinct curatorial decisions about acquisition. Throughout the early to mid-nineteenth century English ceramics remained an underrepresented area in museum collections.<sup>160</sup> Before the mid nineteenth century, the British Museum contained only two Wedgwood objects in their collection. One of these objects, the so-called Pegasus Vase, was presented to the museum by Josiah Wedgwood in 1786.<sup>161</sup> (Figure 120) The vase, which is now acknowledged by the museum as 'amongst the masterpieces of Wedgwood's art', was accepted with only a terse acknowledgement: 'Mr. Wedgewood [sic] having presented a Vase of his own manufacture, thanks were ordered to be returned for the same'.<sup>162</sup> It was Wedgwood's high estimation of this vase, which he described as 'the finest & most

<sup>157</sup> Lucille Beeson, 'Wedgwood: Introduction to Subject', no date, BMAA.

<sup>158</sup> Mrs. Beeson to Mr. Wasserman, 27 November 1960, BMAA.

...Mr. Beeson and I made a talk and took our slides of the collections in both the British Museum and the Victoria and Albert Museum of the Old Wedgwood, including the case of Portland vases in the British Museum... Now we have been asked to make that same talk to a study club here on December 6<sup>th</sup>. We usually take the latest piece we have bought to such meetings - we shall plan to take the little dice pattern urns to the December 6<sup>th</sup> lecture - and we shall show them as our latest addition.

<sup>159</sup> Lloyd Hawes, 'A Week in Ceramic England', *The American Wedgwoodian*, vol. II, no. 5, December 1966.

<sup>160</sup> According to Joseph Marryat, (1857), *op. cit.*, p. 439, there were only three public collections in Britain where ceramics could be viewed; the British Museum, which had collections of continental majolica and medieval wares; the Museum of Practical Geology, which from 1846 displayed the collection of Enoch Wood, a pottery manufacturer who acquired historic Staffordshire ceramics; and the Museum of Ornamental Art, the embryonic Victoria and Albert Museum, whose collection was described merely as containing 'miscellaneous' ceramic wares.

<sup>161</sup> The vase was decorated with a design of the Apotheosis of Homer adapted by John Flaxman from a Greek prototype in the collection of Sir William Hamilton.

<sup>162</sup> Aileen Dawson, *Masterpieces of Wedgwood in the British Museum*, (London: British Museum Publications Limited, 1984), p. 111.

perfect' he had ever made, that led him to donate it to the British Museum.<sup>163</sup> The museum provided a platform where his best work would be permanently displayed for the British public, who were, in turn, Wedgwood's prospective consumers.<sup>164</sup> The Beesons looked to these museums, and their collections of Wedgwood, in order to examine, record and then diffuse a methodology of display. In order to understand how the Beesons chose to order their collection – in the home and in the museum – it is useful to understand the display techniques of the most influential museum collections of Wedgwood.

The Wedgwood Bicentenary exhibition held at the V&A commemorated the role Josiah Wedgwood had played in changing 'the whole character of the ceramic industry, not only in England, but throughout Western civilisation.'<sup>165</sup> The visitor was introduced to Josiah Wedgwood through a series of family portraits at the beginning of the exhibition, including the portrait of Josiah by Sir Joshua Reynolds.<sup>166</sup> (Figure 8) Wedgwood was described in the accompanying catalogue as both a 'pioneer and specialist' in technique as well as a 'captain of industry' who possessed 'artistic perception'.<sup>167</sup> He was positioned as the leader in his field, his productions superseding the rougher English stoneware, the French painted faience, and challenging even the Continental porcelain factories.<sup>168</sup> The exhibition, while providing a comprehensive overview of the range of productions from the eighteenth century to the twentieth-century, placed emphasis 'naturally and rightly' on Josiah I, commenting that 'the first Josiah's own simple and elegant English shapes... enhanced by chaste decorations' had 'yet to be equalled'.<sup>169</sup> The British Museum's display of ceramics similarly praised Wedgwood productions, devoting more attention to the company's wares in their catalogue of English pottery than any other single

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<sup>163</sup> Josiah Wedgwood to Sir William Hamilton, 24 June 1786, Keele University Archives, E26-18976. Wedgwood drew his inspiration from the ancient world in the creation of this vase, but it is an adaptation from various sources rather than a direct copy. The main design was adapted by John Flaxman, who was himself looking at an unpublished drawing lent to him by D'Hancarville.

<sup>164</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>165</sup> *Wedgwood Bicentenary Exhibition*, (1959), *op. cit.* See the Introduction by Arthur Lane, p. 4. Contributors to the exhibition included Messrs. Josiah Wedgwood and Sons Ltd., Nottingham Castle Museum, the V&A, the Wedgwood Museum, the Lady Lever Art Gallery, Mr. G. Duff-Dunbar, the British Museum, the City of Stoke-on-Trent Museum, Sir George Barnes, and HM the Queen.

<sup>166</sup> *Wedgwood Bicentenary Exhibition*, (1959) *op. cit.*, p. 9.

<sup>167</sup> *Wedgwood Bicentenary Exhibition*, (1959) *op. cit.*, p. 3.

<sup>168</sup> *Wedgwood Bicentenary Exhibition*, (1959) *op. cit.*, p. 5.

<sup>169</sup> *Wedgwood Bicentenary Exhibition*, (1959) *op. cit.*, p. 8.

manufactory.<sup>170</sup> When the Beesons displayed their collection at the Birmingham Museum of Art they similarly celebrated the importance of Josiah Wedgwood, including a section where portrait medallions and commemorative mugs with Josiah Wedgwood's likeness were displayed along with images of the factories he had operated. (Figure 133)

After the initial introduction to Josiah Wedgwood, the exhibition at the V&A was arranged as a linear progression through the forms and ceramic body types produced by the firm. The early wares, characterised by their coloured glazes and represented in the exhibition by a number of teapots and coffeepots, were described as being distinguished by 'their fine workmanship' and a 'picturesque naturalism'.<sup>171</sup> (Figure 121) Yet these objects were deemed too 'related to wares by other mid-eighteenth century Staffordshire potters'.<sup>172</sup> They represented 'a provincial manifestation of the European rococo style against which Wedgwood himself reacted so strongly after the opening of his new works at Etruria'.<sup>173</sup> The second section of the exhibition incorporated works of variegated and marbled ware, the best of which, the exhibition claimed, were produced during the 'Wedgwood and Bentley' period.'<sup>174</sup> The exhibition again acknowledged that 'Staffordshire potters before Wedgwood had produced so-called 'agate ware' from clays of different colour kneaded together' but Josiah Wedgwood was credited with developing 'the idea further with the aim of imitating various natural marbles and stones'.<sup>175</sup> The black basalt wares were similarly situated in the context of the Staffordshire potters, who had 'from the early eighteenth century made an unglazed black ware resembling the commoner unglazed red stoneware with relief decoration'.<sup>176</sup> Again, Wedgwood was portrayed as an improver of existing methods and techniques; 'While still at Burslem Wedgwood began experiments towards the improvement of this ware' and the black basalt was described as being of great importance historically in that it represented 'a break with local Staffordshire tradition, being used for shapes that appealed to the sophisticated

<sup>170</sup> R.L. Hobson, *Catalogue of English Pottery in the British Museum* (London, Printed by order of the Trustees, 1903).

<sup>171</sup> *Wedgwood Bicentenary Exhibition*, (1959) *op. cit.*, p. 5. There were ten items included in this section of the exhibition.

<sup>172</sup> *Wedgwood Bicentenary Exhibition*, (1959) *op. cit.*, p. 5.

<sup>173</sup> *Wedgwood Bicentenary Exhibition*, (1959) *op. cit.*, p. 10.

<sup>174</sup> *Wedgwood Bicentenary Exhibition*, (1959) *op. cit.*, p. 11.

<sup>175</sup> *Ibid.* There were six items included in this section, primarily vases.

<sup>176</sup> *Wedgwood Bicentenary Exhibition*, (1959) *op. cit.*, p. 12.



Neo-Classical taste that was just beginning to spread all over Europe.<sup>177</sup> (Figure 122) The British Museum used the same language when describing Wedgwood's basalt which was said to have derived from the 'ruder... Egyptian black' made for some time in Staffordshire, yet 'in Wedgwood's hands it acquired a richer hue, finer grain, and smoother surface than any of the productions of his predecessors or imitators'.<sup>178</sup>

The jasperware, of which the Beesons were so fond, was described by the V&A as 'the most original of all Wedgwood's creations, and certainly the one most often popularly associated with his name.'<sup>179</sup> The jasper display was by far the largest segment of the exhibition and included three of the celebrated Portland Vase copies, including one the Beesons would later purchase.<sup>180</sup> (Figure 22) The British Museum's catalogue described the jasperware as 'the most successful of all Wedgwood's inventions' and accounted for the largest proportion of the collection.<sup>181</sup> The second Wedgwood piece acquired by the British Museum was a blue jasperware copy of the Portland Vase. (Figure 123) The vase, like the Pegasus vase before it, was given to the museum by a Wedgwood, this time John Wedgwood, Josiah's eldest son, and helped to contribute to the status of the firm. The Portland Vase was considered to be the most ambitious of Josiah Wedgwood's productions and in the museum it took on a canonical status.<sup>182</sup> Mrs. Beeson particularly emphasised that they had seen and photographed the Portland copies on their visit to the museum.<sup>183</sup>

Another production celebrated by the V&A exhibition was Wedgwood's creamware, called in the catalogue 'the most influential and far-reaching of Wedgwood's technical achievements'.<sup>184</sup> (Figure 124) Indeed, in the catalogue at least, it was the cream-ware which was the most highly regarded manufacture, describing the black

<sup>177</sup> *Wedgwood Bicentenary Exhibition*, (1959) *op. cit.*, p. 12-13. This section included thirty items.

<sup>178</sup> Hobson, (1903), *op. cit.*, p. 208.

<sup>179</sup> *Wedgwood Bicentenary Exhibition*, (1959) *op. cit.*, p. 17. This section contained one hundred and seventeen pieces including the Portland Vase copies, seventeen plaques, and forty-five medallions.

<sup>180</sup> *Wedgwood Bicentenary Exhibition*, (1959) *op. cit.*, p. 22. This vase was illustrated in *A Picture Book of Wedgwood Ware*, London: Waterlow & Sons Limited for the Victoria & Albert Museum, 1927, no. 15. The Beesons purchased the 'Darwin' copy of the vase which was on loan to the V&A by its then owner, Sir. Robin Darwin.

<sup>181</sup> Of the illustrated items in the catalogue, sixty-three of seventy-five were jasper pieces. The majority of the items were cameos and intaglios, some 559 items of 795, while the rest of the collection consisted of bas-reliefs, plaques and vases in the jasper, a few vases in other materials like the variegated ware, and just over a dozen pieces of the cream-ware. Hobson, (1903), *op. cit.*, p. 211.

<sup>182</sup> See for example Dawson, (1984), *op. cit.*, p. 112.

<sup>183</sup> Lucille Beeson to Otto Wasserman, 27 November 1960, BMAA.

<sup>184</sup> *Wedgwood Bicentenary Exhibition*, (1959) *op. cit.*, p. 5.

basalt and jasper favoured by the Beesons as, 'too closely associated with the neo-classical taste of the late eighteenth century'.<sup>185</sup> The final rooms of the exhibition provided a limited range of nineteenth century bone china and modern Wedgwood.<sup>186</sup> (Figure 125) While the exhibition claimed to be an assessment of the two hundred years of production of Wedgwood ware, there was a definite bias towards the eighteenth-century products, especially those associated with Josiah Wedgwood and those which were considered innovative and original. These were the same kinds of pieces which the Beesons had chosen for their purchases of the 1960s and the display methodologies were echoed in the Beesons organization of their own material. In Birmingham, the jasperware constituted the largest display area, with acknowledged 'masterpieces' such as the Portland Vase granted their own isolated vitrines.

Unlike the display in these other museums, the Beesons themselves were a visible presence in the gallery space. Upon entering the gallery the visitor was first introduced to several 'items illustrating the eighteenth-century fascination with the Barberini Vase' including a plaster cast of the original vase and an engraving depicting the vase.<sup>187</sup> The portraits of Dwight and Lucille were placed alongside these objects. Centred in a free standing case in front of these displays were the two Portland Vase copies, 'the gems of the collection' and the objects which had signalled the Beesons' own status as Wedgwood collectors.<sup>188</sup> (Figure 126) In another section of the gallery the Beesons displayed a brick from the recently demolished Etruria factory as 'a sad reminder that Etruria is no more', along with photographs of the destruction of the former Wedgwood factory.<sup>189</sup> The destruction of the factory had been lamented by the WIS; pictures of the demolition were included in the *American Wedgwoodian* and the event was described by the president, Elizabeth Chellis, as 'tragic'.<sup>190</sup> (Figure 127) Despite the efforts of English and American Wedgwood collectors, the buildings were destroyed due to what was described as 'extreme dilapidation of the old buildings' and 'apathy among the local citizens'.<sup>191</sup> The

<sup>185</sup> Ibid. This section included sixty pieces.

<sup>186</sup> There were nine pieces of the bone china and eleven of the modern Wedgwood.

<sup>187</sup> Ibid.

<sup>188</sup> Ibid.

<sup>189</sup> Schedule of Wedgwood and Related objects to be Given to the Birmingham Museum of Art during 1978, BMAA.

<sup>190</sup> Elizabeth Chellis, 'The President's Message', *The American Wedgwoodian*, vol. II, no. 3, April 1966.

<sup>191</sup> Ibid.

Beesons, who often characterised their role as one of stewardship, affirmed this position through this display of grief at the loss of this factory.<sup>192</sup> They also subtly highlighted their erudition on the subject of Wedgwood, and their interest in source material for the classically inspired designs. The encaustic painted pieces were displayed alongside their copy of the *Collection of Etruscan, Greek and Roman Antiquities from the Cabinet of Hon. William Hamilton, Vol. I, 1765*, and plaques were placed on the pages from Monfauçon's *Antiquity Explained* and the Hamilton folio from which their designs were derived. (Figure 128) However, little or no information was provided alongside the objects; labels, if included at all, gave the date of manufacture, notes on the mark and perhaps the designer. The objects were displayed as if they offered an objective knowledge, as if they were able to speak to the audience without any form of interpretation. Yet, the very methodologies of display utilised in the gallery, namely the conventionalised ordering of the objects by date and material, the spacing of the objects to allow individual contemplation, and the isolation of certain objects of perceived value, communicated the concerns of the collector/connoisseur with process, with biography and social practice.

One of the most prominent features of the gallery was a room designed and presented as a reconstruction of an eighteenth century interior. (Figures 129 & 130) The architect, Mrs. Beeson commented, had spent 'a good deal of time and research' and had planned a 'truly lovely inner-room, in the Adams' style', which was to incorporate the 'lovely George II mantel which [Museum Chairman] William Spencer gave to the Museum to be used in this very room'.<sup>193</sup> Such a gallery, Mrs. Beeson wrote, would be 'an asset to any fine museum'.<sup>194</sup> This inner room was built primarily for the display of a series of jasper frieze tablets installed in the cornice, but the Beesons also chose to include two Wedgwood chandeliers, the 'period' mantelpiece, assorted pieces of furniture and two large cabinets displaying jasper

<sup>192</sup> 'We feel a STEWARDSHIP and must arrange that it be placed in a welcoming, permant [sic] home.' Mrs. Lucille Beeson to Mr. Gilbert E. Johnston, 14 August 1974, BMAA. When Mrs. Beeson first spoke at a WIS meeting on the Darwin Portland vase, her first statement was that she and her husband were 'humble to have the stewardship of two important Wedgwood copies of the Portland Vase'. Lucille Beeson, 'The Darwin Portland Vase Number 12', *The Eleventh Wedgwood International Seminar*, 5-7 May 1966, The Henry Ford Museum, Dearborn, Michigan, pp. 87-90.

<sup>193</sup> Mrs. Lucille Beeson to Mr. Gilbert E. Johnston, 14 August 1974, BMAA.

<sup>194</sup> Ibid.

wares.<sup>195</sup> The ceiling was painted in ‘jasper colors’ and a rug was woven to ‘reflect’ the ceiling colours and design.<sup>196</sup> Mrs. Beeson felt that this room would provide visitors with the opportunity to study the decoration ‘employed in England during the eighteenth century when so much of the taste we admire so today was used’.<sup>197</sup> Despite her intentions, the room was largely a pastiche. This display, intended to encourage recognition of the ways these objects were displayed in the domestic setting of the eighteenth century, merely served to alter their interpretation. The very act of protecting these objects in the museum setting, let alone embellishing them with reconstructions of an imagined past, manipulated and refashioned their appearance and meaning.<sup>198</sup> An object does not bear a continuous relationship with its origins, although Mrs. Beeson was here imposing a metaphorical meaning. Her timeline was also skewed; the earliest piece in the room dated from 1784, but the tablets, decorated with scenes of the marriage of Cupid and Psyche, the sacrifice to Hymen, the death of Hector and other classical tales, actually dated to the nineteenth century, as did many other objects in the room.<sup>199</sup>

The Beesons, however, were eager to follow what had become an established tradition of incorporating a period room into the display of English ceramics in America. Mellanay Delhom had included one in her display at the Mint Museum in North Carolina.<sup>200</sup> Elizabeth Chellis, serving as president of the Wedgwood Society of Boston, took the concept one step further when the society held its first exhibition in 1970 at the Jackson Homestead in Newton, Massachusetts, ‘a handsome federal house... beautifully furnished in period style’.<sup>201</sup> (Figure 131) This kind of interpretive display offered a transitional space, a conflation of the domestic and the public, where the objects were conceived as representatives for a culture and an era. These rooms functioned as a kind of cultural trust, idealising an imaginary ancestral identity, namely aristocratic Anglo stock, and transferred them to the modern

<sup>195</sup> Mr. Dwight Beeson to Mr. William H. Hulsey, 30 November 1973, BMAA. The dates of production for these items ranged from about 1785 to 1805 and most came originally from the Vurpillat collection. The frieze itself was purchased for the Beesons by Mr. Simmons, Otto Wasserman’s London agent, for £4400. See ‘Salcroom’, *The Financial Times*, 28 February 1968.

<sup>196</sup> *The Dwight and Lucille Beeson Collection of Wedgwood*, published by the Museum in 1978.

<sup>197</sup> Letter from Mrs. Beeson to Mr. Gilbert E. Johnston, August 14 1974, BMAA.

<sup>198</sup> Lowenthal, (1985), *op. cit.*, p. 263.

<sup>199</sup> Record of objects given to the Birmingham Museum of Art in 1978 in Museum holdings.

<sup>200</sup> *The American Wedgwoodian*, vol. II, nos. 6 & 7, April 1967 & October 1967.

<sup>201</sup> Constance Leggett, ‘Wedgwood Treasures From Cabinets and Cupboards’, *The American Wedgwoodian*, vol. III, no. 7, May 1971, pp. 147-150.

collectors.<sup>202</sup> The women who organised these displays even played hostess. Visitors to the Wedgwood Society at the Jackson Homestead were received by Mrs. Chellis in the front hall and were served hot spiced cider and molasses cookies, while the house ‘was made gay’ with flowers arranged by members of the local garden club in Wedgwood flower containers.<sup>203</sup> In her own efforts to avoid the ‘antiseptic atmosphere of institutional installations’, Mrs. Beeson flew in imported white lilacs for an exhibition of the collection at the Birmingham Museum of Art.<sup>204</sup> This interpretation of the objects through contextualisation, however forced, was thought to enhance the stated purpose of stimulating visitors to ‘further study and new interests in collecting’ and to ‘acquaint the public with the scope and variety of Wedgwood wares’.<sup>205</sup> However, the room cast the visitor as an outsider, removed in both time and space from the ordered socially ranked world displayed.<sup>206</sup> The visitor was constructed as an admirer, not only of the objects, but also of those who were able to acquire and live with these objects.

### 1978 WIS Seminar at the Birmingham Museum of Art

The 1978 donation of the Beesons’ collection coincided with the twenty-third annual meeting of the Wedgwood International Seminar, which was hosted by the Birmingham Museum of Art. Mrs. Beeson published an open invitation to the event to all WIS members in the *American Wedgwoodian*. ‘Come to Birmingham’, she urged, ‘to see the work of Matthew Boulton set with Wedgwood gems, to see the jasper frieze tablets, to see the combined collecting efforts of several major Wedgwood collectors’.<sup>207</sup> She exhorted people to come to see the new gallery, which she described as her ‘pride and joy’.<sup>208</sup> ‘Come to Birmingham and let me show you a few of our favorites, some of which many of you may never have seen except as illustrations in books.’<sup>209</sup> ‘Variety’, she reminded her reader, was ‘one of the

<sup>202</sup> Duncan, (1995), *op. cit.*, p. 65.

<sup>203</sup> Constance Leggett, ‘Wedgwood Treasures From Cabinets and Cupboards’, *The American Wedgwoodian*, vol. III, no. 7, May 1971, pp. 147-150.

<sup>204</sup> Mildred Housen, ‘A Fabulous Collection in Birmingham’ in *Town & Country*, vol. 121, no. 4535, June 1967, pp. 156 & 159-60.

<sup>205</sup> Constance Leggett, ‘Wedgwood Treasures From Cabinets and Cupboards’, *The American Wedgwoodian*, vol. III, no. 7, May 1971, pp. 147-150.

<sup>206</sup> Duncan, (1995), *op. cit.*, p. 68.

<sup>207</sup> Lucille Beeson, ‘An Invitation’, *The American Wedgwoodian*, November 1977, Vol. V, No. 4, p.

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<sup>208</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>209</sup> *Ibid.*

interesting features of our collection'.<sup>210</sup> Although many of the members had previously seen the two copies of the Portland vase at other Seminars, Mrs. Beeson asked them to come and see them 'in their place of honor in their permanent home'.<sup>211</sup>

Openly praising the collection, she wrote;

We believe that following each lecture you will be able to visit the Wedgwood Gallery to study one or more objects mentioned by the speaker. Does this sound immodest of me? Perhaps so but remember there are some 1400 examples in the collection and it is reputed to be one of the finest in the world. Remember, too, Wedgwood has been my world for over thirty years! When one has had a long-time dream and has seen it realized, has personally placed each object in a beautiful new gallery-well, I do have a special pride in being able to say: Come to Birmingham and see the Dwight and Lucille Beeson Collection of Wedgwood.<sup>212</sup>

Once at the museum, Mrs. Beeson served as the Chair for the seminar, where she remarked that while every collector knew the 'thrill of the chase' and the reward of acquisition, only a few knew 'the return on his investment in time, travel, research and effort' which she and Dwight felt on hosting the seminar in Birmingham.<sup>213</sup>

Every registrant was given a commemorative booklet which illustrated the new installation of the Beesons' collection. Yet, the Beesons shared their spotlight at the Seminar with the Museum itself and the city of Birmingham. This celebration of their hometown was, indeed, one of the original purposes behind the Beesons donation of their collection to this museum. In 1974, Harry Buten's son suggested the Beesons leave their collection to the Buten Museum of Wedgwood. Mr. Beeson responded that though this would have resulted in 'its being seen by many, many more people' than it would be in Birmingham, he 'having been born in Mississippi, educated in Georgia, and living in Alabama' hoped 'to interest more people on the subject of Wedgwood in our part of the country'.<sup>214</sup> David Vann, the Mayor of Birmingham, was present to welcome the guests to the Seminar and he spoke on the city's upcoming cultural programmes.<sup>215</sup> The visit included a tour of the city, during which

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<sup>210</sup> Ibid.

<sup>211</sup> Ibid.

<sup>212</sup> Ibid.

<sup>213</sup> *The Twenty-Third Wedgwood International Seminar*, ed. by Gail Andrews, (Birmingham Museum of Art, 1978), Preface.

<sup>214</sup> Mr. Beeson to David Buten, 9 April 1974, BMAA.

<sup>215</sup> '1978 - Birmingham Seminar', *The American Wedgwoodian*, vol. V, no. 6, November 1978, pp. 182-189.

the audience was cursorily told of the city's industrial importance.<sup>216</sup> Yet, *The American Wedgwoodian* reported that they had not dwelt on this topic, for soon they 'entered some of the most beautiful suburbs we have ever seen, enhanced by the spring flowers which were in full bloom.'<sup>217</sup> While Seminars had been held at Williamsburg, Virginia, and Charlotte, North Carolina, Gail Andrews, then Assistant Curator at the Birmingham Museum of Art, encouraged members to visit Alabama where they would encounter what she called 'the real South'.<sup>218</sup> Birmingham, she said, was 'always a surprise to the first-time visitor'.<sup>219</sup>

Instead of the expected polluted, dust-laden landscape, one finds an attractive city offering a variety of activities. The city has art galleries, a new natural history museum, an antebellum mansion, lovely botanical gardens, and a unique landmark: Vulcan, a cast-iron watchdog of the city. All are worth a visit.<sup>220</sup>

Andrews, who served as co-Chair with Lucille, opened the Seminar, which took as its theme the relationship between Josiah Wedgwood and Mathew Boulton, playing on Boulton's association with Birmingham, England, where his Soho Manufactory was based. (Figure 132) Alongside the Beeson collection housed in the new gallery, visitors were able to view a special loan exhibition, 'Wedgwood and Boulton: Artists of Industry'.<sup>221</sup> Andrews wrote that;

Birmingham, Alabama, was an appropriate site for the 1978 meeting of the Wedgwood International Seminar in that one of the finest collections of the works of Josiah Wedgwood, the Dwight and Lucille Beeson Collection, is exhibited in the Birmingham Museum of Art. Moreover, Birmingham, Alabama, the new industrial city of the South, is reminiscent of its namesake, Birmingham, England, which witnessed the rise of the industrial revolution in England during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Birmingham, England, the Industrial Revolution, and the interaction of various craftsmen and industries were all key elements in Wedgwood's production.<sup>222</sup>

Similar confluences of America and Wedgwood's England were constructed in the gallery space. Included among the pieces in the Beesons' collection were several

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<sup>216</sup> The group was told that the first mill was opened in the city in the first half of the nineteenth century. '1978 - Birmingham Seminar', *The American Wedgwoodian*, vol. V, no. 6, November 1978, pp. 181, 182-189.

<sup>217</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>218</sup> Gail Andrews, 'Wedgwood International Seminar-1978', *The American Wedgwoodian*, vol. V, no. 4, November 1977, p. 159.

<sup>219</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>220</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>221</sup> '1978-Birmingham Seminar', *The American Wedgwoodian*, vol. V, no. 6, November 1978, pp. 181, 182-189.

<sup>222</sup> *The Twenty-Third Wedgwood International Seminar*, ed. by Gail Andrews, (Birmingham Museum of Art, 1978), p. 20.

items relating specifically to Josiah Wedgwood, such as portrait medallions and a Stubbs engraving depicting Josiah, a pitcher celebrating the 200<sup>th</sup> anniversary of his birth, and a statuette of the potter holding a small replica of the Portland Vase. (Figure 133) These objects celebrating the cult of artistic individuality were displayed alongside several other objects, including a Wedgwood Liberty Bell produced in 1976, a Wedgwood medallion of John Paul Jones, and a wax portrait and mezzotint of the same American patriot. (Figure 134) The backdrop for the portrait pieces was an enlarged copy of the Declaration of Independence. This display encouraged a reading of the objects in relation to one another, imposing a nationalised narrative ideologically associating Josiah Wedgwood and his productions with the history of the United States. When any object enters another culture it takes on new meanings, and when placed within a society for any period of time, a new taxonomic order is created, whereby the objects are transformed in accordance with cultural identity. In this example, the objects, acting as the literal equivalent of myth, underwent an inversion in their symbolic interpretation at the boundaries between differing cultural groups.<sup>223</sup> This is a way in which artefacts like Wedgwood became Americanised. When the object in the collection was inserted into a narrative its status became semiotic, it was transformed from thing to sign.<sup>224</sup> By Americanising objects, the Beesons and other collectors both created a narrative around an article which reconstituted meaning in the subject in a very personal way, but also composed a new, specifically American story of Wedgwood collecting. As with all collecting, there was both the subjective, personal story and the public projection of the narrative.

## Conclusion

The 1978 seminar also initiated the beginnings of a significant shift in the way the Beesons' collection was interpreted. Gail Andrews wrote an article following the Seminar for *The American Wedgwoodian* titled 'Wedgwood and Boulton: Artists of Industry' in which she stated that efforts were being made 'to develop a broader understanding of Josiah Wedgwood and the products from his factory'.<sup>225</sup> Another

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<sup>223</sup> Daniel Miller, 'Artefacts and the Meaning of Things', in *Companion Encyclopedia of Anthropology*, ed. by Tim Ingold, (London & New York: Routledge, 1994), p. 401. Miller is drawing from Levi-Strauss' work on the mask here.

<sup>224</sup> Micke Bal, 'Telling Objects: A Narrative Perspective on Collecting' in Elsner & Cardinal, *The Cultures of Collecting*, (London: Reaktion Books, 1994), pp. 97-115, p. 111.

<sup>225</sup> Gail Andrews, 'Wedgwood and Boulton: Artists of Industry', *The American Wedgwoodian*, November 1978, Vol. V, No. 6, pp. 190-192.



speaker at the seminar, Barbara Brandon Schnorrenberg, examined four female consumers of Wedgwood from varying socio-economic backgrounds.<sup>226</sup>

Manufacturing techniques began to come under examination, especially mass production and the subsequent marketing of articles produced for those of moderate income.<sup>227</sup> The emphasis was shifting from Wedgwood as manufacturer to the Queen, to Wedgwood as an industrial pioneer.<sup>228</sup> These articles were part of a larger trend and reflected the changing patterns of academic study of Wedgwood in America more generally away from strict connoisseurship towards an approach focused on social history and material culture. Authors from varied academic disciplines were approaching ceramic studies in new ways. Archaeologists opened the field to not only those pieces saved by collectors, but also the ware used in everyday homes.<sup>229</sup> Cultural anthropologists, sociologists, and cultural historians sought to study human investments in, attitudes toward, and behaviours around, consumer goods in order to define consumer culture.<sup>230</sup> Most shared the basic assumption that goods could be studied as carriers of a wide range of meanings which are creatively applied by consumers and, perhaps, more importantly, that goods were indicators of who these consumers were.<sup>231</sup>

After the death of Dwight Beeson in 1985, Douglas Hyland, Director of the Birmingham Museum of Art wrote a short article for *The Birmingham News*. In it we can see the shift the museum was taking in its approach to the collection. While the Beesons had ‘consistently emphasized connoisseurship’ and had ‘established a unique collection for all to enjoy’, Hyland stressed that ‘by studying Josiah Wedgwood, his

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<sup>226</sup> Barbara Brandon Schnorrenberg, ‘Some Eighteenth Century Consumers of Wedgwood’, *The Twenty-Third Wedgwood International Seminar*, 9-12 May 1978, Birmingham Museum of Art, 79-94.

<sup>227</sup> See David Barker, ‘“The Usual Classes of Useful Articles”: Staffordshire Ceramics Reconsidered’ in Robert Hunter, ed, *Ceramics in America*, (Hanover & London: Chipstone Foundation, 2001), pp. 73-93.

<sup>228</sup> See Neil McKendrick, ‘Josiah Wedgwood and Factory Discipline’, *The Historical Journal*, Vol. IV, No. 1, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1961), pp. 30-55 and Neil McKendrick, John Brewer, J.H. Plumb, *The Birth of a Consumer Society: The Commercialization of Eighteenth-century England*, (London: Hutchinson, 1982).

<sup>229</sup> See Barker, (2001), *op. cit.*, pp. 73-93.

<sup>230</sup> Elizabeth Kowaleski-Wallace, *Consuming Subjects: Women, Shopping, and Business in the Eighteenth Century*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997), p. 5. See Mary Douglas and Baron Isherwood, *The World of Goods*, (London: Routledge, 1996); and Grant McCracken, *Culture and Consumption: New Approaches to the Symbolic Character of Consumer Goods and Activities*, (Bloomington : Indiana University Press, 1988).

<sup>231</sup> See *Consumption and the World of Goods*, John Brewer and Roy Porter, (eds.), (London and New York: Routledge, 1993).

scientific experiments, philosophy, production techniques and economic theories, the entire period of the 18<sup>th</sup> century in England becomes meaningful. Thus, these objects can be appreciated for their artistic value and also in relationship to the history of the period'.<sup>232</sup> Mr. Beeson's death and the fact the majority of the collection had been given to the museum meant that control over interpretation(s) largely shifted from Mrs. Beeson to the Director of the Museum and the Decorative Arts Curator. Hyland, as Director, perceived the collection within the museum as a tool of communication and a linkage to other cultural institutions.

Each art museum prides itself on being part of a larger network connecting similar cultural institutions around the world, each a cultural pilgrimage site providing enjoyment and enlightenment to the visitor from near or far. For almost four decades the Birmingham Museum has served as a magnet for those interested in the imagination and achievements of Josiah Wedgwood. Fortunately, [the Beesons] decided to share their achievement with the general public. We are indebted to Lucille and the late Dwight Beeson for lavishing such a rich bounty on this Museum and for helping to secure our place on the cultural pilgrimage of museums.<sup>233</sup>

Despite the shifting balance of power, Mrs. Beeson continued to wield a great influence over the collection. The new Curator of Decorative Arts, Elizabeth Bryding Adams, had been hand-picked by the Beesons several years previously, and it was Adams, who with funding from Mrs. Beeson, published a catalogue of the collection.<sup>234</sup> While Adams relationship with Mrs. Beeson verged on the obsequious<sup>235</sup>, she was instrumental in the re-interpretation of the collection. In publicity for the museum, Adams was keen to highlight Wedgwood's innovations in marketing, mentioning the London showrooms and his use of catalogues.<sup>236</sup> She emphasised the middle class customers of Wedgwood's products; stating that 'there was a whole mid-range of things that people could buy, and there was a consumer

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<sup>232</sup> Douglas Hyland, 'Their Generosity Gave Us Unique Collection' in *The Birmingham News*, 19 June 1985.

<sup>233</sup> Douglas Hyland, introduction to the Beeson collection, BMAA.

<sup>234</sup> See letter from Dwight Beeson to George Seibels, the Mayor of Birmingham, 12 March 1975 in which he stated that Lucille had been able to locate a 'local young lady' currently in her final year of an undergraduate degree who was 'extremely interested in obtaining employment in the Birmingham Museum of Art'. The 'young lady' was Bryding Adams. The Beesons discussed the proposition with Adams' parents and ascertained that they would be prepared to send Adams to Richmond College, Richmond, England, where she would study to be a curator of the decorative arts. The Beesons also hoped that Adams would attend classes at the Victoria and Albert Museum.

<sup>235</sup> See, for example, an article in which Mrs. Beeson said of Adams, 'She is a precious girl to me. She is one of the smartest little girls I've ever met. I undertook to give her a little information, and she just gobbled it up.' Adams responded that Mrs. Beeson was 'so wise, and it's a wonderful, wonderful friendship for me to have.' Rosalind Smith, 'Bryding and the Beeson', in *Fun & Stuff*, January 1994.

<sup>236</sup> *Ibid.*

revolution here in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century, in the way people wanted stuff.’<sup>237</sup> When she looked at these ceramics, she told a local paper, she did not think of them ‘just as ceramics’, she preferred to envision ‘a much grander picture of this man, and what he did for the pottery industry of the world.’<sup>238</sup> Adams did maintain a strong attachment to the connoisseurial approach of the Beesons, however, commenting that while one could learn ‘from reading books to a certain degree’ the ‘real key to knowing particularly about decorative arts is to be able to handle them.’<sup>239</sup> Despite any discussion of Wedgwood’s eighteenth century consumers, the museum maintained an enforced distance between the object and the visitor, ensuring they could not envision themselves as a consumer of these goods.

Adams instigated a complete reinstallation of the Wedgwood Gallery in 1990 which was designed with the idea that the objects ‘need intimacy to inspire appreciation’.<sup>240</sup> She intimated that the new installation had become necessary because more research had been conducted into the collection and because they had ‘more sophisticated design concepts as far as museums [were] concerned’.<sup>241</sup> The Director of the Museum described the collection as ‘one of the most popular and important collections in the Museum’ which was ‘renowned throughout the world for its quality and comprehensiveness’, yet the reinstallation was needed in order to ‘display this collection to its best advantage’ and help visitors ‘appreciate the variety and beauty of these ceramics in an attractive and educational context’.<sup>242</sup> Whereas the 1978 installation had relied on colour and material for its taxonomies, the new gallery took a more chronological approach to the display. (Figure 135) The carpet in the gallery was replaced with wood parquet, the walls painted golden yellow, and the trim white, which according to the review of the reinstallation in *The Birmingham News*, enhanced ‘the sense of order and space that is an essential quality of the neo-classic

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<sup>237</sup> Ibid.

<sup>238</sup> Ibid.

<sup>239</sup> Ibid.

<sup>240</sup> James Nelson, ‘Installation Enhances Wedgwoods’ in *The Birmingham News*, 13 May 1990. The 1990 reinstallation coincided with the Thirty-fifth Annual Wedgwood International Seminar, held for a second time at the Birmingham Museum of Art. The theme for that year’s seminar was ‘The Consumer Revolution in Eighteenth Century English Pottery’. The reinstallation was funded jointly by the City of Birmingham, the National Endowment for the Arts, and Mrs. Beeson.

<sup>241</sup> Mitchell Diggs, ‘Seminar Marks Reopening of Beeson Wedgwood Collection at Birmingham Museum of Art’, *Birmingham Post-Herald*, 17 April 1990.

<sup>242</sup> Letter from Douglas Hyland to Ms. Antris Hinton of the City of Birmingham Council Office, 16 April 1990, BMAA.

spirit'.<sup>243</sup> (Figure 136) The gallery was converted into a series of passageways that retained as a focal point the recreation of an eighteenth century English interior with Wedgwood frieze and lighting fixtures. Other contextual exhibits were added, such as the installation of a wall sized mural depicting the interior of the 1809 Wedgwood showroom. (Figure 137) In this image one can see in the foreground on a central table a large sculptural piece in jasper of 'Britannia Triumphant', an image enhanced by the object's actual presence in the room. The figure was a new acquisition to the collection, purchased with funds provided by Mrs. Beeson, and became a highlight of the new installation. The emphasis placed on this object, as a large 'master work' indicated that the museum, despite its more didactic approach, was continuing the kind of object fetishism begun by the Beesons.<sup>244</sup> Although wall colour, labelling and even the floor plan has changed over the years in the Beeson wing of the Museum, installation design has consistently sought to isolate the objects for the concentrated gaze and to suppress as irrelevant other meanings the objects might have.<sup>245</sup> The display case creates a removed and distanced context, which does not encourage dialogue.<sup>246</sup> Even where education is attempted, the practice of isolating important originals in niches or vitrines, and the refusal to display them in order to make an historical point, undermined an attempt to explain the chronology of the pieces in relation to any other chronology or history.<sup>247</sup> The museum space is marked off and visitors, separated from their daily lives, are encouraged to open themselves to a different quality of experience.<sup>248</sup>

Mrs. Beeson's final contribution to the collection was to ensure that the museum was confirmed as a place for the academic study of Wedgwood. She acted in 1992 to acquire the Chellis library, a collection of texts and documents about Wedgwood and English ceramics, then identified as America's largest Wedgwood library. Shortly thereafter, the Museum recorded in their minutes an official thanks, extending 'its sincere appreciation to Mrs. Lucille Stewart Beeson for her continued generosity to

<sup>243</sup> James Nelson, 'Installation Enhances Wedgwoods' in *The Birmingham News*, 13 May 1990.

<sup>244</sup> See Susan Pearce, *Collecting in Contemporary Practice*, (London: Sage Publications, 1998), p. 128, where she traces the word 'fetishism' to the Portuguese *feiticos*, meaning 'a charm', which anthropologists appropriated to refer to objects with inherent magical powers.

<sup>245</sup> Duncan, (1995), *op. cit.*, p. 17.

<sup>246</sup> Kevin Walsh, *The Representation of the Past*, (London & New York: Routledge, 1992), pp. 31-32.

<sup>247</sup> Duncan, (1995), p. 17.

<sup>248</sup> Duncan, (1995), p. 20.

the Museum and for her dedication in helping the Museum become a renowned center for the study of eighteenth-century ceramics.<sup>249</sup> The collection, now hailed as ‘one of the symbols of the Museum’, was meant to attract not only the casual visitor, but the scholar and the collector as well.<sup>250</sup> The Chairman of the Museum Board, William Spencer wrote that;

The Beesons, after giving this magnificent collection to the Museum, insured through their influence and support, that there would be educational activities to create a better understanding of the subject for the general audience and special seminars and publications for the more serious student. Mrs. Beeson has continued to add rare and early pieces to the collection which expands the gallery interpretation and significance of the holdings... The Board is grateful to Mrs. Beeson for her vision of what the collection could be and for what it achieves for the Museum and the City.<sup>251</sup>

When the Beesons donated their private collection it became an institutional collection with broader and more extended implications for its identity, it became reflective of community and regional ideals.<sup>252</sup> At the same time this kind of public philanthropy ensured a legacy for the donor. The Beesons had by this point established their role as philanthropists in Birmingham, as was evidenced in the articles reporting Mr. Beeson’s death,<sup>253</sup> yet it was the Director of the Museum who became one of the most active proponents in instilling a legacy for the Beeson name. In 1990, timed to concur with the opening celebrations at the museum, Hyland petitioned the City Council Office to honour Mrs. Beeson by issuing a reading from the Council and the Mayor.<sup>254</sup> Mrs. Beeson was to be awarded at this time by the city for her ‘generous support’ of the Museum as well as in acknowledgment of her and

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<sup>249</sup> William M. Spencer, Chairman of the Museum Board of the City of Birmingham, Excerpt from the Minutes of the Four Hundred Eighty-fourth Meeting of the Museum Board of the City of Birmingham Held 23 June 1993, BMAA.

<sup>250</sup> Ibid.

<sup>251</sup> Ibid.

<sup>252</sup> Belk (1995), *op. cit.*, p. 102.

<sup>253</sup> In *The Birmingham News*, the obituary was titled ‘Wedgwood donor Dwight Beeson Dies’ and goes on to list his other philanthropic endeavours, the Dwight M. Beeson Hall at Samford University, which houses the School of Business Administration, and the founding of professorships at several universities. Mr. Beeson’s life was defined through his affiliations, to his church, to the country club, as a member of the Sons of the Colonial Wars and Sons of the American Revolution, but primarily he was remembered for his role as a member of the board of the Birmingham Museum of Art and the contributions he made to the museum through this collection. The family even requested that any memorials be sent to the Wedgwood Gallery at the Birmingham Museum of Art. ‘Wedgwood Donor Dwight Beeson dies’ in *The Birmingham News*, 7 June 1985.

<sup>254</sup> Douglas Hyland to Ms. Antris Hinton of the City of Birmingham Council Office, 16 April 1990, BMAA.

her husband's 'contributions to the cultural life of Birmingham'.<sup>255</sup> The City commended Mrs. Beeson 'for her outstanding service to the Birmingham Museum of Art and the citizens of Birmingham' and presented the city seal to her 'in recognition of the time and effort she has unselfishly given to promote Birmingham's cultural development'.<sup>256</sup> Hyland then went on to nominate Mrs. Beeson for the Birmingham Business and Professional Women's Club 1990 Woman of the Year.<sup>257</sup> Hyland wrote that;

Lucille Stewart Beeson and her husband, Dwight, put together the finest collection of Wedgwood that exists outside of the factory in England. This they donated to the Birmingham Museum of Art to share with all the citizens of the city and its visitors. ... No one visits the Wedgwood Collection at the Birmingham Museum of Art without being awed by the ceramics of Josiah Wedgwood in the Beeson Collection. As William Spencer III, Chairman of the Board of the Birmingham Museum of Art said of the Beesons, "their gifts have inspired many people." They are the "principal stars in the crown of our museum." All the citizens of Birmingham appreciate the gifts of Lucille Stewart Beeson and the Birmingham Museum of Art therefore nominates her as the Birmingham Woman of the Year 1990.<sup>258</sup>

Despite the effusive praise, when Lucille Beeson died on 8 January 2001 she left no further assets or monies to the Museum. Instead, her final act was to leave her entire estate, valued at some \$150 million dollars, in a charitable trust whose earnings would benefit thirteen Birmingham charities and non-profit organisations in perpetuity.<sup>259</sup>

According to the *Chronicle of Philanthropy*, Mrs. Beeson's gift ranked nationally

<sup>255</sup> Ibid. The resolution itself went on to acknowledge that, as a result of the donation, the Birmingham Museum of Art had 'achieved international acclaim, publicity, and notice from scholars and art connoisseurs' and through Mrs. Beeson's own personal generosity the Museum had been able to 'embellish and improve upon this already outstanding collection through additional gifts and purchases', all of which served the ultimate purpose of the 'educational enrichment of the people of Birmingham and visitors to our community'. Resolution included in letter from Douglas Hyland to Ms. Antris Hinton of the City of Birmingham Council Office, 16 April 1990, BMAA.

<sup>256</sup> Ibid.

<sup>257</sup> He identified her contributions to the community during the subsequent year as the reinstallation of the Wedgwood Collection at the Birmingham Museum of Art, the acquisition for the collection of the 'Britannia Triumphant' figure, the attraction to Birmingham of the Thirty-Fifth Annual Wedgwood International Seminar and Mrs. Beeson's 'generous donation to endow the office of the Decorative Arts Curator in the expansion of the Birmingham Museum of Art'. Douglas Hyland, Director of the Birmingham Museum of Art, Nomination Form for the Birmingham and Professional Women's Club 1990 Woman of the Year Award, BMAA.

<sup>258</sup> Ibid.

<sup>259</sup> Clarissa Harms, 'The Legacy of Lucille Beeson', *Newsheet: Junior League of Birmingham*, Summer 2001, pp. 13-14. Some of the organisations, such as the Birmingham Zoo and the Birmingham Botanical Society, were chosen because of their service to the entire community. Some were provided funds to ensure the care of the elderly and the poor, such as the Baptist Health Foundation of Birmingham to assist needy patients and Canterbury United Methodist Church for aid to the needy elderly. The local homeless shelter, the Jimmy Hale Mission, was remembered, as was the Alabama Sheriff's Boys and Girls Ranches.

among the largest single charitable donations by an individual in the previous four years.<sup>260</sup> It was a gift many people predicted would ‘change the face of Birmingham’.<sup>261</sup> Indeed, the trust instantly became one of the state’s largest charitable trusts.<sup>262</sup> Richard Brockman, Mrs. Beeson’s attorney and executor, wrote that; ‘Lucille Beeson had a vision. She wanted to leave a legacy that would improve the quality of life for all of Birmingham.’<sup>263</sup> The Beesons had both ensured during their lifetimes that their names would be remembered through their philanthropic actions, through their contributions to local universities and churches, yet it was the Wedgwood Collection that was their enduring legacy.<sup>264</sup> The Museum Newsletter reported on her death that she was ‘one of Birmingham’s greatest philanthropists and one of the Museum’s greatest friends’ and credited the gift of the collection as giving the Museum ‘an international reputation’.<sup>265</sup> Lucille Beeson would ‘always be remembered through her magnificent and transforming contributions to our Museum and the community’.<sup>266</sup> Although the collection was commonly praised as this kind of contribution to the public, it was first and foremost a discourse directed towards and reflective of the Beesons themselves.<sup>267</sup> Through their collecting activities, through their appropriation of the symbolic value of these goods, the Beesons ensured for themselves a lasting and distinctive identity.

### Postscript

The Beesons did everything they could to ensure that their collection of Wedgwood ceramics would remain a distinct entity, a testimony to a lifetime of collecting activity. Their donation was circumscribed and the power over the display of the collection was regulated to the extent that the museum did not have to ability to loan, move or remove any of the objects in their care. In the years since Mrs. Beeson’s death, the Birmingham Museum of Art has fought to gain more control over these

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<sup>260</sup> Kathy Kemp, ‘Beeson Gives Millions’ in *The Birmingham News*, 13 May 2001.

<sup>261</sup> Ibid.

<sup>262</sup> Ibid.

<sup>263</sup> Richard Brockan quoted in Clarissa Harms, ‘The Legacy of Lucille Beeson’ in *Newsheet: Junior League of Birmingham*, Summer 2001, pp. 13-14.

<sup>264</sup> Like her husband, Mrs. Beeson gave to Samford University; the Dwight and Lucille Beeson Center for the Healing Arts at Samford University, the provision of the first fully endowed professorship at Samford’s Cumberland School of Law and the Lucille Stewart Beeson Law Library at Samford.

<sup>265</sup> ‘In Memoriam: Lucille Stewart Beeson’ in the Birmingham Museum of Art Newsletter, March/April 2001.

<sup>266</sup> Ibid.

<sup>267</sup> Jean Baudrillard, ‘The System of Collecting’ in Elsner and Cardinal, eds., *The Cultures of Collecting*, (London: Reaktion Books, 1994), pp. 7-24, p. 22.

objects. While the terms of the Beesons donation and will have remained binding, there have been some concessions towards loosening the Beesons control over the collection. The museum recently hosted an exhibition of objects from Pompeii, in conjunction with which the curators held an exhibition of Wedgwood material from the Beeson collection examining the firm's relationship with the designs of ancient Greece.<sup>268</sup> However, what was noteworthy in this exhibition was that it marked the first time that material from the Beeson collection was removed from its purpose built gallery and reinterpreted in other areas of the museum. Although the objects remained within the confines of the museum, they were presented to the audience in new ways, ways which had nothing to do with their previous ownership. Slowly, the determining force of the Beesons is beginning to fade. Although the gallery remains known as the Beeson Collection, the couple's portraits were removed from the walls three years ago. Despite the waning influence of the Beesons over the material, their goal of promoting the study of the decorative arts and cultivating Birmingham as a centre for the study and display of Wedgwood remains powerful. Discussions are currently underway to transfer Harry Buten's collection of Wedgwood from its current location at Hempstead House on Long Island to Birmingham.<sup>269</sup> This addition will greatly increase the size and prestige of the collection of Wedgwood at the Museum, yet it will further erode the presence of the Beesons and their role in the formation of the existing collection.

My own research at the Museum has led to improvements within the archive. When I first approached the material it was stored without any concessions to organization. The material has now been transferred to the Clarence Hanson library within the museum and the librarian is working on cataloguing the items. While former curator, E.B. Adams, worked for several years on the publication of a comprehensive catalogue of the entire collection, very little work had been done on the Beesons and the process of acquiring the collection. This thesis contributes to the study of the

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<sup>268</sup> The exhibition of material from Pompeii was titled 'Pompeii: Tales from an Eruption' and ran at the Museum from October 14, 2007 to January 27, 2008. The Wedgwood exhibition was titled 'Artes Etrvriae Renascvntvr: Sir William Hamilton, Josiah Wedgwood, and the Dream of Etruria' and featured objects taken from the Beeson collection which were inspired by the excavation at Pompeii and Herculaneum. It ran from August 26, 2007 to January 13, 2008.

<sup>269</sup> These discussions are in their preliminary stages and remain outside the public discourse. However, the curator of Decorative Arts at the Birmingham Museum of Art has confirmed that the collection will move to Birmingham.



Beeson collection in its evaluation of the evolution of the collection and in its analysis of the methodologies which informed both the Beesons purchases and their display techniques. Unlike previous studies of this material, this thesis sees the objects in the collection as significant outside their original eighteenth century framework. The Beesons, informed by authors, curators and other collectors, created and imposed new meanings onto these objects relative to their own circumstances. They participated in the creation of a boom time for Wedgwood collecting in the United States and at the same time they narrated and communicated their own stories about class identity. In this way, this collection can tell us about the relevance of consumer objects in the process of identity formation and about the vital role such collections had in defining a prosperous post World War Two America. The Beesons envisioned themselves as the custodians of culture and saw their wealth as an opportunity to transform and define their communities.

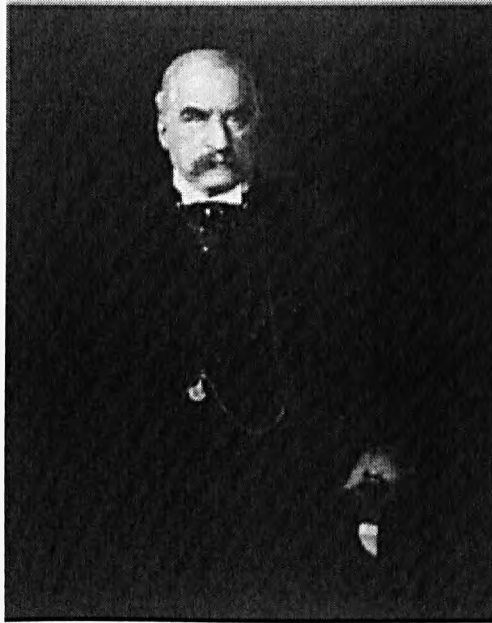
**Figure 1: Liberty National Insurance Company**  
Ralph Beeson, pictured on the right, was Dwight Beeson's brother



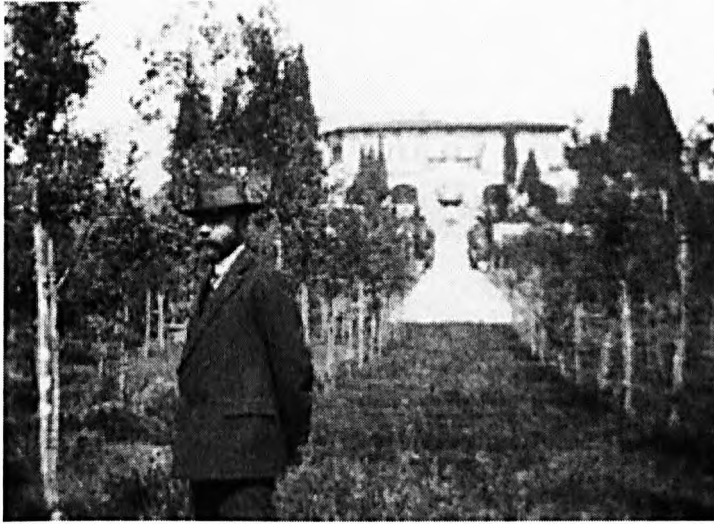
**Figure 2:** The Metropolitan Museum of Art



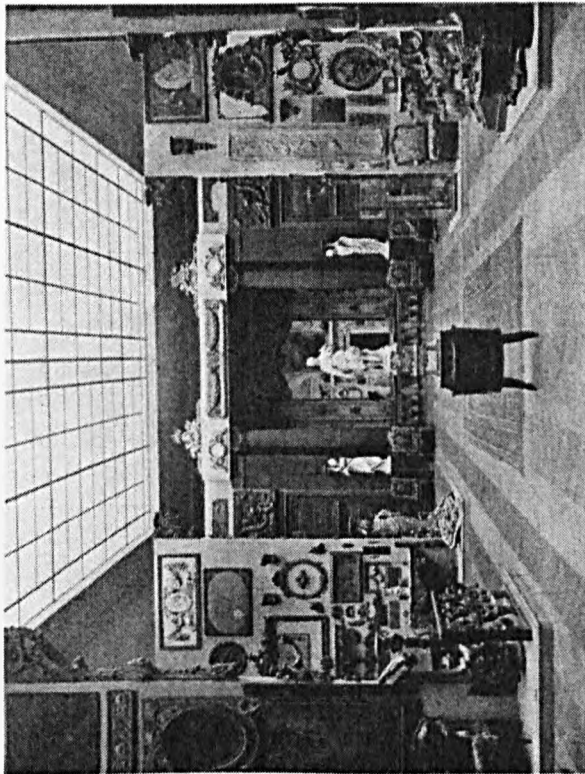
**Figure 3:** J. P. Morgan, photographed by Edward Steichen in 1903



**Figure 4:** Bernard Berenson in 1911



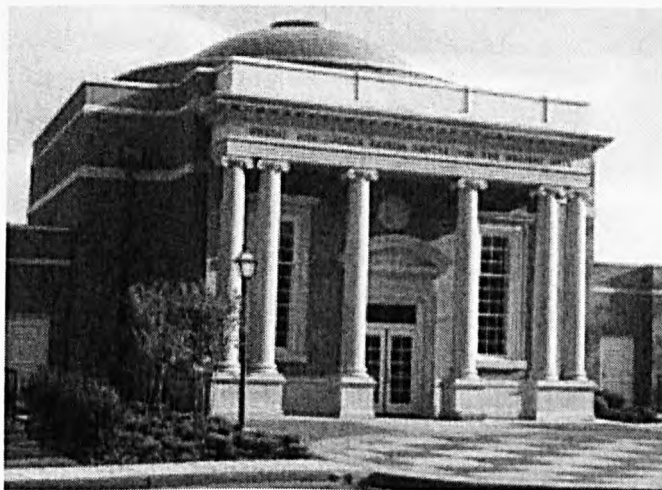
**Figure 5:** The Hoentschel Collection



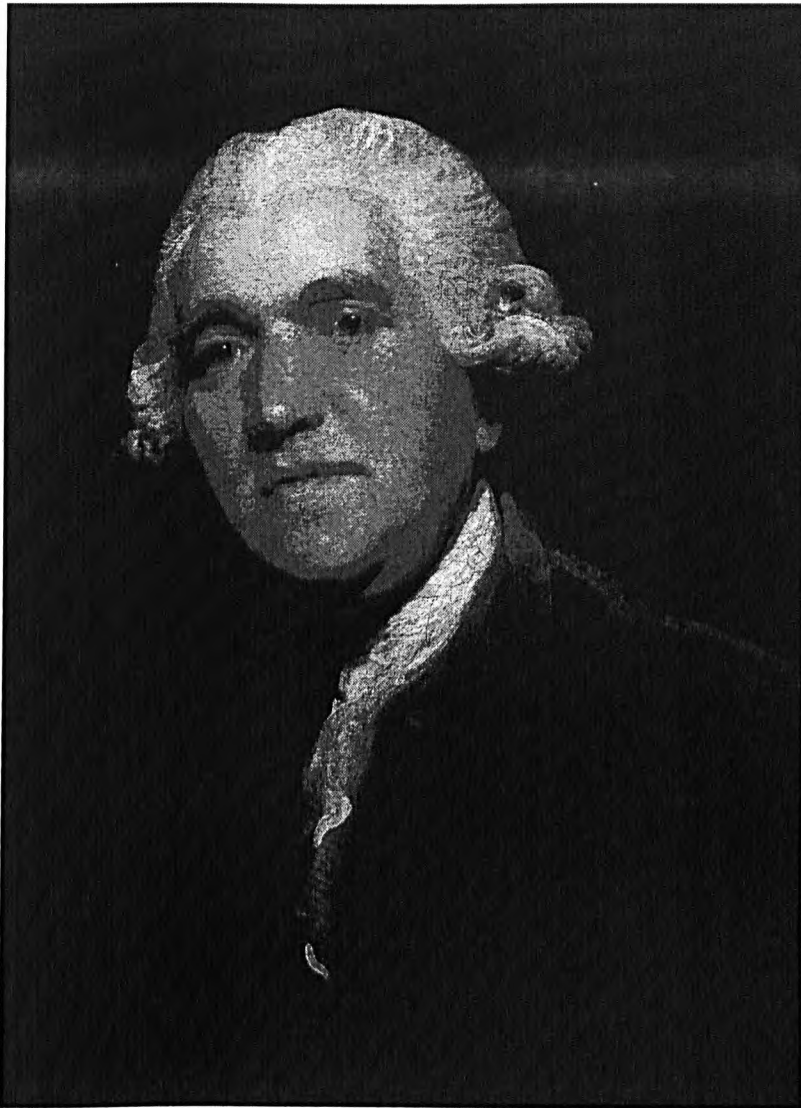
**Figure 6:** Jasperware Vase in the Metropolitan Museum collection, late 18th century, designed by John Flaxman (1755–1826); Made by Josiah Wedgwood and Sons



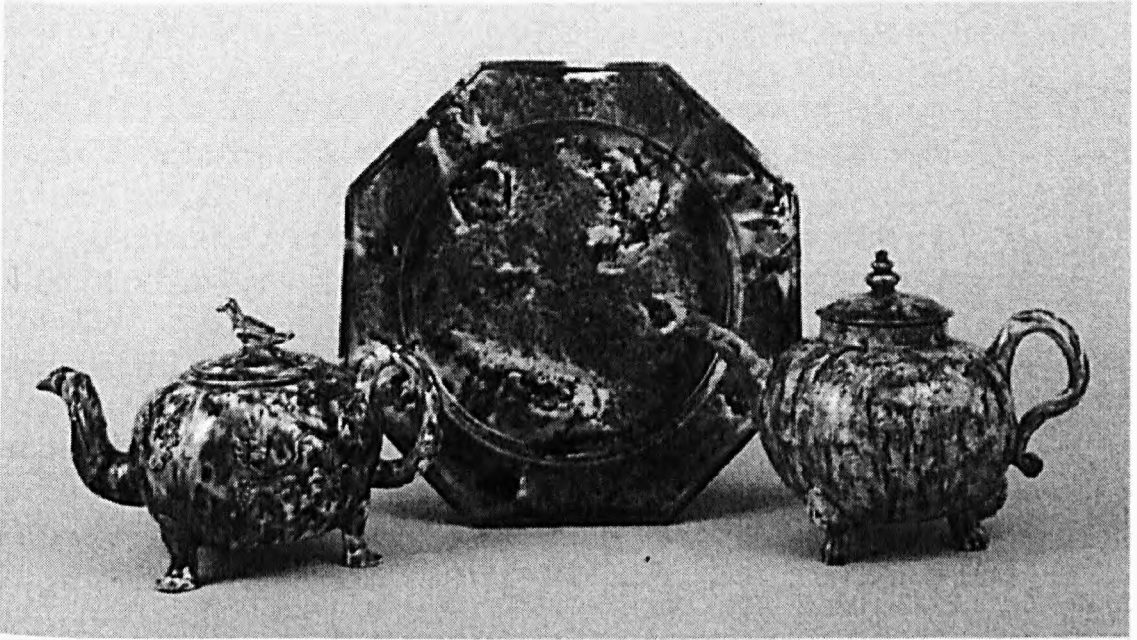
**Figure 7:** The Dwight and Lucille Beeson Center for the Healing Arts at Samford University in Birmingham



**Figure 8:** Josiah Wedgwood (1730-1795). Portrait, oil on canvas, by Sir Joshua Reynolds, Wedgwood Museum



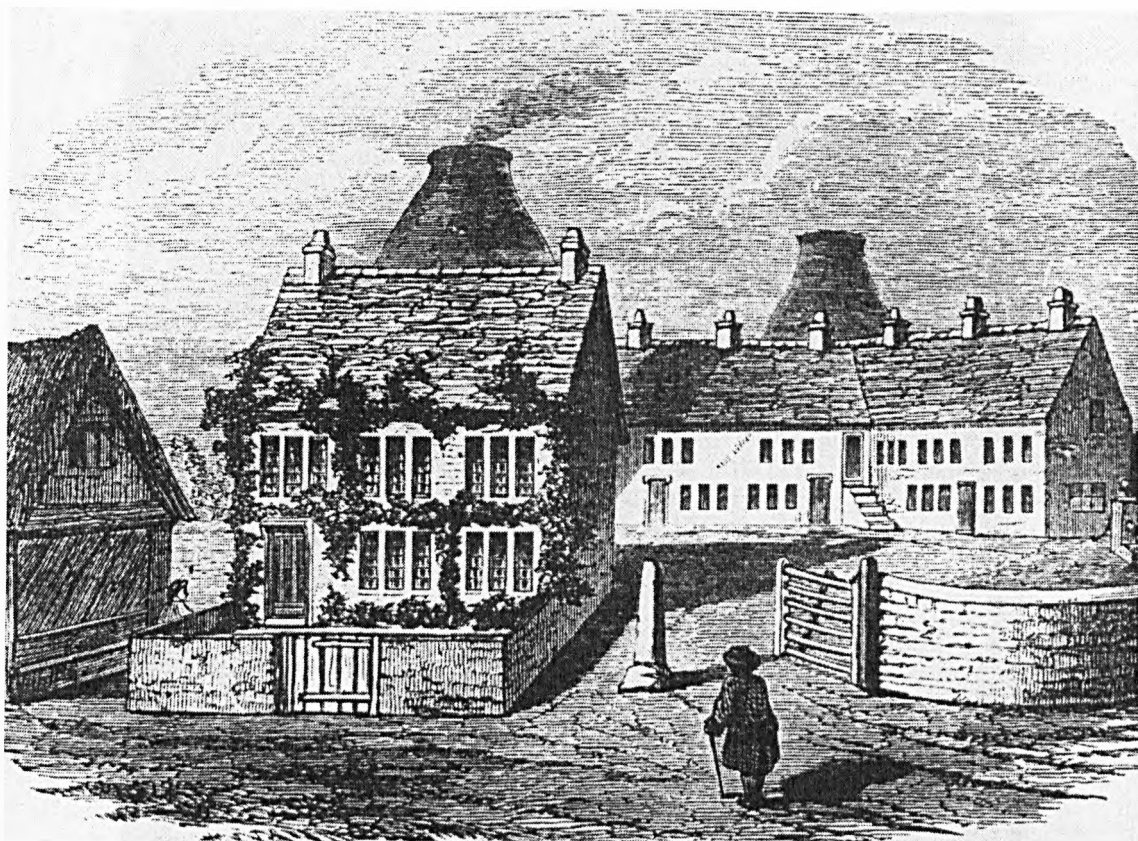
**Figure 9:** Left; Teapot 1750-60, cream ware with multicoloured metallic oxides under clear glaze and applied decoration, BMA 1979.20; Centre, Plate Tortoiseshell, c. 1760, cream ware with multicoloured metallic oxides under clear glaze, BMA 1979.204; Right, Teapot, c. 1765, agate ware, BMA 1979.203



**Figure 10:** Left; Cream Pitcher, Cauliflower, 1760-70, cream ware with green glaze, BMA 1979.179; Centre, Teapot, Cauliflower, 1760-70, cream ware with green glaze, BMA 1979.178; Right, Teapot, Pineapple, 176-70, cream ware with green and yellow glaze, BMA 1979.181



**Figure 11:** The Ivy House Works, Josiah Wedgwood's first pottery

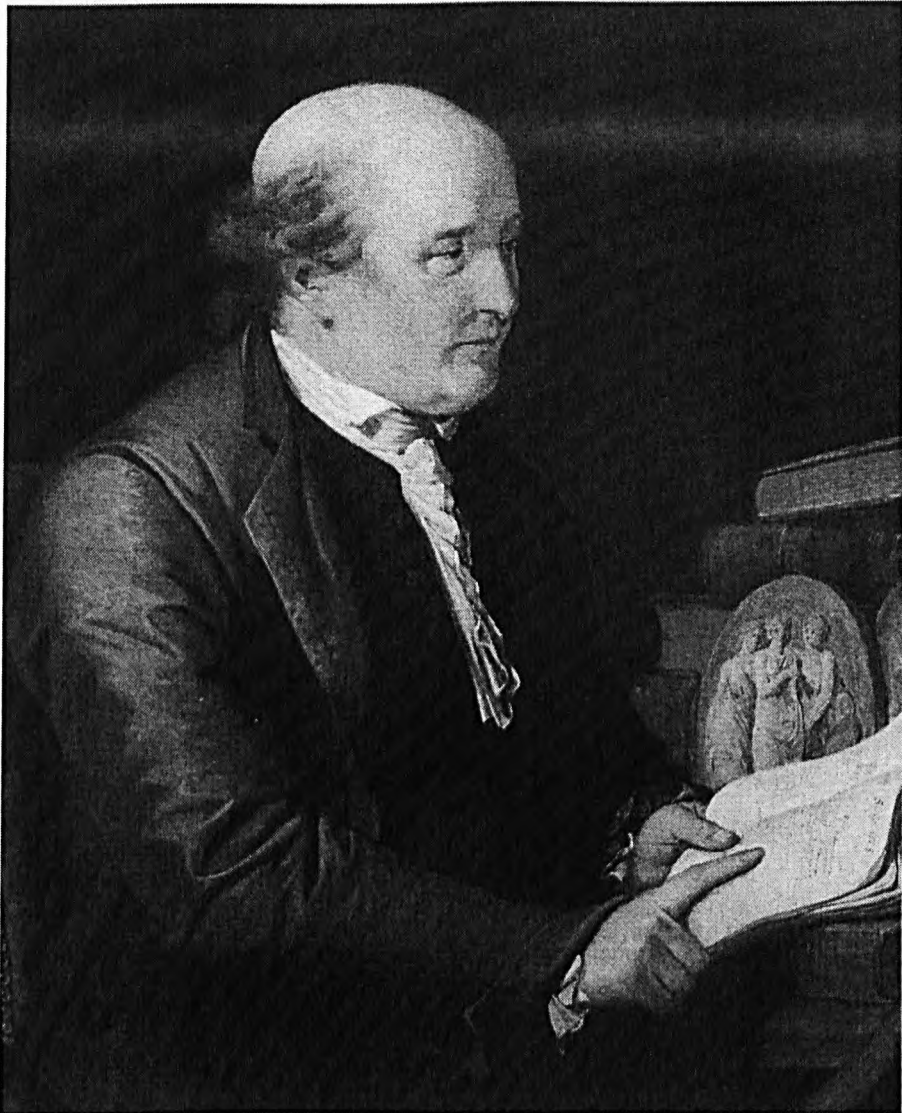


**Figure 12:** Cream ware Teapots; Left, Teapot, Grecian Bust, c. 1775, cream ware with overglaze enamel decoration, BMA 1989.14.1; centre, Teapot, c.1780, cream ware with gilding, BMA 1989.14.2; Right, Teapot, c. 1775, cream ware with overglaze enamel decoration, BMA 1979.160





**Figure 13:** Thomas Bentley (1730-80), Josiah Wedgwood's partner in the manufacture of ornamental wares, 1769-80. Portrait, oil on canvas, attributed to Joseph Wright of Derby, Wedgwood Museum



**Figure 14:** Map showing the locations of the Wedgwood London showrooms

**WEDGWOOD'S LONDON SHOWROOMS, 1765-1984**

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| <p>1 1765-1766 The Sign of the Artichoke, Cateaton Street<br/>         2 1766-1768 The Queen's Arms, 5 Charles Street, Grosvenor Square<br/>         3 1768-1774 The Queen's Arms, 1 Great Newport Street, Soho<br/>         4 1774-1796 The Queen's Arms, Portland House, Greek Street, Soho</p> | <p>5 1797-1829 York Street, 8 St James's Square<br/>         6 1875-1890 4 and 6 St Andrew's Buildings, St Andrew's Street, E.C.1.<br/>         7 1890-1911 108 Hatton Garden, Holborn Circus, E.C.1.<br/>         8 1911-1941 26 and 27 Hatton Garden, Holborn Circus, E.C.1.<br/>         9 1948- 32-34 Wigmore Street, W.1.</p> |
|---|--|



Figure 15: Advertisement for Wedgwood's 'Pattern Warehouse' at Number 1 Great Newport Street, London, opened in 1768

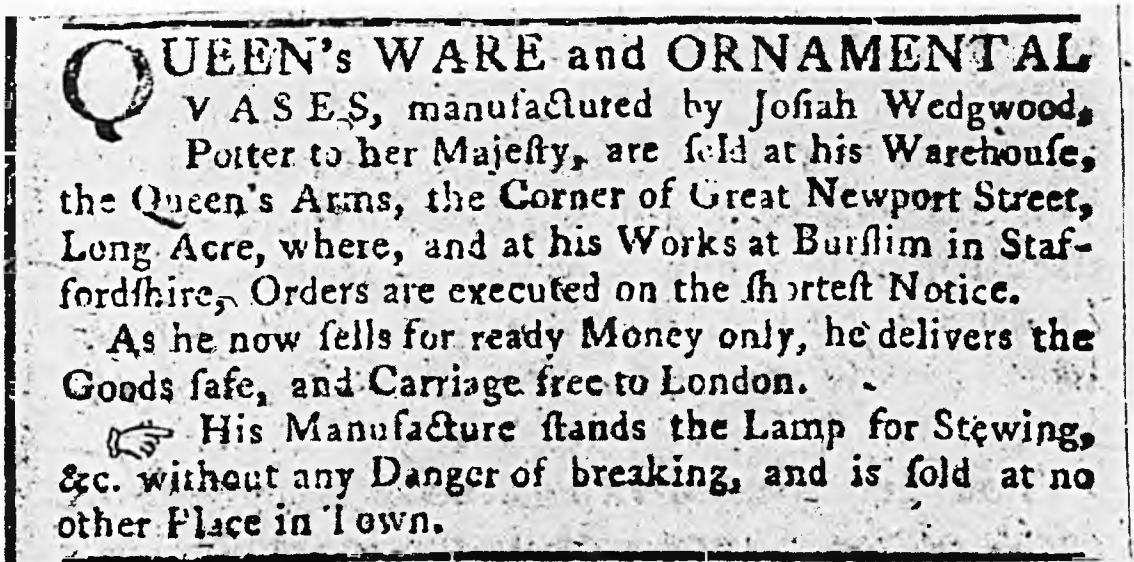


Figure 16: Wedgwood and Byerley, York Street Showroom as depicted in aquatint in Rudolph Ackermann's *Repository of the Arts*, February 1809



**Figure 17:** Left; Catherine the Great of Russia Dessert Plate, *The Chapel in Fairley Castle, Somersetshire, 1773-74*, cream ware with polychrome enamel overglaze decoration, BMA 1983.6; Right, Catherine the Great of Russia Dinner Plate, *Saint Brivals Castle, Gloucestershire, 1773-74*, cream ware with monochrome, mulberry and green enamel overglaze decoration, BMA 1986.638

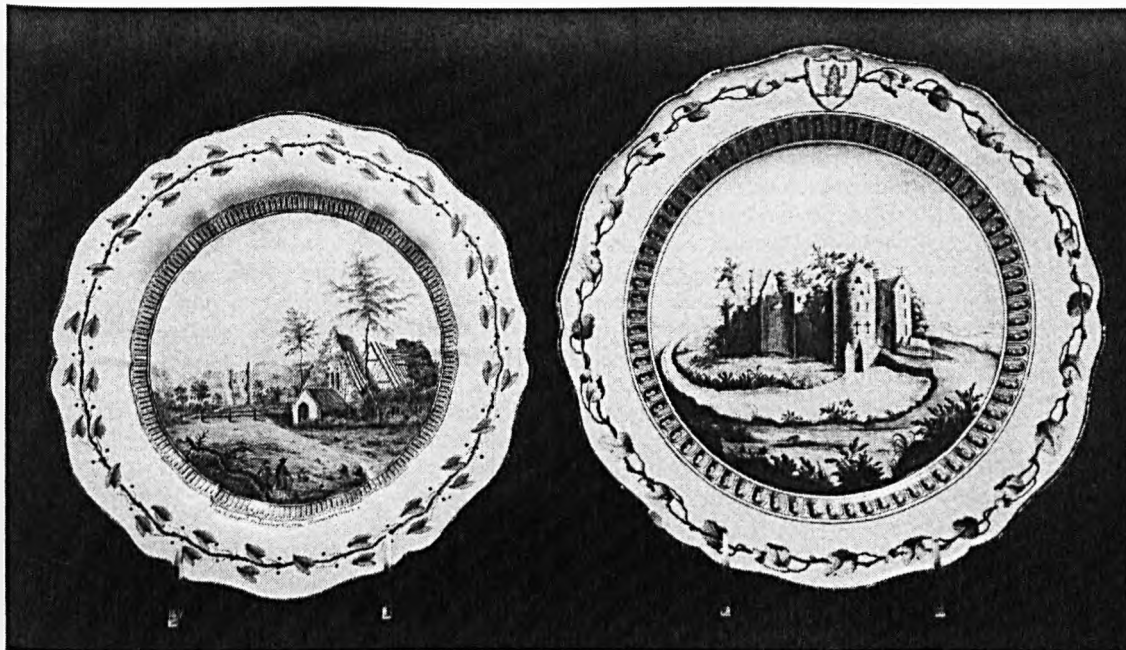
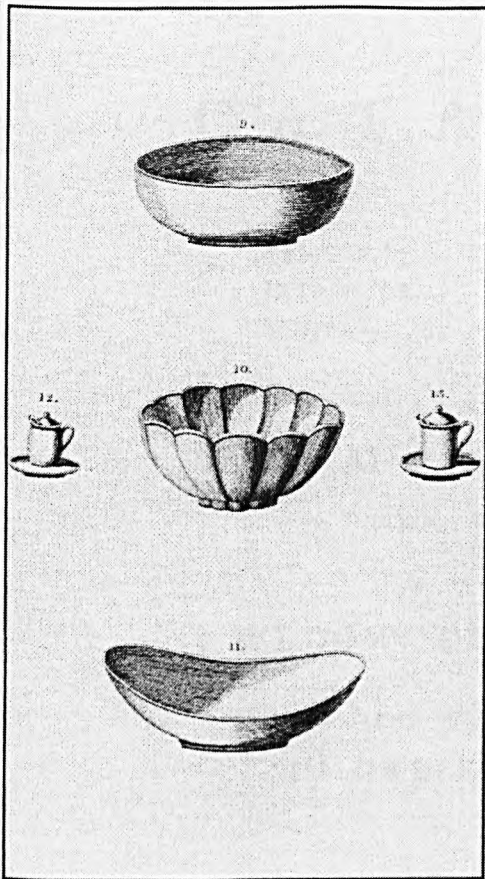
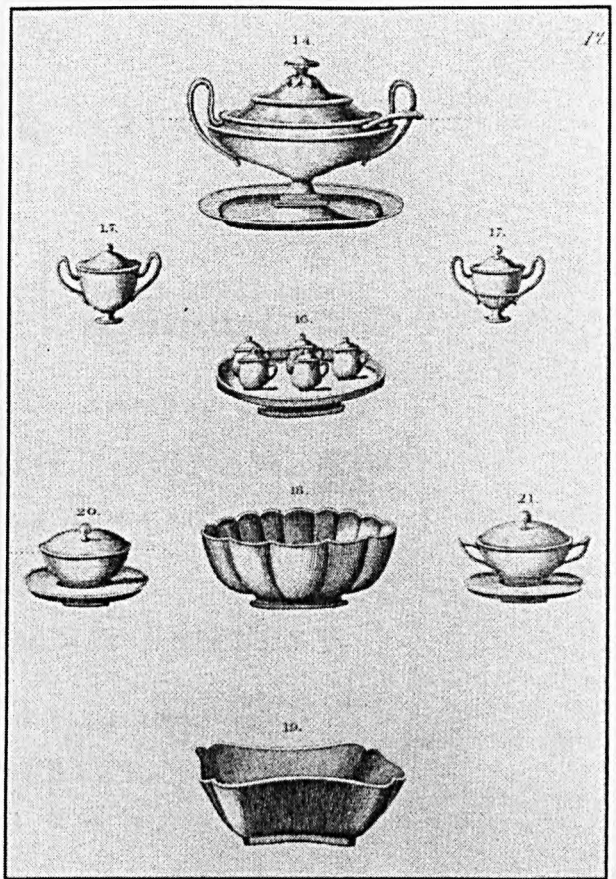


Figure 18: Wedgwood's First Queen's Ware Catalogue, 1774



429



430

Figure 19: Catalogue of Ornamental Wares, 1779

A  
C A T A L O G U E  
O F

CAMEOS,  
INTAGLIOS,  
MEDALS,

BUSTS,  
SMALL STATUES, AND  
BAS-RELIEFS ;

WITH A GENERAL ACCOUNT OF  
VASES AND OTHER ORNAMENTS  
AFTER THE ANTIQUE,

MADE BY  
WEDGWOOD AND BENTLEY,

AND SOLD AT THEIR ROOMS  
IN GREEK-STREET, SOHO,  
L O N D O N.

-----  
THE FIFTH EDITION, WITH ADDITIONS.  
-----

*Quoniam et sic Artes nobilitantur.*

PLIN. lib. xxxv. *De Vasib. fictilibus.*

—Heureux les Artistes qui malgré la Contagion du mauvais Gout, sçavent,  
chez tous les Peuples, respecter les Regles de la Nature, & ne s'ecartent jamais  
des Modèles de l'Antiquité. CAYLUS. vol. ii. p. 165.

-----  
L O N D O N :

SOLD BY CADEL, IN THE STRAND; ROBSON, NEW BOND-  
STREET; AND JOHNSON, ST. PAUL'S CHURCH-YARD.

MDCCLXXIX.

**Figure 20:** Sir William Hamilton. Portrait medallion, 1772, basalt with encaustic decoration, BMA 1982.177



**Figure 21:** The First Day's Vase, basalt painted in encaustic orange, 1769. The figures are taken from Plate 129 of d'Hancarville's *Collection of Etruscan, Greek and Roman Antiquities from the Cabinet of the Honble William Hamilton*.

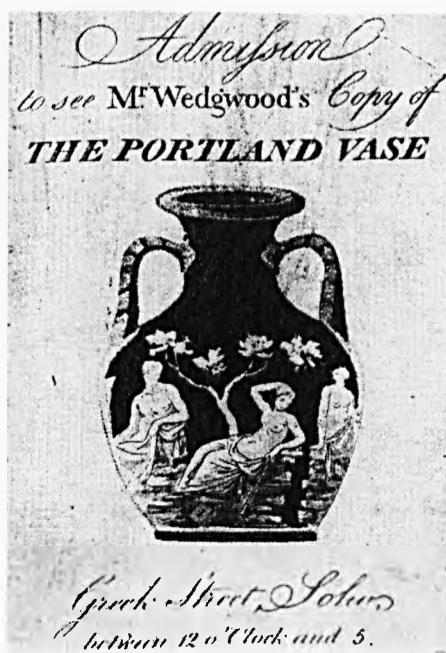




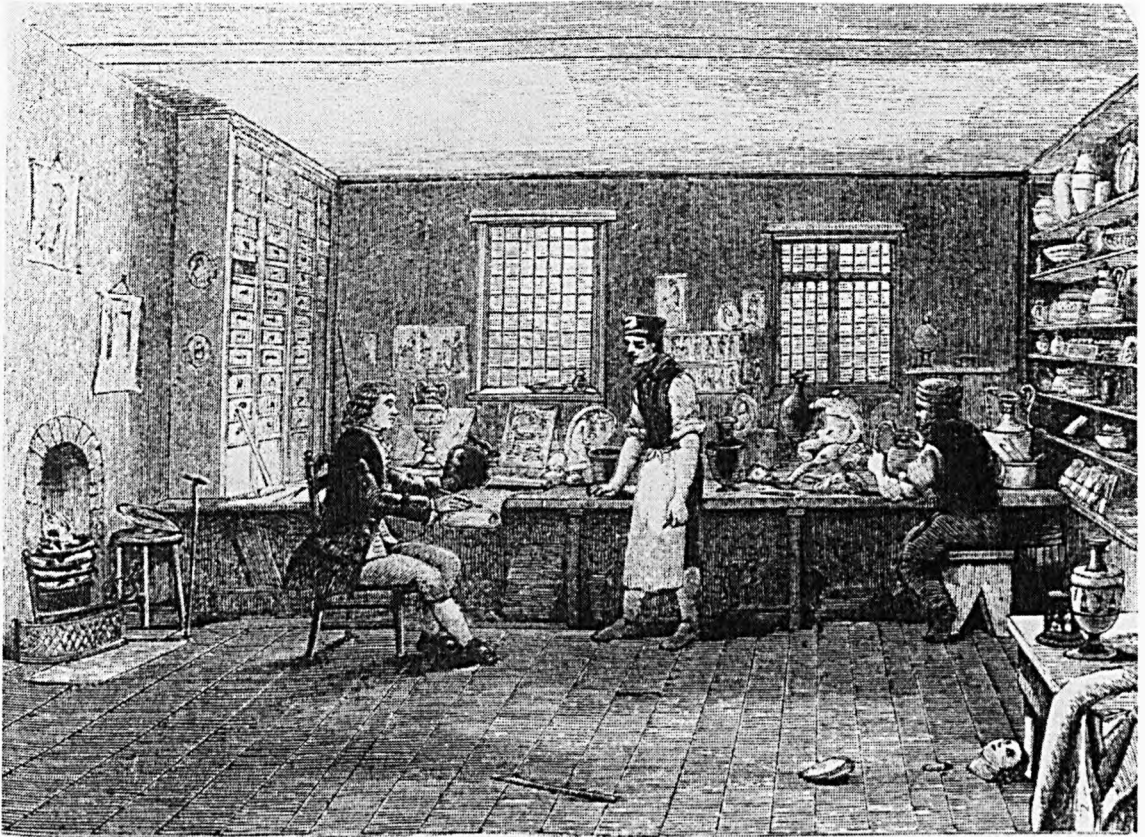
**Figure 22:** Two Wedgwood copies of the Portland Vase, Left, the 'Slate Blue' copy, c. 1791, BMA 1983.25 and right, the 'Darwin' copy, c. 1790-92, BMA 1983.26



**Figure 23:** Wedgwood's invitation to the public to view his copy of the Portland Vase at the Greek Street showrooms, May 1790



**Figure 24:** The Modelling Room at Etruria. Line engraving from Eliza Meteyard's *Life of Josiah Wedgwood*, 1865. Though this is a nineteenth century image, it does highlight the specialised skills of the modellers and the relative status they enjoyed at Etruria.



**Figure 25:** Centre; the Slave medallion, c. 1787, jasper, white ground with black relief, BMA 1976.200. Pictured with two other medallions, left; George Washington, c. 1780, BMA 1979.125 and right; Benjamin Franklin, c. 1775, BMA 1979.138

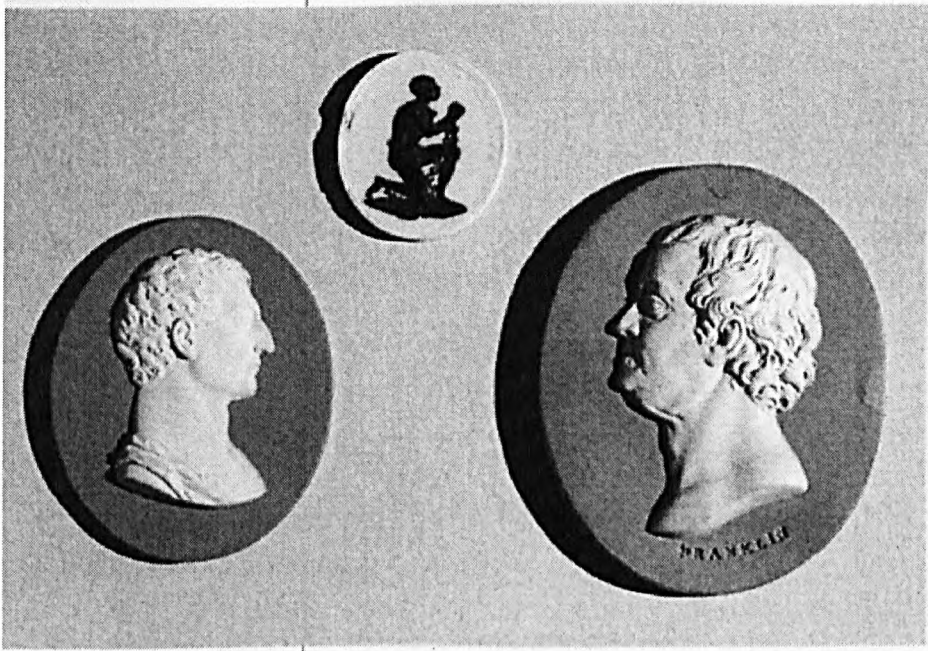
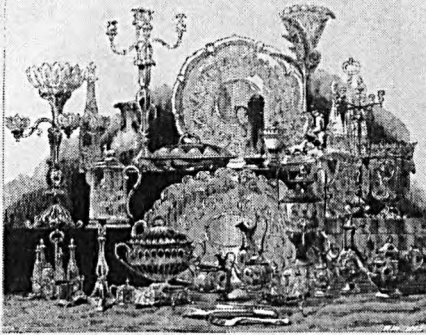


Figure 26: Joseph Mayer's Trade Advertisement

ADVERTISEMENTS 1867



**JOSEPH MAYER,**  
68 & 70, LORD-STREET, LIVERPOOL.  
MANUFACTURING

**GOLDSMITH, JEWELLER, AND SILVERSMITH,**  
Dealer in Sheffield and Electro Plate, Silver and Gilted Cutlery,  
PRECIOUS STONES, ANTIQUE AND MODERN CAMEOS AND INTAGLIOS.  
**MEDALLIST, HERALDIC ENGRAVER & EMBLAZONER.**

J. M. has an extensive assortment of Electro Plate, manufactured by the London, Liverpool, Glasgow, Dublin, and  
Franklin, Patent, and other Manufacturers, Agents and Dealers, with every requisite for table use.  
From the great facility afforded by this process of Manufacture, many of these articles may be made, and executed,  
with rapidity to order.

Engraving and Embellishing plates for Memorials, Plaques, and various Engravings, when in conformity with the design provided for  
Plates to be presented.

**FOUNDATION TROWELS, AGRICULTURAL AND RIDGWAY PRIZES.**  
Ecclesiastical Metal Work, Altar Pials, Lamps, Lanterns, Monumental Crosses and Bases,  
CORRELATION PLATE, MADE TO THE ORDER OF ARCHITECTS OR THE CHURCH.

A large Stock of Mosaic and Slate Clocks on Sale, consisting of COPPER and TEA SERVICE, WATERERS,  
LANTERN, BOTTLES, SPINDLES and TRIVETS, with several Specimens of various Mosaic Clocks.

Is every one desirous for the sake of saving for their People, to be informed of it, to keep an open House at  
Dunelm, Glasgow, Liverpool, Manchester, Whitechapel, No. 1, Lamb Court, and the Old, Whitechapel, Street,  
Dunelm, and London, for those who wish to see every thing in any quantity, at a short notice.

It is in the Illustrated Catalogue of the various of Silver Plate, Precious and Electro Plate, Jewellery, Watches, &c. &c.  
and every thing else to be had, printed and published, at the office of the author, No. 1, Lamb Court, Whitechapel, London.

**JOSEPH MAYER,**  
SILVERSMITH, JEWELLER AND WATCHMAKER,  
68 & 70, LORD-STREET, LIVERPOOL.

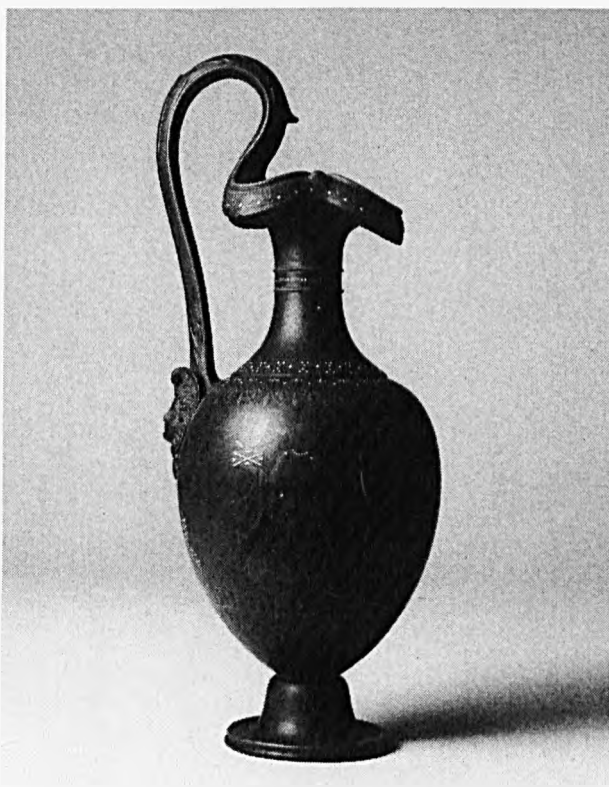
**Figure 27:** Joseph Mayer, portrait by William Daniels, c. 1840



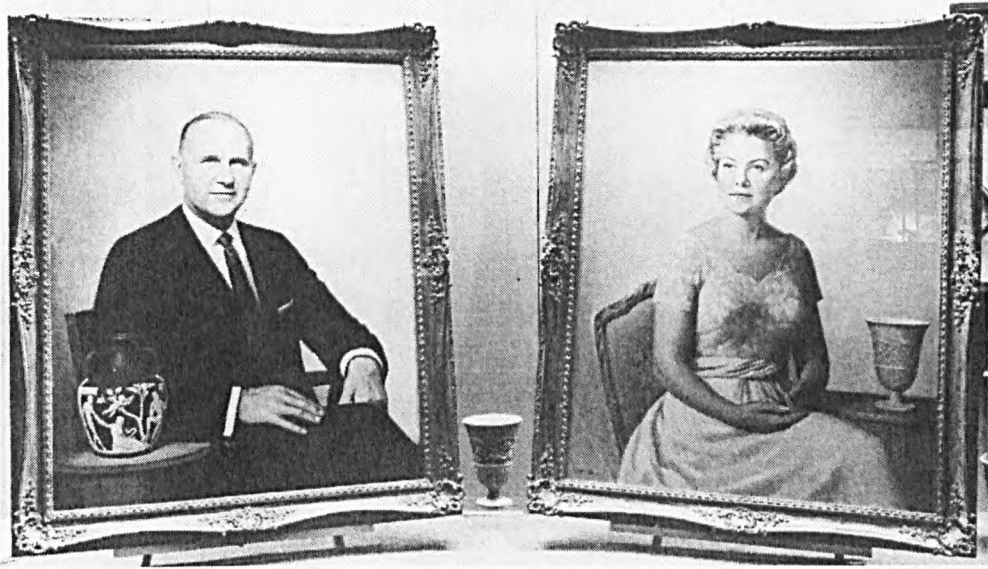
**Figure 28:** Jasper Vase featured in portrait of Joseph Mayer



**Figure 29:** Basalt urn with encaustic decoration, featured in portrait of Joseph Mayer



**Figure 30:** Portraits of Dwight Beeson, with the Wedgwood copy of the Portland Vase, and Lucille Beeson, with the yellow jasperware goblet vase



**Figure 31:** Jasperware cameos donated to the British Museum by Joseph Mayer in 1853



**Figure 32:** Harry Buten wearing a Portland Vase hat with his wife Nettie





Figure 33: Contents page from Robin Reilly's *The Collector's Wedgwood*

<h1>Contents</h1>	
<b>The Wedgwood Story</b>	<b>8</b>
The history of the Wedgwood company from its beginning in 1759 to the present day, including a concise biography of Josiah Wedgwood, founder of the firm and 'Father of the pottery industry'.	
<b>Wedgwood Wares</b>	<b>33</b>
I. EARTHENWARE	
Queen's Ware	34
Pearl	114
Majolica	128
II. STONEWARE (Dry Bodies)	
Black Basalt	140
Cane	168
Jasper	180
Rosso Antico	242
Drab Ware	252
III. PORCELAIN	
Bone China	260
Parian/Carrara	282
<b>How Wedgwood is Made</b>	<b>290</b>
The most important processes of manufacture explained, with illustrations photographed at the Wedgwood Factory.	
<b>Collecting Wedgwood</b>	<b>300</b>
Recognizing and determining the provenance of Wedgwood wares. Fakes and forgeries. Price trends and how current style affects them. Collecting and investment; the creation of artificial markets. The Wedgwood marks.	
<b>The Care of Wedgwood</b>	<b>308</b>
The cleaning, restoration and display of Wedgwood ware. Glossary. Further Reading.	

**Figure 34:** Mrs. Beeson's first purchase.  
 Left and Right, Pair of Vases, Apollo and the Nine Muses, c. 1880, jasper.  
 BMA 1981.251 and 1981.252



**Figure 35:** A piece from the Mayer Collection featured in Marryat's *A History of Pottery and Porcelain: Medieval and Modern* (1857)



Fig. 121. Punchbowl made at Shaw's works, and presented to Capt. Metcalf, 1753. (Mayer Coll.)

**Figure 36:** Objects exhibited at The Crystal Palace Exhibition, London 1851 by Wedgwood & Brown as illustrated in catalogue. Most of the wares shown were reproductions of eighteenth century designs.



**Figure 37:** Rathbone *Old Wedgwood* (1898)  
Rathbone almost exclusively featured the decorative productions of the factory such these jasper vases.



Figure 38: Wedgwood marks explained in Rathbone's *Old Wedgwood* (1898)

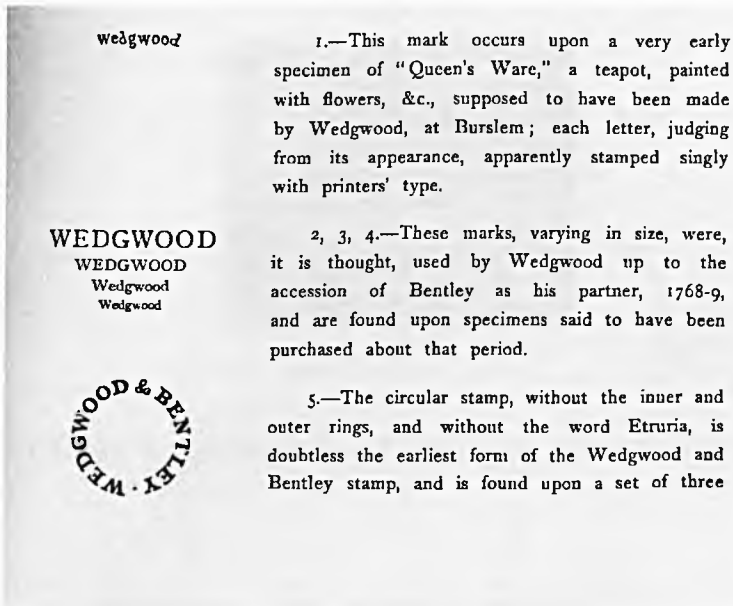


Figure 39: Wedgwood marks explained in Reilly's *The Collector's Wedgwood* (1980)

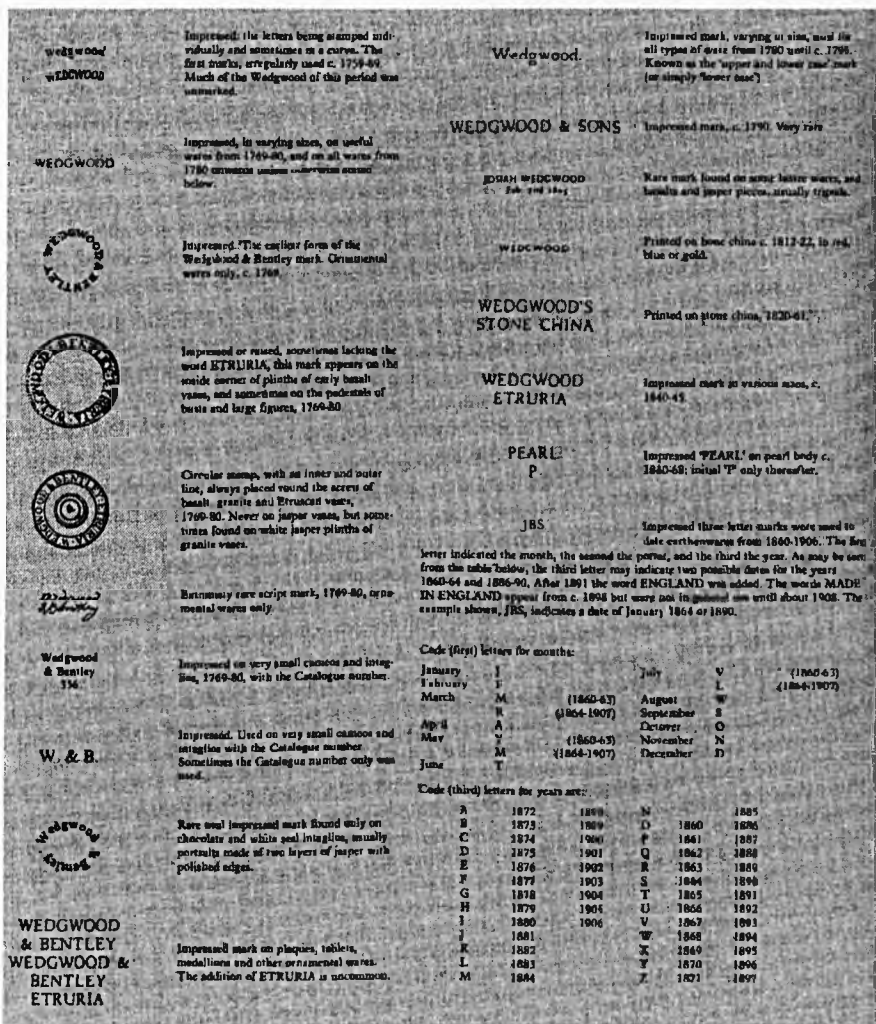


Figure 40: Plaque: *Power of Love*, c. 1800  
Jasperware, BMA 1980.182

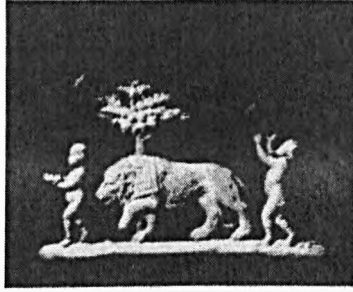


Figure 41: Unique Wedgwood registry founded in *The American Wedgwoodian*

MARCH 1972

THE WEDGWOODIAN

## REGISTRY OF UNIQUE WEDGWOOD

At the Wedgwood International Seminar in San Francisco Mrs. Leonard S. Rakow introduced a Registry of Unique Wedgwood from the Wedgwood Society of New York. It is felt, however, that this very worthwhile Registry, which would give prominence to unique Wedgwood artifacts, would serve Wedgwood collectors best under the banner of *The American Wedgwoodian*. The *Wedgwoodian* reaches so many more collectors and its photographic reproductions are of such good quality that the presentation of unique pieces in its pages would reach a much wider and more critical audience.

With this issue and with the full consent of the W.S.N.Y., the *Wedg-*

*woodian* begins its Registry of Unique Wedgwood. *Webster's Dictionary* defines unique as being without a like or equal, single in kind or excellence. It is the purpose of this column, then, to find and highlight these unique examples of Wedgwood production so that Wedgwood collectors all over the world will know of their existence.

The rules are few and simple:

1. The piece must be marked—either Wedgwood or Wedgwood & Bentley.
2. It must be complete and have all its parts.
3. Its uniqueness may lie in its size,

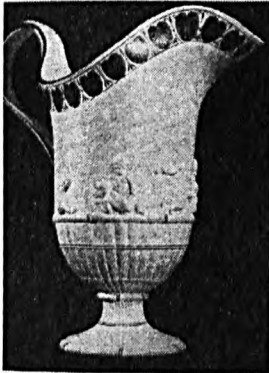
color, shape, form or manner of decoration.

4. Excluded from consideration are pieces made at the factory by you, or personal presentation pieces of recent vintage.

Any Wedgwood collector desiring to establish the uniqueness of his Wedgwood piece by enrolling it in the Registry of Unique Wedgwood should submit a black and white photograph and detailed description, including size and color as well as decoration, to the editor. Any reader desiring to challenge the inclusion of such a piece in the Registry of Unique Wedgwood should submit a picture of the matching piece.

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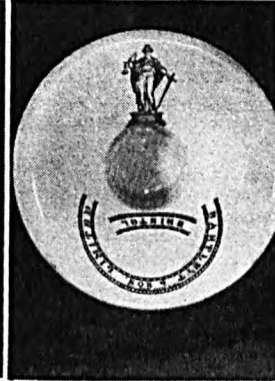
The following pieces are offered for the Registry of Unique Wedgwood



Salmet pitcher case ware, with encaustic enamelling in red and black, border of Mintheion design, Lady Beauclerk babies and baby Pans in relief, 18th century, 10½" high. Impressed Wedgwood (upper and lower case). *Rakow collection.*



Ham Stand, creamware, 2 views, upright and top, showing depression to hold ham bone, Impressed WEDGWOOD, 20th Century, *Born collection.*



Bulb pot, terra cotta with black encaustic enamelling, fits for four bulbs, 6 in. high, Impressed Wedgwood & Bentley (upper and lower case). Three-bulb pots of like design, half lengthwise or across the width, have been seen but not a four-bulb pot. *Rakow collection.*



Hot Water pull, creamware, 8" high, 11" long, Impressed WEDGWOOD, late 19th Century, *Born collection.*

**Figure 42: Glazed wares**

Left: Teapot, 1760-70, cream ware with multicoloured oxides under clear glaze  
BMA 1979.182

Centre: Teapot, 1765-75, cream ware with green glaze  
BMA 1979.180

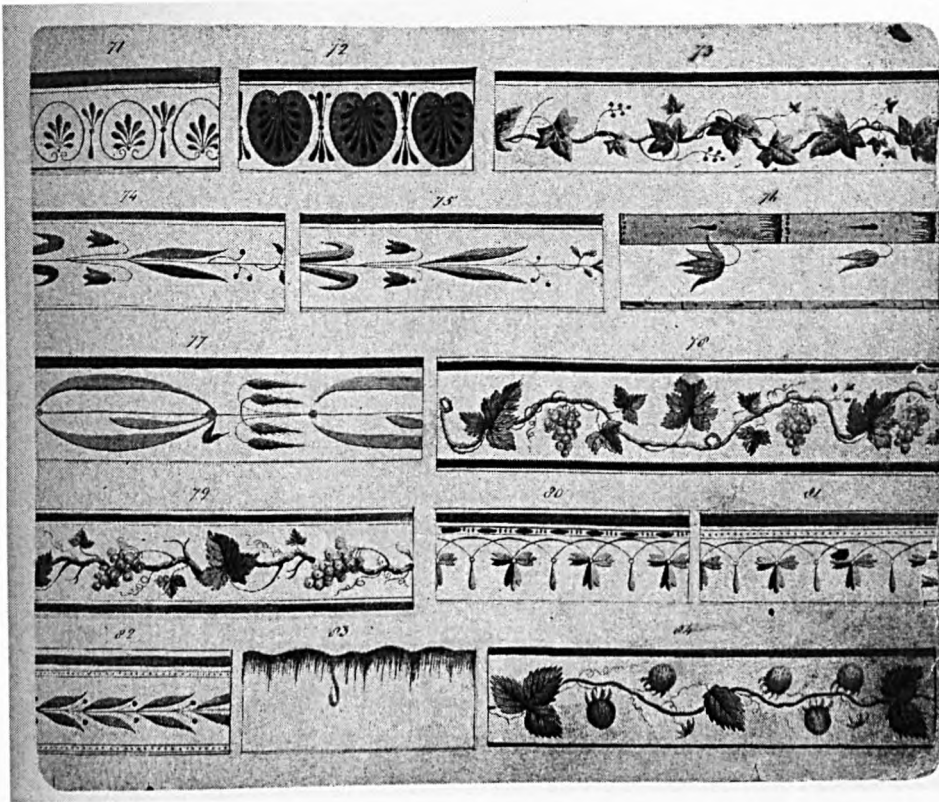
Right: Teapot 1770-80, cream ware with underglaze polychrome decoration  
BMA 1979.159



**Figure 43: Tea canister, c. 1775 and plate, c. 1770, both cream ware with transfer printed decoration of *The Tea Party***  
BMA 1978.167 and 1978.166



**Figure 44:** A page from Wedgwood's 'First Pattern Book' showing drawings of patterns



**Figure 45:** George Stubbs design for the Wedgwood plaque, *The Frightened Horse*



**Figure 46:** John Flaxman in the frontispiece of Rathbone's *Old Wedgwood* (1898)



† HANC SVI IPSIVS EFFIGIEM FECIT IOANNES  
FLAXMAN IVNIOR ARTIFEX STATVARIVM  
ET CÆLATOR ALVMNVS EX ACADEMIA  
REGALE. ANNO ÆTATIS XXIV.  
AD MDCCLXXXVIII.

"But your admiration of the Greeks has not led you to the bigotry of the mere Antiquarian, nor made you less sensible of the unappreciated excellence of the mighty Modern, worthy to be your countryman, though till his statue is in the streets of our capital, we show ourselves not worthy of the glory he has shed upon our land. You have not suffered even your gratitude to Canova to blind you to the superiority of Flaxman. When we become sensible of our title-deeds to renown, in that single name we may look for an English public, capable of real patronage to English Art,—and not till then."—LORD LYTTON (*Dedication of "Zanoni" to John Gibson, R.A., 1845*).

**Figure 47:** Top: John Flaxman, Jr., Drawing for Wedgwood Chess Set, c. 1785  
Bottom: Jasperware Chess Set, c. 1790, BMA 1981.278.1-.26





**Figure 48:** Three objects manufactured during the Wedgwood and Bentley period

Left: Covered Vase, *Venus and Cupid*, c. 1775

White terra-cotta stoneware with imitation porphyry underglaze, BMA 1983.15

Centre: Medallion, *Venus and Cupid*, c. 1775-80

Jasper, blue ground with white relief, BMA 1976.214

Right: Vase, *Venus and Cupid*, c. 1775

Basalt, BMA 1979.252



**Figure 49:** Wedgwood factory worker ornamenting a jasperware vase with bas-relief

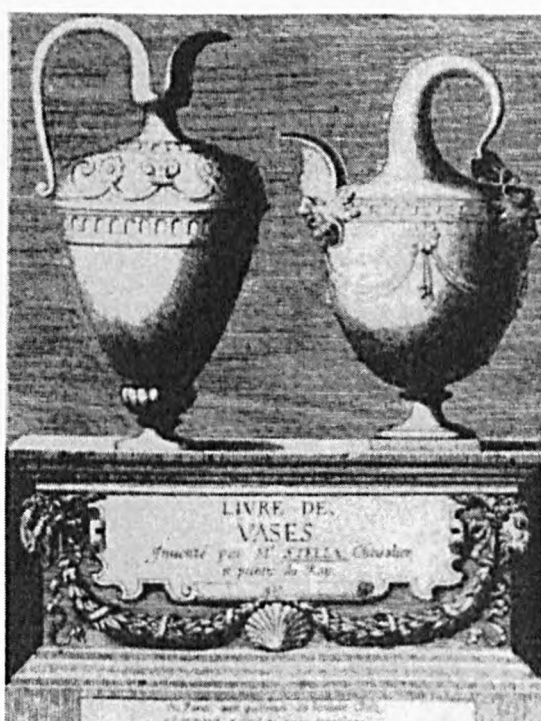


**Figure 50:** Jasperwares from the Beeson Collection



**Figure 51:** Stella Ewer, c. 1775, white terra-cotta stoneware with sponged colour underglaze and gilding, BMA 1983.16.

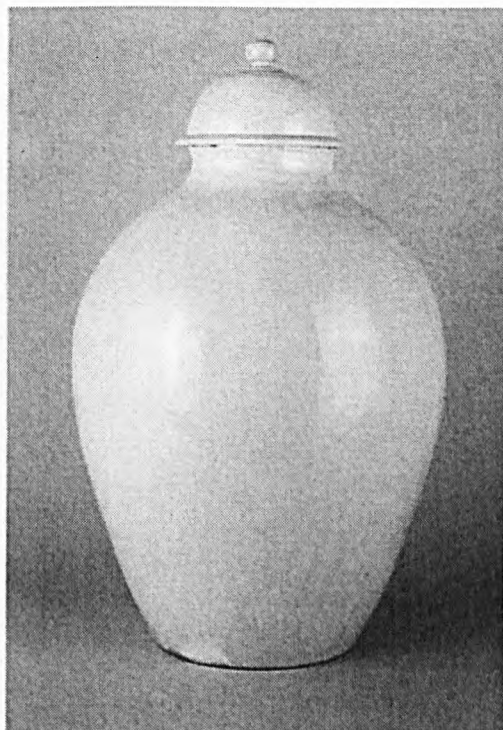
Title page to *Livre de vases* by Jacques de Stella, Paris, 1667



**Figure 52: Ornamental and useful ware**

Left: Vase with Candelabra, c. 1780  
Basalt, marked 'Wedgwood & Bentley Etruria', BMA 1980.107

Right: Cream cullier, c. 1780, BMA 1986.637



**Figure 53:** The 'Fun Corner' at the Birmingham Museum of Art. Displayed here are objects in a variety of media which copied Wedgwood's jasper wares and encaustic painted basalt wares.



**Figure 54:**Intaglio: *Classical Male Head*, c. 1790

BMA 1985.421.4

Intaglio: *Young Hercules*, c. 1790

BMA 1985.421.1

Intaglio: *Sappho*, c. 1790

BMA 1985.421.2

Intaglio: *Psyche*, c. 1790

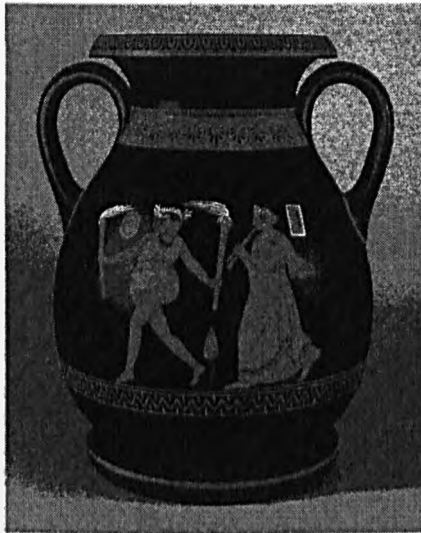
BMA 1985.421.3



**Figure 55:** Covered Jar, c. 1800  
 John Turner (1738-86), potter  
 Jasperware, blue ground with white relief  
 BMA 1979.236



**Figure 56:** Vase, Basalt with encaustic decoration  
 BMA 1982.180



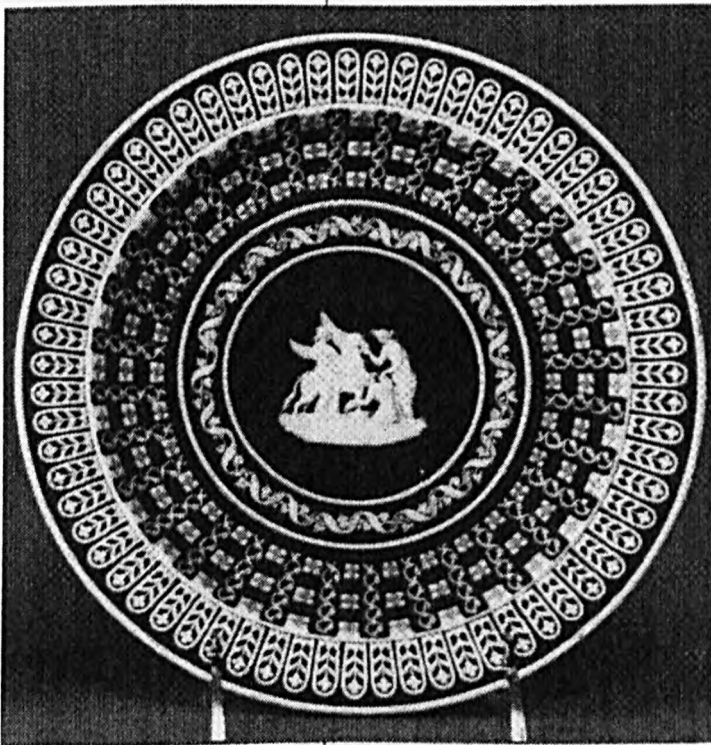
**Figure 57:** Page from Sir William Hamilton and P. H. d'Hancarville's *Antiquities Etrusques, Grecques, et Romaines*, 4 vols. Naples (1766-77), vol. I, pl. 43



**Figure 58:** Portrait medallion, *Benjamin Franklin*, jasper, purchased at Toby House, BMA 1979.93



**Figure 59:** Trophy plate with quatrefoil design, *Muses Grooming Pegasus*, c. 1880, purchased at an antiques fair at the Civic Auditorium held in Birmingham in 1962, BMA 1980.338



**Figure 60:** Portrait medallion, *Lady Banks*, jasper, 19<sup>th</sup> century, BMA 1979.83



**Figure 61:** Caneware pastry dish with rabbit finial, 19<sup>th</sup> century, Purchased on trip to Royal Street in New Orleans, 1958, BMA 1976.277

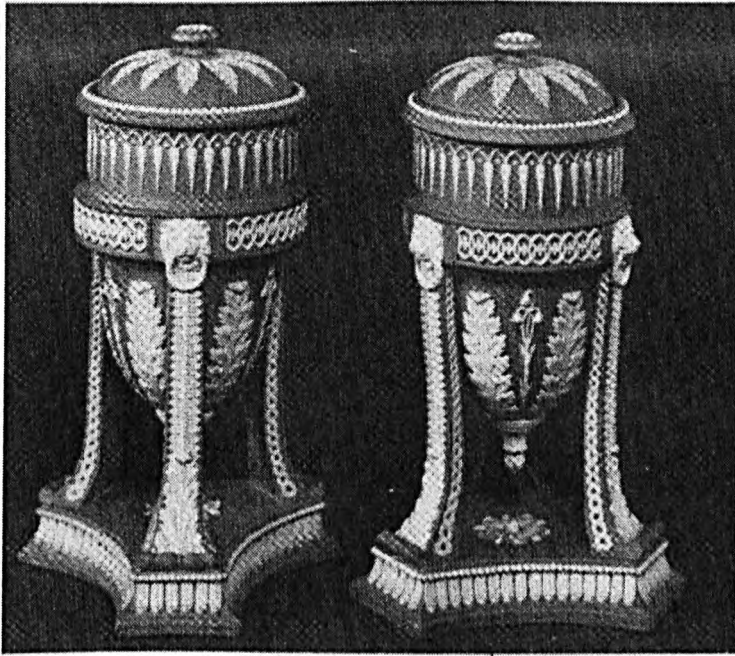


**Figure 62:** Basalt *Egret on Rock*, c. 1918, Purchased on trip to Royal Street in New Orleans, 1958, BMA 1980.135





**Figure 63:** Pair of tripod covered urns, jasper, 19<sup>th</sup> century, Previously featured in *Antiques* magazine by Chicago dealer, W. Russell Button  
BMA 1981.245 & 1981.246

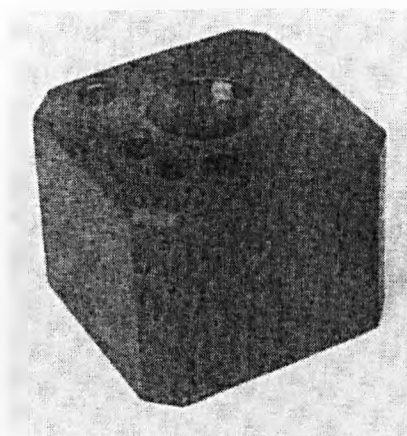


**Figure 64:** Portrait medallion, *Josiah Wedgwood*, jasperware, 19<sup>th</sup> century  
One of the medallions the Beesons purchased at Manheim's during a WIS visit to  
New York antique dealers. BMA 1978.145



**Figure 65:** Basalt inkwell, c. 1775

Purchased during visit to Edward Wolbank of the Edwardian Antique Shop in Chicago, BMA 1980.153



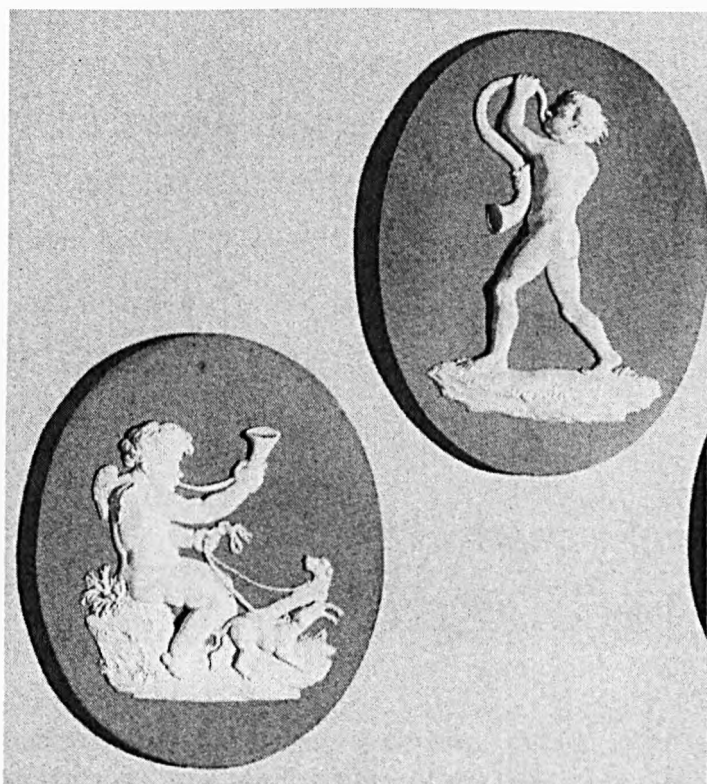
**Figure 66:** Portrait medallion, *Sir Joshua Reynolds*, jasperware, 19<sup>th</sup> century  
Purchased at W. Russell Button Gallery, Chicago, 1962, BMA 1979.141



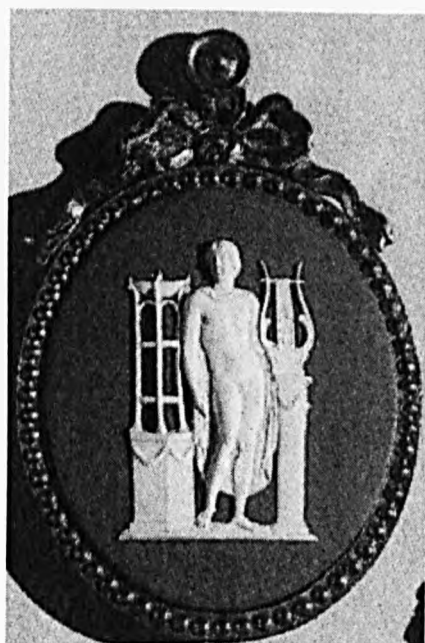
**Figure 67:** Portrait medallion, *Lord Nelson*, jasperware, 19<sup>th</sup> century  
Purchased at W. Russell Button Gallery, Chicago, 1962, BMA 1979.152



**Figure 68 & 69:** Left: Medallion, *Cupid Seated on a Stump*, jasperware, c.1775-80  
BMA 1976.215  
Right: Medallion, *Bacchanalian Figure*, jasperware, c. 1775-80, BMA 1978.213  
Both previously in the Klawans collection



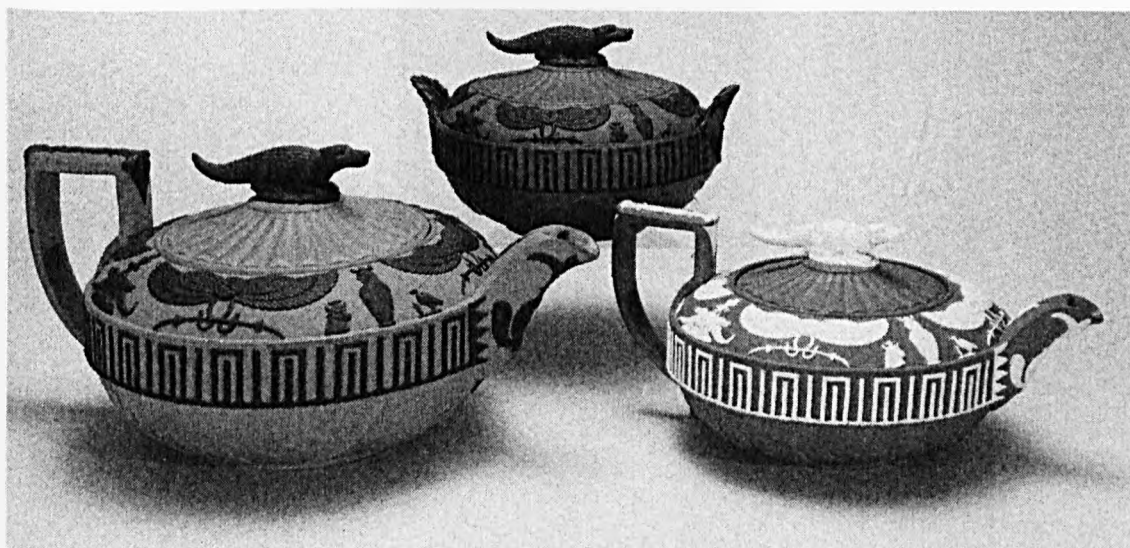
**Figure 70:** Medallion, *Apollo Musagetes*, c. 1775-80, jasperware with ormolu frame, previously in Klawans Collection, BMA 1977.83



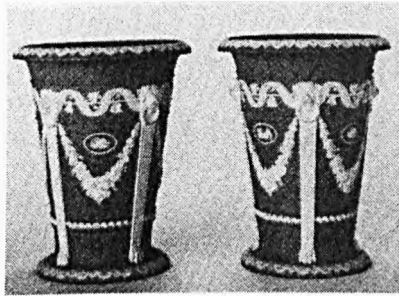
**Figure 71:** Seven Piece Dejeuner Set, jasperware, 19<sup>th</sup> century, previously in the Vurpillat collection, BMA 1985.444.1-.7



**Figure 72:** Three *rosso antico* “Nelson” tea wares. On left is the teapot, c. 1820, which was the Beesons’ first purchase from Otto Wasserman, BMA 1976.232



**Figure 73:** Pair of vases, *Monopodia, Swags, and Classical Figures*, c. 1875-85, jasperware, purchased from Otto Wasserman in 1960, BMA 1981.274



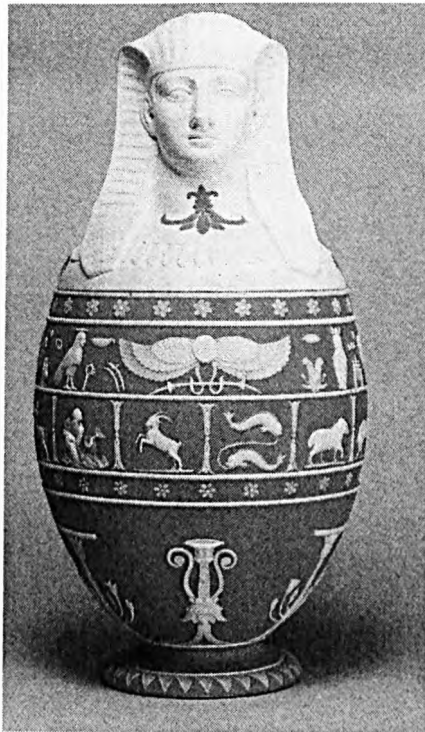
**Figure 74:** Pair of Urns, *Apollo and the Muses*, c. 1790, jasperware, purchased from Otto Wasserman in 1960, BMA 1982.68



**Figure 75:** Teapot, *Classical Figures and Swags*, c. 1810, jasperware, purchased from Otto Wasserman in 1960, BMA 1982.62



**Figure 76:** Canoptic Vase, c. 1865-75, jasperware,  
Purchased from Otto Wasserman, September 1960, BMA 1982.193



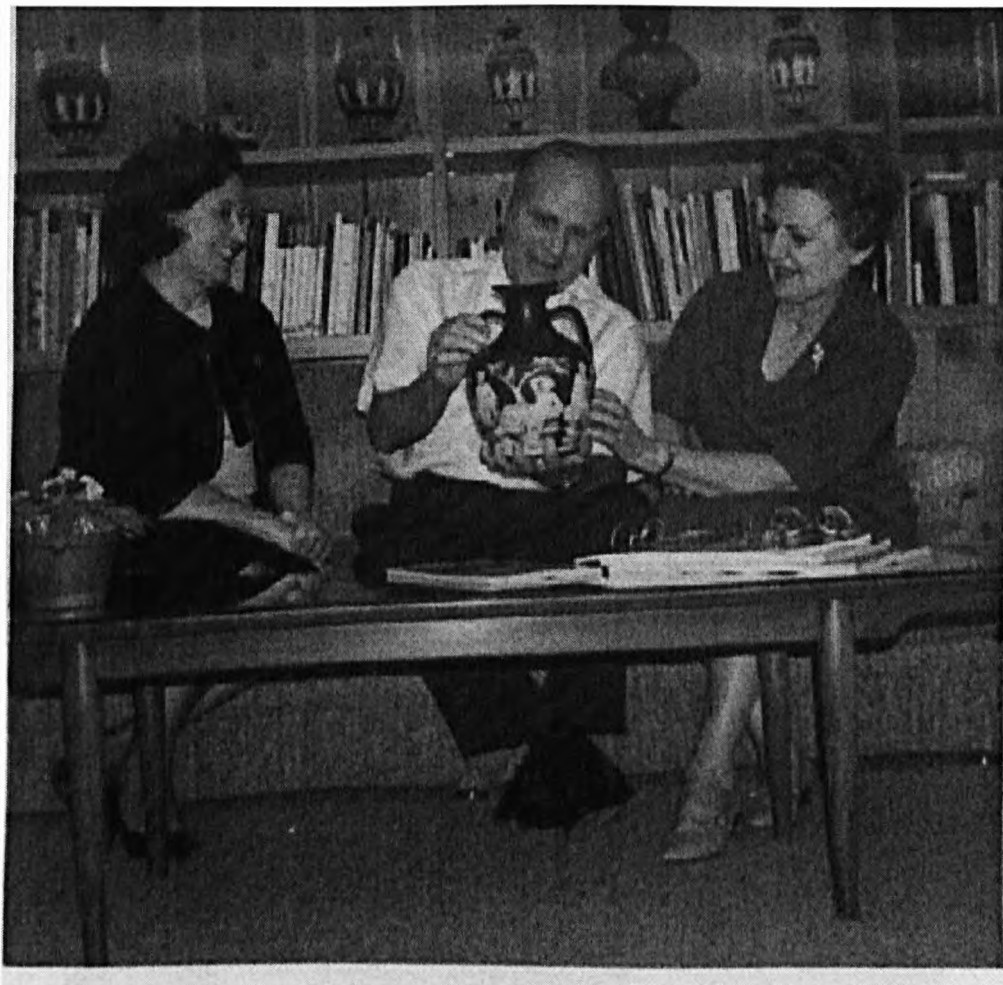
**Figure 77:** Pair of dice pattern potpourri vases in three colours with perforated lids, c.  
1800, jasperware, BMA 1978.126



**Figure 78:** From left: Zyg and Ann Brodkiewicz, Dwight Beeson and Mellanay Delhom at the Beesons' home



**Figure 79:** Ann Brodkiewicz delivering the 'Darwin' copy of the Wedgwood Portland Vase to the Beesons

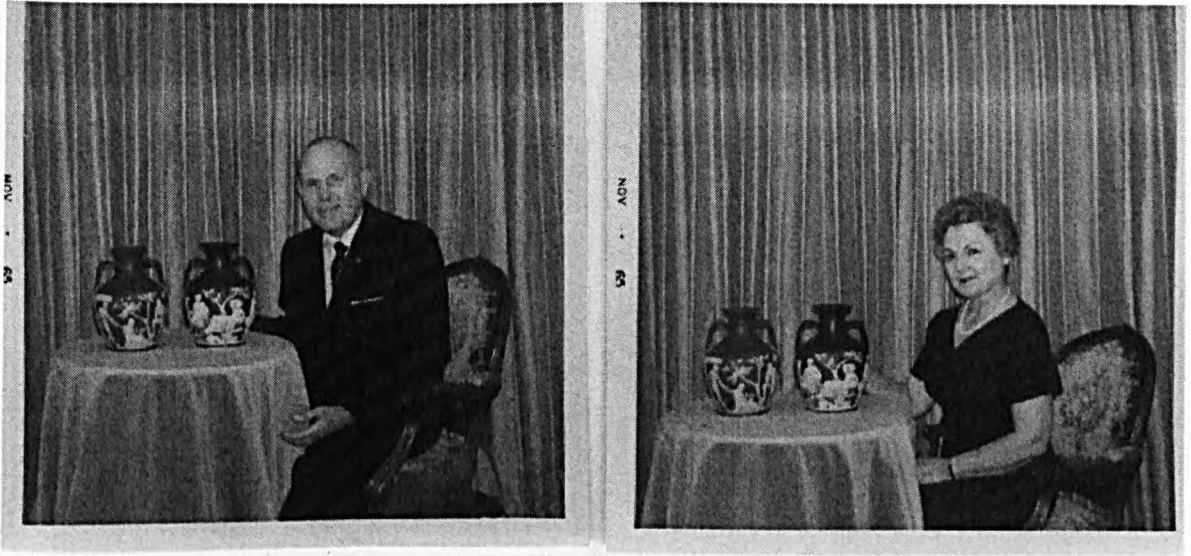




**Figure 80:** The Beeson's copy of the Portland Vase displayed at the Tenth Annual Wedgwood International Seminar held at Williamsburg in 1965 as featured on the cover of *The American Wedgwoodian*



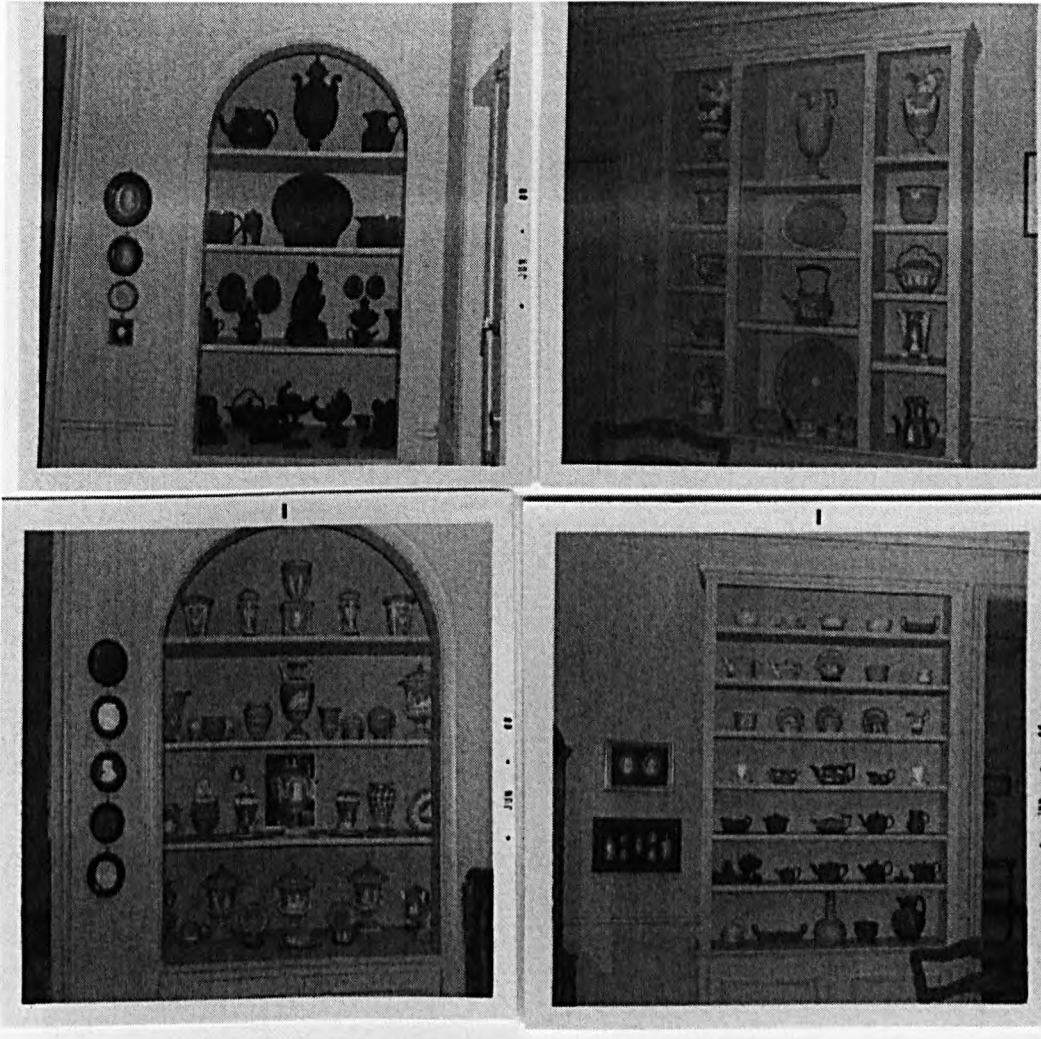
**Figure 81:** The Beesons pictured with their two copies of the Portland Vase



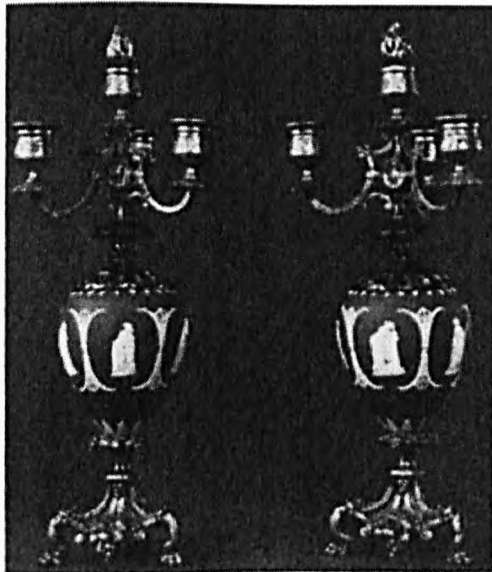
**Figure 82:** The Beeson's home



**Figure 83:** The Wedgwood Collection displayed in the Beesons' home



**Figure 84:** Pair of Candelabra: *The Muses*, late 19<sup>th</sup> century. Jasperware set in gilded metal, BMA 1977.119 and 1977.120

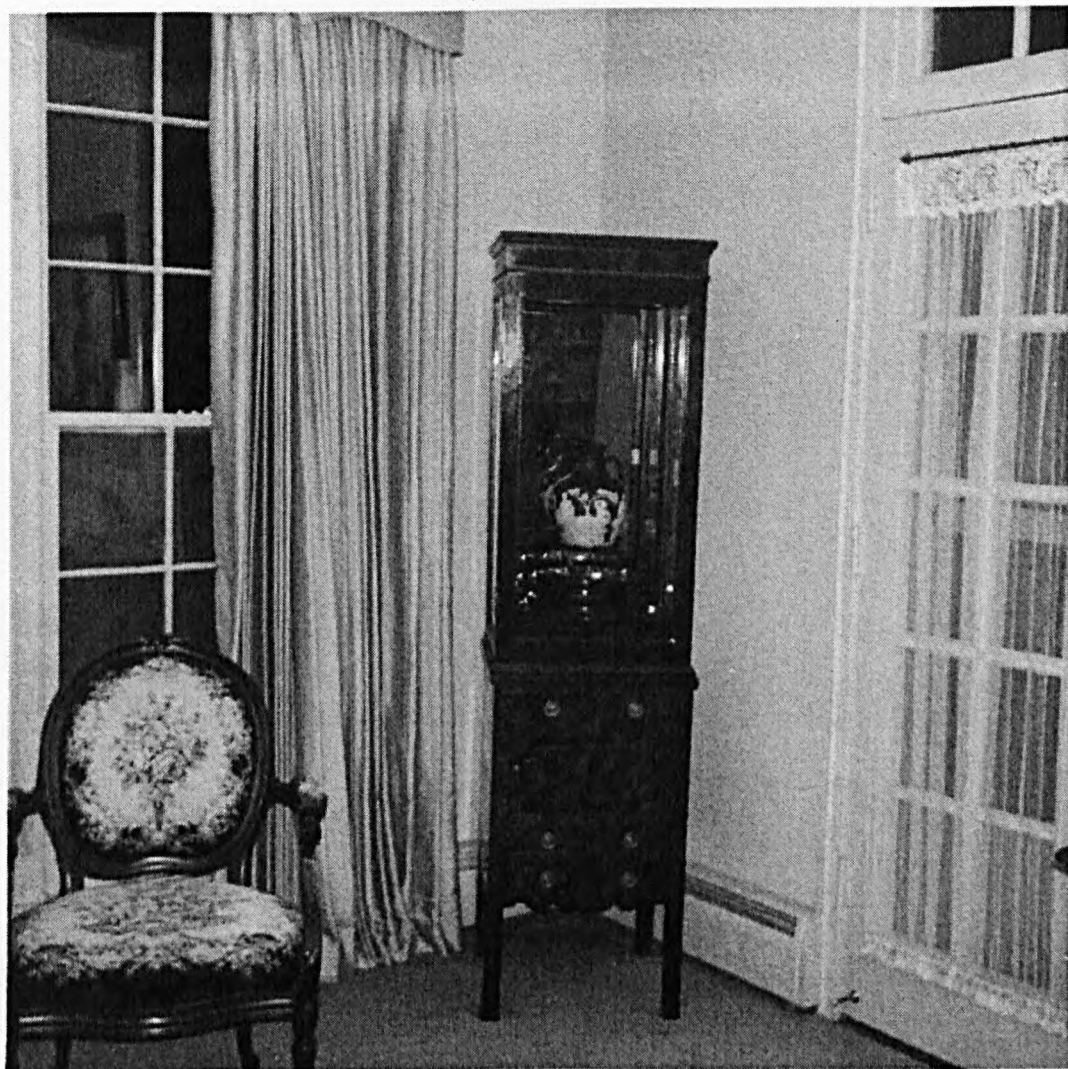


**Figure 85:** Mrs. Beeson in front of the mantelpiece with integrated Wedgwood plaques, medallions and vases with similar decoration of the muses



**Figure 86:** The Wedgwood copy of the Portland Vase in the cabinet the Beesons purchased for its display, March 1965

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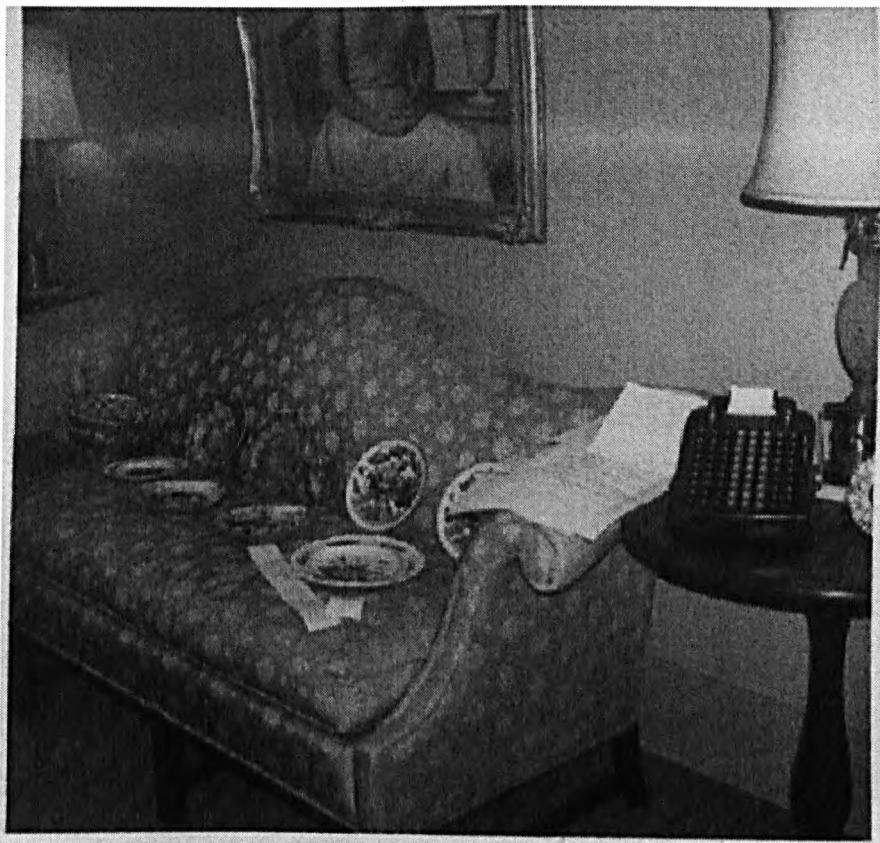
**Figure 87:** The Beesons photographed with their two representative objects



**Figure 88:** Goblet vase, white stoneware with yellow jasper wash and blue jasper relief, BMA 1981.227



**Figure 89:** The Beesons' home with the portrait of Lucille Beeson and the yellow goblet vase shown above the sofa





**Figure 90:** Mrs. Beeson wearing a jasperware necklace



**Figure 91:** Mrs. Beeson wearing dress to match her interior



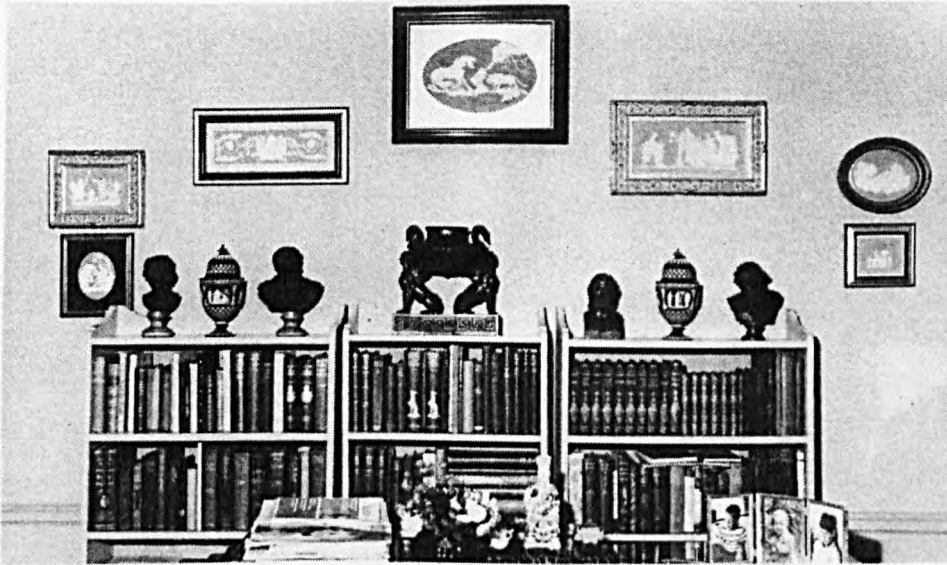
**Figure 92:** Attending the dinner given by the Members of the Board of the Birmingham Museum of Art to honour WIS members, seated left to right: Miss Mellanay Delhom, Mrs. Dwight M. Beeson, and Mrs. Samuel Laver; standing are Mrs. Harry M. Buten, Mr. Samuel Laver, Dwight M. Beeson and Harry M. Buten



**Figure 93:** The Oster Collection of Philadelphia as illustrated in *The American Wedgwoodian*

DECEMBER 1966

THE WEDGWOODIAN



^ Fig. 2 — Framed plaque of the Frightened Horse

v Fig. 3 — The long, deep cabinet in the dining room



"Artes Etrusciae Renascuntur" — The Arts of Etruria Are Reborn

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Figure 94: The Wedgwood Collection of Mr. and Mrs. Milton Milestone as illustrated in *The American Wedgwoodian*

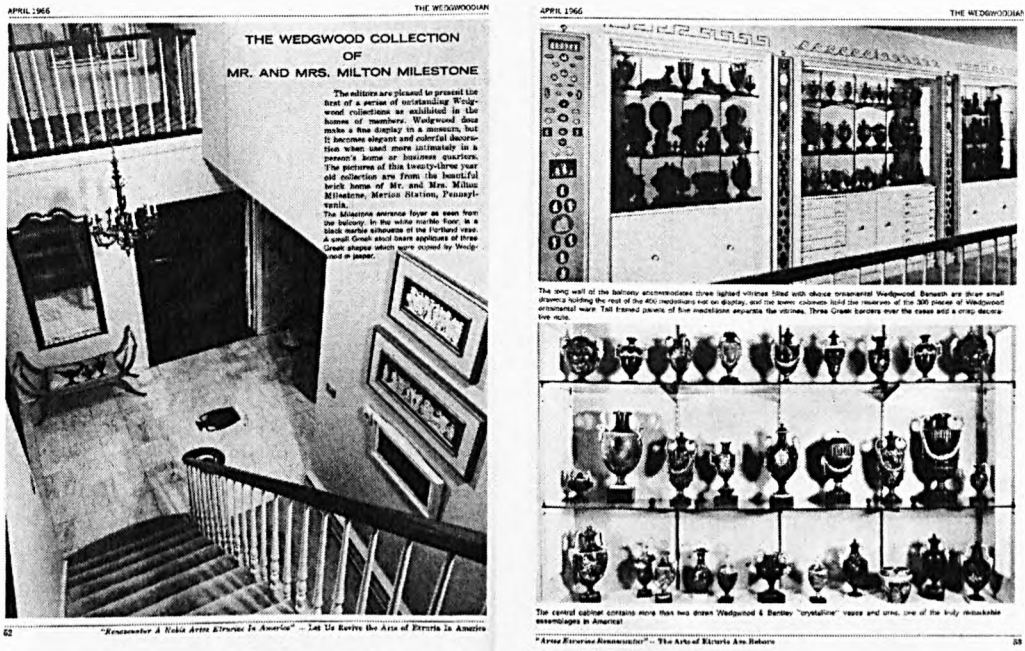


Figure 95: Two pieces from the Beeson's Collection as illustrated in *The American Wedgwoodian*  
 Also See Figure 87, which was used in the same article



**Figure 96:** Harry Buten in his home which he dedicated as a Museum of Wedgwood



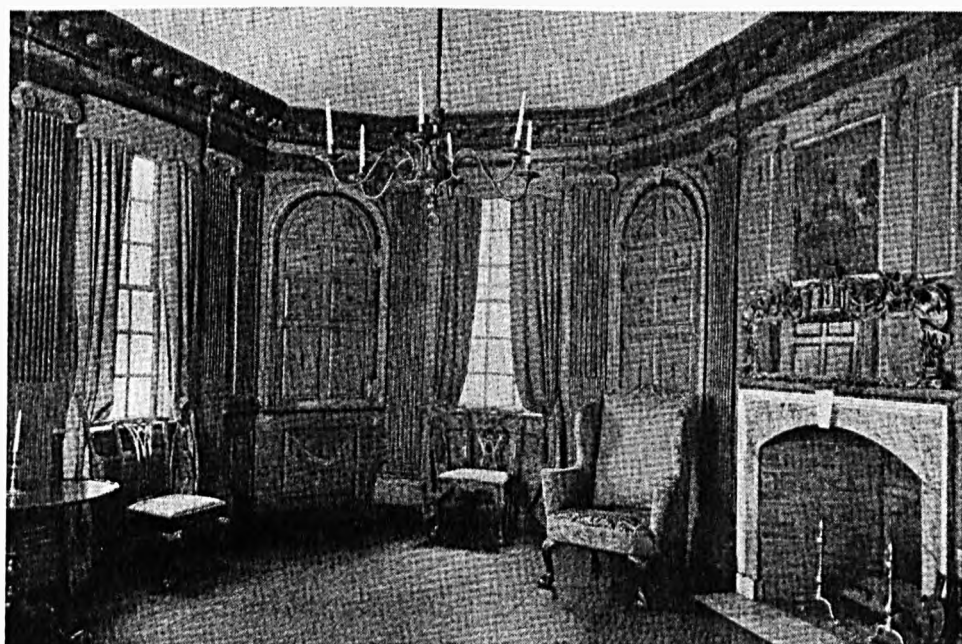
**Figure 97:** The Mountain Brook Country Club



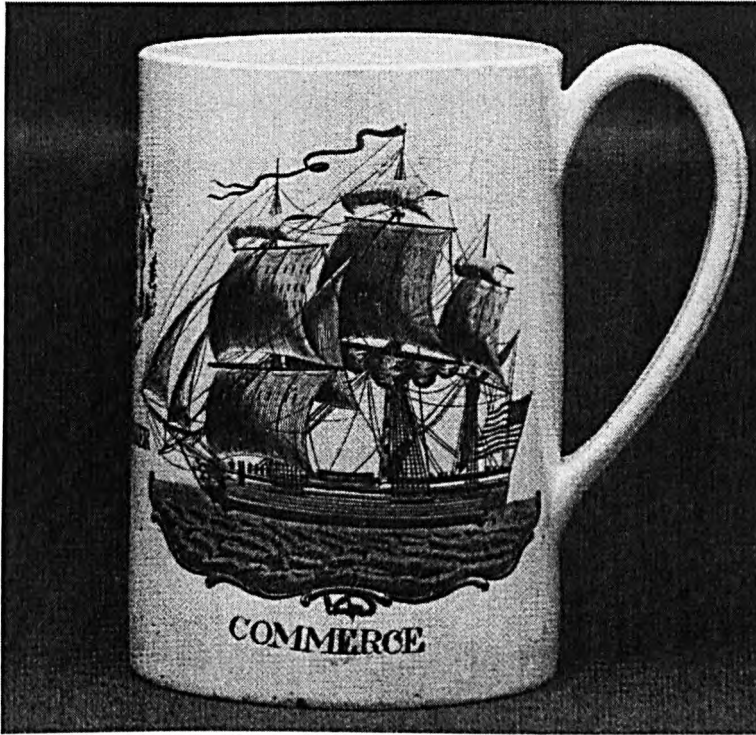
**Figure 98:** Commercial buildings in Mountain Brook built in an English Tudor style. The building shown was the first to be built and follows Jemison's 1926 plan.



**Figure 99:** The Drawing-Room, Marmion, Virginia, circa 1735 (installed in the Metropolitan Museum of Art)



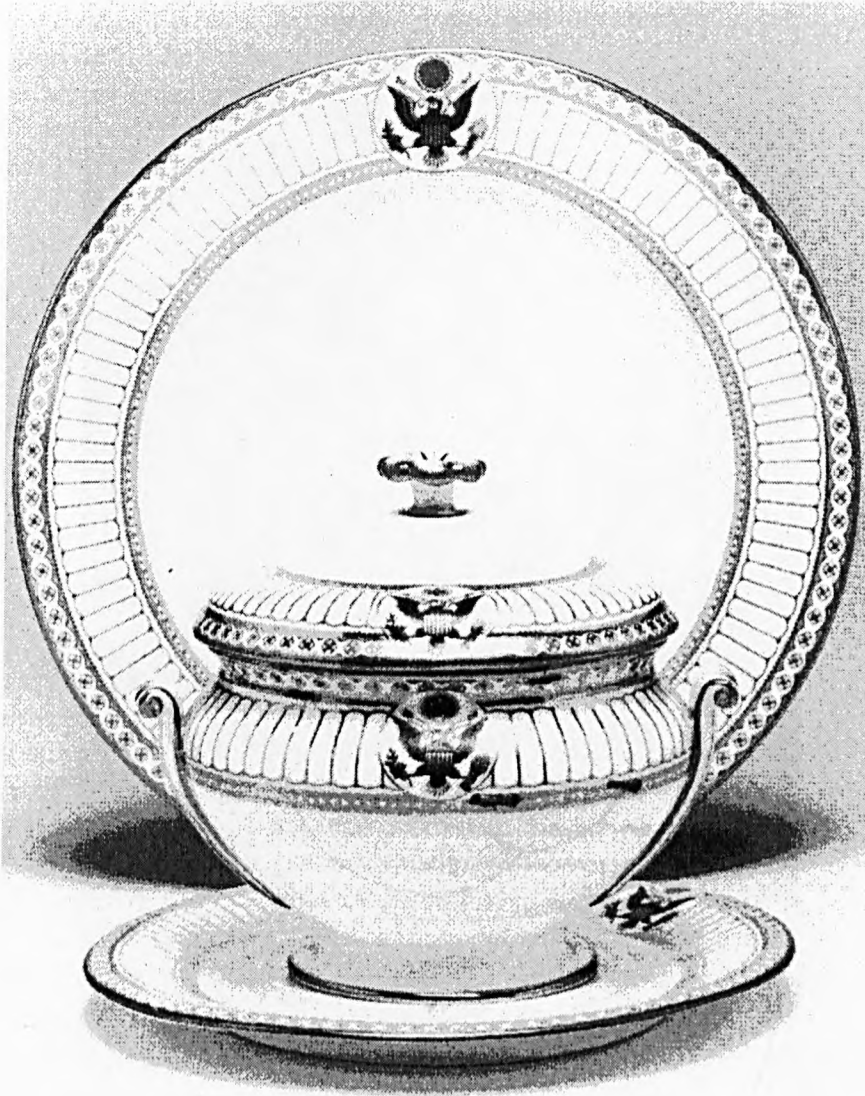
**Figure 100:** Queen's ware mug, transfer-printed in black with view of a vessel flying the American flag and the inscription 'COMMERCE', c. 1791-2



**Figure 101:** Portrait Medallion: John Paul Jones, Jasperware, blue ground with white relief, 20<sup>th</sup> century, BMA 1978.151



**Figure 102:** The Presidential Wedgwood Service, bone china plate and sauce tureen and stand, made for the White House in 1903

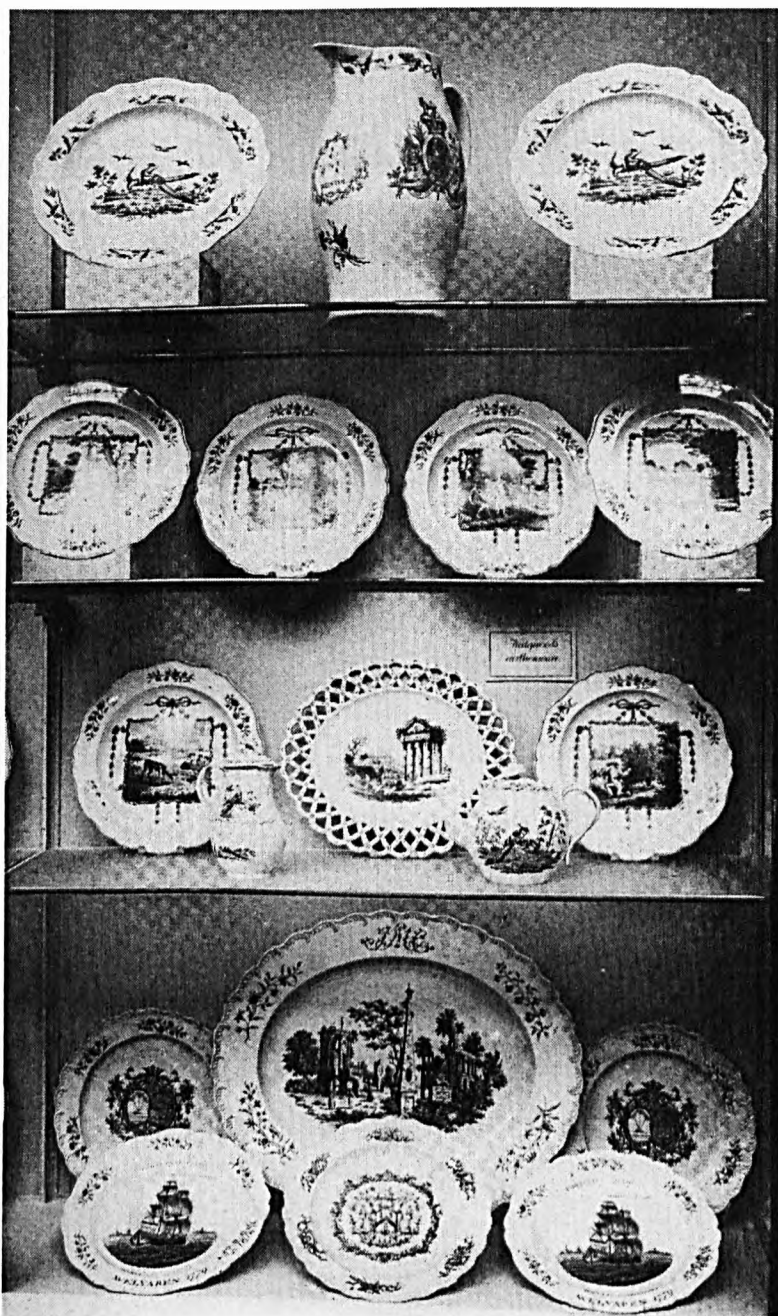




**Figure 103: Lady Schreiber**

*Lady Charlotte Schreiber.  
In the Drawing-room at 17, Cavendish Square.*

**Figure 104:** A selection of the Schreiber's Wedgwood collection



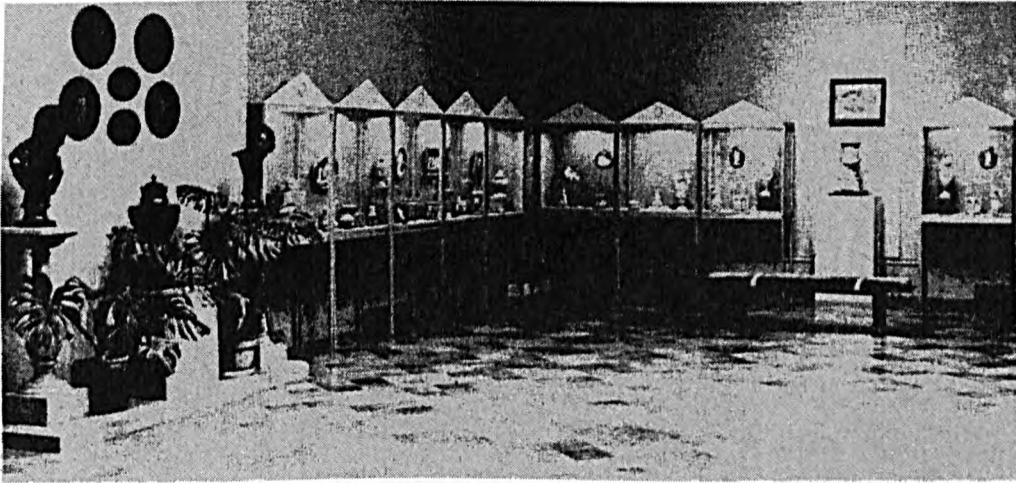
EXAMPLES OF JOSHUA WEDGWOOD'S POPULAR QUEEN'S WARE WITH PAINTED DECORATIONS AND PRINTED ORNAMENTS, MANY OF WHICH WERE ADDED LATER BY THE FAMOUS FIRM OF SADLER AND GREEN OF LIVERPOOL.  
*The Schreiber Collection*

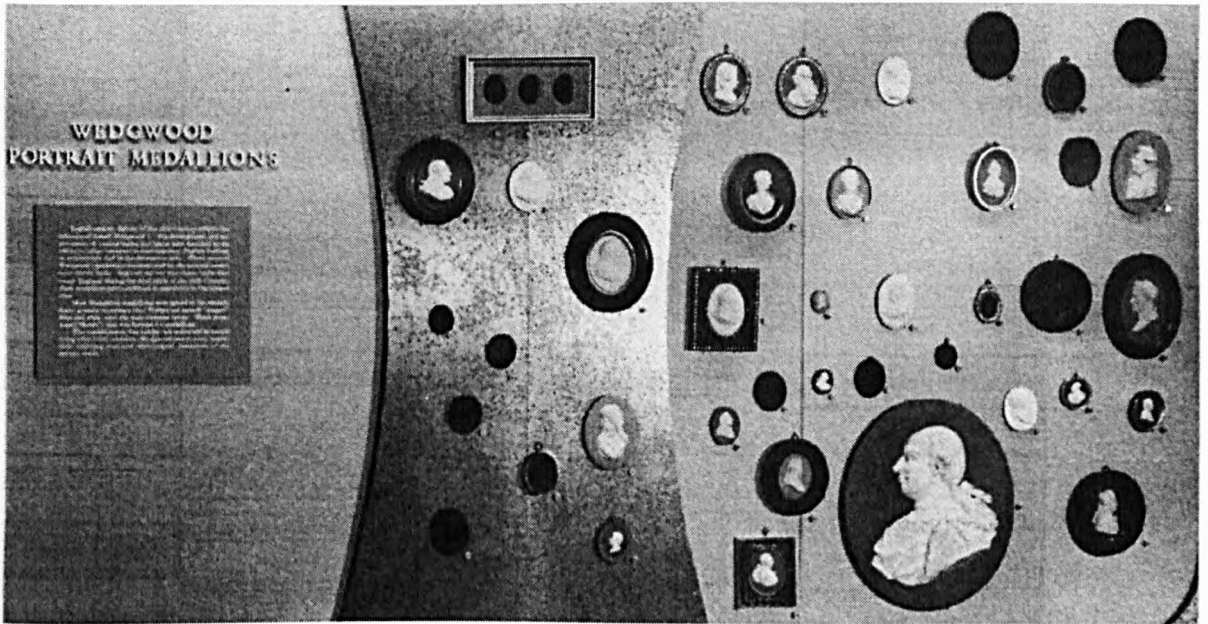
**Figure 105:** Paine Art Center display as illustrated in *The American Wedgwoodian*

AUGUST 1965

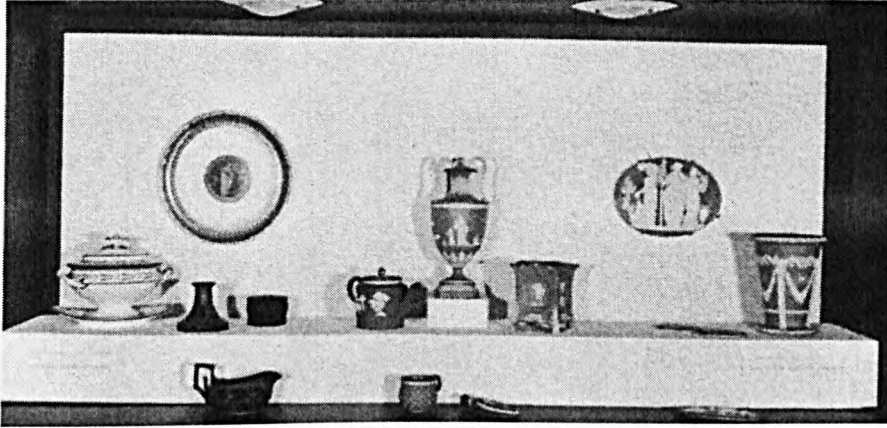
THE WEDGWOODIAN

## WEDGWOOD IN OSHKOSH



**Figure 106:** Display of Wedgwood at the Smithsonian

**Figure 107:** Display at Columbus Gallery of Fine Arts (1966)



Mrs. Wallace C. Harrison, Curator of Decorative Arts at the Columbus Gallery of Fine Art in Ohio with the Director of the Museum, Dr. Mahonri S. Young



**Figure 108:** Lucille Beeson speaking at WIS Seminar

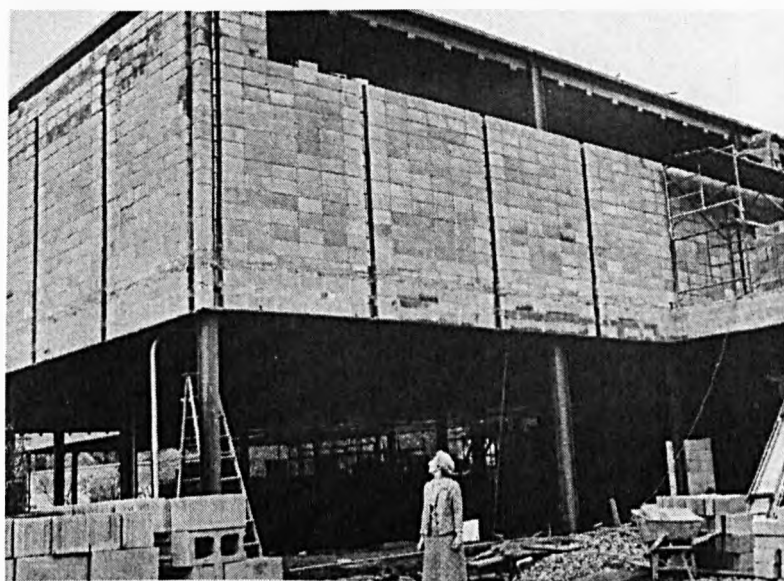


**Figure 109:** The Buten Museum



**Figure 110:** Mellanay Delhom pictured in front of the Mint Museum

**CONSTRUCTION AT THE MINT MUSEUM**



*Miss M. Mellanay Delhom checking construction of the Delhom Wing of the Mint Museum*

**Figure 111:** Mellanay Delhom installing her collection at the Mint Museum

**THEY'RE RUSHING AROUND AT THE MINT**



*Charlotte News Staff Photo by Dan Hunter*

*Miss M. Mellanay Delhom getting the new Mint Wing ready*

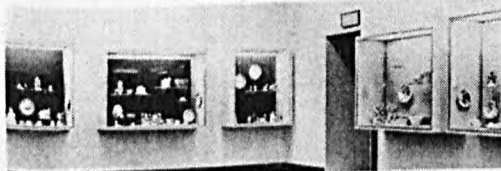
**Figure 112:**The Birmingham Museum of Art, 1959



**Figure 113:** Exhibition design at the Birmingham Museum of Art



Western gallery



Porcelain gallery



Oriental gallery

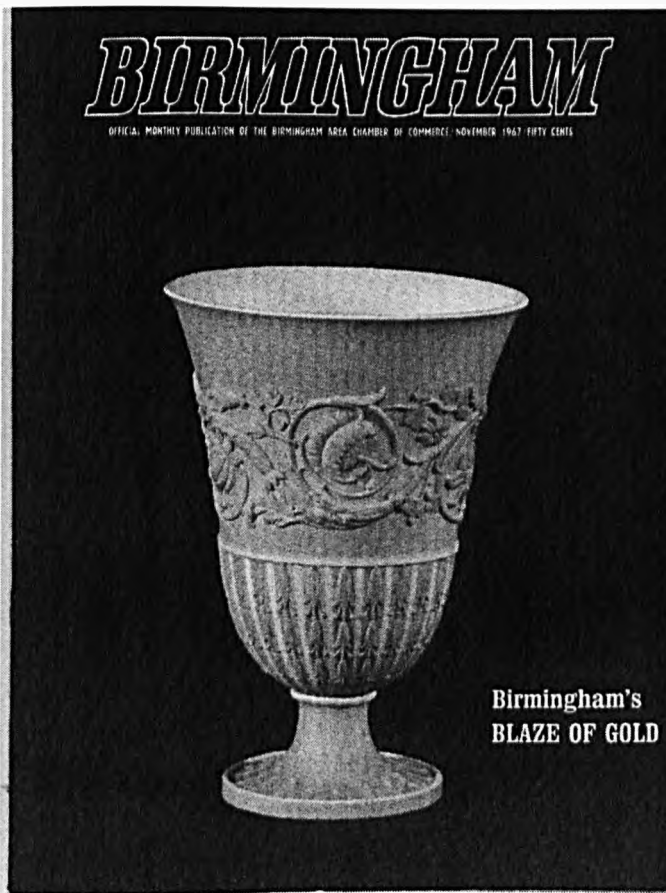




**Figure 114:** The new wing at the Birmingham Museum of Art under construction



**Figure 115:** *Birmingham* Magazine promoting the Beeson collection



**Figure 116:** Opening of the temporary exhibition of the Beeson collection at the Birmingham Museum of Art in 1968



**Figure 117:** William Spencer (pictured on right), Chairman of the Birmingham Museum of Art with WIS president Lloyd E. Hawes



**Figure 118:** The Wedgwood Collection at the Birmingham Museum of Art, c. 1978



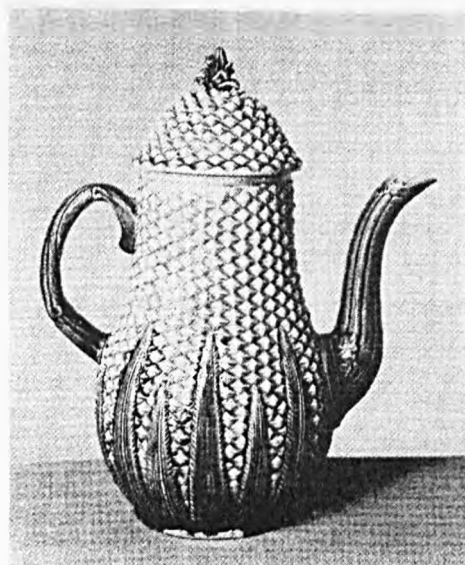
**Figure 119:** Jasperware at the Birmingham Museum of Art, c. 1978



**Figure 120:** The Pegasus Vase in the British Museum



**Figure 121:** Green glazed 'Pineapple' coffee pot from the Victoria and Albert's *Wedgwood Bicentenary Exhibition*



*'Pineapple' coffee pot; about 1765. Catalogue No. 10.*

**Figure 122:** Black Basaltware from the Victoria and Albert's *Wedgwood Bicentenary Exhibition*

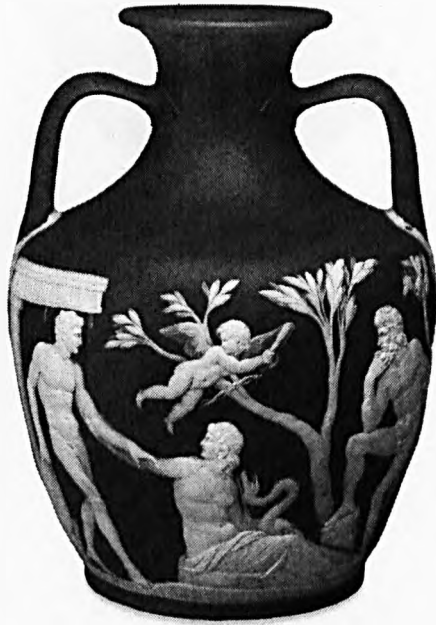


*Vase, Black Basalt, with encaustic painting.  
About 1795. Catalogue No. 33.*

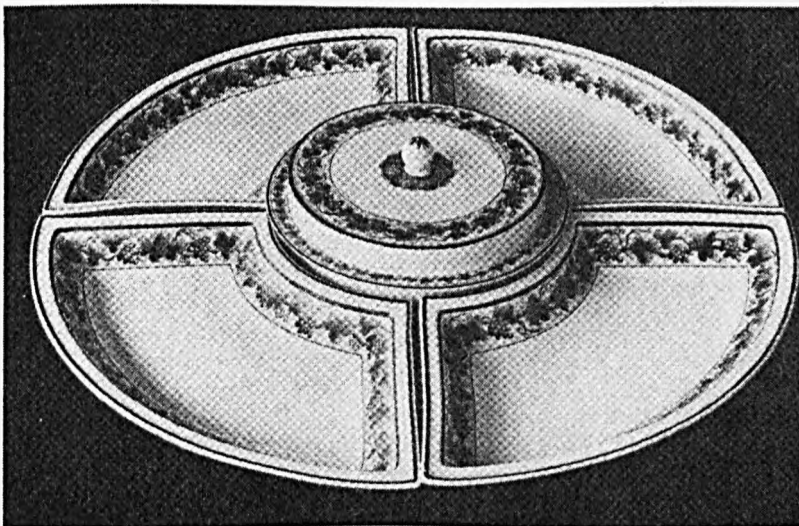


*Plaque, Black Basalt; Bacchus playing with a panther.  
About 1775. Catalogue No. 39.*

**Figure 123:** The Wedgwood Portland Vase copy in the collection at the British Museum

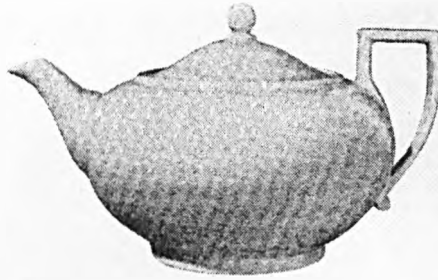


**Figure 124:** Creamware from the Victoria and Albert's *Wedgwood Bicentenary Exhibition*

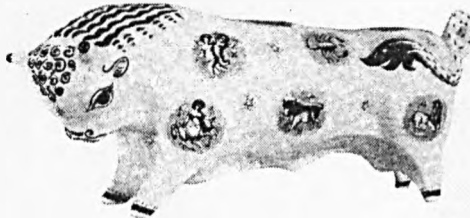


*Sandwich Set. Queen's Ware, hand painted. About 1780. Catalogue No. 206.*

**Figure 125:** Modern Wedgwood from the Victoria and Albert's *Wedgwood Bicentenary Exhibition*



*Queen's Ware shapes in present day production. The '146' teapot was designed for the first Josiah Wedgwood, and appears in his first catalogue in 1770. Catalogue No. 297.*



*'Taurus the Hull' was modelled in 1946 by Arnold Machin. Catalogue No. 363.*



*The coffee pot is in the 'Barlaston' shape designed by Norman Wilson; its pattern is 'Breton', designed by Robert Alfukin. Catalogue No. 299.*

**Figure 126:** The Portland Vase copies at the Birmingham Museum of Art



Figure 127: The destruction of Etruria lamented by *The American Wedgwoodian*

## IN MEMORIAM "ETRURIA" 1769-1965



ETRURIA, About 1962-3

A few weeks ago, September 8, 1965, while passing the old Etruria works, I noticed demolition men at work. I immediately parked my car, and along I went with my camera to record another phase in Wedgwood history (Figs. 2-6). Standing amid the ruins, memories rushed back to happy days there when potting was a craft; also my imagination took me back further still when Josiah himself had stood on the same spot, but watching the beginning of an epoch. To me the destruction of the Etruria works is a sorry climax. At least the old portions should have been retained, either by the National Trust or the Civic Fathers. In years to come our present generation will stand condemned as wreckers leaving little or nothing to hand down to posterity. Before I leave the subject, one good piece of news now to hand: the demolition men tell me for the time being at least they have orders to leave the two ovens and the buildings at the front of the works intact.

Harry Sheldon



(LEFT) Fig. 2—The old lodge and waiting room, now in rubble



(RIGHT) Fig. 3—A closer view of the waiting room. The old grate you see being pulled out, I now have at home. Couldn't resist...



Fig. 4—One of the original two round-houses



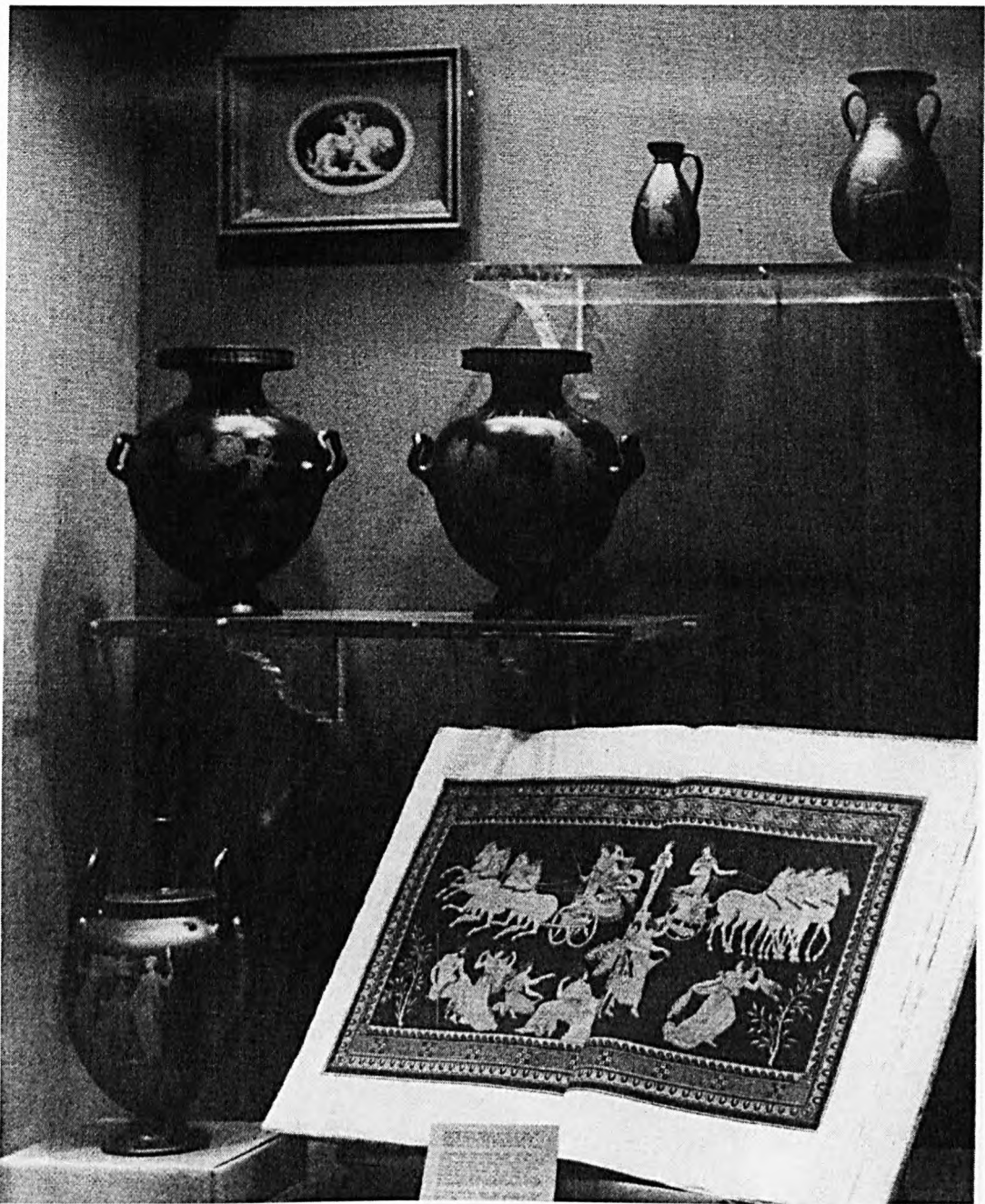
Fig. 5—Last of two remaining ovens, polishing shop, now rubble, sorting and stock warehouses, demo' men moving in.



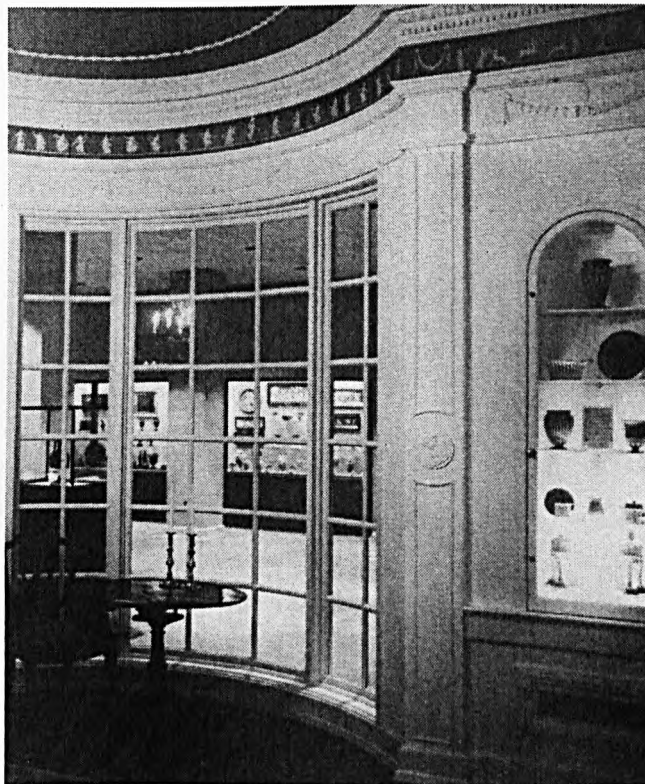
Fig. 6—The two remaining ovens, earthenware glost



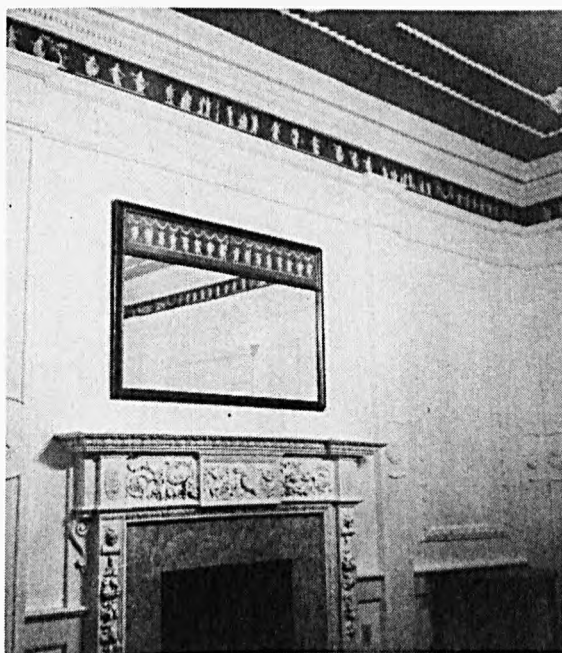
**Figure 128:** Wedgwood encaustic painted pieces displayed with *Collection of Etruscan, Greek and Roman Antiquities from the Cabinet of Hon. William Hamilton, Vol. I, 1765*



**Figure 129:** The 'Eighteenth Century Room' at the Birmingham Museum of Art, c. 1978



**Figure 130:** The 'Eighteenth Century Room' at the Birmingham Museum of Art, c. 1978, showing the jasper frieze in the cornice and the period mantelpiece



**Figure 131:** The Jackson Homestead in Newton, Massachusetts where the Wedgwood Society of Boston held its first exhibition in 1979

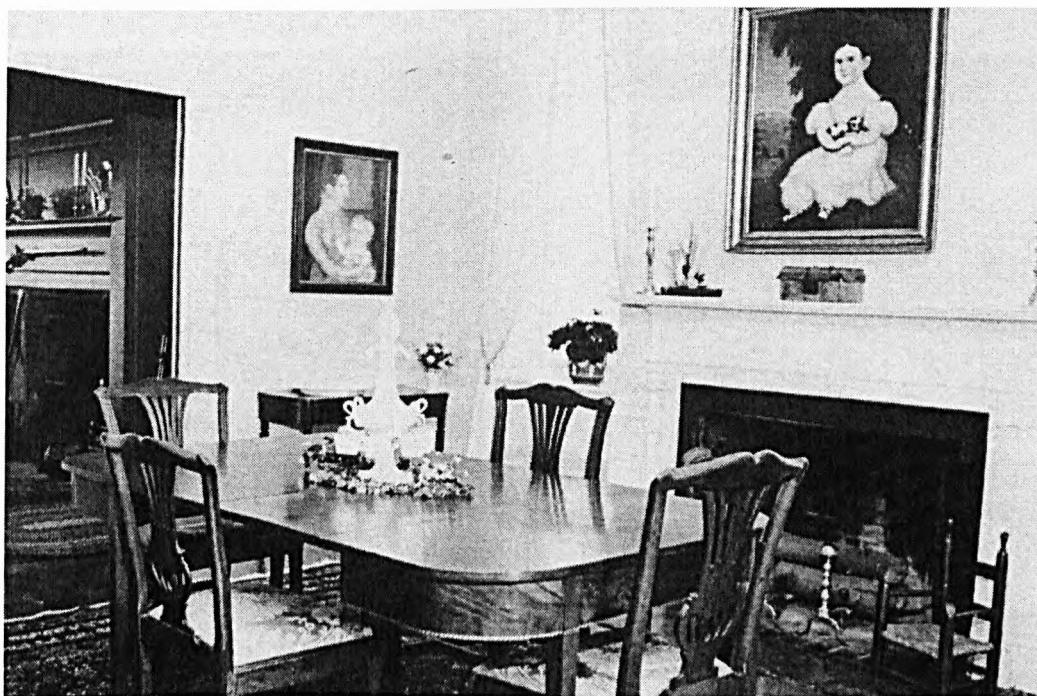
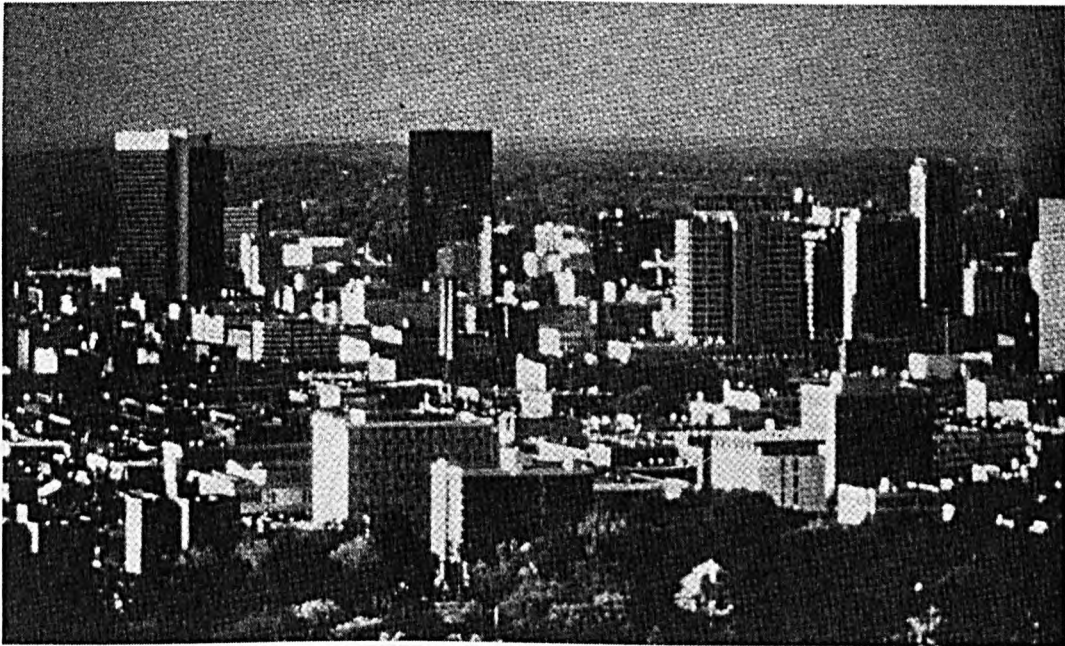


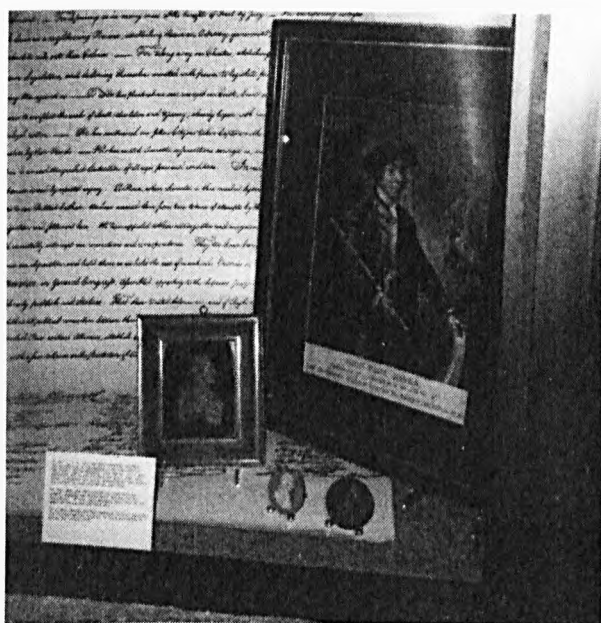
Figure 132: 'Wedgwood and Boulton: Artists of Industry' Birmingham, England and Birmingham, Alabama



**Figure 133:** Images of Josiah Wedgwood displayed alongside a reproduction of the Declaration of Independence



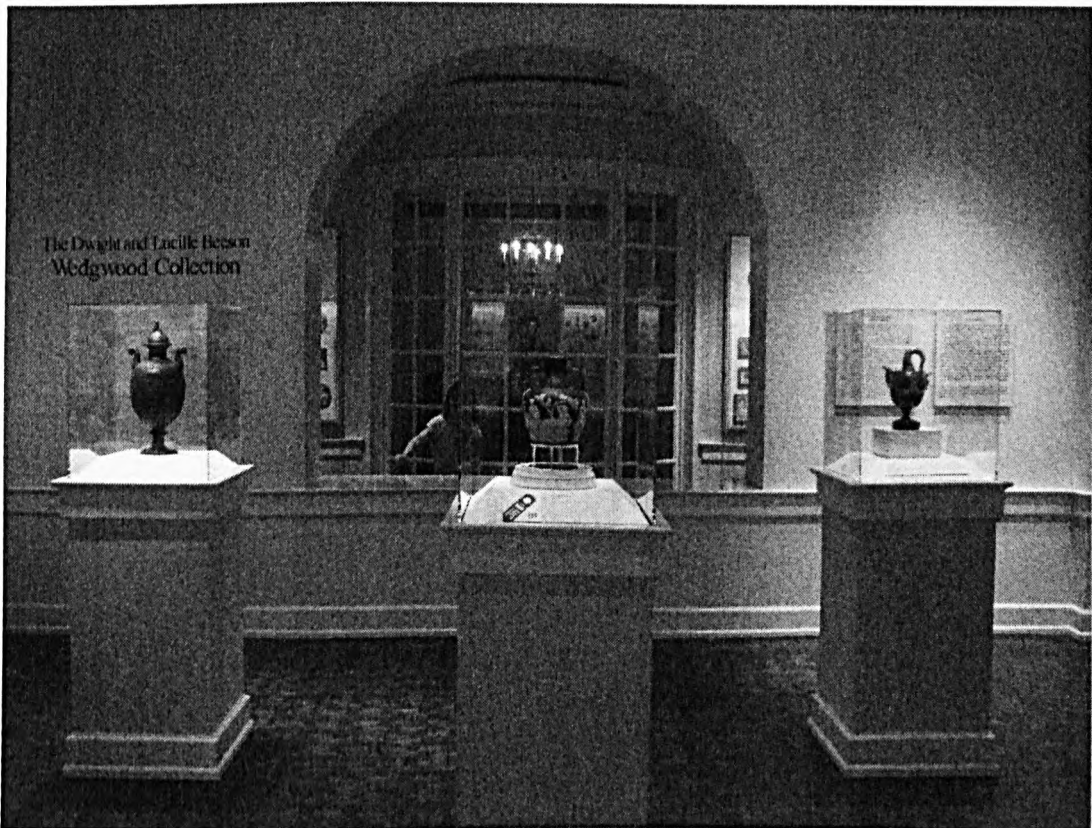
**Figure 134:** Wedgwood medallion and other images of John Paul Jones



**Figure 135:** Chronological display at the Birmingham Museum of Art



**Figure 136:** The Reinstallation of the Wedgwood galleries at the Birmingham Museum of Art, 1990



**Figure 137:** The figure of Britannia Triumphant against the backdrop of an image showing the Wedgwood showrooms



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