

One of the most famous names in fine china and pottery today—Wedgwood—first became famous during the Industrial Revolution in Britain. Josiah Wedgwood's creative business ideas helped make pottery making one of Britain's major industries. ♦ *As you read, think about how Wedgwood's career compares with of those modern business leaders. Then, on a separate sheet of paper, answer the questions that follow.*

## Josiah Wedgwood (1730–1795)

For Josiah Wedgwood, the youngest of thirteen children, pottery making was the family business. Staffordshire, the part of England where he lived, was already well-known for its pottery. Josiah went to work for his oldest brother when he was nine, but his experimental ideas got him in trouble. For all his career, he was always looking for new materials, new processes, and new ways of using his craft.

In 1759, when he was 29, Wedgwood took a major step and leased buildings and kilns to start his own small pottery making factory, Ivy House Works. As the master potter, he was everywhere—running the business, supervising every department, and still personally mixing clays and making models. He soon realized that a new system was necessary for his business to grow. As in modern factories, he divided up the jobs. He also wanted his factory-made plates, dishes, and teapots to be better than handmade pottery. Each piece was uniformly made so that lids fit well and plates could be stacked. He used elegant and beautiful designs—for instance, modeling decorative vases after classical Greek ones. He also tried out new machinery and chemical processes and was friendly with prominent scientists.



As his business quickly prospered, Wedgwood became a leader in developing local industry. He gave generously to support a school and backed the building of roads and canals. Soon he bought land near Stoke-on-Trent, where he built a larger factory, a new family home, and eventually a village for his workers, which he named Etruria. The new factory opened in 1769, only ten years after his first venture.

The dishes from Wedgwood's factories were just what the growing middle classes wanted. Factory production made them affordable, but they were well made and decorated with classical designs such as vines and leaves that were in perfect taste. His special designs included a raised pattern of leaves and fruit on cream-colored earthenware, cameo-like medallions made for decoration, and vases with a deep-black finish.

It was not just the middle class who admired Wedgwood's work. In 1762, he was named official potter to Queen Charlotte, which brought him still more prestige. His cream-colored earthenware came to be called "queen's ware." Later, in 1774, he produced a custom-made set of more than 900 pieces for Catherine the Great of Russia.

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### Questions to Think About

1. What changes did Wedgwood make in his factory to turn out the kind of pottery he wanted?
2. What made Wedgwood's pottery appealing to the new middle class?
3. **Determining Relevance** Why might an ambitious business leader like Wedgwood have wanted to develop roads and canals?