

Wedgwood – the Museum, Visitor Centre and 250th Anniversary

Wedgwood is one of the latest British institutions to have been hit by the global financial crisis.

It comes in the same year the company reaches its 250th milestone.

A taskforce, chaired by the City of Stoke-on-Trent elected mayor Mark Meredith, has been set-up to help; and a buyer is currently being sought for the Stoke-on-Trent based company.

In the meantime, the new £10m Wedgwood Museum – opened at the end of 2008 - will not be affected by the situation, and remains open to the public.

The award-winning Wedgwood Visitor Centre, and factory shop, are *currently* open and trading as usual.

Events to mark the 250th anniversary of the founding of the company are currently under review.

Josiah Wedgwood himself was described as the 'Father of English Potters'. His life and work was summed up by the then Prime Minister, William Gladstone, as: "The greatest man who ever, in any age or country, applied himself to the important work of uniting art with industry".

His achievements in the 18th century were remarkable. A master potter, he was also an inventor, and a pioneer canal builder; and he helped to shape an area of Britain which is now affectionately known world-wide as 'The Potteries'. Never afraid to speak his mind on the major issues of his time, he was an avid supporter of the abolition of the slave trade, and even sympathised with the colonists during the American War of Independence.

The nephew of Thomas Wedgwood and John, Josiah Wedgwood I started to rent The Ivy House Works in Burslem from the two of them from May Day, 1759. In a Rent Account Book belonging to John Wedgwood, now held in the collection of the Potteries Museum & Art Gallery, details of the 'hiring' of the Ivy House Works are given. These are headed '*Cousin Josia [sic] Wedgwood Dr to house & work houses from May Day 1759 to 1760*'.

The rent for the Ivy House Works was £15 per year, and Wedgwood worked the site until about New Year 1764, at which point Josiah rented larger premises - again in Burslem - at the Brick House Works, which he hired from William Adams.

In June 1769, Wedgwood's revolutionary purpose-built factory at Etruria was opened by a pot-making ceremony in which six copies of an 'Etruscan' vase in Black Basalt were thrown by Josiah Wedgwood himself, while Thomas Bentley, his partner, turned the wheel.

Two of the remaining four First Day's Vases can still be seen at the newly opened Wedgwood Museum which also tells the full story of the man and his business.

Anyone requiring additional tourist information can request a free pack of information by writing to Stoke-on-Trent Tourist Information Centre, Victoria Hall, Cultural Quarter, Stoke-on-Trent City Centre, ST1 3AD. (Tel: 01782-236000. E-mail stoke.tic@stoke.gov.uk). Or, log on to www.visitstoke.co.uk.

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