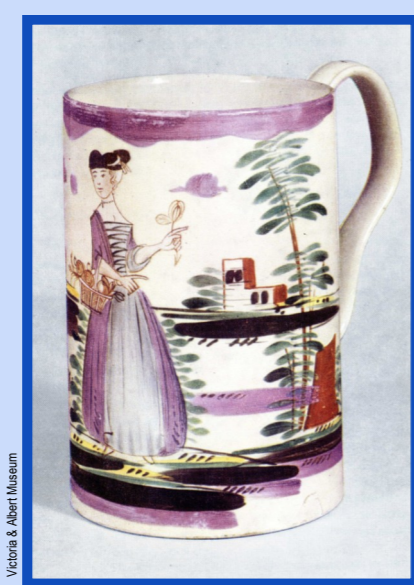


International renown

Josiah Wedgwood, perhaps the greatest British innovator and manufacturer of ceramics, had a common interest in canal building with the Duke of Bridgewater. Both men needed a better way of transporting their products than the inadequate road system of their day. Wedgwood's visit to Worsley in 1765 led the Duke to order a creamware table service from him as a token of his sincerity in cooperating with canal development.



C18 Wedgwood Creamware



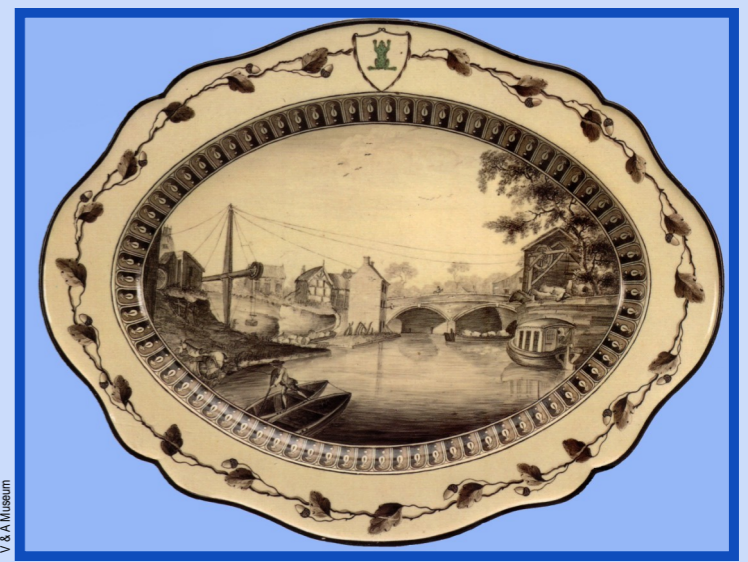
Victoria & Albert Museum



Josiah Wedgwood



The illustration for the Green Frog Plate



The Green Frog Service - Bridgewater Canal plate



Queen Charlotte

Artists went all over the country in pursuit of material for the decoration. They used camera obscura to obtain accurate images of famous landscaped gardens, ruined abbeys, castles, Roman ruins, Stonehenge and a dolmen, the Giant's Causeway, Fingal's Cave, Peak Cavern and views of the Lake District, Scotland and Snowdonia. London scenes were the only urban views. Knowing that Catherine was interested in new scientific and industrial developments, they also painted industrial scenes such as a view of Plymouth docks, a Bristol colliery and a paper mill at Rickmansworth.

Worsley's importance as the birthplace of the canal age was not overlooked in the project. Two paintings, attributed to Jean Jacques Rousseau, were used by Josiah Wedgwood, who knew Worsley well. One shows the Barton Aqueduct, the other a view across the canal towards Worsley Road bridge with the nailmaker's house (Lantern Gallery) and part of the Delph. The sketch is shown above and the Green Frog plate can be seen, above right.



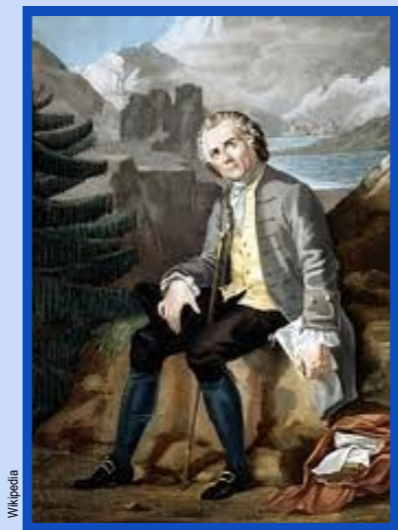
Catherine the Great of Russia

Creamware
Porcelain, invented in China, and very fine compared to earthenware, was much in demand in wealthy English households. Less wealthy ones wished to emulate their richer neighbours. In about 1750, British potters, most notably Josiah Wedgwood, perfected a range of cream coloured, fine earthenware which they called Creamware. It was ideal for domestic use because it was inexpensive. Ironically however, the rich and famous also developed a taste for this product, making it even more popular. It was produced by many factories but Queen Charlotte, the wife of King George III, helped Wedgwood by accepting a tea service in 1765. In her honour, and to help his sales, he adopted the name Queensware for the product.

Catherine the Great, Empress of all the Russias
In 1773 Josiah Wedgwood received a commission of unequalled difficulty for an English ceramics manufacturer. It was entirely the idea of the Empress Catherine, whose Cheshmiski Palace near St Petersburg, was built in an area of drained marshland and was nicknamed 'La Grenouillère' - the Frog Pond! She ordered a huge table service of 952 pieces which were to be decorated with 1244 different views of Britain, hand painted by a team of artists and each bearing a tiny frog image. This was the celebrated Green Frog Service. Questions of shape and decoration were left entirely to Wedgwood's professional competence and there were only two stipulations: the landscapes should be accurate and none be repeated.



The Catherine Palace, St Petersburg



Jean-Jacques Rousseau

In 1774 the completed service went on show in London. It was a great success, as people came to see whether one landowner's country estate was more prominently featured than another's. When it arrived in Russia, it was used for state occasions in the Cheshmiski Palace. After Catherine's death, the service was packed away and only rediscovered many years later, which may have ensured its survival. It is now displayed at the Hermitage Museum in St Petersburg.

A selection of pieces including the Bridgewater Canal plate was displayed in 'The Genius of Wedgwood' at the Victoria and Albert Museum in 1995 to mark the bicentenary of Wedgwood's death.