

SALTY COMMENTS #32

(Facts and Opinion on Open Salt Collecting)

Years ago when we heard the word "Wedgwood", we immediately thought of an unglazed china, usually blue, with delicate white figures applied to it. Since we have been collecting open salts our Wedgwood horizons have broadened considerably, for we have several sizes and shapes of china and porcelain with the Wedgwood mark. We will try to describe some of them for you to give you an idea of the range of Wedgwood salts you might find.

Josiah Wedgwood was born in Burslem, England in 1730, the thirteenth and youngest son of a potter. His oldest brother inherited the business, as was the custom, and Josiah went out on his own after a 5-year apprenticeship in his brother's factory. He was very successful, primarily because he experimented and innovated extensively. He was a stickler for quality, insisting that handles fit the hand comfortably, that spouts work properly, and that lids fit the dish. He developed a thinner, more durable cream-colored pottery that was much closer to expensive porcelain than other kinds. It was also more elegant and refined in its form than its competition. This was called "Queen's Ware", after he presented a set to Queen Charlotte and received a "Potter to the Queen" title in return. "Queens Ware" was immensely popular, and the designation has been used into this century, although the composition of the china has undoubtedly changed.

At first Josiah worked in a small factory in Burslem, but in 1769 he built a new one he called Etruria. It has been operated by his descendants ever since, for over 200 years. In 1940, the Company opened a modern plant at Barlaston because the old one was out of date and was subsiding into old coal mine tunnels in some spots. Today Wedgwood is still a highly respected manufacturer, with an extensive line of ceramic ware. If you have any doubts about its reputation, look at the prices on its products in your local high-class china store.

Josiah's most famous invention was jasper ware. He used a high percentage of barium salts in his "clay" to make a pottery that was strong, easily decorated, and almost translucent. It could be colored throughout, or could be decorated with a layer of colored clay (slip) on the white base. He applied cameo-like designs, formed by pressing his special clay into shallow molds. The decorations are carefully lifted out and placed on the dish by hand before firing. We don't know if Josiah's formula is used today, but modern jasper ware still has delicate figures in contrasting color applied by hand.

The open salts in our collection are not those made during Josiah's lifetime, of course. Since his company stayed in business for over 200 years, they have made more recent ones which can be found. Most of their products are marked, usually with the word WEDGWOOD impressed into the bottom of the piece. Other marks are sometimes impressed into bottom too, identifying the potter, decorator, year made, or pattern.

In studying what we have, we tried to find the differences between the various types of china. We are totally confused. There are more than a dozen different kinds, ranging from earthenware through ironstone and bone china to porcelain, which is the most durable, hardest to make and most expensive. There are so many different combinations of ingredients, which can be fired to so many different degrees of hardness and porosity, that we have abandoned attempts to label exactly which is which. For the sake of this article, we will call something "porcelain" if it is translucent, jasper ware if it has applied decorations in contrasting color, and china if it is anything else.

Between our collection and the books, we have identified seven different shapes of Wedgwood jasper-ware salts. All have white figures on a colored background. As shown in the attached illustrations, these are:

1. Urn shape. We have one in solid powder-blue color dated 1952, and one white china with a cobalt blue slip coating made after 1891.
2. Urn shape with silver rim - shown in Smith 93-3-3
3. Modified urn shape. We have solid powder blue dated 1954.
4. Sloping sides, silver rim - Smith 46-2-3.
5. Sloping sides, tucked in bottom, silver rim - Smith 136-2-1, H&J 1850.
6. Concave sides, tucked in at top and bottom, silver rim - Smith 314-1-3.
7. Straight sides, silver rim - H&J 1871
8. Bulbous sides, not true jasper because it is glazed all over. Ours is grey with white decoration, and has a mark used after 1940. One of the open salt books says it is part of a cigarette lighter, but we have seen the complete lighter and its body has a permanently-installed metal liner. Without the liner it will not hold the lighter, but can be used for cigarettes, matches or even salt.

Besides the jasper ware, Wedgwood made a number of other china salts, and at least one porcelain one. All that we have seen are fully glazed, unlike true jasper ware. The shapes we have identified are as follows (listed by shape number from the illustrations):

1. Urn shape, similar to jasper ware salts. We have two cream-color with applied grape vines, one 2 $\frac{1}{4}$ inches and the other 3 inches in diameter. We also have one white with no applied figures, decorated with blue decals and red hand-painted designs. This also is 3 inches diameter. A fourth is smaller (2"), and is solid powder blue with no decoration. All have marks in the 1891-1923 period.

6. Sloping sides, silver plated rim, white china. Hand painted with red, black and gold vegetation, and a geometric design. No "England" mark, which suggests it dates before 1891.

9. Boat shape with diamond-shape foot. We have two. One is cream color with applied grape vines around the top sides of the bowl and a row of dots around the foot. Its mark suggests it dates before 1891. The other has no applied figures, but is decorated in purple, green and brown with grape vines. It has an impressed mark dating 1909.

10. Bulging sides, sterling rim, the only true porcelain Wedgwood salt we have. Translucent white with an orange, brown, black and gold Willow pattern on the sides. The mark and the rim hallmark date this as 1884-5.

11. White china, blue willow pattern on the sides. Marked "Willow, Wedgwood, Etruria, England", we think it dates about the turn of the century.

12. Round cream-colored dish on three lion feet, embossed with flowers and vines which lack the delicate detail of applied work. Marked "Made in England, Wedgwood Patrician, U.S. Patent Applied For", but no clue to the date.

13. Round luster ware, mottled brown outside and mottled blue inside, gold decorations. Wedgwood made luster ware about 1910-1930, and collectors have escalated its value considerably in recent years.

14. Black basalt, a color originally developed by Josiah himself. We have only seen a picture of it (H&J 1847). The dish shown dates after 1891, since it has an "England" mark.

The marks used by Wedgwood can give a clue to the date of manufacture. A few of the ones they used are shown below the illustrations. The basics are:
Wedgwood impressed into the bottom of the dish - 1759 onwards

Vase and Wedgwood - 1878 onwards

"England" or "Made In England" added to any mark - 1891 onwards

Line and 3 stars added under vase - 1920 onwards

"Wedgwood" in sans serif type - 1929 onwards

Barlaston in the name - 1940 onwards

— serif W - **W**
— sans serif W - **w**

If you are fortunate enough to have an impressed dating code on your salt, the break points are:

1860-1906 - 3 letters, the last is a year code.

1907-1923 - "3" plus 2 letters, the last is a year code.

1924-1931 - "4" plus 2 letters, the last is a year code.

1932-World War II - number, letter, two digits of the year (33 is 1933).

post WW II - The year or the last two digits of the year.

The detail codes for the above can be found in Godden's "Encyclopaedia of British Pottery and Porcelain Marks", our bible on the topic.

There are two other "Wedgwood" marks that may be confused with those of the company founded by Josiah. The first is J. Wedgwood, used in the mid-1800's by John Wedge Wood, obviously trying to capitalize on the reputation of Josiah. The second is "Wedgwood & Co.", used by a pottery in Tunstall from 1860 to the present day. They even had a "Queen's Ivory" line about 1925, to further confuse things. We have not seen any salts with this company's mark to date.

Jasper ware has been made by many companies, since it was and is a popular item. One of the best makers other than Wedgwood was Adams, who apprenticed under Josiah. When he finished his apprenticeship and went into business on his own, the two remained close friends, even though they were competitors. There are three Adams jasper-ware shapes we have identified, all cobalt blue slip coated on white, with applied white decorations.

15. Sloping sides, decoration is coat of arms with word "Guildford" in it.

16. Sloping sides, hallmarked sterling rim, classical figures
(Smith 204-3-1)

17. Bulbous, silver plated rim, classical figures decoration.

Other jasper-ware salts we have seen are lower quality than the ones we have described. This generally shows in the applied figures, which have less detail than the ones on Wedgwood and Adams dishes.

We hope this discussion will help you identify any Wedgwood salts you may be lucky enough to own, and will help you understand them better when you see one. Since our sources are limited, there are undoubtedly more salts than we know about. Maybe some day we could get more comprehensive information, but it would probably take a trip to England to find it.

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References:

"Wedgwood" by John Meredith Graham II and Hensleigh Cecil Wedgwood

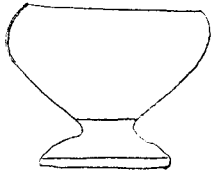
"The Story of Wedgwood", by Alison Kelly

"Wedgwood Counter Point", by Harry M. Buten

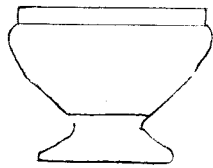
"Open Salts Illustrated", a series of 10 books by Alan and Helen Smith

"5000 Open Salts" by Heacock and Johnson

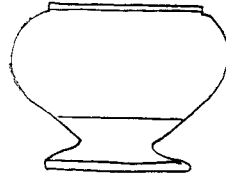
SHAPES OF WEDGWOOD AND ADAMS SALTS



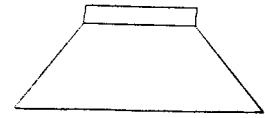
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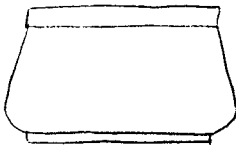
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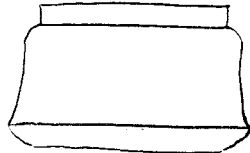
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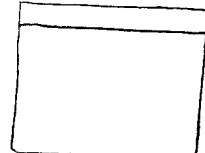
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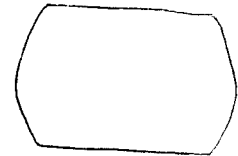
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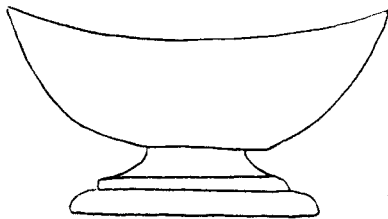
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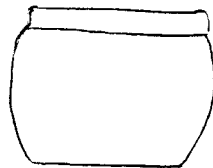
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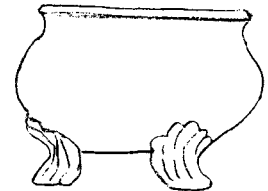
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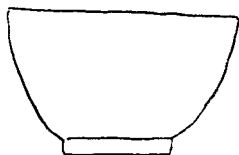
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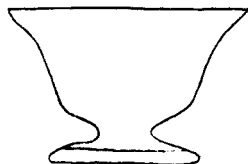
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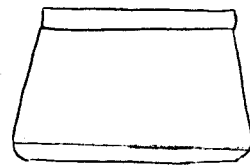
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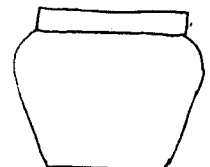
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A FEW OF THE WEDGWOOD TRADEMARKS

WEDGWOOD



WEDGWOOD

MADE IN ENGLAND



WEDGWOOD

WEDGWOOD

