

Coalport CHINA MUSEUM

The Coalport China Museum stands on the site of the former Coalport China Works which occupied this site from 1796 to 1926, producing fine bone china. The Works opened as a Museum in 1976, to preserve the buildings and history of the site.

China manufacture was established at Coalport by a local entrepreneur, John Rose. John Rose began his career as an apprentice at the Caughley Porcelain Manufactory on the opposite bank of the Severn. In 1793 he left Caughley and by 1796 had established his own porcelain manufactory by the side of the canal at

Coalport. By 1799 the new factory at Coalport was flourishing and John Rose was able to purchase his former employer's failing porcelain works at Caughley.



During the 1820s improvements were made to the body of the china and the factory began to acquire a reputation for high quality decoration. A number of highly skilled painters, such as Birbeck, Aston and Kelshall, were employed, in addition to a large workforce of more routine painters, enamellers, and gilders. By the time of his death in 1841, John Rose had built a financially sound and artistically first-rate company, which was one of the leading producers of British porcelain at the time.

The factory continued to prosper under the ownership of William Pugh and William Frederick Rose, who inherited the business after the death of John Rose. The international exhibitions which took place between 1851 and 1872 gave Coalport designers the chance to show their excellence, and provided a spur for technical improvements. By the mid 19th Century the standard of factory decoration had reached a peak. Among an array of talented artists, William Cook specialized in flower painting, John Randall was famous for his bird painting, whilst Robert Abraham produced outstanding cherubs. The factory's output at this period was dominated by the influence of the French Sèvres factory, and in particular the development of vivid Sèvres-style ground colours. The pink Rose-du-Barry colour was perfected by Coalport just in time for display at the Great Exhibition of 1851.

For the next 70 years the Coalport factory saw various highs and lows in its fortunes. After Charles Bruff took over the management of the Works in 1889 the factory experienced a period of renewed vigour. However the decline of the important American market, the economic slump of the early 1920s and the increasing geographical isolation of the factory's location at Coalport all led to heavy financial losses in the 1920s. Charles Bruff was obliged to sell the Works to Cauldon Potteries in 1925. The following year, 1926, the factory at Coalport was closed and production was transferred to Stoke-on-Trent. After several changes of ownership Coalport China became part of the Wedgwood group in 1967, where it continues to flourish to this day.

The vacant factory site at Coalport was used by other industries during the mid 20th Century, but by the 1970s it was virtually derelict. Luckily the significance of the site was recognized and in 1976 it was opened to the public as one of the Ironbridge Gorge Museums.

Bottle ovens

The first things visitors to the Museum notice are the distinctive bottle-shaped chimneys of our two surviving bottle ovens. These were the kilns in which the china was fired. Once a common feature of the Staffordshire Potteries and any area in which ceramics were produced, today very few survive.

Introductory Gallery

The Indian Tree Pattern



The Indian Tree pattern was the most famous pattern used at the Coalport China Works. It was produced in large quantities, particularly in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Many people still own Indian Tree pattern pieces today. The pattern was apparently first introduced at the factory in 1801, but the first known example dates from the 1820s. No-one can be sure where the design came

from. One legend has it that the pattern was originally copied from a piece of silk belonging to a soldier in the Shropshire Light Infantry.

Also on display in the introductory gallery are examples of other popular and much-loved Coalport patterns, including the Batwing pattern and the Broseley Green Dragon pattern.

The Batwing pattern takes its name from the shape of the brightly coloured panels on the china, which look like the outstretched wings of a bat. It was first produced in 1896 and is one of the most popular Coalport designs.

The Broseley Green Dragon pattern was another long-standing Coalport pattern. It was first produced in about 1805. The pattern takes its name from the small town of Broseley, about three miles from Coalport.

Northumberland Vase

The largest piece of Coalport china ever manufactured, which was made for the 1862 International Exhibition in London. It features a vibrant turquoise ground colour and exquisite painting by Robert Abraham and William Cook.

The Caughley Gallery

Cabbage Leaf Mask Head Jug

As well as Coalport china, the Museum houses a nationally important collection of Caughley porcelain. The late Eighteenth Century Caughley Porcelain Manufactory was the fore-runner of the Coalport China Works and was located a couple of miles downstream, on the opposite bank of the River Severn. The Manufactory's most famous product was its distinctively shaped Cabbage Leaf Mask Head jugs. This example is decorated with a print of the nearby Iron Bridge, and was probably made to commemorate the Bridge's completion in 1779.

The Prince of Orange Plate

The coat of arms on this splendid plate are those of the Dutch Prince of Orange, Stadtholder Willem V. The plate was made at the Caughley Porcelain Manufactory, but as with many of the pieces made at the factory, we cannot be entirely certain when it was made or even where it was decorated. We believe the plate was probably made to present to the Dutch Prince when he visited the Ironbridge Gorge in August 1796, and would have been decorated at the Caughley factory.

