



The other Josiah

From humble beginnings to the famous Willow pattern – one of the world's best-loved porcelain designs – Spode's story is a triumph of innovation and ambition, says Willa Latham

Last month we looked at the genius of Josiah Wedgwood, the modest potter who transformed Staffordshire. This month, we look at his contemporary and namesake: Josiah Spode (whose son was also called Josiah). Born just three years after Wedgwood in 1733, Josiah Spode was apprenticed to the same Thomas Whieldon with whom Wedgwood formed a partnership only a few years later.

Spode came from a poor family; his father died young, so Josiah had to climb his way to the top. His marriage to Ellen – the owner of a haberdashery shop – helped, as she provided financial stability while he was learning the trade. In 1776 he bought the small factory from which he started building an empire that is still famous today – I bet many of you have a Spode dish in your cabinet somewhere!

Spode brought his son (also named Josiah) into the business at a young age; they are usually referred to as Spode I and Spode II and, together, they would bring many changes to the industry. We all know, of course, the famous Willow pattern – a rather random jumble of Chinese motifs and architectural elements – but the clever Spode II, who was a marketing genius, made up

a story around it to suggest that a genuine Chinese heritage lay behind this blue-printed, mass-produced pattern.

Spode I had started using a printing press for 'blue-printed' wares in 1784, making it possible to mass-produce beautifully decorated wares using less skilled workers; each engraved copper plate could be used 40,000 times, and oiling those plates and cutting out stencils could be done by cheap child workers. This created a huge market for the beautiful blue-printed pearlware dishes that we all know so well and still love today.

One of Spode II's great innovations was bringing bone china to Staffordshire. Miles Mason and New Hall were already producing 'hybrid hardpaste porcelain' (a strong, slightly greyish porcelain that could be fired at lower temperatures), and an early form of bone china had been around since the Bow factory c1740, however its true potential had never been fully explored. Spode II saw that bone china was beautiful, cheap and an excellent ground for decorations, and in 1800 he refined and defined the recipe and started mass-producing it; today it is recognised as the world standard.



Josiah Spode II (1755–1827) was the most successful china manufacturer of his time.

Bone china begged for colourful decorations, and this is where Henry Daniel came into the picture. Daniel was what we would today call Spode's Art Director; he made the colours, designed the patterns and trained up a workforce of highly skilled painters and gilders. Uniquely, Daniel's department functioned as a factory within a factory; he owned the kilns, materials and contracts with his workers, and he and Spode II were in effect, if not in name, business partners. This shows the respect Daniel commanded; his talent for creating colours and designs was unequalled and there would be no Spode without Daniel. In 1822, Daniel started his own factory and there is a wonderfully detailed handwritten separation agreement of their amicable split; the two men kept doing business with each other, and Daniel's workers got to choose which factory they wanted to work for.

Another important partner was William Copeland. Initially a shop apprentice to the son of Spode II, also called William, Copeland was a travelling salesman and became a trusted business partner. Some say he was allowed to sell tea from his pocket to earn some extra income on the side and he built up a fortune. Copeland's son, who, you guessed it, was also called William, would later buy the entire factory with his father's savings.

Perhaps the most significant driver of change was the dynamic between father and son, Josiahs I and II. Spode I was a softly spoken, mild-mannered man, described by contemporaries as 'amiable and endearing'. He was devoted to his pots; engaged in the creation of recipes, methods and shapes. Spode II couldn't have been more different: he was ambitious, business-minded and did not suffer from modesty. Together they formed a formidable team. Spode I built a strong, highly skilled factory that his son took



CLOCKWISE FROM ABOVE LEFT A pair of small ewers with flowers typical of the Henry Daniel era, c1820; blue-printed pearlware plate with the famous 'Italian' pattern, 1815–1820; shell dish with a bold Imari pattern, c1815.

FACING PAGE A Spode Felspar dessert service with very fine landscape paintings, c1825.

forward; Spode II was the marketing genius who kept bringing the innovations the public needed.

Perhaps Wedgwood was the more revolutionary potter in the 18th century, but what played into Spode's success after 1800 is that, once both the elder Josiahs had died, Wedgwood's sons were aimless and distracted, while Spode's offspring kept going from strength to strength. Josiah II kept innovating at the Staffordshire factory, while his son William ran the London retail, keeping informed about the latest fashions and selling to the London elite. There is a right place and time for everyone, and the three Josiahs flourished in their time, laying the ground for countless Staffordshire potters after them – but more about that later!

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Read Willa's blog gentlerattleofchina.com, follow her @gentlerattleofchina