

**Transcription of a letter from Samuel Wedgwood to his father
Thomas Wedgwood July 1788**

In July 1788 Samuel Wedgwood was living in France and wrote a long loving letter to his father in Staffordshire in which described his life in Paris and a visit he had made to the Sèvres factory.

Samuel was the second son of Thomas Wedgwood; he had grown up on the Etruria estate where his father was partner with Josiah Wedgwood in the production of useful earthenwares. Thomas Wedgwood intended to leave the partnership to develop his own business, he was a relatively wealthy man and in 1788 owned two factories in Burslem the Hill Works and the Churchyard Works.

Thomas Wedgwood died tragically 3 months later, drowned having fallen in the canal walking to his home from the Etruria factory. Samuel joined his brother Ralph in the pottery business, but he too died tragically, at the age of 21 in January 1790.

The letter has been transcribed with the original spelling, punctuation, line length and same pagination as the original. We thank Wedgwood Archivist Lucy Lead for access to the document.

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Paris the 4 July 1788

Dear Father

I rece'd your very agreeable & kind letter, which as you say has been rather long in coming, but knowing the vast occupations you always have, & knowing also there tendency, that of our Welfare, I very easily excuse your not writing me sooner ——— I am very sorry to learn of your having been not well for some time — may not your illness proceed from too much occupation? I am afraid it does; might I advise you it would be to give yourself a few holidays, to take a turn somewhere or other to dissipate yourself, for I am sensible there is everything to fear from your too closely occupying yourself; Aye but Sam, says my dear father, What would become of things if I were not here? This rather puzzles me to answer, for it is certain that nobody in your place could do so well as you do, — however agreeable the fruits of those occupations may be to us, I dare say there is not one of us that would not pass by those pleasures rather than you should procure yourself the least harm in getting them. — Could you not for a little time leave your affairs in the hands of Brother Ralph? I dare say he would put forth all his assiduity to fill ~~the~~ your place to your satisfaction. How happy should I be to give a helping hand to ease you for a moment of your burden. — What pleasure to see a father who has all his life time been occupying himself tenderly for our good, to see him at his ease enjoying himself! I hope we shall yet see the happy day when you will sit in your arm Chair, take your pipe, & see all your children about you studying to please you.——

I perceive by your letter the great alteration you are making in the Hill Works, my prayers are that prosperity may attend you in this as in all your other Works, & that ~~they~~ it may bring along with it contentment, its rare but wish'd for Companion, without which all riches are as nothing ——— It gives me great pleasure to see that proof of Fatherly Goodness in you in the offer of taking me into partnership with you be assured that I shall be assiduous as possible in getting you all the information in my power for which end I have been to Seve with Mr. Hollins & Son of Newcastle who have been here some time; We were so happy as to get a sight of the Works a favor obtained scarcely & never without permission of the Superintendent, this was told me by the porter, now I set my brain to work to get this permission, when this Scheme came into my head, to pretend the greatest ignorance in the Manner of making the different Articles & the greatest astonishment at the beautiful Works I should see, together with an ardent desire I expressed on every proper occasion of seeing the manufacturing part, which answered my wishes, for the Conductor in seeing our great Curiosity, sent expressly to the Superintendent, who happily gave us permission. — The first room we entered into was ornamented with different Gardenpots wherein were plants & trees of different kinds in porcelain which were very Old but extremely curious : In the next, the principle objects w^h strike the Eye are two large Vases ab^t 4 feet without the pedestals, ornamented with Ormoulu & bas relief, one of them is of a fine blue under the glaze, a thing wherein they excel here, the Color being equal to the finest enamel coulor & very solid; there were also some useful articles, such as Compotiers &c &c. On entering the next room I was astonished to see two enormous vases of 7½ feet high without the pedestals (which were at least 3 feet) which surpass everything I have ever seen for their beauty & workmanship, the bottom is of blue under the glaze, the top ornamented with figures in white jasper & the the (sic) whole decorated with ormoulu

enamelled in a most superb manner, the next thing one observes is a large round table formed of different tablettes painted in a most elegant manner in flowers & figures & set in ormoulu, in this room are numbers of Tea sets & coffee sets of different patterns, Vases & other ornaments of w^h some where very beautifull with a ground to the paintings, & gilt in an elegant stile; but what struck my attention most was a color w^h had all the appearance of a metal, being either of a beautifull buff yellow Color, or a greenish or bluish tinge; I made all the enquiries I could to discover how this was brought about,, & of wⁱ it it was composed but all I could learn was that it was an enamel Color like the rest — Here is room for experiments for Brother Ralph, & which will in my opinion be worth his while for it is extremely Curious & at the same time extremely beautifull. — I would have bought some patterns of these things to have sent you, but everything is so extremely dear that I durst not venture, for, a cup and saucer which would have been of no use to you, without gold costs 6 livres or 5/- therefore to have purchased pieces which would have been serviceable to us would have cost considerably. —

The next room is small & contains a few rarities in painting in tablettes set in Frames one of which cost the painter two years labour the price only 200 guin^{es} it is about 1¾ foot long & 1¼ broad, there are also several other that merit attention: — In the next room are the figures in white Jasper extremely beautifull & passing dear, but to see the immense labour there must have been in making these things is astonishing as the Clay of which they are made works as we say in Staffordshire like short cake, notwithstanding this there are vases & other flowers cut our as fine & as delicate as nature itself, & the Least flower is cut out with a neatness of w^h you have no Idea; of these figures there are a great Quantity, which serve only to put under Glasses to ornament Chimney pieces &c. — the body is in nothing superior to ours if so good, it is not so much fired as ours for fear of spoiling the fine Work, which would not have that sharpness if more fired, but then it is necessary to keep the figures under Glasses for fear of Dust ————— in the next room w^h is the largest are the useful articles, the Vases, & other Ornaments here the eye is lost amongst so many beauties, observe, these beauties do not lye with form on the contrary the forms are in general bad, but in the fineness of the body, paintings, gildings, & other ornaments, which are extremely fine; it will suffice to give you the price of the painting on one plate viz 2 louis or £12, to judge of the Value & beauty of these things. Amongst the colors was a most beautifull sky blue, the finest & brightest Color I ever saw. ————— Now we went to see the formation of all there fine things, which I expected to find something extra. the first room we entered into was where they squeeze plates where we found every thing in great Order, the Moulds numbered &c. they squeeze a plate before us at which I could scarcely forebear laughing they first made the bats ab^t ½inch thick & then laid it on the Mould after having prepared it a little with the Hand without Water laid another concave mould upon it, then laid it in a press & squeeze it when it came from the press the impression was pretty well taken but the thickness of the plate was stile ¼inch w^h is turned off in the following manner, the plate when thoroughly dry is put upon a kind of mould of softish clay fastened to a wheel w^h turns horizontally like our Throwing Wheels, where it is turned to its proper thickness. I believe we can make at least 2doz plates while they are making one; then to form the outside of the large things such as Ice

Pails &c. &c. when come out of the Moulds & dryed they cut and scape them 'till they are of a proper form and thickness, so that each of the things is like a separate model, then to put on a handle they first draw the form of it on the piece they stick it on & afterwards model & or rather grave it to their taste; but what I found droll was to see them stick a Knob on a teapot cover, after the cover is moulded & dried (for there is nothing thrown here on acco^t of the shortness of the clay) they turn the outside to their taste then turn a little hole in which they place the Knob. — What is very expensive is their manner of propping everything in the Oven with the same Clay as the Ware is made of its falling so that to prop each plate there is three times as much Clay consumed as is contained in the plate here every handle has its prop every spout its upholder. The Clay diminishes 1/7 part. We went next to see the Oven of the form of which I can say nothing as I saw but one & that was lighted, they fire the biscuit at the bottom & the Glazed Ware at the top in the same ovens.— The next thing we saw was the Glazing which is the same as ours — We went next to see the painting w^h is the principal thing in the Manufactory. We saw many curious & valuable paintings particularly a plate w^h will cost £20. & w^h they give 6 every year to the King,— A piece of Ware is sometimes fired 5 or 6 times before the painting is finished which occasions an immense risk — The colors did not smell of Oil at all.— The gold burnt on when laid on is of an umber color it is all the most pure Gold of 24 Carratts — The enamelling Kiln w^h is on the plan of M^r Dawsons except that instead of Iron the boxes are made of a kind of Sragger Clay, w^h I think a very good invention. The Kiln is very large & the boxes must pass 3 or 4, graduations before they arrive at the greatest Heat, & the same in coming out.— the Ware is placed or rather hung in the boxes on pins of Iron, by means of little holes made in the feet &c. to prevent them sticking to one another or the boxes; the last thing we saw was the Gold burnishing, which is done by women the only ones in the Manufactory & is nothing extraordinary, & then we turned into the grand show Room & having satisfied our Guide, returned to our Inn. — I forgot to observe that there is no such thing as a regular Service to be seen rather there, at Mr Sykes nor at any other Warehouse in Town except in the English stile which do not sell well; here every one buys by odd articles what pleases his fancy or convenience, so that I shall only be able to gratify my brother's desire in chalking out the articles as they are placed chez nous; I shall only be able from time to time to pick up some few sketches of such things as are most in use, of w^h I may pack up & send some with the Medallions which could not possibly be got ready for Mess. Hollins's departure I am afraid in all my long description of the Works at Seve you will not be able to pick up anything useful, as we should be much preferable to them in Workmanship if our articles would pay to have as good Artists Workmen. —————

I am very happy to hear of your having succeeded in your purchase of the Jasper Stone I am very much obliged to my Es^t Father for his kind enquiries after my Welfare, & have the pleasure to inform him that soup Meagre, Bouille, ragout or fricassee have so well agreed with me that I question greatly whether he would know his son if he were to see him — I have begun to learn Italian which I now write & understand in a good measure & speak a little — I began to learn myself but found I could not go thru with it without a Master, so I took one by whose means in 2 or 3 Mo. time shall be perfect enough. The French I speak tolerably well, & hope to be able to make some proficiency in the German before this year is out; be assured I shall do all my power & time permit.

Your kind demand of how much Money is wanted for Cloaths, pocket Money &c makes me remember an Instance of that meanness of Disposition which you know to characterise M^r Wedgwood, viz, that of refusing to give me any thing for the time I worked in the Counting house, which I counted upon to defray all the little expenses I should have occasion to make here, but I now find myself obliged to all upon you for every farthing I may have occasion for not that I think you will grudge me anything, but that I should have found it much more comfortable to have had a little purse of my own to have eased you of many little expenses one is obliged to run into here. I owe at present a considerable sum to Mess. H & Co. (abo^t £50, besides the kind remittance in Earthen Ware) for Cloaths, of w^h every one here is obliged to have a considerable stock, (as a man is not esteemed here for his Merit so much for the goodness of his Coat) & of w^h I found myself very wanting in comparison of the rest, Linnen also of w^h I had not a sufficient quantity, My Voyage from Nancy w^h cost near ten pounds, Washing which we are obliged to pay here, which is excessive dear & very bad, & diverse other expenses. ———

I am very sorry to see by your letter that my Sister Charlotte has not been well for some but am happy to learn of her getting better as well as of the Welfare of my Brothers & Sister Betsy & all friends, to all of whom I beg you will remember my Love. I am happy to see you have got rid of my old friends, as you call her, M^{rs} Powell. —

Affairs are very bad here on acco^t of the dispute betwixt the Government and the different Provinces; trade is very slack, money very scarce, and am afraid many bankruptcies will take place in a little time if matters do not go on better. — Am astonished to see the great number of Bankruptcies which have taken place in England within a little time, as it cannot be owing to the treaty of Commerce taking the Money out of England, on the Contrary. — I hope my Sister has receive'd my letters w^h I wrote her a little while ago. If anything occurs I shall write next to my Brother R. in French, in the meantime, shall be extremely happy to receive your answer as quick as possible, as there is nothing gives me greater pleasure than to hear of your increasing Welfare, which thank Heaven may still increase & preserve is the Prayer of

Your most dutifull & affectionate Son
S Wedgwood

Sam: Wedgwood

4 July 1788

To T. W.