‘Industry in Life, Art in Industry’

The Life of James Edwards of Dalehall 1805 - 1867

Note: This is slightly longer version of a talk given at the 17th National Convention of The White Ironstone China Association, York, Pennsylvania, 2011. Some of the quotations have been glossed for ease of oral presentation but are substantially accurate. There are no source notes in the text but a full bibliography is appended.

If there are any serious errors in this text, or you have additional information then please contact me through the James Edwards web site at http://www.james-edwards.info.

Sue Mussell

You may be familiar with Llewellyn Jewitt's description of James Edwards as

"*entirely a self-made man, and one of those bright examples of indomitable perseverance, unflinching rectitude, steadiness of purpose, and genuine benevolence, which crop up every now and then among our most successful manufacturers"* -

An opinion echoed in all the obituaries.

You may also recall that Geoffrey Godden describes Jewitt's account as "*very flowery"* – which seems to suggest, perhaps, a 'raised eyebrow'?

The question is: What prompted these eulogies and the sense that they go beyond mere formality?
Why – in an industry and at a time that produced a number of remarkable men, did James Edwards' contempories seem to consider him as exceptional?

The quality of his work speaks for itself.
But what about the **quality** of his life –
the **quality** of his character?

But first – sadly – I'm afraid there are many things that we don't know about. For instance – we have no idea what James Edwards looked like - there are no descriptions – and though he lived into the age of cartes-de-visite and albums – there is no photograph. And though men in his position often had their portraits painted, there is no portrait has been traced

But – it's worse than that:
Because although we know he was born in Newcastle-under-Lyme in 1805, to date, James Edwards' baptismal records have not been located in the local parish registers, so we don't know for certain who is parents were. The fact that there are so many Edwards's living and working in the Potteries at that time doesn't help. The 1841 census records tell us that James' brother, Thomas, was born in 1811 and there was a

brother, William, and a sister Eliza, but again, no records have been located to help us determine their age.

We *do* know that his father was a pottery manager – a respected and efficient one – so James was from a family of potters in a world of potters.

He would have started work probably by the age 9 or 10 at the latest, and given his father's background he would be familiar with the various stages and materials of production before becoming formally apprenticed as a "thrower" at around 14 or a little before.

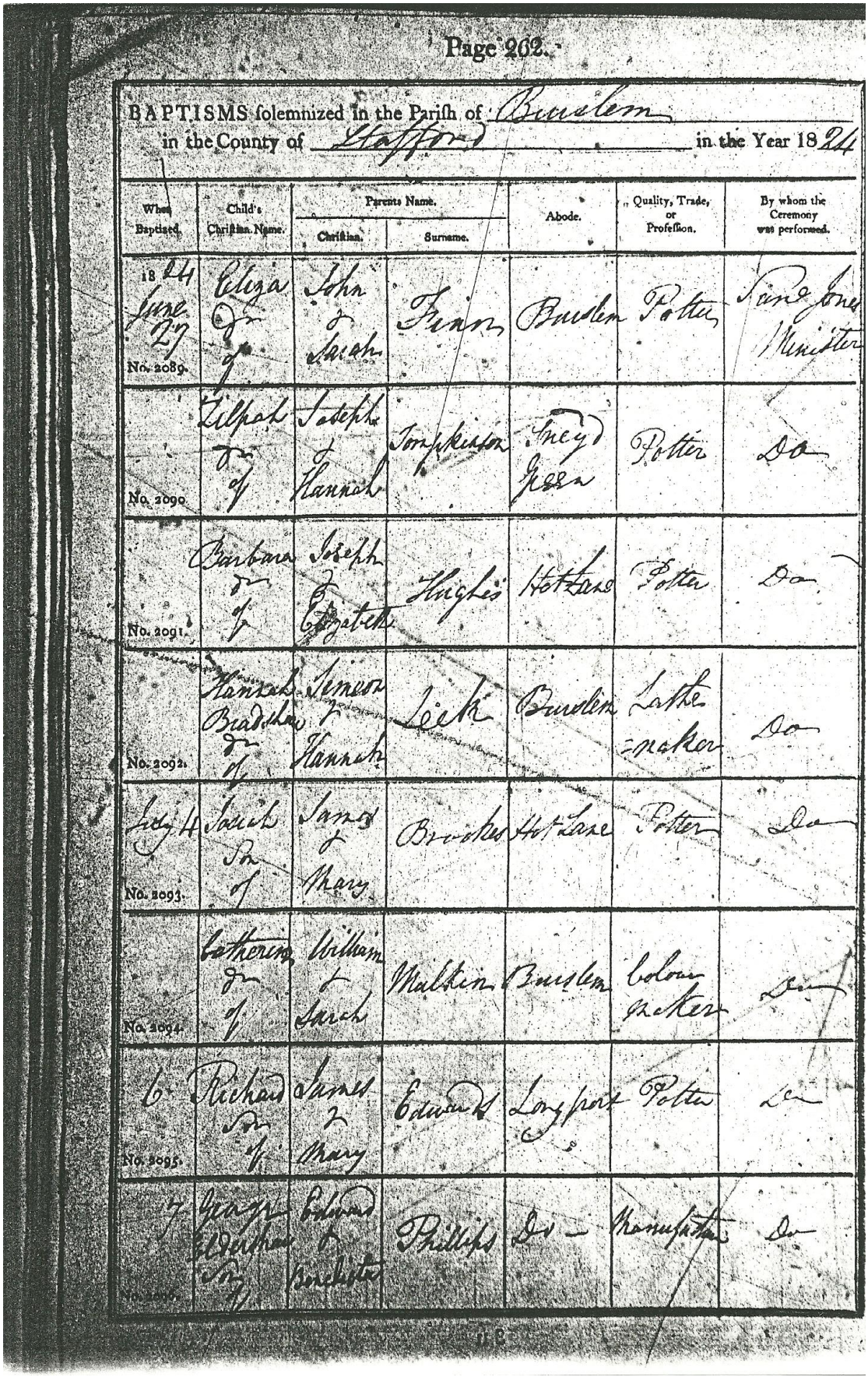
Whether he served his apprentiship under John or Spencer Rogers isn't clear, but certainly his first known position was as an operative thrower with Spencer Rogers at Dale Hall.
(I wonder – did he even then dream of one day owning the place? – I suspect he may well have done)

But that he had acquired more than just the skill of throwing is shown by his very soon becoming a manager for Enoch Wood at Fountain Place – and then at John Alcock's at Cobridge – before joining George and Edward Phillips at Longport in about 1824.

This remarkably swift progress shows ambition as well as ability –
Ambitious men move on – and they tend to start early –
Old Josiah Wedgwood had worked his way to a partnership before he was 24.
It looks as if James Edwards was a manager for a major pottery before he was 20.

A rather different indication of his being a young man in a hurry is the birth of his son Richard in 1824 – his baptismal entry is the first document we have: A son *Richard to James and his wife Mary* – He was no more than 18 or 19 – **very** young to marry – perhaps a "shotgun" was involved? - we can't tell.

As yet I have found very little on Mary's background – 4 or 5 years older than James – born in 1801 – She was to outlive him by seven years, dying in 1874



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BAPTISMS solemnized in the Parish of Burslem in the County of Stafford in the Year 1824

When Baptized.	Child's Christian Name.	Parents Name. Christian.	Surname.	Abode.	Quality, Trade, or Profession.	By whom the Ceremony was performed.
1824 June 29 No. 2089.	Eliza Dr of	John & Sarah	Evans	Burslem	Potter	Saml Jones Minister
No. 2090.	Lilpah Dr of	Joseph & Hannah	Tomkinson	Sneyd Green	Potter	Do
No. 2091.	Barbara Dr of	Joseph & Elizabeth	Hughes	Hot Lane	Potter	Do
No. 2092.	Hannah Bradshaw Dr of	Jeneor & Hannah	Leek	Burslem	Lathe maker	Do
July 4 No. 2093.	Sarah Dr of	James & Mary	Brookes	Hot Lane	Potter	Do
No. 2094.	Catherine Dr of	William & Sarah	Malkin	Burslem	Colour Grinder	Do
6 No. 2095.	Richard Son of	James & Mary	Edwards	Longport	Potter	Do
7 No. 2096.	George Eldridge Son of	Edward & Winchester	Phillips	Do	Manufacturer	Do

Notice that the very next entry in the register is a son to Edward Phillips, Pottery Manufacturer, Longport!

His years with Phillips were crucially formative –
As an 1867 obituarist notes:

> "*Here he spent about 10 years of his early business life, testing and improving upon the hints which no doubt he received from his father – and gaining that experience which was to qualify him for becoming one of the best practical potters and one of the most successful manufacturers".*

Brothers George and Edward Phillips set up business in the New Bridge Pottery in 1822 – and while Edward was connected by marriage to the Wedgwoods, the brothers themselves had no pottery background and it looks as if they may have soon come to rely on the skills and enterprise that James brought with him from his so far short but intense career.

Louise Richardson, in an article on Phillips suggests that his arrival there may account for the sudden dramatic improvement in the quality of their output. He must have carried out a lot of his work on ironstone development here before leaving Phillips in about 1834.

What is striking about James Edward's employers – Enoch Wood, John Alcock, John and Spencer Rogers, and George Phillips – is that they were all themselves, in their own ways, exceptional men; exceptional men who must have recognised something exceptional in James Edwards to give him such responsibility at such an early age.

And they have certain characteristics:
Enoch Wood especially was a man of great invention and industry – and a benefactor of the community – well known for his support of the Burslem Methodist Sunday School, for example. John Rogers, too, was a great philanthropist – especially in his supporting the North Staffordshire Infirmary.
They all produced ware of the highest quality.
And all of them incidentally, came to specialise to a considerable extent in supplying the American market.

That they were all men of integrity as well as of industry and philanthropy, must have helped shape the young James Edwards's character.

But another very significant feature is the quality of their establishments:
When Samuel Scriven made his report on the Potteries in 1841/42, he ranked Alcock's, Phillips' , Rogers' and Wood's manufactories all in his first class – which included less than 20% of the 128 he inspected. This is important because the quality of the structure and layout of a pottery and the efficiency of the processes carried out in it had *social* implications above and beyond the quality of the output –

We'll come back to this point in a moment because it is central to our theme.

Leaving George Phillips after 10 years to go into partnership with John Maddock would have been a step up in responsibility and status – but it seems to have involved a compromise on the class of premises. Certainly Maddock's factory at Newcastle Street, Burslem, was graded second class by Mr. Scriven.

While with Maddock, in 1836 – typically, a difficult year with fluctuations in trade and a number of strikes in the area – James Edwards became the father of a daughter, Maria . She would grow up to marry into the local colliery owning and Iron-master family, the Williamsons, and sadly, to be outlived by her father.

Apart from Richard and Maria, James Edwards had no other children who reached adulthood – but there were to be ten grandchildren.

The Edwards-Maddock partnership was dissolved in September 1838, Maddock going on to join with Joshua Seddon and to continue producing good quality work. Like James Edwards he later became active in public affairs and a campaigner for social reforms. (They may have had religious differences).

Then early in 1839, James joined his younger brother, Thomas, as partner, first at the Kiln Croft Works, Burslem, and later at Sylvester Street. This appears to have been a smaller establishment than he was used to running, and another in the Grade 2 class on Mr. Scriven's list. But as an enterprise it was high successful.

The Edwards brothers' partnership was dissolved on April the first, 1842.
It isn't clear why –
There *was* a depression in the trade at that time – one of the worst ever – as we shall see.
Nothing suggests a fraternal falling out.
But part they did – Thomas went on to run the Swan Bank and subsequently the Waterloo Pottery. But like so many in that blighted decade, he went Bankrupt in 1848, and like so many more living among the pot kilns, he died of consumption in 1855. He was only 44.

I must apologise now for what may seem like a digression . But before we come to Dalehall, I think to properly appreciate the significance of what James Edwards achieved there – and what motivated and informed his interests and activities in his mature years – we need here to briefly remind ourselves of some of the conditions he would have observed and experienced up to this point in 1842.

First – the deplorable state of education in the Potteries – and here we have the direct testimony of two of James and Thomas's own employees at Sylvester Street – collected and recorded by Mr. Scriven:
Charles Baskerfield worked there as his older brother's mould runner –
He was 12 – He'd 5 months of schooling before he started work:

> "*I cannot read or write. Never went to Sunday School – I have 4 half brothers and 2 of my own sisters .....my 4 brothers nor sisters can neither read or write – nor father – nor mother – I come to work in the morning at half past six – I have stopped to work here all night –"*

His brother, James 25: "*None of us can read or write- I go now and then to Chapel – none of the rest do".*

Mr. Scriven said: "*I almost tremble when I contemplate the fearful deficiency of knowledge ... throughout the district – "*

Many factors contributed to this, but we should note: most children had started work by 7 or 8 years old – rather as in some third world countries today their household economy depended on it –
so that even if children *were* sent to school, they weren't there long.

And the nature of the available schools:
The quality of some of the privately run day-schools can be judged by the experience of an inspector sent from Manchester to investigate the state of schooling in the late 1830's who met the schoolmaster:
"*Issuing from his school at the head of all his scholars – off to* ***see a fight*** *in the neighbourhood".*
Another teacher, asked if he taught 'morals' replied: "*That question does not belong to my school, Sir – it belongs to the girls' school."*

The Church and Chapel run *National* and *British* schools tended to be better regulated, but they both used a monitorial system – where the bigger children taught the younger the lessons they had themselves learnt – so with children leaving school to start work aged 7 or 8, these senior 'teachers' might be 6 or 7 years old.
And they used a catechismal system of learning – memorising and chanting set lists of questions and their answers. Learnt by rote, the inspectors found that if they jumbled the sequence of the questions they got some 'interesting' answers:
Such as – that the world and everything in it was made by – 'Queen Victoria';
or asking, "W*hat are the just rewards of a Christian life?"* being confidently answered – "A*ll the sinful lusts of the flesh".*

The inadequacy of weekday education throws into relief the importance of the **Sunday Schools,** as these could be attended by pupils of any age, including adults. and on a day on which there was no work to go to. Even if they were often poorly run, they were for most of the poorer children their one chance to get at least the rudiments of literacy.

There **were** evening schools, but given the children's hours of work and its nature, they were in no fit state to use them.

Now, this problem had a direct connection with the manner in which the pot banks were laid out and run. The class 2 and 3 premises – more than 80% - described as being at this time "*rambling, ramshackle conglomerations of buildings – as if a stampede of old cottages had been arrested in their march"* and with their "*floors thick with waste clay"* made supervision difficult if not impossible. Under these conditions, the men, working a piece-rate system, regulated their own rate of work – as they felt inclined. The '*Old Potter'*, Charles Shaw, recalled 50 years later – "*they lived like children, without any calculating forecast of their work or its results –"*

So, when paid on Saturday they got drunk, stayed drunk through Sunday, **and** what they called St. Monday – **and** sometimes St. Tuesday, too – thinking they could catch up their quota at work later in the week.

This had terrible consequences for the children employed in the potteries – typically working for their parents or other relatives who were the piece-rate employees – like young Charles Baskerfield mould-running for his older brother at the Edwards Brothers Sylvester Street works.

Catching up six days quota in four or five days meant children might have to work from 4 or 5 in the morning until 9 or 10 at night – even all night. With no regulation of hours there was no possibility of these children being available for education. And sad to relate, the pottery owners had successfully lobbied to be exempted from the factory legislation which had begun to introduce some modest limitations on children's hours in cotton mills, for example.

With this self-perpetuating cycle of ignorance and exploitation, Potteries' culture – the social landscape – was felt to be in a chronic state of moral crisis. Drink, fighting and prostitution were regarded as its principal features.

A letter to the London '*Times*' in 1859 said, in the Potteries all the men were "*drunk before breakfast"* and on Sundays, the women "*dressed like rope-dancers"*. Burslem is not a big place, but the 1851 Directory shows at least 110 pubs and beerhouses – and the court records show no shortage of illicit stills. Fighting ran

close second as entertainment - Fighting in the home, in the street, or - for the more refined - some pubs reserved special rooms for their customers to fight in. Men fought men, women fought women, women fought men. Men even fought dogs - The journalist James Greenwood reported seeing in Hanley a very bloody contest between what he described as:

> "*a grizzled dwarf with tremendous hands and feet, kneeling on the floor stripped to the waist – and a ferocious battle-scarred fighting dog"*

(The dwarf won by the way – round II – technical knockout!)

A sobering thought:
Some of your delicate pieces of china may have been made by hands that the night before were fists knocking seven-bells out of someone on the street corner in Longton.

You might say in these respects the Potteries were the 'Wild West' of Industrial Britain. Earlier in the century it had been pointed out in Parliament that there was *then* only one magistrate covering the district. Getting a warrant and appearing in court might take a constable 20 or 30 miles of travel. The place had been a law unto itself and was slow to adapt to Victorian standards of law and order.

Set against this background, the regularly recurring periods of famine and the frequent slumps in trade, often aggravated by the volatile industrial relations in the surrounding coal mines – and a pit strike could mean no coal for the kilns – all this made a dangerous recipe for unrest. Which brings us back to 1842.

Mentioning famine in this context – (and it's hard not to be struck by the image of hungry pottery workers spending their days making empty dinner plates - it's the British sense of irony – it has historical roots) - we should notice here that James Edwards played an active role at this time in the movement to repeal the Corn Laws.

These were laws that protected the interests of the landed classes by restricting imports of foreign grain – thereby keeping the domestic price artificially high – so

high – especially in periods of crop failure – that bread was so expensive the poor were often on the verge of starvation.

Of course there was an element of self-interest on the part of those manufacturers who campaigned for cheaper bread – it might reduce demands for increased wages – and the foreign exporters of grain might use their profits to import British products. So mixed motives, perhaps. But it was recalled a quarter of a century later, how James Edwards had been active in the Potteries Anti-Corn Law 'agitation'. And, though he mellowed somewhat in later years, politically he remained a Liberal all his life.

But repeal of the Corn Laws was in the future, and when it did come it didn't end famines or trade recessions.

In 1842 all these factors came to head, and the Potteries along with other industrial areas , boiled over. The worst month was August; mobs marched through the towns, burning down the houses of public officials, ransacking, looting.

A reporter witnessing the burning of one house wrote:

> "*The scene baffles all description – the blazing of a large bonfire at the back of the house – the house on fire at the rear – drunken men staggering away from the spot – and drunken women rolling about or being piloted away – one in a wheelbarrow –"*

At the house of the Police Chief – to the reporter's horror - a man cutting off the head of the family cat "*presented himself at a window with the bleeding trophies of his valour".*

"For plunder the women were the worst" says another report –

At Fenton they burned down the magistrate's house – while, says another paper, "*the women cheer on the men – and take part in all the riots".*

(Even if they didn't have equal rights, it seems the women had *equal* rio*t***s)**

A column of rioters said to be 2 miles long marched on Burslem and set about wrecking buildings; Dragoons came from Newcastle – the Riot Act was read – soldiers fired on the crowd – people were killed – the crowd fled.

Our friend 'The *Old Potter*' recalled meeting "*a little cobbler, the crown of his tall hat cut right off .*" Ducking beneath the swing of a sabre to save his neck, he lost the top of his hat

Resentment seethed.

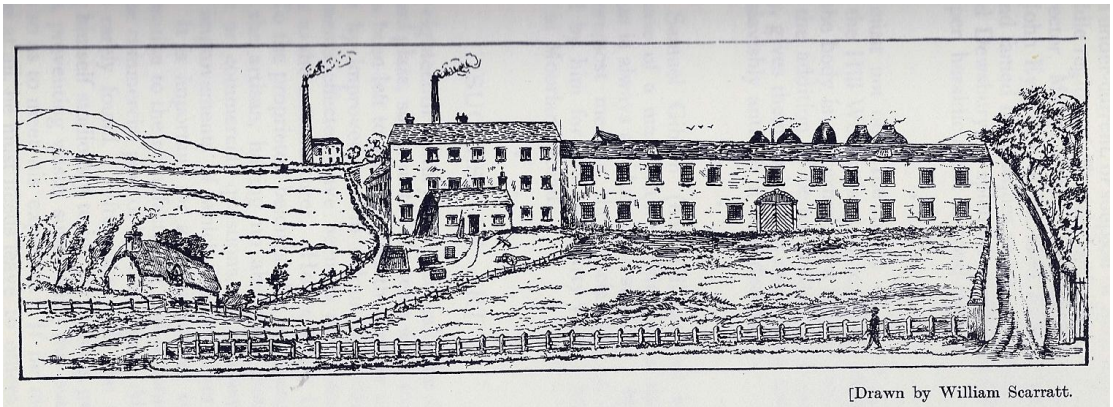
Now I've dwelt on all this because it was in this very troubled and uncertain year of 1842 that James Edwards decided to risk everything by buying the Dale Hall Pottery from his first employer, Spencer Rogers.

It's not as if the writing hadn't been on the wall. At the very beginning of the year the crisis in the Pottery Industry was clearly set out in the *Morning Chronicle* . As part of a long catalogue of catastrophe it declared:
"*That for the last several years the trade has been gradually declining and is now in a state of unexampled depression"*
"That selling prices of these manufactures have been gradually reduced. Until they have become generally unprofitable – and in many cases ruinous"
"That many manufacturers are sinking their capital, and losing the means of giving employment to their workpeople"
"That the exports of our manufacturers, so far from showing a state of prosperity, on the contrary show the embarrassment and difficulties of the trade – (they) cannot sell at home, therefore are obliged to speculate abroad, or give up their concerns"

That was in January. Between then and the Summer riots, as the situation worsened, James ended his partnership with Thomas and surely staked everything in the purchase of Dalehall.

In retrospect it appears the act of an astute businessman. With potteries going out of business all around and no doubt bargains to be had, perhaps here was a unique

opportunity to achieve a long held dream to own the Pottery he had started out in. But at the time it must have seemed to many – perhaps including Thomas – an act of recklessness.



[Drawn by William Scarratt.

DALEHALL.—Mr. Spencer Rogers' Manufactory, 1840; also Mr. James Edwards' Manufactory, 1850.

Certainly it suggests supreme self-confidence – and perhaps the ability to inspire confidence in someone with the means to back him in a bet against the odds. Perhaps it was a mid-century equivalent of a 'mid-life crisis' – he was after all, 36 – and asthmatic. Time running out?

Perhaps experience had given him confidence that he could rely on the American Market?

The *Morning Chronicle* had said manufacturers would be "*obliged to speculate abroad or give up their concerns"* But at that very time Mr. Scriven was writing that:

> *"The monied and commercial interests of America, a country on which the welfare of this district so much depends, has been such as to create fearful anticipations and an extraordinary depression of the trade, by which thousands have been thrown out of employ".*

All things considered – it was a Bold Stroke.

He immediately set about enlarging and extending – in 18 years he increased the premises three-fold.

At every point in the production process he installed the latest machinery: steam jiggers – lathes – jollies – throwing wheels; patent pressing machines, patent stoves

and pug-mills – a flint mill. One result was a six fold increase in output – and an output responsive to the needs of his market. His contemporaries recognised his key ability as being that of "(comprehending*) what was required by his customers, and seeing by what methods he could most [*efficiently*]meet their [*demands]"

And of course, his input was not only organisational . As *you* know, in the production of ornamental ironstone china many of the bodies and shapes were of his own invention and design.

But, what *I* want to stress are the *social* consequences of these improvements:
In a virtuous cycle improved production both *required* and *produced* an improved workforce.

Apart from the ramshackle layout of the class 2 and 3 pot works one element that made their effective economic management difficult was the absence of machinery. A stark contrast, for instance, with the calculation of hours and output in the cotton mills.

The introduction of steam especially tended to introduce its own regulation of the rate of output that disciplined the wayward inclinations of the piece-workers.

In "*Anna of the Five Towns"*, one of the famous Potteries novels by Arnold Bennett – (born incidentally the year James Edwards died and educated in Enoch Wood's Burslem Sunday School) – Pottery owner, Henry Myners, his works transformed by the inventions of an unnamed "*dead genius whose brain has reconstituted a whole industry" – (*in many respects not a bad description of James Edwards) -
Mr. Myners, we are told,
"*devoted all his ingenuity to prevent that wastage which was at once the easiest to overlook and most difficult to detect – the wastage of labour".*

The introduction of production line discipline tended to have a wider effect on the behaviour of the workforce. The experience of the fictional Mr Myners no doubt echoed that of James Edwards at Dalehall:

"*No pain s were spared"* writes Bennett " *to keep all departments in full and regular activity, and owing to his judicious firmness the Feast of St. Monday, that canker eternally eating at the root …. of prosperity ….was* ***less*** *religiously observed on his bank than perhaps anywhere else in Bursley". (*'Bursley' being Bennett's fictionalized Burslem**).** And as we have seen, St. Mondayism was a "canker" at the root of more than just prosperity.

I do not think that from the perspective of James Edward's social concerns this was merely an incidental benefit. Everything speaks to his having a dual mission: to perfect his products and to improve the conditions of his people – especially the children.

Let's just glance at the physical and educational implications for them. One obituary noted of James Edwards:

> "*He had an eye to the physical well-being of the people in his employ (*and was) *one of the first to introduce the mechanical appliances which relieve the operatives – and especially the youthful portion of them – from much of the labour that was fast wearing them down"*

Take for example the jiggers and mould-runners described by Mr. Scriven:

Working 12 hours a day – much more on a 'St. Monday week' – they carried ware to the hot-house, and the moulds back – from temperatures of 130 degrees (Scriven had two thermometers burst) out into temperatures below freezing.

Scriven saw "*boys running to and fro' on errands without stockings, shoes or jackets – bathed in sweat – out into the cold"*

Diligent observer and conscientious bureaucrat that he was, Scriven calculated that such boys might carry 3,840 lbs of burden over a distance of 7 miles 1,120 yards – per day. He noted many died of bronchial infections.

Observing that the manufacturers "*seemed powerless to prevent these phenomena*" he expressed in powerful language a conviction that "*should a remedy be suggested, the children would have reason to nail the day of their emancipation from toil* ***little removed from slavery"***

What James Edwards did was to rationalize the layout – to cluster operations in single buildings – and to pipe the steam that turned the machinery to heat all the rooms to one uniform temperature. And by reducing St. Mondayism, save the children from overlong hours.

These physical improvements also meant improvements in the prospects for education. The potential for this was already apparent from Scriven's research. Joseph Wilkerson, aged 11, working in Grade 2 premises for James Edwards's former partner, John Maddock, told him:

> "*I would rather work 10 hours a day than 15 – I should go to school then – and have a bit of time for play"*

Whereas , at James Edward's former employer, Alcock's Grade 1 works (singled out by Scriven for excellence) a high proportion of the children had schooling **and** seemed content in their work.

But James Edwards also took a much more direct involvement in education. Throughout much of the nineteenth century the issue of the education of poor children was contested on sectarian grounds – the established church vs. the non-conformist chapels. Suspicious of each other, each had their own schools. But despite being a member of the Church of England, James Edwards took a non-sectarian approach which enabled him eventually to support all the schools in the district – financially and in other ways.

However – the prospect of universal primary education for poorer children wasn't to be realised in James Edwards' lifetime. In the meantime, the best hope for rudimentary learning for *working* children remained with the Sunday Schools.

The '*Old Potter',* Charles Shaw, looking back on the importance of the Sunday Schools for the lives of what he called "the little white slaves" in the Potteries, said:

> "*To speak of the benefit it has been to this nation would be a joy, and all I could say would fail to tell the measure of its beneficence and inspiration to the children of the poor in these days"*

(I don't know if Mr. Godden would want to call that tribute "flowery"?)

In answer to any suspicion that James Edwards's interest might have been just the token 'noblesse oblige' of a wealthy employer, his involvement with the Sunday Schools could scarcely have been more 'hands on': He became a School Superintendant!

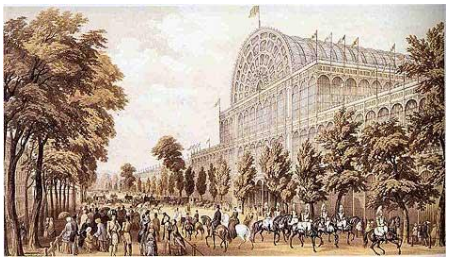
His support for evening and further education, too, continued throughout his life – Speaking in 1859 at the annual dinner of the Friends and Supporters of the Newcastle School of Art, he talked of his support for all the Schools of Art in the District, and stressed their potential importance for *both* local industry *and* the personal development of the pupils and students. He said "*(They) ought not be regarded as established for the benefit of a few, but for the* ***whole*** *population"* . He was disappointed they were not generating enough local financial support and "*recommended that the working classes of the Town should make subscriptions among themselves for the benefit of the school"*

And he expressed the view, radical for its time, that he "*hoped the day was not far distant when the government would pay the Masters of the Schools of Art".*

His concern was not restricted to the welfare of the young. *Government* employees had long received pensions, and those in the 'professions' or similar were accustomed to taking out annuities for old age – but apart from scant subscriptions to unreliable benefit societies there was no provision for ordinary workers. The Norwich Union Insurance Company lays claim to one of the earliest occupational pension schemes – that was in the 1880's. It was in 1852 or 53 that James Edwards began paying a weekly allowance to his superannuated employees.

In 1847, his only son, Richard married Eliza Reay. Their first two sons, James and Joseph, were born in quick succession shortly after.

Then in 1851, the year of their exhibition success in London and New York, Richard was made a full partner in the firm.



Of course, by now success had made James Edwards a very wealthy man. He'd come a long way from the boy apprentice at the throwing wheel.

In 1854, his daughter, Maria, married Robert Williamson of the local coal and iron dynasty. And James Edwards had reason to feel he was founding a dynasty himself – two granddaughters, Maria Louisa Edwards and Annie Mary Williamson were followed in 1856 by another grandson, Robert Edwards.

Other family members were involved in the business – James Edwards's cousin, John Edwards, based in Liverpool, and in New York, James'George Reay – a relative of Eliza Edwards.

A dynasty requires a 'family seat'. In 1857 he left Brampton Tree House in Newcastle and built and furnished for himself and the family, a mansion, May Place, in Wolstanton, not far from "Watlands", Spencer Rogers's, fine house. Set in 11 ½ acres of parkland, with lodges and cottages in the grounds – with pictures on the walls and books on the shelves – 'May Place' had all the trappings of a country gentleman's residence. A place – you might think – for an ageing man who had achieved all this by a lifetime of effort to at last relax in?

But that would not suit this life of "untiring industry". In November 1857, he was sworn in as a Justice of the Peace – a Magistrate for the County.

Presiding over the never-ending and dispiriting round of court sessions it was noted "*he discharged his duties with the same assiduity and business like tact he had brought to bear in the conduct of his own affairs"*

The accounts of these court hearings provide a fascinating – appalling – though often humorous – picture of life in the Potteries in the middle of the nineteenth century – They are also an opportunity to see James Edwards in action

Amongst scores of diverting cases: Like that of James Chadwick, who, charged with a violent assault on Jane Brown claimed that it was not an assault – because Mrs

Brown had agreed to fight him. Or Charles Hughes – who, charged with great brutality to his wife pleaded in mitigation that prior to the offence it had been quite some weeks since he'd last beaten her. Or Ann Nixon, charged with assaulting one Elizabeth Windsor – (where have I heard that name before?) who – rather mysteriously had come home on Sunday evening – from a 'place of worship' "*a little worse for drink" –*

Or George Owen, a potter-lad of about 13, who, caught, literally with his hand in the till of a butcher's shop at Dalehall, claimed he was *" trying to catch a mouse"* -

And the endless succession of cases of drunkenness, prostitution, petty theft and sheer brutality – which must have caused even the most compassionate of magistrates to echo old Josiah Wedgwood's famous cry of exasperation: "O*h! I am teased of my life with dilatory drunken idle worthless workmen!"*

But in amongst all this I must mention one case and one topic which are too revealing of the man and too relevant to the story to omit.

There are many work related cases where the magistrates show no sympathy for sloppy workmen on charges related to neglect of work, and they have a tendency to back the employers over workplace discipline. Given the Justice of the Peace's backgrounds this would be a natural inclination. This makes all the more revealing I think, the attitude taken by James Edwards in a very serious case arising from the deaths of five miners in a colliery explosion near Hanley.

The owners, accused of not providing adequate ventilation, claimed the men had been supplied with the materials to make the shaft safe, but failed to do so. After what are described as "*several pointed questions by Mr Edwards",* it emerged that no one could recall anyone being sent down to inspect the pit before the men started work.

The owners called further witnesses to repeat the claim that *had* the men done their duty – by attending to the safety work themselves – the accident would not have happened.

Again he pressed the question:

"*How many times have you known a man go down to **examine** before the men went to work?"*

Again – no recollection

The pit manager assured the court that every care had been taken, everything supplied, nothing wanting.

The mine owner said "*the proprietors had spared no expense to make the works safe and he **himself** had been **quite unaware** that the men had not undertaken the necessary safety work".*

Mr Edwards – now clearly angry – pointed out that *that* did not exonerate the owners "*it was their **duty"*** he said "*to **see** that the rules were strictly enforced"*

They were fined £20 – presumably the maximum - "*Mr Edwards remarking he was very sorry it was not £200!"* The money was divided among the families of the five dead men.

What is revealing of the man here is his persistence, his insistence on proper procedure, and his sense of the duties incumbent upon an employer in a dangerous industry. He seems outraged as much by their carelessness as by their irresponsibility. If he had no time for a sloppy workman , he had even less for a sloppy employer.

The other aspect of his courtroom experience is that he must have been affected by the plight of children in the dock – and the seeming powerlessness of the magistrates to reform rather than punish – all they could do was order longer and harder gaol sentences – or increasingly harsh whippings – punishments designed for adults –

Robert Cooper, 14, *"for stealing nuts through a broken window pane in a shoop window in Burslem",* 1 month's hard labour.

Up before James Edwards , another lad of 13, "*for stealing money and a pistol in Burslem –abetted by his father, mother and brother – 'the mother evidently the worst"–* The boy sent for 3 months in the House of Correction, alongside hardened criminals.

Now, Magistrates also had a responsibility for inspecting prisons. In 1857 the Committee of Visiting Justices received a report from the prison chaplain, "*that the number of boys received during the year and instructed in the prison school had been 340 –"* Of these, 125 had been in prison before, 24 were in for the fifth time or more.

The chaplain believed mere punishment without "*preventative measures"* was bound to fail. What was needed was "sound education" to reform juvenile behaviour. He pointed out that elsewhere "*six boys had been sent to a Reformatory"* and five were doing well – Only one had been sent back to prison.

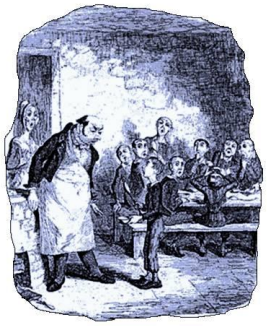
We find James Edwards and fellow justice, Mr. T. Bailie Rose, trying two lads of 12 or 13 who had stolen some boots – one was sentenced to be whipped, followed by 2 months in gaol – harsh enough. But **what** to do with the other – clearly a worse repeat offender – not long out of prison "*and more lately in custody for wantonly cutting off the finger end of a poor child"* ?

Clearly at a loss they decided to hold him in remand while they "investigated the possibility" off getting him into a Reformatory. We don't know the outcome.

This was the magistrate's dilemma – the virtual non-existence of reformatory institutions meant the only option open to them was punishment designed for adults. (If "design" is the right word in this context).

James Edwards response was as ever, practical: He supported and funded fellow magistrate, J.E. Davis's efforts to establish a reformatory. Premises were finally acquired a few months after his death, and it was officially opened in 1870 as an "Industrial" or "Approved" school for juvenile offenders aged from 9 to 15. It is still in operation more than 140 years later, as a centre for young offenders at Werrington.

As a magistrate James Edwards was an ex officio member of the local Board of Guardians of the Poor. Among other things they were responsible for the staffing and administration of the Workhouses. These were designed by central government to be harsh, but in practice the local Guardians had a lot of discretionary powers over how harshly the regulations were to be enforced. It was the Guardians who ultimately controlled



whether Oliver Twist could "have some more" or not. It's difficult to resist the thought that James Edwards might have been **almost** as interested in the quality of Oliver' empty dish as in the quantity of the food!

Between 1858 and 1861 there were three more grandchildren – Albert Edwards and Rosa Maria and Hugh Henshall Williamson.

Then, on the 6th April 1861, James Edwards handed over the running of Dalehall to Richard, who continued his father's policy of installing the latest equipment. James continued to undertake the demanding workload of a Magistrate and Guardian and was still active in his support of education – but increasingly his health was beginning to fail.

At the beginning of 1862 his only daughter, Maria Williamson, died after giving birth to another granddaughter, Catherine – Maria was only 26.

Now with his eyes on posterity he made meticulous provision for his grandchildren through a series of trusts – perhaps remembering only too well how quickly Enoch Wood's heirs had managed to squander his hard won fortune . His investments were shrewd. As well as a substantial amount of real estate he held stock in several successful Railway Companies in England. He had shares in the Potteries Waterworks Company, of which one of Arnold Bennetts' characters says "*You canna pick that up on shard rucks"* Shares in the Burslem and Tunstall Gaslight Company, where he was also a director, are not unexpected, but what about the Augusta Gaslight Company, Georgia? And he had an estate in Wisconsin – which is intriguing.

As you no doubt know the desperate troubles in the Potteries and the events of 1842 led to the setting up of the "Potters Joint Stock and Emigration Society and Savings Fund" which bought a large area of land in Wisconsin. Divided and distributed by lottery it became, Pottersville – Did James Edwards have any involvement in this? We know one of his employees, John Goodwin, went from Dalehall to the major pottery district of East Liverpool, Ohio, and in the 1850's was heavily involved in real estate dealing. Whereabouts in Wisconsin James Edward's estate was we don't know (perhaps somebody can tell me?)

Then, probably in the winter of 1866, and very likely advised that his struggling lungs could no longer cope with the smoke drenched air of the Potteries, he sought respite in the south western coastal town of Torquay –

Failing but restless, he added codicils to his will – in the manner of a careful man eager that nothing should be overlooked. At one point, while saying that his wife should have his horse and carriage, it's as if he suddenly remembers he has forgotten his coachman, William, and leaves him a legacy of £50.

Then, as the end neared, there came that remarkable gesture of sending to his work people at Dalehall cheques of from £20 to £200, according to their length of service. The scale of these gifts can be gauged by recalling that Anna, in "*Anna of the Five Towns*", found the weekly household bills for herself, her father and her sister, came to about £1. For some of the lower paid workers, James Edwards's parting gift could have been nearly two years' wages.

A few days later, on the 13th of January 1867, five years to the day, bar a few hours, since the death of his daughter Maria, James Edwards died.

Fitting, that later that same year, the Factory legislation regulating children's hours of work was at last extended to *all* industries, including the Potteries, and a Bill was passed giving the vote to working men. And discussion was under way that would **at last** make primary education available to **all** children, in the 1870 Education Act.

So on a cold dark Burslem winter's day – in London even the Thames was frozen – the air full of drizzling sleet and the everlasting smoke from the ever burning pot kilns, carried on the shoulders of his workmen he was brought to St. Paul's church yard. Where they laid to rest a man whose name is remembered almost 150 years

later – and 3,000 miles away – for the quality of his beautiful **white ironstone china.**

Here I think is a paradox, certainly an irony:

It has been written of Burslem that even in the Eighteenth century "*the landscape was more like the moon than the English countryside – gouged with pits and humped with mounds of drying clay and towering shard - rucks of spoild pots – and on every side great bottle shaped kilns curved and smoked against the sky".* An observer at that time found that the air of Burslem after firing formed a cloud so thick "*as to cause persons often to run into each other, travellers to mistake the road,"* it was, he said, "*not unlike the smoke of Etna or Vesuvius"* A traveller in that pivotal year of 1842 wrote "*the rain is not felt till it has worked its way through the smoke – and the sun shows himself only as a yellow patch"*

And below, 300 years of mining and excavation brought subsidence – the ground on which Wedgwood's proud Etruria Works stood is now many feet below the Trent and Mersey Canal with which it was once level.

Digging away the coal and clay it stood on, this was a landscape devouring itself, burning itself in furnaces, choking itself in perpetual smoke – breathing its own exhalations.

In the 1950's in his classic study, "*The Making of the English Landscape",* W.G. Hoskins published this view of Burslem –

His caption read:

"Homes lie intermingled with the filthy potbanks with their characteristic bottle shapes rising above the roof tops.....*It is a formless landscape, usually thickly blanketed with smoke – The photograph was taken on a favourable day or it could not have been taken at all .... Imagine being born amid all this ugliness"* says Professor Hoskins, "*or worse still"* he concludes, "*buried among it"*

James Edwards was buried – here.

So this is the paradox – Out of this squalid physical landscape and amid what was in many ways an equally squalid and brutalized social landscape he produced objects of pristine beauty. And into many dark and blighted lives he brought the possibility of illumination.

By way of a curiously appropriate postscript –

Alongside the account of James Edwards's funeral in the *Staffordshire Sentinel* newspaper it was noted: "*The Great American Slave Troupe and Brass Band performed in the Town Hall, Burslem on Tuesday and Wednesday evenings to crowded audiences"* This was a troupe of recently emansipated slaves from Georgia – nothing so elevated as the *Fisk Singers* – they were a 'Minstrel Show' – but at the end of each performance they answered questions from the audience about their former lives.

The Potteries had a long association with Abolitionist movements, since the 1780's and Wedgwood's 'Slave Emancipation Medallion'

And Charles Shaw, '*The Old Potter*" remembered how "*Nearly all England wept for Uncle Tom"* pointed by adding, "*but no fine lady or gentleman wept for the cruelly used Pottery Children"* Those "*Little White Slaves*"

So, in remembering James Edwards's life I like to recall Mr. Scriven's words, written in the year he took over Dalehall, "*Should a remedy be suggested, the children would have reason to hail the day of their emancipation from toil little removed from slavery"*

James Edwards was the epitome of a '*self made man'* and that famous chronicler of "*self made men*", Samuel Smiles, said the key was not *Genius*, but *'Industry"*.

The Victorian critic, John Ruskin, wrote that "Life without Industry is Guilt, - Industry without Art is brutality".

For me, the essence of James Edwards was,

"Industry in Life and Art in Industry"

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With thanks to the staff at:

- Staffordshire Record Office
- Stoke on Trent City Archives
- The Gladstone Pottery Museum, Stoke on Trent
- The Pottery & Art Museum, Stoke on Trent

With special thanks to Jane Diemer of the White Ironstone China Association who lit the fuse.