

AN ILLUSTRATED QUARTERLY
BLAKE

M I N U T E
P A R T I C U L A R

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Blake/An Illustrated Quarterly, Volume 24, Issue 1, Summer 1990, pp. 249-250



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William Blake is known to have made engravings for Wedgwood's catalogue of earthenware and porcelain in 1815-16,¹ but he is not known to have had an earlier contact with the firm or the man, though he did engrave the Wedgwood copy of the Portland vase in illustration of Erasmus Darwin's *The Botanic Garden* in 1791. Indeed, it is commonly believed that "William Blake did not begin his connections with the Wedgwood firm until late in his career, probably from 1815 to 1816."²

However, Blake must have known of Wedgwood from very early in his career, not only because of his work on the Wedgwood copy of the Portland vase and the growing fame of the firm, but because his friend John Flaxman did a great deal of work for Wedgwood in the 1780s.³ Flaxman not only designed pottery for Wedgwood but also decorated his very ambitious house called Etruria Hall in Staffordshire. And it seems likely that Flaxman managed to get Blake to assist him in this work.

The account book for Etruria Hall, shows that Wedgwood paid Flaxman in itemized amounts for his work (see box).

The fact that this "Blake" is a painter suggests that he is Flaxman's friend the painter William Blake. That the payment came through Flaxman rather than to Blake directly and that there is no expense money for travel to Staffordshire, etc., suggests that Blake's work was done in London—perhaps he was painting on canvas or on an early version of his own fresco invention which was shipped to Staffordshire and affixed to the ceiling. The facts that he was "painting on Ceiling pictures" and that Flaxman had already been paid for "Drawings for Ceiling" suggest that Blake was carrying out Flaxman's designs, perhaps transferring sketches to the surface to be put up on the ceiling—Blake was particularly skillful at transferring designs from paper to copper, and, years later, the master-engraver John Linnell employed Blake to help him by laying in the outlines of designs.⁵ The context, at any rate, suggests that the designs are Flaxman's and that Blake is primarily concerned with transferring Flaxman's "Drawings" into "painting[s] on Ceiling."

The design is described in Flaxman's letter to Wedgwood of 5 February 1784:

I was last night honored by Mr. Byerley with your enquiry concerning the pictures you employed me to paint for the drawing-room ceiling. The four divinities heads for the corners have been nearly finished, and the allegory for the centre has had the effect roughly laid in some time since, but that I waited for your opinion on them, as you were expected in town almost daily

for some time since. However, I have now sent two of the corners and the centre, accompanied with the difficulties I am under, for your contemplation and decision. I think, when you have fastened them with pins in their places and considered the effect, you will find either the heads are too large for the centre, or that the figures in the centre are disproportionately small for the heads. If you think the heads have a proper effect, and are not too large when seen in their proper places, I must reduce the number of figures in the centre and replace them upright in the long way of the oval, retaining the allegory, or make them genii children telling the same story; by which means also the whole will have a better proportion. If you think the figures in the centre of a proper height and the heads too large and heavy, I will alter the corner to whole figures of children (genii) sitting with the same attitude the heads have now; and in this case I shall reduce the number of figures in the centre to show the outlines more distinctly, like paintings on the Etruscan vases, as this manner has the best effect. When you have determined these matters and sent back the paintings, they shall be finished with all possible despatch.⁶

In his reply of 20 February, Wedgwood said of "the paintings for my drawing-room ceiling," that "The two heads of divinities and a sketch of the allegory for the centre came to my hands last night. I have hastily looked them over, but am obliged to put them by for the present. . . ."⁷

The date of Blake's work must be between February 1784 and 10 December 1785, when Flaxman was paid, or at least when this account was entered in the ledger.

1785		[£]	[s]	[d]
Dec. ^r 10 . . .	44	19..	12..	3½
To John Flaxman Acc ^t for Mantles in 1781 & Jaumbs of Marble—& designs				
To—D ^o —Drawings for Saloon in 1782	44	1..	8..	—
To—D ^o —Drawings for Ceiling &c	67—	4..	6..	6
To—D ^o —Chimney piece in Saloon	67—	29..	4..	4
To—D ^o —Blake for painting on Ceiling pictures	67	3..	17..	—
To—D ^o —his own work	67	5..	5..	— ⁴

The paintings for the ceiling are now not in Etruria Hall, and no other record of them is known.⁸

Blake thus worked for two generations of the Wedgwoods. Blake's disciple Frederick Tatham noted that "Mr Flaxman introduced Blake to Mr Wedgwood" in the context of "The Designs of the Pottery," and the introduction has therefore been dated to 1815.⁹ But these new records of work by Blake for Etruria Hall make it virtually certain that the elder Josiah Wedgwood knew Blake's work and saw it as early as 1785.

But note that in each case Blake is employed not as an original artist, making or copying his own designs, but as a reproductive craftsman, transferring the genius of other men to copper or canvas. There is no evidence that either Wedgwood knew of Blake as an original artist.¹⁰ Considering that the younger Josiah Wedgwood later provided an annuity to Coleridge, so that his genius would not need to waste itself in mundane tasks, the lost opportunity to Blake—and to posterity—for such potential patronage is indeed striking.

Flaxman's sponsorship of Blake is quite in keeping with what is known already. He frequently introduced Blake to potential patrons, and he solicited commissions for Blake widely. Naturally he endeavored to get Blake commissions first for modest and inexpensive work, such as drawings and engravings, rather than for finished tempera paintings or Blake's own books in illuminated printing. Blake's own style was so unusual, not to say eccentric, that patrons had to be introduced to it gradually.¹¹ In most cases, such as this with Josiah Wedg-

wood, the commission was either not repeated at all or was succeeded only by requests for more journeyman labor. Blake was a superb craftsman, intensely proud of his craft. He did not repine at such reproductive labor. But what he wished for most dearly was commissions for large paintings, for suites of paintings such as Thomas Butts gave him, even for suites of large frescoes to decorate churches. But most of his patrons, like Josiah Wedgwood, were content to employ him—once—as a reproductive craftsman. It is not so much that they did not appreciate his genius as that it probably never occurred to them to consider him in the light of a genius at all.

¹ *Blake Books* (1977) 631-32.

² Shelley Bennett, *Thomas Stothard: The Mechanisms of Art Patronage in England circa 1800* (Columbia: U of Missouri P, 1988) 6.

³ "Flaxman principally subsisted through his employment for the firm of Wedgwood & Company" in 1775-87, according to Samuel Smiles, *Josiah Wedgwood, F. R. S.: His Personal History* (New York, 1895) 224.

⁴ Quoted from a reproduction of Wedgwood Ledger D (1779-87) 69, in Keel University Library (on deposit from the Wedgwood Museum Trust). Christine Fyfe, Keel University Library Archivist, tells me that the figures "44" and "67" (before the sums paid) are apparently cross-references to other ledgers which do not survive with the Wedgwood materials in Keel University Library.

The role of "Mr Blake" in this commission is mentioned without connecting him to the poet in Bruce Tattersall, "Flaxman and Wedgwood," *John Flaxman* [catalogue of the Flaxman exhibition at the Royal Academy 26 Oct.-9 Dec. 1979], ed. David Bindman (London: Thames and Hudson, 1979) 47.

⁵ *Blake Records* (1969) 256.

⁶ Smiles 229-30.

⁷ Smiles 232.

⁸ They are not mentioned in Martin Butlin, *The Paintings and Drawings of William Blake* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1981).

According to Smiles (222n), the "ceilings were ornamented by drawings in oil by Angelica Kauffman. They were removed by the agents of the Duchy of Lancaster, to whom the place belongs, to one of their offices in the north, probably in Yorkshire." (Such easily removable drawings were probably painted elsewhere and affixed to the ceilings.) If this is so, there were evidently ceiling paintings in Etruria Hall by both Angelica Kauffman and by Flaxman-Blake. Perhaps the Flaxman-Blake paintings suffered the same fate as Angelica Kauffman's.

The Duchy of Lancaster acquired Etruria Hall in the late nineteenth century, but the printed "Particulars" of the sale (generously provided to me by the agents of the Duchy of Lancaster) under Lot 1 detailed merely "A handsome, convenient, and well-built MANSION, called 'ETRURIA HALL,' in good repair, comprising 34 Rooms, besides Entrance . . .," plus 44 acres with cottages, crofts, outbuildings, and a pool, with no reference to ceiling paintings at all. There appears to be no record with the Duchy of Lancaster of what became of the ceiling paintings.

⁹ *Blake Records* 239.

¹⁰ I presume that the last entry in the Wedgwood letter quoted here (£5.5.0 "To—D°—his own work") refers to original work by Flaxman, not by Blake, for the money is paid to Flaxman with no indication that the work for which it paid was performed by anyone else than the payee.

¹¹ For the explosive results when a conventional patron was introduced too abruptly to Blake's idiosyncratic style, see the correspondence between Blake and the Rev. Dr. Trusler in August 1799.