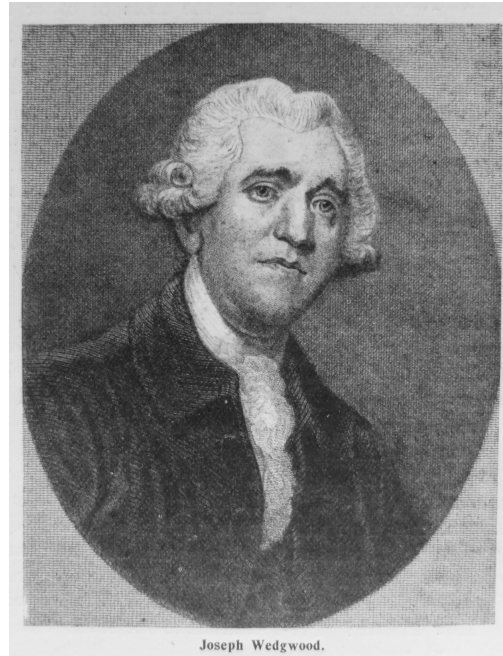


The Ancestry of William Clowes

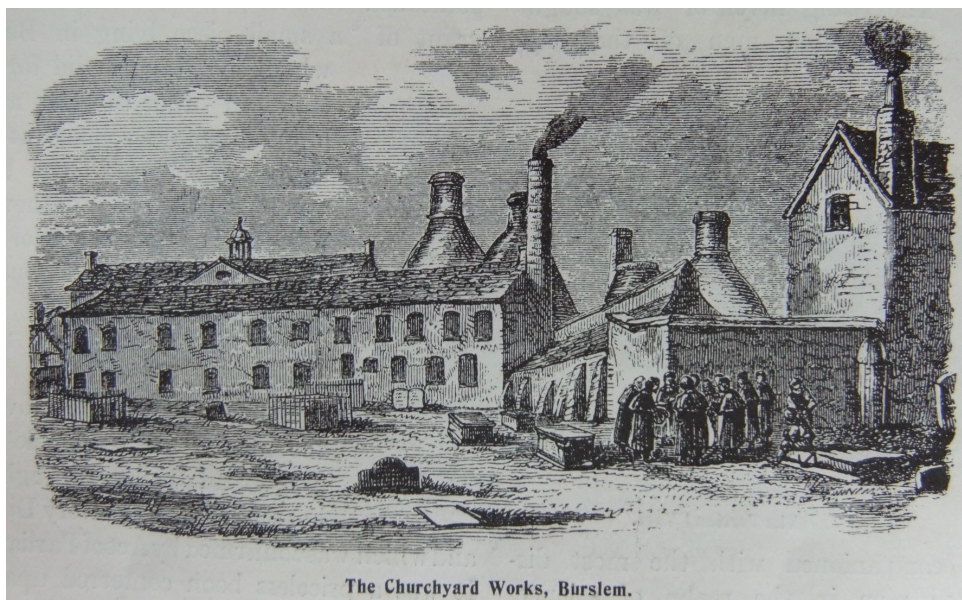
Transcription of Sketch in the Primitive Methodist Magazine by A.A. Birchenough

Part 2

In his autobiography William Clowes states that he was apprenticed to his uncle, Joseph Wedgwood, whose pottery was near Burslem Churchyard. "In his service I was taught to make small plates, and soon grew expert in my new employment. To encourage diligence, the task of making twenty-one dozen a day was allotted to me, which I performed with ease. Occasionally, however, my fondness for youthful diversions drew me into negligence, and my fear of punishment was such, that when only part of my work was done I entered it as completed, thus making my uncle the dupe of my trickery—"



The "Churchyard Works" were situated on the North-Eastern side of Burslem Churchyard. In the days of William Clowes there was an open pathway leading through the extensive churchyard, and it was connected with one of the entrances leading direct to the works. In the seventeenth century the historical Churchyard Works were held by one of the cousins of William Clowes' grandfather. After passing through many changes, they were rented by Mr. Joseph Wedgwood, one of the five brothers of William Clowes' mother, who made jasper articles and other fine earthenware under the supervision and for the great Josiah Wedgwood.



There is a tendency on the part of some writers to belittle Josiah Wedgwood's parentage by speaking of him "as a coarse, ignorant, diseased, impoverished workman, whose father was a poor potter at Burslem, barely able to make a living at his trade." The father of Josiah was an earthenware manufacturer, and was forty-four years of age at the time of his son's birth. His mother was the daughter of a Nonconformist minister of the name of Stringer. Josiah Wedgwood, was the youngest child of a large family of thirteen sons and daughters, and was born at the house adjoining the Churchyard Works at Burslem. Although the Wedgwoods were people of wealth they taught their sons the practical features of the potter's art. Unfortunately his father died when he was only nine years of age: when he attained his majority he inherited by his father's will a small legacy of £20. Like his Biblical namesake, he spent the years of youth-hood in an exemplary manner. According to a tradition of the neighbourhood of the Potteries, it was the common custom for parents to exhort their children to be as good as young Josiah Wedgwood.

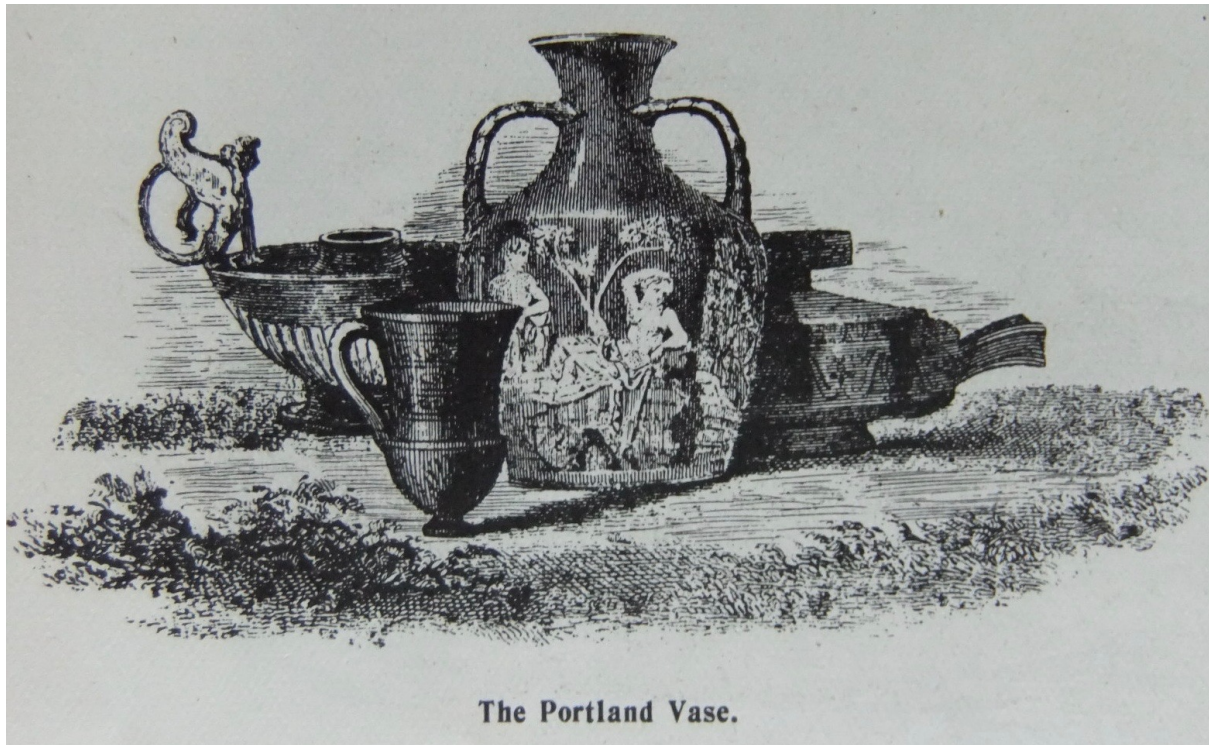
After his father's death, and when he was fourteen years of age, Josiah was bound apprentice to his eldest brother, Thomas, for a period of five years, "to learn his Art, Mystery, Occupation or Imployment of Throwing and Handling." The indenture of Josiah Wedgwood is still extant. Some years later William Clowes served his apprenticeship at the same works as Josiah Wedgwood, who raised the North Staffordshire potters' art to the highest degree of excellency.

When Josiah Wedgwood was about sixteen years of age, he was seized with a violent attack of small-pox, which left a humour in his right knee. At times it was so painful that he had to sit at his work with his leg stretched on a stool. The labour at the potter's wheel was too heavy for him in his enfeebled state of health, and, consequently, he was employed in moulding and modelling. In his early manhood he had the misfortune to bruise his leg, which necessitated him keeping his bed for several consecutive months, and which reduced him to a state of physical debility. When the disorder threatened his life he consented to amputation. Without assistance, or the aid of stimulants, he calmly sat in his chair and without uttering a groan he calmly watched the operation. Afterwards his usual state of health and activity were re-established. These so-called misfortunes and cross-providences were in his favour. In after life, Wedgwood attributed much of his success in life to the protracted illness of his early manhood. The quietude of the sick chamber afforded him opportunities for self-improvement. Therein he read and thought out the exquisite objects of beauty which were reproduced in clay.

His mind was bent on improving the quality and finish of the ware produced by the North Staffordshire Potteries. He spent much of his spare time in experiments, and in trying new applications for producing superior manufactures. His brothers, however, urged him to abandon these fanciful ideas, and to follow in the well-beaten tracks of his ancestors. At the termination of his apprenticeship, Mr. Josiah Wedgwood entered into partnership with Mr. John Harrison, and conjointly they manufactured a superior kind of ware at a pottery at Stoke-on-Trent. In 1754 they welcomed into partnership Mr. Thomas Whieldon, who had the reputation of being the best potter of his times.

At twenty-nine years of age, and in 1759, Josiah Wedgwood returned to his native town of Burslem, and commenced business by himself. For sometime he was the occupant of the old-established Churchyard Pottery, where he employed his leisure in producing earthenware that should be

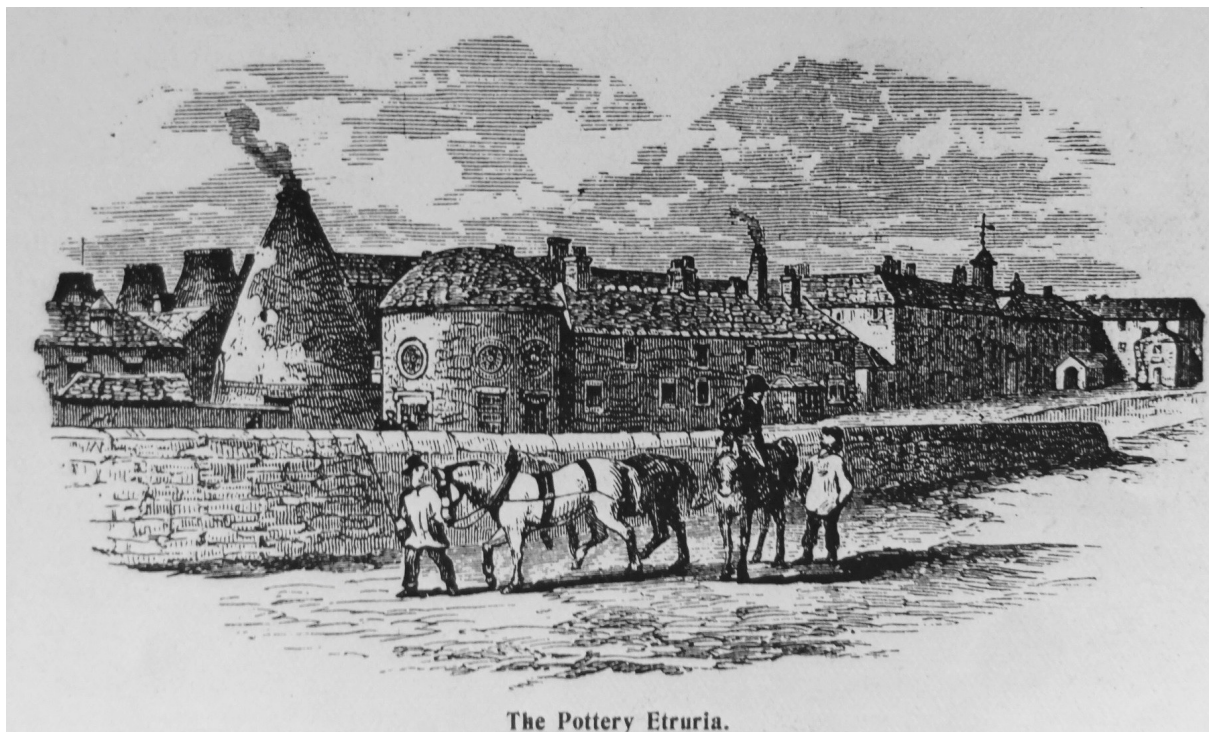
superior to the costly productions of foreign nations, and should out-rival all previous English manufacturers. This enterprising young potter opened show-rooms, and his beautiful cream-coloured ware became the talk of the fashionable circles of the city. The rising inventor was sought out by the leading men of the day, and he companioned with the most distinguished men in the realm of science, art and literature. In 1762, Josiah Wedgwood received the gracious commands of Queen Charlotte, wife of King George III., to style himself "Potter to Her Majesty." Two distinct patterns of ware that he had supplied to the king's household at St. James' Palace were designated "The Queen's Pattern" and "The Royal Pattern." With the bestowment of the royal patronage Wedgwood's fame and fortune were fully established.



In the year 1764, Josiah Wedgwood was united in wedlock, at Astbury Church, Cheshire, to his distant relative, Sarah Wedgwood. This wealthy lady belonged to the Wedgwoods of the Big House, and was second cousin to the mother of William Clowes. Ten years after marriage Mrs. Josiah Wedgwood became sole heiress to the Smallwood Estate, Cheshire, which was worth £20,000. This large sum was of considerable service to Josiah Wedgwood, who was rising into national fame by the proud distinction of "The Queen's Potter."

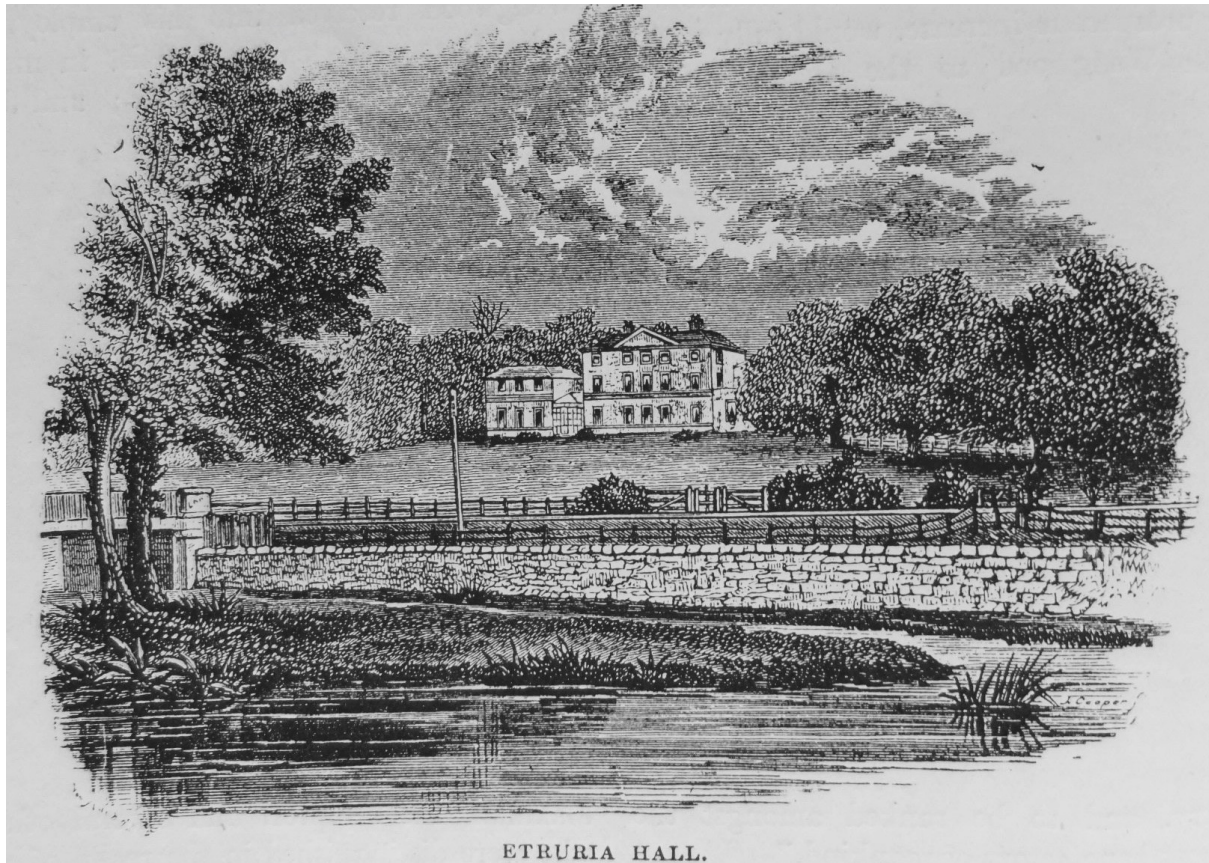
Wedgwood's inventions and manufactures did not occupy all his attention. As a citizen he interested himself in educational, social, philanthropic and other public questions that would benefit his native town, further its commercial interests, and promote the welfare of its inhabitants. According to an ancient document, in the year 1760, he petitioned the Lords of the Manor for a grant of "a small piece lying in Burslem where the Maypole did formerly stand in order to erect a piece of building for a schoole, as there is but one schoole in the town; and for want of another two parts of the children out of three are put to work without any learning, by reason the other schoole is not sufficient to instruct them."

He was the prime mover in the making of a suitable turn-pike road right through the heart of the busy Pottery District, and which was confirmed by Act of Parliament. It was a priceless boon conferred upon the one hundred and fifty-seven potteries of Burslem and neighbourhood, which provided employment for about seven thousand artisans. Wedgwood was one of the chief promoters of the Grand Trunk Canal. At one of the initial meetings of the promoters when he was asked in a derisive manner by Earl Gower what he would subscribe towards the undertaking that he was so forcefully advocating, magnanimously replied a thousand pounds towards the preliminary expenses, and also he would be prepared to take a large number of shares in connection therewith. In July, 1766, Josiah Wedgwood was privileged to cut the first sod of the proposed canal, and for many years he was the treasurer of the canal fund. In these days of quick transit it is almost impossible to estimate the value of this inland waterway to the isolated district of the Staffordshire Potteries, and the benefit it conferred in bringing provisions and raw material into the neighbourhood, and conveying therefrom manufactured goods for exportation to the ports on the Mersey and the Humber. One writer, in his appreciation of Wedgwood, says: "If for no other reason, the part he took in the carrying out to a successful issue the scheme of canal communication, to which, undoubtedly, the Staffordshire Potteries owe their prosperous increase, would fully entitle Josiah Wedgwood to the thanks of his country, and to be ranked amongst the foremost benefactors of mankind."

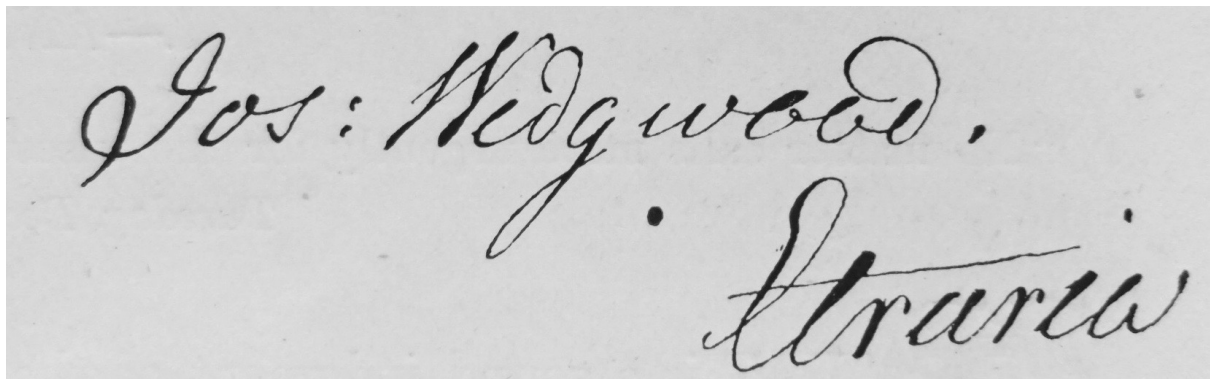


In the year 1766 Josiah Wedgwood purchased "The Ridge House Estate," lying some two miles distant from Burslem, and skirting the canal. On this site, which was nothing better than a waste, he erected works on a large scale, which covered a ground surface of about seven acres. Everything in connection with the vast undertaking was planned by Wedgwood himself. When the works were completed they had the reputation of being the most extensive potteries in the world, and they were fitted with the most improved machinery of the latest pattern. In addition to the erection of the manufactory, he built a mansion for himself, and also a village residence for his workpeople. This

neighbourhood was called Etruria, after one of the Italian cities. In this newly-formed centre he completely revolutionised the potter's art. As one of old found Rome a cluster of huts and transformed it into a city of palaces, so Josiah Wedgwood found the potter's trade of North Staffordshire in the same rude condition it had been for centuries. He raised it until the English Potteries took their place in producing the most beautiful specimens in the front rank of ceramic art. Josiah Wedgwood received into his employment John Bacon, the eminent artist in marble and clay; Pingo, the modeller; and John Flaxman, the sculptor, and several others who were distinguished in the realm of art. They visited museums and private collections, they studied every form of beauty, and conjointly they produced only those specimens which were of the highest known excellence.



Mr. Josiah Wedgwood took into partnership his relative, Thomas Wedgwood. He was entrusted with the department where the Queen's ware was manufactured, and retained that responsible position until his death, by accidental drowning in the river Thames. Mr. Thomas Wedgwood was a man of remarkable scientific attainments, and was the original inventor of the electric telegraph. His son, Ralph, born in 1766, was possessed of exceptional scientific ability. He was the originator of several scientific inventions. In the year 1814 he published an extraordinary treatise under the fanciful title of "The Book of Remembrance," in which he sets forth the native benefits of the electric telegraphic communication, under the peculiar description of "The Fulguri-Polygraph." For a time he carried on business as a potter at Burslem, and subsequently removed to the neighbourhood of Worcester, where he issued prospectuses as a teacher of chemistry at schools. In 1803 he removed to London, and proceeded thither in a peculiar conveyance as "a long coach to get out behind, and on grasshopper springs, now used by all the mails." On the journey this unusual style of carriage was mistaken by the villagers for "a travelling show."

A black and white photograph of a handwritten signature in cursive script. The signature reads "Jos: Wedgwood." on the first line and "Etruria" on the second line. The ink is dark on a light background.

One who knew Mr. Josiah Wedgwood intimately, and who was well acquainted with his private life, affirms that for many years previous to his death he searched out, through the medium of his trustworthy friends, the names of the deserving poor people resident in the towns of Burslem, Shelton and Cobridge, whom he liberally supplied during the winter months with food, bedding, clothing and coals. He was also a liberal subscriber to all agencies of a philanthropic and benevolent character. He was respected by his employees. One of his biographers says: "He had always a kind and cheery word for his work-people, a sympathising look, an approving nod: and it is handed down that no sound was more welcome through the long days' labour than that which gave the sign of the good master's approach."

In his later years Josiah Wedgwood was honoured and beloved. He was elected a fellow of several of the learned societies, including the Royal Society, the Society of Arts, and the Antiquarian Society. He died at his residence, at Etruria, on January 3rd, 1795, at the comparatively early age of sixty-four. Three days later, his mortal remains were laid to rest in the chancel of St. Peter's Church, Stoke-on-Trent.

William Clowes's distinguished kinsman — the great Josiah — was the father of eight children, several of whom gained more than ordinary distinction. The eldest daughter married Dr. Robert Darwin, of Shrewsbury, and was the mother of Charles Darwin, the famous author of "The Origin of Species," and other important works of a scientific character. One of his sons was member of Parliament for Stoke-on-Trent, and was also one of the principal founders of the Royal Horticultural Society. His son, Thomas, was the friend of Coleridge, the poet, with whom he wandered "up and down England in a travelling carriage."

Fronting the railway station at Stoke-on-Trent, is a bronze statue of Josiah Wedgwood, erected by public subscription, which was inaugurated by the Earl of Harrowby. In the centre of Burslem is the "Wedgwood institute," the foundation stone thereof having been laid by the Right Hon. W.E. Gladstone, M.P. This memorial of the great potter is becoming one of the most important educational centres of the Northern Midland Counties.

That covenant-keeping Jehovah, who commissioned the Hebrew prophet “to go down to the potter’s house, and there I will cause thee to hear my words,” called William Clowes from the potter’s wheel to become one of the greatest evangelists of the nineteenth century. As a co-founder of the Primitive Methodist Church, and a national reformer, William Clowes was a worthy son of the distinguished family of Wedgwoods, from whom he was an honoured descendent.

References

Primitive Methodist Magazine 1902/96