



# Wedgwood: The First Tycoon

*Brian Dolan*

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## **Wedgwood: The First Tycoon** Brian Dolan

With its familiar white classical figures against a pale-blue background, Wedgwood has been one of the most recognizable brand names in the world for more than two hundred years—the epitome of quality and luxury—and the Enlightenment’s most remarkable success story.

Born into a family of struggling potters, Josiah Wedgwood amassed a fortune that, at his death in 1795, was valued at the equivalent of \$3.4 billion in today’s dollars and helmed an empire that stretched from England to Russia to the United States. As a member of the famous Lunar Society, whose members included James Watt, Joseph Priestley, and Erasmus Darwin, he combined rationality with bold experimentation, revolutionizing the business model of his time with a series of innovations that have continued to this day:

- Organizing skilled labor in one of the world’s earliest factories
- Encouraging employee loyalty by offering long-term contracts that included health insurance and pension plans
- Changing the very notion of shopping by utilizing showrooms and traveling salesmen

The story of how phenomenal wealth affected the lives of a family and of the turbulent political climate that threatened their very livelihood, this vivid and compelling portrait of a pioneer of commercial culture is sure to be a hit with loyal collectors and the business market alike.

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