

## Decoration

Decorative colours and patterns were applied to Coalport porcelain by dipping the piece into buckets of coloured glaze, dusting the glaze powder on and then hand-painting. Another important method of creating designs was transfer printing, where a line drawing was scratched into a copper plate, the ceramic colour was brushed over the plate and then wiped off, so it only remained in the grooves. The plate was then put through a heavy roller with a sheet of special tissue paper, which took a print from the plate. This paper was then placed directly onto the ceramic object transferring the print as the colour soaked into the surface.

There were two sorts of decorator at the Coalport China Factory. Many of Coalport's most popular designs were based on a transfer outline to which colours were applied to bring it to life. Indian tree is an example of this and this work was nearly always done by women painters, who were not paid very much. The detailed one-off hand-painted landscapes and flower painting that Coalport was famous for were classed as art. They were created in a different studio space well away from the hustle and bustle of the workshops. This work was almost always the work of men.

The last stage in decorating a piece of china was gilding. The gold was painted on in a solution and fired in a low temperature firing. After firing the gilding looked dull and burnishers, who were often women, rubbed the gold decoration with soft cloths dipped in water and sand to brighten the gold. Gold was expensive and was only added to high quality pieces.



## Artists and Their Art

The factory at Coalport had many talented designers and artists from mould-makers and engravers who produced transfers and of course the china painters who created rich tableaux of fruit and flowers, naturalistic animals or dreamy landscapes. Some of the artists became quite famous for their designs, such as John Randall for his birds and Percy Simpson for his landscapes.

Create your own unique ceramic below which could be a vase, a dinner plate, a statue or a modern piece of art. Decorate it richly, or use simple colours and designs.

# Coalport China Museum

## Early Beginnings

The early history of Coalport is complicated. It began with 21 year old John Rose who set up a china works in 1793 at Jackfield in partnership with Edward Blakeway. In 1796 they established a porcelain manufactory across the river at Coalport where a canal had recently been built and many new industries were starting up. By 1815 John Rose had taken over two other local porcelain firms and was well-established as a manufacturer of fine china.

## A Difficult Journey

John Rose died in 1841 and his nephew William Pugh took over the factory. In the mid-nineteenth century Coalport developed its famous 'Du Barry' pink and turquoise blue glaze colours in the style of the famous French porcelain factory Sevres. The factory produced many Royal and aristocratic commissions and Coalport was exhibited in the great Victorian fairs of trade and industry, including the Great Exhibition of 1851.

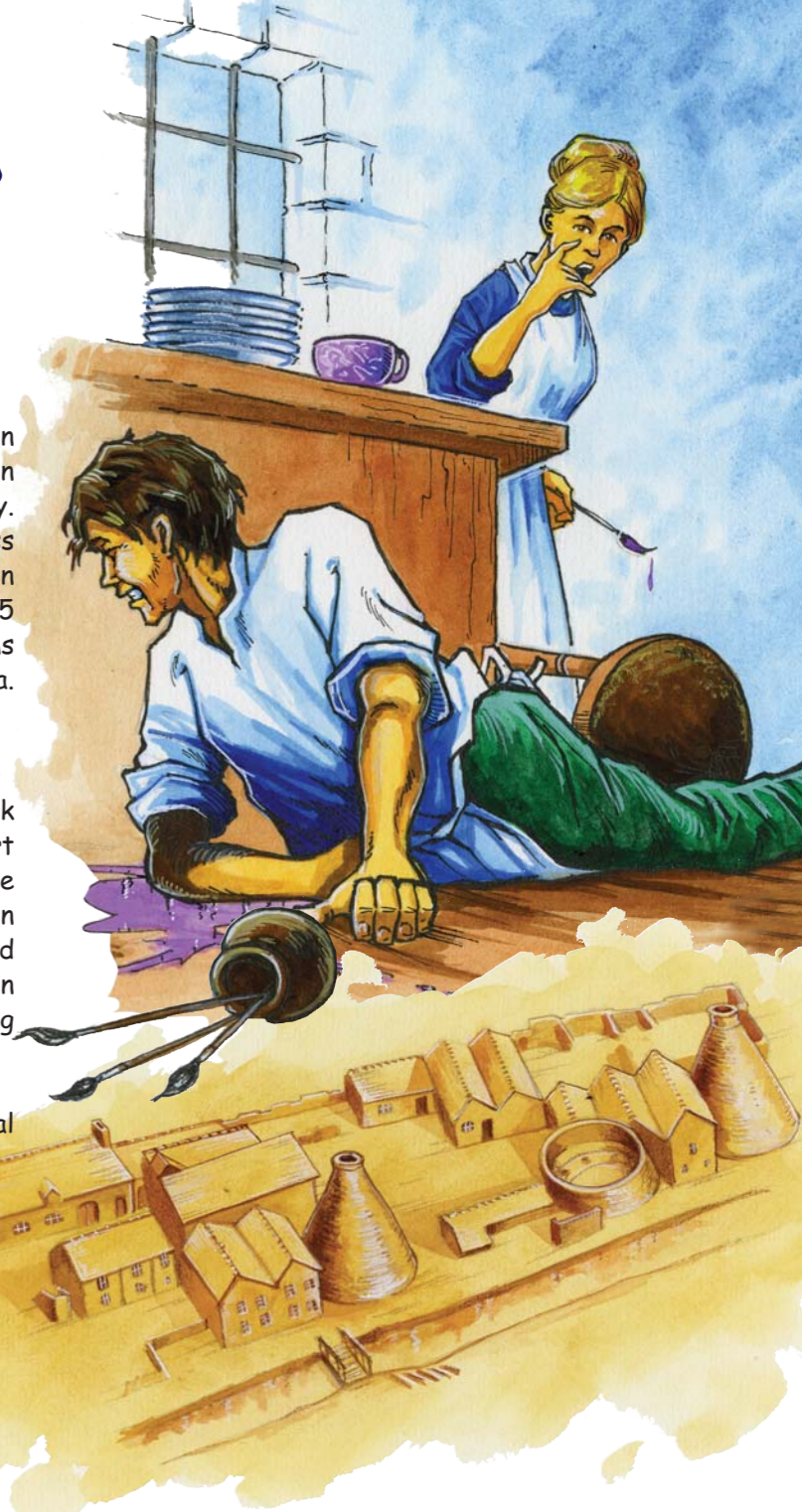
Unfortunately by 1875 the company was in financial trouble and would have closed if it had not been for an engineer, Peter Bruff, who purchased Coalport for £15,000 in 1880. His son Charles became the new Managing Director in 1888 and he successfully revived the high standards and quality of the Coalport name.

## Coalport Move

During World War I sales of luxury goods fell and Coalport was increasingly isolated geographically, forcing production to be transferred to the Potteries in Stoke-on-Trent. Employment was offered to the workforce, but only 24 members of staff moved to the new site.

After World War II Coalport porcelain continued to be produced, but under a series of different owners. Finally, in 1967 Coalport became part of the Wedgwood group. The original factory site was a car exhaust factory for a time, but in 1976 the Ironbridge Gorge Museum Trust was able to acquire it and the Coalport China Museum opened in 1977.

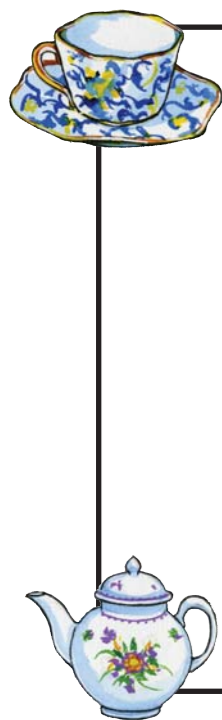
Today, we can see examples of Coalport's finest porcelain in the place where it was originally made. We can also see contemporary potters at work in the Museum and learn about the materials and skills which were perfected here.



## Potter's Rot

Although the china produced here was of exquisite quality the workers producing it were prone to a disease called 'potter's rot'. People developed a blue line around their gums and became very weak, eventually dying. These were the symptoms of lead poisoning, which came from the lead in the porcelain glazes used to make them fire better. The lead was absorbed through the skin, but also by painters and painters who often licked their brushes to bring them to a fine point in order to create the delicate designs.

Beer was popular amongst the workers as it was thought to protect against lead poisoning, but anyone caught smuggling it on to the premises was severely disciplined and had to pay a fine.



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## The Smell of Success

Bone china was made with real cattle bones, which were burned so that they could be crushed into a fine powder. Before they could do this the flesh had to be stripped off the animals and the terrible smell of rotting flesh and burning bones was one of the first things that struck you about the factory. The bones were dealt with by women workers at the factory. It is said that the maggots found on the carcasses were often sold to fishermen for bait. The Works' Manager's house was deliberately built upwind of the site to avoid the horrible smell.

## How to Make a Piece of China

The standard 'recipe' for bone china is 50% animal bone, 25% Cornish stone and 25% Cornish clay, which together give porcelain its fine, strong, white quality.

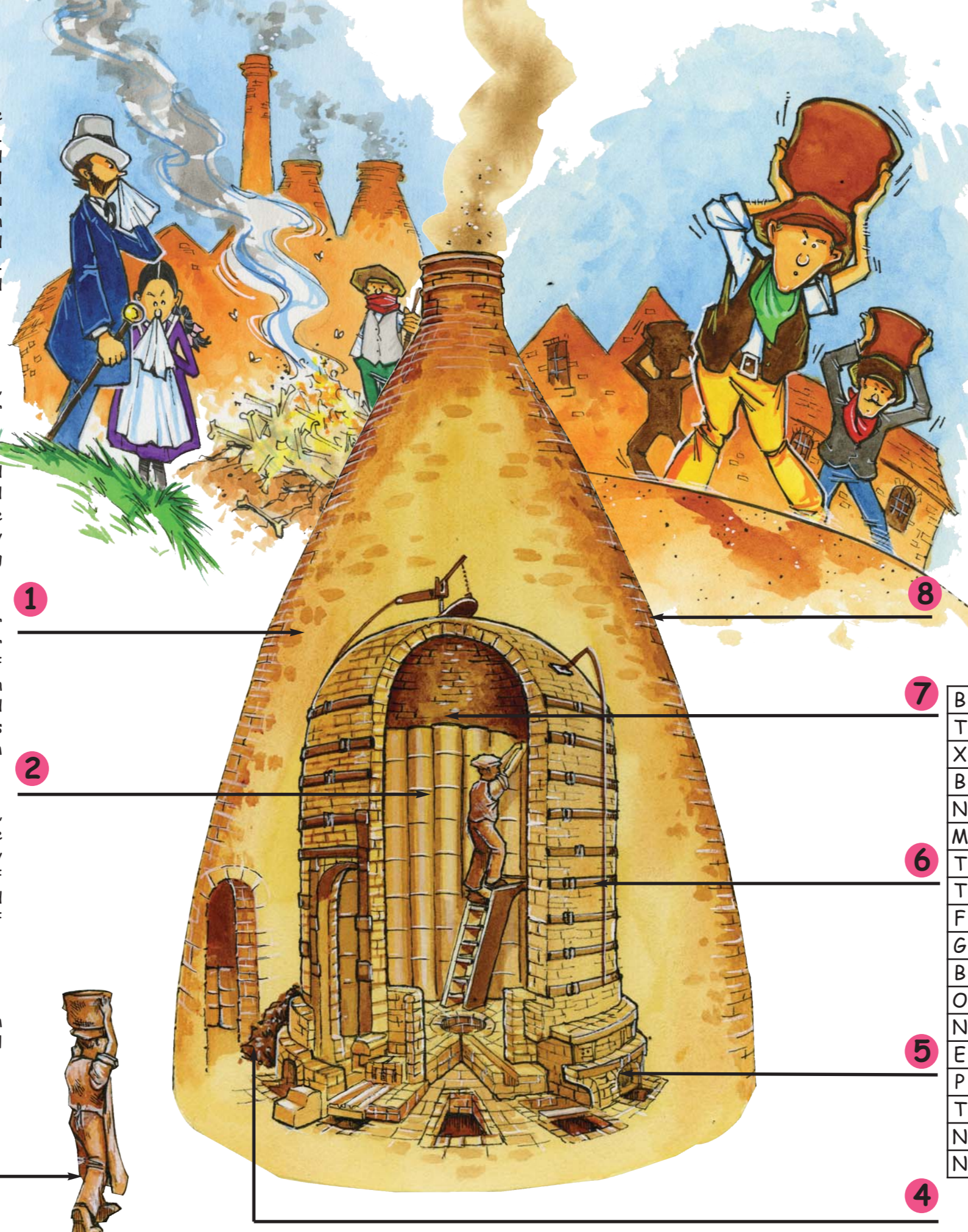
A machine called a 'blunger' mixed the finely ground ingredients together with water and the resulting liquid clay was called 'slip' and had the consistency of single cream. The slip was passed through sieves to remove any lumps and finally it ended up in 'arks' which had rotating arms to keep it from settling.

To make a piece of china the slip was poured into a plaster mould in the shape of the desired item. The plaster absorbed some of the water in the mix causing a layer of clay to develop on the inner surface of the mould. When the required thickness of the object wall was achieved the excess slip was poured away leaving a clay skin. As the slip dried further, it hardened and shrank away from the mould and could then be removed.

This process, known as 'slip-casting', leaves rough edges, or seams at the joins of the moulds and these have to be brushed off, or 'fettled'. It is good for making very complicated objects, such as the foot, body and neck of a vase, for example, which can be cast separately and then joined together with slip once they are taken out of the moulds.

## What is a 'Bottom-Knocker'?

The saggarmaker required a 'bottom-knocker' on his team who made the bottom of the saggar by beating the marl into an iron ring to form a strong base.



## What is a 'Saggar'?

'Saggar' probably comes from the word 'safeguard'. Decorated porcelain required several firings and to protect the delicate pottery from flames, ash, smoke and kiln gases it was placed in a saggar. The fireclay containers, which were made from strong, rough clay called saggar marl, were made in standard sizes so that they could be readily stacked into the kilns for firing. Each saggar could weigh up to 25 kg and were carried by men called 'placers', either on their heads or shoulders. It was back-breaking work, as well as a delicate balancing act.

## Word Search

Can you find some of the words associated with china production in the grid below?

- |             |                |
|-------------|----------------|
| Saggar      | Slip           |
| Jiggered    | China clay     |
| Fettling    | Bone           |
| Paintress   | Blunger        |
| Placer      | Lead           |
| Bottle Kiln | Flux           |
| Coalport    | Bottom Knocker |
| Potter      | Fire           |

B	T	W	E	R	Y	F	E	T	T	L	I	N	G	U	I	O	P
T	O	I	U	Y	D	I	Q	A	S	C	D	F	G	H	J	S	L
X	Z	T	N	M	F	R	H	G	H	Y	T	U	R	T	A	C	V
B	P	K	T	H	J	E	G	I	F	N	M	K	E	G	T	C	B
N	L	N	B	O	D	V	N	T	O	I	U	J	G	J	T	O	K
M	A	W	E	R	M	A	Y	U	I	K	I	A	F	Q	P	A	L
T	C	T	B	T	C	K	T	H	R	F	R	O	L	V	G	L	R
T	E	M	T	L	O	T	N	T	B	O	I	U	Y	R	E	P	E
F	R	H	A	B	U	C	X	O	F	G	H	J	K	L	A	O	T
G	B	Y	E	W	Q	N	T	T	C	D	R	Y	U	I	G	R	F
B	J	K	T	F	T	T	G	T	T	K	T	T	N	T	J	T	T
O	G	F	L	G	L	W	P	E	O	I	E	T	A	Z	B	V	P
N	N	B	A	E	T	U	T	T	R	T	R	R	A	S	P	P	O
E	W	Q	K	T	A	G	X	F	R	E	G	H	X	T	A	T	T
P	T	I	E	W	T	D	T	E	S	D	E	S	U	R	O	I	T
T	L	K	J	I	O	P	R	S	T	I	O	P	L	T	J	U	E
N	B	V	C	X	A	S	E	Q	W	E	R	Y	T	I	F	G	R
N	M	I	O	P	J	I	G	G	E	R	E	D	U	T	P	T	B

## Activity

Using the diagram of an up-draught bottle oven, see if you can place the labels in the correct place on the illustration?

1. Bottle Kiln
2. Saggar
3. Placer
4. Coal used for fuel
5. Fire Mouth
6. Inner Chamber - Called 'A Kiln'
7. Central Chimney
8. Outer Wall - Called 'The Hovel'

## Activity

Can you find out what a 'flux' is used for? \_\_\_\_\_