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## PERSONALLY SPEAKING

Dave Proudlove – Founder of development and regeneration advisers URBME



SIGNPOST INTO HISTORY: The Trent & Mersey Canal.

# The men who made the Potteries a place

**P**LACEMAKING. It's a bit of a buzzword and a bit of a big thing these days. Local authorities and politicians talk about it. Government agencies talk about it. Some property developers profess to do it.

There is even a professional body dedicated to ensuring its success, The Institute of Place Management.

But while lots of people identify that it is possible to 'create' place, there are many that get it wrong, which may be down to interpretation and misjudgement.

Many towns and cities around the world are associated with their original placemakers: Daniel Burnham and Chicago; London and Christopher Wren; Owen Williams, Lord Mostyn and Llandudno. And it is fair to say that The Potteries would not be The Potteries without Josiah Wedgwood, **inset, above,** and James Brindley, **right.** Before Wedgwood and Brindley's brilliant collaboration, the area that became known as The Potteries was a backwater. A series of scrubby, under-populated hamlets and villages that amounted to very little. Thanks to them, The Potteries is now a city of more than a quarter-of-a-million people and famous throughout the world. There are not too many places named after the product for which they are known.

Although their collaboration was genuine, it was also one of convenience. It was a relationship

based on mutual needs. Brindley's grand vision of connecting England's four great rivers – the Trent, the Mersey, the Severn and the Thames – utilising a network of canals needed backers, and most thought he was a bit mad.

At the same time Wedgwood needed to transport his fragile wares in a safe manner, while he was also exploring ways of breaking into new markets in the New World and Europe. And so each could see the benefit of working together, and as a result Etruria happened and The Potteries was born.

Without Josiah Wedgwood, ceramics as an industry in North Staffordshire would not have evolved in the way that it did and the Six Towns would not have emerged. Without the vision and innovation of James Brindley, Wedgwood would not have revolutionised his business the way that he did. And without Wedgwood's persuasion, Brindley's masterplan would have remained on the drawing board.

As Fred Hughes has said, history was made at The Leopard in Burslem. Although there were those who came before Wedgwood – the likes of the Adams family and Thomas Whieldon – it was Wedgwood's entrepreneurship and foresight combined with Brindley's vision and can-do approach that shaped The Potteries as we know it. Wedgwood and Brindley gave our city its genius loci.

The Wedgwood company's move to

Barlston to deliver another factory in a garden was a further extension of this. By then, Josiah's Etruria had been brutalised, ravaged and dominated by the industrial machine that he had in effect created with Brindley. But this inevitable messiness – at its worst, an environmental disaster – is a big part of Stoke-on-Trent's character.

However, their legacy was secure and today their achievements are recognised and celebrated. Though only the squat Roundhouse remains of Wedgwood's pioneering Etruria Works, the Trent and Mersey Canal is a much-valued piece of green and blue infrastructure that meanders through The Potteries providing a place for peace and contemplation, while providing the context for efforts to improve our city. While aspects of our city's story have disappeared or been eroded, Wedgwood and Brindley have provided something of real permanence.

On June 17, the Potteries Heritage Society will host a walking tour from Burslem into Middleport, and then along the Trent and Mersey Canal to Etruria in celebration of Civic Day, and our city's original placemakers, Josiah Wedgwood and James Brindley. It may only be a small event, but it's a big one in terms of its meaning.

We are now at an important juncture in our city's relatively short history, and big decisions need to be made in terms of its future direction, and both Wedgwood and Brindley's contribution will still remain central to our success as a place. And what's more, it would be helpful if another Wedgwood and Brindley could come along too.

