

Title: "To add beauty to utility": Design procurement strategies of leading Manchester cotton, Macclesfield silk and Staffordshire pottery firms c.1750-1860

Authors: Catherine Casson (presenting author) (Alliance Manchester Business School, University of Manchester) and Mark Dodgson (University of Queensland Business School)

Abstract: The ability to combine excellence in manufacturing with excellence in design has been recognised by business historians as an important characteristic of a successful business. This paper focuses on three industries - pottery, cotton and silk - and examines how leading firms procured designs that complemented their manufacturing expertise. The British Industrial Revolution of 1750 to 1860 is the main period of study, but context is provided on preconditions before 1750, and the legacy from 1860 to 1900. Evidence is drawn from leading firms in England in these three sectors, namely Wedgwood in the pottery industry, cotton textile firms around Manchester and silk manufacturing centered on Macclesfield. For purposes of comparison we look at competing sectors in France and America.

The paper argues that the procurement of design was a key factor governing the success or failure of firms in these sectors. It identifies five strategies for the procurement of design and considers which strategies were chosen in which industries and why. It also considers whether these choices were successful. The paper argues that sectors with pro-active firms were more successful than those dominated by reactive firms.