Networks, innovation and knowledge: the North Staffordshire Potteries, 1750-1851
Abstract

During the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the industrial district of the North Staffordshire Potteries dominated the British earthenware industry, producing local goods that sold in global markets. Over this time the region experienced consistent growth in output, an extreme spatial concentration of physical and human capital, and became home to some of the most famous Master Potters in the world. The Potteries was also characterised by a growing body of useful and practical knowledge about the materials, processes and skills required to produce world-leading earthenware. This thesis exploits this striking example of a highly concentrated and highly skilled craft-based industry during a period of sustained growth and development which offers a rich opportunity to contribute to several strands of economic and business history. This thesis presents and analyses new empirical evidence based on trade directories to examine the organisational evolution of the district. It reconstructs the district at the firm level, showing that the region’s growth was incredibly dynamic. The spatial concentration of producers and the importance of social and business networks are also explored through a new map of the region in 1802 and social network analysis.

As a study of a craft-based, highly skilled industry without a legacy of formal institutions such as guilds to govern and protect access to knowledge, this thesis also offers substantial empirical and historiographical contributions to the study of knowledge and innovation during the period of the Industrial Revolution. It presents a new database of pottery patents alongside a variety of qualitative evidence such as trade literature, exhibition catalogues, advertisements and sales catalogues. Quantitative and qualitative analysis reveals the low propensity to patent in the North Staffordshire pottery industry, and provides a new typology of knowledge used in the industry. It argues that the types of knowledge being created and disseminated influenced the behaviour of producers substantially, and this typology of knowledge is far more complex than those established tacit/explicit divisions favoured in historical study and the social sciences more broadly. The findings of this thesis allow us to answer numerous outstanding questions concerning the development of the North Staffordshire Potteries during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. When brought together in such a way, the complementary strands of research and findings presented offer a coherent narrative of an extremely complex and dynamic cluster of production that both challenges and confirms traditional historiographical tradition concerning industrial districts.
and abroad. They developed new designs, materials and techniques. Their collaboration led to several innovations in ceramic manufacture and design. Here the plate is printed in solid areas of coloured enamels without lines. Between 1851 and 1915, nations from across the world competed in vast international exhibitions, where they displayed their country's products. This coffee pot was made for the London 1862 exhibition.