

Decorative tile and terracotta exports by British manufacturers, 1840-1940

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Towards the end of the eighteenth century Liverpool-made printed delftware tiles were exported to America where they were used in colonial houses.¹ Another early architectural ceramic export, in the late eighteenth century and early nineteenth century, was Coade stone, with many commissions from the East India Company and a speculative venture carried out by Mrs Coade's works manager William Croggon, who shipped eleven cases of mixed figures and animals to the West Indies in 1816.² However, following the demise of the Coade factory during the 1830s, the history of the British architectural ceramic and tile export trade becomes more difficult to discern due to the lack of relevant archival material.³ It is known, for instance, that Minton's of Stoke-on-Trent had a substantial foreign trade in tiles, with a significant number of commissions from Europe, America, India, Australia and New Zealand, but there is no detail in the Minton archives concerning the bulk of these contracts.⁴ This article attempts to outline the extent of this British export trade during 1840-1940 and describe some of the major foreign architectural commissions obtained over that century by British ceramics manufacturers.

Early Minton tile exports

Having exported earthenware since the 1790s, Minton's began to produce encaustic tiles in the 1830s and exported them before 1850, initially to Europe and then worldwide; some of the first Minton tiles in Australia were used at one of the country's earliest Ecclesiologically correct churches, St John the Baptist, Buckland, Tasmania, built in 1846-7.⁵ In 1851 the *Staffordshire Advertiser* reported that Minton tiles had previously been exported to India, Jamaica and other parts of the Empire, and were newly in demand in America, the cost of shipping them from Liverpool being lower than that of sending the tiles from the Potteries to the port; this was due to a surplus of ships which carried raw cotton from America being available on the return leg to transport freight at very competitive rates.⁶ Minton's plain and encaustic tiles were used in 1856 for the extensive floors of two wings added to the Capitol building in Washington.⁷ In the following year a high-quality multicoloured floor of Minton's encaustic tiles was installed in the circular entrance hall - the 'Grand Hall' - of Grace Hill (now the Litchfield Villa, 1855-7), Prospect Park, Brooklyn; this Italianate pile, then sited on a remote hilltop, was built for the developer Edwin C. Litchfield by America's leading country house architect Alexander Jackson Davis (1803-92).⁸

Amongst the 173 gifts of encaustic tiles made by Herbert Minton to churches, chapels and cathedrals were seven to institutions outside the British Isles: a church in Philadelphia (1847); St John's Cathedral, Hong Kong (1848); a church in Gwalior, northern India (1852); a church in Geelong, Australia (1855); and St Paul's Episcopal Church, Monrovia, Liberia (1855).⁹ Two donations were

made to St Anne's, a chapel of ease to Christ Church Cathedral in Fredericton, New Brunswick, Canada, built in 1846-7 by an English architect, a follower of the Tractarians, who mostly paid for the church himself. It was said to be the first Ecclesiologically correct church in Canada and its lavish Minton tiling includes a representation of the Royal arms.¹⁰

North America

Although Minton's appear to have been the first to export encaustic tiles, other firms soon followed, particularly Maw & Co, whose wares were imported by several American agencies from around 1860.¹¹ English-made encaustic tiles were felt to be a fashionable floor covering throughout America from the 1850s. However, their use tended to be confined to public buildings and the homes of the wealthy in east coast cities, as the tiles were initially only available from a few importers situated in Atlantic ports, and rail links were poor.¹² Maw's supplied a tile pavement for University College, Toronto, in the late 1850s, and another - which included a trade tile - for the nearby Sherborne Villa, built in 1857-8 for an English family; the overall designs of both pavements were very similar. The University pavement was installed by Maw's own tile fixers, who were sent over with the consignment of tiles.¹³ This appears to have been a common practice, even for smaller companies like George Swift of Liverpool's Swan Tile Works, who sent their own fixers out to South Africa in 1898 with the mosaic to floor the new Bank of Africa building in Johannesburg.¹⁴

American manufacture of encaustic tiles flourished after the fine displays of European tiles at the Philadelphia Centennial Exposition of 1876 increased their general popularity. English tiles were still exported to America towards the end of the nineteenth century and into the early twentieth century, but were generally used in rather less prestigious locations than before, and complaints about the quality of the imports became more frequent. In 1892 the Indianapolis-based *Clay-Worker* reported that Maw tiles laid in the city's Denison House, complete with trade tile, were 'irregular as to surface and color'; the article pointed out that purchasers might not be familiar with the current quality of American tiles, suggesting that 'the English product will stay on the other side of the water until they can make something which is really better than comes from our own manufactories'.¹⁵ In 1905, following a complaint from Toronto concerning the quality of an order of Maw's tiles, a result of 'the higher standard of sorting adopted by American manufacturers as compared with ourselves', the firm decided to re-sort all Canadian orders before packing. Despite a continuing trickle of such complaints, in 1905 the firm's foreign trade in paving tiles still exceeded that of the home market.¹⁶ Their 1906 catalogue recorded eighty-nine commissions from outside the British Isles (from America, Argentina, Australia, Canada, Europe, India, New Zealand, Russia and South Africa), and the firm built up great expertise in handling large overseas contracts.¹⁷

Australia and New Zealand

Although the market for tile exports to America appears to have declined in the last quarter of the nineteenth century, it was still expanding elsewhere, notably in the antipodes. By the 1880s Australia had its own iron foundries, plasterworks, wallpaper manufacturers and furniture makers but many decorative products were still imported, including a huge number of tiles. The upper end of the Australian domestic market was firmly attached to England as a source of sophisticated decorative items, although local importers and agents were crucial in setting styles.¹⁸ The fashionable Scottish decorators Daniel Cottier and John Lyon opened a branch in Sydney in 1873 and decorated a large number of private houses 'in the latest London style', as the *Australasian Decorator and Painter* put it.¹⁹ Several British tile manufacturers showed at the 1879 Sydney International Exhibition, including Craven Dunnill, Doulton's and Maw's, whose display of encaustic tiles was described in the official record as 'the best exhibit, by far, of its kind in the Exhibition'.²⁰

British-made tiles were used in a wide variety of late nineteenth century public and commercial buildings in Australia and New Zealand, a relatively early occurrence being the Minton floor tiling at St Andrew's Cathedral, Sydney, consecrated in 1868. Tiles by Maw or Minton also appeared in Parliament House buildings at Queensland, Perth and in Melbourne, for which a specially designed Minton floor was made in 1879; this was Minton's most important encaustic tile commission in Australia. Antipodean tile manufacturers began to emerge from the 1870s, and by the 1920s had become dominant in their home market, although European and Japanese imports regained some ground in the 1930s.²¹

India

The 1860s Sassoon Clock Tower in Bombay (see below) incorporated tiles by Minton's, who also supplied tiles for the city's Law Courts of 1871-9 and the University Library of 1878.²² However, the biggest and most prestigious Bombay tile contract went to Maw's; it was for the Victoria Terminus (1878-87), the terminus of the Great Indian Peninsula Railway. This St Pancras-style pile had encaustic tiled floors and wall tiling throughout, the two-dimensional flat-pattern of the wall tiling being acceptable in both English and Indian design traditions.²³ The same firm were also responsible for the 1905-8 scheme for the tiled floor of the Wedding Pavilion in the Mysore Palace, southern India, which is a rare example of a well-documented foreign contract. The records show that determining the exact design was a process which took over two years to complete and involved the Maharaja, the architect, the executive engineer and Maw's chief designer.²⁴

The terracotta export trade

Terracotta became popular in Bombay in the 1860s, when the city was being rebuilt by its Governor, Henry Frere, as *Urbs Prima in Indis*, the first city of the Indies. John Lockwood Kipling was appointed as professor of Architectural Sculpture in Bombay's School of Art in 1865; this was one of several appointments made with the intention of helping traditional Indian crafts

compete with British manufacturing. Kipling - the father of Rudyard Kipling - had trained in Burslem, been apprenticed as a terracotta modeller and worked on the ceramic decoration of the South Kensington Museum (now V&A). After he arrived in India, a lavish scheme of terracotta decoration was carried out in the 1860s in the city's Victoria Gardens; this included the Sassoon Clock Tower, made from terracotta supplied by John Blashfield's Stamford works in Lincolnshire.²⁵ The London terracotta manufacturer Mark Henry Blanchard had been involved slightly earlier, supplying wares in 1865 for the Horniman Circle, a prestigious development in the centre of Bombay.²⁶ Blashfield turned out to be an enthusiastic exporter of terracotta, but his work for the Boston Museum of Fine Arts (1870-6) led to the downfall of his firm due to late payments associated with the contract.²⁷

To judge from their catalogues, neither of the major turn-of-the-century Welsh terracotta manufacturers, the Ruabon firms J. C. Edwards and Dennis Ruabon, dabbled in the late nineteenth century export trade. However, Doulton's exported a large terracotta group by John Broad to Brisbane in 1880 and Burmantofts of Leeds built up a worldwide trade in faience and tiles towards the end of the century.²⁸ The latter's markets included Belgium, India, Russia, Australia, New Zealand, Canada, Argentina and Brazil, where a major contract was for Manaus opera house (1884-96); this was followed in the early 1900s by the same city's Customs Building.²⁹ Around the turn of the century, celebrations following Queen Victoria's 1897 diamond jubilee resulted in several commissions from abroad for commemorative fountains and statues by Doulton's. The fountains were usually in glazed, coloured Doultonware while the statues, often modelled by John Broad, were normally plain terracotta. A still-extant 1900 example from Victoria, the capital city of Mahé in the Seychelles, combines both, with a tiny terracotta statue of Queen Victoria mounted on top of the mostly green-glazed fountain, itself similar in design to those found in Britain. At least three Doulton fountains of varying dates were still extant in Australia in the late 1990s.³⁰

Doulton's was also successful in exporting terracotta for building construction, especially just before the First World War when the firm won several important commissions in Canada. They provided forty-four strange terracotta figures to decorate the outside of the Calgary Herald Building (1912-13) including assorted animals, birds and reptiles as well as gargoyle-like representations of several of the newspaper's staff.³¹ The Canadian Pacific Railroad Hotel (1913) in Vancouver had similarly odd Doultonware ornament, as did St John's Cathedral (1912-17) in Saskatoon; the Cathedral had some internal facing of white glazed Carraraware, which was also used for the facade of the Canada Life Assurance Building (1912-13) in Calgary. Aside from Canada, Doulton's had a worldwide export trade in terracotta including South Africa, Mexico and India.

The role of the agent

Although agents were an essential part of selling abroad, their role was often problematic; they normally acted for several firms all making the same type of product, and were paid a retainer and commission by each of them, thus making the agency economical for the agent but increasing expense for the manufacturers. There was also the expense of producing lavish catalogues directed at specific markets - Maw's 1906 catalogue came in Home, Colonial, Indian and Foreign versions - and making extended visits abroad. In 1905, when competition was at a peak, Maw's minute books record lengthy discussion by the Board of Directors on difficulties with South African agencies, who tended to take on too many clients.

A. J. Maw made a trip to South Africa in late 1903 and went to Canada in autumn 1905. His report on the latter was a story of inadequate agencies, shipping delays and severe price competition from Pilkington's in particular; he managed to gain access to Pilkington's invoices 'by some means or other' in order to compare their prices. Most annoying was the action of the Vokes Hardware Company, who had offered to act as Maw's agents. In securing the contract for tiling a railway station, 'They submitted samples of our tiles and specified the use of them, and this fact was a determining factor in their tender being accepted. They then scavenged the factories of the United States for supplies of inferior qualities of tiles and seconds, and proceeded with the execution of the contract.' Despite these difficulties, Maw suggested annual visits to Canada for the next three years, as he had found that in Ontario, bye-laws required the tiling of various public buildings to fulfil sanitary requirements; in addition, the use of tiles in Canadian private houses was also spreading rapidly.³²

Conclusion

Although other European manufacturers, notably Spanish firms based in Valencia and Barcelona, exported tiles from the late nineteenth century, the sheer extent of British exports, along with the prestigious nature of many of the commissions, makes this an interesting field of research, where ideas - for instance on Ecclesiology, and on the suitable appearance of public buildings - were being exported, not simply ceramics. The early encaustic tile trade with America was followed by expansion into Australia in particular, and the fashion for tile and terracotta, especially with elaborate decoration, continued abroad well into the interwar period, long after it had collapsed at home. Doulton's seem to have been the most successful of the architectural ceramics exporters in the early twentieth century; apart from their substantial terracotta trade, their largest ever tile contract, for 7,500 tiles in 1935, was for the Singapore Terminal Station where they installed eighteen hand-painted pictorial tile panels showing local industries.³³ In the countries where an indigenous tile manufacturing industry developed, especially Australia and America, designers began by emulating British-made products and later diversified into wares which took into account local preferences. It is hoped to continue research on this subject to produce a

qualitative and quantitative account of architectural ceramic exports and develop a comprehensive database of locations abroad where British products were used.

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Notes and References

- 1 van Lemmen, H. (1997) *Delftware Tiles*. London, Laurence King. See p.130.
- 2 Kelly, A. (1990) *Mrs Coade's Stone*. Upton-upon Severn, Self Publishing Association. See p.25, pp.440-5.
- 3 Pearson, L. (2002) The World at Their Feet: Decorative tile exports by British manufacturers, 1850-1910, *Glazed Expressions*, 44, p.4.
- 4 Jones, J. (1993) *Minton: The first two hundred years of design and production*. rewsbury, Swan Hill Press. See p.174.
- 5 Andrews, B. (2001) *Australian Gothic: the Gothic Revival in Australian Architecture from the 1840s to the 1950s*. Carlton, Melbourne University Press. See pp.28-9. See also Lewis, M. *Australian Building: A Cultural Interpretation*. (Online, cited 10th January 2005) <<http://www.arbld.unimelb.edu.au/~milesbl/>>. p.6.08.7 gives Moore, G. M. (1984) *Antipodean Gothic*. MA, University of Melbourne, as the source of the reference to Minton tiles.
- 6 Ewins, N. (1997) "Supplying the Present Wants of Our Yankee Cousins." Staffordshire Ceramics and the American Market 1775-1880, *Journal of Ceramic History*, Vol. 15, pp1-154. See p.28.
- 7 Grimmer, A. E. and Konrad, K. A. (1997) *Preservation Briefs: Preserving Historic Ceramic Tile Floors*. Washington, National Park Service.
- 8 My thanks to Hans van Lemmen for drawing the Litchfield Villa to my attention.
- 9 (1996) The Late Herbert Minton, Esq. *Glazed Expressions*, 32, pp.3-6. See also King, D. (1987) *Short History and Guide to St John's Cathedral, Hong Kong*.
- 10 Leroux, J. (2001) Minton tiles in Canada - St Anne's Chapel of Ease, Fredericton, New Brunswick, *Glazed Expressions*, 43, pp.1-3.
- 11 Personal communication, Michael Sims, 3rd July 2002.
- 12 Sims, M. (2003) The Encaustic Tile in America - Part One: The Fashion for Encaustic Tiles, *Tile Heritage*, Vol. 7, 1, pp.2-13.
- 13 Richardson, D. (1997) The Maw Tiles from Sherborne Villa, *University of Toronto Quarterly*, Vol. 66, 2. Maw's also supplied the lobby tiles for an early New

York cooperative apartment house, 34 Grammercy Park (1883), which in addition featured tiles by Minton Hollins and T. & R. Boote; see Tunick, S. *The New World*, pp.167-196 in van Lemmen, H. (1993) *Tiles in Architecture*. London, Laurence King. See p.168.

14 Beckett, P. (2004) George Swift and Liverpool's Swan Tile Works, *TACS Journal*, Vol. 10, pp.24-31.

15 (1892) English Tile in America, *The Clay-Worker*, 15th March, p.309. My thanks to Michael Sims for pointing out this article.

16 Maw & Company Limited Minute Book, Directors' Meetings, 1905-6; Ironbridge Gorge Museum Trust Library, D/MAW/1/6; begins 2nd January 1905. Information from meetings which took place on 27th September and 17th November 1905.

17 The exact figures were America 22, Argentina 6, Australia 36, Canada 5, Europe 1, India 3, New Zealand 6, Russia 1 and South Africa 9.

18 Forge, S. (1981) *Victorian Splendour: Australian Interior Decoration 1837-1901*. Melbourne, Oxford University Press. See pp.28-9.

19 Donnelly, M. (1999) Daniel Cottier, Pioneer of Aestheticism, *Decorative Arts Society Journal*, Vol. 23, pp.32-51. See pp.47, 51.

20 (1881) *Official Record of the Sydney International Exhibition, 1879*. Sydney, Thomas Richards. See p.203.

21 Denne, D. (1991) *British Tiles in the Antipodes*. Paper given at International Conference on the Study and Conservation of Tiles, Institute of Advanced Architectural Studies, York, 30th October-2nd November. See also Lewis, M. *Australian Building*.

22 London, C. W. (2002) *Bombay Gothic*. Mumbai, India Book House.

23 Stratton, M. (1987) British Tiles in India, *Glazed Expressions*, 14, pp.2-3.

24 Kay, G. (1998) The Peacock of Mysore: An account of the tiled floor of the Wedding Pavilion in the Mysore Palace, Karnataka State, India, *TACS Journal*, Vol. 7, pp.3-9.

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26 Dilawari, V. and Cunningham, C. (2003) Exporting South Kensington: Terracotta in Victorian Bombay, *The Victorian*, 13, pp.24-27.

27 Stratton, M. (1993) *The Terracotta Revival*. London, Victor Gollancz. See pp.144-7.

28 Eyles, D. and Irvine, L. (2002) *The Doulton Lambeth Wares*. Shepton Beauchamp, Richard Dennis. See p.306.

29 Wood, J. G. (2004) Behind the Facade: An Insight into Burmantofts' Trading Ethos, *TACS Journal*, Vol. 10, pp.3-11. Although Manaus opera house, the Teatro Amazonas, is extant, it was rebuilt in 1929 and again in 1974.

30 Irvine, L. (1997) Tile Hunting in the Antipodes, *Glazed Expressions*, 35, pp.6-8.

31 Atterbury, P. and Irvine, L. (1979) *The Doulton Story*. Stoke-on-Trent, Royal Doulton Tableware. See p.85. Although the Calgary Herald Building was

demolished in 1972, the gargoyles were saved and some are now on public display at the University of Calgary.

32 See note 16; information from meeting which took place on 16th February 1906. See also the Maw & Co minute book for 1906-9 (Shropshire Archives, Mss 5228), which reports a series of complaints from abroad concerning delays and the quality of Maw's products.

33 Eyles and Irvine (2002) *Doulton Lambeth Wares*. See p.235. The panels were each over 23 feet high and about 5 feet wide, and at least twelve of them are still extant in what is now known as the Old Malaysian Railway Station. My thanks to Willem Irik for this information.

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