

## ESSEX

Although far from the heartlands of tile or terracotta production, Essex has several interesting ceramic locations, notably a handful of rare fifteenth century Spanish tiles in Billericay, early sixteenth century terracotta at Layer Marney Tower, the unique maritime memorial tiles at Brightlingsea Church, and tile panels marking the various works carried out by the architect-priest Ernest Geldart (1848-1929) of Little Braxted. Geldart worked on a total of fifty-seven projects in Essex, and his tile panels, often bearing biblical texts, can be found in several of his church restorations along with his distinctive paving designs. Finally, in the postwar period, there is the curious story of the Basildon Bus Station tile murals. Suggested reading: James Bettley, "The Master of Little Braxted in his prime": Ernest Geldart and Essex, 1873-1900', *Essex Archaeology and History*, 31 (2000), pp169-194; Lynn Pearson, 'Memorial and Commemorative Tiles in Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Century Churches', *TACS Journal*, 9 (2003), pp13-23; Alfred L. Wakeling and Peter Moon, *Tiles of Tragedy: Brightlingsea's Unique Maritime Memorial*, (Ellar Publications, Stockton-on-Tees, 2003). The *Gazetteer* entry for Essex covers the administrative areas of Essex County Council, Southend-on-Sea Borough Council and Thurrock Borough Council.

## ARDLEIGH

The peaceful churchyard and unexceptional, though pleasant, exterior view of **St Mary the Virgin** does not prepare the visitor for the spectacular colour of its ravishing chancel decoration, which was largely carried out in 1894-5, following restoration work begun by William Butterfield in 1882. St Mary's vicar during 1872-91 was T. W. Perry, a high churchman who had previously been a curate at All Saints, Margaret Street. Perry raised funds for the restoration and brought in Butterfield as his architect, although the dramatic chancel decorative scheme was only completed after Perry's death in 1891.<sup>1</sup> The chancel's encaustic tile pavement, which features examples of the *Green Man* design, is by Godwin's and was part of the 1882-3 works. Perry's successor as vicar called on the Essex architect-priest Ernest Geldart to produce a decorative scheme for the remainder of the chancel, and this was executed by Percy Bacon & Brothers during 1894-5. It includes a highly glazed seven-tile plaque on the wall below the south chancel window; the black lettering on cream ground largely commemorates Perry.

## BASILDON

Basildon's **Bus Station** on SOUTHERNHAY, on the southern edge of the new town's shopping precinct, is distinguished by a brightly coloured tile panel at first floor height stretching along its entire length and portraying scenes from the town's history (Fig 71). This impressive installation, about 60 yards long by 10 feet high, probably dates from the early 1980s as it shows the railway station, which was opened in the late 1970s. Its mixture of square and oblong tiles can easily be seen by passers-by on road and train, although not by passengers

waiting at the bus station, whose shelter is directly beneath. The shelter was added in front of a row of shops during the 1966 rebuilding of the bus station. Curiously, the original 1958 layout of the bus station also featured a large tile mural, in exactly the same place as the present installation. This mural, designed by William Gordon for Carter's of Poole, was made up from hand-painted tiles in an abstract pattern using mainly geometric motifs.<sup>2</sup> Photographs show it to be an impressive piece, but it was fairly short-lived; the alterations to the bus station do not appear to have necessitated its removal, and indeed the present tiling may simply have been installed on top of the older mural (which perhaps may have been weathering badly). Or was the vivid 1958 abstract scheme so unpalatable to Basildon that it had to be replaced with the blander, more figurative design?

#### BILLERICAY

The **Church of St Mary Magdalene**, HIGH STREET, with its oddly battlemented brick tower, has some intriguing but easily overlooked objects of ceramic interest: six scruffy dark blue and white tiles are set in the spandrels above the outside of the west doorway, through which one enters from the High Street. These tiles, four showing flowers and two bearing coats of arms, are from Manises, near Valencia, and date from the early part of the fifteenth century. This type of metallic lustre tile is very rare in Britain, and their appearance - built into the wall of a fifteenth century church tower - seems to replicate heraldic building decoration of the time, albeit in an otherwise unknown fashion. The tiles, luxury items, were probably installed during the construction of the tower, although they could have been added when the church was remodelled during the eighteenth century.

#### BRAINTREE

The inn sign at the **White Hart Hotel**, COGGESHALL ROAD (in the middle of the town centre) is an attractive pentagonal pictorial tile panel high up on the pub main facade. It probably dates from the interwar period and shows a white hart (a male deer bearing antlers) and a colourful rural scene within a cream frame. The panel measures about three feet by four feet and is signed Doulton of Lambeth in the bottom right hand corner.

#### BRIGHTLINGSEA

**All Saints Church** stands a good mile out of Brightlingsea, on a breezy hilltop at the north end of CHURCH ROAD. It has a unique collection of 213 six-inch square ceramic memorial tiles dated between 1872 and 1988; they form a dado on the walls of the nave and south aisle (Fig 72). The memorial scheme originated in 1883 with the loss of nineteen Brightlingsea fishermen in a storm at sea.

Brightlingsea's incumbent, the Reverend Arthur Pertwee, was so shocked by the disaster that he decided to make a commemorative record of all parishioners lost at sea since his arrival in 1872. Many of the casualties were fishermen, but as the tradition was maintained into the twentieth century, wartime losses became more frequent. Each tile gives on successive lines the name, age, brief summary of the loss, and the date it occurred; many of them use gothic lettering on a pale

ground, and there is little additional decoration. The tiles are hand-painted overglaze on white ground and were initially supplied by the church decorating firm Cox, Sons, Buckley & Co.<sup>3</sup>

The Brightlingsea memorial tiles are unusual not only because of their number, which could be approached by a handful of Staffordshire churches, but in their design; the norm for these memorials is a lozenge shape, and few from other areas date from after the First World War.<sup>4</sup> In fact there is also a ceramic memorial of the more common type and design at All Saints, on an inner wall of the tower; it comprises a four-tile group set diagonally, is dated 1886 and commemorates the tower's restoration. It seems certain that the influence of the priest-architect Ernest Geldart, rector of Little Braxted, played a strong part in the decision to begin the extraordinary memorial tile frieze at All Saints. Geldart, who first used commemorative tiles in 1882, occasionally preached at Brightlingsea, having met its vicar for the first time in late 1884; the first of the memorial tiles was not installed until the following year.<sup>5</sup> Geldart also worked on St Mary's Church at Southery in Norfolk, where there is a tile frieze comparable to Brightlingsea's although lacking the maritime connection.

Down in the town itself, beside Brightlingsea Creek on WATER SIDE, is a substantial building, formerly a pub, rather out of scale with its neighbours and topped by four fine red terracotta dragon finials.

#### CHELMSFORD

The **Shire Hall** (1790-2), DUKE STREET, has Coade stone capitals and three high relief panels of Justice, Wisdom and Mercy, all modelled by the artist John Bacon. The architect of the Shire Hall was John Johnson, County Surveyor for Essex, who also used Coade stone in his partial rebuilding in 1801-3 of the nearby parish church of St Mary following its collapse in 1800; the church became the **Cathedral** in 1914. The south aisle piers, and the clerestory tracery and figures are all of Coade stone.<sup>6</sup>

#### Galleywood Common

**St Michael's Church** has a tile and mosaic reredos dating from 1874; this was probably designed by Harry Burrow for Powell's of Whitefriars.

#### COLCHESTER

Just north of Colchester's imposing Town Hall is **St Martin's Church**, WEST STOCKWELL STREET (Fig 73). The now-redundant church was restored by Ernest Geldart in 1890-1 and a small glazed tile wall plaque in the south aisle records this fact, along with the names of the churchwardens, in strong gothic lettering; these tile plaques were a feature of Geldart's restorations. Another Geldart trademark is striking geometric design of the paving, here carried out in red, black and yellow. There is also an ornate eight-tile wall plaque, installed at the west end of the north wall in 1892, which records the partial destruction of the tower in 1648.

West of the main shopping area on CHURCH STREET (in the shadow of the Jumbo water tower) is **Colchester Arts Centre**, formerly the church of St Mary-

at-the-Walls, which was rebuilt (apart from its tower) in 1871-2 by Sir Arthur Blomfield. There is a decent encaustic tile pavement in the sanctuary, hidden away backstage, but the real surprise is in the nave (now auditorium), where the shiny buff columns with their elaborate capitals turn out to be faced in terracotta. The cladding was added to the original cast iron columns in 1911, when the topmost part of the tower was also built.

Well north of the centre at **Colchester General Hospital**, TURNER ROAD, two large mosaic panels by Cleo Mussi, made from a mix of broken and recycled hand-made and mass-produced tiles, form part of the 65 art and craft commissions carried out during the late 1990s; all the work was funded through the Colchester and Tendring Hospital Arts Project, which aimed to de-institutionalise the hospital atmosphere. Mussi's colourful panels are mounted on the staircase wall of the Constable wing, where the overall theme for art commissions was air, water and earth.<sup>7</sup>

#### FRINTON-ON-SEA

Frinton's first pub, on the quiet little town's main street CONNAUGHT AVENUE, is a conversion of a shop with an unusual green faience facade incorporating curved glasswork and a singular green faience column as well as tiled pilasters; it probably dates from around 1900. Almost opposite is **Maynard's** the fishmongers, with a porch whose blue art nouveau tiling continues inside the shop; one interior wall has white tiling with two lozenge-shaped blue pictorial panels, both probably of sheep but partly obscured by shop furnishings.

#### GOOD EASTER

The chancel of **St Andrew's Church** was restored in 1879-81 by Ernest Geldart, who designed the IHS tile which can be seen in the piscina, as well as the painted decoration. There is also a tile pavement by Maw & Co.

#### HARLOW

Harlow New Town began life in 1947, with Frederick Gibberd responsible for its overall planning. The first part of the centre to be completed was the MARKET SQUARE, overlooked by **Adams House** with its clock on a blue and white tiled background. The square retains much of the integrity of the original design, as does the main shopping street, Broad Walk, and WEST SQUARE. Here, beyond the bridge, is **Gate House** with a large abstract tile mural in lustrous blue and dark blue relief tiles, the latter with an attractive rippling motif; it was made by Pilkington's in 1955.<sup>8</sup>

There was a clear emphasis on architectural decoration throughout Harlow's centre, with several external mosaics and marble-slab murals, along with sculpture from the Harlow Arts Trust collection. Although much of the artwork is still present, it is generally ignored and not well-presented; even the listed Gibberd-designed water gardens have been demolished (although they are to be rebuilt) to make way for a modern shopping experience. Unlike the Hertfordshire new towns of Stevenage and Hemel Hempstead, where alterations have respected the initial conception, Harlow's 1950s layout has not been valued,

while much of the new building is wildly out of scale; the bus station, however, using terracotta slabs and green-faced bricks, is a welcome exception.

As a decorative finish, mosaic was more popular than tiling in late fifties Harlow - the broad slabs of the listed Frank Lloyd Wright-style Harlow Town railway station are mostly faced with it - and a mosaic by the artist John Piper is the town's great (but normally hidden) glory. Just south of the centre in PLAYHOUSE SQUARE is **St Paul's Church** (1959-61, architects Humphrys & Hurst) where the east wall is completely covered by Piper's mosaic representation of the Madonna and child, in bright colours on a looming black ground (Fig 74). But this dark presence does not overwhelm the wonderfully light interior, where glazing bars cast a rectangular grid of shadows.

#### HARWICH

The major landmark of this odd town - a bracing mixture of high-tech port and old-fashioned buildings - is **St Nicholas Church**, CHURCH STREET, built in 1820-2 and designed by the Essex architect M. G. Thompson; it took the place of an earlier chapel which had become dilapidated and was pulled down. The materials are London brick combined with iron columns and window frames, all topped by a series of eye-catching Coade stone pinnacles. One of the three fonts is made from terracotta (its origin is unclear); it was used until 1873 when it was replaced by a stone and marble model. At the rear of the church is a collection of Dutch seventeenth century tin glazed tiles, removed from a house in West Street where they had been reused to line a pantry. The tiles portray biblical scenes as well as familiar images of landscapes and windmills. Just north of the church at 21 MARKET STREET is a former fruit and vegetable shop with a mainly green and blue tiled facade probably dating from around 1900; it includes a signed Carter's porch panel showing a boy and girl picking apples (Fig 75).

#### HATFIELD BROAD OAK

**St Mary's Church**, CHURCH YARD has an encaustic tile pavement; its broadly terracotta colouring inspired the design of the 1988-9 set of kneelers. There is also a patterned chancel tile pavement at the **Church of St John the Evangelist** (1856), BUSH END.

#### LAYER MARNEY

Sir Henry Marney (Baron Marney from 1522), whose family had held Layer Marney since the twelfth century, was born in the mid-fifteenth century and rose to become Sheriff of Essex and Captain of the King's Bodyguard under Henry VIII. He was eventually made Keeper of the Privy Seal, but died shortly afterwards, his position as the King's chief adviser having already been taken over by Thomas Wolsey, European diplomat and builder of Hampton Court (from 1514), which passed to the King in 1528. Wolsey's architectural ambitions knew few bounds. Foreign travel ensured that his extensive patronage was not restricted to home-grown artists and sculptors; he floored the (lost) Manor of the More, Rickmansworth, with fine tiles from Flanders, and commissioned terracotta roundel busts by the Italian sculptor Giovanni da Maiano for Hampton

Court. Dating from 1521, these roundels were some of the earliest examples of a brief, passing fashion for terracotta - then seen as a foreign material - lasting from the early 1520s until its abandonment about a quarter-century later, as the country became more insular following the dissolution of the monasteries.

Sir Henry Marney, who also had contacts with Italian craftsmen, began to build a palace on his country estate at Layer Marney around 1520, having rebuilt the church a few years before. **Layer Marney Tower** was intended to rival Wolsey's Hampton Court in size and grandeur, with a gatehouse taller, at about eighty feet, than any other domestic building in England. Ostentation was all, as fortified gatehouses were no longer any real proof against attack; indeed, the style is transitional between medieval and renaissance, with rather more terracotta decoration (possibly provided by English craftsmen) than at Hampton Court itself. Ornament on the red brick tower includes bands of terracotta trefoils, stylised dolphins and shell-like battlements, giving good views of the Essex countryside.<sup>9</sup>

Lord Marney died in 1523, after the gatehouse had been completed but before very much of his palace had been built. His tomb, in **St Mary's Church**, has an elaborate canopy above a black marble effigy which rests on a terracotta tomb chest. The monument to Lord Marney's son John, who died in 1525, just two years after his father, also has a terracotta tomb chest. The design of these tombs appears to have been the inspiration behind the extravagant terracotta tombs of Lord Marney's sister Margaret and her husband Sir Edmund Bedingfield at Oxborough, Norfolk, which in turn brought the material into fashion in that county.

#### LITTLE BRAXTED

Little Braxted was the only parish of the architect-priest Ernest Geldart (1848-1929), whose architectural career encompassed 163 projects, of which 57 were in Essex.<sup>10</sup> He worked for the firm of church decorators and furnishers Cox & Sons (later Cox, Sons, Buckley & Co), from at least 1881, when he also became rector of remote little **St Nicholas Church**. He soon made changes to the arrangement and decoration of St Nicholas, so that it would accord with his ritualist view of worship; it seems as if every inch of the church's interior is covered with meaningful pattern, lettering or figurative decoration. His five chronograms, in which the letters used for Roman numerals within an unrelated text are added together to form a date, are particularly strange. Major alterations followed in 1883-6; the 'before' and 'after' plans are recorded on a single six-inch tile in the vestry. Within this amazingly colourful decorative scheme are a few tiles, including a vicars list inscribed on glazed tiles, in Geldart's own handwriting, on the west wall of the north aisle; this type of small ceramic panel was a trademark of Geldart's church restorations, along with his striking designs for paving. Another tile panel, bearing the commandments, is on a north aisle column of St Nicholas, although this dates from after Geldart resigned the living (on grounds of ill-health) in 1900.

## LOUGHTON

There are three relatively minor items of ceramic interest here, two right in the town centre on LOUGHTON HIGH ROAD, where the **Royal Standard** pub has a good external ceramic panel of the eponymous flag on its canted corner. Across the road from the pub stands the **Lopping Hall**, a public hall built in 1883-4 partly as compensation for the loss of lopping rights; lopping was the ancient commoners' practice of cutting branches of trees in nearby Epping Forest for firewood. Above the hall's entrance in STATION ROAD is a high-relief red terracotta tympanum showing lopping taking place. Further north in RECTORY LANE is **St Nicholas Church** (1877), which has a dado of *cuenca* tiles made by Frederick Garrard of Millwall.

## RAYLEIGH

The **Dutch Cottage**, 33 CROWN HILL, is a pretty little timber-framed and thatched octagonal cottage dating from 1621. It is believed to have been built by Dutch refugees, and includes a broad selection of Delft tiles dating from 1630 to the late nineteenth century, which were probably introduced into the building in the nineteenth century.

## STANFORD-LE-HOPE

The tower of **St Margaret of Antioch Church** was rebuilt in 1882-4 by Ernest Geldart; the work is recorded inside the tower on a small tile panel. A large ceramic mural, designed and made by the Essex ceramicist Lisa Hawker in collaboration with staff and pupils, was installed in 2001 at Stanford-le-Hope **Infant School**. The *Super Square of Stanford* is a colourful relief map of the school's catchment area.<sup>11</sup>

## STAPLEFORD ABBOTTS

The medieval parish church of **St Mary the Virgin**, CHURCH LANE was largely rebuilt during the nineteenth century; the architect of its chancel, which dates from 1862, was Thomas Jeckell of Norwich. The unusual ceramic feature of the chancel is the Minton encaustic tiled dado on the east wall. The designs, which are all familiar, include roundels of the four evangelists, the Lamb of God and an ornate cross, but these tiles are normally found in pavements rather than being used as wall tiles. As a result of their position, the tiles remain in perfect condition.

## THUNDERSLEY

Tyrells Arch, a ceramic entrance archway at the **Tyrells Centre** (for the care of the elderly), 39 SEAMORE AVENUE, was created by the artist Lisa Hawker and members of the local community in a project which culminated in the unveiling of the dramatic artwork in June 2004.

## TIPTREE

On an outside wall of **Tesco's**, CHURCH ROAD, is a large tile mural, about 12 feet high by 10 feet wide, showing an Edwardian-style picnic with the local preserves to the fore. The mural, in mostly pale blue on white ground within a dark blue

frame, was installed in 2002 (when the store opened) and was designed by Ned Heywood and Julia Land of Chepstow.

#### TWINSTEAD

Henry Woodyer's rebuilding of the **Church of St John Evangelist** in 1859-60 included the installation of its attractive pavement of red, black and yellow tiles from Poole and Minton's.<sup>12</sup> In the churchyard is a memorial cross whose base is decorated with encaustic tiles.

#### WALTHAM ABBEY

On the ground floor of Waltham Abbey's art nouveau **Town Hall** in HIGHBRIDGE STREET is a corridor with an elegant dado of green art nouveau floral relief tiles, dating from around 1905 and probably manufactured by one of the Burslem firms T. & R. Boote or J. & W. Wade.

#### Essex Roundup

In the main shopping street of **Dovercourt** is a Dewhurst's with at least six of the usual Carter's *Farmyard* series of four-tile panels; the one nearest the window shows an attractive piggy scene. Restoration of Holy Cross Church, **Felsted**, by the architect Henry Woodyer in 1874-8 included the installation of a Minton tiled floor in the chancel. The State Cinema, George Street, **Grays**, a huge 'super cinema' built in 1938 for Frederick's Electric Theatres, has a cream and black moderne faience facade. Nine medieval tiles (dating from around 1300) which formerly lay close to the altar of the Church of St Mary the Virgin, **Great Bentley** are now on display at the rear of the church; although worn, their designs can still be made out, including a stag and a complex knot. There is an encaustic-tiled reredos (probably 1857-8) at the Church of St James the Great, **Great Saling**. The patterned tiled pavements at St Giles Church, **Langford** probably date from the extensive restoration carried out around 1880; the church has a unique western apse. **Rawreth** Church was rebuilt by Ernest Geldart in 1880-2; he used glazed tiles here for the first time, to record the donors of the reredos in 1882. The chapel at St Osyth's Priory, The Bury, **St Osyth** has encaustic and impressed medieval floor tiles, as well as a nineteenth century tile pavement installed during the building's conversion to a chapel. St Peter's Church (1888), Church Lane, **Shelley** has a gently polychromatic interior including a patterned tile pavement. A thirteen square metre mural with much ceramic content was installed on the platform wall of **Southminster** Railway Station in autumn 2004; the design was by Lisa Hawker and local community groups. The fourteenth century south porch of the Church of St Mary Magdalene, off Clacton Road, **Thorrington** is partly constructed of Roman bricks and tiles; inside is a floor combining herringbone-style wooden blocks and fairly plain nineteenth century tiling. There is a Godwin encaustic tile pavement in the sanctuary of St Nicholas Church, **Witham**, probably dating from its 1877 restoration.

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