

HERTFORDSHIRE

The best of the county's *in situ* medieval tile locations is the brightly coloured circular mosaic at Meesden Church, but the churches of the Victorian era, aside from Ayot St Peter with its unique Martin Brothers stoneware chancel arch, are rather a ceramic disappointment. Much more intriguing are the postwar New Town tile murals, or at least what remains of them, for one large-scale Carter's mural in Hemel Hempstead has already disappeared. However, another remains there, on a car park, along with two murals in Stevenage's Town Square, one being part of its listed Clock Tower. Hertfordshire is also significant in that it retains several locations where the pattern-making tiles of Peggy Angus may still be seen. Suggested reading: Katie Arber, *Patterns for Post-War Britain: the tile designs of Peggy Angus*, Middlesex University Press, 2002. The *Gazetteer* entry for Hertfordshire covers the administrative area of Hertfordshire County Council.

AYOT ST PETER

For a taste of the exotic and experimental in the context of the Victorian church, visit **St Peter's Church**, Ayot St Peter, in the middle of nowhere west of Welwyn. The church, which was designed by J. P. Seddon and built during 1874-5, has a red brick exterior with buff and black brick banding, and a clock with a blue mosaic face; inside the church, all is colour. As well as green and brown tiles in the chancel, there is a complete Arts and Crafts furnishing scheme which dates from around 1880 and includes a circular font with colourful mosaics of landscape and sea on the bowl, and painted panels on the chancel roof. But the outstanding feature is the unique stoneware chancel arch made by the Martin Brothers at Pomona House, Fulham, to Seddon's design, which was a contemporary adaptation of medieval work with birds, flowers and foliage.¹ Robert Wallace Martin, the eldest of the brothers, had already established a working relationship with J. P. Seddon before their pottery moved to Pomona House, and the Martins produced a variety of smaller architectural elements, such as fireplace surrounds, for Seddon and other architects. The chancel arch, however, was far and away the biggest item of architectural ware the brothers ever produced. It was never to be repeated, by the Martin Brothers or any other makers, and it would be interesting to know if there were problems with its manufacture or construction, or if the cost of such a large ceramic piece proved prohibitive.

GREAT AMWELL

Sir Hugh Myddelton (1560?-1631), banker and Member of Parliament, brought fresh water to London by building the New River, a thirty-eight mile long canal which was fed by springs in and around Great Amwell. The canal was ten feet wide and four feet deep, and was built in 1609-13. When it was decided to commemorate Myddelton's feat in 1800, Robert Mylne, architect to the New River Company, designed a water garden (off AMWELL LANE) at the source of the springs, comprising several grassy islands amidst streams. On the main island is

an urn to Myddelton, and on another island a pedestal and globe, all in Coade stone.² While working on the water garden Mylne erected his family's mausoleum in the churchyard of **St John the Baptist** above. The white brick structure is topped by a Coade stone urn and also has a Coade roundel of a mourning woman.

HARPENDEN

Ernest Heasman (1874-1927) was a stained glass artist who also designed and painted tiles at his studio in Harpenden. The tiles were used in domestic and church settings, for instance at the **Methodist Chapel**, LOWER LUTON ROAD, Batford (on the northern edge of Harpenden) where there is an eight-tile First World War memorial plaque including two finely drawn angels (Fig 94).

HEMEL HEMPSTEAD

Hemel Hempstead was designated a New Town in 1947 and building began, south of the old town centre, in the early 1950s. The master plan was devised by Geoffrey Jellicoe, whose water gardens adjoin the new town centre; the mid-fifties shopping area, Marlowes, bounded by offices and car parks, lies south of the main civic buildings. Hemel Hempstead stood out from the other six post-war London satellite towns as several of its public buildings sported large-scale ceramic murals in striking geometric designs, for instance the bowling alley (built 1962-3, demolished) just east of the shopping centre with its Carter's tiling. Although other new towns commissioned the occasional ceramic mural, as at Basildon bus station (1958), the use of tiling was most widespread at Hemel Hempstead. Unfortunately only one such installation survives, the *Tile Mosaic Map* (1960) by Rowland Emmett (1906-90). This can be found on the south side of the **Hillfield Road NCP Car Park** which fronts on to Marlowes, opposite the market. Emmett was best-known for his eccentric mechanical sculptures, but began his career as a cartoonist and developed a drawing style depicting a quaint, rather old fashioned world. The Hemel Hempstead images, hand-painted by Phyllis Butler at Carter's on white tile panels against a background of grey mosaic, show historic and modern local attractions connected by roads, although assorted methods of transport - from trams to space ships - also play a part. It is a delightful and unexpected work, which only encourages the observer to wonder about the vanished murals.³

There is another surprising and important survivor in Hemel Hempstead, however, at **South Hill Primary School**, HEATH LANE, just west of the central area. Here the entrance hall still displays wall tiling designed by Peggy Angus around 1950, its dense pattern incorporating the Hertfordshire stag, oak leaves and acorns. The tiles were commissioned by Hertfordshire County Council and the school's architects, Harrison & Steel, and made by Carter's, with whom Angus worked from about 1949. Angus's distinctive screen-printed pattern-making tiles were popular with school architects throughout the 1950s.⁴

HERTFORD

Right in the centre of Hertford is **St Andrew's Church**, ST ANDREW STREET, restored in 1869-70. There is an encaustic tile pavement in the chancel and an impressively large opus sectile and mosaic reredos designed by E. Penwarden for Powell's of Whitefriars and installed in 1914. Just east in PARLIAMENT SQUARE is the former **Green Dragon Hotel** (1903), converted to offices in 1975 but still displaying fine terracotta lettering inviting prospective customers to enjoy its 'good stabling & motor pit' as well as the products of local brewers McMullen's. HIGH WYCH

Opinions vary about **St James Church** (Pevsner called it 'High Victorian design at its most revolting' and 'perversely ugly'), but it certainly has some items of ceramic interest. It was designed by the architect George Edward Pritchett (1824-1912) of Bishop's Stortford and built during 1860-1, most of the funds being provided by the Reverend H. F. Johnson. The exterior is of knapped flints with red brick and stone dressings, but brick is the dominant material inside, with bands of red brick set into walls of buff brick, and brick vaulting in the chancel, which has a colourful encaustic tile pavement. There are also glazed ceramic plaques, bearing alpha and omega symbols, set into the exterior of the west doorway.

MEESDEN

The important tile pavement in the sanctuary of **St Mary's Church** dates from around 1315 and is a wheel-plan mosaic, measuring about nine feet by seven feet, although with some impressed and inlaid tiles. The tiles radiate from the round central tile like spokes on a wheel, each segment being made up from six different tile shapes in alternating colours. Those colours - bright yellow and deep green - its circular lay-out and good condition make this a most memorable pavement, and, now, a great rarity.⁵

OLD HALL GREEN

A mile south-west of Standon village is Old Hall Green and **St Edmund's College**, a Roman Catholic foundation whose extensive school buildings mostly date from the late 1790s. The chapel is an addition of 1845-53 by A. W. N. Pugin, with some later alterations including floor tiles of 1897 in the choir and ante-chapel; Pugin's decorative scheme included a pavement of red, blue and yellow tiles.⁶

ST ALBANS

Sir Edmund Beckett (1816-1905), later Lord Grimthorpe, was a member of the notable Leeds banking family; he was a lawyer (and something of a bully) who enjoyed theological discussion and took a great interest in ecclesiastical architecture. His opinion of architects was low. He lectured members of the architectural profession on their incompetence and went so far as to design several churches in Yorkshire himself.⁷ Without his generosity, however, the restoration of **St Albans Cathedral**, almost ruinous in the early nineteenth century, could not have been completed. Restoration had been planned from the 1850s, but nothing was done until the 1870s when Sir George Gilbert Scott began

work; his death in 1878, combined with lack of funds, brought the process to a halt. At that point Lord Grimthorpe took a hand and is said to have spent £130,000 on the Cathedral, the most obvious of his often controversial interventions being the almost complete rebuilding of the west front. The Cathedral's encaustic tile pavements were made for Lord Grimthorpe by Minton & Co around 1885. Many of the new tiles were copies of medieval designs found during the building work; a few of the medieval tiles were relaid in the north transept.

STEVENAGE

Stevenage was the first New Town to be designated as such, in 1946, and housebuilding began in 1949; its new town centre (1957-9) included the first pedestrian-only shopping area in England. An openwork concrete **Clock Tower** designed by Leonard Vincent, one of the planners of the town centre, forms the focal point of the TOWN SQUARE. Its frame, which rises from a rectangular pool lined with tiles in primary colours, is clad in black granite and encloses two cubes; the upper cube bears clock faces and a bell compartment, which is illuminated at night (Fig 95). The lower cube carries inscriptions and reliefs, one with a backing of Carter's cream textured tiles, and on its east face a Carter's painted tile panel, about five feet square; this shows a contour map of the area (in black lines on grey ground) on which information logos are dotted about. These are mostly black on white but a few, for instance the bus station, are in red. There are also Carter's pattern-making tiles in black, grey, yellow and white, in three different designs, on the undersides of both cubes and the roof of the tower.⁸ The Town Square is small, with a good sense of enclosure; the clock tower and its recently installed fountain make a strong and unusual centrepiece.

Unlike Hemel Hempstead, where the integrity of the centre has been lost, modern developments in Stevenage have generally been on the fringes of the original new town centre. It retains not only its fifties feel (although still functioning as a successful shopping centre) but much of its late fifties decorative work, including a large pictorial tile mural on the **Primark** store on the south side of the Town Square, overlooking the pool (Fig 96). The shop was built for the Letchworth, Hitchin & District Co-op in 1958-9 and the mural, which is about 15' high by 10' wide, was designed by G. Bajo of the CWS Architects' Department. Its jolly, slightly idealised old-fashioned imagery - is there some rustic Spanish influence here? - was intended to depict 'the spirit and activities of the Co-operative Movement as a whole and in relation to Stevenage', and includes elements representing 'the architectural atmosphere of the town' and transport, industry, commerce, science, technology and agriculture.⁹ The tiles may also have been made by Carter's, or could have originated abroad.

The bright colours of the Primark mural are a contrast to another panel just north in QUEENSWAY; here an area of similar size is filled with black textured and plain tiles making a striking abstract pattern. There are other areas of similar tiling around Queensway. This is one of the few remaining shopping centres

where it is possible to see how tiles were used externally in the late 1950s; they were almost ubiquitous, but due to the ever-changing nature of shopping, most examples have disappeared.

Just east of the old town centre, which lies a mile to the north of the new town centre, is **Barclay School**, WALKERN ROAD, built by Yorke, Rosenberg & Mardall (YRM) in 1950-1; it was the first significant secondary school to be built after the war, and its broad foyer still retains wall tiling by Peggy Angus. The architect F. R. S. Yorke commissioned Angus to design her first tiles in 1948, and thereafter YRM used Angus's tiles in their school projects until about 1958.¹⁰

TRING

The **Church of St Peter and St Paul** stands just north of the High Street in CHURCH YARD. The restoration of 1861-2 included the installation of encaustic tiles by Maw & Co in the nave, while those in the chancel were made by Maw's from patterns of old tiles dug up during excavations. The chancel pavement comprises mainly nine-tile groups of buff and brown tiles divided from each other by diagonal black-tiled bands.¹¹

WARE

South-east of Ware, across the River Ash, is the site of Easneye Park (now a school) designed by Alfred Waterhouse and built in 1866. The mansion, in red brick and much red terracotta, is significant because it was the first time Waterhouse had specified a substantial amount of terracotta in a design. The estate outbuildings, which included **Easneye Dairy**, a quarter-mile north-east of the house on Hollycross Road, were probably designed by a local architect working in the Waterhouse style.¹² The octagonal Dairy, which is attached to the farmhouse, was built around 1868. Its interior tiling is exceptionally decorative, with a flowery frieze, blue tiles impressed with a geometric pattern and an ornate encaustic tile floor.

On the north-east edge of Ware is **Fanhams Hall**, now an hotel, which has six bathrooms lined with reused seventeenth and eighteenth century delft tiles; these were probably installed during alterations to the house carried out during 1898-1901.

WATERFORD

St Michael's Church lies a mile or so north of Hertford, on the main Stevenage road, at the entrance to the grounds of Goldings, a mansion built in 1871-7 for the banker Robert Abel Smith. The little church (1871-2), designed by gentleman architect Henry Woodyer, was also built for Smith, who financed a lavish decorative scheme including fourteen stained glass windows by William Morris and Philip Webb, amongst others.¹³ The brilliant mosaic angels which hover around the chancel were made by Powell's of Whitefriars in 1909-12; their designer may have been Gerald Hutchinson, who is known to have visited the church but was on Powell's salaried staff, rather than working as a designer, by that time. The stone reredos, also by Powell's, includes six angelic figures in opus sectile.¹⁴ The tile pavements, mostly geometrics, are by Minton.

WATFORD

Holy Rood R. C. Church, MARKET STREET, was one of only four churches to be built by John Francis Bentley (1839-1902), the architect of Westminster Cathedral. He was offered the commission in 1889 by S. Taprell Holland, a member of the building firm to which Bentley had been apprenticed, and the church was complete by 1899.¹⁵ Holland funded the church, Bentley's masterpiece, and its sumptuous furnishings; the chancel is ablaze with colour. The sanctuary has opus sectile panels designed by George Daniels, and a partly encaustic tiled floor incorporating tiles bearing one of Bentley's favourite motifs, a lion with its tongue protruding. In addition, there are lettered tiles on the risers to the altar.

Hertfordshire Roundup

The Powell's of Whitefriars opus sectile reredos (1874) at St Peter's Church, **Berkhamsted**, was designed by Harry Burrow. **Flaunden** parish church, St Mary Magdalene, was built in 1838 by George Gilbert Scott; it was his first church, and has medieval tiles from the old parish church (a mile or so to the south) on the porch floor. An unusual, mostly green-tiled, pavement occupies the chancel of St Peter's Church, **Lilley** (1870-1). At St Mary's Church, **Puttenham** there is a Godwin encaustic pavement (comprising four-and-a-half inch tiles) of 1887 in the chancel, as well as a few fifteenth century tiles. St Bartholomew's Church, Hemp Lane, on the northern edge of **Wigginton**, was restored in 1881; it has an encaustic tile pavement and a reredos which includes two mosaic and opus sectile panels of angels (*The Annunciation*) designed by Ada Currey for Powell's in 1899.¹⁶

In addition, the following churches have encaustic or geometric tile pavements which were installed during late Victorian restoration or rebuilding: St John the Baptist, **Aldbury** (also medieval tiles); St Mary's, **Aspenden**; St Margaret of Antioch, **Barley** (also wall tiling); St Mary's, **Bayford**; St Andrew's, **Buckland**; St James, **Bushey**; St John the Baptist, **Cottered**; St Botolph, **Eastwick**; St Mary, **Graveley**; St Nicholas, **Great Hormead** (and tiled east wall); St Peter & St Paul, **Little Gaddesden** (by Maw's and Minton Hollins); St Cecilia, **Little Hadham** (also medieval tiles); St Mary's, **Standon** (also reredos); St Mary the Virgin, **Walkern**; and Holy Trinity, **Weston**.

References

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4. Katie Arber, 'Peggy Angus, designer of modern tiles for a modern Britain', *Decorative Arts Society Journal*, 26 (2002), pp120-134.
5. Jane A. Wight, *Mediaeval Floor Tiles* (John Baker, London, 1975).
6. David J. S. Kay, *The Buildings of St Edmund's College* (St Edmund's College, 2000), p39.
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9. Kathryn A. Morrison, *English Shops and Shopping: An Architectural History* (Yale University Press, New Haven and London, 2003), p156.
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12. Colin Cunningham and Prudence Waterhouse, *Alfred Waterhouse, 1830-1905: Biography of a Practice* (Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1992), pp100, 160.
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15. Peter Howell, 'John Francis Bentley: Homage for his Centenary', *The Victorian*, (2002) 9, pp12-15.
16. Dennis Hadley, 'Ada Currey (1852-1913): a forgotten artist', *The Journal of Stained Glass*, 24 (2000), pp29-37.