

NORTHAMPTONSHIRE

Although it cannot be said that Northamptonshire is a major ceramic county, it has a number of interesting locations, notably those with Minton tiles designed by Lord Alwyne Frederick Compton (1825-1906), bishop of Ely 1886-1905 and chairman of the influential Architectural Society of the Archdeaconry of Northampton. His work deserves more attention, for Sir George Gilbert Scott remarked that 'No one has equalled (Pugin) in the designing of patterns, though I think Lord Alwyne Compton greatly excels him in arrangement.'¹ In Northamptonshire his tiles may be seen at the churches of Castle Ashby, Easton Maudit and Northampton (Holy Sepulchre), with possible attributions at Cotterstock and Pilton; in Leicestershire, they may be found at Theddingworth and Oakham (Rutland). Lord Alwyne's family home was Castle Ashby, itself one of the best two surviving locations in England for Blashfield's terracotta, produced over the Lincolnshire border in Stamford.

In addition, Northamptonshire can offer late Coade stone at Easton Neston, a tile pavement donated by Herbert Minton at Winwick, fine Powell's work at Kelmars, and the massive Barratt's works at Northampton with its gargantuan terracotta lettering by Gibbs & Canning. Modern locations are scarce apart from the tile pavement of Northampton's Guildhall, which was recreated in the early 1990s. The *Gazetteer* entry for Northamptonshire covers the administrative area of Northamptonshire County Council.

ALTHORP

The dairy built in 1786 at **Althorp**, near Great Brington, is one of the most important survivors from a group of eighteenth-century tiled dairies put up for aristocrats on their country estates. It has an original Wedgwood tiled interior, mostly in white but with some decoration in the form of a trailing ivy motif, with fittings also by Wedgwood. The dairy was erected for Lavinia, Lady Spencer, on her return from France, where she had seen Marie Antoinette's dairy at Versailles under construction.²

CASTLE ASHBY

The four linked terraced gardens lying to the east and north of **Castle Ashby**, an Elizabethan and Jacobean mansion, are defined by terracotta balustrades made at the works of John Blashfield in Stamford. The gardens were completed in 1864, to the designs of W. B. Thomas, and the ornate balustrades added about two years later; the whole project was supervised by Sir Matthew Digby Wyatt for the 3rd marquis of Northampton. The outer balustrades, which separate the terraces from the park, have continuous lettering in imitation of the south parapet of the house itself, the text being as follows: 'The grass withereth and the flower fadeth but the word of the Lord endureth for ever' and 'Consider the lilies of the field how they grow they toil not neither do they spin and yet I say unto you that Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these'. Finally

comes a Latin dedication to Theodosia, the 3rd marchioness, who died in 1865 before the terraces were complete.

Completing this excellent display of early terracotta are two terracotta fountains (east terrace) and a large terracotta urn to the north-east. Almost adjoining the balustrades east of the house is the **Church of St Mary Magdalene**, whose rector during 1852-78 was the high churchman and antiquarian Lord Alwyne Compton, son of the second marquess of Northampton. The church, which was restored in 1870 by G. E. Street, has Minton tiles designed by Lord Alwyne Compton, whose skill in the design of tile arrangements was admired by Sir George Gilbert Scott.³

EASTON MAUDIT

The **Church of St Peter & St Paul** has an exceptional Minton pavement running throughout the church; motifs include the motto of the marquesses of Northampton, a mitre and pairs of birds. The tiling dates from 1859-60 and was designed by Lord Alwyne Compton while he was rector of Castle Ashby, a couple of miles to the west.

EASTON NESTON

The grand gateway screen of **Easton Neston** house, which now forms the entrance to Towcester Racecourse, dates from around 1822 and was made by William Croggon, who bought Mrs Coade's business following her death in 1821 (Fig 202). The single-storey Coade stone archway, which is signed Croggan rather than Croggon, is crowned by a coat of arms while the two lodges are each topped by recumbent hinds.⁴

KELMARSH

The lavish high Victorian interior of the **Church of St Dionysius** (also known as St Denys) results from work undertaken by the architect J. K. Colling in 1874. Its chancel wall decoration includes a Powell's opus sectile panel designed by H. E. Wooldridge and depicting the Four Evangelists with St Denys; it cost just over £77, about £20 more than the east wall opus sectile panel of St Peter and St Paul, also by Wooldridge.⁵

NORTHAMPTON

Northampton's gothic **Guildhall** in ST GILES'S SQUARE was built in 1861-4 to the designs of the young architect E. W. Godwin, later to become one of the leading figures in the aesthetic movement. The building was greatly extended in 1889-92 and again in the early 1990s; the latter work, completed in 1992, included the refurbishment of Godwin's original gothic structure under the direction of the architect Roderick Gradidge.⁶ Godwin's designs for the tiled floor and wall tiling of the council chamber have survived in the Victoria and Albert Museum. They include Godwin's earliest known individual tile design, dating from around 1863, which was intended to be used in a band of glazed tiles on the lower part of the wall. These were not executed, probably due to financial constraints in the fitting-out phase of construction; it is unclear whether the pavement was unexecuted or had simply not survived.⁷ Gradidge therefore worked with H. &

R. Johnson's to recreate the pavement from Godwin's drawings, which show the tiles forming a mostly geometric border in black, buff and red around a central oak floor. The major decorative element was the inclusion of the town's coat of arms.

To the north of the Guildhall in ABINGTON SQUARE is the Doulton terracotta statue of the MP **Charles Bradlaugh** (by George Tinworth, 1894). A little to the west in SHEEP STREET is the ancient Church of the Holy Sepulchre, with its rare circular nave. Sir George Gilbert Scott's additions of 1860-4 included a semicircular apse with tiles by Lord Alwyne Compton of about 1861.

Much the most impressive of Northampton's ceramic locations lies on the northern edge of the town: the ornate neo-baroque form of **Barratt's Footshape Bootworks** (1913), Kingsthorpe Hollow, KINGSTHORPE ROAD. This three-storey red brick and terracotta factory building proudly displays the words 'Footshape' and 'Bootworks' in Gibbs & Canning's tawny terracotta as larger-than-life parapet lettering.

THORPE MANDEVILLE

The chancel of the medieval **Church of St John Baptist** was restored by the architect Albert Hartshorne in 1872. Powell's of Whitefriars supplied several windows for the rebuilt chancel as well as an early example of opus sectile work for the reredos, which, unusually, was to the architect's own design. It includes figures of St Mary and St John, and cost £30.⁸

WINWICK

The chancel of **St Michael's Church** was added around 1853 to the design of the architect E. F. Law. Its pavement comprises tiles donated to the church in August 1852 by their manufacturer, Herbert Minton.⁹

Northamptonshire Roundup

Inside All Saints Church, Blakesley Lane, **Adstone** are nineteenth-century ceramic tablets bearing religious texts. The expensive reconstruction of the chancel of St Mary's Church, **Ashley** by Sir George Gilbert Scott in 1867 included the installation of a marble and encaustic tile pavement. St Mary's Church, **Benfield**, a lavish Tractarian building of 1847, has an encaustic tile pavement throughout. In the drawing room of **Canons Ashby House** (NT) is a magnificent fire surround which includes some delft tiles. The chancel tiles at St Andrew's Church (restored by G. E. Street in 1877), **Cotterstock** may have been designed by Lord Alwyne Compton. Maw & Co supplied the chancel pavement at St Peter's Church, **Deene**, which was restored in 1868-9 and is now in the care of the Churches Conservation Trust. Maw's were also responsible for the pretty chancel pavement at St Mary's Church, **East Haddon** restored in 1878 by E. F. Law & Sons.¹⁰ There are mid-fourteenth century tiles in the chancel of St Mary's Church, **Higham Ferrers**. In West Street, **Oundle**, near the market square, is the butcher's shop of Johnson & Sons, its tiled stall risers displaying a good pair of animal panels. The chancel pavement (probably 1864) at St Mary and All Saints,

Pilton includes tiles with bird and animal motifs, and could well be the work of Lord Alwyne Compton. There is a patterned Minton tile pavement in the sanctuary of St John Evangelist, **Whitfield**, rebuilt by the architect Henry Woodyer in 1869-70.¹¹ The sanctuary of St Mary the Virgin, **Woodford Halse** has a roof lined on the interior with encaustic tiles; this perhaps dates from the 1878 restoration of the church.

References

1. Geoffrey K. Brandwood, *Bringing them to their knees: church-building and restoration in Leicestershire and Rutland 1800-1914* (Leicestershire Archaeological and Historical Society, Leicester, 2002), p39.
2. Alison Kelly, *Decorative Wedgwood in architecture and furniture* (Country Life, London, 1965), p121.
3. Nikolaus Pevsner and Bridget Cherry, *Northamptonshire Buildings of England* (Penguin Books, London, 1973).
4. Alison Kelly, *Mrs Coade's Stone* (Self Publishing Association, Upton-upon-Severn, 1990), pp207, 366.
5. Dennis W. Hadley, *James Powell & Sons: A listing of opus sectile, 1847-1973*, (2001).
6. Michael Hall, 'Modern Gothic', *Country Life*, 187, 4th February 1993, pp48-51.
7. Susan Weber Soros, ed. *E. W. Godwin: Aesthetic Movement Architect and Designer* (Yale University Press, New Haven and London, 1999), pp301-5.
8. Hadley, *James Powell & Sons*, 2001.
9. 'The Late Herbert Minton, Esq.' *Annals of the Diocese of Lichfield, past and present: being a Supplement to the Lichfield Church Calendar*, (1859) Crewe, Newcastle-under-Lyme, pp83-88. Reprinted in *Glazed Expressions* 32, Spring 1996, pp3-6. This encomium, published in the year following Minton's death, details the 173 gifts made by Herbert Minton to churches and other institutions.
10. *The Builder*, vol 36, 6th July 1878.
11. John Elliott and John Pritchard, eds, *Henry Woodyer: Gentleman Architect* (Department of Continuing Education, University of Reading, Reading, 2002).