

## OXFORDSHIRE

Medieval tiles, often made outside Oxfordshire, can be found in many of the county's churches and most notably at West Hendred, where there is a large expanse of fourteenth century tiling; however, the pavements in the Muniment Tower at New College, Oxford are in rather better condition. There are fine late eighteenth century Coade stone panels at the Radcliffe Observatory in Oxford, the city which was to be at the heart of the anglo-catholic Oxford Movement in the mid-nineteenth century. Examples of highly decorative Tractarian church interiors are therefore relatively easy to find, although the inclusion of substantial amounts of tiling in these schemes is less common. Even in Keble College Chapel (1873-6), William Butterfield's visualisation of a neo-medieval setting for collegiate worship, mosaic work is predominant with tiles making only a minor contribution.

Perhaps the most unusual ceramic location in Oxfordshire is Sunningwell Church (1877), where the encaustic pavement includes Godwin tiles designed by the architect John Pollard Seddon; their wonderful gothic imagery is based on Revelations, the last chapter of the New Testament. Sunningwell appears to be the sole English site where these 'Revelations' tiles survive *in situ*, although they are present in at least another three churches in Wales, where Seddon built and restored many churches. Finally, as with many of England's more rural counties, modern ceramic work is in fairly short supply. Suggested reading: Chris Blanchett, 'The Tiles of Dorchester Abbey' *TACS Journal* 6, 1996, pp13-22. The *Gazetteer* entry for Oxfordshire covers the administrative area of Oxfordshire County Council.

## BROUGHTON

**Broughton Castle**, which originated as an early fourteenth century fortified manor house, occupies a beautiful moated site just east of the church. A licence was granted to John de Broughton for worship in his tiny private chapel in 1331; it retains many mid-fourteenth century tiles, although the pavement may have been relaid during 1860s alterations by George Gilbert Scott.

## BUCKLAND

The Barcote Aisle, a once-private chapel in the south transept of **St Mary's Church**, is a lasting memorial to Clara Jane West (d1888), wife of William West of nearby Barcote Manor, director of the Great Western Railway. Beneath the gold stars of its sky-blue ceiling the walls are almost completely faced with shining Powell's opus sectile work, ordered from the firm in late 1890 along with stained glass and other furnishings and fittings including wrought iron lamp standards. There are brilliantly colourful and complex groups of angels and archangels, along with figures of prophets and apostles; the decoration even extends above the north entrance archway, where rose-winged angels swirl on mosaic ground. A stained glass window of the Ascension looks down upon this unusually complete decorative scheme, to which the Powell's artist George Parlby

contributed a sketch, although the principal draughtsmen were Sharp and Charles Hardgrave. Ada Currey also had an input to the Barcote Aisle, being paid for 119½ hours of work on it, but none of the final design can definitely be attributed to her. The overall cost was £1,000 plus £46 for the paving.<sup>1</sup>

#### CHASTLETON

**St Mary's Church** has a good set of fourteenth century floor tiles in its south aisle as well as an encaustic pavement throughout the chancel, which was rebuilt by C. E. Powell in 1878-80. Beside the church is **Chastleton House** (NT), built for Walter Jones, a Witney wool merchant, and completed in 1612. In the Great Parlour is a fire surround decorated with a mixed bag of sixty-four Dutch tin-glazed tiles, all but four of them blue and white, the others being manganese and white. They date from between 1630 and 1800, and show a wide variety of images including the Three Kings, swans, sailing vessels and mythical beasts.

#### CHECKENDON

There are some fourteenth century tiles in the sanctuary of the **Church of St Peter and St Paul**; in addition, Powell's made opus sectile panels for the church in 1919 and 1932. Just over a mile south-east of the village is **Wyfold Court** (no public access), a madly gothic country house built in 1874-84 for Edward Hermon, Conservative MP for Preston during 1868-81 and a partner in the cotton spinners Horrocks, Miller & Co of the same town. He was one of the richest of the cotton magnates and an enthusiastic patron of contemporary artists. His architect George Somers Clarke (1825-82) provided him with a series of vast internal spaces including a stone-vaulted main corridor floored with black and white tiles, a huge stairwell and a picture gallery. The house was used as a hospital from 1932 until the early 1990s, after which it was restored and converted to luxury apartments by P. J. Livesey Rural Heritage Ltd, opening in 1999. Many of the original decorative features still remain, including several tiled fire surrounds and, most importantly, one of a series of large tile paintings which originally hung in the main corridor. It measures around 7' across by 5' high and shows Christ preaching in a crowded temple. The highly detailed and colourful scene is signed by I. A. Gibbs & Howard, 64 Charlotte Street, Fitzroy Square, London, a firm of church decorators.<sup>2</sup>

#### DORCHESTER

The **Abbey of St Peter and St Paul** originated as an early Christian shrine. St Birinius, a Benedictine monk, was granted land at Dorchester to build a cathedral in 634; shortly after its refoundation as an Augustinian abbey in 1140, the present church was built. The monastic buildings were almost entirely demolished following the Dissolution, and the church itself was much altered during the seventeenth century. It had been paved with inlaid tiles during the mid to late fourteenth century, but the remaining fragments of the pavement were relaid in 1747 or later as patches in the main body of the church; these tiles were recorded in the mid-Victorian period. All that now remains of the medieval tiling is a strip

comprising pieces of Penn and Late Wessex designs beside the screen dividing the nave and south aisle.

William Butterfield worked at Dorchester during 1846-53, installing tiling on the east wall of the chancel - an arrangement of plain and majolica glazed geometric and inlaid tiles and marble - and the nearby tile pavement. The tiling was all supplied by Herbert Minton, but the unusual inlaid wall tiles were probably made by Samuel Wright of Shelton. Minton used Wright's patent inlaid tile production method under licence from 1835, and appears to have bought at least some of Wright's stock of tiles, which he then sold as his own products.<sup>3</sup> George Gilbert Scott continued the restoration of the Abbey during 1859-74, adding the Godwin tile pavement which covers the floor and steps of the People's Chapel in 1863.<sup>4</sup> Most of the designs of these plastic clay inlaid tiles were based on medieval examples from the Abbey. Finally Godwin's dust-pressed inlaid tiles, again with designs mostly drawn from Dorchester's medieval paving, were installed in the Lady Chapel, the Requiem Chapel and St Birinius Chapel during the 1870s and 1880s. Altogether the Abbey provides an interesting vision of the way in which Victorian architects and tile manufacturers used medieval exemplars as the basis for contemporary pavements.

#### EWELME

Remote **St Mary's Church** was rebuilt and endowed by William de la Pole, later Duke of Suffolk, and his wife Alice from about 1432. The chancel's south chapel, dedicated to St John the Baptist, is lavishly decorated, the motifs including much heraldry. In the tile pavement may be found the wheel of the Roet family (the name was the French word for wheel) and the fine two-tailed lion of the Burghersh family (the arms of Alice's grandmother). Originally there were probably further tiles in the body of the church, with heraldry for the de la Poles, but only a few fragments remain around the font.<sup>5</sup>

#### GORING

On the vestry walls in the **Church of St Thomas of Canterbury** are around ninety mostly thirteenth century tiles which probably came from the nuns' church erected following the building of an Augustinian Priory (as an extension to the parish church) in the late twelfth century. They have bird, animal and foliage designs as well as the double-headed eagle of the patron, Richard of Cornwall.

#### HAILEY

The original design of the **Church of St John the Evangelist** (1868-9) was criticised by the diocesan architect G. E. Street as being 'needlessly eccentric', but in its built form even the revised version is genuinely odd, with strong colours and improbably large detailing. Its architect was Clapton Crabb Rolfe (1845-1907), who was only twenty-one years of age when appointed to the job in 1866 by his father, the Revd. George Crabb Rolfe, vicar of Hailey. The young Rolfe also designed the furnishings, including the encaustic tiling flanking the altar; in addition, the sanctuary is paved with tiles.<sup>6</sup>

## HORTON-CUM-STUDLEY

**St Barnabas Church** was built in 1867-8 by William Butterfield. The exterior is attractive, with hand-made yellow brick (from the nearby south Oxfordshire grey brickfields) banded in red and blue; inside, the Butterfield-designed reredos is a colourful geometric pattern of cut tiles.

## KELMSCOTT

**Kelmscott Manor** was the summer home of William Morris from 1871 until his death in 1896. The fireplace in the Green Room is covered with a combination of Morris-designed tiles made and decorated in Holland (*Swan*, *Sunflower* and *Artichoke* patterns, incorrectly arranged and probably installed in 1873) with a few traditional Dutch 'tulip and carnation' tiles, possibly introduced in the 1960s. In the Panelled Room, the fireplace tiling is Dutch and dates from around 1880 to the 1900s; the designs were copied from sixteenth century Iznik tiles, probably as special commissions for the London tile importers Murray Marks (later Thomas Elsley & Co).<sup>7</sup> Also at Kelmscott are cast-iron grates probably supplied by Elsley & Co with Iznik-patterned six-inch tiles made by the Dutch firm Ravesteijn.<sup>8</sup>

## KIDMORE END

The **Church of St John the Baptist** was built in 1852 to the design of the London architect Arthur Billing. Its polygonal apse is floored with unusual glazed tiling, and the stone pulpit has mosaic panels by Salviati.

## NUFFIELD

There are several medieval tiles in the chancel of **Holy Trinity Church**, outside which is the grave of William Richard Morris (1877-1963), Lord Nuffield, the founder of Morris Motors. His home from 1933 until his death was **Nuffield Place**, just off the A4130 which runs to the north of the village (about two miles west of Nettlebed). The house was built in 1914 and enlarged for Lord Nuffield in 1933. Its interiors still reflect typical upper middle class taste of the thirties, with tiled bathrooms (by Carter's of Poole and H. & R. Johnson) and several tiled fire surrounds, including - in the drawing room - one with tiles designed by Reginald Till for Carter's.

## OXFORD

There is much of ceramic interest to see in the city, from medieval to modern locations, although access to sites within individual colleges is often difficult and may require an appointment. Begin right at the centre with the **Ashmolean Museum** (1841-5, C. R. Cockerell) in BEAUMONT STREET; high up on its fine classical facade, of Portland and Bath stone, runs a series of pale grey terracotta consoles. These may have been produced in adjacent St Giles Street at the works of Thomas Grimsley, who manufactured terracotta in Oxford between around 1837 and his death in 1875, after which the business was carried on by his sons.

Take Cornmarket to the south, which leads into ST ALDATE'S; on the left is the **Town Hall**, just past the busy junction with the High Street. This expensive and lavish structure was put up in 1893-7 to the designs of the young architect Henry T. Hare, who won the commission in a competition held following

Oxford's elevation to county borough status in 1889. The building showed that the city could, for once, match the University as an architectural patron. The room directly above the entrance, reached via the very grand main staircase, is the Assembly Room, which has a large stone fire surround dated 1895 and an iron fireback dated 1896; to either side of the fireback are red lustre tiles designed by William De Morgan. These are variants on the 'BBB' design, named after the Norwich metalworking firm Barnard, Bishop and Barnard, who probably made the fireback; they also supplied a range of tiles for use in their fireplaces, notably the 'BBB' with its floral motif.

Across St Aldate's and a little to the south is the **Bradford & Bingley Building Society**; in the main office is a large ceramic panel showing the buildings of the *City of Oxford* and signed by Philippa Threlfall (Fig 223). This richly modelled mural with its colourful glazes dates from the early 1970s, and was one of a series of about twelve made by Threlfall and her husband and partner Kennedy Collings for the Bradford & Bingley during the 1970s. The materials were high fired ceramics glazed with natural oxides and lustres then bedded into fibreglass backing.

Head back towards the Town Hall and turn right into the High Street, just south of which stands **Merton College**, MERTON STREET. In its fourteenth century library, the oldest in Oxford, are medieval tiles which, however, were bought and laid in 1623 when other alterations were made to the building. Merton's Chapel, restored in 1849-56 by William Butterfield, was the first of the college chapels to be restyled in the anglo-catholic taste of the Oxford Movement; fittings included a colourful and extensive tiled floor with many decorative nine-tile groups. Return along the HIGH STREET to the **Covered Market** on the north side; at its far end is Lindsey's butcher's stall, with modern tiling by Von Ellis showing traditional butcher's imagery.

Emerge on to Market Street, turning right then left into TURL STREET for **Jesus College**, where the Chapel, restored by G. E. Street in 1864, has a complex floor of alabaster, marble and Minton encaustic tiles.<sup>9</sup> Across Turl Street is **Exeter College**; in the Morris Room are fire surrounds with tiles by William De Morgan, and in the Chapel, built in 1856-9 by George Gilbert Scott to replace the expanding college's seventeenth century Chapel, is a good encaustic tile pavement including a Greek cross arrangement, as well as Salviati mosaics around the polygonal apse. William Morris and Edward Burne-Jones were undergraduates at Exeter College during the 1850s.

At the north end of Turl Street turn right into Broad Street, continuing past the Sheldonian Theatre into HOLYWELL STREET; the entrance to **New College** is on its south side. In the Muniment Tower (the treasury, now used for college archives) are four rib-vaulted rooms with tiled floors dating from around 1386, the upper two pavements being largely undamaged; the need for strict security led to limited access and thus little wear on the glazed floor tiles. The ground floor pavement includes tiles bearing the New College arms, and the first floor

tiling was relaid around 2005, as the bricks beneath had begun to disintegrate.<sup>10</sup> Next, head east to the end of Holywell Street, going left into ST CROSS ROAD; on the right, at number ten, is the tile-hung **Old School House** (no public access), formerly a lodge house for the adjacent Holywell Cemetery. It was built in 1848 by Thomas Grimsley using structural terracotta beams made at his St Giles Street workshop; the beams may be seen protruding beneath the eaves. This is an early date for such use of terracotta and a most unusual method of construction; replacement of wood by terracotta was intended to improve the building's fireproofing qualities.<sup>11</sup>

On the northern edge of the centre in PARKS ROAD is **Keble College** (1868-82), the first complete college to be built in Oxford since the seventeenth century; the architect was William Butterfield. In a revival of the medieval ideal of a college propounded by the anglo-catholic Oxford Movement, Keble was intended to attract poorer scholars, many of whom might eventually enter the anglican priesthood.<sup>12</sup> Butterfield's design used locally-available red brick in place of the traditional stone, and the polychromatic walls of the quadrangle are a feast of red, blue and white brick. The Chapel (1873-6), all spiky pinnacles outside and transcendent gloom within, cost £40,000 and was paid for by the anglo-catholic guano magnate William Gibbs of Tyntesfield in Somerset, itself a house replete with ceramic decoration. Butterfield based the Chapel's decorative scheme on an iconography of 'the successive dealings of God with his church'; it was executed in mosaics and stained glass by Alexander Gibbs (c1831-86, no relation), a frequent collaborator of Butterfield's.<sup>13</sup> Beneath the high-level band of stained glass windows runs a series of strongly coloured mosaic panels depicting scenes from the Old Testament, and below these is blank arcading enclosing polychromatic banding. The sanctuary steps are paved with a combination of marble and encaustic tiles. The tiles, which are mostly buff and brown with yellow glaze covering the buff sections, were made by Minton Hollins and are marked on the reverse; the twin bird design has an unusual black body.

Slightly north-west of Keble College on the west side of BANBURY ROAD is the former **High School for Girls** (1879, architect T. G. Jackson, now the University's Department of Materials), in Queen Anne Revival style with an ornate Doulton red terracotta facade; the detailing, designed by Jackson, includes columns with strapwork.<sup>14</sup> West again to the WOODSTOCK ROAD; in the forecourt of the **Radcliffe Infirmary** is the rugged Triton Fountain (1857), designed by John Bell and made from terracotta produced by J. M. Blashfield at his Millwall workshop.<sup>15</sup> Just north-west is the remarkable **Radcliffe Observatory**, in the grounds of Green College (Fig 224). The construction of an observatory tower was suggested by Thomas Hornsby, Savilian Professor of Astronomy, and plans were drawn up in 1772 by the London architect Henry Keene. Work began in 1773 but after Keene's death in 1776 the project was taken on by the young architect James Wyatt, and the final design - inspired by the Hellenistic Tower of the Winds in Athens - is largely due to Wyatt. Building was finished by 1779 but

decoration of this stunning neoclassical tower was not completed until 1794. Its exterior is rich with Coade stone ornament including a series of beautiful plaques of the *Signs of the Zodiac*, some impressed with the Coade mark, and bas-relief panels symbolising *Morning, Noon and Night*, all modelled by J. C. F. Rossi. Even the dome's interior has Coade ribs and capitals, although these have been overpainted.<sup>16</sup>

Now turn southward into Jericho for the **Church of St Barnabas** (architect Arthur Blomfield, 1869-72), its landmark campanile overlooking the Oxford Canal from ST BARNABAS STREET (Fig 225). Construction was at the expense of the staunch anglo-catholic Thomas Combe of the nearby University Press, whose workers lived in the surrounding area, then an 'unsavoury slum'. The foundation of the church was thus an expression of the church's mission to the poor, one of the ideals of the anglo-catholic tradition. The bland walls of its exterior (rubble faced with Portland cement) leave the visitor unprepared for the wealth of colourful detailing within, including a good geometric tile pavement in the sanctuary. The highlight of the decorative scheme, begun in 1893 and never completed, is the combination of opus sectile, blue glass tiles and ceramic tiles on the wall above the north aisle arcading; permission for this nave decoration was requested in 1905.<sup>17</sup> Powell's of Whitefriars then supplied the church with a total of eighteen opus sectile figures of apostles and others during the period 1905-11.<sup>18</sup> The murals were intended to represent a Ritualist vision of heaven, while the theme of the east end decoration, with its seven hanging lamps, was the fourth chapter of Revelations (see Sunningwell, below). Thomas Hardy began writing *Jude the Obscure* (published 1895) in 1893, and may have seen the partly-decorated interior of St Barnabas, which features in the book as St Silas, Christminster, the 'Church of Ceremonies'.

Finally, return eastward to Walton Street, Jericho's main thoroughfare, heading north to find **St Sepulchre's Cemetery** (founded 1849), which is accessed via a gravel path leading from a gateway just north of JUXON STREET. Thomas Combe's grave is here, as well as a good selection of terracotta headstones made nearby at the St Giles Street workshop of Thomas Grimsley. Most of them are impressed with the firm's mark, and there is an example of the most ornate of his sixteen different designs, a jewelled cross.

#### SUNNINGWELL

**St Leonard's Church** was restored by the architect John Pollard Seddon (1827-1906) in 1877.<sup>19</sup> He designed the Pre-Raphaelite style east window, which portrays the Adoration of the Magi, and the very unusual encaustic floor tiles whose theme is the fourth chapter of Revelations, the last book of the New Testament (Fig 226). The tile and mosaic pavement includes a nine-tile group centred on a winged figure above a globe, surrounded by seven lamps with lettering - Scientia, Consilium, Sapientia, Fortitudo, Timor, Intellectus, Pietas - beneath. This refers to Revelations 4.5:

‘And out of the throne proceeded lightnings and thunderings and voices: and *there were* seven lamps of fire burning before the throne, which are the seven Spirits of God.’

There are also four-tile groups showing six-winged versions of an ox, a lion, an eagle and a man; these are the ‘four beasts’ round about the throne (Revelations 4.6). Another four-tile group depicts one of the ‘four and twenty elders’ who sat near the throne and ‘cast their crowns’ before it, while yet another shows a complex lamp, in fact a Duplex (twin-wick) burner oil lamp, a rare non-traditional image for a Victorian tile.<sup>20</sup> Similar pavements, containing most of the above elements, can also be found in three Welsh churches restored by Seddon: St Padarn (1868-9, 1878-80 and 1882-4), Llanbadarn Fawr, near Aberystwyth, where the tiles are mostly covered by carpet; Christ College Chapel, Brecon, Powys (1861-4) and St Jerome, Llangwm Uchaf, near Usk, where the tiles form part of a larger pavement and date from around 1866-8. The British Museum holds panels of the six-winged ox and lion, and the elder casting the crown; some of these have Godwin’s backmarks, suggesting that several sets of the ‘Revelations’ tiles were made by the firm to Seddon’s designs.<sup>21</sup> In addition, drawings by Seddon in the collection of the Victoria and Albert Museum show the ‘Revelations’ designs in a detailed plan of a tile pavement, but name no specific church.<sup>22</sup> It seems likely that further ‘Revelations’ pavements may be found at churches restored or built by Seddon, a most inventive designer. Certainly the ‘casting crowns’ tiles appear at St Oudoceus, Llandogo, north of Chepstow; the church was built by Seddon in 1859-61 but much of the decoration is of a slightly later date.<sup>23</sup>

#### WEST HENDRED

**Holy Trinity Church** has not been altered a great deal since it was built in the fourteenth century, and amazingly still retains a large expanse of its original medieval tiling on the floors of the chancel and the nave, although the upper step to the sanctuary is paved with Victorian encaustics. The chancel tiles, which have been relaid in panels divided by bands of newer plain tiling, have only two patterns, a fleur-de-lys and a geometric motif of two half circles. The fleur-de-lys tiles also cover most of the nave floor, with some plain yellow and green tiles near the font. Despite the fact that many different patterned tiles were available, pavements comprising only three or four different basic designs appear to have been common.<sup>24</sup>

#### Oxfordshire Roundup

In the south transept of St Mary’s Church, **Adderbury** are black and white tiles dating from the fourteenth century. The little Church of St Mary, **Adwell** (rebuilt 1865, architect Arthur Blomfield) has a tiled reredos. The Ardington Pottery occupies the nineteenth century dairy of Home Farm, School Road, **Ardington**; the dairy’s walls are completely tiled with Minton panels by Henry Stacy Marks and others, all framed by an elaborate floral frieze. There are some well-

preserved fifteenth century floor tiles in the chancel of St Lawrence Church, **Besselsleigh**. In St Mary's Church, **Childrey** are about one hundred rather worn late fifteenth century floor tiles, mostly with geometrical and floral designs along with a green man. A good collection of fourteenth century patterned floor tiles is set into the west end wall of the south aisle at St Peter's Church, **Great Haseley**. There are fifteenth century tiles on the floor of the chapel to the north-west of Thame Park House, **Thame**. The encaustic tile pavement in the sanctuary of St Lawrence Church, **Toot Baldon** dates from its restoration in 1863-6 by Henry Woodyer. The little-altered interior of St Lawrence Church (1844-7), **Tubney** - a rare anglican commission for A. W. N. Pugin - includes an encaustic tile pavement. The chancel of St Leonard's Church (rebuilt 1846), **Woodcote** has an encaustic tile pavement and a glazed relief tile dado. The diminutive porch added to Wood Eaton Manor (1775), **Wood Eaton** by the architect Sir John Soane in 1791 has Ionic capitals of Coade stone as well as bases and - unusually - shafts of the same material.<sup>25</sup>

In addition, there are small numbers of medieval tiles at the following churches: St Helen, Berrick Salome; St Michael, Blewbury; St Bartholomew, Brightwell Baldwin; St Mary, Charlton-on-Otmoor; St Andrew, Chinnor; St Mary, Cholsey; St Mary, Crowell; St Leonard, Drayton St Leonard; St Peter, Easington; St Mary, Great Milton; St Margaret, Harpsden; St Mary, Kidlington; St Mary, Long Wittenham; St Nicholas, Marston; St Giles, Newington; St Mary, North Stoke; St James, Somerton.

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19. Lynn Pearson, 'The 'Revelations' tiles of John Pollard Seddon at Sunningwell Church, Oxfordshire', *Glazed Expressions*, (2003) 48, p18.
20. Tony Herbert and Kathryn Huggins, *The Decorative Tile in Architecture and Interiors* (Phaidon Press, London, 1995), p83.
21. Personal communication, Imogen Loke, Special Assistant, Department of Medieval and Later Antiquities, British Museum, 21st June 1995. The British Museum's 'Revelations' tiles are known to have been purchased in 1994 at a sale of Godwin tiles in Stroud, Gloucestershire.
22. Michael Darby, *John Pollard Seddon Catalogues of Architectural Drawings in the Victoria and Albert Museum* (Victoria and Albert Museum, London, 1983), p116; see also p74 for the similar tile pavement at Llangwm Uchaf Church. Of the Seddon drawings held by the V&A, D.2096-1896 includes most of the 'Revelations' series in a plan for a pavement (a few are shown in several other drawings) and D.1669-1896 is a handpainted design for the six-winged lion.
23. John Newman, *Gwent/Monmouthshire. Buildings of Wales* (Penguin, London, 2000).
24. Wight, *Mediaeval Floor Tiles*, p135.
25. Alison Kelly, 'Sir John Soane and Mrs Eleanor Coade', *Apollo*, (1989), pp247-253.