

Anything But Football
A critical survey of sporting images in the decorative arts

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The history of sporting art goes back thousands of years, although in Britain it flourished especially from the 18th century onward, with field sports dominating the subject matter. Academic study of sporting art came to the fore in the mid to late 20th century, and indeed the theme of the 1991 version of this conference was art. Today the term sporting art tends to be interpreted more broadly to include sports other than field sports. This slowly became the norm during the 20th century; one influence may have been various art competitions, notably the series run between 1912 and 1948 to coincide with the Olympic Games. The Olympic Art competitions included architecture, sculpture, graphic arts, painting and drawing amongst other classes.

Then in 1953 the Football Association decided to mark its 90th anniversary by organising an art competition, Football and the Fine Arts, the majority of the 1,710 entrants offering paintings but with some sculpture. The most recent football art exhibition was the Football Art Prize, run by Manchester's Lowry gallery in 2005 and attracting about 900 entries. From there the judges selected 70 - mostly prints, paintings and photographs, with the odd sculpture and video - which were exhibited the following year to coincide with the World Cup. I would generally agree with Mark Hathaway's entry on Sporting Art in the Encyclopedia of British Sport, where he points out that 'Compared to painting, photography and prints, the decorative arts and sculpture are used infrequently in sporting art.' The Encyclopedia was published in 2000, just as statues at football grounds were coming back into fashion. By then figurative sculptures were seen as more artistically acceptable, and there seemed to be a call for commemorative and memorial pieces.

Since then there have been many football statues, the best known perhaps Sir Matt Busby (1996) at Old Trafford by Philip Jackson. According to the Public Monuments and Sculpture Association's survey of Greater Manchester, this is the city's 'most recognisable and most photographed statue'. Indeed all these football statues will eventually appear in the PMSA's national recording project. Jackson was also responsible for the group from the England World Cup winning team at West Ham, Champions (2003) and Bobby Moore (2007) at Wembley. In fact it almost seems that no football ground feels itself complete without a statue, even relatively lowly League One Carlisle at Brunton Park with their own legend Hugh McIlmoyle. And statues are now escaping from the grounds into the surroundings - the statue

of Brian Clough (2007) is in Albert Park, Middlesbrough, near the old Ayresome Park ground; it is by Vivien Mallock.

Football is not the only sport to have discovered sculpture. A few examples are *The Runner* - a bronze (2002) by Colin Spofforth - at the City of Manchester Stadium; *Spirit of Cricket* (1997) by Allan Sly in Priory Meadow Square, Hastings - that's a shopping centre built on a former cricket ground; boxer Jim Driscoll (1998) at Cardiff Bay, by Philip Blacker; and cyclist Reg Harris (1994) by James Butler at the Manchester velodrome. Blacker, an ex-jockey, also produced these three equine pieces, *Red Rum* (1988) at Aintree, *Generous* (1995) at Epsom and *Desert Orchid* (1991) at Kempton Park.

Now that sculpture does seem to have been annexed by sporting art, we should consider the Encyclopedia's remaining point concerning the lack of use of decorative art forms. Hathaway goes on to say that there has been little mass production of commemorative pottery, although here one could refer to the collection at the National Football Museum, which includes these 1880s Doulton Lambeth ware pieces and much else. What is more intriguing is the apparent absence of sporting imagery on any scale in decorative arts such as ceramic tiles and stained glass, which were used on a vast scale in late Victorian and Edwardian Britain, and in other 20th century decorative arts.

For this paper I have attempted to bring together a survey of such sporting images, mostly in an architectural context and mostly in Britain. Often the decoration is specifically related to the purpose of the building, and there are a number of categories into which these buildings fall: firstly venues - these could be swimming baths, football grounds and so on but also schools and colleges; secondly pubs, which are sometimes the headquarters of clubs or supporters, or have a sport-related theme; thirdly there is advertising; then what might be called modern celebratory; then ecclesiastical; and finally the non-architectural examples.

A) Venues

1) To begin with, three swimming baths: firstly the Gibson Street Baths, Newcastle upon Tyne, a complex of baths and wash-houses designed by the city architect and opened in 1907. They were considered to be the latest thing in bath design, and included a glazed brick entrance hall with five Carter's pictorial tile panels, each around 4' high by 2' wide. Four show aquatic scenes - jolly water-polo players, swimmers and mermaids - while a less inspiring fifth lists the members of the Baths and Wash-houses Committee.

2) Longton Swimming Pool c1880, Stoke-on-Trent - here the other images were rural scenes.

3) The Victoria Baths, Manchester was a luxurious bathhouse built by Manchester Corporation in 1903-6 to serve the whole of the city. The building cost £59,000 and was described by the Lord Mayor on its opening day as a 'water palace'. The unusual stained glass windows include some with images of sportsmen by William Pointer of Manchester - although not watersport-related images.

- 4) Then there are clubhouses: Olympic Bowling Club in the Orrell Park area of north Liverpool, founded 1892, pavilion built the same year, the stained glass panels in the entrance doors probably date from then. They emphasise the link between the club and the history and traditions of the game.
- 5) This late 19th century small stained glass window panel, showing early mixed doubles tennis scene (perhaps German), could be domestic or from a clubhouse.
- 6) Stained glass from Preston North End boardroom dates from 1936 and was made by Abbotts of Lancaster.
- 7) Rangers FC at Ibrox - mosaic of club badge in main entrance and murals on same theme in the Blue Room.
- 8) Arsenal field gun motif on granolithic floor in main entrance of old Highbury East Stand, stand designed by William Binnie in 1936.
- 9) Arsenal concrete lettering at new stadium on same heroic scale. Decorative typography.
- 10) Deepdale, Preston North End, stands with seat mosaic portraits, the Tom Finney stand was first, opening in 1996, then came Bill Shankly and Alan Kelly stands.
- 11) Ohio State University, their Buckeyes american football team plays at Ohio Stadium, Columbus, Ohio, built 1922, the stained glass dates from 2001.
- 12) These delightful roundels are from the pavilion at Werneth Cricket Club in Oldham. The club was founded in 1864 and joined the Central Lancashire League in 1910. The pavilion, and probably also its glass, dates from the late 19th century. There are six roundels, one of which is too damaged to show. Unusual and surprising survivors.
- 13) Lord's pavilion (1888-9) designed by Thomas Verity using terracotta by J. C. Edwards of Ruabon, includes a series of corbel-head portraits of cricketers which runs above the balcony. Also at Lord's is the Gilbert Bayes 1934 stone relief *Play up! Play up! and Play the Game*, which was commissioned as a tribute to all sportsmen. So it is not just cricketers but does show Ashes; he did other sporting reliefs. And still at Lord's we have decorative ironwork in the form of the weathervane, designed by Sir Herbert Baker in the mid 1920s; other examples at the County Ground in Taunton and - stretching a point - at Fen Ditton Church, overlooking the Cam where the Bumps are rowed annually.
- 14) Staying with cricket but moving to the Oval, we have the brick relief memorial to Sir Len Hutton (1993) by sculptor Walter Ritchie, and nearby at the Oval tube station is modern cricket-themed tiling.
- 15) Now to modern venues: at Gateshead Leisure Centre is the unusual mid 1990s ceramic frieze *Bridges of Friendship*, a collaboration between Japanese and north-east artists working with local people. Images include athletes and the Tyne Bridge.
- 16) Another couple of even larger-scale murals, both by the Scottish artist Charles Anderson, first at Bellahouston Sports Centre in Glasgow, incised cement render (35' high by 60' long) c1967. The 150' long concrete mural at the Thompson Centre in Burnley dates from 1973. It was about to be

demolished by the local council, along with the centre itself, in 2006 when a Burnley businessman stepped in at the last minute to save it, by paying for the mural to be taken down and stored, while a new site was found for the artwork. No site has yet been agreed.

17) In the hall of the Royal High School, Edinburgh, are three large windows of 1949 by William Wilson (1905-72), one of the major postwar Scottish stained glass artists. They are history windows with small roundels relating to sporting life of the school, depicting cricket, golf, rugby, athletics (discus), diving and gymnastics. Another educational location is Magdalen College, Oxford, where there are stained glass panels representing a boy learning to swim on bladders and another learning to skate.

B) Pubs

1) Now to the second main category, pubs, and a few examples of the art of the pub sign: the Bowling Green at Chorlton-cum-Hardy, the Border Minstrel at Newcastle racecourse and the Bullring in Ludlow.

2) The pub as clubhouse: the Charnock Hotel in Preston with Preston North End colours in stained glass; their colours are blue and white, so the flash is turning the photo rather yellow.

3) This tile panel, about 6 foot tall, has been dated to around 1892 and was originally mounted on a wall at the Sandon Hotel in Walton, Liverpool, which Everton then used as their base. It was later plastered over but revealed again in 1986 and presented to Everton FC; it is now on display at Goodison Park.

4) The greyhound and angler are two from a series of window inserts at the Greyhound pub in Crawley, West Sussex.

5) Football and Cricketers Arms, Linlithgow, probably interwar, like the previous example.

6) This is the Bartons Arms, Aston, Birmingham, built in 1899-1901 for Mitchells & Butlers. The opulent tiled interior includes a tile painting depicting a hunting scene; the manufacturers were Minton Hollins of Stoke-on-Trent.

7) Café Royal Oyster Bar, Edinburgh - was a pub from 1901. Its fabulous turn of the century glass scheme is by Thomas Wilson, who was a designer for the glass firm Ballantine & Gardiner from 1890s. (He was the uncle of William Wilson, whose work at the Royal High School you've just seen.) Here the windows include highly detailed images of bowls, tennis, rugby and cricket.

8) Another excellent set of sporting windows is at the Champion in Wells Street, Fitzrovia, just north of Oxford Street. The champions in various fields include 8 sportsmen: 'Young' Thomas Morris, Scottish golfer; tobogganning champion Bertie Dwyer who won the Grand National at St Moritz twice in the 1890s; Matthew Webb, Channel swimmer; climber Edward Whymper; W. G. Grace; Bob Fitzsimmons; jockey Fred Archer; and tennis player William Renshaw. Windows made in early 1980s, after Sam Smiths took over the pub, by York stained glass artist Ann Sotheran.

9) Central Bar, Leith was built in 1898-9; the architect was Peter Lyle Henderson (1848-1912), who was reputed to have the largest workload of new

pub commissions of any Edinburgh architect. He specialised in tiled pub interiors, and the Central Bar is an excellent example, its walls completely tiled from floor to ceiling and including four tiled murals of sporting activities by Minton Hollins.

C) Advertising

- 1) On to advertising, and John Wisden & Co's red terracotta frontage at 21 Cranbourne Street near Leicester Square.
- 2) On a rather grander scale is Bibendum, or the Michelin Building, which opened on London's Fulham Road in 1911. The British headquarters of the Michelin Tyre Company, this three-dimensional advertisement for the pneumatic tyre was designed by Michelin's own engineer-cum-architect, Francois Espinasse. Hiding its reinforced concrete frame is mostly white glazed terracotta, with much decoration, including stained glass and mosaics depicting Bibendum (the Michelin man), and thirty-four tile panels, most of which show motor racing scenes. These were replicas of a set originally made for the Michelin headquarters in Paris by the architectural tile painting firm Gilardoni Fils et Cie, also of Paris, with images largely taken from drawings by the poster artist Ernest Montaut. Michelin left the building in 1985; following restoration, completed in 1987, the Michelin Building reopened as an office, shop and restaurant (Bibendum) complex.

D) Modern celebratory

- 1) The fourth category is modern celebratory, and this 1998 tile panel at Newcastle's RVI Hospital features St James's Park amongst other local images, with what is supposed to be Alan Shearer to the fore, although it looks more like Peter Beardsley to me. Local people were consulted as to which images they wanted to be shown on the panel.
- 2) This mosaic of Pontypool Rugby Club players dates from 1993 and was commissioned from Oliver Budd, who - with his father - had been producing public artworks for many years. The Pontypool one, called Try and Try Again!, decorates a pedestrian subway in the town.
- 3) The Our Wee Country mural in east Belfast commemorates Northern Ireland beating England 1-0 at home in a World Cup qualifier in 2005.
- 4) This mural in Coventry, by the artist and town planner Gordon Cullen, was commissioned by the council in 1958 to mark the city's recovery from the war, and included images relating to cycle manufacturing, a local industry.

E) Ecclesiastical

- 1) And now to the church. In All Saints Cemetery, Jesmond, Newcastle upon Tyne is an unusual late Victorian memorial to local racing cyclist George Henry. It features a small stone relief of a penny farthing bicycle and was erected by his fellow cyclists.
- 2) And as to stained glass, there are a very few sporting images dating from the medieval period. At Gloucester Cathedral, in its mid 14th century great east window, is a small roundel of what at first glance appears to be a figure

playing golf, although in fact it is more likely to be cricket or bandy ball. The earliest depiction of what is thought to be cricket is in late 12th century stained glass at Canterbury Cathedral.

3) Dating from around the end of the 15th century is this archer from the chapel at Oxburgh Hall in Norfolk; he is shooting at St Sebastian.

4) To the twentieth century, and firstly memorial windows; there are two stained glass windows of 1961 at St Francis Church, Dudley, commemorating the life of footballer Duncan Edwards, seen in his Manchester United and England kit.

5) In the crypt of St Nicholas Cathedral, Newcastle upon Tyne, is this 1932 window of an angler; it is one of four, all with secular imagery, commemorating the life of local shipbuilder Archibald John Campbell Ross (1867-1931). The artist was Frank Barber (1902-32).

6) From commemoration to local interest: this tiny image of boys playing cricket was originally at St Augustine, Haggerston, in Hackney. It has been moved to St Mary Magdalene, Munster Square (near Regents Park) where it can be found in the crypt. The glass is 1931-3 by Margaret Edith Aldrich Rope, scheme was Life of the Virgin and six saints, with vignettes of local festivities below. The cricket one is St Leonard.

7) More local interest at St Nicholas Church, Wallasey, built from 1910 onward as a memorial church for the local Harrison family of ship owners. The golfers window (by Shrigley and Hunt of Lancaster) was placed in the lady chapel in 1926 by one Herbert Edward Wild to mark his appreciation of the Sunday morning service for golfers, and in honour of the support of golfers for the local cottage hospital. But the window was criticised as many felt that golf on Sunday was a distraction, others were unhappy at secular images, complained bitterly in 1920s. In fact windows were attempt to reconcile worries, as showed Christ involved in various activities on the Jewish Sabbath, including walking in the cornfields (at leisure) - implied ordinary Christians also able to combine duty and leisure.

8) The best example of a sporting window is in what is known as the sports bay at the Episcopal Cathedral of St John the Divine in New York. The cathedral was built between 1892 and 1941, and the inclusion of its sports bay - one of the nave chapels - was intended to symbolise the acceptance of sport into mainstream American culture. The campaign to raise money for the sports bay began in 1925; donations were solicited from sports players, and a series of contests and exhibitions was held, for instance Madison Square Garden hosted boxing matches, ice hockey games and cycle races. The chapel was dedicated in 1928, with the stained glass dating from then into the 30s. The window is a little under 40 feet high, and its original design featured modern sports in all the larger roundels. This was later changed to a series of biblical sporting scenes, with 28 representations of modern sport squeezed into the remaining space. Looking at the left lancet, the central row of small roundels outlined with circles and reading upward from the bottom, are bowling, car racing, swimming and figure skating. At either side are boxing, ice hockey, american football, baseball, basketball, tennis and fencing, with

billiards, fencing and pistol shooting symbolised in the border. For the right lancet, the central row of small roundels show sculling, tobogganing, sailing and cycle racing. At the sides are archery, hunting, soccer, skiing, polo, fishing and golf. In the border are cricket, curling and golf.

9) In southwest France at Larrivière is the chapel of Notre Dame du Rugby; the glass dates from the mid to late 1960s and was designed by Pierre Lisse, who was also a rugby player.

F) Non-architectural decorative motifs

1) Aside from architectural examples, we have other decorative and domestic imagery. This stained glass was designed in the late 1880s by the gentleman on the right, Dick Barlow (1851-1919), the Lancashire and England batsman and slow bowler. He is seen here with his fellow Lancs opener A. N. Hornby at Old Trafford, with two of its original pavilions. It was paid for the the proceeds of Barlow's benefit match, eventually ended up in a house in Southport, and is now on display at Old Trafford in the Long Room. Realistic depiction of the cricketers and pavilions of the time.

2) The small panel of american footballers is actually in the law department at Hutchinson Hall, University of Michigan.

3) The balloon is in George Eastman House (1902-5) in Rochester, New York State. Eastman was the founder of Kodak; the lavish house is now a photography museum. One of a series of roundels in the billiard room on a transportation theme.

4) Dutch Delftware ceramic tiles, very popular 18th century onward, often showed children's games amongst a huge variety of potential images.

5) In the late 19th century the Stoke-on-Trent firm Malkin Edge produced a series of 12 tiles with images of figures playing what were described as Old English Sports, including croquet, bowls, billiards, real tennis, cricket and archery.

6) Minton Hollins, late 19th century, tile series Humorous Sporting Scenes included runner jumping a fence, boxing, cock fighting, hunting, cricket, skating and fencing. They also did a series of 12 hunting and racing scenes, of which this is one. Also (but not illustrated) T. & R. Boote did a set of 3 golfing cartoons - humorous sports is a theme.

7) Edward Bawden's 6-tile Sporting set for Carter's of Poole, produced from the 1920s to 50s. The 4-tile panel of the lady golfer is also by Carter's and from about 1935.

8) Packard & Ord Sporting set included images of golfer, rugby player and shooting, dating from just before and after Second World War. Their tiles showing Eton College boat crews date from late 30s.

9) The cyclist tile, from c1960, is by a small Stoke firm called Tilecraft. Also here are modern Turkish tiles showing form of polo. The small 1990s panel of rugby players is by Birmingham artist Eileen Hemsoll; on the right is The Wrestlers (1988) by Bronwyn Williams-Ellis.

10) And still showing (until 28 November 2008) at the exhibition *40cm²* by the British Society of Master Glass Painters at the Cochrane Theatre Gallery in

Southampton Row, London, is this recently made golf-themed glass panel by the artist Roy Walter Coomber.

Conclusion

There are many things I've not had time to consider here, including the graphic arts, posters, and in particular stamps; there are so many football images on stamps - albeit not in Britain - that the French equivalent of Stanley Gibbons has issued a catalogue of them. Or medals, trophies, cigarette cards, programmes and much else. Aside from foreign examples, we have seen images of 27 sports, with cricket easily the most numerous, then football - although when I gave this talk its title, I had no football images - followed by golf, with images of male players easily outnumbering those of female players. (Walthamstow dog track opened 1933.)

So what can we draw from this? I am fairly sure there are many other images out there waiting to be discovered, but it already seems clear that sporting images in the fine arts are vastly more abundant than in the decorative arts. What are the reasons behind this gap in our visual culture? Can we conclude that decorative artists are not attracted to sports imagery, or indeed sport itself? Or perhaps decorative motifs have been subsumed into branding? Or is it that most sports images feature teams or individuals which only a section of the possible audience is involved with, so - being divisive rather than unifying - this type of artwork tends not to be commissioned for public places. The exception proving the rule here is the Newcastle United footballers on a local hospital tile panel, where one might guess the team would be pretty much universally supported.

One important point concerns the commissioning of works. Mary Ann Wingfield, in her 1988 book *Sport and the Artist*, said that 'During the twentieth century, sporting art in general stagnated', with very little sporting art being produced between 1914 and 1960. She puts forward the reasons as perhaps being a lack of commissions from patrons, or artists not perceiving sport as a significant enough subject. The examples of decorative art in this paper, on the other hand, date mostly from around the end of the 19th century and between the wars. The interwar examples come from new stands at football grounds, domestic scale ceramic tiling and memorials. This may imply that those buying or commissioning decorative art were, at least in the interwar period, a different group from those acquiring fine artworks.

This paper has been a very small first step in looking at the relationship between sport, the decorative arts, visual culture and national identity. I have only been able to show a few examples of work, rather than establish exactly how much was created, and how much survives. That should be an essential first stage for any further study. Sporting art, like maritime art, is generally seen as marginal in relation to art history, and decorative arts are themselves perhaps a less well regarded specialism in the academic study of the arts. However, given that sport does have such a substantial and significant role in our culture, it is surprising that this area has not received more attention.

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