

Anatomy of Tiles

By Connie Rogers

It has been four years now since I last wrote about my growing interest in tiles. Since that time, we have continued to learn more about the subject and have now reached a total of 951 tiles recorded in the *TCC Database of Patterns and Sources (Database)*. We were privileged to hear

two lectures from Hans vanLemmen, noted tile researcher and writer at the TCC Annual Meeting in Phoenix in 2017. It is pleasing to know that more of our members have become aware and expressed an interest in the tile category.

When we first set up the *Database*, we had to decide what



Figure 1



Figure 2



Figure 3



Figure 4



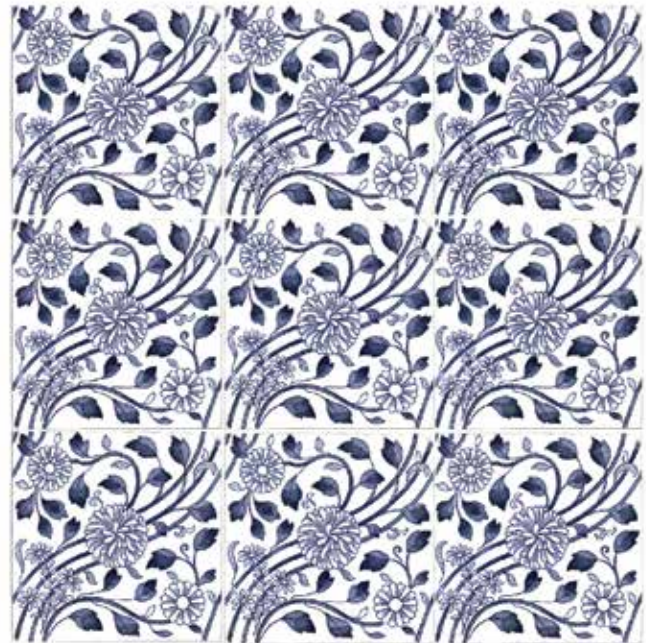
Figure 5

aspects of transfer printed patterns were important to document. We noted that names on patterns most often described the center pattern, so we proceeded as if it were primarily a center pattern database. However, because many of the categories such as American, British and European themes have series with printed marks and are identifiable by their borders, we also needed to document images of the borders. This gave us the sequence of center, border and over-all pattern for recording patterns. It worked well for most patterns in

the *Database*, and we are also able to fit in the patterns with no border or patterns that are border-only designs.

Naturally, we began recording tiles using the same system. Many tile patterns have a well-defined center and border, even though the series are generally named for the center pattern rather than any consistent border pattern. An example seen in Figure 1, “Elfin doffing his hat to a mole”, Pattern #15238 in the *Database*, is from the Elfin series of 12 patterns that share the same border. The Mintons series was produced in black, blue

and brown on buff as seen here. It is one of the series we were able to photograph in situ during our TCC 2015 UK Tour. We were able to visit the former Minton Library in Stoke-on-Trent located next to the old Minton factory that had been demolished. The lower level of the library had included a lunch room for employees at the Minton factory, and the walls were decorated with hundreds of tiles by Mintons China Works. When the building was vacated, the tiles were painted over. Restoration was in progress in 2015, and the tiles were



Figures 6



Figures 7

in view for the first time in many years.

In our research, we have discovered that the borders on many of the tile patterns serve as a simple narrow frame, as for a painting. Figure 2, "Grotesque Floral Pattern" by Copeland, Pattern #17637 in the *Database*, is a good example. It is a charming and fanciful pattern printed and painted in several colors. Many of the framed picture tiles are floral patterns, but there are also birds, animals and fish portraits in narrow frames. "Clumber Spaniel," Pattern #17538 by W. P. Simpson, an artist at Minton Hollins & Co., is seen in Figure 3. It comes from an Animal Series by that maker and is one of my favorites. The dog has caught a mallard and is holding his prey in his mouth.

The tile patterns that are framed are complete in themselves and can provide many interesting patterns for the collector. They also may have been used on furniture, flower boxes or fireplace surrounds. However, there are other tiles that were specifically designed to be used as borders when use in rows. Figure 4, Pattern #17564, "Border with Circular Pattern" by Minton Hollins & Co. is such a tile. It has borders on the top and bottom only. The center pattern consists of a double circle. Inside the circles are four leaves with stems that form interlocking partial circles. The way it was designed allows the row of tiles to be used vertically as well as horizontally.

Figure 5 has a TCC Assigned Name as most of these tiles do: "Medallions, Convolvulus and Ferns,"

Pattern #14715. It is a tile with narrow framing border, but it is somewhat of a transition to the tile designs examined in the next section of this article. Realistically rendered flowers and

ferns surround a dark blue circular medallion containing a six-lobed motif of white stylized flowers, vines and leaves. The floral pattern is framed by a border with a chain of stylized

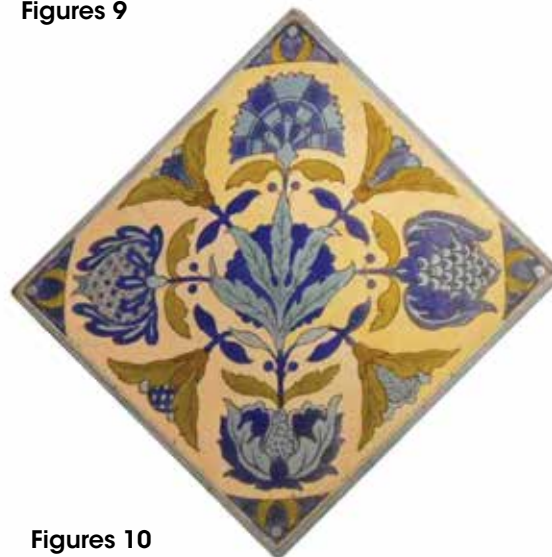
white flowers and leaves on a dark ground. Here is the difference we see in this border: The motif in each corner repeats a portion of the center medallion. When we notice that partial



Figures 8



Figures 9



Figures 10

motif in the corners, we can almost see what the tile would look like if it were seen next to others like it on a wall display.

Our *Database* Image Editor Kurt OHare has been trimming patterns, cutting borders and centers for our editors for many years and has amassed a personal file of many thousands of patterns. It is a time-consuming job, but he enjoys doing it, and has improved the look of the *Database* almost single-handedly. We were discussing the fact that it would be great to see some of these tile

patterns in groups as they are often used to decorate furniture, hearths and walls. Pattern books from the factories often display the tiles in groups. Kurt began to experiment and came up with ways to duplicate tiles we have photographed and place them in groups of 4, 9, or more. Figure 6, "The Mythic Pomegranate" by Mintons, Pattern #16941, has a narrow beaded framing border around the center pomegranate, extending from the middle to the outside border, also beaded. The outer beaded border has inserts of half-

flower heads on each side as well as a leaf motif inside a square in each corner. Kurt has copied the tile into a group of 4 so that we can see new pattern motifs formed by the joining of the tiles. We see a new square center leaf motif and a grid-work with flower head inserts.

We will now turn to tile patterns that have no framing borders and see how that freedom allows a smooth transition to placing groups of tiles together to decorate a large space such as a wall. Figure 7, Pattern #17557, "Blue Floral with

Waves of Lines" by Mintons is a very open blue-printed pattern on a white background. The pattern consists of three wavy lines moving diagonally from the lower left of the tile to the upper right corner. Stems of leaves break away from the main lines, and flower heads are placed here and there along those stems. The group of 9 tiles shows the energy that is created in the upward motion of this tile display. There is a 16th century painted pattern stone tile from Syria in the British Museum that was probably the source.

Figure 8, "Carnival", another TCC Assigned Name, is Pattern #15719, a very colorful and busy pattern by an unknown maker. It is a quatrefoil geometric design. Four small sections on each side contain a fleur-de-lis, which is repeated in various sizes throughout the design. Putting 4 tiles together pulls out the strong green and white fleur-de-lis giving shape to the appearance of butterflies of different sizes and shapes. Or perhaps we see four airplane shapes pointing nose to nose in the center of the pattern. Seeing these groupings of tiles really sparks the imagination.

The *Database* has patterns with a slim border or a near-border that offers no interference with the intended grouping of the tiles. A near-border is one way to describe Figure 9, the "Bamboo Canes and Leaves," Pattern #15721 by Mintons. The cane pattern is set over the delicate bamboo and leaves. The border pieces are set in from the edge and crisscross each other at the corners. The



Figures 11

grouping of 4 tiles sets up double horizontal and vertical borders in the center and adds an array of different geometric forms to the trellis.

In 2014, the Spode Factory Exhibition Center in Stoke-on-Trent set up an exhibition of Copeland tiles in long enclosed horizontal cases. Many were transfer printed. Paul and Kath Holdway were in charge

of the exhibition. They allowed my son, a photographer, and me to come after hours and dismantle the display in order to photograph fronts and backs of tiles to add to the *Database*. Figure 10 in this article is a tile from that display, dated May 1885 on the back. It has a TCC Assigned Name of "Blue Fern and Flowers," Pattern #14301. The pattern out-

line is printed in black on a buff ground. The flowers are two shades of blue with ochre colored leaves. Placed in the horizontal display, the tile, of necessity had to be set flat side down. However, the pattern was described as "Arabian style conventionalized flowers in cruciform arrangement." Kurt saw the need to place the tile on the diagonal for recording in the *Da-*

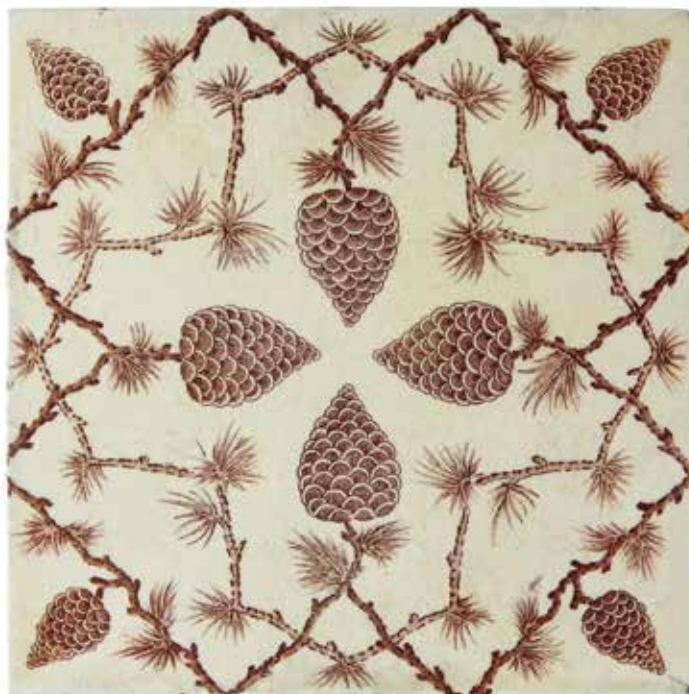
tabase so that the blue fern in the center could point upward. He mounted the tiles in a group around it, cutting the edge tiles in half in order to make a rectangular display. The cruciform arrangement is now easily recognized, and the narrow border is all but invisible.

Figure 11, Pattern #17670 in the *Database*, is an example of the versatility of an Aesthetic design on a tile. A quarter of a stylized sunflower sits in each corner of the tile and serves as the border. A stylized center flower head has a yellow ribbon running through it diagonally from lower left to upper right. The ribbon is decorated with geometrical patterns. A circular vine with brown leaves and blue thistle-type flowers serves as a background for the ribbon and flower head. It is interesting to see how the pattern expands when it is put in a group of 4 tiles as there are now 3 diagonal ribbons running across the pattern with a central sunflower formed from the border. Placing the tiles in a different way, a group of 24 shows a pattern of zig-zag yellow ribbons with the change of direction coming at each full sunflower image. This tile pattern seems to spark the imagination. Kurt discovered a way to form vertical rows of diamond shapes from the ribbons with a complete sunflower in the center of each when he put together a group of 56 tiles.

Contrary to several of the tile patterns featured here where the borders are of no consequence, we include Figure 12, "Yellow Bouquet," Pattern #15756 with a tile pattern number of "635" by an unknown



Figures 12



Figures 13

maker. It shows how border patterns can be used to expand the pattern of one tile. "Yellow bouquet" has an intricate border with scrolls featuring a large red C-scroll in each corner. An image of Kurt's cut out of the border is included here. These large C-scrolls frame the pattern by opening into the center yellow bouquet. When 4 tiles are grouped together, a secondary center pattern, brown on beige, is shaped by the same C-scrolls now facing outward.

Another example of the border pattern adding to the extension of the pattern is Figure 13, "Pine Cones," Pattern #17614 by an unknown maker. It has the Rd. No. dating it to 1884. Kurt also cut out this border pattern, which

has three triangular shapes on each side. This border pattern outlines the quatrefoil shape extending to the 4 corners of the tile. That shape as well as the smaller uneven cruciform shape in the center are formed by pine branches and tufts of pine needles. When putting a group of 4 tiles together, a series of diamond-shaped motifs are created horizontally and vertically: four pine cones now pointing inward in the large center diamond with smaller diamond shapes on either side holding two tufts of pine needles. The openness of the pattern belies the complexity created with just pine cones, branches and tufts of pine needles.

Our last tile to show and discuss is Figure 14 by Josiah Wedgwood. It

has a TCC Assigned Name, intended to be descriptive: "Anglo-Eastern," Pattern #17667. We have two different colored versions with each 8" tile using 6 different colors painted in the printed outline. All the motifs are stylized and tend to pull together motifs both from China and from Islamic adaptations of Chinese patterns that were most common in Persian art. Of particular interest to our theme in this article, we see the curved, framing motifs at the top that are adapted from Chinese cloud bands. The sides of the tile pattern are the parts that need to be completed. By putting a horizontal group of 4 tiles together, a top border is created by the framing motifs. Matched vertically, the curving white

vine is completed as can be seen in the 4-tile grouping. Placing some of the tiles upside down to match the smaller motifs creates a different design. It is two tiles deep with the Chinese cloud bands framing top and bottom. This can be seen in both the 16 and 64 tile images.

Kurt and I have learned a lot about how tiles are used. We are now looking at the big picture and enjoying the increasing possibilities we discover. A big thank you to Kurt for being so helpful by coming up with ideas on how to extend the range of the pattern of a single tile, for his expertise in doing it, and for his willingness to invest so much of his time to being *Database Image Editor*.



Figures 14