



Yes – Transfer-Printed Tiles are in the Database

Connie Rogers

Database Discoveries – Contribution # 13

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Tiles are among the earliest examples of the use of ceramic material for decorative purposes. We may think of the blue and white Dutch Delft tiles found on fireplace surrounds in the 18th century. As the popularity of tin-glazed tiles declined, the production of tiles dwindled away until the 1830s when heavy encaustic floor tiles were introduced. Other tiles used for major architectural schemes such as the adornment of walls also became popular. Our main interest is in the decorative art tile that came into its own from about 1870 to 1900, many of which were transfer-printed.

If you put the word “tile” in the General Search in the database (DB), you will come up with 145-150 patterns the count changes almost daily. Some you find will be individual 6 inch tiles with a printed pattern, often in colors. For instance there are some lovely floral patterns by unknown makers. Figure 1 has the TCC assigned name Blue Thistles. Figure 2 (Columbine) is another lovely natural floral pattern on a tile.



Fig. 1 – “Blue Thistles”



Fig. 2 – “Columbine”

There are also more stylized and/or geometrical patterns such as the Classical Sunflower in Figure 3.



Fig. 3 – “Classical Sunflower”

Many of the tile patterns we find are from series with a theme and specific artist-engraver. Search Aesthetic Category/Tiles Series. These tiles were often produced for hearths, wall linings, baths, friezes, and cabinet work. John Moyr Smith was a prominent designer-engraver who produced more than a dozen different series produced by the Mintons China Works c. 1870--1892. The earliest of the series is the Old Testament series of 12 patterns. The 6 inch tiles were produced in blue or black on white, brown on buff and black on blue. “Death of the First Born” is the title of the tile seen in Figure 4.



Fig. 4 –
Old Testament series “Death of the First Born”

Tennyson’s “Idylls of the King” made an enormous contribution to the Arthurian literature. John Moyr Smith designed 12 tile patterns depicting various scenes from the Idylls. This series of tiles was the first to be printed in three colors. The example here has a blue background with black printing on white. Figure 5, “Morte D’Arthur,” shows King Arthur in the Royal Barge with the three Queens. This is the only series by this designer that is complete at present in the database.



Fig. 5 Idylls of the Kings series “Morte D’Arthur”

Classical Figures with Musical Instruments is a series of 8 inch tiles produced by Mintons China Works and was a popular series used on other media such as painted glass and as stamped leather for furniture. As with other series, this one was made in different colorways. Figure 6 shows the Double Flute pattern. The musician is wearing an animal head dress.



Fig. 6 – Classical Figures with Musical Instruments series “Double Flute”

The Early English History series of a dozen 6 inch tiles features scenes from legendary and actual early history in the settlement of England. Here we see in Figure 7 a blue-printed tile of “Edward the Martyr” and a brown-printed 8.5 inches plate in the same

pattern in Figure 8. This is an example of how the tile patterns were also applied to tableware.



Fig. 7 – Early English History series
“Edward the Martyr”



Fig. 8 – “Edward the Martyr” plate

The factory that may have made the most use of tile patterns on dinnerware is that of Josiah Wedgwood. Often, the tiles came first, but in the case of the “Fresco” or “Game Series” T291, the six images were first produced on a Louis XV dessert service painted with majolica glazes. The designs came later on tiles (c. 1880). Figure 9 shows “Gun Dog with Bird” on a brown-printed plate with “Mekado” border, and Figure 10 shows the black-printed 6 inch tile of the center pattern. Four of the six subjects in that series (T291) can be found in the DB by searching that code number in the General Search field.



Fig. 9 – Fresco or Game series “Gun Dog
with Bird” plate



Fig. 10 – Fresco or Game series “Gun Dog
with Bird” tile

Certainly, the most colorful of the Wedgwood tile series with patterns also found on plates is the Months series. It was designed by Helen A. J. Miles. There are several named

borders. For instance, the “Mekado” border in the T291 series is also found decorating the 10 inch September plate in the Months series. In fact, the word “Mekado” is found in the mark. See Figure 11.



Fig. 11 – September plate, Mekado border

“Florentine” is another border pattern used for the Months series in various colors in the database. It is brown-printed on the March pattern, and a polychrome version can be seen on plates for March, May and June. February shows the pattern in red. Figure 12 shows the June pattern on a plate with the “Florentine” border, and Figure 13 shows the tile pattern in brown. Originally a 6 inch tile, it becomes an 8 inch tile with the added border known as Bell Flower.



Fig. 12 – June plate, Florentine border



Fig. 13 –June tile, Bell Flower border

Wedgwood also produced a series of small calendar tiles for the Boston retailer firm of Jones, McDuffee & Stratton (JMS) yearly from 1879 to 1929. The first two years featured only a calendar; however, in 1881, Wedgwood began producing a transfer-printed pattern on one side with a calendar on the other. Most of these patterns are historical. In the year 1881, the image shows the building that was Washington's Head Quarters in 1775 and became Longfellow's home in 1843. Figures 14 and 15 show the front and back of this 1881 tile. Although the Wedgwood tile works closed down in 1902, they continued to produce the JMS tiles by purchasing blanks for decoration from other local tile companies such as T. & R. Boote. Search JMS Calendar Tile to find the complete series in the database or add the date if you want to search for a specific date.



Fig. 14 – 1881 Longfellow's Home 1843

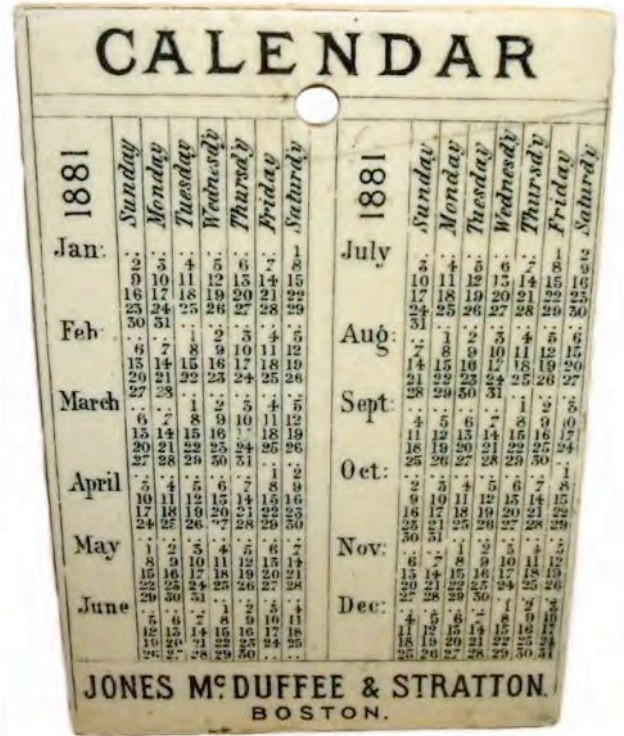


Fig. 15 – 1881 Longfellow's Home (reverse)

Marks and more additional information and images are available in the database for all of the patterns mentioned and illustrated in this short article.

I have found these tile patterns to be fascinating and especially enjoy working with the series. If there is a TCC member out there who also has an interest in tiles, I would welcome him or her with open arms as an editor in charge of entering tiles in the database. It is a huge field and needs an editor.

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