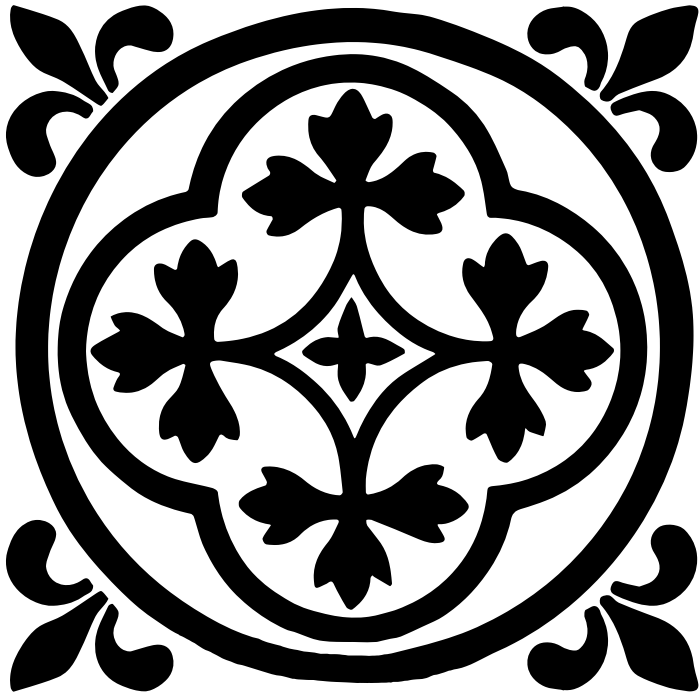


Touching History

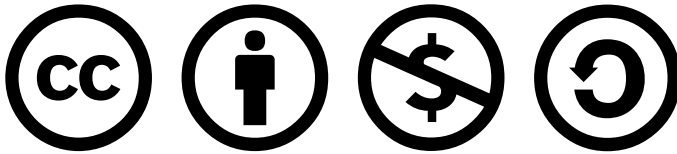


Hans van Lemmen & Bret Shah

“Every ornament, to deserve the name, must possess an appropriate meaning, and be introduced with an intelligent purpose, and on reasonable grounds. The symbolical associations of each ornament must be understood and considered: otherwise things beautiful in themselves will be rendered absurd by their application.”

Augustus Welby Northmore Pugin

Glossary of Ecclesiastical Ornament (1844)



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Hans is a tile historian, author, and the current president of the Tiles and Architectural Ceramics Society. He has written numerous books on tiles, including *5000 Years of Tiles* published by The British Museum Press.

Bret Shah

Bret is a teacher, pattern maker, and a director of Stoke Your Gratitude C.I.C. He is the cheeky creator of the Playful Learning Method^(TM) which helps people to see things differently.

The Project

The Touching History project raises the profile of Minton's earliest encaustic tile patterns. Quite literally during the project, 3D interpretations of these tiles were created that raised the pattern from the base, making them tactile and accessible to people with visual impairments.

This book can be read as a standalone or it can accompany the project exhibition and also the 3D Handling Box available for schools and the community. This book is in large print to aid with readability, and is also available as an accessible eBook and an audiobook.

Gratitude

Research shows that noticing, appreciating and feeling gratitude for our local urban environment is key to wellbeing. When we stop to notice the world around us, we begin to appreciate the beauty and excellence that surrounds us. Appreciation fosters a sense of gratitude for where we live and consequently this improves our wellbeing.

After reading this book, you may find yourself noticing more tile patterns and other heritage to appreciate in your local area.

A story of four people

The story of Minton's early encaustic tile patterns is really about four people; Herbert Minton the ceramics manufacturer, who made them; Augustus Welby Northmore Pugin, the Gothic Revival architect who designed many of them, John Talbot, the 16th Earl of Shrewsbury, who paid for them, and architect Lewis Nockalls Cottingham who re-discovered the now famous medieval tile pavement in Westminster Abbey Chapterhouse, the designs of which were copied onto encaustic tiles by Minton & Co.

The five tile patterns

We have undertaken historical research to determine which tiles tell the greatest story. Some of the earliest patterns made by Minton are simply decorative but there are five that reveal much more.

In this book we reveal the story behind the first, second, fifth, sixth and seventh encaustic tiles ever made by Minton.

Herbert Minton (1793-1858)

Herbert Minton was the successful owner of a ceramics factory in Stoke-on-Trent that made tableware and ornamental ceramics but he also had an interest in tiles.

He was a clever businessman and recognised the value of the ideas in new patents in the ceramics industry particularly the patent taken out by Samuel Wright of Shelton in 1830 for the manufacture of encaustic floor tiles¹.

In the mid-1830s Minton struck a deal with Wright that allowed him to operate the patent under licence in return for paying royalties.

It took a further five years to develop suitable methods of production using plaster moulds and small screw presses until tiles could be commercially produced.

Some of the early commissions for tiles in 1840 were for buildings designed by the architect A.W.N. Pugin² with whom Minton developed a successful business relationship.

A. W. N. Pugin (1812-52)

A.W.N. Pugin was an architect who saw Gothic as the most suitable style for Christian churches. As a staunch Roman Catholic he said classical architecture was pagan and advocated that buildings of all kinds such as churches, schools, civic buildings and private homes should be built in the mediaeval Gothic style which best expressed the religious and moral ideas of a Christian society.

One of his most famous commissions in the 1840s was the interior of the Houses of Parliament for which he designed stunning tiled floors, and in most of the buildings Pugin

planned, he used decorative encaustic tiles which were based on the study of medieval examples³.

In the introduction to his Glossary of Ecclesiastical Ornament⁴ published in 1844, he wrote “Every ornament, to deserve the name, must possess an appropriate meaning, and be introduced with an intelligent purpose, and on reasonable grounds. The symbolical associations of each ornament must be understood and considered: otherwise things beautiful in themselves will be rendered absurd by their application.” His tile designs for Minton often have meanings and use symbols which are based on Pugin’s Christian beliefs.

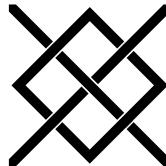
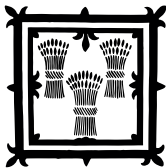
John Talbot (1791-1852)

John Talbot was the 16th Earl of Shrewsbury also known as “Good Earl John” who like Pugin was a prominent British Roman Catholic.

He was a very wealthy peer and a generous sponsor of churches, hospitals and convents which he asked Pugin to design for him.

He also asked Pugin to work on his country home, Alton Towers, in Staffordshire during the 1830s and 1840s and to rebuild medieval Alton Castle.

Talbot appointed Pugin as the architect of St. Giles Church in Cheadle (1840-46)⁵ which was completely financed by him. This is why the Minton encaustic tiles used in these buildings carry heraldic devices and monograms relating to the Talbot family.



L. N. Cottingham (1787-1847)

L.N. Cottingham was an architect with a strong interest in medieval architecture.

He examined the interior of the thirteenth century Westminster Abbey Chapterhouse in London and discovered a well preserved pavement of medieval tiles under a temporary wooden floor.

This wooden floor was put in after the dissolution of the monasteries in 1537-40 when the Westminster Abbey Chapterhouse began to be used as a government record office. The medieval tiled floor was forgotten until the

early 1840s when Cottingham 'found' it again.

It caused quite a stir among antiquarians and Cottingham made tracings of the medieval tiles and gave them to Minton who used them to make replica medieval encaustic tiles for use in churches which were then being restored as part of the nineteenth century Gothic Revival Movement.

One of the first churches to be paved with them was Temple Church in London in 1841 which attracted national attention.

Encaustic Tiles

Encaustic tiles became closely associated with the architectural movement known as the Gothic Revival.

They are a very specific type of tile made of red-brown clay indented with an ornamental clay pattern of a lighter colour.

The word 'encaustic' comes from Greek meaning 'burnt in' and the hallmark of an encaustic tile is the pattern of different coloured clay burnt into the body of the tile.

A screw press was used to force the clay into

a plaster mould and indent a design into the soft clay, which was then filled with clay of a contrasting colour, either by pouring or pasting. More than one contrasting colour could be used if required.

When semi-dry the surface was scraped level to reveal the inlaid design. Then after more drying, the tiles were placed in ceramic boxes called saggars for firing in large bottle kilns.

One of the greatest technical problems to overcome was to produce clays which would all contract at the same rate during the firing. The tiles were fired at temperatures of between 1100 and 1200 Celsius which made them

virtually impervious to water and dirt and therefore ideal for use as floor tiles.

Minton's encaustic tiles were usually left unglazed but during the early 1840s the white inlaid parts would often be painted over with a yellow enamel glaze which created a vivid contrast with the unglazed background colour.

The Minton encaustics of the early 1840s were so called 'solid body' tiles with irregular stab holes on the back (this aided the drying process and provided a key for the mortar on which the tiles were laid), but these early tiles were not marked with the name of the firm.

From the middle of the 1840s onwards production methods changed and Minton encaustic tiles were made using the so-called 'sandwich' method employing layers of different clays.

The tile maker would press a thin layer of good quality buff clay into the mould; add a thicker layer of coarse red clay and then another thin layer of buff clay to form the back.

It was probably at this time that Minton, with Pugin's encouragement, began to experiment with other colours⁶ in his encaustic tiles than just the traditional yellow and brown-red of medieval times.

With the addition of blue, green and white clays, richer more colourful effects could be created that fitted well with the colourful ecclesiastical interiors designed by Pugin.

*

The sandwich layers prevented warping and added to the strength of the tile. The back of the tiles were marked with regular stab holes using a metal plate with spikes as well as the name of the firm Minton & Co.



MINTON & CO



PATENT



STOKE UPON TRENT



The Minton Tile Pattern Book of 1835

Minton's original twelve encaustic tile designs first appeared in a factory pattern book dated 1835 that was presented by Alderman J. W. Minton to the Library in Stoke-on-Trent in October 1884. This book is now stored in the Stoke-on-Trent City Archives.

On the first page of this book is a handwritten inscription that reads: 'The earliest pattern book of the first encaustic tiles made in England by Herbert Minton in 1835'.

The book shows the tiles actual size and the first twelve designs are printed in yellow and

brown, while the remaining 50 designs in the book are hand-drawn.

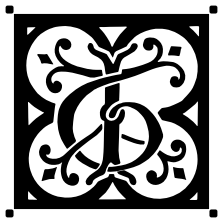
The hand written date of 1835 for this factory pattern book is open to question. 1835 was the year when Minton first began using Wright's patent but this was followed by several years of development work and therefore it would be more realistic to date the pattern book to circa 1839-40 when Minton had begun to produce encaustic tiles commercially.

By that time, Minton had also got to know Pugin as is made clear in a letter⁷ that has survived from Pugin to Minton dated 14 September 1840 enquiring about tiles he had

ordered for a hospital chapel in Birmingham.

The hospital chapel in question is the Hardman's Hospital Chapel (now part of St. Mary's Convent of Mercy, Handsworth in Birmingham) which was built by Pugin and funded by John Harman and John Talbot, the Earl of Shrewsbury.

Despite building alterations, the early Minton tiles referred to in Pugin's letter have survived and can now be seen in the McAuley Oratoria. They include some of Minton's earliest encaustic tile patterns including three heraldic designs relating to John Talbot.



The First Minton Tile Catalogue of 1842

The first printed Minton catalogue showing encaustic tiles (including Minton's first twelve encaustic tile patterns) was published in 1842 under the title of 'Examples of Old English Tiles Manufactured by Minton and Co'⁸ and features 96 designs.

It was lithographically printed and the tiles were shown much smaller than actual size. Encaustic tiles are heavy and it would be difficult for company representatives to have many samples with them, so a catalogue of this kind was ideal - more easily carried or sent to customers via the newly organised postal service.

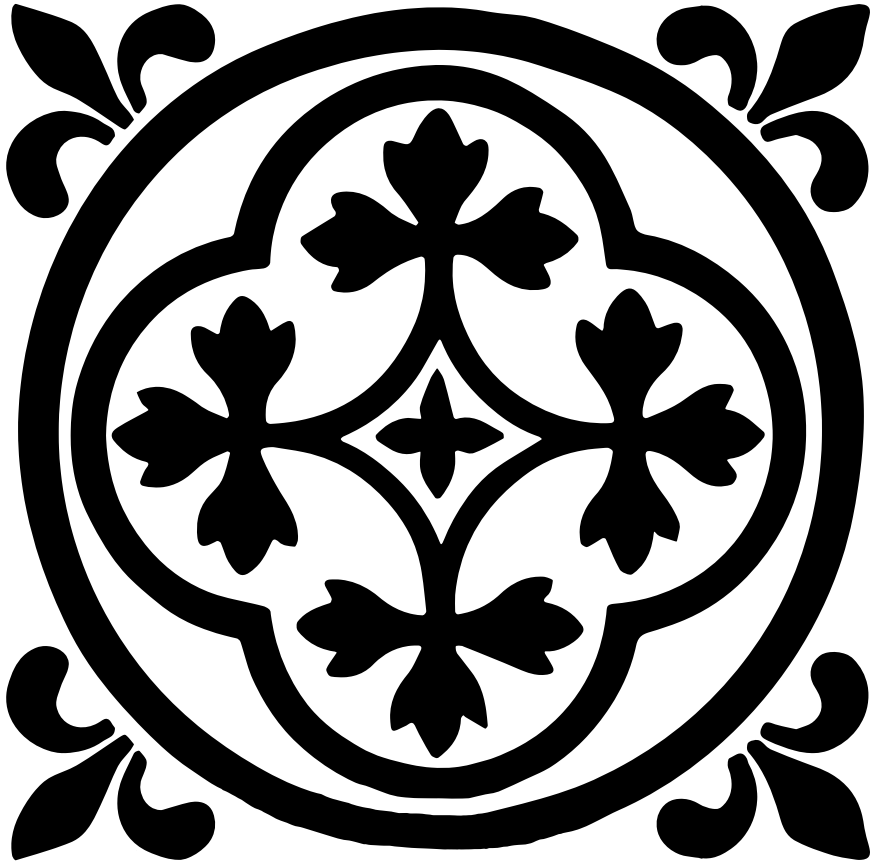
The issue of this catalogue also signifies a pivotal moment in the history of Minton encaustic tile production. The paving of Temple Church with encaustic tiles⁹ in 1841 had been a great success and Minton banked on more orders like that to follow.

At the end of 1841 Minton had also ended his partnership with John Boyle¹⁰ who had always been luke-warm about Minton's encaustic tile making endeavours.

The publication of the 1842 catalogue therefore can be regarded as sign of confidence in an expanding market for encaustic tiles in ecclesiastical, public and domestic buildings.

Tile Pattern 1

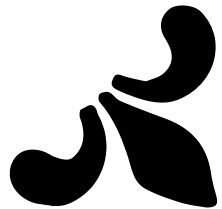
Pugin drew inspiration from a medieval example¹¹ for Tile 1. This design shows a small four-leaf flower inside a cross with trefoil leaf endings set within a quatrefoil border surrounded by a circle and fleur-de-lis motifs in the corners.



Fleur-de-lis

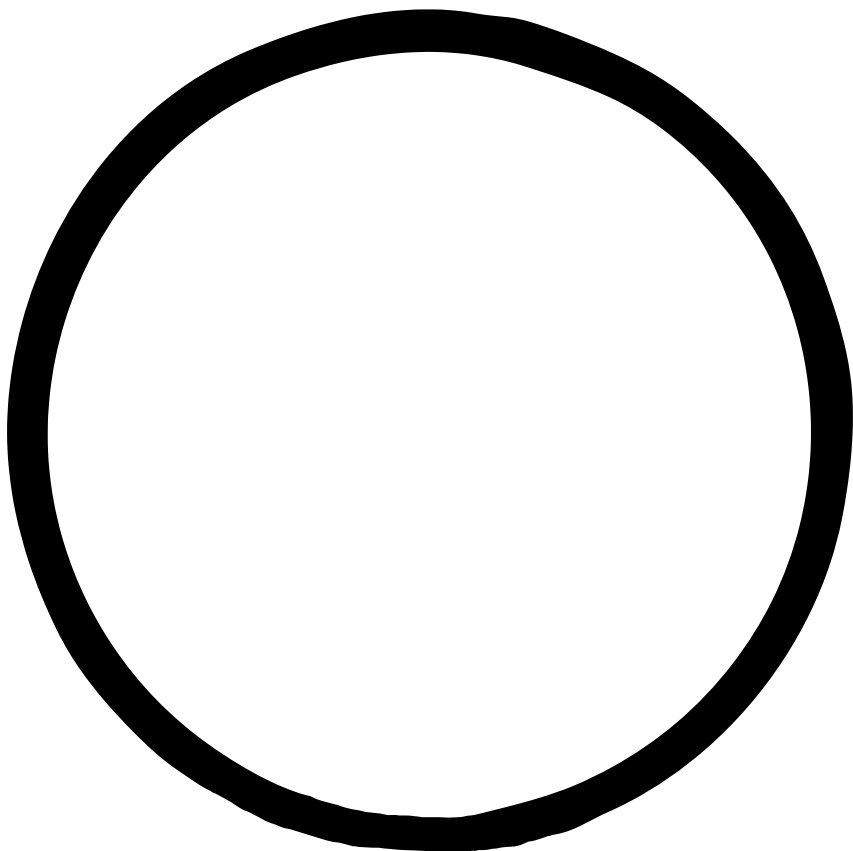
In French, “fleur” means flower, “de” means of, and “lis” means lily. The fleur-de-lis is a stylised lily, used in Christian circles to denote the virgin Mary, and also the Holy Trinity. It’s also used in heraldry as decoration.

A fleur-de-lis usually has all three petals bound together, but Pugin has simplified the design by focusing on the three petals alone. The meaning behind this unorthodox style is yet to be discovered.



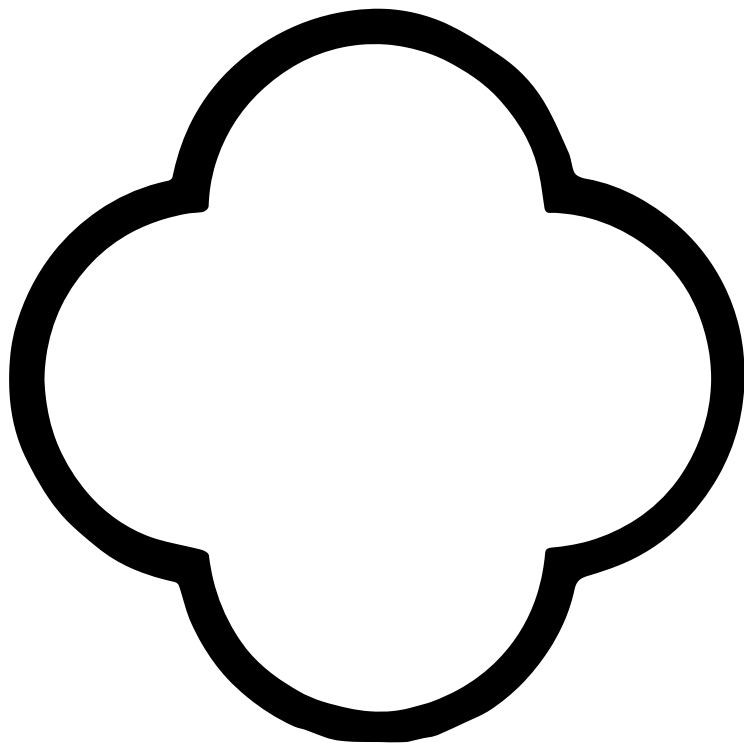
The Circle

A perfect circle has no start and no end. The circle can symbolise God, as the infinite, and also represents everlasting life.



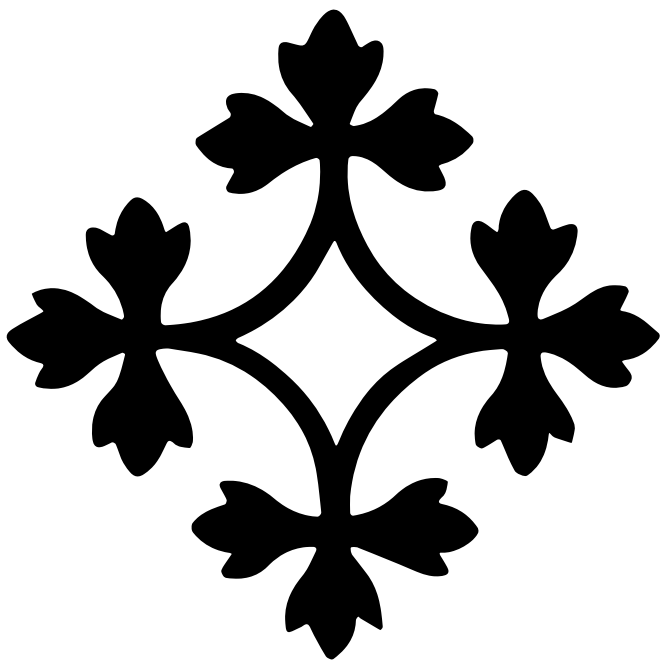
Quatrefoil

Four partially overlapping identical circles form this shape. In Christian symbology it represents the four Evangelists (Matthew, Mark, Luke and John). In heraldry, it represents good luck, as it looks like a four-leafed clover.



Lozenge Ployé with Trefoil Endings

A lozenge ployé - a diamond shape with the sides curved in - forms the centre of a cross with three-leaves at the ends of each of the compass points of the cross, symbolising the presence of the Holy Trinity in all areas of the world.



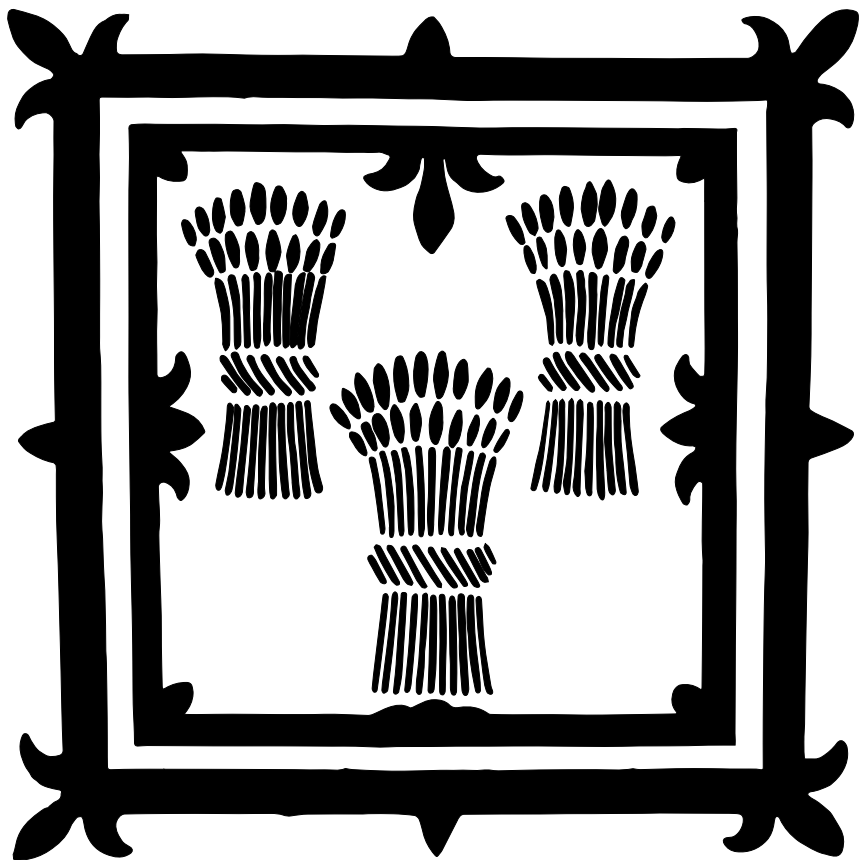
Flower

A small four-leaf flower in the shape of a cross is placed at the centre of this pattern, symbolising the central tenet of Christianity.



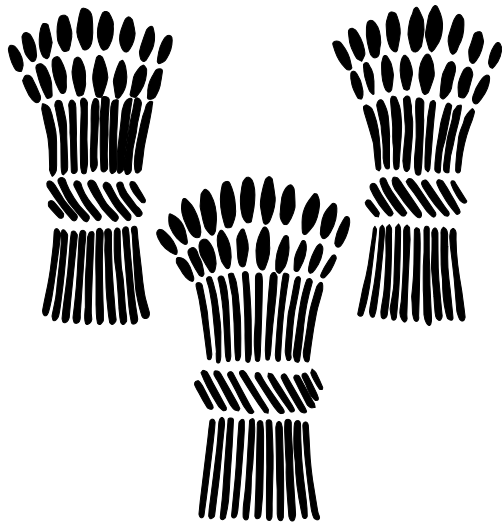
Tile Pattern 2

A coat of arms related to John Talbot's wife who came from the Scottish Comyn family. It depicts three 'garbs' (wheatsheaves) set within a double square border accentuated with protruding leaves and flower petals.



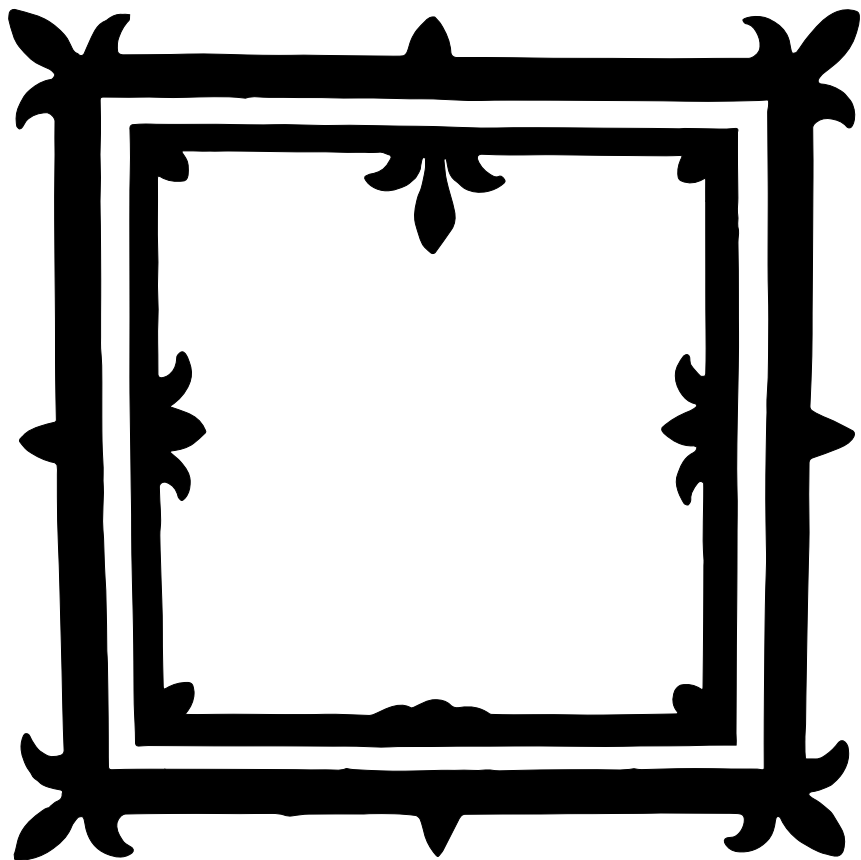
Three Garbs

The three garbs denote a wealthy agricultural land-owning class that grew rich and maintained itself through farming. A coat of arms with three garbs is illustrated in *A Display of Heraldry* by John Guillim, 1724 where it is described as “He Beareth Gules, three Garbs Or, by the Name of Preston. This Coat was born by Robert Comyn a Scot, who at the Time of the Conquest was Earl of Cumberland”.



Frame

The double square frame with stylised floral/leaf decorations is a Puginesque ornamental border. Pugin is very likely the designer of this Minton tile pattern but he must have seen or been given existing examples of Coats of Arms to work from.



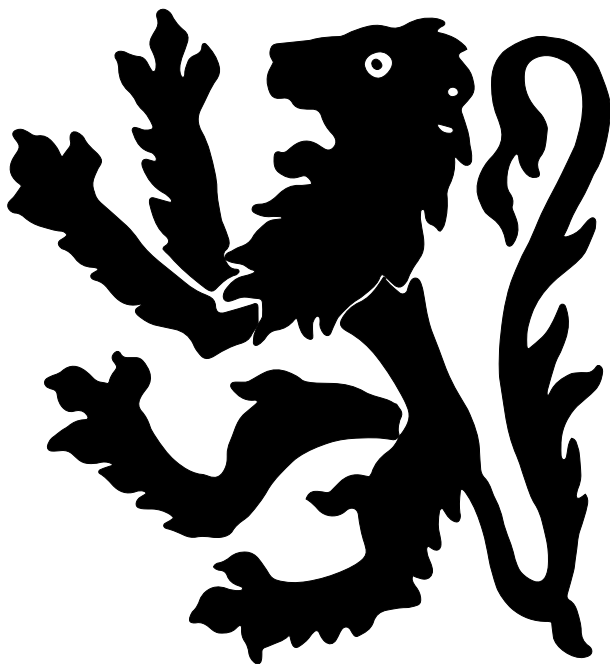
Tile Pattern 5

This tile depicts a Lion Rampant, set within a serrated or scalloped border.



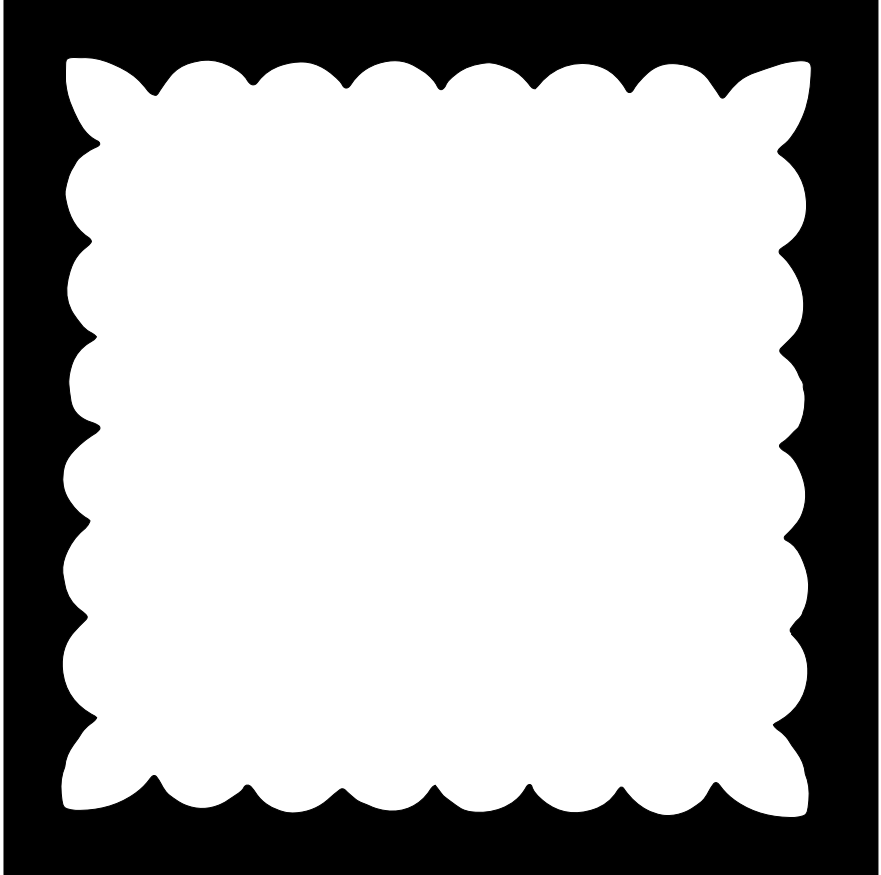
Lion Rampant

A Lion Rampant was the main heraldic device of the Talbot family. A shield shaped coat of arms with a lion rampant is illustrated in *A Display of Heraldry* by John Guillim, 1724, where it is described as “Ruby, a Lyon Rampant within Bordure engrailed Topaz, is born by the Right Honourable Charles Earl of Shrewsbury, Baron Talbot.” Because the lion is “king of beasts” it symbolises things like courage, nobility, royalty, strength, stateliness and valour. Pugin must have seen or been given existing examples of Talbot Coats of Arms to work from.



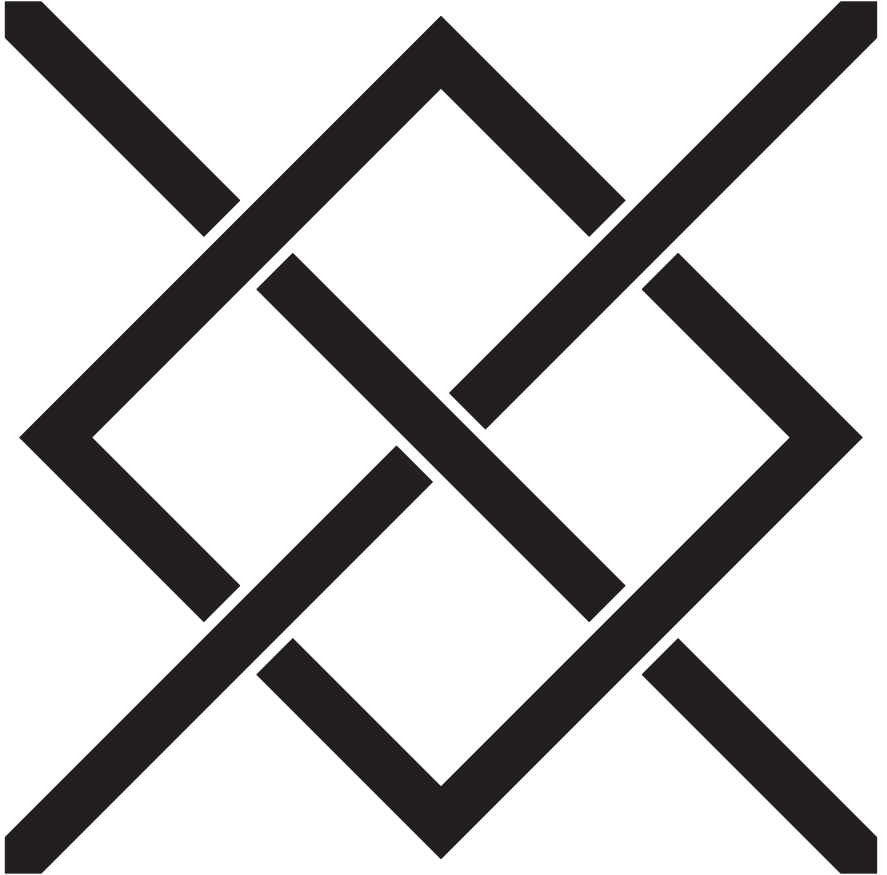
Border

Pugin adapted the original shield shape of the 'Bordure engrailed Topaz' to fit Minton's square tiles.



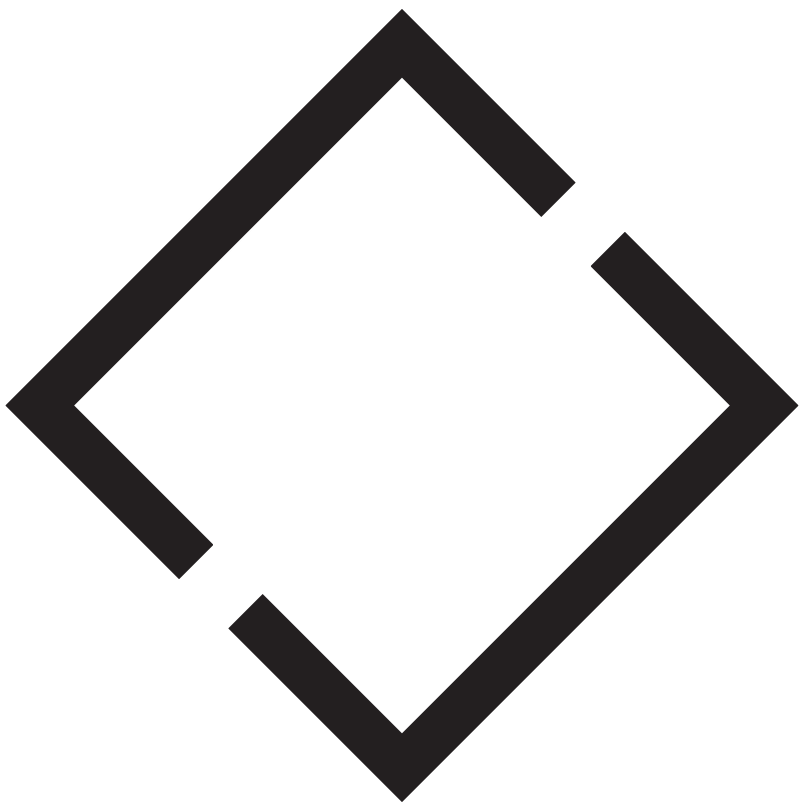
Tile Pattern 6

This tile shows a heraldic device linked to Bertram de Verdun. The Arms of the Verdun family showing a fret representing the meshes of a net as described in *A Complete Body of Heraldry* by Joseph Edmondson published in 1780. Bertram Verdun, a companion of William de Conqueror, built Alton Castle in c. 1175. The castle was later owned by the Furnivalls, and in 1406 it passed to the Talbot family. The deployment of this coat-of-arms is therefore all to do with tracing back your history via famous families to William the Conqueror, making your family look really important.



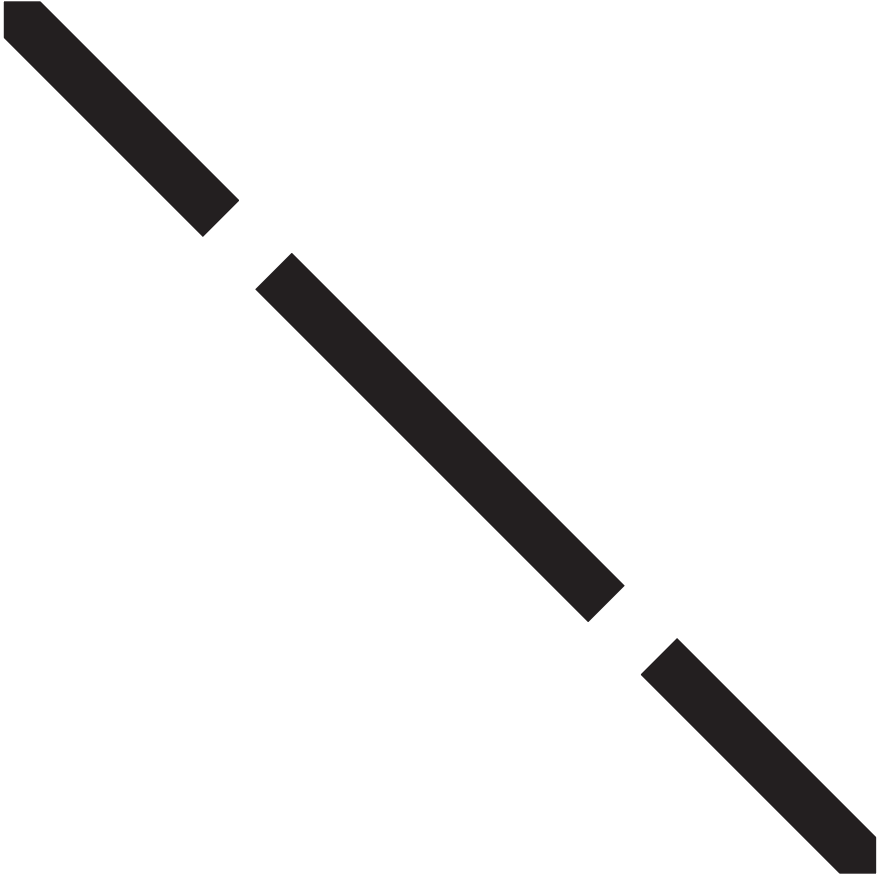
Mascle

A mascle is a voided, meaning hollow, diamond shape. Here it is perforated to show the interlacing of the other two elements.



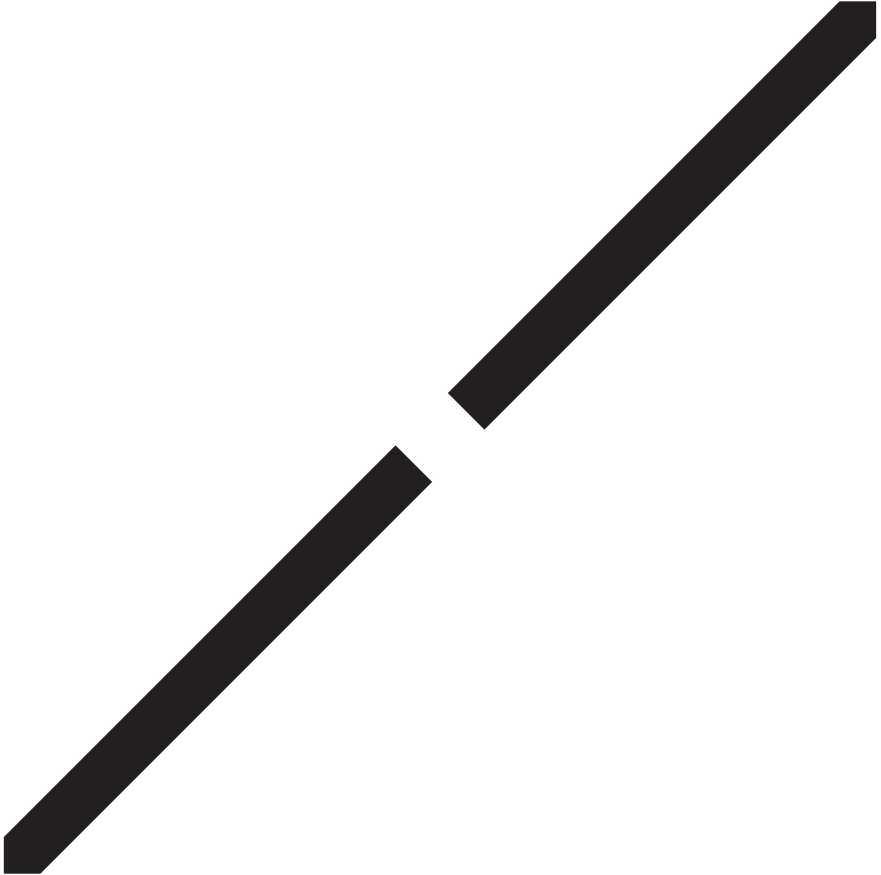
Bendlet Dexter

A bendlet dexter is a thin strap running from the viewer's top-left to the bottom-right. Here it is perforated to allow interlacing.



Bendlet Sinister

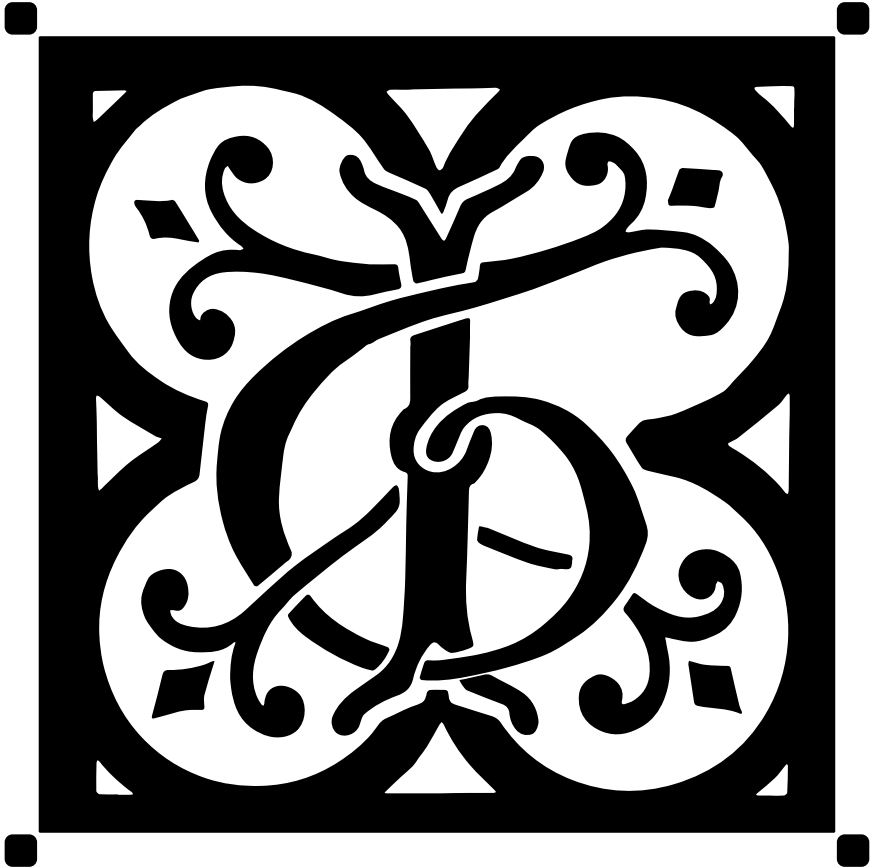
A bendlet sinister is a thin strap running from the viewer's top-right to the bottom-left. Here it is perforated to allow interlacing.



Tile Pattern 7

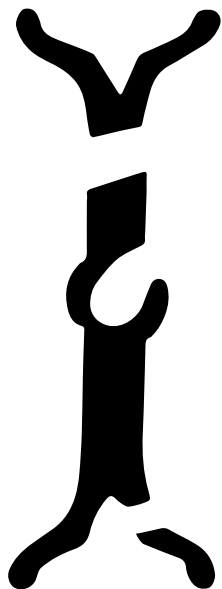
This tile shows an interwoven monogram of the letter IT for John Talbot. The letter I is sometimes used instead of the letter J, particularly in the middle ages. The monogram with simple floral/leaf designs at the endings of the letters is placed within a quatrefoil inside a square.

There is a fireplace at Alton Towers with encaustic tiles designed by Pugin showing a variation of the John Talbot monogram combining the letters IT executed in red, buff, blue and white. Having your own monogram designed by a famous architect denotes status, power and wealth.



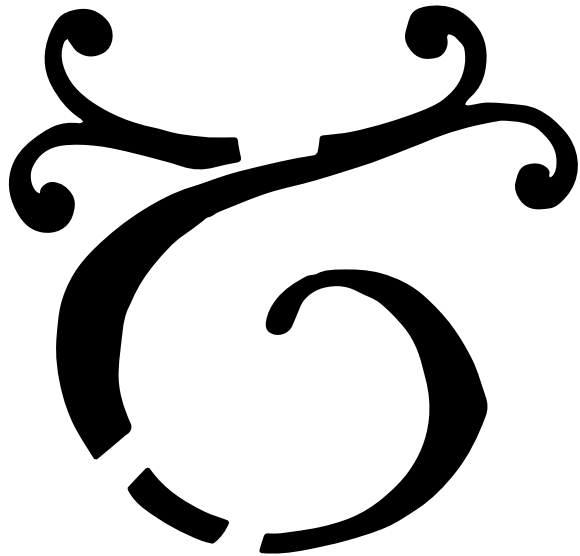
The Letter I

The letter I is sometimes used instead of the letter J, particularly in the middle ages.



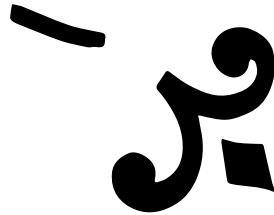
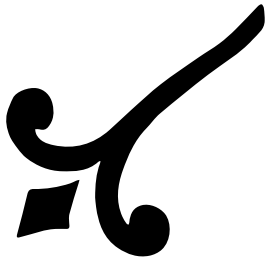
The Letter T

Pugin must have been aware of French or English medieval tiles with such monogram designs and as a true medievalist was inspired by such examples.



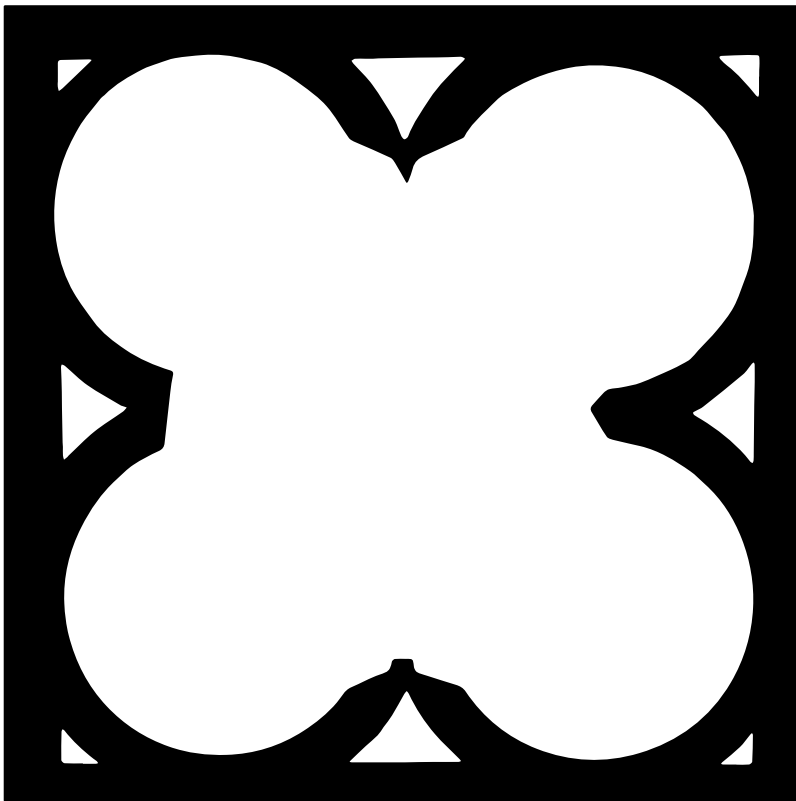
Decorative Elements

The whole design has a Gothic feel. French medieval tiles are known to have monogram designs like this. However, it's not clear whether the curly lines here are part of the main monogram lettering, as they are in the same style, or have been added as decoration to create balance.



Border

The quatrefoil inside a square creates a bold border.



What next?

In this book, we hope we've helped you to see and appreciate tiles differently.

Some people are privileged enough to live in Stoke-on-Trent, the birthplace of Minton tiles. These tiles have travelled all over the world and are used to decorate buildings of exquisite beauty and importance. Our homes are equally as important to us, so if you live in Stoke-on-Trent then you are one of those people who has benefited from these tiles, whether you own any, or not. The affluence that Minton brought to Stoke-on-Trent helped this city to flourish.

With the decline of the pottery industry, the city is now reinventing itself. One of the key ways to improve the city is to improve the wellbeing of the people. Part of that process is to train people how to notice, appreciate and find gratitude for the good in their lives.

Stoke Your Gratitude C.I.C. is a not-for-profit organisation that runs workshops to help you learn how to do this. We also work with other organisations to create projects that can help the community to feel more grateful. If you'd like to learn more, or to collaborate with us, please get in touch. Thank you!

www.StokeYourGratitude.org.uk

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- 1) G.K. Beulah 'Samuel Wright of Shelton'
Journal of the Tiles and Architectural Ceramics Society, 1990, Vol. 3, pp. 28-32.
- 2) Michael Fisher, 'Pugin's designs and Minton tiles' a paper delivered at the TACS 25th anniversary conference 'Church Ceramics: Decorative tiles, mosaic and terracotta during and after the Gothic Revival' held at the Coalbrookdale site of the Ironbridge Gorge Museum Trust on the 6th-7th October 2006. This paper has been published on the website (www.tileassoc.org.uk) of the Tiles and Architectural Ceramics Society where it can be downloaded as a PDF file.

3) A.W.N. Pugin, *The True Principles of Pointed or Christian Architecture*, John Weale, London, 1841, p. 26

4) A.W.N Pugin, *Glossary of Ecclesiastical Ornament and Costume Compiled and Illustrated from Ancient Authorities and Examples*, Henry G. Bohn, London, 1844, p. 1

5) Michael Fisher, *Staffordshire and the Gothic Revival*, Landmark Publishing, Ashbourne, 2006, pp. 63-74.

6) Kenneth Beulah, *Church Tiles of the Nineteenth Century*, Shire Publications, Aylesbury, 1987, p. 13.

7) Willem Irik, 'An 1840 letter from August Welby Pugin to Herbert Minton' *Glazed Expressions*, No. 44, 2002, pp. 11-12.

8) There is a copy of this catalogue at the National Art Library at the V&A in London. The full title (as seen on the front cover) of this Minton catalogue issued in 1842 is **EXAMPLES OF OLD ENGLISH TILES MANUFACTURED BY MINTON AND CO STOKE UPON TRENT AND SOLD BY WAYTT PARKER AND CO HOLLAND STREET LONDON**. Wyatt Parker was the London agent for Minton & Co tiles in the 1840s.

This is further corroborated by an advertisement in *The Civil Engineer and Architect's Journal* of 6

January 1844 in which Wyatt Parker & Co. offer encaustic tiles made by Minton for sale.

9) Seventeen designs for the encaustic tiles used at Temple Church were illustrated in *The Minton Tile Pattern Book of 1835* and *The First Minton Tile Catalogue of 1842* under nos. 8, 11, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22, 23, 24, 25, 26, and 28 which were copied directly from the 13th century medieval floor tiles at Westminster Abbey Chapterhouse.

10) Joan Jones, *Minton – The First Two Hundred Years of Design and Production*, Swann Hill Press, Shrewsbury, 1993, p. 159. Jones quotes the famous remark supposed to have been made by Herbert Minton when he saw his partner John Boyle

throw uneasy glances at the encaustic tile making department 'Say no more on the subject Mr. Boyle. I will make these tiles if they cost a guinea each!'

11) Medieval examples can be seen in Henry Parker's *A Glossary of Terms used in Grecian, Roman, Italian and Gothic Architecture* of 1840 that shows this particular design in Part II, plate 135, tile design no. 24 as from St. Albans Church.

Elizabeth Eames illustrates tiles made in the 14th century found in locations like St. Albans Abbey in her *Catalogue of Medieval Lead-Glazed Earthenware Tiles*, British Museum, 2 Vols. 1980 under design nos. 2426, 2427, and 2428. She says 2427 is from St. Albans Abbey and that corroborates Parker.

12) There is a fireplace at Alton Towers with encaustic tiles designed by Pugin showing a variation of the John Talbot monogram combining the letters IT executed in red, buff, blue and white.



About this book

Did you know that Victorian tile patterns tell a story? In this book we uncover the very first Minton encaustic tiles ever made and reveal the message he shared with the world. Discover the fascinating secrets that are now hidden in plain sight by learning the lost language of tiles.

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