

The Potteries Tile Trail Stoke

The Potteries Tile Trail is a pilot project that aims to celebrate tiles and architectural ceramics to be found in locations across Stoke-on-Trent. It aims to promote the city's built environment as well as its internationally significant tile and architectural ceramic industry.

The collection has been created in partnership with a volunteer research team, the local community and a wider constituency of online contributors. The trails can either be accessed using this digital document (PDF) or via our dedicated Historypin channel using the website or smart phone app. The digital documents can be printed out if required.

We have created a series of six introductory 'tile trails' - one for each of Stoke-on-Trent's famous six towns (Tunstall, Burslem, Hanley, Stoke, Fenton and Longton). The trails are aimed at local residents and visitors alike. They offer a selection of varied and interesting examples of ceramics to be found in buildings and public spaces in each local area. We hope the trails encourage more people to explore and enjoy the city's wonderful 'in situ' ceramics. We also hope they contribute to the collection by adding comments and photographs to the Historypin collection.

The Potteries Tile Trail project has been led by the national **Tiles and Architectural Ceramics Society** (TACS) and funded by a grant from the **Heritage Lottery Fund** (HLF) All Our Stories initiative.

Further details about the project and trails can be found at: www.thepotteriestiletrail.org



1 Shelton Old Road

Minton Hollins Tile Works is one of the few remaining icons of Stoke-on-Trent's historic tile industry still to be found in the city. This is a building of truly international importance. Architect Charles Lynam designed this state-of-the-art facility for Michael Daintry Hollins in 1869. Sadly - only the front office range and main entrance has been retained. Arrays of different geometric tile patterns decorate the panels above and below windows to the front and side elevations. Rosette tiles decorate the brick buttresses and a mosaic sign above the main entrance proudly proclaims 'Minton Hollins Ltd' in blue letters on a white background. Although the building is Grade II Listed - a number of the tile panels are in very poor condition and deteriorating fast. They are in urgent need of conservation and restoration.



2 Minton & Co, London Road

(1930 photograph courtesy of www.staffspastrack.org.uk)

This is the location of Minton's hugely important London Road manufactory. Herbert Minton's early experiments in producing encaustic tiles took place here and some of the most important and prestigious commissions were produced. Decorative 'pavements' for the Palace of Westminster (London), and Washington's United States Capitol Building and 16,000 tiles for the unique ceiling for Bethesda Arcade in the middle of Central Park, New York were all made here.

Sadly, there are no original works buildings left on the site that is now occupied by a supermarket. Although there are some important associated public buildings on the opposite side of the road it is frankly scandalous that arguably the single most important location in relation to the city's internationally important tile industry has no interpretation or commemorative information. So the place that produced London's first commemorative 'blue plaques' to mark sites of historical importance has no blue plaque of its own...



3 Herbert Minton Building, London Road

This is how the 'new building' was described in The Illustrated London News on 11th February 1860 (courtesy of www.thepotteries.org):

'The memorial building is of Italian-Gothic character, picturesque, and in its style well calculated to exhibit with effect the use of local materials. It contains accommodation for the School of Art, apartments being provided for modeling and drawing schools, studios for the masters, and with a large room sixty feet by twenty-five (occupying the upper part of the front building) available for general purposes, for exhibitions, &c. Rooms are also provided for a savings - bank, &c. The bath building (sic - sadly now demolished), which is immediately behind the memorial building, and faces the side street (in which are the entrances), contains first and second-class baths for each sex, with every requisite and convenience. A large swimming bath, fifty feet by thirty feet, is provided. A residence for the keeper of both buildings is also a portion of the whole. Externally the buildings show three fronts. Red brick is the principal material employed, relieved with dressings, bands, and moulded work of Hollington stone: bands and enriched cornices of terra cotta (manufactured by Minton) are judiciously introduced.'

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4 The Public Free Library & Shakespeare Institute, London Road
Potteries' Architect Charles Lynam designed this beautiful building. Colin Minton Campbell donated the site and Thomas Minton was a major benefactor. The building is made of local brick (red and blue), terracotta and tiles. The building has circular windows on the raised ground floor and the first floor has large rectangular panel to flood the interior with natural light. Beneath a band of decorative terracotta are a series of large-scale tile panels that surround the whole building and no doubt would have created a significant decorative architectural feature. Sadly these tile panels are in very poor condition and the once no doubt exquisite designs are now badly faded. However, a stunning focal point mosaic that depicts Shakespeare adorns the frontage and remains in good condition. A second mosaic panel offers a description about the building featured that offers a description of the background and those responsible for achieving the Museum and the Library that 'were opened for free use of the Burgesses, Nov 7th 1879'.

According to Neville Malkin: 'in 1882 the library began experimental opening on Sundays but after four years, it was stopped, because it was being frequented only by "noisy and destructive children.' (Courtesy of the www.thepotteries.org)



5 Shelburne Street
Want to strike gold in Stoke? Don't miss this rather extraordinary 'ordinary' street to be found just off London Road! The terraced houses incorporate a highly unusual 'string course' or 'band' of glazed bricks. Each brick is decorated with a strong transfer motif and the words 'Gold Coin' using predominantly gold and black colours.

Historian Fred Hughes shares one explanation relayed by local window-cleaner Geoff Smith: "My father who had the window round before me told me that the man who built the houses was a familiar face at the Racecourse at Sideway. Apparently one day he won a lot of money that he invested in building these houses. Being pleased with his success he incorporated the line of gold bricks all the way up the street telling the tenants that he'd put a gold sovereign behind one of the bricks of each house for luck. But he didn't say which brick! Amazingly after all these years very few bricks have been disturbed. And the name of the winning horse was – as you've already guessed - Gold Coin."?(Courtesy of the www.thepotteries.org)

Some of the houses also incorporate pleasing decorative arch-shaped designs above their front doors created using geometric and encaustic tiles.



6 Regent Street
Historic ceramic signs still grace many of Stoke-on-Trent's residential streets. Unsurprisingly - you will spot these distinctive name plates throughout the London Road area. They can be found inlaid in the brickwork of 'end terrace' properties - usually installed at a first floor height. Minton Hollins was one of the main manufacturers of ceramic

signs, letters and numerals. Original catalogues feature samples of "INDESTRUCTIBLE LETTERING" available with "SPACING TILES IN 1", 1 1/2", 3" WIDTHS". Each catalogue page adds a reassuring footnote: "All MINTON TILES bear the name 'MINTON HOLLINS & CO' impressed on the back.

7 James Street
(Encaustic features)
Inlaid decorative tiles form an integral and locally distinctive part of Stoke-on-Trent's vernacular architecture. James Street offers an interesting showcase of the range of ways that tiles were used within residential architecture: bay window decorations, front paths and porches (and inside hallways and fireplaces of course).



Keep your eyes open as you make your way up to this impressive villa style detached house. It commands a prominent position above the valley (and worst of the smoke in days gone by) and is clearly a high quality and high status property. Decorative tiles have been inlaid within the brickwork at regular intervals. Not quite a 'string course' but a large decorative encaustic tile design repeated at regular intervals that punctuate the brickwork in a grand way and to dramatic effect.

You will find other fine examples of residential properties many with decorative ceramics perched on the steep hillside above London Road and also throughout adjacent desirable neighbourhoods including Penkhull and extending along to Hartshill.

8 James Street
(Pathways)
Ceramic pathways leading to residential front doors can be found throughout The Potteries. These two simple but elegant paths have been created using standard geometric tiles. Many local companies offered similar and sometimes identical products. However - it is interesting to note that although these two neighbouring paths are the same and were



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created using 'off the peg' tiles - it is rare to see two designs the same. This pattern does not appear to be replicated in any other location across Stoke-on-Trent. Unless you have original deeds or documents that explicitly identify a manufacturer - the only chance you have is by looking for a back stamp if a tile is loose and you are able to turn it over. The occupant reported that these are 'Minton Hollins & Co' tiles made in their tile works at Shelton Old Road.



9 The Villas, Stokeville
Opulent original porches can still be glimpsed in this unusual and beautiful part of Stoke. Take a look but please respect the resident's privacy of course (as with all the domestic properties featured in this collection). Potteries' architect Charles Lynam

designed this exclusive development of 24 Italianate style properties on behalf of 'The Stokeville Building Society'. This Victorian development was built between 1851-1855 on land owned by the Reverend Thomas Minton, brother of Herbert Minton and son of the founder of Thomas Minton and Sons (later Mintons Ltd). It could therefore be assumed that the tiles are probably 'Minton & Co.' and made at the London Road works.

10 Market Hall, Church Street

The surviving street frontage and main entrance of Stoke's Market Hall is a wonderful example of the faience work or 'architectural ceramics' to be found throughout The Potteries. Glazed terracotta offered a modular, varied and relatively inexpensive approach to wall construction. It was particularly adaptable for vigorous and rich ornamental detailing. It was usually hollow cast in blocks. Late 19th century advertising for the material promoted the durable, impervious and adaptable nature of glazed architectural terracotta. It could accommodate subtle nuances of modeling, texture and color. It never needed paint, and periodic washings restored its appearance from soot and other dirt.



Each of Stoke-on-Trent's famous '6 Towns' had busy markets. They provided an important focus for community life and economic prosperity. Some of the markets survive today and also some of the original buildings. However, there is an urgent need to conserve these buildings and amenities that form the distinctive civic core of each of the towns. Key buildings include town halls, libraries, churches public squares and parks and more. This unique city has already lost too many of these 'components' - the whole is greater than the sum of its parts. It is vital that all of these remaining 'parts' are protected from further neglect or even demolition.

11 Leek Road

Most of the tiles and architectural ceramics included in The Potteries Tile Trail were manufactured and installed in the 1800s or early 1900s. However, there are a number of more contemporary ceramic commissions to be found in the city.



These beautifully illustrated tiles by Stoke-on-Trent based artists Dashlyne form part of an imaginative public realm design in front of Stoke 6th Form College.

The tiles adorn the raised planters and informal seating units. The highly intricate and detailed images explore knowledge, learning and life. The tiles were produced by North Staffordshire based Tiled Space. It's worth reporting that some of the tiles have chipping and scuff marks from skateboards. Although this is unfortunate - it is hoped that the same tiles can be remade and a more robust solution can be installed to protect them in the longer term. It would be great to see more enlightened developers commissioning and incorporating locally designed and locally produced ceramics within new buildings. Finally, it is also worth reporting that if you ask the 'boarders what they think of the tiles - you will receive an emphatic "we love them - they're cool!"



12 Winton Square (off Station Road)

North Stafford Hotel and Stoke Railway Station overlook Winton Square. The square is an important transport gateway to Stoke-on-Trent. The hotel played an important role in the city's history. Both buildings are high quality and fine examples of Victorian architecture. Interestingly although both buildings incorporate ceramics they are only mainly to be found within internal areas. The only external tiles to be found are white glazed bricks used to reflect light in an inner courtyard area within part of the station building. Tiles were originally used for all main floor areas in the station. North Stafford Hotel originally also featured tiled floors in all main public areas and the main entrance. Sadly most are lost or covered today. However, there are still two fine ceramic examples that have been retained - a rare mural now in a private 'kitchen area' that needs further exploration and some wonderful decorative wall tiles that line the staircase and gentlemen's lavatory. Certainly worth a look but you might want to gain permission from hotel staff before taking photographs!

