

TACS Gazetteer News

January 2000

Issue 5

Database site count nears 3500!

Congratulations to all you TACS volunteer researchers - the number of known sites has now quadrupled since the start of the project. I should just like to thank everyone who has sent information in - the gazetteer will only exist because of your efforts.

We are making progress with the details of the appearance of the gazetteer. It will be set out by county (England), borough (London), and unitary authority (Scotland and Wales). If we are able to include Northern Ireland, the six geographical counties will be used. What to do about the English counties, which have changed so much - in boundary terms - over the last quarter-century, is always a problem for any directory. We have tried to retain a geographical connection while incorporating modern administrative boundaries (important for planning queries) by defining our English counties so as not to split up any authority.

For some counties, this is simple, for instance the gazetteer's Cornwall is simply the area covered by Cornwall County Council. With some urban areas it's a bit more complex; to take our Northumberland, this comprises the Northumberland CC along with Newcastle and North Tyneside authorities. The object is to try and get back to the original geographical counties while retaining all the advantages of the

Around and About

Some fascinating new sites have come to light over the last few months, including a few from that very under-researched county, Bedfordshire. The photograph (left) shows part of the fine reredos at the Church of the Virgin Mary at Meppershall, a tiny village about ten miles south-east of Bedford. The reredos combines what appear to be Powell's glass tiles - in red, rather than the blue often seen elsewhere - with mosaics in shades of turquoise, red, pale blue and gold, and lettering from Exodus. Altogether, a visual treat. Another great



Photo: Don Slade

surprise was the ex-country house, now company head office, in North Wales, which turned out to be decorated with a complete Medmenham scheme. A personal favourite is the recently-restored museum at Pontefract in Yorkshire, which has an astonishing art nouveau entrance hall, a relic of its days as a Carnegie Library; it was built in 1904. The tiles (detail right) have a blue and green relief design on a lime green ground, with dark green edging tiles. The stairs are reached from the hallway through a swooping, mostly elliptical opening in the tiled dado - quite giddy! Also in Yorkshire is some magnificent Burmantofts work in the entrance of Ripon Spa Baths.



Photo: Helen Ross

Ernest Heasman (1874-1927)

Ernest Heasman was a stained glass artist who also designed and made tiles; the V&A holds a collection of his stained glass and papers. Left is an extant example of his work, but there may be many more Heasman tiles in locations as yet unknown. The photograph of the three-tile panel on the right, entitled 'Jan 1', has been sent by Linette O'Sullivan, granddaughter of Ernest Heasman, who is researching his career. If any reader has information regarding the location of this unusual panel (which has Heasman's 'EH' monogram in the bottom right hand corner) or knows of the existence of any similar



A bathroom tile showing a sign of the zodiac, Leo, still extant at a West Sussex house



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Database Site Count

Date	Number of Sites in Database
January 2000	3485
November 1999	2747
November 1998	1850
March 1997	1443

More on Minton

Work on the Cumming Ceramic Research Foundation project has progressed steadily - you'll remember that we were awarded the 1999 Foundation Scholarship for research on the Staffordshire churches to which Herbert Minton had donated tiles during the 1840s and 1850s. A total of 28 out of the 38 churches concerned has now been seen; of the remaining ten, four were derelict or had been demolished, while six had their tiles permanently covered. The 28 provided a huge variety of ceramic experiences, from the vivid colour and decorative variety of Hartshill and Trentham to the sadder cases of Hanley St Luke and Blurton (Stoke), where few and no Minton floor tiles remain respectively (although Blurton did have a fine little collection of ceramic wall memorial plaques, including one to the ever-present Bishop Selwyn of New Zealand).

The next step in the project was to ascertain what archival resources were available; the answer was, not many! The Minton Archives, Stoke City Library, the National Art Library, the 'red box' collection at the National Monument Record, Swindon, and other sources were consulted. The results were few, although a very early Minton catalogue was seen, and - using our (by now) large collection of photographs - a partial 'copy' was made using modern photographs, which helps with tile identification. There was a great lack of relevant correspondence, although fortunately one of the non-Staffordshire churches to which Minton gave tiles, St James the Less in Morpeth, Northumberland, has retained some correspondence which will be seen shortly. The next stage is to write up this fascinating experience..... Photos of Trentham are shown below, with later Minton Hollins tiles in the Sutherland Chapel on the right.



Frequently asked questions.....

How many volunteers are involved with the Gazetteer project?

Around thirty Tiles Society members have taken on responsibility for particular counties, London boroughs and the like. This can involve an amount of travelling, research in libraries, and arranging of visits, but can also be very enjoyable and enlightening. And there are numerous other members who make smaller, but still extremely welcome contributions on an irregular basis - every little helps, and the volunteers cannot cover all the counties alone. Indeed, we still need people to look at most of Wales, Devon, Derbyshire, Essex, Norfolk and the various islands - Wight, Man and Channel! Apart from our own members, we also receive site information from other sources - CAMRA regarding pubs, for instance.

What is the difference between the Gazetteer and the database?

The database is the basic listing of information that we know about every site; it is intended to form a comprehensive, computerised resource for all those interested in tiles and architectural ceramics. In the beginning, it existed as a collection of location index cards, which still form part of the growing archive of information. The database will soon be publicly available, possibly on our web site (see below). The Gazetteer is essentially a book containing details of the 'best of' the sites in the database, and will include the most important and interesting sites in Britain (and, probably, Northern Ireland).

Have we searched the listed building system for tiled sites?

Yes, but the intricacies of the system are such that you cannot, at present, easily search for the type of site we are interested in. The word definitions used on the system tend to conflate wall, floor and roof tiles, making searching difficult if one is not to end up with a list of irrelevant sites to check. We are discussing an improved list of ceramic word definitions with the National Monuments Record. I estimate that our original search probably came up with around 75-80% of listed buildings with decorative tiles; of course, extra buildings are being listed all the time. You can obtain free listed building information via the web from the National Monument Record site (which can be reached through the English Heritage site at www.english-heritage.org.uk).

What will the Gazetteer look like?

It will be a book something like a modern Pevsner, in a large pocket-sized format. It will be illustrated with small black and white photographs throughout, showing about 300 sites, with a central section of around 40 colour plates. It will contain about a quarter of a million words describing sites and general trends. It may even be a paperback - to encourage sales!

How can I keep up to date with news on the Gazetteer project?

Apart from reading *Gazetteer News*, the easiest way is to look at our new web site, address below. It is connected to the main TACS site but has a different address; it will be updated at the end of February (not before for technical reasons) to include a form for sending in site details, and more information on new sites, including more, bigger and better photographs. When complete, the site can easily and frequently be updated to give the very latest news and pictures on newly-located ceramic finds. If you try out the site, just click on the photos to enlarge them (use the browser back button to return to the page).

TACS Gazetteer Web Site

www.gosforth3.demon.co.uk