

# Transfer-Printed Victorian Tiles

By Connie Rogers

It is sometimes surprising how quickly a new interest comes upon us. As collectors, we have varying ways of limiting our collections. It may be just one pattern, one factory, or perhaps a specific category of transfer printed ware, or only one color. When we do that, we tend not to look for items outside our specific collecting field. Of course there are those who collect a little bit of everything – whatever strikes their fancy when they see it. But for most any collector, there may come a time, when something comes along and grabs your interest so that you look for more of the same.

This happened to me when our Aesthetics Editor began finding transfer-printed tiles. She had no books on the subject, and asked me to help find references for the patterns. I had several books devoted to tiles (and promptly bought more). It became apparent that Victorian tiles, c. 1850-1910, cover a wide spectrum of styles and decorative subjects ranging from flowers, animals, abstract and geometric patterns to literature, history and fairy tales. Lockett tells us in the Introduction to *Collecting Victorian Tiles*, that an important factor in creating all this diversity is the artistry of designers of the tiles. In order to touch on this wide range of patterns on tiles, I will begin by discussing the work of prominent designers at Minton China Works and Wedgwood, two of the largest manufacturers of Victorian tiles: John Moyr Smith, William Wise, Thomas Allen and Helen J.A. Miles.

Lockett's book, published in 1979, gives an outline biography of John Moyr Smith on pages 121-133, with illustrations of tile patterns in Plates 26-29 with 6 tiles in each plate. Lockett names Smith as the "most prolific of Minton's tile designers." In 2002, Annamarie Stapleton wrote a much more complete biography in *John Moyr Smith, 1839-1912, A Victorian*



Figure 1. Jarius' Daughter

*Designer.* With an apprenticeship in architecture and training in art school, Smith became involved with other students and architects in the Glasgow Architectural Society. Meetings were held regularly that covered all aspects of architecture and design. This group was important in his development as an artistic designer, and he maintained life-long connections with his colleagues. Smith found early recognition as a cartoonist ("Fun" and "Punch"). He illustrated many children's books as well as becoming an author himself.

In the 1870s, he was employed by Minton's China Works, designing various series of tiles, specializing in literature and history. He was fascinated with historical detail, literature, fables and legends from all cultures and loved the chance to research and to discover new periods of culture

and dress. His classical style of design is easily recognizable. In addition to series illustrating Early English History, scenes from Shakespeare, Waverley and *Idylls of the King* by Tennyson, John Moyr Smith designed 12 scenes from the Old Testament and another 12 from the New Testament. These were not necessarily the well-known Biblical stories. For example, Figure 1 shows Jarius' 12 year old daughter dying in her bed. Jesus went with Jarius (a leader in the synagogue) to the daughter's bedside. Although she appeared to be dead, Jesus said she was just sleeping. He took her hand, and she arose (Mark 5:21, Matthew 9: 18-20, Luke 8: 41-56). Stapleton tells us that Smith was a staunch Presbyterian and knew his Bible well. He also illustrated at least one children's book of bible stories and illustrated publications for the Religious Tract Society.



Smith's series on Fairy Tales, c. 1873-74, was introduced at about the same time as a book titled *The Old Fairy Tales*, that he illustrated, as well as the Nursery Rhymes series he designed on tiles for Minton Hollins & Co. The popular Fairy Tales series was produced in a number of color combinations and also was used on tablewares, as can be seen by this tile pattern named "Six Swans" on an 8 ½" plate in Figure 2. This pattern illustrates the Fairy Tale of the wicked stepmother who changed her husband's 6 sons into swans. The factory liked to extend the life of tile designs by also placing the design on plates with an added border.

William Wise (1831-1889) was a painter, designer, etcher and engraver. Born in London, he trained at an art school with a national scholarship. He worked at a London studio, where he painted glass windows and assisted in the work of designing decorative tile panels for the Grill Room at South Kensington Museum. After a fire destroyed the studio where he worked, Wise moved to Stoke. There he was employed by Minton from about 1876-1889, where he began with underglaze painting for ornamental wares. An excellent copyist and engraver, his work included china patterns he designed and decorative tiles that he copied from other designers. His best known, signed works are his own designs for several tile series: *Rustic Figures*, *Scenes of Village Life* and *Animals of the Farm*. His designs began with pencil sketches, followed by engraving on copper plates and printing. Figure 3 shows Pattern 2159 from the Minton pattern book: "A young woman carrying water over stepping stones". ("Girl with Urn" is the *TCC Pattern and Source Print Database* assigned name.) It is one of many designs under the general heading of Country Life that cannot be placed in its correct series. Although these patterns are in the Minton

archives and definitely by Wise, there is no checklist of the precise subjects in each set. Several references, including *Tiles, 1,000 Years of Architectural Decoration* by Hans van Lemmen, show the preliminary sketch for "Girl with Urn" as well as the finished pattern, an excellent example of copper plate engraving specifically for a tile. A tile from "Animals of the Farm" series is seen in Figure 4. It has a descriptive title of "Pig at Trough." Both of these scenes demonstrate the work of an exceptionally skilled designer/engraver in the Realistic style popular at the time.

Thomas Allen (1831-1915) was an exceptional painter and designer. He trained at the Stoke-on-Trent School of Design followed by studies in London. He went to work at Minton where he soon became known for his fine painting. A vase painted by Allen in the Sevres manner was shown by Minton at the Great Exhibition of 1851. As a result, he received a national scholarship to the South Kensington School of Design. In 1854 he returned to Minton where he was employed as a painter until c. 1875. Continuing to paint in the French style, Allen was not given the high wages the French painters there received or permission to sign his work. Allen moved to Etruria, where he became supervisor of the Fine Art Studio at Wedgwood, moving up to chief designer. From 1880 to 1904, Allen served as its first professional art director.

In Wedgwood, *The New Illustrated Dictionary*, Robin Reilly gives a brief summary of Allen's most recognizable work. His fine painting of tall vases and plaques is noted, as well as his designs for transferware patterns on table wares, all of which were adopted for tiles: "Ivanhoe," "Banquet," "Columbia," "Swallow," and "Greek Musicians" (after paintings by Albert Moore), along with patterns for tiles printed in a single color or printed and painted with enamels.



Figure 2. "Six Swans"



Figure 3. "Girl with Urn"

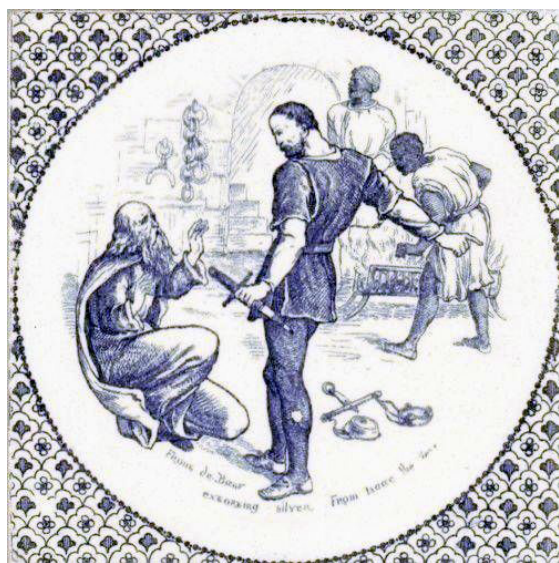


Figure 4. "Pig at Trough"

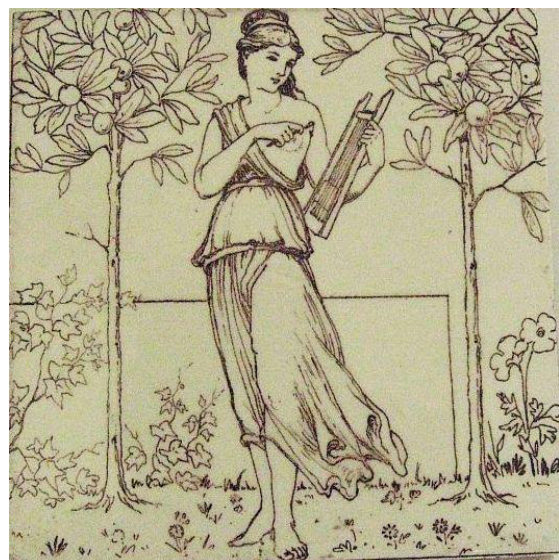




**Figure 5. "Friar Tuck Entertains the Black Knight"**



**Figure 6. "Front de Boeuf exhorting silver from Isaac the Jew"**



**Figure 7. "Bell Player"**

Figure 5 shows a soup plate in the "Ivanhoe" tableware series. It is titled "Friar Tuck Entertains the Black Knight." Figure 6 is an 8" tile made from the tableware pattern "Front de Boeuf exhorting silver from Isaac the Jew." Figure 7, "Bell Player" is one of the lovely scenes from the Greek Musicians series, also known as "Greek Musicians in an Orange Grove." The complete series can be found printed in blue in the *Database*.

Helen Jane Arundel Miles (fl. 1860-93) was primarily a painter in watercolor. Also an illustrator and designer, she studied at the South Kensington School of Art where she was a regular exhibitor for over twenty years. Helen J.A. Miles illustrated a number of books. She also designed several series of tiles for Wedgwood including "Months," which were also used on tableware with many different borders, and Shakespeare's "Midsummer Night's Dream." That play is the basis for the subjects in a series of 12 tiles produced c. 1878. Figure 8, shows "Peas Blossom" ("Peaseblossom" in the play) whose role is fairy servant to Queen Titania.

Most tile patterns not included in series are by unknown designers, and most do not have names given by the manufacturers. Figure 9 is a lovely example of a

floral pattern, evidently produced by more than one pottery. With a slightly different border, it is illustrated in the printed catalogue of the Minton Tiles Exhibition at Stoke-on-Trent City Museum April 9 - September 1, 1984. It is No. 177 in the Exhibition. Search "Dogwood in Bloom" in the *Database* for more information regarding this pattern.

The sunflower motif is often used on tiles by various tile companies. There are enough examples seen in the references that the motif might make an interesting tile collection. Sherwin & Cotton (1877-1911) produced the lovely sunflower pattern no. "S.1598" seen in Figure 10. A lively oriental tile pattern seen in Figure 11 features a central planter with a full flowering tree. The four elements of Fire, Air, Earth, and Water are seen in the rectangular border images. The four-toed dragon denotes "Fire", and the two flying cranes the "Air." The fruit tree is growing from the "Earth," and the fish are swimming in the "Water." This tile design was registered by Sherwin & Cotton on May 3, 1881.

An interesting fruit and foliage pattern has been illustrated in several references. It may have been a pattern produced by several different potteries; however, the markings are either sparse or

## For Further Reading:

Austwick, J. & B., *The Decorated Tile* 1981, Charles Scribner & Sons

Barnard, Julian, *Victorian Ceramic Tiles*, 1972, London

Batkin, Maureen, *Wedgwood Ceramics*, 1981, London

Lang, Gordon, *1000 Tiles*, 2004 Chronicle Books

Lewis, *A Collector's History of English Pottery*, 1999, Antique Collector's Club, U.K.

Lemmen, Hans van, *Tiles 1,000 Years of Architectural Decoration*, 1993 Harry Abrams (A coffee table book with full color photos internal & external International buildings.)

Lockett, Terence A., *Collecting Victorian Tiles*, 1979 Antique Collector's Club

Stapleton, Annamarie, *John Moyr Smith 1839-1912, A Victorian Designer*, 2002 Richard Dennis



non-existent, making attribution difficult. It is also tricky to decide which end of the pattern is up. Figure 12 is the “Fruit and Foliage Swirl” pattern printed in brown with yellow color added, seen as illustrated in Plate 47 in *Barnard’s Victorian Ceramic Tiles*. It is unmarked and dated c. 1895. Lockett shows a black on white example on p. 208, Figure 62, possibly by Fielding & Co., c. 1890. The ‘J’

shaped motif on the lower side of the photo in Figure 12 has moved to the left side of the tile in Lockett’s illustration.

A floral/geometric pattern with no name will complete the examples seen here illustrating the range and styles of patterns found on transfer-printed tiles. Figure 13 shows “T.245” the interesting printed and painted pattern with colors of brown, blue,

yellow and green. The pattern number “T.245” is seen painted on the back of the tile in Figure 14. The back of a tile not only shows the types of marks often found – this one also has impressed “No”, and an indistinct impressed circular section that may or may not have identification imbedded in the circle.

We also see the remnants of glaze and glue used to attach the tile to a



Figure 8. “Peas Blossom”



Figure 9. “Dogwood in Bloom”



Figure 10. “Sunflower Pattern No. S.1598”



Figure 11. “Fire, Air, Earth, Water”



wall, fireplace or piece of furniture for enhancement. We are reminded that the transfer-printed Victorian tiles were used for architectural decoration. Wendy Harvey wrote an excellent article, titled "A Brief History of Transfer Printed Tiles" (pp. 17-19, *TCC Bulletin* Vol. XII No. 1, 2011), in which she presented the background for the history of transfer-printing beginning with the on-glaze printing (on tiles) by Sadler & Green. The subject was enhanced with information regarding the development of industrialization, transportation, globalization and all factors that led to the production of tiles in the Victorian period for architectural enhancement. This

paper builds on that background and fills in more detailed information on transfer-printed Victorian Tiles. Transfer printed tiles are a broad subject. There are dozens of tile manufacturers not mentioned here, including Spode/Copeland who produced several pattern books full of tile designs. Pam Wooliscroft, former curator at Spode, provided me with an interesting photo that I will use as Figure 15. "Images are attached of a cellar at Spode," she wrote. "These are 'left-over' tiles of all sorts, including some printed ones, used to cover spillages when a clay cellar was converted to a wine cellar. They are still in situ but I believe very damaged since I took

this photo."

Collecting of tiles probably began in earnest during the 1960s and 1970s when many Victorian properties in the U.K. were demolished. All types of Victorian tiles taken from these buildings were available in abundance. Later, the source of the supply diminished as the emphasis shifted to preserving the tiles in situ. In the 21st century, reclaimed tiles are available. Many books have been written on the subject, and the *TCC Database* is doing its part by researching and recording patterns. I would be pleased to hear of your interest in tiles. ■



**Figure 12. "Fruit and Foliage Swirl"**



**Figure 13. "T.245"**



**Figure 14. Tile back "T.245"**



**Figure 15. Spode/Copeland Tiles**