

LONDON CLAY: AN ARCHITECTURAL WALKING TOUR

1 CITY & GUILDS OF LONDON ART SCHOOL, 124 KENNINGTON PARK ROAD ///chef.librarian.tribune At first sight the Art School building might not seem a promising place to look for significant examples of historical ceramics, but looks can be deceptive. London is predominantly a city built of ceramic bricks and the eighteenth-century buildings housing the Art School are excellent examples of a style of terraced housing that typifies much of the city. But the Art School has a much closer relationship to the history of ceramics than its building. Not only was it sponsored in its early years by local ceramic manufacturers such as Doulton & Co., but some would claim this is the birthplace of the nineteenth-century art pottery phenomenon. Originally called Lambeth School of Art, it was here the ceramic artist George Tinworth first trained from 1861. Unable to find work in ceramics after completing his studies, Tinworth returned to his old job as a wheelwright. This so horrified the Art School's headmaster, John Sparkes, that he persuaded Henry Doulton to branch out from producing utilitarian ceramics, and allow Tinworth to start a new department at Doulton & Co. producing art pottery. Other ceramics graduates soon followed Tinworth into Doulton's, including Wallace Martin, one of the famous Martin Brothers, Hannah Barlow and Sparkes' own wife, Catherine.

2 THE DURNING LIBRARY, 167 KENNINGTON LANE ///most.anyway.likely Architectural ceramic production in London often has a Lambeth connection, and specifically to Henry Doulton's factory in Lambeth High Street. This is certainly true of the Durning Library. Built in 1888 by Sidney Smith, it was one of the "free libraries", most sponsored by the sugar manufacturer Henry Tate, located across south London. Smith was Tate's favourite architect, so much so that he also designed the original Tate Gallery. In this case Tate persuaded Jemina Durning Smith to pay for the building and in the ground floor window tracery is a white ceramic roundel showing her portrait. Above this on a stone plinth is a seated ceramic dragon supporting a coat of arms, and higher still another ceramic coat of arms, along with decorative stone carvings. The ceramics are the work of James Stiff, who began as an apprentice at Doulton & Co. before setting up his own ceramic works, also in Lambeth, in 1842. Doulton and Stiff competed head-to-head in their ceramic wares, both producing everything from drain pipes to art pottery, as well as architectural ceramics. Their styles were so similar Doulton tried, unsuccessfully, in 1859 to sue Stiff for breach of copyright.

3 BEAUFOY INSTITUTE, 39 BLACK PRINCE ROAD ///artist.soon.models The Beaufoy Institute, designed by FA Powell in 1907, has origins in the 1840s when Harriet Beaufoy founded a school for poor children in nearby Newport Street. The institute had a connection to Doulton & Co. from the start, with various family members on its board of trustees. The exterior is a mixture of brick with honey-coloured ceramic decorations, including floral swags and cartouche shields in the gable ends. Art Nouveau lettering sits above the main entrance, flanked on either side by blank corner cartouches, all in ceramic. These are likely to be the work of the Doulton factory. However, the ceramics inside are in many ways more interesting as the only known examples of Cockrill-Doulton Patent Tiles. These brown salt-glaze tiles, particularly evident on the staircase, were invented by JW Cockrill, an engineer from Great Yarmouth. They were heralded as an innovation in the production of cheap, easy-to-use and most of all hygienic tiles for public buildings. Yet, despite continuing to produce more conventional glazed tiles, Doulton & Co. appear to have abandoned production of Cockrill-Doulton Patent Tiles almost immediately, for reasons still unknown.

4 DOULTON FACTORY, 28 LAMBETH HIGH STREET ///stops.cloak.attend Founded in Vauxhall Walk in 1815, Doulton & Co. moved to Lambeth High Street in 1826, although the surviving buildings, built as showrooms, date from 1876. Initially Doulton was a successful manufacturer of architectural and industrial ceramics, drainpipes, and sanitary wares such as sinks and lavatories. In 1871 a somewhat sceptical Henry Doulton was persuaded by John Sparkes, headmaster of Lambeth School of Art, to move into producing art pottery. The Gothic Revival building is richly decorated with ceramic relief work, much of it evoking the company's history. In the tympanum above the corner door a relief panel, designed by the first art potter to be employed by Doulton, George Tinworth, depicts buyers in the showroom. In the background a workman carries a tray of finished pots on his head, while a seated female figure to the left, identified as ceramicist Hannah Barlow, paints a vase. Around half of Doulton's employees were women. The seated man is Henry Doulton, notably surrounded not by examples of sanitary ware, but art pottery. Nice details include the cat sitting under Barlow's chair, while elsewhere on the building, amongst the gargoyles and gothic foliage, can be found two "wally-birds", a reference to the Martin Brothers, whose wally-birds remain highly collectable today, and whose working life began at Doulton & Co.

5 PORTICO OF BRUNSWICK HOUSE, 30 WANDSWORTH ROAD ///harsh.mini.movies Even without a specific ceramic interest, Brunswick House is a curiosity in a part of London so badly damaged by wartime bombing and subsequent redevelopment. Despite being sandwiched between a ten-lane highway and high-rise tower blocks, it remains a gem of a Georgian town house. Built in 1758 by Lambeth glassmaker John Dawson, its interest for historians of ceramics lies in the curving classical portico at its main entrance. Comprising two freestanding fluted Corinthian columns, with matching pilaster columns at the rear, and an entablature decorated with bucrania and floral swags, it is made from a ceramic called Coade stone. Named after its inventor Eleanor Coade, Coade stone was manufactured in Lambeth on the site now occupied by the Hayward Gallery at the Southbank Centre. Although marketed at the time as "artificial stone", Coade stone was a composite stoneware, in which grog, crushed flint and fine quartz were added to the clay, which was then fired twice at very high temperatures. Known for being extremely hardwearing, in the Georgian and Regency periods it was one of the most popular materials for architects looking to add fashionable classical detail to their buildings without incurring the cost of carved stone.

6 HARRODS, BROMPTON ROAD ///will.sends.hats Harrods is one of the most iconic shops in the world, not least due to its extraordinary building in Brompton. This exemplifies the Edwardian love of an exuberant Baroque style which reflected a sense of confidence as the British Empire reached its zenith. As with a number of "pleasure palace" buildings of the period, especially shops, theatres and hotels, the chief architect of Harrods, CW Stephens, used the flexibility of ceramic decoration to add a sense of playful glamour to the exterior of the building. Built in stages between 1894 and 1939, Harrods comprises a mixture of stone and ceramic, notably black granite on the ground floor and buff terracotta above. This was manufactured by Doulton & Co. in Lambeth. Like many terracotta buildings of the period, such as the Russell Hotel in Russell Square, also clad in Doulton terracotta, Harrods combines historical architectural styles with fashionable new ideas imported from France. This can be seen in the sinuous Art Nouveau lines decorating the spandrels above the first floor windows, and in the mix-and-match approach to classical decoration, which draws heavily on the late-nineteenth century French Second Empire style.

7 COURTYARD, VICTORIA & ALBERT MUSEUM, EXHIBITION ROAD ///same.years.dirt Begun in 1857, the courtyard buildings are the oldest surviving part of the V&A. The impetus for their construction came from Henry Cole, founder of the museum, who was desperate to replace the museum's prefabricated buildings with something worthy of the collection of beautiful objects he was assembling. At first sight the architect appointed to create Cole's vision, Captain Francis Fowke of the Royal Engineers, might not have seemed an inspiring choice. Yet Fowke was more than up to the task, even if a sculptor, name Godfrey Sykes, was brought in later to assist with the detailing. That detailing is overwhelmingly ceramic. The buildings draw heavily on early Renaissance design from northern Italy, and evoke towns like Florence and Siena. This can be seen in the three arches of the terracotta balcony fronting the museum tearoom, where the repeated columns are encased in pale cast ceramic panels depicting playful putti, angels and other figures. Similar motifs are repeated on the square columns of the ground floor windows, helping to unify the space. Designed by Sykes, the panels were mass-produced from reusable moulds, making them cheap to manufacture, although Sykes hid his cost saving method by mixing up the different designs. The pediment mosaic, celebrating the origin of the museum in the Great Exhibition of 1851, is also terracotta, again designed by Sykes and made by Minton & Hollins of Stoke-on-Trent.

8 CERAMIC STAIRCASE, VICTORIA AND ALBERT MUSEUM, EXHIBITION ROAD ///same.years.dirt The Victoria and Albert Museum is a key resource for ceramics history with one of the world's most impressive collections. But clay is also integral to the building itself as shown by the museum's stunning ceramic staircase. Comprising richly coloured glazed tiles and mouldings, it was designed by Francis Moody who taught at the nearby Government School of Design. Moody was inspired by Italian Renaissance ceramics, particularly those of Luca della Robbia, and the ceramics used here are known as Della Robbia ware. They were manufactured by Minton & Hollins through an experimental process called fictile vitrification. This technique fused the surface glaze into the body of the clay, creating a highly durable form of ceramics. The staircase celebrates the educational purpose of the museum, which originally housed scientific and technical displays alongside those of the arts, with allegorical representations of the arts, commerce, agriculture and manufacturing. Science is here too, with allegorical figures in the spandrels representing geometry, chemistry and astronomy, and somewhat curiously, spectrum analysis. Originally the entire ceramics gallery, once housed at the top of the staircase, was constructed of Della Robbia ware, but this was removed in the 1930s before partial restoration in 1995.

9 NATURAL HISTORY MUSEUM, CROMWELL ROAD ///ducks.friday.gossip Few buildings better represent the Victorian love affair with ceramic as a construction material than the Natural History Museum, designed by Alfred Waterhouse in neo-Romanesque style, which opened in 1881. The exterior is almost entirely formed from clay. This use of ceramic stemmed from Waterhouse's belief that the polluted air of industrial Britain had rendered traditional building materials obsolete as acid rain would literally dissolve stone. His answer was fired clay and from the "red brick" universities of Leeds, Liverpool and Manchester, to the headquarters of the Prudential insurance company in London's Holborn, he used it with aplomb. At the Natural History Museum the colours may have been buff and blue-grey, but the single firing process used in brick production remained the same. The museum's moulded "bricks" were produced by Gibbs & Canning of Tamworth, along with the ceramic sculptural decoration of animals and plants. However, the moulds for these were fabricated in Lambeth by Farmer & Brindley, possibly modelled by a French sculptor named Edouard Dujardin, to designs by the palaeontologist Richard Owen. Despite their resemblance to medieval gargoyles, the ceramic sculptures, including pterodactyls, sabre-toothed cats and coelacanths, are realist images based on the best scientific evidence available at the time.

10 ROYAL ALBERT HALL, PRINCE CONSORT ROAD ///lunch.sings.notes Begun in 1867, the Royal Albert Hall is one of the most striking buildings in London. Its architect was Henry Scott, a serving officer in the Royal Engineers, who constructed it using an iron frame then clad in red brick. Its circular form evokes ancient buildings such as the Colosseum in Rome, but what marks out the Albert Hall from this example is its emphatic use of brick and terracotta decoration, something that brings to mind another ancient Roman building, the Pantheon. Scott clearly intended the Hall to harmonise with the nearby Victoria and Albert Museum, where the central courtyard is similarly a celebration of terracotta decoration. But he also draws on the fashion for using large numbers of round arches in buildings, called rundbogenstil, which had swept into Britain from Germany. Scott also made extensive use of mosaic at the Albert Hall, replacing what had been intended as a carved stone frieze running around the top of the building with mosaics, designed by some of the leading British artists of the day. Taking his lead from the head of the V&A, Henry Cole, Scott used an unusual form of mosaic, using ceramic tiles rather than more traditional coloured glass and stones, employing female students from the nearby Government School of Design to assemble the mosaic panels prior to the installation.

LONDON CLAY: AN ARCHITECTURAL WALKING TOUR is part of the Art School research series, MATERIAL MATTERS

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MATERIAL MATTERS Across the Art School's main disciplines of contemporary fine art, the conservation of historic objects, wood and stone carving and art histories, we foster an abiding focus on materiality. We think materials have an intrinsic importance in the fine art and craft skills we teach and that have been practised throughout history. In order to interrogate the integrity of materials further, we have developed a research series called Material Matters. Material Matters sets out to explore a specific material through a range of approaches including exhibitions, interviews, essays, and symposia. The 2021 clay symposium is supported by the Paul Mellon Centre for Studies in British Art.

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