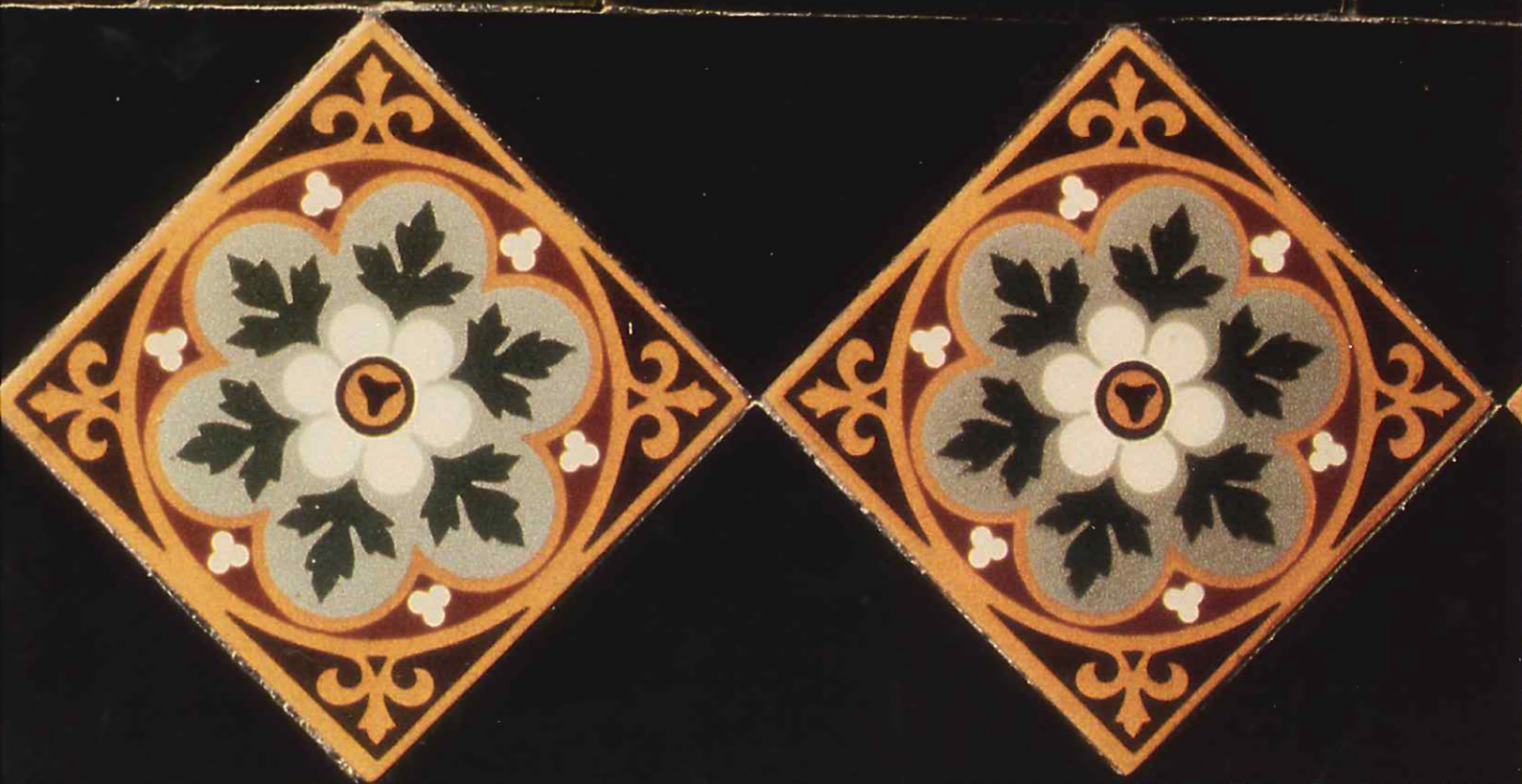


PEOPLE'S PICTURES

The story of tiles in Glasgow



PEOPLE'S PICTURES:
THE STORY OF TILES IN GLASGOW

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Glasgow University; Phil McCafferty; Adam
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people of Glasgow for keeping the museums service
informed about the welfare of historic tiled schemes.

COVER: Detail of Victorian close, Elie Street, Partick



Text: Elspeth King Design: Judith Wilder

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INTRODUCTION

For over a hundred years, tiles have played a significant but often unacknowledged part in the everyday lives of the people of Glasgow. Until the comprehensive redevelopment schemes of the period 1955-75 which remodelled the old inner city areas, the majority of Glaswegians lived in tenements with common stairways or closes. These closes were an extension of the street, and had an ambience and life of their own. Many of the closes were tiled for cleanliness and were incidentally decorative, quietly enriching the lives of those who lived there and those who passed through them.

Glasgow tenement dwellers often shopped locally in a variety of small establishments - dairies, bakeries, butchers and fish shops - many of which were tiled. The meanest dairy usually sported one or two large picture tiles of cows or milkmaids, whilst chain shops like those of the Leith-based Buttercup Dairy Company were splendidly tiled in the prevailing company style with complete picture panels. Butchers and fishmongers, regardless of size, often demanded picture panels unique to their shop. A Gallowgate butcher had a continuous tiled frieze depicting the scenic beauties of the Clyde Coast, whilst a fishmonger in Nithsdale Road had a similar frieze sporting mermaids and sailing ships. Before such shops were virtually wiped out by demolition and changes in the retail trade, the Glasgow shopper had a veritable art gallery in the street. At the same time, those who liked to drink could often enjoy a similar experience in their local public house from the tilework, including picture tiles, there. The

Encaustic floor tiles from Alexander 'Greek' Thomson house, 4 Great Western Terrace



splendours of the public houses were more than matched by those of the temperance-led public halls; the Kingston and Govan Burgh Halls were walled with leafy green and yellow tiles, while the Co-operative Society's St Mungo Halls were carpeted with art nouveau flowers.

There was no escape from tilework in Glasgow. Swimming baths and washhouses were walled with white tiles, often with instructions to users printed on them to order. Churches were cheered by extensive use of encaustic floor tiles in rich reds and yellows. While much of it was taken for granted, there was nevertheless a general consciousness about tiles, colloquially known as 'wallies', in Glasgow.



ABOVE LEFT: Panel for fish shop at 126 Nithsdale Road 1892 ABOVE RIGHT: View of wall frieze from the same shop



THE WALLY CLOSE



The word wally usually denotes something made of white china. 'Wally dugs' or china dogs were popular chimney ornaments on Glasgow mantelpieces. 'Wally jawboxes' were the white or brown ironstone sinks which began to replace the old black cast iron sinks in Glasgow tenement kitchens in the 1880s. 'Wally' can also mean large, ample and prosperous. Jamieson's Scottish Dictionary (1808) defines 'a wally bairn' as 'a fine thriving child'.

'Wallies' are also false teeth, but above all, wally closes are tiled closes, and much more desirable than plain painted closes.

Before the era of comprehensive redevelopment began in 1955, there was an entire culture relating to tenement living in general and to the ethos of the close in particular. The dispersion to the peripheral housing estates eliminated a great deal of it. At the same time, the closure of the last of the Glasgow clay pipe factories in 1955 and 1968 saw the end of the common use of block pipe clay, the substance with which the stairs of the common closes were washed and decorated. Each tenant or owner on each stair landing was obliged to take her turn of washing the stair on a Friday night. This was done by dissolving pipe clay in the wash bucket, giving the surface of the stair stone a thin film of either red or white pipe clay. The process was usually finished by decorating the edges of the stairs with the solid block of pipe clay, the chalked pattern lasting for a week until the next resident took her 'turn of the stair'. Many women were at great pains to draw distinctive patterns - sometimes loops or zig-zags or even

flowers - which were locally recognisable as theirs.

Sometimes there was (and still is) a kind of communal close pride in certain closes, whereby the brass nameplates, letterboxes, doorhandles and doorbells are kept shiny, to complement the painted glass doors and stair windows, and the splendour of the wally tiles. Unfortunately the ravages of time, changes in fashion, and need for new security systems have eliminated the Victorian door furniture. Within the last five years, many tenants have elected to fit security doors to the close mouths, thus making private areas which were once very much part of the street, and changing the ethos of the close.

Until the present generation, closes were part of the Glasgow way of life. For children, they were the convenient play areas, particularly in wet weather. Neighbours met there, and at nights, the young used them for courting. These activities have been curtailed by the security entry systems.

With the move to the housing schemes, tenement life was badly missed, as summed up in Adam McNaughtan's song, *The Glasgow that I used to know*:

Oh where is the Glasgow where I used to stay?
The white wally closes done up wi' pipe clay;
Where you knew every neighbour frae first floor to third,
And to keep your door locked was considered absurd.
Do you know the folk staying next door to you?

Tiled closes, so much the background to Glasgow life, are always in the background of Glasgow literature, although now often referred to in nostalgic terms, as in Moira Burgess's new novel, *Below*. Social

TOP LEFT: Tile rescued from St Mungo Halls
LEFT: Detail of close Dalnair Street, Yorkhill

TOP RIGHT: Detail of close 531 Victoria Road
RIGHT: Entrance to 106 West Campbell Street



worker Linda Arthur of 'Wally Jumpers' who now makes a living designing and producing knitwear which is entirely inspired by Glasgow close tiles, unleashes a stream of memories and reminiscences when the jumpers are exhibited.

SANITARY REFORM

Why did the wally close develop as a feature of the architecture of Glasgow's tenements? The initial drive came from the movement for sanitary reform and the desire to provide better housing. Glasgow in the 19th century had an unenviable reputation as a city of festering slums, crammed full of poverty-stricken workers, compelled to eke out an existence in dark, ill-ventilated hovels rife with dirt and disease. Sanitary and social reformers pilloried the public consciousness of industrialists and architects alike about this appalling situation.

By the beginning of the 1870s, this message was at last being taken to heart, and the first of the City



LEFT: Close with stencilled band above, Thornwood Avenue. Thousands of ground floor closes were plainly tiled like this.

Improvement Trust campaigns led to the eradication of some of the worst and oldest of the closes and wynds in the city.

Glasgow was still expanding, and it is in the new tenement of the mid 1880s that the inclusion of painted and tiled closes as part of a sanitation process became the order of the day. Like every innovation, it was not universally welcomed. Many thought the new house rents too dear. A minority thought them too cheap, as this passage from Neil Munro's *Earchie, A Son of the City*, indicates:



Tear doon the rookeries, and pit up rooms and kitchens wi' wally jawboxes and tiled closes at a rent o' eighteenpence a week when ye get it.

"That's a' very fine," says the economists, "but if ye let guid wally jawbox hooses at ten shillin's a year less than the auld-established and justly-popular slum hoose, will't no' tempt mair pair folk frae the country into Gleska and congest the Gorbals worse than ever?"

RIGHT: Detail of wally close in red sandstone tenement, Broomhill Drive c1910

CLASSES OF CLOSES

For the duration of the present century, most Glaswegians have considered the wally close to be the finest form of dwelling-place. Many speak of their wally closes with some pride. Only in jest would any Glaswegian prefer them otherwise, as when the music hall artiste sings:

It's oh that I'm
longing for my ain
close.

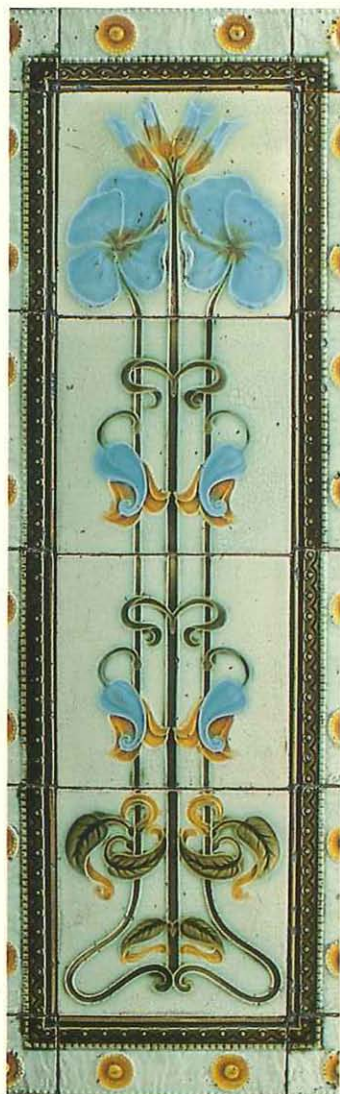
Nane o' your
wallies - just a
plain close!

In general,
most closes fall
into four distinct
categories:

1 those with a
painted dado throughout, dark
coloured to conceal thumps from coal
bags, with whitewash above.

2 those with a painted base, tiled
central band, and sometimes an
additional band of stencilling above.

3 wally closes: tiled dado on the
ground floor, which is continued
by bands of painted colours and



stencilling through the various
landings.

4 the super wally: this represents the
ultimate development of the process
and dates from the period 1895-1914.
The tiles are on all four floors and are
often art nouveau style, complemented
with painted glass stair windows.



There can be
no hard and fast
distinctions
however. Many
of the tenements
in the east end,
one and two-
roomed houses,
which were
cleared away in
the redevelop-
ments of 1960-
80, had finely
tiled close-
mouths.

Although tiles are very much part of
the community consciousness of
Glasgow, and in spite of the presence
of a large pottery industry, few of
them were actually made in the city. It
is therefore appropriate to consider the
historical development of tiling
elsewhere in Britain, to understand the
uses of tile work in Glasgow.

LEFT: Detail of Art Nouveau close, Marlborough Avenue c1910

CENTRE: Detail of close, west end of Glasgow c1890 RIGHT: Detail of close, Battlefield Crescent



THE GOTHIC REVIVAL



During the 19th century three important artistic movements exerted a profound influence on the craft of the tile-maker. The first of these, known as the Gothic Revival and inspired by the genius of Augustus Welby Pugin, led in England (and to a lesser extent in Scotland) to the end of the predominance of the classical ideal in architecture. Pugin, a convert to Catholicism, sought to recover through the re-discovery and reinterpretation of the ecclesiastical architecture of the great cathedral builders of medieval times, an escape from the brutalising repetition and loss of craftsmanship implicit in the operations of industrial mass-production.

Supported by John Ruskin, Pugin and his myriad of architectural disciples aimed at nothing less than a spiritual transformation of society, in which the artificial distinctions between architecture, arts and crafts would be broken down, leading to a cultural renaissance. The impact of the new movement was quickly felt as Pugin, leading by example, poured forth a stream of superb designs for metal work, textiles, stained glass and tiles.

The impact of his creativity led directly to the reintroduction of encaustic floor tiles based initially on painstaking copies of surviving medieval examples, but quickly developing a wide range of new patterns as the initial inspiration was modified, ironically by the very industrial processes it had revolted against. Of the many artistic partnerships to emerge from the Gothic Revival that of Pugin, with the industrial potter Herbert Minton, was the most

crucial, leading to many important landmark commissions. Among these were the 1841 flooring of the Chapter House at Westminster and the joint displays at Pugin's medieval court at the Great Exhibition of 1851.

Pugin's early death in 1852 robbed the movement of its leader but his influence through his buildings and writings and those of his successors, J P Seddon, Owen Jones and William Burges, ensured the re-establishment of decorative tiling as an essential part of architectural decoration.

THE INFLUENCE OF MORRIS & CO

By the end of the 1850s the impact of Pugin and his followers in the realm of public architecture was overwhelming. However its end products, in furniture, tiles, stained glass and interior decoration, were confined to churches, town halls and the mansions of the very rich.

Inspired by Godwin, Street and Ruskin, the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood of artists led by Dante Gabriel Rossetti, John E Millais and Edward Burne Jones, had begun to complement the innovations in architecture with a new approach to easel painting, yet the vast range of everyday objects for domestic use from furniture to carpets, textiles and wallpaper remained sunk in a quagmire of meretricious ornament, rendering the very term 'Victorian' synonymous with bad taste.

The dangers implicit in mass production techniques were addressed in the early 1860s with

Tiles illustrating ÆSOP'S FABLES by John Moyr Smith



the establishment of Morris & Co, a group of artists and designers associated with the artist poet William Morris. Containing among its members former leaders of the Pre-Raphaelites such as Rossetti, Ford Maddox Brown and Burne Jones, Morris & Co also included the architect Phillip Webb, and like Pugin, the company aimed to provide a complete package embracing every aspect of a building from its initial conception to the smallest detail of its internal furnishings and decoration.

The establishment of the Victoria and Albert Museum was another attempt to address the problems revealed by the 1851 Exhibition. The inclusion among its displays of international decorative art of a major ceramics gallery furnished by Minton Hollins & Co, provided a high profile prototype for the lavish decoration which in succeeding decades would be repeated in thousands of pubs, theatres, town halls and public baths.

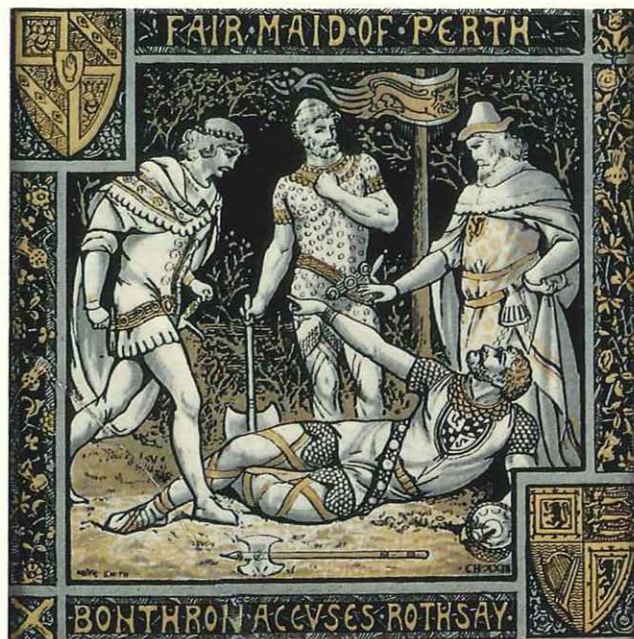
The famous Green Room in the Victoria and Albert

provided a unique showcase for Morris & Co and established indelibly their reputation as the leading avant garde designers in Britain.

The impact of this firm during its first few years was out of all proportion to its size, helping by competition to raise the standards of many long established firms compelled to respond to its challenge by employing new designers, but also by stimulating a host of rivals, among whom expatriate Scots were to play a significant role.

Edward Burne Jones, William Morris and their collaborator William de Morgan enjoyed a wide popularity with Glasgow's *nouveau riche* industrialists, and while Morris & Co's output was limited, de Morgan tiles still survive in many

listed buildings in Glasgow. Both Morris and de Morgan are represented in the People's Palace collections by tiles from Rhuarden, the Clyde coast mansion of the Glasgow architect James Smith, whose daughter Madeleine had a penchant for strong-tasting coffee and French lovers.



Tile illustrating THE FAIR MAID OF PERTH from the Sir Walter Scott series by John Moyr Smith

THE AESTHETIC MOVEMENT

The 1860s were notable for the arrival at artistic maturity of several architects of great talent and originality who shared a common interest in interior decoration and the arts of Japan. The growth of imperial political and cultural contacts with Japan had led to a revival of interest among artists and designers in its beautiful porcelains and the streamlined asymmetrical qualities of its architecture. Among these were the Glasgow-born designer, Christopher Dresser, and Arthur Lasenby Liberty, who in 1875 opened a London shop specialising in Japanese furnishings and porcelain.

These pioneers were soon joined by others, among whom the architect William Godwin, the designer Thomas Jeckyll and the Anglo-American artist James McNeill Whistler were the most prominent. Both Dresser and Godwin were notable tile designers, while Jeckyll's Japanese-inspired cast iron and brass fireplaces designed to house banks of hand painted or printed tiles enjoyed a widespread popularity.

JOHN MOYR SMITH

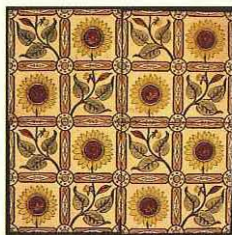
The late 1860s marked the departure from Glasgow of three Aesthetic Movement artists who were to become prolific designers of ceramic tiles: John Moyr Smith, Daniel Cottier and James Bruce Talbert. Only Smith appears to have designed for the mass production market of Minton, while Cottier and Talbert executed smaller numbers of hand painted

tiles intended for high class furniture and fireplaces.

For a brief period at the beginning of the 1870s all three participated in schemes for Cottier and Co before going their separate ways. Of the three, only Moyr Smith had a significant tiling commission in Glasgow when in the 1870s he designed the Queen's Arcade, Stow Street, Cowcaddens, and lined one of the shop fronts with his 'Industry' series designed for Minton's. The Arcade was demolished in 1968, and only a few tiles, and Smith's characteristically lively griffons, survive in the People's Palace collections to commemorate this popular shopping venue.

During his time at Minton's, Moyr Smith produced a wide range of designs, usually in sets of twelve of which the Old Testament, Tennyson's 'Idylls of the King', Shakespeare and the Waverley Novels, enjoyed a widespread distribution. The latter were large 8-inch tiles designed for the Paris Exhibition of 1878. These deluxe tiles were popular with cabinetmakers for including in washing tables, sideboards and even chairbacks.

Moyr Smith tiles have been found in all parts of Glasgow - the Shakespeare series in fireplaces in two-roomed houses in the Gallowgate and London Road, and the Old Testament series in closes in Balgrayhill, Springburn. The demolition of the Queen's Arcade was a much-felt public loss, and when the opportunity arose for tiling the new public areas of the People's Palace in 1990, reproduction Moyr Smith tiles were chosen for that reason.



LEFT and RIGHT: Tiles illustrating Tennyson's IDYLLS OF THE KING by John Moyr Smith 1875

CENTRE: Aesthetic movement tile with characteristic sunflowers, from a piece of furniture

SHOP AND PUBLIC HOUSE TILES

Few good historic public houses have survived the ravages of time. One particularly sad loss was the St Mungo Vintner's in Queen Street, with its art nouveau bar, metalwork, stained glass and tiled panels by Doulton of Lambeth. The latter included a Glasgow shipbuilding scene and a harvest scene in the Realist tradition. The fittings were sold to an American buyer in 1974.

A number of excellent panels and schemes still survive in shops. Notable among these is the panel designed by the French artist Alphonse Mucha for the Glasgow International Exhibition of 1901, and later installed at 713 Great Western Road, where it is still greatly admired and appreciated.

Glasgow's main firm for the supply and fitting of picture panels in shops was that of James Duncan Limited, established in 1865, and in business for a century. Duncan commissions were tailored to suit the individual shop, and while their style has certain similarities, no two Duncan shops are ever the same, unless they are part of a chain. Duncan was responsible for tiling the Buttercup Dairy shops throughout Scotland, and surviving panels can be seen in Biggar, Selkirk, Haddington and Innerleithen. The tiled entrance to their old showroom in West Campbell Street survived until 1980.

The People's Palace has many examples of Duncan panels from both fish and butcher shops.

SAWERS OF HOWARD STREET

Sawers, Fishmongers, Ice Merchants, Poulterers and Game Dealers, were the largest and most influential company of their kind in the west of Scotland and their headquarters shop in Howard Street, Glasgow, tiled by Doulton of Lambeth in 1890, was a showpiece for the firm.

Sawers had branches in Birmingham and other English cities, as well as eight branches in Glasgow. A branch in Perth was devoted to the purchase of salmon for the other branches.

The firm was the biggest buyer in the Glasgow Fish Market, and could command any exotic sea creature, such as a shark, porpoise, turtle or monk fish, as a centrepiece for their displays in Howard Street. The Howard Street shop was the only licensed fishmongers in Scotland. Part of it was an oyster bar, and city gentlemen could come and eat oysters, sea food and brown bread with a glass of ale or porter.

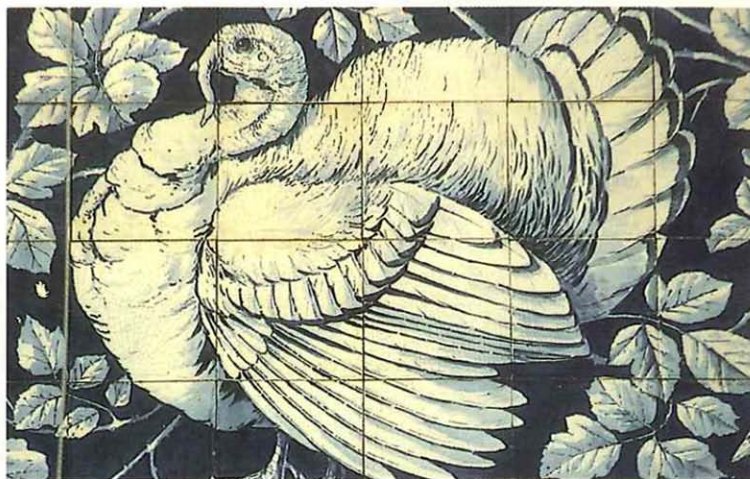
Press notices for the shop were glowing:

There is probably no more magnificent fish shop in Europe, and the splendours of the suggestive tiles and granite slabs - to say nothing of the refreshing coolness experienced in the spacious refrigerator - must be inspected in order to be appreciated.

The shop was so splendidly appointed that a full



LEFT and RIGHT: Tiles by John Moyr Smith from the Queen's Arcade, Cowcaddens, demolished 1968
CENTRE: Tiled picture by James Duncan of Glasgow for Leishman & Sons, London Road c1920



page of the *Harmondsworth Self Educator* of 1899 extolled the artistic and sanitary function of the tile work and the high standards of the fittings and hygiene.

The company also had its own transport fleet, garaged at the back of the Howard Street premises. The motors had pet names, such as Miss Haddock, Miss Crab, Miss Plaice, etc. In the late 1950s, the Dunoon branch had a Lambretta motor as a special attraction for the shop.

The demise of the firm in March 1960 was sudden and catastrophic, involving a pair of corporate raiders. The tenement in Howard Street was scheduled as a dangerous building in 1989, and prior to demolition, the museum organised the rescue of the entire tiled scheme, as well as part of the mosaic fascia from the front of the shop.

LEFT: Alphonse Mucha panel, 713 Great Western Road RIGHT: Turkey panel from Sawers, Howard Street, prior to removal



TOP LEFT: Mosaic fascia from Sawers, Howard Street CENTRE: Frieze with stags, from Sawers, Howard Street, prior to removal
LEFT: Sawers, Howard Street c1910 RIGHT: Window panel from Sawers, Howard Street, signed 'A H Wright 1890'

THE FUTURE OF TILES IN GLASGOW

There is a healthy interest in the welfare of historic tilework, and its history, in Glasgow. Some architects involved in tenement rehabilitation have gone to great lengths to preserve and repair existing schemes. Others, recognising how significant the wally close is, have created new wally closes in newly-built schemes. The housing associations have been in the forefront of maintaining this tradition, and imaginative schemes in Partick and Meadowside, using the tiles of Glasgow-trained ceramic artist Margery Clinton, have been used in the closes.

Architectural partnerships such as Assist, and Michael and Sue Thornley, have both helped the museum service through the rescue of tiles, and the community in reintroducing tiled closes. Significantly, tiled closes are now being introduced to the rehabilitated housing in the peripheral schemes, for the first time. This gives acknowledgement to the community belief that in Glasgow there is no better dwelling place than the wally close.

Happily, a number of young tile designers, inspired by tile history, are currently setting up new businesses for tile decoration and production in Glasgow, and will be undertaking public commissions as well as private work. Glasgow tilework, with its glorious past, seems assured of a good new future.

*New tenement, with tiles by Margery Clinton,
for the Partick Housing Association*