

Glazed expressions

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Notes and References

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- [2] Bell, Q. (1999) *A man of many arts*, The Charleston Trust, p. 21.
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- [4] Spalding, F. (2016) *Vanessa Bell, portrait of the Bloomsbury Artist*, Taurus Parke Paperbacks, London and New York, pp. 351, 356-547.
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- [9] Bussell, M. (1985) *Notes and News*, October 1985, Greater London Archaeological Society.
- [10] Chris Green, pers. comm.
- [11] Spartacus-educational.com/ARTbellQ.htm (accessed July 2022).
- [12] Bell, Q. (1999) pp. 6-53.
- [13] One tile back illustrated by Blanchett is somewhat different. This has two stamps on a flat back, a circular stamp with a bell and a rectangular stamp lettered 'FULHAM POTTERY'.
- [14] It has been suggested the tile top-left may show Angelica Garnett.
- [15] On-line auction catalogues illustrate other lettered tiles including examples marked 'Nivose' and 'Ventose', the fourth and sixth months of the French Republic Calendar respectively. It should be noted that these tiles are larger measuring, around 145mm square (around 5 1/2 inch square), (lotsearch.net/lot/a-pair-of-fulham-pottery-tiles-by-quentin-bell, assessed August 2022).
- [16] Bell, Q. (1982) Seventy-two years after: a personal note, *Antique Dealers and Collectors Guide*, October 1982, p. 62.
- [17] Cressida Bell expressed somewhat similar mixed feelings concerning some of her father's tile designs when I showed her the Green and Richardson, Blanchett and V&A designs during the authors meeting in 2018.
- [18] Bell, Q and Nicholson, V. (1997) *Charleston, A Bloomsbury house and garden*, White Lion Publishing, London, p. 13.
- [19] Bell and Nicholson, p. 109.
- [20] Quentin Bell also painted tile panels for his daughter, Cressida Bell's house. The bathroom has a large decorative scheme with mermaids and fishes.
- [21] Bell, Q. (1999), pp. 34, 36.
- [22] theenglishhome.co.uk/cressida-bell-bloomsbury-revised/ (assessed July 2022).
- [23] Bell, Q. (1982), p. 65.



The Banbury Buildings Tile Mural by Reeves and Clarke

Lily Crowther

An impressive large-scale mural by Ann Clark (née Wynn Reeves) and her husband Kenneth Clark has recently come to light after several decades in storage. The mural was commissioned for the boardroom of Banbury Buildings Ltd, Leamington Spa, Warwickshire, in 1964 and completed in 1965. It is approximately 1.2x6.5m in size, composed of dozens of individually shaped and painted bas-relief tiles illustrating the company's working processes (Figure 1).

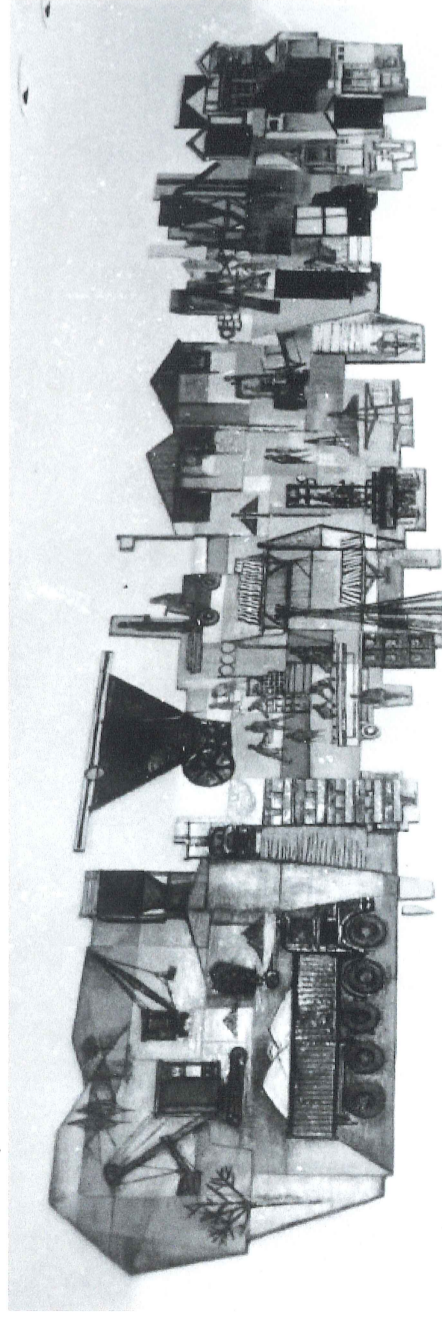


Fig. 1 - The mural during installation at Robins House, 1965. (Image courtesy of Camilla Clark, daughter of Ann and Kenneth Clark.)

Banbury Buildings was established by Derrick Robins in the mid-1950s and specialised in prefabricated concrete buildings. Their products included garages, greenhouses, coal bunkers, fencing, farm and industrial buildings, and home extensions; they produced 'England's best-selling concrete garage' and supplied blocks of garages to councils. Their manufacturing facility was at Ironstone Works, Adderbury, just to the south of Banbury in Oxfordshire, and the company expanded rapidly in the early 1960s, mainly across the west of the country. By the summer of 1961 they had showrooms in Coventry, Reading and Orpington; a year later, new sites had opened in Chesterfield, Manchester, Gloucester and Barry, and in 1963 they added a showroom in Bridgwater.

At the peak of this period of expansion they opened a head office in Leamington Spa. Their new building, which was named Robins House, replaced the 1950s Marlborough Hotel on Holly Walk. The company was based there from 1964-5 until around 1974. The dates of the mural suggest that it was commissioned to mark the move into the new HQ. Banbury Buildings' founder Derrick Robins lived in Leamington and was prominent in local life, especially in the sporting community. He was well known as a cricket promoter and was also the chairman of Coventry City FC, where distinctive new vaulted stands were built by Banbury Buildings in the 1960s.

Banbury Buildings prided itself on innovation in design and technology. A 1957 advert described their new garage as 'the latest example of Banbury progress' with 'a streamlined new look'. The mural would have been in keeping with this forward-looking image. There was a trend in the 1950s and 1960s for large-scale decorative wall treatments, which were pioneered by local authorities for public buildings and then became popular with private clients. Artists experimented with relief decoration using materials such as concrete, resin, plastics and fibreglass.

It was in this context that Ann and Kenneth Clark began to produce tile murals in 1954. Their first client was a hospital, and they continued to work frequently in the healthcare sector in the following decades; other major public commissions included a 1000-tile mural for Harrow civic centre. They were also commissioned by private companies including the construction giant John Laing and accountants Arthur Andersen. Ann designed and made the complex assemblages of hand-painted tiles and sculptural elements, while Kenneth was responsible for glazes, as well as managing the business and overseeing installation.

The Banbury Buildings mural combines ambitious scale with a strong narrative quality. It shows the quarrying of raw materials, the production of prefabricated elements, packing and transport to the building site, and finally a variety of completed structures. The busy scenes, full of figures, vehicles, and carefully detailed machinery, are clearly based on the real operational processes of Banbury Buildings. The varied textures, subtle shifts of colour, and interlocking shapes create a visually absorbing effect which adds depth to the pleasingly illustrative quality of the overall design. Two examples of details from the mural are shown in Figure 2 (Front Cover) and Figure 3 (right).

Derrick Robins retired to South Africa in 1975. Banbury Buildings closed down, and Robins House was renamed Marlborough House. Offices in the building were rented out to tenants including Warwick District Council. The mural was taken down in 1996, and the council's Heritage and Arts Manager, Jeff Watkin, helped to arrange for its conservation and storage. Leamington Spa Art Gallery & Museum now hopes to find it a suitable permanent home.

For any enquiries about the mural please contact curators@warwickdc.gov.uk



Conservation News

Lesley Durbin

Conservation within TACS has been interesting and varied over the last six months. We have responded to numerous conservation treatment enquiries generated from our website. Enquiries come from the public sector, architects, volunteer buildings trusts and private owners. We always endeavour to answer as fully as we can. Myself, Michael Rieveley, Deborah Last and our President, Hans van Lemmen acting as the Conservation Grants Panel have considered grant applications as the first stage of full approval from the committee, and the Terracotta, Past, Present and Future Conference lectures continue to be viewed in good numbers. There is also a new short film on our website about cleaning tiles the conservation way.

We linked up with our friends in the Tile Heritage Foundation of America to support what came to be a successful project to save the Rosalie Doolittle Fountain, Rio Grande Botanic Garden, Albuquerque, New Mexico.

TACS has supported a forthcoming seminar organised by Birmingham City University *Architectural Terracotta - Conservation and Currency*, Wednesday 5 July 2023, at BCU Parkside Building, Birmingham B4 7BD. TACS Committee members have been generous with their photo archives to produce a PowerPoint slide loop for use at the seminar.

Finally, a building with rather splendid interior tiling in a prominent northern town has recently undergone interior refurbishment. It was found that, whilst there was some enthusiasm from local councillors to try to protect the interior, like many buildings across our towns and cities, buildings in conservation areas which are not listed and are not undergoing a change of use, do not require a planning application for interior works.

However, almost all local authorities have a 'local listings' procedure to which anyone can apply to place any building or interior they consider to be important on the list. A Local Listing does not give full protection, but it does require a Local Planning Authority to take the listing into account. It may prove to be worthwhile to search out the local listings in your area.

Fig. 3 - Detail from the Banbury Buildings mural showing the extraction of raw materials, composed of three tiles, 628x459mm. (Image © Leamington Spa Art Gallery & Museum.)