

Although familiar with the characteristic red earth that gave Redland its name, caused by an abundance of iron oxide in the soil, did you know that in the 18<sup>th</sup> century a Clifton householder was fined for illicitly mining iron in their back garden? The medieval technique of making red or neutral coloured clay tiles decorated with inlaid patterns of coloured clays was known as encaustic and such tiles were used for the floor of many a medieval church until the dissolution of the monasteries in middle of the sixteenth century. Augustus Welby Northmore Pugin, the Victorian architect and ecclesiologist, championed the Gothic style and reintroduced encaustic tiles to his designers, Crace, Minton, Hardman and Myers who further developed the medieval technique. Pugin placed encaustic tiles, along with stained glass near the top of the list of church ornaments that “most charm the eye”, and whenever a new church was built newspapers usually extolled the beauties of the encaustic floor tiles. In the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries tile making was a major industry, and in a manner reminiscent of the craftsmen who carved the church Misericords, any subject that came to the carver or tile maker’s mind was used, from angels to demons, and from acrobats to animals and heraldry.

I was therefore delighted to discover this collection of tiles, not where expected on a church floor, but on very public display in the heart of Redland. Have you noticed the row of more than three dozen encaustic tiles that adorn the frontages of the [Betty] Boop Café and the adjacent letting Agents in Lower Redland Road? Put there as decoration a few years ago during renovation, the wide variety of tiles probably came from an architectural reclamation firm then a few doors away. Preliminary research has shown that at least one is stylistically similar to a Godwin design used for a new floor in the east end of Hereford Cathedral. Others feature in a 1840 Style Guide, used by tile manufactures such as Chamberlain and Minton. It would be interesting to carry out more research to identify the provenance of the others. Perhaps they are ‘spares’ from other well known commissions.

