

requirements of the details of design led to the quicker and cheaper method of stamping the figures upon the clay. For a long period after the use of the red or Samian ware, introduced by the Romans, ceased, tiles appear to have been the only branch of the decorative fictile art in Britain. They were applied chiefly in ecclesiastical decoration, about the altars and choirs, and for memorial purposes. The excellence of this mediæval tile-work is regarded as having stimulated and led the way to improvement in decoration of household pottery. Some of the earliest specimens of the art, preserved in the British Museum, are from ruined churches in Norfolk. The neighborhood of Great Malvern appears to have been one of the chief centres of production in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, and few churches in Great Britain can show a greater variety of ancient tiling than the Priory Church of Great Malvern, the interior of which abounded with encaustic tiles in the floors and forming panels in the walls.

The manufacture in Britain has been assigned to two periods. The most ancient tiles are believed to have been fabricated between the years 1290 and 1380, and those of the second period during the prevalence of the perpendicular style in building. Numerous kilns have been unearthed at Malvern Hills, and it is believed that Tewkesbury Abbey and Worcester and Gloucester Cathedrals were supplied with tiles from these kilns. The manufacture is supposed to have been continued in Worcester County down to about the year 1640, and to have been repressed, if not stopped, at that time through the influence of Puritanism. In that year visitors were appointed to visit the ecclesiastical structures of the kingdom and destroy all ornaments of a "superstitious nature."* The designs upon the tiles at that time were largely formed of sacred symbols and inscriptions, of memorial letters and monograms, and of heraldic devices, chiefly in connection with tombs. These mediæval tiles have been classed according to their decorations, as follows* :—

1. "Sacred symbols; inscriptions, consisting either of verses of the Scripture or pious phrases.

* Antiquarian and Architectural Year Book, 1844, p. 128.