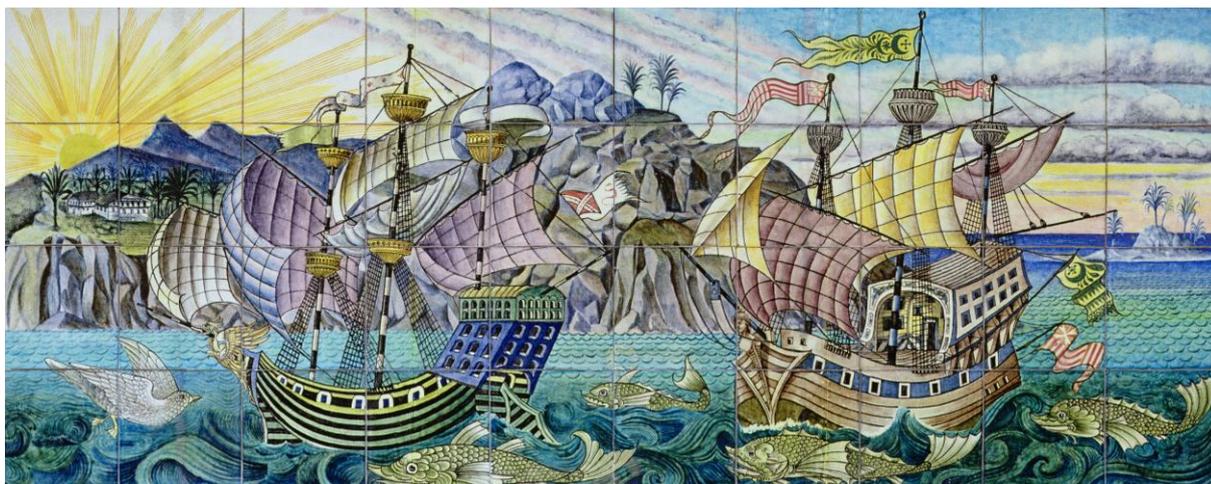


GALLEON TILE PANEL



The De Morgan Centre purchased this spectacular galleon panel at auction on the 4th October 2006 (Sotheby's Lot No.6) with the generous assistance of The Heritage Lottery Fund, The Art Fund and Mr John Scott. Measuring 2ft by 5ft, the panel consists of 40, 6 inch square tiles and represents a colourful and exotic scene of sailing ships, birds and sea creatures - all favourite De Morgan motifs.

Marks on the reverse of the tiles show an early Fulham Period impress stamp, dating the panel to between 1888 and 1897, and so we know that the tiles were made at De Morgan's Sands End Pottery in Fulham. The previous owner of the tiles was based in Colorado USA and there is speculation as to how the tile panel came to be out there. It may well be that émigrés took it with them, or perhaps it was purchased by an American and shipped over? De Morgan was certainly trying to court the rich American market, in January of 1895 while wintering in Florence, Italy he wrote to his business partner Halsey Ricardo:



Fulham impress mark

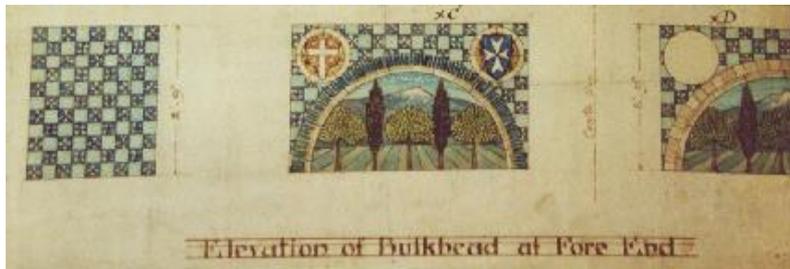
If I had really good samples out here I should have many opportunities of showing them to people who would either buy them after in England, or tell their friends to. Per exemplid [sic.] there are Yankees in this house rolling in millions, who have a son who is going to be married in America – but though I shall show them the workshop I shall have nothing to show of work done. (*Letter from William De Morgan to Halsey Ricardo, November 1892, Private Collection*).

Either way, the design of the galleon panel was

originally created for De Morgan's commissions with P&O. Between 1882 and 1900, De Morgan was asked to design schemes and provide tiles for twelve P&O liners. By the 1880's steamships had become a popular and luxurious way to travel. The main shipping companies employed specialist architects and designers to create a sense of sumptuousness and style on these floating hotels. P&O was no exception, employing architects such as J.J. Stevenson and T.E. Collcutt (eminent Arts and Crafts architect, with credits including the Lloyd's Register of Shipping and Imperial College) to design the interior public spaces. Thus, it comes as no surprise that the leading designers and craftspeople of the day were also commissioned to provide decoration for these luxurious 'homes from homes'.

Both Stevenson and Collcutt commissioned De Morgan and Company to produce tiles for 12 P&O liners.. These included the s.s.*Sutlej* (1882), s.s.*Britannia* (1887), s.s.*Oceana* (1888), s.s.*Nubia* (1895), s.s.*Malta* (1895), s.s.*Sumatra* (1895), s.s.*China* (1896) s.s.*India* (1896), s.s.*Egypt* (1897), s.s.*Arabia* (1898) and s.s.*Persia* (1900). Correspondence between William De Morgan and his business partner Halsey Ricardo clearly demonstrates the importance of the P&O contract to the success of their business and it is obvious that P&O kept a tight control over the look and quality of the interiors of their liners: "We want to get into the big ships as well as these second class cargo boats – the Chairman has yet to be convinced that the tiles are good enough for these" (Letter from Halsey Ricardo to William De Morgan, February 18th 1895, Private Collection).

The galleon panel was most likely designed for the s.s. *Malta* (built by Caird and Co. for P&O in 1895). On the 23rd March 1895, De Morgan wrote to Ricardo outlining his ideas for panels for the ship and states "They will be the two flank panels – crusaders in wessels [sic.] on the sea". De Morgan elaborates further in April, when he writes to *Ricardo* asking him to add details to the design: "Of course we can cook up dummy stemmé here even without going to the Bargello (former prison



Additional designs for the s.s. *Malta* by William De Morgan

which was turned into an Art Gallery in 1865), but I was imputing to you a sort of subcutaneous knowlege or nerairy, which would make trings a bit plausible. If you can tackle those in the ship cartoons doing at Fulham..." (*Letter from William De Morgan to Halsey Ricardo, 23rd March 1895, Private Collection*). Looking at the details on the Ship's pennants, we can see a Maltese cross: the symbol of Christian warriors and a reference to the s.s.*Malta*. However, De Morgan's idea of crusades seems to have gone a little awry, as on the same ship we see the star and crescent insignia, which was an Ottoman symbol.

Further evidence that the galleon panel was designed for the s.s.*Malta* comes from its actual construction. De Morgan wrote to Ricardo in April 1895 of a new method he was trying out "We have now got the method of papering the glass so perfect that a better palette would give a most enviable way of painting. The paper



on the glass is now so hard that we can draw on it in pencil and rub out even with India-rubber, and when an accident does occur any space can be cut out and refilled to a nicety. It's very pretty!" (*Letter from William De Morgan to Halsey Ricardo, 17th April 1895, Private Collection*). After using the glass to help transfer the pattern from the master design to paper, pigments would be applied and the painted paper then placed face down onto slip-coated tiles, coated with glaze and sodium silicate and fired. The paper would turn into fine ash and be easily absorbed in the glaze. Looking closely at the tile panel, we can see lines where the tracing papers join together. These aren't as apparent on later panels and thus we can assume that the galleon panel was an early example of this technique and still in need of perfecting in 1895.

Three other large tile panels on display at the De Morgan Centre (on loan from the Southwark Art Collection) are also thought to be designed for P&O liners - although it is not clear for which. These three are comparable in scale and in construction techniques to our *Galleon* panel, and are again typical of the atmospheric schemes chosen by De Morgan. One shows an Islamic city with a mosque set between two minarets, another depicts a fanciful Italianate fountain with dolphins spouting water into a vast marble urn, and the third, another fountain scene set against a classical Italianate city. The panels were given to the *South London Gallery* by the avid De Morgan collector, Harold Charles Mossop in 1922, where they remained forgotten until 1999. Unfortunately, none of the ships which De Morgan worked on have survived, over half were sunk and the remaining were sold or broken up. Thus, it is unlikely that these panels were ever installed on a ship. However, we do know that De Morgan made spares: "I have started the painter thrown out here on duplicates of the panorama. If by good luck the first ones sent should be destroyed...these duplicates will come in handy – if none are spoiled we are no worse off" (*Letter from William De Morgan to Halsey Ricardo, 20th April 1895, Private Collection*).

De Morgan's designs were often challenged by curved walls and openings for doorways and this meant revision and changes to the schemes had to occur as the ships build progressed. The process was further complicated by De Morgan's long stays in Florence and the copious correspondence needed between London and Italy in order to complete and alter designs as necessary. Prices charged by De Morgan and Co. for the designing and production of tile schemes are not known for all the ships. Although correspondence between Ricardo and De Morgan does give prices for s.s.*Sumatra* (1895) at '£9 a square yard' which came to a total of '£237 for the 26 1/3 yards of tiles provided' and comparable prices were probably charged for the sister ships, commissioned a year later.

In addition to De Morgan and Company's work for P&O, he also designed schemes for several other ships and yachts including Lord Ashburton's yacht and a ship called the s.s.*Iniscarra*, designed in 1903 for the City of Cork Steam Packet Co Ltd and perhaps most notable of all for the *Royal Steam Yacht Livadia* - designed for Czar Alexander II of Russia.