

'We can equal more cheaply': German, Belgian and French interest in English industrial tiles and tile technology during the nineteenth century

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The successful reintroduction of the encaustic floor tile by Samuel Wright and Herbert Minton, followed by the invention of the dust press technique by Richard Prosser and its implementation for the production of mosaics, wall and floor tiles by Minton, have been widely published. The international success of the English encaustic tile and dust pressed wall tiles of Minton, Maw and other factories on the European continent, however, is much less known, as is the transfer of English dust press technology.

The study of how the encaustic tile, as a standardized product of high quality, and the completely new dust press technology was received in the specialized press in three of the most industrialized countries on the European continent - Germany, Belgium and France - from the late 1840s and early 1850s onwards, is most instructive. At once, archaeologists, architects, engineers and ceramic manufacturers clearly saw the advantages of the new products.

The high cost of English encaustic tiles encouraged them, however, to search for similar but cheaper production techniques. Ernst March in Berlin, the Boch family in Septfontaines, Mettlach, La Louvière and Maubeuge, and the Boulenger brothers in Auneuil soon produced tiles of a similar quality but with motifs that reflected their own national taste. Many other factories followed their example. This led to fierce competition, in local markets as well as at the international level.

Crucial for this 'technology conquest' seems to have been the quick international publication of patents containing technical descriptions - vague as they were - and an extensive article by Digby Wyatt for the *Journal of the Society of Arts* (1858) in honour of Herbert Minton.

The successive presentations of English tiles at the series of International or Universal Exhibitions held on the continent of Europe (from Paris 1855 to Paris 1900) also helped significantly to influence specialists, as well as the general public, towards acceptance of the generalized use of tiles and architectural ceramics around 1900. This becomes very clear through a detailed study of the many national and international reports and the general magazines for the middle classes.