

May 26 - 1930.

MARK MOERT



HISTORY TOLD IN TILES.

The Ceramic Studio at Olifantsfontein, where the inscriptions which formed a historic feature of Park Station Tea Room are being copied on to tiles to form part of a novel scheme of decoration which is being carried out by Mr. Gerald Moerdyk for the new station restaurant. In addition to reproducing the inscriptions, the story of South Africa will be illustrated on tiles, and altogether over seven thousand are being painted with this end in view.

HISTORY IN TILES

DECORATING THE NEW RAILWAY STATION

ARCHITECT'S ARTISTIC SCHEME

Thousands of hand-painted tiles depicting scenes in the history of South Africa from the earliest days of the Cape settlement up to the present day are now being prepared at the Ceramic Studio at Olifantsfontein for the decoration of the tea room at Johannesburg's new railway station.

A representative of The Star, who visited the studio, writes:— Many of those whose wont it was to sip their tea in Park Station tea room and at the same time meditate philosophically on the Dutch texts painted in archaic characters on the strip around the top of the walls must have been keenly disappointed, when

some months ago the texts were snatched away without any warning and uninspiring paint took their place. The tea room was never quite the same. These texts lent it an air of quaint distinction, which marked it off from the rest of Johannesburg. There were those who thought that the inscriptions had been ruthlessly sacrificed for appearance sake.

That the authorities were guilty of no such thing was discovered by a representative of The Star, when on paying a visit to the Ceramic Studio at Olifantsfontein he found the texts being laboriously copied by hand from the original canvas on to tiles, which in due course will decorate the new station.

These tiles are, however, only a few of 4,500 which the workers at the Ceramic Studio, under the direction of Miss Short and Miss Methley, have been painting by hand for the past 18 months. For Mr. Gerald Moerdyk, the architect, is carrying out the novel scheme of decorating the walls of the new station tea room up to the six feet level with tiles portraying the spirit of South Africa. When the work is finished, visitors will find themselves in a truly South African atmosphere. At the eye-level the history of the country is to be illustrated by a line of tiles beginning with the landing of Van Riebeeck at the Cape and carrying the story right up to the present day on the Rand. Below these will be scenes, con-

nected with the history, and then will follow illustrations of South Africa and South African life. The Dutch texts will be in the middle. The charm of these remains unimpaired as the archaic lettering has been retained and they are still in High Dutch, which has the same quaint smack about it as Chaucer has to the English ear.

WORKS OF ART.

The pictures on the tiles are in blue paint and are exquisitely done. No trouble has been spared to make the work a success. Old prints, books, photographs and manuscripts have been obtained from all over the country, and pictures from them have been copied. Material for illustrations has been got at museums. How varied is the range of subjects could only be appreciated from the selection of tiles to be seen at the studio. There were pictures of Bushman paintings, Zim-babwe relics, old galleons, diamond mines, Paul Kruger, wagons on trek, Dingaon and a host of other scenes and personalities of no less interest. But the illustrations are not all copies. Many of the scenes of life in South Africa are original drawings, notably a whole album which Miss Audrey Frank did when on a special visit to Durban.

But the painting of 4,500 tiles does

not exhaust the capacity of these energetic people. Mr. Gordon Leith is carrying out a similar scheme of decoration for the walls of the bar and lounge bar, and for this some 3,000 tiles are needed. These however, are not going to be painted with South African scenes; they will form brilliantly coloured geometric patterns after the fashion of the walls of the Alhambra, the Sultan's palace in Granada, Spain. It is a striking example of the thoroughness with which the work at the studio is being done, that Miss Short went specially to Spain to study the designs. At present experiments are being carried out to secure brilliant colours.

A SIMPLE PROCESS.

Many fascinating minutes could be spent watching the girls at work. They sit painting at benches surrounded by a medley of pots and vases of many beautiful shapes in all stages of manufacture, scattered among which are plaques of various designs—for this studio, as all studios should be, is untidy. The process is quite simple. The tile after being pressed, baked and dipped in an opaque glaze is handed to a girl who punctures the picture from a sheet of tracing paper on to its surface. This bare outline serves as a guide for the painting, which takes from ten minutes to an hour to do. Oxide of cobalt which is black when put on, is then applied with a delicate camel hair brush. The tile is now ready to be sprayed with transparent glaze powder. When this has been done it is sent to the ovens and comes out a beautiful glazed tile. There it is. Seven thousand tiles to be painted by eight girls in two or three months. "We dream tiles," said Miss Short.



SOUTH AFRICAN HISTORY AND LIFE.

Some of the seven thousand tiles illustrating South African history and life which are being painted at Olifantsfontein for the restaurant which will be erected in the new station. The Dutch words are part of the texts which will compose the middle row of tiles.



ARCHITECT ENGAGED IN DECORATIVE WORK AT N.W. STATION.

Mr. Gerard Moerdyk (on the right) is at the moment superintending the decoration of the tearoom at the new station with tiles illustrating the history of South Africa and also in the erection of well-known mottoes on tiles. "Before you trust a friend you should eat with him a bag of salt" is the motto upon which Mr. Moerdyk and his assistants are engaged. The decorative work in the "Koffiehuys" promises to be unique.