

'Tile Bead' Beading

Diane Fitzgerald

Making tile bead mats (and other items) was a popular hobby in the 1930's and 1940's for both children and adults and provided a pleasant pastime which resulted in a decorative item to brighten a table. The beads, which were inexpensive and came in many colours (Fig 11), were tubular with large holes and measured about 5-6mm (3/8") long and the same diameter (a similar size to today's plastic 'Hama' beads which children place in a form and iron to make them adhere to each other).

Peyote stitch and sometimes brick stitch were easy to learn techniques that were used to make the mats. Depending on the size, one could complete a mat in an evening or two. The tile mats were often 12-15cm (5-6") in diameter, but larger ones up to 30cm (12") in diameter were also made. The beads were occasionally used for jewellery (Fig 2) or baskets. (Fig 1).

My first tile mat was included in a box of miscellaneous beads my mother found at a flea market and it was broken into several pieces. I could see it was a star shape (like Fig 10) and tried to put it back together, but some beads were missing. So I put it away and didn't think too much about it until I found another one and a collection was born. You know the routine - buy one of something and it's an oddity, buy two and you're on your way to a collection! →

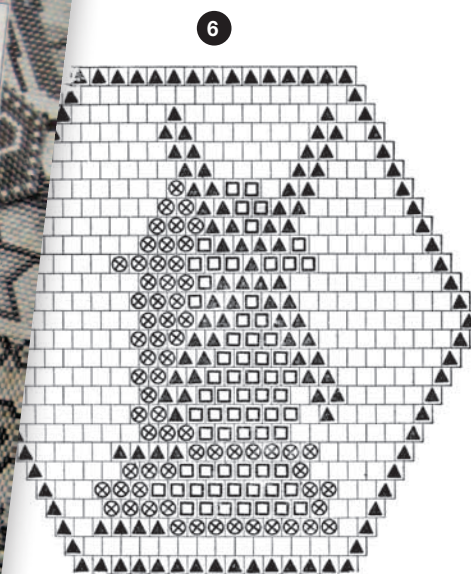
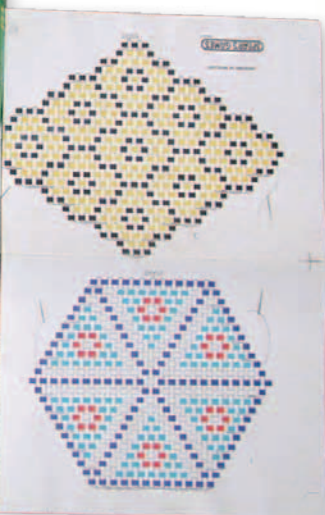
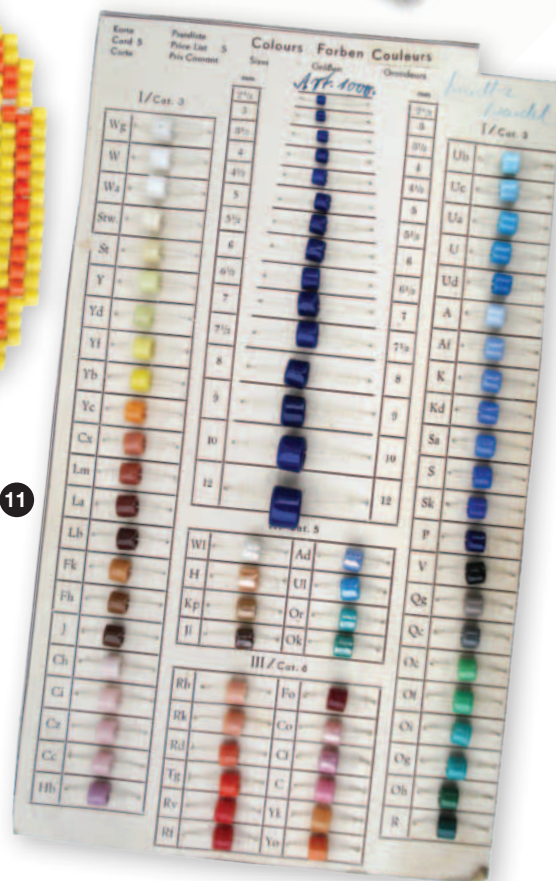
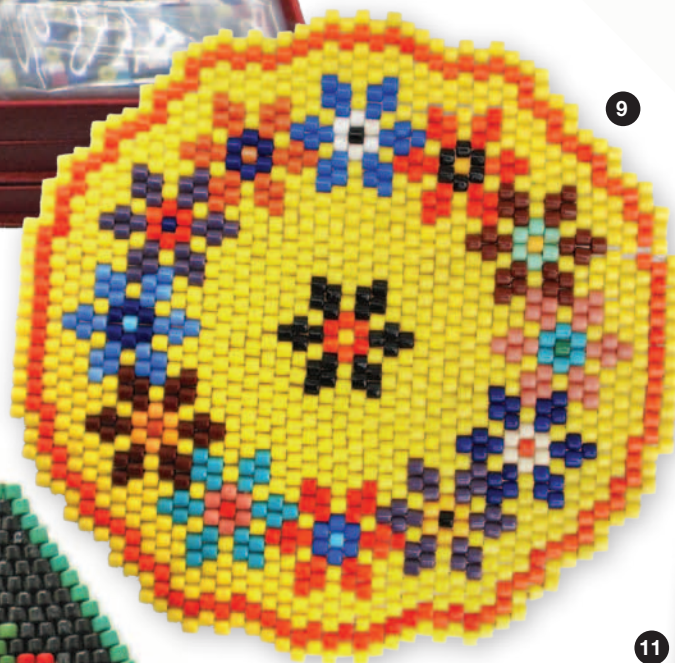


Fig 5 Walco tile bead sample card with 22 opaque colours, each with a symbol representing that colour.

Fig 6 A black and white pattern from the Tile Craft pattern book for a blue and white 'delft-look' windmill, using the symbols displayed in Fig 5.



Figs 7-10 A selection of tile bead mats in the author's (7, 8 & 10) and Carole Morris' (9) collections.

Fig 11 A sample card of cylindrical tile beads showing a range of 15 different sizes from 2.5-12mm and available in 64 different colours. The card is marked with a written maker's name in the top right hand corner - probably Schmidt & Brandel. (Carole Morris' Collection)

Fig 1 Black and white basket

Fig 2 Double strand choker length necklace using 'tile beads'.

Fig 3 Walco 3-drawer cabinet with Tile-Craft Kit No. 1200 in the top level.

Fig 4 A Glass Bead Craft kit made by Spears Games in England for R Altman & Co, New York.

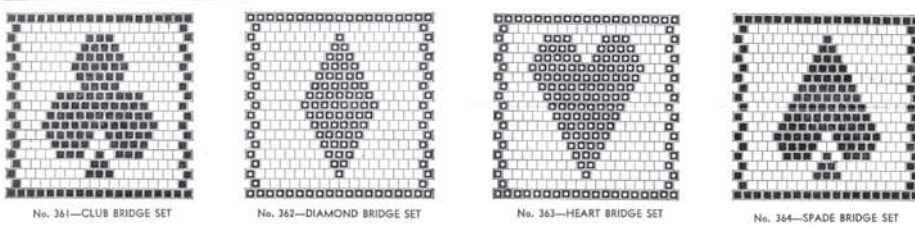


Fig 12 Patterns for a set of four coasters called 'The Bridge Set' with a diamond, heart, club or spade on each for use under cocktail or water glasses Fig 13 (below) Tile Craft Price List for the Walco Bead Company (form 1148-2) showing that 1000 tile beads of one colour cost \$1.50, while 100 cost \$0.20. Complete outfits (or kits with beads and pattern) could be bought for 30 patterns ranging from \$0.60 for the Duck to \$2.80 for the Tulips in Bloom!

→ I soon found that tile bead mat kits were one of many colourful beadwork kits offered by the Walco Company which is familiar to many beaders for their Indian Bead Loom Kits.

The Walco Company, also known as the Walbead Company, Walcraft Company and later as the Walco Toy Company, made three variations of the Tile-Craft Kit for making mats

- No. 1210 kit was a single boxed set.
- No. 1211 was a little more elaborate and had two levels and thus more beads
- The most exciting kit had three drawers, each with a separate bead kit (Fig 3): a *Tile-Craft Kit* (No. 1200) in the top level, a *Bead Jewelry and Marionettes Outfit* (No. 1800) in the middle level and No. 2900, the *Snowflake Jewelry Outfit* in the bottom drawer. Imagine getting that for Christmas!

Today, one can occasionally find the tile bead mats at antique shows, flea markets or on Ebay reasonably priced from approximately \$5 to \$10 (£4-6) but up to \$25 (c. £16) or more for a very large mat at least 12 inches in diameter (Figs 7-10). Sometimes, entire intact kits can be found as well which contain all the supplies and instructions for making a tile bead mat (Fig 4).

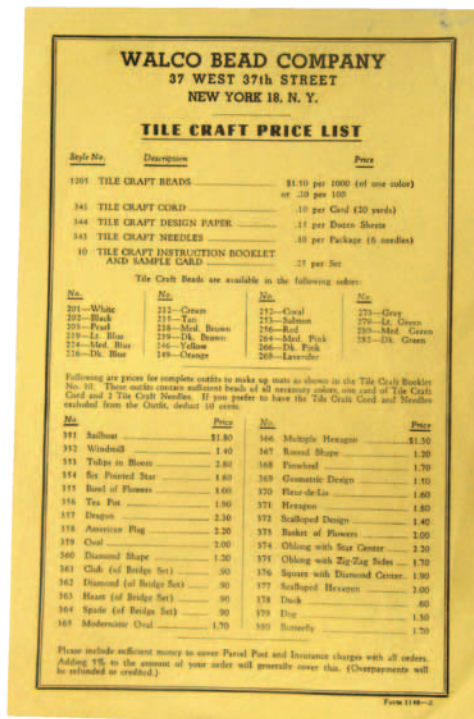
Extra supplies were offered by mail order, such as design paper, coloured pencils, needles, pincers and cord (Fig 13). Perhaps the most interesting accessory available was the *'Tile Craft Design Board'*, a 9" x 12" (23cm x 30cm) board with notches in which beads could be laid out to aid in designing or doing the actual beading.

Some 30 designs for different mats were offered in the kit booklet and included a floral basket, windmill, sailboat, teapot, dragon, flag, several geometric designs and a set of four coasters called *'The Bridge Set'* with a diamond, heart, club or spade on each for use under cocktail or water glasses (Fig 12). The booklet suggests that these would make 'an excellent bridge prize'. Most mat designs were hexagonal or square shaped, but some, like the *Six-Pointed Star*, had more complex shapes and some had intricate floral borders.

Sample cards of tile beads sold by the Walco Company show a nice range of some 22 opaque colors, including one golden orange color with a Ceylon finish to give extra shine (Fig 5). A German sample card from a company in Bayreuth, Alemania, however, offered 64 opaque colours and fifteen sizes of tile beads (Fig 11).

The beads themselves have an interesting history and can give us a glimpse into the competitiveness of the bead industry.

Before zips, buttons were the primary closure used on clothing and there was a ready market for cheap buttons for underwear and everyday clothing. In 1840 Richard Prosser was granted a patent to make knobs, rings and other articles including beads and buttons, out of clay and feldspar ground together, moulded and



fired. The patent was bought by Minton & Chamberlain in the UK who used it to make buttons (Kaspers 2011, 34).

It is difficult to classify the beads made by this process as either glass or porcelain because their makeup has components of both, but they are generally considered as glass beads.

A similar process for making buttons was patented in France in 1844 by Jean Felix Bapterosse and was applied to beads by 1860 as well (Ibid). These beads go by several names – in the USA they are known as tile beads, but in Europe they are often referred to as agate beads, Oriental beads, Bapterosse beads, Prosser beads or porcelain beads.

The cheap buttons and beads made with this process flooded the European and American markets and dealt a cruel blow to the manufacturers in Bohemia who up until then had been the major suppliers. But Bohemian beadmakers were not left

behind and by 1884, the Redhammer brothers, prominent Bohemian glass manufacturers, had developed their own formula and were successfully producing similar beads. These beads sold well because they could be produced more cheaply than even pressed glass beads which required the additional step of tumbling to smooth the edges.

Tile beads were produced in the Czech Republic until 1993 when Preciosa, the last European producer of 'Prosser' beads stopped making them due to increased energy costs and decreased demand (Kaspers 2011, 35). Stocks of cylindrical 'tile beads' are still available (see 'Sources' below).

Earlier, tubular beads similar in size to tile beads were already being used to make baskets, mats, wall holders and lamp trims throughout the 1800's. These beads were made by the drawn method in which a bubble of air is blown into a glob of molten glass which is then drawn into a long tube. The tube is cut into short lengths, usually about 5-6mm (3/8") but sometimes longer for lampshade fringes. To colour the glass, the inside of the tube could be painted, or the glass itself could be coloured. These beads had the disadvantage of having sharp edges, however, and were somewhat irregular compared to the tile beads, yet many beautiful items were made from them.

Today, tile beads can occasionally be found in bead stores with old stock and mats can make an interesting collection. Hung on a kitchen wall, they offer a colourful and interesting glimpse into a bygone beadwork era.

Bibliography & References

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- Kaspers, F. 2011 *Beads from Briare. The Story of a Bead Revolution from France* (Marblings Publishing, Blurb.com) ISBN 9789491311000
- Morris, C. A. (with Wells, M.) 2002 'Bead Tile Mats' *Newsletter of the Bead Society of Gt Britain* 66, 9-10.
- Sprague, R. 1983 'Tile Bead Manufacturing' in *Proceedings of the 1982 Glass Trade Bead Conference Research Records No. 16*, 167-172 (Research Division, Rochester Museum & Science Center, Rochester, New York)
- Sprague, R. 1985 'Glass Trade Beads: A Progress Report' *Historical Archaeology* Vol. 19, No. 2.

Sources for tile beads:

- Eagle Feather Trading Post, 168 W. 12th St., Ogden, UT 84404; + (801) 393-3991 or EglCrafts@aol.com
- Harman Importing Co. 95 Bi-County Blvd., Farmingdale, NY 11735-3919 Tel: +(516) 756-9800 NY; fax: +(516) 756-9845

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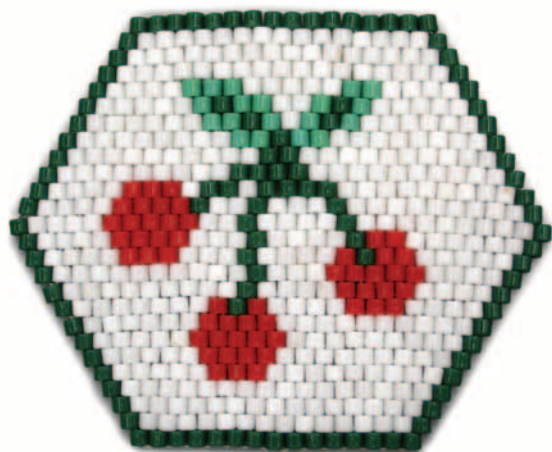
(We have had two small articles on tile beads before – Morris 2002 & Fitzgerald 2003 – but these were up to 10 years ago and we have had many new members since then, so Diane's new article and patterns here are very welcome additions to this not-quite-lost bead art – Ed)

Pattern Projects

Diane Fitzgerald

Make your own tile bead mats with cherry and tumbling blocks design following the brick stitch patterns below based on original old tile mats.

Cherries in the snow



Materials: Cherry Pattern

- 54 red tile beads (R)
- 378 white tile beads (W)
- 19 medium green tile beads (M)
- 108 green tile beads (G)
- Conso #18 cord or FF bead cord, or other heavy thread or string.
- Scissors
- Size 22 tapestry needle

Method

The pattern is worked from the top downward.

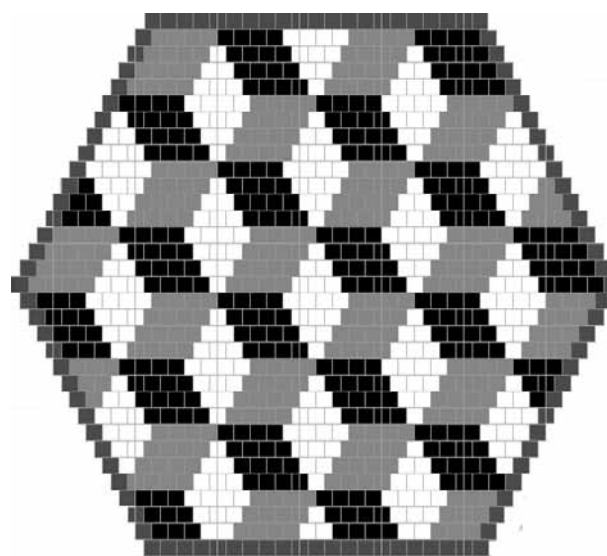
Increase at the beginning and end of Rows 2–13:

Row 1:	16G
Row 2:	1G, 15W, 1G
Row 3:	1G, 16W, 1G
Row 4:	1G, 17W, 1G
Row 5:	1G, 4W, 3M, 5W, 2M, 4W, 1G
Row 6:	1G, 5W, 1M, 1G, 2M, 2W, 1M, 1G, 1M, 5W, 1G
Row 7:	1G, 6W, 2M, 1G, 1M, 1W, 1M, 1G, 1M, 6W, 1G
Row 8:	1G, 8W, 2M, 1G, 1M, 8W, 1G
Row 9:	1G, 10W, 2M, 10W, 1G
Row 10:	1G, 9W, 4G, 10W, 1G
Row 11:	1G, 4W, 3R, 1W, 2G, 1W, 4G, 9W, 1G
Row 12:	1G, 4W, 4R, 1G, 2W, 1G, 3W, 1G, 9W, 1G
Row 13:	1G, 5R, 2W, 1G, 4W, 1G, 9W, 1G

Decrease at beginning and end of Rows 14–26:

Row 14:	1G, 4W, 4R, 3W, 1G, 4W, 1G, 2R, 6W, 1G
Row 15:	1G, 4W, 3R, 3W, 1G, 4W, 1R, 1G, 2R, 5W, 1G
Row 16:	1G, 10W, 1G, 3W, 5R, 4W, 1G
Row 17:	1G, 9W, 1G, 4W, 4R, 4W, 1G
Row 18:	1G, 7W, 1R, 1G, 1R, 4W, 3R, 4W, 1G
Row 19:	1G, 6W, 4R, 10W, 1G
Row 20:	1G, 5W, 5R, 9W, 1G
Row 21:	1G, 5W, 4R, 9W, 1G
Row 22:	1G, 5W, 3R, 9W, 1G
Row 23:	1G, 16W, 1G
Row 24:	1G, 15W, 1G
Row 25:	1G, 14W, 1G
Row 26:	15G

Tumbling blocks



Materials: Tumbling Blocks Pattern

- 104 tile beads (A)
- 285 tile beads (D)
- 275 tile beads (L)
- 285 tile beads (M)
- Threads, scissors and needles as above

Method

The pattern is worked from the top downward.

Increase at the beginning and end of Rows 2–17:

Row 1:	21A
Row 2:	1A, 4D, 4M, 4L, 4D, 4M, 1A
Row 3:	1A, 4D, 1L, 4M, 3L, 4D, 1L, 4M, 1A
Row 4:	1A, 4D, 2L, 4M, 2L, 4D, 2L, 4M, 1A
Row 5:	1A, 4D, 3L, 4M, 1L, 4D, 3L, 4M, 1A
Row 6:	1A, 4M, 4L, 4D, 4M, 4L, 4D, 1A
Row 7:	1A, 1L, 4M, 3L, 4D, 1L, 4M, 3L, 4D, 1L, 1A
Row 8:	1A, 2L, 4M, 2L, 4D, 2L, 4M, 2L, 4D, 2L, 1A
Row 9:	1A, 3L, 4M, 1L, 4D, 3L, 4M, 1L, 4D, 3L, 1A
Row 10:	1A, 4L, 4D, 4M, 4L, 4D, 4M, 4L, 1A
Row 11:	1A, 1M, 3L, 4D, 1L, 4M, 3L, 4D, 1L, 4M, 3L, 1D, 1A
Row 12:	1A, 2M, 2L, 4D, 2L, 4M, 2L, 4D, 2L, 4M, 2L, 2D, 1A
Row 13:	1A, 3M, 1L, 4D, 3L, 4M, 1L, 4D, 3L, 4M, 1L, 3D, 1A
Row 14:	1A, 4D, 4M, 4L, 4D, 4M, 4L, 4D, 4M, 1A
Row 15:	1A, 4D, 1L, 4M, 3L, 4D, 1L, 4M, 3L, 4D, 1L, 4M, 1A
Row 16:	1A, 4D, 2L, 4M, 2L, 4D, 2L, 4M, 2L, 4D, 2L, 4M, 1A
Row 17:	1A, 4D, 3L, 4M, 1L, 4D, 3L, 4M, 1L, 4D, 3L, 4M, 1A

Decrease at beginning and end of Rows 14–26:

Row 18:	1A, 3M, 4L, 4D, 4M, 4L, 4D, 4M, 4L, 3D, 1A
Row 19:	1A, 3M, 3L, 4D, 1L, 4M, 3L, 4D, 1L, 4M, 3L, 3D, 1A
Row 20:	1A, 3M, 2L, 4D, 2L, 4M, 2L, 4D, 2L, 4M, 2L, 3D, 1A
Row 21:	1A, 3M, 1L, 4D, 3L, 4M, 1L, 4D, 3L, 4M, 1L, 3D, 1A
Row 22:	1A, 3D, 4M, 4L, 4D, 4M, 4L, 4D, 3M, 1A
Row 23:	1A, 2D, 1L, 4M, 3L, 4D, 1L, 4M, 3L, 4D, 1L, 2M, 1A
Row 24:	1A, 1D, 2L, 4M, 2L, 4D, 2L, 4M, 2L, 4D, 2L, 1M, 1A
Row 25:	1A, 3L, 4M, 1L, 4D, 3L, 4M, 1L, 4D, 3L, 1A
Row 26:	1A, 3L, 4D, 4M, 4L, 4D, 4M, 3L, 1A
Row 27:	1A, 2L, 4D, 1L, 4M, 3L, 4D, 1L, 4M, 2L, 1A
Row 28:	1A, 1L, 4D, 2L, 4M, 2L, 4D, 4M, 1L, 1A
Row 29:	1A, 4D, 3L, 4M, 1L, 4D, 3L, 4M, 1A
Row 30:	1A, 3M, 4L, 4D, 4M, 4L, 3D, 1A
Row 31:	1A, 3M, 3L, 4D, 1L, 4M, 3L, 3D, 1A
Row 32:	1A, 3M, 2L, 4D, 2L, 4M, 2L, 3D, 1A
Row 33:	21A