



**GEE & COMPANY, LIMITED,
GLOUCESTER.**

Slate and Marble Manufacturers.

IT may not be generally known even to those most familiar with Gloucester's industrial life that in this city originated the art of enamelling slate, to give it the appearance of marble, granite or wood. The idea of substituting slate for marble in many of the uses for which the latter had been considered the only suitable material has resulted in a very important local industry, giving employment to a considerable number of hands, and adding not a little to the city's prestige as a manufacturing centre. The work of enamelling slate has spread to other localities, although no outside concern has as yet been able to turn out work of the high quality which has always been, and still is, characteristic of that produced in Gloucester. It should be added, in this connection, as an evidence of the skill to which the Gloucester workmen have attained in this art, that when manufacturers elsewhere are in need of skilled and experienced hands they advertise for them in our local papers.

The oldest existing firm of slate enamellers in Gloucester, and one of the leading in the kingdom, is that of Gee and Company, Limited, to whose successful history it is a pleasure to refer. The Company were established in 1868, beginning operations on a small scale, and occupying premises which would be wholly inadequate to the present volume of business. In 1878 the present premises were purchased, and several modern buildings erected, the Company installing the machinery and moving into the new quarters the following year.

The Company have the advantage of one of the best manufacturing sites in the city, occupying an ample piece of ground at the junction of the Bristol and Stroud roads, opposite the Gloucester Railway Carriage and Wagon Works, within easy access to the canal and railway siding, and on two sides facing the electric tram lines. As an illustration of the changes that industry has wrought in Gloucester even in the memory of the living, it may be stated that but a generation ago the premises of Gee and Company, Limited, were part of a purely residential district, the Company's present offices having been for many years the home of one of our most widely known and highly respected magistrates.

Gee and Company, Limited, occupy a triangular space aggregating nearly 3,000 square yards, a large proportion being under roof. The buildings, which were specially designed for the purpose to which they are put, are modern and substantial, and are particularly well-lighted and well-arranged. The large showroom is particularly noteworthy by reason of its admirable lighting and heating arrangements, and is undoubtedly one of the finest show rooms in the city. The various apartments are heated throughout with hot water pipes, and are provided with cranes and chutes for conveniently receiving and shipping the rough slate and the finished product. The excellent arrangement of the buildings not only facilitates production and minimises labour in every stage of the work, but also adds to the comfort, and consequent efficiency, of the operative.

The mechanical equipment is in keeping with the buildings in which it is housed. It comprises a number of heavy machines for sawing, planing, drilling, and sanding the slabs, the machinery being driven by steam. The equipment also includes several large ovens and enamelling rooms, and, in fact, every appliance which could add to the uniformly high quality of the product or lessen its cost.

Much of the slate used by the Company is obtained from the Welsh quarries, although a

considerable quantity required for special purposes is imported from abroad. For the benefit of those whose knowledge of enamelled slate is limited to the finished product, and who imagine that its manipulation is an easy matter, it should be stated that no impression could be more erroneous. In the course of transformation from rough slabs or blocks to artistically-designed and very highly-finished chimney-pieces, or other articles of use or ornament, the slate is operated on by a number of workmen, and undergoes many processes, some of the latter requiring peculiar technical skill.

To the ordinary visitor to Gee and Company's works probably one of the most interesting sights is the process of colouring the slate to give it the appearance of marble, granite or wood it is designed to imitate. In some cases, particularly in the cheaper grades, the manner of colouring it is ingeniously simple. The desired colours are floated on water in a large receptacle, and are intermingled in such a way as to produce the desired combination of colours. The slab of slate, the surface of which has already been prepared, is then gently placed on the surface of the water, and when removed it is found that the colours have adhered to it, forming a delicate tracing without the touch of the brush.

In most cases, however, (particularly when it is desired to exactly imitate the colouring and grain of wood or marble,) the colours must be applied with special tools, the work requiring great skill and nicety. The richest marbles and woods are so exactly imitated that even the closest inspection would fail to show the real character of the work were it not known. Not only are the finished pieces the exact counterpart of marble or wood in the tracing, but they are given the effect of the peculiar translucence of the former, and the soft, rich texture of the latter.

As has been intimated, the Company's product has always been distinguished by its peculiar excellence. They have the credit of having gained the greatest number of medals and awards that has ever been given to any one manufacturer or firm in the trade. Their designs, which are constantly being added to to meet the requirements of changing styles and tastes, range from the simplest to the most ornate and expensive, and may be literally numbered by the hundred.

The introduction of enamelled slate chimney-pieces has done not a little to add to the beauty of many houses by giving them the appearance

of having been expensively furnished, yet without entailing great cost. Messrs. Gee and Company, Limited, manufacture complete, and quite attractive, chimney-pieces at a small cost, these being principally designed for cottages. On the other hand, many of the more elaborate chimney-pieces are costly, though this is never anything like so great as would be required to obtain the same effect from the actual marble or wood.

It should be added here that it is a mistake to suppose that because enamelled slate is an imitation, it is therefore of no more value than most imitations. This is one of the few instances in which the copy is nearly as good, and from many points of view quite as good, as the real thing. Before the general introduction of enamelled slate, chimney-pieces were usually made of marble or stone, which is far from ornamental if left plain, and, if carved, becomes so expensive as to be beyond the reach of the man of ordinary means. Moreover, marble is far from perfection; it is easily discoloured by smoke, and, owing to its chemically porous nature, is peculiarly susceptible to atmospheric influences, dingy yellow spots frequently appearing upon it, particularly on the Parian and other white marbles. Enamelled slate is free from these disadvantages. If properly executed, the enamel is nearly as hard and durable as adamant; neither dampness nor dryness affects it; and its brilliant surface may be maintained by ordinary polishing.

For many years Messrs. Gee and Company have done a very extensive business in other branches of stone work, having been particularly successful in their marble entablatures, facias, and other kinds of ecclesiastical and mural decorations. They have also made a special feature of designing and manufacturing baths, lavatories, cisterns, larder shelving, and general sanitary appliances, and, in fact, nearly all the articles fashioned from marble or slate. It is interesting to know that their work has gained a national recognition, and that there are but few important places in the kingdom that have not made some demand upon this Gloucester manufactory. Frequent shipments have also been made to the Colonies and elsewhere.

It is but just to add that the members of the Firm are now, as they have always been, held in high regard for their personal as well as business traits. Visitors to the City will find the pleasure of their stay greatly enhanced by an inspection of the works, where they will receive every courtesy and attention.



View of Messrs. Gee & Co.'s extensive premises from Bristol Road, Gloucester.