

PROLIFERATION

**New products**

It was now common for twenty-colour surface-printing machines to be in operation. A writer in the *Journal of Decorative Art* commented in 1883: 'To see a piece of paper go in at one end of a machine plain, and come out on the other side printed in twenty colours, all complete, is a very wonderful sight.' But the papers produced in this way were, like the hand-prints, printed in distemper, which was not washable – something of a disadvantage in an age when atmospheric pollution created in the home by oil lamps, gasoliers and coal fires was considerable, and was compounded by the dirt and grime which seeped into the house from the industrialized world outside.

Manufacturers had been trying to produce a washable wallpaper since at least mid-century. At the 1851 Exhibition W. B. Simpson displayed examples printed in distemper which had been hardened in some way afterwards, but it wasn't until 1853, when John Stather's oil-printed patterns appeared, that washable wallpapers were recognized as a commercially viable proposition. Even so, the process took some time to develop: in 1873 it was still worth while for *The Practical Magazine* to publish a laborious 'improved' recipe for the water-proofing of traditionally printed wallpaper. But also in the early 1870s Heywood, Higginbottom & Smith produced a monochrome washable paper printed in oil colour from copper rollers, and English 'sanitary' wallpapers were launched. Further experimentation culminated in the issue by several firms, notably Lightbown Aspinall, of polychrome 'sanitaries' in 1884 – appropriately, the year of the International Health Exhibition. According to the founder of Walker & Carver (also of Pendleton), a pioneer of their development, the new papers 'at once hit the public taste.'<sup>9</sup>

The main advantage of the oil-printed papers was the resistance of the colours to water, which was enhanced greatly if they were coated with size and varnished. The majority were also strikingly different in appearance. Until now, shaded effects and blended colours could only be obtained by hand techniques, usually stencilling. The 'sanitary' production process enabled, for the first time, the machine-printing of shaded effects in the same tone from a single roller. Thus a smaller number of engraved rollers could produce at low cost multi-colour patterns featuring soft, subtly blended effects and fine lines eminently suitable for realistic designs and pictorial patterns. Not only had the industry produced, at long last, a washable wallpaper, but its patterns could be produced so cheaply that almost anyone could afford to buy them.

The success of 'sanitaries' encouraged the production of a great variety of designs. By 1896 the 'set' produced by Potters alone included more than 650 borders and friezes,<sup>10</sup> and as some cost only a little more than the cheapest surface-printed papers, it was suggested that they be used in the homes of the working classes. The better qualities were also advocated for hallways, kitchens, etc., in middle-class dwellings, and many have survived to this day in the bath-

rooms of late Victorian and Edwardian houses. By the 1890s many of the major manufacturers had followed the lead of the Lancashire firms, and the genre  
231 remained a major part of the industry's output until well into the 20th century.

'Sanitary' wallpapers were rarely admired by commentators on design matters. Nevertheless, as the *Journal of Decorative Art* asserted in 1884, 'in these days of International Health Exhibitions' no popular support would be given to an invention which could not claim to be 'sanitary'. Thus, despite its association with products considered by some to be downmarket and lacking in artistic merit, the word was rapidly taken up as a term of commendation by manufacturers of other new wallcoverings which bore little or no relation, visually or in composition, to the myriad washable wallpapers which proudly bore this appellation on their selvedges. Among these were Lincrusta and Anaglypta, two of the most famous late Victorian wallcoverings, which are still available, virtually unchanged, more than a century later; indeed, many examples sold in the 1880s and 1890s are still giving good service in Europe and elsewhere.

Lincrusta-Walton, developed in 1877, was the brainchild of Frederick Walton, inventor of linoleum, and its composition was similar, comprising largely a mixture of oxidized linseed oil, gum, resins, and wood-pulp spread onto a canvas backing. But visually it was very different, having a relief pattern machine-embossed on the surface by engraved iron or steel rollers. It was immediately successful, not least because although not a 'sanitary' paper, it was considered unrivalled in terms of its hygienic properties. Lincrusta was completely waterproof; someone established that it could even be cleaned with

211 Wallpaper pattern book showing a 'sanitary' dado, filling and frieze manufactured by Lightbown Aspinall, c. 1892. This elaborate tripartite decoration (available in three different colourways) cost 2s. 6d.–3s. 3d. per roll for the dado and 1s. 6d.–2s. for the filling. The dado comprises a dense patchwork of unrelated motifs (like most machine-printed dados of the period), and is combined with a much lighter filling of trailing poppies and leaves. The fine lines and shaded tones made possible by the 'sanitary' process give these decorations a radically different appearance from that of their hand- or machine-produced distemper-printed counterparts.

