

NEW DISCOVERIES OF PENN TILES

PAULINE AND STANLEY CAUVAIN

Two collections of Penn tiles are described. Tiles from graves at Penn church, and one tile from the other collection, may be from the earlier phases of Penn tile production.

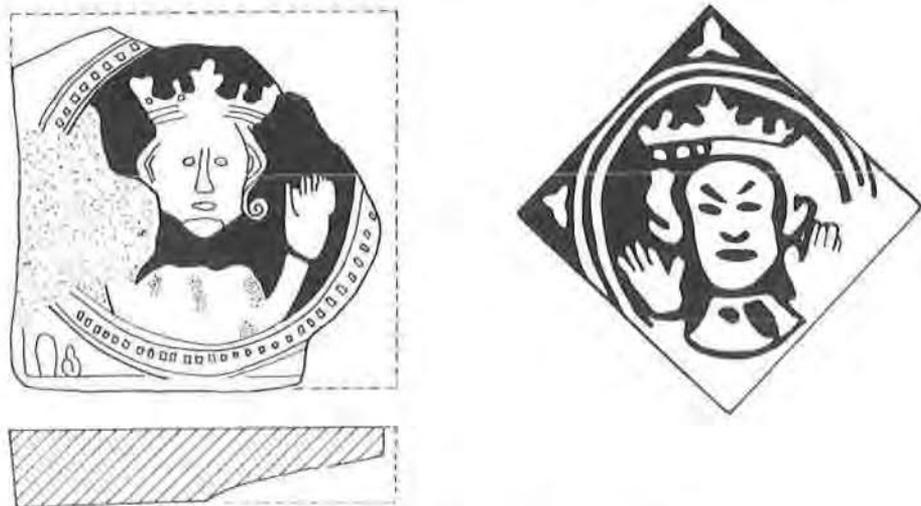


Figure 1: *Left:* Unrecorded design from Beacon Hill. *Right:* Hohler P18

Introduction

The production of decorated floortiles at Penn, Buckinghamshire, in the fourteenth century was studied by Hohler (1941, 1942) using collections of material found locally and in churches of the surrounding areas. Subsequently collections of Penn tiles in the British Museum were studied and published by Eames (1980). Other examples have been reported from chance finds during local developments (Rouse and Broadbent 1952, Broadbent 1981). More recently fieldwork has provided evidence for the location of kiln sites (Cauvain et al 1989, Hutchings and Farley 1989) and chemical analysis has been used to characterize the ceramic fabrics (Cauvain 1990).

During the course of continuing investigations of ceramic production in the Penn and Tylers Green area, two further collections of material have come to light which extend our knowledge of the Penn tile industry. Since the two collections were found in very different circumstances they are described separately in the following study but their importance to our understanding of the industry is jointly discussed.

a) Beacon Hill, Penn

Over a number of years Mr & Mrs Lamont have collected fragments of glazed floortiles from the garden of their cottage in Beacon Hill, Penn (SU 909933). Their collection to-

talled 152 fragments of decorated floortile which, with one exception, were of the type commonly associated with the local floortile industry.

The collection was recorded using the format recommended by Stopford (1990). Only two tiles were complete enough to measure dimensions of both sides; one example of an Eames 2864 measuring 110 × 110mm and the other, an Eames 2199/Hohler P71, measuring 112 × 110mm. It was possible to record a single side dimension for another 11 fragments; the mean value of the group was 110mm ($\sigma = 3.3\text{mm}$). A total of 110 fragments had measurable thicknesses and they ranged from 16 to 28mm, with a mean value of 24mm ($\sigma = 2.2\text{mm}$). The angle of the bevel of the tile bases averaged about 7 degrees, with some slightly less and others slightly more than that value. Most of the tiles (85% of the collection) had a red oxidised surface colour, often associated with a dark grey/black reduced core (48% of the collection). All those tiles which retained their base surfaces showed that a dusting of sand had been applied during manufacture. The tile fabric was moderately hard; the most common inclusions were small quartz grains, all less than 1.0mm in size with inclusion levels ranged from 10 to 30%. Other occasional inclusions were small pieces of ironstone and burnt flint, the latter sometimes as large as 6mm. Some tiles showed impressions of organic material within the fabric. Flaking of the tiles was common because the clay had been poorly worked before packing into the mould during manufacture.

Forty-eight of the tiles were complete enough to allow identification of the pattern. One unrecorded new design was noted (Fig. 1) but it is possible that there were three others; unfortunately these were too fragmentary to reconstruct the full pattern and so may only have been slight variations of known designs.

The list of identified patterns and their frequency of occurrence in the collection are as follows:

<i>Hohler</i>	<i>Eames</i>	<i>Number of examples</i>
—	2864	1
P71	2199	2
P50	2226	2
—	2836	1
P101	2377	6
P69	2337	2
P66	—	2
P85	2552	2
—	1845	2
P88	2535	2
P58	2353	3
P34	1804	1
P49	2229	1
P88	2538	6
—	2030	1
—	2836	2
P143	—	1
P54	2231	1
—	1360	1
P156	—	1
—	2338	2
P62	2395	1
possible P88	2537/8	1

There are slight differences between the drawings for Hohler P88 and Eames 2537/8. Since it is not certain whether these are due to real differences in design or to differences in illustrative techniques the attribution for the last of the listed tiles remains uncertain.

The one unrecorded new design is illustrated in Figure 1. Its nearest comparison is Eames 1357/Hohler P18, though these tiles are much smaller and the head so placed as to allow for laying such tiles in diamond patterns. The full thickness of the illustrated tile is 33mm and it measures more than 150mm across. The fabric is moderately hard and similar to others in this collection. The clay has an oxidised pink/red colour throughout. The pattern is impressed onto the surface, to a depth in places approaching 2mm. A white slip filled the pattern and in places spread onto the surrounding tile surface. There was some evidence for a pale yellow, almost clear glaze. The lower surface of the tile was covered with a dusting of sand during manufacture. There was no evidence for stabbing holes or keying scoops.

b) Penn church

The second collection of tiles was found in quite different circumstances. The finds were made in 1967 when two graves were disturbed during the digging of drains on the north side of Penn parish church (Eames 1980). The graves were lined with plain and decorated tiles; the latter were recognised by the vicar at the time, the Reverend Oscar Muspratt, as being commonly associated with the Penn tile industry. He arranged for the removal of nineteen tiles and sent them to the British Museum for identification.

Two of the tiles from this collection, one hexagonal and the other round, decorated using a line impressed technique, have been described in detail by Eames (1980, 89) but never illustrated. These tiles will be the subject of a separate publication (Nenk pers. comm). The remaining seventeen tiles, which are diverse in character, are described below.

Plain tiles

In the following catalogue < signifies less than and > greater than a given value. The dimensions of the tiles are recorded as width × length × thickness. The fabrics are red oxidised, hard with small quartz grain inclusions, and a layer of sand was applied to the lower surface during manufacture. Individual variations to the fabric are noted as appropriate.

1. Unglazed, 211 × 211 × 31mm. Angle of bevel > 7 degrees. A series of individual stabbing holes on the base starting about 30mm from the edges and arranged in roughly parallel lines across the tile.
2. Green glazed, 132 × > 140 × 28mm. Angle of bevel > 7 degrees. Smooth bottom surface. A series of individual stabbing holes on the base about 20mm from the edges and arranged in roughly parallel lines along the length of the tile.
3. Green glazed, 133 × > 140 × 28mm. Angle of bevel > 7 degrees. Smooth bottom surface. A series of individual stabbing holes on the base about 20mm from the edges and arranged in roughly parallel lines along the length of the tile.
4. Green glazed, 130 × > 140 × 24mm. Angle of bevel < 7 degrees. Smooth bottom surface.
5. Green glazed, 112 × 111 × 23mm. Angle of bevel < 7 degrees.
6. Green glazed, 109 × 108 × 24mm. Upper surface scored to create two triangular tiles. Angle of bevel < 7 degrees.
7. Yellow glazed, triangular, long side 150mm, short sides 115mm, 21mm thick.
8. Yellow glazed, 57 × 55 × 24mm. Manufactured from scored larger tile. Angle of bevel > 7 degrees.
9. Yellow glazed, 55 × 55 × 7mm. Manufactured from scored larger tile. Angle of bevel > 7 degrees.
10. Eames 2037, 118 × 7 × 7mm. White slip applied but not glazed before firing. Angle of bevel < 7 degrees.
11. Eames 2037, 112 × 112 × 22mm. Brown glaze on body, yellow glaze over white slip. Angle of bevel < 7 degrees.
12. Hohler P42, 117 × 7 × 7mm. Green glaze on body, yellow glaze over white slip. Angle of bevel > 7 degrees.
13. Hohler P60a, 111 × 110 × 21mm. Brown glaze on body, yellow glaze over white slip. Angle of bevel < 7 degrees.
14. Hohler P71/Eames 2199, 112 × 111 × 26mm. Brown glaze on body, yellow glaze over white slip. Angle of bevel < 7 degrees.
15. Hohler P123, 112 × 110 × 22mm. Brown glaze on body, yellow glaze over white slip. Angle of bevel < 7 degrees.
16. Hohler P107/Eames 2460, 113 × 113 × 24mm. Brown glaze on body, yellow glaze over white slip. Angle of bevel > 7 degrees.
17. Hohler P64/Eames 2388, 110 × 108 × 22mm. Brown glaze on body, yellow glaze over white slip. Angle of bevel > 7 degrees.

Discussion

The historical evidence for the production of Penn tiles was comprehensively reviewed by

Eames (1980) who considered that it started a few years before the first reference to tilers at Penn in AD 1332 and continued for about 60 years thereafter. The presence of stabbing holes in the backs of some of the plain tiles from Penn church is unusual for Penn but reminiscent of Eames (1980) 'stabbed Wessex series', characterised as they are by a series of erratically stabbed holes in the base. Hohler (1941/1942) noted this tile type and illustrated many decorated forms but none were from Penn. Typical dimensions of the decorated 'stabbed Wessex series' tiles are approximately 138 × 136 × 24mm, slightly larger than typical Penn tiles but considerably smaller than the large square tile (number 1) described above. The width of the broken rectangular tiles, 132mm, is close to typical dimensions of the 'stabbed Wessex series'. It is interesting to note that several of the stabbed tiles have not had a layer of sand applied to the base showing that variations in manufacturing technique were not uncommon.

Tiles of the 'stabbed Wessex series' are believed to be derived from thirteenth century designs. Their place of manufacture is unknown at present. Eames (1980) records their range of distribution as being from Gloucestershire, through the Midlands, to Leicestershire and suggests that an itinerant band of tilers might have been involved in their production. If the stabbed tiles from Penn church are related to the 'stabbed Wessex' form, they may well then be the product of such a group of itinerant tilers. Re-examination of the tile material from Ashwells, Tylers Green (Cauvain *et al* 1989) has revealed two fragments of plain tiles with stabbing holes in the back. However, given the large area of distribution for 'stabbed Wessex' tiles and the relatively few examples recorded from Penn and Tylers Green, it is unlikely that this part of the Chilterns was the major production centre for this type of tile.

The decorated tile from Beacon Hill, at circa 150 × 150mm, is much larger than any other known example of square Penn tiles and the design on the tile appears to be unique. There are some similarities between this new find and that recorded as Eames 1357/Hohler P18. The

design on the new find has been more deeply impressed into the tile surface than is normally observed with Penn tiles, presumably by using a carefully cut block. The white clay slip appears to have been applied to this particular tile after impressing, the surplus being wiped away from the body of the tile. Visually the fabric of the tile is very similar to the others found at Beacon Hill.

There are several possible explanations for the appearance of this particular tile in the Penn/Tylers Green area. One is that it was brought to the site from an as yet unidentified local kiln; however, as there are no obvious parallels amongst tiles recorded from Penn it may come from further afield. It is possible that this decorated tile represents a different, possibly earlier, phase of tile production at Penn, or it may represent the prototype for the form which eventually becomes Eames 1357/Hohler P18. In the absence of further information we incline to the latter explanation.

On historical evidence Eames suggested three generations of tilers and considered there to be three slightly different types of Penn tiles. One of the characteristics of the first (and earlier?) type of Penn tiles pinpointed by Eames was that they were thicker than the average. Assuming the Lamont collection is an homogeneous group of contemporary material, the wide range of thicknesses recorded suggests it would be unwise to use that particular tile dimension as the sole indicator of production period.

Conclusion

The Penn tile industry is best known for the production of decorated and glazed floortiles of a standard size though it is clear that it was producing a wide range of tiles of other types. The importance of the discovery of a unique decorated tile will only be fully realised when parallel material comes to light, whether at Penn or elsewhere. On present evidence the hypothesis that this particular tile is the forerunner of later known Penn tile forms is favoured.

Acknowledgements

We wish to thank Mr and Mrs Lamont for

access to the material from their garden and Miles Green who brought it to our attention. Thanks are also due to Mrs Beverley Nenck, Curator of Medieval Antiquities, for access to the British Museum material, and for permission to publish its details.

References

- Broadbent, J. D., 1981, 'A second Penn tile kiln site', *Recs. Bucks* 23, 128-9.
- Cauvain, P. M., Cauvain, S. P. and Green, M., 1989 'Prehistoric, Romano-British and fourteenth century activity at Ashwells, Tylers Green, Bucks', *Recs. Bucks* 31, 111-119.
- Cauvain, S. P., 1990, *A study of the chemical composition of ceramic materials from Medieval kilns in South Buckinghamshire*, MSc thesis, Polytechnic of East London.
- Eames, E., 1980, Catalogue of lead glazed earthenware Medieval tiles in the Dept. of Medieval and Later Antiquities, British Museum, 2 vols, London.
- Hohler, C., 1941, 'Medieval paving tiles in Buckinghamshire', *Recs. Bucks* 14, 1-49.
- Hohler, C., 1942, 'Medieval paving tiles in Buckinghamshire', *Recs. Bucks* 14, 99-132.
- Hutchings, N. and Farley, M., 1989 'A fifteenth to sixteenth century pottery industry at Tylers Green, Penn, Bucks', *Recs. Bucks* 31, 105-110.
- Rouse, E. C. and Broadbent, J. D., 1952, 'Further discoveries of tile fragments and wasters in connexion with fourteenth-century paving-tile and roof-tile kilns at Penn', *Recs. Bucks* 15, 314-318.
- Stopford, J., 1990, 'Recording Medieval Floor Tiles', *CBA Practical Handbook* 10, Council for British Archaeology, London.