

# The Eltham Pavement

*Illustrations by Jennifer Tinker*

HUMPHREY WOODS

SINCE December 1975 the Department of the Environment has been carrying out excavations under the direction of the author within the Great Court of Eltham Palace, Kent.

A sequence of occupation has so far been traced from the seventeenth century to the twelfth, and there are indications that continued excavation will show that it extends even further back.

Of the actual structures, the earliest belong to the final years of the thirteenth century. In 1295 William de Vesci conveyed the manor of Eltham in fee to Antony Bek, Bishop of Durham and Patriarch of Jerusalem. Bek, in the words of the contemporary chronicler John of Graystones, 'curiosissime aedificavit Manerium de Eltham'.

One of the excavated structures of Bishop Bek's palace is a secular building containing an intact tiled pavement which Mrs. Elizabeth Eames of the British

Museum has dated to *c.* 1300. The pavement consists of six main panels, four decorated and two plain.

The purpose of this note is to seek the assistance of readers in tracing parallels to the eight tiles illustrated. The pavement is composed of a wide variety of configurations of these eight designs. Nos. 6 and 8, of course, form groups of four.

The author has been able to find an exact parallel to only one tile, No. 8, of which an example from Lesnes Abbey, Belvedere, is on display in Plumstead Museum.

A cousin to No. 6 is illustrated in the Medieval Catalogue of the London Museum (p. 251, No. 75), but though the two bear a general resemblance, the detail treatment differs, and it could not be said with certainty that they are the work of the same tiler.

Mrs. Eames has suggested that the Eltham pavement is the work of a 'West Kent tiler' with a kiln



Overall view from the south of the pavement and the structure containing it, with, in the background, the excavated undercroft of another major structure of Bek's palace.

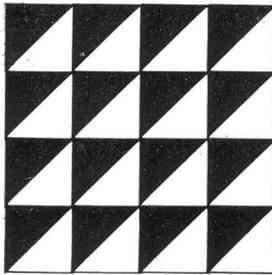
(Photo: Derek Craig)

local to Eltham and Lesnes, though not necessarily situated on either site, perhaps plying a waterborne trade up and down the Thames. If this were the case, the distribution of his tiles might be fairly widespread.

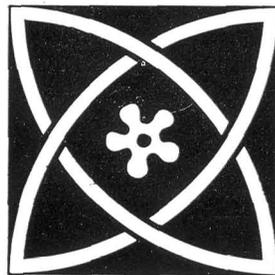
The Eltham tiles have an average width of 14cm and an average thickness of 24mm (the Plumstead Museum example of No. 8 has the same dimensions).

They have no keying holes, the reverse being flat, but have edges bevelled at approx. 15°.

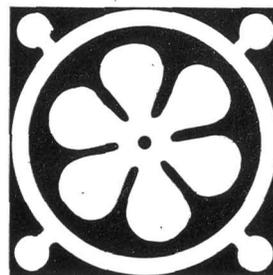
If any readers know of tiles which are *exact* parallels both in design and dimensions, whether the tiles are *in situ*, in museums, or have been recovered from excavations, the author would be glad to hear of them at: 16 New High Street, Headington, Oxford.



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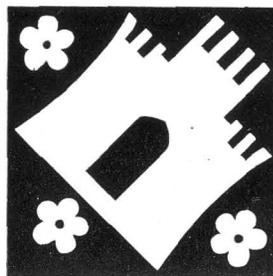
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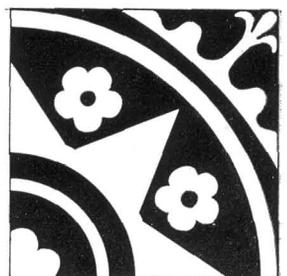
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## Letters

### OIL JARS

PETER BACKMAN is to be congratulated on his painstaking search for London oil jars through the Street Views of John Tallis but I feel I must disagree with his suggestion that the engravings were not accurate. He bases this conclusion on the assumption that the views were "often prepared to tight deadlines". There is not the slightest evidence to suggest that this is so. On the contrary, there was no time-factor involved. As their production must have been a long and complex process, the artist had plenty of time to prepare his drawing for the engraver.

Moreover, their accuracy can be checked by comparing them with contemporary views of the same streets. I am in the process of extra-illustrating my copy of Tallis with trade cards and bills and whenever these have included a view of the shop it has always corresponded exactly with the frontage depicted in Tallis.

Perhaps Tallis's artist may have left out a few oil jars but

the suggestion that the elevations were not accurate must not go unchallenged.

17 Blandford Road,  
Ealing,  
London, W.5.

PETER JACKSON

*Mr Backman replies:*

I AM very grateful to be corrected by Peter Jackson with regard to the accuracy with which Tallis's views were put together, especially since his knowledge of this subject is so much more extensive than mine.

I never intended to imply that the views were prepared with anything but great care. However, my contention that the views were "not *totally* accurate" is reinforced by Mr. Jackson's statement that "... Tallis's artist may have left out a few oil jars".

This, of course, does not alter my conclusion that oil jars might have existed on shop fronts other than those I identified in my article.