

Books

Rothschild Buildings. Life in an East End Tenement Block 1887-1920

Jerry White

Pimlico 2003 (First published 1980)

300 pages, illustrated, index. £12.50 paperback.

There was a significant Jewish population in the East End in the 1860's, but persecution in the 1880's drove many Eastern European Jews abroad. Thousands wanted to be near their co-religionists in Whitechapel but to do so was to settle in an area that was already a source of official anxiety because of its poverty, poor housing and high crime rate. The tenement complex known as Rothschild Buildings owed its existence to two motives; the movement to provide affordable housing for the artisan class in place of unregulated slums, and the desire of the established Anglo-Jewish bourgeoisie to see the often impoverished Yiddish speaking newcomers settled, employed and assimilated.

Although underpinned by documentary research, this book is primarily a piece of 'People's History', based mainly on the oral recollection of those who were born and grew up in Rothschild's Buildings before and just after World War One. A tale of day to day life in the Buildings and streets around, shopping, schooling, leisure activities and employment in the local clothing or furniture making trades. It is given form and cohesion by its focus on the experiences of the block's first immigrant residents and their British-born children. It is the first work of an author who has produced other social histories and written with the enthusiasm of a young explorer. Although not a history of the Jewish East End, it gives a vivid picture of how the early tenants of the Buildings coped with the many difficulties surrounding them.

Rose Baillie

Medieval 'Westminster' floor tiles

Ian M Betts

MoLAS Monograph 11, 2002

78 pages, 49 illustrations, bibliography, index. £11.95 paperback

'Westminster' floor tiles are the most common type of decorated medieval tiles found in the London area from 13th-century contexts. They were widely used in monastic buildings, parish

churches, castles and royal palaces, as well as in domestic houses and tenements. They are so called because pavements of these tiles are preserved at Westminster Abbey, notably in the Muniment Room (and to distinguish them from the series of higher quality tiles in Westminster Abbey Chapter House, known as Chertsey-Westminster tiles).

This monograph is the first major study of the 'Westminster' tile industry since the publication of Elizabeth Eames' *Catalogue of Medieval Lead-glazed Earthenware Tiles in the British Museum* (1980). It is divided into ten chapters which discuss manufacture, production sources, tile distribution, size, dating, decorative designs (including a section on heraldic tiles by Tony Wilmott), pavement designs (a significant section based on the evidence from surviving tiled floors), and mosaic flooring. A catalogue of sites and all known designs follows.

This research has enabled Ian Betts to draw important conclusions about the industry. Analysis of the clay used to make the decorated tiles has enabled identification of both mosaic and plain-glazed tiles made by the 'Westminster' tilers. This has helped to establish a dating sequence for the industry, as the earliest tiles using this clay are the mosaic tiles from Merton Priory and Stratford Langthorne, produced during the 1230s or 1240s, probably by monastic orders, or under their auspices. Thereafter, commercial production of square decorated and plain-glazed tiles dominated the London market from the 1250s or early 1260s when the Muniment Room at Westminster Abbey was being paved, until the end of the 13th century when the industry declined.

Recent finds of waster or reject tiles have shown that most of the 'Westminster' tiles used in London were made at the floor tile kiln which was found at Farringdon Road in the 1860s, or at other kilns probably located nearby. However, 'Westminster' tiles have an unusually wide distribution outside London, stretching from Kent to Staffordshire, as well as sites in Leicestershire, Warwickshire, the West Midlands, Berkshire, Hertfordshire and Essex. Two sites in Norfolk also have tiles similar to the 'Westminster' group. Recognition of the fabric of the London

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Fig. 4: Team work. Teacher and pupils from Reay Primary School, Lambeth search for excavation locations at Stockwell Uncovered archaeology workshop

accessible, attracting new audiences etc., is the limit of the organisers' imagination, their ability to identify opportunities in the 'marketplace' and their ability to target and exploit these opportunities.

Archaeology has a lot to offer all Londoners, particularly those within London's disadvantaged communities. It is our duty as guardians of the past to promote our archaeology – it is not difficult or expensive, but it does require sustained commitment!

Definition: Social Inclusion

A term initiated by government to describe individuals and communities experiencing 'a variety of linked problems, including unemployment, poor skills, low incomes, poor housing, high crime environments, bad health and family breakdown'.⁵

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For more information you can contact Lesley at discoveringarchaeology@hotmail.com.

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1. www.neighbourhood.statistics.gov.uk/tables/eng/TableViewer/wdsview/2/06/02
 2. Hackney Building Exploratory 2003 information leaflet
 3. DCMS 2002 *People and Places: Social Inclusion for the Built and Historic Environment* UK: Department of Culture, Media and Sport
 4. L. Smith 'Outing' *Archaeology in Lambeth* Quarterly Review: April to June 2003 London: Greater London Archaeology Advisory Service (GLAAS) forthcoming.
 5. www.cabinet-office.gov.uk/seu/publications/reports/html/pse/pse_html/04.htm 10/6/02
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'Westminster' tile clay has shown that in some cases the finished tiles were transported from London to pave buildings elsewhere (such as Windsor Castle and Canterbury), while in other cases the 'Westminster' tilers themselves travelled, making tiles at production sites outside London (notably in the Midlands and Norfolk).

The book is well illustrated with maps, colour photographs and over 160 tile designs. It is an important contribution to the study of medieval floor tiles, and will be an essential reference work, not only for those working in London, but to all with an interest in the subject.

Beverley Nenck