

Medieval Floor-tiles at St. Mary's Priory, Hurley, Berks.

By J. B. WARD PERKINS & P. D. R. WILLIAMS-HUNT.

DURING the excavations by Colonel C. N. Rivers-Moore on the site of Hurley Priory a considerable number of medieval floor-tiles have been recovered. A large number of churches within a short distance of Hurley have identical designs (Harpsden, Saunderton, Little Marlow, Thame Park, Hitcham, to quote only a few); and the same designs are also found to some extent over a considerably wider area in south Oxfordshire, East Berkshire and south Buckinghamshire, and even as far afield as London. Throughout this region may also be found similar tiles differing only in small details such as the size and thickness of an animal, the substitution of a trefoil for a cinquefoil, and so on. Such minor variations may be ascribed in part to the traditionalism of craftsmanship, in part also to deliberate attempts to reproduce the original design at a later date for the purpose of replacements. Hurley provides a clear instance of the latter in the case of designs Nos. 45 & 47, which are found closely associated in the cloister.

The presence of the same or similar designs over so wide an area raises problems too wide for full discussion in this context. The facts are perhaps most easily explained by the hypothesis of professional, semi-itinerant tile-wrights, who carried their stamps with them and made tiles wherever they were needed. On the other hand the distribution of this group of tiles within, but hardly extending beyond, the area of the middle Thames basin suggests that cheap water-transport was an important consideration, and hence that production was to some extent limited and localised within this region. Pending the discovery and scientific excavation of some of the kilns which produced this group of tiles, it is hardly possible to do more than define the problem. Figure I, which shows the distribution of the two related designs, Nos. 1 & 2, which bear inscriptions, RICARD' ME FECIT and SIGNUM SCE CRVCIS, may be taken as fairly typical of the whole group; ¹ few of the other designs are however found so far to the north.

¹ They are found in Buckinghamshire at Notley Abbey, Amersham church, Pitstone church, Great Marlow church, Moulsoe church, Little Marlow Priory, Drayton Beauchamp church, Long Crendon church, Milton Keynes church, Grove Farm Chapel, Chesham, Rycote chapel, and Missenden Abbey; in Berkshire at Hurley Priory, and Cookham church; in Oxfordshire in Thame Park chapel; in Hertfordshire in St. Albans Abbey; and in Westminster Abbey. These facts we owe largely to Mr. Christopher Hohler.

MEDIEVAL FLOOR TILES AT ST. MARY'S PRIORY,
HURLEY, BERKS.

PLATE I.



TILE PAVEMENT IN SITU IN NORTH AISLE.

Colonel Rivers-Moore has already given an account of the excavations at Hurley in Vol. 38, No. 1 of this Journal but this is now necessarily rendered incomplete by subsequent work on the site. At the moment (1938) practically all the foundations of the monastic church, chapter house and part of cloister, together with a range of buildings north of the church, have been uncovered. Tiles in a disturbed condition have been found in nearly all these buildings whilst tiles *in situ* have been uncovered in the church, chapter house and cloister.

A small portion of complete pavement consisting of three examples of design No. 1, alternating diagonally with plain black tiles, was found in position at the west end of the south aisle near the well. This fragment was badly broken up and the design almost illegible. Nearby the sandy mortar or lime foundation on which the tiles were laid clearly showed the imprint of tiles placed diagonally, whilst another area in the north transept showed where they had been laid lengthways. In each case the tiles themselves had disappeared.

A large portion of pavement was found at the east end of the north aisle (Plate I). It was covered by a mass of chalk and flint rubble, apparently part of the walls which must have been pulled down over-dramatically at the time of the Dissolution. The tiles overlaid an earlier wall, possibly of 11th or 12th century date, which had been levelled, and except for a few examples which had been crushed, were completely undamaged. This pavement illustrates one of the ways in which tiles were laid at Hurley. It is arranged in narrow panels divided by single lines of patterned tiles. Within each panel the tiles are laid diagonally, patterned and plain black tiles alternately. In this case the designs used within the three surviving panels are Nos. 13, 15 and 16. The borders between the panels consist of (i) tiles of design No. 14 laid lengthways, (ii) tiles of design No. 21 alternating with small plain black tiles, measuring $4\frac{1}{2}$ " by 3". The whole is bordered by a continuous row of design No. 21, and beyond it a row of alternate plain black and yellow $4\frac{1}{2}$ " tiles. This pavement probably belongs to the middle of the 14th century.

In the cloister were found two small portions of undisturbed pavement, again beneath a mass of debris. Several badly worn examples of design No. 48 were found in position, and nearby others of designs Nos. 25, 45 & 47, slightly disturbed. They were laid in continuous blocks, the designs in each case being incomplete upon the single tile.

Inside the chapter-house a number of tiles were found *in situ* at the foot of the wall. These had all been cut in half before use and were of designs 22, 23, 24 and 26. At a much higher level in the south-west corner of the chapter-house was a small portion of pavement with the same designs. The raising and relaying

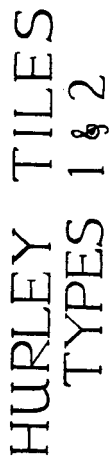


FIG. 1. DISTRIBUTION OF HURLEY TILES, TYPES 1 AND 2.

of this pavement may reasonably be associated with the severe floods which are recorded as laying many of the monastic buildings in ruins in the late fourteenth century.¹

Complete tiles and many fragments are found all over the site, but these are the only portions of pavement so far found in position. It would seem therefore that the floors were systematically robbed at the Dissolution, and that only those tiles were left that were broken in removal or were too deeply buried in the debris of destruction to merit uncovering. They were doubtless removed to local churches and perhaps in some cases to houses in the village. A few tiles, all of different design, have been found at Hurley House. It has been suggested that there was a kiln here; but these tiles are perfect copies and, to the writers' knowledge, no wasters have yet been found on this site. It is possible that they found their way here during the nineteenth century, when there are several records of foundations being uncovered in the cloister-court and elsewhere whilst laying drains.

Several of the neighbouring churches have a great variety of designs. At Cookham, five miles away, there are almost as many designs as there are tiles, and the same is true of Little Marlow. It is of course possible that at one time these churches had many more tiles than now and that these have been swept away in the course of nineteenth century "restorations." It is however equally plausible to ascribe this diversity of design to the circumstances of their acquisition by casual plunder from the ruins of Hurley Priory.

Technically the Hurley tiles all belong to the class of printed tiles, unlike the earliest red and yellow patterned tiles in this country, which were inlaid.² Inlaying involved two distinct processes to produce the design. This was first impressed with a wooden stamp upon a suitably prepared square of clay, and pipe-clay was then spread into the resulting hollows. The printing technique involved only a single process, for the pipe clay was apparently spread straight on the raised portions of the wooden stamp and so impressed directly upon the clay. It was in fact

¹ The following record is from the *Liber Niger Quaternus of Westminster*, 15 Richard II, June 1391-2: "At the same time the Prior and Convent of Hurley besought my Lord the King that out of reverence to Lady Edith, sister of the holy king Edward the Confessor there buried, and inasmuch as they are troubled in many particulars, that is to say by Thames floods, their houses laid in ruins, the death of their occupants, and inasmuch as they are modestly endowed, it might please the said Lord the King to appropriate to them the Church of Warefield in the Salisbury Diocese of which they from a distant date have been the patrons."

² The best account of the technical processes involved in making tiles is given by Loyd Haberly in *Medieval English Pavingtiles* (Oxford, 1937). He is concerned specially with the area round Oxford, in which are found many of the Hurley designs.

closely analogous to the printing of designs on paper with an inked wood-block. On both inlaid and printed tiles the design appears in white or yellow against a red ground, and the differences are only apparent on close inspection. In the former the pipe-clay is always fairly thick, sometimes as much as $\frac{3}{8}$ ", and the edges of the design are clear-cut. Often the clay ground and the pipe-clay have not shrunk uniformly in firing and portions of the latter have fallen away. Printed tiles on the other hand are rarely clear-cut. If the stamp has been too heavily "inked" or clumsily applied, the pipe-clay spreads and smudges the outline of the design. Consequently the impressions resulting from a single stamp may vary considerably from tile to tile, and in extreme instances the design may be quite unrecognisable. In reproducing the Hurley designs it has often been necessary to strike an average; and in a few instances, where one or two defective specimens alone remain, there is a considerable possibility of minor error.

The following list represents all the designs so far recovered at Hurley during the excavations. It is possible that others are yet to be found. Wherever possible, the design has been drawn from comparison of a number of examples. In several instances however single worn specimens or fragments alone survive, and here there is often some uncertainty, particularly at the corners where wear is heaviest. Such cases are noted individually. The designs of Nos. 6, 40 and 56 are completed from tiles elsewhere. Unless indicated, no examples have been found *in situ* at Hurley. The dimensions, normally about $4\frac{1}{2}$ inches square, may vary as much as half an inch on two tiles from the same stamp, and the thickness ranges from a half-inch to slightly over an inch. In no case are the backs "keyed." No attempt has been made to compile an exhaustive list of localities where similar tiles occur, and in some cases designs, which are here noted as the same, may, on closer comparison, prove to be from similar, but slightly differing, stamps. It may however be claimed that the list of parallels is representative and indicates roughly the area to which tiles of the Hurley group are confined. References to Haberly are to the plate-numbers of Lloyd Haberly's *English Medieval Pavingtiles* (1937).

1. Inscribed RICARD' ME FECIT, "Richard made me." A few *in situ* alternate with plain black tiles at the west end of the south aisle of the Priory-church. No well-preserved example of this design was available for reproduction.

This tile has been found also in Buckinghamshire at Notley Abbey Amersham church, Pitstone church, Great Marlow church, Moulsoe church, Little Marlow Priory, Drayton Beauchamp church, Long Crendon church, Milton

Keynes church, Grove Farm chapel, Chesham (in Aylesbury Museum); in Berkshire at Cookham church; in Oxfordshire at Thame Abbey; and Haberly states (p. 187) that it has been found at St. Albans Abbey and in Westminster Abbey frater. Haberly, No. CXXXVIII (the foliate corners shown in his plate are perhaps taken from a better preserved example). See distribution-map of this and No. 2, fig. 1.

2. Inscribed SIGNUM SCE CRUCIS, "The sign of the holy cross." Also recorded from Little Marlow, Notley Abbey and Missenden Abbey (Bucks); from Rycote Chapel and from Thame Abbey (Oxon.); and from St. Albans Abbey (in the Herts. Museum). The Rycote Chapel was finished after 1460, but the tiles may well be monastic spoils. Haberly, No. CXXXIX. See distribution-map of this and No. 1, fig. 1.
3. A rider, hawking. Large examples show a narrow white border. Also recorded from Hitcham, *Records of Bucks.*, IX, 1907, pl. VI, 11.
4. Stag. Large examples show a narrow white border.
5. Lion. Similar tiles at Great Kimble and at Hitcham. *Records of Bucks.*, IX, 1907, pl. VI, 7.
6. Running deer. Completed from a tile in the British Museum, one of a set from Harpsden, on which are also depicted a dog, a cat, a hare and a rabbit. The set are also found at Notley Abbey, and individual examples in the churches at Combe, Long Crendon, Chinnor and Chilton, and in Merton College Library, Oxford. Haberly, No. XC, cf. Nos. LXXXVII-XCI.
7. One of four tiles which together form a wheel with "rabbits" and birds in concentric circles. The evolution of this form of the design is very clear. On an inlaid tile which is found as far afield as London (London Museum) and Osney (Haberly, No. LXXIII) the "rabbits" are evidently originally deer. A printed tile found at Notley and elsewhere (Haberly, No. CXV) is an obvious copy, and the Hurley design marks the final stage. A printed tile from Charlton-on-Otmoor (Haberly, No. CCXIV), in which a hound chases a deer and the birds in the inner ring fly round in one direction, probably preserves a hint of the origin of this design.

This tile seems to be exactly paralleled at London (London Museum, from St. Helen's Place, E.C.3) and at Milton Keynes, Bucks.

8. Man with a battle-axe. Also found at St. Albans Abbey (Herts. Museum), and Little Marlow (*Arch. Journ.*, LIX, 1902, 318).
9. The design is here reproduced from worn examples and it may well be identical with a tile in the London Museum (from the corner of Wood Street and Gresham Street, see annexed sketch, fig. 9a). Haberly (No. CXLIII) records a similar design from Thame Abbey and from Ludgershall church, and there is another in the London Museum from Blomfield Street, E.C.2.
10. The detail of the lower left hand corner is uncertain but it certainly represents two grotesque faces, as in a tile from London in the London Museum. Haberly records two or more variants with a shield at this point from Oxford Cathedral, Notley Abbey, Steventon church and Marston church (Nos. CXVI and CXVII); but he specifically states that "the shield corner is always doubtful" and his illustrations approximate very closely to the present design.
11. There is an apparently identical tile from Thame Abbey (Haberly, No. CXXXIII). One in Bierton church is from a different stamp with a slightly smaller fleur-de-lis, and Rycote Chapel has a variant with oak-leaves in alternate corners (Haberly, No. CXLVIII).
12. The design is completed from fragments and the detail of the beast's heads is uncertain. A similar design with fleurs-de-lis in place of the beasts is recorded from Lower Winchendon church (Haberly, No. CLXXXIII).
13. Found with Nos. 14-16 and 21 forming a pavement in the north aisle (see p. 118, pl. 1). An earlier and slightly fatter version of the design in inlaid technique is known from St. Albans Abbey and from Berkhamsted Castle (both in the Herts. Museum).
14. Found with Nos. 13, 15, 16 and 21 forming a pavement in the north aisle (see p. 118, pl. 1). Also known from London (London Museum from Westminster, site of the aquarium) and Hitcham, *Records of Bucks.*, IX, 1907, pl. VI, 9. A very similar tile, in which the design is reversed and the charge of the third shield has a millrind in place of a cross moline, is recorded from Notley Abbey (Haberly No. XCII) and Little Marlow (*Arch. Journ.*, LIX, 1902, 318). It is probably therefore useless to enquire into the significance of the heraldry.

15. Found with Nos. 13, 14, 16 and 21 forming a pavement in the north aisle (see p. 118, pl. 1). Also known from London (London Museum from St. Bartholomew-the-Less, Smithfield) and Little Marlow (*Arch. Journ.*, LIX, 1902, 318). Also probably from Thame Abbey (Haberly, No. CXXVII).
16. Found with Nos. 13-15 and 21 forming a pavement in the north aisle (see p. 118, pl. 1). Also known from Thame Abbey (Haberly, No. CXL), and Little Marlow.
17. Cf. No. 21.
18. Cf. Nos. 19 and 20, to which set it belongs.
19. Cf. No. 14.
20. Cf. No. 14.
21. Found with Nos. 13-16 forming a pavement in the north aisle (see p. 118, pl. 1).
22. Found *in situ* in the Chapter-House (see p. 118) with Nos. 23, 24 and 26. Heraldic gyronny. This design is so common on printed tiles that parallels are valueless. It is undoubtedly made from a number of different stamps.
23. Found *in situ* in the Chapter-House (see p. 118) with Nos. 22, 24 and 26. This design is recorded also from Notley Abbey and Marston and Chinnor churches (Haberly, No. CIX), from London (London Museum, from Spital Square) and from St. Albans Abbey.
24. Found *in situ* in the Chapter-House (see p. 118) with Nos. 22, 23 and 26. A common design with many variants. Cf. Nos. 25 and 26. Also from Thame Abbey (Haberly, No. CXXXII) and at Saunderton church.
25. Found in the cloister, roughly in position. Also found at Saunderton church and London (London Museum from Cloth Fair, E.C.1.).
26. Found *in situ* in the Chapter-House (see p. 118) with Nos. 22-4. Also found at Notley Abbey and Haddenham church (Haberly, No. CVIII) and in London (London Museum, several examples).

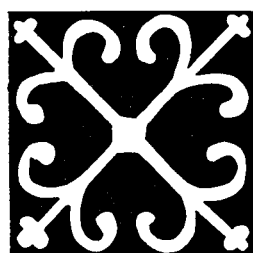
27. Also found from Thame Abbey (Haberly, No. CXXXV) and at Hitcham church (*Records of Bucks.*, IX, 1907, pl. VI, 4).
28. Same set as No. 29.
29. This tile is recorded also from Notley Abbey and Thame Abbey (Haberly, No. CXI); a very similar design, with a plain circle in place of the whirligig, comes from Berkhamsted Castle (Herts. Museum).
30. Same set as No. 31.
31. This design is known from Notley Abbey and from Chilton and Long Crendon churches, both of which were probably paved with tiles taken from Notley after the Dissolution (Haberly, No. CV).
32. Possibly same set as No. 43.
33. A common and very confusing form of design, of which a number of closely related types are known. Cf. Haberly, No. CIV, from Notley; *Records of Bucks.*, IX, 1907, pl. VI, 1.
34. Probably identical with a design from Thame Abbey, (Haberly, No. CXXVI), also at Little Marlow.
35. Another common and confusing design, akin to No. 33. The earliest, inlaid form is represented at Great Haseley (Haberly, No. LXIV), and printed examples, some perhaps from the same stamp, are known from Thame Abbey and Notley Abbey (Haberly, No. CXXV), in Milton Keynes church, and from Berkhamsted Castle (Herts. Museum).
36. Another common and often-copied design. Cf. No. 38. The differences between the various stamps occur chiefly in the outer corner, which is often too worn for identification. Designs of this general type occur from Thame Abbey, Notley Abbey, Chinnor church and Eynsham (Haberly, Nos. XCIV-XCVI); also in Bucks. at Bierton, Hanslope, Milton Keynes and Stone churches and from Aylesbury (in the Aylesbury Museum); from Reading Abbey; in St. Albans Abbey and Sandridge church, Herts.; and from London (London Museum, site of Savoy Palace).
37. The same design at Bierton church (Bucks.).

38. Cf. No. 36.
39. This design is known also from Thame Abbey (Haberly, No. CXXXIV) and from Broughton (Aylesbury Museum). There is a similar design in the Herts. County Museum, St. Albans.
40. This design is known also from Thame Abbey (Haberly, No. CXXXVI, with a companion facing to left, No. CXXXVII) from Cookham, from Little Marlow, and from Broughton (Aylesbury Museum).
41. A poor version of a common type of design. For a good early example cf. a tile from the site of St. Christopher-le-Stocks, London (London Museum). Cf. also Haberly, No. CCXLII, from Dorchester Abbey.
42. Also known from Thame Abbey, Rycote and Wallingford. (Haberly, No. CXLII).
43. Possibly same set as No. 32.
44. A slightly differing design occurs in Somerton Church. (Haberly, No. CLXXIII).
45. Found in the cloister, roughly in position. A similar but rather more elaborate design is found at St. Albans, at London (London Museum), and in Barham church, Kent. Cf. No. 47.
46. Also found in Marston Church and Oxford Cathedral. (Haberly, No. CLXXII).
47. Found in the cloister, roughly in position. Cf. No. 45.
48. Found *in situ* in the cloister, several worn examples. Worn but possibly identical designs occur at St. Albans (Herts. County Museum), and closely similar ones exist in Chinnor Church (Haberly, No. CXCVI) and Saunderton Church.
49. Fragment only.
50. Fragment only, apparently from a crude vine-pattern.
51. This is similar to, but not identical with, a tile in the London Museum from the site of the Savoy Palace.

- 52-4. A design covering nine tiles. Very similar designs are recorded from Notley Abbey, Chilton and Long Crendon churches (Haberly, Nos. CII, CIII), and from Crowell church (Haberly, No. CCVIII). An example of No. 54 from Eynsham Abbey (in the British Museum) is possibly identical (Haberly, No. CCII). A design of this type was normally laid diagonally to the panel in which it occurred with a border of plain tiles between each set.
55. A fragment of a design which occurs in several slightly varying forms, chiefly in Bucks. Cf. Haberly, No. CXXXI, from Thame Abbey.
56. A fragment of a design found at Notley Abbey and at Chilton and Long Crendon churches (Haberly, No. CI).
57. A fragment, identifiable with Haberly, No. CXLIV, from Thame Abbey. Since going to press a complete example of this design has been found at Hurley. Also found at Little Marlow.



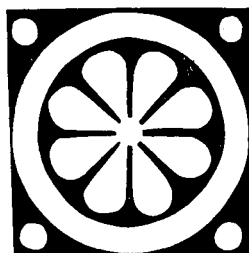
FIG. 2.



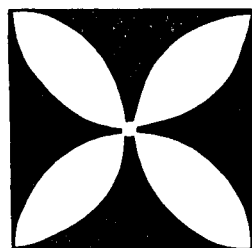
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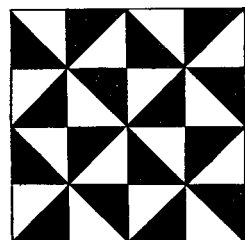
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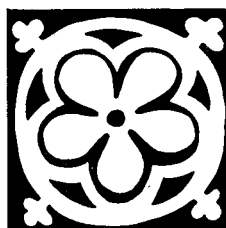
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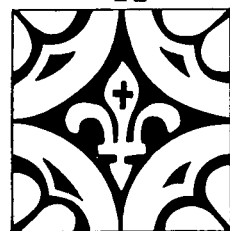
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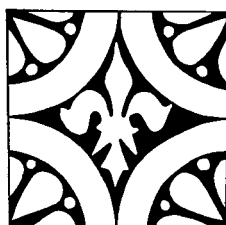
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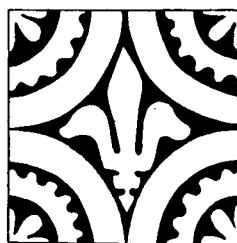
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INCHES



FIG. 3.

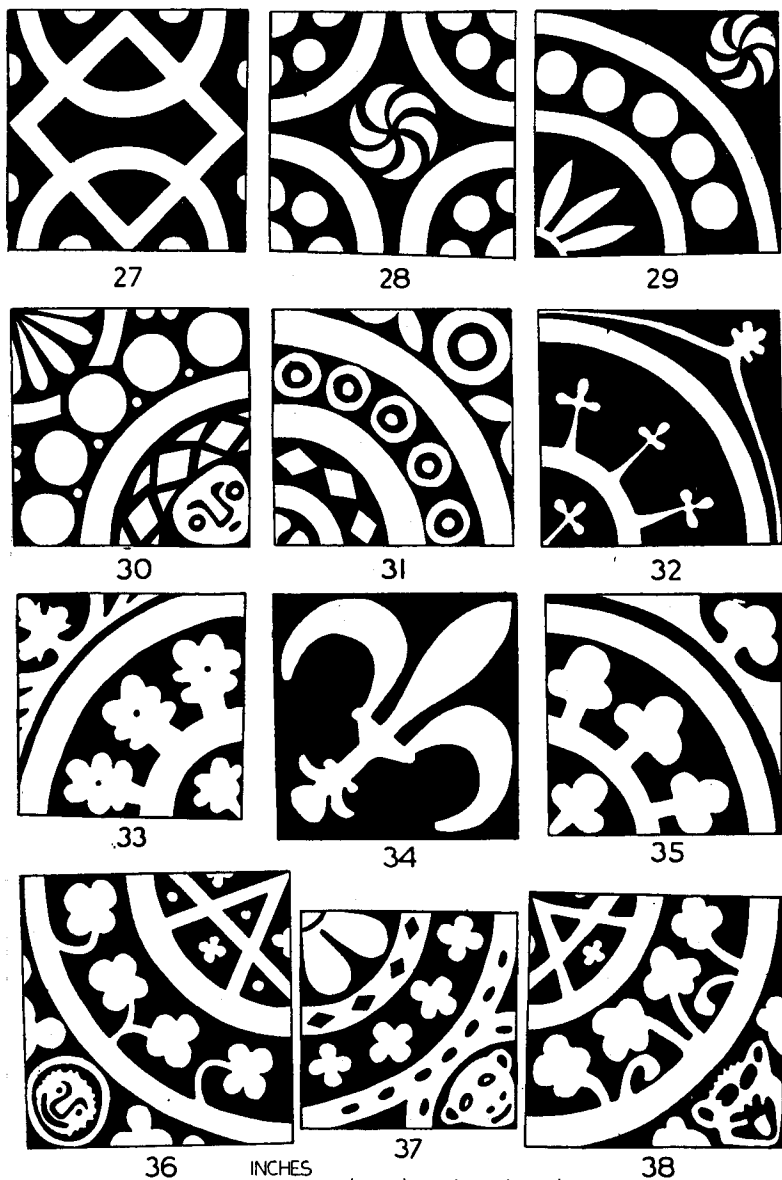
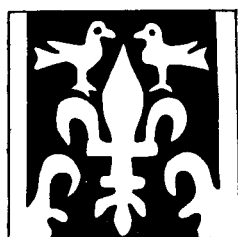
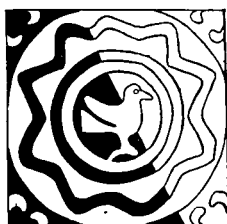


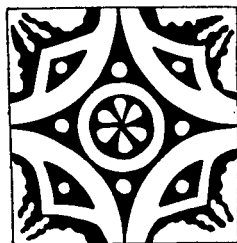
FIG. 4.



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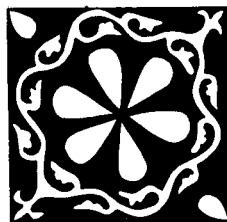
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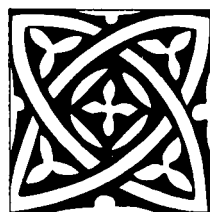
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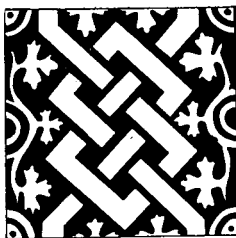
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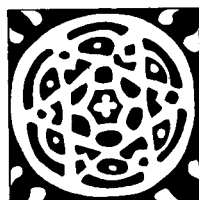
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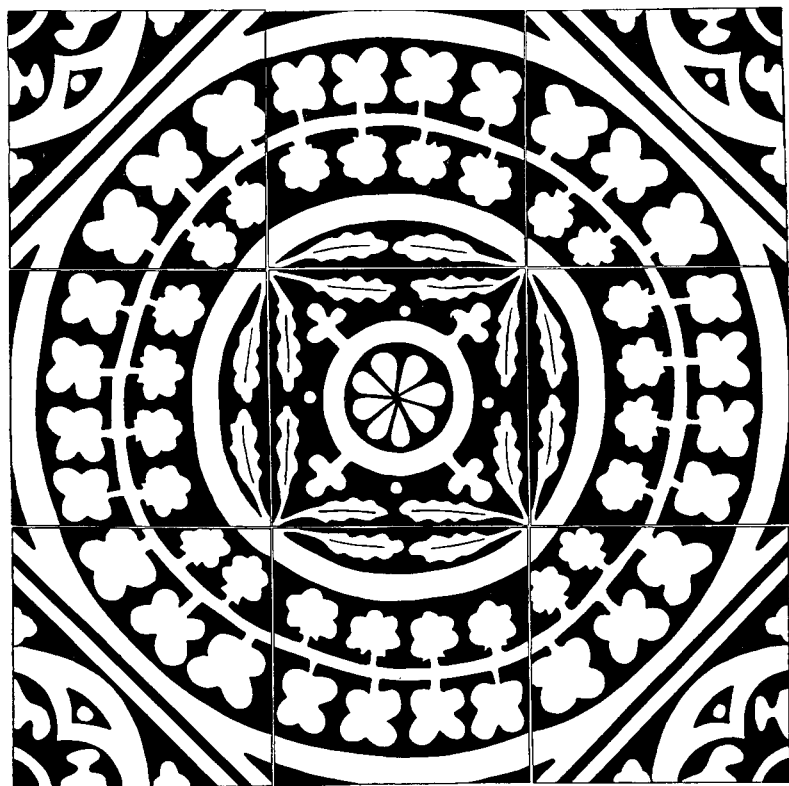
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51



FIG. 5.



52 (CENTRE)

54

53



55



56



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INCHES



FIG. 6.