

Assessment of Tewkesbury Abbey Meadow Floor Tiles (TAM92)

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Introduction

The ceramic building material from Tewkesbury Abbey Meadow (Gloucestershire County Council Site TAM92) was submitted for assessment and a record made of the fabrics and decoration of the tiles, including a context-by-context record by fragment count.

Aims and Objectives

The aims of the assessment were:

- to establish the date range of the material
- to establish its potential for studying the social status of the abbey
- to make recommendations for further work, if appropriate, and to justify those recommendations.

Description

Two hundred and twenty-six fragments of floor tile were present, in fifty separate contexts (plus six unstratified tiles).

context	SumOfnosh
0	6
6	1
42	3
1000	8
1001	5
1002	1
1015	1
1017	1
2001	2
2026	1
2083	2
2086	1
2141	1
2151	3
2329	1
3000	23
3001	10
3020	16
3021	1
3022	22
3023	4
3026	3
3028	1
3029	3
3033	1
3034	1
3036	12
3038	2
3039	1
3041	2
3042	3
3047	9
3066	2
3078	1
3079	42
3081	1
3082	2
3090	1

3098	8
3099	1
3112	7
3148	1
3149	1
3200	2
3225	1
3226	2
3236	3
5000	1
5028	1
6000	1

They appear to come from four sources:

Source	Code	Date	Quantity
Nash Hill, Lacock, Wiltshire	NH	late 13 th to 15 th century	9
Hereford?, H & W	BREDON	early to mid 14 th century	3
Malvern Chase, H & W	MALV	early 14 th century to mid 16 th century	38
Droitwich, H & W	DROIT	mid 14 th to mid 15 th century	177
Great Malvern, H & W	GM	mid to late 15 th century	1

Nash Hill tiles have not previously been recognised in Tewkesbury and this find represents the furthest north-west that the tiles have been found. Because they are at the limits of the known distribution of these tiles, and because it seems that a number of attributions to Nash Hill have been made on the basis of similarity of design only, it is important to confirm this identification using ceramic petrology. The fabric of these tiles is distinctive in thin-section and it would be possible to confirm, or refute, the attribution by the analysis of two or three of the seven examples. The designs on these tiles are all to be found in the published corpus from the Nash Hill kiln site and only require illustration.

The Bredon-type tiles are similar to those published in *Antiquaries Journal* in 1991 from the Lady Chapel at Tewkesbury Abbey (Vince & Wilmot 1991). In that paper it was suggested that the industry began in the 1320s with a major commission from one of the Mortimer family and that with the fall from grace of the Mortimers these tiles would have been unpopular from early in the reign of Edward III. It seems that there was only ever one pavement of this type at Tewkesbury, in the Lady Chapel, and the archaeological context of the new finds is therefore interesting, to see whether or not these finds predate the destruction of the Lady Chapel and subsequent dispersal of the tile floor.

Malvern Chase tiles are present in the Abbey, both relaid in the nave and loose in the Abbey museum. The production sites for these tiles lay only a few miles to the northwest of Tewkesbury and there is little surprise to find them in this collection. Several of the tiles have designs not previously recorded which require tracing, illustration and study.

The Droitwich tiles appear to belong to two or three distinct design groups, as identified recently at St Oswald's Priory, Gloucester. These groups probably range in date from the mid-to-late 14th century to the early 15th century. There is as yet only a single, poorly-recorded, kiln site producing tiles of this sort, and it is possible that manufacture took place over a wider area, perhaps including Worcester and conceivably even Tewkesbury. Chemical analysis of the fabric, using ICPS (Inductively Coupled Plasma Spectroscopy) would at least determine whether the different design groups were made using chemically-distinct clays.

The Great Malvern tile appears to be decorated using a different from those previously recorded for this industry and requires tracing and study.

The floor tiles therefore range from the late 13th or early 14th centuries through to the mid to late 15th century, with the majority falling into the central part of this range. The Nash Hill tiles are found west of the Cotswold scarp only at sites of high status, such as abbeys, other major religious houses and castles. Even in Wiltshire they occur mainly at such sites, although they have also been found in parish churches. The other three types are widespread in the Severn Valley, mainly on religious sites but also on urban excavations where they may reflect the use of floor tiles in the richer secular households.

Recommendations

Where possible, the designs used on these floor tiles should be traced and compared with the author's collection of tile tracings and other sources. The purpose of this is to establish whether or not the

Tewkesbury tiles were stamped with the same dies as used elsewhere or were merely using a similar design. Those designs or fragments which might be identifiable should be published so as to make the information available to other researchers.

Scientific analysis is recommended to confirm the attribution of tiles to the Nash Hill tilery (3 thin-sections) and to establish whether the tiles in the two or three design groups found in the Droitwich tiles were made with distinctively different batches of clay (18 ICPS analyses).

A report should be written for publication in a local archaeological journal to accompany the die illustrations (2 days).

Summary of Costs

Task	Comments	Cost
Tracing and study of dies	2 days research assistant	£160
Thin-sections	3 @ £40 each	£120
ICPS analyses	18 @ £15 each	£270
Report	2 days reseacher	£390
Total		£940

Appendix: Catalogue of Medieval Floor Tiles from TAM92

context	cname	dec	SumOfnosh	comments
US	DROIT		1	U/S
US	DROIT	YES	2	DR U/S
US	DROIT	YES	2	U/S
US	DROIT	YES	1	U/S DR
6	DROIT	YES	1	DR
42	DROIT		2	
42	MALV		1	REUSED
1000	DROIT	WS	2	
1000	DROIT	YES	1	
1000	MALV		2	
1000	MALV	YES	2	
1000	NH	YES	1	DR
1001	DROIT		1	
1001	DROIT	WS	1	
1001	MALV		2	
1001	MALV	WS	1	
1002	BREDON	YES	1	
1015	DROIT		1	
1017	MALV		1	
2001	DROIT	YES	1	
2001	DROIT	YES	1	DR
2026	BREDON		1	
2083	DROIT	YES	1	DR
2083	WORCS		1	
2086	DROIT	WS	1	
2087	WORCS		1	
2141	DROIT	WS	1	
2151	DROIT		1	
2151	DROIT	WS	2	
2329	DROIT		1	
3000	DROIT		12	
3000	DROIT		1	MORTAR ON UPPER SURFACE
3000	DROIT		1	REUSED AS SMALL SQUARE
3000	DROIT	WS	1	
3000	DROIT	YES	1	
3000	DROIT	YES	1	DR
3000	DROIT	YES	3	SCRAP
3000	MALV		8	
3000	MALV	WS	1	
3000	MALV	YES	1	DR MORTAR ON TOP
3000	NH	YES	1	DR
3000	RTIL		1	
3001	DROIT		1	
3001	DROIT		1	REUSED ON SIDE
3001	DROIT	WS	2	
3001	DROIT	YES	1	
3001	DROIT	YES	1	DR
3001	DROIT	YES	1	SCRAP
3001	GM	YES	1	DR
3001	MALV	YES	1	
3001	MALV	YES	1	MORTAR ON TOP
3020	DROIT		6	
3020	DROIT	WS	5	
3020	DROIT	YES	1	
3020	MALV	YES	1	
3020	MALV	YES	1	DR
3020	NH	YES	2	DR
3021	DROIT	WS	1	
3022	DROIT		6	
3022	DROIT		2	MORTAR ON TOP
3022	DROIT	WS	6	
3022	DROIT	YES	3	DR
3022	DROIT	YES	1	SCRAP

3022	MALV		1
3022	MALV	YES	1
3022	NH	WS	1
3022	NH	YES	1 DR
3023	DROIT	WS	1
3023	DROIT	YES	2 DR MORTAR ON TOP
3023	MALV		1
3026	DROIT		2
3026	DROIT	YES	1
3028	DROIT	WS	1
3029	DROIT		2
3029	DROIT	WS	1
3033	MALV		1
3034	DROIT	YES	1 SCRAP
3036	DROIT		8
3036	DROIT	WS	1
3036	DROIT	YES	1 SCRAP
3036	MALV		1
3036	MALV	YES	1
3038	DROIT		1
3038	DROIT	YES	1 SCRAP
3039	DROIT	YES	1
3041	DROIT	WS	1
3041	DROIT	YES	1 MORTAR ON TOP
3042	DROIT		1
3042	MALV		1
3042	MALV	YES	1
3047	DROIT		4
3047	MALV		3
3047	MALV	WS	1
3047	MALV	YES	1 DR
3066	DROIT		1
3066	MALV		1
3078	NH	YES	1 SHELL KEYED
3079	DROIT		8
3079	DROIT		1 SCORED BUT STILL SQUARE
3079	DROIT	WS	3
3079	DROIT	WS	1 MORTAR ON TOP
3079	DROIT	WS	1 REUSED
3079	DROIT	YES	11
3079	DROIT	YES	12 DR
3079	DROIT	YES	1 DR MORTAR ON TOP
3079	DROIT	YES	1 MORTAR ON SURFACE
3079	DROIT	YES	1 MORTAR ON TOP
3079	DROIT	YES	1 SCRAP
3079	NH		1
3081	MALV		1
3082	BREDON	YES	1
3082	MALV	WS	1
3090	DROIT	YES	1 DR
3098	DROIT		7
3098	DROIT	WS	1
3099	DROIT		1
3112	DROIT		3
3112	DROIT	YES	1
3112	DROIT	YES	2 DR
3112	NH	YES	1 DR SHELL KEYS
3148	MALV	YES	1 DR MORTAR ON TOP
3149	DROIT	WS	1
3200	DROIT		1
3200	MALV		1
3225	DROIT	YES	1 DR
3226	DROIT		2
3236	DROIT		2
3236	DROIT	WS	1
5000	DROIT		1
5028	DROIT		1
6000	DROIT		1

Notes: WS = white-slipped, usually border tiles and separators
mortar on top = reused as building material
DR = Should be drawn