

Assessment of Medieval Floor Tile from Lincoln College, Monks Road, Lincoln (LCB02)

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A single fragment of floor tile from archaeological work at Lincoln College, Monks Road, was submitted for identification and assessment. The tile appears to be a waster of later 13th or early 14th-century date and is evidence for floor tile production on the site, presumably associated with building work at the Dominican friary.

Description

The tile comes from context 065. It is heavily bloated and could not possibly have been used. The upper surface has traces of an inlaid pattern which is not immediately recognisable although it is possible that a survey of other inlaid floor tiles from Lincoln might find a parallel. All that can be seen for certain is a straight line parallel and close to one of the sides, a curved line which might be part of a circular band and two undecipherable lines which might be traces of a animal or human figure. The sides of the tile were knife-trimmed with a slight bevel and the base had also been knife-trimmed.

The fabric of the tile is dark grey contains moderate rounded calcareous inclusions which have been heat altered, indicating a firing temperature in excess of c.850 degrees C, and sparse rounded quartz grains up to 0.5mm across.

The fabric of the inlay contains abundant angular quartz grains up to 0.2mm across together with sparse calcareous inclusions. The inlaid clay had a pinkish appearance, probably due to the presence of iron in the sand.

The tile was glazed and the glaze has a green/brown colour.

Many of the features of this tile fabric are the result of over-firing – the bloating, the dark grey colour, the alteration of the calcareous inclusions and even probably the colour of the glaze, which seems to have adsorbed iron from the body of the tile. It is difficult, therefore, to know what the intended characteristics of the tile might have been.

Assessment

There is evidence for the production of plain glazed floor tiles in the later 14th century at St Marks Station East, in the Wigford High Street but this is the first evidence for the production of decorated floor tiles in Lincoln.

The use of inlaid clay, the simple pattern and the bevelled sides and knife-trimmed base are all consistent with a late 13th to early 14th century date and it is likely that by the mid 14th century any

decorated floor tiles used in Lincoln would have been supplied by the Nottingham industry, whose products have been found on several excavations in the city, notably at the Bishop's Palace.

The fact that this tile is definitely a waster is strong evidence for the production of floor tiles nearby but it is also possible that the waster was including in the packing of a batch of tiles made elsewhere. Visual examination of the fabric shows that it is consistent with a local origin but this should be tested by thin section and chemical analysis and comparison with thin section of floor tile fabrics from Lincoln which are part of the CLAU archive.

Assuming that the tile was indeed locally made, this is evidence for the erection on site of a tile kiln. Although it used to be thought that most tile floors were made at the place of use by itinerant tilers further study, including the results of scientific analysis of the tile fabrics, now suggests that on-site production was actually uncommon except for major building campaigns. This, in turn, suggests that the tile is to be associated with major building work at the Friary rather than the repair of existing floors or the paving of a single floor. It is known from documentary sources that the friary was founded in the 1230s, which would be remarkably early for this tile (although not impossible – the earliest two-colour tiles known in the country are those made for the royal palace at Clarendon from the 1240s onwards). However, it is also known that the friars expanded their precinct during the 13th century and it is more likely that this tile was associated with building works in this second stage of development.

Because of the light it potentially throws on the friary and upon the tile industry in Lincoln, the find deserves further work. This work should include a survey of the inlaid floor tiles known from Lincoln, looking both at their decoration and fabric, and the production of a thin section and chemical analysis of the fabric, to test the suggestion that it was made from local resources. The results of this further work should be prepared for publication in an archaeological journal, such as *Lincolnshire History and Archaeology*.

Costing

Illustration of tile £20 plus VAT

Examination of comparanda in Lincoln City and County Museum £88 plus VAT

Thin section production and analysis £22 plus VAT

Chemical analysis and comparison with other locally made ceramics £22 plus VAT

Production of Report £88 plus VAT

Total: £240 plus VAT