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# Proceedings of the Cambridge Antiquarian Society

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(incorporating the Cambs and Hunts Archaeological Society)

**Volume LXXXVII  
for 1998**



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Editor Alison Taylor

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# A New Building at the Dominican Priory, Emmanuel College, Cambridge, and associated Fourteenth Century Bawsey Floor Tiles

Alison Dickens

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## Summary

Excavations at Emmanuel College indicated the presence of a previously unknown building, part of the Dominican Priory complex. The building, probably 14th century in date, was decorated with embossed floor tiles from the Bawsey kiln near Kings Lynn, and with painted glass windows. The role suggested is that of a guest house, perhaps associated with the only Parliament ever to sit at Cambridge, held at the priory in 1388.

## Introduction

This paper is concerned with later 14th century aspects of an excavation conducted on the site of the new Queen's Building at Emmanuel College by the Cambridge Archaeological Unit of the University of Cambridge in 1993. Results are briefly summarised below and are full details are contained in the archive report (Dickens 1993b). The arguments form part of a larger examination of the shift from monastic to collegiate Cambridge and the survival of monastic structure (both fabric and form) within colleges, most recently discussed in relation to Jesus College (Evans *et al.* 1998).

Little is known of the history of the site occupied by Emmanuel College before the arrival of the Dominican Black Friars some time between 1221 and 1238. The Hundred Rolls (ii: 360) records the results of the Great Inquisition taken in 1278/9. This reports that the friars received:

eight acres of land and more in length and breadth, in which place were accustomed to be divers mansions in which many inhabited who were wont to be geldable and aiding to the town.

Stokes notes, however, that this is a customary phrase which should not be taken literally (1915: 11). Identical wording is used about the Franciscan site at Sidney Sussex College. Elsewhere, the Hundred Rolls record that there were only a few messuages along the road and "not a dozen house owners", which certainly suggests that "divers mansions" is something of an exaggeration (*ibid.*: 13).

The site lay in the parish of St. Andrew, just outside the Barnwell Gate, through which the *via Devana*

entered the town. From its early years the priory was second only to the Oxford house in the system of Dominican education, being recognised as a *Studium Generale* in 1309. The records show gifts from successive monarchs of materials and money, allowing the priory at its height to house up to 70 brothers. In 1240 the priory was granted permission to enlarge its cemetery by closing a lane south of the church. As recompense to the people of Cambridge an equivalent amount of land was given over to a new lane along the northern boundary of the priory, on the line of modern Emmanuel Street. The site was enlarged around 1285, coinciding with a large grant of money from Alice, widow of Robert de Vere, Earl of Oxford. This grant and the subsequent enlargement lead Alice de Vere's descendants to claim, erroneously, that she had founded the priory (Palmer 1885: 139). A further two acres were acquired in 1293. The priory appears little affected by the Black Death, indeed the 14th century was a period of activity for the Cambridge Dominicans, one important event being that from 9th September to 7th October 1388 the only Parliament ever held in Cambridge sat at the priory.

Between the end of the 15th century and the 1530s changes took place at the Dominican house that reflected the political and religious situation in the country. In 1491 the Dominicans were granted a forty day indulgence to penitents visiting "the celebrated image of Our Lady" in the church (Palmer *op. cit.*: 142). On 30th August 1538, however, the then prior, Gregory Dodds, requested of Thomas Cromwell that the image of Our Lady of Grace be removed from the church as he could not bear "syche ydolatrye" (VCH 1948: 275). By the time of the surrender in 1538 it seems the site was already run down to a certain extent, and perhaps even partially dismantled (*ibid.* and below). Dodds asked that the house be taken into the King's hands and though the surrender document was neither sealed nor dated, the priory was put into the hands of William Standysh, Principal of the St. Nicholas Hostel to hold "to the King's Use" (*ibid.*). When the Commissioners arrived they found the site abandoned and all portable goods had been removed though "the iron, glass and stone remained and the house undefaced until the King's pleasure be further known"

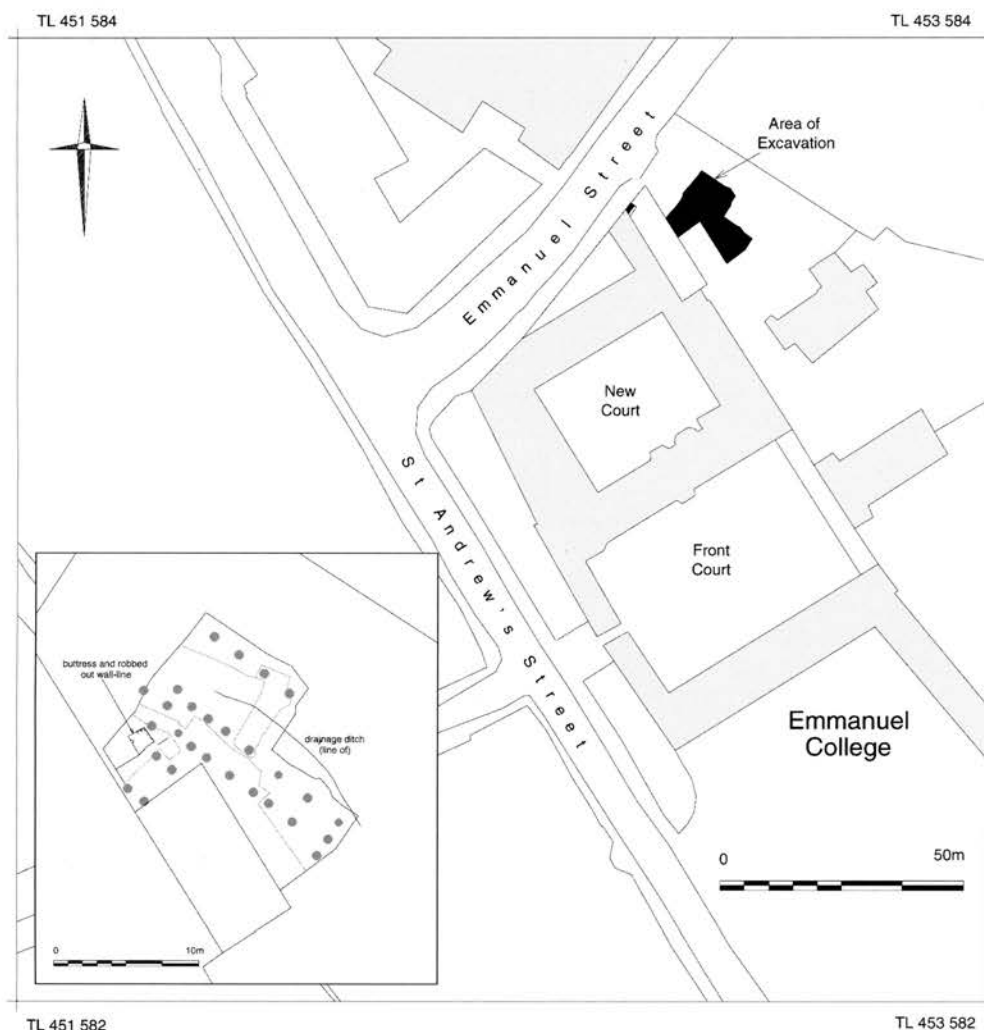


Figure 1. Location of site and feature details

(*ibid.*). In 1539 the site was leased by the Crown for 21 years to William Sherwood, who seems to have lived there for a while (Stokes 1915, 25). In 1544 residency passed to Edward Elrington who started at once to pull down the buildings. The accounts of St. Mary's for 1545 show 40s paid for the stone from the Black Friars and 4d to view the timber (VCH 1948: 275). This demolition may have been completed by Walter Mildmay who came by the land in 1583, and founded Emmanuel College upon it in 1584.

### Priory to College

Tradition has it that the main buildings of the newly created college were built largely on the location, if not the actual foundations, of those of the Dominican priory. Dyer reports:

Yon hall on north, altered indeed and much decorated – the library on the east – and kitchens, raised of clunch stone. Where that hall now stands, the chapel of the Black Friars once stood; and the high altar was towards the screens. (1814: 373)

There is substantial evidence to support this, summarised by Stubbings in 1969, when decoration and

restoration work in the Buttery, Hall and Parlour revealed medieval features surviving in those more recent buildings. Observations by Stubbings in 1959 and the author in 1992 may suggest some early structural remains in the area of the modern kitchens (see below). The earliest known map of Cambridge (Richard Lyne, 1574) shows only a small part of the site some 36 years after its surrender, unfortunately not extending far enough south to show what might have remained of the priory proper. It is not clear whether the few buildings that are shown represent a final stage of the priory or later structures erected before the construction of the college. By the time of John Hamond's 1592 map the college buildings were in place and the area of the 1993 excavation was the Master's Orchard. Walls separated the orchard from the Fellows Garden to the northeast, and both from "Emmanuel College Walks" to the southeast. From this time until its conversion to a car-park in the 20th century, the area remained in use as gardens, encroached upon from the south by expansion of the Master's Lodge, but otherwise largely unchanged for more than 300 years.



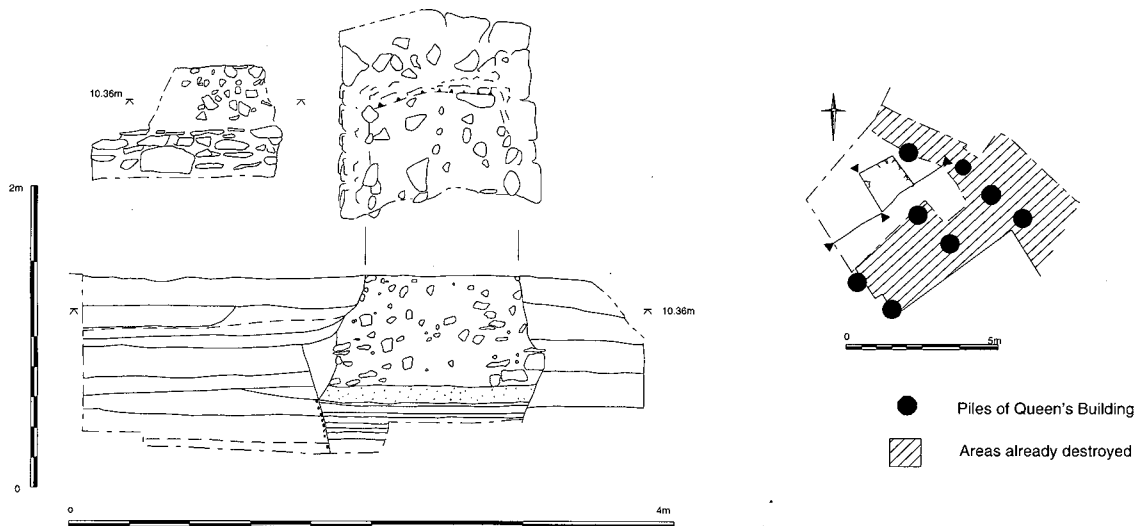


Figure 2. Plan and section of surviving North Building Buttress

### The Excavations

The 1993 excavations were within the new Queen's Building basement, an area of about 90m<sup>2</sup>, much disturbed by later services, in which archaeology survived on three unconnected 'islands'. Despite being in a part of the site presumed to be set back from the main monastic and college precincts, there was evidence of activity relating to both main phases of use. No pre-priory features were observed, although a possible early horticultural horizon was identified. Two main groups of features related to monastic occupation of the site. The earlier was a large tank, at least 2.30m deep, with a possible second similar feature (observed only in the evaluation) immediately to the south. This seemed to be the central feature of a water management system incorporating tank(s) and ditches designed to control the flow of water across the site and out to the north.<sup>1</sup> The tank and ditch sequence was backfilled and covered by a substantial stone structure, the main theme of this paper, which is examined in detail below. This seems to have stood until the mid 16th century when it was at least partially demolished, elements of it being re-used as footings for a short lived timber framed structure. Following the foundation of Emmanuel College in 1584 the whole site area became gardens and orchards, one striking early feature of this phase being a series of square tree pits dug through the demolition debris. The area remained a garden until the mid 20th century.

As indicated above, it is commonly believed that the early college was built substantially upon the surviving masonry of the priory, and nothing was revealed in the excavations to suggest otherwise. The investigation did, however, uncover evidence of a substantial and hitherto undocumented structure to the north and east of the presumed main part of the priory, referred to henceforth as the North Building. Extensive robbing prior to the construction of the early college and subsequent service installation in

more recent times meant that little of the structure survived *in situ*. The main evidence was a substantial stone buttress constructed within a square cut with near vertical sides, breaking sharply to a flat base (Fig 2). The buttress measured 1.40m wide (west-east) by 0.75m deep to the packed foundation, 1.20m to the base, and survived 1.40m long (north-south). At the base of the masonry was a series of very hard compacted layers of flint gravel with interleaving layers of sand and clay. The buttress itself had a fine clunch and stone facing around a core of flint pebbles and sub-angular clunch pieces in a loose mortar matrix. The backfill of the construction trench contained two pieces of a 14th century Hedingham jug. Immediately south of the buttress was a substantial robber trench indicating the removal of a significant wall. At its base was a very hard compact sandy gravel, possibly a remnant of its foundation packing which, to the west, overlay blocks of clunch pressed into the upper backfill of an earlier ditch. The former ground surface around the buttress was sealed by a compact crushed clunch layer which sloped to the north and may either indicate a yard area outside the building or a spread of debris associated with its construction. A pit in this and a later tile surface suggest an extended life for the yard, the tile surface itself being cut by a later pit which contained 14th and 15th sgraffito ware and signs of burning. To the east of the building was a roughly north-south ditch cut into the backfill of an earlier water tank. Only the west side of the ditch survived as the east was truncated by the cut of a later feature. The side sloped at c. 45° towards the top, becoming steeper in the lower part, breaking abruptly to a flat base. The primary fill was a dark grey to black sticky silt clay with a high organic content, occasional chalk flecks and fragments of roof tile. Overlying this was a brown sticky silt clay. The organic material in the primary silts suggests that the ditch was permanently waterlogged and it probably served to carry excess water away from the site.

Although the surviving physical evidence for the

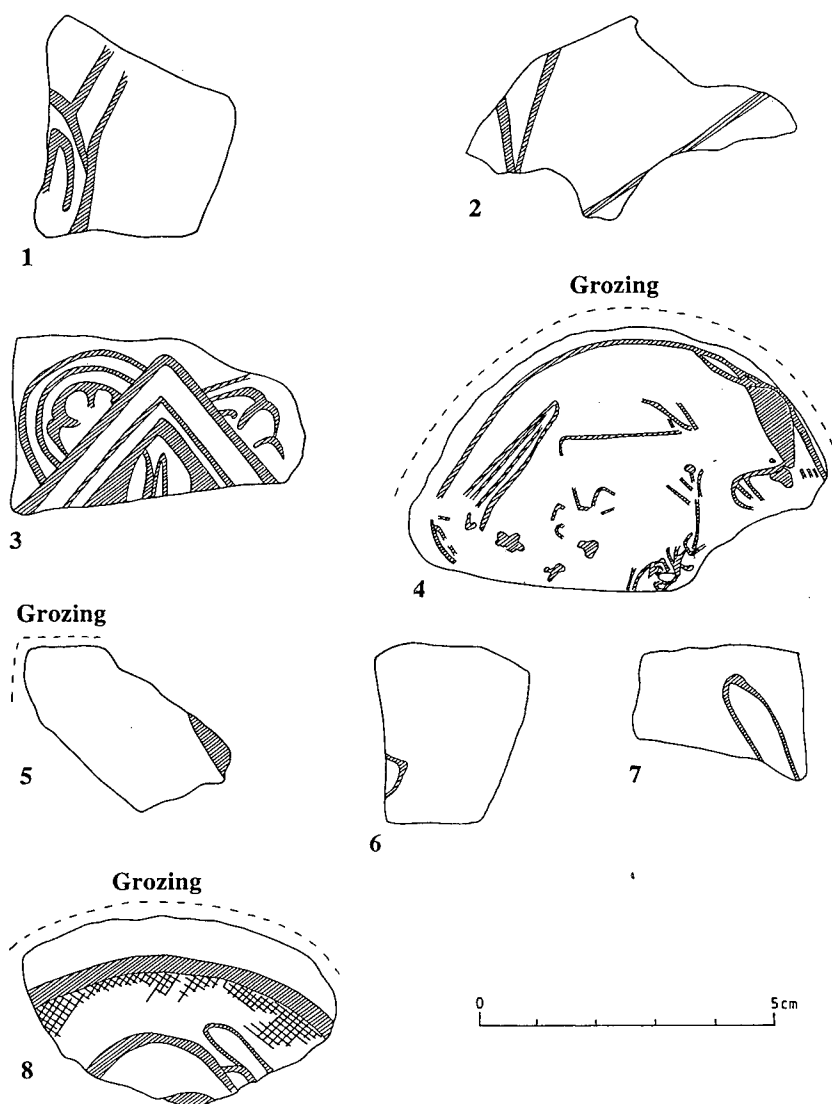


Figure 3. Fourteenth century painted window glass (shading denotes extent of red paint)

North Building is slight, the remains impart considerable information about the form of the structure. This was a substantial stone building, probably rising to two stories, with a finely finished exterior. The proximity of a contemporary drainage ditch argues against the northern wall continuing to the east (see below and Fig 2) making it most probable that the buttress was located on the northeastern corner of the building, matched by its pair on the eastern side of the corner. This would correspond with the pattern observed in the church (see below) and in other Dominican buildings of the period. Modern disturbances had, unfortunately, obliterated any further evidence of the North Building which might have survived post medieval stone quarrying. Further to the south, robbed out remains roughly at right angles to the first buttress were initially thought to represent a second, however it is unlikely that these are contemporary given both the apparent length of the feature and what would be an awkward position along a presumed eastern wall line.

#### Floor Tiles and Window Glass

No *in situ* evidence of the interior of the North Building survived, however there was ample evidence of its character in the rubble remains of its demolition. Contexts immediately post dating the building were characterised by an extensive spread of small scale demolition debris including large quantities of roof and glazed floor tile, mortar, lumps of clunch and fragments of painted window glass. The floor tiles are discussed below (Appendix I)

Twenty five pieces of 14th century window glass were recovered from the same deposits, eight of which had traces of red paint decoration (Fig 3). Unfortunately the glass had survived in a very poor condition, most pieces were small (average thickness 3mm), and were recovered with difficulty. The decoration consists of patterns painted in red onto the surface of the glass. Two of the decorated fragments have identifiable patterns, the others either have lines or, in the case of one, a confused swirl. Two or possibly three pieces have grozed (clipped and shaped) edges.

It must be stressed that none of the 14th century building material was recovered *in situ*. All the decorated tile and window glass came from contexts dated by pottery to the 16th century and later. The material does, however, provide an insight into the stature of the building from which it came. Judging from the historical accounts the structural fabric of the priory had three main phases of expansion: at the founding around 1238; at the time of Alice de Vere's grant around 1285; and during the 14th century, to which no specific date is attached but which was probably associated with the 1388 Parliament. The excavation revealed clear evidence of only the latest of these. The secure dating of the Bawsey kiln tiles to the latter part of the 14th century dates at least the decoration of the North Building to that time.

### *The North Building in Context*

In c. 1250 a Dominican Master-General, Humbert of Romans commented "we have nearly as many different plans and arrangements of our buildings and churches as there are priories" (Butler 1984: 131). Whilst this certainly seems to be the case there was at least a broad pattern to the layout of mendicant houses, though it was far from a blueprint: without exception all had a church with at least one attached claustral range. Hinnebusch notes of the Cambridge house that the church was orientated east-west but it is not known which side of the cloister it flanked (1951: 133). If sufficient space was available, Hinnebusch suggests, the friars were likely to choose to position the church on the northern side of the cloister thus creating a degree of shelter (1951: 133). Of fifteen English examples he notes, however, eight had the church to the north of the cloister, six to the south and at Carlisle it was probably the eastern wing of the claustral range. At Cambridge the evidence remains inconclusive. There is traditional and some archaeological support for a northern cloister, whereas architectural observations have led to the tentative suggestion of a southern range (Stubblings 1969: 99).

Without further firm structural or archaeological evidence to draw upon, resolution of this question cannot be conclusive. The identification of the new North Building does not, unfortunately, cast much light on the problem. If the priory had a northern cloister the North Building could have protruded from its eastern range (a not uncommon situation for the Chapter house e.g. Oxford) or, more probably, sat a little to the east. If the cloister were to the south then the new building would stand in isolation to the northeast of the church (Fig 4). Detached buildings are not unknown in urban and semi-rural mendicant houses. At Guildford, Poulton & Wood suggest that the documented, but undiscovered, King's Lodgings was a detached building (1984: 40). At Brecon and Canterbury detached buildings are thought to be most probably guest houses (Clapham 1930: 94, Poulton & Wood 1984: 40). It is this context that is proposed for the North Building at Emmanuel. Northern cloister or no, the building remains set back from the central complex and so from the day-to-day life of the

priory. It lies close to the 13th century foundation of Preacher's Lane (now Emmanuel Street) and overlay water management features associated with the early priory, confirming that it is a later addition (Dickens 1993b). The demolition material suggests a fine building, one which the priors were quite willing to aggrandise despite the poverty in which they were supposed to live. That poverty, however, was always a means to an end in the Dominican order. As Hinnebusch comments "it could always be sacrificed and modified if it proved an obstacle to a wider apostolate" (1951: 129). Perhaps in the words of an eyewitness literary description of an English friary from the later middle ages:

halles full hygh and houses full noble  
chambers with chimneyes and chapells gaie;  
and kychens for an hyghe kinge in castells to holden,  
And her dortour y-dight with dores full stronge  
(Dobson 1984: 112)

There are sufficient examples, certainly by the 14th century, to testify to the existence and frequent use of guest houses within the precincts of Dominican houses. The guest house at Oxford was undoubtedly occupied by some of the delegates to the 'Mad Parliament' which met there in 1258 (Hinnebusch 1951: 195). It is not recorded where in the Cambridge priory the parliament of 1388 sat or the domestic arrangements of its delegates. Perhaps it is stretching the evidence too far to propose this building as the venue, however, this 'guest house' was lavishly decorated then, as perhaps was the church itself (Stubblings 1969: 101) and the arrival of Parliament was an event that may well warrant such an outlay.

The North Building stood through to the end of the priory's working life, when at least one buttress was incorporated into the foundations of a later timber framed structure (Dickens 1993b). Opinion on what happened to the fabric of the main priory buildings after the Dissolution differs. Haigh suggests that by the time the College was founded the buildings had already been disposed of and demolished (1988: 14), however it seems clear that the main complex was at least partially standing and was incorporated to some degree into the new college (see above). Loggan's 1688 engraving clearly shows the west wall of the church with its large window filled but still recognisable, before its demolition in 1769 (Stubblings 1969: 97). The more likely scenario is that demolition was partial, beginning around 1544/5 when Edward Elrington took up residence. The demolition of the North Building and subsequent removal from the site of much of the larger debris, however, appears to have been rather more thorough. In both assessment and excavation it was noted that almost no large pieces of building material were evident (Dickens 1993a: 8). Of the smaller debris only a handful of tiles, for example, were found intact, the rest seemingly broken at the time of demolition. This thoroughness suggests deliberate clearance of at least this part of the site, and it could well have been the stones of this building that were those sold to St Mary's in 1545 for 40s (VCH 1948: 275).

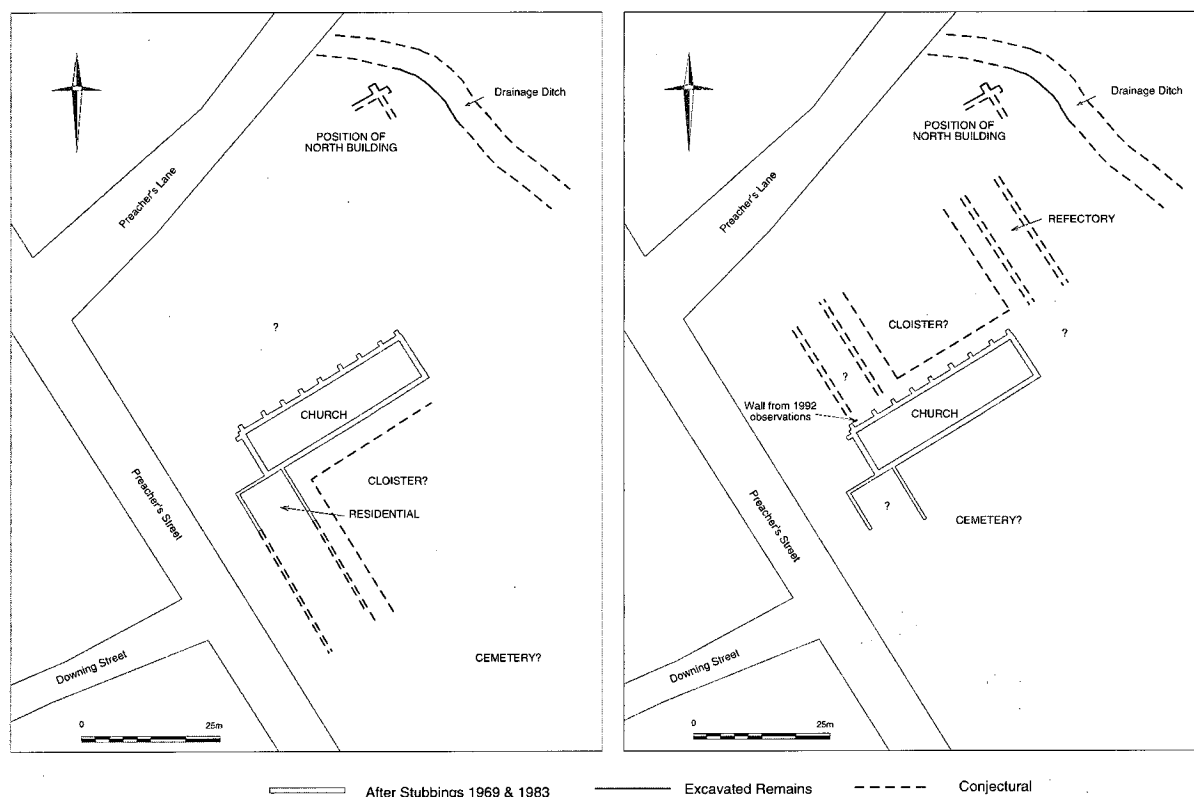


Figure 4. Possible reconstructions of North and South Cloister Ranges based on available evidence

### Acknowledgements

The author would like to thank Emmanuel College for funding the original 1993 excavation programme and the Cambridge Archaeological Unit team who carried it out under the author's direction. Assistance from the McAlpine and Murphy's representatives on site was invaluable. The paper has benefited enormously from discussion with several people including Christopher Evans and Hugh Richmond, however any opinion expressed is the author's own. Figures were drawn by Crane Begg and the author, tile photographs are by Gwil Owen, Cambridge University Department of Archaeology.

### Endnotes

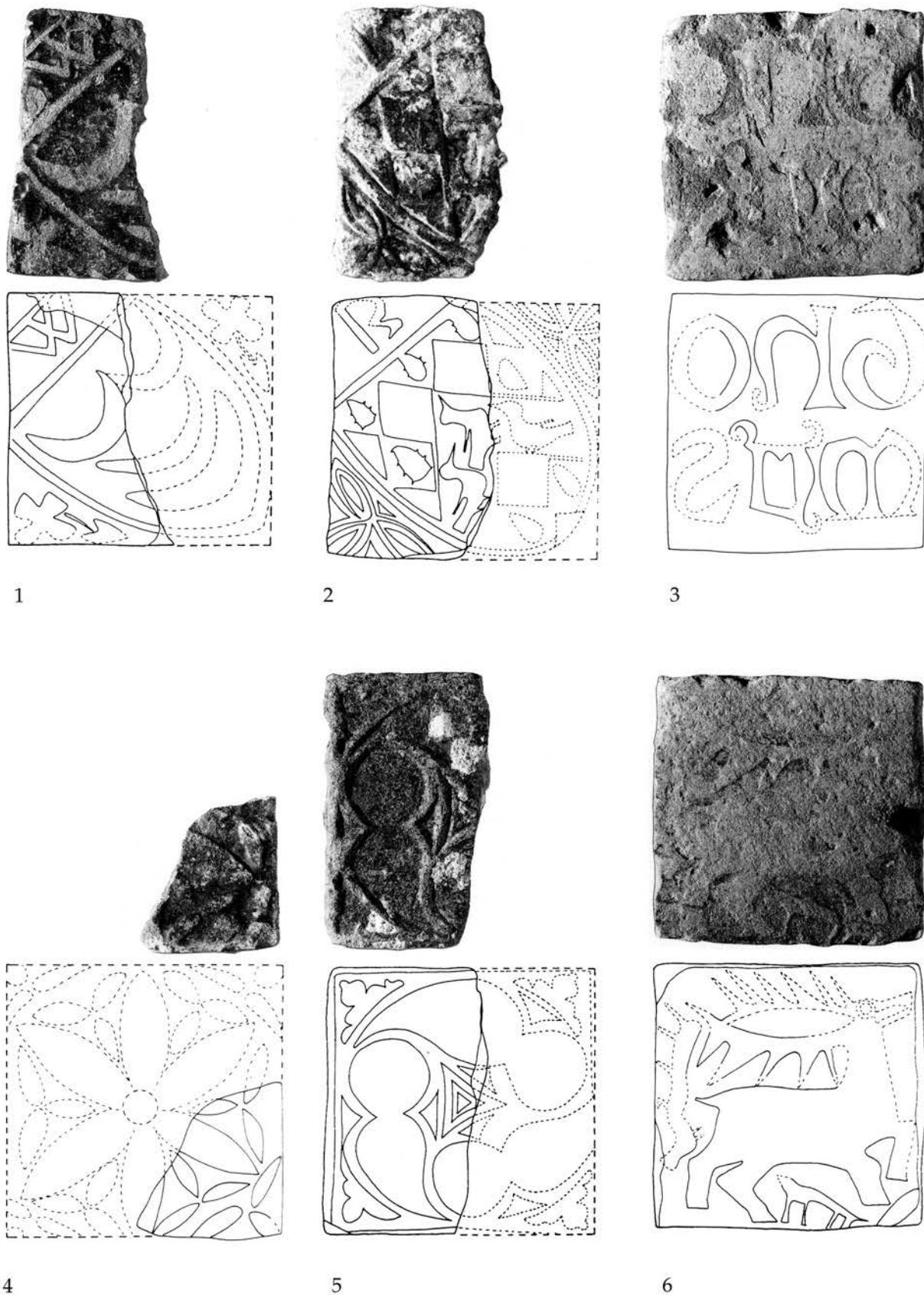
- <sup>1</sup> Flooding and the control of excess water appears to have been a problem on the site at several times in its history, indeed the car park immediately preceding the construction of the Queen's Building used to flood regularly.

### Appendix I

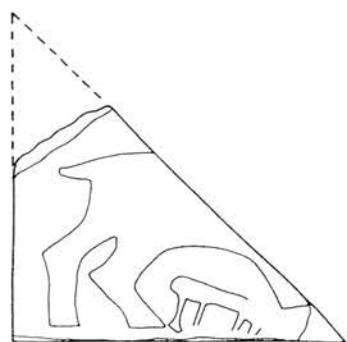
#### The Bawsey Floor Tiles

Elizabeth Eames has published widely on the subject of medieval tiles, but her main work relating to the Bawsey kiln is the 1955 paper in the *Antiquaries Journal*. In this she identifies 57 tile designs, and one other fragment. Of these eleven are represented at Emmanuel among the 36 pieces of complete and broken impressed and glazed floor tiles (and 65 plain) recovered from demolition contexts.

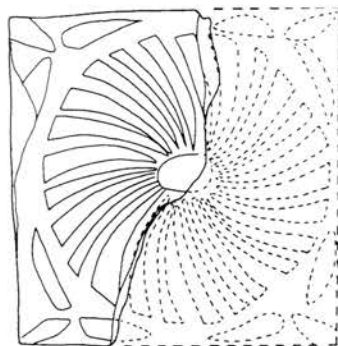
Eames' figures (plates XXIV–XXVIII), show examples of all the known designs, and serve to demonstrate the work of the three principal blockmakers she identifies, mostly producing their own versions of a fairly limited set of designs, plus a fourth – 'the curvilinear artist'. The kiln produced both plain and decorated tiles, the plain in various sizes, the decorated generally about 4" (100mm) square and from 0.7" (18mm) to 0.9" (23mm) thick. The patterns, formed in relief or counter relief were stamped with wooden blocks and covered in lead glaze, a technique apparently derived from Rhenish examples, the firing producing a wide range of colours both of tile and glaze. Relief tiles are comparatively rare in England, although examples from Bawsey are widely distributed in the hinterland of the Wash, with other examples from sites in East Anglia, and some from London (Eames 1955: 175, 1985: 25). Eames demonstrates quite conclusively that the Bawsey tiles have a 14th century date, with a mid-point for the kiln around



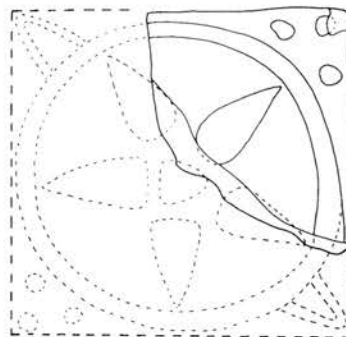
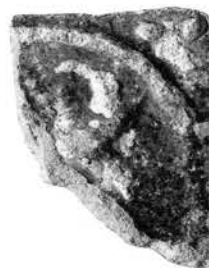
*Figure 5. Floor tiles from demolition layers over the North Building. Manufactured in the Bawsey kiln near King's Lynn. Shown at c. 45% actual size.*



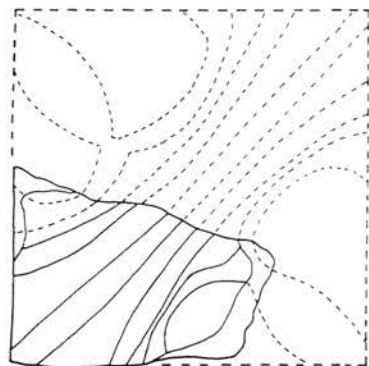
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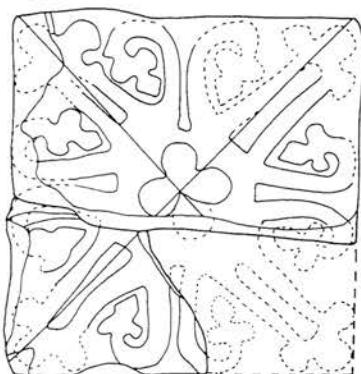
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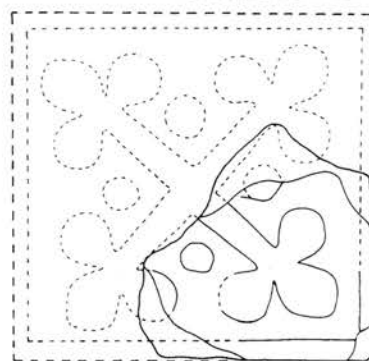
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Figure 5. continued

1376. Wasters excavated from the kiln site in 1843 and 1928 together with the *in situ* pavement at Castle Acre Priory Chapter House, suggest that the working life of all the four blockmakers that Eames identified overlapped and that the kiln may have had only a relatively short existence. It also confirms that the Bawsey tilemakers were following the general medieval practice of using the designs made for a specific site to decorate tiles intended for sites where the design was meaningless. Some of these as well as "off the peg designs" are apparent at Emmanuel. Other Cambridge examples have been recorded from St Michael's (style xxxviii, Eames 1955: 179) and from the front Court Lawn at Emmanuel College itself, in 1949 (styles lviii and lvii, Stubblings 1969: 101).

Bloom's 1843 description of the Castle Acre Priory Chapter House floor (as reported by Eames) gives an impression of how the Emmanuel Dominicans' floor may have appeared:

The pavement was very compactly and neatly laid in cement presenting at brief and regular intervals groups of embossed and intaglio tiles, and the intervening spaces being filled with plain tiles, and all highly glazed... The tiles were arranged in distinct groups of four of the same pattern placed in immediate contact with each other, and, after an interval, another group of four of another pattern, the several patches consisting of an even number of tile, bearing precisely the same device, each pattern differing from its neighbour. (Eames 1955: 174)

## The Tiles

### Style vii, Figure 5.1 1

This design is interpreted by Eames as Blockmaker Three's version of style vi, three crescents in a shield topped by a W. Style vii, however, has "a shield bearing four crescents arranged in a manner unknown to heraldry" (*ibid.*: 166). It is possible that style vi represents the arms of William Bateman, Bishop of Norwich 1344–45.

### Style xii, Figure 5.1 2

Xii is the second version (the first being xi) of "a representation of lozengy gutte or lozengy ermine ... charged with a chevron bearing three martlets, two sinister and one dexter" (Eames: 171). Whilst it is unlikely that the Kings Lynn Museum attribution of the style vi arms to William Waynflete, Bishop of Winchester who died in 1468, is correct, it is possible that it represents an earlier version of the arms borne with a canton by Patten of Warrington, bishop Waynflete being a later Patten. As Eames notes, however, this can only be conjecture (*ibid.*: 171).

### Style xviii, Figure 5.1 3

Xviii is one of only two Bawsey tiles with inscriptions. This one has the name Thomas in two rows of three letters. As with some of the other patterns, the block for this tile was not cut in reverse, thereby reversing the design on the tile. As this design was found *in situ* in the Chapter House floor at Castle Acre Priory in 1840,

Eames suggests that 'Thomas' may have been an officer or benefactor of the Priory. The most likely candidate is Thomas de Wigginhall, Prior in the 1370s.

### Style xxxvii, Figure 5.1 4

Xxxvii has a central 6 foil with trefoils between each arm.

### Style xxxviii, Figure 5.1 5

This design Eames attributes to 'the curvilinear artist': "a very delicate triskele pattern based on one of the motifs employed in decorated window tracery. The corners outside the circle are filled by a beautifully curved trefoil motif" (Eames: 169).

### Style xl, Figure 5.1 6 & 7

Xl is again the second blockmaker's version of a design by Blockmaker One. The main feature of the design is a stag which Eames describes as "being more angular than the first but [retaining] a certain solidity and spirited bearing". Unlike the original design, xl has the addition of two rather odd looking hounds, one below the stag's belly, the other running head first down the left hand edge of the tile.

### Style xlv, Figure 5.1 8

Xlv is a rosette assigned to Blockmaker One

### Style lii, Figure 5.1 9

A five pointed star by Blockmaker One or Two.

### Style liii, Figure 5.1 10

One of a series of "dull geometric designs" assigned to Blockmaker One.

### Style lvi, Figure 5.1 11

Eames describes lvi as a "somewhat unsatisfactory design based on intersecting arcs with foliate terminals" (*ibid.*: 170). She also reports, however, that it was a popular design, found on a number of sites.

### Style lvii, Figure 5.1 12

"A good counter-relief foliated cross" (Eames: 170).

## Heraldic Glossary

*ermine* white marked with black spots

*gutte* pl. *guttae*; drops in a row as ornament

*martlet* footless bird

*canton* square division, less than a quarter, in the upper corner of a shield

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