

FLOOR TILES AND KILNS NEAR THE SITE OF ST. BARTHOLOMEW'S HOSPITAL, RYE.

BY LEOPOLD A. VIDLER.

THIS account of my discoveries during the years 1931 and 1932 on the above site was in substance communicated to the Society of Antiquaries of London in a paper read at their rooms by myself on November 12th, 1931, together with details of the pottery also found upon the site. The pottery having assumed larger dimensions and importance since that date, and further discoveries being probable, it has been thought better to postpone this part of the subject until next year. My subject, therefore, is the History of the Site, the Kilns and the inlaid and incised Floor Tiles discovered. I will begin with a short historical survey.

Rye, as being part of the Saxon manor of Rameslie, was at a date early in the eleventh century promised by Æthelred II. to the Benedictine Abbey of Fécamp in Normandy. This promise, probably through the influence of his wife Emma, Æthelred's widow, was redeemed by Canute, in a charter still extant in France, in 1035, and the gift of the two manors, Rameslie and Steyning, was later confirmed by Edward the Confessor, the Abbots having failed to establish control during the troubled reigns of his two predecessors.

In 1103, William de Ros, one of the great building Abbots of Fécamp, paid a visit to their English possessions, and to soon after this date the Norman part of Rye Church can safely be assigned. Abbot William had founded a Leper Hospital at Fécamp for the young men who had contracted this disease during the First



FIG. 1. KILN NO. 1 FROM W., SHOWING ARCHES OF THE FURNACE WHERE THEY ENTER THE CHIMNEY.

Crusade, and as we find a flourishing Leper Hospital in Rye in 1189, it is not more than a fair inference that we owe its foundation to him.

In this year, 1189, Abbot Ralph d'Argences compounded by charter with the Hospital that in return for a payment of "two sols" per annum it should have its freedom from direct control, the Abbot only retaining the right of presenting the Chaplain. The Abbots retained this right until 1413, when the alien priories lost their estates, which the King had from time to time resumed during the period of the French Wars. The two shillings were paid without interruption first to the Abbot of Fécamp and then to his successors in title, the Lords of the Manor of Brede, until the middle of the eighteenth century!

The Hospital which was called the Hospital of St. Bartholomew at Rye, was under partial control of the Mayor and Commonalty of Rye, who nominated the Chaplain, overlooked the accounts and appointed the inmates, who consisted of both men and women. In 1502 after gross mismanagement by the Wardens or Chaplains, it was granted by the King to Westminster Abbey, and finally appropriated by it in 1521, the proceeds being used towards the cost of building Henry VII.'s Chapel.

The exact site of the buildings is still unknown, though Holloway, the historian of Rye, writing in 1866,¹ placed it in a field in the Borough of Rye, on the west side of Rye Hill. The field was known as the Spittal Field, and he stated that foundations had been found.

It was in this field, consisting of 5 acres, that, with the kind permission of my cousin, Capt. E. P. Dawes, the owner, and of Mr. R. J. Neeves, the tenant, commencing on April 14th, 1931, and searching for these foundations, I have found four early kilns, a large quantity of pottery, and some inlaid and incised floor tiles, evidently the throwouts and breakages of

¹ See *Antiquarian Rambles through Rye*, by William Holloway. Second Series, p. 16.

the kilns. As this was quite a new discovery, I naturally looked up our local records for any notice or mention of them.

I did not find any very direct evidence. In a document of about 1250, Andrew de Pottepurye signed as a witness to the transfer of a house, possibly in the vicinity of the field. In 1304 lands late of William de Pettepirie are mentioned, and in 1324 Andrew de Potepyrrie transfers to Peter the Clerk certain rents, one of which arose from a tenement in Potepirie Streete. In 1359, Thomas and William, sons and heirs of Walter Potter, sell a tenement in the town. These few notices, as I shall explain later, cover the period to which I shall assign my discoveries.

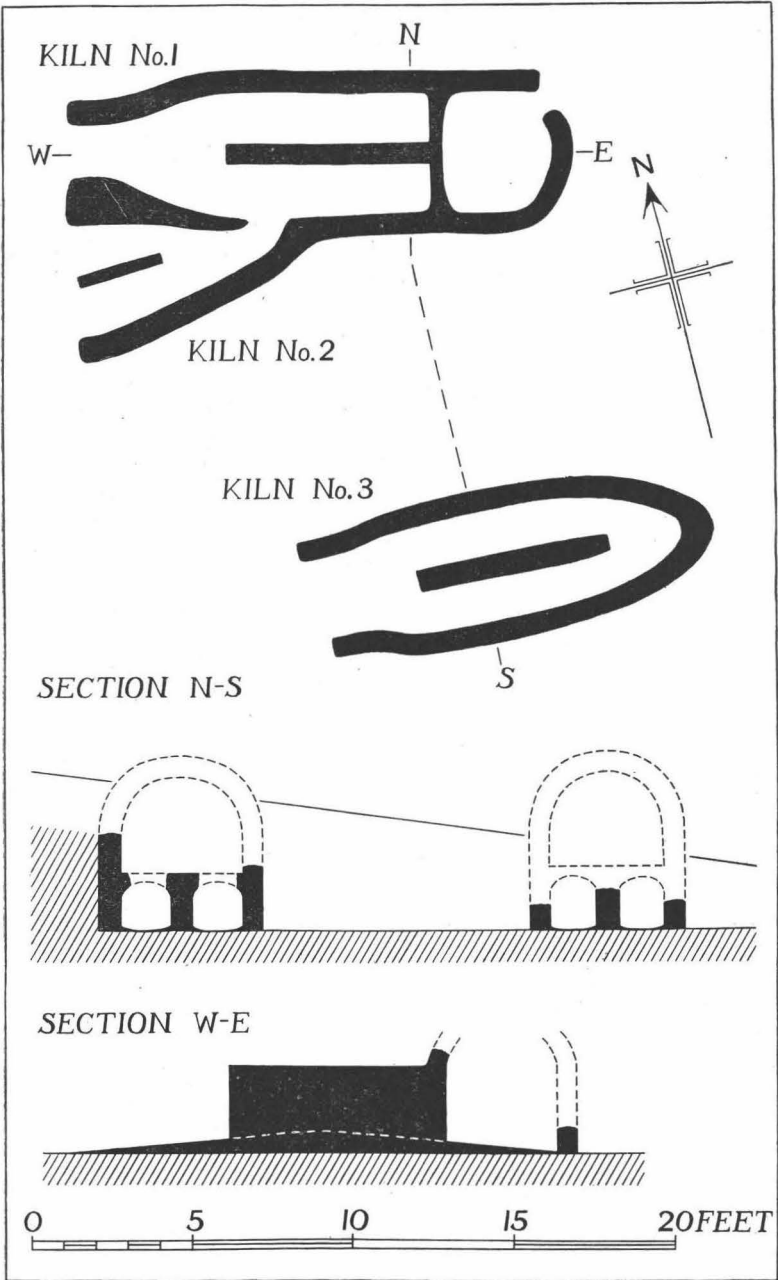
It is, I think, a not uncommon occurrence to find a tile factory in connection with a religious house, such as this undoubtedly was. It possessed bulls and indulgences, worth forty shillings a year in oblations, and received gifts in return for prayers for the benefactors' ancestors. It possessed a church and the Warden was also the Chaplain. Its site, although I have not yet had time to carry on my search for the actual buildings, was almost certainly to be found in the same field, and we can also in this case safely assume a close connection between the two.

Until my discovery, I think I can say no one suspected that there had been a flourishing pottery and tile factory in Rye at so early a date, and down to the present time no inlaid tiles of the sizes and designs I have found appear to have survived.²

My next subject is the kilns, the photographs and plans of which are reproduced here. For the latter I am indebted to Mr. Gerald C. Dunning, of the London Museum, who visited the site in 1932.

When, on April 14th, 1931, I first put my spade into the ground, I had a five-acre grass field in which to prospect for the foundations of the Hospital. Naturally I chose that part where Holloway had stated the foundations to be, and, seeing where the

² But see Note 3.



PLAN OF KILNS, RYE.

ground had lately been disturbed and a few shards of mediaeval pottery thrown up, I started to dig a little way off, not wishing to disturb what I thought might possibly be the last resting place of a lately deceased lamb.

For the first 18 in. the soil was clean mould with occasional pieces of old churchwarden pipes, then I came on to soil packed with small pieces of very uninteresting pottery, and as I got down the pieces got larger and of a better type, until at about 5 ft. I came on a hard baked surface of clay. Thinking I was in a rubbish pit, where broken pots and ashes had been thrown, I started trenches first east and then north, hoping to strike the foundations, but the rubbish gradually petered out in both directions. I then extended my first trench, and made the discovery of a double arched opening with the arches intact, full of pots and fragments of pots, burnt ashes and soil all mixed in utter confusion. Suspecting the opening of a drain, I cleared it back to the arches and beyond, and found a whole pot built in to the structure. From then there was no longer any doubt that I had stumbled on a pottery kiln. I show a photograph taken about this time (Fig. 1).

After clearing the two tunnels, which gradually rose, for some 4 ft. I turned my attention to a hole on the left literally packed with pottery. Soon after a few pieces of broken inlaid floor tiles began to come out. I then started to dig down to where I expected to find the other end of the kiln, and came on to the middle of it at about 3 ft. deep. At this stage, Colonel Gray and Mr. L. F. Salzman, F.S.A., visited the site, and gave me much valuable advice as to procedure.

This kiln, when completely uncovered, ran lengthwise from west to east. On the north side it was built against a clay bank, and this side was intact up as high as the springing line of the probably dome-shaped or barrel roof of the baking chamber. On the south side, which was nearer the surface, the field sloping 1 in 7 from north to south, what remained of

the baking chamber had slipped down and was leaning outwards. This, after I had cleared the southern firing tunnel from the debris of its crashed roof, fell in and broke up. The accompanying photograph shows it in position as I found it.

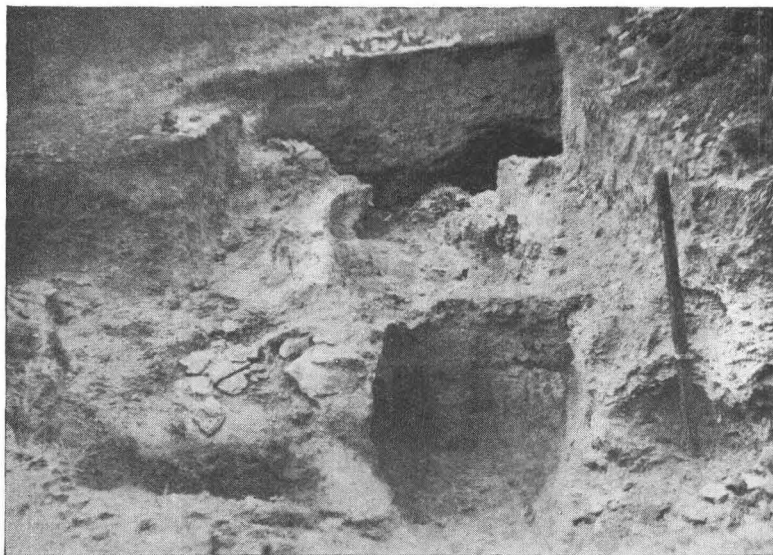


Photo by Guy Allen.

FIG. 2. KILN NO. 1: FURNACE ARCHES AND BAKING FLOOR.

When I came to measure up the kiln I found the southern firing tunnel was wider than that on the north side—this discrepancy was later explained by the finding of another very small kiln attached to this side, which opened into the south tunnel, thus apparently using the same chimney as an outlet for its smoke.

The dimensions of the kiln are 15 ft. long over all and 6 ft. in width at its widest part. The height of the existing baking chamber's wall from the floor at the entrance is about 3 ft. 6 in., but as the tunnels rise and fall from front to back to a point in the centre

10 in. above the entrance level, it is at this point only 2 ft. 8 in. high.

The whole structure is very roughly built of old broken tiles, stones, and pots, some of the latter being quite whole, welded together by the clay on the site. This had then been baked by the fires kindled within into a homogeneous structure that had defied the hand of time for over 600 years; the finger marks of its builders still showed on its blackened sides. Up to the level of the floor of the baking chamber the walls had no outer sides, being dug in to the virgin clay, and the north side of the baking chamber was built up against the bank on that side. The baking chamber's floor, the line of which shows in the photographs (Figs. 3 and 4), rested on arches and the central pier between the two firing tunnels. This pier is 6 ft. 4 in. long and 7 in. thick, varying in height with the level of the tunnel floors from 2 ft. 3 in. to 1 ft. 10 in. Without attempting a definite reconstruction, it is, I think, clear that the fires were fed from the west end, and that the chimney stood at the east end; also that the baking chamber was supported on arches and a central pier, between which the heat passed upwards through flues into its interior. The flues are plainly to be seen in the accompanying photograph. From the remains of the crashed roof it is possible to say that it was composed of like material to the rest. Pieces of charcoal and charred wood were common in the debris, and these were probably the only fuel used.

Later, some 12 ft. to the south-east a third kiln of the same general design was found, which is 13 ft. in length and 3 ft. 6 in. in width inside the walls. It had no smaller kiln attached, and being on a higher level and lower down the sloping field was only about 12 in. below the surface. The top part was completely gone, and it only stood some 16 in. above the floor of the tunnels—these being virtually flat, not rising and falling like the larger kiln.

Early in 1932 I found a fourth kiln to the west of the first kiln found. It appears to be of the same



Photo by Guy Allen.

FIG. 3. N. SIDE OF BAKING CHAMBER, SHOWING FLUES ON SIDE OF FURNACE: FROM S.W.



Photo by Miss Bruce.

FIG. 4. KILN NO. 1: FROM S. SHOWING FURNACES AND REMAINS OF BAKING CHAMBER UP TO THE SPRING OF THE ROOF.

general design, but as its western end passes under the boundary fence surrounding the site it has not been possible to make a complete survey of it.

Of the age of these kilns, I can only say that they must be older than the pots they baked, and the pots built into their structure were probably fired in still older kilns, though some of these may, of course, have been inserted during the frequent repairs necessary to such a structure.

The kilns, pots and tiles are all constructed from the clay on the site, which is quite of a suitable character, and white clay necessary for the inlaid tiles is also to be found in the vicinity of the field. The glaze is a lead glaze, and pieces of rough and melted lead have been found during the excavations. The method of manufacture of the tile seems to have been to cast it in ordinary clay in a mould. This is bevelled to the back, which is consequently smaller on the reverse than on the obverse. In the case of the $5\frac{3}{8}$ in. tiles, the reverse measures only $4\frac{3}{4}$ in. Then the wooden mould is impressed, the white clay run over it and smoothed off until the design shows up clearly. It would then be sun-dried, glazed and baked in the kiln. The reverse of the $5\frac{3}{8}$ tile is generally smooth, but in some instances it is stabbed three times with a four-pronged fork, thus making twelve holes about half through. In many cases the tiles have broken along the line of these holes. These tiles were probably made by a different workman, and the only object of these holes seems to give the tile better clinging power if placed on a wall. The plain tiles are never stabbed in this way, but with larger holes all over the back apparently for the same purpose.

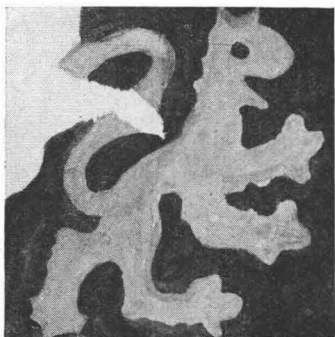
It is, I think, unusual to find both pots and tiles made at the same factory, though the destroyed kiln at Hastings was apparently so used. I cannot say baked in the same kiln, as more than one kiln has been found, but the broken fragments, as well as the few whole tiles, that have been found are mixed and scattered at all but the lowest depths among the



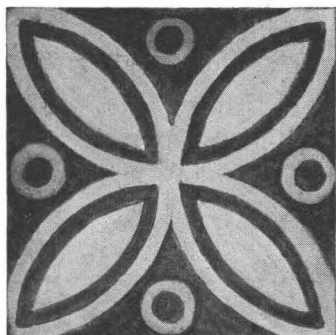
I. 1



I. 2



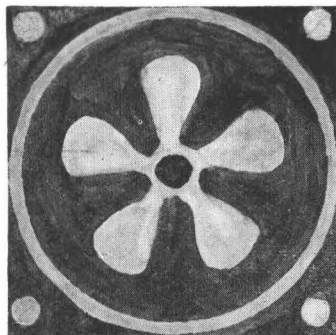
I. 3



I. 4



I. 5



I. 6

RYE TILES: SERIES I. (5×5 in.).

pottery fragments. They are infinitely rarer than the pottery, and it was a good day when I found even part of an inlaid tile.

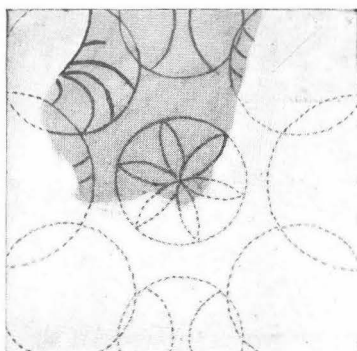
I will not waste time with the roofing tiles, plain tiles, hips and valleys, as none were found quite



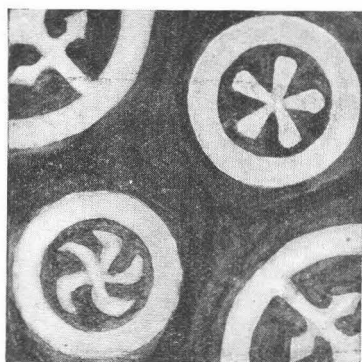
II. 1



II. 2



II. 3



II. 4

perfect, nor with the plain floor tiles generally, 7 in. by 7 in., two of which I found whole, nor again with the floor tiles glazed a plain green and sometimes cut half through for breaking in two, but will proceed at once to the different types of inlaid and incised tiles.

There are three sizes, representing two series of wooden dies, probably made by different artists, and one with incised and painted designs.

The first is the smallest, $4\frac{3}{4}$ in. by $4\frac{3}{4}$ by $\frac{3}{4}$, and less elaborated and possibly older. For much of what follows I am indebted to Mr. W. J. Andrew, F.S.A., though of course the responsibility for all the statements is mine.

No. 1 is a horseman, and of this tile I have no complete example; it is compiled from several fragments of different specimens. He is moving to the left, and seems to be holding a spear in his hand. The plume-like object coming from the back of his head is very strange, and I cannot explain it.

No. 2 is a running stag—a fine drawing full of action, well filling the field.³

No. 3 is a rampant lion—another spirited design—facing right.

Nos. 4, 5 and 6 are conventional and ornamental designs, some of which are half cut diagonally, and therefore were all meant to be placed on the floor or wall. The inlay of all these is very slight, and I first thought it was only painted on, later I found some pieces showing the marks of the wooden matrix which was used to impress them.

A second kind is 5 in. by 5 by $\frac{3}{4}$, and is represented by one complete tile and fragments of three others. The designs are incised and paint added before glazing.

No. 1. This seems to be a comic fancy design of the artist, and may have been intended to take off some of his companions, the three heads appear to represent cowed or tonsured persons and are connected by serpentine necks: or are they phases of the moon?

³ Since this has been in the press, a small piece of this tile has been found about 4 ft. down in the south chapel of Rye Church. This may make it necessary to revise my theory as to the order of dating the tiles. For it seems possible that the largest size was made for the north chapel or chantry of St. Nicholas, which was built about 50 years before the south chapel of St. Clare, where this smallest size has now been found. It is probable that neither of these sizes was made for general sale, but definitely for these chapels when they were built. This suggestion is confirmed by the very small quantity of actual pieces found on the site.

No. 2 is part of similar design. No. 3 is a plain design, incised and painted all over a yellow colour. Just a geometrical pattern.

No. 4. This tile seems to belong to the series, though it is only painted and not incised. It consisted of two small patterns, apparently copied from larger ones, and a corner design. Though I think these three pieces are from the same pattern I cannot be quite sure.

The largest size are $5\frac{3}{8}$ in. by $5\frac{3}{8}$ by $\frac{7}{8}$ of an inch, and are possibly later and certainly of a better made type. It is, I believe, an unusual size, and the only examples of it that I have so far met with are two from Lewes Priory, a stag with a hound below and a knight in armour. These I have seen in our County Museum at Lewes, and other specimens at the British Museum. I do not think they were made at the Rye kilns.

No. 1 of this type is considered by Mr. W. J. Andrew to represent King Edward I. The face is unbearded, and this, with the false perspective of the side *fleurs-de-lys* of the crown, enables him to date it about 1275 to 1290. He considers that this peculiarity in perspective must have been copied directly from the money current at that period, for it does not occur later. Edward I. personally founded New Winchelsea in 1287, and incorporated both Rye and the new town in 1289.

No. 2 is the lower half of the same King. Note the long sleeves and the spurred leg. A figure on two tiles is, I think, uncommon, but there are three identical tiles in Appledore Church, Kent, of the lower half of a knight, and these, I think, are of about the same date.⁴

Nos. 3 and 4 are compiled from somewhat damaged tiles and, taken in conjunction evidently represent an Archbishop in chasuble and apparelled alb, wearing the pallium, three crosses of which are visible, the other two being on the shoulder. The hand raised in blessing is very quaint, and he is holding a crosier turned inwards. For this I suggest Archbishop

⁴ I am indebted to Dr. Cock, F.S.A., for a drawing of this tile.

Becket, to whom Winchelsea Church was originally dedicated, or as an alternative, Archbishop Winchelsey, a local man who filled the chair of St. Augustine from 1293–1313, a date which seems to agree well with the tile.



III. 1 and 2



III. 3 and 4

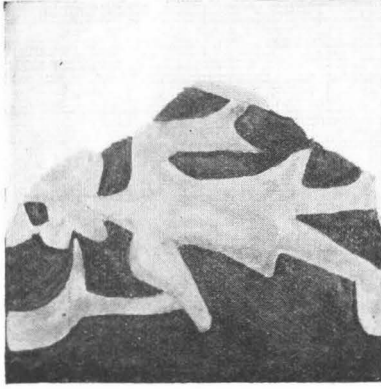
Nos. 5, 6 and 7 taken together represent a hunting scene. The huntsman on foot, blowing a horn and holding what is probably a spear in his left hand. Hounds, evidently greyhounds, two on a tile, though several tiles could be placed on the floor if more hounds were wanted, and lastly the stag. None of the specimens I have are complete, and I have only parts



III. 7



III. 6



III. 5



III. 8



III. 9



III. 10

of four specimens for the three. The whole makes a spirited, and probably familiar, scene of the period.

No. 8. This tile represents two dragons regardant within a circle, ornamented with lozenges and *fleur-de-lys*. I have no perfect specimen, and those parts I have are only in fair condition.

No. 9 a lion passant, but not a very artistic conception. Only one specimen has turned up, and that was in five pieces.

No. 10, an eagle displayed.

No. 11, two birds regardant, with crosses between.

No. 12, the Catherine Wheel. I have one complete tile and many pieces.

No. 13. Merely part of a floor pattern.

No. 14. Interlaced triangles. The familiar design, known as King Solomon's seal, possibly then popular on the return of King Edward from the Crusade. I have one tile nearly complete and parts of others.

No. 15, another ornamental floor pattern.

No. 16, the *fleur-de-lys*. This is the badge of the Blessed Virgin, to whom Rye Church is dedicated.

No. 17, a geometrical design, very similar to No. 4, of the smallest series.

No. 18, the fragments which comprise it are in too bad a condition to be certain of its details.

There are other fragments, from which I can gather no intelligible pattern, so have not ventured to reproduce them.

All of these tiles and other discoveries on the site are on view at the Rye Museum.

There are in addition to the pots and tiles a few other finds of interest.

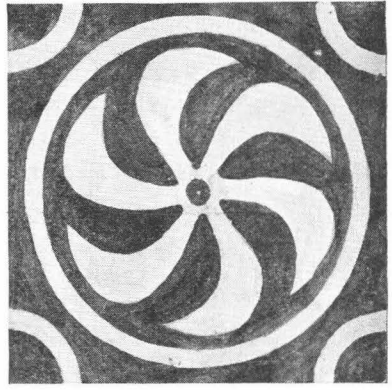
In iron: A hinge, a knife, a two-pronged fork, a piece of another hinge, and many nails or door rides.

In bronze: A needle, a pocket tweezer with ear spoon and hook, and two other relics the use of which is uncertain, but they may be part of a knife and the end of a strap.

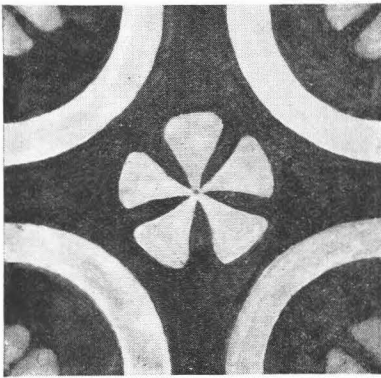
Pieces of charcoal and charred wood were frequently



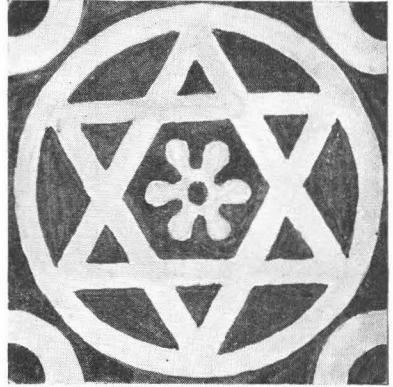
III. 11



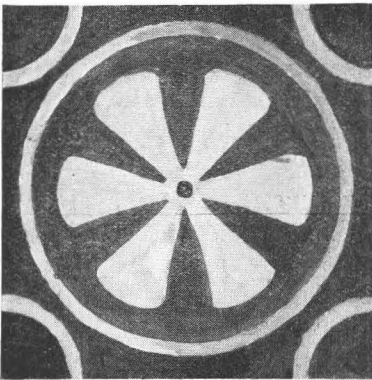
III. 12



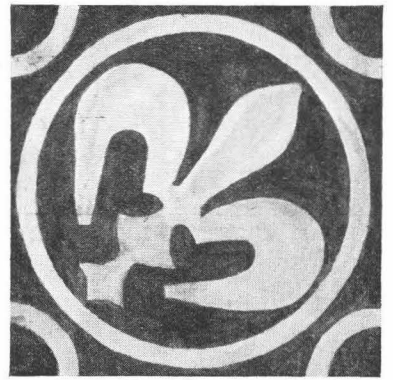
III. 13



III. 14



III. 15

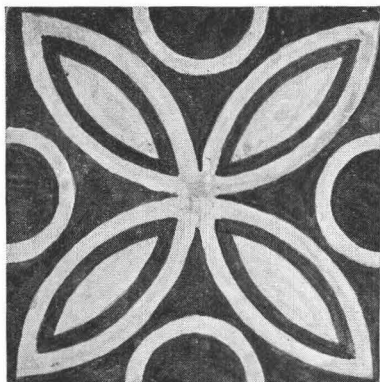


III. 16

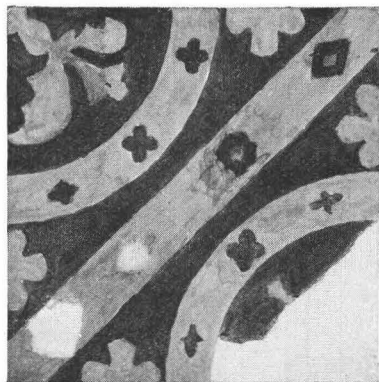
RYE TILES: SERIES III. ($5\frac{3}{8} \times 5\frac{3}{8}$ in.).

found; also bones and oyster shells suggestive of the midday meal of the workers.

There is one more discovery to report. A man who worked on the new road within 50 ft. of the kilns some 30 years ago, brought me a bronze key which he had there found. I bought it from him, and believe it to be of the period of the Hospital.



III. 17



III. 18

Though the excavations have been practically my own personal work, without paid assistance, I wish to express my obligation to the following:—To Mr. H. E. Firth-Franks, for his assistance on the site and in the assembling of the pots; to Colonel Gray, Messrs. L. F. Salzman, F.S.A., and Bernard Rackham, F.S.A., Dr. Cunnington, and others who have visited the site during the progress of the excavations, and helped me by their advice; to Mr. Gerald C. Dunning, for his advice and assistance in the excavation and his plan of the kilns; and, above all, to my friend, Mr. W. J. Andrew, F.S.A., for his keen interest and help throughout in the preparation of this report.