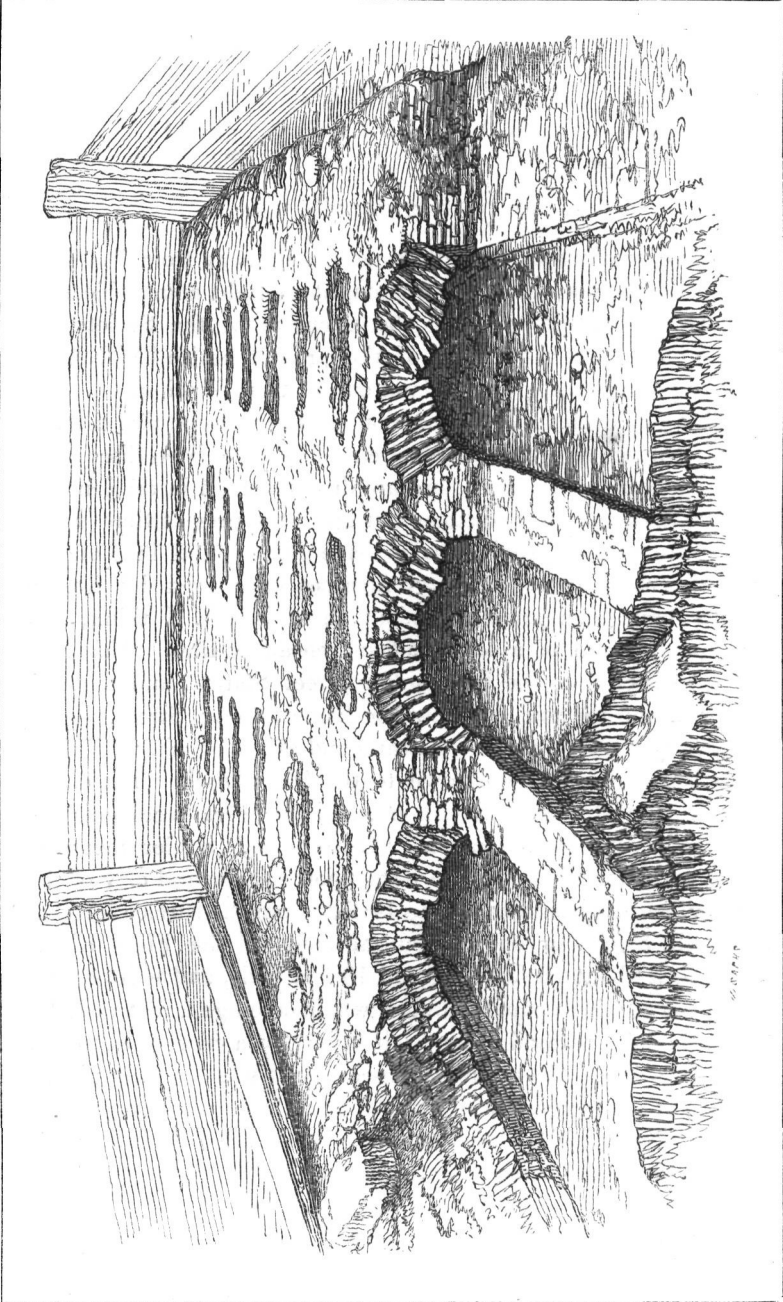


## MEDIEVAL KILN FOR BURNING ENCAUSTIC TILES DISCOVERED NEAR FARRINGDON ROAD, CLERK- ENWELL.

BY JOHN EDWARD PRICE.

The excavations for the Metropolitan Railway from Paddington to Farringdon Street have brought to light many objects of antiquarian interest, to which the attention of the Society has been directed, but the subject of the present notice has from its novelty perhaps the greatest claim on our consideration.

Kilns employed in the fabrication of those decorative tiles, so plentiful in some of the mediæval churches, have been discovered in many parts of England, and are duly recorded in the journals of our Antiquarian Societies; but up to the present time I am not aware that any such remains have been found in London. In different parts of the city, furnaces once used by Roman potters have been uncovered; but there is not, I think, any previous instance of a kiln for firing encaustic tiles. That now before us is close to the Farringdon Street Station, and occupies a portion of the site of Bowling Street, Peter Street, and a number of densely populated courts and alleys which, with their many intricacies, here led down to the Fleet Ditch. The entire demolition of this neighbourhood, and the great accumulation of rubbish, doubtless from the "Great Fire," render measurements uncertain; but the kiln rests upon the natural clay of the locality, and its position is some 14 feet from the surface level of Turnmill Street, or on the natural bank of the Fleet River. The kiln is about 16 feet long and 10 feet wide, and will be seen to consist of three parallel arches which average 2 feet wide by 1 foot high, separated from each other by a pier of about 12 inches in width. Soon after its discovery, it was carefully photographed at the suggestion of Mr. Alfred White, and subsequently sketched by Mr. John Franklin, to whom we are indebted for the drawing from which the annexed illustration has been made.



These arches constitute the furnaces, and support a level floor, which is pierced, at equal distances, with a series of openings each 2 feet long by 5 inches wide. Through these the heat would rise from below for firing the tiles. On the spaces between the apertures the tiles were probably placed, either laid in "saggers," if the nature of the fuel rendered protection from smoke necessary, or, what is more likely, simply stacked for burning. There are thirty of these openings remaining, though in some instances the intervening spaces have fallen away. The entire structure is composed of plain tiles, similar to those used for roofing purposes. These, in such exposed situations as the sides and roof of the furnaces, have "run" together, and become covered with a highly vitreous glaze, though where protected from the heat they are of a bright red colour, and as perfect as when first used. They are also made to serve as the paved floor or fireplace of the kiln; the three arches, as well as the intermediate piers, being built upon two rows of such tiles, one overlaying the other, and placed vertically; this well-made flooring forms a solid foundation of about 14 inches in thickness. In the furnaces the tiles composing it have been cemented together, and the mortar afterwards smoothed over to present a hard and even surface for the reception of the fuel. This layer is as strong as ever, and was apparently a great preventive against the edges of the tiles becoming broken and injured by the action of the fire. In it has been traced a great quantity of burnt wood; so possibly charcoal was the fuel employed, which is the more probable from there having been discovered no sign of flue or aperture for the escape of smoke. The rubbish immediately overlaying the kiln principally consisted of broken tiles and bricks. These, doubtless, formed part of the wall of the kiln, which would be built up to a certain height around the perforated floor. In clearing away the rubbish, a few tiles were discovered; they are of different sizes, but all of familiar types, and appear to be but refuse tiles, spoilt and blistered in the burning, and consequently thrown on one side as unfit for use; many though glazed are quite plain and devoid of pattern; some have the figure of white clay laid in *cavetto*, but unglazed,

while others indicate how both device and glaze have been destroyed by excessive heat. Among the designs we may mention the fleur-de-lys in bloom, and double-headed eagle—devices frequently met with on tiles of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. Of such, Gloucester, Oxford, Worcester, and Malvern have numerous examples, and similar specimens are to be met with in many other of our ancient country churches.

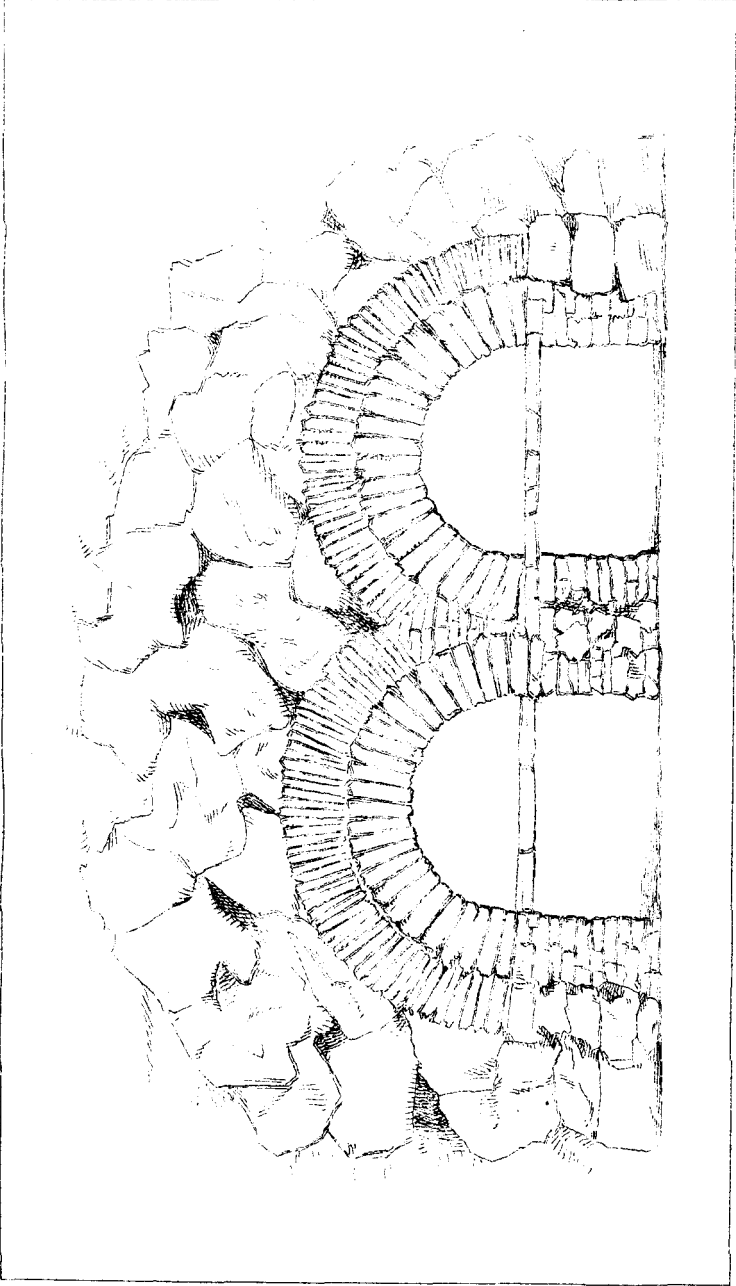
We learn from the writings of Mr. Llewellyn Jewitt, F.S.A.\* that *Worcestershire* gave the first proofs of these interesting fictile decorations being the ancient manufacture of our own country, by the discovery within its boundaries of two kilns.

The most important of these was found in 1833 by Harvey Eginton, Esq. on some land belonging to the priory of Great Malvern. Its construction is shown by the accompanying illustration, for the loan of which we are indebted to Mr. Jewitt, who has also very kindly favoured me with full particulars of the discovery. It was 7 feet beneath the surface, and consisted of two semi-circular arches, separated from each other by a massive pier. The kiln was 35 feet long, and the width of the openings 2 feet 3 inches. The arches were formed of both brick and tiles, firmly backed up with Malvern rag-stone. In each of them occurred a flooring of stone, as shown in the illustration; this division was about 2 feet from the ground, 2 inches in thickness, and upon it at the time of the discovery were found numerous tiles lying in their places, as Mr. Jewitt remarks they did “when the fire smouldered away beneath them four centuries before.” As in the London kiln, there appeared to be no aperture for the escape of smoke. The place for the fire was on the ground, which from long continued heat “had become of extreme hardness, and had all the appearance of a thick pavement of limestone.” The tiles discovered were identical with some at present existing in both Great and Little Malvern churches.†

The other kiln referred to was discovered in 1837 at St.

\* British Archaeological Association Journal, vol. iv.

† A full description of both these kilns was contributed by Mr. Jewitt at the congress of the Archaeological Institute at Worcester.



**TILE KILN DISCOVERED AT MALVERN.**

*From a sketch made for Howellyn-Jewitt, F.S.A., by the late Harry Egidius, Esq.*

Mary Witton, near Droitwich. It consisted of two arches like those at Malvern, and divided in like manner by a strong intermediate pier. They were composed of both tile and brick, and in them a considerable quantity of charcoal was also found. The tiles that were preserved were thought to be of the thirteenth century, and are now in the museum at Worcester. Similar kilns have been found in Wiltshire, Staffordshire, and Derbyshire, and within the last few years traces of such remains have been met with at Hastings in Sussex. In the twelfth volume of the Sussex Archæological Collections, Mr. Thomas Ross, local secretary to the Society, communicates an account of seven or eight kilns for the manufacture of medieval pottery being discovered in a field at Bohemia, near Hastings. Among these he found that some had evidently been employed in the fabrication of glazed tiles, but they were so much broken and crushed that it was difficult to form any very accurate notion of their construction. In a letter from him on the subject, he informs me that the arches were formed of sandstone, and paved with small pieces of the same material, rudely put together without cement of any kind; from the quantity of burnt red clay among the tiles, he considers the roofing to have been formed of clay, as in the Malvern kiln; some were *unpaved*, the natural sandrock forming the bottom. In these cases it is obvious that with so firm a natural foundation there would not be the necessity for constructing so elaborate a flooring as where, like the Clerkenwell kiln, the structure was placed on the soft clay. The pottery and tiles found at Hastings are very primitive in their design, and Mr. Ross assigns them to the thirteenth century or even earlier. Among them were many unglazed, about three-quarters of an inch in thickness, and perforated with a number of small holes, each about the sixteenth of an inch in diameter; others were decorated with early patterns, and are illustrated in the Journal I have referred to.

I would observe that in the year 1843, during the progress of some excavations in Cloth Fair on the site of part of the ancient priory of St. Bartholomew, many glazed tiles of early workmanship were found; and in the present restorations of the church,

numerous examples, similar to those from the kiln, have been discovered among the rubbish, giving additional weight to the conjecture that, the kiln being situated so near to the priory, and in equal proximity to that of St. John's Clerkenwell, it may centuries since have been employed in the manufacture of decorative tiles for both these places. I would here record my obligations to T. Marr Johnson, Esq. resident engineer, and his representative Mr. Armstrong, for their readiness in affording every facility for the proper investigation of the discovery.