

Medieval and later floor tiles in Lambeth Palace Chapel

Susan Degnan
Derek Seeley

Introduction

LAMBETH PALACE has been the London residence of the Archbishops of Canterbury since the last decade of the 12th century, though none of the 12th-century buildings survive. Refurbishment of the Chapel, the upper part of the oldest surviving building, took place during the first half of 1988 (Fig. 1). It involved the removal of the stalls, altar and the raised altar platform inserted by Archbishop Davidson in the early 20th century, and the replacement of damaged areas of flooring. Upon completion, at floor level, the Chapel will be restored to the form created by Archbishop Laud in the mid-17th century. A small team from the Museum of London's Department of Greater London Archaeology (DGLA) was present during the refurbishment, recording and conserving newly exposed areas of floor, and excavating deposits below the 20th-century altar platform and damaged areas of floor.

History of the Chapel

Although there are no surviving documents which give details of the building of the Chapel and Crypt, stylistic comparison of architectural features within the Crypt with Rochester, Southwark and Salisbury Cathedrals indicates a construction date between 1210 and 1225, during the period when Archbishop Stephen Langton held office. Documentary sources inform us that the Archbishop was abroad between 1208 and 1213¹, so it is most likely that construction of the Chapel and Crypt started after his return.

The Crypt has survived in its original form, with the chalk-infilled vaulting of the four bays supported by Purbeck marble columns, whereas the Chapel has undergone many alterations in its 750-year existence. The overall dimensions have not altered as the main walls rising from the Crypt are original, but there are well documented changes to the flooring and furnishings in the time of Archbishop Laud (1633–1645)², the 19th century, and the years immediately after World War II³. The earliest recorded repairs to the Chapel were carried out in 1243 by Henry III⁴,

who considered the Chapel to be dilapidated. Archbishop Laud introduced a new phase of alterations, including the construction of a new floor, a raised sanctuary at the east end of the Chapel and the replacement of the medieval screen that created an ante-chapel at the west end (Fig. 2). The newly-raised sanctuary covered the entire area east of the vestry door and measured approximately 7.8m × 3.7m (25ft 7in × 12ft 2in). The new floor differed in both style and size from its predecessor.

The Chapel survived in its Laudian form until the 19th century, when alterations were made to the roof and a new floor of red, white and black ceramic tiles of varying shapes was laid in the antechapel. There are indications that the ante-chapel floor level was lowered, forming a step into the Chapel. Archbishop Davidson constructed an altar platform measuring 4.7m × 2.0m (15ft 5in × 6ft 7in) in a central position along the east wall of the Chapel, providing two distinct levels in the sanctuary.

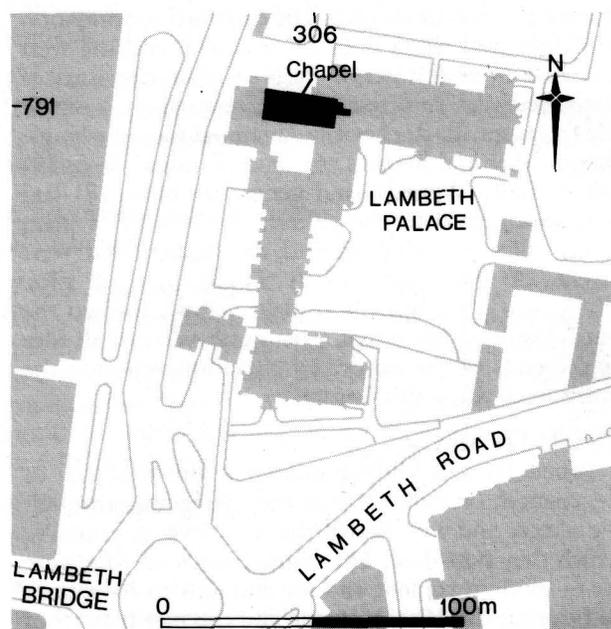


Fig. 1: location map.

1. C. R. Dodwell *Lambeth Palace* (1958) 18.
2. William Prynne *Canterbury's Doome* (London 1646).
3. C. R. Dodwell *op. cit.* fn 1, 22.
4. *Close Rolls of Henry III ... AD 1242-1247* (London, 1916) 140.

In May 1941 the Chapel roof was destroyed by fire, damaging the interior as it collapsed⁵. The post-war restoration programme included moving the Laudian screen to the adjacent Post Room and replacing the stalls and desks in the Chapel and the pews in the antechapel.

Discoveries during the recent refurbishment

The removal of the Chapel furnishings revealed large areas of floor which had been previously concealed, including distinctive areas of medieval and later floor tiles. The newly-exposed areas of floor, and the central 17th-century black and white floor are shown on Fig. 2 and discussed below.

Panel I

Panel I was a narrow strip of flooring along the north wall of the chancel consisting of unglazed, red terracotta tiles 8¾-9in (222 - 229mm) square by 1 in thick. They respected the north edge of panel II but were partly covered by the mortar surround of panel IV. Viewed in section, it was seen that the mortar bedding for panel I was laid after panel II was in position. The tiles were laid from along the north edge of panel II towards the Chapel wall, where the final row of tiles had been cut to fit the available space. In this final row, a single yellow-glazed tile, similar to those found below the altar step, was used to fill a void.

Panel II (Fig. 3)

Panel II was a carefully laid chevron design 0.87m (34in) wide with alternating lines of plain black and decorated two-colour tiles. The eastward continuation was destroyed when floor IV was laid, and the west end had been disturbed. Parts of four chevrons of decorated tiles survived, one recognised by a single tile fragment. Each chevron contained tiles of a single design: stag and hounds (6), lion (5), fleur-de-lis (9) (all similarly aligned); and geometric tiles (18) laid with due regard to the pattern. A chevron of plain yellow tiles probably marked the undisturbed west extent of the sequence. A single row of tiles, alternating plain black and plain yellow, formed the north border of the panel. Triangular, yellow half-tiles at the ends of the decorated chevrons indicated the position of the south border.

Panels III and V

Panels III and V were located at the west end of the chancel, on either side of the passageway through the screen, and were laid at the same level as floor IV, which they post-date. The re-used medieval tiles were set in modern cement and are thought to have been laid during the 19th century. The chequer pattern of black and decorated (or plain yellow) tiles incorporates 17 of the 20 designs in the Chapel, suggesting

that an effort was made to display the majority of the designs available.

Floor IV

The chequer-pattern floor (IV) incorporating white Carrara and Belgian Black marble was ordered by Archbishop Laud between 1633 and 1645. The floor was designed to cover only those areas to remain exposed, leaving the earlier floor around it intact, concealed beneath the furnishings. The sanctuary was defined by inserting a raised floor east of the vestry door.

Panels VI (Fig. 4) and VII

Panels VI and VII, in the south-west corner of the chancel, were separated by a single row of tiles. They consisted of a mixture of plain and decorated tiles laid in poorly-aligned diagonal rows, and pre-date floor IV and panel V. Panels II, VI and VII may have continued further west but may have been truncated during the insertion of the 19th-century antechapel floor.

Panel VIII

At the east end of panel VII a damaged area of floor separated panel VII from a long irregular strip of medieval tiles (VIII) which survived along the south edge of floor IV. The tiles were set in a chequer pattern, of black, and decorated tiles of the four-tile pattern type, on a diagonal alignment. Designs 15, 16, 19 and 20 were the most common. The medieval tiles of panel VIII were cut through when floor IV was laid.

Panel IX

Between the strip of medieval tiles (VIII) and the south wall of the Chapel was a broad band of red terracotta tiles (IX) similar to those in panel I. Although the tiles in (I) respected the straight north edge of panel II, the interface between panels VIII and IX was irregular. It was not possible to examine this interface, but in view of the relationship between I and II it is likely that panel IX post-dates panel VIII.

Excavation below individual tiles in the 17th-century floor IV

As part of the restoration, a number of damaged tiles were replaced, allowing the underlying deposits to be examined.

Along the north edge of floor IV a mortar base with tile impressions indicated the continuation to the east of the border row of tiles between panels I and II. The mortar remains were cut, showing that preparations for laying the 17th-century floor removed all the medieval floor tiles, the underlying floor base and most of the medieval levelling deposits, to allow for a

5. C. R. Dodwell *op. cit.* fn 1, 59.

sufficient depth of bedding material for the later floor. The medieval floor was laid on a thin spread of dark brown, sandy earth covering the uneven surface of the crushed chalk infill of the vaulted ceiling of the underlying Crypt. In places a thin mortar spread, interpreted as the working surface during the construction of the Chapel, overlay the chalk.

Excavation below the altar step

A marble altar step, approximately 4.7m × 2.0m (15ft 5in × 6ft 7in) was placed in the middle of the sanctuary by Archbishop Davidson at the beginning of this century. This was removed during the current refurbishment. Beneath it, the levelling layer for the 17th-century raised sanctuary was found to cover a mortar spread extending over and beyond the whole excavation area. In the surface of the mortar were impressions of the original floor tiles as well as a few tile fragments which survived along the base of the east wall. Six panels were defined including four adjacent panels of 4 inch (102mm) square tile impressions, separated by single rows of tiles. These panels were of similar width and alignment to panel II, and fragments of both plain and decorated tiles were retrieved, suggesting that both types were used. Between these panels and the east wall was an area consisting mostly of tiles 5¾-6in (146-152mm) square. The surviving remnants had a red fabric with a yellow glazed surface, identical to the single glazed tile found in panel I.

South of the southernmost row of border tiles was a panel of tile impressions 7¾-8in (197-203mm) square which extended beyond the excavation area. No examples of these tiles were recovered. A rectangular area equivalent to eight tiles (two rows of four) revealed no tile impressions. It is likely that a single object, possibly a ledger stone, rested here.

Medieval decorated tiles (Fig. 5)

Twenty different designs were revealed in the Chapel, in addition to plain black and yellow tiles. They are all of a type known as 'Westminster', after the tiles found in the Muniment room at Westminster Abbey. No kiln site has been found. They have a wide distribution area, mostly along Watling Street, from Canterbury to Warwickshire⁶. 'Westminster' designs have also been found at Clifton House in Kings Lynn⁷; a couple of the designs there parallel some of those found at Lambeth. The Lambeth tiles measure 100-105mm (c 4in) square, 20-25mm (0.8-1.0in)

thick; and are in a coarse red earthenware fabric (Museum of London fabric code 2892). This is the same size as the tiles still in the Muniment room floor at Westminster Abbey. The white clay slip used for the design is often smudged, making some of the designs very unclear. This is also typical of the 'Westminster' tiles⁸.

The dating of this kind of tile has proved problematic, but has previously been placed between the late 13th and early 14th centuries. The discovery of 'Westminster' tiles in Lambeth Palace Chapel is therefore important because it appears to place their date much earlier in the 13th century than was formerly thought.

It has not been possible to find parallels for all these designs. Where they are known they are listed in the catalogue.

1 Knight on horseback

This design has a parallel in the British Museum (BM) catalogue⁹ provenanced from Aldgate, London. This type of tile has also been found on recent excavations at 11-15 St Thomas' Street, Southwark¹⁰.

2 Arms of England, in reverse

No parallels.

3 Arms of Fitzwalter

This tile has an unprovenanced, unpublished parallel in the BM collections¹¹.

4 Lion with a tongue

Only a single example of this design was found. No parallels.

5 Lion without a tongue

This is possibly a damaged version of the above stamp. It was a common tile on the Lambeth floor. No parallels.

6 Stag being attacked by two dogs

No parallels.

7 & 8 Hunting scenes

These two designs are part of the same series depicting a hunting scene, with a dog chasing a stag, both set in a bordered tile with a tree in the background. No parallels have been found for the dog, no. 7: the stag, no. 8, has parallels in tiles found at 29 Mansell Street and Billingsgate in the City of London.

9 Fleur-de-lis

No parallels.

6. E. S. Eames *Catalogue of Medieval Lead-Glazed Earthenware Tiles in the Department of Medieval and Later Antiquities* British Museum (1980) 270.

7. E. S. Eames *English Medieval Tiles* British Museum (1985).

8. E. S. Eames *op. cit.* fn. 6.

9. E. S. Eames *op. cit.* fn. 6, no. 1368.

10. S. Degnan *forthcoming*.

11. E.S. Eames *pers comm*.

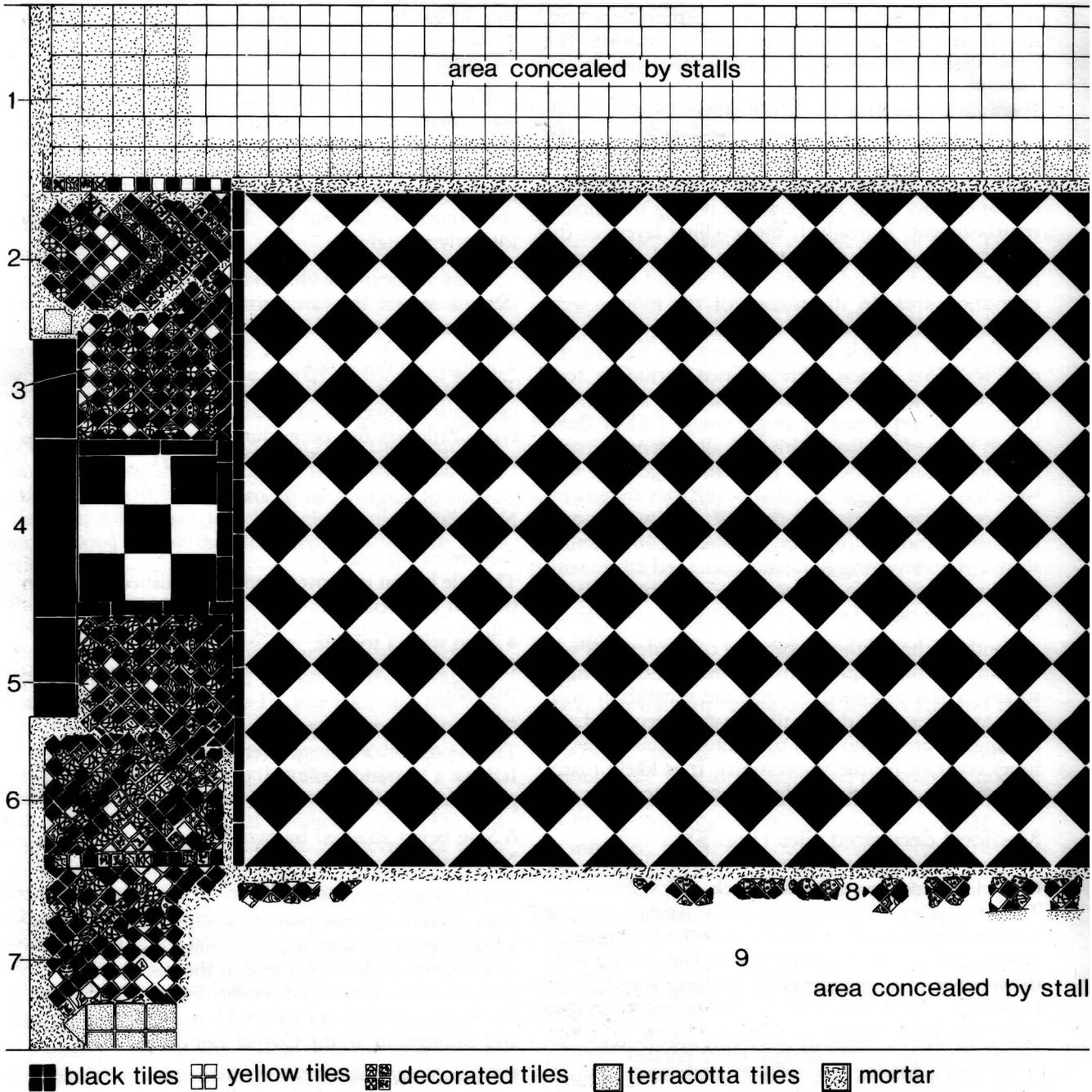
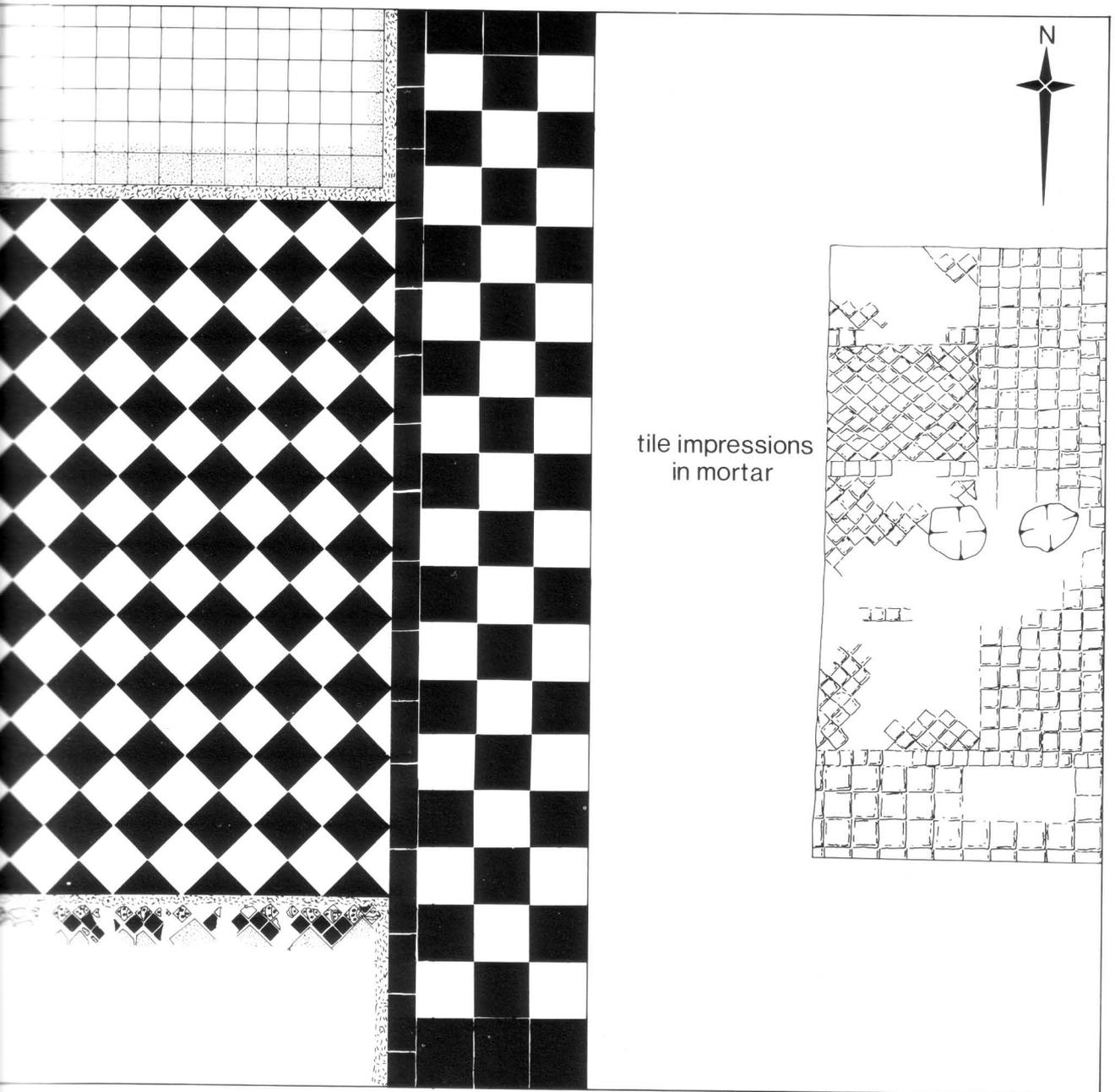
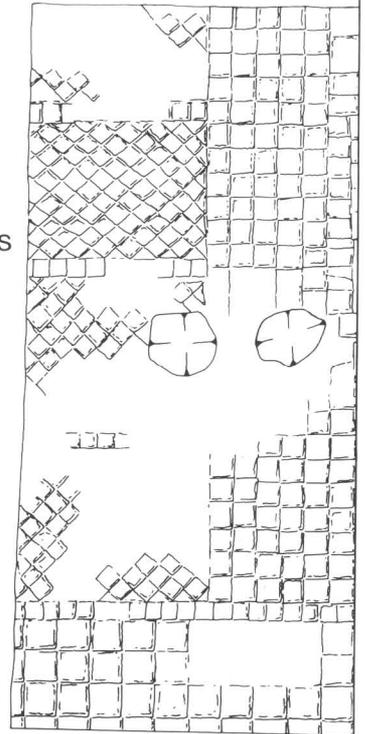


Fig. 2: plan of Chapel floor, to east of ante-chapel, showing numbered floor panels.



tile impressions
in mortar



0 3m

10 Quatrefoil

A single example of this design was found. It has parallels in the BM collections (unprovenanced¹²), and at Clifton House, Kings Lynn¹³.

11 Small circles, forming a sixfoil, set within a large circle

One broken example of this tile was found. No parallels.

12 & 13 Two geometric repeating patterns which would form interlocking circles and squares

No parallels.

14 A small, broken example of a different design

No parallels.

15 A four-tile design with dots in circles

There is a parallel for this design, from Finch Lane, London in the BM collections¹⁴. This design is used in the floor of the Muniment room at Westminster Abbey.

12. E. S. Eames *op. cit.* fn. 6, no. 2288.

13. E. S. Eames 'Decorated Tile Pavements in English Medieval Houses', in J. G. Renaud (ed) *Woning en Huisraad in de Middeleeuwen* Rotterdam (1975).

14. E. S. Eames *op. cit.* fn. 6, no. 2108.

16 Part of a four-tile design with dots in circles

This tile is unusual in having two inner circles. No parallels.

17 An elongated fleur-de-lis cutting part of a circle, part of a four-tile design

This tile is paralleled at Clifton House, Kings Lynn¹⁵. It is also used in the Muniment room at Westminster Abbey.

18 A repeating pattern with small trefoil decoration

There are parallels for this in the Museum of London collections, from King William Street, St Bartholomew the Great and Smithfield¹⁶.

19 A four-tile repeating pattern

The slip on these tiles is always badly smudged, so it is very difficult to identify the design. It is paralleled by tiles from Temple Dinsley¹⁷. The design has small lions enclosed in a quatrefoil.

20 Repeating pattern tile, probably part of the same series as 19.

15. E. S. Eames *op. cit.* fn. 7.

16. London Museum *The Medieval Catalogue* HMSO (1967) fig 59.

17. E. S. Eames *op. cit.* fn. 6, no. 1821.



Fig. 3: panel II.

(Photo: Museum of London)

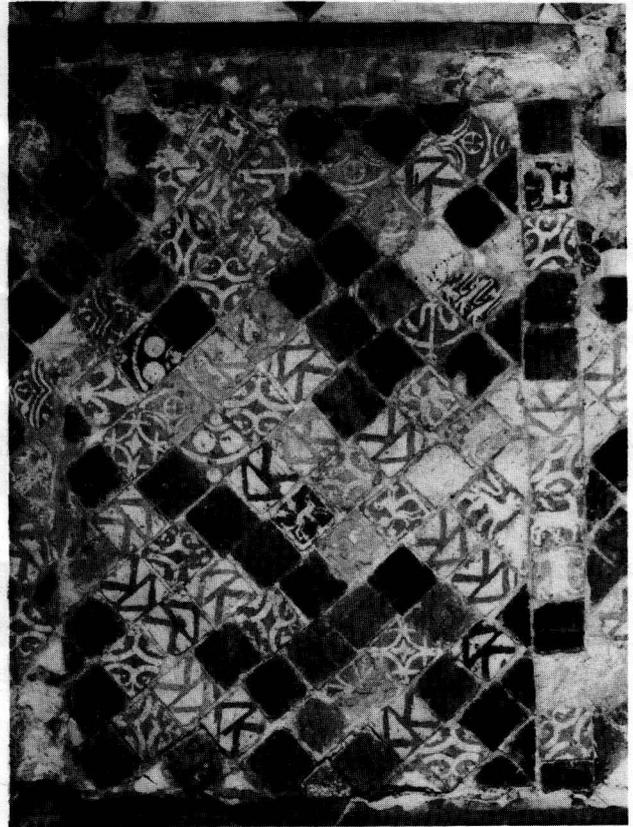


Fig. 4: panel VI.

(Photo: Museum of London)

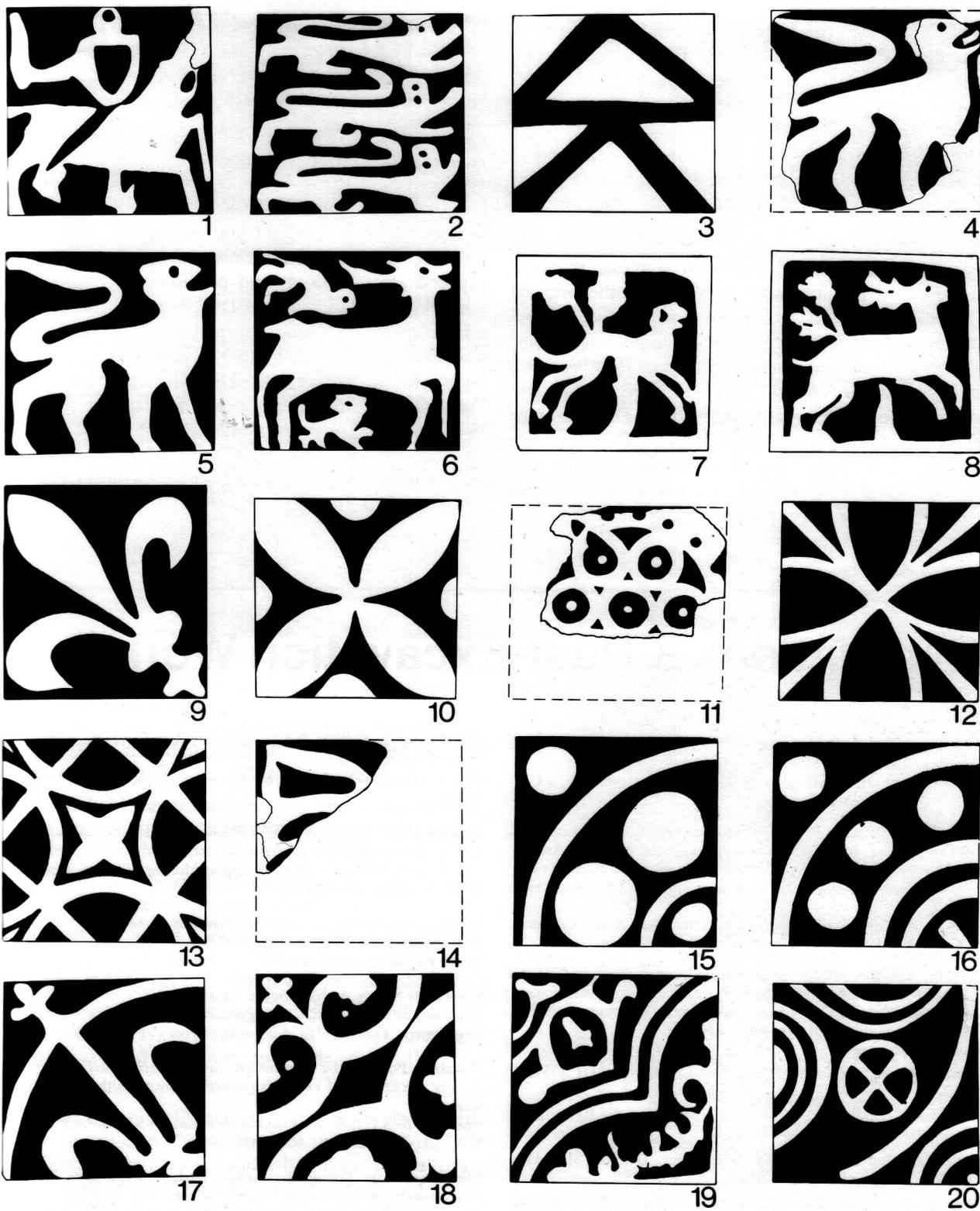


Fig. 5: decorated floor tiles. Scale $\frac{1}{3}$.

This design also has consistently smudged slip and is paralleled by tiles from Temple Dinsley¹⁸. It is also paralleled by 19th-century copies used in the Victorian floor of the Chapter House Vestibule at Westminster Abbey. The other tiles in this floor are all copies of extant medieval tiles found in the Abbey. It is therefore reasonable to assume that this tile is also a copy of a now lost medieval tile from the Abbey.

Conclusions

The evidence from excavation suggests that the undisturbed part of panel II is part of the original Chapel floor, which contained a series of long, narrow panels separated by single rows of tiles. Subsequent alterations largely destroyed this floor. It is not clear whether panels VI, VII and VIII were part of the original floor or were later repairs. Documentary evidence indicates that panel II, and the floor which survives as tile impressions beneath the altar was laid in the second quarter of the 13th century, giving an earlier date for 'Westminster' type tiles than has previously been suspected.

The tile impressions below the altar step have been covered by a layer of sand and sealed below the new floor; all the exposed tiles, some of which are still visible, are preserved beneath the restored stalls and screen.

Acknowledgements

We wish to thank Ewan Harper, Director of the Lambeth Palace and Crypt Restoration Programme, for arranging funding of the archaeological investigation, recording and conservation of the newly exposed areas of floor, and providing access to the Chapel. Tony Mackenna of DGLA undertook all the conservation and Philip Norman kindly assisted as a volunteer. We are grateful to Mrs Elizabeth Eames for her valuable advice; to Dr Richard Mortimer, Westminster Abbey Librarian, for access to the Westminster Abbey Muniment room; and to all members of DGLA staff who assisted in the preparation of this article, including Alison Hawkins who prepared Figs. 1, 2 and 5.

18. E. S. Eames *op. cit.* fn. 6, no. 2776.

Excavations & Post-Excavation Work

City, by Museum of London, Department of Urban Archaeology. A series of long term excavations. Enquiries to DUA, Museum of London, London Wall, EC2Y 5HN (01-600 3699).

Croydon & District, processing and cataloguing of excavated and museum collections every Tuesday throughout the year. Archaeological reference collection of fabric types, domestic animal bones, clay tobacco pipes and glass ware also available for comparative work.

Enquiries to Mrs Muriel Shaw, 28 Lismore Road, South Croydon, CR2 7QA (01-688 2720).

Greater London (except north-east and south-east London), by Museum of London, Department of Greater London Archaeology. Excavations and processing in all areas. General enquiries to DGLA, Museum of London (01-600 3699 x241).

Local enquiries to:

North London: 3-7 Ray Street, London EC1R 3DJ (01-837 8363).

South-west London: St. Luke's House, Sandycroft Road, Kew, Surrey (01-940 5989).

Southwark and Lambeth: 6-8 Cole Street, London SE1 4YH (01-407 1989 or 403 2920 - office - and 407 1258 - warehouse).

West London: Town Mission Hall, Mission Square, Pottery Road, Brentford, Middlesex (01-560 3880).

Hammersmith & Fulham, by Fulham Archaeological Rescue Group. Processing of material from Fulham Palace. Tuesdays, 7.45

p.m.-10p.m. at Fulham Palace, Bishop's Avenue, Fulham Palace Road, SW6.

Contact Keith Whitehouse, 86 Clancarty Road, SW6 (01-731 4498).

Kingston, by Kingston upon Thames Archaeological Society. Rescue sites in the town centre.

Enquiries to Marion Shipley, Kingston Heritage Centre, Fairfield Road, Kingston (01-546 5386).

North-east London, by Passmore Edwards Museum.

Enquiries to Pat Wilkinson, Passmore Edwards Museum, Romford Road, E15 4LW (01-534 4545).

Surrey, by Surrey Archaeological Unit.

Enquiries to David Bird, County Archaeological Officer, Planning Department, County Hall, Kingston, Surrey (01-541 8911).

Vauxhall Pottery, by Southwark and Lambeth Archaeological Society. Processing of excavated material continues three nights a week.

Enquiries to S.L.A.S., c/o Cuming Museum, 155 Walworth Road, SE17 (01-703 3324).

The Council for British Archaeology produces a monthly British Archaeological News (9 issues a year). It gives details of conferences, extra-mural courses, summer schools, training excavations and sites where volunteers are needed. The annual subscription of £7.50 includes postage, and should be made payable to C.B.A., 112 Kennington Road, SE11 6RE (01-582 0494).