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OVEN-FLOOR TILES FROM A TILE KILN IN FARNHAM PARK, FARNHAM, SURREY

An excavation conducted by Farnham Museum in 1982 explored a tile kiln sited in Farnham Park (SU 8451 4808) some 1100 metres north-east of Farnham Castle. The site is bisected by a small stream which has left the kiln structure largely intact but has removed most of the stokepit. The kiln was a parallel-flue, updraught kiln served by a single firebox flue which was built to produce pegtile and perhaps also crested ridge-tile. The kiln consisted of a series of arches set within a sub-rectangular, roughly built, stone structure. The arches were built using great-brick (3100 × 1400 × 500mm)<sup>1</sup>, voussoirs and tile; tiles were laid across the top of these arches to provide an oven-floor. This type of oven-floor tile appears to be extremely unusual and has not been previously recorded from a tile kiln excavation.

The kiln had been partially dismantled and robbed of re-usable materials in the medieval period to a point just below the oven-floor. However, the frequency of these oven-floor tiles in the assemblage of ceramic building materials from the site, and the residual positioning of a few examples, clearly suggests that they cannot have been used for any purpose other than as oven-floor tiles,

Seven complete examples and diagnostic fragments of a further 51 oven-floor tiles were found in the kiln. Analysis and measurement of these shows that they all conform to a uniform design with only minor differences between individual examples. The tiles were made by moulding a large slab of clay in a wooden mould on a sanded work-surface. The tile was turned out of the mould and two holes were cut through the slab from the sanded, lower face using a knife; the nib was produced by cutting rectangu-

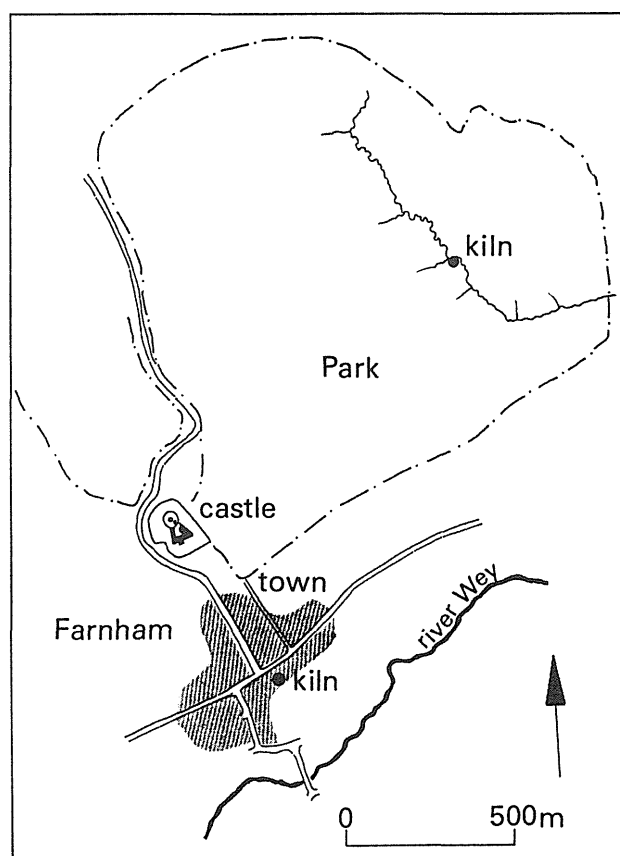
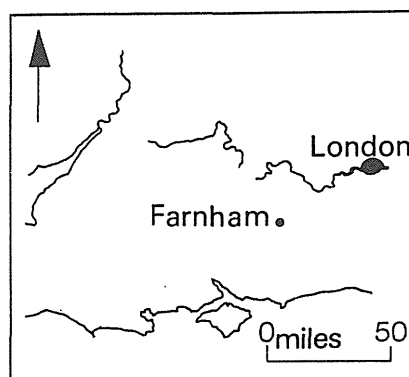


Fig. 1. Location map showing Farnham in the medieval period (1200-1450).

lar pieces from one side of the tile leaving a central nib. Many of the tiles also have a chamfer along the nib-edge on the sanded face. The tiles, after firing, measure c. 355-60 × 220-5 × 50-3 mm and weigh between 5.9 and 6.4 kg each. The positioning and size of the holes, length of nib and depth of chamfer differ in fine detail but the broad design remains the same throughout.

Samples of the ceramic building materials from this site (both structural material and product) were examined using microscopy (×20) by the late Robert Foote, Senior Finds Assistant with the Winchester Museum Service. All the material from the kiln was made from a homogenous, fine textured, clay which is slightly micaceous with flecks of white mica less than 0.1mm across. The fabric is pinkish-orange in colour, in the range Munsell 10R 6/8 and 2.5R 6/8.<sup>2</sup> Red-orange ferruginous inclusions occur sparsely on the surface and in the body of the fabric. These are fine-grained ('silty') in texture, rounded in shape and up to

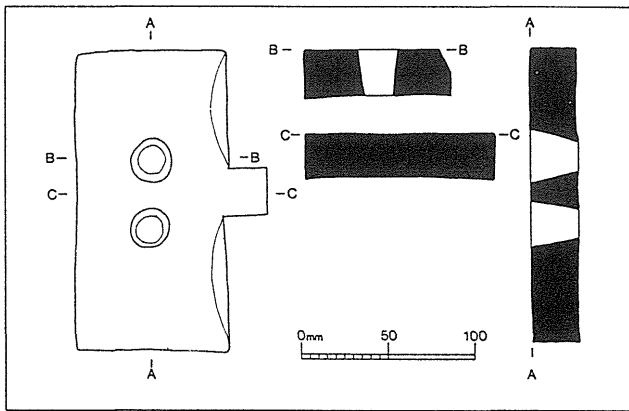


Fig. 2. Oven-floor tile from Farnham Park kiln, scale 1:4.

1.5mm across. The sand content (and the sand on the mould surfaces) is formed of sub-rounded grains in the range 0.3–0.5mm with some grains up to 2mm across, and varies in colour from translucent to milky white and a translucent pink-orange. Occasional pebbles and fractured

pieces of flint up to 15mm across, occur in the body of individual pieces but are not a regular feature of this fabric.

Samples were taken for dating by both thermoremanent magnetism and thermoluminescence but both placed the kiln in the Anglo-Saxon period. The crested ridge-tiles and peg-tiles recovered from contexts in the kiln suggest a date between the 13th and 15th centuries and are comparable to material recovered from elsewhere in Surrey and in Hampshire.

A report on the excavation is to be published by the Surrey Archaeological Society.

**Footnotes**

1. Great-brick is best known from sites in Essex, especially Coggeshall, but three sites in west Surrey have now produced similar bricks: Borelli Yard (Farnham), Farnham Park and Guildford Castle.

2. The consistent colour-range of the assemblage of ceramic building material and the lack of any vitrified or fire-damaged material indicate that the kiln was hardly used before it was abandoned.

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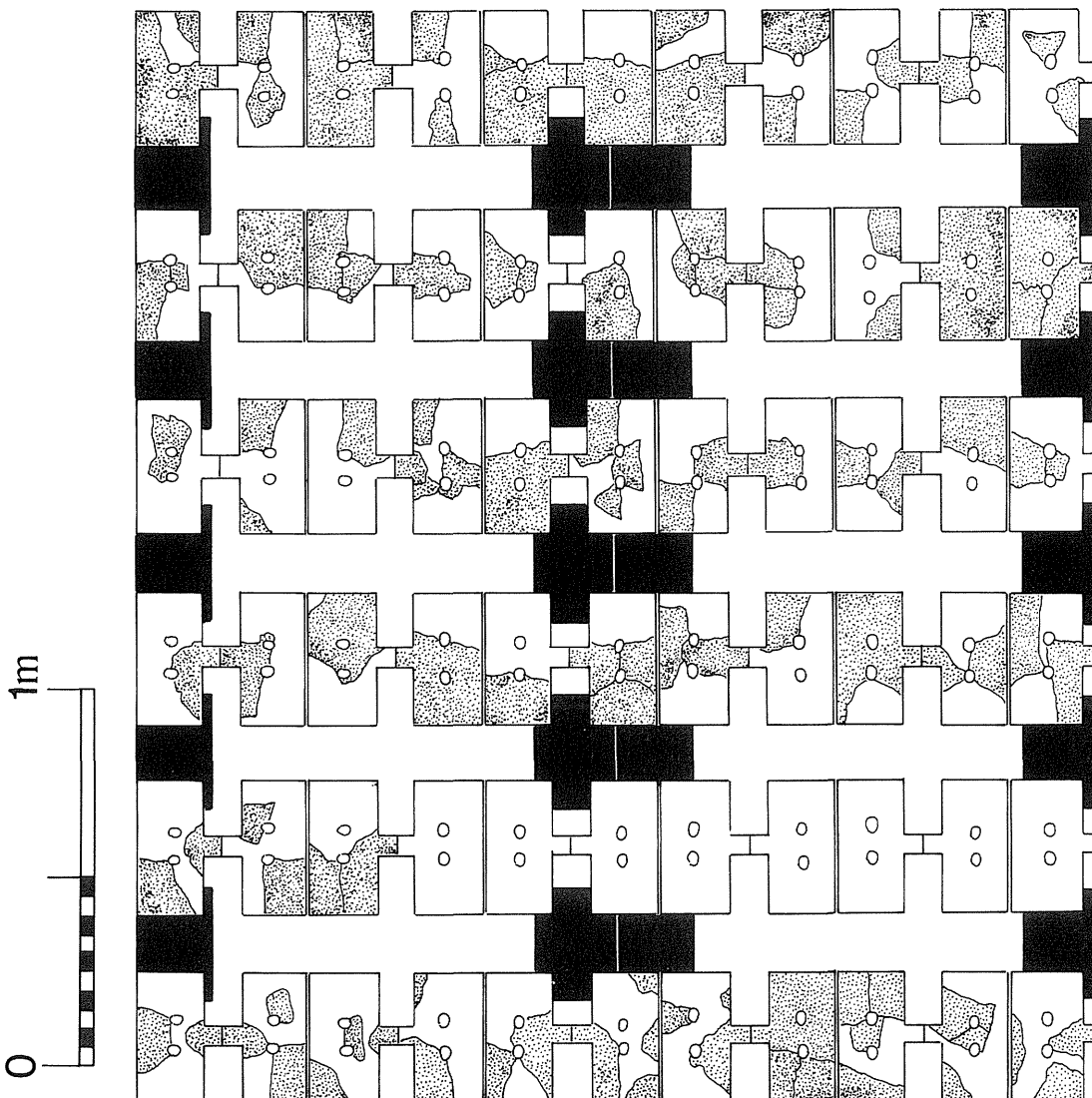


Fig. 3. A suggested scheme for the layout of the oven-floor tiles.