

Ian M Betts, *Medieval 'Westminster' Floor Tiles*

MoLAS Monograph 11, 2002. pp. xii + 78, 49 figs,
ISBN 1 901992 24 1. Price: £11.95 paperback

This monograph is an important and comprehensive survey of the work of one of the earliest 'commercial' producers of paving tiles in England, named after surviving pavements in Westminster Abbey. Ian Betts convincingly grounds the major production centre in Farringdon Road, just outside the walls of the city of London, and establishes the production period as spanning from the 1250's or 60's to around the end of the 13th century. This places 'Westminster' tiles as early as any other known slip-decorated (rather than inlaid) tiles, alongside those of the Paris Basin (Norton 1986, 290).

At such a date, a mosaic component of the repertoire is to be expected; stylistically, the mosaic tiles found at Merton Priory, Stratford Langthorne Abbey and Waltham Abbey need not predate the production period of the slip-decorated tiles. If they really do belong to the second quarter of the 13th century, as proposed by Betts (page 43), then it is somewhat misleading to include them within the 'Westminster' appellation when, as he says, they are likely to have been produced at or for the monastic houses at which they have been found, albeit from the same basic raw materials. 'London mosaic' might be more appropriate. However, the archaeological dating evidence cited (page 41) only establishes a *terminus post quem* of c.1230 for the mosaic fragments at Merton.

There is a full description of the manufacturing process (page 6), based on close examination of the tiles, illuminated by documentary references. However, tiles are made by throwing clay into a wooden form on a sanded surface, not rolling the clay out like pastry, which tends to make the finished tiles curl up in firing. The idea that two colour tiles can be produced by using a wooden stamp dipped in white slip – 'printing' – was suggested by Lloyd Haberly in 1937. In the early 1970's, in response to the results of experimental work, he admitted that he could never make the method work (Drury and Pratt 1975, 139-40), but the myth persists. Slip decorated tiles can be produced by applying the slip either before or after applying the stamp. Where the pattern happens to remain below the finished surface of a tile, and the glaze is thin, one can tell which technique was used, according to whether the vertical edge of the design is devoid of slip or coated in it. Unusually for the products of a single workshop, both techniques have been observed by this reviewer on 'Westminster' tiles from the London region, although most appear to have the slip applied after stamping, emphasising the derivation from the inlay technique.

Betts is surely right that the Midlands group was made by tilers moving from London, taking their stamps with them. But any direct association between the tiles from Clifton House, King's Lynn included here and the London and Midlands 'Westminster' tiles is most unlikely. Rather, the

Clifton House tiles appear to be part of an East Anglian tradition of tile making which originated with itinerant tilers whose mid-13th century products (made using the same stamps) have been found both at Waltham Abbey in Essex and Horsham St Faith Priory in Norfolk (Keen 1976). Subsequent regional developments are complex, but the 'commercial' series to which the Clifton House designs belong occurs widely, if thinly, scattered across East Anglia (e.g. Binham, Bury St Edmunds, Campsea Ash, Castle Acre, Ely, Horsham St Faith, Langley, Norwich, Thetford) and probably dates to the late 13th-early 14th centuries.

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Paul Drury

John Black, *British Tin-Glazed Earthenware*

Shire Publications Ltd. Princes Risborough, 2001.
40 pp, many colour illus., bibliog.
ISBN 07478 0512 1. Price: £4.50 paperback

Anthony Ray, *English Delftware*

Ashmolean Museum, Oxford, 2000.
80 pp, 51 colour illus., bibliog.
ISBN 1 85444 130 2. Price £11.95 hardback
ISBN 1 85444 129 9. Price: £7.95 paperback

These two small books, published within a year of each other, pose an interesting exercise in 'compare and contrast'. Superficially, we have a hardback on 'English' tin-glazed ware from the Ashmolean Museum (Ray) and a paperback on 'British' tin-glazed ware from the publishers of a well-known series of pocket books on artefacts of all types (Black). The former is a selection of 51 vessels from the collections of the Ashmolean Museum (as the subtitle, not apparent on the cover, makes clear). It can perhaps be seen as a more popular version of Ray (1968), aimed at visitors looking for an attractive and durable memento of a visit. The latter is very much in the Shire 'mould' of a short introduction to a wide-ranging subject,