

A FIFTEENTH TO SIXTEENTH-CENTURY POTTERY INDUSTRY AT TYLERS GREEN, PENN, BUCKINGHAMSHIRE

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The ceramic industry of Penn is best known for its production of decorated floor tiles of the fourteenth century, and of roof tiles, but evidence is presented that there was also a late medieval/Tudor pottery industry. A previously unrecorded heraldic tile pattern of the Penn series is noted.

Introduction

The Penn floor tile industry of the fourteenth century has been studied by, amongst others, Hohler (1941, 1942), Rouse and Broadbent (1952), Eames (1980, 221–6), Broadbent (1981), and Cauvain (1987). However, despite tantalizing reports of traces of kilns, during various developments, none have ever been examined under modern conditions or adequately recorded. A recent magnetometer survey of one suspected kiln site, at 'Dell Cottage' (noted in Rouse and Broadbent 1952, fig. 2) unexpectedly produced no positive evidence for a kiln at all. Moreover the initial view of the location of the Penn tile industry as a whole has been extended by the discovery of an area of tile and pottery production some distance from earlier finds, marked 'C' on Fig. 1 (see the article following this).

The discovery of fragments of decorated Penn tile in a ploughed field alongside a footpath at Tylers Green, by Mrs D. Waterton and others in 1984 (Cauvain 1987), was therefore welcome, since it provided an opportunity to carry out a non-destructive evaluation of one possible production area by fieldwalking. This was executed, courtesy of Mr M. West who farmed the land, by members of the County Museum Archaeological Group in September 1986 (Fig. 1a) and the results are discussed below. Material previously discovered by members of CMAG in the garden of Yonder Lodge,

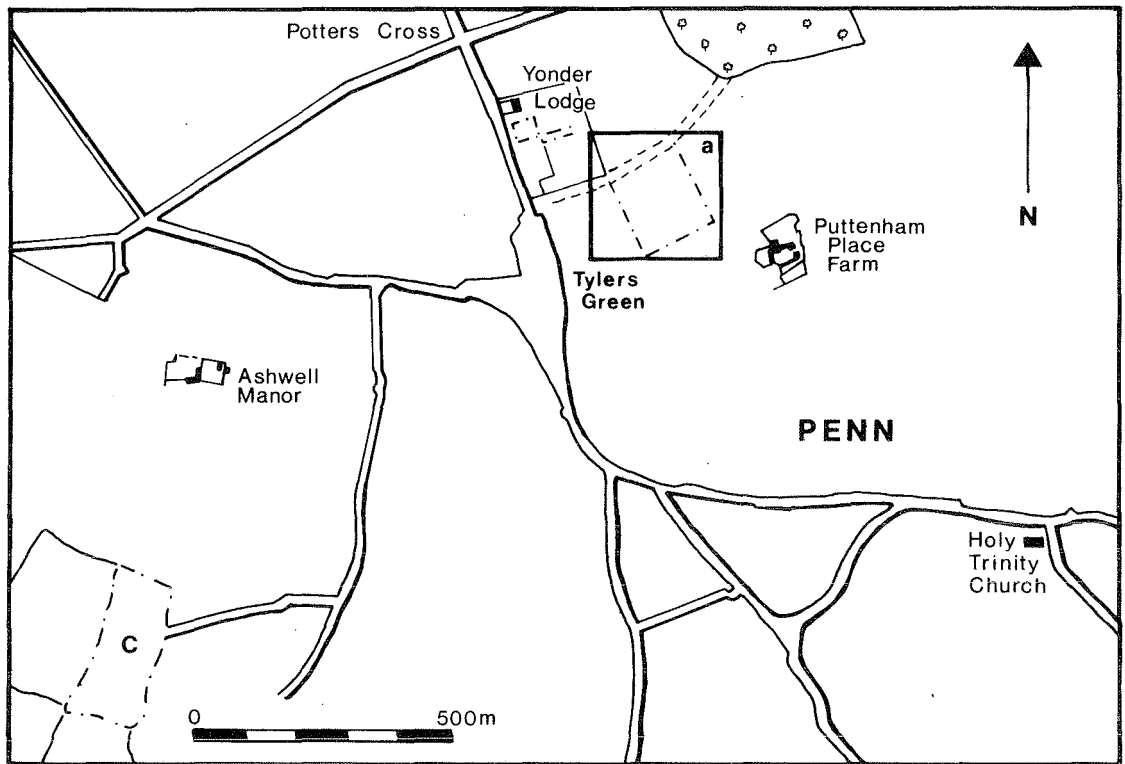
c.200m north-west of the main site, is also considered. The discoveries at the two sites add yet another twist to the Penn tale.

The principal material recovered during the fieldwalk was not as expected floor tile, but pottery of late medieval to Tudor date, including wasters clearly indicative of pottery production, and also roof tile. The area surveyed was 150×180m, based on a 30m grid (Fig. 1) and brief inspection of the surrounding field suggested that this area included the only concentration present.

The material from the initial discovery and the fieldwalk is accessioned at the County Museum as 83, 1984 and 330, 1987 (CAS 5411) respectively, and from Yonder Lodge as 30–32, 75, 60, 75, 15, 1984 (CAS 2165).

The Pottery

The pottery collected in 1984 and 1986 forms a relatively small group, of 1,349 sherds. Approximately 1–2% of the assemblage is rim sherds, the same percentage base sherds, and about 0.5% handle sherds. The remainder consists of unidentifiable body sherds. The pottery is mainly brick red in colour. Under ×20 magnification, the principal components are fine, round quartz grains within the range 0.1–0.5mm. There are occasional inclusions of flint and possibly ironstone.



KEY:



over 100



under 100



under 50



under 10

Total no. of sherds from each grid square

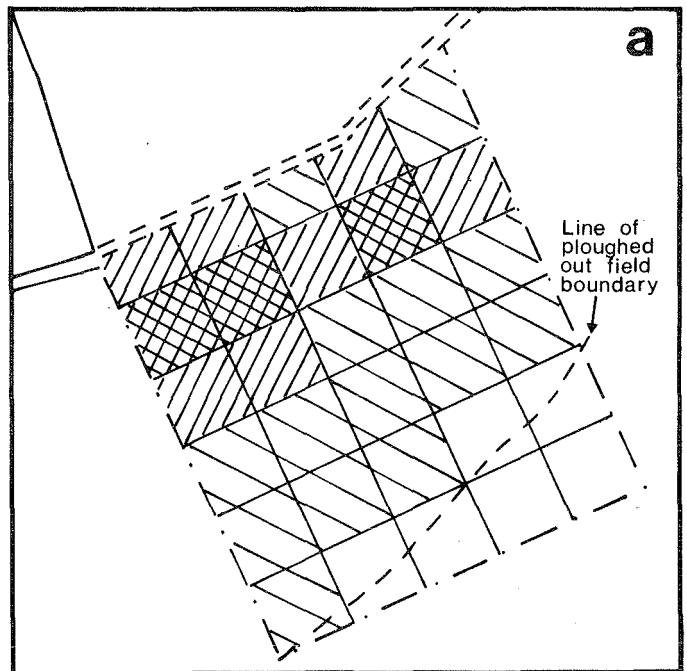


Fig. 1. Location of Tylers Green site.

Much is overfired, some is distorted, often badly, and a few sherds are edge-glazed. The presence of these wasters strongly suggests that pottery was being produced on or near the site.

All of those rim sherds which were also wasters, were sorted into three groups; jars, bowls and jugs. The remaining rims were then included in the groups if they were of the same form as the wasters, or if they were a frequently occurring type and therefore likely to have been produced in the area. This produced a group of 142 classifiable sherds leaving a few sherds that were either of uncommon forms or too small to be identified. The three groups were further sub-divided by considering the complexity of the rim, resulting in groupings of five jar-rim types, two bowl-rim types and three jug-rim types (Fig. 2). One overfired rim sherd may come from a sagger.

The classification of forms and types is as follows, the illustrations showing the range within each type.

Jars

Jars were dominant, forming 61% of the group. Normally the maximum diameter of the vessel was greater than the rim diameter and most had a rim diameter of 20cm or above (the average rim diameter was 26cm). Jar rims were divided into five types.

1. Simple everted rim, outward curving (Fig. 2, 1-2).
2. Everted, bifid rim (Fig. 2, 3-4).
3. Everted rim with internal lip (Fig. 2, 5-6).
4. Everted, squared rim with internal recess (Fig. 2, 7-8).
5. Everted, squared, bifid rim with internal recess (Fig. 2, 9-10).

Bowls/Dishes

18% of the rim sherds were bowl or dish forms. Insufficient profile survived to enable the two to be distinguished. However, some of the rims indicated the presence of flat, dish-like forms. Most had a rim diameter of 30cm or above, wider than the jar forms. Two types were represented.

1. Simple everted rim (Fig. 2, 11-12).
2. Everted, bifid rim (Fig. 2, 13-14).

Jugs

Jug rims formed the remaining 21%. Six of these rim sherds had part of a handle attached, and one included part of a spout (Fig. 2, 18). These were sub-divided into three types.

1. Simple rim (Fig. 2, 15-16).
2. Squared rim (Fig. 2, 17-18).
3. Squared, bifid rim (Fig. 2, 19-20).

Handles

The handle sherds were examined in the same way as the rim sherds, but the number of handle sherds was considerably less, and those considered to have been produced in the area numbered only 19. This is too small a number to establish a definite type series, but these sherds were sorted into three forms: rod handles, oval handles, and flattened strap handles (Fig. 2, 21-3). There were nine oval handles, eight flattened strap handles, and only two rod handles. The total assemblage contained two pipkin handles, one of which was slightly distorted and therefore possibly a waster, although there was no other definite evidence for the presence of pipkins. There were also two pieces from black glazed Cistercian-type tyg handles although again there was no other evidence of production of this type.

Decoration

About 20% of the pottery is glazed, and in the majority of cases the glaze is internal, normally occurring on jars and bowls. Since much of the pottery is overfired, the predominant dark-brown black colour does not reflect the potters' intent. Normally fired pieces have brown and occasionally olive-green glaze, otherwise there is little evidence of decoration. Thumb/finger print decoration was present on only three rim sherds. Two of these are jar rims, everted with is little evidence of decoration. Thumb/finger-print impressions on the outside of the jar just below the rim (Fig. 2, 6), while the other has more widely spaced impressions on the outside edge of the rim (Fig. 2, 5). The third example is a jar with an internal recess and a bifid rim, where the two edges of the rim have been pressed together between finger and thumb at intervals (Fig. 2, 10).

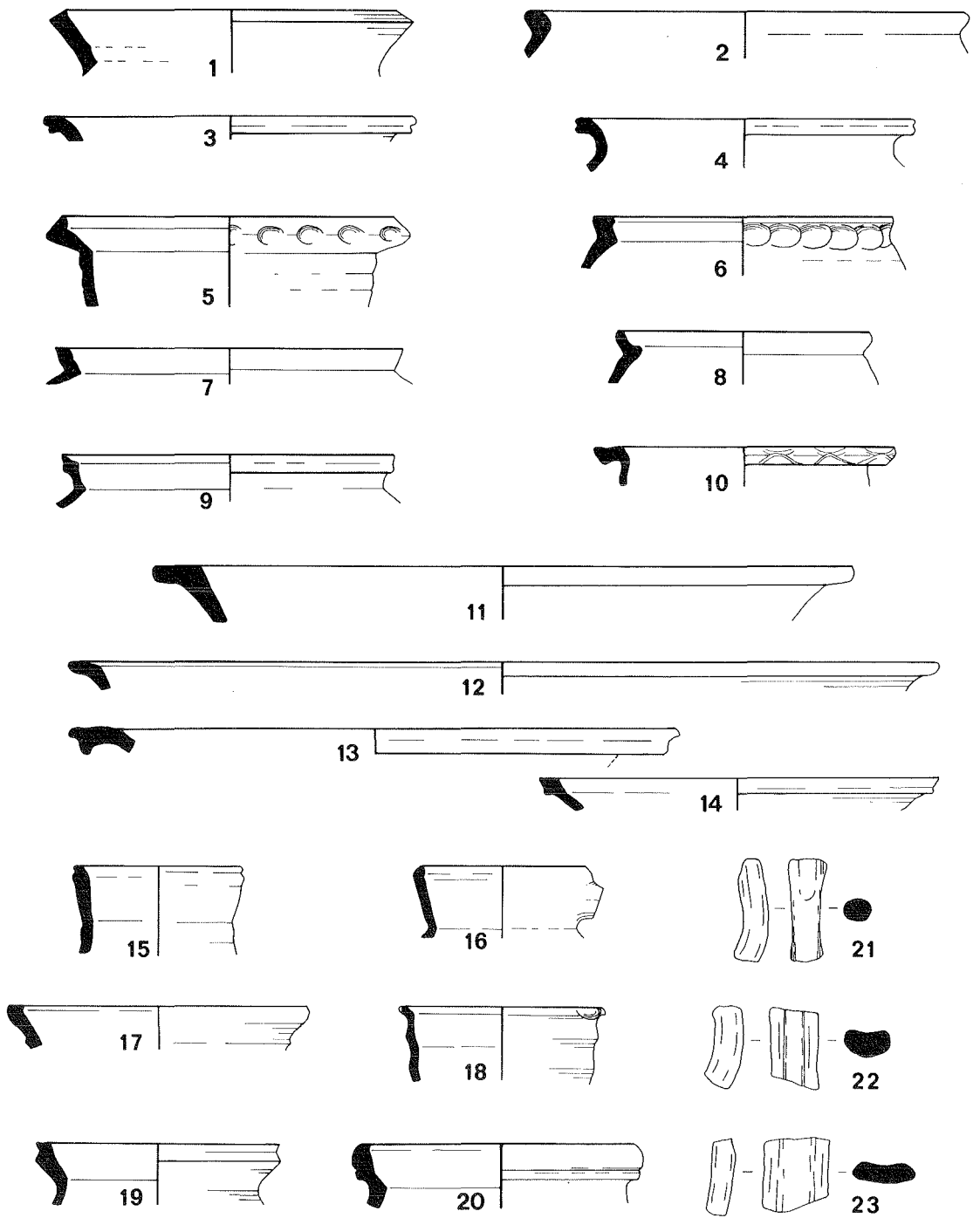


Fig. 2. Products of the Tylers Green pottery ($\frac{1}{4}$ scale).

Roof Tile

Roof tile was as common in the area fieldwalked as was pottery, but only a sample was collected. The collection included a large proportion of overfired tiles, many of which had splashes of glaze on the face of the tile. One tile had a rim sherd stuck to it and one a body sherd. Both sherds were too small to be linked with any of the types in the type series. Several tiles had a ring of glaze on the surface, or a ring impression on a glazed surface. In three cases, two pieces of tile were stuck together, with splashes of glaze on them, one having a glaze ring on one surface. The whole provides good evidence of the use of tile as kiln furniture. A smaller proportion of the overfired tiles had glaze on the edge of the tile, indicating that they may have formed part of the wall of a kiln. Overall the tile provides additional evidence for the presence of a kiln producing pottery in the vicinity.

Dating

Penn floor tile production is historically attested between AD 1322–88 (Eames 1980, 221–6), but production is unlikely to have continued after the fourteenth century. The pottery from the site is significantly later than this.

No stratified groups containing pottery of Tylers Green type are at present known, and this means that dating must be tentative. However, the bricky fabric, a clear intention to produce oxidized wares, a relatively cautious use of glaze, along with a few distinctive forms, for example the galleried rim jars (Fig. 2, 8), suggest a likely range from the late fifteenth century well into the sixteenth. Until the archaeomagnetic date for the Ley Hill, Latimer kiln of AD 1460–1510, at 68% confidence level, one would have hesitated to attribute any Buckinghamshire ceramic to the fifteenth century; however given that reference point, ceramic of the Ley Hill and Tylers Green tradition goes some way to closing the often noted gap between the medieval and Tudor traditions. It cannot be said however that the Buckinghamshire pottery industry was innovative at this period and it is clear that the same forms continued in production over decades.

Floor Tile

Twenty-four glazed floor tile fragments were collected from the fieldwalked area in addition to those noted by Cauvain (Cauvain 1987). Seventeen of these were from decorated tiles. Of the remaining tiles, one had a green glaze over a plain white slip, two had a clear glaze over a plain white slip, and three had a plain black glaze, one of which was possibly overfired. There was no other direct evidence of floor tile wasters.

Ten of the decorated tiles were from previously recorded patterns (Hohler 1941) as follows: P68, P73, P86, P103, P120, P128, P130, P142, P164, P172B. Six decorated fragments were either too small or too worn to be identifiable. One decorated tile fragment was of a pattern not identified by Hohler, and is apparently a previously unrecorded Penn design (see Fig. 3). It depicts two leopards or perhaps lions, part of the English royal coat of arms. The closest parallel would seem to be five fourteenth-century tiles, three from Wessex, one from Luton, and one of unknown provenance, all in the British Museum (Eames 1980, design nos. 1503–5). The date of the ceramic suggests that the decorated tile comes from an earlier phase of activity on the site, or its vicinity.



Fig. 3. Impressed heraldic tile from Tylers Green (1/1).

Discussion

The presence of pottery wasters strongly suggests the existence of a kiln producing pottery. Whether this was a purpose-built kiln, or one producing some pottery as a sideline to the production of roof tile, cannot be determined on the available evidence.

As the location map shows, the greatest density of sherds occurs in the north-western half of the area examined which may indicate the position of the kiln or kilns. It is possible that a former field boundary now ploughed out, that ran across the area south-west to north-east (Fig. 1a), may delimit the bounds of the potter's holding. The distribution of rim sherd forms was studied separately, but this did not reveal any significant patterns and merely reflected the bias towards the north-western side of the site. The close association of pottery and roof tile production is not an uncommon occurrence, and has been previously noted in Buckinghamshire at Brill (Yeoman 1988) and at Ley Hill, Latimer (Farley 1987, 228).

Yonder Lodge, Tylers Green

At Yonder Lodge (Fig. 1) north-west of the area described above, a quantity of pottery was collected from the kitchen garden and from an adjoining strip of woodland behind the property. Most of this was in brick red fabric similar to that collected during the fieldwalk and some, although a smaller proportion, is overfired or distorted. The pottery from this area numbered 277 sherds, and was compared with that recorded above, using the same sorting procedure. The resulting 36 sherds could all be

classified within the previously established categories as follows:

Jars

Seven type 1 rim (1 possible waster). Eleven type 4 rims (2 wasters).

Bowls/Dishes

Twelve type 1 rims.

Jugs

One type 1 rim. Five type 2 rims (3 wasters).

There were fifteen handle sherds in the Yonder Lodge assemblage; one was a rod type, two were oval, and twelve were strap handles. The only form of decoration on the Yonder Lodge material was on a strap handle, which had small holes stabbed through. This was overfired and therefore possibly a waster. The range of pottery types produced here, although more limited, otherwise closely matched the fieldwalked material. It probably comes from a separate although contemporary kiln or kilns.

The Yonder Lodge material contained only a few sherds of roof tile (although more was noted to be present on site), and none were wasters. There was no floor tile in the Yonder Lodge collection.

Acknowledgements

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