

PENN TILES FROM PENN CHURCH, BUCKINGHAMSHIRE

STANLEY AND PAULINE CAUVAIN

A collection of tiles from a grave in the grounds of Penn Church is described. Two new tile shapes and one new pattern are illustrated.

INTRODUCTION

The production of decorated floor tiles from the Penn and Tyler's Green area of Buckinghamshire is well known, with numerous finds and studies described in the literature (Hohler, 1941, 1942; Rouse and Broadbent, 1952; Eames, 1980; Broadbent, 1981, Cauvain *et al.*, 1989, Hutchings and Farley, 1989; Cauvain and Cauvain, 1991 and Cauvain, 1995).

During the course of drain digging in 1967 on the north side of Penn church (Figure 1) two graves lined with Penn tiles were disturbed (Eames, 1980). The Reverend Oscar Muspratt arranged for the removal of some nineteen tiles to the British Museum for identification. The details of seventeen of those tiles at the British Museum were previously recorded by Cauvain and Cauvain (1991). Eight tile patterns were known to be products of the Penn kilns; the remainder of the collection was plain. Following the death of the Reverend Muspratt a collection of a further thirty-two tiles from the disturbed graves was found in his effects. This collection contained two tile shapes not previously associated with Penn and one new pattern.

THE TILES

Most of the tiles from the Reverend Muspratt's collection had traces of mortar on one or more of their undecorated surfaces. In many cases, the tiles were broken and the mortar was on their broken edges, indicating that the tiles had been broken when used in the lining of the grave. Many of the tiles could be described as 'wasters' with poorly formed patterns and fragments of others tiles adhering to glazed surfaces. In a large number of cases it was not possible to determine the full thickness of the tiles because they had split during firing.

Two tile-shapes have not been previously recorded. One, the most important of the collection, is illustrated in Figure 2. It comprises the crudely-drawn head of a lion or mythical beast with its tongue extended. Unlike other Penn forms the tile is not square and its shape suggests that it was intended for use in a mosaic. The fabric for this tile was more uniform than the rest of the collection but was similar to the range of fabric types seen in other products of Penn/Tyler's kilns. The second was a triangular form (broken) of Eames type 2027 (Eames, 1980) and is also illustrated in Figure 2.

The new pattern appears to be a hybrid of two known designs, E2070 and E2072 (Eames, 1980). One square, patterned tile in the collection, design E1398 (Eames, 1980) had been scored diagonally ready to make two triangular tiles. All of the remaining tiles in the collection were decorated with designs previously identified as being from Penn (Hohler, 1941, 1942; Eames, 1980).

THE CATALOGUE

The collection was recorded using the format recommended by Stopford (1990). Ten tiles were complete enough to provide both dimensions, the mean values were 113 x 114mm (standard deviation = 2.9mm). Fourteen were complete enough for a single side to be measured, the mean value was 114mm (standard deviation = 2.0mm). The thicknesses of twenty-one tiles were measured, they ranged from 20 to 27mm with a mean value of 22mm (standard deviation = 2.0mm). The angle of bevel of the tile bases averaged around 7 degrees, with some slightly more and some slightly less than that value. These measurements are within the range normally seen with Penn tiles.

All of the tiles had a red, oxidised, surface colour only 18% of the collection having a black reduced

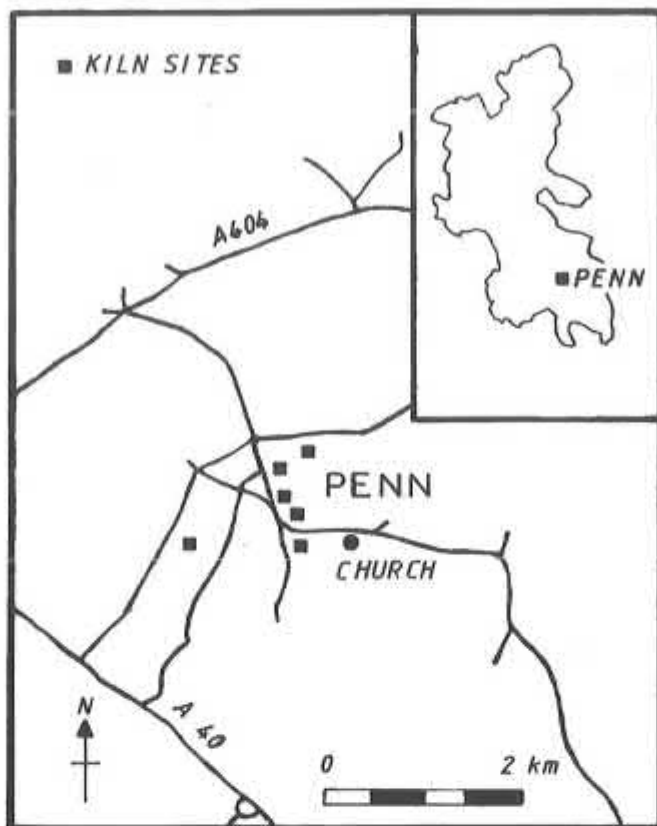


FIGURE 1: Location of Penn church and kiln sites

core. The fabric was moderately hard with small quartz-grain sand inclusions, all less than 1mm in size, with inclusion levels ranging from 10 to 30% of the tile body. Flaking of the tiles was common and may indicate that the clay had been poorly worked before being packed into the moulds.

The previously recognised tiles were as follows:

<i>Eames</i>	<i>Hohler</i>	<i>Number of examples</i>
2460	107	2
2037		12
2037*		1
2390	64	3
2336	75	2
2199	71	6
2070/2072	93/94	4
1398#		1

* scored for creation of triangular tiles

triangular form, see Figure 2.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

The polygonal tile (Figure 2) was probably intended to form part of a mosaic pattern with other similar tiles. There are any number of ways in which it could have been laid in a mosaic but the most likely layout is suggested in Figure 3. This suggestion is based on a four-lion-head design tile (E1826) which comes from Byland Abbey, Yorkshire (Eames, 1980) and is dated to the mid-thirteenth century. However, the Byland Abbey tile is a square form with all four lion-heads on the same tile. Lions' heads of various forms are also known on tiles identified by Hohler as being from Penn/Tylers Green (P73, P100, P110-112) and by Eames from either St. Albans or the City of London (E1829) but all are square in shape.

If the arrangement suggested in Figure 3 was employed, it would also require the use of a large

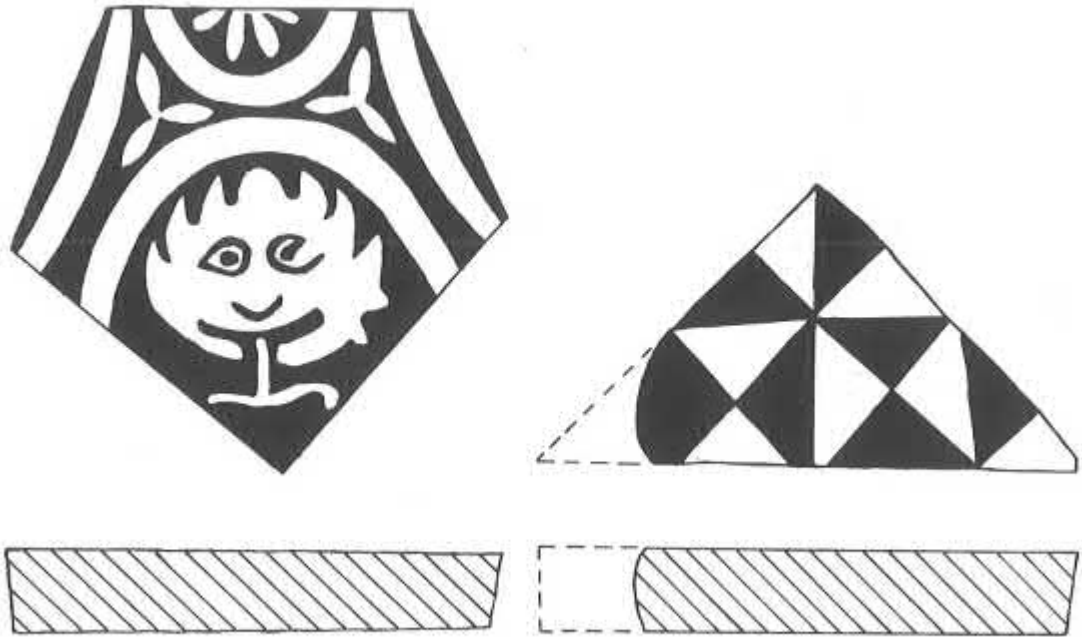


FIGURE 2: The new tile shapes (1:2)

octagonal tile, each side being a little less than 80 mm in length. An octagonal tile is known to have been removed from one of the graves in Penn church Eames (1980). It is one of the two line-impressed tiles identified by Eames (1980) and bears the head of a lion. It has not been published but is held in the collection of the British Museum. This tile has a 72 mm side which would make it a suitable fit into the illustrated mosaic. However, given the different technique employed in the production of line-impressed tiles and that they are probably a little earlier in date, it is unlikely that this particular tile was part of the pattern proposed in Figure 3, and its place was probably taken by an unrecorded form.

New forms of Penn tiles continue to be unearthed and add to our knowledge of the Penn/Tyler's Green industry. The latest finds extend the range of Penn tile forms into areas of design not seen before. Since the polygonal tile was found in the secondary context of a grave fill there is no direct evidence that it was manufactured locally. It is possible that the polygonal tile could have been brought to the Penn/Tyler's Green area as an interesting example of a tile form for the local tilers to look at, although the fabric appears to be similar to those other tiles

found within the grave fill and so it is more than likely that it does originate from Penn/Tyler's Green. That being the case it would suggest that fragments of Penn tiles deserve closer study to see if any other possible examples of polygonal or the missing octagonal tiles might be identified.

REFERENCES

- Broadbent, J.D, 1981, 'A second Penn tile kiln site', *Recs. Bucks* 23, 128-9.
- Cauvain, P.M, Cauvain, S.P. and Green, M, 1989, 'Prehistoric, Romano-British and fourteenth century activity at Ashwells, Tylers Green, Bucks', *Recs. Bucks* 31, 111-9.
- Cauvain, P.M, and Cauvain, S.P, 1991, 'New discoveries of Penn Tiles', *Recs. Bucks* 33, 44-48.
- Cauvain, S.P, 1995, 'A study of the chemical composition of ceramic materials from Medieval kilns in South Buckinghamshire', in (ed. R.Holgate) *Chiltern Archaeology - Recent work*, The Book Castle, Dunstable.
- Eames, E, 1980, *Catalogue of lead glazed earthenware Medieval tiles in the Dept. of Medieval and Later Antiquities*, 2 vols, London.

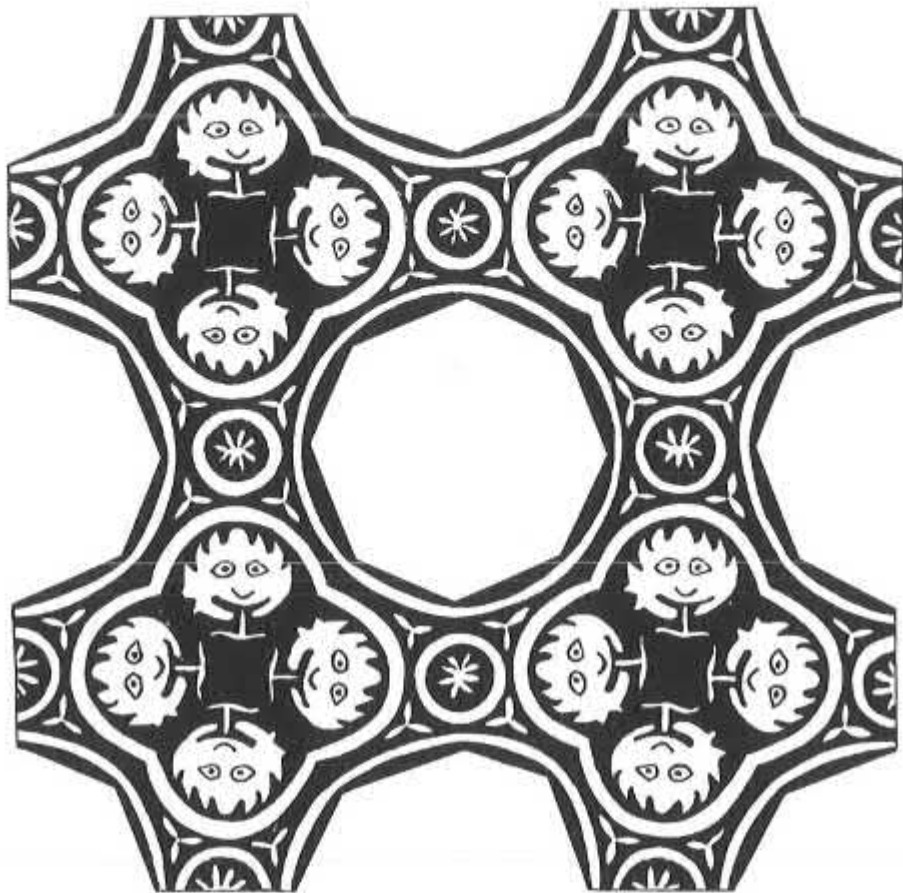


FIGURE 3: Conjectural mosaic pattern (1:4)

Hutchings, N, and Farley, M, 1989, 'A Fifteenth to Sixteenth-Century Pottery Industry at Tylers Green, Penn, Buckinghamshire', *Recs. Bucks* 31, 105-110.
 Hohler, C, 1941, 'Medieval paving tiles in Buckinghamshire', *Recs. Bucks* 14, 1-49.
 Hohler, C, 1942, 'Medieval paving tiles in Buckinghamshire' *Recs. Bucks* 14, 99-132.

Rouse, E.C. and Broadbent, J.D, 1952, 'Further discoveries of tile fragments and wasters in connexion with fourteenth-century paving-tiles and roof-tile kilns at Penn, *Recs. Bucks* 15, 314-8.
 Stopford, J, 1990, 'Recording Medieval Floor Tiles', *CBA Practical Handbook* 10, Council for British Archaeology, London.