

A LATE-MEDIEVAL DECORATED FLOOR TILE, WITH OTHER CERAMIC PRODUCTS FROM KILN AREAS AT CADMORE END COMMON, FINGEST, BUCKINGHAMSHIRE: A PRELIMINARY NOTE

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In Buckinghamshire County Museum is a late-medieval, decorated floor-tile and a collection of late-medieval ceramic from Cadmore End. Evidence is presented that these were the products of medieval pottery and tile kilns in this area..

INTRODUCTION

In the County Museum is a collection of ceramic from Cadmore End, which consists of one incomplete, decorated, glazed floor tile; a few small pieces of plain, worn yellow glazed floor tile; other pieces of tile in a red sandy oxidised fabric with very worn glaze and some five hundred pottery sherds.

Cadmore End lies in the Chilterns, in the south-west of Buckinghamshire, in the parish of Fingest and Lane End (Fig. 1). The material is recorded as having been recovered at Cadmore End Common, near to the Cadmore End – Lane End Road, ‘when stripping off topsoil for a bypass at Bolter End, NGR SU 793926’ (County Museum Accession Register 188.64). The works are presumed to have been preparatory to construction of the M40 Motorway.

At the time there was no Archaeological Field Officer in the county to act upon the possible destruction of archaeological features and it was, therefore, thanks to Mr Sidney Smith, a noted local historian, that the County Museum was alerted to the discoveries. Apart from collecting pottery, Mr Smith also noted a structure. A typescript in the County Sites and Monuments Record records a visit, presumably by a member of the museum staff (CAS 0887):

The structure, which was much destroyed by heavy-earth moving machinery, appeared to have

been roughly oval in shape, measuring 8' x 4'. Layer (2) contained in the centre a quantity of broken tile and tile or brick rubble. Pottery was found throughout layers (1)–(5), but most of it occurred at either end in layers (1) and (2). Apart from the tiles of layer (3), no obvious signs of construction remained. The structure was either a pottery kiln or an oven used for drying pots.

A sketch section accompanies the typescript. A rough draft of the typescript is dated 23 November 1964. The County Museum collected samples from the area and from Mr Smith. According to Mr Smith ‘lots of people in the area came and helped themselves ...’. In 1965 a further collection of material, mostly pottery apparently from the same general area, was donated to the museum by Mr Smith (Acc. 100.65).

Amongst the latter material is a tile decorated with a cross-leaf pattern which is a ‘waster’, a reject piece.

Amongst Mr Smith’s correspondence to the Curator of the County Museum, is a letter of 6th December 1964 describing the piece accompanied by a sketch (Fig. 2):

This week end I was able to pick out from the tile kiln site – now in process of being finally broken up – an interesting piece of what looks like ornamented floor bricks, glazed on one side and showing a leaf pattern. Two pieces fused together. I had picked up a similar piece on the

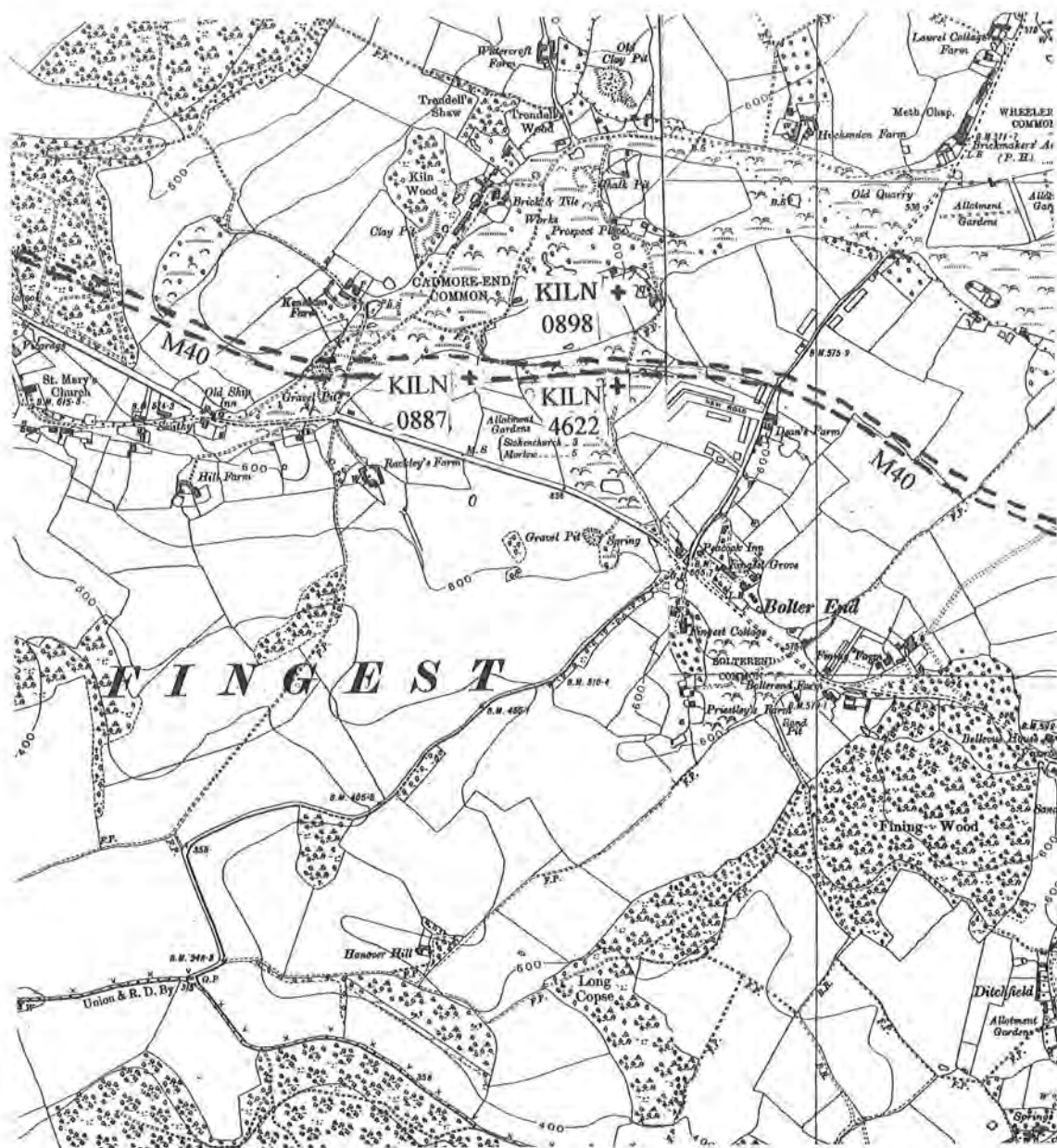


FIGURE 1 Pottery and tile kiln sites near Cadmore End, Buckinghamshire. Based on OS 6" maps of 1919 & 1922, with M40 added.

This week end I was able to pick out from the tile kiln site — now in process of being finally broken up — an interesting piece of what looks like ^{like} ornamental floor bricks glazed on one side and showing a leaf pattern. Two pieces fused together.



I had picked up a similar piece on the site a year or more ago, but took little notice then, because I had not seen it come out and thought it might have come as

FIGURE 2 Extract from Mr Smith's notes with sketch of the cross-leaf tile he discovered.

site a year or more ago, but took little notice then. Because I had not seen it come out and thought it might have come as ballast for the road. But these pieces I found today being fired together, and from where I found them I am almost certain that they were made here ...

THE DECORATED TILE (Fig. 2 and 3)

The tile which Mr Smith found, has one complete edge and an adjoining undamaged fragment; it had been spoiled before it went in the kiln by incorrect placing of the stamp, giving an incomplete pattern. It is hard to understand why the maker had bothered to glaze and fire it. It is possible to roughly estimate the original size to be 135mm square x 22mm thick. The fabric is red, oxidised and very hard. A hand-lens x10 magnification shows sparse quartz grains and occasional specks of mica within the clay. The fractured lower and under surface, including the edges of the tile, are ragged and show a flaky clay, usually caused through insufficient working of the clay in the early preparation stages.

The whole of the upper surface of the tile is covered with a transparent, plain lead glaze giving

a pale, yellowish appearance. Some sparse speckles of iron or copper in the body of the clay show black/brown and green under the glaze, which overall has a clear glassy, crackled finish, the latter a result of a high firing temperature within the kiln.

The design is shallow-stamped, except where the stamp lifted from the top edge. The pattern on the tile is incomplete but whole examples are known. When complete four tiles would be needed to complete the whole pattern of the cross-leaf design (Haberly 1937, CLV p. 201). Each tile consists of four 'leaves' arranged in cross-shape with four hearts at the centre. Of these leaves the veins of three face outwards and the fourth inwards. In the corners are half-circles. Either side of the half-circles are facing heart-shapes. These hearts are intersected, with a stunted stemmed-type, flared leaf, joining to make the central point of the four-tile pattern. (Fig. 5)

The relief decoration for this type of printed pattern, is made by a wooden block, which has the background of the design cut away. The clay, after being formed in a wooden mould is released, part dried, impressed with the wooden design stamp then glazed and fired.



FIGURE 3 Cross-leaf medieval floor tile, kiln waster, from Cadmore End. (photograph D Parish).

DISCUSSION OF THE TILE

Hohler, in his major work on Buckinghamshire floor tiles, recorded two tiles identical to the tile from Cadmore End; his type P/87 which he described as:

Cross formed of ears of corn, three springing from, and one towards, the centre; between four quadrants powdered with pellets; with various ornaments on the background.

The tiles he recorded came from Radnage, Bucks (which he illustrated) and St. Frideswide's Priory, Oxford (Hohler, 1941, 35 and 1942, 113). He found design P/87 rather a puzzle to place in his design Listings V, and placed the example from Radnage Church with the probable 'Chiltern factory' entries, remarking that this was 'for convenience, a true connexion not being clear'. With the discovery of the Cadmore tile we are able

to say his placing was correct.

An account of the church at Radnage (Jackson 1976, 99) provides information about medieval tiles once known there; '... one final note about the Church, not so far recorded in the official history, is the finding in 1962, of some broken pieces of medieval tiles, taken from under the old wooden floor and cemented below the north window of the nave.' He notes (p. 115) that a church inventory dated 29th February 1968, refers to tiles being cemented under the north and east windows. There are none to be seen today under the east window, but the arrangement below the north window remains (Fig. 4). The glaze is rather worn but when dampened the pattern is clearly visible and the glaze appears brown. Hohler's illustrated example of this tile P/87, would appear to be the same piece.

Haberly's (1937) book consisted of 'some Designs of Medieval English tiles an illustrated survey of all the decorated paving tiles existing or recorded within fifteen miles of Oxford'. The



FIGURE 4 Cross-leaf floor tile from Oxford Cathedral, after Haberly 1937, 201.

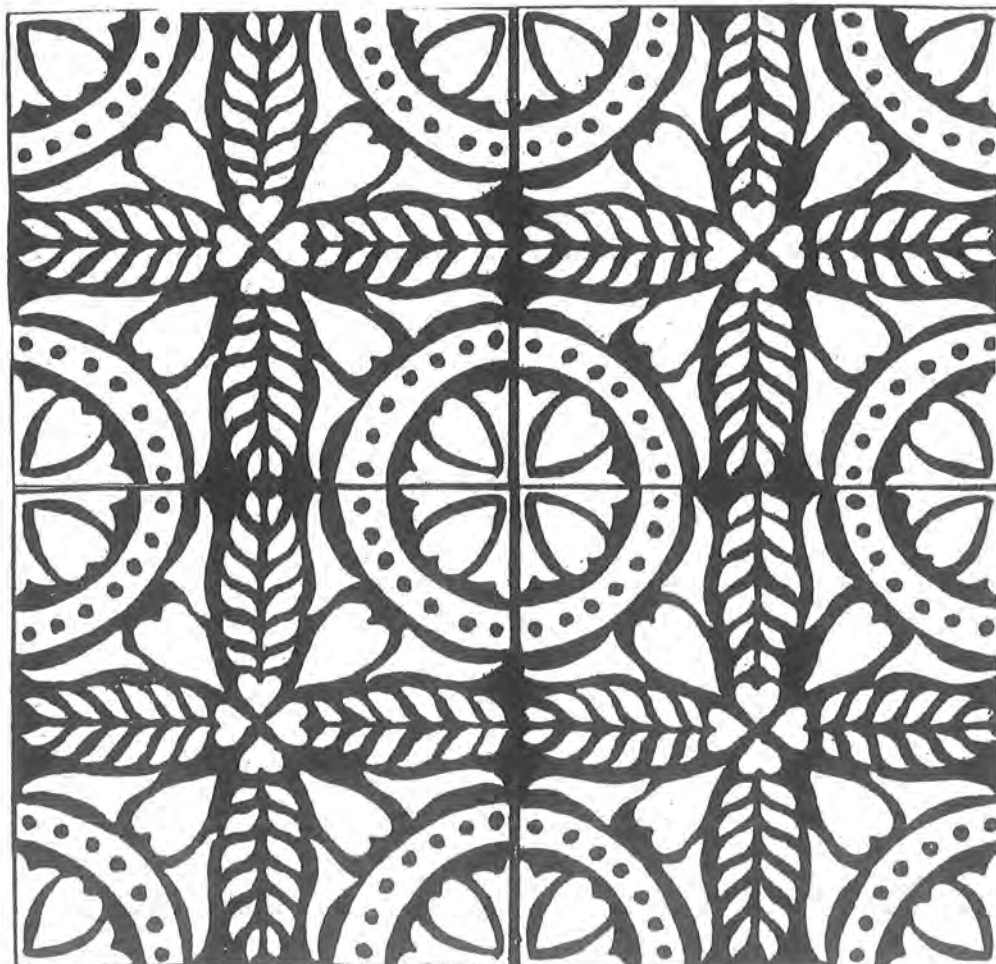


FIGURE 5 Cross-leaf tile showing made-up four tile pattern.

Cadmore End cross-leaf tile is shown on page 201, CLV – 'In Oxford Cathedral' measuring 5¼ square inches. No other information is given.

In reviewing three books on medieval tiles an anonymous author, included an illustration of 'Tiles from the Cathedral Oxford' (*Arch Journ* 1848, following p. 232), amongst which was the Cadmore End cross-leaf tile pattern, with the caption 'a number of very interesting decorative tiles hitherto unpublished, existing in Christ Church Cathedral, Oxford.' (Fig 4) The author has been unable to locate this tile.

Two other tiles, with a variant of the design, are recorded in Berkshire; one at St. Mary's Church, Streatley (drawn by Church, Payne 1845). On a visit to the church the vicar and others stated that there is no such tile at the church now. The other, a fragment, from Tilehurst churchyard is now in Reading Museum. Williams-Hunt (1974) shows an illustration of a fragment with a short report stating that it was found in here in October 1942. Jill Greenaway, Curator of Archaeology, Reading Museum Service, kindly arranged for me to examine the fragment of the Tilehurst tile which was given to the Museum by Mr Williams-Hunt (Acc 1945.19.1) It was quite worn and the upper surface covered with a label. Although the pattern is a cross-leaf design, a different stamp to the Cadmore End stamp has been used. There are not as many ribs as on the Cadmore End example and the heart shapes are not present. Despite the place name 'Tilehurst' no kiln tiles have been found in the area. (pers. com. J.Greenaway)

THE POTTERY FROM CADMORE END

The pottery collection consists of a variety of domestic wares, and also several sherds of roof furniture.

Domestic wares

Amongst the pottery recovered in 1964 and 1965 were wasters, represented here by sherds with glaze on their broken edges. Products included bowls, jars, and jugs. The fabric of the sherds is a soft-fired, sandy and quite pink, red-pink or grey-pink in colour. Bowl base sherd interiors showed glazing which was dull green or brown. Rim forms indicated several types of bowls and jars. Jug rims were squared and there was some glazing on sherds. A single sherd had an applied green-glazed strip

decoration with iron speckles and one another had a circular grid-stamp pattern. A number of larger sherds from a globular jug were decorated with spasmodic green glaze and white painted strips decoration. One jug-base edge had close horizontal thumbing. Also present was the base of a pipkin with a foot stump.

The Louver (Fig 6)

A louver was the largest and most elaborate example of medieval ceramic roof furniture, and was used as a ventilator or smoke extractor (Hurman and Nenck 2000). The initial sorting of the pottery produced some 20 sherds of louver, not enough to reconstruct any form (BCM Acc.188.64). The fabric was red to pink, soft sandy, with clear red inclusions. Only two rim sherds joined. Most sherds were decorated with crossed, incised lines, wide-spaced; others had applied, thick thumb-strips. One sherd in particular had vertical thumbing near the rim edge. Pieces with finished edges come either from the lower rim, side vents or perhaps the top. Several sherds had a worn pale green glaze over a white slip.

Medieval roof furniture, such as chimney pots, finials and louvers were made on pottery sites together with domestic wares, so this is not an unusual find.

DOCUMENTARY EVIDENCE FOR KILNS AT CADMORE END

Hohler (1941) refers to Loyd Haberly's book, *English Medieval Pavingtiles* (1937) as 'An indispensable and infuriating book' on account of the many misprints which he draws attention to. However, it is in Haberly that reference is made to 'Kiln sites' in the Oxfordshire area (p. 76) where the name 'Cadmer End' is mentioned.

Though no kiln has been excavated in or near Oxford, there is evidence that kilns were operated in the Bagley Wood field, in the Stoke Grange Orchard, and in Cadmer End field near Thame, whence tiles were brought to Thame Church, as recorded in the wardens' accounts (Lee 1883).

In Haberly's bibliography for Oxfordshire (Haberly, 315), he uses Lee's publication of the churchwarden's accounts (Lee 1883). 'The remarkably



FIGURE 6 Ceramic louver sherds from Cadmore End. (photograph A Boarder).

early Churchwardens' accounts of Thame say nothing of tiles that can be identified as decorated. Tiles of some sort were brought from Cadmerend, probably a mile or two out on the Aylesbury road'. The writer has found no evidence of any 'Cadmer End' apart from the Buckinghamshire place discussed here nor did Hohler see reason to doubt that 'Cadmerend' is Cadmore End in the Chilterns. Elizabeth Eames, who includes Cadmer End, Thame on her distribution map of 'Known kiln sites and probable centres of production of decorated medieval tiles' in her medieval tile publications (e.g. 1985, 1992), confirms (pers. comm.) that her source of information was Haberly.

In *The Gentleman's Magazine*, 1883 Vol I, some 'Building accounts of Thame Church, Oxon' are transcribed. There are several entries for *Kadmerend* or *Cadmerende* with variant spellings. In 1442 (p. 182) expenses were paid to Thomas tyler for delivery of lime. In 1457 (p. 186) John

Chapman and John Walkeleyn, pay a Tyler and also for 200 tyle, 4 crests, 13 Gutter tyles and 4 bushels of lime. Most important of all is the entry for 1488-9 when le tylemaker de Cadmerende sold 400 for the church house. Tiles from Cadmer End were sold for 2s 6d per thousand and tiles per hundred (roofing) were sold from 3d to 3½d 100. There was no mention of floor tiles being sold.

Extracts from the records of the Churchwardens of the parish of Thame, by Harry Lupton (1852) include a few entries under expenses in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, for the payment of pavyng tile, although there is no mention of decoration or of where the tiles came from. However, an entry in 1540 states expenses were 'Pd to Pluemergere of lane end for a lood of tyle ---- vs.' Lane End is adjacent to Cadmore End. A further entry in 1551 reads 'Pd for the pavyng about the common well in the Market Playce --- iijl/bj xxijd'.

EVIDENCE ON THE GROUND (FIG 1)

Cadmore End Common has been used for quarrying for a long time; from the documentary evidence, at least since the mid fifteenth century until the last brick kiln closed in 1938. Clay was dug here from pits for the manufacture of brick and tiles, and, as we now know, also for the production of pottery. Lime and sand was also extracted here. There are remains of brick kilns still to be seen.

Apart from the discoveries noted above, further direct evidence for production has been collected 'a few hundred yards to the east of the kiln that produced 188.64' towards Bolter End (Accession number 189.64 CASS 4622). A large amount of tile was found. A sample in the Bucks County Museum consists of pieces of tile, green glazed and fused together, with a variety of fabric colours caused by the varying temperature when fired in the kiln. Finds accessioned as 101.65 are also presumed to have come from this second site.

A third area across the M40, at NGR SU796928, also produced wasters, collected in 1968 by the County Museum staff (Acc.115.74: CASS 0898). At the time, the pottery was thought to be of eighteenth century date, but re-examination suggests a date of fifteenth-seventeenth century. Kiln wasters, including distorted, overfired sherds were present, and a sherd with kiln debris adhering showed it had been used, as a support or spacer in a kiln. The material also includes sherds from saggars with the characteristic remains of wall vents. Saggars were introduced after the mid-fifteenth century to hold and protect small glazed vessels and Cistercian-type cups during firing. A cup sherd with handle scar provided an example of the kind of material which would have been sagger-fired. Amongst the material is also a pale-yellow glazed floor tile with the underside shattered. The site was obviously a kiln site but in this with case no structural evidence.

Lupton (1852) as previously noted, mentions production of tiles at Lane End in 1540, and Sheahan (1862) records a pottery here in the later seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, producing coarse brown ware.

SUMMARY

It is not unusual for tile, pottery and roof furniture to be made at the same site with both tilers and

potters making use of the kiln. An example of this, within Buckinghamshire, is the late sixteenth century kiln at Brill, excavated in 1983 (Yeoman 1988).

Documentary evidence demonstrated the production of roofing and paving tiles in the late-fifteenth century at Cadmore End, but it was not known from the early records that decorated medieval floor tiles, roof furniture and domestic pottery were also being made. It is possible that the ceramic industry in the Cadmore End, Lane End, Bolter End area was as extensive as the better known Penn industry.

Christopher Hohler noted that 'the tile history of Buckinghamshire during the 15th century is to one and all a blank' (1941, p. 14). This blank has since been partly filled through post-Hohler discoveries at Little Brickhill (Mynard, 1975) and now at Cadmore End.

This article draws attention, principally, to a decorated tile. A fuller examination of the unpublished pottery assemblage than has been possible here, would be beneficial.

Mr Sidney Smith, who was responsible for so many discoveries, died in 1989. A copy of his manuscript 'History of Lane End' is available in High Wycombe Library.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

My research necessitated the help of many people. I wish to express my sincere thanks to the following for their help and patience with my enquiries: Sarah Gray, Curator and Brett Thorn, Keeper of Archaeology, at Buckinghamshire County Museum for the loan of the tile and access to documentary material; Julie Wise, Buckinghamshire County Archaeological Service Sites and Monuments Record Officer provided further information; Doris Waterton for her invaluable knowledge of the local area, and for accompanying me on many perambulations in search of evidence; Arthur Boarder who knew Mr Smith and discussed much useful information with me; Barbara North a close colleague of Mr Smith for pointing out his published notes in the library at High Wycombe, Buckinghamshire; Beverley Nenk, British Museum, for her valuable expertise on the subject of Medieval tiles, and last but not least the following who allowed me their time, in different ways to assist with my research: Dr Arthur Macgregor,

Maureen Mellor, Ashmolean Museum, Dr Lauren Gilmour, Dept. Cultural Services, Oxford Museums; Dr Richard Ivens (for drawing my attention to the Tilehurst tile, from a note/sketch of Professor Jope; Jill Greenaway, Reading Museum Service, Berkshire; the Vicar and Tina Fair, St Mary's Church, Streatley; Mr Edward Evans, Dean's Verger, Christ Church, Oxford; Mrs Edgerley, Cadmore End Common.

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