

Decorated Medieval Tiles from Taunton

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THE collection of medieval tiles in the Somerset County Museum, Taunton Castle, includes a number from Taunton itself. Though they lack the quality of the thirteenth-century examples from Clarendon, Cleeve Abbey and elsewhere in the south-west of England, it has nevertheless been considered desirable to place them on record, partly in view of the scarcity of visible remains from Taunton Priory and partly as a contribution to the study of the medieval tiles of this part of England.

These tiles come from :

- (1) The site of Taunton Priory. They were dug up at various times during the last years of the nineteenth century and the beginning of this, when the development of the Priory Estate and the construction of Priory Avenue were in progress.
- (2) An old house in East Street : a set of four tiles acquired by the Museum in 1860. They were probably taken from the Priory at the time of the Dissolution and re-set there.
- (3) St. James's churchyard : discovered in 1856, while digging a grave in the south-west corner of the churchyard.

In addition to these a number of tiles, all unlabelled, were recently found in the Museum stores. The majority of the latter, judging by the technique, the fabric and the mortar with which they were once cemented to the floor, as well as by the fact that most of the designs are the same as those on the tiles from Taunton Priory, are almost certainly from that site. The remainder, which belong to an entirely different series, probably came from Cleeve Abbey or from Leighland Chapel, near Washford.

All the tiles from the site of Taunton Priory show signs of considerable wear ; but the condition of those from St. James's

churchyard, except for four, is quite different. Excluding these four, they are all, with a single exception, in a fragmentary state. They are unworn and the backs are without any trace of cement, indicating that they were never laid. The designs on them are all more or less obscured by faulty development of the glaze. They are, to a greater or lesser extent, covered on both sides with a mixture of glaze and burnt clay similar to the fabric of the tiles. Some are fused together. There was also found associated with them a fragment of Devonian sandstone from the Quantocks with burnt clay adhering to it and splashed on both sides with lead-glaze. These features indicate that the tile-fragments from this site are kiln-wasters and the fact that some are fused together and are covered with burnt clay, added to their greatly over-fired condition, may be explained by the assumption that the wasters were afterwards used in the construction of a kiln, the tiles being laid one on top of another and the interstices filled with clay. This assumption is supported by Llewellyn Jewitt's description of a kiln found at Malvern.¹

Comparison of the tiles from the site of Taunton Priory (not counting those which probably came from there) and from St. James's churchyard shows that out of a total of twenty designs, made with the same stamps, seven are common to both. The fabric, a coarse red ware, with abundant grit composed of a mixture of quartz and Devonian sandstone, is identical in tiles from both sites. This leads to the conclusion that the wasters from St. James's churchyard are from the same kiln as that in which the tiles made for Taunton Priory were fired. As it is unlikely that the wasters were brought from any great distance it follows that the site of the kiln was probably near St. James's churchyard, a convenient distance from the building for which the tiles were made.

The tiles may be divided into two groups :

- (A) Inlaid : the inlay deep and varying from about one-twentieth of an inch to one-tenth (Pls. V and VI, Nos. 1-21).

¹ Llewellyn Jewitt, *Journ. Brit. Arch. Assoc.*, iv (1849), 217. For another instance of tile-wasters (in this case roofing-tiles) being used for kiln-construction cf. P. B. Chatwin, *Trans. Birmingham Arch. Soc.*, lx. (1936), 2, Pl. I.

(B) Printed: the impression made by the stamp being scarcely perceptible and the layer of pipe-clay correspondingly thin (Pl. VI, Nos. 22-4).

In the tiles of Group A the sides vary from 5.5 in. to 5.8 in. and the thickness from 0.7 in. to 0.8 in., with the exception of two, whose sides are 5.0 in. and 5.1 in. respectively, and are 1.0 in. thick. There are also some large, oblong border-tiles approximately 9.5 in. long, 6.8 in. broad and 1.0 in. thick. The edges are either square or bevelled and all tiles of this group normally have four keys on the back.

They all bear a family resemblance to types made in Wessex during the thirteenth century and the first half of the fourteenth and probably date from the latter part of that period. The designs, though related to the Clarendon-Salisbury series ¹ and to the thirteenth-century tiles from Cleeve Abbey,² are inferior in quality. Their very restricted distribution also argues a later date: for, whereas the Clarendon-Salisbury series extends from London ³ to Exeter ⁴ in one direction and from Abbotsbury in Dorset ⁵ to Tintern Abbey ⁶ in the other; and the Cleeve series from Lyme Regis ⁷ to Llandaff, Glamorgan ⁸ and Gloucester,⁹ those from Taunton, with the exception of three (and these only extend from Muchelney to Cleeve), are known from there alone.

The tiles of Group A were probably laid at the end of the period during which the main building operations were taking place. The reconstruction of the Priory Church of SS. Peter

¹ The Clarendon tiles, save for a small selection illustrated by T. Borenius and J. Charlton in *Antiq. Journ.*, xvi (1936), Pl. xiv, have unfortunately not yet been published. Before this is done little real progress can be made in the study of the medieval tiles of the South-West of England.

² J. B. Ward Perkins, *Proc. Som. Arch. Soc.*, lxxxvii (1941), ii, 39-55, Pls. I-X.

³ *London Museum Medieval Catalogue* (1940), 234 and Fig. 81, no. 63.

⁴ Lord Alwyne Compton, *Tile-Tracings*; MS. in Library of Society of Antiquaries, 24, 26. J. W. Hewett, *Trans. Exeter Diocesan Architectural Society*, ser. I, iii (1849), Pls. 28, 29.

⁵ Examples in Taunton and Dorchester Museums.

⁶ In British Museum, *Rutland Coll.*, 229, 230.

⁷ Examples in Victoria and Albert Museum; Arthur Lane, *Guide to the Collection of Tiles* (1939), Pl. 20, D.

⁸ In National Museum of Wales.

⁹ Fragments recently dug up at St. Bartholomew's Hospital, Gloucester. I am indebted to Mr. J. Neufville Taylor, Curator of the City Museum, Gloucester, for drawing my attention to these tiles.

and Paul, begun in 1277 or earlier, was still apparently unfinished in 1337.¹ Though on stylistic grounds there is little likelihood of there being much difference in date in the tiles of this group, it is suggested that Nos. 8, 9 and 10 are the earliest.

The tiles belonging to Group B, of which three examples only have survived—all from St. James's churchyard—are, in technique and style, much later. They were probably made in the fifteenth, or may even be as late as the sixteenth century. Nos. 22 and 23 are types found in West Somerset, North Devon and Cornwall, possibly originating in the Barnstaple-Bideford area, a very old pottery centre. No. 24, which, so far, is known only from Plymtree, Devon, belongs to a different tradition, in style, fabric and number of keys. No members of Group B are known to occur east of Taunton.

EXPLANATION OF PLATES V and VI ²

1. St. James's churchyard. Kiln-waster : 5·8 in. × 0·8 in. : square edges : 4 keys. Also from site of Taunton Priory.
2. Probably from site of Taunton Priory. 5·7 in. × 0·8 in. : square edges : 4 keys. This is probably the companion of No. 1—*cf.* lion and griffin paired at Salisbury Cathedral Chapter-house.³
3. Probably from site of Taunton Priory. 5·8 in. × 0·8 in. : square edges : 4 keys. Also from St. James's churchyard (kiln-waster) and from site of Taunton Priory. This motif has not so far been recorded from Somerset. It may be derived from the design on a tile found at Clarendon Palace.⁴ A similar device appears on the seal of William de Promhelle attached to a deed of c. 1220.⁵
4. Probably from site of Taunton Priory. Fragment of scroll within a circle, with trefoils at the corners. 0·8 in. thick : square edges. This fragment probably belongs to the same set as Nos. 1-3. The stamps from which these four examples were made all seem to be by the same hand

¹ T. Hugo, *Proc. Som. Arch. Soc.*, ix (1859), ii, 11, 24, 37.

² It has been necessary, in many cases, to complete the illustrations from two or more fragments.

³ H. Shaw, *Specimens of Tile-Pavements* (1858), Pl. xxiv.

⁴ T. Borenius and J. Charlton, *Antiq. Journ.*, xvi (1936), Pl. xiv.

⁵ C. L. Kingsford, *Archæologia*, lxxv (1913-14), Pl. xxxiv, 7.

(note the small trefoils at the corners). It is suggested that No. 4 may be part of a similar device to No. 3 and to have been paired with it, as No. 1 probably was with No. 2.

5, 6. Site of Taunton Priory. A pair of large oblong border-tiles: 9.5 in. \times 6.8 in. \times 1.0 in.: square edges: 10 or more keys: upper edge rabbeted on underside. This pair is one of the numerous examples of the Richard-and-Saladin series, and has been discussed by J. B. Ward Perkins.¹ Since his paper was written, however, some more fragments have been found in the Museum stores. With the help of these it has been possible almost completely to restore 'Richard' and to add a significant detail to 'Saladin'. 'Richard' is now seen to be wearing a large square-topped helm and to be carrying a small heater-shaped shield charged with a cross pattée. His lance has apparently been broken into four pieces. 'Saladin' is shown to be partially unhorsed—his left foot has lost its stirrup, which hangs empty behind it.² His sword, which Ward Perkins considered, from the material at that time at his disposal, to be an irrelevant detail, has evidently fallen from his hand. It is unfortunate that no more of 'Saladin's' body has survived.

While this pair of tiles shows certain early features, such as 'Richard's' helm, the coarser treatment, particularly the 'stencilled' effect, points to a later date than those from Cleeve Abbey.³ Comparison with the latter reveals the fact that in the Taunton example 'Saladin's' sword is no longer of the scimitar type. The Taunton tiles are comparable rather with one from Great Bedwyn, Wilts,⁴ which resembles them both in the presence of a deep border and in the increased stylization of the tree between the two figures.

An uncommon technical feature is the rabbet on the underside of the upper edge. This has so far been found

¹ J. B. Ward Perkins, *op. cit.*, p. 45, Pl. III, i-iii; Pl. VII, 1-5.

² There is an earlier version of this among the Chertsey tiles. Here, however, 'Richard' has not broken his lance; M. Shurlock, *Tiles from Chertsey Abbey, Surrey* (1885), Pl. 31. *Cf.*, also, the combat between Tristram and Moraunt; Shurlock, *op. cit.*, Pl. 13.

³ J. B. Ward Perkins, *op. cit.*, Pl. III, 8, 9.

⁴ F. Stevens, *Wilts. Arch. Mag.*, xlvii (1936), 362, Fig. 2.

only in a border-tile, representing a hunting-scene, from Stavordale Priory.¹ The latter is stylistically, though not necessarily chronologically, later than the Taunton Tiles. In both instances the rabbit was not made in the mould, but cut with a knife.

It should be mentioned that the fragment illustrated by Ward Perkins as coming from Stavordale Priory, is, in fact, from the site of Taunton Priory.²

7. Site of Taunton Priory. Fragment of a large, oblong border-tile, probably of the same dimensions as Nos. 5 and 6. Like them it has the underside of the upper edge rabbeted. It evidently forms part of a hunting-scene, probably consisting of two or more tiles and perhaps alternating with the 'Richard and Saladin' pair.
8. Probably from site of Taunton Priory. Fragment of a large border-tile. Thickness 1.0 in. : square edges : probably 9 or more keys. This fragment, though small and in bad condition, is interesting because it is yet another and unrecorded member of the 'Richard and Saladin' series. Like No. 5 the helm is of the square-topped type, but in this example the right-hand figure (as in the Wilts-Hants version)³ carries a lance. The rest of the decoration on this fragment is difficult to make out. The roundel near the upper edge, behind the head, was probably intended to be separate from the arm and recalls the border of similar roundels in the Wilts-Hants version, perhaps forming a link between the latter and Nos. 5 and 6. This tile, like Nos. 5 and 6, is rabbeted on the underside of the upper edge.
9. Old house in East Street. 5.5 in. × 1.0 in. : square edges : 4 keys. Also from site of Taunton Priory, Cleeve and Athelney Abbeys.⁴
10. Probably from site of Taunton Priory. A fragment only, restored from an example from Muchelney Abbey. 1.0 in. thick : square edges : probably 4 keys. Also occurs at Cleeve,⁵ Muchelney and Athelney (examples in Taunton Museum).

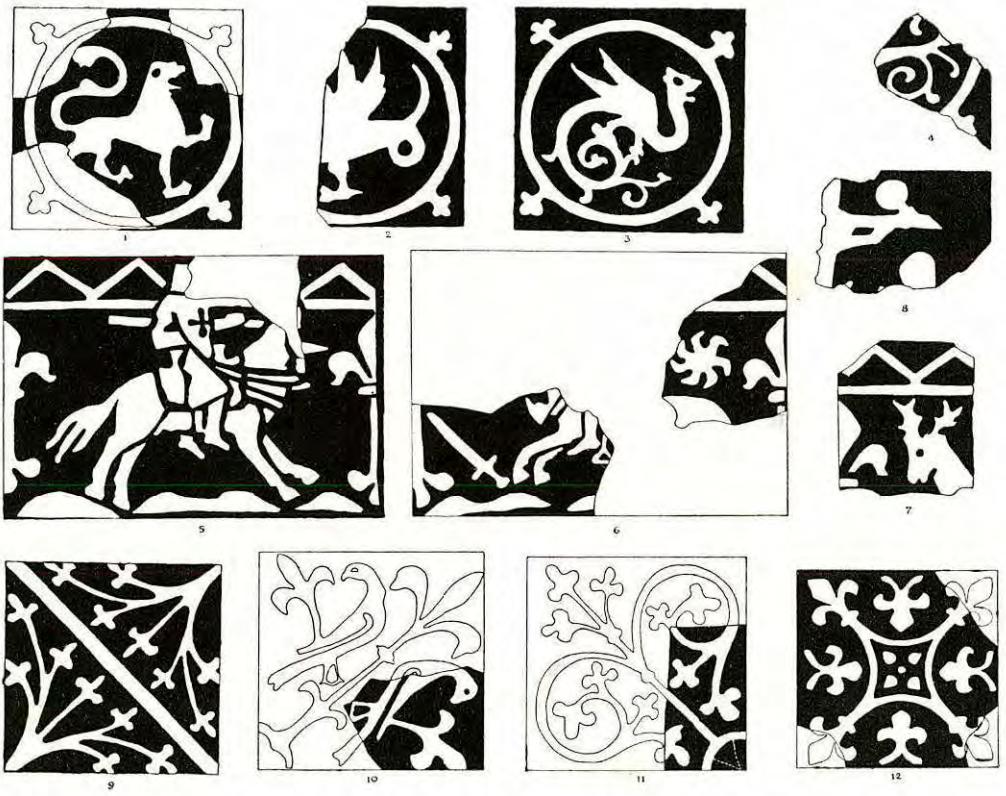
¹ In Taunton Museum.

² J. B. Ward Perkins, *op. cit.*, Pl. III, ii.

³ F. Stevens, *op. cit.*, 362, Fig. 2 and Pl. IV, 14.

⁴ J. B. Ward Perkins, *op. cit.*, Pl. VI, 23.

⁵ J. B. Ward Perkins, *op. cit.*, Pl. VI, 24.



DECORATED MEDIEVAL TILES FROM TAUNTON.

11. Site of Taunton Priory. A fragment only, restored from an example from Muchelney Abbey. 0·9 in. thick : square edges : 4 keys. Also occurs at Cleeve, Muchelney and Athelney Abbeys.¹ In examples of this tile from Muchelney the quadrant at the corner encloses one arm of a cross pattée. This part of the stamp was evidently damaged and re-worked, leaving the open quadrant found at the other three localities. This is indicated in the illustration by broken white lines, the inlaid part being at the sides. From this it can be inferred that the stamp was first used at Muchelney, passing thence to Athelney, Taunton and Cleeve.
12. Site of Taunton Priory. 5·1 in. × 1·0 in. : square edges : 4 keys. Also from St. James's churchyard (kiln-waster). This design is probably derived from an earlier version found at Glastonbury and at St. Nicholas' Chapel, Stoke-under-Ham, where it is associated with the late thirteenth-century Cleeve type of tile.
13. St. James's churchyard. 5·0 in. × 1·0 in. : square edges : 4 keys. This tile is quite unworn, and appears never to have been used. The design, a simple fleur-de-lys, is not known, at present, from anywhere in Somerset, except Taunton, though a number of versions are widely distributed in Wiltshire and Hampshire.²
14. Two half-tiles : the right-hand from the site of Taunton Priory ; the left-hand probably from the same site. 5·5 in. × 0·7 in. : bevelled edges : no keys.³ This is a very close variant of No. 13, being almost a replica of it. Its proportions, however, are more slender and there are slight differences in the form of certain of its elements. Another example of this design, from the same stamp, is seen on a fragment, probably from Taunton Priory. Here the design has been struck vertically, instead of diagonally, on a 'blank' 1·0 in. thick and with square edges. The

¹ J. B. Ward Perkins, *op. cit.*, Pl. vi, 20.

² Cf. F. Stevens, *op. cit.*, Pl. iv, 9 and Pl. v, 1, 4 ; B. W. Greenfield, *Proc. Hants. Field Club*, ii (1892), Pl. D, 4-8.

³ It was the practice of the tilewrights employed at Taunton Priory to omit the keys when it was intended to halve a tile. The face of any tile to be treated thus was scored deeply with a knife in the required direction before firing. Normal tiles of this series have four keys.

disposition of the keys on the back of this fragment as well as the necessity for the breadth of the 'blank' to be at least 6.5 in., in order to include the whole length of the fleur-de-lys, make it probable that it formed part of a large border-tile, whose breadth was the same as Nos. 5 and 6. It should be noted, however, that the upper edge is not rabbeted underneath.

15. Two half-tiles, cut diagonally : the right-hand from site of Taunton Priory : the left-hand from two fragments probably from that site. 5.7 in. \times 0.7 in. : bevelled edges : no keys. Also from St. James's churchyard (kiln-waster). This may be either a rather clumsy variant of No. 11, or else it may be derived independently from the Central Wessex prototype illustrated by F. Stevens.¹
16. St. James's churchyard. 5.7 in. \times 0.75 in. : bevelled edges : no keys. This tile is much worn and is not a kiln-waster.
17. St. James's churchyard. Kiln-waster: 5.5 in. \times 0.75 in. : bevelled edges : 4 keys. Also from site of Taunton Priory. This, with Nos. 1 and 16 are three variants of a widely-distributed motif, probably derived from the Clarendon-Salisbury example.²
18. Site of Taunton Priory. 5.5 in. \times 0.7 in. : bevelled edges : 4 keys. Also from St. James's churchyard (kiln-waster). This seems to be a further development of the Clarendon prototype noticed under No. 3.
19. Site of Taunton Priory. 5.6 in. \times 0.7 in. : bevelled edges : 4 keys. Also from St. James's churchyard (kiln-waster). This, and a number of other variants of a widely-distributed motif have been discussed by J. B. Ward Perkins.³
20. Probably from site of Taunton Priory. 5.6 in. \times 0.75 in. : bevelled edges : 4 keys. Also from St. James's churchyard (kiln-waster).
21. Probably from site of Taunton Priory. An oblong border-tile. 5.7 in. \times 2.9 in. \times 0.7 in. : bevelled edges : no keys. Also from site of Taunton Priory.
22. St. James's churchyard. Not a kiln-waster. 4.9 in. \times

¹ F. Stevens, *op. cit.*, Pl. v, 24.

² T. Borenius and J. Charlton, *op. cit.*, Pl. xiv, bottom left.

³ J. B. Ward Perkins, *op. cit.*, 55, Pl. x, 4.

PLATE VI



DECORATED MEDIEVAL TILES FROM TAUNTON.

- 0·8 in. : bevelled edges : 5 keys : printed. Also from Westleigh, near Bideford, Devon.¹
23. St. James's churchyard. Not a kiln-waster. 4·8 in. × 0·9 in. : bevelled edges : 5 keys : printed. Also in West Buckland church, near Taunton, Westleigh, Devon,¹ and Tywardreath church, Cornwall.² Two close variants in Timberscombe church.
24. St. James's churchyard. Not a kiln-waster. 4·7 in. × 0·9 in. : bevelled edges : 4 keys : printed. Also in Plymtree church, Devon, but here with a single central key instead of four, as at Taunton. The fabric of No. 24, a fine-grained red ware, is quite different from that of Nos. 1-23. It may be an importation.

¹ Lord Alwyne Compton, *op. cit.*, 163.

² In British Museum, *Rutland Coll.*, 749.