

HYDE ABBEY - REDISCOVERING THE LOST MINSTER OF ALFRED THE GREAT

Hyde Abbey medieval encaustic floor tiles: it's a panel game

Tile usage and floor patterns in monasteries and churches

The floors of monastic houses like Hyde Abbey evolved over several centuries as the floors were constantly repaired or replaced due to wear and tear or changing fashions. Few pavements observed today are in situ. Those that are were mainly preserved in treasuries or muniment rooms where there was little wear, or were covered up by later building without disturbance.

Tile pavements were often arranged in panels, separated from one another by narrow borders, often of plain (black and yellow) glazed tiles. Within the border the tiles were laid in a number of ways, either as a single design or in groups of 4, 9 or 16 tile patterns. Panels were generally long and narrow along the length of the room or corridor, but circular patterns were used in places like Clarendon Palace near Salisbury. The majority of the tiles that make up tile pavements are square or rectangular ranging between 100mm to 150mm in length. Tiles mainly bore a single design but were sometimes made in designs that covered 4 or more tiles.

Examples from Winchester Cathedral



Elongated panels of stars and fleur-de-lis with plain border tiles



Small 4-tile panel with narrow border of plain black and yellow tiles



Lions and griffins with black narrow plain tile border



Winchester Cathedral corridor of tile panels

Tiles in the context of Hyde Abbey

One of the objectives of our study was to throw some light on where encaustic floor tiles may have been used in Hyde Abbey monastery. Whilst we have ample evidence of tile fragments from demolition material, there are no documentary records of usage. Until recently no site excavation had recorded tile pavements in-situ.

However, what we find gives a good insight into the probable riches of Hyde Abbey. The likely uses of tile pavements in the abbey can be inferred from other monastery sites where pavements have been found in situ.

The tiles would have been arranged in panel arrays similar to Winchester Cathedral. Some of the tile designs found at Hyde Abbey were also used in Winchester Cathedral as well as other monasteries in Hampshire and Dorset.

Some tiles of Hyde Abbey



A late date tile with shallow inlay and a humorous sketch of a smiling man on the bottom left



King's face



Double headed eagle



Crossed vesicas with circular designs



Foliage motif set diagonally



Rosette and circle motif



Square divided diagonally into triangles



Square and circle with radiating tracery



Square and circle with central petal



Fleur-de-lis

Tiles were sometimes made in sets of 4 or more



Examples of 4 tile set with writing



Tile with writing found at Hyde Abbey: part of a 4 tile set

Hyde Abbey tile catalogue project

Hyde900 with the help of Winchester City Archaeological Department are creating a catalogue of tiles found on the Hyde Abbey site. Each tile has been photographed to capture its main characteristics.

Over 100 of the best tile fragments have been examined so far. More than twenty designs have been identified. The date of manufacture of the tiles spans the last half of the 13th century probably to the early 16th century indicating the vibrant evolutionary nature of an important monastery like Hyde Abbey. Examples of the data sheets are shown below.

Hyde Abbey: Medieval floor tiles

Hyde900 item No. 121



Date found: 1935

WINCM ARCH: no:2059.2

Discovery location:

Little is known about the discovery location of this item.



Description:

Glazed inlaid floor tile fragment depicting the back half of a lion. Many variants of this design are found on medieval tiles. The original tile was about 130mm square.

The back displays two large round 'key' depressions, which were made with a knife. There would have been four keys on the complete tile. These helped to secure the tile to the mortar bed. The glaze is worn by use. The colour of what remains is a brownish dark yellow/green. The thickness of the white inlay is 1-2mm.

Design:

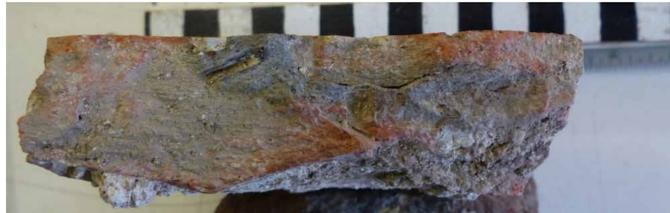
Early 14th century floor tile depicting lion in circular frame. The particular design of tile is widespread in South Hampshire. Examples can also be found in Winchester College.

Hyde Abbey: Medieval floor tiles

Hyde900 item No. 9



base



Date found: 1999

Site code: HA99

Trench no: 1

Context no: 1990

Discovery location: 1990 - loose coarse fill of pit. Fill of alter pits coarse fill. Stratigraphically below 1961.

Description:

Fragment of glazed inlaid floor. There are no keys on the base of the tile. The tile was covered with a clear yellow lead glaze. The inlaid white pipe clay is thick with depth of 3-4mm. No keys are visible because probably this is the centre of the tile. Would most likely have had 4 keys.

Design: This floral design is found in Winchester Cathedral's original retrochior floor c.1262. It is also found at Romsey Abbey. (Sperry & Scott - group two No.16) where it is dated at around 1280.

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