

The Medieval Floortiles of Herefordshire

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Access Archaeology





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With some of the heraldic shields I have drawn on the work done by Tony Wilmott, published in the Vince and Wilmott paper on 'A lost tile pavement at Tewkesbury Abbey' published in the Antiquaries Journal 1991. My thanks to Mr Wilmott for allowing me use of his drawings.

Hilary White kindly provided me with some notes she had made on medieval floortiles whilst she was part of the Sites and Monuments Record staff at Hereford. Her information on the Netherwood tiles at Thornbury was particularly helpful, and I am grateful to Ivan Turner who showed me his private collection of floor tiles from Netherwood.

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I am grateful to the Hereford Museum staff for granting me access to search for medieval floortiles within their Collections. Judy Stephenson identified the possible use of a barrel lock key in the production of a unique tile from Leominster Old Priory.

There were three locations, secular buildings now in private ownership, which house medieval floortiles, and I am most grateful to the owners of Wigmore Abbey; Chapel Farm, Wigmore; and Deans Place, Yatton, for allowing access to their tiles. Dr Patrick Brown helped with the identification of certain tiles from Deans Place and provided the main photograph.

Most of the tiles which appear to be unique to Herefordshire are illustrated by the author's own photographs and those of Andrew Stait. Other individual photographs are credited within the text.

Introduction

It had been my original intention to research the decorated medieval floortiles in Herefordshire in order to better understand the dating and distribution of the tiles and the links between the sites at the time the tiles were originally laid.

However, circumstances have dictated that this book is only the first step along that road, in that this is simply a survey, inevitably a snapshot in time, of the decorated medieval floortiles visible in the county of Herefordshire in 2013. I have also included a few instances where records exist of medieval floortiles having been found, but the actual tiles are no longer available. I hope that it will provide a foundation for others to undertake further research.

I am of course in the shadow of the late Alan Vince and his exhaustive studies of the ceramics industry in the Severn valley. His interest was primarily with the analysis of the fabric of the tiles, its origin, and the trade routes. However, the vast majority of the medieval tiles in Herefordshire are laid as flooring, albeit not in their original setting, and the fabric of the tile is not available for analysis. I can only work with the designs.

In this book I have not included plain glazed tiles, as these are difficult to date, and unhelpful in suggesting links between sites. It should be noted perhaps that a significant number of surviving tiles feature heraldic shields, but we should be wary of the assumption that these shields formed such a large proportion of the original tiles laid. It is likely that the workmen salvaging these tiles, often during Victorian restorations of the churches, considered the shields to be of more importance than the foliate designs.

It is impossible to look at Herefordshire in isolation, particularly with such large and well-documented collections of floortiles close by, notably at Great Malvern, Worcester, and Gloucester. Where other sites have tiles of the same design I have tried to list only those locations within a 20-mile radius of Herefordshire.

As the decorated tiles are now to be found in often dark buildings where photography is difficult, where there is a drawing available of the design then this is what I have used as this gives a clearer image. The photographs were taken mainly by the author and Andy Stait; those taken by Laurence Keen and Dr Patrick Brown are referenced in the text.

Given Herefordshire's shared border with the Welsh counties, there are many similar designs to those in J. M. Lewis' exhaustive book 'The Medieval Tiles of Wales'; these were drawn by Jeremy Leech and are referenced throughout the book. Laurence Keen produced the drawings of the floortiles from Blackfriars, Gloucester; Worcester Cathedral; and Netherwood. The heraldic shield tiles were drawn by Tony Wilmott; Lynn Harper produced some of the Abbey Dore drawings; Duncan Brown the Leominster Old Priory Gilbert-Scott tiles; the other Leominster Old Priory tile drawings and those of Dilwyn are the author's own. A few are derivatives from Elizabeth Eames' Catalogue of the British Museum tiles.

I have therefore listed the main sites alphabetically, and detailed under each site name the tiles visible at that location. Obviously some places (such as Stretton Sugwas and Croft) have a large number of tiles of the same design, but I have still listed all of them at both locations so that a reader selecting only one discrete site will still find a complete record within that chapter.

I am presenting a census of what is visible, or available in the record; it is as comprehensive as I can make it but I do not pretend it is complete. I hope that others will find it a useful basis for further research.