

THE MEDIEVAL TILE-MAKERS OF OULTON

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DECORATED FLOOR-TILES, both in relief and with slip decoration, enjoyed a relatively brief vogue in East Anglia. Occasional instances during the twelfth century preceded widespread use from around the middle of the thirteenth century to the late fourteenth. By that time plain-colour glazed tiles, and occasionally stone quarries, had come into common use in high-status buildings, and this fashion continued until the late sixteenth century. Many of these plain tiles were Flemish imports, or at least reflected similar manufacturing techniques; contemporary imported or locally-produced decorated tiles occur very rarely.¹

The distinctive manufacturing techniques, fabric, and above all designs produced using wooden stamps, enable the distribution of tiles made at the same manufactory to be mapped. During the *floruit* of decorated tile manufacture, distributions and known kiln sites typically suggest that in the early stages of the development of the industry, tile-makers were itinerant. In East Anglia, this quickly gave way to settled production sites, the majority of which also made (and were probably sustained by producing) roof-tiles.² The best known in East Anglia is probably Bawsey, in Norfolk, whose fourteenth-century products are found up to 60km/40miles from the kiln site near King's Lynn, across several counties.³ There was a similar, almost contemporary, production centre around Grimwade Street, Ipswich, with a complementary distribution pattern.⁴

This paper, however, is concerned with the products of one of the many smaller production sites that served a much more limited market. Its particular interest lies in the way that its craftsmen drew, so far as their skills allowed, on a wide range of regional and local precedents, and included in their repertoire ceramic grave covers, which in any form are highly unusual in England.

DISTRIBUTION

Oulton, St Michael the Archangel, Suffolk (TM 5100 9357), has produced the largest collection, which is held at the church.⁵ Finds have been made over the years particularly south-west of the building in digging graves along the old western boundary of the churchyard, now marked by a terrace within the extended churchyard, just south of the church itself.⁶ The grave covers, which only occur at Oulton, certainly came from this location in 2005. Most likely they were disposed of against the churchyard boundary when displaced from the interior.

Other tiles of this group (but not grave covers) have been found at the following churches, all, like Oulton itself, close to waterways that doubtless provided the means of distribution (Fig. 73). *Flixton, St Andrew*, Suffolk (TM 5170 9551), a ruined church in which a tile was first found by Norman Scarfe.⁷ More tiles were recovered by the Suffolk Archaeological Unit c.1970, which remain in its possession; and later by Paul Durbidge, now deposited in Lowestoft Museum.⁸ *Norwich, St Julian*, Norfolk (TG 2349 0812), where a portion of 'ancient pavement' exhibited to the Norfolk Archaeological Society in 1847 was found 'in the recent alterations...about eighteen inches below the then level of the pavement, near the south door'.⁹ The 'more curious' designs were illustrated in *Norfolk Archaeology*, and the same four tiles (which cannot now be traced) were also drawn or rubbed by Lord Alwyne Compton, sometime bishop of Ely.¹⁰ All but one design have been found at other sites.¹¹

Reedham, St John the Baptist, Norfolk (TG 4278 0249), a church mostly rebuilt c.1300.¹² Tiles were found during the reconstruction of the building in 1981, following a fire, and in

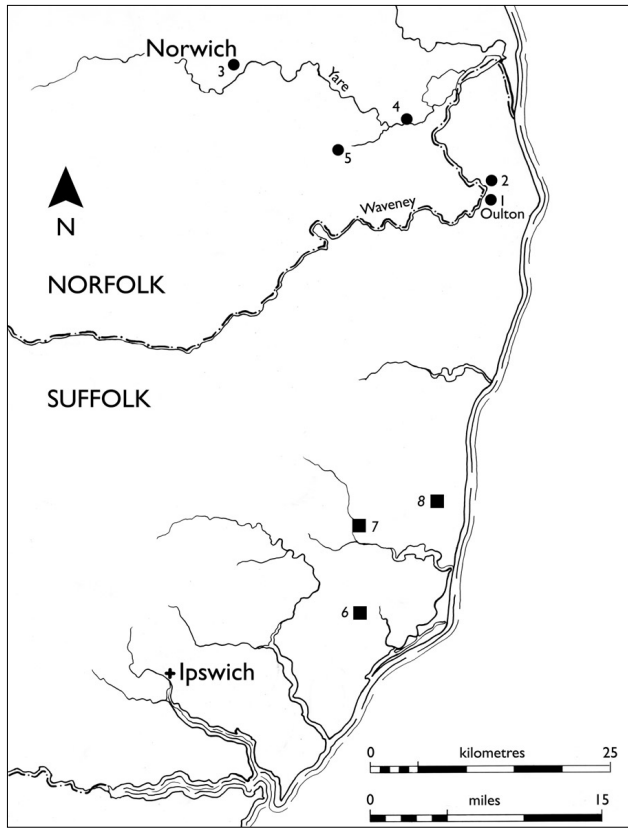


FIG. 73 – Distribution map of Oulton Group tiles:

1, Oulton; 2, Flixton; 3, Norwich; 4, Reedham; 5, Sisland. The distribution of the Butley Group is also shown: 6, Butley; 7, Snape; 8, Leiston. Rivers are shown on their approximate medieval courses.

repairs in 1984. A representative selection is now deposited in Norwich Castle Museum.¹³ Early fourteenth-century tiles of the ‘Humberside decorated mosaic group’ were also found, *in situ* in the south chapel, suggesting a switch to Oulton as a more local source of supply became available.¹⁴

Sisland, St Mary, Norfolk (TM 3441 9857), altered *c.*1300 and largely rebuilt in the eighteenth century, where excavation of a dry area and other works in 1984 were monitored by P.W. Williams and tiles submitted to the Norfolk Archaeological Unit for identification.¹⁵

The distribution of individual designs at these sites is summarised in Table 1. The illustrations of Oulton Group designs 1–35 (Figs 74–77) utilise all available examples to build up as complete a representation of an impression of the stamp as possible; missing areas are defined by dotted lines.

CHARACTERISTICS

The fabric is dense, sometimes with little visible temper, but usually sandy, normally with a few large flint grits (up to 5mm) and occasional flint pebbles. The surface colour is normally brownish red, but always with a heavily-reduced grey core which often extends to the face. The plain lead glaze is frequently rather sporadic and pitted, firing brown to olive green

Design	Flixton	Norwich	Oulton	Oulton G C	Reedham	Sisland	Earlier references
A	1						Rogerson <i>et al</i> 1983, 1
	2						
	3						
	4						
	5						Rogerson <i>et al</i> 1983, 3
	6						Rogerson <i>et al</i> 1983, 5
	7						Rogerson <i>et al</i> 1983, 4
	8						
	9						
	10						
	11						
	12						Rogerson <i>et al</i> 1983, 6
	13						
B	14						Rogerson <i>et al</i> 1983, 2
	15						
	16						
	17						
C	18						
	19						
	20						Martin <i>et al</i> 2009
	21						West 1971; Sherlock 1980, 39
	22						
	23						
D	24						
	25						
	26						
	27						
	28						
	29						
	30						
	31						
	32						
	33						
	34						
	35						

TABLE 1 – Distribution of individual designs of the Oulton group.

according to the degree of reduction of the underlying fabric; sometimes a cream slip was applied, the glaze over it firing a patchy yellow. The base of the tiles (as formed on the bench) is either smooth or retains fine sand used to prevent the clay adhering. The edges of the tiles were normally undercut in the final knife-trimming, to achieve tighter joints in laying.

All the designs were formed by impressing wooden stamps into the clay, but several styles were used either singly or in combination to produce a varied range of distinctive products. Normally the tiles are *c.*130–35mm (*c.*5.25ins) square and *c.*20–25mm (*c.*1in) thick. The designs (used in combination with undecorated glazed tiles of the same size) range from shallow two-dimensional relief and counter-relief (Fig. 74: 1–10 and Fig. 75: 11–13), through three-dimensionally modelled relief designs of two different styles (Fig. 75: 14–17 and Fig. 76:

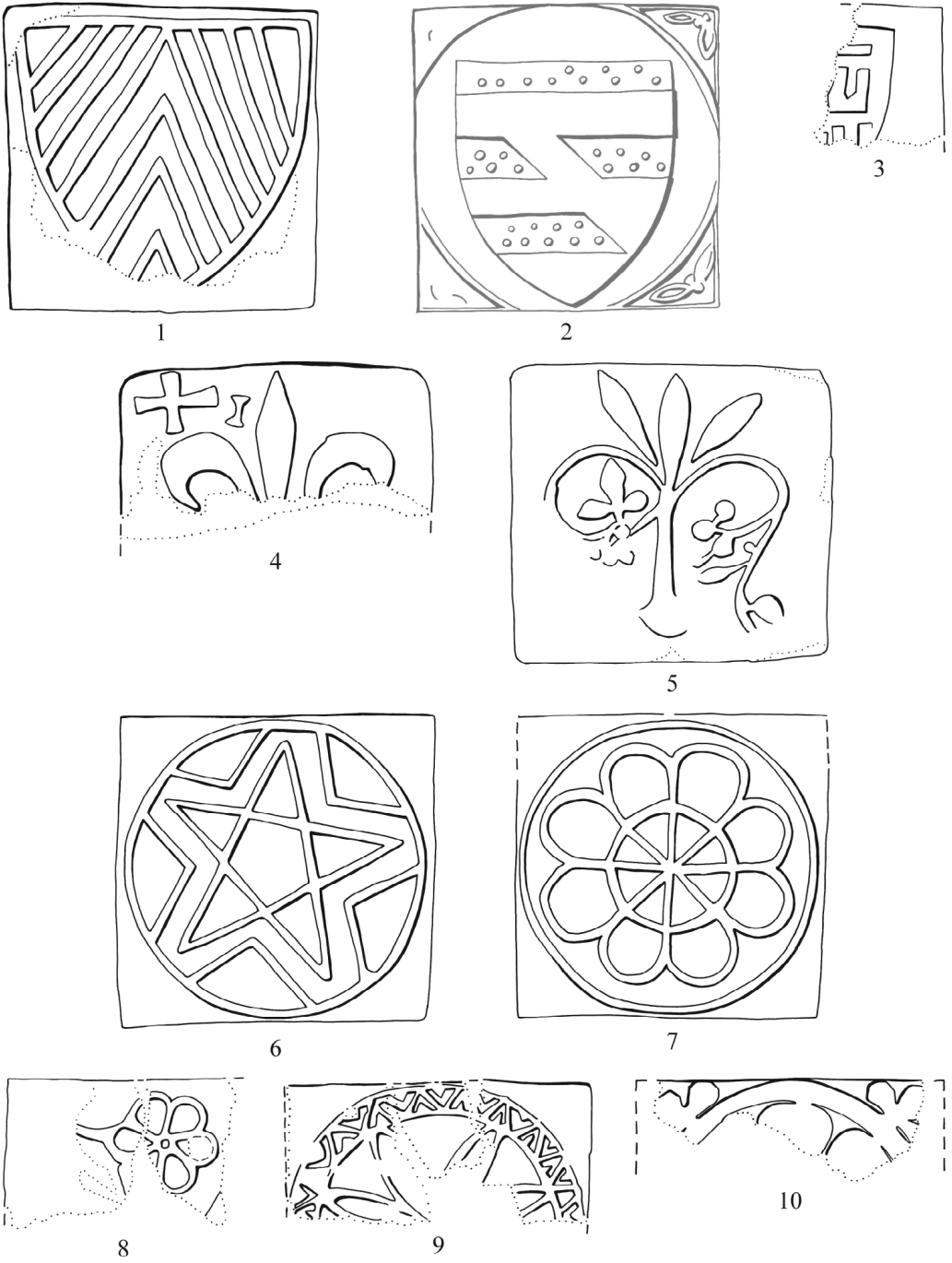


FIG. 74 – Oulton Group tile designs, Series A, 1–10. Scale 1:3. Design 2 is redrawn from an engraving.

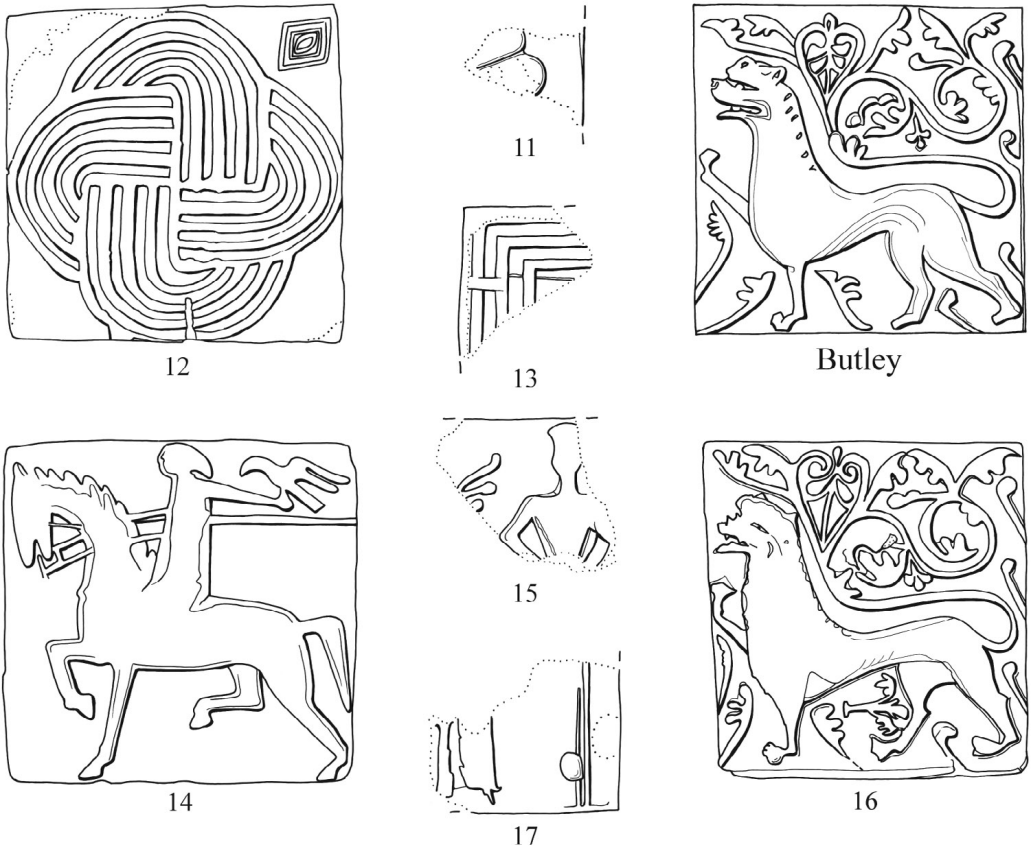


FIG. 75 – Oulton Group tile designs, Series A, 11–13, Series B, 14–17, with a Butley Group design for comparison with Oulton design 16. Scale 1:3.

18–23), to line-impressed counter-relief designs (Fig. 77: 24–35). Unusually there are no designs which are completed only by repetition on four or more tiles. The workshop also produced larger tiles, *c.*150mm (*c.*6ins) square, in which the stamp as well as the design appears quite deeply impressed near the centre of a quarry *c.*35mm thick (see, for example, Fig. 77: T4 with design 16). On the modelled grave covers, this approach was developed into multiple impressions of these varied relief and line-impressed stamps. This, the site groups, and the essential homogeneity of fabric and manufacturing details confirm that all the designs belong to a single production centre.

A TWO-DIMENSIONAL RELIEF DESIGNS

These comprise mostly regular geometric patterns based on bands *c.*3–5mm wide, raised 1–1.5mm in relief, although Fig. 74: 9–10 are in counter-relief. The *chevronny* shield (Fig. 74: 1) is probably generic, related to the ubiquitous [*or*] *three chevrons [gules]* of the de Clare family, but Fig. 74: 2 (redrawn from an engraving) is specific.¹⁶ The arms are of Sir Herv[e]y de Stanhow[e], *Barry [Or and Azure] a bend [ermine]*.¹⁷ He was joint sheriff of Norfolk and Suffolk 1259–60, appears as a witness on several Norwich deeds of the mid–late thirteenth century, before 1290, and died *c.*1297.¹⁸ In Fig. 74: 3 the design stands in relief but in a shield-

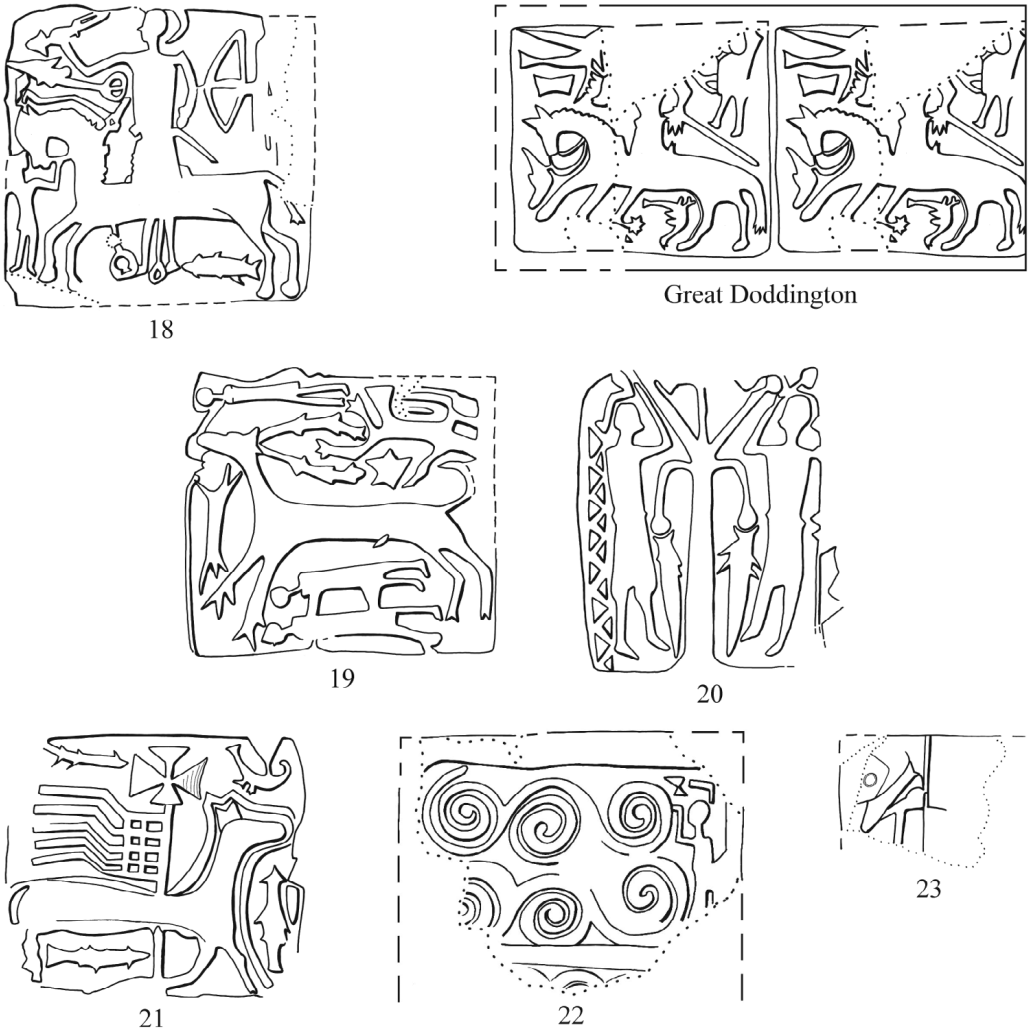


FIG. 76 – Oulton Group tile designs, Series C, 18–23, with a design from Great Doddington, Northamptonshire, for comparison. Scale 1:3.

shaped impression that must reflect the shape of the stamp; the coat may be *vairy* but too little survives to be certain. The other designs are mostly variations on themes common on medieval floor-tiles in East Anglia, Fig. 74: 8 being a relief version of the line-impressed design Fig. 77: 27; but the variations on the *fleur-de-lys*, Fig. 74: 4 with a cross and Fig. 74: 5 foliated, are unusual. By the time design 1 was used on a grave cover fragment at Oulton (Fig. 79: T12) the stamp had developed a near-central vertical crack.

B MODELLED RELIEF DESIGNS

These accomplished designs (Fig. 75: 14–17) are modelled in three-dimensional relief, and where enough survives to be certain, include human and animal figures. Fig. 75: 14 shows a

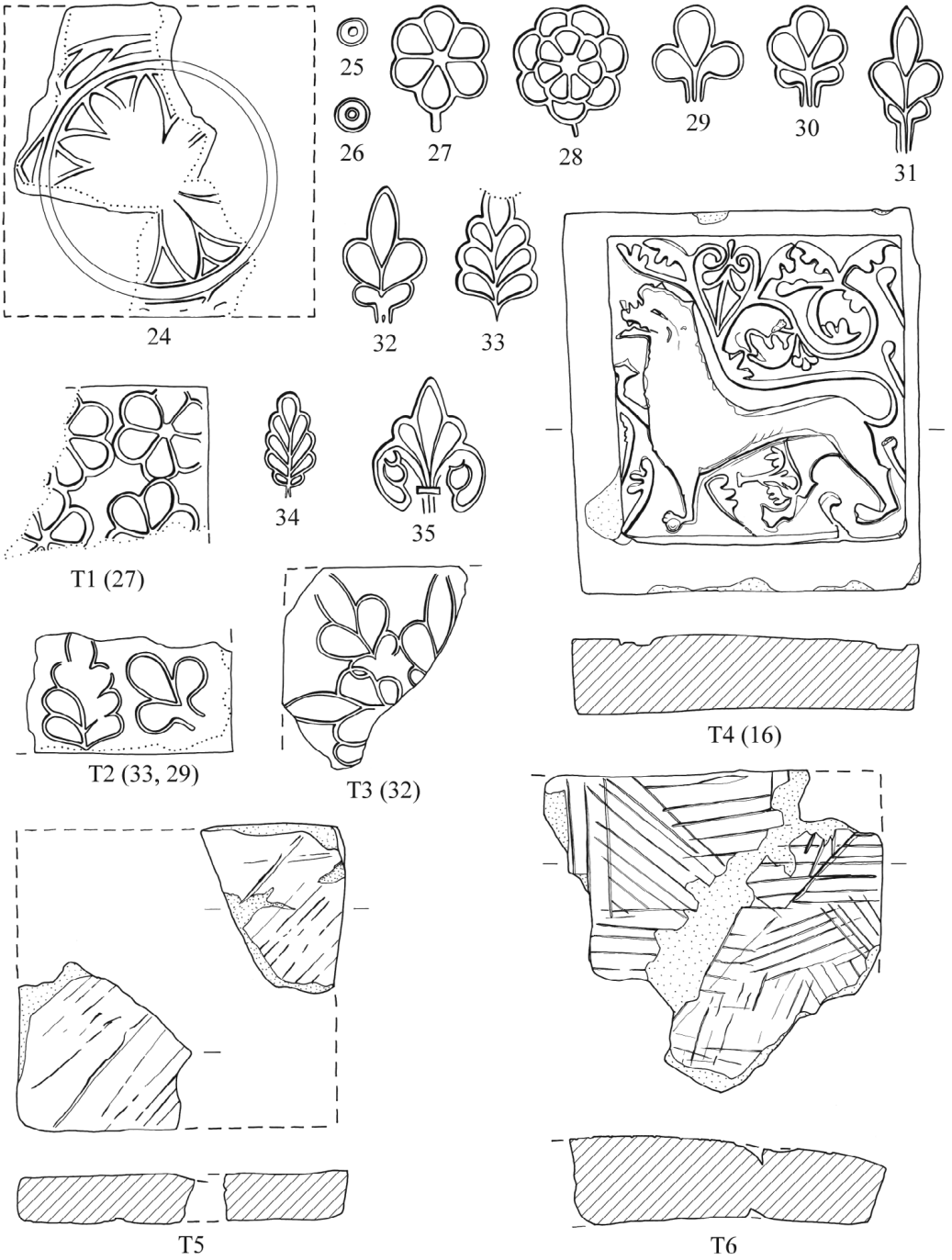


FIG. 77 - Oulton Group tile designs, Series D, 24-35; Tiles T1-4, showing examples of the relationship of stamps (designs present noted in brackets) to small (T1-3) and large (T4) quarries; knife-scored patterns of Oulton Group Series E, T5-T6. Scale 1:3.

man on horseback with a hawk on his left arm; his right hand seems to be holding the reins and possibly also a lance. Fig. 75:15 shows a man in armour wearing a thirteenth- or fourteenth-century great helm, the outward-flaring flat top of which is similarly depicted on, for example, the seal die of Robert Fitz-Walter, c.1213–19.¹⁹ Fig. 75: 16 (see also Fig. 80: T4) shows a lion whose tail terminates in stiff-leaf foliage, which also figures in the background of Fig. 75: 15.

C STYLISED COMPLEX DESIGNS

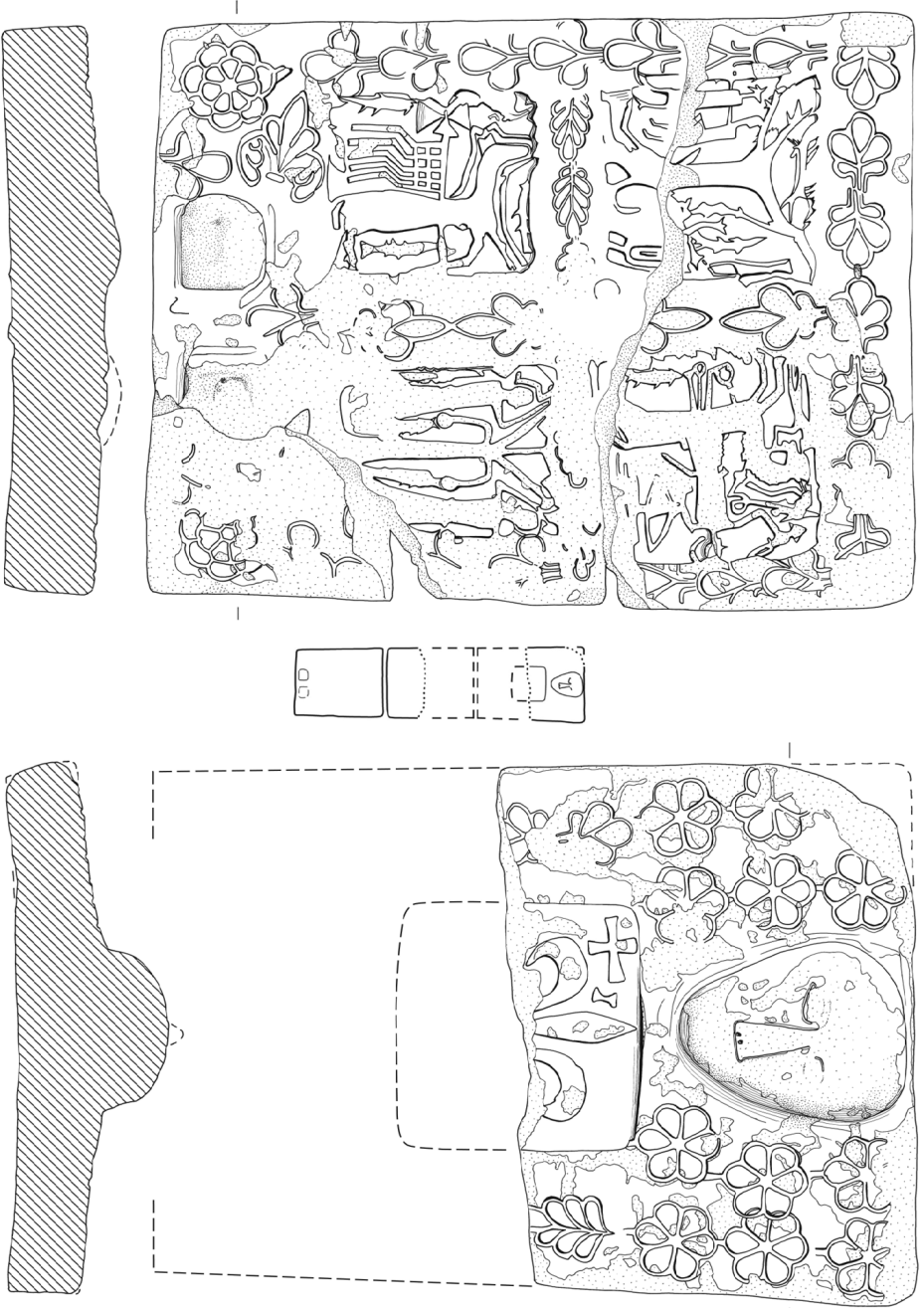
The stamps used to make these tiles have sides tending to be convex, used to produce designs in relief with considerable three-dimensional modelling (Fig. 76). The background field is sunk beneath the surface of the tile, leaving upstanding borders of 3–5mm on standard (c.130–35mm square) quarries. Design 22 is a rectangular stamp, probably intended for use on riser tiles (in making steps) or border tiles, but on one tile (illustrated, from Sisland) used twice in parallel on a large non-standard quarry.

The style of carving is very different from series B. The designs are crowded, the elements stylised but lively, inconsistent in scale, and so stand outside the dominant stylistic norms of the later medieval period. Design 18 shows what appears to be a hunting scene, a man on horseback (with the stirrups clearly delineated) hurling a lance, while the reins of the horse are held by a diminutive ‘stick man’. Behind the rider, a bow is visible to his right, an arrow to his left, and it seems likely that the bow was being aimed by another small figure to the right, whose body is ill-defined in the impression and partly lost. Curiously, there is a fish beneath the horse’s hindquarters. Design 19 is certainly a hunting scene, dominated by a stag, with three ‘stick men’ horizontally, what should be a hound to the left, and a second subsidiary creature top right, apparently the heraldic *lion passant guardant* of England with a five-pointed star between his legs. Design 20 shows two figures (clothed so presumably not Adam and Eve), reaching up into what seems to be a tree to pick fruit, but with what look like large fish hanging from it down to ground level. Design 21 is the *Agnus Dei* (Paschal Lamb), unconventionally with what seems to be a dove top right and three fish (like that in design 18) below, above and to the right.

The association of fish with the *Agnus Dei* might suggest that the allusion is to the Greek word for fish [*ichthys*] whose letters form an acrostic of ‘Jesus Christ, Son of God, Saviour’, although this would be unusual in medieval iconography. If so it is likely that the inclusion of fish in designs 18 and 20 also carry this symbolic meaning as Christological symbols, as well as being pertinent to coastal communities. In design 22, a diminutive human figure to the right has his arm extended to the upper tier of the scroll, with two indecipherable symbols above his head; is he looking out to sea, the irregular scrolls representing waves?

D LINE-IMPRESSED DESIGNS

Series D comprises stamps in the form of rosettes, leaves and the *fleur-de-lys* in counter-relief outline, known as line-impressed designs (Fig. 77: 24–35). The small ones could be used singly (for example design 27 originally nine times on [a complete] T1, design 32 originally eight times in a star pattern on T3 at Flixton, or in combination [designs 29 and 33 each originally four times on T2]) to decorate a single standard (130–35mm) tile. Design 24 exceptionally filled a whole tile. The small stamps were also used liberally on grave covers. The small ring and dot stamps (designs 25, 26) were used as borders around series C stamps when used on large (150mm) square tiles or grave covers. Fig. 79: T10 has design 26 around 20; another, not illustrated, has 25 around design 19.²⁰



T7 (18-21, 28-30, 32, 34-35)

T8 (4, 27, 30, 33)

FIG. 78 - Oulton Group grave covers T7-8 (designs present noted in brackets). Scale 1:4. The diagram (not to scale) shows the probable original form of the monuments.

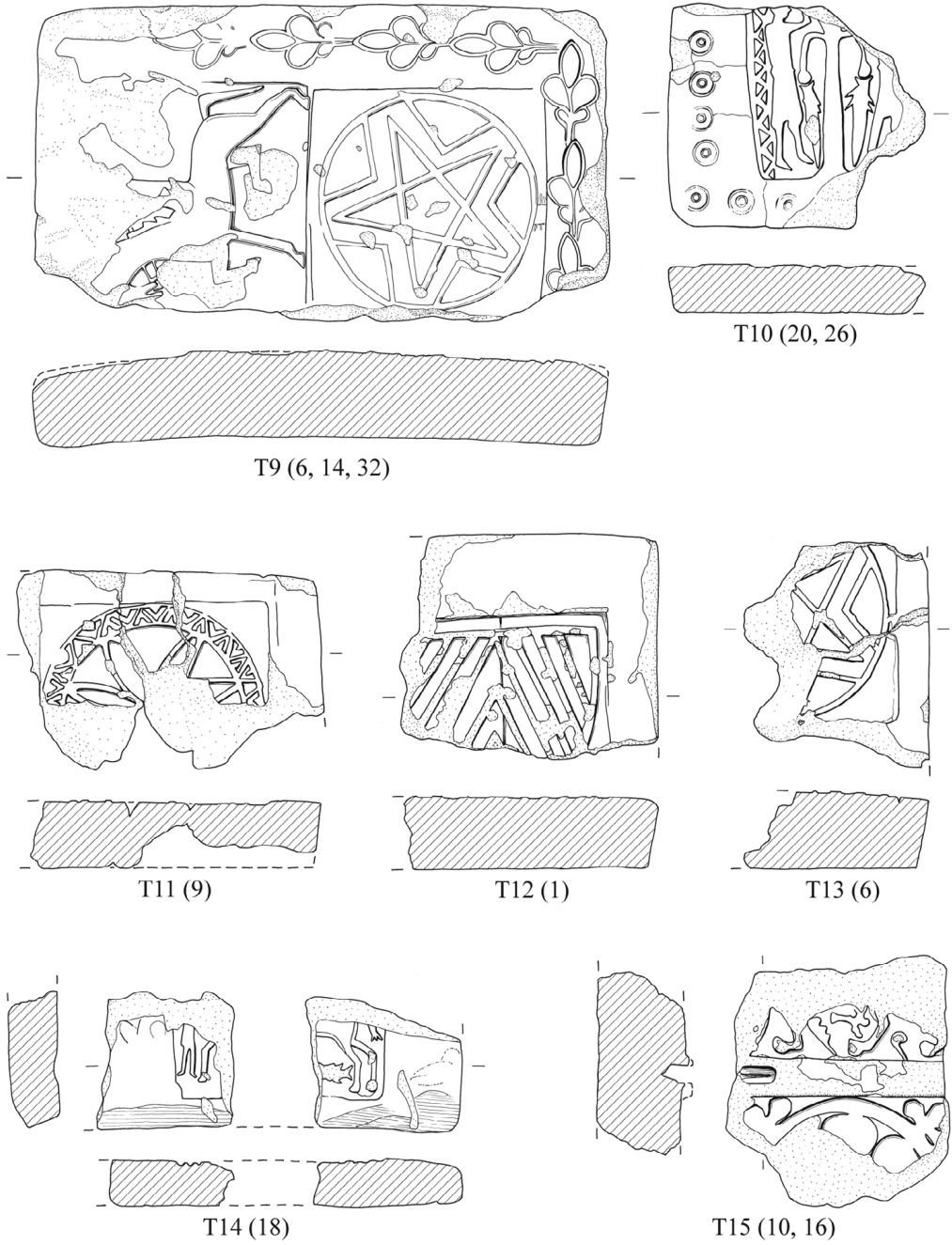


FIG. 79 – Oulton Group grave covers and large tiles, T9–15 (designs present noted in brackets). Scale 1:4.



T8 (4, 27, 30, 33)



T4 (16)



(18)



T7 (18-21, 28-30, 32, 34-35)



(19)



(21)

FIG. 80 – Oulton Group tile T4 and grave covers T7 and T8. Scale 1:4. Designs 18, 19 and 21 from T7 are also shown enlarged to 1:3. (photo: Sue Holden).

E KNIFE-SCORED PATTERNS

Tiles decorated with knife-scored lines (Fig. 77: T5–6), but otherwise similar in fabric and type to others of this group, occur among the material from Flixton. Fig. 77: T5 is scored 1–2mm deep, unglazed and fired red (oxidised); 20mm thick, so probably *c.*135mm square. Fig. 77: T6 is scored 1–5mm deep, a blown, unused waster, plain glazed, originally 26mm thick and more than 145mm square. Neither tile shows signs of wear. At first sight the patterns seem little more than graffiti, but similar tiles occur sporadically elsewhere.²¹

F THE GRAVE COVERS

The Oulton grave covers (Figs 78–80) are not complete, but the best-surviving blocks of which they were formed tend to be tapered to the foot, with convex upper surfaces resembling coped stone slabs.²² They are technically identical to the tiles save for their greater size and thickness, and are densely covered with impressions of stamps normally used on tiles. Their general form is best illustrated by T7–8, about 0.29–0.32m wide formed in blocks (on the basis of T7) about 0.42m long, with (on T8) a pronounced taper from head to foot. The fragments can be reconstructed into a complete bottom block (T7) with two protuberances representing feet, as in an effigy, and a partial top block, on which the head was modelled in three dimensions, with at least eyes and nose clearly depicted. The proportions suggest that there was a further slab between them, making the complete monument about 0.3m wide by 1.2m long (proportion 1:4), which is much smaller than an adult coffin or grave. Assuming that T8 (Fig. 78) was the same length as T7 would place the large *fleur-de-lys* stamp (design 4) exactly in the centre of the block, with rosette stamps applied around the head. On T7 the pattern seems to be simply of four square stamps (all of series C) separated and surrounded by line-impressed stamps, other than across the bottom, where line-impressed stamps are scattered around the feet. A putative central slab was presumably treated similarly. The slabs show extensive wear, particularly to the ‘head’ and ‘feet’, making clear that they were set, as usual with such monuments, into the paving of the church floor.

At least three monuments, probably more, are represented by the larger fragments. T8 is narrower than any of the other fragments for which the width is known, so cannot have paired with the feet on T7; but the width of T9 is consistent with T7, so it could have been part of a putative central slab. The choice of stamps (series A rather than C) and the absence of small stamps down the centre might suggest otherwise, but against that it is evident from the border across the top of T7 that each slab was treated as a separate field. T15, with a plain band between the stamps and differing in thickness, cannot have been part of it. It might relate to the fragments with a plain border (Fig. 79: T11–13). The fragment with small ring and dot stamps in the border, T10, is different again, and like the thin fragments with a plain border (T14), is probably part of a large, non-standard tile.²³ There seems to have been much variation around a common theme.

ORIGINS AND INFLUENCES

The material from St Michael, Oulton, includes some floor-tiles with mortar on totally unworn faces, suggesting that kiln waste was used as rubble in at least one phase of church building. Waster tiles also occur at St Mary, Sisland, especially of 130–35mm square plain tiles, and at St Andrew, Flixton, including design 1. These indicate that the as yet unlocated kiln site was in their vicinity, probably in or close to Oulton parish since the greatest range of types, including the unique grave covers, occurs there. The known distribution of the group

is restricted to the Broads, along the rivers Waveney and Yare, the latter as far as Norwich, with Sisland served by the tributary River Chet. Although, as noted, local production centres in East Anglia tended to produce floor-tiles alongside large quantities of standard flat roof-tiles, those are unlikely to have been traded so far, and of course are very difficult to distinguish in site collections.²⁴

Designs of series A, comprising mostly regionally conventional designs, occur at all known sites, with design 6 being recorded at all but Sisland. Series B is present at all but Norwich and Sisland, but these being a much smaller proportion of total designs, this may not be significant. Series C is represented at all sites except Reedham, the most commonly occurring design being the *Agnus Dei*, Fig. 76: 21. Series D, line-impressed designs, is absent from Reedham and Norwich; but the stylistic links between these stamps and series A tiles (compare design 24 with 9, 27 with 8, and 28 with 7) suggest that it was developed alongside series A. Considering the small number of known sites and the role of patron's choice at each, and the eclectic combination of stamps on the grave covers, it seems likely that all these stylistic traits were part of the workshop repertoire for much if not all of its life.

The stylistic differences nonetheless indicate the work of at least two stamp-cutters, one more formally competent, exemplified in series B, the other's work distinctive and stylised, as in series C. The latter was conceived essentially as stamps which could be used in various ways, not just to make square quarries of the standard c.135mm size (as at Norwich); one rectangular stamp (design 22) was of non-standard size and shape, suited to use on the risers of steps, but not always used as such. While the craftsman's choice of subject matter was mostly conceptually conventional (the hunting scenes, designs 18–19, and the *Agnus Dei*, 21), both the carving style and elements of the complex iconography (like fish surrounding the *Agnus Dei*) find no obvious parallels. Even the *Agnus Dei* is a rare subject on British floor-tiles.²⁵

At first sight, most designs of series A and B are variants on regionally common themes, with design 16 standing out for its quality of execution. However, it is a close copy of an even better-executed version known from Butley Priory and Leiston Abbey, and illustrated for comparison in Fig. 75.²⁶ The Oulton group tile differs primarily in the lack of space between, and the precision of definition of, the moulded elements, and the addition of the horizontal stem and leaves between the lion's legs.²⁷ Tiles of the Butley production group (which also includes mosaic and two-colour slip-decorated tiles, all of very high quality) also occur at Snape Priory (its distribution is shown on Fig. 73). The three sites are within 15km of each other, further down the Suffolk coast, and on the evidence of wasters, these tiles were probably made at or near Butley where they were used, apparently in a primary context, in the finishing of the thirteenth-century nave.²⁸ The Butley group is one of the earliest production groups of decorated tiles found in Suffolk, in the mid- to late thirteenth century. A connection with the Butley group tiles is supported by the Solomon's Knot, design 12, a nationally rare motif on medieval tiles, which occurs on a two-colour tile there, as does design 10, the common rosette in a circle motif, but in both cases highly stylised with very narrow lines separating the petals.²⁹ The tile-makers of Oulton may indeed have had an example of the prototype of design 16 from Butley from which to work, given the closeness of the copy. The derivation makes clear that the Oulton tiles are later, so that the use of stiff-leaf foliage on designs 15 and 16 is not a reliable indicator of their date.

The concept behind series D stamps and tiles should ultimately be derived from the principal group of line-impressed mosaic pavements, widely if sparsely distributed across the east midlands and exemplified in East Anglia at Ely (in the Cathedral and Prior Crauden's Chapel), and more locally in Suffolk at All Saints' church, Icklingham.³⁰ The dating evidence for them clusters in the early fourteenth century. Prior Crauden's Chapel was completed, on documentary evidence, c.1324/5, and similar tiles are associated with the remodelling of the

chancel at Higham Ferrers, Northamptonshire, begun about 1327.³¹ The re-laid pavement at Meesden, Hertfordshire, has been dated, on the evidence of heraldry, to the first quarter of the century, possibly as early as the first decade.³² The terminal date of the group is less clear, possibly as late as c.1340.

Designs and techniques of this widespread group were selectively copied and developed by smaller regional production centres, including one in mid-Essex and another whose products are distributed across northern Essex and southern Suffolk.³³ The latter comprised tiles with a single impression of a large line-impressed circular stamp (Oulton design 24 is similar in concept), produced alongside designs using an entirely different technique, being stencilled in white slip.³⁴ The Oulton products fit neatly into this context of regional dissemination of the use of line-impressed designs, separated from their original context of mosaic tiling (of which there is no hint in the Oulton material) and alongside other techniques of decoration. The connection suggests production at Oulton in the early–mid fourteenth century.

The individual stamps used by the Oulton tilers are similar in concept to those in the principal and some other line-impressed production groups, especially the rosette (Fig. 77: 27, 28) and trefoil (29) designs, although no precise matches have been found. Most stamps of the Oulton group, however, differ from those used by other known line-impressed production groups in that the rosette and leaf designs have stalks, whether single (27, 28, 33), double (34) or triple (29–32, 35).³⁵ The derivation of this is surely from the stamped leaves and terminals of decorative ironwork, a technique introduced to England in the late 1240s.³⁶ In high-quality late thirteenth-century work the stems commonly have two or three ribs.³⁷ So while the idea of line-impressed designs on floor-tiles, including multiple stamps of a stamp on a single tile, can be traced back to a widespread production group of mosaic tile floors, the Oulton tilers took as the model for the majority of their stamps linear designs stamped in iron, presumably on local church doors. The adjacent north-eastern half of Norfolk is particularly rich in medieval decorative ironwork, and there is no obvious reason to think that this is due to differential survival.³⁸ Modern plaster casts of these terminals including a stub of the stem give a good idea of the form of the presumably wooden stamps.³⁹

Stone raised grave covers, tapering from head to foot, often coped and decorated with a cross in relief, are widely distributed in East Anglia, stylistically dateable between the eleventh and thirteenth centuries. They were usually carved from limestone (mostly from Barnack) or Purbeck marble, the latter predominating in eastern Norfolk, and during the first two decades of the fourteenth century the tapered shape gave way to rectangular slabs.⁴⁰ During the thirteenth century the iconography of the cross tended to be superseded by the effigy, initially carved in relief on what was still essentially a coffin lid.⁴¹ The change seems to have been intended to bring the deceased to mind and prompt intercessory prayers, as fear of an apocalyptic Last Judgement gave way to a belief in individual judgement.⁴² Inscriptions become usual, and by the mid-fourteenth century the regionally normal form of commemoration was brasses and images incised into rectangular flat floor slabs, with an inscription around the edges.⁴³ This was in clear contrast to more northerly counties,⁴⁴ where the cross slab continued in popularity to the end of the medieval period, frequently accompanied or occasionally replaced by symbols ‘generally agreed to be signifiers of a chosen identity or attribute of the commemorated person, be it in terms of occupation, rank or gender’.⁴⁵

The form of the Oulton covers could be interpreted as a shrouded body with the head exposed and the feet visible through the fabric.⁴⁶ A more likely influence may be the inclusion of a shallow relief bust above a foliate cross, as on a later thirteenth-century coffin lid at Norton Priory, Cheshire.⁴⁷ A Lincolnshire workshop, probably based at Ancaster, produced similar semi-effigial slabs, in which only the head and shoulders and the feet were depicted, as if seen through cusped piercings of the coffin lid, which otherwise continued to carry

decoration including a foliate cross and heraldic shields, as in a tomb of a member of the Disney family of c.1340–50 at Kingerby, Lincs.⁴⁸

On Oulton T7, the *fleur-de-lys* tile stamp below the head should carry meaning as a symbol of the Virgin, here including in the corner a cross, and what is possibly a hammer as one of the tools of the Passion. The line-impressed rosettes and leaves suggest the custom of casting them into an open grave.⁴⁹ But on the remaining slabs they define borders to panels between larger stamps (T7, T9), which while including the *Agnus Dei*, are predominantly secular symbols and hunting scenes, suggesting that the primary intention, like much of the ornament on stone covers, was essentially decorative.

The covers might therefore be seen as a ceramic variation on the form of tapered grave cover which was still current in the region in the early fourteenth century, but was soon to be superseded by flat slabs, both incised and inlaid with brasses.⁵⁰ Versions of these were produced in England in mosaic tile work, involving stamps and *sgraffito* drawing, within the early fourteenth-century principal group of line-impressed tile mosaic. Parts of one have been excavated from Warden Abbey, Bedfordshire, using the same techniques as the ‘Adam and Eve’ picture panel in the floor of Prior Crauden’s Chapel at Ely.⁵¹ Fragments of others (and similar panels) have been found at Norton Priory, Cheshire, associated with line-impressed pavements made on site, but very closely related to the principal group and of similar date, c.1315–24.⁵² Both probably reflect the techniques used in making the tile tombs of the abbots of Jumèges in Normandy more than a century before, c.1213–39.⁵³

The use of tile tombs in England was very rare, limited to these occasional examples associated with line-impressed mosaic pavements and (to date) the grave covers from Oulton. By contrast, tile tombs, full size and composed of large square hand-incised quarries, continued to be made in Normandy down to the early modern period, and particularly in the first half of the fourteenth century in the vicinity of Bayeux.⁵⁴ While the influence of line-impressed mosaic on the output of the Oulton workshop is clear, including in the decoration of the grave covers, their conception probably looked primarily to established regional precedents.

CONCLUSIONS

The influence of line-impressed mosaic pavements, combined with the conservative form of memorial represented by the grave covers, points to the Oulton workshop flourishing within, probably early within, the first half of the fourteenth century. That is consistent with the tiles depicting the arms of Hervey de Stanhow (d.1297) in St Julian, Norwich, assuming that they were commissioned to commemorate a bequest or endowment. The link with line-impressed pavements indicates that the Oulton tile-makers were aware of the products of other craftsmen working on some of the most important ecclesiastical commissions of the early fourteenth century across and beyond the south-east midlands. That some of their products reflected in a simplified way an aspect of contemporary fashion is what would be expected of a workshop serving a modest local market.

The interest of the Oulton workshop, however, lies particularly in the diversity of its sources and output. The craftsmen drew on earlier, high-quality tiles that existed further down the Suffolk coast, which seem in consequence still to have been held in local repute despite some of their motifs (especially stiff-leaf foliage) being old-fashioned. They also drew on stamped ironwork (itself probably earlier) as a specific source of inspiration for their line-impressed motifs, produced some highly individual original work (the series C designs) which stands outside mainstream contemporary norms, and used their craft skills to produce (somewhat basic) ceramic memorials. So although their identifiable products were supplied to quite a small area, they were aware of, and probably had contacts with, a much wider one.

The Oulton tile-makers' innovation of ceramic grave covers, which must have been much cheaper than those of stone, marble or brass imported to the region for richer customers, does not seem to have been taken up other than in what was almost certainly their own parish.⁵⁵ Regional medieval tile-makers are shadowy figures, low in the social hierarchy in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, and hardly showing in the documentary record of that time. Is it too fanciful to suggest that some of these modest monuments commemorated the proprietors of the workshop and their families?

Finally, the distinctive style of our series C stamp-cutter sheds some light on the eventual dispersal of the workshop. Fig. 76 includes for comparison a design excavated from the chancel of St Nicholas, Great Doddington, in the Nene Valley north-east of Northampton. The stamp was used twice on a riser (or perhaps border) tile originally *c.*105mm by 210mm, in which the right-hand impression was cream slipped, the other not, both under a plain glaze. It depicts a rather elongated horse and rider (although most of the latter is missing), the rider shown wearing a prominent spur, holding what seems to be a lance, and perhaps carrying a banner.⁵⁶ Doves, with heads turned back and distinctive triangular tails, just as in Oulton design 21, appear below the horse's hindquarters and below its head. What seems to be a diminutive human figure (but might be the front of a diminutive horse and rider; the impression is very poor) occupies the top right of the field. These distinctive characteristics, as well as the overall composition, suggest that this unusual design is by the same hand as Oulton series C, its composition perhaps influenced by Fig. 76: 18. It was associated with several other relief designs, none precisely matching any found at Oulton, although one other fragment shows what seems to be a pair of feet like the diminutive figures of Oulton series C, while others suggest influence from the low-relief geometric designs of series A.⁵⁷

The Great Doddington tiles are, therefore, not products of the Oulton tile-makers (although their fabric is very similar), but rather suggest that the series C stamp-cutter moved on to set himself up as a tile-maker in or near the Nene Valley, about 160km (100 miles) to the west. This would have been a rather less adventurous move than that made by one of the tile-makers of the Central Essex Group workshop, which dispersed around the 1320s.⁵⁸ He emigrated to Utrecht taking some of his stamps with him, producing tiles from them at the tileworks in the suburb of Bemuurde Weerd.⁵⁹

POSTSCRIPT

In 2018, Mr Durbidge recovered further material from a storm drain trench dug parallel to the south side of St Michael's church, Oulton, to a soakaway in the vicinity of the old western boundary of the churchyard. His finds included two fragments of a green-glazed ceramic grave cover different from those reported above. It is semi-effigial, less than life size, tapered, with the remains of a head in relief (pushed out from the underside) and the shadow of an applied arm. The fabric and glaze are similar to those described in this paper, but the slabs are thinner, with multiple stabbed keys on the underside. The techniques are more those of potters than tilers. An illustrated note on the object will appear in the next volume of the *Proceedings*.

A fragment of a tile in the same idiom as Fig. 75: 12–13, the glaze pristine, also found in 2018, may be a waster, but there is no doubt about the peg-tile wasters, overfired and fused together, the bottom third of their upper faces glazed brown. This is an early feature, suggesting, as expected, that roof-tiles were produced alongside the floor-tiles. The wasters are not mortared, so are unlikely to have been imported to the church as rubble for use in walls. This implies that the Oulton kiln site was on the edge of the Waveney marshes, to the west or possibly south of the churchyard, where the suitability of the clay is suggested by a brickworks operating before 1904 (see 1905 edition of the 25in Ordnance Survey map of Norfolk, map sheet C.2).

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NOTES

- 1 The pattern of floor-tile use in northern England was similar save for a revival of decorated tile production around 1500: Stopford 2005.
- 2 For example, Danbury, Essex: Drury and Pratt 1975. For modes of production see Stopford 1993.
- 3 Eames 1955; Eames 1980, 109–15; Norton 1990, 105–6; Distribution maps, Keen 1971, 150; Norton 1990, fig. 5.
- 4 Not yet published as a group, it includes Sherlock 1980, nos 19, 22–26, 28–30, 32, 34–35, 38, 48–50, 54, 66, 68, 72, 75. For the site see Amor 2011, 103–4, pl. 2; roof-tiles continued to be made there in the fifteenth century.
- 5 Except one of design 19, with a border of stamp 25, in the Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology, University of Cambridge, Z18074, labelled ‘Churchyard, Oulton, Norfolk’, probably collected by the then curator, Louis Clarke, in the 1920s or 30s and subsequently donated to the Museum (Imogen Gunn, pers. comm.). Dr A.B. Emden recorded a complete tile of design 6, probably set in the floor, c.1950 (Emden archive, Ashmolean Museum, Oxford).
- 6 Martin *et al* 2009, 66 and fig. 14; PAS find SF-963765 by Paul Durbidge.
- 7 West 1971; design 21 here.
- 8 Box A4135, marked with their Census design numbers.
- 9 Anon 1847, 368–69.
- 10 Compton’s drawings in the Society of Antiquaries of London (outside folder 1, f17) comprise designs 21 and 22 rubbed, and designs 2 and 6 drawn (the former in light outline only), the two latter being noted as ‘impressed yellow’.
- 11 The exception being Fig. 74: 2.
- 12 Pevsner and Wilson 1997, 644.
- 13 Norwich Castle Museum (NWHCM) 1983.2; previously published in Rogerson *et al* 1983 but included here for completeness.
- 14 Rogerson *et al* 1983, designs 7–10. For the group and dating, see Stopford 2005, 149–78; distribution map, *ibid.*, fig. 3.2; Reedham finds, *ibid.*, 350–51. Other recorded finds of tiles of this group in the region rule out antiquarian introduction.
- 15 Norfolk HER 10464, variously recorded by the author in 1984 and 2013.
- 16 Anon 1847, 369.
- 17 Chesshyre and Woodcock 1992, 344; sources XF 372, WLN 867, E1 462; E II 464. The identification, as ‘Herman de Stanhow’, was first made in Anon 1847, from a seal on a Norwich Corporation document, possibly NCR 25a/18/715, c1275, now with only a fragment of a seal remaining.

- 18 Including NCR Case 4a/31/47 [1280]; NCR 25a/13/509 [pre-1290]. The family derive from Stanhoe in north-west Norfolk, where Sir Hervey also witnessed deeds: NCR BL/MD 3.
- 19 British Museum 1841.0624.1; for an illustration see Gravett 1993, 62.
- 20 The tile now in Cambridge Museum; see note 5.
- 21 For example, see Stopford 2005, 255.
- 22 T9 is less certainly tapered; as drawn the format of the ornament matches T7.
- 23 In fragmentary form, there is no clear dividing line (in terms of thickness or curvature) between large quarries on which a design has been stamped leaving a wide border, and grave covers. In addition to the illustrated 'grave covers', there are seven other fragments of this type from Oulton, using large stamps of designs 6 (x2), 7, 9, 11, 16 and 19 (the latter with a border of 25, in Cambridge Museum).
- 24 As at Danbury: Drury and Pratt 1975.
- 25 Dr Christopher Norton (pers. comm.); presumably because of reticence about treading on a symbol of Christ. Eames 1980 records only four such designs in the British Museum (BM) collections (347–50). One of these (348) is an Ipswich design (Sherlock 1980, 38) misprovenanced to Bristol or Gloucester; otherwise in East Anglia the motif occurs in the repertoire of both the Danbury (Drury and Pratt 1975, fig. 52: D15) and Oulton tile-makers.
- 26 For Butley, see Myres 1933, fig. 5.6 and pl. IX; Eames 1980, 105 and design 277. The Leiston tiles were probably moved from the former site of the abbey in 1363/5: Clapham 1923, 139; Knowles and Hadcock 1971, 190. See Digventures interim reports on line, SF LA9: <https://digventures.com/leiston-abbey/>.
- 27 Another copy, reversed and further simplified, forms part of a fourteenth-century production group widespread across Norfolk and Suffolk, recorded from Campsea Ash Priory, Suffolk (Keen 1971, fig 38.3) and Castle Acre, Norfolk (Norwich Castle Museum, NWHCM 1846.62).
- 28 Myres 1933, 249–50, 268, 270, 272.
- 29 Myres 1933, figs 4.2, 4.1 respectively. Another (two-colour) Solomon's Knot is recorded from Langley Abbey, Norfolk (Elliston-Erwood 1922, fig. 25), again probably derivative from the Butley group.
- 30 Keen and Thackray 1974, with distribution map, 163.
- 31 Eames 1975, 204.
- 32 Keen 1970, 79–80.
- 33 For the mid-Essex group see Drury 1974, 71–72, Group D, first half of the fourteenth century.
- 34 For the full series of five line-impressed designs (with some stencilled ones) see Drury 1993, fig. 11. Unlike Oulton 24, all the sunk lines are the same width. The distribution suggests a production site in the Stour valley.
- 35 Save that two clover-like trefoil stamps from Norton Priory have curved stalks (Greene 1989, fig. 92), but forming a complete rather than open-ended design.
- 36 Geddes 1991, 179–80; 1999, 157.
- 37 Geddes 1991, fig. 85, Westminster Abbey 1292–3; Geddes 1999, 158–71.
- 38 Geddes 1999, map 3, p. xii.
- 39 Geddes 1993, pl. XXIB.
- 40 Finch 2000, 29. A similar pattern seems likely in the adjacent area of north-east Suffolk: Butler 1964, 146.
- 41 Butler 1964, 140–41; Saul 2009.
- 42 Finch 2000, 39–40; Saul 2009, 33.
- 43 Finch 2000, 28; Butler 1964, 146.
- 44 McClain 2010, 41–43.
- 45 McClain 2010, 45; Butler 1964, 133–35.
- 46 A reset slab of c.1100 at South Leverton has feet projecting from a shroud; the head is missing: <http://southwellchurches.nottingham.ac.uk/south-leverton/hfitting.php>.
- 47 Greene 1989, 127, fig. 77.
- 48 Saul 2009, 45–46 and fig. 9.
- 49 Butler 1964, 152.
- 50 See e.g. Saul 2009, 73–82.
- 51 Baker 1982; Norton 1984, 147 and pl. XXXI.
- 52 Norton 1984, 147; Greene 1989, 13–14 and fig. 11; 132–42.
- 53 Norton 1984.
- 54 Norton 1984, esp. pl. XXXII; CRAHM 2003; Cockerham and Coles 2000.
- 55 On the market, see Saul 2009, 48. Very few monuments of any kind dated before 1400 survive in the adjacent area of eastern Norfolk: Finch 2000, fig. 7.
- 56 BM 1947.0505.2262, parts of two tiles incorrectly joined together with plaster, so that the composite illustration of the stamp in Eames 1980, design 272, is stretched horizontally. They were part of a small

- collection bought in 1931–32 by the duke of Rutland from W.J. Whiting, 85 Wheatfield Road, Northampton, stated to be from Pipewell Abbey, Northants, but now known to be from various sites in the county. Watercolour drawings among the papers of Lord Alwyne Compton in the Society of Antiquaries of London (outside folder 1, f4), but not in his hand, show that these fragments were found, with several other relief designs, in the chancel of St Nicholas, Great Doddington, presumably during its restoration in 1870–71 (Bailey *et al* 2013, 198).
- 57 The other tiles have not been located but at least ten designs are illustrated in watercolour drawings in the Compton papers, outside folder 1.
- 58 Drury and Pratt 1975, 152, updated (following finds at Clare Castle, Suffolk) in Drury 2016.
- 59 Van Rooijen and Hoekstra 1996, 210–12

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