

MEDIEVAL FLOOR-TILES FROM CAMPSEA ASH PRIORY

by LAURENCE KEEN

The study of medieval floor-tiles in Suffolk and in East Anglia generally has been seriously neglected: there has been no article on Suffolk material since 1933, when Dr. Myres published the tiles excavated at Butley Priory.¹ The only other work to appear has been Mrs. Eames' important study on the products of the tile kiln at Bawsey, near King's Lynn, Norfolk.² Certainly sites other than Butley and those listed by Eames are known to have, or to have had tiles. Apart from those still *in situ*, or in museum collections, these tiles are recorded by tracings in the Society of Antiquaries' Library,³ and by brief references in journals or guide books. However, it is extremely unlikely that floor-tiles were less common in this area than in other parts of Britain, as the published material would at first glance suggest. Clearly excavations on monastic sites and field work can be expected to produce many more examples and much more information. With the limited material available this paper can be no more than an attempt to present what few details there are, with the hope that it will serve as a basis for future work.

Nearly all the tiles recovered from Campsea Ash in 1969 and 1970 (see p. 133 above) were loose in *débris* and without any associations which might have provided dating evidence. The one section of floor still probably *in situ* (Fig. 33 above) was unfortunately too worn to establish the layout of designs. In the absence of archaeological grouping the most appropriate method to describe the tiles would seem to be by technique.

Relief Designs

The majority of some two hundred fragments examined was decorated with the design in relief—all of these designs were a single colour. Forrer describes two techniques for producing relief tiles. The first consists of pressing the clay into a mould carved in intaglio at the bottom of a moulding box. In the second the tiles are shaped in a wooden frame, the top surface is stamped with a decorative mould while the tile is still in the frame and the frame is

¹ J. N. L. Myres, 'Butley Priory, Suffolk', *Arch. Jour.* xc (1933), pp. 265-75.

² Elizabeth Eames, 'The products of a medieval tile kiln at Bawsey, King's Lynn', *Antiq. Jour.* xxxv (1955), pp. 162-81.

³ Lord Alwyne F. Compton, Bishop of Ely, *Tile Tracings*.

then removed.⁴ The fortunate survival of a mould for making relief tiles found in north Devon has allowed a detailed examination of the process employed in the north Devon potteries. It would seem from the shrinkage rate, which can be worked out on tiles made from the block, that the tile quarries were already leather-hard when they were stamped with the design.⁵ From a production point of view this would seem to be a better arrangement than having large numbers of wooden frames spread out waiting for the tiles to become dry enough to be moved. Whatever method was used in Suffolk it is evident that tiles with complicated patterns in high round-relief could be produced best with a moist clay by one of the frame methods.

Twelve relief designs were found at Campsea Ash (Fig. 38, 1-6; 39, 7-12). Clearly they are not all contemporary: at least three groups are present.

Fig. 38, 3, of which only one example was found, is about 20 mm. thick with a dull brown glaze and slight bevel. It belongs to a group of tiles with animal designs moulded in high round-relief. A tile now in Norwich Castle Museum from Castle Acre Priory, is apparently from the same mould. The excavations at Butley produced a similar design but in reverse⁶ and tiles from the same mould as the tiles at Butley are known from Leiston.⁷ Fig. 38, 2 with the design in slighter relief and between 17-20 mm. thick is also recorded from Butley.⁸ There is no indication that these two tiles belong together but Myres regards the animal designs as belonging to the 13th century.

No. 6, of which over thirty pieces were found, all about 15-20 mm. thick, is the most common design from Campsea Ash. It was found *in situ* in the chapel, though unfortunately the pavement was too worn to see how the tiles were arranged. The designs are in flat relief about 2-3 mm. above the background. The majority has a light brown glaze, a few tiles, where the glaze has not fused properly, are khaki, others are speckled with copper, producing a mottled effect—only two are consistently green.

No. 5 is recorded at Butley,⁹ but no. 6 is not yet recorded from other sites. The shield is that of Ufford and the fleur-de-lys may be a cadency mark for a sixth son. Sherlock sees this shield as that of

⁴ R. Forrer, *Geschichte der europäischen Fliesen-Keramik* (Strasbourg, 1901), pp. 71-2.

⁵ Laurence Keen, 'A series of seventeenth- and eighteenth-century lead-glazed relief tiles from North Devon', *Jour. Brit. Arch. Assoc.* 3rd ser., xxxii (1969), pp. 148-9.

⁶ Myres, *op. cit.*, fig. 5, 6. and pp. 269-70. A selection of the Butley tiles is in the British Museum, Rutland Collection.

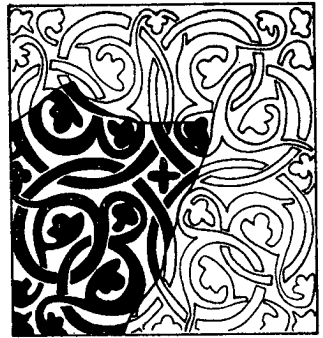
⁷ *ibid.*, p. 270.

⁸ Fig. 5, 1.

⁹ Fig. 6, 3, and p. 272.



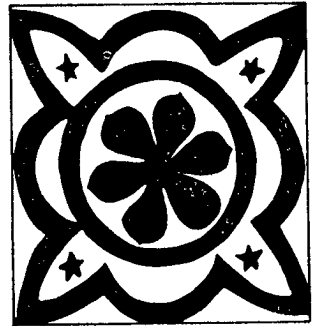
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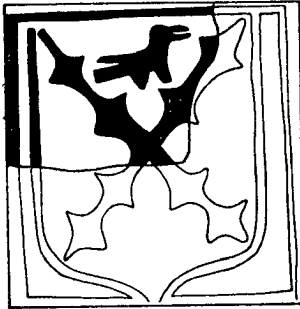
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5



6

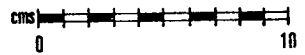
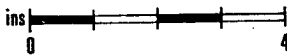


FIG. 38.—1-6 Single-colour relief tiles.

Edmund de Ufford (see p. 133 above). The B of BM for *Beata Maria* is reversed but evidently the design as a whole is not. The documentary evidence would suggest that the design of the tile could belong to the period 1347-54 or more likely to c. 1375 when Edmund himself was buried in the Lady Chapel at Campsea Ash (see p. 130 above).

Fig. 38, 4 and Fig. 39, 7 and 8 are all found at Butley in the same area of pavement,¹⁰ and no. 7 is also found at Bricett.¹¹ These and no. 9 clearly belong to the same group. Each design is represented by only a couple of pieces, except no. 4 of which eight pieces were found. The more pointed form of shield would perhaps suggest that the group is slightly earlier in the 14th century than nos. 5 and 6, though the architectural associations at Butley would seem to suggest that they were later.¹² Nos. 8 and 9 are also found at Sudbourne (see pp. 198-200, below).

Fig. 39, 10 and 11 are the most unusual tiles from Campsea Ash. No. 10 is a stamp repeated four times, with the shield pointed towards the centre, on a large quarry 255 mm. square and about 30 mm. thick. There are no single examples of the stamp. No. 11 is likewise repeated four times on large quarries but is found also on single tiles as well. The relief of the designs is very slight and all the tiles have a dull green glaze. This peculiar method is found at Maxstoke Priory (Warwickshire) on tiles 280 mm. square¹³ where designs with shields are arranged with the points of the shields to the centre of the tiles. Single stamps too are known on large quarries about 280 mm. square found in north Devon where the vacant space is filled up with hand-incised decoration.¹⁴ The Campsea Ash group may belong to the 15th century.

Unplaced in the relief groups mentioned above are nos. 1 and 12. No. 1 is in high relief and the six brown-glazed pieces found vary in thickness between 20-30 mm. No. 12 has less pronounced relief decoration—examples are about 20 mm. thick.

The relief tiles from Campsea Ash contribute important details towards the knowledge of relief tiles generally. Ward-Perkins in his study of relief tiles¹⁵ has surveyed the range of relief tiles in Britain and considered their origins. The animal in high relief from Campsea Ash (no. 3), belongs with similar tiles from Butley, Leiston and Castle

¹⁰ Fig. 6, 4, 6 and 9; p. 274.

¹¹ B.M., Rutland 386.

¹² Myres, *op. cit.*, p. 274.

¹³ J. R. Holliday, 'Maxstoke Priory', *Transactions, Excursions, and Reports 1874*, Birmingham and Midland Institute, Archaeological Section (Birmingham, 1878), p. 81.

¹⁴ Keen, *op. cit.*, p. 153.

¹⁵ J. B. Ward-Perkins, 'English medieval embossed tiles', *Arch. Jour.* xciv (1937), pp. 128-153.

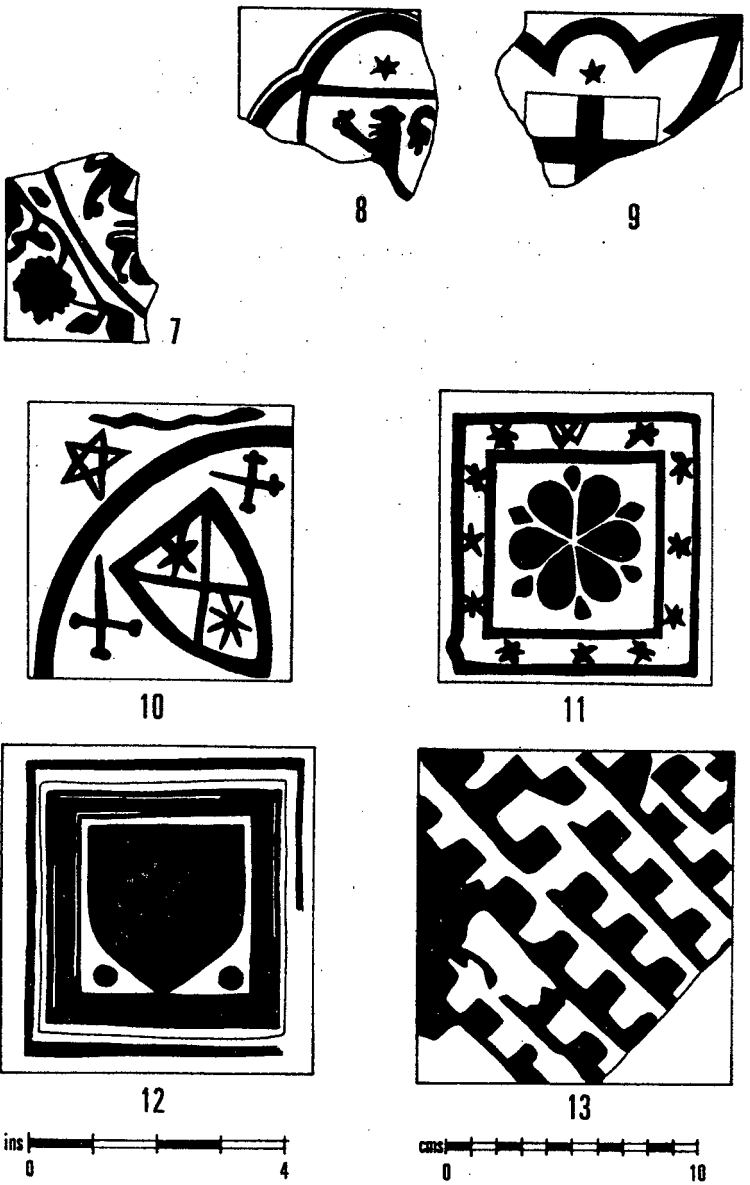


FIG. 39.—7-12 Single-colour relief tiles, 13 two-colour printed tile.

Acre among Ward-Perkins' earliest series. This bears a close resemblance to tiles from a kiln site at North Berwick, Scotland¹⁶ which Eames thinks could be by the same hand.¹⁷ Ward-Perkins considers that the mainly eastern-coast distribution of the 13th-century tiles suggests that the technique was introduced from abroad, 'perhaps at a variety of dates and from a variety of related sources'.¹⁸ Relief tiles have a fairly restricted distribution in north-western Europe though their use there as wall tiles is more usual. They are particularly common in the upper-Rhine area, in Alsace and north Switzerland, where some designs are close to British examples. It is from here that the technique may have been introduced.¹⁹ Although relief tiles are known from many areas of Britain they seem to have been particularly popular in East Anglia (Fig. 41). The tiles from Bawsey, which were produced on a large-scale commercial basis comparable with the tile industry in the Penn area of the Chilterns, clearly catered for much of the East Anglian market in the 14th century; tiles reached London too.²⁰

The distribution of tiles with other relief designs suggests that tilers making relief tiles were very active in other parts of East Anglia. There is as yet not enough evidence to know if there was another large-scale industry like Bawsey or whether the distribution of tiles with the same designs results from itinerant tilers. However, the large number of relief tiles should not obscure the fact that tiles were being produced in other techniques perhaps at the same time. It is particularly significant that at Castle Acre Priory where there was a complete pavement of Bawsey tiles in the chapter house²¹ a large pavement of two-colour 13th-century tiles is recorded from the church.²² This 13th-century pavement cannot be too far removed in date from 13th-century relief tiles mentioned above. At King's Lynn two pavements are known, one in Norfolk Street, of Bawsey tiles, the other at Clifton House of two-colour tiles. Inlaid and printed tiles are recorded from a number of sites, Butley among them.²³ An extraordinary series of tiles from Ixworth recording the repair of the

¹⁶ J. S. Richardson, 'A thirteenth-century tile kiln at North Berwick, East Lothian, and Scottish medieval ornamented floor tiles', *Proc. Soc. Antiq. Scot.* LXIII (1928-9), pp. 281-310.

¹⁷ Elizabeth Eames, *Medieval tiles, a handbook* (London, 1968), p. 26.

¹⁸ Ward-Perkins, *op. cit.*, p. 135.

¹⁹ This summary is based on Ward-Perkins' thorough examination of the continental material.

²⁰ For the Chilterns industry see C. Hohler, 'Medieval paving tiles in Buckinghamshire', *Records of Bucks* xiv (1942), pp. 1-49 and 99-132, and Eames 1968, pp. 16-21; for London see Eames 1955, p. 175.

²¹ Eames 1955, p. 174.

²² W. H. St. John Hope, 'Castle Acre Priory', *Norf. Arch.* xii (1895), p. 119 and pl. I.

²³ Myres, *op. cit.*, fig. 4 and p. 268.

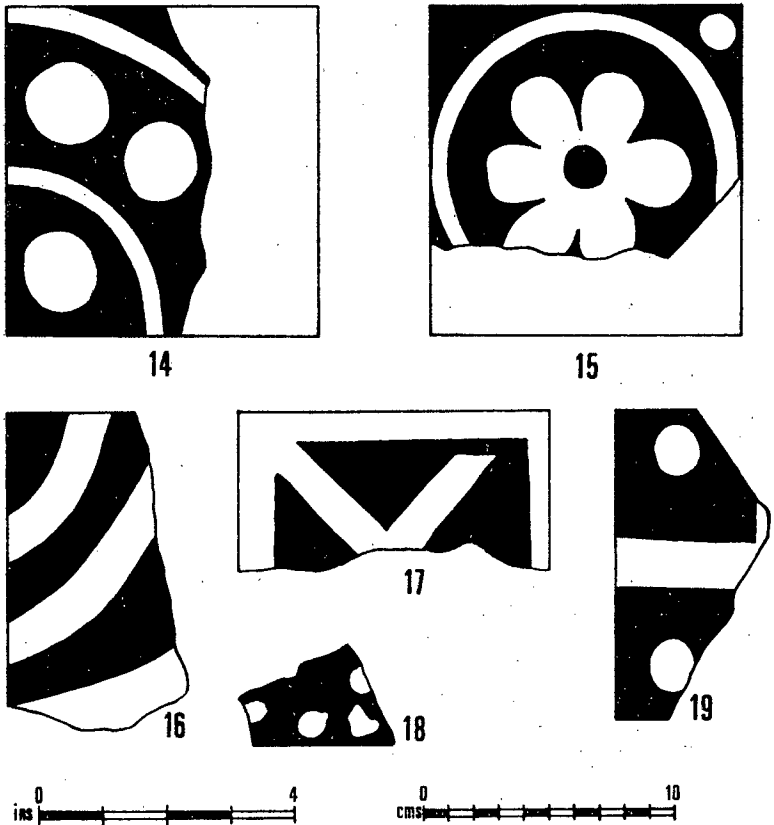


FIG. 40.—14-15 Two-colour printed tiles, 16-19 slip decorated tiles.

tower, now in Moyse's Hall Museum, Bury, shows that the inlaid technique could still be used in the 15th century.

Printed Tiles

At Campsea Ash are three designs (Fig. 39, 13; Fig. 40, 14-15), each represented by one example only. The designs are printed, that is, the stamp is put into white slip and the design is then 'printed' slightly into the surface of the tile. The tiles are about 25 mm. thick and do not appear to have been recorded from other sites.

The remaining designs, Fig 40, 16-19, are each represented by one tile only. These tiles are particularly interesting as they illustrate unusual techniques which have not been recorded before.

Slip Decorated Tiles

The simple design of nos. 16 and 19 would seem to have been produced by brushing white slip onto the surface of the tile. No. 17 has blobs of white slip on the surface of the tile—a barbotine type of decoration.

Stencilled Tiles

No. 18 has an extremely simple design but the slight ridge on the edges of the 1 mm. thick white slip decoration suggests that the design was brushed through a stencil which was placed on the surface of the tile.

Because so little work has been done on East Anglian tiles it is difficult to know how these examples fit into the range of techniques used. A preliminary investigation of a few sites and collections has shown that simple designs on two tiles from London²⁴ appear to have been brushed onto the tile surface. The use of a stencil is well demonstrated on tiles from Bury²⁵ with fleur-de-lys, lion and St. Edmund's crown and from Little Dunmow on simple four-tile designs. On all these tiles there is a pronounced ridge on the edges of the design and brush marks are clearly visible filling up the open area of the stencil. Tiles produced by the same technique have been found at Witham and Coggeshall. It is interesting to note that at Bury and Little Dunmow a stencilled lion has its main features shown by the addition of line-impressed decoration. This may indicate a connection with the 14th-century series of line-impressed tiles from the region. Evidently these brush and stencil techniques were used over a fairly wide area, though this at present seems confined to southern East Anglia.

Plain Tiles

Three groups of plain tiles were recognised; tiles of the first are about 110 mm. square from 10-15 mm. thick with yellow and green-brown glazes belonging with the decorated tiles described above. Tiles of the second are about 120-125 mm. square and 20-25 mm. thick with yellow and brown glazes. The third group is of tiles about 230 mm. square and 27 mm. thick with yellow and brown glazes. The yellow glaze of the two last groups was achieved by a lead glaze put over a layer of white slip.²⁶ This white slip is very flaky and comes away easily from the surface of the

²⁴ Guidhall Museum, 6914. MXII. 128 and 6835.

²⁵ Department of the Environment, site museum. Report in preparation.

²⁶ For a discussion of methods of obtaining different colour glazes see Keen, 'A fourteenth-century tile pavement at Meesden', *Hertfordshire Archaeology* II (1970), p. 75 and nn. 3-5.

earthenware quarry suggesting that the quarry was already fired when the slip was applied. This is a continental technique and shows that these two groups are imports. Tiles of the same kind are found on a large number of sites in England. Documentary evidence mentions floor-tiles as coming specifically from Flanders, though this is particularly difficult because the term 'Flanders tiles' covers both bricks and paving tiles. Among these sources may be cited the 8,000 tiles of Flanders at 6s. 8d. the thousand supplied by Henry Yeveley in 1368 for work at Westminster Palace²⁷ and the 45,300 *pavyngtiel empt. de Flandre* supplied in 1397-8 at the same price for Winchester College;²⁸ John Digges directed in his will (1375)²⁹ that his executors should buy *tegulas de Flandres* to pave the chancel of Barham Church (Kent) where he was to be buried. Floor-tiles as well as bricks were shipped to many east coast ports during the 14th century,³⁰ but actual references to floor-tiles among port imports are rare. In the 15th century there is a reference to 700 paving tiles being brought to Hull by a shipmaster of Edam in 1471/2;³¹ references to floors occur in 1438, when thirty-three broad pieces of Flemish paving for a new pavement in Exeter Cathedral cost 2s. 9d.,³² in 1449, when William Bruges left money for the whole of St. George's, Stamford, to be paved with *brode Holand tyle*,³³ and in 1415, when York Minster purchased 600 *largis tegulis Flaundrensibus* for 33s. 4d. and 600 *minoribus tegulis* for 8s. 4d.³⁴

It is unfortunate that the Campsea Ash tiles cannot be more closely dated, but by comparison with tiles from elsewhere the series would seem to range in date from the 13th to 15th century. Some of the tiles produced by different techniques may well have been produced at the same time but only further work will clarify the situation. The present lack of floor-tile kiln sites in East Anglia makes the understanding of the industry extremely difficult. The Campsea Ash tiles illustrate a wide and interesting range of techniques; it is for this that they are particularly important.

²⁷ E. 472, 14, quoted in L. F. Salzman, *Building in England down to 1540* (Oxford, 1952), p. 145.

²⁸ T. F. Kirby, *Annals of Winchester College* (London & Winchester, 1892), p. 145.

²⁹ *Arch. Cant.* xl (1928), p. 19; Ward-Perkins, 'Late medieval Flemish inlaid tiles in England', *Antiq. Jour.*, xvii (1937), p. 443.

³⁰ Salzman, *English Trade in the Middle Ages* (Oxford, 1931), p. 360.

³¹ E. 122, 62/17. m. 4r. I am grateful to Mr. John Hare for providing me with a transcript. Mentioned in N. J. M. Kerling, *The commercial relationship of Holland and Zealand with England from the late 13th century to the close of the Middle Ages*. Unpublished University of London thesis presented 1952 for Ph.D. (Arts).

³² Salzman, *Building in England*, pp. 145-6.

³³ J. Anstis, *Register of the Most Noble Order of the Garter* (London, 1724), II, p. 343.

³⁴ J. Raine, ed., *The Fabric Rolls of York Minster* (Durham, 1859), Surtees Soc., vol. 35, p. 36.

APPENDIX

The distribution map (Fig. 41) is based on information as listed below. Much of the material is taken from the distribution list published by E. S. Eames in *Antiquaries Journal*, xxxv (1955), 176-181, here referred to as Eames 1955, and lists published by J. B. Ward-Perkins in *Archaeological Journal*, xciv (1937), 142-153, hereafter Ward-Perkins 1937. Tracings by Lord Alwyne Compton in the Society of Antiquaries' Library are referred to as Compton. ● indicates Bawsey designs, ■ other relief designs.

1. ● Boston, Greyfriars. Ward-Perkins 1937.
2. ● Spalding. Eames 1955.
3. ● Crowland. Eames 1955, Ward-Perkins 1937.
4. ● Newton. Eames 1955.
5. ● Walpole St. Peter. Eames 1955, Ward-Perkins 1937.
6. ● West Walton. Eames 1955, Ward-Perkins 1937.
7. ● Terrington St. John. Eames 1955.
8. ● King's Lynn, St. Margarets. Eames 1955.
Norfolk Street. A. Carter and H. Clarke, *King's Lynn Archaeological Survey*, II forthcoming.
Blackfriars. Eames 1955.
9. ● Castle Rising. Eames 1955, Compton 67-8.
10. ● Snettisham. Eames 1955, Ward-Perkins 1937.
11. ● Barwick. Eames 1955, *Norfolk Arch.* I (1847), pp. 373-4.
12. ● North Creake. Eames 1955, Ward-Perkins 1937, *Arch. Jour.* VI (1849), 178.
13. ● Hempton. Eames 1955.
14. ● Brisley. Eames 1955, *Norfolk Arch.* XXIII (1929), p. 90.
15. ● Blackborough. Eames 1955.
16. ● West Acre. Eames 1955, *Norfolk Arch.* XXIII (1929), pp. 391-2.
17. Castle Acre Priory. ● Eames 1955, Ward-Perkins 1937, Compton 68 and 68v.
■ Ward-Perkins 1937, Myres in n.1 on p. 140 and p. 141.
18. ● Bexwell. Eames 1955, Ward-Perkins 1937.
19. West Dereham. ● Eames 1955.
■ Ward-Perkins 1937, *Norfolk Arch.* I (1847), p. 371, and p. 269 of Myres *op. cit.* in n.1.
20. ● Beechamwell. Eames 1955, Ward-Perkins 1937.
21. ● Marsham. Ward-Perkins 1937, Compton 68v.
22. ■ Horsham St. Faith Priory. *Ex. inf.* David Sherlock.
23. ■ Coston. Ward-Perkins 1937, Compton 69.
24. ■ Norwich, St. Julian. *Norfolk Arch.* I (1847), pp. 368-9.
25. ■ Ashwellthorpe, St. Peter Hungate, Norwich.
26. ● Ely, Prior Crauden's Chapel. Eames 1955.
27. ● Denney Abbey. From excavations by P. M. Christie and J. G. Coad.
28. ● Cambridge, St. Michael's. Eames 1955.
29. ■ Flixton St. Andrew. See below, p. 201.
30. ■ Oulton. Museum of Archaeology and Ethnology, Cambridge.
31. ● Rushford. Eames 1955.
32. ■ Burgate. Ward-Perkins 1937, Compton 171.
33. Bury St. Edmunds. ● Babwell Friary. Eames 1955, Ward-Perkins 1937.
● St. Edmunds Abbey, site museum.
■ Ward-Perkins 1937.
34. ■ Bricett. B.M., Rutland 385a, 386, 880.
35. ■ Wormingford. Ward-Perkins 1937.

36. Colchester, ● St. Botolph. Eames 1955, Ward-Perkins 1937, Fowler and Clapham *Beeleigh Abbey* (1922), 80.
 ■ Ward-Perkins 1937.
 ■ St. Mary. Ward-Perkins 1937.
37. ■ Higham. *Proc. Suff. Inst. Arch.* xxxi (1969), p. 326, no. 76.
38. ■ Dennington. See below, pp. 198, 200; Compton 172 and 42v.
39. ■ Sibton. See below, pp. 198, 200; *Gent. Mag.* lxxvi (1806), p. 17.
40. ■ Farnham. B.M., Rutland A50 (counter relief).
41. ■ Campsea Ash.
42. ■ Butley. Ward-Perkins 1937, Myres in n.1 on p. 141.
43. ■ Leiston. Ward-Perkins 1937, Myres in n.7 on p. 141.
44. ■ Sudbourne. See below, pp. 198-200.
45. ■ Orford. Ward-Perkins 1937 and below, pp. 198-200.
 BAWSEY kiln. Eames 1955 with full documentation, Ward-Perkins 1937. Bawsey church. *Antiq. Jour.* xi (1931), p. 169.

Addenda:

- Thetford Priory. *Ex. inf.* Glynn Coppack.
- North Elmham. G. A. Carthew, *The Hundred of Launditch and Deanery of Brisley*, II (1877), 3rd. pl. after p. 516. no. 1.

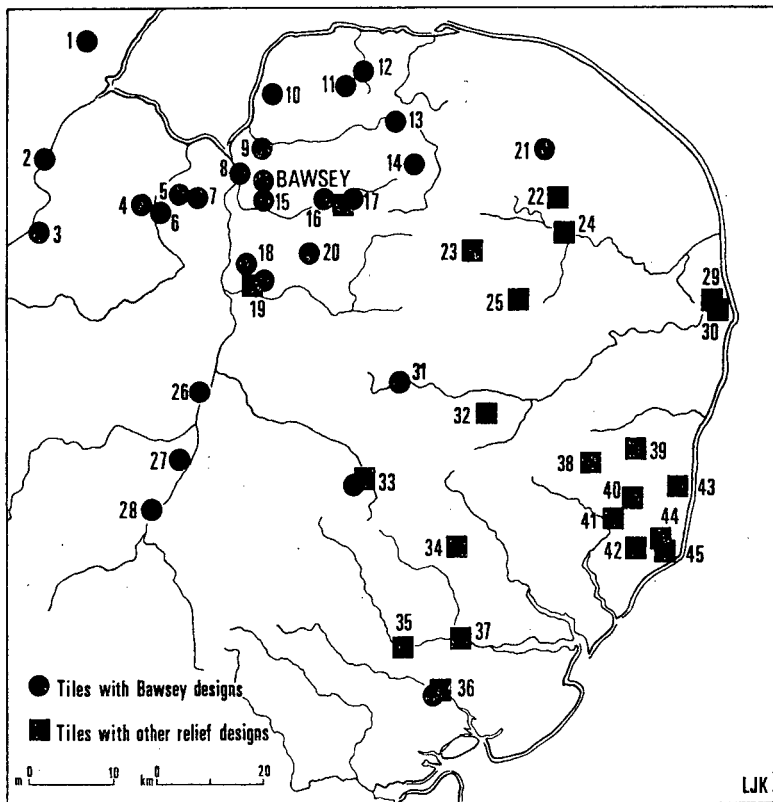


FIG. 41.—Distribution of relief tiles in East Anglia.

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