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A New Relief-Patterned Flue-Tile Design from Roman Silchester (*Calleva Atrebatum*)

By SARA L. WILSON

ABSTRACT

A relief-patterned flue-tile recovered during the excavations of the forum-basilica at the Roman town of Calleva Atrebatum (Silchester) features a previously unpublished roller-stamped design. The tile is described in terms of its fabric and design and compared to the other roller-stamped examples from Silchester.

Keywords: Silchester; Roman ceramic building material (CBM); Roman flue-tile; relief-patterned tile; roller-stamped tile; tile fabric; hypocaust

An on-going project by the author¹²⁰ to characterise the ceramic building material (CBM) from the Roman town at Silchester has discovered a previously unpublished relief-patterned tile design. Relief-patterned keying is primarily found on box-flue tiles. The dies, applied using a wooden roller, vary considerably in terms of the designs they feature, from relatively simple geometric diamond-and-lattice designs to complex

¹²⁰ Ongoing PhD project: 'Constructing *Calleva*: a characterisation of the production and consumption of brick and tile at the Roman town of Silchester'.

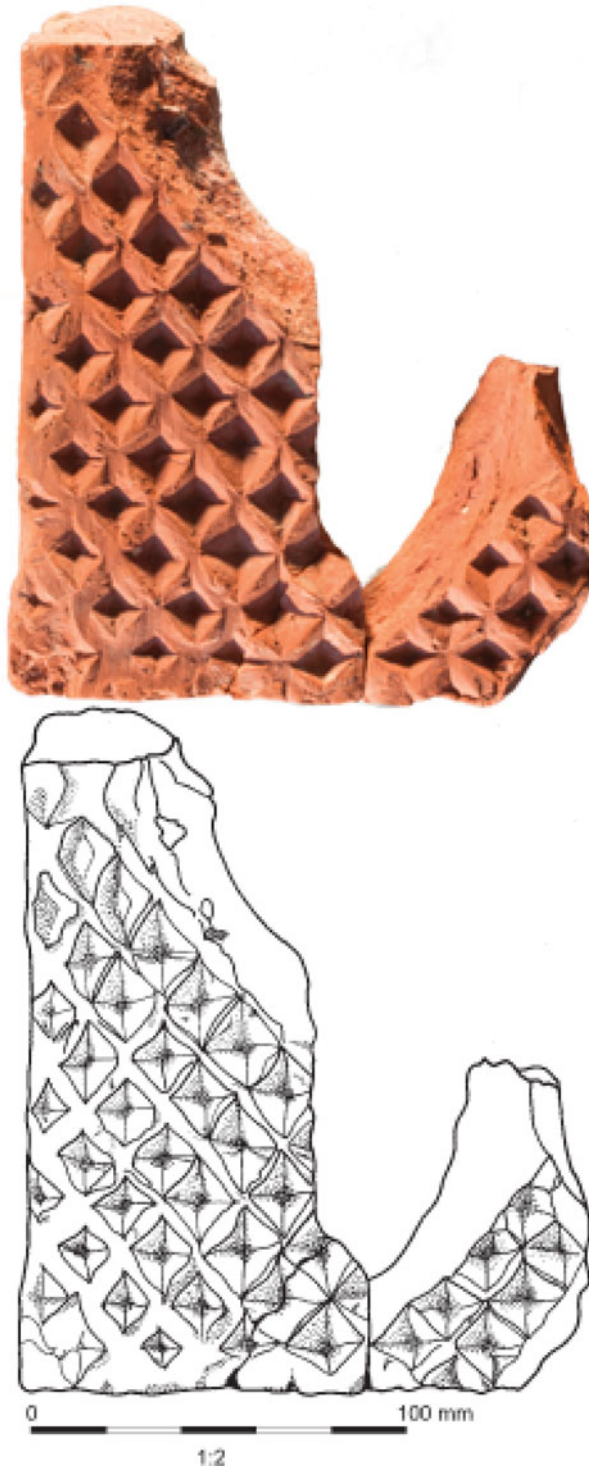


FIG. 14. Photograph and drawing of a new relief-patterned flue-tile from Silchester. (*Photograph by Sarah Lambert-Gates; drawing by Sara Wilson*)

motifs and often elaborate decorative schemes. Lowther¹²¹ studied their production and distribution based on initial findings at the villa site on Ashtead Common. He divided the designs into nine preliminary groups based on their decorative schemes and proposed a date range for their production of *c.* A.D. 80–150; though the reuse of tiles in the construction of buildings of a later date obscures the final date of their production, there is no evidence of their use later than (or as late as) A.D. 200.¹²²

Relief-patterned flue-tiles were made in a range of fabrics with some evidence of the same dies on different fabrics and others only used on a single fabric.¹²³ This evidence led Lowther to the conclusion that these roller-stamps were used by itinerant tile-makers, skilled specialists producing flue-tiles using local tileries alongside other tile-makers, and thus needing to differentiate their products, like potters sharing the same kiln.¹²⁴ Betts *et al.* proposed a number of systems for the production of relief-patterned tiles: local production for use in the immediate area of the kiln sites; itinerant production with a tile-maker moving between production centres; and central production for distribution to building projects.¹²⁵ These systems are neither comprehensive nor mutually exclusive and are likely to have been coeval.

In their corpus of relief-patterned tiles,¹²⁶ four dies are recorded as being present in the CBM assemblage from the Roman town at Silchester, dies 3, 27, 38 and 39. Further examples of dies 27 and 39 have been recovered during the excavations of Insula IX,¹²⁷ along with examples of dies 27 and 68 identified in the assemblage from the forum-basilica excavations.¹²⁸

In the publication of the investigations at the forum-basilica at Silchester, a small, unstratified fragment of tile was illustrated and described as having ‘cuboid impressed decoration’.¹²⁹ A recent reassessment of this assemblage has brought to light a larger fragment of the same tile which shows it to be part of a relief-patterned flue-tile with roller-stamped decoration (FIG. 14). The tile was recovered from a Period 7 (fourth-century) post-hole (F264) in the basilica¹³⁰ where tile was used as packing around the post. The tile is certainly residual in this context.¹³¹

The tile is made of a hard, red (Munsell: 2.5YR 5/8) homogeneous, slightly micaceous fabric. The fabric is characterised by moderate (10–15 per cent) fine quartz inclusions along with rare inclusions of iron oxides, calcium carbonate and flint. It is comparable to fabric 2459A in the fabric series maintained by Museum of London Archaeology (MOLA), which has a suggested date range of pre-A.D. 60–1 to mid-second century.¹³² Examples of *tegulae*, *imbrices*, flue-tile and bricks are all found in this fabric in the Silchester assemblage. It shares the same composition as the fabric of the examples of die 27 from Silchester, although these have a straw/organic moulding agent, comparable to MOLA fabric 2459C.¹³³ The design of the roller-stamped decoration could be described as part of the diamond-and-lattice designs,¹³⁴ of which die 39 is an example, albeit in a different fabric and comprised of much smaller design components. While die 27 examples are of a similar fabric, they are stylistically very different designs.

The total width of the flue-tile is 147 mm, with walls up to 24 mm thick. There is a semi-circular cut-out at the bottom edges of both sides of the tile which would have allowed hot air to get into the flue system when the flue was constructed to the level of the floor of the hypocaust.¹³⁵ These sides are not roller-stamped but have been keyed by scoring with a lattice design.

To date, this is the only known example of relief-patterned decoration of this type, so the author would be interested to hear of any other examples.

¹²¹ Lowther 1948.

¹²² *ibid.*, 10.

¹²³ *ibid.*, 6.

¹²⁴ Peacock 1982, 122.

¹²⁵ Betts *et al.* 1994, 33–4.

¹²⁶ *ibid.*

¹²⁷ Warry 2011, 226–8.

¹²⁸ *contra* Timby 2000, 119.

¹²⁹ Timby 2000, 117–18, fig. 94.11.

¹³⁰ Fulford and Timby 2000, 70, fig. 71.

¹³¹ M. Fulford, pers. comm.

¹³² I. Betts, pers. comm.

¹³³ I. Betts, pers. comm.

¹³⁴ Lowther 1948; Betts *et al.* 1994.

¹³⁵ Brodribb 1987, 75–7.

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Woodland in Roman Britain: Some Hypotheses

By STUART WRATHMELL

ABSTRACT

The recently published 'Fields of Britannia' project has lent a measure of support to the idea that the patterning of woodland and open land evident in the Anglo-Saxon period may in part have persisted since Roman times, if not before. This article explores the potential value of these woodland and open land contrasts in explaining the locations and distribution of a variety of Roman cultural material: coins, military installations and early road alignments.

Keywords: Roman Britain countryside; woodland; coin distributions; Roman roads; forts and fortresses; Domesday Book

For the 2013 issue of this journal, Jeremy Taylor provided a thought-provoking discussion of the diversity of response to *Romanitas* among Britain's agricultural communities.¹³⁶ To over-simplify the argument, the response of those who lived in some parts of the East Midlands was markedly different from that exhibited (at least in the archaeological record) by communities living in the area that was later to become Shropshire and the Welsh Marches; specifically, in the Wroxeter hinterland.

The former region saw, by the middle of the second century, 'a significant and growing network of modest villas' along with 'a far larger number of materially more modest settlements ... all of which came to use a wide range of material culture associated with the Roman world'.¹³⁷ In the hinterland of Wroxeter, on the other hand, the take-up of such material culture seems to have been very limited. For example, the quantities of Roman ceramics recovered from rural settlements is small: 'known rural sites of the Roman

¹³⁶ Taylor 2013.

¹³⁷ *ibid.*, 178.