

APPENDIX X

Medieval Floor Tiles from Bective Abbey

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INTRODUCTION

In their 1988 corpus of Irish medieval tiles, Eames and Fanning listed eight designs then known from Bective Abbey, three of the line-impressed type (though one is an uncertain record) and five with relief decoration (1988, 72). Line-impressed tiles were produced from the early-fourteenth century extending into the fifteenth century; relief tiles are generally dated to the late-fifteenth and sixteenth centuries (*ibid.*, 57). No examples of two-colour tiles, which in Ireland usually date to the thirteenth/fourteenth centuries, have so far been recorded from Bective.

There are 288 fragments of medieval floor tile in the assemblage from the four seasons of excavation at Bective Abbey. The tile fragments range in size from small unglazed and undecorated chips to four complete, or almost complete, tiles. One additional crude 'tile' is possibly from the structure of a kiln. Several natural stones and non-tile pieces of fired clay catalogued as tiles were discounted.

Seventeen designs have been identified among the fragments, of which seven are of the line-impressed type and ten are relief. One line-impressed design and four relief designs concur with Eames and Fanning's Bective list. The remaining twelve designs are either new to Bective or are previously unrecorded designs. A small number of plain tile fragments are made in the same fabric as the line-impressed tiles.

The nomenclature used in this report is that established by Eames and Fanning with 'L' indicating line-impressed and 'R' indicating relief, followed by the design number. New designs within each group are designated 'LN' and 'RN' along the lines suggested by Hayden (2004, 194). The Excavation Licence No. E4028 has been omitted from the tiles' finds numbers where used in the text.

LINE-IMPRESSED TILES

Eames and Fanning listed only three line-impressed tile designs from Bective Abbey, L71, L73 and L79, with L71 being an uncertain record. Curiously, of these three designs, only one small fragment of L73 is present among the 155 line-impressed fragments in the assemblage and no examples of L71 or L79 were recognised. Seven designs are represented among the 56 fragments bearing identifiable designs of which

Table X.1 – Tile types, number of fragments, minimum number of tiles (MNT) and weight.

Tile type	Number of fragments	MNT	Weight (g)
Line-impressed	155	21	7,294
Plain	4	3	763
Relief	129	19	5,765
Total	288	43	13,822

only two (L68, L73) have previously been recorded from any site (Table 2). Two designs are close variants of designs L72 and L73 and three are previously unrecorded designs apparently unique to Bective. The two variant forms are described below as 'L72 variant' and 'L73 variant'; the three previously unrecorded designs are designated 'LN1-3'. There are an additional eleven fragments which are too small to be allocated to the above designs with any certainty. Eighty-eight fragments lacking the decorated top surface have been identified as line-impressed tiles on the basis of the fabric.

Although the corner motif of a trefoil enclosed in a quarter circle occurs on tiles of designs L65–L68 the best match for the larger fragment from Bective (020:5) is with L68 where the trefoil extends to the edge of the tile. The distribution of designs L65–L68 is limited to Dublin, Slane, Mellifont, Drogheda and Trim, with R68 previously known only from Trim.

Design L72 has been recorded from St Mary's Abbey, St Saviour's Friary and St Audoen's Church, Dublin (Eames and Fanning 1988, 90; McMahon 2006, 63). The tiles found in the Bective excavations are a variant form whereby one of the two lines forming the quarter circles is missing. This suggests either that the wooden stamp for L72 had been altered by the time it was used to make the Bective tiles or that a new stamp was made.

As with L72, design L73 is also recorded from St Mary's, St Saviour's and St Audoen's in Dublin, with the addition of St. Patrick's Cathedral (Eames and Fanning 1988, 91; McMahon 2006, 63). The excavations produced only one fragment of design L73 as it is illustrated by Eames and Fanning; a further twelve fragments are of a variant and plainer design with fewer lines which has been designated 'L73 variant' in this report. A recent find at the medieval Church of the Blessed Virgin, Ardcaith, Co.



Fig. X.1a–c Line impressed tile design L73 and two variants. Possibly, as the tile stamp wore damaged lines in the stamp were removed.

Meath, has an intermediate design hinting that the wooden stamp was progressively altered as it became worn through use (Gargan 2012, 4–5) (fig. X.1a–c).

The three previously unrecorded designs, LN1–3, have no direct parallels in the Irish tile corpus. Design LN1 features a griffin which does not occur on any other line-impressed tile in Ireland. The griffin in a circle on two-colour tile T67 from Mellifont Abbey is a much more accomplished design and is likely to be earlier in date (Eames and Fanning 1988, 29). The griffin motif is also rare on tiles in England and Wales. It occurs in a quite different form on a line-impressed tile found on sites in Wales, dated to the first half of the fourteenth century, and on a later thirteenth century two-colour tile found at Rievaulx and Whitby abbeys, Yorkshire (Lewis 1999, 88–9, 194, no. 725; Stopford 2005, 144, fig. 13.3). Designs LN2 and LN3 also feature animal forms but unfortunately the fragments are few in number and the designs are incomplete.

The line-impressed tiles are made in an oxidised fabric, light reddish-brown in colour, with frequent dark red inclusions. There are four plain tile fragments in this same fabric. Three complete tiles (designs LN1, L72 variant, L73 variant) and two others with one intact side give a size range of 109–124mm square; thickness range is 24–30mm with most falling within the 24–27mm bracket. A minimum of twenty one tiles are present among the 56 fragments with attributable designs. The 99 fragments with unidentified designs or identified by fabric amount to no more than two complete tiles calculated on the basis of weight, with complete tiles having an estimated weight of 490–550g.

Although the surfaces of most of the tiles are quite worn, the glaze is generally a light brown usually with a green speckle or tinge. A small number are glazed dark green, enough to suggest that the tiles were laid in a chequer pattern of light and dark tiles. Light and dark glazes occur on tiles of the same design e.g. LN1, L68. Only one fragment, with design L73 variant, has a definite white slip under the glaze. Fragments of half-tiles occur in designs L72 variant, L73 variant, LN1 and LN2; one

fragment in design LN1 is a quarter-tile. These tiles were scored diagonally before firing for easy breaking into triangular tiles during the laying of the floor. They indicate that the tiles were laid diagonal to the walls of the building where they were laid, most likely the church.

Line-impressed designs

Design L68: 4-foil within 4 quarter circles (fig. X.2). There is one corner fragment (020:5) with a quarter circle enclosing a trefoil, glazed dark green. The design most closely resembles R68, previously recorded only as an incomplete design from Newtown Trim Cathedral and a complete design from recent excavations at Trim Castle (Hayden 2011, 377, fig. 22.29.1). A further two small fragments, glazed light brown, are probably from a second tile. (find nos. 010:26; 020:5; R02:1).



Fig. X.2 Line impressed tile design L68.

Design L72 variant: Double outlined 4-foil within 4 quarter-circles (fig. X.3, pl. X.1).

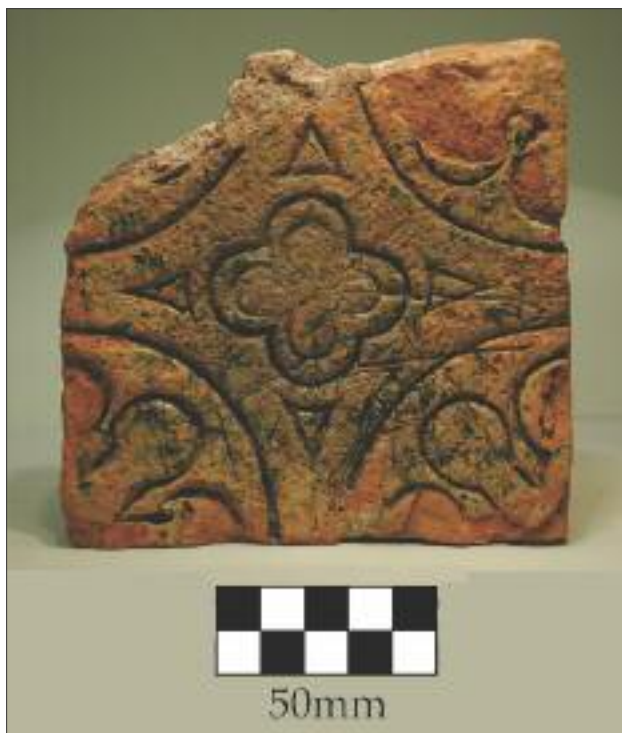
Thirteen fragments with this design range in size from a small surface chip to one almost complete tile.



Fig. X.3 Line impressed tile design L72 variant.

At 109mm square, the complete tile (H02.29.3) is smaller than the other designs by 8–15mm. The design differs from L72 in having a single line enclosing the corner motifs instead of a double line as illustrated by Eames and Fanning. There are two fragments of half-tile. Glaze is pale mottled green or light brown. (Find nos. 001.6.1; 001.21; 001.37; 005.3.1; 102.5.1; 104.10.2; H02.6.4; H02.29.3; J01.1.1; P01.18; P01.159; Q03.7; SS01.34).

from L73 in having two rather than three lines forming the corner quarter circles. In addition, the design variant lacks the diagonal straight lines which divide the petals of the central 4-foil. One small fragment (001.19.7) is of design L73 rather than the variant. Glazes are dark green, light green and green/brown. (Find nos. 001.19.7; 008.3; 009.162; 104.10.1; P01.163, 168, 207, 263, 265; H03.3; J01.8.2; P06.86; R01.65).



PI. X.1 Line impressed tile design L72 variant.



PI. X.4 Line impressed tile design L73 variant.

Design L73 and L73 variant: 4-foil within 4 quarter circles (figs X.1, X.4, pl. X.2).

Thirteen fragments include one almost complete tile (H03.3), and one fragment of a half-tile (P01.163). The design variant is on twelve fragments and differs

Design LN1: Griffin *passant* (fig. X.5).

Twenty fragments, one (H02.29.1) almost complete, allow a reconstruction of this previously unrecorded design, missing only the wing tip. Most of the fragments are glazed dark green or light green with

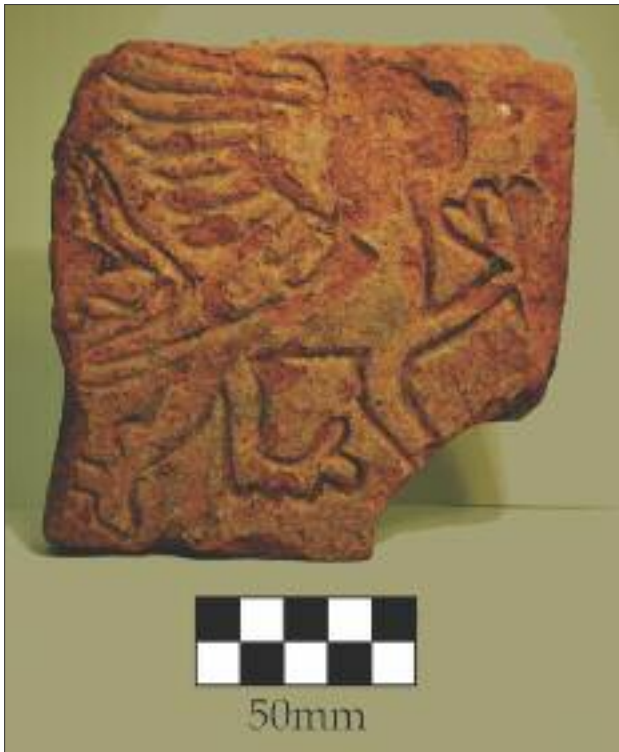


Fig. X.4 Line impressed tile design L73 variant.



Fig. X.5 Line impressed tile design LN1.

some a lighter brown and one possibly with a white slip. There is one half-tile (H02.6.1) and one quarter-tile (H01.9.1), both scored diagonally for breaking. (Finds nos. 002:57; 005:3.2; 011.11; 028:1; 207.12F; H01.9.1; H02.2.1; H02.6.1-3; H02.22; H02.29.1-2; J01.8.1; J01.20; K03.6; P01.157; P05.43; P11.8; R01.72).



Pl. X.3 Line impressed tile design LN1.

Design LN2: Lion rampant? (fig. X.6)

A single fragment, part of a half-tile, has sparse decoration of the forelegs and start of the hind leg of an animal, possibly a lion. The wavy edges on the back of the legs also appear on the lion on the common and widely distributed lion rampant design L4. The tile is glazed brown. (find no. H01.9.2)

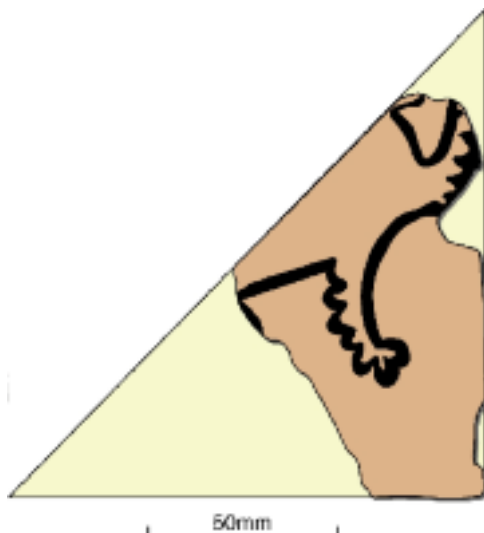


Fig. X.6 Line impressed tile design LN2.

Table X.2 – Line-impressed tile designs

Design no.	Number of		
	fragments	MNT	Weight (g)
L68	3	2	177
L72 variant	13	3	1,024
L73	1	1	3
L73 variant	12	3	1,199
LN1	20	8	2,799
LN2	1	1	175
LN3	6	3	906
Unidentified design	11	–	159
Identified by fabric	88	–	852
Total	155	21	7,294

Design LN3: 4-tile circular band enclosing foliage with bird or animal (fig. X.7)

There are six fragments of this intricate design, five of which overlap to allow a partial reconstruction. A fragment from the right hand side (H02.33) has a five-toed claw or foot. However, the decoration at the centre of the tile does not survive on any of the fragments. The five-leaf corner motif has some similarity to designs L19 and L20, common finds in Dublin but also found at Trim Castle (L19) and Drogheda, Kildare and Kilkenny (L20). (Find nos. 021:21+22; 301.8.1; H01.9.3; H02.2.2; H02.33; P01.266)



Fig. X.7 Line impressed tile design LN3.

PLAIN TILES

There are four fragments of plain tile, made in the same fabric and the same size as the line-impressed tiles. It follows that some of the 88 fragments of line-impressed tile identified by fabric noted above may also be from plain tiles. Glazed light orange-brown or greenish brown, they range 24–27mm in thickness and the one complete side measures 126mm. The plain tiles may have been used as borders to divide

panels of line-impressed tiles. (find nos. H02.12; H02.29.8; P01.264; SS04.31)

RELIEF TILES

Before the recent excavations, five relief tile designs had been recorded from Bective Abbey (Eames and Fanning 1988, 72). Fragments from four of these designs, R51, R52, R56 and R58, are present in the assemblage but no fragments attributable to R29 can be identified. In addition, there is one fragment from design R57 which is not previously recorded from Bective and fragments from a further four, possibly five, designs previously unrecorded from any site. In the absence of existing design numbers, the new designs are here designated 'RN' followed by numbers 1–5. Designs RN1 and RN3 are treated separately but may be part of the same design.

There are 129 fragments of relief-decorated floor tile in the assemblage of which 46 can be assigned to the ten designs noted above. A further 18 fragments have designs on the decorated surface but are unidentifiable due to their small size or indistinct decoration. Sixty five fragments are lacking the decorated top surface and have been identified as relief tile on the basis of the fabric. The majority of the fragments are small, in the 20–80mm size range.

Eight designs, of which there are no complete examples, are on tiles measuring c.140–142mm square, with slightly bevelled edges. Tile thickness ranges from 20mm to 33mm, most falling within the 23–30mm range. Two designs, RN2 and RN5, are on smaller tiles, 92mm square and 28–29mm thick, probably designed to be used together in four-tile arrangements. A fragment with an unidentified design (002:131) had been scored diagonally and was broken to make a triangular half-tile.

The tiles are made in a broadly similar sandy fabric with occasional angular stone inclusions, reduced to a grey core with reddish-brown margins. Although fragmentary and few in number, the tiles of designs R51, R56, R57 and R58 appear to have a better finish, with smooth glossy green glaze and smooth bases and are possibly in a finer fabric than the 'new' designs RN1–5. The decorated surfaces of the 'RN' tiles have a rough sandpaper-like feel derived from the underlying fabric and have distinctive sanded bases.

The tiles belong to a group datable to the late fifteenth- / early sixteenth-century on the basis of the motto and heraldic arms of the Kildare branch of the Geraldines (*ibid.*, 46). The Geraldine motto *SI DIEV PLET CROM ABO* appears in the circular band on designs R51 and R52. Fragments of the similar designs R51 and R52, both featuring a circular band with Geraldine motto enclosing the Geraldine arms,

can be differentiated by minor variations in the designs if these are present on the fragments. The initials G and E on design R51 are thought to refer to the marriage of Garret More Fitzgerald and Elizabeth St John and should date to sometime before his death in 1513. Designs R51, R52 and RN4 are non-repeating patterns which could be used singly. Designs R56–58, composed of decorated bands, foliage and Renaissance motifs, are four-tile patterns i.e. intended to be laid in groups of four to complete the pattern. Three new designs RN1, RN2 and RN5, although of different sizes, are also four-tile patterns, each with circular bands enclosing birds and/or animals. The band on RN1 is decorated with roses, albeit with four petals instead of the usual five, which links it to other tiles in this group, R52 and R57, with roses or rosettes. The size ratio between the large and small tiles is 2:3 so that both could be accommodated in the same floor panel.

The tiles in this group have a limited distribution and, in addition to Bective, are found only at St. Patrick's and Christ Church Cathedrals in Dublin, Dublin Castle, Howth Church, Great Connell Priory, Co. Kildare and an uncertain record (R56) at Mellifont Abbey. The crane-like bird on RN2 has a parallel on two other designs (R12, R13) found at Mellifont Abbey, on four sites in Drogheda and at St. Mary's Church, Duleek (Eames and Fanning 1988, 93, 128). The incomplete design RN4 features a bird-like head as part of the design within a square border similar to design R12 recorded at Mellifont Abbey and as a recent stray find from St. Peter's Church, Drogheda. The unicorn on the companion tile RN5 has not previously been recorded as a motif on an Irish medieval tile.

There is evidence to suggest there was a relief tile kiln on the site in the form of ten possible tile wasters. One waster (001.6.8) has an uneven partially glazed surface with small tile chips adhering to the surface. Other wasters are indicated by glaze on broken tile surfaces. This occurs on tiles with designs R51 / 52, R56, RN4 and RN5. A fragment of crudely-made tile (E4028:010:30) resembles the structural tiles from floor tile kilns found at two sites in Drogheda, the line-impressed tile kiln at the Dominican Priory and the relief tile kiln waste at the Priory and Hospital of St Mary d'Urso (Campbell 1985, 51–2, fig. 2; Campbell 1996, 494). The fabric however, with red inclusions, is more reminiscent of the line-impressed tiles.

Relief Designs

Design R51: Circular band inscribed with Geraldine motto enclosing Geraldine arms and initials G and E (fig. X.8).

Four small fragments of this design were identified.

One fragment (002:3), unusually thick at 33mm, bears the word 'CROM' from the Geraldine motto, with a stop before the 'C'. A second fragment (J02.12.3) has 'SI', another (013.4.1) has the 'O' of 'ABO' and an unglazed fragment (001.19.1) bears part of the central shield motif.



Fig. X.8 Relief tile design R51.

Design 52: Variant of R51 with rosettes instead of initials G and E (fig. X.9). One small fragment (001:13.2) with letters 'BO' is identified as R52 rather than R51 on the basis of the style of the corner motif.



Fig. X.9 Relief tile design R52.

Design R51/R52: Two small edge fragments feature the circular band as seen on designs R51 and R52 (001:36.3; 201.30D). The second listed also has part of the shield.

Design R56: 4-tile circular band with strapwork and foliage (fig. X.10).

Six fragments have elements of this design, including three of the corners. Glaze varies from rough and unfused to glossy green on separate tiles. One fragment (102.13.1) is unglazed. (Find nos: 001.19.2; 102.13.1; H02.6.5; H02.29.5; J02.2.2; P01.127).

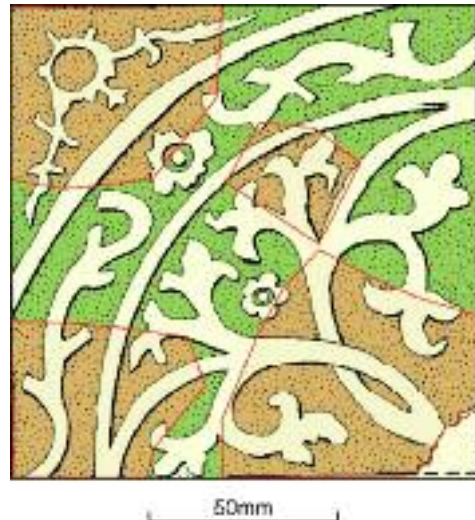


Fig. X.10 Relief tile design R56.

Design R57: 4-tile band with Renaissance ornament enclosing Tudor rose (fig. X.11). A single fragment (001:9) from the lower edge is the only record of this design from Bective.



Fig. X.11 Relief tile design R57.

Design R58: 4-tile hexagonal frame enclosing foliage (fig. X.12).

Three small fragments feature the decoration at the centre of the tile. (Find nos. 001.1.1; 207.13.1; R01.68).

Design RN1: 4-tile circular band with roses and foliage enclosing bird and foliage (fig. X.13). There are at least eighteen fragments of this

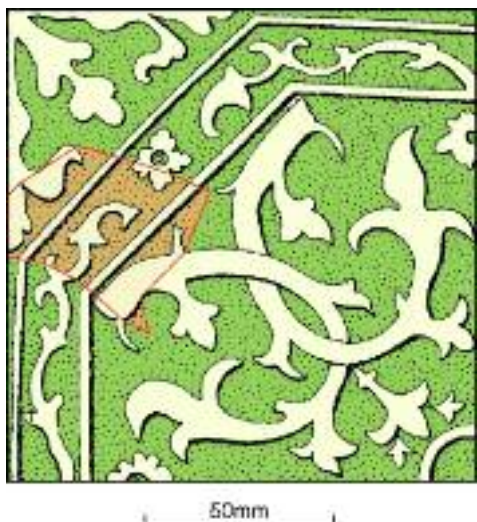


Fig.X.12 Relief tile design R58.

previously-unrecorded design, ranging in size from 28mm up to two large fragments each comprising almost half a tile. Six fragments with overlapping decoration have enabled a partial reconstruction of the design. (Find nos. 005.3.3; 101.4.1; 104.10.4; 302.6A; H01.9.8; H02.29.6; J02.2.5 + H02.29.7; J02.12.1; J02.12.2; K02.10.1; P09.43; P09.106; SS04.32–34; SS05.17+19).



Fig. X.13 Relief tile design RN1.

Design RN2: 4-tile circular band, with foliage, enclosing a bird (Fig. X.14).

A single fragment (H02.29.4) of this design is poorly executed and much of the detail, e.g. of the wings and foliage, is faint. Intact edges at top and bottom give the size at 93mm square.



Fig. X.14 Relief tile design RN2.

Design RN3: fragment with foliage (fig. X.15)

A corner fragment with foliage (205.14.1) is from an unidentified design. This is possibly part of design RN1, from the lower right corner, but there is no area of overlap to be certain of this.



Fig. 14 Relief tile design RN3.

Design RN4: Square frame enclosing bird and animal? Incomplete design (fig. X.16).

Six fragments with a square frame or border are presumed to be of the same design although the

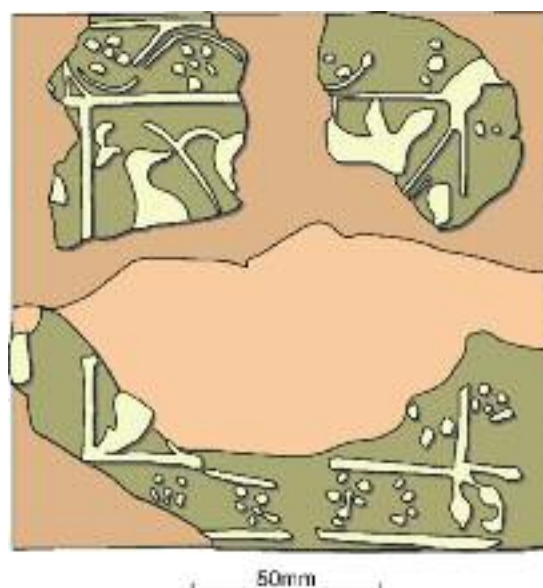


Fig. X.16 Relief tile design RN4.

fragments do not overlap. Three separate non-joining fragments are illustrated. One fragment (SS08.9+11) has matt glaze and smudged design and is probably a waster. A second fragment (P09.103) is unglazed, has sharp unworn design with fingerprint marks, and is probably also a waster. The impression of wood grain from the design stamp is evident on this unglazed tile. (Find nos. 001.36.2; 301.13B; J02.2.3; J02.2.4; P09.103; SS08.9+11).

Design RN5: 4-tile circular band with foliage enclosing unicorn (fig. X.17).

There is one complete tile (SS09.17), a second almost complete (SS08.12) and a small fragment (SS05.22). There are raised dots on the circular band and rope moulding effect on the frame on the right side. The complete tile shows no evidence of wear, as if unused; the second tile has a very rough surface finish and is possibly a waster.



Fig. X.17 Relief tile design RN6.



Pl. X.4 Relief tile design RN6.

Table X.3 – Relief tile designs

Design no.	Number of		
	fragments	MNT	Weight (g)
R51	4	1	223
R52	1	1	8
R51/R52	2	1	21
R56	6	2	395
R57	1	1	41
R58	3	2	82
RN1	18	5	1,830
RN2	1	1	121
RN3	1	1	70
RN4	6	2	723
RN5	3	2	590
Unidentified	18	–	258
Identified by fabric	65	–	1,408
Total	129	19	5,765

TILE WASTERS

Ten relief tile fragments are possible kiln wasters and include one unglazed tile and tiles with glaze on broken edges. Designs R51/52, R56, RN4 and RN5 are present among the wasters.

Find nos. 001.6.8; 001.19.3; 201.30D; L06.2; P01:127; P09.103; SS08.9+11; SS08.10; SS08.12; SS09.20.

DISCUSSION

Previous to the recent excavations, only a small number of medieval floor tiles had been recorded from Bective Abbey. These old finds of line-impressed and relief decorated tiles were most likely collected during conservation works carried out by the Office of Public Works, and are held in the collection of the National Museum and the State Heraldic Museum (Eames and Fanning 1988, 72). Eight designs are represented among the old finds compared with seventeen designs recovered during the excavations, a disparity which may be explained by perhaps only complete tiles or large fragments being retained during the early conservation works. Three designs (L71, L79, R29) listed among the old finds do not occur in the excavation assemblage while two designs (L68 and R57) known from other sites are new records from Bective. Surprisingly, the excavation produced seven, possibly eight, designs (LN1, LN2, LN3, RN1, RN2, RN3, RN4, RN5) which are previously unrecorded. The absence of 13th century two-colour floor tiles at Bective is surprising, given the twelfth century foundation date for the abbey and the fact that two-colour tiles are found at the mother house at Mellifont.

The tiles provide some clues about the organisation of the medieval tile industry in Ireland which is still little understood. In England,

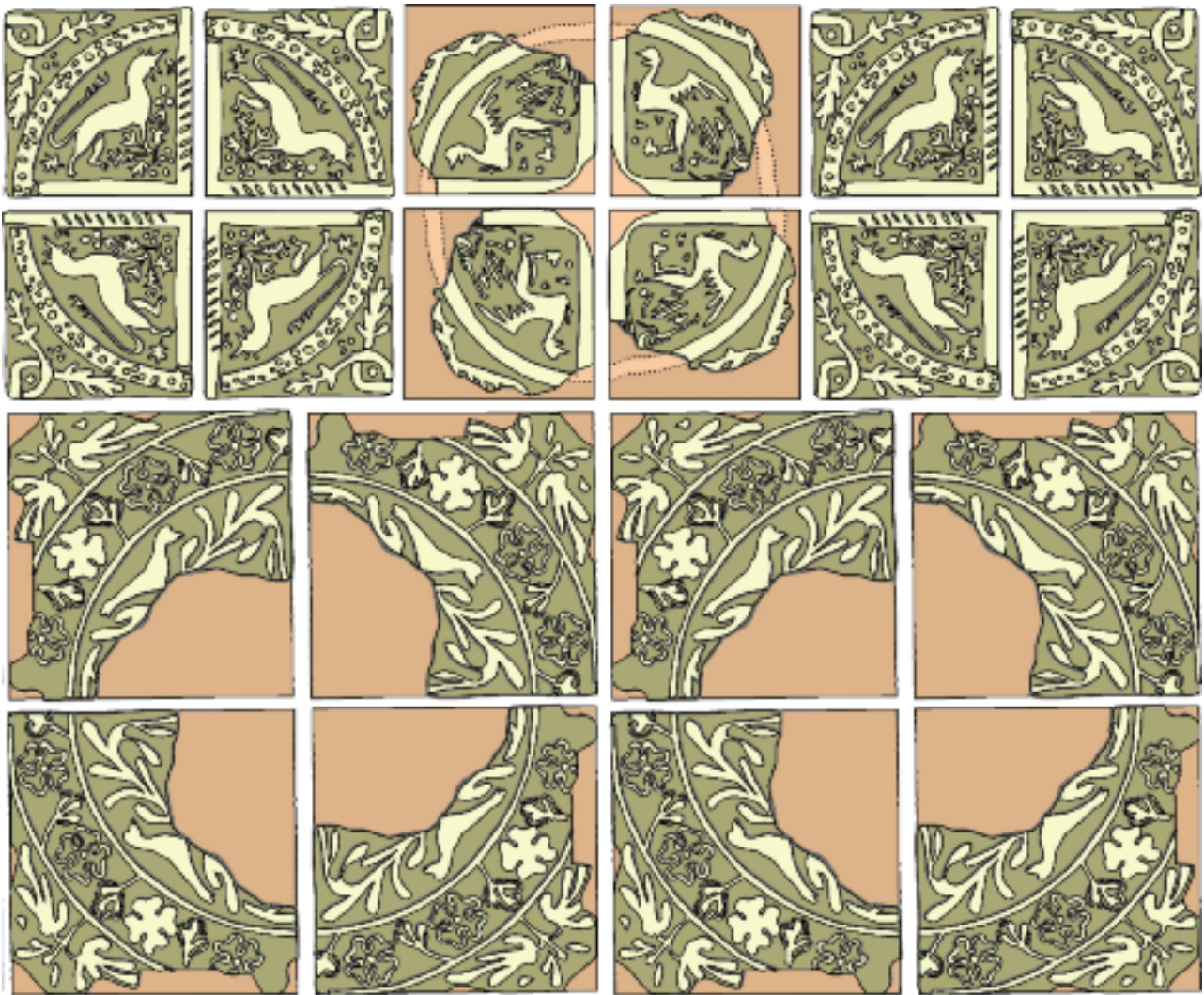


Fig. X.18 Relief tiles RN1 (bottom), RN2 (top centre) and RN5 (top left and right), as they might have appeared on the floors in Bective Abbey

commercial tile works were in existence by the mid-13th century where formerly single kilns had been set up on patrons' land to supply individual orders (ibid 6). A similar situation existed in Wales where tile factories appear to have developed by the end of the thirteenth century (Lewis, 6, 12–3). The limited evidence to date suggests that in Ireland floor tiles were produced in kilns set up by itinerant tile makers at individual religious houses rather than traded from distant commercial tileries. Kilns or kiln debris have been found within the precincts of the Dominican Priory and the Hospital of St. Mary d'Urso in Drogheda, at the abbey of St. Thomas the Martyr in Dublin and at Kells Priory and St. Canice's Cathedral, Kilkenny (Campbell 1996; Campbell 2007; Walsh 2000). The presence of wasters strongly suggests a kiln at Bective for making relief tiles with only a hint, in the form of one possible structural kiln tile, for the making of line-impressed tiles. The distribution of the designs found at Bective, of both decorative types, shows a

clear bias towards Dublin city so that it is possible that the tilers originated there.

Two line-impressed designs, L72 and L73, previously listed from Bective, occur in variant forms with only one small fragment appearing to come from the unaltered L73 design. It would be necessary to re-examine the old finds to establish if, as seems likely, they are also mostly of the variant form. The missing lines on designs L72 and L73 at Bective could have resulted from the 'tidying up' of worn wooden stamps by the excision of damaged parts of the designs. That the stamps used were of wood seems clear from the impression of wood grain and signs of repair seen on tiles from other sites although, aside from one relief tile waster with wood grain impression, these clues were not evident on the Bective tiles (Eames and Fanning 1988, 33–5; Campbell 1985, 49). Among the relief tile designs, two influences may be distinguished. One set of tiles has designs known from religious houses in Dublin City and Kildare; a second group has

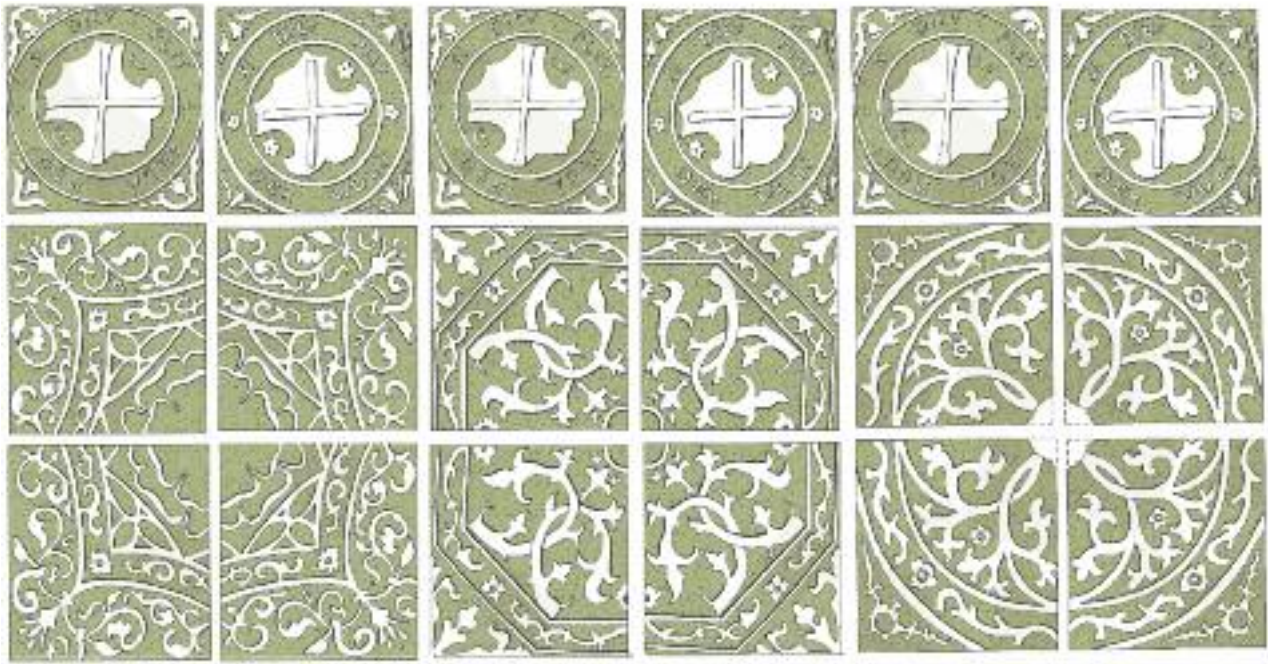


Fig. X.19 Relief tiles R51 and R52 (alternating at top), RN56 (bottom right), RN57 (bottom left) and RN58 (bottom centre) as they might have appeared on the floors in Bective Abbey

designs which are previously unrecorded but in their use of bird and animal motifs appear to have affinities with tiles in the Drogheda area. However, all the relief tiles are in the same fabric and it would appear were produced in the same kiln probably located at Bective.

As is often the case in excavations, the floor tile assemblage is fragmentary with the number of complete tiles counted in single figures. Fifty four per cent of the fragments are lacking the decorated surface and a further 12% are too degraded or small for the design to be identifiable. This is to be expected as none of the tiles were found *in situ* but scattered in derived contexts removed from their original location. The bulk of the assemblage occurred in contexts of post-Dissolution and post-medieval date. Some fragments of line-impressed tile occurred in medieval contexts e.g. Phase 02 barn (P11), Phase 03/04 (H10 post-barn, tower). The presumed location of the tiled floor would be the church where the small number of *in situ* tiled floors found in Ireland, e.g. Duiske Abbey, Kells Priory and St Thomas the Martyr have been recorded. The paved floor uncovered at the Dominican Priory, Drogheda, in 1950, seems not to have been in the church but in the west range of the cloister (Halpin and Buckley 1995, 192). The two types of tile at Bective, line-impressed and relief decorated, have periods of manufacture separated by at least a hundred years. Being of different sizes, they would have been laid in separate panels but it is not possible to say if they co-existed in the same floor or if one floor replaced the other.

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