

Shaftesbury Abbey Education Days

Medieval Clay Tiles



Activity Objectives:

- To observe and handle different clay floor tiles that have been excavated from the Shaftesbury Abbey site and discuss the materials used.
- To design and create a clay tile decorated with a medieval pattern.

Background:

Floors in the abbey were covered with clay tiles which were decorated with medieval designs, such as fleur-de-lys, geometric and floral patterns and then glazed. The more intricate and patterned tiles were placed in important places, such as near the altar. Some of the tiles found at the abbey are incredibly worn and are very likely to have been tiles that were originally placed near doorways or along an aisle that was frequently walked on.

Instructions:

1. Look at the tiles from the Shaftesbury Abbey museum. Handle these tiles and feel the weight and thickness of them. Discuss:
 - What do they think the tiles are made of? (clay)
 - Where does the clay come from (the ground/riverbeds)
 - What tiles do they have in their house - where are the tiles? Where do they think these tiles were put?
 - What designs and patterns can they see? (some designs are quatrefoil - where a pattern is placed in each corner of the tile so that when they are placed together it makes an ornamental design.)

2. Study the designs on the museum tiles. Use a square piece of paper to design a tile.
3. Flatten and press down a piece of clay with the palm of your hand. Roll out into a square shape to get a smooth, level surface but keep the clay thick. Place the square card template over the top of the clay and trim around the edges to get a square shape.

Put your initials on the bottom of the square clay tile!



4. Using the clay tools, scrape out your design onto the surface of the clay. Keep going over it until you have quite a deep channel but be careful not to go right through the clay.

5. Using white paint, paint inside the carved areas so that the pattern is white against the red clay.

6. Leave to dry on a board.

