

# Handmade Clay Plain Tiles including Peg Tiles Heritage Directory Note

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## Distribution

Handmade clay plain tiles have historically predominated in the South East, but also the Midlands, until the arrive of slate in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. They formed a significant proportion of historic roofing materials in Kent, Sussex, Surrey, Hampshire, Berkshire, Buckinghamshire, Bedfordshire, Hertfordshire, Essex, Warwickshire, Worcestershire, and Staffordshire but are also well represented in neighbouring Counties. York was also once a centre for production. In the South East they are orange red in colour, but mixed with yellow and buff tiles in Gault clay areas, particularly Cambridgeshire. In the Midlands the tiles are darker, due to the geological age of the Etruria Marl and higher temperature firing.



This Peg Tile is of a type historically used widely across the country and is larger than than the Kent Peg.

## History

The original form was a peg tile, developed in the 12<sup>th</sup> century, replacing shingles, thatch and slate. Previous to this, a large clay tile developed from the Roman tegula had been in use, but limited to churches and other prestige buildings. Fires in cities such as London and Canterbury resulted in regulations encouraging the use of tiles, such as those for London in 1212. Peg tiles were the universal form of plain tile till the 19<sup>th</sup> century, but have largely disappeared in the Midlands and are now only prevalent in the South East.

The peg was traditionally of timber, one peg being inserted in one of the two holes provided. They are still available today but metal pegs are more commonly used now. Most peg tiles measure around 265 by 160 mm, fairly much in line with the Statute of 1477. A half an inch smaller version is used in Kent, perhaps influenced by smaller tiles found in Normandy. Secondhand tiles can vary as much as inch in dimension.

By 1850, nib tiles were being used and were common by the 1880's. From the 1890's, machine made tiles had become popular, and tiles made in the Midlands were widely specified throughout the country. However the arts and crafts movement resulted in a revival of the use of the handmade tile, but generally with a nibbed back.

## Detail

A steep pitched roof, traditionally 48 degrees, but usually at least 45 degrees is used. Second hand tiles have historically have been used and it is important that when reroofing as many tiles are reused as possible, as they are important for showing local character and history due to variants in production. Too often tiles that have been used on a site for centuries are lost in reproofing. Cambered tiles, particularly across the face of the tile, give a roof much character. The use of riven lathes also add to the irregular and picturesque appearance.



(Above) Some of these second peg tiles show the camber which adds character to a roof

Bonnet tiles have traditionally been used on hips. Traditional third round or hogsback ridge tiles also sit closer to the roof than half round tiles. Sprockets provide a kick at the eaves and provided a means of disposing of water before guttering. In the early 20<sup>th</sup> century swept and laced valley gutters became popular on arts and crafts houses. Upturns to the ridge and eaves ends also were employed. Decorative tiles have existed since the twelfth century, with corners chamfered with a straight or curved line. Diamond cut tiles are also an old pattern. Tiles cut in half at verges are a traditional detail and visually are more suitable than the Victorian tile and a half, but need care to ensure they are securely fixed.



Bonnet tiles have been used for centuries for roof hips.





The decay of this clay tiles has revealed the added sprockets, which provide a kick at the eaves to direct water off a roof and away from the walls.

## Specifying or Repairing a Tile Roof

Repairs are needed where tiles, nails, pegs or lathes have failed. Frost damage may occur to tiles, pegs may rot and metal fixtures such as nails or aluminium pegs may corrode. Nailing tiles to the battens every few courses can help prevent theft.

In selecting new tiles, regard should be had to the geology of the clay as appearance and colour will vary with geological age, despite the use of colourants such as manganese. The source of the clay may be different from the location of the tiling and a number of tiles are being imported from abroad. Tiles should therefore be guaranteed and conform to BS EN Standards, such as frost and strength resistance. It is always worth seeing examples of work carried out, rather than just individual tiles, to ensure they are of an appropriate standard in terms of quality control, particularly in regard to shape, so that distorted tiles or seconds have been removed.

It should also be noted that a new type of tile, the “hand crafted” tile, are not “handmade” and are generally unacceptable to Conservations Officers for replacement of a handmade clay tile roof. It is vital therefore that you obtain consent in writing when considering using such tiles. Handcrafted is basically machine made with some handmade finishing and often have a flat and regular appearance. It also worthy noting that most handmade tiles are now made from blanks, which are then hand thrown into a mould, which in the past they were cut from lump clay. It is always best to see examples on a roof, as you cannot judge the overall impact of a tile or its character or irregularity, based on a single tile sample.



**A second hand peg tile roof in the South East, showing the variety and age of tiles which might occur including yellow gault tile.**



**A yellow gault clay tile, in use until recently broken, probably several hundred years old.**