This large tile was discovered during excavations at the Roman town at Silchester in the 1890s. It was probably part of a tile floor or wall of a large building. When the tile was being made and before the clay was fired, its surface was given finger marks and a dog walked across it.

Silchester: This tile was found during excavations at the Roman town at Silchester about 100 years ago. The site was occupied continuously from the 1st century BC through to the 5th century AD; Southern Britain became part of the Roman Empire in 43 AD. Silchester lies about 10 miles to the southwest of Reading. A visitor to the site today can enjoy a walk around the impressive ruins of the town wall and the amphitheatre.

Marks on the Tile: The circular marks on the tile were made by someone dragging three fingers across the surface. Marks like these are very common on Roman tiles, although the number of fingers used varies. Perhaps they were maker’s batch marks. Did a three finger mark mean thirty tiles had been made that day?

The footprints on the tile are those of a dog. It seems it walked across the tile while the clay was still soft, with its back paws over-printing the front paws in some places. How big was the dog? From the prints it seems it had paws smaller than that of a labrador, but bigger than that of a spaniel. Or was it a puppy? We know very little about which breeds of dog were favoured in the Roman period.

Animal footprints are very common on Roman tiles. This suggests that the tile makers were often located next to farm yards and that the tiles were left out to dry on the ground before firing. Where footprints and finger marks appeared together, the finger marks were invariably printed first. This shows that the finger marks were made before the tiles were left out to dry.