

SMR PRN: 15046.

ROMVIL_2.001

1.12.01

Bridgwater & District Archaeological Society

A ROMANO-BRITISH VILLA FOUND AT STAWELL

Bridgwater & District Archaeological Society

A ROMANO-BRITISH VILLA FOUND AT STAWELL

INTRODUCTION

Previous Work in 2000

Figure 1 shows the general location of the site which lies in a field to the east of Stawell, at National Grid Reference ST 370380.

In the course of some 12 days in August 2000, by the courtesy of the landowner Mr Richard Graham, some members of the Bridgwater and District Archaeological Society had investigated a bank-and-ditch enclosure in Field No. 4531 lying to the east of Stawell and had found pottery sherds including *terra sigillata* (Samian ware) and Oxford ware. Subsequently, in the same field and in land a little to the north, three trenches had been opened. One had disclosed a paved area, another a cobbled area: the third had disclosed remains of a Romano-British building having had stone roof-tiles and a concrete floor that had been divided into two portions by a plastered and frescoed partition. A quantity of pottery was also found.

There was no doubt that a Romano-British building had been located and it was tentatively dated C2 - C4, although from the evidence then available it could not positively be identified as a *villa*.¹

A Note on this excavation was published in the Society's Annual NewsLetter, Autumn 2000; and a full Report (2000) was prepared and lodged in the Somerset County Sites and Monuments Record,² County Hall, Taunton.

Initial Work in 2001

Figure 2 shows the course of overhead electricity lines suspended between poles AA, BB, CC in Field No. 4531. At the end of July 2001 a soil resistivity survey was made around Pole BB. The east side of Pole BB, situated at N.G.R. ST 37380 38345 and at 17.25m O.D., was adopted as Site Reference Point; and the line AA-CC was adopted as the Site Baseline. Centred on pole BB and aligned with this baseline, a 60-metre square area of the field was subjected to four contiguous geophysical surveys of soil resistivity. The resultant survey shade-plots were labelled S, T, L and M respectively (see Fig. 2). Copies of the shade-plots are included in Appendix I of this Report.

Although it was known in advance that this area had formerly been a fruit orchard and that the ground contained land-drains, the survey indicated the positions of some of these drains and also showed areas containing sub-surface spreads of stone: however, it did not immediately indicate any stone alignments that might have suggested the presence of former walls of a building.

As a check on the interpretation of these surveys, Trench 10 was opened in a metre-square area located on survey Plot T at coordinates (15, 29) in expectation of encountering a land-drain. A post-medieval clay land-drain was found, embedded in cinders and clinker, thereby confirming that interpretation: a photograph was taken before backfilling the trench. Trench 10 was outside the area covered by the General Plan of Trenches (see Fig. 3).

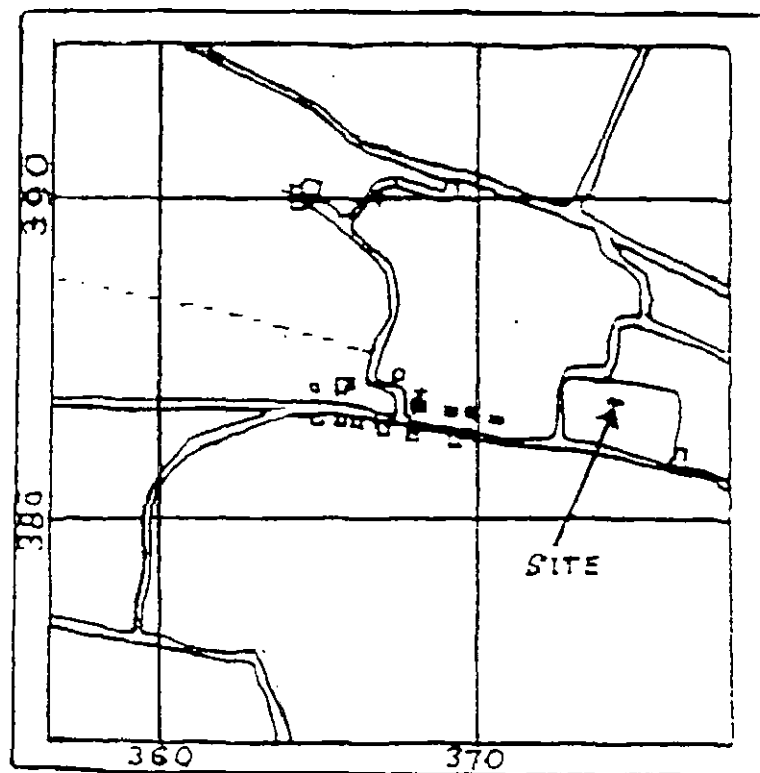
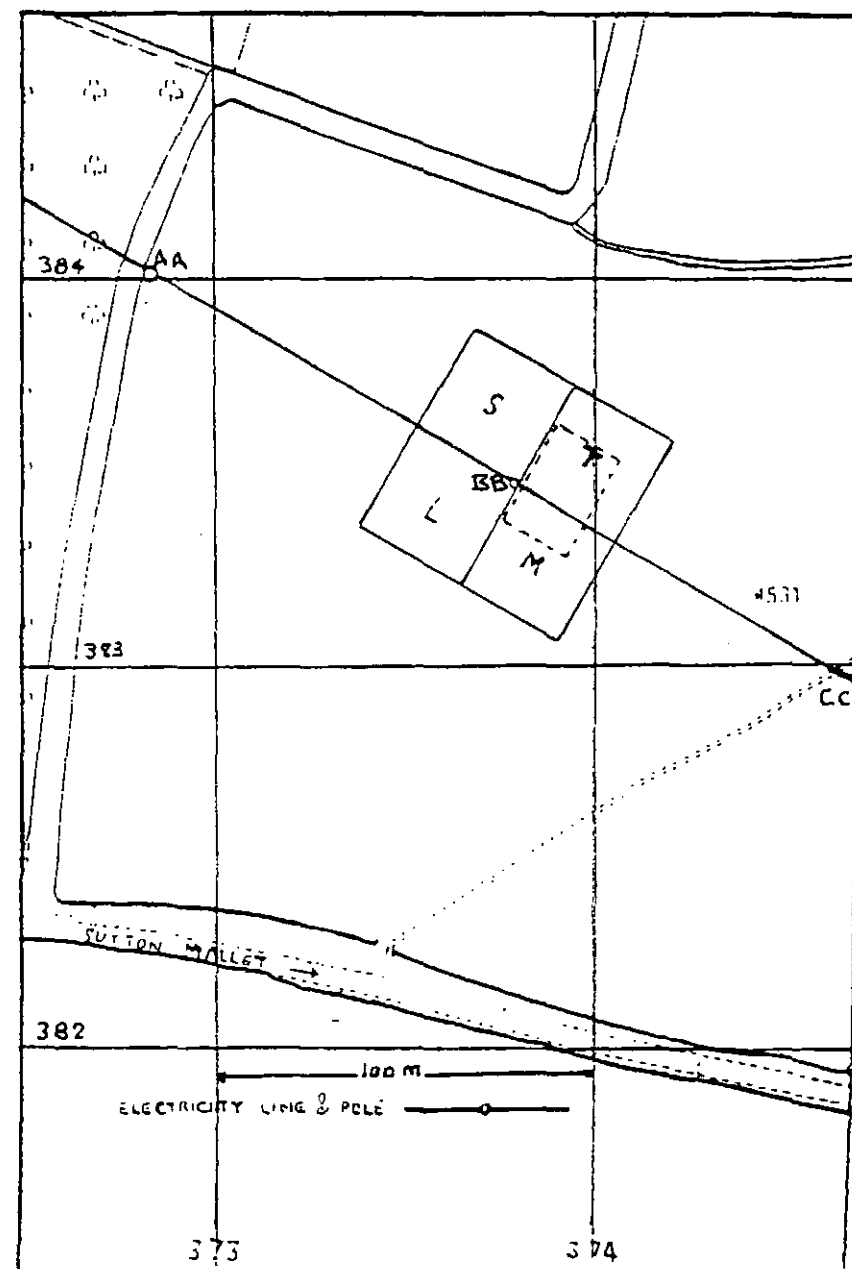


Fig. 1 (*above*) General location of Romano-British villa at Stawell, Somerset.

Fig. 2 (*right*) Location on the National Grid of four geophysical surveys relative to existing overhead electricity lines in Field No. 4531, with area of subsequent (2001) investigations shown dotted.



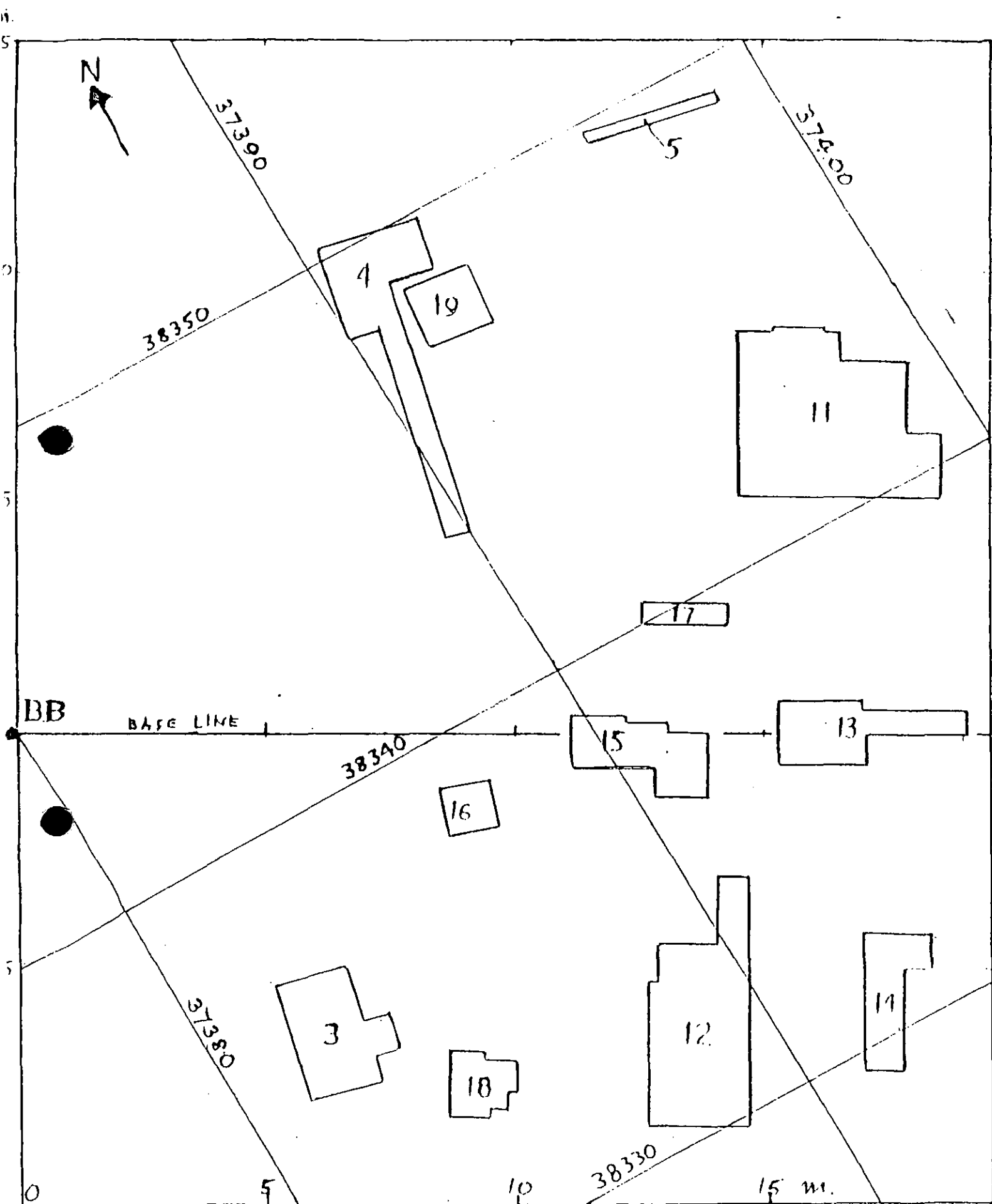


Fig. 3. General Plan of all trenches within dotted area (Fig. 2.) relative to the ten-metre National Grid.

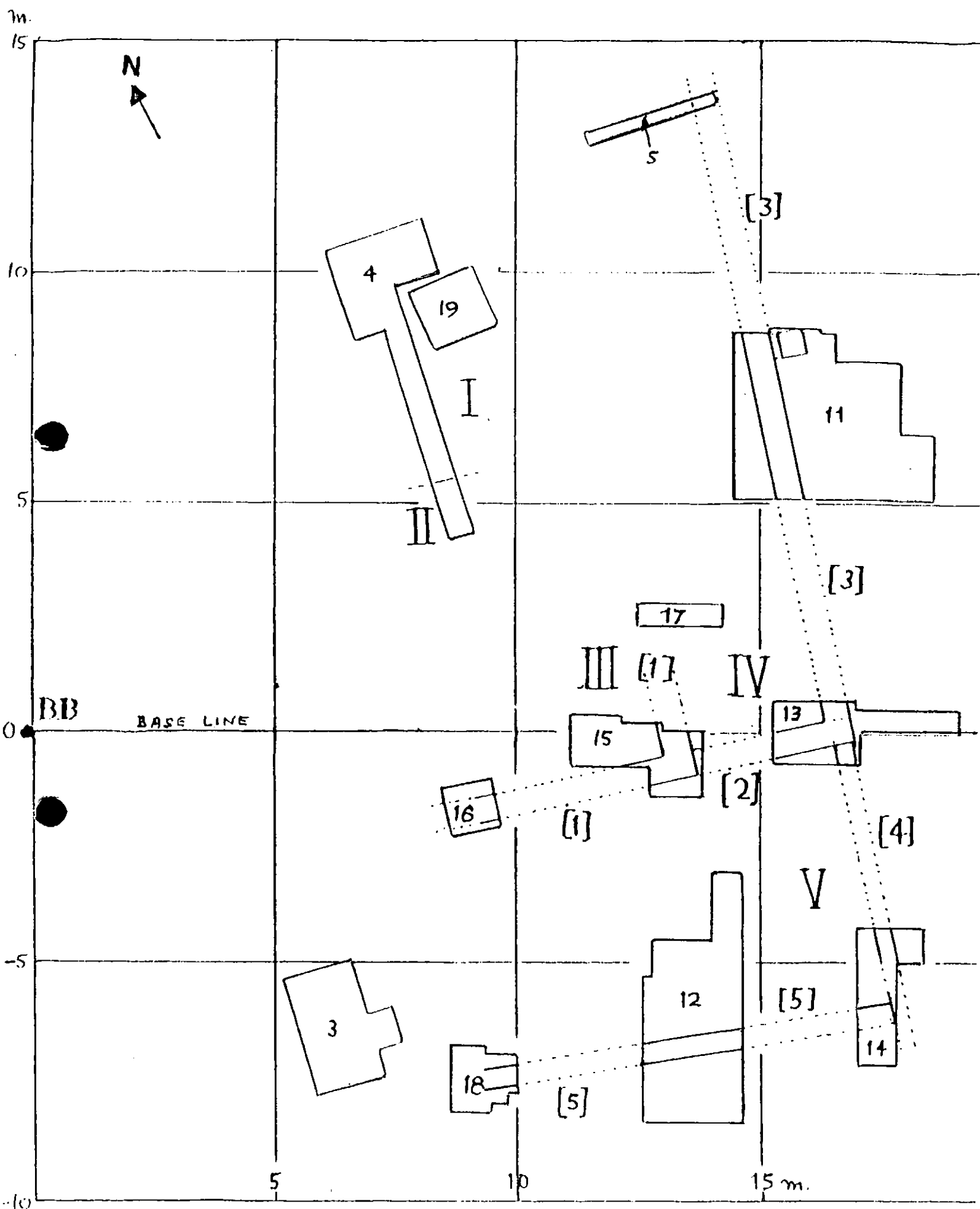


Fig. 4. Tentative Plan - Southeast. A plan of the southeastern portion of a building. Trenches are numbered 11 to 19 (dug 2001) and 3, 4 and 5 (dug 2000). Rooms (tentative) are numbered I to V. Walls are numbered [1] to [5].

General Plan of Trenches and their locations on the National Grid

Figure 3 is a plan of all trenches opened in Field 4531 except Trenches 1 and 2 (dug in 2000) which lie south of the planned area and Trench 10 (dug in 2001) which lies to the north. This plan is based upon the National Grid at ten-metre intervals. Each trench is individually outlined and numbered and all lie either within the lower portion of survey plot T or within the upper portion of survey plot M, as indicated by the dotted area outlined in Fig. 2.

Detailed archaeological reports on each of these Trenches are given in Appendix II of this Report. A curtailed system of excavation by trenching was necessary to meet time restraints imposed by the requirements of agriculture.

SUMMARY

Tentative Plan of Building - (Southeast region).

Figure 4 is a Plan showing what appears to be only the southeastern part of the main building. The Plan covers the same area as that shown in Figure 3, but it is based upon a 5-metre grid aligned on the local Site Baseline and Site Reference Point BB used in the geophysical survey (Appendix I). The Plan purports to show how the main features discovered in the Trenches are linked one to another.

Trench 4 in the Plan (Fig. 4) was excavated in the previous year (August, 2000): it had disclosed a concrete floor divided into two rooms by a thin plastered and frescoed partition. These two rooms are shown in the Plan and have been arbitrarily designated Rooms I and II.

The various Trenches opened this season (2001) have disclosed a series of walls which had been built in succession. This season, the earliest wall disclosed runs both northwards and westwards from its corner in Trench 15. These two arms of the wall have each been labelled [1]: they form the southeastern corner of a room having a concrete floor lying to the northwest which is here labelled Room III. Near this corner of this room was found a broken section of an *imbrex* (a half-round clay roofing-tile)³ and also the remains of a sack of plaster resting on some broken stone roofing-tiles. Butting onto the obtuse angle of Wall [1] and running eastwards therefrom is a wall of later construction, here labelled [2], which may be traced eastwards to Trench 13.

In Trench 13, three walls form a T-junction. Wall [2] forms the western arm of the T-junction and it is not clear whether it turns northwards at this point or whether a later (rebuilt or new) wall formed the northern arm: under these circumstances the northern arm of the wall has been labelled [3]. These two walls form the southeastern corner of a room having a concrete floor and built later than Room III and here labelled Room IV. Abutting on the corner of Walls [2] and [3] and running southwards is a still later wall labelled [4]. It may be that this wall, together with Wall [2], form the northeastern corner of a Room V, but this has not been ascertained. Wall [4] may be traced southwards to Trench 14.

In Trench 14, Wall [4] appears to have continued southwards to, or beyond, the point where a yet later wall, here labelled [5], abutted against its western face. The considerable, if not strong, possibility that a southern wall to the postulated Room V existed between Trenches 13 and 14 has not been investigated. Pending such investigation, it will be assumed that Room V extended southwards into Trench 14, where Wall [5] may have formed the southern wall of this room. Wall [5] may be traced westwards to Trench 12 and thence to Trench 18.

In Trench 12, Wall [5] was seen (from the short section exposed) to have been of herring-bone construction,⁴ a form of walling quickly built with a minimum of mortar (or none at all) and of a quality adequate for lean-to additions to existing buildings and for out-buildings generally: however, that this wall was not a main wall of the building is not conclusive. Furthermore, herring-bone construction is well suited to repair of holes in traditional styles of walling, so the

section of Wall [5] exposed in Trench 12 may represent only a repaired section. Trench 12 also revealed a furnace situated immediately north of Wall [5]: north of this again were remnants of what appeared to have been a squatter's hearth, with portions of broken pots still on the ashes. This hearth lay on detritus over a badly worn concrete floor. Still further north, a large number of stone roofing-tiles⁵ were found. Until further investigations are made, it cannot be ascertained whether this floor lay in the postulated Room V. What may be the damaged west end of Wall [5] was found in Trench 18.

Trench 11 revealed an extended area of paving which has been identified as part of the main southeast-facing entrance⁶ to the building: remains of part of the lime-mortared east wall of this building are seen in the west side of the trench. This wall has been labelled [3] because it is aligned with Wall [3] in Trench 13 and is of similar construction. It is also aligned with remains in Trench 5 which had been tentatively ascribed to remnants of a wall (see Report in August, 2000).⁷

An exceptionally large floor-slab immediately in front of the entrance is covering a conduit for waste water and is presumably acting as a drip-trench for rainwater from the roofs of the building. A stone step (not found, ?robbed) may be envisaged at the threshold of the entrance doorway.

To the east of the porch and entrance slab, the paved area consisted of seven or eight rectangular lias slabs, similar to the two rectangular slabs found in Trench 4 (reported in Autumn 2000), beyond which was an area of hard-standing made of two-to-three inches of stone chippings in a limey clay marl.

On tracing Wall [3] of the building and its drip-trench towards the south, both were again encountered in Trench 13 *q.v.*, where the wall is again identified as Wall [3].

Table I below summarises the levels and dimensions of some of the main features disclosed by the excavations.

TABLE I

Trench No.	11	12	13	14	15	16	18
<i>Levels are in metres O.D.</i>							
Ground level	17.46-17.49	17.52-17.57	17.57	17.58	17.49	17.47	17.49
Top of Floor	17.05-17.07	17.00	16.88	Nil	16.94	-	-
Top of Plinth	16.98	16.84	16.88	Nil	16.89	16.88	-
Natural	-	-	16.80	?	16.68 [†]	? [†]	?
Top of Wall	-	-	-	-	-	17.10	-
Fluvial Mud	-	-	-	-	-	-	16.64
<i>Widths are in inches</i>							
Wall [1]	-	-	-	-	21"	21"	-
Plinth [1]	-	-	-	-	27"	27"	-
Wall [2]	-	-	22"	-	22"	-	-
Plinth [2]	-	-	26"	-	26"	-	-
Wall [3]	25"	-	23"	-	-	-	-
Plinth [3]	29"	-	29"	-	-	-	-
Wall [4]	-	-	24"	?	-	-	-
Plinth [4]	-	-	Nil	Nil	-	-	-

NOTE † = base of a previous occupation.

CONCLUSIONS

Succession and Quality of Walls. From the above descriptions of the various walls found, it will be seen that a number of butt-joints suggest that successive extensions have been made to an earlier core building. It was noted that the walls labelled [1] to [5] became progressively of poorer quality, not only using poorer materials and poorer bonding but also showing less concern with coarsing; wall thickness was not a criterion of quality. These qualities suggest that there was a considerable interval of time between the construction of each of the separate walls. Wall [1] was a well-built lime-mortared wall of coursed stone set on a two-course plinth, its rubble filling also being cemented in place. Only a small sample was seen of Wall [2]. Compared with Wall [1], Wall [3] was less well bonded and was built with irregularly sized stones upon a rough single-course plinth. Wall [4] seems to have been almost entirely a dry-stone wall made of large uncoarsed blocks of rubble and with no plinth. The short section of Wall [5] was built with a minimum of mortar and in herring-bone style, possibly utilising local waste, although it appeared to be well founded adjacent to the furnace.

Features of the Buildings. Numbers have been allocated to Rooms in an arbitrary way: Rooms I and II did not necessarily precede Rooms III, IV and V. On consideration of the butt-joints in walls forming rooms in the latter group, it is seen that they suggest that three Rooms were constructed in succession. On the addition of Room IV to Room III it appears that the building was being developed into a corridor-type *villa*, with an entrance midway along its eastern side. The presence of a square base or plinth alongside the paved (flagged) entrance suggests the former presence here of a pillar or column supporting a portico: it is not known whether the corridor had been developed from a former colonnade, nor whether some pillars from an earlier colonnade were re-used in the portico.

From the evidence in Trench 5 suggesting the site of Wall [3], together with the hypothesis that the entrance was a central feature of the *villa* frontage, it may be concluded that the corridor (Room IV) was at least 14 metres (46ft) long (excluding Room V and any equivalent room to the north). Likewise, evidence of concrete floors and painted plaster walls in Trench 4 and Trench 19, supported by the extent of Wall [5], suggests that the *villa* was at least 9 metres (say 30ft) wide from east to west. Thus the details of rooms lying to the north and to the west of the present ones are entirely unknown; and even those in the southeastern part of the building have been only sketchily described. It is thus too early to form a reasonable estimate of the greatest overall size of the building in terms of the number of rooms.

No hypocaust or other evidence of a heated room has yet been found. Nevertheless, the present excavations have disclosed a furnace, used possibly to supply hot water from a leaden tank, rather than to heat a room, although other uses of the furnace are not ruled out. No bath has been located, but a waste water conduit was found. A great many pieces of lead were found above floor level during the course of the excavations.

One or more heated rooms may lie outside the presently investigated southeastern corner. No *tesserae* have been found, but this is not unusual; the General Plan - Fig. 3 - shows areas not examined that may contain a tessellated pavement. No interior paving of any kind other than concrete has as yet been found and no *opus signinum* has been recognized on the site.

Period of Occupation. Evidence from the Trenches indicates that these Romano-British buildings were situated on a previous Late Iron Age occupation site: in this connection, it is noted that the area is known locally as 'Blacklands', a significant name. Close on the south side of the buildings was a rectangular bank-and-ditch enclosure. Little pottery or other dateable material has been found in the RB buildings, but this is probably because the Society's policy of causing a minimum of damage to archaeological remains has been vigorously applied and many sealed

deposits remain within the backfilled trenches. There appeared to be no footings beneath the wall-plinths, but this information was based solely on none being detected by use of a probing iron.

The discovery of the remains of a sack of wall plaster in Room III suggests that this room had been abandoned as a habitable room in favour of the more up-to-date rooms west of the new grand southeastern entrance. Elsewhere in the remains of the building, what appears to have been a squatter's hearth was found on top of detritus littering the floor: the dating of the broken pottery in use on the fire (A. D. 300-350) suggests that a terminal date between the early and mid-fourth century may be ascribed to the buildings. This is supported by the find (in 2000) of Oxford colour-coated ware (A. D. 325-400) in the ditched enclosure to the south.

Thus, it appears that there was altogether a long period of continuous occupation, starting perhaps in the Late Iron Age, when British (Celtic) 'farmers' were working the high-quality land in the region of Blacklands. This occupation extended into the Romano-British period when their successors benefited from the general increases in the rural economy under the Roman occupation: they were soon able to replace wattle-and-daub buildings by substantial stone ones. Living standards had risen and there was a greater demand for their arable products in the local market at *Ischalis* (Ilchester) and soon they were able to increase the size and grandeur of their 'villa'. Unfortunately, this period of prosperity did not last and there was a general decline in the economy and standards in the third century. This led, ultimately, to an inability to maintain the buildings: the older parts were, perforce, abandoned or used as workshops until, at some time in the fourth century, the whole of the old house was abandoned.

A ROMANO-BRITISH VILLA FOUND AT STAWELL

APPENDIX I

Geophysical Survey

A survey area was set out on the ground on 24 July 2001. It was initially located by reference to overhead electricity supply lines which are carried across this field by poles AA, BB, CC *etc.* (see Fig. 2). This line AA-BB-CC was adopted as the Site Base Line and a point at ground level in contact with the eastern side of pole BB was adopted as the Site Reference Point. This point was situated at National Grid Reference ST 37380 38345 and was at 17.25m O.D. Some incised markings on the pole were identified as "11.F.51" above a horizontal incised line, the latter being 1.25m above Site Datum level.

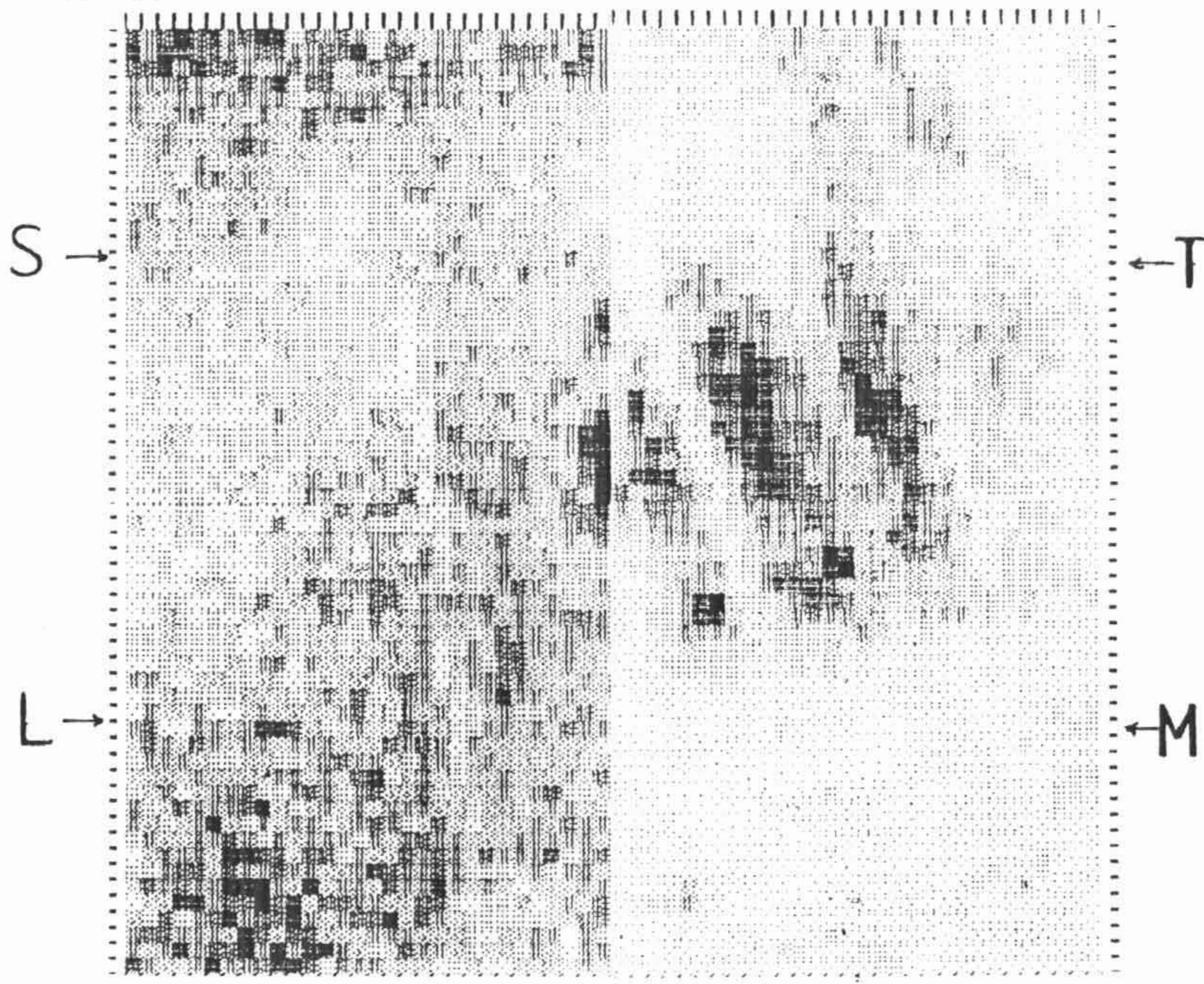
Centred on pole BB and aligned with the electric line, a 60-metre-square area of the field was subjected to four contiguous and square geophysical (soil-resistivity) surveys^a labelled S, T, L and M respectively (Fig. 2). All four plots showed anomalies: linear wet areas were recognised as the possible locations of land drains; many irregular dry areas were indicated and many of these were found, by probing, to consist of spreads of stone just below plough depth.

These features were confirmed in a trench (Trench 10)⁹ which was located at coordinates (15, 29) on survey plot T on 30 July. Trench 10 was rectangular, 1.5m x 1.2m, and it revealed a spread of lias rubble blocks at 0.3m depth, with a later-disturbed area to the northwest: further excavation of a small (0.7m) square extension of the trench towards the northwest disclosed a bed of post-mediaeval cinders and clinker at 0.45m in which was embedded a post-mediaeval clay land-drain. The site was recorded (photo) and the trench was then backfilled. Note that Trench 10 was outside the area covered by the General Plan of Trenches (Fig. 3).

A photocopy of the four soil resistivity plots, S, T, L and M accompanies this Appendix. Note that in this photocopy, dark areas were dry, light areas were wet. Surveys S and L were undertaken under adverse soil and weather conditions: nevertheless they both reveal clearly the course of a land-drain running NNE towards the ditch to the north. Plots T and M reveal a large spread of stone intersected by a number of lightly shaded rows which represent the courses of other land-drains. There are also traces which may represent the courses of two parallel land-drains running across plots S and T in an almost west-to-east direction.

Orientation
NORTH

Scale: metres



A ROMANO-BRITISH VILLA FOUND AT STAWELL

APPENDIX II

Excavation Reports

NOTE - To aid in the identification of the various walls described below, the numbers allocated to them in Fig. 4 (The Tentative Plan - Southeast) - e.g. [3], have been included within each Report. The spot heights in the Figures are given in centimetres relative to the Site Reference Point (17.25m O.D.). Owing to the care taken not to unnecessarily destroy wall footings and floors etc and because of the small areas covered by the trenches, few artefacts were encountered: those found are mentioned in the text that follows.

Trench 5 (see Fig. 4).

Trench 5 was opened during the 2000 season. A level floor composed of small lias chippings in a limey marl was found; at its east end had been found a tumble of blocks of lias rubble which had been tentatively described as remnants of a wall.¹⁰ Figure 4 shows that these remnants now appear to align with Wall [3] (see Trenches 11 and 13).

Trench 11 (see Fig. 5).

The location of Trench 11 was initially determined by a study of Plot T of the resistivity survey. Trench 11 covers approximately twelve square metres centred on coordinates T (16, 07) and it was excavated by Colin Tarrant and Hamish Ramsay. Local ground level is 17.46m O.D. at the northern end and 17.49m O.D. at the southern end of the trench.

At a depth of *circa* 0.43m below ground (at *circa* 17.06m O.D.) a very large and almost rectangular lias slab was found: its dimensions are 2.18m x 0.61-0.64m (85½" x *circa* 24½") and about 0.06m (2½") thick.¹¹ A piece is missing from its southern end - it could not be found. The larger diagonal is 2.35m. (7 8½"). This slab is set almost horizontally in the ground (north end upper face at 17.05m O.D., south end upper face at 17.07m O.D.). It served to cover a conduit and to provide an area of hardstanding immediately outside a main doorway into the building lying to the west.

The remnants of a wall [3] of this building were found immediately to the west of the slab. Only one course of this lime-mortared lias rubble wall is left: it is set upon a plinth of similar material 0.78m (29") wide. The wall itself is 0.64m (25") wide, leaving a 0.075m (3") step-plinth below its east face and 0.025m (1") step-plinth below its west face, both seen adjacent to the south end of the slab.

The area of hardstanding provided by the large slab is extended eastwards some 1.5m by seven or eight lias slabs, most about 0.94m x 0.40m (37" x 16") and by a strip of narrower slabs tapering from 0.18m in south to 0.16m in north. South of this paved area, two rectangular niches 0.02m (8") wide are evident. To the east of the paved area is a further hardstanding, composed of some 65mm (2½") depth of stone chippings in a limey clay marl.

Beneath the large slab is a conduit, draining northwards, its invert set at 16.72m O.D. at the north, 16.86m O.D. at the south: here at the south, the small step-plinth on the east side of the wall was at 16.89m O.D. To the north of the large slab, the alignment of the conduit shifts slightly eastwards before continuing northwards. Lying over the conduit a bridging-stone was found: it remains *in situ*. To the east of this portion of conduit is a square base, possibly the plinth of a short return wall bridging the conduit, or the base of a formal pillar forming part of a portico. Thus, this bridging-stone may have been simply a conduit cover stone (as found in Trench 13) or it may have been part of a bridge in a return wall. In either case, it appears to be part of the north wing of a formal entrance portico: unfortunately, time did not permit a search for



Fig. 5. Trench 11. A grand southeastern entrance to the Villa.

a corresponding south wing.

It has been suggested that the two rectangular niches to the south of the paved area may have been the former sites of timber uprights that had supported a canopy of some kind. However, post-holes have not been reported.

The items described above in the present tense remain *in situ*. The site was protected by a permeable sheet before backfilling.

Artefacts: 1 bodysherd, grey fabric, colour-coated red/brown int. and ext.; 3 small BB bodysherds; 1 small pce glass vessel, unstrat.; 5 pcs lead; 1 iron stay c. 40mm x 20mm o/a, (? cyl. rod or twisted flat strip, flattened to square end and perforated c. 5mm hole through flat); 4 iron nails c. 45mm; 2 iron nails c. 28mm x 3mm, bent and broken; 1 iron spike (bent) c. 110mm x 10mm square section, tapering; 2 small pcs. light scoria or part-burnt tufa; 1 piece cement or concrete, gritty 5-layered fabric, smoothed surfaces.

Trench 12 (see Fig. 6).

Trench 12 was initially located by reference to Plot M of the resistivity survey. Ground level was 17.57m O.D. at the east side of the trench and 17.52m O.D. at the west side. The trench was opened by Stephanie and John Franklin. Remnants were found of the lower two/three courses of a stone wall [5] built with a minimum of mortar in a herring-bone style. The highest part of its remains in this trench were at 17.32m O.D., but remains of some of its upper courses, still retaining some of their herring-bone pattern, were found lying alongside to the south.

Centred some 1.5m (60") to the north of the wall and at a level higher than expected (est. 17.10m O.D.), was a small reddened area buried beneath fallen roof tiles and containing clear remains of a little hearth. Resting on the ashes were 55 sherds in two distinct groups (43 and 12 sherds) and a small piece of lead (see Fig. 7). All the sherds were lifted and re-assembled by John Franklin, but they formed only portions of the two vessels. A thorough search was made in the vicinity for the missing sherds, but none was found.

The sherds of base, body and rim retrieved from one group enabled the size and shape of an original undamaged vessel to be established (see Fig. 8): its height is 235mm, base-diameter 90mm and rim-diameter 200mm, and around its greatest circumference (dia. *circa* 190mm) it has a 45mm-wide band of depressed lattice decoration, the upper edge of which is delineated by a burnished groove. The fabric has a hard, gritty texture and an mainly orange colour. It has been identified (S. Minnit) as a piece of incorrectly fired Black Burnished Ware, WA Type 3 - (a development of Type 2 jars - date range late 3rd century onwards).¹²

The twelve sherds that remained of the second group were similar in colour and texture to those of the first, but the fabric was more substantial, the rim more everted and there appeared to be more uniformity within the lattice design. The rim diameter is estimated to have been about 200mm, but shape and form of the original vessel could not be estimated from the limited number of sherds retrieved.

Below and a little to the east and north of this hearth were small deposits of carbon and a thin scatter of charcoal lying on and in a layer of detritus covering the remains of a floor. The high level of the little hearth relative to the general floor level at 17.01m O.D. and the disposition of these broken vessels, apparently smashed by a fallen roof-slate while (or possibly shortly after) being used in the centre of the hearth, is of particular note: this, and the presence also of the small quantity of lead may suggest that metal-working was taking place on what appears to be a squatter's hearth within the ruined building, waste lead being melted in bits of broken pot and fashioned into small artefacts.

Excavation was continued in the north of the trench, where a large number of stone roofing tiles two, three or even four layers deep were found. Beneath was a thin layer of detritus resting upon the remains of a much-worn concrete floor at 17.01m O.D. This floor was almost totally

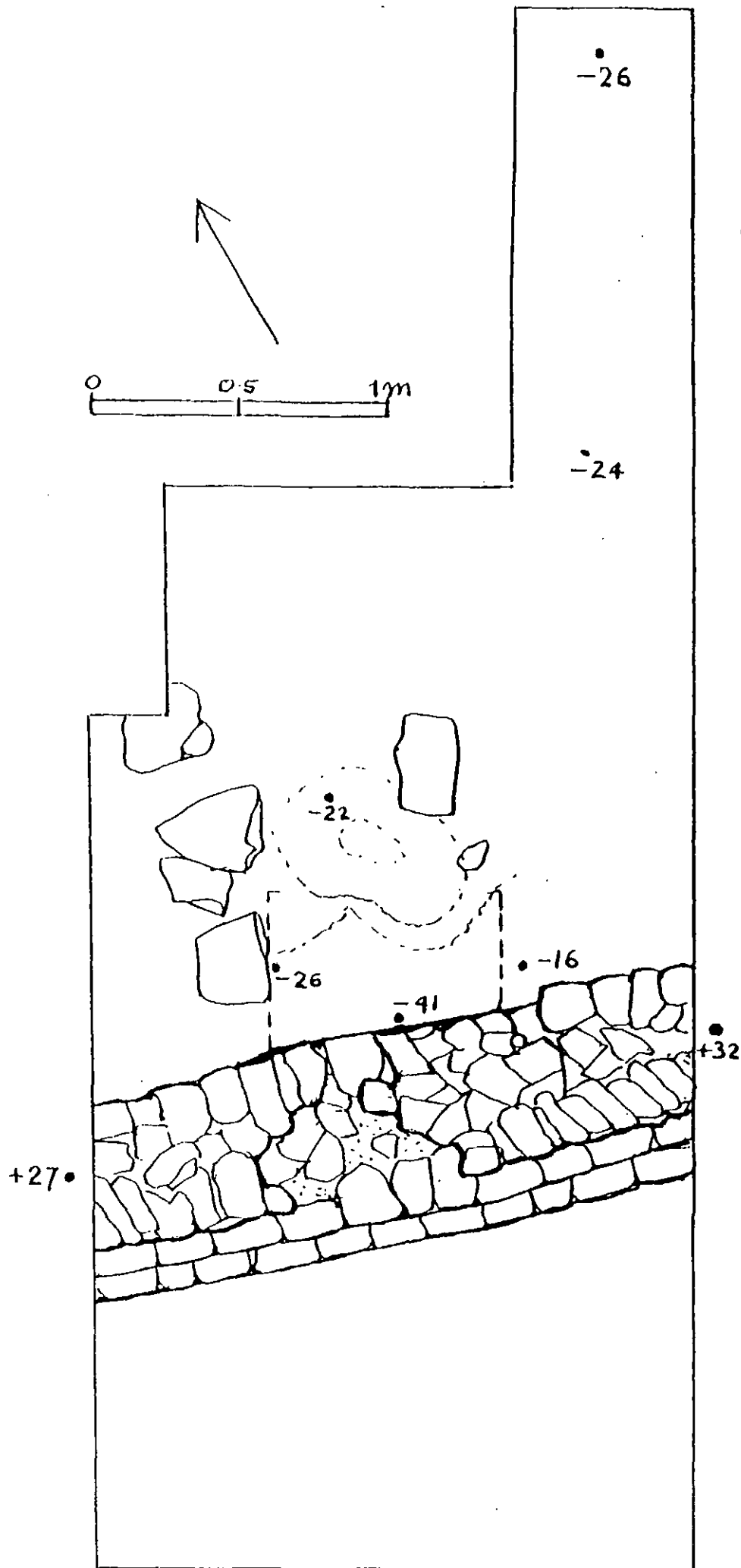


Fig. 6. Trench 12 A furnace room, possibly in a lean-to building.

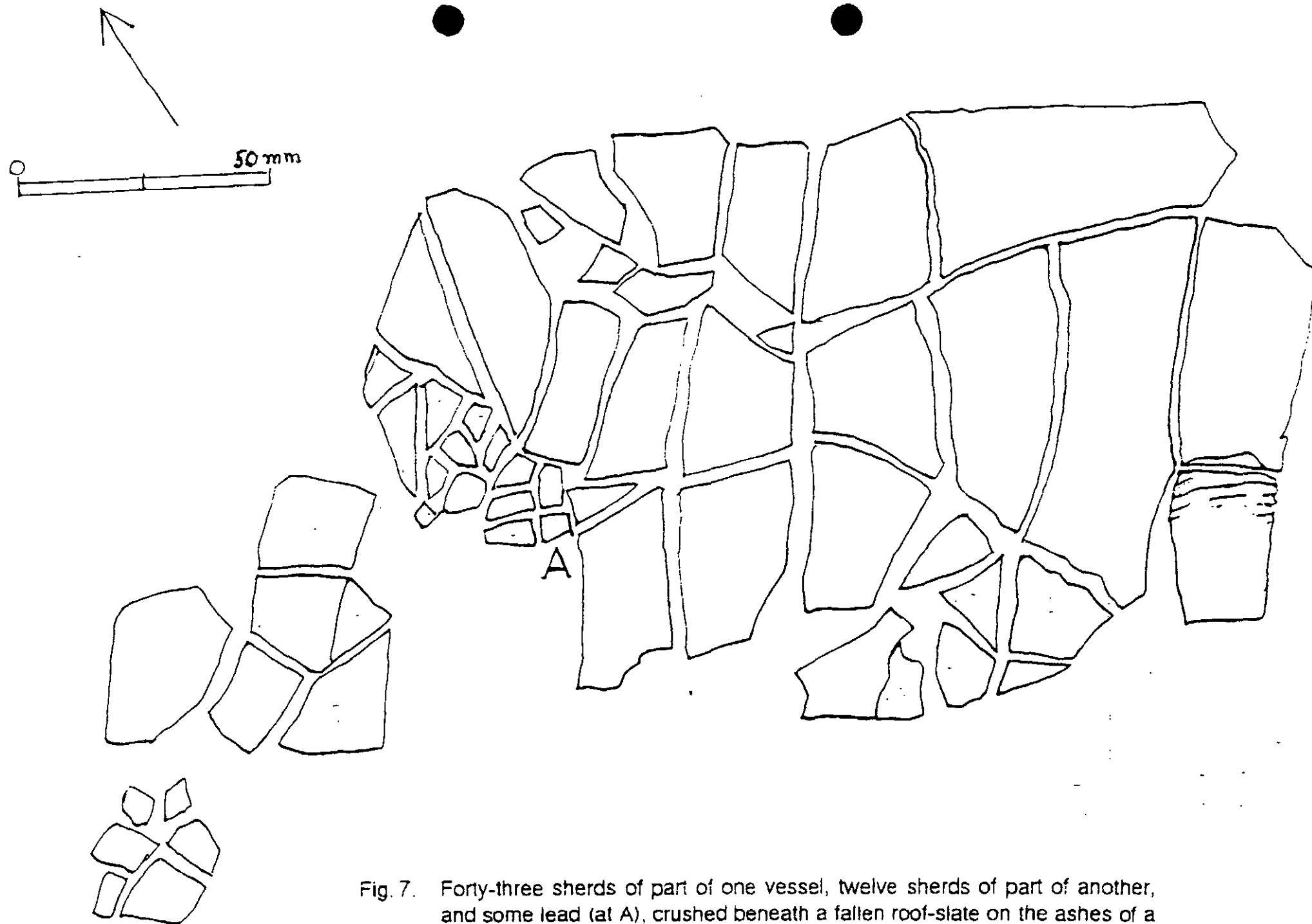


Fig. 7. Forty-three sherds of part of one vessel, twelve sherds of part of another, and some lead (at A), crushed beneath a fallen roof-slate on the ashes of a hearth (possibly a squatter's hearth).

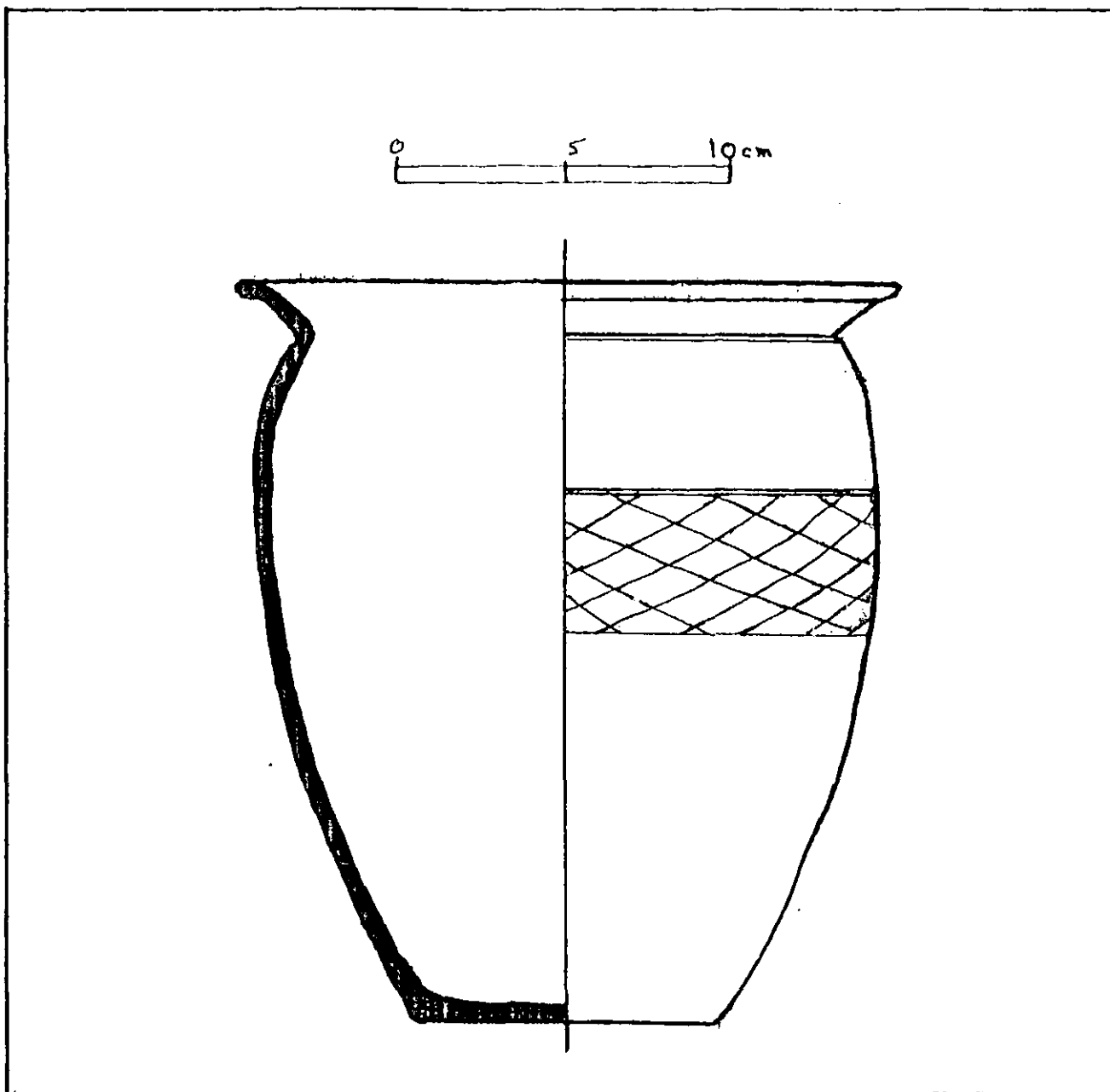


Fig. 8. Type of Coarse Ware vessel (a strongly oxidised Black Burnished ware jar of A. D. 300-350, WA type 299) from part of which the 43 sherds (Fig. 7) were derived .

worn away towards the south of the trench, where hardly a vestige of it was left.

Centred *circa* 0.75m (30") north of the wall and at *circa* 17.03m O.D. (i.e. at or near floor level) was an area of reddened ground, part of which extended southwards so as to be in contact with the lower courses of the wall. To the west lay one large sandstone block and many small pieces of sandstone, while to the north at 16.99m O.D. were two large lias blocks situated as if they had formed the entrance to a flue: there was no soot. This assemblage indicated the remains of a furnace, purpose unknown: no hypocaust had been located. Samples of material were taken from the buff-coloured seat of the fire and from its reddened immediate surrounds and these have been sent for analysis.

In accordance with the Society's policy of avoiding damage to archaeological features requiring specialist analyses, further investigation of the furnace site was limited to the exposure of a short length (0.75m) of the adjacent wall to its full depth, seeking signs of burning on the wall-stones and/or a base or hearth-stone (Fig. 9). It was seen that, over this particular length, the herring-bone wall was founded upon a single course of three lias blocks having rectangular vertical faces approximately 0.10m (4") thick and 0.24m (9½") long: they formed an un-stepped plinth based at 16.84m O.D. Details are seen in photographic records.

Attention now turned to the south side of the herring-bone-style wall [5] opposite the reddened area: stones from the portion of the wall that had fallen southwards were removed in order to gain access to the base of the standing wall. No sign of burning or reddening was found, either on its south face or at its base. However, it was found that the wall was unsymmetrical in section, having a two-step plinth of approximately 0.05m (2") thick slabs on its south side. It was concluded that the construction of the wall had preceded or, more likely, was contemporary with the furnace site to the north. The site was protected by a permeable sheet before being backfilled.

Artefacts: 2 vessels (parts only - desc. above); 2 samples of furnace ash, (sent for analysis -R. Brunning); 3 pieces daub, 1 with wattle impression, unstratified; 6 pcs lead; 1 drip of white wall-plaster; 1 small upper-body sherd, ?Samian, undecorated; 1 small bodysherd, BB ware; 4 bodysherds, coarse redware, (1 small, 1 medium); 6 iron nails c. 40mm, 1 c. 30 mm; 1 iron strip c. 70 mm x 10mm x 3mm; 1 large heavy iron ?bracket, c. 90mm x 70mm x 30mm, unstratified; oyster shell (part); various small pieces tufa.

Trench 13 (see Fig. 10).

This trench was opened by Colin Tarrant. It covered approximately 2½ square metres, excluding an eastwards extension: the latter was not fully excavated in the time available. The ground level was 17.57m O.D. Excavation disclosed the lime-mortared remains of walls forming the south-eastern corner of a room (Room IV) having fallen stone roofing tiles on a concrete floor at 16.88m O.D. The floor was 0.08m (3") thick, but apparently of a poorer quality than that in Room III. The natural was encountered immediately under the floor at 16.80m O.D. No evidence was found of rendering or plaster on the walls, nor of any plinth at the base of the southern wall of Room IV.

The northern and western arms form a junction which is clearly not a butt-joint: on the other hand, it is not clear that the two arms are contemporary (see photograph); also, the base of the western arm is founded at a greater depth than its northern neighbour, so it is quite feasible that the north arm was built later. Under these circumstances the western arm has been labelled [2] and the northern arm is [3], although it is recognized that later research may show them to be contemporary.

Only one course remains of the northern arm [3] of this lime-mortared lias rubble wall: it is set upon a plinth 0.78m (29") wide. The wall itself appears to be 0.58m (23") wide, leaving a 0.10m (4") wide step-plinth below its west face and 0.050m (2") step-plinth below its east face, the latter being concealed by cover-stones *circa* 0.6m (23-24") wide, associated with a conduit

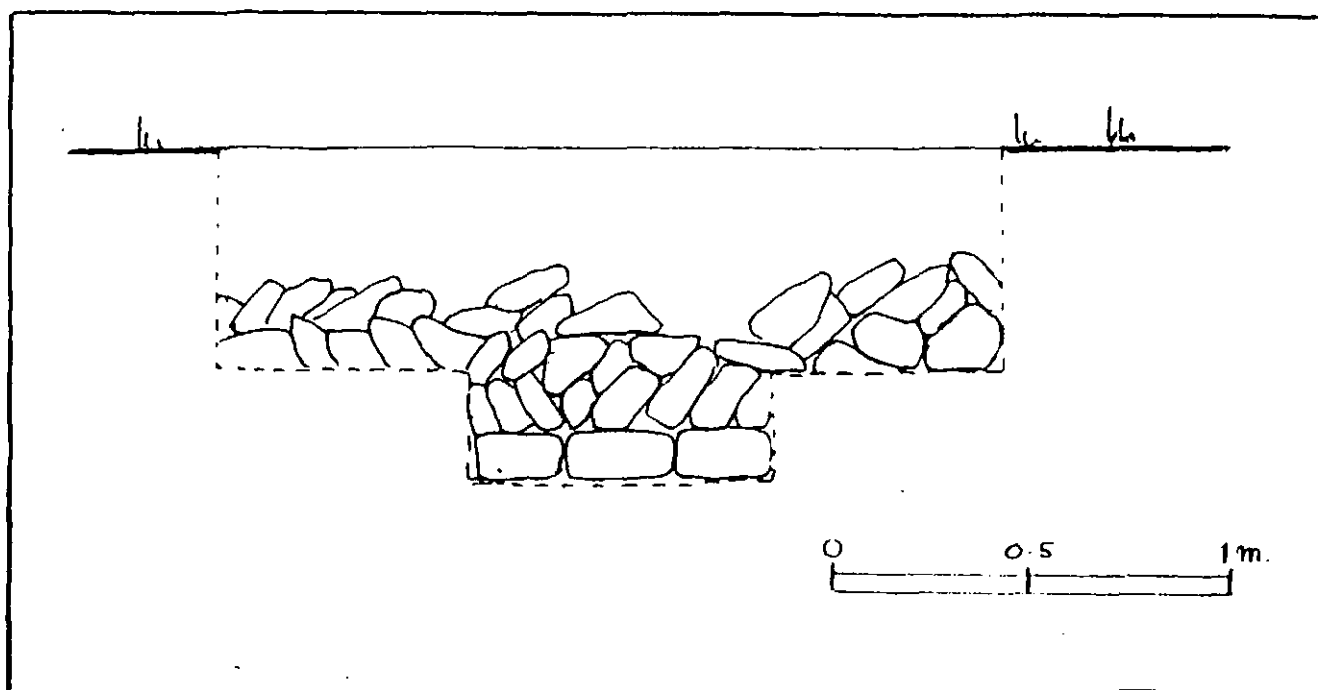


Fig. 9. Elevation of part of Wall [5] to south of furnace (Trench 12).

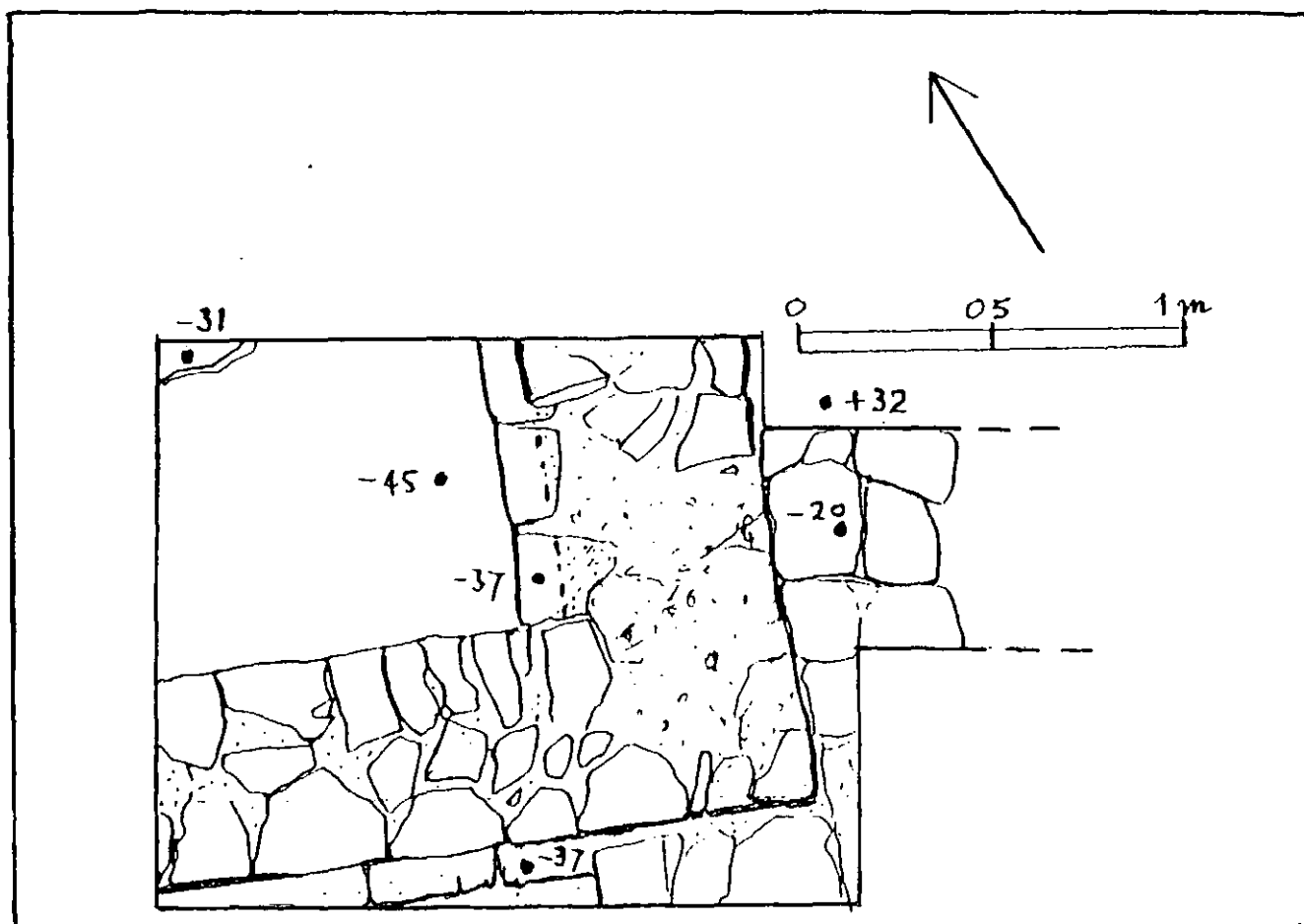


Fig. 10. Trench 13. Southeast corner of Room IV in the angle of Walls [2] and [3]; and northeast corner of Room V in the angle of Walls [2] and [4]

immediately to the east. In many respects it appears to be the southern end of Wall [3] seen in Trench 11.

The plinth of the western arm [2] appears to be set about one course lower than that of the northern arm: A reason for this may be noted in Trench 15. The upper face of the plinth-step on the south side of Wall [2] was recorded as 16.88m O.D. The plinth was 0.63m (25") wide, with a 0.56m (22") wall offset to the north, leaving a 0.07m (3") step on its south side only: this wall [2] appears to be the same wall as that described as the eastern wall in Trench 15.

To the south, aligned with the north wall and clearly butt-jointed to it, are the insubstantial remains of a later wall [4] only 0.60m (24") wide and without any plinth (conforming to that described in Trench 14).

The items described above in the present tense remain *in situ*. The site was protected by a permeable sheet before backfilling.

Trench 14 (see Fig. 11).

The ground level at this site was 17.58m O.D. The trench was opened by Stephanie Franklin. It disclosed only the very insubstantial remains of wall [4], which was described under the heading of Trench 13 as being a later wall butt-jointed to the southeastern corner of Room IV. The wall appears to have been severely robbed; it is believed to have been damaged by a land drainage trench or by planting/removal of fruit trees during the period when the land was used as an orchard. There was no sign of the covered conduit found in Trenches 11 and 13.

By projecting the line of the western face of this wall a little to the south, it was seen to align perfectly with the eastern end of an even later wall [5] which had butted against it. That wall was further examined in Trench 12.

Artefacts: 4 BB bodysherds; 2 greyware rimsherds; 1 iron nail 40mm; 2 pcs lead; 1 pce tufa.

Trench 15 (see Fig. 12).

The location of Trench 15 was initially determined from a study of the alignment of walls. It covers approximately 2½ square metres. Local ground level is 17.49m O.D.

The undamaged and well-mortared remains of the single-step plinths of two simultaneously constructed walls [1] were found, which together formed the south-eastern corner of a room (Room III). The plinths are each 0.69m (27") wide, their upper surfaces are at 16.89m O.D., and they are abutted by a good quality brown concrete floor 0.05m (2") thick at 16.94m O.D. in Room III. This floor had small stone and grit inclusions. The western plinth appeared (from wall mortar exuded at its base) to have here been built on wet lime-mortar laid on uneven made-up ground (see later). At the base of the internal angle is a snugly fitting and small triangular stone which was left *in situ*.

The northern arm retains a single course of masonry, its upper surface at 17.00m O.D. forming part of a lias rubble wall 0.53m (21") wide: this wall leaves a protruding plinth-step to the west, here some 0.13m (5") wide and to the east only 0.025m (1") wide.

The western arm consists only of a plinth and, being two courses thick, it is founded at a deeper level: the original wall was approximately 0.53m (21") wide, ascertained from lime-mortar remaining upon the top of the plinth.

To the east, aligned with the eastern arm of the wall of Room III and plain butt-jointed to it are the substantial remains of a later wall [2] 0.56m (22") wide, upper surface at 17.11m O.D. It has a 0.10m (4") step-plinth to south side only, conforming to that described under the heading of Trench 13.

In Room III a portion of the concrete floor (approx. 0.3 square metre) was removed. Immediately underneath the concrete floor (at 16.88m O.D.) was a bed of dark soil containing particles of wood-charcoal. A portion of this area of soil (approximately 0.45m x 0.15m (18" x

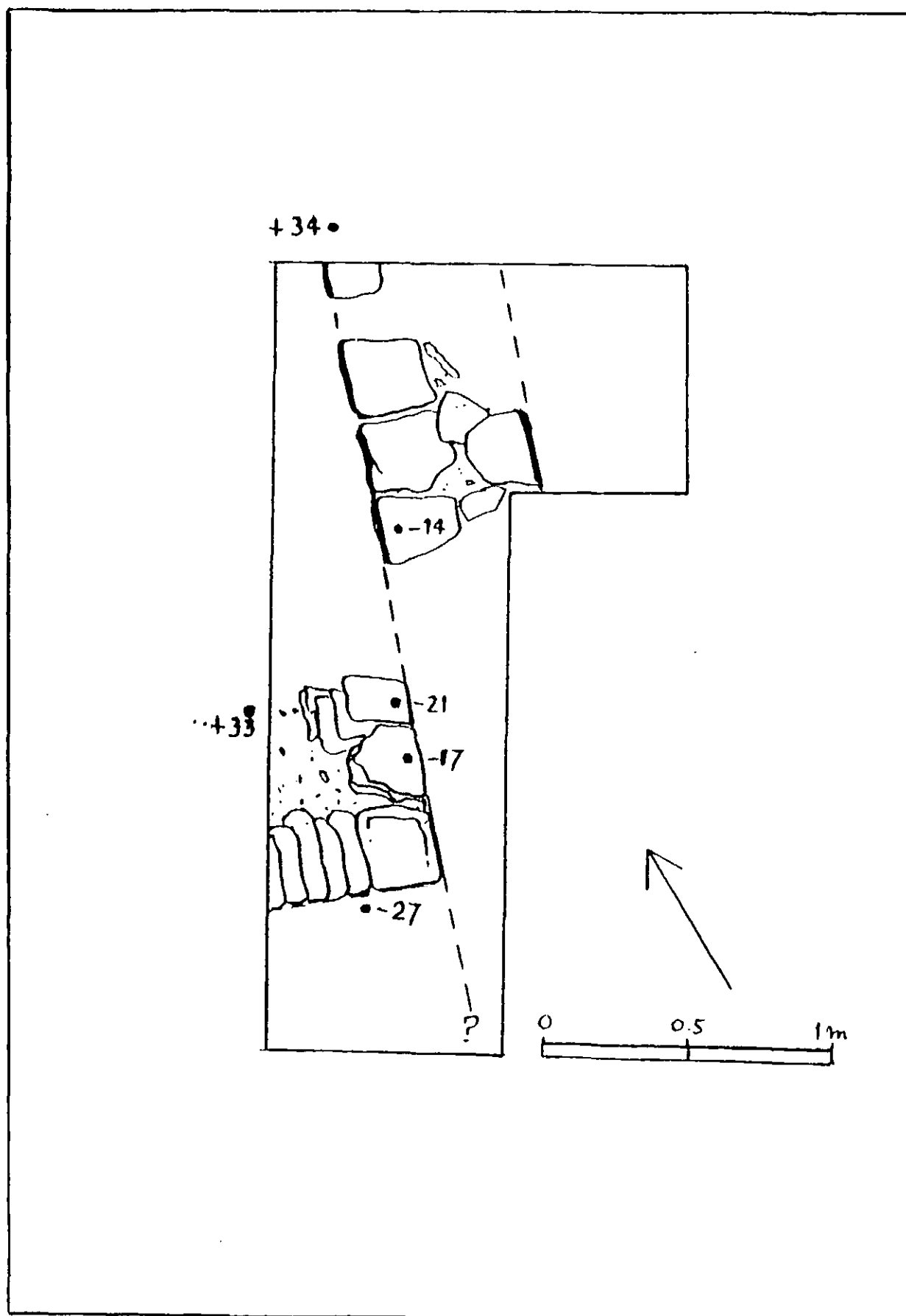


Fig. 11. Trench 14. Southeast corner of Room V in the angle of Walls [4] and [5].

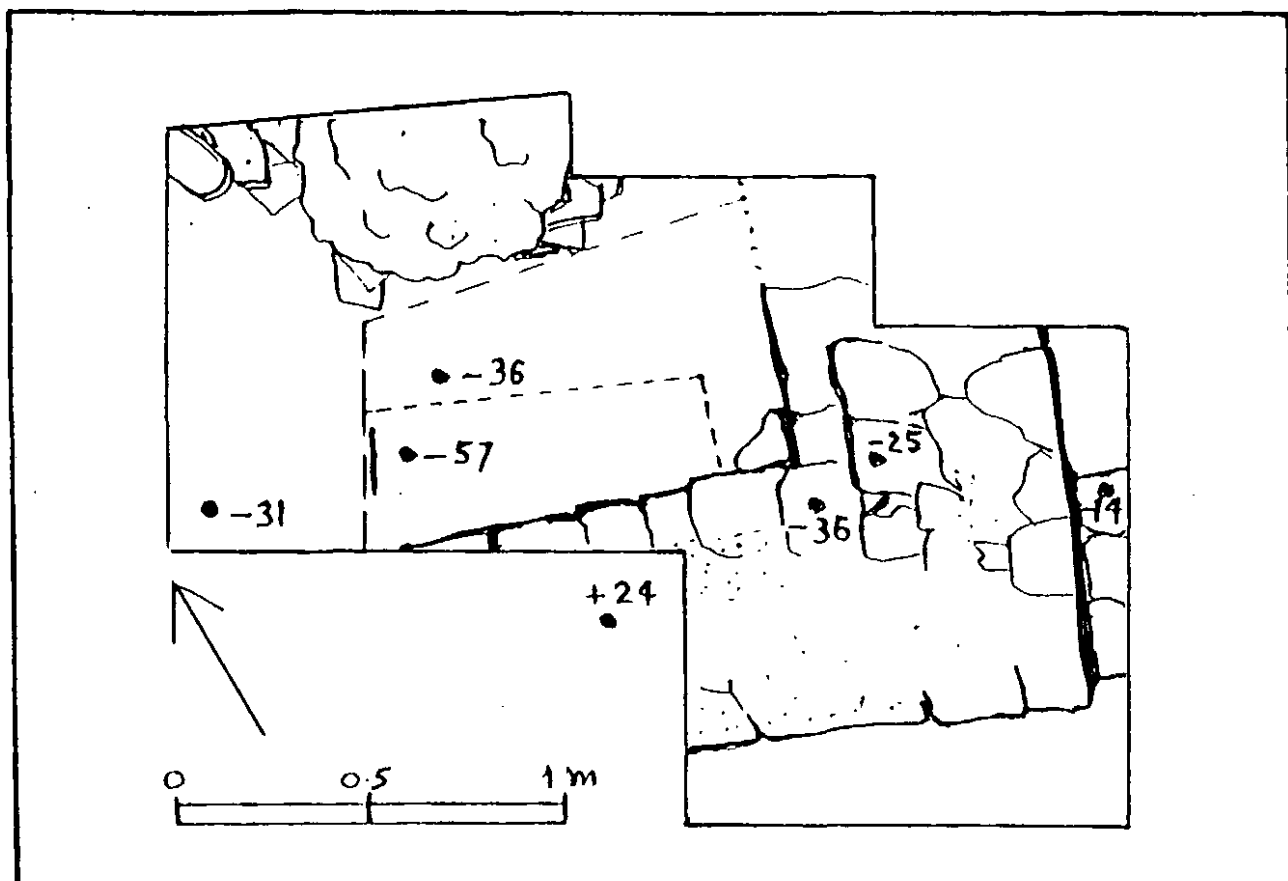


Fig. 12. Trench 15. Corner of Room III, the earliest room found so far, in the southeast angle of Wall [1].

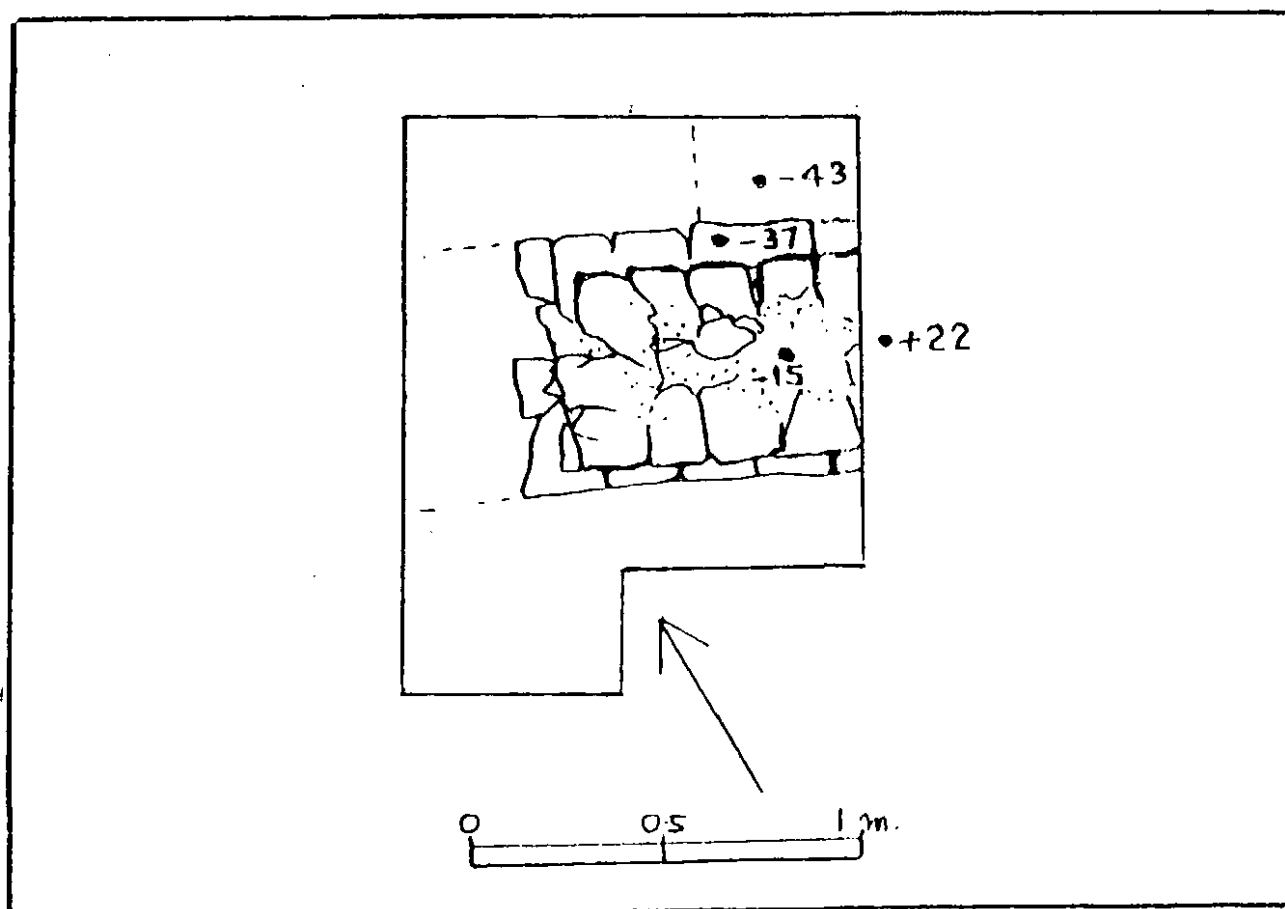


Fig. 13. Trench 16. Damaged western end of Wall [1].

6") was excavated and found to be 0.20m (8") deep and lying on the natural at 16.68m O.D. The profile (section) on the west side of this small sondage showed a mass of charcoal at its base: for further comments, see 'Conclusions'.

A number of stone roof tiles were found on part of the concrete floor in the west of Trench 15. Resting upon some of these tiles was found a large, 0.70m (27½") diameter, mass of fine white wall plaster; apparently some surplus plaster that had been left in a sack and resting on fallen tiles in an uninhabited room: these remain *in situ*. A broken piece of *imbrex* (a half-round clay roofing tile) was found at a higher level nearby: it was retained with other artefacts. This room is the oldest (see 'Conclusions') of the various rooms so far found at this site.

The items described above in the present tense remain *in situ*. The site was protected by a permeable sheet before backfilling.

Artefacts: white plaster (desc. above); 1 *imbrex*, part (descr. above); sample stone roofslate; 1 iron nail (30mm) with very large (40mm) flat head (suitable for fixing lead sheet); several assorted pcs lead; 2 pcs heavy iron strip, perforated at 65mm intervals for nails (*in situ*) c. 150mm x 30mm x 7mm, bent at one end to form hook or hanger); sample of charcoal from below concrete floor.

Trench 16 (see Fig. 13).

This trench was also initially located by reference to the resistivity plot M (09, 28). Ground level was 17.47m O.D. At a depth of 0.37m (14½") below ground (17.10m O.D.) were found the upper parts of a lime-mortared lias stone wall [1]: it is 0.53m (21") wide. Although there were many very small particles of lime adhering to the northern face of this wall, there was no other evidence (such as plaster or mortar droppings) suggesting that at one period it had been rendered. A stone plinth 0.69m (27") wide was found some 0.22m (c.9") below this, at 16.88m O.D. The wall is set symmetrically upon its plinth, providing a 0.75m (3") step on each side. The plinth consists of two courses of stone: this may have been considered necessary as the bottom of the lower course now lies at 16.82m O.D., some six centimetres below the top of a previous occupation soil at 16.88m O.D. (the wall base may have sunk a couple of inches into the previous occupation soil, or it may have been built in a shallow trench). The occupation soil contains charcoal chips similar to those found in Trench 15, but no evidence was found of an earlier floor at its base.

It was noted that, in the eastern side of the trench, this wall is in very good condition; whereas, at its present western end, it is completely broken away and leaving no remnant rubble. Time did not permit of an examination of this situation, but post-medieval land drainage operations or fruit farming may have been responsible for the removal of stone.

The upper surface of this wall is nicely mortared and levelled, suggesting that it may have been the bed for a timber sleeper-beam (wall plate) in a timber-framed building. This alone might be thought rather slender evidence upon which to base such a suggestion, but when it is realised that the top of this wall (17.10m O.D.) is only three to five centimetres higher than the floor level at the east entrance (17.05-17.07m O.D.), this suggestion warrants further consideration.

The alignment of this wall [1] appears to conform with that of the western arm of the plinth found in Trench 15.

The items described above in the present tense remain *in situ*. The site was protected by a permeable sheet before backfilling.

Artefacts: 2 bodysherds BB ware; 1 square iron bolthead (as found in Trench 15); several pcs of flattened and drilled iron strip; 3 iron nail; 1 pce tufa.

Trench 17 (No Figure).

This trench was merely a sondage, intended to locate the alignment of the east wall [1] of Room III (see Trench 15), or an extension thereof. None was found: the sondage was extended

east and west to a minimum depth of 0.60m (24") and the bottom probed without encountering any stone.

Trench 18 (see Fig. 14).

Trench 18 was opened to confirm the expected alignment of the herring-bone wall [5] found in Trenches 12 and 14. The location of the sondage was based upon the results of probing the ground with a probing iron. The original sondage was 0.65m x 1.20m (26" x 47") in which was located a small assemblage of lias rubble (Fig. 14). This was taken to be, either (a) a damaged portion of the herring-bone wall, or (b) a damaged terminal buttress of the kind seen at the east end (see Trench 14, Fig. 11). To establish whether the insertion of a post-medieval land drain had caused damage, the sondage was enlarged towards the west and south and dug to a greater depth: no drain was found.

This trench now offered the opportunity to sample the upper strata at the site. Fig. 15 illustrates these. Ground level was 17.49m O.D. Below the 0.22m (9") of top humic layer was a thick stratum of a dark brown stony soil extending down 0.85m (33½") to 16.64m O.D., below which was a bed of mid-brown mud devoid of stones, clearly deposited by water action.

Trench 19 (see Fig. 18).

This trench was located in the eastern angle of Trench 4: the latter was dug in the previous year, 2000. A large quantity of painted wall plaster was found above a light brown concrete floor (as seen in Trench 4). Immediately beneath this floor was about 0.20m (8") of black occupation soil within which lay two approximately parallel 'walls' with, possibly, a thin floor, all of partially burnt brown clay forming, perhaps, a long tank; although only two side-walls lying about 0.60m - 0.76m (24" - 30") apart were found. These 'walls' were 0.025m - 0.050m (1" - 2") thick and were not vertical but inclined away from each other at their top edges. No soot or other evidence of flue gases was found between these 'walls'. Beneath the bottom of this feature lay an area of blue anaerobic marl with a sooty patch to one side and, nearby, a dark black patch low in the wall of the trench (photographs available). This feature of a previous occupation may have had its upper parts removed when the concrete floor of the *villa* was built.

Unfortunately, the requirements of agriculture precluded the furtherance of the work in this trench. The site was protected by a permeable sheet before being backfilled.

PETER B. ELLSON, October, 2001.

REFERENCES

1. Percival, J., *The Roman Villa* (Batsford, 1981).
2. Ellson, P. B., "A Roman Villa found at Stawell in August 2000" - the Full Report with two Appendices, in Somerset County Council *Sites and Monuments Record*, County Hall, Taunton.
3. The *imbrex* was a ½-round clay tile; 5" dia. externally; 3½" dia. internally.
4. Wedlake, W. J., *Excavations at Camerton* (1958), p. 57: "... herring-bone work which was so often used by the Romans when building over unstable ground"; Taylor, H. M. and Joan Taylor, *Anglo-Saxon Architecture* (Cambridge, 1980), vol. 1, pp. 12-13: "Herring-bone fabric once regarded as reliable criterion of Anglo-Saxon date; but Baldwin Brown claimed it was an infallible sign to the contrary. We believe neither view is correct, that herring-bone technique was used by Romans, Anglo-Saxons, Normans and later."
5. Lias stone tiles found at Stawell were 16" x 9" x ¾" thick (405mm x 230mm x 45mm thick), pointed at base (c.80 degrees); the nail hole was usually off-set from centre and

about 2½" (65mm) from the top of the tile. Similar tiles are illustrated in the *B. M. Guide to R.B.* (1922), p. 125, Fig. 138.

6. Wedlake, W. J., *Excavations at Camerton* (1958), p. 39: "Buildings at Camerton also faced southeast the prevailing wind?"
7. Ellson, P. B., "A Roman Villa found at Stawell in August 2000", in *Bridgwater and District Archaeological Society Annual NewsLetter* (Autumn 2000), p. 11.
8. Soil resistivity assessed as described in "A new soil resistivity meter" in *Bridgwater and District Archaeological Society Annual NewsLetter* (Autumn 1998), p. 11.
9. Trenches opened at this site in year 2001 were numbered 10 to 19 inclusively: trenches opened at this site in 2000 were numbered 1 to 5.
10. Ellson, P. B., "A Roman Villa found at Stawell in August 2000" - the Full Report with two Appendices, in Somerset County Council *Sites and Monuments Record*, County Hall, Taunton.
11. Lias stone slabs of similar dimensions were quarried near Street, Som.
12. Smith, R. S. and Davies, S. M., "Black Burnished Ware Type Series", *Wessex Archaeology* (1993), Monograph Series, No. 12, pp. 230-1 (Vessel Type Series, Jars).

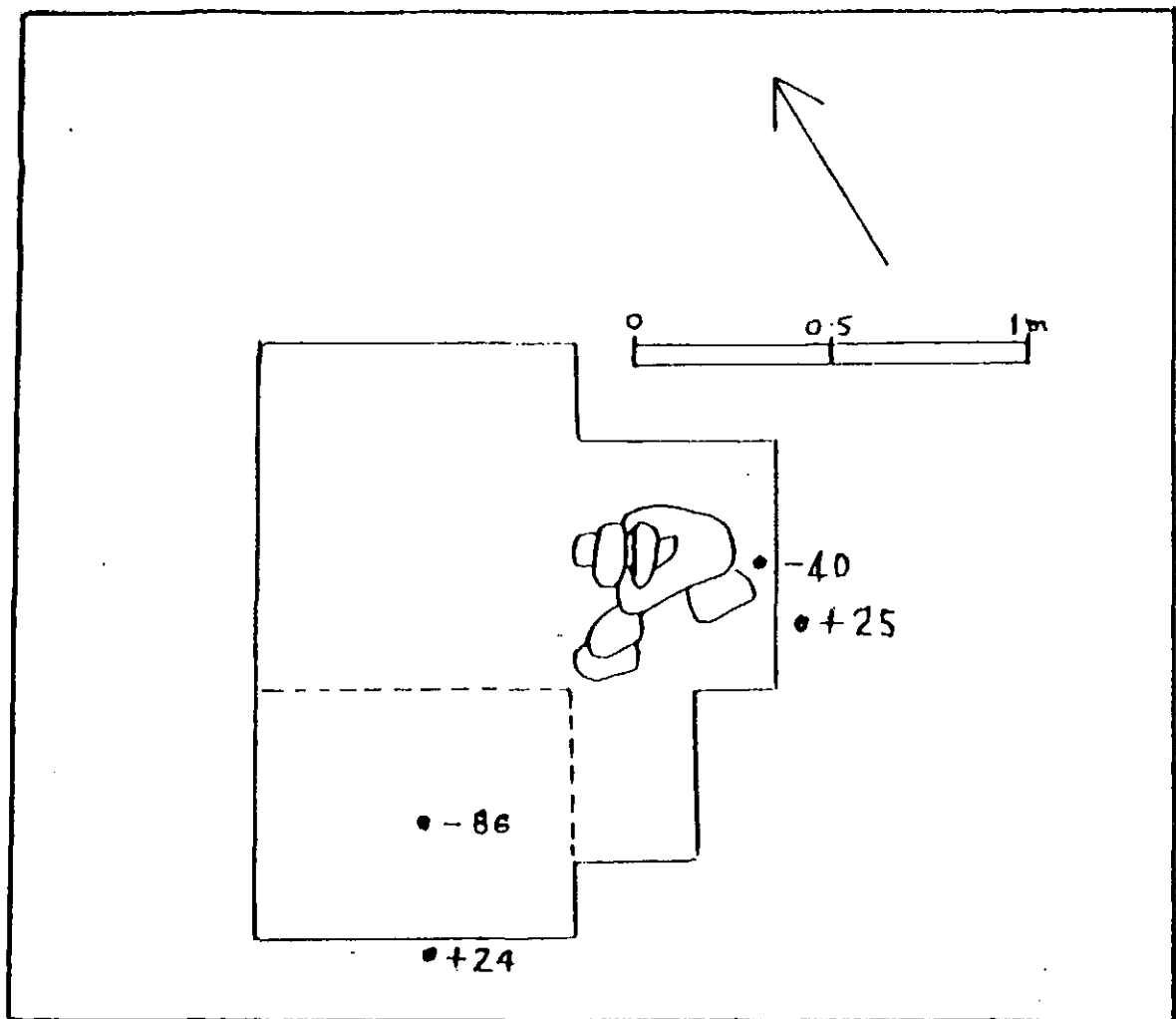


Fig. 14. Trench 18. Confirming the alignment of Wall [5].

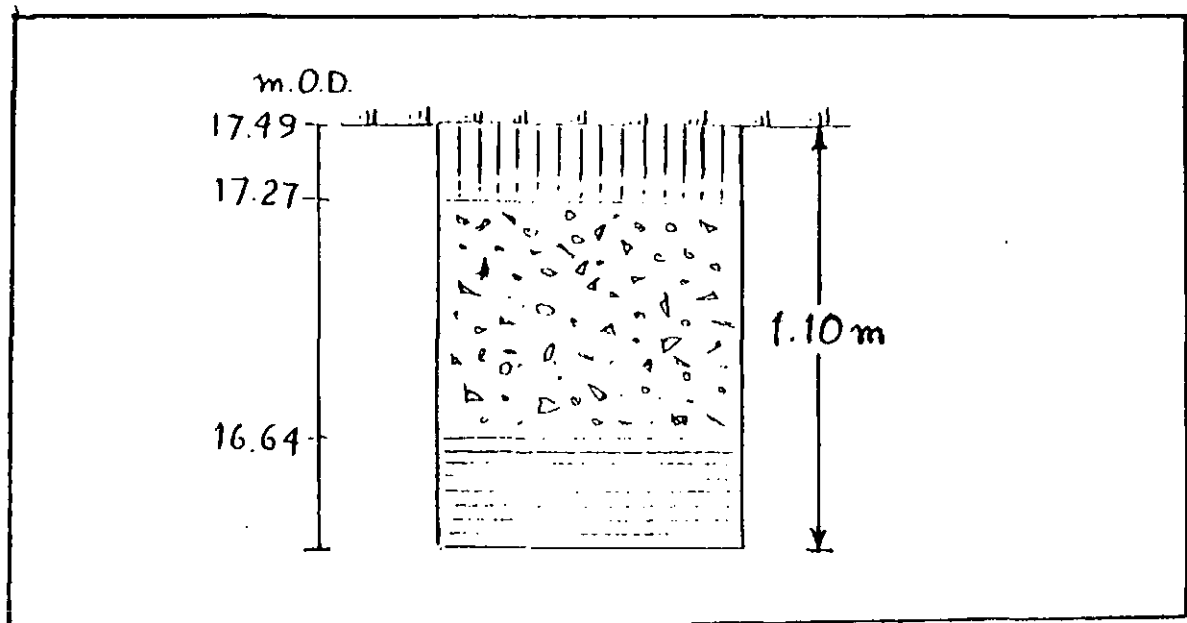


Fig. 15. Trench 18. An extension to determine the nature of the underlying strata.