

SALVAGE RECORDING AT  
SPRINGFIELD, BRITANNIA SQUARE,  
WORCESTER

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June 1993

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Report 179

HWCM 231

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# Salvage Recording at Springfield, Britannia Square, Worcester

Mike Napthan with contributions by J D Hurst

## 1 Summary

*An archaeological watching brief and salvage excavation of foundation trenches were undertaken at Springfield, Britannia Square, Worcester (SO 8460 5575), by the County Archaeological Service on behalf of the Alice Ottley School. The site is recorded on the County Sites and Monuments Record as the location of a substantial Roman masonry building, possibly a temple (HWCM 231). The site is also a scheduled ancient monument (County Monument No Here & Worc 343e). Much of the investigated area, which was limited to foundation trenches and other contractors' groundworks proved to have been disturbed by comparatively modern activity, but a significant quantity of Roman material was recovered. A short length of sandstone foundation was revealed in the area under the steps to the sunken yard.*

## 2 Introduction

Springfield, a substantial late Georgian townhouse, is currently owned and occupied by the Alice Ottley School, and is used as the teaching block for the Preparatory Department. The school is constructing a new teaching block in the current sunken yard, and an extension of the school hall into the area of the walled garden (Fig 2). A substantial number of internal alterations are also being made causing ground disturbance within the hall area and cellars.

The site includes a scheduled ancient monument (County Monument no Here and Worc 343e). Springfield is a Grade II Listed Building, and lies within the Britannia Square Conservation Area. The project was carried out to a brief prepared on behalf of English Heritage by the Archaeology Officer of Worcester City Council (August 1992), in response to planning applications for the proposed extensions (ref P92M0329 and

L92M0055). Scheduled monument consent was sought and granted (ref HSD 9/2/1095 pt 26).

A report on the initial evaluation of the site was produced in December 1992 (Napthan 1992), which should be consulted for the background to the site. Some additional historical material has been located since the original evaluation and this is reported here.

The manor of Claines was held by the bishops of Worcester. This included the land known as Pound Farm which contained the lands which were to become Britannia Square. By the early 18th century the relevant fields were called "first, second and lower pound fields". The lease was sold in 1807 as six lots, though most of the land soon was reunited under the ownership of William Handy. With other local land speculators Handy established the layout of the square and the subsequent purchasers undertook a covenant that the houses they would build would be faced with "Roman cement" (stucco) and roofed with slate. In return Handy covenanted that he would build no more than two houses on the land which he retained in the middle of the square, and that those houses would be built centrally. Between 1810 and 1815 Handy erected a building on his part of the property, (it is not clear whether this was Springfield Lodge) and then sold the whole development for 4/10 per square yard in 1817 (Gegg, nd).

A plan of 1828, revised from an original survey of 1822 (Fig 3) shows development on the sides of the square but no central building.

The fieldwork and research was carried out by Mike Napthan, who also wrote the report. The finds were assessed and reported by J D Hurst.

### **3 Aims**

The aim of the salvage stage of the excavations was to recover the maximum of information from the areas to be disturbed by building operations. As the foundations have been carefully designed so as to minimise ground disturbance only a small area (approximately 5 square metres to a depth of 0.3m) of potentially Roman deposits were anticipated.

### **4 Method**

The areas of the foundation trenches within the walled garden were marked by the building contractors, then archaeologically excavated to the agreed levels. As most of the area consisted of turf and topsoil or gravel paths it was rapidly excavated using mattock and shovels. On reaching archaeologically sensitive deposits (below 20.92 OD) more detailed excavation and recording was undertaken. Recording followed standard Service practice (HWCC County Archaeological Service Recording Manual 1988, as amended).

The watching brief was undertaken wherever contractors works entailed significant ground disturbance, this included areas within the existing hall (bases E and F with the associated ground beam trenches) and the drain trench between the Coach-house block and sunken yard.

Due to the extensive recent contamination and disturbance of all of the contexts investigated, no environmental sampling was carried out.

#### **Methods of finds recovery and analysis**

All finds were retained from the salvage recording and watching brief work with the following exception. Retrieval of finds from unstratified contexts was selective, as a result of the quantity of modern finds they contained. Only perceived pre-19th century material was retrieved from these contexts.

The finds were identified, counted, and spot

dated. For detailed information see Table 1 and archive.

The size of the finds assemblage, and the high percentage of finds from unstratified contexts prevented any detailed analysis.

Fabric numbers below are referenced to a county fabric reference series (Hurst and Rees, 1992).

### **5 Analysis**

The deposits encountered during the archaeological excavation principally consisted of a dark brown sandy loam, intermixed with construction and demolition debris, with small quantities of domestic refuse. These are typical of garden soils. Due to the nature of the current construction works it was frequently difficult to establish the location and description of features during the salvage and watching brief phases.

A small number (26) of bone fragments were recovered during the groundworks. On consideration of the environmental specialists' report on the material from the evaluation (C de Rouffignac 1992) this was considered to be too small to be a worthwhile sample for analysis.

The phases are based on purely artefactual evidence; due to the nature of the salvage excavation few stratigraphic relationships were evident.

#### **Finds Summary**

A range of periods was represented in the finds assemblage. There was a significant quantity of Roman material. Evidence for late Saxon and medieval activity was slight, but from the 17th century post-medieval finds became more common, especially from the 19th century onwards.

The finds were from unstratified contexts, or the upper levels of archaeological features, since the brief required minimal disturbance to archaeological deposits.

## Phase 1 Roman

Roman material was found in significant quantities within the lower deposits of the bases A and C. A fragment of *terra sigillata* (Samian), several sherds of Severn Valley ware and Roman building materials including roof tile were also recovered from topsoil stripping. The only potentially Roman deposit encountered in the walled-garden area was a spread of Roman building materials, datable to the mid 1st to 4th centuries, encountered in base C. This was a layer of friable sandy brown loam containing very frequent yellowy-white mortar flecks, tile and mortared sandstone fragments, typical of demolition debris. A small number of sherds of Roman pottery including black burnished ware were also recovered from base C.

A length of red sandstone footing was revealed during the laying of drains in the sunken yard area (Trench G, Fig 3). The initial discovery reported by the contractors was of a linear arrangement of worked stone blocks, green and red sandstones and limestone. One block appears to form part of an octagon (see Fig 5).

The stone blocks showed traces of yellowish white mortar, and appear to have been re-used in this unmortared foundation which is apparently aligned north-east to south west (Fig 3). On clearing the immediate area of the builders upcast, a row of roughly coursed red sandstone blocks was revealed. These were uncovered sufficiently to establish the presence of a lower course, also of red sandstone. A few fragments of non-diagnostic tile and one fragment of *tubulus* were recovered from the disturbed brown sandy gravelly loam which surrounded this feature.

The blocks consisted of a green sandstone and local soft red sandstone. A number of the blocks are illustrated in Figs 5 and 6.

### *Artefactual evidence*

Most of the material associated with this phase was residual being derived from topsoil stripping. However, Roman deposits were identified in base C. The latest pottery in

this context dates from the 3rd-4th century. Other Roman material was found in significant quantities in the base of A.

The Roman pottery was almost entirely Severn Valley ware (fabric 12), which typically constitutes the bulk of pottery assemblages in the Roman period in this part of the West Midlands (Webster 1976, 43-4; Timby 1990, 243). The Springfield group included tankard and jar forms. Other wares represented were samian (fabric 43), and Black Burnished (fabric 22) pottery. The former was fine tableware originating in Roman Gaul, and the latter cooking pot manufactured in south Dorset.

Both *tegulae* (flat flanged roof tiles) and *imbrices* (curved roof tiles) were present (fig 7), the former being more numerous (relative proportions by quantity of about 4:1). Box flue tile (*tubulus*) was rare, but its presence was potentially of considerable significance (figs 7 and 8). This type of tile typically formed a component of a Roman-style hypocaust heating system. The Roman tile fabrics were similar to those identified at Droitwich (Hurst 1992a, 156).

There were numerous stone fragments, probably building stone. Several types of stone were represented, comprising both green (or grey) and red sandstones (most of which were very badly weathered), and a single piece of sandstone roof tile (Fig 6). Blue Lias limestone was also present in a small quantity.

The source of the grey and red sandstone seems most likely to be quarries to the north of Worcester (possibly Ombersley area). The tile stone may be derived from a more distant source (possibly from the Lower Old Red Sandstone of the Welsh borders), and has been found on many Roman sites in the region (eg Droitwich; Hurst 1992b).

There was a considerable amount of mortar, much of it in large lumps. It was yellow in colour with white speckling, and extensive rounded gravel inclusions. The mortar seemed similar in general composition to that from Roman Worcester (as seen during

excavations at Deansway; Marsden forthcoming).

There was also a small amount of lime mortar with crushed tile inclusions (possibly a crude version of *opus signinum*). This type of mortar was often used in the Roman period for flooring (de la Bédoyère 1991, 27), or as the base for a tessellated or mosaic floor (Neal 1981, 20).

### **Phase 2 Saxon**

There was a single sherd datable to this period (from base D). This was late Saxon (10th to mid 11th century) Stamford ware (fabric 46) from the east Midlands. This is not common, recognised in the county only rarely, though it has been found in both Worcester and Droitwich (Hurst 1992c, 139). The form was not clear, and the extent of glaze was unusual, as it was only applied to the inside surface (Kilmurry 1980, 12).

### **Phase 3 Medieval**

Medieval pottery was not well represented, there being only one sherd of local Worcester glazed sandy ware (fabric 64; Hurst 1992c, 207) dating to the 12th to 14th century. A small quantity of late medieval brick was recovered from topsoil deposits.

### **Phase 4. Post-medieval (17th-18th century)**

From the 17th century pottery again becomes a more common find, including slipwares (fabrics 78 and 91).

Brick of various dates from the 16th or 17th to early 19th century was found in small quantities.

Ironworking slag was recovered in small quantities. This may be Roman or derived from the 18th century reworking of Roman slagheaps on the nearby area of Pitchcroft.

There was also a very small amount of 18th century clay pipe.

### **Phase 5. Modern (19th-20th century)**

Large quantities of 18th-19th century building materials were recovered during topsoil stripping. These principally consisted of pantile and brick fragments, with small quantities of slate and floor tile. Fragments of several air bricks of two designs and sherds of window glass were also found.

The quantities of post medieval pottery recovered included several fragments of spacing rings of the type used in the Worcester Porcelain industries. The pottery dated principally from the 18th to 20th centuries and included earthenware, china and porcelain. A number of 19th-20th century metal artefacts were recovered, principally domestic fittings, including doorhandle escutcheons and sash window fittings. A plated razor handle and bronze mounts from a narrow strap represent the personal possessions of the former occupants.

### *Structural evidence*

During the contractors excavation of trenches within the former hall area an extensive deposit of brick rubble was found to form make-up for the cast concrete floor slab. The rubble filled a shallow basement area at the south end of the hall (trench E, fig 2) which was cut to approximately 20.92 OD. Internal walls and a probable chimney breast indicate that this area was a number of smaller rooms before being knocked into one to form the hall (fig 2). Fragments of newspaper and asbestos sheet recovered from the rubble make-up point to the conversion occurring in the mid 20th century. The form of the original rooms in this part of the house remains unclear, but the stair access to the cellars and to the back staircase suggest a domestic function. The outer walls of the hall area appear to be contemporary with the main building, though the form of the roof appears to have been altered. The northern part of the hall (trench F) has a different make up beneath the floor slab. Here it consists of a sandy loam soil interleaved with layers of dirty local red sand. This layer contained clay tobacco pipe and peg tile. The difference in make-up suggests that the sub-basement area extends only as far north as the steps down to the cellar.

In the sunken yard area a brick built feature interpreted as the base of a former chimney proved to have been infilled with domestic rubbish, including a considerable number of complete bottles and substantial fragments of china and porcelain. This deposit dates to the end of the 19th or early 20th century.

The only discrete features located by the archaeological excavation were gravelled garden paths, which had been marked by a decorative tile edging, similar to that still extant at the front of the main building. A small brick soakaway or service chamber and water and electricity service trenches were also found.

Two wells were revealed by the contractors during demolition and lowering of the ground surface in the sunken yard area. One lay within the former basement room (well "B"), adjacent to the western wall, the other (well "A") located immediately to the north of assessment trench 5. Both were backfilled by the contractors, though well "A" had been largely infilled in the past. A water filled soft-water tank was located beneath the passageway between the Coach-house and the kitchen block, this was revealed by the contractors, drained and infilled. To the west of the soft-water tank a large area of disturbed soil was visible in the section revealed by removal of the former steps into the sunken yard. This disturbance consists primarily of a brown loamy redeposited natural and is cut to a depth exceeding 2m below modern ground level.

All these features appeared contemporary with the current building. Pits containing ashes, bone, earthenware and white china were reported by the contractors during the removal of the footings of the former kitchen block. Several fragments of late 18th century china, an intact late 18th century wine bottle and an early 19th century teaspoon were recovered by the contractors from this area. It is possible that one of these "pits" was in fact the chimney base referred to above.

The removal of part of the cellar floor allowed inspection of below ground deposits,

which proved to be redeposited natural sand, apparently disturbed during construction of the house.

The collapse of the western retaining wall of the sunken yard during construction works revealed the foundations of the coach house. These appear to be recent, dating from the rebuilding of the coach-house as classrooms. The base of the collapsed area was immediately encased in concrete and timber shoring to prevent possible movement of the coach-house foundations, it was therefore not possible to record any surviving stratigraphy which may have been exposed.

## 6 Discussion

A significant quantity of artefacts were recovered. Indeed the volume of post medieval building material in the topsoil was such that it was necessary to retain only a sample of each of the materials present. All recognisably pre-19th century material was retained from all contexts. The earliest deposits noted were the spread of robbing material at the bottom of base C, these appeared to be equivalent to context 302 of the evaluation trenches.

The stone footing revealed by the contractors under the sunken yard steps has been heavily disturbed, probably during 19th century construction works, and the present alignment and coursing may not be original. The footing served no purpose in the 19th century building and may be safely assumed to predate it. The worked stone showed extensive traces of diagonal tooling, which is both a Roman and a medieval feature. There is no sign of the use of a forked chisel which was introduced during the 13th century (Chris Guy *pers comm*). The presence of an octagonal block is very significant, in that it may indicate the presence of columns.

The presence of significant quantities of Roman building material on the site, and the paucity of finds from other periods provides strong circumstantial evidence that this foundation is of Roman origin.

The material recovered during the assessment and salvage phases of the project is consistent with Allies' report (Allies 1840) of a substantial sandstone foundation and Roman artefacts discovered during construction of the main building in the early 19th century. The deposits represent a fairly high status building of typical Roman form, at least partially stone built and with a tiled roof. The *tubulus* or box tile fragments may represent part of a hypocaust system. The low proportion of *imbrex* fragments recovered may be explained by two factors: firstly that they typically represent only less than one quarter of the roofing material by weight as built (Brodrigg 1987, 11-12), and secondly that small fragments are difficult to distinguish from later curved tiles, ridge tiles and pantiles, therefore may not be so easily recognised.

The material recovered during the salvage recording closely mirrors that recovered during the evaluation, and the concentration of the finds around base C is similar to that in trench 1 of the evaluation.

The presence of a single sherd of late Saxon pottery represents a significant discovery, as such finds are rare within the county. It is insufficient evidence, however, to suggest occupation during this period.

The late medieval finds indicate some occupation in the vicinity as they include building materials. These may derive from a farm building or from the nearby Tything suburb.

The more recent deposits primarily consist of dumped soil and building materials, apparently the result of construction activity relating to the present building. A number of gravelled paths were located immediately beneath the current turfline, these correspond with the pathways shown on the 1886 25" Ordnance Survey map (see Napthan 1992, fig 9). The pathway running parallel with the main building had been buried by a deposit of broken pantile, brick, floortile and a surprising number of air brick fragments. This deposit is assumed to represent a period of rebuilding works, possibly the demolition

of the former domestic range and glasshouses shown on the 1886 map. The pantile may derive from the original roof of the coach-house or the domestic offices which were rebuilt as the hall.

The discovery that the original building included the area of the later school hall, and that part of the sunken yard area intrudes into archaeologically significant deposits adds considerably to the area in which the original builders could have discovered the circular foundation as reported by Allies. This also introduces the possibility that the 19th century discovery lies close to the short length of wall discovered during the evaluation (Napthan 1992, fig 5).

## 7 Conclusions

The Springfield finds assemblage was small, and mainly residual in character. Conclusions were, therefore, necessarily limited. The assemblage was broadly comparable in date with the finds reported in the 19th century. A more detailed comparison could not be made as Allies (1840) did not provide a full description of finds, only noting that about fifty coins were present including some of 4th century date.

The recent material from archaeological salvage recording certainly suggests that there was Roman activity in this area in the 2nd to 3rd century at least.

The nature of the Roman activity remains less clear. The finds certainly confirm the presence of a substantial Roman building with masonry foundations, and with roofing of ceramic and stone tile. Such buildings are rare in the county. Associated finds do not indicate a function, though the quantity (given the size of the excavated area), and range of Roman pottery may be used to suggest tentatively that it was domestic.

The salvage recording has enhanced the information gained during the evaluation stage of the project. The removal of a large volume of the topsoil deposits provided the opportunity to obtain a larger sample of the

artefactual deposit than was previously possible. The foundation design of the new building has successfully avoided significant disturbance to the archaeological deposits.

## 8 Acknowledgements

Anthony Connolly (Site foreman), and the site workers of Holloway and Connolly who brought the majority of the finds to my attention.

Especial thanks to Miss Layfield, Headmistress of Springfield, thanks also to David Frewin of Godwin Austen Johnson, Dr Anthony Streeten of English Heritage, Chris Guy (Worcester Cathedral Archaeologist) and Charles Mundy of Worcester City Council.

## 9 Personnel

The site team consisted of the following; Charles Miller, Nigel Topping and Paul Godbehere.

Illustrations were prepared by Carolyn Hunt Finds were assessed and reported by Derek Hurst. The project was coordinated by Simon Woodiwiss and the report edited by Duncan Brown.

## 10 Bibliography

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## Abbreviations

Numbers prefixed with 'HWCM' are the primary reference numbers used by the Hereford and Worcester County Sites and

Monuments Record.

HWCC - Hereford and Worcester County  
Council  
**Appendix 1 The archive**

The archive consists of:

- 11 Context records AS1
- 15 Fieldwork progress records AS2
- 15 Context finds sheets AS8
- 9 Scale drawings
- 2 Boxes of finds

All primary records and finds are kept at:

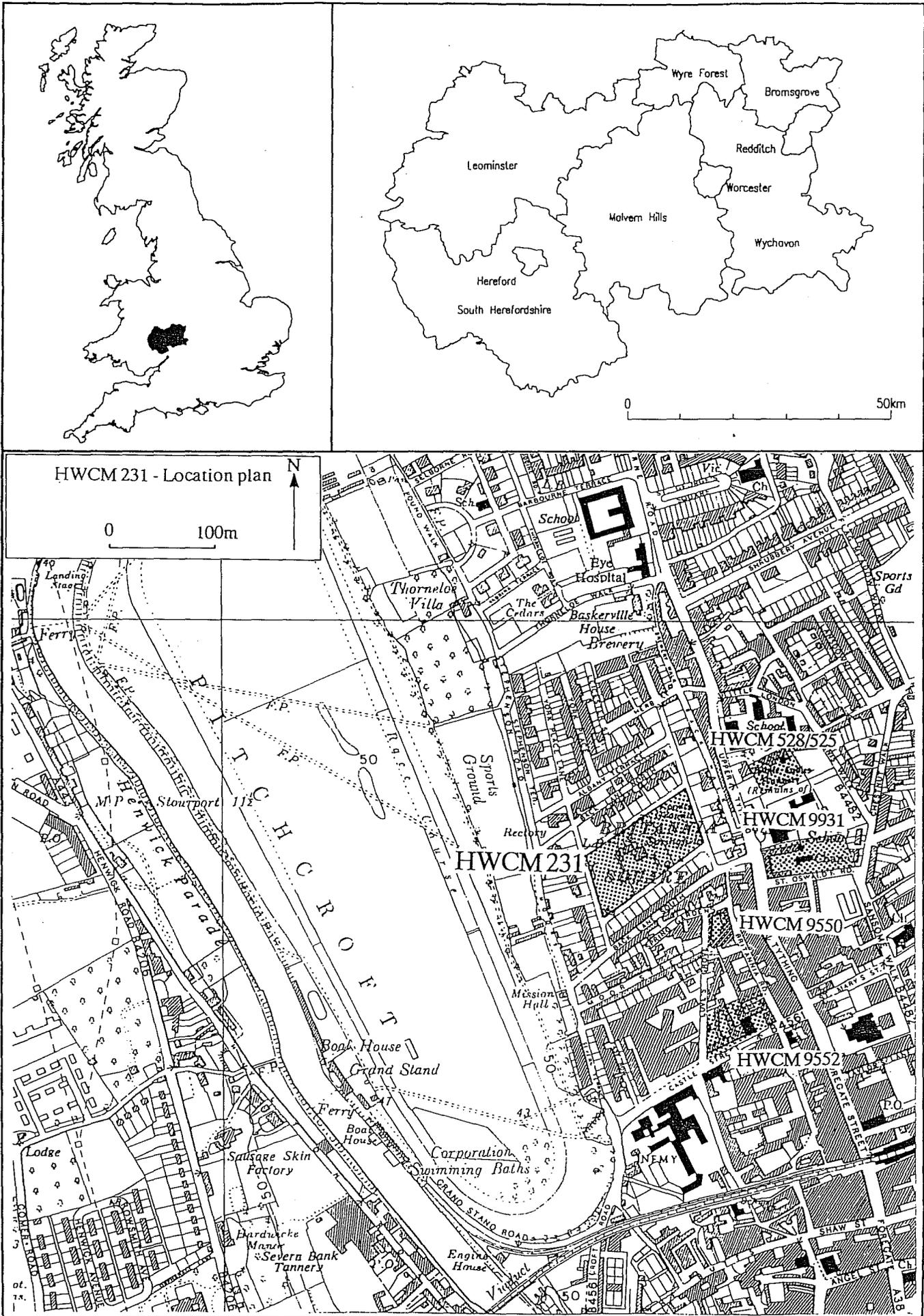
County Archaeological Service  
Hereford and Worcester County Council  
Tetbury Drive  
Warndon  
Worcester WR4 9LS

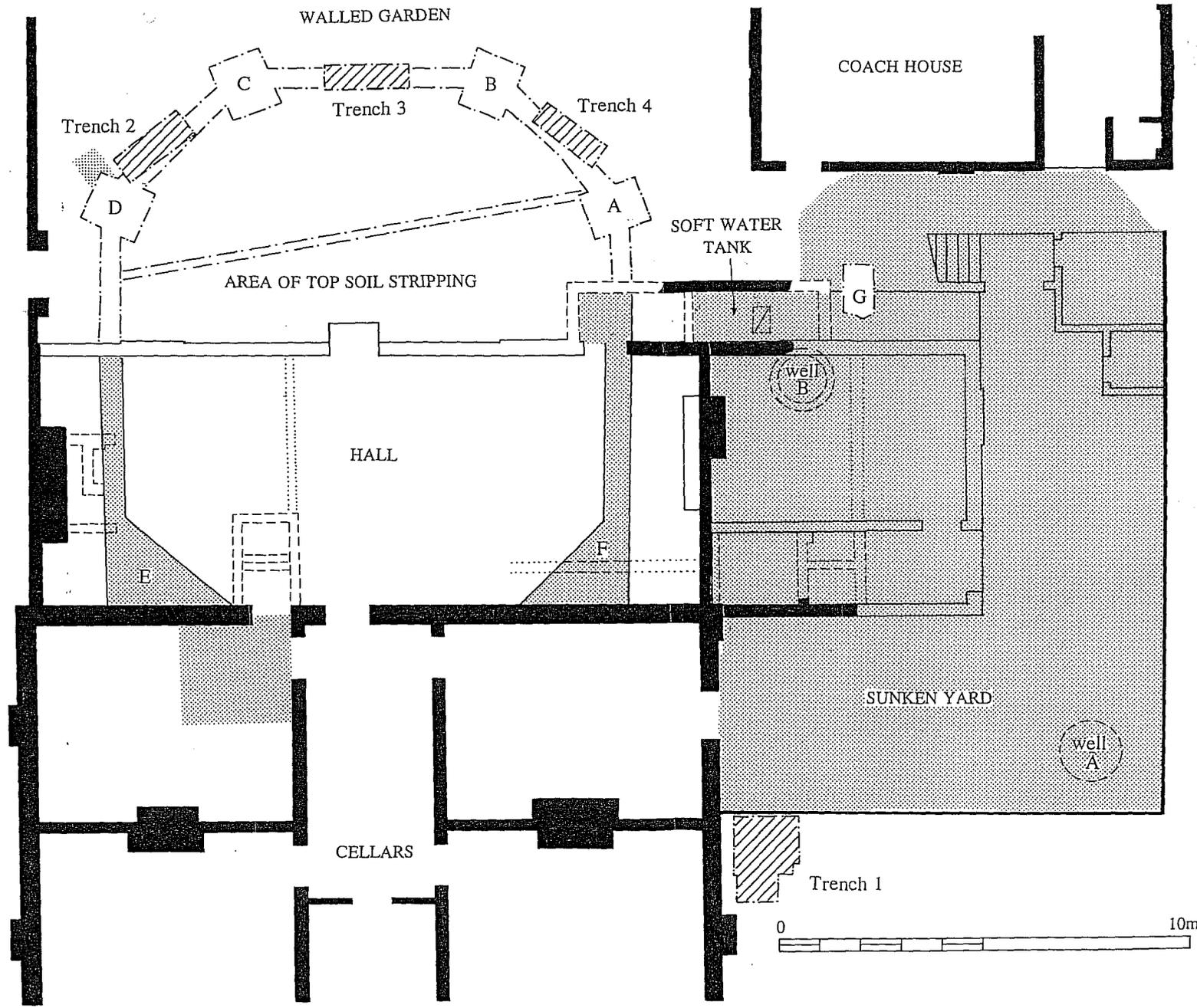
Tel Worcester (0905) 58608

A security copy of the archive has been  
placed at:

Hereford and Worcester County Museum  
Hartlebury Castle  
Hartlebury  
Near Kidderminster  
Worcestershire DY11 7XZ

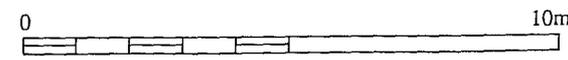
Tel Hartlebury (0299) 250416



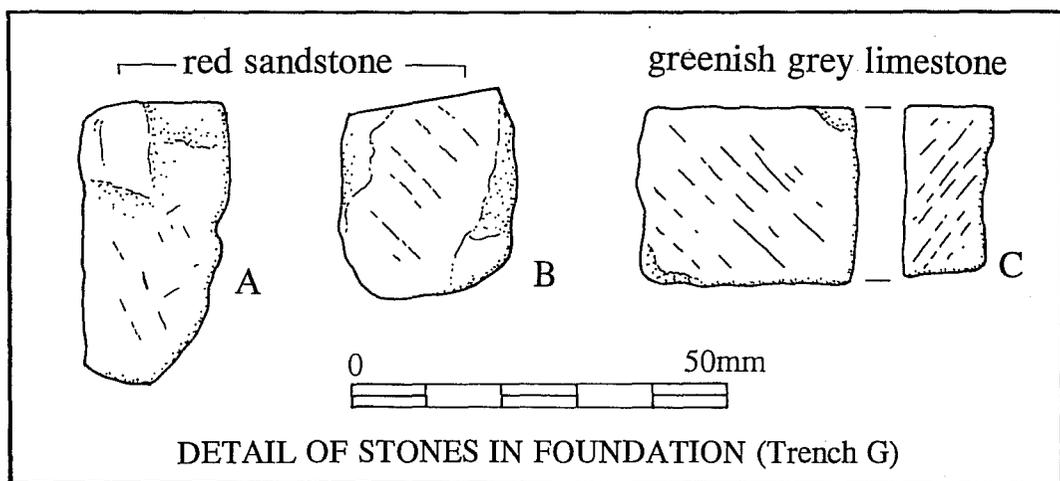
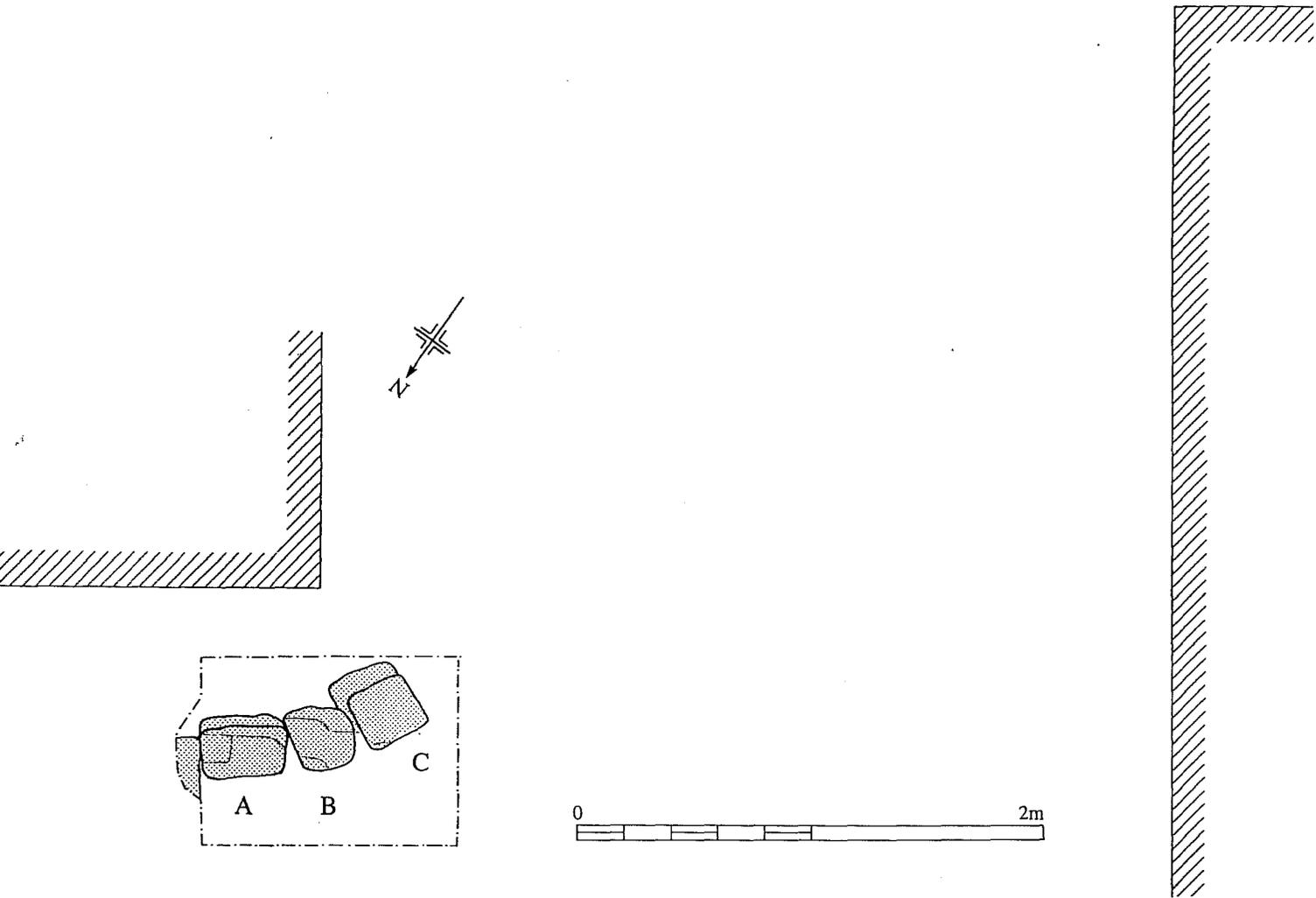


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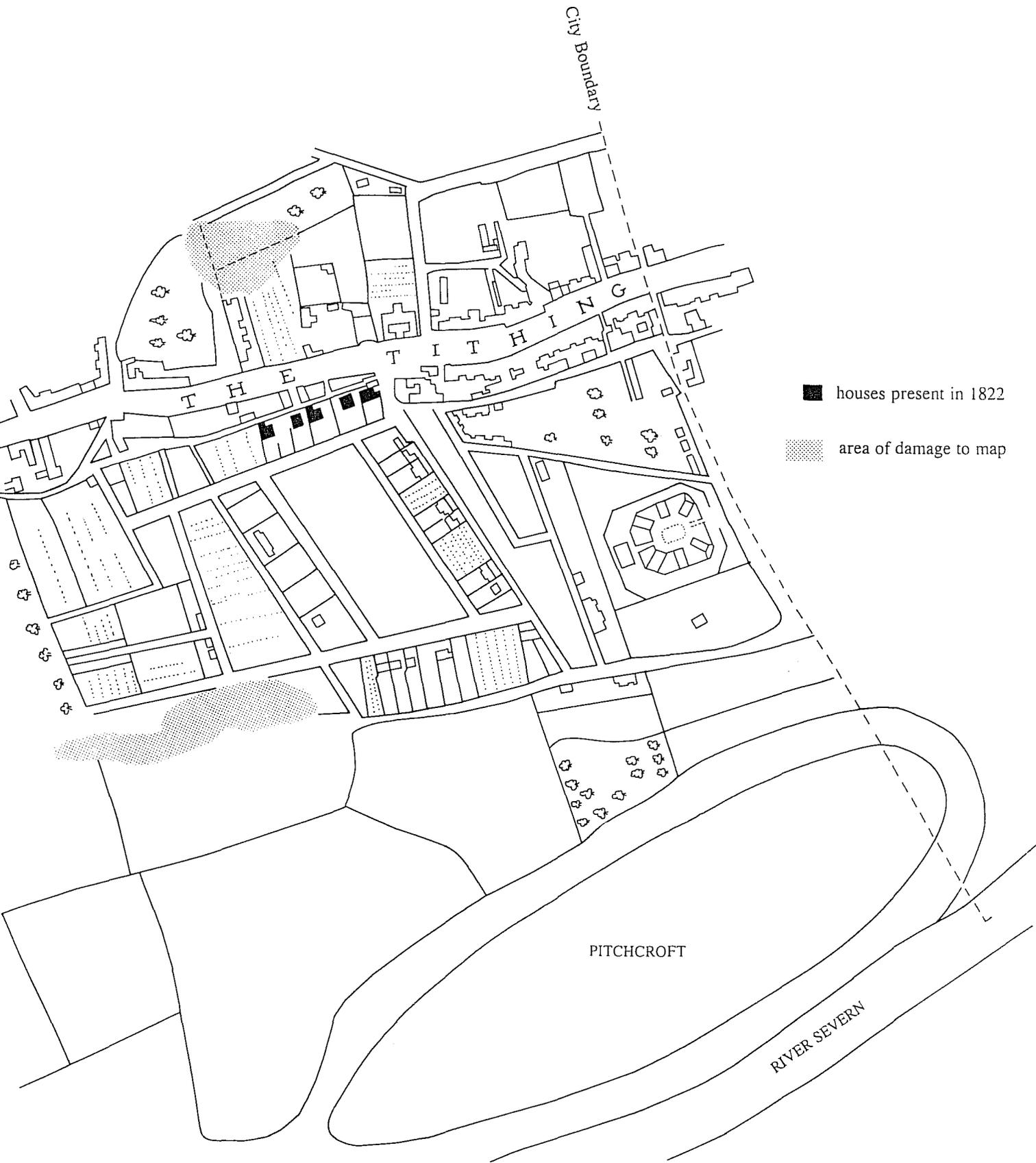
-  archaeological evaluation trenches
-  existing walls
-  walls demolished during current scheme
-  wall footings
-  presumed wall line
-  area of archaeological salvage excavations
-  contractor's ground work



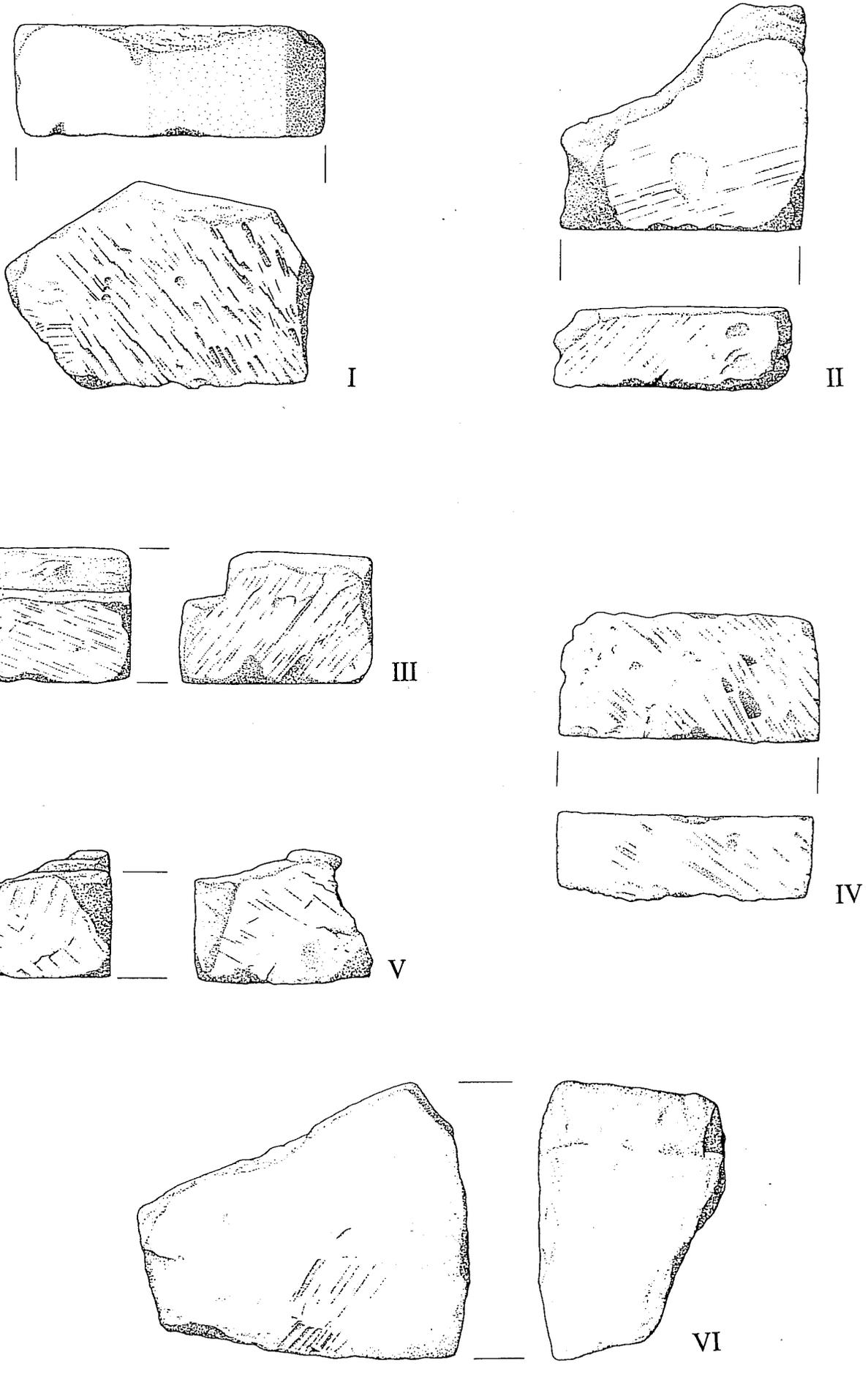
PLAN OF AREAS AFFECTED BY GROUNDWORKS



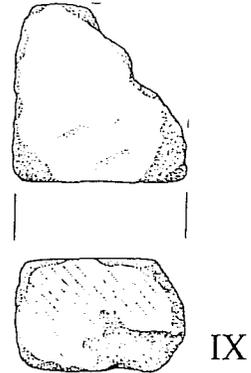
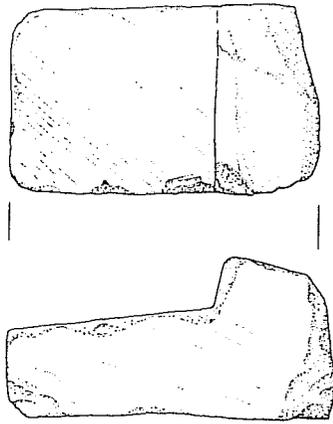
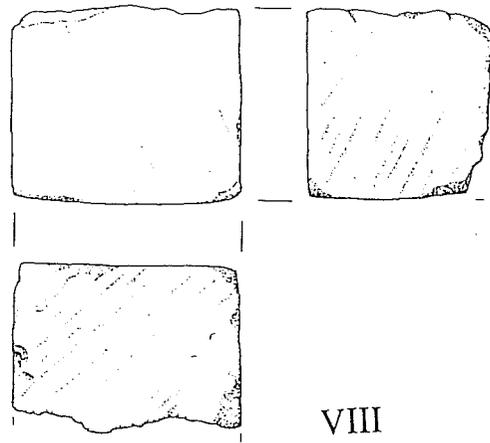
PLAN OF TRENCH "G" (details of stones inset)



PLAN OF THE CITY AND ENVIRONS OF WORCESTER, BY SAMUEL MAINLEY SURVEYOR, THE ALTERATIONS AND ADDITIONS BY C H CRISP SURVR. 1828  
HWRO BA 4120 s 705:477



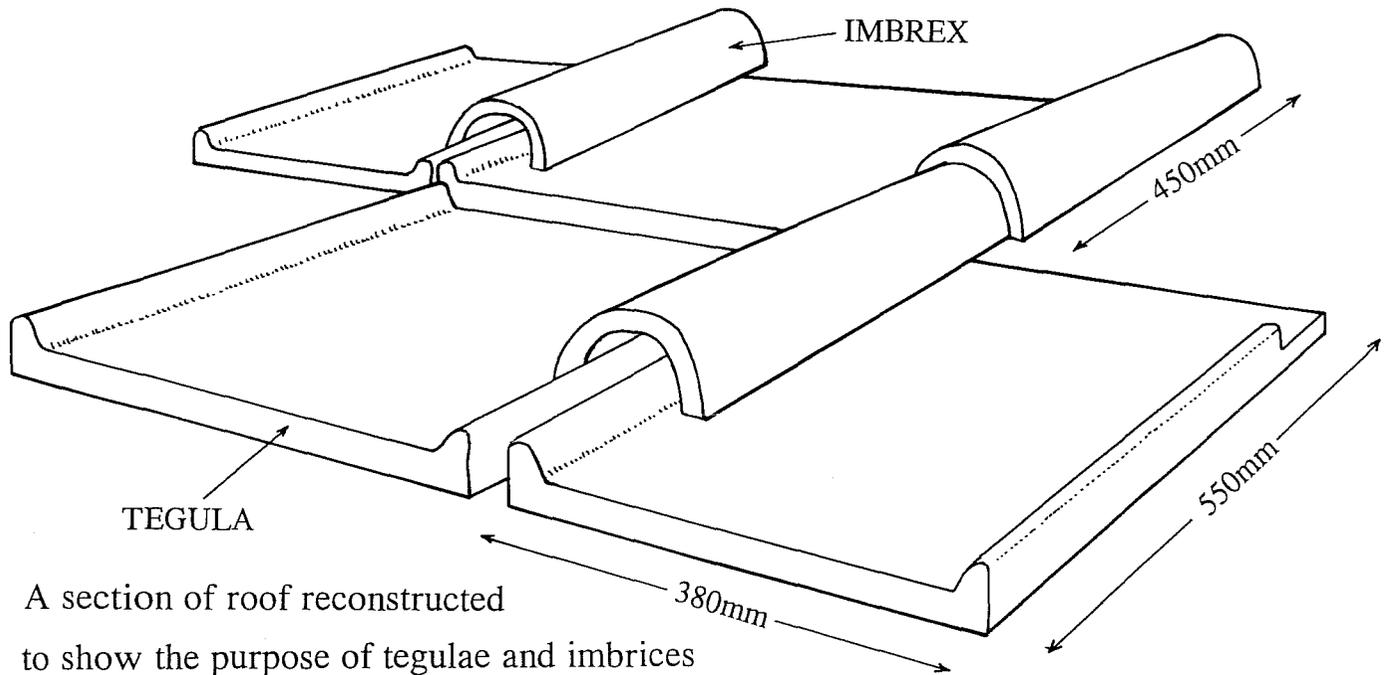
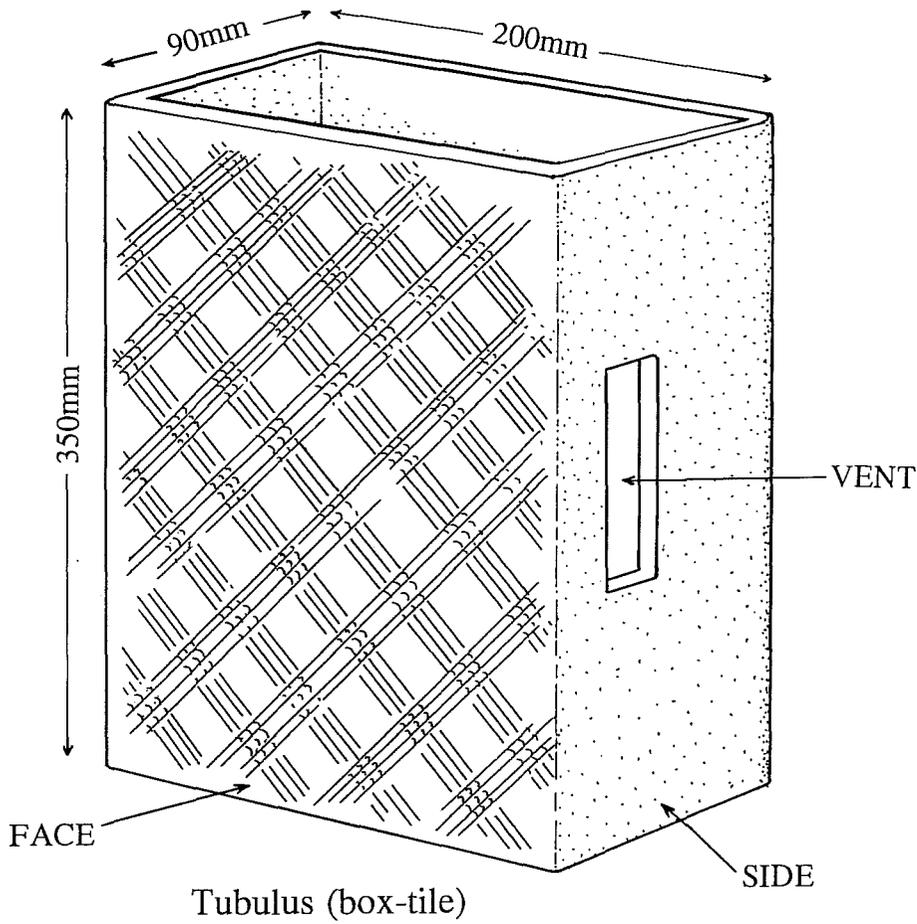
WORKED STONE FROM SPRINGFIELD (scale 1:8)



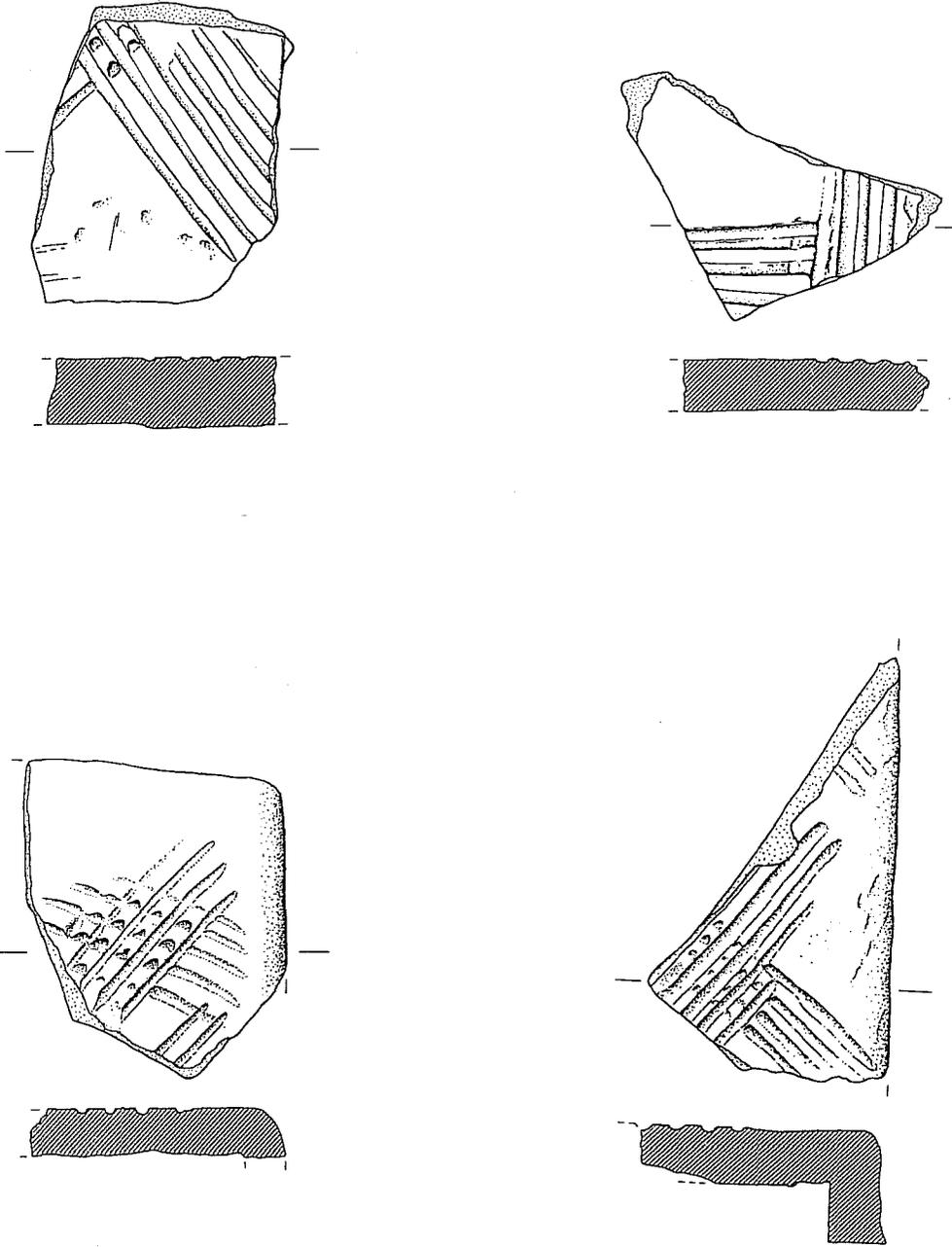
- I) red sandstone
- II) red sandstone
- III) red sandstone
- IV) greenish grey limestone
- V) red sandstone

- VI) red sandstone
- VII) greenish grey limestone
- VIII) greenish grey limestone
- IX) red sandstone

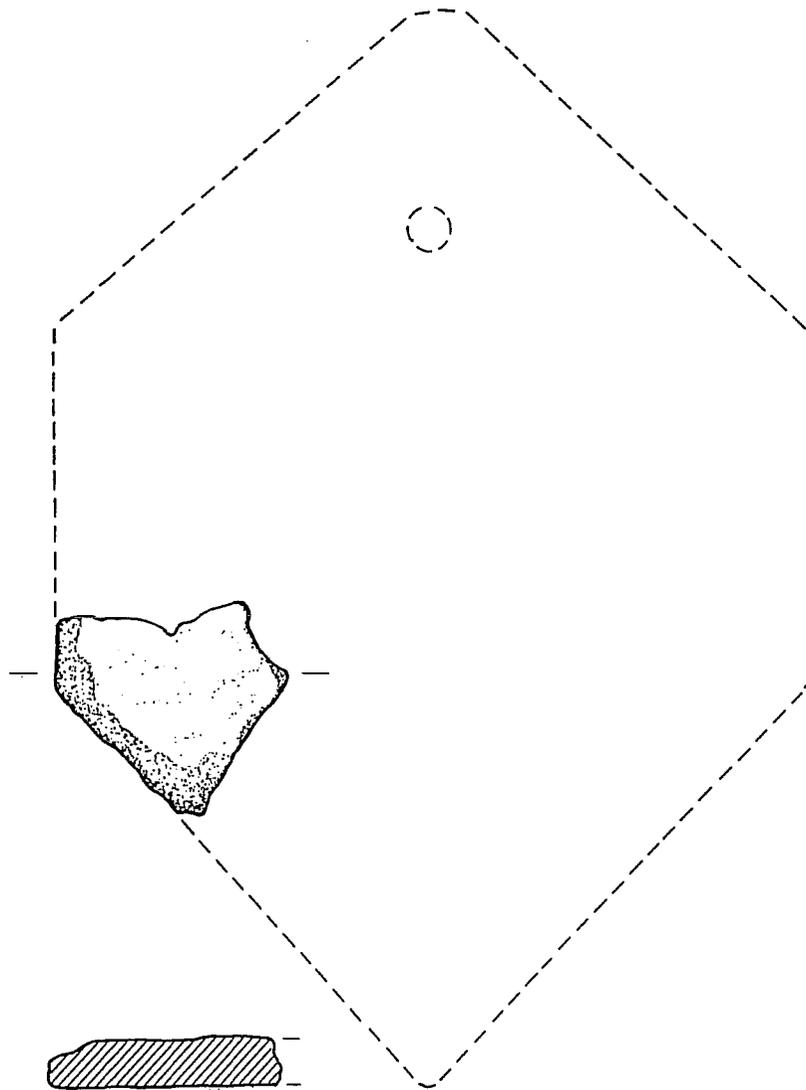
WORKED STONE FROM SPRINGFIELD (scale 1:8)



RECONSTRUCTION OF THE TYPES OF ROMAN TILE FOUND AT SPRINGFIELD  
 (dimensions are based on typical whole examples from elsewhere)



FRAGMENTS OF BOX-TILE (*tubulus*) scale 1:2



FRAGMENT OF STONE ROOF-TILE (scale 1:4)