

**SURVEY AND ARCHAEOLOGICAL EXCAVATION**

**of**

**KINGS WESTON ROMAN VILLA,  
LAWRENCE WESTON, BRISTOL.**

**for**

**City Valuers Department, Bristol City Council**



**Bristol and Region  
Archaeological Services**

**BA/D197**

% Bristol City Museum and Art Gallery,  
Queens Road, Bristol, BS8 1RL.  
Tel. (0117) 922 3580  
Fax. (0117) 922 2047



KINGS WESTON ROMAN VILLA,  
LAWRENCE WESTON, BRISTOL.

N.G.R. ST 53395 77555

Clients: City Valuers Department, Bristol City Council

## CONTENTS

### List of Illustrations

1.	INTRODUCTION .....	1
2.	KINGSWESTON ROMAN VILLA .....	2
3.	FIELDWORK .....	3
4.	DISCUSSION .....	5
5.	ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS .....	7
6.	BIBLIOGRAPHY .....	8
7.	LIST OF CONTEXTS .....	9

October, 1995.

### **COPYRIGHT NOTICE:-**

Bristol and Region Archaeological Services retain copyright of this report under the *Copyrights, Designs and Patents Act*, 1988, and have granted a licence to Bristol City Valuers Dept., Bristol City Council and their agents to use and reproduce the material contained within.

## LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

Fig.1 Location plan with Room XI and test pit indicated.

Fig.2 Copy of original plan of villa by G.Boon (1950)

Fig.3 Ground plan of Room XI

Fig.4 Elevations of walls lining flues

Cover Room XI after excavation

Plate 1 Room XI prior to work commencing

Plate 2 Typical elevation of baulk revetment wall

Plate 3 Tessellated pavement from Baulk B1

Plate 4 Baulk B1 after cleaning

Plate 5 Baulk B4 after excavation

Plate 6 Test pit south of west wing of villa

## **1. INTRODUCTION**

- 1.1 As part of a programme of consolidation work at Kings Weston Roman Villa, Lawrence Weston, Bristol and Region Archaeological Services was commissioned by the City Valuers Department, Bristol City Council, to carry out detailed recording of the hypocaust system in Room XI, part of the villa's east wing. An opportunity was also taken to expose the tessellated pavement originally uncovered in 1948, in order to assess its condition and devise a strategy for its future protection.
- 1.2 Secondly, as part of the need to provide facilities for the disposal of storm water from the roof of a wooden shed covering the villa's west wing, a trial pit was excavated on the south side of the building in order to test for the survival of archaeology in this area.
- 1.3 The work was carried out under the direction of Rod Burchill and the site archive will be deposited with Bristol City Museums and Art Gallery under Accession Number 62/1995.

## 2. KINGSWESTON ROMAN VILLA

- 2.1 Kingsweston Roman Villa lies on the south side of Long Cross, Lawrence Weston, Bristol (**Fig.1**). The villa, centred on NGR ST 53395 77555, was originally excavated in 1948 (Boon 1950). Sometime in the 1950's or early 1960's the exposed walls and associated features were consolidated and the site landscaped for public display .
- 2.2 The villa was found during construction of the main access road, Long Cross, to the then new housing estate of Lawrence Weston. The road had removed the northern half of the building before it could be recorded. However, the southern half remained relatively intact and excavation by G.Boon and J.Brown (Boon 1950) revealed a series of rooms, within two wings with courtyard and porticus and beyond the west wing a bath suite (**Fig.2**).
- 2.3 The villa has been identified as a winged courtyard villa by Boon (Boon 1993) although, Collingwood and Richmond (1969) described it as a winged corridor villa of unusual type and reminiscent of examples from Roman Germany.
- 2.4 The original excavator identified at least two phases of construction (Boon 1950).
- 2.5 The primary phase probably dates from c.268 AD and consists of the porticus, courtyard, and the east and west wings, each of which contains two rooms and presumably the north range.
- 2.6 Sometime later a bath suite was added to the west side of the villa and the east wing altered by the insertion of a hypocaust into the south room (Room XI) (**Fig.2**). Room XII, immediately to the north, was divided to create a furnace chamber and the wall dividing Rooms XI and XII was breached for the furnace mouth (**Plate 1**).
- 2.7 The original floor within Room XI was removed and the flues and central chamber were excavated through the natural subsoil leaving four L-shaped baulks (**Fig.3**). The flues were revetted with calcareous sandstone walls and eight monolithic stone pilae were inserted within the central cavity to support the new floor. The flues were then capped with stone slabs and a new tessellated floor with a decorative central panel, surrounded by a wide border of plain pennant sandstone tessera, constructed over them.
- 2.8 The original excavation concluded that the primary occupation of the villa ended around 370 AD, although elements of the villa continued to be occupied after that time.
- 2.9 Boon (1950) recorded that the central part of the floor within Room XI had collapsed into the base of the hypocaust in antiquity. Other sections of the tessellated border remained intact on the two western baulks with a smaller area on the south-east baulk. In order to provide some degree of protection the surviving areas of pavement were covered with topsoil, either soon after excavation or during the subsequent consolidation work.

### 3. FIELDWORK

#### *Room XI*

- 3.1 Prior to the survey and excavation the site was cleared of weed growth and litter.
- 3.2 A detailed ground plan of Room XI was prepared showing all internal details and the furnace chamber to the north (**Fig.3**). In order to provide a record of the present condition of the internal walls and to assist in planning the proposed consolidation work, the internal elevations of the flues were photographed and drawn at a scale of 1:10 (**Fig.4, Plate 2**).
- 3.3 Each of the four baulks, created when the hypocaust system was inserted in to Room XI, were recorded in detail and where appropriate, further excavation undertaken.

#### *Baulk B1*

- 3.4 The northwest baulk (**Fig.3**). Removal of a red-brown soil (Context 1) revealed an area of plain tessellated pavement c.1 square metre. (2) comprised entirely of 2.5cm cubes of green-grey Pennant Sandstone (**Plate 2**) set in a creamy white mortar (3). The surviving floor was very unstable with numerous loose tesserae at its edges. In addition the roots of thistle and dandelion had penetrated the floor surface causing further damage. It proved impossible to remove all of these roots without causing further extensive damage to the floor. After cleaning the floor was photographed and a tracing made of the tesserae at 1:1 scale (**Plate 3**).
- 3.5 The remainder of the surface of B1 was cleared of weeds exposing a yellow-brown sandy soil (4), which overlay a layer of fragmented Pennant Sandstone slabs (5) (**Plate 4**). These Layers were left *in situ*.

#### *Baulk B2*

- 3.6 Situated in the southwest corner of Room XI, B2 was similar to B1. Beneath the red-brown soil was a continuation (2) of tessellated pavement covering 3.75sq.m (**Fig.3**). Its eastern edge contains twelve 15mm cubes of White Lias Limestone which probably represents part of an inner decorative panel in the pavement. The tessellated pavement here was unstable, with many loose tesserae and evidence of damage caused by perennial weeds.

### ***Baulk B3***

- 3.7 Baulk B3 was badly weathered and only a few loose Pennant Sandstone tesserae associated with (2) were present. The removal of a thin layer of accumulated soil and surface weeds revealed a thin deposit of creamy-white mortar (38). Beneath (38) a layer of hard brown mortar containing flecks of charcoal and lime (39), 150mm in depth, overlay a shallow deposit of orange-red sand (40). The brown mortar (39) partly overlay the northern edge of the stone capping of the southern flue in the hypocaust and may originally have continued up to the south wall of Room XI. Below (40) a layer of red-brown, sandy marl (41) formed a base for the floor make-up. On its west side (41) contained a large group of snail shells.
- 3.8 At the northern end of B3 there was a brown friable soil (42) containing numerous fragments of box-flue tile, fragmented Pennant Sandstone tiles or slabs, numerous coloured tesserae and a single sherd of 4th century pottery. This material appeared to fill a hollow in the natural subsoil (43) which underlay (41) and (42).

### ***Baulk B4***

- 3.9 In the northeast corner of Room XI, Baulk B4 was devoid of any evidence for the tessellated floor. Covering B4, except at its southern end, was a 200mm deep deposit of yellow-brown sandy soil (44), which contained finds including loose tesserae (Pennant Sandstone), five sherds of late Romano-British pottery and a single flint flake.
- 3.10 At the southern end of B4 a lens of yellow-brown sandy clay, flecked with charcoal (45) contained part of the rim of a wide mouthed jar or urn. It was made of a soft, rather corky, fabric containing quartz, ceramic, other opaques, and rare vegetable matter. The vessel is decorated with simple thumb-nail indentations. The sherds have not yet been positively identified but may possibly originate in the Sub-Roman or Dark Age period.
- 3.11 Beneath layers (44) and (45) there was a pink to red-brown clay that became more sandy to the north (46). This appeared to be the natural subsoil (**Plate 5**).

### ***Trial Pit (Fig.1)***

- 3.12 At the west end of the site, near the southern end of the wooden building which covers the west wing, a trial pit was excavated in order to test for the survival of archaeology in this area.
- 3.13 A pit, 1.5m by 1m was excavated to a maximum depth of 1.5m. A series of redeposited soils and clays overlay the natural subsoil. No archaeological features were found (**Plate 6**).



#### 4. DISCUSSION

- 4.1 When the archaeological evidence from Boon's excavation in 1948 was compared with the current fieldwork it clearly reveals that there has been considerable deterioration to the preservation of elements of the tessellated pavement in Room XI (Boon 1950).
- 4.2 On B2 there had been little reduction in floor area, although most of the tesserae had become rather loose due to the decay of their mortar setting. There had been some damage from perennial weeds.
- 4.3 The B1 floor was much reduced in area with a considerable part of the pavement and its underlying make-up having been lost into the base of the hypocaust, mainly as the result of water and frost damage. Many tesserae were loose and detached from their mortar base and the area had suffered considerable damage from weeds.
- 4.4 The small area of tesserae shown in 1948 to be extant on B3 was missing, although the mortar and clay base for the pavement largely survived.
- 4.5 B4 had apparently lost its floor prior to excavation in 1948 since there is no mention of it in the report that followed (Boon, 1950).
- 4.6 After discussion with Mr A.Davison of English Heritage and Mr G.Reeder of the City Valuers it was agreed that the remains of the tessellated floor above Baulks B1 and B2 would be retained in-situ and a strategy devised to ensure its future protection. It was further agreed that Baulks B3 and B4 should be fully excavated to permit examination of the internal faces of the flue revetment walls and, if possible, to record the sequence of construction of the second period floor.
- 4.7 The excavation undertaken on Baulk B3 to record the construction sequence of the new tessellated floor, which was laid as a result of the remodelling of the villa and the insertion of the hypocaust into Room XI, revealed a simple sequence of redeposited subsoil, sand and mortar. The floor was clearly of inferior quality when compared to the complex make-up of the primary tessellated floors found in the west wing (Boon 1950).
- 4.8 The finds from context (42) at the north end of B3 show that the material was deposited after the collapse of the floor. It is not clear how soon after the collapse this deposition took place.
- 4.9 The vessel found in context (45), whilst not yet positively identified, clearly does not fit the known Iron Age and Romano- British ceramic traditions and is tentatively suggested to be of Dark Age date. Such dating, if confirmed, would appear to support Boon's amended date for the male skeleton recovered from the Room XI flue (Boon 1993).
- 4.10 Examination of the flue walls showed that they are in very poor condition. The walls were faced with yellow sandstone rubble re-pointed with a modern grey cement mortar when the consolidation work was undertaken sometime after 1948. This cement has

become loose and in a number of instances has become detached from the wall. Much of the stone is badly eroded and several faces exhibit large cracks.

- 4.11 The internal construction of the walls was more random suggesting that rubble had simply been packed behind the external faces. The external faces were originally bonded in mortar, but no mortar survived. However, as Boon (1950) recorded the original mortars as being brown in colour, it is possible that the mortar has become indiscernible from the soils revetted by the walls.
- 4.12 The test pit against the west range clearly shows that the earth bank to the south is made ground and that archaeology does not survive there.

## **5. ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

- 5.1 Rod Burchill was ably assisted by Frank Coyne and volunteer Jennie Hesford. Penny Blackmore and Sarah Kriefman, year 11 pupils at Filton High School, completed a week of work experience on the site and their assistance and enthusiasm was greatly appreciated. Simon Cox undertook the excavation of the test pit.
- 5.2 Rod Burchill would like to thank Mr and Mrs L.Lamoon, who, in the interest of security permitted site equipment to be stored on their premises, and colleagues Eric Boore, for his assistance and Ann Linge for preparing the published drawings.

## 6. BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Boon, G., 1950, Excavation at King's Weston. *Transactions of the Bristol and Gloucestershire Archaeological Society* 69, pp5-58
- Boon, G., 1993, Kingsweston Villa Revisited: The East Wing Murders and Other Burials. *Transactions of the Bristol and Gloucestershire Archaeological Society* 111, pp 77-84.
- Collingwood R. & Richmond, I., 1969, *The Archaeology of Roman Britain* pp 137. New York.

## **7. LIST OF CONTEXTS**

### **Context**

- (1) Red-brown sandy topsoil
- (2) Grey-green Pennant Sandstone tesserae
- (3) Creamy-white mortar
- (4) Yellow-brown sandy soil with small stones
- (5) Stone slab fragments
- (6) Not used
- (7)-(11) Flue walls Baulk B1
- (12)-(15) Flue walls Baulk B2
- (16)-(20) Flue walls Baulk B3
- (21)-(26) Flue Walls Baulk B4
- (27)-(34) Yellow sandstone pilae
- (35) Recessed flue external east wall
- (36) Capping of south flue
- (37) same as (2)
- (38) same as (3)
- (39) Hard brown mortar, flecks of lime and charcoal
- (40) Orange-red sand
- (41) Red-brown sandy marl
- (42) Brown soil and demolition material
- (43) Pinky orange-brown sandy clay with fragments of decayed sandstone
- (44) Red-brown sandy soil
- (45) Yellow-brown sandy clay, charcoal flecks
- (46) Pink to orange-brown sandy clay.

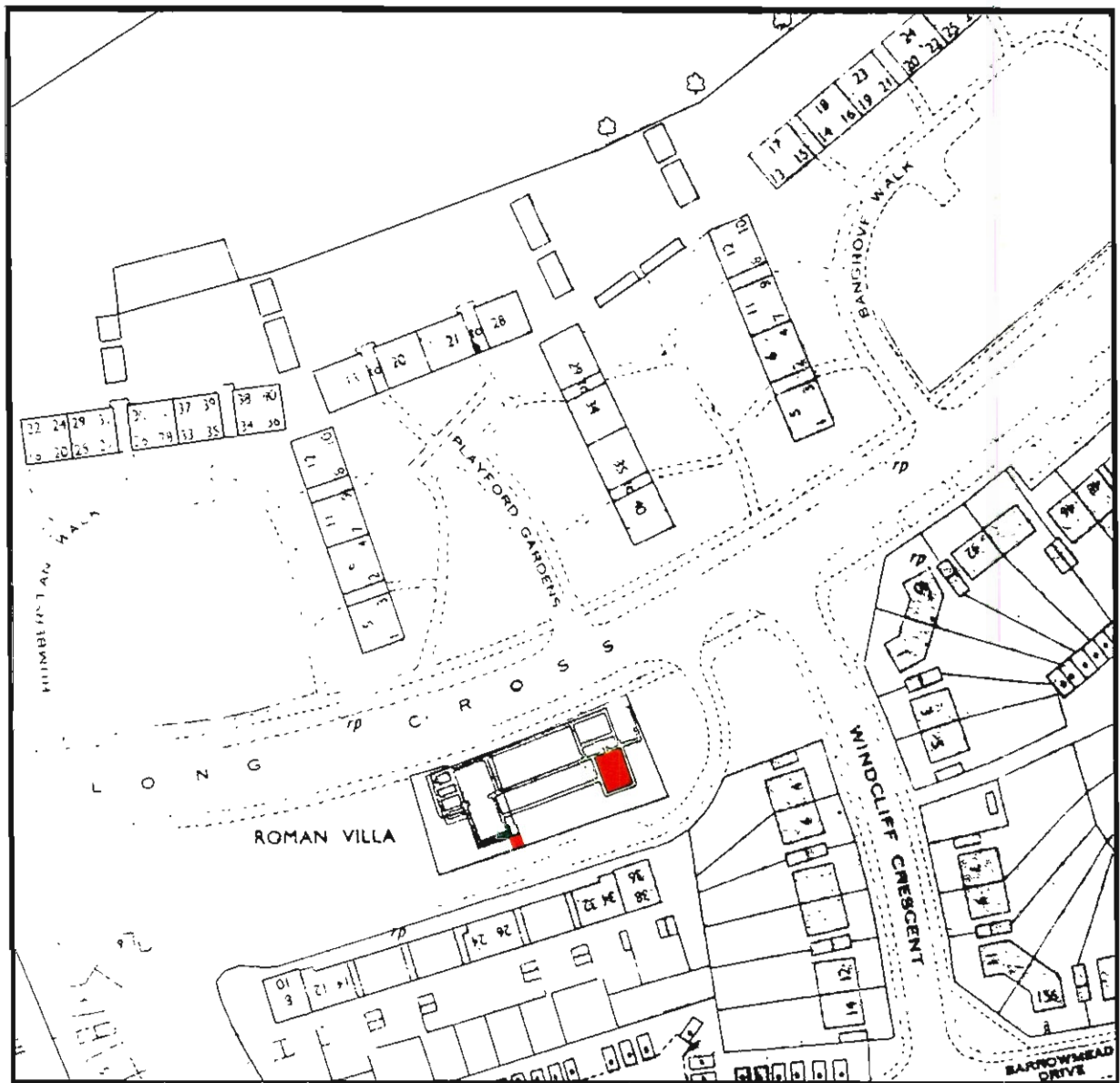


Fig.1 Location plan with Room XI and test pit indicated.

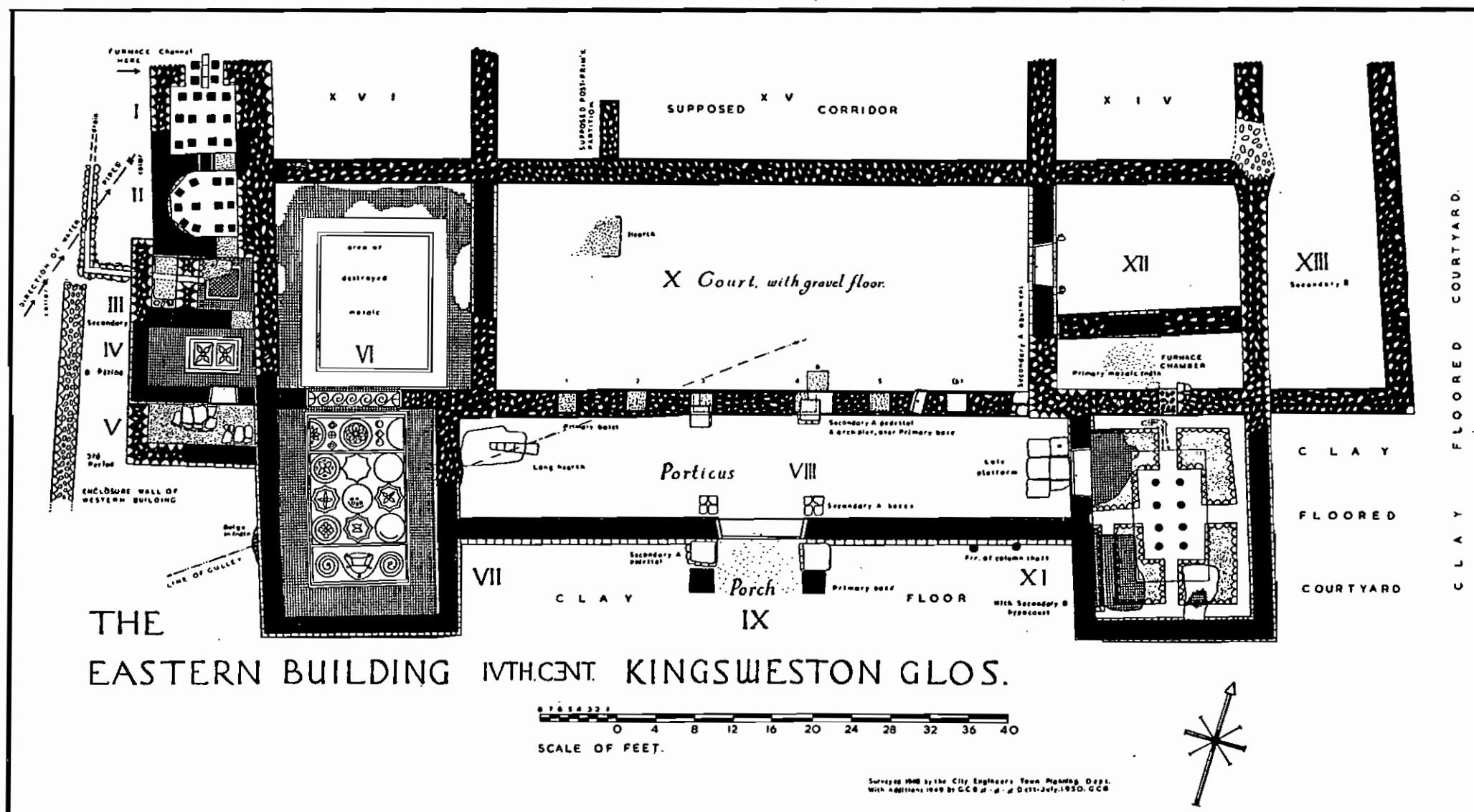


Fig.2 Copy of original plan of villa by G.Boon (1950)

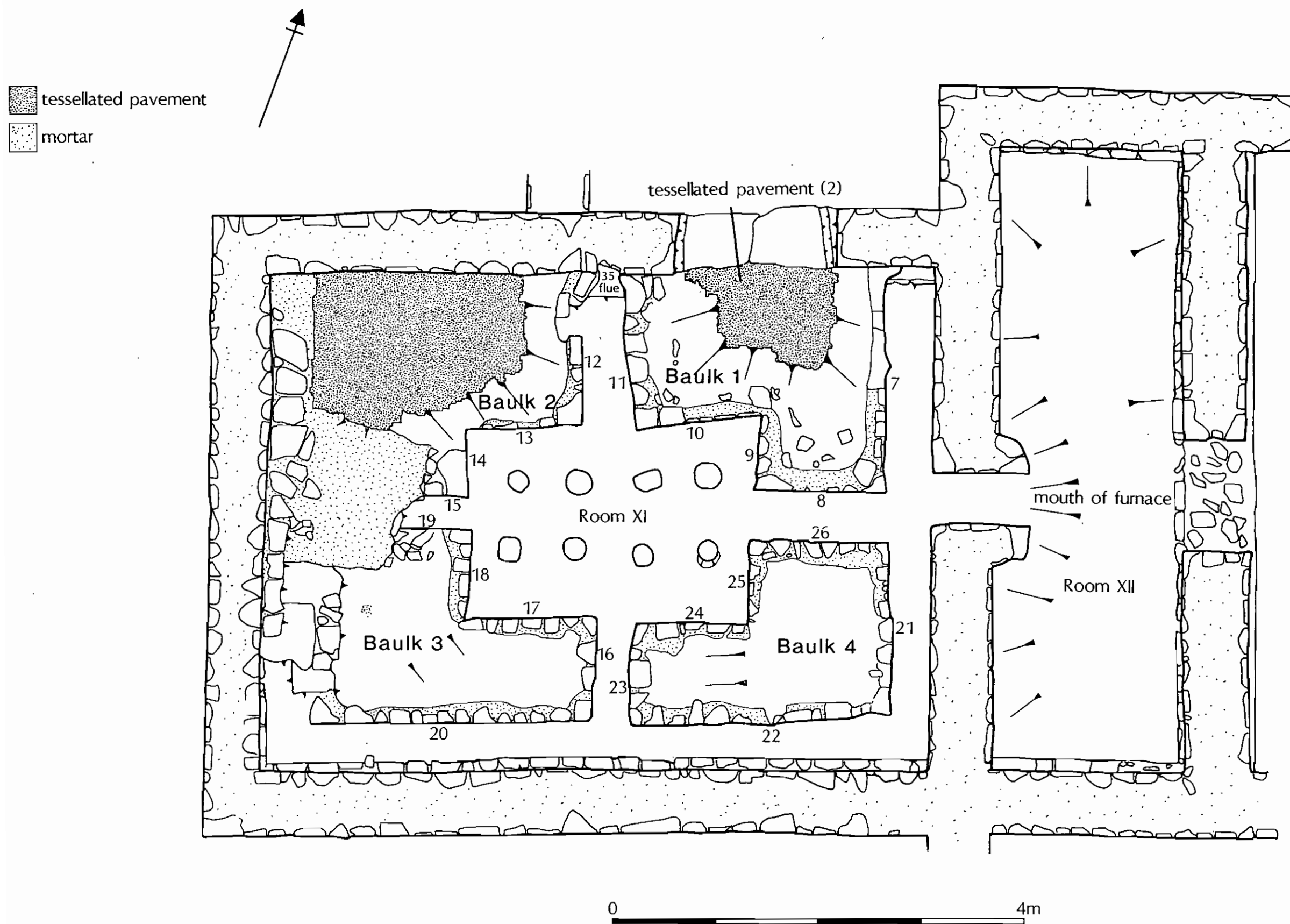
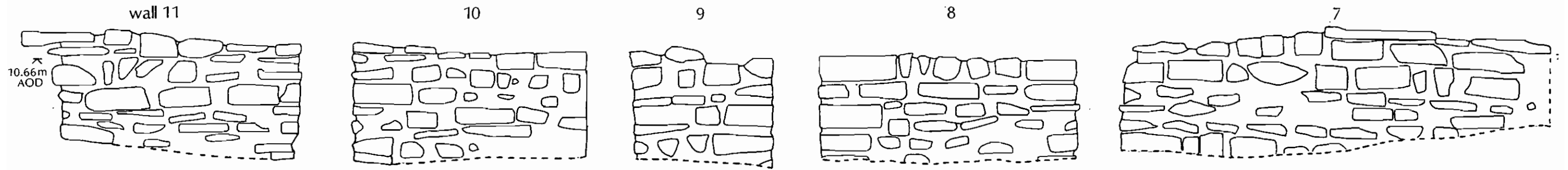


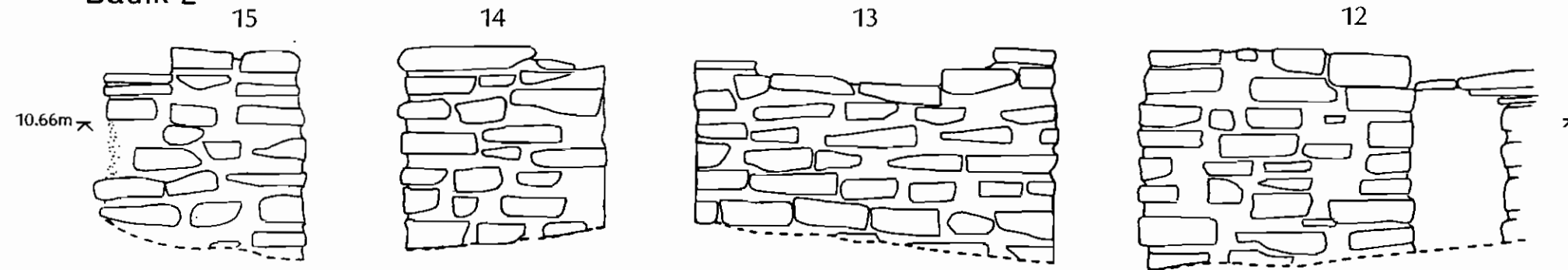
Fig.3 Ground plan of the hypocaust in Room XI and part of Room XII



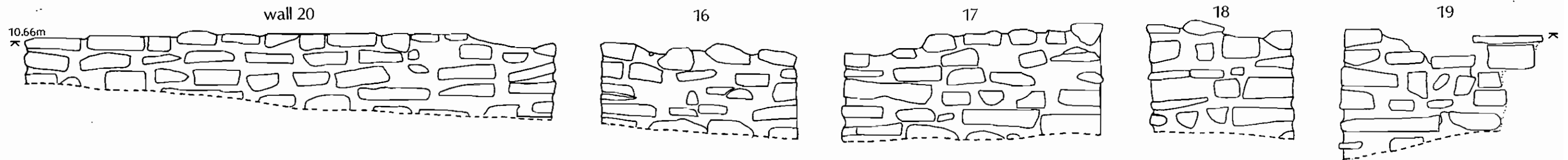
### Baulk 1



### Baulk 2



### Baulk 3



### Baulk 4

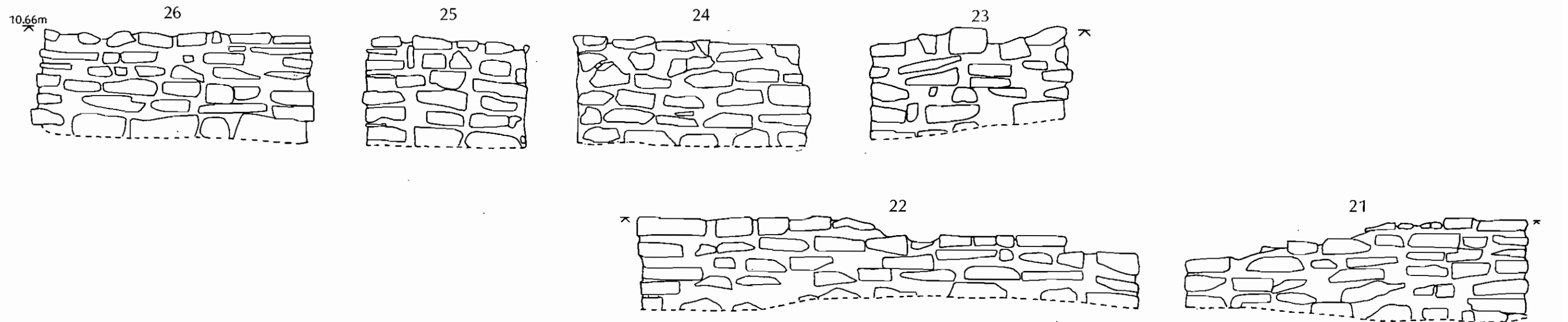


Fig.4 Elevations of walls lining flues

0 2m





Plate 1 Room XI prior to work commencing

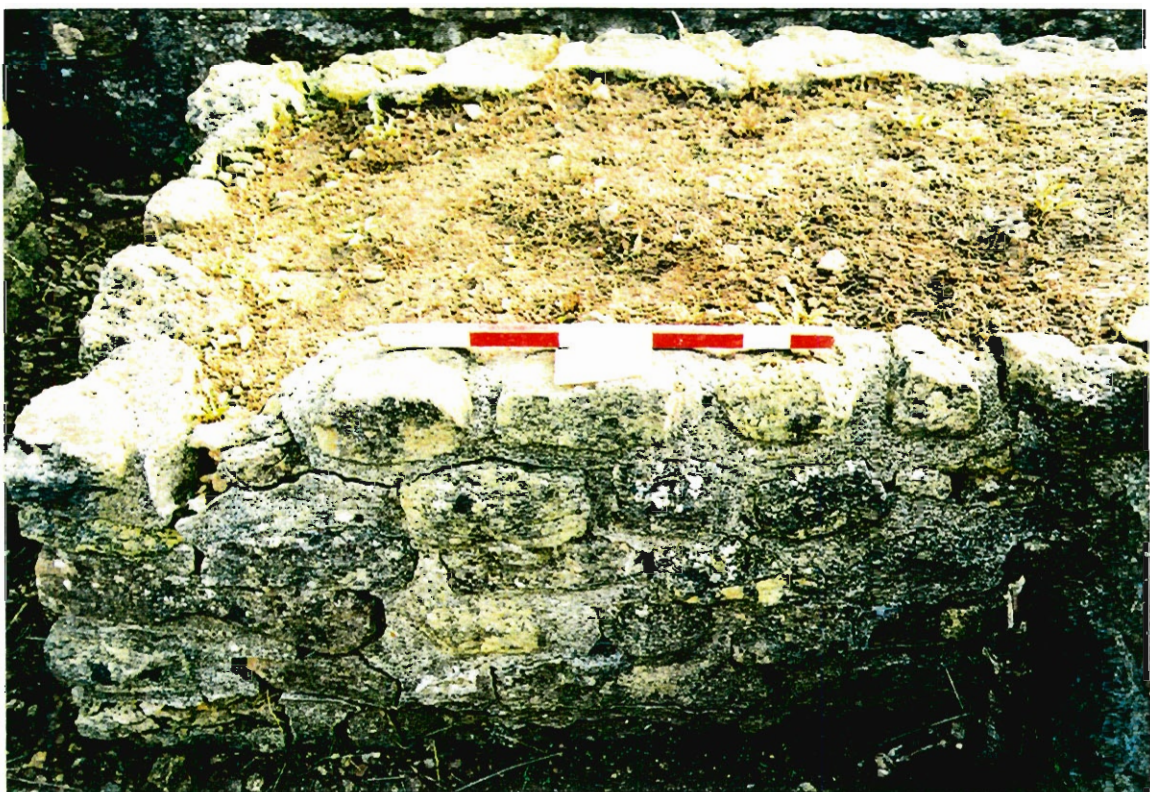


Plate 2 Typical elevation of baulk revetment wall





Plate 3 Tessellated pavement from Baulk B1



Plate 4 Baulk B1 after cleaning



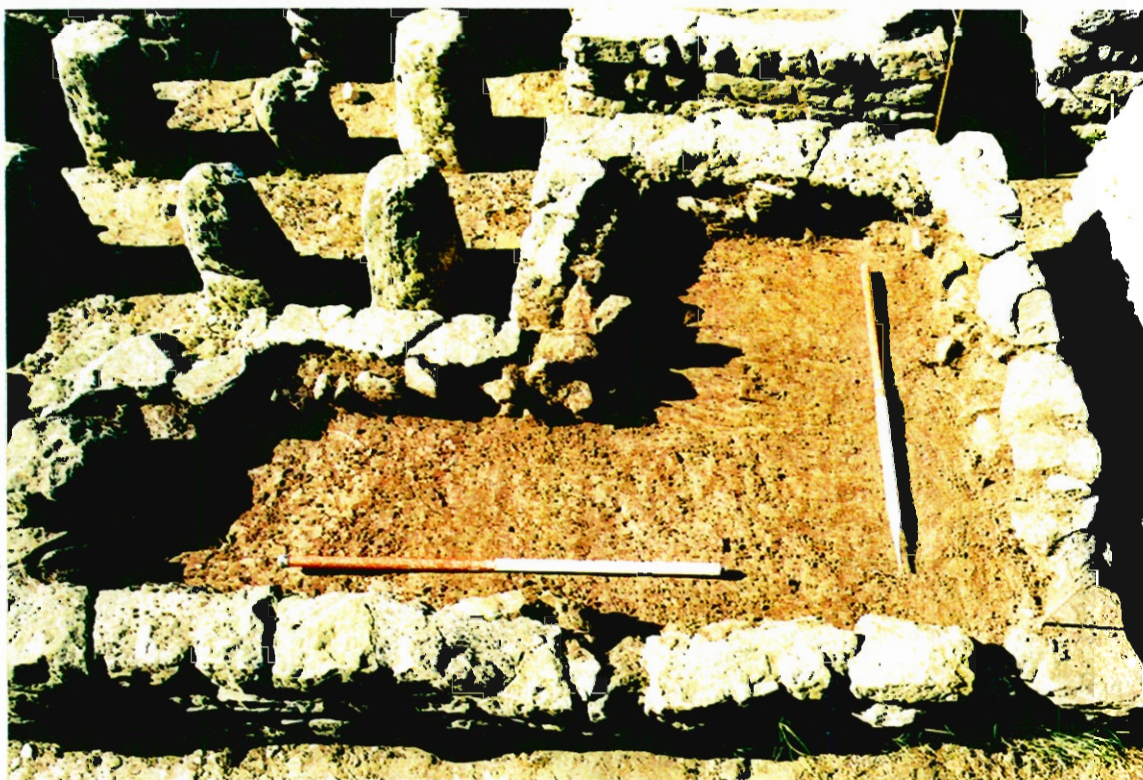


Plate 5 Baulk B4 after excavation



Plate 6 Test pit south of west wing of villa