

The Roman Villa at Blacksmith's Corner, Walberton, West Sussex: An interim report on the 2009 excavations

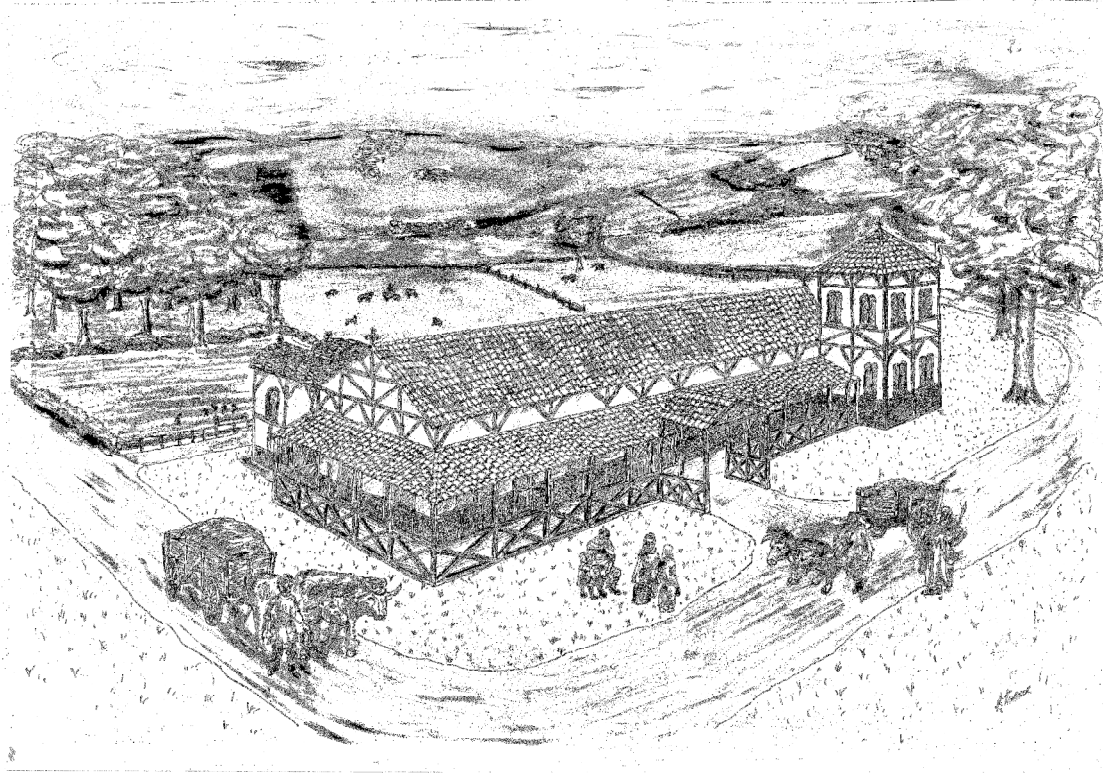


Figure 1: Walberton Villa Possible Reconstruction

Worthing Archaeological Society
September 2009

CONTENTS

CONTENTS.....	2
SUMMARY.....	3
FIGURES.....	4
PREVIOUS WORK.....	5
AIMS AND OBJECTIVES	7
RESULTS	8
Objective 1: Is the structure on the south-west corner of the villa a bath house?.....	8
A: The apse ended room	8
B: The pit area.....	9
C: The “lost” wall	10
Objective 1 Interpretation	10
Objective 2: How does the ditch uncovered in 2008 relate to the villa?	13
a. Ditch A	13
b. The Northern end of the Villa.....	15
Wall Foundation 1.....	16
Wall Foundation 2.....	17
Wall Foundation 3.....	19
Objective 2 Interpretation	20
Objective 3 How much survives of the villa complex survives?.....	21
Trench G	22
Trench H	22
Trench K	23
Conclusion	26
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	29

SUMMARY

In 2006, at the invitation of the land-owner, Mr Luke Wishard, Worthing Archaeological Society undertook excavations in a field at Blacksmith's corner, Walberton to investigate finds of pottery and ceramic building material brought to the surface during ploughing. Four seasons of excavation and field survey have revealed a previously unrecorded Roman villa. The 2008 fieldwork involved excavation to determine the construction of the villa, the possible bath house and an area outside the main building.

The 2009 season Project Design was set up to further investigate the probable bath house, and to look at the north end of the Villa and the relationship with the ditch located in 2008.

FIGURES

Figure 1: Walberton Villa Possible Reconstruction.....	1
Figure 2: 2006 Geophysical survey results.....	5
Figure 3: 2007 Trench Plans (with 2008 trench highlighted in the blue hashed area) ..	6
Figure 4: Bath House Area	8
Figure 5: Excavated Bath House, facing east	9
Figure 6: Demolition Pit Plan	10
Figure 7: Bath House plans amalgamated with 2007 wall plans	11
Figure 8: Northern end of the villa showing trenches and main features	13
Figure 9 Section through Ditch A in trench G.....	14
Figure 10 Section through Ditch A in eastern baulk of Trench G.....	14
Figure 11 Section of Ditch A in trench J	15
Figure 12 Section through baulk of Trench G showing sub-floor level.	16
Figure 13 Photograph showing the sub-floor level in Trench G	17
Figure 14 Burnt area in Trench G	17
Figure 15 Photograph showing the relationship between contexts (9/17) & (9/57) ...	18
Figure 16 Photograph of the neo-natal burial prior to lifting.....	19
Figure 17 Plan of the neo-natal burial.....	19
Figure 18 Photograph looking east towards Trenches H (centre), J (left) and M (right).	20
Figure 19 Photograph of Trench M showing the gap between contexts (9/72) and (9/74).....	20
Figure 20 Plan of site showing Trenches G, H & K	22
Figure 21 Pit 2, left prior to excavation, right post excavation.....	23
Figure 25 Phasing of the Villa	27

PREVIOUS WORK

In 2006, a series of test pits were located based on the verbal evidence of the landowner that a large quantity of pottery and ceramic building material (CBM) had been uncovered during ploughing. One of these test pits located the junction of two walls of the main villa, and a geophysical survey (Fig. 2) was undertaken which showed the layout of the rooms of the villa.

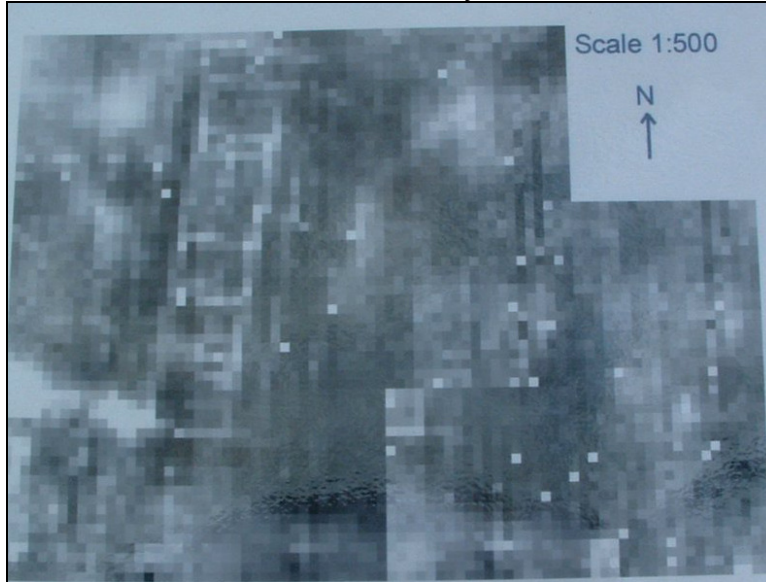


Figure 2: 2006 Geophysical survey results

In 2007, a 30m x 30m trench was opened to reveal the majority of the floor plan of the villa (Fig. 3). Several sondages were dug in key areas to determine the depth of the remaining walls, which were found to extend to a maximum of 0.83m below the uppermost layer.

In addition, in 2007 an apsidal wall was uncovered. It was not immediately obvious whether this wall related to an apse ended corridor, or whether this was part of a possible bath house structure.

In 2008, the excavation investigated the relationship of a number of internal walls between rooms 1 & 2 and 2 & 3 (see Figure X), in particular examining whether the internal 'corridor' walls were all built at the same time as the main villa walls. In addition, trenches investigating the construction of the walls were dug to the base of the wall foundations to explore whether any floor levels had survived.

A possible pit, which cut one into the main west wall of the villa building, was also investigated, to determine its relationship to the villa. Based on the contents of the pit, i.e. large pieces of painted wall plaster, brick and tile, appeared to relate to the demolition of the villa.

A trench was also located beside the apsidal wall found in 2007 in order to investigate whether this feature formed part of a possible bath house.

B.C.W. 07 Trench 'A'

This plan view map illustrates the layout of B.C.W. 07 Trench 'A'. The map is enclosed by a dashed red boundary. A central area is shaded with blue diagonal hatching. Numerous points are marked with black dots and labeled with numbers, including elevations such as 1042, 1177, 1125, 1128, 1129, 1130, 1131, 1132, 1133, 1134, 1135, 1136, 1137, 1138, 1139, 1140, 1141, 1142, 1143, 1144, 1145, 1146, 1147, 1148, 1149, 1150, 1151, 1152, 1153, 1154, 1155, 1156, 1157, 1158, 1159, 1160, 1161, 1162, 1163, 1164, 1165, 1166, 1167, 1168, 1169, 1170, 1171, 1172, 1173, 1174, 1175, 1176, 1177, 1178, 1179, 1180, 1181, 1182, 1183, 1184, 1185, 1186, 1187, 1188, 1189, 1190, 1191, 1192, 1193, 1194, 1195, 1196, 1197, 1198, 1199, 1200, 1201, 1202, 1203, 1204, 1205, 1206, 1207, 1208, 1209, 1210, 1211, 1212, 1213, 1214, 1215, 1216, 1217, 1218, 1219, 1220, 1221, 1222, 1223, 1224, 1225, 1226, 1227, 1228, 1229, 1230, 1231, 1232, 1233, 1234, 1235, 1236, 1237, 1238, 1239, 1240, 1241, 1242, 1243, 1244, 1245, 1246, 1247, 1248, 1249, 1250, 1251, 1252, 1253, 1254, 1255, 1256, 1257, 1258, 1259, 1260, 1261, 1262, 1263, 1264, 1265, 1266, 1267, 1268, 1269, 1270, 1271, 1272, 1273, 1274, 1275, 1276, 1277, 1278, 1279, 1280, 1281, 1282, 1283, 1284, 1285, 1286, 1287, 1288, 1289, 1290, 1291, 1292, 1293, 1294, 1295, 1296, 1297, 1298, 1299, 1300, 1301, 1302, 1303, 1304, 1305, 1306, 1307, 1308, 1309, 1310, 1311, 1312, 1313, 1314, 1315, 1316, 1317, 1318, 1319, 1320, 1321, 1322, 1323, 1324, 1325, 1326, 1327, 1328, 1329, 1330, 1331, 1332, 1333, 1334, 1335, 1336, 1337, 1338, 1339, 1340, 1341, 1342, 1343, 1344, 1345, 1346, 1347, 1348, 1349, 1350, 1351, 1352, 1353, 1354, 1355, 1356, 1357, 1358, 1359, 1360, 1361, 1362, 1363, 1364, 1365, 1366, 1367, 1368, 1369, 1370, 1371, 1372, 1373, 1374, 1375, 1376, 1377, 1378, 1379, 1380, 1381, 1382, 1383, 1384, 1385, 1386, 1387, 1388, 1389, 1390, 1391, 1392, 1393, 1394, 1395, 1396, 1397, 1398, 1399, 1400, 1401, 1402, 1403, 1404, 1405, 1406, 1407, 1408, 1409, 1410, 1411, 1412, 1413, 1414, 1415, 1416, 1417, 1418, 1419, 1420, 1421, 1422, 1423, 1424, 1425, 1426, 1427, 1428, 1429, 1430, 1431, 1432, 1433, 1434, 1435, 1436, 1437, 1438, 1439, 1440, 1441, 1442, 1443, 1444, 1445, 1446, 1447, 1448, 1449, 1450, 1451, 1452, 1453, 1454, 1455, 1456, 1457, 1458, 1459, 1460, 1461, 1462, 1463, 1464, 1465, 1466, 1467, 1468, 1469, 1470, 1471, 1472, 1473, 1474, 1475, 1476, 1477, 1478, 1479, 1480, 1481, 1482, 1483, 1484, 1485, 1486, 1487, 1488, 1489, 1490, 1491, 1492, 1493, 1494, 1495, 1496, 1497, 1498, 1499, 1500, 1501, 1502, 1503, 1504, 1505, 1506, 1507, 1508, 1509, 1510, 1511, 1512, 1513, 1514, 1515, 1516, 1517, 1518, 1519, 1520, 1521, 1522, 1523, 1524, 1525, 1526, 1527, 1528, 1529, 1530, 1531, 1532, 1533, 1534, 1535, 1536, 1537, 1538, 1539, 1540, 1541, 1542, 1543, 1544, 1545, 1546, 1547, 1548, 1549, 1550, 1551, 1552, 1553, 1554, 1555, 1556, 1557, 1558, 1559, 1560, 1561, 1562, 1563, 1564, 1565, 1566, 1567, 1568, 1569, 1570, 1571, 1572, 1573, 1574, 1575, 1576, 1577, 1578, 1579, 1580, 1581, 1582, 1583, 1584, 1585, 1586, 1587, 1588, 1589, 1590, 1591, 1592, 1593, 1594, 1595, 1596, 1597, 1598, 1599, 1600, 1601, 1602, 1603, 1604, 1605, 1606, 1607, 1608, 1609, 1610, 1611, 1612, 1613, 1614, 1615, 1616, 1617, 1618, 1619, 1620, 1621, 1622, 1623, 1624, 1625, 1626, 1627, 1628, 1629, 1630, 1631, 1632, 1633, 1634, 1635, 1636, 1637, 1638, 1639, 1640, 1641, 1642, 1643, 1644, 1645, 1646, 1647, 1648, 1649, 1650, 1651, 1652, 1653, 1654, 1655, 1656, 1657, 1658, 1659, 1660, 1661, 1662, 1663, 1664, 1665, 1666, 1667, 1668, 1669, 1670, 1671, 1672, 1673, 1674, 1675, 1676, 1677, 1678, 1679, 1680, 1681, 1682, 1683, 1684, 1685, 1686, 1687, 1688, 1689, 1690, 1691, 1692, 1693, 1694, 1695, 1696, 1697, 1698, 1699, 1700, 1701, 1702, 1703, 1704, 1705, 1706, 1707, 1708, 1709, 1710, 1711, 1712, 1713, 1714, 1715, 1716, 1717, 1718, 1719, 1720, 1721, 1722, 1723, 1724, 1725, 1726, 1727, 1728, 1729, 1730, 1731, 1732, 1733, 1734, 1735, 1736, 1737, 1738, 1739, 1740, 1741, 1742, 1743, 1744, 1745, 1746, 1747, 1748, 1749, 1750, 1751, 1752, 1753, 1754, 1755, 1756, 1757, 1758, 1759, 1760, 1761, 1762, 1763, 1764, 1765, 1766, 1767, 1768, 1769, 1770, 1771, 1772, 1773, 1774, 1775, 1776, 1777, 1778, 1779, 1780, 1781, 1782, 1783, 1784, 1785, 1786, 1787, 17

Page 6 of 29

AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

The aims of the 2009 excavation were as follows:

1. To determine whether the structure on the south-west corner of the villa is a bath house and how it relates to the wall running west from the main western wall of the villa discovered in 2006. The apsidal wall uncovered in 2007 suggested the presence of a structure attached to the southwest corner of the corridor villa. Further excavation in 2008 suggested this might be the location of a bath house. Its northern limit, however, was not defined. In 2006 a section of wall was uncovered that led away from the western wall of the villa. Part of the objective was to understand its purpose and how it relates to the possible bath house feature.
2. To investigate how the ditch uncovered in 2008 relates to the villa. The evaluation trench dug in 2008 revealed the presence of a flint-lined ditch, containing much pottery, a few metres north of the northern wall of the villa. It was necessary to try to establish the extent and purpose of this ditch.
3. To establish how much survives of the villa complex. Excavations in 2006, 2007 and 2008 have established a firm floor plan of the Walberton villa and begun to identify various phases of construction and demolition. It is now hoped to place the villa more firmly in its immediate environment. The wealth that generated the villa was almost certainly based on agriculture, which would necessitate the presence of ancillary buildings. There would also have to have been access to the villa, probably linking to an east west running road (along the bottom of the dip slope of the Downs) north of the villa. Previous resistivity surveys indicate the presence of other possible features, which need to be evaluated.

RESULTS

Objective 1: Is the structure on the south-west corner of the villa a bath house?

A: The apse ended room

In 2007, an apse ended structure was located at the south east end of the villa. It was thought that the structure was likely to be a bath house; however its northern limits were not defined.

The area opened in 2007 and 2008 was fully exposed, and then the area was worked by mattock and trowel to explore the whole area of the room (Figure 4). During the clearance of the overlying spoil, a high quantity of metal working slag found.

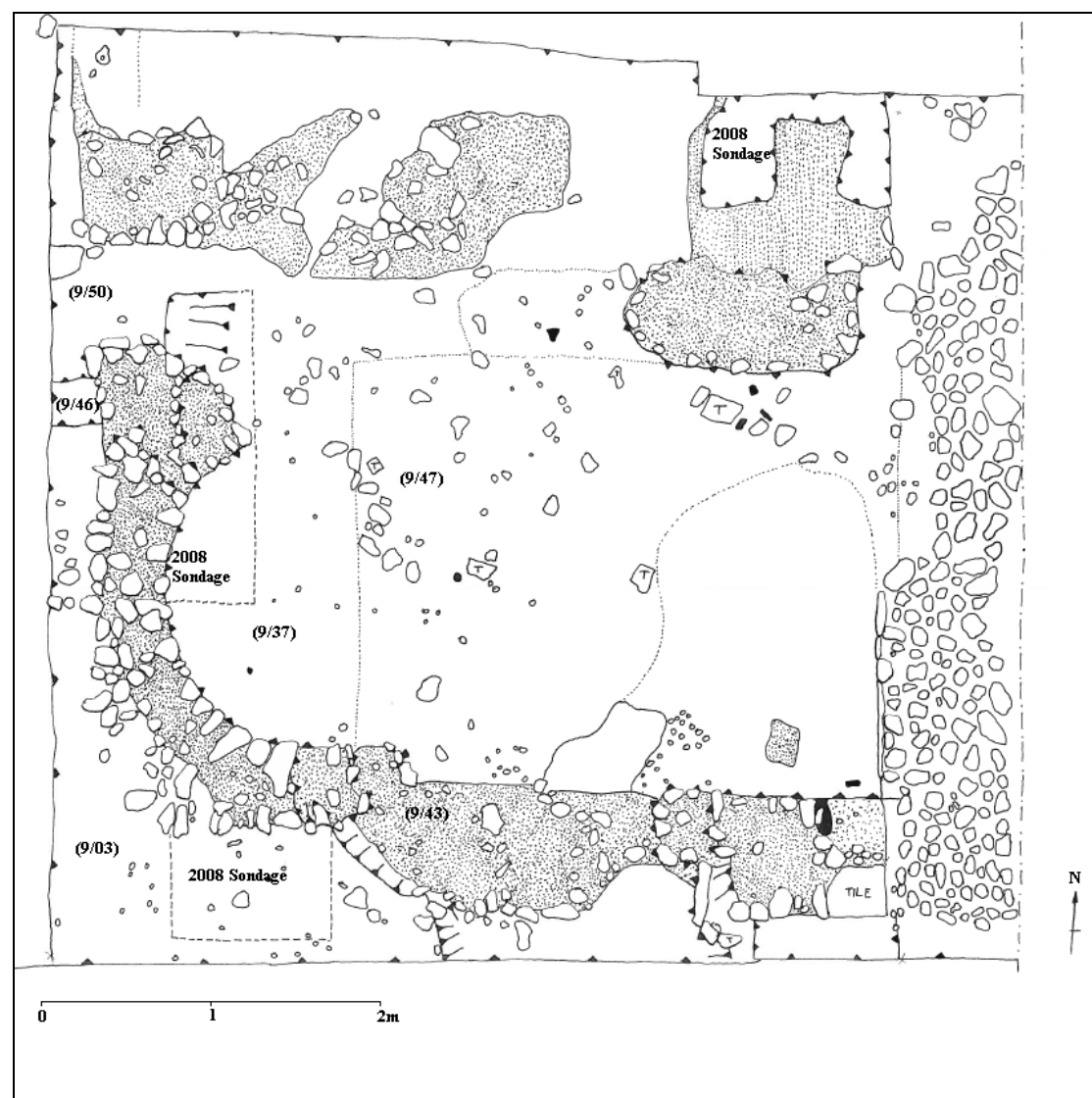


Figure 4: Bath House Area

The excavated floor of the putative bath house showed two distinct areas, context 9/37 in the apse and context 9/47 covering the area to the east of the apse. In addition, to the north of 9/47 was a partial wall whose foundation survived for approximately 1m. This wall appeared to continue to the end of the apse, and the “ghost” foundations were clearly visible as a soil mark (see Fig. 5). In the remaining section of this wall was the distinct outline of where two box flue tiles had been laid on end.

There was a considerable quantity of broken box flue tile scattered around the floor surface of the structure. On initial examination it appears that the tile is mainly third century in date.

At the east of the room, plaster survived on the southern end of the wall, and in the south-east corner of 9/47 there was a fairly distinct square patch of mortar, the remains of the floor surface



Figure 5: Excavated Bath House, facing east

Directly to the north of the apse, in context 9/50, there was a distinct gap between the wall structures. Although there appeared to be a “bridge” of flints above this area, there was a definite break in the wall construction.

B: The pit area

To the north of the apse ended room, an area of disturbance was located adjacent to a demolition pit that was partially excavated in 2008. The area was excavated and revealed large quantities of tile, mortar and even painted wall plaster (in various colours and designs). The layer of demolition rubble came to an end approximately 3 metres from the western wall of the main villa building.

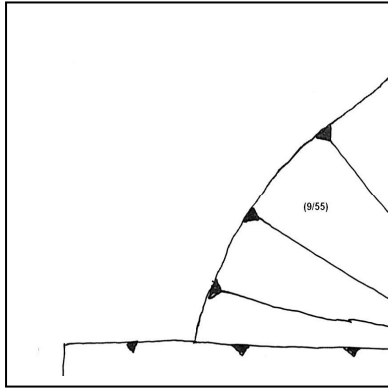


Figure 6: Demolition Pit Plan

When this demolition rubble was removed, the west wall of the main villa building was exposed, and it was apparent that there was a distinct change in the make up of the main wall from the well-packed regular flints exposed in the sondages dug in 2008 to what appeared to be a much rougher fill of material. At the south end of the wall exposed in this area, there was a large spread of substantial flints (9/66), underneath which a deep patch of mortar was visible.

The area to the west of the wall had a thick layer of heavily burned material that appeared to have been built up over a period of time.

C: The “lost” wall

In the original excavations of 2006, a small portion of wall on an east-west orientation was found to the west of the main villa wall, but it had been problematical to relocate this wall subsequently.

However, this year, we re-exposed the section of wall 2 metres north of the pit area and 6 metres north of the apse ended room. A small sondage at the side of this wall showed that only a single layer of flints with some mortar remained.

The wall itself only ran for just under 1 metre before it disappeared. However, two metres to the west an area of mortar and flint was uncovered which may represent the original return of this wall, although further excavation in this area is needed to confirm this assumption.

Objective 1 Interpretation

Although this season began with initial doubts over whether the apse was part of a bath house, this now appears to be a correct assumption.

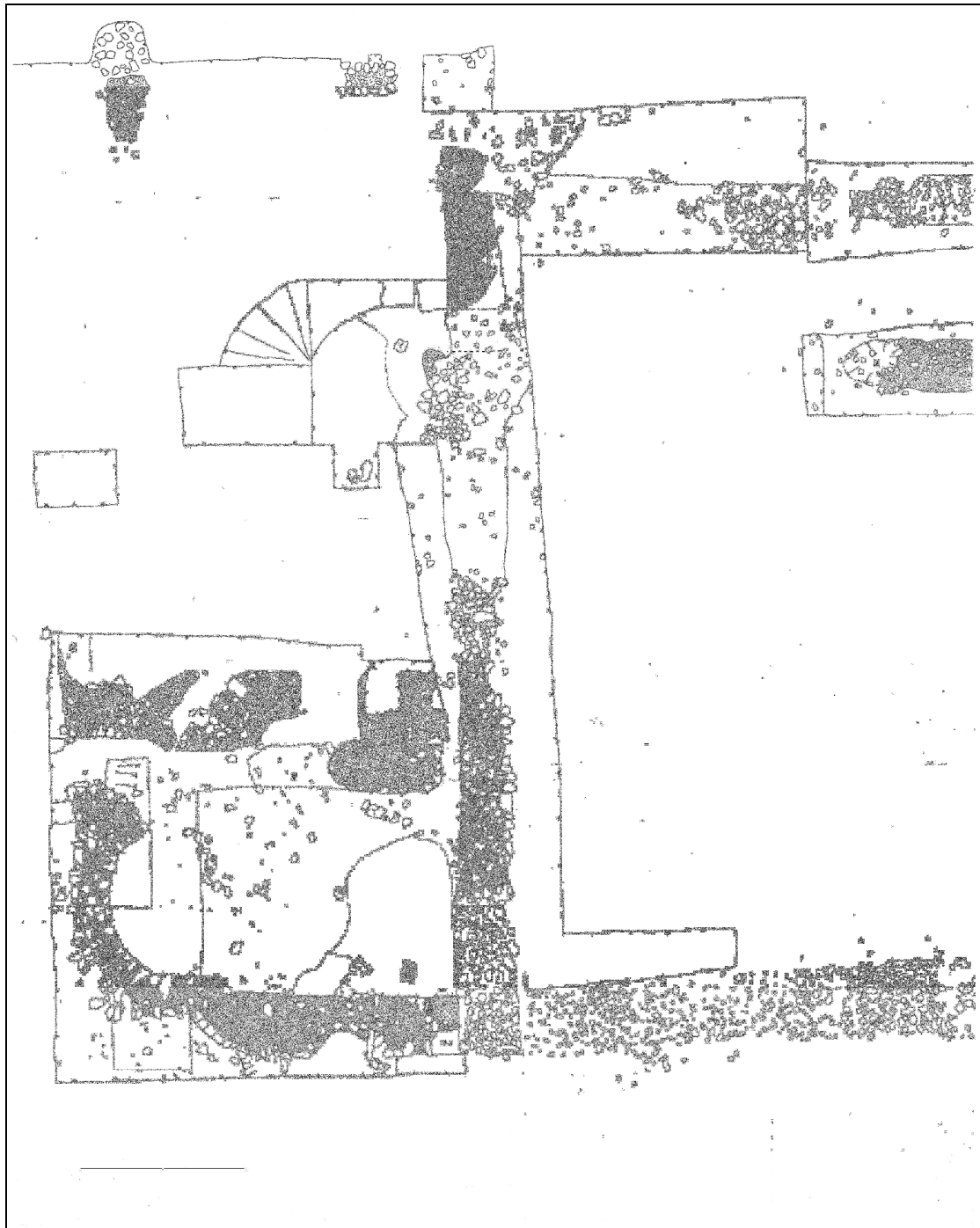


Figure 7: Bath House plans amalgamated with 2007 wall plans

Current interpretation is that the bath house was constructed at some time after the main villa. The main reason for this interpretation are that the foundations of the bath house do not extend to the same depth as that of the main building and built in different way with less use of mortar.

The apse ended room appears to have operated as both the *tepidarium* (the warm room) and the apse itself would have been the *frigidarium* (the cold plunge pool).

Evidence of the location of box flue tiles in two areas, and the possible mortar imprint of a stack of *pilae* tiles on the floor of the apse ended room seem to indicate that the eastern 2/3rds of the room were heated by a *hypocaust*. The floor of the bath house is approximately 50 cm lower than the assumed floor surface of the rooms of the main villa. Once the *hypocaust* system was included, this would have meant that the floor of the *tepidarium* would have been on an equivalent level with the floor of the main villa rooms, and there would have been a step down into the *frigidarium*.

The gap in the western wall (9/50) is thought to have been the deliberate gap to allow drainage from the plunge pool. There has so far been no archaeological evidence of the drainage system itself, but if there had been lead pipes, it is very likely these would have been removed for reuse after the villa had ceased to be habitable.

The third room of the bath house complex, the *caldarium* (the hot room) has yet to be located, although the assumption is that it would be between the *tepidarium* and the *praefurnium*.

When the bath house was constructed, the opportunity appears to have been taken to heat room I of the villa, and this is evidenced through the channel that was dug through the wall foundation.

It also appears that the installation of the bath house may have led to the remodelling that caused the movement of the internal walls between rooms I, II and III.

The cut through the wall foundations from the *praefurnium* area is on an exact line with the original internal wall delimiting the north end of room I. Therefore, it appears the internal wall was then moved just over 1 metre north to accommodate the heating vent into room I.

The small wall found to the north of the demolition pit could be a part of the bath house complex, possibly surrounding the *praefurnium* area to either act as a wind break, or to shield the area from view.

At present, there is no direct evidence linking the addition of the bath house to the phases of rebuilding detected at the north end of the villa (see below).

When the villa had come to the end of its use, it appears that the entire site was levelled down to ground surface, and any usable material was moved for use in an alternative (and as yet unlocated) project.

The demolition pit located in 2007/2008 in room I now appears to extend into the *praefurnium* area to the west of the main walls. The current hypothesis is that part of the demolition of the villa involved the removal of the *pilae* tiles under the bath house floor and under the floor of room I. This would have left a large ready made hole which was then used as a convenient place to deposit the rubble that was not deemed to be worth salvaging (hence the low proportions of tiles, but the large amount of wall plaster).

Objective 2: How does the ditch uncovered in 2008 relate to the villa?

The evaluation trench dug in 2008 revealed the presence of what was thought to be a flint-lined ditch (Ditch A), containing much pottery, a few meters north of the northern wall of the villa. One objective of the 2009 excavation was to try to establish the extent, purpose and period of the ditch. Three trenches were positioned to help facilitate this, trench F (from 2008) was reopened and extended, whilst trenches G and J were positioned to cross the assumed line of the ditch.

When the topsoil was removed by machine, unexpected walls were encountered in trenches J and H. It quickly became apparent that the northern end of the villa was more complex than had been assumed and required further investigation. To this end, trenches F, H and J were extended and trenches L and M were dug (see figure 8)

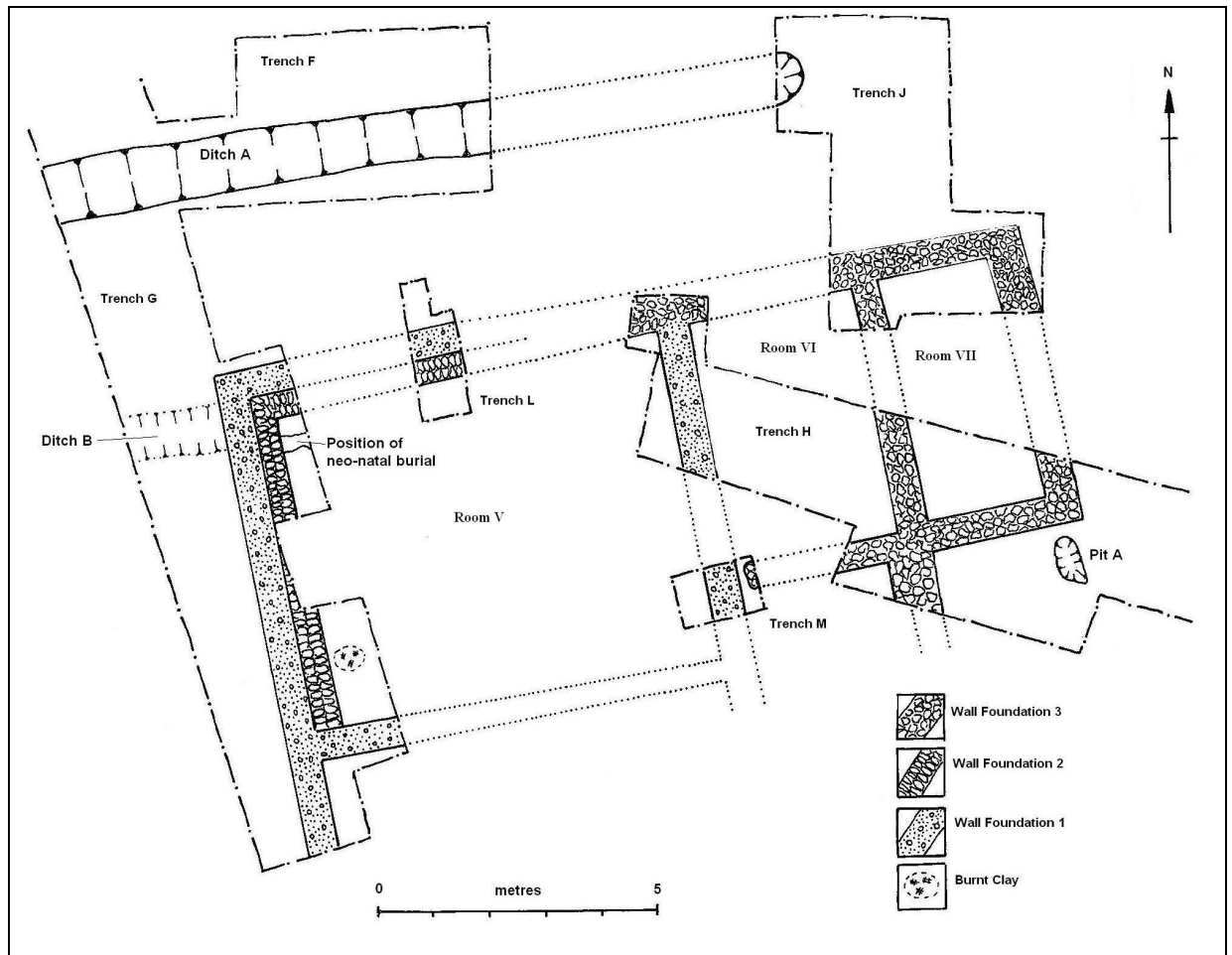


Figure 8: Northern end of the villa showing trenches and main features

a. Ditch A

As in 2008, it was very difficult to establish the upper limit of this feature in plan, indeed it was necessary to box section it in order to delineate the edges. The ditch is

approximately 1.45m wide, has an original depth of c0.8m and runs east-west approximately 2.6m north of the northern wall of the villa. In profile it is V shaped but asymmetric, with northern slope being c40°, the southern slope being steeper at 50° (see figures 9 & 10).

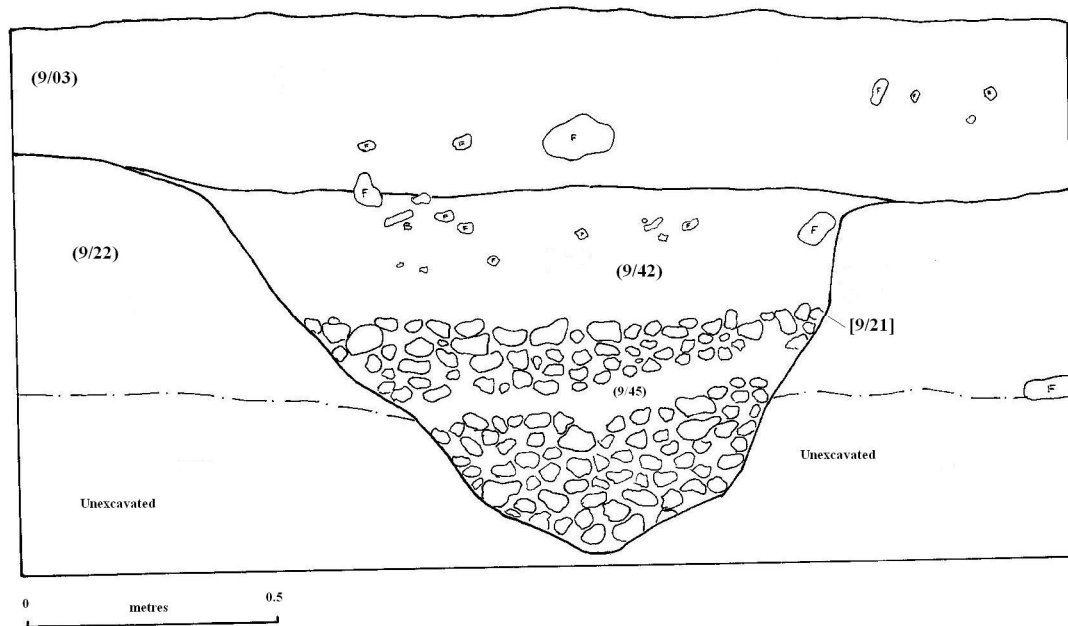


Figure 9 Section through Ditch A in trench G



Figure 10 Section through Ditch A in eastern baulk of Trench G

Rather than being flint lined, the lowest c0.5m of the ditch is filled with small (up to 150mm, but the average being less than 70mm diameter) rounded flints (context 9/45). The upper levels of flint are held in a clay matrix, but further towards the base there are increasing numbers of void spaces between the flints. This suggests that the flints were deposited in a single event, with clay subsequently being washed into the

upper layers and filling the original voids. One fragment of pottery was recovered from within this layer and two from the interface between the flints and the underlying brickearth. Initial assessment suggests that these sherds are Late Iron Age/early Romano-British in age, though this is yet to be confirmed.

In several places, orangey clay (context 9/49) lay above the flints, though never completely covered them, rather it appears to have lined the slopes in places and washed down onto the flints.

Above this was a layer rich in artefacts (context 9/32). This consisted of dark, silty clay from which lithics, pottery (including fine wares), metal objects, CBM, bone, glass and many hundreds of oyster shells were recovered. Initial assessment suggests a 1st/early 2nd century AD age for this deposit. The condition of the artefacts, the fact that they were clustered and the stratigraphy of the feature suggest that this was kitchen waste being deposited by the bucket load.

The top of the ditch appeared to be capped by an orangey brown clay (context 9/38), which contained very few artefacts and probably deposited in one event, sealing the underlying layers.

The ditch was only seen over a small area and to a depth of 30cm in trench J (see figures 8 and 11), and there was no flint fill present. This has been interpreted as a possible terminus.

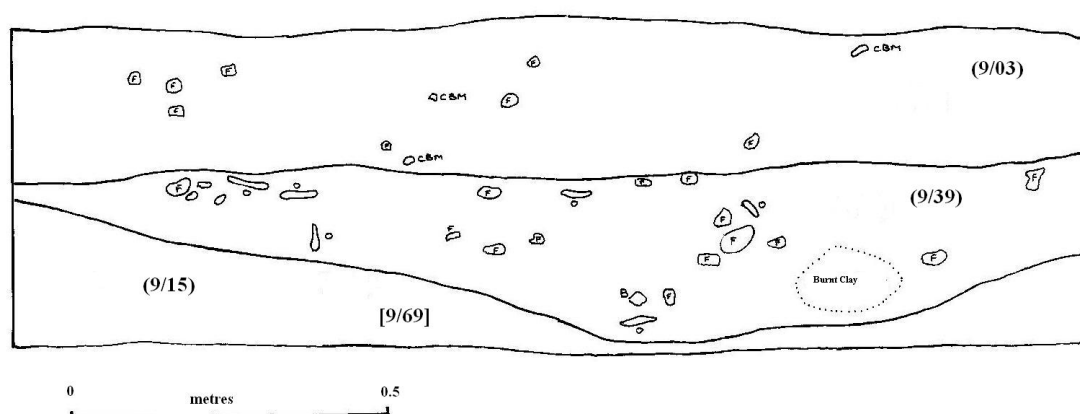


Figure 11 Section of Ditch A in trench J

b. The Northern end of the Villa

The new trenches (H, J & M) revealed the presence of a small, two-roomed wing attached to the eastern side of the north of the villa (see Figures X). It was possible to establish phases of activity in this area, though not possible to provide firm dating for these phases.