

# **Easton Maudit VI, Northamptonshire – The coulter and lead weight from the pool, Area G**

## **The site – a brief summary**

Located at NGR SP 895582, at Easton Top Low, part of the Compton Estates, it was recorded as site 'Easton Maudit 6' by David Hall in his 1966 Bedfordshire Archaeological Journal article, though subsequently referred to as EM 7 by the 1979 RCHM Inventory of Archaeological sites in Central Northamptonshire. Excavations of a RB structure by the Bozeat Historical & Archaeological Society was carried out between 1987 and 1994 with some investigation of the surrounding compound's boundary walls and other features continuing until 2001. The site appears to have been occupied continuously from at least a later Iron Age, to early Anglo-Saxon date, with the notable exception of much of the third century.

The excavated area revealed two stone-footed and two substantial stone-built roundhouses or towers, the former pre-dating, the latter becoming incorporated into and flanking a corridor villa. This structure included a cellar and also a large central room with a smaller heated room adjoining.

Several rooms were surfaced with coarse limestone tesserae, these included the full length corridor, linking the stone-built circular structures and which themselves may have been similarly surfaced. Smaller numbers of finer tesserae give evidence of something grander in an unknown location.

The building, part of a site, overwhelmingly agricultural in nature, we believe to have been a Villa.

## **Area G, The Plough Burial Pool and its environs**

This was investigated after its appearance as an anomaly in the results of a magnetometry survey, which was carried out over the area to the east of the villa subsequent to the conclusion of that excavation in 1994. The principle cause of the anomaly was found to be an iron plough coulter, buried at an angle of maybe 60° along with a large (13kg) lead weight, that having an iron pruning hook flow-soldered to it, the weight appeared to have been deliberately placed on a shelf. This artefact is believed to have been used in association with the coulter, whilst working the heavy clay soils of this locality. A near complete, though broken Samian dish, of Form Dr. 31 with a stamp of Cintusmus i of Lezoux, believed to date 160-180 was found nearby, sealed in the same deposit (9716). This had the appearance of having fallen in with the stones rather than being deliberately placed. Substantial stones were placed over the artefacts in a sloping revetment fashion, it was uncertain whether these stones had been removed from the structure of the pool to facilitate the burial or if the objects had been present in the structure of the pool from its creation. Several stone linings of the pool were identified in places, though they could not in all places be reliably recognised amongst stone debris merely tipped into the feature.

## **The structure of the pool**

This large elongated, sub-rounded hollow measuring 7.5m x 5m had specific characteristics to each of its four 'sides'. The long eastern one had a steep face, behind the stone cladding (we believe deliberately constructed) of which the coulter, weight and dish had been secreted. Away from this, the slope into the hollow around its circuit became less steep, the long western side being the shallowest. The shorter northern portion of the pool certainly has a structural element in the form of a platform following the arc of the slope some 30 cm below the rim. This platform would have provided a firm place for users of the pool, to be able to stand to reach a little further into its depths, for whatever purpose. From this platform, one exceptionally long limestone slab was in position, whilst several smaller ones had slipped into the pool. These had been supported on an arc of substantial bunter pebbles which remained intact. The shallower slopes into the pool had a yard-like surface of flat limestones. At the steeper south eastern, corner was a substantial thickness of limestones stacked from top to bottom of the feature, I have interpreted this to be a permeable filter as it appears to be deliberately built across the end of a stone lined gully which feeds into the pool. It was often difficult to differentiate lining stones from those which formed part of the tipped-in debris fill of the pool after it had gone out of use. Very substantial limestones formed the base of the pool at its deepest, these had been placed onto what we believe was a primary silting, these deepest levels were not properly examined due to being below the water level in this feature. A large storage jar with the neck and rim missing was sunken,

we believe deliberately, into the waterlogged silt at the base of the pool.

## **Features in the environs of the pool**

The area around the pool was not widely investigated, however we found several features which help put it into a context. The pool was situated just inside the villa complex's southern boundary wall (9901), the rim of pool being hardly more than a metre from that wall. We know that the features are contemporary as the gully/drain leading into (or possibly away from) the pool passed in a stone lined, and covered channel built diagonally through this wall. This gully, lined and capped with rough flat limestones extended for about 5 metres before meeting another deep, water laden feature which we believe to be a boundary ditch. We were only able to observe a very small segment of this ditch due to its depth and time restraints, we believe that the ditch had been blocked at this point by a stone built causeway, the gully was formed in the top layers of that causeway. Levels were recorded, but it was never obvious as to which way water would have flowed through this gully. If water was raised from the ditch outside the wall and fed into the pool via the gully, a hopper arrangement to direct water into the gully would surely have been provided. This arrangement would have supported the interpretation of the mass of limestones as a filter stack at the poolside. Conversely, the lack of a collection hopper suggests that the gully acted as an overflow in order to prevent the pool surroundings becoming flooded. Perhaps the gully could be used to pass water in either direction between the two water sources as required.

The ground to the north of the pool was provided with a limestone-paved yard. This is clearly in association with the paved step down into the pool, suggesting this end to be the access point for the pool's users. This yard surface was bounded by a wall (9990) to the north, this is not parallel with the boundary wall to the south. Associations between the two were not investigated for proof but we feel we can suggest that it be likely that the pool was largely enclosed by a perimeter wall.

## **Purpose of the pool**

It would seem from the presence of the buried coulter and weight that the pool had ritual purposes. The jar sunken into the pool's base and a bovine skull in the pre-destruction silting also hint at some ritual element. The lowered step indicates that the water was reached and whether used, ritually, for bathing or for gathering water for domestic use I can only guess at. It was never obvious whether the water channel was an inlet or overflow/outlet. When the villa went out of use, we feel that this pool was filled with debris from that building, box flue tiles both of the combed and roller stamped types found in the villa debris were also to be found here, as was one of the carved oolitic limestone finials closely matching another from the villa site. No matches were found amongst the pottery assemblage of vessels being present in both areas. However, this is not surprising as the greater majority of pottery collected from the villa excavation was from pre-villa phases, that actually being in the villa at point of destruction being virtually completely swept away with the floors by later ploughing. We can say that the part of the southern boundary ditch nearby and given context no. [9510] was filled with the same debris, some extraordinary connections between broken pottery vessels being recorded from these two contexts. However, much of the pottery and glassware we recovered from the pool did not enter with building debris, we could at times trace the passage of disintegrating vessels, particularly thin-walled beakers, down the shallow western slope. We felt that these had been in use here, dropped either by people drinking at the pool, (not necessarily of the pool). That the pool was in fact a large washing-up bowl, and indeed laundry was felt to be a reasonable interpretation.

Some plans of the site are included at the end of this report.

## **The coulter and weight**

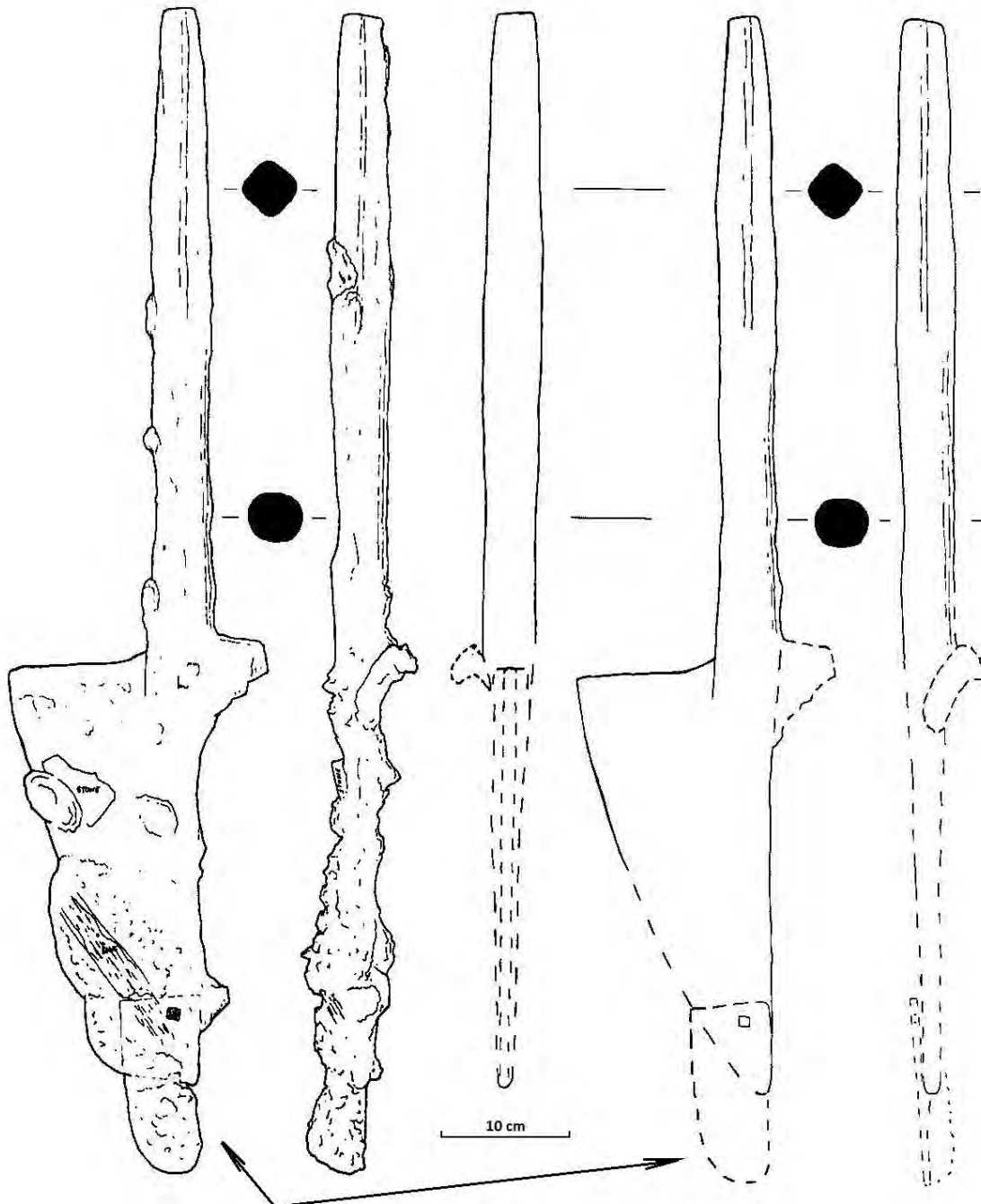
These are not recorded on that database. Unpublished elsewhere, as yet, I make it available to the Roman Finds Group membership. These artefacts, all others and the site archive are now the property of the Northamptonshire Archaeological Resource Centre. Hopefully a more detailed account of the site and artefacts can be published in some form in due course.

## Plough coulter blade.

SF 9738 (9716) – Behind stone revetment of plough burial pool, Area G

Iron plough coulter, walled up, almost vertically in the eastern side of the plough burial pool. This was in association with a lead weight having an iron pruning hook soldered to it, SF 9739, and a Samian ware dish, <DP 31>. Plough coulter has an overall length of some 850mm. Shank is of square section, about 50 x 50 mm, becoming more rounded towards the blade.

Easton Maudit VI SF 9738



Straight lines and square 'hole' seen on x-ray photos, these are unexplained, we believe that any suggestion of these being an appendage other than a corrosion product are illusory.

SF 9738 - Plough coulter in situ, the top of the lead weight SF 9739 with rust stain from attached iron hook, can be seen to the right of coulter. The scale is marked in feet.



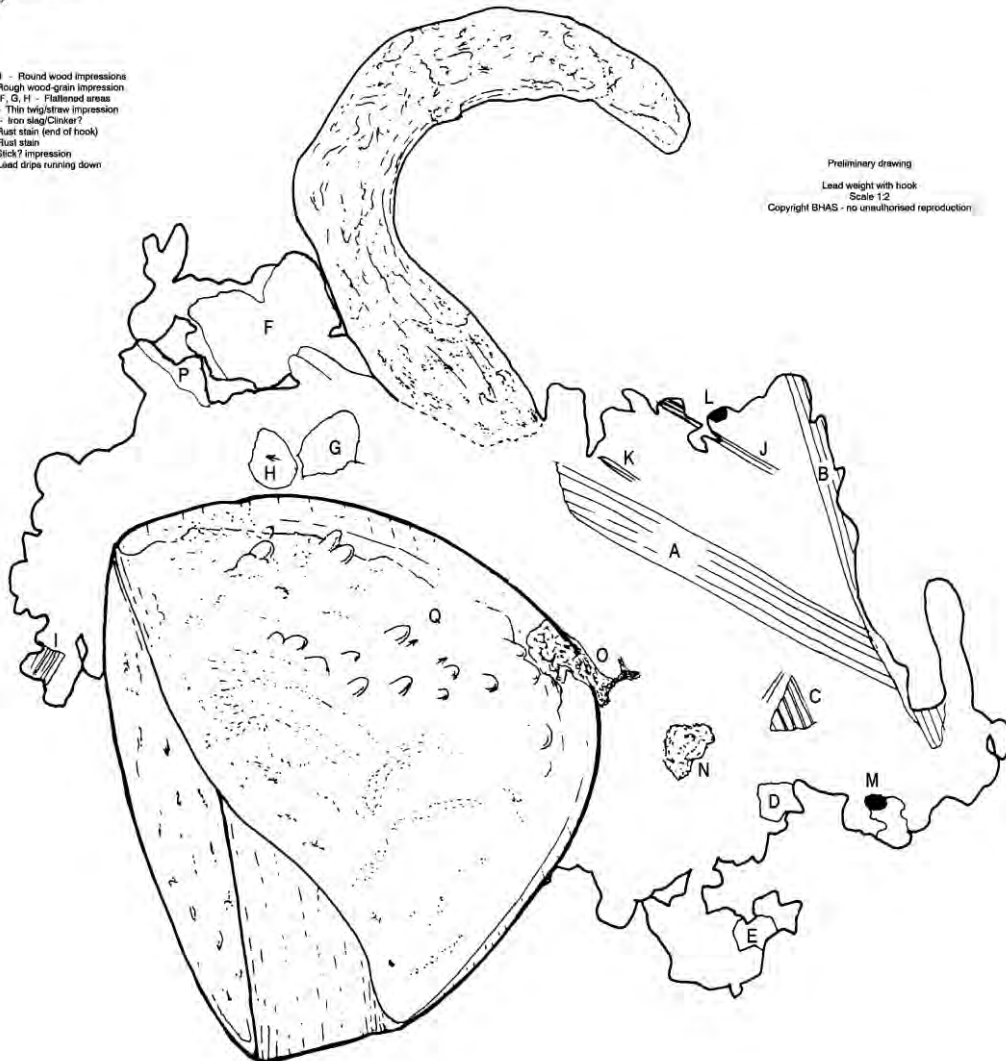
**Lead weight with iron hook soldered to it, this accompanied the coulter blade.**

SF 9739 (9716) – Behind stone revetment of plough burial pool, Area G

A lead weight with an iron pruning? hook attached by flow soldering, a spread of molten lead. Standing on a soil-cut shelf with a Samian ware dish <DP 31>, clearly in association with the plough coulter <SF 9738> alongside, these were behind stones covering the eastern and steepest side of the plough burial pool. It is believed that these stones were deliberately placed rather than tipped in with the debris of the destroyed villa. It was not ascertained whether or not the plough coulter and weight had been sealed in-situ like this whilst the pool was in use or if they represented a closure event. The weight is clearly cast in a crucible, with the hook affixed subsequently. It weighs 13 Kg. It is believed that this weight was used with the plough coulter, the heavy clay soil of the surrounding fields necessitating the additional weight to keep the blade biting into the soil.

EASTON MAUDIT VI  
SF 9739

- A, B, I - Round wood impressions
- C - Rough wood-grain impression
- D, E, F, G, H - Flattened areas
- J, K - Thin twig/straw impression
- L, M - Iron slag/Clinker?
- N - Rust stain (end of hook)
- O - Rust stain
- P - Slick? impression
- Q - Lead drips running down



Preliminary drawing  
Lead weight with hook  
Scale 1:2  
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SF 9739 continued

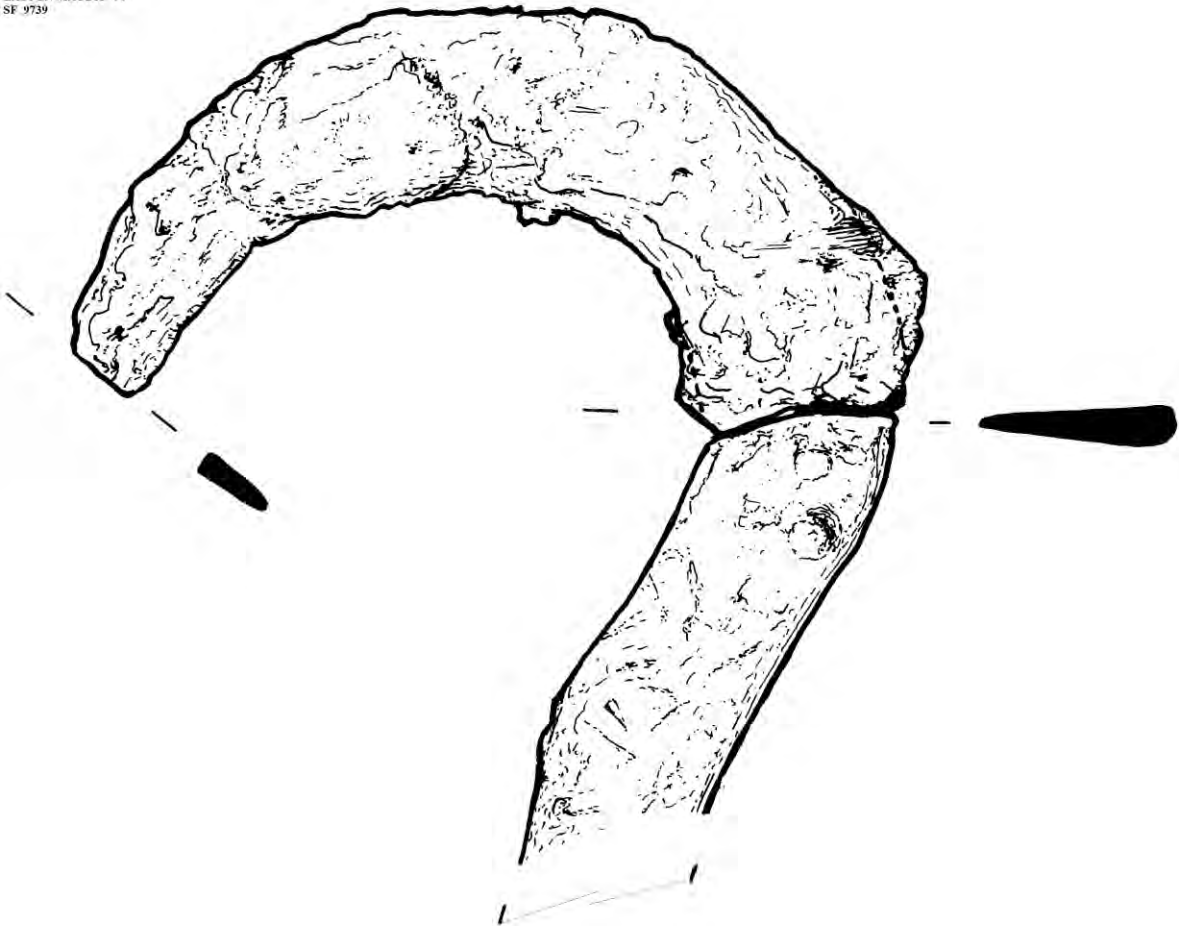
EASTON MAUHI VI  
SF 9739



0 10 cm

SF 9739 continued

EASTON MAUDIT VI  
SF 9739



Obscured by lead

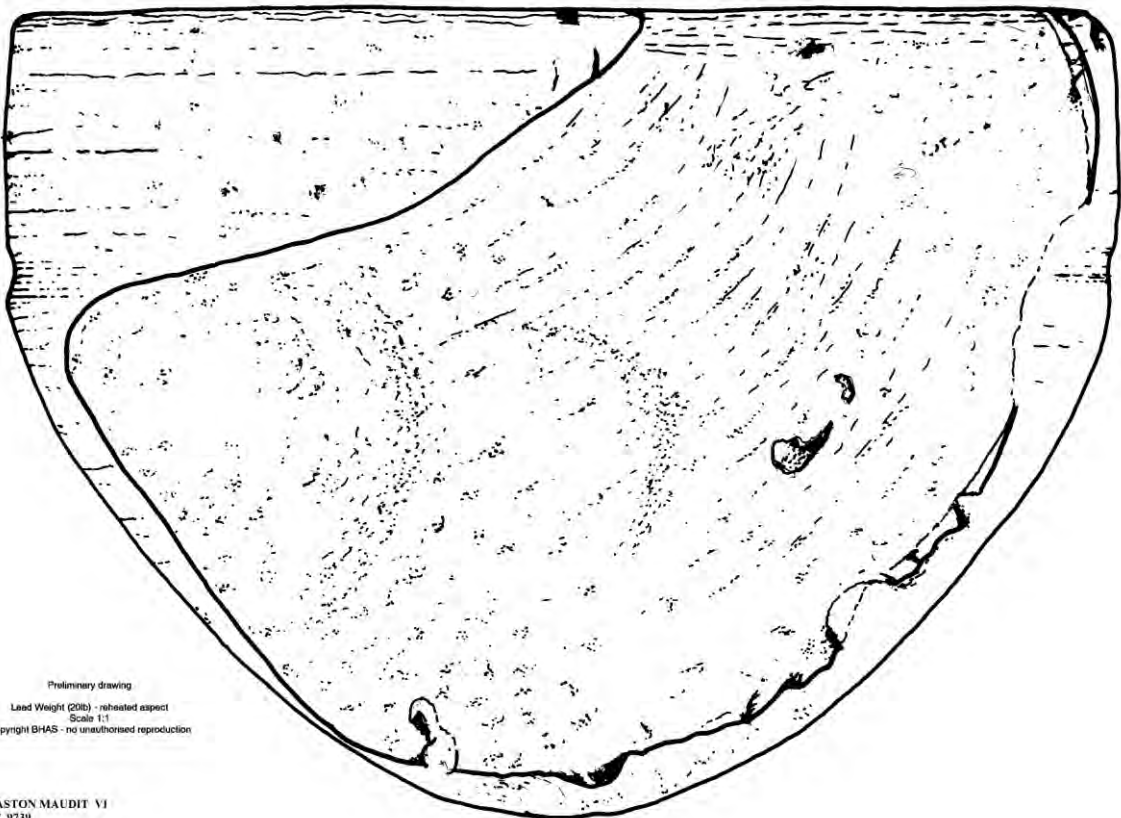
Preliminary drawing  
Iron hook from lead weight  
Scale 1:1  
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SF 9739 continued



EASTON MAUDIT VI  
SF 9739



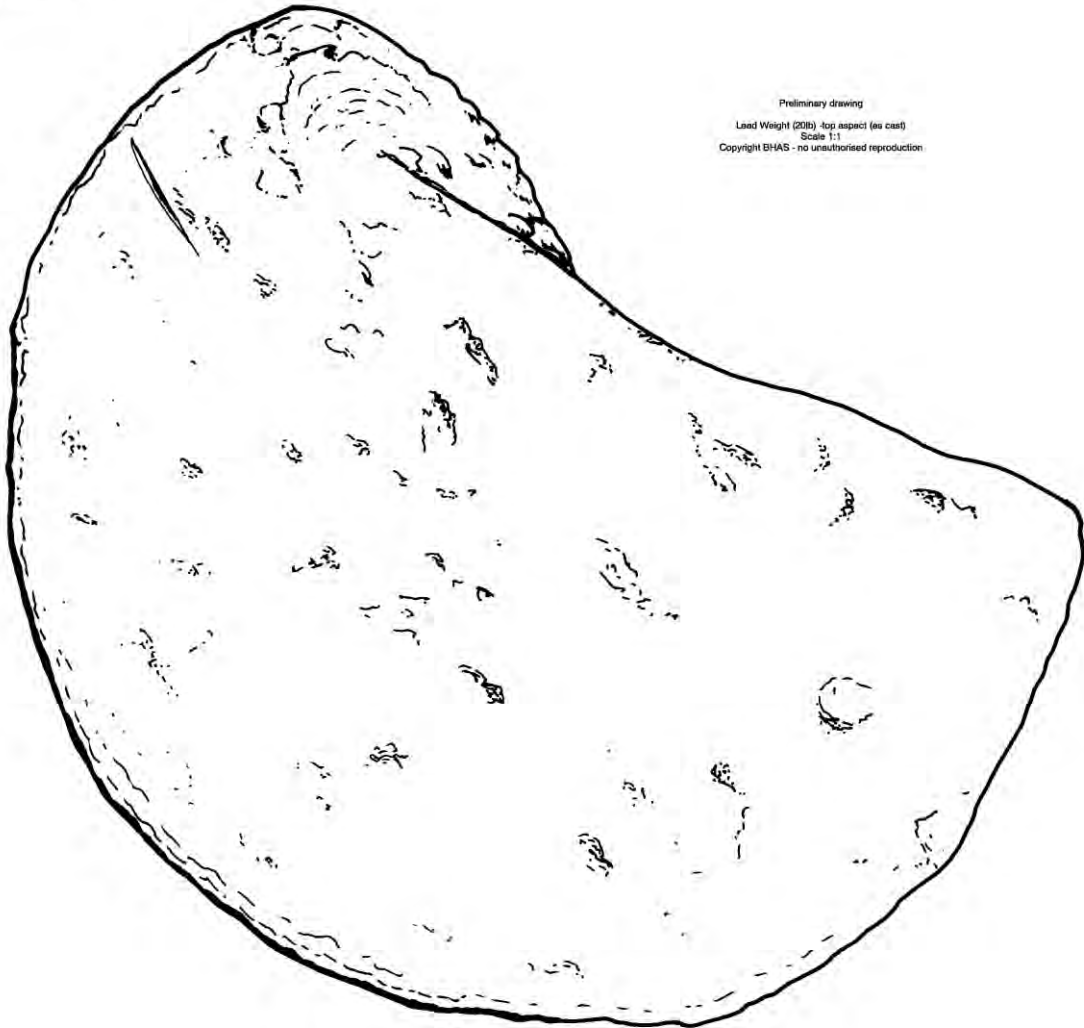
Preliminary drawing  
Lead Weight (20lb) - reheated aspect  
Scale 1:1  
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EASTON MAUDIT VI  
SF 9739



SF 9739 continued

EASTON MAUDH VI  
SF 9739



Preliminary drawing  
Lead Weight (2019) top aspect (as cast)  
Scale 1:1  
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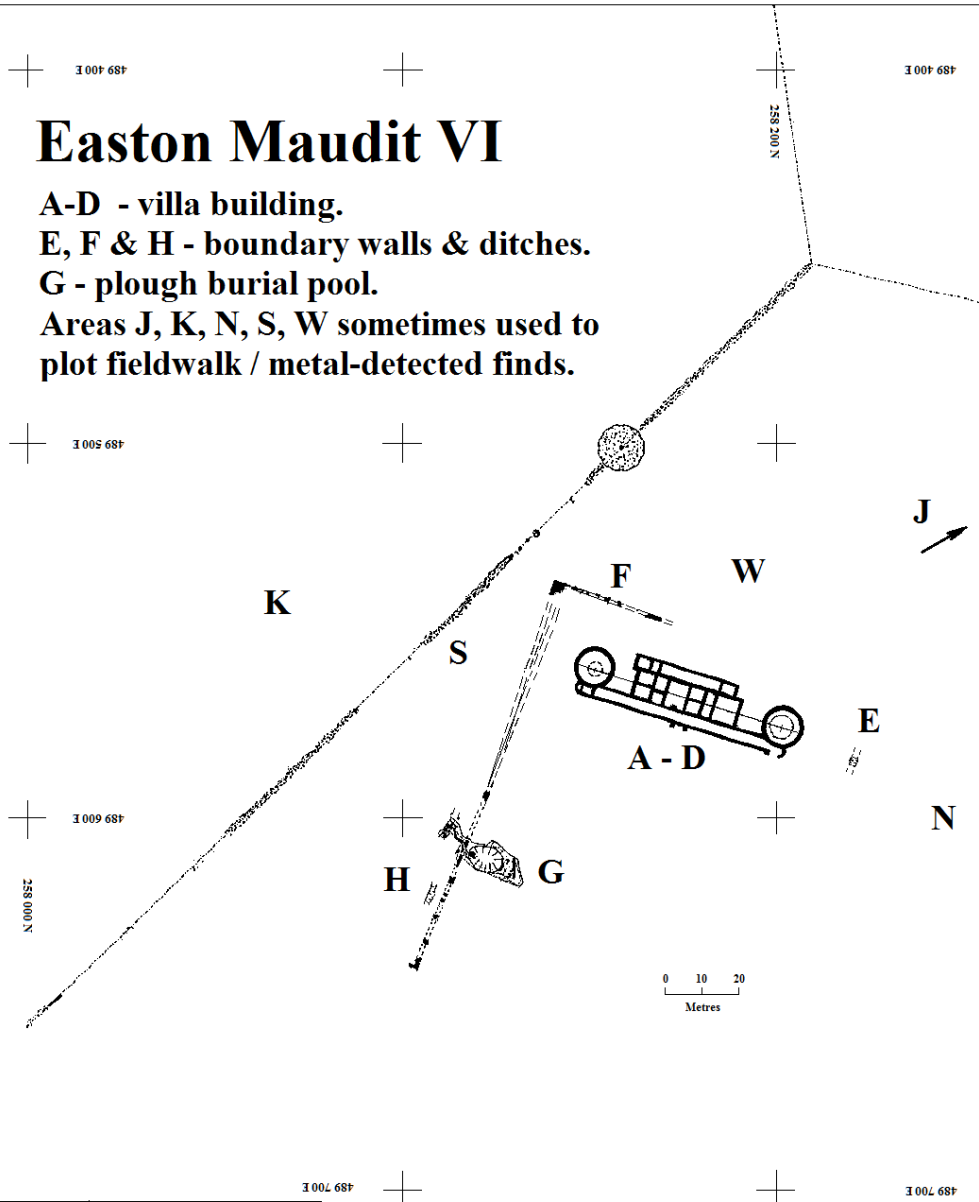
# Easton Maudit VI

A-D - villa building.

E, F & H - boundary walls & ditches.

G - plough burial pool.

Areas J, K, N, S, W sometimes used for plot fieldwalk / metal-detected finds.



DATE:--		SCALE:--		DRAWN:--	
DRAWING No.				CHECKED:--	
CLIENT:-- MONKTON AGRICULTURAL SOCIETY PROJECT:-- REMAINS OF ROMAN TITLE:-- SITE NAME:					
BRUCE PATRICK M.A. (Arch. C.E.S.) 75 BROADWAY, NORTHAMPTON, NN4 4SG. Tel. 0527 72444					

**EASTON MAUDIT VI, 'PLOUGH BURIAL POOL'**  
Area G, (97xx-99xx) contexts.

