

# Easton Maudit VI, Northamptonshire – Unusual Ceramic Building Materials

*Marc Line and Brian Martin with much specialist advice from Gerald Brodribb and Michael John Astill*

## 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, was notable not only for its integration of circular structures but also for its use of some innovative roof tile forms. These include those pre-formed for use in the valleys of a cross-gabled roof along with square tegulae with flanges to the top and bottom of their undersides, seemingly making them functional only as a single row of tiles. These tile types are largely unknown elsewhere, though some of the variants listed here have been found in smaller quantities at the nearby Harrold Kilns site, recorded in Brown A. E., 1994. The pieces recorded here have every appearance of products of those kilns, we feel it most likely that they were manufactured there, only some three miles distant.

These tile variants are the subject of this small report submitted to the Roman Finds Group in an effort to make this information more widely available.

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

## The assemblage

This group of specialised bricks and tiles, all of the same shell-tempered fabric, were found in association with parts of many standard ceramic building materials. Fragments of the specialised forms of tiles form a substantial part of the retained assemblage due possibly to these pieces being of little value in any retrieval for reuse in antiquity. Subsequently, after excavation the more unusual pieces better survived the sampling and selection for retention process.

The specialised tiles and bricks were mostly found in the environs of the cellar room, both fallen outside and inside the room. Some such as the small bricks were probably stored unused within the cellar whilst others, components of a cross-gabled roof likely came the roof of this room. The central porch and corridor interface is an alternative location for these valley tiles to have been utilised. Many tiles slipping from either of these locations could likely have come to rest outside of the building where these were found.

Only one obvious fragment of one of these unusual tiles was found in the demolition debris deposited into the nearby Plough Burial Pool, in Area G, excavated in 1997 & 1999. One of the three foliate carvings, probably also associated with the villa's roof, was also found in this pool. Whilst not proven, it would seem likely that it is debris from the wrecked villa which was deposited into this pool, the two therefore going out of use at the same time.

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.

## SCALE OF ALL DRAWINGS (UNLESS OTHERWISE STATED) – 20%

### Small Rectangular Bricks

The villa excavations produced 19 examples of these hard-fired, shell-tempered bricks, 13 of which were complete. The bricks are made to a uniform size and in all cases, have a lateral groove impression incorporated into each end. The bricks being of such uniform dimensions, only one drawing has been included here.

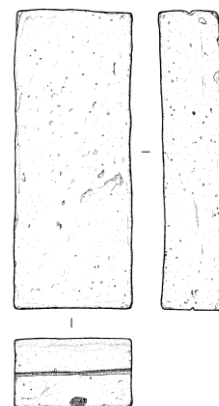
The average dimensions of these bricks are 201 x 76 x 41mm, variations being limited to +/- 2-3mm, one exception being all of 10mm longer. The lateral groove generally being U-shaped and 4mm across. The aforementioned larger brick has a differing groove, being V-shaped and 8mm across, whilst one of the broken examples has a U-shape groove of 12mm. Only one example shows evidence of having mortar applied, this to all surfaces.

All of these bricks were found amongst the charcoal, ashes and shattered tile fragments of a burned and collapsed cellar, Room 1 ((8018) assigned to debris on floor). Most were found in the immediate vicinity of the southern-most of a pair of shaped stone plinths (94187) set into the floor such that their placement divided the room into two East-West and into three North-South. The plinths are believed to have served as bases for roof supports or somewhat shorter altars and it is tempting to consider the bricks in this light. It was also felt that at the time of its destruction, this room was being used to store building materials such as pigments in pots, unused tiles and maybe a large pile of broken sandy plaster possibly suitable for reclamation. If these bricks been components of piers, there should certainly have been more than were found, although evidence of the removal of material subsequent to the destructive fire is sufficiently compelling to support the contention that most of the useful materials that survived the fire were removed for re-use elsewhere. All are of shell-tempered fabric, having pale buff surfaces and a grey core, akin to the tiles and pottery produced at the nearby kilns site at Harrold.

SF 661 (8018) – cellar floor

Typical example of these shell tempered bricks with 'v' notches across the ends.

Pale buff surfaces on darker grey core.



A fragment of small tile/brick seemingly of this type is recorded at the Harrold kilns site, some 5 miles distant (Brown 1994, fig 48:56), the illustration suggests that its two known dimensions are as these here. A brick of somewhat similar dimensions, though shorter (150 x 80 x 40mm) and with no mention of the distinctive end groove, from Templebrough is listed in a table of 'Oblong Bricks and other Brick oddities' (Brodrribb 1987, 57).

## Special purpose roofing tiles

A considerable number of unusual, special purpose tiles of limited value for re-use had evidently been left behind after more useful standard tiles had been removed and these form the core of this report. It is noticeable that all specimens of the specialised tiles recorded here are products from the shell-tempered tile industry which was clearly manufacturing a developed and refined roofing system.

Most of this material was found where we believe it to have fallen from the roof of the corridor, Room 13, in the vicinity of the central porch and to the North of this in Area C, where the Cellar / Room 1 stood behind the corridor at this point. Some of the special purpose tiles were found within the Cellar Room, possibly as unused spares, in addition to being found external of the building, one that was a very likely to have been roofed with them. Also puzzling, was the likely interface with the corridor of this building of uncertain height, the subterranean room being truncated at ground level. It is also postulated that the cellar room was under construction or being rebuilt at the time of destruction, the most substantial indicator of this being that the access to the subterranean room was by way of a surely unfinished slope cut through the clay, when stone steps would be expected.

The roof of the corridor has several features that potentially required special purpose tiles, (if indeed it was roofed with tiles, many fragments of limestone roofing slates were also deposited in the vicinity). Along its length it variously abutted one and two storey parts of the villa whilst other parts of the room stood in isolation, with an open yard behind. We consider the roof to have been mono-pitched, therefore variously different methods of finishing the apex would have been needed. In addition, we believe the central entrance porch to have been cross-gabled and the end porches to have been apsidal. Possible applications for the specialised tiles occur in the complexities of this roof and in addition to that above the Cellar Room. We believe the shell-tempered tiles, in spite of their developed nature, to be products of the first flowering of the local shell-tempered ceramic industry. These tiles and the re-building works they were associated with, we believe can be dated to the mid-late second century as suggested by the presence of shell-tempered tile as a minor aggregate in the early-mid second century *opus signinum* floor of the temple-mausoleum vault at Bancroft, Milton Keynes, (Zeepvat 1994, 218).

### ***Tegulae* with flanges on reverse, these could only be used in single horizontal rows**

An unusual module of tile produced by the shell-tempered ceramic industry, represented in the sample by some 25 examples. A narrow, short, square and symmetrical *tegula* variant, the side flanges have no tapers and the flange end cutaways appear to all be of the type seen at the top of a normal *tegula*. The most noticeable feature is the presence of small, neat flanges formed across the underside of all transverse edges. These flanges render the tiles (arguably) useless in a normal overlapped column arrangement. It is possible that these tiles were used in a single row, less clear is the nature of how the rear flanges were utilised, possibly assisting to seat tile on a lath. Maybe the tiles were used for coping, possibly forming a single row at the rear of an otherwise mono-pitched roof, below the apex, seated on the rear wall of the corridor in places where there was nothing but an open yard area behind the wall, the little rear flanges serving as drip guides. Most tiles in the sample collected from upper demolition debris prior to a site grid being established, but all with a known context are from Area C mostly where they could have fallen from the corridor roof in this area. An association with the cellar roof also in this vicinity cannot be dismissed.

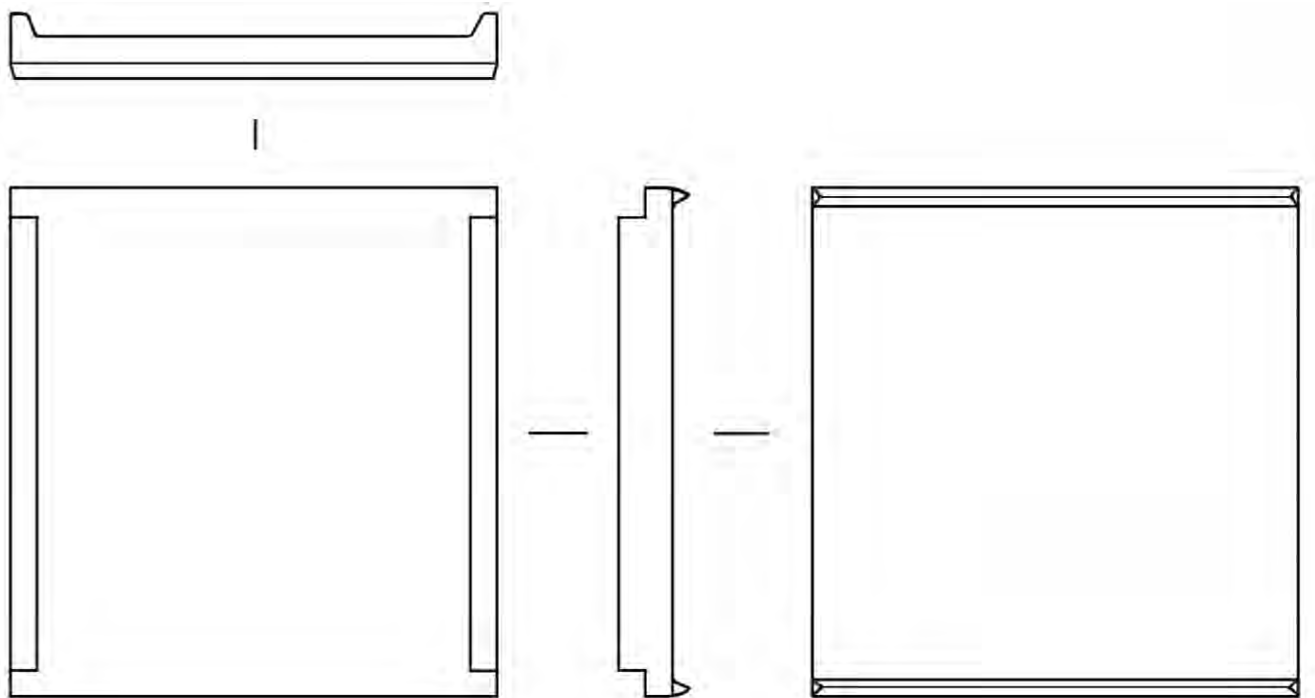
Three examples provide a consistent full breadth dimension of 325-333mm, whilst one tile alone, SF 794, gives evidence that unlike usual *tegulae*, these are square, (some full width examples of standard shell-tempered *tegulae* found at the site have similar widths but others are rather wider, measuring 360-365mm and of course they are longer). It is noted that the two closed end *imbrices*, SF 415 & 728 which survive to a full length, do so to a length of 330mm, making them more compatible with these square *tegulae* than with normal ones of some 440mm length.

It is felt that these reverse flanged *tegulae* could have had the same purpose, and be a development of one referred to by Gerald Brodribb in his 1987 book, p19, where he records, from Foscott, a small square *tegula*,

with lengths of 310mm and side flanges with no cutaways. Whilst ours have the simple cutaways to the side flanges and the additional top and bottom flanges at the rear, these tiles, similar in size to ours, also share the characteristic that they could not be used to build a vertical run up a roof, but could be used in a single horizontal row, maybe as coping slabs, ours having the refinement of the small cutaways permitting use of closed end imbrices and the neat little rear flanges which could be drip guides.

All fragments of these tiles show great consistency, not just dimensionally, all side flanges are slender with well-rounded upper internal angles. None bear any of the 'finger signatures' seen on many ordinary *tegulae*, nor are any perforated with a nail hole. A few of the fragments bear traces of mortar adhering, variously to the front or back and none of the sample collected appears to have been burned. Illustrated below is the reconstructed module to which all fragments conform.

**Module of square *tegula* with rear flanges, reconstructed with reference to SF 417, 794, 808 and many other fragments.**

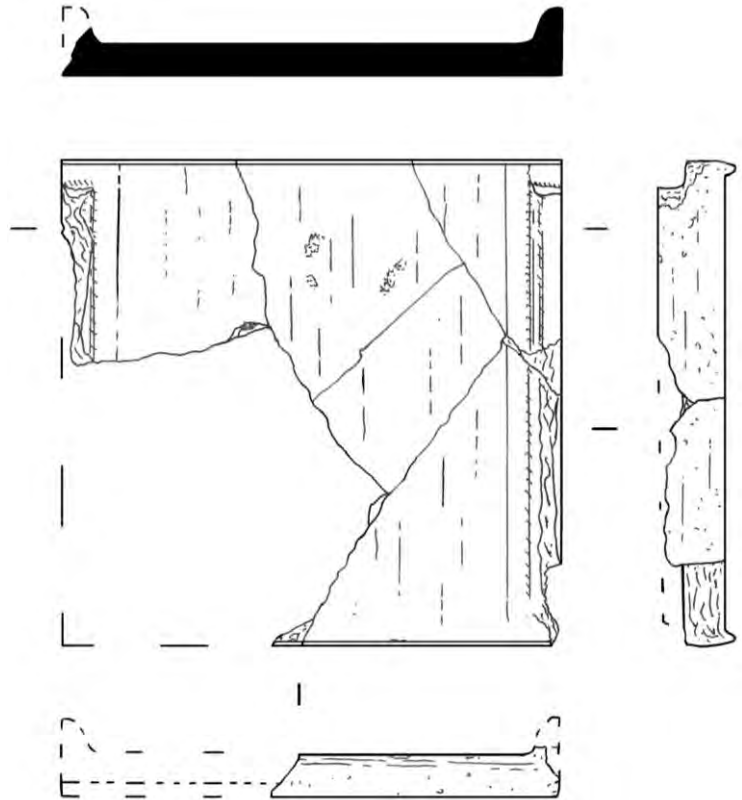


SF 794 (unknown context)

Part of a shell-tempered tegula of the square type with rear-facing flanges top and bottom, and non-tapering side flanges. This example provided all dimensions and a full profile of the type.

Tile is 325mm square, with a body thickness of 21mm. Various buff and pale grey surfaces on grey core.

There are small traces of mortar on both front and rear surfaces.

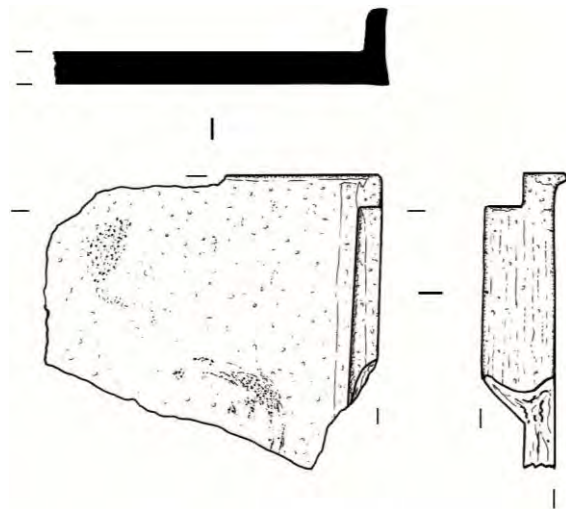


SF 431 (unknown)

Upper part of a shell-tempered *tegula* with a small but deliberately formed flange across the rear top edge of tile. There is residue of a sandy mortar, seemingly combed in a circular fashion onto the tile's face.

Tile surfaces are pale buff, on a pale grey core.

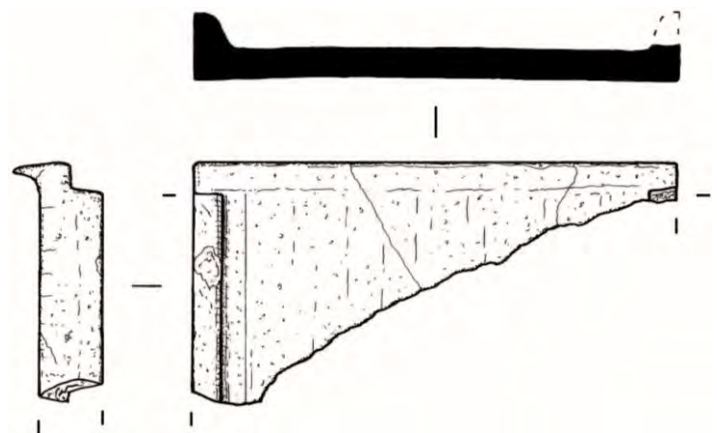
Minimum width of 210mm, body is 22mm thick.



SF 417 (unknown context)

Upper part of a shell-tempered *tegula* with a slender and well-formed flange across the rear top edge of the tile. There is evidence of sandy mortar spread over the back of the tile with slight traces also seen on the outside of both the side and top flanges. Tile survives to full width of 333mm but one side flange is broken off.

Body is 21mm thick. The colouring is variously pale buff and grey throughout.



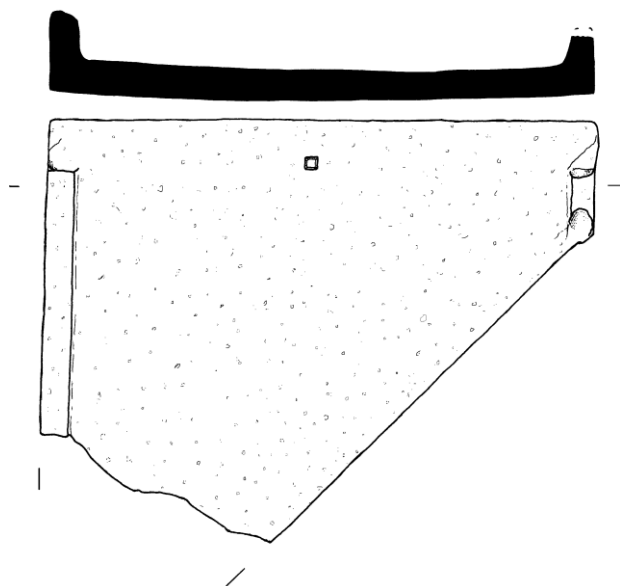
## Diagonally moulded and/or sawn *Tegulae* and *Imbrices* specific for valley areas of roof.

The fragments of seven examples of these *tegulae* were found. All but one are fashioned in a shell-tempered fabric, three have a 45°-47° angle moulded into their geometry whilst one differs in having a moulded angle of 54°. Whilst yet others exhibit similar diagonal edges achieved by sawing. The largest fragment SF 416 has a nail hole at the wide end, which would seem to indicate that it was intended to be fixed such that the taper reduced the depth from right to left. Similarly, the other fragment with a right to left taper SF 730 is from the wide end of the tile, whilst the fragment from the narrow end of a tile, SF 737 has a taper which reduces the width from left to right. The only logical purpose for these tiles is use in the valley of a cross-gabled roof. The villa has an integral porch on the façade corridor which does indeed protrude from the line of the corridor roof at an angle of 90°. It is therefore tempting to speculate that the tiles were thus employed, although it must be stressed that the evidence for this speculation is purely circumstantial, lighter limestone slates often being utilised for roofing the less substantially built parts of buildings such as this and a great number of pieces of these being in evidence at this eastern side of the building.

One moulded diagonal tile, probably the most obvious, SF 416 is recorded as being found on the cellar floor. The cellar building is another prime candidate to have had a complex, maybe cross-gabled roof, although this room was certainly in use for storing other building materials at the time of its destruction, and of note is the fact that this tile did not show any evidence of having been used. Neither this nor any other triangular examples are burnt, but many blackened tiles were found in the debris of this room and it is these that I believe came from its roof. One of the triangular tile fragments, SF 730, is made even more intriguing by the fact that it has been reduced in length by sawing and maybe filing. The result is a *tegula* fragment which is no more than 105mm in length, having a moulded 45° angle (B) and a smooth cut end. The supposition is that the tile was positioned at the ridgeline and cut in such a fashion to reduce the overhang. Three other fragments were found, one, SF 738 having a sawn angle of 57°, the other, SF 739 having a moulded angle of 54°. The single example in a sandy fabric, SF 817 has a moulded angle of 45°. The latter three small fragments are devoid of flanges.

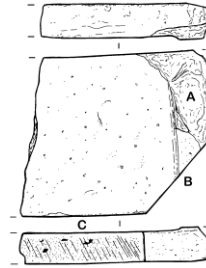
Closely associated with the previously listed diagonally moulded ‘valley’ *tegulae* are these *imbrices* with closed-over ends, an integral *antefix* formed of a worked-in slab of clay, which on four examples has been fashioned to incorporate a (roughly) 45° chamfer. The fabric is the same shell-tempered type as used for most of the valley *tegulae*. It is proposed that those *imbrices* which are closed over at an angle at their broad lower ends were utilised with the angled *tegulae* where roofs met at the sloping valley created in a cross-gabled roof.

SF 416 (8018) – cellar floor  
Shell-tempered fabric,  
Breadth – 365mm,  
Length (reconstructed) – 430mm,  
Thickness – 20mm,  
Depth at flange – 54mm,  
The short stump of flange is  
pinched up both ends, not cut square.  
A square hole, made pre-firing is  
7mm<sup>2</sup> on top face and  
5mm<sup>2</sup> on underside.



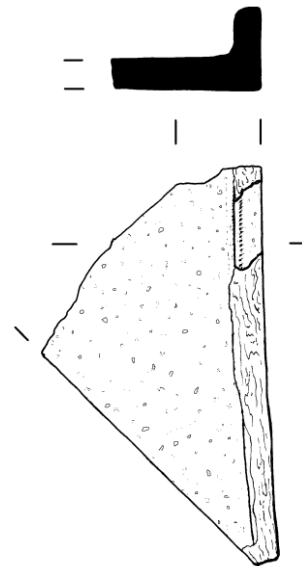
SF 730 (uncertain context)

Shell-tempered fabric, A tile probably the same as #?  
Featuring a moulded 45° diagonal (B), later sawn to reduce its length to just 105mm, the cut face marked (C). The short stub of flange seen on the previous tile has been deliberately removed, leaving a scar (A), in which are remnants of a particularly gritty mortar. The cut face bears the marks of sawing, made by a blade operating at 55° - 60° to the horizontal.



SF 737 (8018) – cellar floor

Shell-tempered fabric, the tip of a tile similar to the two previous examples but of the opposite hand, Tile is 20mm thick, 56mm at flange, which is 17mm wide. There is a moulded diagonal of 45°.



SF 738 (uncertain context)

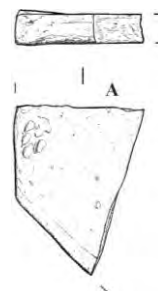
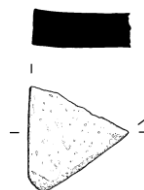
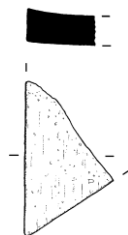
The tip of a tile of 20mm thickness it has been sawn diagonally at an angle of 57°. Tile is made of a particularly harsh, 'hackly' shell-tempered fabric.

SF 739 (uncertain context)

The tip of a shell-tempered tile of 23mm thickness, this has a moulded angle of 54°.

SF 817 (uncertain context)

A fragment of sand-tempered tile with a moulded 45° angle, it also bears the paw print of a small dog. The edge marked A is unfinished, seemingly broken post-firing, nonetheless has fired to the external orange colour rather than the grey of the core.



SF 738

SF 739

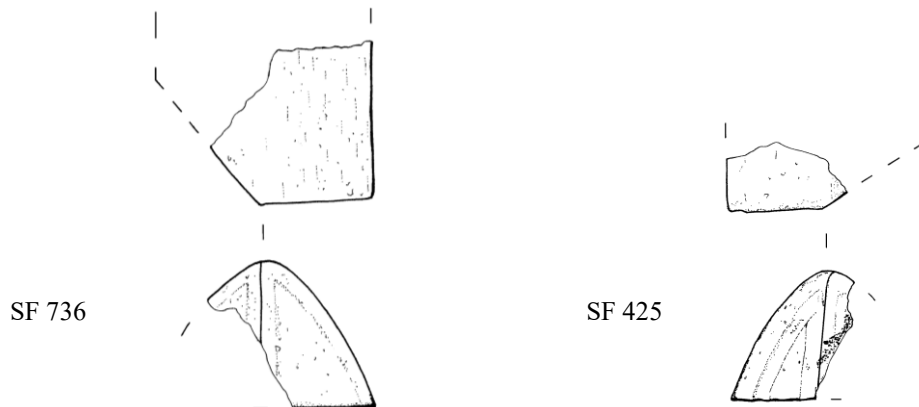
SF 817

SF 736 (uncertain context)

A shell-tempered *imbrex* with an end wholly closed over, half of this has been cut and closed at a 50° angle. A neat finger groove delineates all the worked edges of the closed end. The tile's breadth at its end appears to be 140mm, thickness of tile is 17-20mm whilst that of the closure is 10-13mm.

SF 425 (uncertain context)

An *imbrex* as last but with the opposite half of the closed end chamfered to 35°. Two fingers rather than one have been used to finish part of the end. Mortar remains adhere to the angled end. The tile's breadth at its end appears to be 130mm, the thickness of tile is 17-18mm whilst that of closure is 11-16mm.



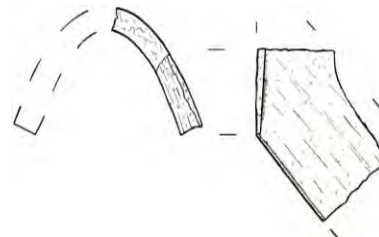
### Special purpose *Imbrices* with moulded mitred ends and those with integral *Antefix*

The *imbrices* with a moulded mitred end which is not closed over, see SF 789, are represented by fragments that so small that we are unsure if it is the top or bottom of the tile which is so treated. Whilst snapped near the apex, I feel that the suggested width and height is likely to represent the smaller, top end of a tile. A more substantial tile of this form is recorded in the Harrold kilns report, (Brown 1994, fig 41:6). The suggestion therein that a likely application for a tile of this nature, to interface with a wall or similar rising vertically above a mono-gabled roof, seems very reasonable. If the supposition that the corridor, Room 13 was roofed with ceramic tiles, probably mono-pitched is correct; then an application arises for such *imbrices* with angled top ends, this being where the mono-pitched roof meets the front wall of the two storey parts of the villa.

Other *imbrices*, with an integral *antefix* sealing over the broad end at 90° but otherwise closely matching the chamfered examples listed with other 'valley' elements were also found. Two of these were complete, one of which is illustrated here, #. It is notable that both examples we have exhibiting the full length, are of 330mm length making them compatible with the small square *tegulae* with back flanges, rather than normal length tiles. A total of ten examples of these shell-tempered *imbrices* with their broad ends closed over at 90° were recovered, notably, two were retrieved from the floor of the cellar, Room 1, a very well-sealed context.

SF 789 (uncertain context)

Shell-tempered *imbrex* with at least one half of an end moulded at an angle of 45°. Believed to be the upper, narrow end which has been mitred. Breadth was probably 125mm, thickness of 17-18mm.



This is the more substantial of two examples from the group with a mitred and open end, the other, SF 790 shows the same handed side.

See (Brown 1994, fig 41:6) for a more substantial example from the nearby Harrold kilns site.

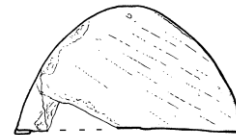
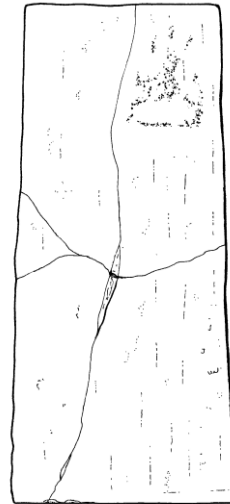


SF 728 (uncertain context)

Shell-tempered *imbrex* as previous but the broad end has been closed over at 90°. Length of tile is 330mm, the broad end being 150mm wide, reducing to 130mm at the narrow end.

Thickness is 16-19mm and that of closure is 13mm.

There are no finger-tip grooves on this example, though these are present on several others. It was noticed on this and the similar, unillustrated SF 415 that the closed end had been internally thinned by chipping, presumably to enable this to fit over the ends of *tegula* flanges. Other examples are manufactured with the closure piece thinning markedly towards the bottom edge. It was also noted that these two *imbrices* are somewhat shorter than *tegula* #, although this is admittedly not of the same shell-tempered fabric and probably not manufactured to work together.

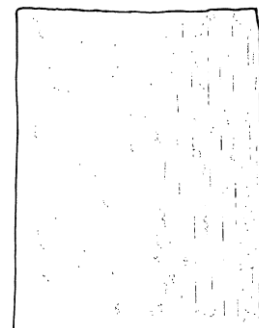


## Ridge Tiles

A complete half-round tile was found, amongst a total of maybe 13 examples. Some burnt and fragmentary examples were found on the floor of the cellar, room 1, (8018) whilst all others came from the eastern corridor room 13 or room 11C in area C, (8191 & 8111) appearing to have fallen from that room's roof, though loosely in the vicinity of the cellar. The tiles seem to be very standard in their appearance and dimensions, averaging 210mm in length and 165mm wide at the base with a thickness of 19mm, making them proportionately heavier than an *imbrex*. They are made of a shell-tempered fabric and have no taper. One bears a rust stain across one of its feet, suggesting that it had been placed over a nail when in situ. That the tiles were intended to close the ridge of a roof is the most plausible suggestion to account for their shape. In use, they would have to be butted together and joined with mortar, although none of the examples in hand bear any indication of having been mortared at any of their faces or edges.

SF 404 (8191)

Half-round and parallel sided tile.  
Shell-tempered fabric,  
length – 212mm, breadth – 165mm, thickness – 19mm.



## Finials

Fragments of five ceramic finials were found during the course of the excavations. All are in shell-tempered fabrics, wheel-thrown and well-potted. The most complete #?, SF 732 is red in colour, consisting of at least 4 tiers. Each tier includes 7 cut-outs, consisting of rectangles with a 45° isosceles triangle at the top. The upper part of the uppermost tier is absent, but the pinnacle was found, although we have no indication of the intervening profile.

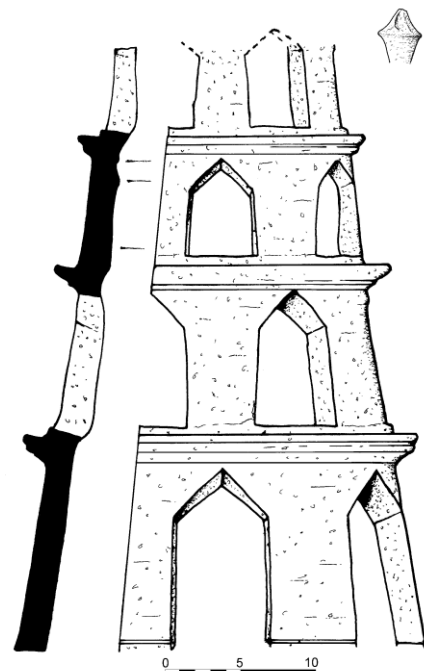
Fragments of two domed finials were found. The fabric in both cases is a light buff colour, with such a consistent composition that it is hard to divide the fragments between the two examples. The body profiles are so similar in the parts found that a single illustration, #? For SF 731 & 740 was considered sufficient. The major difference between the two consists in the diameter of the base ring. The piece given no. SF 735, we later determined to be the same as SF 731, whilst SF 740 is the no. given to the almost identical finial, we illustrate only the base ring. Finial SF 731 consists in a tier of 8 arched cut-outs below a domed head with an open top. There is some evidence to suggest that there may have been a second tier of cut-outs below, although it has not been possible to establish the supposition sufficiently to justify a presence in the illustration.

Finial SF 733, #? is represented by three fragments, the buff coloured fabric being very similar to that of SF 731, the flange profile suggests it is a different finial from the others found, although it could possibly be part of a lower tier of SF 731 for example.

Finial SF 410, #? is represented by one fragment only, it is in a reddish fabric with evidence of arched or ovoid cut-outs.

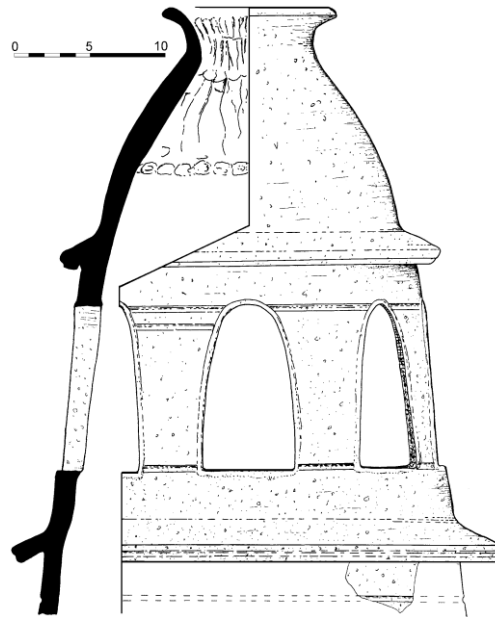
#? SF 732 (uncertain context)

Finial with at least 4 tiers, each having seven cut-outs, consisting of rectangles with triangular tops. The pinnacle was also found, but sadly none of the intervening profile.



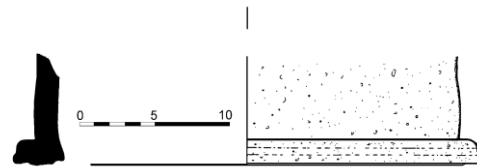
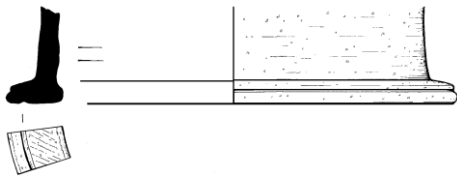
SF 731/735 (uncertain context)

Finial SF 731 consists in a tier of eight arched cut-outs below an open top. There is some evidence to suggest there may have been a second tier of cut-outs below. SF 735 was issued to the base ring before it was established that it is part of the same finial, SF 731. Some parts of this finial had previously been given SF 390/414 & 734 prior to reconstruction.

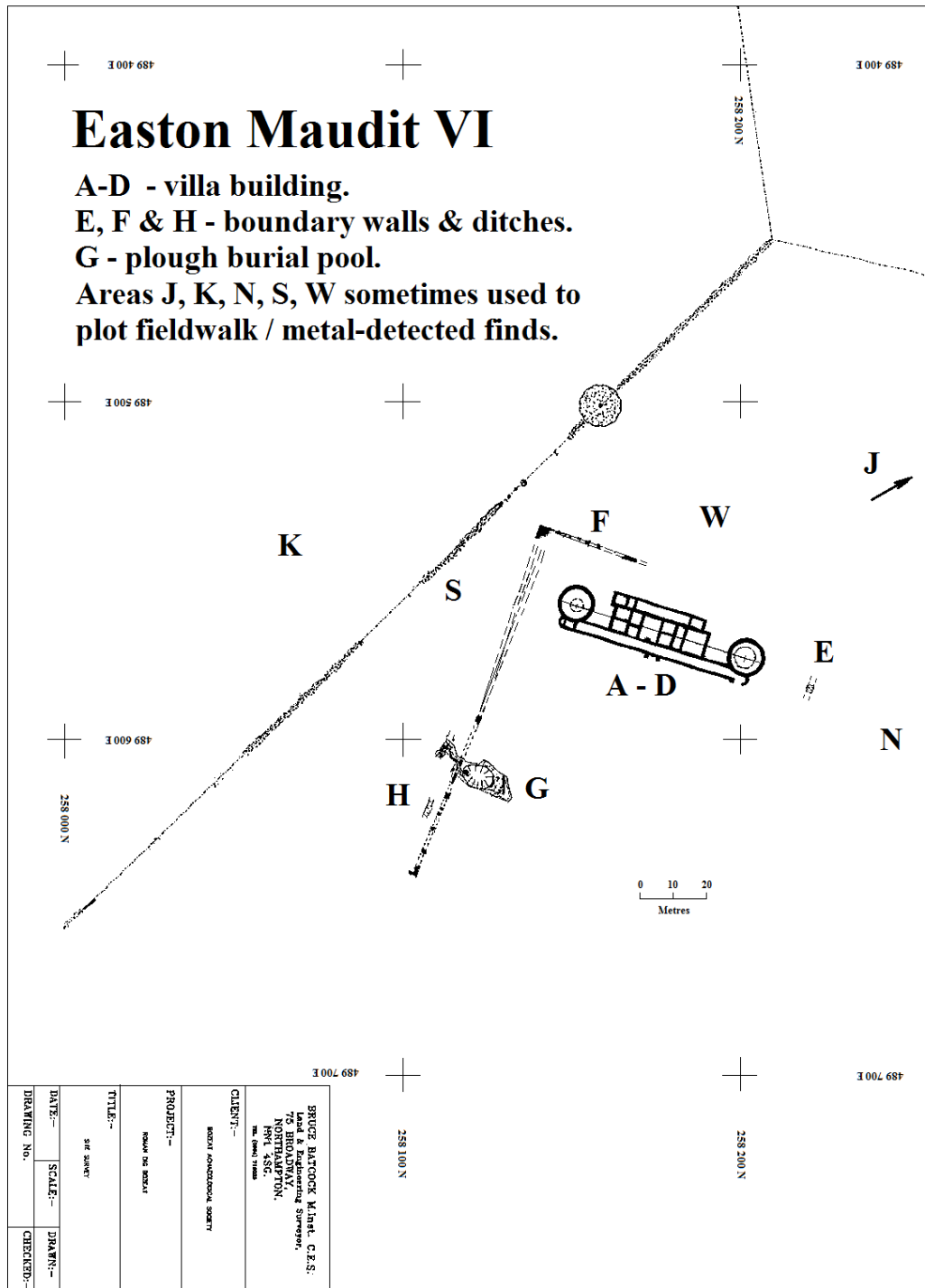


SF 740 (uncertain context)

A finial, substantially represented, being practically identical to SF 731, only the slightly differing base ring is illustrated.








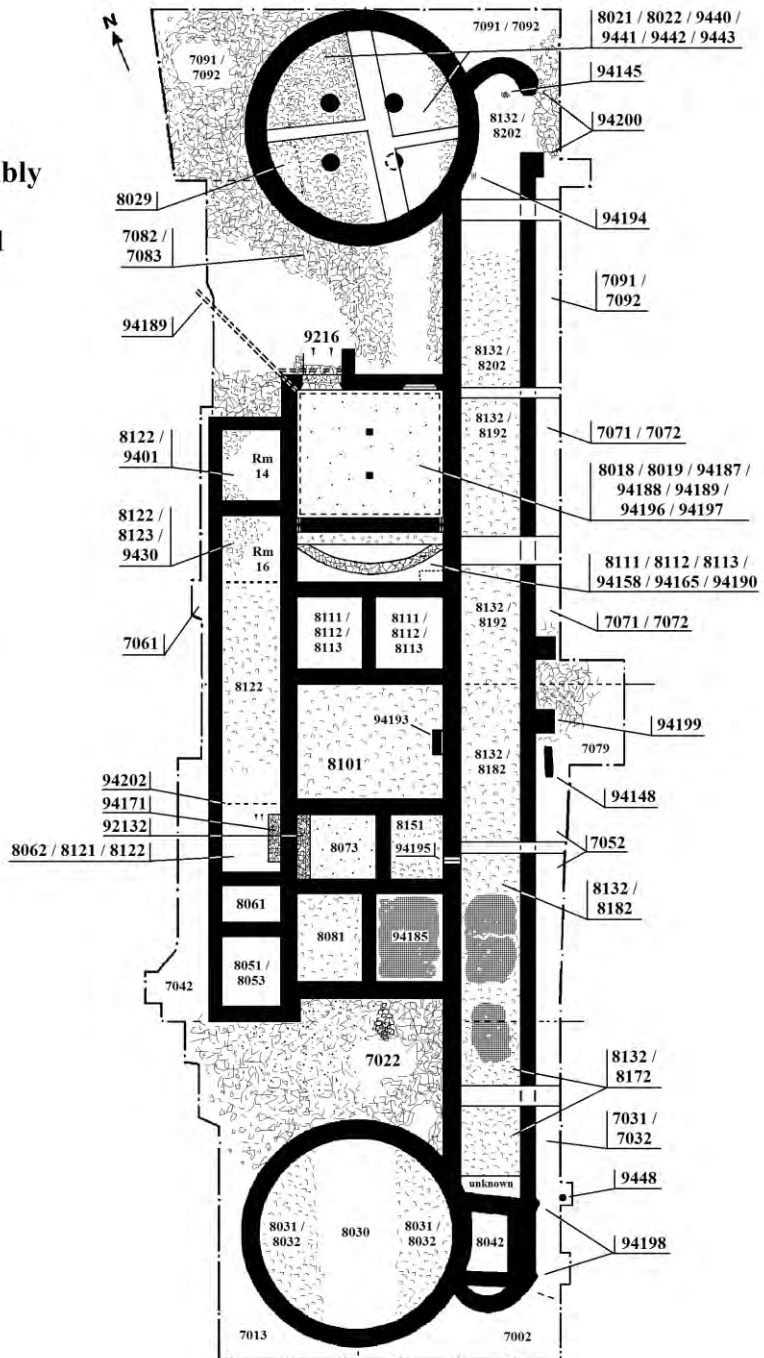
The following pages comprise a series of plans which should give some idea of the arrangement of this site.



# Easton Maudit VI

Interpretation of the villa at its most complete, possibly being reconfigured at the time of its destruction and abandonment

-  - Yard surface or other stonework.
-  - Clay berm.
-  - Substantially intact Tessellated floor surface.
-  - Stone subfloor, those in Rooms 10 & 13 are substantial enough to support a Tessellated floor, others are less so.
-  - Clay / Mortar floor, both subterranean



**Easton Maudit VI**  
**Wall and room numbering**

