

# A study of finds from Field 109 2011 to 2015

The culture of working hard to produce a variety of high quality ceramic building material (CBM) (flat tile, roof tile, brick).

The creativity demonstrated in what they did with the off cuts and waste materials when the product run was finished.

The first scan gave up an unusually large amount of Roman British CBM, far more than other Roman Britain (RB) fields that the group have worked on previously. The diversity and quality of the CBM could mean we are on a site of a high status building with a tile kiln nearby.



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# FORWARD

Shadows

Time flies over us, but leaves its shadow behind.

Nathaniel Hawthorne. The Marble Faun. 1860.

I would like to dedicate this to Zena Alice (nee Davis) my late wife of 68 years, and Philip Rahtz my friend and mentor of over 50 years. (Late Professor of York). It is their strong will and character that has given me the will to publish.

This is not a normal archaeological report, but neither is the subject matter. This is a sample of what I have drawn and photographed. The field still holds many secrets. The following report is a collection of conjectures. The assertions are speculative largely because there is an absence of comparable findings in the current literature. The progress of archaeological knowledge and the development of new paradigms must start with evidence that is difficult to explain.

If you have similar evidence or theories please contact me via [www.wallwork.org.uk](http://www.wallwork.org.uk)

Ray Wallwork aged 88

August 2015

**ANOMALIES ON ROMAN BRITISH CERAMIC BUILDING MATERIAL**  
**An Interim Report**  
**by**  
**Ray Wallwork**

With a comment on the *graffiti* by  
Martin D Wilson  
And drawings by Ray Wallwork.

In 2011 and 2012, the CADAS Field walking Group recovered over 60 Kg of Roman fired clay building material from a single field (SP ... ..) to the north west of Allesley village largely comprised of fragments of roof tile, flat tile and brick. In addition to tegulae and imbrex are a number of pieces of fired clay of unusual form, some bearing graffitos and/or other marks, which are the subject of this report. All of the material was examined with a magnifying lamp and light conditions suited to bring out the faintest marks.

#### Fabric

The clay used to make the ceramic building material was relatively clean with few inclusions and is most likely to be from a local source. The colour ranges from bright orange-red to slate-purple. The orange-red type is 'soft'; its surface easily marked with a fingernail, while the slate-purple is harder and will mark with an iron nail.

#### Shape tile

Tile with curves of various sizes, concave, and convex, upon which graffiti was applied before firing (possibly recycling the scrap of clay after the cutting of an antefix or a disc).

#### Patterns of holes

Many holes appear on the surface of the ceramic objects, some of which have been caused by the loss of material in the clay mixture during the firing process called blowholes, whilst others appear to have been deliberately made by hand using some kind of implement; the purpose of the latter is uncertain.

The holes range between 1mm and 6mm in diameter. The smaller holes, arrayed in lines or arcs, are of uniform size having been pushed in to the 'green' clay, possibly with a wooden dowel or metal wire rod.

#### The Graffiti

The graffiti consists of linear incisions, crosses and what appear to be numerals or letters. This type of graffiti has been variously termed 'commercial' or 'numerical graffiti' or 'batch counting graffiti'. Examples of these are known from Roman tileries and pottery in Britain, such as at St Oswald's Priory, Gloucestershire (Heighway, et al, 1982) and elsewhere in the Roman world (Montani, 2012). The graffitos were applied by the person who made the objects, perhaps to identify the person for whom they were intended. Some of the graffiti appears to be figurative/zoomorphic, one resembling a crude outline of a bird, a common characteristic of this type of inscription. One may imagine that where tile kilns were fairly large or may have involved a group of producers, then batches of products would have an accompanying piece of inscribed clay to identify them. It is also possible that letters and numerals are not necessarily Latin or Greek that we normally associate with the Romans - for example, neo-Punic graffiti has been found at a Roman tilerie at Holt in Wales (Thacker & Wright, 1955).

### **Faces**

Curiously, five objects resembling human faces or heads were found. Bearing in mind that human form is sometimes observed in random data (i.e. pareidolia), these are treated as deliberate representations, until disproven. Hence the wear on the graffiti.

**Face 1** The two sides of the face can clearly be seen in good light. The left line goes down to a chin and carries on, joining the right cut at a point below the chin. Is this meant to be a beard? The right line was marked by a thumb print side of face. A happy face with a smiling upturned mouth, eyes, and nose. The head goes on higher suggesting a hat or headdress.

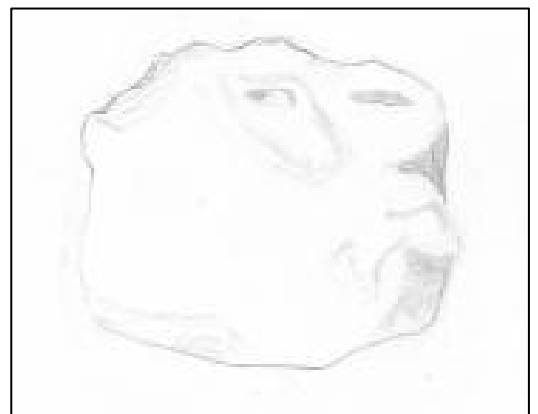


Face 1

**Face 2** is a fragment of fired clay 70 x 73 x 17mm. It portrays a front and side view of a face, the eyes nose and mouth being well modeled. On the left side a decoration of small hole indents is just visible. On the back are holes and slight graffiti. Possibly a portable item.



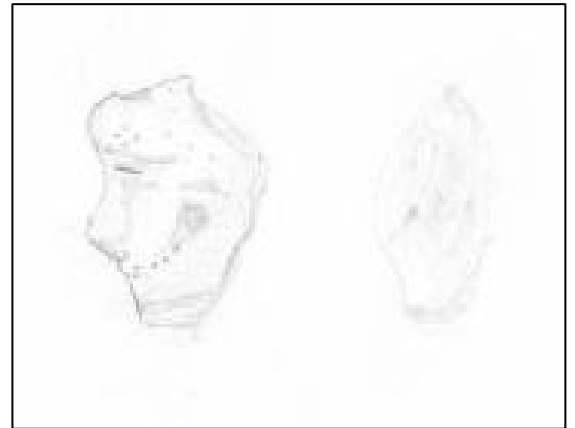
Face 2



**Face 3** consists of a fragment of bright orange –red fired clay measuring 39 x 23 x 13mm. It shows the left profile of a face with indented nostril. The head is adorned with a headdress and a chinstrap with over 25 small stones impressed at the time of manufacture.



Face 3



**Face 4** head of dog or pig 26 mm high with eyes nose with nostrils.



Face 4



**Face 5** Terracotta head of small stature 52mm high weight 85 gm with decorated head dress similar to face 3; most of the small black stones are in the back



Face 5

### SHAPED TILES

Tiles with a concave radius curve of 190mm if projected, 28 examples found so far.

Tiles with a concave radius curve of 75mm if projected, 15 examples.

Tiles with a convex curve of 190mm, 18 examples.

Tiles in a Tee shape.

Tile with convex curve of 110mm, 8 examples.

To make it more complex, some of the tiles have other features.

Graffiti and holes cut into surfaces when still in a green state before firing in kiln.







### SHAPED TILES

Tiles with concave radius curves of 190mm and 75mm if projected,

Tiles with a convex curve of 190mm, and 110mm

Tiles in a Tee shape.

To make it more complex, some of the tiles have other features.

Graffiti and holes cut into surfaces when still in a green state before firing in kiln.





## A BIRD IN FLIGHT AND ASSOCIATES

F109, 2012 /2013/2014 Shaped fired clay artefacts with zoomorphic features.

Model 1. Rose red weight 200gms, 120mm long, 67mm high, and 20mm thick.



Model 1 Stands upright, as do all the models



Model 2 Dog



Model 2 Fish

Model 1 Dog/Model 2 Fish. This is the same tile inverted. Weight 400gms, 170mm long, 100mm high, 20 mm thick. A matching pair found. With the same size shaped curves.

Model 4 modelled with eight curves in well-fired clay. 180mm long. Weight 350gms. Light orange. Slight graffiti, holes in patterns, look at that eye. Blessed is the Seeing Eye, and the questing mind, Part of a poem by Doreen Beer



Model 4 Bird



Model 5 Pig



Model 6 Cat



## GRAFFITIS

The most common of these consists of two lines ending in a Sharp point. Some have a small hole. To indicate an eye of fish or bird? Is this the tile maker's tally mark or his signature?



Tile 03



Tile 11



Model 10



Tile 14



Tile 61



Tile 62



Tile 63



Tile 64



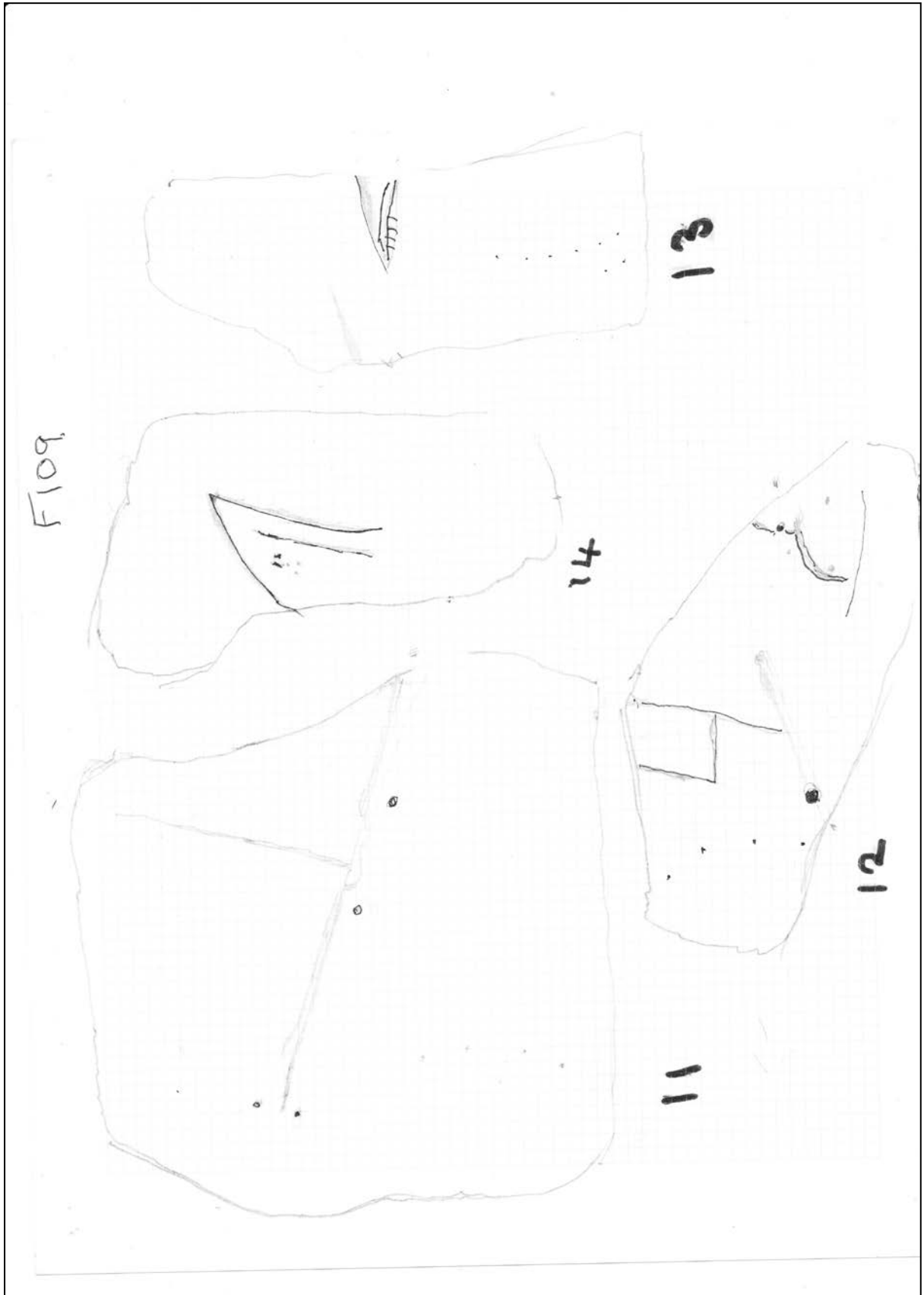
Tile 65



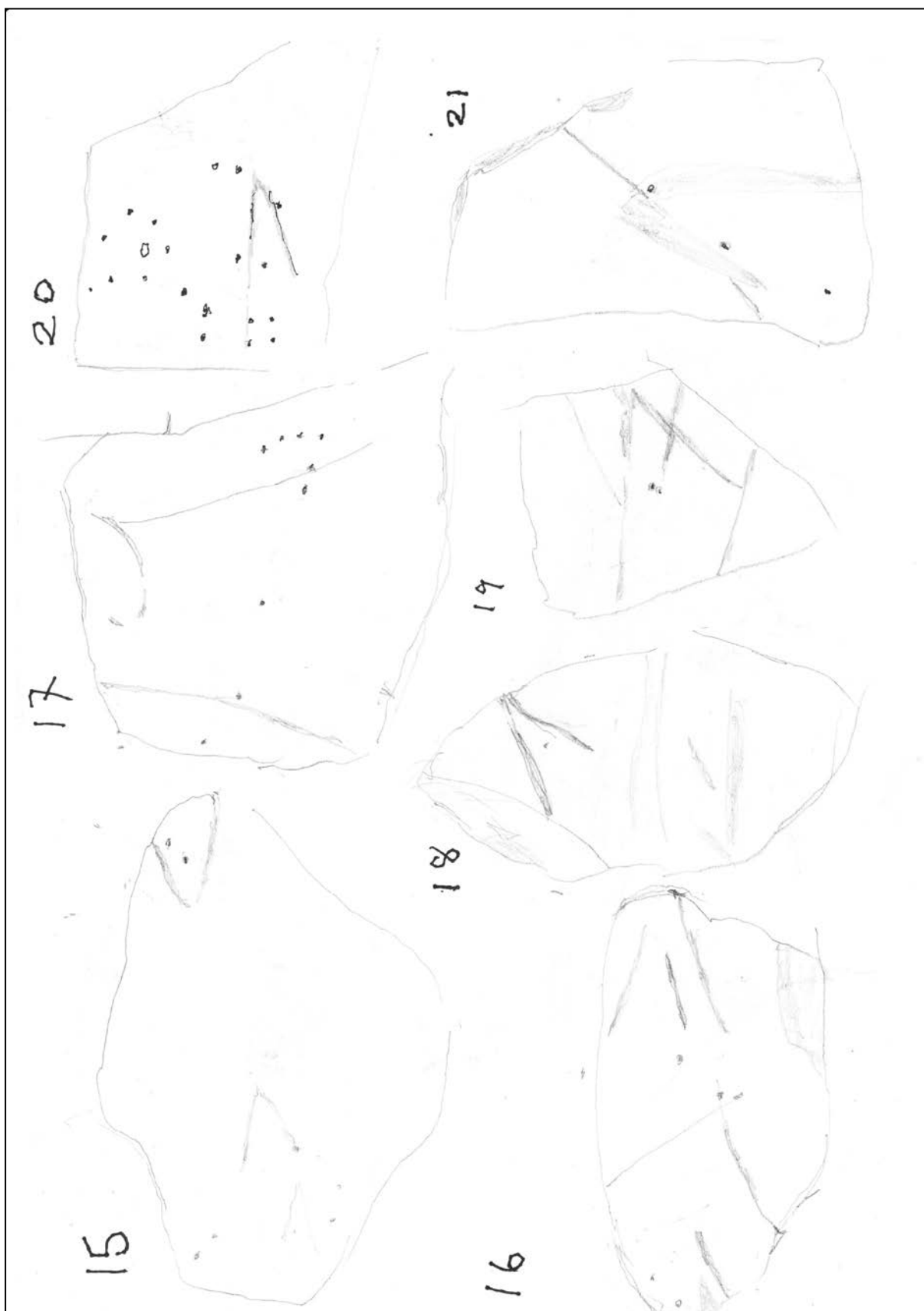
Tile 73

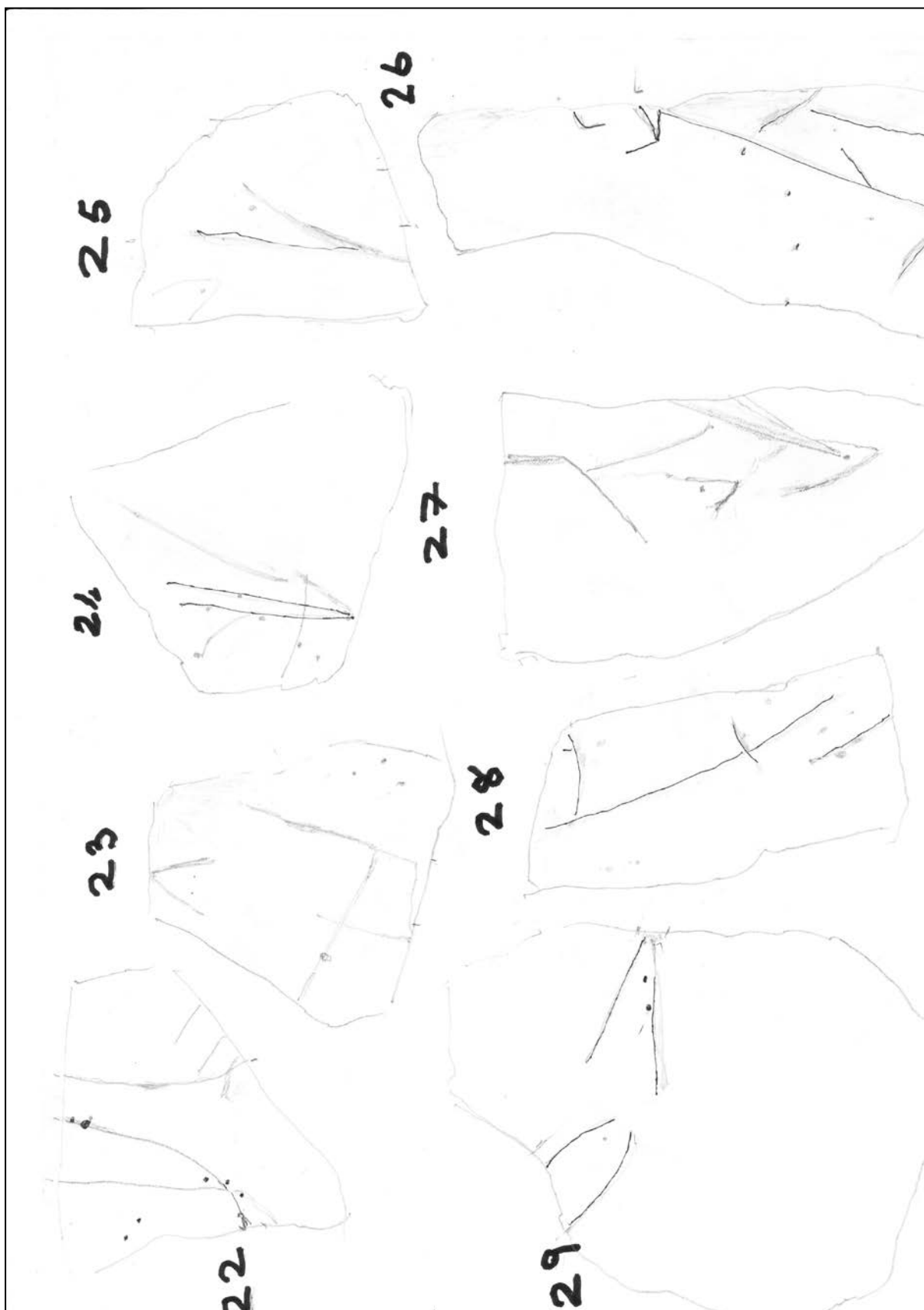


Tile 67









### **Tiles marked with a V.**

We have tiles with **V** in the assemblage. What is the significance of this recurring graffiti? Could this be a clay worker tally number, or a private number or letter ownership? Tiles with **V** marked on the surface, with some **V** tucked away on the edge.

Tile with V numbered 14, 25, 31, 64, 65, 69 and 74.

Tiles with graffiti numbered

02, 03, 04, 06, 07, 08, 11, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22, 23, 25, 28, 30, 31, 40, 47, 50, 64, 69, 74, 90, 91, 92 and 93.



## Roman Mortar

A hard sandy mortar was used to bind the flat tile together. All the tile depicted here look over fired. Possibly from the remains of a kiln or furnace. Note the impression of a metal rod in the mortar. (Was this to tie the walls together or hangers in the kiln)





## Tracks from Allesleys past

Animals walked across soft tile before firing leaving clear prints.



Identified as possibly being Polecat prints.



Identified as Deer prints



Identified as Otter prints



Identified as Dog prints

## **Conclusions**

It seems likely that the material denotes a manufactory of ceramic building material. Serving the demands of a developing settlement in the locality. The valley had all the necessary elements for a good living water, woods and clay. Perhaps the owner made a larger farm with the land carved out of the woods and lived in a villa type farm house with a heating system. Fragments of box flue tiles found in same field. He and his neighbours had cut into the old wild woods, still full of game. A river with fish and wild fowl. Images of fish and birds scratched on to tile. Significantly, the finds are in proximity to a complex of buried structures recently discovered by CADAS' geophysical (resistance meter) team.

A nice spot to live, are they still there!

## **References**

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