

# The re-excavation of the Inveresk hypocaust

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## ABSTRACT

*Re-excavation of the Inveresk hypocaust revealed the basement of a heated room with a putative furnace to one side.*

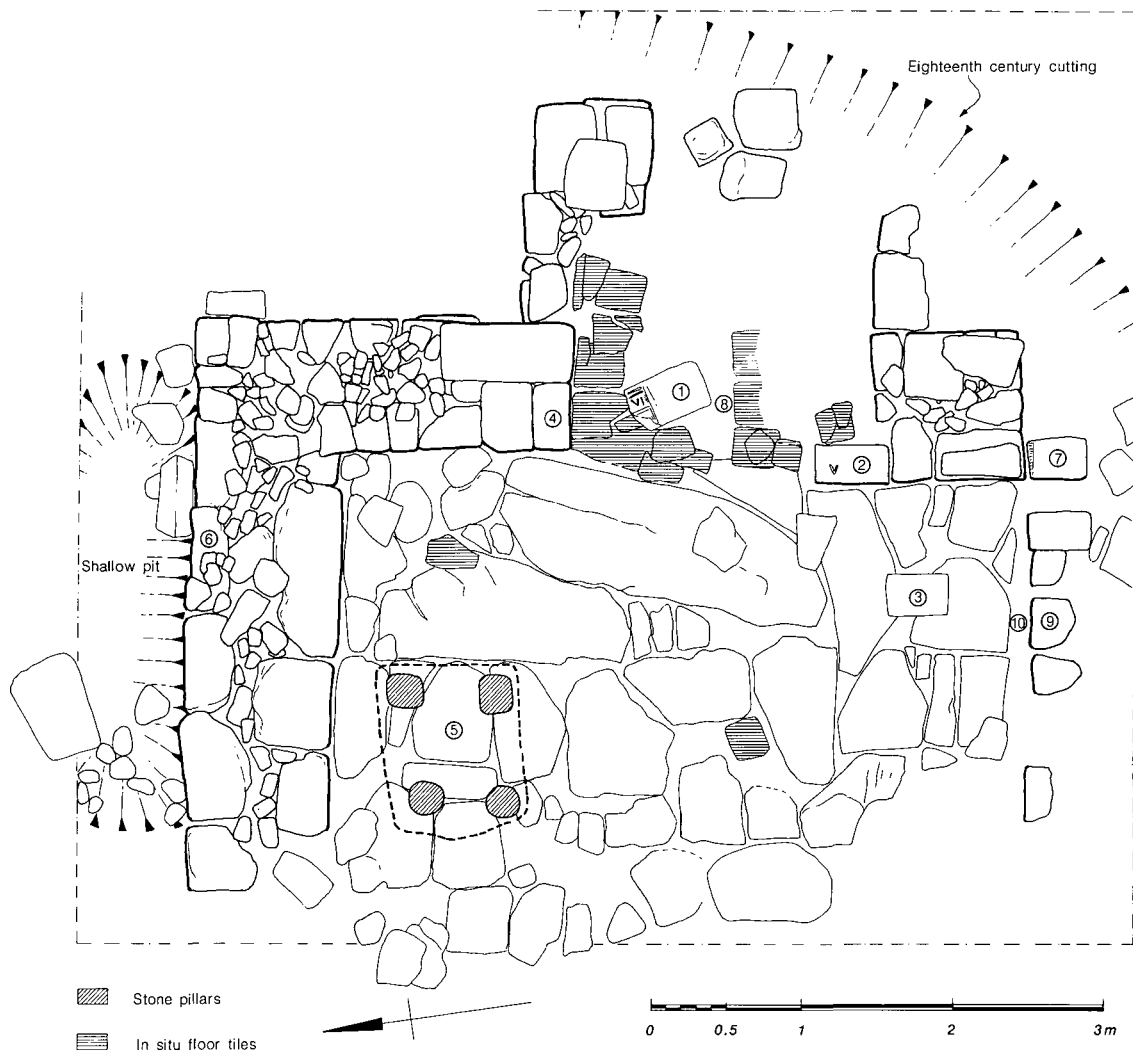
The remains of a hypocausted building lying in the grounds of Inveresk House, East Lothian, form a fragment of the original building uncovered in 1783 during the construction of the present Inveresk to Musselburgh road (Moir 1860, 12). Over 200 years of exposure to the elements and modern curiosity have caused some decay to the structure which is no longer as extensive as when first discovered or recorded a century later by Robert Stuart (1845, 159). Dr D J Breeze (Historic Buildings and Monuments, SDD) initiated a programme of consolidation and preservation. Excavation was undertaken by the author in November and December 1987 in order to prepare the building for consolidation. This entailed clearing out accumulated debris and undergrowth from within the structure and excavating down around the building to remove post 18th-century disturbances. No attempt was made to investigate further, although new details of the construction of the building were revealed.

The remains consist of a square hypocausted room, 2.60 m by 3.60 m (extant internal measurements), with stone wall foundations preserved on the north and east sides and stone wall footings only on the south side. There was no wall or continuation of known walls to the west which was masked by heavy undergrowth and trees. To the east was the supposed furnace room (2.0 m by 1.55 m internal measurements) of which little survives. The floor of the basement of the main room had been paved in large irregular stone slabs which were set several centimetres below the level of the adjacent tiled floor of the furnace room.

The wall along the north and east sides stands two to three courses high with a width of 0.82 m–1.0 m and was well constructed with an inner and an outer face of large blocks and a rubble core. There is a gap of 2.0 m along the east wall with square corners beyond which the wall continues for a further 1.80 m, displaced 0.10 m to the west and not directly aligned on the stretch of wall to the north of the opening. This part of the wall, as well as showing indications of structural differences, is also badly preserved. Through excavation the impression gained is that this was once the foundation of a stone pier and not a continuation of the east wall. This also applies to the north-east corner of the furnace room where a similar stone pier may have stood. In both cases the adjoining furnace walls and the south stone wall footings appear to butt on to the piers and may be secondary.

The walls of the furnace itself are poorly preserved and more roughly constructed, consisting of a mixture of large square blocks and smaller stones standing several courses high, from 0.40 m to 0.80 m wide and butted against the main walls. The furnace walls to the east and south are now almost

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ILLUS 1 Plan of hypocausted building in the grounds of Inveresk House showing: 1-3, locations of the carved stones; 4, the original position of 1; 5, the original floor supported on four stone pillars; 6-7, locations of the carved and worked stones; 8, channel?; 9, wall footing; 10, channel?

non-existent, although an opening may have existed to the east. The floor of the furnace was covered in clay tiles which only survive *in situ* along the north edge of the wall. These tiles are laid in several layers and may indicate resurfacing in antiquity. The rest of the floor area of the furnace room was covered by an irregular jumble of broken tiles and earth which appears to have subsided into the central portion of the room. A short stretch of channelling was uncovered.

Four stone pillars supporting a section of flooring stand in the northern part of the hypocaust (5 on illus 1). It is thought that these may have been re-erected. Certainly there are fewer of them than were recorded by Stuart in 1845 and the positioning of them is not square with the walls of the structure. Mortar around the tops of the pillars also indicates recent attempts at consolidation. The pillars themselves are not identical, being rounded to square in section and having roughly-formed

rounded capitals and bases. The south-west pillar has almost no definition of the capital and base but is instead waisted.

Several of the large stone blocks from the wall have been thrown down and now lie within the hypocaust room. In a few instances it has been possible to replace them with the help of old photographs and plans. Mention should also be made of three squared and well-finished blocks with markings upon them. The best of these (1 on plan), although broken, had been used as a corner stone at the junction of the main hypocaust walls and the furnace room where it faced out towards the room. The lettering on this stone is VI and was incorporated within what appears to be a frame and panels. Most of the carving had been broken off and is now impossible to reconstruct. The other two stones are inscribed with a V and VI, both on plain tooled faces. The stone with the V (2 on plan, illus 1) was used as the corner foundation stone in the short south stretch of the east wall where it faced upwards. The third stone (3 on plan) was lying loose within the building.

A shallow pit to the north of the building contained stones from the wall and rounded cobbles which had collapsed into it. No dating material was found within this pit, although it did respect the wall of the building. No other finds of Roman date were recovered, apart from scattered broken tiles.

#### REFERENCES

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 Stuart, R 1845 *Caledonia Romana: a descriptive account of the Roman antiquities of Scotland*.  
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