



A ROMAN CHIMNEY HOOD AT NEWPORT, ISLE OF WIGHT.

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ALTHOUGH open fireplaces have been found before in Roman houses in this country,¹ the discovery of part of the chimney hood in connection with one at Newport, Isle of Wight, justifies a detailed description.

An account of the Villa was published in *The Antiquaries' Journal* for April, 1929, (Vol. IX., p. 141). Room V., which measures nineteen feet four inches by fifteen feet six inches and retains its tessellated floor in almost perfect condition, has a tile-built fireplace against its south wall. The hearth, of large tiles, measures two feet eight inches in width and two feet six inches from the outer edge to the wall. It rests upon a mortar bed about one inch thick, which is laid on the *tesserae* of the floor.

The rounded fireback is built into the wall in such a way that, while the centre is flush with the face of the wall, the sides project four inches and terminate three and a half inches from the edge of the hearth.

The back is made of pieces of tile one inch thick, laid in horizontal rows with joints of about half their thickness. Ten rows remain, reaching to the top of the existing wall, which is here one foot eight inches high. Supported by the angle between the wall and the edges of the fireback, a cheek-piece thirteen inches long by ten and a half inches high, consisting of a single tile one and a half inches thick, rests at each side upon the hearth, forming a shallow fire-chamber,

¹ e.g., Silchester. Ins. XIV., House 2 (*Archaeologia*, LV., p. 240); Ins. XXXII., House 3 (*ibid.*, p. 429); Ins. XXVII, House 1 (*Archaeologia*, LVIII., pp. 19-20), House 2 (*ibid.*, p. 26): Clanville. (*Archaeologia*, LVI., p. 4): Carisbrooke (*Collect. Antiq.*, VI., p. 126).

which shows considerable remains of a coating of plaster. The western cheek-piece had been displaced and broken, but has now been put back. The eastern one has not been disturbed and is covered outside with an inch-thick layer of coarse plaster rather roughly finished off with a thin coat of fine white cement. This plaster does not quite reach the edge of the hearth, which shows no evidence of a cement covering.

When the room was being excavated, a piece of moulded plaster was found lying near the hearth. Shortly after two more pieces, which fitted together and to the piece previously found, were recovered from the spoil heap. They have been carefully joined and form a block fourteen inches long, with a width ranging from six and a half inches near the top to four inches near the bottom, both ends being broken. The back shows the impression of the flank of an arch of small bricks to which it was attached. The front is ornamented with a curved fillet moulding, one inch wide on the face, with slightly splayed sides and about half an inch projection. Coming in at the broken left-hand top corner, it curves close along the left side and terminates with a square edge about one and a half inches from the bottom. It resembles very closely the drip moulding above a medieval window. The right-hand side of the block curves outward slightly toward the top and has a return face along its whole length, its greatest depth to the broken edge being three inches. The left-hand side is more broken but retains a piece of a return face about three inches long and two and a quarter inches deep. This piece, the adjoining edge of the block and the underside of the fillet, especially toward the top, are blackened by smoke. There seems no reason to doubt that it is the right-hand springer of a—presumably—semi-circular arch which formed the chimney hood of the fire-place. Both side faces splay slightly outward. The construction consists of about an inch of coarse yellow plaster into which the bricks were keyed, covered by an inch of pink cement worked to a smooth surface and finished off rather roughly with one-eighth to one-quarter of an inch of hard white cement. The fillet was worked in the pink cement before receiving the finishing coat of white.

At the same time and place a large wedge-shaped block of pink cement was found, showing on both its sides the

impression of bricks and having its base covered by a quarter-inch layer of hard white cement. This base is concave in every direction and measures about seven inches across. The coat of white cement is much cracked and blackened by fire. It appears to be part of a semi-dome which roofed the interior of the fireplace. Judging by its shape, it must have filled an angle, and it may be noted that the marks of the bricks on one side are at right angles to those on the other.

Another find near the fireplace was a tile one and a half inches thick and originally about twelve inches square, which seems to have been worked into a sort of bracket. From one corner, a piece, roughly square and containing about a quarter of the entire tile, appears to have been removed with some care. From the corner diagonally opposite, the edge slopes inward for seven and a quarter inches and then runs more or less parallel with the above square to form an arm about three inches wide projecting from the main body of the tile. This may be due to natural fracture but the square removed has every appearance of being intentional and the tile perhaps formed part of the construction of the fireplace; *e.g.*, a bracket to support the arch on which the front was moulded. The flimsy nature of the cheek-pieces, a single tile set on edge, implies that the real substance of the chimney hood was cement, for which the tiles simply formed a foundation.





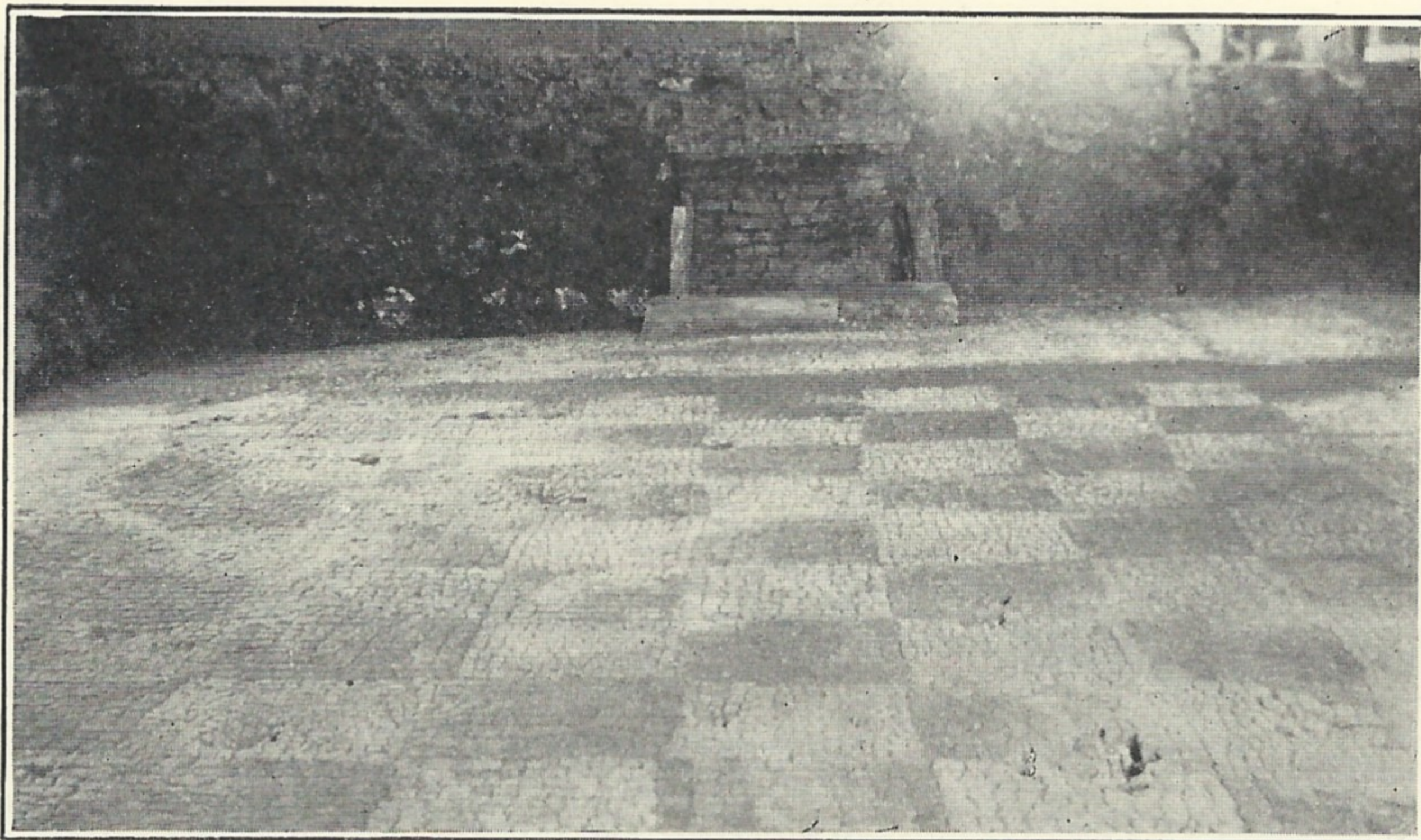


Fig. 2.—FIREPLACE IN ROOM V.

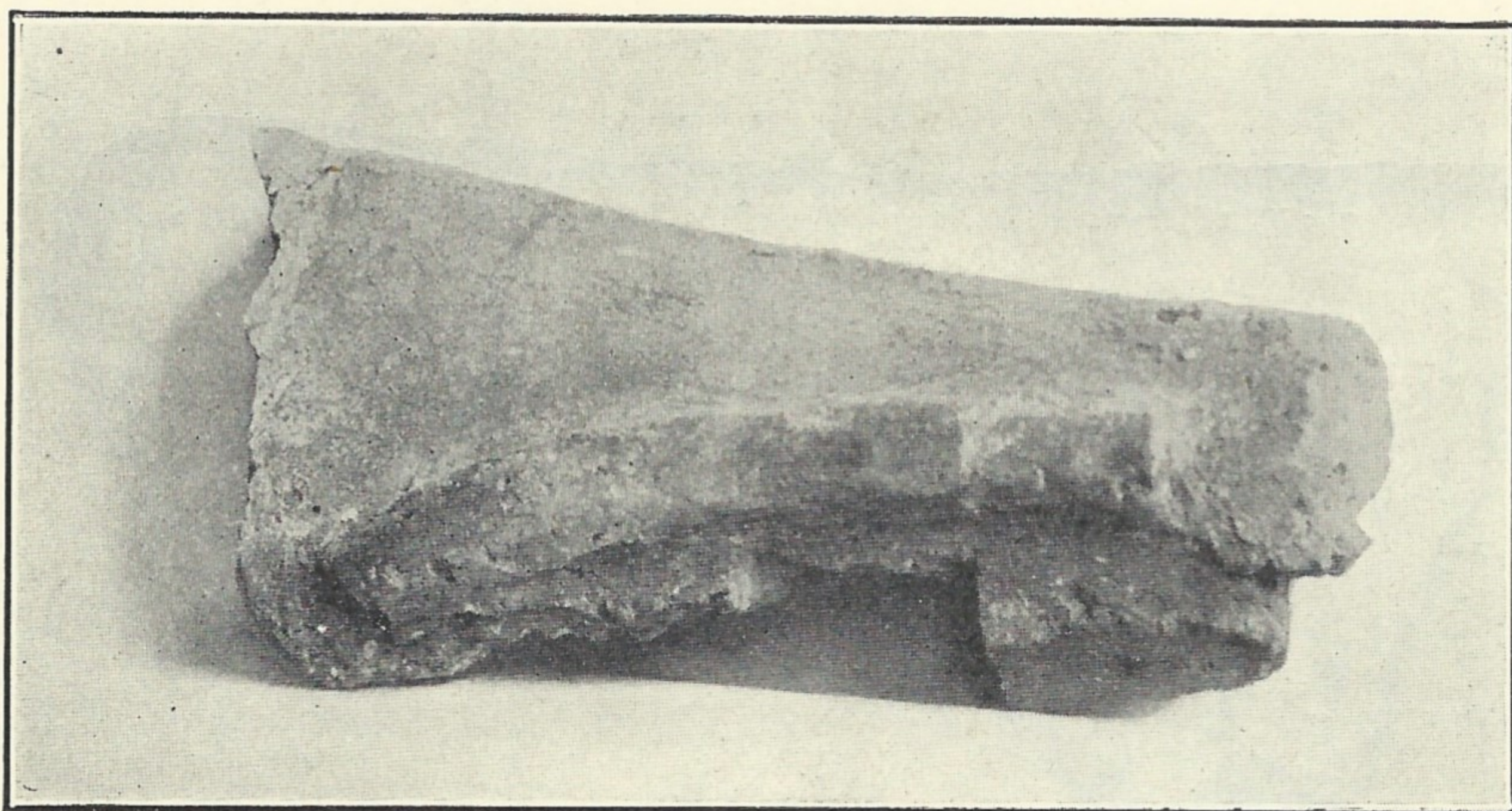


Fig. 3.—PART OF HOOD TO FIREPLACE IN ROOM V.

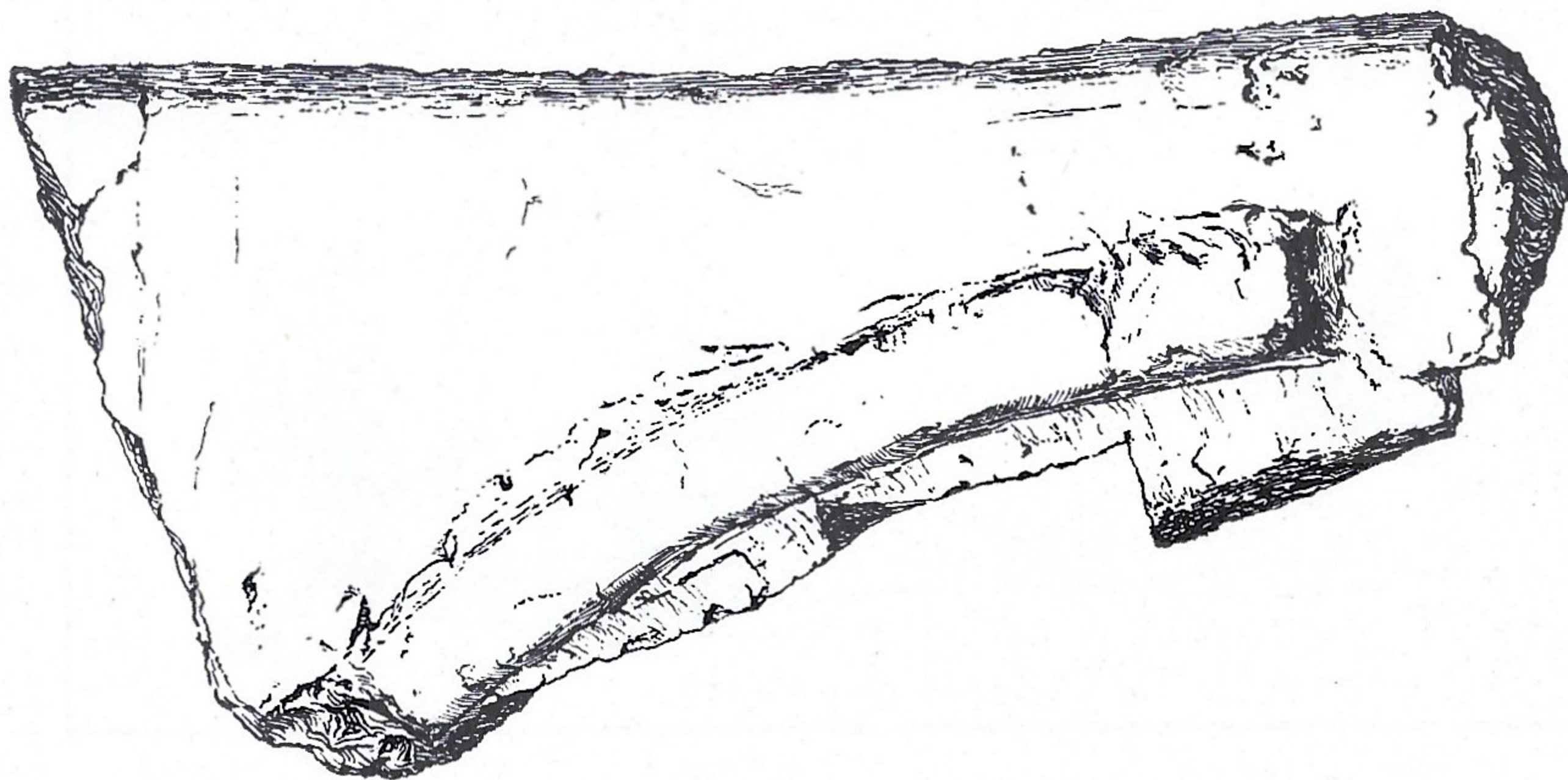


Fig. 4.—SPRINGER. Front view.

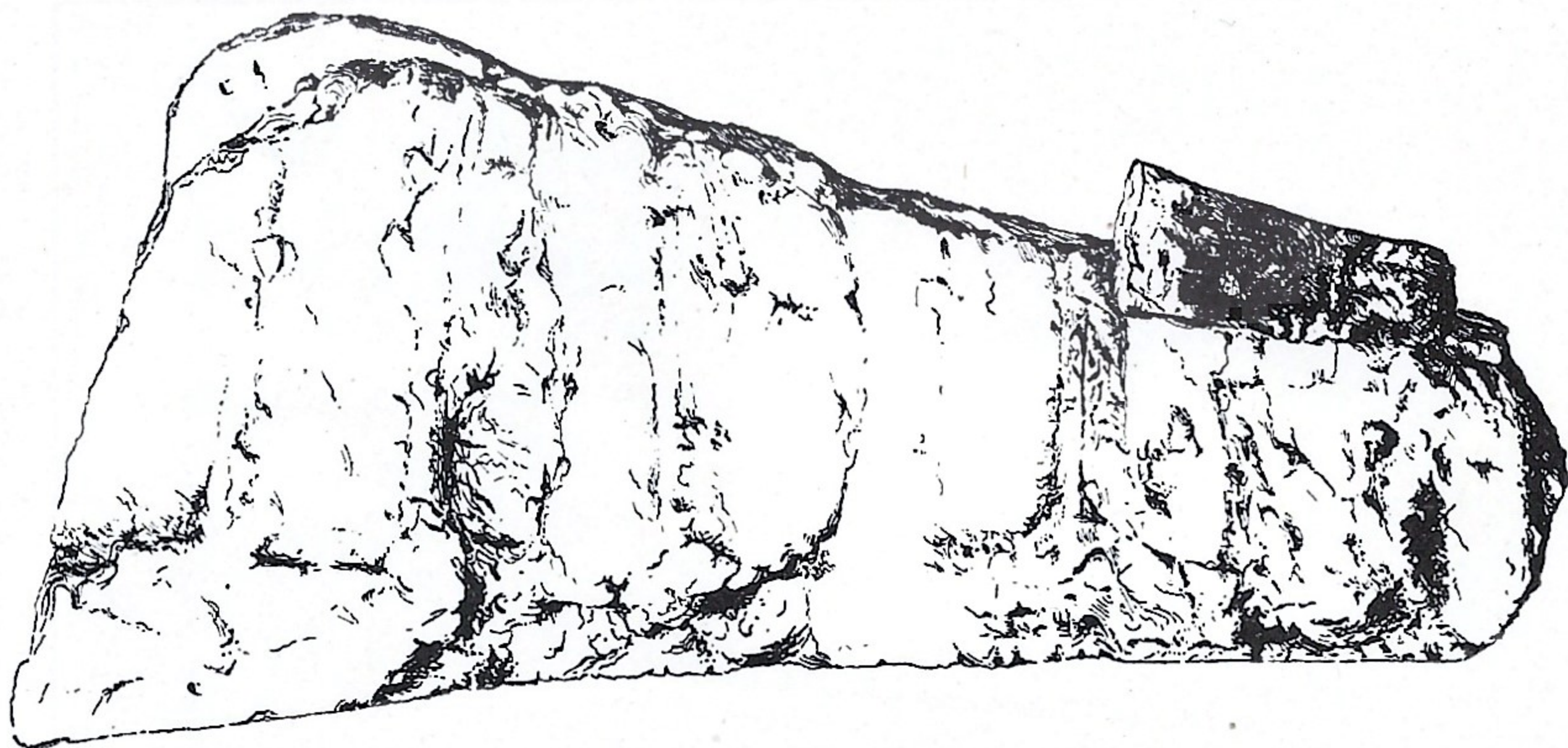


Fig. 5.—SPRINGER. Back view.

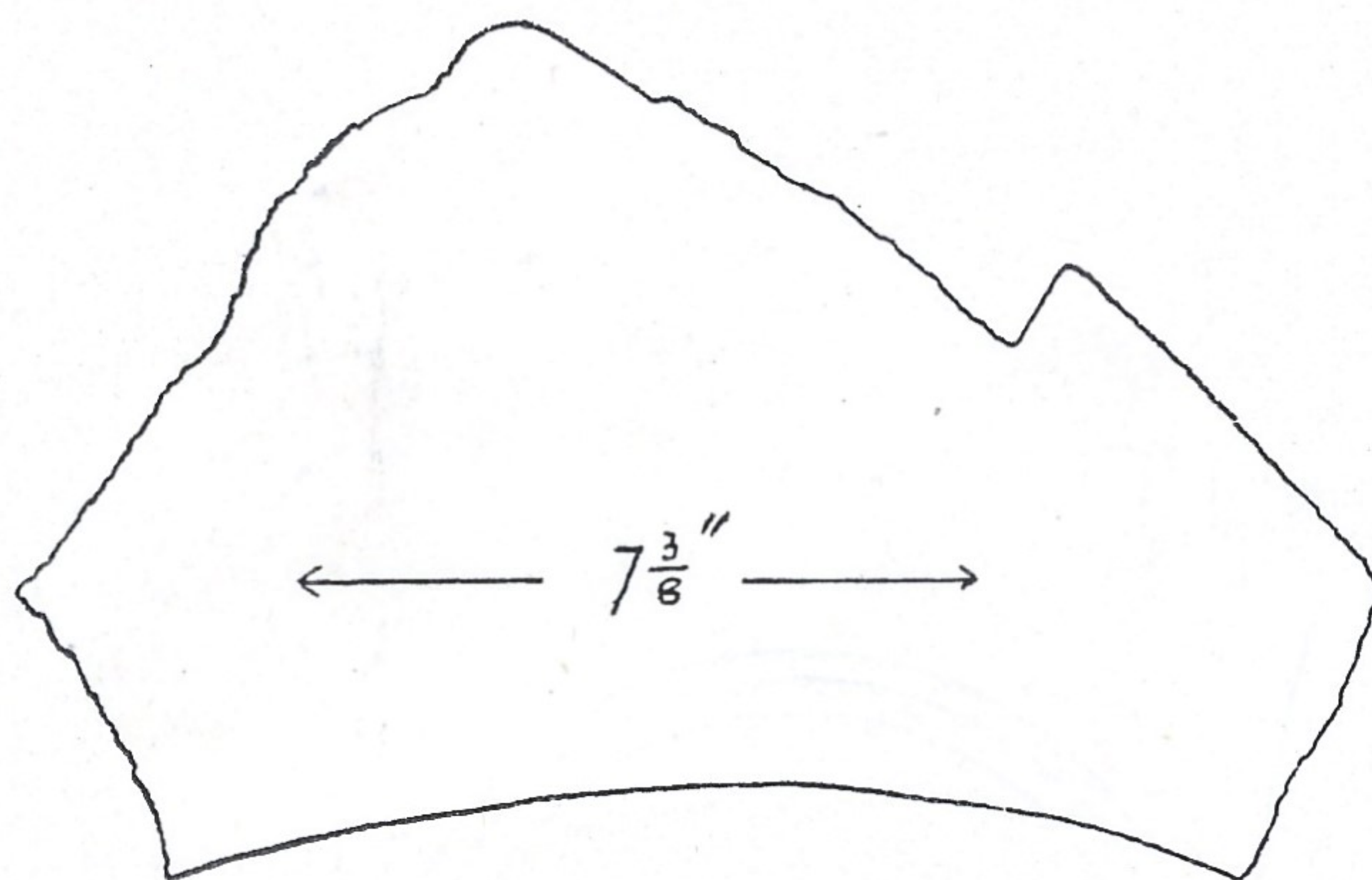


Fig. 6.—WEDGE-SHAPED BLOCK.

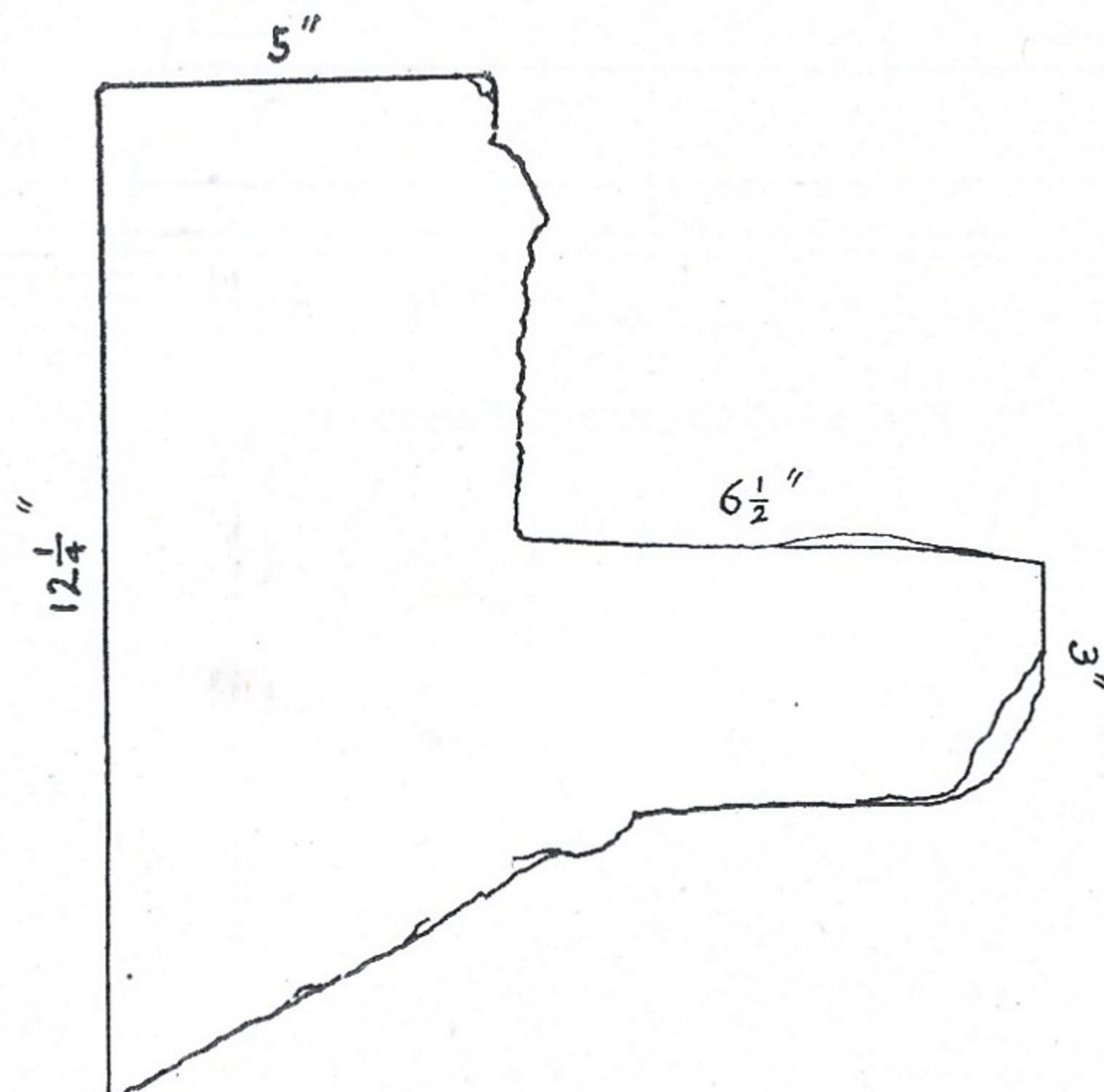


Fig. 7.—WORKED TILE.

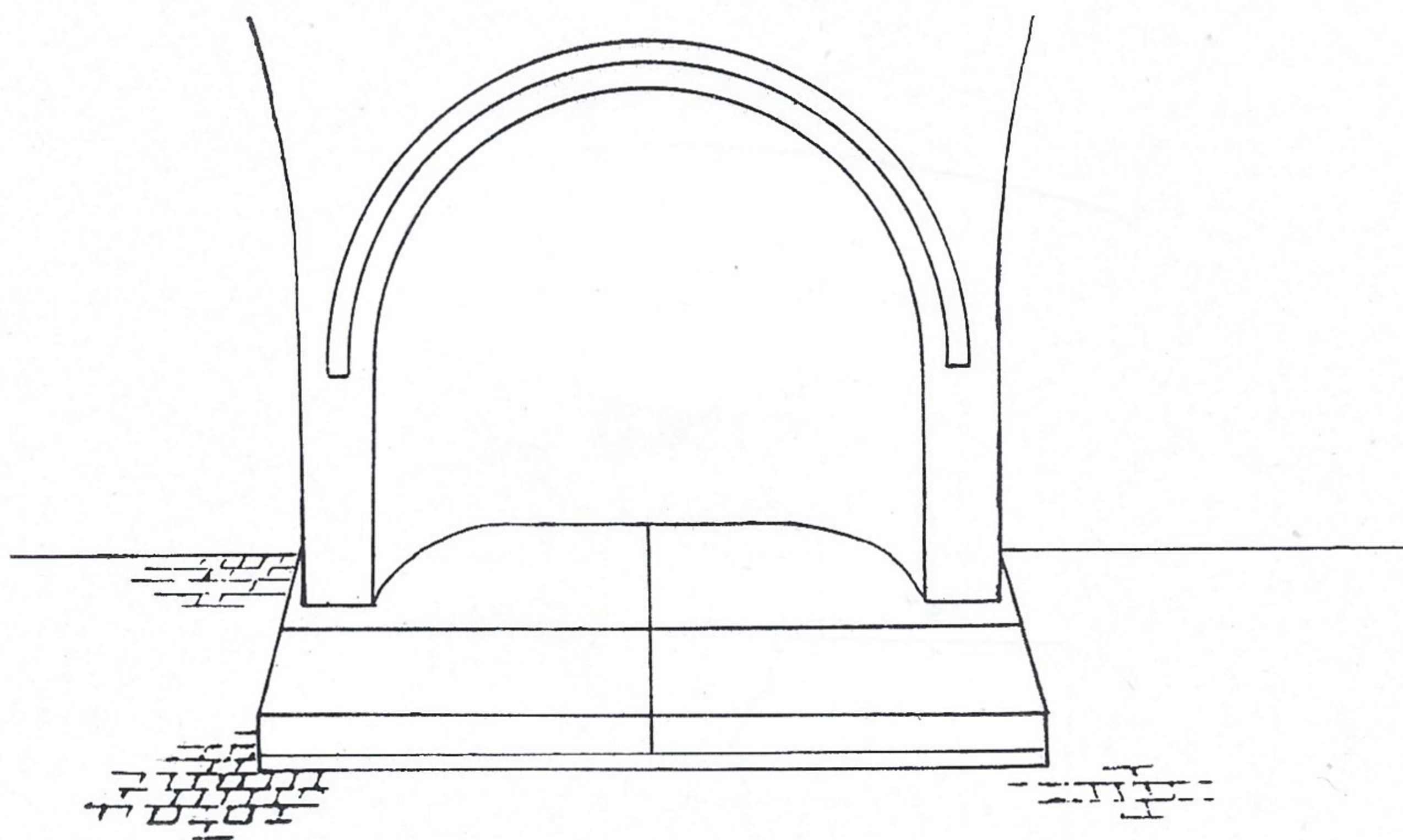


Fig. 8.—SUGGESTED RESTORATION.