# Excavations at Marcham 2001-2011: a later prehistoric ritual complex and a Romano-British temple

Gary Lock

## Background

The extensive archaeological site at Marcham[1] has a long history of investigation. Interest began as a result of quarrying in the mid-nineteenth century when a late Romano-British and early Anglo-Saxon cemetery was discovered north of the A338 road to Wantage (Akerman 1865a and b; Rolleston 1869; 1880) with further excavation and analysis of the numerous graves continuing just after the first World War (Dudley Buxton 1921). More recent archaeological evaluation has confirmed the extent of the cemetery together with Saxon occupation (Cass and Ford 2008).

In the 1930s, acting on the advice of Arthur Evans, Bradford and Goodchild excavated within the garden of the Noah's Ark Inn just to the south of the road and cemetery. Here they uncovered a series of Iron Age features, including an unusual 'shrine' with votive offerings, directly overlain by a stone-built Romano-British temple (Bradford and Goodchild 1939). Parts of the temple were explored further by Harding in the 1960s (Harding 1987) and then again in the 1980s (Wait and Miles 1988). The surrounds of the temple, including the southern half of the Inn's garden and the adjoining field known as Trendles, were the focus of field work by Hingley (1982; 1985) who pulled together the aerial photographic evidence and conducted surface survey. The importance of Hingley's work was in showing the extent of the archaeological remains consisting of a series of buildings including a circular stone-built amphitheatre-like structure (henceforth the arena) to the east of the temple which he confirmed by small-scale excavation. It is appropriate here to quote Harding's conclusion:

'Air-photography and fieldwork since 1964 have clearly indicated the importance of the Frilford site in the Romano-British period, and it is probable that further excavation would reveal an intensity of occupation in the context of which the apparent superimposition of structures would seem less remarkable. The site certainly warrants a more extensive programme of excavation, not least because the Iron Age occupation appears to have survived reasonably well beneath the Romano-British levels.' (1987, 16).

This accumulating evidence together with conflicting aspects of the site's interpretation established Marcham as a site of national importance. Encouraged by the initial large scale geophysical survey and by the landowners' enthusiasm and generosity excavations were conducted for 11 seasons starting in 2001 co-directed by Gary Lock and Chris Gosden. These acted as training excavations for full and part-time students at the University of Oxford as well as for many other people, in total nearly 1,000 were trained over the 11 years. With over 40 excavated trenches producing many complex features and a large amount of material culture the post-excavation and publication have been considerable with much of it so far being supported by the National Lottery Fund thus offering opportunities for local volunteers to be involved.

[1] The site is sometimes known as Frilford as published by Bradford and Goodchild in 1939 although Frilford is actually the neighbouring parish. The site is also sometimes referred to as Marcham/Frilford.

**Continuity and change**

In summary, we suggest that through the later prehistoric and Romano-British periods Marcham was not a settlement in the domestic sense but a specialised sacred place where religious/ritual activities were the focus for people being there *contra* Burnham and Wacher (1990, 178-83), who saw this as a small town with a specialised religious function. During both periods, Marcham was located within the busy landscape of the Vale of the White Horse (Wintle 2013; Wintle et al 2017), in the Iron Age serving surrounding farmsteads and perhaps the settlement at nearby Abingdon (Thomas 2026; Lambrick et al. 2009; Henig and Booth 2000; Muir and Roberts 1999). In the Roman period it lay close to the Roman road running to the settlement at Wantage (Holbrook and Thomas 1997; Barber and Holbrook 2002) and also to the Roman town at Abingdon (Thomas 2026; Henig and Booth 2000; Booth *et al.* 2007; Brady *et al.* 2007; Yeates 2017). While the remains for both periods make Marcham an important site it is the relationship between the two which have placed it at the centre of discussion regarding continuity and change between the Iron Age and Romano-British periods.

Bradford and Goodchild (1939) argued for direct continuity between the Iron Age and Roman remains in both time and in function as a persistent religious/ritual/sacred place. Their interpretation was based on three main lines of argument: firstly that many of the Iron Age features, specifically postholes and ditches, were intentionally back filled in the early Roman period when the temple was built suggesting that they were surviving holes or hollows in the ground. Secondly the spatial correlation of the Roman and Iron Age structures, specifically the 'rotunda' being constructed over the ditched 'shrine' and the temple itself being built over a post-built circular building. Thirdly the early dating of the construction of the temple to *c.* 80-90 CE based on coins found under the first phase path leading from the eastern entrance. This theme and these details will be explored further below.

**The 2001-2011 excavations**

Before the excavations began the site was understood through aerial photographic evidence and earlier limited excavation, Figure 1. The further extent of the evidence at Marcham was indicated by the geophysical surveys (Johnson, 2002; Wintle 2013; Wintle et al. 2017; Figure 2). It is clear that the core of the site comprises the areas in the garden of the Noah's Ark where the main Romano-British temple and rotunda are found together with a large Iron Age barrel-shaped enclosure, all within the scheduled area. Also, in Trendles field to the east where the arena is positioned together with other structures, while further east still are a series of small Iron Age ditched enclosures, many rock-cut pits and evidence of Saxon occupation.

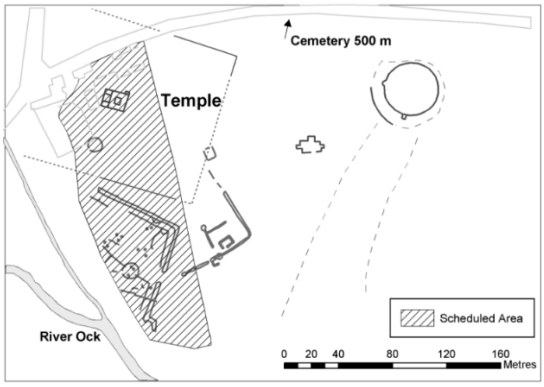



*Figure 1. Evidence for the site before the 2001-2011 excavations began, comprising earlier excavations and aerial photography*

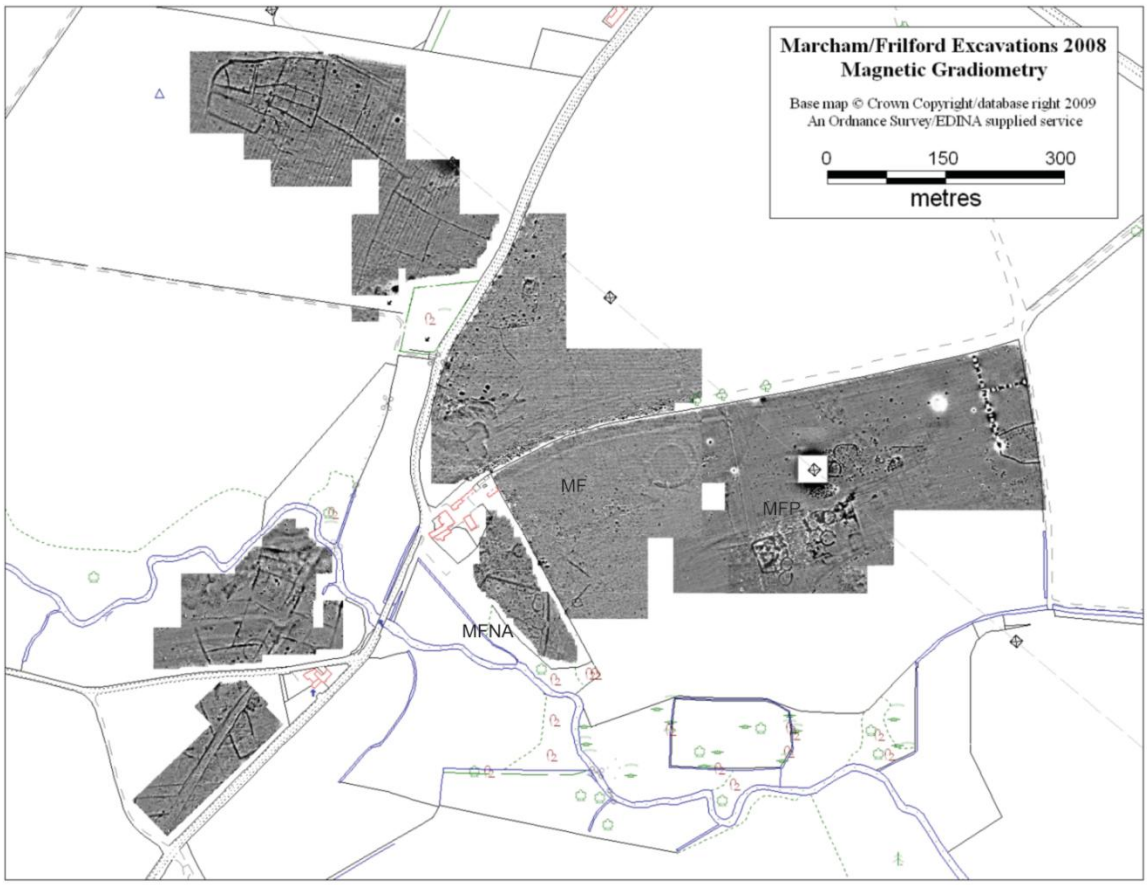



*Figure 2. The geophysical survey results of Trendles field and surrounding areas. Courtesy of T. Johnson and W. Wintle.*

Figure 3 shows the fully excavated trenches spanning the eleven seasons of fieldwork. The site is divided into three zones each with its own trench numbering system: to the west is zone MFNA (Marcham/Frilford Noah's Ark), centrally is zone MF (Marcham/Frilford) and to the east zone MFP (Marcham/Frilford Prehistoric). The following site narrative is a summary of the trenches that contained significant evidence.

Discussion of the trenches is grouped spatially according to the main features of the site as follows:

The Bronze Age enclosure and small semi-circular enclosure (principally Trenches MF3, 12 and 4)
The barrel-shaped Iron Age enclosure (Trenches MFNA1, 2 and 3)
The Romano-British temple, its temenos and associated buildings (principally Trenches MFNA6, 7 and 8, MF14, 15, 32, 18 and 16)
The central rectangular building and nearby shrines and other buildings (principally Trenches MF 2, 36, 39 and 22)
The arena and its drain (principally Trenches MF1, 9, 29, 17, 33, 33, 21, 37 and 40)
The eastern group of Iron Age enclosures and pits and a Saxon hut (Trenches MFP1, 2, 3, 4, 5 and 6)

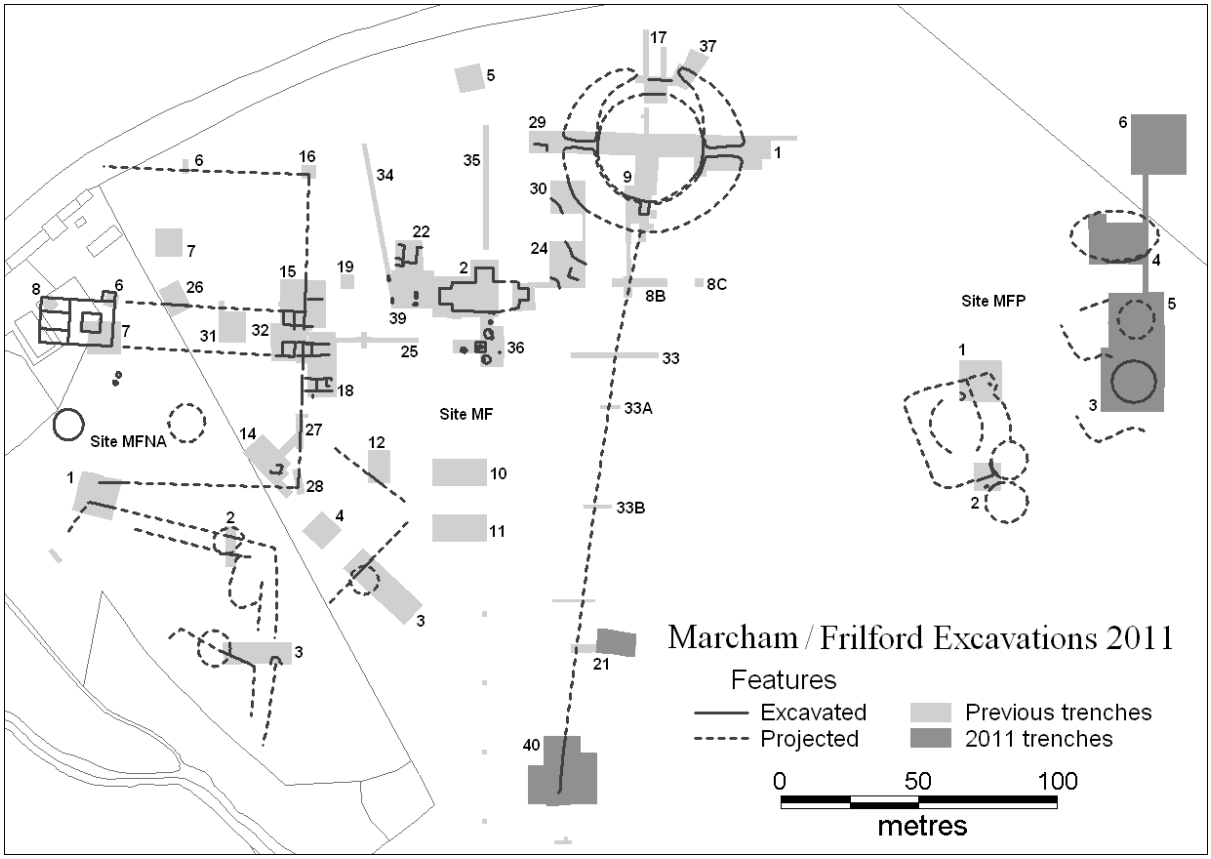



*Figure 3. The main excavated trenches at Marcham with the three zones of the site, MFNA, MF and MFP. Some smaller trenches are omitted.*

**The Bronze Age enclosure and small semi-circular enclosure (principally trenches MF3, 12 and 4)**

Two sides of what appears to have been a ditched enclosure show on both the aerial photography and the geophysics situated to the south-east of the temple temenos being partly obliterated by this later structure. The ditch was excavated in Trenches MF3 and MF12, the former also investigating a circular feature which was visible on the geophysics.

The roughly V-shaped enclosure ditch averaged 1.5m wide at the top and was cut through 0.5m of limestone and then into sand to a depth of just over 1m. In both trenches it showed at least three episodes of recutting. The original cutting of the ditch is dated by the presence of an almost complete Middle Bronze Age urn, *c.* 1,500 BCE, found broken and laid, seemingly deliberately, on its bottom, Figure 4. Just outside the enclosure in Trench MF12, within a shallow oval depression, another Bronze Age urn, in poor condition, but mostly complete, was deposited upright. In Trench MF3 the ditch was recut in the Romano-British period as part of the 'shrine' described below although the extent of this final recutting did not seem to extend to trench MF12.

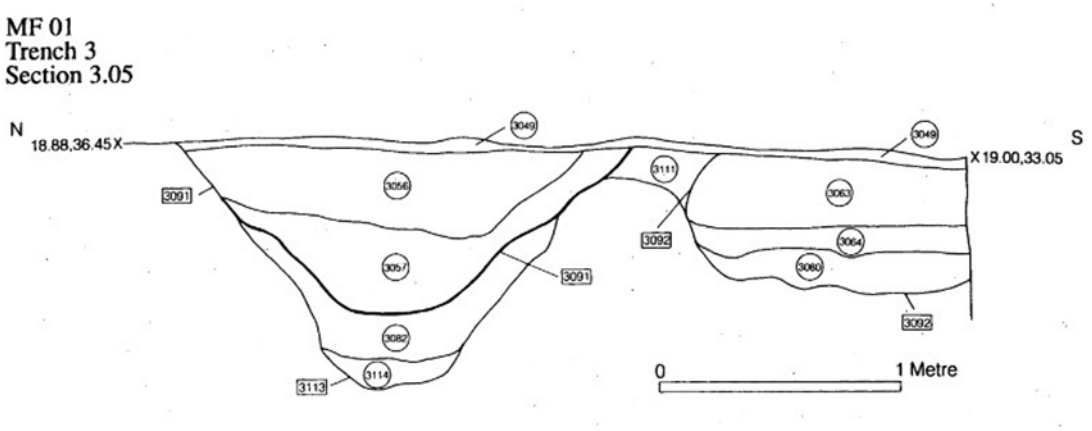



*Figure 4. Trench MF3 section showing the recut [3091] of the enclosure ditch*

While there was little evidence for activity within this enclosure (Trench MF4), further features within Trench MF12 show evidence immediately outside the enclosure spanning the Iron Age and Roman periods. A cluster of three inter-cutting pits was found in the northern portion of the trench, Figure 5. At the bottom of the latest pit several large mammal bones were deposited against the sides. The fills that remained from these pits did not contain a large amount of artefacts, but the ceramics recovered strongly indicate an early/middle Iron Age date. A smaller pit was found in the east of the trench containing numerous finds, including most likely deliberately deposited faunal remains and Iron Age pottery, capped by a tightly packed layer of small limestone cobbles. A spread of badly decayed human remains was found close to these pits within a barely perceptible dip of the bedrock and seem to have been that of a child. Part of the ditch was overlain by a surface of tightly packed, fist sized stone cobbles densely covered in oyster shells, and a rich assortment of Roman artefacts, including seven coins, more than 30 nails and hobnails, terra sigillata tesserae, and pottery. Another cut feature contained Roman pottery as well as burnt material, half formed bits of metalwork and slag suggesting a small furnace. In total Trench MF12 contained 361 Iron Age sherds of pottery and 971 Roman giving a total of 1,328. Trench MF4 contained only a single sherd of Roman pottery.

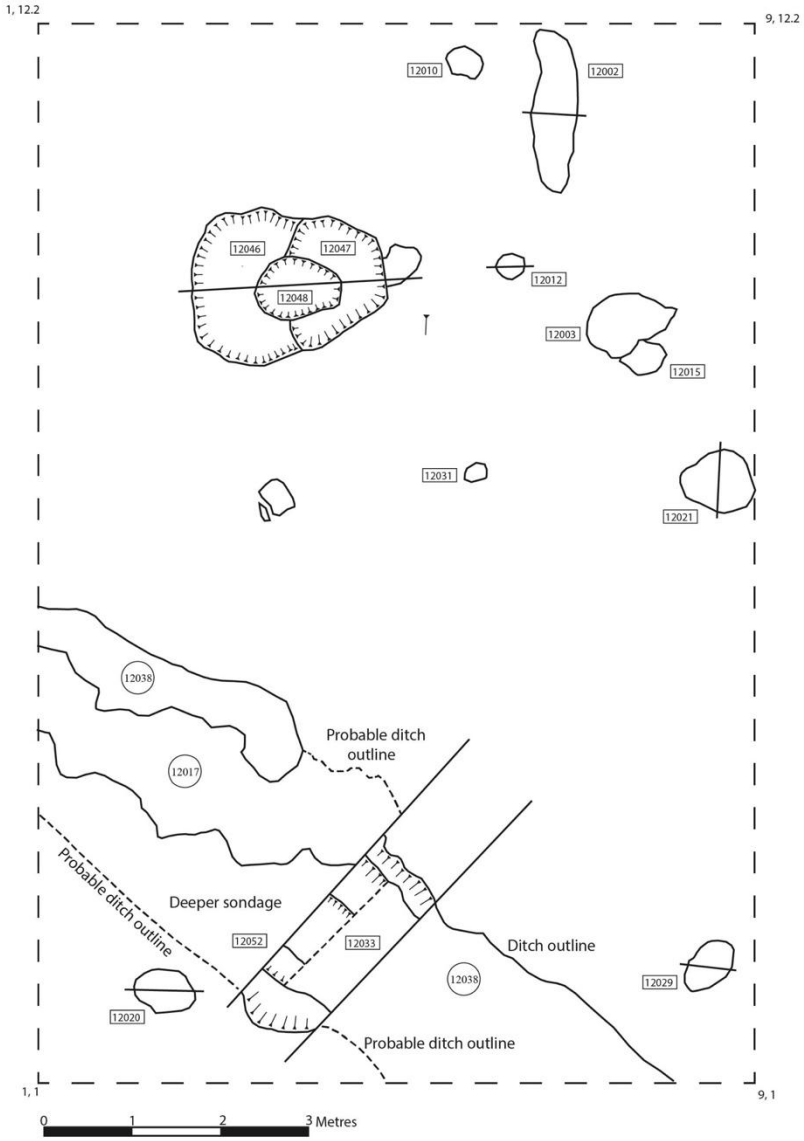



*Figure 5. Trench MF12*

A small distance east of the enclosure, in Trenches MF10 and MF11, six pits were excavated producing a small number of sherds, 191 in MF10 of which 187 were Roman and 203 in MF11 with 199 being Roman. In total Trench MF4 contained 1,328 sherds of pottery of which 971 were Roman and 161 Iron Age, the corresponding figures for Trench MF12 were108 and 20 giving a total of 128.

Trench 3 was located to investigate a small sub-circular structure indicated by the geophysics. Excavation showed that this cut the fill of the larger enclosure ditch identified in Trench MF12 and was constructed in two phases, Figures 6 and 7.

The first was a sub-circular arrangement of small pits defining an area of approximately 7 to 8 metres diameter. The fills contained early/middle Iron Age pottery. Definition of these pits was complicated by the cutting of a ditch through them to create a sub-circular enclosure probably in the Romano-British period. The ditch was less than a metre wide, steep sided, flat bottomed and 0.8m deep. Within the interior of this small enclosure were a series of posthole suggesting some form of timber structure although no patterning was obvious.

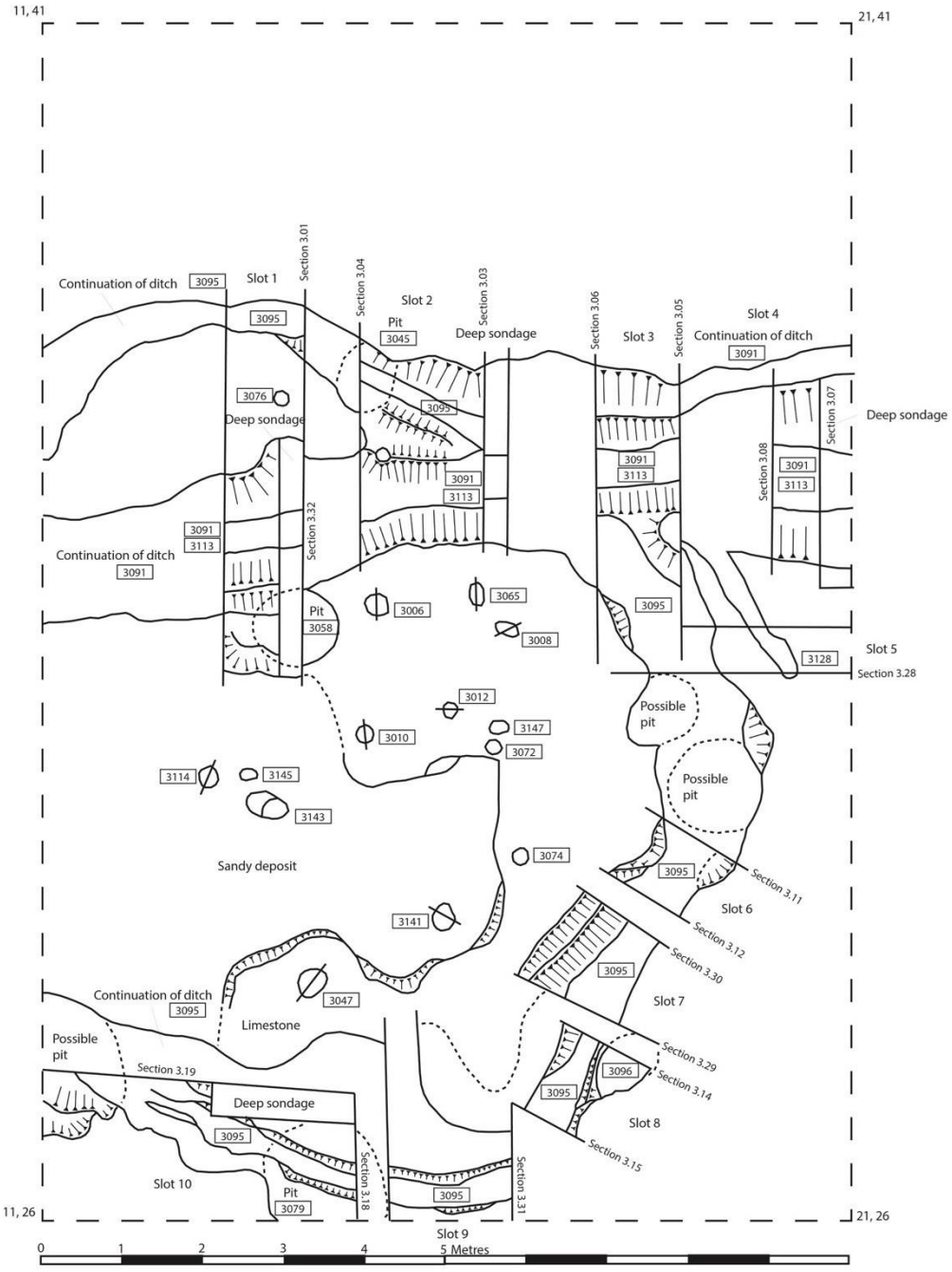



*Figure 6. Trench MF3*



*Figure 7. The intercutting ditches within Trench MF3*

In total 1,168 sherds of pottery, 542 being Roman and 626 Iron Age, together with faunal remains were recovered from this trench together with nine coins and crucible fragments with iron slag and nails. Within this small enclosure were a series of postholes and although it was not possible to identify the outline of a structure perhaps more than one existed. Iron Age pottery was contained within several of the postholes.

Based on the unusual structural characteristics of this small enclosure together with the quantity of material culture deposited there it seems possible that this was a form of shrine although whether dated to the Iron Age or Roman periods is unclear. It may be of significance that it is close to the shrine identified by Bradford and Goodchild and similar in appearance, Figure 8.

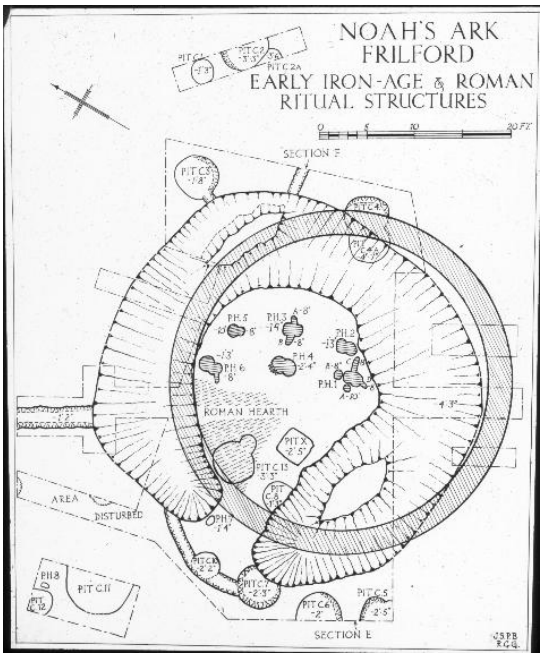



*Figure 8. The Iron Age 'shrine' overlain by the stone Romano-British rotunda (Bradford and Goodchild 1939 Figure 5)*

**The barrel-shaped Iron Age enclosure (trenches MFNA1, 2 and 3)**
The barrel-shaped enclosure has been identified through aerial photography and geophysics, Figure 9, and investigated through the excavation of three trenches. The enclosure does not appear to be complete as the River Ock and an associated reed bed cuts off its south-western half probably due to the Ock having changed its course and moved eastwards. This is indicated by a series of dry oxbow lakes a few hundred metres to the south visible on aerial photographs. If the known shape of the enclosure is extrapolated it could have originally been approximately 140m by 85m and enclosed 1.2ha.

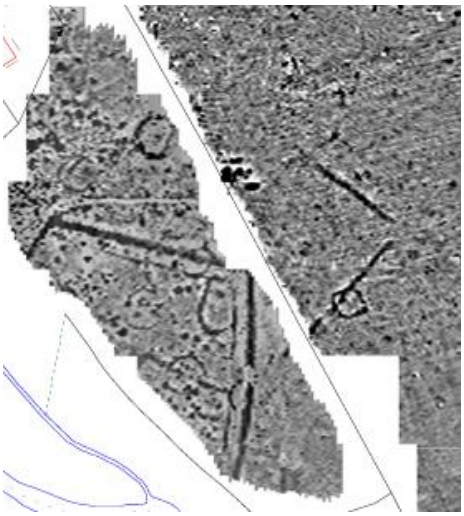


*Figure 9. Geophysical survey showing the large barrel-shaped enclosure and the two sides of the Bronze Age enclosure together with the small semi-circular enclosure excavated in Trench MF3 (courtesy of William Wintle)*

The main enclosure ditch was a stepped V-shape cut through bedrock a maximum of *c*. 5m wide and over 2m deep with middle Iron Age pottery (some of it very early middle Iron Age, *c.* 400–350 BCE), contained within its primary fills in trenches MFNA1 and 2, Figures 10, 11, 12 and 13. The bedrock here is unstable and had collapsed into the ditch, which was then re-cut to the same shape but smaller. The geophysics clearly shows a narrower linear feature running parallel with the ditch *c.* 4m on its inside, which excavation revealed to be 0.65m wide and 0.95m deep with steep sides and a flat base, Figure 14. This is probably a slot to hold a wooden inner revetment of the bank and it contained similar pottery to the outer ditch. Trench MFNA2 was an area of complex archaeology with several intercutting ring-ditches and other cut features as shown in Figure 10. In total trench MFNA2 contained 713 sherds of which 676 were Iron Age and 37 Roman.

MFNA 08
Trench 1

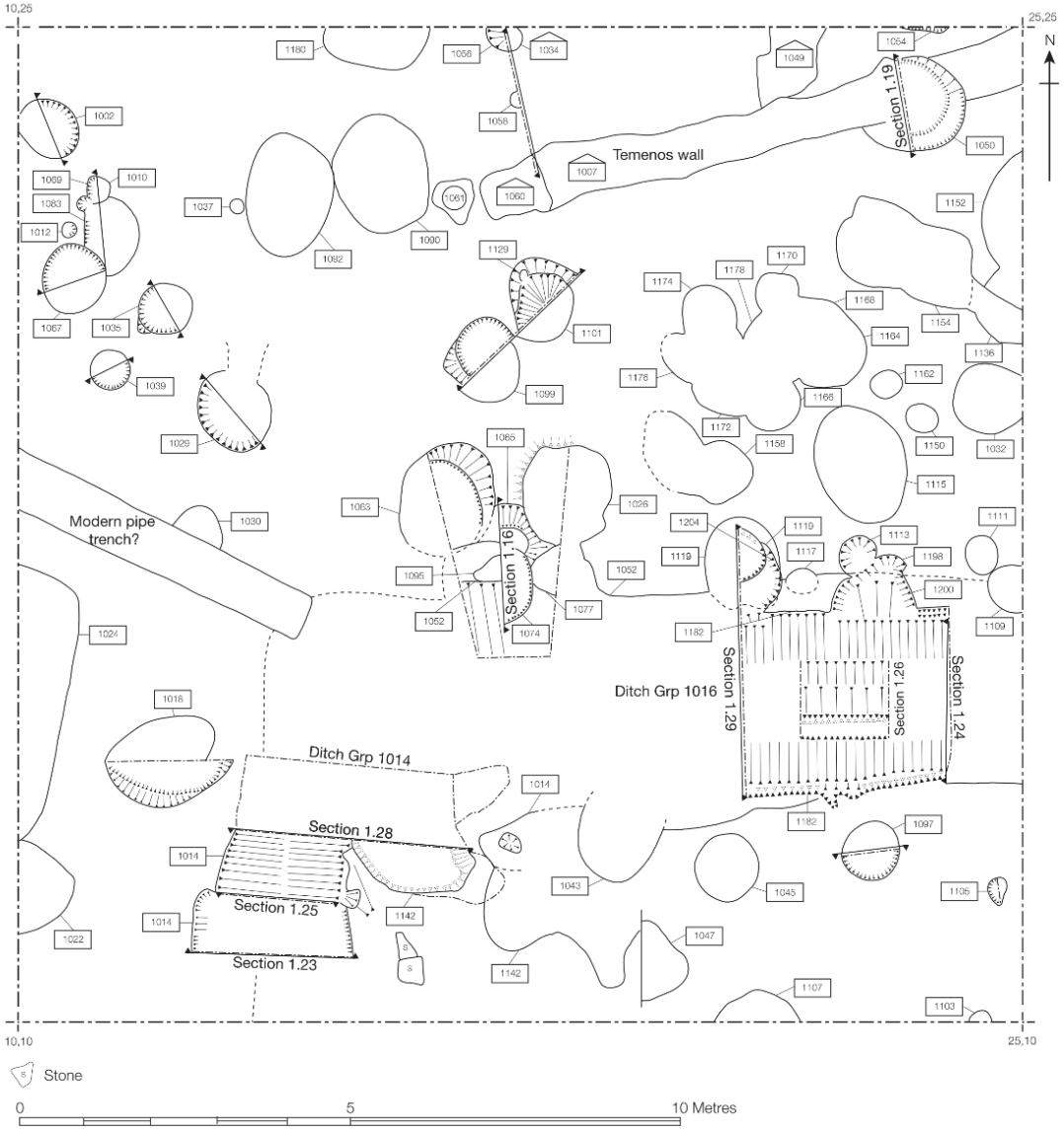



*Figure 10. Trench MFNA1*

MFNA 08
Trench 2

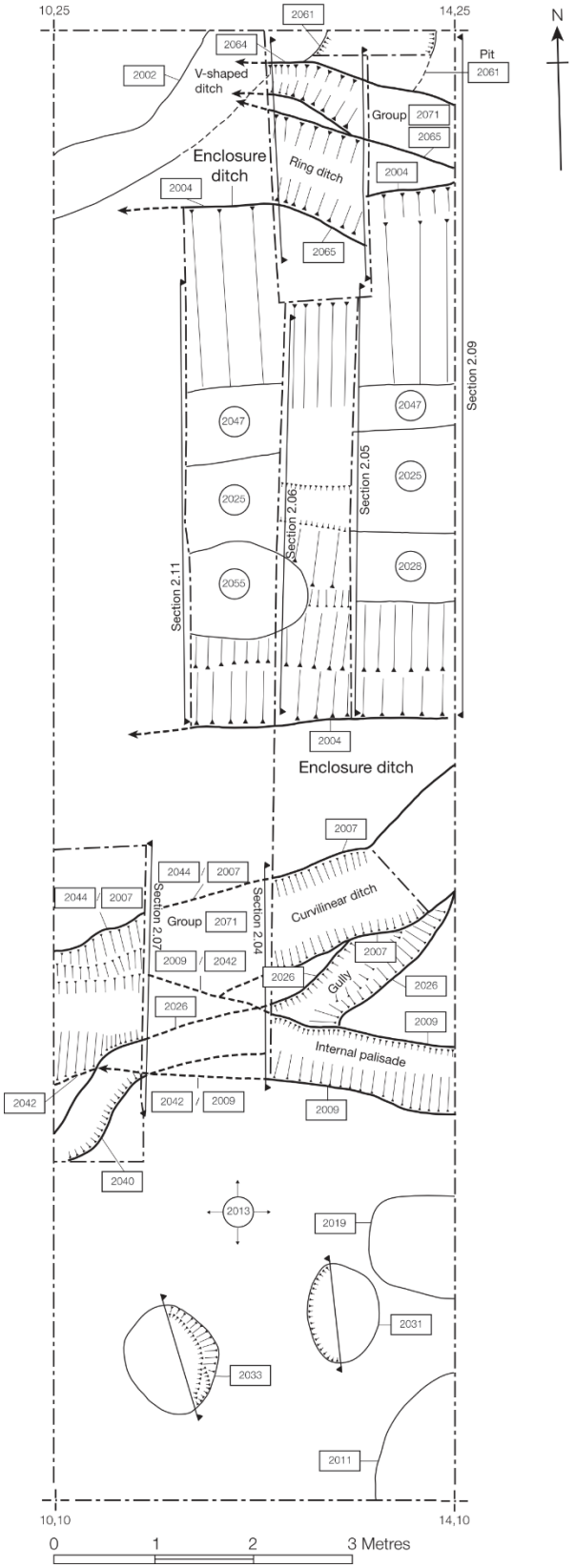



*Figure 11. Trench MFNA2*

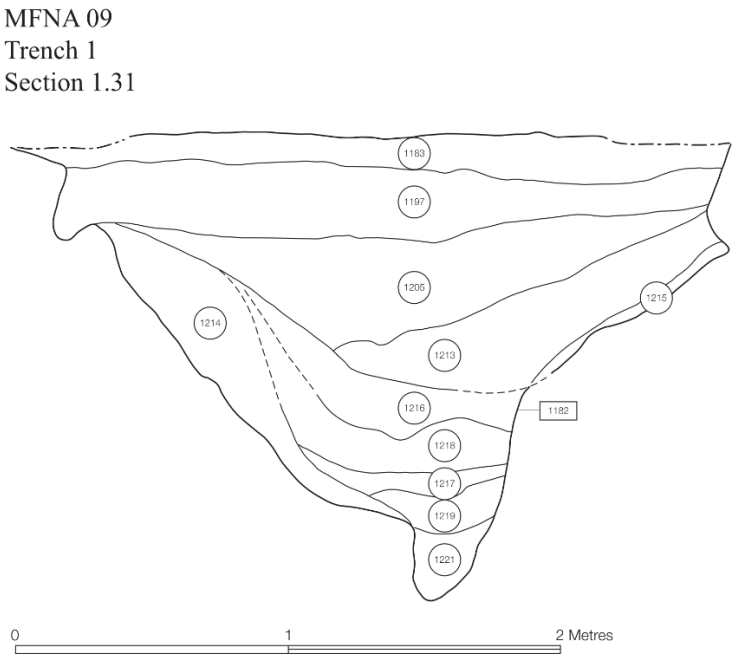



*Figure 12. Section of the barrel-shaped enclosure main ditch*



*Figure 13. The large enclosure ditch*

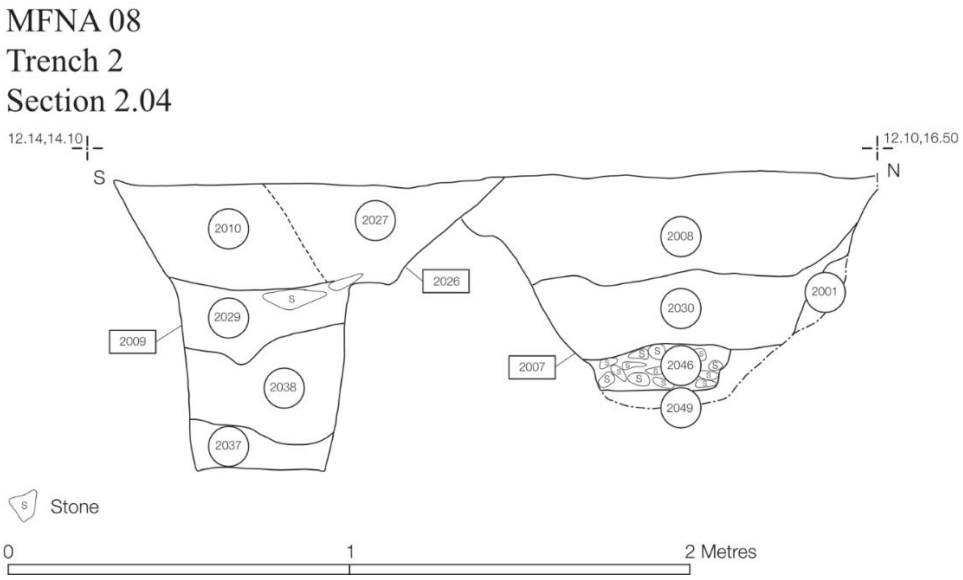



*Figure 14. Section through the internal palisade ditch (left) of the barrel-shaped enclosure*

The enclosure had an entrance through the eastern side, the southern half of which was excavated, trench MFNA3, Figure 15. The terminus end of the ditch was surrounded by an arc of four shallow pits/postholes, all with steep sides and flat bottoms measuring *c.* 1m in diameter and a maximum of 0.3m deep. This unusual configuration was clearly related to the entrance architecture and may have held posts that were fixed together rather than being embedded in the ground. The geophysics and excavation show a series of small, ditched enclosures of various shapes within the large enclosure, together with a series of pits/large postholes. Although it is difficult to make sense of many of these features, within the area excavated a row of at least five postholes running from the entrance westwards seems to have divided the interior into two. These were spaced *c.* 2.8m apart and averaged 0.7m diameter and 0.45m deep. Other groups of postholes running north/south may have formed radial divisions from the central line. Over the whole area of the enclosure was a complex of inter-cutting ditches, some of which predated the barrel-shaped enclosure based on stratigraphy and late Early Iron Age/early Middle Iron Age pottery in upper fills. Trench MFNA3 contained 544 sherds of pottery, 416 Iron Age and 128 Roman.

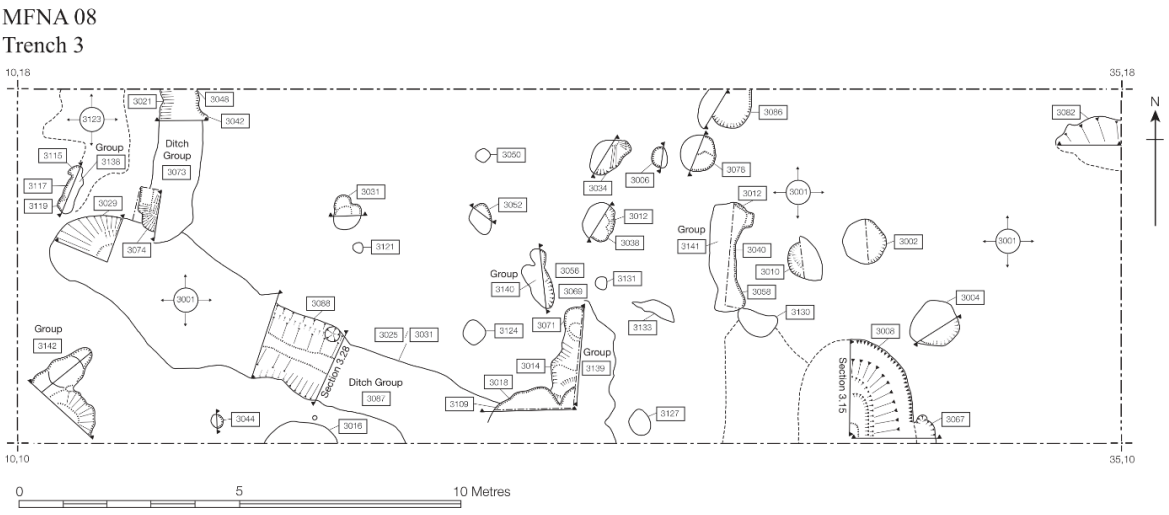



*Figure 15. Trench MFNA3 plan of the barrel-shaped enclosure entrance and interior*

The *temenos* wall of the temple enclosure (described below) at its southwestern end runs very close to the northern ditch of the barrel-shaped Iron Age enclosure, trench MFNA1, Figure9. The upper fills of the Iron Age ditch in this area, and only in this area, produced a small amount of late Iron Age pottery as well as a very large assemblage of 1st century AD Roman artefacts including very early Roman pottery, two asses (one of Domitian and the other a Claudian copy) and four early brooches (a Nauheim derivative, a T-brooch, a penannular brooch, and a Hod Hill type). A large quantity of pottery was uncovered in trench MFNA1, 2,609 sherds in total of which 575 were Iron Age and 2,034 Roman. It may be that a break in the *temenos* wall at this point was another entrance giving access to the area of the earlier enclosure, the ditch of which was still evident as a hollow in the ground when the Roman temple was constructed.

It seems clear from the evidence that the barrel-shaped enclosure is not domestic, as its characteristics are so different to those of many enclosed farmsteads/settlements known across central and southern England. The shape of the enclosure is unusual, as are its internal bank revetment and its entrance architecture, together with the arrangement of posts leading from the eastern entrance and dividing the internal space. The lack of evidence for roundhouses or domestic activity suggests a sacred/ritual function and this can be seen as just one such element, albeit a significant one, of the wider Iron Age Marcham site, which also has a series of small Iron Age enclosures and pit groups further to the east all appearing not to be domestic (described below).

Further discussion of the barrel-shaped enclosure and its interpretation can be found in Lock and Raven (2023, available on this website).

**The Romano-British temple, its temenos and associated buildings (principally trenches MFNA6, 7 and 8, MF 14, 15, 32, 18 and 16)**

**The temple MFNA6, 7 and 8**

The ground plan of the temple was established by Bradford and Goodchild (1939) and confirmed by Harding (1987). These latest excavations showed no evidence to alter that overall plan. The temple comprised a square *cella* measuring 7.6m externally surrounded by a portico of 16.7m, exposed in trench MFNA7, a plan that according to Bradford and Goodchild occurred so often in Gaul and in Britain that examples are too numerous to quote *ibid*. 29), Figure 16. Perhaps more unusual was the addition of two annexes, shown convincingly by Bradford and Goodchild to be later additions, Figure 17. To the west a large annex the full width of the portico extended another 10m and was divided into three rooms with the central one being slightly larger than the outer two, confirmed by trench MFNA8. Attached to the north-eastern corner of the temple was a second annex in the form of a single small room 3.8m by 2.4m internally, confirmed by trench MFNA6. None of the excavations provided any evidence for the use of these annexes particularly as much of trench MFNA8 was disturbed by a large post-medieval pit or cellar associated with the Noah's Ark Inn. In total these three trenches produced 5,882 sherds of pottery, 826 Iron Age and 5,056 Roman.

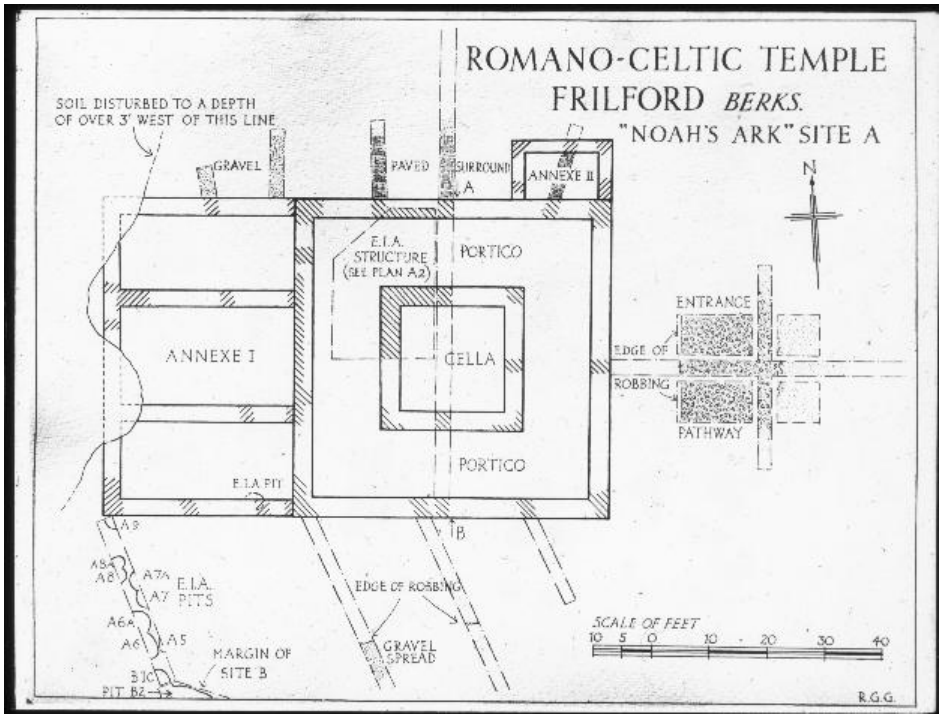



*Figure 16. The ground plan of the temple (Bradford and Goodchild 1939 Figure 9)*



*Figure 17. A computer-generated hypothetical reconstruction of the temple building showing the annexes and the rotunda (Courtesy of Mike Athanson)*

The walls of the temple appear to have been almost completely robbed of their stone with the robber trenches which were easily identifiable providing a good proxy for the building's ground plan. The robber trenches which had been backfilled with a mixture of small stones and mortar were approximately 1m wide suggesting that the temple walls were probably slightly narrower, the robber trenches were 0.5m deep, Figure 18. In places the original foundations survived comprising mortared vertical and pitched limestone pieces laid onto the limestone bedrock. The date of the robbing of the walls is unclear.

No original floors survived within the *cella*, ambulatory or the annexes although large numbers of ceramic and stone tesserae were found scattered across the building suggesting a tessellated floor within at least a part of it. Most of the tesserae were ceramic and orange in colour although a small number of black and white stone ones does suggest the possibility of a patterned floor somewhere within the temple. Outside the temple building and surrounding it were a series of destruction layers which contained many fragments of wall plaster of a variety of colours, white, red, green, blue and black with some striped. In contrast, very little plaster was found inside the building suggesting that it was decorated on the outside rather than on the inside which would have made it a colourful and striking focal point within the *temenos*.

A large quantity of roof tile was recovered from within and around the temple with a concentration in trenches MFNA6 and MFNA7, with *c.* 316 kilos deriving from MFNA 6 and *c.* 400 kilos from MFNA7. Analysis of the tile (Warry, this website) suggests two different deposits one dating from the 2nd century CE and the other from the 3rd century. This indicates that the roof was renovated at least twice during the life of the temple and that the building was first constructed before the 2nd century CE. A combination of red and white fabrics was used for the tiles which together with cream, red and possibly blue colouring suggests that the roof may have been 'dramatised' through coloured patterning.

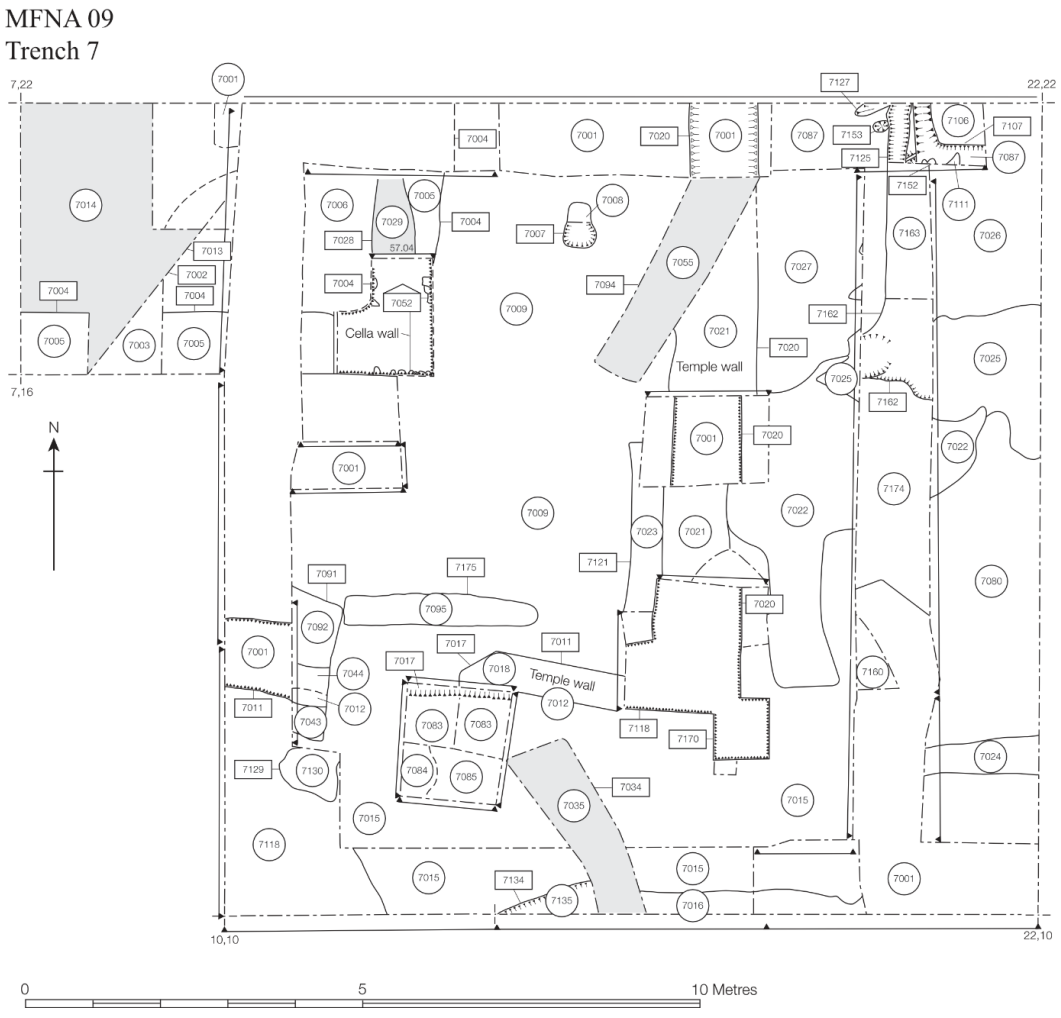



*Figure 18. Trench MFNA7*

Within the temple was evidence for several small burning episodes which may be related to activities that occurred within the building. No inscriptions or other evidence for which deities the temple was dedicated to were found. A possibly significant find from just outside the temple was the finely modelled head and neck fragment of a ceramic bull figurine wearing a painted garland on top of its head. It appears that this figurine was a product of the local Oxfordshire potteries (P. Booth *pers. comm*.) and may have been made specifically for deposition at this temple. This is the only figurine that has so far been found at Marcham, though a ceramic model of an animal horn was found in the upper ditch fills in trench MFNA1 to the south of the temple.

**The temenos wall and interior MF6, 16, 7, 26, 31, 14, 27, 28**

Bradford and Goodchild failed to identify the *temenos* wall surrounding the temple enclosure but were correct in suggesting that its northern and eastern walls lay outside the Noah's Ark garden. The *temenos* was in fact large, the line of its northern, eastern and southern walls being confirmed by geophysics and excavation. The eastern wall is approximately 120m long, its northern and southern right-angled corners being identified in trenches MF16 and MF28. The western ends of the northern and southern walls remain unknown as does the existence of a western wall. Even so, it is clear that the temple stood centrally within a large walled area with approximately 35m between it and the northern and southern *temenos* walls and 70m between the temple entrance and the temenos entrance to the east, Figure 19.

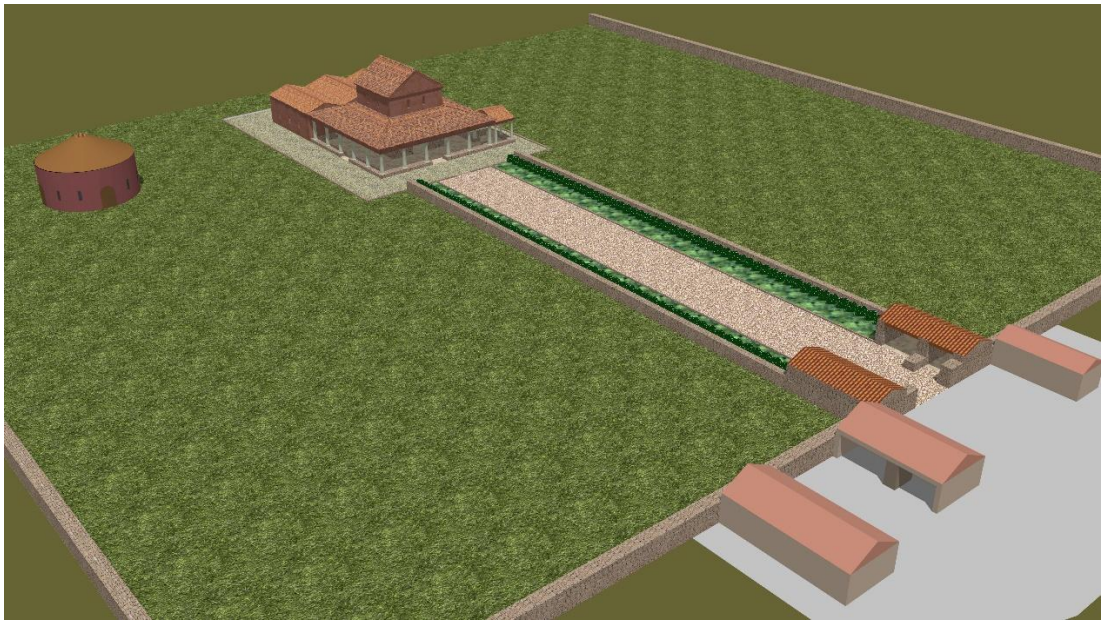


*Figure 19. A computer-generated hypothetical reconstruction of the temple within its temenos showing the temenos entrance and the buildings outside the temenos (courtesy of Mike Athanson)*

Like the temple walls the temenos wall had been extensively robbed. The foundation trench of the wall was all that survived, being about 0.7m wide and cut into subsoil to a depth of approximately 0.3m. It was packed with mortared limestone rubble and was clearly possible of supporting a substantial stone wall. At various places immediately outside the temenos wall was evidence for a cobbled surface.

Other than the main pathway running from the temenos entrance in the east to the temple entrance, the limited excavation within the interior of the temenos yielded two points of interest. In trench MF7, north of the path, were two possible small tree-throws in an east-west line on the long axis of the temple. These could have been planting hollows for small trees or shrubs within the temple precinct and garden suggesting formal landscaping of this sacred space. Only 90 sherds of pottery were recovered from this trench, 86 of those Roman, suggesting little activity in this area.

In the south-eastern corner of the temenos, trench MF14 Figure 20, was a large oval pit measuring approximately 5m by 3m, irregularly shaped cut through bedrock to a maximum depth of 1.5m. This feature was remarkable for the number and variety of finds within it especially animal bone, mainly sheep/goat and cattle but also bird, dog and horse many bones showing signs of butchery (Randall this website). As shown in the archaeobotanical report (Payne, this website), quantities of charred cereals and plants were also deposited within this pit. It seems likely, therefore, that this is a *favissa* pit into which the remains of offerings from the temple were deposited, animals and plants. King (2005; 2007) has shown that the sacrifice of animals at Roman temples in Britain and the special deposition of bones after feasting is commonplace. The evidence from places such as Uley (Gloucestershire), Great Chesterford and Harlow (both in Essex) suggest that certain species were favoured, perhaps goats, and that ceremonies were seasonal, perhaps spring and autumn. The Roman pottery from the Marcham *favissa* pit dates to the 3rd, and mainly 4th centuries CE suggesting that it wasn't in use during the early periods of the temple. Of the large number of sherds found in it, 1,219 in total, very few were Iron Age suggesting that the pit was dug in the Roman period. Covering the pit and spreading out from it was an extensive midden comprising a dark organic loam with a maximum depth of 0.3m This contained pottery and animal bone in similar quantities to the f*avissa* pit and appears to be a continuation of the same deposition after the pit was filled.

This large pit is not far from the southern building in Trench MF18 which we have described as the 'temple café' as it shows extensive evidence for the consumption of food and drink. It may be that some of the waste animal remains from this building were also disposed of in the *favissa* pit and its overlying midden.

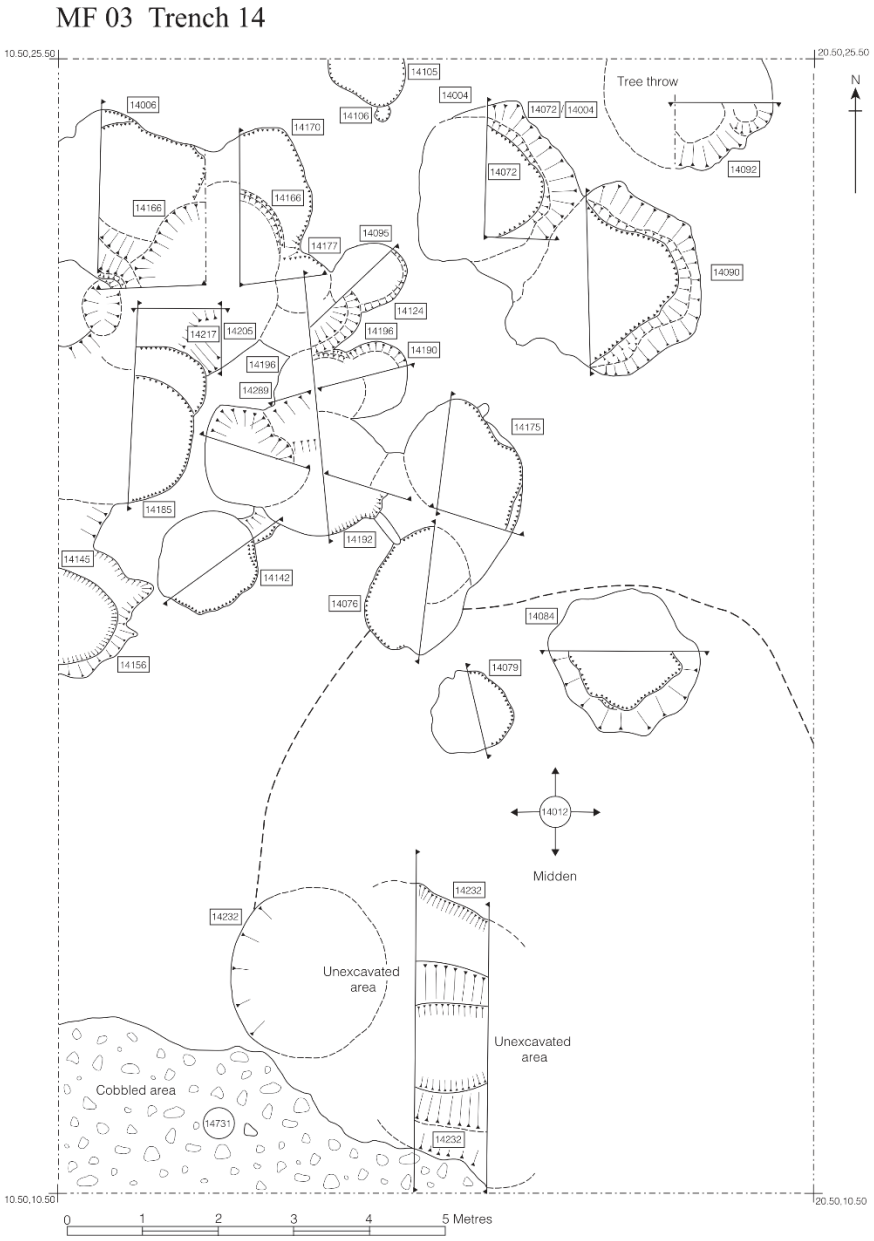



*Figure 20. Trench MF14 showing the outline of the favissa pit [14232]. The dotted line shows the extent of the Roman midden*

**The temenos entrances and associated buildings MFNA1, MF26, 31, 15, 32, 18, 25**
Although the main entrance to the temple is clearly to the east, there is evidence suggesting a secondary small entrance to the south, situated in trench MFNA1. Here the southern wall of the *temenos* was not completely robbed out as elsewhere but remained as a single foundation course of non-local limestone blocks constructed on a foundation layer. The wall ended abruptly and didn't continue further to the west suggesting open access between the temple and the area of the Iron Age barrel-shaped enclosure, Figure 10. This is of interest because, as suggested above, it appears that the large ditch of the enclosure was still partially open when the temple was constructed and early Roman artefacts were deposited within its upper fills.

The main eastern entrance of the temple is joined to the *temenos* entrance by a path approximately 6.7m wide. This was excavated by Bradford and Goodchild and shown to comprise three consecutive metalled layers (1939, 31). The second path, probably constructed

in the 2nd/3rd centuries CE, was the most solid and eventually worn away in places to be repaired by a layer of gravel in the 4th century. This sequence was confirmed by trenches MF26 and 31 positioned over the pathway.

Trenches MF15 and MF32 investigated the entrance through the temenos wall. The eastern end of the pathway was located and as with the earlier excavations it showed several layers indicating repairs. The top surface was crushed limestone gravel up to 0.1m thick in the middle of the path and thinning towards the edges. A few fragments of tabular limestone lay on top of the gravel suggesting an original tiled surface which has now been lost. There was also evidence for stone walls running east-west along the edges of the path towards the temple under which were postholes suggesting an earlier wooden phase.

At the eastern entrance inside the temenos were two structures, one to the north of the path (MF15) and one to the south (MF32), Figure 21. Again, all the walls had been robbed out with some foundation stones in a mortar matrix remaining in places. The buildings mirrored each other in alignment, layout and dimensions both using the temenos wall as their north-southeastern wall. An internal dividing wall created two rooms, 4.2m by 2.5m to the east and 4.2m by 3.3m to the west. The continuation of the outer walls suggests that a third room may have existed. In places postholes underlay the walls suggesting an earlier timber phase similar to the walls lining the path to the temple. No floor surfaces survived in these buildings nor did anything to suggest a possible function for the rooms or for the activities that might have taken place in them although these were probably associated with entering and leaving the sacred enclosure. Two opposing possible plinths, each measuring *c.*1m x 0.8m, were positioned either side of the pathway although these were badly damaged and this interpretation may not be correct. If these were plinths they could have provided foundations for statues or even an arch or columns which would have framed the view from the *temenos* entrance and guided the eye towards the temple building straight ahead.

Further to the north in trench MF15, inside the *temenos* a complete sheep/goat burial was excavated close to a plastered square, which may have been the foundation for an altar. The animal was buried with two pots, one of which was a complete miniature Oxford colour-coated vessel within an small jar of unusual form (P. Booth *pers. comm*.), probably a libation vessel. The two trenches produced interestingly different quantities of pottery, MF15 to the north 7,492 sherds of which 7,343 were Roman while MF32 to the south only contained 649 sherds of which 601 were Roman perhaps suggesting different activities taking place in the two areas. A total of 254 fragments of iron structural nails were recovered from these trenches indicating perhaps extensive timber elements to the buildings.

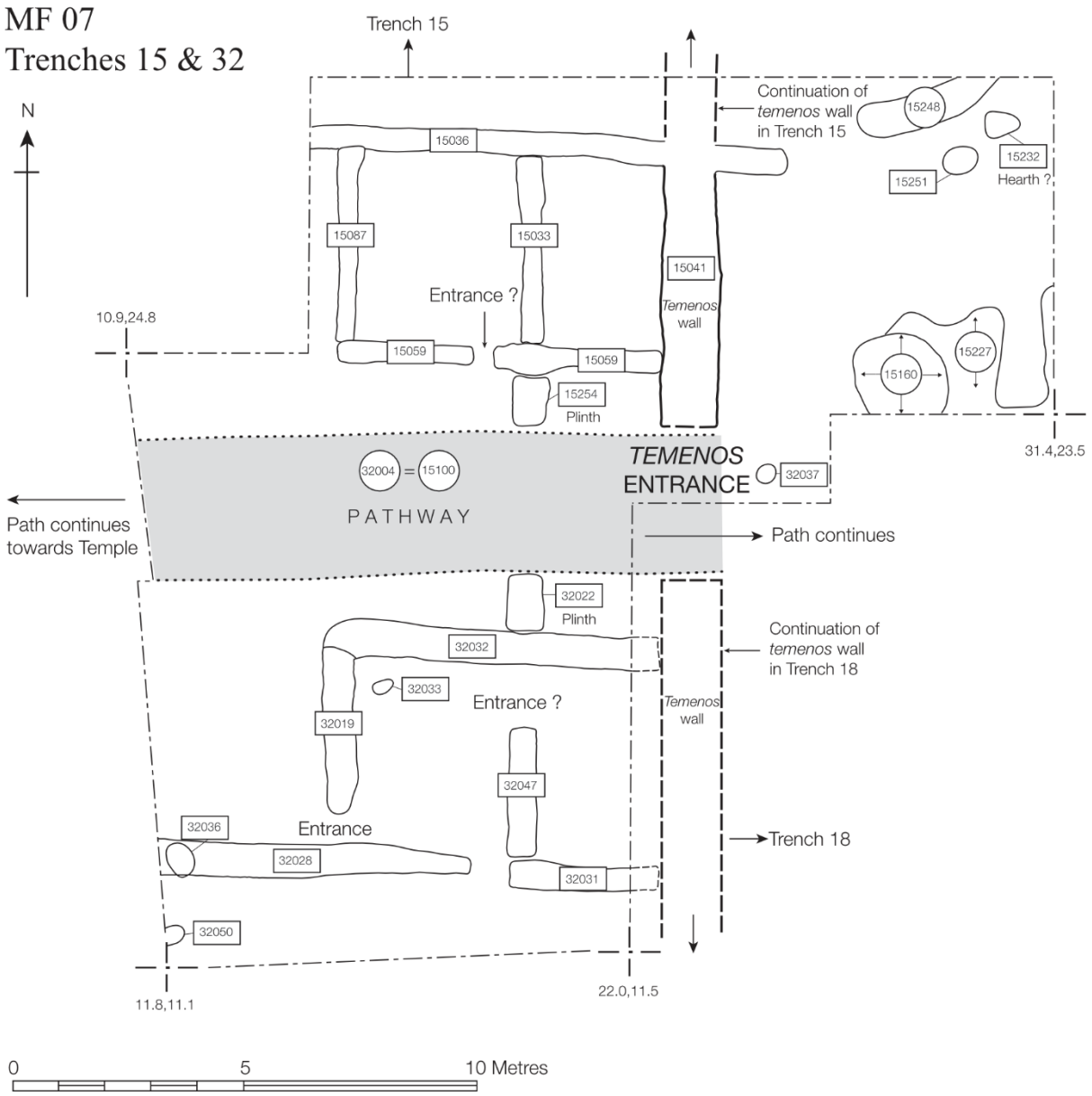



*Figure 21. Trenches MF15 and MF32 showing the main features*

Immediately outside the eastern entrance was evidence for extensive cobbled surfaces probably part of a path leading away from the enclosure gateway. Scattered on this surface were tesserae, fragments of glass and copper, tiles and large nails of a type used with substantial timbers and sealed within the cobbling was an almost complete Savernake-ware pot of the late first to early second century CE. Below the cobbled surface, sealed in the top of an earlier ground surface, was a coin of Domitian (CE 81-96). To the north-east of the entrance a well-laid cobbled surface lay outside of the *temenos* wall with the upper layer composed of large tabular limestone blocks that appeared smooth and well worn. To the north of this cobbled surface was a work area containing a small hearth or oven which was D-shaped and clay lined with vertical sides. On the surface the clay was moulded to form a smooth rounded rim. A spread of mixed ashy material extended eastwards for approximately 2.6 m with an associated small pit *c.* 0.4 m to the southwest.

Outside the *temenos* and to the south of the entrance in Trench MF18 were two buildings oriented towards the east and using the *temenos* wall as their rear, northern, wall. The stone from the walls had been robbed with just the mortared foundations surviving, of herringbone form in places. The two buildings were of similar layout with front and rear rooms, the eastern ones open at the front. There was an open 'courtyard' of *c*. 8m width between the two buildings, Figures 22 and 23.



*Figure 22. Trench MF18 showing the two buildings*

The northern most of the two buildings had two parallel walls running for nearly 8m eastwards from the temenos wall with an internal space *c*. 3.5m wide. These were constructed onto natural with pitched stone foundations and up to three courses of mortared limestone blocks surviving in places. Pre-dating the construction of the building several large postholes/small pits, one 2m deep, were dug and then filled with the overall surface then being being consolidated and levelled ready for the construction of the building.

The front room was open to the east and fronted by an area of laid stone cobbles which showed several phases of repair. At the back of the building, to the west, a dividing wall created a small room just over 2m in length. Over the entire interior of the building a series of laid floor levels showed repeated repairing and consolidation. The floors, especially the later ones, showed a high concentration of ash and charcoal which was probably associated with two stone furnaces which were identified one in each of the rooms, Figure 24. These were well preserved and showed a solid construction of well laid regularly shaped limestone blocks reddened by exposure to high temperatures. Heavy mineral residues from micro-analysis of floor deposits showed evidence for copper working.

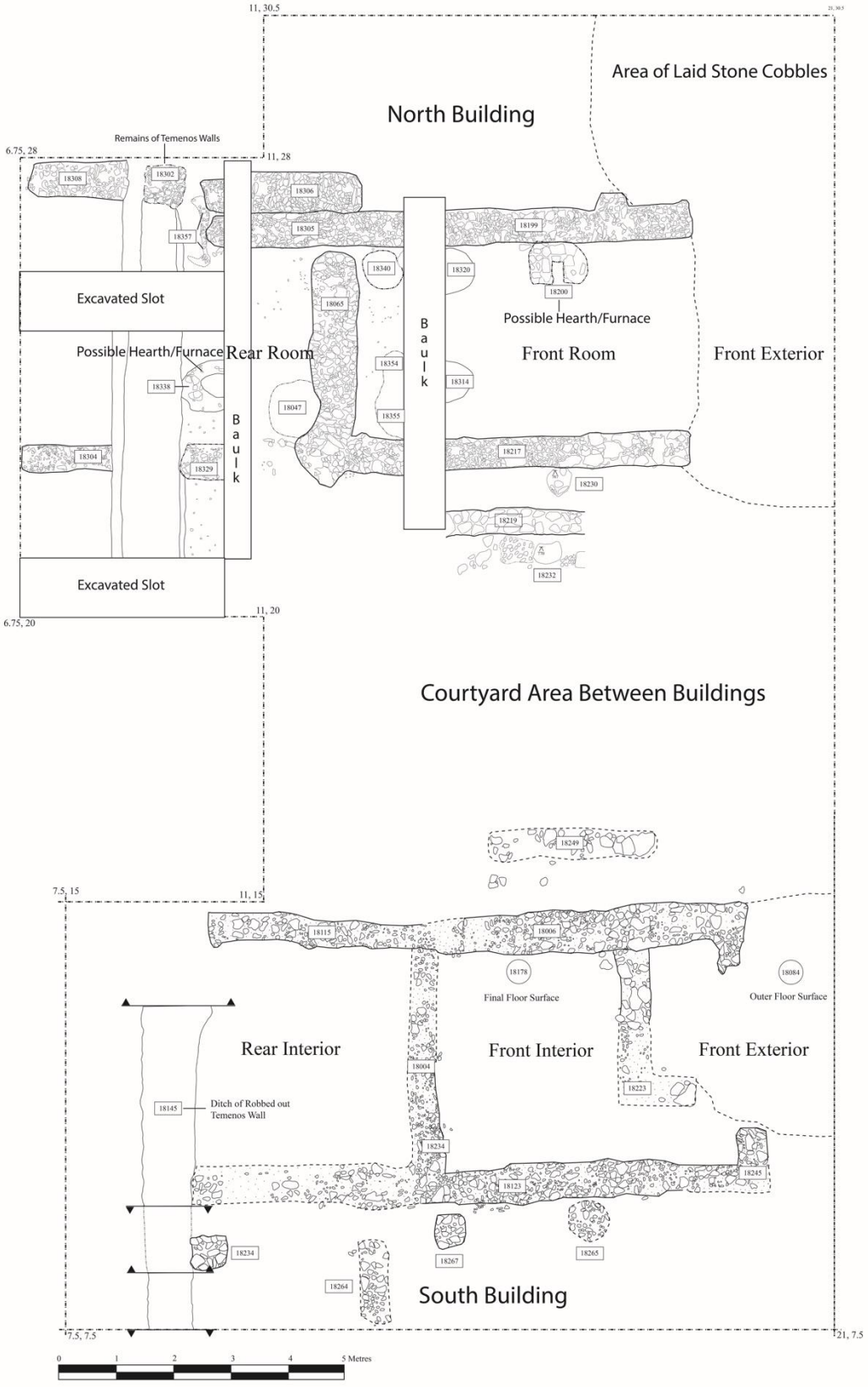



*Figure 23. Trench MF18, the two buildings to the south of the temenos entrance*




*Figure 24. One of the hearths from within the northern building, Trench MF18*

The southern building was of a similar ground plan to the northern one with two east-west main walls divided into a front and rear area with the former being open onto the cobbled area and the latter being defined to the west by the *temenos* wall. While the eastern end of the building was not delimited by a substantial wall but rather had a small open vestibule, it could also have involved a more ephemeral structure such as an awning or wooden wall. The building has an internal space of *c.* 3.3m in width. The dividing wall appears to have been a second phase of construction suggesting that originally it was a single room. As with the northern building this one had a complex series of laid floors within it that showed evidence for repair and consolidation over a long period of time. Immediately south of the building, a wall, several possible hard clay floor surfaces and three well-built 'pads' of small stones were found. The shape and location of these suggests that they were part of the building, but of a more ornamental than structural nature; possibly the base foundation for standing pillars or statues.

The southern building had no internal features but was remarkable for the richness of artefacts found within it, both with regards to quality and quantity. Large amounts of ceramics, tile, building material including 679 structural nails, ceramic tesserae, shell, animal bone and 54 hobnails were found. In addition, many small finds, such as coins, finely crafted metal tools and jewellery, the remains of delicate ceramic and glass drinking vessels, multicoloured painted wall plaster, and two of the only three intaglios found on site came from this trench. One is a very well-preserved onyx intaglio depicting the figure of Achilles (a Greek heroic figure) and the other is a ring with a glass intaglio showing a satyr with grapes – both are 2nd century in date (see Henig, this website). Many of the finds indicate feasting and food consumption including imported fine ware beakers and cups, samian bowls, flagons, handled glass vessels together with the bones of young pig, lamb, chicken, wild birds, calf or veal and many oysters. This trench produced a large number of pottery sherds, 19,280 in total of which 19,179 were Roman.

Based on finds from within the two buildings and also on stratigraphical evidence, the stone buildings were constructed in the early to mid-4th century CE and continued in use until the

late 4th century. Both buildings showed several phases of use with renewed floor levels and changes to their structural elements. The northern building probably suffered sudden collapse whereas the southern one seems to have slowly decayed. Levels below the buildings also contained evidence for food and drink consumption perhaps going back a century or two although there was no evidence for structures earlier than the stone buildings.

It is likely that these two buildings are part of a number of ancillary buildings built around the outside of the temple's *temenos* wall that existed to serve the needs of visitors to the temple, and to facilitate the activities carried out therein. While there are certainly similarities between the southern and the northern buildings in Trench MF18, such as lay out, alignment, dating, open eastern fronts, and connection with the *temenos* wall, there are also clear differences in the functions of the two structures. The north building almost certainly has some sort of industrial function as well as being for eating and drinking, most likely involving copper-alloy working perhaps to produce items for votive deposition at shrines across the site. These may have supplied stalls set up near the *temenos* entrance selling small votive items for visiting worshippers. In contrast the evidence from the southern building was characterised by fine ware glass and ceramic vessels, and faunal remains indicated a centre for eating and drinking. This appears to have been a semi-formalised area for activity directly associated with the temple, which involved a number of different types of structures, 'shops/workshops', surrounded and linked by cobbled 'piazza' areas.

The northern end of trench MF18 was extended eastwards to explore the extent of the cobbled area around the temenos entrance and the two buildings. Trench MF25 showed that there was a well laid pathway, although much disturbed by ploughing in places, that extended eastwards heading for the shrine in trench MF36. The path consisted of a layer of cobbles covered with a layer of mortar and part way along it was a junction with a similar path running north-south thus giving access to other parts of the temple complex. Across this trench 2,131 sherds of pottery were recovered of which 2,007 were Roman.

***The central rectangular building and nearby shrines and other buildings (principally trenches MF 2, 36, 39 and 22)***

Lying to the east of the temple, between it and the arena, were a series of religious structures explored mainly through trenches MF2, 36, 24 and 22. The Romano-British shrine and earlier features within MF36 are crucial in understanding the positioning and orientation of the temple itself. Two large Iron Age pits were located by geophysics resulting in the excavation of this area. Centrally between the two pits was a square stone-built shrine enclosing a filled pit and a form of 'ritual shaft' containing many votive deposits. Importantly, the central east-west axis of the temple continues through the *temenos* gate, past an Iron Age burial, through the shrine and between the two pits. The significance of this alignment is reinforced by the fact that from the *temenos* entrance the temple entrance lies 65m (44 Roman passus) to the west and the shrine is situated the same distance to the east, Figure 25. This is unlikely to be a coincidence and shows that the temple was initially aligned on the two Iron Age pits which still survived as considerable hollows in the ground when the temple was constructed. The shrine was located between the pits and the path revealed in Trench MF25 was laid to lead directly to it from the *temenos* entrance.

The main features within Trench MF36 dating to the Iron Age are the two large pits and the burial. The Romano-British shrine comprises a square stone-built enclosure with a deep pit in its interior, Figures 26 and 27.

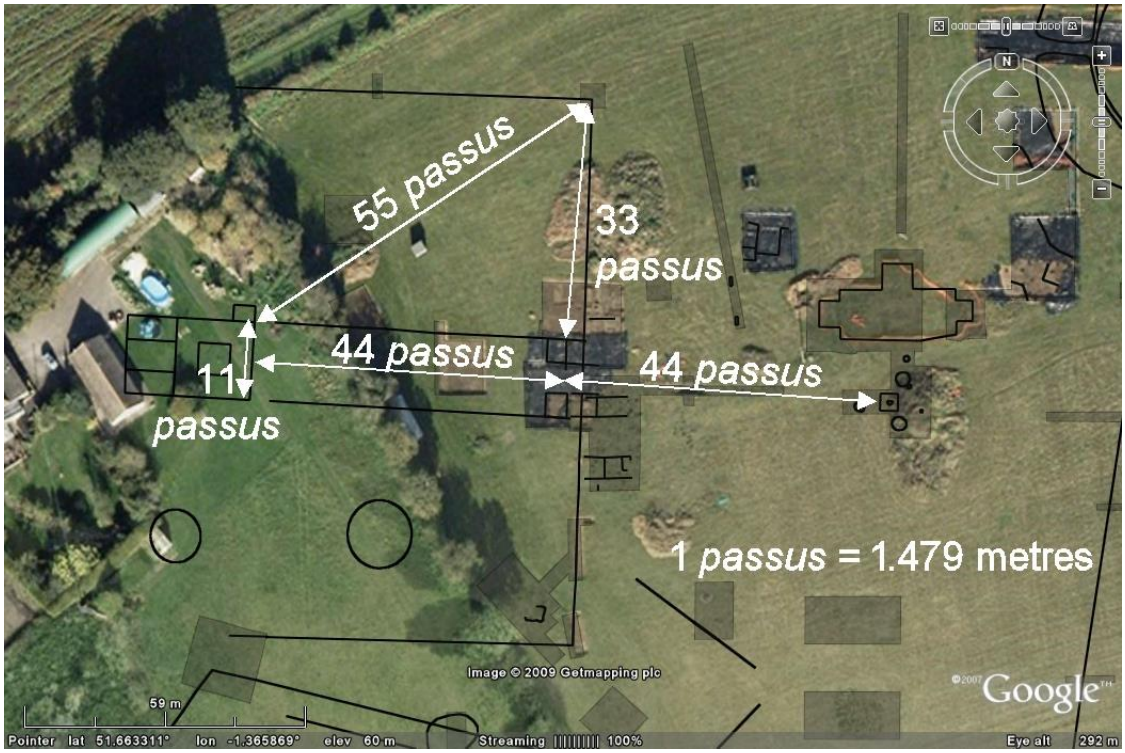



*Figure 25. The alignment of the temple on the shrine in Trench MF36 (courtesy of Mike Athanson)*



*Figure 26. Trench MF36 showing the Romano-British shrine and large flanking Iron Age pits*

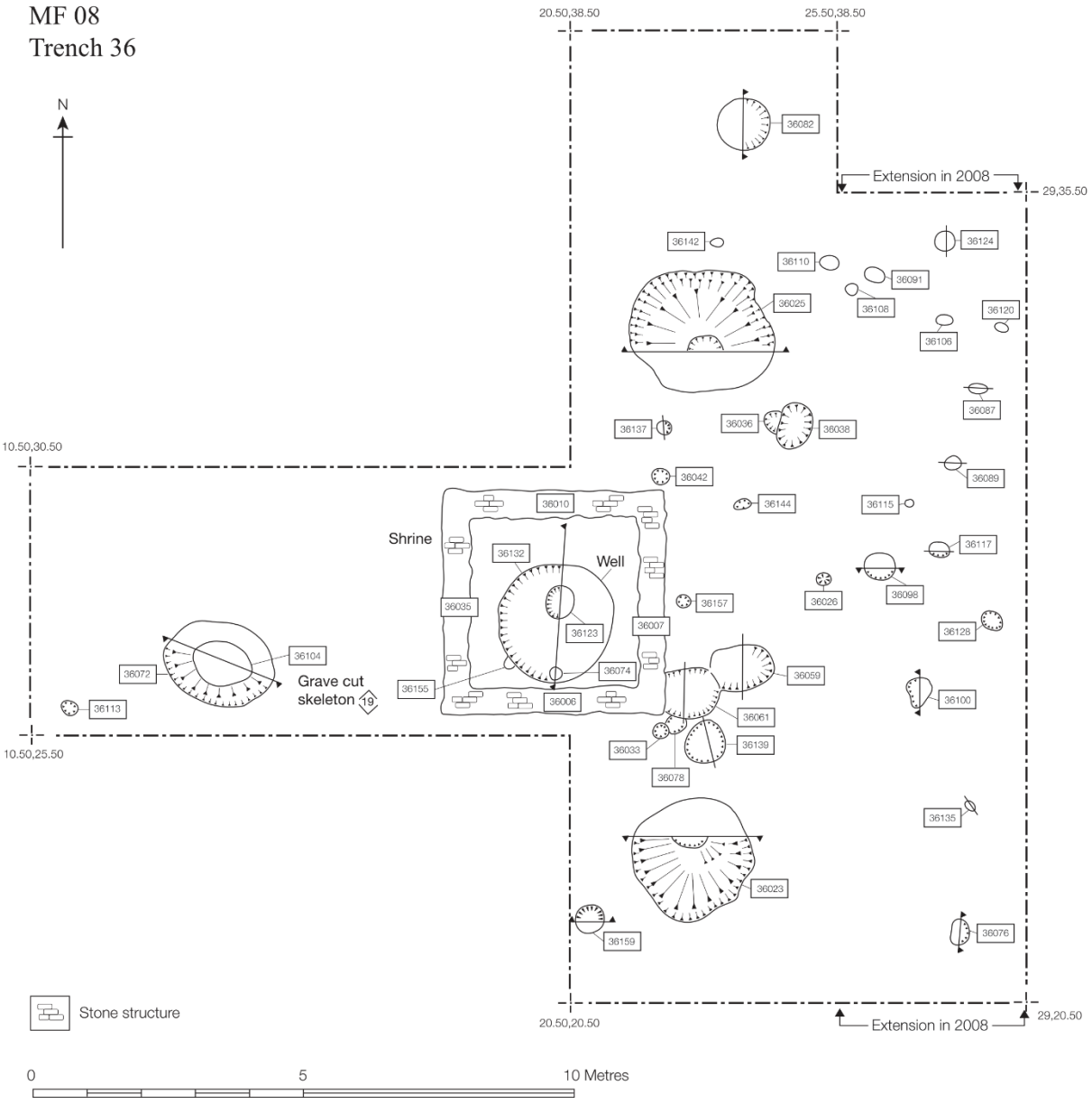



*Figure 27. Trench MF36 showing the two large Iron Age pits, the Romano-British shrine and the Iron Age burial to the west*

Based on the pottery found within them, the two flanking pits were dug and their lower halves filled in the late early/early middle Iron Age, *c.* 5th century BCE. They are both approximately 2m in diameter and 1m deep cut through bedrock comprising thin layers of sandstone and sand. Both contained large numbers of Iron Age sherds in their lower fills, 497 in the southern pit and 697 in the northern one. In the middle and upper fills of both pits were Romano-British sherds, 54 in the southern and 15 in the northern, which together with the

wide erosion cones at their tops showed that the pits were still open in the early Romano-British period.

The other significant feature in this trench which can be definitely assigned to the Iron Age is a burial within an oval shallow pit to the west of the two large pits and approximately central to them. The burial is within a recut of an earlier pit with the recut measuring *c.* 1.6m x 1.2m with a maximum depth of *c.* 0.75m, and the lower sub-oval part housing the skeleton measuring *c.* 0.65 x 0.45m and *c.* 0.35m deep. The top fill produced large amounts of prehistoric pottery, some 410 sherds, animal bone and burnt stones, plus part of a cow skull and long bones which may represent a partial cow burial. Below this the next fill contained 135 prehistoric sherds and some animal bone and stones, some of which were burnt. Below was not really a separate fill, just a circle of five large burnt stones which looks like a deliberate construction, possibly with some symbolic function? The base fill, inside the very narrow oval shaft at the bottom of the recut contained 28 prehistoric sherds and frequent limestone fragments around the crouched remains of a complete skeleton with its knees drawn up to its chin and the head in the SW facing NE. This was a male of aged between 13 and 15 years who was local to the area and died between the years 410-230 cal. BCE.

The evidence from this area, the burial, the large pits and the very high numbers of prehistoric sherds (almost 3,300 in total from trench MF36), suggests that it was of special significance during the Iron Age use of the site. At about 4m to the east of the pits are a series of 11 postholes, four of which contained Iron Age pottery, forming an approximate north-south line and perhaps representing an eastern boundary to this prehistoric sacred area.

In the Roman period a stone-built square structure was constructed, a walled enclosure containing a shrine. It was 4.15m square and survived only as foundations due to ploughing in this area. A maximum of two surviving courses were laid in herringbone fashion to support walls probably about 0.5m wide constructed of rough finished limestone slabs. In one area a foundation cut was identified. The whole structure was of a single build although dating its construction was not possible. There was no obvious indication of an entrance although the logical location for one would be in the western wall where the path from the temple, as seen in Trench MF25, ended. The original height of the walls is unknown and it maybe they were left low so that no entrance was needed, in which case people could look over the walls to the features within the enclosure and deposit their offerings.

Inside the enclosure is a large pit filled with layers of elaborate stone packing surrounding a ‘ritual shaft’ located towards the northern side of it, Figures 28 and 29. It is perhaps significant that the pit itself is not central within the enclosure whereas the shaft is thus making it the main focus of the shrine. The filling of the pit was definitely carried out in the Romano-British period as shown by a quern stone in its basal fill, although it was not possible to date the digging of the pit itself. There is a possibility that it is Iron Age and, therefore, matches the other two large pits in which case its original fills were entirely removed. Alternatively it could have been dug and filled for the purpose of creating the ‘ritual shaft’. Only a few sherds of both Iron Age and Romano-British pottery were found within these fills.

The large pit is cut through bedrock and measures 2.20m x 2.4m with a maximum depth of 1.80m. On the base of the pit is a layer of flat limestone slabs and above this at least nine layers of stones and earth filling the pit but leaving the shape of the ‘shaft’ which is about 0.70m in diameter and ends just above the basal layer of slabs. Some of the pit fills are

carefully constructed with slabs interlocking and others pitched to create solid sides to the 'shaft'. This contrasts with the fills of the 'shaft' itself which were mainly silts with small stones containing a wealth of objects. It seems unlikely that the stone fills of the pit could have been laid to leave a 'shaft' the full depth of the pit and a more likely explanation is that the 'shaft' originally held a large post which then either rotted *in situ* or was removed thus leaving a 'shaft' which then became the focus for the deposition of votive offerings eventually being capped with limestone slabs when its use ended, possibly the base for a statue. The post could have been positioned up against the northern edge of the pit and then the layers of stones and slabs built up around it fixing it firmly in place. Dating for the digging of the pit, its filling and the erection and subsequent removal of the post is lacking although it is before the 4th century CE. Given that the alignment of the temple on this shrine must have been established when the temple was constructed, perhaps late 1st century, it seems likely that something was at this point from the very early days of Roman activity at the site.



*Figure 28. The 'ritual shaft' within the Trench MF36 shrine*

The lower fills of the 'shaft' contained a small number of sherds and coins of 4th century date which could have percolated down by worm action. But it is in the 4th century that the intensification of ritual deposition really happened when the top of the 'shaft' was still open as a void within the pit. In total 110 late Roman coins were deposited there together with 88 hobnails and three rare examples of cockerel spurs. This combination of coins, hobnails and cockerels suggests that the deity being worshipped here could have been Mercury, the God of travel. The significance of this shrine and its main use in the 4th century is increased by its proximity to the building excavated in nearby Trench MF2.

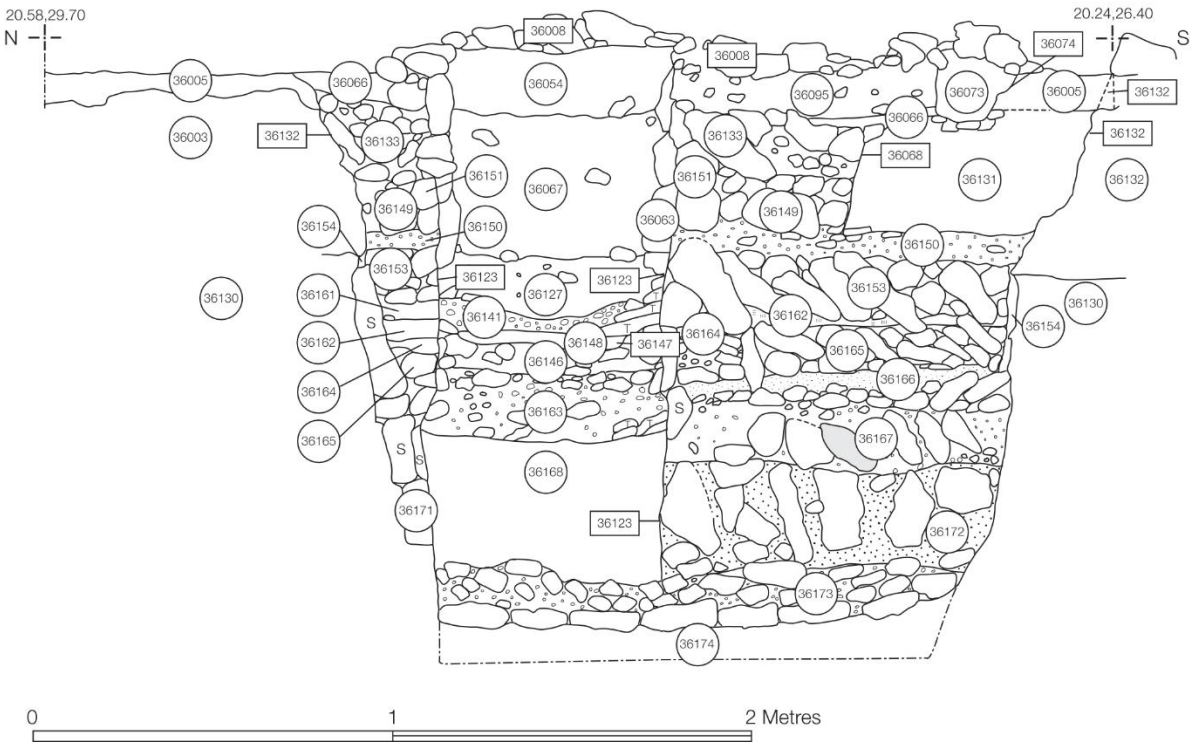



*Figure 29. Trench MF36, section through the pit and 'ritual shaft' to the left*

The outline of the large building in Trench MF2 was indicated by crop marks on aerial photographs and confirmed by geophysics. The building is situated centrally within the site between the temple and the arena and approximately 10m north of the shrine in Trench MF36. It is aligned east-west, the same as the features in MF36 and the temple itself. The building plan shows a rectangular main room measuring approximately 23m by 9m internally, with three small rooms added centrally within the northern, western and eastern walls. The northern and western rooms measure approximately 5m square internally while the eastern one is smaller at about 2.5m. There was no evidence of any dividing structures, walls or timber, between the main room and the three smaller ones. Overall, the building measures approximately 34m long and 17m wide externally. All of the exterior walls of the building have been robbed but foundation levels survive beneath the modern plough soil suggesting that the walls were originally *c.* 1m wide, Figure 30.

Underlying the Romano-British building is evidence for Iron Age activity in this area, not surprising as it is so close to trench MF36. This takes the form of three pits, eight postholes and two layers, most of which contained Iron Age pottery. The total number of Iron Age sherds from Trench MF2 is 4,856, 45% of the trench total, indicating considerable prehistoric activity in this area. A radiocarbon date from a spread of charcoal, initially thought to have been Roman, came out at 550-390 cal. BCE, which fits with the pottery as late early to middle Iron Age.

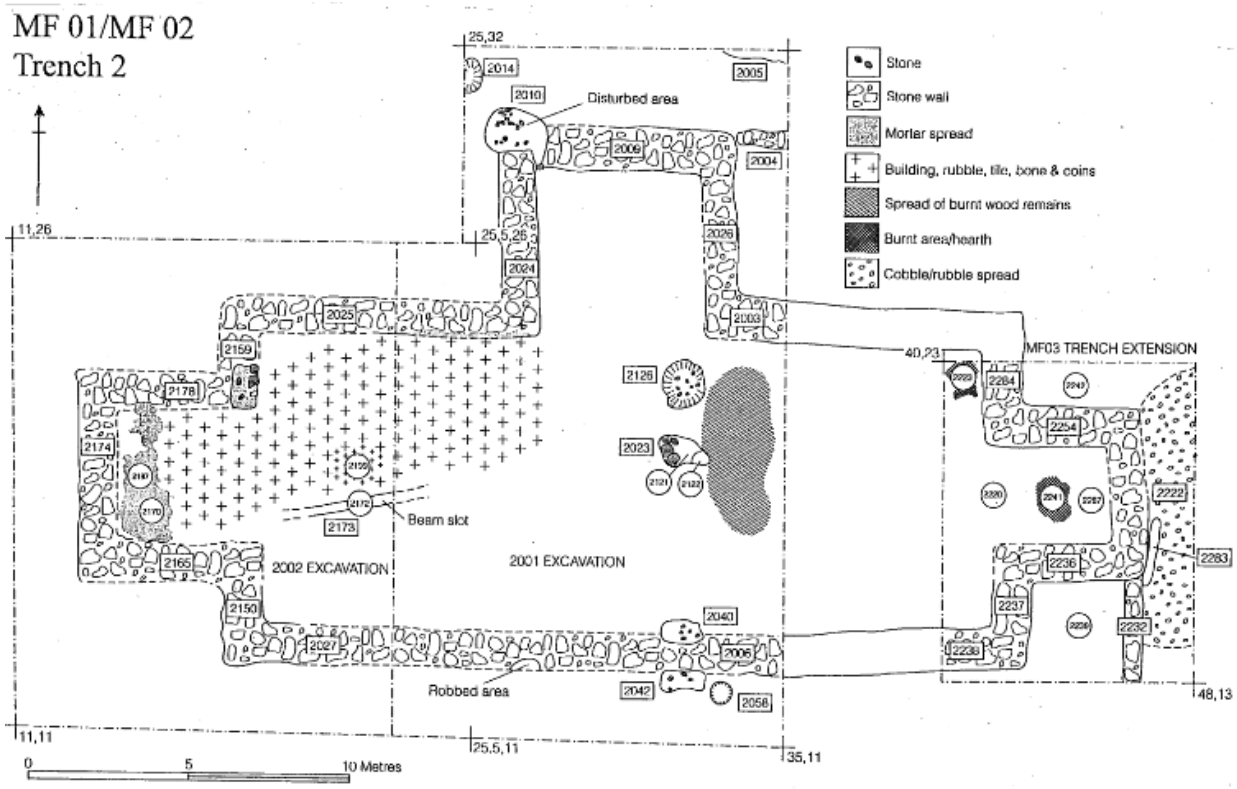



*Figure 30. Trench MF2*

The history of the building itself can be divided into the two distinct phases of pre- and post-fire which represent two very different structures and probably uses. It is clear that the first phase building was not entirely stone-built indicated by the insubstantial nature of the foundations and the entire lack of building stone debris in the vicinity. It is more likely that this was a large timber building set on sill beams that were supported by shallow stone foundations set in shallow foundation trenches. Where sectioned the foundations were shown to have a basal layer of small limestone slabs laid in a rough herringbone pattern covered by a layer of rubble, surviving to a maximum depth of 0.25m. In places the limestone bedrock had been levelled to create a flatter building platform for the foundations. Within the building there was no evidence for phase 1 postholes which could have acted as roof supports although several concentrations of stones and mortar could have been post-pads. The roof was probably largely supported by rafters resting on the walls themselves.

Outside the eastern end of the building was a cobbled surface which may have been a path suggesting an entrance into the phase 1 building at this point. This surface consisted of three levels, perhaps phases of repair, a lower layer of small limestone fragments peppered with pieces of tile and bone, overlain by a final layer of larger limestone blocks. Within this upper layer were found coins of the late 4$^{th}$ century. Another possible entrance into the building is suggested by two roughly rectangular structures of mortar and limestone rubble either side of the southern wall positioned slightly off-centre to the east, potential door sills. There could have been other entrances which are not visible within the surviving lowest levels of the wall foundations, the evidence for which has been destroyed by destruction and subsequent ploughing.

Beneath the phase 2 levels within the building there was considerable evidence for burning suggesting that the phase 1 building was destroyed by fire. As well as areas of charcoal there were fire-reddened and black soil lenses, burnt wall plaster, and deep pink burn marks on the wall foundation stones. Situated around the inside of the walls were a series of positive geophysical anomalies which when investigated were shown to be dense concentrations of burning. This evidence for burning, together with the relative lack of finds in the central, northern and eastern parts of the phase 1 structure, suggests the original building probably had a raised wooden floor which was burnt in situ, a suggestion supported by the lack of evidence for phase 1 floor deposits. Any burnt structural timbers have probably been all but erased by ploughing although another possibility is that the debris from the fire was cleared away to create a clean area for the post-fire use of the building remains. This idea of post-fire cleaning is also supported by the small number of structural iron nails found, just 233 being very few for a building of this size.

The condition of the building after the fire is unknown, although it seems that the ground plan, at least at the western end, was still visible in the form of the stone wall foundations. This is indicated by the phase 2 activity respecting the walls and being contained within them. Here a thick flooring layer comprising mainly building rubble and roof tile fragments was laid down with patches of mortar laid in places, at least one of which ran over the wall foundations indicating its visible level. Upon analysis the roof tile fragments, over 250 kg, were shown to be a different date and type to those of the temple, here late 3rd/4th century CE (Warry 2024 and this website) suggesting that this building may have had a tiled roof. This roughly laid floor ended at the building's foundations to the north and west and to the south was delimited by a beam slot running for 3.5m diagonally across the interior of the western end. If this formed some sort of boundary wall its character is unknown other than it probably being of wood. The resulting ground plan suggests that the western end of the building may have been enclosed in some way to form a sacred space where ritual deposition of artefacts took place.

This is supported by the finds of material culture occurring on the surface of the phase 2 laid floor. The main two categories are coins and hobnails, Figure 31, which form a significant link with the deposits within the Trench MF36 shrine situated not far away. A total of 717 coins were found on this floor, a much higher number than in any other area of the site including the temple itself. The coins are largely late Roman, late 4th century. Together with the coins, a huge number of hobnails were found, some 3,099 in total, representing *c.* 85% of all the hobnails found across the entire site. Other than these two categories of finds other types were found including 33 glass fragments and 36 worked bone items, mostly hair pins and needles together with 279 iron structural nails.

This large building is dated to the late 4th century CE. A coin of this date was found sealed within the stone foundations of the phase 1 wall thus dating the building's construction. The many coins found on the surface of the phase 2 flooring are of the same date range which suggests that the phase 1 building only survived for a short period of time before being burnt down.

The function of the phase 1 building is unknown. The ground plan is unusual and parallels with other late Roman buildings in Britain have not been found. Its construction at the time when the pagan temple complex was falling into disuse led to initial suggestions that it may have been an early Christian church although this now seems unlikely based on the ground plan and lack of parallels despite some of the coins found within having Chi-Rho symbols on them. The use of the western end of the building after the fire, phase 2, is perhaps easier to interpret. The

very confined focus of Roman metalwork found in this building, specifically coins and hobnails, is unlike the pattern seen in any of the other trenches, other than the shrine in Trench MF36, and does seem to point to a very particular form of votive deposition. It seems likely that both of these nearby structures were dedicated to the God Mercury and formed a focal point for worship and votive offerings situated in the centre of the religious complex between the temple and the arena.

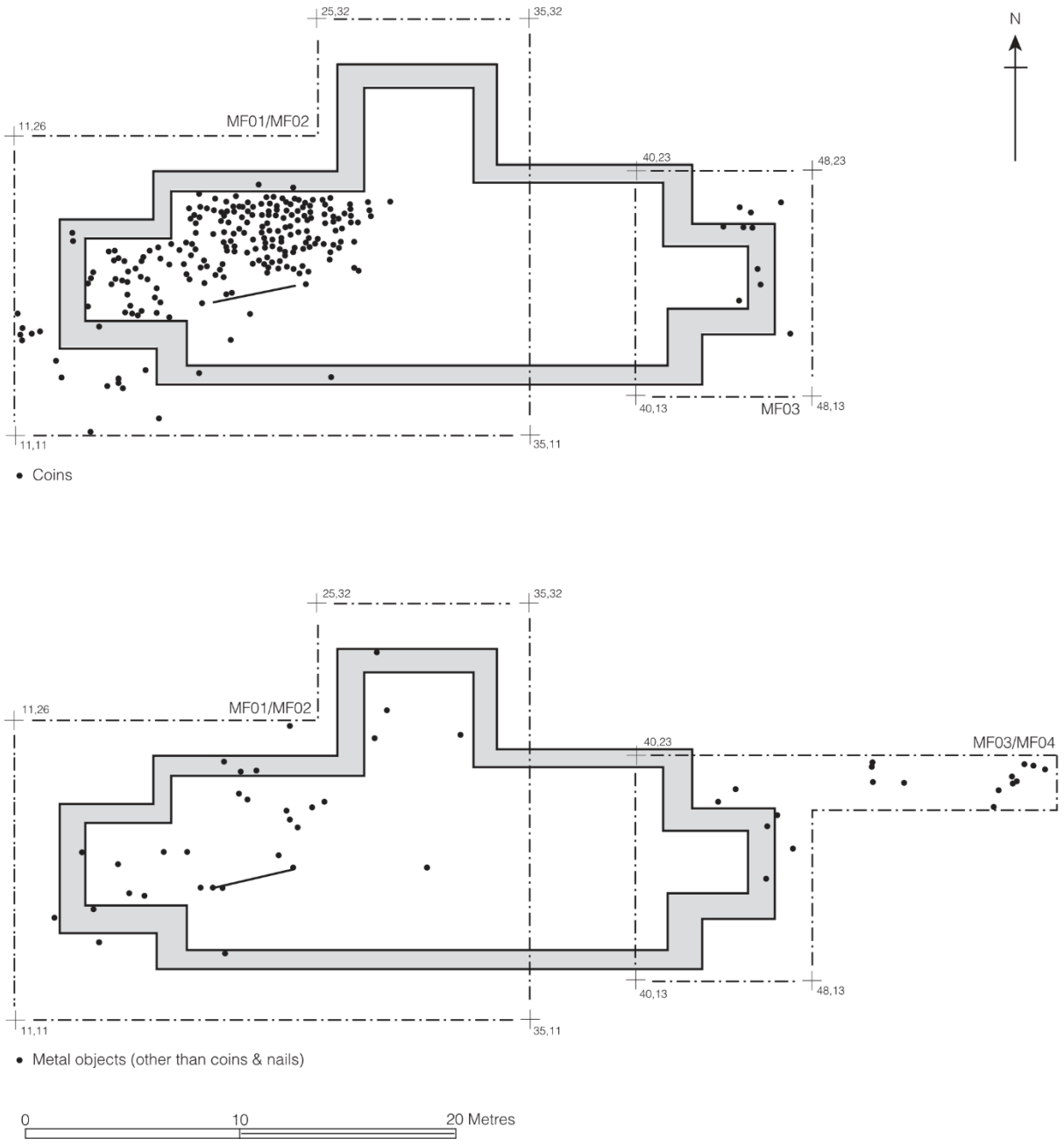



*Figure 31. The distribution of coins and metal objects within the phase 2 Trench MF2 building*

At the temple site of Uley in Gloucestershire, there is clear evidence for Mercury worship in the form of altars and figurines together with large quantities of hobnails in certain areas suggesting that these may have been deposited as votive offerings to Mercury in his guise of messenger and traveller (Woodward and Leach, 1993, p. 184). Also, at Uley temple buildings

that were no longer completely fit for purpose were used as an area to deposit votive offerings, possibly originating from a shrine in another part of the complex (*ibid*. 316).

Nearby to the west of MF2, between it and the temenos wall of the temple, geophysics showed a series of strong positive anomalies. These were explored by opening trenches MF22 and MF39 together with exploratory strip trenches MF34 and MF35.

Within MF22 part of the remains of a Roman building with at least three rooms were uncovered, identified by the stone foundations of the walls *c.* 0.75m wide, Figure 32. What appears to be the main room had one entirely exposed wall to the south giving an internal room measurement of just over 4m with western and eastern walls of just over 5m in length. This three-sided room was open to the north and must have faced to main pathway from the western arena entrance towards the eastern entrance into the *temenos*. The northern end of the western wall was finished with a carefully constructed sub-circular wall end *c.* 0.7m in diameter, which was possibly built as a base for a monumental wall terminal perhaps for a statue or column. The eastern wall end had a similar structure although this was badly plough damaged. Adjoining to the west of this main room were two smaller room, a larger one to the north measuring nearly 4m and a smaller one to the south just 2m north to south internally. The western extent of the building was not excavated. The walls suggested that the two larger northern rooms may have been part of the original layout and that the smaller room was added later. The large western room also appears to have been open at the north and could have played an equally important role as the eastern room as a large quantity of Samian ware was found within it.

Three lines of cut features were found associated with the building. To the south of the main room, in a line running parallel to it and about 1m away, were four post holes recognised by their stone packing which may have been the upright posts of a verandah running along the southern side of the building. Approximately two metres away from the building wall, and again running parallel with it, was a series of stake holes which had possibly been replaced up to three times suggesting a fence line to the south of the verandah. Between one and two metres to the north of the building was another line of postholes, five in total were exposed, which may have represented another fence line, this one possibly along the pathway.

The most significant feature within the main room was a substantial stone-built hearth in the south-eastern corner showing evidence of extreme heat. Just to the west of it were the remains of another possible hearth and another in the small southwestern room. In the larger western room was a shallow cut feature which was filled with metal-working and hearth debris. As discussed below evidence from Trench MF39 which adjoins to the west suggests that the metal working was an earlier phase pre-dating the MF22 building.

A total of 9,235 sherds of pottery were retrieved from MF22 of which 8,828 were Roman and 407 prehistoric. The prehistoric sherds were not from any significant features and probably represent general background activity before the construction of the Roman hearths and buildings. The majority of the Roman pottery is courseware with some high-status Samian and Imported Colour Coated ware, 114 sherds in total, from the large western room. There were a total of 82 small finds comprising 21 copper-alloy coins, 12 functional metal objects including studs, pins, jewellery and a stylus, 23 unidentified fragments of metal (copper-alloy, iron and lead), five pieces of worked animal bone, eight pieces of worked flint including flakes, debitage, a scraper and a tool, two jewellery beads, a piece of carved stone and a fragment of window glass. Unfortunately, 44 of these items were from the topsoil and

upper cleaning layers so are not stratigraphically significant. Of the animal bones found sheep were the most common followed by pig and cattle. Two contexts contained horse bones and nine contexts contained bird bones including being associated with the high-status pottery mentioned above.

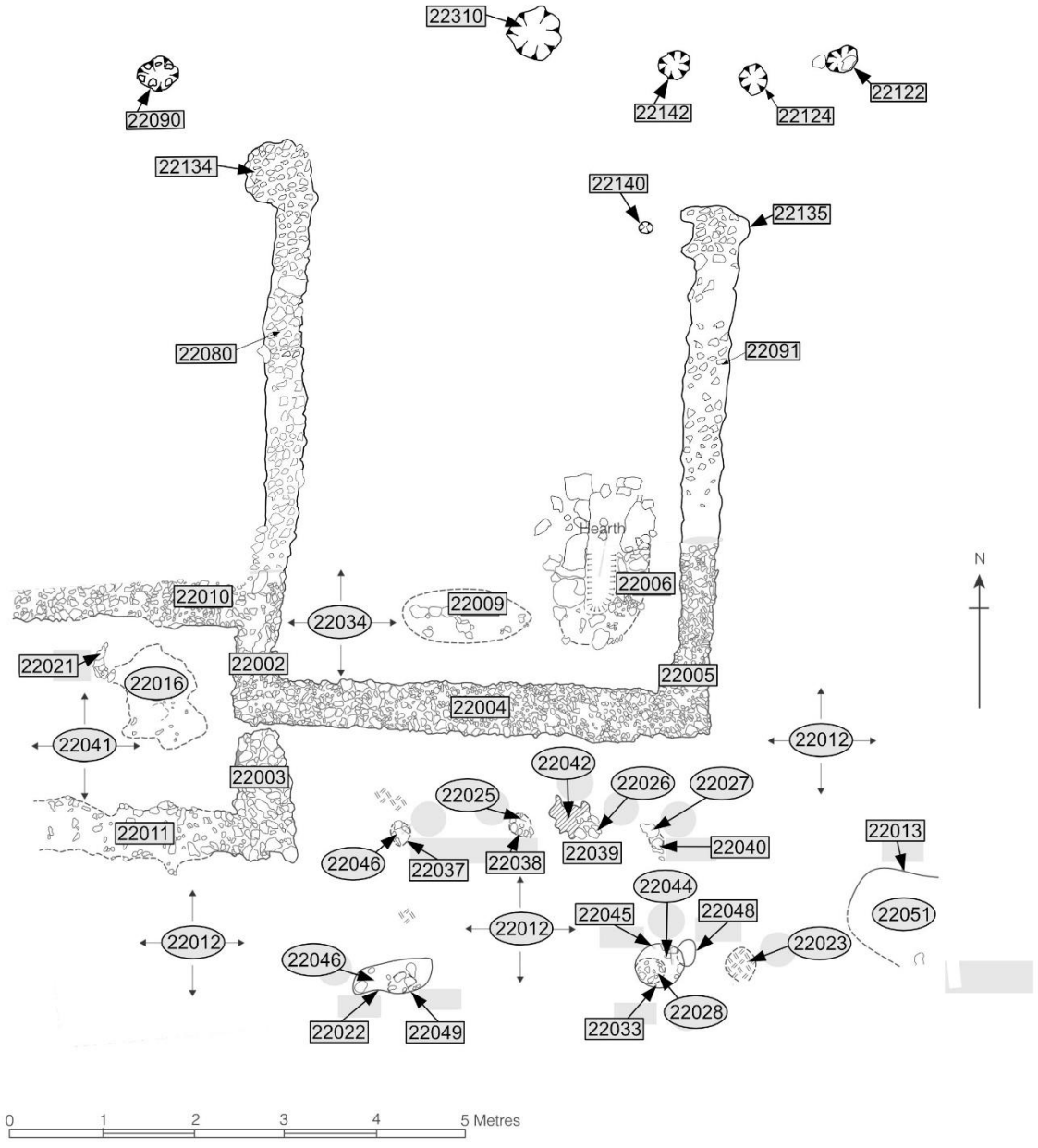



*Figure 32. Trench MF22 plan, the eastern end of the building complex*

Trench MF39 was located not only to investigate geophysical anomalies but also to link Trenches MF2 and MF22 and to establish chronological relationships between the buildings therein. The archaeology in MF39 was concentrated in the southern and eastern area between the buildings within MF2 and MF22. Two large geophysical anomalies were caused by substantial iron smithing hearths, the northern most one aligned north-south and approximately 1.5m to the south, another aligned east-west.

The fan of raked-out material from the open end of the southern hearth ran so close to the northern one that it is unlikely that the two hearths were used at the same time. Both had been partially dismantled before the area was levelled using a spread of oyster shells. This layer, several shells thick, covered an area in the south of the trench over 5m long and 3m wide. Sealed by this oyster shell layer, along with the hearths, were several postholes or post-pads, and another hearth. Some postholes, post-pads and small pits, discovered to the east, were just beyond the oyster shell layer, but these seemed to have represented temporary structures, possibly belonging to a period of industrial activity focused on the hearths. It appears that the smithing hearths belonged to a phase before the construction of the Trench MF22 building. This is supported by the position of the hearth within the building, impractically close to an internal corner, and would explain the tree-throw hole filled with metal-working and hearth debris in the building's annexe as part of site-clearance and levelling for ready for building.

A cobbled surface, revealed in previous seasons to the west of the MF2 building, was found to continue into MF39 and, significantly, to overlie the oyster shell spread. The cobbles were in turn sealed by demolition debris, presumably from the MF2 building. In the south of MF39, west of the cobbled surface, faint gravelly traces were found of foundation trenches for a three-sided building open to the south, *c.* 7m long x 4m wide. The remains of these gravel-lined trenches just scooped the top of the oyster shell layer and made use of the western side of one of the hearths as part of the foundations, suggesting that the shell layer had been part of the site preparation for this building. Any other remains of this later construction, apart from a spread of debris related to the gravel foundations, has been lost to ploughing. Trench MF39 produced a total of 3,728 sherds of pottery of which 2,619 were Roman.

Two long strip trenches, MF34 and MF35, were opened to evaluate the density of archaeology in the northern part of the field between the *temenos* and the arena. In general the strips showed a lower density of archaeology to the north than to the south and MF35 contained little to comment on. Trench MF34, 59.5m long by 2m wide, was also opened to investigate several strong positive geophysical anomalies in the south and to determine the western limits of the building uncovered in Trench 22.

The two strong geophysical anomalies had been produced by the foundation courses of another two substantial iron smithing hearths. Both were constructed from limestone blocks, with three to five courses remaining, a maximum of *c.* 0.6m high. The northern hearth, 2m long and 0.9m wide, was the larger of the two, Figure 33. Evidence of clay bonding and lining remained and up to five fills of internal deposits comprising heat-affected silty sands containing abundant hammer-scale and occasional smithing slag. The closed rounded ends of the hearths faced each other, though with a gap of *c.*6.5m between them. The stones were roughly faced in the interior. All the stonework was heat affected and cracked.

Spreads of similar scorched and charcoal-rich material fanned out from the open ends; those from the less-disturbed northern hearth produced a number of iron fragments and objects. Other evidence for metalworking was discovered in an irregular scoop 16m north of the northern hearth. The fill of this feature contained burnt clay similar to the hearth linings, fragments of bone and pottery, considerable amounts of slag, iron nails and 25 iron fragments and objects. In total this trench did not produce a lot of finds apart from the metal-working evidence with the vast majority of the material being Roman. There were only nine prehistoric sherds, probably residual, and 136 Roman sherds. The seventy-two small finds

from this trench included 37 iron objects (plate fragments, various fittings, tool fragments); 12 copper-alloy objects or fragments; and 15 late Roman coins all third to fourth centuries CE. Also found were small fragments of iron slag, charcoal, and iron hammer scale.

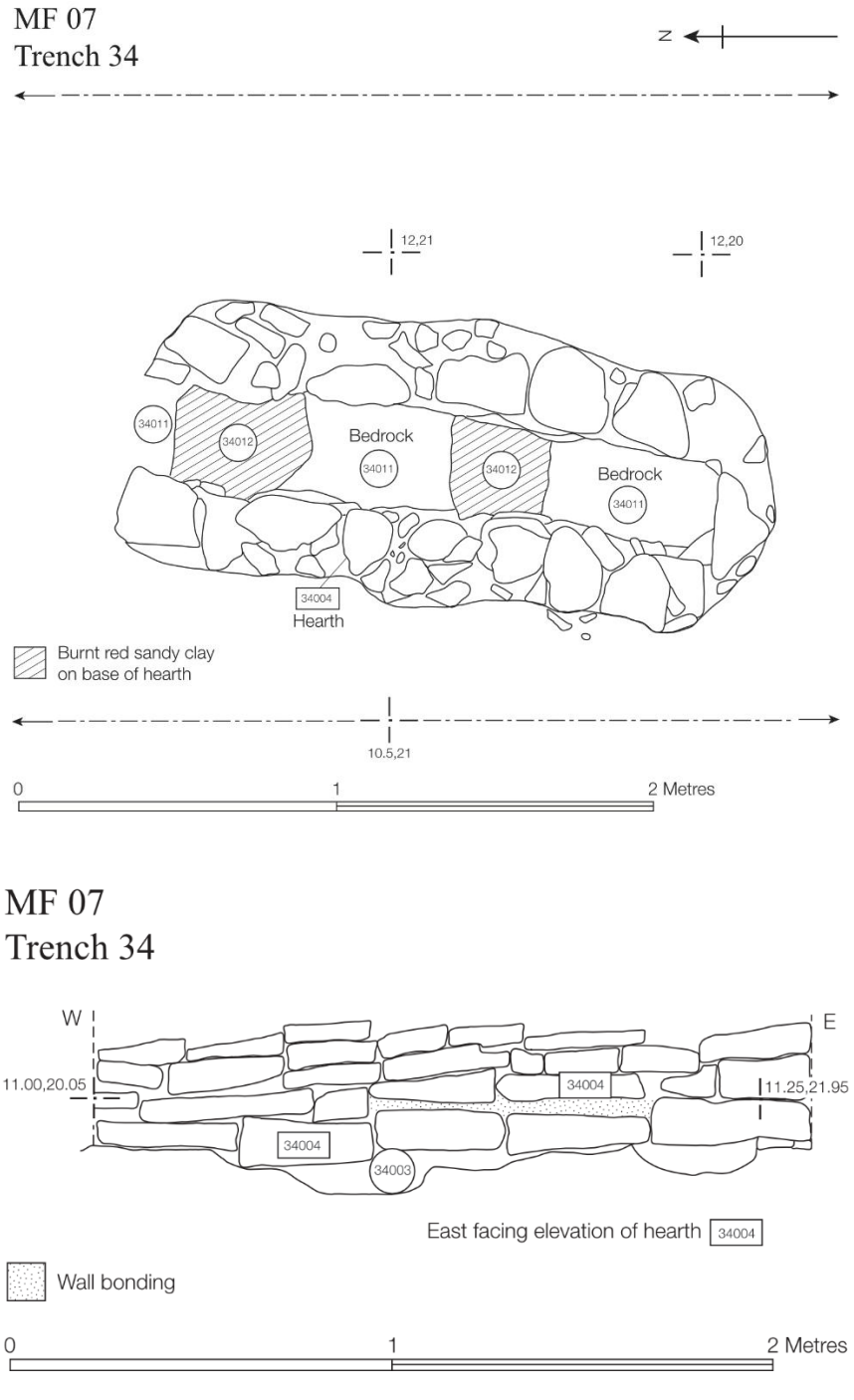



*Figure 33. Plan and section of one of the iron working hearths in Trench MF34*

Between the hearths and the scoop, the western edge of the Trench MF22 building appeared as a short stretch of east-west aligned wall and a line of four small postholes, running parallel to the western wall. These features suggested that the western room of the MF22 building

was three-sided, like the main structure, with the line of post-holes in MF34 marking the roofline of the open side.

In summary, this area between the western end of the large Trench MF2 building and the temple *temenos* wall has evidence for three possible phases. The earliest are as an area of considerable iron working, specifically smithing rather than smelting. At least five substantial hearths were in use, probably not all at the same time. When these stopped being used a series of structures were built, a couple quite ephemeral but one, in MF22, a more substantial building with at least three rooms, two with hearths, stone foundations and a veranda supported by posts. By the late fourth century the area was levelled ready for the construction of the large MF2 building.

***The arena and its drain (principally trenches MF1, 9, 29, 17, 33, 33, 21, 37 and 40)***
The large circular structure to the north-east of the Trench MF2 building was first identified as a crop mark in the 1970s, Figure 34. Also apparent on the aerial photograph is that the structure is located intentionally at the northern end of a filled linear hollow running southwards as a continuation of the crop mark, the significance of which is discussed below. Subsequent small-scale excavation (Hingley 1982; 1985) confirmed some of its elements as Romano-British dry-stone walling resulting in the suggestion that it was an amphitheatre associated with the nearby temple creating a 'religious complex'. Geophysics prior to the excavation campaign in 2001 provided more detail of the structure and indicated areas of interest for further investigation. These included the arena wall with a 'feature' at each cardinal point and the width of the bank, Figure 35.



*Figure 34. The arena as first identified by a cropmark during crop spraying (courtesy of Will Cumber)*

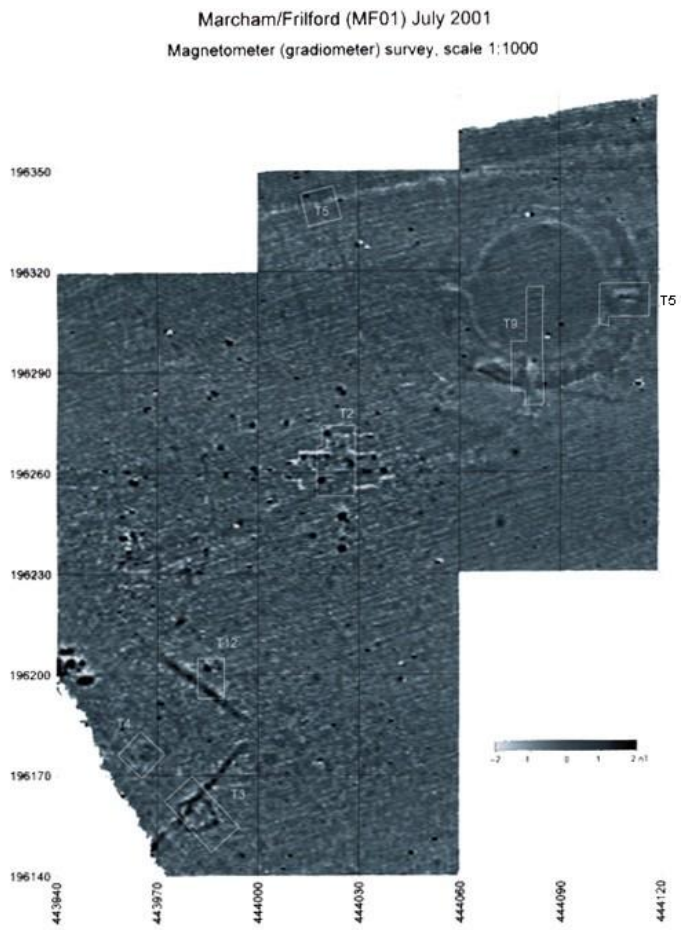



*Figure 35. Geophysics showing detail of the arena and Trench MF2 building*

The Marcham structure is unusual in that it is different to other known examples of amphitheatres in Britain. Firstly, its arena is circular at *c.* 40m diameter whereas amphitheatres usually have elliptical arenas, for example Silchester's is 45m x 39m (Calleva Atrebatum), Carmarthen's is 46m x 27m (Moridunum) and Cirencester's is 46m x 41m (Corinium Dobunnorum). Secondly, the bank around an amphitheatre's arena is continuous to enable a view of the activities within the arena from anywhere. The bank around the Marcham arena does not extend around the northern area where the evidence of foundation pillars suggests that statues were perhaps displayed there. This is a similar design to more impressive stone-built Roman theatres known from elsewhere in the Empire with a D-shaped plan where the plays took place in the sunken central area (the orchestra) watched by an audience around three quarters of it with a monumental façade across the rear. Roman theatres are rare in Britain with the best example being at St. Albans (Verulamium), and while this is a much more sophisticated example than that at Marcham, the similar design of sunken orchestra, bank and rear facade can be suggested by the excavated evidence. In central and northern Gaul a cross between an amphitheatre and a theatre, designated a 'semi-amphitheatre', has been recognised (Golvin 1988) and while none have been suggested in Britain it is possible that the Marcham arena, though it was a different shape from Gallic 'semi-amphitheatres', may have performed some similar function (for a fuller discussion of the Marcham 'amphitheatre' see Kamash *et al.* 2010, 106). Thirdly, all known amphitheatres in Britain are associated with either a town or a fort and so probably serve a very local audience. The Marcham arena is associated with a rural temple and while there are nearby

villas (Wintle 2013; Wintle *et al.* 2017) and the Roman town of Abingdon is *c*. 8 kilometres away (Thomas 2006; Boothe *et al.* 2007), there is no obvious local population for it to serve suggesting that it was used primarily by people visiting, perhaps from afar. Hingley's term 'religious complex' is supported by the use of the arena being integrated with activities focussed on the temple and its satellite shrines.

A brief summary of the results follows with more detailed discussion below. The central arena, *c.* 40m in diameter, was sunken for more than 1m from ground level and surrounded by a mortared stone wall which was plastered and painted. The surrounding earthen bank was a maximum of only 2m high and was probably intended to be stood on rather than providing any form of seating. At each of the cardinal points the bank was broken by a feature, a characteristic common to amphitheatres across the Roman Empire although structural details and possible uses differ greatly (Bomgardner 2000). At Marcham, to the north were four stone foundations in a line which could have held a platform and/or statues; to the west was the main entrance into the arena with a plastered passageway through which a pathway led westwards towards the *temenos* and temple's eastern entrance; at the eastern point a step in the arena wall appears to have provided access down into it and to the south was a stone built box, originally open to the arena but subsequently blocked, possibly a shrine.

The arena floor was covered with a layer of gravel and sand which covered areas of rubble in places levelling off the natural bedrock. Approximately in the centre of the arena was a void in the bedrock through which water emanated at times of high rainfall. Leading from this running southward was a well-constructed stone drain which went beneath the southern box and continued southwards for *c.* 250m towards the River Ock terminating at, what in Roman times was, a boggy pool into which a lot of pottery and bone was deposited. Just to the north of this pool, close to the drain, was a large water-logged pit within a cobbled area which contained well preserved items including a leather shoe, a willow basket, a writing tablet and two complete Roman pots deliberately stabbed, all possibly votive offerings. Around the outside of the arena bank, in the south and south-western quadrant, there was much deposition of artefacts, including many high-status personal items of jewellery, coins and beads, which appear to have been left as votive offerings.

The main trench through the arena was MF9 which initially ran north-south from the centre of the arena, along the drain and through the southern box to the rear of the bank and was later extended from the centre of the arena eastwards to join with MF1 and westwards to join MF29. MF17 and MF37 were positioned to the north. Hingley's two trenches, located on the arena wall and on one wall of the southern box, were identified and extended within Trench MF9, Figure 36.

The arena was dug down to a depth of just over 1m and the material deposited around it to form the bank. The arena wall was built to define the arena and to revett the natural material which was left *in situ*. The wall was remarkably well preserved to its original full height in places. The front face was constructed of well-dressed slabs of local Corallian limestone laid horizontally and mortared with a run of slabs along the top angled at approximately 45 degrees. None of the wall was removed by excavation with the intention of preserving it and so the rear face was not exposed to the same extent as the front face and appeared, where revealed, to be not as well constructed comprising undressed blocks of limestone not set in mortar. Looking from the top, the wall averaged 0.6m to 0.7m in width with the interior between the two faces filled with limestone rubble although whether this was the same for its full depth is not known.

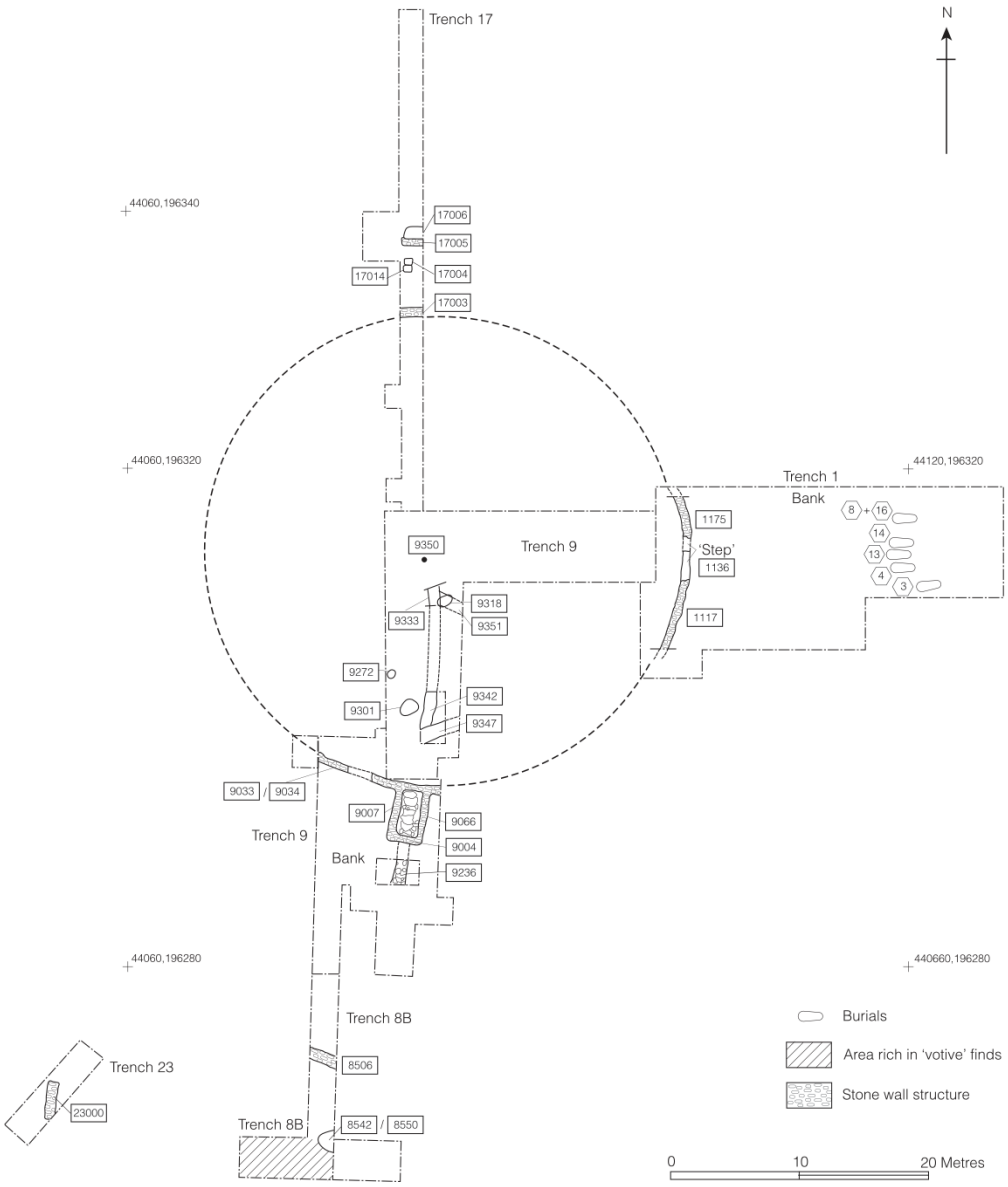



*Figure 36. The arena trenches MF9, 1 and 17*

The front face of the wall was plastered white with a design of ashlar blocks painted on it in thick dark red lines, Figure 37. This was preserved in patches especially around the area of the southern box and it is assumed that it was originally the same around the whole arena wall. The plaster did not extend to the bottom of the wall but finished *c.* 0.5m above the arena floor which consisted of a layer of gravelly sand.




*Figure 37. The arena wall showing a patch of white plaster with deep red lines producing an ashlar block design*

At the southern point of the arena, while exploring the stone-built box, a full section through the bank was excavated. This was constructed from discontinuous layers of sand and clay sloping up from the arena wall and then down away from the arena. The stratigraphy suggested the possibility of two phases of bank, a smaller one close to the arena wall later extended southwards and made higher. The first phase bank had a turf line on top of it indicating a period of stability before the second phase extension. The slope of the final bank at the rear is gradual and there was no evidence for an outer retaining wall to the bank or to any wooden or stone internal structure to support the bank or to suggest any form of seating on the bank. Beneath the bank was a buried soil containing Iron Age pottery, presumably the ground surface on which the bank was constructed. At its centre the bank is missing its apex which has been removed by ploughing, but from the stratigraphy it appears that it was never very high, perhaps a maximum of 2m above the top of the arena wall and was gently rounded. The bank sloped down at the front to the arena wall and was revetted by the top of it and sloped down to the surrounding ground level at the rear giving a full width of approximately 10m.

Let into the bank at the southern cardinal point of the arena is a rectangular stone-built room measuring roughly 2.5m east-west and 4.5m north-south. The walls are of the same height as the arena wall and 0.3m wide at the top. The two north-south walls abut the rear face of the arena wall so that it forms the fourth wall of the room in its final form, Figure 38. The three walls are constructed of roughly shaped blocks of local limestone, smaller in size than those of the arena wall, being roughly mortared. Approximately 0.2m below the bottom level of the walls inside the southern room was a large stone-built drain running north-south beneath the room and its northern and southern walls. This is the main drain running southwards to which a series of minor drains beneath the floor of the arena connect (more on drains below).

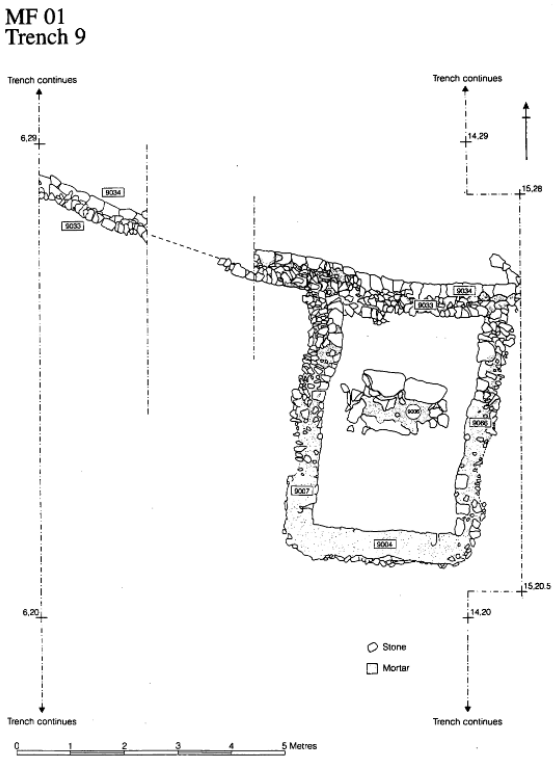



*Figure 38. The stone-built room and arena wall in Trench MF9*

Based on the stratigraphy and characteristics of the walling in and around this room it is possible to suggest a two-phase sequence. Originally the stone room was open to the arena and constructed at the same time as the arena wall together with the first phase smaller bank, Figure 39. The main north-south drain was part of this build as it goes under the southern wall of the room the lowest course of stones resting directly on one of the capstones of the drain. In the second phase the arena wall was continued across the open front of the room as is indicated by a difference in details of the stone and mortar used. The line of the wall across the filled in gap deviates slightly from the circular and the mortar is in better condition than elsewhere indicating that it was plastered over more quickly than the rest of the arena wall where it weathered. It is likely that the plastering and painting of the entire arena wall was part of this second phase enhancement.

Finally, the room was intentionally filled with sediments and on the top surface three large, dressed slabs of limestone together with many smaller pieces and mortar were placed to create a rectangular platform. Around, or originally on, this possible plinth offerings were left, in total eleven finds were recovered and important amongst these were two copper-alloy finger rings, a copper-alloy brooch, a silver denarius and a bone hair pin along with hob nails and other small pieces of metal, Figure 40. The bank was enlarged as part of this second phase.



*Figure 39. Trench MF9: the front face of the stone-built room showing the Phase 2 blocking and the main drain*

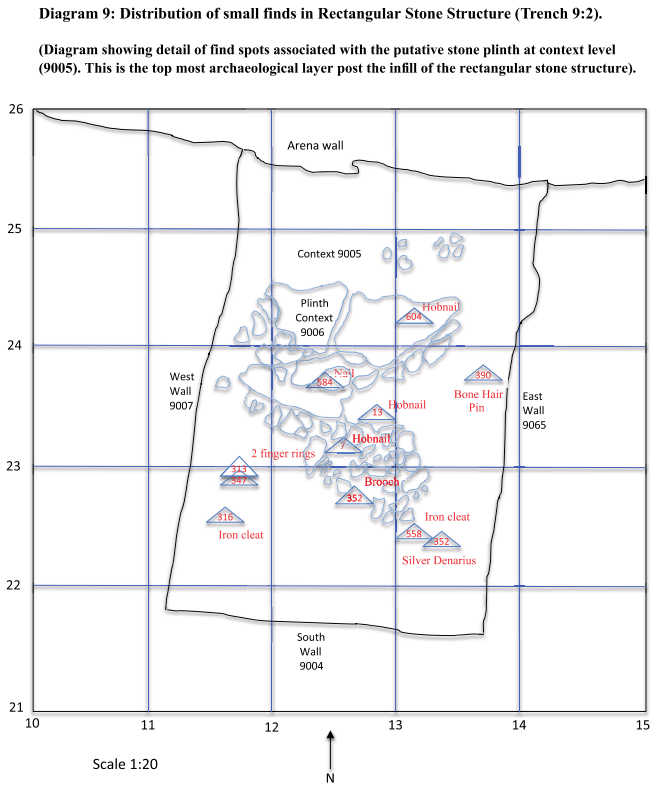



*Figure 40. Trench 9: the plinth and offerings within the filled in southern arena room (courtesy of Trevor Greer)*

Trench MF9 was the main trench across the arena and in total produced 157 sherds of prehistoric pottery, 74% of them from the area around the southern room and bank. Within this trench were recovered 1,907 sherds of Roman pottery of which 786 were within the main drain and 500 within and around the southern room. Of the 691 animal bones recovered from this trench most were from within the main drain and from levels above the arena floor probably representing the dumping of rubbish after the arena had gone out of use.

Similar structures to the small rectangular room attached to the arena wall have been found at other amphitheatres across the Roman Empire with several examples in Britain. These are often interpreted as shrines dedicated to one of the many deities known to be associated with amphitheatres including Sol, Mars, and harvest gods like Consus. The most popular, however, was Nemesis the Goddess of fate, fame and fortune, worshipped at many amphitheatres as shown by architectural and epigraphic evidence of her presence. Shrines dedicated to Nemesis, *Nemeseum*, are often found looking into the arena positioned at a cardinal point where, it has been suggested, the senior officials and other important people were seated sometimes in viewing boxes above the shrine, known as *tribunalia*.

The most convincing evidence for a *Nemeseum* in Britain is at the amphitheatre in Chester where a small stone-built room next to the northern entrance led directly into the arena. The room measured *c.* 3.6m x 4.2m and had a gangway over the top of it which made it dark inside. At the rear of the chamber was a sandstone plinth or alter, of the same dimensions as the base of a stone altar found in the later deposit just above this level and associated with the re-use of the shrine. The sandstone altar was inscribed with the words:

'to the goddess Nemesis, Sextius Marcianus, the centurion, (sets this up) after a vision'

The *Nemeseum* shrine at Chester fell into disuse with the collapse of the structure over it and in a second period of use it was unroofed and of and more improvised nature but still used by some worshippers. One third of it was unusable due to being filled with debris, but the remaining area contained an altar with evidence of burning and pottery, probably dated from the later 3rd to mid-4th century CE. The importance of this as a possible parallel to Marcham is in showing how a sacred place within the configuration of the arena can maintain its significance even when the physical characteristics of the location change. It is possible that both the first-phase open fronted room and the second-phase filled in room with an alter above it were continuations of the same shrine.

Other British amphitheatres have rooms/boxes/niches/chambers of various shapes and sizes built into their arena walls often at one of the cardinal points. At Cirencester two chambers flanked the north-eastern entrance and were originally open to the arena but later blocked. The military amphitheatre at Caerleon had two 'boxes' for dignitaries at opposite points of the arena, east and west. Both had small chambers beneath them, and both were thought to support ceremonial seating above. The one on the east side had a small niche in the wall, suggested as a possible shrine to the goddess Nemesis. The 3rd century stone phase of the amphitheatre at Silchester had two semi-circular recesses built on the east and west sides of the arena wall, one of which may have been a shrine. Inside the eastern recess was an eroded trapezoidal shaped limestone slab which has been interpreted as a possible altar foundation.

As mentioned above, running north-south beneath the southern room was a substantial stone-built drain. As with shrines, drains are a common feature in British amphitheatres as all seem to have been liable to some degree of flooding (Bomgardner, 2000; 80). This is probably

because the arenas were sunk well below ground level so prone to collecting rising groundwater. Downward sloping entrances would also funnel water into the arena. Drains could be stone-built or lined with wood and often had a main axial drain sometimes with smaller side drains feeding into it, or peripheral drains or gutters running inside the arena wall.

The drain at Marcham was excavated within the southern box and the arena itself as well as at various points south on its way to where it terminated in trench MF40. Its construction was of the same design along its length suggesting a single build although in the north of the arena there was evidence of repairing. The drain was built within a trench cut through the natural deposits with maximum dimensions of 0.7m wide and 0.6m deep, the cut of which was rarely visible suggesting that the stones of the side walls were pressed into the soft natural from inside the trench. Beneath the capstones which averaged 0.5m square in size, the side walls were constructed of limestone slabs stacked without mortar between three and six courses high, Figure 41, in places built directly onto the bedrock. The internal dimensions of the drain averaged 0.35m wide by 0.4m deep and there was no flooring suggesting that it partly functioned by draining away rising groundwater.




*Figure 41. The drain showing its construction*

The drains within the amphitheatres at Chester and Silchester, for example, were filled with rubble, sometimes known as ‘rumble’ drains, indicating that the flow of water within them was relatively low. In contrast, the Marcham drain was filled with clean silt showing layers of deposition suggesting that it gradually filled up and eventually blocked along its length. It is also likely that the speed of flow and the volume of water through the drain would have fluctuated thus depositing sediment when running slowly during drier periods.

The main drain meandered slightly north-south through the arena and was joined by at least three subsidiary feeder drains, two from the east, one joining it approximately 4m north of the southern box and the other towards the centre of the arena. The third feeder drain joined the main drain from the west running parallel with the arena wall and close to it. The feeder drains were of approximately the same build and size as the main drain, Figure 42.

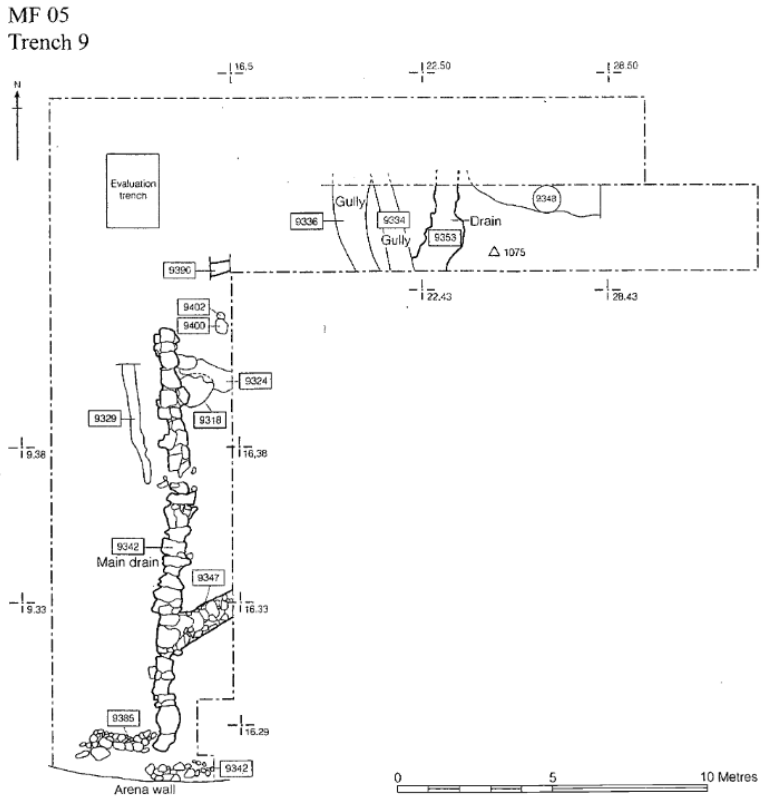



*Figure 42. Trench 9 showing the main and feeder drains within the arena*

The northern extent of the main drain was not established due to much disturbance and damage and it is unclear whether it reached much further north than the centre of the arena. At the centre of the arena the remains of a stone-built structure were uncovered although the original size and shape of the feature could not be established. The structure comprised partly a linear cut filled with layers of limestone slabs laid horizontally and associated with this were oyster shells and a wooden stake 0.45m long and circular in cross section at the top (50mm in diameter) tapering to a rectangular cross-section at the bottom (20mm x 10mm). The stake was driven into a natural deposit and overlain by the cut for the main drain suggesting that it was early in the life of the arena and perhaps associated with the initial construction of it. This produced a radiocarbon date of cal 1BCE – 245CE and shows that the centre of the arena has remained waterlogged since the deposition of the stake.

It is interesting to note that the axial drain within the amphitheatre at Chester also meanders around a central structure, here probably a form of wooden platform as represented by postholes with the capstones of the drain forming a path around it. In the central area at Marcham there was evidence that the main drain had been remodelled and repaired several times with the original capstones which were thin and averaged 0.5m square, being replace by much larger ones over 1m long and 0.8m wide. These also stood slightly higher than the rest of the drain and the central feature and may have been part of a path used when the centre of the arena was waterlogged. A series of trampled sands and clays with water-lain deposits shows that this central area presented a problem in terms of water management.

It is worth mentioning here that over eleven years of the excavation the excavated arena flooded several times and sometimes stayed flooded for weeks. The reason for this is that in the centre of the arena, associated with the stone structure, is a fissure within the bedrock through which water rises, sometimes very quickly, after periods of rainfall. The Corallian beds are formed of a very mixed lithology comprising limestones, sandstones and clays which act as variable aquifers and are known to contain perched water tables. Springs are well known in the Marcham area due to it lying on the junction of the Corallian beds and the Kimmeridge Clay resulting in the former being full of water (Druce 1915). It is likely, therefore, that such a perched water table exists below the amphitheatre and this is supported by the electrical resistance survey which suggested water at a depth approximately 3m beneath the arena.

The course of the drain as it ran southwards from the amphitheatre was followed and investigated through a series of small trenches, MF 8 and 33. In places a clear cut for the drain trench was visible *c.* 1.5m wide while the construction of the drain was the same as in the arena with dry-stone vertical walls, no constructed base and capped with limestone slabs. At its southern most end, *c.* 250m away from the arena, a larger trench was opened to explore the drain's terminus, MF40, Figure 43. The drain maintained the same structure with no elaboration to mark its end where the water flowed out into what appeared to be a wet, muddy shallow pond. This was represented by layers of grey/black thick sediments which had fanned out from the drain's end and built up against and over it. These layers contained 4,573 sherds of pottery of which 4,501 were Roman. A range of other finds also came from these once waterlogged deposits including 199 late Roman coins of which 77 (38.7%) were unidentifiable due to corrosion caused by the nature of the sediments. There were also approximately 20 pieces of iron including nails, 30 pieces of vessel glass and two beads, eleven pieces of lead including a piece of sheet and a spoon together with two pieces of shale bracelet and a perforated bone tool. The sherds of pottery appear too large and un-abraded to have passed through the comparatively small drain channel, so it seems probable that these, along with the other items, were deliberately deposited in this boggy pool – a practice that is well-attested in prehistory and is becoming increasingly well-known in the Roman period (Bradley 1998; Kamash 2008; Goldberg 2009, 193-195).

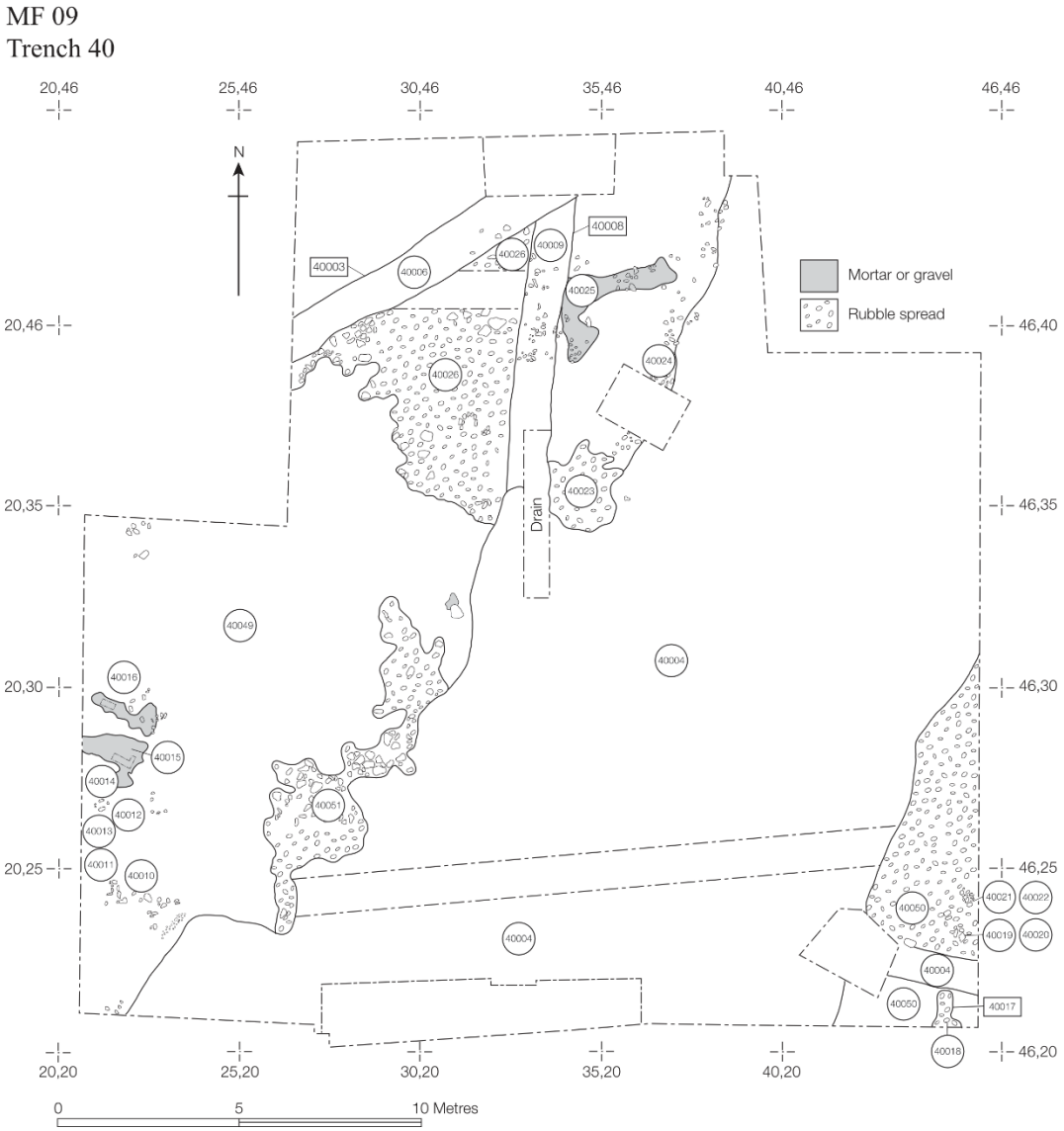



*Figure 43. Trench MF40 showing the southern end of the drain*

Within and around the edges of this apparently muddy pool were patches of laid cobbles, rubble and gravel with small areas of burning including a hearth, charcoal, ash and burnt stones. Associated with the cobbled areas were two postholes, a small pit and the possible foundation of a stone wall. This all suggests that the wet area created by the drain's outflow became a focus for votive deposition which was formalised by the laying down of cobbled areas where people could stand and place their offerings into the water.

Approximately 50m before the end of the drain, and just to the east of it, a large water-logged pit or well was located, in trench MF21, Figure 44, dated to the late Roman period by pottery found within it. The pit/well was *c.* 1.6m in diameter at the top and *c.* 1.3m deep with a step on one side. The depth is approximate as excavation was difficult due to the level of the water within the feature despite attempts to pump it out, Figure 45.

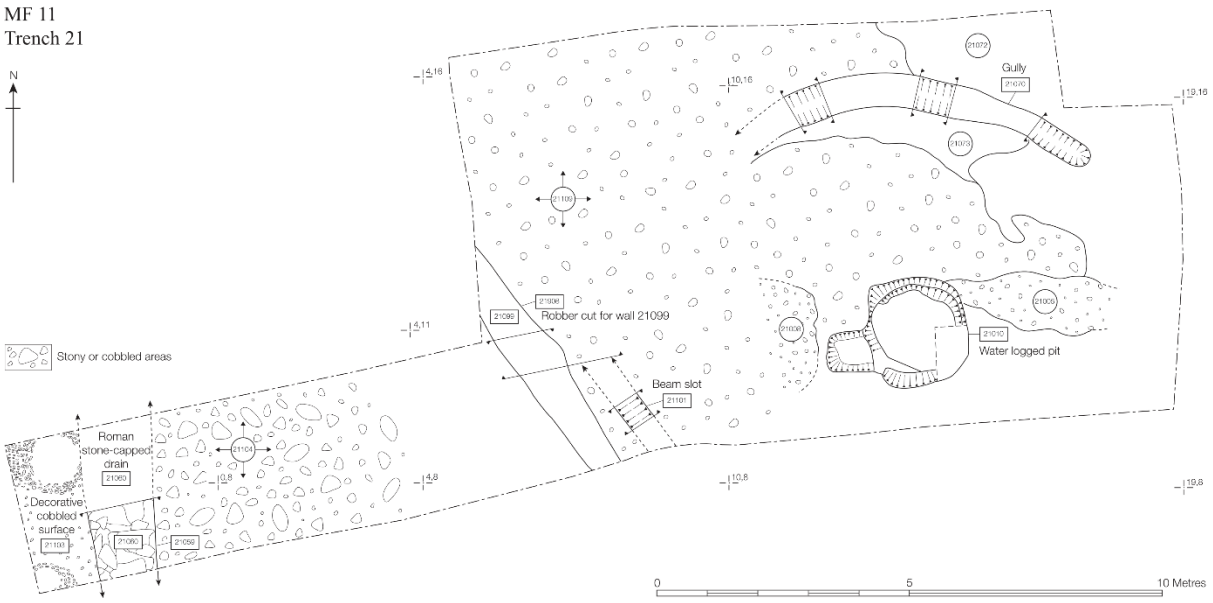



*Figure 44. Trench MF21 plan*

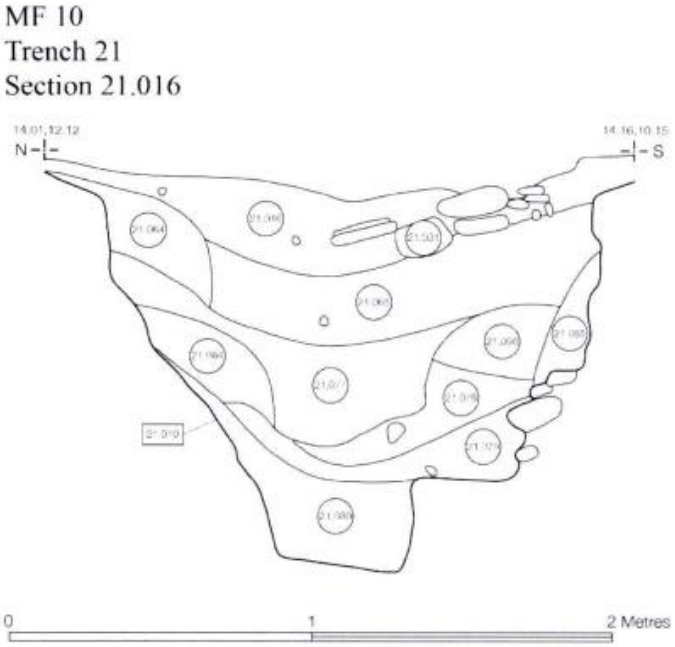



*Figure 45. Trench MF21: a section through the pit/well*

A series of remarkable finds were recovered from the pit/well, Figure 46, including a leather shoe, a wooden writing tablet, a willow basket, a nearly complete pot, a second complete pot

with an intentionally made hole in its side probably produced by a spear, the skull of a bird and the skull of a cow. The shoe is nearly complete with a small number of hobnails and a centrally stitched upper, it is probably a *soccus* as worn by both sexes as a house shoe or slipper, approximately size 5/6. The writing tablet is a cut-down larger version with a recess for wax and is a particularly interesting find as these are usually confined to military sites. Analysis using RTI (Reflective Transformation Imaging) showed scratches in the wood but nothing that was decipherable as writing. The drum-shaped basket is beautifully woven from very fine stripped willow, has a domed lid and its bottom section cut off, A similarly damaged basket was found at the nearby site of Gill Mill also in a waterlogged pit (Paul Booth *pers. com*.). Baskets have a long tradition of being associated with ritual activities often used to carry offerings and sacred objects such as during the Eleusis Mysteries and the worship of Demeter. The stabbing of the pot and the intentional damaging of the basket possibly suggest some form of ritual 'killing' of these objects before they were deposited in the pit/well as votive offerings.








*Figure 46. Finds from the pit/well in Trench MF21: a shoe, part of a writing tablet and a woven basket*

Around the pit/well and to the west of it were features suggesting that this was one of several foci of activity spread across the whole site. To the north was a curvilinear ditch *c.* 1m wide and 0.1m deep which may have been some form of boundary or fence around the pit/well. Covering much of the immediate area, and running westwards to the amphitheatre drain, were a series of compacted floors and cobbled surfaces showing signs of wear and a single posthole. To the west of the pit/well was a robbed-out wall and a beam slot. While none of these features could be interpreted as parts of structures, they do show that this was a busy area with the pit/well being the central focus for activity. At the very west of the trench a curious circular pattern of pitched cobbles was cut by the drain trench suggesting that some of the cobbled surfaces were earlier than the drain.

In total Trench MF21 produced 9,486 sherds of pottery of which 9,509 were Roman together with 22 coins. As well as the remarkable finds in the pit/well a range of finds occurred across the trench including vessel glass, a bone pin, iron objects such as two rings and copper-alloy objects such as an earring, two brooches a ring and a child's bracelet.

Returning to the arena itself, as stated earlier as well as the box positioned at the southern cardinal point there are also features at the northern, eastern and western points and it is to the north we turn first. Here it was established through trenches MF17 and MF37 that the bank was not continuous around the northern area of the arena. In MF37 the bank was identified comprising similar layers as in the south but sloping down to ground level to the east of the structural features found in MF17. It is assumed that the same happens to the west thus creating a northern gap in the bank. There was no bank in the northern most area of MF17 behind the structures described here.

The northern extent of the arena wall was established in MF17, Figure 47. It was the same build as in MF9 to the south and equally well preserved with the inner face comprising regularly spaced limestone blocks mortared and covered with a layer of yellow sandy mortar and then white plaster showing a pattern of painted red ashlar blocks. Between this and the

inner face of similar blocks was a fill of rubble and mortar, the visible stones along the top of the exposed wall suggesting that at least some of these internal stones may have been placed at angles or vertically within the wall packing to better consolidate the wall. The base of the wall was constructed very near the bedrock.

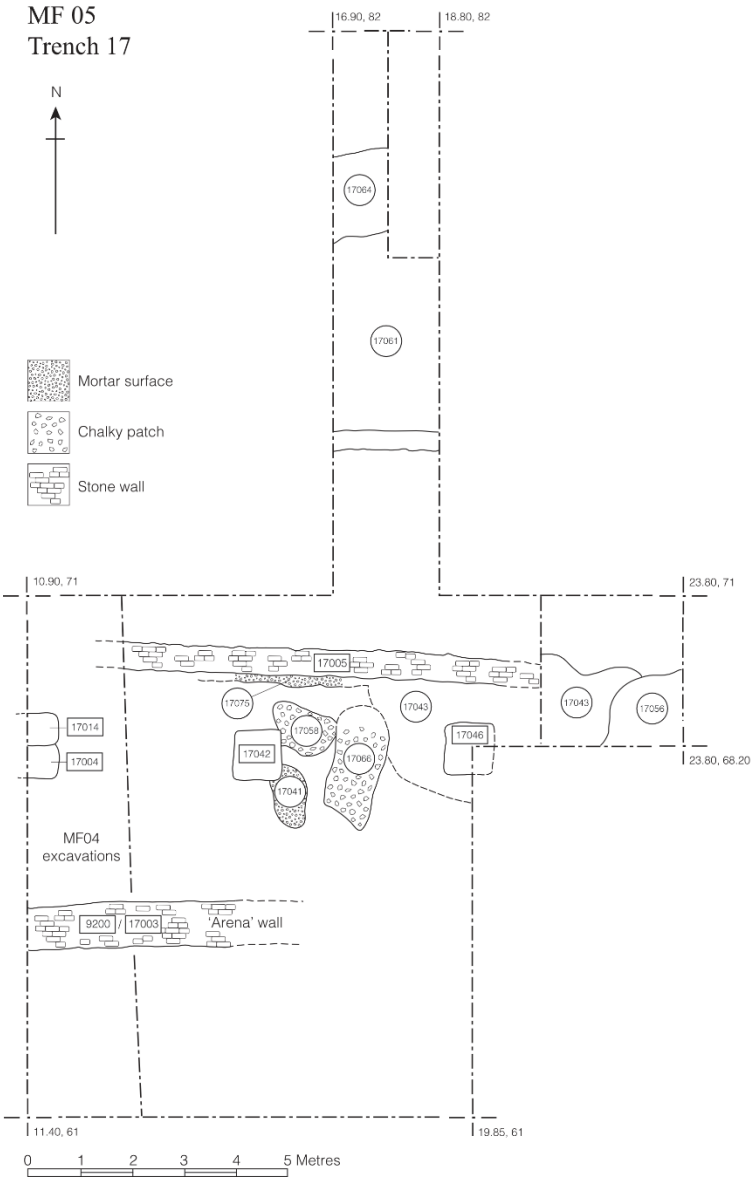



*Figure 47. Trench MF17 plan*

Some 5m north of the arena wall a second stone wall, straight rather than curved, ran east to west across MF17, in total 8m in length. Unlike the arena wall, this structure was constructed using a dry-stone technique and consisted of two basal courses forming a herring-bone pattern with a *c.* 10cm thick layer of mortar above which consolidated a top layer of flat stones. Damage to this wall by ploughing resulted in a layer of rubble and mortar to the north.

The western corner of the wall consists of a single, much larger block of limestone with packing stones placed near vertically around its outer edge and a course of flat stones to support its base. Between the arena wall and the northern wall and lying *c.* 1m south of the

latter, were four equi-spaced stone structures forming a line. The western structure was constructed in two parts to form a low pillar or plinth *c*. 1.2m square while the other three consisted of small angular stones placed vertically into the ground, arranged in the form of a square approximately 1m x 1m. These were poorly made in relation to the western-most example, in particular the easternmost one which appears to be partially destroyed. Extending south from the wall and abutting the central and eastern structures is a patchy surface consisting of a mixture of small pebbles and flecks of chalk, sloping downwards as it approaches the arena wall.

The northern wall and the four stone structures seem to be the lowest levels of what must have been some kind of important focus at the north of the arena. These could be foundations for a wooden platform with the four structures perhaps being post-pads for vertical posts or the platform itself rested directly on the wall and four columns forming a formalised display area for statues or other objects. It seems likely that timber would have been involved in whatever was here and it is, of course, possible that statues could have been place directly onto the four bases and the wall. Compared to the rest of the amphitheatre this area was devoid of finds suggesting that activities going on elsewhere were not taking place in the north. In total there were only 109 sherds of pottery from this trench of which 86 were Roman. It seems that whatever was here was intended to be seen from the rest of the arena and the surrounding bank.

The Marcham arena is somewhat unusual in being associated with a temple rather than with a town or a fort as were other known examples in Britain such as Catterick (Cataractonium), Canterbury (Durovernum Cantiacorum) and St Albans (Verulamium). At Colchester (Camulodunum) two theatres were associated with temples but these were within the town. The implication of this relationship is that the events which took place in the theatre were religious in character and an integrated part of the experience of worshipping at the temple. Reinforcing the relationship between the arena and the temple is the location of the entrance into the arena at the west and the pathway leading from it towards the temple, explored through trench MF29, Figure 48. The western arena entrance was constructed in two phases which matches the sequence established elsewhere for the arena as a whole. In Phase 1 a passageway was cut into the bedrock and natural sand sloping eastwards down to the arena, measuring 2.2m wide at the west and expanding outwards as a curve to be 3.3 m wide at the arena wall. The arena walls were built up to the edges of this cut and show the same characteristics as elsewhere including white plaster with ashlar block patterning in thick deep red lines. The break in the arena wall was filled by three steps down into the arena, 3.3m long by 0.3m wide with a total drop of approximately 1m, constructed from mortared limestone blocks with the lowest step incorporating a natural outcrop of stone. The step was consolidated by rubble packing behind it while a cobbled surface was laid for a small area inside the arena at the foot of the step, possibly the remnants of a path leading to the centre of the arena. In a context associated with the wall was a cluster of 11 late Roman copper-alloy coins which appeared to have been deposited as a group.

The rubble packing was also associated with a semi-circular wooden platform positioned behind the step and indicated by an arc of seven small postholes up against the southern bank edge. Corresponding evidence to the north was lost through plough damage. Just to the east of this platform, within the entrance passage, a north-south beam slot measuring 1.5m long was part of this construction and possibly supported a wooden step down from the higher area of the passage to the west to the wooden platform which was lower at the level of the step.

MF 08
Trench 29

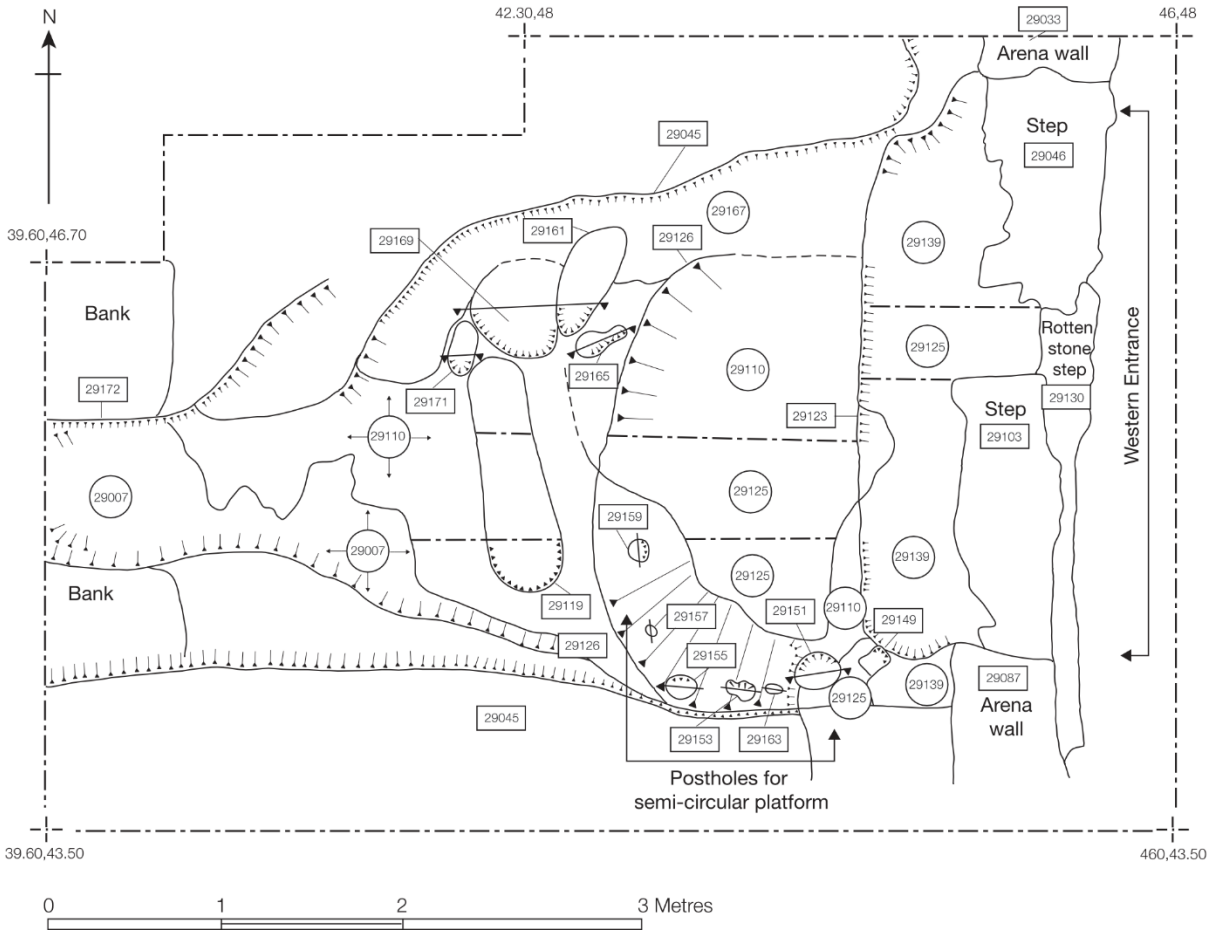



*Figure 48. Trench MF29, the western arena entrance*

The banks were built up either side of the entrance passage and reinforced with layers of rubble and clay. Within the entrance passageway a considerable number of fragments of pink plaster were found suggesting that plaster covered at least parts of the passage walls. Narrow horizontal grooves cut into the bedrock faces of the passageway show that the plaster was probably supported by wooden lathes rather than being applied directly to the rock face. Within the southern bank the remains of a stone built three-sided structure open to the west were found within which were a series of small piles of tightly packed vertical stones. Similar piles flanked the south of the path as it exited the passageway to the west. This appears to be a shrine with small alters similar to those found outside the bank to the southwest in trenches MF24, MF30 and MF8B (discussed further below). The floor of the passageway was covered with a layer of sand and at the western end a grit surface which extended beyond the passage to the west heading slightly southwards towards the *temenos* entrance past the shrine in trench MF22. Not far beyond the entrance passageway this path was badly damaged by ploughing and was only identified as a thin spread of gritty mortar.

In the second phase the entrance was remodelled with repairs made to the arena wall terminals to the north and south of the original step and a new step inserted which was smaller. This was constructed of a single course of squared limestone blocks and measured 1.3m long by 0.7m wide. The new step was positioned at the northern end of the original step

and did not stretch all the way across the gap with the southern two metres being blocked by a fence or shuttering based on a line of three postholes. As part of these changes the semi-circular wooden platform was removed and a new north-south aligned beam slot may have provided a wooden step down to the stone step. At the western end of the entrance passageway the banks were remodelled by adding material to narrow it to approximately 1m, half of its original width. This trench produced 1,385 sherds of pottery of which 759 were Roman.

At the fourth, and final, cardinal point of the arena to the east the geophysics showed another possible entrance passageway running through the full width of the bank. This was explored through the eastern end of trench MF1 and revealed complex stratigraphy which suggested several phases of rebuilding and remodelling. The geophysical negative anomaly represents the gravel and stone flooring of a passageway through the bank sloping down towards the arena wall in places cut through the Corallian bedrock which sloped down towards the centre of the arena. The bedrock was chopped away to accommodate the arena wall itself leaving a gap behind it which was filled with rubble, the wall being built straight onto bedrock in places. The wall shows the same build as elsewhere comprising mortared limestone blocks faced with mortar, white plaster and deep red ashlar block patterning, Figure 49.

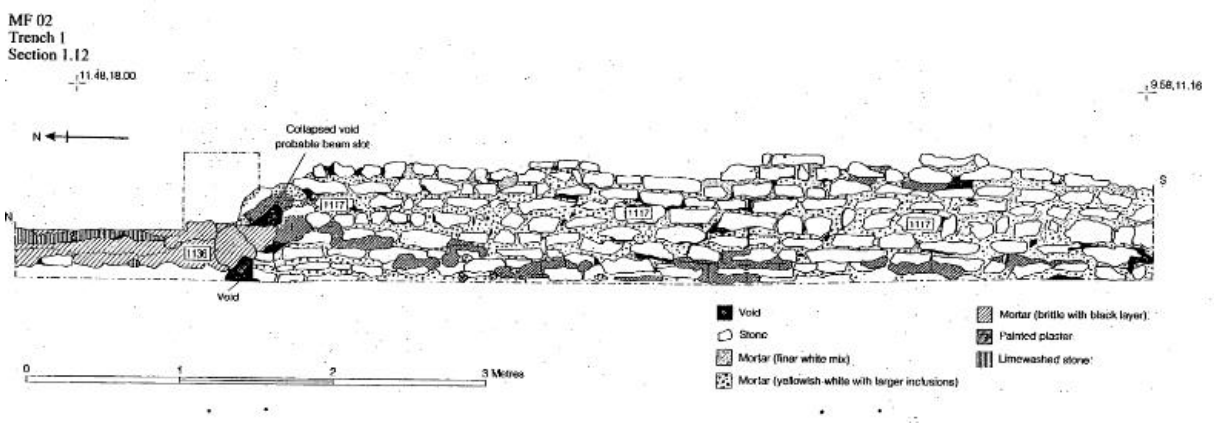



*Figure 49. The arena wall in Trench MF1 showing the step to the left*

In line with the passage is a step in the top of the wall measuring approximately 2m wide and 0.5m deep. The drop from the step to the arena floor was approximately 1m, a height which suggests that perhaps this wasn't meant to be a step enabling access into the arena. No convincing evidence was found in this area for wooden or stone structures to suggest that this was an entrance into the arena, for example steps or a ramp down to the arena floor. A more plausible interpretation seems to be that the step in the wall was associated with some form of viewing point overlooking the arena, involving a platform, offering visual access to the arena reached via the passageway through the bank. Cuts in the bedrock behind the step suggest the position of a wooden platform extending back behind the wall for over one metre. The arena wall at this point shows signs of alteration and it seems likely that the step was inserted into the wall rather than being part of its original design. As part of this Phase 2 modification the wall ends were built up and heavily re-mortared, possibly to support the wooden viewing platform, with the courses of stone below the gap also being re-mortared. The top of the step itself was also mortared in which was a small single human footprint with toes pointing towards the west, probably of a child or a woman.

The bank either side of the access passage was approximately 15m wide and incorporated a layer of local stone and clay probably as a stabilisation layer within the sandy loam that most of it was constructed from. As elsewhere, the stratigraphy within the bank suggests that it was never very high, perhaps 2m maximum, with a gently curved profile and built onto an Iron Age soil. The shape of the bank means that anyone approaching the arena would see nothing of the interior which would be revealed quite suddenly when reaching the top of the bank or on going through the passageway. The geophysics suggests that there may have been some form of revetting wall around the rear edge of the bank in places shown by a linear negative anomaly and evidence of this was found at the east in the form of stones although not elsewhere where the bank was excavated.

The passageway itself was just under three metres wide at its eastern end and widened slightly towards the west, Figure 50. Either side of it evidence for a narrow and shallow gully shows that the ends of the bank were revetted probably with planks which were covered with pink plaster as evidenced by the many fragments in the fill of the passageway especially the western half closest to the arena. At the western end of the northern gully a posthole indicated the end of the revetment. As described above, the main entrance passageway to the west of the arena was also decorated with pink plaster. The revetment gullies curved around the outer edges of the banks at the eastern end of the passageway. The floor of the passageway, which sloped down towards the arena, was laid with stone in places, more so towards the east, gravel in places and sand in others. Approximately 6m to the east of the rear of the bank another small gulley was located. This was only seen in an extension to trench MF1 measuring 1.5m wide but the gully, which ran north-south, did appear to be curved to reflect the arena's shape. Snails and Roman pottery were found in its fill and a layer of material washed down from the bank came to an end at the ditch suggesting it had held some form of palisade that ran around the outside of the bank at least in the eastern area.

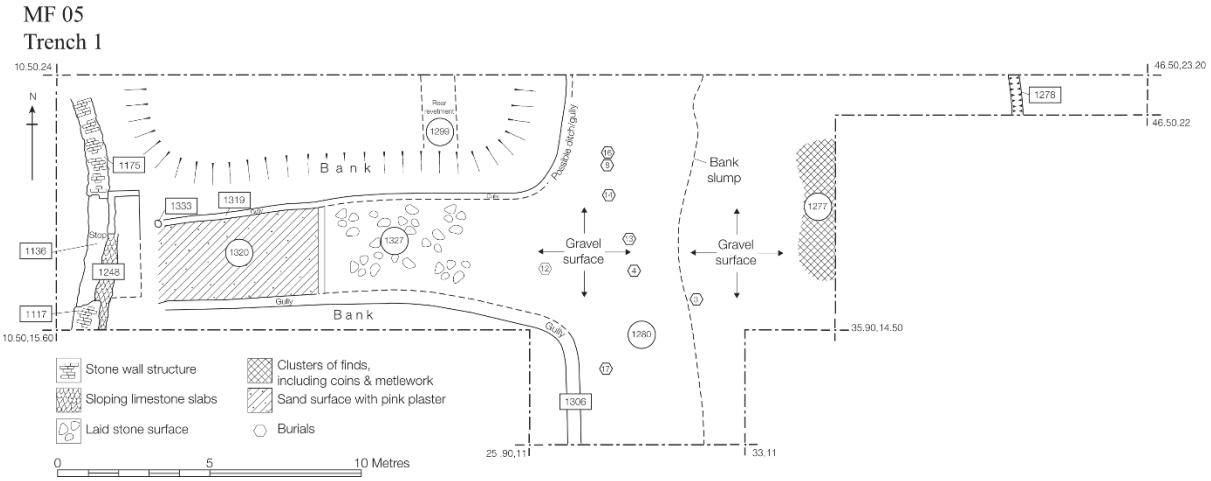



*Figure 50. Trench MF1: the eastern entrance into the arena showing the location of the burials*

The eastern arena feature seems to fit the two-phase model of the arena presented elsewhere above in that the original arena wall was modified to incorporate a platform constructed on a step in the wall to enable viewing of the arena interior. This second phase included the digging of the entrance passageway to provide access to the platform and the laying down of a surface along it. At the same time the bank was made higher which necessitated the

construction of revetting walls within the passageway comprising planks within a foundation gully, some of which were covered with pink plaster.

At various points around the outside of the arena bank there was evidence for the deposition of a range of artefacts as votive offerings, sometimes associated with various types of structures which were probably shrines. Staying with the eastern arena, just outside the entrance passage and within the possible outer palisade was a concentration of finds. This included nearly thirty Late Roman coins, some in mint condition and some temple 'forgeries', sherds of Roman pottery, animal bones, vessel glass, hair pins, rings, and decorative metal studs and fittings. There was a definite clustering of small groups of finds as if they had been buried together possibly in a small pit, for example a hair pin was grouped with white stones, pottery sherds and animal bones in an otherwise find-free area.

In total across Trench 1 there were 174 small finds although 64% of these were from disturbed contexts. Finds consisted of 78 third/fourth century Roman coins, 25 iron nails/hobnails, 28 miscellaneous iron objects, 3 iron pins, two copper-alloy brooches, two copper-alloy bracelets, 11 copper-alloy objects, one lead lump, one polished pebble (possibly a gaming counter), one copper-alloy votive object, one bone pin, two flint scrapers, two pieces of glass vessel and one jet/shale bead/toggle. Within the whole of Trench 1 a total of 1,015 sherds were found of which 818 were Roman.

To the south of the arena bank trench MF8/8B, along the line of the drain, revealed further evidence for votive deposition. Here, as in the east, the outer edge of the bank was marked by a line of stones with the addition of a fine rubble surface extending southwards from the bank. It is on this surface that significant quantities of animal bone and artefacts were recovered including over 150 copper-alloy objects and over 70 worked bone objects, a remarkable number from a relatively small trench. The deposited objects consisted of medical/toilet articles such as spatulas and spoon probes, toilet implements such as tweezers and nail cleaners and items of personal jewellery such as hairpins, finger rings and bracelet pieces together with 46 coins. The preservation of many of these items was exceptional, and some showed signs of deliberate defacement. Also found in this trench were 1,559 sherds of pottery of which 1,451 were Roman.

At least six small structures were also found in this area, consisting of small collections of angular limestone pieces arranged in triangular or circular patterns around a small void. A cut was apparent in the excavation of one of these structures, and they therefore may have held a central post which supported a small wooden alter on which to place offerings. Given the sheer number of fine items from this area it seems to represent a deliberately delineated place where votive offerings were made. Coins recovered from Trench 8b extend into the fourth century and it is possible that later votive deposits in this area may also be related to the building uncovered in Trench 2, which functioned into the later fourth century CE

To the west of MF8B Trench MF24 was positioned between the large late Roman building in Trench MF2 and the rear of the arena bank within a cobbled area that ran eastwards and joined the Trench MF2 building. This revealed a more formal shrine in the form of a three-sided stone-built building with an open front facing the arena, a ground plan similar to the shrine in Trench MF22 and that at the western entrance in MF29, Figure 51. The building was smaller with internal measurements of approximately 3.5m square. As with the buildings in Trenches MF22 and MF29, only the well-built lower courses of the stone walls survived and nothing is known of the upper parts of the building whether stone, wood or both. Stone

from the eastern wall had been robbed and it was identified by the robber trench and the whole structure was surrounded by stone and mortar demolition layers suggesting that it may have been deliberately dismantled.

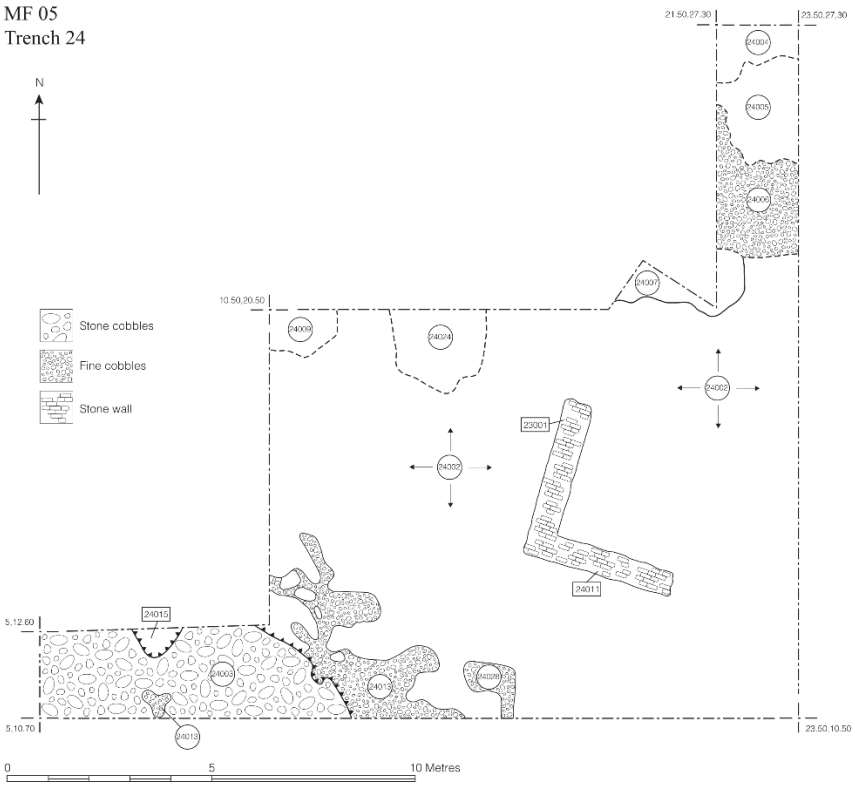



*Figure 51. The shrine in Trench MF24*

Within and around this structure were many clusters of small stones, some possibly forming piles similar to those found in the other areas already described. There were approximately thirty of these outside the building and nine within it, some very close to the outside of the wall suggest that they pre-dated the building perhaps showing a long period of votive use for this area. Associated with these stone groups were a large number of coins and worked bone and copper-alloy pins showing that the stones were a foci for deposition and supporting the interpretation of them being small personal alters or shrines acting as foci for offerings. In total nearly 600 small finds were recovered from Trench MF24 including 65 coins, fragments of glass vessels, lead items, a range of personal toilet implements such as tweezers and ligula, jewellery including rings, pins and brooches, iron objects including 82 hobnails, 379 structural nails and 12 furniture nails, armour scales and studs. Also found were 7,038 sherds of pottery of which 6,119 were Roman. The ritual nature of this area was further confirmed by the excavation of a complete sheep/goat burial in the southern part of the trench. Just to the north in Trench MF30 was a complete cattle burial cut into the rear side of the arena bank. Coins from the topsoil and contexts across the trench show a range from 69-79 CE through to 388-402 CE, although the majority date from the late 3rd century and the 4th century. Also from nearby Trench MF30 were 2,519 sherds of pottery of which 2,404 were Roman.

Probably associated with this ritual activity is a wall within Trench MF23 positioned between Trenches MF24 and MF8B. This length of wall, running south-west to north-east, was oriented at odds with both the trench MF2 building and the arena and is constructed from

worked limestone blocks. The length of wall is odd in being standalone but is remarkable in being the best constructed length of walling from anywhere on the site.

Within the arena was evidence of features which post-date the original sand flooring and pre-date the final silting of the arena in the late 4th century CE. These comprised a pair of postholes, a pit and an east-west aligned beam slot representing a structure that may be contemporary with the second phase alterations to the arena wall, the establishment of the eastern step and the blocking of the southern box.

Considerable evidence was found for the end of use of the arena which gradually filled with deposits washing down from the banks combined with periods of flooding by water probably coming through the bedrock in the centre. A series of natural drainage gullies were cut through the sand of the arena floor which marked the end of the drains as a functioning system probably due to them being blocked. In the eastern part of the arena these irregular linear features were aligned northwest-southeast and were filled with clay. The interior of the arena became a boggy, pond-like area with evidence for the laying down of cobbled areas probably to try and maintain the surface for walking on. Eventually the arena seems to have been used for the dumping of rubbish, especially building material rubble and pottery which covered the original sand floor. A series of interleaved sand and clay layers were naturally deposited across the arena as the banks eroded together with dumps of rubble which must have been tipped in. Some of these were rich in artefacts such as pottery, animal bone, coins and a 2nd century CE zoomorphic brooch while the rubble contained ceramic building material. This activity ended in the late 4th century CE based on the pottery dating. These deposits were overlain by a 0.5m thick medieval/post-medieval plough soil, which was in turn overlain by modern topsoil.

At the western entrance, in the area of Trench MF29, thick demolition and destruction layers were preserved over the cobbled pathway in the passageway. These layers contained large rubble blocks, as well as significant amounts of pink wall plaster and oyster shells. After the entrance had crumbled into disuse, a long period of silting occurred washing down from the banks. This thick silt layer contained large numbers of coins, a fragment of glass finger ring, a fragment of shale bracelet and a duck brooch, all of which may have been redeposited from the possible shrine found on the top of the bank to the south of the pathway. At the eastern step, directly below it in the arena was a thick deposit of black, water-lain clay which was probably a ponding deposit laid down in still water showing the level of flooding within the arena. Within the passageway were a series of deposits showing the collapse of the revetting walls and the banks themselves which gradually filled the access route.

A final act in the eastern entrance, the eastern end of Trench MF1 was the burial of at least eight individuals. These graves were dug into the top of the bank and into the rear of it with one being partly cut into the sand and clay bank material that had slumped down into the passageway, Figure 50 for the location of the burials. This seems to be an informal cemetery and how it relates to the formal late Roman and Saxon cemetery nearby to the north-west in Frilford is unclear (Akerman, 1865; Rolleston, 1869; 1880) although one similarity is the relative lack of coffins and grave-goods. In total a minimum of 25 individuals are represented by bone across trench MF1 although other than these burials it is all disarticulated and comprising single pieces.

Six partial adult skeletons, with differing degrees of plough damage and bone erosion due to the acidic soil, were grouped together outside the eastern passageway with a further two to

the south although these were more disarticulated due to more extensive damage, Figure 52. Two radiocarbon dates place the burials in the early to mid-4th century CE (347-440 and 328-414 cal CE) and other details support this including a combination of a lack of grave goods, the prone position of one of the bodies, the east-west alignment with heads to the west and a single corroded Roman coin found within the fill on one grave cut, all suggesting burial within the Christian tradition. While small rural inhumation cemeteries are relatively common in the Upper Thames region for this period (Booth, *et al*. 2007), it is uncertain why these people were not buried in the large Frilford cemetery less than a kilometre away. Coins of Constantine II (323-361 CE), Valens (364-378 CE) and Gratian (367-383 CE) were recovered from coffins within the Frilford cemetery (Rolleston, 1869), showing that the burials in the arena bank were contemporary with those.



*Figure 52. Two of the damaged late Roman burials at the eastern end of Trench MF1*

Clear cuts were found for only two of the graves; the most northerly contained two skeletons on top of each other, while the neighbouring burial had stone markers positioned around the head and feet. Three further burials were marked by only traces of grave cuts, all of which were extremely shallow. The most southerly burial had no trace of a grave cut and may have been lain on the gravel surface of the passageway and then covered. There were also remains of an infant although no grave cut could be identified and these were disarticulated and poorly preserved.

All but the most southerly skeleton, which lined up with the break in the bank, seemed to have been dug into the bank to some degree and to have been buried at the end of the use of the arena or shortly before. This raises the intriguing possibility that the burials may have been associated with one or more ceremonies marking the closure of the arena although the stratigraphy shows that they were not all buried at the same time. The extent of the burial ground is unknown and it may be that these inhumations represent the western edge of a

larger group continuing to the east. The other possibility is that a similar arrangement of inhumations continues along the edge of the bank to the south. The burials do not appear to continue to the north.

Despite the skeletons being in poor condition and the overall sample size being small, analysis has shown that the group were of mixed gender and of mature years. Of the seven, three were probably male and three female with one undetermined with possible ages ranging from mid-twenties to late-sixties. The mean heights for the males was 171.46 cm (5' 6") and for the females 157.91 cm (5' 2"), values that fit the accepted means for the Romano-British population. The palaeopathology showed a range of minor ailments, again quite normal for people of the time. Six showed signs of mild osteoarthritis, another three had spinal problems, two had mild spina bifida occulta and one curvature of the sternum. Five of the skeletons showed probable evidence of the effects of a lifetime of manual labour with a cruciate ligament injury and five having tendon insertions indicating muscular exertion and repeated trauma of the tendons. Their teeth were generally in poor condition with one having ten missing ante-mortem, another six and another four, all together with multiple caries and extreme wear.

The following is taken from the full human bone report by Paula Levick:

"The idea that these were possibly 'deviant burials', cast out from the rest of society through wrongdoing or physical disfigurement has been considered. However, other than the probable deafness and facial disfigurement suffered by one, there were no patholgies in the surviving sample that would have had any outward manifestation other than that seen in any ageing population at that time, and other than one being buried in a prone position, there was nothing to suggest disrespect of the deceased during burial. One had large stones placed around the head and feet. This was also noted by Rolleston (1869) in the Frilford cemetery, a practice he associated with the Romano-British burials. The prone position of one burial might indicate a wrongdoing by the individual concerned, but it is not an uncommon practice in this region, where it appears to be without age or gender distinction (Booth *et al.* 2007). It could also have occurred accidentally if the body had been wrapped in a shroud and buried in haste or at night.

It is possible that the arena burials represent an extended family group. Populations in which local families interbreed may develop unique congenital signatures which are reflected in the higher prevalence of certain congenital anomalies if buried in the same cemetery. Only two complete sacra and one partial sacra had survived from the cemetery population, but all had the congenital anomalies of partial spina bifida occulta and/or sacralization of the 5$^{th}$ lumbar vertebra. With such a small number it is impossible to say how representative this group was of the general population, but this might reflect a potential genetic relationship, supporting the suggestion that this was a family group. The individuals in the arena cemetery were of mixed sex and the majority middle aged or old at the time of death. Their association with the remains of an infant and possible juvenile also seem to point to this being a family group.

During excavation it was found that one burial had been placed above another, such a burial might be accidental, possibly through continuing reuse of the cemetery. If the burial of the latter had disturbed the earlier burial this could account for the loss of the thoracic cavity of the former and the apparent offsetting of the skull with the lower part of the body. Due to the small number and incomplete nature of the skeletons recovered, any conclusions drawn are

necessarily tentative and should be subject to reinterpretation if any further burials be discovered".

The aerial photograph of the arena shows it to be located at the northern end of a long, linear crop mark running southwards across the field towards the River Ock, Figure 34. It is clear from the overall excavations that this is some form of natural feature, perhaps a fault line, that has filled with deep, soft colluvium making it a very different geology to the surrounding areas where the hard Corallian limestone occurs very close to the surface. The location of the arena within this soft band, and at the very northern-most point of it, raises an interesting question about choices underlying that location especially when the presence of ground water and the possibility of a perched water table, as mentioned above, are taken into account.

There are two very different possibilities. Firstly, that the arena was located there simply because the deep, soft colluvium facilitated the easy digging out of the arena which was dug downwards from ground level. The colluvium provided ample suitable material for the construction of the bank which was piled up around the arena. This scenario assumes no knowledge of the presence of water and the possibility of the arena getting very wet and suffering from periodic flooding. This would very quickly be realised and necessitate the construction of the drainage system which from the evidence within the southern box is shown to be part of the original build.

The second possibility is that this was already a wet, boggy place and it is the presence of water that attracted the building of the arena to that location. The electrical resistance survey, mentioned above, shows that beneath the arena there is a wet area of considerable size. Three fields away to the east in a field called Salt Marsh, there is a spring with water rich in salt from the Corallian beds around which have been found sherds of Roman pottery and a coin of the Emperor Constantine, 307-310 CE (Gelder 2006). Here a saline-loving form of wild celery grows, an unusual plant that was recognised in Roman and Saxon times to have medicinal benefits (Godwin 1975):

'Apium, parsley – the leaves of one species (water-parsley, our celery, the Apium graveolens, Linn(aeus)) were often used by the ancients for garlands, on account of their strong fragrence' (Virgil Eclogues 6.68 quoted in Lewis and Short, 1975).

Evidence for it has been found at Iron Age Silchester only thirty miles away (Lodwick 2014). The name Marcham derives from 'wild celery flood meadow' in Old English.

It is well attested that both in prehistoric times (Bradley 1998) and during the Roman period (Kamash 2008), water and wet places were considered special sacred places and attracted ritual activities. A curious feature at Marcham is that the drain takes the water from the arena to the lower end of the field where it pours out into a boggy pond which seems to have had some form of significance based on the large quantity of material culture intentionally deposited in it. This suggests that the water from within the arena was considered special and treated in a very formal way rather than just being disposed of. Rather than the drain ending within the field close to the south of the arena and the water being allowed to drain away it was intentionally taken 250m to the pond where it was deposited.

The implication of this second possibility is that the water was used within the arena as part of the activities that took place within it. It seems that the water emanated from the hole in the bedrock in the centre of the arena where there was evidence for some form of structure

although the details are unsure. Across all parts of the arena that were excavated there was evidence of water-lain deposits periodically during its use. The presence of wood within the arena shows that it has remained water-logged since Roman times. It seems certain that considerable depths of water were present within the arena at different times although there were also periods of dryness when the sand flooring of the arena was dry. It is interesting to note that the plastering of the arena wall ended approximately 50cms above the arena floor, perhaps indicating the maximum depth of water. Kamash (2008) has shown the ritual power of water in the Roman period as both a life-giver and a life-taker and considering that the activities that took place within the arena were religious in character it is likely that the presence of water played a role in them.

Returning to the relationship between the temple and the arena we can cite the importance of religious festivals and performance as part of the experience of visiting a temple and the practice of worship. Using the classical sources and archaeological evidence, Hanson (1959) has shown that theatre/temples are known throughout the Roman provinces and especially in Gaul. Dramatic performances originated as pagan activities and were originally associated with *ludi*, public games, which were part of Roman religious festivals. There is an early relationship between temples and performance sites with the dedication of a temple often accompanied by *ludi* in the vicinity of the temple. The festivities would include a sacred procession, the *pompa*, starting at the temple and ending in the arena often at the *nemesea*, the shrine of Nemesis so that the deity could look down on the performances in her honour. The parade included contestants, dancers, musicians, persons carrying incense, perfumes, precious objects from the temple treasury including chairs with cushions and drapery, gods represented by statues or other symbols and it often ended with a sacrifice on the *nemesea* alter (*ibid*, 81).

In contrast to amphitheatres associated with military sites which housed big displays to entertain the troops, the theatre/temple performances had a different function and may have been based on rituals of local derivation. Futrell (1997) has argued that these are often built in connection with a sanctuary site of pre-Roman significance, as at Marcham, and were important in establishing and maintaining group identity. They are often rural and comparatively small in terms of performance area and audience, again as at Marcham, where people met and shared the communal experience of the cult event, the place being a catalyst for the convergence of Iron Age practices within a Romanised context, ‘a means of understanding the radical changes wrought by the onslaught of Rome, a new political reality’ (*ibid*. 118).

In Gaul rural theatre/temple sites such as Grand and Chennevières-sur-Marne are associated with sanctuaries of pre-Roman origin but in Britain such sites are less well known. One convincing example is Gosbecks (Colchester), Iron Age Camulodunum, where a large theatre is situated close to a Romano-Celtic temple (Dunnett 1971). Here excavation has revealed a two-phase theatre, neither of which were completely stone built, constructed in the second century CE and lasting until the mid-third century. The site was of special significance in pre-Roman Camulodunum which, it is claimed, explains its continued development in the Roman period where it housed a congregation to witness religious rites and acted as a meeting place for pilgrims to the cult centre.

**The eastern group of Iron Age enclosures and pits and a Saxon hut (trenches MFP1, 2, 3, 4, 5 and 6)**

To the east of the arena the geophysics showed a series of circular, sub-circular and sub-rectangular enclosures, Figure 53, which were excavated through six trenches during the last four years of the project, Trenches MFP1 to MFP6. The enclosures appeared to be of several phases as in places they were superimposed and ditches were recut. The whole area was dotted with pits, some in clusters with one very marked cluster explored through Trench MFP4.

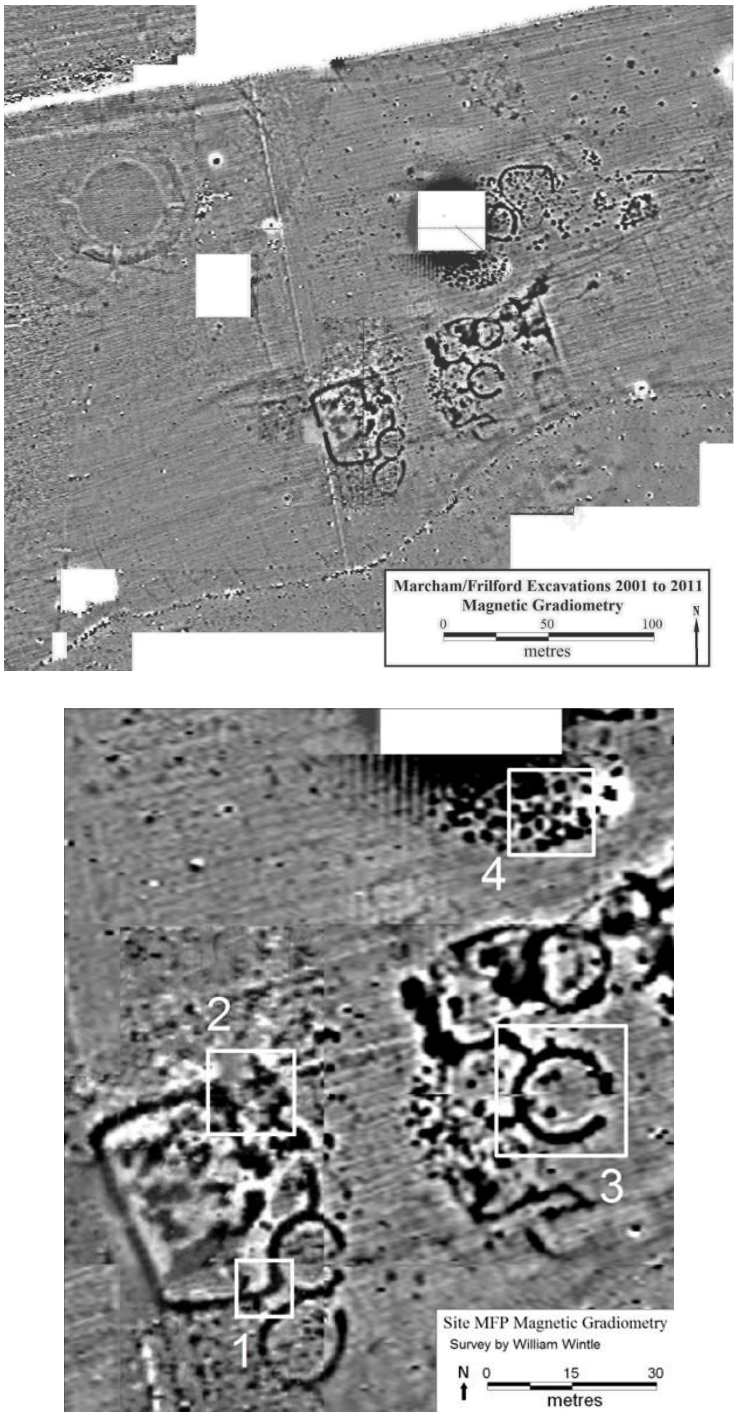



*Figure 53. Geophysical plot of the MFP area (above), showing trenches MFP1 to MFP4 (below) (courtesy of William Wintle and Tony Johnson)*

We have argued elsewhere (Lock and Raven 2023) that the large barrel-shaped enclosure located near the Roman temple in zone MFNA could have been a ritual enclosure rather than for domestic use. Even though the enclosures here in zone MFP are different in size and shape the material culture found within their interiors and ditch fills are very similar in date and character to the larger enclosure. The lack of evidence for a house in any of them supports the argument that these are also forms of sacred enclosure used primarily for the ritual deposition of offerings.

It has long been recognised that during later prehistory the deposition of material in pits and ditches was not random but probably represents intentional selection and burial, a process often called 'structured deposition'. For the Iron Age this was demonstrated in the detailed study of the enclosure ditch and internal pits at the Winnal Down settlement by Hill (1995) and is further expanded by Sharples (2010). Although Hill looked at the patterning of human remains together with more unusual material culture such as iron objects, quern stones and worked bone he recognised a constant background presence of animal bone and pottery arguing that all material remains had meaning beyond the pragmatic. This suggests that the filling of pits and ditches was not just a random process but was embedded within peoples' religious actions. While there were special religious occasions during the Iron Age, religious practice and associated ritual was also integrated into everyday life. This results in there being very little distinction between the sacred and the profane during daily activities and the filling of a pit or a ditch was automatically done in the 'right' way.

One implication of Hill's analysis and subsequent thinking is that the ditches of enclosures were boundaries imbued with some kind of ritual significance. This has been long established by anthropologists (Douglas 1991; Pellow 1996), and more recently by archaeologists (Stark 1998; Lock 2007) who recognise both the physical and metaphysical powers of a boundary. This raises the differences between being out or in, the everyday of the outside and the 'other' which happens inside the enclosure. Boundaries, i.e. the banks and ditches of enclosures, define these social differences and they can also be associated with social ambiguity and, therefore, danger. While not physical danger per se, here we mean the metaphysical danger of challenging the social order that is established by the boundary itself. To maintain the potency of the boundary offerings of everyday material objects are laid within the ditch. The evidence for this is often more demonstratable at the ditch terminals close to the enclosure's entrance, suggesting that as people entered they made an offering. The filling of pits has received similar attention in the literature although these are obviously not seen as boundaries in the same way. Pits could have been more of a boundary between this life and the afterworld and the appropriate behaviour required offerings within their fill. Cunliffe (1992) has argued that this practice is related to pleasing the chthonic deities, the action of giving thanks for a good harvest and guaranteeing the next one, a barrier against crop failure and impending difficult times. The material within pits also shows structured deposition with a similar background to ditches of pottery and animal bone. More common within pits, however, are specific groups of material, often including articulated parts of animals and human remains which may be complete skeletons or individual bones. These have been labelled 'special deposits' (*ibid*.) and may indicate a more valuable level of offering perhaps to counteract a more dangerous threat, for example after a particularly poor harvest. The greater the threat the more valuable the offering.

Looking in more detail at the enclosures in zone MFP, Trench MFP1 was located on the junction of a sub-rectangular and a circular enclosure, the former measuring approximately 30x18m and the latter approximately 15m diameter with an entrance facing east. The trench

also included a small length of another circular enclosure, approximately the same size, to the south which conjoined with the more northerly one.

The northern circular enclosure was defined by a ditch *c.* 0.88m wide and *c.* 0.30m deep cut into the subsoil and containing a single fill with charcoal fragments, burnt animal bones, some large animal bones including horse and Iron Age pottery. This ditch seemed to vary in size around its circuit as elsewhere it was larger at *c.* 2.0m wide and 0.7m deep with a broad flat base *c.* 0,6m wide. The sub-rectangular enclosure ditch was different in profile being V-shaped, *c.* 1.5m wide at the top and 0.85m deep, Figure 54. A series of pits were in both the corner of the sub-rectangular enclosure and outside its ditch. Animal bones and Iron Age pottery, including large sherds from a single large vessel, were found within these pits the largest of which was bell-shaped, *c.*1.0m in diameter and *c.* 0.8m deep.

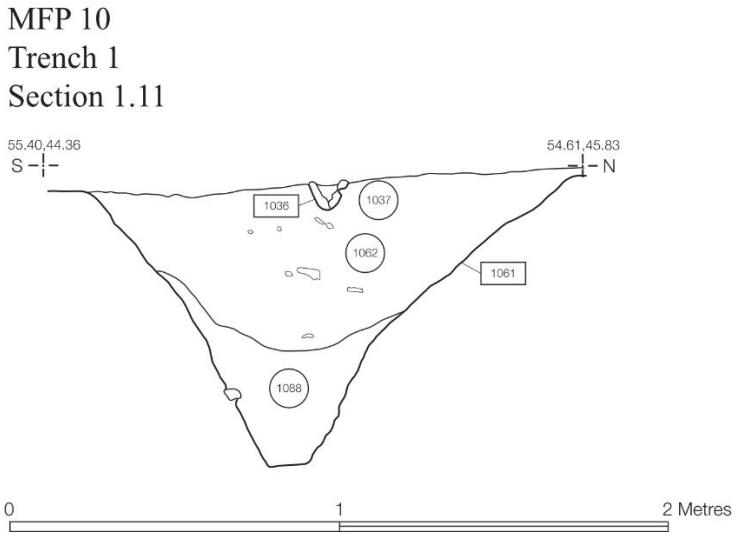



*Figure 54. Trench MFP1 ditch profile*

Finds were relatively few from this trench with only 16 small finds, both Iron Age and Roman, some from the topsoil. These included five copper-alloy artefacts including a bracelet, pin and ring fragment, a quern fragment, a glass vessel fragment and two lead objects, one a piece of sheet. A total of 930 sherds were uncovered of which 859 were Iron Age.

Trench MFP2 was located to investigate the northeastern corner of the large sub-rectangular enclosure described above. This was a complex area of geophysics showing a series of intercutting ditches and other cut features, confirmed by excavation to show an area of intensive use possibly over a long period of time. Excavation revealed two phases of construction for the enclosure with associated features for each phase together with an overlying Romano-British midden deposit.

The Phase 1 ditch of the enclosure was flat-bottomed and approximately 1.6m to 2m deep, flanked by a bank of re-deposited material on either side. Several later pits had been cut into the bank on the south side, whilst the bank on the north side appears to have slumped into the ditch. The ditch, pits and bank were all subsequently truncated by the later Phase 2 ditch which was V-shaped and approximately the same size as in Trench MFP1, 1.5m deep and 0.85m wide at the top. This ditch was itself re-cut twice and together with an adjoining ditch aligned north-west/south-east, may have partitioned and reduced the size of the enclosure.

The edge of the latter ditch was lower on the north side where it truncated partially silted pits and was itself truncated by further pits. In contrast to most of the pits in this trench, the ditches contained relatively large amounts of pot, bone and other finds. Of note is the top fill of one ditch which appeared to be deliberately dumped material comprising 65 sherds of Iron Age pottery and 20 fragments of animal bone, 15 of which were the teeth, mandibles or maxilla of horse, ovicaprid, pig and dog. The later recut of this ditch contained a single artefact-rich deposit of 258 sherds of Iron Age pottery, 2,920 sherds of Roman pottery and 297 animal bones. Most of the bones came from cattle, ovicaprid and pig and might represent feasting or a closing event. In addition, loom weights and spindle whorls were recovered along with a fragment of human skull.

Across the trench were many pits, 28 in total with 23 of those intercutting. Three pits were considered to be contemporary with the first phase of the large enclosure. These were bell-shaped and had been left open and allowed to silt up naturally although the lower fills of at least one appeared to be deliberate deposits with quantities of prehistoric pottery, animal bone, a fragment of copper-alloy and a flint blade. The other, later, pits formed three groups with six underlying the Roman midden in the southeastern area of the trench, four in the southeastern corner and nine in the middle of the trench. Most of these were cut into the thick deposit of clay which overlay the limestone bedrock in this area and as few of them contained any material culture they could have been dug to extract the clay. Where material culture was found it was usually in the upper fills and more likely to have washed in or derive from midden deposits than to represent any significant depositional event.

A couple of exceptions to this was, firstly, a pit in the central group which had neonate bones placed on the base of the shallow pit against the edge of the cut with no other finds recovered from the single fill. Secondly, in the south-eastern corner of the trench, within the sequence of inter-cutting pits, one had significant quantities of pot and bone throughout most of its five fills. The primary fill of this pit was cut by a small pit which contained a relatively large number of animal bones, including four articulating bones from the rear left leg of a horse with the pit appearing to have been cut for the placement of these. After the placement of the leg bones, further artefact-rich fills were deposited including individual bones from the left and right rear legs of a horse, possibly the curated bones from the same animal. A single human skull fragment was recovered from the top fill of this same pit.

Excavations across the trench revealed a series of ditches, many of them intercutting, the purpose of which is not fully understood. In the north-eastern corner a possible ring ditch which appears to have been allowed to silt up naturally was cut by a ditch running on an approximately east-west alignment. Small quantities of prehistoric pottery were recovered in the fills of both ditches. The continuation of these ditches to the south and west is unclear. A shallow ditch or gully in the north of the trench contained 57 sherds of Iron Age pottery and larger quantities (124 sherds) of Roman pottery together with animal bones and a number of small finds. This was cut by a further ditch which in contrast, had only seven sherds of prehistoric pottery within its five fills. A possible Iron Age ditch running approximately north-south through the centre of the trench appeared to rise and fall in section and could have been cut as a series of pits. Quantities of Iron Age and some Roman pottery and animal bone was recovered from the upper fill. Another ditch which was visible on the geophysics was traced for 5m and investigated by two cuts which produced artefact-rich fills although the upper ones possibly derived from the midden deposits that overlay it, with further finds of pottery, animal bone and several small finds recovered from the primary fill.

Covering much of the southeastern area of the trench was a Roman midden measuring a minimum of 4.4m wide and 8.8m long and comprising three layers. The midden contained small amounts of Roman material as well as large quantities of middle and late Iron Age pottery. This may have been residual material or possibly curated and brought in from elsewhere and deposited as a single fill after the underlying pits had remained empty for some time. Of note are deposits in which specific depositional events seemed to have taken place. Examples of this include lines of animal bone, distinctly separate clusters of pottery of different types and colours, three large tabular blocks of limestones, a minimum of three burnt clay loom weights and a Roman coin of the first century CE. It is possible that this deposition represents a closing event where old or out-dated artefacts were disposed of, perhaps as the focus of activity migrated westward toward the Temple complex. Concentrations of oyster shell and metal slag were also found elsewhere in the midden. From this trench in total 10,132 sherds of pottery were excavated of which 4,194 were Iron Age and 5,938 Roman.

Central within the midden, and lying mostly on top of it, were three large pieces of tabular limestone, one of which went down into the top of an Iron Age pit. The largest measured 1.5m x 0.9m x 0.3m, with rough circular holes, some of which pierced the entire breadth of the stone although there was no evidence of their being anything other than natural. Perhaps the holes imbued this stone with an indeterminate significance that warranted its deposition in the midden. No distinctive deposits were identified beneath the stone.

The final phase of activity in Trench MFP2 was the cutting of three sub-circular Roman pits through the midden layer, all with vertical sides and flat bases. Within one of the pits a cattle skull and maxilla, along with quantities of Iron Age and Roman pot were recovered from the lower fills, along with copper alloy and clay objects. This shows that although the major focus moved towards the west, activity in this area continued.

A complete circular enclosure was uncovered in Trench MFP3, Figure 55. All features in this trench were cut through a layer of yellowish-red material that was probably hill wash from further upslope. The ditch was *c.* 2.0m wide and *c.* 1.1m deep with a V-shaped profile, Figure 56, enclosing a space 13m in diameter with an entrance *c.* 3m wide on the eastern side. Several sections were excavated across the ditch and the two at the entrance terminal ends were of interest. These were cut square in both plan and profile and in their upper layers contained a large amount of early Roman metal work including copper-alloy brooches and rings. This suggests that the ditch was still visible as a hollow in the ground in the early Roman period. The lower fills were different between the northern and southern terminals the former producing very few finds whereas the southern one contained an area of burning, a large amount of animal bones, Iron Age pottery and a copper-alloy ring. The clustering of these finds within the southern ditch terminal suggest that they were intentional deposits.

Within the interior of the enclosure were several pits, gullies and postholes but all were relatively shallow, perhaps due to erosion, and contained few finds. Outside the enclosure to the north three pits were of interest. One was 0.80m in diameter and 0.45m deep and undercut, with a broken quern stone as the uppermost fill and an amount of green clay possibly associated with pottery production from the lower layers. The second was unusual in that it was rectangular, 0.6m by 0.4m and 1m deep, with a ‘ledge’ on the eastern side. It was severely undercut on the northern side, possibly due to erosion. The top layers produced evidence for metal working with the discovery of two halves of a crucible with copper-alloy residue, while the lower layers produced burnt stone, an unfired loom weight and a large

amount of green clay. The third pit was 1.2m in diameter and 0.75m deep and was also undercut. The top layers produced a very dark, organic fill with stones arranged in a circular pattern suggestive of a hearth, together with large amounts of iron slag.

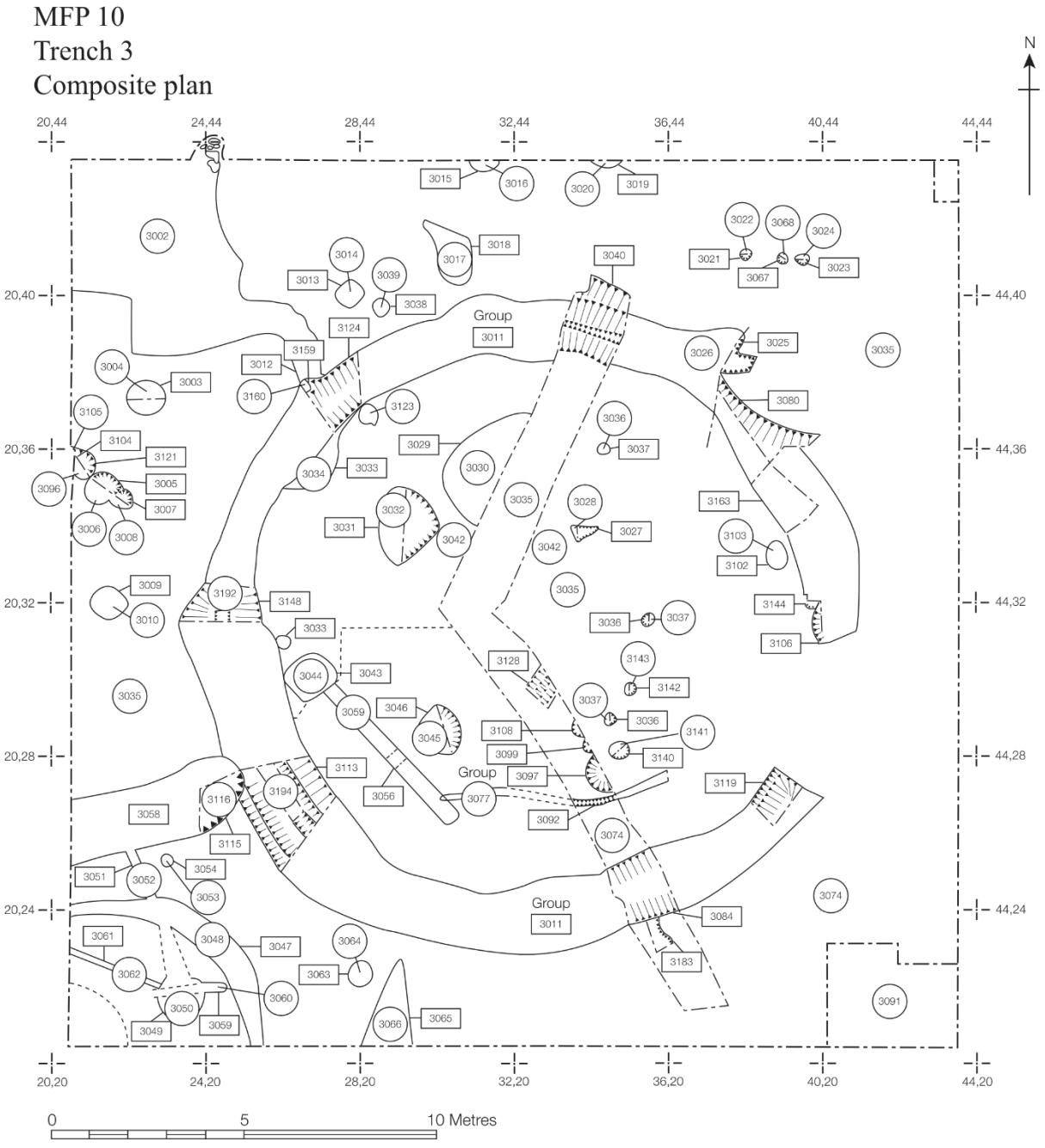



*Figure 55. Trench MFP3 plan*

South-west of the enclosure were several intercutting pits and gullies all shallow with few finds, the largest being 1.05m wide and 0.25m deep containing a large amount of animal bone and a human femur. Nearby a pit contained two very dark fills and the base was lined with a red ceramic material identified as a collapsed pot covering the bottom and all sides of the pit suggesting it had been purposely placed there. This appears to be a large storage jar or

possibly a container for votive deposits with the surrounding features playing some function in relation to this.

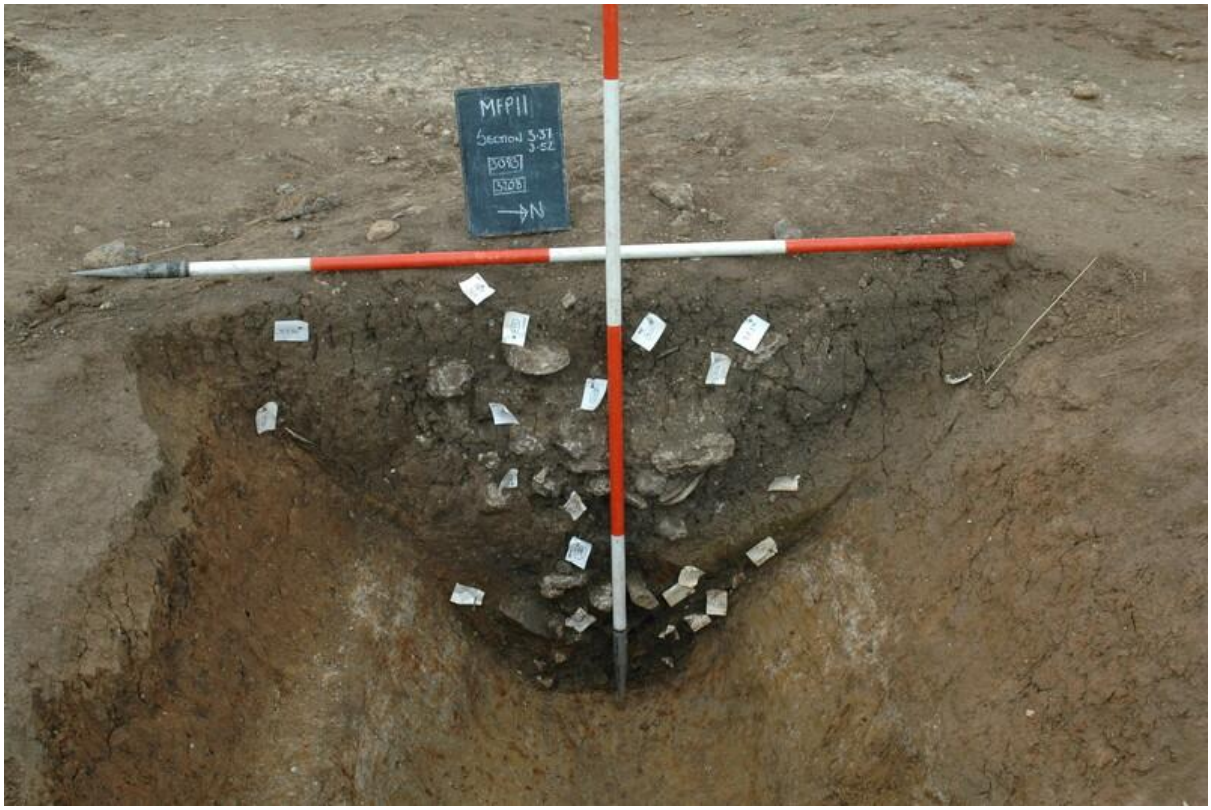



*Figure 56. The MFP enclosure ditch*

Trench MFP3 produced over 100 Small Finds, 12 of copper-alloy including four coins, two pins and an earring, a fragment of a quern stone, four fragments of clay loom weight and fifteen iron objects including a penannular brooch, an early Iron Age swans neck pin, a ring, a fragment of a knife and a possible chape. Also excavated were 4,781 sherds of pottery of which 3,938 were Iron Age.

A dense cluster of intercutting pits showing in the geophysics and located between trenches MFP5 and MFP6 was the focus for trench MFP4, Figure 57. The excavation was hindered by the presence of an electricity pylon and the full extent of the pits was not established, they probably continued to the west. Despite them being a tight cluster neither the geophysics nor excavation identified any form of physical boundary around them. Variations in the natural across the eastern part of the site are demonstrated by trenches MFP2 and MFP4. In the former a thick layer of clay, up to 2m deep, overlay the bedrock whereas in trench MFP4 the topsoil was only 0.1m to 0.2m thick before the Corallian sands and limestone were encountered.

MFP 11
Trench 4

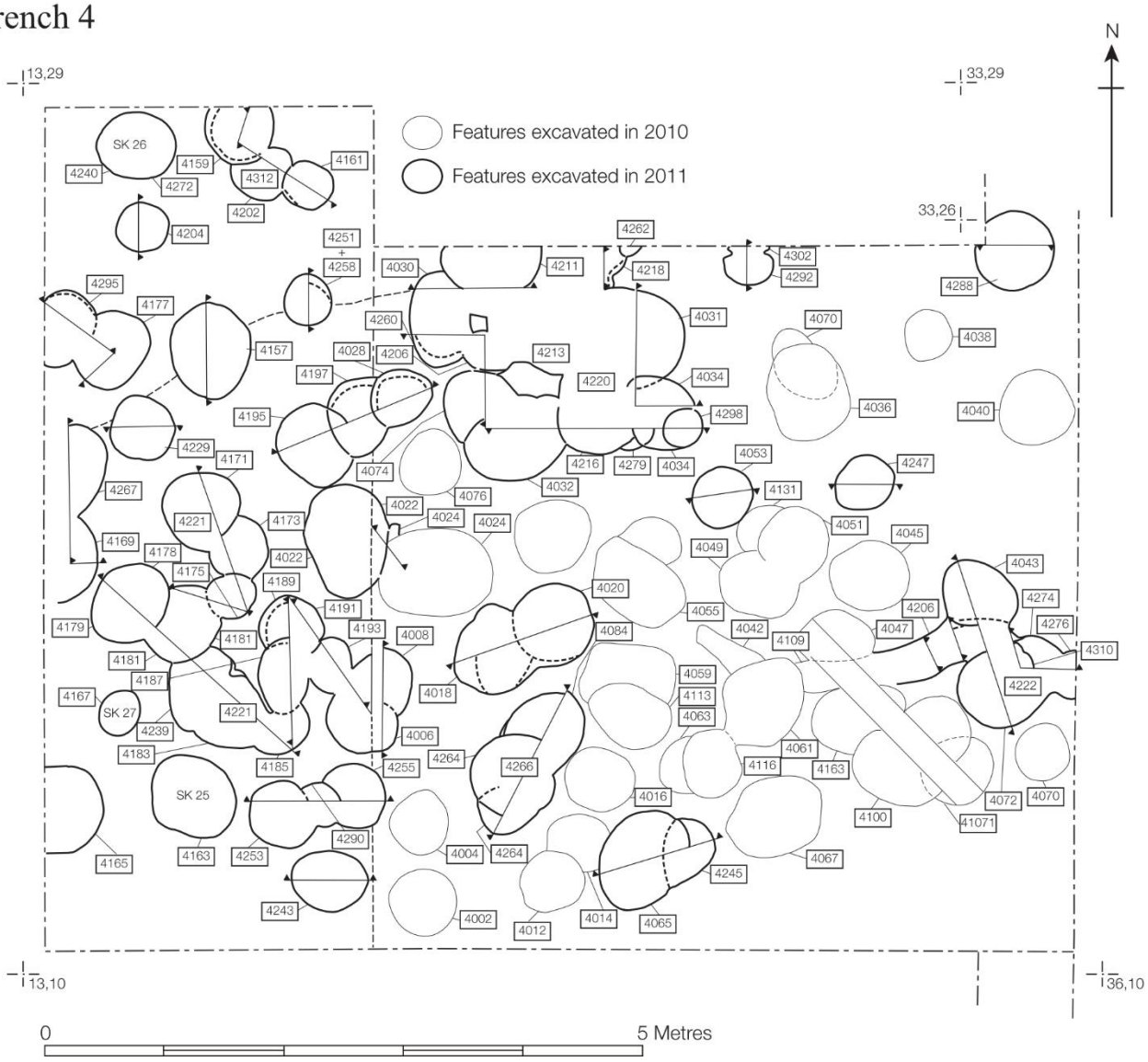



*Figure 57. Trench MFP4 plan*

Many of the pits were shallow with some surviving only to a depth of 0.1m to 0.2m and many less than 0.5m deep. The deeper pits had cut into the more solid geology whereas many of the shallower pits were represented only by a scoop in the bedrock. The shallow depth of the topsoil suggests the soil was much deeper during the prehistoric occupation of the area, but natural erosion or agricultural practices have lowered the soil since then and pottery, animal bone and human bone were recovered from the topsoil. However, while there had been truncation it appears the shallow pits were always comparatively shallow as much deeper pits survived across all parts of the trench and often next to shallow pits.

A total of 109 pits were excavated from which 12,058 early and middle Iron Age pottery sherds were recovered and over 1,500 individual fragments of animal bone. A further 38 sherds of Roman pottery were found in the top contexts of the pits which were considered to be residual from later activity on the site. Only 18 pits survived as discrete cuts, the remainder cutting or being cut by at least one other pit. The density of the intercutting pits may suggest that the earlier pits were no longer evident at the surface when further pits were

dug, which might indicate a period of transient or seasonal use. These pits, rich in domestic waste and other artefacts, stand in marked contrast to those found in trench MFP2 which appear to have been mostly dug for clay extraction and then left open to fill naturally over time.

The eighteen discrete pits varied in depth from 0.11m to 0.95m and these provided the most secure contexts being undisturbed by later recutting. Many contained large quantities of pottery, the most with 480 sherds recovered from its three fills, while another two contained 233 and 156 sherds respectively. One of these also contained large amounts of animal bone including a horse skull from the latest of the three fills which had been placed upside down on top of stones. Further stones surrounding the skull appeared to support it.

The remainder of the pits all cut or were cut by at least one other pit, many of them conjoining resulting in large clusters of pits, the largest of these comprised 16 intercutting pits, possibly providing the longest temporal sequence although it was comparatively artefact poor. While it is unnecessary to describe all the pit groups here, a small number of typical examples follows. A large group of at least 13 intercutting pits were clustered in the north of the trench and continued under the baulk. For some the surface plan had been mostly obliterated and earlier pits were possibly lost through recutting and it is probable that smaller clusters of pits amalgamated over time. Many of the pits were little more than shallow cuts with at least three being only 0.1m deep. The deepest of the pits at 0.61m produced 363 pottery sherds from its single fill. Only two of these pits had small finds, one with worked bone, a stone object and a *micraster sp.* fossil, and the other containing a worked flint with six articulated cattle vertebrae. A further 22 fragments of unfused vertebral epiphyses indicate further vertebrae were once present and that the animal was a juvenile.

Within some of the groups the sequence of cutting was clear. For example, a series of three intercutting pits in the centre of the trench ran in a linear pattern southwest to northeast with the earliest and latest identifiable. A relatively large number of pottery sherds were recovered from all three pits and two of them contained small quantities of human bone while all three had small finds including bronze objects and quern stones. Four other intercutting pits also ran approximately southwest to northeast through the trench. The fills of three of them each contained a single sherd of Roman pottery, all containing a comparatively low number of pottery sherds and animal bone with a single human bone recovered from one.

There were some cases of just two pits intercutting, for example one of two large pits towards the west of the trench contained a single artefact rich fill with 200 sherds of Iron Age pottery and possible special deposits of a single horse bone and a chicken spur. A bronze fragment and four *micraster sp.* fossils were also recovered. One of two other intercutting pits in the northwest of the trench contained a deposit of burnt stone, burnt pottery and charcoal although the lack of ashy deposits makes it uncertain if these were from a hearth. The bottom fill contained 119 sherds, with the upper fill having a single deer bone, a worked stone object, worked bone, and an iron object. The second of the pits had 92 sherds and 126 sherds from its two fills with a fragment of deer antler and a worked bone from one.

Other than the pits, trench MFP4 contained a ditch, two postholes and five possible graves. The ditch was shallow and curvilinear ditch running east-west for approximately 5.6m in the south-east of the trench with both ends terminating within the trench. The width varied throughout from 0.4m where it terminated in the west to a maximum of 1m in the east, the depth ranged from 0.16m to 0.25m and the terminals were rounded. It underlies several

groups of pits and is cut by one and cuts one. The fill was found to be similar across all five slots and was relatively artefact poor with 152 sherds of Iron Age pottery and 12 animal bone fragments recovered from the entire length of the feature. The two small postholes, approximately 0.17m in diameter and 0.2m deep, cut through the fills of pits within the largest clusters and through the ditch. The purpose of both the postholes and the ditch is unknown.

Seven cut features were found to contain juvenile and young adult inhumations suggesting that the area was used as a cemetery for a period. In all cases the graves were respected by pits although two of the graves cut through earlier pits, one containing a tightly contracted burial of a male aged between 17 and 19 years old, Figure 58 <SK21>. The relationship between the pit and grave is not clear, however, as the finds from the pit could be considered as special deposits perhaps related to the burial. These included 139 sherds of pottery, horse bone, possible cremated material, at least 3 foetal pigs and bird bones. Similarly, two other pits which are cut by another of the graves contained horse bones and an almost complete corvid.

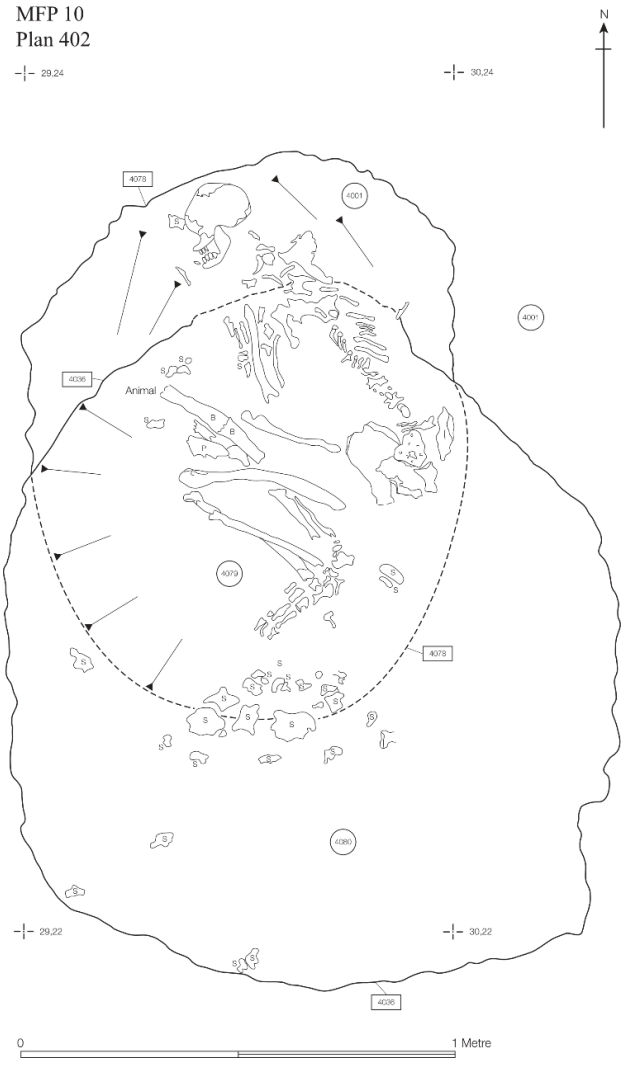



*Figure 58. Trench MFP4: a crouched burial (SK21)*

One of the burials was recovered from a circular pit 2m in diameter which appears to follow the outline of a possible earlier pit. The skeleton <SK25> was well preserved and had been deposited directly onto the bedrock. Unlike the other burials, which had been tightly contracted, this skeleton, a female young adult aged 18 to 22 years, was almost fully extended with on arm outstretched and appeared to have been unceremoniously thrown into the pit, Figure 59. Iron slag, an unidentified iron object and a crucible with copper slag were recovered within the grave fill along with a fossil *micraster*. The fill of the earlier pit contained an iron plate, quern stone and a further *micraster*. Mixing of the deposits from the earlier pit cannot be ruled out.




*Figure 59. The burial of a female young adult <SK25> on the bottom of a shallow pit*

A more damaged skeleton in the northwest of the trench was that of a juvenile which had been placed in a tightly crouched position directly onto bedrock. A bronze ring was found very close to the throat and might have been worn around the neck. The grave appears to have been a recut of an earlier pit. An unidentified bronze object and a worked bone were recovered from the fill. The fill from the earlier pit was found to contain 233 sherds of Iron Age pot and four sherds of Roman pot. A dog tooth and horse metapodial were also recovered. A possible further disturbed grave, 0.4m deep and cut by a pit was found to contain six adult human bones, along with horse bones, water vole bone, an iron pin and a crucible fragment.

Burials of children were also present although these do not appear to have been in formally cut graves. For example, the fragmentary remains of a badly plough-damaged infant burial were discovered in a shallow scoop cut into the bedrock, just to the northwest of an adult burial. The remains of a neonate were recovered from a pit which had been cut centrally through the fill of earlier pit into which the body had been placed. A single *micraster sp.* fossil, horse and bird bones were also recovered along with bones from domesticated species although admixing of the deposits from the earlier pit cannot be ruled out. Three unarticulated bones from an infant three to six months old were recovered from the second pit

in a sequence of three intercutting pits, together with a loom weight and two Roman pot sherds.

Individual disarticulated human bone, both adult and infant was also recovered from Iron Age contexts. Finds of disarticulated human bone down-slope in Trench MFP3 suggests that more of the pits may once have contained burials and the bones have moved. In most cases possibly special deposits of crucible fragments, metal objects, in particular bronze objects, or bone tools were recovered with the human bone.

It is interesting to note that the adult burials were undisturbed within an area of intense pit digging activity. This suggests that the graves were respected in some way and that possibly some form of grave maker might have been present or that the graves were placed on the periphery of the ongoing activity at the time of burial.

Six complete or near complete skeletons were subjected to scientific analyses. These were three from Trench MFP4, one from Trench MFP6, one from Trench MF36 and one from Harding's excavation of the temple area in the 1960s. Radiocarbon dates showed that all six were buried between the years 408 to 166 cal BCE, middle Iron Age which matches the majority of the pottery. Two of the burials could have taken place at the same time, between 408 and 352 cal BCE and another two between 361 and 166 cal BCE. Three of the skeletons were male and three female and all were either juveniles or adolescents. DNA showed that none of the six were related. Isotopes showed that five of the six grew up locally and the sixth person was from further afield although it could not be established from where. This is interesting because the five 'locals' were all respectfully buried in a crouched position within graves whereas the 'newcomer' seems to have been rather casually thrown into a pit, Figure 59.

Osteological analysis of the Iron Age burials and disarticulated bone from across the site (Boston, this website) indicates a minimum number of individuals of 39, seven articulated burials, four disturbed burials and 28 with single features. The age range of the burials, eight to 22 years, is unusually low for Iron Age populations. They were generally in poor health, with all of them showing evidence of either chronic respiratory disease, or stunted growth resulting from a poor diet when young. SK21, who had healed spondylolysis and chest infection, had a very distinctive wear pattern on his teeth indicating using his moth as a 'third 'hand' perhaps to process leather or reeds. Two had healed wounds on their skull.

The 'outsider', SK25, had a healed cranial fracture and a chronic respiratory disease that was long term and still affecting her at death causing the growth of new bone on her ribs and leg bones. She showed stunted growth, 1.54 metres tall compared to the average of 1.62 metres. This young woman must have been in severe pain and considering that she wasn't local and her disrespectful raises the possibility that she might have been a slave.

Several of the disarticulated long bones showed some interesting post-mortem alterations. Firstly very fine cut marks which suggest defleshing or filleting of the flesh after death but when the corpse was still fresh, Figure 60. One young adult's cranium showed cuts which could represent scalping. A small number of long bones also had their ends smashed probably with a stone, again when the corpse was fresh, Figure 61. This sort of evidence is part of the wider discussion of Iron Age burial rites and their complex relationship with the dead and the afterworld (Madgwick, R. 2008).



*Figure 60. Cut marks on a long bone (photo: Ceri Boston)*




*Figure 61. The smashed end of a long bone.*

Although the evidence from this area of the site, the eastern prehistoric area, suggests a series of possibly ritual enclosures that appear not to be domestic in the sense of people living there, there is considerable evidence from within the pits for a settlement having been nearby. This is despite there being no evidence of an Iron Age settlement from the excavations, the geophysical survey or from aerial photographic evidence of the surrounding area. It has been shown, however, that within the wider area of the Vale during the Iron age there were a series of settlements, both enclosed and unenclosed, enclosures and field systems (Wintle 2013; Wintle et al 2017), as well as the major Iron Age settlement at Abingdon (Thomas 2026).

In addition to the large quantities of pottery and animal bone from everyday activities, small quantities of daub, some with wattle marks, recovered from at least two pits indicate more permanent structures of some sort had been present in the vicinity and fallen into disuse. Several of the objects recovered from the pits were still serviceable, similarly bronze was a valuable resource that could be melted down and reused, suggesting the some of the objects recovered from the pits were intended as special deposits. Overall, the objects from the pits give an insight into activities being carried out nearby and also provide proxy evidence for a possible settlement that is otherwise lacking.

Evidence for domestic activities includes grain processing in the form of quern stones from six pits. Analysis of environmental remains shows that both emmer and spelt wheat were present through the Iron Age and Roman periods with an increasing dominance of spelt together with barley in the later period. Remains preserved within the waterlogged pit deposits in Trench MF21 include fig, grape and Box leaves.

Metal working is shown by decorative bronze objects including fragments of bronze sheet and jewellery, as well as iron objects. Support that such objects might have been manufactured on site comes from the recovery of crucible fragments, copper-alloy and iron slag and iron hammer scale. Nineteen bone tools indicate leather working, recovered from pits together with awls and highly polished animal long bones from that were possibly used for burnishing leather. Evidence for weaving is in the form of a spindle whorl, loom weights and a bone weaving tool.

A total of over 20,000 complete and fragmentary animal bones were recovered, the largest group being ovicaprid (domesticated sheep and goats) with cattle second. There were also some horse bones as well as other species. A few examples of complete animals were excavated including a complete cow, a sheep and three foetal pigs in a pit together with what has been identified as corvid (the Crow family), all possible votive offerings. Many rodent bones were found in pits, a large number of which are water vole. While these may have fallen into the pits it is possible that they held some special significance to Iron Age people due to their association with water and wet places. It is interesting to note that within Segsbury hillfort, a site on the chalk Ridgeway which is not wet, bones of three different water voles were found in pits (Lock, *et al.* 2005; 117 and Mulville and Powell online).

A total of 25 fossil echinoids, of which 24 were *micraster* sp., were recovered from the pits and graves within trench MFP4. Although these do occur naturally within the local Corallian limestone such a concentration does suggest that these had been collected and deliberately deposited, perhaps holding some special significance. Similar fossils were also found within the excavations of the nearby Frilford late Roman/Saxon cemetery and prompted the excavator to comment:

‘The only other objects found in the graves were a number of echini (fossil sea-urchins). I was at first inclined to think that they had been placed there on purpose, and Mr. Henry Balfour suggested to me that as they are known as ‘fairy loaves’ in some parts of the country they may have been conventionalized offerings to the dead, taking the place of food. Further experience of the site has inclined me rather to the view that the presence of these fossils was due purely to chance, as they do occur in the rock. We have in a few cases found them *in situ* but they were certainly more common in the graves than elsewhere, and the fact that they appear to have been placed opposite the joints of the skeleton would seem to suggest that there was some method employed in the arrangement.’ (Dudley-Buxton 1921; 91).

Trench MFP5 was opened over another circular enclosure shown on the geophysics to be similar to that in Trench MFP3 although it turned out to be more complex. The internal area is smaller being *c.* 11m in diameter and the outer ditch appears to be relatively wide due to it being made up of more than one intercutting ditches, Figure 62. Around the circuit of the enclosure these varied in number, size and shape and suggest several phases of reworking the definition of the enclosure. To the east the enclosure ditch was made up of two ditches; an outer ditch which was 1.6m wide by 1.2m deep and filled by a dark silty deposit from which large amounts of burnt animal bone and charcoal were recovered, and an inner ditch which had steeply sloping sides and was approximately 1m deep. Further to the north-east the enclosure comprised two circuits with the earlier ditch later cut by the outer ditch. The enclosure continued as a series of shallow ditches and gullies in the north comprising an inner ditch which was 0.7m wide and 0.45m deep and cut down to natural. This appears to have cut a curvilinear ditch with shallow sloping sides and flat base, 0.28m deep.

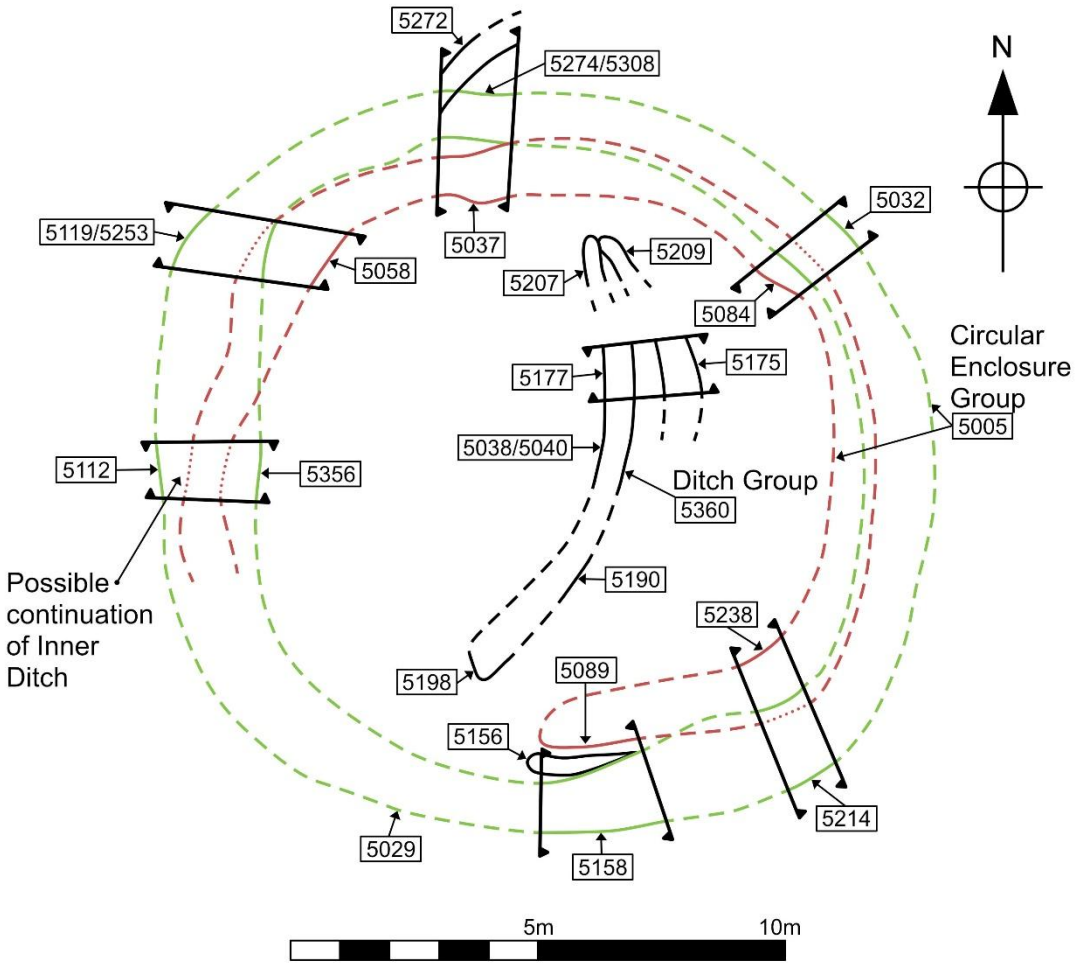



*Figure 62. The enclosure within Trench MFP5 showing the two ditch phases The ditch shown in green is later than that shown in red.*

Outside the enclosure in the north-west of the trench a series of what appeared to be small, possibly intercutting ditches were investigated. These showed that while some of the features might have been deliberately cut, the entire area had the appearance of a natural but heavily eroded surface probably formed through water puddling and erosion, and rapidly overlain with a deposit of clay 0.2m to 0.6m thick. In the north-east of the trench a fill from an irregular-shaped pit contained a loom weight and numerous finds of fired clay.

A number of possible postholes 0.3m to 0.50m in diameter were also investigated within and outside the enclosure. Some were found to be shallow, probably truncated features, for example one at only 0.07m deep, others were more substantial at 0.22m deep. Four postholes in the south-west corner of the trench appear to form a square of approximately 1.2m in size, possible some form of four-post building. Trench MFP5 produced 2,953 sherds of pottery of which 2,876 were Iron Age.

Trench MFP6 was the northern most trench of the eastern group and positioned to investigate the ditches of two enclosures and a series of pits shown on the geophysics. The northern most enclosure was irregularly shaped and joined a smaller, third enclosure ditch, while the southern one was D-shaped, all date to the early/middle Iron Age, Figure 63. The ditches of both enclosures were re-cut several times, not always on the same alignment, which produced a complex of ditches across much of the trench. More than 30 pits and *c.* 20 postholes, all Iron Age, were also excavated which added to the complexity of excavating and interpreting this trench. It is clear that considerable plough damage and soil erosion down slope has truncated most of these features so that in many cases only the basal contexts survive. Topsoil averaged 0.3m deep before the bedrock. There were no Roman features in MFP6 and excavations revealed an early Saxon building (sometimes known as Sunken Featured Buildings or SFBs), important in being the only excavated evidence for Saxon activity in the area we investigated.

The large northern most enclosure appears to be sub-rectangular but with only three sides on the geophysics and encloses an estimated area of 20m by 30m. The ditch varies between *c.* 0.6m and 1m wide and 0.35m to 0.40m deep and curves through the centre of the trench from north to southeast. It seems to respect the boundary of the D-shaped enclosure to its southwest, so was either contemporary with it, or was created later than it. However, this ditched enclosure must predate the small enclosure ditch to the southeast as it is cut by it. The ditch cuts at least two earlier pits and there are a number of circular and irregular shaped pits contained within the enclosure, including approximately 16 that were not excavated due to time limitations. Whether these pits were largely contemporary with the enclosure or predated it, is difficult to gauge.

The small enclosure ditch to the southeast was a maximum of *c.* 1m wide and between 0.25m and 0.3m deep. On the inner side of the enclosure was a large pit which the enclosure ditch diverts around narrowing to 0.4m to intentionally miss it. This pit was truncated but survived to be 1.8m to 2m in diameter at the top and c, 0,35m deep and its western side was reinforced by stones to differentiate it from the ditch fill. It contained a young female crouched inhumation, aged 8 to 10 years and dated to 361-166 cal BCE, 87 sherds of Iron Age pottery and a lot of animal bone. This suggests that the ditch diggers knew about the grave, which may have been marked, and respected it.

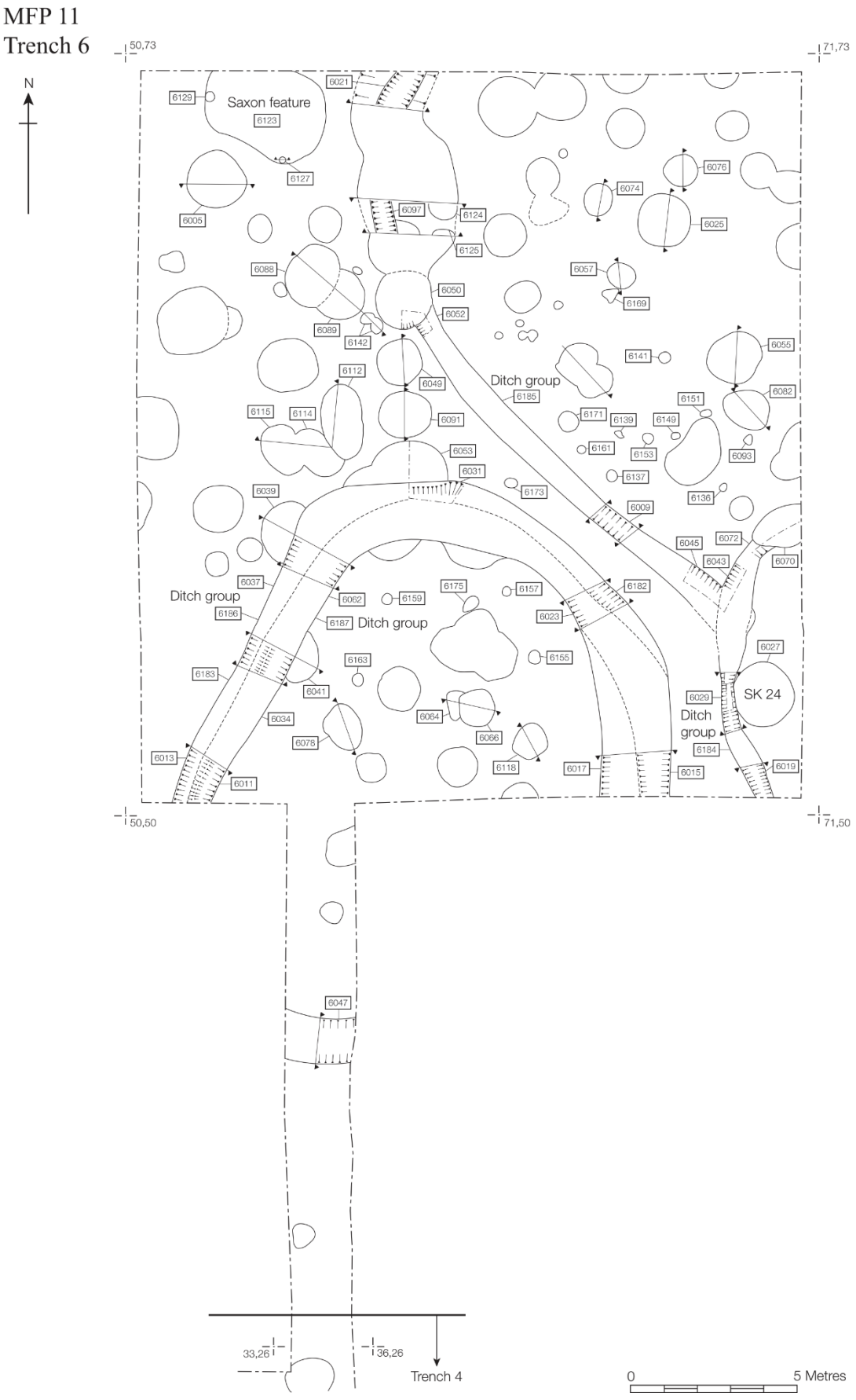



*Figure 63. Trench MFP6 plan*

The D-shaped enclosure in the south of the trench, half of which was exposed, would have originally enclosed an area of approximately 17m by 15m. The ditch was recut creating a double-ditch profile, the first one being partly obscured but probably between 1.2m and 2m wide at the top with a surviving depth of between 0.4m and 0.6m. The recut of the ditch varies in width along its length, ranging from *c.* 0.7m to 1.5m wide with a surviving depth is *c.* 0.5m. Both phases of this ditch cut through a number of Iron Age pits suggesting that many of the pits inside the enclosure may not have been contemporary with it and may represent earlier activity.

Other than the enclosure ditches, a total of 32 Iron Age pits and *c.* 20 postholes were excavated in this trench, a number of them intercutting. The pit sizes range from *c.* 1.75m to *c*. 0.75 diameter, with an average depth of *c.* 0.70m representing only their lower fills. Most of the postholes are within each of the two large enclosures and are probably Iron Age in date. They form a cluster within each enclosure and, if contemporary, may represent internal structures although no obvious patterns could be identified

This area seems to have been beyond the activity associated with the temple complex to the west as very little Roman evidence was found here. Of importance, however, in understanding the chronology of the site overall was the discovery of an early Saxon SFB and a range of associated artefacts. It is unlikely that this domestic building would have been an isolated example and there is evidence that it is the southerly most edge of a substantial Saxon settlement. The field to the north of Trendles field has shown several sub-rectangular positive geophysical anomalies which are probably further SFBs (Johnson 2002). Further north still, on the other side of the A338 Wantage road, is the well-known Frilford late Roman/early Saxon cemetery (Dudley Buxton 1921) and the extensive Saxon settlement more recently identified by an evaluation (Cass and Ford 2008).

In the northwest corner of MFP6 was the SFB, the cut of which was sub-rectangular *c.* 3.0m by 3.8m in size with a maximum depth of *c.* 0.45m into a central area which was sunken deeper than the surroundings. Like all other cut features in this trench this was truncated by plough damage and soil erosion. Within the building were two small postholes both positioned at the edge of the cut feature which must have formed part of the structure. One measured *c.* 0.15m diameter by 0.05m deep and the other 0.3m to 0.25m by 0.45m deep.

Overall within trench MFP6 a total of 2,850 sherds were found, the vast majority of which were Iron Age in date (2,417), accompanied by some early Saxon sherds (409) and a handful of Roman sherds (24). This trench only produced 42 small finds. Because this area lacks any observable Roman features or substantial Roman layers, it is not surprising that there are only eight Roman coins and only two copper alloy fragments. Within the fills of the Saxon building there were numerous finds that confirmed its date including early Saxon pottery sherds, some being the distinctive Saxon ‘grass-tempered’ fabrics. As small plain Saxon sherds can look very similar to Iron Age pottery fabrics, it may be that some of the less diagnostic pottery assigned to the Iron Age period might also be Saxon. However, those assigned to the Saxon period in this assemblage do have distinctive early Saxon fabrics or forms. Other finds include an early Saxon composite bone/antler double sided comb and seven out of the total eight Roman coins from the whole trench, included two pierced ones. The piercing of coins to use as a form of jewellery is a distinctive early Saxon trait. Other finds included a bone awl and a bone needle; two pottery spindle whorls (one being of fired clay and the other made from a cut down Roman pottery base); a stone bead; and a quantity of burnt material. Environmental sampling of the fills inside the feature found barley, eel and

frog bones and some eggshell fragments which may indicate aspects of the diet of the Saxon settlers living on this part of the site.

**Memory and religious practice**

It is clear from the evidence presented above and, in more detail, elsewhere within this publication that activity in and around Trendles field spanned a long period of time across the later prehistoric and Romano-British periods. We have also argued that throughout this period the key focus of the site has been one of religious practices involving worship and ritual rather than being more profanely domestic. Having said that, however, we need to accept two points. Firstly, that the boundary between religious and profane thoughts and actions was probably very different in the past than today with the distinction being much more blurred. Even so, specifically religious places and structures can be identified in both the Iron Age and Roman periods. Secondly, although Marcham seems to have been a rural place of religious significance throughout the period there were settlements nearby from which the populations were drawn for worship. The domestic nature of some of the material in the Iron Age pits argues for a settlement nearby and farmsteads are known from the surrounding Vale. In the Roman period there are villas nearby and the important town of Abingdon is within a few kilometres.

Here we can recognise two themes which seem to be fundamental to the interpretation of the evidence presented here. The first is the role of memory and the second the changing character of religious practices. Memory is a slippery concept and involves not only the brain's ability to store and recall facts but also experiences. Within an archaeological context we can argue that memory plays a central role in the much-used idea of 'continuity', or re-use of a place, concepts often used in a very loose way without definition. While memory resides in the individual, we can also see that it is socially constructed and manipulated so that remembering people and events become binding factors within social groups and are important aspects of building and maintaining a community. This is obviously multi-scalar so that certain social memories may be local while others may be at a much larger scale, even national or international. What interests us here as archaeologists are the physical manifestations of memory, the way that the materiality of places and buildings can act as mnemonics or triggers to remember people and events from the past (Gosden and Lock 1998) and within a religious context remembering deities and what they stand for.

The second central theme is the changing character and physical circumstances of religious practices between the Iron Age and Roman periods. Here we can also differentiate between personal worship carried out as individuals or small groups of individuals and larger scale activities that would be conducted at the community or larger scale. Both forms of worship, personal and group, would involve recognised rituals and take place within or at recognised places of religious significance and perhaps at significant times. The challenge here is to assess how the evidence at Marcham, outlined above, can help to elucidate these two themes.

It has long been recognised that much of the detail of Iron Age religion is poorly understood (Wait 1985; Webster 1995) as are the burial practices of the period (Madgwick 2008). According to the classical authors aspects of so-called 'barbarian' religion may have involved Druids and sacred groves with trees and mistletoe although archaeological evidence for these is difficult to pin down. We are on firmer ground with other possible religious practices such as the deposition of hoards within the ground and the importance of water and watery places as foci for votive offerings (Bradley 1998). It is now well established, however, that within Iron Age, and earlier prehistoric studies the deposition of material into pits, and to a lesser

extent ditches, represents evidence for religious/ritual practice. This is based on the acceptance that ritual involves the repeated actions of routine practices, doing the same thing repeatedly, in this case involving the deposition of certain groups of material culture within dug features. This process has been called 'structured deposition' and the resulting evidence 'special deposits', as introduced within and Iron Age context by Cunliffe (1983, 156-7).

In a later paper Cunliffe (1992) expanded on this theme to outline seeing the deposition of material within the ground as propitiation, an act of appeasing the Gods, seen as essential for a community whose survival depends on the annual agricultural cycle: 'the belief in the power of the chthonic deities in ensuring fertility of crops was a widespread theme in Indo-European religion' (*ibid*. 79). The inherent ambiguities between recognising ritually deposited material and what may be considered as more profane discarded domestic rubbish were explored by Hill (1995). He showed through detailed analysis of excavated material that the contents of pits and ditches, particularly their terminals, was deposited in a structured way rather than randomly.

Many of the pits at Marcham seem to fit this pattern, especially those in Trenches MFP4 and MF14. The range of material within them, including pottery, animal bones of which some were articulated, human remains and other forms material culture, fit the general pattern of accepted ritual deposition recognised across much of central England and further afield. While it is argued for some other sites, e.g. Danebury (Cunliffe 1992), that this deposition was the secondary use of the pit with its initial function being for grain storage, that is not the case for many of the Marcham pits. Here, many pits were very shallow, even allowing for truncation through erosion, and for the deeper ones the nature of the bedrock would not facilitate grain storage unless the pit was lined for which there was no evidence. This suggests that the pits were dug primarily to act as a receptacle for votive offerings an act which may also invoke social memory as implied by the intercutting of pits. The cutting of a new pit partially through a filled in older pit, as is witnessed many times in trenches MFP4 and MF14, could have been an act of connecting with the ancestors who were responsible for the earlier pit and had witnessed good past harvests. Whether the worship based on pit deposition was an act carried out by individuals, a family group or the wider community we will never know although it seems likely that another element of Iron Age religious practice would have involved larger groups and that is the use of enclosures defined by banks and ditches.

As outlined above there is convincing evidence from Marcham for a series of Iron Age enclosures that appear not to have been domestic in the sense that they were occupied and contained roundhouses but were sacred places where ritual practices took place. In the eastern area of the site the geophysics shows seven or more circular and sub-circular ditched enclosures and at least two larger ones of sub-rectangular form. While there is no evidence for roundhouses within these there is considerable evidence for the deposition of material culture within the ditch terminals and within pits in the interiors. The most impressive enclosure, however, is the large barrel-shaped feature in the west of the site identified by geophysical survey and explored through Trenches MFNA1, 2 and 3.

The characteristics of this enclosure are very unusual and elsewhere we have explored the possibility of it being a form of *viereckschanze*, a type of ritual enclosure known on the continent (Lock and Raven 2023). The use of this term is somewhat controversial although it is widely accepted that the act of enclosing is a key element of Iron Age sacred sites. Within a wider European context, delimiting a specific space is seen by Brunaux (1988, 7) as an

‘essential feature’ in creating a sacred place of ‘assembly, passage and encounter’, with entrances having a particular importance where ‘the holiest forces meet the pressure of the profane’ (*ibid*. 27), hence their often-preferred orientation to the east, as we see with all the Marcham enclosures. Webster’s (1995, 447) survey of Classical accounts of Celtic sacred places concludes that ‘the formalized structuring of space, incorporating enclosing works, is suggested by most texts’ reinforcing that ‘enclosure was the primary and indispensable feature of Celtic cult sites’. The unusual shape of the large Marcham enclosure, the internal revetting of its bank, the eastern orientation of the entrance and the lack of domestic evidence within it all suggest that it was a major focus for religious and ritual activities involving groups of people rather than individuals.

There are some interesting and convincing indicators of social memory acting over a long period of time. The pottery dating of the Iron Age activity across the site indicates that it was mainly within the middle of the period, perhaps 400 to 150 BCE with a little evidence for an early and a late Iron Age presence. Pre-dating this is the middle Bronze Age rectangular enclosure, two sides of which show on aerial photographs as confirmed in Trenches MF3 and MF12. This was replaced centuries later by the barrel-shaped Iron Age enclosure, presumably the location of the earlier one being marked by its eroded banks still standing and ditches surviving as hollows in the ground. A similar length of time must have elapsed between the barrel-shaped enclosure being abandoned and the building of the Roman temple. In Trench MFNA1 very early Roman material was found in the top fills of the enclosure ditch, again indicating that it survived as a visible feature which could be filled.

That the builders of the temple were aware of the earlier features is convincingly shown by the layout of the temple complex. It is aligned east-west with its centre line running from the eastern entrance, through the *temenos* entrance to the major shrine in Trench MF36 which is positioned centrally between two large Iron Age pits. Roman pottery within the top 0.5m of fills of these pits shows that they were open to that depth when the temple was being laid out on the ground. The distance between the temple entrance and the *temenos* entrance is 44 passus (65 metres), the same as the distance from the temenos entrance to the shrine which is unlikely to be coincidental. It is clear that the Roman surveyors who were laying out the site were not just guided by practical concerns but also had respect for the history and significance of the location based on some form of social memory linked to what they could see on the ground. This Iron Age/Roman continuity ending in a temple is not unusual (Smith 2001) with well-known examples being Hayling Island (King and Soffe 1998), Thetford (Gregory 1991) and the nearby Oxfordshire site at Woodeaton (Harding 1987).

Once the temple complex was built and functioning as a major cult centre attracting visitors from further afield, the personal experience of worship must have been very different from that of the preceding Iron Age period. Group worship was no longer within the various forms of earthen banked and ditched enclosures but now within the impressive stone-built temple and its associated shrines and arena. While we don’t know the details of what sacred performances and rituals occurred within the Marcham enclosures the more formal layout of the temple with its central *cella* and surrounding ambulatory situated within the sacred space of the *temenos* is reflected in many known temples, so called Romano-Celtic temples, across central and southern England (Smith 2016; Woodward 1992). The architectural links between these British temples and those in Gaul are well established (Horne and King 1980), a point of interest here is the unusual form of the arena, possibly a semi-amphitheatre, which also has parallels there (Kamash *et al*. 2010).

Public, or group worship, performances, ceremonies and ritual would have taken place within the arena probably linked to the temple through sacred processions from one to the other. There is also evidence for a more individual worship in the form of votive offerings left at a series of small shrines many positioned around the arena. Here we can see the result of people leaving individual artefacts, varying in value from probably inexpensive to obviously more expensive, at both informal small shrines as in Trench MF24 and more formally constructed shrines as in Trench MF36. This more personal worship, in contrast to the formal proceedings within the temple and arena, can be seen as a continuation of the small-scale deposition of offerings within pits in the Iron Age (Fulford 2001). It is likely that the temple complex offered the opportunity to take part in both formal activities presumably at set times of the day, month or year as well as more casual visits where individuals and small groups of people could walk around the site visiting and worshipping at a range of shrines and deities.

There are, of course, many significant questions left unanswered concerning the Roman temple. The two buildings excavated outside the *temenos* wall in Trench MF18 appear to be a workshop producing copper-alloy items for deposition at shrines while next door provides food and drink for visitors. These, together with the rural location of the temple, suggest that people could have travelled a long way to worship there. If so, was there accommodation on site for overnight stays? It is likely that such a large complex would have had resident workers looking after the buildings and maintaining the formal gardens within the *temenos*, alongside resident priests who conducted the services, ceremonies and ritual activities. If so, where did these people live? There are a range of shrines across the site but who were they and the temple itself dedicated to? The complete lack of altar fragments, inscriptions, statues, miniature figurines of deities or their associated animals, and votive plaques etc means we have no direct evidence for which deities were worshipped here. All we have is 'circumstantial' evidence based on the incidence and type of potential votive objects deposited in various places. Objects from the shrine in Trench MF36 suggests Mercury worship but it is usual for a selection of deities to be represented at a large complex like Marcham so that people could choose who to make offerings to.

***Chronological summary***

Other than stray finds of Mesolithic, Neolithic and early Bronze Age flints scattered across the whole site, the earliest evidence for activity is in the middle Bronze Age, *c.* 1,500 BCE. A broken urn was laid in the bottom of the ditch of what was originally probably a rectangular ditched and banked enclosure although we have no dating for the cutting of the ditch itself. There is no contemporary evidence from the enclosure's interior and its function, therefore, remains unknown. What is clear, however, is that the ditches silted up over time but remained as hollows in the ground through the Iron Age and into the Roman periods as artefacts from both were found in the top fills.

The next activity is dated to the Iron Age by pottery from features across the whole site and supported by a series of radiocarbon dates: 550-390 cal BCE from a spread of charcoal in Trench MF2 and six burials dated to between 408 and 166 cal BCE. The pottery shows activity at the site, certainly the digging od pits and ditches, through the early Iron Age and into the late Iron Age although the concentration of use is during the middle of the period, approximately 450 to 150 cal BCE. Within many of the cut features, however, there is evidence for sequence with, for example, the barrel-shaped enclosure in zone MFNA overlying earlier smaller enclosures, the enclosure ditches in the MFP zone being recut and most of the pits in Trench MFP4 being inter-cutting. This shows that the Iron Age use of the site was comparatively constant and intense with many changes.

The ditch of the barrel-shaped enclosure was large, averaging 5m wide at the top and more than 2m deep and only silted up slowly meaning that it remained as a considerable hollow in the ground at the beginning of the Roman period. This is confirmed by late first century CE material being found in its upper fills including distinctive pottery and brooches. Together with evidence cited above for the temple being laid out along a line based on two Iron Age pits these confirm Bradford and Goodchild's suggestion of the religious continuity of the site.

As argued elsewhere (Kamash *et al*. 2010) and above, there is good evidence at Marcham for long term continuity although the actual dating of the construction of the temple is another matter. Bradford and Goodchild's (1939) original dating of the temple to AD80-90 was subsequently disputed by Harding (1987) who preferred a later date in the 2nd century AD. This later date is supported by Smith (2001) based on reinterpreting the evidence from both of the cited reports. He went one further and suggested that the evidence didn't support a religious/ritual interpretation of the Iron Age features underlying the temple so religious continuity is not relevant anyway: 'both of the Frilford (Iron Age) structures can be shown to have very little evidence for a religious interpretation, and as they were situated in an area of extensive Iron Age settlement, they are just as likely to have served a domestic or agricultural function' (*ibid).* Taking into account these new excavations the evidence suggests that Smith is wrong as the 'extensive Iron Age settlement' is not domestic settlement but a landscape of religious/ritual activity into which the two structures of Bradford and Goodchild do not seem out of place.

The late first century material found in the upper fills of the barrel-shaped enclosure show activity at the site that corresponds with Bradford and Goodchild's earlier dating for the temple. This is supported by other evidence, in Trench MF15 a coin of Domitian (AD 81-96) was sealed in the top of an earlier ground surface, below where the floor of the room would have been. Furthermore, the remains of an almost complete Savernake-ware pot of the first to early second century CE was found sealed within the cobbling outside the temple entrance. Therefore, it would be reasonable to place the construction of the temple precinct somewhere between 81 CE to about 120 CE. It is possible that the arena was constructed at approximately the same time as the temple, the two being elements within an integrated complex. This is supported by a radiocarbon date of cal 1 BCE-245 CE from a wooden stake found driven into the natural in the centre of the arena which was perhaps associated with the initial construction of it.

There is evidence for changes being made to the structure of the arena within its possible 400-year lifespan. Not least is the blocking of the southern room and the re-design of both the western and eastern entrances. Whether changes were also made to the temple is more difficult to assess due to the nature of the remains, but the ground plan does suggest that the small, annexed rooms may be a later addition. In the year 391 CE the Emperor Theodosius I decreed the closing of pagan temples and the banning of pagan cults. How long this took to reach the distant province of Britannia we don't know although it may not have taken long as by the late 4$^{th}$ century it seems that the temple was disused and the building in Trench MF2 was constructed. With the demise of the temple in the late fourth century CE so the amphitheatre also fell into disuse as shown by the deposits of material within the arena. Associated with these final days of what was once a significant religious monument were the series of burials dug into the eastern bank encircling the arena radiocarbon dated to cal 347-440 CE and 328-414 CE. Within the site the focus shifted to the large rectangular building of Trench MF2 dated by a coin found within its wall foundation trench and material culture

found within it. The function of this building is unknown although the number of coins and other artefacts within it do suggest some form of votive offerings taking place. It seems to have been short-lived with evidence for it being destroyed by fire within a short time of its construction.

Beyond the site the focus of activity moved to the north where the one excavated Saxon building in Trench MFP6 was the southernmost element of the settlement that developed next to the late Roman and early Saxon cemetery. There is considerable evidence that the ruins of the temple and its *temenos* wall, all stone-built, were extensively robbed of stone. Although it is not known when this took place there are indications of Roman stone being re-used in some of the medieval buildings in the nearby village of Marcham. As for the arena, such a large hollow feature could have taken centuries to fill, and it is interesting that the field name Trendles originates from the Old English *tryndel* meaning round or circular. This could be based solely on the physical remains as the stone-built elements of the arena were not robbed, or also be combined with folk memory of the importance of the site in the past. Whatever memory did exist had faded before the arena was re-discovered by farmer Will Cumber spraying his crops and taking an aerial photograph of a curious large dark green circular crop mark. The rest, as they say, is history.

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