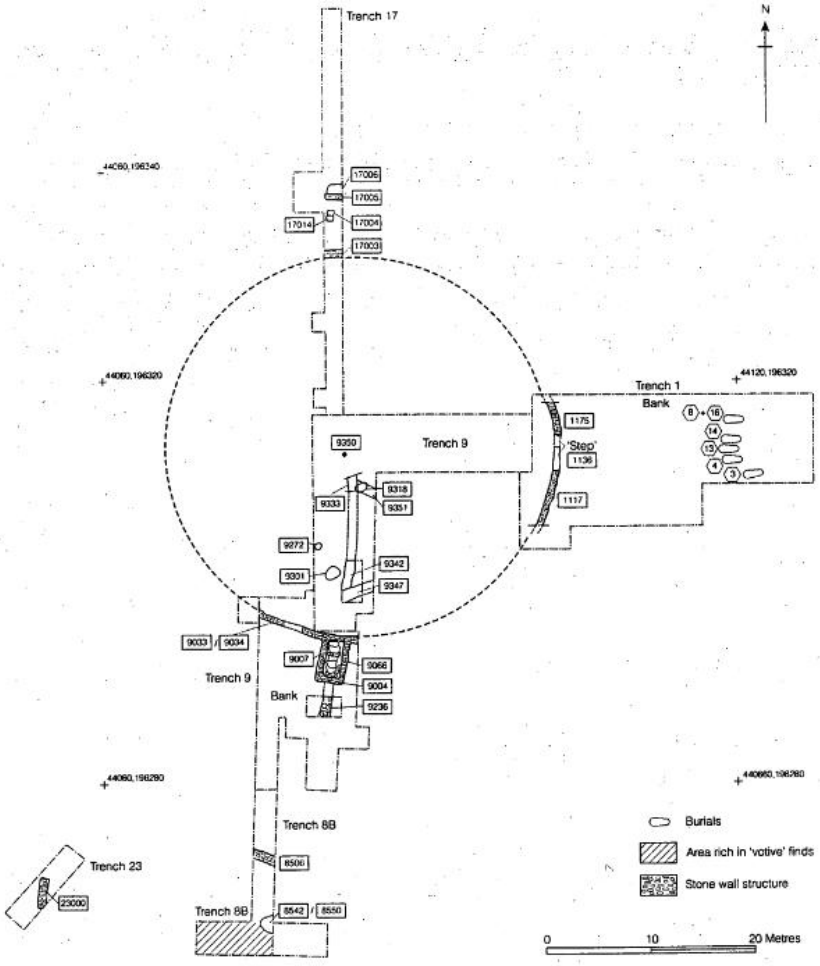
Trench MF1 narrative

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Introduction

Trench 1 was located upon the eastern side of the arena with the aim of exploring what was thought to be the eastern entrance into the arena. This possible entrance was defined by a gap through the bank indicated on the geophysics by a strong negative anomaly. At this point material from the arena formed a 15-metre-wide bank through which a clear passage could be observed.

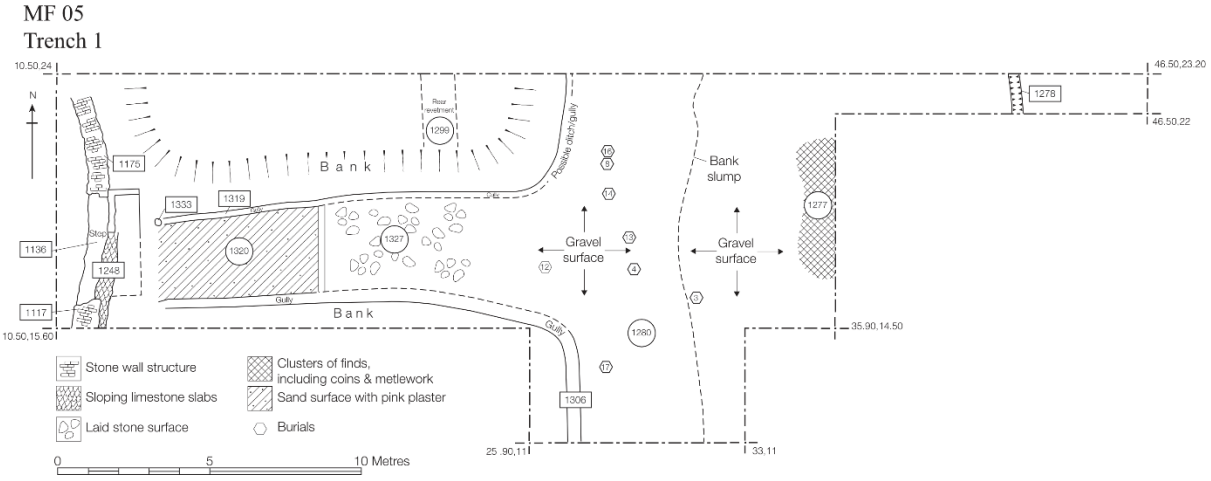
The trench was opened in 2001 to run in tandem with the excavations in trench 9. The east/west section of trench 9 commenced at the approximate centre of the arena spanning across to the east wall and connecting with trench 1. This then provided a unique opportunity to consider the activity within the arena and its relationship with the eastern entrance.



The main arena trenches showing trench MF1 in relation to trenches MF9 and MF17

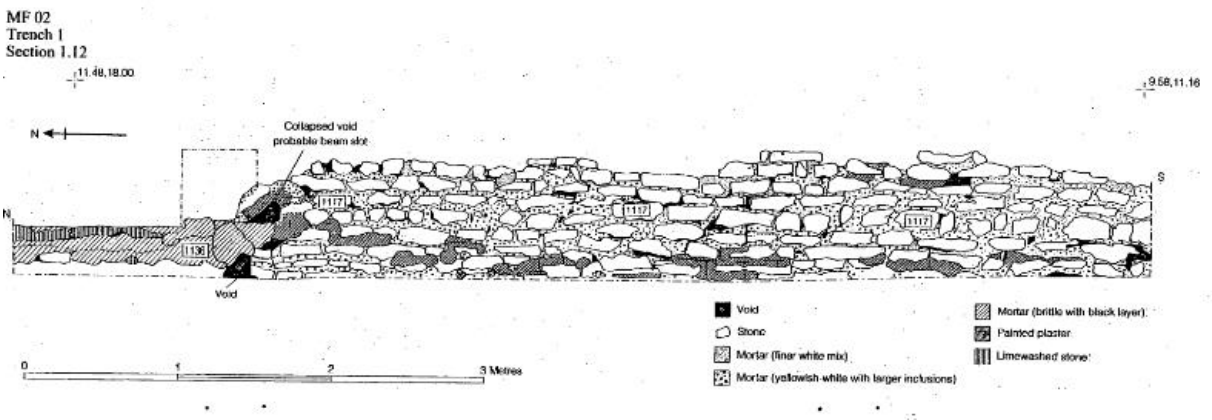
Excavation in trench 1 ran from 2001 through to 2005. During the period 2001–3 work was concentrated primarily upon the area of the negative geophysical anomaly between the bank and over the area of the eastern section of the arena wall. A clearly defined passage was

excavated that identified areas of a carefully prepared gravel and cobble path built on an Iron Age soil surface. The gravel surface marked an important horizon, below which were no Roman finds. This gravel surface was patchy and thin (1-2 cm) but was thought to be deliberately laid to create a walking surface.



Trench MF1

The arena wall [1125] was identified as it approached the entrance passage. The wall was found to rest on bedrock and in places the bedrock had been cut away to accommodate the wall. The wall itself at this point had been lowered to provide a step down into the arena. The wall was constructed from a combination of dressed limestone blocks held in place with mortar. 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 inner surface of the wall was still covered in its upper sections with mortar or coarse plaster which retained traces of red paint that was used to represent ashlar blocks. This decorative application was consistent with findings in sections of the wall excavated in trenches 9 (south) and 17 (north) and 29 (west).



Trench MF1: the arena wall to the south of the 'step'

The southern embankment terminal was defined by a ditch and probably a timber revetment, at least at its corner with the access way [1031]. From small pieces of red painted plaster found in this entrance area it was thought that the wooden revetment on both the north and south embankment terminals may have been plastered and painted red reflecting the treatment of the inner arena wall. This would have provided a very imposing walkway. To

the rear of the bank turf and stone revetment was found. Drainage gullies were positioned at the base of the revetted bank terminals that ran from the entrance of the arena to the back of the embankment

In 2004–2005 the focus of activity shifted to the eastern section of the trench, to an area 10 metres beyond the embankment. This was primarily to explore what would have been the wider entrance to the passage between the embankment terminals. During this investigation several human skeletons were excavated. In total bones from at least 25 individuals were identified, although only three near complete articulated skeletons were found. Articulated partial skeletons represented another four individuals whilst groups of disarticulated bones identified others. All the skeletons were characterised by being buried in shallow graves, aligned east (feet) west (head) and close to the modern ground surface. There was clear evidence of plough damage to these skeletons and in some cases biological processes had further degraded the bones. Two of the skeletons were radiocarbon dated to the 4th century CE. (See the full report on human remains by Dr Paula Levick).

The furthest 5 metres of this trench extension were excavated down to an undisturbed clayey layer immediately above bedrock having removed a deep layer of sandy silt. Stratigraphical relationships and phasing were difficult to unravel. Cuts and negative features even buried surfaces survived poorly in the biologically active sandy contexts. At the rear of the bank a combination of bank erosion material and gradual levelling of the land by ploughing further obscured relationships.

Finds were concentrated in the eastern section of the trench and included many late 3rd/4th century Roman coins, sherds of Roman pottery, animal bones, vessel glass, hair pins, finger rings and decorative metal studs and fittings. These finds in conjunction with the skeletons gave rise to the view that they may have been votive deposits although this remains conjecture.

Unfortunately owing to the depth of soil across much of trench 1, which varied from 60 cm to 1 metre and set over bedrock, the whole area was greatly disturbed either by ploughing, animal burrowing activity or soil erosion processes. Therefore, many of the small finds were in very disturbed layers, particularly those within plough soil depth and could not, therefore, be regarded as archaeologically significant. For example, a total of 77 coins were found, but only 24 of these in sound archaeological deposits. A similar ratio to this affected all small finds including nails, hobnails, pins and other miscellaneous metal objects.

As a result of these skeletal remains and small finds trench 1 was extended in two areas.

2004 The eastern extension slot trench.
A slot trench was opened in 2004 measuring 1.5 metres in width and 7 metres in length. This trench was positioned at the north-eastern corner of the main trench extending eastward. The purpose of the trench was to confirm that the limit of embankment related activity had stopped.

A small ditch [1278] was discovered running north to south across the trench. The ditch may have curved to reflect the arena's shape, and a layer of hill wash from the embankment came to an end above the ditch. East of the ditch re-deposited natural sandy soil and eroded bank material were found above a patchy gravel surface

2005 The southern extension.
The southern extension trench was opened in 2005 measuring 7 metres long and 3.5 metres in width. This trench was positioned to the south-east of the main trench below where the skeletons were found. The primary aim of this trench was to confirm whether the ditch found in the slot trench in 2004 continued further south, and to determine the extent of the burials located towards the eastern end of the main trench. Two disturbed burials, Sk17 and 18 were discovered situated on the edge of the eroded southern embankment, and appeared to have been placed directly on the ground as no grave cuts could be identified

Main features Roman phase.

The arena wall and entrance into the arena from the east passage.
The arena wall [1175] and a linear group of stones [1125] on top of the wall, was cut into bedrock [1099] and [1248] (as noted in trenches 9/17/and 29) which enabled the wall to be constructed. At this eastern section the wall had been lowered to form a step down into the arena and several carefully placed limestone blocks [1136] formed the step. The area between the wall and the bedrock cut was filled with loose rubble and mortar as packing (1005) and (1006), (possible waste building material). This area of packing was then capped with a line of limestone blocks [1010].

There were several limestone blocks/large pieces of limestone close to the wall that initially were thought to be part of the wall but later proved to be possible revetting of the embankment [1117].

At the immediate entrance and above the step into the arena the bedrock had been cut back forming a slope [1191] that slanted down toward the step. A carefully placed group of limestone slabs [1219] bridged the filled gap [1099] [1248] between the slope and the top of the step.

Just below the step inside the arena a deposit [1126] consisting of loose rubble co-mingled with some larger stones was excavated. Initially this was thought to be a possible disturbed cobbling of the immediate floor surface into the arena. However, this was inconsistent with cobbling found in the area and was therefore considered to be a deposit of rubbish that occurred possibly after the arena went out of use.

On top of the wall, a piled layer consisting of limestone blocks and rubble [1228] close to the cut away bedrock [1191] was thought to be possible stone revetting of the embankment.

Cuts and fills.

Of the 30 cuts recorded only 12 could be positively identified as Roman through the inclusions found within the fill. These are as follows.

Grave cut [1203].
Grave cut for skeleton SK3 (a juvenile).

Grave Cut [1222].
Grave cut of skeleton SK14 (10% complete). Found with stone markers around the head and feet. Single fill (1221) contained a late 4th century CE copper-alloy coin <SF 3022>.

Grave Cut [1224].
Grave cut for skeleton SK4 (25% complete). Single fill (1225) including fragment of CBM. No other finds.

Grave Cut [1232].
Grave cut for skeleton SK16 (50% complete). Buried beneath SK 8. The torso of SK16 was missing presumably removed in antiquity to accommodate SK8. Single fill (1233). Apart from the skeleton no other finds were made.

Bedrock Cuts [1099]/ [1248].
Cuts into the bedrock to accommodate the building of the wall.

Ditch [1278].
Curvilinear ditch with rounded base 30cm wide and 10 cm deep at the eastern end of the trench. Single fill (1276) including a piece of Roman pottery.

Grave cut [1289].
Grave cut for skeleton SK17 (10% complete). This grave appears to have been cut into the bank. Upper fill (1307) partly ditch fill and the slump of turf material from the bank together with sand and clay bank material. Lower fill (1288) included a piece of Roman pottery.

Bedrock Cut [1304].
A curved cut into bedrock with a single fill (1303) which included a piece of Roman pottery. Despite this cut being dated as Roman the shape and characteristics of the cut suggests that it is more likely to be a natural feature that contained a piece of Roman pot.

Ditch [1315].
Ditch 45cm wide x 9 cm deep. Top fill (1311) including a piece of Roman pottery <SF 1311>. Mid fill (1316) no finds. Bottom fill (1317) including a piece of Roman pot <SF 1317>.

Cut 1319.
Long narrow slot (no measurements recorded). Single fill (1318) including a piece of Roman pot.

Grave Cut [1346].
Grave cut of skeleton SK3 (75% complete). Post excavation context number applied. No fill data other than the skeleton, however a large piece of Iron Age pottery was found tucked against the left foot. This was the most southerly burial.

Grave Cut [1347].
Grave cut for skeleton SK8 (75% complete). Post excavation context number applied. No fill data recorded except for the skeleton. Two pieces of Roman Oxford Colour Coated Ware were found against the mouth and jaw of the skeleton. Radiocarbon dated to the 347-440 cal. CE.

Grave Cut [1348].
Grave cut of skeleton SK13 (70% complete). Post excavation context number applied. Apart from the skeleton no other fill data available. Radiocarbon dated to 328-414 cal. CE.

NB. It was noted at the time of excavation that the grave cuts were extremely shallow and significant evidence of plough damage was observed. In total it is thought that the skeletal remains of a minimum of 25 individuals and a possible maximum of 30 individuals were recorded during the excavations in trench 1, the majority of which were plough scattered bones.

Un-phased Cuts and Fills (no phasing evidence found**)**

Pit [1028].
Circular pit (no dimensions recorded). Top fill (1029) of yellow/brown sand. Bottom fill (1036).

Cut [1191].
Circular cut into the bedrock to create a slope down to the entrance of the arena immediately behind the wall.

Posthole [1096].
Possible posthole. No dimensional data. Single fill (1353).

Cut [1099].
Sondage. No other data.

Cut [1116].
Although recorded as a cut it is thought to be the demarcation line in the clay that marked a group of stones that may have been part of the revetting along the edge of the embankment.

Gully [1234].
Possible gully. Post excavation context number applied. No dimensional data recorded. Single fill (1168) of yellow clay.

Post/stake hole [1234].
Stake or possible posthole. Circular, 11cm deep. No other data. Single fill (1235) of reddish-brown loam.

Post/stake hole [1238].
Possible stake or posthole. V-shaped 7 cm deep. Single fill (1239) loose brown sandy loam.

Post/stake hole [1240].
Possible stake or posthole. 30 cm diameter with east edge stepped and west edge vertical, 18cm deep. Single fill (1241) brown sandy loam.

Post/stake hole [1242].
Possible post or stake hole. Circular with vertical sides, 18cm deep. Single fill (1243) brown sandy loam.

Cut [1244].
Probable small bush-throw or animal burrow. No other data. Single fill (1245) brown sandy loam.

Posthole [1255].
Possible posthole. 25 cm deep. Single fill (1254). No other fill data.

Post hole [1261].
Possible posthole. Circular in shape, 22cm diameter x 7 cm deep. Single fill (1262) brown sandy loam.

Posthole [1264].
Possible posthole. Rectangular cut into bedrock with vertical sides. Single fill (1265) red sandy loam.

Posthole [1266].
Possible posthole. 50 cm diameter x 30 cm deep with rounded base. Single fill (1267) red sandy loam.

Bedrock cut [1301].
Cut into bedrock. Possibly a natural feature. 30 cm wide x 25 cm deep. Single fill (1302) loose red brown soil.

Ditch [1306].
Ditch 35 cm wide x 25 cm deep (same as [1342] and [1341]). Single fill (1332) mainly stone packing.

Ditch [1334].
Probable animal burrow. U-shaped ditch, 10 cm wide x 8 cm deep. Single fill (1325) sandy loam.

Gully [1336].
Possible gully. Cut into bedrock at the foot of the embankment terminal. Top fill (1329) sandy clay. Bottom fill (1337) silty sand.

Gully [1342].
A V-shaped gully with a flat bottom. 40 cm wide x 34 cm deep. Single fill (1341) red brown silty sand.

NB. As mentioned in the introduction the condition of the bedrock in this area and particularly toward the eastern end of the trench was such that it was often difficult to distinguish between man-made and natural features in the bedrock that gave rise to so many possible post holes and ditches etc.

Small Finds.

In total 174 small finds were recovered from trench 1, although there were several finds that should not have been included in the small finds register. These included such items as pieces of limestone, pieces of chalk, pebbles, pottery fragments, pieces of mortar and human/animal bones. In total there were 14 such items which for this analysis have been disregarded.

However, given the shallowness of the soil over bedrock, the noted disturbance of the whole area through ploughing, soil erosion and animal burrowing activity nearly 64% of all finds could be regarded as archaeologically insignificant as they came from very disturbed

contexts. Context (1000) topsoil and contexts (1001), (1018), (1022), (1025), (1026) and (1027) being subsoil contexts within the plough depth. Finds from these contexts totalled 102.

The range of finds from within these contexts were quite varied, most notably of the 78 late Roman Copper-alloy coins found in trench 1, 46 came from disturbed contexts.

Context (1277) is of note. This context was situated at the eastern end of the main trench in which 24 small finds were recorded. These included 20 coins and 4 iron objects together with a considerable number of animal bones and sherds of Roman pottery (largely colour coated wares). Amongst these finds were a human forearm and Phalanx bone (possibly plough scattered bones of skeleton SK6). The ground in which this context was situated was approximately 60 cm in depth over bedrock according to section drawing 1.52 and context (1277) was no more than 40 cm in depth which would put it well within the limits of ploughing. Context (1284) lay directly below (1277) in which a further 8 finds were recovered including 4 late Roman Copper-alloy coins.

Finds from these two contexts initially gave rise to speculation that they were possible votive depositions as they were said to have been found deposited in pits, although no cuts for pits associated with them have been identified. According to the plans and section drawings of this eastern end of the main trench the area is pock marked with a considerable number of natural pits and depressions in the bedrock that could be mistaken for deliberate votive pits, therefore doubt is cast over these notional votive deposits.

These 'votive' finds included nearly thirty late Roman Copper-alloy coins (some in mint condition together with a number of forgeries), Sherds of Roman pottery, animal bone, glass vessel fragments, hair pins, finger rings and decorative studs and fittings.

Within the less disturbed contexts, notably (1284) there was a definite clustering of finds, as if they had been buried together. For example, a hair pin was grouped with white stones, pottery shards and animal bones in an otherwise find free area.

Context (1205) within which many small finds were recovered was a general layer that covered a wide area in the mid to eastern end of the main trench. The majority of burials were from this context. This context varied considerably in depth averaging 50 cm giving rise to the varying degrees of disturbance across its range. As discussed above the further east the more disturbed the ground became. This was reflected in the degree of disarticulation and preservation of skeletons found. Notable amongst the finds in this context were six late Roman Copper-alloy coins and two Copper-alloy bracelets.

Perhaps the most significant find spot in trench 1 was a group of 11 late Copper-alloy Roman coins from context (1216). This context was situated at the western end of the trench and directly above the arena wall at the entrance to the arena and may be regarded as a probable votive offering of coins.

Overall small finds consisted of 78 3rd/4th century Roman coins, 25 iron nails/hobnails, 28 miscellaneous iron objects, 3 iron pins, 2 Copper-alloy broches, 2 Copper-alloy bracelets, 11 Copper-alloy objects, 1 lead lump, 1 polished pebble (possibly a gaming counter), 1 Copper-alloy votive object, 1 bone pin, 2 flint scrapers, 2 pieces of glass vessel and 1 jet/shale bead/ toggle.

The Skeletons.

A full and thorough scientific report on the skeletons from trench 1 has been prepared by Dr Paula Levick, therefore this short synopsis is only intended to provide a brief overview of these important finds and their relationship within trench 1 overall.

During 2004 and 2005 the skeletal remains of a minimum of 25 individuals were recovered from trench 1. All were found within the eastern half of the trench in the flat area between and a little beyond the embankment terminals that form the entrance into the arena. These finds then prompted an additional southern extension to the trench to establish the extent of the burials. In so doing a further skeleton was located. Of these skeletons three were between 50% and 75% complete, two were 25% to 50% complete and 17 were 5% to 25% complete. Three were located as bones co-mingled with topsoil removal. A further two skeletons (SK5 and SK6) were recovered as loose bones from the soils around the graves.

The skeletons lay in poorly defined shallow graves aligned east/west with their heads at the west and their feet at the east end of the grave. There was no evidence for coffins or deliberate grave goods and all appear to have been placed directly into the ground. Only seven of the 25 skeletons body/grave positions could be identified.

At the time of excavation only four burials (SK4, SK14, SK16 and SK17) provided sufficient information to determine grave cut data. However, through a study of the photographic records it was possible to determine grave cuts for a further three individuals (SK3, SK8 and SK13) for which post excavation numbers were applied.

Several skeletons were identified from fragments of bone scattered throughout the various contexts of the eastern end of the trench, all of which were disarticulated. This provides good evidence for the level of plough damage and possible movement of bones through animal activity and exemplifies the shallowness of these burials, in particular SK10, SK15, SK22, SK23, SK24, and SK25.

Four further possible skeletons SK26 – SK30 were even more fragmentary. A considerable number of bones were recovered from spoil heaps.

Burial SK12 is noteworthy as these fragments were of infant bones, although no grave cut could be determined. The bones were disarticulated and poorly preserved.

Across the range of skeletons very little dating evidence was found however radiocarbon dating of SK8 and SK13 shows them to be late Roman, 4th century CE. The combination of a lack of grave goods, the prone position in which they were lain, and the east/west alignment does mark them out as unique burials. All the skeletons, where it was possible to determine mode of burial, showed signs of being bound and wrapped in shrouds before burial, although no shroud pins were found. The feet were extended, shoulders hunched, and hands tucked around the neck.

Dr Paula Levick pointed out that most of the inhumations from the arena cemetery were buried in what was considered to follow a Christian tradition with the bodies being laid supine and facing east and unaccompanied by grave goods.

Pottery Finds.

A total of 197 sherds of prehistoric pottery (including two pieces of decorated ware) and 818 sherds of Roman pottery were recovered from trench 1. Of the Roman pottery RCWR 398 sherds was the most common type found followed by RCWO (Roman course ware oxidised) 88 sherds, OXFRS (Oxfordshire red slipped ware) 75 sherds and unusual for the site DOR (Black burnished ware) 65 sherds. RFWR (Roman fine ware reduced) and RFWW (Roman fine ware white) both with 48 sherds and RFWOX (Roman fine ware oxidised) with 47 sherds.

However as previously discussed there were several Prehistoric and Roman pottery sherds that were recovered from disturbed top/sub-soil contexts, primarily contexts (1000) topsoil and (1001), (1016), (1018), (1025), (1271) and (1277). In total 53 Prehistoric and 397 Roman pottery sherds were from these contexts which should be disregarded.

It is interesting to note that six contexts all situated in the eastern section of trench 1, including the sub-soil deposits, produced significant quantities of both Prehistoric and Roman pottery. These contexts are (1145) 21 sherds, (1205) 107 sherds, (1271) 28 sherds, (1277) 212 sherds, (1284) 140 sherds and (1291) 35 sherds. A total of 543 sherds which is just over 50% of the total pottery recovered, there being 38 sherds of Prehistoric and 505 sherds of Roman pottery.

It must be pointed out these large quantities of pottery from the eastern section of the trench were found within the area of the burials which would have added a further element of ground disturbance in the late to post Roman period. It is also worth considering the question of why so many fragments of pottery were found in this area, could they have been introduced co-mingled with rubble to prepare the entrance path to the arena.