Trench MF10 narrative

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Introduction

Trenches MF10 and MF11 were opened in 2002 and were part of a series of trenches that continued a prehistoric focus on the Marcham site following on from Trenches MF3 and MF12 opened in 2001. Whereas Trenches MF3 and MF12 were placed to investigate distinct features visible from the geophysical survey, Trenches MF10 and MF11 were not based on the presence of geophysical anomalies. In Trench MF3 for example a small sub-circular enclosure and part of a larger rectangular enclosure that identified a complex of ditches and pits ranging in date from the Middle Bronze Age to Romano-British, whilst Trench MF12 was excavated to verify that both sections of the larger enclosure ditch were part of the same feature. These four trenches were situated in the south-central part of the site and with Trenches MF10 and MF11 approximately 25 metres to the east of Trenches MF3 and MF12. Trenches MF10 and MF11 each of 10m x 20m and both in line with Trench 10 set above Trench MF11 and spaced 10 metres apart, with both on an east-west axis. Both trenches were stripped down to the natural to remove plough soil. The natural was an awkward mixture of sand and badly decayed limestone. In both trenches a number of features were visible cut into the natural, all excavated in section.

Trench MF10 contained eight pits, five of which were clearly archaeological in nature. All had a similar general sequence of deposition, with initial layers of sand, covered with a mixture of limestone rubble and soil. The composition of the upper fills made the features very difficult to distinguish from the surrounding limestone that they were cut into. All of the pits were well shaped, and regular in construction, and all were rather small. Pit [10025] is the largest and has the most complex stratigraphy. It seems reasonable to suggest that all the features were associated in some way.

Cuts and fills

[10004] Pit. Circular pit 0.83m in diameter x 0.27m deep with irregular sides.

(10002) Top Fill. Stoney mid brown sandy silt. 80% stone. No dating material.

(10003) Bottom Fill. Yellow brown silty sand. Natural fill material.

[10013] Pit. Large circular pit 1.25m wide x 0.35m deep.

(10008). Top Fill Gritty sandy loam with pieces of limestone.

(10017) Shared bottom Fill. Sandy yellow brown loam. No inclusions.

(10018) Shared Bottom Fill. Reddish brown sandy loam. No inclusions.

[10014] Pit. Long shallow pit or depression. 2.39m in length x 0.3m deep**.**

(10009) Top Fill Friable mid brown loam with pieces of limestone and with inclusions of animal bone and pottery sherds. Fill approximately 17cm thick.

(10016) Bottom Fill. Yellow brown sandy loam with pottery sherd inclusions.

[10020] Posthole. Or possibly a pit. 0.37m round x 0.32m deep with sharp break sides. This feature cuts down into limestone rubble.

(10011) Single Fill Reddish brown soil with limestone pieces and pottery sherds.

[10021] Pit An oval shaped pit 1.3m at its longest with a stepped base. 0.1m to the step and 0.31m to the base.

(10019) Top Fill. Mid brown sandy loam. No inclusions.

(10022) Bottom Fill Mid brown, yellow sandy loam. No inclusions.

[10023] Pit. Possibly a natural feature. 0.5m wide x 0.2m deep.

(10024) Single Fill. Mid brown sandy loam with pieces of limestone. No inclusions.

[10025] Pit. A large pit 1.25m wide x 0.5m deep. Steeply sloping sides. This pit had 6 fills. The bottom most of which consisted of a mound of compacted rock set in the centre of the pit.

(10026) Top Fill. Friable silty loam mid brown with limestone pebbles. This layer was 15cm thick and butts fill (10028).

(10028) Top Fill. Friable silty loam, mid-greyish brown with small rocks and pebbles. extended from the eastern corner of the pit abutting (10026), and was 15 – 20 cm thick.

(10027) Mid Fill. Loose gravelly soil, grey in colour. 12cm thick.

(10029) Bottom Fill Sandy loam, mid yellow in colour. Thickest layer in the trench at 30 cm. This layer starts from the western edge of the pit base to the centre where it abuts layer (10030) meeting over the top of the pile of stones (10031) in the centre base of the pit.

(10030). Bottom. Fill Sandy loam of mid grey-brown colour. Abuts fill (10029) as explained above. This layer starts at the eastern side of the pit base and was 23cm at its thickest point.

(10031) Base fill. This was a compacted layer of limestone set in the centre of the base of the pit. Mid grey to white in colour, rectangular in shape, 40cm in width and 26cm deep.

[10032] Pit. Or possibly a large natural circular depression. 2.65m wide and up to 0.63m deep with rough sloping sides to a flat bottom. Four fills.

(10033) Top fill. Friable sandy loam, brown in colour ranging in depth from 5 to 20cm in centre of the layer.

(10034) Mid Fill Friable mid brown sand with small limestone pebbles. This layer starts at the western side of the pit where it is 45cm thick tapering to a point in

the centre of the pit and sits above (10035).

(10035) Mid fill. This fill layer sits on a slant running from the east of the trench where it meets and layer beneath (10034) to the base of the pit on its western side sharing the base fill with (10036). This fill was made up of dark blackish brown soil approximately 20cm thick. There were a large number of jagged limestone pieces in this fill.

[10037] Pit. This pit was shaped as a half circle as it sat at the baulk of the trench It had almost vertical sides and a stepped base due to the excavation cutting into an area with rocky inclusions. The pit was 0.78m in width and *c* 0.45m at its deepest point.

(10040) Top Fill. Smooth sandy loam**,** with large pebble inclusions and 0.15m deep

(10039) Mid Fill. Sandy gravelly loam mid-pinkish brown in colour 10cm thick.

(10038) Bottom. Smooth sandy loam, light grey in colour and with patches of orange iron staining although no sign of any metallic objects.

N.B. With the exception of pits [10014] and [10020] the remaining pits had no items of material culture therefore determining their purpose and chronology is extremely difficult.

Layers

(10006) Layer. Friable dark brown sandy loam with poorly sorted limestone inclusions. This layer appeared as a deposit of rubbly material in the west of the trench 1.3m in diameter and surrounded by limestone bedrock. This deposit overlay posthole [10020]. This deposit contained pottery sherds and animal bone.

(10010) Layer. Mainly friable mid yellow brown loam with large amounts of jagged limestone fragments. With the deposit being 0.30m at its thickest overlying rubble and soil covering a large area of Trench 10 , particularly over limestone bedrock. Numerous Roman pottery sherds and animal bone were co-mingled in this deposit.

Small Finds

There were only three small finds recovered from Trench MF10, two of which came from the top soil layer context (10000). A bone needle and a 3rd/4th century Copper-Alloy Roman coin. The third find came from context (10016) which is the bottom fill of pit [10014].

Pottery analysis

In total 191 pottery sherds were recovered from Trench MF10 which included four sherds of Iron Age pottery and 187 sherds of Roman pottery. The Iron Age sherds were of the Iron Age type PCW (Prehistoric Coarse Ware). There was a range of 12 types of Roman pottery recovered from across the trench. Two contexts yielded fairly high levels of pottery sherds, context (10000) topsoil, with 91 sherds (48.6%) and context (10009) with 61 sherds (32.6%). Context (10009) is significant as this was the top fill of Pit [10014] and possibly represents a dump of material into the pit. Overall, the range of Roman pottery recovered very much

reflects the range and quantities of specific pottery types found elsewhere on the site. However, there was a relatively high level of Samian ware with 27 sherds (14.4%), with 21 sherds coming from context (10000) topsoil. The following table highlights the most predominant Roman pottery types and quantities recovered.

1.	RCWR.	Roman Coarse Ware Reduced	44 sherds. 23.5%
2.	RFWOX.	Roman Fine Ware Oxidised	34 sherds. 18.1%
3.	SM.	Samian Ware.	27 sherds. 14.4%
4.	RCWO.	Roman Coarse Ware Oxidised.	24 sherds. 12.8%
5.	RFWR.	Roman Fine Ware Reduced.	14 sherds. 7.4%
6.	OXFRS.	Oxford Red Slip Ware.	13 sherds. 6.9%