Trench MF12 narrative

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Summary: Trench MF12 was one of three trenches opened to during the MF01 field season to investigate two large linear features (suspected enclosure ditch) and associated anomalies on the magnetometer survey in the area near the Roman temple. Trench MF12 was an 11m x 8m rectangle, located to include a section of the north-eastern segment of the enclosure ditch (with Trench MF3 covering the south-eastern segment of the enclosure ditch), and several suspected pits just outside of the enclosure. Trench MF12 contained a variety of features, most of which were not stratigraphically related (Figure 1).

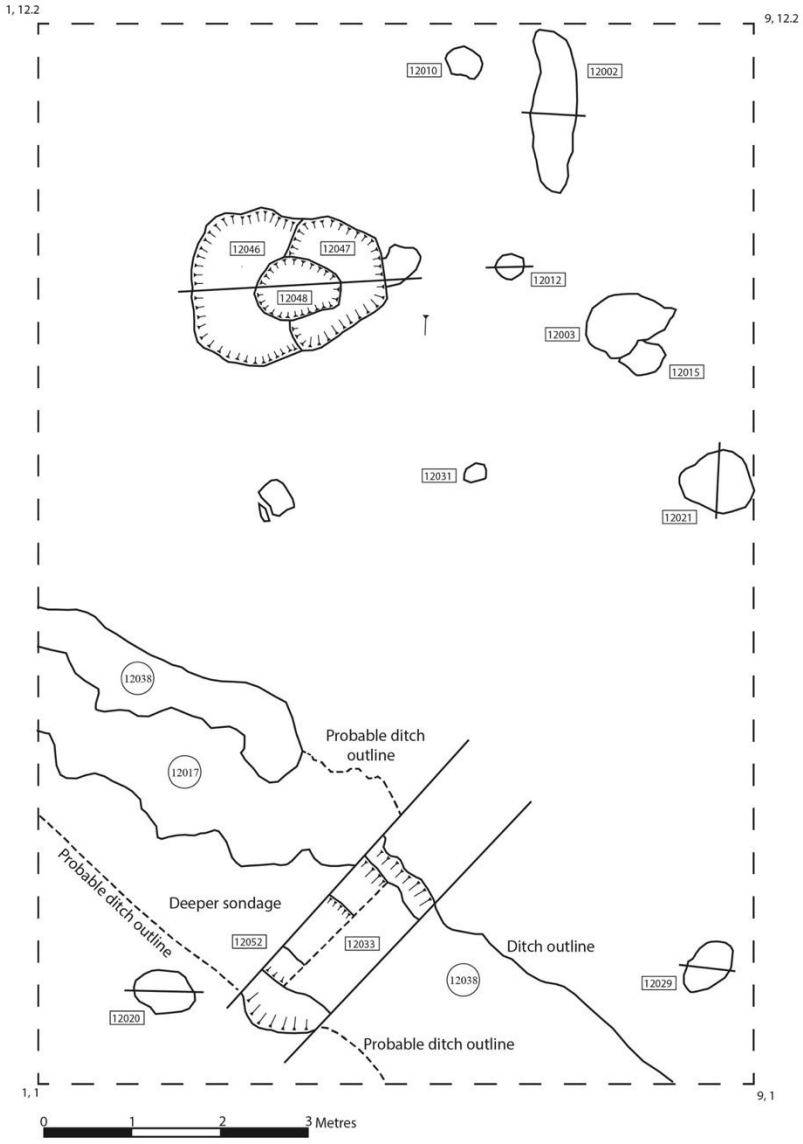


Figure 1: Plan of Trench 12.

The Roman Stone Surface

A layer of tightly packed, fist-sized stone cobbles was found during the removal of the topsoil, in the southwest portion of the trench. This surface [12017], was most likely deliberately constructed during the Roman period. Immediately on top of the cobbled surface is a dark

brown soil layer (12006) containing a rich assortment of animal bones, extensive quantities of oyster shells, fragments of terra sigillata tesserae, and 385 sherds of Roman pottery. Context (12006) produced a fine-ware rich assemblage, which contained an exceptional amount of middle Roman material (99 Samian and 28 Imported Continental Colour-coated sherds). The bulk of the material is 2nd to 3rd century – substantially earlier than the Roman material found within near-by Trench MF18 (which had a solid 4th century date). Six sherds of late Roman pottery were also recovered from this context, but these seem likely to be a later addition. This would date the stone surface as 2nd to 3rd century CE. A metre-wide section was dug through the tail end of this surface, and into the ditch [12052] that lay directly underneath it. The ditch follows the same alignment as the surface, and it seems likely that the surface was intentionally laid over the upper fill of the ditch to consolidate it.

The Enclosure Ditch

We excavated a metre-wide slot across the suspected ditch, (Figure 2) revealing that it consisted of three distinct phases. The first cut was a V-shaped ditch [12052], of which one fill (12050) survived subsequent re-cuts. This fill consisted of sandy sediment with small limestone inclusions, and contained no material culture. The second cut [12033] was a shallower, flat bottomed ditch, which contained three fills (12051, 12049, and 12042). All three of these fills consisted of a mix of sandy material and small limestone inclusions. The lower two fills (12051 and 12049) did not contain any ceramics. The upper-most fill (12042) contained 7 sherds of Roman pottery, however, it is possible that this was worked in from the overlying layer (12035). The third cut [12053] was a smaller flat-bottomed ditch that truncated the second phase cut and upper two fills. It contained one fill (12041), which contained three sherds of pottery (one Iron Age and two Roman). While it is not identical to the ditch in Trench MF3, it does seem to have been part of the same sequence of construction. Therefore, we propose that the initial V-shaped cut was part of a Bronze Age enclosure (as dated conclusively in Trench MF3 by the presence of a fragmented Bronze Age urn), which was subsequently re-cut during the Roman period.

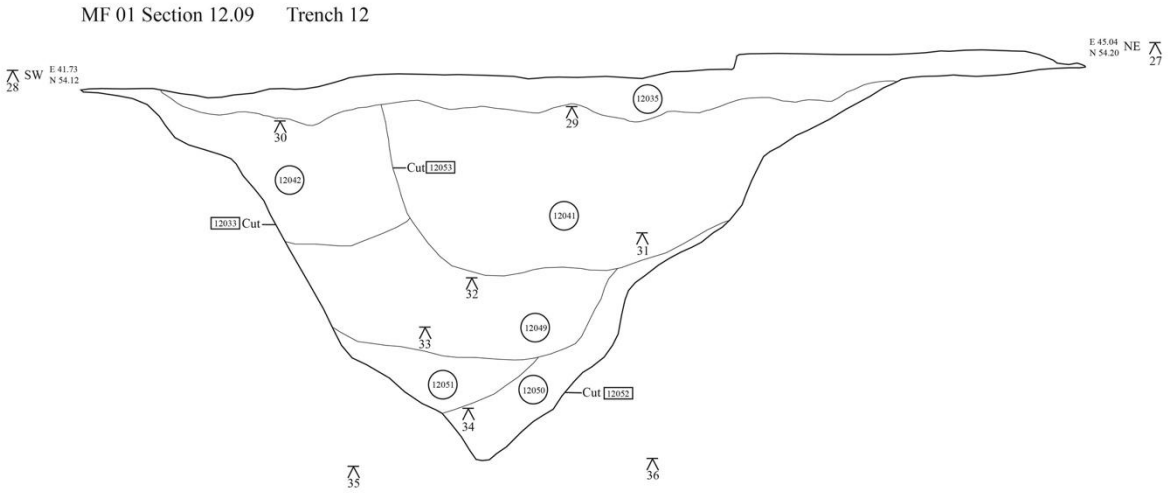


Figure 2: Cross section of three ditch cuts, [12052, 12033, & 12053] (Section 12.09).

Pits and Postholes

A number of pits and postholes were also identified in plan and excavated. It is not possible to distinguish the layout of any structures from the arrangement of the postholes, and two out of the four excavated were little more than shallow scoops in the bedrock.

A cluster of three inter-cutting pits was found in the northern portion of the trench (Figure 3). The earliest pit [12046] was subsequently cut by [12047], and in turn both were cut by [12048]. Pit [12046] was shallow, with a flat bottom, and contained two fills. The initial fill (12039) contained small flecks of charcoal and two sherds of Iron Age pottery. The upper fill (12009), contained 127 sherds of pottery, including 65 Iron Age and 62 Roman sherds. However, the records indicate that later cut [12048] was only discovered in section, and therefore (12009) needs to be treated as a combination of the fills from pit [12046] and [12048]. Pit [12047] was a deeper flat-bottomed pit, which contained two fills (12045 & 12018). The lower fill was a mix of sand and limestone flecks and did not contain any material culture. The upper fill (12018) was similar in composition to (12009). This fill contained 20 sherds of pottery, including 16 Iron Age and 4 Roman. Pit [12048] was a U-shaped cut into the underlying pit fills. It contained one fill, which is not clearly identified in the trench records. As noted in the 2003 interim report, at the bottom of the latest pit, several large mammal bones were deposited against the sides.

It is possible that these three pits were all Iron Age, but the inclusion of Roman pottery in some of the deposits challenges this interpretation. It is not clear from the records if the Roman pottery might have been worked in from upper layers. Therefore, we cannot conclusively assign these three pits a date range. Finally, a spread of badly decayed and truncated human remains was found in a radius of about 1 metre, just southwest of the three inter-cutting pits. The remains were found within a barely perceptible dip in the bedrock, and seem to have been that of a child. The burial lacked any grave goods, or clear association with any features, artefacts, or hints of formality of disposal, therefore no speculation can be made about the date.

A smaller, roughly oval pit with steep sides and a flat bottom was cut into the underlying limestone along the eastern edge of the trench [12021] (Figure 4). This pit contained three fills (12044, 12043, and 12022). The bottom fill (12044) contained four sherds of Iron Age pottery. It was capped by a thin layer of tightly packed small stones, which we interpret to be an intentional effort to divide the lower and upper layers. The upper fill (12022) contained flecks of charcoal, burnt stones, animal bones, and 80 sherds of pottery, 63 Iron Age and 17 Roman. We interpret this as an Iron Age pit, with deliberately laid deposition of material culture, and propose that the Roman ceramics were worked in from the overlying layer.

Nearby, a shallow oval depression, [12015], contained a coarse Bronze Age urn, in poor condition, but mostly complete and deposited upright in-situ. The entire block was removed by a conservation specialist and the interior of the vessel has not been excavated yet. This feature was cut by a sub-rectangular pit [12003] with upper fills containing ash and burnt material, and some skeletal material, which was not possible to identify in the field. In lower levels, a large amount of very well preserved, and almost complete ceramic vessels were found. It is possible that this feature was some sort of cremation, but no skeletal material was recovered to positively identify it as such.

Just to the north was a shallow, rectangular cut with steep sides and a rounded bottom *c.* 1.6m long and 0.3m deep [12002] (Figure 5). There were traces of in-situ fire on the limestone edges. It had two fills (12023) and (12004). The bottom fill (14023) contained charcoal and a small

amount of Roman pottery. The main fill (14004) contained a large amount of Roman pottery, animal bone, and significant traces of burning, including metal objects and slag. It is possible that this feature was used as a small furnace

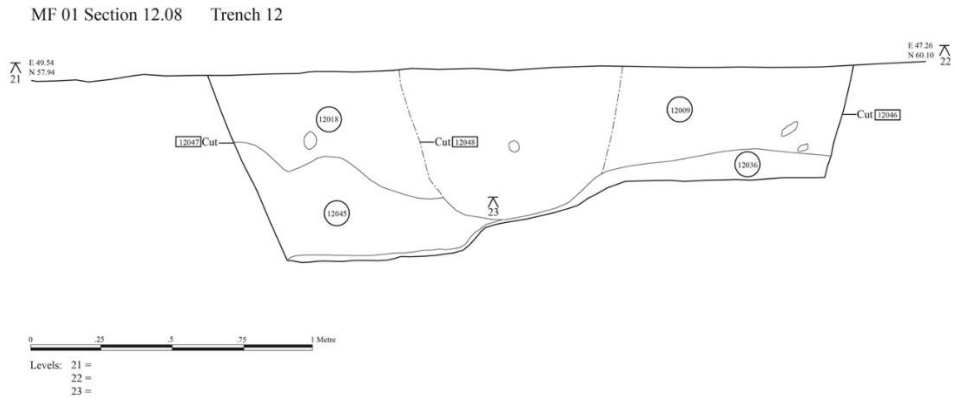


Figure 3: Cross section of three inter-cutting pits [12046, 12047, & 12048] (Section 12.08).

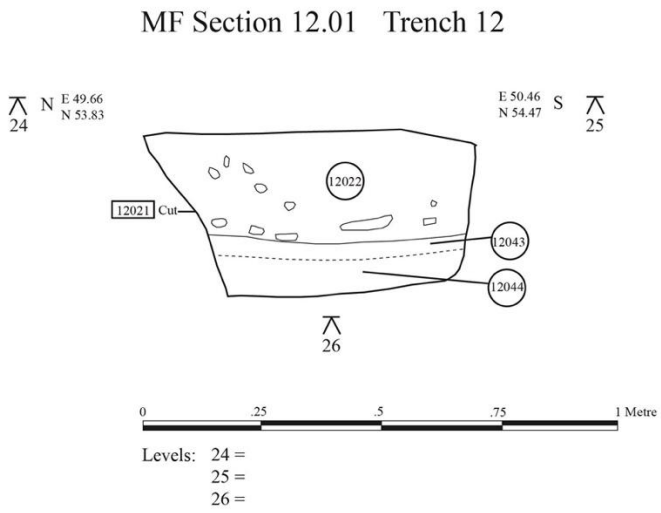


Figure 4: Cross section of possible Iron Age pit [12021] (Section 12.01).

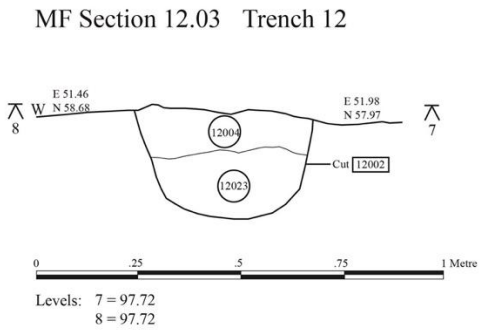


Figure 5: Cross section of Roman cut [12002], which was likely used as a small furnace.

Detailed Context Information

[12052] CUT
Description: Initial cut of the ditch, which cuts through the limestone bedrock into the underlying sand. The preserved parts of the cut are V-shaped. The cut only contains one fill (12050), with the rest of the ditch and possible fills truncated by later cuts [12033] and [12053].
Relationships: Fill by (12050). Cut by [12033].
Material Culture*:* N/A
Interpretation: The initial cut of a large ditch, similar to the ditch exposed in Trench MF3, which contained a Bronze Age urn. It is likely that this ditch was part of the same sequence of construction.

(12050) FILL
Description:
Relationships: Fill of [12052]. Cut by [12033]. Overlain by (12051) and (12049).
Material Culture: N/A
Interpretation: The fill of the initial cut of a large ditch, similar to the ditch exposed in Trench MF3, which contained a Bronze Age urn. It is likely that this ditch was part of the same sequence of construction. No ceramics were recovered from this fill.

[12033] CUT
Description: Roughly V-shaped ditch cut. It cuts through the initial ditch cut and its fill(s). It contains three fills (12051), (12049), and (12042).
Relationships: Cuts through [12052] and (12050). Filled by (12051), (12049), and (12042). Cut by [12053].
Material Culture: N/A
Interpretation: A re-cutting of the initial (presumably) Bronze Age ditch.

(12051) FILL
Description: N/A
Relationships: Fill of [12033]. Overlies (12050). Overlain by (12049).
Material Culture: N/A
Interpretation: Initial fill of the second phase of the large ditch.

(12049) FILL
Description: Friable, yellow brown sandy loam with flecks of limestone and small limestone cobbles. Very clean fill.
Relationships: Fill of [12033]. Overlies (12051) and (12050). Cut by [12053]. Overlain by (12042) and (12041).
Material Culture: N/A
Interpretation: Second fill of the second phase of the ditch re-cut.

(12042) FILL
Description: Friable to firm orange brown sandy loam with small limestone inclusions and flecks of charcoal.
Relationships: Fill of [12033]. Overlies (12049). Cut by [12053]. Overlain by (12041) and (12035).
Material Culture: A total of 7 sherds of Roman pottery recovered from the context.
RCWO 1 ROBSH 6

Interpretation: Upper fill of the second phase of the ditch re-cut. While the fill contains fragments of Roman pottery, it is possible that this was worked in from the overlying context.

[12053] CUT
Description: Shallow U-shaped cut with a flat bottom. The cut contains one fill (12041).
Relationships: Cuts (12042), (12049), (12050), and [12033].
Material Culture: N/A
Interpretation: The upper-most (latest) re-cutting of the ditch.

(12041) FILL
Description: Slightly firm light brown clayish sandy loam with *c.* 15% small limestone cobbles and some snail shells.
Relationships: Fill of [12053]. Overlies (12042), (12049), and (12050). Overlain by (12035).
Material Culture: A total of 3 sherds of pottery, including 1 Iron Age and two Roman sherds recovered from the context.
PCW 1 RCWR 1 SM 1
Interpretation: Initial fill of the second phase of the large ditch.

(12035) LAYER
Description: Firm brown loamy silt with some clay. Some small limestone flecks and evidence of charcoal.
Relationships: Overlies (12042) and (12041). Overlain by (12017/12034).
Material Culture: A total of 14 sherds of pottery, including 6 Iron Age and 14 Roman sherds.
PCW 6 RCWO 1 RFWOX 4 RFWR 2 SM 1 OXFWS 4 GR 1 D 1
Interpretation: A layer directly underlying the cobbled limestone surface (12017/12034). As it seems to extend beyond the edges of the ditch, it might have been material laid down to level the upper fill of the ditch during the construction of the cobbled surface.

There is a cluster of three intercutting pits outside of the enclosure ditch [12046], [12047], and [12048].

[12046] CUT
Description: Cut with steep side and flat bottom. Contains two fills (12036) and (12009). The cut, and its fills were first truncated by cut [12047] and then by cut [12048].
Relationships: Filled by (12036) and (12009). Cut by [12047] and [12048].
Material Culture: N/A
Interpretation: A shallow pit, with well-defined edges. It was heavily truncated by two later cuts.

(12036) FILL
Description*:* Friable, light yellow/brown sandy silt with some dark patches. Small limestone inclusions and a small amount of charcoal flecks.
Relationships: Fill of [12046] Overlain by (12009)
Material Culture: A total of two sherds of Iron Age pottery
PCW 2
Interpretation: Initial fill of the pit.

(12009) FILL
Description: Friable, mid-brownish clay-silt. Inclusions of limestone fragments, including burnt flecks, oyster shells, some flecks of charcoal, animal bones, and pottery.

Relationships: Fill of [12046]. Overlies (12036). Cut by [12048].
Material Culture: A total of 127 sherds of pottery, including 65 Iron Age and 62 Roman sherds.

PCW 62	PFW 3					
RFWOX 10	RCWR 8	RFWR 18	SM 11	RFWW 7	OXFWS 1	D 1
O 6						

Interpretation: The main fill of the first pit.

[12047] CUT
Description: Clearly defined cut of a pit with steep sides and a flat bottom. Contains two fills (12045) and (12018). Truncated by cut [12048]. Possible that it cuts [12046] and its fills, but the interface is obstructed by [12048].
Relationships: Cut by [12048]. Filled by (12045) and (12018).
Material Culture: N/A
Interpretation: The second in the sequence of intercutting pits.

(12045) FILL
Description: Friable dark brown sandy loam with some clay with limestone inclusions.
Relationships: Fill of [12047]. Overlain by (12018). Cut by [12048].
Material Culture: N/A
Interpretation: Initial fill of the pit.

(12018) FILL
Description: Similar to context (12009).
Relationships: Fill of [12047]. Overlies (12045). Cut by [12048].
Material Culture: A total of 20 sherds of pottery, including 16 Iron Age and 4 Roman sherds.

PCW 14	PFW 1	D 1
RFWR 2	ROBSH 1	O 1

Interpretation: Upper fill of the second pit. Field notes indicate that it is very similar to context (12009). It seems likely that the cut [12048] was discovered only in the section, with the fill of [12048] possibly being conflated with either (12018) and/or (12009).

[12048] CUT
Description: Small U-shaped pit. It contains one fill (12009). It cuts through two underlying pits [12046] and [12047] and their respective fills.
Relationships: Cuts (12018), (12045), (12036). Filled by (12009).
Material Culture: N/A
Interpretation: The latest in a sequence of pits in the same area. There is some confusion in the records about the fill of this pit – with the section drawing indicating that (12009) was the fill for both pits [12046] and [12048]. This is most likely because cut [12048] was only identified in section following excavation.

Small Pits and Postholes

[12002] CUT Section 12.03
Description: A shallow, elongated cut, with steep sloping sides and rounded bottom cut into the underlying bedrock. Approximately 160cm long and across and 30cm deep. The cut contains two fills (12023) and (12004).
Relationships: Filled by (12023) and (12004).
Material Culture: N/A

Interpretation: A regular slot. At first thought to be a grave cut. In the middle of the longer sides, stones are distinctly red, probably a sign of burning. Shorter sides were semi-circular and instead of being vertical like the longer sides, are less steep, especially on the north side where out gently slopes inwards. The bottom is fairly flat, with smaller 'steps' on the north half and a curious hole in the bedrock in the base of the cut.

(12023) FILL
Description: Loose, dark brown silty loam with limestone inclusions (including burnt fragments) and charcoal.
Relationships: Fill of [12002]. Overlain by (12004).
Material Culture: A total of 5 sherds of Roman pottery.
RCWR 4 D 1
Interpretation: Lower fill of a small cut, with the bedrock at the bottom blackened, indicating burning, possibly in-situ.

(12004) FILL
Description: Friable very dark black clay loam, with lots of ash and charcoal, burnt animal bones, and metal small finds.
Relationships*:* Fill of [12002]. Overlies (12023).
Material Culture: A total of 50 sherds of Roman pottery.
RFWOX 5 RCWR 14 RFWR 8 SM 9 IMPCC 2 RWW 4 OXFRS 1 ROBSH 1 D 4 O 2
Interpretation: Lots of big and small animal bones, many metal small finds (nails, slag), dark black pot. The shape of the fill and burning initially consistent with a cementation/firepit. Burnt limestone suggests burning took place in-situ. Metal slag indicating possible metal working.

[12029] CUT Section 12.04
Description: Roughly oval-shaped cut into the limestone bedrock, with sloping sides and a rounded bottom (*c.*15 cm deep). Contains one fill (12030).
Relationships: Filled by (12030)
Material Culture: None.
Interpretation: Possible posthole.

(12030) FILL
Description: Loosely compacted mid-brown silty soil with small limestone inclusions.
Relationships: Fill of [12029].
Material Culture: None.
Interpretation: Fill of possible posthole.

[12020] CUT Section 12.05
Description: Circular cut into the underlying limestone bedrock, *c.* 50 cm in diameter and *c.* 30cm deep. Straight sides and flat bottom.
Relationships: Filled by (12019).
Material Culture: None.
Interpretation: Possible posthole.

(12019) FILL
Description: Loosely compacted mid-brown silty sand with small limestone inclusions.
Relationships: Fill of [12020].
Material Culture: None.

Interpretation: Fill of possible posthole.

[12012] CUT Section 12.06
Description: Small circular cut into the limestone bedrock with gentle sloping sides and flat bottom. Contains one fill (12013).
Relationships: Filled by (12013).
Material Culture: None.
Interpretation: Possible posthole.

(12013) FILL
Description: Loosely compacted silty soil with a few small limestone inclusions.
Relationships: Fill of [12012].
Material Culture: None.
***Interpretation**:* Fill of possible posthole.

[12031] CUT Section 12.07
Description: Small, circular shallow scoop out of the limestone bedrock. Contains one fill (12032).
Relationships: Filled by (12032).
Material Culture: None.
Interpretation: Most likely natural feature, but possibly a posthole?

(12032) FILL
Description: N/A
Relationships: Fill of [12032].
Material Culture: None.
Interpretation: Most likely natural fill of small natural depression in the limestone bedrock.

[12021] CUT Section 12.01
Description: Roughly oval, slightly elongated cut into the limestone bedrock with vertical sides and a flat bottom. 1m x 1.3 m around and 45cm deep. Contains three fills (12044), (12043), and (12022).
Relationships: Filled by (12044), (12043), and (12022).
Material Culture: None.
Interpretation: Cut of a small pit (Iron Age?), cut through the bedrock into the underlying sand.

(12044) FILL
Description: Friable to slightly firm mid-brown sandy loam with small limestone inclusions and a small pocket of red clay.
Relationships: Fill of [12021]. Overlain by (12043).
Material Culture: A total of 4 sherds of Iron Age pottery. PCW 4.
Interpretation: Bottom fill of a pit that contains three large pieces of the same Iron Age pot.

(12043) FILL
Description: Firm layer of brown loam with dense level of small limestone cobbles set in the matrix.
Relationships: Fill of [12021]. Overlies (12044). Overlain by (12022).
Material Culture: None.

Interpretation: Apparently a deliberately laid stone layer dividing the bottom of the pit from the upper fill – a stone capping between (12022) and (12044).

(12022) FILL
Description: Slightly compacted mid-brown loam with small limestone inclusions and small quantities of burnt stone and charcoal.
Relationships: Fill of [12021]. Overlies (12043).
Material Culture: A total of 80 sherds of pottery: 63 Iron Age and 17 Roman.
PCW 57 PFW 6
RFWOX 2 RCWR 8 RFWDS 1 SM 6
Interpretation: Top fill of the pit, contains extensive amounts of material culture. Most likely an Iron Age feature, with some Roman pottery impacted into the upper part of the fill.

[12003] CUT (No section drawing)
Description: Trapezoidal cut through the limestone bedrock, north side longer. Vertical sides. 80cm x 60cm at the widest, *c.* 40 cm deep. Contains three fills (12005), (12024), and (12025).
Relationships: Filled by (12005), (12024), and (12025). Cuts [12015] and (12014).
Material Culture: None.
Interpretation: This cut was found in the NE corner of the trench. At first it was thought to be a regular, rectangular cist-like cut with funerary remains inside. Once it was excavated, the cut was re-defined and edges were found to be trapezoidal.

(12005) FILL
Description: Friable, dark brown sandy loam with *c.* 10% limestone fleck inclusions, a small quantity of charcoal, and some fragments of pottery.
Relationships: Fill of [12003]. Overlies (12024).
Material Culture: A total of 4 sherds of Iron Age pottery: PCW 4
Interpretation: Uppermost fill of the cut.

(12024) FILL
Description: Compacted brown loam with *c.* 10% limestone inclusions, and large pieces of black pottery (Iron Age).
Relationships: Fill of [12003]. Overlain by (12005). Overlies (12025).
Material Culture: A total of 14 sherds of Iron Age pottery: PCW 13 PFW 1
Interpretation: Second fill of the pit.

(12025) FILL
Description: Medium firm light brown sandy loam with *c.* 10% charcoal flecks, and *c.* 5% limestone flecks. Contains remains from at least two distinct Iron Age pots.
Relationships: Fill of [12003]. Overlain by (12024).
Material Culture*:* A total of 96 sherds of Iron Age pottery: PCW 74 PFW 22
Interpretation: Lower fill of cut [12003]. Slightly lighter than (12005), and the same as (12024). Abundant inclusions, especially of charcoal. At least two distinct vessel fragments found, a crude, shell tempered and finer vessel found bottom in-situ and adjoining collapse. Could well be cremation fill, but no conclusive human skeletal remains found in the cut.

[12014] CUT (No section drawing)
Description: Small irregular shaped cut into the limestone bedrock. Contains one fill (12015). Cut truncated by cut [12003]
Relationships: Filled by (12015). Cut by [12003].

Material Culture: None.
Interpretation: Small, shallow cut that contains almost a complete Middle Bronze Age urn.

(12015) FILL
Description: Friable mid-brown sandy soil with a small amount of clay. *c.* 20% limestone inclusions, large amount of pottery and animal bone. The sherds mostly belonged to one large vessel – the entire deposit was consolidated in-situ and removed to be carefully excavated off-site.
Relationships: Fill of [12014].
Material Culture: A total of 73 sherds of pottery (Middle Bronze Age bucket urn): PCW 73
Interpretation: Uniform, single fill of cut [12014]. Fairly sandy with limestone and charcoal inclusions. Contained a single, quite large coarse ware vessel (a Middle Bronze Age bucket urn). The vessel was broken, but standing up. We initially suspected it might contain a cremation, but no conclusive proof was recovered in the field, apart from two possible human ribs embedded around the base of the vessel.

(12006) LAYER
Description: Friable, dark blackish brown sandy loam. Contains poorly sorted pottery fragments and lots of oyster shells. Ranges in thickness from 2cm – 4cm.
Relationships: Overlies (12017), (12019), (12020), (12030), (12034), (12039), and (12040).
Material Culture: A total of 385 sherds of Roman pottery:
RCWO 20 RFWOX 74 RCWR 80 RFWR 48 SM 99 IMPCC 28 RFWW 9 OXFWS 6 ROBSH 3 D 14 O 4
Interpretation: A large layer that contains extensive amounts of Roman pottery and oyster shells. Overlies what seems to be a deliberately constructed cobbled surface (12017).

(12017) LAYER
Description: Tightly compacted stones overlain with lots of oyster shells, red/dark brown, broken angular stones with sandy soil.
Relationships: Overlain by (12006). Same as (12034). Overlies (12033) and (12038).
Material Culture: A total of 9 sherds of pottery – 4 Iron Age and 5 Roman.
PCW 4 RFWOX 3 RCWR 1 GR 1
Interpretation: Compacted, pavement-like surface. Level on top of it was (12006). Full of Samian pottery and oyster shells. Cobbled surface looks more compacted, better preserved and laid out some 1 metre each of the western Trench MF12 edge. Surface is made of limestone cobbles of fairly uniform size, no more than 10cm in diameter with a few larger blocks (no more than 20cm to 30cm in diameter).