Trenches MF23 and MF24 narrative

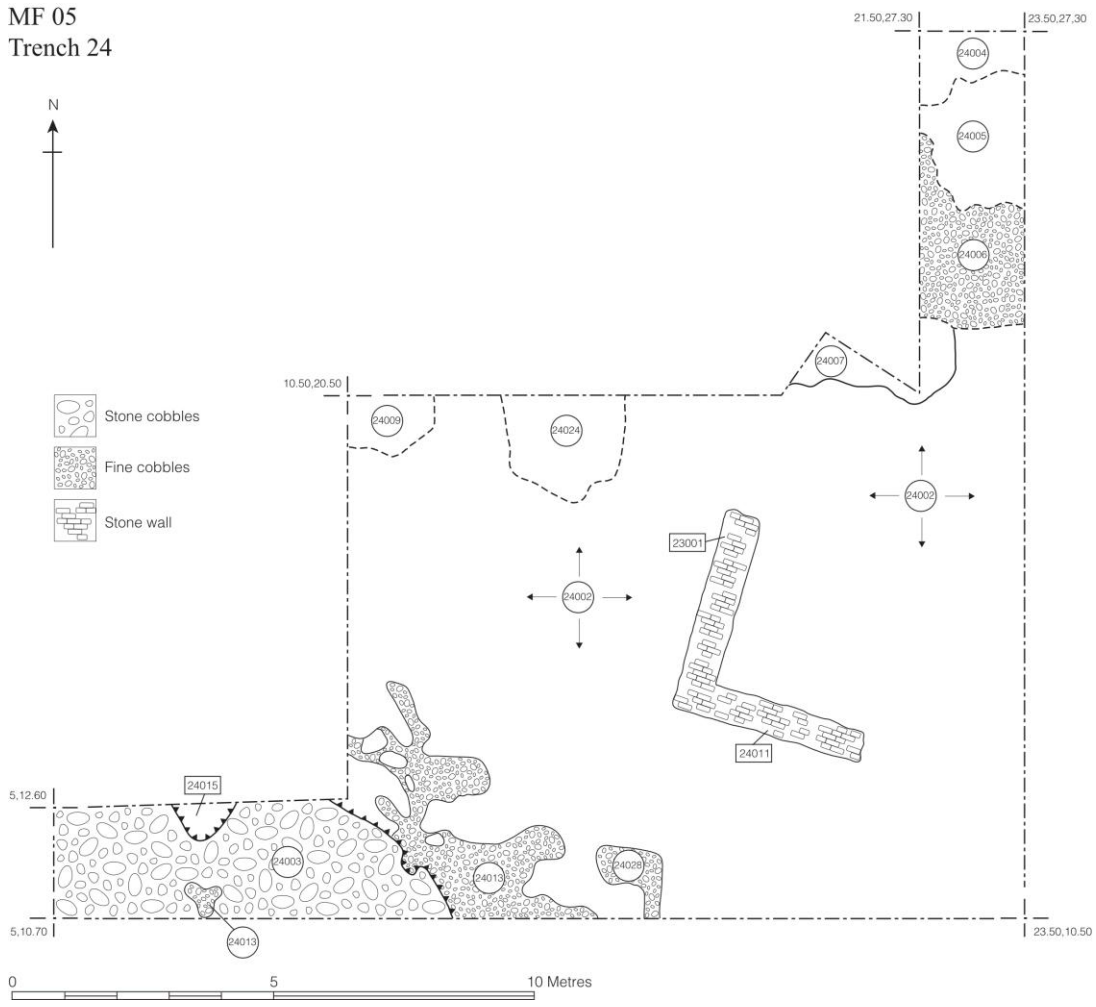
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Introduction

Trench 23 was situated to the east of the rectilinear building in Trench 2 and to the south-west of the arena. This exploratory trench was opened in 2004 to investigate a geophysical anomaly. The initial trench was 10m in length and 3m in width. The remains of a carefully constructed wall [23001] was excavated. The wall was approximately 4m in length and 60cm in width. The wall was constructed of laid and mortared irregular shaped limestone blocks and lay on a south-west to north-east axis. At the southern end of the wall a definite corner was noted running south-east, indicating a second wall. Considerable numbers of stones of varying size lay about the trench, which may have been demolition rubble.

Trench 24

In 2005 it was decided to enlarge this initial trench to investigate the nature and extent of the possible building and to extend the area of the trench between trench 2 to the west and the arena to the east. This extended trench then became Trench 24.



Trench MF24

Trench dimensions
The original trench 23 was extended to form a trench approximately 17m x 1 m and set on a north-south axis. A further trench extension of 2m x 6m was opened in the south-west corner of the main trench with the aim of exploring the area between trench 24 and trench 2 and connecting with the north-east corner of trench 2.

Key features
Excavations in Trench 24 continued through seasons 2005 to 2008. The wall feature [23001] [24249] (post excavation numbering applied) was further excavated identifying a second wall [24011] running on a north-west to south-east axis as a continuation of the building structure which was constructed in the same manner as wall [23001] [25249] but was terminated abruptly at its south-east end. Further excavation showed evidence of a third wall [24121] through a positive foundation cut situated in an area of rubble suggesting that this wall had been robbed out. This third wall was set on a south-west to north-east axis. There was no evidence of a fourth wall or constructed entrance, therefore these three walls formed a three-sided building with an open end on its north-east side. This building became known as BU11. The overall dimension of this structure was approximately 4m x 4.5m.

Extensive areas of cobbling were identified with a large area of coarse cobbling (24003) in the most westerly section of the trench leading to trench 2 (the south-west trench extension). This area of coarse cobbling overlay an earlier layer of fine cobbling (24013). A pit (24015) was excavated on the northern edge of this section of the trench. Two finely cobbled surfaces at opposite ends of the trench (24013) and (24006) were similar in appearance and possibly part of the same original surface. The extensive level of stone and loose cobble found across the trench does suggest that this area was extensively cobbled and provided a formalised open space. In total 13 separate areas of cobbling were recorded.

Thirty-two clusters of stones were identified across trench 24 with the majority being positioned close to the rectilinear structure BU11. These stone clusters were variously identified as possible postholes or post pads with stone packing. A post excavation review of these features established that none of these contexts had cuts identified and were all therefore re-recorded as layers. In reviewing the various plans that show these contexts *in situ* they do seem to be randomly located and therefore do not appear to have supported a structure. It was concluded that these groups of stones were probably disturbed cobbling. It was further suggested that they may have been associated with a practice of votive offerings with the stone groupings forming small shrines within which or upon which votive offerings were placed. Trench 24 contained many possible votive small finds including coins, jewelry and personal items such as bone and copper-alloy pins. However, it has only been possible to directly associate small finds with two of these stone clusters, (24036) which had ten small finds and (24098) which had one small find. It was therefore concluded that there was little evidence to support this votive practice. However, it is thought that the structure BU11 may have been a shrine within which large numbers of personal items were found. To the south of the building a whole sheep burial was found providing further evidence of ritual practice, therefore, a votive association with the stone groupings cannot be ruled out.

To the south of BU11 a complete articulated sheep skeleton was excavated within cut [24077] and fill (24074). A group of flat limestone blocks (24049) were laid along the northern perimeter of the burial cut. This burial possibly represents further evidence of ritual practice within trench 24 and the wider area.

A horse skull was located in the north-eastern section of the trench, but no burial cut could be identified, which suggests that its deposition was a random event that may have taken place after the site was abandoned in the late 4th century.

Other significant layers
Several references to the arena bank were noted on the eastern side of Trench 24 such as layers (24004) and (24237) being recorded as evidence of the arena bank revetment, and (24230) recorded as the base of a bracing wall for the arena bank, and (24034) being a layer within the arena bank. However, a post excavation review showed that these layers were approximately 15m distant from the perceived position of the arena embankment outer limit and therefore could not be arena bank features.

Several charcoal patches were noted across the trench (24039) (24106) (24126) (24166) (24167) (24185) and (24237), each area being rich in charcoal. Context (24106) being a single burnt fill of Cut [24105] a possible posthole or fire pit. The other contexts appear to be random burning events.

The stone groupings
(24026) Layer. A possible post pad.

(24036) Layer. Possible post pad with ten small finds (including a copper-alloy bracelet, a ring, a coin, a dress pin, a necklace fitting and three bone pins and a glass vessel fragment.

(24098) Layer Possible post pad (including a bone hair pin).

All of the following contexts have been recorded as layers forming stone clusters. Whilst they are most probably random they have been given context numbers and are therefore included here for completeness. **(24100) (24104) (24107) (24108) (24109) (24110) (24112) (24114) (24114) (24116) (24118) (24119) (24120) (24146) (24161) (24163) (24164) (24168) (24170) (24175) (24177) (24179) (24181) (24200) (24204) (24205) (24206) (24220) (24221) and (24222).**

Main Features

[23001]. [24299]	**Wall**	West wall of BU11. Wall positioned south-west to north-east, measuring 4m in length and approximately 60cm in width.
[24011]	**Wall.**	South wall of BU11. Wall positioned north-west to south-east measuring 4m in length and approximately 60cm in width.
[24121]	**Wall**	Robbed out east wall of BU11. Foundation cut [24196] with single fill (24197). The dimensions and shape of this cut feature suggest that this wall was similar in shape and size to the other two walls and was approximately 4m in length.
[24320]	**Wall?**	Purported base of a bracing wall for the arena bank. This feature consists of a cut [24230] running south-west to north-east, measuring 1.8m in length and approximately 40cm in width. This cut is situated in the north-east corner of trench 24. Excavation of this feature was not extended beyond the confines of the existing trench. There were no large stones *in situ* to

suggest a wall's existence. This cut had a single fill (24231). As previously explained this feature was not associated with arena bank.

Cobbling

(24003)	**Layer**	Cobbling layer to the east of trench 2 BU9 and in the south-west corner of trench 24 along the narrow section of trench connecting the two trenches. The cobbling is coarsely laid and appears to have been laid over earlier fine cobbling.
(24006)	**Layer**	An extensive area of small well-placed cobbles in the north-east of the trench.
(24013)	**Layer**	Small layer of coarse cobbling alongside [24003]. Possibly coarser earlier cobbling.
(24042)	**Layer**	Area of fine cobbling to the trench opposite BU11.
(24045)	**Layer**	Area of small well-placed cobbles in the north-east of trench and thought to be a continuation of cobbling (24006).
(24047)	**Layer**	Area of fine cobbling to the east of the trench opposite BU11.
(24050)	**Layer**	A small area of cobbling to the west of the trench of BU11.
(24052)	**Layer**	An area of fine cobbling in the centre of the trench, 2m north of BU11.
(24054)	**Layer**	Cobbled surface made up of small well-placed stones. This area could be linked to (24006) as the cobbling quality is similar.
(24060)	**Layer**	Rough, uneven cobbles along the north central edge of the trench and possibly related to an area of cobbling (24088).
(24083)	**Layer**	A small area of cobbling in the north-east corner of the trench.
(24086)	**Layer**	This area of cobbling is on the western side of the trench and appears to provide a paved area alongside building BU9.
(24088)	**Layer**	A line of deliberately placed stones in the north-east of the trench and suggestive of a wall but with no foundation it more likely to be a continuation of the cobbling (24006).
(24124)	**Layer**	An extensive area of cobbling in the north-east section of the trench. This area also encompasses smaller patches of cobbling (24177) (24178) (24179) (24180) and (24181).

Pits and Postholes

(24015)	**Pit**	Pit cut through cobbles (24003) in south-west of the trench.

(24032) **Fill** Single fill of (24105) composed of small stones and compacted soil. To the right of the pit a small area of bedrock (24030) was exposed.

(24105) **Posthole** Possible posthole 25cm in diameter and 16cm deep with a dished base.

(24106) **Fill** Single fill with evidence of burning. May also have been a fire pit.

Small Finds

In total 585 small finds were recovered from trench 24 although 44.6% (261) items came from the top soil (24000) and sub soil (24001) and (24002) contexts and therefore have been disregarded in this analysis. However, within this group were 40 Copper-alloy coins, largely 3rd and 4th century dates, 77 other Copper-alloy objects, primarily personal items such as brooches, bracelets and pins. There were also six pins.

There were 61 archaeologically significant contexts from which 324 small finds were recovered representing 55.38% of the total. These finds were as follows:

Cu – Alloy coins, largely 3rd and 4th century in date	12
Cu – alloy objects (pins, rings and brooches)	144
Antler/bone objects, primarily pins	94
Iron objects	30
Vessel fragments	27
Beads	6
Flint tools	4
Lead fragments	3
Quartz token	1
Clay spindle whorl	1
Piece of ochre	1
Wet stone	1

It is important to point out that perhaps with the exception of the iron objects the majority of these finds in both the non-archaeological and archaeologically significant groups are of a personal nature. If as has been suggested that BU11 was a possible shrine and the cobbled area surrounding it formed a religious precinct, then the idea that these personal items may have been deposited as votive offerings does take on added significance.

In terms of personal attribution, particularly prominent are the 23 Copper-alloy pins and the 76 antler/bone pins. Add to these 11 Copper-alloy finger rings, 19 Copper-alloy brooches, four Copper-alloy tweezers, six Copper-alloy nail cleaners and four4 Copper-alloy ligula.

Small find clusters

Where contexts are in close proximity forming groupings.

Finds	Contexts	Finds data	Position in trench
Group 1			
3	(24028)		
1	(24057) (24179)	All within groups of stones largely rubble	South-east of trench

8	(24089)		

Group 2

2	(24022)	Within rubble/cobbling	Central west of trench
3	(24037)		

Group 3

9	(24036)	Within groups of stones	Centre of trench
	(24098)		

Group 4

6	(24059)		
2	(24060)	Contexts in a fairly stone free area	North central edge of trench
	(24061)		
	(24072)		

Group 5

9	(24057)		
8	(24074)	Associated with the sheep burial	South of trench below BU11
	(24077)		

Group 6

10	(24036)	Amongst groups of stones and rubble	Centre of trench
	(24098)		

Trench 23 Small finds.
In total 224 small finds were made in trench 23.

(2300) Topsoil. Seven 3rd/4th Century Copper-Alloy Roman coins. Two Glass fragments. Five Copper- Alloy fragments (nail cleaner/tweezers/pin/bracelet fragment/ earring fragment. Two bone pins. Two iron objects.

(2301). Sub-soil. Glass vessel fragment.

(2303). Sub-soil. Copper-Alloy hook/bone pin/ glass vessel fragment/iron fragment.

Bone Analysis
At the time of writing this narrative the bone report for trench 24 was not available, therefore it has only been possible to report on significant bone finds. However, the
data recorded on the context sheets indicates that from the first 100 contexts 34 recorded bone finds were made. These are from the early phase of operations in trench 24.

Significant bone finds
A fully articulated sheep burial was located just south of building BU11. This sheep <4513> was buried in a shallow depression with a definable cut [24077] with a single fill [24074]. On the northern perimeter of the burial cut were a group of large stones (24049) that appear to have been deliberately placed. As previously mentioned a number of small finds were found in association with this burial.

Near trench 24 a complete cattle burial was excavated cut into the arena bank. It does seem significant and suggestive of ritual burial practice that two whole animal burials were found in this area.

To the north of the trench a horse's skull [24124] was located within an area of large and small stones (possibly disturbed cobbling). There is no evidence to show that this was a deliberate burial (no burial cut or fill). It has been assumed therefore that this skull may have been discarded after the site fell into disuse.

A large number of worked bone pins (76) were found across the trench. These were created elsewhere and brought into this location.

Pottery analysis
In total 6,087 pottery sherds were recovered from trench 24 and consisted of 919 Iron Age sherds and 5,168 Roman sherds. However, topsoil (24000) and subsoil/plough soil contexts (24001) and (24002) were as follows:

Iron Age pottery	324 sherds:	Total 2,129 sherds.
Roman pottery	1,805 sherds:	35% of the overall sample.

These top and subsoil contexts have been disregarded in this analysis.

6,087 pottery sherds is an extremely high number from a single trench. It is possible that pottery sherds of both Iron Age and Roman wares may have been deliberately brought into the site co-mingled with other materials and then consolidated to provide a substrate upon which cobbling was laid.

Iron Age pottery (595 sherds).
The overall sample was made up of PCW 591 sherds and PFW 4 sherds. The pottery was distributed broadly across the trench with perhaps several contexts with a relatively high number of sherds: contexts (24009) 23 sherds, (24012) 30 sherds, (24044) 68 sherds, (24048) 28 sherds, (24074) 24 sherds, (24089) 36 sherds and (24138) 34 sherds. Whilst there were frequent recorded comments relating to original Iron Age surfaces being uncovered the pottery found may not have been in their original place of deposition as explained above.

Distribution of Iron Age pottery: contexts with 10+ sherds

(24000)	77 sherds	Type PCW	Topsoil.
(24002)	241 sherds	Type PCW	Subsoil.
(24009)	23 sherds	Type PCW	Close to BU11.
(24011)	17 sherds	Type PCW	Close to BU11.
(24012)	30 sherds	Type PCW	Within BU11.
(24027)	15 sherds	Type PCW	Close to BU11.
(24036)	17 sherds	Type PCW	To west of wall (24059) co-mingled with rubble.
(24043)	10 sherds	Type PCW	Not identified.
(24044)	68 sherds	Type PCW	Within cobbled area (24006).
(24048)	28 sherds	Type PCW	Within BU11.
(24057)	18 sherds	Type PCW	Within fill of sheep burial.
(24070)	19 sherds	Type PCW	Just north-west of BU11.
(24074)	28 sherds	Type PCW	Within fill of sheep burial.

(24079) 16 sherds Type PCW Just south of BU11.
(24089) 36 sherds Type PCW To the north-east of the trench.
(24127) 15 sherds Type PCW North-east corner of the trench.
(24138) 34 sherds Type PCW Not identified.
(24189) 17 sherds Type PCW To west of wall [24059].
(24192) 20 sherds Type PCW Centre of BU11.

Notable are the number of contexts bearing Iron Age pottery sherds in close proximity to BU11.

Roman pottery (3,633 Sherds).
As with the Iron Age pottery the distribution of Roman pottery was relatively even across the trench. The most predominant Roman pottery types were as follows:

RCWR	1211 sherds	36.0%
RFWR	432 sherds	12.8%
RFWW	376 sherds	11.1%
RWW	352 sherds	10.4%
RFWOX	287 sherds	8.5%
RCWOX	151 sherds	4.5%
OXFWS	120 sherds	3.5%
SM	89 sherds	2.6%
DÉCOR	86 sherds	2.5%

There were 25 contexts across the trench that yielded considerable quantities of Roman pottery. Significant amongst these were 11 contexts within or close to BU11, however these may be quite random deposits particularly if they were used as substrate to bed cobbling.

Roman pottery sherds associated with BU11
(24007) 381 sherds an area 2.5 m to the north of BU11.
(24011) 84 sherds within BU11
(24012) 252 sherds within BU11
(24014) 123 sherds an area directly south of BU11
(24027) 168 sherds in immediate entrance to BU11
(24048) 82 sherds within BU11
(24057) 163 sherds directly south of BU11
(24060) 98 sherds alongside wall [24059] west wall of BU11.
(24070) 459 sherds an area just north of BU11 robbed out wall [24121].
(24071) 39 sherds an area just north of BU11 entrance alongside context (24070).
(24189) 114 sherds an area directly west of wall [24059].
(24210) 42 sherds an area against the south side of wall [24011].