# Trench MF26 narrative

**Trevor Greer**

## Introduction

Trench 26 was opened in 2006 to investigate the pathway that ran through the western *temenos* entrance towards the temple. The line of the pathway was clearly indicated through the excavations in Trenches MF15 and MF32 which identified the *temenos* wall and the western entrance into the *temenos* precinct. From this both the line and width of the pathway could be determined.

Trench 26 was sited over what was the perceived to be the central section of the pathway between the *temenos* wall and the temple. The trench formed a rectangle set on an east/west, north/south axis and measured 8.6m east/west x 7.5m north/south. The depth of soil over bedrock was quite shallow with a maximum depth of approximately 45cm at its deepest point as has been found elsewhere on the site. It is possible that the soil cover during the Roman period was shallower which would have been an important factor in creating a pathway that was weather tolerable.

The main feature of the trench was the pathway itself which ran across the trench from the south-east corner to the north-west baulk. This feature [26004] was approximately 1m in width at its widest point and 9.4m in length. The path was constructed of tightly packed varying sized pieces of limestone bonded with mortar. The depth of the path was variable along its length but averaged 25cm set directly upon bedrock (26009). The path was calculated to connect with the north temple wall at 90 degrees and connect with the *temenos* wall at 88 degrees.

Several copper-alloy Roman coins were found within the structure of the path that might date the later phase of it to the fourth century AD. Excavations beneath the mortared path identified four possible postholes or pits [26021], [26023], [26025] and [26027]. These features were cut directly into the bedrock, were roughly oval, evenly spaced along the central part of the path and measured between 20 to 30cm in width. If these are possible postholes, they might suggest that an earlier path may have existed, perhaps made of wood, before the mortared path was constructed.

The various layers on either side of the path were shown to be made up of compacted silty soil with stone or rubble inclusions such as contexts (26002), (26006) and (26007) each close to the path. Two small areas just north of the path were identified as compacted silty soil with mortar (26003) and (26005). Given the overall depth of the soil these layers are probably the result of modern ploughing where material from the path was moved around.

## Cuts and structures

**[26004]** Path. Constructed of various sized pieces of limestone tightly packed together and mortared into position. The path measured approximately 1m at its widest point and extended across the trench from the south-east corner to the north-west baulk spanning 9.4m. This path was 25cm in depth at its deepest point.

**[26010]** Posthole Pit Possible posthole 40cm wide x 50 cm long.

(26008). Fill. Single fill of post hole/pit [26010]. Brown sandy silt material.

**[26021].** Posthole Pit Cut of a possible posthole beneath the mortared stone path. 20cm in width. Cut into bedrock (26009).

(26016). Fill. Fill of posthole/pit [26021]. Greenish clay material.

**[26023]** Posthole Pit Cut of possible posthole beneath the mortared stone path. Oval in shape 20cm x 10cm. Appears to have been recut to extend the hole to 40cm x 15cm. Cut into bedrock (26009).

**[26025]** Posthole Pit Cut of possible posthole beneath the mortared stone path. Round in shape 15cm wide. Cut into bedrock (26009).

(26024). Fill. Fill of post hole/pit [26025]

**[26027]** Posthole Pit Cut of possible posthole beneath the mortared stone path, 20cm x 30cm. Cut into bedrock (26009).

(26026). Fill. Single fill of [26027] of yellow brown sandy loam.

These four postholes/pits are aligned along the length of the path with [26027] being most easterly and moving westerly are [26025], [26021] and [26023].

**[26012].** Cut. Foundation cut of the path.

**[26020].** Cut. Possible foundation cut of the mortared path. Likely cut into earlier deposits of rubble (26011) and (26015)

(26013). Fill. Fill of [26020]. Loose mid brown sandy soil. Upper fill.

(26012). Fill. Lower fill of [26020] mid brown sandy soil with mortar.

**Layers**

**(26003)** Layer. An area of compacted silty soil and mortar with clay tile, Roman pot and small find inclusions. This subsoil layer was 10cm thick.

**(26005)** Layer. A mortared surface just north of the path. Possibly purposefully laid or mortar from the construction of a wall.

**(26006)** Layer. **(26007)** A silt/sandy soil mix of rubble, mortar, tile and limestone, including an animal jawbone. This layer was situated on the north side of the path.

**(26015)** Layer. Compacted mid-brown sandy soil with inclusions of tile, mortar, Roman and Iron Age pot fragments, animal bone, CBM, oyster shell, iron hobnails and glass. This layer might be a dump of material. There is no evidence for this type of material being used in this trench to form a substrate for cobbling or other made-up surface. This type of material has been evident elsewhere

where cobbling has taken place such as in trench 24.

**(26017)** Layer. Two layers of brown sandy loam 5cm thick extending under the baulk of
**(26018)** Layer the trench. Contained animal bone, oyster shell and tesserae.

**(26019)** Layer. This is the bottom layer beneath (26015) of brown sandy loam with mortar, CBM, iron nails, and oyster shell.

**Pottery Analysis**
In total 736 pottery sherds were recovered from this trench. This group was made up of 31 sherds of Iron Age pottery and 705 sherds of Roman pottery.

**Iron Age pottery**
The 31 sherds of Iron Age pottery were all PCW type. (Iron Age Coarse Ware). There were three contexts that yielded amounts of pottery, (26000) topsoil 14 sherds, (26018) and (26019) each yielded six pottery sherds.

**Roman Pottery**
The Roman pottery recovered from this trench very much reflected the types and range of pottery found elsewhere on the site. There were seven predominant pottery types from this trench, as follows:

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| Roman Coarse Ware Reduced (grey to black). | 328 sherds. |
| Roman Coarse Ware Oxidised (orange/red/buff). | 104 sherds. |
| Oxfordshire Red Slip Ware (orange red to brown). | 74 sherds. |
| Roman Decorated ware. | 58 sherds. |
| Roman White Ware. | 36 sherds. |
| Samian (even red glossy slip). | 25 sherds. |
| DOR. BB1 black burnished ware. | 22 sherds. |

Much of this pottery came from the following contexts:

Context (26000) 262 sherds. This is the topsoil layer.
Context (26002) 69 sherds. A sub-soil layer.
Context (26007) 166 sherds. A sub-soil layer.
Context (26011) 47 sherds. Layer within the cut of the stone path.
Context (26012) 43 sherds. Layer within the cut of the stone path
Context (26017) 4 sherds and Context (26018) 18 sherds, a combined layer that contained other debris see details above.
Context (26015) 18 sherds together with Context (26019) 26 sherds. This was a deposit of dumped mixed material.

**Small Finds Analysis**
In total there were 68 small finds recovered from this trench of which 36 were from the topsoil layer. However, given the shallowness of the soil over bedrock at 45cm at its deepest it is unlikely that any of the finds were in their place of deposition. It is not surprising therefore to find that most of the small finds were either in topsoil or in shallow subsoil layers. The remaining 32 finds were from subsoil layers, generally layers either side of the path (26002), (26003), (26007) and (26012).

The small finds were made up as follows:

Copper-alloy Roman coins 30. Primarily late 3rd to 4th century types. Within this group it was possible to identify 11 Radiates, 12 Sestertius, five Minims, one Minimissimus and one Dupondius or As.

There were six jewellery or jewellery related items. One copper-alloy jewellery link. One Iron finger ring. One copper-alloy bracelet. One copper-alloy bracelet strip. One copper-alloy necklace link. One copper-alloy cable bracelet.

Other items included:
One iron Stylus or rod together with two iron tools.

A copper-alloy binding strip/alphabet letter thought to be a possible votive object.

There were two animal bone teeth and one tooth thought to be human.

One ceramic game counter.

There were five flint objects one of which was a blade with others being flakes or debitage.

Five glass vessel fragments.

The remaining 14 finds were made up of odd pieces of copper-alloy and iron objects.