Trench MF30 narrative

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Introduction

Trench 30 was opened in 2006 to investigate the construction of the bank on the western side of the Roman arena. The trench was sited directly south of Trench 29, the western entrance to the arena, and directly north of Trench 24, which was an extensively cobbled area with much evidence for votive offerings being placed there. Whilst the primary siting of the trench was over the perceived limit of the bank an additional slot trench was opened during the excavation that ran from the south-east corner of the main trench southward to connect with the north-east corner of Trench 24. The purpose of this slot trench was to investigate the extent of the cobbling activity in Trench 24.

Trench 30 was approximately 13m east-west and 12m north-south. The additional slot trench was 1.5m wide at its northern point on the southern edge of the main trench, running due south for 9m and tapering slightly to finish at 1.25m where it joined Trench 24. Although the main body of the trench covered an area of 156 sqm, much of the trench was revealed following the removal of the topsoil. It was noted at the time of excavation that there was good evidence of disturbance through modern ploughing over soil that was quite shallow over bedrock, little more than 1m at its deepest point. Nevertheless, it was possible to discern the main features of the bank construction. Two distinct layers (30002) a clean turf/loam soil layer and (30003) a yellow sandy loam layer formed an arc that ran from the central northern edge of the trench down to a point at the lower south-eastern side. Layer (30003) formed the inner side of the arc close to the arena whilst layer (30002) was situated on the western side of the arc. In the south-west corner of the trench a diagonal strip about 2.5m in length and 1m wide ran from the mid-point of the trenches western edge to the southern edge of the trench that marked a stoney layer (30001). This was interpreted as a stone path that might indicate the limit/edge of the bank construction. Layers (30002) and (30003) appear to have been constructed from material dug from the area that formed the arena. Further excavation showed that the line of the arc was the inner line of a shallow buried stone revetment [30010].

During excavation a slot trench measuring 12.2m long x2m wide was opened within the main trench to investigate down through these two broad layers (30002) and (30003) and to further understand the bank construction. This slot trench was positioned from the south-west, southern edge of the trench set on a diagonal line out toward the middle of the eastern trench edge. This confirmed the presence of the stone revetment [30010]. Excavation directly beneath layers (30002) and (30003) identified eight contexts, along the length of the slot trench, which are as follows, from north-east to south-west.

Context **(30016)** an area 1.5m x 2m in the east of the trench. This context was made up of brown clay/sand and was beneath layer (30003) and directly over layer (30009). Layer (30009) was interpreted as the Iron Age surface upon which the bank was constructed. This Iron Age surface sat upon bedrock (30022).

Context **(30014)** measured 2m x 2.5m consisting of yellow clay/sand and small angular pieces of limestone beneath context (30003). Further excavation showed this context to be a lense of material that partly overlay contexts (30016) and (30015).

Context **(30015)** abutted the inner side (east) of context (30010) the stone revetment. This context was a small layer of brown sandy silt.

Context **[30010]** was the stone revetment of the bank approximately 0.5m in width and forming a slight arc. The revetment was made up of various sized limestone pieces packed tightly together. There was no evidence for the use of mortar.

Contexts **(30013)** and **(30009)** (including lower layers **(30011)** and **(30012)** were all later identified as all part of context (30009) the possible Iron Age soil. Due to modern ploughing this area was very mixed up.

Context **(30002)** was a continuation of the turf/soil layer that covered much of the trenche's western side.

Context **(30009)** the Iron Age soil, described as a buried grey soil.

Context **(30001)** meandered across the south-west corner of the trench, forming a rubble layer that was interpreted as a possible path that may have formed the boundary and limit of the embankment.

The Southern slot trench extension

Context (30004) comprised a sub-soil layer that covered much of the southern extension. There was little in the upper part of the trench until the final five metres. In this lower section two distinct areas of compacted limestone were excavated. The area immediately abutting Trench 24, approximately 1.5m x 2m shows what may have been an extensive area of cobbling, context (30029) and is most likely to be a continuation of the cobbling that was found over much of Trench 24.

A relatively clear area, context (30021) directly to the north of the cobbled area, was made up of light brown sandy gravel material. This area formed a space between the cobbling in the south and a rectilinear feature to the north. This southern edge of the feature (30019) was interpreted as a cut, although on further excavation, this was then shown to be the southern edge of a compacted rubble/mortar mix (30020) that may have been a possible foundation, perhaps for a wall. At the time of excavation these features were interpreted as reveting for the arena bank however this is not possible as the perceived limit of the arena bank was eight to ten metres to the northeast. Given their proximity to Trench 24 they are most likely be part of the extensive cobbling found in that trench.

Further excavation of this area identified a large group of stones (30035) which was thought to be the collapse of a possible wall (30018). Immediately to the north of the stone grouping several layers were recorded in section the first of which formed the uppermost layer (30025) consisting of friable loam containing oyster shell and pottery fragments. This overlay (30026) a thin layer of clayey loam. Below this (30031) consisted of friable sandy loam which was interpreted as the Iron Age soil. This overlay (30032) a layer beneath the Iron Age soil that was approximately 15cm thick and consisted of brownish red sandy loam. Within this layer were tiny pieces of abraded Iron Age pottery with fine pieces of charcoal. Below this was layer (30034) above bedrock (30022). This small layer was interpreted as the probable fill of the paleo-channel in which the arena was located.

Votive Cow Burial

To the south of the main trench a cow burial was excavated. The cut of the burial (30006) formed a roughly rectangular pit approximately 1.95m in length and 0.86m at its widest point. This cut was positioned on a north-west to south-east alignment and necessitated excavating one metre beyond the southern boundary of the trench. At its deepest the pit was 15cm and within it was the articulated skeleton of a cow with its head in the southern most point. The animal was laid with its back to the western edge of the pit with its legs folded up against its belly on the east side of the trench. At the time of excavation, it was observed that this was a precisely dug pit in which to place the beast. There was only one fill of the pit (30007) which comprised of reddish-brown sandy silt with piece of naturally occurring iron stone and a few pieces of CBM (tile).

This burial has been interpreted as a votive offering despite there being no burial goods such as libation cups or jugs. The burial lies to the north of the sheep burial in Trench 24, which was buried close to a three-sided shrine building BU11. This area was populated with thirty plus small stone mounds or cairns that were interpreted as possible votive shrines that together with many small finds of a personal nature strongly supports the interpretation of votive activity.

Cuts and structures

(30006) Pit Cut of the pit for the cow burial.

(30007) Fill Single fill of pit (30006) of reddish-brown sand silt with small pieces of iron stone together with small fragments of CBM (tile). Also included in this fill was the articulated skeleton of a cow.

[30029] Structure. A possible wall oriented north-east to south-west and with a deep substantial foundation. This feature in the southern part of the south slot trench is most probably part of the extensive cobbling activity in trench 24.

[30035] Structure. As (30029) above. Recorded as a possible revetment wall but most likely associated with the cobbling activity in Trench 24.

Important Layers

(30001). Path. A layer of stones that meanders from the lower western edge of the trench **(30005)** diagonally north-west to south-east approximately 2.5 m in length x 1m at its widest point. A possible path that marks the extremity of the embankment.

(30002). Turf. A clean sandy loam bank layer primarily made up of turf. On the west side of the stone revetment (30010).

(30005). Path. A layer of densely packed limestones beneath (30001) and probably part of the construction of the path.

(30009). Soil. This layer was interpreted as an Iron Age soil upon which the embankment was constructed. Three other contexts (30012), (30011) and (30013) were later interpreted as being part of the possible Iron Age soil deposits.

(30003). Sand. A yellow sandy layer thought to have been dug out of arena and used in the construction of the embankment. This layer sat on the eastern side of the stone revetment (30010).

(30014). Bank. Layers of the arena bank on the east side of the stone revetment (30010) closest to the arena that included contexts (30015) and (30016). These layers were sandy silt deposits with stone inclusions that again represent material dug from the arena. Context (30016) contained large pieces of limestone.

(30017) Trample. This layer formed an area of compacted limestone pieces in clay/sand and was interpreted as a 'trampled' area at the edge of the bank, possibly marking the extremity of the bank. This feature sits between the stone path (30001) and the stone revetment (30010).

(30018) Cobble. This layer included context (30019) described as a mortared surface situated in the lower half of the southern slot trench extension. It is probable that these layers were associated with the cobbling in Trench 24 where similar mortared foundation levels were excavated.

(30020) Rubble. Together with context (30021) formed a layer of rubble close to (30018) and was possibly part of the cobbling in Trench 24. It was recorded as a dump of material.

(30023) Turf. These layers sat on the east side of the revetment in the main trench. These **(30024)** are mid layers and were interpreted as the first layers of the embankment construction sitting on the Iron Age soil level (30009).

(30027) Bank. Layers the same as (30014). A mid-brown sandy loam with small stones. A **(30028)** small lense of material above context (30016) and part of the bank construction material.

(30033) Wall. Interpreted as a possible collapsed stone wall in the southern end of the south extension trench. This again is most likely to be part of the extensive cobbling in Trench 24.

Pottery analysis

Trench 30 was rich in both Iron Age and Roman pottery with 114 sherds of Iron Age pottery and 2,405 sherds of Roman pottery.

Iron Age Pottery.

Much of the Iron Age pottery came from four contexts. All pottery was of type PCW (Prehistoric Coarse Ware)

(30008) 29 sherds. Western end of the main trench a layer above the Iron Age soil (30009).
(30009) 41 sherds. Iron Age soil found across the whole trench.
(30012) 12 sherds. Same as (30009).
(30031) 15 sherds. This context came from a small area in the southern trench extension.

It is not surprising that there was a good level of Iron Age pottery recovered as much of the trench was just above or upon Iron Age soil levels.

Roman pottery
A significant proportion of the Roman pottery came from context (30012) yielding 2,154 sherds. Contexts (30001) and (30005) the stone layer (path) on the western side of the main trench yielded 190 sherds.

The pottery from context (30012) is intriguing as this context is part of the Iron Age soil deposits and was recognised as the same as context (30009). The only record of context (30012) was from a small section of the main slot trench which shows it alongside context (30009). The area covered by context (30012) must have been much greater than has been recorded either on plan or section drawings. Whilst the whole area has been subjected to modern ploughing with considerable movement of soil and its contents it does not explain why so much pottery came from a single context.

The types of pottery recovered from these contexts very much reflects the levels and types of pottery recovered from much of the site as a whole. These are shown below in order of magnitude.

RCWR.	RFWR.	RCWO.	OXFRS.	D.	RFWOX.	RFWW.	RWW.	DOR.	SM.	OXFWS.	ROBSH.
921.	323.	223.	185.	147	120.	113.	90.	79.	63.	45.	30.

Small finds
In total 22 small finds were recovered and from just three contexts. Six came from top-soil context (30000), seven from context (30001) the stone path area and nine from context (30002), a large area on the western side of the revetment arc. These finds are as follows:

Finds	Context. (30000)	Context. (30001)	Context. (30002)
Cu-alloy 3rd/4th Roman coins.	5	1	5
Glass vessel fragment.	1		
Bone/antler pins.		2	1
Cu-alloy brooch.			1
Cu-Alloy ring fragment.		1	
Iron nail.			1
Bone tool (awl).		1	
Quern stone fragment.		1	
Iron plate fragment.		1	
Cu-Alloy + bone object.			1