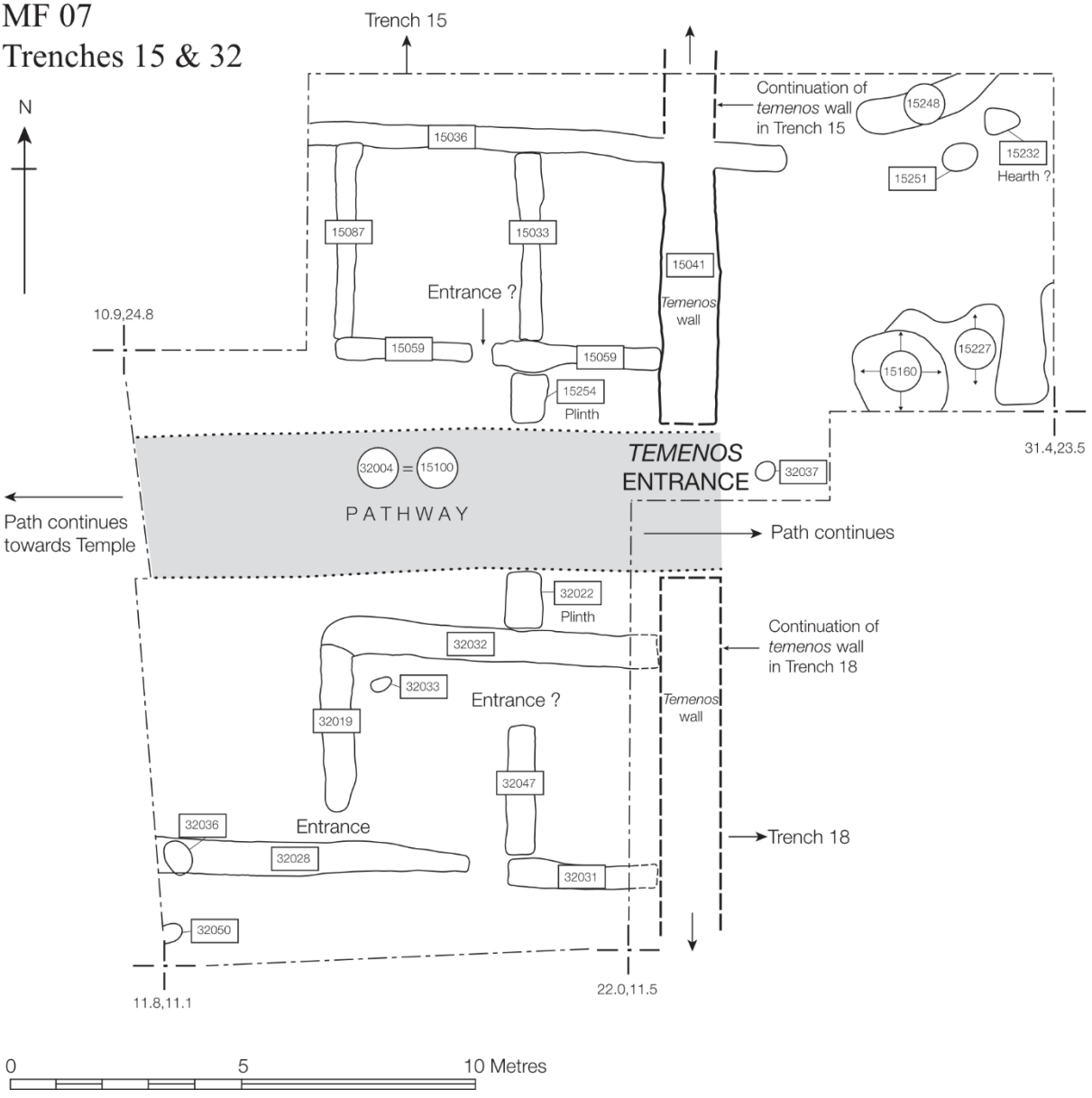
Trench MF32 narrative

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Introduction

Work in Trench 32 commenced in 2007 with the aim of investigating the buildings and structures on the south side of the temenos pathway, and their relationship to those excavated in previous seasons in Trench 15. As elsewhere on the site, the walls had been robbed out. The foundations, which had been partially robbed out, directly overlay the bedrock but did not cut into it.



Trench MF32

Trench 32 was significantly smaller than Trench 15. The eastern boundary of the trench was set approximately 1m from the temenos wall inside the west room. The 1m of room and the temenos wall became part of Trench 18.

The pathway inside the temenos ran east to west towards the temple and is probably a continuation of the pathway investigated in Trench 25. The pathway was constructed on the surface of the pre-building soil (32004/15100) at the same level as the surfaces on the inside and outside of the buildings. It has an overlying layer of crushed limestone gravel, which was thickest in the centre and thinning towards the edges. A few fragments of tabular limestone lie on top of the grounds suggesting that the gravel might have provided a foundation for a tiled surface which has now been lost. Within the gaps between the stones a number of different layers were excavated suggesting that the pathway was repaired several times.

Excavations have determined that the structures to the south (Trench 32) and to the north (Trench 15) of the pathway inside the temenos mirrored each other in alignment, layout and dimensions. To the south the structure is formed by six walls. In both north and south suites of rooms the temenos wall was used as the easterly wall from which the two rooms were attached towards the west into the temple precinct. In Trench 32 two walls attached to the temenos formed the north and south wall of the two rooms, each was set on an east-west axis. Wall [32032] formed the northern wall and approximately 4.5m to the south wall [32054] formed the southern wall. However, the southern wall only ran as far as the mid dividing wall [32023] after which there was a gap of approximately 1m, perhaps forming an entrance. The south wall then continued as wall [32028] for a distance of 7m which is 3m beyond the west wall [32019]. At the northern end of the dividing wall [32023] an entrance doorway [32053] measuring 1.2m was constructed. The foundations of which consisted of a row of tabular limestone blocks, each 0.1m thick and set vertically that might suggest that they supported a door sill which has now been lost. Another possible entrance measuring 0.5m was recorded at the southern end of the west wall [32019]. Oddly, there does not appear to be an entrance into either of the two rooms from the temenos pathway. This arrangement of walls created two rooms, (although as pointed out the west room in Trench 32 was truncated by about 1m) an easterly room of 4.2m x 3.5m and a west room of 4.2m x 3.3m.

As discussed, the southern wall [32028] continued 3m beyond the west wall [32019] suggesting that a third open fronted room may have existed. At the western end of wall [32028] a posthole [32036] was excavated, and approximately 1m inline and to the south of this a second post hole [32050] was located that might suggest that a timber framed lean-to type of structure may have existed. A small pit or posthole [32033] of unclear phase was found in the north-west corner of the west room. One metre to the west outside the temenos entrance, a single posthole [32037] measuring 0.33m x 0.2m x 0.2m deep was located. The fill (32006) comprised a large limestone slab 0.4m x 0.25m, which had been placed horizontally on the base of the hole together with other large tabular limestone blocks placed vertically around the hole presumably as packing. This arrangement suggest that a very large post was supported. The purpose of such a post is unclear.

Nothing has survived to suggest a possible function for the rooms or for the activities that might have taken place in them, in addition no floor surfaces have survived. A comparison between the finds recovered from the rooms in the north (Trench 15) to those of the south provide data that suggest that the level of activity in and around the northern rooms was very much greater. For example, small finds in the southern rooms totalled 33 items, including 17 3rd/4th century Copper-Alloy Roman coins and little else of significance, whereas finds from the northern rooms and surrounding cobbled area (Trench 15) to the east of the temenos wall yielded 469 small finds. Within this group were 74 3rd/4th century Copper-Alloy Roman coins

and 22 items of jewellery, including 12 shale bracelets, four Copper-Alloy finger rings, six Copper-Alloy bracelets together with three bone/antler pins and six Copper-Alloy pins. The difference in pottery finds is also significant, with 649 sherds from Trench 32 against 6,923 sherds from Trench 15. Despite the fact that Trench 32 was smaller in area than Trench 15 this does not fully explain away the significant difference between the two suites of rooms. A full analysis of all aspects of the structures and findings in Trenches 15, 18 and 32 may elucidate a better understanding of these structures and their purpose.

During excavations two rectangular features were noted each being positioned either side of the path and in line and abutting the central dividing walls of the north and south suites of rooms [15034] and [32023]. Each feature was approximately of the same dimensions with the northern feature at 1.45m x 0.8m and the southern feature at 1.3m x 0.75m. The northern feature [15254] was constructed of flat tabular limestones, each approximately 0.1m thick and set vertically and bonded with mortar forming a partial herring bone pattern. Unfortunately, this feature was only recorded in section and not in plan. The southern feature [32022] was less well defined with an ephemeral outline of the rectangle in clayey soil and no masonry filling. Again, this feature was not excavated to see if any form of foundation existed, although it was recorded in section which showed a fill of red/brown soil with pebbles and some pieces of CBM. At the time of excavation these features were interpreted as possible plinths that may have supported columns or an archway marking a formal grand or ceremonial entrance into the temple precinct. However, there is little evidence from the partial excavation of these features that would support this interpretation.

Cuts and Structures

[32002] Path A metalled path that forms a formal entrance into the temple precinct through the temenos wall. This path was approximately 2m in width although the exact edges of the path were poorly defined. Seven specific layers or sections of the path were identified. This path stretched from the outer limits of Trenches 18 and 15 approximately 4m to the east of the temenos wall through to the west of Trenches 15 and 32. The width of the path was defined by the two features either side of the path, one to the north at Trench 15 and one directly in line to the south at Trench 32 with a distance of 2m. These features were thought to possible plinths.

The following fill/construction data does not describe a fill sequence of the path but various layers or sections of the path associated with trench 32.

(32005) Path Top layer. Fine grained Oolitic limestone gravel surface at variable thicknesses across path but up to 6cm measured in section. Tended to be thicker on the northern side of the path close to Trench 15.

(32009) Path Thin sandy layer directly below the Oolitic limestone layer (32005). This layer was fairly widely distributed across the path.

(32011) Path Rounded limestone cobbles up to 20cm in diameter used in the construction of the path. Seen as odd groups along the path.

(32034) Path Small angular limestone pebbles embedded into the underlying soil as part of the construction of the path. These may also represent repairs to the path.

(32039) Path Small flint cobbles with pottery sherds and animal bone fragments possibly used as a matrix within the stone packing of the path. Possibly a later repair to the path.

(32042) Path A small area of red/brown silt forming a matrix into which (32011) cobbles were embedded.

(32045) Path A mixture of small limestone pieces together with CBM (primarily fragments of ceramic roof tiles) and red/brown soil covering a 1.4 m section of the path and 5cm thick. Thought to be a later repair to the paths surface.

[32022] Plinth Whilst this feature was recorded as a possible plinth there is little evidence in the context records or on plan or section drawings. This context records a rectangle approximately 1.3m x 0.75m and robbed out. This feature was only seen in section and the fill was not excavated.

(32048). Fill. 'Robber' fill of the plinth feature. Although not excavated the fill was recorded as red/brown soil with inclusions of pebbles and broken CBM although this might be surface scatter

The West wall set on a north-south axis

[32019] Wall Foundation cut for the Western most North/South wall. This wall cut showed the wall to be approximately 3.3m long x 0.6m wide x 0.15m deep.

[32051] Wall Small terminal section at the Southern end of wall [32019] measuring 1.1m in length that was possibly an entrance into the west room. This feature was hard to define as it may have been damaged during robbing and there was clear evidence of modern plough damage that distorted this part of the trench.

(32029) Fill Fill of wall [32019]. Consisting of single course of large tabular limestone blocks, 20cm long x 10cm thick x 13cm wide which were bedded into the foundation trench vertically.

(32052) Fill Fill of [32051], made up of red/brown soil with inclusions. Unfortunately, this feature was poorly recorded with very little data.

The central dividing wall

[32023] Wall This wall was the central North/South wall that divided the two rooms. This wall was recorded in two parts with [32023] being the main section of the wall at 3.0m and a northern section [32053] measuring 1.5m. This second section is thought to be an entrance between the two rooms. The width of the wall varied due to damage probably caused when robbing took place but generally appeared to be 0.5m in width. In the centre section of the wall an area of wall tumble was noted on the east side possibly the result of robbing activity.

(32047) Fill Single fill of [32023]. This part of the trench was filled with a number of large tabular limestone blocks and gravel thought possibly to represent a section of unrobbed trench foundation particularly in the southern end of the

trench.

The central dividing wall entrance

[32053] Wall This feature is thought to have been a formal entrance between the two rooms. Set at the north end of the dividing wall and the northern east-west wall [32032]. This entrance measured 1.5m wide x 0.5m in width. This entrance connects with wall [32032] via a shorth wall spur of about 0.5m.

(32046) Fill. Although recorded as a structure this is the fill of [32053] and was much the same in construction as the central wall [32023]. This construction consisted of a linear arrangement of tabular limestone blocks. All the stones were of a similar size, approximately 15/20cm in length and 10cm thick, each being laid vertically forming a well-constructed group and may have supported a lintel.

The southern wall of the west room

[32028] Wall This wall ran from the southern end of the central dividing wall [32023] westward for a distance of approximately 7m, and passes the southern end of of the west wall at the 4m point. It does appear that this wall does not connect with either the southern end of the dividing wall or the southern end of the west wall [32019]. It may be therefore that there were additional possible entrances at these points. The gap between this wall and the central dividing wall is about 1m, and the gap at the south end of wall [32019] is about 0.5m. Both seem to be oddities in both size and location if they were intended as entrances. The continuation of the wall 3m beyond the west wall is of note. At the western extremity of this extension a posthole [32036] was located which may indicate that this wall extension may have been part of a timber framed lean-to structure.

(32021) Fill Top fill of wall trench [32028] consisting of red/brown soil with inclusions of variable sized pieces of limestone, sherds of Roman pottery, animal bone and fragments of CBM.

(32024) Fill Bottom fil of the trench consisting of limestone blocks of varying size within A matrix of red/brown soil together with sherds of Roman pottery and fragments of CBM.

The southern wall of the east room

[32054] Wall This is the southern wall of the east room the east end of which was in Trench 18 [18304] therefore this section of wall was approximately 2.7m in length. The average width of the wall was approximately 0.5m and depth of 0.2m The western terminal of the wall where it joined the central dividing wall [32023] appears to be extremely misshapen with a terminal resembling a pit, possibly caused during the robbing of the walls.

(32031) Fill Recorded as an arrangement of stones being the lowest course of the foundation.

The northern east-west wall

[32032] Wall This is the north wall of the two rooms, set on an east- west axis. As with the

southern wall the east end of this wall was excavated as part of Trench 18. This northern wall was approximately 6.5m in length x 0.5m in width and 0.25m deep. 2m from the east along the wall is the junction with the central dividing wall and directly adjoining this on the north side of the wall was the possible plinth [32022]. The western end of the forms a sharp right angle where it joins wall [32019].

(32018) Fill Single fill of red/brown soil forming a matrix within which were variable sized limestone blocks up to 12cm square with gravel and mortar, abraded pieces of CBM, flint and animal bone.

[32033] Pit A large oval pit situated in the northwest corner of the west room, approximately 0.7m x 0.5m and 0.2m deep with sloping sides that formed a cone shape.

(32020) Fill Single fill of pit [32033] consisting of a brown soil matrix with limestone inclusions. There were clear signs of burning through reddish brown stones and flecks of charcoal. Also within the fill were pieces of animal bone and oyster shell. A few large pieces of limestone some with adhering mortar which may have been used as packing material for whatever was in the pit. Flotation showed many small snail shells and chard plant remains to be present.

[32036] Posthole This posthole was cut into the bedrock at the base. West terminal end of the south wall of the west room. This is the odd 3m extension of the wall beyond the west wall [32019]. This posthole was approximately 0.5m round x 0.4m deep. As pointed out in the discussion of the south wall this posthole together with the wall extension may have been part of a timber framed lean-to building. 1m to the south of this posthole is another posthole [32050] which may be part of the same structure.

(32044) Fill Single fill of red brown soil mixed with a high level of limestone and mortar. Possibly remnants of the robbed-out wall or packing material to support a post.

[32037] Posthole The siting of this large posthole is intriguing as it is to the east of the gap in the temenos wall that forms the entrance path between the two sets of buildings, therefore its purpose is unclear. The posthole was slightly oval in shape measuring 0.78m x 0.66m and with a depth of 0.2m and almost vertical sides.

(32038) Fill Top fill of dark brown soil which acted as a filling between vertically placed limestone pieces. Possibly representing final packing after the limestones were put in place.

(32006) Fill Large stones that can be seen to have been placed in two phases. The lower and largest of the stones had been placed horizontally onto the base of the hole. The largest of these was a tabular limestone slab measuring 0.4m x 0.25m. A second series of stones and a large roof tile had been placed vertically around the outside edges of the hole possibly forming packing for a very large post. The large roof tile together with small, abraded pieces of CBM provided dating material. Small flecks of charcoal were also found in this fill.

(32040) Fill Bottom fill. A mixture of orange red sandy soil forming a thin layer beneath the fill of large stones.

[32050] Posthole. Ovoid in shape measuring 0.38m x 0.48m cut into bedrock with stepped sides to a flat base. This posthole was sited 1m south of posthole [32036] and together may have held a post that supported a timber framed structure. This posthole was situated close to the western and southern baulks of the trench. This might also indicate that other postholes might have been present beyond the southern limit of the trench

(32049). Fill A single fill made up of soil, small pieces of limestone and mortar together with inclusions of Roman pottery sherds, animal bone, flint flakes and small pieces of CBM.

Small Finds Analysis

There were very few small finds of significance in Trench 32 with a total of 33 within which 18 3rd/4th century Roman coins were found. In comparison in the northern counterpart where 469 small finds were recovered, which included 74 3rd/4th century Roman coins. Overall, the finds from this trench were as follows:

1. 3rd/4th century Copper-Alloy Roman coins. 18
2. Copper-Alloy scrap/strip/smelt waste 5
3. Lead pieces/folded sheet/lead core 3
4. Iron pins/rod 2
5. Glass vessel fragments 5

Significant Contexts

(32000) Top soil total of 18 finds including nine 3rd/4th century Roman coins, three vessel fragments, four pieces of Copper-Alloy fragments, one lead folded sheet and one iron pin.

(32002) Sub soil. One 3rd/4th century Roman coin.
(32003) Sub soil. One 3rd/4th century Roman coin.
(32004) Sub soil. One 3rd/4th century Roman coin.

These four contexts have little archaeological significance as they were all within plough soil levels.

(32017) two finds. One 3rd/4th century Copper-Alloy Roman coin and one Copper-Alloy lace tag. Floor of the west room.

(32018) one 3rd/4th century Copper-Alloy Roman coin.

(32024) Three 3rd/4th century Copper-Alloy Roman coins. Fill of southeast west wall.

(32030) one lead core, one vessel fragment and one 3rd/4th century Copper-Alloy Roman coin. Floor of the west room.

Pottery Analysis
In total 649 sherds of pottery were recovered from Trench 32. This group was made up of 48 sherds of Iron Age pottery (7.4%) and 601 sherds of Romano British pottery (92.6%). However, 393 sherds (60.5%) of mixed pottery came from top soil context (32000).The remaining 256 sherds (39.5%) was fairly evenly distributed across the trench.

Iron Age pottery was entirely of type PCW (Prehistoric Coarse Ware) with 48 sherds overall. eight of which came from top soil (32000) and 13 sherds from the floor of the west room (32030)

The distribution of pottery was as follows in order of magnitude.

1. RCWR. Roman Coarse Ware Reduced. Grey to black. 199 sherds (33.0%).
2. RFWR. Roman Fine Ware Reduced. Grey to black. 75 sherds (12.4%).
3. RCWO. Roman Coarse Ware. Oxidised. Orange/red. 50 sherds (8.3%).
4. D. Decrated ware. 47 sherds (7.8%).
5. RWW. Roman White Ware. 41 sherds (6.8%).
6. RFWW. Roman Fine White Ware. 32 sherds (5.3%).
7. RFWOX. Roman Fine Ware Oxidised. Orange /red. 31 sherds (5.3%).
8. DOR. BB1 Black burnished ware. 24 sherds (3.9%).
9. OXFRS. Oxfordshire Red Slip Ware. 23 sherds (3.8%).
10. OXFWS. Oxfordshire White Slip Ware. 23 sherds (3.8%).
11. SM. Samian. 22 sherds (3.6%).
12. ROBSH. Roman Shell Tempered Wares. 12 sherds (1.9%).