Trench 34 narrative

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Introduction

Trench 34 was opened to evaluate the density of any archaeology in the northern part of the field between the temenos and the arena features. This long evaluation trench ran N-S just to the west of Trench 22 and measured 59.5m x 2m. One of the goals was to investigate the possibility of a W-E trackway in the north heading towards the arena and another was to look at several strong geophysical anomalies in the southern part of the trench. Finally, it was hoped that this trench would also determine the western limits of the building in Trench 22. All the archaeology in this trench was severely truncated by ploughing, so only the foundations of structures and the lower occupation deposits survived. No traces of a trackway were discovered in the northern end of the trench. Indeed, the northern half of this long thin trench has no features at all.

However, the two strong anomalies seen in the southern part of this trench were discovered to be the foundation courses of two substantial Romano-British limestone built smithing hearths, namely [34004] to the north and [34009] to the south. Both hearths were aligned NE-SW and built directly on limestone bedrock. Although the southern hearth [34009] in the SW corner had suffered the most plough damage, both hearths had three to five lower courses remaining up to a depth of *c.* 0.5m. The northern hearth was slightly larger than the southern one, at *c*. 2m long and *c*. 0.9m wide. The closed rounded ends of the hearths faced each other, though with a gap of *c*. 6.5m between them. The stones were roughly faced in the interior. All the stonework was heat affected and cracked. Evidence of some clay bonding remained and up to five layers of internal heat affected silty sands were found. These internal layers produced abundant hammer-scale and some fragments of smithing slag, making it very clear they were smithing hearths. Spreads of scorched and charcoal-rich material fanned out from the open ends of both hearths and in the northern hearth a number of iron fragments and finds were also discovered. Another feature, irregular scoop [34036] to the north of hearth [34004], contained evidence of burning and metal-smithing as well as more domestic items like pottery and animal bone.

In the southern part of the trench, *c*. 1.5 m north of the northernmost smithing hearth [34004] was a very short stretch of fragmentary NE-SW stone wall [34020]. It appeared to be the corner of a building, with only part of it appearing on the eastern edge of the trench and running onwards in a NE direction. The position of this wall aligns to a potential E-W end wall for the western annex of the building in Trench 22. Set to the west of this wall and its' suggested NE trajectory was a line of four postholes which could be postulated as running parallel to the suggested NE-SW western wall end of the Trench 22 building. These four truncated postholes [34016], [34019], [34024] and [34038] created a line *c.* 7m long and ending approximately where we might expect the northern end of the Trench 22 annex to finish. However, this is a very narrow trench, so it is possible that more related postholes run further north of this line, way outside of the trench limits. It is also worth noting that the

postholes are not set at an equal distance from each other, which you might expect for a veranda support. If the wall and postholes are part of the Trench 22 building it suggests that its western annex was like the main structure, open on one side with a line of postholes marking a veranda or roof line on the open side.

Not surprisingly this trench did not produce a lot of finds apart from the metal-working evidence, as there were only a few features. The vast majority of the material was Roman. There were only nine prehistoric sherds, probably residual, and 136 Roman sherds. The Roman pottery was mostly fine and coarse reduced wares and some coarse oxidised wares and the majority of these probably date to the mid to late Roman period. The 72 small finds from this trench break down into 37 iron objects (plate fragments, various fittings, tool fragments); 12 copper-alloy objects or fragments; 15 Roman coins, all late Roman; four flint flakes; three glass fragments (two vessel fragments and one bead); and one shale bracelet fragment. The coins all suggest a late Roman date (3rd and 4th centuries) for this activity. Also found were small fragments of iron slag, charcoal, and iron hammer scale.

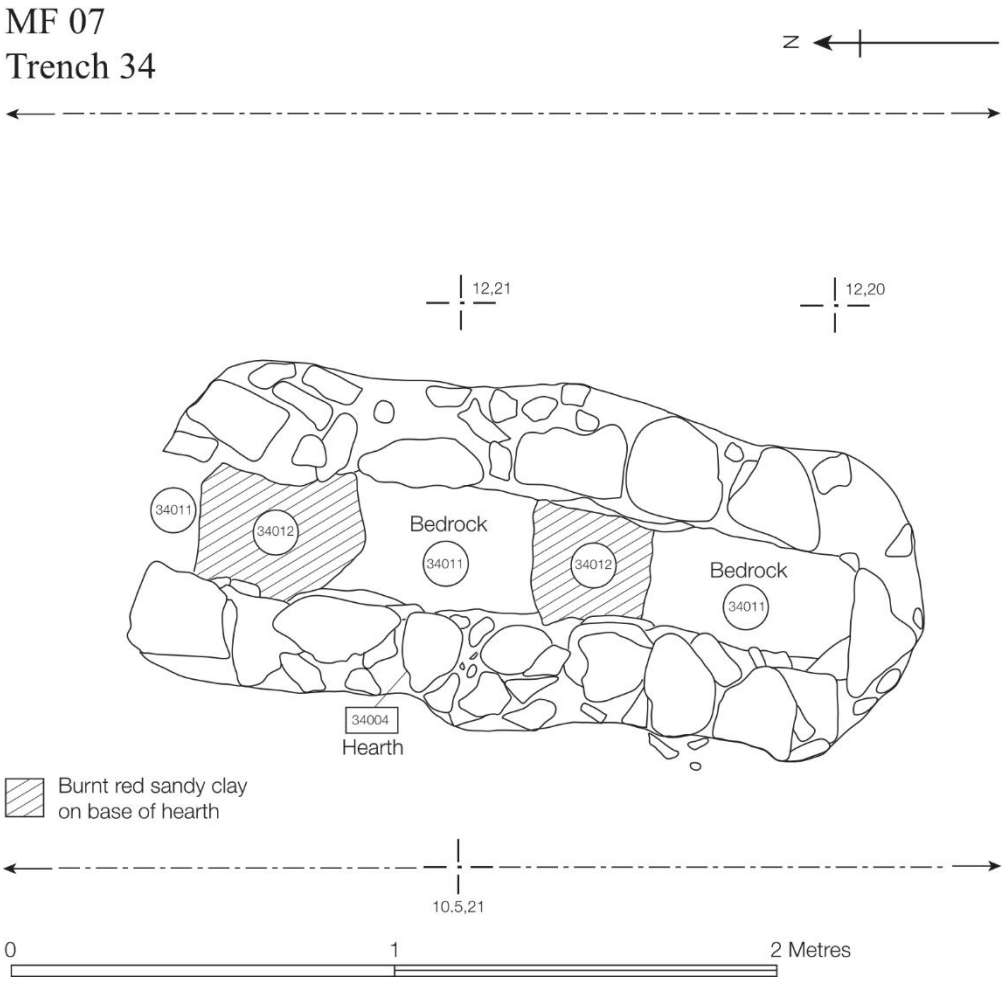
Roman Phase

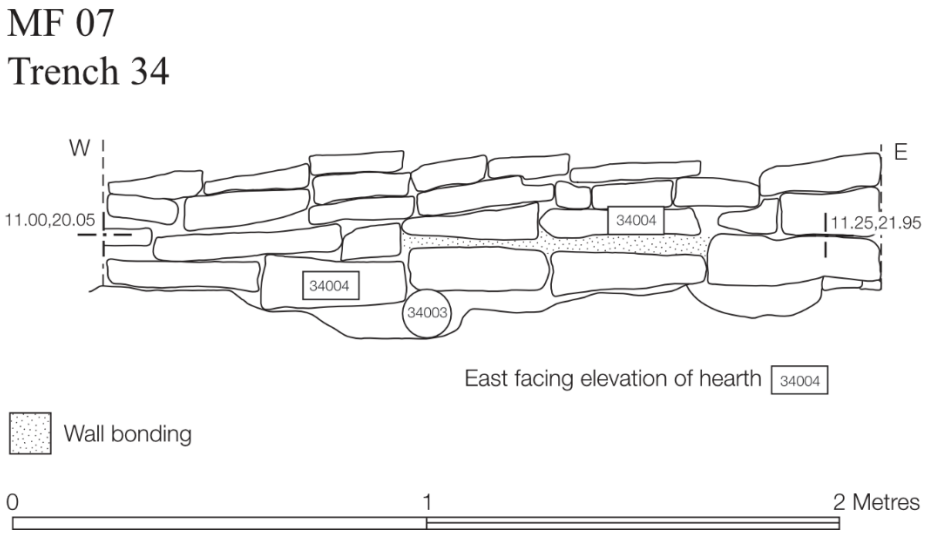
There appears to be no prehistoric features in this narrow trench and very little prehistoric activity of any sort in this area. With the two smithing hearths and a scoop full of what appears to be burnt debris of various sorts, the activity evidenced in this trench all points to metal-working. The presence of another two smithing hearths in Trench 39 just to the east of this one also supports the suggestion that this was an area of metalworking in the Roman period. All of the coins found in this trench are Late Roman so this appears to be the main period when this activity took place. The only other features in this trench are the fragmentary corner of a stone building with a possible veranda or projecting roof line set to its west, as evidenced by four postholes. The position of this eroded and damaged wall and its line of postholes on the western side, all align with the 'potential' position of the western end wall to the western annexe of the building in Trench 22. The distance of the postholes from the side of northward trajectory of this wall varies from 0.5m-0.75m. If this is the western end of the Trench 22 building, the proximity of the two smithing hearths in this trench and the other two hearths in Trench 39, might suggest a link between all of these Roman features. Whatever the activity was in the Trench 22 building, it may be related to the iron working or smithing happening in these hearths to the south of it, making it an industrial or craft workshop.

STRUCTURES

Hearth [34004] is a U-shaped hearth built of rough limestone heat-reddened blocks. The hearth was situated in the southern half of this trench, about 6.5m north of the southernmost hearth and a few metres south and west of the southern end of the building in Trench 22. The dimensions were *c.* 2m x 0.9m with a surviving depth of about 0.3m to 0.35m. The width of the surviving walls ranges from *c*. 0.25m to 0.3m and the limestone blocks range from *c.* 28cm x 25cm to 55cm x 55cm. This feature survived to three to five courses with

some traces of clay bonding. The structure was set on heat reddened limestone bedrock (34034).





Hearth [34004]

There were five layers of dark silty sand inside the structure, all with abundant iron hammer scale, supporting the suggestion that this was a smithing hearth. Pieces of charcoal and small fragments of slag were also found in these layers and some had heat reddened patches. The layers in stratigraphic order from top to bottom are (34005), (34006), (34007), (34008) and (34010). The top layer (34005) spread out to the north of the hearth as a fan of material with some charcoal fragments, see information below. Only the top two layers produced any small finds. Layer (34005) produced three iron fragments and one glass bead and layer (34006) produced a fragment of Roman vessel glass. No pottery was found in this structure.

Hearth [34009]is a second smithing hearth, situated at the very southern end of the trench *c.* 6.5m to the south of hearth [34004]. Part of the western edge lies outside the limits of the trench. The dimensions of this hearth were *c.* 1.75m x 0.65m, slightly smaller than its northern counterpart. The walls were more fragmentary than hearth [34004] with a surviving width of *c*. 0.10 to 0.20m. It was oblong shaped and set on bedrock (34034), which also showed signs of burning. The surviving depth of the hearth ranges from 0.2m to 0.3m. It was constructed of rough limestone blocks, these had sizes ranging from *c.*15cm x 14cm to 27cm x 17cm and surviving to three courses. The limestone was roughly faced on the interior.

Inside this structure were five layers of dark silty soil, containing large quantities of charcoal, some reddened burnt stone and iron hammer-scale. The layers in stratigraphic order, top to bottom, were (34021), (34022), (34026), (34029) and (34032). Layers (34022) and (34026) include fragments of red orange burnt clay which may be parts of the hearth lining. Layer (34033), a dark silty sand with *c*. 15% charcoal inclusions, extends out for *c.* 1m from the open end of the hearth and probably represents the rakings from it. The only layer within the hearth with any pottery is (34026), which has five Roman sherds. Only small fragments of animal bone were found in these layers and no small finds were discovered.

Posthole [34016] is a small oval posthole *c.* 0.3m x 0.2m, cutting layer (34002) and severely truncated by ploughing. Fill (34015), which included some small limestone packing, contained no pottery or other dating evidence. This posthole along with another three, described below, may have a connection with wall [34020] as a possible line of supports for a veranda or extended roof line just to the west of and parallel with it. See discussion section above. It is situated *c*. 1.5m to the north of the wall.

Posthole [34019] is a straight-sided posthole with a flat bottom, measuring *c.* 0.3m x 0.2m. Fill (34018) included some limestone packing as well as three or four small pieces of chalk but there was no pottery or any other dating evidence. It is set *c.* 4m from wall [34020]. This posthole may be part of a group relating to wall [34020, the most southerly of which is [34016]. Posthole [34019] is *c*. 2.5m north of [34016].

Wall [34020] is a line of fragmentary limestone blocks with traces of mortar and appears to be the damaged corner of a stone building. No wall cut was observed. The visible length north to south of this wall was *c.* 2.5m and the visible west to east 'width', until it disappears

in the east baulk, was. *c*. 1.5m. The remains were very fragmentary due to robbing and/or plough damage. As discussed above, the position of this wall aligns with the potential position of a west end wall of the building in Trench 22. This would make it the western wall of the western annex of the Trench 22 building. A line of postholes set *c*. 0.5 to 1m west of the proposed NE trajectory of this wall fragment, may represent the supporting timbers of a veranda or extended roof line. Overlain by subsoil (34002).

Posthole [34024] is a straight-sided circular posthole *c.* 0.25m x 0.25m and surviving to a 0.15m depth. There is evidence of limestone post packing and the single sandy fill (34023) included no pottery or any other dating evidence except a fragment of Roman ceramic tile. It is situated *c*. 1m north of posthole [34019]. This posthole may be part of a group relating to wall [34020], the most southerly of which is [34016]. Posthole [34024] is *c*. 1.3m north of posthole [34019].

Scoop [34036] is an irregular ovoid scoop of a stepped profile, measuring *c.* 2.0m x c. 0.8m with a total surviving depth of *c*. 0.2m. It is situated about 15m north of the hearth [34004] which is about half-way up this long thin trench. There are no other features in this area. It may be a tree-throw reused as a rubbish pit. The single fill (34031) contained mixed hearth material, including burnt orange clay hearth lining, burnt stone, numerous fragments of iron slag, some charcoal, as well as pottery and metal small finds. This probably represents dumped material from the nearby smithing hearth [34004]. There were 102 sherds of Roman pottery, mostly reduced greywares, and two sherds of residual prehistoric pottery. Some 24 small finds were found in this scoop, 22 of which were iron fragments or objects. These iron objects included fragments of tools like gouges and chisels, pieces of thick plate, staples, bars and an iron nail stem. The other two small finds were a 4th century Roman copper-alloy coin and a broken copper-alloy pin.

Posthole [34038] is a small, truncated posthole only partly barely visible in the trench edge and cut by the baulk. The width may be *c*. 0.3m to 0.4m. The single surviving fill (34037) contained no finds of any type. This posthole may be part of a group relating to wall [34020], the most southerly of which is [34016]. Posthole [34038] is *c.* 1.4m north of posthole [34024].

MAIN LAYERS

Layer (34005) is the upper layer inside hearth [34005] but also extends as a fan of burnt material extending northwards from the open end of hearth. This represents the rakings of the hearth and measures *c.* 1.3m x 1m. It contained charcoal, small fragments of bone, and three iron fragments (sf 5319, sf 5318 and sf 5374). It overlies layer (34027) in the area outside the mouth the hearth.

Layer (34027) is a friable black silty layer with charcoal and burnt clay fragments. It spreads out northwards and underlying layer (34005) in the fan of burnt material deriving from hearth [34004]. Like (35005) it represents the rakings or clean-up from the smithing hearth. The only finds were iron fragment sf 5381 and four sherds, three of which were Roman.

Layer (34028) is another dark spread of material extending out from the mouth of the hearth [34004]. It underlies layer (34027) and contained a larger variety of finds than the two layers above it. As well as the charcoal and burnt clay and stone fragments found in the other layers, two iron fragments were found (sf 5381 and sf 5428), as well as small fragments of animal bone, 24 Roman sherds and six Iron Age sherds.

Layer (34030) is a dark sandy clay with patches of orange burnt material and represents the lowest layer in this fan of burnt material extending out from the mouth of smithing hearth [34004]. It underlies layer (34028). It also represents the rakings from the hearth and the only finds were one Roman sherd.