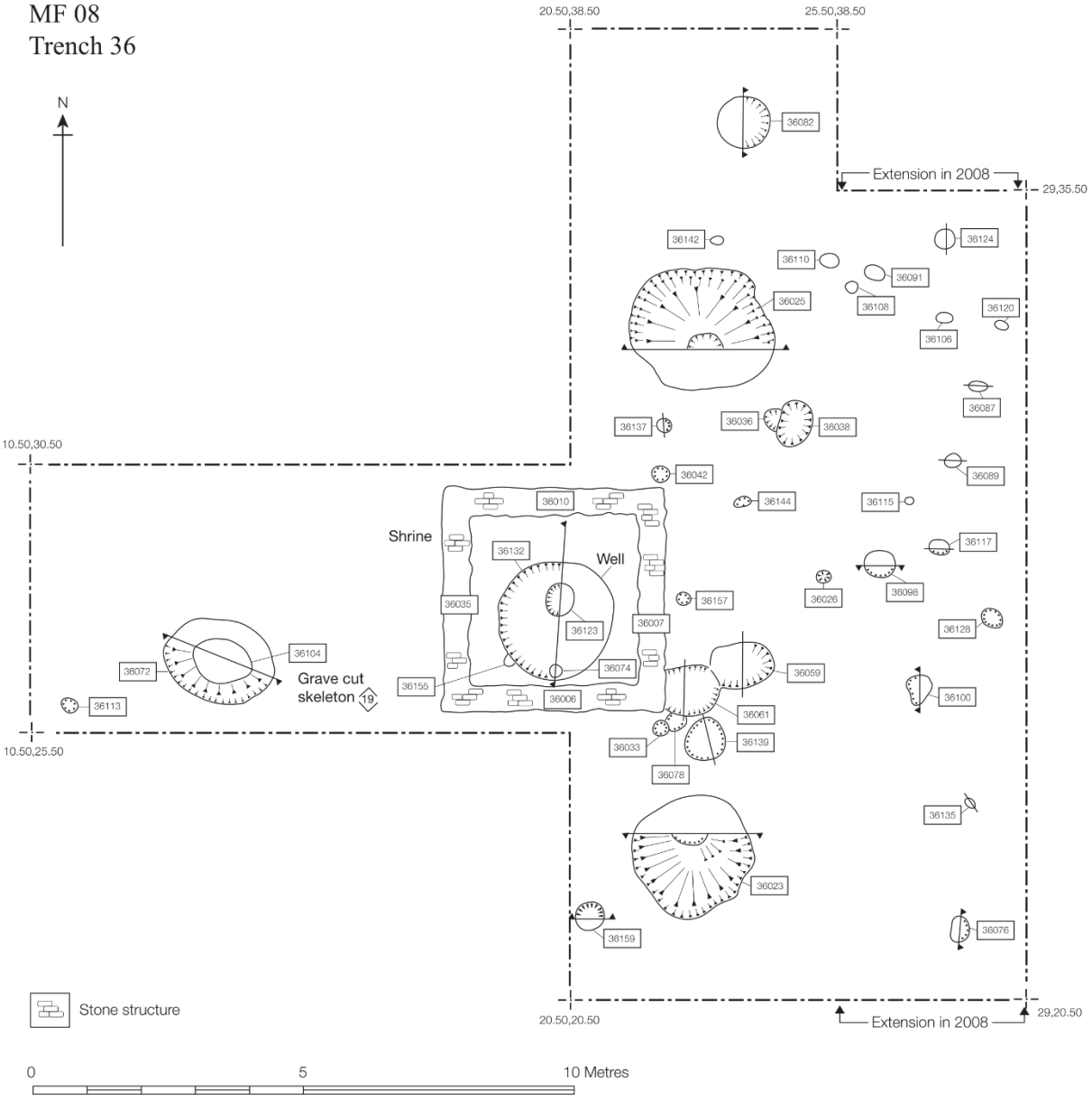
Trench MF 36 narrative

Sheila Raven

Introduction

This trench was located over two strong geophysical anomalies in the centre of the site, which turned out to be two large pits just to the south of the Trench 2 building and on the same alignment as the path leading out of the temenos surrounding the main Roman-Celtic shrine heading eastwards. In addition to the two pits, the excavation soon revealed a small square stone-built structure placed between them (BU.10). In 2007 an investigative T-shaped trench measuring 15m x10m was opened to investigate the two large pits, the structure, and other cut features. Initial investigation inside the square stone building found the foundations of a circular limestone structure [36008] positioned over a pit [36132] situated inside but off centre inside the square space. Stone lining within the pit appeared to support a shaft of some sort. In 2008 two extensions to the existing trench were opened. One extended the trench by *c.* 3m x 5m to the north, to investigate any other features between the square structure and the Trench 2 building. A second extension to the west, measuring *c.* 6m x 5m, investigated another large oval feature [36072] which it was discovered contained a secondary grave cut [36104]. Though the shaft feature had initially been thought to be a well, full excavation of this feature made it clear that it did not reach the water table. Originally there was a large pit occupying the central area inside the later Roman square structure. It appeared that a shaft was created in the pit by filling it with supportive limestone layers around a void. After filling up this void with deposits containing late Roman coins and hobnails, a limestone cap covered the shaft. In 2009 the excavation of the central pit and its stone-lined shaft [36123] within the square stone structure was completed.

Much of this area in the trench was truncated by ploughing, leaving in some areas only a thin layer of what was probably the Iron Age occupation surface (36002) which sat directly above bedrock, and only the lower part of some of the shallower prehistoric features. The remnant of this Iron Age ground surface is mixed up with small amounts of late Roman pottery, so the whole area is very disturbed. As we only have the lower part of many Iron Age pits in this area (which probably would have cut an original Iron Age occupation surface), it is clear that medieval and later ploughing went very deep and has disturbed and obscured the Iron Age ground surface. The main features in this trench were the small stone square structure known as **BU. 10**; the two large pits **[36023]** and **[36025]** flanking it; a large pit **[36132]** inside the square shrine, with stony fills inside this pit seeming to support a cylindrical 'ritual shaft' **[36062/36123]**; another large but shallow cut **[36068]** through the central pit and near the 'ritual shaft'; and a large oval pit **[36072]** to the west of this containing an Iron Age burial in grave cut **[36104].** Besides this, 35 other small pits and potholes were revealed in the trench, most of them dating to the Iron Age. The large Iron Age pottery assemblage dates to the EIA and MIA. In total 193 small finds were discovered in this trench, the vast majority of which (151) were Roman coins.



Trench MF36

The coins were largely 4th century in date, apart from six 3rd century coins, one 2nd century coin and a rare 1st century coin (dated A.D. 41-54 and from a subsoil layer). The majority of these Roman coins, 112 in total, came from seven of the fills in shaft feature [36123] and probably represent a ritual deposit. The remaining 42 non-coin small finds from this trench are a mixture of small iron objects, copper alloy objects (including a finger ring and a brooch), worked bone items, flint tools, and a handful of worked stone fragments and slag. Amongst the flint blades and scrapers there was one rare Bronze Age tanged arrowhead SF 5734, deriving from the fill of a small pit under the SE corner of the shrine. About 89 Roman iron hobnails were found in the trench, about half of which came from two fills (36054) and (36067) within shaft feature [36123]. The significance of hobnails has been discussed in the Trench 2 narrative - their link with Mercury, the god of travel, when used as offerings, rather than just decayed footwear, is of particular interest when found in conjunction with quantities

of Roman coins as is the case in the Trench 36 ritual shaft and in the case of deposits within the nearby potential shrine structure in Trench 2. When we look at the pottery from Trench 36 it may seem surprising that in an area featuring a Roman square shrine and ritual shaft, that some 86% of the pottery was prehistoric and not Roman. Out of the total 3,861sherds, 3,296 were prehistoric in date and only 565 were Roman. The largest assemblages of prehistoric pottery came from three of the major Iron Age features in the trench, namely the two large pits [36025] and [36023] on either side of the square structure and also grave cut [36104] containing crouched skeleton SK19. Most of the Roman pottery came from the subsoil and other layers rather than from any features. About 272 fragments of animal bone were found in this trench, and of the identifiable fragments the majority were sheep/goat (111), with smaller amounts of cattle and pig making up most of the remainder. Fifteen fragments of bird bone were also found, more than in many trenches, and eleven fragments of horse bone.

Prehistoric Phase

When looking at the layout of the whole Roman temple site and in particular the main Romano-Celtic temple within its temenos to the west of the square structure in Trench 36, it became clear that the temple and its central path are on exactly the same alignment as both the central pit inside the square structure and the two large flanking pits on either side of it. The two flanking pits were indisputably Iron Age based on pottery dating, and both were of late EIA to early MIA. However, the central pit contained little dating material amongst the stone fills, but it did contain a large chunk of Roman quern stone in the basal fill proving that the stone fills were laid in the Roman period. However, the Iron Age pits to either side of the square structure and its pit and shaft seem to be honouring something, so it may be that the central pit was originally a prehistoric feature emptied of its original fills in order to create the later Roman 'shaft'. The flanking pits and whatever they flanked must have been of some significance in the prehistoric period, the memory of which lasted into the Roman period. It appears that the main Roman temple was placed in reference to this sacred area and also to other prehistoric features within and just outside the temenos boundary. There are many instances in Britain of Roman and later religious structures being laid out either directly over or close to past sacred markers and the site at Marcham is a clear example of such a practise.

The crouched burial of SK 19 in oval cut [36104] reinforces the argument for this area being of significance in the Iron Age. The burial is placed just to the west and roughly aligned to the pit within the square shrine, and the pottery from the burial is of the same EIA to early MIA date as that found in the two large pits. Almost 3,300 Iron Age pottery sherds were found in this trench, again highlighting its importance in the prehistoric period. The pottery assemblage ranges from the Early Iron Age to the Middle Iron Age , showing that this was the period of prehistoric activity in this area. The pottery assemblages were particularly large in the two big pits flanking the square shrine and also in small pit [36061] just to the south-east of the pit within the square shrine and underneath the south-east corner of the shrine wall. The latter also contains a rare Bronze Age tanged arrowhead (SF 5734), which may well be a curated object placed in this area of sacred importance. There was a surprisingly large number of prehistoric sherds (88) also in a double posthole feature [36026] situated to

the east to the pit within the square structure and at an equal distance between the two flanking pits. There is a whole series of postholes (about 11x in all) on the eastern edge of the trench, only about 5m from the east wall of the square structure, and apparently in the same N-S alignment. This potential group has been assigned **Group Number [36172]** in the post-excavation stage. It does appear as if most of them are roughly aligned on this N-S axis, though some deviate and are placed just to the east or west of a postulated line. Could they represent a formal eastern boundary to this sacred area in prehistoric times?

MAIN CUTS:

[36023] large pit to the S of shrine is situated equidistant to the south of the path from the temenos entrance to the sacred area in Trench 36, the same distance as pit [36025] lies to the north of it. It measures *c*. 2-2.5m in diameter cutting though a thin layer of Iron Age occupation layer and bedrock and was *c.* 0.9m deep. It contained eight fills, which were from top to bottom fills (36012), (36013), (36004), (36022), (36028), (36040), (36046) and (36048), all silty and organic rich. All of the fills, apart from top fills (36012) and (36013), contained substantial amounts of late EIA to early MIA pottery, together totalling 427 sherds. There were also 54 sherds of Roman pottery in the upper and middle fills. Fill (36004), like fills (36012) and (36013) above it, was disturbed and contained Roman pottery which may be 3rd century in date, as well as a small Roman copper alloy ring, SF5120. This is a high number for IA pottery compared to many of the prehistoric pits across the site – further supporting the ritual and spatial significance of this pit, just like its 'sister' pit [36025] to the north. By contrast, there was a surprisingly small amount of animal bone from these fills, mostly fragmented and probably residual from backfilling, making the large quantities of pottery look much more like a special deposit.

The top two fills of this pit may well be the truncated remains of higher fills that were still open in the Roman period and they contained only four IA sherds and one Roman sherd. Even in its truncated state the upper parts of this pit displayed a wide and very weathered cone, suggesting it was open for some time in the Roman period. This tallies with our theory that this and pit [36025] to the north, were still clearly visible in the early Roman period and still retained enough sacred significance for the first temple building within the temenos to be aligned with them.

[36025] large pit to N of shrine is situated to the north of the square shrine and to the north of pit [36023], at an equidistant point from the temenos path alignment. It measures *c*. 2m in diameter narrowing to *c.* 0.5m as you get to the lower portion and was cut through bedrock. The depth was *c*. 1.45m. As with pit [36023] it had a large weathering cone at the top, sloping at a 45% angle, and was still open and visible in the Roman period. It contained seven fills which from top to bottom are (36018), (36027), (36041), (36047), (36049), (36051) and (36052). The seven fills produced a large amount of late EIA to early MIA pottery, totalling 697 sherds, plus 15 Roman sherds from the upper fills. The date of the pottery assemblage from this pit matches that of the equivalent large pit [36023] to the south of the shrine. The animal bone assemblage was not large with some contexts having no bone at all. It featured nothing unusual apart from a complete sheep horn core in (36027). Like pit [36023] the pit

appears to have filled slowly and was still left open in the Roman period. Aside from the pottery and animal bone finds there were no small finds of any type in the fills, but if the ritual or sacred importance of this and the other pit are correct, it is worth speculating as to whether votive offerings of foodstuffs, liquid or organic materials which would leave no trace, might have been placed in the pit at various points?

[36026] posthole is a small oval cut, possibly a truncated double posthole, and measures *c*. 0.30m x 0.20m and 0.14m deep. It is situated to the east of the shrine on the E edge of the trench. The single fill (36024) contained 88 Iron Age sherds, a surprising amount for such a small feature. The pottery includes EIA as well as MIA sherds, and the EIA pottery was probably residual.

[36036] small pit is a shallow cut situated to the NE of the square shrine measuring *c*. 0.65m in diameter. It may cut plough-disturbed layer (36002). The shallow pit is cut by large pit [36038]. Single fill (36030) contained animal bone, 33 sherds of abraded prehistoric pottery and three Roman sherds.

[36038] sub-circular pit is situated to the NE of the square shrine and measures *c.* 0.82 x 0.88m with a depth of *c.* 0.3m and with near vertical sides. The pit cuts bedrock and also smaller pit [36036]. It contained three fills which from top to bottom were (36037)/(36039), (36050) and (36053). Top fill (36037)/(36039) included several large burnt stones. Only 43 sherds of pottery were found in these fills, 42 of which were small abraded prehistoric sherds and one of which was Roman.

[36045] truncated pit is situated to the NE of the shrine and to the south of pit (36038). It is so heavily truncated that only the bottom of the pit is just visible and what remains measures *c*. 0.35m in diameter. Single fill (36044) includes a partially articulated juvenile sheep which may represent a special deposit.

[36059] pit is situated at the SE corner of the square shrine and sits next to pit [36061] to the west. The sub-ovoid pit measures *c.* 1.0m x 0.70m and was truncated so the original depth is unknown. The surviving depth was *c.* 0.38m with a steep profile on one side. Because of the truncation of the upper fills of this pit and a pit [36061] abutting it, it is difficult to assess which cut which, as the upper fills look the same. They may be contemporary. The pit cuts disturbed layer (36002) and is overlain by (36017). It would have had more fills, but the surviving bottom fill (36055)/(36056) was said on site records to have included prehistoric pottery, but none were found in the Trench 36 assemblage under these fill numbers. One small find of a 4th century Roman coin was found in this fill, so the period of its construction and use is extremely uncertain. As the pit is severely truncated and disturbed, it seems most likely it was a prehistoric pit with a Roman coin that was deposited when the whole area was disturbed, either for the construction of the Roman shrine or by later ploughing.

[36061] pit was situated at the SE corner of the square shrine, adjacent to pit [36059] and possibly cut by it. The pit was sub-rectangular and measured *c.* 0.76m x 0.6m with near vertical sides and survived to a depth of *c*. 0.58m but, like many of the pits in this area, was truncated by later ploughing. As discussed with neighbouring pit [36059] above, the

truncation and loss of the upper profiles of both these pits makes their relationship uncertain. They may be closely contemporary in their construction or one may have cut the other. The pit ran under and was overlain by the eastern wall of the square shrine [36007]. There were two fills, which from top to bottom are (36060) and (36064). Layer (36065), originally thought to be a top fill, was actually a stony layer, possibly deposited to stabilise the underlying pit so as to create a more solid surface for the creation of shrine wall [36007]. Upper fill (36060) contained 38 EIA/MIA sherds and bottom fill (36064) contained 56 EIA/MIA sherds, four small Roman sherds and a rare Bronze Age tanged arrowhead (SF 5734). The presence of this potentially 'curated' object may represent a special deposit and the proximity of this pit to the important 'sacred' pit inside the Roman square shrine and its position below the shrine wall itself may be of significance.

[36072] large oval pit containing grave cut for skeleton SK19 is a large oval pit just to the west of the square shrine. It measures *c*. 2.20m x 1.60m with a depth of *c.* 0.5m and has an irregular V-shaped profile, more vertical at the top and with a narrow flat base. It cut though bedrock (36003). It has been truncated by ploughing and was largely recut by grave cut [36104]. The combination of plough truncation and the recut means only the primary fill (36102) of this original pit has survived on the outer edges of the recut. It contained only two prehistoric sherds, so more precise dating is impossible.

[36078] posthole is situated at the SE corner of the shrine, possibly cut by pit [36061] and is in turn cut by another posthole [36033]. It measures *c*. 0.20m and the depth is *c.* 0.2m. The only fill (36077) contains a few large stones (post packing?) but no finds. Possibly Iron Age.

[36082] pit is situated to the north of large northern pit [36025] and measures *c*. 1.00m x 1.20m with a surviving depth of *c*. 0.40m, it has straight sides with a small weathering cone at the top implying it remained open for some time. It cuts bedrock and disturbed layer (36002). From top to bottom the 3 fills are (36083), (36090) and (36099), together containing 114 EIA/MIA sherds.

[36104] oval grave cut for skeleton SK19 seems to be an almost complete recut of large oval pit [36072] with gently sloping sides leading to a narrow and deep lower section with straight sides and containing the tightly packed crouched human remains of SK19. The pit is situated close to and to the west of the square shrine [36169]. The top of the recut measures *c*. 1.6m x 1.2m with a complete depth of *c*. 0.75m, and the lower sub-oval part housing skeleton SK19 measures *c.* 0.65 x 0.45m and *c.* 0.35m deep. The whole recut contains five fills, which from top to bottom are fill (36071), fill (36079)/(36094), stones (36105), fill (36081) and base fill (36084)/(36103) containing SK19. No small finds were discovered in this recut. Top fill (36071) produced large amounts of late EIA to early MIA pottery, some 410 sherds, plus a mix of sheep and cow bones including part of a cow skull. Below this fill (36079)/(36094) contained 135 EIA and MIA sherds and some animal bone and stones, some of which were burnt. Fill (36105) was not really a separate fill, just a circle of five large burnt stones set on the top of fill (36081), which looks like a deliberate construction, possibly with some symbolic function? Lower fill (36081) contained 20 prehistoric sherds and some burnt bone. The base fill (36084)/(36103) inside the very narrow oval shaft at the bottom of the

recut contained 28 EIA sherds and many limestone fragments around the crouched remains of a complete skeleton with its knees drawn up to its chin and the head in the SW facing NE. The grave is orientated roughly SW/NE. The pottery in the fills includes both EIA and early MIA pottery. Radiocarbon dating of the skeleton gives a date of 408-357 cal. BCE.

Posthole Group [36172] was assigned in post-ex to a group of 11 postholes set in a rough N-S alignment on the eastern edge of the trench and in the same alignment as the N-S west wall of square shrine structure BU.10. This groups consist of posthole cuts [36076]/fill 36075; [36087]/fill 36086; [36089]/fill 36088; [36100]/fill 36101; [36106]/fill 36107; [36115]/fill 36116; [36117]/fill 36118; [36124]/fill 36125; [36128]/fill 36129; [36135]/fill 36136. Most of these postholes contain no dating but postholes [36076], [36089], [36100] and [36128] all contain prehistoric pottery. Posthole [36120] contains one Roman sherd only but that may be due to worm action, so still may be prehistoric. Posthole [36124], a rather larger cut at the north end of the group, contained a mix of prehistoric and Roman sherds, so the dating of this is uncertain. The alignment of these postholes may mark out an eastern boundary to the sacred prehistoric area in Trench 36, set as it is just to the east of the big prehistoric pits flanking the square shrine and its enclosed pit.

Roman Phase

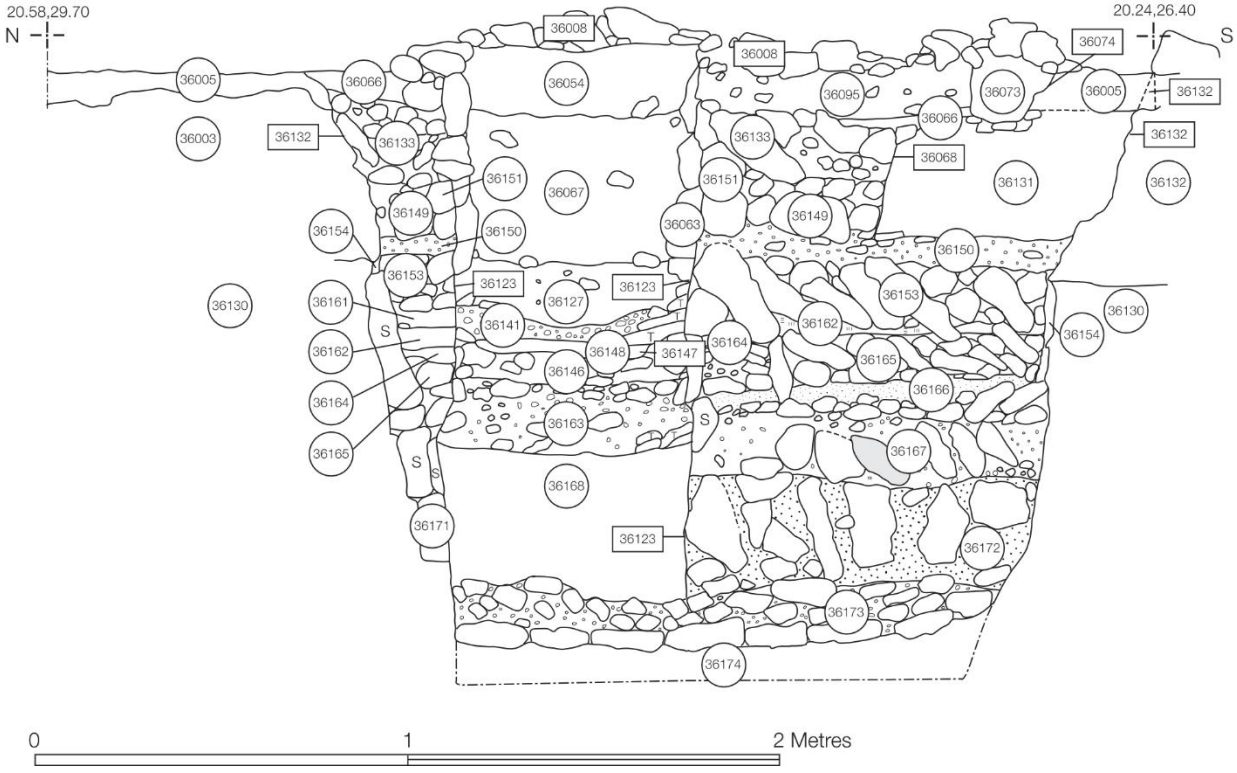
DISCUSSION

When it was discovered that the axis of the main Romano-Celtic temple, and the entrance through the temenos surrounding it, was centred on the small square shrine structure to the east in Trench 36 – it became clear that this area to the east must have been an early sacred or ritual focus much earlier that the late 1st century founding of the main temple. How early was the next question? The square shrine surrounds a large pit into which a 'ritual shaft' was apparently constructed, the shaft being a late feature as it was full of 4th century coins. The topsoil in the area contained 3rd and 4th century Roman pottery, so it seems Roman activity in this area was focused on the later Roman period. Furthermore, the siting of this square structure (which has little or no dating) and probably the large pit within it, seemed to be linked to the position of two large flanking prehistoric pits, which are securely dated by their rich deposits of Iron Age pottery. The weathering cones of these two flanking pits show that these were surprisingly still open and therefore visible in the early Roman period. The initial conclusion was that these two flanking pits were the reason the square shrine was created where it was, and the reason why the main Roman temple to the west was positioned where it was. Our original conclusion was that the other large pit actually within the square structure was created at some point in the Roman period to support the 'ritual shaft' cavity with a complex supporting system of layers of stones.

However, important though the flanking prehistoric pits clearly were, it is the central pit and its later 'ritual shaft' that the square shrine actually encloses and that marks the central axis of the temple to the west, so it would seem likely that this central pit or possibly something that preceded it, was the most important pre-Roman sacred focus. And the 'flanking pits' are just that, they flank a key point of ritual activity in the prehistoric period. One possible theory is

that this focus was the large central pit that the Roman 'ritual shaft' was built into. As this pit has practically no finds except possible fragments of Roman CBM, four small prehistoric sherds, and more significantly what seems to be a founding deposit of a large fragment of Roman quern stone (SF 5813) in the basal fill, it seems it must have been filled at some point in the Roman period. Was this a prehistoric pit that was emptied in the Roman period in order to create the elaborate stone layers supporting a 'ritual shaft'? The problem with that theory is that the 'ritual shaft' is not central to the pit but is situated at its northern edge and if the pit itself was the reason for the positioning of the 'shaft', why not put it in the centre? Also, the square shrine structure is centred on the 'shaft' position and not the actual pit, suggesting the 'shaft' was of greater importance and potentially the spatial focus of the main 1st century temple to the west. Yet the shaft contains many 4th century coins plus the occasional 3rd centur coin and late Roman pottery, so its construction is unlikely to be late Roman, otherwise why are there no early Roman finds of any type even at the base of it. Practically speaking, it also seems strange that it would have been a lot easier just to dig a ritual shaft straight into the ground close to the central pit rather than either emptying a pre-existing sacred pit (if it was prehistoric) and building elaborate stone layers to make an artificial space or equally digging a new pit in the Roman period and layering it in order to create this empty shaft space.

MF 09
Trench 36
Section 36.28



Large pit [36132] showing the 'ritual shaft' [36123] to the left

The off-centre positioning of the ‘ritual shaft’ in its pit and the decision to create a ‘vacant space’ by building up many elaborate supporting layers of stone in a large pit does however make sense if you consider that the ‘ritual shaft’ was in its initial construct, not a shaft at all. Instead, we can postulate that the ‘ritual shaft’ space originally housed a very large trunk or post that over time rotted away or was partly removed leaving a partly silted up/partly vacant space. This makes sense of why the ‘shaft’ is positioned off centre and close to one side of the pit, in the way a much smaller post in a conventional sized post-hole would be i.e. pushed up against one side of the cut and shored up and supported on the other side by stones, or in this case elaborate stony layers. The position of the ‘shaft’ pushed up hard against one side of the broad pit, also makes sense if you think of the difficulty of pushing a large tree trunk sized post into a hole in the ground, you could not drop it from above straight into the middle of a pit, but if you could lever it in at an angle from one side it would be much easier. The concept of a sacred post/tree trunk seems more prehistoric than Roman, but there is no reason why on such a complex and unusual ritual site like Marcham, with clear signs of a continuity of ritual practise from Iron Age to Roman times, that such a feature might not be created in the Roman period. So, one possible theory about this complex feature is that a sacred prehistoric pit still visible in the early Roman period was emptied and repurposed in the early Roman period to support a large timber post/tree trunk which then became a focus for ritual and a key to the positioning of the main temple to the west. Then as time progressed the post rotted and fell or the remains were removed, creating a post-hole cavity that was then re-purposed again as a ‘ritual shaft’ at the end of the Roman period. An alternative theory is that there was some kind of prehistoric sacred feature between the two flanking pits and in the area of the square shrine, perhaps a standing stone or some other feature, and this spot was seen to be of such ritual importance, that in the early Roman period a large pit was dug from scratch in order to house a large ritual post.

Whichever of the possible theories is correct, certainly by the late Roman period, there was a need to repurpose this feature. The lower layers of the ‘ritual cavity’ only contained a few 4th century coins, which could have been moved down by worm action, and the basal layer (36168) contained no coins at all. There are small amounts of pottery in the lower fills like fill (36163) which produced 33 sherds, these may represent earlier offerings. The pottery from (36163) has been dated to the mid to late 4th century. This suggests that the shaft must have been repurposed at least in the 4th century, so the period of its active use as a ritual shaft for offerings may have only been decades at the most. However, it is in the top half of the ‘shaft’ that the fills produced substantial numbers of 4th century coins (98 coins), as well as Roman hobnails and Roman pottery. Small amounts of Roman pottery and a handful of Roman coins were found in the lower fills, which may have been partly filled by the remains of rotted timber, but on a very small scale compared to the Roman finds deposited in the top three fills. So, it may be that whatever point in the Roman period this ‘ritual cavity’ was created by the decay and/or removal of a large timber, there was a time of use where the lower fills built up and perhaps the few Roman coins and pottery sherds were deposited (and possibly also organic materials like food or drink leaving no trace in our record). This was followed by an intensification of ritual deposition at some point in the 4th century when the

custom of leaving large numbers of coins (107 coins in the top 3 fills) and hobnails to a deity very possibly Mercury, really took hold.

The nature of the square structure around the 'shaft' feature is also not totally clear, as we only have the bottom one or two rows of foundation stones for all four walls, and the north and south walls in particular have been severely robbed. Though it was speculated in the interim that there was an entrance through the south wall, there is no evidence in the form of door post traces or stone sills or thresholds, just a thinning of the stones which is most likely down to robbing. In fact, the position of an entrance would logically be in the west wall facing the direct route to the main temple and the entrance through its temenos to the west. Though no evidence of this pathway was found in Trench 36 itself, the path was traced in Trench 25 as it exited from the temenos eastern entrance and headed directly towards the square shrine and its west wall. The area in Trench 36 was heavily disturbed by ploughing, so it is very possible that this removed any traces of a temple path as it approached the square shrine. The other question about this small square structure is - was it an actual roofed building or was it simply a stone wall of limited height protecting the sacred pit or 'ritual shaft' or 'ritual post'? We can never be sure, but as the small space would not allow much room for any activities as the large, capped pit occupied most of the space, it seems more likely it represents a low stone wall. If the central pit did contain a large post/tree trunk there certainly could not be a roofed structure over it.

Another point of interest is the relationship between the Trench 36 shrine and the large structure in Trench 2 in the later Roman period. The Trench 2 building is both close to and in the same alignment as the square shrine in Trench 36. The ritual shaft within the square shrine produced 110 late Roman coins, very much in line with the large quantity of late Roman coins found in secondary deposits such as (2070) and (2195) in the Trench 2 structure. These two neighbouring and similarly E-W aligned structures were clearly in use at the same time. It is hard to pin down when the square shrine and its ritual shaft were actually constructed, but it seems likely that ritual activity within the square shrine was happening at roughly the same time as late Roman material was being deposited in the Trench 2 structure. So, the proximity and shared alignment of the two structures and the fact that both the top of the ritual shaft and the west end of the Trench 2 building contained late Roman coins of the same date – does suggests a relationship between the two. Perhaps, one deity was worshipped inside the square shrine earlier in the Roman period, then at some point in the 4th century there was a move to a different kind of worship and perhaps a different deity. Perhaps both the Trench 2 building and the ritual shaft inside the pit within the square structure were created to worship a new deity? Whether one came before the other or both were constructed around the same time is difficult to say.

Just as discussed in the Trench 2 narrative, the shrine feature in Trench 36 also lacks any clear evidence of specific deity worship in the form of figurines, miniature associated animals, altars and inscriptions. However, as with the Trench 2 evidence, favoured offerings for the god Mercury in the form of coins, hobnails, and either the bones or figurative representations of ram and cockerels (his associated animals) do occur within and around the ritual shaft feature inside the square shrine. The shaft produced 110 late Roman coins, 37 hobnails and three

examples of cockerel spurs, the latter a very rare occurrence on the site. The limestone capping (36008/(36057) over the ritual shaft may represent an ending procedure after the deposition of coins and other offerings into the 'shaft'. It might also have formed the base for a statue of Mercury or an altar to Mercury but without any actual statuary this has to remain a theory

MAIN CUTS

[36068] pit seems to be a secondary small pit cutting pit [36132] on the south edge of it. There is some confusion in the records as this number was originally assigned to the circumference of what became large pit [36132] but once the latter was half sectioned [36068] was revealed to be a smaller feature cutting the southern edge of it. According to the section this pit has straight sides and measures *c.* 0.7m across and has a depth of *c*. 0.35m. It appears to cut pit fills (36149) and (36133) inside [36132]. The single fill (36131) contains no pottery or any other finds. It seems to be overlain by the upper fills of [36132], namely fills [36066/36095] and [36005] and if that is the case then this feature was cut before the upper fills of the large pit were completed. If so, it may imply that these very last pit [36132] fills were put in rather later than all the fills below them. The function of this broad but shallow cut is unclear, but considering its strategic position inside the square shrine, cutting the central pit, and the fact that it was not only aligned to the ritual 'shaft' but also of the same diameter suggests it was also of ritual importance. Was it a shallow pit for ritual offerings like food that left no trace or a cut housing a stone feature or a post (see discussion above)? A smaller posthole cut [37074] (see below) which cuts the upper fills of large pit [36132] directly overlying [36068] is interestingly positioned directly over [36068], as if honouring or sustaining the position of the earlier cut.

[36074] square posthole cuts large pit [36132] inside the square shrine, south of the stone capping over the shaft, and measures *c.* 0.45m x 0.35m with a depth of 0.26m, it has near vertical sides and is lined with ten limestone cobbles. It cuts the upper fills of pit [36132] and the only fill (36073) contained no finds, but quite a lot of limestone fragments. As it cuts the upper fills of the refilling of pit [36132] during the Roman period, it seems likely this is a Roman feature but with no dating evidence we cannot be sure. Its position, directly over pit [36068] may be significant in terms of acknowledging the position of whatever pit [36068] represents.

[36123]/[36062] ritual shaft Measured *c*. 1.8m deep and was *c*. 0.7m in diameter. Overlain by limestone capping stones layer (36008) and (36057). From top to bottom stratigraphic order, the fills run as follows:

Top fill (36054)/(36058) sandy silt upper fill of 'shaft' containing 90 prehistoric sherds, 24 4th century Roman sherds, ten Roman hobnails and 19 Roman coins. Fill (36058) is a yellow sandy lens within (36054). Overlain by stone capping layer (36008) and overlies fill (36067). The mix of Iron Age and Roman sherds in the top fill implies there was a lot of residual prehistoric material in the ground surface in the late Roman period when this final fill was deposited or partly washed in.

Fill (36067) was a deep dark silty fill directly overlain by (36054)/(36058) and overlying fill (36127). It contained much Roman material including fragments of CBM, 34 late Roman sherds, 27 Roman hobnails and 64 Roman coins. It is abutted by supportive stones (36063/(36096).

Side supporting stones (36063)/(36096) seem to represent an extra supportive structure for the ritual 'shaft' feature but only for the upper fills (36067) and (36054)/(36058), so probably added into the shaft at a later date after the lower fills were already built up. So stratigraphically they must belong to the same phase as these two fills or perhaps slightly before. Site records record that the 'matrix' for supporting stones (36096) included 11 hobnails, 12 Roman coins, two prehistoric sherds and 14 Roman sherds and that (36063) included one Roman coin. The structural stones could not 'contain' any finds as such, so these finds in reality belong to upper fills (36054)/(36058) and (36067). These supporting/lining stones abut fills (36054) and (36067) and are overlain by stone capping layer (36008).

Fill (36127) was a dark fill overlain by (36067) and overlying (36141). It contained 15 Roman sherds and 11 Roman coins as well as three rare cockerel spurs and a near complete articulated bird or fowl skeleton.

Fill (36141) was overlain by fill (37127) and overlies fill (36148). The fill was quite shallow, measuring 0.02m - 0.06m only and contained much fragmented limestone as well as three Roman coins, one Roman pottery sherd, burnt bone fragments and oyster fragments. There was also a bird metatarsal with a spur broken off.

Fill (36148) was a shallow sandy layer overlain by (36141) containing one Roman coin, one Roman pottery sherd, three complete oyster shells and a large piece of ceramic roof tile.

Fill (36146) was a stony layer overlain by (36148) and contained one Roman coin, 11 Roman pottery sherds and fragments of limestone, tile, charcoal, burnt and unburnt bone and oyster shell.

Fill (36163) was a lower fill, *c.* 0.20m deep, just above basal fill (36168) and containing one Roman coin, 33 Roman pottery sherds, tile and charcoal fragments and flat stones set vertically against walls of the 'cut'.

Basal fill (36168) overlies stony layer (36173) on base of pit [36132] and is overlain by fill (36163). This compact sandy clay fill contained no Roman pottery or coins but did contain small fragments of ceramic tiles, oyster shell and charcoal.

[36132] central pit within square shrine is situated just off centre inside the area of the Roman square shrine. It measures *c*. 2.20m x 2.40m with a maximum depth of *c.* 1.20m. It is filled with the elaborate stone packing surrounding the 'ritual shaft' feature [36123]. If the pit had originally been a prehistoric feature any original fills are long gone, so we can only speculate as to what they might have contained. However, the few finds discovered in the fills suggest these fills were laid down in the Roman period, so it is possible the pit itself may have been dug in the Roman period also. As the axis of the early Roman temple appears to

be centred on this spot or more precisely the position of the ‘shaft’ within the pit and the indisputably prehistoric pits flanking this central point seem to honour and flank that spot, it seems likely that ‘something of ritual important occupied this space in the prehistoric period. The argument for this area being of great significance to the sacred nature of the whole site both in the prehistoric and Roman periods seems certain. In stratigraphic order from top to bottom the pit fills are as follows:

Top fill (36066)/(36095) originally described as two fills on site, seems to be a mix of fine sandy soil and reddish silty soil with some stones but with no finds except a few bone fragments. Cut by later posthole [36074].

Top fill (36005) may well be the same fill as (36066)/(36095) above, but the site records are confusing suggesting it might also be a layer over the pit and square structure interior. The deposit contained 40 prehistoric sherds and 20 Roman sherds so is clearly disturbed by ploughing.

Fill (36133) was made up largely of limestone slabs, many quite large (*c*. 0.30m x 0.20m) and smaller stones, very tightly packed and well-constructed in order to support the ‘shaft’ or an original post. It contained no finds and was cut by later pit [36068]. It is overlain by fills (36066)/(36095).

Fill (36149) consists of tightly packed stones which appear to be laid carefully with some intermittent sand. The stones range from *c.* 18cm x 16cm to *c*. 12cm x 8cm. The fill is overlain by fill (36133) and cut by pit [36068]. There were no finds in this fill.

Fill (36151) is a layer of limestone edging or stones supporting the ‘shaft’ feature [36123] or an original post within. The stones range from *c.* 5cm x 5cm to 25cm x 25cm and are abutted by fills (36149) and (36150). These stones are overlain by fill (36133). There are no finds in this fill.

Fill (36150) is a shallow but compact sandy fill with smaller limestone inclusions and no finds. It is overlain by fills (36149) and stones (36151).

Fill (36153) was a deliberate construction of pitched and upright stone slabs *c.* 20cm x 10cm. In the southern half of the pit these stones were pitched at an angle and tightly packed, as if to brace the theoretical original post that may have occupied this ritual ‘shaft’ In the northern section the stones were more vertical and not interlocked. There were no finds in this fill and it overlies (36161) and (36162) and is overlain by fill (36150). It abuts clay fill (36154).

Fill (36154) is a 2-5cm thick blue grey deposit on the edge of the pit, possibly lining the pit where the cut went through a natural sandy layer. It abuts fill (36153) and is overlain by (36150). There were no finds in this fill.

Fill (36161) is a small fill or lens of loose sand, possibly part of overlying fill (36153) rather than a separate fill. Overlain or part of (36153) and overlies (36162). Four prehistoric pottery sherds were the only finds in this small fill.

Fill (36162) is a grey sand and clay fill with some gravel and limestone fragments and flecks of charcoal. It is overlain by (36153) and partly by (36161). Site records mention oyster shell and ceramic fragments, but none of these are recorded in the finds assemblage.

Fill (36164) is a thin clay and sand deposit or lens over fill (36165) or possibly part of it. Overlain by (36162). There were no finds in this fill.

Fill (36165) is a tightly packed and well-constructed stone layer of pitched large limestone slabs with flatter stones over some of the pitched ones, particularly round the edge of the pit. There were no finds except some burnt stone and charcoal and some CBM fragments. This fill was overlain by (36164).

Fill (36166) is a thin sandy layer with natural cobbles mixed in (possibly redeposited bedrock) overlying stony fill (36167). There were no finds in this fill.

Fill (36167) is a deep fill consisting of very large limestone slabs laid in a pitched pattern with some stones more upright at edge of the ritual 'shaft' or original hole for post. The stones in this fill are larger and more tightly packed than those in stony fill (36165) above. Their size ranges from *c.* 30cm x 30cm to *c*. 17cm x 17cm. The context sheet says some have evidence of re-use with possible mortar patches but as they were not kept this cannot be confirmed. This fill overlies final basal fill (36172). There were no finds in this fill.

Fill (36172) is another stony fill with many large stones of *c.* 35cm x 15cm size plus a range of smaller ones. In the southern half of the fill the stones are pitched in a rough herringbone pattern as with other fills in this pit, and in the northern half the stones are more upright. Some of the stones are burnt. The only artefacts found in this fill was a large fragment of Roman quern-stone SF5862. This is the only solid dating evidence for the filling of this pit and it is a significant artefact that may represent a founding deposit.

Basal fill (36173) is a layer of large limestone slabs running across the whole width of pit [36132] and underneath the ritual 'shaft' and thereby supporting it at the base. It is the only fill in this pit which does not stop at the sides of the 'shaft' These rough stone blocks, ranging from *c*. 10cm x 20cm to *c.* 20cm x 30cm and *c*. 15cm deep, are laid in natural sand. This fill is overlain by (36172) and by the ritual 'shaft' cut [36123]. There were no finds in this fill.

Supporting stones (36171) These large upright limestone slabs run along the northern edge of the pit and appear to support the northern side of 'shaft' [36123] from the lower fill (36172) up as far as middle fill (36153). It seems probably that these were laid early on in the construction after the basal fill of stones (36173) was laid across the whole pit as a foundation layer. The stones range in size but the largest seem to be *c.* 0.48m high. These upright support stones abut fills (36165, (36164), (361620, (36161) and (36153).

MAIN STRUCTURES

[36171] Square stone-built shrine structure (includes walls [36006], [36007], [36010]/[36169] and [36035]), also known as **BU.10**.

This 4.15m square structure survives only as foundations with a maximum of two rough courses surviving laid in a herringbone pattern. This small structure encircles large pit [36132], inside which was the 'ritual shaft' space [36123]/[36062]. The 'shaft' and its surrounding pit were finally capped by limestone slabs [36008]. The four walls were all *c*. 0.50m wide, constructed mostly of rough finished limestones and some natural cobbles ranging from smaller stones to ones about 25cm x 20cm. The east wall, running N-S, is [36007], the west wall, running N-S is [36035], the south wall, running E-W, is [36006] and finally the north wall, running E-W is [36010]. The latter is the only wall that the excavators identified a wall foundation cut for, namely [36170]. There were probably foundation cuts for the other walls, but these were not caught by sections in the appropriate place. The whole structure seems to be of a single construction. With walls producing no finds, it is impossible to be clear about when in the Roman period this was built. The one identified foundation cut appears to cut through layer (36002), but unfortunately due to intense activity in the Roman period combined with more recent ploughing, this is a very disturbed layer with large amounts of prehistoric pottery mixed up with smaller amounts of Roman pottery and a handful of 3rd and 4th century Roman coins. The main layer inside the square structure seems to be 'bedrock' layer (36003), which is basically shattered bedrock mixed with dark sandy silt with evidence of plough damage. It extends across at least 30% of the southern part of the trench including the area inside the structure. All of the area inside and outside of the square structure was heavily disturbed and truncated by plough damage so there is simply no secure dating evidence left for when this shrine was constructed.

MAIN LAYERS:

Layer (36001) is an extensive subsoil layer overlain by topsoil (36000) containing 108 Roman sherds of 3rd century date.

Layer (36002)/(36069)/(36070) is a pottery rich layer which extends over much of the northern and western part of the trench and may represent a very disturbed Iron Age occupation layer. It is overlain by subsoil and topsoil layers (36001) and (3600), and (36002) is the same as layers (36069) and (36070). These all overlay layer (36003). The very high quantities of Iron Age pottery found here supports the other evidence for the ritual importance of this area in pre-Roman times. (36002) itself contained 309 prehistoric sherds and 51 late Roman sherds and the linked layers (36069) and (36070) contained 149 and 181 prehistoric sherds, plus 17 and 79 late Roman 4th century sherds. This is clearly an area highly disturbed by ploughing, as besides the high numbers of Iron Age sherds, fourteen 3rd and 4th century Roman coins, iron nails and small finds like gaming counters were also found.

Layer (36003) represents shattered limestone bedrock, which (presumably due to the ploughing and erosion disturbance in this area) is close to the surface. It extends in patches across the southern third of the trench. It is overlain by topsoil and subsoil layers (36000), (36001) and (36002). Same as layers (36020) and (36093). No finds came from this layer.

Limestone capping [36008]/[36057] was a layer of packed limestones ranging from 60cm x30cm to 10cm x 10cm lying directly over the 'shaft' feature [36123] and also covering most

of the surrounding pit [36132] apart from the southernmost part. Some of the stones may be dressed and the whole capping 'structure' measures *c*. 2m x 2m. This capping may also have served as the foundations for something like an altar or cult statue long gone. It overlies fill (36054) of shaft [36123] and the upper fills (36066) and (36095) of the large central pit [36132]. It is overlain by layer (36034).

Layer (36034) is a mixture of reddish-brown silt, limestone rubble, and crumbly mortar lying over much of stone capping layer (36008). It probably represents an upper and degraded layer of the stone capping. It contained six prehistoric sherds though does not date to the prehistoric period.