Trench MF5 narrative

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Introduction

Trench MF5 was opened in 2001 with the aim of exploring a linear feature identified on the geophysical survey that showed an anomaly running along the northern edge of the site. The anomaly was on an ENE – WSW alignment. Trench MF5 was positioned where this feature gave its strongest readings, but also where it could be observed to intersect a second linear shadow running perpendicular at NNW – SSE. This second possible anomaly was far less distinct on the survey. The initial interpretation of these anomalies led to the hypothesis that they might prove to be a possible branch road or track way into the settlement from the nearby Roman road, now known as the A388.

The main body of the trench measured 10m x 10m which was extended in the southeastern corner of the trench through the addition of a slit trench of 9m (making the eastern edge of the trench approximately 19m) designed to follow the perpendicular North-South anomaly. Excavation within the slit trench showed that this anomaly did not continue beyond the 15m point.

The smaller perpendicular feature gave a positive reading on the magnetometer indicating a possible ditch with a parallel neighbour showing slightly to its west as well as the fainter trace of other possible ditches along a similar alignment across a wider area. Initial thoughts of these were the possible remains of a prehistoric field system although this was not supported through excavation evidence.

It is worth noting that the depth of soil over bedrock proved to be an important factor during the excavation with soil depths averaging 0.8m. Considerable evidence of modern ploughing affected the top 0.4m depth where small finds and pottery sherds were co-mingled with other inclusions of stone etc. However, on removing the topsoil (5000) and sub-soils (5001/5002) the number of finds recovered was observed to be less than other nearby trenches that might indicate that this was outside the main area of habitation. It was also noted that soil depths were greater in the north and south edges of the trench and shallower in the centre of the trench where the strong signal indicating the anomaly was registered.

On removal of topsoil and sub-soils patches of consolidated gravel were revealed. As the level of the trench was brought down over a wide area, patches of green sand and larger areas of orange sand were revealed, with very few inclusions. On top of this could be seen patches of consolidated limestone gravel (5006). In plan these patches of sand and gravel did not form a recognizable pattern that would indicate the presence of a road or trackway and therefore did not support the initial hypothesis. Despite excavating into the bedrock at the exact point where the positive anomaly indicated no feature could clearly be found. The fragmentary nature of the gravel deposits makes any future interpretation difficult, although a Roman road or trackway cannot be entirely ruled out. What is clear is that the strong magnetic signal was at least in part generated by the dip in the topsoil.

Cuts, Fills and Layers.
Whilst natural features are not normally recorded it is worth using this data to illustrate the natural characteristics of the bedrock in this area. There were six cuts recorded all of which proved to be natural features within the bedrock and ranged in size from 20cm in diameter to 1m. These features were interpreted in the early stages of excavation as possible ditches that would have run alongside the road. These are as follows:

Cuts and fills
[5024], a 20cm round depression in the baulk of the trench with a single fill (5025) of compacted clay.

[5027], a 1m wide depression initially thought to be an edging ditch of the possible Roman road but later interpreted as a natural feature. This feature had a single fill (5026) of compacted clay.

[5028], a semi-circular feature 25cm x 25cm with a single fill (5029) of compacted clay.

[5030], a depression in the bedrock 10cm x 20cm with a single fill (5033) of compacted orange clay.

[5032], a circular depression in the bedrock 35cm in diameter with three fills, (5033) top fill of compacted clay, (5034) mid fill of compacted gravel in a clay matrix and a bottom fill (5035) compacted grey clay.

[5047], a 60cm wide depression with a single fill (5046) of yellow brown sandy clay.

Layers
Excluding topsoil (5000) there were 3 primary layers that occurred across the trench, (5001) a very shallow layer of silt, (5002) a fairly deep layer mix of sand and clay material with lots of limestone inclusions of variable size and (5006) a limestone gravel layer that occurred intermittently across the trench. In addition to these there were 30 other layers of material recorded. These appeared as small pockets or lenses of material that formed very localised deposits and often seen as additional capping over the cuts and fills above, or accumulated deposits in the many natural depressions in the bedrock. Primarily these deposits consisted of green sand, orange sand, compacted clay with limestone inclusions and rubble.

Pottery Analysis
As pointed out in the introduction Trench MF5 yielded very little pottery compared to other nearby trenches of comparable size. All the pottery finds came from topsoil (5000), sub soil (5001) and sub soil (5002) all of which are plough soil levels therefore these pottery sherds have very little archaeological significance.

In total 201 pottery sherds were recovered made up as follows, Iron Age 16 sherds, all PCW (Prehistoric Coarse Ware), Roman pottery 185 sherds.
The Roman pottery showed a fairly wide range of types many in small numbers. There were two predominant pottery types that made up the bulk of the sample,

RCWO (Roman Coarse Ware Oxidised) 60 sherds and RCWR (Roman Coarse Ware Reduced) 77 sherds.

Small Finds

There were 53 small finds recovered all of which came from plough soil levels (5000) topsoil, (5001) and (5002) sub soils, therefore as with the pottery finds these small finds have little archaeological significance. The small finds sample was made up of ten Copper-Alloy 3rd/4th century Roman coins, 13 iron hob nails, 22 small iron objects, five Copper-Alloy objects including a bracelet and three iron nails.