Trench MFNA2 narrative

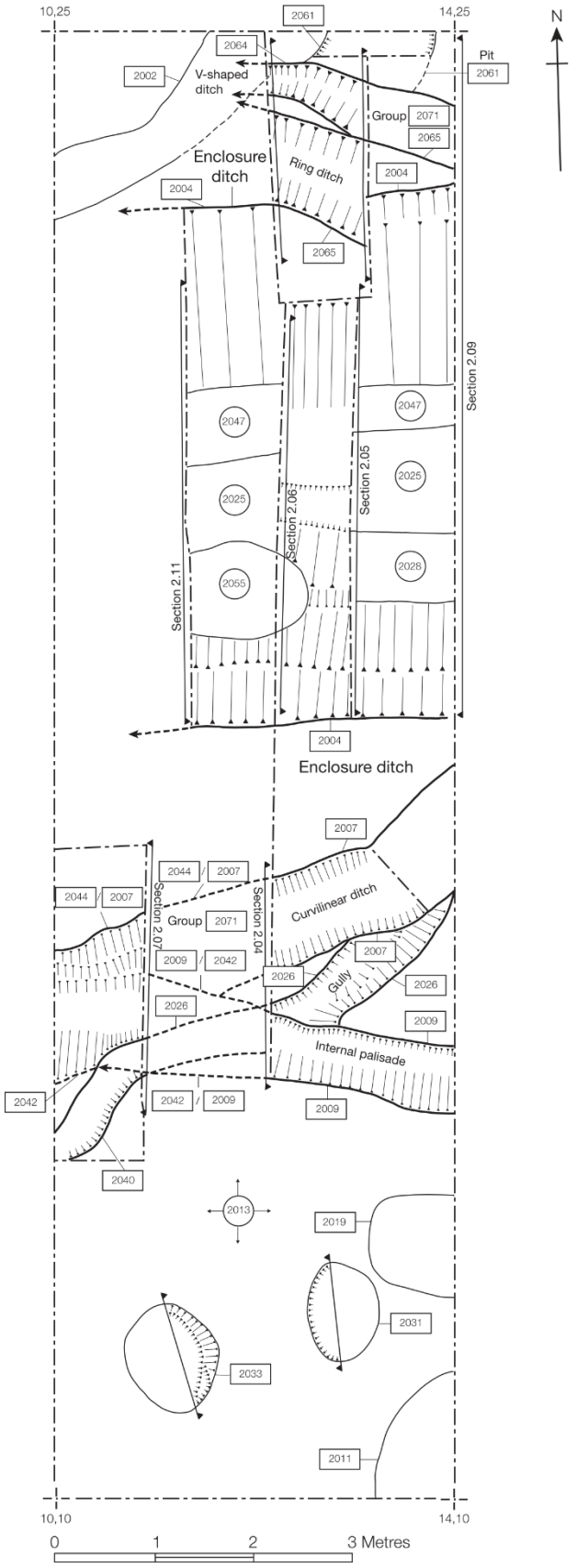
Sheila Raven

Introduction

Trench 2 was located in the Scheduled part of the site in the Noah's Ark Garden, south of the temple enclosure and measured *c.*15m x 4m. It was sited over part of the Barrel-shaped Enclosure's northern boundary and its potential inner palisade ditch, and several other prehistoric features. All of these features were revealed by the geophysical plot done by William Wintle (Wintle, 2013). The trench was investigated during the 2008 season only, with the aim of establishing the relationship between the large Barrel-Shaped Enclosure Ditch (BSE) and its Internal Palisade Ditch, a Ring Ditch, a small Curvilinear Ditch, a Narrow Gulley, and a V-shaped ditch. Besides this tangle of prehistoric ditches, all cutting and intercutting each other in a small space, there were also four pits inside the large Enclosure. The pottery dating suggests the majority of the prehistoric features here were of Middle Iron Age date. However, there are some features which are cut by MIA dated ditches, and these may be of an earlier Iron Age date but with fills contaminated by pottery from the later cutting features.

Excavations revealed that the Ring Ditch [Group 2071 = cuts 2007; 2044; 2065] predated the large Barrel-shaped Enclosure. Its size, *c.*7m in diameter, suggested it was a ring ditch rather than a round house gully and it is cut by the large BSE and its internal palisade ditch. Initial thoughts were that it might be of Bronze Age date, but the pottery evidence suggests a MIA date rather than Bronze Age or EIA date. However, the muddling of contexts in the intercutting ditches means it is impossible to be sure that all the MIA pottery found did actually come from the Ring Ditch rather than the BSE ditch cutting it. There are some potential late EIA/early MIA forms in the pottery assemblage from the Ring Ditch which may represent original unsullied deposits from the feature. This Ring Ditch in turn cuts the V-shaped Ditch [2064], suggesting the latter was at least earlier than MIA, probably EIA or possibly even earlier, though the lack of any pottery in the fills makes any precise dating impossible. The Ring Ditch also cuts Ditch/Pit [2061] which also contained some MIA pottery. The large BSE Ditch cut [2004] represents a section of the northern boundary of the MIA Barrel-shaped Enclosure Ditch and measured a massive *c.*5.3m wide by *c.*2m deep at this point. The pottery dates for the fills in this Enclosure Ditch are MIA. The original Enclosure Ditch was later recut by Ditch [2070], which was narrower at *c.*3.3m wide. There were only 25x MIA sherds in the three fills of ditch [2070], plus 3x Roman sherds in the upper fills, so it is probably MIA/LIA in date. Ditch cut [2009/2042] represents part of the internal palisade to the big enclosure and ran *c.*4 m to the south of the main enclosure ditch [2004] and on the same E-W alignment. It only measured *c.*0.65m wide by *c.*0.95 deep. There is no stratigraphical evidence to show that the palisade was contemporary with the enclosure ditch but the close alignment suggests that it probably was, and the pottery dating also supports a MIA date to match that of the outer ditch. The only potential Roman feature in this trench is narrow gully [2026]/[2040], situated south of the Barrel-Shaped Enclosure ditch and cutting though various prehistoric features.

MFNA 08
Trench 2



Trench MFNA2

The total number of pottery sherds found was 713, the vast majority of which (676 sherds) were Iron Age and largely MIA, with only 37 sherds being Roman in date. The few Roman sherds occurred largely in topsoil and upper fills of the ditches.

The animal bone assemblage was predominately made up of cattle, sheep and pig, with small quantities of horse, bird and deer. The only deer bone found was in (2030) the middle fill of the Ring Ditch [2007].

Only 12 small finds were found in the trench, which included three quern fragments, two copper-alloy fittings, one iron object, and a 4th century coin (in layer 2036). There was a worked stone object in a middle fill (2029) of palisade ditch [2009], and a stone object in fill (2041) of gully [2040]. There were two pieces of stone quern in the top fill (2051) of pit [2061] and a flint blade and sandstone quern fragment in the top fill (2016/2052) of ring ditch [2065].

Reference

Wintle, W. 2013. *Becoming Romano-British: The landscape of the late prehistoric and Romano-British periods in the Vale of the White Horse.* Unpublished DPhil Thesis. University of Oxford. Available at: https://ora.ox.ac.uk/objects/uuid:cbba769b-31e2-46e8-a70f-1fd0ef17c2d6

Early to Middle Iron Age Phase

There were three features potentially earlier than the MIA large BSE Ditch [2004] in this trench, based on their form and dimensions or on their relationship to each other. They were certainly earlier than the large Barrel-shaped MIA Enclosure, but possibly not that much earlier. The main feature designated as predating large BSE Ditch [2004] is the Ring Ditch known as Ditch Group [2071]. Its width and depth suggest that it is too big to be an Iron Age round house gully, so it is most probably a Ring Ditch enclosure, perhaps similar to those in the MFP area of the site to the east. It is cut by the internal palisade ditch of the Barrel-shaped Enclosure, giving further support to an earlier date. Pottery evidence has revealed that this feature is of MIA date also. However, as mentioned in the Introduction, a few late EIA/early MIA forms in the Ring Ditch fills may represent the original material from the ditch and the other purely MIA forms may be contamination from the fills of the BSE ditch. Whether this is the case or not, it is probable that the Ring Ditch was not hundreds of years earlier than the BSE. Another ditch feature, namely V-shaped Ditch [2064], being cut itself by this Ring Ditch, may be late EIA or much earlier, but the absence of any dating material makes its precise date uncertain. Pit/Ditch [2061], is also cut by the large Ring Ditch (and itself cuts the V-shaped Ditch) and might also be at least late EIA, but the MIA pottery found in its upper fill means the stratigraphic relationship is not secure. The tangled intercutting of many ditches and features in this area means a number of these fills may have contaminated each other, so reliable and secure pottery dating is not possible in all cases. However, what we can deduce from the stratigraphy is that the earliest feature in this tangle is definitely the V-shaped Ditch [2064].

CUTS:

Ditch [2007]
(see Ring Ditch Group [2071])

Ditch [2044]
(see Ring Ditch Group [2071])

Ditch/Pit [2061]
A possible ditch or large pit on the north baulk of the trench and to the north of the BSE Ditch [2004]. It has vertical sides and a flat base and measures *c.*1.1 m across and is *c.*0.65m deep. It is cut by Ring Ditch [2065], which is part of Group [2071] and in turn cuts the earlier V-shaped ditch [2064]. It contained two dark, charcoal-rich fills (2051) and (2062), which may be the same fill or at least contemporary. Together these two fills produced 91x MIA prehistoric sherds. As this feature is cut by the potentially MIA Ring Ditch [2065], which is in itself cut by another MIA feature (the BSE), the pottery dating in these three intercutting features is a little confusing. An EIA or at least a late EIA date might be expected from this cut, as the lowest of these three intercutting features, but all that can be said is that the possibility of contamination and stratigraphic confusion between these features should be considered.

V-shaped Ditch [2064]
is a narrow ditch with a V-shaped profile, situated just to the north of the BSE Ditch. It measures *c.*0.5 m wide and *c.*0.4 deep. It is cut by Ditch/Pit [2061] and by the Ring Ditch [2065] = Ring Ditch Group [2071]. It and these other features are all then cut by the later curvilinear ditch [2002]. It is the earliest feature in this tangled group of ditches and cuts. The ditch contained two fills, namely upper fill (2053) and bottom fill (2063) which was largely redeposited bedrock. These fills provided no dating material but as it predates the potentially MIA Ring Ditch Group [2071] and MIA Ditch/Pit [2061], it may be EIA or earlier.

Ditch [2065]
(see Ring Ditch Group [2071])

Ring Ditch Group [2071]
comprises three cuts through the large Ring Ditch, namely cuts [2007] and [2044] in the southern part of the feature and cut [2065] in the northern part of the feature. This feature predates the Middle Iron Age BSE ditch and its internal palisade ditch, which emphasises the importance of this area of the site in the prehistoric period. It is cut by the internal palisade ditch [2009] and by gully [2026] in the south. In the north it is cut by large Enclosure Ditch [2004], and by small curvilinear ditch [2002]. In the northern sector is cuts earlier features, V-shaped ditch [2064] and Pit/Ditch [2061]. The width of the ditch was between 1.2m and 1.5m and the depth from 0.65m to 1.0m, the sides were steep and the bottom flat. The diameter of the space inside this feature was *c.*7m. The size of the ditch suggests this was a ring ditch rather than a roundhouse gully. As discussed above, though the pottery in its fills is

largely MIA, the possibility of its fills being contaminated by later material should be considered.

Ditch cut [2007]
represents the southern part of the Group [2071], measuring *c.*1.2m wide at this point and *c.*0.65m deep. It is cut by the Internal Palisade Ditch [2009] and by the gully [2026]. It was steep sided with a flat base and cut bedrock layer (2001). It contained three fills, (2008), (2030), and primary fill (2046). Top fill (2008) contained 51 sherds of probable MIA date, and middle fill (2030) contained 15 sherds which may also be MIA but there were no classifiable forms, so precise dating is impossible. See discussion above for possible contamination of Ring Ditch deposits from the MIA BSE ditch which cut them. The bottom or primary fill (2046) had no pottery and was very hard-packed, possibly deliberately.

Ditch [2044]
represented the southern part of part of the group [2071], at the west end of the trench in this area. At this point the ditch was, at *c.*0.8m deep, a little deeper than the section to the east (cut [2007]). It is cut by internal palisade ditch [2009]. It contained two fills, upper fill (2045) and lower fill (2057), neither of which contained any dating evidence.

Ditch [2065]
represents the northern part of the main Ring Ditch Group [2071]. At this point the ditch was *c.*1.5m wide and *c.*1.0m deep, making it larger here than in the southern section. In this area, the Ring Ditch cuts V-shaped ditch [2064] and Pit/Ditch [2061]. It in turn is cut by the large Enclosure Ditch [2004] and by ditch [2002]. It contained three fills, namely upper fill (2016)/(2052), secondary fill (2066) and the primary or bottom fill (2067) which was largely made up of limestone chunks. Upper fills (2016) and (2052) included 68x sherds of MIA date, but the other two fills contained no dating evidence. As it is the upper fills that may have been contaminated by pottery from the fills of the BSE ditch which cut them, it is unfortunate that there is no pottery in the potentially uncontaminated primary fills of this ditch cut (see discussion above for possibility of a slightly earlier late EIA date for this Ring Ditch). A flint blade and a sandstone quern fragment were also found in the top fill.

Middle Iron Age Phase

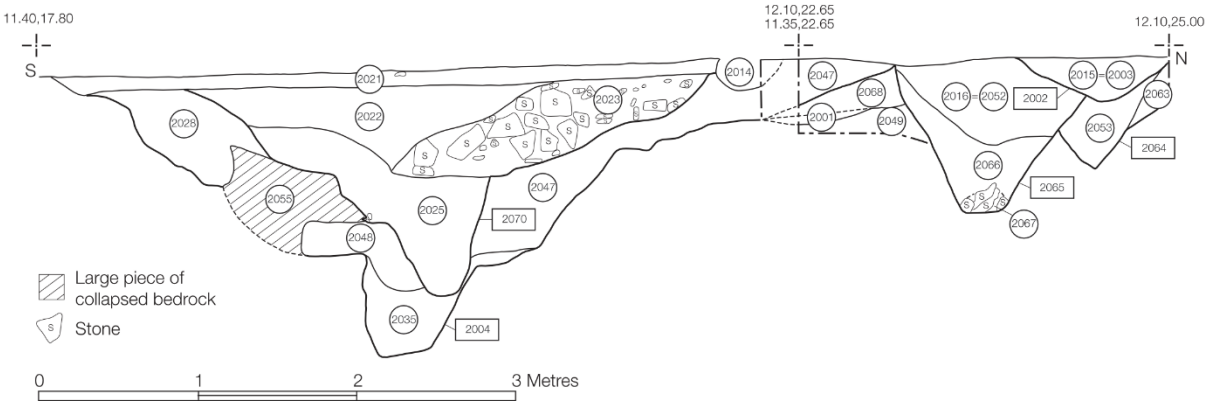
The main purpose of the trench investigation in this area was to establish the relationship of the large Iron Age Barrel-shaped Enclosure and its internal palisade ditch to the big Ring Ditch and other cut features in this area. Evidence from the pottery now suggests most of the Iron Age features were of MIA date and not much earlier. Though the possibility remains that earlier features like the Ring Ditch Group [2071], as cut by the BSE, may be late EIA/early MIA or in some cases a little earlier (see 'Early to Middle Iron Age Phase' discussion above). Apart from the outer ditch [2004] and the internal palisade ditch [2009/2042] of this feature, there were two other ditches dated to the Iron Age plus two pits inside the enclosure boundary. Two other cuts (a pit and a possible ditch), which had no dating material at all, were also most probably of Iron Age date, though they are listed in the 'Unphased' section.

CUTS:

Ditch [2002]
is a curvilinear V-shaped ditch, *c.*0.4m wide and 0.3m deep, in the NW corner of Trench 2. It cuts V-shaped ditch [2064] and Ring Ditch [2065]. Its relationship with Enclosure Ditch [2004] is uncertain. The ditch contained only one fill (2003/2015) which contained 25 Iron Age sherds. Though its diameter is unknown, it may have been a round house gully. This feature most likely dates to the MIA.

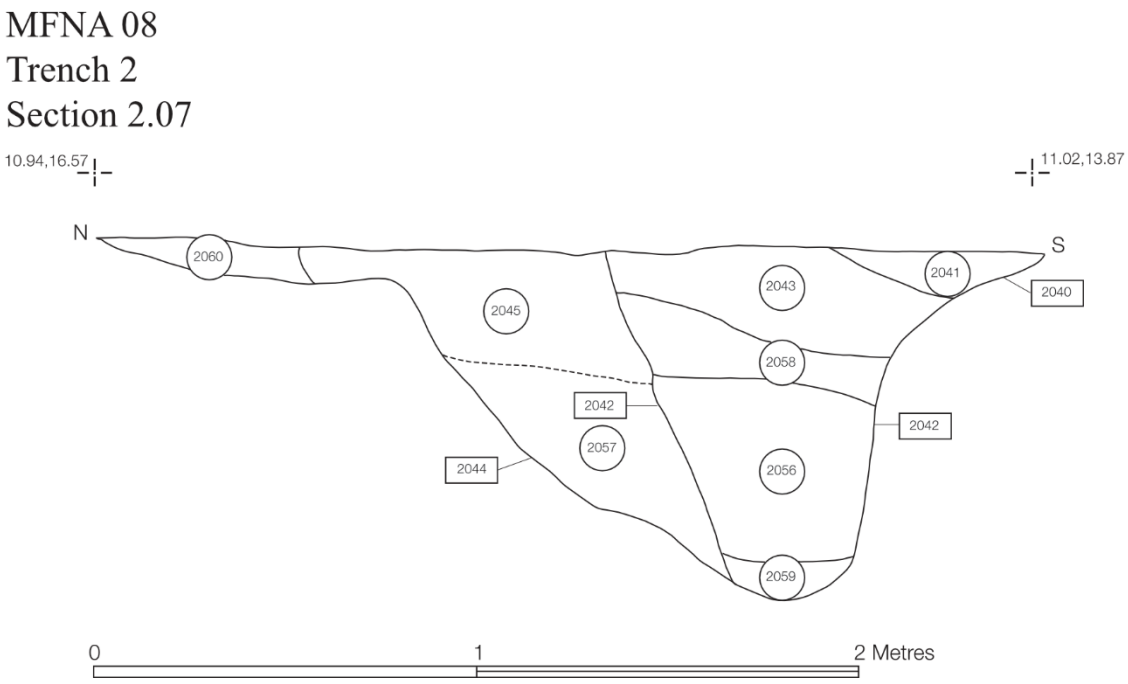
Ditch [2004]
is the northern part of the outer ditch of the large Barrel-shaped Enclosure, situated to the south of the Roman temenos wall. This whole enclosure encompasses an area estimated to be *c.*60 m wide by over 75 m long. This northern section was aligned east-west, and was a stepped V-shaped in profile, *c.*5.3m wide by *c.*1.8m to 2m deep. The southern edge of this part of the ditch was badly eroded, as shown by the collapse of a large chunk of bedrock (2055) into the ditch. The ditch cut the Ring Ditch [2065] = Group [2071] at this point, as well as bedrock layer (2001). This broad ditch contained six observable fills, but as it was recut drastically by re-cut ditch [2070], we have lost some of the information on the top and middle fills. The highest fill still intact is (2050/2069), on the southern edge of the original ditch, this contained no dating evidence. Below that on the southern side is fill (2028), which included 16 MIA sherds. On the northern edge of the ditch, fill (2047) is the uppermost fill visible, and this may be contemporary or even the same fill as (2028) to the south. It contained no finds. Fill (2054) lay on the northern edge of the ditch, below (2047), and contained a small amount of prehistoric pottery. Both (2047) and (2028) overlay primary or bottom fill (2035). This fill contained 136 sherds of MIA pottery. On the southern side of the ditch, layer (2055) represents a large chunk of upper bedrock that became detached, distorting the ditch profile. This event pushed the underlying natural sand and clay layer (2048) downwards and into the edge of the ditch.

MFNA 08
Trench 2
Section 2.14 (=2.06; 2.10; 2.11)



Cuts [2004] and 2065]

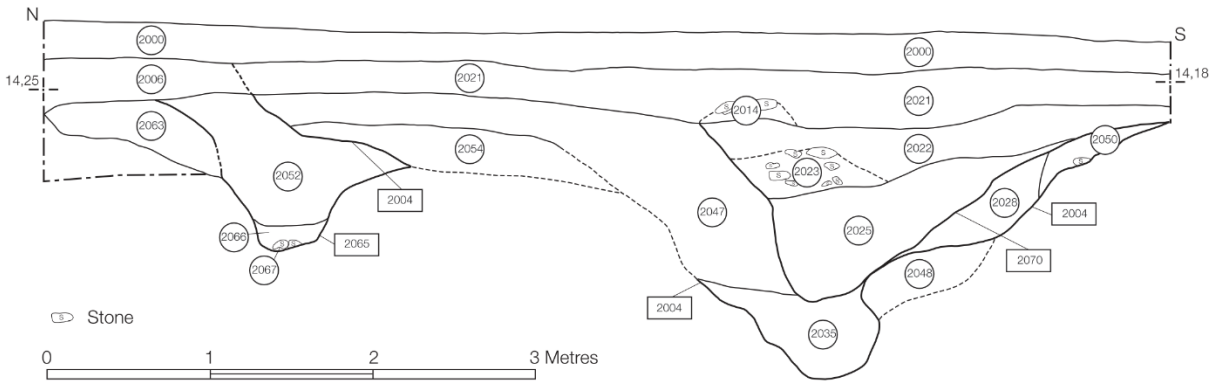
Internal Palisade Ditch [2009]=[2042]
runs inside the Barrel-shaped Enclosure ditch. It is positioned *c.*4m to the south of outer ditch [2004] and on the same alignment. This internal ditch measures *c.*0.65m wide by 0.95m deep at this point, with very steep sides and a flat base. The shape and narrow dimensions suggest that it was a palisade trench inside the enclosure, perhaps free standing or acting as revetment for the bank. It is impossible to tell stratigraphically whether the palisade was contemporary with the enclosure ditch, but its relationship to it suggested so. It cuts Ring Ditch [2007]/[2044] and is in turn cut by later gully [2026]/[2040]. Cut [2009] represents the more westerly section of the internal palisade ditch. It contained four fills.



Cut [2042]

The top fill is (2010), and this contained 35 Iron Age sherds. This overlies fill (2029), which also included 40 sherds of MIA pottery. Below this was lower fill (2038), which had no dating evidence. Finally, the primary or bottom fill was (2037), and this also contained no dating evidence. Cut [2042] represents the more easterly section of the same palisade ditch. The fills in this part of the ditch were (2043), (2058), (2056), and (2059). Top fill (2043) contained 31 MIA Age sherds. This overlies fill (2058), which contained no dating material. Below this was fill (2056), which contained 7 sherds, of probably early MIA date. The lowest or primary fill in this part of the ditch was (2059), also lacking any dating material.

MFNA 08
Trench 2
Section 2.13 (=2.05; 2.09; 2.12)



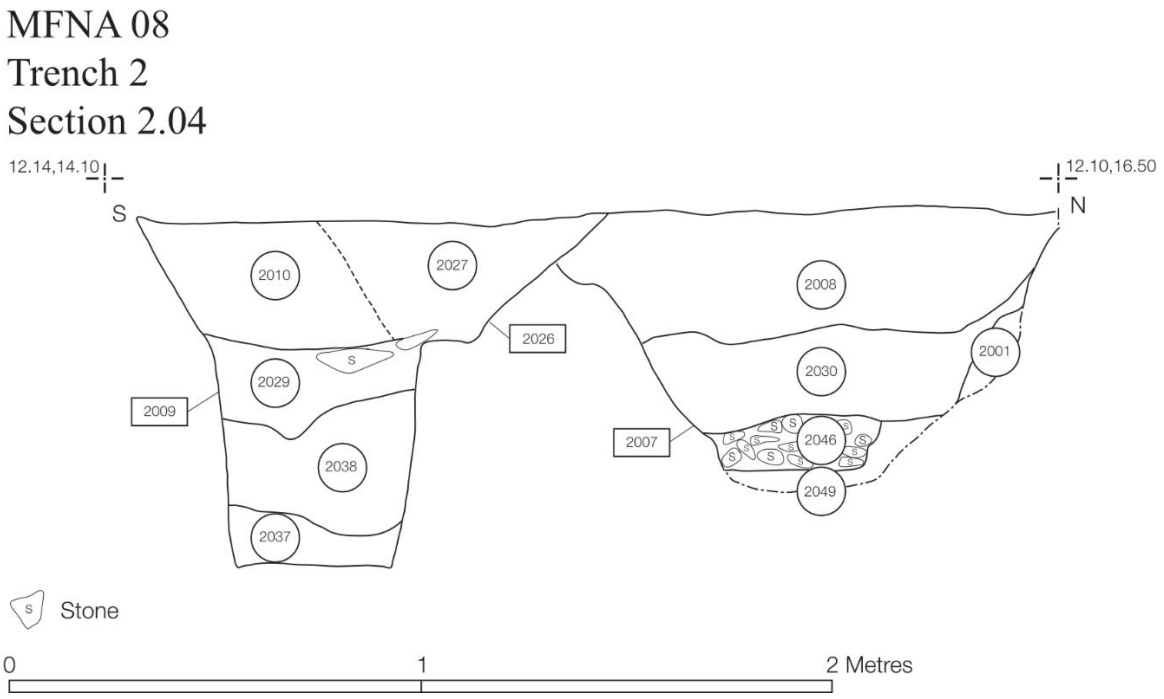
Cuts [2004] and [2065]

Pit [2031]
is an oval, apparently shallow, pit in the SE of trench, inside the large barrel-shaped enclosure It measures *c.*0.95 in diameter and *c.*0.19 m deep. Its extreme shallowness may indicate it is very truncated. The pit cuts layer (2013). The sole or remaining fill is (2032), which contains six sherds of prehistoric pottery.

Pit [2033]
is a sub-circular pit in the SE of trench, close to pit [2031]. It measured *c.*1.2 in diameter and was *c.*0.5 m deep, dug down to natural clay. The pit cuts layers (2001) and (2013). The top fill (2034) contained six Iron Age sherds. This overlay primary or bottom fill (2039) which contained 14 prehistoric sherds.

Ditch [2042] =[2009]
Inner enclosure ditch/internal palisade

Recut Ditch [2070]
is the recut of the large outer Enclosure Ditch [2004]. It was considerably narrower than the original ditch, measuring *c.*3.3 m wide and *c.*1.3m deep. It had a similar profile to the earlier ditch, namely gently sloping sides, then changing to a more abrupt stepped lower section. It is overlain, like the earlier ditch, by layer (2021) (= same as (2005) and (2006) probably). The ditch contains three fills. The top fill (2022) contained only seven Iron Age sherds and one Roman sherd. This overlay fill (2023) which produced only three Iron Age sherds and one intrusive Roman sherd. The bottom or primary fill (2025) contained 15 Iron Age sherds. The recut was probably done in the later MIA to LIA period.



Cuts [2007] and [2009]

Roman Phase

Only a very small amount of Roman pottery was found in this trench and that was mostly found in topsoil or the upper fill of prehistoric ditches, so we know there was not a great deal of Roman activity in this area south of the Roman temenos enclosure. This is a very different picture to the large assemblage of Roman material found in the NW corner of the barrel-shaped enclosure just to the west – which probably relates to the presence of a southern entrance into the temenos at this point. In Trench 2, the only feature probably Roman in date is gully [2026]/[2040], as it cuts various prehistoric features and has some early Roman pottery in its fills.

Ditch [2026]/[2040]
is a narrow and shallow gully, situated to the south of the large Enclosure Ditch and on a different alignment. It measured *c.*0.66m wide and was *c.*0.29 deep and had a U-shaped profile. It cut both Ring Ditch [2007/2044] and the later Internal Palisade ditch [2009/2042]. It also cut layer (2018). It is assumed that the cut named [2040] (set a little further SE than the ditch cut explored in cut [2026]] is part of the same ditch system, though it has a rather twisted trajectory if this is so. If we assume both these cuts are one and the same, the gully contained only one fill (2027) = (2041). This fill included six prehistoric pottery sherds and 10 Roman sherds of 1st and 2nd century CE date, which suggests this may be an early Roman feature.

Unphased

These two features contained no dating evidence, but they are probably Iron Age in date.

?Ditch [2011]

was in the SE corner of the trench, but only part of this large feature appears in eh trench. Seems to be too large for a pit and in the geophysics plot of the whole area, it looks like a curving ditch. The part of the feature exposed measures *c.*0.6m x 1.0m. As so little of the feature was revealed in the trench, it was not fully excavated, just the top fill being explored. Top fill (2012) contained no dating evidence.

?Pit [2019]
was a possible sub-rectangular pit or perhaps the curved terminal of a ditch, set on the eastern edge of the trench and situated inside the Large Enclosure**.** It was not excavated, with just the top fill (2020) being exposed. This fill contained no dating evidence.