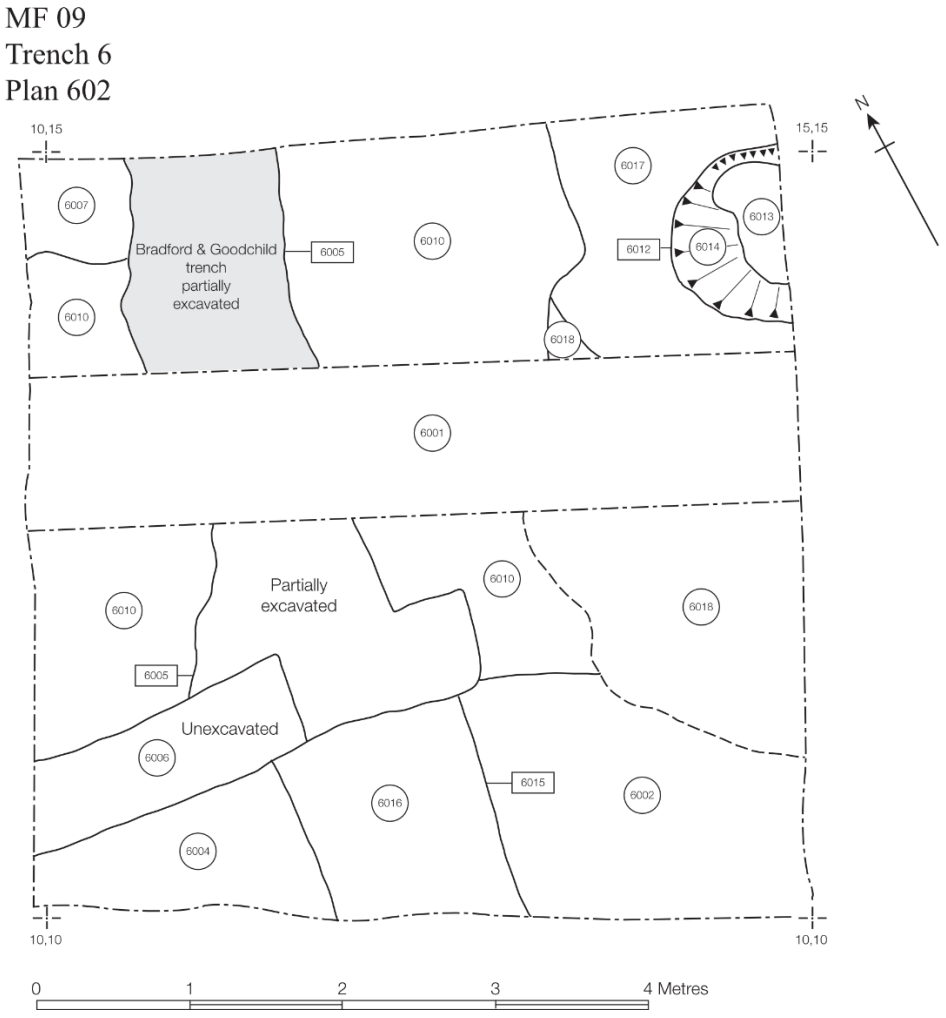
Trench MFNA6 narrative

Sheila Raven

Introduction

Trench 6 was located in the Scheduled part of the site in the Noah's Ark Inn garden over the site of the 'cella-style' temple within the temenos enclosure and was originally excavated by Bradford and Goodchild in the 1930's (Bradford and Goodchild, 1939). The trench measured 5m x 5m. This trench was opened in 2009 to explore the small side-annexe of the cella-style temple building, situated at the north-east corner of the main building. The trench was roughly rectangular in shape, approximately 10m x 15m in size. Trench 6 was only explored for one season in 2009, due to the constraints of Scheduled Monument Consent for this western area of the site. As with the other MFNA trenches dug in and around the temple structure, Trench 6 was located following information from the early 1930's excavation plans and reports. It was decided to re-excavate this NE annexe in Trench 6 in order to check the extent and thoroughness of the Bradford and Goodchild excavations and to perhaps discover further dating evidence and further insights into the nature of this temple annexe structure.



Trench MFNA6

The trenches excavated by Bradford and Goodchild proved easy to locate but their shallow depth was a surprise. Most of the 1930's trenches only hit the tops of the robber trenches for the walls and were mostly not excavated to any depth. Their original plan however did prove to be extremely accurate. The location of the Oxford Archaeological Unit trenches in this area excavated in the 1980's proved much harder to locate (Wait and Miles 1988). One of their evaluation trenches should have run through Trench 6 but this was not found, so there must have been some sort of surveying error. It was hoped that the new excavations of this NE annexe might reveal more of its character and purpose, but unfortunately that purpose is still unclear.

As to be expected the vast majority of the features and areas in Trench 6 were assigned to the Roman or Post-Roman periods. Though handfuls of Iron Age pottery did occur in some Roman layers and features, only one context (6020), had a higher proportion of prehistoric pottery than Roman. The only features excavated in this trench were: cut [6015], the robber trench over the eastern wall of the north-east annexe structure; cut [6005], the northern section of the robber trench over the same east wall, excavating the actual backfill of the original Bradford and Goodchild trench; cut [6026], a central section of the robber trench over the east wall of the annexe, originally excavated by Bradford and Goodchild in the central area of the trench; and finally pit [6012], a clay-filled pit just to the east of the annexe and outside of its walls. The 2nd century date of one of the major destruction deposits in this trench might suggest a remodelling of the original temple in this area at that time? However, the presence also of a 4th century coin in the same deposit implies this was a very disturbed area. So, though these deposits may represent a major dismantling of the temple building during the late Roman period, they may also suggest 2nd century activity in this annexe area.

In total 2,416 pottery fragments were found in Trench 6. Of these only 3% were of Iron Age date, representing residual material, and 97% were of Roman date. The main fabrics represented in this pottery group from Trench 6 are local fine ware oxidised and reduced types, and both fine and coarse ware white fabrics. There is also a fairly high proportion of decorated wares, as opposed to plain wares. There are no examples of the later Roman coarse wares like grog and shell-tempered wares and very few of the local late Roman Oxfordshire Red Slip types. So, in general the pottery from this area, though lacking many of the imported Samian and other imported continental wares, does have very high proportions of the regional and local finer wares and decorated wares, which implies the vessels were mostly table ware rather than coarse cooking or storage vessels. The lack of the recognisable late Roman types (3rd and 4th centuries AD) suggests the original activity in this area was mostly focused in the 1st to early 3rd centuries, though of course the robber trenches may date to much later. As these robber trenches only produced tiny amounts of undiagnostic Roman pottery, we cannot be sure exactly when this robbing took place.

The animal bone assemblage consisted largely of sheep and cattle bone with reasonable amounts of pig bone. There is very little horse bone at all; it only occurs in small quantities in contexts (6024) and (6028). Contexts (6008), (6018) and (6019) have the largest percentage of sheep bone (60-65% each). Only topsoil context (6000) has a large percentage of cattle

bone (60%). In general however, the animal bone assemblage from the whole of Trench 6 is relatively small.

Apart from the small find wall plaster, there were only 27 small finds from this trench. These mostly consisted of small fragments of glass, copper alloy or iron and some flint fragments. Of the more recognisable small finds, there were three Roman coins, one iron chisel, and one stone spindle whorl – these are all probably Roman in date. The coins from contexts (6002) and (6008) are all 4th century. The majority of the small finds were found in disturbed subsoil layer (6002) and destruction layer (6008). What has not been found here is the range of votive material found in some other parts of the site, such as large amounts of coins, jewellery items, medical /cosmetic tools etc. This suggests that whatever the function of this small annexe it was not the repository of sacred or votive items from the main temple building.

As to be expected in an area at the corner of the temple structure itself, a lot of building material was found in this trench. This includes plain and painted plaster (28 fragments); a large number of ceramic tesserae (*c*. 450 pieces); and a very large concentration of ceramic roof tile (316 kilos). The tile largely came from three layers (6003), 6008) and (6010). Analysis suggests that this represents two separate deposits of roof tile, one dating from the 2nd century AD (layers (6010) and (6003)), and another in context (6008) from the 3rd century AD (Warry this website). This shows that the main cella-style temple roof here was rebuilt at least once in its lifetime and that it was probably originally roofed by ceramic tile in the 2nd century at the latest.

References

Bradford, J. and Goodchild, R. 1939. Excavation at Frilford, Berks, 1937-8. *Oxoniensia*, 4, 1-70.

Wait, G. and Miles, D., 1988. Frilford: Noah's Ark Inn. *South Midlands Archaeology*, 18, 77.

Prehistoric Phase

There are no prehistoric features in this small trench, situated as it is in the corner of the Roman temple. The only prehistoric contexts are the underlying Iron Age layer that the temple structure was built upon:

Layer (6020) lay just above bedrock and below the Roman levels. It contained 33 sherds of Iron Age coarse ware pottery, and no Roman pottery or other Roman finds at all, so represents the pre-Roman Iron Age phase of this part of the site. It was overlain by Roman layers (6003 and (6010).

Roman and Post-Roman Phase

The focus of this trench was re-exploring the Bradford and Goodchild trenches over the robber cuts across the walls of the side annexe attached to the original cella-style Roman stone building. This was partly to provide more dating for this phase of the building and also

to try and determine its function. The limited range of diagnostic finds in this area means its function is still unclear. Strictly speaking cut [6005] is 'modern' in date being our re-cut of the 1930's trench over the original robber cut through the temple walls, but as it is exploring the area of the Roman temple walls it has been included in the Roman phase. There were very few features here apart from the original robber trenches over the temple walls and a single pit. However, the many destruction layers contained large amounts of Roman pottery, in particular layers (6008), (6010) and (6018), suggesting intense Roman activity in this area. Destruction deposit (6008) contained largely 2nd century pottery. However, as a 4th century Roman coin was also found in the context, this may be residual material. This still suggests that there was 2nd century activity in this area. The robber trenches themselves which cut [6015] and [6026], only produced five sherds of Roman pottery, so although it is probable that these date to the late Roman or Post-Roman periods, we have no secure dating for this.

CUTS:

Cut [6005] is the same L-shaped trench opened by Bradford and Goodchild over the original robber cut which accessed the northern sector of the east wall of the annexe building. It measured *c.* 0.6 – 0.85 m across, and the N-S leg was *c.* 3.9m long and the W-E leg *c.* 3m long. It was shallow, being only *c.* 0.11m deep, and had two fills. The top fill (6006) represented the backfill from the 1930's trench exposing Roman deposits. It produced 28 sherds, largely of finer reduced ware and one Samian sherd. Below this the bottom or primary fill (6025) also dug into the original 1930's back-fill and had re-deposited Roman material in it. Only three greyware sherds were found in this fill.

Pit [6012] was a circular pit with sloping sides, cutting into the east baulk of the trench. It measured *c.* 1.2m wide by *c.* 0.6m deep. The single fill (6011) consisted of clay. This may have been a pit simply made for storing clay for various uses. It lay to the east and well outside the walls of the annexe and the main temple structure. Only 29 sherds of Roman pottery were found in this fill, mostly grey wares.

Robber trench [6015] is the southern part of the same robber trench seen in northern section [6005] above – again this represents a robber trench of the original Roman east wall of the annexe. It was only partially excavated to reveal its top fill, so we do not know what the depth or the profile of the robber cut was in this southern section. It may have measured just over 1m across at this point. The top fill (6016) contained no pottery and very few finds of any sort.

Robber trench [6026] represents the middle section of the robber trench over the same east wall of the annexe (explored in [6015]), representing what was left of the original robber cut after the Bradford and Goodchild excavation of the area. It is situated underneath cut [6005] and cuts through layers (6020) and (6028) on either side. The remaining profile is steep-sided and measures here *c.* 0.45m where not decimated by the 1930's cut. There was only one fill, namely (6021)/(6027), which contained chunks of mortar and gravel. Five sherds of Roman pottery were found in this fill including and Samian and fine white ware fabrics.

MAIN LAYERS:

Layer (6004) was situated in the area of the temple ambulatory but only the upper surface was cleaned and as there was no pottery of any sort it is unclear as to whether this is part of an original Roman surface.

Layer (6008) represents one of the upper Roman destruction layers, overlying the thick destruction deposit (6010). This destruction deposit, as to be expected, contained numerous fragments of CBM, tesserae, painted plaster and mortar. It covered the north and central part of the trench with a thickness varying from 2cm to 10cm in places. This layer also contained the largest amount of Roman pottery in Trench 6, some 1,096 sherds. These were mostly reduced grey fine ware and coarse ware fabrics (736 sherds), plus numerous sherds of high-status table wares including fine white wares and oxidised wares, plus 19 Samian sherds. This Roman pottery is largely 2nd century in date but may represent residual material as a 4th century Roman coin (sf 349) was found in the same deposit. In terms of small finds there were seven iron objects, mostly nail or pin fragments, plus three copper alloy fragments, one coin dated 364-375, one piece of vessel glass and two quern fragments.

Layer (6010) is another thick destruction deposit in the north-east annexe. It lay under layer (6008) and over layers (6020), (6022) and (6023) and covered *c.* 70% of the north central and western parts of the trench disappearing under the west baulk. It was cut by robber trench [6026]. The deposit was *c.* 12 - 18cm thick. This layer contained 204 Roman pottery sherds, mostly greywares and fine white wares. It also contained large quantities of 2nd century ceramic roof tile. The only small finds in this layer were two fragments of worked bone.

Layer (6018) represents another destruction deposit in the north-east annexe on the eastern side of the trench, measuring *c*. 10 -15cm thick. It is overlain by destruction deposits (6008) and (6017) and layer (6022). It lies above layer (6022). The layer produced 461 Roman pottery sherds, mostly greywares and whitewares, plus a handful of residual prehistoric sherds.