Trench MFNA8 narrative

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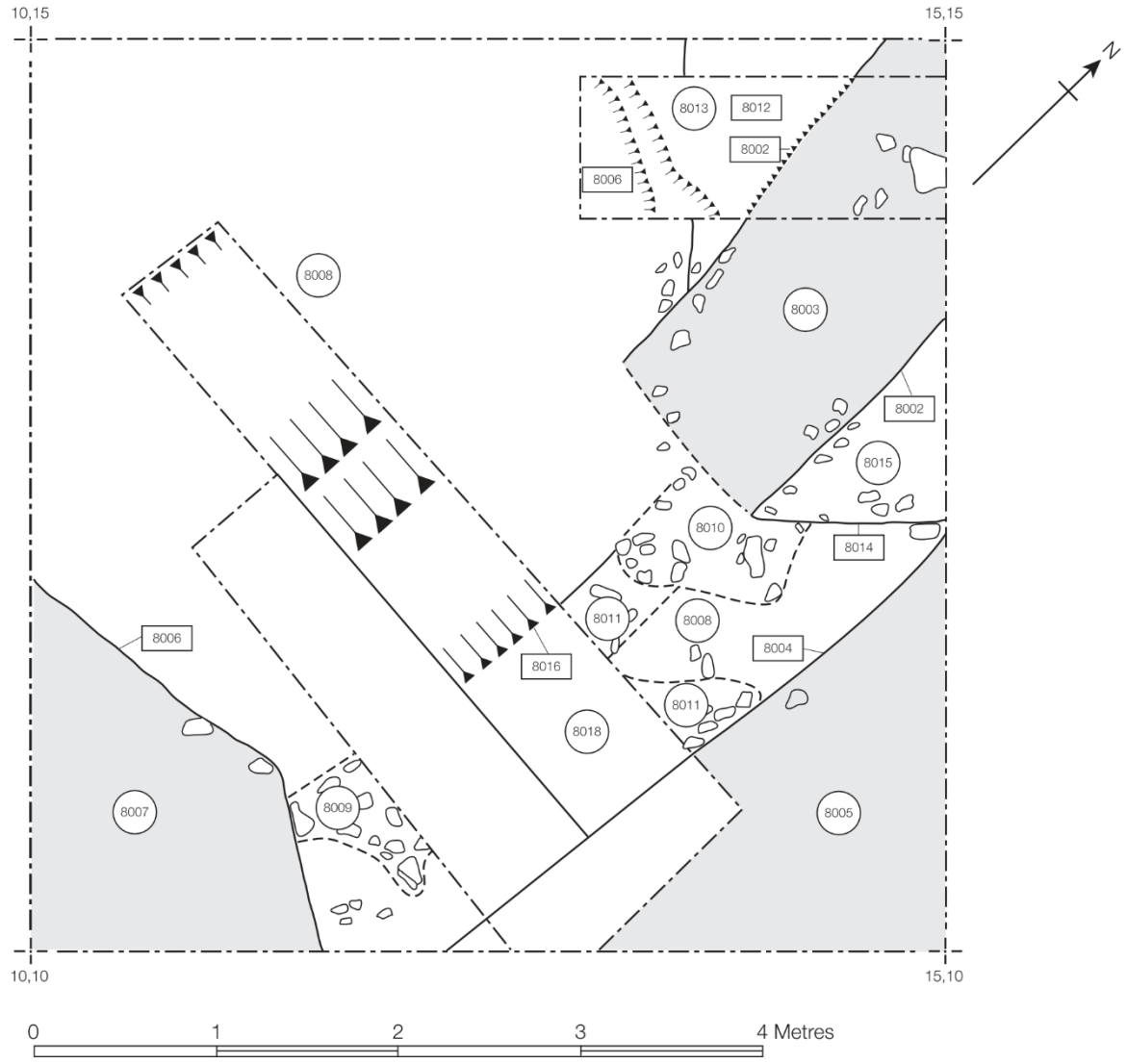
Introduction

Trench 8 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, in the area originally excavated by Bradford and Goodchild in the 1930's (Bradford and Goodchild, 1939) and by Harding in the 1980's (Harding 1987). This small trench measured 5m x 5m and was opened in 2009 to explore the NW corner of the tripartite annex at the back of the cella building. It 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 8 was located following information from the 1930's excavation plans and reports. It was decided to re-excavate this area over the tripartite annexe in Trench 8 in order to help unravel the function, purpose, and chronology of this part of the structure.

Unfortunately, the bulk of any early archaeology in Trench 8 was severely truncated by a large post-medieval pit or cellar [8016], which may be related to the nearby Noah's Ark building when it functioned as a public house. Excavation trenches dug by both Bradford and Goodchild and by Harding in the 20th century further obscured any early evidence. The location of the Oxford Archaeological Unit trenches in this area excavated in the 1980's, one of which may have run through Trench 8 or through Trench 6, proved impossible to locate (Wait and Miles 1988).

Truncated as this trench was by 20th century excavations and the post-medieval pit/cellar, it is not surprising that it produced very few finds of note. Only four small finds were discovered, three of those in disturbed topsoil. The latter consisted of one late Roman coin, a piece of glass and a Roman nail. Fill (8003) of Bradford and Goodchild's cut [8002] produced one copper-alloy fragment. Fragments of Roman building debris and charcoal were found in various layers and fills, as were small quantities of animal bone. In terms of more precise dating evidence, 105 Iron Age sherds were discovered, but these were mostly found in the bottom fill (8024) of post-medieval pit [8016] alongside some 19th century pottery, so it must be all residual. No recognisable prehistoric features were found in this trench. Besides this, 98 sherds of Roman pottery were also found, largely from the topsoil layer (8000) and from subsoil layer (8008) which extended across the trench. As with the prehistoric phase, there really were no clearly definable Roman features in this trench, apart potentially from a couple of robber trenches that are at best late Roman, but just as likely to be post-Roman. As a result of a lack of definable temple features and precisely located finds in this area, the original function and chronology of this three-room annexe still remain unclear.

MFNA 09
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References

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

Harding, D. 1987. *Excavations in Oxfordshire 1964-66*. Edinburgh: University of Edinburgh Department of Archaeology Occasional Paper No. 15.

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, just small quantities of residual Iron Age pottery, derived from areas disturbed either by modern activity or perhaps by late or post-Roman robbing activity. The only deposit that might be prehistoric is layer (8017).

Layer (8017) is a deposit to the east of [8016] and cut by it. It is overlain by layers (8008) and (8009) and overlies bedrock. It contained 12 prehistoric sherds and three Roman sherds, and as it directly overlies bedrock it is the only potential prehistoric layer in this trench.

Roman Phase

LAYERS

Layer (8009) is a CBM rich deposit in the southern part of the trench to the east of the post-medieval feature [8016]. It was probably cut by post-medieval feature [8016] and Harding trench [8006]. It is overlain by topsoil (8000) and overlies layer (8018). It produced seven Roman sherds and many fragments of Roman tile, which may make it a candidate for the Roman period, but this is by no means certain.

Post-medieval Phase

CUTS

Pit/Ditch [8016] is a very large ditch or pit running across a large part of Trench 8 in a N-S trajectory. Only a section of it was exposed in the trench, so its full size and shape remain unknown. Looking at the profile in section it seems likely that only about half of the real width of the feature was exposed in our sondage. What was exposed measured *c.* 2.9m across, so this feature may have measured about 6m across originally. Also, as the excavation ended before bedrock was reached the full depth is not known. It was dug to a maximum depth of 3m before digging had to stop. Unfortunately, this massive feature truncated much of the original earlier archaeology in this part of the temple annexe, thus wiping out any new dating evidence we were hoping to gain for the prehistoric and Roman period. It seems likely that Bradford and Goodchild's trench [8002] and Harding's trench [8006] cut through this feature in their 20th century investigations. The feature is overlain by layer (8008). It contained three fills to the depth we were able to reach. Top fill (8022) was a thin clay rich deposit and contained the usual fragments of CBM, stone, charcoal and bone, plus a small handful of both residual prehistoric and Roman pottery. Below this lay fill (8023), a more mixed and thicker layer at *c*. 0.7m deep. It contained fragments of CBM and small stones and just three Roman pottery sherds. Underneath (8023) was fill (8024), which amongst the fragments of CBM etc, produced 69 residual Iron Age sherds, two Roman sherds, and some post-medieval pottery. The presence of pottery this late near the bottom of the feature confirms it as a post-medieval feature, either the cellar of some lost building or a very large pit.

Layer (8008) is an extensive deposit across the annexe area in the central and western part of the trench. It is overlain by topsoil (8000) and is cut by Bradford and Goodchild trench [8002], and Harding's trenches [8004] and [8006]. It overlies post-medieval feature [8016]. The layer produced two Iron Age sherds and 11 Roman sherds, but because it overlies the large post-medieval feature it must date to the post-medieval period itself.

20th century Exploratory Phase

CUTS

Bradford and Goodchild Trench [8002] is a rectangular cut situated in the NE corner or the trench running in a roughly N-S direction. It is overlain by modern topsoil and cuts and truncates both potential robber trench [8012] and potential robber trench [8014]. It also cuts layers (8008) and (8010). The re-exploration of this 20th century trench uncovered single fill (8003) but our investigation did not go down to bedrock. Fill (8003) contains remnants of Roman building debris such as CBM and stone fragments and fragments of bone, but no pottery or other dating evidence. The only small find was an undiagnostic scrap of copper-alloy (sf 512). Unfortunately, the lack of any dating material meant we could add nothing to the information originally given in the Bradford and Goodchild report of 1939 about this area.

Harding Trench [8004] is a wide cut running across the SE corner of the trench and running in a N-S direction. Only a partial excavation of this 20th century trench was undertaken, on the western edge. It was overlain by modern topsoil and cuts layers (8011) and (8018). The top fill of the area excavated was (8005) and this contained Roman building debris including stone and CBM, but no pottery or other dating evidence. Unfortunately, the lack of any dating material meant we could add nothing to the information originally given in the Harding report of 1987 about this area.

Harding Trench [8006] is a wide cut stretched across the SW corner of the trench. After establishing its position, this 20th centruy trench was not excavated. The top fill (8005) was not fully excavated and produced no finds, so no new information was uncovered.

Unphased

CUTS

?Robber Cut [8012] is an irregular shaped cut in NE corner of the trench running on a roughly E-W trajectory, which could match the original position of the northern wall of the three-room annex. If this is a robber trench only a small corner of it was revealed in our excavations so it is difficult to be sure. The maximum dimension across this feature was *c.* 1m in length but the full dimensions and shape are unclear. It was excavated down to bedrock at a depth of *c*. 0.55m. It cuts layer (8008) and is overlain by topsoil (8000). Single fill (8013) contains only one prehistoric sherd and two Roman sherds and no other dateable material. Because of its position near the north wall of the temple annexe, this feature may represent a late Roman or post-Roman robber cut retrieving stone from the original walls, but the minimal nature of the investigation here makes that impossible to verify.

?Robber Cut [8014] is situated on the eastern edge of the trench, to the south of and truncated by Bradford and Goodchild trench [8002] and to the north of Harding's trench [8004]. The side of the cut still existing and visible runs in an NE-SW direction. As so little of this feature is visible, only the top layer was excavated to define the edge, so its

dimensions and full extent remain unknown. This feature cuts layers (8010) and (8018) and is overlain by (8000). Top fill (8015) contained no pottery or other dating evidence. Because of its position near the NW corner of the temple annexe, this feature may represent a late Roman or post-Roman robber cut retrieving stone from the original walls, but the minimal nature of the investigation here makes that impossible to verify.

Cut [8019] is a small triangular shaped feature in the NE corner of the trench, measuring at its maximum *c*. 0.9m. Only part of this feature was exposed in the small sondage trench, so its extent and shape are unknown. The site records are confused, but it was probably situated under robber trench [8012] in this area and may have been cut by it. It contained two fills, the topmost being fill (8020) which was rich in CBM and also produced some animal bone and three Roman pottery sherds. Lower fill (8021) produced only two Roman pottery sherds.

Layer (8010) is small deposit containing many fragments of Roman CBM and stone rubble. It is situated on the eastern part of the trench. It is overlain by (8000) and probably cut by Bradford and Goodchild trench [8002] and by post-medieval feature [8016]. The layer produced no pottery or other dating material so while it may be Roman, it has to be classed as 'Unphased'.

Layer (8011) is a burnt layer containing much Roman CBM in the eastern part of the trench and to the east of post-medieval feature [8016], which probably cut it. It is overlain by topsoil (8000) and overlies layer (8018). With only three residual prehistoric sherds and the Roman building debris, it cannot be dated securely.

Layer (8018) is situated in the east part of the trench, adjacent to (8017). It is overlain by layers (8009) and (8011) and lies directly over bedrock [8001]. With only four prehistoric and three Roman sherds, the dating is uncertain. Like (8017) it may be a prehistoric layer or a Roman one with residual prehistoric material.