The Ridgeway and Vale Project:
Excavations at Marcham/Frilford 2003.

Gary Lock and Chris Gosden (with contributions by David Bukach, Patrick Daly, David Griffiths, Paula Levick, Jedrzej Majewski, Sheila Raven, Peter Warry, Carole Wheeler and Steve Yeates)

The background to the project and site has been detailed in previous interim reports in South Midlands Archaeology (Lock *et. al*. 2002; Lock, *et. al*. 2003).

As in previous years the excavation acts as a training excavation for Oxford University students and is committed to education in the widest sense. Education Officers were on-site throughout the month of excavation and gave tours to many visitors including groups from local schools and community organisations. Various activities were organised for National Archaeology Day when c.2,500 people visited the site and talks are given to groups throughout the year.

The location of trenches is shown in last year's interim report (Lock, *et. al*. 2003, page 85), they are based on a geophysical survey which was published in the first year's interim (Lock *et. al*. 2002, page 71).

Brief report on the excavations in 2003.
Based on our previous excavations, and those in the garden of the Noah's Ark in the 1930's (Bradford and Goodchild 1939), the south-western area of the site shows a high concentration of Iron Age activity. This will be described first.

Trench 14
This was excavated over the two seasons of 2002-3, measured 15m x 10m and the features recorded in it ranged in date from the Iron Age to the Romano-British period.

The earliest archaeological features were a series of pits, which were, tentatively from the pottery recovered, catalogued as being early to middle Iron Age in date. In the northeast corner of the trench there were seventeen inter-cutting pits, Figure 1. Lying outside of this dense cluster were a further seven pits. The pits varied in size with some being up to 2m in diameter. There was also variation in depth, some being over 1m deep and others surviving only as shallow depressions. The stratigraphic deposits within the pits were often structured, with deposits of burnt and un-burnt stone and bone covered with layers of soil. There was considerable variation within the pit fills, in some, for example, there was more than one deposit of burnt stones. The fill of pit [14090], one of the outlying pits, had a rapid fill in its lower part evident from the re-deposition of a layer of natural sand with very little contamination. The upper part of the pit was weathered, which would indicate that the pit had been filled partly and then the edge of the pit was allowed to weather. Such a process would suggest that the pit had never been used for storage and was excavated for the disposal of material, perhaps produced during a specific act or event.

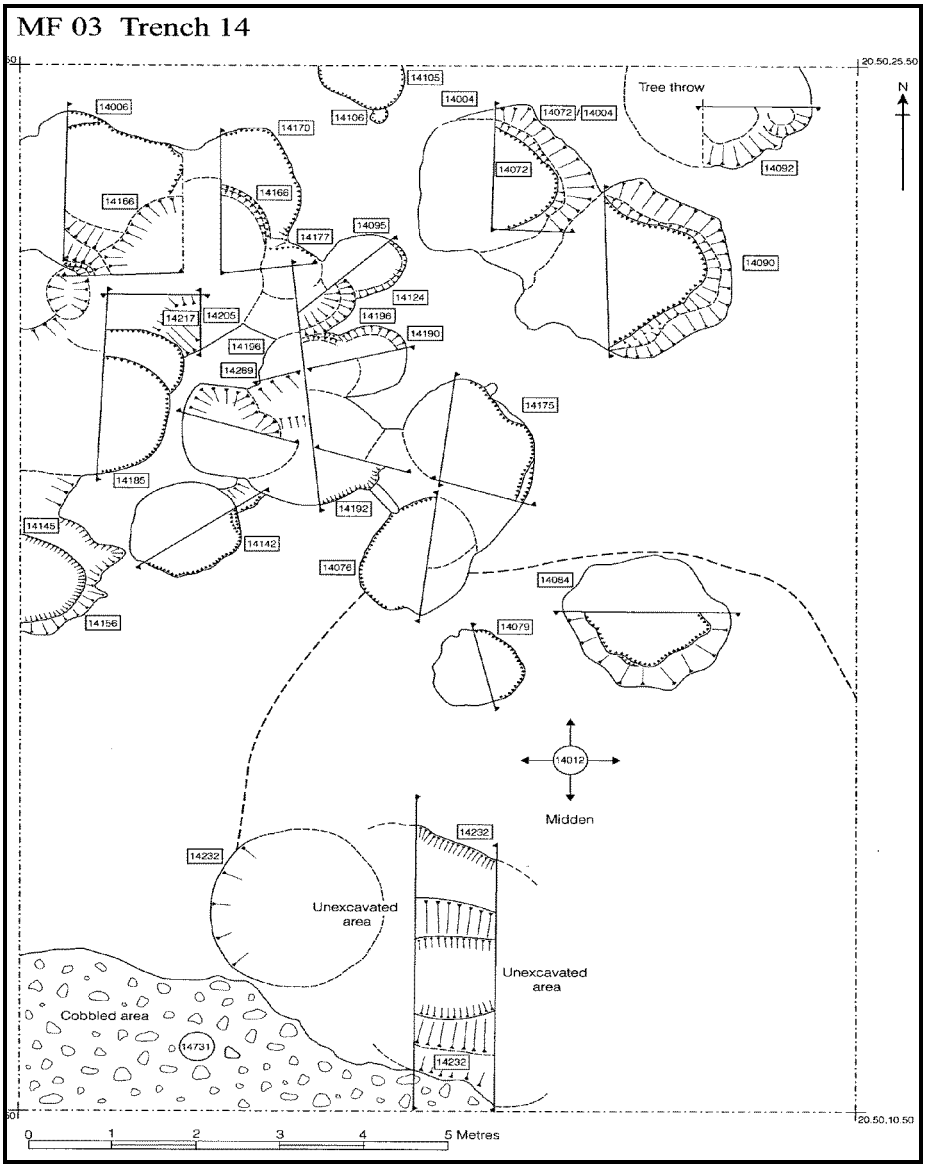

Figure 1. Trench 14, overall plan.

This type of deposition has been noted in other pits throughout Southern England and is now recognised as structured deposition (Hill 1995). Here it has been noted that there are deliberate processes in action when pits are filled, and that certain types of domestic refuse, and the deposition of certain types of animal or human bones can be recognised as occurring in specific groups. It is interesting to note that at this site there seems to be a continuity of this activity between the Iron Age and Romano-British periods, perhaps indicating a long lived practice that helps to explain the location of the temple complex.

In the southern part of trench 14, there were Romano-British deposits, including the remains of a metalled surface (1473) and a large pit [14232], approximately 6m long, 3m wide and 1.5m deep. A number of fills were recognised in the pit, but there were also deposits of dumped stones and associated animal bones including the remains of a skull, of bovine or ove-caprid species. The material recovered from the pit seems to come from throughout the Roman period.

The pit continued to be used for the deposition of rubbish after it was full when it built up into a midden. Fulford (2001, 199-218), has recently argued that traditions of structured deposition in pits, as widely claimed for the Iron Age, continued into the Roman0-British period. The deposition of stone and bone in the pits of both periods in Trench 14 would support this argument, even though there had been an apparent break in use of the site in the late Iron Age with the practice being re-started. Though it is difficult to determine where the beasts deposited in the Roman pit were killed and consumed, the proximity of the temple and the temenos, and the fact that there were a number of complete skulls may indicate that these were the remains of sacrificial animals.

Across the rest of the site, the other trenches excavated in 2003 were mainly concentrated on Romano-British elements as follows:

Trench 18

In continuation of the work started during the 2002 field season (Lock *et. al.* 2003), Trench 18 was re-opened with the main aims being to determine how many discrete structures were present and to conduct a detailed investigation of the southern part of the trench and the structure therein. It was revealed that there are at least two separate structures represented, both of which seem to be rectangular buildings oriented along an east–west axis, Figure 2. The dimensions of the structure to the north are still not known, but the building in the south consists of two main walls [18006 and 18115; 18123] running east-west for approximately 7 m. The building is approximately 3.3 m wide, and has clear evidence for at least two phases of construction, with a smaller wall [18004] running north to south in the western half of the building. The exact chronological relationship has yet to be clarified, but at present, it seems most likely that wall [18004] was built in a different phase to walls [18006, 18115; 18123], and is probably later.

Interestingly, and as suspected in 2002, there is only a partial north south wall at the eastern side of the building [18058]. However, rather than seeing this as a robbed out or damaged area, additional evidence strongly suggests that it is an intentional part of the architecture. This is supported by the fact that there are several sandy–gravely floor surfaces both inside what would be the larger room of the structure [as defined by walls 18004; 18006; 18058; 18123], and in the area to the east of wall [18058]. While still speculative, it is very possible that the structure did not have a substantial eastern face, and in fact, might have had a working surface on the outside that was directly associated with its function, perhaps covered by a more ephemeral structure, such as an awning or wooden wall. By the end of the 2003 field season a significant sample of the interior of the southern building had been excavated down to natural to determine stratigraphic depth and complexity, Figure 3. In addition, the excavations extended into the area just north of the southern building to determine the nature of the area between the southern and northern buildings, and, if possible, the relationship between them. This work has not been conclusive, and will continue during the 2004 field season.

A cursory examination of the material culture recovered during the 2003 field season from the southern building, and the area just outside to the north show a remarkable richness of artefacts, both with regards to quality and quantity. Large amounts of ceramics, tile, building material, ceramic tesserea, shell and animal bone were found.

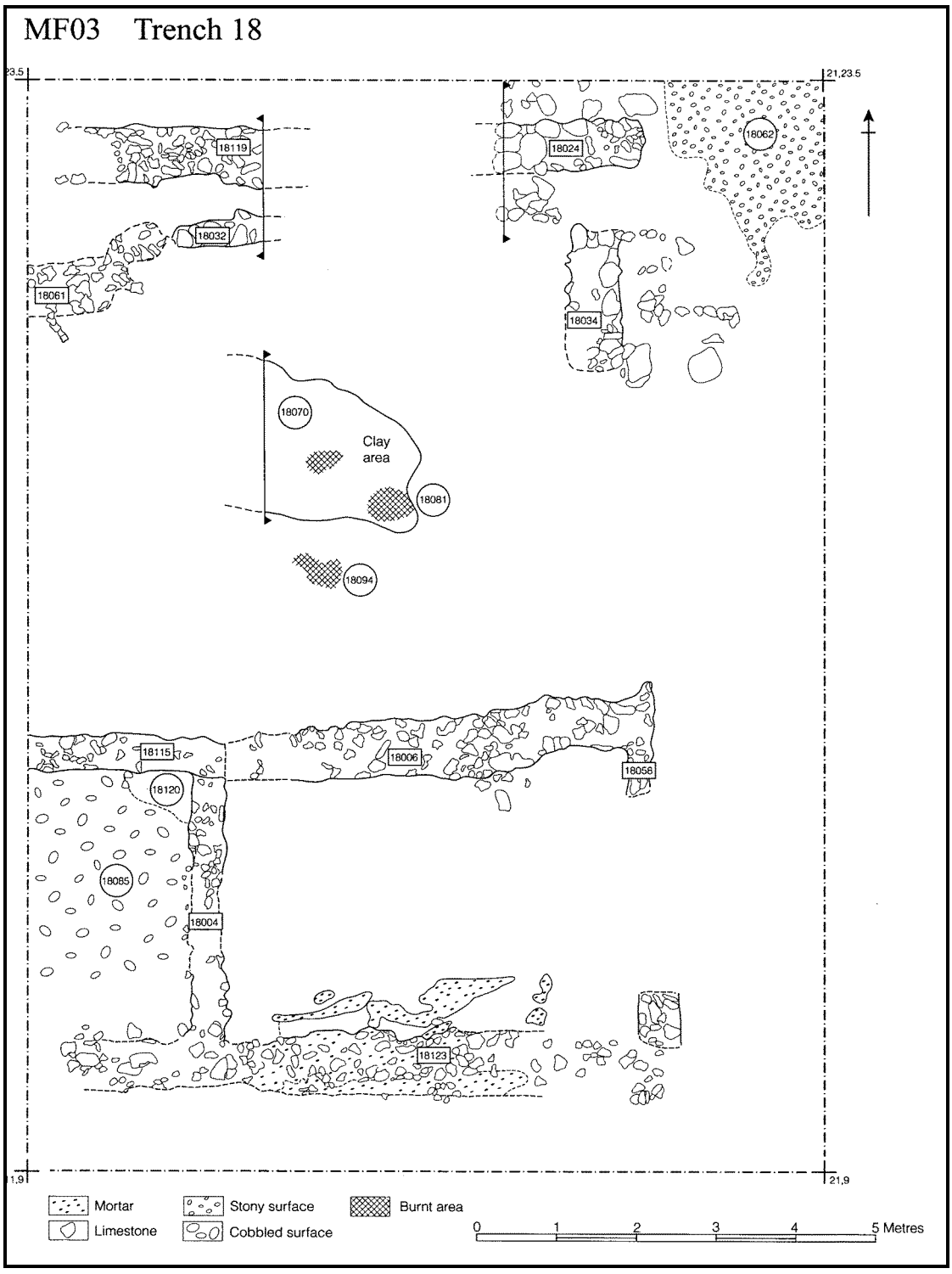

Figure 2. Trench 18, overall plan.

In addition, many small finds, such as coins, finely crafted metal tools and jewellery, the remains of delicate ceramic and glass drinking vessels, multicoloured painted wall plaster, and a very well preserved intaglio depicting [a Greek heroic figure] were recovered. All of this strongly suggests the presence of at least one, but possibly more, structures most likely associated with the temple based upon provisional dating and possible function. At this stage the dating of the finds suggests a range from late first/early second century to late third/early fourth century, approximately

contemporary with the temple. It is possible that the structures in Trench 18 are part of a number of ancillary buildings built around the outside of the temple's temenos wall that existed to serve the needs of visitors to the temple, and to facilitate the activities carried out therein. Many of the finds so far indicate feasting and food consumption including imported fine ware beakers and cups, samian bowls, flagons, handled glass vessels together with the bones of young pig, lamb, chicken, wild birds, calf or veal and many oysters.

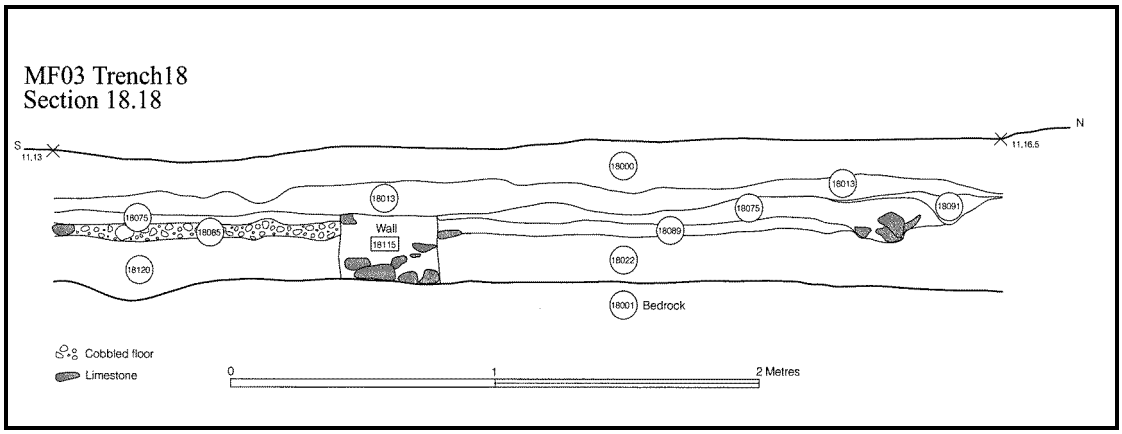

Figure 3. Trench 18, section across the southern building.

The excavations in Trench 18 will continue during the 2004 field season with the aim of completing the excavation on the northern structure and the area in between the two buildings – hopefully establishing phasing for the buildings, providing more evidence of function, and relating both structures to the wider Marcham/Frilford complex.

Trench 2

Work continued on the large rectilinear building, located by magnetometer survey in 2001, which is positioned centrally in the excavation area between the 'amphitheatre' and the temple complex. This structure, which is nearly 34 metres long and up to 17 metres wide, Figure 4, and apparently originally conceived on a monumental scale, now consists of a series of low limestone wall bases approximately 1m in width, the tops of which meet the lowest horizon of ploughsoil. Excavations in 2001 and 2002 showed that the building had been burnt, probably early in its life, and lower-grade occupation such as quartering for animals may have subsequently taken place prior to abandonment. The coin finds from within the building, the chronology and detailed distribution of which is still being analysed by Adrian Marsden, strongly suggest that both construction and re-use happened in the late to very late Romano-British period. The walls enclose an internal area which is characterised by successive spreads of mortar and mixed rubble with tile/animal bone – this rubble deposit in particular contains large numbers of low-denomination late Romano-British copper coins, principally from the fourth century and stretching at least to the very early fifth century in date. The coins from this building are dominated by post-AD 348 issues through to circa AD 402, with only one pre-fourth century coin (a small radiate imitation of the third century). The profile of the numismatic evidence suggests a start-date of significant coin loss or deposition around AD 340.

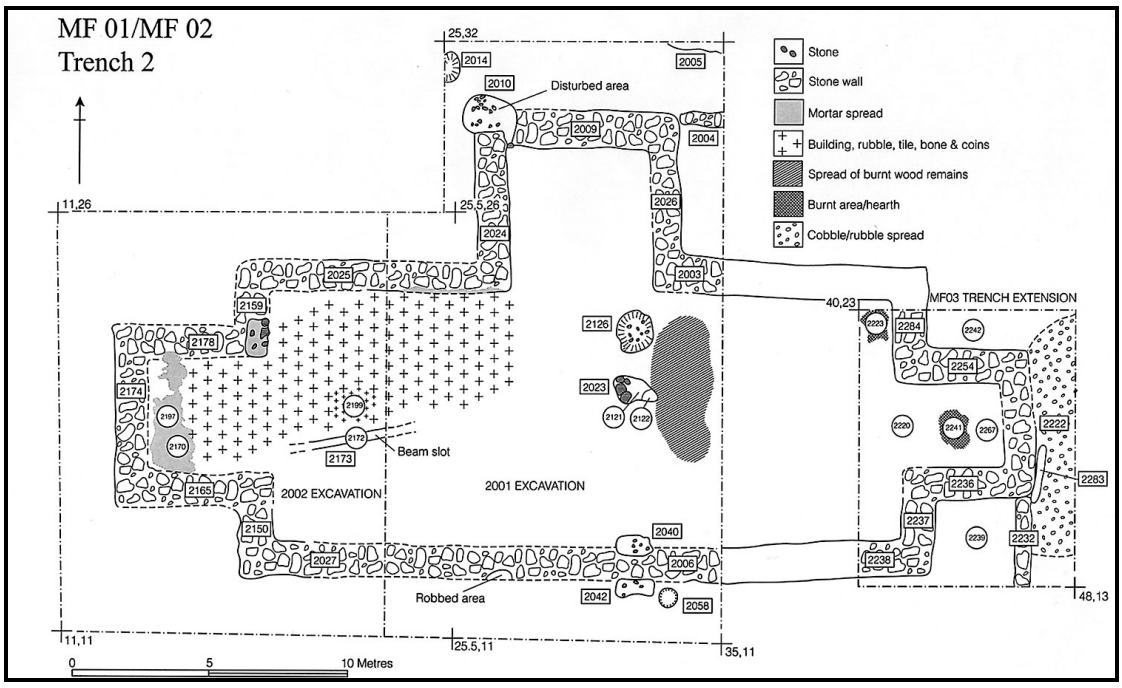

Figure 4. Trench 2, overall plan.

Excavation had so far concentrated on the central and western parts of the building with the plan of the central part of the building being investigated in 2001/2. Much of the internal Romano-British deposits had been removed or ploughed out, leaving an orange subsoil containing considerable Iron Age evidence including several pits with pottery and human and animal bone. Spreads of burnt timber (see Figure 3) were initially thought to be associated with the burning episode of the building. However in the winter of 2002-3, a radiocarbon accelerator date was obtained from a piece of charred oak timber in this spread (OxA-12608, wood charcoal, $\delta^{13}C$=25.6%) giving an (uncal) date of 2141±32 BP. This gives a 71% (cal) probability of 550 BC – 390 BC, giving an early to middle Iron Age date.

This date helps to define a substantial phase of Iron Age activity in the area of Trench 2, which is particularly marked in the centre of the trench although given the chronological gap, it is highly likely that the building was sited without reference to the position of the earlier activity. There was, however, evidence in 2001 that the NW corner of the northern extension had been underpinned with mortar and stone as it was constructed over a large Iron Age pit [2010], and it had in fact subsequently slumped slightly into the softer pit fill.

In 2002, the series of better-preserved Roman-period interior deposits discovered in 2001 and trending towards the western end of the building, which were clearly associated with the building, were investigated. In 2003 an extension trench measuring 10m x 8m, and separated from the main Trench 2 area by 5m of unexcavated ground, was opened in order to define and characterise the eastern end of this intriguing structure.

The main central/western trench covering the majority of the building in 2003 proceeded as a continuation of the 2002 season. The mortar spreads forming floor levels in the western ‘extension’ were disentangled, showing that an upper spread,

which in places overlies the inner surfaces of the walls, is separated from a lower mortar spread (2170) by the characteristic rubble/bone/tile layer with fourth-century coins, the southerly extent of which is limited by an E-W beam slot running at a slight angle to the long axis of the building [2173]. Occasional dense concentrations of mortar with large stones were encountered e.g. (2199), suggesting possible pads for roof-supports for the original building, but these were consistent in neither form nor pattern, indicating that if there had been a roof supported on the floor surface, most evidence has been lost. There were no post-holes of any appropriate size or position to indicate roof supports. An alternative scenario might see a roof supported upon rafters rested on the walls at their original height.

Beneath the lowest mortar 'floor' spread, there was considerable evidence for burning, with fire-reddened and blackened soil lenses with charcoal powder and flecks, possibly including some burnt wall plaster, abutting deep pink burn marks on the limestone walls. These were carefully studied, during which it became clear that some of the larger 'pit-like' anomalies on the geophysical plot around the inside of the walls, were in fact probably reflections of dense concentrations of burning. Four transverse sections across the interior were excavated to show the stratigraphy of the burning, mortar and rubble/bone/tile layers in relation to the walls.

The burning evidence suggests that the building probably originally had a wooden floor, which burnt *in situ.* The arrangement of mortar and rubble/bone/tile spreads suggests that the rubble layer was imported as a dump of secondary material (probably from derelict buildings nearby) to level up the interior for a new mortar floor after the burning episode. This would accord with the heterogeneous character of much of the tile – indicating it did not come from a single *in-situ* collapsed roof. There is also evidence in the form of repositioned stonework and mortar additions that the limestone walls were repaired at some stage after the original construction. It was around this point in the building's life that most of the coins were apparently lost – their profile suggests individual loss through trading activity, and/or possibly votive deposition, rather than as a single dispersed hoard.

Further examination of the wall structures in section showed that they were securely founded on the limestone bedrock, which had been levelled in places with rough masonry to provide a flat building platform. A group of stake-holes in the NW corner, which were sealed by the burning layer, may suggest the presence of wooden supporting structures during construction. All evidence points to the fact that the wall bases were originally intended to support very substantial upper works of stone or timber.

At the western end, at a point where all but the lowest courses of the wall do not survive as well as elsewhere, the bottom of the foundations was examined. In the lowest level of the wall foundations was found an abraded body sherd of shelly ware pottery. Although lacking a diagnostic rim form, the results of an examination by Paul Booth of Oxford Archaeology suggested an 80% probability that this stratified sherd represents a fourth-century AD type. This, in conjunction with the coin finds, strongly suggests that the walls were constructed from new in the very late Romano-British period and the building's subsequent secondary use and abandonment may have taken place into the early post-Roman period.

The 2003 extension trench investigated the eastern end of the building, which was, according to the geophysical plot, apparently a symmetrical counterpart to the western end with a square protruding extension from the main rectilinear building plan. Upper topsoil stripping was done by machine, and the lower topsoil layer (2220) was excavated by hand. An early discovery in the lower topsoil, at the centre of the eastern square extension, was a large Roman bronze coin of the Emperor Constantius II (who reigned in the western Empire AD 353-61) bearing a chi-rho on the reverse.

The line of the walls in the eastern end, which were identical in form to the western end of the building, due to robbing and plough-damage were confined to their lowest foundation courses and therefore were less well-preserved than elsewhere. There was evidence, as in the western end, of mortar spreads partially overlying the inner edge of the walls. In the exact centre of the eastern square extension (although not necessarily contemporary with the walls) was a spread of burnt limestone (2241) which appears to represent a hearth. Another, more ephemeral, burnt area (2223) was encountered in the NW corner of the extension trench just inside the building. Internal deposits in the eastern end of the building superficially resembled some characteristics in the western end, with occasional tile fragments, late Roman coins and animal bone fragments, but on the whole they were less well-preserved and more discontinuous, possibly indicating greater plough damage in the eastern end.

Immediately outside the main walls of the eastern extension, although largely separated from it by a shallow gully, there was an area of cobbling [2222], in the form of large worn limestone fragments which clearly continue into the unexcavated area to the east. These were associated with another, smaller, wall [2232] in the SE corner of the extension trench, which lay N-S, abutting the SE corner of the eastern extension to the main building, and apparently indicating an ancillary structure of some kind. The question of activity outside the main building to the east, towards the site of the 'amphitheatre' and 'palaeochannel', is an important one and will form the subject of further investigations in 2004. The possibility that the eastern end of the building had an entrance facing eastwards is suggested by the extra-mural cobbling; the very low remnant of wall foundations in the E wall of the eastern extension may have underlain a door portal, which on the basis of the character of the building elsewhere, may have been a wooden structure leading onto a wooden floor. Evidence of the burning episode, however, which is so strong on the western end of the building, is much less pronounced in the east.

Further post-excavation work remains to be done on the finds, the detailed pattern of coin loss, and structural relationships within the building, but current indications point to the building being a very late Romano-British monumental structure, very probably with (originally) a high-status ceremonial function, which after a fire was subsequently partially rebuilt and then down-graded to a more utilitarian purpose. It seems to be the latest of the large structures at March/Frilford, a fact borne out by the generally late date of the coins and some other artefacts such as bone pins found in it. A ritual or religious purpose would appear to be a strong hypothesis – but was it a late temple or a church? The pattern of coin deposition may indicate a Christian use (A. Marsden, *pers comm*.), as there are coins of post 391-2 (ie., after Theodosius's edicts closing pagan temples) and there are Christian symbols in the form of the chi-rho on coins, but these are essentially portable objects which circulated both within and outside explicitly Christian contexts. The building has a pseudo-basilican style plan,

but the simple fact is that we have no clear idea what a late Romano-British church may have looked like. Most of the best structural evidence in the form of Christian mosaics comes from rooms in villas which have no explicitly Christian plan or form. The few 'churches' which are documented in Roman Britain such as that excavated at Silchester, Hants, in the early 1960s, (Frere 1975) were designated as such on the basis of architectural features such as apsidal extensions, which compare to continental and Medieval churches, but otherwise lack diagnostic structural evidence of early Christianity (King 1983). This line of reasoning may apply to Marcham/Frilford, where we also have a possible contemporary association through coin finds with the late Romano-British burials in the nearby cemetery (Akerman, 1865; Rolleston 1869; 1880; Calkins, 1978).

Trenches 1, 9 and 8b are focussed on the 'amphitheatre' first excavated by Hingley (1985):

Trench 1

Excavations here continue to reveal the nature of the entranceway on the eastern side of the circular structure and helped greatly clarify the situation. The arena wall was found to rest on bedrock and in places the bedrock behind the wall had been cut away to accommodate it, reinforcing the idea that this was a natural hollow, formalised by the building of the wall. At its base the wall was below the water table as it stands today and the bedrock slopes down towards the centre of the arena, so that it is covered by an ever greater depth of water. The bank behind the wall was built on an Iron Age soil, presumably the same as that found in trench 9. Running into the arena through the entrance was a layer of rubble to be found both inside and outside the arena wall. The step discovered last year had been constructed on top of this layer. Within the arena, directly below the step was a layer of thick, black water lain clay, which looks like a ponding deposit laid down in still water. Under this was a layer of stones laid on bedrock.

No formal structures have been encountered in this area, but a complex sequence has been revealed in which the originally continuous wall may have been broken through and then a ramp of stone laid down into the arena, resting partly on existing waterlain clays. The step was constructed on top of this ramp. We hope to extend Trench 1 into the centre of the arena next season, but also to extend the trench to the east to pick up the full width of the bank.

Trench 8b

Trench 8b was extended initially to determine the southern extent of the bank constructions of the circular structure, as well as to better explore the area surrounding the vicinity where a large number of small finds were recovered towards the end of the previous excavation season. The extension south from the end of Trench 9 quickly revealed a linear stone structure cross cutting the trench. The structure consisted of a single course of angular stones laying on a course of rubble on its south side. The position of the structure is significant, however, as it rests at the end of the turf additions to the bank, overlying only a long thin layer of clay from the last clay deposit of the bank. A diffuse layer of fine rubble extended south of the structure, and as this layer was reached significant quantities of first animal bone and then small finds were recovered. These finds extended south for some metres from this point, and it is possible that the stone courses may have delineated the back of the bank of

the circular structure. Small finds throughout the southern extent of trench 8b consisted almost exclusively of bronze brooches, bone and bronze pins, Roman coins, glass beads and trinket rings. Preservation of small finds was exceptional, and some showed signs of deliberate defacement. Further structures were uncovered in the south western corner of the trench, and all appear to be associated with a layer of fine rubble resting on a pre-Roman surface evident across both trenches 8b and 9. At least six structures were also found, consisting of small collections of angular limestone arranged in triangular or circular patterns around a small void. A cut was apparent in the excavation of only one of these structures, and they therefore may represent post platforms for small wooden structures resting atop of a deliberately laid cobble surface. Small finds stopped almost immediately underneath the laid rubble surface, and these structures (and the associated cobble surface) represent the only Romano-British activity at the south end of the circular structure.

Given the sheer number of fine items from this area it may represent a deliberately delineated area where votive offerings were made, which may have been placed within some form of structure, the nature of which is now hard to determine. Coins recovered from Trench 8b extend into the fourth century and it is possible that later votive deposits in this area may also be related to the building uncovered in Trench 2, which appears to have existed into the later fourth century AD. Further work in the intervening unexcavated region between these trenches may help establish some relationship between activity within both trenches.

Two significant features were also uncovered towards the southernmost extent of Trench 8b towards the final days of excavation. One contained a concentration of Roman tile within a matrix of dark greasy sandy loam. This corresponds with a large anomaly visible from magnetometer survey of the area. This cut may be part of a silt trap on the line of the drain from the circular feature. A hint of a second feature into which yellow clay material was deposited was also found just to the north of the feature just mentioned was found. Both of these await further excavation next season.

Trench 9

At the southern side of the circular structure, excavation continued within Trench 9 explored the stone structure first discovered by Hingley (1985) in order to understand more about the construction of the bank, the rectangular stone structure built on the southern side of the 'arena' wall and area just inside the wall.

Excavations inside the rectangular stone structure revealed that approximately 20cm below the base of the 2002 excavations, a north-south linear alignment of large flat-lying flagstones was uncovered resting on a course of smaller rubble. The downward slope of the feature, as well as the presence of water at the same level as the feature would suggest that its primary function was to transport water away from the arena area. A flagstone was lifted to explore the interior of the drain and this revealed a substantial structure consisting of two built walls of angular limestone descending in 6 courses to a depth of 0.6 m, and resting on what is believed to be the limestone bedrock. The drain clearly runs under both the arena wall, where one of the flag stones forms a lintel and the southern wall of the rectangular structure where the lowest courses of the wall rest on the flagstones of the drain. Both walls were either constructed after the drain or contemporary with it.

A trench approximately 2 m by 3 m was also opened directly to the south of the rectangular 'room' structure, with the hopes of uncovering the continuation of the drain southwards from the arena. Excavation revealed the western half of a deep cut, which extends through underlying pre-Roman and sterile surfaces and this represents the continuation of the same drain feature. The fill of the cut consists of at least two phases, the uppermost of which consists of a 0.5 m deep layer of yellow clay resting on alternating thin layers of clay and grey sand. The deep clay layer is of similar composition to clay within the bank extending to the south of the arena wall and appears to have been partially laid into the ditch and partially slumped into the ditch cut. The ditch cut into which the drain was laid does not appear to cut through any part of the bank and therefore predates at least one phase of bank construction (see below). This clay layer is then covered by alternating tips of re-deposited turf or iron oxide rich soils, orange sandy loams and brown subsoil. These appear to represent a much later filling in of the ditch.

We also excavated in the interior of the circular structure, on the northern side of the main wall from the rectangular structure. Excavations successfully revealed a similar arrangement of flagstones and rubble along with a void heading beneath the arena wall and matching up with the drain within rectangular structure. A large lintel was also placed at the base of the arena wall above the void, and this suggests that the wall may have been deliberately built as part of the drain construction.

An exploratory trench 15 m long was opened into the centre of the area defined by the circular structure and which reached the northern side of the arena wall. The upper 1.5 m was stripped by machine and some preliminary hand excavation was carried out. The main purpose of the trench was to provide some idea of the nature of the central deposits and to allow us to plan for next season. A possible linear collection of stones was found near the centre of the arena at a depth of approximately 2 m, in association with a human bone and oyster shells. Near this was found an intact waterlogged piece of timber. Only a small portion of the timber was exposed, and it was decided to leave it in position for further excavation next season. However, a small piece was removed for radiocarbon dating. A date of 1910 ± 60 BP (Beta – 182615) was obtained, which calibrates to 30 BC – AD 245 (at two standard deviations), which probably puts the date within the early Romano-British period. The existence of a piece of wood in the centre of the structure is very significant in judging the purpose of the structure as a whole. The central area must have been continuously wet since the post was placed. There is no evidence of laid surfaces or floors in this area, and we feel that the waterlogged nature of the central area increases the chance that this was a water feature in its earliest phase, with a possible drier use later (Gosden and Lock 2003). It also raises the possibility that there was some sort of wooden construction pre-dating the stone one. Preliminary investigations on the northern side of the arena wall at the northern end of the trench also uncovered a possible structure to the north of the wall and set within the bank. The centre of the feature and its northern wall will be major foci for the coming 2004 season.

The circular structure – discussion

Through the 2003 excavations we have a better understanding of the phasing of the circular feature. Examination of the arena wall over the drain indicates the distinct possibility of the removal of an initial arena wall to lay down the drain. Several features suggest a removal and reconstruction of the wall in this area. Firstly, the

arena wall above the drain does not follow the same curve as the rest of the visible wall in Trench 9. The condition of mortar in the arena wall above the drain is also considerably better than that of the rest of the wall in Trench 9, and suggests a later construction. Tracing the extent of possible new construction also reveals several gaps in the construction of the wall, appearing in steps along the western end of the arena wall. Finally, as mentioned, the topmost stone of the drain feature as it extends beneath the arena wall appears to be an integral part of the wall reconstruction. Therefore, it is quite likely that the addition of a drain into the arena area of the circular structure occurred at some point after the construction of the arena wall itself, which necessitated the reconstruction of the wall.

Examination of the stratigraphy of the bank deposits may also suggest at least two phases of construction. Clay deposits nearest the arena wall appear to be capped by soil prior to the addition of alternating clay and turf banks along the southern half of the bank. This suggests an initial smaller bank construction followed at some point by a larger bank which was extended southwards. Deposits of oxidized sand on the arena side of the arena wall also suggests the presence of at least the initial bank construction prior to the presence of the wall itself, and previous work suggests that construction of the wall included cutting into the bank to lay the wall. The capping of the drain behind the rectangular structure with bank material may also be part of a second phase of construction.

Despite the difficulties in the evidence available at this stage, a relative sequence of construction for the circular structure can still be postulated using the interpretation outlined above. New geophysical evidence suggests a natural circular hollow existed on the site, probably filled with water. An initial bank was then constructed and the arena wall was cut into this banking. A long ditch was then dug through the pre-Roman layers below the bank, at the bottom of which was laid the drain. This necessitated the partial destruction of the arena wall at the point where the drain was needed, and a new phase of wall construction was made to cover this break in the wall. At some point after the digging of the ditch to lay the drain the southern bank was constructed, some of which slumped into the drain ditch. Finally, the last phases of construction were the construction of the walls of the rectangular structure and the capping of the arena with gravely sand. It is possible that the addition of the drain represented the end of its use as a watery feature, although it is still possible at this point that the arena area remained water-filled until the capping of the arena with gravel. The sequence of deposits within the drain may provide some clues towards the sequence of events within the circular structure, and may also point to the use of the drain within the context of an initial watery feature. The last deposits within the drain consist of the same iron oxide-rich arena capping material as well as some deposits of sandy clay, which is very similar to the sequence of deposits within the arena. The arena deposits rest significantly above the water level within the arena, and the capping of the arena surface may have removed the need to deliberately drain the circular structure. Some of this capping material was transported through the drain until the drain became clogged, with the upper deposits within the drain representing the last infilling of the drain.

Our preferred sequence at present is that a natural wet feature was formalised through the construction of a bank and then wall, with possible other features in the waterlogged centre of the feature. This was then deliberately or naturally infilled,

which led to a dry feature and it may have been contemporary with this that the bank was extended. Large numbers of objects were deposited at the southern end of this bank, at least into the fourth century AD. Such a sequence requires further test through future excavation and post-excavation analysis of datable finds.

Lake Marcham

At the end of the 2003 season we started to investigate sediments in the bank of the River Ock on the southern margin of the site. These investigations revealed water-logged deposits, cut through by the present river channel, but laid down in an open lake or swamp, as indicated by the existence of still water snail species. These could be oxbow lakes related to the complex meandering history of the Ock. Worked wood, a human vertebra, animal bones and the sole of a leather shoe were removed from the upper parts of these deposits. Radio carbon dating of a piece of worked wood produced a date of 950 ± 70 BP (Beta-182616) which is calibrated to AD 980 – 1235 at two standard deviations. A second date was obtained from an animal bone produced dates of 850 ± 60 BP (Beta-182617), which calibrates to AD 1030 to 1280 at two standard deviations. These two dates show substantial Medieval deposits. On the basis of finds of flint we believe that much older, prehistoric water-logged deposits lie beneath, which also offer the possibility of excellent organic preservation due to water-logging. An initial auger survey (carried out by S. Hesselbo and M. Langford) has shown that water-logged deposits may be up to 2 m thick. Initial survey leads us to believe that such deposits are found over a wide area, with a complex history that can only be revealed through a combination of mapping, augering, coring and excavation. Further work will be carried out here in 2004.

Conclusions

It is apparent from early excavations and our three seasons of work that Marcham/Frilford is a site of considerable importance. In terms of sequence, the excavations of 2001 established a middle Bronze Age presence including a substantial ditch, pottery, small cut features and human cremations. In an early layer within Trench 18, last year several well preserved sherds of decorated Neolithic pottery were found, although no features, which suggests an even longer sequence. The Iron Age activity has been well attested since the excavations of the 1930's and our work has consolidated and extended that understanding. It appears that the Iron Age activity, although concentrated towards the west of the site, extends across the area of Trench 2 based on the radio carbon date and pits there. This seems to be unenclosed activity rather than a settlement defined by a banked and ditched enclosure of any kind.

Both the structured deposition within the pits of Trench 14, and the radio carbon date of the wooden post within the centre of the circular structure hint at continuity between Iron Age and Romano-British interests at the site. This extends from the early and middle Iron Age through structured deposition and from the late Iron Age through the focus on the wet area which was later enclosed by the circular structure.

Within the Romano-British activities at the site we are also beginning to identify possible phasing, broadly into two. The buildings within Trench 18 appear to be contemporary with the temple and associated with it which is not surprising considering their location just outside the temenos eastern wall and, presumably, close to temple's main entrance. This dates to approximately late first/early second century to late third/early fourth. There then appears to be a shift of focus from the temple to

the large basilica-type building in Trench 2 in the late fourth century, accompanied by the temple and associated buildings being abandoned and falling into disrepair. Uniting the two phases, and indeed them with the preceding prehistoric activity, is the wet area at the head of the palaeo-channel which was eventually delineated by a bank and wall. This spans the two Romano-British phases and practices that were played out within and around the watery place must have related to those taking place within the temple initially and then within the basilica building. The whole site appears to have been a rural religious complex based both on its links with the past and on the continuing presence of the watery feature. It is early days yet to reach any final conclusions but it is tempting to see a sequence of religious 'conversions' from prehistoric paganism to some as yet unknown Romano-British deity or deities which were eventually Christianised. None of these appear to have involved a total rejection of previous beliefs and customs but, rather, a re-working of those beliefs and practices to fit the new social conditions.

Acknowledgements

Special thanks to Will and Janey Cumber for endless and varied support. Thanks also to John Duffield for logistical support, Debbie Day for catering, Michael McKeon and Mike Langford for infrastructure and all supervisors, students and friends who were involved in the Project. Funding was provided by the Roman Research Trust, the Cumber Family Trust and Oxford University.

References.

Akerman, 1865. Report on excavations in an ancient cemetery at Frilford. *Proceedings of the Society of Antiquaries of London*, 3, 136-41.

Bradford, J.S.P. and Goodchild, R.G. 1939. Excavations at Frilford, Berks, 1937-8. *Oxoniensia*, 4, 1-80.

Calkins, R.G. 1978. Grave goods from the Frilford cemetery at Cornell University. In Farrell, R.T. (ed), *Bede and Anglo-Saxon England*, Oxford: BAR, 148-72.

Frere, S.S. 1975. The Silchester Church: the Excavation by Sir I. Richmond in 1961' *Archaeologia* 105, 277-302.

Fulford, M. G. 2001. Links with the past: pervasive ritual behaviour in Roman Britain. *Britannia* 32:199-218.

Gosden, C. and Lock, G. 2003. Frilford: A Romano-British ritual pool in Oxfordshire? *Current Archaeology*, No.184, Vol. XVI No 4, pp. 156-9.

Hill, J. D. 1995. *Ritual and rubbish in the Iron Age of Wessex: a study on the formation of a specific archaeological record*. Oxford: British Archaeological Reports British Series 242.

Hingley, R. 1985. Location, Function and Status: a Romano-British 'religious complex' at the Noah's Ark Inn, Frilford (Oxfordshire). *Oxford Journal of Archaeology*, 4 (2), 201-14.

King, A. 1983. The Roman Church at Silchester Reconsidered. *Oxford Journal of Archaeology*, 2, 225-237.

Lock, G., Gosden, C. Griffiths, D., Daly, P., Trifkovic, V. and Marston, T. 2002. Hillforts of the Ridgeway Project: excavations at Marcham/Frilford 2001. *South Midlands Archaeology*, 32, pp.69-83.

Lock, G., Gosden, C. Griffiths, D. and Daly, P. 2003. Hillforts of the Ridgeway Project: excavations at Marcham/Frilford 2002. *South Midlands Archaeology*, 33, pp.84-91.

Rolleston, G. 1869. Researches and excavations at an ancient cemetery at Frilford. *Archaeologia*, 42, 417-85.

Rolleston, G. 1880. Further researches in an Anglo-Saxon cemetery at Frilford. *Archaeologia*, 45, 405-10.