

## **The Vale and Ridgeway Project: Excavations at Marcham/Frilford 2005: interim report**

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### **Introduction to the Vale and Ridgeway Project**

The background to the project and site has been detailed in the previous four interim reports in South Midlands Archaeology (Lock and Gosden 2002; Lock and Gosden 2003; Lock et. al. 2004, Gosden and Lock 2005), as well as on the project web site

[http://www.arch.ox.ac.uk/research/research\\_projects/marcham](http://www.arch.ox.ac.uk/research/research_projects/marcham)

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 organizations. Various activities were organized for National Archaeology Day when c. 1,000 people visited the site despite torrential rain for most of the day. Talks are given throughout the year to local societies and community groups. This was the first of two seasons partly funded by a Lottery (Local Heritage Initiative) grant that enabled local people to participate in the excavation. In the first week of excavation the site was featured on Time Team's Big Roman Dig.

### **The 2005 excavation season**

The 2005 excavations had four main goals: 1) further investigating the large circular structure (the possible amphitheatre) which involved extending existing trenches 1, 9 and 17; 2) further investigating the northern structure in trench 18 and extending it eastwards, trench 25; 3) locating the entrance through the temple *temenos* wall, trench 15; and 4) exploring the relationship between the large building previously excavated in trench 2 with the rear of the arena bank, trench 24. As part of this, work resumed in a number of existing trenches, with extensions made to facilitate our research goals, as well as in several new trenches. In all areas, the initial stripping of turf and/or removal of backfill was assisted by machine shovel, with work continuing by hand once archaeological deposits were reached. The 2005 field season focused largely upon the Romano British components of the site, and little if any prehistoric material was encountered. The location of all trenches is shown in Figure 1.

### **The Temple Precinct and Associated Structures (Trenches 15, 18 and 25)**

The presence of the Romano-British Temple in the garden of the Noah's Ark pub has long been established (Bradford and Goodchild 1939). However, until our excavations little has been known about the wider temple precinct and immediate environs. Geophysical survey and excavations in previous seasons have demonstrated the presence of a number of Romano British structures laying in close proximity to the east of the temple, as well as locating several segments of the *temenos* wall which demarcates the area of the temple compound. Investigations in this area during the 2004 and 2005 seasons have focused upon further understanding the nature of the structures around the temple, establishing their relationship with the temple, and finding the formal entrance to the temple complex.

In 2003, geophysical survey work was carried out along and around the eastern edge of the *temenos* enclosure to establish the location of the east wall of the temple precinct. The northern boundary wall had been detected in two places during the 2002 excavations (trenches 6 and 16 - Lock and Gosden 2003). The survey showed a number of anomalies which were considered worth investigating. To do so, three small trenches were opened in 2004. Trench 19 produced no evidence of archaeological activity to explain the anomalies on the survey; trenches 15 and 22 were more productive, the former being continued in 2005.

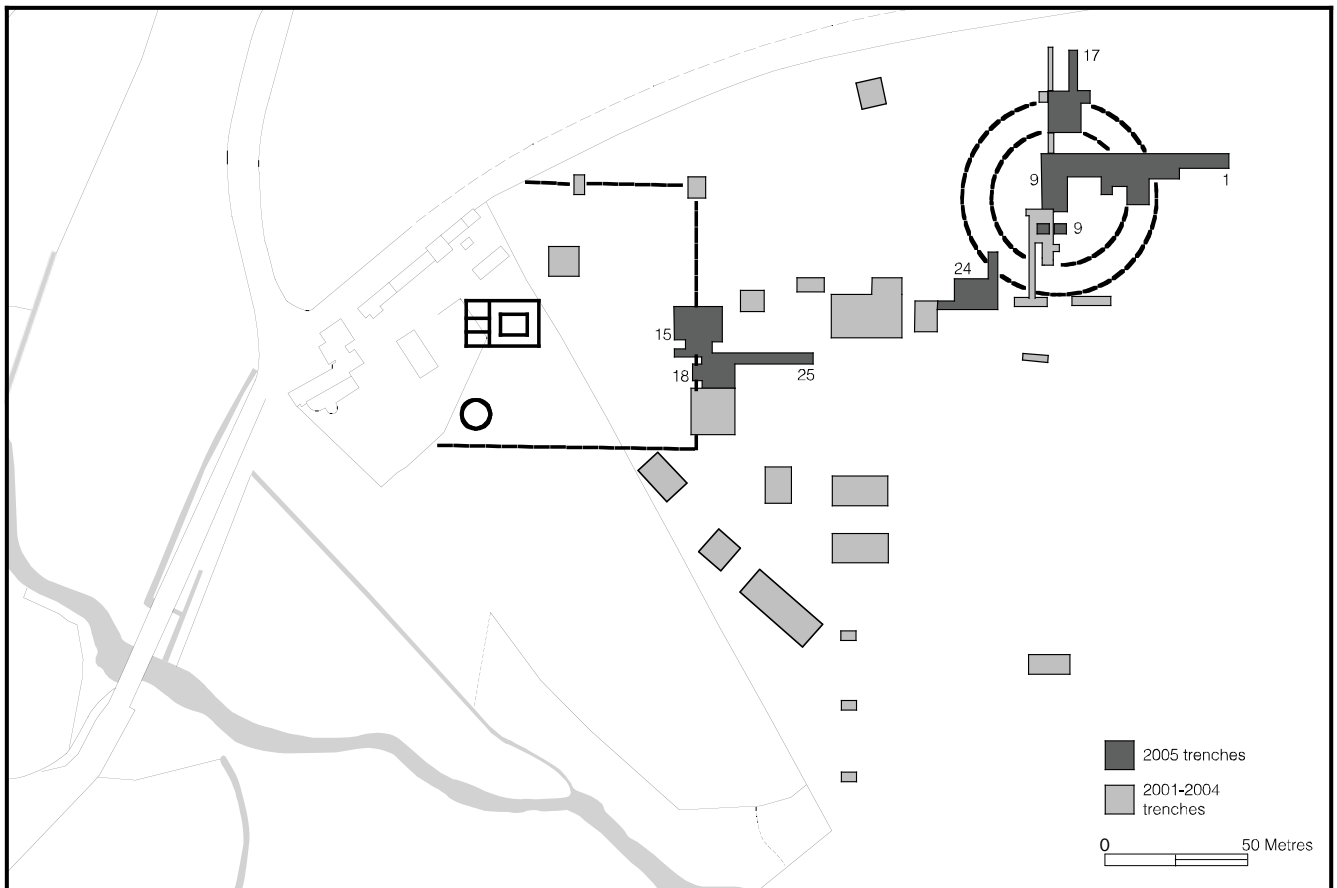


Figure 1. Excavation trenches at Marcham/Frilford from 2001 to 2005. The 2005 trenches are indicated as are the Romano-British temple excavated in 1937-8 with its suggested temenos wall.

### Trench 15

This work focussed on the possible gate complex of the temple precinct, extending the 2004 excavated area mainly to the north to produce a trench 18m by 20m, Figure 2. To the west the walls of the rooms around the gateway were found to extend further into the enclosure and formed the remains of a second room. The walls of this were mostly robbed out surviving only in three places [15033, 15036, 15059 and 15087]. In some parts of the surviving foundation the stones were in a mortar mix, in other areas they were rammed together and had a sandy loam fill. In the second room there were the remains of a square foundation cut [15089], but again there was no evidence of what this was for as the feature had been totally robbed.

The extension of the trench to the north was designed to ascertain the dimensions of the gateway although what it actually confirmed was that the *temenos* wall continued in a robbed out state, and that the rooms uncovered in 2004 were actually on the north side of the entrance. It seems that the foundation for the *temenos* ran the whole length of the trench and that there was a foundation cut even across the entrance [15041 and 15040]. Part of the south range of rooms inside the entrance were uncovered in trench 18, with two walls [15052 and 18306] extending out from the *temenos* boundary wall either side of the entrance. Two post settings (15070 with the other in the baulk of trench 18) could have supported an external porch. To the east an area of cobbling [15161] extended to the gateway, and there was also evidence of a gravel surface which ran through the entrance and extended inside the temple precinct [15006 and 15009].

MF 05  
Trench 15

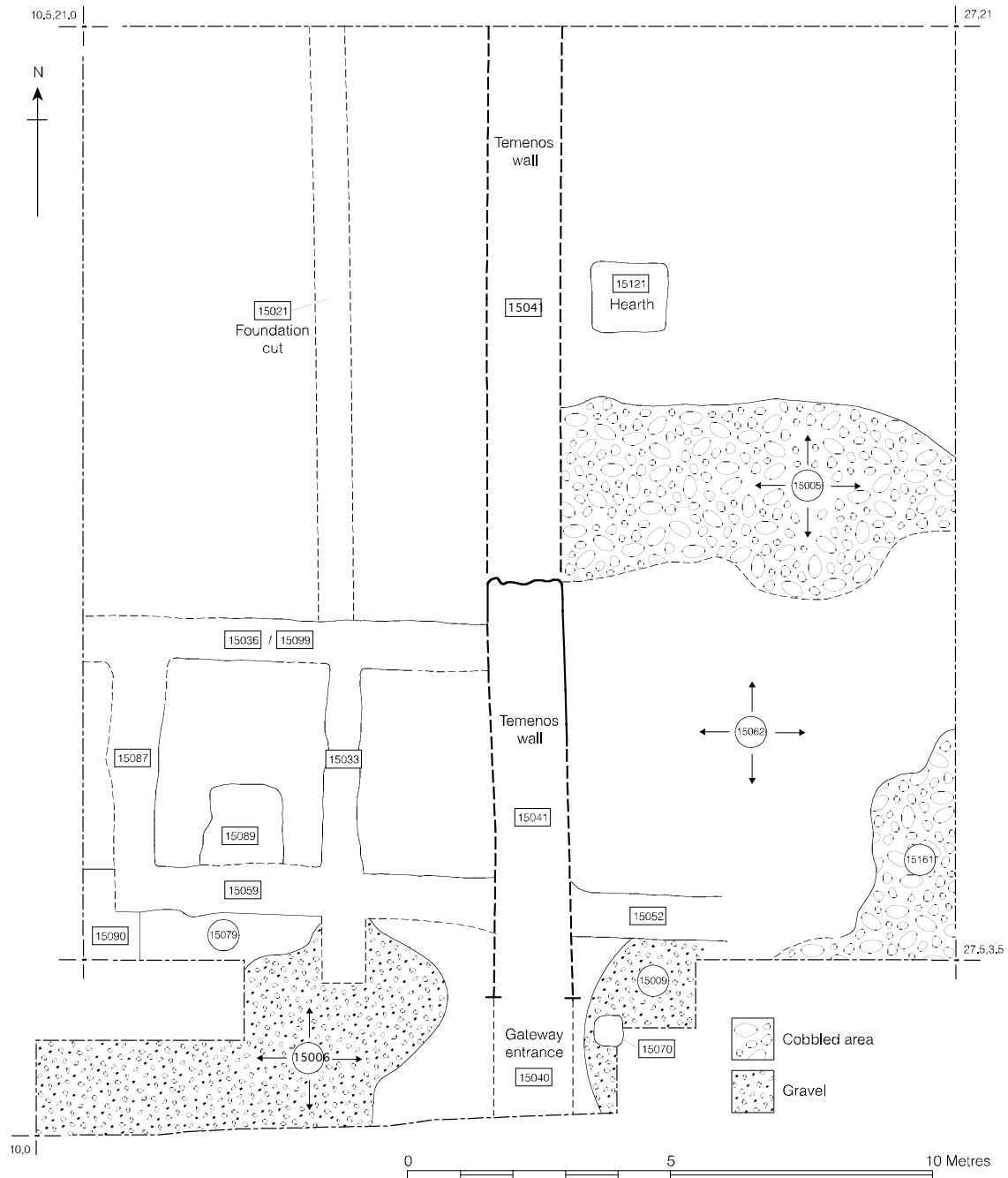


Figure 2. A schematic plan of Trench 15 showing the temenos wall and the entrance through it.

In the north of the trench the remains of the robbed out *temenos* wall [15041] formed a distinct division between the inside of the enclosure possibly with evidence of a portico in the form of mortar spreads and poorly preserved postholes in a foundation cut [15021], and the outside with the remains of a building backing onto the wall. This was poorly preserved and difficult to define but it could have matched the two excavated to the south of the entrance in trench 18 although it appears to have been smaller. It contained the remains of a well built stone hearth [15121] and finds from the third and fourth centuries.