

Loss of archaeology in the machining process

The richness of the finds from the machining layers suggests that some of the deposits machined off may have contained real archaeological features. However, comparison between distributions of stratified and unstratified finds (of, for example, coins) suggests that the two bear little relation to one another, and perhaps relate to very different formation processes. Given a choice between less machining (and more manual cleaning) or less time to spend on excavating the clear archaeology, the authors feel that the information loss would have been greater if more time had had to be spent on manual removal of what were essentially undifferentiated soils. More time and money were simply not available, and even had they been, a choice to excavate more of the site in the same way would still have been preferred over a different stripping policy.

A couple of areas of site were machined less heavily and hand cleaned to examine the possibility of significant loss of information due to the depth of machining. Neither produced appreciably more information than the deeper machined areas, as it remained impossible to define clear features at a higher level.

Examination of the baulks at the excavation's edge in Area P showed that although around 0.40m of deposit under the turf line had been machined off, it was largely bland and undifferentiated. One possible post hole feature was observed within this at the northern edge of site; none at the south. It is possible that the occasional entire feature may have been lost in this way, and more likely that the tops of many were truncated; presumably it was the latter that provided many of the metal detected finds. But it should be stressed that if this depth of soil had been manually excavated across the entire site, there would have been no time at all to excavate stratified features.

The possibility that later periods of the site would have been more badly affected than the earlier periods also needs to be addressed. The balance of the dated features is strongly weighted towards the earlier end of the occupation, raising fears that the lack of later features may be due to their being at the top of the sequence and thus more prone to being machined off. In this respect, perhaps viewing the site stratigraphically is misleading, for the physical depth of the 'top of the sequence' was rarely very different from the top levels of the earlier features. Crucially, there is no strong indication that the unstratified material contains a different balance of dating from the excavated features.

The high watertable throughout the period of excavation also precluded absolute confidence that the complete bottoming of many features had been achieved.

Effects of the excavation strategies on recovery and legibility

In this section, three site areas will be examined as representative of the whole. It is important to note from the start that none of Area A3 or Area C, and only tiny fractions of Areas A4 and B were excavated. Area W saw complete coverage (in that all features were sampled, though few were 100% excavated).

Area G

Area G was located in the north-east corner of Area A1 and defined by Road 5 to the south, the edge of A1 to the east and north, and Road 1 to the west. The full area was some 2800m², of which only around one quarter by area saw substantial excavation. It was an area wholly

lying on brickearth, overlain by fairly homogenous dark silts within which feature definition was very poor. As a result, machine stripping was quite severe in places, and may have removed some late features as well as layers. Excavation produced relatively few late features, and such loss may perhaps be assumed; however features such as large pits should be expected to have survived and it may be the case that there was little late occupation in this area.

Excavation within Area G was fragmentary; largely confined to two small areas on its southern limit, targetted on specific features (Building 56 and the road junction; roadside build-up deposits) and along the haul road strip to the north. The picture which emerges is likewise fragmented. Of 130 5mx5m squares in this area, 37 saw substantial excavation and perhaps 16 more had limited exploration. Nearly all the sequences explored involved complex stratigraphy and significant stratigraphic depth. It is fairly clear that no sequence was really satisfactorily bottomed, and no sequence has much surface extent either. This is particularly important in relation to the brickearth deposits, where excavation generally stopped, but which may not have been the end of the archaeological sequence. Nor is it always clear where this was a single layer and where there may have been more than one, and if so which one was being referred to in the recording. Linking the stratigraphy across separate sequences is problematical, and largely a matter of conjecture and faith. Features cutting recognisable 'natural' were not encountered.

In summary this area produced a number of isolated keyhole glimpses of complex stratigraphy all of which are difficult to place into meaningful spatial context.

Area J

Area J showed the greatest concentration of structural remains on the site. Bounded to north, west and south by the road system, its initial boundary on the east was the division between site stripping Areas A1 and A2, although excavation later expanded eastwards into A2. Its overall extent was 2700m². Coverage in this area was reasonably comprehensive in terms of spatial extent. Of the 113 5mx5m squares falling wholly or mainly in this area, only 16 saw no excavation or nearly none, (two of which appear to have had no features visible) and 8 saw little. All of the rest had all, or nearly all, of their visible features sampled, so far as can be ascertained. However, it is not always entirely clear if excavation reached natural in many places, and it is certain it did not across most of the area, stopping at the level of pebble surfaces. Thus a reasonably full picture of this area was revealed for the period from the middle of the first century to the end of the fourth, but evidence for the early part of the first century (and earlier) is patchy.

Features excavated here concentrated on structural remains, with sampling of two pit complexes/ clusters, some limited exploration of roadside sequences and also limited exploration of the broader surfaces outside the temple precinct.

Area N

One of the 20m wide strips in A2, Area N demonstrates the tensions between a strategy of 'random' transects and a need to excavate obviously important features. This 1800m² area lay almost wholly on natural gravels. There were 70 5m grid squares which fell wholly or mainly within this area (excluding those covered by a spoil heap). Of these 25 were wholly or almost wholly explored, with 8 more partially examined. However, much of the shortfall can be accounted for by the fact that excavation was extended beyond the limits of the transect as strictly defined, in order to explore the very clear corner of the ditched land plot in the north

of the area, and a kiln and its environs at the south. The result was that in the end some 44 squares were reasonably fully explored and 9 partially so within the expanded area. Most squares explored were taken down to the natural gravels, although in some cases there may have been artificial gravel surfaces left unexcavated. Stratigraphy was largely confined to sequences of pitting, and the majority of features were cut into natural.

Excavation here concentrated on the ditches, post holes and pits of domestic occupation, and two small kilns. Surfaces and trackways were not examined in any detail here.