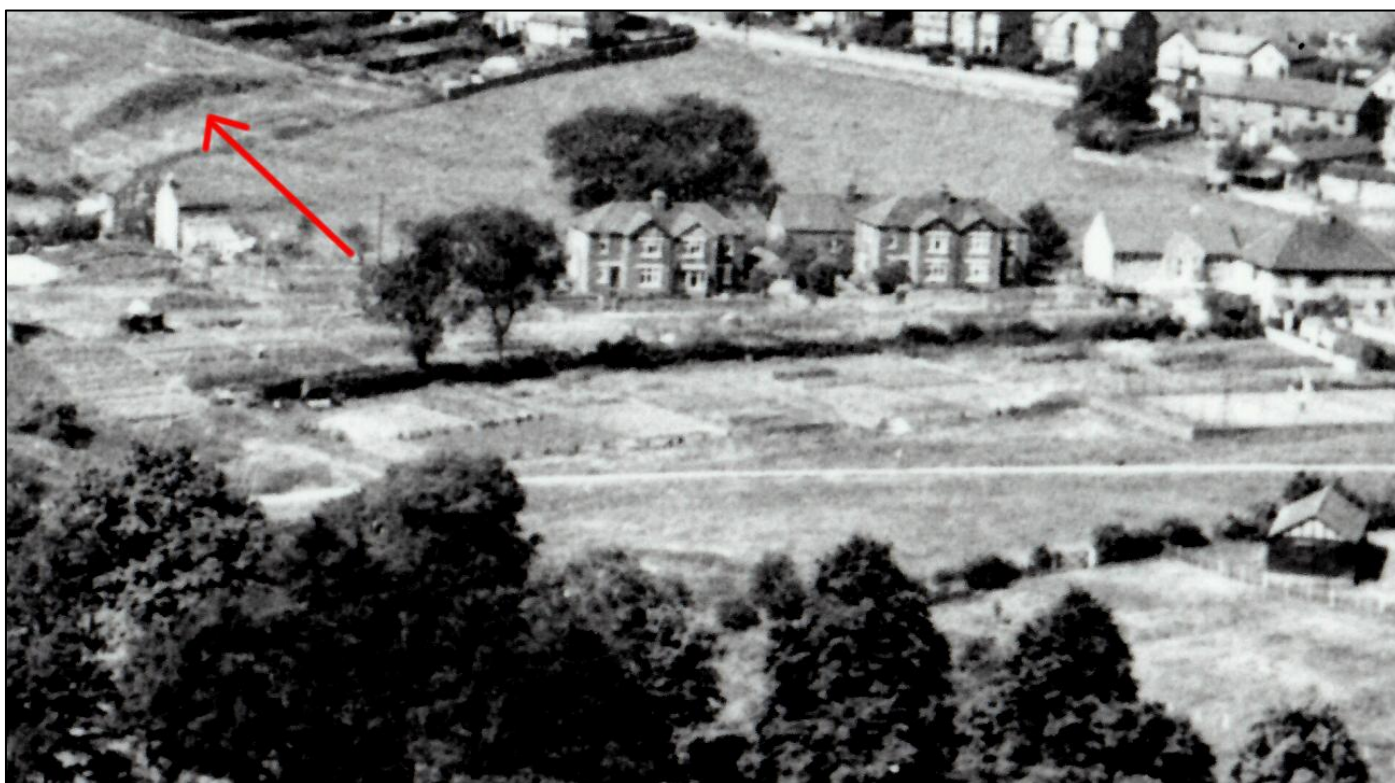


Progress Report November 2025

The final work for this dig season took place on Sunday the 30th November, whose purpose was to confirm where the south seating bank (specifically its remains) reached the surface of the modern garden and consequently to consider how much of the south side of the amphitheatre may have survived below the gardens of numbers 10, 11 and 12.

To explain this, here is the picture of the top of the bank before it was levelled by the construction of Ian Avenue in 1963. Our work for this season has therefore revealed what remained in the garden was indeed this truncated seating bank, the south cavea, of the amphitheatre.



Oat Hill and Canterbury Terrace in early 1963

The photo was taken from the Gilkin and the angle does not allow us to see the north seating bank. What happened in 1963 was that the south seating bank, the crest of which is marked by the red arrow, was levelled by the estate builder to create space for numbers 10, 11 and 12, at which point the houses were built and the crest of the bank bulldozed into the gardens to make them level.

The effect of this was to partially destroy the seating bank and the major outcome of the 2025 season of archaeological digging has been to show that only the crest and part of the top of the seating bank was truncated (destroyed) but most of the lower section of the seating bank has survived under the garden and under the tons of builders rubble which were later bulldozed over it. This sounds awful but its effect has been to preserve a large section of the seating bank under the garden, perhaps as much as a partial circuit of the cavea, up to 10 metres from the considered location of the arena wall.

A further effect of the final work this year was to identify the presence of gravel as a material in a secure context (layer if you like) which gives the first indication that the stepped terracing of the seating bank was constructed in the known Roman method of building a series of timber boxes (revetments) up the slope of the seating bank and filling them with gravel to form the terraces, from which spectators could sit or stand to see the show taking place below in the arena.

This method of construction is known, in particular, from the Roman amphitheatre at Carmarthen (Moridunum), which is in a location with considerable geographic and layout similarities to ours here in Wirksworth: that is built into a hillside.

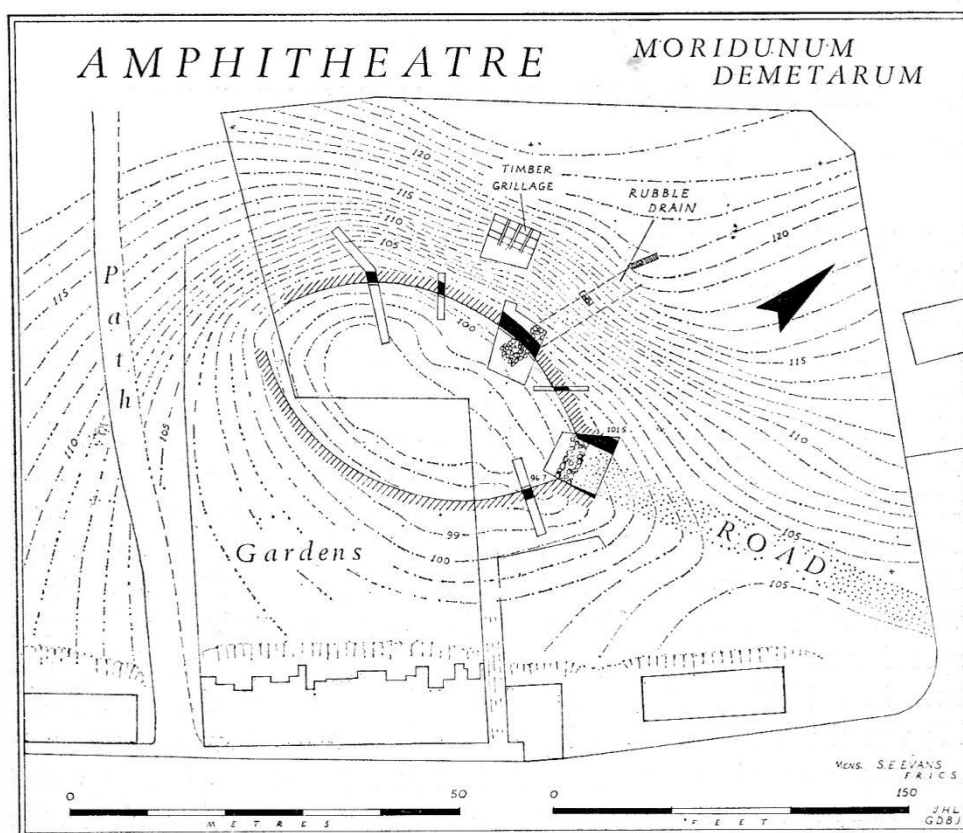


Fig. 1. General plan of the amphitheatre at Carmarthen.

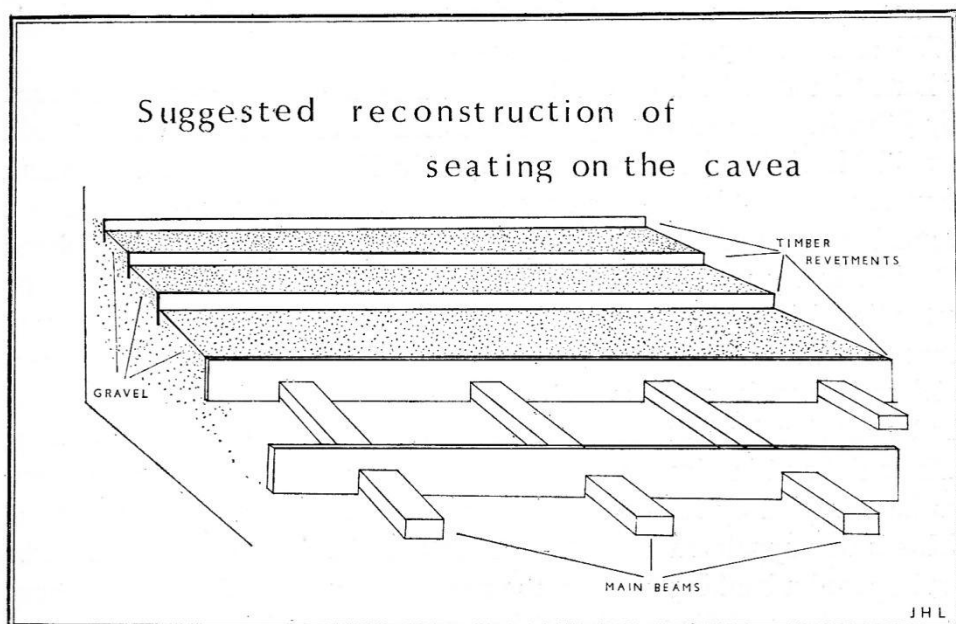


Fig. 2. Diagrammatic reconstruction of the seating arrangements on the northern "cavea".

The amphitheatre at Carmarthen: abstract from Little, 1971

This work concludes the dig season for 2025 with thanks to all concerned: in particular the Beacham family for their lively interest in our efforts. Next season the work will concentrate on identification of the arena wall, or its foundations if its been robbed out; together with a section along the gravel terracing of the

seating bank to obtain greater construction detail, as well as closer dating information from finds or carbon analysis. It is not our intention to do more than this because our resources, time and staff are necessarily limited. The purpose of this work has always been to simply establish whether this feature is indeed a Roman Amphitheatre and not to engage in costly large-scale examinations of it.

References:

Jones GDB, 1969, Excavations at Carmarthen 1968, The Carmarthenshire Antiquary: Trafodion Cymdeithas Efrog Hynafriaith a Natur yn Sir Gaerfyrddin, Vol V, pp2-5

Little JH, 1971, The Carmarthen Amphitheatre, The Carmarthenshire Antiquary: Trafodion Cymdeithas Efrog Hynafriaith a Natur yn Sir Gaerfyrddin, Vol VII, pp58-63