

9. 2005 Conclusions

Each trench excavated during the 2005 season of excavation individually succeeded in its designed objectives and contributed significantly to our understanding of the nature and extent of the settlement on the hilltop at Mellor. Furthermore the excavations at Mellor are now reaping the rewards from the implementation of coherent strategy of evaluation begun by the Mellor Archaeological Trust and UMAU. This strategy means the results from any individual trench excavated in a single year, no longer stand alone. They will form part of a group of trenches excavated over several years designed to gradually provide an insight on specific questions about the history of settlement on the hilltop around the Old Vicarage.

This long term strategy of evaluation now means that the information gathered from the various groups of trenches is beginning to overlap to provide new interpretations of the site.

Excavation of Trenches 26 and 36 have provided a valuable insight into the settlement present upon the hilltop. Unlike previous explanations of multiple roundhouse gullies, it appears that the area in question contains far more. Roundhouses appear to be present, along with four semi circular features which are provisionally interpreted as animal enclosures or structures from the Bronze Age. The presence of the largest stone packed curving gully may show the potential use of this area for other structures that are not round houses, such as the kerb of a possible burial mound. The identification of the multiple inter-cutting pits, shows that the area was heavily reused over a substantial period of time, for multiple purposes, but primarily as domestic or industrial cooking pits. The presence of industrial waste within a small pit confirms the existence of the industrial practices at Mellor during the Iron Age and highlights the confirmed view that the areas are used for multiple occupational tasks. However it is worth noting that the recovery of radio-carbon sample from a particular feature does not necessarily date the feature, the sample material may have been re-deposited from an earlier feature elsewhere upon the site.

The combination of the trenches within the Old Vicarage garden, 1, 2, 33, 34 and 35 revealed a new period of occupation from the excavations at Mellor. The existence of an aligned row of post pits confirmed within Area A the presence of a substantial timber structure. Pottery recovered from the packing of some of the post pits was dated to the 11th – 13th centuries and material recovered from the post pipes within the post pits has been dated to the 13th – 15th centuries. The arrowhead is dated to the 13-14th centuries. This would conclude that the structure was constructed during the 11th to 13th centuries and closed at some point during the 13th to 15th centuries. Thereby possibly indicating a closure or demolition of the building and as a result, the creation of another building at a different location within the site, which has yet to be located or identified. Due to the limited area of excavation it is not possible to state the extent or type of building that would have been present, although there are examples of Timber halls dating to the medieval period with similar alignments of post pits. Further excavations of areas within Area A should assist in identifying the true nature of the structure.

Excavation of the inner enclosure ditch within Trench 33, confirms its existence between the previous known extents of Trenches 1 and 2 in Area A. As the ditch is present throughout the whole portion of Trench 33, it is possible to say that there can be no entrance way into the area enclosed by the large ditch to the western side of the hilltop. It is therefore postulated that the entranceway would be located towards the eastern side, close to Trench 18 and therefore providing access from the flat area of settlement in between the outer and inner enclosure ditches.

The discovery of the continuation of the palisade slot for a short distance confirms its association with the ditch, but lack of rampart.

The absence of the palisade slot within the central segment of Trench 33, and its close proximity to a posthole alignment may indicate the presence of a small overlapping entranceway in order to gain access for maintenance of the ditch.

It is suspected that the timber structure could be that of a medieval hall mentioned as housing a group of foresters called the 'De Mellurs'. These foresters would have protected the Kings' forested lands within the region, particularly that of the Peak. Such a location within the landscape would possess numerous benefits, isolation, but also a view over the prime access route into the forested areas.

Trench 37 confirmed the expected continuation of the ditch from Trench 18, to the furthest extent available within Area A, the perimeter of the church yard wall. Along with indicating the presence of the palisade slot remaining in a similar position and alignment to that identified in earlier trenches, parallel to the internal side of the inner enclosure ditch, however, it is worth noting that at this in the excavations, no evidence of an inner bank has been identified.

The excavation of trenches within Area D over geophysical and evaluation trench results has confirmed the presence of an entranceway for the outer enclosure ditch and the ditch's continuation to the middle of Area D, it is expected that this will proceed across the entirety of Area D, in the direction of Mellor Old Hall. Continued evaluation following geophysical results, over the linear anomaly identified within Area E, has confirmed the presence of a linear enclosure ditch, similar in proportions to those identified within Area D. The extent of the feature can now be followed from the car park within Area E, to the eastern most edge of this field.

The possibility remains that the ditches located within these two areas are the remains of a single outer enclosure ditch which would have encompassed the entire flat portion of the Mellor hilltop, and more entranceways are likely to be present throughout the remaining segments of the enclosure ditch. This would create an enclosure ditch that encompasses a much greater area than most Iron Age hill top enclosures. Therefore should we be seeing the outer and inner enclosure ditches as contemporary?

Future work at the site would provide valuable information as to the character, nature and extent of the continuous occupation present at Mellor.