

## ***8. Mellor Within The Region***

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Settlement on the hilltop of Mellor spans nearly 10,000 years yet even in the present, during the temperate summertime it can become quite inhospitable. The outstanding view across the Cheshire Plains and its dominantly visible position from them is likely to be a key factor that attracted people here throughout the periods.

This section provides some background relating to the different periods and discusses some of the sites close to Mellor and how they may be related.

### **Mesolithic Period**

During the Mesolithic period, the lifestyle was based around a 'hunter-gatherer' system. Nomadic groups would move across the landscape according to the season and the availability of food. During the winters, the climate of the upland regions was too harsh to survive and the people would eat fish and plants from the valley areas. As the warmer times of spring approached, they would migrate towards higher ground and hunt game such as red deer.

The period is dominated by the use of microliths; small fragments of flaked stone, often used in groupings to form composite tools and weapons. Finds spots of these artefacts are quite common in the region. However campsites are more sparse, those with structures even more so.

A general pattern to many of the known sites is that they are found on spurs of land overlooking the valleys below (Hart, 1984, 1990) and Mellor fits into this model. Three sites within the locality identified in the North Derbyshire Archaeological Survey (Hart, 1984, 1990 p.33) are at Small Clough, overlooking Charlesworth, along the Torside reservoir, Tintwistle and at Harry Hut (SK045 907).

The flint artefacts found at Mellor have been classified as Later Mesolithic (Myers, 2000) and those from Shaw Cairn (see below) from the Earlier Mesolithic (Myers, 2000). This shows a continuous use of the area, being returned to time and time again.

### **Neolithic Period**

The Neolithic period is characterised by a transition from nomadic to settlement and the introduction of farming. At the beginning of the Neolithic period much of Britain below c.600m was covered in forest. At around 4000BC the clearance of trees and the growing of crops begins to have an affect on the environment (Longley, 1987 p.41 )

Tool technology progresses from the microliths used throughout the Mesolithic Period. Leaf-shaped arrowheads and polished stone axes become more widely used. Many such axes were produced in the Lake District in a factory-like fashion and distributed across Britain.

Death becomes an important event amongst the communities and great effort is spent constructing long barrows, large chambered tombs in which the deceased were placed. The estimated time spent in building one of these is 10,000 man hours, so it would take a team of 20 a couple of months to complete one (ParkerPearson, 1993 p.41). Towards the Early Bronze Age, Britain is introduced to the Beaker Culture from the continent, named after the vessels commonly found in the graves, often individual crouched inhumations.

Although, as yet, there has been no evidence of the Neolithic Period found on the site, there is activity in the locale. To the south, on Mellor Moor, lie the remains of a Late Neolithic/Early Bronze Age funerary cairn (GM SMR 421.1.0). This was excavated in the 70's and 80's by a group of local , however no report was ever compiled by them on the results. Following the death of one of the last remaining leaders of the group, the archive was saved from deposition within a skip and a report based on the limited archive was written in 2000 by Victoria Mellor, a Bradford student on placement with GMAU. This report was written to provide a review of the fieldwork at Shaw Cairn, together with information on the construction and layout of the site (Mellor 2000 p. 9).

The site is a stone-built funerary cairn, enclosed by a stone kerb c.15m in diameter. 12-15 cremation burials were discovered some of which were within stone cists or settings. There are indications by way of charcoal, burnt flint and lenticular pottery fragments of a possible pyre site. However the recording of the excavations was of too poor a standard to confirm this. Within Britain there are only 100 or so known pyre sites

Some of the cremations had associated finds of flint and pottery, including a near complete Food Vessel and a particularly fine plano-convex knife. The Food Vessel is almost identical to one found in Tissington and the knife is comparable to ones found at Harland Edge (Myers in Mellor, 2000 p.93). A radiocarbon date for the site there was 1490+/-150bc, c.1670BC. Food Vessels begin to come into burial rites after 2000BC when funerary pottery and cremations become more widely used (Longley, 1987 p.65).

A large proportion of the flint assemblage found does not however relate to the cairn. It is Mesolithic in date and is likely to have been debitage from an earlier temporary settlement. Indicating a preference for knapping in a quiet spot with an excellent view (Mellor 2000, p.104).

The cairn lay towards the south-southeast of a raised oval enclosure, approximately 80m east-west by 60m north to south. In the Later Neolithic, from c.3000BC, the construction of bank-and-ditch 'henges' and stone circles begins and continues into the Early Bronze Age (Longley, 1987 p.58). The topography of the site at Shaw Cairn suggests that this could be a possibility, together with that of it being a settlement.

GMAU have begun a programme of archaeological evaluation to better define the character of this potentially very significant prehistoric site. A small scale evaluation by resistivity survey and trial trenching in November 2001 demonstrated that there was no defensive ditch. Further work is planned for 2002 to examine the oval platform.

## Bronze Age

It is possible that in the North West, up until the end of the Early Bronze Age, the social and economic organisation still revolved around a system of mobility. The number of finds spots are concentrated towards the river estuaries suggesting the positions of the settlements. Towards the Middle Bronze Age, there was a climatic decline and the lowlands (Neveall, 1997) became more waterlogged, probably forcing the people to the middle and upper reaches of the river systems (Cowell 2001, p.170).

The local area contains no known sites of Bronze Age settlement however barrows and finds spots are more common. Immediately to the north on Ludworth Intakes are two barrows, both investigated by Rev W Marriott in 1809. The first, known as Brown Low (GM SMR 5.1.0) is located at SJ 988 909 and the second, known as Intakes Farm Cairn (GM SMR 6.1.0) at SJ 989 913, both c.290mAOD.

Unfortunately his interest into the mounds sparked fascination into other members of the community who took it upon themselves to undertake an excavation of that by the farm. Although Marriott's techniques of archaeological excavation were very crude compared to those used at present, he did at least try to be methodical and make some records of his findings (Marriott, 1810), more so than the '*mass of people, said to be from fifty to one hundred*' who '*burst into the sepulchre*'.

Marriott excavated a slot across Brown Low and found '*spelts*' of bone, along with '*streaks of red*' and stones '*black with fire*', suggesting the possibility of a funerary pyre on the site. The only other find from his excavation here was of an acorn, partly germinated with a stem and stalk extending from either end to a total of ten to twelve inches. Marriott was unsure whether this had been buried together with remains or if it had become there by accident, either way it does imply that the area was wooded with oak trees (*ibid.*).

The more easterly barrow near the farm is written to have appeared similar to Brown Low prior to its ransacking. From a verbal account of one of the perpetrators and what was left of the cairn, Marriott was able to gain some information as to its construction and contents. The barrow was formed of three concentric stone walls, about two feet high and 6 inches wide. Ash, bone and other burnt materials were found amongst the fills. Above the central vault, an urn was uncovered yet whether but the process of time or by the heavy hand of the excavators this broke apart on lifting. Marriott tries to reconstruct the vessel in the account and he describes it as having a narrow neck widening out to a large concave body, a curved pedestal then down to a flat base. It was decorated with two sets of two incised bands circumnavigating it. The whereabouts of the finds from either barrow is not known (*ibid.*).

Both barrows are now Scheduled Ancient Monuments and although they have been partially destroyed, could yield important information were they to be excavated in the future.

Marriot also refers to '*a very ancient urn*' being discovered during the construction of All Saints Church on Marple Ridge during 1808. It was either smashed by the workmen or broke on lifting,

either way it's whereabouts is unknown (ibid.). It was also postulated by Marriot that a barrow once stood on Werneth Low and that it was destroyed during the construction of a roadway close-by to where the Hare and Hounds public house stands to day (SJ958 956)( Nevell pers comm).

The barrows of Shaw Cairn, Marple Ridge and Brown Low/Intakes are positioned almost exactly to the south, west and north of the site at the Old Vicarage, all in very imposing positions.

A one day evaluation was conducted late in the 2000 Season on a possible cist burial at Hilltop farm to the east of the hillfort(GM SMR 11186.1.0). During the construction of a new barn within the farm, a flat terrace was cut into an earth mound, revealing two stone chambers in the section. These were built of flags of sandstone and continued into the mound some three to four metres. 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century pottery sherds were found and it is likely that the feature is related to the industrial activity in the area rather than prehistoric. A seam of coal runs south to north across the farm and through the mound which may have been created by spoil.

72% of all burials in Cheshire are positioned in the higher altitudes. There are a number between 60 and 120m AOD, along the eastern side of the mid-Cheshire Ridge and on the Western slopes of the Pennines-areas where agriculture would be more sustainable. The high density of burials between 240 and 425m would be agriculturally more marginal during the later part of the 2nd millennium BC(Longley, 1987 p.61).

During the Early Bronze Age, copper and later tin mining for metalworking begins. The copper deposits at Alderley Edge are known to have been exploited since the Early Bronze Age. A wooden shovel found in the mines in 1875 and rediscovered in 1953 was carbon dated to 1780 +/-100bc(Selkirk,1994 p.172-5). If indeed the metalworking on the Old Vicarage site could be traced back to this date, it is possible that the source for the copper may have been Alderley.