

3. Excavation Background

3.1 Preview

- 3.1.1 In 1995 it was noticed by Ann Hearle that the summer sun had parched the grass in the gardens of the Old Vicarage and in the field to the north. It was left brown, however in some places it remained lush. Of particular note was a band arcing through the field. She believed that these marks could possibly relate to Medieval origins of the church and of Mellor.
- 3.1.2 In 1997 Dr Peter Arrowsmith of UMAU visited Mrs Hearle for advice on the local history to include in his book, *Stockport: A History*. She showed him the photographs that had been taken two years previously and he suspected that the features could be earlier than first imagined. The site was then visited by Graham Eyre-Morgan, at the time the Field Division manager at UMAU, who also believed them to be early.

3.2 1998 Season Summary (Figure 2)

- 3.2.1 During the Easter vacation, three students from the University of Manchester Department of Archaeology conducted a geophysical survey using resistivity across parts of the field and gardens. The results of the field survey reciprocated what could be seen in the photographs of 1995. The gardens also showed features, these however were not quite so distinct. The students returned in July to conduct an evaluation of the features, in total six trenches were excavated.
- 3.2.2 Trenches A and B were located to the south of the gardens, close to the church over what appeared to be linear features (considered at the time to be possible grave sites). Trench A revealed three postholes cut into the bedrock, however Trench B was devoid of features.
- 3.2.3 Trenches C and D were excavated in the northwest of the garden and within them the edges of a feature were picked up. The feature was found to be that of a substantial ditch, cut through the bedrock. It was excavated to a depth of 1.2m yet not bottomed. The trenches were left open during the winter.
- 3.2.4 Trench E was excavated across the feature in the field and again the rock cut ditch was found, although its dimensions were substantially less than in the garden. A further trench was excavated outside of the enclosure, however no features were found within this.
- 3.2.5 The evaluation results concluded that the ditch was Iron Age in origin and that the site either had been continuously occupied until the late 1st / early 2nd century, or had been re-occupied at that time after an earlier abandonment. It was envisaged that the site encompassed an area of 5.5 acres and that it could be the remains of an Iron Age hillfort

also occupied during the Roman period.

3.3 1999 Season Summary (Figure 2)

- 3.3.1 Trenches C and D were renumbered as Trench 1 and extended to give a complete section across the ditch. At its largest size the ditch measured 4m wide and 2.1m deep. More Roman and Iron Age pottery was found, as well as industrial waste, possible Late Bronze Age flints and a conical bronze boss, possibly a piece of horse furniture.
- 3.3.2 Trench 2 was excavated in the southwestern corner of the Old Vicarage gardens to trace the alignment of the ditch. The inside edge was found although the centre would have been positioned almost directly under the boundary wall. 3m behind the ditch and running parallel with it, a narrow slot was found. It was thought that this was either part of an internal building or, more likely, a part of the reinforcement to a rampart or palisade.
- 3.3.3 Trench 3 was positioned in the centre of the gardens over an anomaly that showed up on the 1998 geophysics, believed to be a ditch. On excavation however it was found that the anomaly was geological. In the western end of the trench, a cluster of five flint waste flakes were recovered. By the end of the excavation 39 worked flints were recovered including blades, flakes, scrapers and cores, all Mesolithic in date. 3m from the western end of the trench a post-hole was found, cut into the natural bedrock. As excavation continued towards the east, the geology changed to a stiff boulder clay. The eastern end of the trench was expanded to reveal a very complex area of archaeology with features found ranging in date from the Mesolithic period through to the Romano-British period, all within a shallow depth of stratigraphy. So complicated was the archaeology in this area that it was backfilled at the close of excavation and left to be re-opened in 2000.
- 3.3.4 Trench 4 was excavated in the southeastern corner of the field to the north of the Old Vicarage, across the suspected ditch alignment. No evidence for the ditch or any other features was discovered in this trench, although two pieces of white lead and a lead spindle whorl (possibly Roman) were recovered along with several fire cracked pebbles.
- 3.3.5 Trench 5 was excavated along the grassed area on the north side of the car park, in front of the Vicarage, however no archaeological features were identified.
- 3.3.6 A further five trenches were excavated across the ditch in the field to the north. Trenches 6-9 revealed essentially the same, steep sided 'v'-shaped ditch profile cut through the natural sandstone bedrock. The dimensions of the ditch within each trench varies between 0.9m deep and 1.6m deep and between 1.5m and 2.4m wide. Trench 10 proved to be an exception, for here the ditch was cut through natural boulder clay, this reflects a localised change in the geology of the area. In this trench the ditch was 2.3m wide and 1.40m deep.
- 3.3.7 The excavations concluded that not only is the site of significance in the Iron Age and Roman Period, but also had origins in the Mesolithic Period, and possibly in the Later Bronze Age. The limits of fortification to the north were confirmed yet to the east they

proved to be elusive.

3.4 The Mellor Archaeological Trust

3.4.1 The Mellor Archaeological Trust was established as a registered charity (No. 1081602) in 1999. This was in response to the overwhelming support and enthusiasm of the locals and land owners.

3.4.2 The aims of the Trust are twofold;

- (1) To promote the investigation, interpretation, and preservation of the archaeology of the area surrounding Mellor Church and of other parts of Mellor, Stockport, in the County of Greater Manchester,
- and
- (2) to organise displays, educational activities, or other means of bringing information on the history and archaeology to the notice of the public.

3.4.3 Such was the interest from the local public in 1999, that an Open Day was held to allow viewing of the excavations and finds. More than one thousand people attended the event and in 2000 it was extended to cover a full weekend resulting in a similar number of visitors. The attendance of the Open Days in 2001 broke the records with almost one and a half thousand people coming to the site, reflecting its popularity and increase in public awareness.

3.4.4 Funds raised by the Mellor Archaeological Trust are used to pay for a variety of services. Amongst these are specialist analyses on finds and geophysical survey work.

3.4.5 Over the winter of 2000, the Trust put together an application for a grant from the Local Heritage Initiative. The scheme is run by the Countryside Agency with financial support from the Heritage Lottery Fund and Nationwide. In April 2001 the Trust were informed that a grant of up to £13,525 had been awarded.

3.4.6 The LHI cannot be used to fund excavation, but is intended to foster involvement in the local heritage by other means. The purpose of the grant is to:

To involve the local community in the Mellor site investigations, survey work and education and community outreach by means of topographical and geophysical survey of the site, computer modelling to produce 3-D models interpreting the site, a booklet, a web-site, open days, site tours, demonstrations of archaeological techniques and interpretation panels. All aspects of the project will provide opportunities for direct involvement by local groups, schools or members of the community.

- 3.4.7 The topographical survey was conducted between July and September and supervised by Graham Mottershead of UMAU. This involved a detailed contour survey around the hilltop using Total Station Theodolites, which use electromagnetic pulses to take readings of the position and relative heights of points around the area. This data was saved to a palmtop computer and then downloaded onto a PC. Specialist software, purchased through the grant, was then used to produce a three dimensional model. This data can then be used to create visual representations of the site throughout the periods.
- 3.4.8 During the summer of 2001 members of the Marple Active Volunteer Initiative Squad, together with professional Firefighters from Marple Fire Station and headed by Peter Clarke, endeavoured to establish the origins of the well in the triangular field to the north of the Old Vicarage gardens. After lowering the depth of water and removing the stone debris, the silts were dredged out and sieved.
- 3.4.9 Numerous artefacts were recovered however most dated back only to the last century. These included a plastic comb-complete with case, a penny whistle, a pocket watch and around three hundred rounds of ammunition-most still live. This complimented the 'Tommy' gun retrieved from there some years before by Professor and Mrs Hearle. During the Second World War the well was used to stockpile weapons in order to fight a guerilla war, should England be invaded. As they were retrieved, some fell down into the water below.
- 3.4.10 With the in-fill and water removed it was possible to see that there were scars on the walls, made by chisels and drills. The presence of these proves that the well, as it stands today, was certainly only dug within the last 200 years. It is however, possible that it was enlarged and deepened from an earlier one in the same location.