

7. Conclusions

The Defences

Of those features excavated over the past four years features the most substantial is the ditch. From the geological report conducted by Fred Broadhurst it was possible to deduce from looking at the ditch that it is likely to have been excavated using a tool similar to a mattock with the digger standing facing to the east. From this position it would have been simple to lever off plates of bedrock. It was noticed that the section of ditch unearthed ran particularly straight, this is because it follows between two joints in the bedrock (Appendix 6), making it even easier to be dug (Plate 20). Although, as of yet, the shape of the enclosure to the east has not been proved, this may suggest a straight section along the northern side where it is easier, then a turn sharp to the south through Glebe Cottage.

It must be questioned where all the material removed in the construction of the ditch has gone to. At 1.2m deep and one metre wide, there would have been approximately 15 tonnes of material from the portion revealed in this years excavation alone. Much may have been cleared from the land and used in the construction of the field boundaries. Most other hillforts have been identified for many years, either through remaining earthworks or aerial photographs. The reason Mellor had not been discovered earlier is that there are no visible earthworks standing, the rampart and ditch have been ploughed flat leaving no positive evidence behind.

Without the presence of a visible rampart it will very difficult to establish the location(s) of an entrance, or entrances. The apparent absence of the ditch by the car park could indicate one point, however at the least naturally defended part of the site, it seems unlikely to have been positioned here. It is possible that the large posthole [035] found within Tr.1 in 2001 may have formed part of either a gateway system. Hillforts often had complicated and highly elaborate entrance ways, using various ditch arrangements and superterranean defences. The Roman defences of the site may also have included a gate system.

One other possibility is that it formed part of a Roman signal tower. These are quite common and are usually built with either four or six posts. An example of a four poster was found at the western Stanegate fort, Burgh I (Shotter, 1993 pl.22 p.34).

The Occupational Features

The sheer size of posthole [035] lead to the conjecture that it may have originally been used as a storage pit and then re-used as a posthole later. Trial pollen sampling was undertaken by Dr Barbara Bradshaw, however it was found that the conditions of the fill were not conducive to preservation.

Although no evidence of hut circles was found it Tr.15, postholes cut into the bedrock were discovered outside of the ditch. This confirms the presence of structures extending beyond the enclosure and may still indicate a pre-ditch use of the site. However, the paucity of dating evidence or definitive arrangement leading to identification of purpose, neither proves, nor disproves this. Excavation has so far not indicated whether the site was inhabited during the Iron Age. It is widely thought that hillforts were not used primarily as settlement areas but as a

tribal focal point.

Few deductions can be made from the series of ditches and gullies found in Tr.3. Their function cannot be ascertained without further definition of their extent and spatial relationship. The areas within the enclosure studied so far only represent a small percentage of the total. If each trench opened is likened to a jigsaw piece, then it can be appreciated that the full picture will not be seen from a few oddments.

The absence of later material from within the stone filled slot in Tr.3 [3015]/[3019], suggests the possibility that this feature is Mesolithic in date. It's form suggests that it is part of a temporary structure, made of a light timber frame, draped with skins that were held down in the slot with the rocks. A similar structure was found at Deepcar, Yorkshire (Radley and Mellars, 1964).

The Pottery

Much of the problem in associating Mellor with other such sites in the region is due to the dearth of material culture found. This is not a problem specific to Mellor but to the whole of the North West. Mathews (1994) outlines the situation in Cheshire and the ethos can be applied regionally. When discussing the regional grouping in the north and west of Britain, Cunliffe writes 'the material culture was poor, and pottery was very little used over the area except in the extreme north-west of Scotland.'

Nevell (1997) attempts to establish a sequence of pottery types from the Mersey Basin. However only one of the five types is represented by more than one vessel. As the sample size is so small it is difficult to demonstrate the distribution of these wares. Most other comparative pottery is found on sites to the south and east of the Pennines and it is possible that the Mellor assemblage may bridge this gap.

Mellor has produced pottery from several Iron Age contexts, with a number of vessels being represented. Thin section analysis allows petrological analysis of the clays used in the production of the pottery and can determine their origins. A slice of the pottery is examined under microscope allowing the makeup of the fabric to be compared to known sources. Following the 2001 season, thin section analysis began on pottery sherds identified as Iron Age (Appendix 8) and found within the ditch, although at the time of writing the results were not available.

The Metalworking

The discovery of crucible fragments and metalworking slag from the ditch early in the 2001 season has shed new light onto the utilisation of the site. The number of iron-smelting furnaces excavated is limited, only about twenty (Cunliffe, 1995 p.453). As the slag found is likely to be from ironworking, rather than smelting, it is implied that the raw material was gained through the trade of currency bars. These have been found in numerous locations to the south of England, but are less common in the northern parts (*ibid.* p.455).

The crucible fragments show the continued use of bronze into the Iron Age, not often for everyday tools which iron had replaced, but for smaller more intricate items. The scale of production is less than during the Bronze Age and likely to be done by specialists in regional centres (*ibid.* p.456). Fragments of crucible, used in bronze casting, have been found on a number of sites, however it is not common (*ibid.* p.456). This indicates an element of prestige at the Mellor settlement and will hopefully enable ties to be made to neighbouring sites through bronze artefacts. It is entirely conceivable that the bronze boss found in Tr. 1 in 1999 was made on site.