

3. Aims and Methodology

In 2003 each of the trenches excavated at Mellor had a specific question to answer. Trench 21 (Tr21) was opened next to the 1999 and 2002 trenches to determine the extent and form of the gullies found those years in trenches 3 and 16. In particular Tr21 was intended to examine the possibility that these gullies represented drainage gullies surrounding an Iron Age roundhouse (Fig 3). To do this Tr21 would follow the gullies to see if they continued to describe a circle, the form of these features associated with roundhouses on other sites. Initially a 13m long north arm of Tr21 was excavated. This ran east to west parallel to the southern edges of the backfilled trenches 3 and 16. Under the supervision of UMAU archaeologists a mechanical excavator was used to remove the topsoil and sub soil in this arm of the trench which was then hand excavated to reveal the archaeological contexts. Subsequently Tr21 was expanded south in a series of hand excavated steps to follow the curving gullies. This west arm of Tr21 ran north for 10m up to the west end of the rhododendron bush which marked the limit of the area available for excavation. The north west corner of Tr21 was expanded north by 2.0m to give a broader view of the archaeological survival in this part of Area A. In addition Tr23 was excavated in the small space available between the south west corner of Tr16 and the edge of the rhododendron bush. Tr23 was excavated to confirm that the gullies found in Tr16 continued to curve south west. When completed there was only a 7.0m gap between the west arm of Tr21 and Tr23. At the end of the excavation both Tr21 and Tr23 were backfilled.

Trench 22 was planned as part of the campaign to trace the line of the east arm of the Iron Age ditch excavated in previous seasons in Area B. Along with geophysical survey these excavations had defined the line of this ditch running south west to north east across Area B. However attempts through geophysics and trial trenching to determine the line of the ditch east, beyond Area B had proved inconclusive. It was therefore decided to excavate Tr21 as close as possible to the eastern boundary wall of Area B. Topsoil and subsoil were stripped from Tr22 using a mechanical excavator under the supervision of archaeologists from UMAU. The removal of this material exposed a layer of natural boulder clay against which the fill of an archaeological feature running west to east up to the east wall of Area B. This wall is one of two parallel walls 8.0m apart which run north to south up the north slope of the hill at Mellor. The area they enclose is known as the Ale House track way. The feature in Tr21 was excavated by hand and once this had confirmed it was the ditch the topsoil and subsoil were removed by machine from four trial trenches within the Ale House track way. The purpose of these trial trenches was to determine whether or not the ditch continued east into the next field (Area D) or if it turned north to follow the line of the track way. In the trial trench excavated north to south, parallel to the east wall of the track way, the fill of an archaeological feature could be clearly seen following the same east to west alignment as in Tr22. This trial trench was designated as Trench 24. The feature was hand excavated which confirmed that it was the same ditch as seen in Tr22 and elsewhere in Area B. Trenches 22, 24 and the trial trenches were all backfilled.

By a happy coincidence the 2003 excavations coincided with the owner of the field forming Area D ploughing it prior to re seeding. He gave permission for a machine to be used to topsoil and subsoil strip trial trenches within Area D in an attempt to follow the line of the ditch east from Tr24. Time constraints meant that it was not possible to excavate any of the features observed in the trial trenches. In all eight of these trenches were stripped over a 120m long line. In each of the trenches some form of soil difference could be detected running roughly east to west.

A geophysical survey of the Old Vicarage garden carried out in January 2002 had located a

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large archaeological feature at the east end of Area A, the Old Vicarage garden. During that years excavation a small trench (18) had been opened across the line of the anomaly adjacent to the driveway to the Old Vicarage. It had not proved possible that year to fully determine the size or function of the feature. Therefore the 2002 trench was left open and in 2003 it was re visited and expanded. An area roughly 9.0m by 7.0m around the 2002 trench was opened up by hand. Removal of the topsoil and subsoil revealed the full extent of the feature located in 2002 which was then excavated by hand. Under the supervision of UMAU archaeologists a metal detecting strategy was implemented within Tr18 which helped recover a number of finds dating from the Roman period. As part of the Mellor Archaeological Trust's education and interpretation policy John and Ann Hearle kindly agreed to leave Tr18 open as part of a public display.

As a result of the findings from Tr18 two trial trenches were hand excavated 10.0m to the north of Tr18 on the opposite side of the driveway. The purpose of these trenches was to see if the feature found in Tr18 continued into Area C. Both trial trenches were backfilled after recording was complete.

A further piece of work was carried out in November 2003. Collation of the 2003 results suggested that there may be a double ditch system around the hilltop at Mellor. To try and gain more information a 12m long trench (25) was hand excavated to the north east of Tr1 at the west end of Area A. Tr 25 was backfilled after recording was completed.