

## **4.6 Trench 22**

Over a number of years several trenches had been excavated in Area B which along with geophysical survey had served to locate the line of an Iron Age enclosure ditch running north west to south east across the area (Fig 3). Trench 22 was designed to locate the position of the Iron Age enclosure ditch in Area B as close as possible to the eastern boundary wall of that area. The purpose was to use the results from Tr22 as a basis for tracing the line of this ditch, east, beyond Area B. Trench 22 measured 11.60m by 4.00m. It was located within Area B immediately to the east of the previously excavated trench 10 and adjacent and parallel to the line of the west wall of the 'Ale House' track way which forms the eastern boundary of Area B. The topsoil and subsoil was machine stripped from the trench to reveal the surviving archaeological features which were then hand excavated. The geology into which these archaeological features were cut differed from that found in previous trenches within Area B. In these trenches the natural soil was the plated sandstone bedrock found elsewhere at Mellor in Tr18, Tr3, Tr1 and the west side of Tr21. Whereas the natural geology within Tr 22, and indeed, the subsequent 2003 trenches excavated to the east of Area B, was an orange brown boulder clay, (420). This was virtually identical to the natural found in Tr16, Area C, and the east half of Tr21. This seems to suggest that there is a band of boulder clay which covers the sandstone bedrock and which runs south west to north east from the area around Tr16 on the hilltop through Area C and into the very east end of Area B, the track way and Area D.

The removal of the subsoil in Tr22 revealed a series of parallel bands of mid-grey, mid-brown and dark brown soils filling an archaeological feature which ran west to east across the centre of the trench. The feature was excavated for a distance of 3.40m (Fig 15). This showed that its maximum dimensions were 2.00m wide and 1.15m deep. The sections of the feature showed that it was formed by a series of re-cuts of the Iron Age enclosure ditch (Fig 16).

The earliest phase of ditch within the feature was cut [413]. This formed the north edge of the feature which sloped down at approximately 45 degrees for a distance of 1.40m. At the bottom of this edge there was a curved break of slope. The base of the cut then ran south at a shallow angle for a further 0.40m before curving to run upwards for 0.20m. Cut [413] was represented by three surviving fills, (450) (452) and (442). The upper fill (450) was a loose light to mid-grey silty sand. On the surface this showed as a 0.35m band running east to west across Tr22. On excavation it was seen to be a 0.20m thick fill running down the top 0.90m of the north edge of [413]. Immediately below was fill (452) a firm mottled mid orange/brown silty clay. Fill (452) was 0.34m thick and ran downwards at an angle from below (450) on the north side of cut [413] to the surviving portion of the south side of cut [413].

The primary fill of cut [413] was fill (442). This was a compact light grey silty clay. Fill (442) was 0.10m thick and covered the base and bottom 0.32m of the north edge of cut [413]. Fill (442) contained a single fragment of flat sandstone.

The next event in the series of ditches is cut [465]. Like cut [413] only the north edge of this cut survives. In size and profile it closely mirrored the shape of cut [413]. Two fills of this cut survived. The upper fill, (449), was a friable light grey silty clay, 0.47m deep, which ran down the top half of the north edge of the cut for 0.68m. Below this was fill (451) a firm light brownish grey silty clay. Fill (451) survived to a depth of 0.39m and a width of 0.29m deep, it appeared to be the primary fill of [465] and ran horizontally across the cut.

The latest re cut in the series was cut [466]. This survived as a 0.89m wide and 0.34m deep cut seen cutting through fills (449) and (451) of cut [465] and fill (452) of cut [413]. The angle of the north edge of this cut was slightly steeper than the previous two however the curved break of

slope and flat base was very similar. It would seem that cut [465] respected the south edge of the original ditch cut. Cut [466] contained a single fill of (419). This was a compact light greyish blue clay.

The latest phase of activity associated with the enclosure ditch is represented by a series of fills (414) (446) (453) and (448). These seem to relate to the period after the ditch had permanently fallen out of use. Fill (414) was a firm dark brown silty sand, 0.89m wide and 0.28m deep. The interface between (414) and the surrounding fills beneath it (453) (448) and (446) contained large flat slabs of stone averaging c0.15m in length and 20mm thick. These stones were infrequent and did not appear in any apparent order. Located below was (446) a loose mid reddish brown sandy silt, 0.17m wide, 0.18m deep. (453) a compact reddish brown silty sand, 0.89m wide, 0.28m deep. The earliest of this group of fills was (448), a mid-brown sandy silt, 0.52m wide, 0.24m deep.

In addition to the enclosure ditch a number of other features were identified within the trench (Fig15). These included a series of small postholes, all five were identified within the western limits of the trench and half sectioned.

Posthole [445] was cut into the top of the outer enclosure ditch [413]. It was circular in form, measuring 0.24m wide, 0.28m long and 0.16m deep. It contained a single fill, (463), a friable, mid-brown silty sand.

Posthole's [428] and [430] were very alike in size and shape to [445]. Both were filled with a mid brown silty sand. Postholes [434] and [432] were more irregular in shape and shallower than the others although their fills were virtually identical.

The location of the five postholes indicate the possibility of them being related. Postholes [445], [428], [432], and [430] can all be identified within a north south alignment. No origin or structure can be identified due to the limitations of the trench; further excavation to the west could provide further clues. If the postholes are related then their construction can be dated to after the ditch [413] was backfilled.

Immediately below (412) an irregular shaped pit was identified [436]. Undulating and irregular edges, sloping towards a flat base, the pit was quarter sectioned, excavating the north west and south east quadrants. Measuring 2.08m long and 1.1m wide and 0.38m deep. The sole fill was (437), a friable, mid-brown silty sand.

## **Discussion**

The surviving fills of cut [413] were confined mainly to the north side and base of the feature. As a result it is not possible to be certain about the width of this original cut. However from the angle of fill (452) and from the small portion of cut [413] which survives on the south side of the feature it seems reasonable to suppose that the south edge of the ditch as seen in Tr22 also corresponds with this first phase of ditch cut. It would seem then that the re-cuts were confined within the original boundaries of the ditch and in the case of [464] and [466] shared a common southern edge with the original cut. Speculation on the size and shape of cut [465] is more tentative as nothing survives of its south edge. However as the north slope and base of [465] follow closely that of [413] it does not seem unreasonable to assume that it shared the same south edge as the other cuts. This would give rise to a situation where the south edge of the ditch was maintaining its original line while the north edge was creeping south. It might be that fill (414) is a result of deliberate infilling in order to level out the ground to allow the land to be ploughed. However as no dating evidence was recovered from the fills of cut [413] it is not possible to be precise about the timescale of these events.

A pollen assessment was carried out on environmental samples taken from several fills of the ditch cuts (Appendix 6). Two of these samples, from (442) and (449) were taken to full analysis. The report from Durham University Archaeological Services concludes “The pollen indicates the presence of mixed deciduous woodland dominated by hazel. There also appears to have been a nearby wet meadow and open body of water. The cereal- type pollen and associated weeds indicate a mixed farming economy.”

It would appear that the series of re-cuts were part of a process designed to maintain the effectiveness of the enclosure ditch. This can perhaps be best illustrated by cut [466]. A situation could be imagined when after a number of years through erosion and silting fills (449) and (451) had filled up the ditch represented by cut [465] to a point where it barely functioned as either a drainage channel, stock enclosure or boundary ditch. The decision was then taken to dig out enough of these fills to restore the ditch; the result was the excavation of cut [466] which in time itself became filled in with (419).