

## **6. 2004 Conclusions**

---

This year's excavations within Trench 26 have improved our understanding of several key questions concerning the character of the occupation upon the hilltop in the Iron Age and Romano-British period. However as with all of the trenches excavated at Mellor in this and other seasons, many new questions on the nature of the occupation within these and preceding periods have arisen.

The discovery of the Bronze Age flint dagger has raised interesting possibilities on the use of the site prior to the Iron Age and Romano-British occupation. The deposition of such an object upon the Mellor hilltop is unlikely to be by chance due to the high status of the artefact, although it is unclear as yet whether the recovery of the dagger denotes Bronze Age activity within the locale (possibly in the form of a barrow) or whether the irregular nature of its deposition represents activity not normally associated with such an artefact. A precedent for this last possibility may be found in the similarities to its unusual deposition with the late Neolithic polished stone chisel uncovered within Trench 16 during the 2002 season of excavations. This artefact was also discovered lying upon a surface layer (this time the natural boulder clay) and was seemingly un-associated with surrounding features. Excavation of areas adjoining Trench 26 in further seasons may help resolve these questions.

One of the key questions to be resolved was the confirmation that the large ditch uncovered within Trench 18 did not continue to the north into this area. It seems likely therefore, that the ditch turns sharply to the west to the north of Trench 18, (possibly partially entering Area C), and runs west along the present day driveway for the Old Vicarage. A survey of the driveway using ground penetrating radar was undertaken toward the end of this seasons' work, which revealed that a large anomaly existed along its length. Though inconclusive, this evidence taken with the negative evidence from Trench 26 would suggest that the ditch on its northern side encloses an area similar to the present day Old Vicarage.

Perhaps the most significant of the discoveries within Trench 26 was that Iron Age and Romano-British settlement of the hilltop extended into Area C. However, as with the curvilinear gullies first uncovered within Trench 16 in 2002, their form extends outside the area of excavation, therefore definitive conclusions as to their nature are not possible. However due to their similarities in form to those found in 2002 their interpretation as roundhouse drainage gullies seems justified. Due to the density of gullies it seems clear that settlement within Area C was repeated and long-standing. Previously, evidence for roundhouses had been limited to an area enclosed within the large ditch excavated in Trenches 1 and 18, within an area now occupied by the Old Vicarage and Mellor church. This had led to assumptions that the inner ditch possibly demarked a zone of occupation with the smaller outlying ditch serving as a stock enclosure, drainage ditch or boundary marker.

The discovery of two small sections of inter-cutting gullies, located to the eastern corner of Trench 26 indicates the possibility of another set of roundhouse gullies. If this is another area of multiple re-cut drainage gullies then this would point clearly towards the use of particular zones for building and use of the land. Deliberate rebuilding upon some areas for roundhouses and not on others would indicate a

conscious decision to separate the usage of the land and its space over a prolonged period of time.

This raises several interesting possibilities, not least of which is whether the two ditches are contemporary, and/or which of them encloses the Iron Age settlement. Does the settlement within area C denote an expansion into a previously un-settled area enclosed by the smaller ditch? Or is the occupation within Area A different in terms of function or status to that within Area C, necessitating a large ditch to denote its limits?

The discoveries resulting from the 2004 season of archaeological works as usual produce not only many answers but new questions. Excavation suggests that the large inner ditch does not continue far north from Trench 18 and most likely turns to run west towards the Old Vicarage to join Trench 1. The palisade slot indicates that on the inside of the ditch there would have been a rampart or palisade. It is tempting to suggest that this defensive arrangement would have run along what is now the Old Vicarage driveway, turned south to join the ditch in Trench 1. Previous excavation has located the ditch and palisade gully running out of the south west corner of the Old Vicarage garden. From there it may well swing round to run east following the line of what is now the south wall of the churchyard before turning north through the churchyard to rejoin Trench 18.

At the end of 2003, with the discovery of the round house gully in Area A and the possibility that this area lay within part of the hilltop defended by a substantial ditch and palisade, it was thought that this might represent the limit of the zone of human occupation during the Iron Age at Mellor. This theory would have people living within the defended area with the zone between the defensive ditch and the enclosure being used for agricultural purposes. However if the suggestion that the defensive ditch runs along the line of the Old Vicarage driveway is correct then the round house gullies found in Trench 26 in 2004 clearly indicate occupation outside of the defended area.

Lastly, the tantalising potential offered by Bronze Age flint dagger promises next seasons excavations to be especially informative.