

Non-Technical Summary

The excavations conducted over the past eight years around the Old Vicarage at Mellor, Stockport (SJ 9818 8890) have revealed an extensive multi-period settlement. Previous excavation seasons have identified the site predominantly as an Iron Age Settlement (GM SMR 11249.1.1). In addition, the recovery of flint fragments dated to the Mesolithic period suggest the site was used as a seasonal hunter-gatherer camp while a substantial assemblage of sherds of Roman material, coupled with comparable radiocarbon dates suggest the presence of a Romano-British settlement.

2004 Excavations

Trench 26 revealed a large area of continuous Iron Age settlement within Area C. It was the largest single trench opened by the excavations at Mellor. A total of 19 gullies were identified. The presence of these inter-cutting features indicates a sustained period of occupation upon the immediate area. Although the exact alignment of the northern extent of the inner enclosure ditch has not been confirmed by excavation, its absence within Trench 26 suggests that its location lies beneath the Old Vicarage driveway. This would mean that this particular area of settlement was located outside the inner enclosure ditch, contrasting with those gullies found within the confines of the inner enclosure ditch identified within Trenches 16 and 21.

Trench 27 showed that the outer enclosure ditch continues towards the Old Vicarage drive. It also indicated that the level of the surrounding ground surface appears to have been reduced. Together with the results of Trench 25 in 2003, it is possible to show a substantial amount of alteration, landscaping and terracing around the western end of the Old Vicarage during the post medieval period.

Trenches 28 and 29 confirmed the presence of a significant number of archaeological features towards the north of Area C. Indicating that the settlement located within Trench 26 is not the furthest extent of occupational archaeology from the inner enclosure ditch, both of these trenches were exposed but not excavated.

Trench 30 followed geophysical investigation of Area E in attempt to establish the parameters of the outer enclosure ditch. Trench 30 positively concluded the presence of a ditch, running in an east-west direction towards the summit of Mellor hilltop.

Trench 31 located next to Trench 18, confirmed the presence of the inner enclosure ditch running towards the Old Vicarage driveway and the continuation of the palisade slot identified within Trench 18 parallel to the ditch.

Trench 32 showed the continuation of the inner enclosure ditch, from Trench 18 towards the church wall and identified the continuation of a stone lined feature parallel to the ditch.

Trial trench 16, stripped in Area B in 2004 provided an insight into more archaeological features occurring in between the inner and outer enclosure ditches expanding the areas of the potential settlement.

2005 Excavations

In Area A, Trench 35 revealed four large post pits associated with the one found in the Trench 1 extension during the 2001 season. They were in a north south alignment, *c.*11.80m long and each separated by a distance of *c.*2.65m. Each pit was cut into the natural bedrock and *c.*1m wide, *c.*0.40m deep, containing a *c.*0.40m wide post pipe. Provisionally these represent post pits, which together with three identified within Trench 33 and two located in Trench 34. The recovery of an arrowhead – dated to the 13-14th centuries, identification of 11th to 15th century pottery fragments and a radiocarbon date of 1000-1250 cal AD (Beta209508, 2 sigmas), all contained within the post pits, would suggest a provisional dating of the structure to the medieval period. However the true form of the building in terms of extent and shape is as present unknown due to the current limits of excavation. Investigation within Trench 33 also confirmed the presence of the large inner enclosure ditch and associated palisade slot expected to continue between Trenches 1 and 2.

During 2005 Trench 36, was positioned adjacent to the previous years Trench 26. Identifying the continuation and extent of the curvi-linear roundhouse drip gullies partially exposed in 2004 one of which produced a radio-carbon date of 190 cal BC - 10 cal AD (Beta 202315, 2 sigmas). The combined evidence for the two trenches suggests that the curving gullies were on average a diameter of *c.*10m, and had similar inter-cutting tendencies demonstrating that there was a substantial period of occupation and rebuild in the immediate area. Within this trench numerous inter-cutting pits were identified comparable to and in a similar alignment to those found within 2004. These are provisionally interpreted as Iron Age cooking pits, established through the recovery of significant quantities of fire cracked sub rounded and rounded inclusions from the pit deposits. The fill of a small circular pit / posthole located within the confines of the numerous roundhouse gullies contained possible evidence of industrial waste, along with environmental evidence relating to a domestic nature and produced a radiocarbon date of 190-40 cal BC (Beta 209510, 2 sigmas). Suggesting the possibility of Iron Age industrial processes present on the site and occurring within the roundhouses or their immediate surroundings. Two parallel lines of stake holes running up to the roundhouse gullies provides evidence for a possible fenced off animal enclosure.

The extent of the inner enclosure ditch has now been proven to continue through Area A, without the interruption of an entrance way, and has been tracked to the furthest point accessible for archaeological investigation through the excavation of Trench 37. Both trenches over the two inner enclosure ditch show the presence of an associated palisade, with a possible post hole alignment overlapping, creating a small entrance to the ditch located to the far west of the site.

Continuing a programme of geophysical survey and subsequent trial trenching excavation during 2005 in areas D and E, further investigation concludes the continuation of the outer enclosure ditch alignment. Trenches 38 and 39 were placed across the suspected geophysical anomaly and revealed ditch sections showing this feature continues to the easternmost extent of Area E. In Area D it seems likely that outer enclosure ditch runs the entire distance between the 'Ale house' track way in the west, and Mellor Old Hall in the east. Excavation of Trenches 40 and 41 during October 2005 identified these two features as terminal ditch sections of the outer enclosure ditch. This entranceway is the first identified as part of the enclosure ditches. Suggesting a significant area, if not all of the hilltop, was at some point enclosed, encompassing a suspected area of 23 hectares.



Figure 1: Plan of Mellor hilltop indicating the areas covered by the various different types of geophysics and the results. The red coloured lines represent coverage by Ground Penetrating Radar (GPR).