

Summary

During the summer drought of 1996 Mrs Ann Hearle photographed what appeared to be an ephemeral cropmark in the grounds and fields surrounding the Old Vicarage, Mellor, Stockport. After consultation between Mrs Hearle, Dr Peter Arrowsmith and Graham Eyre-Morgan of UMAU a geophysical survey of the site was undertaken and following the results of the survey, an evaluation of the site by trial trenching during the summer of 1998.

The evidence from the evaluation confirmed the presence of a large fortified ditched enclosure suggestive in style of an Iron Age hillfort of similar proportions to the neighbouring hillforts in Derbyshire. The single sherd of Iron Age pottery and the abundance of fire cracked pebbles tended to support this suggestion. It appeared from the artifacts discovered in the upper fills of the ditch that the site was also occupied during the Roman period.

In total ten trenches were excavated across the site covering 140m². Nine of the trenches were excavated across the ditch surrounding the site. The remaining trench was positioned within the enclosure to identify an anomaly present on the 1998 geophysical survey, originally thought to be a ditch type feature. On excavation this was not apparent however at the eastern end of this trench a linear feature and a possible hearth was identified. In light of these findings, the trench was expanded to an area of open excavation and variety of features including postholes, layers and linear gullies from a variety of periods were revealed.

The results of the excavations across the ditch suggest that the fortified enclosure could be much larger than previously anticipated, possibly up to an area of fifteen or sixteen acres. This would make the site comparable to, or possibly even larger than the largest Derbyshire hillfort at Mam Tor. Clarification of the overall dimensions should be confirmed during the following season (summer 2000).

The artifacts discovered in 1999 included: a number of Iron Age pottery sherds many of which are of high quality opposed to the VCP (Very Coarse Pottery) that is generally found on North West sites, a marked increase in the amount and quality of the Roman pottery sherds, two possible Late Bronze Age flints, a bronze boss (possibly a piece of horse furniture) and most surprisingly an assemblage of Mesolithic flint work from features that may relate to a Mesolithic dwelling.

In addition to the prehistoric and Roman discoveries a moderate amount of Late Medieval pottery and a single piece of jewellery were also discovered during the 1999 season of excavations.