

Summary

The excavations conducted over the past two years at Mellor, Stockport (SJ 9818 8890) have produced a great wealth of information which will advance our knowledge of the archaeology of the site and its placement within the region. The site was established as an Iron Age hillfort (GM SMR11249.1.1) following the 1999 season. The two seasons of work documented in this report were targeted to expand upon this.

The objectives have been; to gain a fuller understanding of the internal features encountered during the excavation of a trench located in the near centre of the site, to further investigate the defensive system of the fort, to assess the character of anomalies present on geophysical surveys and to evaluate the possibility of the origins of the site being earlier than previously thought.

In 2000, work continued on a trench opened in 1999 which had previously revealed a complex area of archaeology. Intersecting features had been identified from the Mesolithic Period, through to the Romano-British Period and all within just a shallow depth of stratigraphy.

The 2001 season concentrated on an area of open excavation straddling the ditch to the north of the site, over a feature believed to be a hut circle from the geophysical survey results. Although this was not found, postholes cut into the bedrock were discovered outside of the ditch. This confirms the presence of structures extending beyond the enclosure, however the lack of dating evidence means they cannot be tied down to any period.

The excavations have yielded a number of finds including Mesolithic flints, Iron Age pottery and Roman pottery of the late-1st century to the 3rd century. The Iron Age pottery found proves difficult to date as there are so few comparable assemblages in the North West and Pennine regions. Many of those identified as Iron Age, have come from contexts within the defensive ditch, below a layer of charcoal radiocarbon dated to 430bc +/-140.

It must be said that as more is discovered about the site, twice the number of questions arise from those answered. The knowledge of the Iron Age in the North West is limited, mainly due to a paucity of sites, compared with other parts of Britain. Mellor has quickly become a potential key to unlock a previously sparse archaeological landscape. As the only prehistoric settlement known in Stockport, it fills a huge void in the history of the Borough alone.

The excavations are run by the University of Manchester Archaeological Unit together with the Mellor Archaeological Trust and staffed by students and local volunteers. The quality of the archaeology and its importance, has sparked a great interest in the community. Over the past four years the project has evolved from a small scale excavation, undertaken by a handful of students and volunteers, to one involving individuals from the age of ten to over seventy, local schools, groups and societies. The Open Weekends held over the last three years, have become an attraction drawing over four thousand visitors in just five days.