

8. Mellor Within The Region

Settlement on the hilltop of Mellor spans nearly 10,000 years yet even in the present, during the temperate summertime it can become quite inhospitable. The outstanding view across the Cheshire Plains and its dominantly visible position from them is likely to be a key factor that attracted people here throughout the periods.

This section provides some background relating to the different periods and discusses some of the sites close to Mellor and how they may be related.

Mesolithic Period

During the Mesolithic period, the lifestyle was based around a 'hunter-gatherer' system. Nomadic groups would move across the landscape according to the season and the availability of food. During the winters, the climate of the upland regions was too harsh to survive and the people would eat fish and plants from the valley areas. As the warmer times of spring approached, they would migrate towards higher ground and hunt game such as red deer.

The period is dominated by the use of microliths; small fragments of flaked stone, often used in groupings to form composite tools and weapons. Finds spots of these artefacts are quite common in the region. However campsites are more sparse, those with structures even more so.

A general pattern to many of the known sites is that they are found on spurs of land overlooking the valleys below (Hart, 1984, 1990) and Mellor fits into this model. Three sites within the locality identified in the North Derbyshire Archaeological Survey (Hart, 1984, 1990 p.33) are at Small Clough, overlooking Charlesworth, along the Torside reservoir, Tintwistle and at Harry Hut (SK045 907).

The flint artefacts found at Mellor have been classified as Later Mesolithic (Myers, 2000) and those from Shaw Cairn (see below) from the Earlier Mesolithic (Myers, 2000). This shows a continuous use of the area, being returned to time and time again.

Neolithic Period

The Neolithic period is characterised by a transition from nomadic to settlement and the introduction of farming. At the beginning of the Neolithic period much of Britain below c.600m was covered in forest. At around 4000BC the clearance of trees and the growing of crops begins to have an affect on the environment (Longley, 1987 p.41)

Tool technology progresses from the microliths used throughout the Mesolithic Period. Leaf-shaped arrowheads and polished stone axes become more widely used. Many such axes were produced in the Lake District in a factory-like fashion and distributed across Britain.

Death becomes an important event amongst the communities and great effort is spent constructing long barrows, large chambered tombs in which the deceased were placed. The estimated time spent in building one of these is 10,000 man hours, so it would take a team of 20 a couple of months to complete one (ParkerPearson, 1993 p.41). Towards the Early Bronze Age, Britain is introduced to the Beaker Culture from the continent, named after the vessels commonly found in the graves, often individual crouched inhumations.

Although, as yet, there has been no evidence of the Neolithic Period found on the site, there is activity in the locale. To the south, on Mellor Moor, lie the remains of a Late Neolithic/Early Bronze Age funerary cairn (GM SMR 421.1.0). This was excavated in the 70's and 80's by a group of local , however no report was ever compiled by them on the results. Following the death of one of the last remaining leaders of the group, the archive was saved from deposition within a skip and a report based on the limited archive was written in 2000 by Victoria Mellor, a Bradford student on placement with GMAU. This report was written to provide a review of the fieldwork at Shaw Cairn, together with information on the construction and layout of the site (Mellor 2000 p. 9).

The site is a stone-built funerary cairn, enclosed by a stone kerb c.15m in diameter. 12-15 cremation burials were discovered some of which were within stone cists or settings. There are indications by way of charcoal, burnt flint and lenticular pottery fragments of a possible pyre site. However the recording of the excavations was of too poor a standard to confirm this. Within Britain there are only 100 or so known pyre sites

Some of the cremations had associated finds of flint and pottery, including a near complete Food Vessel and a particularly fine plano-convex knife. The Food Vessel is almost identical to one found in Tissington and the knife is comparable to ones found at Harland Edge (Myers in Mellor, 2000 p.93). A radiocarbon date for the site there was 1490+/-150bc, c.1670BC. Food Vessels begin to come into burial rites after 2000BC when funerary pottery and cremations become more widely used (Longley, 1987 p.65).

A large proportion of the flint assemblage found does not however relate to the cairn. It is Mesolithic in date and is likely to have been debitage from an earlier temporary settlement. Indicating a preference for knapping in a quiet spot with an excellent view (Mellor 2000, p.104).

The cairn lay towards the south-southeast of a raised oval enclosure, approximately 80m east-west by 60m north to south. In the Later Neolithic, from c.3000BC, the construction of bank-and-ditch 'henges' and stone circles begins and continues into the Early Bronze Age (Longley, 1987 p.58). The topography of the site at Shaw Cairn suggests that this could be a possibility, together with that of it being a settlement.

GMAU have begun a programme of archaeological evaluation to better define the character of this potentially very significant prehistoric site. A small scale evaluation by resistivity survey and trial trenching in November 2001 demonstrated that there was no defensive ditch. Further work is planned for 2002 to examine the oval platform.

Bronze Age

It is possible that in the North West, up until the end of the Early Bronze Age, the social and economic organisation still revolved around a system of mobility. The number of finds spots are concentrated towards the river estuaries suggesting the positions of the settlements. Towards the Middle Bronze Age, there was a climatic decline and the lowlands (Neveall, 1997) became more waterlogged, probably forcing the people to the middle and upper reaches of the river systems (Cowell 2001, p.170).

The local area contains no known sites of Bronze Age settlement however barrows and finds spots are more common. Immediately to the north on Ludworth Intakes are two barrows, both investigated by Rev W Marriott in 1809. The first, known as Brown Low (GM SMR 5.1.0) is located at SJ 988 909 and the second, known as Intakes Farm Cairn (GM SMR 6.1.0) at SJ 989 913, both c.290mAOD.

Unfortunately his interest into the mounds sparked fascination into other members of the community who took it upon themselves to undertake an excavation of that by the farm. Although Marriott's techniques of archaeological excavation were very crude compared to those used at present, he did at least try to be methodical and make some records of his findings (Marriott, 1810), more so than the '*mass of people, said to be from fifty to one hundred*' who '*burst into the sepulchre*'.

Marriott excavated a slot across Brown Low and found '*spelts*' of bone, along with '*streaks of red*' and stones '*black with fire*', suggesting the possibility of a funerary pyre on the site. The only other find from his excavation here was of an acorn, partly germinated with a stem and stalk extending from either end to a total of ten to twelve inches. Marriott was unsure whether this had been buried together with remains or if it had become there by accident, either way it does imply that the area was wooded with oak trees (*ibid.*).

The more easterly barrow near the farm is written to have appeared similar to Brown Low prior to its ransacking. From a verbal account of one of the perpetrators and what was left of the cairn, Marriott was able to gain some information as to its construction and contents. The barrow was formed of three concentric stone walls, about two feet high and 6 inches wide. Ash, bone and other burnt materials were found amongst the fills. Above the central vault, an urn was uncovered yet whether but the process of time or by the heavy hand of the excavators this broke apart on lifting. Marriott tries to reconstruct the vessel in the account and he describes it as having a narrow neck widening out to a large concave body, a curved pedestal then down to a flat base. It was decorated with two sets of two incised bands circumnavigating it. The whereabouts of the finds from either barrow is not known (*ibid.*).

Both barrows are now Scheduled Ancient Monuments and although they have been partially destroyed, could yield important information were they to be excavated in the future.

Marriot also refers to '*a very ancient urn*' being discovered during the construction of All Saints Church on Marple Ridge during 1808. It was either smashed by the workmen or broke on lifting,

either way it's whereabouts is unknown (ibid.). It was also postulated by Marriot that a barrow once stood on Werneth Low and that it was destroyed during the construction of a roadway close-by to where the Hare and Hounds public house stands to day (SJ958 956)(Nevell pers comm).

The barrows of Shaw Cairn, Marple Ridge and Brown Low/Intakes are positioned almost exactly to the south, west and north of the site at the Old Vicarage, all in very imposing positions.

A one day evaluation was conducted late in the 2000 Season on a possible cist burial at Hilltop farm to the east of the hillfort(GM SMR 11186.1.0). During the construction of a new barn within the farm, a flat terrace was cut into an earth mound, revealing two stone chambers in the section. These were built of flags of sandstone and continued into the mound some three to four metres. 18th and 19th century pottery sherds were found and it is likely that the feature is related to the industrial activity in the area rather than prehistoric. A seam of coal runs south to north across the farm and through the mound which may have been created by spoil.

72% of all burials in Cheshire are positioned in the higher altitudes. There are a number between 60 and 120m AOD, along the eastern side of the mid-Cheshire Ridge and on the Western slopes of the Pennines-areas where agriculture would be more sustainable. The high density of burials between 240 and 425m would be agriculturally more marginal during the later part of the 2nd millennium BC(Longley, 1987 p.61).

During the Early Bronze Age, copper and later tin mining for metalworking begins. The copper deposits at Alderley Edge are known to have been exploited since the Early Bronze Age. A wooden shovel found in the mines in 1875 and rediscovered in 1953 was carbon dated to 1780 +/-100bc(Selkirk,1994 p.172-5). If indeed the metalworking on the Old Vicarage site could be traced back to this date, it is possible that the source for the copper may have been Alderley.

Iron Age

The Iron Age spans from the later eighth century BC through to the time of the Roman invasion of Britain, although, like the transition between many periods, there is no definitive occurrence which separates this from the Late Bronze Age. Many of the characteristics, originally thought to exemplify the period, can now be associated with the Late Bronze Age. These include the construction of hillforts (Haselgrove, 1999 p.113).

Unlike during the earlier periods, the people of the Iron Age did not construct monuments to demarcate the burial of their dead. There are, however, examples of specialised interments, such as those of the *Arras Culture* of Eastern Yorkshire. This community was quite contained and shows strong interaction with the continent through chariot burials. An example of these were found at Dane's Graves (Cunliffe, 1991 p.77)

The inhabitants of Britain were socially grouped and occupied loose territories. These groups are likely to have stemmed from extended families. The settlements range from small homesteads to massive earthwork enclosures. These are often found on higher and the larger of these are referred to as hillforts. The dispersion of hillforts is largely weighted towards the south and

southeast, the region of the Welsh Marches and the western coast of Scotland (Cunliffe, 1995, Fig.3 p.15). It has been questioned whether these fortified enclosures were primarily constructed for defensive use, as a display of power or as a focal point for a wider spread community.

One of the most documented explanations for the sparse settlement of the North West region is that of its agricultural marginality (Cunliffe, 1991 p.247 Nevell, 1999 p.14). As already mentioned above, the cooler air currents coming in from the Atlantic, bringing with them a higher precipitation rate, combined with the higher altitudes, affecting temperature, greatly reduced the ability to grow crop and therefore support large communities.

These factors may have pushed the economy of the people to favour animal husbandry as opposed to agriculture. This, together with the isolated and inhospitable terrain, may have reduced the need for defended community centres, dividing the people into smaller groups (Cunliffe 1995, p.278). This may also explain why the territory known as Brigantia, which occupied much of northern England, is generally accepted as not being one tribe, but a confederation of smaller ones.

Of those few hillforts in the region two notable ones are Almondbury, Yorkshire(c.20 miles to the northeast of Mellor) and Mam Tor, Derbyshire(c.12miles to the southeast of Mellor).

Almondbury underwent at least six phases of development during the prehistoric times. It began as an open settlement at the end of the third millennium, and gradually gained defences. Firstly by a single ditch, followed by successive ditches and ramparts. The first ditch was 3m wide and two metres deep, encompassing an area of 2.2hectares (5.5acres)-the same as Mellor. Its final stage was of slighting by burning in 431bc +/-180 (Varley, 1976 p.127)

Much of the lands east of the Pennines show abandonment of fortified enclosures during the early part of the mid first millennium BC, a trend which had spread throughout the Pennine regions by around 450BC (Higham, 1987 p.1). The radiocarbon date of 430bc +/-140 from the charcoal layer within the ditch in Tr. 1 may be indicative of the time of abandonment at Mellor.

Mam Tor is one of the largest hillforts in the north of England at 6.4 hectares (16 acres). It is essentially univallated (single ditch), however there are indications of a smaller, inner ditch to some parts of the enclosure (Coombs, 1976 p.147). The limited excavations of the site during the later half of the 1960's, revealed a series of hut circles and posthole structures, as well as pits. Sections were also cut through the ditch and rampart. Evidence was found to suggest that the rampart was preceded by a timber palisade and that the settlement stemmed from the Late Bronze Age. There were no indications as to when the fort went out of use although the apparent lack of Roman artefacts suggests that the site was never occupied during this period and had been abandoned by the first century AD.

Roman Period

Following campaigns by Julius Caesar in 55 and 54 BC, the Roman invasion proper occurred in AD 43 under Claudius. The southeastern tribes were quickly overpowered and under the future

emperor Vespasian, the southwest was targeted. Caractacus led resistance in South Wales with the Silures and during the winter of AD 47-48 attacked a tribe allied to Rome, probably the Dobunni. Then governor, Ostorius Scapula, began more aggressive policies occupying the West Midlands and cutting off the Welsh from the Brigantes occupying the central northern parts of the country. Sites at Chester, Walton-le-Dale, Whitchurch and Wroxeter were probably established at this time, if only on a semi-permanent basis (Walker, 1987 p.5)

A revolt in Icenian territory, now East Anglia, in AD 47 was quickly resolved and the armies returned to Wales where Caractacus had moved to the North in lands occupied by the Ordovices. Guerrilla tactics were abandoned and Caractacus made a stand from a fortified hilltop. The battle was lost and he fled to seek refuge from the Brigantes under Queen Cartimandua who, having already established ties with Rome, handed him over in AD 52. This decision would have jeopardised the already tentative internal situation within the confederacy of the Brigantes, which had recently seen troubles over their allying with Rome. A few years later intervention from Roman troops was required to deal with the fracas between Cartimandua and her husband, Venutius with control falling to him. The forts at Templeborough, Chesterfield and probably Littlechester had already been established under Nero by the governor at that time, Didius Gallus (Walker, 1987 p.5). It is likely that these were positioned to enable swift movement into the territories of the Brigantes and may have been so as a request from Cartimandua (Hartley, 1987 p.16).

Resistance continued in Wales and in AD 51 the Silures defeated a Legion but during the late 50s were worn down by the continuing campaigns of Didius Gallus. The Roman presence was not to conquer but to remove the threat from the frontier, however policy changed in AD 58 and Veranias was ordered to conquer Britain. A single campaign finished off the Silures in AD 59

followed by moves towards the Ordovices by Suetonius Paulinus.

In AD 60 Queen Boudicca led a rebellion, again in East Anglia, destroying the Roman towns of Colchester, Verulamium and London. The Brigantes played no part in this, such as would be expected under Venutius, so it is believed that Cartimandua had regained control. However by AD 69 the problems had returned and Cartimandua divorced Venutius and shackled up with his armour bearer, Velllocatus. The control of the kingdom was seized by Venutius, however it was some years before the Roman troops entered the battle to rescue Cartimandua.

Petillus Cerialis's campaigns along the eastern side of the Pennines flushed out Venutius by AD 72 but with considerable casualties to the Roman armies. York was established during this period as a legionary fortress and housed the *Legio IX*. The Brigantes continued to war against Rome probably employing guerilla tactics from the hills (Hartley and Fitts, 1988 p.19).

Cerialis's campaigns are also likely to have spread from the western side of the Pennines although evidence is more sparse. There is evidence of sites of this period at Ribchester (Walker, 1987 p.7), together with those sites already established by Scapula.

In AD 74, Cerialis was removed from Britain and replaced by Julius Frontinus, probably brought in due to his proven record in mountain warfare (Walker, 1987 p.7), who campaigned across

Separation of Brigantia into smaller, more manageable tracts was necessary to protect the rear of the advancing forces. A network of roads and military establishments across the northern territories of England was created. It is possible that much of the labour for these engineering tasks was undertaken by natives under the supervision of the Roman armies (Hartley and Fitts, 1988 p.22). A major road crossing the Pennines from the legionary fortress being constructed at Chester to that at York was essential, with strongholds positioned along its route, separated by a days march (Redhead, 1989 p.14). Two of these were the nearby forts at Manchester and Castleshaw.

Manchester's first fort was also established c.AD 79 and was a standard auxiliary cohort turf and timber fort. In the AD 90's it was enlarged and was redeveloped again in the latter half of the second century to contain stone buildings. The fort was finally defended by stone walls from the beginning of the 3rd century before abandonment in the early-5th century (Walker, 1987 p.141-143).

The fort at Castleshaw was also built in c.AD 79 and seems to have been slighted and abandoned in the AD 90s. It was subsequently overlain by a smaller fortlet built around AD 105 and eventually abandoned in the AD 120s.

Melandra Castle, the Roman fort four and a half miles to the northeast of Mellor was built prior to AD 78 and lay en-route from Manchester to Brough-on-Noe. The first turf and timber fort was reinforced in the early-2nd century with stone walling and a second ditch before abandonment in c. AD 140. Outside of the fort, lay a *vicus*, military bathhouse, *mansio* and cemetery (Hart, 1984,1990 p.87-90).

At 140m AOD it lies on a rise of land within the Vale of Glossop with good views to the east and west, out of view from Mellor. A near direct, yet feasible passage from Mellor to Melandra was walked in part during the course of the excavation. The route headed down into the valley to the east of Mill Brow where the stream is narrower and not in a steep gorge. From here Gird Lane, the old road to Glossop, takes a reasonably straight course towards the top, along a footpath past the cairns on the summit (if the cairns on Ludworth Intakes are associated with settlement at Mellor it is possible that the route followed an earlier Bronze Age trackway, an idea postulated by Peter Noble during the excavations of 2001). From here the path follows down into the vale.

Approximately 10 years ago a small lead figurine in the shape of an owl was found by metal detector from the area of Mill Brow (Plate 21). The Roman Goddess, Minerva was often portrayed with an owl and as the goddess of warfare, wisdom and craft, it is possible that this object was carried by a Roman soldier as a tribute to her (Eyre-Morgan, pers comm.). A number of similar objects, many of birds have been found. An owl cast in bronze was found at Chester (Green, 1978).

Locally, possible Roman sites have been identified at Highstones, Tintwistle and Mottram Church. The former is visible as an undated rectangular earthwork consisting ditch, rampart and causewayed entrance, overlooking the Torside reservoir (Hart, 1984, 1990). The latter lies along the route from Melandra to Manchester and was noticed as crop marks on aerial photographs. This underwent testpitting during research by UMAU and although two sherds of late-1st century pottery were found, the existence of a suggested signal station was not confirmed (Roberts, 1998).

In the field to the south of the church, a silver *dinarius*, was found by Mr Peter Hodgson, dating to the Emperor Vespasian, AD 69-79.

There are a number of sites dating from the late-1st century through to the 2nd century, west of the Pennines which although not auxiliary forts, are likely to have been run by the military. These include supply bases and works depots at Wigan, Walton-le-Dale, Holt and Wilderspool (Walker, 1987 p.7). These would have been essential for the construction and maintenance of the forts in the region.

The Roman pottery found at Mellor dates from the late-1st century, through to the 3rd century (Leary, this report). This illustrates that the site was occupied from the launch of the campaigns into Brigantia and continued for some time, beyond that of some nearby sites from the Roman period. The discovery of tile fragments implies that buildings must have been erected during this period. Where precisely these stood and their function are two questions yet to be answered. Without these, and other such answers, it is impossible to establish the purpose of the Roman occupation of Mellor. Although speculative it may have served as a sentry post, making the most of the views out towards Manchester; an industrial works to supply the garrisons although civilian settlements outside of Melandra and Manchester could also have served these