

4. Excavation Results.

4.1 Trench 16

Fill/layer Morphology

The character of the archaeological features revealed divided the trench into two (Fig 7). The majority of the features in the western half were linear ditches and gullies, while in the eastern half post holes or pits pre-dominated. Three exceptions to this are linear features [94] and [203] which run west to east across trench 16 and feature [28] which runs south to north for 3.30m in the east half of trench 16. After the excavation of the dark grey and brown topsoil and subsoil to a depth of around 0.50m a layer of light orange grey silt clay (layer 67) was exposed over all of trench 16. It was clear that there were a considerable number of archaeological features cut into layer 67. Excavation soon revealed that layer (67) was, on average, 0.15m thick and that it lay above the layer (76), the undisturbed orange brown natural boulder clay. The horizon between layers (67) and (76) was very diffuse with the two layers merging into each other. The interpretation of (67) was that it represented a layer of weathered natural rather than man made occupation layer. However three pieces of worked flint were found on the surface of layer (67). Two of these appear to be simple scrapers however the third is possibly a re used polished Neolithic axe head. At some time the point of the original head has been broken off, perhaps deliberately and the flint has been re-worked. It is possible that the weathered layer has formed over several thousand years and has covered archaeological evidence for Mesolithic and Neolithic occupation of the hilltop. To test this hypothesis in the north-east corner of trench 16 a 4m x 3m area of layer (67) was excavated until it was clear that layer (76) was exposed. There were no finds recovered during this excavation of layer (67) and there was no indication of archaeological features in the exposed area of layer (76). This process was repeated with the same results on a 3.0m x 3.0m area in the middle of trench 16.

Linear Features

The fills of the majority of the linear features in the western half of trench 16 were very similar. This was a mid-grey clay silt with a high percentage of charcoal flecks and sub-angular stone inclusions (Fig 8). This served to highlight them against the orange brown boulder clay through which they were cut but made detecting re-cuts and stratigraphic relationships difficult in section and virtually impossible in plan. The high charcoal content may well account for the geophysical anomalies on the 2002 survey which were interpreted as an area of brick, iron or burnt material.

The lack of dating evidence from the fills of the linear features means that the phasing is entirely stratigraphic. It is likely that some of the features which appear together in the same stratigraphic phase are not contemporary.

Phase 1

The earliest phase of the linear features in the western half of trench 16 was represented by ditch [199]. This was cut at its south end by feature [94]. However as [199] did not continue south, beyond [94], it seems likely that its northern terminus was close to this point. From this point it ran north for 2.50m where it intersected, and was cut by, ditch [96]. A small fragment of a crucible was found in the fill of ditch [199]. This has yet to be analysed. Several crucible fragments have been recovered in previous years from the enclosure ditch which have been provisionally dated to the Iron age.

Phase 2

The second phase of linear features was represented by four stretches of ditch [96], [111], [114] and [233]. Ditch [111] emerged from the west section 1.40m south of the north west corner of trench 16. It then curved to the south east for 2.0m before running directly south for 3.60m. At its southern end it is cut by ditch [94]. A sample was taken of the charcoal rich fill of ditch [111] and sent away to be radiocarbon dated. The result gave a 2 Sigma calibrated date range with a 95% probability between 380 BC and 520 BC.

At its north end ditch [233] emerges from the west section of the trench immediately to the north of [111]. Excavation at this point revealed that [233] was a re-cut of an earlier ditch [235] which followed the same line. From the section [233] ran south east for 2.0m at which point it was cut by ditch [156]. The base of [156] is 0.20m below that of [233] so all trace of [233] has been lost. However it does seem likely that it continues to the south of [156] as ditch [96] which is also cut by [156]. Like [233] the base of [96] is above that of [156] in this instance by 0.15m. Recording of the section after excavation at the intersection of [96] and [156] showed that [96] was a re-cut along the line of an earlier ditch [211]. Ditch [96] ran for 5.40m in a shallow arc south east then south west. At its south end [96], like [111], is cut by [94].

Immediately to the south of and also cut by [94] there was a 2.0m long stretch of ditch [114]. This curved gently south west from [94] to enter the west section of trench 16 0.40m north of the south west corner of the trench. From its proximity and alignment it seems likely that this represents a continuation of either [96] or [111]. Unfortunately due to the presence of ditch [94] it was impossible to prove stratigraphically if this was the case (Fig 11). The fills of [96] [111] and [114] were so alike that any determination on these grounds would be highly subjective. In addition the alignment of the three ditches is such that a case can be made for either [96] or [111] continuing as [114].

Phase 3

The third phase is represented by two linear features. Ditch [156] was 4.40m long and ran north east to south west from the north section of the trench to ditch [111] (Fig 10). Three quarters of the way along from the trench section it cuts through ditch [96]. Ditch [156] continued to the south west of ditch [96] for another 1.0m before intersecting with ditch [110]. There was no suggestion that [156] continued beyond [110] in the small space between it and the west section of the trench. Excavation close to the north section of the trench revealed that [156] was itself a re-cut of an earlier ditch, [168].

The second linear feature assigned to this phase was ditch [94] (Fig 9). This emerged from the west section of the trench and ran east for 6.50m where it terminated. Along its western half it cut ditches [96], [110] and [114]. Its eastern half curved gently to the south. Ditch [94] stood out from the other linear features in the trench because all along its length its sides were lined with angular stones set on edge. It is possible that these stones were used as packing around a hurdle fence set into ditch [94]. A sample of charcoal was collected from the fill of ditch [94] and was sent away for radiocarbon dating. The result for this sample fell on a point of the calibration curve which 'wiggles' and so provided two possible 2 Sigma calibrated results each with a 95% probability. The earliest is between 360 BC and 410 BC and the later is between 240 BC and 280 BC.

Phase 4

Stratigraphically the latest linear feature appeared to be cut [203]. This emerged from the east section of the trench and ran west for 9.0m. At its west end it cut through ditch [96] and then continued into ditch [156] at which point it seemed to terminate. For the eastern two thirds of its length the fill of [203] closely resembled layer (67) through which it was cut. At its western end the colour and texture of its fill closely resembled those of the ditches through which it cut.

The presence of ditch [203] was first detected through the excavation of a number of post holes aligned east to west. The post holes were defined, on the surface, by stone spreads containing occasional charcoal flecks. On excavation the material containing the stones and charcoal proved to be very shallow but in some instances their removal did allow the differences between layer (67), the fills of the post holes and the fill of ditch [203] to be discerned. In other cases once the initial stone and charcoal spread had been removed the only indications for the extent of the post holes were the edges of the ditch and shallow depressions or cuts in its base. In its western third the excavation of ditch [203] was also made simpler as here the base of the ditch was filled with frequent stones, many of which appeared to be fire-cracked pebbles.

Un-phased linear features

Two other linear features were excavated in trench 16.

Ditch [28] emerged from the south section of the trench. It ran north in the south east quarter of the trench before terminating. It had no stratigraphic relationship with any of the other linear features although it ran only 0.5m to the east of the terminus of ditch [94]. Halfway along the west edge ditch [28] cut the east half of post hole [165].

In the north west corner of the trench the south east side of what appeared to be a linear feature was excavated. Ditch [15] ran south west to north east for 1.0m. In the west section of the trench it was seen to cut ditch [233]. A row of four stake-holes were cut just inside the edge of ditch [15]. From the small area of this feature visible in trench 16 it was difficult to draw any conclusions. However when compared with the records of trench 3 it became clear that this was ditch [3009]. This ditch ran south west to north east across trench 3 for 7.50m. Stratigraphically this was the latest of the ditches excavated in trench 3. From the fill of ditch [3009] a sherd of Romano-British Derbyshire ware pottery was recovered which dated from the 2nd century AD as well as four sherds of Late Iron Age pottery.

Post holes, pits and stake-holes

In the eastern half of the trench the majority of features were oval or sub rounded post holes, pits and stake-holes. A total of forty one of these features were excavated within trench 16. Only two produced any dating evidence while fourteen had stratigraphic relationships with other features.

Seven post holes were excavated within the line of cut [203]. It seems likely that some, if not all, of them might be associated with the ditch. However the spacing of the post holes is irregular which makes it difficult to use that in determining which ones might be associated with the ditch. In terms of size and shape there seemed to be two groups; [121], [134], [226] are all around 0.30m wide by 0.30m deep with near vertical sides and flat bases. The sides, bases and depth of the other group [54] and [219] are the same but at around 0.40m these two were wider than they were deep. Post hole [216] which was also within the line of ditch [203] was considerably smaller than the others. As with spacing the location of these groups does not offer

any help in associating any of the post holes with the ditch.

It is worth noting that none of the post holes excavated within the line of ditch [203] had either the high charcoal contact or the on edge stone packing present in many of the other post holes in trench 16.

Close to the east section of the trench ditch [203] is cut by post hole [74] (Fig 15). This, along with [26] (Fig 16), [68] and [98], was one of four post holes which were characterised by a dark grey fill resulting from a relatively high charcoal content. They were also clearly defined by the presence of medium to large angular stones which appeared to have been set on edge around the sides of the post holes. It is likely that these represent packing wedged into the post hole to hold the post in place. Several other post holes in trench 16 contained similar formations of on edge stones although their fills did not have the same high percentage of charcoal.

Two other post holes had stratigraphic relationships with other features. Post hole [30] lay 1.0m to the south of ditch [203] and was cut through the fill of a shallow pit, [40]. The fill of post hole [30] contained two sherds of Roman pottery one of which has been provisionally dated to the middle to late 2nd century AD.

As was mentioned earlier post hole [165] was cut by ditch [28]. One of the fills of the post hole produced what appears to be a fragment of a crucible used in metal working. The fragment was very similar to the one found in the fill of ditch [199].

Discussion

Care must obviously be taken in trying to draw too many conclusions from a ten metre square trench in the middle of what is probably at the least a two hectare enclosed area. However a major aid to any attempts to interpret the archaeological features in trench 16 is its proximity to trench 3. For the first time we can look at two connecting pieces of the Mellor jigsaw. In addition the interpretation by Geoquest Associates of the anomalies on their 2002 geophysical survey of the Old Vicarage garden seem to have proved accurate.

The high levels of charcoal found during excavation on the west side of trench 16 matches well with the anomalous area interpreted as representing burning on the geophysical survey. This bodes well for excavation of two other such areas detected by the survey in the Old Vicarage garden.

Ditch [203] aligns exactly with ditches [3015] and [3019] in trench 3. These ran west to east for 6.20m across trench 3. It seems likely that these two ditches are the same ditch which has been cut by ditch [3009]. The plan of trench 3 shows ditch [3019] running into the east section of trench 3 just 1.0m to the west of where ditch [203] terminated in trench 16. Based on alignment it is tempting to see ditches [203], [3015] and [3019] as sections of the same ditch. However there are some problems with this interpretation. There was no evidence of ditch [3019] in trench 16. If it continued east it should have appeared in trench 16 at the point where ditch [111] curved into the section. It is possible that ditch [111] has cut away any evidence of ditch [3019] in trench 3. However, as ditch [203] appears to represent the latest phase of linear features in trench 16 then if ditch [3019] is associated with it there should have been evidence of [3019] running into trench 16 and cutting ditch [111].

The curved nature of ditch [111] and compositely ditches [236] and [96] taken together with ditch [114] is highly suggestive of drainage ditches surrounding Iron age round houses. It is possible that ditches [3049] and [3047] found in trench 3 represent a north westerly continuation of ditches [110] and [235]. Excavations at other Iron age sites have found that these drainage ditches were regularly re-cut in order to keep them working properly. In some cases slight re

alignments have taken place either as a major form of repair or to reflect a change in layout or reconstruction of the buildings they served.

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