

5. Conclusions

Individually each trench of the 2003 season of excavation succeeded in its objectives and contributed significantly to our understanding of the nature of the settlement on the hilltop at Mellor. Furthermore the excavations at Mellor are now reaping the benefit from the implementation of coherent strategy of evaluation begun by the Mellor Archaeological Trust and UMAU nine years ago. This strategy means that the results from any individual trench excavated in any year do not stand alone. They will form part of a group of trenches excavated over several years designed to gradually provide insight on specific questions about the history of settlement on the hilltop around the Old Vicarage.

Perhaps the success of this strategy is best illustrated by the series of trenches excavated in the centre of the Old Vicarage garden since 1999. The combined results of these trenches now offer clear evidence that at least one Iron Age roundhouse stood in this area. Evidence from previous years tells us that the nature of the occupation changed with the roundhouse gullies being cut through by later features. Amongst these were linear stone lined gullies. However the close proximity of the radio-carbon dates from two sets of gullies suggests that this was a planned and managed change within the Iron Age settlement at Mellor rather than a hiatus. However other features and finds relating to the roundhouse gullies show that this part of the hilltop was occupied during other periods. In 1999 and 2002 a shallow ditch was seen to cut through the roundhouse gullies. This was picked up again in 2003 as cut [353]. The extent, alignment and the presence of Roman pottery in its fill hint at a Roman date for its excavation even if its function is unclear. Going further back in time the number of mesolithic flint flakes recovered from a discreet area within Tr3 and Tr21 seem to prove conclusively that this was a favoured seasonal site for the hunter gatherers of 10,000 years ago. With the suggestion that this was a specialised area comes the possibility that other mesolithic sites devoted to different functions occupy other parts of the hilltop.

This long term strategy of evaluation now means that the information gathered from the various groups of trenches is beginning to overlap thus providing new possible interpretations of the site. One example of this is the evidence from geophysical survey and excavation around Tr18 and the results from trenches 3, 16, 21 and 23. The discovery that the anomaly detected by geophysics and excavated in Tr18 was a large ditch comparable to that found in Tr1 at the opposite end of Area A raises the possibility that there are two ditches around the hilltop at Mellor. The size of the ditch sections in Tr1 and Tr18, especially if there is an associated palisade, suggest that their original excavation was at least partly motivated by a desire to provide a defence for part of the hill top. The projected line of this ditch system would enclose Area A where the evidence of Iron Age roundhouses has been found. Perhaps the purpose of the ditch was to enclose and protect the areas of human occupation. If contemporary then the ditch found in Area B and projected into Area D could be looked upon as an outer enclosure ditch perhaps with a combined function as stock enclosure, drainage ditch and boundary marker. It is intended to open up a large trench in Area C as the focus of the 2004 season. It is hoped that this will provide information relevant to the interpretation of all the previous years groups of trenches. In particular it is designed to see if the ditch found in Tr18 curves west through this area towards Tr1. In addition if there are two ditches surrounding the hilltop at Mellor it will provide a look at the nature of occupation in this inter ditch zone. It will be especially interesting to see if this area of boulder clay reflects the high level of archaeological activity found around Tr16.