

4.4 Excavation Results; Trench 19

Although the line the enclosure ditch took through the field had been fairly well established there are still important questions to be answered. Trench 19 was excavated to see if any evidence of a rampart could be found in association with the ditch. Also it was hoped to learn more about the method in which the ditch was originally excavated. Trench 19 was excavated immediately to the west of trench 15 which was excavated in 2001. Trench 19 was 10m long and between 3m and 4m wide. As with trench 17 there was only a thin layer of topsoil c0.20m deep covering the sandstone bedrock. The top most fill of the ditch (103) stood out against the sandstone as a line of mid brown silt sand running across the trench. The excavated section of ditch in trench 19, cut [43], was between 1.40m and 1.80m wide and between 1.10m and 1.30m deep. Perhaps not surprisingly given their proximity the profile of the ditch in trench 19 was very similar to that in trench 15. The upper third of the ditch had steeply sloping sides which became near vertical with a flat base.

The earliest fill of the ditch in trench 19 were (109) which was comprised of around 95% small, sub angular fragments of sandstone within a mid to dark brown sandy silt. Above this was (108) which was very similar to (109) except that the percentage of sandstone inclusions was lower, around 60%. Both (109) and (108) ran the entire length of the stretch of ditch excavated in trench 19. The same was true of the latest fill, (103). This was a mid brown silty sand containing medium to large fragments of sandstone which lay practically horizontally at the base of this fill. Between (103) and (108) the nature of the ditch fills varied along the length of the trench. Seven of these fills were identified during the excavation. Most contained large percentages of small to medium sandstone fragments. Three stood out as being noticeably different. Fill (107) did contain around 70% sandstone fragments but these were all very small c100mm. Fill (117) was a mid to dark brown silty sand which contained no sandstone fragments at all. Fill (116) was a very similar soil to (117), it did contain sandstone fragments but only around 20%. Both (116) and (117) contained flecks of charcoal.

Discussion

One of the reasons that the Iron Age settlement at Mellor had remained undiscovered was that, unlike many other hill forts, the present day view and topography contain no ridges or depressions to indicate the existence of a rampart and ditch. As with previous trenches excavated across the line of the ditch there was no indication in trench 19 of rampart material on either side of the ditch.

The amount of material excavated to create the ditch would have been considerable so the question is where has it all gone? The bulk of the material removed during the excavation of the ditch would have been fragments of flat sandstone. While this material is probably too thin to be used in large buildings it is ideal for laying as pathways and for constructing small walls. It might be that it was never used in the construction of a rampart but was utilised as a construction material elsewhere on the site. This would account for the absence of a ridge in the landscape. However it is unlikely that natural erosion of the sides of the ditch and hillside alone could have filled in the ditch so completely so as not to leave a hollow. The high percentage of small to medium sized sandstone fragments within the ditch fills suggests that at least some of the original excavated material was mounded adjacent to the ditch and has found its way back into the ditch. While the presence of an up slope bank or rampart would facilitate the filling of the ditch it again seems unlikely that natural processes alone could have removed all physical indications of a rampart and ditch from the landscape. To do this would probably have required human intervention. The nature and timing of this intervention is as yet unclear. The presence of a rampart and ditch would have hindered the agricultural use of this field. The larger fragments of sandstone may have been taken away to be used in buildings and walls and the remaining

material pushed into the ditch. This could have been done any time after these features became redundant. Another possibility is that the rampart and ditch were deliberately slighted when the settlement was abandoned. This may have been done by the occupants themselves when they left or as part of a process imposed on them by a new regime.

One interpretation by the excavators in 2001 of the depositional sequence of the fills found within the ditch in trench 15 takes into account both human and natural processes. The continuous early fills possibly represent a deliberate partial backfilling of the ditch. The variable intermediary fills are likely to be the result of natural erosion. The latest continuous fill is seen as deliberate levelling of any remaining ditch and rampart in order to be able to plough the field. The evidence from trench 19 would seem to support this interpretation.