

4. Excavation Results

4.1 Trench 18

In 2000, a geophysical survey undertaken by Geoquest associates identified a linear anomaly running roughly north to south at the east end of Area A near the present day drive to the Old Vicarage. Excavation of Trench 18 during the summer of 2002 confirmed the presence of a large archaeological feature cut into the natural sandstone bedrock. Only one edge of the feature was revealed that year and the feature was not excavated to its full depth. Numerous sherds of pottery dating from the 1st to 4th century A.D. were recovered from the excavated upper fills of this feature. It was felt that the most likely interpretation of the feature was that it represented a large ditch of the Roman period. To test this theory Tr18 was expanded during the 2003 season in order to fully excavate a section of this feature.

The extended Tr18 was sub-square in shape 9m along the south side, 8.5m along the north, 4.5m the west and 7m the east. Turf, topsoil (300) and subsoil (301) were removed by hand. Layer (300) was a friable, dark brown grey humic silt clay with very occasional small stones. Layer (301) was a friable, mid brown silt clay, containing occasional small stones. During excavation both layers produced numerous sherds of post medieval and 20th century pottery as well as 18th and 19th century clay pipe stems, glass and ferrous objects.

The area of Tr18 was then trowel cleaned at which stage two features were clearly visible cut into the bedrock (Fig 4). One, cut [302], was a linear feature running diagonally north west to south east across the south west corner of the trench. This feature was distinctive due to the number of flat fragments of sandstone sitting on edge within it (320). Cut [302] ran parallel to the second feature in Tr18, cut [303] which was obviously the one encountered during the 2002 excavation. The top fill of this feature a dark brown sand silt was clearly visible against the yellow brown of the natural sandstone. At their highest level both these features were cut through layer (309). This was a loose layer of natural yellow brown sandstone highly eroded and fragmented by ice, weather and roots. In the area of Tr18 this layer was between 0.20m and 0.30m deep and sat above (310) which was much more compact and had complete plates of sandstone.

Two 0.50m long sections of [302] were excavated to record its profile and fills. These showed it to be between 0.30m and 0.42m wide and on average 0.15m deep with square profile. The cut contained two fills, (320) and (328). Fill (320) was c 0.30m wide and c 0.12m deep. In composition was a mid brown silt sand which contained occasional small sub-angular and sub-rounded stones. What made this fill so distinctive was that a number of sub-angular fragments of the natural sandstone had been placed vertically so that their long axis corresponded to the orientation of [302] (Fig 7). Many of these stones stood proud of the top of the feature so that although only two sections of this feature were excavated the presence of these on edge stones in the un excavated portions could be clearly discerned. Fill (320) lay over a second fill, (328), a friable, light brown silt sand containing occasional sub-angular and sub-rounded stones. In the sections excavated fill (328) had a maximum width of 80mm and a maximum depth of 0.10m. There were no artifacts recovered from either of these two fills.

Cut [303] was excavated along the full 7.0m length of Tr18 and clearly continued north west and south east beyond the limits of Tr18. The excavation provided two vertical sections for recording. The north facing section was at a right angle across the ditch while the south facing section, an extension of the 2002 excavation presents a slightly elongated aspect of the features profile and fills. The top of cut [303] varied in width from 4.0m across the north facing section

to 4.50m at the most northerly point were a true cross section measurement could be taken. This widening is also reflected at the base of the cut. At its south end the base was 0.98m wide while the most northerly true measurement was just over 2.0m. The north end of the ditch also gives the impression of a slight curve to the east. The depth of cut [303] in Tr18 varied between 1.75m and 1.90m. The feature cut through the natural sandstone of the area and had a smooth flat base and irregular sides. The deposition of the sandstone bedrock in horizontal bedding plains facilitated the regularity of the base. The same geological arrangement meant that the sides descended in a series of small steps as [303] cut down through the multiple bedding plains. For the most part the sides slope at roughly 45 degrees however each side has two definite and corresponding faces of excavation. At these points the sides of [303] had been deliberately cut to a much steeper angle by the original excavators of the feature. The irregular nature of the sides was exacerbated by four natural, vertical, joints which run east to west through the sandstone in this area.

The ditch fills (Fig 5) were as follows :-

The uppermost fill of [303] was (341) a dark brown friable sand silt. Fill (341) had a maximum depth of 0.20m and lay immediately below the subsoil. Fill (341) was only found during excavation of the north half of [302] and possibly represents the natural silting of a hollow caused by the settling of the other fills of [303].

Fill (304) was a friable mid/dark brown grey clay silt containing occasional small to medium stones and flecks of charcoal. Fill (304) had a maximum depth of 0.25m. A number of sherds of Roman pottery were recovered from (304) (Appendices 3 & 4) as well as fragments of two bronze brooches Appendices 1 & 2).

Fill (305) was a friable light grey clay silt including frequent small to medium stones and flecks of charcoal. Like (304) fill (305) ran the full length of the excavated portion of [302]. Fill (305) increased in depth from south to north to a maximum of 0.45m. It was from this fill that the majority of finds were recovered.

Fill (307) was a friable light grey/brown clay silt with a maximum depth of 0.25m.

Fill (311) was a friable mid grey brown sand silt containing frequent flecks of charcoal and clay. It had a maximum depth of 0.10m and was confined to the western edge of cut [303] and was not apparent in the north facing section of cut [303].

Fill (313) was also only found against the west edge and was not present in either of the sections. (313) was a friable light brown sand with a maximum depth of 0.25m.

Fill (306) was a friable light brown clay silt with occasional small and medium fragments of sub-angular sandstone and small sub-rounded stones. (306) also included occasional flecks of charcoal. The maximum recorded depth of fill (306) was 0.40m.

Fill (340) was a friable light brown clay silt with a maximum depth of 0.12m. It contained frequent small sub angular and sub- rounded stones.

Fill (312) was a friable light brown clay silt with a maximum depth of 0.30m. It contained frequent small and medium fragments of sub-angular sandstone and occasional sub-rounded stones

Fill (314) was a friable mid-grey sand silt with a maximum depth of 0.25m. It contained

frequent charcoal flecks and frequent small to large fragments of sub-angular sandstone.

Fill (315) consisted of loose and often voided medium and large fragments of sub-angular sandstone and occasional patches of light brown clay silt. (315) had a maximum recorded depth of 0.50m. A large fragment of a beehive quern was found amongst the dense concentration of sandstone within this fill.

Fill (316) was a very compact mid-orange brown clay silt with a maximum depth of 0.25m. (316) contained frequent small fragments of sub-angular sandstone and occasional flecks of charcoal.

Fill (338) consisted of loose small sub angular fragments of sandstone, occasional medium patches of light brown clay and occasional flecks of charcoal. (338) had a maximum depth of 0.18m.

Fill (329) was a friable mid brown sand silt with frequent small sub angular fragments of sandstone and very occasional charcoal flecks.

Discussion

The excavations in Tr18 during 2003 confirmed the hypothesis developed the previous year that the anomaly located by geophysics in 2001 is a large ditch. As with the excavations in 2002 numerous artifacts dating from the 1st to 4th century A.D. were recovered suggesting a Roman date for the ditch. However unlike 2002 the 2003 excavation was able to fully excavate a length of the feature allowing a more complete and detailed analysis of its form and alignment. In terms of dimensions the ditch section in Tr18 is similar to that excavated in Tr1 between 1998 and 2000. This section has been interpreted as part of an Iron Age ditch system. Perhaps the ditch sections in Tr1 and Tr18 were once linked and formed part of a defensive Iron Age enclosure. The vast majority of Roman artifacts were recovered from (304) and (305) the upper fills of the ditch. The number and variety of Roman finds from these fills, along with the nature in which they seem to have been tipped in, seem to indicate that this part of the ditch was being used as a rubbish pit. The charcoal and daub found in fills (305) and (311) suggest that this rubbish deposition might be associated with the final abandonment of the site in the 4th century A.D.

The high percentage of small sandstone fragments in fills (329) and (320) suggest they resulted from natural silting and erosion into the ditch. The frequency of larger sandstone fragments in fills (314) and (315) may be evidence that at least some of the bedrock excavated during the construction of the ditch was piled alongside it to form a bank. There has been no evidence found so far from any of the Iron Age ditch sections excavated at Mellor of an associated bank. However the ditch sections do seem to indicate that this is at least partly due to a deliberate in-filling of ditches using what may be material that originally formed a bank.

Analysis of the Roman artifacts hints at a substantial and prolonged settlement at Mellor during the Roman period. As yet there is very little evidence of this period of occupation from archaeological contexts excavated at Mellor. There are a few features which stratigraphically may belong to this period but there is certainly no dominating Roman archaeological 'footprint' to suggest a whole scale supplanting of an Iron Age community. The dating evidence so far for the Iron Age settlement at Mellor places it in the 5th century B.C. It is possible that the site was abandoned in the Iron Age and re occupied in the Roman period. However if this was the case, given the current interpretation of the Roman finds assemblage, it might be expected that archaeological features indicative of Roman buildings and occupation would have shown up in

considerable numbers within the trenches excavated at Mellor. Another possibility is that the area of occupation in the Roman period was outside that covered by the evaluation trenches excavated so far at Mellor. The size of the hill is such that a substantial Roman civilian or military structure could lie so far undiscovered. Yet another possibility is that rather than being a product of a settlement in Roman times the Roman artifacts are a result of the site having some significance within the landscape. Perhaps a small shrine related to one of the springs present on the hilltop resulted in offerings. This might especially be the case if the site lay on a well used route and may explain why no Roman buildings have yet been discovered.

The presence of Roman artifacts does not necessarily mean that the indigenous Iron Age community had left the site. It is possible that they continued to inhabit the hill top and simply adopted the available material culture of the Roman world. Previous trenches at Mellor have revealed a few archaeological features which stratigraphically could belong to the Roman period however nothing that indicates a thriving Romano British community. The excavation of Tr16 in 2002 did produce evidence that land use changed within Area A during the Iron Age with features more indicative of stock enclosures cutting through gullies associated with an Iron Age roundhouse. If this is the case then it is possible that the evidence for continuous settlement of the hilltop spanning the late Iron Age and Roman period also lies outside the area's so far evaluated.

Occasional finds dating from the Roman period were found in underlying fills although their frequency dropped dramatically. Fills (314) and (315) were the earliest fills from which artifacts dating from the Roman period were recovered. It is possible that (315) represents the primary fill of this ditch as it stood in the Roman period and that the ditch in its full extent is part of the Iron Age settlement at Mellor. The fills below (315) may therefore represent infilling of the ditch prior to the site's occupation in the Roman period. Contexts (338) and (329) represent the basal fills of [303] and were characterised by their degraded sandstone matrix. Both these fills were hand sieved after excavation in order to maximise finds retrieval. Two small flint flakes were recovered during this process. Whilst it is possible that they represent the inadvertent deposition of earlier material culture within a later feature it is more probable that they indicate a pre Roman date for the excavation of the ditch.

In 1998 Tr2 was excavated in the south west corner of Area A and picked up the line of the ditch found in Tr1. A feature very similar to cut [302] was found running next to the ditch in Tr2. Cut [302] lies about 1.50m to the west of the ditch and runs roughly parallel to it. This may represent a gully cut to take the timbers of a palisade running alongside the ditch. Upright fragments of sandstone have been found in many post holes and gullies excavated at Mellor. These fragments make ideal material for wedging timber posts, stakes and fences tightly in place, particularly useful on the hard sandstone bedrock. Another possibility is that it held posts or planks designed to support an earth and stone bank associated with the ditch. The interpretation of cut [302] must remain tentative and it is hoped that excavations in 2004 will provide more evidence.

The similarities between the ditch in Tr18 and Tr1 and the evidence for a palisade in Tr18 and Tr2 open the possibility that they are part of a continuous, defensive system surrounding that part of the settlement largely contained within Area A. This theory would have the ditch in Tr18 following roughly the line of the Old Vicarage driveway on the north side and from Tr1 running south and then turning east to follow the line of the churchyard. This possibility has major implications for our interpretation of the settlement at Mellor. In particular if the ditch in Tr18 is associated with that in Tr1 and Tr2 how does this system relate to the sections of ditch excavated in several trenches in Area B ? It seems that there are three possibilities :-

1) That the hilltop was surrounded by two contemporary ditches which join close to Tr1 at the west end of Area A. This would fit in with the interpretation of this part of Area A being the site of an entranceway. It is worth noting that the increase in size towards the north end of the ditch excavated in Tr18 may also be indicative of an entrance at the east end of Area A. If so then it is probably beneath the present driveway to the Old Vicarage immediately north of Tr18. It would not be too surprising if we discovered that this modern entrance followed the line of an ancient one. If the ditches are contemporary then it is possible they served to separate areas of different activity. Perhaps habitation was confined to the area within the larger ditch while the area between the two ditches was given over to specific agricultural and industrial activities.

2) Geophysical survey and excavation suggest that if the line the ditch in Area B and in Tr1 were projected they would join. However it is possible that instead of joining they run concentrically, separated by a relatively short distance. If the ditches in Area B and Area A are contemporary and if there was an entrance close to Tr1 a bi- vallate ditch system at the west end of the hill top would necessitate a more complex and elaborate arrangement.

3) It may be the case that the ditches in Area A and Area B are not contemporary. The less substantial but more extensive ditch excavated in Area B does not seem to serve a defensive function. It may represent a boundary ditch simply demarcating the settlement. The more substantial ditch system represented in trenches 1 and 18 may date from a time when security was more of an issue.

During the summer of 2003 and then in November of that year opportunities presented themselves to try and gain more information about the ditch in Tr18 and the ditch system at the west end of Area A.