

= Mellor hill fort =

Mellor hill fort is a prehistoric site in North West England , that dates from the British Iron Age ? about 800 BC to 100 AD . Situated on a hill in Mellor , Greater Manchester , on the western edge of the Peak District , the hill fort overlooks the Cheshire Plain . Although the settlement was founded during the Iron Age , evidence exists of activity on the site as far back as 8 @, @ 000 BC ; during the Bronze Age the hill may have been an area where funerary practices were performed . Artefacts such as a Bronze Age amber necklace indicate the site was high status and that its residents took part in long @-@ distance trade . The settlement was occupied into the Roman period . After the site was abandoned , probably in the 4th century , it was forgotten until its rediscovery in the 1990s .

= = Location = =

Mellor lies on the western edge of the Peak District in the Metropolitan Borough of Stockport . At grid reference SJ9820088929 , the known site of the Iron Age settlement in Mellor is partially under St Thomas Church and extends into the gardens of several nearby houses . It is on a spur about 220 metres ( 720 ft ) above sea level , between two valleys which drop steeply away and run west where the two small streams in the valleys meet the River Goyt , approximately 100 metres ( 330 ft ) above sea level . The site commands views of the Cheshire Plain and Alderley Edge to the south and the range of hills to the north . Although there are higher points locally , the site has access to a water supply and the river valleys , and there is flat land to the west which could have been used agriculturally .

= = Background = =

Until the 19th century little was known about hill forts ; none had been excavated and their original purpose had long been forgotten . In the medieval period their origin was ascribed to various iconic figures such as Julius Caesar , King Arthur , King Alfred , the Danes , and even giants . By the 18th century it was thought that hill forts were Roman in origin . Opinion changed again in the 19th century following a large scale investigation by Augustus Pitt @-@ Rivers , who concluded that hill forts were built during the Iron Age .

The study of hill forts was popular in the 19th century , with a revival in the 20th century due to excavations at Danebury . However it was not until the 1990s that the settlement at Mellor was discovered ; the site had a lack of tell @-@ tale earthworks , such as a circular ditch ( which would indicate ancient activity ) . Excavations began in 1998 where unusual marks had been noted in 1995 during a drought . Instead of the medieval ditch the marks were thought to denote , the ditch of an Iron Age hill fort was revealed . As of 2009 the excavations are ongoing . Before these excavations began , relatively little was known about the prehistory of the Stockport area before about 1 @, @ 200 BC . It was generally thought that the areas of Marple and Mellor had been mostly untouched by prehistoric human activity , including during the Romano @-@ British period . Little is known about Iron Age activity in North West England as pottery is rare on the sites excavated in the region , and there is a dearth of settlement sites . Of the more than 1 @, @ 300 hill forts found in England relatively few are in the northwest . The paucity of known sites led archaeologist Colin Haselgrove to describe the region as a " black hole " for the Iron Age . Mellor is the only hill fort in Greater Manchester , and one of four known Iron Age settlement sites in the county .

= = History = =

There is evidence of human activity on the site pre @-@ dating the Iron Age , as far back as 8 @, @ 000 ? 6 @, @ 000 BC . During this period Mellor may have been a knap site where flint tools were produced , and also may have been a seasonal camp . Over 200 lithics have been recovered and range from the early to the late Mesolithic . A high proportion of the flints are bladed tools ,

indicating that the people who produced them were hunter gatherers . Bronze Age artefacts are rare on the site , and there is no definitive indication of habitation in this period . Despite this , it is likely that the long @-@ term habitation of the site had its roots in the late Bronze Age .

A flint dagger was discovered on the site . This type of artefact is rare in Greater Manchester ; the nearest comparable site is in Saddleworth . Its presence has been taken as an indication that during the Bronze Age the site was used for funerary practices . Many of the hills near Mellor are surmounted by Bronze Age funerary monuments such as Brown Low , Shaw Cairn , and Werneth Low , supporting the possibility that Mellor was also a funerary site . Also dating from the Bronze Age and found on the site was a rare high @-@ status amber necklace . Amber does not occur naturally in Britain ? the nearest source is the Baltic . It would have been traded over long distances . The necklace was discovered as part of a 4 @,@ 000 ? year ? old burial .

The hill fort was built in and used throughout the Iron Age , as demonstrated by finds from the site which span the period . Occupants lived in roundhouses , and habitation of the site was spread over a long period . In common with many other hill forts , the site was probably divided into separate areas for habitation , industry , and agricultural activities such as storage , although the layout of these areas changed over time . Excavations indicate that the area enclosed by the inner ditch was used mainly for habitation , while the area between the inner and outer ditches was agricultural . The separation was not necessarily fixed as some of the outer area shows signs that it was used as a living space . The Roman fort of Melandra is nearby .

Fragments of glass , possibly Roman in origin , and shards of pottery which date to the 1st and 2nd centuries AD , indicate the site was used in the Romano @-@ British period . However no Roman structures have been discovered , and the nature of Roman activity at the site is a source of speculation . The position of the hilltop indicate that it was easily defended ; however , local finds indicate it was a high @-@ status settlement rather than a military outpost unless a similar feature was located nearby . One reason that Roman structures have not been identified is that the Romano @-@ British inhabitants may have used roundhouses rather than buildings of a typically rectilinear Roman style . This would make them more difficult to differentiate from Iron Age roundhouses and would imply a continuation of local culture rather than an imposition of Roman style . It is also possible that Romans simply influenced the area , rather than actively occupying the site . The site was later abandoned and forgotten until its rediscovery in the 1990s .

= = Investigation = =

With sites such as Danebury where there is no modern habitation or built environment , extensive excavations can be undertaken to establish the general layout . The modern settlement of Mellor extends over the Iron Age hill fort , which restricts archaeological investigation . A geophysical survey was performed to establish the extent of the settlement ; methods such as magnetometry and ground @-@ penetrating radar were successful in identifying the eastern and northern sections of the ditch encircling the site . Excavations have been concentrated around the Old Vicarage . By 2004 there were 43 trenches , 14 trial trenches , and 17 test pits . The investigation of the site has revealed two ditches . While the external ditch encloses a larger area , it has smaller dimensions than the internal ditch .

The chronological relation between the two ditches is uncertain . The internal ditch has been cut into the sandstone bedrock and is 4 m ( 13 ft ) wide and 2 @.@ 1 m ( 6 ft 11 in ) deep ; there was a palisade 3 @.@ 25 m ( 11 ft ) beyond the inner edge of the ditch . At some point , part of the ditch was refilled and a posthole inserted into it , possibly relating to a gateway . Artefacts recovered from the ditch indicate that the inhabitants of the site had links with salt @-@ producing communities in lowland Cheshire . The Very Coarse Pottery ( VCP ) which was used to contain the salt at Mellor is similar to fragments recovered from the Iron Age site at Beeston Castle . A layer of charcoal has been radiocarbon dated to 830 ? 190 BC . The latest deposits in the ditch include hundreds of fragments of Roman pottery dating from the 1st to 4th centuries , bronze Roman brooches , and Roman nails .

The outer ditch is 1 @.@ 5 m ( 4 ft 11 in ) wide and 1 @.@ 4 m ( 4 ft 7 in ) deep , and like the inner

ditch was cut in the local bedrock . A rare Iron Age pot was recovered from the outer ditch , with 125 shards found . The material used to make the pot originated about 15 to 20 km ( 9 to 12 mi ) away in Castleton , Derbyshire . The pot was found in one of the earliest contexts in the ditch , and dates to the Iron Age . It was probably deliberately placed at the bottom of the ditch as part of a ritual after a significant event such as digging the ditch . While the inner ditch did have a palisade , neither ditch had a bank associated with it .

The archaeological excavations that have been undertaken since 1998 are funded by Stockport Metropolitan Borough Council and grants from the Heritage Lottery Fund , and have received news coverage . The site is used as a training excavation for students and a community dig to introduce people to ancient history , with the participation of Mellor Archaeological Trust . In 2002 , students from Ridge Danyers Sixth Form College built a replica roundhouse that is still standing on the site . Many of the artefacts discovered at Mellor during the excavations are on permanent display at Stockport Museum . The site is open to the public annually , in the first week of September , so that people can view the work done over the past season of digging .