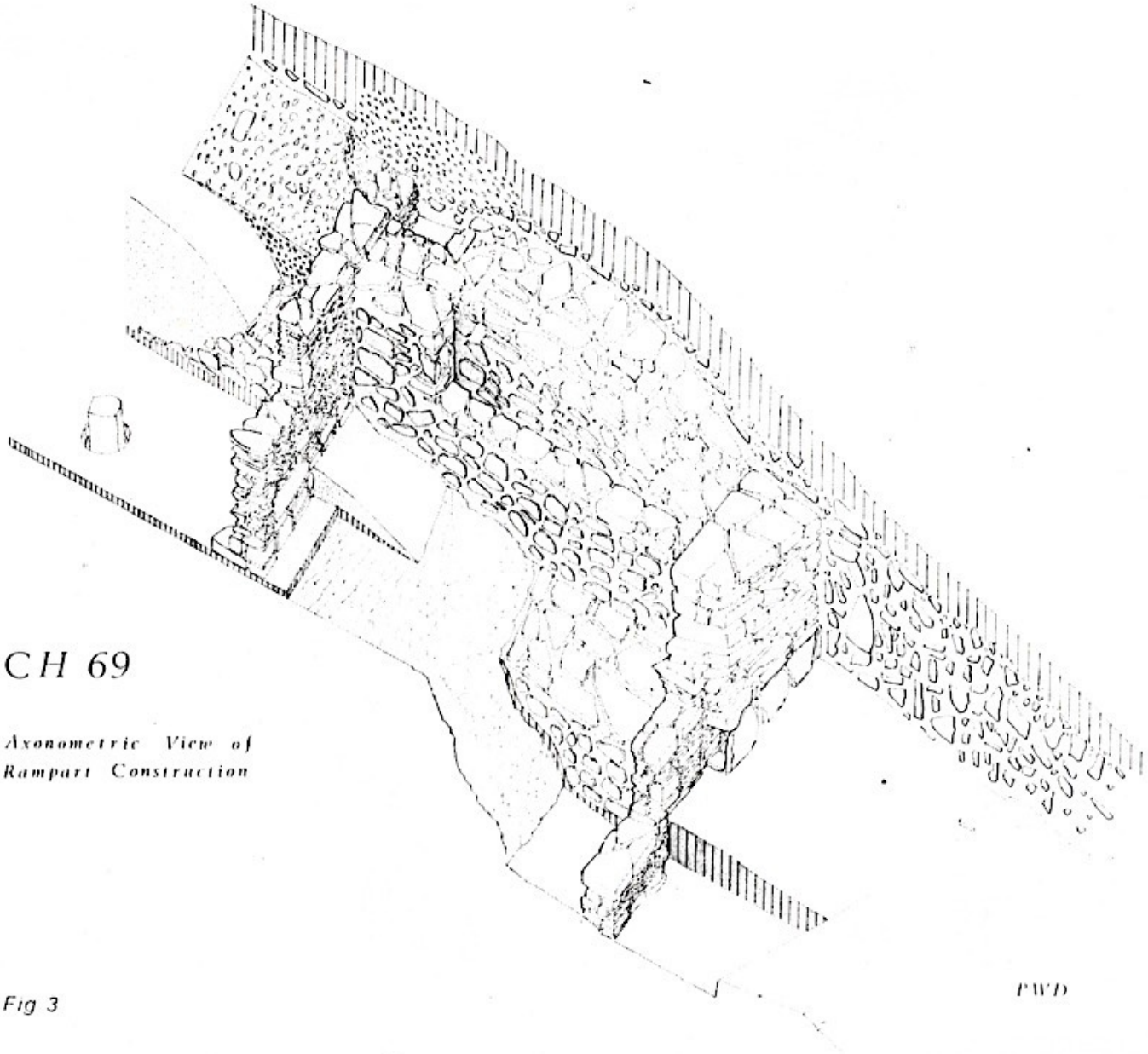

CH 69

Axonometric View of Rampart Construction

Fig 3

PWD

CRICKLEY HILL 1969

PRELIMINARY NOTES

The Iron Age hillfort on Crickley Hill, 4 miles S.W. of Cheltenham (SO 927161) was excavated for the first time between 4th July and 17th August 1969. The work was made possible by the generous support of the Gloucestershire College of Art in Cheltenham. Our thanks are due too to the owner of the land, Mr. T. Morris, and to the many people who helped with the excavations.

The hillfort consists of two ramparts about 200 metres apart, running almost Norto to South between cliff edges, cutting off the highest point of the hill from the gently sloping land to the East. The western rampart is much weathered, but the eastern one stands to about 3 metres above ground level. The entrance, which is defended by a curving hornwork, lies at the North end of this rampart; work in 1969 was confined to this area. The present notes merely put forward the chief results in advance of formal publication.

Four cuttings were opened (see Fig. 1): Cutting I lay across the rampart 18 metres to the South of the entrance passage, and Cuttings II - IV lay in a grid, behind the entrance itself. These confirmed the position of the entrance, and revealed structures of several periods and of considerable interest.

CUTTING I

This cutting (34 x 3 metres) extended from the rear of the rampart across the rampart and ditch to include the low bank which runs outside the ditch and parallel to the rampart. Excavation revealed two main phases of construction; the plan and section (Figs. 2 and 3) show the western half of the cutting as far as the ditch.

In its earliest form the rampart consisted of a front and rear wall (the lower part of wall 3 and wall 5) 550 cms. apart, filled with limestone rubble, whose highest point is now 2m. above bedrock. This was strengthened by a lacing of horizontal timbers supported by uprights, four of which were uncovered in the cutting. The uprights measured 30 - 35 cms. in diameter, and were dressed to shape, with square-cut bases resting at the bottom of postholes. The ditch in this period was 2m. deep and was separated from the rampart by a berm 175 cms. wide; the outer edge of this ditch could not be traced because of recutting.

This structure had been thoroughly burnt; the rubble core had been reduced to quicklime and slaked, presumably, by rain. Only the lowest horizontal timbers of the lacing survived the burning, as charcoal, protected by the damp subsoil on which they were lying, and perhaps by lack of oxygen at the bottom of the rampart.

The uprights reveal a progression from unburnt timber in the postholes to charcoal to a height of 50 cms. and then to hard white streaks in the slaked lime, where the fire in the rampart was hottest. Similar horizontal streaks in the upper parts of the sections, parallel to the timbers on the subsoil, may well be traces of timbers now destroyed.

First Stage of Rebuilding

After a period in which a layer of silting accumulated over the ruins of the front and rear walls, the rampart was reconstructed. A wall (Fig. 2, wall 3), still standing 2m. high, was built on the line of the earlier front wall; it incorporated the remains of the wall in its lowest courses, and re-used stones, burnt during the destruction of the rampart, were mixed with unburnt stones. The space between the top of this new wall and the remains of the old rampart was filled with a packing of small stones.

Second Stage of Rebuilding

Before the stones of this new wall (3) had weathered a further wall, wall 2, 4m. to the East, was built on the same alignment, revetting the inside edge of the ditch. The space between walls 2 and 3 was filled with a horizontal packing of unburnt stones. These stones must have been quarried after the firing of the rampart: the ditch bottom showed a clear division in cutting at its midpoint, and the smooth cutting of the eastern half resembled that of the foundation trench for wall 2. Thus the great width of the ditch (12m.) is due to recutting for material for the new rampart.

A wall (Fig. 2, wall 2a) was uncovered on a different alignment from wall 2. Surface indications make it plausible that this wall is part of the defence of the hornwork which surrounds the entrance. The wall rests on 30 cms. of earth which had been packed against the footings of wall 2. From a height of 1m. above bedrock, however, walls 2 and 2a had been bonded together; there were no indications that wall 2 had been rebuilt to produce this bond; thus wall 2a, though clearly later than the lower courses of wall 2, may have been begun during the building of wall 2, after a packing had been laid against its base.

The rear wall of the rebuilding period (wall 6) rested on silting which covered the old rear wall, wall 5. Wall 6 was very badly preserved, probably because of the slope on which it was built, and it is not possible to say whether it was constructed during the first or the second stage of rebuilding of the rampart.

The rebuilt rampart ultimately collapsed into the ditch. During this collapse part of the top of wall 2 fell bodily down a slide of fallen material and remained substantially complete, 5 courses high.

CUTTINGS II AND III

The baulk between these cuttings was removed and is thus shown in Figs. 4 and 5. Together the cuttings measured 10 x 10m., and covered the rear half of the entrance. They revealed two main periods of construction corresponding to the two periods of rampart in Cutting I.

In the earlier period the entrance was between two large postholes (6b and 10) 170 cms. in diameter and 190 cms. apart. These were separated by a shallow slot c.90 cms. broad, which was probably a sill beam. Two troughs, c. 3m. long and averaging 40 cms. deep, which ran into the fort towards two large postholes (25 and 27) may have been palisade trenches for an inturned entrance. Postholes 25 and 27 may have been gateposts for an inner gate, and the shallow postholes 26 and 28 may have held inclined braces to support them. The area between the opposing postholes had been worn in a shallow trough to a maximum depth of 15 cms. in the centre. As in Cutting I the rampart had been thoroughly burned and slaked lime had flowed into some of the postholes. Here, however, the builders of the later rampart removed the burnt ruins and cut vertical faces into the slaked lime banks, against which the later walls rested.

Two small postholes (6c and 14) were cut into the debris of the burnt rampart. They were overlain by the later walls and presumably represent a temporary refortification of the entrance during the construction of the new rampart, perhaps during the building of wall 3, in Cutting I.

In its final stage the entrance consisted of two curving bastions, that to the North having a diameter of c. 5m., and that to the South a diameter of c. 9m. The walls of both bastions still stood to a height of 1m., the rampart core about 1m. higher. The gate probably hung on a post in posthole 6a, swinging against posthole 12; the three large re-used postholes (11, 16 and 20) may have supported a bridge behind the gate. Two main layers of cobbling and some patching remained of the road surfaces in this period.

A thick layer of charcoal overlay the entrance area, and the bastion walls had been reddened by fire. Above this level of burning two areas of occupation, a small patch of debris and bones in the entrance passage and a larger area against the South bastion, may be attributed to temporary use of the ruined fort. This occupation was ended by the collapse of the upper part of the bastion walls.

In the modern period two small quarries were cut in the interior of the fort; the passage of heavy carts through the entrance, clearly marked by the tracks of their wheels, had led to considerable damage to the South West corner of the excavated area, although the tumbled stones in the entrance had protected the bastions themselves.

CUTTING IV

This cutting (7 x 4 metres) immediately to the North of Cuttings II and III revealed the rear walls of the rampart phases, and the remains of structures underlying the earlier rampart.

The pre-rampart structures may be divided into three phases. No evidence was found either of date or of function. The earliest phase consisted of four postholes (30, 31, 32 and 39) and a deep cut (29) leading to a fault in the bedrock: this was probably a drain. Subsequently the whole area, including the drain, was levelled with clean earth and small stones, and walls of two phases constructed, the earlier burnt bright red, and the later unburnt.

At the end of this last phase the later wall was demolished and a bank of earth and small stones piled in the South half of the Cutting. This formed the base of the first period of the rampart, and a rear wall of this period was uncovered, corresponding to Cutting I, wall 5. Two postholes of this period were found, 33, in line with the rear pair of postholes in Cutting I (see Fig. 2), and 13, which appeared to have contained a post which strengthened the rear wall; traces were found of a horizontal timber aligned on this posthole along the top of a demolished wall of the pre-rampart building. A badly damaged stub of wall was bonded into the West face of the rear wall; its purpose is doubtful. With the exception of an unburnt area at the South East of the Cutting, attributable to a different pattern of timber lacing so close to the entrance, the rampart construction closely paralleled that revealed in Cutting I.

The rampart was burned thoroughly, and silt spread across the remains of the rear wall. The rebuilt rear wall of the following period (corresponding to Cutting I wall 6, and to the bastions in Cuttings II/III) was of unusual design: the difference in size between the bastions has been mentioned above; the smaller, northern bastion was continued by two curving walls each with a diameter of c. 5m. These extended the rear wall to the same point as that reached by the rear of the larger southern bastion.

FINDS

A large quantity of pottery was uncovered in the layers behind the rampart in Cutting I, associated with wall 6 and thus with the second rampart period. Among this pottery was a rim with thumbed decoration along the shoulder, and a body sherd with similar decoration. There was a scatter of pottery in the ditch and in Cuttings II - IV, almost entirely consisting of coarse body sherds. A full examination of the pottery is not yet complete, but so far there are no sherds which are demonstrably later than the early date suggested by the thumbed sherds.

A crucible with pinched handle and spout was uncovered against the wall of the southern bastion, in the debris of the last, temporary occupation. Dr. Tylecote has identified this as type D 1, pinched (cf. R. F. Tylecote, Metallurgy in Archaeology, p.132).

A preliminary study of the bones has been kindly undertaken by Mr. Alan White. Most of the bones uncovered this year were those of domestic and wild pigs. Other animals represented were ox, sheep and goat, dog, and possibly Red Deer. Snails and horse bones are probably both modern.

Three small pieces of iron and a small ornament of bronze were found on the surface of the later cobbling in Cutting III.

CONCLUSIONS

The 1969 excavations were limited to a small area, and so the phasing of the site which they reveal is not likely to be exhaustive. In particular the connection between the inner and outer ramparts must remain unknown until the inner rampart is excavated in a future season. This rampart, in marked contrast

to the outer rampart, is almost invisible on the ground, and as an interim hypothesis it may be assumed that it is the earlier, and it may be contemporary with one of the three pre-rampart phases excavated in Cutting IV. These three phases may be distinguished as Period 1, phases a, b, and c, with the proviso that there is no evidence for this phasing in the other cuttings.

The building of the earlier rampart marks the beginning of Period 2, and its destruction the end. This period lasted long enough for the bedrock in the entrance passage to be worn down to a depth of 15 cms.

Period 3a corresponds to the refortification of the entrance and perhaps the building of wall 3 in Cutting I. The complete restoration of the rampart and entrance is the beginning of Period 3b; this period was sufficiently long to wear down two sets of cobbles on the road surfaces. Like Period 2, Period 3b was ended by a destruction, although burning was largely confined to the timber of the entrance; for the 3b rampart contained no structural timbers.

The site may then have been abandoned for several years, although there was no build up of humus over the destruction layer of Period 3b. The subsequent occupation (Period 4) seems to have been a temporary use of the entrance, perhaps by an itinerant metalworker, and was ended by the collapse of the bastion walls: in the entrance passage a small domestic pig seems to have been trapped by this collapse.

No further occupation was traced in any of the cuttings, other than the cart-track mentioned in the account of Cuttings II and III; large quantities of nails and other metal objects of recent date were found in the topsoil, and come, like the cart-track, from the quarry working on the hill.

PLANS FOR 1970

The second season of excavations will concentrate on the entrance and the hornwork, to investigate their construction and to test the hypothesis that the hornwork was built during the reconstruction of the rampart in period 3b, in a change from an inturned to an out-turned entrance.

The success of the excavation depends on adequate financing. We should be most grateful for any contributions to supplement the generous help from the Gloucestershire College of Art and Design. Any donations should be made out to the Crickley Hill Excavation Fund and sent to the Secretary of the Excavations, Mr. R. D. A. Savage, Gloucestershire College of Art and Design, Pittville, Cheltenham, GL52 3JG, from whom may be obtained copies of these notes, price 15p (3/-) and copies of the notes on the 1970 Crickley season, price 25p (5/-)

PHILIP DIXON

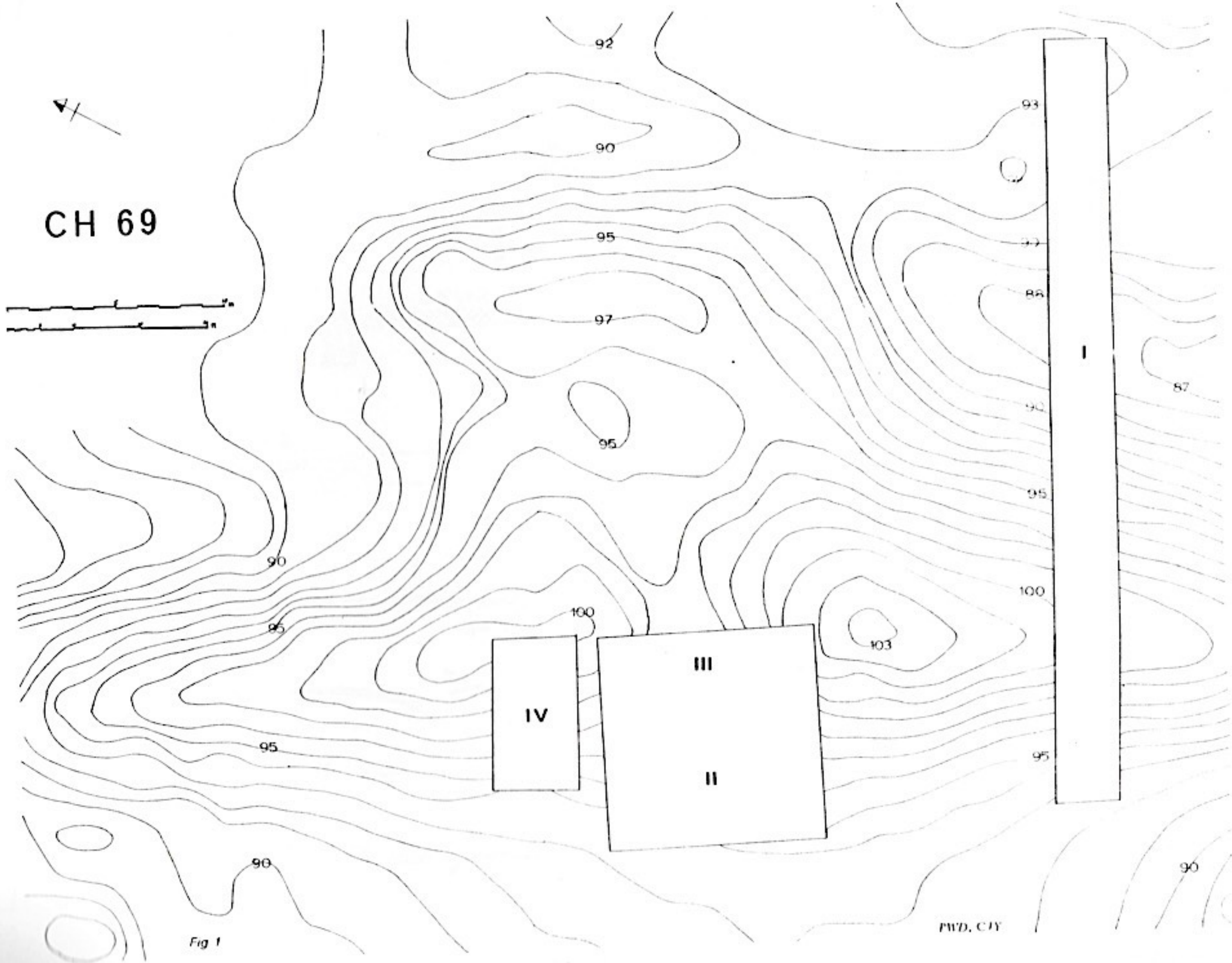

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Fig 1

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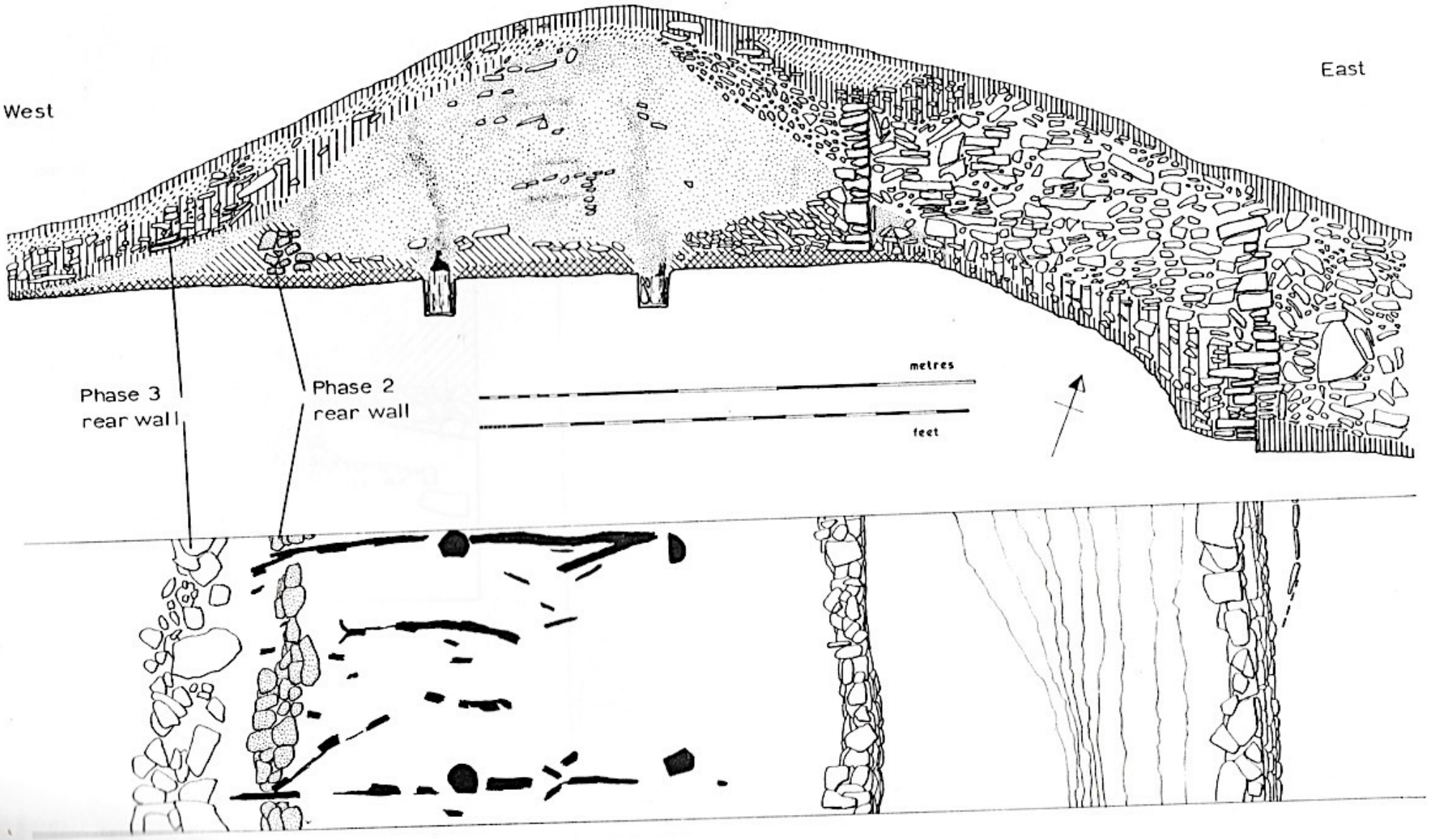
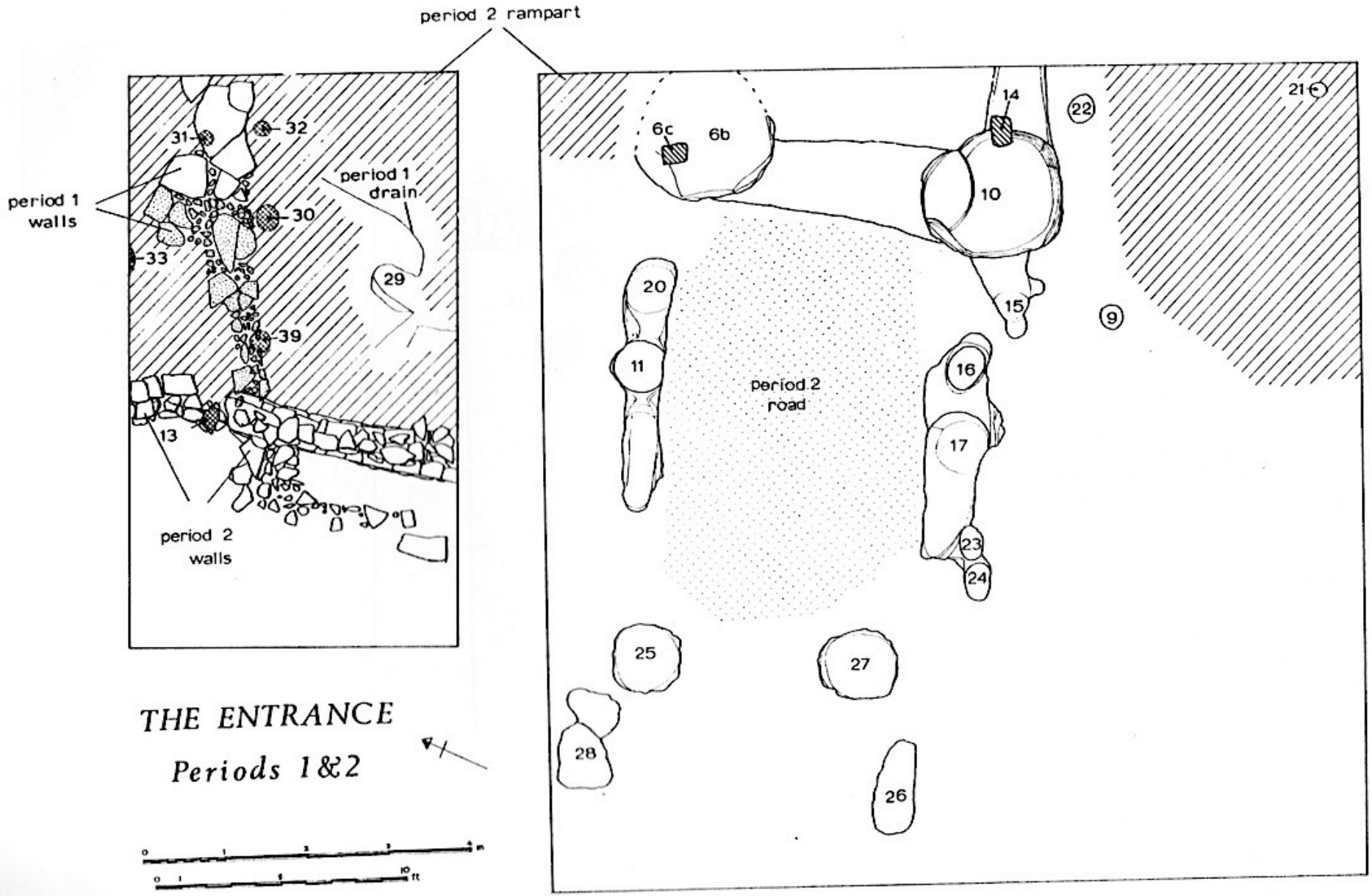


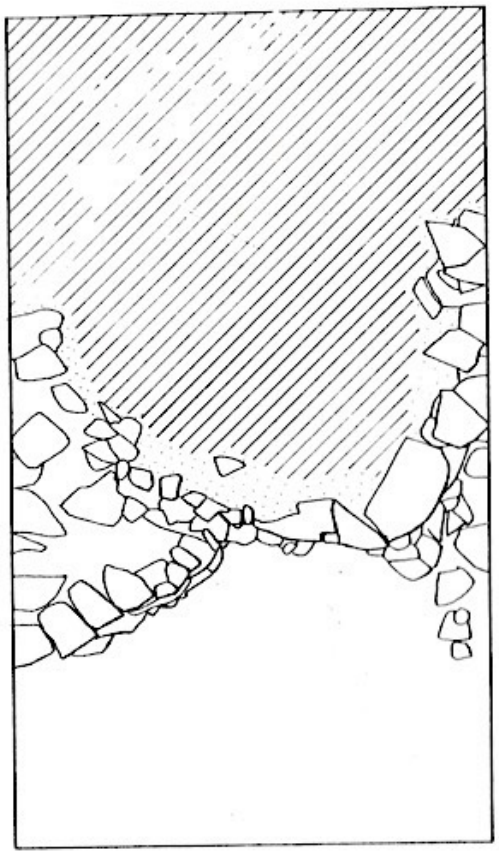
Fig 2

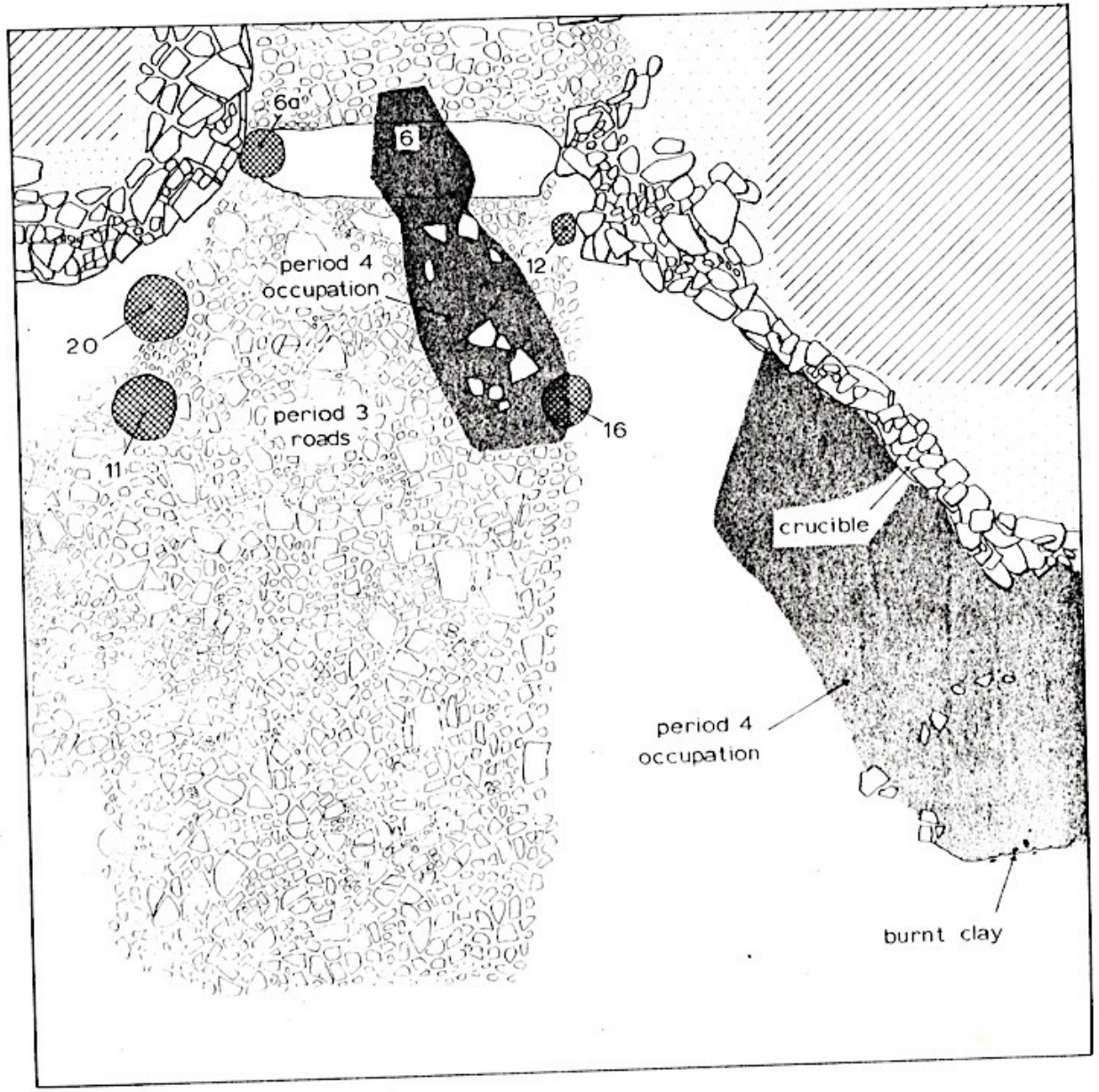


THE ENTRANCE

Periods 1&2

Fig 4





THE ENTRANCE

Periods 3 & 4

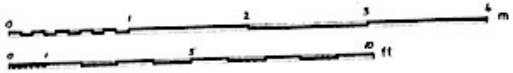


Fig 5