

CRICKLEY HILL 1986

The eighteenth season of excavations took place over a period of eight weeks between mid July and early September 1986. An average of 60 volunteers took part, supervised by eight staff. As before, the project was organised by the Crickley Hill Archaeological Trust, and assisted by the Crickley Hill Project, members of whom (supported by the MSC) are engaged in the post-excavation work. We are grateful to all who have made donations to help with the project, and in particular to the Gloucestershire County Council for their continued support.

The Final Settlements

Work in 1986 was concentrated on the extreme south-eastern end of the hillfort. Here, in 1982, we had found the traces of a settlement of small stone-walled buildings constructed from the ruins of the final Iron Age defences. Dating for this phase was ambiguous, but it was conjectured that occupation during the Post-Roman Dark Ages was very likely. The 1986 cuttings were located due North of those cleared in 1982, and included a section cut through the Iron Age bank, to cover a hollow in the rampart where surface indications suggested that an entrance had been hacked through the old bank.

The results of the 1986 work proved extremely useful. Two phases of post Iron Age occupation were identified. In the first, called Site Period 4a, at least three small hollows, with stone revetment walls on their uphill sides, had been cut into the hillside. To the North of these lay a stone-walled building measuring at least 12 metres long and 3.5 metres wide. It is possible that this formed the eastern side of an L-shaped or U-shaped structure about 16 metres square overall, traces of whose walls were found to the West of the main building. Further walling to the South of this building suggest a single-cell extension on this side. The structure had been extremely badly damaged by tramping and the reuse of its wall stones in the subsequent period, 4b: it had, therefore, no obvious function. The regularity of its arrangements suggests that it formed a small courtyard house of three sides, opening southwards. It is possible that the building was in use at the same time as the three scooped huts, none of which intruded on its area.

In the subsequent phase, 4b, further scooped hollows were cut into the hill slope, and revetted with low stone walls. The even distribution of these buildings suggests that they all formed part of a single coherent plan - a settlement of small square houses which seems from surface indications to have extended at least 40 metres westwards beyond our cuttings. The hollow way through the Iron Age rampart proved to be a rough entrance, built in this period by the partial demolition of the Iron Age bank and the filling in of its ditch. The pottery from both phases of period 4 included a few abraded sherds of Roman vessels, and quantities of tiny fragments from crude, poorly made, pots - some of them tempered with grass in their fabric. Such pottery is normally attributed to the late 4th century or later. In the 1986 season we found excellent confirmation of this in the discovery of a bronze belt-buckle of Hawkes type IVb, manufactured at the very end of the Roman period or the early years of sub Roman Britain, perhaps between c.A.D.400 and c.A.D.430. Most such buckles have been found, probably by then as antiques, in graves. The Crickley buckle is a rare example from a settlement, and particularly from a settlement which appears to have been Romano-British (and not Anglo-Saxon) in its culture.

Both phases of period 4 were ended by fire. A similar pattern has been observed in the small palisaded enclosure excavated between 1983 and 1985 at the western tip of the hill. The grass-tempered ware and the late Roman grey ware of the palisaded enclosure resembles that found in the 1986 cuttings; there is thus some probability that the two settlement foci were in occupation at the same time, and that both together suffered the same fate at the end of phases 4a and 4b. No imported wares, of the types found in other southwestern sub Roman enclosures, have so far been identified at Crickley. Though the absence of such ware is not decisive (for Crickley lies at the eastern end of the normal distribution of this imported pottery), it is a working hypothesis that the end of phase 4b lay before the arrival of imports, perhaps in the final years of the 5th century. It seems likely that the palisaded enclosure was the residence of a local notable: the settlement of huts at the rear of the old Iron Age bank may have been occupied by followers or attendants, and the destructions the result of some unrecorded internecine struggle between the political leaders in the years after the overthrow of central Roman administration in A.D.407.

The Iron Age Occupation

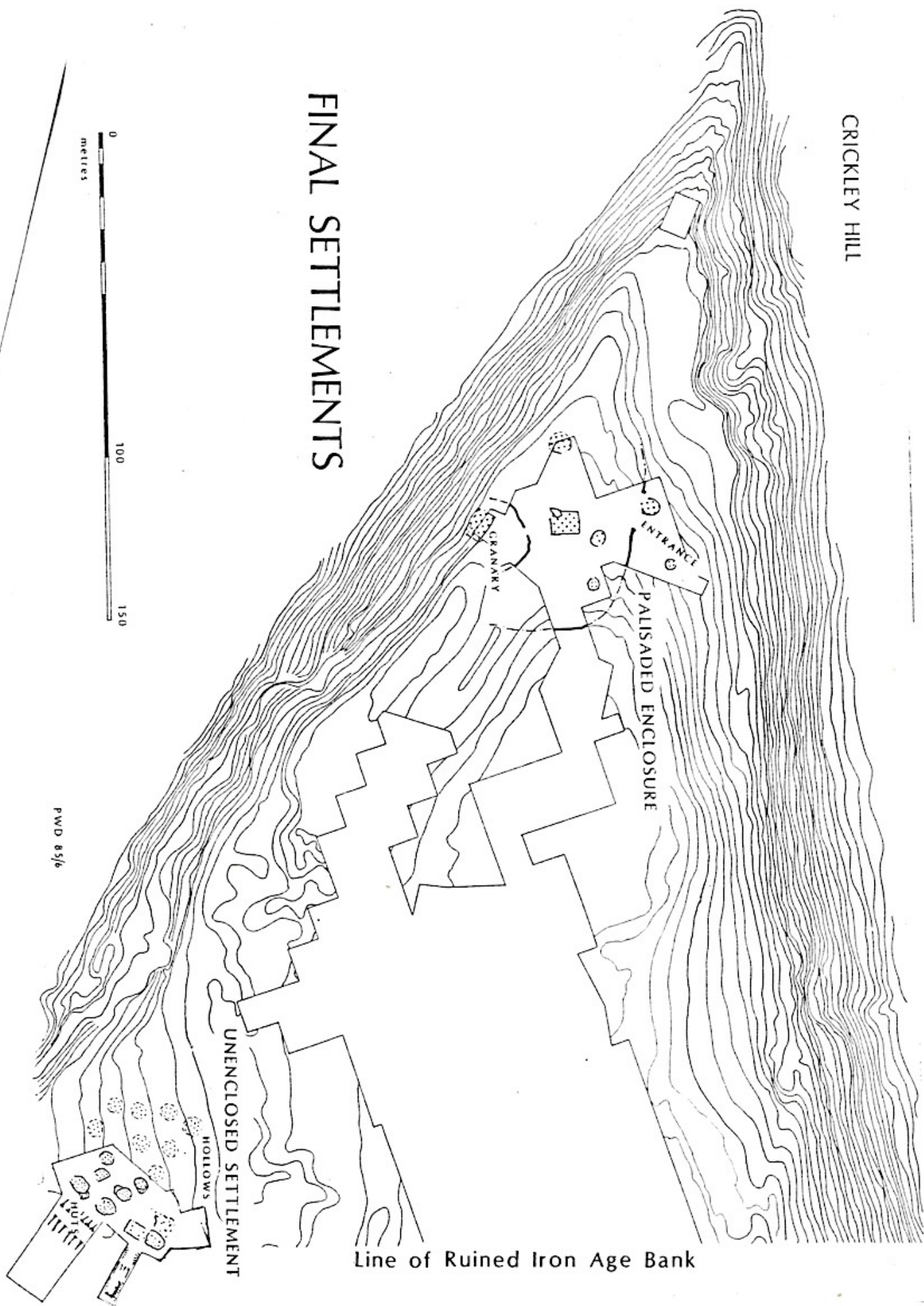
Below the levels of sub Roman occupation we found the fragmentary remains of several Iron Age buildings, in some cases badly damaged by the scoops of the Period 4 huts. The earliest of these were two square post-hole built structures aligned with and set close to the rear of the rampart. These belonged to our Period 2, the first Iron Age fort. They may have been towers or look-out platforms, overlooking the rampart. Similar structures were found in 1973 close to the Period 2 entrance, one, significantly enough, associated with a hoard of some 300 sling stones. The northernmost of the two in the 1982/6 area was surrounded by fragments of human bones and teeth. These may have been the result of the attack which ended the Period 2 occupation, but it is conceivable that a function of the rampart-edge 4-posters was as exposure platforms for the dead. Further from the rampart lay a large rectangular building. Elsewhere on the site such structures have been shown to belong to Period 2. The 1986 building, however, differed in the spacing of its posts and its general arrangement. Its stratification, too, seemed high in the sequence, and it is therefore quite likely that this was a rectangular structure of the roundhouse phase, Period 3.

The 1986 excavations have completed investigation of the sub Roman settlements for the time being. In 1987 we plan to resume our work beside the Neolithic roadways and houses first exposed in 1976. The season is expected to run between 9 July and 13 August 1987.

Philip Dixon

CRICKLEY HILL

FINAL SETTLEMENTS



P.W.D. 85/6

Line of Ruined Iron Age Bank

DARK AGE

Phases 4a and 4b

