



Archaeological Investigations at Claydon Pike, Fairford/Lechlade
An Interim Report
1979-82

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FIGURES IN A LANDSCAPE

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Fairford/Lechlade Gloucestershire
Interim Report 1979-81

Summary

In 1979 the Oxford Archaeological Unit began investigation of an 80ha complex of cropmarks, earthworks and relict watercourses at Claydon Pike, between Lechlade and Fairford in Gloucestershire. The area on the first gravel terrace near the confluence of the river Coln and the Thames includes a variety of late prehistoric and Romano-British settlements, their fields, roads and trackways. This interim report describes the results of two years of interdisciplinary studies involving aerial photography, geophysical survey, phosphate analysis, excavation and biological analyses.

Acknowledgments

We are grateful to the owners of the site Coln Gravel Ltd for their cooperation and also to their associates Amey Roadstone Corporation for their help, both financial and with equipment. We would also like to thank local farmers for their advice and for allowing access to their land for fieldwalking, particularly Vincent Gammond, George Mawle and Leslie Hicks.

The project is grant-aided by the Department of the Environment and we are grateful to our DoE Inspector Tony Fleming and to Geoffrey Wainwright for their continuing support. Much of our labour force has been provided by schemes organised by the Manpower Services Commission and also by soldiers from the Light Infantry Depot, Shrewsbury where Dr John Stead has been particularly helpful. A large scale archaeological investigation is first and foremost a team effort. All our colleagues in the Oxford Archaeological Unit have contributed to the Claydon Pike work and the Upper Thames Iron Age and Romano-British project of which it forms a part. We would like to thank our many volunteers and also: Tom Hassall (Director OAU), Jocelyn le Petit (Secretary, OAU), David Viner (Director, Corinium Museum), John Hampden and the staff of the National Monuments Record (aerial photos and plotting), Mark Robinson (waterlogged samples), Martin Jones and Anne James (carbonised plant samples), Bob Wilson (animal bones), Judith Russen and Gwynne Oakley (finds), Alan Hardy, Peter Rooke and Chris Storey (Site supervisors), Phil Page (Computing) Wendy Page (draughtsperson), Richard Chambers (surveying), Geoff Mees (phosphates), Marylee Parrot (conservation), Elaine Morris (Iron Age ceramics), Kathy King and Daphne Nash (coins), Richard Macphail (soils).

The Nature of the Site

The Claydon Pike cropmark complex (SU 190996) is the largest group of archaeological sites currently being removed by gravel extraction in the Thames Valley. The sites straddle the first gravel terrace near to the confluence of the Coln and Thames, 3 km west of Lechlade and 18km east of Cirencester (Roman Corinium) (Fig 1).

1. with overlay
 2. in red, overlay
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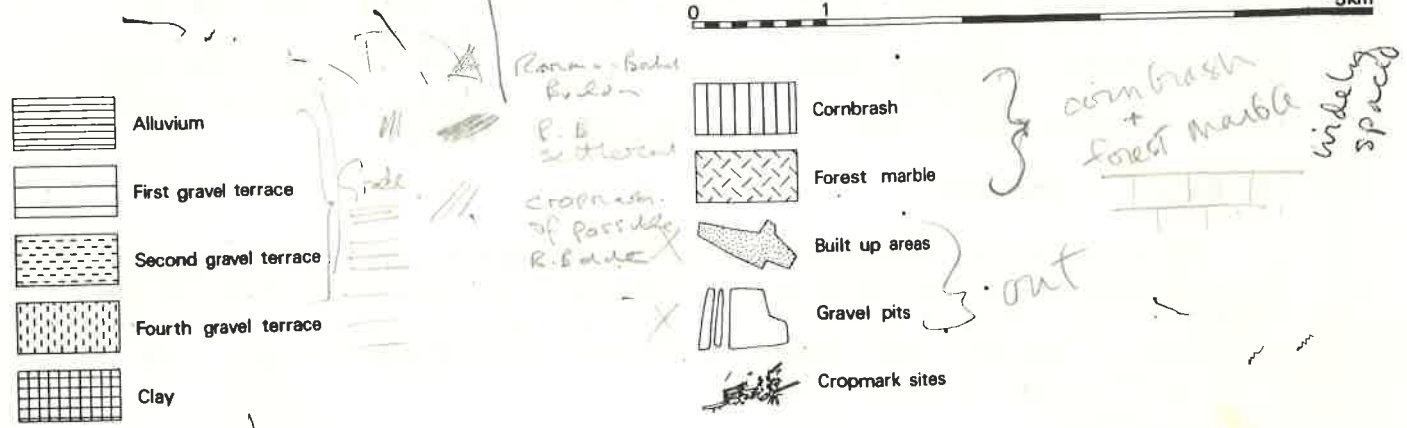
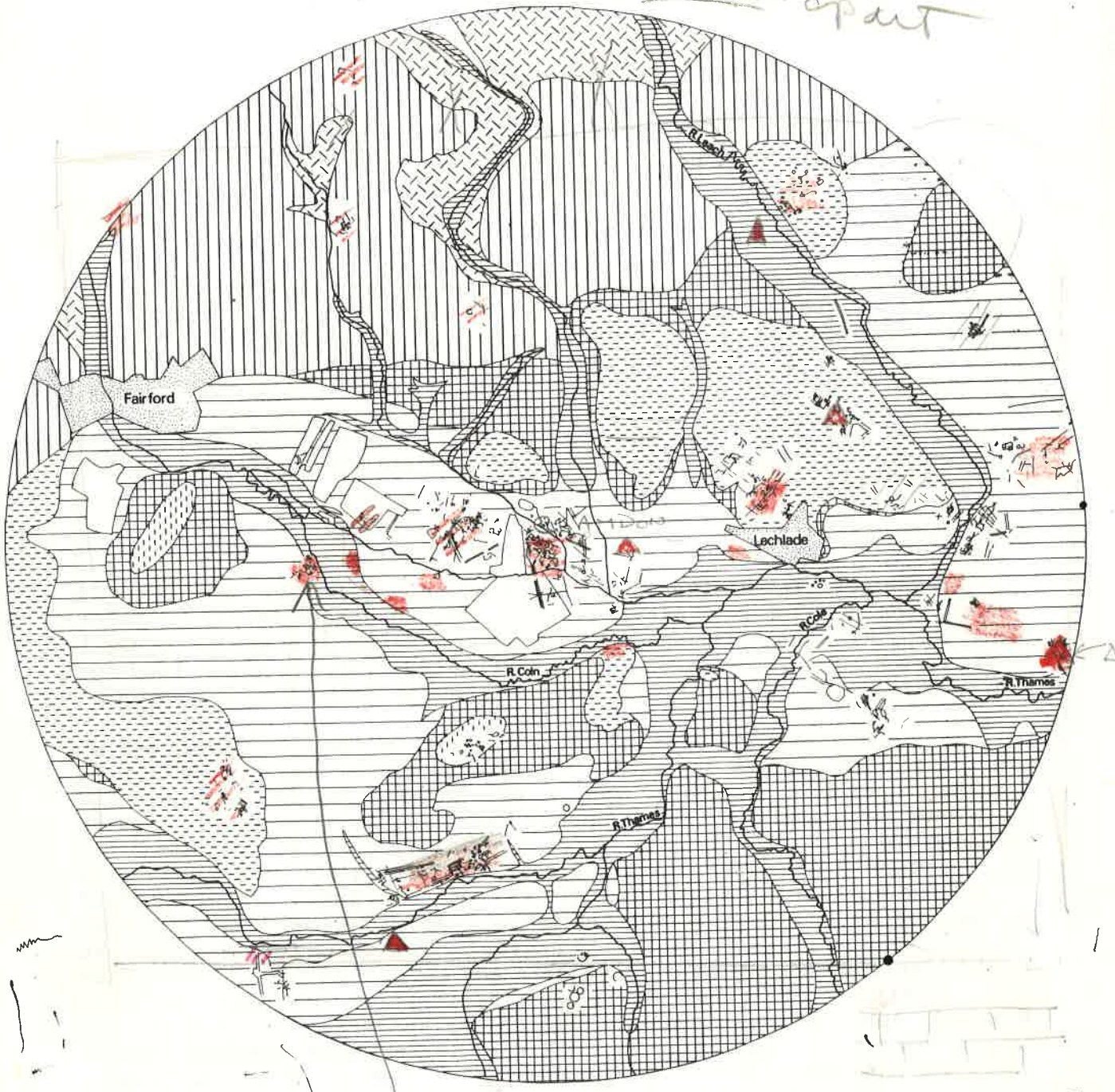


Fig 1 The Claydon Pike site in its geographical setting

The narrow gravel terrace was densely occupied in late prehistoric and Roman times. The terrace was dissected by water courses and marshy areas but the islands and tongues of gravel provided well drained sites for settlement. On the terrace and floodplain to the south were rich areas of valuable pasture. North, beyond a band of clay, the land rises to the cornbrash slopes of the Cotswolds.

CROPMARKS (Fig 2) The Claydon Pike sites were first discovered by aerial survey in 1957. Since then the Cambridge Committee for Aerial Photography and the National Monuments Record Air Photo Division have photographed the site on a number of occasions. These photographs also monitor changes in modern land use. With efficient drainage and more intensive ploughing the pattern of cropmarks has emerged with increasing clarity, culminating in the excellent pictures of the long hot summer of 1976.

The cropmarks indicate three principal settlement groups:

1. In the east scatters of small oval enclosures sitting on 'islands' of gravel defined by relict marsh areas. Linear features indicate superimposed systems of fields, tracks and roads in this area.
2. A nucleated settlement of the Romano-British period of about 4ha, the focal point of roads from the north, west and south. Lanes branching from the main trackway define platforms which are clearly visible on the ground and covered with stone, Romano-British pottery and tile. This settlement is bounded by streams and marsh.
3. A 'native' settlement of dispersed cellular enclosures covering about 30 ha. to the west of 2, possibly linked to the Romanised settlement by trackways.

LAND USE HISTORY Documentary evidence indicates that the area was mainly pastoral in the medieval and post medieval period. Two farms were established close by in the seventeenth century but ploughing only began on the Romano-British settlement in the late 1950's and ceased in 1979.

Objectives

Since 1974 the Oxford Archaeological Unit has been carrying out a regional study of late prehistoric and early historic settlement in the Upper Thames basin. Emphasis has been placed on defining and investigating the whole shifting range of settlement types and their social and economic inter-relationships within the context of rescue archaeology. Areas are chosen for detailed investigation on the basis of two major factors.

1. The potential contribution to the overall regional research programme.
2. The quality of the surviving evidence.

The Claydon Pike complex fits these criteria extremely well as it includes a range of settlement types likely to reflect chronological, social and economic variation. These settlement types are all common in the Thames Valley but have never before been subjected to detailed investigation. No others are known to survive in such a relatively good

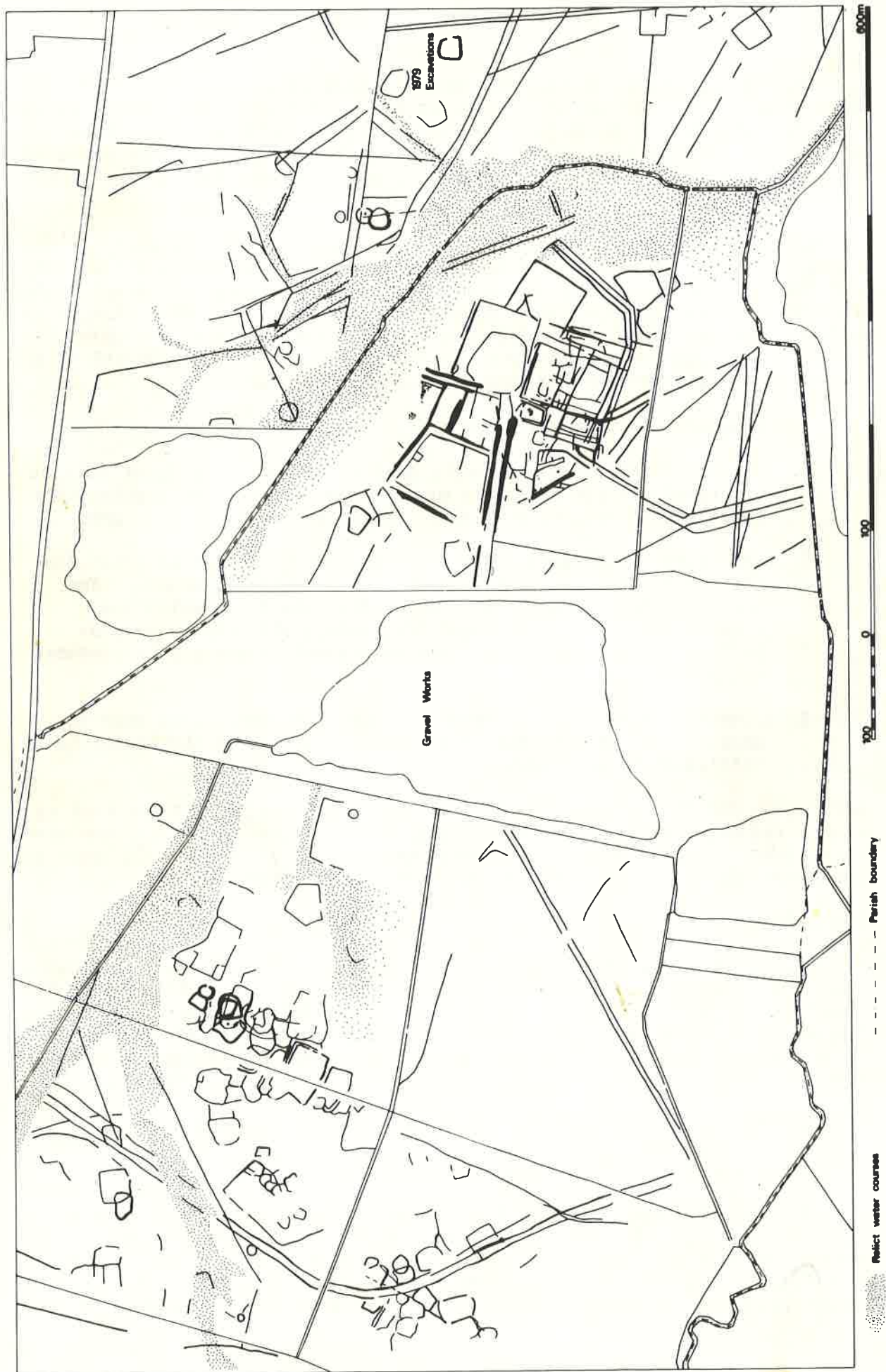


Fig 2 Cropmarks at Claydon Pike Lechlade

state of preservation and with extensive waterlogging. The settlements are linked by watercourses as well as defined by them and some are also linked to each other by the road system. The area not only offers the possibility of studying the development of a range of complete settlement nuclei but also the land around them in which field systems survive.

Claydon Pike is in a particularly interesting area at the junction of two river valleys and two settlement systems. In the Roman period the Coln Valley in the Cotswolds was dominated by villa estates and the Thames Valley by native communities. The pre Roman Iron Age also shows a contrast in Cotswold/Thames Valley settlement types. The social and economic reasons behind these differences have scarcely been investigated. The late Iron Age saw great changes in the Celtic communities of the Upper Thames region: agricultural improvements, the growth of international trade, new settlement types, and population growth are all apparent. The Roman Conquest appears to follow on this period of change rather than initiating it. The Claydon Pike area offers the opportunity to investigate in detail, at the local scale, the implications of transformation in Celtic society, the effects of Romanisation and the extent of its ultimate failure.

Methods

The aim of the project to examine the whole area of land use at Claydon Pike with a minimum of bias and the maximum range of interdisciplinary techniques. Data are being recovered so that results are comparable not only across this site but with other sites in the region and beyond.

Pre-excavation work includes detailed examination and plotting of aerial photographs, large scale contour survey, examination of surface scatters of artefacts, phosphate analysis and geophysical survey. Selective trial trenching was carried out in 1979 before embarking on larger scale work in order to examine questions such as the extent of waterlogging, the survival of structures and the chronological range of cropmark complexes.

Excavation

A variety of tactics have been adopted including:

1. Small-scale selective excavation of particular features and intersections of cropmark complexes.
2. Larger scale excavation of selected activity areas. In both 1 and 2 random sampling procedures are carried out to minimise digging but to enable the distribution of material - bones, pottery, plants etc to be studied over the whole area.
3. Random trenching to minimise bias in 1 and 2.
4. Topsoil stripping and salvage excavation of the whole area not covered by 1-3.
5. Coarse water sieving is carried out on site as a control on artefact recovery rates. Finer sieving is done in laboratory conditions.
6. All artefacts are plotted to a maximum of 5m squares on a site grid tied into the National Grid.

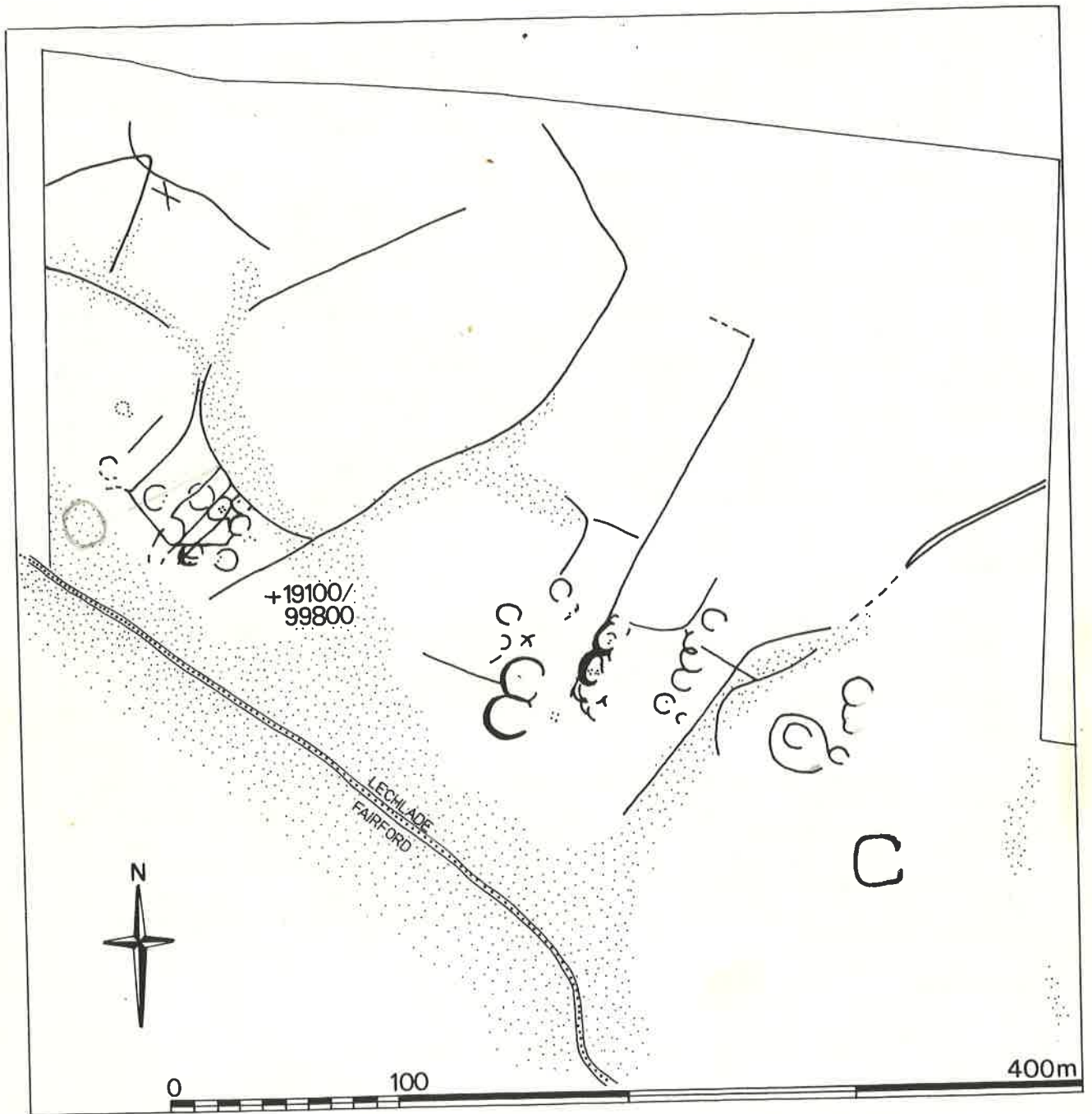


Fig 3 The middle Iron Age settlements and fields at Claydon Pike

Results

THE MIDDLE IRON AGE (Fig 3)

Three gravel 'islands' were investigated in the eastern part of the site (Lechlade parish) on each of which there were clusters of round-houses associated with linear drainage ditches and field ditches. Altogether these covered about 15ha. Radiocarbon dates have not yet been obtained but the ceramic evidence indicates a period of occupation in the 4-2 centuries BC.

Enclosure 1 was slightly isolated from the other Middle Iron Age features and to the south-east. This was four sided and irregular in shape 25m by 22m with a eastern entrance 3m wide. The entrance was marked by two lines of limestone packed post-holes. The enclosure ditch was 3m wide and 1m deep. A ten percent random sample of the ditch was excavated in addition to the terminals. Very little cultural material was found in or around Enclosure 1. Low phosphate levels were recorded inside the enclosure but were high outside it on the lee side to the east. A provisional interpretation is that the interior of Enclosure 1 was used as a stacking area for hay.

HOUSES: Approximately twenty four round house sites have been excavated but several of these were re-used as many as four times. Not all of the houses were in use at any one time (see for example Fig 4) and even the two large clusters of nine or ten buildings in reality probably represent contemporary groups of two to four.

The standard round house was sited inside a circular drainage gully c.10m in diameter with an entrance to the south-east, away from the prevailing wind. The concentration of debris - pottery, animal bones and burnt limestone fragments was noticeably heavy in the ditch terminals. A pair of stone packed post-holes c.2m apart indicated the doorway, in some cases with traces of a porch. In two examples a house was represented by these entrance posts only. In one house the faint line of a stake-built wall was traced, forming a circle 8m in diameter - the commonest size for the Iron Age round houses at Claydon Pike. Inside each house was usually a clay-lined pit full of burnt stones - possibly a cooking or parching hole or a water tank. One house had a clay lined hearth.

Most houses seemed to be single units but one pair stood facing each other (Fig 4). The southerly house had a north-western entrance facing directly into the entrance of a second house 5m away.

The most northerly house on the western 'island' (Fig 4) was of a different construction to the rest. It consisted of a circle (6.5m diameter) of post-holes and a projecting pair of door posts. An outer wall line was not traceable but could have formed a hut of 8.5m in diameter.

LANDSCAPE AND ECONOMY: The biological evidence from the site reflects an open landscape dominated by pasture. The cold flora and fauna in the peat deposits indicate that they were laid down in the last glaciation. The gravel terrace was drained and enclosed with ditched fields about 300 BC. The fields were predominantly used as pasture for cattle and sheep. Weaving was indicated by clay loom weights found in several round houses.

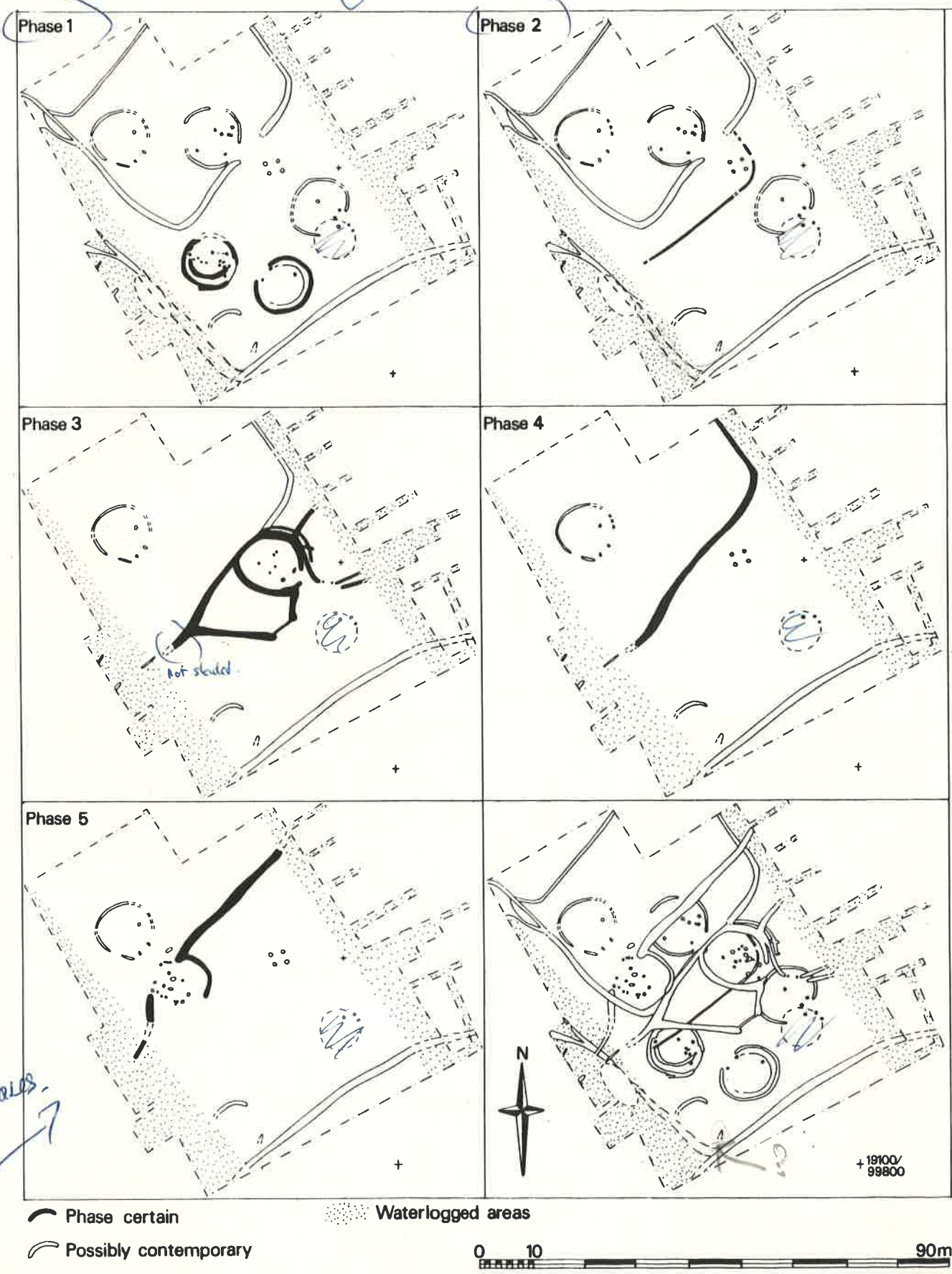
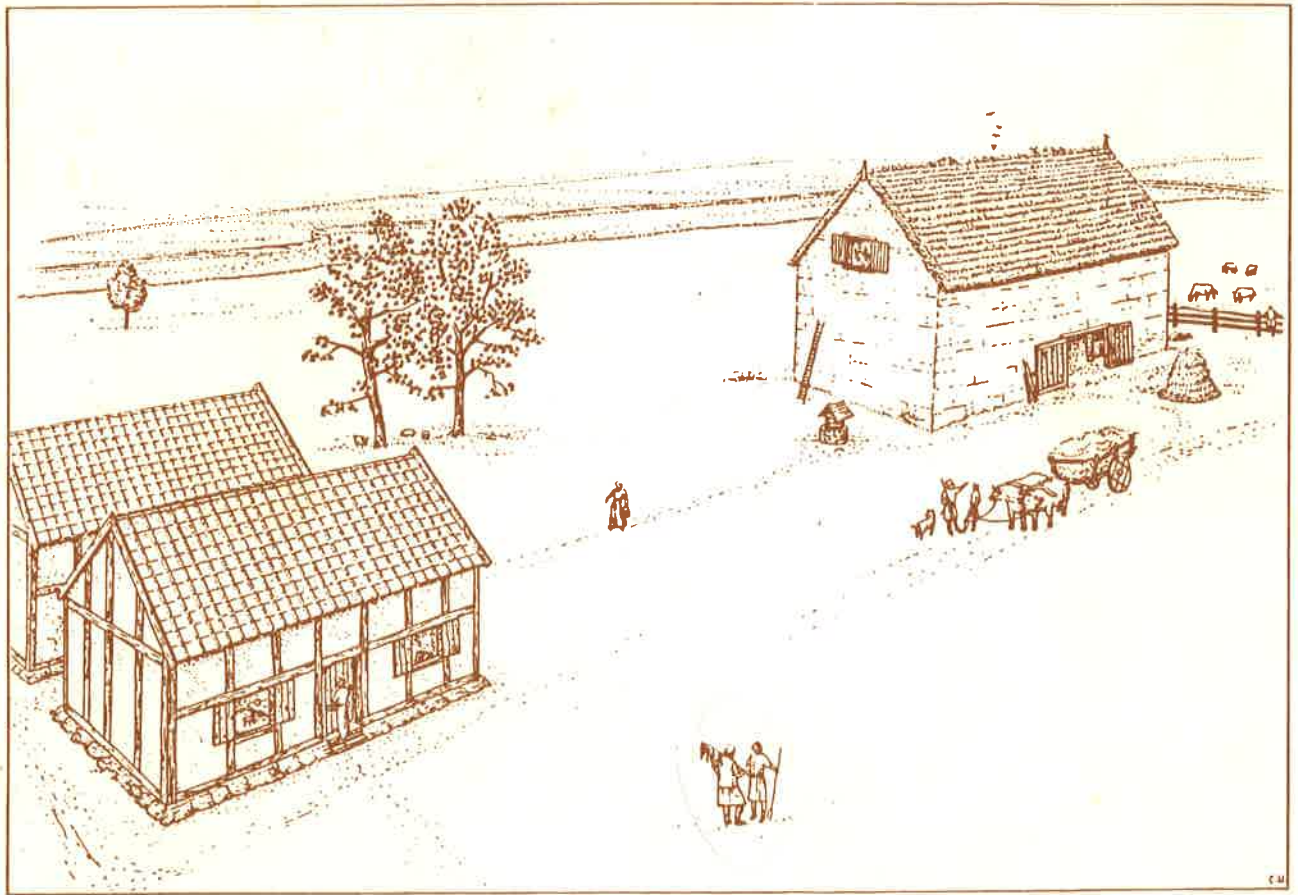
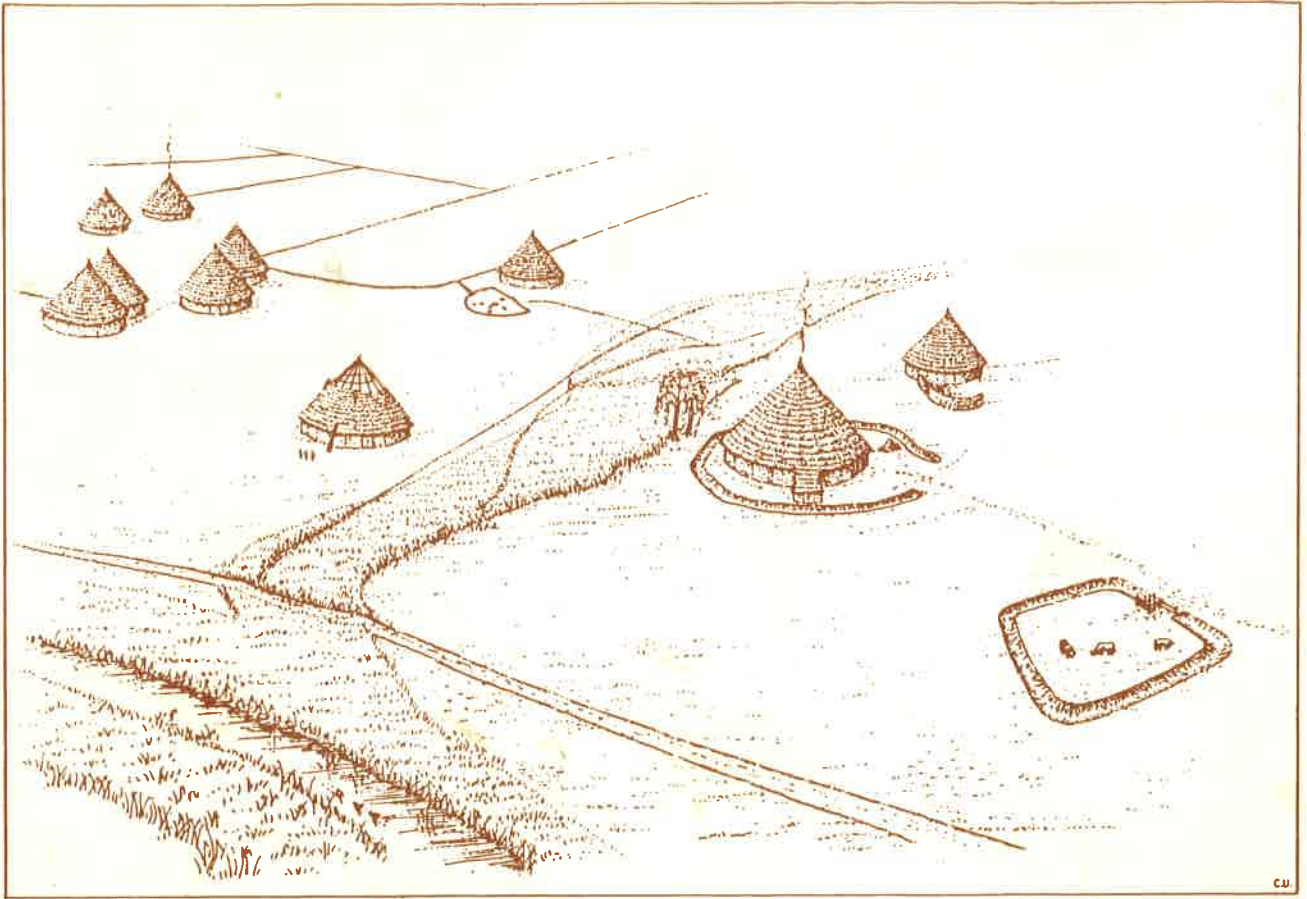
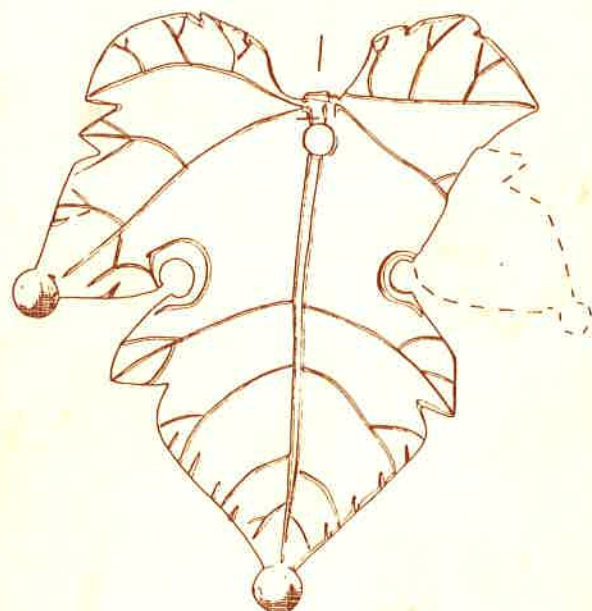


Fig 4 Phase plan of the middle Iron Age settlement on the western 'island' at Claydon Pike



Reconstruction Reconstruction drawings of part of the middle Iron Age settlements at Claydon Pike (top) and part of the Romano-British settlement (below)



A bronze vine leaf found
at Claydon Pike probably
a decorative insignia from
a suit of military armour