

FINAL INTERIM REPORT ON EXCAVATIONS IN
THE IRON AGE HILL-FORT AND ROMANO-BRITISH
IRON-WORKING SETTLEMENT AT
GARDEN HILL, HARTFIELD, EAST SUSSEX

1. INTRODUCTION

The eleventh and final interim report, which deals only with the summary of the 1982 excavations, has been compiled primarily for the information of the subscribers to the 1982 excavation fund, to whom we are deeply grateful for enabling us to complete the work at Garden Hill; and of the staff and volunteers who carried the work to its conclusion. Copies are also being sent to those who enabled us to run a successful camp for the volunteers; to those who provided specialist services; and to others who usually receive our interim reports.

2 SUMMARY OF DISCOVERIES IN 1982

During the eleventh season, lasting for four weeks in August, a workforce of between 30 and 40 a day, under a supervisor and site assistants, and supported by a finds/ conservation assistant, carried out the excavation programme, made detailed plans of the features and processed the portable finds. Most of the workforce lived in camp, where they were accommodated and fed free of charge. Reference is made to the gridded plans (Figs. 2 and 3) throughout the following account of the discoveries; the hill-fort as a whole is shown in Fig. 1.

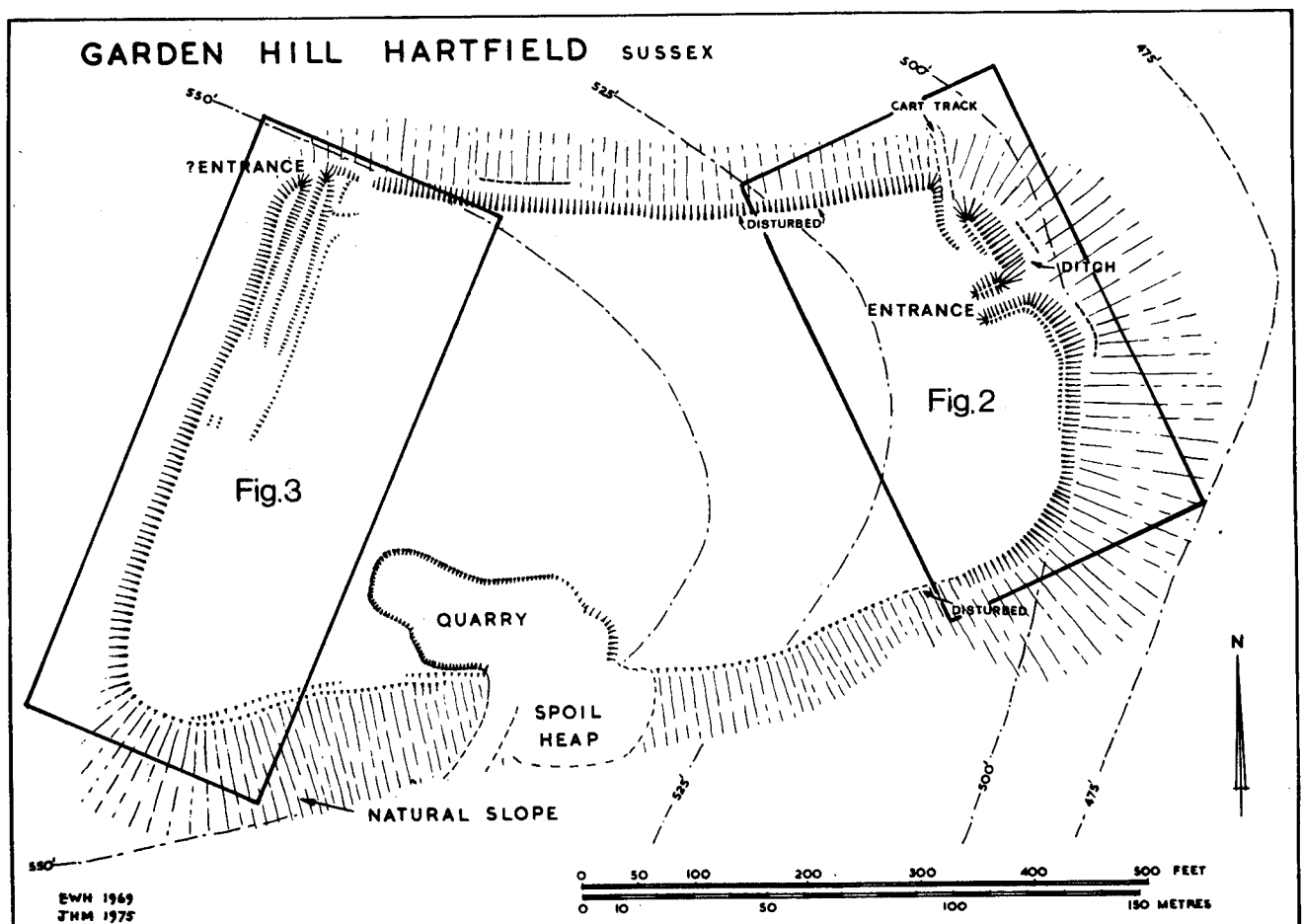
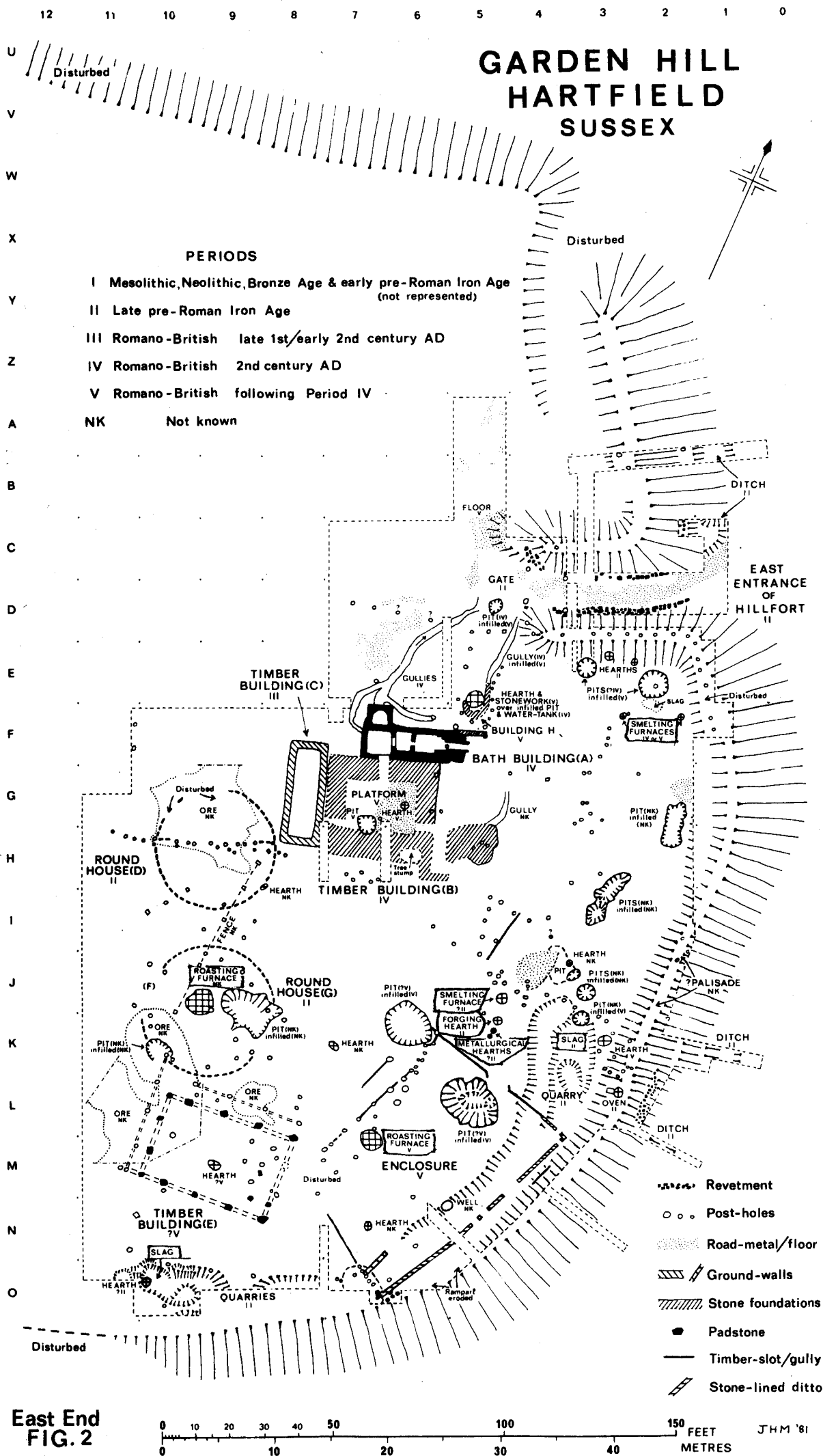


FIG. 1. General plan of Iron Age hill-fort on Garden Hill.



a) EAST END (Fig. 2)

Work was completed on the levels below the platform of Building B (G6/G7/H6/H7), and a thorough search made for postholes which had been cut into the natural subsoil.

The following conclusions were reached:

- (i) The existence of a round-house (the third at Garden Hill) under the western half of Building B was established. The remainder of the round-house lies to the west of Building B; undetected during earlier seasons, the postholes on its western half remain unexcavated.
- (ii) The sill-walls of a period III rectilinear structure were found under the platform, running at right angles and obviously related to Building C. There were also various short alignments of postholes, which at first sight seem to represent other related structures; these have been planned but not yet studied in detail. These structures as a whole probably represent a simple timber villa, with internal partitions.
- (iii) The outer side of the south wall of the bath-house (Building A) was found to be faced with roughly dressed stones and was probably free-standing, unless it constituted one side of the associated living-quarters. It was certainly not bonded into the platform of Building B. Later examination of portable finds from the period III levels showed the presence of tile- and since tile has only been found in connection with the bath, it seems likely that the bath was an adjunct to the period III villa; continued through period IV; and was demolished, as already known, at the beginning of period V.
- (iv) The so-called "hearth" in G6, having been fully excavated, is now shown to be a mixture of broken tile, roasted ore and clay both burnt and unburnt - all gathered from elsewhere as material for composing this part of the platform; there was no sign of significant in situ burning.

b) WEST END (Fig. 3)

- (i) Occupation areas
095/485-495 (A)

Our aims were firstly, to define the southern limit of flint scatter and secondly, to remove a section of the rampart in the hope of finding remains of earlier occupation.

Very few flints were found in the two squares immediately behind the rampart. These could be accounted for by hillwash and there is, therefore, no change in the picture of flint concentration already presented.

The rampart consisted mainly of yellow clay mixed with medium-sized fragments of sandstone; its top was mixed with brown hillwash. There was no sign of a clearly defined old land-surface under it - all that was found was an intermittent layer of sandy brown soil on top of the natural clay and sandstone.

Behind the rampart there was the usual quarry. In the upper part of the fill of the quarry was a straight-sided timber-slot/gully of uncertain age and purpose, but possibly representing a post-medieval field boundary.

095/500-515 & 100/505-510

The excavation of this area down to natural, begun in 1981, was completed; a few more flints were found.

The hearth in the SE corner was excavated. It consisted of burnt stones set in the natural; the soil under the stones was reddened either by leaching or direct heating.

The pit in the NW corner was also excavated. It was found to have been deliberately infilled and contained three nondescript pieces of flint. Its age and purpose are unknown.

085-095/520-525 (B)

Trenches were excavated on either side of the area where a concentration of flints was found in 1980/1. The purpose was to define the eastern and western limits of the concentration.

On the outer edge of the western trench a small artificial depression was found - probably part of a rampart quarry. The flint-scatter continued for some way, but stopped short of where the depression began.

In the eastern trench, immediately under the humus, were two lines of stakeholes, which probably held a wattle fence, perhaps of a temporary shelter, or enclosure for cattle, the date is unknown. At a lower level there were several rectangular postholes, showing as dark grey patches against the yellow subsoil. They appear to form a rectilinear structure, aligned roughly N - S; there was no associated dating material.

Most of the flints were on the west side of the trench, and the scatter diminished to the north and east.

110/545 (G)

The anomaly detected by fluxgate gradiometer turned out to be a shallow stone- and clay-lined pit, oval in shape, which contained charcoal, a few pieces of slag, roasted ore and, at the top, pieces of sandstone. The sides of the hearth were only lightly burnt, and it cannot have been a smelting site. The presence of roasted ore suggests a roasting-hearth. Dr. R.F. Tylecote considers that the presence of a few pieces of slag at the bottom, above the charcoal, was caused by temporary ~~ova~~-heating during the roasting process.

105-110/570-575 (E)

The anomaly was an open roasting-hearth of irregular shape; there was another small, superficial, hearth to the north of it. Most of the excavated area contained pits of irregular size and shape, which had been dug in order to extract iron ore; when exhausted the pits were infilled with a mixture of soil, pieces of sandstone and gangue. On the south side of the excavated area there was a layer of natural ore still in situ. Small areas of burning on the surface of the natural outcrop may indicate that fires were used to crack the ore before quarrying.

This ore is not the clay ironstone found in outcrops of the Wadhurst Clay and commonly used in Wealden iron-working, but a thin layer of iron-pan developed on joint-surfaces and bedding-planes in the Ashdown Beds sandstones. This iron-pan was identified by Dr. E.R. Shephard-Thorn as limonite, which is an hydrated oxide of iron. This important site, with evidence of mining and natural iron-pan in situ, resolves the problems of pits, dumps of ore and gangue which were widespread in the Romano-British settlement at the east end of Garden Hill, and indicate that limonite was the ore mainly, if not exclusively, used at Garden Hill.

The iron-pan from this site was no doubt roasted in the hearth of Site G, 20m to the south. The process of roasting was designed to drive off water and produce a ferric oxide suitable for the smelting process.

100-105/630-635 (F)

21 The anomaly was a bowl-shaped hearth filled with black soil and charcoal. Archaeomagnetic tests give it a date of either A.D. 1260 or 1480. It cannot, therefore, be associated with the defence of the hill-fort, although two pieces of late Iron Age pottery were found near it.

(ii) Western defences

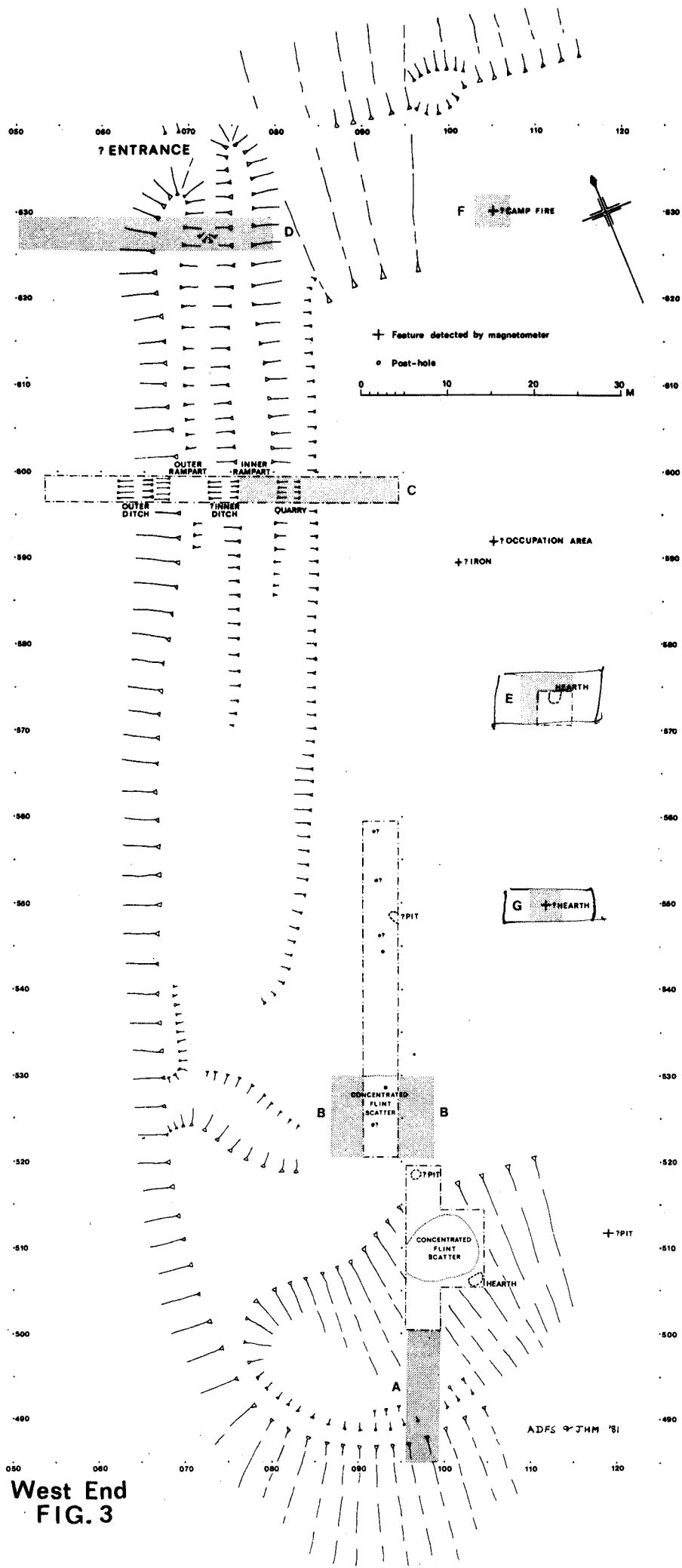
055-090/595 (C)

Work on the removal of soil behind and under the "inner rampart", which is now known to be a bank of 17th century or later, was completed. Nothing of interest was found.

Final work was done on the revetment of the outer, Iron Age, rampart. The footings of the revetment were set firmly in the old land surface, just behind where the surface was cut by the outer ditch. Below the level of the stones there were a few postholes in the top of the natural, which may be evidence of timber-lacing in the revetment. There was no berm.

The ditch itself was re-examined and was found to be broader and deeper than had seemed in 1981. Its inner side was defined satisfactorily, but its outer side has not yet been established with certainty. There is tentative evidence for a counterscarp bank beyond the ditch.

There were nine pieces of what looks like late Iron Age pottery from various points of the section.



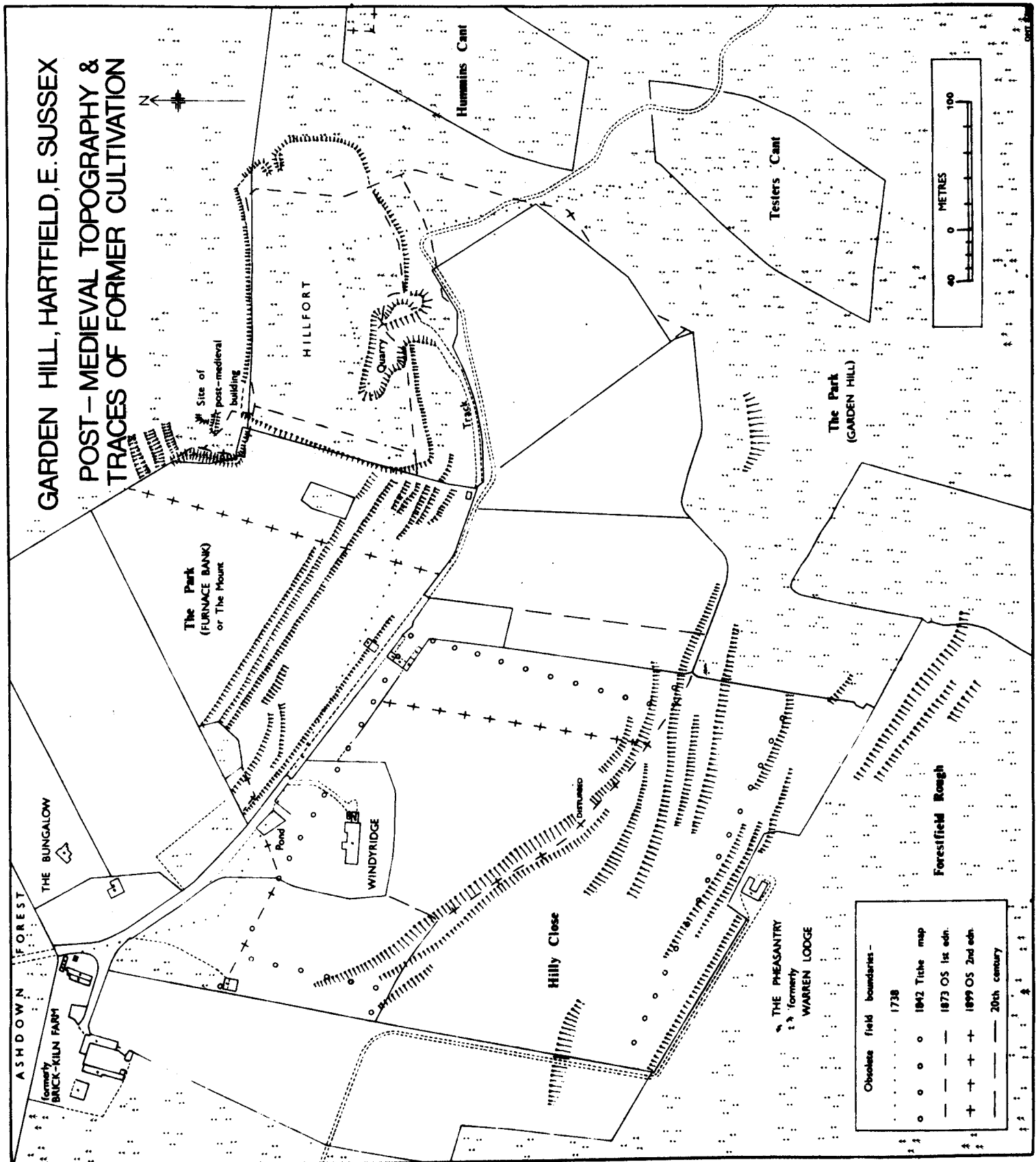


FIG.4

060-080/625-630 (D)

A 4m trench was cut through the defences at the NW corner of the fort, in order to examine their general character, and with the specific aims of discovering, firstly, whether the defences on the west were single or double, and secondly, whether or not there was an entrance at this point, as was mooted when the hill-fort was surveyed in 1969. The excavations were not helped by the extensive damage and disturbance caused by burrowing animals, mainly badgers.

Both of the main queries were solved. First, there is no entrance at this point. Second, only the outer bank and ditch are Iron Age. The inner bank is 17th century or later - probably a field-boundary or enclosure bank. This latter conclusion is derived from archaeomagnetic tests undertaken by Dr. A.J. Clark, which indicate a 17th century date for samples of burnt clay found beneath the bank.

The outer rampart, which was composed of turf, subsoil and clay, lay on a well-defined land surface (similar to that found under the ramparts at High Rocks and Castle Hill). On top of the land surface there was a small scatter of charcoal, which, by its position, is likely to be associated with the construction of the fort. It is hoped that the British Museum Laboratory will accept samples of this charcoal for radiocarbon determination.

The outer ditch contained the usual tumble of revetting stones from the outer face of the rampart. The profile of the ditch indicates that it was both wider and deeper on the west side of the hill-fort than at the east end where the defences were constructed at the crest of a steep natural slope. There was no visible sign of a counterscarp bank.

A late Iron Age pottery rim with decoration, which may be helpful in dating the fort, was found in the ditch silt.

3. FIELD SURVEY (Fig.4)

Irregularities in the surface of the fields around Garden Hill have been observed for several years by Mr. C.F. Tebbutt. He photographed ridges to the west of the hill-fort under melting snow on two occasions in January 1982. These were surveyed by Mr. D. Tucker of the Ordnance Survey during August.

Research is also being undertaken into the post-medieval topography of the area, principally from cartographic sources. Identifications can now be suggested for certain enigmatic features found in the excavation, and the results of the field survey can be assessed by comparing existing topography with former field boundaries. Preliminary results of this work are shown on Fig. 4, and a fuller account will be published in the final report.

At least since the emparking of Ashdown Forest in the late 13th century, much of the area is unlikely to have been cultivated before the mid-19th century. There can be little doubt, however, that some of the ridges represent traces of former cultivation. Unless they are associated with former

woodland management, these ridges must therefore be of some considerable antiquity.

The small 'terraces' are surprisingly close together and the precise nature of the presumed agriculture remains uncertain. Little is known of ancient cultivation in the Weald, and closely-spaced terraces may prove to be a regional phenomenon of the Wealden hillsides.

Thus there is a strong possibility of cultivation associated with the Roman or earlier settlement at Garden Hill. It is to be hoped that recognition here will lead to further discoveries elsewhere from which more general conclusions can be drawn.

4. PUBLICATION

Work has begun on the preparation of the final report on Garden Hill, which will include a full history of early prehistoric, Iron Age and Romano-British occupation, illustrated by line drawings and photographs. There will be contributions by specialists on geology, iron-working technology, and the various categories of portable finds - pottery, flints, tiles, glass, coins, bronze artefacts, iron objects, mortars, querns etc. The report will contain a study of post-medieval topography and traces of earlier cultivation in nearby fields; and conclude with a consideration of the economy of Garden Hill and the extent of trade with areas outside the Weald.

It is hoped that the report, which will cover about 150 pages, will be published by the Sussex Archaeological Society and that copies will be available for sale.

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