

EXCAVATIONS AT CAESAR'S CAMP, ALDERSHOT, HAMPSHIRE

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ABSTRACT

A small excavation was carried out in 1970 on a bank lining the western crest of Bricksbury Hill revealing details of timber built defences that were later replaced by a dump constructed bank and finally by a mediaeval deerpark boundary.

INTRODUCTION

In 1915 J P Williams Freeman published his extensive fieldwork in Hampshire in which he included an account of the defences at Caesar's Camp. Although he surveyed the defences with care he omitted to take note of the bank along the western side of the site. Hogg (1975) notes the line of the bank (hereafter termed Bank I) but not the counterscarp bank and ditch (Bank II and Ditch II) in his survey of hillforts.

THE SITE

Caesar's Camp (SU 83505005 centre) lies on a plateau of tertiary gravel and sands-with-clays of the Bagshot series. To the north, east and west are the sands, gravels and occasional clays of this formation which give rise to the scanty heather and grasslands that are characteristic of north-east Hampshire. To the south are heavy clays butting onto the chalk which runs through Farnham as a narrow strip from the Hampshire uplands to the North Downs.

The Camp occupies an irregular promontory which angles to the east and north away from the main bulk of the hill^{making} Caesar's Camp a typical promontory hillfort (Fig 1). The ramparts follow the natural contours of the hill except on the south where the defences cross the plateau, cutting the site off from Bricksbury Hill. The slopes on the north and north-east sides of the camp are extremely steep and were apparently undefended as there are no traces of defences on these sides. These slopes, together

with the defended western side, appear to have been scarped. The eastern side is defended by a double rampart (Fig 2). The south-east corner of the site has three ramparts and traces of a counterscarp bank running on round to the southern side of the defences. The original main entrance may have been sited mid-way along the eastern side of the site but a recent quarry has obscured the details of this area of the defences. The defences across the level ground on the south are the strongest present at Caesar's Camp and are pierced by a possibly modern trackway. The interior of the Camp lies some 600 feet (182.9m) above sea level and overlooks the plains around the site by up to 200 feet (61.0m). A possible water supply is located at the north-west corner of the site at Jock and Jennies Stones.

THE EXCAVATION

A small excavation was carried out on the western side of this hillfort in the autumn of 1970 with the object of investigating the low bank, Bank I, which tops the crest of the slopes on this side of the Camp.

Bank I had been eroded by a cutting some 300 feet (*c* 90m) north-east of its junction with the major defences on the south (Fig 2). A path now runs diagonally down the slopes below Bank I having passed through the bank.

A trial trench was cut across Bank I to determine the value of a larger trench. This revealed a pair of postholes and a linear feature. The trial trench was therefore enlarged to examine an area about 18 feet (5.5m) by 7 feet (2.1m) of Bank I (Fig 4). The trial trench was also extended to the west, downslope, to explore a suspected counterscarp bank and ditch which lay at the foot of the slopes below Bank I (Fig 2A).

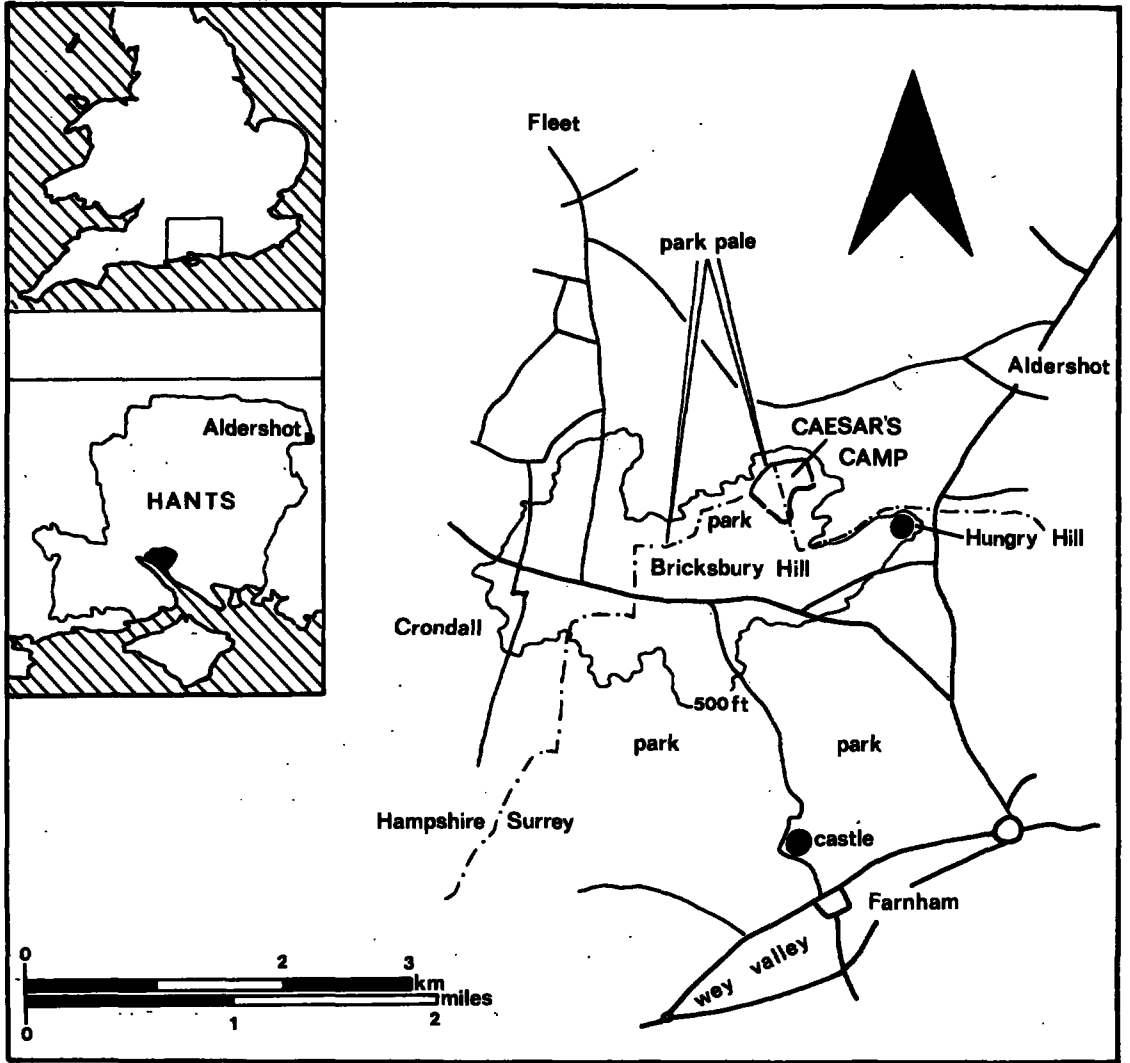


Fig 1. Location of Caesar's Camp in northeast Hampshire and the nearby earthworks at Hungry Hill.

Bank I was found to survive to a height of slightly over 2 feet (0.61m) and had a width of about 6 feet (1.9m). It was composed of six layers overlying the natural gravels, Layer 24 (Fig 3). Layer 1 was a brown sand with much flint and root matter: this forms the 'topsoil' within the Camp and is covered by a flora including grasses, heather, bracken and gorse.

Layer 2, a grey-brown sand with a clayey texture, is similar to layers 4, 5 and 6, all of which contain angular flint forming between 30% and 50% of these fills. Layer 3, between Layer 1 and 4, was a distinctly darker material being a deep brown stiff, sandy clay with few flints. Underlying Layer 4 and over layers 8, 9 and 23, was Layer 7. This was a stiff, brown, sandy clay with

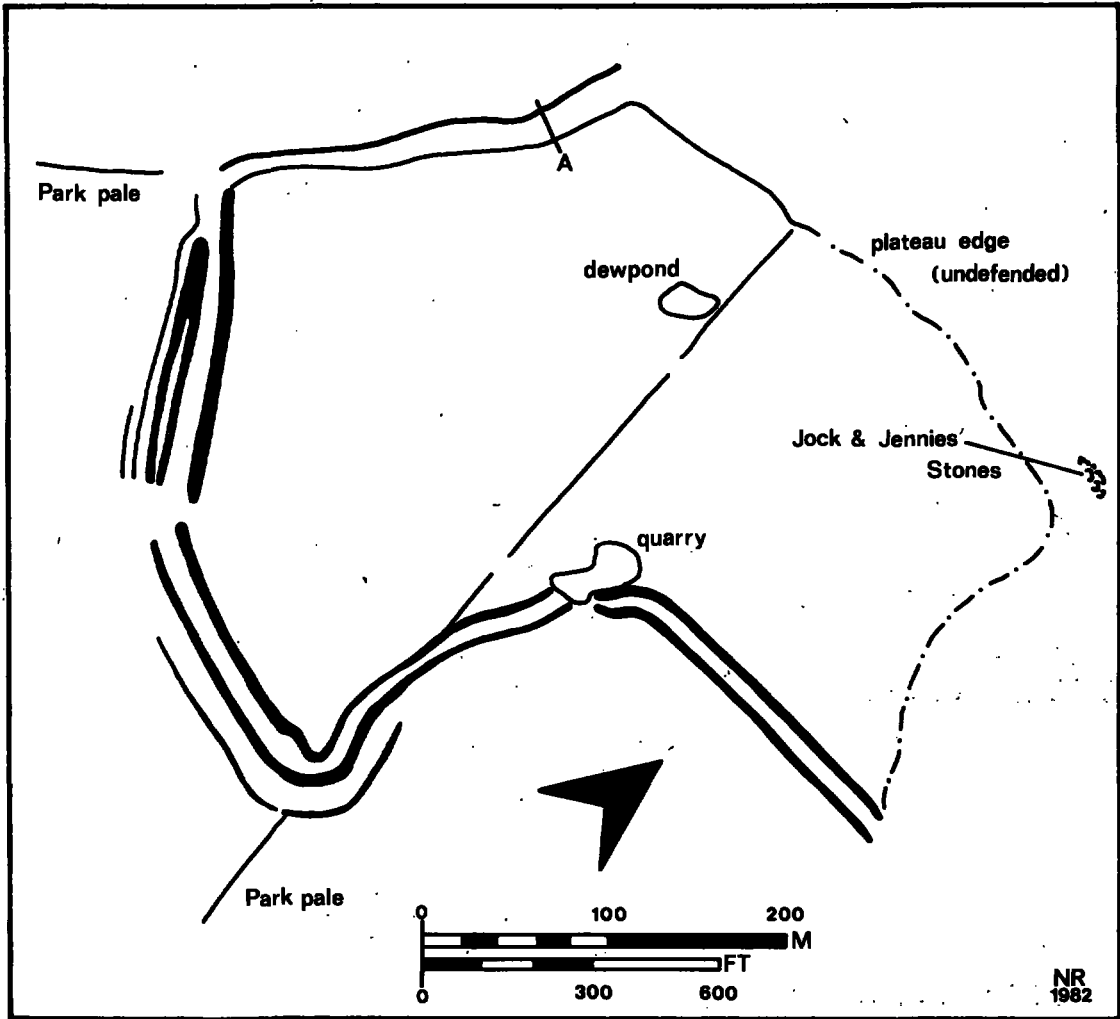


Fig 2. Caesar's Camp, Aldershot. Plan of the Iron Age and medieval earthworks.

a content of between 5% and 10% flint. Layer 8 completed the sequence of layers in Bank I. This was a dark-brown clayey soil with very few flints and was further distinguished by a thick root mat which was not present in Layer 7 above.

Ditch I lay on the internal side of Bank I and had three layers of fill capped by the topsoil, Layer 1. Layer 5 is similar to Layers 2 and 4 and Layer 6 is the presumed undisturbed soil of the camp interior. Layer 21 was a grey-brown silt

with angular flint forming about 10% to 20% of the fill. Layer 22, overlying the natural gravels (Layer 24), was a dark, grey-brown silt with less than 5% of the fill formed by flint.

The presumed natural horizons to the east of the ditch, Ditch I, contained three layers: Layer 1, described above, Layer 6 which was closely similar to Layer 5 in Ditch I and Layer 23, a dark-brown sandy clay with angular flint forming 5-10% of this layer. Layer 24, the natural

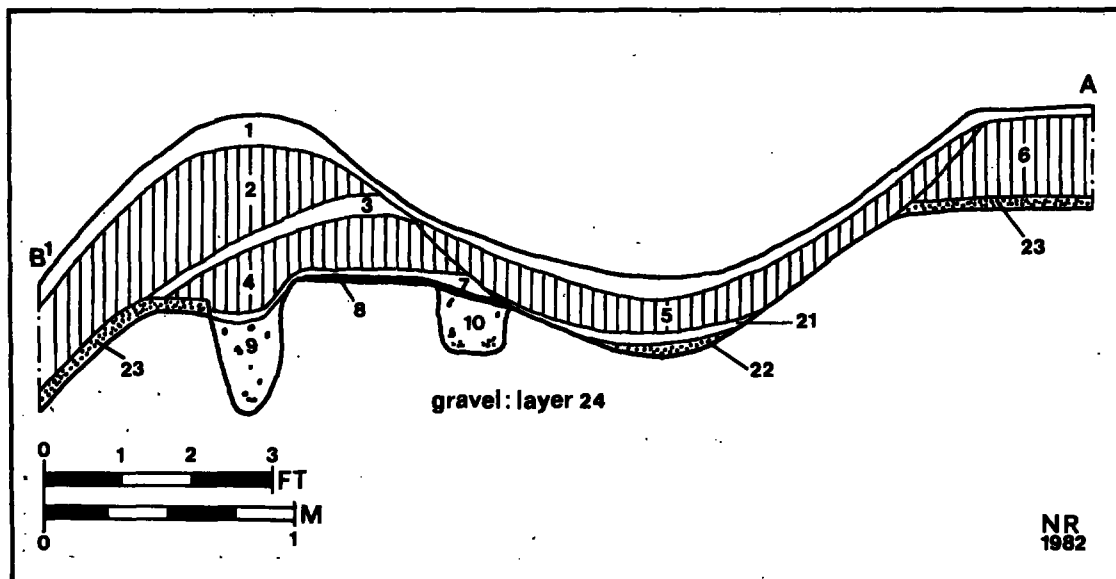


Fig 3. Caesar's Camp, Aldershot 1970. Section through Bank I and Ditch I facing north.

gravels, were formed of large and small rounded and angular flint set in a matrix of orange clay.

Features beneath Bank I

Below Bank I and cut into the natural clay through Layer 23 were eleven postholes and a linear feature. The postholes form a somewhat ragged line less than one foot away from the edge of the plateau occupied by the site, except that Posthole 14 lies closer to the edge and Posthole 16 which lies to the rear of the line (Fig 4). Posthole 12 was cut by Posthole 13, presumably a replacement for Posthole 12. The profiles of the postholes and their fills had been disturbed by root action and it was not possible to identify any post-ghosts or to determine whether any of the flint present in the fills of the postholes had been used as post-packing.

The fills of the postholes were similar throughout, being a loose black-brown sandy clay with a flint content of between 10% and 20%. The dimensions of individual postholes were as follows:

Posthole	Dimensions	Depth	
9	11 × 8½ ins.	19 ins.	(28.0 × 21.6 48.3) cms
11	8 × 7	14	(20.2 × 17.8 35.6)
12	14 × 9	17	(35.6 × 22.8 43.2)
13	10½ × 9	15	(26.6 × 22.8 38.1)
14	12 × 10	12	(30.5 × 25.4 30.5)
15	8 × 7½	10	(20.2 × 19.0 25.4)
16	12 × 9½	19	(30.5 × 24.2 48.3)
17	8 × 9	11	(20.2 × 22.8 27.9)
18	6 × 5	10	(15.2 × 12.7 25.4)
19	6 × 6	9	(15.2 × 15.2 22.8)
20	6 × 7	11	(15.2 × 17.8 27.9)

all measurements being taken on or from the surface of Layer 24.

TABLE 1 Caesar's Camp, Aldershot 1970.
Posthole dimensions

Feature 10, the linear feature, lay parallel to and to the rear of the line of postholes (Fig 4). It fluctuated in depth from 2 to 18 inches (5–46 cms); cut into the natural gravels, Layer 24, it had a fill of loose dark-brown sandy soil with flints forming 10–20% of the fill. The profile of this feature had been heavily damaged by root action from Layer 8, which seals Feature 10 (Fig 3), and, probably as a result of this disturbance,

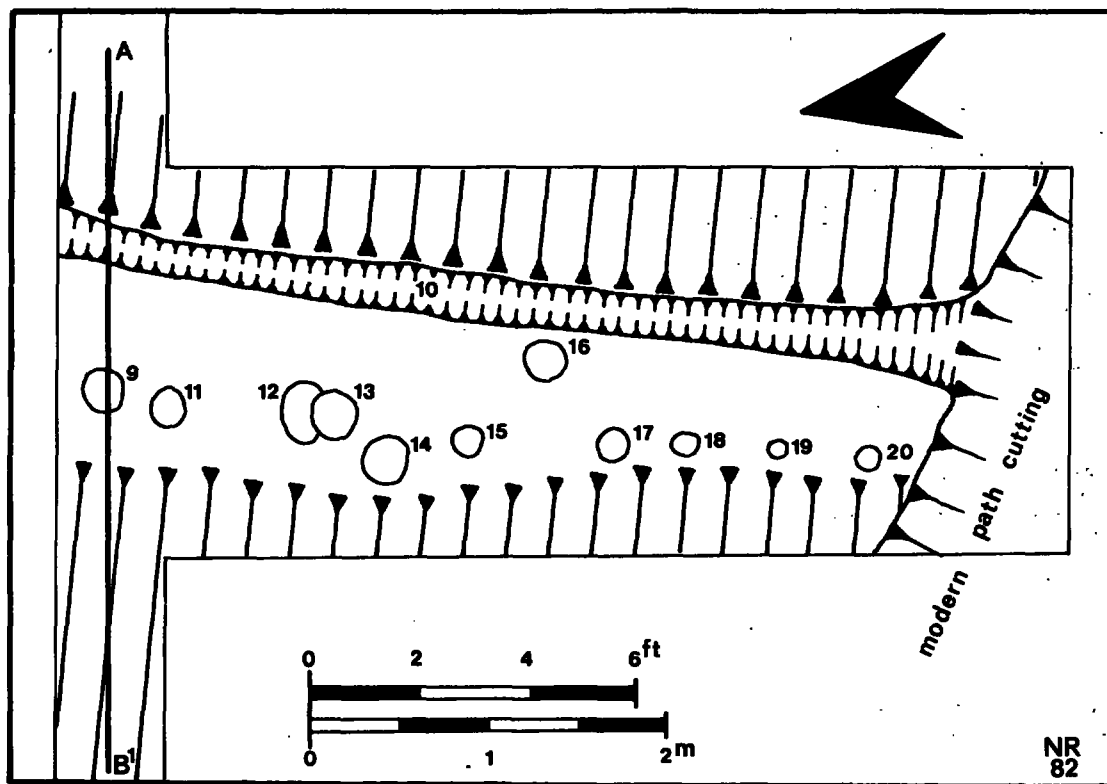


Fig 4. Caesar's Camp, Aldershot 1970. Plan of features excavated beneath Bank I.

no features were identified within Feature 10. Within one foot of Section A-B (Fig 3) the profile of Feature 10 changed from a steep-sided to a more rounded 'U' and also widened close to the modern cutting (Fig 4).

Bank II and Ditch II

The trial trench was extended downslope and away from Bank I and provided some evidence of a second system of bank and ditch, Bank II and Ditch II.

Neither of these features was fully excavated. Ditch II was probably a steep sided, V-profile ditch (regrettably a motor vehicle was dumped into the trench and it proved impossible to remove it). The fills of Ditch II were as follows: Layer 1, the topsoil, ran downslope from Bank I, across Ditch II and then onto and over Bank II. Over Ditch II Layer 1 was considerably thicker

than elsewhere owing to the accumulation of a deeper deposit of vegetable matter. Under Layer 1 and over Layer 25 was Layer 2 which was similarly much thicker than it had been over Bank I. Layer 2 butted against but did not overlie Bank II. Layer 25 was not fully excavated; it was composed of a stiff, orange silty-clayey sand with much rounded and angular flint that formed 50-70% of this fill.

Bank II was not sectioned but a possible construction line was observed in the east face of Ditch II (Fig 5). It is likely that Bank II was dump-constructed with material excavated from Ditch II and scarped from the slopes between Bank II and Bank I. The trial trench revealed no features cut into Bank II.

No dateable material was found during the excavation.

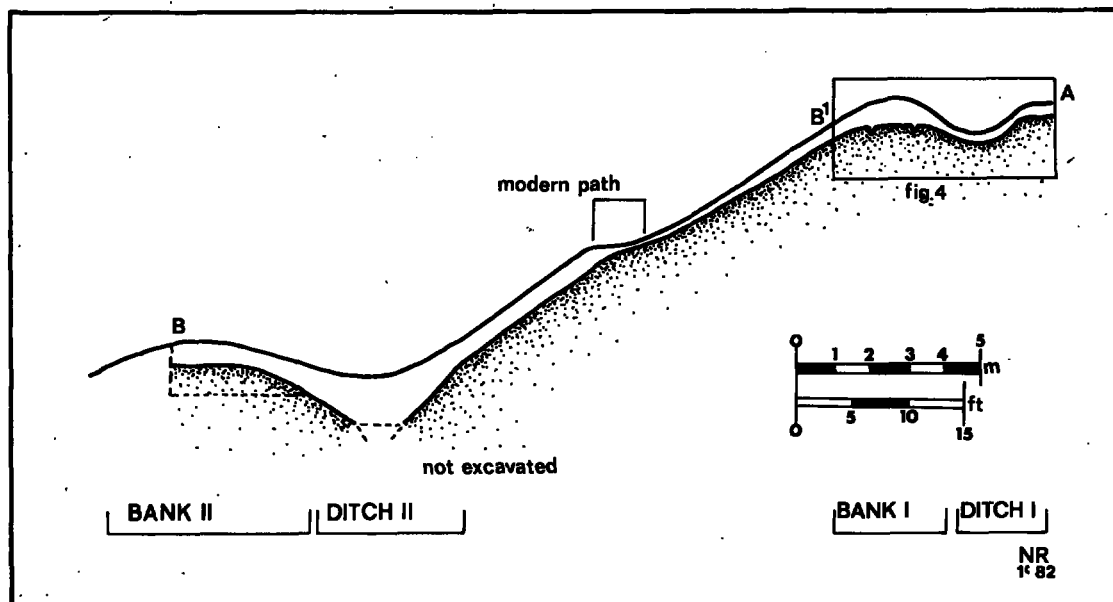


Fig 5. Caesar's Camp, Aldershot 1970. Section through the western defences of the hillfort, facing north.

Phases of Construction

The section through Bank I and Ditch I suggests there were four phases of construction which represent two main periods of use: the Hillfort phases (Phases A–C) and the Medieval Park. (Phase D).

Phase A: A linear feature; Feature 10, was cut through the then topsoils, Layer 23 and (?) Layer 6, some 2 to 3 feet (*c* 1.0m) from the edge of the plateau. This may have been a marking out trench or perhaps a pallisade trench similar to Phase I, at Blewburton Hill (Harding 1976) and have had a small bank behind it. Apart from Feature 10, the evidence for this phase has been destroyed by subsequent developments on the site, particularly the cutting of Ditch I. Phase A would probably have formed part of the initial defensive circuit of the hillfort.

The evidence provided by Layer 8 is critical for the interpretation of the development of the western defences. Layer 8 overlaid Feature 10 but was cut by the series of postholes: 9 and 11–20. Layer 8 would therefore represent an intermediate period between Phase A and Phase

B and it is probable that it was a humus layer that developed after the decay or abandonment of the Phase A defences.

Phase B: A line of postholes were dug along the natural contour line and within *c* 1 foot of the crest of the western slopes (Figs 3 and 5). One of these settings was later replaced. The evidence shown by Layer 7, which seals the postholes, indicates that there was no bank behind the timber pallisade that must have occupied the postsettings.

The Counterscarp Defences: These were not fully investigated. Bank II and Ditch II extend from below the angle formed between the southern defences and Bank I (Fig 2) to a point *c* 150 feet north of trench A–B. This second system of defences cannot be firmly ascribed a place in the development of the Hillfort defences. It seems likely that the counterscarp defences form part of the redevelopment of Caesar's Camp from what was probably a univallate site into a multivallate hillfort. It seems likely to this writer that Phase B of Bank I

and the construction of the counterscarp defences were contemporary operations.

Phase C: The deposition of Layer 7 across the postholes (Fig 3) suggests that the timber palisade of Phase B decayed *in situ*. Layer 7 may be a second humus horizon representing a period of decay or abandonment. The western defences were remodelled a third time and in Phase C a bank was built along the line of the Phase B timber palisade. The remains of this bank are represented by Layer 4 (Fig 3).

Phase D: There is no evidence for any activity at Caesar's Camp from the end of the Iron Age until the Medieval period. By the time of the Norman Conquest the hillfort formed part of the Farnham estates of the bishops of Winchester. Documentary evidence from the thirteenth century and later *Pipe Rolls* of the bishops of Winchester indicate that *Blackheathfield*, as Bricksbury Hill was then called, was one of three Parks attached to Farnham castle (Thompson 1961). References in the *Pipe Rolls* to the upkeep of the Park mention repairs to the 'timber pale' and the reconstruction of the bank and ditch. Cartographic evidence suggests that Bank I and Ditch I are the surviving remains of the Park Pale.

In Phase D therefore Ditch I was excavated and the spoil from it thrown up onto the remains of the Phase C Iron Age defences. No trace of the timber pale was found. Bank I and Ditch I can be followed along the northern edge of Bricksbury Hill to a point midway along the western side of Caesar's Camp when its course changes to take it across the interior of the hillfort and across the southeast corner of the Iron Age defences (Fig 2).

CAESAR'S CAMP: CONTEXT AND PURPOSE

Apart from a handful of sites in the Wey valley or lying on the gravel terraces overlooking the Wey (Oakley *et al* 1939) little is known of the distribution of Iron Age sites around Caesar's Camp. The generally poor and infertile soils, as well as the extensive marshlands around Fleet, across the northern side of Bricksbury Hill suggest that the area was sparsely settled if at all. On the west the sands are replaced by clays

around Crondall and it seems likely that this area was not opened up to settlement until the Romano-British period.

Caesar's Camp seems to lie on the north-western edge of a settlement pattern extending from Surrey along the Hogs Back and into the Farnham district, perhaps following the course of the river Wey. On this analysis Caesar's Camp would fit into the Wealden Iron Age, rather than Hampshire, and the hillfort should be compared with other hillforts in the Wealden area, for example Anstiesbury, Hascombe and Holmbury. These sites have been examined by Thompson (1979) who suggests that they were temporary refuges.

HUNGRY HILL, ALDERSHOT: A NOTE, by Nicholas Riall

On a spur of Bricksbury Hill, known as Hungry Hill, are a series of earthworks which were attributed by Williams Freeman (1915) to the Iron Age. He believed that these entrenchments represented a complementary position to the major hillfort of Caesar's Camp. This view was not supported by Oakley, Rankine and Lowther (1939) who make no mention of the site despite their extensive survey of the pre-history of the district.

A map drawn from a survey of the Aldershot district made by Captain Festing (Royal Engineers) in 1862-3 shows these earthworks and a comparison between Festing's survey and recent editions of the Ordnance Survey maps of Hungry Hill suggest that the earthworks noted by Festing, Williams Freeman and the Ordnance Survey are the same. Festing drew the defences of Caesar's Camp as a series of hachures but marked the entrenchment on Hungry Hill in great detail as if they were then newly constructed (Fig 6). Comparison of the earthworks on Hungry Hill with other nineteenth century earthworks suggests that Festing mapped a freshly constructed military site composed of a redoubt and breastworks. These positions would have been associated with the then newly occupied military camp at Aldershot.

The earthworks on Hungry Hill (SU 84604980 centre) would have consisted of a steep sided,

flat bottomed ditch with a steep sided, revetted bank and incorporating masked entrances. The earthworks have been partially destroyed by the

construction of a housing estate and the surviving sections of this system are very eroded and covered in scrub.

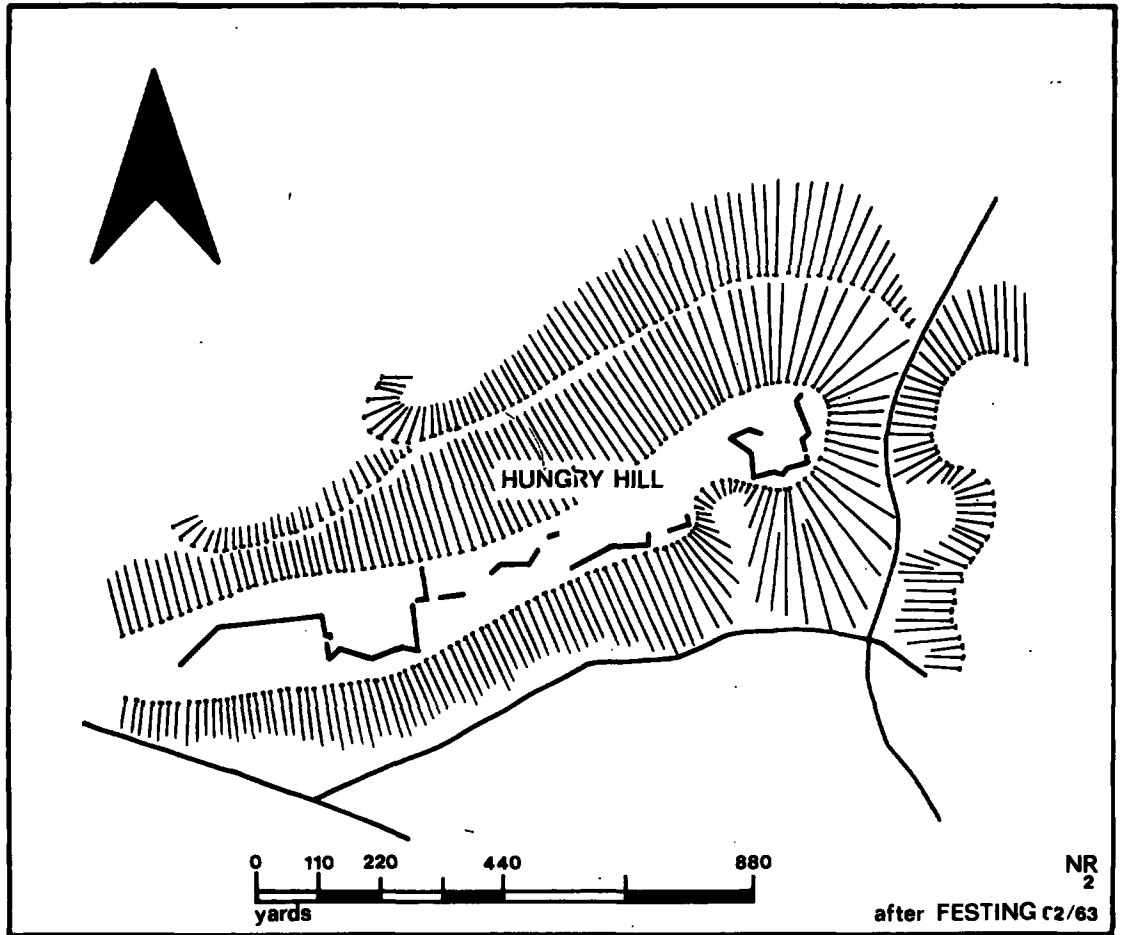


Fig 6. Hungry Hill, nineteenth-century military earthworks.

REFERENCES

[see also p 4]

Maps

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