

Book Review

CRICKLEY HILL. VOLUME 2. THE HILLFORT SETTLEMENTS BY PHILIP DIXON

Crickley Hill Archaeological Trust, 2019. 325 pages, 284 B&W and colour illustrations, 4 tables, ISBN 0-900572-84-2 (£20).

This volume describes the archaeological excavation of the Iron Age hillfort on Crickley Hill, a site located approximately 5km to the south of Cheltenham, Gloucestershire. Crickley Hill was subject to a series of excavations undertaken over a twenty-five-year period from the late 1960s to the early 1990s, revealing an extensive multi-period site. The archaeological evidence suggests that the site was initially occupied in the Neolithic period, before a hillfort was constructed in the Early Iron Age (600-450 BC). During the Iron Age two settlements occupied the area within the hillfort, which was later abandoned after a fire, and then reoccupied in the post-Roman period. The site is known, in part, for evidence for a series of destructive episodes throughout its history and as such a large proportion of this volume is dedicated to the notion of warfare and violence during the Iron Age.

This volume represents the second in a series of six planned volumes, of which two have been published to date. The first discussed the archaeological investigation of the Hillfort Ramparts and was published almost 30 years ago (Dixon 1994); so long in fact that this current volume includes a critique and reanalysis of the original interpretation of the entrance defences outlined in Volume 1 (Appendix 1). The remaining planned volumes will include the archaeological evidence for Neolithic deposits at Crickey Hill (volume 3 and 4), the later post-Roman settlements (volume 5) and the environmental and faunal remains, as well as an overall synthesis (volume 6). As such this current volume reveals only part of the story of the Iron Age occupation of Crickley Hill.

After the preliminary outline of the site, the volume begins with an extensive section entitled ‘The Hillforts: Attack and Defence’, which discusses the archaeological evidence for warfare at Crickley Hill. This section draws mainly from volume 1 of this series on the hillfort defences but also includes some discussion of the archaeological evidence from the interior of the site. The evidence for burning and destruction at the site is dominant and, as such, notions of defence and warfare are

paramount throughout this discussion. Although this initial section is in keeping with recent debates on the nature of warfare and violence in Iron Age Britain and beyond (James 2007; Fernández-Götz & Arnold 2019), it does veer into a predominantly functionalist interpretation for the Iron Age hillfort, which has seen much critique over the last 30 years (e.g. Hill 1995).

This section in chapter 4 is followed by a detailed discussion of contemporary textual evidence from Roman and Greek sources as well as a discussion of documentary medieval sources from Ireland. Although some of the contemporary sources cited can be useful in understanding the social and political relationships of this period, as well as warfare in general, they should be viewed cautiously and critically in the context of Iron Age Britain as these represent views of authors from outside Britain. Instead, throughout this section the contents of the texts are taken as fact despite the widespread acknowledgment of the complications of the uncritical use of contemporary sources (e.g. Hingley 2012). Moreover, the use of the terms ‘Celts’ and ‘Celtic’ as descriptors for Iron Age people at Crickley, and Britain more generally, is also problematic considering the vast literature that details their debatable usage (James 1999; Collis 2003) as well as recent detailed examinations of the Celts as a specific social entity (Pope 2022). In addition, there is a great deal of archaeological evidence and synthesis for Iron Age Gloucestershire (e.g. Moore 2006; 2020) that is not referred to and could have been relied upon, in addition to the contemporary sources, to build a narrative of Iron Age society in this region.

Most of the volume (chapters 6 and 7) details the archaeological evidence and interpretation of the internal structures uncovered within the hillfort, including evidence for roundhouses, square and rectangular structures and other irregular groups of postholes. This detailed section provides a contextual analysis of the structural information of, and interpretation for, these structures and their possible roles within the hillfort. For each structure the account includes a feature-by-feature description, as well as accompanying photographs and section drawings that allows for a detailed understanding of each building. Importantly this section includes an in-depth discussion of the conditions and difficulties of excavating these features (and the site more generally), which will allow later re-evaluation and reinterpretation. Although the presence of rectangular structures of an Iron Age date were considered controversial at the time (p. 8) of the excavation, a series of studies have since shown this to be a wider phenomenon than previously suggested (Moore 2003). More recently, several large scale rectangular structures have been found during the excavation of the Late Iron Age oppidum at Silchester (Fulford *et al.* 2018). As such, this newly published corpus of additional examples should only serve to reinforce this interpretation and provide a series of interesting parallels for further analysis.

Chapter 7 ends with a short section of text that draws together the information for the structures and presents a layout of the site across the different sub-periods of the Iron Age. This section aptly draws together the evidence in a concise manner and includes a series of well-presented reconstruction drawings that allow the reader to reimagine the layout and structure of the site. Comparisons to other hillforts were present (Danebury, Moel y Gaer, Flintshire), however, some examples that were geographically closer would have been welcomed. Chapter 8 – ‘The Nature of the Hillfort’ – aims to draw together all the evidence presented across the volume to understand the development of the site, its landscape position, the labour required to build the enclosing earthworks and the social status of its inhabitants. Despite the breadth of topics covered, this chapter was surprisingly short, especially considering the detail of the earlier archaeological evidence, and as such leaves room for further analysis and interpretation in the future.

Discussion of the finds associated with these phases of the excavation is located in a section at the back of the volume (chapter 9). This is a well-catalogued and detailed discussion of the recovered artefacts, however, it would have been beneficial to integrate the analysis of these finds within the context of the archaeological remains and structures. This approach would have provided a more contextual analysis of the chronology of the site as well as a richer understanding of daily life within the hillfort. There is also some discussion of the environmental remains associated with the Iron Age occupation of the site, however, this is again saved for a later section of the volume. Including this information would have been useful in understanding food consumption and storage as part of the occupation of the hillfort, however, most of this data has been saved for a later volume (see above).

It should be noted that the post-excavation analysis presented by this volume was funded almost entirely with donations from the Crickley Hill Archaeological Trust and small grants from English Heritage. Moreover, the volume is almost entirely written, designed and copy edited by the author (p. 2), who should be congratulated in creating this well-published volume of a site that was excavated so many years ago. This is no mean feat. Recent examples of projects aiming to reinvigorate past research and reinterpret and publish material from the 1970s and 80s (e.g. the Exeter: A Place in Time Project) required both large collaborative teams of researchers and a great deal of financial support. It is difficult to admonish the deficiencies of this volume without wondering whether a greater financial input would have been important in rectifying these concerns. The author should be applauded for their efforts despite difficult conditions.

In summary, this is well-appointed and well-structured volume that provides in detail the archaeological evidence for the Iron Age occupation of Crickley Hillfort. Although some parts of the text could include more updated interpretations, the detailed synthesis of the structures uncovered within the hillfort will contribute to a greater understanding of these settlements, and domestic life more generally in Iron Age Britain. The recent ‘Atlas of Hillforts’ project (Lock & Ralston 2019) has provided a detailed syntheses of this site type across Britain and Ireland and the publication of the Crickley Hill volume will add significantly to our understanding of this subject matter.

Dr Nicky Garland
University of York

[Note: The Author of this review was a researcher on the ‘Exeter: A Place in Time Project’ for Cotswold Archaeology]

Review submitted: April 2023

Bibliography

Collis, J. 2003. *The Celts: origins, myths & inventions*. Stroud: Tempus.

Dixon, P. 1994. *Crickley Hill, Volume 1: The Hillfort Defences*. Nottingham: University of Nottingham Department of Archaeology; Crickley Hill Trust.

Fernández-Götz, M. & Arnold, B. 2019. Internal conflict in Iron Age Europe: methodological challenges and possible scenarios. *World Archaeology* 51 (5), 654–672. DOI 10.1080/00438243.2020.1723682.

Fulford, M., Clarke, A., Durham, E. & Pankhurst, N. 2018. *Late Iron Age Calleva. The Pre-Conquest Occupation at Silchester Insula IX*, Britannia Monograph Series 32. London: Society for the Promotion of Roman Studies.

Haselgrove, R. & Pope, R. (eds) 2007. *The Earlier Iron Age in Britain and the Near Continent*. Oxford: Oxbow Books.

Hill, J. D. & Cumberpatch, C. G. (eds) 1995. *Different Iron Ages: Studies on the Iron Age in Temperate Europe*. Oxford: British Archaeological Reports.

Hill, J. D. 1995. How Should We Understand Iron Age Societies and Hillforts? A Contextual Study from Southern England. In Hill & Cumberpatch 1995, 45–61.

Hingley, R. 2012. Iron Age Knowledge: Pre-Roman Peoples and Myths of Origin. In Moore & Armada, X.2012, 617–637.

Humphrey, J. (ed) 2003. *Re-searching the Iron Age: selected papers from the proceedings of the Iron Age Research Student Seminars, 1999 and 2000*. Leicester University Monograph. 11. Leicester: University of Leicester.

James, S. 1999. *The Atlantic Celts: ancient people or modern invention?* London: British Museum Press.

James, S. 2007. A bloodless past: the pacification of Early Iron Age Britain. In Haselgrove & Pope, R. 2007, 160–173.

Lock, G. & Ralston, I. 2019. *Hillforts: Britain, Ireland and the Nearer Continent. Papers from the Atlas of Hillforts of Britain and Ireland Conference, June 2017*. Oxford: Archaeopress.

Moore, T. 2003. Rectangular Houses in the British Iron Age - Squaring the Circle? In Humphrey 2003, 47–58.

Moore, T. 2006. *Iron Age societies in the Severn-Cotswolds: Developing narratives of social and landscape change*. BAR British Series 421. Oxford: Archaeopress.

Moore, T. & Armada, X. (eds) 2012. *Atlantic Europe in the First Millennium BC: Crossing the Divide*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Moore, T. 2020. *A Biography of Power: Research and Excavations at the Iron Age 'oppidum' of Bagendon, Gloucestershire (1979-2017)*. Oxford: Archaeopress.

Pope, R. 2022. Re-approaching Celts: Origins, Society, and Social Change. *Journal of Archaeological Research* 30 (1), 1–67. DOI:10.1007/s10814-021-09157-1.

The views expressed in this review are not necessarily those of the Society or the Reviews Editor.