

ROMAN DERBY: EXCAVATIONS 1968-1983

By JOSEPHINE DOOL, HAZEL WHEELER *ET ALIA*

INTRODUCTION

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This report publishes a series of investigations into Roman Derby from 1968 to 1983. The opportunity has been taken to draw together the present information about Roman Derby from all available sources. Included are Rosemary Annable's work on the West Gate; Josephine Dool's on the industrial site, on the Racecourse and on the early fort site at Strutt's Park; and Hazel Wheeler's on the Racecourse cemetery, and on the interior of Little Chester Roman fort (Fig.1). It had been hoped to include Christopher Sparey-Green's work on the south-east defences, work that should add greatly to our understanding of important aspects of the site. Although this is not yet available, account has been taken as far as possible of the results of that excavation.

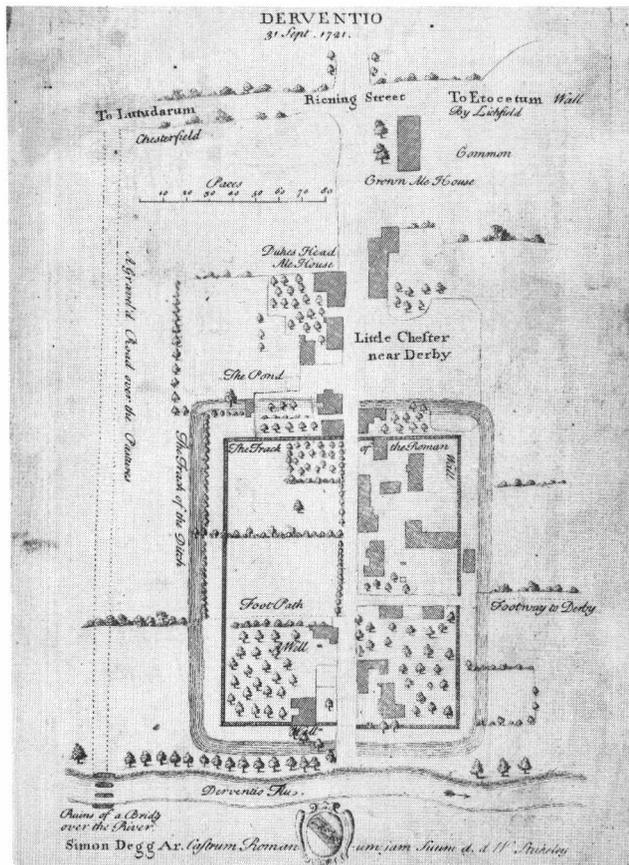


Plate 1 Derby Little Chester as recorded by William Stukeley in 1721 (Photographed by D. Farnsworth with kind permission of Derbyshire Local Studies Library).

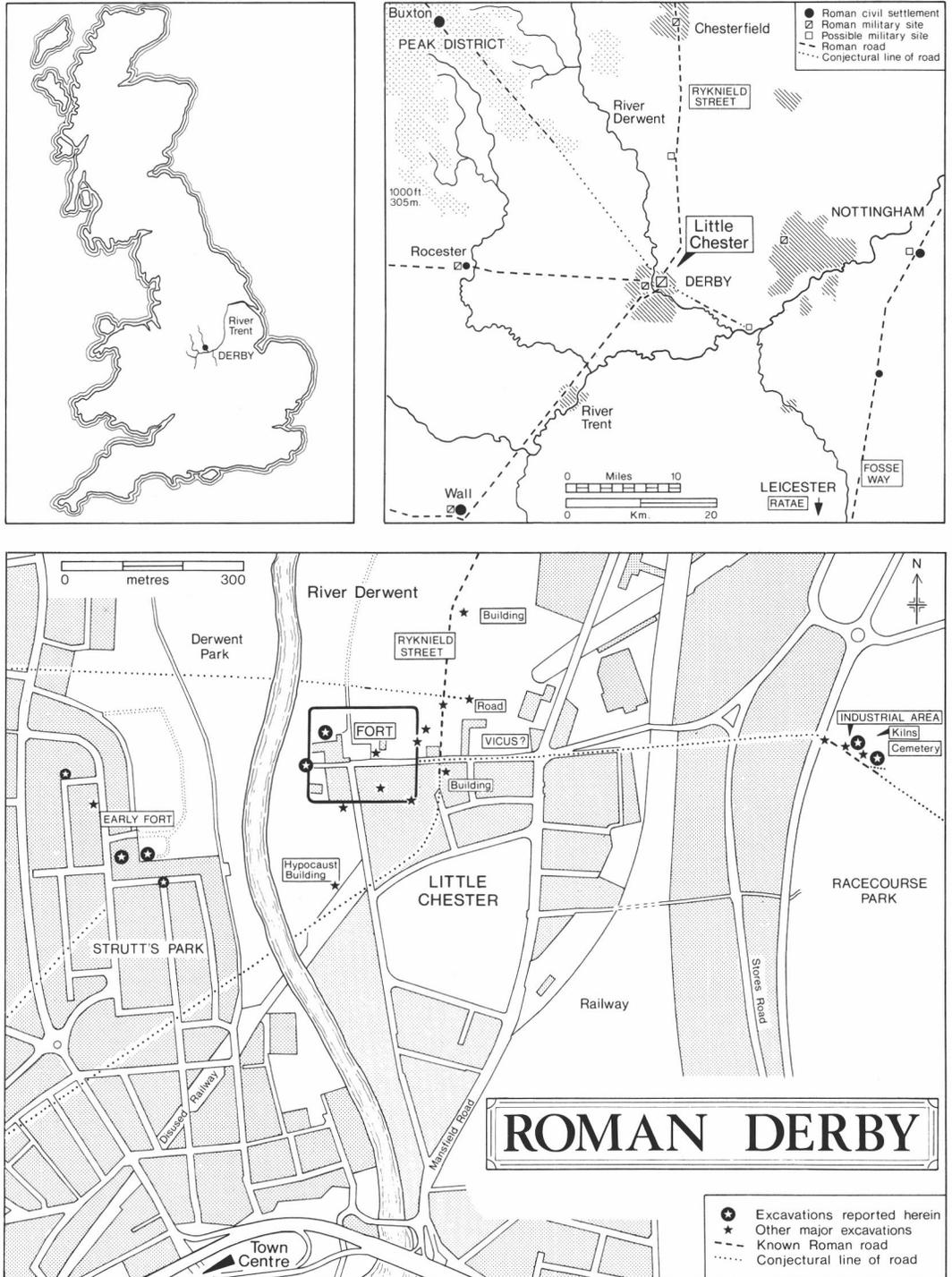


Fig. 1 Roman Derby: The evidence for Roman Derby in its local and regional setting. Based upon the Ordnance Survey Map with the permission of the controller of Her Majesty's Stationery Office, Crown copyright reserved.

Interest in Roman Derby dates from the eighteenth century, when William Stukeley planned the walls and ditches of the Little Chester fort (Pl.1). At Strutt's Park (Fig.4), situated on a hill on the west side of the River Derwent, first-century samian pottery and coins have been recovered at various times (below p.15), and a first century Roman fort is suspected. In 1970, the Derbyshire Archaeological Society Research Group carried out a small excavation at 91 Belper Road in advance of residential development (Brassington, 1970). Two gullies on a north-south alignment were believed to be associated with coins of Nero and Vespasian. Some bronze objects distorted by heat and a spillage of lead were also found. The position of the site, close to the highest point, suggests that it lay inside the fort and the finds indicate a terminal date during the governorship of Agricola. In 1974 Josephine Dool conducted watching briefs at a plot of land adjacent to 78 Belper Road (Site A) during building operations and at a pipe-trench in Arthur Street (below p.24 and Fig.4.) At Site A, slots of at least three buildings were identified and an earlier phase with a possible hearth, a pit and stake-holes was observed but not fully investigated. At Arthur Street, the pipe-trench sectioned a steep-sided feature, possibly part of the eastern defences of the fort. Dool was also able to conduct a small excavation on a vacant plot of land in the south-west corner of Derwent Park (Site B) with the intention of locating the eastern defences of the earlier fort. However, the area had been disturbed by post-medieval pits, modern land-drains and tree-roots. The defences were not located but two phases of structures were found, the second associated with demolition-pits and fragments of buckled lead-sheets, some with nail-holes. At both Site A and Site B, the phase 2 structures are interpreted as barrack blocks which had been deliberately demolished in the early 80s AD when a new fort was established at Little Chester. The samian from these sites suggests a foundation-date at Strutt's Park not later than AD60 but the first-phase features were not associated with any datable finds. Brady (p.16) conducted a small excavation at 93 Belper Road in 1977 prior to the erection of a garage, but no certain Roman features were identified. The location of the defences at Strutt's Park and the date and nature of the earliest phase remain uncertain.

At Little Chester, on the eastern side of the River Derwent, the evidence for Roman occupation derives from Stukeley's map of 1721 (Pl.1), from major excavations, and not least from the careful recording and publication of small-scale investigations and observations over many years (Fig.2). Without these observations, and particularly those of Maurice Brassington, we should today have no information about the Roman remains on Derby Racecourse, and much less about the fort site. Stukeley's map (Pl.1) showed the stone wall of a rectangular enclosure, with a single broad ditch beyond a wide berm, although he reported seeing the stone wall blown up by gunpowder for road-making in 1725. A road (Old Chester Road) traversed the enclosure from east to west, and the openings in the wall were marked by external features on the presumed Roman gateway sites. To the north he showed "a Gravel'd Road over the Pastures" which joined "Ricning Street" at right angles, and led to the stone piers of an earlier bridge. In 1926, when fields to the north of Little Chester were converted into playing fields, Sherwin, of the Borough Surveyor's Department, supervised excavations which revealed some 390m of Rykniel Street (Fig.2,A) and some stone footings (Fig.2,B), aligned with Stukeley's wall within the fort (Brassington, 1967, Fig.2, from C.B. Sherwin's notebook and plans, Derby City Reference Library. BA 913. 12719). In 1960, Webster (1961) conducted a small excavation on the southern defences prior to an extension of Pickford's garage in Old Chester Road (Fig.2,C) to investigate the defences shown on Stukeley's plan. Webster found five to six feet of slag dumped over the site and the wall itself robbed out, presumably by the gunpowder explosions seen by Stukeley in 1725. The features were also damaged by farm constructions. No rampart

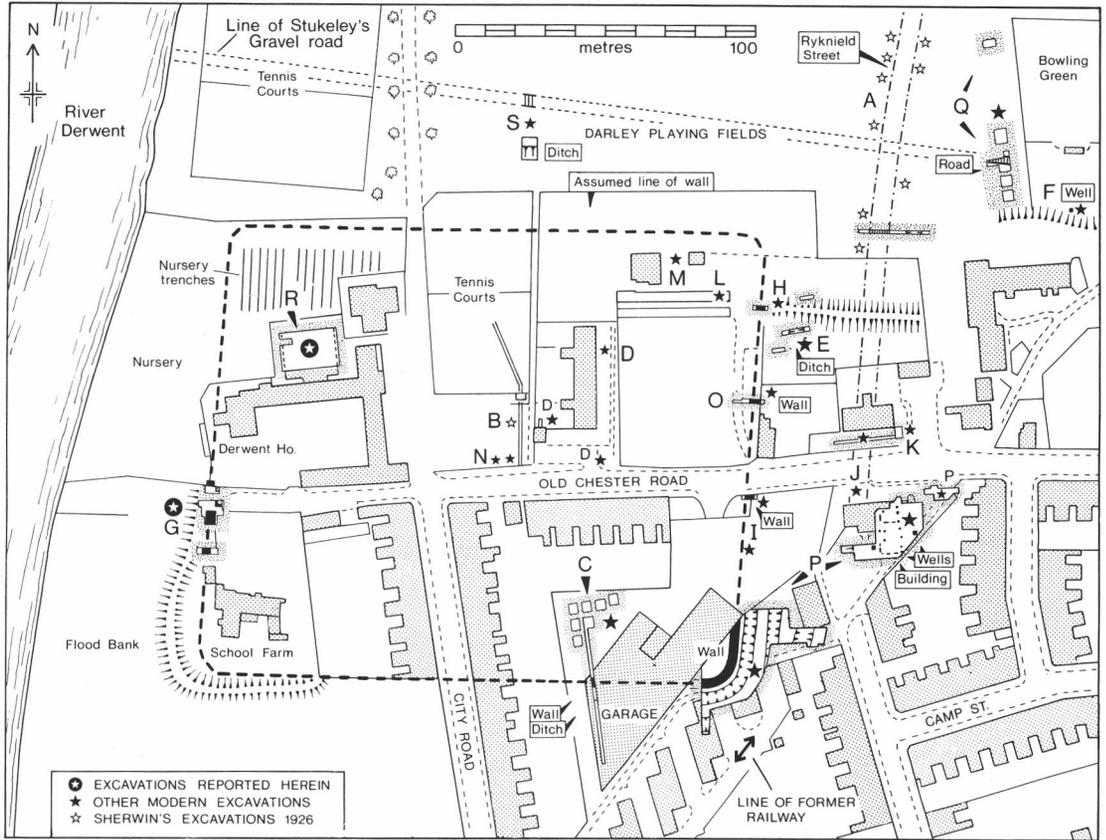


Fig. 2 Roman Derby: Little Chester fort excavations A: Ryknield Street, Sherwin in 1926; B: stone footings, Sherwin in 1926; C: wall, ditch and pre-defences features, Webster in 1960; D: stone footings, Brassington in 1965; E: Ryknield Street, ditch and pre-defence features, Todd in 1966; F: well, Brassington in 1967; G: west gate, Annable in 1968; H-O: Brassington, various excavations in 1968-82; H: eastern wall and the clay rampart; I: eastern wall; J: Reyknield Street; K: well and robbed-out Ryknield Street; L: *via sagularis* and hard standing; M: north-south wall; N: wall of *?principia*; O: building platform pre-dating clay rampart; P: south-east, defences, *?Late Saxon* bastion foundations, extra-mural colonnaded building and Saxon cemetery, Sparey-Green in 1972-3; Q: east-west road, Dool in 1973; R: north-west sector fort interior, Wheeler in 1979-80; S: road and ditch, Dodd in 1983. Scale 1:2500. Based upon the Ordnance Survey Map with the permission of the controller of Her Majesty's Stationery Office, Crown copyright reserved.

was located behind the robbed-out wall, but in front of it Webster found a U-shaped ditch 6m wide and 1.2m deep with fourth-century pottery in its upper filling. Pre-dating these defences and on a different alignment, he found five phases of timber buildings associated with mid to late second-century pottery. The samian ware indicated occupation from the early-Flavian period until the time of Hadrian, when Webster thought the fort was abandoned or under care and maintenance. During the Antonine period, c AD160-200, there was a peak in the quantity of samian ware reaching the site, and Webster equated this with the five building phases. In 1965, Brassington (1967) excavated on the north side of Old Chester Road (Fig.2,D) prior to the construction of old people's flats. He recorded stone footings and a series of floors dating to the

Antonine period and on the same alignment as those discovered by Sherwin. A later structure was also identified.

In 1966, Todd (1967) and the Derbyshire Archaeological Society Archaeological Research Group conducted excavations immediately outside the eastern defences (Fig.2,E), in order both to investigate the relationship of Ryknield Street to the fort and to sample the eastern defences prior to the erection of a small block of flats. Ryknield Street was located running parallel to the eastern defences at least as far south as the Old Chester Road junction, and a link road with the fort is yet to be found. Todd excavated a ditch, 5.1m wide and at least 1.8m deep, with pottery no later than the second century in the primary filling, and a metalled area running some 6m to the west. No trace of the wall was found but features were identified pre-dating the defences, and Todd associated these with the Antonine structures found by Webster in 1960 pre-dating the southern defences. A lack of Hadrianic samian ware was noted here too. In 1967, Brassington (1969a) re-excavated a well (Fig.2,F) discovered in 1929 in front of the vicarage garden. The well contained much third to fourth-century pottery with a little second-century material.

In 1968, Annable (below p.33) conducted a small excavation in the area of the West Gate (Fig.2,G) in advance of the building of a flood-bank. Three periods of occupation were identified: building-slots and possibly floors of several phases associated with some pottery post-dating AD150, a stone structure interpreted as the western gateway of the Antonine fort, and a stone wall equated here with Stukeley's stone wall. The wall sealed nothing later than the second century.

During 1968-70, Brassington (1982) carried out a series of small excavations prior to development work in the Little Chester area (Fig.2,H-O). At H, a section through the eastern defences revealed that the wall was completely robbed-out at this point, but a clay rampart to its west had survived to nearly 1.5m. A group of Hadrianic-Antonine pottery was sealed by the clay rampart. At I, the robbed wall was located with a pitched-stone foundation intact, and, at J, the western curb of Ryknield Street was located, demonstrating that Ryknield Street did not make a right-angled turn into the east gate of the fort.

At K in 1967, J.R. Marjoram mechanically excavated a trench 21m long in front of the flats in Old Chester Road, and found Ryknield Street had been destroyed there. A well was found at the south-west corner of the flats. In 1970 at L, Brassington and J. Potts excavated the western edge of the *via sagularis* with its ditch and a hard-standing to the west. The *via sagularis* had later been extended to the west. At M, a series of slots was found oriented north-south on the line of the northern rampart. At N, wall-foundations were excavated and interpreted as the gateway of the *principia*. At O, a platform and two floors pre-dated a clay rampart (see below) inside the wall.

In 1971-72, C. Sparey-Green conducted excavations on the south-east defences prior to building development (Fig.2,P) and identified at least three phases of timber buildings pre-dating the later defences, a clay rampart with two ditches of Antonine date, some alterations to the defences in the third and fourth centuries, and, outside the fort, a third to fourth-century colonnaded building with stone sills. The site of this building was used as a cemetery by an Anglian community, and sherds of St.Neots, Stamford and Thetford wares were found sealed below a crude rubble platform, perhaps the foundations of a late-Saxon bastion, at the south-east corner of the fort. A narrow ditch, lying to the south of this 'bastion' and following the line of the defences, also produced Saxon wares. In 1973, Dool (1973) conducted a small excavation on Darley Playing Fields (Fig.2,Q) prior to levelling of that area by Derby Corporation Parks Department. A well-constructed road was located, pre-dating a thin gravelled surface of Hadrianic or early-Antonine date with later repairs. The road may be a

continuation of Stukeley's Gravel Road.

In 1979-80, prior to the construction of new changing rooms at Darley Playing Fields, Wheeler (below) conducted excavations in the North-West Sector of the fort (Fig.2,R) to investigate the earliest history of the site and to examine the evidence for Saxon occupation within the fort. Three phases of timber buildings of Flavian to mid-Antonine date were identified. Although the relative quantity of samian ware decreased during the Hadrianic period as on Webster's and Todd's sites, there was a peak in the quantity of mortaria reaching the site and a cessation or diminution of occupation is unlikely. Above the timber buildings, industrial features were found overlain by a humic deposit. A fourth-century stone-sill building and later pits were excavated, and the pottery and coins suggest domestic occupation had ceased by the middle of the fourth century. The cutting of nursery trenches to the north of the excavated area was observed. A spread of red keuper marl was noted along the north of the trenches. Stone spreads were seen, including at least one north-south wall, and also a skeleton. None of these features could be dated. In advance of the laying out of a new tennis court in 1983, Dodd observed and conducted a salvage excavation on behalf of Derby Museum (Fig.2,S). A road was located with a ditch to the south.

Excavation on the Racecourse began in 1968, when A. Gregory and Brassington conducted excavations (Fig.60,B). Gregory excavated a stone structure and some industrial features in advance of harrowing. Excavations continued in 1969 and 1973 under Wheeler (Fig.60,C. Below p.154) and in 1974 under Dool (Fig.60,A. Below p.155), who located a gravel road with, on either side, at least three post-hole buildings, possibly two buildings with stone footings and several hearths, and wells, pits and two pottery kilns to the north of the road. The road was probably constructed in the 80s AD but had been repaired and widened at a later date. The two pottery kilns were of mid-second-century date, and the pits and wells dated to the early-second to mid-fourth century. The stone footings to the south of the road were overlain by a layer containing Antonine or later pottery, and the timber buildings were associated with third- to mid-fourth-century pottery. The samian ware decreased in the Trajanic period and proportionately more Hadrianic types were recovered here than at Little Chester.

In 1968 and 1972-3, Brassington (1971 and 1982) excavated sixteen Trajanic-Antonine pottery kilns (Fig.1) on Derby Racecourse. The production included lead-glazed ware.

In 1978, a Roman cemetery to the east of the industrial complex (Fig.98) was uncovered by the Parks Department of the City Council while removing topsoil, and excavations were conducted by C. O'Brien, S. Losco-Bradley and Wheeler (below p.222) in 1978, 1979 and 1983. The excavations revealed a line of five Flavian to early-Hadrianic mausolea parallel to the road from Little Chester, a mid-second- to mid-fourth-century walled cemetery containing inhumations and cremations and with a number of cremations and inhumations lying between the mausolea and the walled cemetery. Several decapitated and prone burials were found.

Abbreviations used in the text:

- Ae: Bronze. N.B. Bronze is used throughout this report for all copper alloys.
 AMP: Amphora
 Ant: Antonine
 BBI: Black-burnished ware category I
 B.M.C.: Mattingly, H. (1923 onwards) *Coins of the Roman Empire in The British Museum*

- BR: Burnt
 BS: Bodysherd
 c: century
 cc: Colour-coated
 CG: Central Gaulish
 D.1019: Dechelette, J. *Les Vases ceramique ornes de la Gaule romaine.* (Paris, 1904). Reference to types.
 DBY: Derbyshire ware
 DW: Dales ware
 e: early
 EG: East Gaulish
 EW: extremely worn
 Fe: Iron
 FF: Flange fragment
 FL: Flagon ware
 Flav: Flavian
 Frag: fragment
 Gillam 137: Gillam, J. P. *Types of Roman Coarse Pottery Vessels* (Newcastle-upon-Tyne, Oriel Press, 1957). References to types.
 Had: Hadrianic
 Hermet 87: Hermet, F. *La Graufesenque (Condatomago)* (Paris, 1934). References to types.
 H & H: Hawkes, C.F.C. and Hull, M.R. *Camulodunum. First Report on the Excavations at Colchester, 1930-1939.* (Oxford). Reports of the Research Committee of the Society of Antiquaries of London 14.
 IRS: Incomplete rim section
 l: late
 LRBC.1/2: Carson, R.A., Hull, P.V. and Kent, J.P.C. *Late Roman Bronze Coinage* (1960).
 m: middle
 0.363: Oswald, F. *Index of Figure-Types on Terra Sigillata (Samian Ware)* (Liverpool, 1936-1937). References to types.
 O & P, 1920: Oswald F. and Pryce, T.D. *An Introduction to the Study of Terra Sigillata* (London, 1920).
 Pre: Prehistoric
 RIC: Mattingly, H. and Sydenham, E.A. *Roman Imperial Coinage* (1923-1983).
 Rogers B18: Rogers, G.B. "Poteries sigillées de la Gaule centrale", *Gallia Supplement XXXVIII* (1974). References to types.
 SG: South Gaulish
 S & S, 1958: Stanfield, J.A. and Simpson, G. *Central Gaulish Potters* (London, 1958). References to types.
 SW: Slightly worn
 Traj: Trajanic
 uw/uw: Unworn obverse, unworn reverse
 vw: very worn
 w: worn
 x: present
 *: Grave pot in Table 20

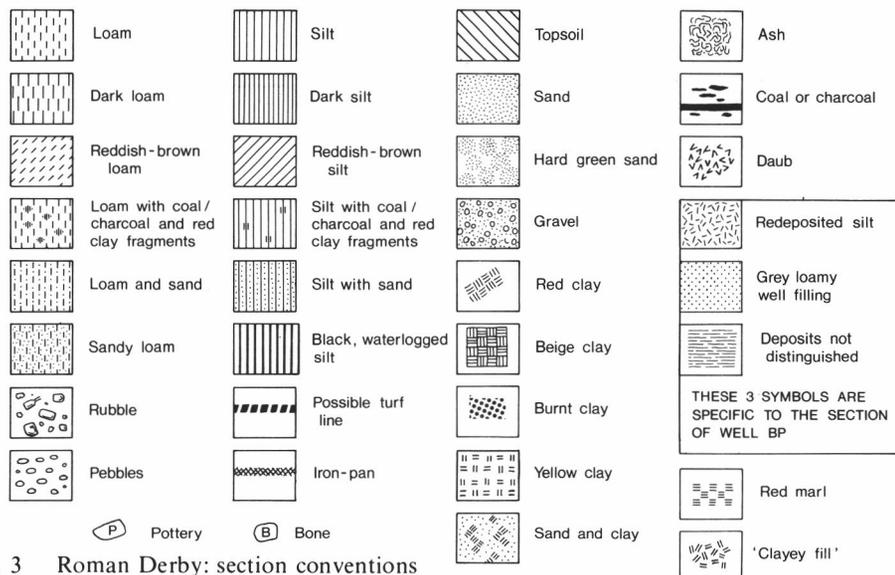


Fig. 3 Roman Derby: section conventions

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