

A ROMAN SITE AT CLAPHAM

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THE EXCAVATIONS

In the summer of 1966 two boys, David Hudson and Derek Reeve, started excavations in the derelict garden of No. 31, Clapham Common South Side. Their attention had been drawn to the site by the discovery in the vicinity of an apparent Roman lamp, which was found in the garden of No. 33 in 1937 and was presented to the London Museum.¹ Unfortunately the lamp is a forgery, of a type recently recognised to have been made in the Naples area during the early part of this century.²

However, the boys were lucky, for in the course of their excavations (area A, fig. 3) they found a Roman ditch (ditch 2) and other features.

During the winter of 1966 further excavations were undertaken under my direction for the Clapham Antiquarian Society, since the owner intended to demolish the existing buildings (since carried out) and develop the site for a garage and car park. I am grateful to the owner of the site, Mr. K. Smith, for permission to excavate, to Mr. Nicholas Farrant for the loan of tools and to Mr. E. E. F. Smith, Secretary of the Clapham Antiquarian Society, for arranging for insurance and other matters. The Ministry of Public Building and Works kindly offered a grant for backfilling which fortunately did not have to be used. I am indebted to Mr. G. R. Adamson and Mr. G. R. Taylor who successively assisted me in running the excavations, and to members of the Wandsworth and Morley College archaeological classes who carried out the work together with members of various local societies. I am obliged to D. Hudson and D. Reeve who have kindly allowed me to include an account of their discoveries in this report.

An area 18 ft. x 17 ft. was opened up (area B) to the north of the earlier excavations and Roman levels were found at about 4 ft.-5 ft. The considerable depth of overburden and the lack of finds led to various labour difficulties, which together with several serious instances of hooliganism made it clear that any further excavations would have to be continued under rather different arrangements.

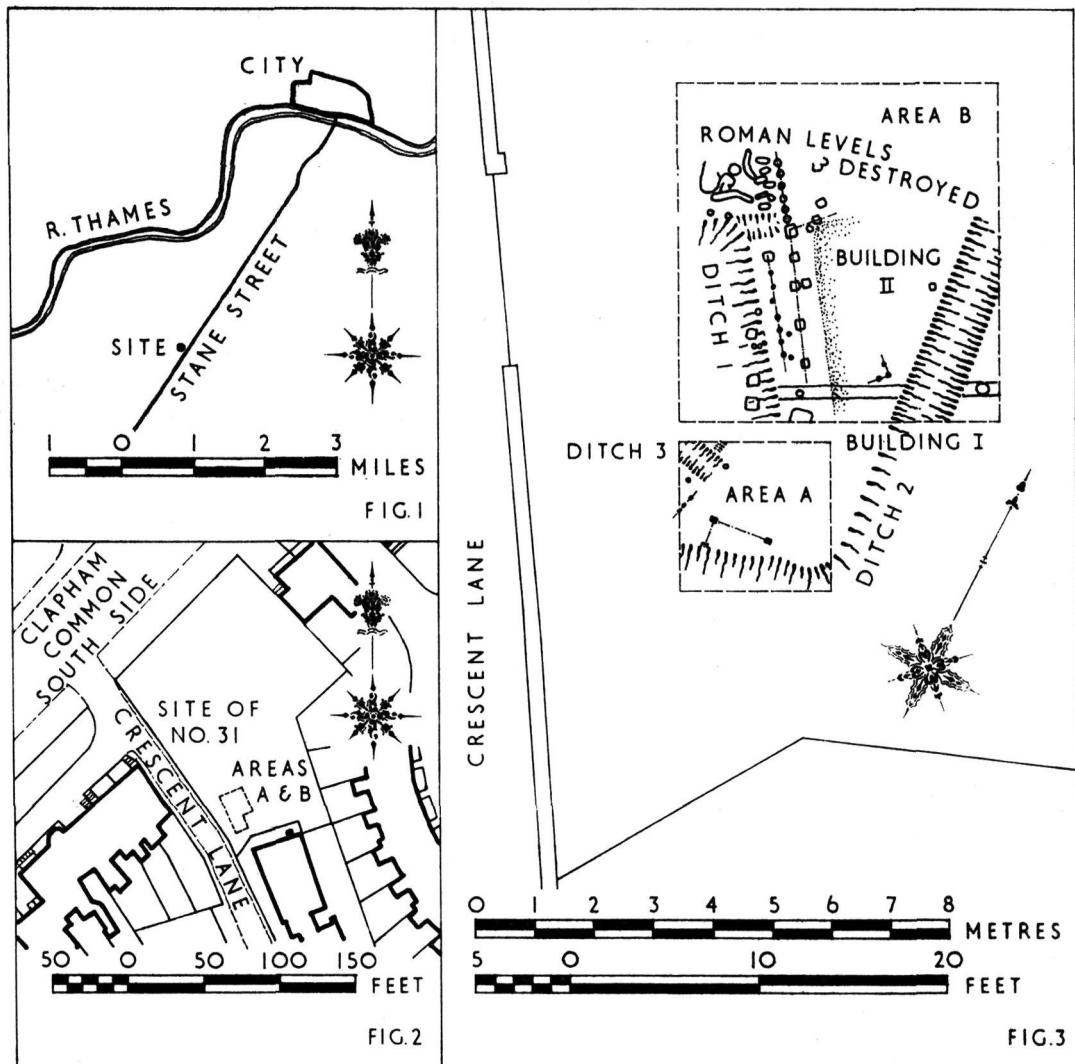
The finds from the site were donated by Mr. K. Smith to the two boys, D. Hudson and D. Reeve.

THE SITE AND STRUCTURES

The site (map reference TQ. 29347510) lies about 4 miles from London Bridge and some 800 ft. north-west of the course of Stane Street as recently suggested by Mr. Donald Imber³ (fig. 1). The garden of No. 31, Clapham Common South Side (fig. 2) is situated on London clay close to the edge of the terrace gravels comprising Clapham Common. Ground level is approximately 79 ft. above sea level (O.S. datum).

ROMAN OCCUPATION

The Roman levels had been seriously disturbed during the early eighteenth century when the ground level appears to have been lowered and the site levelled. In the process the Roman and medieval levels had been completely removed at the north end of area B. Elsewhere only the bottom of post holes and ditches had survived. At least three phases of occupation could be recognised.



Figs. 1-3 Location Maps and Site Plan

Phase I. Building I was represented by an 8 in. wide foundation slot or trench running approximately east-west. The slot had a rectangular section with a yellow clay loam filling which contained a sherd of handmade pottery (Appendix I No. 7). A similar sherd was found in ditch 2 (Appendix I No. 8). Both suggest pre-Roman occupation in the vicinity. The 9 in. diameter post hole of one of the main uprights survived at the east end of the slot. The slot had been cut by ditches 1 and 2.

Phase 2. The north-west end of a second timber framed structure, building II, was found overlying building I. The west wall consisted of 6 in. square uprights at approximately 2 ft. centres, with a row of 2 in. diameter stakes at 9 in. centres driven in a foot in front of them. Internally there were traces of the beginning of an occupation floor about a foot behind the main posts, although unfortunately the floor did not survive elsewhere. The type of construction represented by these remains is probably that of clay lump walling about 2 ft. wide built up round the structural posts. The outside face of the walling appears to have been reinforced by wattling in a manner which has been noted elsewhere.⁴ The return of the north wall was found at the north-west corner of the building, but nearly all its length had been removed by later disturbance. Immediately overlying the natural in the area of building II were fragments of burnt daub and roofing tiles (*tegulae* and *imbrices*).

Continuing the line of the west wall from the north-west corner of building II were the remains of a fence consisting of 4 in. diameter posts at 8 in. centres. A series of oblique post holes indicate that the fence was braced on the western side.

Ditch 1 also probably belongs to phase 2, since it runs parallel with the wall of building II and may have acted as a drainage ditch carrying off water from the eaves. The rounded bottom of the ditch ends close to the northern end of building II and probably ran through area A although it was not recognised at the time. The brown silty-clay-loam silting of the ditch was sterile, although in the very top of the secondary silting was found a fragment of Purbeck marble column (Appendix I No. 5).

Phase 3. A third group of structures which appear to be later than the two buildings of phases 1 and 2 are those associated with ditches 2 and 3. Ditch 2 appears to form the south-east corner of an enclosure. Only the silty-clay-loam primary silting survived in area B, and contained nothing. In area A, however, the darker silty-loam secondary silting was found, and contained the only substantial group of finds from the site.

The most striking find is the copper coin of Ptolemy III (Appendix I, No. 1). This curious survival dating from the third century B.C. was probably only of value as bullion by the Roman period. The pottery associated with the coin includes two Romanised Belgic forms (Appendix I, Nos. 3 and 4) which, as a class in south-east England, tend to survive into the later second century. The pie-dish form (Appendix I No. 2) which appears in the London region during the Hadrianic or early Antonine⁵ period, suggests an Antonine date for the group as a whole which is supported by the fragment of Samian, form 37 (Appendix I No. 9). With the pottery were found several pieces of Roman building material. Apart from a *tegula*, there were mosaic tesserae (Appendix I No. 10) and a fragment of Purbeck marble wall lining (Appendix I No. 6).

Ditch 3 and associated structures represented by post holes may belong to this phase since they are roughly in alignment with ditch 2. They are certainly later than phase 2 whose ditch 1 they appear to overlie.

POST-ROMAN OCCUPATION

Following the levelling of the site during the early eighteenth century the area of the site appears to have been occupied by gardens. This stretch of Clapham Common South Side was already built up by 1745 as indicated on Rocque's map of Outer London. A fine dark brown loam deposit about 1 ft. 6 in. thick represents this phase of the site's life. It contained eighteenth century pottery including many fragments of porcelain.

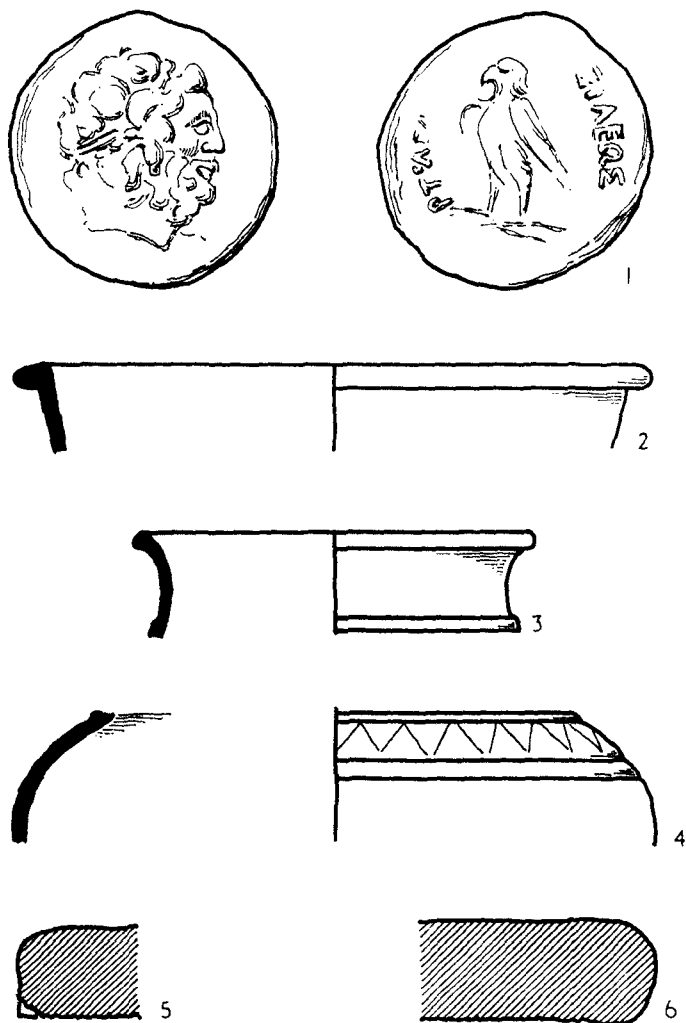


Fig. 4 Finds (I, 1/1 : 2-6, $\frac{1}{2}$)

In 1791-2 the former No. 31, Clapham Common South Side was built,⁶ and its construction was no doubt responsible for the dumping of about 1 ft. 6 in. of building rubble and dirty gravel over the site. The gravel was probably derived from the basement excavation of No. 31. The final phase of the site's occupation was represented by a series of Victorian rubbish pits and drains cutting through the eighteenth century levels.

SUMMARY AND DISCUSSION

Apart from pottery suggesting pre-Roman settlement, three or more phases of Roman occupation have been identified, the earliest two of which are represented by timber buildings, and the last by field or yard boundary ditches. All three phases probably belong to the early Roman period as evidenced by Antonine rubbish in the ditch 2 of phase 3.

It is difficult to be certain of the precise nature of the Roman occupation in the small area excavated. The possibility that the timber buildings may be of military origin cannot be ruled out, and the marked cleanness of the associated ditch deposits indicates that the buildings may not have had a long life.

The contents of ditch 2, however, point probably to a different kind of settlement during the second century A.D. The mosaic tesserae and architectural fragment of Purbeck marble indicate the existence of a substantial masonry building in the locality. The wall veneer is particularly interesting since the nearest parallel to it are Purbeck marble linings for the cold bath of the *mansio* baths at Godmanchester.⁷ Indeed such architectural features are most unusual on normal villa sites at this period,⁸ and their occurrence here probably points to a government, or public establishment, rather than a private residence.

The possibility that the site formed part of a *mansio* during the second century is strengthened by its close relationship with Stane Street and the spacing of other possible *mansio* or *mutatio* sites along the road. Three such sites are known, Hardham, Alfoldean and Ewell, with a possible fourth site at Dorking⁹ mid-way between Alfoldean and Ewell. The spacing of these stations from the southernmost at Hardham are 11, 10 and 10 miles respectively. The Clapham site, nearest of the series to London, is just over 9 miles from Ewell.

If a *mansio* does exist it seems likely that it will be found in the area between this site and the line of the Roman road some 800 ft. away to the south-east. The chance of excavation in this area is admittedly rather small, since it is heavily built over, but the gardens of some of the older properties still offer opportunities for exploration before they are in turn developed.

APPENDIX I

ROMAN FINDS (FIG. 4)

1. Copper coin of Ptolemy III (247-222 B.C.) in worn condition found in ditch 2, area A. Diameter 1.65 in. *Obv.* Head of Zeus Ammon right. *Rev.* ΠΤΟΛ[ΕΜΑΙΟΥ ΒΑΣΙ]ΛΕΥΣ Eagle left on thunderbolt.¹⁰
2. Pie-dish. Two different vessels from ditch 2, area A. Grey fabric with burnished black surface.
3. Jar with cordon at base of neck, from ditch 2, area A. Grey fabric burnished externally.
4. Shoulder of similar vessel to No. 3, from ditch 2, area A. Grey fabric with cordons on shoulder with zone of burnished chevrons between.
5. Grey Purbeck marble torus moulding from a column, 1.15 in. thick with a polished nosing of approximately 14 in. in diameter. From top of ditch 1.
6. Grey Purbeck marble wall veneer with polished upper surface and bullnose moulding. 1.15 in. thick. From ditch 2, area A.

NOT ILLUSTRATED

7. Sherd of coarse handmade brown fabric with white stone grit, 0.4 in. thick. From Foundation trench of building I.
8. Sherd of coarse handmade brown fabric, grass tempered with white stone grit, 0.2 in. thick. From ditch 2, area A.
9. Sherd of Samian form 37. Lezouz. Base of wall. Antonine. From ditch 2, area A.
10. Two tesserae, red brick and white chalk respectively, $\frac{5}{8}$ in. square each. From ditch 2, area A.

NOTES

- 1 Acc. No. 37.124.
- 2 *Ant.* XXXIII (1959), 218 footnote.
- 3 D. Imber 'Stane Street at Clapham' *The London Archaeologist* (Winter 1968), 12-15.
- 4 I. A. Richmond 'Roman Timber Building' *Studies in Building History*, 23.
- 5 M. R. Hull *Roman Colchester*, pottery form 303.
- 6 Occasional Sheet No. 226, *Clapham Antiquarian Society*.
- 7 H. J. M. Green 'An architectural survey of the Roman baths at Godmanchester' Part I, *A.N.L.* Vol. 6 No. 10 (1959), 225 f.
- 8 S. Frere *Britannia* (1967), 270.
- 9 S. E. Winbolt *Britain under the Romans* (Penguin 1945), 60.
- 10 B.M.C. *Greek Coins*. Egypt, type 108. I am indebted to the staff of the British Museum Department of Coins and Medals for help in identifying this coin.