

# FURTHER EXCAVATIONS AT NO. 31 CLAPHAM COMMON, SOUTH SIDE

BY HARVEY SHELDON

## INTRODUCTION.

### I. THE 1966 EXCAVATIONS

Following an archaeological investigation in the garden of No. 31 Clapham Common South Side in 1966, it was reported<sup>1</sup> that "three or more phases of Roman occupation have been identified, the earliest two of which are represented by timber building and the last by field or yard boundary ditches". The author stated, however, that it was "difficult to be certain of the precise nature of the Roman occupation in the small area excavated".

### II. THE 1970 EXCAVATIONS

Just after the 1966 excavations, No. 31 and the adjoining house No. 30 were demolished, since then the estate has remained derelict awaiting redevelopment. This afforded an opportunity to investigate more of the site in an attempt to obtain additional information as to the nature of the reported Roman occupation. Consequently a further excavation was carried out, for the Clapham Antiquarian Society, between August 15th and August 30th, 1970.

An examination of the report on the 1966 excavation shows that two separate areas were dug. Area A was excavated by the two schoolboys who had initiated the work on the site, while the much larger Area B was done later in the year. The report noted that the boys found in Area A a "Roman ditch" (Ditch 2) and that *their* ditch contained "the only substantial group of finds from the site". These finds include the *only* pottery (five sherds) which are definitely identifiable as Roman.

From Area B two successive structures (Buildings I and II) were reported but little material was listed which would indicate that they were Roman. This evidence was: one sherd of "handmade pottery", "fragments of burnt daub and roofing tiles", and a "fragment of Purbeck marble column" (see Appendix). The strength of the argument for their dating would appear to rest in that the later building (II) was cut by Area B, Ditch 2, *which was hypothetically* connected with the boys' "Roman ditch" in Area A.

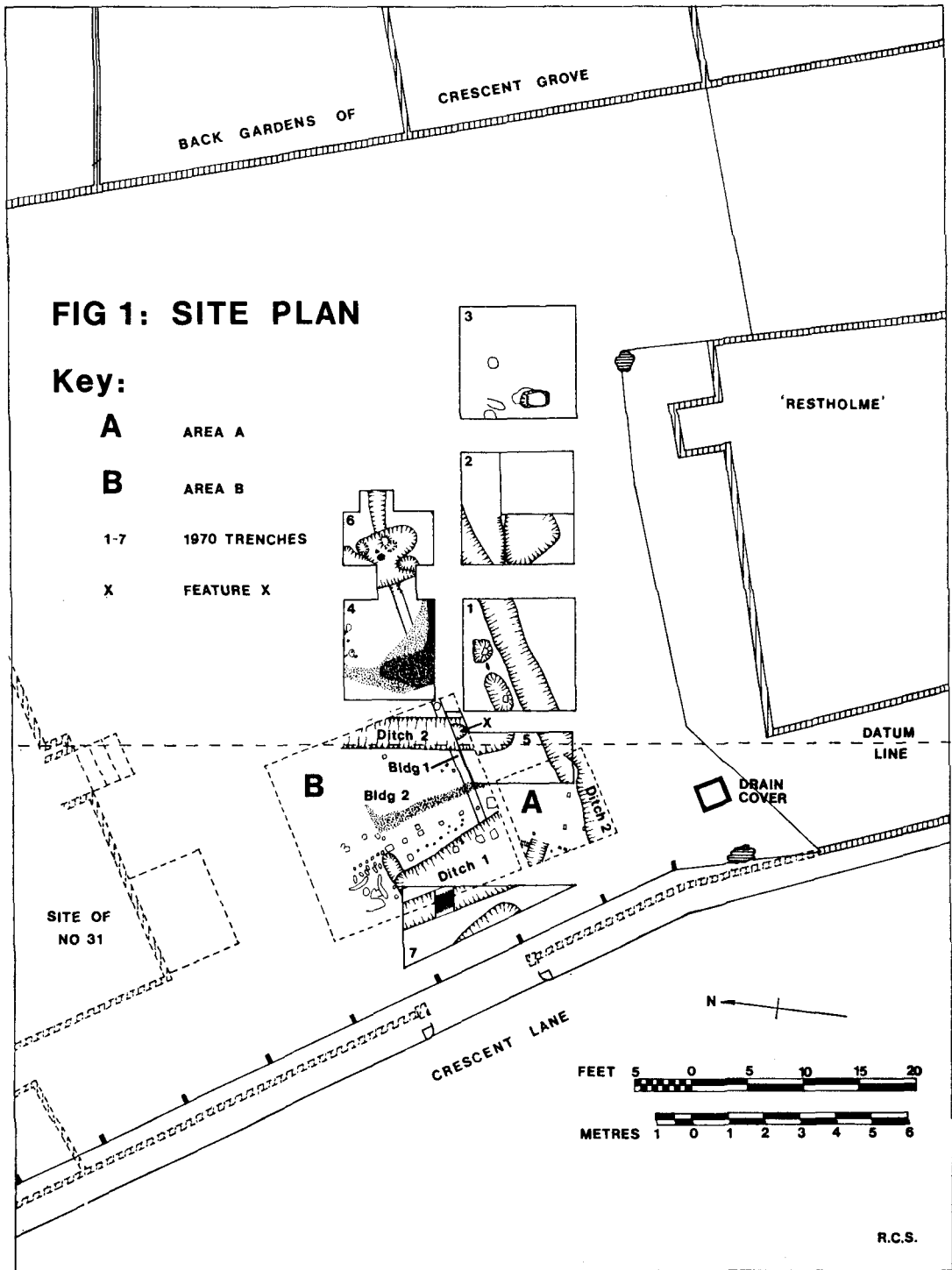
The 1970 trenches were primarily laid to examine the area in greater detail and especially to see:

1. Whether Ditch 2 in Area A actually connected with Ditch 2 in Area B.
2. Whether any traces of Buildings I or II survived to the east of the 1966 trenches, and whether any more material evidence to assist in their dating could be obtained.

### III. MAJOR FINDINGS

The 1970 excavation produced no additional information either in the way of pottery, other objects or features which support the 1966 evidence for Roman occupation on the site. It did, however, show that:

1. Ditch 2 in Area A which contained "the only substantial group of finds from the site" was unrelated to Ditch 2 in Area B and therefore was not archaeologically connected to Buildings I and II.



Clapham Common: Site Plan

R.C.S.

2. Ditch 2 in Area A should be assigned to the eighteenth century A.D. rather than to the Roman period.
3. The "foundation slot" of Building I (first Roman phase) was unlikely to be part of a building and should, in all probability, be assigned to the eighteenth century.

#### DITCH 2 IN AREA A.

This ditch was located in the 1970 Trenches 1, 2 and 5. It was seen to be running on a north-east, south-west line, and *not* turning sharply north to meet Ditch 2 of Area B. It was approximately 3 ft wide, 1 ft deep and generally round-bottomed. The fill was largely fine green to brown sandy earth and contained pieces of pottery, tile and tobacco pipe as well as coal fragments and small traces of what may have been brick. The pottery and pipe would suggest an eighteenth century date for its fill.

In Trench 5 the eastern side of Area A was re-excavated. This showed the ditch running clearly into Area A, and it also demonstrated that, in this part at least, it had not been completely dug out.

#### THE BUILDING "I". "FOUNDATION SLOT".

What is apparently the continuation of this feature was found in the 1970 Trenches 4 and 6. A cut in line with the Area B "foundation slot" was separated from it by an area of natural iron-pan concretion. This cut runs approximately parallel to the ditch described above, and then, towards the east of Trench 6 widens, dips and veers to the east. Before this change it was about 6 ins to 7 ins in depth, round-bottomed, and filled with a fine sandy earth; clean water-worn pebbles were found at its base.

Very little direct dating evidence was obtained. A small tin glazed sherd and many minute traces of coal and brick were found in the fill, but these could be accounted for by worm or root action. Only two larger sherds were found, both were glazed and post-Medieval but occurred above where the cut was definitely located as an intrusion into the natural yellow sand. They were, however, in a deposit indistinguishable from the lower fill.

This feature is probably not a "foundation slot" and no post holes were identified along its length in either Trench 4 or 6. It changed in width, depth and direction towards the east and appeared to stop on either side of the iron-pan. When an extension was made to the west of Trench 4 the sections showed that undercutting had taken place to the east of Area B. The relationship between the "foundation slot" and the iron-pan concretion in this area is therefore unknown.

#### OTHER FEATURES EXCAVATED IN 1970.

Apart from six pits or similar cuts—all of which contained seventeenth century or later material, two features were located which probably related to the 1966 excavation:

##### 1. "DITCH 2 IN AREA B".

This ditch was noticed in Trench 5 as a dark fill ending in a butt short of Ditch 2 in Area A. It contained seventeenth and eighteenth century pottery and pipes, as well as coal, brick and bone. It was cut down from a higher level than Ditch 2 in area A.<sup>2</sup>

## 2. "DITCH 1 IN AREA B".

Only a little of this feature survived. It was found in Trench 7 at the west of the 1966 Area B and just east of a north-south drain cut. It contained a few pieces of brick, tile and coal and a fragment of seventeenth-eighteenth century salt-glazed ware. The colour of the fill was similar to Ditch 2 in Area A, and it lay on the natural sandy pebbly clay.

## IV. CONCLUSION.

All of the features excavated in 1970 appeared to be of seventeenth-century or later date and none of those dug in 1966 can definitely be assigned to an earlier period.<sup>3</sup>

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Much of the work on the site was done by Becky Warren (Assistant Director), John Earp (Photographer), Robert Symberlist and Eric Ferretti. Thanks are also due to all others who assisted in the excavation and to Win Exley who typed the report. Roy Canham of the London Museum was responsible for initiating the excavation and E. E. F. Smith, Secretary of the Clapham Antiquarian Society, handled its administration. The (then) Ministry of Public Building and Works provided the finances for the excavation and the report. Total Oil Company, the owners of the property, gave permission for the excavation.

## APPENDIX

For the purpose of this report, two of the finds from the 1966 excavation were further examined.

## 1. THE SHERD OF HAND-MADE POTTERY

Dr. D. P. S. Peacock, Department of Archaeology, University of Southampton, looked both at the sherd and a thin section made by S. A. Mackenna. Dr. Peacock wrote: "It is impossible to date such a featureless piece of coarse ware with any precision at all, and the fabric could either be late Iron Age or Roman. I have examined the thin section but there is nothing diagnostic to suggest date or provenance. The temper consists of angular flint fragments set in an anisotropic matrix of baked clay with occasional quartz grains".

## 2. THE FRAGMENT OF PURBECK MARBLE COLUMN

Professor Donald Strong, Institute of Archaeology, University of London, stated that, in his view, it was not possible to ascribe a precise function to the piece of stone.

Mr. Martyn Owen, of the Geological Museum, also examined this specimen, and wrote:

"Your submitted specimen is a piece of pale creamy limestone composed mainly of fragmental shelly material. It is quite a compact rock and fairly well bedded, in fact I should think the two larger flat surfaces are natural bedding planes while the edges appear to have been worked.

"You mention the possibility of it being Purbeck Marble. In my opinion this cannot be so. There are no signs of the Viviparidae (*i.e.* fresh-water snails) that are diagnostic of this horizon and Purbeck Marble is usually dark grey, greenish or reddish".

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> *Lamas Transactions* Vol., 22 Part 2, 1969, pp. 27-32.

<sup>2</sup> In January 1971 a limited part of Area B was examined to check this further. Under the back-fill a hollow was seen in the clay. (See Site Plan, feature X.) Its archaeological significance is uncertain; however, if it relates to Ditch 2 in Area B then the base of that ditch terminated in Area B.

<sup>3</sup> Documentary sources indicate activity in the area which might account for them. Rocque's map (1741-45) shows large houses standing in close proximity to the site with the grounds given over to fields and vegetable plots. The houses of Nos. 30 and 31 Clapham Common South Side were built in 1796, and in the 1820's the estate now known as Crescent Grove was completed.