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NEWSLETTER

MAY 2019

MILLE·VIAE·DUCUNT·HOMINES·PER·SECU·LA·ROMAM

FROM THE EDITOR

HERE'S THE LATEST newsletter, number 9, red hot on the heels of the previous issue. Can I keep this pace up - judge me on when the next issue comes out after this and its' content?

Inside this edition you'll find an opening piece from Mike, our Chairman, restating what RRRRA is intent on achieving, how we're doing against those objectives and what comes next - and the role you can play if you choose to. Following on from that are articles about RR18c the Midlands A38, and potential Roman ferry sites. Also here is an update from the RRRRA geophysics team with more discoveries, a release to RRRRA members of the OS data for England's roads as well as a few brief notes of other Roman road news. The QGIS Guide mentioned in the last newsletter is still going through completion and checks - the quality of the information and its presentation is important, as in all our documents - but it'll be released to you soon. Thanks to all those who've provided the enclosed material, and particularly to Mike for obtaining the OS data and processing it into a format for us all to use, no small effort.

How will I follow this up in the next issue? Well; that's my problem to overcome, but getting some more newsletter material from you, whether large or the merest Roman road snippet, does help (please?) - I'd rather not have to write it all myself.

Research into Roman roads, particularly when trying to locate a road's course, usually starts with much speculation which moves towards certainty only as supporting evidence is found. So, to encourage discourse and debate, we are very relaxed about what we choose to publish and, within reasonable bounds, we generally publish most submitted articles (with the implicit understanding that Newsletter content does not necessarily reflect the opinion of either the Editor or that of the RRRRA!). We'll leave you, the reader, to form your own view as to where on the speculation/certainty spectrum some of the content sits! Caveat Emptor!!

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From our Chairman; Mike Haken

Looking back over the last twelve months, it all seemed a bit of a blur as I personally stumbled from one bout of ill-health to the next. During that time, however, the RRRRA's activities have actually gained momentum, thanks largely to the efforts of several of our members. Perhaps I shouldn't risk embarrassing them, but I feel I should take this opportunity to ensure they all get the recognition and thanks that they deserve. You already know the excellent job our membership secretary, Dave Armstrong, is doing as stand-in Editor for this newsletter, but you may not know about his comprehensive in depth research for the gazetteer on Roman roads in Durham, which he has now completed. And then there are David Ratledge and Neil Buckley who have finished their research on roads in Cheshire, with Neil having got the bug so badly he is all set to commence research in Derbyshire, with assistance from a couple of other members. You can read about the achievements of the Geophysics Project in this newsletter but none of that would not be happening if it weren't for the efforts of Albert Hills, who has a truly remarkable success rate in gaining access permissions. And then there's James Lyall's whose willingness to share over 20 years professional experience in the field with a team of willing but inexperienced novices should be held as a model for other professionals to follow. Not forgetting the team themselves who turn out week after week – Richard & Sonia Anderson, Gill & John Firth, Richard Gibson, Rob Matley, Alison Mason, & Roger Wetherill – not to mention new recruits Ian Sanderson and David Spencer.

I have a feeling that in another 12 months time I'm going to need a couple of pages to make sure I don't miss anyone out!

I am only too aware of a perception that most of what we are doing is in the north. In our defence, this has happened more by accident of where some of us happen to live, rather than by design, and ensuring that our projects expand across the entire country is now a primary aim. The success of our first Geophysics team is something we dearly wish to replicate elsewhere, and we already

have plans to form two further teams, one potentially in Essex and the other covering Durham and Northumberland (for balance!). I hope to be able to bring more news of these developments in the next newsletter. In the meantime, if you know of any potential survey sites or potential excavation targets, or if you have any other ideas for future projects, no matter where they may be, please let us know – if we don't find out about your ideas we can't make them happen!

Following the theme of involving members, later this year RRRRA will be excavating part of RR8a (usually known these days as Dere Street), just south of Aldborough, N. Yorkshire, and there will be plenty of opportunities for members to get involved. Unlike certain other well known Roman road excavations, we won't charge anyone for the privilege! The course of the road is well known, however recent aerial photographs have revealed that the road may be of three carriageways of a total width of c.20m, making it extremely unusual, especially in northern Britain. The excavation aims to determine whether or not the road does indeed have three carriageways, perhaps a grand approach to Isurium Brigantum, the Civitas capital of the Brigantes. We also aim to determine whether the road was built this way or is the result of later widening and, subject to the right types of material having been used in its construction, we also hope to test the viability of Optically Stimulated Luminescence (OSL) for dating Roman roads. The excavation will most likely take place in the autumn subject to harvest and the following crop, and we will let everyone know once we have a clearer idea of dates.

The future for our field of research is starting to look extremely productive and exciting.

Roman roads in focus

Ryknild Street section RR18c. Wall to Little Chester, East of Letocetum to Derwentio – 24½ miles (39.4 km)

From Lez Watson

Ryknild Street is a Roman road in England, 112 miles long (180 km), with a route roughly southwest to north-east. It runs from the Fosse Way at Bourton on the Water in Gloucestershire to Templeborough in South Yorkshire, and passes through Alcester, Studley, Redditch, Metchley (Birmingham), Sutton Coldfield, Lichfield, Burton upon Trent, Derby and Chesterfield.

Much of the Midlands route of the Icknield Street is used by modern roads, most notably the A38 from Lichfield to Derby; and many sections retain the name "Icknield Street", but not always accurately as in Hockley, Birmingham and in Redditch, Worcestershire where there is also a road called Icknield Street Drive which stands near the course of the Roman road. "Ryknild Street" is still in use in Lichfield and "Ryknild Road" in Derby.

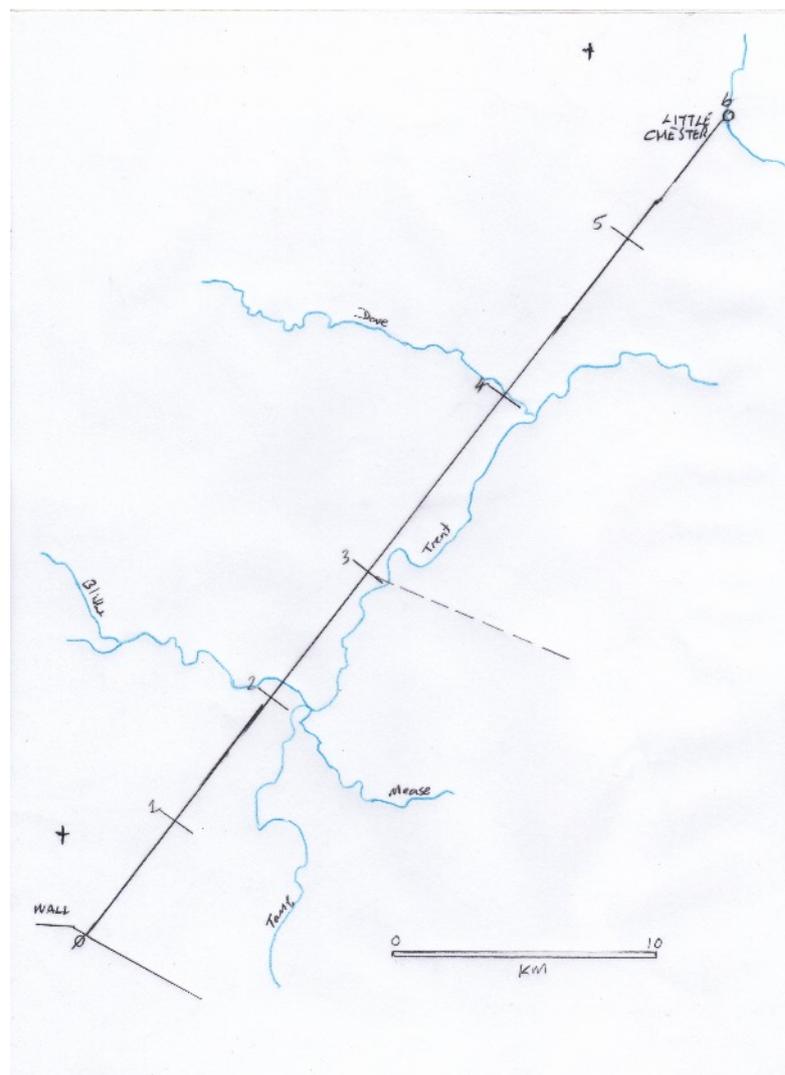


Fig 1, the route of RR18c between Wall and Little Chester

Continued on p.4

Ryknild Street section RR18c, continued..

Continued from p.3

This Roman road has been described a number of times; firstly by Stukeley. In more modern times by Codrington in his [Roman Roads in Britain](#). Margary gave his own summary of the route in his similarly named book [Roman Roads in Britain](#), commenting 'and is a fine highway, very straight and well raised, generally by 1-3 feet at first, and the more noticeably, by 2-3 feet beyond Alrewas'. A more recent description of the route has been made available on the [SABRE website](#) by this author.

A new description and commentary

The section of the road from the Roman forts and settlement at Wall near Lichfield to those at Little Chester in Derby is known by modern commentators as RR18c after the number assigned by Ivan D Margary. In this study it is divided up into six segments as shown in figure 1. Part 4 is described here in detail, the others are still work in progress.

Part 1. Watling Street to Streethay. 4 miles From OS Grid Reference SK 1061 0620, 100m above sea level This part was described by JW Whiston, and published (1978). Recent investigations are summarised in the Lichfield Historic Character Assessment (Langley 2011).

Part 2. Streethay to River Trent. 4.25 miles From OS Grid Reference SK 1427 1047, 75m above sea level.

Part 3. River Trent to Tatenhill Brook. 3.32 miles From OS Grid Reference SK 1830 1581, 54m above sea level A road from Leicester to Ryknild Street at Tatenhill Brook was postulated by Liddle and Hartley (1994) along with an extension into the Needwood forest.

Part 4. Newbold Farm to River Dove. 5.68 miles. From OS Grid Reference SK 2138 1967, 49m above sea level.

If you are fortunate enough to have a copy of Ordnance Survey Explorer Map 245 'The National Forest' (West sheet) in front of you, you'll see Ryknild Street entering the sheet at Streethay, by Lichfield and exiting south of Derby at the A38/A50 interchange. This provides a good overview of

street's route as it travels through the Trent valley. You can also see the line of the ancient road is perfectly straight across the map.

Although greatly improved over time, the northbound carriageway of the modern A38 south of Burton rests on the Roman agger. Raised on a broad causeway the Roman road would have stood above all but the highest river flooding.

The approach to Burton, and the starting point of our study, is a turnpike milestone Figure 2, (Lichfield 9, Burton 3¼) beside the A38 southbound carriageway. Figure 3 shows the position of the post at location 'B'. The post was originally



Fig 2, Turnpike milestone at 'B'

approximately 300 metres further south (A) but moved at least twice to accommodate the trunk road and large scale 'Burton Gateway' commercial development. The northbound carriageway of the milestone's former position is close to the Roman road alignment.

After a short distance the modern road veers away west from the Roman alignment and crosses Tatenhill Brook at Gallow Bridge. The Roman road would have cross the brook a little to the east (C). There is no record of the bridge's structure, no doubt due to extensive gravel extraction and drainage management.

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Ryknild Street section RR18c, continued..

Continued from p.4

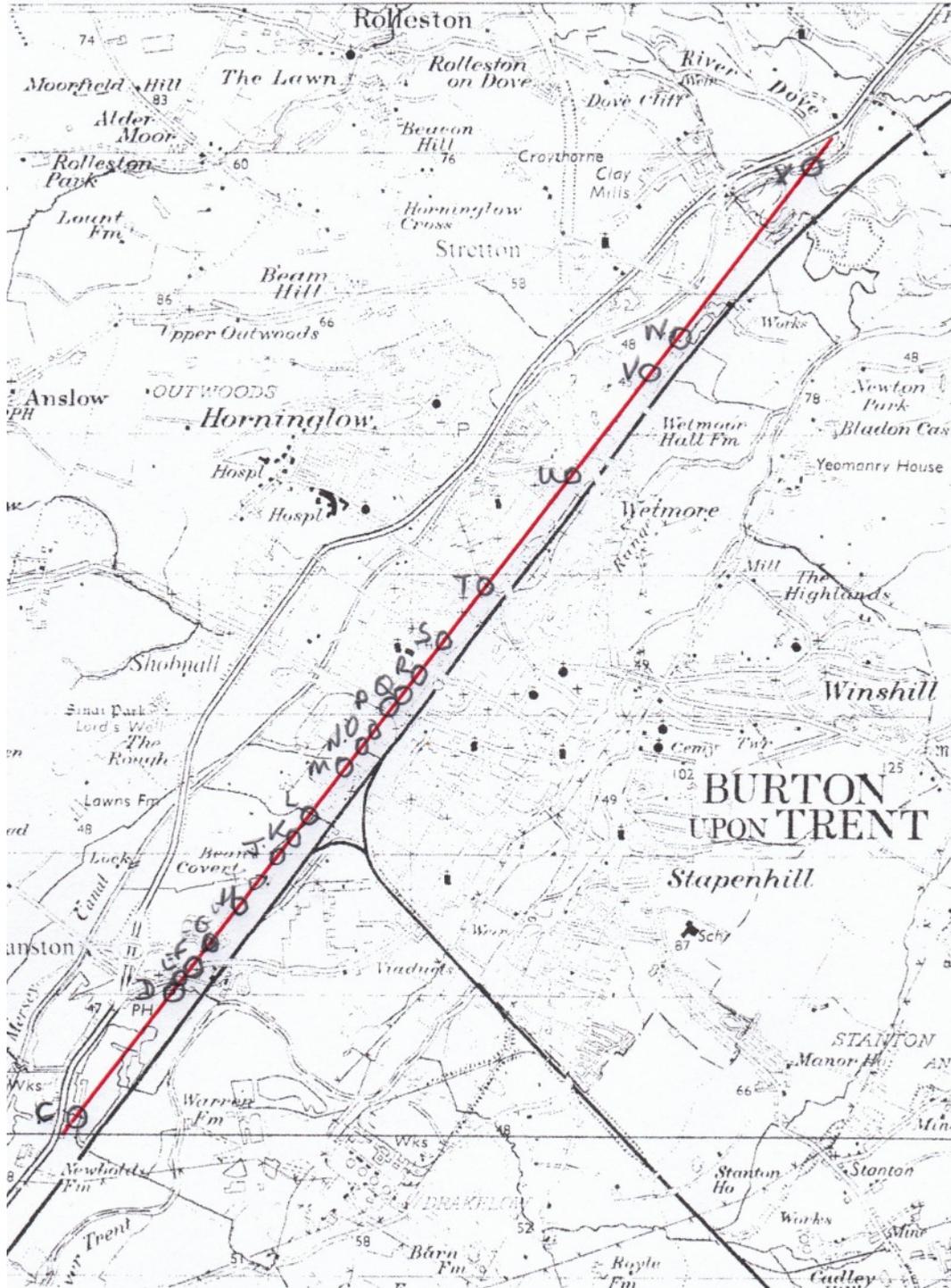


Fig 3, Map of Section 4 of RR18c superimposed on OS 1" sheet 120

For the next 1.3km all trace of the road is lost due to extensive gravel extraction. There is no reason to believe the Roman road diverged from its alignment as the modern dual carriageway does. The Ordnance Survey map of 'Roman Britain' Third Edition (1956) depicted a kink in the road in this

area, but the following edition (1979) straightened it out.

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Ryknild Street section RR18c, continued..

Continued from p.5

The road leaves the modern floodplain to cross Branston Brook (D) and Green. The alignment crosses Old Road, Branston (E) and then Main Street at point location 'F' (near The Blacksmiths Arms) and is re-joined a short distance along Clays Lane (G). The road is accompanied by the lane to the southern end of the recreation ground (H). At this point it can be seen as a low ridge running under a tennis court and a car park. After crossing the corner of the ground, it enters Bean's Covert (I) alongside the unmade footpath. After a short distance the Roman road's agger can be seen to the left (west) for about 250 metres, averaging 18 metres wide and 0.3 metres high (see fig. 4).

On leaving the covert the road is lost among modern commercial development for a considerable distance to Shobnall Brook (P). However, 18th and 19th century mapping provides

considerable detail of the area prior to the road's destruction by modern works. The line is then taken up along the backs of properties on the east side of Wellington Street (Q to R), Figure 5.

The road is lost as it passes through the Town Hall area, to be joined by the south end of Derby Street (S). Both Derby Street and Derby road are on the alignment all the way to where the modern 'A' road diverges to Clay Mills (W). Before here the road crosses an ancient track way at Derby Turn, before crossing Horninglow (U) and Stretton brooks (V). The ancient trackway from Tutbury to the Trent river crossing meets the Roman road not at the modern road junction but a little south at Little Burton West (T). From the divergence near Hillfield Lane, the Roman road continued on to cross the river Dove at point X.



Fig 4, Agger at Bean's Covert, point I

Continued on n 7

Ryknild Street section RR18c, continued..

Continued from p.6

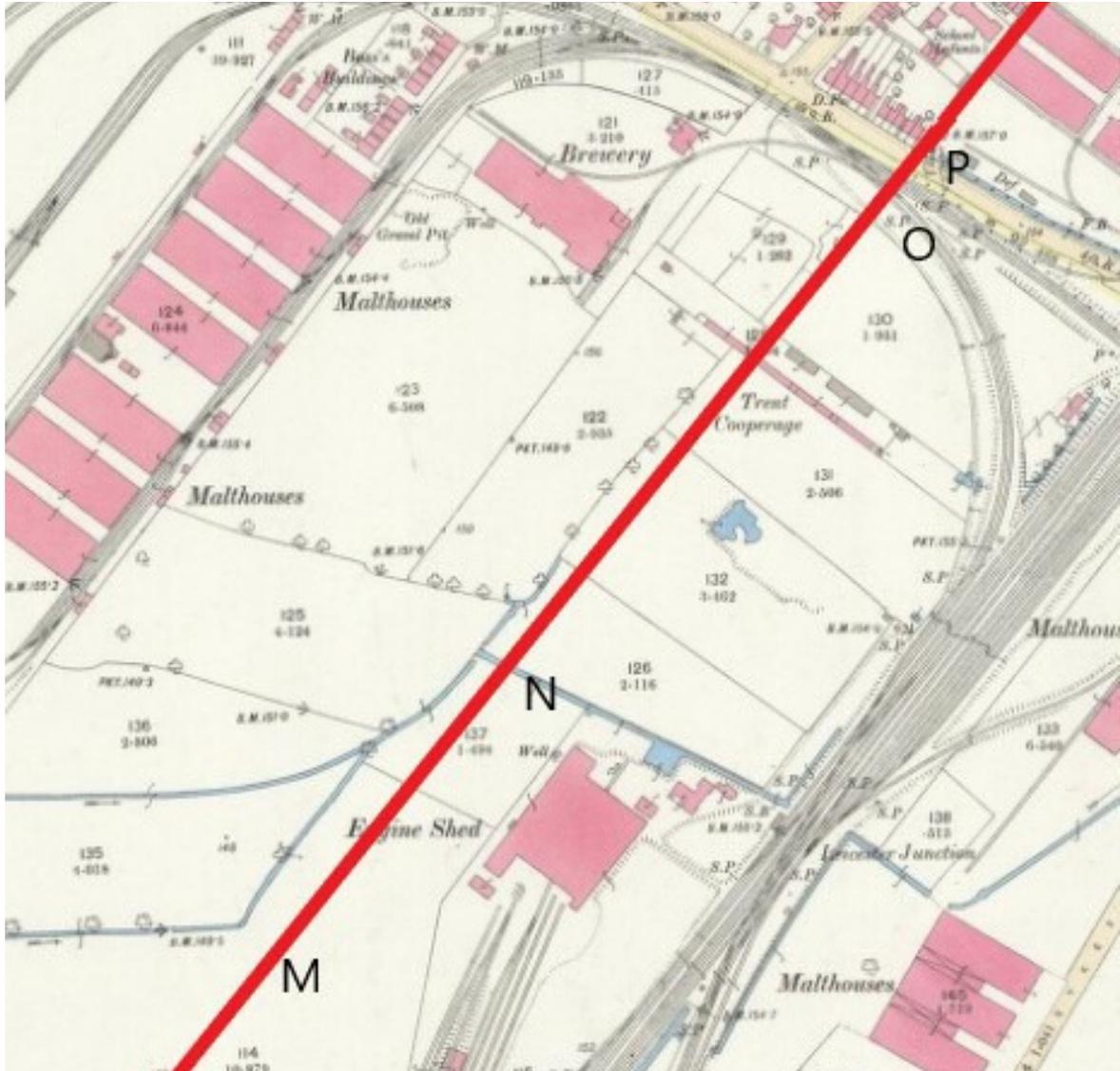


Fig 5, Through Burton on Trent, Points M to P, superimposed over 1884 25" OS map

Section 4 location points - south to north

- A. Original Turnpike milestone position SK 2121 1960
- B. Current Turnpike milestone position SK 2146 1988 (correct grid ref SK 21548 19911 according to milestone soc database)
- C. Tatenhill Brook SK 2162 2014
- D. Branston Brook SK 2304 2104

- E. Old Road SK 2362 2111
- F. Main Street SK 2240 2118
- G. Clays Lane begin SK 2261 2145
- H. Clays Lane end SK 2278 2166
- I. Bean's Covert begin SK 2286 2177
- J. Bean's Covert end SK 2300 2196

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Ryknild Street section RR18c, continued..

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- K. Ordish Covert SK 2321 2222
- L. Brook and Parish boundary SK 2327 2229
- M. Watercourse SK 2361 2276
- N. Old field boundaries begin SK 2367 2284
- O. Old field boundaries end SK 2382 2301
- P. Shobnall Brook SK 2386 2305
- Q. Boundaries at rear of properties begin SK 2387 2307
- R. Boundaries at rear of properties end SK 2410 2334
- S. Alignment with Derby Street SK 2421 2349
- T. Alignment with Derby Road (old Derby Turn location) SK 2461 2401
- U. Horninglow Brook (Hornbrook) and Parish boundary SK 2451 2504
- V. Stretton Brook SK 2568 2539
- W. Modern road diverges SK 2601 2581
- X. River Dove Bridge SK 2686 2692

Part 4 Monument Record sources

Monument Number: 929354. Location: SK 2283 2170.

Ryknild Street at Bean's Covert. (Taken from annotations on large scale map strips with Linear Archive File RR 18c). (SK 2284 2170 - SK 2287 2175) "Ploughed down agger as gravelly ridge 18m wide and 0.3m high across ploughed field." V J Burton/19-MARCH-1958/Ordnance Survey Archaeology Division Field Investigator.

(SK 2294 2183 - SK 2301 2193) "Agger survives through copse averaging 10m wide and 0.5m high." Surveyed at 1:2500. D J Chapman/22-JAN-1975/Ordnance Survey Archaeology Division Field

Investigator. (SK 2284 2170 - SK 2287 2175) Slight ridge across playing field. (SK 2294 2183 - SK 2301 2193) No change. D J Chapman/22-JAN-1975/Ordnance Survey Archaeology Division Field Investigator.

The agger (between SK 2284 2170 - SK 2287 2175) described by authorities 1 and 2 was not seen on good quality APs. However, cropmarks of four ditches on slightly different alignments (with a maximum length of 142m) were seen. These probably represent flanking ditches of the road which may have been recut, hence the differing alignments. (Morph No. FR.86.19.1). Antonia Kershaw/21-APR-1993/RCHME: National Forest Project.

Monument Number: 929355. Location: SK 2317 2212 Potential cropmark ditch of Roman date seen as a single linear feature defined by one ditch, with a maximum length of 68m. This is probably a flanking ditch belonging to Ryknild Street. Mapped using good quality AP's. (Morph No. FR.86.20.1). Antonia Kershaw/21-APR1993/RCHME: National Forest Project.

Derbyshire

The route is described beyond the Staffordshire border by M. Brassington (1981).

Part 5. River Dove to Staker Flats. 4.79 miles From OS Grid Reference SK 2686 2692, 47m above sea level. The road continues along the line made from Burton to just south of Staker Lane where the A38 veers off to the north. The line is picked up again at Micklemeadow and, gaining height, continues to Littleover.

Part 6. Staker Flats to Little Chester. 3.68 miles From OS Grid Reference SK 3117 3250, 70m above sea level; to SK 3536 3459, 49m above sea level.

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Ryknild Street section RR18c, continued..

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Editors Note; Lez's full write up of RR18c is available [here](#). As said above, this is work in progress and if anyone would like to get in touch with Lez you can do so via [this contact link](#). Members interested in road alignments could consider the [Brassington reference](#) where the alignments around Little Chester are analysed.



Roman roads in focus, continued..

Roman Ferries

From Anthony Durham

Properly engineered Roman roads formed a surprisingly small part of the transport network that held the Empire together. It is always far cheaper to move goods and people in a boat than in a wheeled vehicle. So the most interesting part of any Roman road (at least for me) is not the stones along its course, but the points where it met water. How did that road cross rivers? Which port was it heading for? How did it deal with marshy ground? And so on.

Across the Solent

I grew up in the Isle of Wight, watching ferries cross the Solent. Down the hill from my home in Ryde the tide goes out so far you can almost fancy wading across to Portsmouth. The Solent is barely a mile wide at its narrowest (by Hurst Point) and on both sides there is an abundance of safe mooring places for small boats. So travelling to and from the Isle of Wight should have been no big deal for the Romans.

Yet the Roman army seems to have chosen a surprising route across the Solent. Nowadays, Lepe, on the Mainland, and Gurnard, on the Island, look distinctly unpromising as terminals for what might be called the original Isle of Wight ferry. We can be reasonably confident about that route thanks to [Clarke](#) (2003), who established the precise route of [Margary's RR423](#), with sight lines and various wiggles to bypass boggy areas. From a big hill-fort ([Tatchbury Mount](#)) north-west of Southampton, that road ran south-south-west for about 21 km towards the Solent.

The end point of RR423 was probably at Stone Farm, SZ457993, or possibly at Pits Copse, inside a small estuary that has since silted up, probably after its mouth got blocked by a sandbar. One edge of that former estuary is now marked by a stream called Dark Water and the other by a nameless ditch and series of ponds. That important ancient transport node passes unnoticed in the modern landscape, because it is overshadowed by much bigger neighbours, Beaulieu River and Southampton Water.

Reading about that lost little estuary was a penny-dropping moment for me, because a road on the Island continues the line of RR423 almost as if the Solent was not there. There is little archaeology suggesting a Roman military presence in the Island ([Ulmschneider](#), 1999) but it was probably occupied early in the Roman conquest of Britain, when Vespasian and the 2nd Legion Augusta subdued 20 hill-forts. Carisbrooke Castle, in the middle of the Island, is medieval, but has a rectangular bailey shaped very like a Roman fort.

On the Island, a road called Rew (a variant spelling of row) Street essentially continues RR423 for 8 km, with Roman-looking singleness of purpose. From Gurnard on the coast it runs due south for about 3km, avoiding wet ground, almost to the edge of modern Parkhurst Forest. Then a slight turn allows several forest trails, and then Gunville Road, to point straight towards Carisbrooke Castle.

I used to think that Rew Street was just a seductive coincidence, because Gurnard formerly had a substantial [promontory](#), on which sat a Roman villa and a Tudor fort. It has now eroded into the sea, though you can still see its' remains underwater in Lidar images, and parts survived almost into living memory. Living near Ryde Pier, I foolishly imagined that Romans could land onto a promontory sticking out from the coast, but then Clarke's article explained how Roman embarkation points probably really worked.

Gurnard promontory sheltered the mouth of a stream, which one can see from aerial photos must once have had a substantial, funnel-shaped estuary. Nowadays all that remains is a tiny inlet with room for two dozen boats to moor, cut off from a marshy valley by a road. The Gurnard embarkation point would have been on the west side of the valley, perhaps near Cliff Farm or Baskett's Farm. As far as I know, no one has seriously metal-detected or looked for Roman archaeology in that area.

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Roman Ferries, continued..

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Here is a map of the Solent area, in which coastlines and river courses are modern and possibly quite different from their Roman equivalents. Rings indicate hill-forts. Red lines indicate Roman roads, labelled with M numbers if endorsed by Margary or with NEW if described by Clarke as newly discovered. This map is based on the work of many people, including Scott Vanderbilt's mapping of Margary roads, www.megalithic.co.uk, Clarke, A, (2003), *The Roman Road on the Eastern fringe of the New Forest, from Shorn Hill to Lepe*, and Field, NH,

1992 *Dorset and the second legion : new light on a Roman campaign*. It is imperfect in many ways.

Editors Note; After Anthony submitted this for the newsletter (thank you) we recalled that David Staveley has identified what appears to be a Roman road on the Isle of Wight, reported in the Autumn 2016 newsletter ([available here](#)) approximately on the same alignment.

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Roman Ferries, continued..

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Across the Severn

The River Severn was one of the great highways into the heart of early Britain. The Romans crossed it near the location of the new Severn Bridge and the former car ferry. This is known from the Antonine Itinerary's *iter* 14, which runs thus:

Isca – viii – Venta Silurum – xiii – Abone – viii – Traiectus – vi –

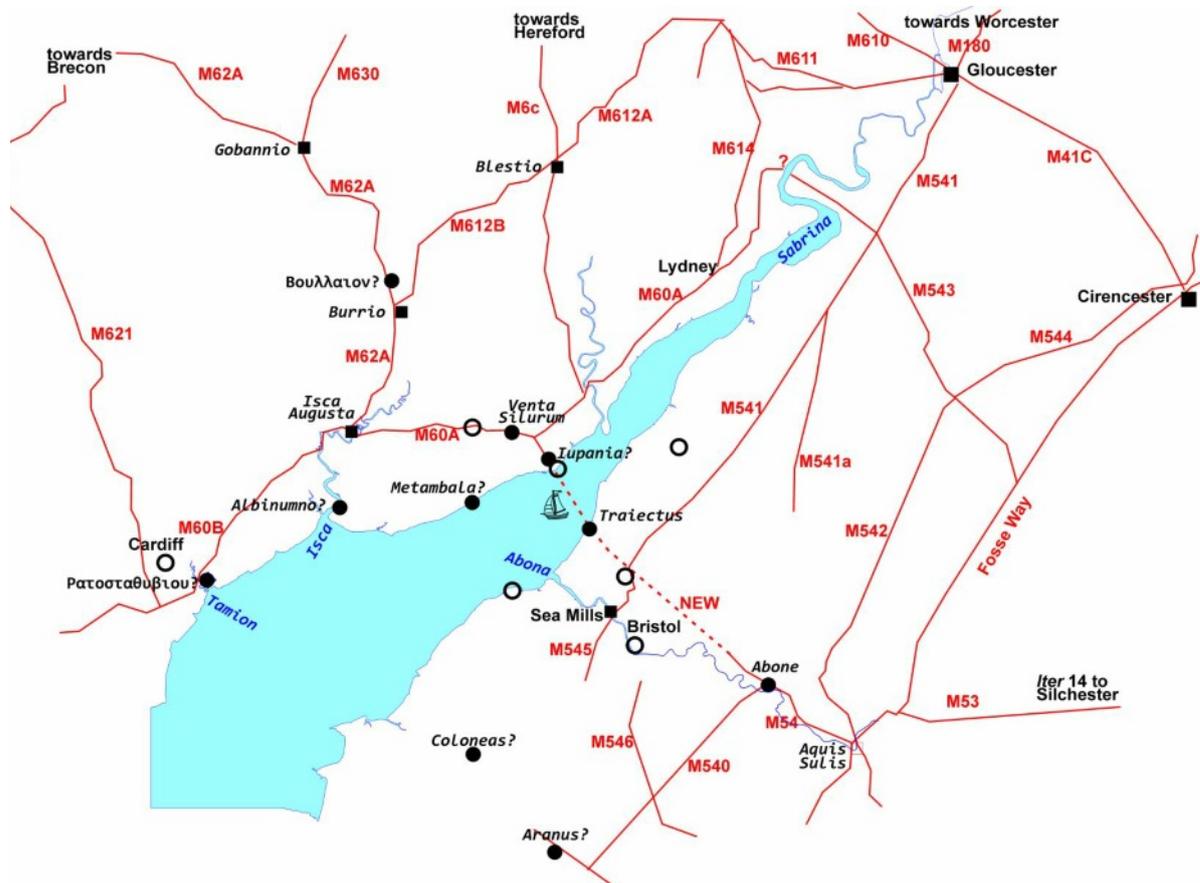
Aquis Sulis – xv – *Verlucione* – xx – *Cunetione* – xv – *Spinis* – xv – *Calleva*.

Isca (Caerleon) and *Venta Silurum* (Caerwent) lie west of the Severn, but the other places are to the east. *Traiectus* obviously indicates a ferry crossing, but it seems to have perplexed a manuscript copyist, perhaps because it was somehow indicated differently from normal place names on an original archetype. Anyway, *Abone*

and *Traiectus* (plus their mileages) got transposed, and they need to be put into the correct order for *iter* 14's track to become clear.

Iter 14 starts out as RR60aa from *Caerwent*, running on land to somewhere near Sudbrook, by the Welsh end of the new Severn Bridge. This is where, in 2008, Time Team worked out that an estuary, now silted up, led to Portskewett, with a likely embarkation point at about ST498881. A strong candidate for the ancient name of that place is *Iupania* in the *Cosmography*, derived from *ἴπαντα* 'to come to meet'. Celtic scholars hate being told that place names they find baffling have simple explanations in a dictionary of ancient Greek!

The rest of that stage of 8 Roman miles ran across water, probably to a point on the English side of the Severn near Crook's Marsh power station, where



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Roman Ferries, continued..

Continued from p. 12

Stup Pill (or New Pill Gout) may be a remnant of a silted-up ancient estuary that served as the ferry terminal. Severn Road is therefore probably originally Roman, leading towards Hallen and the two [hill-forts](#) associated with Blaise Castle at Henbury. Presumably it continued through built-up Bristol to link up with RR54 somewhere in the area of Westbury or St Werburghs. RR54 then continued towards Bath, brushing the river Avon at [Abone](#), where the tributary river Boyd entered, at Bitton, ST679696.

Bristol residents will not like having Sea Mills dethroned as *Abone*, but they can take comfort that, while the *Cosmography's* [Abona](#) was the Avon (river estuary, not a place), Sea Mills remains one of the strongest candidates in Britain for river

engineering of Roman date. The name [Avon](#) is often mis-used to argue that much of England formerly spoke Welsh. Actually dozens of rivers across the Indo-European area had similar names. In Britain it seems to indicate an ancient cargo-transporting route.

Above is a map of the Severn area, laid out much like the previous map. Notice how many ancient names look distinctly Graeco-Latin.

Other Ferries

The same pattern, of a Roman ferry between two little inlets on either side of a major estuary, shows up on the Humber. [Petuaria](#) was the Roman fort at [Brough-on-Humber](#), around SE938268, where one of several roads called Ermine Street reached the north side of the Humber, with an embarkation point probably in an estuary whose surviving remnant is Ellerker Clough. Ermine Street continued south of the Humber as RR2d, with a likely Roman embarkation point in a precursor of Winterringham Haven, which also shows up in a surprising context. [Dubglas](#), a battle site attributed to Arthur by the *Historia Brittonum*, has puzzled generations of scholars because it could mean 'blue-black' in later Welsh, but around AD 500 it meant something like 'amber pool'. That probably referred to rust-coloured water in Winterton Beck, after the huge iron ore deposits of the Scunthorpe area were disturbed in Roman times, notably at the Romano-British site of Dragonby.

Latin *trajectus* 'crossing', past participle of *traicio* 'to throw across', contributed to ancient names that became modern Utrecht and Maastricht on the Continent. The word was also used for the long trip across the Adriatic from Brindisi to a port in modern Albania. In Britain, a Roman coin of Caracalla marked *TRAIECTUM* may refer to a crossing of the river Forth near Kincardine. And the Domesday name *Tric* (near Skegness) may preserve a trace of a *trajectus* across the Wash towards the Norfolk coast, where the Icknield Way ended and there was a Roman fort, [Branodunum](#), at modern Brancaster.

The Menai Strait, which separates Anglesey from north Wales, must also have had a Roman ferry. It used to be routine, but risky, for men and animals to wade across the Strait at extreme low tides (much like the Solway Firth, Morecambe Bay, and some other estuaries), at least before Telford's 1826 bridge. As with the Solent, there are many

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Roman Ferries, continued..

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potential ferry routes across, but one that was probably used in Roman times would have started in the south-west at or near [Seguntio](#), modern Caernarfon. The Menai Strait, with large sandbanks on the Anglesey side where a ferry might have landed, may have been Roman [Leugosena](#).

Ancient names almost always have multiple possible meanings, and it is rarely 100% certain which is best. An element **seg-* 'to attach, to tack on' shows up in the names of four water-crossing

places in Britain, and an element **leuk-*, 'light', shows up at many places with a wide field of view. Is that a significant correlation, or an example of the human tendency to see patterns where none really exists?

Funny Names

Loads of nonsense about names has made its way into books and unpicking it is often the key to understanding Roman travel routes. This will be vital in my next article, dealing with parts of the Antonine Itinerary, but let's just mention some problematic names touched on here.

Port, as a man who founded Portsmouth, is obviously fiction. *Wihthgar*, allegedly king of the Isle of Wight, is most likely a confused memory of [Wihthwara](#) 'Wight dwellers'. *Hengist* 'stallion' looks like a politically inspired pun-translation of Latin [cantarius](#) 'gelding', to resemble *Cantware* 'Kent dwellers'. Hengistbury Head is a wedge-shaped

promontory, whose name probably descends from Roman [Cunia](#).

Cerdic's *ora*, mentioned in the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle for years 495 and 514, is often associated with the Solent. Although Latin *ora* could mean 'shore', this may not refer to Cerdic's landing site, but to his inland headquarters, since Old English *ora* usually meant 'ridge' and the Chronicle actually explains it using two words, *stede* and *stowe*, both types of 'place'. Lepe may descend from something like *ad Lapidem*, which [Bede](#) (4, 14) described as being in the right area, and which alludes to stone, often associated with Roman remains.

Editors Note; Anthony's full Roman Era Names - place name site is accessible on line [HERE](#)

Other roads in the news; bits and pieces

Searching for the elusive Stanegate RR85a

From Dave Armstrong

Hadrian became Emperor in AD118 and, it seems, inherited chaos in Britain. All the previous advances made into Scotland in the AD70 - 80's had been gradually drawn back perhaps matching the inferred withdrawal of troops from Britannia for the Emperor Trajan's military needs or ambitions in Dacia and against Parthia. Around AD105 there seems to have been a loose frontier of sorts between the Solway Firth and the River Tyne in northern England. Snippets from surviving Roman texts and interpretation of the symbolism of the images on coin issues suggest that this was a volatile frontier. This is often described as The Stanegate Frontier following the line of a Roman road that was so named by medieval times.

All that sounds very plausible except the Stanegate Roman road, whilst strongly present in the centre of the country and Cumbria is only intermittently known further east across Northumberland. It is assumed to cross the river North Tyne progressing to Corbridge but significantly has never been convincingly found further east. Early Roman forts confirm a military presence at Corbridge and further to the east with the undated, but presumed early, two phase fort site at Washingwells outside Gateshead. These suggest a continuous frontier line or zone. Probably the Roman road was not built when this was the frontier line although improved tracks may have formed a communication and logistics route between the military installations.

Attempts have been made to accurately plot the course of the Stanegate RR85a. In the 1930's RP Wright excavated and prove a Roman road west of Corbridge and to the east of Vindolanda .Ray Selkirk found a road surface to the east of Corbridge at Bywell in the 1980's but his only record are some grainy photographs with no authoritative write up, the associated Roman finds are not catalogued and are now lost. In Cumbria David Ratledge has traced much of the course aided by lidar and recorded in the [Cumbria Gazetteer](#). The missing segments on the road remain elusive and a challenge for local Roman road researchers.

The Northern Archaeology Group (NAG) led by Bill Trow and guided by Steve Hedworth have excavated a section of road just to the east of Bywell on the north side of the Tyne at NZ 0544 6223. While there's no dating evidence from the section, the ~6m width and construction could suggest it is of Roman origin. Having now confirmed the probe surveys' indication that there is a road in situ they are following the line and considering further excavations. As ever, dating the road is an issue to be overcome.

Watch this space for further news as investigation continues.



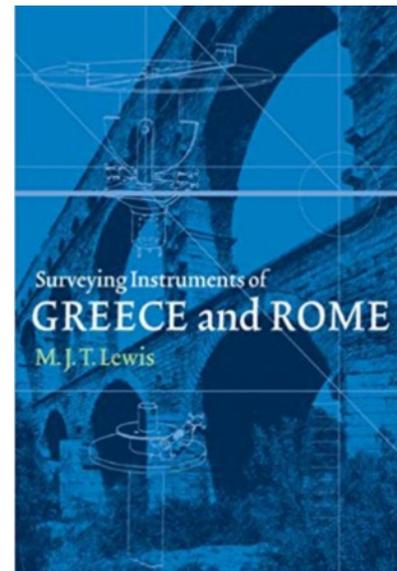
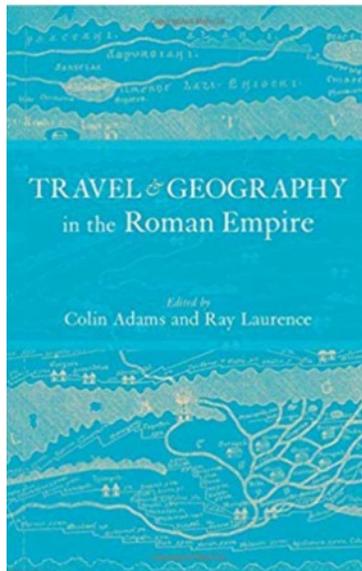
Part completed section looking from the north

Other roads in the news; bits and pieces continued..

More Roman Roads books

From Dave Armstrong

Continuing the last newsletters theme, here's two more Roman roads related books, note these aren't new publications but you may find them relevant to your research?



Travel and Geography in the Roman Empire, edited by Colin Adams and Ray Lawrence, available from Amazon [here](#) with a summary of;

The remains of Roman roads are a powerful reminder of the travel and communications system that was needed to rule a vast and diverse empire. Yet few people have questioned just how the Romans - both military and civilians - travelled, or examined their geographical understanding in an era which offered a greatly increased potential for moving around, and a much bigger choice of destinations.

This volume provides new perspectives on these issues, and some controversial arguments; for instance, that travel was not limited to the elite, and that maps as we know them did not exist in the empire. The military importance of transport and communication networks is also a focus, as is the imperial post system (cursus publicus), and the logistics and significance of transport in both conquest and administration.

With more than forty photographs, maps and illustrations, this collection provides a new understanding of the role and importance of travel, and of the nature of geographical knowledge, in the Roman world.

Surveying Instruments of Greece and Rome by MTJ Lewis, available from Amazon [here](#) with a summary of;

The Greeks and, especially, the Romans are famous for the heroic engineering of their aqueducts, tunnels and roads. They also measured the circumference of the earth and the heights of mountains with fair precision. This book presents new translations (from Greek, Latin, Arabic, Hebrew and Syriac) of all the ancient texts concerning surveying, including major sources hitherto untapped. It explores the history of surveying instruments, notably the Greek dioptra and the Roman libra, and with the help of tests with reconstructions explains how they were used in practice. This is a subject which has never been tackled before in anything like this depth. The Greeks emerge as the pioneers of instrumental surveying and, though their equipment and methods were simple by modern standards, they and the Romans can be credited with a level of technical sophistication which must count as one of the greatest achievements of the ancient world.

RRRA Projects, update

QGIS RRRA geophysics project – Yorkshire group update

From Mike Haken

The following account presents a brief summary of the work that has been carried out since the Spring newsletter. The figures illustrate the main relevant features without being full interpretations, which will be prepared later this year as part of the final reports. To date, the team has been too busy actually getting the work done for James to train them in report writing!

You may recall from the Spring newsletter (Haken, 2019, p.15) that our first geophysics team, based in

the Tadcaster area of North Yorkshire, had begun working on sites along RR280, usually known by the name of its post medieval equivalent, Rudgate. The first half mile of Rudgate north from its branch with RR28 (what is now the A 64 dual carriageway), is well known, and can be clearly seen ranging across the fields on most aerial photographs. The route further northwards, however, from Tadcaster Moor to the major Roman fort and Settlement at Newton Kyme and almost to Cattal, about 6 miles,

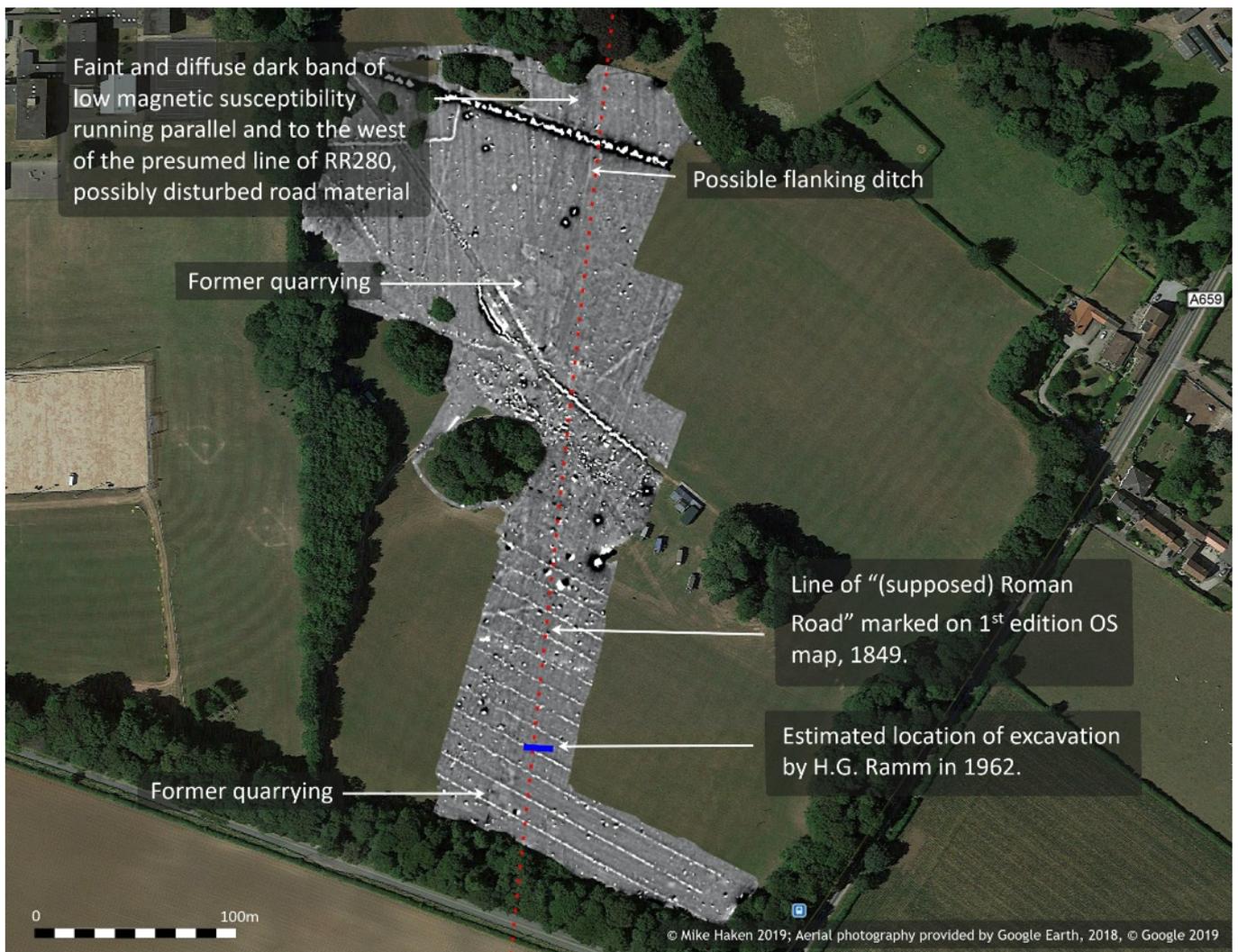


Fig 1, Plot of Gradiometer Survey of land at Toulston Polo Club, Tadcaster, North Yorkshire superimposed on 2018 Google Earth Imagery

Continued on p.18

QGIS RRRA geophysics project – continued..

Continued from p.17

has always been largely one of supposition. The team hopes that its work will identify some firm evidence and provide a little clarity.

In 1964 Hermann Ramm excavated in Toulston Park, now Toulston Polo Club (Ramm 1976, p.8) along the line of the road as marked on Ordnance survey maps, however whilst he did find two ditches, possibly road ditches, no trace of the road structure itself was discovered. To test whether or not any evidence does survive within the Polo Club's grounds, an area of some 4.5 Ha of grassland was surveyed (fig. 1). The results are an

extremely good example of how a wide range of commonly encountered features appear on a gradiometer plot. There is an enclosure of some kind, possibly late Iron Age, a pair of parallel ditches of uncertain date (too narrow for the road), medieval rig and furrow, quarrying, Victorian steam ploughing, an Edwardian drive (normally no longer visible), a pipeline, and a modern drainage system. You will have noticed what is absent from the list – a Roman road!

It's become a bit of a standing joke amongst the Tadcaster based team that whenever James Lyall



Fig 2, Plot of Gradiometer survey of land surrounding Ings House, Skelton, York, superimposed on Google Imagery

Continued on p.19



QGIS RRRA geophysics project – continued..

Continued from p.18

(who is training them) has set out to find a Roman road, he has always failed – in over 20 years of geophysical survey. It seems at first sight that James has again failed to find a Roman road. It remains possible, however, that he found the remains of a Roman road. If you look closely at the plot, you can see a faint darker smudge in a line that runs to the west of and parallel to the line marked as (supposed) Roman Road on the 1st edition Ordnance Survey map (1849). It is possible that this anomaly of low magnetic susceptibility is being caused by heavily disturbed material which originated in the Roman road, before being churned up by Victorian ploughing. If, as we now suspect, that the road is actually just west of the predicted line, this explains why Hermann Ramm could not find the road.

Unperturbed, a fortnight later, following contacts from a local history group in Skelton, near York, an area of pasture at Ings House, Skelton, was targeted in the hope of finding some trace of RR801, the road that is known to leave the NW gate of York legionary fortress on the line of modern Bootham. If it continued along the line of its known course and head close to the modern A19 towards Shipton by Beningborough and Easingwold. I confess that I was quietly confident of breaking James's duck.

A block of land to the south and west of the House was surveyed, along with a west to east to strip a minimum of 25m wide by 385m long. Despite some extremely prominent rig and furrow, and some very unfavourable tussocky ground, both of which made controlling the cart quite tricky, the team managed to cover 2.9 Ha in a day. And the results? Nothing. Absolutely nothing. No road, no ditches, no archaeology, not even the rig and furrow showed! It's always possible that the road, possibly of quite light construction based on what we know further north, could have been destroyed long ago, or alternatively it takes a course further to the east, perhaps heading to join the putative direct alignment which we failed to find evidence of on the

first training day (Haken 2019). Either way, James's Curse of the Roman Road struck again!

The most recent work that the team has conducted was to complete the survey west of Rudgate close to the large fort and settlement at Newton Kyme. At this point, the medieval Rudgate veers west of the fort and settlement rather than passing through them, something that has always seemed peculiar, and yet this is the "accepted" Roman course. The main purpose of this work had been to see if there were any Roman period features aligned with Rudgate which might provide some evidence for a Roman origin.

Prior to the recent work, the survey had found no such evidence, although the possible western ditch of a Roman temporary camp had been located as reported in the Spring Newsletter (Haken 2019). Up until now, previous interpretation of aerial photography had concluded that there had been two temporary camps at Newton Kyme, and our interpretation was that the ditch we had identified was the western ditch of the camp usually referred to as Camp A (Boutwood, 1996, p.340), further west than it was expected to be.

Since then, the team has completed work on the next field to the north, and also surveyed a small strip to the south, with the hope of locating the NW and SW corners of the possible camp. The total area surveyed on this site is now just over 20Ha (50 acres). Unfortunately, there was no trace of the south west corner, or the southern ditch, the survey showing that the area had been extensively quarried for limestone. It is worth noting that geophysical survey and excavations in 1979, prior to the laying of a pipeline, found no trace of this southern ditch either (Bolton and Heathcote 1978 & Monaghan 1991). To the north, our survey found no trace of the corner of the supposed small camp "A" previously identified from aerial photography, and the area where we expected to find the NW corner of our proposed larger camp proved to have been subject to limestone quarrying. It wasn't all

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QGIS RRRA geophysics project – continued..

Continued from p.19

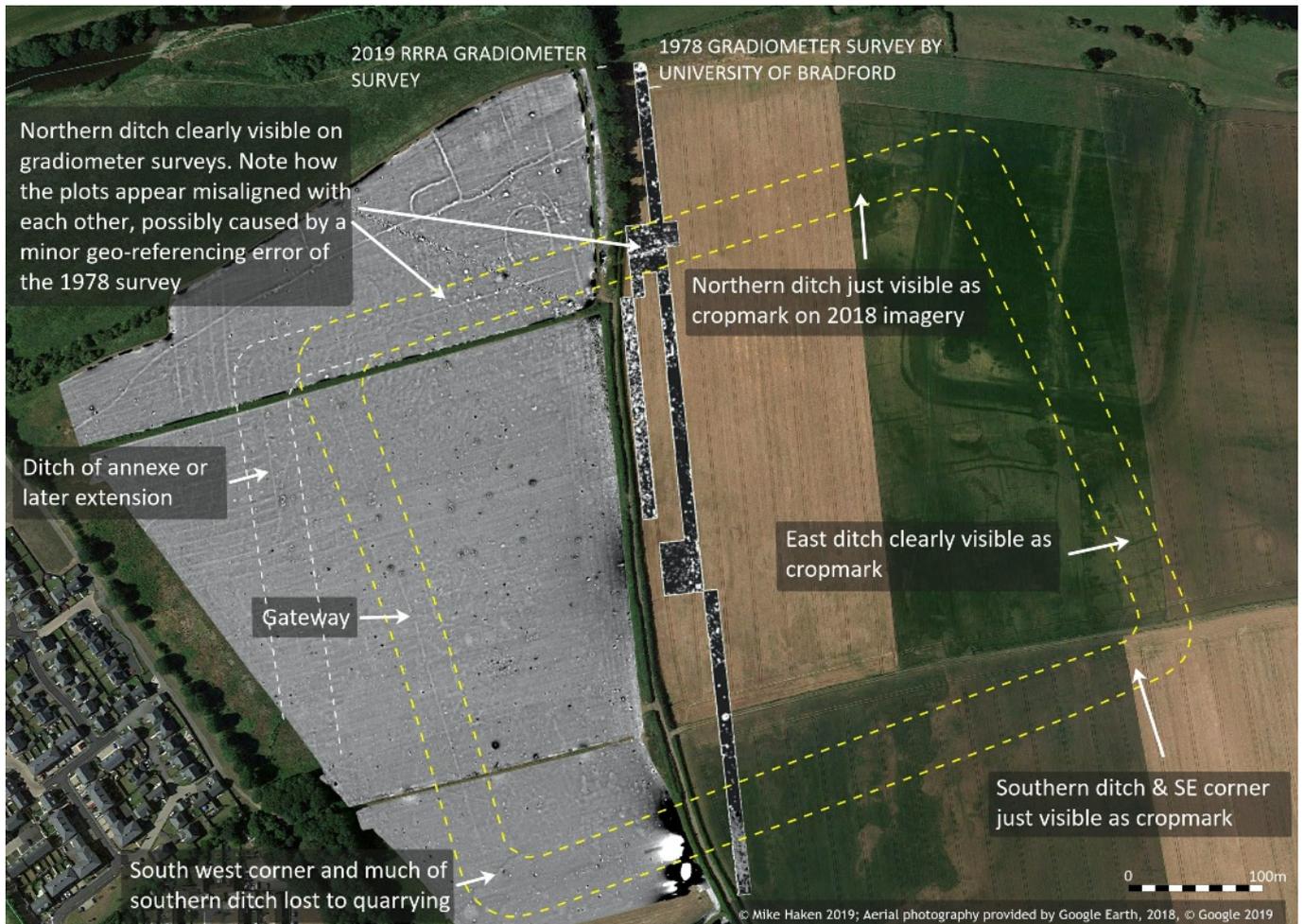


Fig 3, Plot of Gradiometer Survey of land at Newton Kyme, Tadcaster, North Yorkshire superimposed on Google Earth Imagery

bad news though, far from it. Instead of turning south as has previously been assumed, the results strongly suggest that the marching camp ditch identified from aerial photography and excavated in 1979 actually continued west for another 110m or so. Not only that, a ditch on the same alignment could be seen west of the quarried out area (see fig. 3) which then turned south with a nicely curved corner. Our interpretation is that the camp's NW

corner has been quarried away, and that the camp had an annexe attached to its western side.

Further examination of available aerial photography, both from Google Earth and images taken in July 2018 by the author, could not locate the NE corner as previously identified on aerial photography (Boutwood 1996, p. 342). Instead, a ditch following the same alignment can clearly be seen heading ENE until it is bisected by the defences of the large later fort, and could well be

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QGIS RRRRA geophysics project – continued..

Continued from p.20

heading to meet the ditch heading SSE – NNW, previously attributed to Camp B. The clear implication is that we have evidence for a large camp of around 24Ha, large enough for an army of over 20,000 men. Camps of this size are fairly common in Scotland, but this would be the largest currently known in England, just bigger than that at Brampton Bryan near Leintwardine in Herefordshire (Welfare & Swan 1995, p.61). Whilst we failed to find the NW corner or western ditch of camp A, it remains possible that it has either been destroyed by the plough, or for some reason the ditch fill is not magnetically susceptible and we cannot detect it.

Taking measurements along the axes of the putative camp gives probable internal dimensions of approx. 533m x 427m, almost exactly 15 x 12 actus (an actus = 120 Roman feet). This is far from proof that our interpretation is correct, but it would certainly be a massive coincidence. If we are correct the camp is quite early since it appears to pre-date the smaller of the two known forts on the site which has so called parrot-beak gateways, generally recognised as Flavian in date. We then have to consider when such an army would be likely to be assembled here, and the most likely candidates would be either under the governorship of Petilius Cerialis (71 - 74 AD), or that of Gnaeus Julius Agricola (77 – 84 AD).

Returning to the results, the sinuous linear feature running roughly parallel to the river is probably Iron Age, with possible water meadows running off it toward the R. Wharfe. The feature can be seen on Google Earth 2017 imagery continuing to the east of Rudgate, suggesting that the idea of Rudgate being a prehistoric route crossing the R. Wharfe here, at what later became Saint Helen's Ford,

seem highly unlikely. Similarly, siting a large camp right across the line of the crossing would also seem to make it unlikely. This does not of course preclude the possibility that there was an Iron Age, and a Roman crossing, about 400m further to the east.

We are now about to enter a quiet period for geophysics, with access to arable land being largely impossible until harvest, so there is now time to focus on compiling reports. As each one is completed, it will be made available to members.

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RRRA Projects, update

The Ordnance Survey Roman Road Files

- now accessible from our website

From Mike Haken

Until its closure in 1984, the Ordnance Survey Archaeology Division maintained detailed files on all the known and suspected Roman roads in Britain. The files were then passed on to the respective Royal Commissions on the Ancient and Historic Monuments of England, Wales and Scotland. 35 years after most of the files were last updated, they remain one of the main sources of baseline data for Britain's Roman roads, and when analysed objectively frequently reveal how thin on firm evidence the claimed routes for many roads actually are. Previously the only way for researchers in England to access this data was to travel to the respective archives, not the easiest thing to do for most researchers working independently of universities or other institutions.

In 2018, RRRA commissioned a four month project to digitise the Ordnance Survey's files held in the Historic England Archive in Swindon. Whilst in theory these should be only Roman roads in England, a few Welsh and Scottish roads have crept into the collection, mainly close to the borders. We are now pleased to announce that the project is complete, and we can now make those files, in pdf format, available to RRRA members for research purposes. To facilitate access, the RRRA website has been updated with a new page [Projects and RRRA Activities](#) with these files as well as access to geophysics and other RRRA activities.

You will need login details to access each file. The files are in two sets, which we have arranged on separate pages.

OS Roman Road Files A (Margary) include all those roads which were recognised in Ivan Margary's "Roman Roads in Britain" and given a reference number according to Margary's own numbering system. The Ordnance Survey used his system, with a prefix RR.

During the course of their work, the Ordnance Survey Archaeological Division identified many

roads of a possible Roman origin, which were either not recognised by Margary, or discovered after the final publication of "Roman Roads in Britain" in 1973. These were given the prefix RRX and were numbered sequentially as they were recognised, with no adherence to Margary's numbering system. These roads are listed in OS Roman Road Files B (RRX).

It is hoped to be able to make this section complete by the addition of all the Scottish and Welsh OS files in due course. The individual elements to each file have been photographed at very high resolution by a specialist team, and the original 'tiff' files will be made available to members only on request by means of DVD, simply because of large file sizes. A typical reproduction of an RAF aerial photo is, for example, 200MB, and trying to build an online means of downloading these large files is probably not realistic, at least for the time being. However, to make access more viable, the individual images have also been collated as lower resolution pdfs, usually one for each road, although some larger files will be split.

How you can access the data

Navigate to the [Projects and RRRA Activities](#) page and click on the 'A' or 'B' button, select the OS File Name you're interested in and click. It'll ask you for a user name and password - enter the following details.

This seems to give access for a period of time before requesting you to login again.

Username: member

Password: Margary1896

I hope you find this useful for your own research.