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What did the Romans do for us? One thing they certainly did was to lay the foundations for our modern road network, with millions of us driving every day along roads first laid out by Roman surveyors two millenia ago (such as Oxford Street in London, and large parts of the A1, A5 and many others). Unfortunately though, much of the Roman road network is not represented by modern roads, and despite a common assumption that Ivan Margary’s comprehensive gazetteer, *Roman Roads in Britain* (1973) made our understanding of the Roman road network reasonably complete, less than 40% of the network is actually known with any certainty. That false assumption has also frequently led to a lack of attention from the professional archaeological community (with the notable exception of roads in Wales), and for most of the past hundred years the serious study of Roman roads was left to a handful of disparate individuals and small amateur groups, with little or no co-ordination or cooperation between them.

The RRRA was formed in 2015 as a registered charity to bring those disparate individuals together, and to coordinate a nationwide programme of consistent and high quality research, promoting the study of Roman roads and Roman heritage throughout the former Roman province of *Britannia*. Over the last couple of decades, it has often been a race against time to discover and record what we can of the 60% of the Roman road network about which we are still uncertain, since modern agricultural methods and urban development have been steadily removing surviving features from the landscape. Fortunately, new technologies such as LiDAR and geophysical survey have helped enormously and enabled researchers to identify the remains of hundreds of miles of previously unknown Roman roads, along with associated Roman sites, and we continue to work to fill the many gaps. Research is only half the story though, we also have to ensure that the results of our work are readily available. We aim to:

1. bring together all known information on Roman roads in Britain, summarised in a freely accessible online interactive gazetteer, expected to be complete by 2026.

2. identify key sites where important questions remain, and organise fieldwork necessary to answer those questions. 100 Ha of geophysical survey have been completed, with a further 500 Ha already planned, and several future excavations are currently at the planning stage.

3. encourage the involvement of as many people as possible in our activities. We care passionately about community archaeology, and will always encourage local people to get involved in our work, without any charge (unlike some organisations, we will never do this!).

4. organise events to keep people up to date with research including online talks & seminars.

5. ensure that all our published work is Open Access, including our quarterly newsletter and *Itinera* (following a very short initial members only embargo).

**Membership is open to everyone**, and our three hundred or so members come from a wide variety of backgrounds ranging from those with just a general interest in our Roman heritage to professional archaeologists from both the public and commercial sectors, alongside seasoned Roman roads researchers. Joining the RRRA gives you the knowledge that your modest subscription (just £14 a year for a single adult) is helping to support our important work. You might even get a warm and fuzzy glow.
FROM THE CHAIRMAN
MKE HAKEN

Whilst it may no longer be fashionable for academic journals to carry a Chairman’s message or annual review, we felt that for our first ever volume a brief outline of our activities in 2020 was more than justified, especially in the current circumstances of the Covid-19 pandemic.

The Roman Roads Research Association is a young organisation and was less than five years old at the beginning of 2020. Of course, at that time we had no idea of the challenges that the Covid-19 pandemic would present. For ourselves, the impacts were felt mainly in our fieldwork and public engagement. Our plans to revisit the site of our hugely successful community excavation on Dere Street (RR8a) and a nearby Romano-British settlement in 2019 had to be shelved, and we currently cannot say with certainty if we will revisit the site this year. The pandemic also prevented us moving forward with our Devil’s Causeway project in Northumberland, examining possible Roman military sites along the route of the Roman road, and it seems unlikely that much fieldwork will take place there until 2022. Similarly, plans to launch a major community based geophysical survey also had to be postponed, as did a planned community project near Doncaster which was to process the finds from a fieldwalking survey conducted just before the first lockdown on a newly identified Roman roadside settlement.

However, the year’s events were far from being entirely negative. Despite the difficulties, or even perhaps because of them, 2020 did bring positive changes as well. It was right at the start of the first lockdown that we took the decision to launch *Itinera*, and just over a year later you are now reading our first ever volume. Our increased social media presence resulted in a doubling of our membership in the year, a trend that has continued since, with membership now standing at 311 at the time of writing (early March 2021). Whilst most of our community projects were postponed, our small but highly dedicated team conducting geophysical survey on parts of the road corridor between Doncaster and Aldborough did achieve some excellent results (when the regulations permitted). Turning out in all weathers, even in a blizzard, they surveyed the fort at Roecliffe, confirmed the route of RR720b as it approaches *Isurium Brigantium* (Aldborough, N. Yorkshire), and discovered an entirely unexpected ‘new’ road near Tadcaster. These are just a few examples of their many achievements, and the reports for all these surveys will be published on our website later this year.

2020 also saw the launch, quietly, of a pilot project in the East Riding. *Living Beyond the Town – Petuaria* is our contribution to the *Petuaria ReVisited* project (shortlisted for the 2020 Marsh Award for Community Archaeology) and will conduct a magnetometer survey of the Roman road corridor out of Brough (Roman *Petuaria*) heading towards York, as far as South Cave. The project aims to give us a clearer idea of how the Roman period landscape developed...
FROM THE CHAIRMAN

along this road corridor. The survey is being carried out by a group of fourteen local volunteers, who have all received training and support in using our equipment, and it will cover about 300 Ha. It is one of the largest community geophysics projects ever conducted in this country, and if successful it will be replicated elsewhere in Britain.

Without question, the most significant event for us in 2021 is the launch of this first volume of *Itinera*. From the beginning, the Editorial Committee was very conscious of the increasing problems faced by researchers when attempting to access academic papers, even by those with access to university libraries, since so many academic journals these days are held securely behind a publisher’s pay wall. We wanted to ensure that no researcher would ever struggle to obtain a paper published in *Itinera*, and so we took the decision to produce the journal entirely ourselves and without the aid of a publisher. This was far from being a straightforward process, but we have now proved that with a dedicated group of volunteers, inexpensive publishing software and the advice of people with experience in publishing, typesetting and illustration, it can be done. We can only hope that others follow our lead. Crucially, by going down this route we can not only keep the price of the printed version low but are able to make the entire journal open access online, after an initial members-only embargo of one year.

We continue to promote a strong community-based approach, and 2021 will see the launch of two further community geophysics projects examining sites along the course of Roman roads, one in Nottinghamshire and the other in North Yorkshire. Another potential project is being discussed in Cambridgeshire. We are very well aware of an apparent bias towards projects in Yorkshire; this is an unintentional but inevitable consequence of the Association being founded in Yorkshire. However, we are extremely keen to undertake fieldwork elsewhere in Britain, especially geophysical survey, and welcome any suggestions for areas of future research. In time, we hope that we can meet many more of our members face to face, whether that be by our planned zoom series of chats and lectures, or back out in the field when circumstances allow.

Despite the uncertainties of the coming months, thanks to the enthusiasm and participation of our membership, the long-term outlook for the RRRA is extremely bright. In the meantime, we hope all our readers remain safe and well in these challenging times.

Mike Haken

Chairman

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EDITORIAL
ROBERT ENTWISTLE

The first Editorial of a new annual journal is a significant moment. Launching *Itinera* marks a step forward for the RRRA, focusing light on an aspect of Roman archaeology that has not previously enjoyed its own published academic outlet. That such a development is possible, demonstrates the current health and breadth of an area of Roman studies that will always be associated with the expert labour of Ivan Margary in the middle years of the twentieth century.

*Itinera* is, from conception, a journal intended to bridge the gap between academic researchers and that large band of enthusiasts – the backbone of so many local societies and our own RRRA membership – who wish both to stay informed about, and contribute to, developments in the field. Thus *Itinera’s* content will include quality work by capable independent researchers alongside significant papers from established academics. To ensure maintenance of standards, all papers are peer assessed.

*Itinera* has been established to offer a point of reference for all those doing work which can develop and broaden understanding of Roman roads and land communications. It is an aspect often touched upon in wider archaeological investigations (see for example Janet Phillips and Pete Wilson’s paper in the current volume) but in the past such isolated findings have not always been treated with due emphasis and made readily available for a better understanding of the road network as a whole. *Itinera* will allow Roman road studies to make their proper contribution to understanding Roman society, technological practice, communications, and military and economic development. The journal will inform academics about the current state of knowledge while also making it available to local individuals and societies, allowing future work to be targeted for maximum efficacy. Thus this journal is published both in digital form for maximum reach (free to RRRA members), and in paper form for permanent academic reference and record.

Our content, as may be judged from this first volume, is wide-ranging. The first paper, from David Ratledge, shows how an experienced and skilled practitioner is able to exploit modern technology (in this case LiDAR) to expose and clarify routes that were previously imprecisely defined. Other papers demonstrate the findings of specific excavations, examine the artefactual and archaeological evidence for Roman transport, explore issues of planning and surveying, and speculate about the extent of local road networks. A major contribution from Bill Trow represents the culmination of many years work in testing some of Selkirk’s conclusions regarding the existence of a ‘Proto Dere Street’. A roundup of the year (interpreted broadly for this first volume) keeps track of investigative work relating to Roman roads around the country.
The starting point of Roman road studies has long been Ivan Margary’s classic study, ‘Roman Roads in Britain’. A major challenge for the present day is how to build constructively upon this work in the 21st century, allowing recent findings, seldom pulled together, to be readily referenced by the archaeological community. Two important papers in this volume, from Mike Haken and Dave Armstrong, examine ways in which the RRRA supports identification, classification and nomenclature of new discoveries, building upon Margary’s work and ensuring that it remains fit for purpose in the twenty-first century.

A new journal is not launched without the labour of a dedicated band. Our editorial committee has met regularly on-line throughout this year of pandemic to resolve the many issues that have arisen. It has established ground rules; invited, gathered, reviewed, and selected material; communicated with authors; edited text and images; created and used templates; entered materials into publishing software; stitched together the journal itself; and finally sent the completed journal for printing and circulation.

Mike Haken, the RRRA Chairman, has been unsparing of his time and expertise, actively involved at every stage. Dave Armstrong, indefatigable as the man at the centre, has pulled together the materials into the form of a journal, always positive and perceptive, no labour too challenging. Mike Bishop has given generously of his archaeological knowledge and crucial publishing experience; Chester Forster has brought his experience from other archaeological journals both to head up our band of local correspondents and to manage the indexing of this volume; and John Poulter has been a valued consultant. Paul Bidwell and Pete Wilson, among several others, have acted as readers and referees, their immense knowledge and expertise allowing us to maintain a solid academic basis to this venture.

Nevertheless, it is the authors to whom a journal is ultimately indebted for its success: we thank all our contributors for making Itinera’s first volume possible. We trust that others will be inspired to maintain and develop this journal, taking note of our mid-November deadline for 2022 copy. Similarly we welcome offers of help for our next volume in terms of reading, reviewing, managing images or digital typesetting.

We look forward to receiving ideas for relevant and authoritative papers, whether from inside or outside the UK.

Robert Entwistle
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THE CASE FOR PROTO DERE STREET: EXCAVATIONS TO THE NORTH OF EBCHESTER, 2012 - 2017, INTRODUCTORY NOTES

BY MIKE HAKEN
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When taking the decision to launch our own journal, *Itinera*, our prime driver was to create an easily accessible vehicle to facilitate the publication and dissemination of new evidence and data relating to Roman roads, not just in Britannia, but across the Roman empire. All involved were also keen to ensure that we encouraged authors from a broad spectrum of archaeological backgrounds, not merely those from within academia or commercial archaeology. In particular, we were extremely aware of the need to encourage and support submissions from community archaeology groups, whose work is all too often overlooked due to a perceived lack of quality in the fieldwork and presentation of results. In short, provided that the evidence is clearly present and supportive, we want to actively encourage the presentation of fresh thinking, ideas and theory; whatever the source.

We understood that this would inevitably mean receiving submissions by authors with little or no experience of preparing a paper for a peer reviewed journal, and who might find such a task quite daunting. It was further recognised that some other editorial committees have in the past treated many such papers as somehow substandard and therefore not worthy of publication, irrespective of the actual evidence presented. However, we took the potentially controversial view that wherever we felt that important archaeological evidence had been discovered, we must work with those responsible to enable them to tell their story, despite any perceived shortcomings in archaeological method or writing style. Additionally, from an RRRA perspective, we see part of our role is to help those unfamiliar with publishing their work; coaching, encouraging and developing their confidence in this task. This is one of those papers.

The subject of this paper is a putative Roman road which was first postulated by the late Ray Selkirk, which he termed Proto Dere Street. Selkirk was, to say the least, a controversial figure, loved by some, ridiculed by others. No-one, however, can deny the passion and enthusiasm he had for Roman archaeology; passion and enthusiasm that infected many of those who knew him and worked with him in the Northern Archaeology Group, the society that he established. One of those people was this paper’s author Bill Trow, who has had no formal archaeological training, and spent his entire working life in the building trade. The RRRA was made aware of Trow’s work on Proto Dere Street in 2016 and subsequently...
encouraged two further excavations, described in this paper, on both the putative Proto Dere Street, and a second short bypass or replacement road which was thought by Trow to link both iterations of Dere Street. The publication of this paper provides Trow and the NAG the opportunity to present their evidence for the existence of both Proto Dere Street (at least at its southern end) and the possible bypass road. The interpretations and conclusions reached in the paper are Trow’s, although it is certainly worth adding that in the opinion of the current author, having witnessed part of the excavation of the bypass road, there did appear to be the remains of part of a well constructed Roman agger, including some of the rammed gravel surfacing in one small area.

The paper is followed by an independent assessment of the evidence and its significance by John Poulter, whose work on the planning alignments underlying Dere Street is well known and published in BAR 492 (2009) and in his The Planning of Roman Roads and Walls in Northern Britain, Amberley (2010). For the benefit of the reader, these Notes, Trow’s Paper, and Poulter’s assessment, have been released together as a single pdf document.

Following the RRRA’s decision to continue applying the numbering system of Ivan Margary to roads identified since his death in 1976 (see Armstrong, this volume), we have reserved the number RR8ee(x) for Proto Dere Street, the ‘(x)’ denoting that it has been allocated by RRRA and is not one of Margary’s original series.
The Case for Proto Dere Street: Excavations to the North of Ebchester, 2012 – 2017

Excavations carried out by the Northern Archaeology Group at the request and assistance of the Roman Roads Research Association and Mr John Poulter.

By Bill Trow
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Abstract

Between 2012 and 2015 the author and colleagues of the Northern Archaeology Group carried out a series of small-scale excavations to explore the possibility that an early Roman road had been built to run directly between Ebchester and a point further north named Beukley. In 2017 a more extensive excavation was carried out in collaboration with the Roman Roads Research Association.

This report presents the results from all these excavations and then reviews the accumulated evidence to indicate that the remains are most likely to be those of an early Roman road running directly between Ebchester and Beukley, as predicted.
Fig. 1, Long distance line of suspected Roman road from Lanchester to Beukley
INTRODUCTION.

Summary

In 2017, two archaeological excavations were carried out in the Marley field NZ 0929 5594 following requests from the Roman Roads Research Association and Mr John Poulter (author of *Planning of Roman Roads and Walls in Northern England*). The requests were to probe further the results of extensive excavations carried out by the Northern Archaeology Group between 2012 and 2015 (fully documented on pages 115-134). Those excavations had revealed a possible long-distance Roman road (see plan) extending between a point on Dere Street south of the Roman fort at Lanchester, (Longovicium) Co. Durham NZ 1592 4689 and Dere Street near Beukley, Northumberland NZ 9824 7064. Unfortunately it had not been possible to determine the exact nature and date of these remains due to a lack of manpower, Health and Safety requirements, and the need to reinstate most excavations within the same day to protect the fields. The site chosen for the 2017 excavations was an arable field immediately south of the disused Marley Tile Co works. At the time of operations that field had just been harvested after rain delay, allowing a window of opportunity to become available for archaeological investigation before ploughing.

The work consisted of two excavations, one over what was thought to be an early Roman road and the other over what was believed to be the line of a later replacement or bypass Roman road.

No geophysical surveys were carried out on these or any of the other previous sites. No LiDAR traces were found for the suspected Roman road.

The excavations were carried out in an attempt to assess whether road construction was demonstrably of Roman origin.

No further work is currently anticipated in the area as sufficient excavation has taken place along the long-distance alignment to satisfactorily prove that some form of road existed.

While there is no definitive dating evidence, based upon the number of points at which a road has been demonstrated either upon, or close to, the long distance alignment, we are pointed strongly towards this road being of Roman origin.

Location

The site is located half a mile north of Ebchester (Vindomora), east of the B6309 road from Ebchester to Whittonstall, and immediately south of the old Marley Tile Co. buildings (Fig. 2). The 2017 excavation sites were on the eastern side of a field that slopes to both east and south. Old O.S. maps (Fig. 3), indicate a 400ft (122m) contour running south-west to north-east across the field in the area of the replacement/bypass road. The outlook from the site is southwards over the River Derwent valley, extending to Dere Street on the horizon one mile (1.6k) south of Ebchester.
Fig. 2, Google Earth location plan showing the Marley Field OS Gris ref, NZ 0929 5594, the site of excavations. Map data © Google, Getmapping plc, Bluesky 2020

Fig. 3, 1862 OS map of area of excavations. Watling Street was the former name for the Roman road presently named Dere Street. Reproduced with the permission of The National Library of Scotland
Geology

The underlying solid geology of the field is Pennine Lower Coal Measures Formation—Mudstone, Siltstone and Sandstone, Sedimentary Bedrock of the Carboniferous Period. Till, Devinsion-Diamictan, Superficial Deposits formed up to 2 million years ago in the Quaternary Period.

Site history

The excavation sites were chosen following historical research from several sources. The initial source was a publication by Selkirk (1992, 102-105) in which it he claimed that a road discovered some 4.5 miles (7.25 km) north of Beukley was on an alignment to Ebchester Roman Fort (Vindomora). Selkirk believed this to be the line of a Roman road, and named it ‘Proto Dere Street’, listing a number of locations along the alignment where there was circumstantial evidence of a road. He carried out two excavations at Bywell, with investigation of recorded bridge ruins in the River Tyne at that location.

The earliest record of a possible Roman road upon this line was in a work that came into the possession of William Stukeley (a respected antiquarian and member of the Royal Society) in 1751. The work was a description and map of Roman Britain by Richard of Cirencester, which one Charles Julius Bertram (an English teacher at the Royal Marine Academy of Copenhagen) claimed to have found and copied. Stukeley included it in a description of Roman roads in Britain (1757). The route of the Iter was described as, ‘from York, Aldborough, Catterick, Piercebridge, Binchester, Lanchester to Ad Murum (Halton Chesters) on the Wall’. The Iter ignored the Roman forts of Ebchester and Corbridge which lie upon the currently accepted route of Dere Street. However, this supposed work by Richard of Cirencester has since been dismissed as a forgery (Bertram & Leman, 1809 and Haken, 2018/a).

The Rev. Tom Leman (1809) published a commentary of the above road ‘without noticing Ebchester’.

Robert Surtees (1820, 298-302), in a letter to Mr Gale (date unknown), mentions a local antiquarian (Dr Christopher Hunter, died 1757) who believed that a ‘Roman road ran from Lanchester to Halton Chesters’.

Henry MacLauchlan (1852) mentions both this possible Roman road and a Roman altar found on the north bank of the River Derwent opposite the Bludder Burn Dene. His map of the area (Fig. 4) indicated the conjectured route from the River Derwent, probably based upon the forged Richard of Cirencester document.

W.H.D. Longstaffe’s map of 1856 (Fig. 5) indicates a Roman road bypassing Ebchester, possibly also based upon the Richard of Cirencester document. However it also indicates burials in the Bludder Burn Dene, and an altar discovered opposite on the north bank of the River Derwent.
Fig. 4, Maclauchlan’s map shows the conjectured route leaving the north bank of the River Derwent.

Fig. 5, Part of W.H.D. Longstaffe’s ‘Map To Elucidate The History of Durham and Sadberg Before The Conquest’ indicates the possible Roman road bypassing Ebchester with burials in the Bludder Burn Dene and an altar on the north bank of the Derwent.
Between 2012 and 2015 excavations were carried out between a point south east of Lanchester (Longovicium) at Heugh Farm, Quebec (NZ 1892 4292) and Beukley, Northumberland (NZ 9824 7064), see Fig. 7 for the excavation locations. The above sites are on Dere Street, the main Roman road north to Scotland. All excavation reports have been deposited with the Northumberland and Durham Historic Environment Record’s offices as well as with landowners. The excavations were carried out as near as possible to a direct line between the two points, with minor local adjustments once excavations had indicated the road’s precise location. The excavations were limited in their nature due to restrictions imposed by Land Agents, farmers’ requirements, and availability of labour. Many of the excavations were carried out in the Ebchester area (mostly to the north of the River Derwent). Dere Street itself lies upon the long-distance line from the south, from Lanchester to within one mile of Ebchester, at which point it deviates northwards to access the Roman fort. Excavations carried out near Iveston, two and a half miles north west of Lanchester, found Dere Street off the line indicated by Ordnance Survey. To the north of Ebchester the long-distance line alignment crosses the River Derwent approximately 290m upstream from the suggested crossing of Dere Street. Field walking discovered that, due to steep cliffs on the south side of the River Derwent only one place was suitable for the route of a road: the Bludder Burn Dene, 50m east of the long-distance line. Three excavations were carried out in the Dene after an embankment to a possible bridge and ford site had been identified.

**Excavation A in the Bludder Burn Dene, Grid ref. NZ 1007 5512**

In August 2013 the first excavation uncovered a stone road 450mm thick, on a 225mm bed of sandy clay, itself on top of a lower stone road (Plates 1 & 2), by the embankment for a possible bridge site. The Dene has extremely steep sides. The excavations appeared to indicate that two roads had existed upon the site. Confirmation of the road’s existence was made by other excavations in the Dene.

---

Plate 1. Left. Excavation A. The stone road with sondage at nearside indicates road under. Photograph looking west.

Plate 2. Right. The small sondage uncovered a possible earlier road.
Excavation B, C & D. Grid ref. NZ 1005 5512

Plate 3. Left. Excavation B. Looking west. The excavation was carried out in two parts because of dumped farm material which had worked down the steep valley side. Again it uncovered a cobbled surface. A piece of pottery found on this surface was thought by the pottery expert to be 11th century but a possible Roman date could not be ruled out. The road had a revetment of rammed sand and gravel on the lower side. The excavation was extremely hazardous because of the danger of slipping and falling 9m to the valley floor. It was believed the road zig zagged out of the valley but because of the dumping it was not possible to trace it. This excavation was 36m south of Excavation A.

Plate 4. Below. Excavation C. Stitched photograph of excavation C on National Trust land 4m north of Exc. A. Embankment leading to bridge site to left (east) and possible road to ford site to right.

Plate 5. Excavation C. Left. Embankment to right (east), and possible ford road to left. Many stones had been lifted by roots from a large oak tree nearby.
Investigation of suspected bridge site. NZ 0999 5515

In the summer of 2013, Northern Archaeology Group’s experienced archaeological divers, Rolfe Mitchinson and Bob Middlemass, carried out a preliminary search in the River Derwent at the suspected bridge site and found timbers thought to be the remains of the foundations of the north abutment. The river at this point is approximately three times wider than it should be, due to the effects of a weir downstream, ponding the river upstream. The area was surveyed in 2014 and recorded (Fig. 6). It was at this point on the north bank that a Roman Altar was found in 1787 (MacLauchlan 1852, 17-18).

However, samples of the timbers were identified by Historic England as Larch, introduced into the UK in the late 17th century. It is now believed they were the remains of a structure erected as a starting point for regattas held in that area. In hindsight, because of the artificial depth of water at this point due to the weir downstream, Roman river levels would have been below that at which the timbers were discovered.

As Dere Street passes through Ebchester it is hard to conceive why any post-Roman road, requiring hundreds of tons of stone and possibly construction of a bridge, should be built with the sole purpose of by-passing that location. Nevertheless, a road on this line was shown to have existed by several excavations carried out on the low-lying field and steep
valley side immediately north of the bridge site. Field walking noted several sites for excavation beyond the course of Dere Street to the north.

**Excavations carried out on The Haughs**

**Excavations D & E**

Four excavations were carried out on the Haughs, the low-lying field to the north of the Derwent. Excavations D and E were closely associated but excavated on separate weeks. Because the site of a bridge had been determined, an effort was made to try and discover the road leading from it as well as the road alongside from the suspected ford site, which may have been on a slightly lower level.

In the 1920s, The Haughs was regularly ploughed as it was the site of ploughing competitions over many years. This was possibly the reason that the nearside of Excavation D had lost the sand and gravel from the surface.

---

Plate 6. Excavation D. The west end of the road to the front of the excavation leading to the bridge site to the right. Note the heavier stones forming the side of the road. Picture looking east. The farmer informed me that in his experience the whole of The Haughs consisted of soft loam. A pipeline laid over the length of The Haughs uncovered pure loam under the topsoil. Picture looking east.

Plate 7. Excavation E. This excavation was to the east of fig 13 and uncovered more of the same but at a slightly lower level. The edge was excavated eventually in the nearside. Total trench length was 8.2m. It appeared the old road at the lower level from the ford merged with the later road from the bridge above it. Picture looking west.
Excavations F. (NZ 0995 5518) & G. (NZ 0996 5517)

It was thought at this point there may have been a route from another ford upstream of the bridge site. A second ford may have been needed if the bridge was constructed over the original, necessitating a new one, at least as a temporary crossing. This second ford would have allowed cavalry units to cross without using the bridge. The above excavation therefore could represent a base for a road covered with loam. It was necessary to excavate another, deeper trench on the line close to the river (Plate 9) as this road probably left the river by means of a hollow way.

Plate 8. Excavation F. The truncated cobbled remains of the road looking west. It appeared the stones had been dislodged at an angle by ploughing and this corresponded with damage we noticed in the previous Excavation E.

Plate 9. Excavation G. This excavation uncovered large cobbles where it was expected to find the road after leaving the ford. The picture is looking west with the Derwent to the left. The cobbles were at a deeper level closer to the river.
Excavations D to G were intended to investigate questions arising from earlier digs. The excavations in the Bludder Burn Dene, A to C, proved that an old road, possibly associated with the original incursion by the Romans, had approached the River Derwent and crossed by ford. This ford was possibly replaced later by a bridge which rendered the ford unusable and necessitated another crossing point upstream from the bridge. The road construction in the Dene would have required hundreds of tons of stone to construct. There appears to be no reason for any other road other than Roman to take this route.

**Fig. 7, Map of excavations carried out in the Bludder Burn Dene and The Haughs indicating possible crossing of the River Derwent. The excavations appeared to indicate a possibility of two fords, the easterly being the first which became inaccessible when the bridge was constructed. The suspected second ford would have replaced the first which may have been necessary both for use during the bridge construction and possibly horse traffic afterwards.**
PREVIOUS ARCHAEOLOGICAL WORK NORTH WEST OF THE RIVER DERWENT, EXCAVATIONS H TO S

The road, after crossing The Haughs needed to negotiate crossing an old course of the Derwent that still floods to this day. This was crossed by a causeway, the kerb line still visible in places. Cattle have trampled out large cobbles in the area where it is muddy. The line of the road then crosses the steep bank at an angle and was excavated after it crosses a tiny stream (Excavation H).

Excavation H. Grid ref. NZ 0977 5541

Plate 10. Excavation H. The excavation uncovered a heavy cobbled surface close to the tiny stream to the left. The larger cobbles were at the far end of the road (west) to give protection from the stream on that side. Note the natural stone strata had been excavated and stones laid either side before a layer of sandy clay was laid to prevent the cobbles slipping off the natural rock strata.

Fig. 8. 2009 Google Earth Pro map indicating features found as the line of the road leaves The Haughs and crosses an old channel of the River Derwent. Image © 2020 Getmapping plc
Excavation J. Grid ref. NZ 0963 5559

The excavation was carried out at the point where it was believed the suspected Roman road crossed the known line of Dere Street. Although two excavations were carried out it was not possible to define the line of each road without an extensive machine-operated excavation. It was noted however that both roads appeared to have been constructed with sand and gravel and a limited quantity of larger cobbles.

Excavation K. Grid ref. NZ 0943 5588

The excavation uncovered a badly damaged road approximately 2.85m wide (Plate 13). It was found that several trees had grown over the road with root action moving stones. The woodland, now planted with conifers, is believed to be ancient, and was possibly used as a hunting park for the Manor of Whittonstall.

Plate 11. This was one of the two excavations carried out to try to determine the edge of Dere Street and the suspected Proto Dere Street road. It was not possible to identify the edges of the two roads.

Plate 12. The second excavation uncovered more of the same
The second excavation in the Park Wood uncovered a similar road at the side of a steep slope, with some stones on the east side falling down the slope (Plate 14).

**Excavation L. Grid ref. NZ 0947 5577**

The second excavation in the Park Wood uncovered a similar road at the side of a steep slope, with some stones on the east side falling down the slope (Plate 14).
Plate 15. This picture of Excavation L shows a clear edge to the road on the west side. Apart from one buried cobble the area was sand and gravel.

Plate 16. The excavation looking east and towards the steep slope.
Excavation M. Grid ref. NZ 0940 5589

It was necessary to carry out excavation M in the field to the north east of the woodland to prove that the road had not been constructed for forestry purposes. The excavation (Plate 17) again discovered a fragmented, lightly-constructed road approximately 2.7m wide.

The local line of the above excavations to the south appeared to cross the mouth of a very deep hollow way (Plate 20) which on its south-west side runs parallel to Dere Street. A hand-written historical document (below) supplied by the landowner Ken Sisterton noted that during the 1980 ploughing a cobbled road was ploughed up across the corner of the Holywell Field towards the top of Cow Gap (possibly the hollow way). That hollow way appeared to align with previous excavations in the woodland but confused the author of the document as it was not the established course of Dere Street. It is now believed that the feature may be a former Roman quarry. Early Ordnance Survey maps mistakenly showed Dere Street running down this depression.

Plate 17. Excavation M. Photograph looking West.

**Handwritten Document:**

During the 1980 ploughing signs of a straight road were seen running from the top of the Cow Gap and down the far side then on in to the Holywell Field. It is said that the Roman road passed through here. And not through the hollow in Mr Potter’s Field which looks as if it was dug out for sand. The 1786 map however indicates that the road followed the route preserved by the modern road.
Plate 18. This small excavation was carried out to try and determine if the suspected road had crossed the mouth of the hollow way. The excavation only uncovered sand and gravel and another minor excavation nearby confirmed the base of the hollow way to be sand and gravel on a bed of clay. In view of the material previously found in Excavation J it was now interpreted as a possible Roman quarry for the construction or improvement of Dere Street.

Plate 19. This photograph looking north and taken from the site of the excavation indicates the mouth of the possible Roman quarry with the route of the suspected road just to the right of the single hawthorn bush arrowed. Excavation L is approximately 30m further from that point.
Upon viewing aerial photographs, a crop mark of a possible ditch was observed running across the Marley Field (Fig. 9), believed to represent the line of a bypass or replacement road.

Plate 20. The massive hollow way above looking north west which is now believed to be a former Roman quarry. The entrance in the foreground is believed to have cut through the road previously excavated necessitating a replacement or bypass road further north. Dere Street runs parallel along the top left of the ridge. This area was originally ancient woodland.

Upon viewing aerial photographs, a crop mark of a possible ditch was observed running across the Marley Field (Fig. 9), believed to represent the line of a bypass or replacement road.

Fig. 9, Google Earth map showing cropmark (arrowed) of the suspected bypass road ditch in the Marley field. The approximate route of the old road and the long-distance line are indicated. Image © Google, Infoterra Ltd. & Bluesky.
No excavation number was given to this excavation as it was slightly in the wrong place but it has been included as it indicates the material used for Dere Street in that area. The excavations appeared to indicate that Roman roads were generally constructed with the material that was closest to the site. The following Excavation O was carried out just to the east of the above trench and, as with Excavation J, (Plates 11 and 12), no joining of the roads could be found. The trench would have needed to be extensive and machine excavated. However at a depth of 600mm a hobnail was found within the sand 1m from the east edge of Dere Street within the site of the suspected bypass road.
Plate 24. This stitched photo is only a small portion of the excavation to try and find the bypass road joining Dere Street. The photograph was taken while standing on Dere Street looking north. The eastern edge of Dere Street can be seen 900mm deep at the nearside base of the two sondages. Sand and gravel appeared to have been dumped in quantities similar to single bucketsful. This can be seen by the cluster of small gravel just above centre in the area of the bypass road.

Plate 25. This stitched photograph of part of the excavations indicate the difficulty encountered with Excavation O. The base of Dere Street running parallel with the above photograph can be seen in the base sondages top right.
Excavation P. Grid ref NZ 0937 5587

Excavation P was carried out close to the south boundary of the Marley Field in September 2014 to locate the suspected bypass road. The excavation exposed the remains of a cobbled road badly damaged on the east side where cobbles appeared to have fallen into the east ditch.

Plate 26. Excavation P on the suspected bypass uncovered a badly damaged road on the nearside (east). It was not possible to excavate fully the suspected ditch on the nearside because of a field drain, but at a depth of 1.2m below ground level, cobbles, assumed to be tumble were still being encountered.

Fig. 10, North facing section of excavation on bypass road in the Marley Field, Ebchester.
Excavation Q. Grid ref NZ 0940 5589

An excavation on the old road. This uncovered the old road, again damaged chiefly on the east side.

Plate 27. Left. The old road badly damaged on the near (east) side.

Fig. 11, Google Earth map showing the suspected alignments and excavation sites between the River Derwent, Ebchester and the Marley Tile Works. Image © Google, Infoterra Ltd. & Bluesky
There was a need to explore the possible route of the suspected Roman road further to the north. The previous excavations had found the road running parallel to the long-distance alignment but very slightly to the east after the necessary deviation to cross the River Derwent. A feature just over 1km further north appears to indicate the route. This feature is a ditch or water course running across the side of a slope instead of following the natural course down the slope (Fig.14). The ditch is obviously man-made and is on an alignment with a straight crop mark on the road alignment in the next field to the north (Fig.13). Permission was refused by the landowner to investigate the road. The land holding extends to the valley base at the confluence of the Mill Burn and the Lynne Burn.

Fig. 12, The map shows two more excavations (R and S) which were carried out north of the Marley Field. Selkirk also carried out two excavations at Bywell as well as describing the possibility of a Roman bridge at the site. NAG’s divers discovered Roman stones in the River Tyne at Bywell.
Fig. 13, Google Earth map showing green cropmark (arrowed) of suspected road running through the field to the north of the Howlet Gill and north west of Wood House (NZ 0874 5705). A suspected Roman camp seen by Selkirk from aerial photographs is considered doubtful although exactly on the line. © Google, Infotrerra Ltd & Bluesky

Fig. 14, Google Earth map of area further south from Fig. 13 where a ditch, running across the contours, is thought to be associated with the suspected local road alignment. © Google, Infotrerra Ltd & Bluesky
It was suspected that the road continued by crossing the heavily forested south side of the steep sided valley via a narrow terrace-way, but no permission was granted by the land owner to carry out an excavation there. After crossing the valley floor, the suspected Roman road would probably have used the side of a hollow way on the north side to leave the valley. This provided an excavation site just within the woodland but exactly in line with a public footpath leading to Hedley Grange. This ‘green road’ was mentioned by Selkirk as the possible course of Proto Dere Street.

Fig. 15, The above Google Earth map shows the site of Excavation R in relation to the local alignments identified by previous excavations and features indicated by the yellow line. Note the spot height of 248m on the drive to Hedley Grange which appears to indicate a realignment at that height. The spot height is 290m east of the long distance black line. Strategically this could possibly be the site of a marching camp. © Google, Infotrerra Ltd & Bluesky
Excavation R. Grid ref. NZ 0785 5805

Excavation R was carried out 3m south of the field boundary in a position that would not interfere with any trees in the plantation and on a line with the public footpath (green road) leading to Hedley Grange. The excavation uncovered a fragmented stone road under 225mm
Fig. 16, The Google Earth map shows the site of Excavation S in relation to the public footpath from the west end of Newton to Tofts Hill. At Tofts Hill a realignment of the road takes a turn towards the west. The suspected position of Proto Dere Street at Tofts Hill is 420m from the long-distance line. Image © Google, Infoterra Ltd. & Bluesky
of soil on the west side and 375mm on the east side. The road consisted of mainly angular worn sandstone blocks of varying sizes, but many were also encountered within the topsoil.

For information regarding excavations at Bywell, investigation of the possible crossing of the River Tyne and other sites of interest, reference should be made to Selkirk’s publications, (1995 and 2001).

One of Selkirk’s points of interest was the possible route of Proto Dere Street to Tofts Hill (NZ 0317 6474) at a height of 161m, where he believed a Roman signal station may have existed. From the west end of the village of Newton, a public footpath runs up the field boundary to Tofts Hill. Extending this line into the field to the south gave a position for Excavation S.

Permission was kindly granted by Lord Allendale to field walk and carry out excavations on his land. The field walking was carried out at a time when all the fields were in crop. However interesting stone cobbles were seen in the plantation to the south of Newton and an excavation was planned. The stones when cleaned may have been the site of an iron age enclosure and this was reported to Northumberland HER office. The field north of the plantation had just been harvested and after probing, it was possible to carry out a four-hour excavation where the suspected Roman road was thought to exist.

*Excavation S. Grid ref. NZ 0354 6425*

Plate 30. Excavation S. The trench was 5m long by 600mm wide. Topsoil depth was 225mm average. The base cobbles to the nearside (east) were cleaned, but had been slightly touched by the plough. The gravel and clay metalling to the west side had been touched by the plough and was left in place. The road appeared to be approximately 3.5m wide.
2017 EXCAVATIONS IN THE MARLEY FIELD, EBCHESTER

Objectives

The reason for the excavations was to attempt to uncover, by excavation, two possible Roman roads in the Marley Field, Ebchester.

The old road.

After previous excavations there remained a possibility that the old road may have been an early Roman road associated with the Roman conquest. An excavation at the site of that road was hoped to confirm Roman construction.

The bypass or replacement road.

A previous excavation in the Marley Field appeared to confirm that a bypass or replacement road existed, linking from Dere Street and re-joining the old road slightly further north. The excavation was designed to confirm this finding, and to investigate the possibility of a roadside ditch previously seen as a cropmark on aerial photographs (Fig. 9).

Methodology

Advice from Roman Roads Research Association was taken to optimise excavation methodology and to ensure good understanding of the data.

The excavation sites were chosen with respect to the alignment identified in previous excavations, and to the cropmark seen on aerial photographs, indicating a possible roadside ditch.

Two-metre wide excavations were hand excavated over the line of both suspected Roman road alignments. These were extended in length where necessary.

The excavations were, in places, taken down to the natural clay by excavating with spade and mattock, or by trowel where archaeology was present.

Digital colour photography recorded the archaeological contexts and features as the work progressed.

The 2017 Marley Field excavations were carried out over fifteen active days between 30 July 2017 and 31 August 2017. The field which had been in crop had suddenly become available after several weeks of poor weather had delayed harvesting. The field remained in stubble for the period of excavation. Weather conditions were excellent for the whole period of excavations with only one light shower over the fifteen days. One excavation was carried out on the bypass road and one on the old road, (Fig. 17), shows the sites of the excavations. On the final day on site it was decided to carry out a rapid exploratory excavation on the line of the old road in an attempt to see whether it was better preserved elsewhere.
Excavation of bypass road: Grid ref. NZ 09343 55903

The description of the bypass excavation should be considered and reference made to the section drawing Fig. 18.

The bypass excavation trench was set out 11m long by 2m wide on an orientation east-west. This position was determined by the cropmark of the suspected ditch (Fig 9.) which was thought to be at the extreme east end of the excavation. Topsoil was removed by hand. Over the excavation area, the topsoil was generally between 250mm and 275mm deep, although
a section three metres east of centre was slightly less where cobbles were encountered under the topsoil. It was noted that topsoil to the east end of the excavation contained more small cobbles than the west which was generally clean. Initial trowelling found scattered cobbles of various sizes over the whole area, in places within a very thin layer of red/brown

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**Fig. 18.** A south facing section of the bypass road.
subsoil. However, only one large stone was present in the excavation (arrowed), which may be relevant in the final interpretation.

Further trowelling on the second day found several notable features within the excavation, relevant to the final interpretation. The west end of the trench uncovered a fairly dense scattering of mainly large cobbles up to 200m, with less cobbles present on the south side.

The east end of the excavation contained many cobbles just under the plough soil, initially thought to be ploughed off the road, in a loose dark clayey soil. Cobble size up to 200mm. These were removed to a point where it appeared the cobbles were firmly placed on a brown gritty sand and gravel base which extended to the eastern extremity of the trench (Plate 33). It was at this point that a roadside ditch, seen on cropmarks, was thought to exist.

At this stage it was decided to section the north half of the excavation. The excavation was developed further over the following two days. After removal of the surface cobbles, trowelling continued on the western side of the trench from the large stone sloping down towards a field drain one metre from the extreme west end. This trowelling appeared to follow an area of dark clayey soil with some generally small stones. The appearance was of

Plate 31. The excavation at the end of day 1 looking east. The field can be seen sloping fairly steeply to both the east and south to the right. Note the large angular stone which was just under the ploughed level. Large cobbles can be seen appearing beyond the large stone.
Plate 32. Above. The west end of the excavation showing dense scattering of cobbles just below topsoil level. The photograph is looking up the field to the west.

Plate 33. Photograph looking west. The extreme east end after removal of loose cobbles. Sand and gravel in the nearside and a denser surface of large cobbles overlaid with smaller stones.
half a causeway or agger usually formed as the core of a Roman road. The final 1.5m east of the field drain contained clay and cobbles up to 200mm disappearing into the ground, obviously tumble. The material above these features, and to the west, was a mix of slightly different clays and small cobbles with small gravel. This material had obviously been introduced at some later date and overlies the above-mentioned features.

The extreme east end of the excavation was developed further after excavation through sand and probing had indicated stones at a depth of approximately 1.3m below ground level. In order to carry out the excavation it was decided to extend the trench to the east by two metres. This initially uncovered the eastern field drain. The small excavation uncovered some stones on natural clay under a maximum of 0.9m of sand. It was noted that this sand was stratified: a thin layer of coal was present with a finer particle sand under and a slightly coarser sand above. The stones were both angular and sub-rounded with some coal and shale cobbles present. The larger angular stones were up to 300mm in size. These stones were sitting on a light brown stiff natural clay mixed with some small stones. At that level water penetration immediately took place, although it dried out during the course of the excavation.

Plate 34. The west end of the excavation looking north. The west field drain has been found. The area 1.5m to the east of the field drain contained large cobbles and clay which appeared to be tumble. From that area sloping up to the large stone appeared to be the core of the road. The above features were overlain by material introduced at a later date.
The east side of the excavation was taken down by trowelling, removing obviously loose cobbles that had probably been ploughed off the suspected road surface.

The cleaned-off neat cobbled surface had been overlaid with loose cobbles of varying sizes mixed with clay/soil. This overlying tumble material appeared to have been ploughed off or removed from above the suspected core of the road and deposited over the neat cobbled surface, filling in the area to the east of the suspected road to a similar slope as existing field levels although, as previously mentioned a slight high point was evident with a thinner depth of top soil over.
Plate 36. Trowelling on the east side found a scattering of small cobbles thought to have been ploughed off the suspected road surface. The clay area to the right is at the site of the central field drain.

Plate 37. A neat cobbled surface came to light to the east side of the excavation. For health and safety reasons the first 600mm of cobbles have been removed from the right side. Cobbles and clay overlie these cobbles to the left.
Trowelling revealed that the cobbles within the area 750mm east of the central field drain, appeared to rise slightly from the neat cobbled area. The marking pole indicates the approximate slope on those cobbles.

Further trowelling east of the central large stone indicated the make-up of the suspected core of the road. It consisted of a mixture of clay and soil with gravel, small stones and
cobbles. Previous excavations in the area had indicated materials delivered on site appeared to be in small quantities and varied in nature at regular intervals.

The core of the suspected road was removed in sections and confirmed previous indications that the infill material consisted of material delivered to site in small quantities. This was highlighted in a section of the core as it was removed. To the east side of the core was a layer

![Plate 39. Photograph showing the east side of the suspected core with the central stone bottom left. The core of the road has become evident and slopes down towards the central field drain. From that point to the field drain slightly larger cobbles were evident. These cobbles appeared to slope slightly upwards towards the field drain.](image)

![Plate 40. The above stitched photograph shows the core of the suspected road with central stone. Note that the larger cobbles thought to be tumble to the right of the field drain are continuing to a lower level well below the suspected road.](image)
of predominately clay with virtually no stones, and to the west a layer of small stones in clay which, when trowelled appeared to form a reasonable level surface.

It only became evident after removal of the core and discovery of the cobble base, that the base and previously excavated neat cobbled surface to the east were both at the same level.

Plate 41. The east side of the core after removal, mostly clay with very few stones. It was a bonus to find this material sitting on a prepared cobble base below.

Plate 42. The west end of the core after trowelling appeared to show a surface of small stones and clay different to the material found in the east side.
Plate 43. This photograph looking west shows the upper trowelled level of small stones and clay, with on the nearside, a predominately clay-only fill upon a cobble base.

Plate 44. The central core, after removal, revealed a cobbled base to the suspected road. The cluster of small cobbles and clay towards the bottom left were left in-situ for reference.
Plate 45. The extreme west end of the excavation was extended by 1m and taken down gradually to a coarse sand and gravel layer. Gravel size up to 75mm in size. No sign of a cut ditch was noticed in the overlying material.

Plate 46. Excavation west of the field drain found the 75mm layer of fine sand on the natural clay level. The fine sand continued under the coarse sand and gravel. No evidence was found of a ditch in this area.
It was evident that coarse sand and gravel to the west, and coarse sand with smaller pebbles, overlaid the natural clay under both the base of the core and the neat cobbles to the east.

It was necessary to extend the extreme west end of the trench to seek a possible west ditch. This increased the north half of the trench to 15.2m in total. Excavation had taken place immediately to the east of the field drain which had found a layer of sand and large gravel on a thin 75mm layer of fine sand on natural clay with small stone intrusions. This sand layer was at one metre below ground level.

The west end of the field drain was taken down gradually to the layer of sand and gravel previously found on the east side.

The east end of the trench was excavated to a depth which located the natural clay level at a depth of 1.5m at the extreme east end. Two steps were formed at the extreme east end of the excavation to allow access.

The layer of coarse sand and small gravel petered out over a deep deposit of sand. This sand included a thin layer of coal which sloped slightly to the west, the opposite direction to the

![Plate 47. A very thin layer of very coarse sand and gravel approaches the east field drain before dipping to a lower level and appearing on the east side of the drain at the lower level (arrowed). The sand and gravel can be seen under the field drain. The light coloured stone to the right was blue when excavated and thought to be a glacial deposit.](image-url)
natural slope of the field. In the area of and under the eastern field drain, a sand and gravel intrusion into the underlying sand may represent a filled-in eastern ditch (arrowed).

The eastern end of the excavation uncovered much stone on the natural clay level. The clay level sloped more rapidly in the area to the west of the field drain. Some stones were angular sandstone with cobbles, glacial coal and shale. Some large angular stones dried out dark in colour. These stones were initially thought to have fallen down the slope from the suspected road further west, but excavation of the whole area indicated they were too far away to be associated with that road. At the time of excavation it was thought that the stones may have been natural deposits.

Old Road Excavation 1. Grid ref. NZ 09382 55901

As previous excavations on this possible old road had indicated the width was approximately 2.7m, it was initially only necessary to excavate a trench 4m by 2m trench, to
Plate 49. The eastern end of the excavation looking east from the central field drain. The larger stones just before the eastern field drain were lying at the base of a steeper section of natural clay.
be extended if needed. The topsoil was generally 225mm deep but contained many small stones and cobbles. The topsoil overlaid a stiff brown/orange clay, upon which were many small stones and cobbles. This indicated that any road would have been close to the surface and therefore would have been damaged by the plough.

It was decided to extend the south side of the excavation by 1m to the west and 700mm to the east to try and locate any possible ditches associated with the road. A further 225mm of clay was removed with no sign of a ditch at either end, but the area to the east became wet with water flowing over the clay. It was necessary to excavate a drainage ditch to prevent the trench from flooding. The water continued to flow for the 16 days that the excavation remained open despite no rain falling in that period. As the clay was removed, a section of stones was encountered within the clay.

The eastern side of the suspected road appeared to be made up of stones approximately 900mm wide, cut some 275mm into the clay. A field drain was located running through the road, and another section of large cobbles located further west. Measurements indicated the width of the possible road at 2.7m which corresponded with previous excavations on the old road.
Plate 51. The scattering of small cobbles (up to 75mm) immediately under the topsoil, on top of a stiff brown/orange clay. The south side of the excavation was extended to the west and east in an attempt to locate any possible associated ditches. A field drain has come to light, and a little further west some larger stones thought to represent the west side of the road.
Plate 52. The excavation looking west after further trowelling and excavation at each end. The extreme eastern side of the road consisted of some large stones up to 300mm used as a kerb/edge of the road. These stones had obviously been placed in a trench excavated into the clay. It appeared that because of this, the trench was acting as a drain and was the source of the water in that area. A field drain was identified running through the road and a western edge was found in the area of the ranging rod.

Plate 53. The eastern edge of the road. Many stones in the area had decomposed, some leaving only a footprint of sand. These softer stones were predominately a ginger colour. A similar situation had occurred at an excavation on Dere Street, in wet ground near Lanchester, where stones of the same colour had been reduced to sand, possibly from frost action after being so close to the surface.
Plate 54. Photograph looking west as trowelling continues to highlight the cobbles set within the clay. The clay in the area of the road appeared to be a slightly lighter colour than the surrounding area, possibly because it was drier.
Old Road Excavation 2. Grid ref. NZ 09377 55909

This excavation was the result of a last-day decision to carry out a rapid dig further to the north of the previous excavation in the hope of finding a section of road in better condition with more soil cover. The excavation was approximately 5m long by 900mm wide. The excavation did reveal more cover over the road. Topsoil to a depth of 300mm covered brown sub soil to a depth of 200-300mm, itself overlying the road.
Plate 56. The old road excavation after final trowelling highlights the 900mm section of stone on the east side of the road. It was noted that while the excavation was open, the clay in the area of the road turned a yellow colour, very dry and hard in contrast to the clay either side of the road. This may have been caused by the sections of kerb/edging stones acting as drainage ditches keeping the central section dry.
Plate 57. View looking east after final trowelling. Not a lot left of the west edge of the road, but some stones were removed and can be seen in the spoil to the right. Some of these edging stones had also been lifted by the plough into the topsoil.
Plate 58. Stitched picture of Old Road Excavation 1 indicates the remainder of the stones that formed the road edge. The field drain ran up the centre of the road.

Plate 59. The photograph looking south shows the position of the exploratory trench in relation to the Old Road Excavation. 1. It also shows the excavation in relation to the previously described excavations Q, M, and K on the old road. Q was on the nearside of the hedge, M was on the far side of the hedge and K was in the Park Wood beyond.
The excavation found the road in a better condition than Old Road Excavation 1 but time restricted further investigation. A field drain was again found running through the road. Stones were mainly angular with a few cobbles. Road width was 2.6m. Although the excavation did uncover a slightly improved example of the road it was still badly damaged, and it must be doubtful that the road could be found in a better condition anywhere else in the field.

Plate 60. The photograph looking west shows the road at a depth of 600mm at the west end. It consisted of mainly angular stones up to 225mm with a few cobbles. The width of the road was 2.6m. As with all the excavations, a field drain was found running through the road.
The Artefacts

No dateable material was found within the road context. All finds were within the plough soil and these consisted of Victorian up to 20th century sherds of pottery and glass (Plate 62). One metal button was found in the context (Plates 63, 64, 65) but was in too poor a condition to be dated.
Geological observations.

It proved difficult to interpret the presence of sand, sand and gravel, and cobbles within the excavation of the bypass road as natural glacial deposits, or as the result of extreme weather events in the Roman period, or as the result of human agency. This was especially true for the cobbles and stones found on the natural clay level to the east end of the excavation, some of which were covered by a 900mm layer of sand. Professors David Bridgland and David Evans of Durham University kindly agreed to give their advice. As the excavations were complete, it was only possible to supply them with photographs of the section of the bypass road as well as the section of the same road (Fig 10) excavated previously in 2015, which may also have been of some use in their analysis.

Some difficulty was encountered in the interpretation of photographs, therefore it must be noted that the email quoted below is an observation rather than a report.

“Hard to tell from peering down trenches but they look like man made ridges to me. If the material is natural it is poorly sorted boulder gravel but it’s arranged in a seriously big ridge so my money is on humans.”

Professor Bridgland and David Evans then discussed by email the sand with the coal streak.

“The well differentiated sand could be the product of a water course within or on the Devensian ice (englacial or supra-glacial melt-water stream) but the single coal-rich inclined lamina is unusual and perhaps more suggestive of anthropogenic ‘tipping’, which could explain the whole or the upper part (above the coal) of the sand body. The coal in the section in the ‘old excavation’ (Fig 9) looks like anthropogenic ‘tipping’, which clearly makes that a more likely interpretation of the coal in the sand. So we both agree that there are uncertainties but it is quite likely that all the material in your trenches above the till, which you have reached in places is anthropogenic.”.
The purpose of the investigation that commenced in 2012, was to look at the possibility of a postulated Roman road (Selkirk 1995) which may have existed between Ebchester and Beukley. It was clear that when that alignment was extended south of Ebchester it passed Lanchester to the east by a considerable distance (1 km). As the investigation was to identify the actual route of the suspected road it was prudent to use the known position of Dere Street at each end of the line. A new line drawn from Lanchester (Longovicium) indicated a reasonable fit to the known route of Dere Street for the first 5 miles (8km) before Dere Street veers off northwards to the Roman fort of Vindomora at Ebchester. However it can be seen to be a better fit if the alignment was taken from the higher survey point at Beukley Farm, east of Dere Street (Poulter pers. com.). As the alignment passed close to the Bludder Burn Dene, the only suitable crossing place of the River Derwent in the area because of steep cliffs, the Dene appeared to be the first area to investigate. It was a surprise how much historical evidence (pages 115-134) for this route was found. The excavations in the Dene were successful and research and excavations continued north of the River Derwent. One of the initial reasons for identifying the road as possibly of early Roman origin was the fact that the known course of Dere Street passed close by Ebchester, some 400m to the east of the Dene. There did not appear to be any other reason for a road in that area after the construction of Dere Street into Ebchester, and therefore a strong possibility that this section of road predated Dere Street. Because of the alignment, it was believed to be Roman. Excavation A, confirmed that an early road, possibly crossing the River Derwent by ford, predated the formation of the suspected ramp towards the site of the river bridge, reinforcing the thought that the road had been improved, and therefore had existed for a considerable length of time. It was disappointing to discover that the timbers found in the Derwent were probably the remains of a starting platform for regattas held on that section of river, but in hindsight, the Roman level would be lower.

In 2020 a survey was carried out by probing and field walking for 1.5 kilometres on the alignment south of the Derwent. It was not possible to inspect 25% of that land. Records indicate that the land has been farmed since at least the 12th century. Much of the surveyed land consisted of rock strata just under the topsoil level restricting identification of any road in that area. In a field south of Dene House, quantities of stones were encountered but not in a suitably solid structure to warrant an excavation. It was not possible therefore to indicate a suitable site for excavation, but it should be noted that the lightweight nature of the road found in previous excavations leads to the possibility that the probe was finding gaps between stones.

Due to lack of labour, and the landowner’s need for reinstating pasture quickly, many of the excavations were restricted to one day only. The discovery and excavations of the narrow road in Park Wood and the field to the north (Excavations K, L and M), and the Marley Field excavations were important in allowing the investigation to be carried out using local alignments from points already excavated, which was necessary to answer local questions that arose.
A series of questions arose, including: the following. How did the road cross The Haugh to the north of the Derwent avoiding an old course of the river in that area? Did it cross Dere Street or join it? Was the massive hollow way a Roman quarry, and if so, what was the nature of the material taken from it? How did the quarry, if Roman, affect the route of the old road through Park Wood? Was the old road simply a forestry road? It was important to demonstrate that a bypass road existed in order to indicate the possible continuity of the road during or after construction of Dere Street.

Excavation P, on the suspected bypass road in the Marley Field appeared to answer most of these questions. Although damaged, the excavation found the road to be of heavier construction and wider than the narrow lightweight construction of the old road. This appeared to be a natural progression in road construction. Excavations R and S to the north were slightly east of the long distance alignment, but both indicated the road was heading towards high points at Hedley Grange Farm and Tofts Hill respectively, possibly as local survey points or suitable sites for temporary camps, and reflecting the need for a strategic, safe military route. The alignment of these points opened up the possibility of a crossing of the River Tyne at the historic hamlet of Bywell (where there is a tradition of a suspected Roman bridge) and other sites of interest further north of Bywell (Selkirk 1995). Interested readers should refer to that publication.

The excavation on the suspected bypass road was set out on the basis of a ditch, observed on Google Earth, which crosses the Marley Field on an alignment back towards Dere Street, to a position would just clear the upper limit of the quarry cutting. The route of the ditch appeared to be heading north to re-join the line of the old road. Despite ploughing damage the excavation found that there may have been several remakes of the road suggesting its longevity. The excavation found that features in the excavation indicated the remains were of a Roman road. That this Roman road originated from Dere Street, itself an accepted Roman road, and leads to the old road, but no further, can only imply that the old road was in-place and in use in Roman times. As well as Excavation Q, the two additional excavations in the Marley Field (Old Road Excavations 1 and 2) uncovered the remains of a severely damaged cobbled road on the same projected local alignment of the old road.

Many other questions, still to be addressed, were asked during and since completion of the excavations.

If the old road predates the Roman period, that would require construction in the Iron Age before AD70 when Brigantia was a client kingdom. As this section of road from Lanchester to Beukley is some 18.5 miles (29.6Km) long, construction would have required enormous cost, labour and expertise for both planning and construction. To what purpose? Suggestions that the road may have been built using local labour under the Roman supervision is a possibility, but the same method would also have been used following Roman occupation though the lack of skilled surveyors in the post-Roman era makes this unlikely. Taking this further; as this section of road joins Dere Street north of Beukley then it would imply that these segments of Dere Street were also earlier than the Roman period. There is no evidence for that. However recent excavations at Scotch Corner (Fell, 2020) appear to indicate that, in that location, Dere Street ran through an earlier settlement. There may have been a requirement for the Romans to construct their
early road past the Brigantian stronghold of Stanwick, possibly using an earlier road or trackway.

Consideration should therefore be given to the possibility that an earlier Roman road, possibly using a Brigantian route and predating the course of Dere Street as we know it, ran from Scotch Corner past Stanwick and towards Piercebridge, possibly under the public footpath leading exactly to a crossing of the River Tees, upstream of the Dere Street bridge at the site of the recently-discovered earliest Roman bridge (Wessex Archaeology, 2010).

The road does not appear to have been built locally after the Roman period. About two miles (3.4Km) north of Ebchester, the road crosses the Mill Burn valley. The steep sided valley has an outcropping coal seam (Brockwell seam) in many areas and has been the site of extensive mining, resulting in the construction of a railway into the valley in the late 19th century. Because of this it could be suggested that the road was used locally for the transportation of coal. Indeed Excavation P uncovered evidence of a scattering of coal possibly from an overturned cart. The excavation found the west side of the road to be in reasonable condition with the east side damaged. The coal consisted of mostly dust with one small 125mm piece of coal lying on a layer of soil, which, in turn was scattered on the cobbles of the west side of the road, see Fig. 9 for section. However, the possibility that the road had been constructed for the transportation of coal can be discounted since Excavation S, just south-west of Newton, seven miles (11.25Km) north of Ebchester and Excavation R, north of the Mill Burn valley, indicate the road’s existence north of the coal seam and indeed for a considerable distance from Ebchester. Possible evidence at Bywell and elsewhere should also be considered (Selkirk 1995). Rather, the scattering of coal appeared to indicate that the east side of the road was still being used sometime after the Roman period. A sherd of early mediaeval pottery found in this excavation might lead to the suggestion that the road was built in that period; however the sherd, was found above the road and not within its fabric, therefore merely indicating continued usage of the road after the construction period. It should be noted that archaeological excavations in the Roman fort at Ebchester found coal ash within the Roman context, with the possible source of the coal originating alongside the road crossing the Mill Burn valley.

The failure to discover any agger or ditch in the excavations might suggest the road is not Roman. However, as there was a necessity to carry out excavations in a short period of time, it was not possible to look for any ditches. Excavation K appeared to show an agger but old tree stumps and roots of the ancient woodland in the area may have lifted the remaining stones. It should be noted that the Excavations K, L, M and Q, as well as the two excavations in the Marley Field were on the earlier old road, apparently replaced with a later, more substantially constructed bypass road with Roman features. Indeed, the excavated bypass road in the Marley Field (Excavation P), found ditches on both sides of the road, as more time was available to carry out that excavation. The answer to the question of whether the old road looks Roman is difficult to answer. Many excavations have been carried out on known Roman roads, most of which existed for the length of the Roman period and later, connecting known Roman forts and towns and carrying a heavy traffic flow.

Doubt has been cast on the date of construction of the old road due to its light weight construction as well as its narrow width. However, it cannot be assumed that the earliest
roads, rapidly constructed for the invasion force, would meet the same specifications as later roads, when time and volume of traffic to newly developed sites in more peaceful times permitted a higher specification. Parts of the A1 (Dere Street) through north Yorkshire have, in living memory, been updated from single carriageway to six lanes due to increasing volume of traffic. Neither can it be assumed that all the earliest roads took exactly the same route as the later improved roads. Excavations on many Roman roads in rural areas in the north-east have found they are generally of a lightweight nature consisting of only one layer of stones. The narrowness of this road, about 9ft (2.85m) raised much concern. An excavation at Piercebridge (Cool and Mason, pages 90-96) found an early road, 2.5m wide leading towards the steep riverbanks resulting in the speculation of a jetty to transport goods by river. Since the above publication, divers discovered the site of a Roman bridging of the River Tees in this area indicating the probability that the road was associated with the bridge. The use of the road was thought to have ceased around AD120. This corresponds with the dating evidence of the site of the 2nd century bridge downstream as well as the dating of Dere Street approaching that bridge (Cool and Mason, 96-101). Another early 9ft (2.85) Roman road was found in an excavations by the Huddersfield and District Archaeology Society at Pule Hill, between Castleshaw and Slack where the Roman road from Manchester to York crossed the Pennines (Lunn et al 2008, 6-12).

Plate 66. This small excavation looking west, immediately east of Excavation M, uncovered a field drain necessitating investigation resulting in a lack of time to continue the trench. Excavation M was carried out immediately west towards the top.

Plate 67. Right. The excavation after cleaning, uncovered a cobbled field drain. Clay can be seen in the sides and base of the excavation with no natural spread of gravels.
The area between the River Derwent flood plain and towards the Mill Burn valley consists of glacial deposits of sand and gravels leading to extensive quarrying in the area. This has led to speculation that some excavations, and in turn the road, could represent a spread of natural cobbles and gravel. Excavation N and another minor undescribed excavation nearby appeared to indicate the suspected quarry site had been removed of sand and gravels down to clay level. A small area of erosion on the east side of the suspected quarry indicated sand in that area. Although some photographs in the excavation reports may appear to give the impression of a natural spread of gravels, other photographs which have not been included because of space, show clear edges to the cobbles.

Plates 66 and 67 illustrate an excavation not previously described in this report, immediately east of Excavation M. The excavation uncovered a cobbled field drain in a natural clay which required investigation at the time, resulting in the inability to extend the trench to the west. Excavation M, carried out the following week, uncovered the cobbled remains of the road. The excavation proved there is no natural spread of gravels or cobbles in that area. However, the excavation did find that the cobbles for the field drain were identical to the material used for the construction of the road and therefore the road would be an ideal source for that material resulting, in some areas, to road damage.

Plate 69 shows a clay surface in Excavation Q with no spread of natural gravels to the east of the excavated road.
The copy of part of the historical report prepared by a local historian for the land owner and described with Excavation M, clearly states that while ploughing the Holywell Field, “a straight road was seen” on the assumed line of the old road. The description is not indicative of a spread of gravel and cobbles in that area.

**CONCLUSION.**

Proving that excavated remains of roads in rural areas are of Roman origin is extremely difficult. It becomes even more difficult if the suspected Roman road has not been built between known Roman sites and is not of substantial construction with a recognised width. This road is not visible on LiDAR due to its lightweight construction, and very little evidence can be found on aerial maps, old maps, field boundaries, minor roads or even visually on the ground, resulting in it being almost invisible along its route.

It is well known that Romans constructed their roads as near as possible to a straight line as that was the shortest and least expensive means of building, providing the fastest route for the movement of soldiers and communications. A major reason for considering the excavated road to be of Roman origin is its close adherence to the straight line from Lanchester to Beukley. The first 8km of Dere Street as constructed from Lanchester towards Ebchester is almost exactly on the long-distance line and bears no resemblance to the line of the known course of Dere Street to Corbridge. It should be noted however that the route of Dere Street as shown on Ordnance Survey maps may not be exact, as NAG’s excavations in the area of Low Woodside Farm, Iveston, discovered Dere Street to be some distance east of the deviation indicated by Ordnance Survey, and exactly upon the long-distance line. The possibility of a local road constructed on that line in the Bludder Burn Dene later than the Roman period is extremely unlikely, as there would be no need to bypass Ebchester, already served by Dere Street and the later road. Roman activity in that area is indicated by the discovery of an altar on the north bank of the River Derwent directly opposite the Bludder Burn Dene, as well as by Roman burials and a Roman coin found in the Dene. A plausible reason for construction of the bypass road in Roman times (a question which arose during excavations) is provided by the suspected Roman quarry alongside Dere Street cutting through the line of the old road. The continued route of the road is suggested by the tradition of a Roman bridge crossing the River Tyne at Bywell, where there is no official record of a Roman road apart from excavations by Selkirk, 1995. The suspected Roman road would pass immediately east of the Roman fort at Halton Chesters (Hannum or Onnum) on Hadrian’s Wall before progressing to the connection with Dere Street 250m west of Beukley Farm. It should be considered whether an earlier station, predating the Wall, could have existed on the site of this fort. Once the Wall was constructed there would probably be no need for a through road in the area, with the probable later connection made from Corbridge to Beukley.

Selkirk, (1995, 104) decided to name the suspected road Proto Dere Street (proto meaning original or earliest) on the basis that it appeared to be on a straight line from Ebchester to Beukley indicating a faster military route through Northumberland from the south, therefore predating Dere Street as we know it. The Bludder Burn Dene excavations as well
as the bypass road excavations appear to indicate an early construction. Selkirk (1983) described how he found the line of Dere Street from the Dry Burn, some 7K north of Beukley, to be on an alignment to Bywell, later realising that the projected alignment appeared to end up at Ebchester.

It has been suggested that the earliest known bridge at Piercebridge, thought to date from c.70AD, could be carrying a lightly built campaign road across the Tees, potentially proto Dere Street. (Haken, 2018/b).

After excavations of an early Roman fort at Roecliffe near Boroughbridge, Yorkshire, (Bishop, 2005), it had been thought that a possible Roman road heading north, perhaps on a prehistoric trackway, suggests a case for a ‘proto-Dere Street’ in the area (Bishop, 2007 now unavailable online), predating the accepted route of Dere Street from York to Catterick and crossing the River Ure over one mile to the west.

As a cobbled road has been found in multiple excavations on what has been suggested as a Roman secondary survey line (Poulter, 2010), there appears to be no justification for dismissing the remains as mere coincidence.

When the investigation commenced in 2012, the intention was to discover whether a Roman road existed. If that has been demonstrated, then it should be given the name Proto Dere Street as the late Raymond Selkirk suggested.

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AN ASSESSMENT OF THE CASE FOR THE EXISTENCE OF 
AN EARLY ROMAN ROAD RUNNING DIRECTLY 
BETWEEN Ebchester, BY THE RIVER DERWENT, AND 
BEUKLEY, TO THE NORTH OF HADRIAN’S WALL

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ABSTRACT

This assessment accompanies the report by Bill Trow and colleagues of their excavations south of the Marley Tile Works near Ebchester in Tyne and Wear. The assessment is solely concerned with the question of whether or not what was found is a Roman road. If the road should have been Roman, its date, purpose and significance are left for discussion elsewhere. Two aspects of the possible road are considered: (a) the alignments; and (b) the width and construction. These considerations are then brought alongside the evidence presented in Trow's report to weigh the overall pros and cons for the case, and a conclusion is reached which is cautiously positive.

FOREWORD

Please note: throughout this text, the phrase ‘Dere Street as we know it’ is frequently used. As the recent excavations at Scotch Corner have shown, there can sometimes be a number of substantially-built Roman roads, especially in the vicinity of Roman sites, which have escaped detection by eye, aerial photography, LiDAR and even geophysical survey at times, and which therefore remain unknown until uncovered by excavation. Some of these roads may be earlier iterations of roads which we do know. For instance, at Scotch Corner, at least two previous versions of Dere Street seem to have existed, both of them running northwards from the site but on separate courses somewhat to the west of Dere Street as we know it today. Thus the courses of Roman roads which are shown on maps such as those of the Ordnance Survey may not be the original or only courses of the Roman roads which we know at present. In addition, even the ‘known’ courses might have been subject to alteration in post-Roman times, whilst still retaining a misleadingly Roman appearance. Moreover the mapping of the road might not always be entirely correct. Bill Trow, for instance, has shown by excavation that Dere Street does not deviate through Woodside farm, between Leadgate and Lanchester, as is shown on Ordnance Survey maps. For the avoidance of doubt,
Fig. 1, General arrangement of Dere Street and alignments between Esh and Beukley
therefore, the use of the term ‘Dere Street as we know it’ is meant to refer to the course of Dere Street as shown, rightly or wrongly, on the current Ordnance Survey maps.

**HISTORY**

The Roman fort at Ebchester lies on or right alongside a long-distance Roman planning alignment which had been detected running for 26 miles (41.6 km) from the village of Esh in County Durham to a small stream called the Dry Burn, north of Hadrian’s Wall (Poulter 2009, 10). See Fig. 1. Roman Dere Street, as we know it, after heading north from the Roman site of Corbridge, turns onto this alignment at Beukley and follows it for some 4 miles or so (c6.4 km) to the Dry Burn (Poulter 2009, 17). The course of Dere Street to the south of Corbridge first crosses the River Tyne and then returns to the alignment at Ebchester. Thus the route of Dere Street as we know it through Corbridge appears to be that of a typical Roman deviation from a long-distance alignment, such as are found on many Roman roads elsewhere in Britain (Poulter and Entwistle 2016, 12-18).

However, the late Raymond Selkirk claimed that the Romans had actually built a road along the long-distance alignment between Ebchester and Beukley, as a predecessor to the deviation of Dere Street through Corbridge, and he nicknamed it ‘Proto Dere Street’ (Selkirk 1995, 104-05). In the current author’s book on *The Planning of Roman Roads and Walls in Northern Britain*, doubt was expressed about Selkirk’s claim (Poulter 2010, 62-63), whereupon Bill Trow made contact and reported that he and his colleagues of the Northern Archaeology Group had set out to see if Selkirk’s claim could be verified. It was agreed that this author would remain in contact whilst their work was under way. As it happens, the investigation proved to be very long-running and consumed a great deal of effort, but the full report by Trow provides all of the details (Trow 2021).

**ALIGNMENTS**

To the south of Ebchester, the known course of Dere Street does not return to the alignment from Esh, as might be expected. See Fig. 1 again. Instead, it picks up a secondary alignment, facing some 2°-3° more to the south, which runs through Leadgate and past the fort at Lanchester to Heugh farm, where Dere Street finally quits this alignment to cross the River Deerness by Rag Path Wood (Poulter, 2010, 41). Perhaps guided by Selkirk’s thinking, Trow had extrapolated this secondary alignment northwards from Leadgate so as to meet Dere Street at Beukley, where the Roman road as we know it joins the alignment from Esh. See Fig. 2. This extrapolation is the predicted long-distance alignment which is shown on some of the aerial views in Trow’s report.

As can be seen on Figure 11 of Trow’s report, this predicted alignment provided only a coarse guide to where the excavations were carried out by Trow and his colleagues. In general these were conducted some 80 yards (c72 m) to the east. This discrepancy between a predicted and an actual line of road will not worry experienced followers of Roman roads. In fact it may offer a healthy sign. If Trow had found their remains exactly where they had
predicted them to be, their findings might have had the whiff of a self-fulfilling prophecy. As it happens, Trow and his colleagues had identified, by eye, the line of the possible road in Park Wood (see Plates 13-16 in Trow 2021) and had simply carried out excavations along extensions of this line to the south and north of the wood.

When this author was brought into contact with the work of Trow and his colleagues, it was decided to examine the alignment through Leadgate afresh, and it was concluded that the correct Roman alignment had been just a little more northerly than the alignment which Trow had predicted. Moreover, when this fresh alignment was extrapolated to the north it was found to run exactly to the farm at Beukley, which stands upon the highest point around and which offers a superb vantage position from which to set out an alignment to the south. See Figs. 2 and 3. In contrast, at the spot where Dere Street joins the alignment from Esh, whilst there is a superb view to the north-west, there is scant view to the south because the meeting-point lies over the shoulder, on the northern side of a ridge. What was more significant to find, though, was that most of Trow’s excavations lay exactly upon this

Fig. 2, Details of Dere Street and related alignments at Beukley
reconsidered secondary alignment, or very close by it. See Fig. 4. It thus appeared that what Trow had found to the north of Ebchester was indeed on the same secondary alignment that Dere Street was taking further south.

There is no discernible indication that this secondary alignment had any influence upon the course of Dere Street, as we know it, once this Roman road had crossed to the south of the River Deerness. Therefore the purpose of this alignment appears to have been for the line of the road simply to cut out the dog leg of following the long-distance alignments via Esh. This suggests that adopting the shortest route and gaining the maximum speed of travel had been priorities at the time. It also indicates that this secondary alignment had been just a road-planning alignment, whereas the long-distance alignments via Esh may have had more to do with strategic planning. As already noted, for instance, the early Roman fort at Ebchester stands on or right by the alignment from Esh.

This raises the question of how the secondary alignment had been set out. At its southern end, Heugh farm is insufficiently elevated to have served as a sighting point. More centrally, Dere Street as we know it, as it heads southwards from Ebchester, climbs steeply and then curves on to the alignment near Pleasant View Cottages, where there are excellent long-distance views to both south and north. However, although the location at the Cottages is certainly elevated, there is no natural standpoint from which to set out an alignment in either direction. In addition, the Cottages are located at quite some distance from the long-distance alignment to Esh, which might seem likely to have been a setting-off point for the Roman surveyors.
Hence it does appear that the secondary alignment had indeed been set out southwards from Beukley farm, which does stand quite close by the alignment to Esh. At the same time it might seem odd that the Romans should have created an alignment that Dere Street as we know it would only pick up some 13 miles (c20.8 km) away. Other examples of this are not unknown, however. When the Fosse Way leaves Leicester to the south-west, it does not join the long-distance alignment from Leicester until it reaches Stretton-on-Dunsmore, some 22.7 miles (36.7 km) away, having first made a lengthy deviation through High Cross on Watling Street (Poulter and Entwistle 2016, map on page 15). The indication is, nevertheless, that the Romans could have intended to set out a road all the way southwards from Beukley farm to run past Ebchester and down to near the crossing of the River Deerness, below Heugh farm. This does not necessarily mean that the Romans had actually built that part of

Fig. 4, Locations of Trow’s excavations, taken from the OS grid references stated in their report, in relation to the secondary alignment to Beukley farm. N.B the locations of the excavations of the proposed bypass road have not been included. See Figure 11 in Trow 2021 for the locations of all their excavations.
the road between Beukley and Ebchester, though. That would depend upon the physical remains which Trow and his colleagues had been excavating along this secondary alignment, albeit unaware of its relationship to their work.

**Width and Construction**

As stated in the report by Trow, where it had been possible to establish the width of what they had found, it appeared to be only about 9 feet (c.2.7 m), which is narrow for a Roman road in Britain. However, narrow Roman roads have been found elsewhere in Britain. As Trow mentions in his report, one has been examined not so far south at Piercebridge (Cool and Mason, 2008, 90–91), seemingly leading northwards from what is now believed to have been the earliest bridge over the River Tees at that point. In his *Roads in Roman Britain*, the late Hugh Davies mentions two Roman roads with widths of less than 9 feet at Hyde Barn in Winchester, Hampshire, and at Ardleigh in Essex (Davies 2002, 74). Davies also reports that at Corfe Mullen in Dorset, the Roman road from Badbury Rings to Poole (Margary RR4d) had initially been only 8 feet (2.4 m) wide, but that it had subsequently been widened to 16 feet (4.8 m) and eventually extended to a width of 30 feet (9.1 m) (Davies 2002, 106).

Another narrow Roman road, also mentioned in Trow’s report, has been found by members of the Huddersfield and District Archaeological Society by Pule Hill, between Castleshaw and Slack, where the Roman road from Manchester to York (Margary RR712) crossed the Pennines (Crosland, Spence and Clay 2008, 6-12 and 44). In fact, the members of the Society had found two such roads, side by side, and both were only 9 feet wide. What is interesting here is that part of the original 9 feet (c.2.7 m) wide road had been bypassed by the second 9 feet (c.2.7 m) wide road, possibly as a result of a nearby landslip. The fact that the replacement road was also narrow indicates that this had been the intended width at the time. It was only later that the replacement road had been rebuilt to a more standard width of 22 feet (6.7 m).

In contrast, there are reports of excavations of Roman roads between Willington and Durham, and between Lanchester and Chester le Street, from which it appears possible that narrow pilot roads, acting as central spines, had been constructed first before the roads were then extended to full width (Fawcett 2004a; Fawcett 2004b; Wright 1938, 362-69). However, in these cases it appears that the spines were simply part of the construction process for the roads. The excavators suggest that the spines were created either to set the maximum height of the camber, or else to ensure the correct alignments of the roads, and perhaps also to aid the transport of materials, before the roads were then completed to full width. It is not suggested that, in these cases, the spines had acted as interim roads before being widened at some time later.

Davies notes that some early narrow roads were also lightly built, and at times laid directly on virgin ground (Davies 2002, 154). One example of such might have been found at Shielhill North tower, along the road over the Gask Ridge in Scotland between the forts of Ardoch and Strageath (Woolliscroft and Hoffmann 2006, 100-03 and Figure 41). Here the earlier Roman road conspicuously narrows immediately after passing the tower and it was found there to
have a lighter construction than the later road, which seems to have acted as a by-pass (Woolliscroft _pers com_). Davies discusses a number of other lightly-built and sometimes narrow early Roman roads which have been found, both south and north of the Thames (Davies 2002, 118, 148). He believes that many previous excavators had missed the evidence of earlier construction through assuming that the Roman roads which they had found had been created in a single phase of endeavour (Davies 2002, 35-36). In fact, he suspects that the existence of lightly metalled and narrow Roman roads, as predecessors of the later fully-built Roman roads that we know, could well be more common than has as yet been reported (Davies 2002, 154). As such, the remains found by Trow would appear to fit well within this scenario.

**Discussion**

Taking the foregoing considerations into account with the arguments advanced by Trow in his report, the following pros and cons can be listed about whether or not what Trow have found was a Roman road.

**On the positive side:**

- the remains excavated by Trow largely lie upon the same secondary alignment that Dere Street, as we know it, takes to the south of Ebchester

- this secondary alignment seems likely to have been set out southwards from Beukley farm, indicating that the Romans could have planned to build a road from there past Ebchester down to near the crossing of the River Deerness

- the remains found by Trow extend northwards for a considerable distance from Ebchester, including one excavation north of the River Tyne, supporting the possibility that a road on the alignment did exist, and that it was not simply a local feature

- the Roman appearance of the bypass road which was excavated, together with its multiple resurfacings, imply that it had an extended period of use, and if the interpretation of it as a bypass around the original line of the road should be correct, this implies that the earlier road had a considerable period of use too, including after the time when Dere Street as we know it was constructed

**On the negative side:**

- there can be some impressive natural spreads which look very like a road surface (Woolliscroft _pers com_).

- what Trow have found has no ditches, no camber, and no agger, and the remains are narrower and more lightly-built than a normal Roman road. However, there are precedents, as discussed above
• if the remains are of a road, it could be Iron Age or Medieval in date, or even a more recent track, possibly connected with mining, which just happened to be on the same alignment. Coincidences do happen. Where the alignment to Beukley farm runs just to the east past Halton Chesters fort, its course is taken up exactly by a petrochemical pipeline that assuredly would not have been planned with any reference to its Roman predecessor

• no detectable sign of a continuation of the stonework has been found on the same alignment running up the hillside to the south of the River Derwent.

CONCLUSION

On balance, although it is far from clear cut, is considered more likely than not that the Romans did build an early narrow but relatively unstructured road, in places at least, between Ebchester and Beukley.

If so, it would be helpful for more of the road’s remains to be sought further to the north, between the River Tyne and Beukley. In addition, since any such road is likely to have been constructed during the earliest period of Roman involvement in the area, it would be interesting to know what happened to the road when its line was subsequently cut by Hadrian’s Wall and its ditch, and then by the Vallum.

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