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The Roman Roads Research Association also wishes to acknowledge the contributions of all the other individuals who have volunteered their time and expertise in the preparation, production and distribution of this volume, without whom it would not have been possible:

**People and Officers**

**Editorial Committee**

Rob Entwistle (Hon. Editor)
Dave Armstrong
Dr. Mike C. Bishop
Chester Forster
Mike Haken

**Advisory Panel**

Paul Bidwell
John Poulter
David Ratledge
Dr. Pete Wilson

Alun Betty
David Brear
Neil Buckley
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James Lyall
Robert Matusiewicz
Katherine Playford
Andy Putnam
Eric Rose
Paul Seddon
Paul Smith
Matt Sparkes
Alan Taylor
Gary Whitaker
James Whitaker
Sally Woodlock

**Contact Roman Roads Research Association**

If you’re interested in Roman roads or would like to know more contact us via our web site [http://romanroads.org/](http://romanroads.org/) or by mail to one of the below;

*Mike Haken* (Chairman)  
[Mike@romanroads.org](mailto:mike@romanroads.org)
*Dave Armstrong* (Membership Sec. & Newsletter Editor)  
[dave.armstrong@romanroads.org](mailto:dave.armstrong@romanroads.org)
*Rob Entwistle* (Itinera Editor)  
[itinera@romanroads.org](mailto:itinera@romanroads.org)
*Rebecca L. Ellis* (Finds Officer & Social Media)  
[reb.ellis@romanroads.org](mailto:reb.ellis@romanroads.org)
ABOUT THE ASSOCIATION

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.
F
ROM
THE
CHAIRMAN
MIKE HAKEN

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Hilst 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
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
mike@romanroads.org
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
Hon Editor, Itinera
itinera@romanroads.org
ROADS AROUND CIRENCESTER

BY ROBERT ENTWISTLE
rob.i.entwistle@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

The roads around Cirencester offer a remarkable case study, as first noticed by Margary, who made deductions about the order in which they were constructed based upon their unusual configuration (1973, 148). Similar conclusions were repeated by Wacher (1998, 212).

The present study develops these observations in the light of more recent findings by Entwistle and Poulter, deepening insight into the sequence of planning tasks carried out by Roman surveyors and engineers. It suggests that one of Margary’s deductions – that the layout of Cirencester was dependent upon Ermin Street – is not quite as it seems. Although Ermin Street formed the spine of the town, the orientation and position of that road was itself decided by an early Fosse Way planning alignment, as was the line of Akeman Street. The Fosse Way south is also reconsidered, and we notice that in several cases a substantial interval may have occurred between aspects of planning and road construction.

THE ORIGINS OF CIRENCESTER

The Roman roads around Cirencester exhibit peculiarities that caused both Margary and Wacher to reflect on how they came into being. Their conclusions can now be reconsidered and developed.

Margary demonstrated that Cirencester, one of the great towns of Roman Britain was built, around and upon Ermin Street (RR41c), giving it an extended oval shape (1973, 148). However the story of the town starts further back with a Fosse Way planning alignment from Leicester. In an age of digital maps this is readily demonstrable, as the long-distance alignment from that town is preserved over a distance of 34 km (21 miles) between Stretton-on-Dunsmore and Blackwell. Extended both ways this alignment directly connects the Roman centres of Leicester and Cirencester. The site of the first fort at Cirencester seems to originate as the point where the Leicester planning line met the River Churn, at a convenient distance from Bagendon (a major oppidum of the Dobunni tribe). As this fort is regarded as one of the earliest in Britain (Wacher 1995, 292), the planning exercise by Roman
surveyors is associated with the earliest days of Roman Britain (Poulter and Entwistle 2016; Entwistle 2019, 50).

Long-distance surveyed alignments of this sort, of which a number have been identified, often display branches towards places of strategic significance, set out by surveyors at pre-established set angles to the prime line (Entwistle 2019, 24-7). The Romans had a wholly different conception of angles to ourselves and did not define or understand them as made up of degrees of a circle (Lewis 2001, 226). They did, of course, make frequent use of the right-angle in survey and construction work, but it would not have occurred to them to define it as 90 degrees. Thus the four set angles we commonly find on long-distance alignments are not measured in whole degrees but are derived from simple Pythagorean right-angled triangles, a concept Romans understood. They have been termed Alpha (53.13), Beta (36.87), Gamma (61.93) and Delta (28.07) (Entwistle 2019, 25), and when measured are generally found to be accurate to less than a degree, as we would understand it.

Measurement of such angles by ourselves needs to be dependable and reproducible, therefore the orientation of an alignment is calculated by identifying end points as OS coordinates, and the bearing between derived mathematically. The angles between alignments are then readily calculated.

THE LAYOUT OF CIRENCESTER: ERMIN STREET NORTH AND AKEMAN STREET

Margary observed that the shape of Cirencester is essentially an oval with its spine formed by Ermin Street, no doubt reflecting the orientation of the first fort. Yet he noticed also that the road from Silchester only takes up this orientation on arriving at Cirencester, changing direction as it enters the South (Silchester) Gate. The road line which begins here continues north-west through the town and beyond, ultimately stretching for 12km, past Bagendon, to the edge of the Cotswold escarpment – where it modifies its course again to head for the Severn crossing at Gloucester.

Reference to Map 1 shows that this line for Ermin Street derives from the primary planning alignment from Leicester, being laid out at a Gamma angle to it (actually 61.59). It seems likely that the original fort was sited to have its main gate outward looking, towards Bagendon, the allied territories of the Dobunni, and the more distant Severn crossing, rather than inward towards the newly established province.

Ermin Street has long been recognised as fundamental to Cirencester, but not so Akeman Street. It is therefore with some surprise that we see the line of Akeman Street (RR 16b) may well have been established at a similarly early date (Map 1). It has not generally been noticed that the long 20km alignment of this road starts at the town, as the matter is obscured by the road failing to follow its own alignment for the first 5km. The issue is, nevertheless, readily confirmed with a tool such as Google Earth, which reveals that the alignment extends from the town almost to the modern village of Bradwell. From there the line needs only minor modification northwards to reach Alchester, recently identified as a major military centre –
a vexillation or legionary fortress, probably associated with Vespasian’s *Legio II Augusta* (Sauer, 2005). Dendrochronology has shown Alchester fortress to have been established (like Cirencester) in the first years of the province (Mattingly 2007, 142). This makes it a rare example, as few forts were established in the province’s heartland in the post-Conquest period (Entwistle 2019, 53). Akeman Street, or its informal predecessor, must initially have represented a vital military link between Alchester and Cirencester.
The 20km alignment is laid out at a half right-angle (actually 44.65 degrees) to the prime alignment from Leicester, a situation that is unlikely to be coincidental. Use of the half right-angle has been found elsewhere in association with long-distance alignments, most particularly at Lancaster (Entwistle 2019, 94). It is unthinkable that an alignment started 20 km away would reach accurately to Cirencester if surveyed from the east: it is clear it was surveyed from the fort.

The earliest planning at Cirencester therefore seems to have been built around three alignments: the prime planning alignment from Leicester, and two subsidiary alignments: towards the Severn crossing (later secured by Kingsholm and Gloucester fortresses) and Alchester respectively. The alignment towards the Severn crossing, became, in due course, the continuing line of Ermin Street, defining the shape of the town. If this planning has not been evident before, it is because neither the Fosse Way (north) nor Akeman Street follow their planning alignments in the immediate region of the town.

**Ermin Street north and the White Way**

The White Way is a local Roman road (RR55) which leaves Cirencester to trend in a northerly direction, serving numerous Roman villas. For the most part the road has little in the way of alignments and ‘adapts its course to the ground’ (Margary 1973, 146). However, some 3.5 km from the town it takes up a very direct alignment for just over 2 km, after which it again adapts itself to the ground.

That alignment is aimed directly at Cirencester and would seem to be a vestige of surveying from the earliest days of Cirencester. It is at 36.83 degrees to Ermin Street north, a remarkably exact Beta angle. Although the White Way was not a trunk route in Roman times, the alignment it uses would seem to have been laid out along with other key alignments, and with reference to the road heading out of the fort (Ermin Street north).

**Ermin Street south**

Ermin Street (RR41b), long considered fundamental to the town, was an important artery and almost certainly the first constructed road to arrive at Cirencester. For much of the first century AD, during the lifetime of Cogidubnus (alternatively known as Togidubnus) this road would have linked Cirencester both to his client kingdom and to London beyond. Roman troops from places such as the Lake Farm fortress, as well as drafted troops from the Kingdom (Entwistle 2019, 63), may have passed this way when needed for action on the borders of the province.

We have noticed that the line of Ermin Street through the town does not reflect the road’s line of approach from Silchester. Knowing that Cirencester was at the periphery of the early province we might anticipate that road surveyors worked their way along the line of the road from Silchester and the province heartlands, but close examination shows that things were not so simple.
The alignment emerging from the South Gate makes its first course correction after 3.5 km, by a disused airfield at Driffield Crossroads (Map 2), where the direction in which surveyors were working can be identified through use of John Poulter’s methodology (Poulter 2009, 6). Land here falls towards the south-east – allowing no view back towards Cirencester for surveyors to sight upon the fort, but providing a good view onwards for the next road alignment. That alignment continues in turn for nearly 5km until there is a further minor course correction near the village of Latton, where again the best views continue south-eastwards. Despite further minor modifications to the road’s course, it is only near Baydon,
30km from Cirencester, that the road makes a decisive turn, swinging more to the east. Thus Ermin Street south was for some distance surveyed by working away from Cirencester.

THE FOSSE WAY NORTH

In view of what has been said about the importance of the Fosse Way prime planning alignment, it might seem logical to assume that this road was the first to be constructed at Cirencester. Margary, however, demonstrates that this was not the case.

Although the Fosse Way (RR5d) has diverted away from its prime planning alignment as it approaches the town (having made an off-alignment diversion to Stow-on-the Wold), the road builders clearly started making a bee line for the town (or fort) from the high ground of Ampney Downs, some 8km away, once they had it in visual range. As there was no physical barrier to prevent this approach, it is surprising that the road does not continue forward all the way to Cirencester. Instead the Fosse Way turns away to by-pass the town, on a link that seems designed to take traffic straight from Ermin Street and Silchester, avoiding Cirencester (and the double crossing of the River Churn). This arrangement strongly indicates that when the Fosse Way was being constructed, Ermin Street was already in existence, or at the very least in an advanced state of planning. It was of course still possible for travellers on the Fosse Way to reach Cirencester, despite the diversion. A spur was built from the by-pass, entering the southern part of the town via the Churn bridge. At the time of the early fort that bridge would have been rather differently located, as at some stage the course of the Churn was diverted to go round, rather than through, the town. That arrangement might also be quite early however, as the basis for the town’s grid layout may already have begun in the 60’s during the lifetime of the second (cavalry) fort (Wacher 1995, 304; 310).

We must assume that when the by-pass decision was made, military priorities were for a through-route from Silchester to the Midlands, not requiring access to Cirencester. We have no certain knowledge when that might have been, but one possibility is in the mid 70’s when priorities were shifting north and west, and when Cirencester fort was being decommissioned (Wacher 1995, 304). It is likely that military traffic and supply convoys would have been on the move around that time, supporting the next round of expansion into and through the Trent-Severn gap – a scenario which also justifies a renewed programme of road building.

CONSTRUCTION OF AKEMAN STREET

Akeman Street, like the Fosse Way north, shows evidence of early planning but later construction: later even than the Fosse Way. We have noticed that paradoxically Akeman Street does not follow its own alignment all the way into Cirencester but opts to choose a different line of approach, linking to the Fosse Way spur – presumably to save extra road construction. The road from the east diverts from its alignment towards the spot known as Hare Bushes, where the spur road into Cirencester leaves the by-pass. Margary’s comment
remains entirely valid: “Had this spur not already existed there seems no reason why Akeman Street should change direction at a point so near the town when a direct approach would have been possible” (1973, 149). As he also points out, “The addition of Akeman Street to the system must have made the eastern entry into the town fully as important as that of Ermin Street from the south.”

Construction of Akeman Street as a properly metalled road therefore seems to come after the final planning or construction of the Fosse Way’s approach to Cirencester, which itself comes after the final planning or construction of Ermin Street’s approach.

**THE FOSSE WAY SOUTH**

The Fosse Way south (RR5c) may well have been the final major road to connect to Cirencester but possesses as many intriguing features as the others.

Margary argues for it being last in the series because its construction appears to post-date construction of the town’s amphitheatre. This was so placed as to block the natural exit of the Fosse Way (south) from the side of the town opposite the road’s entry at the Churn bridge, suggesting construction of this road was an afterthought. The Fosse Way towards Bath follows the line of the modern Tetbury Road, passing north of the amphitheatre, which led Margary to assume that it exited the town via a gate towards the northern end of the town. This would have required travellers on the Fosse Way to work their way rather awkwardly through Cirencester.

That view has now been modified by excavations of the town gate directly opposite the East Gate and Churn bridge (Wacher 1995, 312). It seems that the road to Bath did after all exit there, slanting tightly past the amphitheatre before joining the line of the Tetbury Road.

For the greater part of its journey to Bath, the Fosse Way follows a long-distance planning line (as does the Fosse Way from Leicester). In this case the planning line is projected from the south (near Bath) and remains clearly identifiable for 19km (12 miles) between North Wraxall and Long Newton. It appears to have been laid out as a branch from a parent long-distance planning alignment extending from the Kennet’s source (at Silbury Hill) towards Bath, which also carries a road (Margary 53). The two alignments are separated by a set angle \((\text{Alpha})\), strongly suggesting they were planned together (Entwistle 2019, 66-7).

The Fosse Way alignment northwards from Bath to Cirencester would pass to the west of the town unless course adjustments were made, and there are in fact two – although whether these were laid out as part of original planning, or as part of road construction, must be uncertain. The first takes place near the village of Long Newton, some 14.5 kilometres (9 miles) from the town. The road swings slightly to the east and then continues nearly 7 km (4.25 miles) to what is now Cotswold Airport. From here a final course adjustment was made, where, as John Poulter has pointed out, there are clear views in the direction of Cirencester. This final alignment, however, first crosses the steep sided valley of Jackaments Bottom, where the Roman road bravely tackles steep slopes which the modern road deems fitter to avoid. From here onwards, however, progress to the town is direct and straightforward.
CONCLUSION

The pattern of roads around Cirencester is both intriguing and revealing. From the very earliest days of its foundation, Cirencester emerges as part of a planned environment, with established long-distance alignments north-east to Leicester, north-west towards the Severn, and eastwards towards Alchester and St Albans. A separate long-distance alignment approaches from the south-west and Bath.

Nevertheless, in the first decades after the Conquest (during which time two successive forts were built at Cirencester) it is possible that the only all-weather road connecting to the rest of the province was Ermin Street, planned outwards from the town in its initial stages.

Construction of other roads (Fosse Way north, Akeman Street, and Fosse Way south) was carried out successively, possibly over an extended period. The Fosse Way, from both north and south, was planned (at different times) by teams heading towards the town. Although the long alignment of Akeman Street had been laid out from the site of the town in early times, final planning and/or construction took place after the Fosse Way spur to the by-pass was already established.

If our hypothesis is correct that the peculiar configuration of the Cirencester ‘by-pass’ is best linked to the military expansion of the 70s, then roads other than Ermin Street made use of planning carried out decades before, but were constructed only when needed to service a new phase of military mobility.

The whole process is a reminder that the pattern of Roman roads we see on maps of Roman Britain was not, like Rome, built in a day, but developed according to the shifting needs of military priorities.

BIBLIOGRAPHY