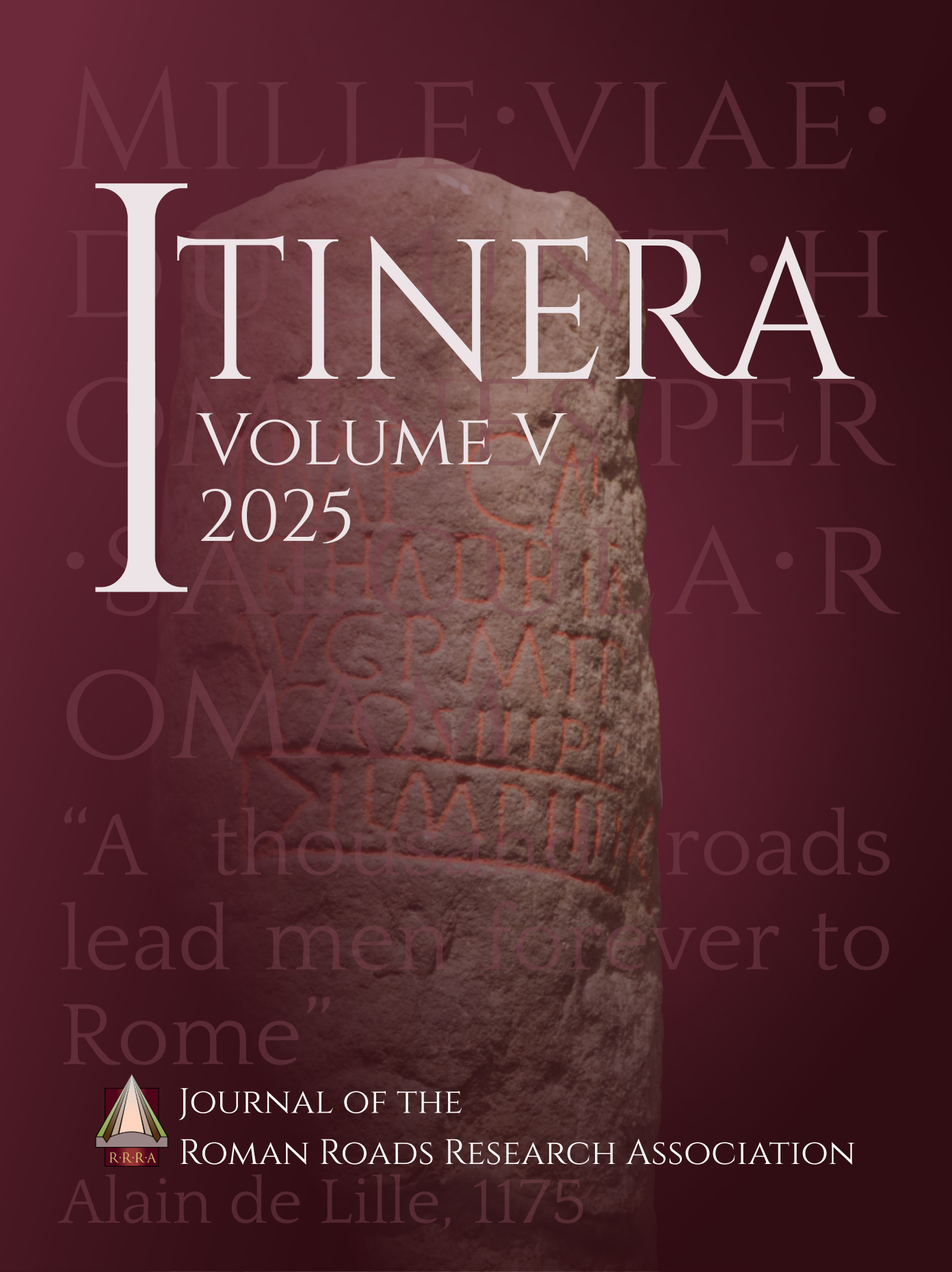


ITINERA

Volume V

2025

"A thousand roads lead men forever to Rome"

Alain de Lille, 1175

Journal of the
Roman Roads Research Association

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Editorial

Robert Entwistle



Welcome to the 2025 edition of *Itinera*, Volume V. *Itinera* continues to hold a unique position among academic journals of Roman studies, with roots in both the academic and grassroots communities. We focus upon the study of Roman roads, transport technology and systems of surveying. We welcome reports and contributions from all researchers able to extend knowledge in these areas to professionals and the public alike, through the format of a formal academic paper.

Volume V, if slenderer than the bumper 2024 edition, is typical in its range of papers. Thus, Wayne Kirk extends our knowledge of Roman Northamptonshire in the light of modern findings, through a wide-reaching paper appraising its road network. Mike Luke, well respected for his excavations and publications on Roman Bedfordshire, shows how a developed understanding of the 'small town' of Sandy leads to an improved appreciation of the local roads. The same theme of road networks is explored in a different way by Keith Abbott, who argues that minor roads and trackways are seriously under-represented in our present appreciation of Roman roads.

Neil Godfrey, by contrast, addresses a wholly different issue: the relationship between roads and Romano-Celtic temples, with roads providing not only transport and passing clients, but also planned landscapes within which temples stood. My own paper is different again, examining ancient surveying methods through the features of extant surveyed works, classical literary sources, and modern surveying techniques. This methodological paper ends my series of papers on Long-distance Alignments. We are also pleased to have a paper from an independent researcher, Paul Smith – one of our own members – presenting his thesis of a road formed over time, from the Iron-Age into the Roman period and beyond.

In this volume we further welcome two authoritative papers from leading academics in Romania, demonstrating the growing understanding of Roman roads in a part of the empire that has received limited attention in the UK. In understanding the growth of road networks in a territory newly brought within the empire we see the link between conquest and road construction, and reflect on the impact of recent political change upon research.

As always, I warmly celebrate the work of our academic advisors and our willing team of volunteers who carry out many critical functions: proofreading, creating the Index, reporting updates from across the country, and managing distribution of printed copy. *Itinera* would not be possible without the willing labours of these individuals, and above all without the editorial team who manage the life of our journal across the year. The process moves from gathering papers and archaeological updates, through review, selection, editing and typesetting, through to final publication. Dr Mike Bishop – writer, publisher and archaeologist – was a founder member of our editorial team, guiding us through the formative first four years of our existence. His expert advice on publishing and all matters Roman helped steer us through a period when everything was new. His international contacts extended knowledge of our journal to contributors as far away as Spain (and most recently) Romania. *Itinera* owes him a great debt as he moves on to other things this year.

With Mike leaving, we are delighted to have welcomed to our team Professor James Gerrard of the University of Newcastle. James Gerrard brings great academic distinction, strengthening us with his experience and calm judgements. Already he has inspired the initiative of an annual Prize for the best Dissertation reflecting Roman Transport studies. Details of the prize (readily available on request)

have been distributed through SALON and the RRRA Newsletter and will shortly be available on the RRRA website. We hope to see this prize awarded for the first time in 2025.

I take this opportunity of warmly welcoming submissions, projected or actual, for Volume VI of Itinera, from all corners of Britannia and the wider empire. You will find '*Notes for Contributors*' on the RRRA website.

In the meantime, I invite you to enjoy everything within Volume V.

Robert Entwistle

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A Review of Roman Roads within and from the 'Small Town' at Sandy

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Abstract

Recent research has changed our understanding of the origins, layout and status of the Roman 'small town' *at Sandy, Bedfordshire (Luke 2024). In addition, the identification of a new Roman road from Sandy to Great Staughton (Ratledge 2024a, 314) and the classification of this settlement as a 'small town' (Historic England 2024), has a significant bearing on our understanding of both Roman Sandy and its road network. This article describes both the Roman roads within Roman Sandy and those that connect to the next significant settlements. In reviewing the evidence, it also presents an alternative interpretation for the development of the road network in this area. Prior to this recent work, Roman Sandy had always been viewed as being located on the apex of the main road between Baldock and Godmanchester (RR22). However, the evidence presented here challenges the assumption that the Godmanchester Road was always the primary thoroughfare, and instead suggests that the Great Staughton Road could have been the first main road through Roman Sandy.*

Introduction

After the Location and Background sections, this article describes the evidence for the roads within the '*small town*' at Sandy, and the roads which connect to other settlements. The evidence often comprises side ditches, identified as cropmarks and geophysical anomalies, but also includes occasional evidence in the form of surface/makeup deposits and quarry pits.

A review of recent and past evidence for Roman Sandy was undertaken in 2020/1, partly due to the 'spare' time provided by the Covid lockdowns. The publication of the preliminary results was the first to establish that the town had defences (Luke 2021). These, along with the layout and extent of the town, were described in more detail in Luke (2024). The publication of the latter has provided the impetus for this article.

In this article, Roman roads are referred to by their RR reference number issued by Margary (1973) or more recently by the Roman Roads Research Association. All roads within the town of Roman Sandy are referred to by a locally designated R number; this is to enable cross-referencing to these roads in the 2024 publication.

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Location

Modern Sandy is a town in the northern part of Central Bedfordshire Authority. The county town of Bedford lies c.12km to the west of Sandy and Biggleswade lies c.5km to the south (Fig. 1). The modern town is bordered by the A1 (Great North Road) to the west and the London–Edinburgh railway line to the east.

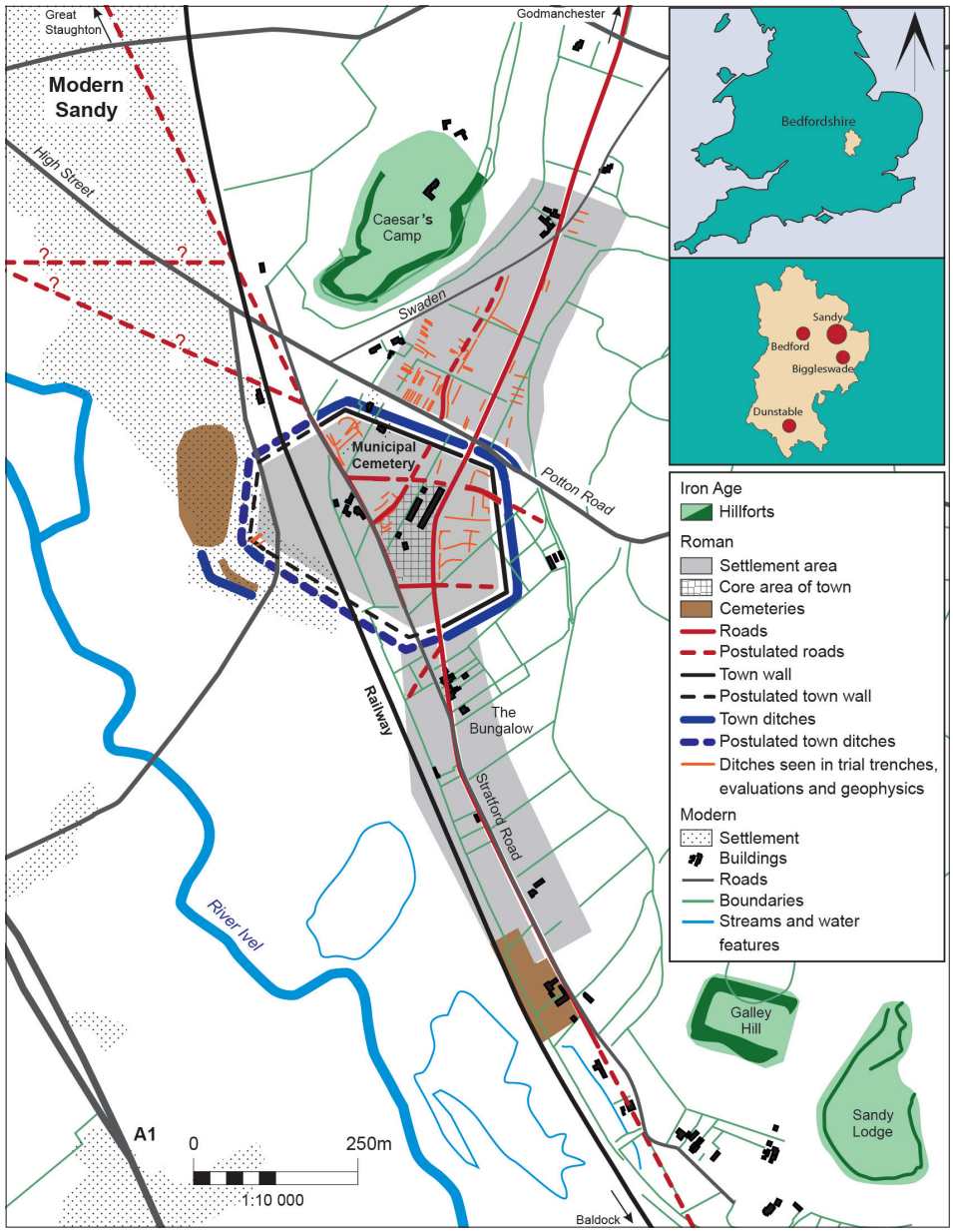


Fig.1. Roman Sandy overlaid onto modern map (after Luke 2024, fig.8)

Topographically, Sandy is located between the floodplain of the River Ivel and the Greensand Ridge to the east, which rises to c.60m OD. The solid geology of the area is mapped as the Woburn Sands Formation from the Lower Cretaceous, Lower Greensand Group. These are overlain by superficial outcrops of clay, silt, sand and gravel head deposits, with alluvial sands and gravels adjacent to the River Ivel.

The Roman town is located on the south-east side of the modern town approximately centred on the Municipal Cemetery (Fig. 1). A number of archaeological investigations within, and in the vicinity of, the Municipal Cemetery, have demonstrated that in places, this part of the Roman town is buried by 1.2m of colluvium. While this layer has protected Roman (and earlier) remains, it has hindered archaeological investigation, especially those restricted to the narrow foundations or service trenches of modern developments. This explains, in part at least, why it has taken so long to establish the extent of the Iron Age settlement and Roman town and identify the existence of the Roman defences.

Background

Iron Age hillforts and settlement

Three hillforts are known within 1km of the Roman town (*Fig. 1*). They have not been investigated in detail and so it is not known if they were still in use at the time of the Roman Conquest. However, their existence probably does illustrate the importance of the Sandy area in the Iron Age. This is reinforced by the number of late Iron Age coins found in the Sandy area, and it has even been suggested that Sandy may have been the site of a tribal mint (BCAS 1997, 2).

There is good evidence for late Iron Age settlement in four different locations within the area of the Roman town, as attested by features and finds from this period (Luke 2024, 9–10, fig. 4). While these remains could represent four individual farmsteads, it is also possible that they were part of the same settlement, in which case it might have extended over 10ha. There is also evidence for cremation cemeteries associated with at least two of these areas.

The presence of three hillforts in the vicinity, the quantity of late Iron Age coins and evidence for the extent of Iron Age settlement, all suggest that the Sandy area was an important location in the Iron Age. The Roman town of Sandy, therefore, developed in an already populated area, and it may well have incorporated some of the existing boundaries and trackways.

The Roman town

The area to the east of the Sandy known as 'Chesterfield', now in vicinity of the modern Municipal Cemetery (Fig. 1), has been a well-known source of Roman finds since the 17th century (Watkin 1882, 268–74).

The first coherent article on Roman Sandy was published by D.E. Johnston in 1974, where it was described as a '*settlement*'. [As an aside, David Johnston later went on to have a career in archaeology including in 1979, publishing a book on Roman roads in Britain]. Since Johnston 1974, the evidence for the Roman town has been described by various authors, e.g. Simco 1984 (114–5); Dawson (1995); BCAS (1996, 1997); Albion Archaeology (2003). Roman Sandy was also included in Rodwell and

Rowley's *Small Towns of Roman Britain* (1975) , but not in Burnham and Wacher's *The 'Small Towns' of Roman Britain* (1990).

Fieldwork for over twenty years has increased our understanding of the origins, defences, layout and extent of the Roman town at Sandy (Luke 2024). The evidence derives from a large number of

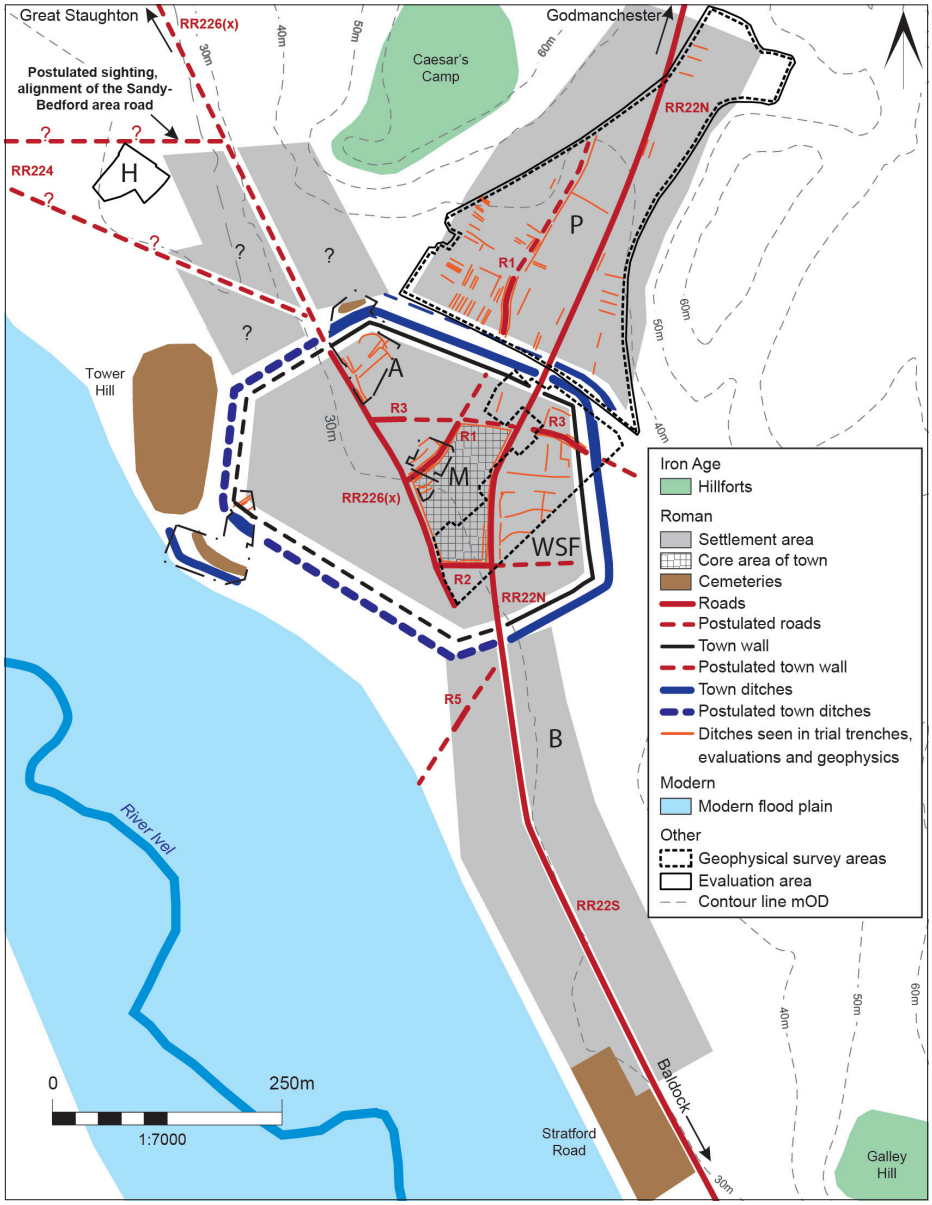


Fig. 2. Overall layout of Roman Sandy (after Luke 2024, fig.7).

Note: A=AOC excavation, B= Bungalow trench, H= High Street evaluation, M= Municipal Cemetery, P= Potton Road evaluation, WSF= Woodside Farm geophysical survey

investigations of a variety of scales and types, undertaken by different organisations/individuals. This 2004 publication showed the value in taking time to review disparate records and carefully consider what links can be made between them. A description of the key investigations can be found in Luke (2024, 3–7), so is not repeated here.

The Roman town is now known to have been 30–35ha in extent (Luke 2024, 34). The area available for settlement may have been restricted to the east and north by the steep slopes of the Greensand Ridge, and to the west by the floodplain of the River Ivel (*Fig. 2*). Present evidence suggests that settlement was concentrated along the roads to Godmanchester and Baldock, RR22 to the north and south. The extent of the town to the north-west – beneath present-day Sandy – is uncertain as only limited archaeological investigation has taken place there.

Within the town, a polygonal area of c.11ha was enclosed by defences comparable to those at Godmanchester (Luke 2024, 33–4, table 1, fig. 12). These comprised a large ditch, 11.5–15m wide and 2.5m deep, and a parallel wall, 3m wide. There is some evidence for an additional, c.5m-wide ditch at the north-east and south-west corners of the defences. No firm evidence for gateways into the walled area of the town is currently available, although they must have existed in some form. The little evidence that exists is discussed by Luke (2024, 17–18). The limited hand excavation and lack of dating evidence mean that it is not yet possible to securely date the defences, although there is sufficient information to suggest, that they were not a primary feature of the town (as was often the case).

Within the enclosed and unenclosed parts of the town, there was a network of roads, some of the minor roads which appear to have been truncated when the defences were built (Luke 2024, 19–24). The layout and nature of these roads are discussed in this article.

The majority of the evidence for buildings comes from within the town's defences, principally from the Municipal Cemetery excavations (Luke 2024, 26–8). With the exception of one possible roundhouse, all the buildings were rectangular (Dawson 1995, 173). These were all timber buildings with thatched or shingled roofs, but some made use of blocks of local sandstone to create low walls, on which timber frames were constructed.

To date, the only evidence for a masonry building was found during the digging of a cess pit on land adjacent to the Municipal Cemetery (within the Woodside Farm area, but outside the extent of the geophysical survey) (Luke 2024, 27–8). Salvage investigations revealed seven courses of '*large, dressed, rectangular blocks of ironstone*', bonded by lime mortar (BCAS 1994, 8). Tiles (roof, floor, and box flue) and fragments of *opus signinum* were also recovered. The substantial nature of the stonework led to the suggestion that it might have been a building associated with a *mansio* (BCAS 1994, 13).

The masonry building was located within the defences and in-between the roads to Godmanchester and Great Staughton. It was also probably within the land plot defined by roads R1, R2 and R3 (*Fig. 2*). Given its central location and the presence of a masonry building, it is possible that this plot was the '*official*' core of the town (Luke 2024, 34–6).

Outside of the defences and on the periphery of the town, there were at least two large cemeteries: Tower Hill/Tesco and Stratford Road (*Fig. 2*). Numerous other burials have been found; some may have been isolated, while others were part of small cemeteries, some of which lay within the town's defences (Luke 2024, 28–31).

Roman road research in Bedfordshire

The existence of about 40 Roman roads was proposed in the 1960s by a group of Roman archaeologists operating in the south-east Midlands, known as The Viatores (1964). A dozen of these Roman roads, totalling c.150km in length, were located within Bedfordshire (Simco 1984, 78), which is of note as Bedfordshire is one of the smallest counties in England. Margary, who was an advisor to The Viatores, listed their roads in later editions of his Roman Roads in Britain, but he did not repeat the descriptions (Margary 1973, 175–7, map 7a).

The evidence proposed by The Viatores for Roman roads usually comprised straight lengths of modern road or tracks, hedgerows, parish boundaries, as well as visible earthworks and occasionally sub-surface remains. This evidence was examined by Angela Simco in her survey of Roman Bedfordshire (1984, 78 and fig. 68), and she dismissed all but a few of the proposed Roman roads, because many of the modern roads and hedgerows were created only at the time of Enclosure. However, Simco was only verifying or dismissing the evidence presented for the Roman roads by The Viatores and was not necessarily saying that all the proposed roads in Bedfordshire did not exist.

The most recent significant discovery regarding roads in the Sandy area is the identification of a Roman road from Sandy to Great Staughton (Ratledge 2024a, 314).

Roads Within the Roman Town

Evidence for Roman roads in this area has been found intermittently over the last 50 years, but recent research has provided a better understanding of the layout and nature of roads within the town *(Fig. 2)*. Having reviewed all the available evidence, a new layout for the roads within the town has been proposed (Luke 2024, 21–24, fig. 7). In summary, it is possible that some of the roads may have existed in the late Iron Age, and the evidence suggests that during Roman times, although the roads appear to have been planned in a systematic way, they did not form a rectangular grid-like pattern. There is also evidence that some of the Roman roads were truncated when the town defences were built. However, the picture is still incomplete, and for the western part of the Roman town, this is likely to remain so, as any evidence is likely to have been destroyed when the railway (including sidings, station, car park and ballast quarries) and residential buildings were built.

The evidence for roads within the town is described here, partly to provide an idea of how these were constructed, and so they can be compared to the major roads which link to other settlements.

The only road within the town that has been the subject of open area excavation was R1, when a 50m length was exposed within the Municipal Cemetery 1989–1991 excavations (M on fig. 2) (Luke 2024, 22). Hand investigation indicated that this road had been repeatedly resurfaced with compacted gravel and was bounded by side ditches, whose recuts narrowed the width of the latest road surface to c.3.5m (Dawson 1995, 173; fig. 15.3). Within the town, most of this road (for c.400m) was 50m west of, and broadly parallel to, the Sandy to Godmanchester road. Approximately 150m to the north-east, the probable continuation of this road outside of the defences, was identified by two parallel geophysical anomalies, c.7m apart, which were traced for at least 100m within the Potton Road evaluation (P on fig. 2, fig. *4*), although for this length, no gravel surface was present (Albion Archaeology 2019, fig. 3) (Figs 2 and 4). One interesting aspect of this road is that the current evidence

suggests that it was *'cut across'* when the northern defences were constructed and therefore pre-dates them.

Geophysical survey undertaken at Woodside Farm (WSF on *Fig. 2*) in 1996, produced good evidence for an E–W road R2 (Luke 2024, 23) associated with the Sandy to Godmanchester road. A linear high resistance anomaly c.4m wide, suggestive of a stone surface (GSB 1996, 4), was visible for c.50m to the west of the Sandy to Godmanchester road. A geophysical ditch-type anomaly was present along part of the north side of R2, and this turned to form the west side of the Sandy to Godmanchester road. There is no evidence that road R2 extended eastwards, however, as this area was beyond the limit of the geophysical survey, but the road's continuation is a possibility. An interesting feature of this road is that it appears to provide a link between the Great Staughton road and the Godmanchester road.

The geophysical survey at Woodside Farm also produced evidence for another road R3, although this was not interpreted as such at the time (Luke 2024, 23). The evidence comprised two parallel ditch-like anomalies c.7m apart (GSB 1996, fig 4). These appear to have been truncated when the eastern defences were constructed. Within the area of geophysical survey, R3 was only located to the east of, and roughly perpendicular, to the Sandy to Godmanchester road. If the alignment of this road is extended to the west of the Sandy to Godmanchester road, it then coincides with '*an E–W gravel track*' identified during grave-digging in the 1960s (Johnston 1974, 39, fig. 3 label 3).

Just outside of the southern defences, was another possible road R5. This is indicated by the presence of a linear faint cropmark on an oblique aerial photograph (SF2503/25 held by the HER), suggestive of a stone surface (Luke 2024, 24). The cropmark was c.7m wide and visible for c.30m to the south-west of the present-day Stratford Road. R5 runs NE-SW and may possibly have been aligned between the south-east gate, across the River Ivel, to the Roman settlement on the opposite bank (Dawson and Maul 1996).

The Viatores suggested another road in this area which might have been associated with the Tower Hill cemetery (*Fig. 2*). This was based on '*by probing*' and observations within two narrow pipe trenches, resulting in section drawings which appear to show 'gravel metalling' (The Viatores 1964, 499). However, the location of these trenches is problematic. In the text, they are described as being near the train station (The Viatores 1964, 271), whereas on the published plans, they are shown as being adjacent to Stratford Road (The Viatores 1964, 516) and therefore, would form part of one of the connecting roads (see below). Therefore, at present, there is insufficient evidence to support the existence of this Tower Hill cemetery road and hence it is not shown on the figures here. However, if it did exist, it is interesting that its possible course would head to the north-west gate of the town, mirroring the arrangement of road R5 to the south. The evidence for a possible Tower Hill cemetery road is discussed in more detail elsewhere (Luke 2024, 24).

Roads From the Roman Town

Traditionally, it has been thought that Sandy was located at a change in the alignment of the road from Baldock to Godmanchester (RR22) (Fig. 3). However, the recent discovery based on lidar evidence of a Roman road from Sandy to Great Staughton, Cambridgeshire (Ratledge 2024a/b, 314), issued Margary number RR226(x) in 2024 (Armstrong and Holmes 2024, 387), and a better understanding of the layout of the Roman town (Luke 2024, 34, fig. 12), has cast some doubt on this long-held view. This will be explored further in the Discussion .

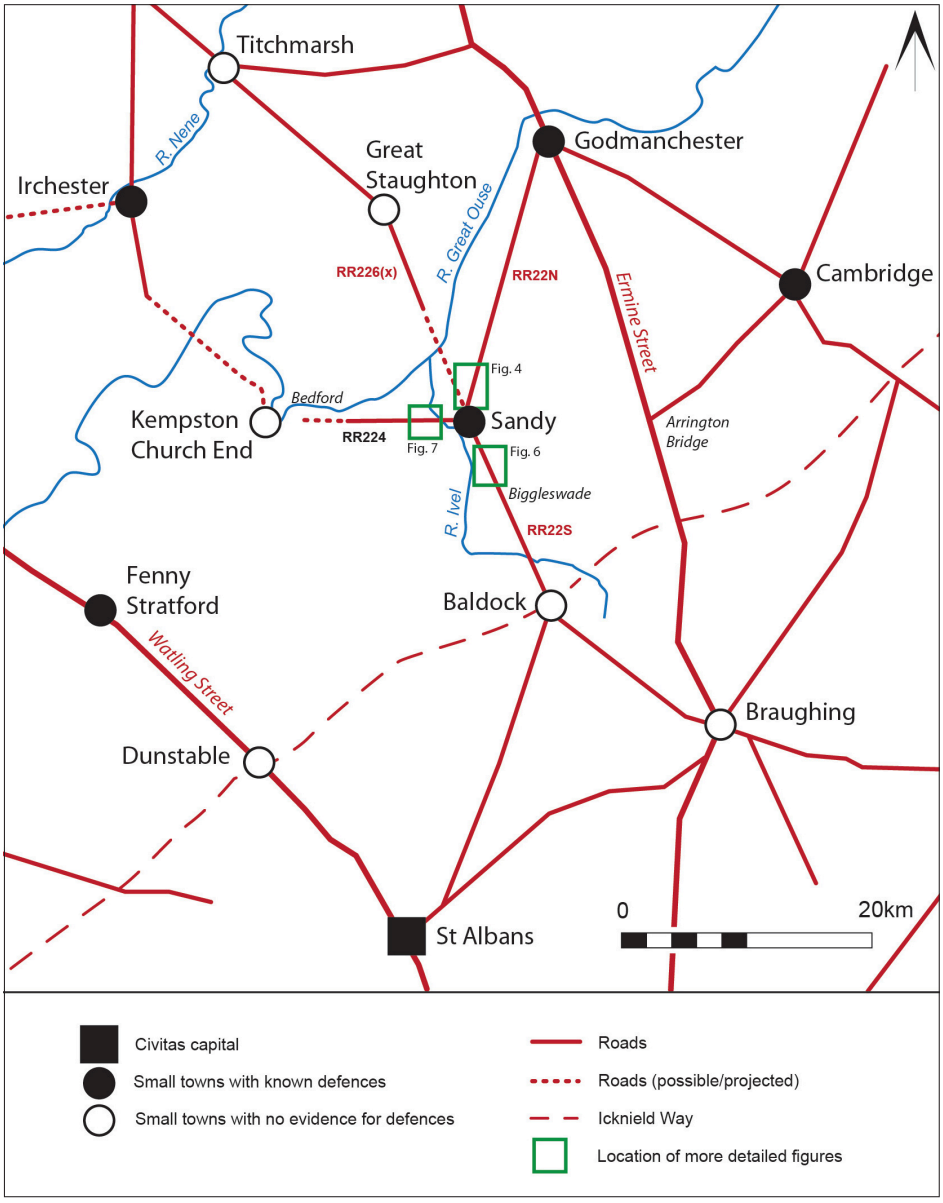


Fig. 3: Map showing the road network around Sandy with the location of detailed figures indicated

The Viatores proposed a road linking Sandy to Cambridge (via Arrington Bridge on Ermine Street), which they considered to be the same road as that to the Bedford area (RR224), and they also proposed one to the Irchester (RR225) (The Viatores 1964 map on 356–7; Johnston 1974, 39–40, fig. 1; Dawson 1995, fig. 15.2). Of these, all except the Sandy to Bedford area road have been dismissed by Simco due to lack of supporting evidence (1984, 78 and fig. 68). Although there is some lidar evidence interpreted by David Ratledge to support the existence of the road to Arrington Bridge (Ratledge

2024b), no firm evidence has been found to date. Therefore, this road, and the claimed road to Irchester RR225, are not discussed in this article.

In the descriptions below, the roads are named based on the next significant settlement from Sandy. This means that the two alignments of the Godmanchester to Baldock road are described separately, as RR22 north (R22N) and RR22 south (R22S). Where possible, the evidence nearest Sandy is described first, followed by any evidence further away. The text starts with a comment on the alignment of the road, then describes the evidence. I have not repeated any evidence previously published by The Viatores and Margary, except in a small number of cases.

Sandy to Godmanchester (RR22N)

Alignment

Despite the road having to ascend onto the Greensand Ridge outside of Sandy, its course took a single alignment from Sandy to Godmanchester, Cambridgeshire (Fig. 3). However, at Godmanchester, the road had to turn to enter the town via the west gate. It has been suggested that this is because the road was originally aligned on a crossing of the River Great Ouse, which predated the existence of the town defences at Godmanchester.

Evidence

Within the defended part of Roman Sandy, and just outside the town to the north, the road has been identified based on non-intrusive evidence and evaluation trenches. Based on the combined evidence, the road within the defences appeared to deviate from its alignment with Godmanchester and gradually curved southwards to become the road to Baldock (RR22S) going south-east (Fig. 2).

On a 1984 oblique aerial photograph (SF2503/25 held by the HER), a faint linear cropmark is visible near the south-east gate, suggesting a stone road surface. The cropmark is c.7m wide and clearly visible for c.50m within the defences, continuing less clearly to within c.10m of the present-day Stratford Road (believed to overlie the Sandy-Baldock road in this area). No side ditches are visible. The intersection of the south-eastern town wall and the road is marked by a broader cropmark which may be associated with the south-east gateway. If correct, this would suggest that the road passed through the defences at a slight angle, rather than perpendicularly, as one might expect.

Road-like linear anomalies that coincided with the cropmarks just described, were found just to the north by geophysical survey at Woodside Farm in 1996. At the time these were interpreted as a street within the Roman town rather than the road to Godmanchester; which was believed, incorrectly, to have been located c.100m to the east (GSB 1996, fig 4). In places, the road appeared to be defined by side ditches as indicated by parallel linear geophysical anomalies, c.9m apart (*Fig. 2*). The north-east gateway should lie within the Woodside Farm geophysical survey area; however, nothing was identified with any degree of confidence, possibly because this area was on the edge of the survey area. However, the Sandy-Godmanchester road must have passed through the northern defences and it is interesting that the gateway was not in a central location.

The course of the road to the north-east of the defences was identified within an evaluation undertaken on land adjacent to the Potton Road in 2018/9 (Albion Archaeology 2019) (Fig. 4). The road was traced for 350m as a linear geophysical anomaly, 12–22m wide (Magnitude Surveys 2018) and it was targeted by Trenches 6, 9 and 15 (Albion Archaeology 2019, 16–17). Hand investigation was challenging (even

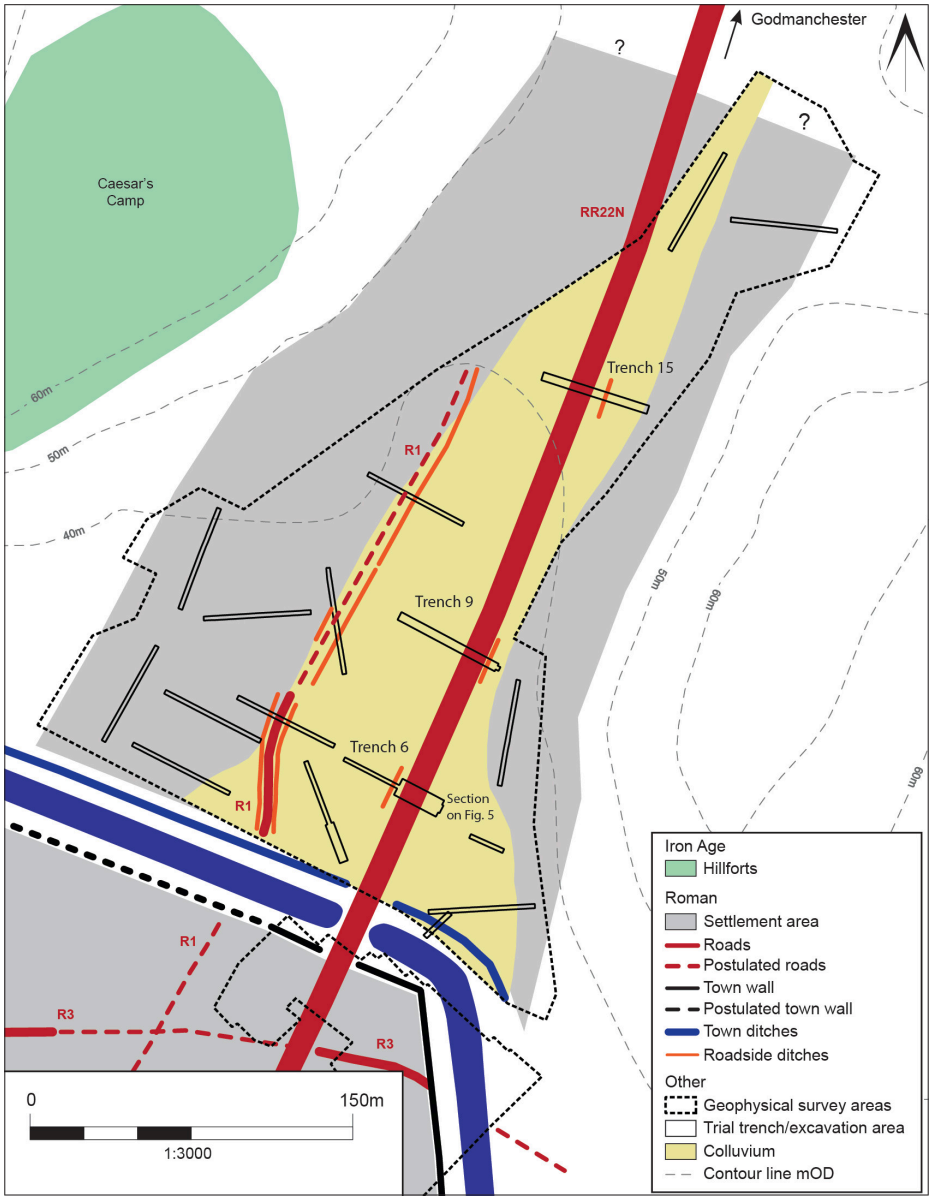


Fig. 4: Plan showing evidence for the Sandy- Godmanchester road (RR22N) - Potton Road evaluation (after Albion 2019, fig. 16)

with the sides of the trenches being stepped) due to a thickness of up to 1.5m of overburden. The overburden consisted of up to 0.7m of topsoil/ subsoil and up to 0.8m of colluvium (Albion Archaeology 2019, 14, table 1). The evidence for the road looked clear as a geophysical anomaly, but identification was initially difficult because of the depth at which it occurred, and because only its makeup layers survived. As expected, the investigation within the trenches indicated that the width of geophysical

anomaly was far greater than the actual width of the road, which was found to be at least 4.15m and 5.8m wide (Trenches 15 and 9 respectively), and up to 12.25m wide (Trench 6).

The nature of the road construction was best observed within Trench 6 where a section through it was hand-excavated (Albion Archaeology 2019, fig. 9, section 1) (*Fig. 5*). Here the road measured at least 12.25m wide; the full width was not excavated to prevent damage to the adjacent Roman building remains, which directly abutted its NW side. The lowest makeup layers comprised mixed silts and sands (used to level the ground), followed by sand deposits (which were cambered to provide drainage), then thin dark silty makeup layers and finally remnants of the road surface which mainly comprised areas of compacted gravel, clay and silt. In total, the road deposits were over 1.2m thick. Understanding the remains of the road within Trench 15 was complicated. There was evidence of a road surface which had been heavily truncated by later features. The surviving surface measured at least 4.15m wide, comprising a yellow-grey sandy silt makeup layer and a road surface of compact sandy gravel. The road appeared to be truncated by a holloway to the NW, although this may have been associated with later use of the road.

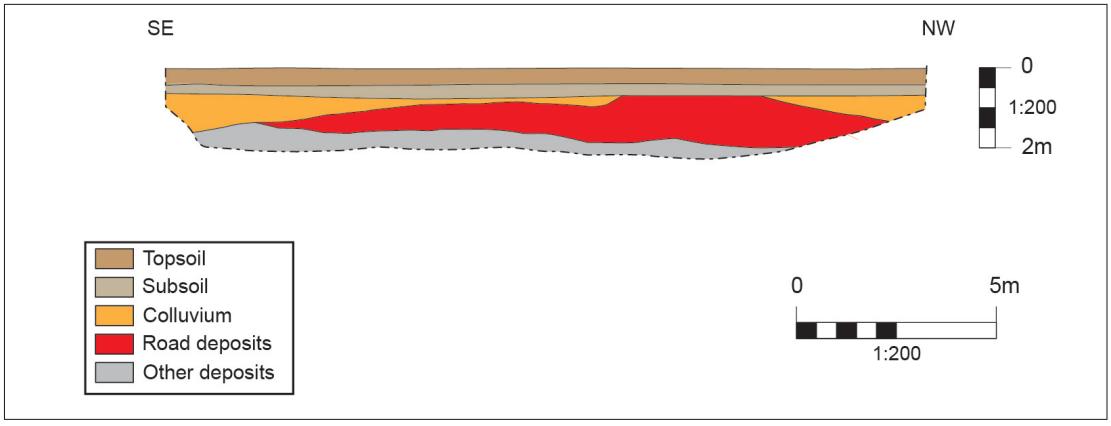


Fig. 5 Section through the Sandy-Godmanchester road (RR22N) - Potton Road evaluation (after Albion 2019, fig. 9, section 1)

The road was found to be bounded by ditches on at least one side in all three trenches and these had been recut on multiple occasions. Evidence for buildings and other activity was present adjacent to the road and may have masked the full extent of the original road.

Clear evidence for the road in this part of Sandy had not previously been recorded. For example, in 1955 when pipe trenches adjacent to Potton Road were observed (The Viatores 1964, 235; Johnston 1974, 39), no evidence for the road was noted. This may be because the course of the road appears to be near the base of a dry valley in which a considerable thickness of colluvium has formed, making the road difficult to excavate and identify.

To the north-east of Sandy, the road coincides with a field boundary known as Hasell Hedge for c.1km, and it is in this area that The Viatores state that the *'road was observed in 1950 to consist of 5in of red sand, packed tightly on a clay foundation*' (1964, 238). However, they do not record a precise location or say where this information came from. More recently, David Ratledge (2024c) used lidar to trace the course of the road between Sandy and Godmanchester.

Sandy to Baldock (RR22S)

Alignment

Current evidence suggests that the course of this road took a single alignment from Sandy to Baldock, Hertfordshire (Fig. 3).

Evidence

All of the evidence described here comes from the section of road between Sandy and Biggleswade (c.5km south of Sandy).

A recent suggestion is that in the southern part of Roman Sandy, the Sandy-Baldock road underlies at least part of the present-day Stratford Road (Luke 2024, 21) (Fig. 1). This supports Margary's initial thoughts in the first edition of Roman Roads in Britain (1955, 177). The evidence for this is that Stratford Road, through what would have been the southernmost part of the Roman town, coincides with the alignment of the Roman road identified to the north of Biggleswade (see below) and, although Margary did not know at the time, a large Roman cemetery was located adjacent to Stratford Road c.500m south of the defences (Luke 2024, 29, fig. 7) (Fig. 2). In addition, within the defended area of the town, there is firmer evidence for the existence of a Roman road underlying part of Stratford Road, see p166. However, it should be noted that, the Sandy-Baldock Roman road deviated from the current Stratford Road near The Bungalow, and in terms of this article became the road to Godmanchester (described above).

An alternative route for the Sandy-Baldock road has been proposed, c.50m east of the present-day Stratford Road. This was based on the discovery in 1954, of a road-like surface in a single trench dug at The Bungalow (Johnston 1955; The Viatores 1964, 237; Johnston 1974, 37 and 39) (B on Fig. 2). The feature was described by The Viatores as being *'17ft wide and 14in thick, formed of rammed gravel, apparently in several periods of construction. Under this was what looked like a foundation-layer of larger stones extending several feet to the east of the road*'. The feature appeared to have been constructed over a ditch and was possibly associated with a hearth (The Viatores 1964, 237, 515). No evidence for the continuation of this feature was found on its projected alignment c.25m to the north during investigations at 7 Stratford Road (Heritage Network 2009). It is therefore possible that the remains observed at The Bungalow could represent either a side street, yard or the floor of a building located within southern part of the town.

Approximately 3km south of Roman Sandy, on the northern outskirts of Biggleswade, two parallel linear cropmarks indicate the course of the Sandy-Baldock road (RR22S). These are visible for c.170m on a Google Earth aerial photograph, dated June 2009. This area has been evaluated by Oxford Archaeology (2020), who identified two parallel linear geophysical anomalies, c.17m apart, that could be traced intermittently for 370m (Magnitude Surveys 2019, 11, fig. 7) (Fig. 6). These were investigated within twelve evaluation trenches. Ditches corresponding to the road were not always present, but when identified, they varied in width from 1.1m to 5m, suggesting that at some point they may have been utilised as quarries (Oxford Archaeology 2020, 60). In addition, linear arrangements of pits were identified by geophysical survey and trenches (Fig. 6). These may represent quarry pits for the road, but as they have been examined only within evaluation trenches, it is not certain that they are Roman in date. The only possible evidence for a road surface was a deposit of compacted flint cobbles within the recut western roadside ditch in Trench 2 (Oxford Archaeology 2020, 34, 60; plates 13, 14; fig. 6 section 173). This was 2m in extent and 0.05m thick (Oxford Archaeology 2020, table 3).

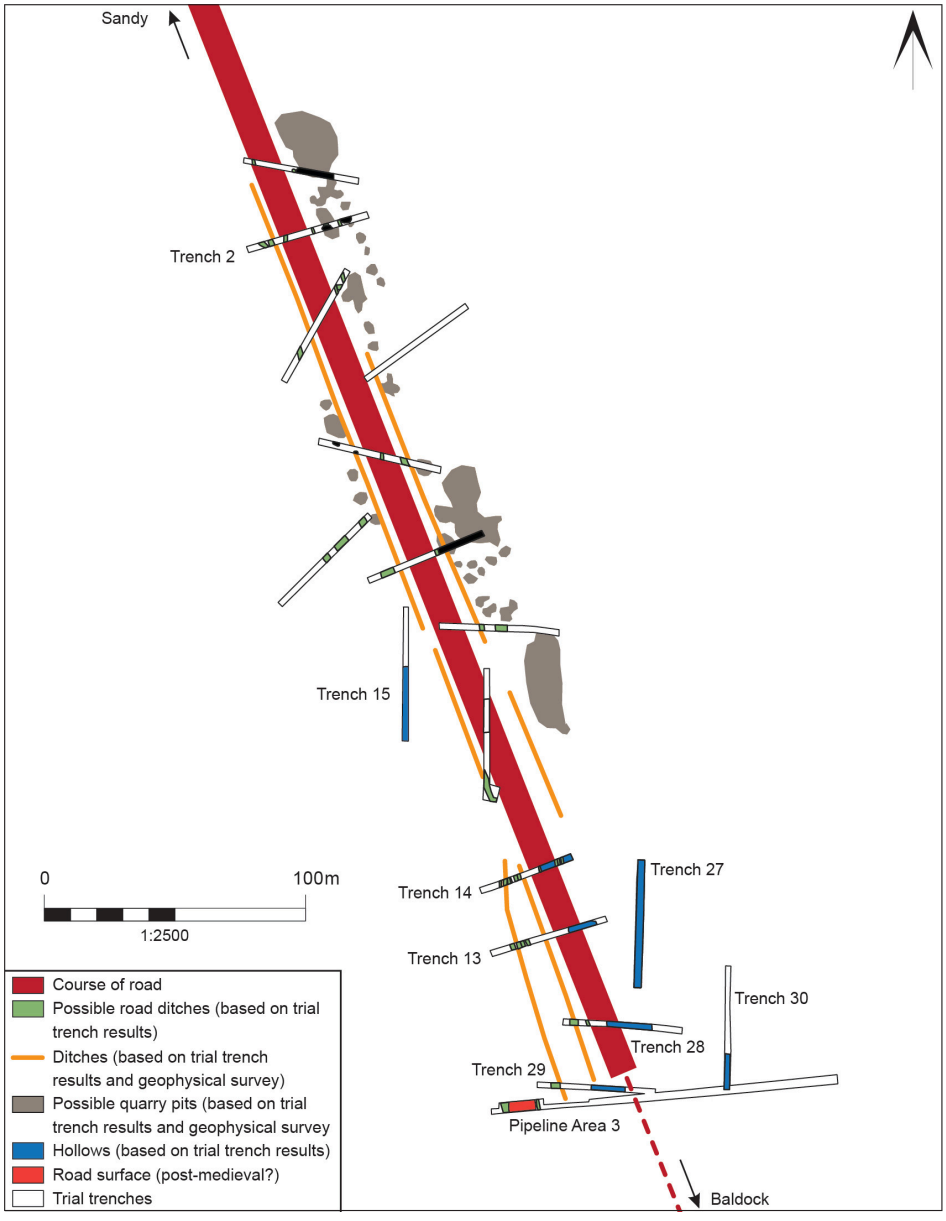


Fig. 6: Plan showing evidence for the Sandy-Baldock road (RR22N) to the north of Biggleswade (after Oxford Archaeology East 2015, fig. 3 and Oxford Archaeology 2020, figs 4, 5a, 5c and 5g)

During an earlier evaluation and excavation undertaken in advance of a pipeline (Oxford Archaeology East 2015, 12, fig. 3), a metalled surface and its associated ditches were identified in this vicinity. These remains were initially interpreted as post-medieval in date, because both ditches flanking the surface contained post-medieval pottery (Oxford Archaeology East 2015, 15). However, since then, it has been suggested that these are remnants of the Roman road which remained in the landscape as a boundary until the post-medieval period (Oxford Archaeology 2020, 4, 60; Forster 2021, 327–8). While

this is possible, based on the location of these remains (as shown on Oxford Archaeology East 2015, 12, fig. 3), it would suggest that either this represents an additional Roman road, or that the course of the Sandy-Baldock road had shifted c.50m west of the road alignment identified in the 2020 evaluation (Fig. 6). Currently, there is insufficient evidence to link the 2015 evidence to the Sandy-Baldock road. It is, however, interesting that metalling has survived. This may be because the area investigated was located on the edge of arable fields so may not have been subjected to intensive ploughing.

The presence of hollows up to 0.3m deep in Trenches 13, 14, 28 and 29 on the proposed course of the Roman road may suggest that they were created by the passage of people along the routeway (Oxford Archaeology 2020, 25). However, the presence of hollows in Trenches 15, 27 and 30, that are not part of the road, casts some doubt on this interpretation.

To the south of Biggleswade, the Roman road between Sandy and Baldock is believed to underlie the A1, but as far as the author knows it has never been observed.

Sandy to Great Staughton (RR226(x))

Alignment

This road was identified on the basis of lidar evidence by David Ratledge (2024d, 314). The limited current evidence suggests that despite the road having to cross the River Ivel and its floodplain, the course of this road took a single alignment to Great Staughton, Cambridgeshire. It is worth noting that from Great Staughton, the road changed direction to take a single alignment to the Roman town at Titchmarsh, Northamptonshire (just east of present day Thrapston), where it crossed the River Nene (Fig. 3).

Evidence

Other than lidar, all the evidence for this road derives from investigation within Roman Sandy. As suggested above, it is possible that the present-day Stratford Road overlies this Roman road (Fig. 2). AOC excavations, which straddled the north-west defences and were adjacent to Stratford Road (Capon 2023, 12) (A on Fig. 2), support this suggestion, as gravel and sand layers are interpreted as being part of a road with side ditches. Additional, but indirect evidence that this Roman road may underlie Stratford Road, is the way in which Roman ditches within the allotment excavations (A on Fig.2) turn to respect it, and that some ditches are parallel to Stratford Road. This area was located very close to the north-west gateway.

The presence of a Roman road underlying the Stratford Road in this area is also supported by early observations made by David Johnston in 1955, within two narrow pipe trenches (Viatores 1964, 271 and 516). The section drawings, recorded as DEJ 4 and 5, appear to show a cambered '*gravel metalling*' (Viatores 1964, 499), which looks reasonably convincing as a possible road. However, there is a problem with the location of these observations as they are titled as being located at the railway station (The Viatores 1964, 271), but the associated location plan shows them both east of, and adjacent to, Stratford Road (The Viatores 1964, 516).

More recently, an area of undated gravel was observed in the side of a foundation trench during a watching brief, adjacent to the south side of the present-day Stratford Road (Albion Archaeology 2020, 9), c.80m south-east of the AOC excavation. Of course, if this was the only evidence then the

recorded remains could be associated with a perhaps wider, potentially post-medieval version of the modern Stratford Road.

Nearby within the Municipal Cemetery 1989-91 excavation (M on Fig. 2), Roman ditches appear to be turning possibly to respect a road to the south underlying Stratford Road (Luke 2024, fig. 5). In addition, the location of some Roman buildings adjacent to Stratford Road within the Municipal Cemetery excavations (Dawson 1995, fig. 15.3) suggests the possibility of a contemporary road just outside the excavation area (Luke 2024, fig. 9). Finally, the existence of the road RR226(x) is also supported by the way in which road R1 within the Municipal Cemetery excavations (adjacent to the modern Stratford Road), turned slightly as if to meet a perpendicular road.

The Roman road underlying Stratford Road was interpreted as an internal one within the Roman town (Luke 2021, 23) until David Ratledge identified a road heading towards Great Staughton (Ratledge 2024a, 314). Although he has identified its probable course based on lidar (Ratledge 2024d), to date, no archaeological fieldwork has been undertaken along this road outside of Roman Sandy.

Sandy to Kempston Church End/Bedford area (RR224 west)

Alignment

Current evidence suggests that for the majority of its course, this road took a single alignment from Sandy to the Bedford area (*Fig. 3*). It has been suggested that its survey was sighted onto/from the hilltop known as Caesar's Camp just north of the Roman Sandy (Luke 2021, fig. 7), but it will have needed to deviate from this alignment to enter the Roman town.

Destination

Although its destination is often described as the '*Bedford area*' (Simco 1984, 65), there are no Roman '*small towns*' as such in the Bedford area. Therefore, unlike the other roads the destination is worthy of a short discussion.

The most significant known Roman settlements in the Bedford area that this road (RR224) may have been associated with are: the possible estate centre at Newnham (Ingham, Oetgen and Slowikowski 2016); the potential high-status villa at Manton Lane (Luke, Cocking and Sayer 2017); the possible high status farmstead SL54 within the southern part of the Biddenham Loop (Luke 2016, 337); and the c.17ha settlement at Kempston Church End (Luke 2016, 208–41). The latter seems the most likely destination.

The Kempston Church End settlement contained a well-built Roman road which may have headed to the walled small town at Irchester. This is the main reason that Kempston Church End is described as a '*roadside settlement*'. If Kempston Church End was at the intersection of the roads from both Irchester and Sandy, then the latter would have required a change in alignment to go round the meander in the River Great Ouse known locally as the Biddenham Loop.

Evidence

The cropmark evidence is key to understanding the course of this road, so is described first. The original identification of a possible road was made by St Joseph based the presence of two sets of parallel linear cropmarks on the same alignment south of Willington and north-east of Cardington

(The Viatores 1964, 268-9; Johnston 1979, aerial photograph opposite page 34; Simco 1984, image 63). The Viatores extended the alignment based on the cropmarks using, in part, existing roads and hedges along the same line; they also believed that the road continued beyond Sandy to Wimpole, Cambridgeshire (1964, 268–9, 484–5). Parallel cropmarks have now been identified in four locations between Sandy and Bedford, all are visible on Google Earth, and the cropmarks are 9–12m apart. No evidence for the road has yet been found within the southern part of modern Bedford.

The easternmost cropmarks indicating the presence of a road, are located 2km west of Roman Sandy; this is the only part of the road which has been subject to archaeological investigation (Fig. 7). The route of the Mox Hill to Sandy water main crossed the alignment of the Roman road in two locations c.600m apart. Therefore, these areas were examined by a two-stage evaluation: stage 1, Trench 29 (Northamptonshire Archaeology 2007a, 4) and stage 2, Trench 1 (Northamptonshire Archaeology 2007b). Subsequently, the locations where the water main crossed the Roman road, were examined in the pipe easement in advance of the construction of this pipeline: Area 3 (in area of Trench 29) and Area 4 (in the area of Trench 1) (Northamptonshire Archaeology 2007c, 4–5) (Fig. 7). The results for the two trenches are described in two separate evaluation reports and the results of the easement investigations within a third report. Unfortunately, the results do not entirely agree with each other, for example: in the western area, one roadside ditch was found in evaluation Trench 29 (Northamptonshire Archaeology 2007a, 4, fig. 3), but two roadside ditches, c.13m apart, were found in the easement investigation (Northamptonshire Archaeology 2007c, 4–5, fig. 4) (Fig. 8); in the eastern area one roadside ditch was found in Trench 1 (Northamptonshire Archaeology 2007b, 4, fig. 3), but

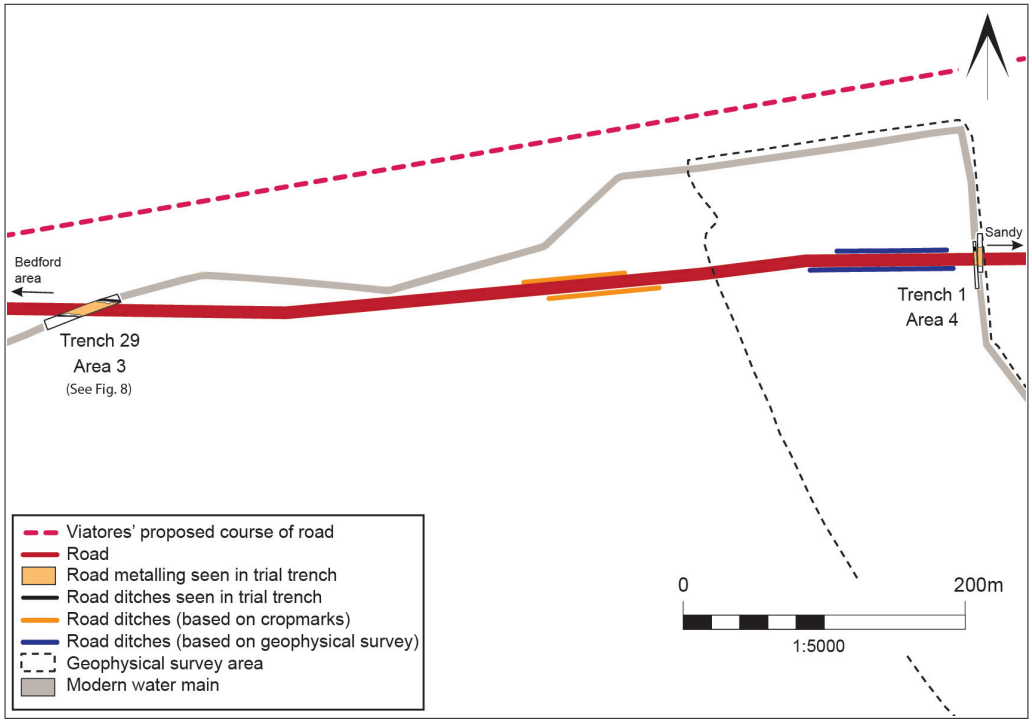


Fig. 7: Plan showing evidence for the Sandy-Bedford road (RR224), west of the River Ivel (after Northamptonshire Archaeology 2007a, fig. 2; 2007b fig. 2; 2007c, fig. 2, and Sumo 2022, fig. 7)

in the easement investigation this was believed to be modern and no roadside ditches were present (Northamptonshire Archaeology 2007c, 4–5, fig. 5).

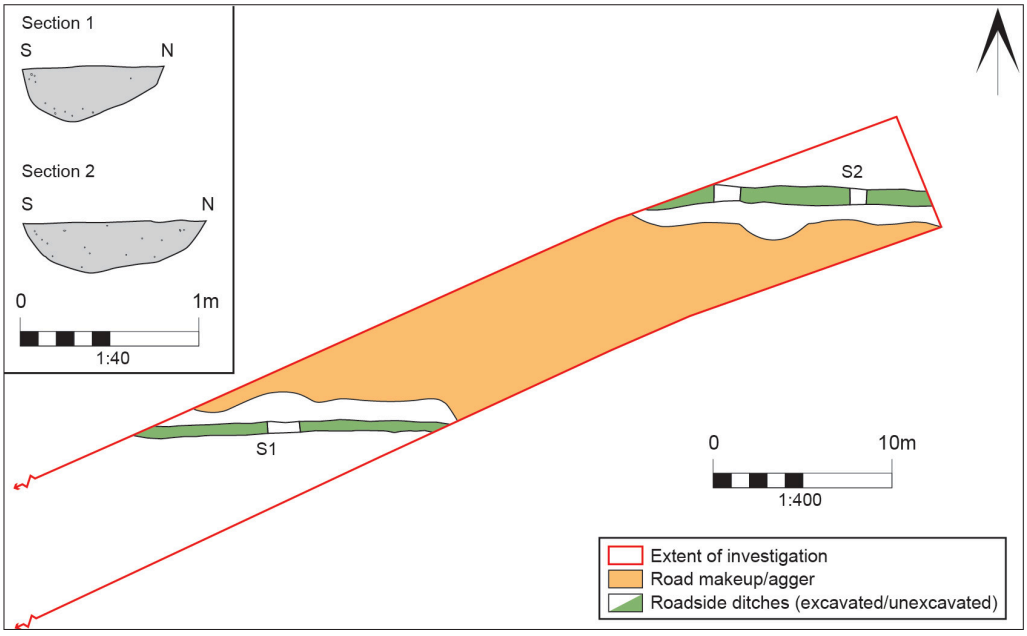


Fig. 8: Detailed plan of the Sandy-Bedford road (RR224) within Area 3 of the water main investigation (after Northamptonshire Archaeology 2007c, fig. 4)

Both the western and eastern areas produced evidence for possible road deposits. The western area contained what is described as '*a sand and gravel bank*' (Northamptonshire Archaeology 2007c, 4, fig 4; plate 2) (*Fig. 8*). This was 8-10m wide, and survived to a maximum height of c.0.35m above the surface of the surrounding natural substrate, and was found lying immediately below the topsoil, with no subsoil present. The report also states that, 'There were traces of a gravel layer, with occasional small cobbles, running down the centre of the bank. Where it survived, the gravelly layer was c.0.06m thick' (Northamptonshire Archaeology 2007c, 4, plate 3). A sand and gravel bank was also identified in Area 4, but at c.12–14m it was slightly wider than that in Area 3 (Northamptonshire Archaeology 2007c, 4–5, fig 5). It had been heavily disturbed by later activity and there were no surviving traces of the gravel layer seen in Area 3.

At a later date, and part of a separate tree planting proposal, a geophysical survey was undertaken immediately to the west of evaluation Trench 1/Area 4 (Fig. 7). This located two parallel linear geophysical anomalies, 11.5m apart, that were believed to represent the Roman road (Sumo 2022, 5). Their presence is curious, given that no roadside ditches were identified in Area 4 (see above), and the two geophysical anomalies are closer together than the recorded width of the road bank in Area 4 (see above). Also, the alignment of the geophysical anomalies is very slightly different to that of the cropmarks to the west (Fig. 7). It is possible that, if this is evidence for the road, this minor change in alignment was required as the crossing point of the River Ivel was located only c.400m to the east.

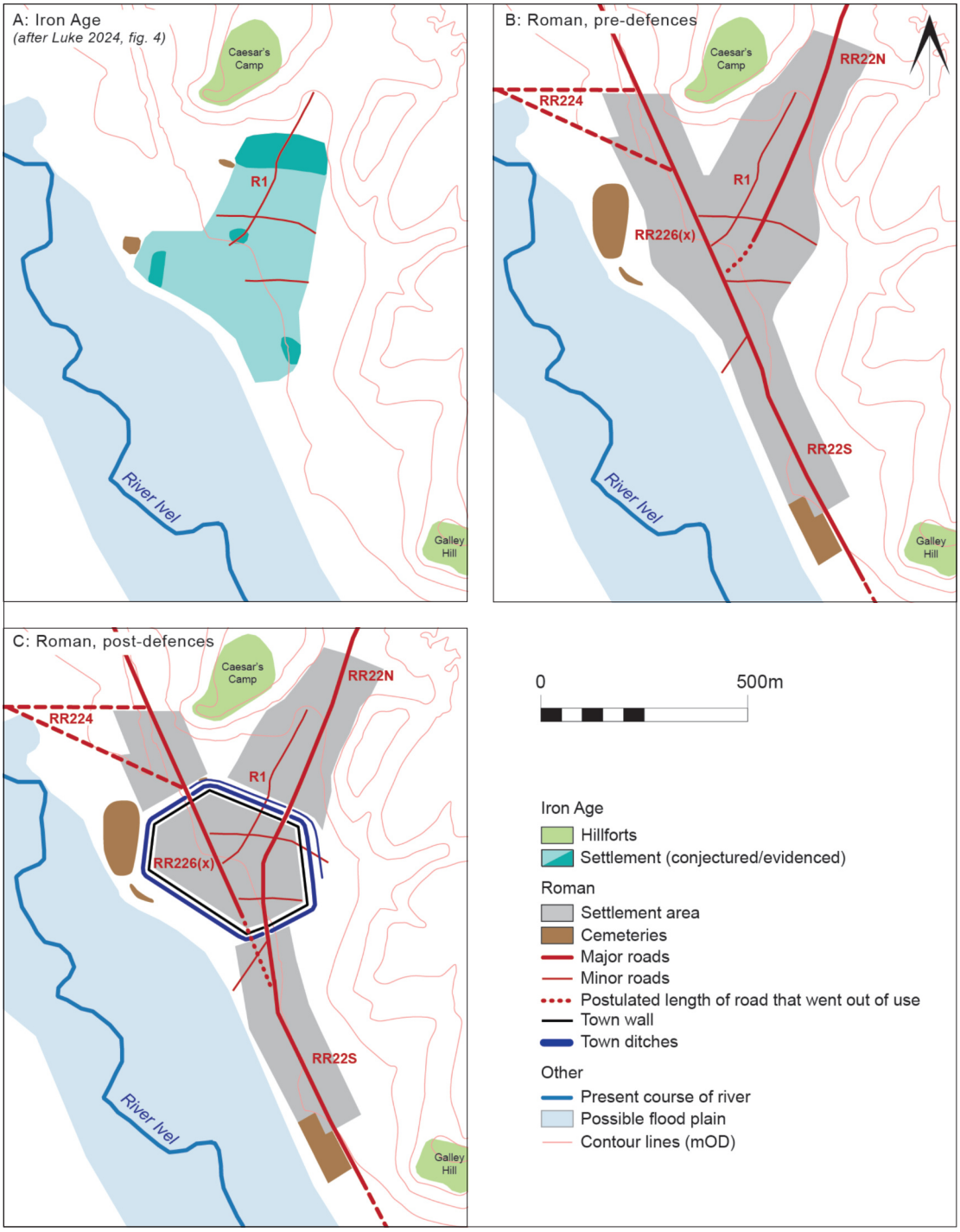


Fig. 9 Possible layout of Sandy in the Iron Age (A), Roman: pre-defences (B) and Roman: post-defences (C)

The evidence for the course of the road in this area corresponds with the alignment of the cropmarks identified near Cardington and Willington, and therefore the route proposed by The Viatores can now be rejected (Fig. 7). Their route took a more northerly course and may have been largely based on their belief that the road would need to cross the River Ivel near the Girtford Bridge (1964, 270, 485). Based on the more recent evidence, the crossing point of the river would be c.140m to the south of the route proposed by The Viatores.

There is no firm evidence for the course of the road between the River Ivel and Roman Sandy, partly because most of this route is under the modern town. The only possible evidence recorded for a Roman road within the modern town was what is described as a '*hard gravel layer*' observed by workmen during the construction of the Fire Station (The Viatores 1964, 249). This is located c.400m west of the town defences and c.60m north of the projected alignment of the cropmarks to the west of the River Ivel. An evaluation at 58-66 High Street was located adjacent to, but mainly on the south of, the projected alignment (H on Fig. 2), but this produced no evidence for the road nor for any evidence for Roman settlement (Archaeological Solutions 2010). It is likely that the E-W course of this road changed to a NW-SE alignment to the west of this area to enter the Roman town via its north-west gate (Luke 2024, 21, fig.7) (Fig. 2).

Discussion

This article has presented the evidence for roads within Roman Sandy, and those connecting to the next significant settlements. These roads will be discussed here under the categories of,'minor and major roads within the town of Roman Sandy and major roads leading away from Roman Sandy, before a new interpretation of the layout and development of Roman Sandy and its roads is described.

Pre-Roman routeways

It has often been speculated that some Roman roads may have had their origins in prehistory e.g. Bishop (2021, 1–10), and it seems likely that late Iron Age trackways existed in the late Iron Age landscape within and around Sandy; hence the inclusion of some on Fig. 9A although there is no firm dating evidence. However, further fieldwork will be required to determine their origins.

Roads within Roman Sandy

There is now a much better understanding of the layout and nature of roads within the Roman town, including both the minor town roads and the major roads which then link with other settlements. However, the evidence has largely been derived from disparate records of work or observations by a variety of people and organisations over the last fifty years, and so our understanding is imperfect.

Minor Roads within Roman Sandy

A number of minor roads have been identified and although the layout of roads within the town did not form a rectangular grid-like pattern, there is still a suggestion that there was some degree of planning (Fig. 9B). The evidence also shows that some roads were truncated when the later defences were built (Fig. 9C). Our understanding of the layout is still incomplete, and for the western part of the Roman town is likely to remain so, as much of this area was destroyed by modern development (Fig. 1).

It has been noted that some of the minor roads comprised compacted gravel; this is confirmed for R3 by observations made during modern grave-digging (Johnston 1974, 39), and by the excavated evidence for R1 within the Municipal Cemetery (Dawson 1995, 173). There is no evidence from trenches within the Potton Road evaluation that the northern length of R1 had a road surface, but this area has been subject to intense modern ploughing. Geophysical anomalies (for R2) and cropmarks (for R5) also show that some roads had stone surfaces. Based on the available evidence, the roads surfaces were 3.5–7m wide.

Based on excavated and geophysical anomalies, most of the roads within the town appear to have been bounded by side ditches, 4–7m apart. The ditches associated with R1, within the Municipal Cemetery excavation, had been recut on several occasions, reducing the width of the road surface (Dawson 1995, 173). It seems likely that the ditches were dug as part of the original road design. Therefore, one explanation for why they are not always visible on geophysical surveys, is that over time the ditches were overlain by masking deposits as roadside activities encroached.

Major Roads within Roman Sandy

The available evidence for major roads within the town i.e. those that then continue outside of the town, towards the next significant settlement, is limited to the Godmanchester road (RR22N) and to a lesser extent, to the road to Great Staughton (RR226(x)).

The course of RR22N within the town is based on cropmarks and geophysical anomalies, but the best evidence for its construction comes from the Potton Road evaluation trenches (Albion Archaeology 2019), which lie just outside the defences to the north. Within these trenches, the road comprised makeup layers 4.15–12.25m wide and 1.2m thick, with remnants of a compacted gravel, clay and silt road surface. It is likely that the makeup layers represent a succession of road rebuilds rather than a single phase of construction. The road was bounded by side ditches which had been recut on multiple occasions. Within, and just south of the defences, cropmark and geophysical anomalies indicate that the road surface may have been c.7m wide and defined by ditches c.9m part. Due to the location of this road within a dry valley its construction may not be representative of all major roads within Roman Sandy.

The road to Great Staughton (RR226(x)) is believed to largely underlie the present-day Stratford Road and has therefore never been fully exposed. Its probable north-east side was investigated within AOC excavations where gravel and presumed side ditches were identified (Capon 2023, 12). Gravel has also been found adjacent to the present-day Stratford Road within narrow pipe trenches observed by Johnston (The Viatores 1964, 499), and within a narrow footings trench for a new building (Albion 2020, 9). All these trenches produced no dating evidence and therefore, it is also possible that the gravel might be associated with a perhaps wider, post-medieval version of the modern Stratford Road.

Major Roads leading away from Roman Sandy

It is clear that each of the four major roads described above took a course based upon a single alignment from Sandy to the next 'significant' Roman settlement: Godmanchester, Baldock, Kempston Church End and Great Staughton (Figs. 10 and 11). It should be noted however, that not all of these settlements could be classified as 'small towns', but they were the next 'major' settlement along the roads from Sandy. The single course of the roads suggests a degree of planning and

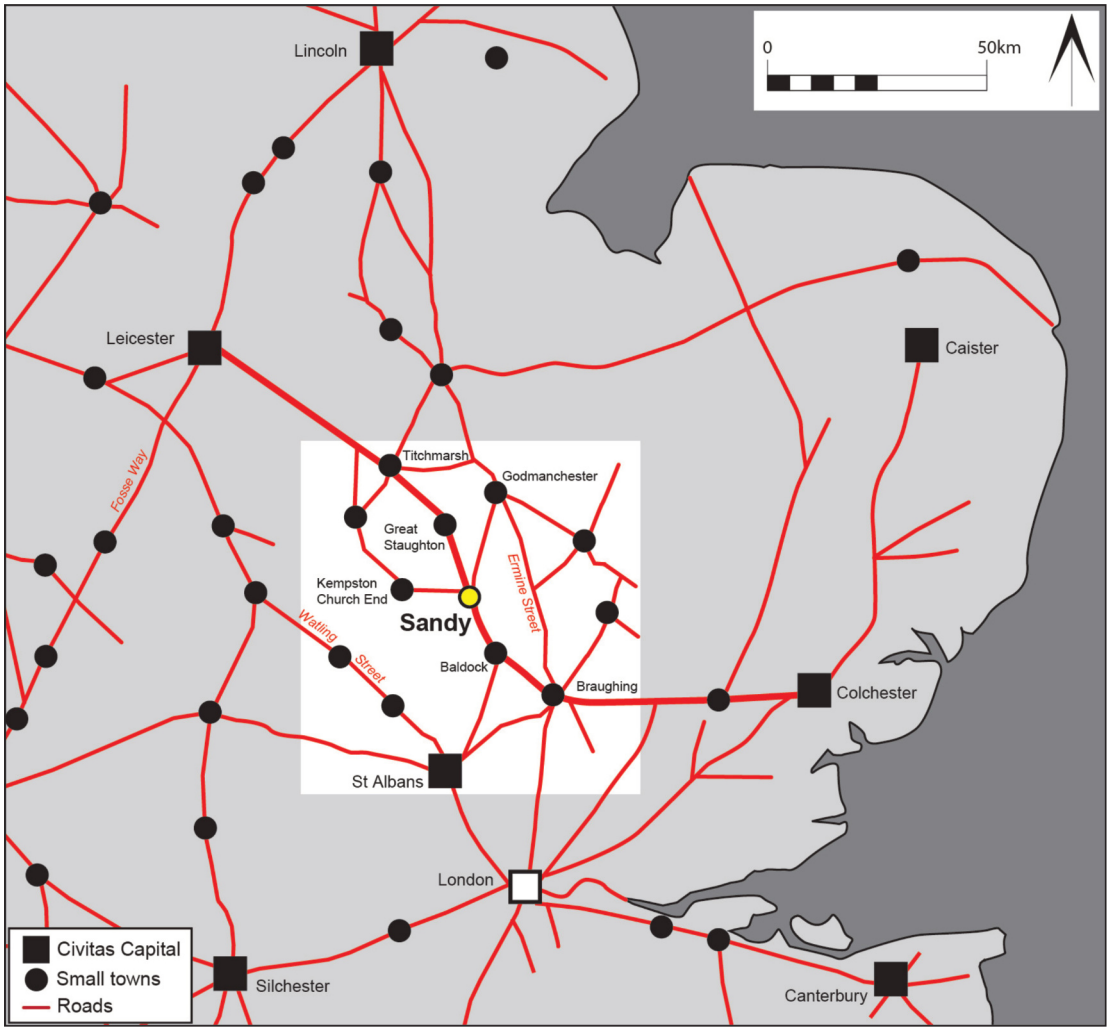


Fig. 10 Map of main roads and settlements in part of south-east England, centred on Roman Sandy (after Burnham and Wacher 1990, fig.1) Note. Area in white shown in more detail on Fig. 3

organisation both before, and during, construction. Whether this was at a provincial, *civitates*, or even a more local level is unknown.

The single alignment of these roads does not mean that there were no minor amendments to suit local conditions, for example as described for RR224 to the west of the River Ivel. In addition, it has been suggested that road RR224 was sighted onto/from the hilltop known as Caesar's Camp, just north of the Roman Sandy (Luke 2021, fig. 7). This would ensure that only one crossing of the River Ivel was required. However, the E-W course of this road changed to a NW-SE alignment to enter the Roman town via its north-west gate (Luke 2024, 21, fig.7) (Fig. 2).

The roads leading away from the town have only been examined in a few locations. The current excavated evidence suggests that in most places, they were defined by parallel side ditches which



Fig. 11: Artist impression by Cecily Marshall, showing what one of the main Roman roads in the Sandy area may have looked like during construction

were 9-17m apart. The variation in separation, may in part reflect the different source of evidence, e.g. cropmarks are less reliable than geophysical anomalies, both of which are less accurate than excavated evidence. It may also reflect the difference between ditches defining the wider '*road zone*' (about 25m), as opposed to those defining the actual road, which may have been much narrower (Margary 1973, 22). In one part of RR224, between Cople and Willington, the road ditches stop at the edge of cropmarks indicating the location of a settlement (Simco 1984, 65–6, image 64). While Simco suggests '*either that the road was never finished, or that it was the work of someone other than the central authorities*' (1984, 65), it would seem possible that either the ditches were not required within the settlement area or have been masked by later settlement activity (as has been observed happening within Roman Sandy).

In contrast to the roads within Roman Sandy, there is currently only limited evidence that the major roads away from the town were constructed with an *agger* and/or metalling. The best evidence for this comes from the investigations associated with RR224, where a waterpipe crossed the route. Here a 'bank', 8–14m wide, was detected in two locations, c.600m apart (*Fig. 7*). It was described as consisting of sand and gravel with an upper gravel layer containing small cobbles (Northamptonshire Archaeology 2007c, 4–5), possibly representing the road surface.

The areas where the roads away from Sandy have been examined are all in arable fields and, therefore, it is possible that modern ploughing may have removed most of the evidence for road

surfaces and *agger*. However, where reports do comment upon evidence e.g. for RR22S (Oxford Archaeology 2020, 60), they note an absence of scattered stones in the ploughsoil where stones might have been expected if the road surface had been metalled. Interestingly at this site, metalling was found associated with a possible post-medieval road so if metalling had been associated with the Roman road, it should also have been present. However, the post-medieval road was only investigated near the edge of the field, as was the case with the water main investigations of RR224, where plough truncation may have been less severe.

It is, of course, possible that some lengths of road were left unmetalled, because the routes were well-drained and wide. This was tentatively suggested for RR22S due to only one small area of possible metalling being identified (Oxford Archaeology 2020, 60). However, if the multiple quarry pits, which have so far only been examined within evaluation trenches, are contemporary with the road, then these are likely to have been dug to extract material to be used to create an *agger* (Fig. 6).

A New Interpretation of the Layout and Development of Roman Sandy and its Roads

The reviews of Roman Sandy by Luke (2021; 2024) and the recent discovery of the Great Staughton road (Ratledge 2024a) provide an opportunity to consider the road network of Roman Sandy in a broader context. This new interpretation postulates that R1 and the Great Staughton road RR226(x) were important roads at the time the defences were built, but then, at some point after construction, the Godmanchester road (RR22N) assumed greater significance. The defences would have been imposed on a large settlement where significant buildings/areas already existed and there was already an established road network. Both of these factors will have, to some extent, influenced the siting of the defences and the location of gateways. As RR22N is believed to have superseded RR226(x) in importance, it would have been necessary to re-locate gateways to allow easy passage on the RR22N, through the defences and through town. The discussion below summarises the evidence and presents this perspective.

As is the norm for small towns (Burnham and Wacher 1990, 23), the layout of roads within Roman Sandy do not form a rectangular grid pattern and it is possible that a pre-existing road layout was adapted as the Roman town developed. R1 may have been the earliest road within the town, possibly originating as part of the Iron Age settlement (*Fig. 9A*). One possible interpretation (based on R1 continuing beyond the defences), is that when the defences were constructed, R1 was still an important road extending northwards, within the town. Its importance is also partly supported by the fact that its course was central within the postulated larger area of late Iron Age settlement (*Fig. 9A*) and, then later, the way it formed one side of the postulated official core of the Roman town (Luke 2024, 54–6). Another interesting feature of R1 in the Roman town is that it would appear to meet the road to Great Staughton (RR226(x)) at a central point within the defensive circuit (*Fig. 9C*). This is not likely to just be coincidence, and the centrality of this junction would suggest that both R1 and the Great Staughton road (RR226(x)) were significant thoroughfares in Roman Sandy, at the time the defences were built.

Additional support for the importance of RR226(x) is its possible link with the road to Baldock (RR22S). If RR226(x) is projected southwards, it coincides with RR22S, in the area to the west of The Bungalow (*Fig. 2*). This almost exact alignment could indicate that RR226(x) was once the northern

section of the road from Baldock (RR22S), passing through Sandy on a single alignment. This would have been a major road and when building the defences it would have been necessary to construct gateways to control entry and exits along this significant route, including a gateway for RR226(x) to the south-east. However, it is not possible to investigate this as the route is now under the present-day Stratford Road.

As already discussed, the course of RR226(x) within the town was more symmetrical to the defences than the other main roads, and when extrapolated, it would have passed through both the north-west and south-east side of the defences on a perpendicular course. The latter is also true for the courses of R1 and RR22N to the north, which also lay perpendicular to the line of their associated defences, suggesting they too were important at the time the defences were built. It is also interesting to observe at Sandy that R1 was located closer to the centre of the north defences, when compared with the Godmanchester road RR22N along the same boundary.

When arguing that RR226(x) was at one point the major road connecting Roman Sandy, it is also necessary to consider the layout and role of the Godmanchester road (RR22N). It is suggested that RR22N was present in the early Roman town, paralleling the Road R1. Projecting RR22N along the same alignment south-westwards into town, and keeping it parallel to R1, results in it meeting the road RR226(x) perpendicularly, in the centre of the undefended town (Fig. 9B). This supports the idea that in the early Roman period, RR226(x) was a significant road through Sandy, with RR22N forming a side road turning off to Godmanchester. However, at some point after the defences were constructed, it is argued that the status and course of RR22N changed. Before this change, to reach Godmanchester from the south, it is speculated that it would have been necessary to enter the town on the main road RR226(x), via a south-eastern gateway, travel to the town centre and then turn north-eastwards onto the RR22N. However, over time and perhaps because the road to Godmanchester became more significant than RR226(x), rather than going into the town centre, a new direct route developed with RR22N taking a N-S alignment to directly meet RR22S (Fig.9C).

It has already been noted that the courses of RR226(x) to the north-west, and RR22N and R1 to the north, lay perpendicular to the line of their associated defences, suggesting they were important at the time the defences were built. However, in contrast, the new route of RR22N would appear to have passed through the south-east defences obliquely before it joined RR22S. It is uncharacteristic for a major road to enter the defended area of a Roman town obliquely and this could therefore suggest that the RR22N gateway was a later addition. As this road assumed more importance, the southern gateway for RR226(x) would have been blocked and replaced by a new gateway, c.40m to the north-east; it is unlikely that two gates would have existed so close to each other at the same time. The obliqueness of RR22N, suggests this gateway was a later amendment to the defences, with its alignment constrained by the requirement to link RR22N to RR22S, the latter being an established major route. Also, at this time, Roman Sandy would have been well established, perhaps making it difficult to route the RR22N directly to the original gate or to build the road perpendicular to the defences.

If this evolution of the road network in the vicinity of Roman Sandy is accepted, then it is necessary to briefly consider what would prompt the diminishing status of the Great Staughton road RR226(x), and the increasing importance of the Sandy-Godmanchester road RR22N, in the later Roman period. To explain this, it is necessary to consider the development of Godmanchester and its relation to Sandy.

It is interesting to note that Godmanchester is the only settlement linked to Sandy by road, which also had defences. The similarity of the nature, extent and shape of the defensive circuit at Sandy and Godmanchester have been discussed by Luke (2024, 57) (*Fig. 12*). Although the date of the defences at both towns is uncertain, it is possible that at the time they were constructed at Sandy, Godmanchester was developing into an even more significant settlement in the area than it had previously been. Eventually, in response to this development, the Godmanchester road RR22N may have assumed more importance, and was re-routed to join the RR22S in order to provide a more direct route through the town (*Fig. 9C*). However, the dating of this sequence of events at Sandy will require further excavation and so this remains as speculation. Also, as yet, it is not known if other settlements connected by road to Roman Sandy other than Godmanchester also had defences, as up until five years ago the defences at Sandy remained unrecognised. Defences at other settlements may yet be discovered, with Baldock perhaps the more likely.

This new interpretation of the major roads to, and from, Roman Sandy has implications for our understanding of the regional Roman road network. To date, Roman Sandy has always been mapped

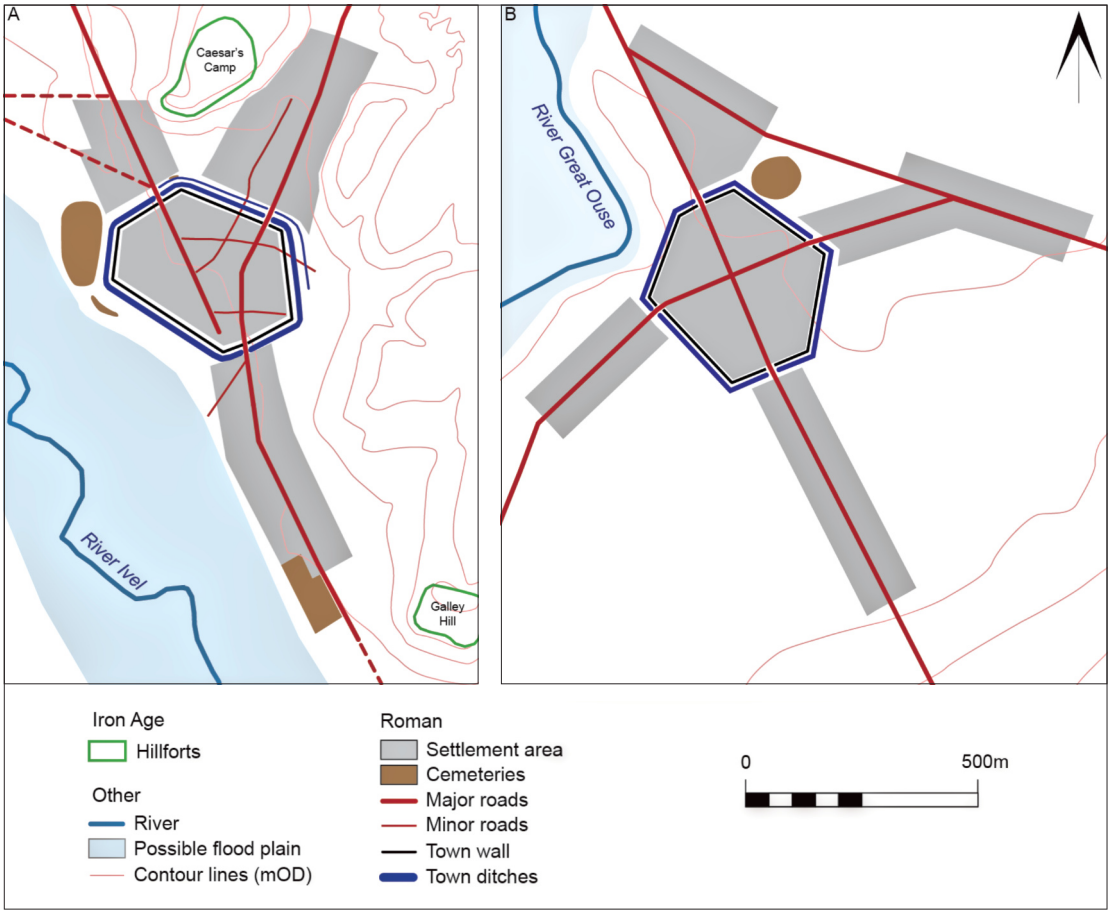


Fig. 12: Comparative plan showing the layout, defences and roads of Roman Sandy (A) and Godmanchester (B) (after Luke 2024, fig. 12)

as being located on a main road which came off Ermine Street at Braughing, passing through Baldock (R22S) before reaching Sandy. Once at Sandy, it changed direction (RR22N) and rejoined Ermine Street at Godmanchester. Therefore, until this review, it has always been assumed that the Baldock to Godmanchester road (RR22S/RR22N) was built as one road and was the most important in Roman Sandy. This is reflected in Margary's numbering scheme where this road is given the same number RR22. However, the recent identification of RR226(x) by Ratledge (2024a, 314), the recent reviews of the road network and defences at Sandy, and the better understanding that we now have of the nature and extent of the small town at Great Staughton (designated by Historic England in 2024), challenges the assumption that the Godmanchester Road was always the primary thoroughfare. The evidence and arguments presented above suggest instead, that the Great Staughton Road could have been the first main road through Roman Sandy.

If the Great Staughton road RR226(x) was the same road as the Baldock road RR22S, it would then appear to be a continuation of the road to Colchester. The latter is often referred to as '*Britain's first Roman town*' (Crummy 1997). Before the Roman Conquest it was the capital of *Cunobelin*, and after the conquest, it was initially the site of a legionary fortress which later became a *Colonia* and headquarters of the imperial cult (Wacher 1995 82). Perhaps it can be tentatively speculated that the Colchester road, RR22S, and RR226(x) were all part of the same road, whose route was established very early in the Roman occupation (perhaps even as a military road). After leaving Colchester it passed through several small towns including Braughing and Baldock before reaching Sandy, which may have been an important pre-Roman settlement. From here, based on the new evidence discussed in this article, it continued over the River Great Ouse initially to Great Staughton, then to Titchmarsh where it crossed the River Nene, after which it continued to Leicester (Fig. 10). The latter, which was located on the Fosse Way, has long time been believed to overlie a pre-Roman settlement where a fort may have been constructed (Wacher 1995, 343, Buckley and Morris 2021, 93-94).

This interpretation has significant implications for the development of the road network in the region especially around Roman Sandy, but it has to be stressed that currently, there is insufficient evidence to do more than suggest that this is just one of a number of possibilities. However, whether this interpretation proves to be correct or not, it is a timely reminder that the Roman road network should not be viewed as being constructed in a single phase, and that individual roads, and settlements would have evolved over time. It is also a useful reminder that there are considerable benefits to critically evaluating existing evidence alongside new evidence and considering alternative interpretations - alternative interpretations are fertile ground for discussions.

Continuation and disuse of roads

Where roads were in continual use, metalling and makeup layers would gradually have been worn away- a process that probably began in the Roman period (Fig. 13).

Following the '*end*' of Roman Britain, segments of the roads may have continued in use, often with little maintenance (Margary 1973, 23). It is possible that any surviving deposits not being used as a road would have been removed in the post-medieval period for use elsewhere e.g. in buildings or turnpike roads. There is a reference with regard to RR22S at Sandy, that states, '*Within living memory, the Roman road across the Chesterfield was almost completely removed by farmers as an obstruction to the plough*' (Johnston 1974, 35).



Fig. 13: Artist impression by Cecily Marshall, showing what one of the main Roman roads in the Sandy area may have looked like after several centuries of use

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