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MILLE·VIAE·DUCUNT·HOMINES·PER·SECULA·ROMAM

From (not) the Editor, Dave Armstrong

Apologies for skipping the Spring edition this year; we were so engrossed in getting *Itinera* out that the Spring passed us by! However, there is good material enclosed within for a strong Summer edition.

We have a pair of articles describing the road system of Hertfordshire. There is some overlap between these which helps build a fuller picture. In addition David Ratledge describes the roads of Cambridgeshire adding on to his mammoth survey of the other East Anglian counties. John Poulter tells us more about his postulation of how a signalling system could function behind Hadrian's Wall in the North Tyne valley.

I have had to take the difficult decision to not include further ripostes regarding the Stanegate. While it is good to have a healthy discussion the details can become hard to follow so we will now only accept new evidence on this subject and regard all what we've had so far as various potential routes.

Thank you to all our contributors. Dave

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A Hertfordshire Triangle

David Ratledge

Introduction

This article resulted from my re-evaluating the Roman roads of East Anglia where I traced several Roman roads to Braughing in Hertfordshire. The latter was an important road hub with no less than 7 roads meeting there. One of the roads westward from Braughing to Baldock had a missing gap, which piqued my interest. Note that Braughing is pronounced 'braff-in'. This did catch me out when giving a local talk!

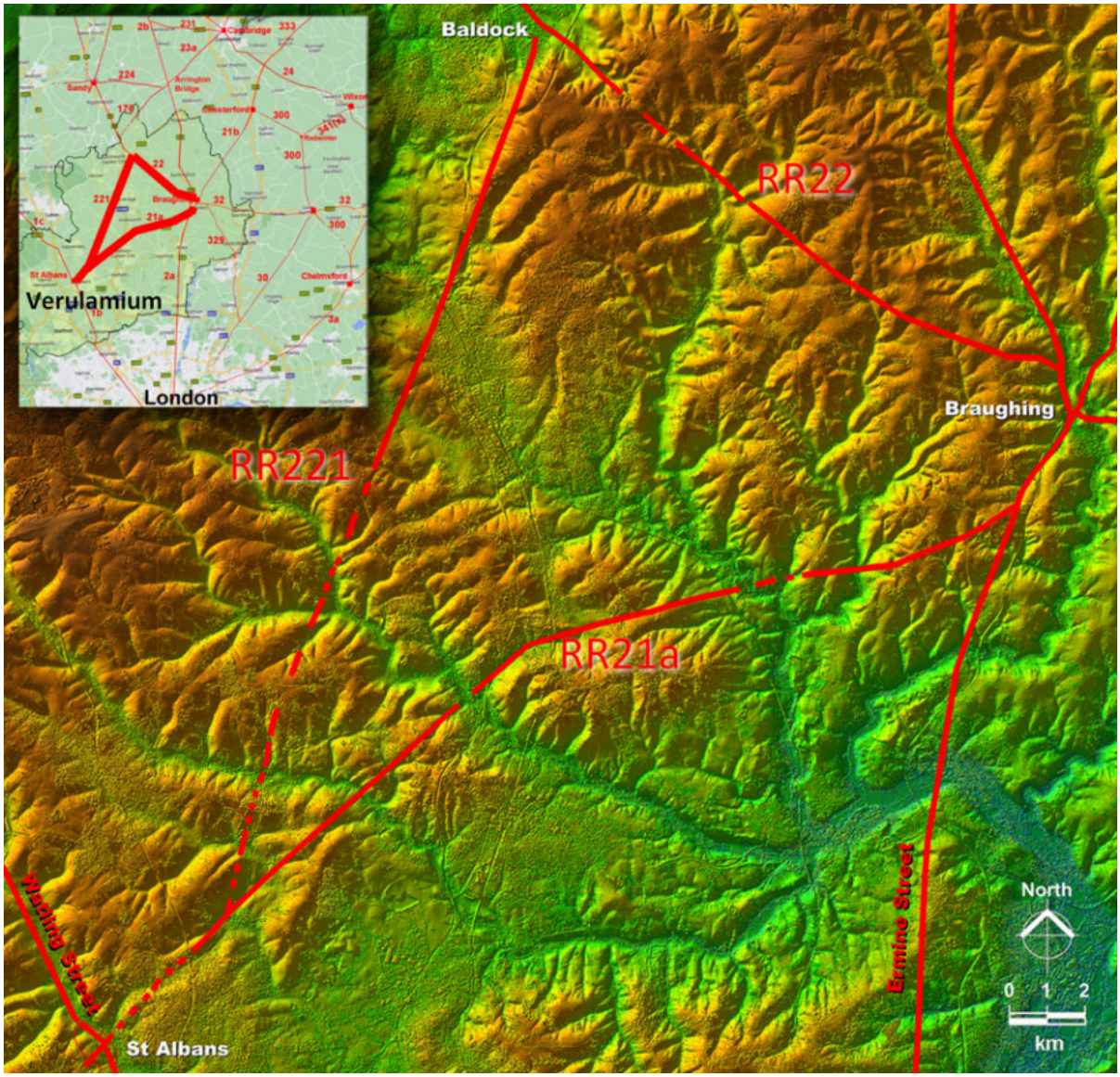


Figure 1. To the north west of St Albans (Verulamium) were the small Roman towns of Baldock and Braughing, which were linked by RR221 and RR21a respectively. A third road connected the two small towns, R22, forming a triangle. Base Lidar data is © Environment Agency copyright and/or database right 2023. All rights reserved. Contains Ordnance Survey data © Crown Copyright and database, 2023.

Tracing other roads from Braughing led to a "triangle" of Roman roads 21a, 22 and 221 connecting St Albans (*Verulamium*), Baldock and Braughing (fig.1). However, the road layout in this area as depicted by Margary (1967 edition) is complicated by the many Roman roads suggested by the Viatores group (1964). In this case their RRs 210, 211 & 22 intermingle with the "triangle" but I have not been able to find much if any lidar evidence in support of them. In the wider area this is generally what I have found or rather not found with their suggestions. I have therefore only shown those that I could verify.

All three roads of the "triangle" have missing sections and I will concentrate more on those lengths. Having been triggered by that gap at the start of the road from Braughing to Baldock I shall begin by examining that one.

Braughing to Baldock, RR22

The Roman settlement at Braughing, sometimes referred to as a small town, was probably preceded by the fort (fig. 2). Oddly the fort is not alongside Ermine Street but seems more positioned with regard to the road to Chesterford. Where I have shown Ermine Street passing the settlement differs slightly from the position recorded in Hertfordshire HER. Either way it does not

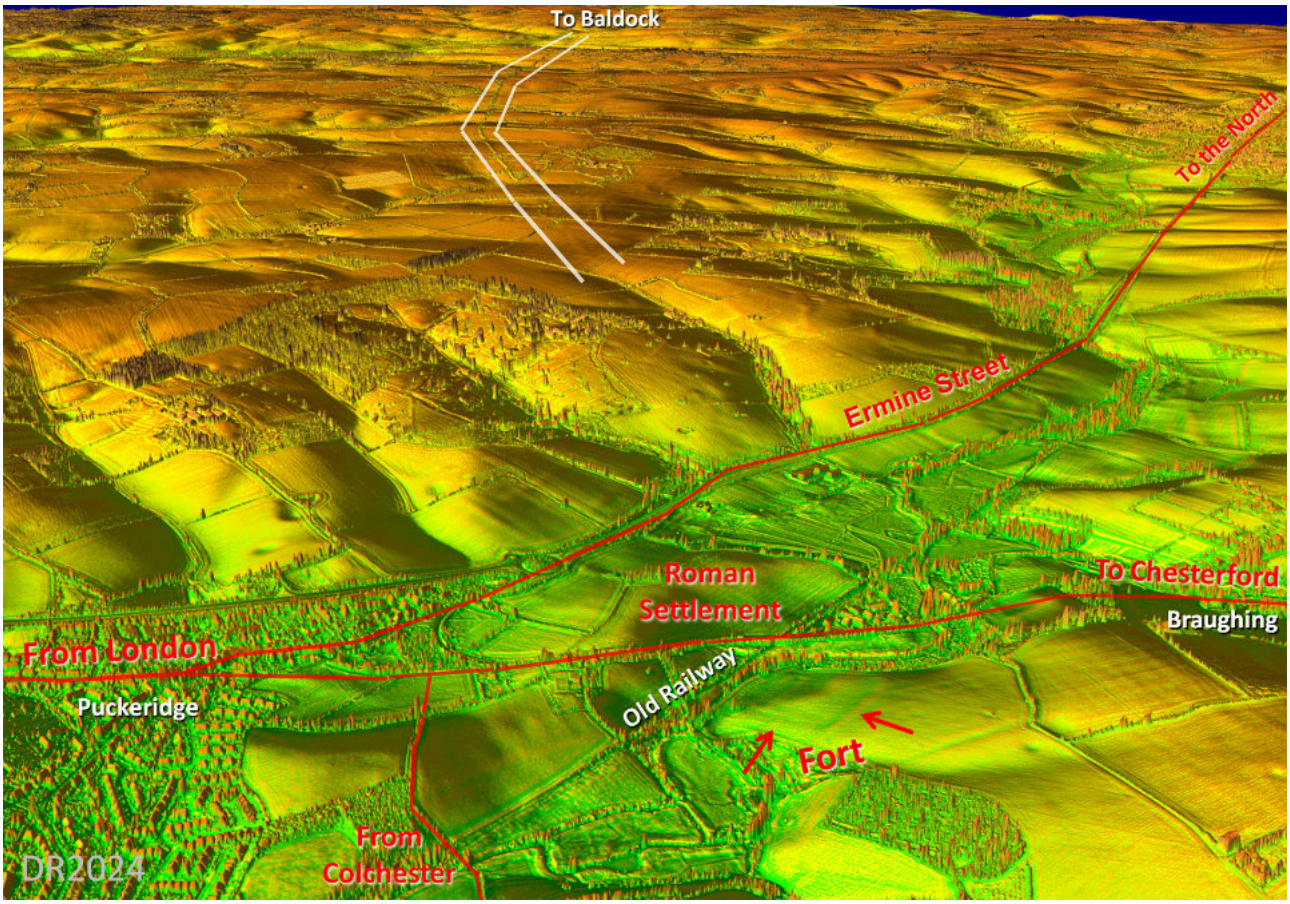


Figure 2. The Roman roads around Braughing. The road to Baldock can be seen in the distance but the link back to Ermine Street and Braughing was unknown. However, the visible section clearly targeted the natural valley down to Ermine Street. Base Lidar data is © Environment Agency copyright and/or database right 2023. All rights reserved.

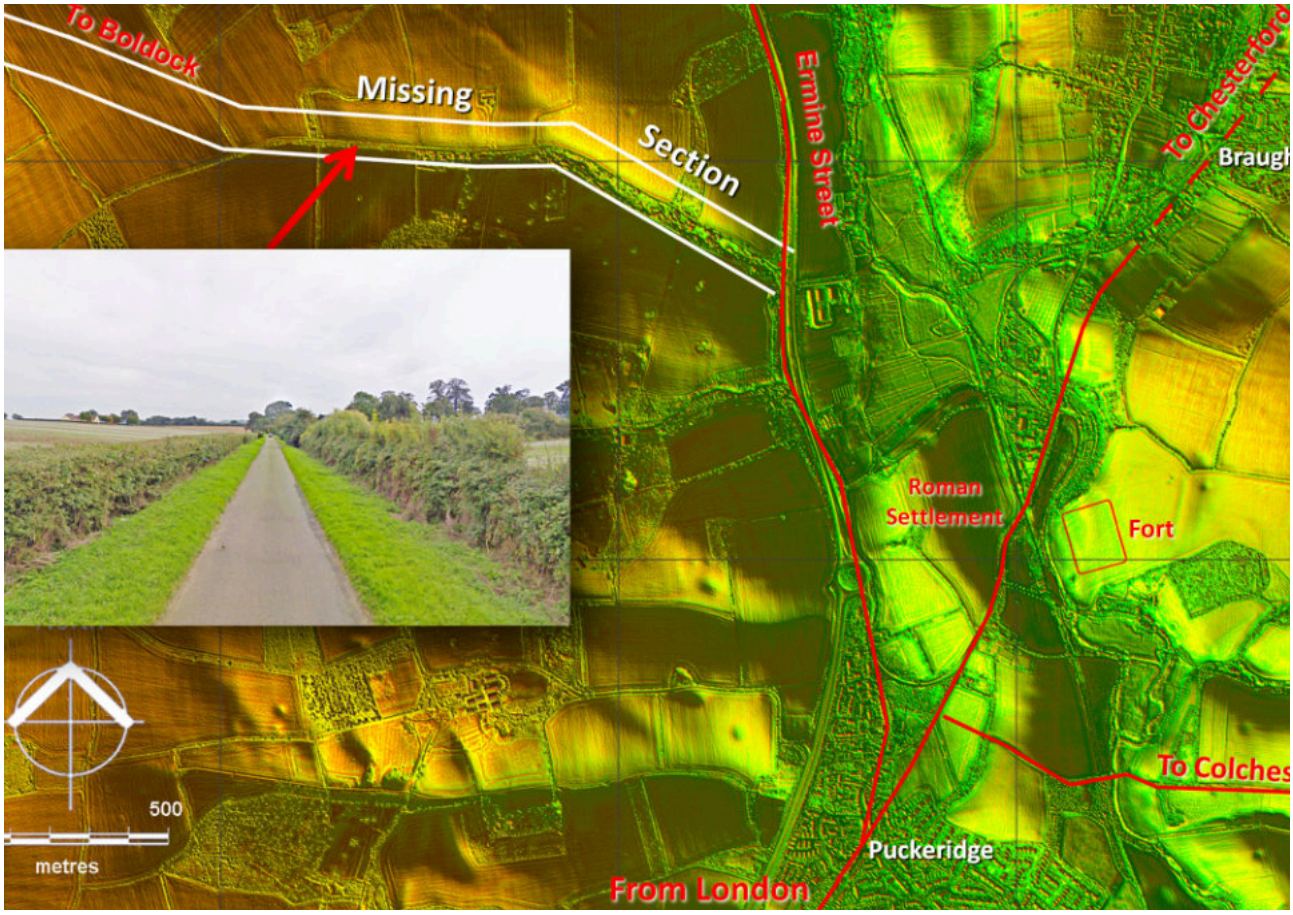


Figure 3. It is hard to understand why this link to Ermine Street was "missing". The connection is now overlain by a modern road, which has all the necessary Roman characteristics i.e. straight alignments on a built-up agger with ditches (inset). Base Lidar data is © Environment Agency copyright and/or database right 2023. All rights reserved. Inset image: copyright Google.

really effect locating the start of the road to Baldock, which was the uncertainty here. Quite why there was any doubt for the location of the connection between the road to Baldock and Ermine Street is a puzzle. The known section, confirmed by lidar, clearly emanated from a natural valley making an easy link possible. In this valley is a typical Roman *agger* comprising two straight sections now overlain by a much narrower modern lane (fig. 3 and inset).

The route onward to Baldock is well recorded and lidar confirms this as correct. One interesting name on the way is Hare Street. The thought of hares using the Roman agger for their high speed runs is perhaps quite an appealing thought although of course Hare Street probably derives from 'here strata', meaning 'army road' (fig. 4).

Baldock was another small sized town located on the (pre-Roman) Icknield Way. There are no reports of it having town walls although the lidar does show what could be boundary banks just to the north of the road coming in from Braughing (fig. 4 – right). Stone buildings are recorded as is a temple. Alongside the road from Braughing, at Clothall Common (Baldock), was found a Roman curse written on a sheet of lead (RIB 221 - Curse upon Tacita).

Baldock to St Albans, RR221

Starting at the Baldock end then the first half of this road was well known to just south of Stevenage, where the clues dried up. The direct alignment from Baldock left no doubt that St

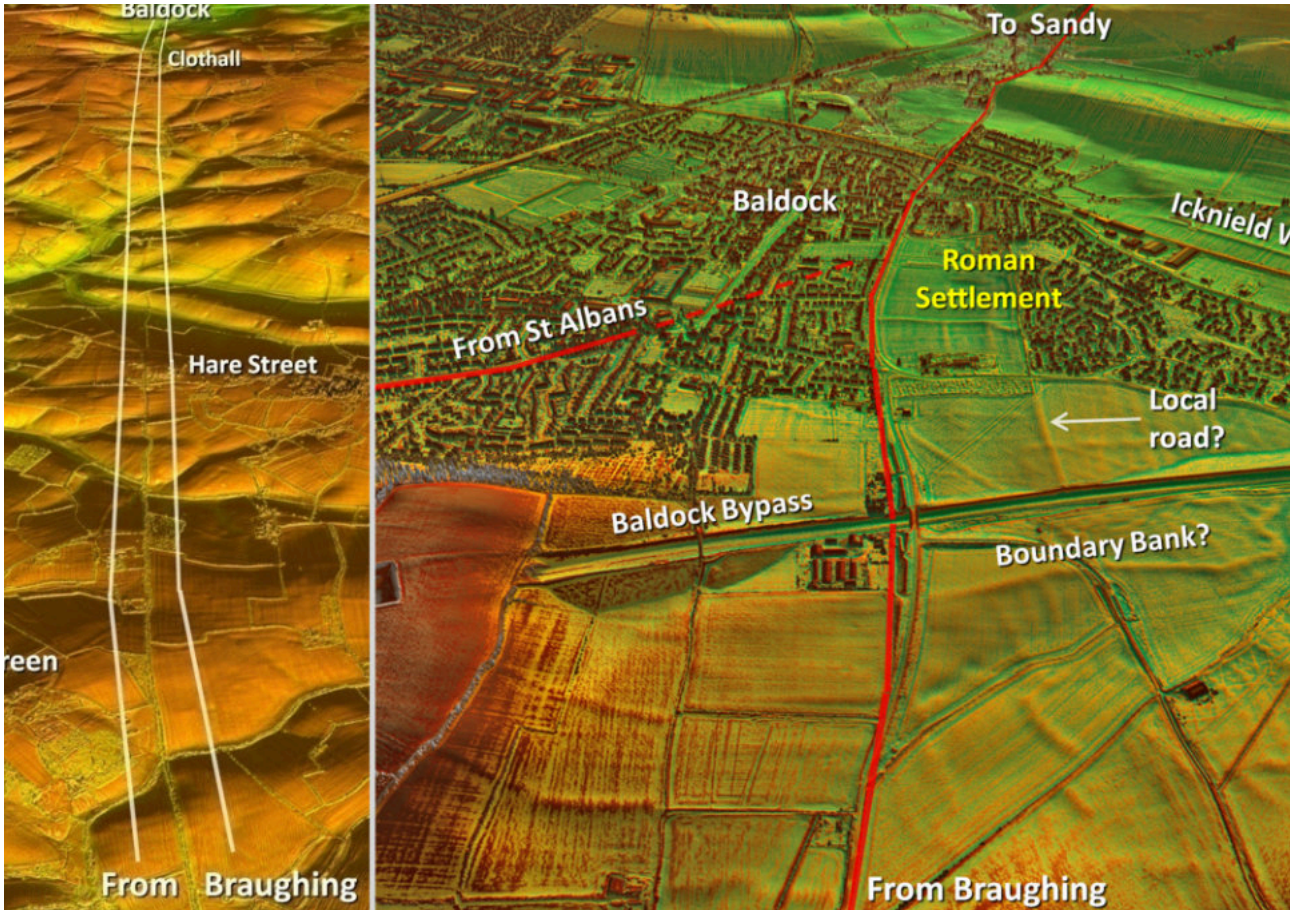


Figure 4. Left – generally the route is obvious over much of it length in this oblique lidar view depicting it passing by Moor Green and on through Hare Street and Clothall to Baldock.

Right – Baldock is believed to have been founded before the Romans arrived when it sat alongside the ancient Icknield Way. In the Roman era, although apparently not having town walls, it was an important centre with several stone buildings and a temple. There is though perhaps the indication of a town boundary bank near Baldock Bypass visible in this oblique lidar view.

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Alban's was the destination but it needed lidar to complete the route as the traces are generally very subtle but with one very notable exception – Prior's Wood. Unbeknown to me, David Staveley and Keith Fitzpatrick-Matthews also independently spotted the route from Stevenage to Sandridge. Good to know we all came to the same conclusion.

From Baldock the old A1, now the B197, marks the course of the road. The modern A1(M) then obliterates a section passing Stevenage with the course then known across open fields approaching to within about 1km of the Langley Valley (fig. 5). Lidar does show it continuing for another 2 km albeit very subtly so not surprising that it was previously elusive. Evidence continues intermittently but sufficiently to show the alignment kept straight on to the Mimram valley. The route then crosses a side valley containing Kimpton Road where clues are more obvious (fig. 6 bottom edge). This section is pointing clearly towards Prior's Wood.

In Prior's Wood there is a remarkable length of surviving *agger* complete with side ditches. When I first saw this I initially thought that it had to be modern as it looks so pristine. However, when I spotted evidence either side of this section, both of which align with it, it would appear genuine (fig. 6 and right inset).

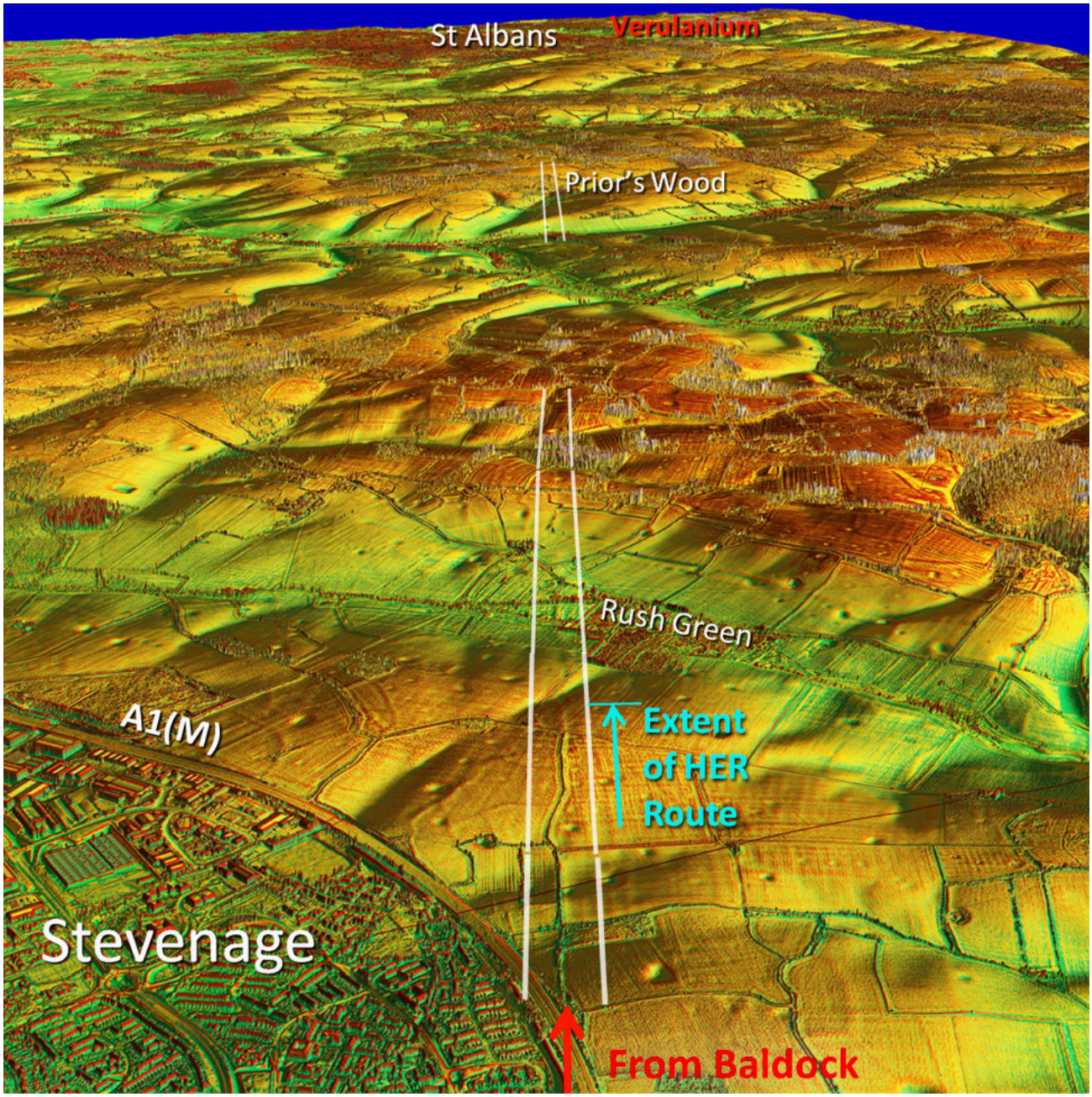


Figure 5. Roman Road RR221 from Baldock to St Albans passing Stevenage. The previous extent of the known section is shown with a cyan arrow. There are sufficient subtle traces indicating the alignment continued to Prior's Wood and beyond. Base Lidar data is © Environment Agency copyright and/or database right 2023.

Beyond Prior's Wood the route drops down to merge in with the B651 Lamer Lane for its approach to Wheathampstead (fig. 6 and left inset). Across the latter there are few clues but the B651 is fairly direct and also contour mapping would suggest this could have been the route. However, west of this is an *agger*-like feature across Nomansland Common (TL17227 12477), which bears a striking resemblance to that *agger* in Prior's Wood, although not quite as long (fig. 7 & inset). This feature would fit well with the extrapolated alignment from the north but Wheathampstead settlement now covers any evidence. This line would cross at a high point there (TL17481 13595), which would have been ideal for sighting the road alignments in both directions. South of the *agger* feature on

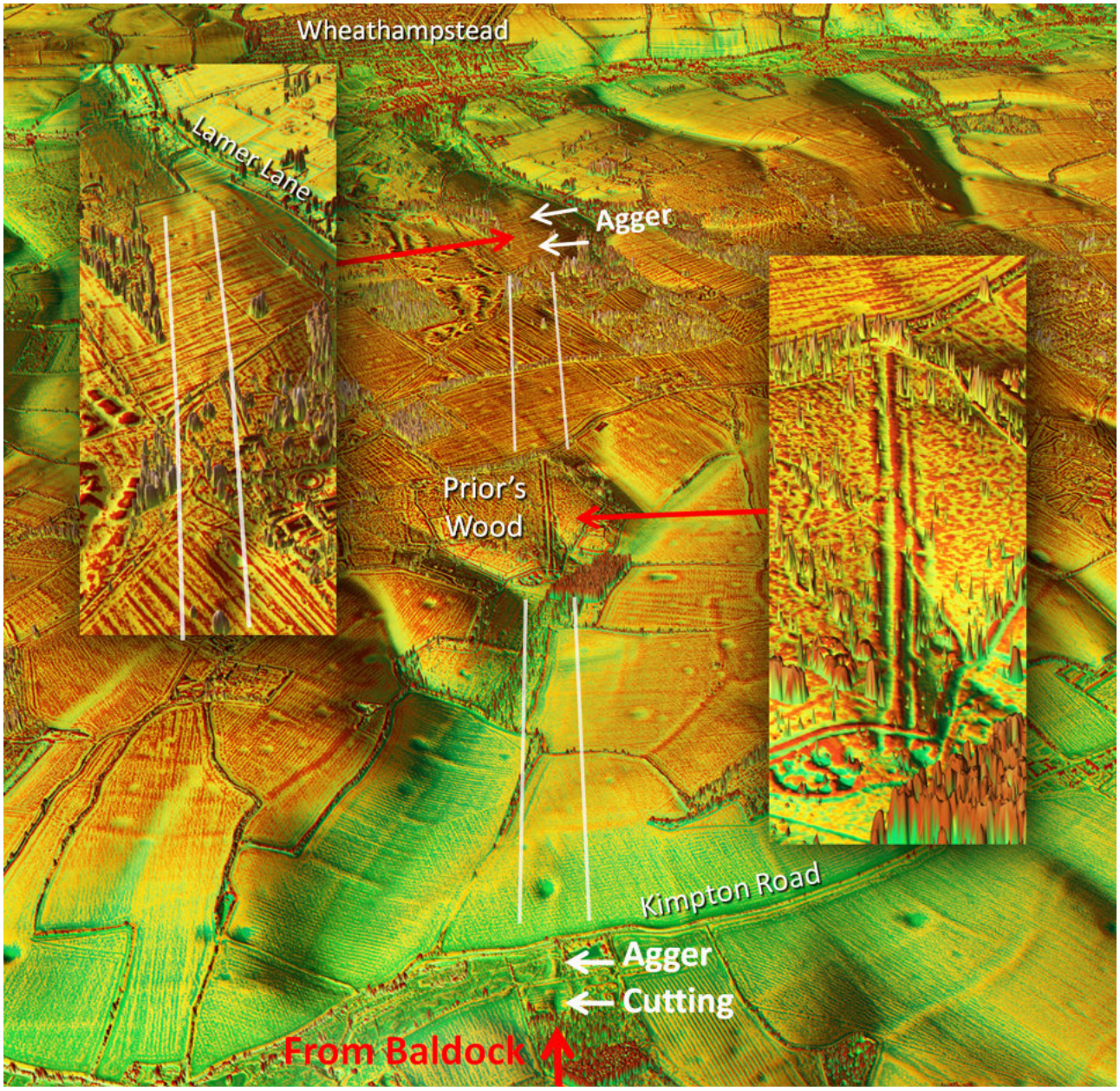


Figure 6. South of Stevenage surviving evidence as to the course of RR221 are generally intermittent but at Prior's Wood there is an amazingly well preserved section. Base Lidar data is © Environment Agency copyright and/or database right 2023

Nomansland Common then there is a worrying gap in the evidence (shown dashed in fig. 9) to just before the junction with the road from Braughing (RR21a). Both options, either one based partially on the B561 or the one across Nomansland Common, have their problems but that feature on the common is so convincing that it is, I feel, the much more likely to correct and the one I have therefore shown on the route maps – see Appendix.

Braughing to St Albans, RR21a

This road initially followed Ermine Street before branching off at Colliers End for a slightly dog-leg course to St Albans (*Verulamium*) comprising of basically two alignments. The route is generally well known with only the approach to St Albans (*Verulamium*) somewhat doubtful across the

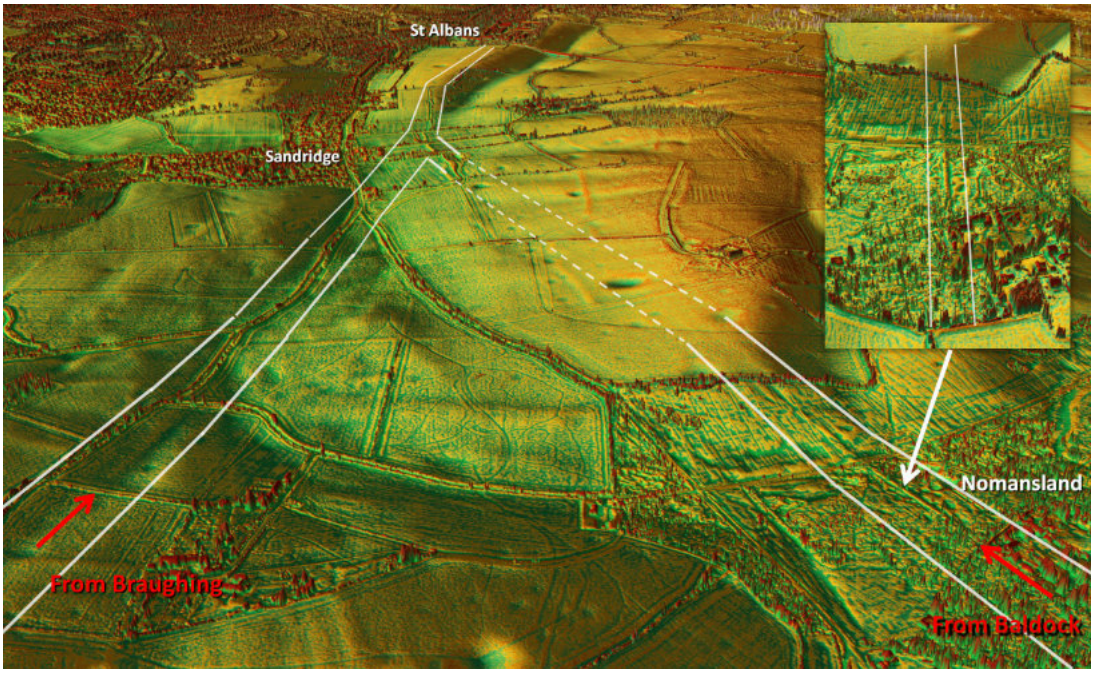
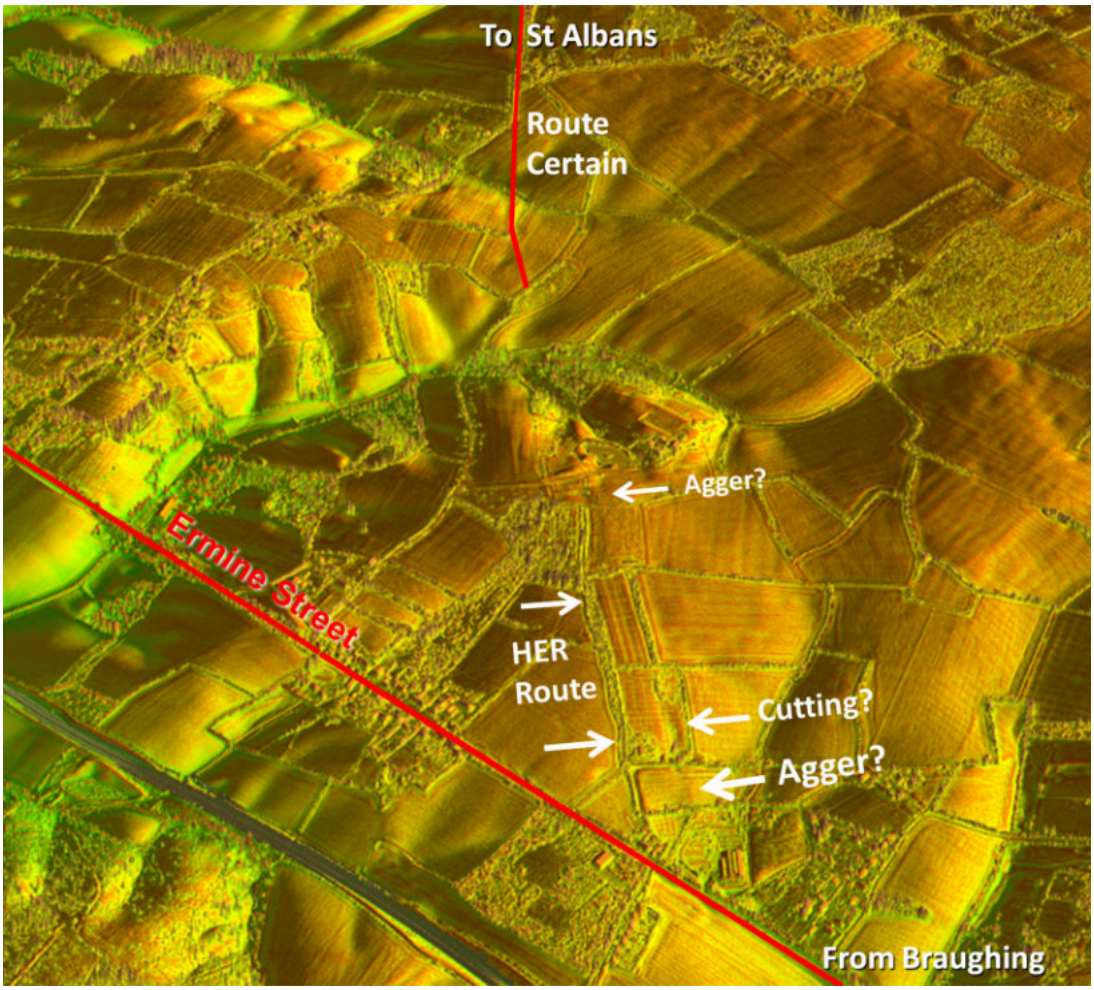


Figure 7. Above. The route from Baldock is joined by that from Braughing (see later) near Sandridge. The course of former has a missing section (shown dashed) but that of the latter quite secure. Figure 8. Below. Leaving Ermine Street and heading for Verulamium the initial (OS & HER) route is perhaps not as secure as thought. Lidar seems to indicate there could be a more direct route. Base Lidar data is © Environment Agency copyright and/or database right 2023



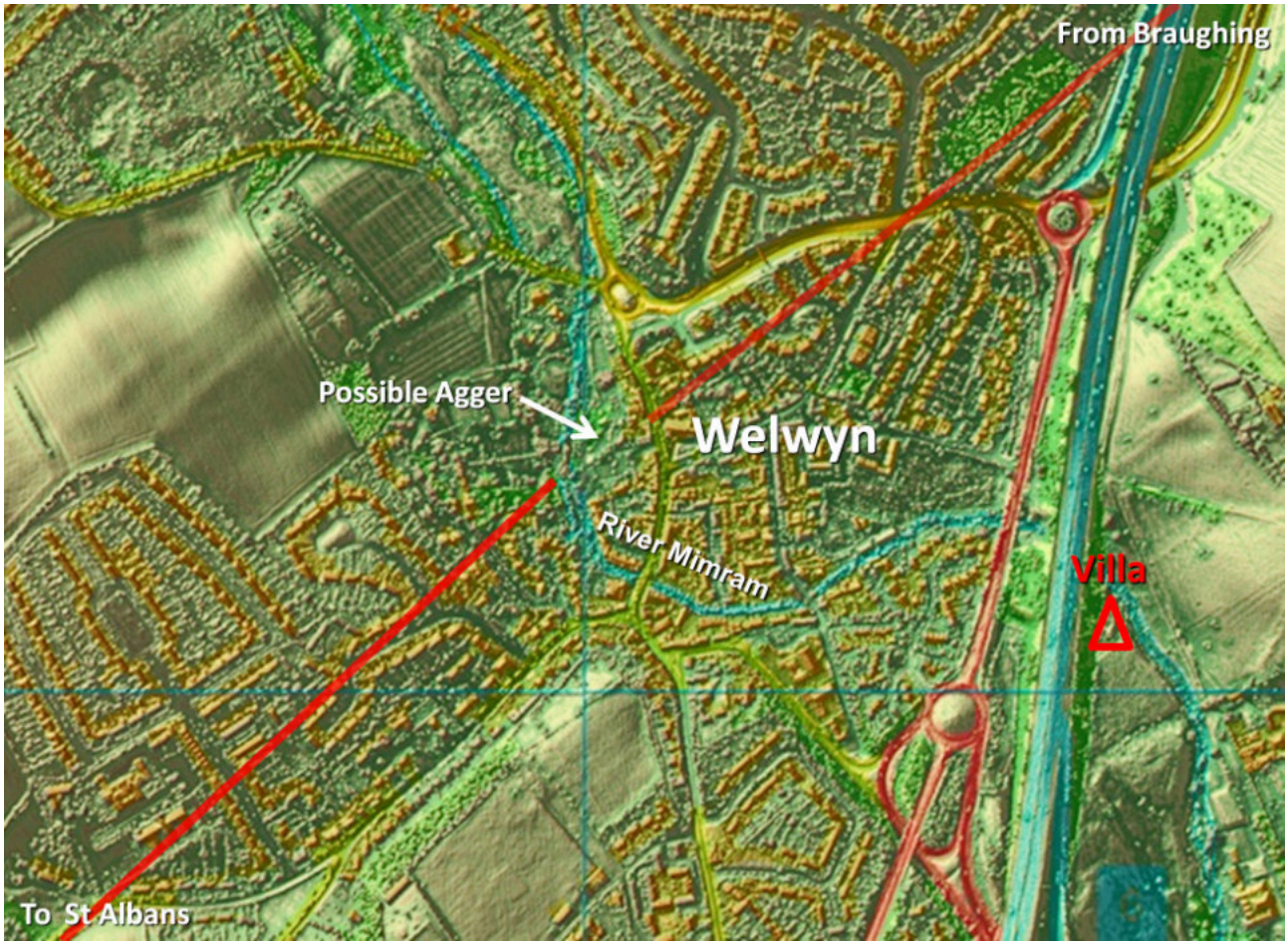


Figure 9. The route across (old) Welwyn is subjective but the Mimram valley was not steep sided so doglegs would not have been necessary. There is perhaps one lidar clue supporting the straight alignment. Base Lidar data is © Environment Agency copyright and/or database right 2023. All rights reserved.

modern town. However, where this road branches off Ermine Street, as shown on the current Ordnance Survey mapping and the Herfordshire HER, then there is perhaps a question mark. Lidar does seem to indicate a possibility of a straighter route for the first kilometre or so (fig. 8). Both of course could be valid with one replacing the other.

Beyond here then the route is not in doubt and Lowgate Lane and Lowgate Farm provide some obvious clues. Was Ermine Street "High Gate" giving this road the low gate status? The first alignment is actually not perfectly straight and in reality is a series of separate sections. The route turns towards St Albans at Oaklands, near (old) Welwyn. Across Welwyn clues are a bit limited but perhaps there is a surviving *agger* on the Braughing side of the River Mimram (TL23006 16242)(fig. 9). It is a single feature though so perhaps caution is needed in placing too much reliance on it. Nearby are the Welwyn Roman Baths (on display under the A1(M)), part of the Dicket Mead villa complex. Discovered in 1960 by Tony Rook following excavations by the Welwyn Archaeological Society.

The second alignment from Welwyn heads towards Sandridge on the northern outskirts of St Albans (fig. 7). Here it was joined by the western road of the triangle (RR221). The common approach to *Verulamium* will be discussed next.

Common Route for RR21a and RR221 across St Albans

The junction of RR21a & 221 was just to the west of Sandridge (TL16783 10569), and judging by the arrangement, RR21a (Braughing) was the through route and RR221 (Baldock) a branch off it.

Across the suburbs of modern day St Albans the Herfordshire HER at the time of writing depicts a straight line all the way to *Verulamium's* north gate. The latter was obviously the target but the Roman line would likely have adjusted here and there to the contours.

From Sandridge the route appears to be aiming to make use of a natural ridge (fig. 7). The road would then have to cross Beech Bottom Dyke, a massive iron-age pre-Roman (defensive?) ditch (fig. 10). The only possible evidence I could see for a crossing of the Dyke was at Harpenden Road. This was therefore the most likely spot where the Roman's crossed over. Aligning with this point is Old Harpenden Road, which has the characteristics of a "captured" Roman road i.e. rather than taking a direct course a later road diverted to take advantage of a length of a pre-existing Roman *agger* (fig. 11).

The crossing of such a substantial dyke was likely to be at right angles to it so the road would have surely dog-legged here. Having crossed the Dyke a straight course to *Verulamium*'s north gate was probably followed as this again would have been along a convenient ridge of high ground.

The route suggested across St Albans, whilst appearing logical, doesn't actually prove the Roman course only that is was a viable option. A YouTube Lidar Flyover video is available at https://youtu.be/lhH7F1FcHXs.

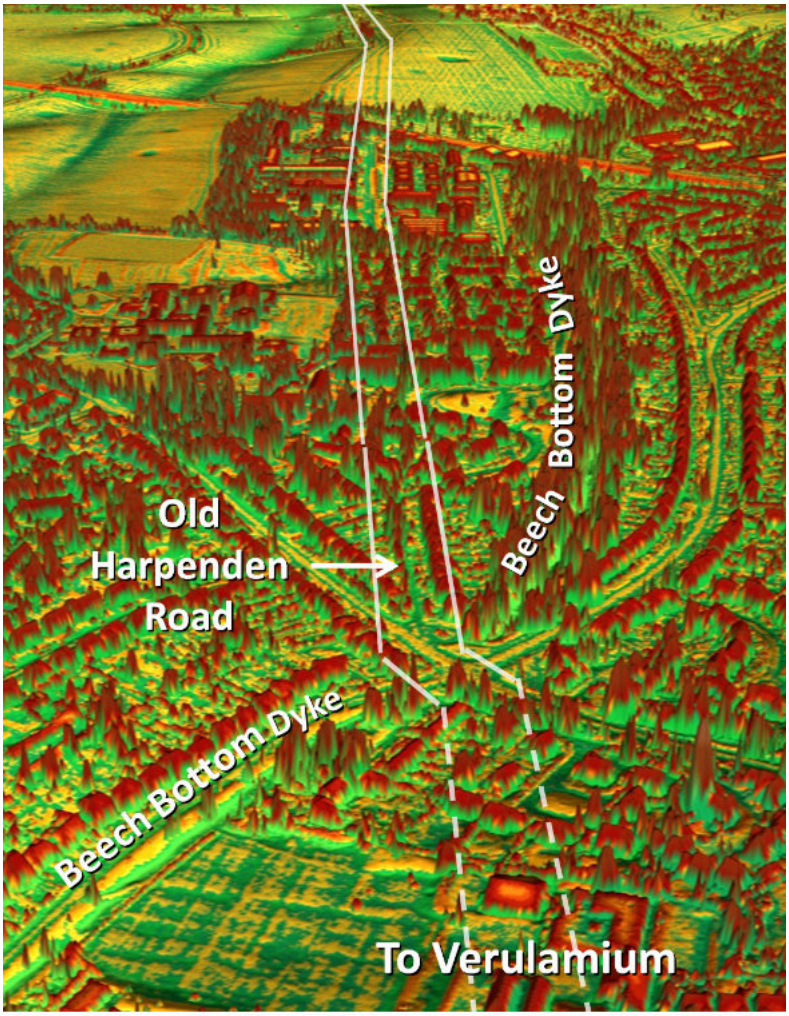




Figure 10. Top - Oblique lidar image looking north over the pre-Roman Beech Bottom Dyke. The crossing of the Dyke is now covered by a large road junction. Base Lidar data is © Environment Agency copyright and/or database right 2023. Bottom – The massive pre-Roman Beech Bottom Dyke.

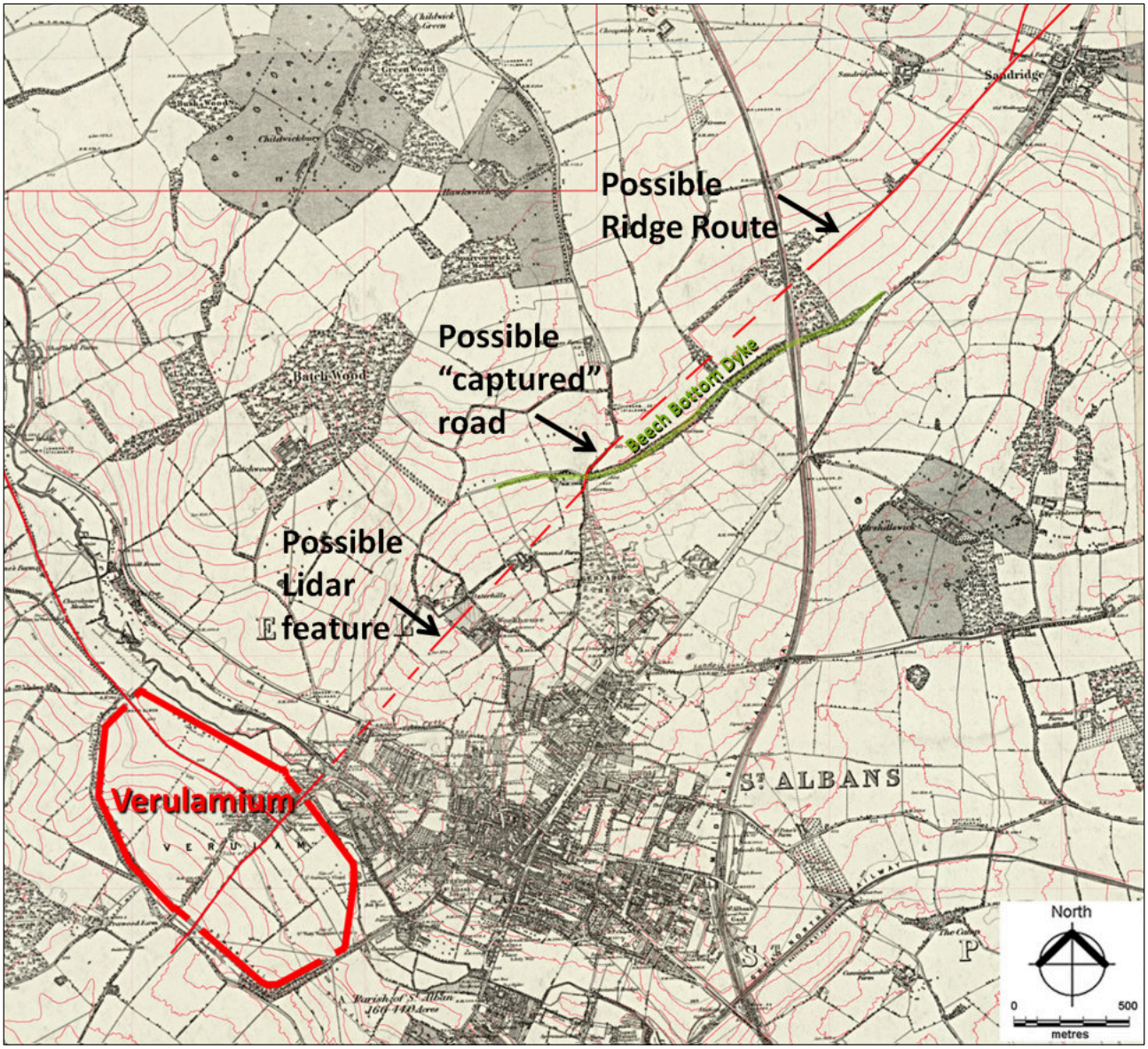


Figure 11. Ordnance Survey First Edition 6-inch mapping for St Albans. One metre interval contours have been overlaid. Heading into St Albans from the north the Roman alignment appear to target a ridge of high ground before dropping down to cross Beech Bottom Dyke (shown in green). Old Harpenden Road could well be a "captured" road. Base mapping © 2024 National Library of Scotland under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution (CC-BY) licence. Contains Ordnance Survey data © Crown Copyright and database, 2023.

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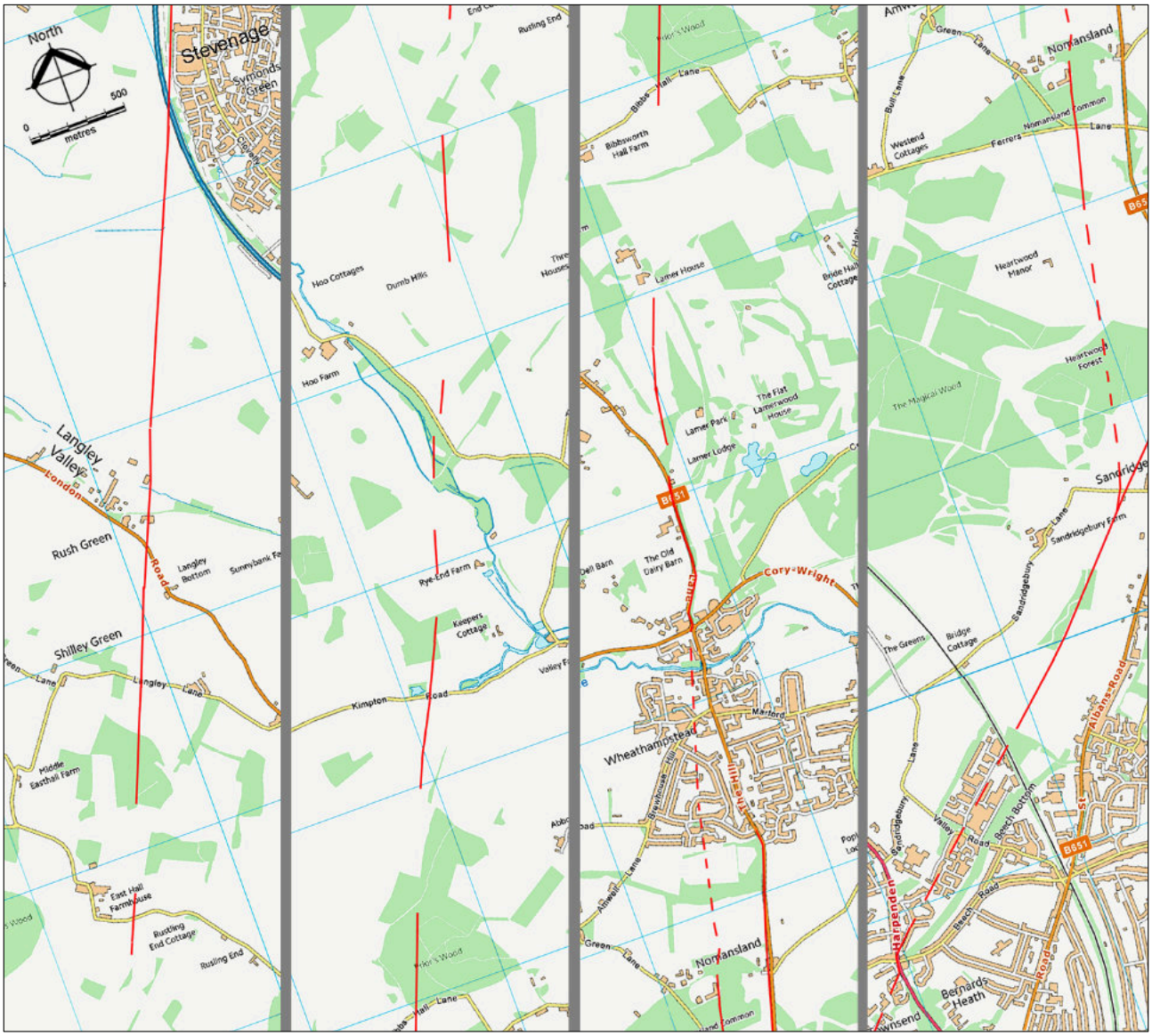
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Thanks to Mark Landon ACIfA, Historic Environment Records Officer, Hertfordshire for his enthusiasm and assistance. Web site: https://www.hertfordshire.gov.uk/services/recycling-waste-and-environment/historic-environment-archaeology/hertfordshire-historic-environment-record.aspx

Appendix - Route Plan for RR221 from Stevenage to Beech Bottom Dyke, St Albans

Mapping contains Ordnance Survey data © Crown Copyright and database, 2023.



ROMAN ROADS AROUND WHEATHAMPSTEAD: A REAPPRAISAL

Phil Sparrow

RR221 is shown (Margary, 1955, 175-6) as ending at Rush Green (TL210236). In the 3rd edition (Margary 1973, 201-2) the rigid alignment is traced to just beyond Lammas Wood (TL208226) and from there uses the route as proposed by the Viatores (1964, 93-9); a twisting route via Ayot St Lawrence and joining the RR21a (*Verulamium* to Braughing) just east of Sandridge at Coleman Green.

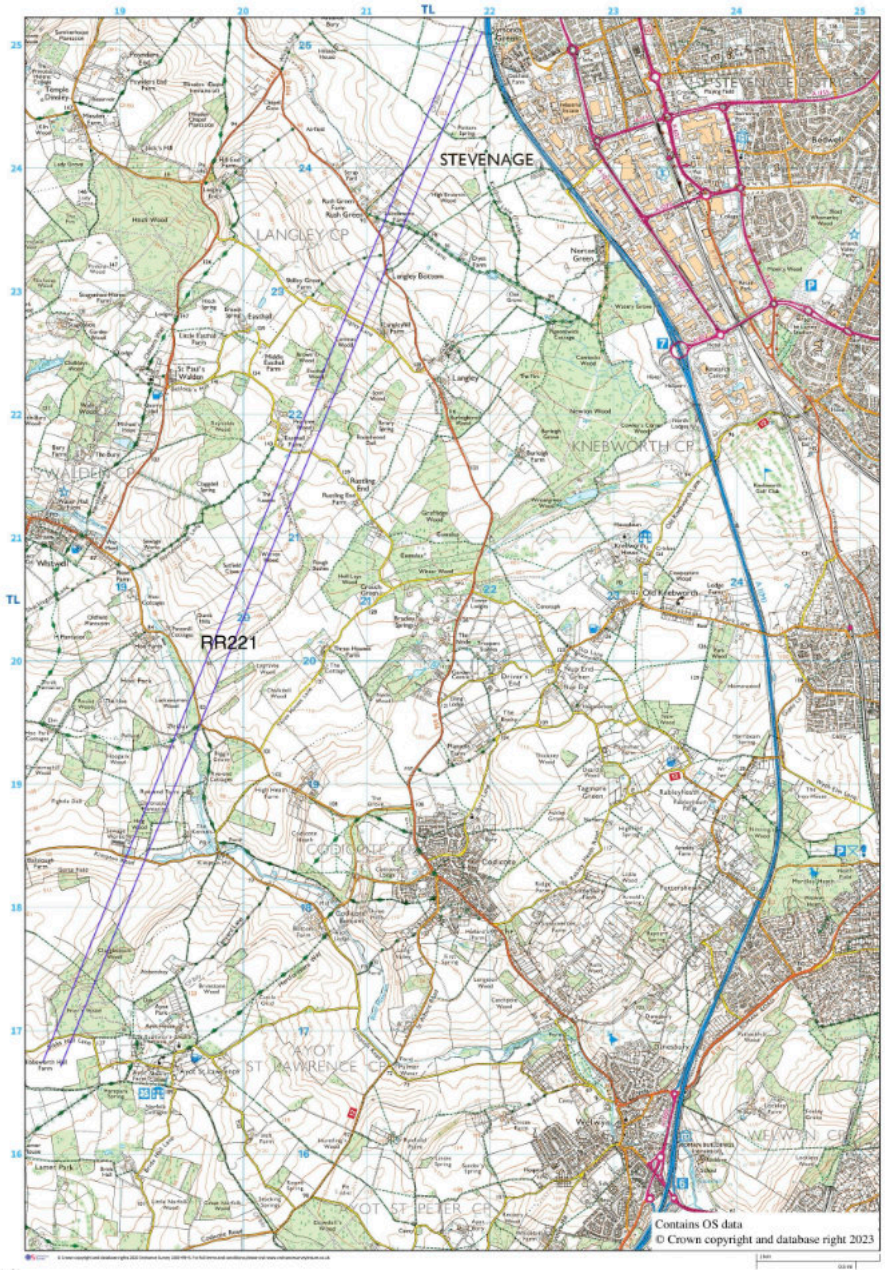


Fig 1 RR221 from Symond's Green to Prior's Wood, Ayot St Lawrence. Base map copyright OS.

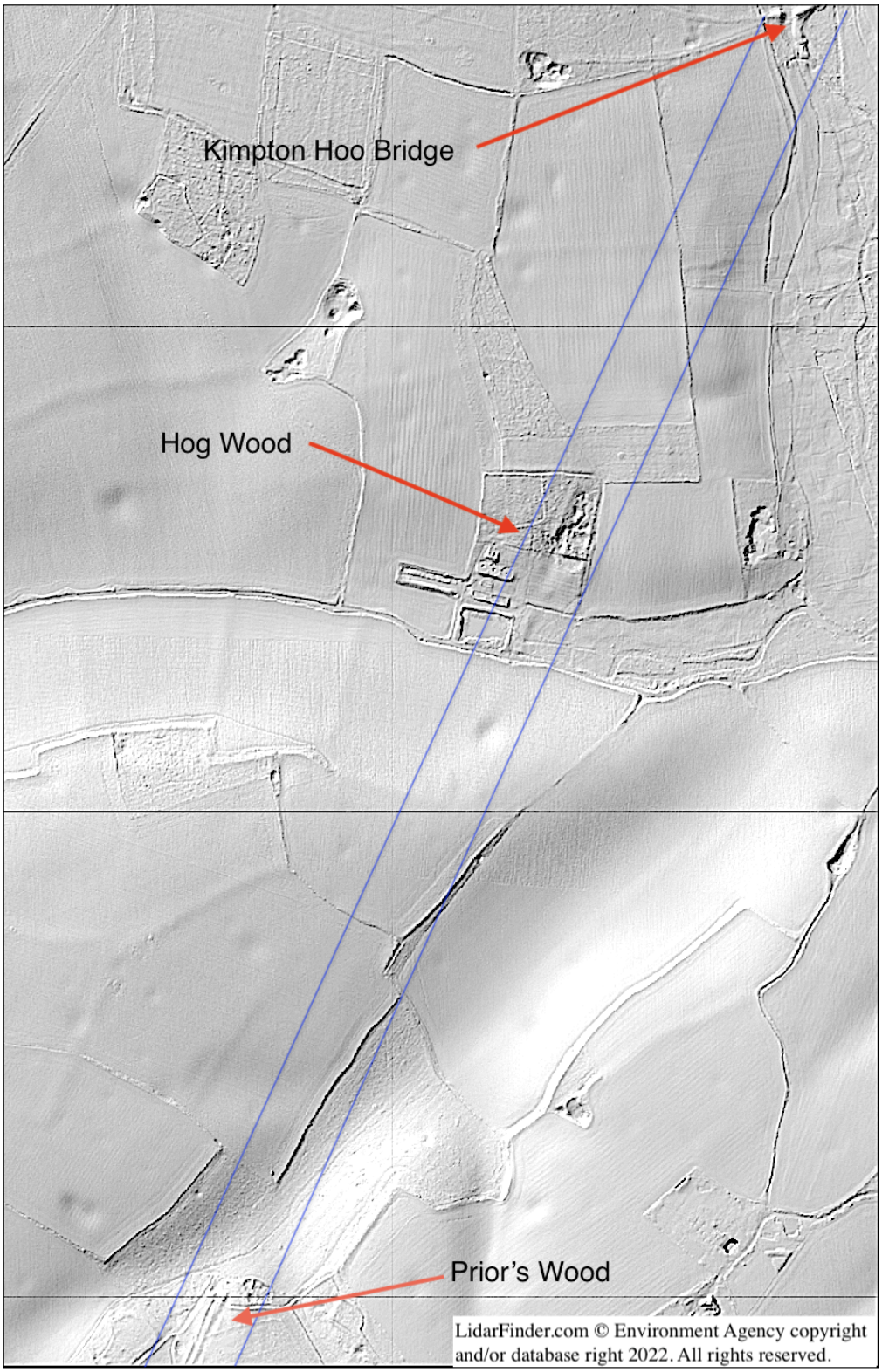


Fig 2 Lidar showing route of RR221 from Kimpton Hoo to Prior's Wood via Hog Wood

Fitzpatrick-Matthews (2020) of North Herts Museum, when reviewing lidar for his Early Kimpton History noted that in Prior's Wood, north-east of Ayot St Lawrence there was clear evidence of a road. The Viatores took it on a strangely contorted route along the eastern

parish boundary, past Abbotshay in Codicote, and east of Rye-end Farm. There is nothing on the supposed line to show a Roman origin until it reaches Rush Green, where it falls into line with the previously known course. Instead, lidar data shows a clearly engineered road on the western edge of Prior's Wood in the southeast corner of the parish, which aligns almost precisely with the section north-northeast from Rush Green. On the ground inspection shows an *agger* about 2 feet high.

It is of interest to note that Dury & Andrews Map (1766) identifies a place called Lavers Street located between Prior's Wood and the manor of Abbotshay, right next to our road. It is often the case that a place-name containing Street can indicate the presence of a roman road in the vicinity (Bishop, 111)

Plotting the alignment on the OS map (fig 1) between Prior's Wood and Symond's Green shows the road crosses the Kimpton road south of Hog Wood and must have crossed the Kyme river west of Kimpton Mill, exactly where lidar shows it to be (fig 2).



Fig 3 Showing crop marks North-East of Kimpton Hoo Bridge on alignment. Copyright GoogleEarth



Fig 4 RR221 through Lamar Park, Wheathampstead

The road crossed the river Mimram further north at TL196194, at the entrance to Kimpton Hoo and where three parish boundaries - St Pauls Walden, Kimpton and Codicote all meet. The alignment suggests the road ran through the point (TL195194) which is where the bridge, built in 1764, crossed over where the River Mimram once ran; the river has now moved slightly further east. Further north-east and directly on the alignment Google Earth® shows two parallel crop marks, about 12m apart, with a lightening in the crop further on suggestive of metalling (fig 3).

The alignment joins the top part of Lincot Lane (part of the Viatores route) and continues on the alignment, which is very close to the Viatores route, and hence to Rush Green.

In fact David Staveley in his YouTube® Video has shown that the road is indeed a straight line from Prior's Wood north-northeast to Rush Green

Going south-west from Prior's Wood the road can be traced through Lamar Park, Wheathampstead where it crosses the Wheathampstead - Codicote road (fig 4).

Where it goes from there is unclear. If we extend the alignment from Rush Green, through Prior's wood it passes *Verulamium* to the west. Therefore there must be another change of direction somewhere.

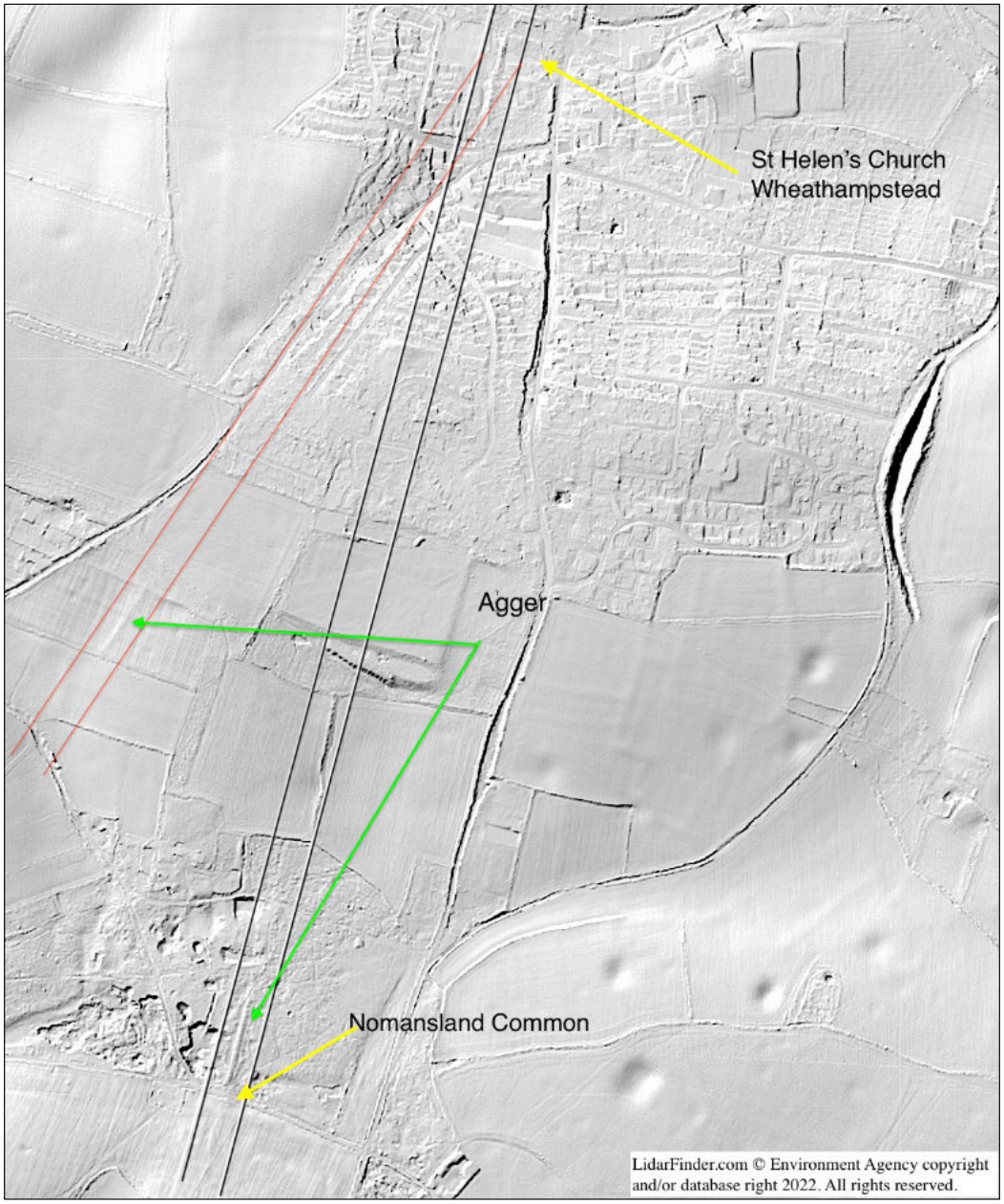
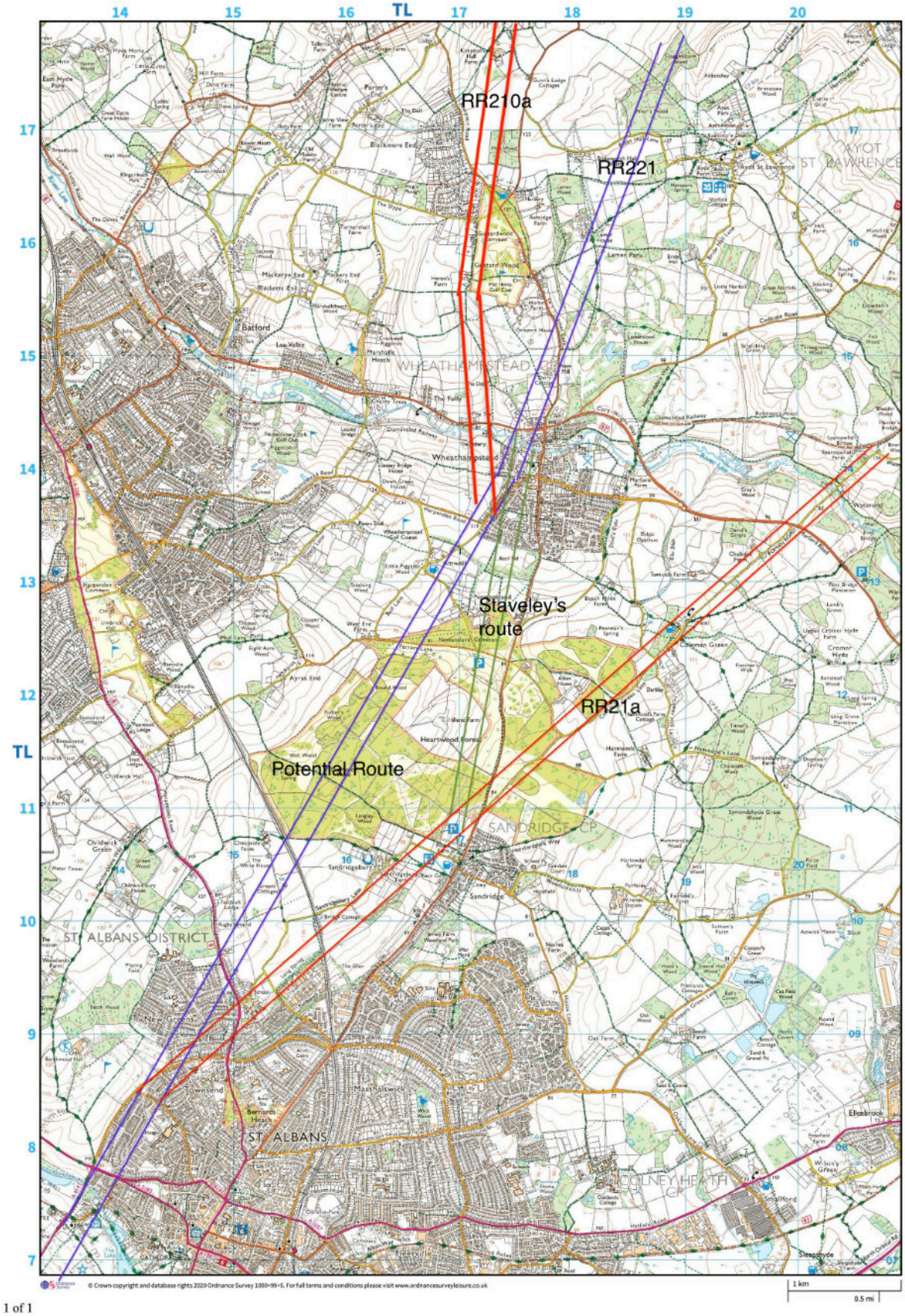


Fig 5 Lidar showing aggers on Nomansland Common pointing towards St Helens Church, Wheathampstead.

There are two possibilities:

Staveley shows a potential lidar *agger* crossing Nomansland Common going due south (TL173124), and an on-site inspection shows a well-defined *agger* approximately17 feet wide and 2 feet high running through the woodland. He postulates that it eventually joins RR21a (*Verulamium*-Welwyn) just west of Sandridge (TL168106), where he also shows an *agger* extending RR21a for a short distance beyond the Sandridge road in the direction of *Verulamium*.

There is also a potential *agger* just east of Amwell (TL170132). Evidence in the field is less clear but it does follow an old field boundary (shown on the 1900 OS map) This also could indicate the change in direction needed as it is on a direct alignment from the north-east



1 of 1

Fig 6 Showing various proposed roman roads around Wheathampstead

gate of *Verulamium*. The two potential routes intersect just west of St Helens Church in Wheathampstead where there is a possible *agger* running due south along the western edge of the Old Rectory and churchyard.

These discoveries raise some interesting questions.

1. The direct route from Wheathampstead to *Verulamium* makes logical sense as the continuation of RR221.There is good evidence for Staveley's route from Wheathampstead to Nomansland, and this would make sense as a direct route between Wheathampstead and Sandridge.

2. If there was a route from *Verulamium* to Ickleford, RR210a, as proposed by The Viatores, and the possible roman road at Herons Farm (TL171156) (HHER 9540) indicates this possibility, then why would it leave *Verulamium* to follow another, less straight forward, route to Wheathampstead when there already existed a road to Sandridge, and a spur to Baldock that went via Wheathampstead (Staveley), or indeed a road direct to Wheathampstead? (fig 6) Perhaps RR210a joined RR221 at Amwell, or even St Helen's church, via the route suggested by The Viatores?

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Cambridgeshire's Roman Roads - A Lidar Reappraisal

David Ratledge

Introduction

When evaluating the Roman roads of Cambridgeshire it is imperative to take into account the considerable extent of the Fens 2000 years ago. In those days almost half of the county would have been marshy water-logged fens and the Isle of Ely would have been just that. Since then the area has seen extensive drainage/land reclamation works including those by the Romans with their Car Dyke and the Fen Causeway. So in the Roman era the north-east section of the county would have been far easier to negotiate by boat and not surprisingly they are few Roman roads located there.

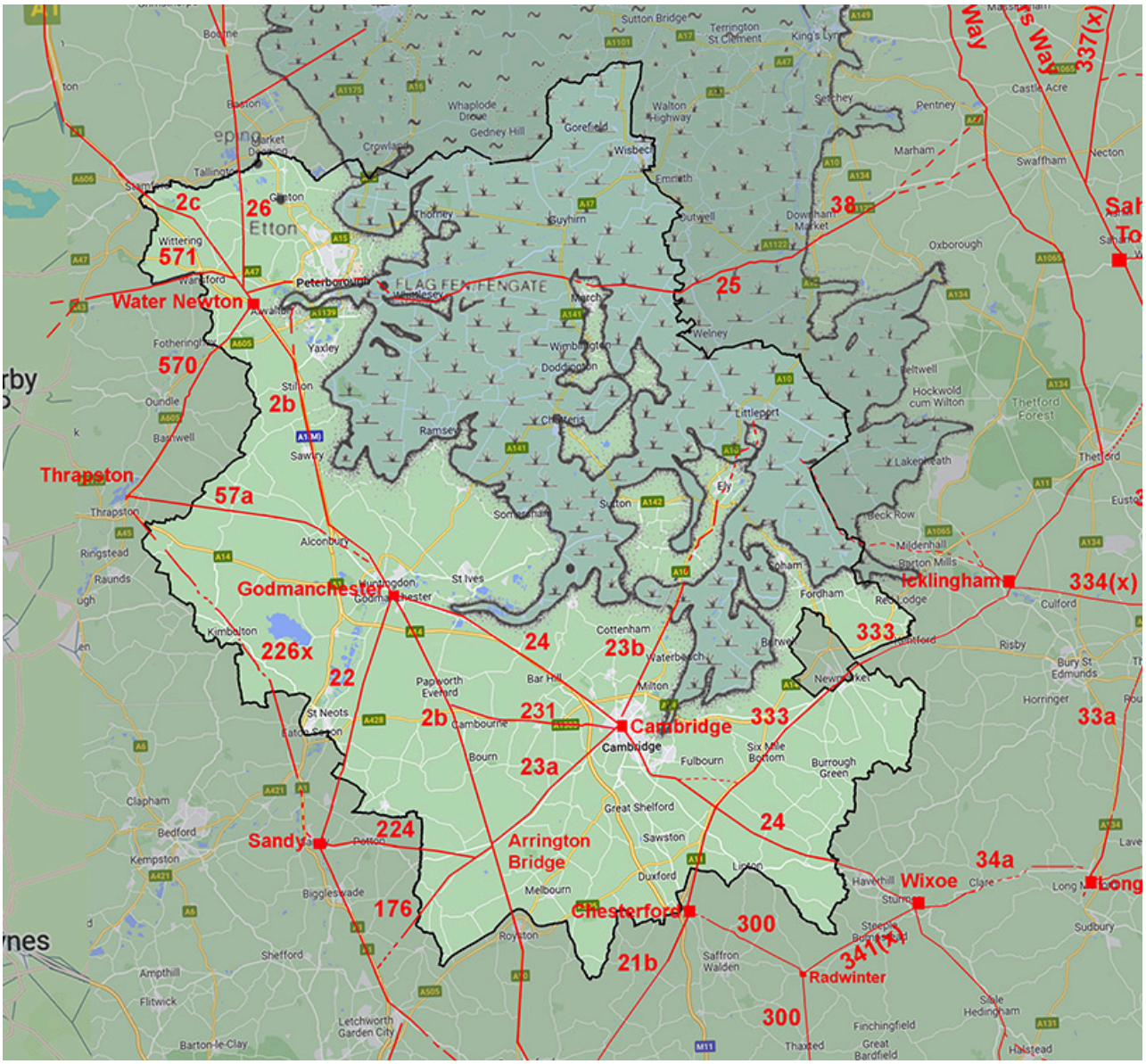


Figure 1. The Roman road map for Cambridgeshire. The extent of the Fens is derived from Pryor. Mapping © Google.

The Roman road map for Cambridgeshire therefore makes perfect sense when the extent of the Fens area in Roman times is understood. The vast majority of the Roman roads keep to dry land. Only the Fen Causeway traversed the Fens and what an incredible undertaking that must have been. It is believed to be perhaps constructed as a response to the Boudican uprising (Pryor, 2019). The remaining Roman road network is dominated by the three major towns: Cambridge, Godmanchester and Water Newton. These three all lie on the edge of the Fens in the Roman era and they would have all been accessible from the sea. Although our route map (fig. 1), on the face of it, looks very familiar several gaps and refinements to the course of the roads have taken place. The major road through the county though was of course Ermine Street. This was the main road from London to Lincoln and ultimately onwards to York. There is only one totally "new" road, Sandy to Thrapston, which passes through Cambridgeshire but the two roads west from Arrington Bridge (Wimpole) are essentially "new" ones too. All the roads are shown overlaid with the probable extent of the Fens at the beginning of the Roman era (Pryor, 2019).

There is not room here to consider each road in detail so I will concentrate on the main additions, i.e. the roads west from Arrington Bridge and the one from Sandy to Thrapston plus those around Water Newton, where there are some significant amendments.

The Arrington Bridge, Wimpole, Roads, RR176 & RR224

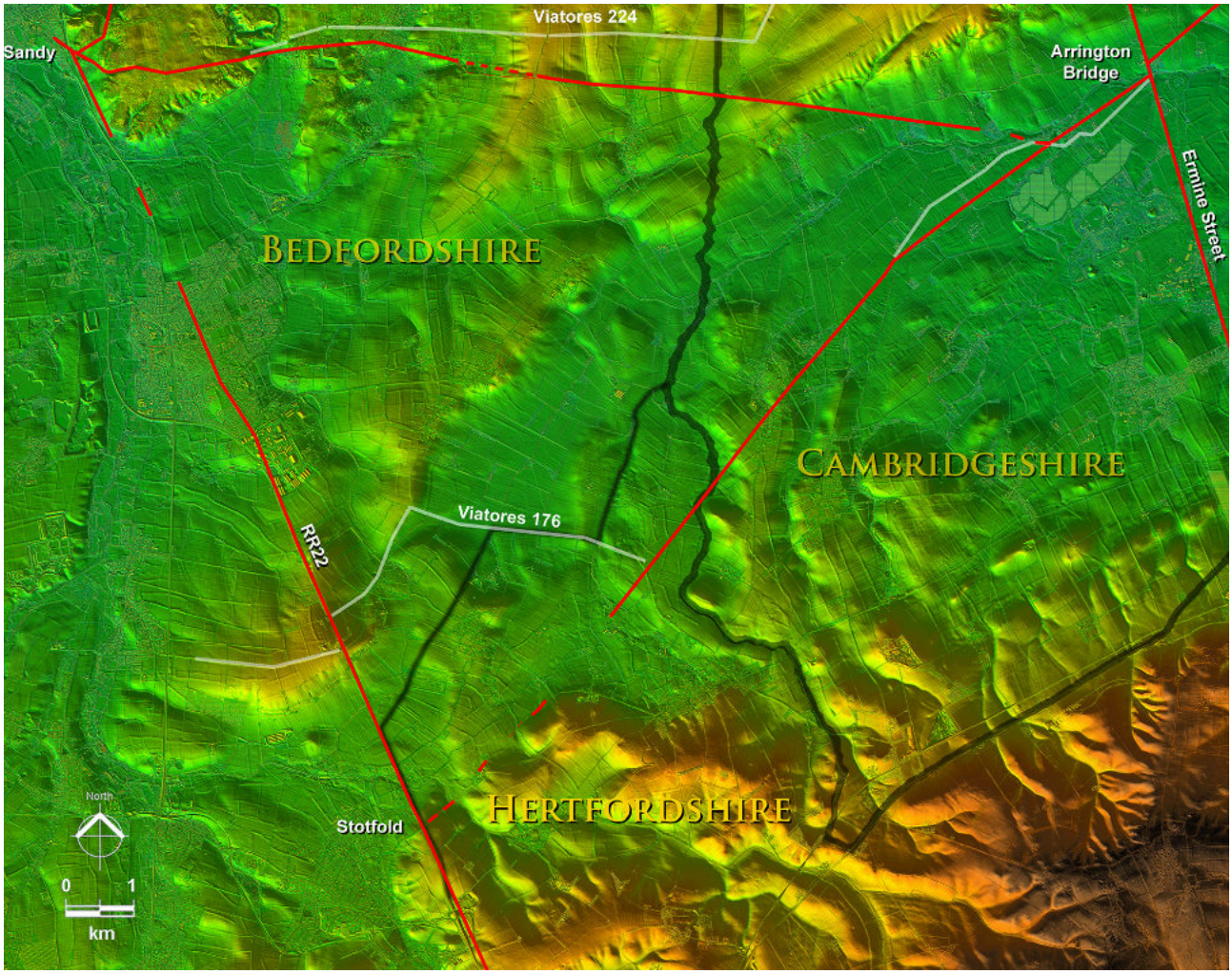


Figure 2. The Roman roads west from Arrington Bridge to Sandy (RR224) and to Stotfold (RR176). The routes suggested by Viatores are shown in white. Contains Ordnance Survey data © Crown Copyright and dtabase, 2023.

If these two roads are "new" ones how is it that they have existing road numbers? The answer is that the Viatores (1964) suggested two Roman roads around here which, very roughly, were in the same area. In reality their routes were very untypical being tortuous with almost right-angled bends. So not surprisingly much of their routes have proved incorrect but it makes sense to correct the routes and re-use these existing numbers.

Arrington Bridge, Wimpole, was a minor Roman settlement on Ermine Street just where it crosses the River Cam. It was about the halfway point between Braughing and Godmanchester so it was not surprising there was a settlement here. We now know it was also an important road junction where 5 routes met (fig. 2).

RR176 Arrington Bridge to Stotfold

This road follows a very direct route connecting Ermine Street to RR 22, which was similar to Ermine Street in being part of a long distance north-south route but in this instance positioned further to the west.

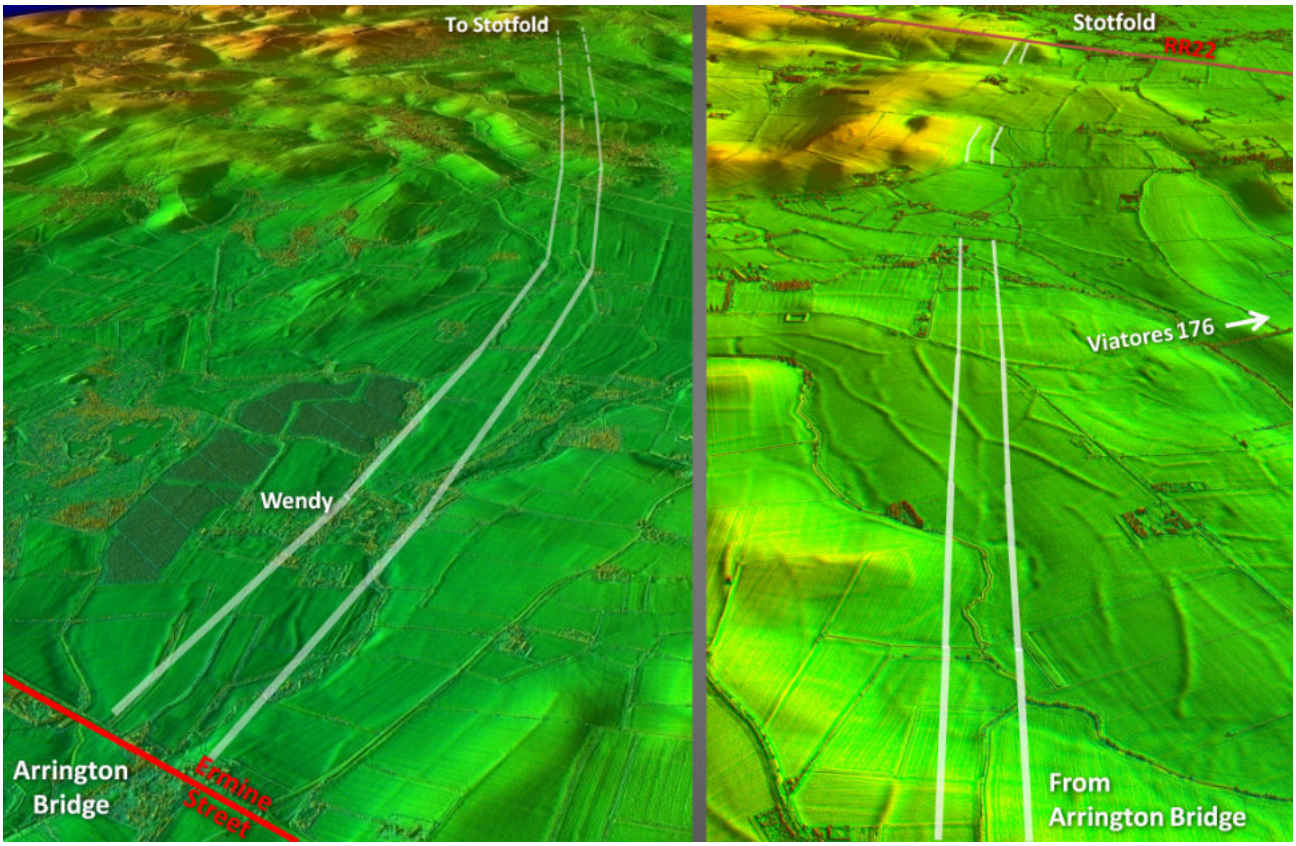


Figure 3. The Roman road from Ermine Street towards Stotfold. Left – the first section is very clear in the lidar imagery. Right – the final section towards RR22 at Stotfold has some gaps in the evidence but logic would suggest it maintained its direction. Contains Ordnance Survey data © Crown Copyright and database, 2023.

Of the two routes heading west from Arrington Bridge then clearly that to Stotfold was the earlier as the route to Sandy is a branch off it at the village of Wendy. It is a very direct road with just a small change of direction about half-way. The evidence is strong apart from the last section to the junction with RR22, where traces become intermittent.

The road begins to the south side of the River Cam bridge on Ermine Street and then runs just to the north of the modern road to Wendy. The Viatores suggested a similar route here but following the modern road to Guilden Morden. In reality the Roman line is all in the fields for its first 3 miles before eventually coinciding with Flecks Lane by Flecks Lane Farm approaching Great Green, Guilden Morden. In the latter village, the footpath of Church Lane follows the Roman course as does the short Silver Street passing by the Three Tuns Pub.



Figure 4. Flecks Lane approaching Guilden Morden. Only the last section of Flecks Lane (west of Flecks Lane Farm) overlies the Roman road. The large width of the agger over the ditches gives a big clue as to the road's Roman origins. It is very much wider than the modern country lane. Image copyright Google 2023.

Beyond Guilden Morden then the road returns to passing through fields in a straight prominent alignment with the *agger* easily traceable in the lidar imagery. The Viatores did suggest this stretch as Roman but this appears to have been based on extrapolation of Silver Street rather than locating any physical traces. However, the surviving *agger* can be seen continuing past where the Viatores thought the road did a right angled turn to the north – in reality the Roman road carried straight on there.

The last section heading to RR22 at Stotfold is a bit vague but little doubt that this was the road's destination. Enough clues remain I think to get its approximate course to Stotfold, where it would have formed a junction with RR22 providing a connection southwards to St Albans.

RR224 Arrington Bridge to Sandy

Sandy was a settlement of sufficient importance to have had a town wall so it was no surprise that it was connected by a road to Ermine Street and also to Cambridge. The Viatores recorded the Sandy end as RR 224 but they wandered off course at Potton whereas the real route came directly from Arrington Bridge. As already mentioned the route to Sandy was a branch off the road to Stotfold at the village of Wendy (fig.5 – left). A fairly direct course then follows to the hills east of Sandy where a more contour based route was chosen to drop down to the settlement there.

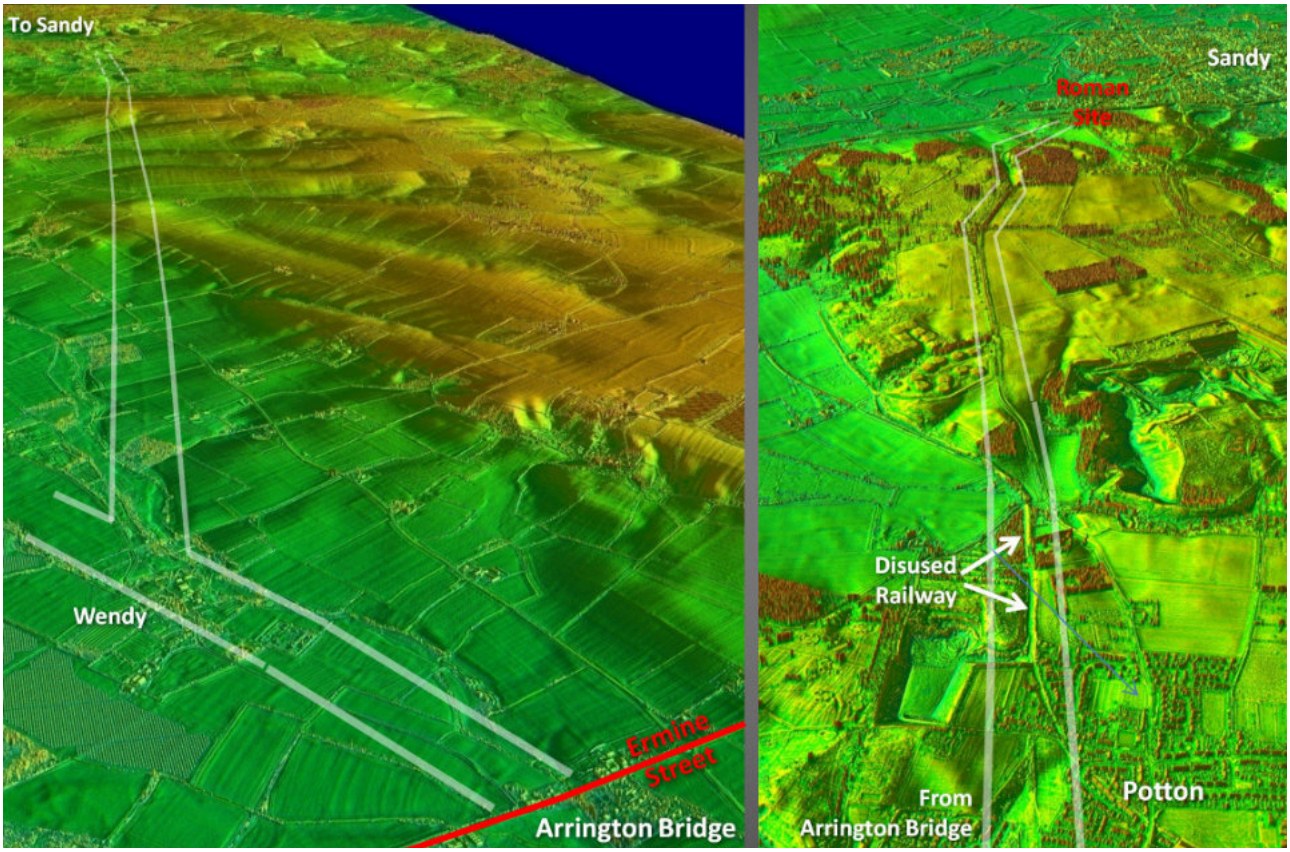


Figure 5. Left – the first section of RR224 can be seen branching off the Roman road to Stotfold and heading towards Sandy. Right – the final section passing via Potton has been partly overlaid with a now disused railway line. Contains Ordnance Survey data © Crown Copyright and database, 2023.

After the branch off the Stotfold road then the River Cam would have needed a bridge but at that spot only a small one. The road then takes a very direct route towards Potton over the border in Bedfordshire. Approaching Potton part of the B1042 does overly the Roman line but that road then wanders off line as the Roman route takes a more direct course.

Despite an old railway obliterating part of the Roman route sufficient traces remain to confirm the route on the west side of Potton (fig.5). A Roman road *agger* would of course made a good foundation for constructing a railway. The B1042 then overlies the Roman road zig-zagging down through a natural valley in Swading Hill to reach Sandy. The Roman site for Sandy was near the railway rather than where the modern town is centred.

RR226(x) Sandy to Thrapston

This road starts in Bedfordshire and ends in Northamptonshire but more than half of its length is in Cambridgeshire. I was looking for a supposed Viatores road, RR173d, but found nothing convincing. Serendipitously though I did spot this road all the way from Sandy to Thrapston where the Northamptonshire end was also spotted by Mike Haken and Wayne Kirk. There appears to have been a possible settlement at Staughton at approximately the half-way point.

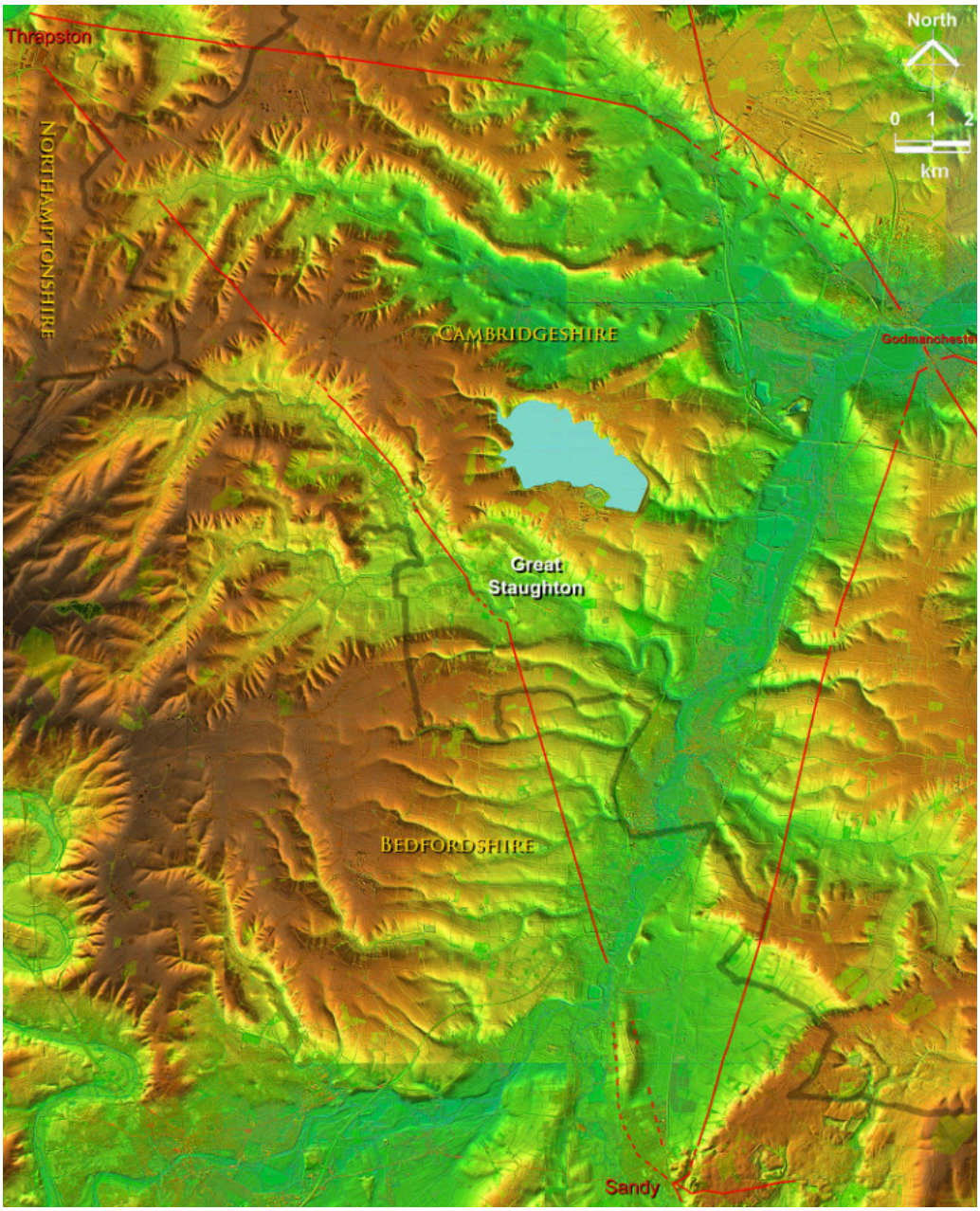


Figure 6. Quite a long road at 24 miles passing through three counties. The fact that the road did not take a direct course perhaps suggests Staughton, where the change of direction occurs, was an intermediate destination. Contains Ordnance Survey data © Crown Copyright and database, 2023.

There are two options for our road as far as the River Great Ouse (fig. 7 left). Perhaps most likely is the route followed by the current road. The Ordnance Survey First Edition mapping

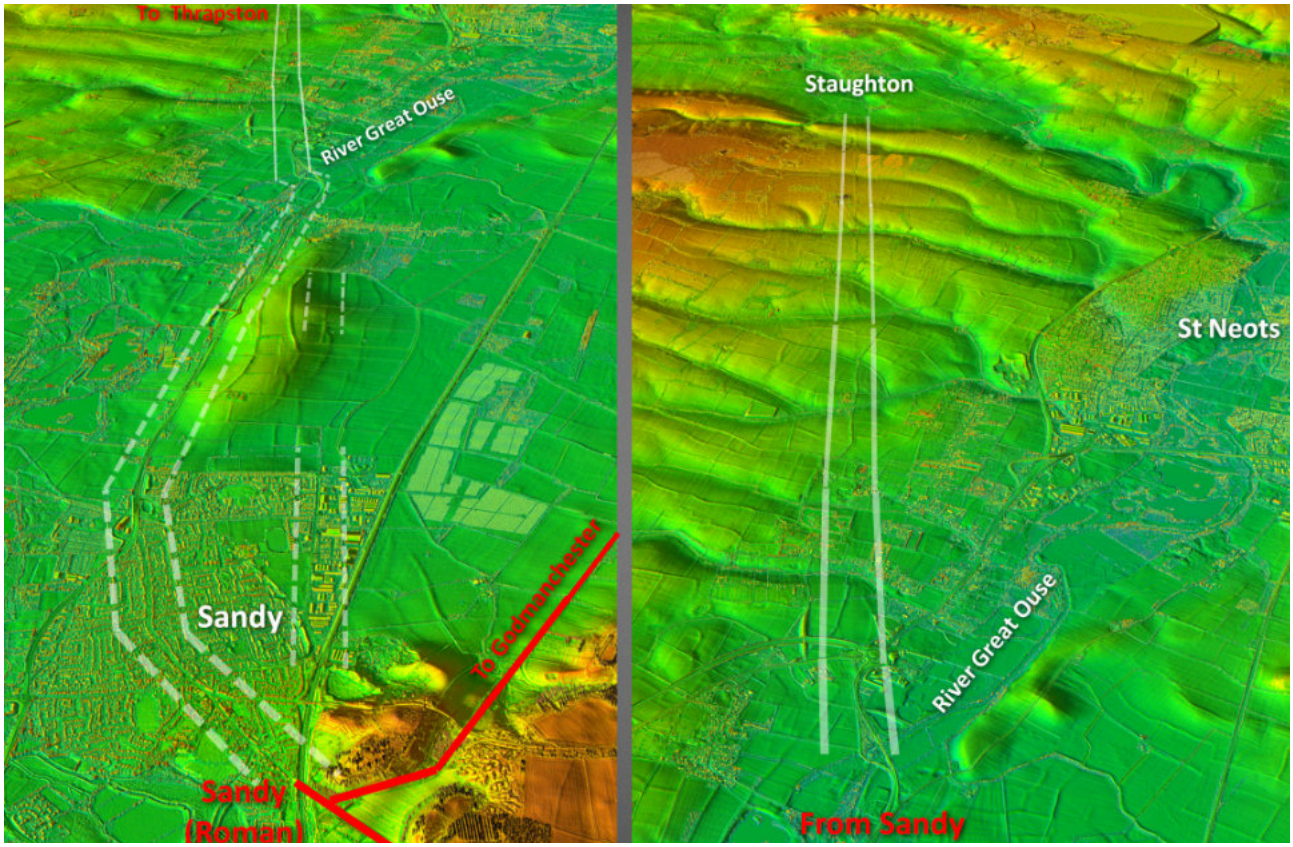


Figure 7. Left – there are two options for the initial course of the road leaving Sandy. The more direct route looks logical but there are some big gaps with no traces leaving the westerly option perhaps as favourite. Right – once across the Great Ouse then a series of very prominent aggers leaves no doubt as to the road's course. Contains Ordnance Survey data © Crown Copyright and database, 2023.

shows this as a series of straight alignments. The alternative is a direct route to the right (east) of the small hillock. There is a straight track leaving Sandy on this line which does fit with a field boundary a little further on. There are worrying gaps though so a case of local research needed to resolve this one.

Whichever route is correct then the Great Ouse would have been bridged at Tempsford. Once across the river there then follows a long straight alignment with prominent *aggers* clearly visible in the lidar imagery all the way to Staughton (fig.7)

The overall direction of this alignment is not on Thrapston but appears to have deliberately targeted Staughton. The probable road course at Staughton is somewhat unusual. It was more complex than a simple change of alignment. However, just before we reach Staughton there is the intriguing name of Roman Field Cottage. This is not a reference to our road, which was previously unknown, but to the presence of Roman buildings believed to have been a villa (Scheduled Monument 1006866). Beyond here, nearer to Staughton, the lidar evidence is subtle and indicated a convoluted course, which was a concern. Fortunately Historic England's Aerial Archaeology Mapping Explorer provides supporting evidence (fig. 8). This suggests there was most likely a small settlement there which the road had to pick its way through it. Hence not a simple turn towards the new alignment to Thrapston.

Beyond Staughton normality returns with another clear section running towards and passing through Kimbolton. There is sufficient intermittent evidence on this final alignment to confirm its straight course all the way to Thrapston. However, modern

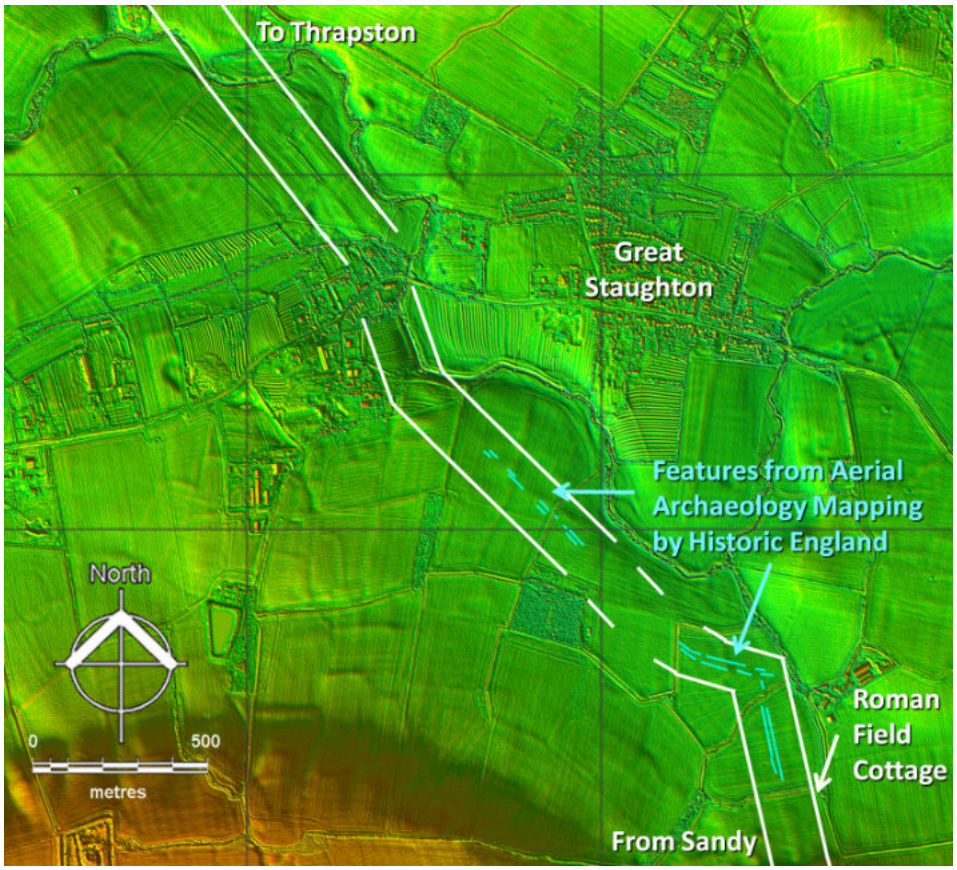


Figure 8. The unusual course of the road at Staughton. This is supported though by features visible in Historic England's Aerial Archaeology Mapping. If Staughton were a Roman settlement then this could provide an explanation for this. The known Roman villa is located south-west of Roman Field Cottage. Contains Ordnance Survey data © Crown Copyright and database, 2023.

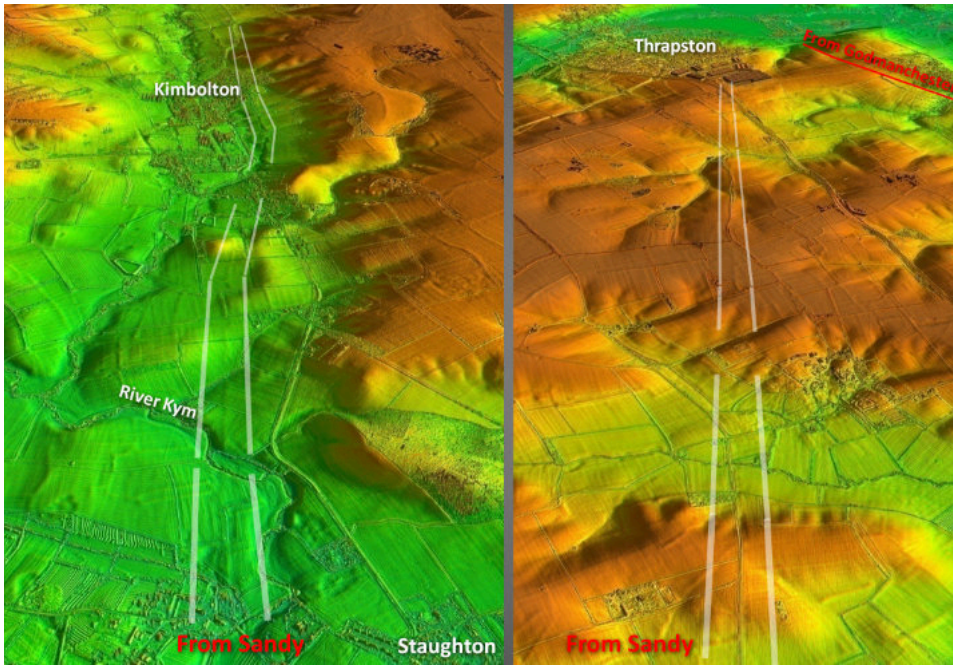


Figure 9. Left – leaving Staughton there is a clear sequence of surviving aggers heading towards Kimbolton. Right – beyond Kimbolton the evidence is a bit more intermittent but sufficient to confirm the route to the outskirts of Thrapston. Contains Ordnance Survey data © Crown Copyright and database, 2023.

developments at Thrapston do mask the road's final section so quite where it joined Roman roads 57a (from Godmanchester) and 570 (from Water Newton) is not clear.

Roman Roads around Water Newton

Margary produced a close-up map of the roads around Durobrivae, Water Newton, (Margary, 1973, his fig. 8, page 226), which can now be updated in the light of the lidar imagery (fig. 10).

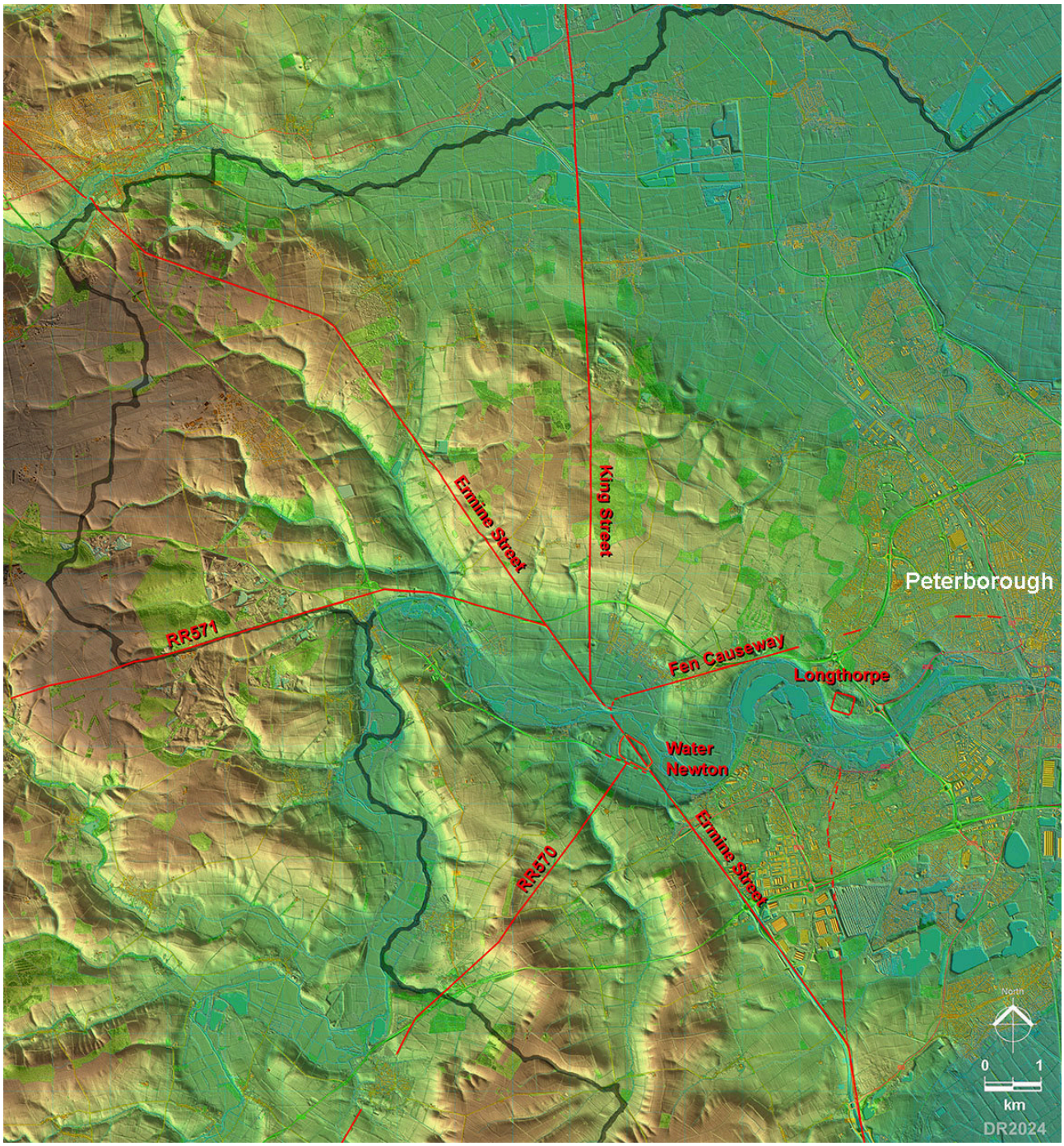


Figure 10. The Roman road network around Water Newton in north-west Cambridgeshire as confirmed/revealed by lidar. Note how Ermine Street coming in from the south appears to be originally aligned on Longthorpe. Contains Ordnance Survey data © Crown Copyright and database, 2023.

Coming into the site from the south is Ermine Street, which would appear to be aligned on the early Roman fort at Longthorpe rather than (the later) Water Newton. There is lidar

evidence for this, at least initially, with old mapping showing this alignment continuing as old field boundaries heading towards the River Nene and Longthorpe.

The other main differences to Margary's map are the initial courses of the Fen Causeway and RR570 towards the south west. In the case of the former the previous suggested route for the Fen Causeway was further north but although lidar does show some features around there these appear to be just some old field boundaries not forming a coherent route. Instead there is much better evidence for a direct course from where the Roman bridge over the River Nene was located. As was to be expected, the river bridge was clearly the focus for this and the other roads around Water Newton.

Regarding RR570 towards the south west and ultimately Thrapston, Margary had it starting north of the River Nene and therefore then requiring its own bridge. However, lidar shows the road emanating from Water Newton's south west gate, obviously south of the river with no need for another bridge. Practical and logical.

Other Roads

One major road not covered in detail is Akeman Street, which could now be regarded as a continuous route from Stotfold via Arrington Bridge and Cambridge to Littleport. It has often been suggested that this continued on to Denver to join the Fen Causeway there. This would have needed to cross the marsh lands of the Fens much like the Fen Causeway did. The latter achieved this by following an old roddon to Denver. In the case for a route from Littleport to Denver no such roddon was available so a built-up causeway would have been needed. This onward link was excluded from the county road map (fig. 1) as no possible causeway was visible.

One road in Cambridgeshire ignored by the Ordnance Survey is the Icknield Way. The section south from the Roman settlement at Icklingham to Chesterford has all the characteristics of Roman surveying. South of Newmarket, it comprises a series of carefully selected straight alignments angling slightly from one local high spot to the next. Given what we now know of the Roman road network this is also the most likely course of Antonine Itinerary V. A strange omission by the OS.

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More about the possible Roman Early Warning System in Tynedale

John Poulter

With regard to the possible Roman early warning system in Tynedale, described in the previous issue of the RRRA Newsletter, Dave Armstrong (pers comm) wondered if what I had proposed might also have formed part of the signalling system of the first phase of Hadrian's Wall, which David Woolliscroft had detected in the 1980s and 1990s. Let me provide the context.

Hadrian's Wall is equipped with a series of milecastles and turrets. The milecastles are nominally 1 Roman mile apart with 2 turrets spaced equally between them. Thus each of these installations should have been ⅓ Roman mile apart. However, it has long been known that many of these milecastles and turrets had not been erected in their nominally correct positions, sometimes being 100 yards or more adrift from their theoretical position. There had been much speculation about the possible reasons for these aberrations, but, working in the 1980s and 1990s, Dr David Woolliscroft observed that several of these misplaced milecastles and turrets had been located in positions which were not well sited for defence or for control of traffic. Instead, verifying by eye and with a camera, David found that they seemed to have been relocated in order to be able to signal to the chain of Roman forts lying along the Stanegate Roman road to the south (Woolliscroft 2001, 58-73). Since, in the initial design for Hadrian's Wall, it is believed that there had been no plans for forts to be erected along the line of the Wall, this made complete sense. After all, if one of the functions of the milecastles and turrets had been observation and signalling, to where else would they have needed to signal, other than to where the main concentrations of troops were housed?

David, however, had confined his investigations to just the central part of Hadrian's Wall, over the crags from Sewingshields in the east (milecastle MC30) to Irthington (milecastle MC58) in the west (Woolliscroft 2001, 52). This area is largely treeless today, with good views to both the north and the south, and this allowed David to test his observations visually between, on the one hand, all of the milecastles and turrets, and, on the other, the locations of the Stanegate forts, the locations of which were known. This left the question: had the same signalling arrangements been applied for the milecastles and turrets all along the remaining parts of Hadrian's Wall?

In the 2000s I had been examining the planning of the entire line of Hadrian's Wall, using my 'best field of view' test (Poulter 2009, 4-6 and 2010, 25-27). To my surprise, I found that the planners laying out the line of the Wall had been working inwards from the coasts, towards the central crags. At any rate, knowing the direction in which the planners had been working enabled me to stand and examine every view with which the Roman planners would have been faced, when considering a change of alignment. From my observations of these fields of view it seemed to me that every change of alignment had been made in order to preserve an ability to signal to the south. This seemed to me to confirm that David Woolliscroft's discovery had indeed been applied along the entire length of Hadrian's Wall, as might well be expected for the same reason (Poulter 2009, 79-80 and 2010, 121-126).

By way of example, figure 1, below, illustrates the lines of signalling which David had identified just to the west of the fort at Birdoswald. Here, the original line of Hadrian's Wall, (which had been built of turf at this point) had run along the top of the northern cliff overlooking the River Irthing, evidently so that the milecastles and turrets spaced along it

would have been able to signal to the Stanegate fort at Nether Denton on the other side of the Irthing. However, as it happens, because of the lie of the land, turrets T49A andT49B, and milecastle MC50, would not have been able to signal to Nether Denton directly, and so they would need to have signalled to a tower at Mains Rigg (just off the left of the picture) in order for their signals to be relayed to Nether Denton from there. Later on, this part of Hadrian's Wall had been rebuilt in stone, and at this time a new line had been chosen for it, a little further to the north. None of the turrets and milecastles along this new line would have been able to signal to Nether Denton fort – but they wouldn't have needed to, because by then the nearest concentration of troops had moved to the fort at Birdoswald.

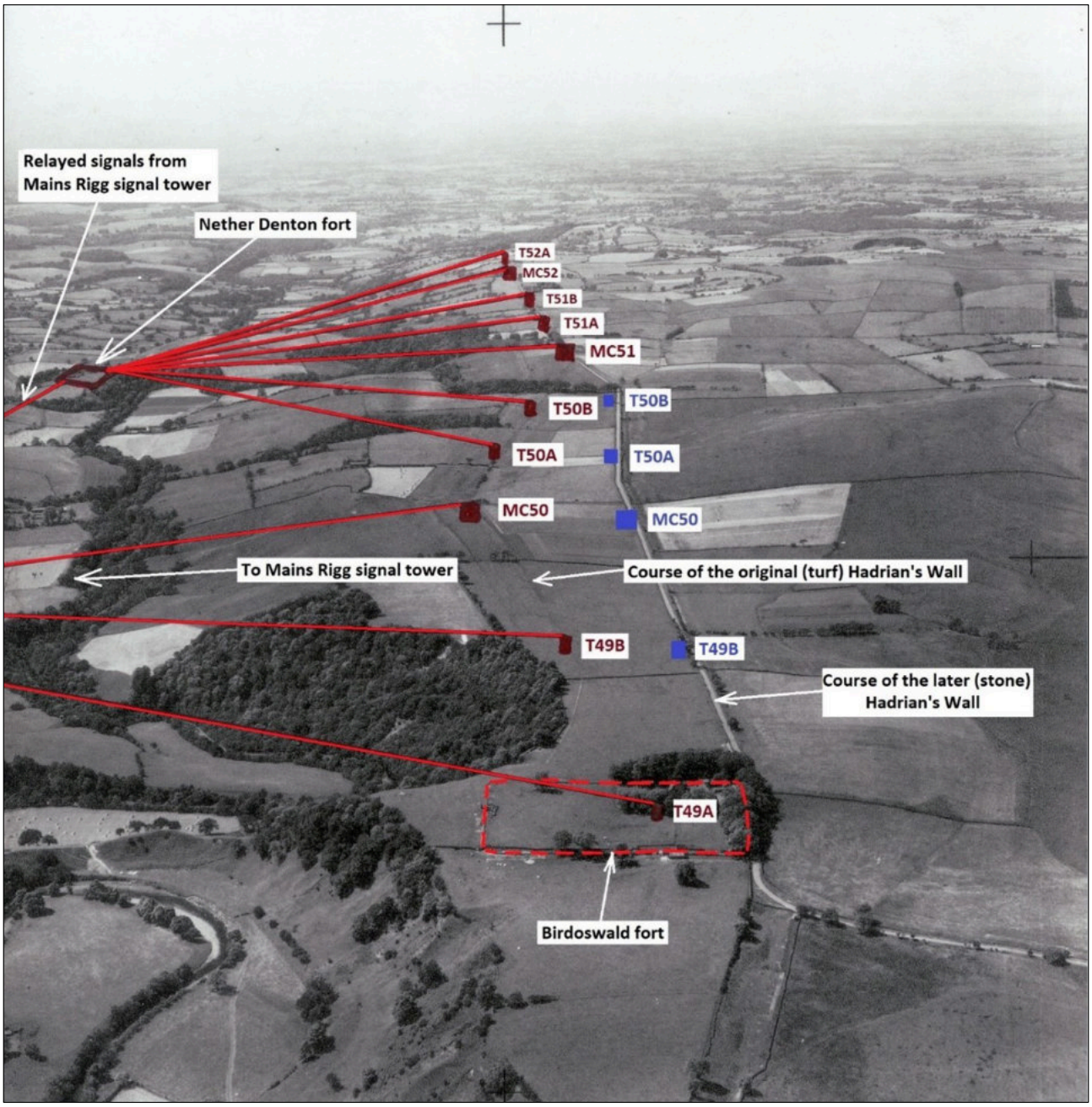


Figure 1. Lines of the early signalling scheme from the milecastles and turrets immediately to the west of the (later) Birdoswald fort, as detected by David Woolliscroft. The turf Wall milecastles and turrets are indicated in crimson and their lines of sight in red, whereas the later Stone wall milecastles and turrets are shown in blue. Base photograph from Cambridge Air Photo JI87, July 1952.
This image copyright © John Poulter, 2024.

There is one stretch of Hadrian's Wall which doesn't seem to fit David's (and my) conclusions, though, and that is the course of Hadrian's Wall running westwards straight up to Limestone Corner after crossing the River North Tyne at the point where Chesters fort later came to be established. Along this stretch, from T27A to MC30, there is a good view to the north from all of the milecastles and turrets, but none to the south, being blocked by higher ground in that direction. If the Wall's planners had wished to preserve a view to the nearest Stanegate fort to the south, which appears to have been at Newbrough near the village of Fourstones, they would need to have curved the line of the Wall southwards from the North Tyne crossing. It is possible that this would have resulted in only a limited view to the north, however, and, if so, the Wall's planners might have opted to take the line of the Wall straight up to Limestone Corner and then put up with the need for signalling to be conducted by relays, like that at Mains Rigg as shown in figure 1.

In his book, Roman Military Signalling, David Woolliscroft suggested that signalling from the Limestone Corner area of the Wall to the apparently nearest Stanegate fort at Newbrough could have been achieved via a signalling relay station on Torney's Fell, at NY 868 696 (Woolliscroft 2001, 72). Yet this left the question of where the lower milecastles and turrets along this stretch would have been able to signal, because it was evident that they would not have been intervisible with a tower on Torney's Fell.

This is where Dave's suggestion came in. Might these lower installations have been able to signal to the lookout tower beside Homer's Lane, which I had postulated in my previous paper as being part of a possible Roman early warning system? Accordingly, I checked the intervisibilities of all of the milecastles and turrets with Homer's Lane, from T26B (Brunton turret) on the eastern side of the North Tyne, to T30A, the first turret to the west of Limestone Corner.

Dave also suggested (pers comm) that the top of Warden Hill might have been the location of a signalling relay station. It would certainly have offered a good site for one, and it would have been clearly intervisible with the Stanegate fort at Newbrough – as well as with St John Lee and a possible tower beside the entrance to the drive to Target House, as discussed in my previous paper. However, the English Heritage Map of Hadrian's Wall only shows an Iron Age/Roman period settlement to have been located near the top of the Hill. Despite this I checked the intervisibilities of all of the milecastles and turrets, from T26B to T30A, with the top of Warden Hill. I also checked the intervisibilities of the upper milecastles and turrets with David Woolliscroft's proposed tower on Torney's Fell, and the results (in black, red and blue, respectively) are shown in the following table.

What these results show is that Dave Armstrong's suggestions were quite right. Milecastle MC28 and turrets from T27A to T28A would have been able to signal directly to Homer's Lane, and thereby convey, via the postulated signalling chain, alerts to the substantial garrison at Corbridge fort. This means that the possible early warning system postulated previously could have been adopted to serve the signalling needs of the initial design of Hadrian's Wall. Moreover, when Chesters fort superseded T27A, the fort would still have been able to signal to Corbridge in the same way, if needed. The milecastle and turrets from T27A to T28A would also have been able to signal to the Stanegate fort at Newbrough via a tower on the top of Warden Hill, if one had existed there. In this way, these three turrets and intervening milecastle would have been able to alert the troops at both Newbrough and at Corbidge, as well as possessing a degree of fallback in the event of poor visibility, e.g. cloud cover on Warden Hill.

Table of intervisibilities from turrets and milecastles along Hadrian's Wall to the site of possible observation and signalling towers (a) located where the remains of the cross now lie beside Homer's Lane, (b) to a potential observation and signalling tower on top of Warden Hill, and (c) via a possible observation and signalling tower on Torney's Fell at NY 868696, as predicted by David Woolliscroft.

[NB Codes used in the table are: red = yes; black = no; blue = theoretically possible but doubtful in practice. Figure 2, below, shows the locations of the places listed in the table.

Turret or milecastle	Intervisibility with possible tower on Homer's lane	Intervisibility with possible tower on Warden Hill	Intervisibility with possible tower on Torney's Fell (NY 868 696)
T26B (Brunton)	Yes, indirectly, but only if there had been a relay station in the vicinity of Wall village	Yes, and from Warden Hill signalling would have been possible to both St John Lee (for relaying to Corbridge) and to Newbrough fort	Not tested
MC27	Ditto	Ditto	Ditto
T27A (Pre Chesters fort)	Yes, but only at 25 feet eyeball height at both ends	Ditto	Ditto
T27B	Yes, easily	Ditto	Ditto
MC28	Ditto	Ditto	Ditto
T28A	Ditto	Ditto	Ditto
T28B	No: blocked by a slight ridge a short distance in front of the turret	No: blocked by a slight ridge a short distance in front of the turret	Yes, but only with two relay stations between T28B and Torney's Fell
MC29	Ditto	Ditto	Yes, but only with one relay station between MC29 and Torney's Fell
T29A	Ditto	Ditto	Yes, but only with one relay station between T29A and Torney's Fell
T29B	Ditto	Yes, just	Yes, directly
MC30	Yes, but at least one relay station would have been required	Ditto	Ditto
T30A	Ditto	No	Yes, but only with one relay station between MC29 and Torney's Fell

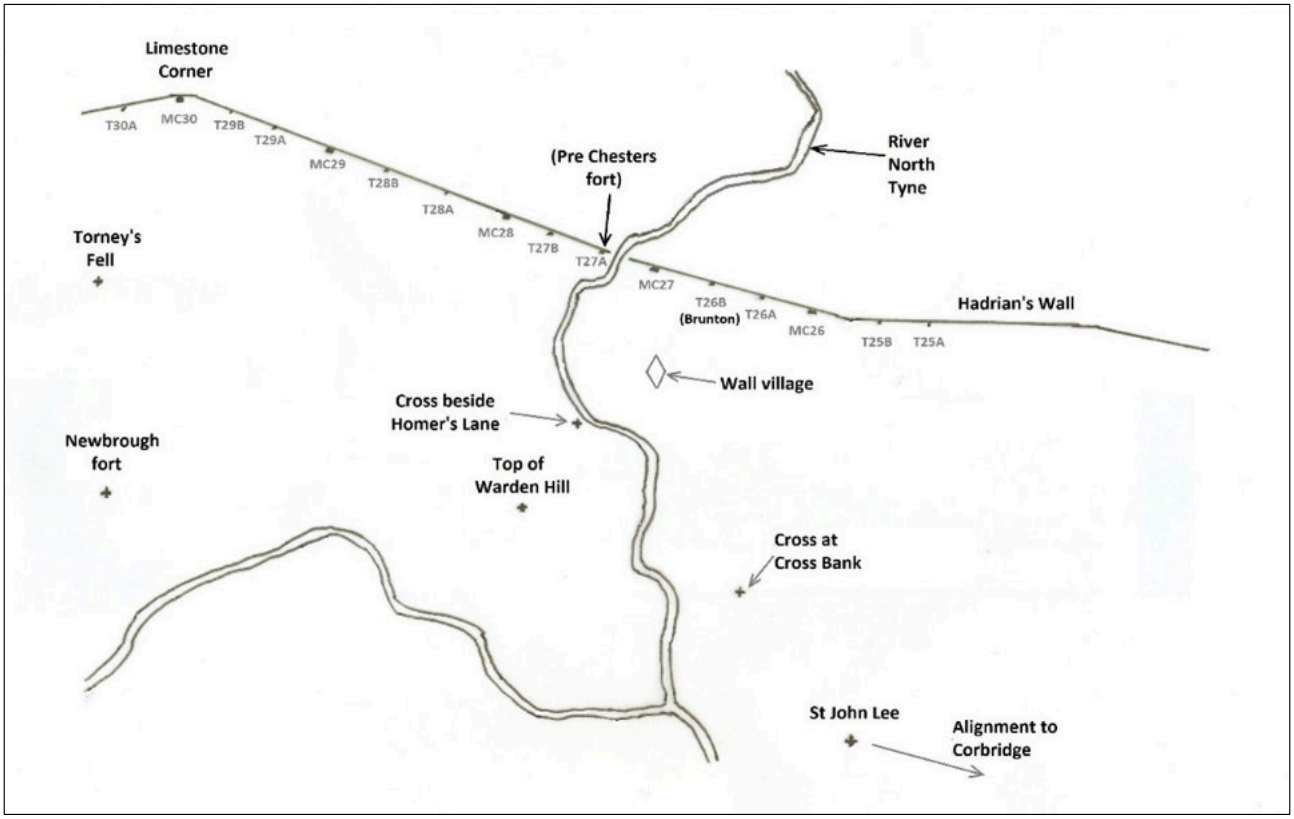


Figure 2. Locations of the places mentioned in the table above.

The table also shows that David Woolliscroft had been correct, in that MC30 at Limestone Corner, and T29B, just before it, would have been able to signal directly to a tower on Torney's Fell, albeit that T30A, just to the west of Limestone Corner, would have needed one intermediate tower to do the same. That leaves T28B, and MC29 and T29A to a lesser extent, unable to signal to either Corbridge or Newbrough without undue complication, and thereby running the risk of signalling failure, and so it is possible that they would have been obliged to signal laterally, along the line of the Wall, to T28A and T29B respectively.

T26B and MC27, on the eastern side of the North Tyne, would also have been unable to signal to Homer's Lane directly, and thus obliged either to signal laterally to T27A or maybe to signal to Homer's Lane via a possible relay station in the vicinity of Wall village. However, they would have been able to signal directly to a possible tower on the top of Warden Hill, and thus to raise alarms not only to Newbrough but, via St John Lee and a possible tower near the entrance to the drive to Target House, to Corbridge as well.

It remains to consider when the projected early warning system via Homer's Lane might have been created, since the arguments for it are almost entirely based upon intervisibilities, which are timeless. In theory, the warning system might not have been Roman at all, but created by the early Christian community in Hexham. This might help to explain the remains of the crosses standing beside Homer's Lane and on Cross Bank. In theory, too, the system could have been created solely as part of the initial planning for Hadrian's Wall. However, if, prior to that, there really had been no substantial Roman fortification blocking hostile incursions approaching down the North Tyne valley, then a need for a signalling chain to alert the nearest sizeable fort along the Stanegate at Corbridge would appear to have been essential.

Therefore it seems likeliest that the possible early warning system had been created prior to the planning of Hadrian's Wall, had then been adopted as part of the signalling scheme for the initial design of the Wall, and had then been resurrected (or, given the lapse in time following the Roman withdrawal, maybe even reinvented) to form an early warning system for the nascent Christian community in Hexham.

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High Street rises from the dead: or does it?

David Ratledge

It was John Poulter's presentation given to the Roman Roads Research Association's 2016 Conference in York that first put doubts in my mind regarding the authenticity of RR74 High Street as a genuine Roman road. Being over high ground High Street was late to have full lidar coverage available but when DEFRA did release the latest batch of National Lidar Programme data then the doubts only got stronger and stronger. From my searches using 3D lidar models I found no Roman *aggers* - only hollow-ways, often meandering and braided. In several places straight alignments were perfectly feasible but instead what was showing was wandering trackways with no typical *aggers*.

I wasn't the only one seeing no evidence. At the 2021 Lake District Annual Archaeology Conference, Dave Knight, Historic England, gave a presentation on their ongoing work on High Street using photogrammetry - 3D modelling from 2D photographs of the full route. Whilst sitting on the fence as to its Roman origin the talk did reveal they found no Roman *aggers* over the full length. Following John's more recent presentation (available on YouTube via RRRA) there was a poll with 45 to 1 voting that High Street was probably not Roman. By that time I had nailed my colours firmly to the "not a Roman road" camp.



Figure 1. Left – Ordnance survey mapping old and new confidently shows the course of High Street. Mapping © 2024 National Library of Scotland under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution (CC-BY) licence. Inset – location map contains Ordnance Survey data © Crown Copyright and database, 2024. Right – Bing's recent aerial photograph showing a prominent feature precisely on the line of the (supposed) High Street © 2024 Microsoft Bing. Inset shows an enlargement of part of the feature – note traces of faint lines along the "road".

HIGH STREET RISES FROM THE DEAD?

So imagine my surprise when Bing aerial photographs recently revealed a pristine Roman road precisely on the OS line across a field between Tirril and Celleron (figure 1- right). Once the panic had subsided and I took a closer look things didn't quite add up. All the historical aerial photographs (GoogleEarth Pro) and lidar imagery (fig. 2) showed no evidence whatsoever. The new feature is around 25 metres wide, which is exceptional for Cumbria – in fact I cannot recall one of this width in Cumbria, only one or two in Lancashire. The more I looked the more it became obvious this was something the land owner had recently created. An email exchange with Mark Brennand, HER officer for Cumberland, Westmorland & Furness, confirmed this. It is the result of a tree planting scheme with Natural England involved, proposed in 2022. They did a desk-based study and a field walkover survey but found no evidence but were requested to do further research – presumably excavations? But without funding decided not to plant the line of the "road". As a result we will have a prominent landmark – an avenue between trees – clearly showing High Street and fooling many for years to come.

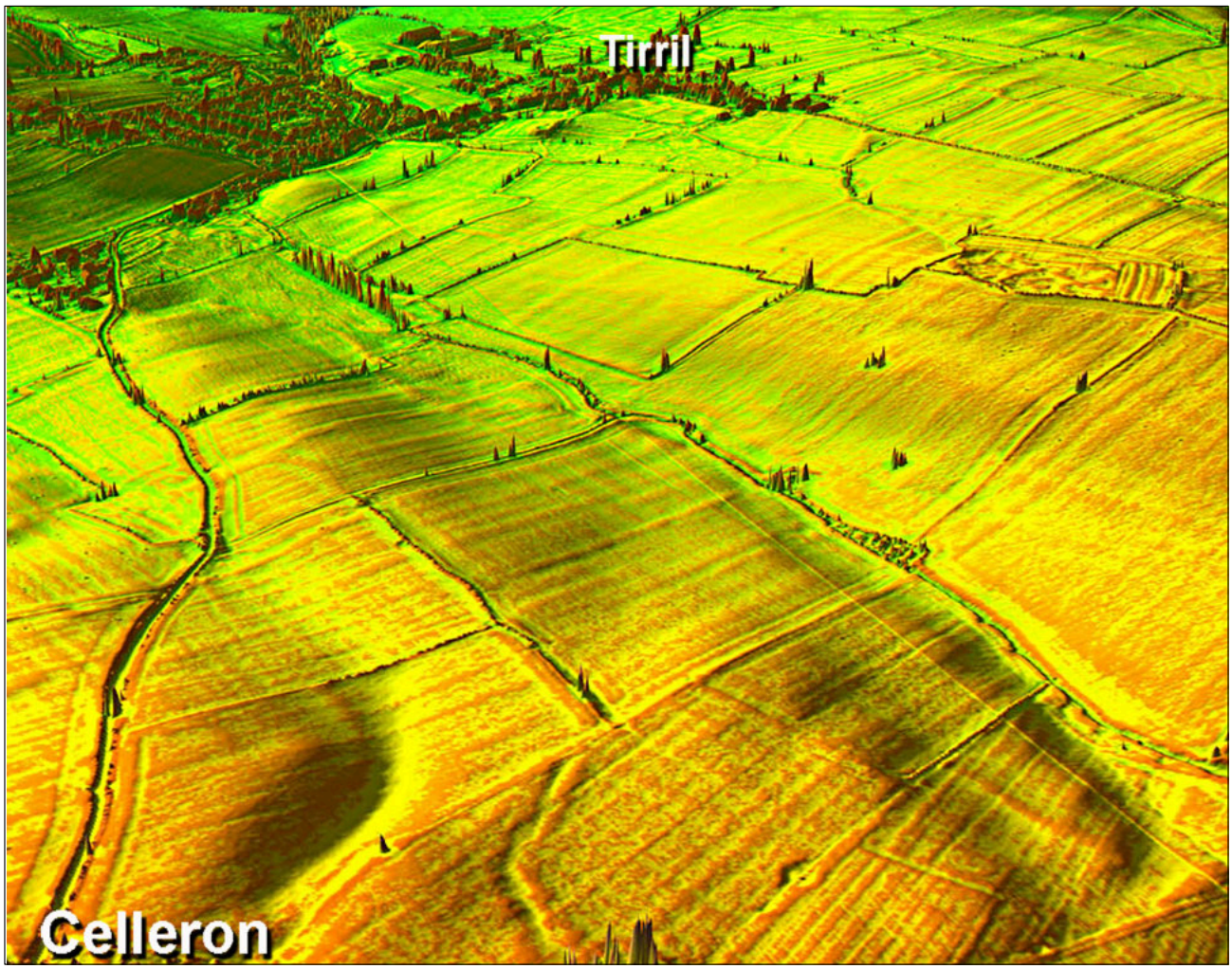


Figure 2. Oblique lidar view looking from above Celleron towards Tirril. The field in question, and all the other fields, show no evidence for High Street but soon an avenue between trees will appear. Lidar data is © Environment Agency copyright and/or database right 2024. All rights reserved.

So there we have it - nothing to do with a real Roman road at all but just in case there might be one there (45 of us know there isn't), then keep clear of it. But the best of intentions will have created a stunning false clue and one that will become even more misleading as the trees mature. Perhaps a warning to never trust what you see in a single field.

Other News, Events, Updates & Miscellany

RRRA AGM

We are scheduling our AGM on Wednesday 20th November at 7:30pm, via Zoom as usual. Please reserve the date in your diaries.

The Association have been moving forward with the aspects endorsed at the last AGM progressing the re-platforming of our website and setting away a regional group - in East Anglia. A full update will be given at the AGM.

The Appian Way

This iconic Roman road, said to be the first, has recently been granted UNESCO World Heritage status. The news outlets have this covered, try searching on it for the details. It does make a great place to visit if you've seen the usual sights of Rome.

A new fort in Pembrokeshire?

Also in the news is the claim of a new fort in Pembrokeshire. This follows a similar claim about a year back of a new Roman road. As previously there are no further details, location or significant evidence. Let's wait and see how this develops?

RRRA Winter talks schedule

Following the success of our previous seasons and the growing reputation for our talks, we've been busy behind the scenes recruiting some interesting speakers with talks for our coming season as below (full details are on our website). It's quite a coup to open with David Breeze. This is coming in the next few weeks and we will get in touch soon regarding booking arrangements. We did have some problems last year with Eventbrite so we could be changing to a different platform. Get these dates into your diary!

26th September	David Breeze	The Logistics of Agricola's Final Campaign
24th October	John Reid	The Archaeology of Conflict in Roman Britain
21st November	Paddy Lambert	The Weird and Wonderful Roman villa site at Priors Hall
12th December	Beccy Haslam	The Roman road Infrastructure in Southwark and Beyond: an Alternative Model
9th January	Susan Rands	Sustaining Cavalry Capability on the Northern Frontier
23rd January	Kris Lockyear	Mapping *Verulamium*
20th February	Alan Montgomery	The Road to *Mons Graupius*: A Journey Through Roman Scotland
24th April	Mike Luke	The Roman road Network associated with the Small Town at Sandy, Bedfordshire

We still have slots available in March if you'd like to help or if you know of a good speaker on a subject aligned with our interests please let me know.

Geophysics at Ad Pontem, Nottinghamshire

Our trolley has been busy across the summer surveying around the scheduled site to help analyse the road network particularly the newly spotted road RR59(x) described in *Itinera* Volume 1, p344-6. Preliminary results and a shot of the survey team are below. This survey may continue, get in touch if you'd like to be involved, you can see everyone is having a good time.

This survey also presented us with another opportunity. A number of our members are interested in dowsing and use it to aid their own research. However, previous claims made



Preliminary results of the geophysics survey near Ad Pontem, presented on a background image from GoogleEarth.



Some of the Ad Pontem survey team.

in the past by some dowsers claiming their results as 'evidence' have given it a poor reputation in archaeological circles. This site adjacent to *Ad Pontem* presented the opportunity for dowsing, with no preconceptions of what the site contained, ahead of the geophysics such that the two, placed alongside the lidar image and other more conventional information and could be compared. This has been completed and the results are currently being analysed. We will update you in the next edition.

Colchester to Mistley Road

Our very own Geoff Lunn has been involved in pre-development work across the apparent course of this road. While what may be roadside ditches were found, no substantive road structure was found leading to a supposition that the road may have realigned towards Salary Brook. A full report is available at http://cat.essex.ac.uk/reports/CAT-report-2033.pdf.

Itinera

We still have copies of our most recent edition, Volume 4, plus some copies of Volumes 2 and 3 for sale. If you would like a copy, order through our *Itinera* page, here. Our delivery Czar, Chris Webb, will be delighted to send these out to you. We are currently establishing what papers we will have for Volume 5. It is not too late to contribute something, please get in touch with the editor at itinera@romanroads.org.