ROMAN·ROADS·RESEARCH ASSOCIATION

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MILLE·VIAE·DUCUNT HOMINES PER· SECULA·ROMAM

From the Editor, Hannah Collingridge

Welcome to the another newsletter, with plenty to digest and chew over. Placename evidence reappears, and we have a search for those elusive things, bridges, or rather, hard evidence of remains of bridges that can be definitively classed as Roman.

What would our newsletter do without at least one contribution from David Ratledge? This edition has the benefit of two; further work in Hertfordshire plus some clarification of King Street in Derbyshire.

Volume V of *Itinera* is nearing being published, information about the Contents is shared in this edition.

Hope you enjoy, and remember to spread the word

Cheers, Han

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Hertfordshire – some Roman Road Updates

David Ratledge

Introduction

Following on from the 'A Hertfordshire Triangle' (Newsletter No.29) and 'RR163 St Albans to Silchester' (Newsletter No. 31), I also came across a few other updates when studying the lidar imagery for Hertfordshire. Two are simple short amendments and the third is an attempt to solve a puzzle.

The minor amendments are to Watling Street, RR1b and Ermine Street, RR2b. It might seem a bit presumptuous to question parts of these well established roads but it does appear that minor corrections are justified, one each for both of them.

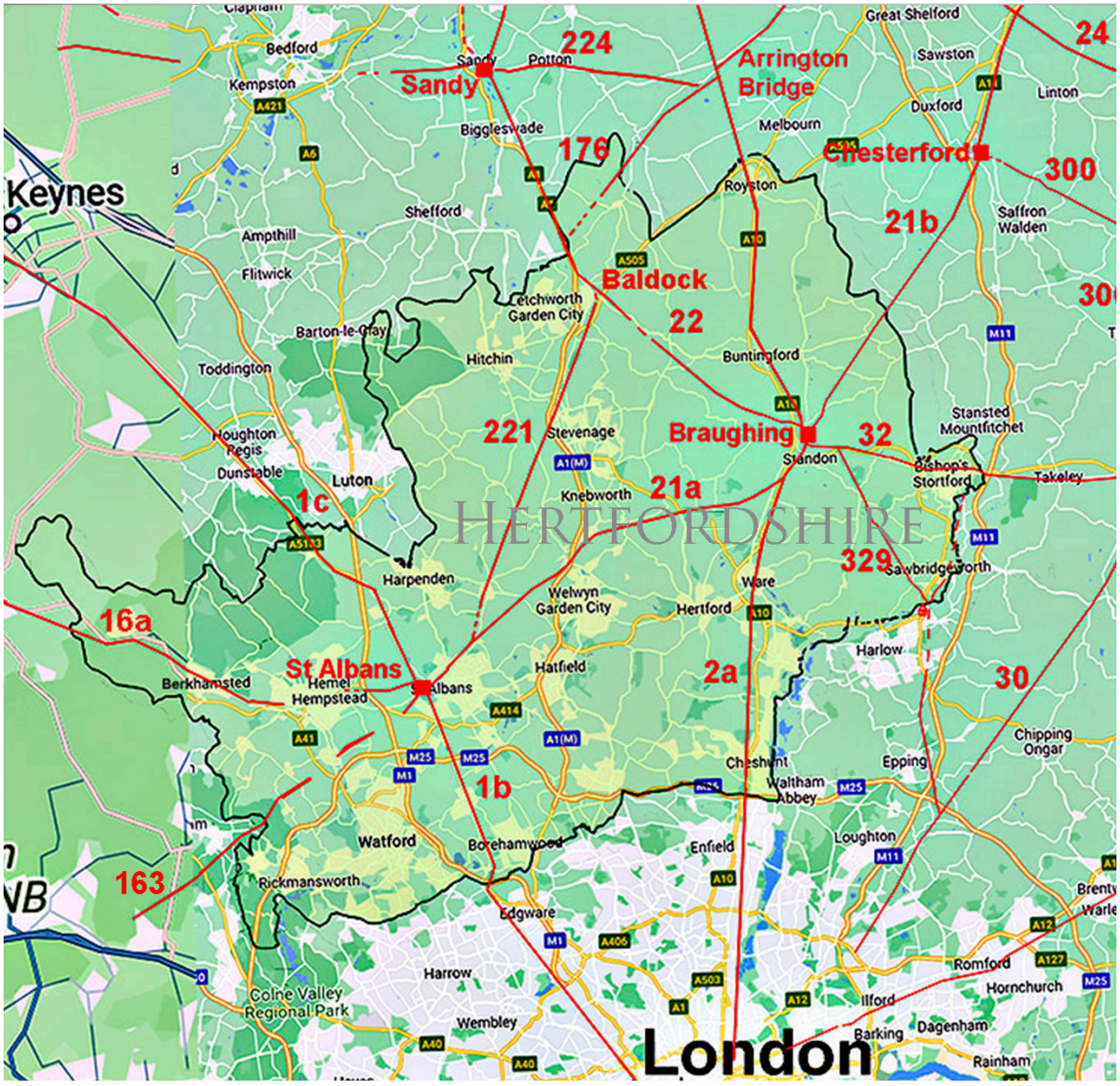


Fig. 1. The Roman roads of Hertfordshire. Lidar data is © Environment Agency copyright and/or database right 2024. All rights reserved. Inset: Location map - base map copyright Google 2024.

The puzzle refers to Akeman Street, RR 16a, and its initial course from St. Albans. There could well be a much more direct alternative to the route recorded by the Viatores.

Watling Street, RR1b, Elstree Hill

Heading south from St Albans the accepted line of Roman Watling Street is overlaid by the A5183 modern road. However, approaching Elstree Hill the modern road swings a little eastwards off a direct line (fig. 2). On the straight line though there is some evidence for an earlier road and again on the climb up the hill (fig. 3). Logically this would seem likely to be the original course of the road and therefore probably Roman. Presumably the route of the road was altered in more modern times to reduce the gradient up the hill.

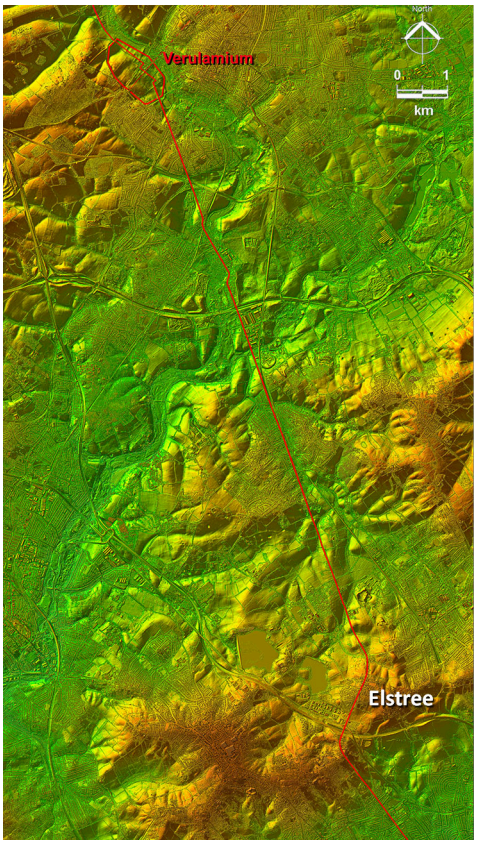
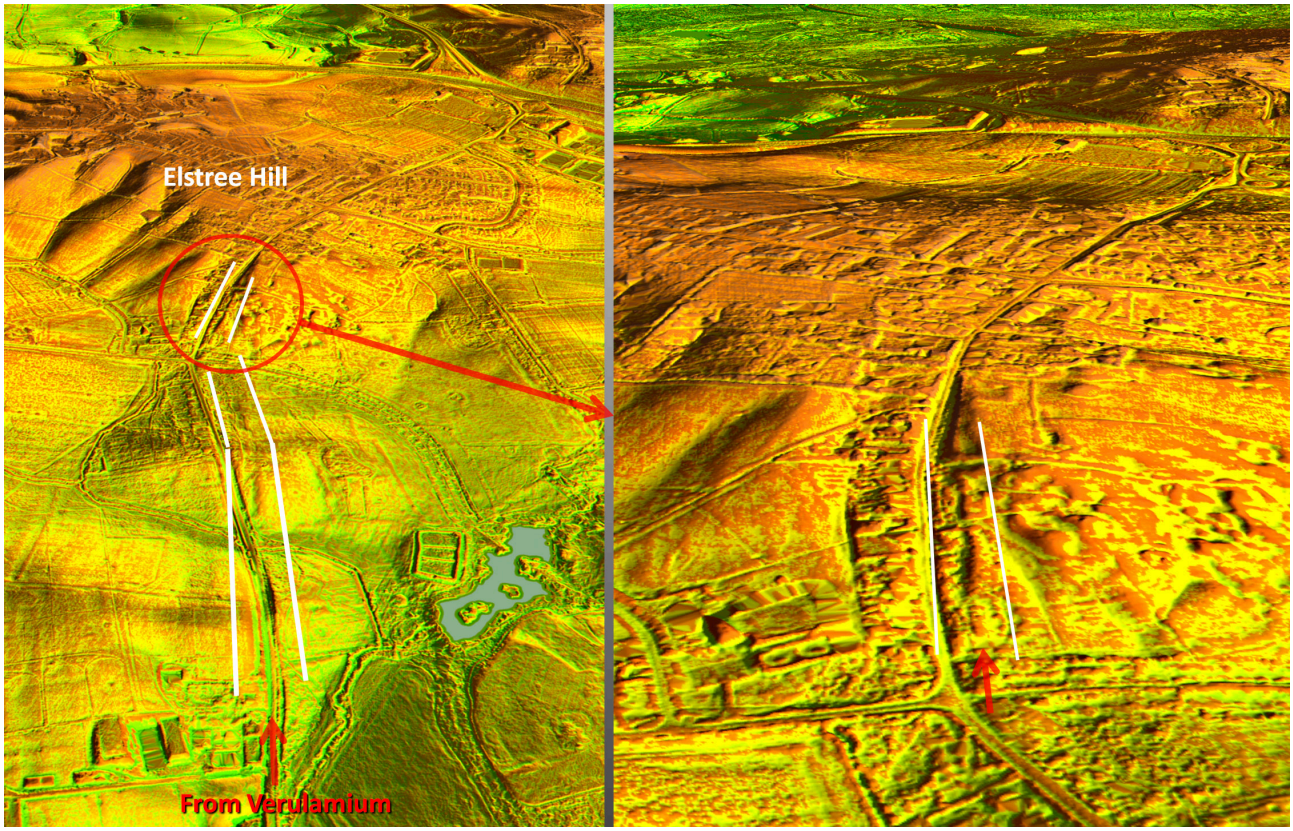


Fig. 2. (right) The route of Watling Street south of *Verulamium*. The slight eastward swing of the accepted route approaching Elstree Hill is just about evident.

Fig. 3. (below) Two oblique DTM lidar views of the ascent of Elstree Hill (looking south). On the inside of the bend are visible the traces of an earlier route, taken to be probably the original Roman course.

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Ermine Street, RR2a, Wormley

Travelling south from Braughing, the course of Ermine Street is well established and crosses the River Lea at Ware, where there was a small Roman settlement. South of there, passing Wormley, the traditional/HER route oddly dog-legs to the west. The reason for this appears to be down to an old track that branches off Ermine Street. This would be understandable if the road were angling down a slope but at this point it is not. What are visible there though are lidar clues suggesting that the road did not bend but the straight alignment continued straight-on. Admittedly the clues are intermittent but there are probably enough of them visible to support a straight alignment whereas on the HER line there is really nothing much at all (fig. 4). The two options merge before Cheshunt.

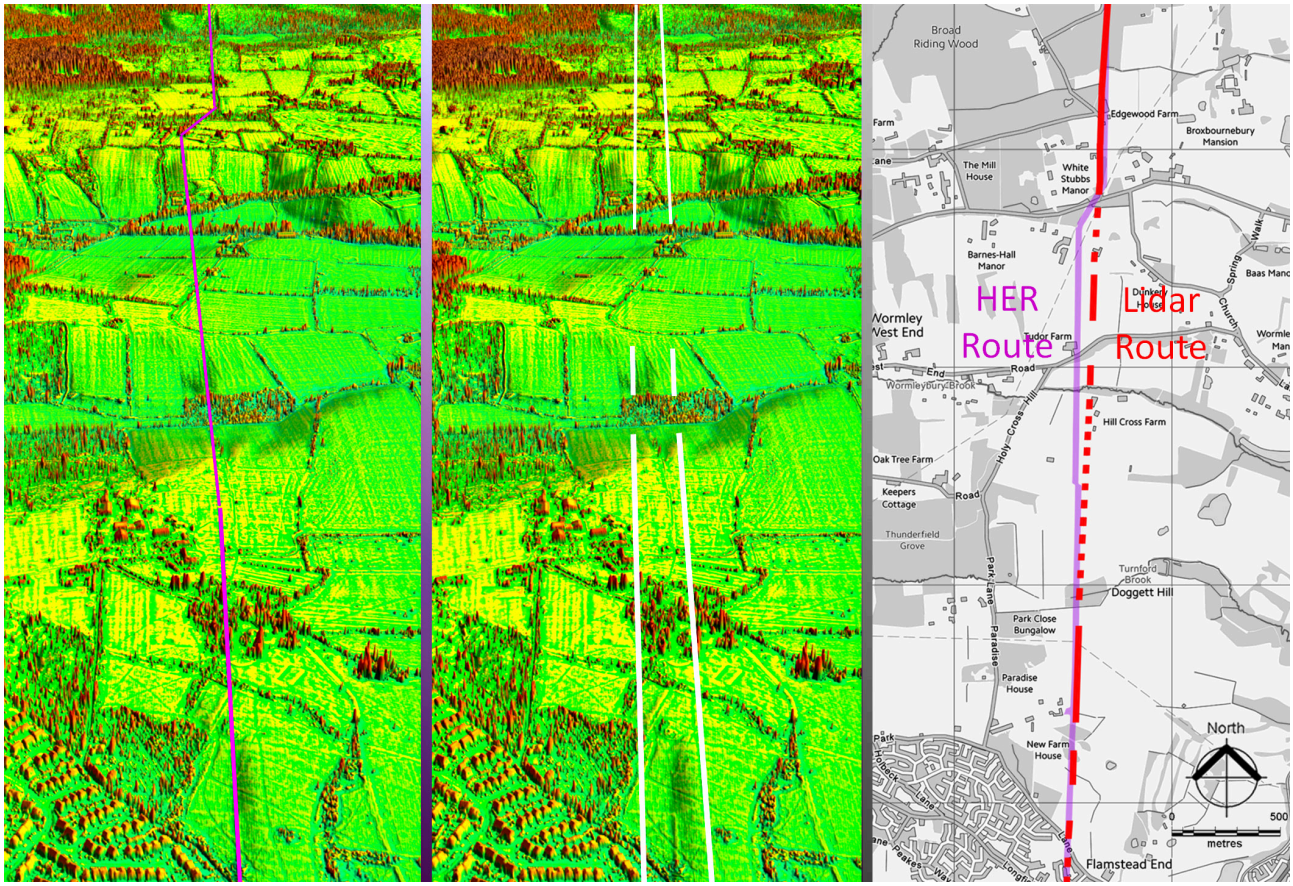


Fig. 4. Left – lidar view looking northwards from near Wormley. The traditional (HER) route is shown in magenta. Middle – same lidar images but with the evidence for the straight alignment highlighted. Right – OS opendata mapping of the area shown in the lidar images with both routes depicted. Base lidar data is © Environment Agency copyright and/or database right 2024. All rights reserved. Mapping contains Ordnance Survey data © Crown Copyright and database right, 2024.

Akeman Street, RR16a, St Albans to Bourne End

A very important route linking what were to become the second and third largest Roman cities in the country, i.e. Cirencester and St Albans (*Verulamium*). Despite this road's importance the section from *Verulamium* to Bourne End in the Bulbourne Valley is very uncertain although the route recorded by the Viatores was accepted by Margary. From Bourne End westwards it is very much an established route along the valleys. However, how the road got to Bourne End is the puzzle.

In general Akeman Street is very direct with long straight alignments and you would therefore expect the same for the *Verulamium* to Bourne End section. However, the Viatores route is anything but direct and takes just about the shortest route to the Bulbourne valley where it then has to make an almost right-angled turn to the north (fig. 6). It must be admitted though that the Viatores route to the valley does have some visible supporting lidar evidence for it (fig. 5). This route would perhaps make most sense if Akeman Street had originally continued south down the valley bypassing St Albans and the section from *Verulamium* was a link to it. However, despite searching for just such a road, no such onward course was detected.

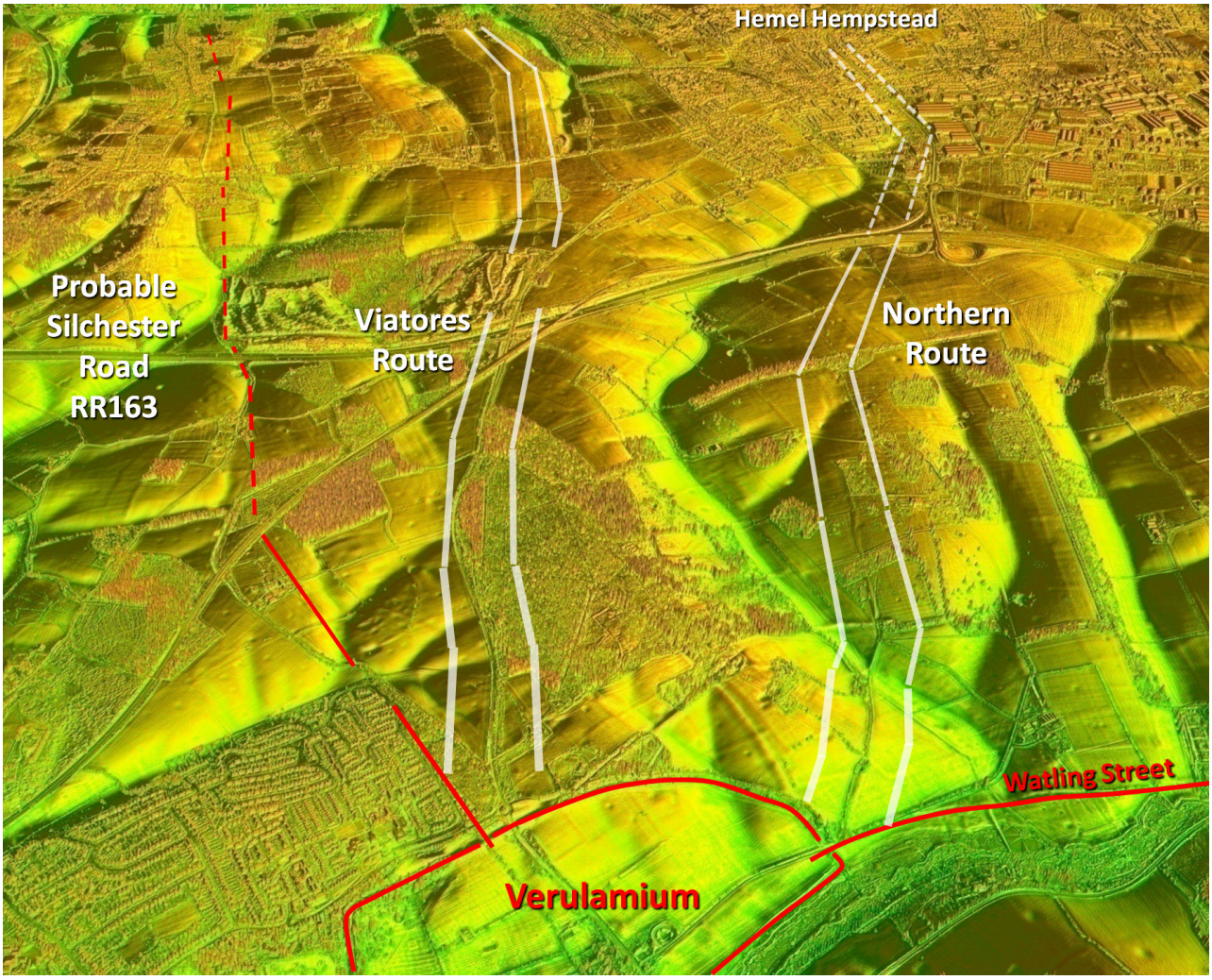


Figure 5. Oblique lidar image looking west from over *Verulamium*. Both options have clear visible evidence so from this view it is difficult to decide which is RR16a, the road to Cirencester.

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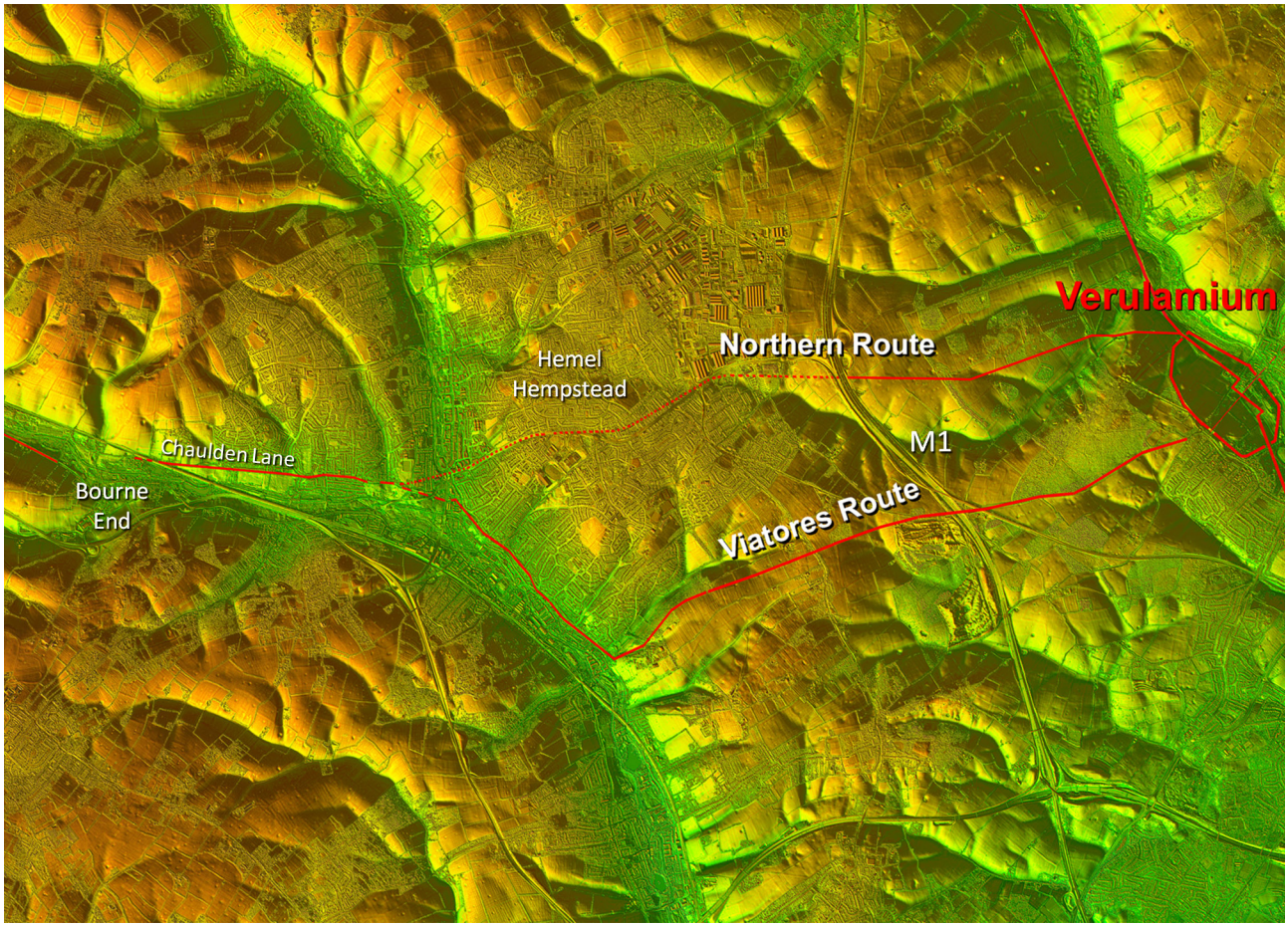


Figure 6. Lidar image for the section from *Verulamium* to Bourne End. The northern route is much more direct but the route across Hemel Hempstead, whilst logical, is speculative. The Viatores route, with that almost right-angled bend, looks very untypical for a Roman road.

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Is there a more direct alternative? From *Verulamium*'s north gate there is visible what appears to be a Roman road agger heading west passing Gorhambury Hall and can be traced to the M1 motorway. The final visible alignment of this would take the road into modern day Hemel Hempstead. However, with so much development there then there is no opportunity to follow the road further, at least using lidar. From a highway engineering perspective there is a practical route through the town to join the generally accepted alignment section on the town's west side. The obvious course would make use of natural valleys whilst still being fairly direct (fig. 6). The modern road down those valleys is called St Albans Road, probably a coincidence rather than a real clue. Whilst this suggested route is perfectly feasible it is of course very speculative.

The generally accepted route on the west side of Hemel Hempstead is approximated by Chaulden Lane. The road would have to change valley sides at or near Bourne End. There a couple of diagonal features that could indicate possible crossing options but there has been so much disturbance there it is difficult to form an opinion.

Of the two route options the northern one is much more direct and certainly the closest to a single straight alignment so typical of the rest of Akeman Street. It does though rely on speculation that the Roman road surveyor would have made use of the natural valleys in Hemel Hempstead. On balance though it is felt the more likely option than the indirect Viatores route.

References

Margary I. D., *Roman Roads in Britain*, 1957.

The Viatores, *Roman Roads in the South-East Midlands*, 1964.

Niblett R., *Roman Hertfordshire*, 1995.

Editors Note: When David wrote this piece, he was not aware that Mike Haken had indepentendtly come to very similar conclusions, which are included in the Hertfordshire section of Roman Roads in 2024 in *Itinera* V.

Discovering Roman Roads in Surrey to Facilitate the Identification of Settlement Sites

Chris Gibson

Abstract

This paper explains the work undertaken by members of Surrey Archaeological Society to identify a local Roman road network with a view to better identify where Roman settlement features might be located. The early results of this work in terms of the road network and settlement evidence of possible settlement features are described together with some incidental findings regarding both early Ordnance Survey (OS) mapping and the possible use of postholes in a road for some aspect of control.

Introduction

During the pandemic lockdown, the Roman Studies Group of the Surrey Archaeological Society initiated a series of Zoom meetings to address the paucity of Roman rural settlements identified within the county by comparison with adjacent counties. Members of the Group were allocated areas to address through reading reference books, studying maps and individual work on the ground. The author was allocated the rather wide area of the Borough of Waverley with Farnham on its western edge, and Ewhurst to the east, some 46km distant. Several candidate locations were identified on paper but subsequent enquiries with landowners who could provide access to potential sites left Ewhurst as the only viable candidate. It is a largely rural location but, with one exception, no particularly large individual holding of land. Thus far, 11 landowners have granted permission, covering the whole area in which we expect to work, and each has required careful discussion and understanding of how the archaeological investigation work would impact on the individual's land. The presence of livestock has also been a key consideration as health and safety requirements preclude work, or passing through to work, on land where livestock is present. Regular communication is required to maintain engagement and demonstrate how important the access is and has been. This is an often-underrated addition to the work of managing an archaeological process. A small core archaeological team came together and a key initial decision was made to start by trying to find any Roman roads in the vicinity as the road network was essential for the existence of settlements and therefore settlements would be more easily identifiable. This has indeed proved to be the case.

Getting the work started

The village of Ewhurst, Surrey was selected for this exercise due to the known Roman features in its vicinity. Ewhurst, a small village on the southern edge of Surrey, lies on Weald Clay up to 150 m OD with occasional outcrops of sandstone and patches of head, above which lies a narrow band of Atherfield Clay with Hythe Beds at the top of the Weald Escarpment from 190 m OD. All of the area of work discussed in this paper was conducted on Weald Clay.

RR151 runs across its south western edge. A single tile and brick kiln 100m north east of RR151 close to Wykehurst Farm was discovered and excavated in 1936 (Goodchild 1937) and a villa, Rapsley - named after the eponymous property where evidence of it was first found - and neighbouring bathhouse 400m north east of the kiln was discovered in 1957 and excavated over successive years until 1968 with a report published that year (Hanworth 1968). These features are shown on Figure 1.

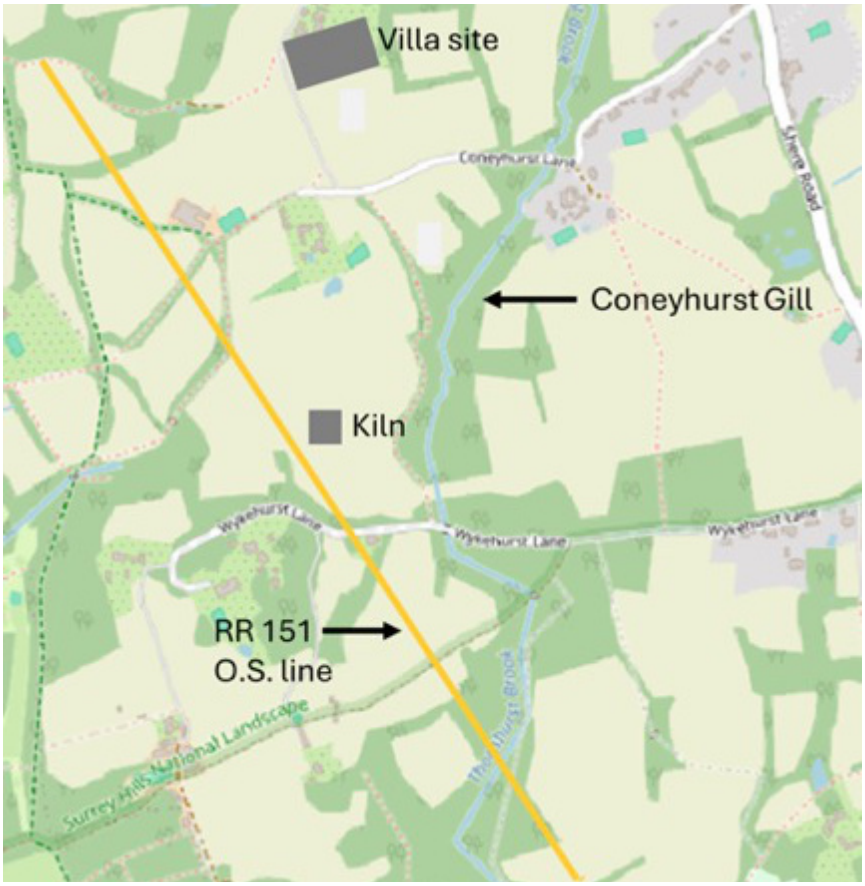


Fig. 1. The known Roman archaeological features before the current work was started. The RR151, the Wykehurst Farm kiln and the Rapsley villa.

RR151 branches off in a north westerly direction from the RR15 Chichester to London road 1.3 km north of the Alfoldean Roman station and 48 Km north east of Chichester. Investigations regarding RR151 have been reported on twice (Harrison 1874 and Winbolt 1924) and had previously been included in mapping work for the OS by the Royal Engineers in 1870 led by Captain Le Poer Trench (Ordnance Survey 1st 25" edition 1873). In each case the assumption made was that it was a road leading up the Weald escarpment to a temple site at Farley Heath – a length of 13 km.

A first step was to validate the presence of RR151 as it crossed the landscape. Lidar was unhelpful, as evidence of a road line on lidar stopped south east of the area that was being investigated. However, the 1873 OS map for the area included RR151 as a line from Rowhook to the supposed destination at Farley Heath and the line has continued to be used to the present day in OS maps of the area. It was therefore decided to use the OS line to locate RR151 on the ground – starting with Great Wickfield, a large field with 200m of road running through its length - based on the map co-ordinates. However, the road was not present where expected for reasons that have become evident subsequently and are explained later in this paper.

An alternative was to use magnetometry, and subsequently resistivity, across a large proportion of the field in the hope that the gullies either side of the road and the roads themselves respectively would contain enough material to show on the resultant picture and thus reveal the true line of the road. There was no evidence of any road in the magnetometry results. The results of resistivity, conducted over a smaller area, were also inconclusive.

A further approach was to use manual probe bars working in pairs across a field to locate the road. The pointed, 1 cm thick, iron bars are 1.2m long with a cushioned T -bar to provide pressure and are capable of reaching a 50 cm depth with a reasonable adult pressure and in damp soil conditions. With experience, the sound of an iron bar making contact with stone is an unmistakable "clang" and unlikely to be confused with hitting a thick root, "thud", or merely gravel giving off a grating

sound. Working in pairs 1 m apart, across a defined area probing every 50cm provides a better chance of not missing any positive hits in the right area and having a probe partner also getting similar hits in that area provides more confidence over the correct area to select to make a trial trench to validate the results. The paucity of natural stones in an area of Weald Clay means that there are likely to be few false positive hits.

In the subject area, the stone surfaces are typically 25 cm below the surface, which is penetrable even in dryer soil conditions. Thus, probing as described has proved to be an extremely reliable method of locating road and potential settlement features and is now the search method of choice for the team.

Excavated Sections of RR151 Located by Probing

Some of the land under review belonged to a working farm and access for sufficient periods of time to undertake the work was dependant on the availability of the land in terms of the presence of livestock. This dictated the selection of fields for probing work and the length of time available for excavation.

The probing work commenced in Great Wickfield as it was thought to have the greatest chance of success of locating the road in view of the length of the field to find it in. An RR151 section was successfully identified with the probing followed by digging trial trenches and a line established by probing further from the trial trenches in both directions. This line was projected across the Ewhurst area to help assess where best to validate the line in the light of the availability of landowner permissions and livestock considerations. The order of the validation work was decided as: Wykehurst, Great Wickfield and Upper Canfold Wood. These three areas, covering some 1.6km north of previously recorded road excavations, were selected and the work was conducted in 2022, 2023 and 2024.

Wykehurst



Fig. 2 This shows RR151 at Wykehurst. The road here was 3.6m wide and generally 20 cm thick; it lay on natural clay. Most of the stones were of sandstone with around 10% being chert. TQ 08076 40678.



Figure 3. The central part of the road at Wykehurst in section.

In an apparently seamless join to the road was an area, initially some 7.1m wide, which was substantially robbed further on and then gradually petered out. However, the mix of the sandstone and chert was noticeably different. The most recent fieldwork has indicated that a second road coming from the south west joined RR151 at exactly the spot where the excavation was taking place which would explain the additional width.

Great Wickfield

Some 800 m north west of the Wykehurst trench is a large field known as Great Wickfield which was excavated (and backfilled!) in very wet weather. The road here was 3.1m wide (although probably wider when built), up to 25cm thick and a mix of approximately 90% sandstone and 10% chert. Either side of the road were:

- a layer of smaller stones forming a gravel pavement,

- roadside gullies and:

- side ditches some 9.6m apart.



Fig. 4 (above) aerial view of the Great Wickfield trench. TQ 07633 41360

Fig. 5 (below) Great Wickfield section with much larger stones in this length of road which was on wetter ground than elsewhere. A crowbar was needed to remove the stones!



Upper Canfold Wood

This site is the most southerly of the three and lies some 800m south east of Wykehurst. It is immediately south of a hill which offers a steep ascent on the line of the RR151 followed by the crossing of a deeply cut stream known as Coneyhurst Gill and a stiff ascent on the far side of the crossing to regain height.

Over 2023 and 2024 two trenches were opened with help from students of the Sayers Croft Outdoor Centre, Ewhust as part of their Duke of Edinburgh Gold Award syllabus which involves one week of archaeological work and was supervised by the author and Surrey Archaeological Society members. The trenches were placed 10m apart to help assess the direction the road took to traverse the hill and approach to the crossing.

The excavated road is 3.7m wide and up to 35cm thick in the centre of the northerly section but more generally 15cm as shown in Fig 7. The stones comprised around 67% sandstone and 33% chert, a much higher proportion of the latter than on the other two sites.



Fig. 6 The two trenches at Upper Canfold Wood. TQ 08315 40242



Fig. 7 Upper Canfold Wood. A quite variable thickness of the remaining stones.

Was this a longer distance route?

The construction quality of RR151 led the author to believe that, rather than terminating at the escarpment-top temple site of Farley Heath, RR151 could indeed be a longer distance road, with Wickham Bushes, Dorchester on Thames and even Alchester as possible destinations on the same line from Rowhook. Winbolt (Winbolt, 1923) suggested a route from Shoreham on the Sussex coast up to Rowhook which would have enhanced the possible usefulness of the overall route but no evidence - beyond his understanding that King John made a journey from Knepp Castle, West Sussex (on the putative route from the coast) to Guildford in one day in 1215 (Winbolt, 1924) which would suggest a fairly direct and good quality route - has yet been adduced to validate this suggestion. A separate project has commenced on determining the destination of RR151 beyond Farley Heath but is not covered in this paper.

Identifying a Secondary Road

The author considered that, as the villa and bathhouse were 400m distant from RR151, a road or track to connect them to it was highly likely. A sandstone quarry, Pitch Hill, on the top of the Weald Escarpment some 700m north of the villa, was thought by the author to be the source of stone for RR151 as the nearest known source of stone. Thus, a connection would be required.

There are numerous iron ore minepits along the northern edge of the Weald Clay layer about 200m distant from the villa. This would also suggest a need to transport either the raw material or the

results of processing the ore and the presence, in close proximity, of a field named on the 1839 Tithe Apportionments as Devil's Oven is highly suggestive of a historic memory of ore processing.

The west gate of Rapsley villa had been located during the 1960's excavations. This was thought by the author to open onto a track or road and this could be the key to locating the connection to RR151. So it was decided in November 2023 to probe in the field, Middle Meadow, on a north south line west of the gate location. There were a number of false positives but eventually the surface of a road with side gullies was exposed. Two further trenches were opened in that field to expose the road, sufficient for identification and to establish its line.

During 2024 further sections of road have been excavated on a broadly consistent line towards RR151. Two trenches in close proximity were opened in August 2024 in Upper Canfold Wood which were expected to be within 20m of RR151 so the junction could then be exposed. However, the orientation of the exposed secondary road shows that it instead turned in a south easterly direction (fig. 8) almost in parallel with RR151 instead of making a junction there. At the time of writing the location of the junction of the two roads remains unclear as access to the fields necessary for the assessment has been restricted due to the presence of livestock.

It is possible in the author's view that the secondary road was used to transport sandstone to a putative construction camp for RR151 shown as X in Figure 9. In this scenario it is quite possible that the secondary road was actually built first and thus required its own bridge crossing over Coneyhurst Gill before that for RR151 was constructed.

The presence of two roads in close proximity also raised questions over the accuracy of the line of RR 151 as shown on OS maps since 1897 and discussed below.



Fig. 8. The secondary road entering Upper Canfold Wood. Heading south westerly in a straight line, it would have joined RR151 here but, instead, the road swings to the south east and runs parallel with RR151, possibly to a construction camp. TQ 08221 40439.

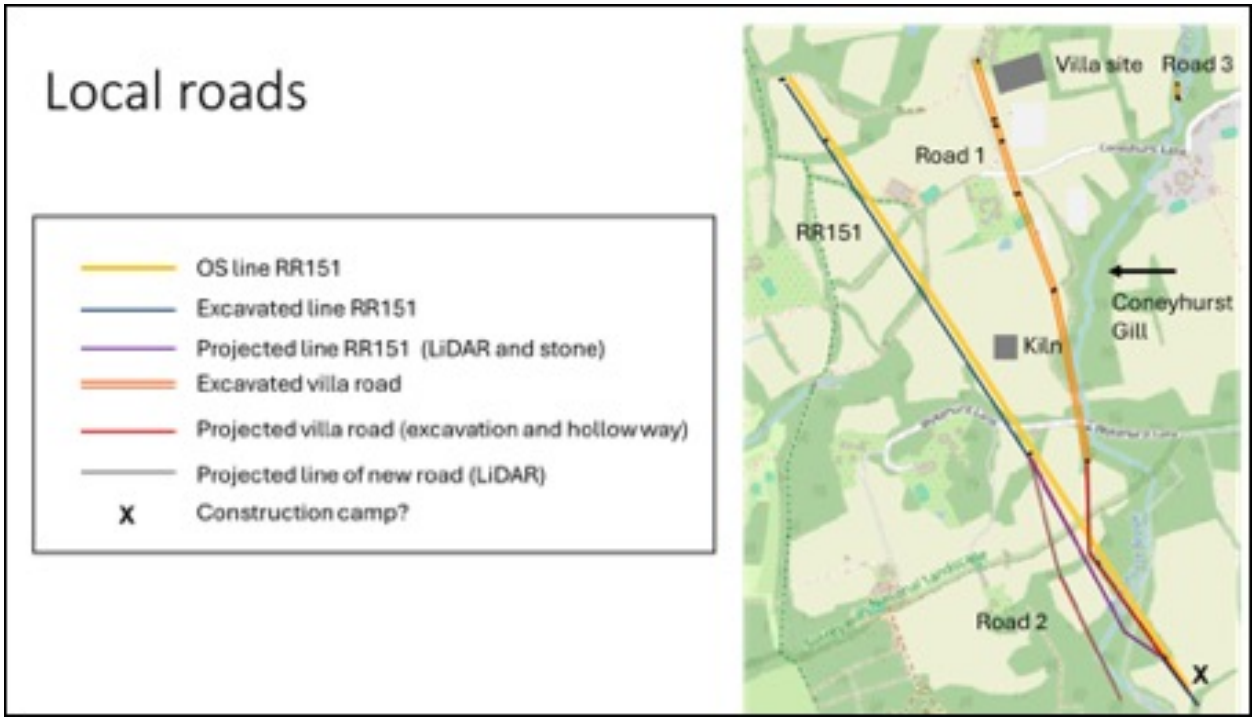


Fig. 9. Roads in the area that have been validated (RR151 in purple and blue) or discovered (all others).

North of the west gate of the villa, one section of road has been excavated 50m distant, just in front of a Tudor barn on an identical orientation, suggesting that the road provided hardstanding for its floor and end walls. 150m further north, traces of the road have been found under a hedgeline and further north up the Escarpment, towards the Pitch Hill sandstone quarry, the line has yet to be located and excavated.

Some 400m east of Rapsley villa and close to a crossing point of the Gill, a section of road that has some Roman characteristics, such as large edge stones and a similar width to the other known Roman roads in the vicinity, was located and excavated in mid-2024. Its provenance and destination are not yet clear but the author believes that this discovery will open up a new area for fruitful investigation.

Finally, very recent fieldwork has identified another road approaching from the south west which appears to merge with RR151 at Wykehurst, which almost certainly accounts for the additional width of metalling found there in 2022.

The current overall position of roads either validated or discovered is set out in fig. 9.

Identification of Settlement Features

The villa was expected to have agricultural buildings in the vicinity so the field, Middle Meadow, below the villa was explored in 2023 using magnetometry. It identified features that the author believes to be elements of a farmyard including a possible large threshing floor and one other ancillary farm building (Building 1 in Figure 10).

During 2023 and 2024 a number of other features were located slightly further away from the villa site, some of which were substantial, but the current lack of dating evidence means that they cannot categorically be linked with the villa site. However, the most substantial feature (50m x



Fig. 10. The area with all the possible settlement features located up to end 2024.

25m) that was partially excavated (Building 2 in Figure 10) appeared to the author to be some form of accommodation for livestock.

Further, Coneyhurst Gill runs through the area and it is highly likely that the villa owners would have made use of the strong water flow, primarily for milling. Various features including a water channel capturing the initial flow of the Gill leading to a large sunken stone lined tank (15m x 7.5m) have been found within this waterscape which have proven difficult to date due to the absence of finds.

As at the end of 2024 the map of the area (Figure 10) has been populated with the additional features that have been found since the start of the project and, undoubtedly, this will expand.

The OS Mapping Work of 1870

The Royal Engineers conducting the 1870 survey worked from south to north from the start point of RR151 at Rowhook. Fig. 11 below shows the line of what the Royal Engineers thought was RR151 running through Upper Canfold Wood as shown on the OS 1897 publication of the 25" to one mile map.

The OS line continues, crossing Coneyhurst Gill and then uses the known exposed section of secondary road (fig. 8 above), whereas RR151 is 15 m west of this. As shown in fig. 11, rather than

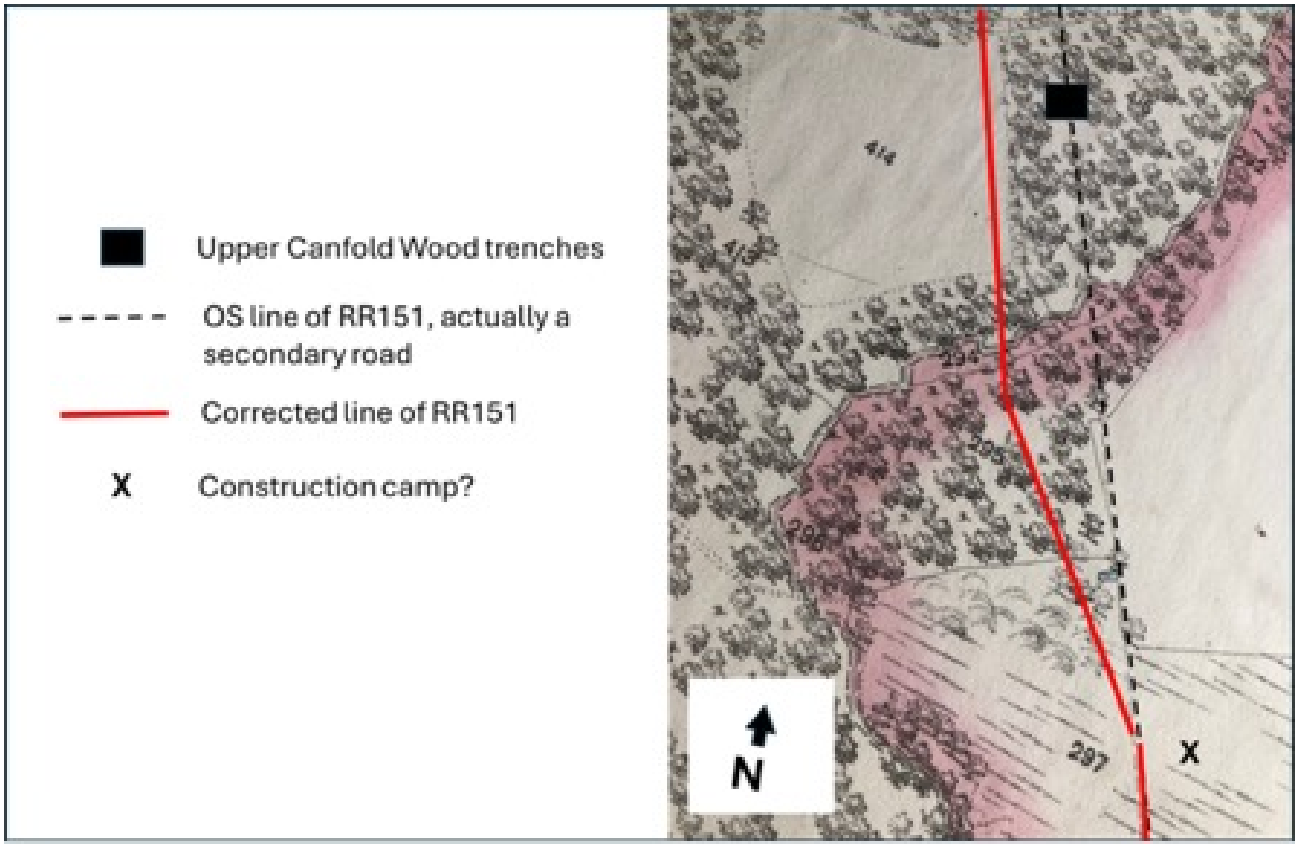


Fig. 11. As shown in this picture of the 25" to one mile OS map, the Royal Engineers traced RR151 northwards across a marshy area, and then erroneously followed the secondary road along the edge of Upper Canfold Wood, across Coneyhurst Gill and then through the Wood to the area shown in fig. 8.

following the hedge line in the field as suggested by the OS line, RR151 can in fact be seen some 15m west of the OS line of the road and heading in a slight north west direction into Upper Canfold Wood. Based on their respective work tracing RR151, both Clark (2004) and Winbolt (1924) considered, also erroneously, that RR151 initially ran straight within Upper Canfold Wood and then joined the OS line on the north side of Coneyhurst Gill.

The OS map then projects this now erroneous line across the landscape for 1.5 km until it changes course and corrects itself in relation to a known lane along which RR151 ran. All the trenches from this current project that have exposed RR151 have been about 15 – 20 m west of the OS line which accounts for the archaeology team's initial inability to find RR151 using OS co-ordinates for its line. The error seems to have occurred where the two roads possibly meet or are very close in the putative construction camp in the area marked X on Figure 11 and the Royal Engineers erroneously followed the straight line of the secondary road from that point as they would not be aware that there was a second road in existence and RR151 had veered off to the north west. As they only checked for the road's continued existence in ditches and field edges (Fig. 12) they would not necessarily have noticed that the construction quality of the road they were now following had become significantly inferior.

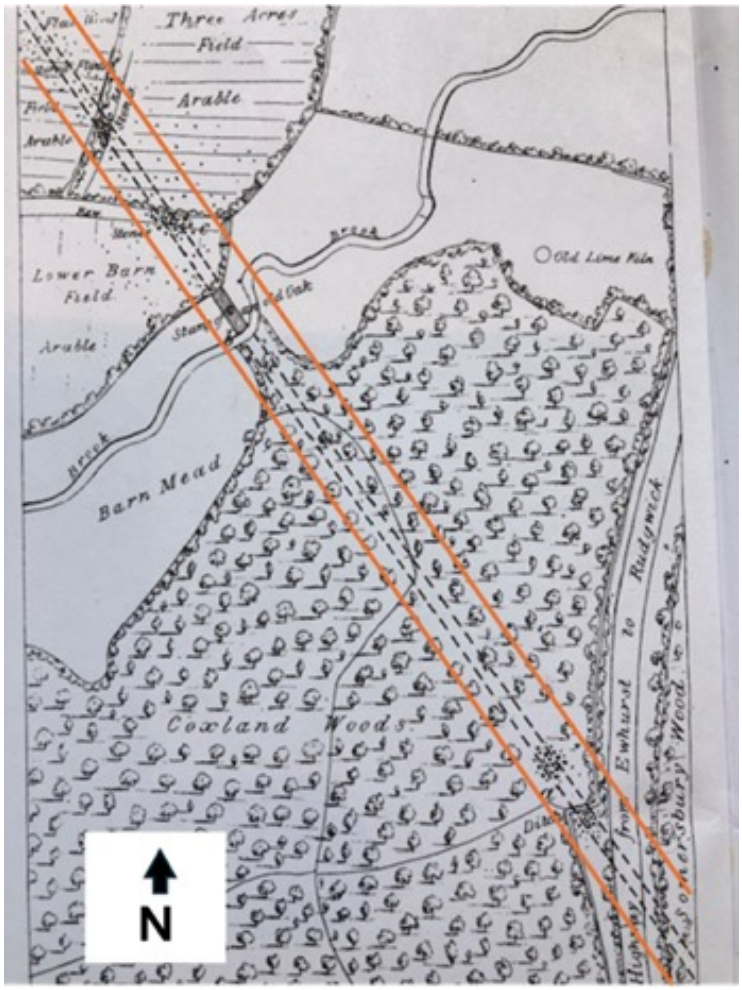


Fig. 12 This is the only evidence that appears to have survived from the 25" to one mile 1870 surveying work by the Royal Engineers. It was a copy of an actual page sent to J.P. Harrison to demonstrate the detail of the Royal Engineers' work and is included in his paper on RR151 (Harrison, 1874). The author understands from the National Archives that the entire set of mapping papers was destroyed in the Second World War.

Traffic Management

Whilst excavating RR151 at the foot of a short but steep hill, two possible postholes were noticed approximately one third and two thirds respectively across the road surface (fig. 13).



Fig. 13. A pair of possible postholes across the central part of RR151 on the flat before the ascent of a steep hill and other vehicular challenges. TQ 08315 40242

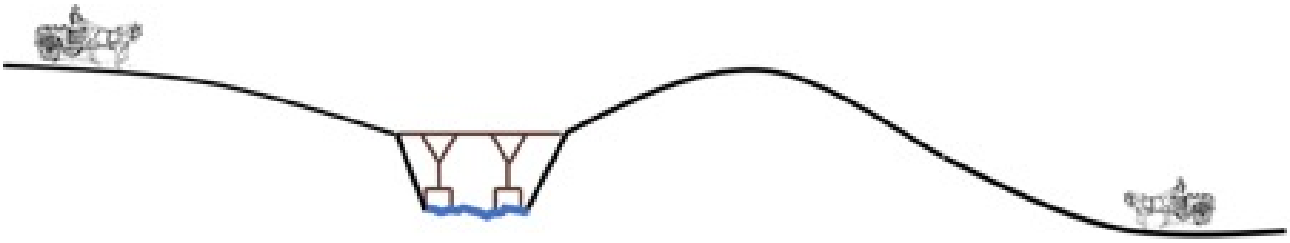


Fig.14. A side view of the series of vehicular challenges that a form of traffic management would alleviate.

Fig. 14 is a schematic version of the topography of the 450m of the believed course of the road north west of the trench – the sharp rise up the hill, which is a blind summit, followed by a drop to a bridge crossing over a deeply cut ravine and a steep rise from the bridge to regain a flat terrain.

Unregulated, this length of road could have given rise to significant difficulties encountering oncoming traffic with heavy loads. Passing places could help but a blind summit leaves the drivers unaware of other traffic.

It is possible that the postholes represent some form of traffic regulation feature such as a controlled barrier. This scenario could require postholes at both ends of the length of road and some form of management around it. It has not been possible yet to locate and excavate sections of the road at the immediate other end of this series of difficult vehicular challenges. It would be very fortunate indeed to locate a section that had the postulated other set of postholes.

It would be interesting to learn of other incidences of postholes in roads and the possible reasons for them. As postholes would not be expected on a road excavation, it is probably very easy to miss them, assuming the holes to be a damaged road surface or poor repairs.

Summary

This is a long-term project, examining the role played by the Roman road network in what appears to the author to be a large agricultural estate. A good deal of work has been done over the three years of the project thus far in terms of discovery. There is far more to do in terms of locating both settlement features and the roads connecting them, together with understanding their relationship with a "main road', or several, running past the estate. Interesting topics for Roman road enthusiasts on this site include the possibility of the estate providing stone for the construction of RR151 at a putative construction camp and the possible use of postholes on RR151 to regulate traffic over a stretch of difficult road features.

Acknowledgements

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made many helpful suggestions. Adrian Hall also very kindly produced the mapping for the project and for this paper.

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Romans and Saxons near the South Coast

Anthony Durham

Introduction

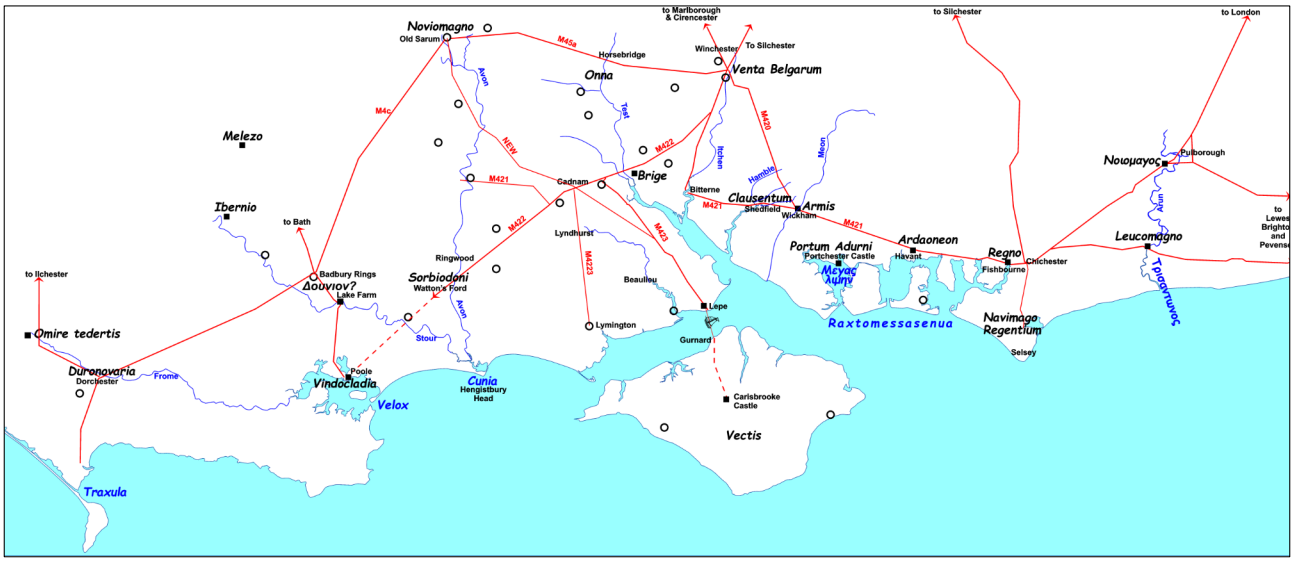
Portchester Castle, at the back of Portsmouth Harbour, is my favourite example of Roman engineering still visible in Britain today. Google Earth offers this aerial view and Google Streetview offers a walking tour outside its Roman wall



Little archaeology survives from Roman times inside the long perimeter wall, but it is reasonable to guess that around AD 400 some cavalry and their horses lived at Portchester, because the *Notitia Dignitatum* reported that a *numerus exploratorum* 'company of scouts' was based at Portum Adurni 'port a-hidden'. What prompts this article now is that the Portchester area seems to have been important in the birth of Anglo-Saxon England out of Roman Britannia around AD 500.

In November I gave a short talk in Lewes about Roman geography around the Solent, which was illustrated by the map below (higher-resolution version downloadable from here), where Roman roads are in red (and dashed if hypothetical), names are in italics if Roman, and rivers and ports are in blue.

Name-to-place assignments on this map are the best that I can offer in 2025, after a childhood on the Isle of Wight plus some exposure to the adjacent mainland and a recent decade working on Roman proper names. In this region, useful information comes from all the main textual sources



(Ptolemy's *Geography*, Antonine *Itinerary*, Ravenna Cosmography, *Notitia Dignitatum*, etc), plus a little help from name survivals, whereas elsewhere a single textual source and/or military inscriptions often dominate.

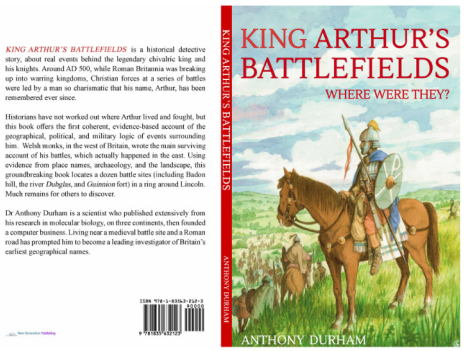
Few name meanings and locations are ever truly certain, but nothing on this map should be condemned as heresy just because something different has been accepted for decades. Many widely repeated name explanations are nonsense, mainly because it used to be customary to liken ancient name elements to words in medieval Welsh and Irish texts while ignoring better candidates in Latin and Greek, or even Old English. My www.romaneranames.uk website tries to set out all relevant evidence and welcomes suggestions for improvements.

Roman roads, with details taken from Ivan Margary's book plus later sources, provide a framework for this map. Yet they were only part of Britain's early transport network, arguably less important than travel on water. Nodes of the network with names that have survived in Roman sources were mostly where roads met water. The map also draws upon recent archaeological discoveries, locations of some pre-Roman hill-forts from www.megalithic.co.uk, and information on early river names, notably from Ekwall (1928).

To bring in more evidence, I paid attention to early post-Roman events in this area, and was amazed as they gradually took over as a focus for this article. The key source is the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, whose compilers (working for King Alfred in about AD 890) seem to have had only fragmentary information about events four centuries earlier. They filled in gaps imaginatively, as in the obviously ludicrous assertion that Portsmouth was founded by a man called Port.

Modern historians have not properly recognised that almost all early post-Roman proper names in the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* and some in its Welsh counterpart, *Historia Brittonum*, are essentially geographical, even if they are presented as belonging to persons, not places. Altogether, they add up to about a hundred names, in a scrambled mess that I have spent years trying to understand, by dogged map reading and studying how words and names change over the centuries.

The first part of Britain where I made progress in understanding early post-Roman conflict is around Lincoln. This is where a warrior called Arthur led Christian forces of the Romano-British establishment in battles against uppity coastal rebels led by imported pagan Germans. Much delayed by the pandemic, my book is now out: King Arthur's Battlefields: Where Were They? The historical Arthur was not a king, but even a dead serious book needs a catchy title.



East Yorkshire, across the Humber estuary from Lincolnshire, played a key role in post-Roman events. I realised this while reviewing a book for this newsletter in 2019. In King Arthur's Wars, Jim Storr, a retired soldier, looks at the hundreds of ditch-and-bank earthworks (Devil's Dyke, Wansdyke, Grim's Ditch, etc) that often interrupt Roman roads or other routes across Britain. In east Yorkshire, earthworks seem to spread out, like ripples on a pond, from a nucleus near Bridlington (Roman *Praetorio*, Anglian *Hypwinesfleot*).

Storr describes Dark-Age earthworks as an elephant in the room for modern British archaeology. Dyke construction was managed by men who thought like experienced Roman engineers and may have served in a late-Roman army. We know only a few names of military commanders in post-Roman Britain (Stilicho, Vortigern, Hengist, Ambrosius Aurelianus, Arthur, etc), but they probably all considered themselves to be as Roman as Constantine or Caracalla, and used much the same skills as the men who built roads, granaries, or Hadrian's Wall.

Storr thinks that the classic story of the Adventus Saxonum has a core of truth. History books rely heavily on this passage from the Venerable Bede, here translated into English from its original Latin:

> AD 449... *the race of the Angles or Saxons, invited by Vortigern, came to Britain in three warships and by his command were granted a place of settlement in the eastern part of the island ... They came from three very powerful Germanic tribes, the Saxons, Angles, and Jutes. The people of Kent and the inhabitants of the Isle of Wight are of Jutish origin ... Their first leaders are said to have been two brothers, Hengist and Horsa.*

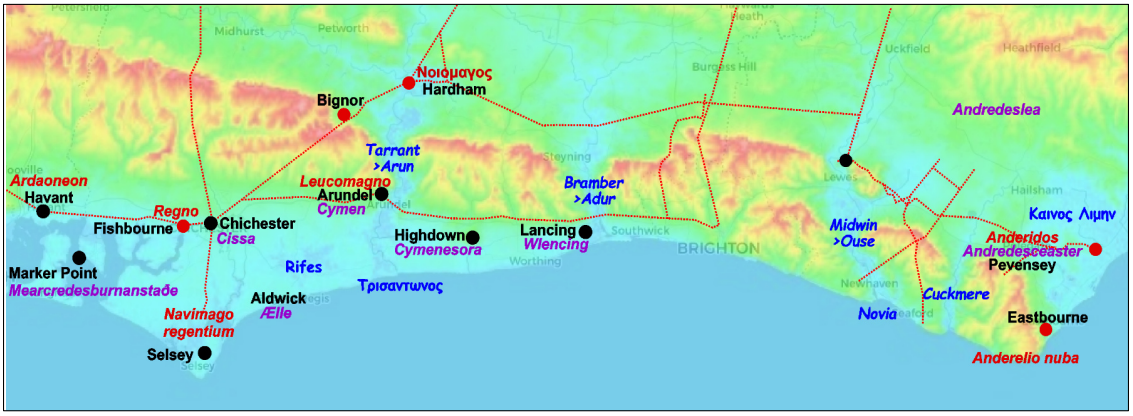
It is usually assumed that the Anglo-Saxon revolt started in Kent, but east Yorkshire is more likely. Bede definitely thought that *Cantuarii* meant 'people of Kent' and *Victuarii* meant 'people of the Isle of Wight', but he never travelled far from his base on Tyneside, and could not know that **cant* and **wiht* describe landscape features that occur repeatedly and contribute to many names. In Kent or Wight there is no valid evidence for any presence of "Jutes", the usual translation of Bede's Iuti, which may make best sense translated as Goths.

For detailed logic and evidence about the names and places involved, see my article 'Hengist was a Yorkshireman' in East Yorkshire Historian, which can be downloaded from here. Storr explains that the kingdom of Deira began in east Yorkshire, with a defensible core in the huge promontory fort around Flamborough Head bounded by Danes Dyke. Importantly, he argues that conflict there was between several Germanic groups, not the grand Celtic–Germanic struggle that is usually suggested.

Near the historic border of Kent (and my home) is Crayford, which is often claimed, wrongly, to be the site of the AD 457 battle of *Crecganford*. However, near there is an earthwork called *Faesten Dic*, whose shape suggests that the Kent side needed to defend against aggression from the London side. That was a puzzle until Storr's book came out.

A similar picture emerges not far from Cambridge, where a sequence of four dykes (diagram here) block the Icknield Way. Storr interprets them as telling a story of prolonged attacks from the core of Britannia (around *Verulamium*) towards Norfolk (old Iceni territory), which broke through three defensive lines until they were finally stopped by the monster Devil's Dyke near Newmarket.

The post-Roman kingdom of Sussex grew up in a strip along the south coast between Chichester and Pevensey, which was cut off from the rest of Britain by forest (the Weald) and by dykes that cut the main Roman road from London and other routes over the South Downs. In the map below, names are black if modern, red if Roman, purple if Saxon, and blue if watery, on a base layer taken from www.topographic-map.com. A higher-resolution version is downloadable from here.



The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle supplies names of four men who founded Sussex – *Ælle*, *Cissa*, *Cymen*, and *Wlencing* – who may personify four centres of population. Everyone agrees that *Wlencing* matches modern Lancing, though the linguistic link of Old English *wlencu* 'pride' to modern English 'flank' and 'lynchet' is complex. *Cissa* matches modern Chichester, whose Roman name is unknown, but its Saxon name was *Cissaceaster*. Graeco-Latin *κισσος/cissos* 'ivy' would be an apt metaphor for the network of streams across the coastal plain near there.

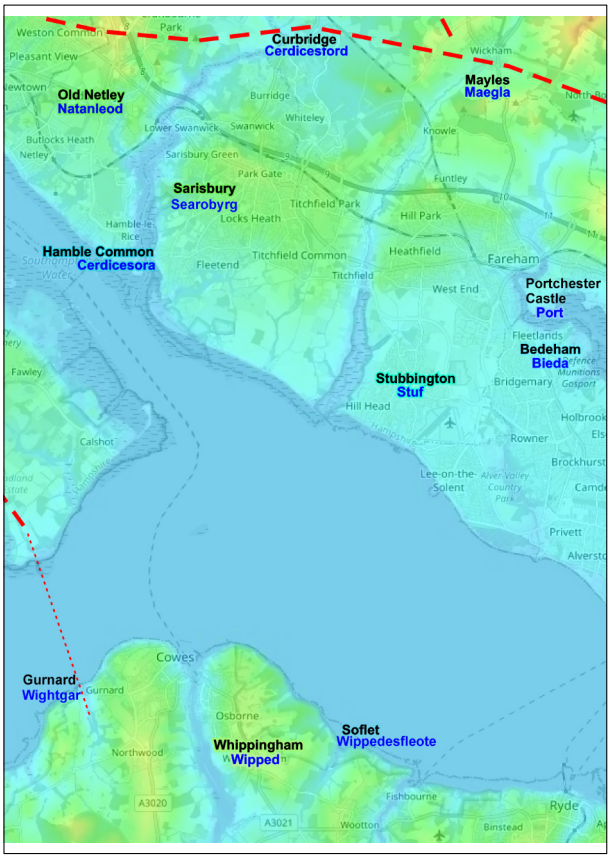
Ælle may match modern Aldwick, next to Bognor and backed by a region of small rivers. He had a namesake *Ælle* 400 years later, in Northumberland, near Alnwick on the river Aln. Many modern place and river names contain Al- or El- that may be a surviving stump of *Alauna*, which was an extremely common name in Roman times for smallish, nurturing rivers.

Cymen was Old English for 'cumin' and other spice plants. Many places owe their names to plants. One plant that still grows wild along the Sussex coast and tastes a bit like cumin is fennel, while Arundel (formerly *Harhundelle*) is named from the medicinal herb horehound.

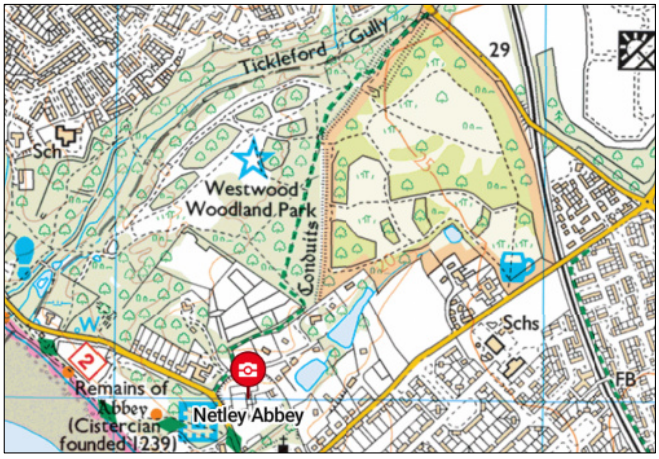
The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle says that those four founders of Sussex came to Britain by ship in AD 477 at *Cymenesora*, which may fit Highdown Hill, the traditional burial place of the kings of Sussex. It also says that the kingdom of Wessex began in AD 495 when Cerdic and his son Cynric landed by ship at *Cerdicesora*. That name ending -ora is usually said to mean 'seashore' but actually means 'rise' more generally.

The birth of the kingdom of Wessex is associated with a rich cast of names, some ostensibly of persons (*Bieda, Maegla, Natanleod, Port, Stuf, Wihtgar, Wipped*), some of places (*Cerdicesford, Cerdicesleag, Natanleaga, Wihtgarabyrg*). They all plausibly link to place names in Hampshire, as shown on the map below of the area around the Solent, whose base layer is also taken from www.topographic-map.com. A higher-resolution version is downloadable from here.

Cerdic's name is often claimed (probably wrongly) to be a version of Caratacus and therefore to suggest that he came from a "Celtic" family. In fact, Cerdic is Old English for 'curved ditch', and there is a curved ditch in exactly the right place, protecting a promontory fort (shown in a lidar image posted online by Simon Terrey) at Hamble Common, where the river Hamble enters Southampton Water. This is a strong candidate to be *Cerdicesora*.



The river Hamble has not previously stood out among more than 30 estuaries usable by small boats in the wider Solent area as possibly associated with Cerdic and the Roman–Saxon transition. To its east, Sarisbury fits *Searobyrg*, where Cynric fought a battle in AD 552 (much better than the usual guess, Old Sarum). Upstream, where the road from *Clausentum* to *Venta Belgarum* crossed the river, *Cerdicesford* may be at modern Curbridge. Just off the map, *Cerdicesleah* may be at modern Curdridge.



Modern Netley has long been likened to *Natanleod* (possibly meaning 'wetland people'), killed by Cerdic and Cynric in AD 508 according to the Chronicle. That may explain the defensive earthwork running towards the coast of Southampton Water near the ruins of medieval Netley Abbey. Storr castigates archaeologists for misidentifying it as a water channel – shown as "Conduits" on this piece of an Ordnance Survey map screen-grabbed from Bing Maps. It suggests an attack from the northern (marshy) end of Southampton Water towards the south.

Modern historians generally dismiss the named founders of Anglo-Saxon royal dynasties as mythological, with any real persons behind their stories beyond the reach of historical enquiry. There is nothing mysterious or fanciful about the suggestions offered here for Cerdic, Ælle, Hengist, et al; they are an accidental by-product of my work on Roman names. Therefore, each name has been given its own entry on my romaneranames website, with hyperlinks to the available evidence, for anyone to check.

Remarkably few Roman proper names contain elements that genuinely have their best parallels in Welsh, Irish, or Breton post-Roman texts. Within our area here, only one claim that a name was "Celtic" is worth examining closely. *Anderidos* in the *Notitia Dignitatum* can be confidently linked with Pevensey Castle, which lay in Roman times at the lip of a huge lagoon, now silted up as the Pevensey Levels, visible at far right of the map of Sussex above.

Jackson (1948) suggested amending *Anderidos* to **Anderitum* and translating it as 'great ford', but could anyone ford the 6 km gap across the mouth of the lagoon that was there in Roman times? Also his linguistic analysis is problematic, notably the claim that an element **ritu* in ancient names was a precursor of Welsh *rhyd* 'ford'. Across the Roman world, 14 locations had recorded names that might contain **ritu* and not one shows convincing evidence of an ancient ford. Then what did **ritu* really mean? Did it refer to water flowing along a river, like the English word *rithe* and my former home town of Ryde? Or to approaching and crossing water with a word like ride? I share the view of Mike Haken that the Roman army did not willingly use fords, and would like to see an RRRA project to catalogue sites where Roman roads met water.

Intriguingly, *Anderidos* makes best sense, linguistically and geographically as a compound of Greek ***ανδηρα*** (*andera*) 'raised bank of a river or ditch, dike', with ***ιδος*** (*hidos*) 'warmth'. And, if the Cosmography's *Anderelio nuba* was named from ***Ανδηρα*** plus ***ηλιος*** (*helios*) 'sunshine', that might fit the grand Roman villa at Eastbourne, where I took this photo of fruiting date palms to illustrate the Sussex coast's sunshine record. Can we translate *nuba* as 'knob', referring to the prominent white cliffs of Beachy Head?



Hundreds of questions arise when one looks carefully at detailed maps of Britain. For example, if five Roman roads met at *Cadnam*, why has no Roman name survived there? Why was the river

through Lewes called *Novia*? Can any more be said about how south coast ports were involved in the Roman conquest of Britain?

The Saxon Shore has been much debated. Did the *comes littoris Saxonici per Britanniam* 'count of the Saxon shore through Britain' administer a long-settled and largely peaceful area or was he busy fighting pirates and unwanted immigrants? No one truly knows what languages were spoken during Roman times in the area considered here. How far did the elite adopt Latin? How many villa owners were retired soldiers who had grown up near the Rhine?

King Alfred's dynasty claimed descent from Cerdic in order to have the earliest possible ancestor. Yet Cerdic's people seem to have moved towards Middlesex, not Wessex. What later became Wessex matches the land that Ptolemy assigned to *Belgae*, stretching from *Venta Belgarum* (on the river Itchen), via *Ὑδατα Θερμα* (Bath on a river Avon), to *Ισκαλις* (probably on the river Parrett).

Is it possible that the real ancestral heart of Wessex was the Chew Valley, between Bath and Bristol? A thrusting early king of Wessex was called *Ceawlin*, literally 'chew-ling'. That area has prehistoric archaeology second only to the Stonehenge area, plus deposits of coal and lead+silver. Did people there readily accept the Romans?

I hope that the RRRA will invite Jim Storr to give a Zoom lecture. He is unusual among historians in understanding how much useful information can be extracted from place names, so he and I should have a lot to discuss, but the pandemic stopped us getting together. Among the archaeological elephants in the room that he might want to discuss is the huge enclosure at Devizes in Wiltshire, that "as with Colchester and the cavalry camps on the North York Moors, is far too big for conventional defensive purposes, unless it was planned to protect a force of cavalry".

Possible Roman Bridges and Culverts

Gavin Smith

Abstract

Do any standing Roman bridges exist in Britain? Where would one look for them, and how would one identify them if found? Issues of frost damage and lack of maintenance are considered. After a brief survey of known Roman bridge types abroad, this initial assessment focuses on the Bristol region where stone bridge-building and repair remains a local phenomenon. Three once-labelled 'Roman bridges' are reviewed, two being from the Bristol region, then six comparable national examples. Included only are those arguably on Roman roads (some not as yet accredited) and structures potentially conforming to Roman engineering types. The examples, of greatly varying scale, include a possible local elliptical local style, a possibly nationally standard round-arched style, approach causeways and culverts. Various possible histories are muted, including who might have undertaken any maintenance in Late Antiquity. It is proposed that the identified examples be protected and further examined.

Introduction

In the past it has been assumed that no standing Roman bridges remain in Britain, other than a few traces of abutments and pier foundations. This conclusion could however be challenged. A set of possible, if much modified Roman bridges are offered here for discussion. The article draws on one prepared for the *Bristol and Avon Archaeology* journal.

Where might Roman stone bridges best survive?

Many bridges built in Roman Britain probably were of timber, as recently discovered at Chepstow (*The Archaeologist*). None of these can be anticipated to have survived, except possibly for their underwater or under-mud parts (as at Chepstow). While Britain does have a fair number of standing Roman remains, these are always of stone and to a lesser extent cement, brick or tile, unless under mud or water . Any surviving Roman bridge would therefore probably have to be of stone; yet while remains of stone abutments as at Chesters bridge on the North Tyne (Bidwell, 1999), or stone pier foundations are one thing, complete stone bridges would be quite another.

If one wished to find a standing bridge arch, where would one look? One might think: on a known Roman road. Yet if so, it probably would have been found previously – none have. Or rather, no complete examples have. Hugh Davies (2002) cites over 80 identified Roman bridge sites, none being standing bridges. Or should one focus on country lanes thought possibly to have Roman origins? Not necessarily: since if Local Authority adopted, any bridge could have been rebuilt and replaced long ago. If however one takes the view that the countryside would have been cross-crossed by minor Roman roads, including *viae privatae* to villas and industrial sites, and as yet unrecognised *viae vicinales* between settlements (see Knott, 2021), then a good place to search might be unpaved byways or bridleways that 'look' Roman – either in structure or in apparent destinations but preferably both – and cross watercourses. The examples given below range between all these options.

Oliver Rackham (1997, 261) suggested that no stone bridge would have survived two millennia of British frosts and floods, and this attitude seems to be general. Yet the accepted Roman bridge at St Dionysen, Oberaich in Austria, with sub-zero average winter night-time temperatures, seems to have; and the uplands of the Balkans and the Middle East where others survive can be at least as frosty in winter as Somerset or Gloucestershire (for an unaccredited illustrated gazetteer see for

example *wikipedia>list of Roman bridges*). Hope emerges once one realises that rural communities with stone-building traditions, if a right-of-way still existed, would have had an incentive to repair such structures and might in practice have retained the materials and the skill to do so.

The Cotswolds, rural Somerset and rural South Wales are known to have been wealthy in Roman times and thus had the incentive and wherewithal to build bridges. In these districts building in stone presumably was and certainly remains a local tradition, strengthened by the availability of good building stone. Limited development has occurred since medieval times; much of these districts have in effect remained rural. Nor are all the rivers subject to strong flooding. And here indeed a local group of amateur enthusiasts (the writer among them) have found candidate bridges, in each instance identified with a possible Roman road – since without a Roman road there would be no Roman bridge (though circularity of argument is a danger).

Further sites of interest are suspected Roman roads subsequently turnpiked; though here not much more than causeways approaching a bridge site are likely to have survived – unless the turnpike diverged from the original alignment.

What would a Roman bridge look like?

How would we know if we had found a Roman bridge? How to distinguish between a Roman and a medieval bridge? The writer is not confident he can distinguish Roman stonework. But we do at least know what Roman stone bridges looked like abroad, as bridge-engineering designs. Visually they conform to at least three identifiable basic types (illustrations of all of which can all be found on the web):

- flat-topped bridges of any size, carried on one or more rounded arches, as at Hadrian's Pons Aelius/Ponte Sant' Angelo in Rome, or Ávila in Spain;
- causeways, sometimes associated with bridges, with several small sometimes separated rounded arches, as over the River Albaggeras in Mérida in Spain (repaired by the Visigoths in 686; Whitney, 2003);
- bridges consisting of a very flat thin segmental or elliptical arch, as at Vaison-la-Romaine in France (O'Connor, 1993), Alconétar in Spain (Prieto Vives, 1925), the partially buried Limyra bridge in Turkey (Wurster & Ganzert, 1978), the Pons Servili at Orake in Albania (Vidman, 1962) and the 'Roman bridge on the Via Egnatia' (a kilometre east of Peqin, illustrated on google as 'Albania Roman bridge') most resembling Nettleton (see below).

Stone bridges previously claimed 'Roman'

At least three bridges in southwestern Britain have for reasons unexplained been in the past claimed as 'Roman'. None are now accepted as such. Though in each case their designs parallel a Roman type.

- 'Roman Bridge' at Blackpill, Sketty, Swansea over the Clyne River (Grid ref. SS 6189 9071). A low elliptical arch. CADW, 'Probably an eighteenth-century road bridge despite its name.' (Illustrations available: Mumbles Community Project). Now isolated, this bridge might have formed part of a Roman coast road to Oystermouth (now served by the adjacent A4067 Mumbles Rd). Restored with new concrete surface, 2015.
- Fig. 1. Sturt Bridge, Wickwar, over the Little Avon river, Gloucestershire (Grid ref. ST 7313 8812). Twin high arches, much repaired and slightly crumpled, one



Fig. 1. Sturt Bridge, Wickwar

pointed, one round, forming a slightly hump-backed bridge. 'Probably late medieval, or C16/C17' (Historic England 1128749). Lies midway along a two kilometre trackway and holloway (Plumber's Trench/Poplar Lane) from the Roman villa (Grid ref. ST 74475 88179) at Lower Woods in the direction of the nearby Roman settlement at Hall End.

• Fig. 2. 'Roman Bridge' over the Bybrook (Grid ref. ST 84100 76836) at Waterside by Castle Combe in the Wiltshire Cotswolds. A marginally humped, short narrow structure; a central elliptical arch flanked by two smaller ones; a single stone parapet. 'Uncertain date' (Historic England 1199255). The bridge exits directly onto The Street, a lane bearing this name beyond both sides of the village of Castle Combe, and linking between two parallel ridgeways both of which connect to the Fosse Way. This road network 'feels' Roman.



Fig.2. 'Roman Bridge' over the Bybrook, Castle Combe

These once-supposed 'Roman' bridges do at least conform to known Roman bridge styles. Three thoughts arise.

Why should local tradition have imagined them 'Roman' rather than the expected 'medieval'? Perhaps antiquarians recognised unusually impressive engineering, and had seen Roman bridges on their Grand Tours. (Renaissance architects had rediscovered the writings of Vitruvius on bridge construction, so 'Roman style' bridge construction might have spread through the profession, though most likely at ostentatious estates).

But secondly, is modern scepticism fully justified? Might some documented datings refer rather to repair dates? Equally relevant, are modern views coloured by an unstated assumption that Roman stone bridges in Britain 'cannot' have survived? That this may well be the case is suggested by for instance Robin Fleming (2021), whose neither chapter on 'Pragmatic, symbolic and ritual use of Roman brick and quarried stone', nor index once mentions bridges.

Thirdly – although normally assumed otherwise – might in some stone-building regions construction techniques have survived through the ages, some conceivably of Roman origin? Might, in other words, these bridges have started out Roman, and been maintained and patched up over the intervening centuries?

Six bridges, of varied type but potentially Roman, offered for discussion

Research, local exploration and chance observations further afield, suggest that there may be more than a few comparable examples. Some sited on obscure byways or bridleways; some not. Six very contrasting examples will be illustrated, each conforming to Roman-looking bridge design.

1. Rickford, Somerset

(Grid ref. ST 486 596). (Fig. 3).

Potentially, here is almost a complete water management system, conceivably in origin Roman. Sited just below a strong spring issuing from the northern scarp of the Mendip Hills, a stream diversion becoming a leat into a (medieval, potentially older) water-mill site, then runs parallel with a roadway, turning into a ford with an adjacent now pedestrian bridge.



The bridge: marginally humped, with twin well-built round arches; modern surface; a single-sided stone parapet (as at Castle Combe, and may or may not be original). No Historic England record. The Roman villa at Havyatt Green lay less than a kilometre downstream. Forty or so metres westwards, beside the lane from the ford (and to the left in this picture), is visible a functioning subterranean slab-roofed culvert with access point and steps down from the roadside (see illustration below); the culvert presumably runs into the stream. No Historic England record.

2. Nettleton Shrub, Cotswolds, Wiltshire

(Grid ref. ST 816 771). (Fig. 4.).





Fig 4 (left) Fig 5 (right)

Bridge over Broadmead Brook, approx. 700 metres upstream from the Fosse Way, at that point within Nettleton Shrub Roman small town site. A low elliptical arched bridge of remarkably fine construction, resembling Blackpill bridge. The original stone road surface survives, albeit degraded. Flanked by a ford. No parapets. From the north end of the bridge a bridleway following a clearly engineered terraceway (fig. 5) leads through part of the Nettleton Shrub site to join the Fosse Way. There was a Roman mill downstream of the Roman settlement, but an early modern mill existed by this bridge. No Historic England record: the bridge is not included within the adjacent designated Nettleton Shrub Roman settlement site (Historic England, 1019637).

A further similar bridge possibly occurs at Baltonsborough St Dunstan's Church Footbridge in Somerset (Grid ref. ST 541 347) ('repaired in the 18th century') as cited and illustrated by Somerset Rivers Authority (2025), observed online but not yet visited; lying possibly on a spur from the Roman-looking lane 'Ham Street' that passes close by.

3 Bridge on Fosse Way at Whitewalls Roman settlement, Cotswolds, Gloucestershire.

(Grid ref. ST 8898 8712). (Fig. 6).

A flat-topped bridge over the Bristol Avon with two separated rounded arches. No parapets. The walling does not look particularly Roman, but might be a rebuilding roughly to an earlier Roman original. Modern surface. Lies within Historic England's (1013354) protected area of Whitewalls (Whatley Manor, Easton Grey) Roman settlement on the Fosse Way (the next settlement north from Nettleton Shrub); yet this 'bridge over the River Avon' (which is not otherwise described), alongside other supposedly non-Roman features, is specifically excluded from scheduling. The Fosse Way may have crossed at this bridge site, if it ran directly from the north via an abandoned holloway, and similarly southward ignoring today's zigzag, as seemingly shown on Colt Hoare's 1821 map of the Roman Whitewalls settlement (his '*Mutantonis*').



Fig. 6. above

Fig 7. below



4.Bridge over the Bristol Avon at Easton Grey, Wiltshire

(Grid ref. ST 88018 87314). (Fig 7).

A mile upstream from Whitewalls (see above). On RR 543 (linking Fosse Way to a ford over the Severn at Arlingham). Historic England (1356034) gives 'probably sixteenth century with later restoration': a not unreasonable description of the upstream side as visible from the road. The difficult-to-see downstream side (Fig. 8) has however a rounded southernmost arch looking potentially Roman. From this side it is clear too that the parapet is an addition; and visible are very large underwater stones beneath the piers. The bridge is clearly not a unified design. It would take a structural survey to confirm, but it looks as if the bridge has at some date been doubled in width. It could further be argued that the 'medieval' upstream arches are the younger.

Conceivably the bridge was rebuilt by Malmesbury abbey which lies three miles downstream: for an abbey building a set of surviving stone bridges in its area, see Waverley abbey in Surrey (Renn, 1994). But that a single Roman arch survived alongside. And then when the nearby B4040 through the village was turnpiked, a connection to the bridge absorbed this surviving arch into a new widening of the medieval bridge (there is an odd bulge observable in the downstream walling, suggesting a rebuild).



Fig. 8

5. Exeter Town Bridge

(Grid ref. SX 91656 92164). (Fig. 9).

A flat-topped major bridge carried on many round arches. This now truncated bridge over the Exe is regarded medieval, which much of its structure may well be. However, the possibility that it is a Roman stone bridge repeatedly repaired (and perhaps repeatedly partially destroyed) is raised by segments of Roman-looking (but possibly Norman) voussoirs (arch segments) visible below sequential rebuildings. The bridge, formerly silt-covered, was excavated in the 1970s. Historic England 1020671 cites: 'constructed around the year 1200'... 'although a succession of timber bridges may have been in existence from Roman times'. Recorded medieval build-dates may rather

be rebuilds/repairs. The bridge led out of the medieval – equally the Roman – west gate of the city: Roman *Isca Dumnoniorum*, cantonal capital and earlier fort.



Fig.9. Exeter Town Bridge (two formerly buried arches, seen from the south side)

6. Southern causeway to Folly Bridge, A4144 Abingdon Rd, Oxford.

(Grid ref. SP 51439 05478). (Fig. 10).



Fig. 10.

A substantial slightly canted stone causeway, carried across a lesser branch of the Thames on two widely-spaced smallish rounded arches. Much of the walling might have been rebuilt. Folly Bridge is beyond the left of this picture. Historic England (1046595) protects the causeway but does not suggest its date. The road - part of the long straight Abingdon Rd/St Aldate's/Cornmarket St/St Giles'/Banbury Rd south-to-north route through the city – is not currently regarded Roman though looks it. Conceivably part of an ancient 'salt way' between Droitwich and Winchester? Margary's network appears somewhat thin in the Oxford area. How then is one to date the Folly Bridge causeway? It is older than Folly Bridge itself (of 1825-7; Historic England 1319913), but neither clearly Saxon (ninth century, *tempus* Athelred of Wessex), nor medieval (1085) – the two dates otherwise



Fig. 11.

discussed for this road alignment by F. S. Hacker (1920). This archetypal ancient causeway, encased within today's A4144 road/bridge structure, might be Roman if the road alignment is Roman.

Similar in structure would seem to be the A37 stone causeway (Grid ref. ST 624 455) north of Downside leading to the Fosse Way Roman settlement of Cannard's Grave, Somerset. (Fig. 11). Although the causeway's northward continuation Old Bristol Rd (sic.) is not known to be Roman it looks it as ascends from the causeway. The original causeway over a brook clearly has been rebuilt into a curve where the A37 turnpike sweeps eastwards to ease the hill climbed by Old Bristol Rd; yet the causeway's straight southern end, pointing to Old Bristol Rd, appears to be earlier and retain part of a rounded arch (unfortunately difficult to photograph from the roadway itself).

Roman culverts

Dymond (1961, 150) cites the usage of culverts for Roman roads crossing minor streams. A Roman culvert is visible within Roman Caerwent's south wall (fig. 12), made narrow for defence. Its simple flat-topped design resembles structurally the probable reconstructed example (Grid ref. 885 863) (Fig. 13), now containing a concrete pipe, under the Fosse Way south the Whitewalls. The culvert (Fig. 14) beside the lane called The Batch, about 40 metres west of the Rickford bridge, is structurally similar again; so although potentially of any age, could be Roman.







Figs. 12 (left), 13 (centre) and 14 (right)

Discussion

Certain repeated distinctive features encourage the thought that some or all of these bridges might be Roman: their siting on Roman roads, their Roman-shaped arches, skilful construction, some with segmental/ellipses of unusually thin upper structure, and a distinctive lack of parapets. Plus their lack of agreed date.

But given that any structure would have had to have been maintained throughout Late Antiquity and early medieval times, who conceivably could have done that? We don't know, yet there are potential candidates, some cited by Dymond (1961). Rackham (1997, 262) notes that the king has imposed bridge-repair duties on landowners since 'at least the eighth century'. In medieval and subsequent times parish authorities as well as monasteries commonly had bridge repair duties (see Renn, 1974). The Oystermouth Leet Court in 1681 required the 'common bridge' at Blackpill to be repaired by the parish (Mumbles Community Council). Prior to that, could local pagan temple authorities have similarly, until superseded by the Church? Though the author cannot offer evidence, villa estates perhaps likewise; could some estates have survived to become manors and retained this activity? Neither option is inconceivable in the Bristol region. Here British control is known until at least 577 AD, the date for which the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle records the capture of three 'kings' and the 'ceastro' of Cirencester, Bath and Gloucester. The cathedral of Wells, by its palpably pagan-looking and probably prehistoric sacred spring, albeit 'founded' by King Ine of Wessex c.700 AD, had a Roman 'mausoleum' apparently absorbed within its first now demolished minster (Rodwell, 2014). Strong cultural continuity regionally is a distinct possibility. An intermediate stage might be represented by Irish monks – who likewise had a stone building tradition – now thought identified at Beckery Island by Glastonbury abbey (South West Heritage Trust, 2017). Beckery (*Berkeria, que parva Ybernia dicitur*, 973 AD) is interpreted by Ekwall (1960, 33) as Old Irish *Bec-Eriu*, 'Little Ireland'; a probable monastic name, equivalent to the *Steapan Relice*, 915 *ASC*, Old Irish Relic, 'cemetery', formerly pertaining to Steep Holm in the Severn estuary (Ekwall, 1960, 181, 441). In addition, Bede (v, 18) implies Malmesbury abbey ('Maildufi urbs') just downstream from Whitewalls was founded by an Irishman in the seventh century (see Ekwall, 1960, 312).There may thus at least in this region have been a choice of possible institutions capable in Late Antiquity of maintaining a useful bridge.

Regarding bridge types, the low elliptical Nettleton, Blackpill and Baltonsborough bridges structurally resemble the far larger Roman bridges cited in France, Turkey and Albania. Those at Castle Combe and Easton Grey look to be more elaborate variants. Does this amount to a local 'style' in southwestern Britain, albeit of undefined date?

Sturt Bridge, seemingly ridiculously over-accomplished for its remote site, clearly has been much altered and repaired over time. If genuinely ancient, might its basic form reflect ostentation on the part of the Roman owners of the Lower Woods villa, with its mosaics and bathhouse? There is evidence this villa 'continued in use as an industrial site into the early post-Roman period' (Historic England, Roman villa and bathhouse remains in Lower Woods, 1021452).

Whitewalls round arched bridge with level top carrying the Fosse Way over a smallish river, and part of Easton Grey, are perhaps suggestive of a 'standard' British Roman bridge design where conditions allow. Rickford being perhaps a minor version. Oxford's causeway (resembling that at Spain's Mérida) and Exeter Town Bridge (resembling a lesser variant of Spain's Cordoba) might then be full-scale variants. Though admittedly, this relatively simple design conceivably dates from any subsequent era.

Oxford and Exeter perhaps represents a more common situation in Britain: a one-time Roman bridge site continuing in use as public rights-of-way, albeit main highway routes may have shifted elsewhere and the bridge itself been subject to repeated rebuilding. Which raises Theseus's Paradox: is something the same thing if all its parts have been renewed?

Conclusions

Possibly none of the bridges discussed here are Roman. Or all of them might be, in part. The case is unproven. Optically stimulated luminescence (OSL) dating might be possible.

Dymond (1961) offers no Roman bridge sites in either Somerset or Gloucestershire (other than at the town gate at Cirencester) and for Wiltshire only at Cricklade on the Thames. Adopting Dymond's (1961, 142-3) classification of potential Roman bridge sites, none of those discussed in this article would merit a score beyond perhaps a 'B' (physical evidence exists but there is no certainty they are Roman). This article is thus necessarily speculative and intended merely to stimulate discussion, but was instigated in part by a place-name Stonebridge in Somerset, on the straight Wolvershill Rd road arguably Roman, connecting Banwell (by the recently discovered abutting Roman town at Winthill) with the Roman salt workings at St George's (see Knott, 2021).

It is perhaps incontestable that the discussed bridges have been inadequately studied, and equally, inadequately protected. At the minimum all require listing as historic monuments (not all are), awaiting fuller assessment as to their likely history.

Acknowledgements

The writer wishes to thank Tim Richards regarding Whitewalls and Easton Grey bridges, the postulated route of RR540, and drawing my attention to Dymond and Colt Hoare. And Bev Knott for editorial help and his library of Roman bridge illustrations.

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Historic England, 1013354, Romano-British settlement, earthwork enclosure and a section of the Fosse Way, 415m west of Whatley Manor, Easton Grey, Wiltshire.

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Historic England, 1046595, Folly Bridge causeway, Oxford.

Historic England, 1319913, Folly Bridge with former Toll House, Oxford.

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Derbyshire – Minninglow Mistakes

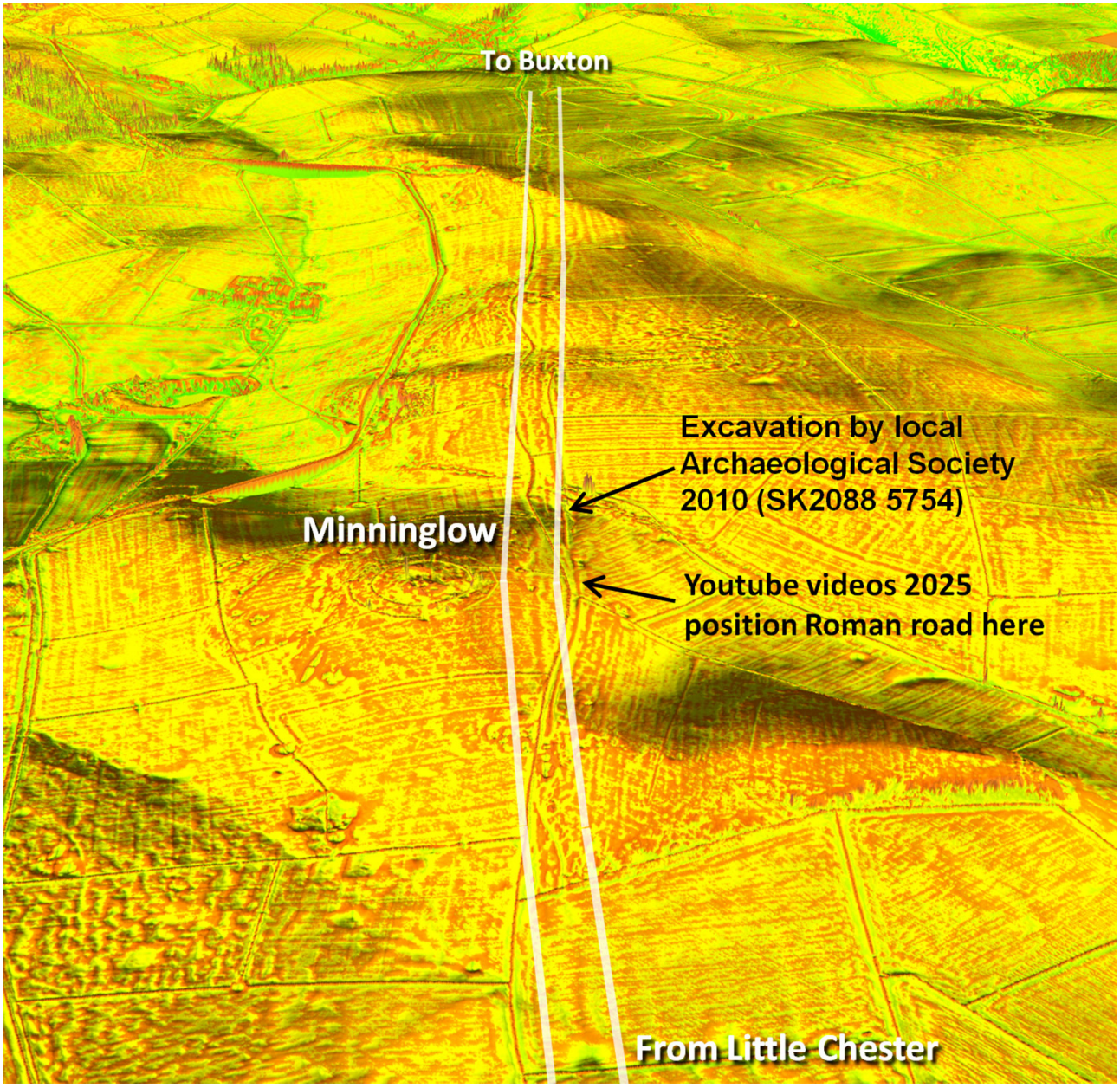
David Ratledge

Introduction

I do not need to tell RRRA readers how wide to expect a Roman road. I was told by the late Hugh Toller to be skeptical of anything less than 5.5 metres wide and of course generally they are least a couple of metres wider.

In May 2025 I watched two YouTube videos on Minninglow Iron Age Barrow in Derbyshire, which included describing where the Roman road, King Street, was located as it passed by it. This was the road that ran from Buxton to Little Chester.

There had been some excavations nearby with the latest in 2010 by the local archaeological society. This was very close to where earlier ones had taken place. The earlier excavations (Smithard, 1910,



Lomas, 1958) had found a road around 3 metres wide with the 2010 finding the same road only 2.8 metres wide.

I had researched the southern route of King Street in 2020 (Derbyshire Archaeological Journal, No. 141, 2021) and what I had seen was nowhere near as narrow as excavated, plus it was not where those YouTube videos showed it either. So what was going on?

Mistaken Identity

The Minninglow barrow is located inside a ring of trees, all sitting on a small hillock. On its eastern side, about 50 metres away (from the tree ring) is a wall with a track on its eastern side. Both the YouTube videos and the 2010 excavation report (see reference) proclaimed the Roman road was "over the wall" i.e. the track on the wall's eastern side. The Grid reference for the 2010 excavation confirms this.

So where is the Roman road really? Well it is not over the wall but passes approximately halfway between the tree ring and the wall i.e. well west of the wall. Lidar shows this clearly (fig. 1) and in fact the side of Minninglow was obviously used as a sighting point for the road's alignments north and south as there is a small change of direction there. Typical Roman road surveying.

The puzzle is why did the excavators, old and new, plus the video makers think the road was further east over the wall? My guess is it must have been down to Ordnance Survey First Edition mapping, which actually depicts the road being located there. Modern mapping no longer does so. So an easy mistake to make but really the alarm bells should have rung loud and clear finding a "Roman road" only 2.8 metres wide. RRRA members would have known better.

Reference

Shone A. & Smart D., 2023: 'The Street: A re-evaluation of the Roman road from Buxton to Wirksworth', *Wirksworth Archaeological Society*. Note: despite the title the road did not go to Wirksworth, it carried straight on to Little Chester.

A 'new' road in Shropshire & Worcestershire

Mike Haken

Most of our members will be aware that for the last ten months, I've been been spending about 50 hours each week working on the construction of a complete (and hopefully accurate!) digital map of Roman Britain, which, when finished, will be made freely available in various formats. For the first version, I've plotted every known Roman military installation, temporary camp (a big thank-you to Paul Smith), nucleated settlement, and of course every known Roman road for which there is sound evidence. Isolated settlement such as villas and farmsteads will be added in future years, as will religious sites and industrial activity.

The aim is to present, as quickly as is practicable, a representation of current knowledge using the main sources of baseline data, primarily the relevant HERs, Ordnance Survey linear files, and published work (not always in the HERs), quickly checking this against lidar imagery for any obvious issues or errors. I'm now about three quarters of the way there, having recorded well over two thousand segments of Roman road, a current (but rapidly increasing) total of 10,800km. I still have two thirds of the southwest peninsula, most of Wales and the Marches, and part of southwest Scotland left to do. I can't begin to guess how many years this task would have taken were it not for the work of many other researchers over the years such as the late Hugh Toller, and of course in recent years the copious output of David Ratledge - thanks David!

I've generally only had to make the occasional minor tweak, although in parts of the country that have received less attention, I have occasionally been rewarded with major new discoveries. A couple of weeks go, just too late to be recorded in this year's *Itinera*, I was checking the Shropshire HER for nucleated settlement, and plotted the Romano-British roadside settlement at Parlour Coppice, Upton Cressett. There was a problem - outside the settlement, there was no record in the Shropshire HER (or anywhere else) of a Roman road, despite the fact that you clearly can't have a roadside settlement without one! Lidar imagery solved the problem almost immediately south of the settlement, with two raised linear features between SO 6527 9122 and SO 6550 9053, perfectly aligned (fig. 2b). In general, the road doesn't survive very well at all but there's sufficient to be reasonably confident of most of the route, plotted in figure 1. The illustrations of lidar imagery on following pages are just a sample to illustrate how the road presents on lidar - the road will be fully published later once work on it is complete.

The road runs south-south-east from Parlour Coppice along a straight alignment that extends 15km (9.4 miles) to the fort known as Wall Town Camp, in Neen Savage parish, . Further southeast, the road can be traced as far as Great Witley, and whilst to date, I haven't managed to trace it any further, it seems to be heading to Worcester. North of Parlour Coppice, the evidence is more fragmentary, but sufficient to ascertain that the alignment from Wall Town Camp was followed as far as Much Wenlock (albeit with two major deviations along the way), where the A458 takes up the Roman line approaching the town. North of Much Wenlock, the road must swing around the northeastern end of the steep escarpment, and we pick up clear traces again with a zigzag north of the Stainton Brook at about SJ 6092 0197. Although the traces are fragmentary, the road can then be traced, to the large fort or fortress at Leighton. This is clearly a military road, with Wall Town camp placed about halfway between Leighton and Worcester, with the settlement at Parlour Coppice is similarly about half way between Leighton and Wall Town. If this road does go to Worcester, this lends support to the idea that there may have been a fort there, although it has to date remained elusive. We might similarly expect a settlement somewhere near Great Witley.

A 'NEW' ROAD IN SHROPSHIRE & WORCESTERSHIRE

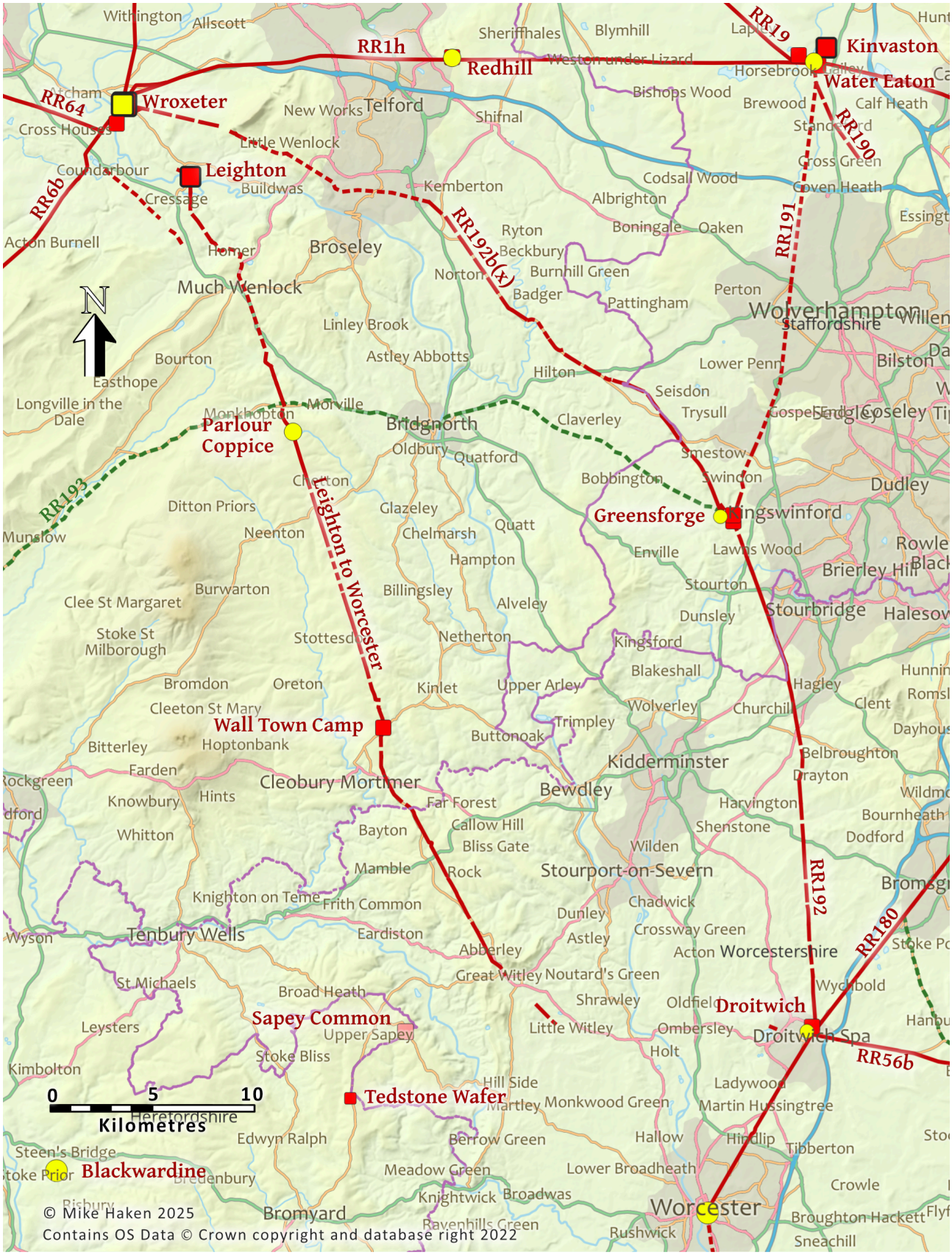


Fig. 1. Map showing the road network between Wroxeter and Worcester, with the 'new' road heading south from the so called vexillation fortress at Leighton, probably towards Worcester. The map also shows a suggested route for the long suspected extension of RR192 from Droitwich to Wroxeter. Forts are red squares, settlement is in yellow.

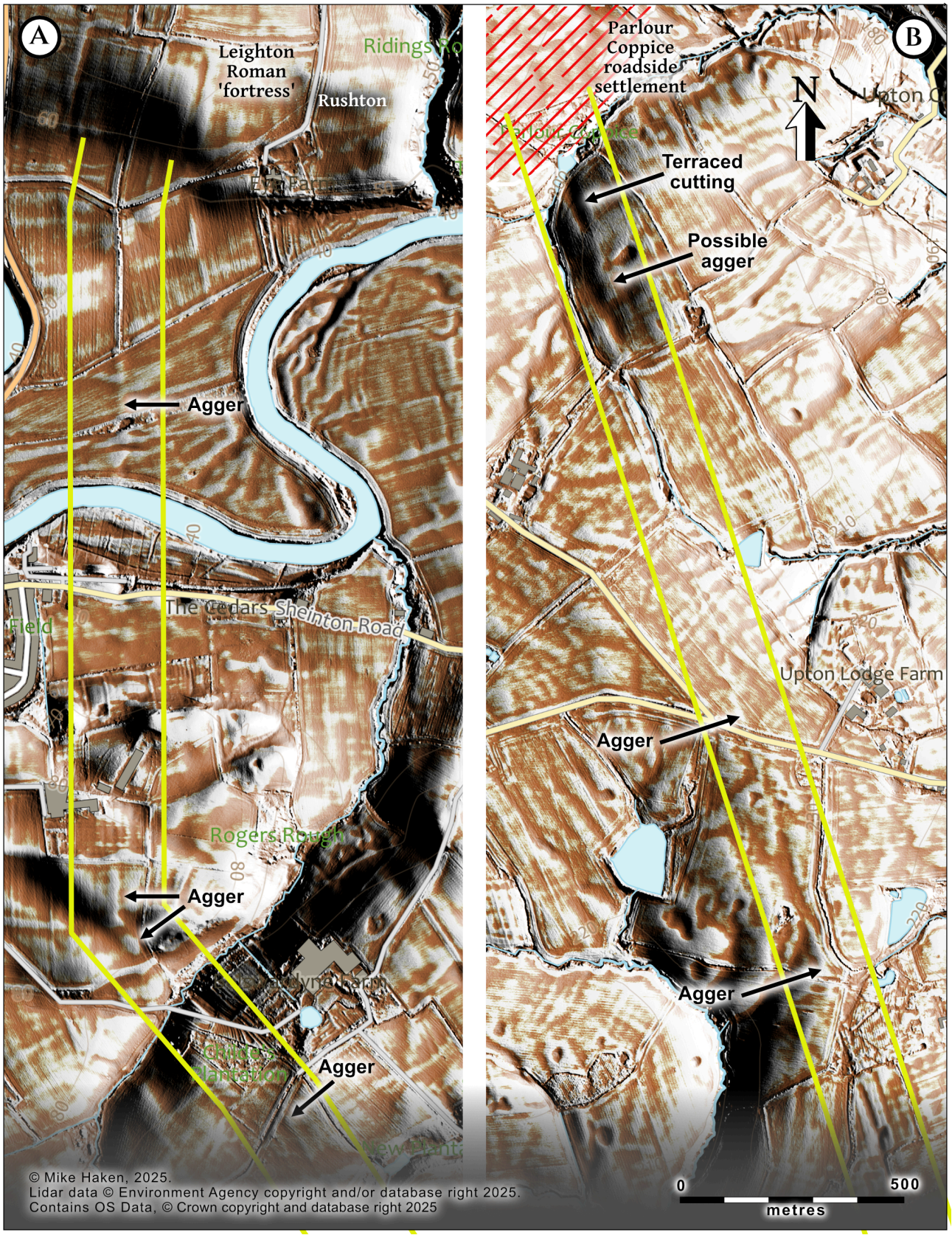


Figure 2. Two examples of lidar imagery showing the fragmentary survival of the 'new' road south from the large fort or fortress at Leighton. A. The road leaves the south gate at about SJ 5985 0520, turning south to go straight across the river, turning again at SJ 5982 0344 to head southeast past Belswardyne farm. B. Part of the alignment south of Parlour Coppice from the terraced cutting at SO 6492 9236, , to another cutting southwest of Upper House Farm (SO 6562 9015).

The eagle eyed will already have spotted that as well as the new road south from Leighton, figure 1 shows a road heading northwest from Greensforge, through the south of modern Telford, then skirting the western end of the Wrekin, turning west to enter the East gate of the Roman town at Wroxeter. The existence of this road has long been suspected, the Ordnance Survey and the Staffordshire HER considering it an extension of RR192 but the only tangible evidence for it has been for the first five kilometres north from Greensforge, and a short length of road leaving Wroxeter's east gate which was not traceable any further.

Lidar imagery has revealed a series of linear features, some barely perceptible, between SJ 5970 0798 and SJ 5970 0798 (fig. 3), which align perfectly with the known stub of a road at Wroxeter's east gate. Not only that, but there are two very obvious lines of round depressions parallel to the putative road line, which are probably roadside quarry pits, regarded by many to be a diagnostic feature of a Roman road.

We can now state definitively that there is solid evidence for 4.4km of this road at the northwestern end, and 5.4km at the southeastern end. In addition, lidar provides a little evidence elsewhere along the proposed route, for example features between SJ 7306 0210 and SJ 7233 0316 which continue the line of the modern B4176 northwestwards towards Telford, where the modern road bears away to the west.

Since Margary only considered RR192 as running between Droitwich and Greensforge, I suggest this road be numbered RR192b(x) to distinguish it from the rest of RR192 that Margary described.

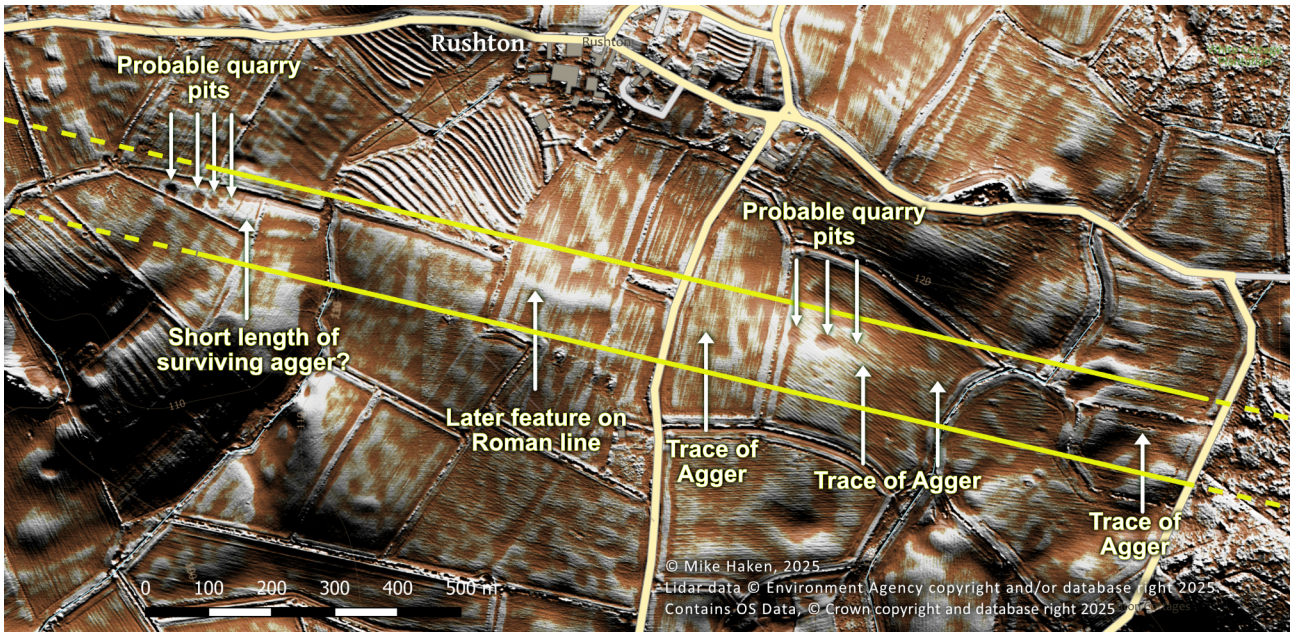


Figure 3. A length of almost certain Roman road leading from the southwest end of The Wrekin towards the east gate of Wroxeter Roman town. Both agger (albeit heavily ploughed out) and quarry pits, are clearly visible.

Other News, Events, Updates & Miscellany

Itinera Volume V

Dave Armstrong writes; Volume V is being constructed and should be published very soon. Below is a copy of the Contents; a number of papers, two book reviews and the usual enthralling yearly round up of Roman road work along with newly allocated Margary numbers. The ordering page on our site will be opening up soon, I'll let you know when this is up. We're publishing this volume at a more economical price than previous years to increase its circulation.

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Articles

Dr. WAYNE KIRK, A Lidar Based Appraisal of the Roman Roads in Northamptonshire

NEIL GODFREY, Roman Roads and Rural Romano-Celtic Temples in Roman Britain - Perspectives and Case Studies

ROBERT ENTWISTLE, The Principles of Roman Surveying as Displayed in Long-Distance Alignments

FLORIN-GHEORGE FODOREAN, The Roman Imperial Road in Dacia: Lederata / Dierna - Porolissum. A General Overview

ADRIANA PANAITE, Roman Roads in Moesia Inferior: the History of Research and the Road Network

Dr. MIKE LUKE, A Review of Roman Roads within and from the 'Small Town' at Sandy

PAUL SMITH, A Review of the Status of RR193: Greensforge, Staffordshire to Newtown, Powys

KEITH ABBOTT, Trails of Breadcrumbs: Predictive Methodologies used to Enhance Analysis and Discovery of Past Movement across Roman Britain

Roman Roads in 2024

Roman Roads in 2024: a Review of Recent Research and Fieldwork

DAVE ARMSTRONG & MIKE HOLMES, Newly Allocated Margary Road Numbers

Reviews

J. Tanner & A. Gardner (eds.), *Materialising the Roman Empire*. (By Paul Booth)

William S. Hanson, Richard E. Jones & Nick Hannon, *Exploring the Antonine Wall with Terrestrial Remote Sensing.* (By John Poulter)

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Nippets

Penny Jackson emailed with a link to an article about the Gough map:

> *I came across this article, you may have been sent it already. I am interested in what members have to say about it and whether it tells us anything about the road network we don't already know, I'm struggling to find a high enough resolution image of the Gough map with place names to tell if they are all roads I expected.*

The article in question is here: https://www.labrujulaverde.com/en/2025/05/roman-roads-continued-to-be-used-in-medieval-england-for-over-a-thousand-years-after-the-fall-of-the-empire/

And the full paper is here: Full Paper. I'm sure someone in the Association has thoughts to share.

Note from Dave; yes, I am aware of this work and I'm trying to engage them for one of our talks this coming season.

Conference on Herculaneum

John Wall has been in touch (quote; '*after all, all roads lead to.....Herculaneum* ') pointing out the forthcoming Conference, 13th and 14th October 2025 on *Herculaneum: Contexts, Present Progress and Future Prospects*. Senate House, University of London. Details and registration for this free event are available through this link.

Original MacLauchlan Maps for sale

Dave Armstrong has been approached by Roger Miket, the eminent Northumbrian archaeologist, who is wanting to sell his two copies of MacLauchlan maps. For those not familiar these were drafted by the Victorian surveyor Henry MacLauchlan for the Duke of Northumberland to record the course of Roman roads and other features across the Dukes' land. For the time this was an impressive work and the maps are a work of art in themselves. Roger writes;

It does seem sensible, for though not easy to come across, as well you know, I would far rather they went as working tools to fellow practitioners who would use them than to collectors.

As you are well familiar with the actual volumes I can tell you that both books are complete.

'The 'Surveys of the Roman Wall and other remains in the North of England' *is a volume inscribed by the Duke as a gift to Charles Roach Smith. He, as you will know, though principally a southern English and continental archaeologist, also was a close friend of John Collingwood Bruce and wrote extensively himself on aspects of the Roman Wall. The book is in fair condition with the usual bits of spotting, but an otherwise good copy gifted to an exceptional mid-19thC archaeologist. As you will see, it includes the section on Watling St. I am asking £450 for this volume excluding.P&P.*

The second volume of maps is Maclauchlan's 'Eastern Branch of Watling St....' *This, also is a gift inscribed by the Duke, here to Gustavus H Coulson. Again, complete and similar to above. For this volume I am asking £370 excluding P&P.*

I have given only the bones here, for I know you are very familiar with them, but more than happy to supply whatever information anyone who might be interested would want to know.

Its a sad day for me to do this and the mitigation is that they might go to a good home. I hope you do not mind my writing to you about this, but it seems a sensible course.

Rather than put Roger's mail address here in the public domain, mail Dave who will relay on any enquiries to Roger himself.