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## ABOUT THE ASSOCIATION

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

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

1. bring together all known information on Roman roads in Britain, summarised in a freely accessible online interactive gazetteer, expected to be complete by 2026.
2. identify key sites where important questions remain, and organise fieldwork necessary to answer those questions. 100 Ha of geophysical survey have been completed, with a further 500 Ha already planned, and several future excavations are currently at the planning stage.
3. encourage the involvement of as many people as possible in our activities. We care passionately about community archaeology, and will always encourage local people to get involved in our work, without any charge (unlike some organisations, we will never do this!).
4. organise events to keep people up to date with research including online talks & seminars.
5. ensure that all our published work is Open Access, including our quarterly newsletter and *Itinera* (following a very short initial members only embargo).

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



## FROM THE CHAIRMAN

MIKE HAKEN



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

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

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

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

## FROM THE CHAIRMAN

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

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

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

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

Mike Haken

Chairman  
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## EDITORIAL

ROBERT ENTWISTLE



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

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

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

Our content, as may be judged from this first volume, is wide-ranging. The first paper, from David Ratledge, shows how an experienced and skilled practitioner is able to exploit modern technology (in this case LiDAR) to expose and clarify routes that were previously imprecisely defined. Other papers demonstrate the findings of specific excavations, examine the artefactual and archaeological evidence for Roman transport, explore issues of planning and surveying, and speculate about the extent of local road networks. A major contribution from Bill Trow represents the culmination of many years work in testing some of Selkirk's conclusions regarding the existence of a 'Proto Dere Street'. A roundup of the year (interpreted broadly for this first volume) keeps track of investigative work relating to Roman roads around the country.



## EDITORIAL

The starting point of Roman road studies has long been Ivan Margary's classic study, 'Roman Roads in Britain'. A major challenge for the present day is how to build constructively upon this work in the 21st century, allowing recent findings, seldom pulled together, to be readily referenced by the archaeological community. Two important papers in this volume, from Mike Haken and Dave Armstrong, examine ways in which the RRRRA supports identification, classification and nomenclature of new discoveries, building upon Margary's work and ensuring that it remains fit for purpose in the twenty-first century.

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

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

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

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

Robert Entwistle

Hon Editor, *Itinera*  
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## THE ROAD TO WIGAN, RR70B: EXCAVATION AT LAND GATE

BY IAN MILLER  
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### ABSTRACT

*An archaeological excavation in 2018 confirmed the precise course of the Wilderspool to Wigan Roman road (Margary, 1973 RR70b) as it continues northwards from Ashton-in-Makerfield in Greater Manchester. Whilst the surface of the road had been removed almost entirely from a combination of agricultural practice and more recent development, the excavation uncovered the sandstone foundations and the associated drainage ditches. The recovery of Roman and medieval pottery from one of these ditches implies that the road persisted as a landscape feature, and its route seemingly remained in use as a thoroughfare, for a considerable period after the collapse of Roman administration.*

### INTRODUCTION

The road between the Roman settlements at Wilderspool, near Warrington in Cheshire, and Wigan in the modern county of Greater Manchester formed part of the main arterial route (referenced by Margary, 1973, 367-368 as RR70b) between Northwich and Lancaster. The course of this road on its approach to Wigan was traced in the 1830s by the Reverend Edmund Sibson, the minister of Ashton-in-Makerfield, who described its appearance and direction with reference to nearby landmarks (Sibson 1836). A similar approach was taken in the 1870s by W. Thompson Watkin, who compiled a detailed description that largely reinforced Sibson's account (Watkin 1883). The alignment described is captured on historic Ordnance Survey maps of the area, which show the modern road (A49) deviating slightly to the west of the straight line of the Roman road just north of Ashton-in-Makerfield, and re-joining the projected course approximately 1.3km to the north. The route of the Roman road between these two points is shown by the Ordnance Survey to pass to the east of the village of Bryn and across fields at Land Gate, 2km to the north of Ashton-in-Makerfield and 4.5km to the south of Wigan town centre (Fig 1). More recently, the precise course of sections of the road have been traced from a detailed analysis of Lidar data which, at Land Gate, largely reinforces the line marked by the Ordnance Survey (Ratledge 2017).

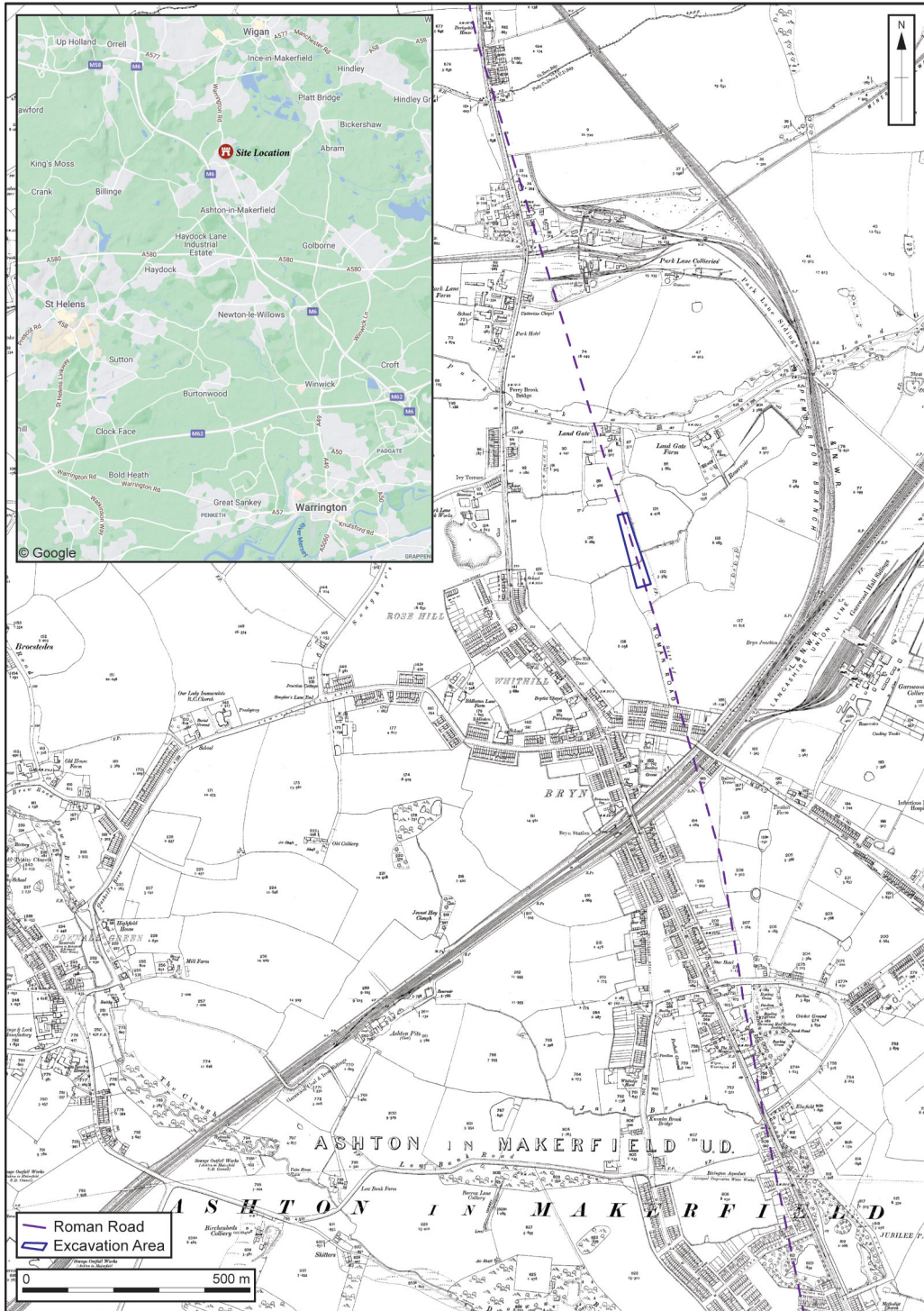


Fig. 1: Location of Land Gate, and the projected line of the Roman road north of Ashton-in-Makerfield superimposed on the Ordnance Survey map of 1909

## THE ROAD TO WIGAN, RR70B: EXCAVATION AT LAND GATE

An opportunity to corroborate the projected course of the Roman road, and examine the character of any surviving fabric, arose with a proposal for a large residential development across 5.45 hectares of agricultural land at Land Gate (centred on NGR SD 57140 01220). In view of the extensive earth-moving works required to deliver the scheme, a condition was attached to planning consent that required an archaeological investigation to be carried out in advance of construction. A geophysical survey was undertaken in the first instance, and whilst the inconclusive results failed to confirm with any degree of confidence that the road survived, physical remains were identified in a trial trench that was excavated subsequently (Birtles 2017). This led to more detailed archaeological investigation that was carried out by Salford Archaeology between March and April 2018, and comprised the excavation of four large trenches across the line of the road on both sides of a small watercourse known as the Brooke (Burns and Harvey 2019).

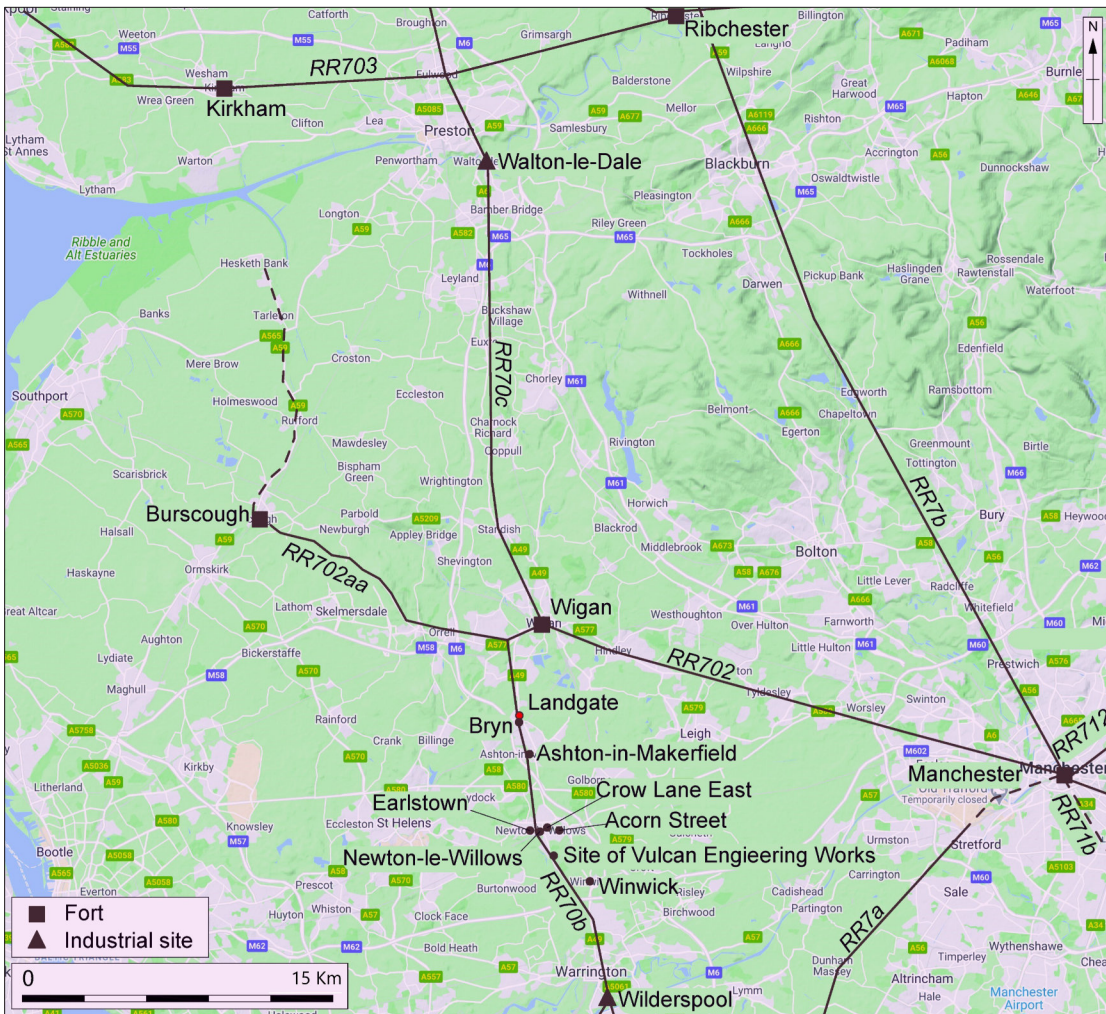


Fig. 2: Plan of the Roman roads in the North West, showing the location of the archaeological investigations mentioned in the text

## ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

### Dating

The Roman road between Northwich and Lancaster is the western of two main routes on the west side of the Pennines (Fig 2), with the second linking Buxton with Manchester, Ribchester and along the Lune Gorge to Kirkby Thore in Cumbria (Toller 2014). It was once considered that the western route was of a slightly later date, being added to the road network during the late Flavian / Trajanic period (cAD 85-117), although work carried out in the 1990s concluded that it had probably formed part of the principal conquest route and was thus constructed during the early Flavian period (Rogers 1996).

### Antiquarian Accounts

The line of the Roman road between Wilderspool and Wigan (Road 70b) was first described by John Whitaker in the 18th century, who noted that it 'very plainly appears' close to Haydock (NGR SJ 57820 98070) on its approach to Ashton-in-Makerfield (Whitaker 1771, 153). This early description provided the basis for the detailed account published by Sibson 65 years later, who concluded that this section of the road was 'fourteen yards wide (12.80m), and a yard in thickness. It is formed of earth, covered with a layer of red freestone, on which is a coat of gravel' (Sibson 1836, 578). A slightly conflicting account of the road in the same area was compiled by Robson in 1852, who noted that it comprised 'a substructure of rude masses of sandstone built up together six or seven yards wide (5.49-6.40m), and covered with a thick bed of gravel... The depth of the road in the centre is between two and three feet (0.61-0.91m), the stone foundation being about one-half' (Robson 1852, 203).

According to Margary (Ibid, 367-368), the remains of the road were 'found to be quite substantial' as it passed through the grounds of Winwick Hospital (NGR SJ 59530 92510) on the northern fringe of Warrington, consisting of a layer of irregular sandstones blocks with gravel surfacing, with a width ranging from 14 to 24 feet (4.27-7.31m). Margary describes a 'distinct relic of the agger' near Earlestown (NGR SJ 58335 95500) before being subsumed by the modern A49, whilst the development of Bryn 'obliterated former traces'. However, 'part of the course north of this, which lay through fields east of the road, is still marked by a hollow and cart track, nearly down to the point where the side road called Land Gate is crossed' (Ibid, 367-368).

### Previous Excavations of the Roman Road

The line of the road as it passes through Newton-le-Willows, 5.5km to the south of Land Gate, has been subject to several archaeological investigations. The first of these dates to 1909, when a section excavated across the road to the east of the Vulcan Engineering Works (NGR SJ 58800 94000) by Captain Doggett revealed that it was 22 feet wide (6.7m) and comprised a layer of stones lying on a substratum of clay (Anon 1910). Dunlop and Fairclough investigated the road in several locations between Newton-le-Willows and Winwick between 1928 and 1932 and, in one excavation, concluded that the road 'is composed of sandstone blocks roughly 8 inches in diameter and about 4½ inches thick. These blocks seem

to be embedded in a very thin layer of small-stoned gravel and sand'. It was noted that there was no trace of side ditches and that the road at this point was 24 feet (7.3m) wide, although in other trenches it was only 4.3m across (Dunlop and Fairclough 1935, 104-7).

The remains of the road were next identified during an archaeological investigation on Crow Lane East in Newton-le-Willows in 1985 (NGR SJ 58325 95495; Fig 2). The foundations of the road at this location were found to comprise a shallow layer of small sorted pebbles beneath a layer of flattish Bunter sandstone slabs that had been laid to form a gently cambered surface that was 6.2m wide, with a capping of fine pebbles. The road was flanked on either side by a shallow ditch (Philpott 2010, 28). Ten years later, a single trench was excavated across gardens alongside Acorn Street in Wargrave (SJ 58900 95330; Fig 2), revealing that the road had a maximum width of 4.7m, with twin ditches on the western side and a single ditch on the east. A series of post holes along the edge of the road were of a medieval date and coincided with a field boundary, suggesting that the Roman road persisted as a landscape feature into the medieval period (Philpott 2010, 24-7).

The projected line of the road on the northern fringe of Ashton-in-Makerfield as marked on Ordnance Survey mapping was investigated by the Greater Manchester Archaeological Unit (GMAU) during the early 1990s. In the first instance, two trenches were excavated across fields on the eastern side of Wigan Road at Bryn (SD 57355 00500), approximately 1km to the south of Land Gate, although no trace of the Roman road survived (Wallace and Davison 1991). A further three trenches were excavated subsequently 100m to the south (SD 57372 00400), and the remains of the road were uncovered in each of the trenches. The road was seen to be at least 5m wide, with a gently cambered profile, and was constructed of irregular-shaped blocks of sandstone on a base of sand and gravel, although there was no surviving evidence for a rammed gravel surface (GMAU 1993).

Continuing northwards from Bryn, the line of the Roman road has been traced by the Wigan Archaeological Society (WAS) as far as Goose Green, which lies some 2.8km to the south-west of Wigan, after which the route is lost (Miller and Aldridge 2011).

## EXCAVATION AT LAND GATE IN 2018

The excavation (centred on NGR SD 57140 01220) was in a field to the south of Land Gate Farm, which lies at a height of 52m above Ordnance Datum. The land rises gently to the south up to the 55m contour, where the line of the Roman road crosses the Brooke, after which is a steeper slope to the 60m contour. A gentle slope continues southwards beyond the excavation area to a high point of 65m on Bryn Road before the land drops back down to the 50m contour in Ashton-in-Makerfield.

The site was stripped of topsoil by the development contractor prior to the commencement of the archaeological excavation, and consequently the surface of the Roman road may have been removed without record. Four trenches were placed across the line of the Roman road within the stripped area, targeted those parts of the site that had the greatest concentration of stones visible (Fig 3).

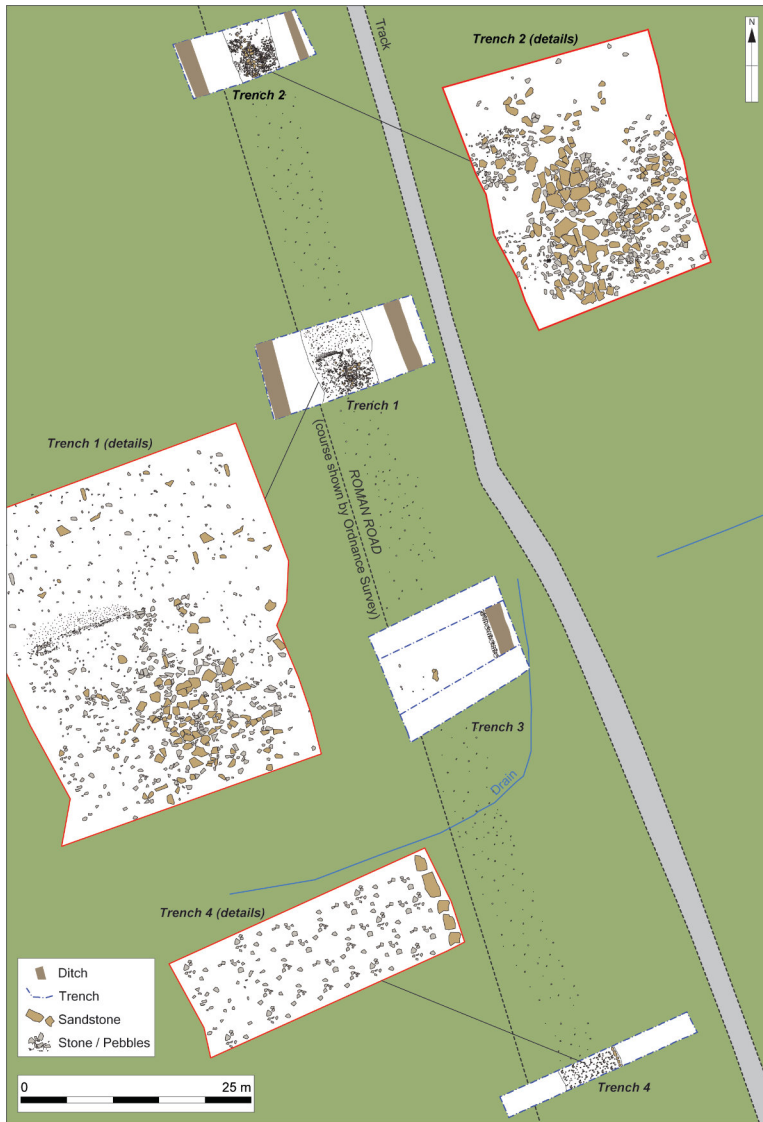


Fig.3: Plan of the trenches excavated at Land Gate in 2018 (© University of Salford)

## Trench 1

Trench 1 measured 8.60m x 19.15m, and was excavated to the surface of the natural clay geology that was exposed at a depth of 0.42m below the level of the stripped ground. Directly beneath the remains of the Roman road, the clay geology was overlain in places by a thin lens of black organic material that was interpreted as the original Roman ground surface. Samples of carbonised material recovered from this lens were subject to radiocarbon assay, which returned a date of 931 BC, implying that the land may have been cleared during the



Fig. 4: The road foundations exposed in Trench 1 (© University of Salford)

Late Bronze Age. It is impossible to ascertain whether this clearance was a deliberate anthropogenic event, or if it was the destruction of scrub vegetation resulting from a natural fire; the excavation did not produce any physical evidence for Bronze Age activity or settlement in the area. Nevertheless, it remains possible that the course of the Roman road followed an earlier routeway that was created initially during the Late Bronze Age, a scenario that has been identified from an excavation of the Chester to York Roman road near Altrincham (UMAU 1996).



Fig. 5: Section excavated across the ditch on the eastern side of the road, showing the Roman ditch and the deeper drainage ditch that contained 19th- and 20th-century artefacts (© University of Salford)



The lens of organic material was sealed beneath a layer of irregular, flat slabs of yellow sandstone that represented the foundations of the Roman road. The layer of sandstone had an average width of 6m and depth of 0.1m, with a concentration of larger stones forming a central spine and smaller stones towards the edges of the road (Fig 4). These foundations were in turn overlain by a smaller stones and pebbles which, in a few places, survived as a surface of rammed gravel.

The remains of roadside ditches, cut into the natural geology and set 15m apart, were identified along both sides of the road. The ditch to the east of the road was 1m wide and 0.48m deep, and had concave sides with a flattish base. It contained a homogeneous fill that suggested the ditch had silted up through natural processes. The western edge of the ditch had been cut by a larger drainage trench, which had been backfilled subsequently with clay and contained fragments of 19th- and 20th-century pottery (Fig 5).

The remains of two intercutting ditches were identified on the western side of the road. The earliest of these was almost certainly of Roman origin and was of a very similar form to the eastern roadside ditch, measuring 1m wide and 0.49m deep with concave sides and a flattish base. The fill of the later re-cut again contained several fragments of 19th- and 20th-century pottery.

## **Trench 2**

Trench 2 was placed 40m to the north of Trench 1, and measured 19m x 8m (Fig 3). The foundations of the road were found to be very similar to those excavated in Trench 1, with a dense concentration of yellow and red sandstone slabs representing the central part of the road, with fewer and smaller stones along the edges (Fig 6). The width of the road foundation at this location was again 6m, although the average depth was 0.5m. Traces of the lens of organic material was again identified beneath the stones forming the central part of the road. The stones marking the edges of the foundation did not appear to constitute a formal kerb to the road, and were overlain in patches by a compacted layer of small pebbles, seemingly representing the rammed gravel surface.

Ditches flanking both sides of the road, again set some 15m apart, were on the same alignment as those excavated in Trench 1 and of similar dimensions and profile. The ditch on the western side of the road had been re-cut, although there was no indication that the eastern ditch had been altered. Neither of the ditches contained any artefacts.

## **Trench 3**

Trench 3 was placed 25m to the south of Trench 1, immediately adjacent to a watercourse known as the Brooke (Fig 3). The trench was intended to establish the survival of the road, and also to assess whether the road builders had need to erect a short bridge or ford across the watercourse. Excavation revealed that the structural remains of the road, including its foundations, had been removed entirely. However, the eastern roadside ditch was identified, and was seen to be of similar dimensions and form to the ditches exposed in Trench 1 and Trench 2. It contained a primary fill of light grey silty clay at its base, the



Fig. 6: The road foundations exposed in Trench 2 (© University of Salford)

excavation of which yielded two sherds of Roman pottery. The was sealed beneath a secondary fill that was distinctly different in colour and texture, indicative of a much



Fig. 7: Section excavated across the roadside ditch exposed in Trench 3 (© University of Salford)

different depositional regime and, presumably, date (Fig 7). This was corroborated by the recovery of 18 fragments of medieval pottery (Fig 8). Some of these fragments were of a relatively large size and none were abraded, implying that they had not been subject to any post-depositional disturbance, such as ploughing. The absence of any later material in this secondary fill added weight to the interpretation of this as a medieval feature, indicating that the ditch and the road had continued in use, or at least persisted as a feature of the landscape, into the medieval period.

The western roadside ditch was absent, although several modern land drains were uncovered, the installation of which may have removed any trace of the Roman ditch. There was similarly no evidence for a small bridge or ford across the Brooke, and it was concluded that this watercourse had probably been created in more recent times to assist with land drainage, perhaps in consequence of the mining subsidence that is prevalent around Ashton-in-Makerfield.

#### Trench 4

Trench 4 was placed across a localised concentration of pebbles and larger stones situated on the rising ground approximately 40m to the south of Trench 3. Excavation uncovered several patches of compacted gravel very similar to those recorded in Trench 1, although



Fig. 8: Selection of the medieval pottery recovered from the roadside ditch in Trench 3 (© University of Salford)

there were very few underlying slabs of sandstone or similar material that may have formed a road foundation. The only exception was a line of sandstone slabs along the eastern edge of the road, which may have represented the vestiges of a kerb. It could not be determined whether the patches of gravel actually related to an agger rather than the road metalling, although the excavation of the other trenches failed to yield any evidence for a well-defined agger.

## The Finds

A small assemblage of finds, comprising 33 individual artefacts, was recovered from just two stratified contexts across the four excavation areas. The earliest finds were two sherds of sandy orange pottery, probably deriving from the same vessel. These were ascribed a 2nd-century date, and are likely to have been a product of the Roman pottery kilns in Wilderspool.

The finds' assemblage was dominated by fragments of medieval pottery, with a date range spanning the late 12th to early 14th centuries. The earliest fragments derived from a globular jar with a splashed, dark green lead glaze and a coarse fabric characteristic of the Northern Gritty ware tradition that was the dominant type in circulation throughout the North until the mid-13th century. The remainder of the sherds represented at least three vessels with a sandy, oxidised orange fabric that typically have a slightly later inception date than Northern Gritty Wares, and are likely to have been in circulation in tandem with the finer and more decorative wares of the later 13th and 14th centuries (Fig 8).

## SYNTHESIS

The archaeological excavation demonstrated that the Roman road at Land Gate takes a course very slightly to the east of that marked on historic Ordnance Survey mapping, and appeared to veer fractionally to the east on its course towards Wigan. Projecting this line to the north of the Trench 2, the Roman road will coincide with the 'hollow and cart track' referred to by Margary (Ibid, 367-368), although to the south this track lay parallel and to the east of the Roman road.

The best-preserved remains of the Roman road were uncovered in Trench 1 and Trench 2, where the traces of a metalled surface survived above the foundation of sandstone slabs. The vestiges of the Roman road in Trench 3 were represented mainly by a layer of clay that had partially surviving fragments of metalled surface along the edges of the road, whilst there was little evidence for the Roman road surviving in Trench 4, other than a small patch of metalled surface. It was nevertheless evident that the structural fabric of the road had a width of approximately 6m, whilst the distance between the inside edge of the side ditches was around 15m.

The width of the road surface at Land Gate corresponds broadly with the evidence obtained from previous excavations of the same road at various points to the south, where the width of the surviving foundations varied between 7.3m at Winwick (Dunlop and Fairclough 1935)

and 4.7m in Wargrave (Philpott 2010), providing an average width of approximately 6m; the distance between the side ditches was rarely recorded in these earlier excavations. In all places, however, the width contrasts with evidence obtained from an excavation of the Roman road from Wigan to Walton-le-Dale in 2018, where a well-preserved section of the road surface at Cuerden in Lancashire was seen to measure c10m wide (Cook, this volume). This probably reflects the two sections of road having been laid by different construction gangs, and at different dates, and whilst it is tempting to suggest that the road north of Wigan, and beyond the junction of the road from Manchester, may have been subject to a great volume of traffic in the Roman period, there is no evidence to substantiate any such claim.

Previous archaeological investigations of the Roman road between Wilderspool and Ashton-in-Makerfield have concluded that its structure comprised a foundation of sandstone slabs covered by a thin layer of pebbles and a capping of finer pebbles and gravel, which is consistent with the remains excavated at Land Gate. The excavations at Crow Lane East in 1985 noted that the sandstone slabs were laid on a foundation of pebbles (Philpott 2010), whilst a base of sand and gravel was identified beneath the sandstone at Bryn (GMAU 1993). This slight variation in the nature of the foundations is likely to reflect localised differences in the character of the natural drift geology.

The excavation at Land Gate confirmed that the road had been flanked on both sides by a ditch. Whilst neither of the ditches had a direct stratigraphic relationship with the surviving elements of the road, there is little doubt that they were contemporary with the Roman road, not least from the recovery of two sherds of Roman pottery from the primary fill of the ditch in Trench 3. It was apparent, however, that the ditches had been cleaned out or re-cut during later periods, demonstrated most clearly by the group of medieval pottery found in the secondary fill of the ditch in Trench 3. The presence of this pottery in the ditch implies that the road persisted as a landscape feature long after the end of formal Roman administration in the 5th century, and may have continued in use as a thoroughfare during the later medieval period. Whilst there is scant physical evidence for medieval settlement in Ashton-in-Makerfield, a medieval moated site known as 'Old Bryn' lies some 700m to the east of Land Gate Farm. Little is known about this site, although it is thought to date to the early 14th century (Roby 1867), and may have been the source of the pottery recovered from the excavation.

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