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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 WIGAN TO WALTON-LE-DALE ROMAN ROAD, RR70C, AT CUERDEN

BY OLIVER COOK

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## ABSTRACT

*In 2018, a well-preserved section of the Roman road linking Wigan with Walton-le-Dale was unearthed in Cuerden (Lancashire). Alongside the remains of the road were features demonstrative of roadside activity dated by radio-carbon assay to the late 1st - 3rd centuries AD. This discovery has put to rest a long-standing debate concerning the course of the road approaching Walton-le-Dale that Margary had allocated the road number RR70c. The excavation formed part of a wider investigation of the site that revealed evidence for settlement and farming activity spanning the 12th to 19th centuries. It has thus presented an opportunity to analyse the road, its setting and lasting influence on the surrounding landscape.*

## INTRODUCTION

The road between Wigan (Greater Manchester) and Walton-le-Dale (Lancashire) formed part of a longer route stretching over 90km from Northwich (Cheshire) in the south, to Lancaster in the north, connecting settlements, manufacturing centres and military bases, some of which have been identified with places mentioned in the Tenth Iter in the Antonine Road Itinerary. Archaeological fieldwork in Cheshire and Greater Manchester has contributed to a far better understanding of the southern portion of this route than Margary, numbered RR70a and RR70b (Margary, 1973, 302&367) but to date, there has been a lack of comparable fieldwork targeting the road (Margary RR70c, *ibid* 368) across central Lancashire.

Attempts to trace the Wigan to Walton-le-Dale road were first made in the 19th century by the antiquaries Reverend Edmund Sibson and William Thompson Watkin, who plotted its course from Wigan as far as Standish (Watkin, 1883, 66-68). However, for much of the route to the north, anecdotal evidence for the road's existence now appears far less reliable. Subsequent work by Codrington (1903, 104) and Margary (1973, 368) relied heavily on these earlier accounts, favouring a path largely mirrored by the modern road between Wigan and Preston (A49).

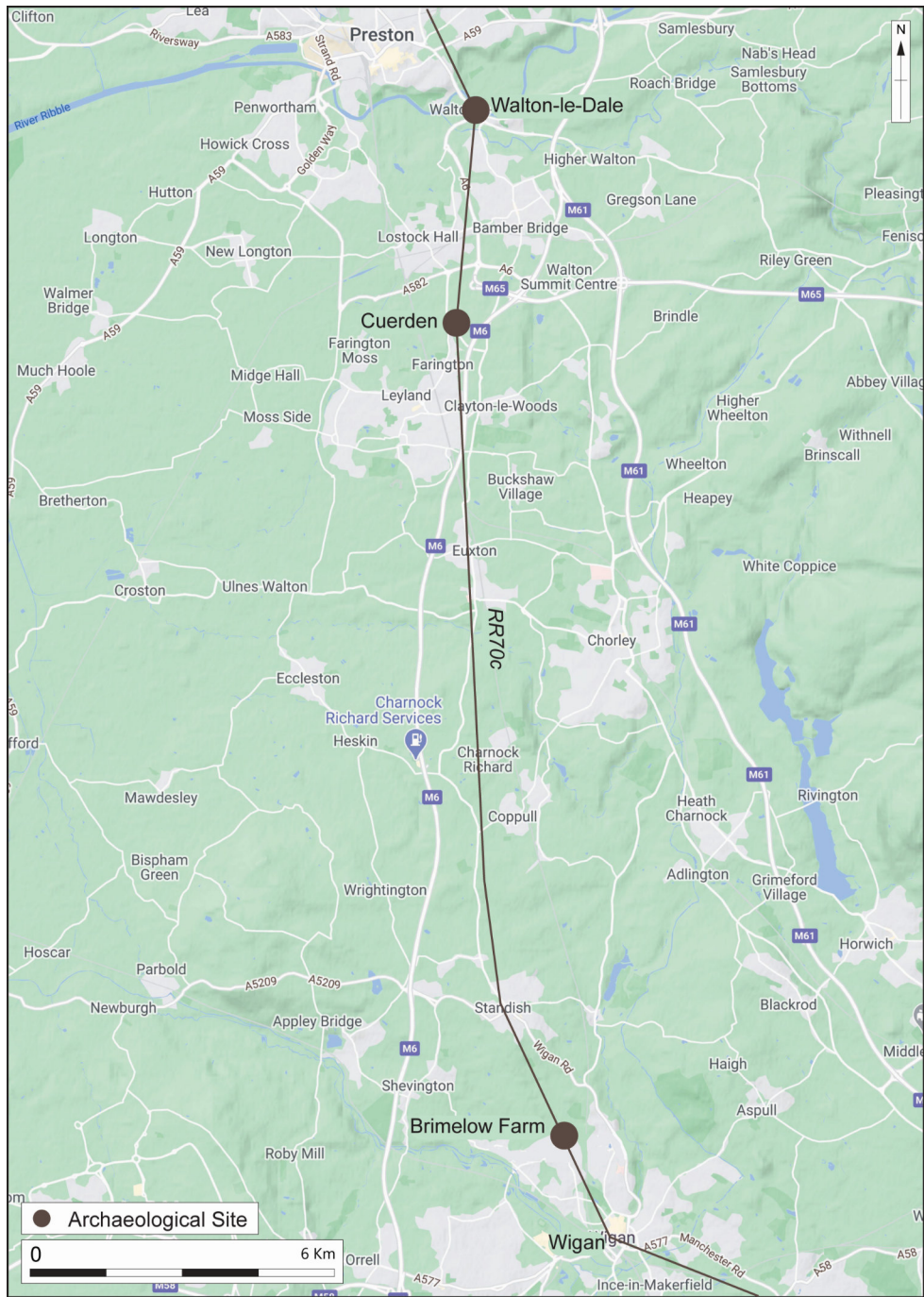


Fig. 1, Location of Cuerden, and the projected line of the Roman road between Wigan and Walton-le-Dale superimposed on the modern Ordnance Survey mapping showing the location of the archaeological investigations mentioned in the text (Standish, Cuerden, Walton-le-Dale)

An alternative route has since been proposed for the northern 7.80km approaching Walton-le-Dale, in response to a well-preserved section of the road excavated there in 1996 (Gibbons, *et al*, 2001). This appeared to point south in the direction of Leyland rather than Bamber Bridge, taking a projected course along Todd Lane and Stanifield Lane (A5083) towards Euxton, where it rejoined the A49. Corroborative evidence was provided by detailed analysis of LiDAR terrain models (Ratledge, 2017), a dataset that has allowed existing and new routes in the North West to be plotted at a resolution and accuracy unparalleled by traditional methods of aerial and field reconnaissance.

Cuerden is located to the south of the River Ribble and River Lostock, lying 5km south of Preston, a similar distance to the south-east of the important medieval settlement of Penwortham, and 2km north-east of Leyland. The development site occupies 65ha of land (centred on NGR SD 55525 24600) to the south of the M65 and A582, bounded by the A49 to the east and the A5083 to west (Figure 1). The site is crossed by Old School Lane and Stoney Lane, both of which represent thoroughfares of some antiquity.

Investigative work at Cuerden began in 2016, taking place in advance of a proposed development. It offered the chance to investigate both potential lines of the Roman road projected close to the eastern and western boundaries of the site, and the prospect of examining a large catchment of the intervening landscape.

In the first instance, a desk-based study was compiled to establish a holistic picture of the site, its history and archaeological potential (Reader, 2016). Several areas were highlighted for their interest and were subsequently tested in 2017 via the excavation of 14 trial trenches. Three of the trenches were intended to establish the presence or absence of the Roman road, whilst the remaining ten evaluated other heritage assets. Promising results led to the opening of six area excavations (Cook and Miller, 2020 in press; Cook, Miller and Rowe, 2020). It was in the southernmost excavation (Area 6) next to Stanifield Lane where the remains of the Roman road were exposed.

## ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

### **Antiquarian Accounts**

Much of what was known about the road derived from a select number of sources that were collated by William Thompson Watkin in the 1870s (1883, 66-70). Its southern extent had been inferred from a number of separate sightings in the vicinity of Standish. These included Rev Edmund Sibson's observations of the road 'in the bleaching crofts (fields) near Ryland's factory in the valley at the north-east end of Wigan Mains and in the next field near the footroad on the east side of the Mains' (Sibson, 1836, 583). A large part of this area had formerly been manorial land known as 'mesnes' or mains and was only acquired for development in the mid-late 19<sup>th</sup> century. It seems the road had survived in pockets of undeveloped land in-between the factories and collieries on the northern fringes of the burgeoning industrial town. Further north-west, it had survived in the rural landscape, in a

field named Beggars Walk (Watkin, 1883, 66). This can be located on the OS Six Inch to 1-mile map of 1849 (NGR SD57536 07350) adjacent to a trackway bearing the same name.

From Standish, the road was traced in a northerly direction, seemingly fossilised in a series of 'lanes, foot-paths and hedgerows' visible in the landscape as far as the Parish Church of Coppull (Margary, 1973, 368). According to Margary, the road was untraceable from this point and could not be related to any apparent features. Nearing Charnock Green, the road was easily recognisable again as a straight section of the main highway to Preston and was followed as far as Euxton (*ibid.*). In the 1840s, physical evidence of the road had been unearthed here. Based on the road's supposed alignment, pointing in the direction of the park at Worden Hall Park, its course was extrapolated onwards to Rose Whithill, Bamber Bridge and Walton-le-Dale. Corroboration was taken from a series of Roman find spots, including two coin-hoards, found in the vicinity and another alleged sighting of the road near Bamber Bridge (Watkin, 1883, 68).

### Previous Excavations

The southern alignment near Brimelow Farm, Standish (centred on NGR SD57278 07822) was targeted by the Wigan Archaeological Society (WAS) in 1986-88 and again in 2004. The work initially involved non-invasive resistivity surveys but was followed up by trenching over areas with high readings; these revealed the presence of a metallised surface of river-washed cobbles and flat blocks of sandstone, measuring approximately 10m in width, flanked by a roadside ditch to the west (Miller and Aldridge, 2011, 19).

5km north of Standish near the junction of Coppull Moor Lane and Hic Bibi Lane (NGR SD 56272 12868) a similar metallised surface was excavated by the Chorley Archaeological Society in 1959 and 1985 (Miller and Aldridge, 2011, 19). It was tentatively interpreted as a continuation of the same road found by WAS at Standish. In 2011, the society commissioned a geophysical survey of the same site, however this failed to produce results that could be positively linked to the surface reveal in earlier excavations (WYAS, 2011).

Perhaps the most significant of the excavations to have taken place in the region, at least in relation to the chronology of the road network, were those at Walton-le-Dale (NGR SD 55160 28130 and SD 55050 28300) in the 1980s and 1990s (Gibbons *et al*, 2001). This settlement was established by the Roman military at the end of 1st century AD with occupation continuing into the 4th century, and probably functioned as an industrial centre and supply base (Shotter, 2004, 43), provisioning nearby forts such as Ribchester. The settlement lay at a strategic crossing point of the River Ribble midway between the Roman military bases at Wigan and Lancaster – on the main north/south road along the West Coast – and between Kirkham and Ribchester within the corridor of the Ribble valley and linked by RR703.

More recently, a commercial excavation took place to the east of the A49 in Clayton-le-Woods (NGR SD55820 22880) (Dunn, 2014). Two trenches were excavated within the projected easement of the road, as it had been traditionally mapped out; both produced negative results, adding credence to an alternative route passing through Cuerden, to the west.



## Historical Background to Cuerden

The earliest references to Cuerden were made in the early 13th century (Farrer and Brownbill, 1911, 23). The original place-name *Kerden* is thought to be derivative of an early medieval word for 'mountain ash' (Elkwall, 1922, 134; Breeze, 1999, 193-195). As its etymology suggests, some form of the settlement could have existed here in the post-Roman period.

Cuerden was one of nine townships in the Leyland Hundred, which as an administrative unit was afforded a brief mention in the Domesday survey of 1086 (Morgan, 1978). Comprising part of a vast estate, the manor was granted to Roger de Poitou after the Norman Conquest, passing subsequently to the Molyneux family around the 12th century (Farrer and Brownbill, 1911). Land within Cuerden later came into the possession the Banastre, Kuerden, Chanock and Langton families, through various grants and settlements that eventually saw the fragmentation of the manor (Farrer and Brownbill, 1911).

Scarcely anything was known about the character of the settlement during this period, though previous studies suggest there were a series of interconnected hamlets, including Old Cuerden and Cuerden Green (Hallam, 1988). Old Cuerden, according to Hallam (*ibid*, 111), was situated to the south-west of Stoney Lane and to the north of the Town Fields, a probable focus for medieval farming.

Stoney Lane still exists and runs a considerable distance through Cuerden, continuing to the south-east in the direction of Clayton-le-Woods. It is mentioned in 1509 but is almost certainly earlier in origin (Farrer and Brownbill, 1911, 28). Portions of Stanifield or 'Staniforth Lane' as it appears on the OS Six Inch to 1-mile map of 1849 probably exist above the remains of the Roman road, attesting to the continuity of this way. Despite this, it deviates in places from its Roman predecessor, in places by c27m. The name 'Stanifield' shares a similar etymology to Stoney Lane, the *stan-* prefix is often attributable to the Old English for 'stone'. Comparison might also be drawn from the origins of the place-name Standish, meaning stone enclosure.

Road itineraries surviving from the late 17th century indicate that both Stanifield Lane and the Wigan to Preston Road were in use in the post-medieval period (Earwacker, 1876). The latter had become the main trade route north of Wigan, on Britain's west coast (Baines, 1867, 66) and was turnpiked in 1726 (Fishwick, 1894, 257). Outlined in bold on Yate's map of Lancashire from 1786, the road (later the A49) retained importance throughout the 19th and 20th centuries, eventually superseded by the M6 and M61 motorways, which now carry most of the cross-county traffic.

## EXCAVATION AT CUERDEN IN 2018

### Methodology

Area 6 was the southernmost area situated to the east of Stanifield Lane (NGR SD 55050 24350). It measured approximately 30 x 40m and was opened using a mechanical excavator.

The first task was to strip back the modern topsoil, followed by the removal of the underlying subsoil. In doing so, a number of negative features were exposed. These had been cut into the natural clay to the east of the road. The subsoil immediately above the road was hand-excavated to minimise damage to its surface. Once exposed, the remains were recorded in plan. A series of slots were then excavated through the eastern roadside ditch and associated features. Finally, two larger sections were excavated through the road and ditch to elucidate the method of construction and establish its profile.

## Geology

The solid geology within the excavation area consists of mudstone, overlain by thick glacial sequences of till and sand, which were laid down during the last glaciation (75,000-11,500 BC). In Area 6, the glacial till was found to be a light yellowish-brown silty clay with occasional to moderate stone inclusions.

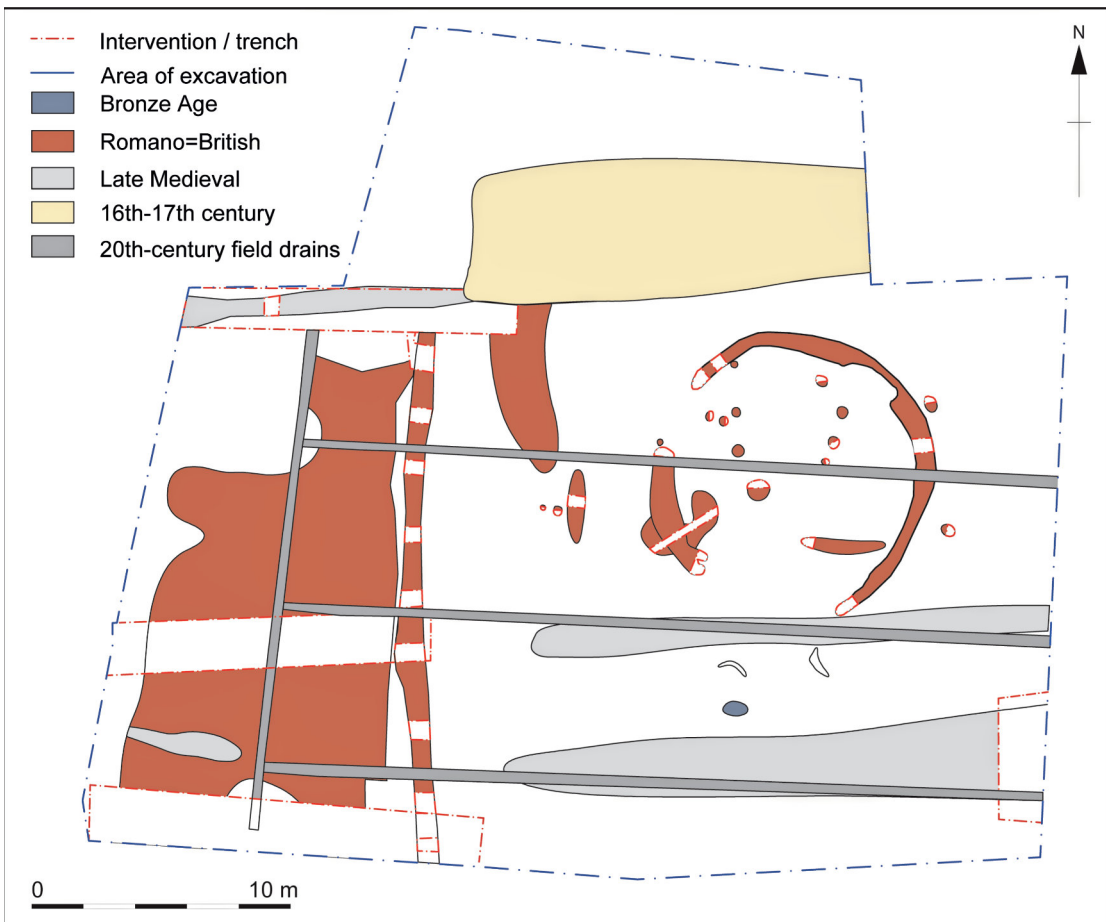


Fig. 2, Plan of the Area 6 showing the road and associated features

## Results

The road was constructed above the natural drift geology and ran broadly north / south across the western edge of the excavation. Its eastern roadside ditch was visible in plan alongside the road, whereas its western counterpart had been subject to truncation by a modern boundary ditch cut along the same alignment. Concentrated to the east of the road, on slightly elevated ground, were several groups of features indicative of Late Iron Age / Romano-British occupation (Figure 2). These included two curvilinear gullies outlining a probable roundhouse, a sunken metallised feature and a several other pits and post-holes.

## Prehistoric Activity

The earliest of the features was a sub-circular pit, measuring 1.10 x 0.50m with a maximum depth of 0.40m. It had an irregular profile and had two fills, the uppermost containing frequent charcoal inclusions. Samples of the charcoal were sent for radiocarbon dating, returning a date of 1501–1418 BC, which falls securely within the Bronze Age period. This might be indicative of early occupation in the vicinity of the road or more widespread



Fig. 3, Aerial view of the roundhouse and sunken metallised feature (© University of Salford)



activities, such as prehistoric clearances. The morphology of the feature suggest it could have been created through the uprooting of a small tree.

## **Roundhouse**

The roundhouse presented tangible evidence of Late Iron Age or Romano-British occupation of the site. It was represented by two arcing gullies and a group of internal post-holes (Figure 3). The gullies – interpreted as eaves’ drip gullies for collecting rainwater – ranged in width from 0.42m to 1.12m and had a maximum depth of 0.26m. Some variation in width and form was noted between the features. In addition, the terminal end of the south-west gully was splayed, implying the feature had been recut at least once. The maximal area enclosed by the gullies c9m is consistent with regional examples of roundhouses (eg Wood *et al*, 2008; Bagwell, 2004). Notable to the form were openings or gaps between the gullies facing north-west and south, which were interpreted as entrances.

Clustered in the northern half of the enclosed space were a series of post-holes of various sizes and forms. These did not conform to any obvious arrangement or distribution but could derive from internal divisions or post-built installations that were often erected within domestic structures.

The majority of the features were stratigraphically isolated, cut into the natural clay and sealed by the subsoil. An exception to this was the south-western gully, which cut through a sequence of pits; although these are undated, they could belong to a separate phase of Roman or prehistoric activity.

The fills of the gullies contained none of the artefactual material typically found on urban Roman sites. A find from one of the gullies was a fragment of black Pennine chert, a material commonly used for lithic manufacture in the prehistoric periods in the North West. Although it was initially thought to resemble a flint core, specialist examination did not identify any obvious signs of working. As an exogeneous lithic that had been transported to the site in antiquity, it does however provide an indication of background prehistoric activity.

Crucial to dating the closure of the roundhouse was a sample of charcoal retrieved from the terminal end of the eastern gully. This was sent for radiocarbon dating and returned a date of AD 80 – 225 with a 95% probability. Fragments of burnt stone that had possibly been displaced from domestic hearth were concentrated in a terminal of the south-western gully.

## **Associated Activity**

Situated between the roundhouse and road was a crescent-shaped feature that appeared to mirror the arc of the adjacent roundhouse gullies. This measured approximately 6.00 x 2.00m and had a relatively shallow depth, 0.05m. Lining the base of the cut was a surface formed of rounded stones, of a similar size and shape used in the road. The surface lay below a fill of silty clay. This has been interpreted as an external surface associated with the roundhouse, although the similarity of the metalling with the road raises the possibility it was related to the road’s construction. It had a spatial relationship with two post-holes and

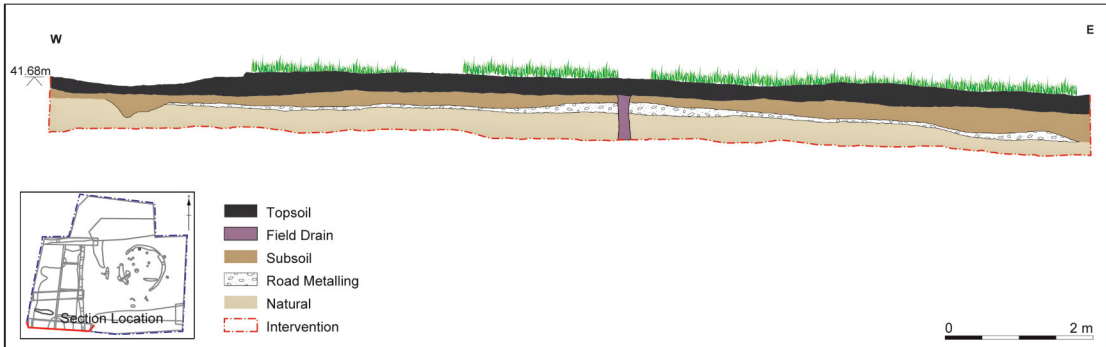


Fig. 4, Section through the road and ditch

a short linear feature to the south, which may derive from an external, post-built structure of some kind.

## Road

The most significant and visually impressive feature was the road, which was defined by a spread of rammed gravel and cobbles that stretched for 18.32m north / south and 11m east / west across the excavation area (Figure 2 & 4). The best-preserved area of metalling was revealed in the southern half of the excavation, becoming more intermittent and disturbed to the north. The surfacing material ranged in thickness from 0.05 to 0.34m and had been laid above a thin bedding layer of clayey sand. It is likely that the surface had been subject to some level of post-depositional disturbance, wear resulting in the loss of the road's distinctive agger. The gravel had survived only in a thin layer and there were no signs of wheel ruts or resurfacings. In the few places where the surfacing and bedding material was thicker there were no distinct bands that could be attributed to different surfacing events

Generally speaking, the profile was flat with slightly cambered edges (Figure 5).

The surviving roadside ditch had a total length of 18.94m, extending beyond the visible extent of the road. It ranged in width from 0.65m to 1.31m, and in depth from 0.25m to 0.31m. Although there was considerable variation in the profile of the ditch, it can be broadly described as concave widening in places to accommodate a flat base (Figure 6). The clay fill was uniform and sterile with few anthropogenic inclusions, such as charcoal and no artefactual material. A single fragment of iron slag, or ore, was recovered from the ditch.

Two vestigial linear features aligned east to west were exposed in the southern half of the excavation. Neither produced any dating evidence but were stratigraphically later than the roundhouse gullies. Interpreted as medieval furrows, both stopped short of the road, seemingly respecting it. The road may have remained a visible feature in the landscape long after its use in the Roman period. Whether it was simply used as a boundary or headland to this field system or remained a trackway, remains unclear.

Various processes of disturbance had impacted on the road. The most substantial evidence for truncation was a field boundary cut to the western side of the road, which had removed



Fig. 5, Oblique view across the road (© University of Salford)

any trace of the original roadside ditch. The field boundary is shown on historic maps and had evidently been established at a relatively late date, as it cut through the subsoil found sealing the road surface. At the northern end of the site, the surface and roadside ditch had been truncated by an east / west furrow of probable late medieval origin, which was in turn truncated by a large oblong extraction pit. Further damage had been caused by the installation of modern land drains housed in deep, narrow cuts.

## DISCUSSION

The excavated remains of the road in Cuerden confirm suspicions that the road (RR70c) diverges considerably from the course of the modern A49, taking a more direct route to Walton-le-Dale. In refining this portion of the route, it is possible to gain a clearer understanding of the context in which the road was constructed and used.

RR 70, otherwise known as King Street was the main lowland route passing through the North West. Evidence from various points along the road suggest that it may have originated in the early Flavian period (AD 69-77) as major northward advances were being made into Lancashire and Cumbria (Strickland, 1995, 24). Advances across the coastal plain may have





Fig. 6, Section of the roadside ditch (© University of Salford)

relied on the use of both land and naval forces, presumably utilising navigable river systems such as the Mersey, Ribble and Lune to rendezvous and for deploying troops and supplies (Rogers, 1996, 365). Walton-le-Dale stands out as an obvious candidate for such a site, although physical remains of a harbour or port are yet to be found (Howard Davis *et al*, 2001, 166). Early imperial coins from the site and other locations along the Roman road however lend credibility to this scenario (Shotter, 2004, 43).

Whether this was a route for conquest or consolidation, its relationship to the physical geography suggests an intimate knowledge of the land, its topography and its hydrology. In the immediate landscape of Cuerden, the road takes what one might deem the most favourable route, skirting the wet, low-lying land and mosses to the west and progressively upland landscape to the east, whilst maintaining a direct path to the site of Walton-le-Dale. The mosses (such as Farington to the south-west of Cuerden, which now cover a less extensive area than in antiquity) would have presented significant challenges for road construction and were avoided.

Certainly, similar environmental factors appear to have influenced construction near Manchester and Warrington, where roads deliberately circumvent areas of boggy ground. In doing so, it is possible that parts of the road network encompassed existing trackways,

particularly where roads passed along narrow corridors of well-drained land that were exploited throughout prehistory (Rogers, 1996, 368). At Broadheath near Altrincham (Greater Manchester) excavations in 1996 revealed a layer of turf dated to the Late Bronze Age (calibrated BC 835-785) that had been sealed beneath the Roman road surface; this was interpreted as evidence for the continuity of a prehistoric routeway in the Roman period (Eyre, Morgan and Irvine, 1996).

No indication of the Roman era ground surface was encountered at Cuerden. Instead, the road had been built directly onto the natural clay. The road was however constructed through a landscape that had already been subject to considerable human intervention. A Late Mesolithic – Neolithic flint blade found in the northern part of the site, approximately 150m from the projected line of the road, provides the earliest indications of a human presence in the landscape. Although this might only indicate a transient use of the landscape, towards the end of the Bronze Age, human interventions were more long-lasting, and included clearance and deforestation; tentative evidence for this was unearthed in the form of a tree hollow and rooting close to the road in Area 6. A residual fragment of Pennine chert reinforces the movement and occupation of people. It has been suggested that Cuerden could have been occupied during the Iron Age, a conclusion based on the identification of a cropmark to the east of Old School Lane. This represented a sharply defined circular ditch, approximately 25m in diameter with some suggestion of an internal bank and an ‘antenna’ extending out to the west, leading to its interpretation as a prehistoric enclosure (Hallam, 1980). However, no intrusive investigation was carried out to corroborate this interpretation, and the site was damaged subsequently by the erection of an electricity pylon.

With this in mind, there is a strong possibility that contact was made with local inhabitants during the construction of the road. The curvilinear gullies encountered adjacent to the road are forms more commonly associated with Iron Age or native settlement, although these traditions persisted for longer in this part of Britain. The radiocarbon date obtained from one of the roundhouse drip gullies suggest it had fallen out of use, at the very latest, by the early 3rd century AD. The date range is however broad, and it remains possible that the structure had been in existence for some time prior to this, perhaps as early as the late 1st or early 2nd century AD. This would correspond to the suggested construction period for the road under the governorship of Agricola.

Several aspects of the road’s construction at Cuerden were quite unexpected, not least of all its size. It measured up to 11.40m between the two cambered shoulders of gravel, considerably larger than the recorded widths of the road to the south of Wigan. The Cuerden example is also slightly wider than the metalled surfaces found by the WAS in Standish (10m in width) but is narrower than sections that were recorded in the 19th century (Watkin, 1883, 66-68), which ranged between thirteen and fourteen yards (11.89 – 12.80m) in width.

Watkin’s observations at Patten Hey (near Standish) include details of the road’s width and composition (*ibid*, 66-67): ‘being fourteen yards in width, and a yard in depth, formed of gravel with blocks of yellow-coloured freestone’. This compares favourably to an account given for another part of road encountered ‘one quarter of a mile north-north-east of

Euxton' described as being 'thirteen yards in width, paved with large blocks of stone and composed of gravel' (Watkin, 1883, 68).

The example from Cuerden was composed exclusively of gravel and cobbles with no indication of paving. In places, the metalling survived to 0.34m but was predominantly a thin scattering of stones with no foundation. Beneath the gravel was a thin layer of sandy clay visible above the natural, interpreted as a bedding material. As there was no indication of a buried soil horizon beneath the road, it is possible it was cleared of soil and vegetation prior to construction. This contrasts with the road's construction to south of Wigan (RR70b: Miller, this volume), which was narrower, utilising blocks of stone and gravel.

Reasons for the disparity in size and construction between the two roads are not readily apparent. The exclusive use of gravel and cobbles at Cuerden may reflect its local abundance over other types of stone. The nearby River Lostock, which meanders around Cuerden, is likely to have been exploited as a source for this building material. The matter of the road's width, which varies considerably as it passes through the modern counties of Cheshire, Greater Manchester and Lancashire is much harder to explain, although it might suggest that the multiple gangs of workers were employed in its construction, utilising slightly different techniques of construction where this was dictated by changes in terrain and the availability of materials. The fact that the road to the north of Wigan is plainly wider may imply it initially catered for a greater volume of military traffic, owing to the convergence of three roads on Wigan from Manchester (RR702), Wilderspool (RR70b) and Burscough (RR702aa).

There is convincing evidence to suggest that the road persisted as a landscape feature for a considerable period after the collapse of formal Roman administration in the 5th century AD. At Cuerden, two furrows revealed in Area 6 stopped short of the road suggesting that later field systems were established in relation to the road. The compacted surface would have proved difficult to plough, acting instead as a headland or farm track. The furrows likely formed part of an open field system. Eventually, the road was transected by a shallow linear feature; its morphology was broadly similar to the late medieval furrows and gullies found in the north of the site. It is possible that this feature defined the edge of one of the early enclosed 'Town Fields'. The 'Town Fields' or 'Towncrofts' feature in a grant of land made by Adam de Charnock in 1325 (Farrer and Brownbill, 1911), providing a rough indication for when this portion of site was subdivided, and the road ceased to be functional.

Even after the road fell out of use, it continued to influence the arrangement of surrounding fields and may have remained a visible feature in the landscape. Its alignment is respected by a prominent post-medieval boundary that ran parallel to the western edge of the road. This is shown on the OS Six Inch to 1-mile map of 1849. Perpendicular boundaries emanate out from this line and are captured on historic mapping and aerial photographs. What is remarkable, however, is that the excavated section of the road survived largely intact, having sustained little damage from later agricultural activity that is likely to have been responsible for removing all trace of the road in the immediate vicinity.

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