

The Rowhook–Farley Heath branch road: excavations by I D Margary and A J Clark and further field observations

Introduction

Among the papers left by the late Dr A J (Tony) Clark are a number relating to his work in the area of Coneyhurst Gill and this note represents a synthesis of information in those papers relating to the Romano-British road and further research by one of the authors.

This road reached archaeological notice when local tradition of a Roman road in Ewhurst and the removal of its surface materials to repair the road from Ewhurst to Rudgwick encouraged research on its alignment, primarily from finds of possible road material in ploughed fields but also, possibly, from minor excavations (Harrison 1874). At the same time similar evidence had been noted by Captain Le Poer Trench and his sappers and provided the basis for the line given on contemporary and later OS maps. Extensive fieldwork by S E Winbolt further confirmed the alignment and extended its apparent line on to the greensand ridge of Winterfold and then on to Farley Heath (figs 1 and 2; Winbolt 1924, 49–67).

The area around Coneyhurst Gill first appears to have attracted the attention of Tony Clark in 1946 while he was working with R G Goodchild in disproving Winbolt's putative line of the road farther north on Winterfold (Goodchild 1949, 147–9). In 1947 a section across

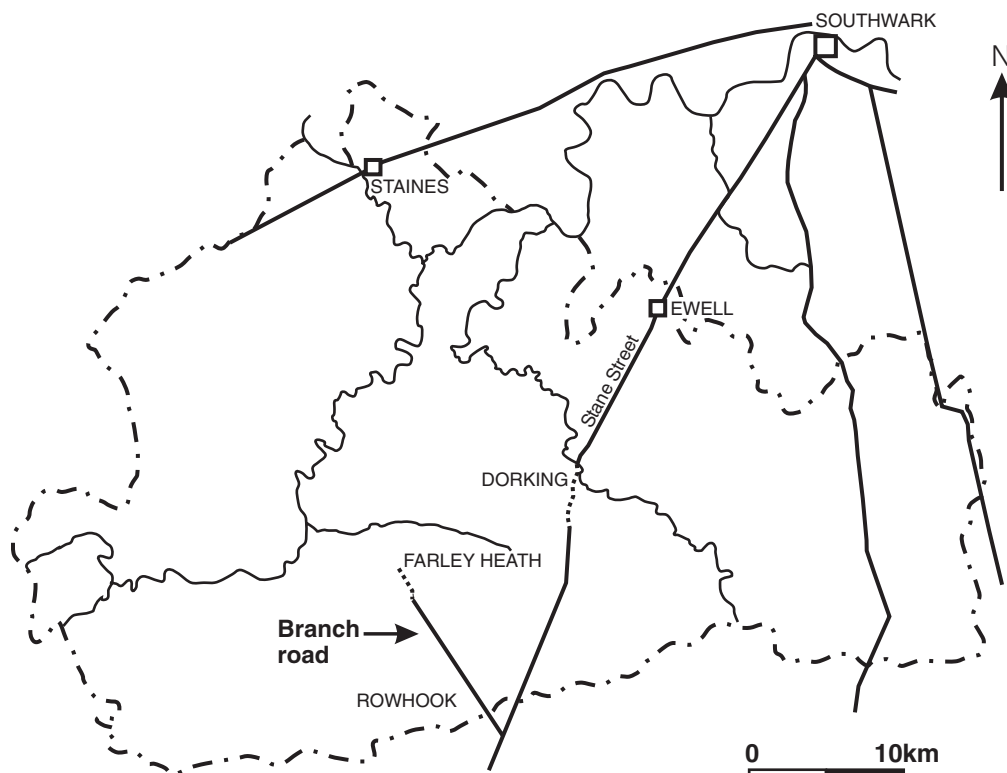


Fig 1 Rowhook–Farley Heath road: location map.

the road was excavated by members of a school camping at Sayer's Croft, Ewhurst (then owned by London County Council), and Tony Clark was asked to visit and advise. A description of this section is contained in a letter from Tony Clark to Ivan Margary dated 27 August 1947: 'By some remarkable coincidence it was found that the road at this point quite obviously lay on the top of one of the thin layers of natural sandstone in the area, just where it arched up towards the surface to a width of about 18ft [6m], the normal width of the road. The arching of the stratum, of course provided a very convincing camber, and it was only by extending the trench well beyond and below the apparent road that its natural origin was able to be proved. Despite this, there seems little doubt that the surface of this extraordinary outcrop [was] used by the Romans as the road, because it is bang on the line'. This 'coincidence' appears to have given rise to some doubts and in the same letter he states his intention of excavating another section close by to investigate the construction of the road with the intention of providing information for Margary's book *Roman Ways in the Weald*, the text of which had been sent to him for appraisal. This excavation, on Sayer's Croft playing field, is designated as AJC 1 in Margary's book (Margary 1948, 85) and further details are given below (see *Excavations*). Fieldwork described in the same letter shows that it was in 1947 that Tony Clark located the industrial site with its 'great oak timbers projecting from the stream-bed' at the point where the Roman road crossed Coneyhurst Gill although he was not to return to this site until 1961. He also identified the point (TQ 0844 4014) where the Roman road crossed a small stream at a ford where the bed was a 'compact layer of largish ironstones and chert'.

The surviving correspondence gives no information about a section excavated – or at least observed in section in the bank of the stream – at Cobbler's Brook, Ewhurst (see *Excavations* below) but the drawing appears with one version of the section at Sayer's Croft suggesting that the work was undertaken at more or less the same time. This section may be the work mentioned in a letter from Ivan Margary to Tony Clark dated 31 October 1948 in which the former notes that he is 'glad to have further notes on the Ewhurst road and it is satisfactory that the new finds all confirm the alignment' and cites a width of 13ft (4.2m).

A further section appears to have been excavated 'in Canfold Wood' in 1949 by the Archaeological Society at Cranleigh School and they clearly intended more work 'near Wykehurst Farm' in 1950 but no record of any fieldwork by the school has been located.

The primary aim of Tony Clark's excavation at Coneyhurst Gill in 1961 was to investigate the industrial site located in 1947 but a further section was cut across the road west of the gill and the few surviving details are given below.

Excavations

COBBLER'S BROOK (fig 2, Site 1)

It cannot be ascertained whether the section drawn here is a record of what could be seen in the bank of the stream or was revealed by subsequent excavation. In Clark's 27 August 1947 letter to Margary he stated: 'the line crosses a small stream that only floods in wet weather, and very striking relics of the Roman ford are visible in its bed: a compact layer of largish ironstones and chert, which is also traceable well into the banks on either side.' and 'The ford is still used as a modern footpath and no stones at all are to be seen in the stream-bed either side of the line'.

SAYER'S CROFT PLAYING FIELDS (fig 2, Site 2)

A letter from Margary to Clark, dated 1 November 1947 reveals that this section had been excavated by them a week previously at a location '34 yards [11.1m] N of the SW corner of field'. The accompanying notes indicate that the 'road [was] buried in meadow at [the] edge of Upper Canfield Wood with slight indication of an agger. Metalling of sandstone and

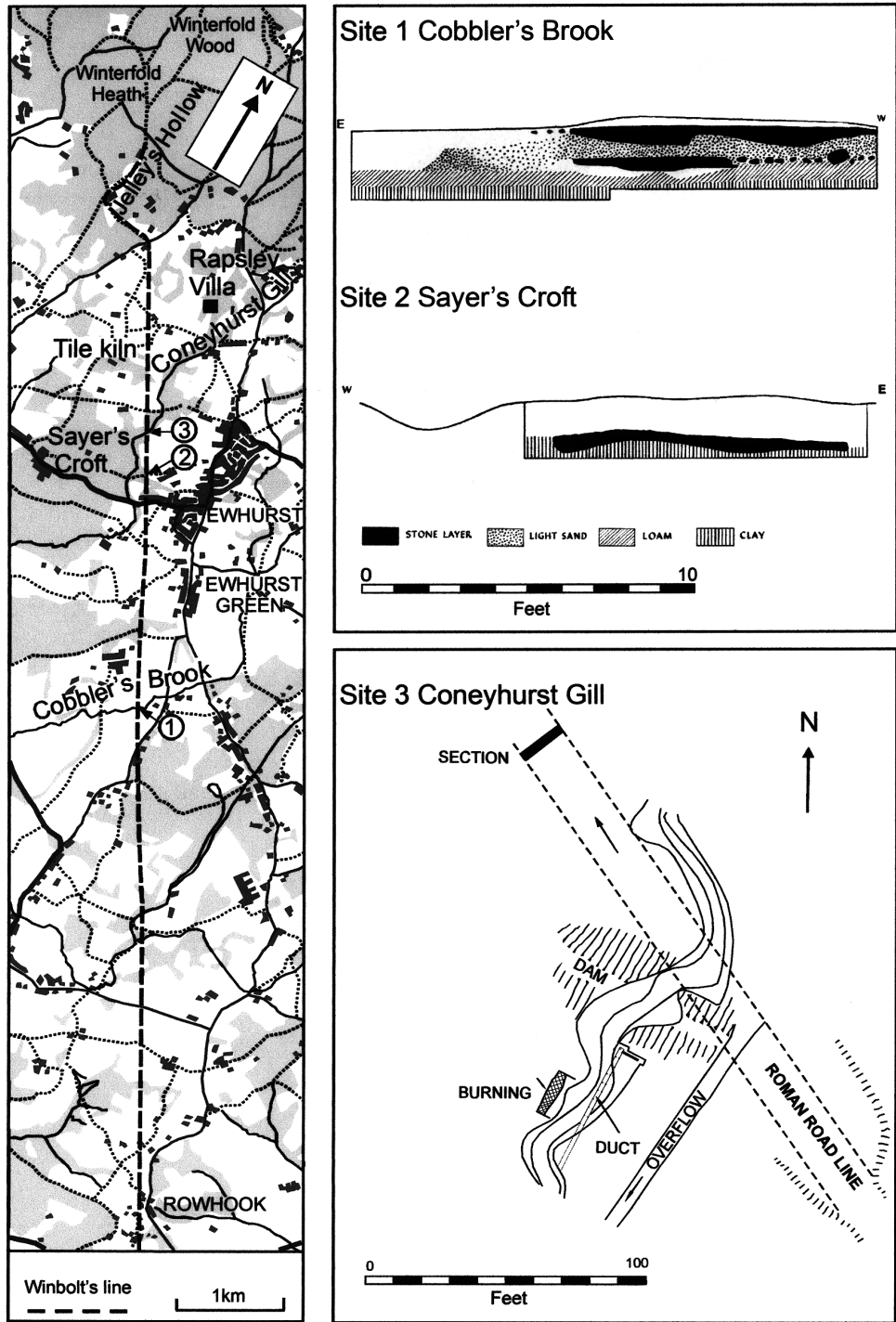


Fig 2 Rowhook-Farley Heath road: locations of the Cobbler's Brook, Sayer's Croft and Coneyhurst Gill excavation sites and sections through the Roman road. (© Crown Copyright. NC/2004/33611)

ironstone with about 10% chert was found as an intact layer 4–7 ins [0.1–0.18m] thick for a width of 10 ft [3.3m], with a slight camber'. Also enclosed was a series of detailed measurements from which it appears that Clark produced the section drawing.

What is particularly noteworthy in the section drawing is that the agger was apparently formed of sand and that there seemed to be two levels of metalling. Whether these were consecutive layers of contemporaneous construction or evidence of an episode of resurfacing cannot be discerned.

CONEYHURST GILL (fig 2, Site 3)

The excavation campaign at this site was targeted at the industrial site and it is thought that Clark was happy to employ a surplus of volunteers in excavating across the projected line of the road. The work was supervised by R W Williams who recollects that full notes and drawings were made (R W Williams, pers comm). Unfortunately, no such records appear to have survived.

What is clear is that the industrial dam did not contain a Roman causeway as had been suspected by Clark. The road, in fact, lay a few feet to the north.

Field observations, by Judie English

In the mid-1980s a field on Hillhouse Farm, Ewhurst, was deep ploughed and, at the invitation of the farmer Mr Cecil Mugeridge, two points were located on the field boundary where large, *c* 0.3–0.4m squared slabs of limestone and sandstone were visible. A few slabs were also seen on the surface of the field between the two points, but not elsewhere, and it seems likely that they were once part of the metalling of the Roman road. The two points – TQ 1048 3703 and TQ 1055 3689 – are both on the line published by Margary (1948, 84).

After the Great Storm of 1987 a straight line opened up through Nag's Wood, also on Hillhouse Farm, where birch trees had fallen. The line ran north-west from TQ 1048 3703 and, with large stones visible in the root plates, this would again be consistent with the position of the Roman road shown on the OS map.

Discussion

These observations, disparate and incomplete though each is individually, provide confirmatory evidence for the position of the Romano-British road from Rowhook towards Farley Heath as it passes through Ewhurst parish. It should, however, be emphasized that, although it is likely that this road continued north-west to meet either the putative Winchester–London road in the area of Guildford and/or the Silchester–London road at either Wickham Bushes or Staines (Bird 1987, 168), the line north-west of Coneyhurst Gill remains unproven.

The section described here involves some of the most difficult terrain for transport links; until turnpikes were built Wealden roads in winter were regarded as some of the most treacherous in the region. The southern portion of Ewhurst parish is criss-crossed by a number of small streams and is still, after several centuries of drainage, cloyingly wet and sticky. That a relatively minor road should require the use of slabs of stone, as seen at Hillhouse Farm, either as metalling (as used where Stane Street crossed wet ground north of the river crossing near Alfoldean: Margary 1948, 63) or as part of the make-up, attests this difficulty. The use of sand to build up an agger was used in the construction of Stane Street at Ewell (Pemberton 1973, 4), but in the section of the branch road seen at Cobbler's Brook it is laid on a bed of stones that seems to represent an attempt to build a cambered road without the material sinking into the clay subsoil.

All the materials used could have been sourced locally. Greensand, probably from the Pitch Hill area of the Hythe Beds, was being exploited during the Romano-British period

(Hanworth 1968, 5, 31) and chert occurs within this stratum. The term ironstone could indicate either carstone, which occurs within the Hythe Beds, or bog iron ore (shravey), extensive deposits of which occur in steam beds throughout the area of Weald Clay. Limestone outcrops in several small areas but most notably on the ridge which forms the watershed between the rivers Wey and Arun some 7km south of Ewhurst at the point where the branch road under discussion leaves Stane Street. Sand could be obtained from the Hythe Beds deposits or from small but exploitable outcrops within the Weald Clay.

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