

**AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING-BRIEF AT
186/188 RYKNELD ROAD, LITTLEOVER, DERBYSHIRE**



**An Archaeological Watching-Brief at
186/188 Rykneld Road, Littleover, Derbyshire.**

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Plate 1 Typical section, seen in AR3

Summary

Background The fieldwork described in this report was carried out in November 2004 and April 2006 at 186/188 Ryknild Street, Littleover, Derby, by G Kinsley and Barry Lewis of Trent & Peak Archaeological Unit. The work was done during construction of four houses by John Sutton Developments Ltd..

Archaeological context. The site is thought possibly to occupy the course of, or to be close to, the Roman road of Ryknild Street, and excavation for construction might cut through the fabric of the road itself or through roadside structures.

Results Two trenches (AR1 & AR2) were inspected in 2004 and trenching for plot 1 in 2006 (AR3). AR1 contained only modern material, and AR2 contained a natural soil profile with no trace of archaeological deposits or features. AR3 also contained extensive natural soil profiles, but no remains of the road. The road may have been scraped away in earlier construction, but the more likely probability is that its course lies outside the boundaries of the watching-brief.

1 Project background

The property, 186/188 Rykneld Road, lies on the A5020 (formerly the A38) on the outskirts of Littleover, Derby. The four new dwellings under construction lie on a plot accessed by a drive approximately 20 metres south-east of the Rykneld Road. A small outbuilding also lies off this drive in the western corner of the plot, approximately 10 metres south-east of the road.

The site is thought to possibly occupy the course of Ryknild Street, a Roman road, and excavation construction might cut through the fabric of the road itself or through roadside structures.

The Local Planning Authority indicated that a watching-brief is required during construction. Following discussions with the Curatorial Archaeologist, Andy Myers, a scheme involving inspection of advance trenching and construction groundworks was agreed. Two trenches at the rear of the site were inspected in November 2004 (reported on in Inker & Kinsley 2004), and the footings of plot 1 at the frontage in April 2006.

2 Method

Two trenches (AR1, AR2) were excavated by the client in advance of construction in November 2004, under archaeological supervision; their locations were chosen to form two transects across the possible Roman road line to be occupied by plots 2-4. Advance excavation provided the opportunity to clean and record without impact on the construction programme. The excavations were monitored by G Kinsley. Further trenches for plot 1 (AR3) were excavated by the client and inspected by Barry Lewis of Trent & Peak on April 19th 2006.

3 Results

AR1 was 22m long and excavated to a width of 700mm and a depth of 1200mm. It contained entirely recent material including asbestos roofing tiles, red clay and brick. The surrounding lie of the land does not suggest that the ground had been made up and the conclusion was drawn that the area had been excavated and backfilled in the recent past. Any traces of the Roman road would have been removed by this process.

AR2 was 14.9m long and excavated to a width of 700 and a depth of 900mm. 250mm of light brown clay topsoil directly overlay the natural Mercia Mudstone bedrock of light red-brown clay mottled light grey clay and decayed stone. There

was no trace of metalling, ditches, or any other archaeologically significant features or deposits.

AR3 comprised the stripped floor area and excavated footings of house 1, occupying a roughly 10m square, and was inspected by Barry Lewis on 18th April 2006. A small outbuilding to the south-east had already been built when T&P were asked to inspect. The footings had been excavated to c.1.4m deep, in trenches about c.0.70m wide. The following stratigraphic sequence was observed.

0-0.25m: a mix of soil, hardcore and general builders waste etc.

0.25-0.55m: dark greyish brown silty loam occasional inclusions of sub-angular small stones. In places this layer was capped by (for 0.15m max of its depth) tarmac and slabs, i.e. general garden surfaces etc.

0.55-c.0.80/1m: grey silty colluvium

0.80/1.00-c.1.4m Mercia Mudstone (veined with greensand).

The spoil heaps inspected, but no artefacts were found.

The only other archaeological observation was that the footings of a later-20th-century garage were observed during excavation occurring at the west portion of the excavations (nearest the existing house 186). The maximum depth of the footings was 0.80m, and the wall thickness was 0.40.

4 Discussion

The modern Rykneld Road is commonly thought to have been built over the top of the original Roman road, called Ryknild Street. Ryknild Street was part of the greater Roman road network, this particular stretch running from Stretton (Burton-upon-Trent) to Little Chester (Derby). Ryknild Street runs from the bridge over the River Dove outside Stretton, in an almost straight line to Pastures Hill (Littleover), where it turns west, presumably due to topography of the area. This point is approximately 1km north of proposed development, 186/188 Rykneld Road. The straightness of the modern road suggests that it is very likely that the Roman road either underlies it. I. D. Margary has commented that the stretch of the Ryknild Street between Stretton and Littleover "is very noticeably raised by 2-3 feet, a fine example of a Roman road still in use" (I. D. Margary, 1967. *Roman Roads in Britain*, p.306.). More recent excavation in Derby on the Roman settlement at Little Chester has accepted that the Rykneld Road overlies the route of the original Roman road, and prefers instead to

concentrate on the road's crossing of the River Derwent and progress through Derby (Sparey-Green 2002). It is likely therefore, that the modern Rykneld Road does indeed follow the line of Roman Ryknield Street.

Recent analysis of Roman road structures has concluded that average width of Roman roads in Britain was 6.5 metres and that Ryknield Street in particular had an average width of 7.4 metres (H. Davis, 2002. *Roads in Roman Britain*, p.75). It is possible that this width might have been enlarged with the addition of an agger, a ditch or bank that would have run alongside the Roman road. However, as Rykneld Road is nearly 10 metres wide and that the proposed development is a minimum of 10 metres from Rykneld Road, it is unlikely that the proposed development would encroach upon the line of the Roman Road. Whilst it is still possible that the Rykneld Road might have deviated slightly from Ryknield Street, it is unlikely that any deviation would be great enough for the Roman road to be uncovered during development. However any roadside settlement or road-related structures might well have fallen within the area affected by construction.

From the above, the lack of finding of any surviving evidence for the Roman road in the watching-brief suggests that its course lies outside the footprint of the trenches. However, there is a possibility that its physical remains may have been removed by building activity prior to the watching-brief taking place: surface scraping might be enough to remove metalling. However, no side-ditches were seen in the watching-brief either, so the probability lies with the course of the road lying elsewhere.

5 References

Inker, P., and Kinsley, G., 2004. *An Archaeological Watching-Brief at 186/188 Rykneld Road, Littleover, Derbyshire: Interim Report*. Unpublished report for John Sutton Developments.

Sparey-Green, C., 2002. 'Excavations on the south-eastern defences and extra-mural settlement of Little Chester, Derby 1971-2', *Derbyshire Archaeological Journal* 122, 56

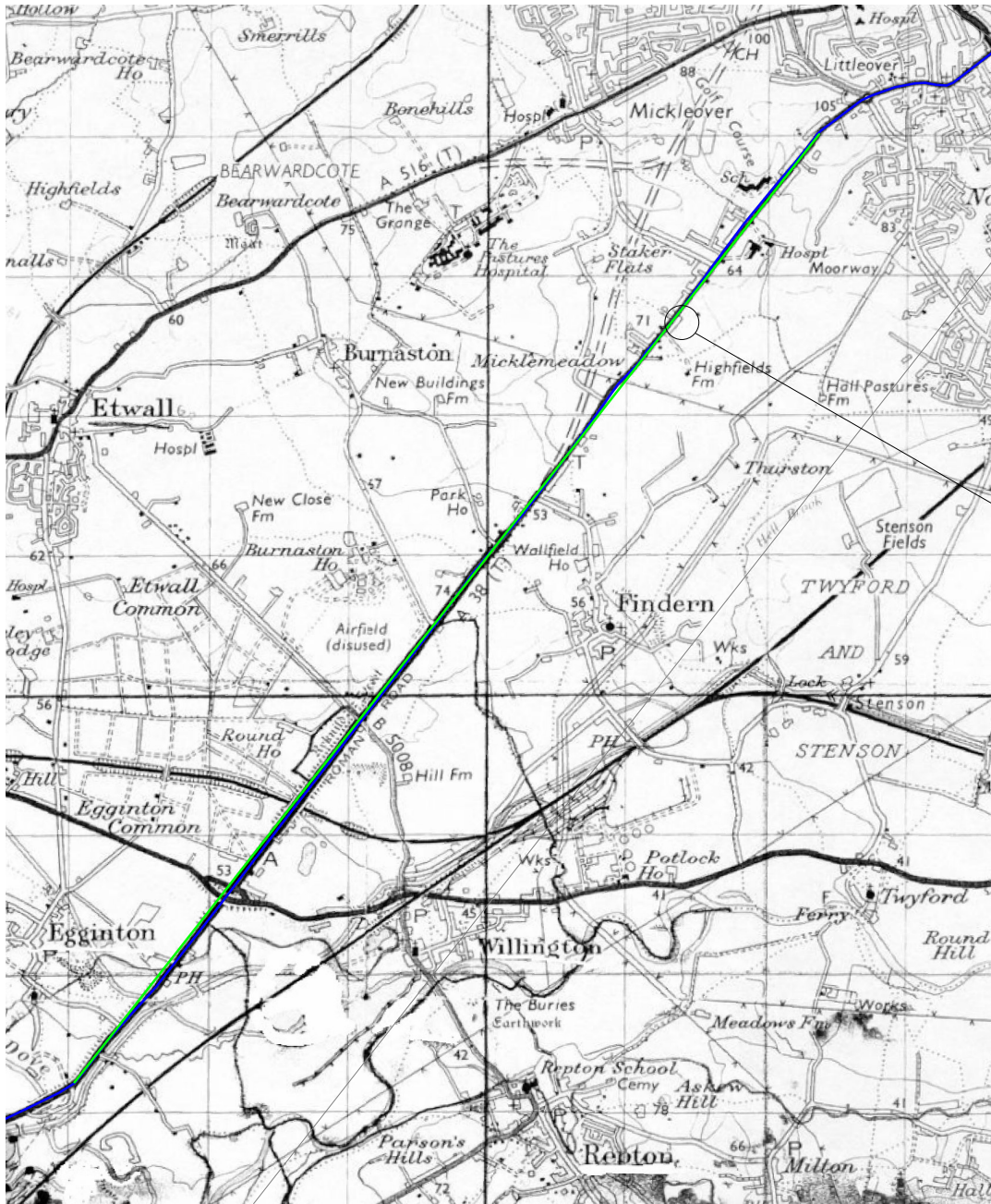


Fig. 1: site location (circle) showing actual course of A38 (blue); greatest length of Roman road which can be projected as a straight course between apparent surviving stretches (green; dot-dashed)



Fig. 2: trenches inspected (red) showing actual course of A38 (blue) and greatest length of Roman road which can be projected as a straight course between apparent surviving stretches (green; dot-dashed)



Fig. 3: trenches inspected (red) and existing site layout with proposed new dwellings 1-4, showing actual course of A38 (blue) and greatest length of Roman road which can be projected as a straight course between apparent surviving stretches (green; dot-dashed)



Plate 1 Typical section, seen in AR3