

*BIRMINGHAM UNIVERSITY  
FIELD ARCHAEOLOGY UNIT*

**An Archaeological Evaluation  
At Pastures Hill,  
Littleover,  
Derbyshire**

*B.U.F.A.U.*



Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit  
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Littleover, Derbyshire**

by  
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# **AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVALUATION AT PASTURES HILL, LITTLEOVER, DERBYSHIRE**

**By Gary Coates**

## **1.0 Summary**

A trial trench was excavated across the projected route of Roman Rykneld Street, by staff from Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit in September 1997. The purpose of the excavation was to assess the extent to which this road would be affected by any construction work for an access to a proposed development to the west of the area investigated. One trench was excavated, but no archaeological deposits were identified: specifically nothing that could be identified as a Roman road. A record of the identified stratigraphy was taken.

## **2.0 Introduction**

This report outlines the results of the evaluation trench excavated within a passage between two existing housing plots on Pastures Hill, Littleover, on the southern outskirts of Derby. The excavation itself consisted of a single 50m long trench excavated by machine and further investigated by archaeological excavation. This was carried out in the early stages of development planning to assess the extent to which access construction would affect any surviving archaeological deposits, especially those associated with Roman Rykneld Street. Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit was commissioned by Countryside Planning & Management behalf of William Davis Ltd to carry out this excavation to assess the depth, date, extent and nature of any archaeological deposits encountered.

## **3.0 The Location of Pastures Hill, Littleover (Figs. 1 & 2)**

Littleover is a suburb to the south of Derby city centre and Pastures Hill itself is a road (A5250) that runs southwest/northeast through Littleover, towards the A38. The trench itself was located in a passage between numbers 58 and 60 Pastures Hill (Fig. 2).

## **4.0 Archaeological and Historical Background**

Rykneld Street Roman road runs approximately north-south from the Fosse Way, north-east of Cirencester, through Alcester, Wall and Derby to Templeborough in Yorkshire (Margary 1967, 280). This particular stretch of the road runs straight through Littleover, towards Little Chester, just north of Derby city centre, although it is not clear where it crosses the River Derwent (Margary 1967, 306).

In Littleover, itself, the road is visible in the grounds of the Crest Hotel and to the south of this area (see Figure 2) as an agger, approximately 3 feet high. This has been assessed to be of sufficient importance to be scheduled by English Heritage, although it has not

received any significant archaeological investigation. It is not known where the road continues in the area of the evaluation trench.

## **5.0 Objectives**

The principal objective of the trial trench was to determine whether any traces of Rykneld Street had survived in this area and if so to assess the impact of the development of these surviving remains. Any further archaeological deposits were also to be sample excavated and then recorded to evaluate their significance. After this information was obtained, it was intended to propose a series of measures to further protect and record any archaeological deposits affected by the proposed development.

## **6.0 Method**

The excavation of the trial trench was carried out by a J.C.B. Excavator with a 1.40m wide, toothless, ditching bucket, under the supervision of suitably qualified archaeologists from Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit. Considerable quantities of building rubble and garden rubbish had been cleared by the developers prior to the evaluation. However, a group of mature trees fronting onto the street, were deemed to be too difficult to remove and essential in preserving the character of the existing residential area. All significant archaeological deposits were to be excavated by hand and recorded on pro-forma record cards supplemented by scale plans, section drawings and photographs, where appropriate. Where no archaeological deposits were identified the stratigraphy was recorded and photographed. These records comprise the site archive, which, at the time of writing, is currently stored at Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit.

## **7.0 The Trial Trench**

The trench itself measured 50m by 1.40m wide. The width of the trench was restricted by the narrowness of the passage, which was approximately 2.5m wide. The excavation extended along the length of the passage from northwest end to southeast, allowing a reasonable distance from the trees, fronting onto Pastures Hill. The natural topography of landscape in this passage suggested a slight rise towards the middle of the trench. The topsoil varied in depth from 0.12m at the southeastern end to 0.4m at the northwestern end and contained considerable quantities of modern building rubble, garden and household refuse. There was also a considerable amount of root activity from the vegetation of the neighbouring properties and from the shrubs which had been cleared prior to the archaeological investigation. The topsoil was directly above the subsoil horizon, which was a red sandy-clay gravel in the east and a brown-red sandy gravel in the west. A small modern, land drain, with a width of 0.40m, was identified 1.0m from the western end of the trench, with a north-south alignment. No archaeological deposits were identified and no artefacts were recovered that were not of modern manufacture.

At the southeastern end of the passage an overgrown section across a bank of approximately 1.0m height was identified on the line of the property boundary of No. 58. Careful excavation by machine was carried out on this area to expose a clean section of stratigraphy without damaging the property boundary, itself. The resulting section had a layer of garden soil, 0.3m thick, above the red sandy-clay gravel subsoil that had been exposed beneath the existing topsoil. This suggested that the bank was a natural feature that at some time in the past had been excavated or eroded away to facilitate this passage. The modern topsoil has subsequently accumulated above this new flatter surface.

### **8.0 Assessment of the Archaeological Importance of the Site**

No archaeological deposits were identified and no evidence of the Roman road was recovered. It is possible that all traces of the road in this area were destroyed during the construction of the existing residential dwellings. Alternatively, the line of Rykneld Street lies outside the area threatened by the proposed access road.

### **9.0 Acknowledgements**

The archaeological excavation was carried out by Gary Coates and John La Niece. Gwilym Hughes monitored the project and edited this report. Thanks to Peter Waterfield (William Davis Ltd) and Royston Clark (Countryside Planning & Management) for their assistance and advice.

### **10.0 Reference**

Margary, I.D. (1967) *Roman Roads in Britain*.

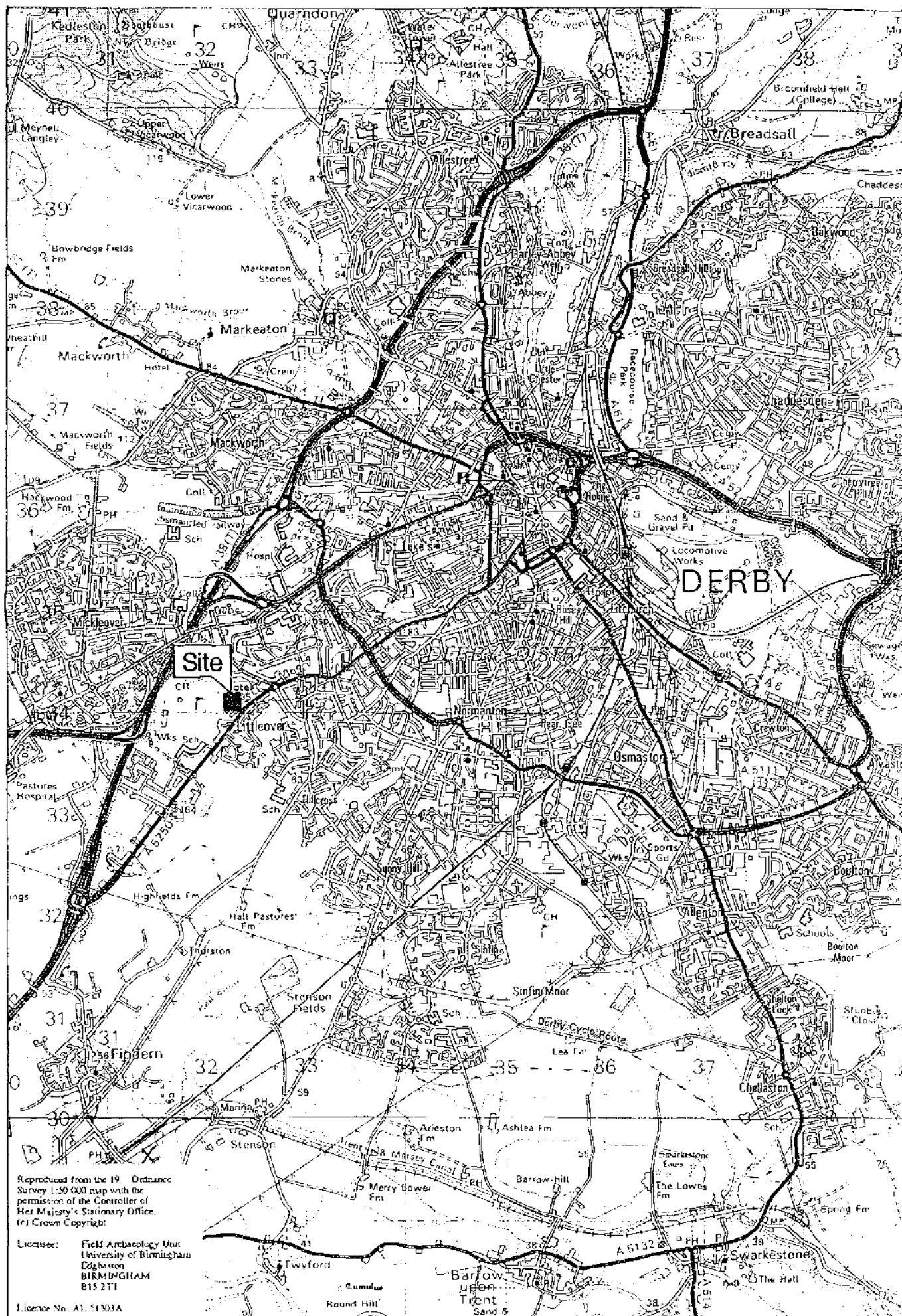


Fig. 1

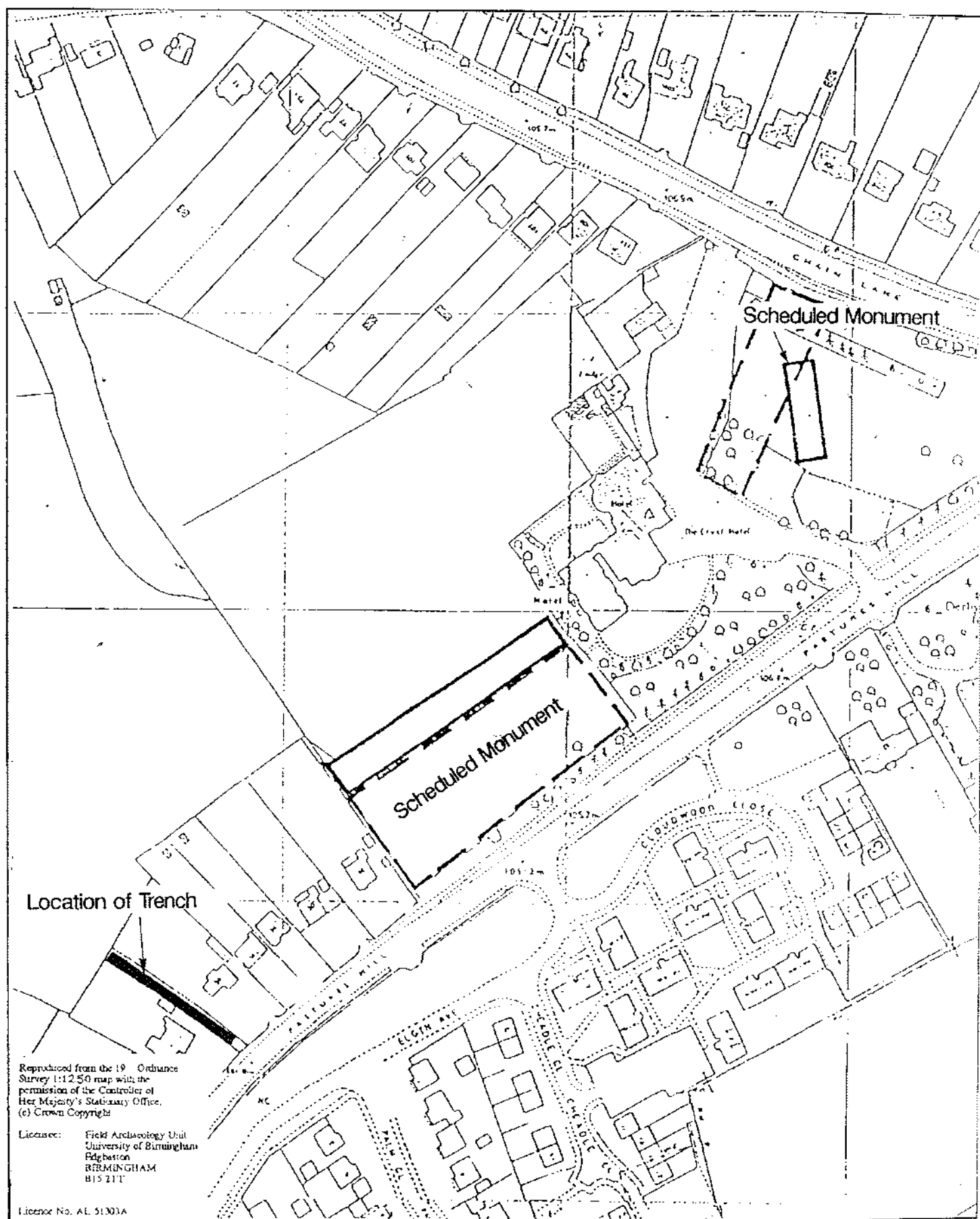


Fig. 2