

## A SECTION ACROSS RYKNIELD STREET AT NEW TUPTON

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In May 1975 a mechanical section was cut through the *agger* of Ryknield Street at New Tupton (SK 392664) in connection with a pipe-laying operation conducted by the National Coal Board. The Trent Valley Archaeological Research Committee was informed of the work at an early stage, and shortly after the Roman road had been sectioned the contractor's trench was claned up, examined and recorded by the writers. The trench was dug across the road in a particularly well-preserved sector largely free from modern obstructions. A new section of the road could thus be expected to provide fresh information on its structure.

From south of Higham, Ryknield Street follows a band of sandstone which outcrops in a strip no more than 400 yd. (0.4 km.) wide. About midway between Clay Cross and Old Tupton a fault occurs across the line of the outcrops, running approximately north-west to south-east. Here the sandstone scarp peters out and the modern road deviates slightly to the west through Old Tupton, reaching the sandstone again at New Tupton, just north of another fault almost parallel to the first. The roads, ancient and modern, follow this towards Chesterfield.

Two successive road surfaces were revealed. The earlier, of small stones loosely packed together, measured only 2.90 m. (9 ft. 7 in.) wide and had been laid directly on the natural clay. Though not impossibly narrow for a Roman road, this may only have served as a bottoming, the surface having been worn off by heavy use. Over this first road there had accumulated a dense, friable, black deposit which subsequent examination showed to be coal-dust. This layer, which varied from 2 to 10 cm. in thickness, extended beyond both edges of the road, being in all 8.50 m. (28 ft. 4 in.) wide. The deposit contained no features of interest except a small intrusion near its western edge, probably an old animal burrow.

Over the deposit of coal dust lay the later road make-up, much thicker than the first (20 to 30 cm.), but once again having lost its surface, this time due to modern ploughing. The make-up consisted of irregularly sized blocks packed in earth. It included also quantities of coal dust, notably in a lens near its western edge (1.20 m. long and up to 6 cm. thick). Only one road ditch was observed, lying on the eastern margin of the later road. It measured 1.30 m. wide and 40 cm. deep, and was filled with greyish-brown silt. A careful search on the western edge revealed no ditch; here a thick layer of yellow clay and sand had built up at the road-side. No artifacts of any date were recovered.

The presence of coal dust in some quantity is of considerable interest. Several other sites on this stretch of Ryknield Street have produced similar evidence and it gradually becomes clear that extraction of coal was of some local importance. The *agger* of the road at Shirland (Saunders 1959) four miles to the south of Tupton had coal compacted into its surface, and a section cut near Mill Lane, Wingerworth (Oakley 1955), one mile to the north, showed coal dust lying in the road ditches. Geology provides a ready explanation. Precisely in this area, several coal-seams outcrop from beneath the Permian

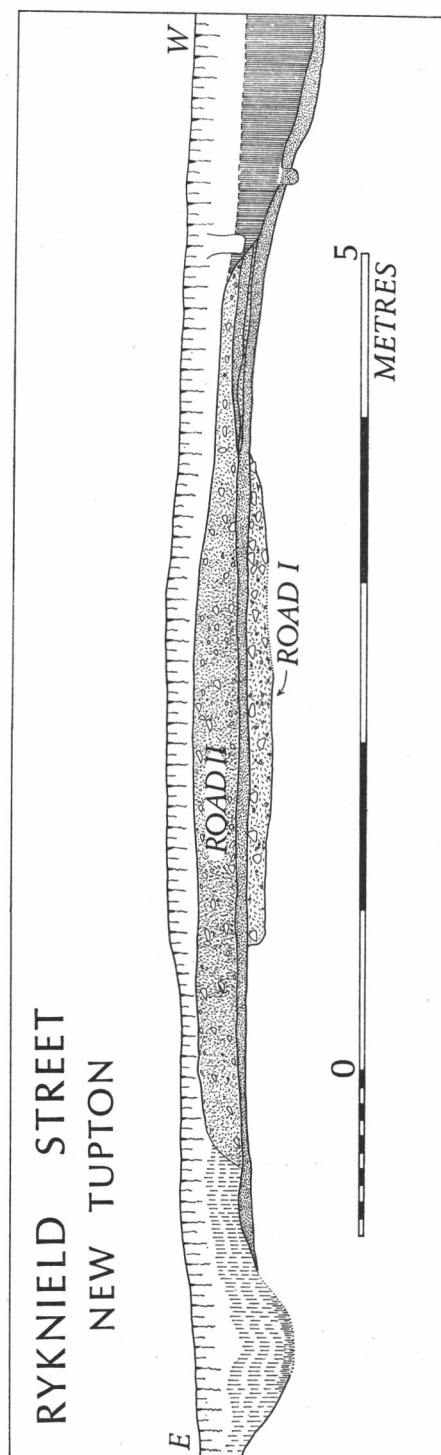


Fig. 1 Section through Ryknield Street at New Tupton

Limestones lying to the east. Extraction would be easy and the presence of a Roman road aided transport, at least for short distances. Whether the Derbyshire coal was dispatched outside the immediate region is as yet unknown. But these outcrops are surely the likeliest source for the deposit of coal found in the *praetorium* of the Roman fort at Templeborough, near Rotherham (May 1922, 37).

## REFERENCES

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