

## THE ROMAN ROADS OF DERBY

by M. BRASSINGTON

The modern A5020 (formerly the A38) from Burton to Derby follows the course of Ryknield Street until it curves gradually towards Littleover as it ascends Pastures Hill. The Roman Road continues in a straight line, passing through the grounds of the Derby Crest Motel — here the *agger* can clearly be seen lying immediately to the east of the motel driveway into Chain Lane. On crossing this road Ryknield Street descends the hill eventually joining and following Constable Lane. After crossing Manor Road the course is represented by the eastern boundary of allotments before crossing the grounds of Bemrose School: this section formed part of the Borough boundary prior to 1877. Passing over Uttoxeter Road it continues on through the Rowditch Recreation Ground, joining the lower half of Old Uttoxeter Road — the course of this section of road can be traced on a St. Werburgh parish tithe map by John Bromley 1844 (Derby Local History Library, tithe map No. 135). Crossing Ashbourne Road it continues in a straight line to Markeaton Brook. From this point, a commonly accepted theory is that Ryknield Street ran straight to the high ground of Strutt's Park, making a steep descent to the Roman bridge that crossed the Derwent a little to the north of Little Chester. However, recent work in the Belper Road area of Strutt's Park suggests that this commanding site was occupied in the first century by a fort and that Ryknield Street terminated at the south gate (Brassington, 1970: 23) (Fig. 1).

In the early Flavian period Ryknield Street was extended northwards linking the newly established forts at Pentrich and Chesterfield with Templeborough. This extension branched off the Strutt's Park road soon after crossing Markeaton Brook, diverting some fifteen degrees eastwards, taking a line represented by the old course of Nun's Street which was formerly the north-western boundary of Nun's Green (Fig. 2).

Traces of the road were found in 1966, a conglomerate of sand and pebble some six metres wide, beneath the foundations of demolished houses on the north side of the street. It was located again when a sewer trench was cut along the line of Parker Road at the intersection with Nun's Street. Random coin finds from the area are: Nun's Green, third century coin (Victoria History of the County of Derbyshire I: 216-221); North Street, two coins, one of Faustina and one of Gallienus (*ibid* I: 216-221); and Garden Street, off Kedleston Street, a coin of Hadrian (DM).

In all probability Ryknield Street continued along the line of Kedleston Street, through the site of the Children's Hospital, skirting the high ground in the vicinity of Margaret Street and making the crossing of the Derwent a little to the north of the former railway bridge. It is likely that immediately after crossing the river, Ryknield Street turned in a north-northeasterly direction towards Breadsall. In the Antonine period a seven acre fort was built across this line and Ryknield Street was diverted around it. The new line took the road to the southeast corner of the fort, where it turned northwards to run parallel to the eastern defences and after leaving the fort curved eastwards to rejoin the original line (Brassington, 1970: 29-30) (Figs. 2 and 3). The road then continued in a north-northeasterly direction until, in the vicinity of the junction of Croft Lane with the A61, it turned east-northeast towards Breadsall village, avoiding the high ground to the right. At this point it is likely that a road branched off to run northwards along the east bank of the Derwent to Milford (Smithard, 1913, plan 6). Here it crossed the river to proceed via Chevin side and Longwalls Lane to Bolehill (Dodd and Dodd, 1980: 27), where it turned westwards towards Lutudarum.

Burials are often found alongside Roman roads, and in 1804 Godfrey Meynell recorded that 'at the time the Derby canal was formed through Breadsall meadows several human skeletons were found and one in particular with a comb apparently fixed

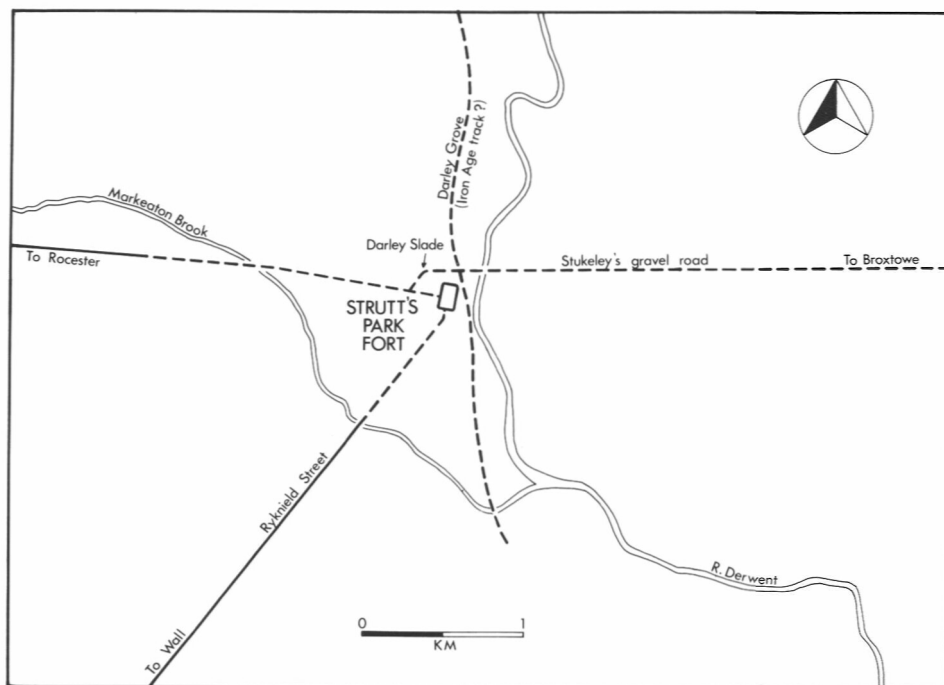


Fig. 1 The Roman roads of Derby: the first century A.D. system. Dotted lines mark conjectured routes.

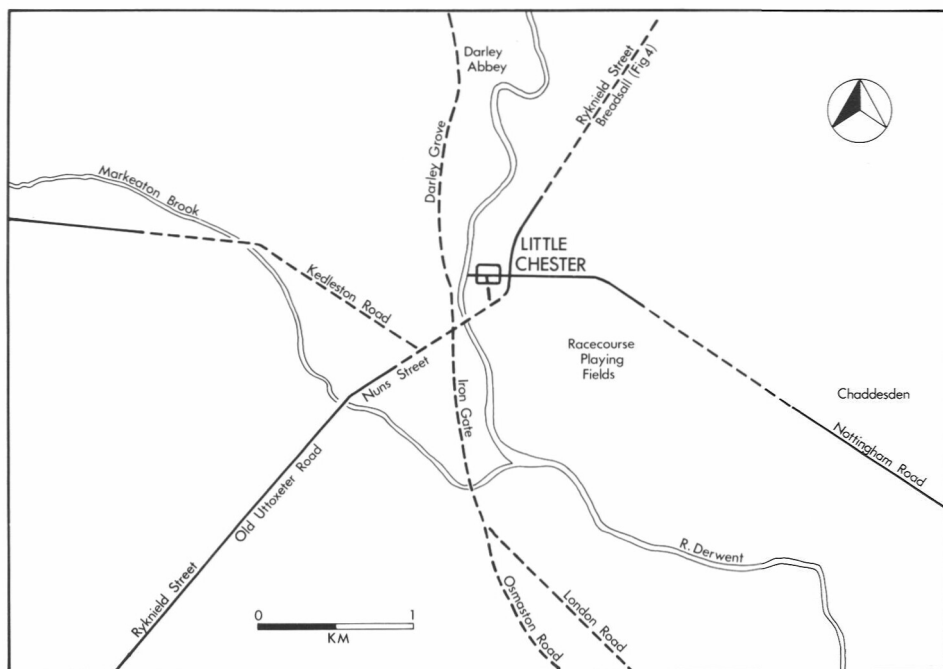


Fig. 2 The Roman roads of Derby: the second century A.D. system. Dotted lines mark conjectured routes.

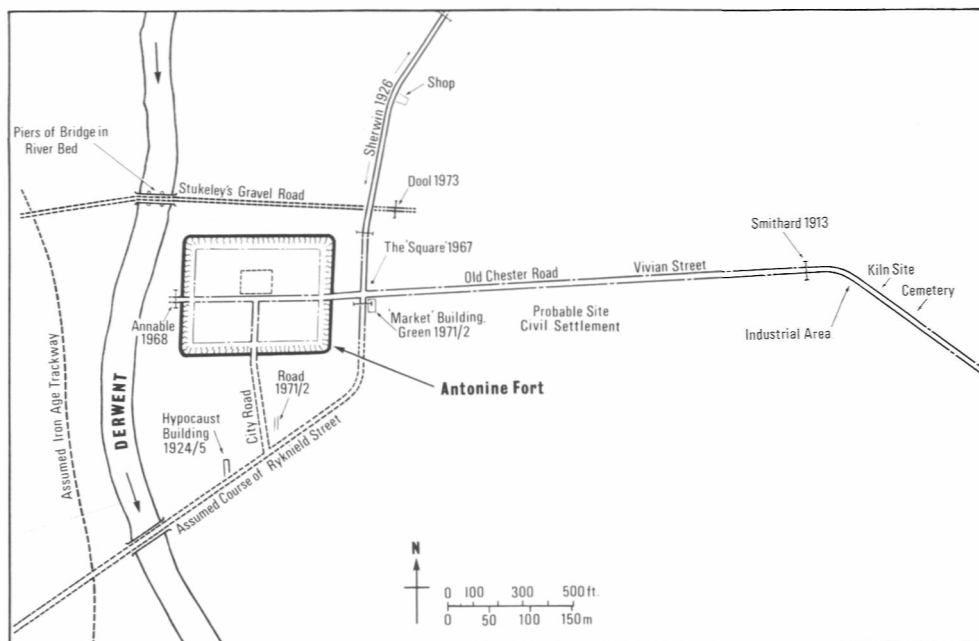


Fig. 3 The Roman fort of Little Chester, Derby, and its environs, showing dates of excavations and discoveries.

to the back part of the head, but this being exposed to the air soon mouldered away. A piece of patera . . . was discovered at the same time' (Meynell, 1804). Godfrey Meynell's drawing of this patera shows it to be a portion of a Samian bowl of the Antonine period (a panelled bowl, form 37: the figure types appear to be a cow (0.1886) with a caryatid on either side). Identification of this single sherd, however, is not positive proof that the burials were Roman.

Croft Lane, where it nears Breadsall, proceeds in a east-northeast direction before it divides into two roads within the environs of the village. If the east-northeast line is continued it will be found that the lower end of Moor Road, at a point adjacent to the Church, is in alignment with it. Further continuation of the line east-northeast across the fields, from a point at which Moor Road bends away northeast, reveals the fact that it bisects Morley Mound (Fig. 4). Codrington (1918: 30) remarked that 'there are several instances where a barrow or tumulus was the landmark, the road passing round it or nearing it. Silbury affords one example and Brinklow, on the Foss, another'.

If a line is drawn from Morley Mound to join the known course of Ryknield Street at Brackley Gate, where the road turns in a northerly direction, it will be found that this northern section also is in alignment with the Mound, which indicates that it was used as a sighting point. The course of Ryknield Street southwards from Brackley Gate can be traced across Morley Moor to the almshouses north of Breadsall. A section cut across the road at point A on Fig. 4 (Munslow, 1949) and a trench cut for a pipeline at point B established that the road was some 5.5 metres wide.

The recutting of a field drainage ditch to the south of point B revealed two small U-shaped ditches 20 metres apart, one on either side of the road. These dimensions indicate a second class road and suggest that this section of Ryknield Street may not have been of major importance (Margary, 1967: 22). South of the Almshouses, the road either continued in a straight line to join the projected line from Breadsall Church to Morley Mound, or turned 20° to the southwest and followed the course of the present Moor Road which joins the projected line nearer to Breadsall Church.

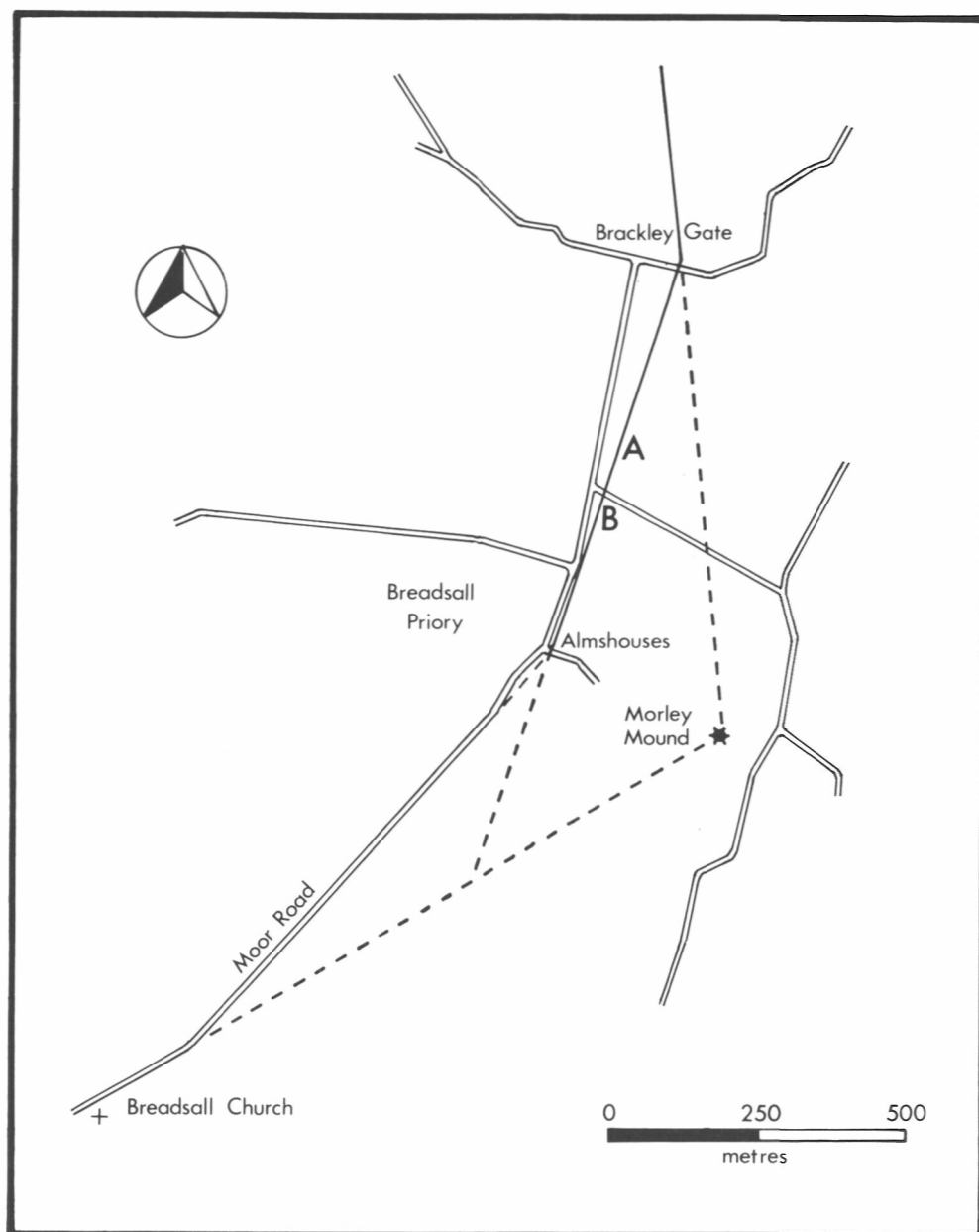


Fig. 4 Ryknield Street at Morley Moor northwest of Derby.

The Roman road linking Chesterton, Rocester and Strutt's Park can be traced through Mackworth village to the western boundary of Markeaton Park. If the line is continued eastwards it will be found that it is roughly in line with Darley Slade, the hollow that makes a steep descent from Duffield Road, just north of Strutt's Park, to the river Derwent where a Roman bridge was sited (Fig. 1) The early roads were

surveyed and constructed by the military for the convenience of the military; it therefore seems likely that the road would have entered the first century fort on Strutt's Park directly by the west gate, a branch of this road descending Darley Slade to a wooden bridge supported by two masonry piers. (Stukeley's 1721 map of Derwentio marks two stone piers in the river, and their presence has been confirmed by skin divers; the timber superstructure is an assumption, but it seems more likely than three masonry arches of large span.) After crossing the Derwent the road continued in an easterly direction (Stukeley, 1725: 24) presumably linking Strutt's Park with the first century fort at Broxtowe. In his *Iter Boreale* Stukeley (1725: 24) commented that 'another such way, they say, went up the hill directly from the street of the city by Chaddesden.'

When Ryknield Street was extended, a second bridge was constructed to the south. Presumably, for a time, both bridges would have been in use together. However, the earlier one, becoming redundant, would not have been maintained and would eventually have either collapsed or been dismantled. This would have necessitated the redirection of the road from the west to a new alignment approximating to that of Kedleston Road, to join Ryknield Street before making the crossing of the Derwent by the later bridge.

The Roman road approaching Little Chester from the Trent at Sawley follows the course of the modern A6005 through Draycott and Borrowash. At the Nottingham Road cemetery the modern road turns sharply to the left towards Derby. The Roman road continued in a straight line to cross the Racecourse playing fields, turning at the northwest corner in a westerly direction along the line of Old Chester Road to join Ryknield Street immediately outside the east gate of the fort (Brassington, 1971) (Fig. 2). Darley Grove, the trackway on the west bank of the Derwent, which I argued previously to be of possible Roman origin (Brassington, 1970: 30), is in fact more likely to be of pre-Roman origin. Possibly it formed part of an iron age trackway now represented by the course of London Road from Shardlow to Derby, traversing the town via St. Peter's Street, the Corn Market, Iron Gate, through the former St. Alkmunds Churchyard. (With the exception of St. Werburgh's all the early churches were sited along this line.) The road continues to join Darley Grove, which extended northwards to connect with the Chevin ridgeway. This route gives access to the west bank of the Derwent without the necessity of fording the river.

*Postscript:* in 1982 a deep trench cut for a water main across Morley Moor (c.90 degrees to the line of Moor Road in Fig. 4) revealed no sign of the Roman road in the fields and strengthens the hypothesis that Ryknield Street directly underlies Moor Road.

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