

## **Searching for lost Roman roads at Tayles Hill, Ewell and Juniper Hall, Mickleham**

The Society's Roman Studies Group carried out fieldwork in 2006 to try to confirm the routes of two Roman roads. The two routes involved were first, a possible line extending west from Ewell and thought to offer a possible solution to the long-postulated line of a London to Winchester route. The second involved the route claimed by earlier researchers for the approach of Stane Street to Mickleham Downs from the Dorking area. In the event, the work failed to find evidence for either route, but is considered worth publishing since it clarifies earlier records.

### **Tayles Hill, Ewell**

Excavations by A W G Lowther in 1934 revealed the presence of what he interpreted as a roadside ditch and part of a road surface aligned approximately east–west at Ewell House, Ewell (Lowther 1935). A sketch plan, dated 1948, has recently been found in the archive of the Society's Roman Villas Research Group, which shows the suggested line of a Roman road on a similar east–west alignment at Tayles Hill, Ewell. The route of this road is adjacent to and approximately parallel to that reported by Lowther. There is a slight divergence in the alignment of the two ditches, which may be real or may be the outcome of inaccurate planning.

Transposition of these two road lines onto a modern map (fig 1) suggested that, allowing for some possible inaccuracy in recording, they might be the same road, and extension of the line to the west indicated that a road might cross the Gibraltar Recreation Ground.

Permission was obtained to excavate a series of test pits to the north and west of the bowling green (TQ 2140 6239 and TQ 2142 6244) across the line of the possible road. Five 1.5 x 1.5m and one 1 x 1m test pits were excavated down to natural London Clay. The lack of pebbles or flint within the soil matrix indicated that a road did not run across the excavations. An area of build-up, in the south of the area – probably spoil from digging the foundations of the pavilion – was avoided in the belief that the northern of the lines might be expected to be the more accurate as Lowther had related the plans of his excavations to properties that still exist.

Although there is strong evidence for a Roman-period road running westwards up Tayles Hill, it either ceased at some objective at the top of the hill or may have changed alignment at the high point towards a distant destination.

### **Stane Street at Juniper Hall, Mickleham**

The theoretical line of Stane Street from North Holmwood northward through the Dorking area and on to Mickleham Downs is based largely on local rumour recorded by early researchers. There have been two pieces of recent possible evidence: a layer of flint seen in roadwork trenches in Horsham Road to the south-west of Dorking (Moss & Shettle 1971), and a line of flint in a tree hole in London Road north of Burford Bridge (Green & Ettlinger 1988). An earlier report had suggested the presence of a possible Roman ford at Burford Bridge (Anon 1937).

The evidence in these reports is not conclusive and has not been supported by excavation to modern standards. The precise line is thus still open to confirmation by further investigation.

Ivan Margary (1965, 68) stated that at Burford Bridge 'on the north [bank] a slight change of direction was noted, leading the road towards Fredley and Juniper Hall, where it had

formerly been seen when the lawn was being laid out.' A previous resistivity survey of this lawn had not revealed any anomalies but, in view of previous lack of success in finding the road in the Denbies Estate and at Moleford Cottages (Hall 2006, 1–4) it was decided to investigate further.

In June 2006 a line was laid out across the front lawn of Juniper Hall at what was considered to be at right angles to the postulated course of the road. Along this line, a series of five test trenches was excavated, each 1.5 x 1.5m and separated by gaps of 5m. Each trench revealed a layer of cinder, clinker and small stones immediately below the turf, and this was interpreted as a drainage feature of the lawn. Trench 1 only contained a post-medieval (possibly Victorian) waste pit with charcoal fill.

Trench 2 came down onto fractured natural chalk at a depth of 30cm and contained surprisingly little flint.

Trench 3 was further up the slope and was excavated to a depth of 1m through chalky hillwash, although the natural chalk was not reached. Once again there was only a small amount of stone.

Trenches 4 and 5 were excavated down into the chalk hillwash, but only to a depth of 20cm. The remarkable feature of all these trenches was the sparseness of stone. The hillwash was sticky and clay-like when wet and any road built on it would require a substantial layer of metalling. Even if this had been removed in the course of laying the lawn, some traces should have remained, but there were none. Furthermore, as the lawn area showed no signs of levelling and the hillwash was apparently undisturbed, it might also have been expected that what was claimed to have been seen when the lawn was laid would have been evident within a short distance of the surface.

Previous investigators had met with no success in tracing the road on this alignment (J Alexander at Burford Bridge and the top of Juniper Hill (Alexander 1976), and Archaeology South-East across Downs Road on Juniper Hill (Bashford 1997). Tony Clark reported finding the road at the top of Juniper Hill (Clark 1959), but the contemporary section drawing by Jack Ruby is not convincing, as the downhill side of the embanked terrace is shown as being constructed of light brown sand or silty material (as Clark stated). This would not have been sufficiently stable to withstand sustained use by traffic.

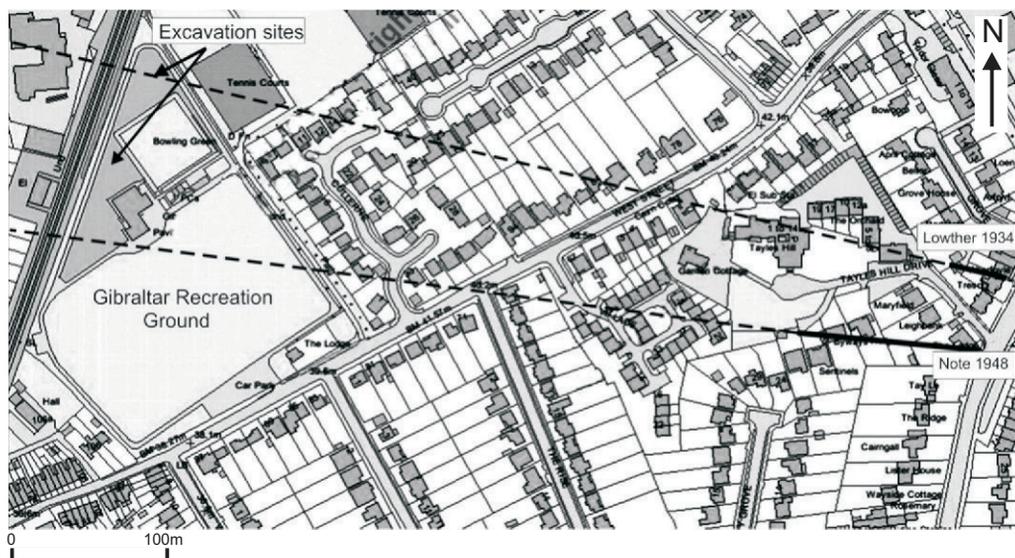


Fig 1 Extension of the lines to the west of Tayles Hill. (© Crown copyright Ordnance Survey. All rights reserved)

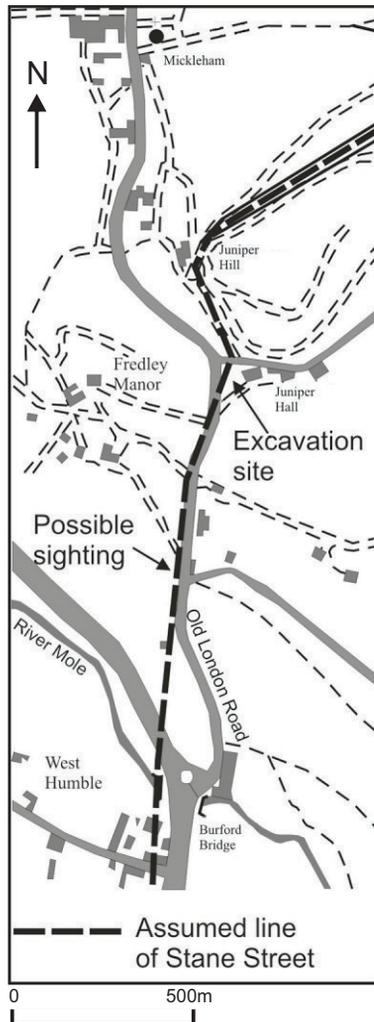


Fig 2 Assumed line of Stane Street and excavation site in the region of Burford Bridge. (© Crown copyright Ordnance Survey. All rights reserved)

Bashford pointed out that the grounds of 'Juniperhill' (immediately to the north of Juniper Hall) had been landscaped including terracing of the hillside, the plantation of trees, and the establishment of an arrangement of water gardens (Bashford 1997, 2). It is possible that these operations destroyed any remains of Stane Street in this area.

In short, the only pieces of evidence for the road between Dorking and the start of the Pebble Lane alignment at Cherkley Court are the observations of flint surfacing either side of the river Mole at Burford Bridge which was interpreted as the Roman ford (Anon 1937) – but could have been of any age – and the band of flints seen in a tree hole near to opposite the bottom of the zig-zag road up Box Hill following the gales of October 1987. This was neither fully explored nor recorded at the time (Green & Ettlinger 1988).

The Old London Road is an obvious and sensible approach to Mickleham Downs and much of the road approaching Juniper Hall from the direction of Burford Bridge has been worn away into a deep hollow-way that may have removed any trace of Stane Street. However, there remains a footpath at original ground level set above and to the west

of the present road that contains some flint and pebble metalling and may be a relict part of an original and wider road. There are other possible approaches to and ascents of the Downs and it is possible that Stane Street followed a different course from that presently assumed.

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