

An Archaeological
excavation on land off
Bath Lane, Moira, Ashby Woulds, Leicestershire
(SK 4310 3155).

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**For: Leicestershire County Council,
Property Services Resource Dept.**

**University of Leicester Archaeological Services
Report 2005/058**

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Leicestershire (SK 4310 3155).**

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1. Summary

Archaeological excavation was carried out in advance of proposed residential development for J. F. Harrington and Sons Ltd on land off Bath Lane, Moira, Ashby Woulds, Leicestershire. The site was known to be located on the route of a major Roman road, the 'Via Devana', previously identified by ULAS in 1998 (ULAS Report No 98/064) and evaluated by ULAS in 2003 (ULAS Report No.03/021) that confirmed the survival of the Roman road, believed to be part of a major route between Colchester and Chester.

The excavation revealed further continuation of the Roman road and adjacent ditch. Probable post medieval industrial activity was located to the north of the Roman road.

2. Introduction

The proposed area of residential development for J. F. Harrington and Sons Ltd is located northeast of Bath Lane, Moira, Ashby Woulds Leicestershire. The site is centred on SK 4310 3155 and consists of an area c.0.4 hectares of rough pasture, lying at a height between 109-117m OD (fig.1). The underlying geology consists of Carboniferous Coal Measures.

Trial trenching in 2003 (ULAS Report No. 03/021) confirmed that the proposed development site was located on the route of a major Roman road that connected Colchester with Chester, known as the 'Via Devana' (SMR SK 31NW AD). The road has also been encountered c.100m to the south east (ULAS Report No 98/64). To the south of the area Late Iron Age and Roman remains have also been identified (SMR SK31NW.S).

As a result of this a pre-planning enquiry was made to Leicestershire County Council Heritage Services (LCCHS) in advance of the proposed housing development. LCCHS requested an excavation to identify and locate any archaeological remains of significance and propose suitable treatment to avoid or minimise damage by the development.

The archaeological work designed to fulfil these planning conditions set by LCCHS are detailed in *Design Specification for Archaeological Work of Land off Bath Lane, Moira, Ashby Woulds, Leicestershire (ULAS Report 03/619)* and follow Planning Policy Guidelines 16 (PPG16, Archaeology and Planning), para.30.

The excavation was undertaken by ULAS on 7th-11th February 2005.

3. Objectives

The objective of the archaeological work was to ascertain whether any significant archaeological remains were present within the area to be developed. If identified, a sufficient sample was then to be recorded to establish the extent, date, quality, character, form and potential, including environmental data. Further archaeological recording was also to be considered if deemed necessary.

4. Methodology

The archaeological work followed the programme set out in a Design Specification (Clay, P ULAS Design Specification 03/619, See Appendix II). The excavation totalled *c.* 561sq.m and was divided into two areas targeting the footprint of the proposed houses. Area 1 covered an area of some *c.* 418sq. m in the western half of the development area and Area 2 covered some 143sq.m and was located in the eastern half (fig.2).

A JCB mechanical digger with a 1.6m wide toothless ditching bucket was used to excavate topsoil and disturbed subsoil in spits under archaeological supervision.

All plans were tied into the Ordnance Survey National Grid. Excavated sections were drawn at a scale of 1:20 and were levelled and tied into the Ordnance Survey Datum. Spot heights were taken as appropriate. All excavated features were recorded using the standard ULAS Recording Manual. This involved a written description, a drawn and photographic record of all excavated deposits.

The location of the trenches was surveyed using a Topcon GTS 303 Total Station Electronic Distance Meter (EDM) linked to a hand held Psion Data Logger. The data was processed using n4ce. survey software, and the final illustrations were produced with the aid of TurboCad drawing software version 7.

All work adhered to the Institute of Field Archaeologists *Standard and Guidance For Archaeological Evaluation*.

5 Results

Area 1 (figures 3 and 4, Plates 1, 2 and 3)

The southern half of the area was machined to a depth of *c.*0.20m, barely removing the topsoil, in order to avoid unnecessary disturbance of the Roman road that was known to be located there through the evaluation in 2003 (ULAS Report No. 03/619).

The northern half of the area was machined to a depth of *c.*0.25 exposing alluvial or re-deposited clays that were generally soft yellow or brown silty clays.

Underlying the top soil, and in places the alluvial deposits, was a surface, [17], that was *c.*0.20m thick consisting of sand and well rounded to angular gravels up to 30mm in size set within a reddish brown silty clay. It had been previously examined in the

2003 evaluations (ULAS Report No. 03/619) where it had been interpreted as being the upper layer of the Roman road.

To the north of [17], and running parallel with it, was a linear feature, [15]. It was *c.*0.36m deep and *c.* 0.70m wide and was filled with an alluvial deposit, (14), consisting of a light grey brown silty clay. The feature truncated a probable sub-soil, (16), consisting of friable pinkish grey silty clay. The linear feature (14) [15] may represent a drainage gully for the road.

Truncating [15] was a sub-circular feature, [22], that was *c.*2.10m in diameter. A trial slot 3m wide was excavated across the area that established that its depth exceeded *c.*0.58m. It had been backfilled with firm pale blue grey clay, (19), mid greyish blue silty clay (21), and soft mid yellowish brown clay (20). No finds were recovered to assist in dating the pit.

Natural substratum consisting of mid brown orangey and yellow clay was encountered at a depth of *c.* 0.36m.

Area 2 (figures 5 and 6 and Plate 4)

The northern edge of a surface, [5], was exposed in the south east of the area. It consisted of compacted frequent rounded pebbles set within mid reddish brown silty clay and was *c.*0.16m thick. A trial slot was excavated some *c.*2.5m wide and *c.*0.60m deep through it down to the orange clay natural substratum. It revealed that [5] was built upon a foundation of rounded pebbles set within light pinkish brown silty clay [6]. This surface is likely to be a continuation of the Roman road present in Area 1.

To the north of [5], and running parallel with it, was a linear feature, [9]. It was *c.*0.64m wide and *c.* 0.18m deep and was filled with very pale greyish brown clay with occasional iron panning, (8). It may be a continuation of (14) [15]. The feature truncated the yellowish orange natural substratum.

Slightly further to the north of (8) [9] was a circular post-hole, [13] that measured *c.*0.42m in diameter and was *c.*0.15m deep and was filled with dark grey clay packed with angular stones (14). The presence of coke fragments, Welsh slate and brick suggests a modern date.

In the northeast corner of the trench at a depth of *c.*0.32m was a relic subsoil, (10), that consisted of mid grey brown silty clay.

The area was sealed modern make up, (11) and disturbed top soil (3) and (4).

6. Discussion

During the Roman occupation (43AD-*c.*410AD) it has been estimated that during the first century alone the Roman road builders constructed 10, 000 miles of road. This includes approximately 7,400 miles of known road and 2,000 miles still to be found. (Bagshawe 1979). It has long been suspected that a Roman road ran north west of

Leicester, towards Burton to meet Rykniel Street in Staffordshire, forming part of a cross country route from Colchester to Chester. This was named the 'Via Devana' by 18th century antiquarians, also known locally as the Gartree Road (Liddle and Hartley, 1994, p188). Until recently, however, there was no proof of its existence north of Leicester.

Observations made by Liddle and Hartley in 1994, provided evidence of this route using documentary sources, aerial photographs and earthworks in the vicinity. In the Ashby Woulds area a reference from a local 19th century antiquarian was cited, equating the road with the "curious causeway called 'Leicester Headland' [which] passes over the Woulds at a short distance from the Mora Baths" and described as "raised throughout with red clear gravel which must have been brought in from some distance"(Hextall 1852, p.155, taken from Liddle and Hartley 1994, p188).

A watching brief, which included trenching, was undertaken by ULAS in 1998 at Bath Lane, Moira on land to the south east of the development area which confirmed the existence of the Roman road. It revealed a section of a slightly convex layer of pebbled surface, c.3m wide, directly on line of the suggested route. A slot was excavated through this and the profile showed it to overlie a compact clay layer containing frequent sandstone pebbles. A linear feature, that could represent a drainage gully for the road, was also identified, c.0.6m wide, c.0.25m deep, which ran parallel with the northern extent of the surface, (Browning 1998 ULAS Report 98/64)

The evaluation undertaken by ULAS in 2003 in the development area revealed further survival and continuation of the Roman road. A slight camber on the road was visible, with a more prominent slope on the southern side. The linear feature revealed in the 1998 watching brief to the north of the road was also identified during the evaluation (Jones 2003 ULAS Report 03/021).

7. Conclusions

The excavation has revealed further survival and continuation of the Roman road, the 'Via Devana', previously identified by ULAS in 1998 on land to the south east of the development area and in 2003 within the area (figs 7 and 8).

The compact layers of pebbles, [5] exposed in Area 2 and [17] in Area 1, can be interpreted as the surface of the Roman road. A foundation layer for the road consisting of light pinkish brown silty clay, (6), was identified in Area 2. This layer was also encountered in the 2003 evaluation.

The linear feature identified as (8) [9] in Area 2 and (14) [15] in Area 1, visible on the northern extent of the road, could represent a drainage gully associated with the road. It may be a continuation of the gully seen parallel to the north of the road during trenching in 1998 and 2003.

The lack of finds has provided no direct dating evidence for the road or gully.

Despite the lack of dating evidence, it is likely that the large sub circular pit, [22], in Area 1, is associated with industrial activity that is known to have taken place to the north of the site during the last century when the land was owned by the Coal Board.

The post-hole (12) [13] located to the north of (8) [9] in Area 2 is also likely to be of modern date suggested by the presence of and brick fragments.

8. Bibliography

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9. Acknowledgements

This report was compiled from information collected on site by Jennifer Browning, Sam George, Steve Jones and the author. The project was managed by Patrick Clay.

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Figure 1: Location Map. Reproduced from the Ordnance Survey 1:50 000 map with the permission of the Controller of HMSO © Crown Copyright. ULAS licence number AL 518000A0001.

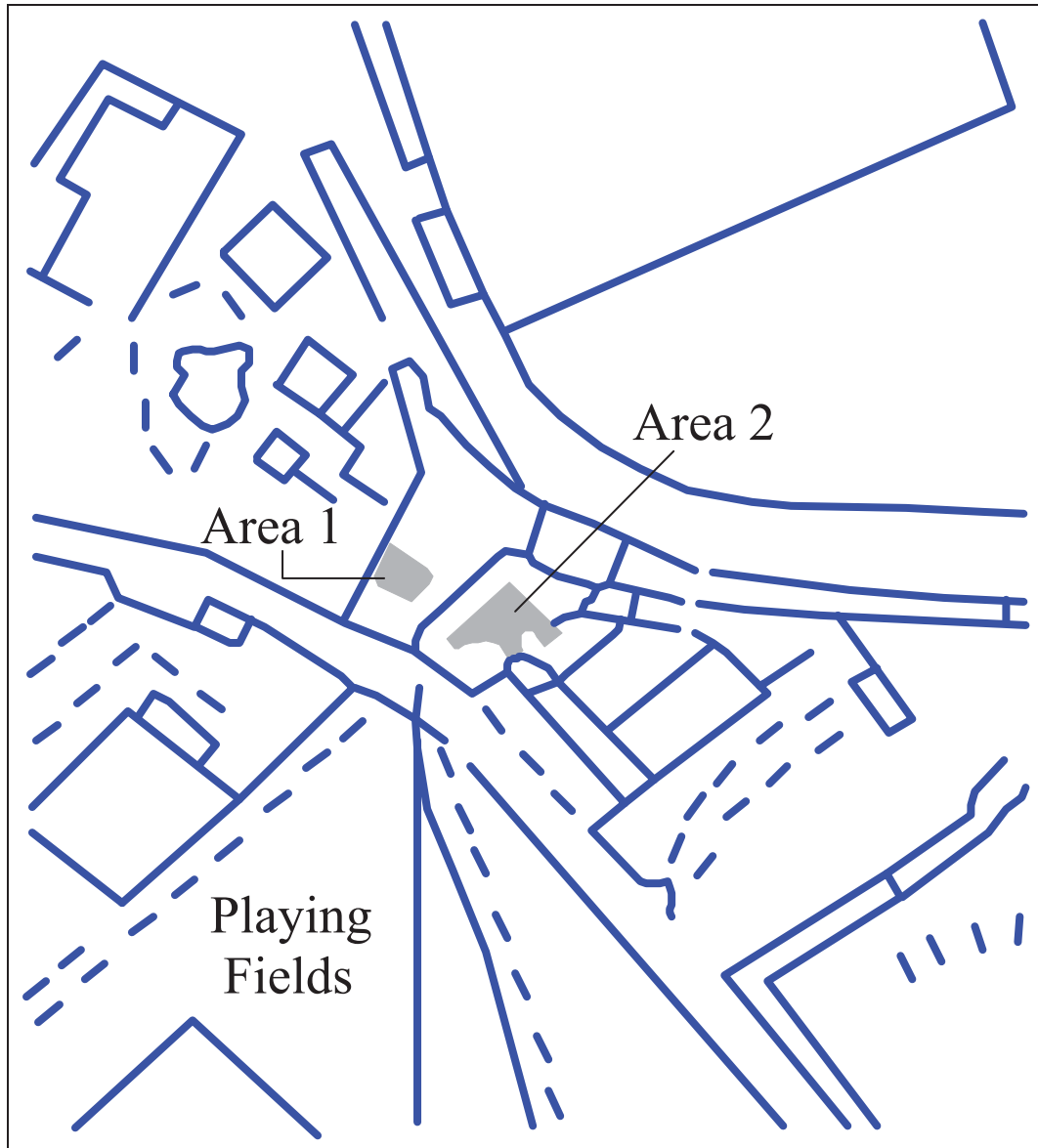


Figure 2. Area location plan (Taken from 1:2500 map).

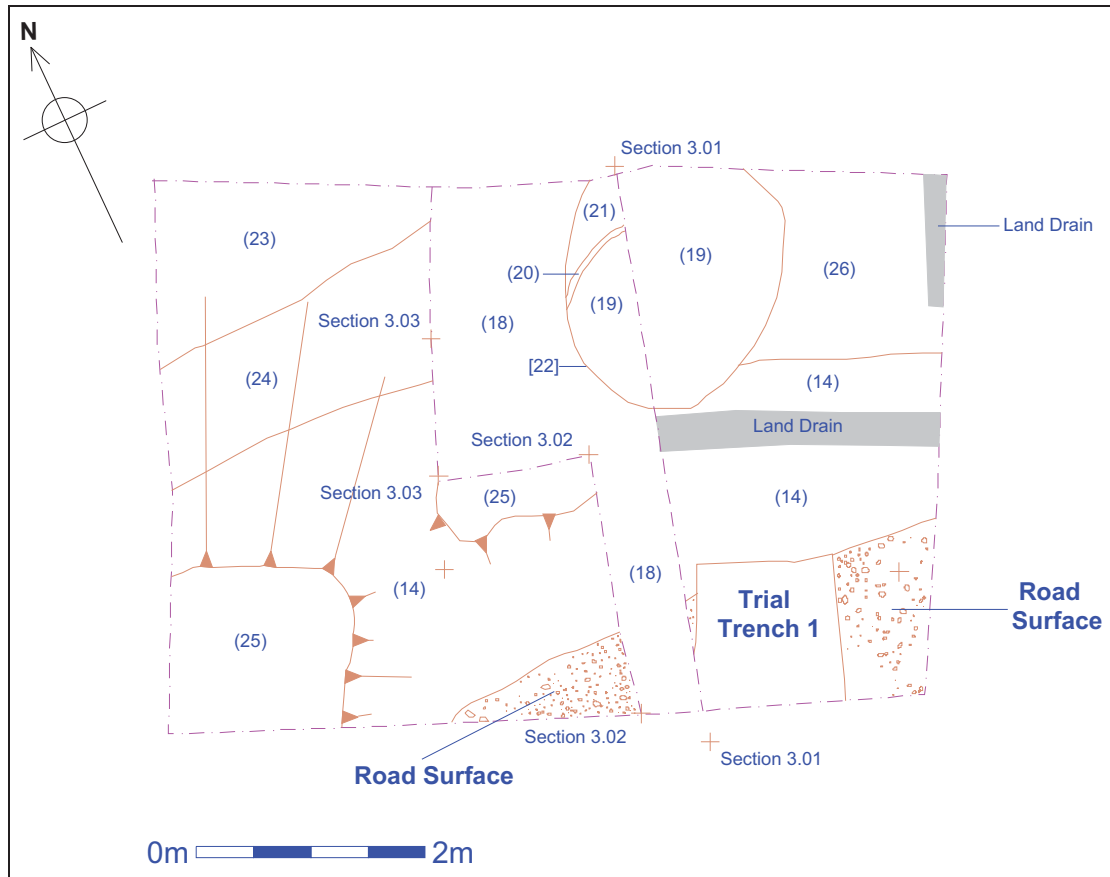


Figure 3. Area 1 Plan 2:01

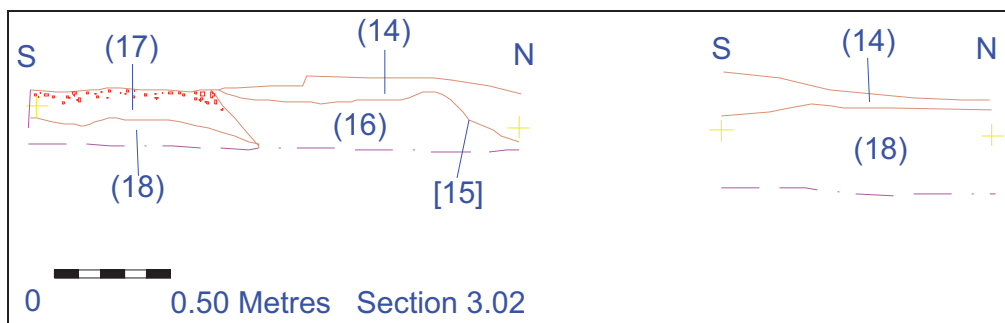
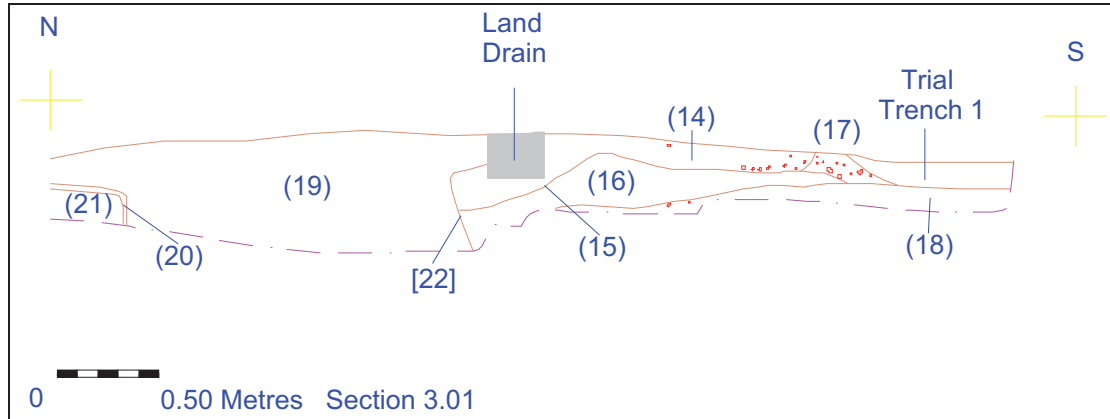


Figure 4. Area 1 Sections.

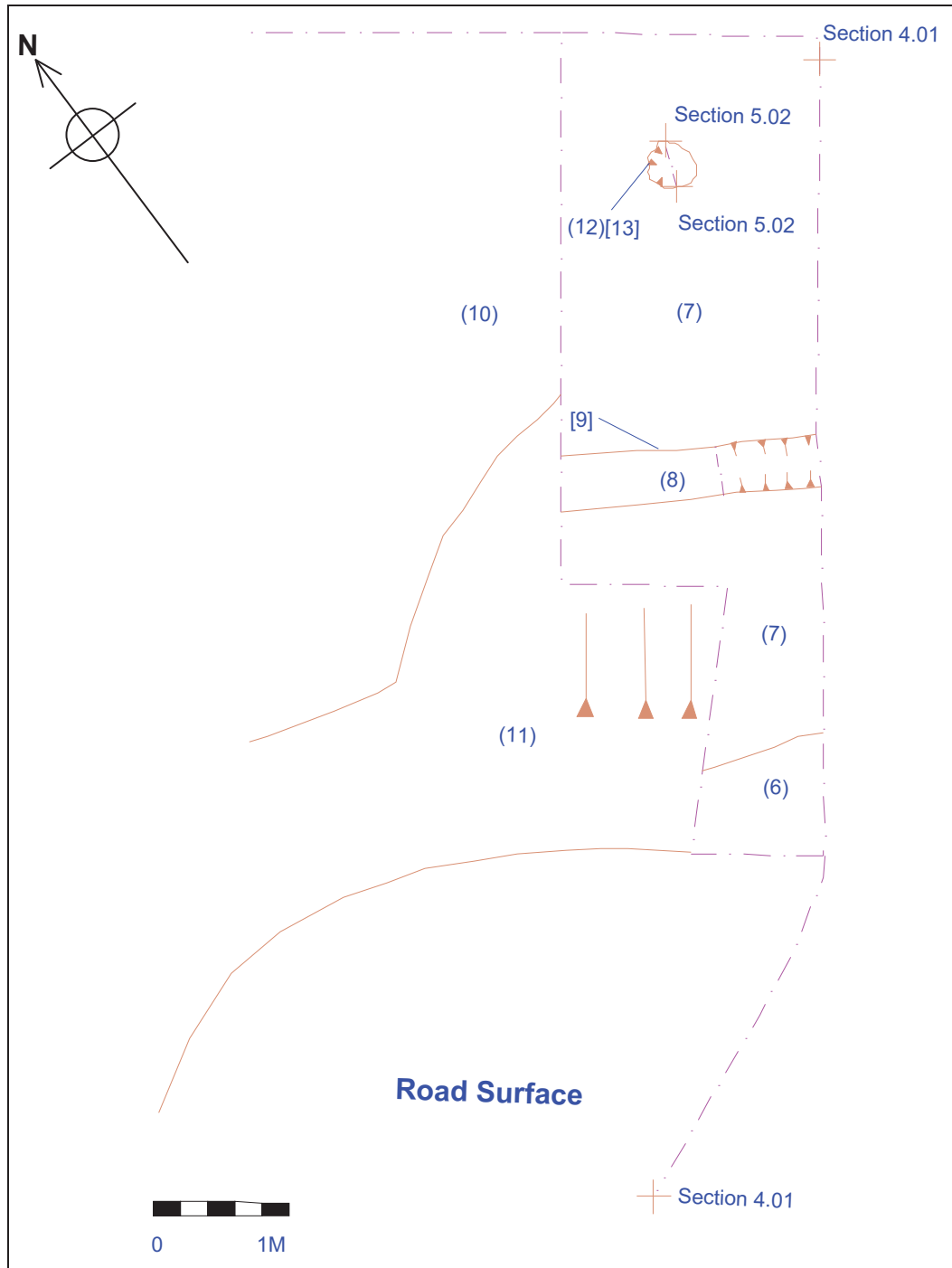


Figure 5. Area 2 Plan 5:01

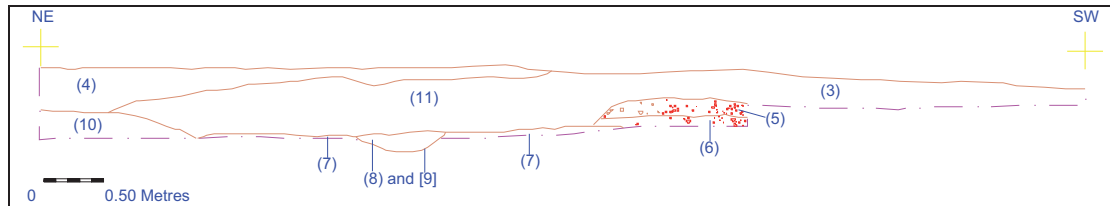


Figure 6. Area 2 Section 4:01

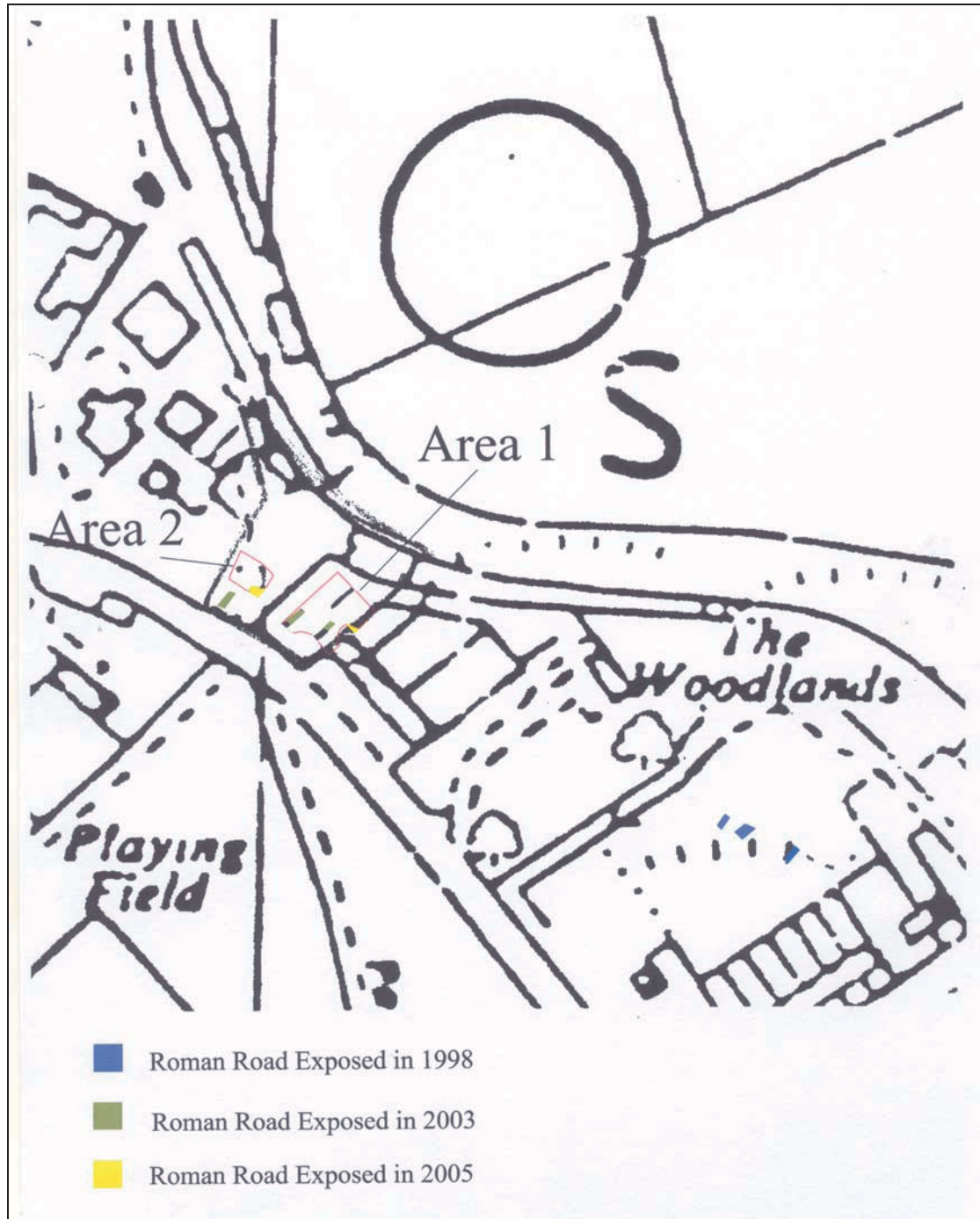


Figure. 7 Locations of exposed Roman road.

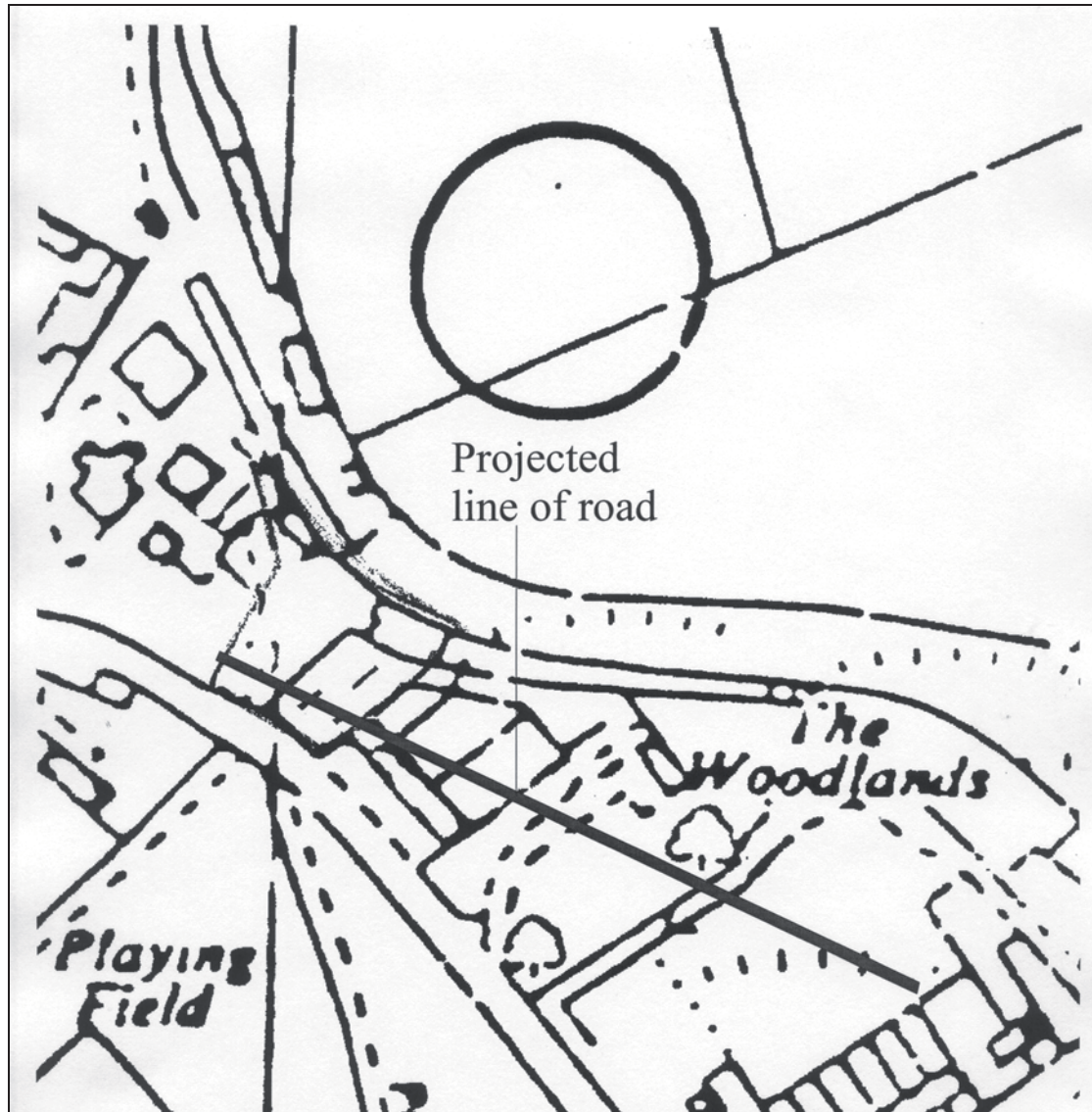


Figure 8. Projected line of the Roman Road (Taken from 1:2500 map).



Plate 1. Area 1 general view looking south.



Plate 2. Area 1 Section 3:01.



Plate 3. Area 1 Section 3:02.



Plate 4. Area 2 General view looking south.

Appendix I

Context index

Context	Feature Type	Description	Comments	Finds Y/N
1	Fill	Grey clay containing stone, mortar, charcoal, and occasional brick.	Fill of modern test pit [2].	N
2	Cut	Square in plan 2.70m by 2.55m.	Modern test pit.	N
3	Layer	Dark brown silt, 5% well rounded pebbles average 35mm.	Topsoil.	N
4	Layer	Dark brown silt with 25% lumps of dark grey clay, 10% stones rounded to angular up to 40mm, and 5% tarmac fragments.	Disturbed topsoil.	N
5	Feature	Linear, 1.20m wide, up to 0.16m deep, mid reddish brown silty clay with 60% rounded pebbles up to 38mm.	Upper layer of Roman road.	N
6	Feature	Light Pinkish brown silty clay with 30% rounded pebbles up to 40mm.	Base of Roman road.	N
7	Layer	Yellowish orange clay	Natural substratum.	N
8	Fill	Very pale greyish brown clay, occasional iron panning.	Ditch fill [9].	N
9	Cut	Linear in plan, 2.00m exposed, 0.50m wide, aligned E-W.	Ditch possibly associated with Roman road.	N
10	Layer	Mid greyish brown silty clay, 1% charcoal flecks, 1% stones, well rounded up to 20mm.	Relict sub-soil.	N
11	Layer	Light grey and yellow re-deposited clay with 60% coal furnace deposits, 10% angular stones up to 125mm.	Modern make up.	N
12	Fill	Dark grey clay, numerous angular packing stones, occasional charcoal,	Post hole packing [13].	N

		large coke fragments, Welsh slate and brick fragments.		
13	Cut	Circular, diameter 0.42m, depth 0.20m.	Post-hole.	N
14	Layer	Light grey brown silty clay occasional small to medium rounded stones.	Spread of alluvial material infilling Roman ditch [15] and covering part of the site.	N
15	Cut	Linear, aligned E-W, length and width not established, depth 0.36m.	Ditch associated with Roman road.	N
16	Layer	Friable pinkish grey silty clay, few small to medium rounded stones, frequent iron panning.	Sub-soil.	N
17	Feature	Reddish brown sand and gravels, 10% reddish brown sand and gravels	Undisturbed upper Roman road make-up.	N
18	Layer	Yellow clay.	Weathered bedrock.	N
19	Fill	Firm pale blue grey clay, 1% small rounded to angular stones average 20mm.	Alluvial deposit infilling post medieval pit [22].	N
20	Fill	Soft mid yellowish brown clay.	Alluvial deposit infilling post medieval pit [22].	N
21	Fill	Mid greyish blue silty clay, 1% small rounded stones.	Alluvial deposit infilling post medieval pit [22].	N
22	Cut	Circular feature, 2.10m by 1.90m, over 0.58m deep.	Pit probably associated with coal workings to the north of the site.	N
23	Layer	Soft mid to light yellow clay with 15-20% lenses of white clay, 5% sand lenses.	Alluvium.	N
24	Layer	Mid brown silty clay, 10% mid orange brown sand mottles.	Alluvium.	N
25	Layer	Mid greyish brown sandy silty clay, 45% orange yellowish clay	Latest alluvial episode.	N

		patches, 5% pebbles up to 30mm, 5% iron panning.		
26	Layer	Orange brown clay, very occasional small to medium pebbles.	Natural substratum or alluvial deposit.	N
27	Layer	Grey clay.	Alluvium.	N
28	Layer	Orange sandy clay.	Alluvium.	N
29	Layer	Dark grey silt.	Alluvium.	N
30	Layer	Orange clay.	Alluvium.	N
31	Layer	Mixed brown, orange and grey clay.	Alluvium.	N
32	Layer	Grey clay.	Alluvium possibly infilling a pit feature similar to [22].	N