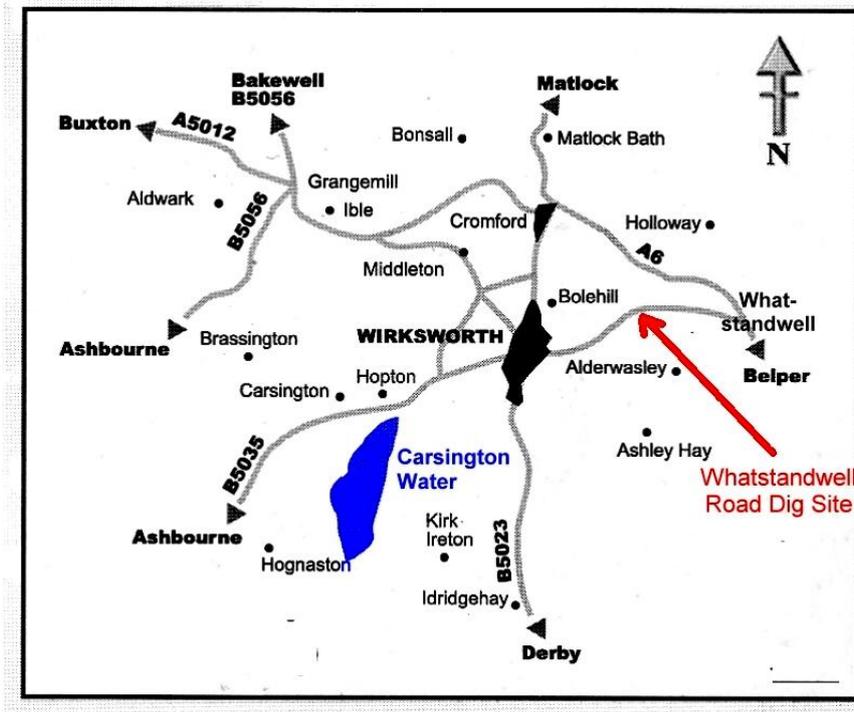
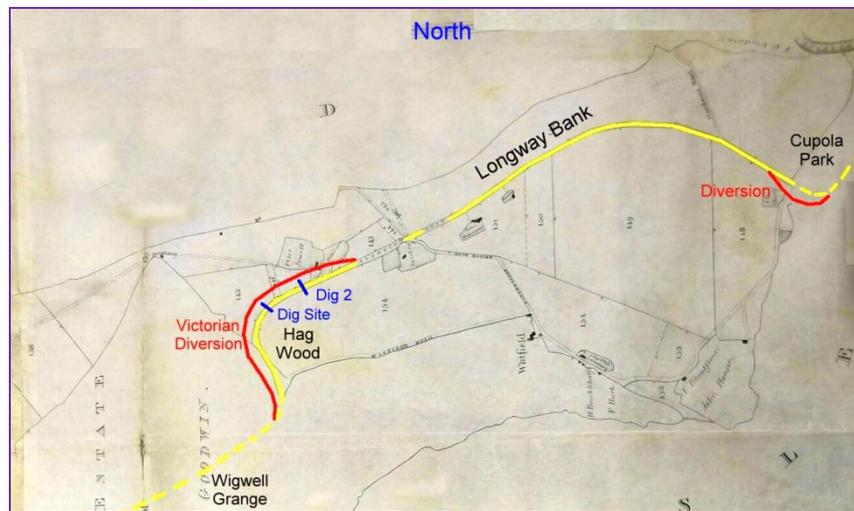


Second examination of the (suspected Roman) road from Wirksworth to Whatstandwell Bridge.

The second dig site, in hilly woodland at Hag Wood, is a former alignment of the 1759 Oakerthorpe to Wirksworth Turnpike. The examination site was at SK 3128 5506 where the alignment runs on a terrace above and to the south of the modern road the B5035. See the June 2019 update for the previous work.



General location sketch



The dig sites in Hag Wood, Wigwell, Wirksworth.

The road, from Oakerthorpe Crossroads near Alfreton to Wirksworth and Ashbourne, was part of the Second District of the Nottingham to Newhaven Turnpike, from an Act of Parliament of 1758. The Act was to repair and widen “an existing road”. The status and origins of the “existing road” were part of the questions this examination was intended to answer. The documentary and other evidence for the existing road is remarkably poor. We determined, in the first examination, that a Roman road underlies the turnpike here and whilst there is no other reasonable destination for this part of road other than to Whatstandwell Bridge from Wirksworth, beyond Whatstandwell Bridge we can make very few secure assumptions, or, that is to say, just because the turnpike went to Alfreton, this may or may not represent where the Roman road went to. We have noted, in other work, that Whatstandwell may just possibly represent a Roman wharf site for the trans-shipment of lead ingots to barges on the Derwent.

This alignment of the road through Hag Wood was out of use by 1880 and the turnpike had a diversion cut through the nick of Hag Wood which is the current road, some time between 1856 and 1880. We feel that this was perhaps done around 1860,

because at that date Wirksworth was thought to be connected to the railway station at Whatstandwell by a “conveyance” to take people to that station (Sprenger, 2004), apparently to moderate the gradient.

The examination

The examination took place on the 28th of September and I am again most grateful to Dean Smart, Ivan Wain and Richard Marriott for their assistance.



Looking eastward in Hag Wood along the original route towards Longway Bank and Cupola Park

The original route turns in Hag Wood in order to avoid the hill in the wood and it takes what would have been the lowest achievable route at the time.

In our first examination of this road we found:

“The main part of the road is composed of an original surface 5.50 metres wide with built up edges of large 10-15cm gritstone whose purpose appears to be to hold the agger in place and provide drainage. The central agger is composed of a base layer of gritstone pitching, that is to say a layer of medium 5-10cm gritstone, which is continuous from edge to edge and this pitching (understoning) forms the base for an upper layer of finer roadstone aggregate also of the same gritstone but in smaller 2-3cm pieces in a hard gritty matrix. The road has at least two ruts and the major ones lie approx 1m 40 cm apart. None of the ruts have penetrated to the base layer. On examination of the “widening” this overlays the south end of the road. The material is starkly different, rammed white limestone chatter versus pink gritstone and the overlaid edge of the former on the latter was extremely obvious. The chatter extends some 80cm but when this was examined to verify its depth it was found that more large gritstone was under it to almost the same width as the chatter. It was not possible to explore whether this was also the case on the north side of the road due to a large tree stump. In terms of known turnpike activity e.g. Nottingham Third District at Bakewell, new parts of road were only built of one single gauge of stone and the edging of limestone chatter “mineral gravel” we found here might represent not road widening but (perhaps) a footpath at the side of the road (Thornhill, 1968). The agger of base and running surface appears to be a single unified period of work, there is no obvious second phase of activity of the main part of the road.”

Due to a tree stump on the north side and an embankment on the south side it was not possible to make a final confirmation of the whole width of the road. The second examination has achieved this.

We can confirm:

1. The underlying road agger of Roman type construction is 5.50 to 5.70 metres wide, this slight width variation is normal.
2. The overlying turnpike road is 8.30 metres wide of which approx 1 metre on either side is lightly constructed as to only support footpaths. (i.e. it has footpaths).
3. On the south side is a stone revetment holding back the hillside approx 80 cm high, that is to say it resembles a boundary wall and it is now completely buried in hillside wash-down, leaf mould, trees and other detritus.



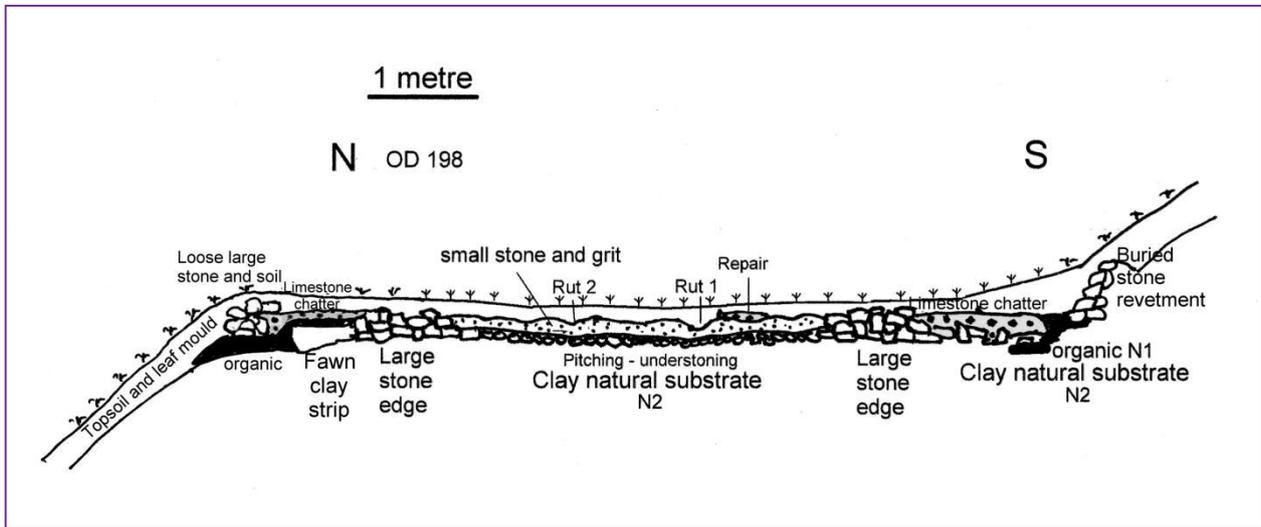
Section trench A of second examination looking north

The underlying road agger is of pink gritstone, this is edged by quite large pieces of stone and terminated by a fawn yellow clay strip which keeps the agger from falling down the slope. Overlying this and cleaned off was a white limestone chatter which thinned out towards the very far edge (shown by the location of the spade at the top of the picture) partially overlaying the original edge but partially laid directly on old soil and substrate. The far edge of the turnpike work on this side was composed of approx 50 cm width of large loose stone in soil and bits of clay which marked the outer edge of the turnpike footpath. The colour in this shot has been photo enhanced to clarify it.



Section trench B of second examination looking south

At this point the road edge is again white limestone and chatter and this can be seen by the line running across the trench. In the embankment is the revetment stoning ("wall") where the ground has been cut into the hillside to increase the width of the road on the south side then stoned to stop it slipping. This is completely hidden in hillside wash down & leaf mould.



Road section 2 at Hag Wood

Discussion

Three shards of cream-yellow glazed stoneware were found overlying the limestone chatter of the south side of the road, there were no other finds. The second examination confirms the first (see June 2019 update) and clarifies the width and some additional construction features. The manner of the underlying road construction (trenching, base stone surface, large edging and small stone gritty running surface) matches known Roman road work in this area and the width of the road suggests a surprising level of importance. We believe that the substantially different widening and haphazard repair materials (limestone and limestone chatter) represent the activities of the turnpike company. The original road has very obvious built edges and these may represent efforts to keep wash-down off the road on the south side and also mark and support the road edge clearly on the north side: such edges and the two-layer build of the road are typically Roman and not typically of known turnpike activity.

As a section examination of a turnpike this has been very useful, published turnpike road sections are very rare. The 1759 work does do what its Act of Parliament instructed: it widened and improved an existing road, however, the widening is not really heavy work, it appears to consist of footpaths on either side. These footpaths may have been kerbed, a single kerb-type stone was found in the southern section trench, at a point where the underlying surface was also unstoned shale bedrock for about half the width, in a kind of lens of bedrock. Either this section was never stoned, or, if the random kerb represents the remains of something stripped off to build the 1860 diversion, then the stoning is partially missing for the same reason. Shale bedrock would be slippery and not really suitable for a road surface, but beyond this point it may have become too much effort to strip anything else off to make the diversion.

Conclusion

We feel this is a Roman road overlain by turnpike work, the two are very self-evident. Although it is known the turnpike went to Alfreton ("Oakerthorpe crossroads") deeper research is needed to see if any clues might be forthcoming as to where the underlying Roman road might go. We have found that there are no pre-turnpike maps of (for example) Crich and what few Roman finds there are from that village are unenlightening. South Wingfield has much the same issue and of the small fort at Pentrich ("Castle Hill Camp") no east-west road is known to cross Ryknield Street there, at this present time. Indeed, carrying on in a generally easterly direction there is precious little before you get to the Roman site at Farnsfield (*But*: this is the location of the "Hexgrave Park" lead pig find) and then the vexillation fortress at Osmanthorpe.

In summary: former Roman road and superceded turnpike from Wirksworth to Whatstandwell.

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