

Co-ordinator's Annual Report

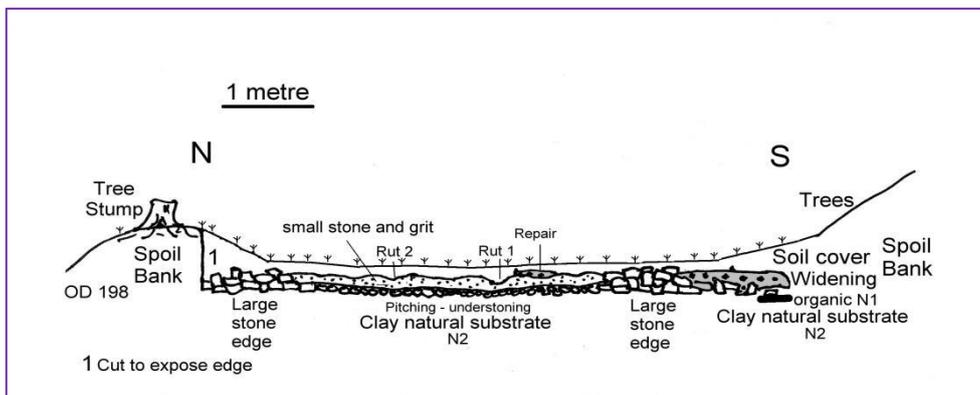
Progress during the past year

The report for the previous year took us to the end September 2019. In so far as we have been overtaken by the current epidemic, which has had a drastic effect on most of 2020, this report is a little delayed, but given the circumstances not surprising.

I give notice that the AGM of the Society will take place on Wednesday the 20th January 2021 at 7pm in the Small Bar of the Red Lion Hotel, Market Place, Wirksworth. In the event of Wirksworth continuing to be in Tier 3, the AGM will take place by video call using Zoom, a final notification will be issued nearer the event.

The early part of this year's activity to which this report refers, from September 2019 to February 2020, was quite productive, from March 2020 to November 2020 rather less so. Not only were there a number of research notes completed, which included discussions of the Navigation of the Derwent in Roman Times; on the Roman Inscriptions of Derbyshire and of a complete documentary re-appraisal of the Roman Villa at Carsington; we also reported on work done by others identifying the Roman road at Kirk Langley (Langley Common) better known to us as Long Lane and which was reported in detail in the Summer 2019 Newsletter of the Roman Roads Research Association. In November of 2019 we also reported on the possible presence of a Roman amphitheatre in Wirksworth suspected as a cropmark on aerial photographs from 1950, in the area between Water Lane and Derby Road, which has since been completely built over. We had hoped to obtain a better series of aerial images which might confirm or eliminate this possibility, the 1966 series, but the National Archive has been shut down for almost the entire year and this has so far proved impossible to address.

In the late autumn of 2019 we did undertake some successful fieldwork at Hag Wood, Wigwell, Longway Bank, Wirksworth, to confirm a suspected Roman road, new to us, first looked at in the summer of 2019, which was a pre-turnpike road appearing to run from Wirksworth to Whatstandwell Bridge and possibly further eastward. (This resulted in the research note about the Navigation of the Derwent, mentioned above, which may have implications for the transport of lead ingots / pigs and other goods from this area to further afield in Roman times). The full report about the road is on our website for October 2019.



Section diagram of the road at Hag Wood (Trench 1)



The road at Hag Wood looking north along Trench 1

This particular road is exceptionally difficult, it is almost wholly unconsidered by any authority or past antiquarian and any eastward destination remains a mystery. There are only two potential references which might apply to it east of Whatstandwell or Crich, these are a note (Thomson Watkin, 1886) in the Derbyshire Archaeological Journal, casually and without any detail, noting a possible Roman road to Wirksworth from “above” the Roman fortlet at Pentrich. There is also a place-name “Lily Street” (sometimes spelt Lilly or Lilley and Lyllyestrete in 1566 - Cameron, 1959) for a farm and part of the former Swanwick Colliery once known as the “Old Colliery” which included a drift mine called Lily Street Coal Mine, with the eastward destination of Lily Street being thought in a very anecdotal way to be somewhere “south of Alfreton” by the locals of Swanwick. East of Alfreton the only major known Roman site is the vexillation fortress at Osmanthorpe from which a suspected Roman road runs to a crossing of the Trent at Ad Pontem (Stoke by Newark). These are hardly sound blocks to build on and takes the meagre evidence beyond its reasonable extent, but had we further time to research the matter we would take our normal approach of looking for documentary evidence in old charters and records for that area and also to plot the pattern of known Roman finds from all available current and historic sources on a large-scale map to see if the pattern might be revealing (this is a technique successfully applied to the possible routes of The Street between Wirksworth and Little Chester which highlights the astonishing concentration of Roman industry around Hazelwood, Blackbrook and Alderwasley). While modern techniques such as Lidar are available to us, we have a word of caution that such techniques cannot be taken in isolation in case what is found is not what it may appear to be. It is also unfortunate that the understanding of the Roman road network of Nottinghamshire is execrably worse than that of Derbyshire.



The Meadows Wirksworth

For 2020 virtually all our effort has gone in to examining The Meadows, now a single field on the west side of Wirksworth, recently purchased by Wirksworth Town Council with the support of many local residents. There are several areas to be examined, of which the first was the “Tump” which appears on the Lidar scan as a kind of building platform. However, the fieldwork examinations of it have been both frustrating and inconclusive, to the extent that we have moved on to our second target, a ditch or watercourse feature running along the boundary between the Meadows and St John Street. These examinations have been badly interrupted by the current epidemic and lockdown(s), they are by no means complete and I cannot give you an expected time-scale for their completion at the moment.

Forward view of fieldwork and research

I often mention the length of “the list”, given we are small society with modest resources. Even keeping within the limited bounds we have set ourselves often gives us difficulties in maintaining the momentum of fieldwork which our strategy requires. We simply cannot do all that needs to be done and we are often approached by others (who do even less or no fieldwork of their own) hoping that we will do something for them.

The present fieldwork list for 2021:

1. The Meadows as noted above.
2. An unexamined pottery find site in proximity to Priestwood Common.
3. The Street (straight line theory) south of Longcliffe.

Research notes recently finalised, drafted or upcoming:

A note on the Bradstone (with a view of trying to identify if the Eastward Stone, a companion stone, still exists).

A note on the Limekilns at Old Lane.

A note on Wirksworth Golf Club 1928-1933.

In conclusion

I trust all those who have taken such an active interest in our work will continue to support us and I thank you all for your engagement and efforts on our behalf, may you all be safe and well.

References:

Cameron K, 1959, The Place-names of Derbyshire, Vol 2, Cambridge, University Press, p189

Thomson-Watkin T, 1886, Minor Roman settlements, camps, coins etc and Roads of Derbyshire, Derbyshire Archaeological Journal, Vol 8, p214