

Wirksworth Archaeological Society - May 2023: Finding Lutudarum

We are often asked, when making presentations to groups of interested people, how we have approached finding “Lost Lutudarum” and why the search was unsuccessful in the past.

In many respects, the historic failure to find Lutudarum was down to there being only a pretence of a search. What was really happening was that the antiquarians of Derbyshire over the last two hundred years were more interested in making a claim for their favourite place than by providing any genuine attempt to compare locations.

For this reason, for us, the first step on the way, even before looking at the Roman road network, was to map the pattern of Roman finds for the whole of the southern Peak District.

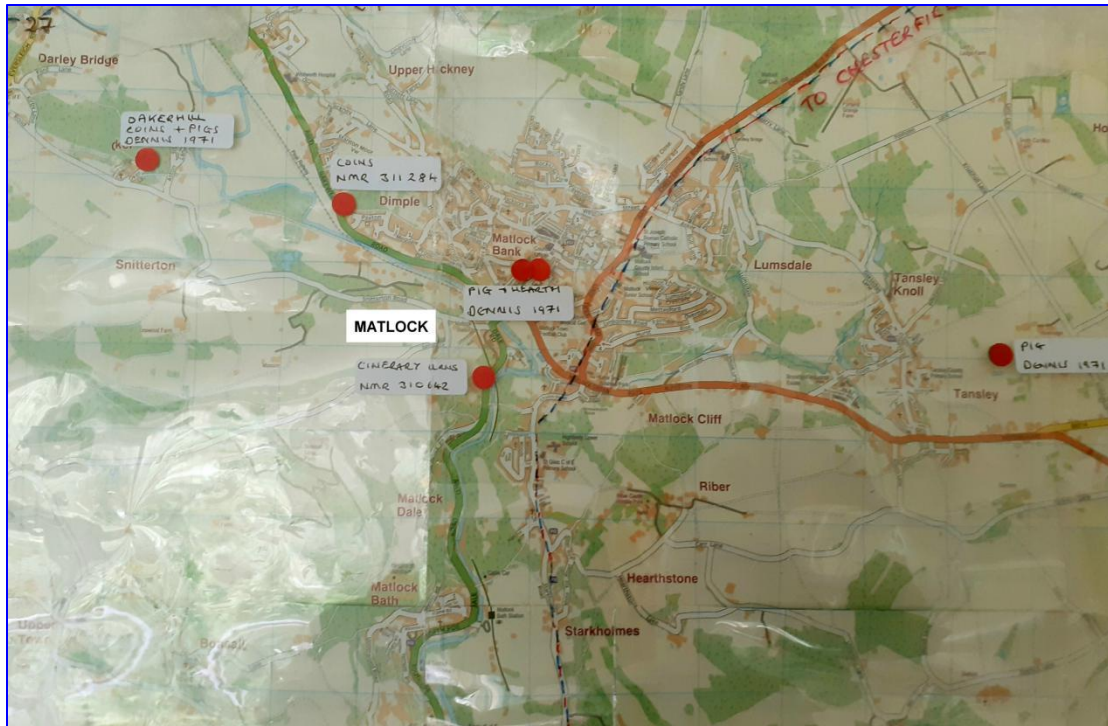
Mapping finds

This is not as easy as it may seem and there are various limitations to be aware of. Finding things is often quite random and reporting them even more random. Consequently, using only one source of information isn't enough to populate a map properly. Its necessary to identify every possible source of information and extract it. When this process was started 20 years ago, the internet was young and it was still essential to have to physically visit libraries, archives and county offices, as well as order hard copies of reports and old magazines and journals and then wait for them to arrive in the post. Once the information was assembled it had to be sorted, checked for mistakes, duplications eliminated and then, in some cases, go back to almost forgotten original documents, because even a fairly recent report of a find might not include the detail needed.

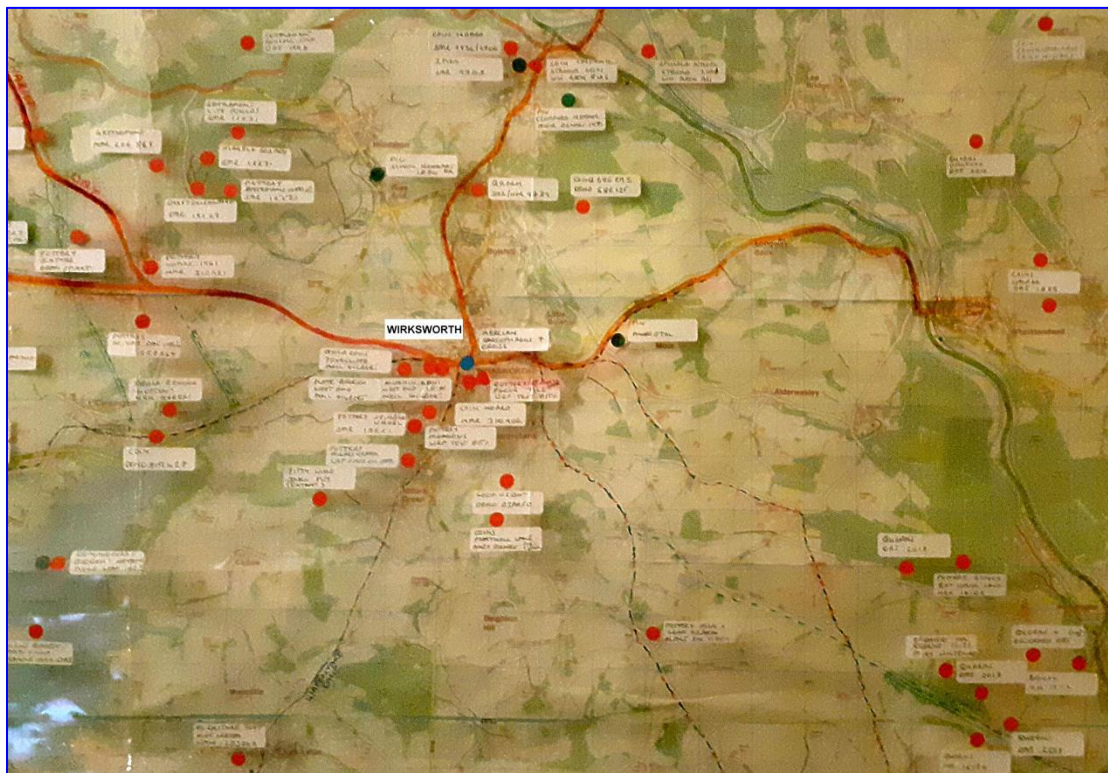
An example is the find of two Roman lead ingots at Yeaveley in 1975. This is quite recent and was reported in detail in the Peak District Mines Historical Society Bulletin in October of that year. However, by the time this report had reached the Historic England database, via a later magazine source, the find location had become “Ashbourne area” with the wrong grid reference and a statement that only one of the ingots was inscribed, when both of them were. This gives an indication of the difficulty of the task.

The map which resulted and is still periodically updated, is therefore not digital, it is an actual paper map. Secondly, it only gives us a pattern of intensity of finds, its purpose is not to highlight differences or similarities between them: so the map gives a find point and that find point might be, say, of lead ingots or it might be of pottery or of a coin. To identify the find, the find spot has an annotation showing what it was and the reference of the original source.

Is this a perfect method? No, because it represents finds intensity or spread - where to look, not a certainty of activity. When the map was originally completed we then went on to the next part of our strategy, which was to confirm the likelihood of the location of Lutudarum by looking at the road network. Lastly, and this is the phase we are now in, to look at whether we can develop the beginnings of a morphology (layout) of Lutudarum from what we know so far. This phase is by far the most difficult, because we can't strip modern Wirksworth off the top of its historic layout and look at it, nor is Wirksworth a conveniently rapidly modernising town with developers funding large area excavations every time they throw up a multi story car park or a massive distribution hub. Its down to us, test pitting and excavating, looking in the keyhole so to speak. Here are some extracts of the maps, and please bear in mind the limitations I have highlighted.



Roman Finds (red dots) in the area of Matlock



Roman Finds (red dots) in the area of Wirksworth

Should you discover any finds, or know of anyone who has (metal detecting finds are relatively poorly recorded, although this is improving) please let us know and we can advise about what to do to have them recorded in a way which makes the record useful.

wirkswortharchaeological@gmail.com or contact the Co-ordinator of the Society via our website.