



**Stay in touch! If you have an interesting topic you'd like to share or a question just get in touch and we'll publish or try to answer.**

***Wyre Archaeology returns to the field! Spades have been dug out of sheds, trowels have been polished, knee pads cleaned and other bits of archaeological ephemera assembled. We've been digging. But what a palaver!***

## **DIGGING & COVID**

In Issue 32 we described a 'freelance' dig by Andy and Simon on the line of the Roman road from Walton-le-Dale to Lancaster.

Following negotiations with the farmer at that location, we obtained permission to have an official WA dig over a long weekend. Of course, with the current COVID-19 and the 'rule of six' situation, great care had to be taken to ensure that our activity would firstly be legal, not rendering the farmer, WA or individual diggers liable and that diggers operated under appropriate Health & Safety and 'social distancing' requirements.

Consequently before we could put spade to turf, a site H&S survey was carried out which identified no specific hazards.



The H&S Site Survey roused local inhabitants.



Contact was made with Lancashire County Council's COVID Help-Line to check whether an archaeological dig in a field qualified as 'socialising indoors in a private house or garden'. The adviser said 'It's a nightmare,' referring to interpretation of the rules and was relieved when informed that the proposed dig was in Wyre District and suggested that an approach should be made to that Borough Council.

Unfortunately the LCC Help-Line only opened at 2.00pm that day and the WBC Help\_line closed at 2.00pm so, it being Saturday no direct contact could be made. An email to WBC brought on Monday morning a prompt and most helpful reply from the Commercial Safety/Environmental Health Officer to the effect that according to LCC's website (!) the restrictions 'apply to social interactions between households' and therefore, since we were not socialising, did not apply to us and provided due attention was given to anti-COVID precautions we could go ahead.

This seemed to bear out what the farmer had told us days earlier that, so far as he was concerned, the field was a workplace that happens to be outdoors and so was exempt from socialising restrictions. He did however ask that numbers be limited to 6 on site.

In the event 11 members volunteered and were arranged in teams of 5 or 6 over 3 or 4 days, from 25<sup>th</sup> to 28<sup>th</sup> September, this last day as a 'stand-by' if extra time was needed to achieve the aims.

A detailed plan was submitted to the farmer for his approval.

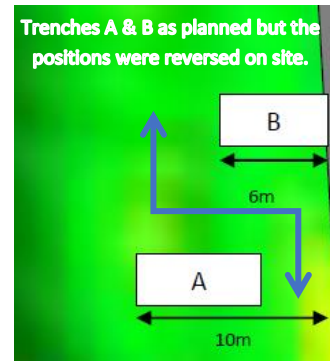
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## **THE DIG**

The plan was to open two trenches initially at a few metres away from Simon's and Andy's earlier trenches that had exposed what appeared to be a road surface and possible kerb stones. Accordingly trenches were marked out and

curves cut and stacked neatly on tarpaulins. Due to a slight communication glitch the North and South positions of Trenches A and B on the site plan were reversed, which had an unexpected impact on how the dig concluded. However this didn't appear to be important at the time so the trenches were left as started.

Trench B, opened from the field edge soon revealed what appeared to be a fairly convincing Roman road surface. As the trench excavation extended westwards during Day 2, the stone scatter was seen to thin out slightly but it was clear that the road surface had spread. What became less clear was the existence of any ditch or of the kerb stones reported by Simon and Andy in their exploratory dig in June.



Trench A, now north of Trench B, opened over where it was expected to reveal an outlying ditch in the 4 ditch configuration, appeared to contain no obvious archaeology at all and a third, 1m<sup>2</sup> trench opened on Day 2 half way towards the field edge in the hope of locating the inner ditch missing in Trench B also proved devoid of any obvious archaeology.

Before the dig was closed at the end of Day 1, Andy opened a *sondage* on the other side of the farm track in the narrow verge between track and the hedge and ditch of the neighbouring field and directly in line with Trench B. At almost the exact same depth as the road surface in Trench B, he revealed a most convincing road surface, consisting of larger flat stones laid close together. This was encouraging as it seemed to indicate that the Roman road metalling had survived.

It became clear on Day 2 (Saturday) that the dig could probably be concluded by Sunday afternoon, despite there being slightly fewer in the dig team, so on Sunday it was agreed to close and backfill the two 'unproductive' trenches opened at the northern section and to concentrate on finding the expected ditch in Trench B. It was decided to cut a lengthwise *sondage* along the southern length of the trench to see if any ditch had in fact been buried by soil or debris washed from the road surface. However apart from a slight indication – a thin black line in the section - that at some point the surface had been covered in organic matter, possibly turf, there was no strong evidence of the existence of a ditch – and no obvious kerb stones.



As Sunday afternoon (much warmer and sunnier than the two previous days) progressed, it was decided to open a final trench exactly where Trench B should have been opened before the positions were reversed (see plan above). However rather than a 6m trench, just a 2m x 1m trench was opened from the field edge. Just 0.25m below the turf was exposed what looked like the road surface and, as the careful towel excavation continued it revealed ... kerb stones! There was also a scatter of larger stones on the field side of this apparent kerb.



Much excitement was aroused at this point although tempered by the fact that this was now early afternoon on what had now been decided was the final day and there was backfilling to do! It was agreed not to extend the trench to a full 6m but instead to turn 90° south to 'chase' the kerb stones towards Trench B to see where and how they disappeared.

As this progressed it appeared that the elevation facing the farm track was very regular, almost 'dressed' in comparison



to the field side. Additionally the 'kerb' appeared to continue for another metre or so but probing with a metal rod seemed to suggest that the feature didn't continue in as regular a form beyond that point.

With time now running short a quick site conference – at 2m separation – decided that in view of too few diggers being available on the following day, the only option was to record the trenches and backfill as we had promised the farmer. Fortunately Chris Drabble had brought his camera-equipped drone which is used to create accurate aerial photos and he also uses software to produce excellent 3D photographs of trenches that may be used to create accurate drawings.



Aerial view taken just before extension of smaller trench at top of picture. 'Kerb stones' may be seen centre of trench but note absence in lower trench.



Aerial view taken at end of Day 2. Trench B to right of shot. Roman road surface close to farm track but scatters of stones in all trenches.

During the 3 days, the farmer visited the site a few times, showing great interest in the proceedings. On closing the dig we explained that we had backfilled (covering our latest trench with tarpaulin) and asked if we might return. Not only was the farmer willing to let us back but he also offered to keep livestock off the field until November.

It's also possible that Wigan Archaeology will assist in siting our trenches by conducting a geophys survey, so weather and Boris permitting, we may return before the end of the season. Members will be informed by email.

## KIRKHAM FORT BROADCAST

Listeners to BBC Radio Lancashire may be familiar with an afternoon programme called 'The A – Z of Lancashire'. This week they're up to 'K' and asked us if we knew anything about the 'lost Roman fort of Kirkham' or could we point them in the direction of anyone who might. Immediately our member and aerial photographer Frank came to mind and he has agreed to be interviewed on the programme.

Long-serving members may recall that in 2009 we excavated on the site of the fort – where it conveniently lay under Frank's front garden. This was an excellent dig which added to Frank's already substantial collection of Roman pots. Photo shows WA's garden remodelling service in action.

The programme is due to go out around 16.20 on Friday 9 October.



## WEBSITE & DIG REPORTS

For a variety of reasons, the exact location of some digs is protected but reports on all digs will eventually appear on the 'members only' section of the Wyre Archaeology website. Members will shortly receive an individual email giving them a personal user name and password.

## RELOCATION OF KIT

We have now relocated all our heavy excavation kit to a secure store in Catforth and are grateful to member Sue for negotiating on our behalf with the Catforth Village Hall Committee.

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In response to Government advice regarding measures to mitigate against the spread of Coronavirus, Wyre Archaeology has cancelled future meetings until further notice. Digs are also suspended for the time being. News will be circulated to members by e-mail, the website and the newsletter.



We're always on the lookout for new projects so if you have a view about potential sites – especially if you have a contact – get in touch. Come to our meeting (when re-instated) or email: [secwya@gmail.com](mailto:secwya@gmail.com)

Prospective new members are especially welcome just email: [secwya@gmail.com](mailto:secwya@gmail.com)

WEBSITES WORTH VISITING	
Lancashire Archaeological Society	<a href="https://lancsarchaeologicalsociety.wordpress.com/">https://lancsarchaeologicalsociety.wordpress.com/</a>
Lancashire's Roman Roads (David Ratledge):	<a href="http://www.twithr.co.uk">www.twithr.co.uk</a>
Wigan Archaeology Society:	<a href="http://www.wiganarchsoc.co.uk">www.wiganarchsoc.co.uk</a>
University of the 3 <sup>rd</sup> Age	<a href="https://u3asites.org.uk/lytham-st-annes">https://u3asites.org.uk/lytham-st-annes,</a> <a href="https://u3asites.org.uk/wyre-lancs">https://u3asites.org.uk/wyre-lancs,</a> <a href="https://u3asites.org.uk/preston">https://u3asites.org.uk/preston</a>



**Membership Benefits: Full Membership:** 10 meetings with voting rights, group membership of CBA and CBA(NW), free training, participation in digs, basic kit loan, personal dig insurance, WA Newsletter, Wigan AS and Lancashire Local History Federation newsletters, Lancaster Uni's Centre for Regional Studies circulars. (£12 individuals, £18 two family members at same address, full-time students up to age 21 free). **Associate Members:** participation in digs, basic dig training, loan of kit, dig insurance, newsletter and circulars as above (£5). **ALL CLASSES OF MEMBERSHIP ONLY £5 THIS YEAR**

**If YOU have any articles, news or views, email to [secwya@gmail.com](mailto:secwya@gmail.com). Check out Wyre Archaeology Group on Facebook too!**

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**Please forward this newsletter to anyone you think may be interested.**