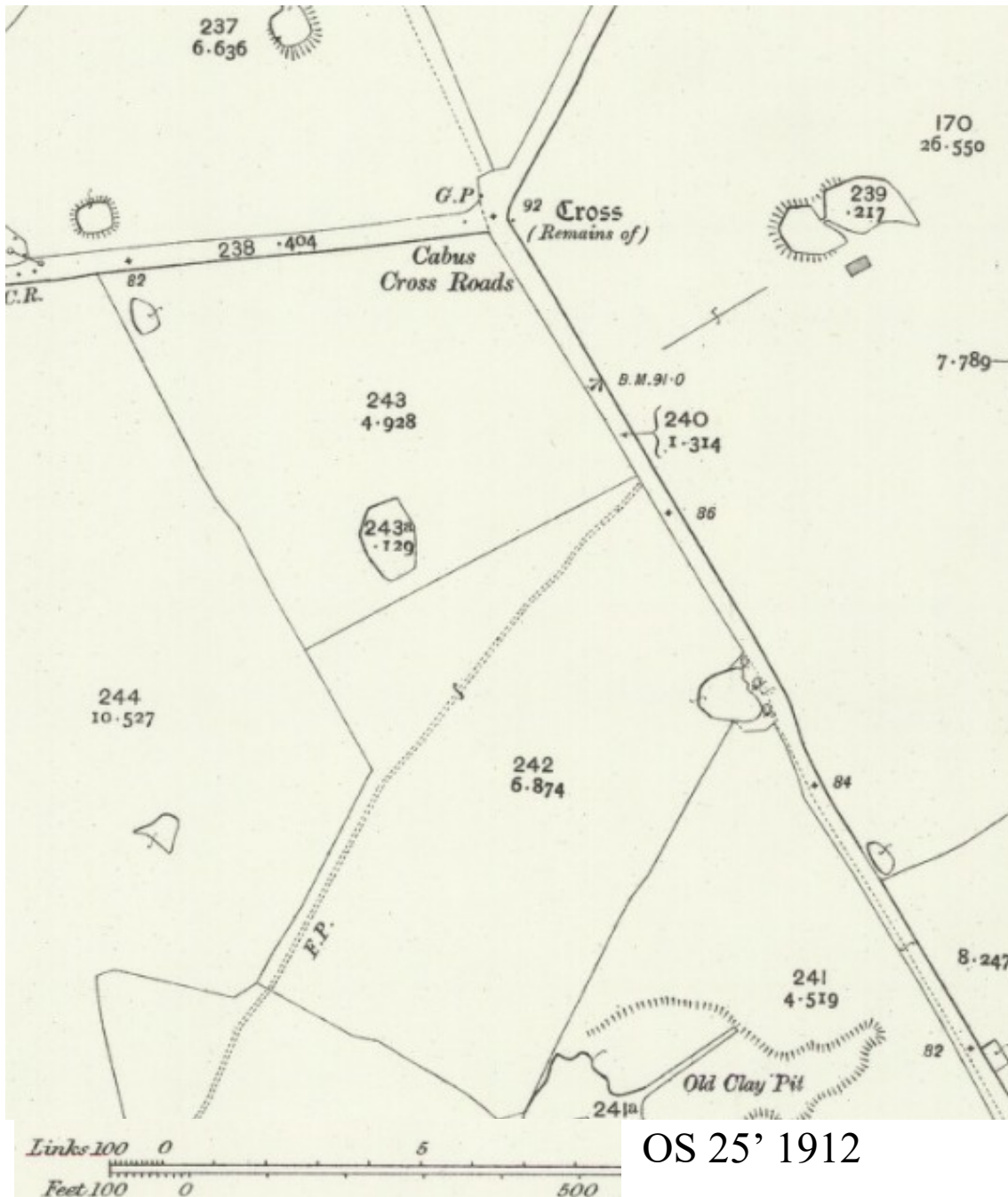


Report on work 18/06/2020 At Cabus Cross



Report Excavations 18/06/2020

Further to the initial excavations on the site at Cabus cross, research has revealed more information about local roads and their dimensions.

John Hallam did some work on a site at Red Scar in 1977 on the road to Longridge. He reports the following in his book 'The Surviving Past. Archaeological finds and excavations in Central Lancashire.' where the work was done using labour from a Job Creation Scheme.

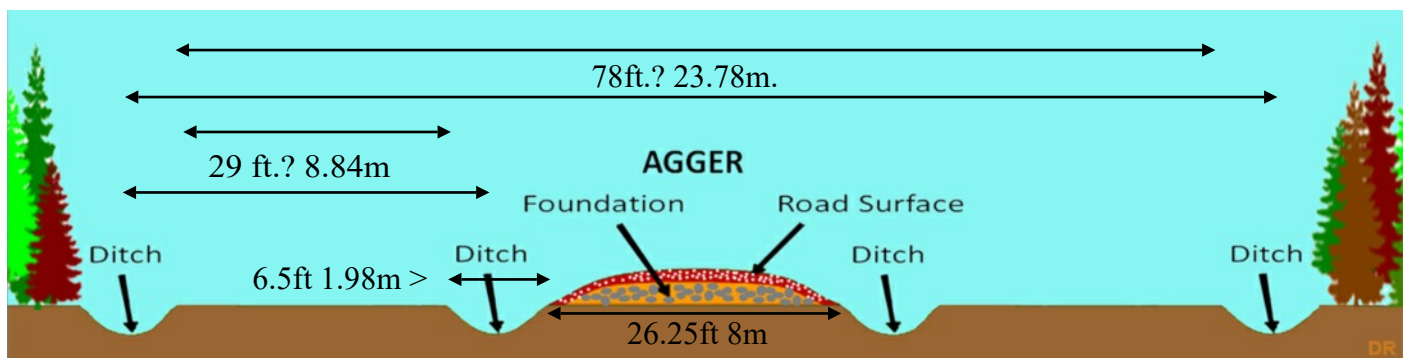
'The excavation took place in the summer of 1977 and consisted of two trenches sectioning the road. The first one, trench number 1, was close to the hedge where the road runs just north of a pond by the old crematorium road, and the second, trench number 2, was across the end of the feature on the western edge of the field.

Trench number 1 determined that the distance apart of the two boundary ditches was 78 feet. Boundary ditches are not always features of Roman roads, and these at Red Scar no doubt formed part of the initial survey and clearing phase. Later, they would indicate the area to be kept cleared for maintenance and security purposes.

Between these two boundaries the road consisted of a loosely graveled surface flanked by two drainage ditches about 29 feet apart. The section revealed that the sub-soil upon which the road rested was composed of reddish clay. In the first phase of the road's use the surface had been cleared of vegetation and weathering of the reddish clay, thickest in the centre, indicated a period of use. Attempts to repair this earthen surface were indicated by the inclusion of occasional pebbles. A dark humus horizon above this weathered surface suggests that the road went out of use for a while or carried only occasional light traffic. The presence of a thin band of charcoal, representing the burning-off of light vegetation, marks the beginning of the next phase of use.

A layer of fine red sand and light gravel was laid next as a foundation for the road surface. In the centre for a distance of about 7 feet the foundation was banked up to provide the camber. The surmounting hard core, composed of large and small pebbles, was compacted but in no way fixed with any binding material. Down the centre of the road there was indication of a line of larger stones, but there was no sign of curb stones along the edges to contain the gravel surface. Here and there the road surface showed signs of patching with larger pebbles.'

These measurements might help us in the interpretation of the road at Cabus to define areas of interest and confirm similarity in construction dimensions.



Previous experience and from information supplied by David Ratledge provides us with information that the ditch might be 6.5ft wide and the road about 26ft wide. Some consideration might be made about where on the road the measurements were taken: from the edge or middle of a ditch, the outer to the inner edge, thus making the determination of width an interesting exercise. Complications caused by the conversion to the metric system make this even more challenging [see above].

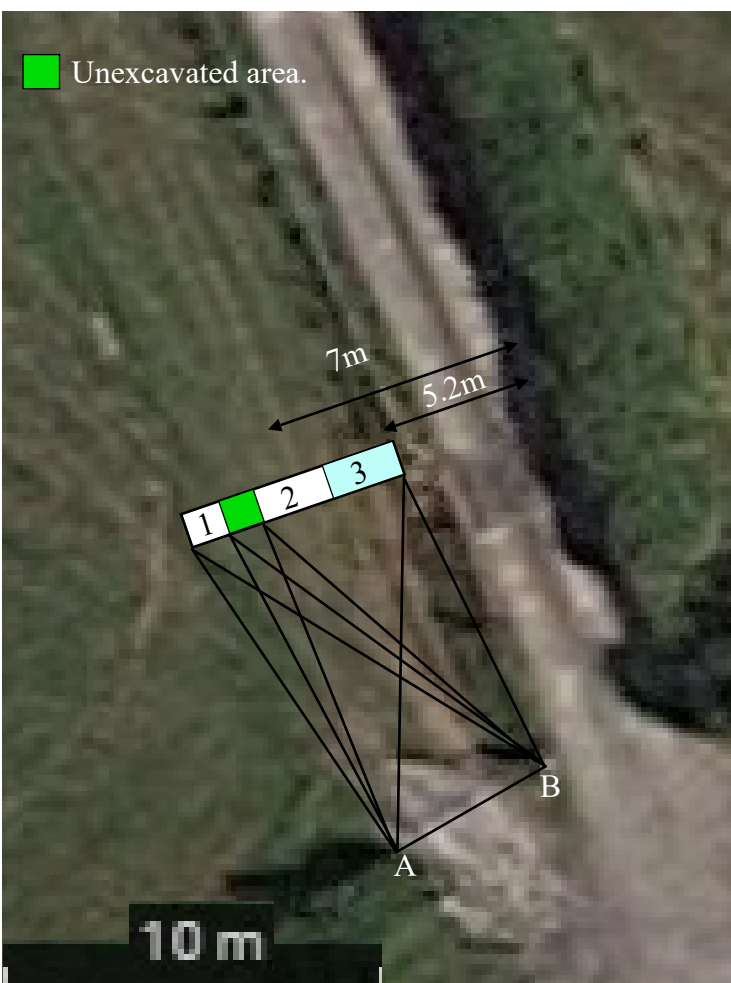
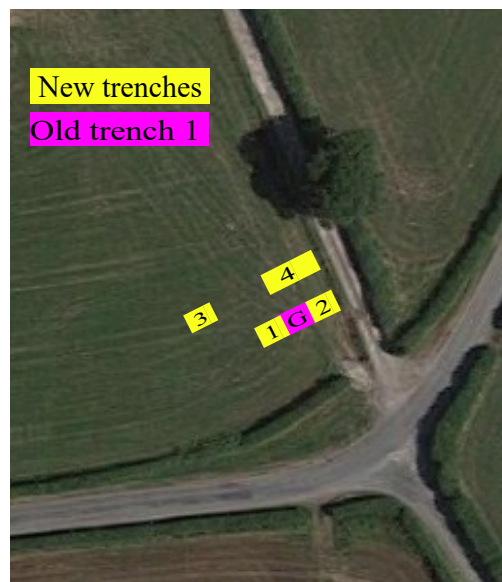
Other evidence about widths make the following points:

‘Standard Roman road construction techniques, long evolved on the Continent, were used. A road occupied a wide strip of land bounded by shallow ditches, varying in width from 86 pedes (25.5 m or 84 ft) on Ermine Way in Berkshire to 338 pedes (100 m or 330 ft) on Akeman Street in Oxfordshire. A trunk road in Britain would typically be 5–8 m (16–26 ft) in width, with a gauge of 7 m (23 ft) being the most common.[L.V. Grinsell, *The Archaeology of Wessex*, p.255] Watling Street was 10.1 m (33 ft) wide while the Fosse Way was little more than half that. Several unnamed roads were wider than Watling Street, such as the Silchester to Chichester road at 11.2 m (37 ft).[Hugh Davis, *Roman Roads in Britain* 2002]’

The purpose behind this day’s work was to answer the following questions:

1. Does trench G show the western side and kerb of the roman road?
2. What is the relationship of the cobble finds in trench G to the other features shown by LIDAR?
3. Is this the outer ditch of the roman road or just a modern agricultural drain?
4. Can we prove the continuation of the road and ditch further north?

Owing to the poorer weather than anticipated, we had to cut short the day’s excavation and complete the work by midday. This meant we were only able to complete some meaningful work in trenches 1 and 2



The excavation took place on Thursday, 18/06/2020, starting at 9 and finishing at 1.

Trench 3 revealed that the overlay from the farm track did spread into the field. This overlay was made up of moderately sized broken sharp chunks of limestone which contrasted well with the rounded river stones found to be making up the roman road. The surface was compacted and difficult to excavate, and covered the surface of the road underneath it.

In trench 2, the previous level was revealed by removing the backfill from the first day of excavation. The area to the west of the trench was taken down further, and the soil in the second layer was found to be very dry despite the recent wet weather and a sandy silty orange in colour. The main concentration of stones was found to be inside the line marked by the supposed kerb stones, though there were a few that had moved beyond them. There was a distinct difference between the subsoil found covering the road and that moving to the west which may have represented the layer that was left after the road was completed and in use. No immediate

sign of an inner ditch were found though this may be because of premature curtailment of work due to increasingly poor weather.

Trench 1 was the most interesting. The soil was very dark and compact and different in colour to that found in trench 2. Very few stones from the road were found in it, but as work went deeper, it was found to contain material of a much more modern period in the form of lumps of coal, brick and a small piece of mortar. A sondage was dug but the bottom of the section was not discovered, though more brick was noticed as the trench went deeper.

Conclusions:

It became clear from trench 3 that the farm track lay beneath the level of the road, but that parts of it may have been revealed by erosion caused by traffic further north down the track. This could be investigated further.

In trench 2, the kerb remains a clear reference point for the transition from a well constructed road to the level beyond where we would expect to find a ditch. Lack of time and good weather made the link between the road and an inner or outer ditch difficult to establish. The position of the kerb can be traced down the field by changes in vegetation visible at the time. The kerb was approximately 7m from the estimated position of the other side of the road.

Trench 3 provided evidence of a possible inner ditch area and modern infill in the form of coal and brick. This feature can be traced down the field via vegetation.

Future progress:

Now that most of the main components of the road have been identified, it sets the project up for a full strip of excavation across the whole width of the road and the ditches to establish the positions and the relations between them more clearly. If this could be done further north up the field by a larger team, better measurements and identification of ditches and kerbs could take place which would set the road up as a standard by which others in the area could be compared. A pre-survey with a ground radar might help determine the position of features of interest.

Acknowledgements:

Thanks again to Ian Pye for giving us permission to work on this project again, to David Ratledge for his wealth of knowledge, to Andrew and Steve for joining in despite the bad weather.



Trench 3 showing difference in types of stone used to construct the road. Recently crushed limestone overlaying the smoother washed river stones.



Trench 3 looking west. The kerb shows a clear delineation of construction to spread caused by wear, as well as the orange colour of the soil that may represent the top layer of soil after the roman period of construction had been completed. The kerb is approximately 7m from the estimated position of the other side of the road and kerb, the expected distance for a road. Comparisons can be later made with dimensions at Matshead Farm and Catterall.



Sondage in trench 1. This is where the infill yielded up a number of more modern finds ranging from coal to brick and stones of different sizes and shapes. This indicates that this ditch has been filled in during the modern period and may represent the infill resulting from an agricultural drain or the infilling of a ditch when the track was being built, though this can only be verified by further work. The soil was of a much darker colour than that to be found in trench 2.

Infill of the sondage in trench 1 shows coal, brick, river cobbles and other types of stone. In some sections it was possible to see that there were dumped layers involved in the filling in process.





The finds from the infill of trench 3 were made up of 3 small pieces of coal. There were others embedded in the side of the sondage which may have resulted from a ditch being filled in at a later period. There was also a small piece of mortar, and a number of pieces of rubble from bricks.