

# THE FOSSE WAY AND OTHER ROMAN ROADS AROUND BATH: EXCAVATIONS AND INTERPRETATIONS SINCE 1997

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## INTRODUCTION

The route and nature of the main Roman roads around Bath (the Roman *Aquae Sulis*) have been a matter of interest and speculation since antiquarians first paid attention to the problem (Collinson 1791, 99–102; Scarth 1864, 107–8), and it has long been recognised that the Fosse Way and the London to Sea Mills (the Roman *Abonae*) roads met and crossed at or near Bath. While existing routes, old boundaries and surviving antiquities such as aggers, have allowed a topographical consensus to grow up on the general and indeed detailed routes of these roads as they approach Bath, the dissected and deep landscape in its nearer vicinity has defeated generalist field archaeological approaches (Codrington 1919; Margary 1973). Recent excavations, both ones targeted and those more incidental to this problem, have provided evidence for arguments that result in a much clearer understanding of it, and indeed, some fairly convincing solutions. In addition, they have added value to antiquarian excavations which have been hard to understand on their own.

Important and fruitful reviews of the local evidence have been put together by Keevil (1989) and Bird (1991), both showing an awareness of the complexity of the problems and the fact that they do not have a simple solution. Keevil concentrated on the Fosse Way itself and specifically its route south of Bath. Bird's article was more a consideration of the possibilities, important in opening out the discussion. The issues were these: what was the route, or routes, that the Fosse Way took from its known position at Cleveland Place on the modern London Road north of the town and river, to Odd

Down on the heights south of the Avon? how and where did it cross the river? where did it part company with the Sea Mills road? and where did the latter run between that point and Swineford?

This article will take up these issues but also add in new data on the nature of the Fosse Way south of Bath. It will also discuss the line of the Fosse Way northwards from its junction with the London road at Batheaston and a few comments will also be offered on the route of the Sea Mills road west of a second junction west of the town in the Royal Crescent area.

The term 'Fosse Way' is of course a post-Roman construct both archaeologically and historically, but it is also the result of a recognition, dating to the medieval period, that the long-distance route must be seen as having a unity of surveying and planning even if it was not built as one project. Although laid out in the early post-conquest period on a Province wide scale, its continuing use for the rest of the Roman period would have been predominantly on a local scale. If this localised use also meant local maintenance then local variations may have occurred over the Roman period. This would be relevant to the route south of Bath, as various routes have been proposed in the past which need not be exclusive and could be local branches and variations.

During the late 1980s and through the 1990s Bath Archaeological Trust carried out a series of excavations which either targeted Roman roads around Bath or incidentally produced evidence for them. The preparation of reports for publication led to an increased interest in the overall problem, and it was clear that the value of the reports would be greatly enhanced by publishing a general report on

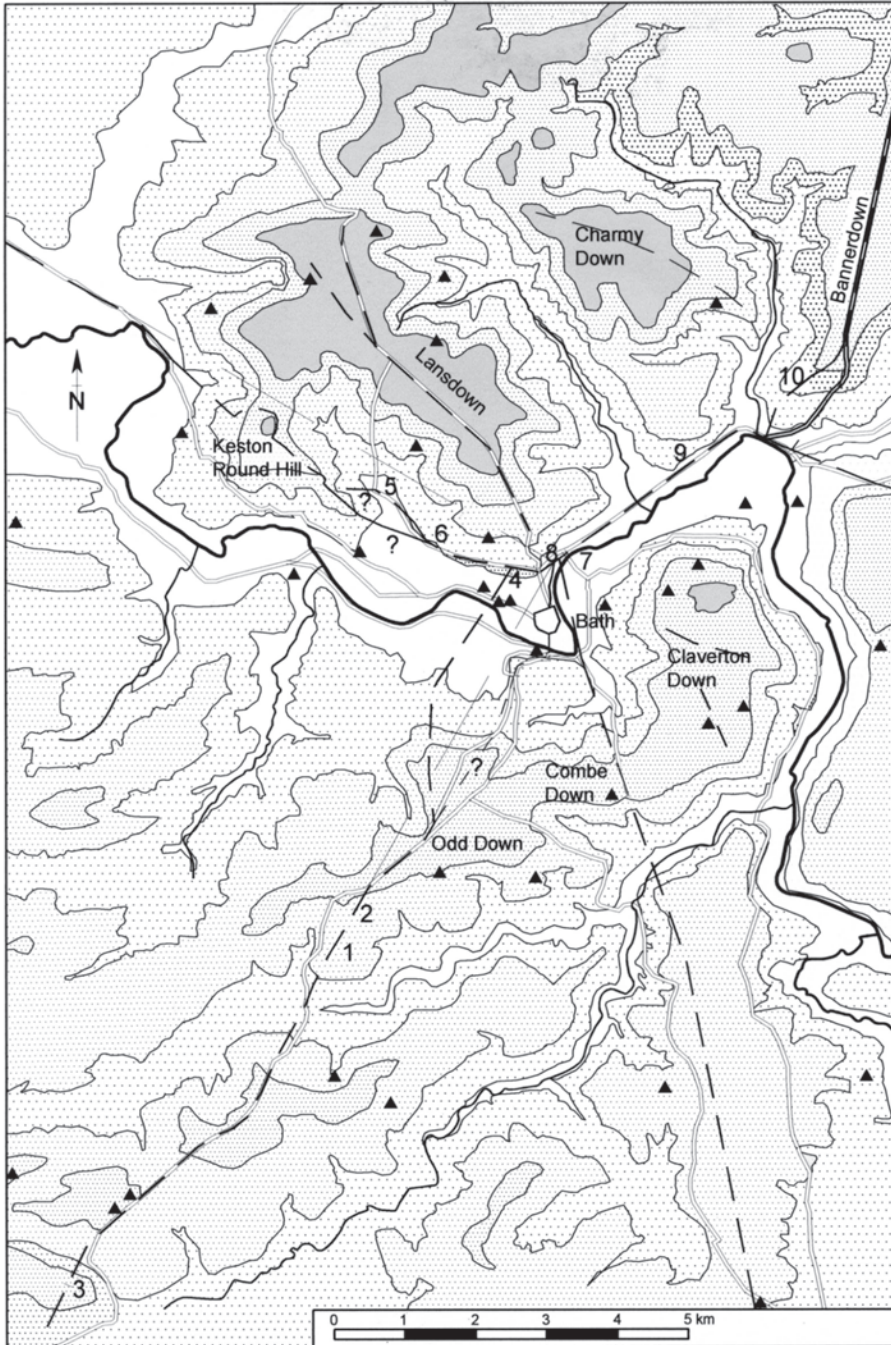


Fig. 1 The Roman road system around Aquae Sulis (dashed lines). The numbers indicate the position of observations or excavations, and modern roads are shown in double outline. Contours are at 50, 100, 150 and 200 metres OD. The fine dashed lines show the sight lines from Odd Down and Swineford converging on Cleveland Place. Main Roman sites are shown as triangles.

the road findings together with an overview to try to answer some of these concerns. Excavations along Walcot Street/London Street provided data on the Roman road at this point. Excavations around the Royal Crescent provided information on the line of the Fosse Way, its putative junction with the Sea Mills road and the crossing point of the River Avon; and observations along Weston Road offered information on the line, or a line, of the road to Sea Mills. Two research excavations across the Fosse Way south of Bath, at Combe Hay and at Clandown, clarified the form of the road there and threw light on earlier excavations. Observations of road and drainage works, further map study and considerations of the route through Batheaston have also led to further comments.

Two of the excavations across the Fosse Way, the research work at Clandown and Combe Hay, are published here. A report on work at Crescent Lane in Bath has been completed as an assessment for the clients (Lewcun 2003) and the evidence in it for the roads is also presented here. Pending publication in full elsewhere, the information from other sites has been extracted and presented here. The archives of all the sites discussed here are held at the Roman Baths Museum, Bath.

#### THE FOSSE WAY EXCAVATIONS SOUTH OF BATH

In July 1997, for National Archaeology Day, the Bath Archaeological Trust mounted a short research excavation across the Fosse Way where it forms the boundary of Combe Hay with Englishcombe and Dunkerton parishes (Fig. 1, 1 and 2). This involved cutting two trenches, one to the south across the Dunkerton boundary where a visible agger is raised above a flat plateau, and the other to the north across the Englishcombe boundary where the agger was

more like a lynchet on the hill slope. The following year a trench was dug at Clandown, also as a National Archaeology Day project (Fig. 1, 3). This was adjacent to a trench cut in 1881 by McMurtrie (1903) and was intended to answer questions raised by his work.

#### The 1997 excavations at Combe Hay

Two 1m wide trenches were dug: Trench 1 c. 150m south of Crossways Farm at ST72046022, and Trench 2 just south of Fosse Cottage, several hundred metres further north, at ST 72286065 (Fig. 1, 1 and 2). Neither provided a complete section across the road. The continued use of the tarmac road along the top of the agger at Trench 1 meant that only its eastern side was excavated. Trench 2 was excavated into the western side of the agger to allow continued access to walkers, the road here being a bridleway. A small sondage was opened on the east of the agger, however. The line had served as the main road from Bath to Radstock and beyond until the creation of the turnpike further west in the late 18th century.

#### TRENCH 1

Before excavation the agger was c. 15m wide at the base and c. 1.1m above the field on the west and c. 2m above that on the east. The trench was placed immediately south of the tarmac track occupying the western half of the flat top of the agger, and extended 9m eastwards to take in the eastern base of the agger (Fig. 2).

Excavation stopped at the top of what was believed to be the lowest of a series of hard-packed layers of limestone rubble set in a pale reddish brown Fuller's Earth matrix (layer 113). The latter acted as a cement fining, producing a hard, smooth surface. It sloped away to the east and is most reasonably interpreted as being the cambered surface of the road.

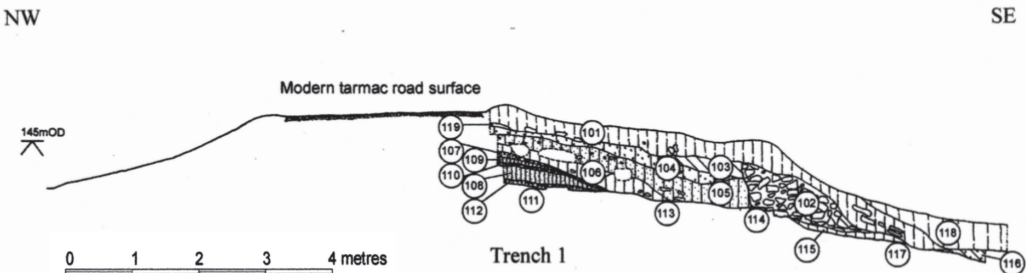


Fig. 2 Trench 1 cut in 1997 across the Fosse Way at Combe Hay, nr. Bath

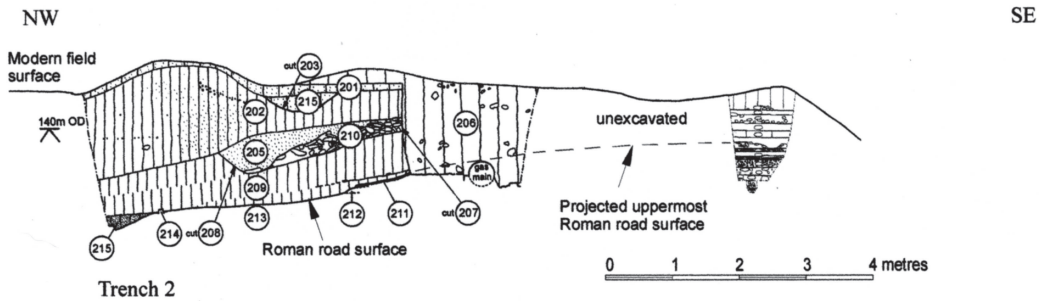


Fig. 3 Trench 2 cut in 1997 across the Fosse Way at Combe Hay

The highest point in the west end of the trench is probably the top of the camber and the approximate centre of the road in which case the metallised surface is, therefore, 9–10m wide. Its thickness was untested but was probably more than 0.2m at the edge, judging by the drop to the subsoil exposed to its east. It was edged by a clear kerb of roughly shaped limestone blocks (114).

At the west end of the trench and therefore about in the centre of the road line, were five layers of gravel and silt, similarly of Fuller's Earth and limestone gravel (Fig. 2, layers 107–110, 112). These were clearly later metallising and make-up. The lowest of these extended only 2m from the end of the trench and could not have represented a surface greater than 5m wide at most. The layers above were the same width but increasingly domed, producing a steep camber. The surfaces were hard and hard-wearing.

No dating evidence was found in these layers but they are likely to be Roman. Layer 113 is the earliest, broadest and best laid of these surfaces and probably represents the first road. Strictly, however it is undated. There was little obvious damage in the lower surface, except for a shallow area of missing top metallising, with sharp, 0.02–0.03m deep sides, as if it had been dug away, or possibly dislodged by frost. The other metallising layers seem more likely, then, to represent not a replacement for the broad one but a raising of the camber in the centre, probably in stages.

The layer immediately above these road surfaces, 106, was a silt, heavily reworked by rabbits but likely to have been a road silt. Layer 105 is interesting as it was a very gravelly silt and may have been the remains of a washed-out, much mixed and eroded post-Roman surface. It was, however, very disturbed by animal burrowing and contained 19th-century finds. It was cut by the terrace for a now collapsed drystone wall, 102, probably of 18th to early 19th-

century date. All the layers above this were of 20th-century date, some associated with the laying of the tarmac surface.

Excavation beyond the edge of the lowest road surface was limited but showed no sign of a ditch. A shallow depression at the east edge of the trench might represent the beginning of a ditch but was as likely to have been the edge of ploughing cutting into the subsoil (Fig. 2, 116).

The excavation was surprising in showing how little of the visible agger was of ancient, presumably Roman, date, and, indeed, just how recent it was. The original structure, while substantial and well built, and raised a maximum 1m above the surrounding land only in its latest form, was hardly the massive symbol of dominance that has sometimes been claimed.

#### TRENCH 2

This revealed a similar original design, but here the road surface was not only deeply buried under ploughsoil washed down from the west, but had clearly been originally laid out in a terrace cut into the hillside rather than on any kind of agger. Before excavation the track had a roughly horizontal profile from the ploughed field to the west across to the positive terrace down to the field above Fosse Cottage (Fig. 3). Excavation revealed that this profile was the result of a combination of post-Roman lynchet formation and road maintenance.

Immediately below the topsoil/leaf mould was a shallow gully (Fig. 3, 203). This was cut into a thick deposit of humic, clayey loam. The deposit was 0.5m thick over the crown of a cambered metallised surface (210), which it covered, and 1.5m thick at the west side of the trench beyond where the metallising and its associated ditch and silting ended. This material was apparently continuous with the thick ploughsoil

in the adjacent field on the north-west and had formed over a period.

The metalled surface was of laminar limestone set in a matrix of Fuller's Earth and was *c.* 0.2m thick. It was well laid and very hard. Judging from the camber and its position on the road line it was probably about 8 or 9m wide, but only just over 2m was exposed of its western edge. The centre was removed by a 1970s gas main trench that had been cut down the length of the road line. The surface had been laid in a hollow cleared in the underlying silts (209), which were basically an earlier phase of the ploughsoil wash 202. At the west edge of the cobbling the side of the hollow seemed to have been utilised as a drainage gully which had filled with silts off the road (205) as is suggested by the section (Fig. 3). The surface was not dissimilar to the lowest surface in Trench 1, but was dated to the 18th century from clay tobacco pipe fragments. It was the only surviving dated evidence of road maintenance after the Roman period.

The soils underlying this surface were 0.6–0.7m thick loamy silts, and covered another well laid cambered surface of small limestone cobbles set in a hard, Fuller's Earth matrix. As in Trench 1 there was a kerb along the edge of the metalling. Beyond the kerb the surface continued but sloped away more steeply as if forming the side slope of a low agger, similar to Trench 1. The slight hollow this formed in the end of the trench was filled with road silts, 215. The thickness of this surface was not investigated in this trench but again, as in Trench 1, it had received resurfacings of small rubble and Fuller's Earth (Fig. 3, layers 211, 212). It seemed probable that this was the earliest road surface but the point could not be proved. A small test pit was then dug to the east and a series of surfaces were found as expected which were similar to those in Trench 1 (Fig. 3). This showed that the highest point of the road was at or near the test pit. If this were the centre – and this need not have been the case – it would indicate a road as much as 16m wide.

Given its position across a slight slope, it is likely that the road was slightly higher than the adjacent land surface and thus more noticeable, but like Trench 1, there was no sign here of a substantial agger construction. No dating evidence was recovered, but again, it seems likely that these surfaces are of Roman date.

The visible shape of the road as seen in the landscape now is entirely due to the post-Roman deposition of ploughsoil washed down from the hill above, presumably retained by the boundary along

its eastern edge and forming a post-Roman lynchet. At some point in the 18th century the road was resurfaced, but already a great depth of soil had accumulated. Soil movement continued so that the presumed Roman surface is now as much as 2m below the present ground level.

No finds were made in the lower surfaces in either trench so the date of this construction is not fixed, or indeed whether it is of Roman date. However, while it seems unlikely that it could be allocated to any other period, further work to date these structures would be highly desirable – silt dating by Optically Stimulated Luminescence might be a possibility.

### The 1998 excavations at Clandown

At Clandown the modern turnpike again deviates from the line of the Roman road and takes a broad curve to the east to reduce the road gradient. This has left the Roman line visible as a raised bank forming a field boundary and farm track south of the village of Clandown. The area chosen for excavation is on a short plateau, between Clandown Bottom and Welton Hollow, forming a horizontal break in the slope down to the valley bottom of the River Somer (ST68155533; Fig. 1, 3).

The excavations here by McMurtrie (1903, 326–36) were well recorded for the time, but the multiple layers found were interpreted as components of a single phase Roman road construction following the descriptions in Vitruvius (McMurtrie 1903, unnumbered figure). Looking at his drawings and photographs, it seemed far more likely that the successive layers were merely repairs and resurfacings over the life of the road. The road would then have been similar to the evidence seen in the Combe Hay trenches – a relatively low and wide first road, raised and narrowed over the years by repairs. Wedlake's excavations at Camerton a mile or so to the north, seem to have revealed a series of surfaces like those in the recent excavations, but the section drawing is too small for safe interpretation and little discussed in the text (Wedlake 1958, fig. 11, 42–7).

Only one trench was excavated in 1998, a complete section across the visible bank (Figs 4 and 5). It started off as a very narrow investigation, but was subsequently opened out to reveal a considerable portion of the road surfaces. The results were very similar to the 1881 excavation section (McMurtrie 1903, unnumbered figure), but the rise in level was clearly the result of resurfacings. The lowest level reached was a layer of limestone rubble acting as a

NW

SE

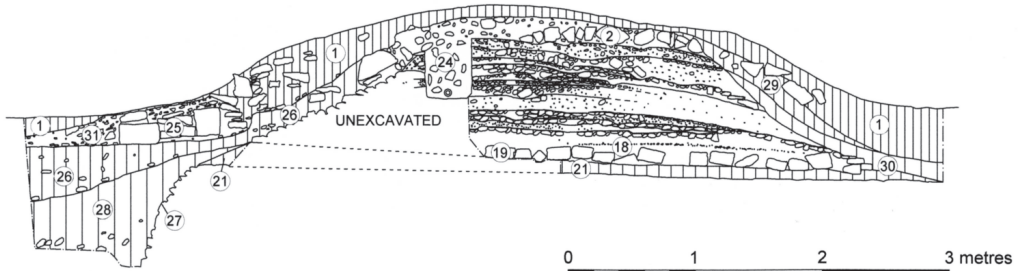


Fig. 4 The trench cut across the Fosse Way at Cladown. 21 is the pre-Roman soil, and 18 and 19 are the first surface and foundations respectively. Around 12 resurfacings are visible as is the rock cut ditch on the left (27, fill 28). The right hand side of the road has clearly been truncated, presumably by ploughing and would never have been quite as steep as this in use.

foundation to the road surfaces (Fig. 4, layer 19). This was presumably what McMurtrie interpreted, following Vitruvius, as the *stammen* or *statumen*. Above this however, where he has *rudus*, *nucleus* and *summa dorsum* or *summa crusta* as parts of the substructure and final surface, 13 layers were identified in 1998 which were clearly resurfacings of stone chippings and stone dust interspersed with silts (Figs 4 and 5). Wheel ruts and wear surfaces

clearly confirmed this interpretation (Fig. 4, especially 6 and 8). That the first road had consisted merely of the lowest layer of stones, perhaps with a thin layer of fines to even it out, was indicated by the wear seen on it. It was possible to agree with McMurtrie, however, on the interpretation of the uppermost metalling under the turf, as a 'metalling of later date'. As with the previous year's excavations, no datable finds were made except from



Fig. 5 The Cladown trench under excavation, looking north

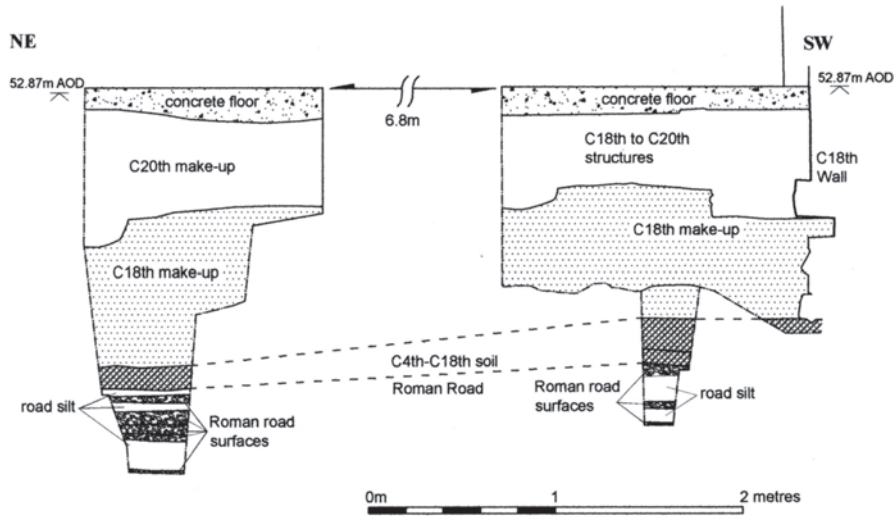


Fig. 6 Trenches 1 and 2 from the evaluation at Crescent Mews, Bath (4 on Fig. 1). Engineering boreholes showed that the road surface was 1.13m thick. The excavations indicated a maximum width of 10m. Trench 2 was nearer the centre of the road line, the difference in height indicating the camber.

the recent metalling, which proved to be of 18th-century date or later.

No preparation of the ground surface seems to have been made before the laying of the foundation stones, other than perhaps turf stripping, but even so a buried soil existed under the foundation layer (21). A rock-cut feature was found on the west side of the road, very close to the edge of the metalling layers. Lack of space precluded full excavation, but it was at least 0.8m deep and more than 1.25m wide. It may have been a later quarry, as it was very close to the road edge for a ditch – especially given the distance of the Camerton lateral ditches from the road (Wedlake 1958, fig. 11, pl. xi). An eastern ditch remains unproven.

The agger at Cladown is now quite certainly merely the result of repairs over time (and some shaping by plough erosion of the sides), not a deliberate construction. In this it follows the results from Combe Hay, but at Cladown, despite the lack of secure dating evidence, mostly, it seems, of Roman date. At both sites there is evidence of an 18th-century paving, which perhaps reflects the increased concern over the state of major through roads which led to the eventual creation of the turnpike on a new route. An instructive comparison would be with the very similar but slightly longer sequences of road construction and repair revealed along the Ermine Street, north of Cirencester. There, similar impressive aggers were merely the result of a long process of

repair and maintenance, also topped off by a (albeit better preserved) post-Roman, indeed post-medieval, set of surfaces (Mudd and Mortimer 1999, 261–81, figs 5.2, 5.3).

#### EXCAVATIONS ON THE WEST SIDE OF BATH

Other excavations on the line of the Fosse Way were carried out in 2002 on the west side of Bath, north of the river. These were funded first by Future Heritage, as part of an evaluation of a development site and, a few months later, by *Time Team* (Videotext Productions) for a television programme. Again these were aimed at clarifying 19th-century excavations. Rather than investigating the structure of the road, however, these excavations confirmed the line of the road north of the river (Fig. 1, 4).

#### The Royal Crescent area, 2002

The mews buildings behind 10–12 Royal Crescent in Bath have a complex history between their building in the 1770s and their most recent use as a garage and tyre and exhaust depot (Fig. 1, 4). Proposals to convert them into housing (now completed) required an evaluation (Lewcun 2002) which was funded by Future Heritage. Two of the test pits dug (Figs 6 and 8 – TP 1 and 2), and several of the geotechnical boreholes, encountered what

were best interpreted as Roman road surfacings and silts of a road aligned approximately south-south-west by north-north-east. In total they were 0.86m thick and extended over a width of about 8 or 9m. The test pits seemed to fall on the western camber of the road. Silts and ruts were visible in the layers and up to five resurfacings were identified. The road was more easily identifiable as such because it is on the line of the road discovered by Irvine in 1870 ‘... running diagonally north-east and south-west ...’ when the foundations for the tower of St Andrew’s church were being dug (Davenport 1999, 129). The camber and wheel rut noted in the northern test pit and the construction material thus confirmed the earlier interpretation as a road. It is clearly substantially built and of the same broad scale as the roads investigated at Combe Hay and Clandown.

On the eastern side of the road observed in 1870, a few metres north of these observations, lay a dense concentration of human remains of Roman date. From the description given by Irvine, these seem to have been a mix of inhumations and cremated remains. A Roman wall was also found here. No remains or other structures were found in the 2002 observations in Crescent Lane, apart from a possible robber trench seen in a builder’s test pit nearby.

Two further trenches were dug south of the Royal Crescent as part of a *Time Team* programme mounted in September of 2002 (Fig. 1, 4). These were designed to confirm the line of the road towards the River Avon. This line, predicted by the Crescent Mews trenches and Keevil’s line south of the river, had also been picked up by a geophysical survey carried out for the *Time Team* programme (Davenport 2004). Both trenches revealed substantial gravel surfaces and road silts, but neither were investigated to a greater depth. However a machine sondage in one of the trenches (TH 4) showed that the road gravels were at least 0.5m thick with large thicknesses of silt washed off the road. Unlike the 1997 and 1998 excavations the road material here was terrace gravel, excavated locally. Each trench also contained an inhumation burial alongside and parallel to the road line, set in a grave cut into the road silts. Unlike the burials recorded by Irvine, they were only on the western side. Both were male, with no grave goods except for hobnails. One, with coffin nails indicating a timber coffin was of a middle-aged male, the other was a younger male with no indication of a coffin. They are seemingly of later Roman date but were not independently dated.

These findings enabled the road line to be projected south towards the river, a little east of the

Victoria Suspension Bridge. Property boundaries on this line between the river and the Upper Bristol Road, unlike the others on either side, are not perpendicular to the modern road and seem to represent old field boundaries laid out parallel to the road before it was lost (Fig. 7). South of the river this alignment is taken up by the parish boundary between Twerton, Widcombe and Lyncombe, the road line proposed by Keevil in 1989.

It seems certain, therefore, that Keevil’s line south of the river has been confirmed by these works. He proposed that the road north of the river took a direct line to Walcot (and the London Road/Fosse Way line north-east of town) via Queen’s Square and the Paragon. While such a route is not disproved by these investigations, it is clear that the main route ran straight up hill to the line of Julian Road following the alignment south of the river. This alignment is parallel to the survey line projected from the Fosse Way on Odd Down to the Cleveland Bridge crossing (see below and Fig. 1).

#### **The road to Sea Mills, observations in 2004**

The conclusions drawn from work behind the Royal Crescent make good sense as Julian Road is generally accepted as the line of the Roman road from Bath to Sea Mills. The route of this road is reasonably clear from the south-east outskirts of modern Bristol to Swineford, c. 6km west of the Royal Crescent (and has been traced much further west). Its line from there is uncertain, as the modern road swings south to skirt the steep and high Kelston Round Hill. One version of the Roman road may well have done the same, linking a Roman site near Kelston Farm and the villa site at Partis College, both on its lower southern slopes. Fragments of field boundary and farm lane suggest another route straight up the steep ridge on the north-west side of the hill skirting the actual summit in short straight lengths and then descending along a col, now supporting a track. Perhaps, in its impracticality for wheeled vehicles, this represents an early military line. It would, at any rate, be a necessary part of the surveyors’ setting-out route whether they swung the road around the hill or across it. Eastwards, the line leads, again via straight sections of footpath and lane, across Dean Hill and on into Weston High Street where recent observations of water main work in summer 2004 (Wessex Water 2004) has shown what appear to be Roman road gravel surfaces and packed rubble foundations (Fig. 1, 5). Further east, roughly half way between here and the Royal Crescent, similar,





*Fig. 7 Aerial photo of the Royal Crescent and the crossing of the Avon. The solid line shows the parish boundary south of the river, and the dashed line is the line projected from the various Crescent excavations to meet it, via the property boundaries by the river mentioned in the text.*

probably Roman, road surfaces and foundations were also observed in 2004 at Weston Lane in further water main works (Fig. 1, 6; Wessex Water 2004). The surfaces in Weston High Street may be a later local diversion or branch from a more logical direct route from Weston Lane to Penn Hill (the foot of Kelston Round Hill) across Combe Park (the present Royal United Hospital). However, there is no evidence for this route as yet.

Further east than this the road itself has not been seen. Excavation behind the Crescent in 1986–87

(Davenport 1999, 127ff), and as part of the *Time Team* excavations in 2002, bracketed the possible route and indicated that the Roman road had to run pretty much under the current Julian Road at this point, although it was not seen. If this is so, then the junction between it and the newly discovered road running under the Crescent must be just north of the site of the demolished tower of St Andrew's Church, whose construction led to the discoveries here in the first place. This gives a context for the burials found east and south of the road junction and the

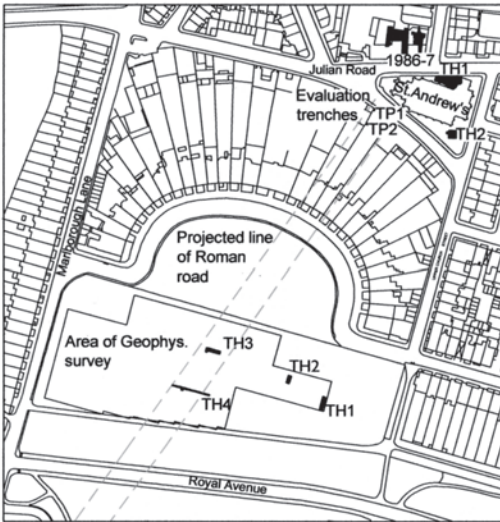


Fig. 8 Plan of the area around the excavations of 2002 around the Royal Crescent, Bath, showing the position of trenches, area of the main geophysical survey and the proposed line of the road

cobbled yard found in 1986 to the north (Davenport 1999, 134–9). The road would then continue eastwards north of burials discovered in the last century and south of what appears to be more domestic material reported in the early 19th century and after the Second World War (Cunliffe 1969, 216–7; 1979, 131).

When Irvine recorded the burials and road under the church tower of St Andrew's in 1870–73, he also recorded further burials and masonry buildings at the north-east corner of the church, against Julian Road (Davenport 1999, fig. II.3). The *Time Team*-funded excavations of 2002 showed that these masonry structures were well-built strip buildings, probably workshops or domestic structures. They postdated the use of the area as a cemetery (probably mid to late 4th-century) and were not part of it, as previously thought. They would have fronted the Roman Julian Road, which must have been on the north side of the present alignment (Fig. 8; Davenport 2004, fig. 6). Any neighbouring buildings to the west would have fitted into the junction of the two roads.

#### THE FOSSE WAY EAST OF BATH

The Fosse Way and the London road join at Batheaston, 3.5km east of Bath, and approach the

city along the modern London Road. Observations in 1865 (Scarth 1867) and 1992 (Beaton in prep.) show that the Roman line lies *c.* 50m south of the modern line at the Cleveland Bridge approach (Fig. 1, 7 and 8). This deviation can be seen as a slight change in the alignment of the modern road at Mile End, the Roman road continuing straight. From here it passes behind the Hat and Feather pub (now Hudson's Bar) in London Street. At this point the road is *c.* 1m thick with three main phases of repair, plus numerous resurfacings (Beaton in prep.). It must pass from here pretty much under St Swithun's church before meeting the line of the road to Sea Mills somewhere near the junction of Guinea Lane and Julian Road. A branch through the Walcot Street suburb into the area around the baths and temple must leave near the Hat and Feather pub to serve the heavy occupation known along here (Beaton in prep.; Davenport 2002, 14–16). While the street itself has not been seen, the arrangement of strip buildings and side alleys known from recent excavations makes it clear that the line must be very close to that of modern Walcot Street.

#### The route through Batheaston to Bannerdown

The line of the road east of Bath is generally agreed as the line of the A4 to Batheaston. Drainage works associated with the Batheaston bypass at the entrance to Bailbrook House were observed in 1994 (Fig. 1, 9) and a thick gravel bed over a rubble raft was observed under the pavement on the north side of the modern road, at about 1.5m down (ST76806675). This suggests that the Roman road, which this probably represents, was slightly up hill of the present, essentially 18th-century, turnpike road and, as with the Combe Hay section, had been buried in hill wash. The general agreement on the line of the road here is clearly correct, but there has been much discussion on the route that the Fosse Way took on leaving Batheaston High Street and Stambridge to reach the accepted route on the ridge of Bannerdown. Stambridge or Stone Bridge, over St Catherine's brook is thought likely to be Roman in origin and so give a definite point of departure (Bird 1991).

Starting from the north-east, as the present road on the hill top approaches the descent to the village, it swings slightly but sharply to the east, and begins the long steady descent into the village. At this point there are medieval or post-medieval quarries on the west side. Two 600m alignments of rights of way leading down the south-west spur of the hill beyond these quarries are of considerable significance. The

upper section is aligned exactly on the change in alignment of the main road – although the quarries have removed all evidence of any junction. It is probably significant that the modern footpath continues the connection but swings around the quarries. This section, now mostly an unmetalled track and holloway, joins the second alignment, now the upper part of Fosse Lane, which is exactly aligned on the Batheaston High Street/London Road line running into Bath. The lower part of Fosse Lane deviates from this line toward the modern Five Ways junction, but this is quite probably original, as only one crossing of the brook (the stone bridge) would then have been necessary to take both the Fosse Way and the road to London passing through Bathford.

The non-metalled parts of these alignments are heavily worn into holloways, and excavation may not be fruitful, even if possible. However a glance at the map shows that this route must be clearly preferable to any other hypothesis for the original, surveyed route. Other routes down the hillside are of course possible – for example Morris Lane, which has the advantage of being followed by the parish boundary. This may be a later variant, but the Fosse Lane route has the clear air of a surveyed line directly related to the known alignment, suggesting an original line.

## CONCLUSION

These excavations and observations have made the Roman route system around Bath reasonably clear and thrown considerable doubt on the idea that the roads were built up on aggers from the beginning as symbols of imperial domination.

The two main roads that pass through Bath, the Fosse Way and the London/Sea Mills road, share their route from Batheaston in the east to what is now the rear of the Royal Crescent in the west (Fig. 9). At the latter point the Fosse Way strikes off southwards to cross the river between Norfolk Crescent and Victoria Bridge. This must surely have been via a bridge, though the river is likely to have been easily fordable here in the past. The road possibly negotiated the flood plain of the river on a causeway that would now be buried by 19th-century makeup and probably alluvium, before rising up the southern valley slope in a sweeping line which avoids all but one short section of steep gradients. This is the route argued by Keevil (1989) (Fig. 1).

West of this junction the Sea Mills road seems to follow Weston Lane and may follow Weston High

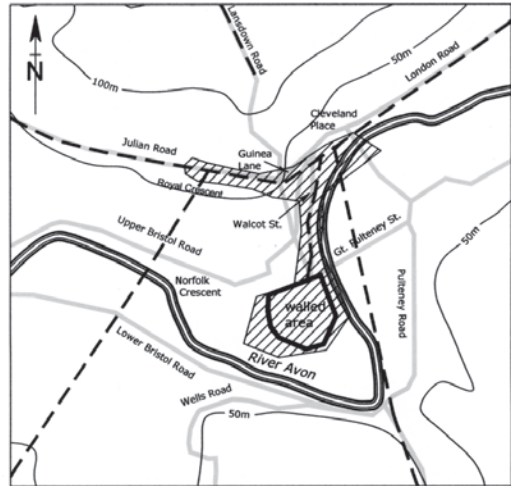


Fig. 9 Roman roads in the Bath area

Street, or the latter may be a local branch. Kelston Round Hill seems certain to be a focal point of the road system even if the roads did not actually, or for long, mount to the summit.

What is particularly striking, however, is the importance of the area at the top of Walcot Street, near Cleveland Bridge (Fig. 1, 8). Significant sections of all the roads approaching Bath are clearly aligned on this point. The long straight section from Bannerdown, the long length of Fosse Way approaching Odd Down, the road from Poole, via Midford and Combe Down, the road over Lansdown and even the part of the Sea Mills road west of Swineford, are all aligned on this spot. Although the Poole road is quite hypothetical in its last few kilometres, its line was suggested by researchers long before the nodal importance of Walcot was understood. A short-lived, probably Claudian, spur from the London Road was excavated at the Hat and Feather site in 1991 which aimed directly at the Poole Road and indicated the site of the Avon crossing. The Fosse Way south of the river demonstrates the importance of the Walcot alignment to the surveyors. The deviation from that alignment was necessary in order to negotiate the difficult contours on the north-west side of Odd Down. The suggested route provides a minimum distance in the valley bottom while avoiding particularly difficult contours and the multiple river crossings that might possibly have been involved in the direct route. Nevertheless, the last length to the river and beyond resumes the alignment but shifted north-west by 450m. The change of angle at Bannerdown, at the northern tip

of Odd Down and the alignment on Kelston Round Hill make it possible to suggest that these were important local survey points in laying out the roads.

It is noticeable that the central area of Bath, around the baths and temple, is largely ignored by these routes. Excavations in the last 15 years and revisiting antiquarian reports make it reasonably clear that settlement traces, industry and habitation are in fact to be found along these suggested road lines, at their junctions, and on the link between them and the ceremonial centre (Davenport 2002). In the wider road system, the baths and temple were a dead end. However, from the medieval period until the mid 20th century the main crossing of the river was at the bottom of Southgate Street. It is entirely possible that a route led from here in Roman times using either a ford or a bridge and passing up the only sensible route to link to the Fosse Way at Odd Down – ie via Holloway, modern Bear Flat and Bloomfield Road. This is the route suggested by the traditional commentators until the mid 20th century. There is some evidence of Roman occupation along Bloomfield Road, but even without this it seems unnecessary to deny the strong possibility of an alternative route up the slopes south of town, one that became dominant in the medieval period when the city clustered around the Abbey and the hot springs.

### Acknowledgements

The author wishes to express his gratitude to the Roman Baths Museum, Bath, which contributed to the costs of producing this paper. I am also indebted to my former colleagues at the Bath Archaeological Trust, Robert Bell, Mark Beaton and Marek Lewcun who carried out much of the fieldwork on which this paper is based.

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