

# 42 Sarmatian Fold, Ribchester Archaeological watching brief

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June 2018

For Rachel Stevens

North Star Archaeology



## Summary

In June 2018 North Star Archaeology undertook an archaeological watching brief on land at 42 Sarmatian Fold SD648354. The archaeological work was required due to the high archaeological potential of the development site, which was situated to the north east of Ribchester Roman fort and close to an area designated as a Scheduled Monument (National Heritage List Entry 1005110).

The groundwork was subject to a permanent archaeological presence. The archaeological work comprised monitoring the mechanical excavation and supporting hand-digging. The groundworks originally comprised excavation of a series of wall footings for the construction of an extension to the side of the property. During machine excavation the ground was found to be unsuitable to build the extension, comprising made ground containing plastic to a depth of 1.2m where a layer of plastic mesh was encountered. The plastic mesh formed part of the footings of the house and were observed to protrude beneath the intended extension location. At this point groundworks for the extension were changed to a 0.40m ground reduction on the footprint of the proposed building. The results of the work suggest that any future groundworks would be highly unlikely to encounter archaeological remains or deposits.

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## 1 Introduction

In June 2018 North Star Archaeology was invited by Rachel Stevens to design and implement a programme of archaeological works at 42 Sarmatian Fold Ribchester planning app 3/2017/1157. The site lies within an area of high archaeological significance, and is close to an area designated as a Scheduled Monument (National Heritage List Entry 1005110). The work comprised the excavation of foundations for an extension to the side of the house by mechanical excavator.

### 1.1 Archaeological Monitoring

1.1.1 The programme of monitoring works comprised maintaining a permanent presence during the groundworks element of the construction project; this comprised excavation by mechanical excavator and supported by hand-digging.

1.1.2 The *Chartered Institute for Archaeologists* (ClfA 2014) defines archaeological watching brief as:

*"a formal programme of observation and investigation conducted during any operation carried out for non-archaeological reasons. This will be within a specific area or site on land, inter-tidal zone or underwater, where there is a possibility that archaeological deposits may be disturbed or destroyed."* (ibid)

1.1.3 In order to provide an opportunity to identify, record and recover any archaeological information present on the site, a programme of watching brief was recommended by Ribble Valley Borough Council, on the advice of the Lancashire Archaeology Advisory Service. Maintaining a watching brief would also provide an opportunity to recognize and take appropriate steps to deal with more complicated archaeological remains.

### 1.2 Site Location

1.2.1 Ribchester lies on the northern bank of the River Ribble in central Lancashire, half-way between the central Pennines and the present Lancashire coastline. The project area lies approximately 100 metres north west of the boundary ditch enclosing the Roman settlement (Vicus) at Ribchester. The groundworks for the project took place abutting the side of 42 Sarmatian Fold.

### 1.3 Site Geology

1.3.1 Solid geology in the area around Ribchester is dominated by 'Sabden Shales', mudstone and siltstones (British Geological Survey 2017). Around Ribchester this tends to be sealed by superficial deposits of Diamicton Till. Closer to the River Ribble, river Terrace Deposits comprising sand and gravel overlook the riverine alluvium.

1.3.2 Ribchester town and its Roman fort stand on the River Terrace of the Ribble, which rises to c 3m-4m above the floodplain (Bridge 1989:17). The terrace is actively eroded with approximately one-third of the area of the Roman fort already lost to fluvial processes to date. Soils of the 'Second Terrace' generally comprise 0.6m-0.8m of un-mottled sandy loams, overlying slightly-mottled sandy-clay loams.

#### **1.4** Archaeological and Historical Background

1.4.1 This section provides only a brief summary of an archaeological and historical background for Ribchester in order to provide a context for the results of the fieldwork.

1.4.2 **Prehistoric period:** prehistoric Ribchester is poorly understood. Bronze Age activity is recorded by Olivier and Turner (1987) who excavated a circular ditch enclosing five cremation burials in collared urns to the north of the site. Soil analysis indicates agricultural disturbance on the banks of the river Ribble during the Bronze Age; the same analysis implies that abandonment hundreds of years before the arrival of the Romans in the early AD 70s (Buxton and Howard-Davis 2000). The nearby hillfort of Portfield Camp appears to have been established in the Late Bronze Age, continuing throughout the Iron Age, and it may possibly have been re-fortified at the time of the Roman invasion (Beswick and Cooks 1986). Only very occasional finds of Iron Age date have been made in central or northern Lancashire and the county is notable for this discrepancy (Haselgrove 1996).

1.4.3 **Roman period:** extensive Roman remains at Ribchester are well-known. Its conclusive identification as *Bremetenacum* is based on a 3<sup>rd</sup>-century dedication to *Apollo Maponus* (RIB 583) from the town (Rivet and Smith 1981:277), translated below:

"To the holy god Apollo Maponus for the welfare of our Lord (the Emperor) and of Gordian's Own Unit of Sarmatian cavalry of BremetenacumAeliusAntoninus, centurion of the Sixth Legion Victrix, from Melitene, acting-commander and prefect, fulfilled his vow willingly, deservedly. Dedicated 31 August in the consulship of the Emperor Our Lord Gordian for the second time and of Ponpeianus."

1.4.4 The site was strategically well-placed at the western end of one of the few major trans-Pennine routes and at its intersection with another major road aligned north/south. It was also at or close to a crossing-point of the River Ribble at the approximate point where it becomes navigable. The road to the south led to Manchester and on to Chester; to the north the road passed along the Lune/Eden corridor and on to Carlisle and Hadrian's Wall (Margary 1973:370). The road east crossed over the Pennines to a fort at Elslack and then on to Aldborough and York. The road west kept to the northern side of the Ribble

Valley connecting Ribchester with an industrial site at Walton-le-Dale and a fort at Dowbridge, Kirkham (*ibid.*).

1.4.5 The frontier moved north during the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> centuries AD, and the fort is thought to have dominated hinterland between settled and 'Romanised' regions around Chester, and the frontier at Hadrian's Wall (Shotter 1997). Ribchester is supposed to lie within the western territory of the *Brigantes* and the garrison is thought to have been concerned with policing the area. Evidence from the 1989-1990 excavations suggests that a timber fort was established in the early AD 70s during the governorship of *Petilius Cerialis* (AD 71-73/74). This was modified c AD 82-86. Demolition of this fort and subsequent rebuilding in stone probably happened around AD 125-135; this is thought to be connected with activity in the area of Hadrian's Wall (*ibid.*).

1.4.6 The Roman occupation of Ribchester is known to have continued into the 3<sup>rd</sup> century AD. The identity of the Ribchester garrisons is mostly unknown during the first two centuries AD, although both *Legio VI* and *Legio XX* are attested by inscriptions (*ibid.*). Later on the fort was garrisoned by a *numerus equitatum Samatorum* (soldiers from modern-day Hungary). They are thought to have settled at or around the fort after discharge from the army as veterans; this is thought to be the origin of the settlement's name *Bremetennacum Veteranorum* (*ibid.*).

1.4.7 Both fort and settlement are well-known from the 16<sup>th</sup> century onwards (Edwards 2000), and largely both occupy ground beneath the church and glebe lands of St Wilfrid. Extra-mural settlement (i.e. outside the walls of the fort) has been recorded up to 500m north of the fort. Evidence from other parts of Ribchester indicates that any area close to the fort, even if partially-damaged, is likely to be of at least some archaeological value (Buxton and Howard Davis 2000).

1.4.8 **Medieval period:** early post-Roman Ribchester is unknown. Whitaker suggested that it was abandoned and later inhabited by '... *a few Saxon settlers of uncertain period*' (1823). Some items recorded as coming from Ribchester by antiquarians and a small collection of objects in the Ribchester Museum suggest that there was post-Roman occupation. Complete abandonment of Roman sites is increasingly considered unlikely; evidence from sites like Birdoswald, on Hadrian's Wall (Wilmott 1997), suggests some kind of continuous occupation from the Roman to the early medieval period. Building the church of St Wilfrid within the walls of the fort, reputedly in c AD 596 (Baines 1870:2), may support this for Ribchester.

1.4.9 A church certainly stood on the site by the Domesday Survey of 1086 (Farrer and Brownbill 1912), where Ribchester is listed as *Ribelcastre*, comprising 2 *carucates*

of land (Williams *et al* 2002:796). From c1150, a manor house may have been situated to the north-west of the church; this seems to have been abandoned in c1450, when the lord of the manor relocated to Dutton (Farrer and Brownbill 1912:45-51). Ribchester was never a borough and never gained the right to host a market.

1.4.10 **Post-medieval period:** cotton and textile mills were built on the outskirts of town, changing both the layout and economy of the settlement. Corry (1825) notes that in 1821 Ribchester comprised 300 houses, 303 families, and was inhabited by 1760 persons. This suggests that the textile industry sustained a thriving community.

1.4.11 **Archaeological Interventions:** writers have observed Ribchester's richness since the mid-16<sup>th</sup> century. There have been numerous artefact finds, including the well-known Ribchester Helmet, a 2<sup>nd</sup>-century cavalry helmet now housed in the British Museum. Over the past 200 years various projects have excavated trenches into the fort and its extramural settlement. A long, detailed, and well-preserved archaeological sequence spanning the entire Roman occupation has been recorded, although much of the information obtained from early work has been lost. The smaller excavations are most usefully summarised by Edwards and Webster (1985; 1987a; 1987b; 1988).

1.4.12 The majority of the more recent excavations undertaken in Ribchester have been in response either to threats to archaeology or to development; these have concentrated to the north and east of the fort. These are summarised in Buxton and Howard-Davis (2000). Of these, those carried out by the Ribble Archaeological Society in 1968-9 are most relevant, being close to the present development area. Their work recorded a complex sequence of Roman timber buildings, many with 'industrial hearths' (Edwards *et al* 1987a:13-28). The remains were interpreted as four distinct phases, all dating to the first two centuries AD (*op cit*:13).

1.4.13 The main phase of occupation seems to occur during the late 1<sup>st</sup> and early 2<sup>nd</sup> centuries AD. A succession of timber buildings aligned north/south were constructed with intervening alleyways across the southern part of the excavated area (*op cit*:15). The layout of this part of the settlement seems to have been redesigned during the mid-2<sup>nd</sup> century AD, when wooden buildings were constructed and new road surfaces were laid down. Several of the new buildings contained hearths which seem to be connected with iron-smithing. These excavations did not produce any pottery later than cAD 200, even from the unstratified material.

1.4.14 The results of this 1968-9 work were supplemented in 1976 by a series of emergency excavations and watching briefs conducted during the construction

of a new sewerage scheme (Olivier 1987; Fig 2). Land close to the present development site contained remains of timber buildings and hearths, again apparently of 2<sup>nd</sup> century date.

1.4.15 In 1979 the construction of housing at the western end of Parsonage Avenue encountered the remains of more timber buildings and industrial activity (*op cit.*:76).

1.4.16 In 2006 OA North undertook an archaeological watching brief at the Ribchester Playing Fields on behalf of the Ribchester Playing Field Trust. Topsoil was stripped from the development site and 14 trial pits were hand-excavated for installation of floodlights and goal posts. During this project, *in situ* Roman deposits were encountered as the remains of a cobbled road surface, probably on an east/west alignment. This led to the repositioning of the whole development some 4m to the north-west of its original location. Pottery recovered from immediately above the Roman deposits and also from the topsoil strip indicated activity from the 1<sup>st</sup> century AD through to the 4<sup>th</sup> century AD, reflecting the known long history of Roman Ribchester.

1.4.17 In 2014 NPA undertook an evaluation within the study area and found evidence of a Roman soil horizon identified as agricultural soil containing Roman pottery.

1.4.18 In 2015 Minerva Heritage undertook an archaeological watching brief at the Ribchester Playing Fields on behalf of the Ribchester Playing Field Trust, along the rear of the gardens along 8-22 Church Street. Roman deposits were identified *in situ* at a depth of approximately 0.8m below the ground surface. These comprised a stone structure, most probably a stone surface; fragments of Roman-period pottery were also found at this level.

## 1.5 Acknowledgements

1.5.1 The archaeological monitoring and survey was undertaken by Ric Buckle who also produced this report. The project was managed by Ric Buckle, and was edited by Karolina Siara. We would like to thank Rachel Stevens for commissioning the work.

## 2 Method Statement

### 2.1 Introduction

2.1.1 The purpose of the archaeological watching brief was to establish the presence or absence of archaeological remains which might be encountered during construction works. It was intended that the archaeological watching brief should enable the client to devise an informed strategy for any further work considered necessary, whilst also affording the opportunity to deal appropriately with any archaeological remains which might be encountered.

2.1.2 The principal objective of the watching brief was to identify archaeological features and/or deposits revealed during groundworks for the development, and to record their presence or absence.

### 2.2 Archaeological Watching Brief

2.2.1 In order to retain archaeological remains *in situ* and to avoid damage to these where possible, a 0.40m-wide toothless bucket was selected for the mini-excavator. Excavation of the foundations proceeded to a maximum depth of 1.2m below the ground surface. Hand-digging was used as necessary.

2.2.2 **Site Recording Techniques:** the drainage trench and all archaeological features, structures, and deposits within it, were recorded using appropriate *pro forma* recording sheets. The process of written recording principally comprised the completion of *pro forma* context sheets, and a watching brief record sheet. The excavation and any feature-locations were recorded onto the watching brief record sheet. Trenches and individual features were photographed using high-quality digital cameras.

2.2.3 **Artefacts:** all artefacts encountered during the excavation were recovered and retained in appropriate containers, which were numbered on site with a unique context number allocated to the originating deposit.

2.2.4 All artefacts were treated according to the United Kingdom Institute for Conservation guidance (UKIC 1998), and standards and guidance issued by the *Chartered Institute for Archaeologists* (2014). Some expressly recent and modern (i.e. 19<sup>th</sup>-20<sup>th</sup> century) material was recorded and will be disposed of as per the Project Design (Minerva Heritage Ltd 2017). Environmental samples were not collected from any of the deposits encountered, as these were not considered suitable for environmental sampling.

### 2.3 Reporting, Project Archive and Publication

2.3.1 An archaeological archive will be produced according to current standards (Brown 2007). All of the records, including the photography, written *pro forma* recording sheets, illustrated material and site notes, will be collated, curated and indexed. The paper archive resulting from the project will be deposited with the Lancashire County Record Office. The material archive including all artefacts retained will be offered to the Ribchester Roman Museum within 6 months of the fieldwork.

### 3 Results

#### 3.1 Introduction

3.1.1 The architects plans required a trench measuring approximately 0.40m in width to a maximum depth of 1.2m to be excavated by mechanical excavator in order to lay concrete footings to be built upon. On commencement of excavation, the ground was found to be unsuitable for the proposed footings and the decision was made to reduce the ground surface by 0.40m throughout the footprint of the extension. The ground reduction was proposed in order to bypass the need for excavation of footings and construct it on a concrete raft or similar engineered construction technique. One homogenous modern deposit (100) was encountered throughout the aborted trench excavation to a depth of 1.2m where heavy plastic mesh associated with the foundations for the house was encountered and a possible modern culvert. No archaeological features or deposits were encountered and the natural substrate was not reached

Ctx	Description
100	Homogenous made ground containing modern inclusions

Table 1: summary context descriptions

#### 3.2 Results

3.2.1 Only one deposit (100) was encountered during the excavation which was approximately 1.2m in depth and approximately 5m x 4m. The deposit was a homogenous, modern made up ground comprising dark grey brown silty clay with plastic inclusions. The same deposit was encountered both in the aborted trench and the ground reduction

#### 3.3 Finds

3.3.1 All finds recovered were modern plastic and metal and were therefore not retained.

## 4

## Discussion

### 4.1 Introduction

4.1.1 The archaeological watching brief has confirmed that no archaeological deposits, features or finds were present within the area of investigation. The homogenous nature of the deposit along with the modern inclusions indicate that the area was heavily landscaped during the construction of Sarmatian Fold.

### 4.2 Conclusion

4.2.1 It is most likely that landscaping or remediation of the former cotton mill that once stood in the vicinity have removed all potential archaeological deposits or features from within the study area. The depth at which made ground was observed (1.2m) indicate that any archaeological deposits have most likely been severely detrimentally impacted if not removed completely during the construction of the housing estate

4.2.2 Any further groundworks in the area are likely to encounter similar results at similar depths. Archaeological remains are unlikely to survive, however, it should be noted that the depths at which archaeological material survives in Ribchester varies and encountering remains at depths greater than 1.2m should not be precluded.

## 5 Bibliography

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## Figures



Figure 1 Site location

## Plates



Plate 1 Working shot facing south east



Plate 2 Aborted foundation trench facing north east



Plate 3 South east facing section of aborted foundation trench



Plate 4 South east facing section of aborted trench



Plate 5 South east facing section of aborted trench



Plate 6 North west facing section of trench



Plate 7 North west facing section of aborted trench



Plate 8 Ground reduction of 0.40m working shot facing south east



Plate 9 Working shot of ground reduction facing south east



Plate 10 Aborted trench in relation to ground reduction



Plate 11 Working shot



Plate 12 Ground reduction of the footprint of the extension facing south east



Plate 13 Ground reduction of the footprint of the extension facing south east



Plate 14 Area of extension after ground reduction of extension area facing east



Plate 15 Area of extension after ground reduction facing south east



Plate 16 Area of extension after ground reduction facing south east



Plate 17 Area of extension after ground reduction facing south west



Plate 18 Area of extension after ground reduction facing south west

## Appendix 1: Archive Index

Item	Material	Size	N
Archive CD (contains Digital Photography and Report as a PDF document)	CD	6"x6"	1
Archive Index	Paper	A4, single sided	1
Context Index	Paper	A4, double-sided	1
Digital Photographic Record	Paper	A4, double-sided	1
Context Record	Paper	A4, double-sided	5
Watching Brief Record	Paper	A4, double-sided	1

The paper archive will be deposited with the Lancashire County Records Office in Preston, Lancashire.