

Back in Time - 9 - Eccles College and the Excavation of the Roman Road in 1973

by John Rabbitt

The photographs I have circulated today relate to Eccles College. The first two photographs were taken in 1971 when the College was under construction.



Eccles College Under Construction in 1971



Eccles College Under Construction in 1971

The three photographs below were taken during the excavation of the Roman road in 1973 by staff and students at the College.



Views of the Roman road on the Three Sisters - 1973

The excavation was instigated by the geography teacher at the college, Mr. John Aldred. The excavation was successful in that they did find the Roman road on the Three Sisters field. The young lady in the photographs could be Miss Neild who lived on Sandwich Road.

During the excavation an article was published in the Eccles Journal in July 1973. Unfortunately the quality of the photocopy we have is very poor so I have had to transcribe it.

Excavation of the Roman Road by Eccles College students in 1973

An article in the Eccles Journal - 12 July 1973

[Unfortunately the first paragraph of this article is completely unreadable on our photocopy.]

Mr Aldred, a member of staff at the college, did all the research work before the dig started and directed operations once it had got under way. He told the Journal that the road had been known to be in the area for at least 100 years or more, the exact line had been lost in the Eccles area.

Mr Aldred also said it had needed a great deal of research. It had been difficult to get literature to help him track down the road but a first edition of the six-inch ordnance map [1848] showed it.

A second problem then arose. The area at that time was not so builtup and that on the map there were no identifiable landmarks. The road ran through named fields – but the names have since been lost. The problem was solved by superimposing a modern six-inch on the first edition giving a rough idea of the line of the road.

Two pieces of luck followed, the road passed through a field next to the college and the field was owned by the education authority. On making their first exploratory trench students and staff discovered what they thought to be the road when they found a small section of pebbles and stones packed closely together. Other evidence was that at either end of the stretch of pebbles were deposits of silt, indicating that along both sides of the road there had been a ditch. This was in keeping with the original construction of Roman roads.

REMAINS

Local historian Mr. Frank Mullineux was invited to the dig and he told the Journal it was almost certainly the remains of the road. Although it was not an important discovery it had helped to establish the line of the road through the area.

Mr Aldred said the main interest had been the educational aspect and that he hoped it had shown some of the students some simple archaeological techniques. Further excavations are to take place this week.

In the article it mentions the first edition Ordnance Survey map of 1848 used by John Aldred. I have included a copy of the relevant section of this map below and annotated it to identify the key features in the vicinity of the Roman road.



- A to B the line of the Roman Road across the Three Sisters as indicated on the 1848 map. The Roman road went in a straight line from Chotton Fold farm to Old Hope.
- C The Three Sisters ponds.
- D Heath Lane which became Chatsworth Road.
- E Quaker Bridge over the London and North Western Railway.
- F A lane running from Heath Lane, across the Three Sisters field along the side of the large ditch, over Quaker Bridge and on towards the Blue Bell Inn. This is why the orientation of Quaker Bridge is at an angle to Ellesmere Road which was built many years after Quaker Bridge.
- G This path was known as Puddle Lane and now forms the path between Cavendish and Chatsworth roads alongside Eccles College.
- H Broom Lane, now Eccles Old Road

1848 Ordnance Survey Map showing the track of the Roman road

I would take issue with the comment made in the article by the local historian Mr. Frank Mullineux where he is quoted as saying that this was not an important discovery. From the work I did excavating the Roman road in 2005, under the guidance of the County Archaeologist, Norman Redhead, it is a very significant and important stretch of Roman road, some 120m in length and in remarkably good condition. There is no other site in the North West that has Roman road of this length which has not been ploughed out in the 1800 years since it was constructed.

Later in the 'Back in Time' series I hope to post some photographs of the EPRA excavation of the Roman road which was undertaken in June 2005.

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