

Property in Care (PIC) ID:	PIC137 and PIC138
Designations:	Scheduled Monument (SM2692)
Taken into State care:	1979 (Guardianship)
Last reviewed:	2011

HISTORIC ENVIRONMENT SCOTLAND
STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

DERE STREET ROMAN ROAD NORTH AND SOUTH



We continually revise our Statements of Significance, so they may vary in length, format and level of detail. While every effort is made to keep them up to date, they should not be considered a definitive or final assessment of our properties.

DERE STREET ROMAN ROAD (NORTH AND SOUTH)

SYNOPSIS

The property comprises two sections of Roman road, known as Dere Street in the Dark Ages. One section (450 metres long) runs from beside Soutra Aisle southwards to Dun Law, and the other section (900 metres long) from west of Turf Law southwards to 2 km north of Oxton.

Dere Street was the main route used by Roman forces during their numerous attempted occupations of Scotland. It ran from York northwards by way of Hadrian's Wall at Corbridge, Northumberland, and the large Roman fort at Newstead, beside Melrose, up over Soutra to forts on the Forth, at Inveresk and Cramond. The Scottish stretch of Dere Street continued in use throughout the Middle Ages, but was largely rendered redundant in the early modern era.

CHARACTER OF THE MONUMENT

Historical Overview

- c.79-81 - Dere Street is constructed on the orders of the Roman governor of Britain, Gnaeus Julius Agricola, as part of his campaigning in northern Britain.
- c.138/142 – the road is re-used during the Antonine period of occupation of southern Scotland, as recorded on a milestone found at Ingliston, Edinburgh.
- post 165 - following the Roman withdrawal from the **Antonine Wall**, the road begins to fall into disrepair, but is still used as a major line of communication.
- early 12th century - the section of Dere Street between Edinburgh and the English border south of Jedburgh plays an important part in the establishment of the kingdom of Scotland south of the Forth, including David I and Earl Henry's attempts to incorporate Northumbria within the Scottish realm.
- 1298 - Edward I of England's army marches up Dere Street en route to the battle of Falkirk.
- 1314 - Edward II of England's army marches up Dere Street en route to the battle of Bannockburn.
- 17th century onwards - Dere Street in Scotland declines in importance, and is eventually largely replaced by new roads, principally the A68 trunk road.
- 1972 & 1979 - the two stretches over Soutra are taken into state care.

Archaeological Overview

- In 1964 two sections of the road were investigated, one on the west slope of Dun Law, and the other on the NW slope of Turf Law. It was found to be constructed of various compactions of stone/gravel, which were built within a wider terrace, or raised base, of clay or stones, depending on the topography.

Architectural/Artistic Overview

- The road is over 7m wide and remarkably well preserved. To the side of the road are small quarry pits that provided gravel for the road's construction.
- The road was used as a boundary marker in later periods, and stone dykes have been constructed on top of its line.

Social Overview

- The historic remains of the medieval Hospital of the Holy Trinity, which stood beside the road (today marked by the later Soutra Aisle), mean much to the local population because of the archaeological investigations of recent times, and are thus well interpreted and popular with visitors.
- This particular stretch of Dere Street is primarily used for low-intensity recreation, mostly walking.

Spiritual Overview

- As a key line of communication for the Roman army into Scotland, Dere Street would have been a channel for the introduction of Roman religious practices and beliefs (including possibly Christianity) to the local population.
- The area around Soutra Aisle is still associated with the medieval church and hospital, and so preserves some aspect of its former Christian identity. There is an annual Easter sunrise service and an annual service on the first Sunday of August, specifically to commemorate the religious history and medical associations of the medieval hospital.
- The stretch of Roman road itself has no current spiritual association or meaning.

Aesthetic Overview

- The stretch of road lies in a dramatic open stretch of moorland and fields, flanked by modern forestry plantations, and most recently wind turbines.

What are the major gaps in understanding of the property?

- When was the last time the Romans used Dere Street?
- Why was the road abandoned?

ASSESSMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

Key Points

- The two stretches in care are among the best preserved lengths of Dere Street.

- Archaeologically, this part of Dere Street, largely untouched for centuries, has the capacity for enabling a greater understanding of Roman road construction and use.

ADDENDA

Associated Properties

other associated Roman sites) - **Antonine Wall**; Cramond Roman Fort; Inveresk Roman Fort; Newstead (Trimontium) Roman Fort; Hadrian's Wall.

(other related sites locally) - Soutra Aisle.

Keywords

Roman road, quarry pits, Agricola

Selected Bibliography

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Poulter, J., *Surveying Roman military landscapes across northern Britain: the planning of Dere Street, Hadrian's Wall and the Vallum, and the Antonine Wall in Scotland* (British Archaeological Reports, no.492, 2009)

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