

= Nico Ditch =

Nico Ditch (occasionally Mickle Ditch or Nikker) is a linear earthwork , six miles (9 @. @ 7 km) long , running between Ashton @-@ under @-@ Lyne and Stretford in Greater Manchester , England . It may have been dug as a defensive fortification , or possibly a boundary marker . It was constructed some time between the 5th and 11th centuries AD .

The ditch is still visible in short sections , such as a 330 @-@ yard stretch in Denton Golf Course . In the parts which survive , the ditch is 4 ? 5 yards wide and up to 5 feet deep . Part of the earthwork is protected as a Scheduled Ancient Monument .

= = Course = =

Nico Ditch stretches six miles (9 @. @ 7 km) from Ashton Moss (grid reference SJ909980) in Ashton @-@ under @-@ Lyne to Hough Moss (grid reference SJ82819491) , just east of Stretford . It passes through Denton , Reddish , Gorton , Levenshulme , Burnage , Rusholme , Platt Fields Park in Fallowfield , Withington and Chorlton @-@ cum @-@ Hardy , crossing four metropolitan boroughs of present @-@ day Greater Manchester . The ditch coincides with the boundaries between the boroughs of Stockport and Manchester , and between Tameside and Manchester as far as Denton golf course . A section is now beneath the Audenshaw Reservoirs , which were built towards the end of the 19th century . The ditch may have extended west beyond Stretford , to Urmston (grid reference SJ78299504) .

= = History = =

Nico Ditch was constructed some time between the end of Roman rule in Britain in the early 5th century and the Norman conquest in 1066 . Its original purpose is unclear , but it may have been used as a defensive fortification or as an administrative boundary . It possibly marked a 7th @-@ century boundary for the expansionist Anglo @-@ Saxons , or it may have been a late 8th or early 9th century boundary marker between the kingdoms of Mercia and Northumbria . In the early medieval period , the Anglo @-@ Saxon kingdoms of Northumbria , Mercia and Wessex struggled for control over North West England , along with the Britons and the Danes . Whatever its earlier use , the ditch has been used as a boundary since at least the Middle Ages .

Legend has it that Nico Ditch was completed in a single night by the inhabitants of Manchester , as a protection against Viking invaders in 869 ? 870 ; Manchester may have been sacked by the Danes in 870 . It was said that each man had an allocated area to construct , and was required to dig his section of the ditch and build a bank equal to his own height . According to 19th century folklore , the ditch was the site of a battle between Saxons and Danes ; the battle was supposed to have given the nearby towns of Gorton and Reddish their names , from " Gore Town " and " Red @-@ Ditch " , but the idea has been dismissed by historians as a " popular fancy " . The names derive from " dirty farmstead " and " reedy ditch " respectively .

Antiquarians and historians have been interested in the ditch since the 19th century , but much of its course has been built over . Between 1990 and 1997 , the University of Manchester Archaeological Unit excavated sections of the ditch in Denton , Reddish , Levenshulme and Platt Fields , in an attempt to determine its age and purpose . Although no date was established for the ditch 's construction , the investigations revealed that the bank to the north of the ditch is of 20th century origin . Together with the ditch 's profile , which is U @-@ shaped rather than the V @-@ shape typically used in military ditches and defences , this suggests that the purpose of the earthwork was to mark a territorial boundary . The conclusion of the project was that the ditch was probably a boundary marker .

= = Etymology = =

The earliest documented reference to the ditch is in a charter detailing the granting of land in

Audenshaw to the monks of the Kersal Cell . In the document , dating from 1190 to 1212 , the ditch is referred to as " Mykelldiche " , and a magnum fossatum , Latin for " large ditch " .

The name Nico (sometimes Nikker) for the ditch became established in the 19th and 20th centuries . It may have been derived from the Anglo @-@ Saxon Hnicker , a water spirit who seized and drowned unwary travellers , but the modern name is most likely a corruption of the name Mykelldiche and its variations , as the Anglo @-@ Saxon word micel meant " big " or " great " , harking back to the early 13th century description of the ditch as magnum fossatum . An alternative derivation is that Nico comes from n?can , an Anglo @-@ Saxon verb meaning " kill " .

= = Current status = =

Despite heavy weathering , the ditch is still visible in short sections , which can be 4 ? 5 yards wide and up to 5 feet deep . A 330 @-@ yard stretch through Denton Golf Course , and a section running through Platt Fields Park , are considered the best preserved remains . In 1997 , a segment of the ditch 150 @-@ yard long in Platt Fields was protected as a Scheduled Ancient Monument . The rest of the ditch remains unprotected .