

Bronze Age, Iron Age, Roman and Saxon settlements along the route
of the A43 Corby Link Road, Northamptonshire



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Chapter 1

Introduction

Project background

Northamptonshire Archaeology (now MOLA) was commissioned by Northamptonshire County Council (NCC) Highways to provide archaeological mitigation prior to development of a dual carriageway link (A43 Corby Link), c6.5km long, from the A6003 near Barford Bridge, on the south side of Corby, to the Eurohub roundabout at Stanion, between June 2012 and October 2013 (Figure 1.1).

Preliminary studies were made prior to seeking archaeological planning advice. An Aerial Photographic Assessment was undertaken in 2003 by Air Photo Services (Palmer 2003). The proposed route was then the subject of archaeological reconnaissance surveys comprising fieldwalking, geophysical survey and trial trench evaluation by Northamptonshire Archaeology (NA) (Upson-Smith 2005). A desk-based assessment of Historic Environment Record (HER) data, historic maps and aerial photographic evidence was combined

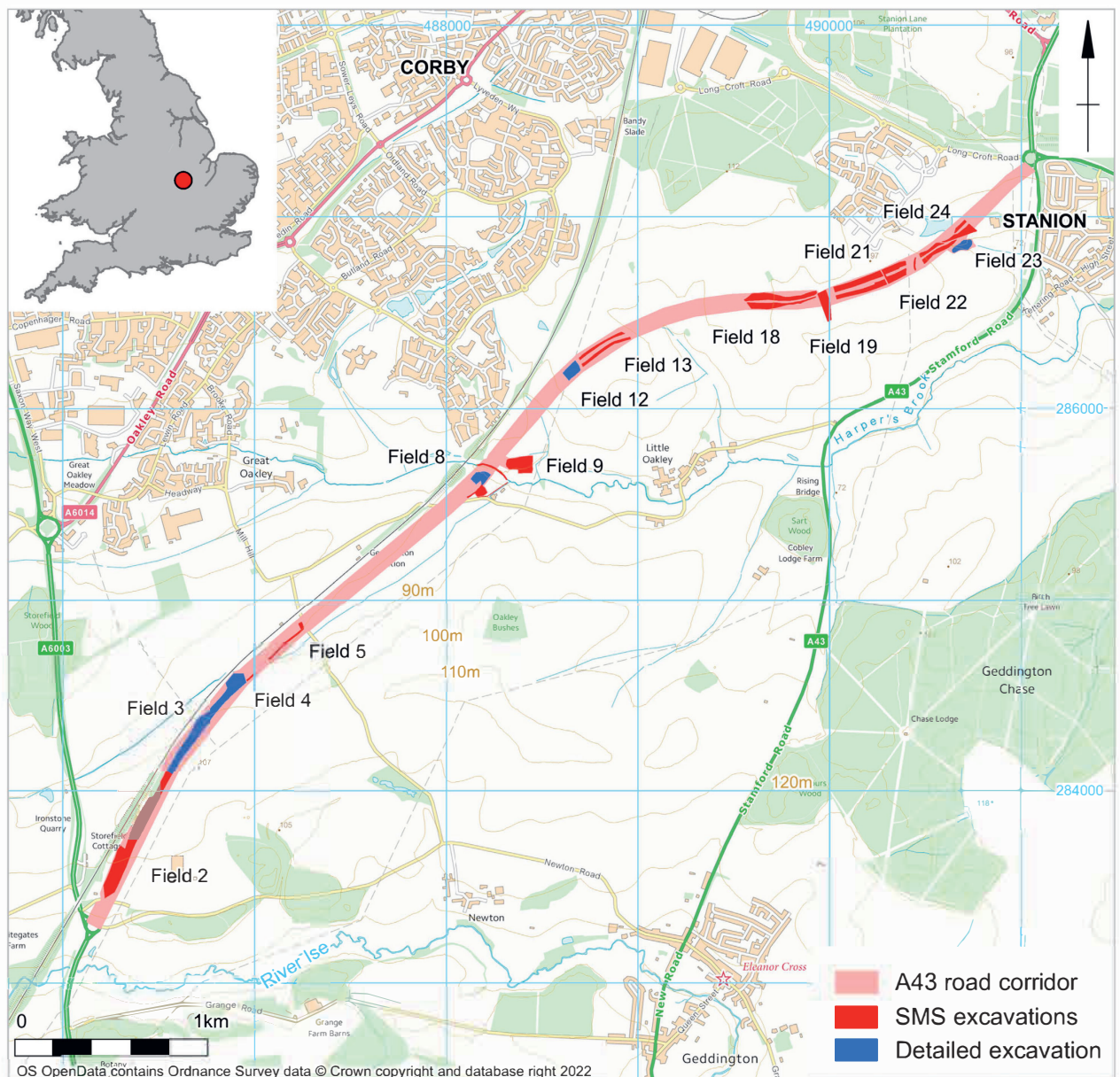


Figure 1.1. Site location and areas of archaeological mitigation along the route by field number

with a walkover survey to form the *Stage 3 Assessment for Cultural Heritage*, identifying a clear archaeological component for consideration for future mitigation (Atkins 2006).

The requirement for a programme of archaeological work was detailed by the County Archaeological Advisor, NCC Planning, in a brief issued in August 2011 (Mather 2011). A specification was prepared by Northamptonshire Archaeology to meet the brief and was approved by NCC Planning, which established a project design for archaeological mitigation (NA 2012). The results of this work were published in an archaeological assessment report (Brown *et al* 2019). Throughout the publication field numbers are referenced and consigned with a prefix of F.

Location, topography and geology

The A43 Corby Link route crosses 25 fields of rolling arable farmland, rising from the River Ise in the south and across a tributary stream valley feeding into Harper's Brook.

The height of the land at the southern end of the route is 90-100m above Ordnance Datum (aOD) on a south-facing slope that overlooks the River Ise. The land rises sharply to the north until it crosses the watershed at c107m aOD into the tributary valley feeding Harper's Brook. The route then proceeds across slope gradually following a canalised stream at c80m aOD. The flood plain of Harper's Brook is broad and flat, overlooked by a steep northern valley side, which the route ascends to c105m aOD as it turns north-east away from the railway line towards Stanion. Along this section, the route crosses two spurs formed by spring heads on the side of the valley, which create rolling hills. The land through which the route passes is mainly arable, with a small amount of pasture in the vicinity of Little Oakley. Land boundaries are defined by modern drainage ditches and hedgerows.

The solid geology comprises geological units of Boulder Clay with narrow bands of Inferior and Great Oolite Limestone, with clays in the valleys, overlain with Diamicton Tills (BGS 2001). The soil of the hillsides is of the Ragdale series (LAT 1983, 712g), which consists of deep, poorly drained soils that formed in loess, found mainly on terraces and uplands. The lower slopes along Harper's Brook are of the Sherbourne series (*ibid*, 343d) and comprise calcareous silty clay loam containing brash that derives from the Jurassic Limestone.

Historical and archaeological background

As part of the road scheme the site was investigated with an aerial assessment (Palmer 2003), desk-based assessment and walkover survey (Atkins 2006) and

a program of trial trench evaluation (Upson-Smith 2005). Early prehistoric to Saxon records within and close to the road scheme are listed in Table 1.1 and are illustrated on Figure 1.2. The locations are prefixed by numbers (no) provided by Atkins (2006).

Early prehistoric

Evidence of earlier prehistoric activity is sparse, although there is evidence from Burton Latimer of forest clearance in the Mesolithic period. A Beaker burial found in 1904 was noted during ironstone quarrying in the area, possibly at SP 873 835, north-west of Little Oakley but its exact location was unknown (RCHME 1979, 112).

The remains of a presumed late Neolithic/ early Bronze Age barrow were identified during the evaluation stages of the project (Atkins 2006, no 15, SP 8818 8567) and most likely represents the barrow excavated in field F8. The air photographic recorded a single ring ditch, likely to indicate a Bronze Age burial site, which has been photographed at SP 8820 8565 (presumably the same ring ditch, but location very slightly different). Palmer stated, "with the knowledge of the ring ditch it was possible to see the site as a slight mound when stereoscopically viewing verticals taken in July 1970." The 2006 assessment by Atkins noted that the monument had subsequently been ploughed flat. The RCHME (1979, 112) records it at 100m aOD and had a diameter of 15m.

A second possible ring ditch was recorded east of the road scheme near the southern extent (Atkins 2006, no 64, SP 8757 8460), also c15m in diameter and faintly visible on aerial photographs.

Iron Age

The Iron Age period brought large-scale reorganisation of the landscape with the expansion of agricultural production and growth in population. From the Iron Age onwards Rockingham Forest was characterised by the extensive and important ironworking industry, perhaps accompanied by a wider charcoal burning industry, although this has not yet been identified (Atkins 2006).

An Iron Age into Roman settlement was found at SP 8608 8380 directly to the west of the road scheme at its extreme southern extent at 110m aOD on boulder clay (no 60, RCHME 1979, 132).

The evaluation for the A43 development identified several Iron Age enclosures associated with a small, enclosed farmstead in F3 (Upson-Smith 2005). Pottery from the features was sparse and most could only be broadly dated to the Iron Age, this was refined

Table 1.1: Early prehistoric to Saxon records within and close to the road scheme

No	Type	Date	Description	Site Name	Source Reference, SMR Monument ID & Listed Building Nos	Civil Parish	National Grid Ref.
Northamptonshire Sites and Monuments Record (SMR)							
15	Ring ditch	Unknown	Possible ring ditch identified on aerial photograph No. SP8885/1+2		1383/0/1/NN20377	Corby	SP 8818 8567
21	Find spot	Roman	Fieldwalking found a large quantity of late Roman pottery sherds, quernstones and blue roofing slates. Opus signinum has also been found in this location.		4018/0/1/NN23868	Corby	SP 8930 8637
23	Road	Roman	During the backfilling of a drainage trench at the crossing of Gartree Road large quantities of stone, pebbles and gravel were observed. It is likely that this material represented the metalling of the Roman road.	Gartree Road	1896/1/9/NN27169	Stanion	SP 9047 8705
24	Feature	Early medieval	A number of features were observed in a sand pit; one was a posthole which contained early-mid Saxon pot sherds; 2 hearths were located close by. Possibly relates to Saxon settlement close by		2566/0/1/NN27424	Stanion	SP 9045 8645
25	Find spot	Early medieval	Fieldwalking found 8 early-middle Saxon pot sherds and slag, possible Saxon settlement		4021/0/1/NN27959	Geddington	SP 8975 8565
28	Find spot	Early medieval	Early-middle Saxon pottery sherds (AD450 – AD850)		4021/0/0/NN33031	Geddington	SP 8975 8565
49	unknown	unknown	Mounded feature labelled The Mount. Possible barrow. Same as site 55.		OS 6" 2nd edition Northants sheet XVII SE	Rushton	SP 860 838
51	Villa	Roman	Much burnt building stone, hypocaust, red roofing tile and blue stone slates; also shelly tile and colour-coated sherds. Part of the site has been quarried away.		9456/1/0 – NN101	Rushton	SP 859 832
52	Industrial site	Early medieval?	Fieldwalking found early middle Saxon pot sherds and iron slag. Several acres were covered by the surface scatter.		3929/0/1 – NN23758	Newton	SP 8680 8450
54	Industrial site	EIA to late Saxon	Two iron working furnaces located in field 5. Only the bases survived having been truncated by the plough. Slag and fired clay lining in situ. Appears to be of primitive type. Iron Age or Saxon.		8243/1/1 – NN35376	Corby	SP 8855 8628

Table 1.1 continued: Early prehistoric to Saxon records within and close to the road scheme

No	Type	Date	Description	Site Name	Source Reference, SMR Monument ID & Listed Building Nos	Civil Parish	National Grid Ref.
55	Barrow cemetery	Roman	Excavation undertaken in 1964; Roman burials were found including 24 secondary decapitated burials in two rows outside the edge of the primary burial which has been robbed. There was a stone circle underneath the mound.	? Drummers Hill	3928/1/1 – NN27927 Scheduled Ancient Monument 101	Rushton	SP 8608 8380
57	Industrial site	Early Medieval	Features identified during pre-1980 quarrying of the surface ironstone revealed Saxon pottery associated with a hearth and the remains of an iron smelting furnace with charcoal, slag and baked clay lining.		5984/1/1 – NN25918	Rushton	SP 8580 8257
58	Settlement	Roman	Roman flue tiles discovered during field walking.		3932/0/0 – NN 27928	Rushton	SP 8590 8320
60	Settlement	EIA to late Roman	Excavation pre-1980 of an Iron Age and Roman settlement, near a possible Roman or post Roman mound (no 60).		3947/0/1 – NN27931	Rushton	SP 8608 8380
64	Ring ditch	Pre-historic	Ring ditch c15m in diameter faintly visible on APs.		NMR 346065	Newton and Little Oakley	SP 8757 8460
86	Stone-circle	Roman	Beneath the mound, but eccentric to it, was a stone circle 3m in diameter, with two arms 2.4m long projecting to the south-east and the south-west. The stone circle was later than the C2nd AD and maybe post-Roman.	Stone circle beneath Drummer's mound	3928/1/2/MNN134754	Rushton	SP 8608 8380
89	Road	Roman	Projection of Roman Road. Identified by an excavation undertaken close to Oakley Purlieus Wood and aerial photographs of the area.		Relates to: 1896/1/25/ NN21191	Newton Corby	SP 898 58730 SP 904 08707
	Villa	Roman	This settlement started in the middle 1st century AD and was associated with iron production	Stanion Villa		Stanion	SP 8590 8697

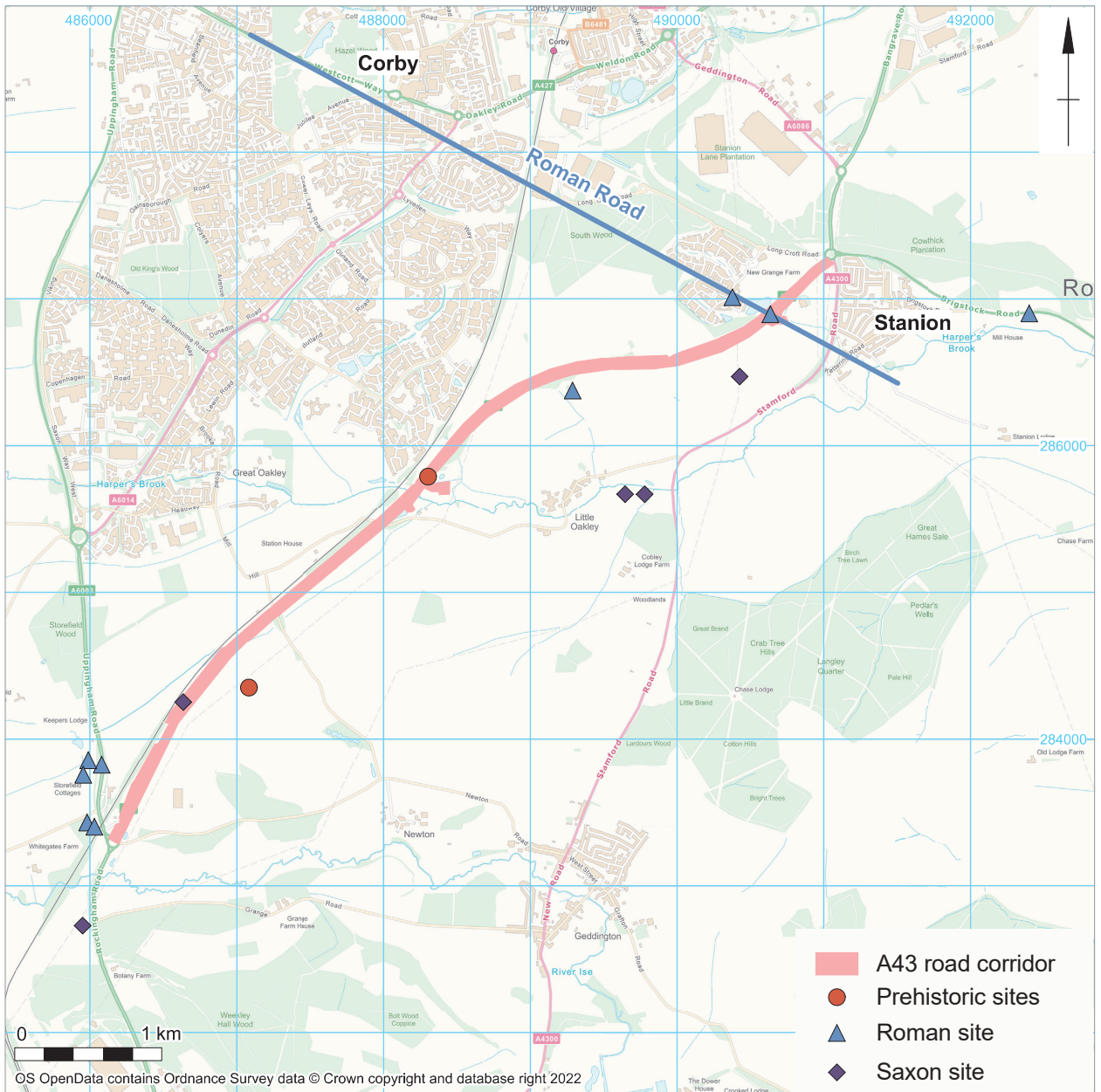


Figure 1.2. Early prehistoric to Saxon records within and close to the road scheme (RCHM1979; Palmer 2003; Atkins 2006 and more recent sites)

to the middle Iron Age for pottery from one ditch. Enclosed farmsteads, usually containing one or more roundhouses, are the most common form of middle-late Iron Age settlement in Northamptonshire (Kidd 2004).

Roman

There is extensive evidence of Roman settlement in the vicinity. The remains of a villa were found at Whitegates Farm, Rushton, c200m to the west of the southern end of the road at SP 859 832. It was on sandy geology at 91m aOD and with finds that included hypocaust tile from a bathhouse (RCHME 1979, 133; Atkins 2006, no 51). The villa was partially destroyed by quarrying.

A quantity of Roman pottery and roof tile, perhaps indicating the location of a further building, was found 100m to the south of F15-16, in addition to Roman flue tiles discovered nearby during field walking (Atkins 2006, no 58, SP 8590 8320). Another villa was excavated directly 0.5km to the east of Stanion, more than 1km to the east of the A43 (Tingle 2008). This settlement started in the middle 1st century AD and was associated with iron production.

A Roman building was located on the south-east side of the northern extent of the road scheme (Atkins 2006, no 21, SP 8930 8637), where fieldwalking found a large quantity of late Roman pot sherds, quernstones and blue roofing slates. Opus signinum has also been found

in this location. A Roman settlement was postulated by pottery sherds recovered at SP 875 842. A Roman iron smelting site is recorded at SP 869 835, 0.5km to the east at the southern extent of the road scheme (RCHME 1979, 112).

Roman settlement (continuation of Iron Age; see above) at SP 8608 8380 (RCHME 1979, 132). Adjacent to the settlement there was a possible Roman or Saxon barrow (SP 860 838 Atkins 2006, no 49). It was a flat-topped conical mound, 37m in diameter and 4m high, which was totally excavated in 1964 before road construction. Beneath the mound was a stone circle structure 3m in diameter, with two projecting arms 2.4m long, to the south-east and south-west (SP 8608 8380, Atkins 2006, no 86). The circle was of 3rd century date at the earliest and may have been post-Roman. The primary burial had been robbed, but secondary burials, located beyond the south edge of the barrow, were in two rows and comprised 24 decapitated men, women and children (SP 8608 8380, Atkins 2006, no 55).

A Roman road proceeded from Leicester to Godmanchester, known as the Gartree Road, which crossed at the northern end of the route. Physical remains of the road survive, including a stretch 270m to the north-west of the site, where there is a slightly raised ridge with a limestone-rubble core. Further north its dimensions are recorded; 0.25m high and 12m wide. Palmer (2003) noted in his aerial photographic survey that "There was virtually no trace of Roman road 570 (aligned west-north-west to east-south-east) on the photographs other than one instance of respect for it by ridge and furrow laid perpendicular in field centred SP900873." The route was recorded at SP 9047 8705, during the backfilling of a drainage trench at the crossing of Gartree Road where large quantities of stone, pebbles and gravel were observed (Atkins 2006, no 23). It is likely that this material represented the metalling of the Roman road. The road was more recently confirmed by excavation to the west of Stanion (1896/1/25/NN21191), undertaken close to Oakley Purlieu Wood and by aerial photographs of the area (Atkins 2006, no 89, SP 8985 8730 and SP 9040 8707), but was not identified during the trial trench evaluation for this route (Upson-Smith 2005).

Much of the area was quarried in the mid-20th century and it is likely this may have destroyed any remains. The evaluation found evidence of a reinstated quarry in F24, extending the known quarry edge in F25 further to the south.

Evidence for another postulated former Roman road within the site has been found to be a modern 19th to 20th-century feature associated with the quarrying. Palmer (2003) noted, "The linear feature aligned north-

north-east to south-south-west is identified on the NAR 1:10560 map (SP88NW) as Roman road RRX 8. It is in fact a former mineral railway (David Hall, *pers comm*, 4 August 2003). The feature was suspect as a Roman road on aerial photographs as it cuts through the pattern of medieval furlongs.

Saxon

The period generally saw a contraction of settlement from the clay uplands, permitting areas of formerly cultivated land to revert to woodland and scrub. One exception to this lack of early-middle Saxon sites is within Rockingham Forest, where fieldwork in the parishes adjoining Harper's Brook found evidence of iron smelting undertaken during this period (Brown and Foard 2004).

A Saxon settlement was recorded at SP 868 845 (RCHM 1979, 112, Atkins no 52). This settlement was located on limestone at 99m aOD. During fieldwalking in 1972 an area of 2ha of dark soil covered with iron slag and crude, and handmade early to mid-Saxon pottery was recorded (within F3 on the road scheme).

On the south of the road scheme at its northern extent, part of a possibly Saxon settlement was observed in a sand pit, which included two hearths and a posthole. Finds comprised early-middle Saxon pot sherds (SP 9045 8645, Atkins 2006, no 24). Saxon artefacts have also been found c1km to the south-west and include early-middle Saxon pottery sherds (AD450-850) and slag from another possible Saxon settlement (SP 9045 8645, Atkins 2006, no 25 and no 28). An early Saxon cemetery was found to the west of Great Newton, c1km from the road scheme (RCHME 1979, 112).

Two sites of industrial iron working were found, one by fieldwalking, which identified a surface scatter of early middle Saxon pottery sherds and iron slag, covering several acres on the north side of the road corridor (SP 8680 8450, Atkins 2006, no 54). The other site beyond the southern end of the route identified features during pre-1980 ironstone quarrying, revealing Saxon pottery associated with a hearth and the remains of an iron smelting furnace with charcoal, slag and baked clay lining (SP 8580 8257, Atkins 2006, no 54).

Medieval and post-medieval

The route lies within the historic boundary of Rockingham Forest, a Royal hunting preserve that was largely cleared for modern agriculture. In the 11th century, the area was one of two main iron production centres in the region. Settlement and ironworking areas are often found in association, such as at Geddington and Stanion. Deer parks were introduced into the

forest during the 13th-14th centuries. The route passes through the parishes of Newton and Little Oakley. At the southern end of the route, Newton-in-the-Willows was formerly composed of two townships, Great Newton and Little Newton. Great Newton survives as a shrunken settlement, without its church, while Little Newton is deserted.

The whole of Newton-in-the-Willows parish was ploughed in medieval times, except for a small area of water meadow close to the River Ise (Hall 1973). An aerial photographic survey of the proposed road identified remains of ridge and furrow earthworks over half of the route. Some headlands were recorded, including what seemed to be a double ditch at SP 88944 86398 (north of Little Oakley), but many of the furlongs used natural features such as hollows or slades as the basis of their layout (Palmer 2003).

Modern

From the 19th century onwards, the area was characterised by large scale woodland clearance and opencast quarrying. Corby became a nationally important centre for steel production in the 20th century. There are areas of quarrying at the north-eastern end of the route, F24-25, which were quarried from 1949-1953. A mineral railway served the quarries but was removed and the embankment partially levelled in 1985. Further extensive quarrying was undertaken at the far south of the route, confined to the south of F1.

Approach to investigation

Each field along the route was the subject of discussion between NCC Planning, Northamptonshire Archaeology and Northamptonshire Highways, using the *Stage 3 Assessment for Cultural Heritage* (Atkins 2006) and the forerunning evaluation surveys (Palmer 2003; Upson-Smith 2005) as a basis of decision making.

Geophysical survey

A detailed gradiometry survey was carried out over four areas of the road corridor as part of the evaluation (Upson-Smith 2005, Areas A-D; Figure 1.3). Area A recorded two 'C-shaped' anomalies in the north-east half of the survey area, interpreted as two partial ditched enclosures, with an occupation or an 'activity area'. Centrally, there was a hollow, possibly relating to a quarry. In the south-west area numerous linear, rectilinear and discrete anomalies were likely to indicate ditches, enclosures and pits.

A large positive circular anomaly c38m diameter, was identified in Area B, which is almost certainly a large ring ditch situated exactly where aerial photography predicted (Atkins 2006, Site 15). A discrete anomaly

to the east and linear anomaly to the west are likely to indicate a pit and narrow ditch respectively. Other weak banding orientated north-south across the area was almost definitely the remains of medieval ridge-and-furrow cultivation.

In Area C, an 'L-shaped' arrangement of anomalies was identified as representing ditches and in Area D a remnant medieval ridge and furrow field system was recorded, much disturbed by buried iron water pipes.

Trial trenching

Of the 69 trenches excavated across the road scheme only seven contained archaeological features (Trenches 2, 10, 12, 33, 41, 67 and 69). These all contained single ditches, six dated to the Iron Age and early Roman periods. Nothing of archaeological significance was encountered in the other trenches. Trenches 63, 64, 65 and 66 at the northern end of the proposed road corridor had been quarried for ironstone and Trench 62 showed extensive disturbance, probably from the former railway embankment (Upson-Smith 2005).

Excavation

The appropriate method of archaeological mitigation required was determined by the evaluation. Details were confirmed within the specification for archaeological works, approved by NCC Planning, and accepted by Northamptonshire Highways (NA 2012). Northamptonshire Archaeology subsequently undertook the archaeological work in compliance with the specification and was monitored for NCC Planning by the Northamptonshire Archaeological Planning Advisor.

There were three main mitigation measures employed along the route (Figure 1.1):

- Detailed archaeological excavation was undertaken in areas where highly sensitive archaeological remains were identified that constituted occupational activity; domestic, funerary, agricultural, or otherwise, and which were considered of high value and significance to understanding settlement within the region (F3, F8, F9, F12, F23 and F24).
- Strip, map, and sample (SMS) excavation work was undertaken in areas where there was a potential to encounter highly sensitive archaeological remains, but where these could not be clearly demonstrated from evaluation data (F2, F4, F5, F13, F18, F21 and F22). In such areas limited investigations characterised the date, extent, nature, and state of preservation of any features, and informed further decisions by NCC Planning as to whether detailed

SETTLEMENTS ALONG THE ROUTE OF THE A43 CORBY LINK ROAD

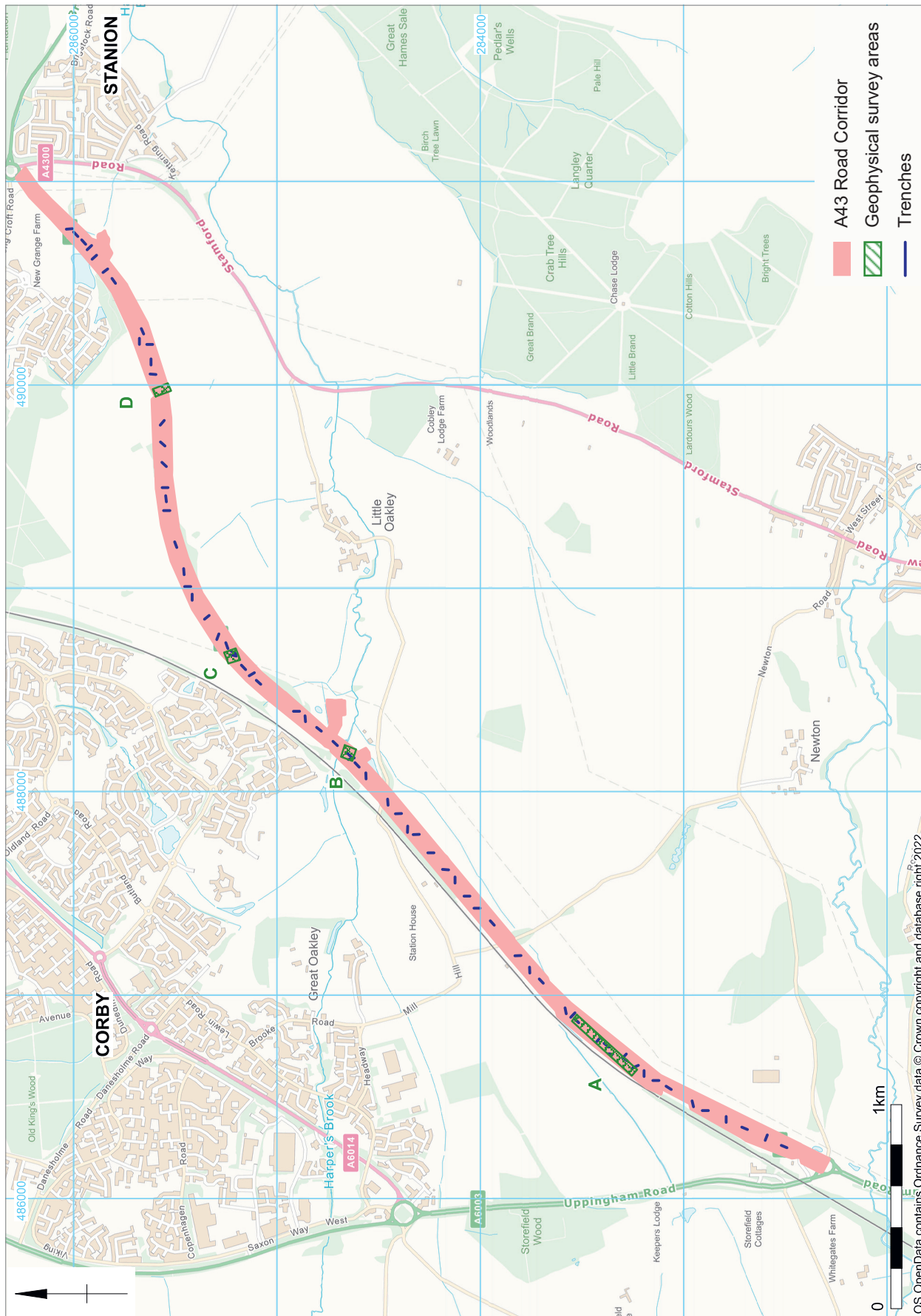


Figure 1.3 Location of geophysical survey areas along the A43 routeway

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archaeological excavation would be desirable or necessary.

- As a minimum, archaeological observation, investigation, and recording (OIR) was required for any intrusive activity prior to sign-off by NCC Planning within fields that held an archaeological planning condition.

In addition, there was limited topographical survey of the ridge and furrow earthworks in F19, where the northern tip of these remains lay within the scheme.

All work was monitored by weekly site meetings between the Northamptonshire Archaeological Planning Advisor, the archaeological Project Manager from Northamptonshire Archaeology, and in conjunction with Northamptonshire Highways. The progressive results of the fieldwork were considered at each monitoring meeting between all parties and decisions were made regarding the extent of the mitigation areas and the scope of the investigation that would be required to fulfil the terms of the NCC Planning brief (Mather 2011).

Areas signed-off from further mitigation works

Approximately one third of the route had no archaeological planning condition from the outset; the remaining two-thirds were subject to mitigation requirements. Following on from the approval of the specification for archaeological works by NCC Planning

(NA 2012), the execution of the fieldwork was broadly divided between detailed excavation areas and areas of SMS excavation. NCC Planning made it very clear that although the Principal Contractor (PC) did not wish to remove subsoil for construction, this was necessary for archaeological purposes. SMS excavation was required for the archaeological mitigation of fields F2, F4, F5, F13, F18, F21 and F22 because the work could not be conducted by archaeological OIR due to the PC construction methodology. The SMS excavation of F2 identified significant, previously unidentified archaeological remains, which NCC Planning required to be the subject of more detailed excavation. Elsewhere SMS excavation showed several fields to be devoid of archaeological remains or contained few remains of low significance limited to ridge and furrow, former post-medieval field boundaries and disturbance from woodland. After confirmatory investigation and GPS mapping of the ridge and furrow these areas were quickly signed over for construction by NCC Planning without further requirements (F4, F5, F13, F18, F21 and F22).

F23 and F24 had originally been designated for detailed archaeological excavation. The area lay across a small valley spur, originating from one of the springs along the main valley sides. The PC construction methodology required that this would be an area of landscape fill. Initial archaeological stripping confirmed that F24 was largely reinstated ground from 20th-century quarrying, as was suggested by the forerunning evaluation

Table 1.2 Summary of site chronology and significant archaeological features

Period		Features
Period 1	Early Bronze Age (2500BC to 1500BC)	Prehistoric watercourse (F9) Early Bronze Age round barrow (F8) Three early Bronze Age pits (F9) One early Bronze Age pit (F8) One early Bronze Age pit (F3) One cremation burial (F8)
Period 2	Middle Bronze Age (1500BC to 1100BC)	Middle Bronze Age Cremation cemetery (F12)
Period 3	Late Bronze Age (1100BC to 800BC)	Cremation burial (F8) Late Bronze Age/ early Iron Age pit alignment (F2)
Period 4	Early Iron Age (800BC to 400BC)	Small area of pits and postholes (F9)
Period 5	Middle Iron Age (200BC to 100BC) to late Iron Age (100BC to AD50)	Middle-late Iron Age farmstead (F3) Middle and/ or late Iron Age segmented enclosures (F9) Middle-late Iron Age settlement (F12)
Period 6	Late Iron Age to Roman (100BC to AD150)	Late Iron Age-early Roman enclosures (F2) Late Iron Age-early Roman enclosures (F8) Two cremation burials (F8)
Period 7	Early-middle Saxon (AD450 to AD850)	Saxon ironworking settlement (F3) Two inhumation burials (F3) Sunken-featured building (F8)
Period 8	Medieval and post-medieval	Medieval field systems (F2, F3, F4, F5, F8, F12, F18, F19, F21 and F22) Late medieval and post-medieval stream crossing (F23)

(Upson-Smith 2005). F24 was subsequently signed-off for construction by NCC Planning without further requirements. In F23 the archaeological strip of the upper slope demonstrated an absence of archaeological remains, and the surface of the natural substrate at the base of slope was buried beneath 1.5m of colluvial soils, which the PC did not require to remove for construction.

Since this meant that archaeological remains within the scheme were less likely to be impacted a method statement was put in place allowing construction to proceed with archaeological OIR during the insertion of drains in F23. Detailed archaeological excavation requirements were retained for the cut of the balancing pond in F23.