

A14 Cambridge to Huntingdon improvement scheme

March 2018

**“This is the biggest
Highways England
archaeology project
and offers a rare
opportunity to build on
our historical record.”**

Dr Steve Sherlock
Archaeology Manager
for the project





The team record every find meticulously to make sure we can build an accurate picture

Excavation of what was once a large ceremonial enclosure (henge), near the new A1 and A14 junction

What are we doing and why?

Archaeological investigation is an important part of many major infrastructure projects and, with 250 archaeologists currently working on site, the A14 Cambridge to Huntingdon improvement scheme is one of the biggest and most complex archaeological projects ever undertaken in the UK.

Highways England is working closely with Cambridgeshire County Council to carry out this important work and ensure that areas of possible historical interest are investigated or preserved.

Archaeological work on the scheme began with geophysical surveys in 2009, when the scheme was first being considered. These helped to identify possible archaeological remains and make informed decisions about where trial trenching (excavations) should take place.

We're now most of the way through our programme, which will cover an area around 350 hectares (over 800 football pitches). Excavation is giving us new information about how the landscape was used by the earliest hunter-gatherers 12,000 years ago and revealing the origins of the villages and towns along the A14

today. Finds so far date from the Neolithic, Bronze and Iron Ages, as well as Roman, Anglo-Saxon and medieval periods.

Our current programme (covering sections one to four, which follow the line of the new road from Alconbury to Swavesey) will run until summer 2018. Once complete, we will move onto sections five (Girton to Milton) and six (Huntingdon town centre).

“The scheme is already contributing to our understanding of the rich archaeological and cultural heritage of Cambridgeshire, and we look forward to sharing the story as it develops.”

**Dr Steve Sherlock,
Archaeology Manager for the project**

We will be keeping you up-to-date with our findings as excavations and analysis progress. Details of our archaeology events can be found at molaheadland.com/events/A14C2H

7 facts about the A14 archaeology

- 1 Nearly 250 archaeologists from all over the world are working on the scheme
- 2 Around 1.35 square miles (350 hectares) of archaeology is being investigated - equivalent to around 800 small football pitches!
- 3 Over 17 miles (28km) of exploratory trenches were dug before the main excavations even began
- 4 There are over 40 separate excavations to be completed by summer 2018
- 5 Almost 15 tonnes of finds such as pottery, animal bone and metalwork are expected to have been uncovered
- 6 Over 140 tonnes of environmental soil samples have been taken - that would fill almost 5 shipping containers!
- 7 Around 25 settlements, burial and industrial sites have been uncovered so far. These include:
 - 40 Roman pottery kilns along Roman roads
 - 7 prehistoric burial grounds (barrows and cremation cemeteries)
 - 8 Iron Age to Roman supply farms
 - 3 prehistoric ceremonial enclosures (henges)
 - 2 brick kilns from the 19th century
 - 3 Saxon settlements, one with royal connections
 - 1 deserted medieval village from the 8th to 12th century AD



We are well under way with our archaeology programme and are excavating a huge variety of finds. This map shows some of the things we've found so far. We will keep you up-to-date in future newsletters.

Alconbury to Brampton Hut

- Prehistoric henge monument
- Saxon timber building, 5th to 9th century AD
- Iron Age (800 BC - 43 AD) farming activity
- Roman settlements c. 2nd century

Brampton Hut to East Coast mainline

- Large Bronze Age (c. 1300 BC) henge with burials
- Iron Age settlement (400 BC - 43 AD)
- Roman pottery kilns, 2nd century AD
- Roman enclosures, field systems and tracks for herding animals
- Saxon settlements (one from 8th century, deserted in 12th century AD)
- 19th century brick kilns

East Coast mainline to Swavesey

- Bronze Age (2300 - 700 BC) barrow with over 50 cremation burials and three burials in a distinctive crouched position, a typical funerary practice of the time
- Unusual and well-preserved finds that include:
 - Notched ladders with axe-marks (one dated to 525-457 BC)
 - Antler pick used for digging
 - Mid-Bronze Age pot
- Iron Age (800 BC - 43 AD) settlements
- Roman (43 - 400 AD) settlements, including a supply depot
- Saxon (6th to 8th century) settlement, probably the origins of the village of Conington

Swavesey to Girton

- Roman (43 - 400 AD) supply farms for nearby towns
- Iron Age (800 BC - 43 AD) agricultural settlement
- High status finds such as Roman jet necklace and rings



- Roman (43 - 400 AD) face pot
- Bone plaque with Roman handwriting

Section 1

- Roman (43 - 400 AD) pottery kiln
- Neolithic (4000-2500 BC) stone axe head

Section 2

- Early Iron Age bowl (6th to 5th century BC)
- Unusual Roman cockerel brooch

Section 3

- Roman jet bead necklace
- Animal head from Roman bracelet

Section 4

A morning in the life of an archaeologist



We spent a morning with **Sam Dixon**, an Archaeological Project Officer for MOLA Headland Infrastructure, working

on the A14 Cambridge to Huntingdon improvement scheme. Sam is running one of the excavation sites at the western end of the scheme.



8.20



9.00



9.30

7.15 An early start to meet with the General Foreman, Bernie, at Alconbury. We update each other on any potential safety issues and discuss our plans for the day ahead.

7.30 Review start of shift and pre-task briefings and collate the archaeology briefing to give to the team.

7.45 Open up site huts and carry out equipment checks.

8.00 The archaeological team arrives on site, eager to get started. I give the morning briefing, explaining any health and safety risks on site and run through the focus of the day.

8.20 The team heads off to the excavation areas with their equipment. Today, the team are focussing efforts on two areas. One is an area of late Roman dark earth (a demolition deposit which may cover a Roman villa) and a mid-Roman settlement with enclosure ditches and buildings.

9.00 The team in the first area are digging 1m² test-pits in the dark earth. The soil is then put through large swing sieves to recover any finds. The other team are excavating and recording large Roman settlement enclosure ditches and post-holes (which would have formed parts of buildings).

9.30 Meeting with the other site supervisors to discuss progress across the scheme, and an area engineer to discuss when work will be starting in another area.

11.00 A complete cremation in a pot is uncovered in the centre of one of the ring gullies in the second area. This could be a prehistoric funerary monument. I call our human remains specialist for advice and contact our project manager to arrange a licence to lift the remains. The cremation and its pot may be lifted in one block and sent off for x-ray, so it is important it is dealt with carefully.

1.00 Lunchtime for myself and the team. Lots of exciting stuff to talk about and plan for the afternoon.



This well preserved Iron Age ladder had to be carefully excavated and removed from the ground

Project update: where are we now?

Much has happened since construction reached its first anniversary in November 2017.

Nearly 40% of the main construction work has been successfully completed and work is currently focussing on the scheme's 34 bridges and structures.

- Giant steel beams have been delivered to site over the winter and many have taken up their permanent positions on some of the bridges near Huntingdon, including the bridge over the East Coast mainline and the bridge that will eventually carry the new A14 over the A1.

- The 750m long River Great Ouse viaduct has seen seven of its 17 spans fitted with steel beams. The rest will come between now and the summer.

- A second bridge opened to traffic in February, the Brampton Road bridge that links Brampton and Grafham, across the A1.

What's next?

Despite the lingering winter, we have begun our new earthworks season. By the time the project is completed at the end of 2020, we'll have moved 10 million m³ of earth across site.

Over the coming year, we'll see even more project milestones complete as well as work starting on new sections of the scheme.

- Work to widen the A1 from two lanes to three in each direction near Alconbury will progress even further, with a section of the new southbound carriageway open just before Easter.
- A critical part of the project is the redesign of the Bar Hill junction, where we'll be building a brand new junction spanning eight lanes of A14 traffic, as well as linking to the future local access road.
- We'll be installing beams over the A14 as part of the redesign of the Swavesey junction, where the current path of the A14 veers off to the new Huntingdon Southern Bypass.

We will be using the following traffic management to allow this work to continue:

- narrow lanes and 40mph speed restrictions on the eastbound A428 between Madingley and Girton.
- narrow lanes and 40mph speed restrictions on the A14 between Dry Drayton and Swavesey.
- narrow lanes and 40mph speed restrictions on the A1 between Brampton Hut and Alconbury.



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