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## A43 ROAD IMPROVEMENT

### BIDDLESDEN ROAD BRIDGE, SYRESHAM NORTHAMPTONSHIRE ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVALUATION: STAGE 3

#### SUMMARY REPORT

##### *Abstract*

*An archaeological evaluation was carried out at the site of Biddlesden Road Bridge, Syresham as part of the programme of archaeological work in advance of the A43 road improvement. Trial trenches confirmed the presence of Late Iron Age/Early Roman features, as suggested by the earlier geophysical survey. The presence of a large quantity of iron slag suggests that iron-working was a significant function of the site. While the evaluation indicated that features correlated reasonably well with those found in the geophysical survey, it is suggested that some isolated features were undetected by the survey and the limits of the site therefore remain ill-defined.*

#### 1 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 Proposals for improvements to the A43 between the M40 and Towcester will affect land to the south of the A43 on the outskirts of Syresham at the proposed Biddlesden Road Bridge (Fig 1). The archaeological implications of the improvement scheme were considered and accordingly Northamptonshire County Council Highways commissioned Northamptonshire Archaeology to undertake an archaeological evaluation.
- 1.2 An initial desk-based study, field walking and geophysical survey was undertaken in 1996 (Chapman & Shaw 1996; Masters & Shaw 1997). Further geophysical reconnaissance and detailed survey was conducted over the winter 1999-2000 (Mudd 2000).
- 1.3 The geophysical survey identified a series of anomalies, which comprised of a dispersed pattern of small enclosures and partial enclosures with some linear features. These were initially interpreted as Iron Age or Romano-British on morphological grounds (Fig. 2).
- 1.4 Following geophysical survey a specification for six trial-trenches was submitted by Northamptonshire Heritage and Northamptonshire Archaeology to the Highways Agency ('A43 Road Improvement Scheme: Silverstone & Brackley Hatch Sections. Specification for Outstanding Archaeological Evaluation.' [30.6.2000].)
- 1.5 The objectives of the trial-trench evaluations were to establish the date, extent, character and degree of preservation of the archaeological remains on the site. Six trenches, each 30m in length were excavated. The trenches were positioned to examine a selection of features showing as geophysical anomalies, and to examine apparently blank areas, taking into account the location of a water main and overhead electric cables.
- 1.6 This summary report on this evaluation does not include a detailed assessment of the finds. These are to be included in the overall assessments following the main excavations. The Iron Age pottery has been examined for spot-dating by Dennis Jackson FSA and other finds by Tora Hylton.

## 2 TRIAL TRENCHES (Fig. 2)

- 2.1 For recording purposes each trench was allocated a block of context numbers, 100s for Trench 1, 200s for Trench 2 etc. For brevity the prefix numbers are omitted on the trench plans shown on Figure 3.

### *Trench 1*

- 2.2 Trench 1 was located on the western edge of the site and was aligned SW-NE. No geophysical anomalies had been recorded in this area.
- 2.3 A natural orange silty sandy clay with a high gravel content lay approx. 0.3 – 0.4m below the topsoil.
- 2.4 A series of linear furrows 3m wide and running E-W cut the natural. Although no dating evidence was recovered, the furrows can be considered part of the known and extensive medieval field system in the general locality. No other features were present in the trench.

### *Trench 2*

- 2.5 Trench 2 was aligned NW-SE and was located to evaluate an N-S linear anomaly.
- 2.6 Natural was located between 0.3m-0.4m below topsoil. No features were observed within this trench which may indicate a break in the linear feature.

### *Trench 3 (Fig 3)*

- 2.7 Trench 3 was aligned SW-NE and was located within an area showing a number of geophysical anomalies.
- 2.8 The natural lay 0.3m below the topsoil and contained a large concentration of gravel. Score marks from recent ploughing were evident, running E-W.
- 2.9 Towards the SW end of the trench a shallow gully [305] ran NW-SE cutting the natural. This feature contained a dark grey-brown fill. Fragments of iron slag and Late Iron Age/ Early Romano-British pottery were recovered from the fill. Situated further north within the trench was a succession of post-holes ([309], [311], [313] and [315]) and a possible pit [307]. Although only one of these features [311] provided a Late Iron Age date the fills were so similar in composition as to allow a conclusion that the features were all of a similar date.

### *Trench 4 (Fig 3)*

- 2.10 Trench 4 ran NW-SE and was placed to test the geophysical survey, which indicated the presence of a number of potential archaeological features.
- 2.11 A light compacted yellow sandy clay natural was present below between 0.45m – 0.7m of top and subsoil. The large depth of subsoil possibly being remnant plough soil.
- 2.12 In the NW corner of the trench a large pit or curvilinear feature [403] was recorded but undated. Progressing southwards were two undated post-holes [405] and [407]. Towards the SE end of the trench was a 2.2m wide ditch [409] reaching a depth of

0.20m. Finds from this feature included slag fragments and Late Iron Age/Early Romano-British ('Belgic') pottery. Inclusions of charcoal were present in the fill and the base of the ditch exhibited signs of burning and scorching. At the SE end of the trench was a large pit or ditch terminus [411] running into the section. This pit contained a large quantity of iron slag (17.4kg), including hearth lining which appeared to be secondary backfill.

#### *Trench 5 (Fig 3)*

- 2.13 Trench 5 ran SW-NE and was located within an area showing a number of geophysical anomalies.
- 2.14 The natural was present 0.3m below the topsoil, with at least one furrow still remaining cut into the natural.
- 2.15 Approximately midway along the trench ran a shallow linear gully [506] containing Late Iron Age/Early Romano-British ('Belgic') pottery. Slag was also present as well as a flint flake, which had been shaped and retouched to form a blade or point.

#### *Trench 6 (Fig 3)*

- 2.16 Trench 6 was located on the eastern edge of the site and was aligned NW-SE. It was placed within an apparent blank area on the geophysical survey data.
- 2.17 At 0.35m below the topsoil the natural ground was present which was compact with high gravel content.
- 2.18 A large pit [605] was recorded and dated to the Late Iron Age/ Early Romano-British. A number of iron slag fragments were recovered from the fill and the base of the feature showed much evidence of scorching.

### **3 DISCUSSION**

- 3.1 The archaeological remains found within the trenches at Biddlesden Road Bridge correlate relatively well with the information provided from the geophysical survey. The vast majority of features were located within the survey area which provided the greatest density of geophysical anomalies. Not all of the archaeological features discovered were observable from the survey results, but this could be because some readings were masked by stronger anomaly readings.
- 3.2 The evaluation findings from Biddlesden Road Bridge provide clear evidence of Late Iron Age or Early Romano-British activity related to domestic settlement. The high concentration of iron slag (c. 21.4kg from five features) has raised some interesting questions as to the status and function of the site. Many of the other features may well provide further evidence of this.
- 3.3 Both the geophysical survey and trial trench evaluation have been able to define the main extent of the settlement within the planned route of the road corridor. Features appear to be sparse or absent in the western part of the evaluation site (Trenches 1 and 2), but the settlement clearly extends south-east of the road corridor. Several pits are present to the north-east of the settlement nucleus (as discovered in Trench 6), but these seem to be sporadic.

## **BIBLIOGRAPHY**

- Chapman, A, and Shaw, M, 1996 A43 Silverstone Bypass: Archaeological Desk Top Assessment Northamptonshire Archaeology Report
- Masters, P, and Shaw, M, 1997 A43 Silverstone Bypass Evaluation: Stage 2-Fieldwalking and Geophysical Surveys Northamptonshire Archaeology Report.
- Mudd A 2000 A43 Road Improvement Silverstone and Brackley Hatch Sections. Archaeological Evaluation: Stage 3. January – March 2000. Northamptonshire Archaeology Report

## **SCHEDULE OF ILLUSTRATIONS**

- Fig 1: Site location plan
- Fig 2: Trench location and geophysical survey
- Fig 3: Trenches 3, 4, 5, and 6 plans

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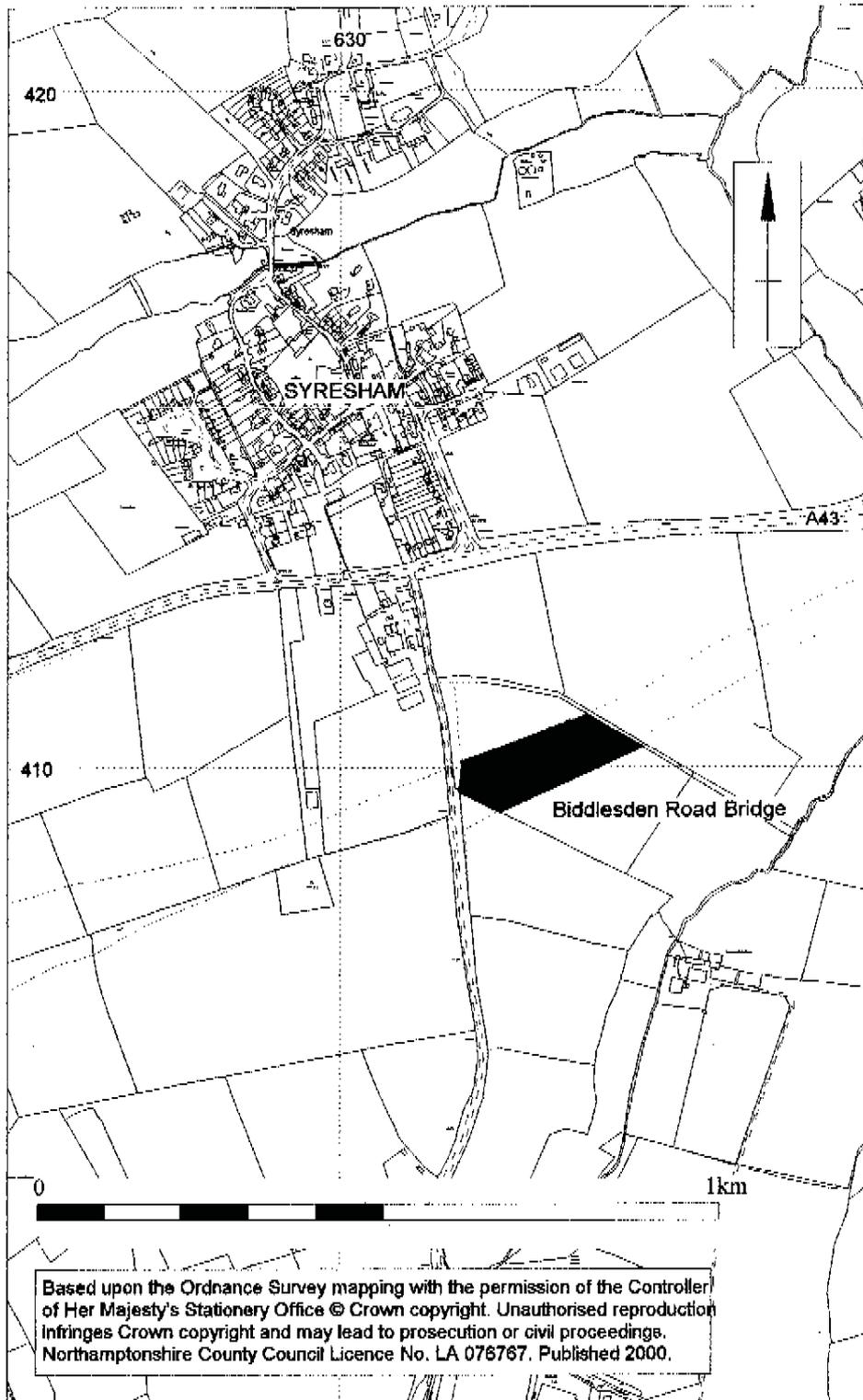
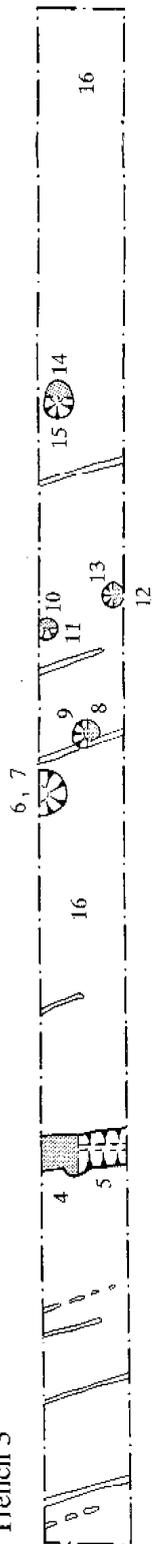


Fig. 1



Fig. 2

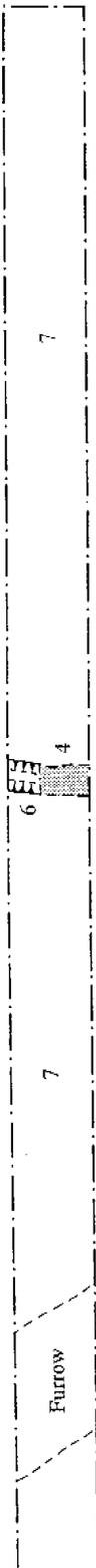
Trench 3



Trench 4



Trench 5



Trench 6

