

- Similar deep-ditched sub-rectangular enclosures found at other nearby Iron Age sites (e.g. the DIRFT logistics parks), suggest that this may have been a standard feature of many Late Iron Age communities in this area.

A tribal boundary area

There is no sign of any fortification around the site, such as a ditch or bank — this was apparently a peaceful settlement.

However, it was open to surprise attack from the south, where the land rises further, suggesting that the country in that direction was 'friendly', and thus that the Barby Hill site may have been an outpost of a larger settlement of the same tribe, such as that at Borough Hill in Daventry. The Barby Hill site may even have been deliberately established here, close to a possible tribal boundary, and alongside a possible ancient trade route.

A continuous history

One aim of the project at Barby Hill was to create a complete history for the hill and its environs, from the earliest traces of humanity in the landscape to more recent times.

The group's work on the Iron Age settlement has clarified the hill's prehistory — and the tale continues with subsequent Romano-British farmland on the hilltop and farm buildings down below in the valley, managed medieval woodland from the 1100s/1200s to the 1500s, periodic gradual felling of the woodland from 1570 to 1820, and redevelopment of the landscape during the 1600s and 1700s with a late-medieval sheep-logistics centre in the valley and major drove routes across the hilltop.

Links with other projects

CLASP is involved in several other long-term projects focused on Iron Age and Roman-period sites in west Northamptonshire.

- At Whitehall Farm, a Roman villa site close to Watling Street (in Nether Heyford parish), CLASP spent 13 years excavating the villa site. Excavation is now largely finished, and the focus is now on preparing for publication what has been learned.
- In the 'Local People - Local Past' project, CLASP is aiming to study social evolution and characterise settlement over the wider area, bringing together data from many sites and using map-based analysis, to piece together an overall picture of the locality from late Iron Age to early post-Roman times.
- A similar survey is also underway on the hinterland around Lactodorum (Towcester) to identify similarities to and differences from the localities that surround both settlements.
- CLASP has provided input, for the whole of Northamptonshire, to the Iron Age Hillforts Atlas project, led by the Institute of Archaeology at Oxford University.

These projects, and others currently under consideration, all form a part of CLASP's stated aim — "to research, interpret and document the early historical landscape of west Northamptonshire, working closely with the local Historic Environmental Record, English Heritage and other regional and national bodies to carry out archaeological research to professional standards by involving the local community".

Find out about CLASP

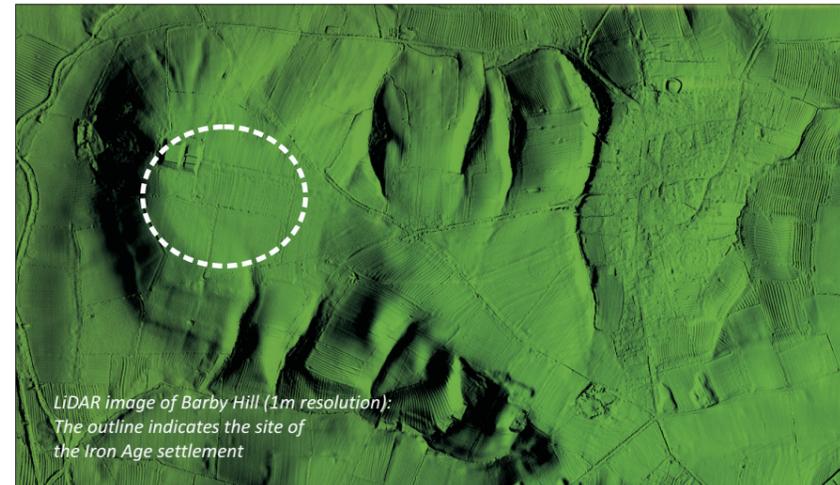
If you found this leaflet interesting, and think that you might like the idea of working with a friendly group, and getting some fresh air and healthy exercise whilst making a serious contribution to professional archaeology, maybe you should consider joining CLASP!

CLASP is always keen to welcome new volunteers. New projects are regularly planned and executed, knowledge is shared and training in both fieldwork and archaeological computing skills is given in a friendly environment.

For more details, contact CLASP at <http://www.claspweb.org.uk>.

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Barby Hill Iron Age settlement: A large hilltop settlement, and its role within the wider landscape



The view from the tip of Barby Hill covers most of the compass, forming an outstanding vantage point over many miles of the surrounding country.

Barby Hill projects very noticeably into Warwickshire — the county boundary follows the stream in the valley below the hill. Such factors suggest that the hilltop was probably a significant location long before the shires were established in Anglo-Saxon times.

To add to this, medieval documents describe an ancient route, known as 'King Street' in the 1500s and possibly pre-Roman in origin. The route leads from the centre of Rugby and heads directly towards the Iron Age hillfort at Borough Hill Daventry, crossing the valley below Barby Hill

at its narrowest point, and continuing over the hill.

These clues — together with the discovery of Iron Age roundhouse circles during work to extend the water reservoir on the hilltop — led local amateur archaeologists to set up a research project, with initial funding from local authorities and members recruited from local villages. Barby Hill Archaeological Project (BHAP) subsequently became a member of CLASP.

The project surveyed most of the flat hilltop and continued down the hillsides. The findings, published in annual reports, aroused the interest of professional archaeologists and county authorities alike, and led to a new appreciation of Barby Hill's significance.

Meanwhile, industrial development around the M1/A5 junction near Crick was revealing evidence of dense clusters of occupation during the Iron Age, and it gradually became apparent that, in archaeological terms, this entire area was of national significance. It thus became important to clarify the role played by Barby Hill within the wider landscape.

A range of investigations

CLASP/BHAP carried out a full range of investigations at Barby Hill over a four-year period, including:

- Desktop surveys and mapping.
- Field-walking in arable areas, covering 14ha.
- Metal detection in arable areas, covering 22ha.
- Magnetometer surveys in arable and pasture areas, covering 12ha.
- Trial excavations totalling 50m² at locations pin-pointed from the geophysics results.
- Collaboration with Cotswold Archaeology (employed by Severn Trent Water within the hilltop reservoir compound).



Fieldwork results

Desktop surveys:

- In addition to the medieval documentary evidence for 'King Street', 1940s air photographs show clear signs of a group of ditched-and-banked farmsteads north-west of Barby Hill, of probable Early Iron Age date.
- Early documents record the felling of much of the hilltop's medieval woodland in the 1500s-1600s, and conversion of valley and hilltop to sheep pastures between 1570 and 1650; newspaper archives date the final deforestation of the tip of the hill to the depression following the Napoleonic Wars.
- The project also mapped nearby archaeological findings, including geophysics evidence of Romano-British farming both due south and north-west of the hilltop, and extensive Iron Age and Romano-British traces further north at DIRFT logistics parks.
- Other Iron Age settlements were recorded around Borough Hill Daventry, and clustered along the line of 'King Street'.

Field-walking and metal detection:

- Evenly distributed sherds of late medieval and early modern pottery in the arable areas (i.e., manure scatters) reinforce the documentary evidence for sheep-pasturing and periodic



Above: Tiny sherds of Iron Age pottery — too small and too few to permit very precise dating.
Below: A lamb jawbone provides dietary information.

Above: These bubbled fragments of slag were the key data that identified early attempts to smelt iron at a cluster of primitive hearth sites near the centre of the settlement. The attempts were apparently abandoned, and the hearth sites appear to have been later built over by a succession of roundhouses.

ploughing of the flat hilltop in the period 1570-1780. This is also confirmed by LiDAR mapping, and by metal-detection finds.

- A few Roman coins were found on the hill's north slopes.
- A large deposit of Romano-British potsherds in the valley north of the hill includes tableware and decorative items as well as kitchen vessels. Most items are wheel-thrown Nene Valley wares from local kilns, but the assemblage also includes hand-thrown Iron Age sherds. The sherds date from the EC1-C4, with most items from the 2C/3C.

Geophysics:

- The geophysics traces reveal a large settlement of typical Middle/Late Iron Age form, some 300m x 400m in overall extent.
- The layout suggests that the settlement was organised as a single composite site.

Iron Age finds are very few and far between — and often fragile and difficult to interpret.

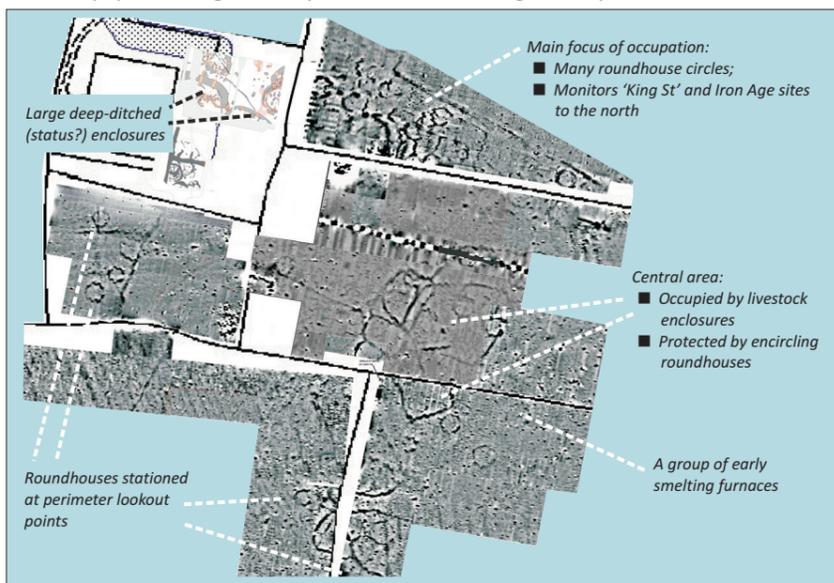
- In addition to many roundhouse circles, there are signs of stock-management enclosures and drove-ways — and at least one cluster of possible furnace hearths in the midst of the site.
- A dense concentration of roundhouse circles on the north edge of the hilltop overlooks both the line of 'King Street' and the probable Early Iron Age settlement across the valley.

Trial excavations:

Two locations were selected for trial trenching, spaced 300m apart, aiming to gather information from opposite ends of the settlement.

- The first trench — near the main group of roundhouse circles at the north of the settlement — produced Mid/Late Iron Age sherds and the jawbone of a lamb with fragments of a cooking pot, with a few posthole traces. The fragments were degraded, as the stratigraphy was disturbed in the 1810s when the last woodland was felled, the stumps burned out, and the ground deep-ploughed and limed.
- The second trench was opened on the south of the settlement, in ploughland where geophysics had shown a group of dark ovals.

CLASP/BHAP geophysics, combined with Cotswold Archaeology within the reservoir compound, provides a comprehensive layout of the site.



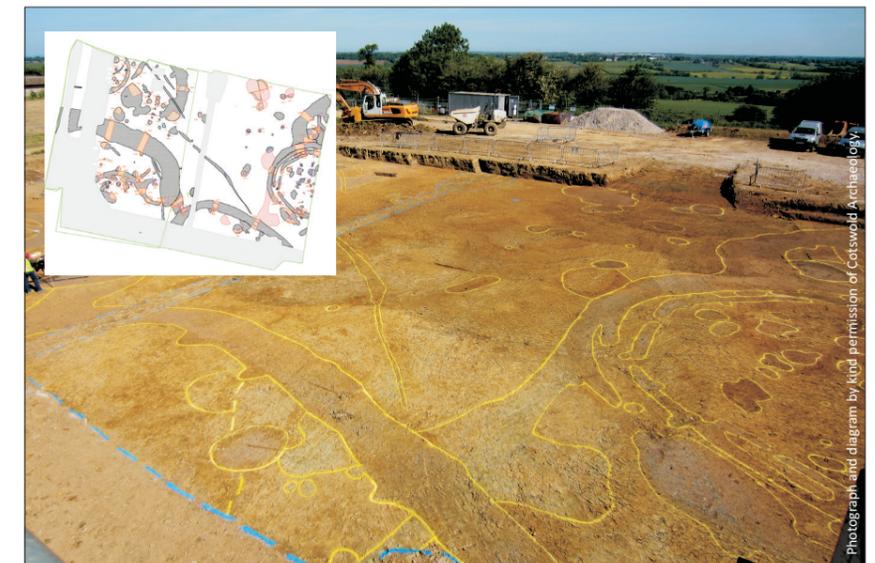
- Excavation revealed these to have been furnace hearths, containing slag-like debris that, when tested, showed that the hearths had been used for basic iron smelting.
- The site was overlaid by a number of roundhouse circles, suggesting that these early attempts at smelting were abandoned in a later phase of the settlement.
- Here too, modern ploughing had done much to disturb the ground, making the site hard to interpret.

Inside the reservoir compound:

Based on the work by BHAP/CLASP to identify the size and importance of this site, county authorities instructed Severn Trent Water to carry out full archaeological excavation as part of their work to upgrade the reservoir in 2015.

- An area of about 1800m² was cleared and stripped back to the Iron Age level, and a team from Cotswold Archaeology spent several weeks excavating the site.
- Further roundhouse circles were revealed, together with sections of two large sub-rectangular deep-ditched enclosures, which appear to have been deliberately located on the tip of the hill, since there are no similar enclosures elsewhere on the hilltop site.

The CLASP/BHAP team excavating a trial trench adjacent to the reservoir compound



Cotswold's excavation within the reservoir compound exposed large sub-rectangular deep-ditched enclosures.

A substantial community

The evidence indicates that this was a substantial community, of perhaps 150-250 individuals. Potsherd analysis and study of the geophysics results shows that it was a Middle/Late Iron Age site, which probably persisted on the hilltop for at least 200-300 years, but was eventually abandoned around the time of the Roman occupation, apparently in an orderly fashion (i.e., not as a result of conflict).

After the hilltop settlement was abandoned, there is evidence of continuity of occupation both on and around the hilltop, including:

- Geophysics and excavation evidence of what appears to be part of a Roman-period field system across the western part of the hilltop, cutting across some of the roundhouse circles.
- Further geophysics work on another nearby project has revealed outlines of what appear to be Romano-British farm buildings in an adjacent field 400m due south of the hilltop.
- The 'tell' of potsherds discovered near a stream in the valley north of the hill indicates that a status dwelling existed near here during the first 300 years AD, though the dwelling has not yet been located.

Features of the settlement

Thanks to the fieldwork and subsequent analysis, a clear picture emerges of life on Barby Hill in the Iron Age, with:

- A series of roundhouse circles around the hilltop perimeter, probably serving as lookout points.
- A dense cluster of roundhouse circles on the north edge of the hill, overlooking both King Street and an older Iron Age settlement on the far side of the valley.
- Livestock management enclosures in the heart of the site — mainly cattle and sheep, with probably a few pigs and horses.
- Evidence of early attempts at iron smelting at a group of hearths in the midst of the site, later abandoned and built over.
- The site would probably also have been interspersed with wooded copses, offering windbreak protection and providing a source of timber poles and coppiced shoots for construction and repair of roundhouses, plus firewood.
- Two spring-lines lead down the south side of the hill, plus one (now underground) down the north side, providing sources of water for the settlement.
- Two large deep-ditched sub-rectangular enclosures on the tip of the hilltop, apparently constructed at different periods. These may have been status compounds (e.g., for a chieftain).