

Press release: HS2 begins archaeology work exploring over 10,000 years of British history

- Over 1,000 archaeologists set to explore 10,000 years of British history across more than 60 separate sites, Neolithic tools, medieval pottery and Victorian time capsules already discovered
- Four-part BBC documentary on the history of Britain exposed by HS2 to be aired 2019/20 presented by Professor Alice Roberts

As part of HS2's enabling works, over the next 2 years, more than 1,000 archaeologists, specialists, scientists and conservators from across the UK will be exploring and recording over 60 archaeological sites for the project.

Ranging from the Prehistoric and Roman Britain to the Anglo-Saxon and Medieval periods, and the Industrial Revolution and World War 2, HS2's archaeology programme is Europe's biggest dig and promises to provide a fascinating insight into the everyday lives of the people and communities who made modern Britain.

The [archaeology programme](#) is a central part of HS2's ground preparation works for Phase One of the project, London to Birmingham. HS2, its contractors and supply chain are well underway with a programme of work, clearing sites, ahead of main construction works next year. Given the historical significance of the sites, HS2 will be engaging over 1,000 archaeologists to ensure that we carry out the works to a professional standard while leaving a lasting legacy of skills and apprenticeships as well as new discoveries.

Early finds include prehistoric tools in Buckinghamshire, medieval pottery in Stoke Mandeville and 2 Victorian time capsules with more discoveries to come as archaeologists begin the exploration of our past.

[HS2: A train through time](#)

Commenting on HS2's archaeology programme, Mark Thurston, HS2 Ltd Chief Executive, said:

How we build HS2 is as important to us as what we are building and we are committed to sharing as much of our cultural heritage as possible. Before we bore the tunnels, lay the tracks and build the stations, an unprecedented amount of archaeological research is now taking place between London and Birmingham. This is the largest archaeological exploration ever in Britain, employing a record number of skilled archaeologists and heritage specialists from across the UK and beyond.

As well as improving connectivity, generating 30,000 new jobs and

creating a network of new wildlife habitats, our archaeology programme shows that HS2 is more than a railway; it's an opportunity to tell the story of our past, create opportunities in the present and leave a lasting legacy for generations to come.

Highlights along the line of route include:

- exploring a prehistoric hunter-gatherer site on the outskirts of London;
- researching an undiscovered multi-period site (Bronze and Iron Age, Roman, Anglo-Saxon and Medieval) in Northamptonshire;
- excavating a Romano-British town in Fleet Marston, Aylesbury;
- uncovering the remains of a medieval manor in Warwickshire;
- finding out more about the Black Death and its impact on medieval villages;
- re-telling the story of a Buckinghamshire village through the careful excavation of a 1,000 year old demolished medieval church and burial ground;
- comparing and contrasting the lives of the buried population in 2 Georgian/Victorian burial grounds in London and Birmingham; and
- discovering a WW2 bombing decoy in Lichfield.

HS2 has granted BBC Two access to this pioneering project, to be documented in a new series made by Lion TV, due on air in 2019/20 presented by Prof. Alice Roberts.

HS2 will also share the finds with local communities through a series of open days and talks and will create a permanent archival legacy of artefacts and discoveries for future generations.

Helen Wass, HS2 Ltd Head of Heritage, said:

The sheer scale of possible discoveries, the geographical span and the vast range of our history to be unearthed makes HS2's archaeology programme a unique opportunity to tell the story of Britain. From Prehistoric remnants and Roman settlements to deserted medieval villages, Wars of the Roses battlefields and Victorian innovation, HS2's archaeology programme has it all.

All artefacts and human remains will be treated with dignity, care and respect and our discoveries will be shared with communities in a variety of ways through open days, expert lectures, the BBC documentary and online. This is a very exciting time for archaeology in Britain and we are committed to make sure that HS2's archaeology programme creates knowledge for further study, engages with communities and leaves behind a lasting archival and skills legacy.

The archaeological investigation is expected to last around 2 years with over 1,000 archaeologists, experts and engineering personnel beginning work on site. They are part of more than 7,000 people already employed on the

project, which is expected to support up to 30,000 jobs at the peak of construction.

Welcoming the launch of HS2's archaeology work, Duncan Wilson, Chief Executive of Historic England, said:

With the building of HS2 comes a once-in-a-generation opportunity to improve our understanding of how people have shaped England's landscapes over thousands of years, from the first prehistoric farmers through Roman and Saxon and Viking incomers to the more recent past.

Historic England is working closely with HS2 archaeologists so we can make sure that this opportunity is seized and we are advising on how we can get the best possible results from the discoveries.

Press and media enquiries

For enquiries during office working hours, Monday to Friday, 9am to 5pm
020 7944 6149

For enquiries outside of these hours and at the weekend
020 7944 0550

The press and media enquiries line is for accredited journalists only