



**Archaeological Recording at
the former rail embankment
Irthlingborough Road
Wellingborough
Northamptonshire
October 2014**

Report No. 14/229

Authors: Jason Clarke, Amir Bassir

Illustrator: Amir Bassir



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Project Manager: Amir Bassir

NGR: SP 90636 67407

MOLA Northampton
Bolton House
Wootton Hall Park
Northampton
NN4 8BN
www.mola.org.uk
sparry@mola.org.uk

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MOLA Northampton
Bolton House
Wootton Hall Park
Northampton
NN4 8BN
01604 700 493
www.mola.org.uk
business@mola.org.uk

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with company registration number 8727508 and charity registration number 1155198.
Registered office: Mortimer Wheeler House, 46 Eagle Wharf Road, London N1 7ED.*

STAFF

Project Manager: Amir Bassir BSc
Text: Jason Clarke BSc MA AifA
Amir Bassir
Fieldwork: Amir Bassir, James Ladocha BA
Illustrations: Amir Bassir

OAS/S REPORT FORM

PROJECT DETAILS		OAS/S molanort1-195935	
Project title	Archaeological Recording at the Former Rail Enbankment, Irthlingborough Road, Wellingborough, Northamptonshire, October 2014		
Short description	MOLA Northampton carried out a programme of archaeological recording of a former rail embankment and bridge parapet located on Irthlingborough Road, Wellingborough, Northamptonshire. The recorded structures were of a mid-19th century date and formerly carried the loop line which connected the Northampton – Peterborough and the Midland Rail lines. This line ceased to operate in the mid 1960s and the rail bridge over Irthlingborough Road was removed. From this time the embankments were disused and fell into disrepair.		
Project type	Historic Building Survey		
Previous work	Unknown		
Future work	Unknown		
Monument type and period	Mid – late 19th century rail embankment		
PROJECT LOCATION			
County	Northamptonshire		
Site address	Irthlingborough Road		
NGR	SP 90636 67407		
Area	62 sq m		
PROJECT CREATORS			
Organisation	MOLA Northampton		
Project brief originator	Assistant Archaeological Advisor, NCC		
Project Design originator	MOLA Northampton		
Director/Supervisor	Jason Clarke		
Project Manager	Amir Bassir		
Sponsor or funding body	Mr Russ Hall, RDC Limited		
PROJECT DATE			
Start date	October 2014		
End date	November 2014		
BIBLIOGRAPHY			
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Serial title & volume	MOLA report, 14/229		
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Abstract

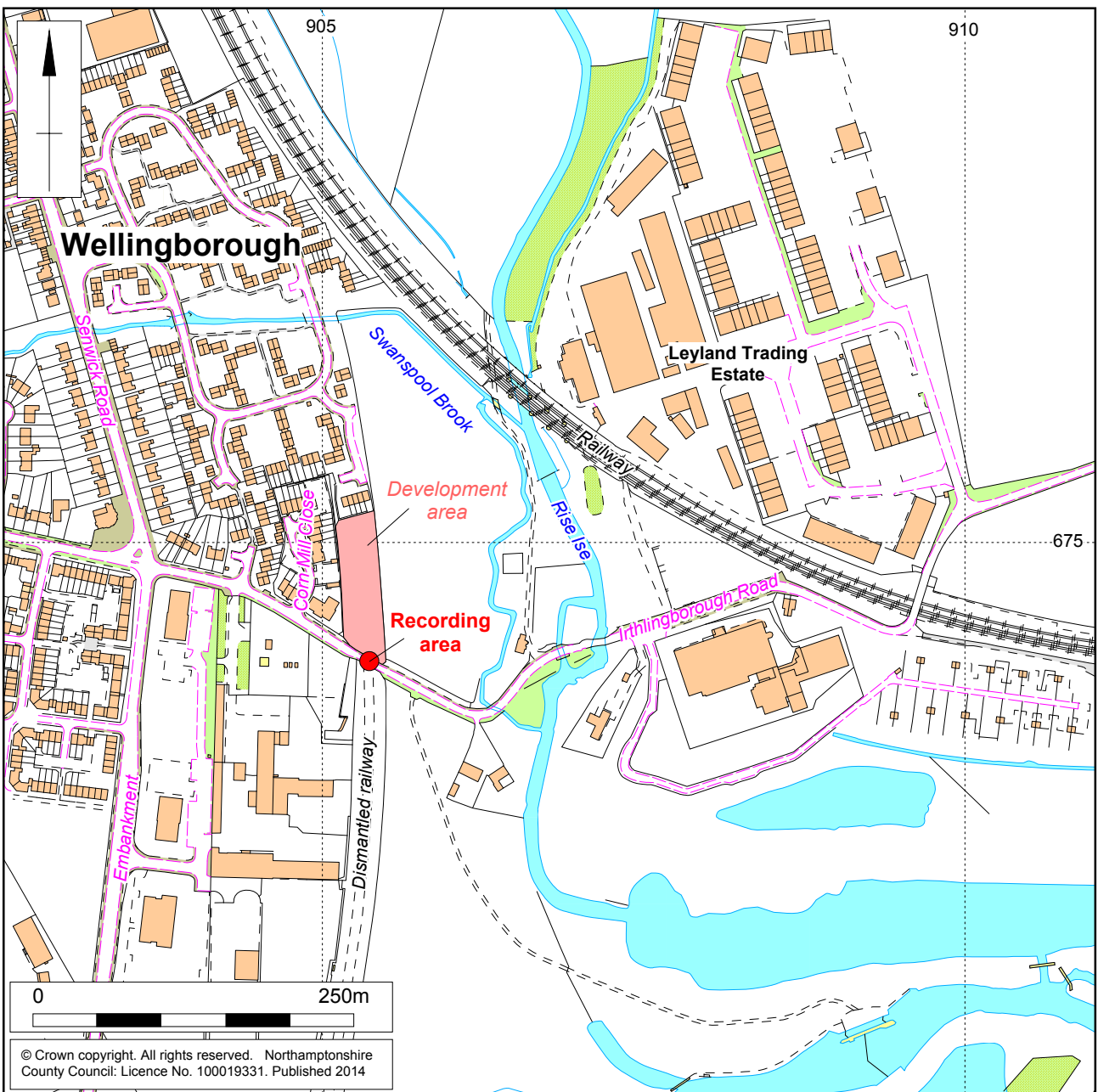
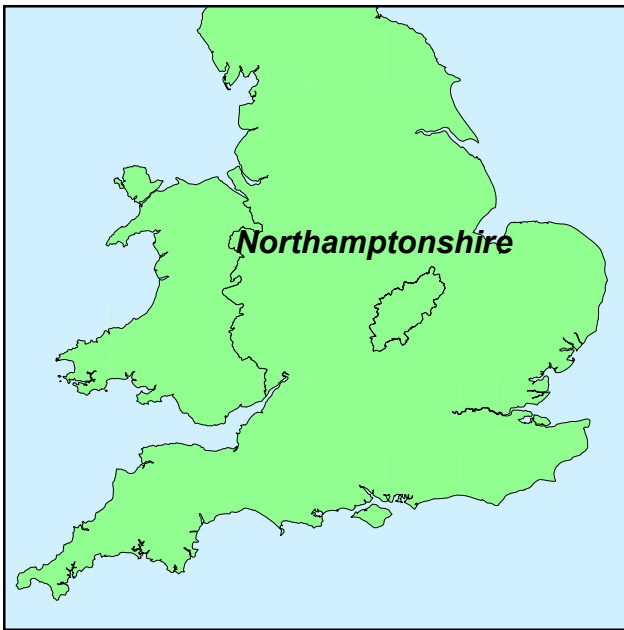
MOLA carried out a programme of archaeological recording of a former rail embankment and bridge parapet located on Irthlingborough Road, Wellingborough, Northamptonshire. The recorded structures were of a mid-19th century date and formerly carried the loop line which connected the Northampton – Peterborough and the Midland Rail lines. This line ceased to operate in the mid 1960s and the rail bridge over Irthlingborough Road was removed. From this time the embankments were disused and fell into disrepair.

1 INTRODUCTION

MOLA was commissioned in October 2014 by Mr Hall of RDC Ltd to undertake a programme of archaeological recording of a former rail embankment and bridge parapet located on land adjacent to Corn Mill Close, Irthlingborough Road, Wellingborough, Northamptonshire (NGR SP 90636 67407, Fig 1)

Planning has been granted for a residential development on land adjacent to Corn Mill Close, Irthlingborough Road, Wellingborough, Northamptonshire. It is proposed that the northern embankment and parapet which are located south of the development area be demolished to allow the widening of the Irthlingborough Road. The consent has been granted with a condition attached for archaeological recording on historic railway structures within the development area.

The underlying geology has been mapped by the British Geological Survey as comprising Triassic mudstone and sandstone of the Lias Group and Jurassic limestone of the Great Oolite Group. These are overlain by glacial till and alluvial deposits (<http://www.bgs.ac.uk/geoindex>).



Scale 1:5000

Site location Fig 1

2 OBJECTIVES AND METHODOLOGY

The level of recording was specified as Level 1, this is defined by English Heritage as consisting of (EH 2006, section 5.1):

- An overall photographic survey of the structures in their present condition comprising general and detailed shots taken in black and white with a high quality camera as well as digital photographs for reporting purposes;
- Written notes on the buildings construction, present and former use and where appropriate, the buildings past and present relationship to its setting in the wider landscape.

All works were conducted in accordance with the procedural documents *The management of Research Projects on the Historic Environment* (EH 2006b, revised 2009), *Standard and Guidance for the archaeological investigation and recording of standing buildings or structures* (IfA revised 2008).

Site visits were made in October and November 2014, when the principal elevations were photographed.

3 HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

3.1 Local history

Wellingborough was a large medieval town that was dominated from before Domesday by the Crowland Abbey manor. However, the town has a complex plan form, which may be due to the presence of several other, smaller manors during the Saxo-Norman period. By Domesday the town was known as *Wedlingaberie* or *Wendlesberie*.

The Abbot of Crowland Abbey promoted the town as a place of settlement and founded the market here in 1201 (Foard and Ballinger 2000). The town grew prosperous from the profits of the wool trade and its advantageous position on the crossroads of two major road routes. By the 16th century, Wellingborough was described as '*a good quik market toune buildid of stone as almost al the tounes be of Northamptonshire*', by Leland (ibid 2000). Unfortunately on 28th July 1738 much of the town centre was destroyed by a major fire. Although by the middle of the following century the town had recovered fully, its recovery entailed the total redevelopment of much of what had gone before.

In the 18th century, although the wool trade was still one of the major industries, the burgeoning boot and shoe industry was beginning to eclipse it. By the 19th century, Wellingborough was second only to Northampton in the number of people that were employed by the boot and shoe industry.

The common fields of the parish of Wellingborough were enclosed by an Act of Parliament of 1765 (*Palmer 1972*).

The Northampton to Peterborough line was opened in 1845 and was operated by the London and North Western Railway. It was opened as part of the national expansion of the railway network and to accommodate the growth of the Iron ore mining industry and burgeoning shoe and boot industry within the Northampton region. The area of investigation was situated on the loop line connecting the Northampton to Peterborough branch line to Midland Railway connecting Leeds to London St Pancras.

By 1884, the town of Wellingborough has substantially expanded to the south and east and the Northampton – Peterborough line is fully formed. The Midland Railway loop line crosses the Irthlingborough Road, carried over the recorded embankment. The area of mills to the east of the site has by this time developed into an iron works.



Aerial view of the site, dated 1945 (image from Google Earth) Fig 4

At this time, the Midland Railway loop line and the Northampton – Peterborough lines are still in use and the embankments still carry the loop line over Irthlingborough Road.



Aerial view of the site, dated 2014 (image from Google Earth) Fig 5

At the time of this survey, the former rail embankment is heavily overgrown with established trees along the full length of the soil bunds. The former rail lines have been removed and the rail bridge over Irthlingborough Road no longer exists.

4 THE RAIL EMBANKMENTS AND ABUTMENTS

The rail embankments are aligned north – south, elevating the now dismantled Midland Railway loop line above the surrounding countryside. The recorded structures comprise a pair of opposing brick abutments flanking Irthlingborough Road (Fig 6). These retain the soil of the embankments and formerly carried a bridge that spanned the road

The abutments each comprise a central straight section of wall c20m in length. This is flanked at each end by wing walls which end with 1.5m high piers (Figs 7-11). The structures are constructed primarily of Midland blue engineering brick in English bond with brick coping and padstones of machine cut sandstone blocks at the top of the central walls. These padstones would have supported an iron girder deck bridge, a design common across the UK rail network.

The structures showed no signs of alterations or phasing except for general maintenance, such as re-pointing of the brickwork. They were found to be in a generally good condition with the exception of some damage to the brickwork caused by vegetation growth, especially at the upper extent around the coping (Fig 13). The brick pier of the east wing wall of the south abutment was most heavily damaged with dislodged bricks, likely having been struck by a vehicle in the past (Fig 12). Modern graffiti is scrawled on the eastern wing wall of the north abutment.

The earth-built embankments were found to be in a moderate state of repair but were overgrown with vegetation including well established trees (Figs 14-15). There was some erosion caused by animal burrowing and tree roots and the area had dumps of modern rubbish scattered throughout.

The site is currently located within a mixed residential, industrial and agricultural environment with the River Nene flowing to the south and the River Ise to the east.

The construction of the recorded rail embankments and abutments is contemporary with the general expansion of the rail network around Wellingborough in the mid-19th century. The London Road station in Wellingborough served as a junction between the North – Peterborough Line and the Midland Railway loop line and was opened in June 1845.



The recorded structures flanking Irthlingborough Road, looking east Fig 6



The north abutment, looking north-east Fig 7



The north abutment, looking north-west Fig 8



The central portion of the north abutment with sandstone padstones at the top Fig 9



The southern abutment, looking south-east Fig 10



The southern embankment and abutment, looking west Fig 11



The south abutment, detail of the damaged brick pier Fig 12



The southern abutment, detail of the damaged coping bricks Fig 13



View of the northern embankment, looking south Fig 14



View of the southern embankment, looking north Fig 15

5 DISCUSSION

The surveyed structures are typical of their type and period with numerous examples surviving around the country, some being still in use on active lines. They were found to be disused but in fair condition with some vegetational damage at the upper parts of the abutments. The embankments were found to be heavily overgrown with numerous established trees. There was evidence of erosion caused by vegetation and animals as well as damage caused by illegal fly tipping. This report provides a visual record of the structures prior to the widening of the Irthlingborough Road.

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MOLA Northampton
Bolton House
Wootton Hall Park
Northampton
NN4 8BN
01604 700 493
www.mola.org.uk
sparry@mola.org.uk