Archaeological Observation at Fotheringhay Bridge Northamptonshire November 2014

Report No. 14/236

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NGR: TL 06045 92980
Scheduled Monument Number: 543761

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OASIS REPORT FORM

PROJECT DETAILS	*OASIS* molanort1-196614
Project title	Archaeological Observation at Fotheringhay Bridge, Northamptonshire, November 2014
Short description	MOLA Northampton carried out archaeological observation of three exploratory test pits which were excavated on the surface of Fotheringhay Bridge, Fotheringhay, Northamptonshire. The purpose of the work was to ascertain the nature of the bridge make up and the thickness of the bridge arches in order to inform future mitigation and strengthening of the bridge. The observation demonstrated that the historic core of the bridge was undisturbed and comprised sandstone rubble overlain by a modern tarmac surface.
Project type	Archaeological observation
Status	Scheduled Monument Number: 543761
Previous work	Monument Management Assessment
Future work	Unknown
Monument type and period	18th century bridge
PROJECT LOCATION	
County	Northamptonshire
Site address	Fotheringhay Bridge, Fotheringhay, Northamptonshire
NGR	TL 06045 92980
Area	3 sq m
PROJECT CREATORS	
Organisation	MOLA Northampton
Project brief originator	English Heritage
Project Design originator	MOLA Northampton
Director/Supervisor	Amir Bassir
Project Manager	Amir Bassir
Sponsor or funding body	Northamptonshire Highways
PROJECT DATE	
Start date	November 2014
End date	November 2014
BIBLIOGRAPHY	
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Fotheringhay Bridge
Northamptonshire
November 2014

Abstract

MOLA Northampton carried out archaeological observation of three exploratory test pits which were excavated on the surface of Fotheringhay Bridge, Fotheringhay, Northamptonshire. The purpose of the work was to ascertain the nature of the bridge make up and the thickness of the bridge arches in order to inform future mitigation and strengthening of the bridge. The observation demonstrated that the historic core of the bridge was undisturbed and comprised sandstone and limestone rubble overlain by a modern tarmac surface.

1 INTRODUCTION

MOLA Northampton was commissioned in November 2014 by MGWSP, Northamptonshire Highways to undertake a programme of archaeological observation during the excavation of test pits on the surface of Fotheringhay Bridge, Fotheringhay, Northamptonshire (SM No 543761, TL 06045 92980 Figs 1 & 3). Prior to this work, a Monument Management Assessment report was carried out which assessed the historic character of the bridge (Cotswold 2013).

Fotheringhay is located in north-east Northamptonshire, approximately 10km to the south-west of Peterborough. The village is of historic importance and is notable for being the birth place of Richard III and the place of execution of Mary Queen of Scots. Fotheringhay Castle, the former home of the Dukes of York, lies close to the site was demolished by the early 18th century. Fotheringhay Bridge spans the River Nene to the south of the village and lies approximately 150m from the motte and bailey remains of the former castle.

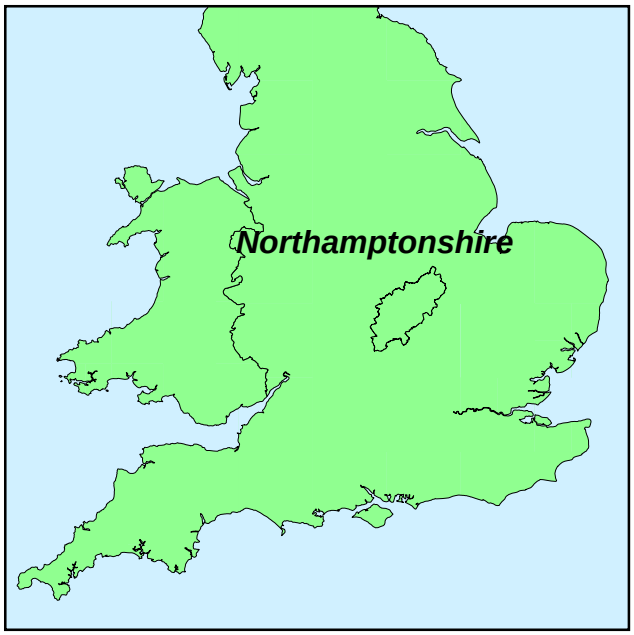
The underlying geology is of Jurassic limestone, sandstone and mudstone of the inferior oolite group, overlain by alluvial deposits (http://www.bgs.ac.uk/geoindex).

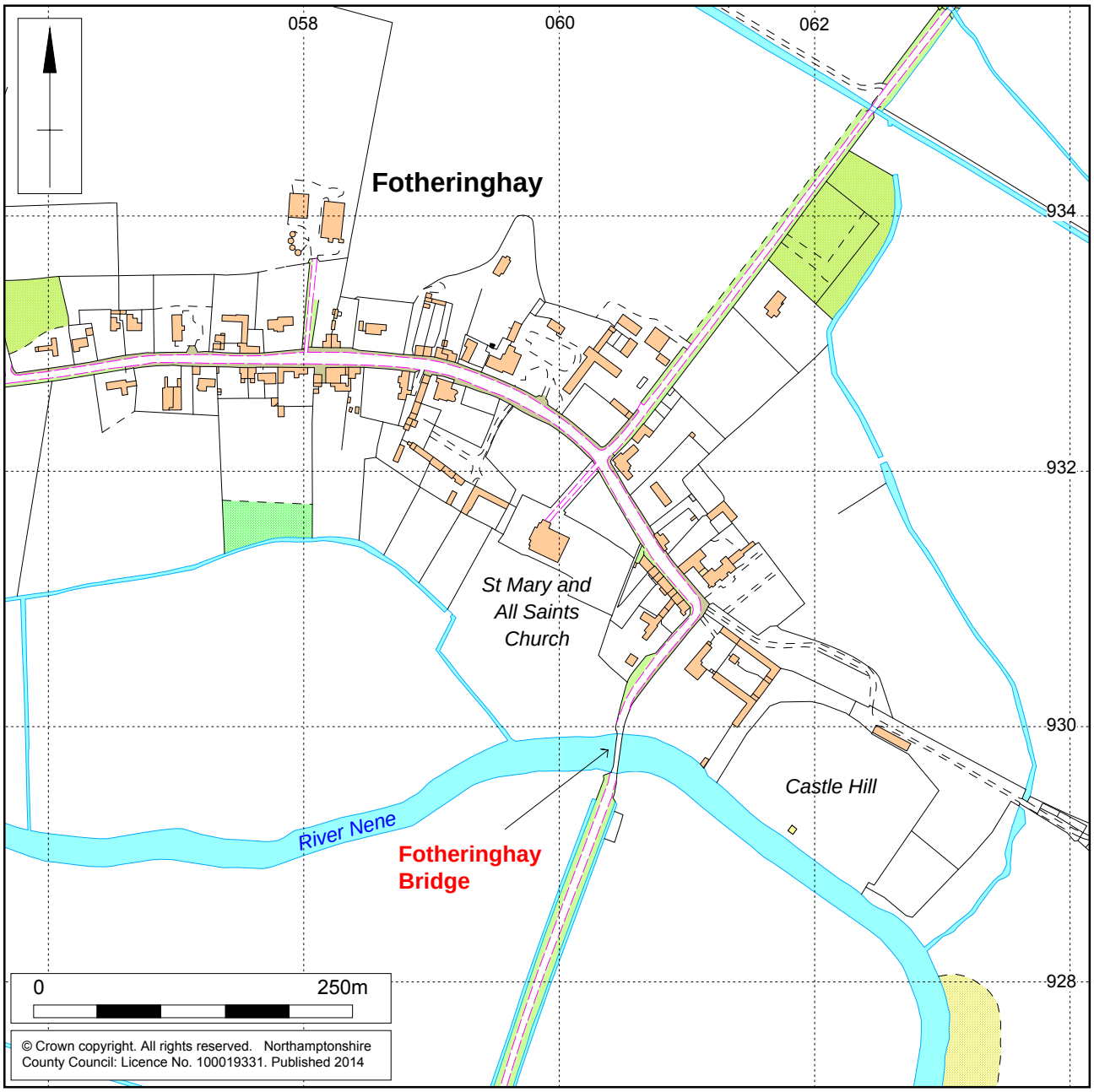
The bridge dates to 1772 and replaces an early bridge of 1573 (Figs 4 & 5). It is constructed of local stone and may well incorporate material taken from the former castle, the demolition of which was completed by the time of the construction of the bridge.

2 OBJECTIVES AND METHODOLOGY

The aims of the archaeological observation were to determine and understand the nature, function and character of the site in its cultural and environmental setting. This was required to facilitate the understanding of the condition of the structure and to inform, if required, the strategy for strengthening of the bridge to increase its traffic carrying capacity using appropriate techniques.

The work was carried out in November 2014 when the three test pits were hand excavated under archaeological supervision to the required depth for each pit. The test pits were photographically recorded and drawings of the exposed stratigraphy were made.





Scale 1:5000

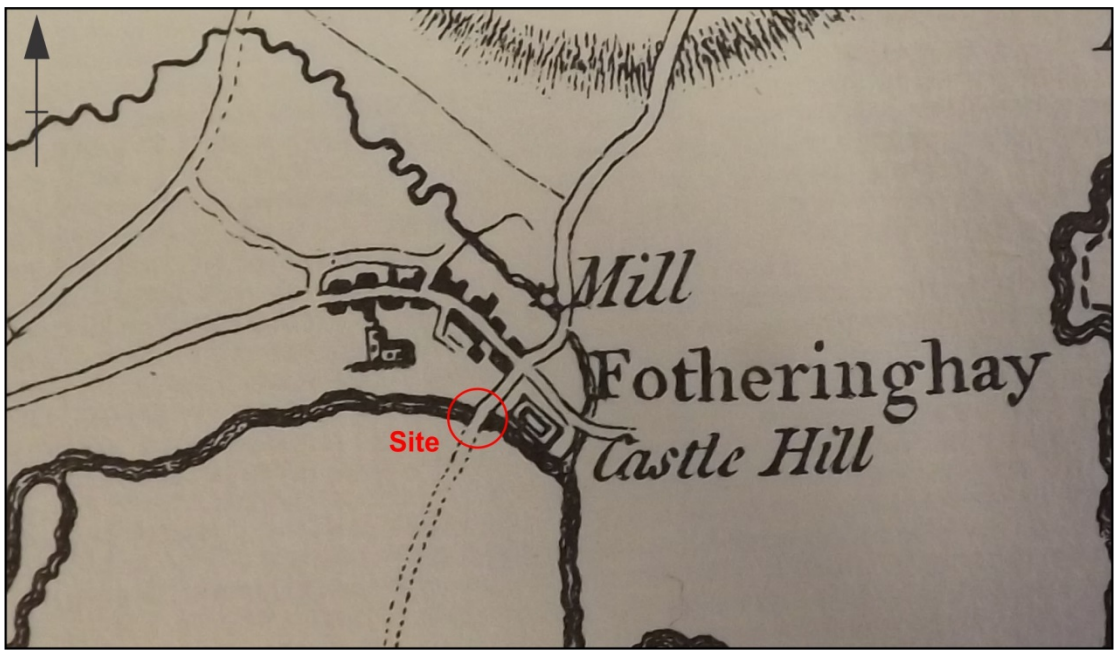
Site location Fig 1

3 HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Although presently a small village with a parish population of 123 people, Fotheringhay was formerly of national significance, being the seat of the house of York. The castle was constructed in the 13th century upon the orders of one of the Earls of Huntingdon. *On the change of dynasty in 1483, Yorkist Fotheringhay gradually lost its importance. After the execution of Mary Queen of Scots in 1587 the castle was little used; in 1592 the local militia stores were kept there until the castle was alienated to Lord Mountjoy in 1603. After 1623 it fell into disrepair. The college was dissolved in 1549 and the derelict choir was dismantled in 1573, the proceeds being used to help rebuild the bridge over the Nene (22). Deprived of its castle and college, the village declined, becoming a purely agricultural settlement. By 1673 the population had fallen to 67 families, and to 57 in 1680* (RCHM Vol 6).

The earliest reference to a bridge is in 1498 when a bequest was made for its repair. Leland says it was of timber and in 1551 it was in need of rebuilding. This early bridge may be associated with a causeway carrying the road S. across the Nene flood plain. There were several bequests for the repair of this causeway between 1546 and 1562. The bridge was replaced in 1573 at a cost of about £180, of which £100 was given by Sir Walter Mildmay and the remainder came from the sale of materials of the collegiate choir. Lord Burghley's mason, Haward, advised on the project and the contractors were William Gromball and Thomas Haywood (?Haward); the stone came mainly from King's Cliffe, timber from Sulehay and Cotterstock and lime from Peterborough and Oundle. Bridges records that it was of four bays, with masonry piers supporting a timber roadway; the masonry parapet bore a tablet inscribed 'This bridge was made by Queen Elizabeth in the 15 yere of her Reygne A° Dni 1573' (RCHM Vol 6).

The present bridge was built in 1722 to designs by George Portwood of Stamford using stone from King's Cliffe (Gent's Mag. 1827 pt. 1, 401–2). It is of ashlar with four semicircular arches of unequal heights, between cutwaters. Each arch has two chamfered orders and a fluted keystone (RCHM Vol 6).



Thomas Eyre's map of 1791, showing the bridge Fig 2

4 EXCAVATED EVIDENCE

The three test pits were hand excavated under archaeological supervision on the 17th November 2014. They were square pits, each measuring *c*0.8m with varying depths. They were located on the northern half of the bridge. Test pits 1 and 3 were excavated over arches 1 and 2 and test pit 2 was excavated over the stone pier between the two arches (Fig 3). The primary aim of the work was to determine the thickness of the arches in order to inform future mitigation and strengthening strategy.

Examination of the external faces of the bridge shows that modern repair work and repointing has been previously carried out.

4.1 Test Pit 1

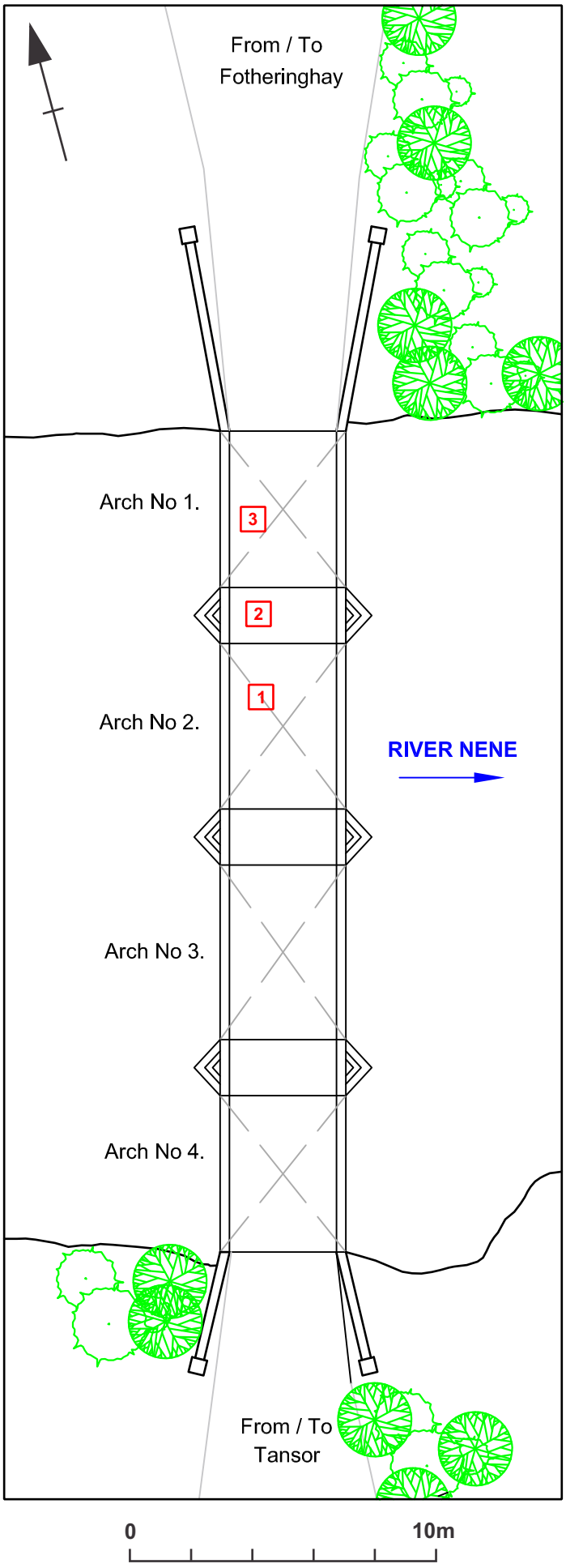
Test pit 1 was located over arch 2 and was hand excavated to 0.45m below the present road surface. Upon the removal of the modern tarmac layer (101), an undisturbed make up layer (102) comprising limestone and sandstone rubble within compacted orange-brown sandy clay was exposed (Figs 3 & 6). The tarmac layer had a thickness of *c*0.1m and directly overlay the makeup layer. Approximately 0.35m of makeup material was excavated to reveal the more compacted material which formed the arch (103).

4.2 Test Pit 2

This test pit was located over the pier between arches 1 and 2 and was hand excavated to a depth of *c*0.6m. The modern tarmac road surface (201) had a thickness of *c*0.15m and directly overlay an undisturbed make up layer (202). This layer comprised mixed stone rubble within compacted orange-brown sandy clay and had a thickness of *c*0.45m (Figs 3 & 7). The material making up the upper part of the arch was denser, more tightly packed stone rubble within a compacted orange-brown sandy clay matrix (203).

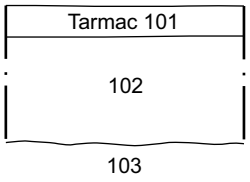
4.3 Test Pit 3

Test pit 3 was located furthest north and was located over arch 1. It was hand excavated to a depth of *c*0.75m onto the upper surface of the arch. The upper layer was the tarmac of the modern road surface (301) which had a thickness of *c*0.13m. The road surface overlay a makeup layer (302) which comprised limestone and sandstone rubble within compacted orange-brown sandy clay matrix and was *c*0.37m in thickness. A change in the compaction and density of the makeup layer was noted at a depth of 0.5m below the road surface (Figs 3 & 8). The denser material (303) was formed of more tightly packed stone rubble within a compacted sandy clay matrix. Approximately 0.25m of this material was excavated to reveal the upper surface of the arch (304).



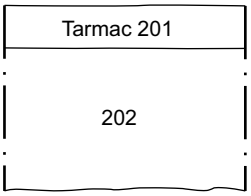
Test Pit 1

N S



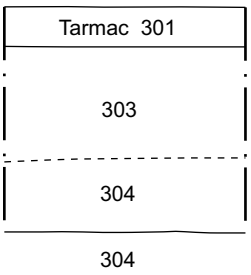
Test Pit 2

N S



Test Pit 3

N S



Scales, Plan 1:200, Sections 1:25

Plan of the bridge, showing locations and sections of the test pits Fig 3

The bridge prior to excavation, looking south Fig 4

The bridge prior to excavation, looking north Fig 5

Test pit 1, looking west Fig 6

Test pit 2, looking west Fig 7

Test pit 3, looking west Fig 8

Test pits 1-3 upon completion of excavations, looking north Fig 9

5 DISCUSSION

The archaeological observation has revealed that the historic structure of the bridge is undisturbed and firm. The makeup material overlying the arches was revealed to be a largely homogenous, firm and compacted stone rubble.

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MOLA Northampton

28th November 2014

Revised 2nd December 2014

APPENDIX; CONTEXT DATA

Test Pit	Length, width & alignment	NGR	Surface height (aOD)	Depth of test pit
1	**0.8m x 0.8m, N-S**	**TL 06046 92991**	**17.1m aOD**	**0.45m**
Context	***Context type***	***Description***	***Dimensions***	***Artefacts/ Samples***
101	layer	Modern tarmac	0.10m thick	-
102	layer	Compact orange-brown sandy clay with limestone and sandstone rubble	0.35m thick	-
103	layer	Compact orange-brown sandy clay with limestone and sandstone rubble	-	-

Test Pit	Length, width & alignment	NGR	Surface height (aOD)	Depth of test pit
2	**0.8m x 0.8m, N-S**	**TL 06045 92987**	**17.1m aOD**	**1.0m deep**
Context	***Context type***	***Description***	***Dimensions***	***Artefacts/ Samples***
201	layer	Modern tarmac	0.15m thick	-
202	layer	Compact orange-brown sandy clay with limestone and sandstone rubble	0.45m thick	-
203	layer	Compact orange-brown sandy clay with limestone and sandstone rubble	-	-

Test Pit	Length, width & alignment	NGR	Surface height (aOD)	Depth of test pit
3	**0.8m x 0.8m, N-S**	**TL 06045 92984**	**17.1m aOD**	**1.0m deep**
Context	***Context type***	***Description***	***Dimensions***	***Artefacts/ Samples***
301	layer	Modern tarmac	0.13m thick	-
302	layer	Compact orange-brown sandy clay with limestone and sandstone rubble	0.37m thick	-
303	layer	Compact orange-brown sandy clay with limestone and sandstone rubble	0.25m thick	-
304	Layer	Compact orange-brown sandy clay with limestone and sandstone rubble	-	-

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