

Pedestrian Causeways at Aldwincle, Great Doddington, Harrington and Ringstead, Northamptonshire

by

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Introduction

Four post-medieval or modern pedestrian causeways were the subject of rapid recording and reporting to the Northamptonshire Historic Environment Record (HER) during 2013 (Cadman 2013a–d). Three of the causeways are located in the Nene valley floodplain with that in Harrington parish spanning the infant River Ise (Fig 1).

There is a long tradition of causeways being used to help people cross river valley floodplains in Northamptonshire. Excavated examples in the Nene valley include the Roman road and medieval causeways at Irchester (Keevill & Williams 1995), believed to have been used in conjunction with fords and possibly bridges. Other ancient causeways may remain lost below alluvium elsewhere in the county.

Causeways also operated in conjunction with medieval and later bridges, as for example at Ditchford (McKeague 1988–9) and Irthlingborough (Goodfellow 1985–6). The four causeways noted here are characterised by being confined solely to pedestrian use though each sits alongside a road and adjoins or is very close to a long

established bridge or, as at Ringstead, a mill. All four are modest in scale and in their present form at least, of relatively recent date.

The Causeways

Aldwincle (NGR TL 02060 81464 to TL 01711 81577) (Fig 2)

Great Doddington, Hardwater Road (NGR SP 8766 6370 to SP 8805 6350) (Fig 3)

Harrington, Newbottle Bridge (NGR SP 78198 81437 to SP 78170 81369) (Figs 4–8)

Ringstead (NGR SP 97413 75172 to SP97671 74882) (Fig 9)

Ringstead is the longest of the causeways, at around 390m; Harrington the shortest at approximately 74m. Generally, each comprises two main built components, lengths of narrow earth bank being interspersed with lengths of raised wooden boardwalks or, as at Harrington, by brick and stone-built flood arches. Three incorporate re-used 19th or 20th-century materials torevet or reinforce the banks,

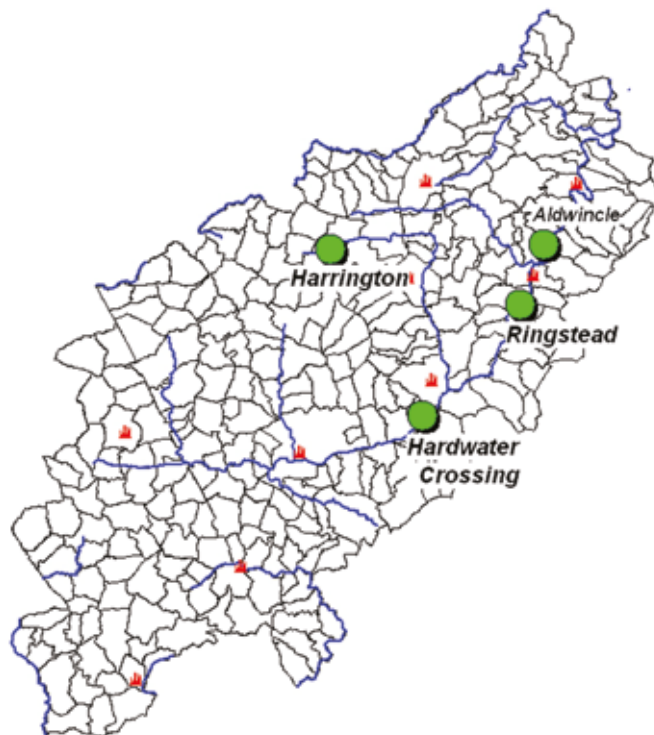


Fig 1 Location of the pedestrian causeways



Fig 2 Aldwinckle, looking east along part of the boardwalk with adjoining bank (Scale 2m)



Fig 3 Great Doddington, view south-east along a concrete cylinder-constructed part of the causeway, together with remains of one of the timber boardwalks (Scale 2m)

namely iron furnace slag blocks and concrete cylinders, the latter as widely used in WW2 home defence road blocks. The nature of some of the brickwork in the Harrington causeway indicates that though it may have earlier origins,

the present form of this causeway is unlikely to be significantly earlier than the examples from the Nene valley. Four inscribed but only partially legible stones built into the Harrington flood arches, indicate a rebuilding in 1876 of an earlier feature of 1648 (or 9) though re-use of these stones from the adjoining Newbottle Bridge, which has medieval origins, cannot be discounted.

What is also unclear is whether these four heritage assets represent a final flourish in a long tradition of causeway building? All the earlier examples referred to above extended to the full width of the road or track concerned. Could the restriction to pedestrian use be a late feature? In addition, were such causeways, along with the neighbouring bridges, built for general public use across parts of Northamptonshire's floodplains or are they part



Fig 4 Harrington, the causeway and flood arches viewed from the south in winter. The inscribed stones sit between the arches and beyond; marked by the white fencing is Newbottle Bridge



Fig 5 Harrington, inscribed stone 1: REBUILT 1876
(Scale 300mm)



Fig 6 Harrington, inscribed stone 2: ?648 (or 9) – the date of an earlier structure?



Fig 7 Harrington, inscribed stone 3: ?undetermined heraldic crest. Possibly crossed keys, windmill sails saltirewise or an open winged bird?

of a separate tradition serving specific users, conjecturally those requiring access to and from specific workplaces, such as provided by railways or quarries located on or by the floodplain? Either way, the pedestrian causeways are of historic environment interest and continue to contribute to the built local character and distinctiveness. It is pleasing to note that three continue in full or partial

use, with that at Ringstead having recently been extensively repaired. All need regular care. There may be scope to give a new lease of life to that at Great Doddington, thereby also enhancing safe access to the adjoining Summer Leys wildlife reserve. All four causeways merit consideration for local listing.



Fig 8 Harrington, inscribed stone 4: ● D G N I or ● D C M



Fig 9 Ringstead, the northern end of the boardwalk, looking south-east

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