



Northamptonshire  
County Council

# Northamptonshire Archaeology

An archaeological watching brief  
at the Iron Trunk Aqueduct,  
Old Wolverton, Milton Keynes  
September 2007



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September 2007

Report 07/149

SMR Event Number: 1147

## Northamptonshire Archaeology

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**OASIS REPORT FORM**

<b>PROJECT DETAILS</b>		
Project name	An archaeological watching brief at The Iron Trunk Aqueduct, Old Wolverton, Milton Keynes	
Short description	An archaeological watching brief was undertaken during groundworks connected with the replacement of the existing towpath within the Ancient Monument Site of the Wolverton Iron Trunk Aqueduct, Milton Keynes. The work entailed shallow excavations along either edge of the tow path prior to the installation of concrete edging and the overlaying of a new surface. The excavations revealed only the make-up layer associated with the existing tarmac tow path. No archaeological deposits or artefacts were present.	
Project type	Watching Brief	
Site status	Ancient Monument (County Monument No. 98)	
Previous work	None	
Current Land use	Canal towpath	
Future work	Unknown	
Monument type/ period	19th century canal aqueduct	
Significant finds	None	
<b>PROJECT LOCATION</b>		
County	Milton Keynes	
Site address	Iron Trunk Aqueduct, Old Wolverton, Milton Keynes	
Study area (sq.m or ha)	87.50 m <sup>2</sup>	
OS Easting & Northing	SP 801418	
Height OD		
<b>PROJECT CREATORS</b>		
Organisation	Northamptonshire Archaeology	
Project brief originator	Milton Keynes Council Canalside Officer (Holmes 2007)	
Project Design originator	Northamptonshire Archaeology	
Director/Supervisor	Edmund Taylor	
Project Manager	Edmund Taylor	
Sponsor or funding body	Milton Keynes Council	
<b>PROJECT DATE</b>		
Start date	September 2007	
End date	September 2007	
<b>ARCHIVES</b>	<b>Location (Accession no.)</b>	<b>Content (eg pottery, animal bone etc)</b>
Physical		None
Paper		Watching brief forms (1) Colour slides (5) black and white contact prints (5) Digital photographs (11)
Digital		Report text and figures

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**AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF AT  
THE IRON TRUNK AQUEDUCT,  
OLD WOLVERTON,  
MILTON KEYNES  
SEPTEMBER 2007**

*Abstract*

*An archaeological watching brief was undertaken during groundworks connected with the replacement of the existing towpath within the Ancient Monument Site of the Wolverton Iron Trunk Aqueduct, Milton Keynes. The work entailed shallow excavations along either edge of the tow path prior to the installation of concrete edging and the overlaying of a new surface. The excavations revealed only the make-up layer associated with the existing tarmac tow path. No archaeological deposits or artefacts were present.*

**1 INTRODUCTION**

An archaeological watching brief was undertaken by Northamptonshire Archaeology on the 21st September 2007 during groundworks associated with the replacement of the existing towpath within the Ancient Monument Site of the Iron Trunk Aqueduct, Old Wolverton, Milton Keynes (NGR SP 801418 Fig 1, Plate 1). The work was carried out on behalf of Milton Keynes Council in response to a brief issued by Milton Keynes Council's Canalside Officer (Holmes 2007) and followed a specification submitted by Northamptonshire Archaeology (Taylor 2007) which was approved by Chris Welch of English Heritage on 20th September 2007.

**2 BACKGROUND**

**2.1 Topography and Geology**

The proposed development area is situated on the north-east edge of the parish of Wolverton where the Grand Union Canal crosses the River Great Ouse. The parish of Wolverton lies in the north-west of Milton Keynes and covers an area of 2324 acres. It is bounded on the north by the Great Ouse, on the east by a small tributary of that river flowing from Calverton, and on the south-west by the Roman road of Watling Street. The ground slopes downwards from a height of about 300 ft. in the south of the parish to 200 ft. on the banks of the Great Ouse.

The underlying geology comprises flat bedded shelly limestones and marls of the Blisworth Limestone Formation, part of the Middle Jurassic Great Oolite Group.

## 2.2 Historical Background

The Wolverton aqueduct known as the 'Iron Trunk' is a cast iron aqueduct which was built for the Grand Junction Canal Company in 1809-1811. It was designed by the engineer Benjamin Bevan of Leighton Buzzard and supplied by Reynolds & Co's Ketley Ironworks, Shropshire. It carried the canal from London to Blisworth over the River Great Ouse and replaced an earlier aqueduct constructed of brick piers and a wooden trough of 1803, which collapsed in 1808. The current brick abutments of which were rebuilt in 1919. Beside the canal in the undergrowth, it is possible to make out the hollows which are all that remains of the flight of four locks down and five locks up from 1800, designed to bring the canal down to river level (about 12m/35ft) and then raising it up again to the wharf on Old Stratford Road. There is an original canal bridge (Bridge No.69) of circa 1800, much repaired in later brick, on the footpath from Stratford Road to Manor Cottages in Old Wolverton.

([www.mkheritage.co.uk/wsah/hood/docs/aqueductbook7.html#aque](http://www.mkheritage.co.uk/wsah/hood/docs/aqueductbook7.html#aque))

## 3 OBJECTIVES AND METHODOLOGY

In order to examine the archaeological resource within the proposed development area the general objectives of the archaeological works were to:

- ◆ Observe the excavation of the current towpath to formation level along with associated groundworks.
- ◆ Determine and record the date, extent, character, state of preservation and depth of burial of any archaeological deposits.
- ◆ Create a permanent archive and record of the archaeological information collected during the course of the fieldwork and analysis.

The fieldwork comprised a single visit to the site to observe shallow excavations either side of a 25m long section of the existing tow path (Fig 2; Plate 2) prior to the installation of concrete edging and subsequent overlaying of a new surface.

A photographic record in both black and white negative and colour slide was kept, with supplementary photographs in digital format. The written record used Northamptonshire Archaeology pro-forma sheets. The watching brief was carried out in accordance with the *Standards and guidance for an archaeological watching brief (IFA 2001)*.

**4 THE RECORDED EVIDENCE**

A 25m section of the existing tow path fell within the area of the Ancient Monument. Excavations along either edge were 0.50m to 0.60m wide and 0.20m deep. These revealed a single deposit comprising loosely compacted dark grey loam with abundant limestone and occasional red brick fragments. This extended the entire length and depth of the excavations. No archaeological deposits were present and no artefacts were recovered

**5 CONCLUSIONS**

The groundworks were of limited nature and remained within the make-up of the existing towpath.

No archaeological deposits were present and no artefacts were recovered. The watching brief was carried out in favourable conditions and the results are considered to be reliable.

**6 THE SITE ARCHIVE**

The project generated a small archive comprising:

<b>RECORD</b>	<b>NUMBER</b>
Watching brief forms	1
Colour slides	5
Black and white contacts and negatives	5
Digital photographs	11

**BIBLIOGRAPHY**

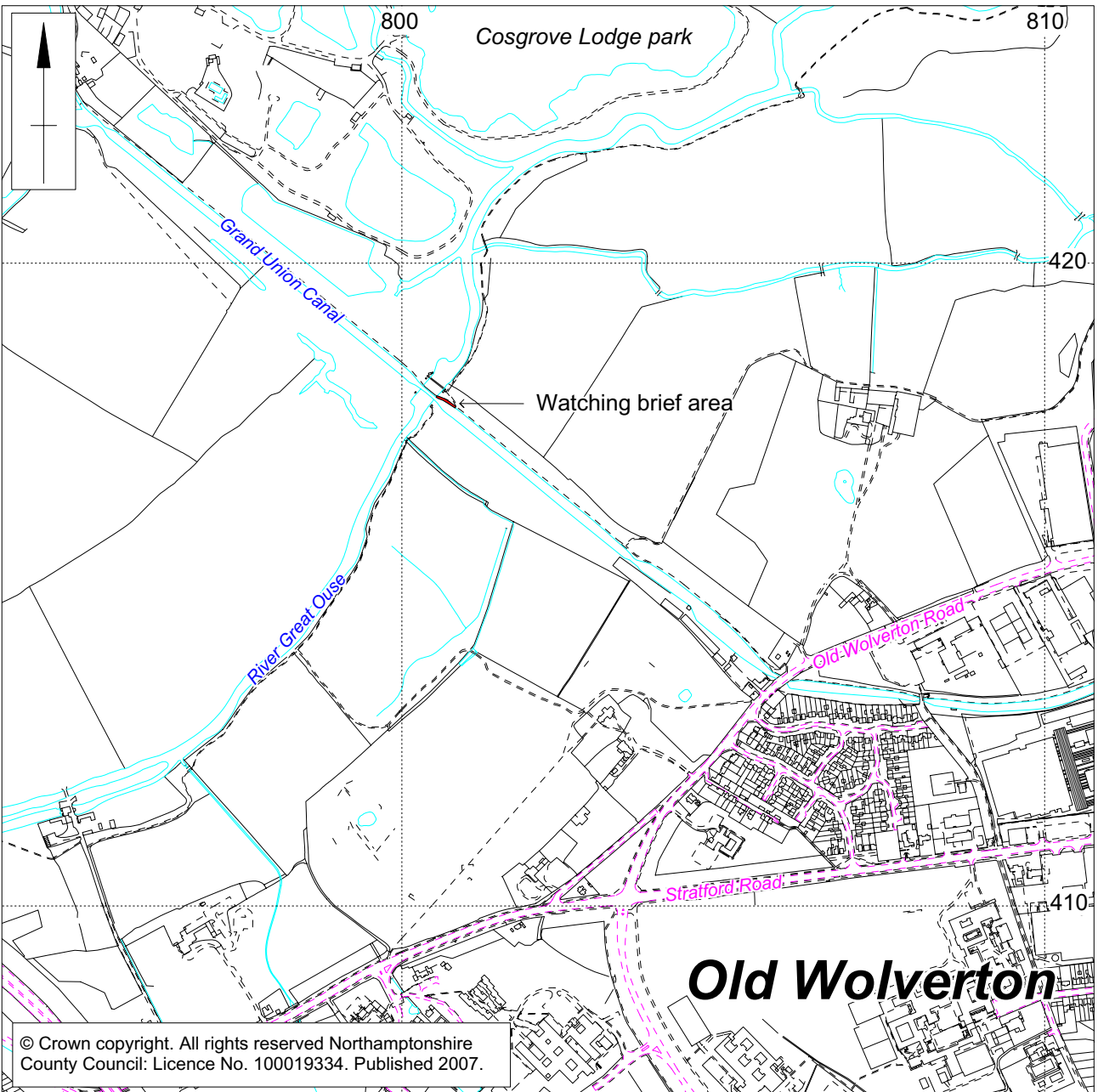
Holmes, A, 2007 *Old Wolverton towpath rebuild adjacent to Iron Trunk Aqueduct. Archaeological Watching Brief*, Milton Keynes Council

IFA 2001 *Standards and guidance for an archaeological watching brief*, Institute of Field Archaeologists

Taylor, E, 2007 *Specification for an archaeological watching brief during the rebuilding of the towpath adjacent to Iron Trunk Aqueduct, Old Wolverton*, Milton Keynes, Northamptonshire Archaeology

**WEBSITES**

[www.mkheritage.co.uk/wsah/hood/docs/aqueductbook7.html#aque](http://www.mkheritage.co.uk/wsah/hood/docs/aqueductbook7.html#aque)

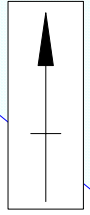


Scale 1:10,000

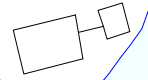
Site location Fig 1



Scale 1:500



*Grand Union Canal*



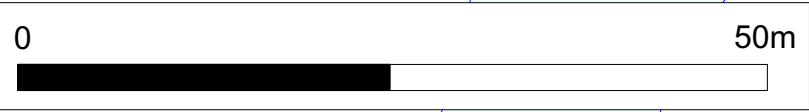
*Pipe line*

*Iron trunk aqueduct*

*River Great Ouse*

*Area of archaeological watching brief*

*Tow path*



Area of archaeological watching brief Fig 2

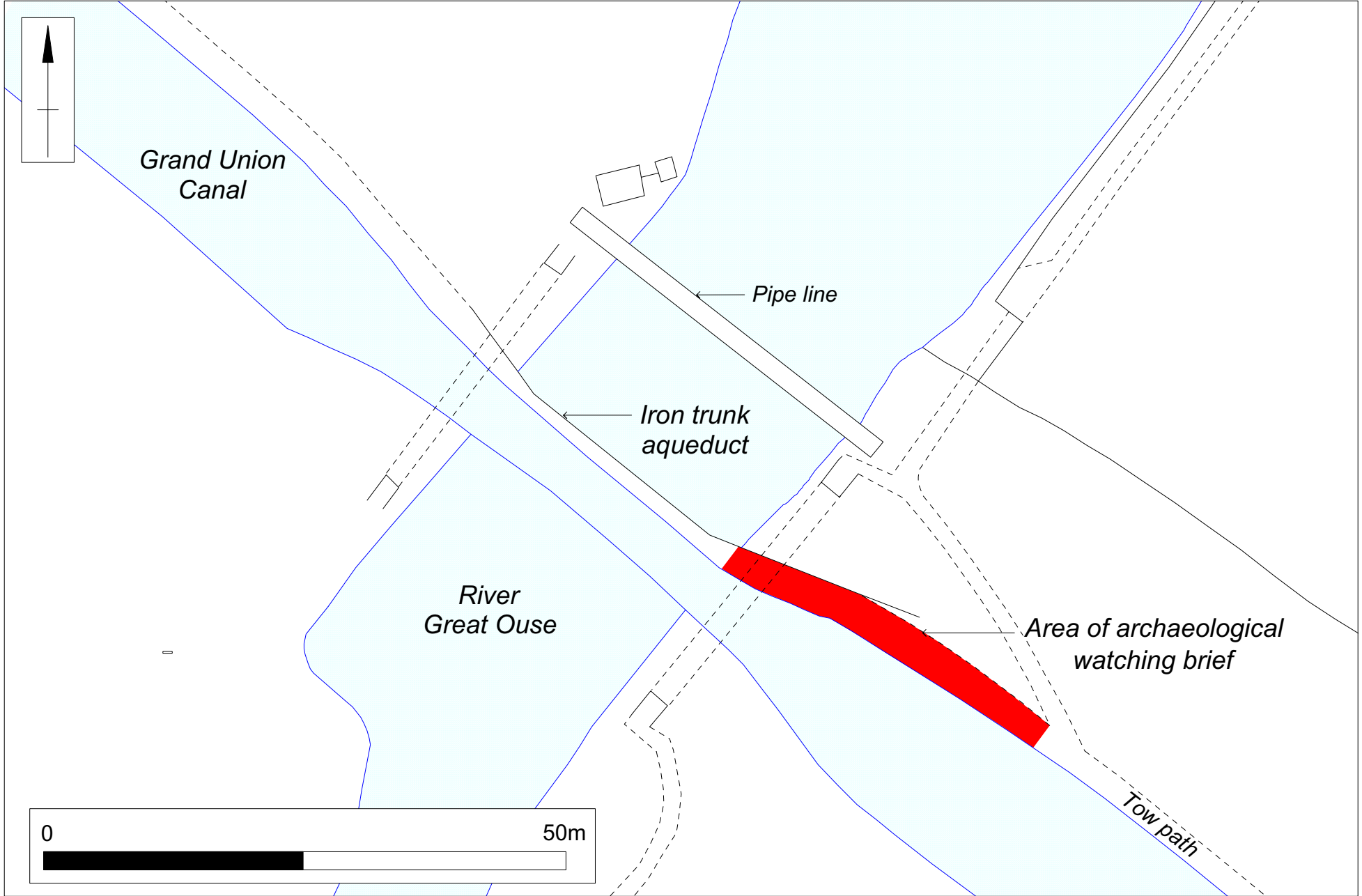




Plate 1: Iron Trunk Aqueduct and River Great Ouse. Looking south-west



Plate 2: Excavations along edge of towpath. Looking south-east