VIRGINSTOWE BRIDGE, VIRGINSTOWE, DEVON

(NGR SX 37195 92710)

Results of historic building recording

Torridge District Council planning reference 1/1091/2014/FUL, condition 4

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On behalf of:
Hammond-ECS

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AC archaeology

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Summary

Historic building recording was carried out by AC archaeology on 5 January 2015 prior to infilling under the arch of Virginstowe Bridge, Virginstowe, Devon (SX 37195 92710). The bridge carries a minor road over the line of the former North Cornwall Railway that opened in 1886.

The bridge and adjacent abutments are constructed of local stone, finished with some architectural detailing. No significant alterations have been made to the bridge, although some modern repointing was recorded.

1. INTRODUCTION (Fig. 1)

1.1 Historic building recording was carried out by AC archaeology on 5 January 2015 prior to infilling under Virginstowe Bridge, Virginstowe, Devon (SX 37195 92710). The investigation was commissioned by Hammond (ecs) Ltd and was required under condition 4 of the grant of planning permission (Torridge District Council reference 1/1091/2014/FUL) for "infilling of former railway bridge".

1.2 Virginstowe Bridge carries a minor road between the A388 and Virginstowe over the line of the former North Cornwall Railway. The bridge is situated in the base of the river valley of, and to the east of, the River Carey. The road level is at a height of 105m aOD. The underlying geology comprises Carboniferous mudstone and siltstone of the Crackington formation.

2. AIM

2.1 The aim of the work was to prepare a record of the bridge prior to the infiling of the railway line under its arch.

3. METHODOLOGY (Appendix 1)

3.1 All works were undertaken in accordance with a Written Scheme of Investigation prepared by AC archaeology (Passmore 2014) and the Chartered Institute for Archaeologists' *Standard and Guidance for the archaeological investigation and recording of standing buildings or structures* (revised 2008).

3.2 A desk-based appraisal, comprising an assessment of the relevant publications and historic maps, was carried out.

3.3 The survey was prepared in accordance with AC archaeology's *General Site Recording Manual, Version 2*, and was undertaken to levels 1-2 as set out in English Heritage's 2006 document *Understanding Historic Buildings: A guide to good recording practice*. The survey comprised:

- A written description of the bridge and its local context in terms of the topography, the road and the railway line; and
- A photographic record including the overall character of the bridge, as well as detailed views of the elevations and the arch. An index of photographs is included as Appendix 1.

4. HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

4.1 The North Cornwall Railway opened from Halwell to Launceston on 21 July 1886, and was extended during the 1890s reaching Wadebridge in 1895. It was a single track line. The route closed to passengers in 1967 (St John Thomas 1981, 104, 159). Comparison of the first edition Ordnance Survey 6-inch map of 1884 with current maps indicates that the road was not significantly altered when the railway was constructed. Its existing course was retained but slightly straightened to pass over the railway line at a right angle.

5. RESULTS (Plates 1-8)

5.1 Topographical location

The railway was located in the base of the river valley on the east side of the floodplain; it was terraced into the base of the hillside on the east side of the valley (Plate 1). To the north and south of the bridge the railway was laid in a cutting. The bridge spans the railway from the top of the cutting on the east side to an embankment on the west side that carries the road down to the floodplain and the modern Middle Bridge to the east. (In the nineteenth century the road crossed the River Carey via a ford.)

5.2 The bridge

Virginstowe Bridge is a large, tall structure, with a span of 8.6m, a width of 5.34m and a height of approximately 4.50m.

The bridge and its abutments are constructed of rectangular roughly finished blocks of coursed purple to red local stone with ribbon pointing in hard grey cement mortar (Plates 2-3). Episodes of repointing have taken place in recent years. It has a depressed arch of wedge-shaped voussoirs finished with pitch facing and plain margins. It rises from string courses featuring the same decoration. At road level above the arch there is a further string course on each elevation, again treated with the same finish (Plate 4). Above the string course are parapets that measure approximately 1.25m high (Plate 5). These extend over the abutments (see below) where they project out from the masonry of the main bridge span (see Plates 2-3). These areas of wider masonry incorporate large quoins. On the north elevation the parapet has limestone capping; however on the south elevation they have been removed and replaced with a concrete slab. The end coping stones over the wider masonry on the north side of the bridge are finished with pitch facing and plain margins, and also appear to be replacements.

On the west side of the bridge the embankment is supported by two retaining abutments. The southern abutment is at a right angle to the bridge whilst the north abutment is angled slightly to the west (Plate 6). Both abutments taper back from the base of the bridge (see Plate 4). On the east side of the bridge the abutments are aligned at 45^0 to the structure, and support the cutting and the road above. The south abutment tapers back from the base of the bridge (Plate 7), whilst the lower courses of the north abutment also taper back, but above the string course for the arch they rise vertically to road level (Plate 8). All of the abutments were constructed separately from the main fabric of the bridge, but are contemporary and their tops support the projecting masonry at the ends of the parapets.

The edge of the road on either side of the bridge is defined by mid-late 20th-century wire fences, terminating in an upright post with a diagonal supports formed from further concrete posts. There is no evidence of any reuse of historic rails.

Under the bridge the line of the railway has been blocked by modern gates associated with the control and movement of grazing animals. Some of the fences incorporate reused highway crash barriers.

6. COMMENTS

6.1 The bridge formed an integral part of the infrastructure of the extension of the North Cornwall Railway from Halwell to Launceston that opened in 1886. It was provided to allow the local road between Virginstowe and the present A388 (historically the main road between Launceston and Holsworthy) to pass over the railway. It is constructed entirely of local stone with no use of brick or other stone to provide architectural interest. The finish of the details, such as to the arch and string courses, is typical of local architecture of the period reflecting national trends in architectural treatment applied in a local context.

6.2 The railway line had a short lifespan of 81 years. However the bridge has remained in use with no significant alterations to the fabric of the bridge or adjacent embankment abutments were made. In recent years the bridge has suffered structurally, perhaps due to the use by heavier goods and agricultural vehicles, and the elevations display evidence of repointing.

7. ARCHIVE AND OASIS ENTRY

7.1 The paper and digital archive is currently held at the offices of AC archaeology Ltd, at 4 Halthaies Workshops, near Exeter, Devon, EX5 4LQ. On acceptance of the report by the Devon County Historic Environment Team the paper archive will be discarded and the digital archive stored with the Archaeology Data Service.

7.2 An OASIS entry has been completed under the unique identifier 199200.

8. ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

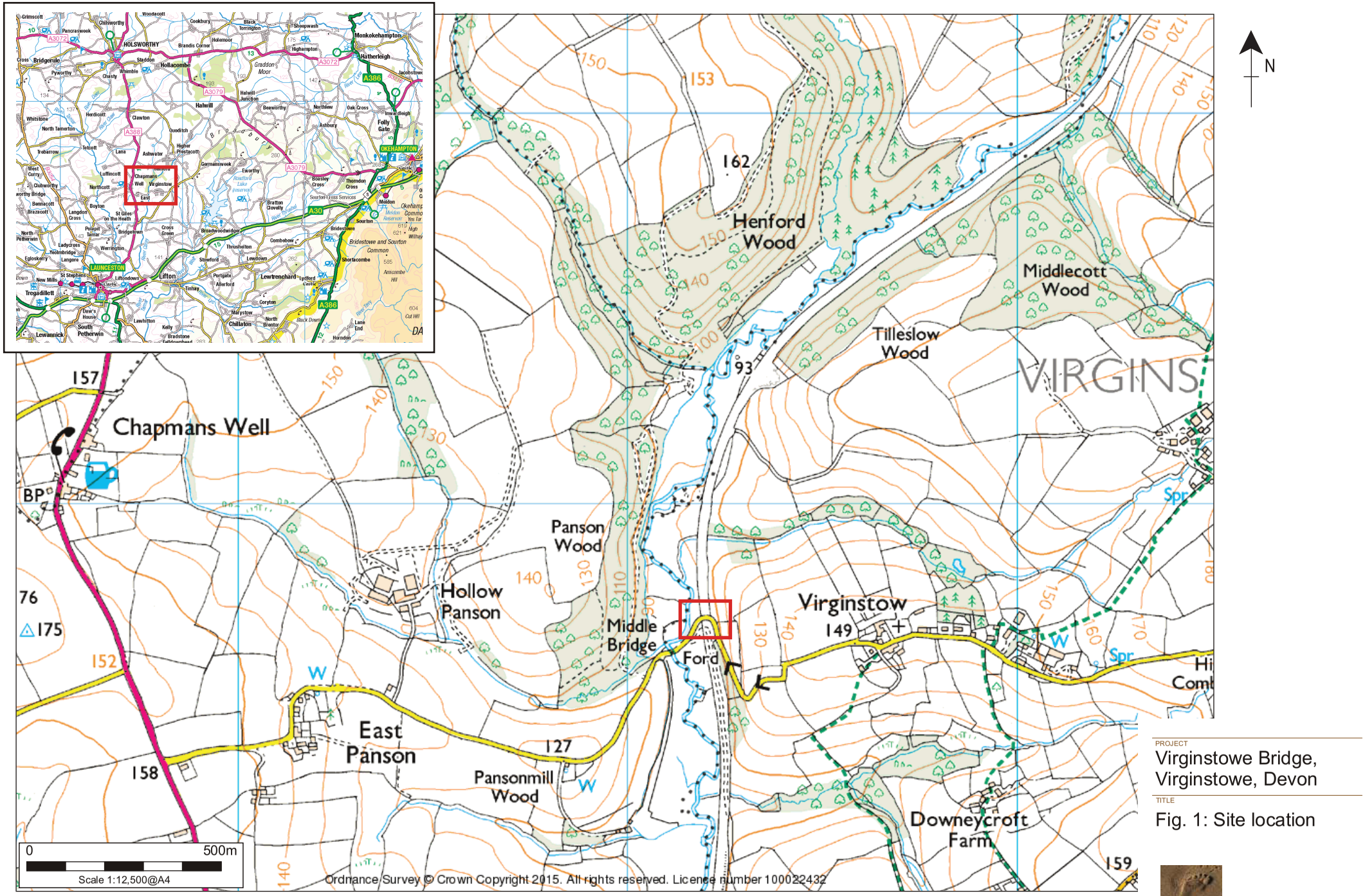
8.1 This report was commissioned by Hammond (ecs) Ltd and managed for them by John Martin and for AC archaeology by Andrew Passmore. The survey was carried out by Stella De-Villiers who also prepared the report text. The illustrations were prepared by Elisabeth Patkai.

9. SOURCES CONSULTED

Passmore, A., 2014, *Virginstowe Bridge, Virginstowe, Devon, (NGR SX 37195 92710), Written Scheme of Investigation for historic building recording, Torridge District Council planning reference 1/1091/2014/FUL, condition 4*, AC archaeology Document No. **ACD1049/1/0**.

St John Thomas, D., 1981, *A Regional History of the Railways of Great Britain Volume 1 The West Country*.

Ordnance survey first edition 6-inch Devonshire map sheet LXXIV. SE, surveyed 1883, published 1884



PROJECT

Virginstowe Bridge, Virginstowe, Devon

TITLE

Fig. 1: Site location

AC archaeology

Plate 1: The bridge viewed from the former railway line to the south showing the cutting at the base of the hillside to the east. 2m scale.

Plate 2: The south elevation, viewed from the south. 2m scale.

Plate 3: The north elevation, viewed from the north. 2m scale.

Plate 4: The south elevation showing the architectural detailing of the arch and string courses, and the tapered profile of the abutment, viewed from the south. 2m scale.

Plate 5: The parapets viewed from the eastern approach to the bridge, viewed from the southeast. 2m scale.

Plate 6: The northwest abutment, viewed from the east. 2m scale.

Plate 7: The southeast abutment, viewed from the southwest. 2m scale.

Plate 8: The northeast abutment showing the change in profile above the level of the arch, viewed from the northwest. 2m scale.

Appendix 1

Index of digital photographs

Photographic Register
ACD1049 Virginstowe Bridge, Virginstowe, Devon

Archive No	Description	Scale	View from	Photo by	Date
1	The bridge viewed from the road	2m	SE	SDV	05/01/2015
2	The bridge viewed from the road	2m	NE	SDV	05/01/2015
3	The bridge viewed from the road	2m	SW	SDV	05/01/2015
4	General view from the floodplain		SW	SDV	05/01/2015
5	General view from the former line	2m	S	SDV	05/01/2015
6	General view from the former line	2m	S	SDV	05/01/2015
7	The south elevation	2m	S	SDV	05/01/2015
8	The southeast abutment	2m	SW	SDV	05/01/2015
9	The southeast abutment	2m	SW	SDV	05/01/2015
10	The southwest abutment	2m	SE	SDV	05/01/2015
11	The southwest abutment	2m	E	SDV	05/01/2015
12	The south elevation, detailed view of west side	2m	S	SDV	05/01/2015
13	The south elevation, detailed view of the arch		SE	SDV	05/01/2015
14	The south elevation, detailed view of east side	2m	S	SDV	05/01/2015
15	The west side of the arch	2m	E	SDV	05/01/2015
16	The east side of the arch	2m	W	SDV	05/01/2015
17	The northeast abutment	2m	NW	SDV	05/01/2015
18	The northwest abutment	2m	E	SDV	05/01/2015
19	The north elevation	2m	N	SDV	05/01/2015
20	General view from the former line	2m	N	SDV	05/01/2015
21	General view from the former line	2m	N	SDV	05/01/2015
22	The north elevation, detailed view of the arch		N	SDV	05/01/2015
23	The north elevation, detailed view of the west side	2m	N	SDV	05/01/2015
24	The north elevation, detailed view of the east side	2m	N	SDV	05/01/2015

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