BLAGROVE'S BRIDGE, OAKE, SOMERSET

(NGR ST 14603 25900)

Results of historic building recording

Prepared by: Steve Robinson

On behalf of: Dyer and Butler

Document No: ACD1528/2/0

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NGR ST 14603 25900

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Client	Dyer and Butler
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Report Author(s)	Steve Robinson
Contributions	
Checked by	Andrew Passmore
Approved by	Andrew Passmore

The recording was commissioned by Dyer and Butler and managed for them by Thomas Morris and for AC archaeology by Andrew Passmore. The fieldwork was carried out by Steve Robinson and Sarah Cottam. The report was written by Steve Robinson with additional information provided by Andrew Passmore; the report illustrations were prepared by Sarah Cottam and Stella De-Villiers.

The views and recommendations expressed in this report are those of AC archaeology and are presented in good faith on the basis of professional judgement and on information currently available.

Summary

Historic building recording was carried out by AC archaeology in January 2017 prior to the infilling of the void under Blagrove's Bridge, Oake, Somerset (ST 14603 25900). The bridge carries a local road over the former route of the Devon & Somerset (later Great Western Railway) Line between Norton Fitzwarren and Barnstaple. The bridge is a late 1930s replacement for the original, probably late 1860s, bridge, and is associated with the upgrading of the line from one to two tracks. It has stone abutments supporting an iron and steel superstructure. The architecture and materials used is typical of railway bridges of the period.

1. **INTRODUCTION** (Fig. 1)

- 1.1 Historic building recording was carried out by AC archaeology on 4 January 2017 prior to the infilling of the void under Blagrove's Bridge, Oake, Somerset (NGR ST 14603 25900; Fig. 1). The recording was commissioned by the principle contractor, Dyer and Butler, and was required by the Somerset County Council Conservation Officer. Guidance on the scope of work was set out in appendix 1/22 of the Somerset County Council Framework Agreement for the infilling works.
- 1.2 The bridge has no statutory designation but is recorded as a heritage asset on the Somerset Historic Environment Record (no. 36844). The bridge carries Blagrove's Road, which connects Higher Common with Oake, over the former Great Western Railway (GWR) Barnstaple Branch Line. The road principally serves Blagrove's Farm and Oakfield. It is situated at a height of c. 60m aOD and the underlying geology comprises Triassic Mercia mudstone, with no overlying deposits recorded (British Geological Survey online viewer).

2. HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

- 2.1 The Devon & Somerset Railway (later incorporated within the GWR network) extended between the Norton Fitzwarren junction on the GWR Paddington to Exeter line and Barnstaple Station. The act for the railway was passed on the 29th July 1864, but the line did not fully open to Barnstaple until the 1st of November 1873 (Somerset HER 43373). In the interim, the line between Norton Fitzwarren and Wiveliscombe opened on the 8th June 1871 (St John Thomas 1981, 45). It was converted to standard gauge in 1881. Traffic on the line reached its peak in the mid 1930s, but steadily declined up until the mid 1960s. The line closed on the 3rd of October 1966, although Ordnance Survey maps show that the railway tracks were not removed until the 1980s.
- 2.2 Comparison of the 1842 Milverton tithe map and the first edition Ordnance Survey 25-inch map show that the local road layout did not change much following the construction of the railway. Blagrove's Road followed the same route from Higher Common to Black Groves (i.e. Blagrove's) Farm, but must have been rebuilt to pass over the new railway bridge. Early Ordnance Survey maps show that the railway was contained at this point within a cutting. They also depict a single track but pre-closure 1960s maps record that this had been upgraded to two lines; the Great Western Railway Plans and Sections document submitted to Parliament in their 1935-6 session outline the scheme for this upgrading and St John Thomas (1981, 46) confirms that the works took place in the mid 1930s. A mile post is also recorded immediately east of the bridge, marking 168.5 miles from London.
- 2.3 No other historical information relating to the bridge has been located. The only contemporary located document is an 1863-4 plan of the proposed railway (Devon Heritage Centre QS-DP-287), which shows a preliminary route slightly to the north of its final course.

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3. AIMS OF THE WORK

- 3.1 The scheme involved the infilling of the void under the bridge (on the line of the railway) and the construction of embankments either side to support the bridge. The main aim of the work was to prepare an historic building record of the bridge prior to the infilling of the void.
- 3.2 Specific research questions include whether the bridge was originally stone and has been replaced with the present iron and steel structure, and who was the architect/engineer for the bridge.

4. METHODOLOGY (Appendix 1)

- 4.1 All works were undertaken in accordance with the approved Written Scheme of Investigation (Passmore 2016) and the Chartered Institute for Archaeologists' Standard and Guidance for the archaeological investigation and recording of standing buildings or structures (revised 2014), as well as the Somerset County Council Heritage Service Archaeological Handbook. Reference was also made to Historic England's 2016 document Understanding Historic Buildings: A guide to good recording practice.
- **4.2** Documentary research was carried out to search for archive material relating to the railway and more specifically the bridge. This included inspection of historic maps, and a search of published material and national and local repositories.
- **4.3** The survey was prepared in accordance with AC archaeology's *General Site Recording Manual, Version 2*, and was taken to levels 2-3 as set out in *Understanding Historic Buildings: A guide to good recording practice*. The survey comprised:
 - A written description of the bridge and its local context;
 - Annotation of existing survey drawings (ground plan and elevations) to record architectural details, breaks in build and evidence for phasing, significant repairs and locations of any fittings and signage.
 - A colour digital photographic record including the overall character of the bridge, as well
 as detailed views of any architectural features and fixtures and fittings. An index of
 photographs is included as Appendix 1.

5. RESULTS (Fig. 2; Plates 1-8)

- 5.1 The bridge carries the road, which approaches the bridge on an embankment, over the former railway. It comprises a single rectangular plate girder bridge approximately 5.5m wide and with a span of approximately 8.5m (Plate 1). It carries the road at a height of 4.45m above current ground level, the approximate height of the track bed. A pair of stone abutments, situated on the north and south side, support four rolled steel joist girders with 90° rolled steel joist cross bracings supporting the two-way spanning arched buckle plates (Plate 2).
- 5.2 The abutment walls on the north and south side of the bridge comprise up to 11 principal courses of pale cement mortar bonded large rectangular blocks of pitch-faced (inner face) sandstone blocks with the inner corner edges dressed with flat lines. The finish of the masonry of the outer faces is deliberately cruder than that of the inner faces. Both walls form the uppermost section of each corner of the parapet, with the iron parapet plates cut into the four stone sections, and the main carriageway set at a lower height between these parapet piers (Plates 3 and 4). The bridge rests of a rough corbelled course and the above this there is a further projecting course of masonry supporting the parapet piers. Much of the central portion of each abutment wall showed evidence of repointing, probably due to the presence of moisture (from the embankment behind) or water running down the walls. A number of iron

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- cable fittings with ceramic transmission insulators, are still present on both abutment walls and are associated with the signalling on the railway (Plate 5).
- 5.3 The embankment is retained by 0.5m thick flanking walls that are separate from and abut the masonry of the north and south facing abutment walls of the bridge (Plate 6). They are constructed of up to 20 courses of variously sized, pitch-faced finished sandstone blocks, bonded in a pale cement mortar. A single course of red bricks lines the top course of the walls, with some of this brickwork showing evidence of replacement or repair, notably on the east side. In a typical arrangement, the abutment walls are slightly battered towards the embankment and splayed outwards from the bridge.
- 5.4 The parapet comprises iron sheets, held together with rivets, sitting directly on a concrete raft, or slab, which spans the width of the bridge. They are also attached to the base of the bridge superstructure using alternating curved "L"-shaped brackets fixed to the base of the rolled steel joists and straight brackets attached to the ends of short additional 90° rolled steel joists. A bridge reference number "BLE 168 22" (Plate 7) is painted onto the internal face of the stone section of the east side of the parapet at the northern end, and is repeated on the adjacent iron sheet. There is some evidence that the iron sheets had been painted but little of this paint now survives. The current road surface is tarmac and it was not possible to identify any earlier structure below it (Plate 8).

6. COMMENTS

- 6.1 The documentary research and field survey has demonstrated that the present bridge dates to the late 1930s. There was no evidence for an earlier structure within the exposed and visible fabric of the present bridge and its regular construction indicates it was built in a single phase when the line was widened to allow upgrading from a single track to double tracks. The widening of the railway line appears to have resulted in the removal of the earlier bridge and a full rebuild of the extant structure.
- 6.2 A stone-arched bridge over the single track was present at Milverton station (on the same Devon & Somerset Railway Line) in the 1870s (photograph in South Molton Museum; reproduced at www.ehive.com, object number 2059). A photograph taken in 1963 shows that the upgrade works from a single to a double track had extended as far as Milverton and that the replacement bridge there was of a very similar construction as the present Blagrove's Bridge. Based on the evidence at Milverton, it is likely that the earlier Blagrove's Bridge would also have been a single-arched stone structure.
- 6.3 The present bridge is not arched and the use of concrete and iron and steel is consistent with the more utilitarian construction methods of the first half of the 20th century. Comparisons can be made with other regional bridges, which used similar materials. For example, the bridge over the A377 Alphington Road in Exeter is of a very similar scale and design to Blagrove's Bridge albeit more ornate and with brick jack arches supporting the deck, set between the rolled steel joists. Smaller extant and demolished iron/steel rail bridges are/were present on branch lines. One replacement bridge on the line between Newton Abbot and Bovey Tracey has a datestone "1934". Despite the utilitarian nature of the bridge the use of stone abutment walls is common, as is the architectural detailing within the masonry.
- 6.4 The designer and manufacturer of the bridge are not known but the 1936 Plans and Sections drawings were prepared by the Great Western Railway's chief engineer Raymond Carpmael, and given his interest in the use of steel for railway infrastructure it seems possible that he designed the bridge.

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7. REFERENCES

Printed sources

Devon Heritage Centre QS-DP-287 Plan 7 section of the proposed Devon [North] & Somerset Railway, Session 1863-4

Great Western Railway (Additional Powers) Additional Provision, Plans and Sections, February 1936

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Doc. No. AC1528/2/0

Ehive cultural heritage online catalogue www.ehive.com

Somerset Historic Environment Record (online viewer) http://www.somersetheritage.org.uk/



ROJECT

Blagrove's Bridge, Oake, Somerset

TITL

Fig. 1: Site location

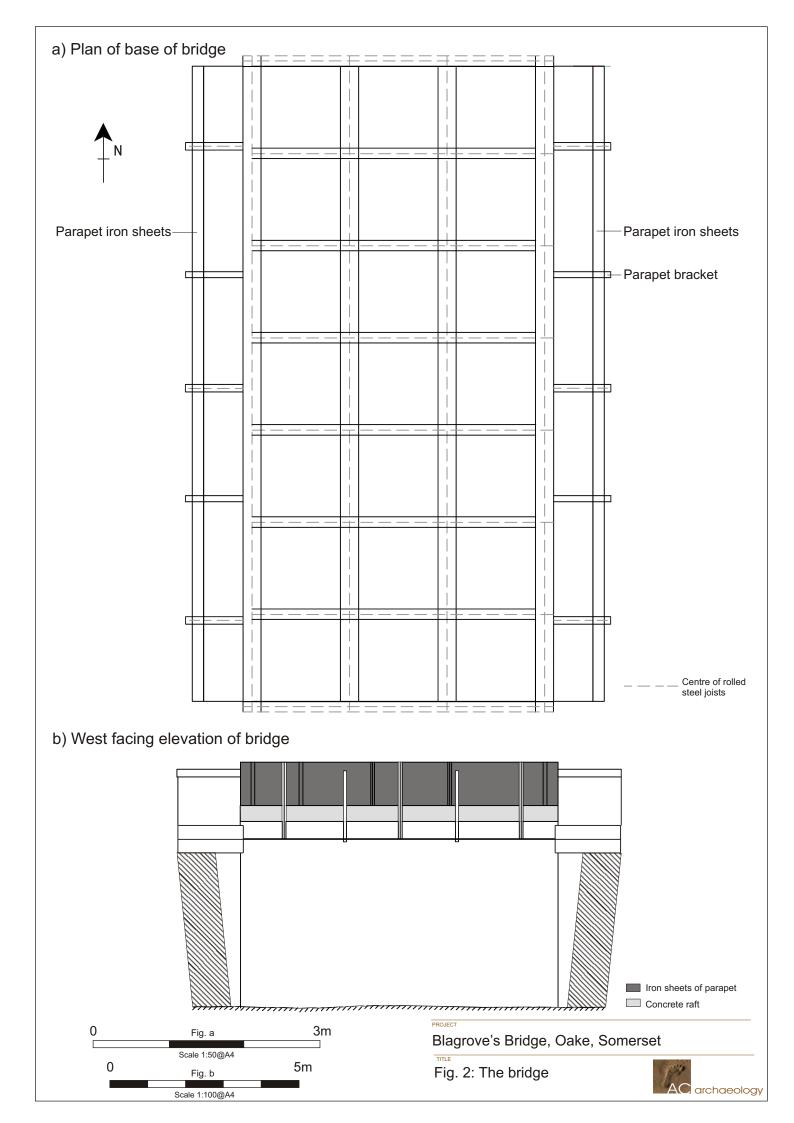




Plate 1: West-facing elevation of bridge (scale 2m)



Plate 3: North-facing elevation of abutment wall (scale 2m)



Plate 2: Detail of underside of the bridge



Plate 4: South-facing elevation of abutment wall (scale 2m)



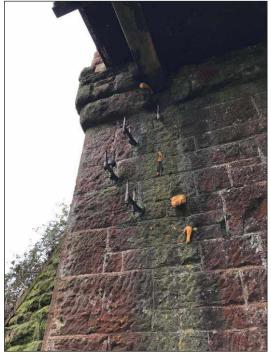


Plate 5: North-facing abutment wall showing cable fittings associated with the former railway



Plate 7: North end of parapet showing the bridge number, viewed from the west (scale 1m)



Plate 6: North-facing elevation of south wall abutment (scale 2m)



Plate 8: General view of the carriageway from the north

Appendix 1 Photographic index AC archaeology

AC archaeology Site Code: ACD1528

Digital Photographic Register

Blagroves Bridge, Oake

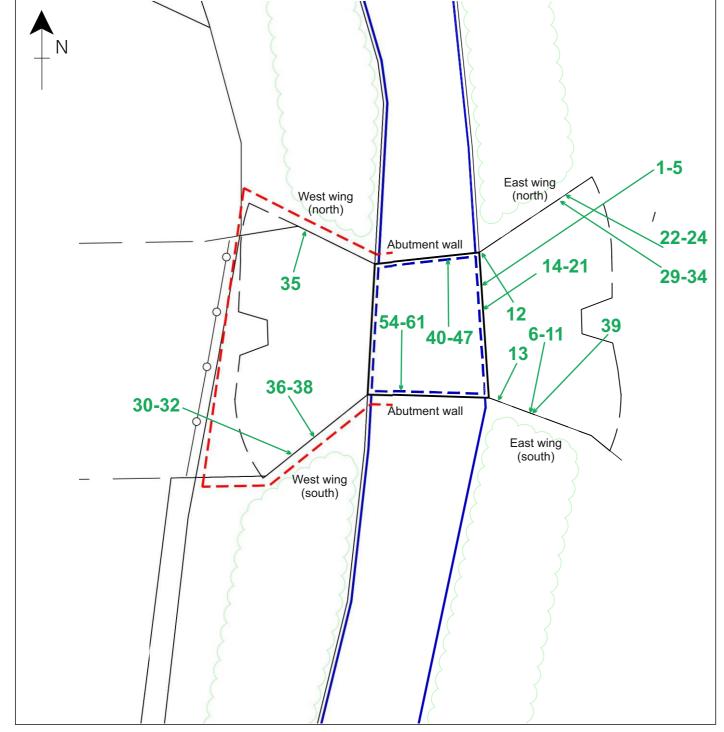
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2	GENERAL VIEW, WEST ELEVATION	2m	SW	SC/SR	04-01-17
3	GENERAL VIEW, WEST ELEVATION	2m	W	SC/SR	04-01-17
4	GENERAL VIEW, WEST ELEVATION	2m	NW	SC/SR	04-01-17
5	GENERAL VIEW, WEST ELEVATION	-	SW	SC/SR	04-01-17
6	SOUTH FACING ELEVATION OF WEST WING	2m	S	SC/SR	04-01-17
7	SOUTH FACING ELEVATION OF WEST WING	2m	S	SC/SR	04-01-17
8	SOUTH FACING ELEVATION OF WEST WING (DETAIL)	-	S	SC/SR	04-01-17
9	SOUTH FACING ELEVATION OF WEST WING (DETAIL)	2m	S	SC/SR	04-01-17
10	SOUTH FACING ELEVATION OF WEST WING	2m	S	SC/SR	04-01-17
11	SOUTH FACING ELEVATION OF WEST WING	2m	S	SC/SR	04-01-17
12	SOUTH FACING ELEVATION OF WEST WING (DETAIL)	2m	W	SC/SR	04-01-17
13	NORTH SIDE OF BRIDGE	2m	W	SC/SR	04-01-17
14	NORTH SIDE OF BRIDGE	2m	W	SC/SR	04-01-17
15	NORTH SIDE OF BRIDGE	2m	W	SC/SR	04-01-17
16	WEST ELEVATION (DETAIL)	2m	W	SC/SR	04-01-17
17	WEST ELEVATION (DETAIL)	2m	W	SC/SR	04-01-17
18	WEST ELEVATION	2m	W	SC/SR	04-01-17
19	SOUTH SIDE OF BRIDGE	2m	W	SC/SR	04-01-17
20	SOUTH SIDE OF BRIDGE	2m	W	SC/SR	04-01-17
21	SOUTH SIDE OF BRIDGE	2m	W	SC/SR	04-01-17
22	DETAIL OF NORTH FACING ELEVATION OF SOUTH WING	2m	N	SC/SR	04-01-17
23	NORTH FACING ELEVATION OF SOUTH WING	2m	N	SC/SR	04-01-17
24	DETAIL OF NORTH FACING ELEVATION OF SOUTH WING	2m	N	SC/SR	04-01-17
25	GENERAL VIEW, EAST ELEVATION	2m	Е	SC/SR	04-01-17
26	GENERAL VIEW, EAST ELEVATION	2m	Е	SC/SR	04-01-17
27	GENERAL VIEW, EAST ELEVATION	2m	Е	SC/SR	04-01-17
28	DETAILED OF EAST ELEVATION, NORTH SIDE	2m	E	SC/SR	04-01-17
29	SOUTH FACING ELEVATION OF EAST WING	2m	S	SC/SR	04-01-17
30	SOUTH FACING ELEVATION OF EAST	2m	S	SC/SR	04-01-17

Archive No	Description	Scale	View From	Photo By	Date
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31	SOUTH FACING ELEVATION OF EAST	2m	S	SC/SR	04-01-17
	WING (WITH MODERN REPAIR)				
32	SOUTH FACING ELEVATION OF EAST	2m	S	SC/SR	04-01-17
	WING (WITH MODERN REPAIR)				
33	DETAIL OF SOUTH FACING	2m	S	SC/SR	04-01-17
	ELEVATION OF EAST WING				
34	DETAIL OF SOUTH FACING	2m	S	SC/SR	04-01-17
	ELEVATION OF EAST WING			<u> </u>	
35	GENERAL VIEW OF NORTH FACING	2m	N	SC/SR	04-01-17
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36	SOUTH FACING ELEVATION OF EAST	2m	S	SC/SR	04-01-17
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37	SOUTH FACING ELEVATION OF EAST	2m	S	SC/SR	04-01-17
20	WING (WITH MODERN REPAIR)	2		66/65	04.04.47
38	SOUTH FACING ELEVATION OF EAST	2m	S	SC/SR	04-01-17
20	WING (WITH MODERN REPAIR)	2	1	cc/cp	04.04.47
39	GENERAL VIEW OF NORTH FACING	2m	N	SC/SR	04-01-17
40	ELEVATION EAST WING	2	N.	CC/CD	04.04.47
40	NORTH FACING ELEVATION OF	2m	N	SC/SR	04-01-17
41	ABUTMENT WALL	2m	NI	CC/CD	04-01-17
41	NORTH FACING ELEVATION OF	2m	N	SC/SR	04-01-17
42	ABUTMENT WALL NORTH FACING ELEVATION OF	2m	N	SC/SR	04-01-17
42	ABUTMENT WALL	2111	IN .	3C/3N	04-01-17
43	NORTH FACING ELEVATION OF	2m	N	SC/SR	04-01-17
43	ABUTMENT WALL	2111	IN .	30/31	04-01-17
44	NORTH FACING ELEVATION OF	2m	N	SC/SR	04-01-17
77	ABUTMENT WALL	2111		30/310	04 01 17
45	NORTH FACING ELEVATION OF	2m	N	SC/SR	04-01-17
13	ABUTMENT WALL	2111	'	30,311	010117
46	NORTH FACING ELEVATION OF	2m	N	SC/SR	04-01-17
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47	NORTH FACING ELEVATION OF		N	SC/SR	04-01-17
	ABUTMENT WALL WITH				
	UNDERSIDE OF CARRIAGEWAY				
48	DETAIL SHOWING FITTING (NAIL)		E	SC/SR	04-01-17
	ON NORTH FACING ABUTMENT				
	WALL				
49	DETAIL SHOWING FITTING (NAIL)			SC/SR	04-01-17
	ON NORTH FACING ABUTMENT				
	WALL				
50	DETAIL SHOWING FITTING (NAIL)			SC/SR	04-01-17
	ON NORTH FACING ABUTMENT				
	WALL				
51	DETAIL SHOWING FITTING (NAIL)			SC/SR	04-01-17
	ON NORTH FACING ABUTMENT				
	WALL				
52	DETAIL OF REPOINTING ON NORTH		N	SC/SR	04-01-17

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55 SOUTH FACING ABUTMENT WALL 2m S SC/S	
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56	'SR 04-01-17
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57 SOUTH FACING ABUTMENT WALL 2m S SC/	SR 04-01-17
AND WING	
58 SOUTH FACING ABUTMENT WALL 2m S SC/	SR 04-01-17
AND WING	
59 SOUTH FACING ABUTMENT WALL 2m S SC/	SR 04-01-17
AND WING	/
60 SOUTH FACING ABUTMENT WALL 2m S SC/	
61 SOUTH FACING ABUTMENT WALL 2m S SC/	
62 SOUTH FACING ABUTMENT WALL 2m S SC/	SR 04-01-17
SHOWING IRON FITTINGS	/op
63 SOUTH FACING ABUTMENT WALL 2m S SC/	SR 04-01-17
SHOWING IRON FITTINGS	/CD 04 04 47
64 NORTH FACING ABUTMENT WALL N SC/	SR 04-01-17
SHOWING CABLE FITTINGS	(CD 04 04 47
65 NORTH FACING ABUTMENT WALL N SC/	'SR 04-01-17
SHOWING CABLE FITTINGS	(CD 04 04 47
66 NORTH FACING ABUTMENT WALL N SC/	'SR 04-01-17
SHOWING CABLE FITTINGS 67 NORTH FACING ABUTMENT WALL N SC/	SR 04-01-17
67 NORTH FACING ABUTMENT WALL N SC/S	SK 04-01-17
68 NORTH FACING ABUTMENT WALL N SC/	SR 04-01-17
SHOWING CABLE FITTINGS	3h 04-01-17
69 DETAIL OF UNDERSIDE OF N SC/	'SR 04-01-17
CARRIAGEWAY	3N 04-01-17
70 DETAIL OF UNDERSIDE OF N SC/	'SR 04-01-17
CARRIAGEWAY	JN 04-01-17
71 DETAIL OF UNDERSIDE OF N SC/	'SR 04-01-17
CARRIAGEWAY	5K 04 01 17
72 DETAIL OF UNDERSIDE OF N SC/	'SR 04-01-17
CARRIAGEWAY	0.011/
73 DETAIL OF UNDERSIDE OF N SC/	'SR 04-01-17
CARRIAGEWAY	0.011,
74 DETAIL OF UNDERSIDE OF N SC/	'SR 04-01-17
CARRIAGEWAY	
75 NORTH END OF BRIDGE PARAPET, 1m W SC/	'SR 04-01-17
EAST SIDE WITH BRIDGE NO.	
76 DETAIL OF EAST SIDE IRON 1m W SC/	SR 04-01-17
PARAPET	
77 DETAIL OF EAST SIDE IRON 1m W SC/	SR 04-01-17
PARAPET	

Archive No	Description	Scale	View From	Photo By	Date
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79	DETAIL OF NORTH END OF PARAPET	1m	NW	SC/SR	04-01-17
80	SOUTH END OF BRIDGE PARAPET, WEST SIDE	1m	Е	SC/SR	04-01-17
81	SOUTH END OF BRIDGE PARAPET, WEST SIDE	1m	E	SC/SR	04-01-17
82	DETAIL OF WEST SIDE IRON PARAPET	1m	E	SC/SR	04-01-17
83	DETAIL OF WEST SIDE IRON PARAPET	1m	E	SC/SR	04-01-17
84	DETAIL OF WEST SIDE IRON PARAPET, NORTH END	1m	E	SC/SR	04-01-17
85	DETAIL OF SOUTH END OF BRIDGE PARAPET, WEST SIDE	1m	E	SC/SR	04-01-17
86	DETAIL OF SOUTH END OF BRIDGE PARAPET, WEST SIDE, SHOWING CONCRETE RAFT	1m	E	SC/SR	04-01-17
87	DETAIL OF SOUTH END OF BRIDGE PARAPET, WEST SIDE, SHOWING CONCRETE RAFT	1m	E	SC/SR	04-01-17
88	DETAIL OF SOUTH END OF BRIDGE PARAPET, WEST SIDE, SHOWING CONCRETE RAFT	1m	E	SC/SR	04-01-17
89	DETAIL OF SOUTH END OF BRIDGE PARAPET, EAST SIDE, SHOWING CONCRETE RAFT	1m	NW	SC/SR	04-01-17
90	DETAIL OF SOUTH END OF BRIDGE PARAPET, EAST SIDE, SHOWING CONCRETE RAFT	1m	NW	SC/SR	04-01-17
91	DETAIL OF SOUTH END OF BRIDGE PARAPET, EAST SIDE, SHOWING CONCRETE RAFT	1m	NW	SC/SR	04-01-17
92	CONCRETE BASE TO PARAPET, NORTH END	1m	NE	SC/SR	04-01-17
93	CONCRETE BASE TO PARAPET, NORTH END	1m	NE	SC/SR	04-01-17
94	CONCRETE BASE TO PARAPET, NORTH END	1m	NE	SC/SR	04-01-17
95	DETAIL OF SOUTH END BRIDGE PARAPET, EAST SIDE	1m	W	SC/SR	04-01-17
96	DETAIL OF SOUTH END BRIDGE PARAPET, EAST SIDE	1m	W	SC/SR	04-01-17
97	DETAIL OF SOUTH END BRIDGE PARAPET, EAST SIDE	1m	W	SC/SR	04-01-17
98	DETAIL OF SOUTH END BRIDGE PARAPET, EAST SIDE	1m	W	SC/SR	04-01-17
99	DETAIL OF SOUTH END BRIDGE PARAPET, EAST SIDE	1m	W	SC/SR	04-01-17
100	DETAIL OF SOUTH END OF WEST	1m	Е	SC/SR	04-01-17

Archive No	Description	Scale	View From	Photo By	Date
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	PARAPET, WEST SIDE				
102	LOOKING OVER NORTH END	-		SC/SR	04-01-17
	PARAPET, WEST SIDE SHOWING				
	STRUCTURAL RELATIONSHIPS				
103	LOOKING OVER NORTH END	-		SC/SR	04-01-17
	PARAPET, WEST SIDE SHOWING				
	STRUCTURAL RELATIONSHIPS				
104	GENERAL VIEW OF CARRIAGEWAY	1m	S	SC/SR	04-01-17
105	VIEW ALONG LINE OF FORMER		W	SC/SR	04-01-17
	RAILWAY LOOKING EAST				
106	VIEW ALONG LINE OF FORMER	-	W	SC/SR	04-01-17
	RAILWAY LOOKING EAST				
107	VIEW ALONG LINE OF FORMER	-	E	SC/SR	04-01-17
	RAILWAY LOOKING WEST				
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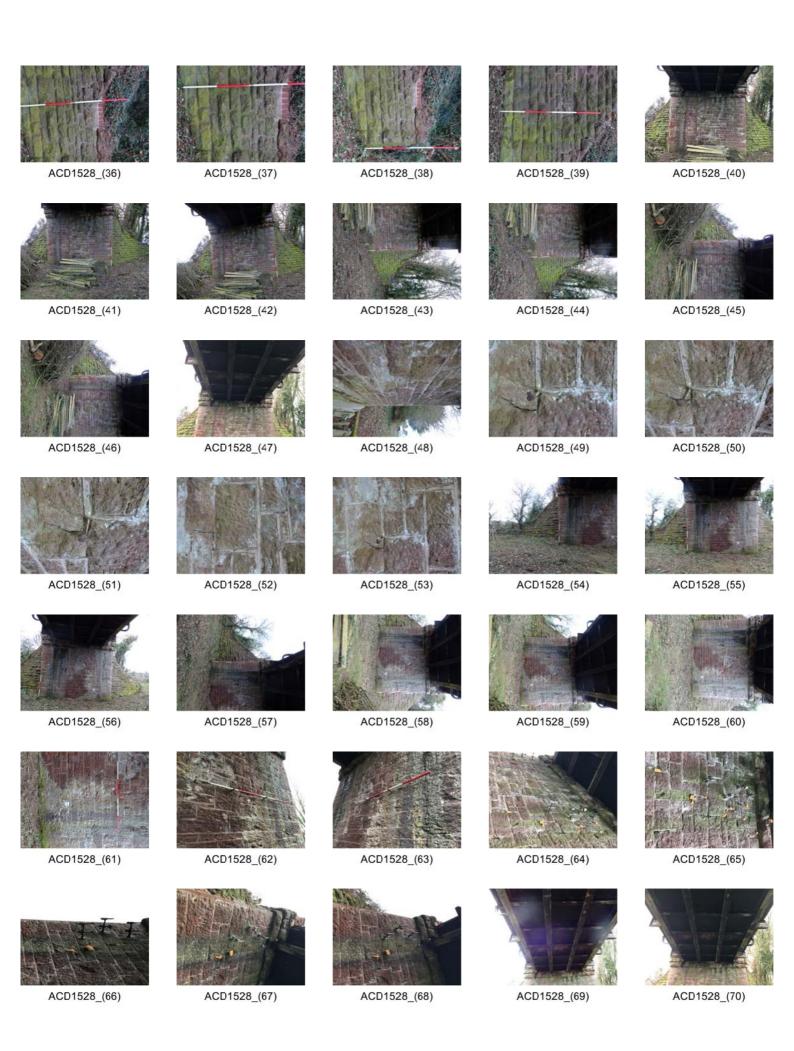


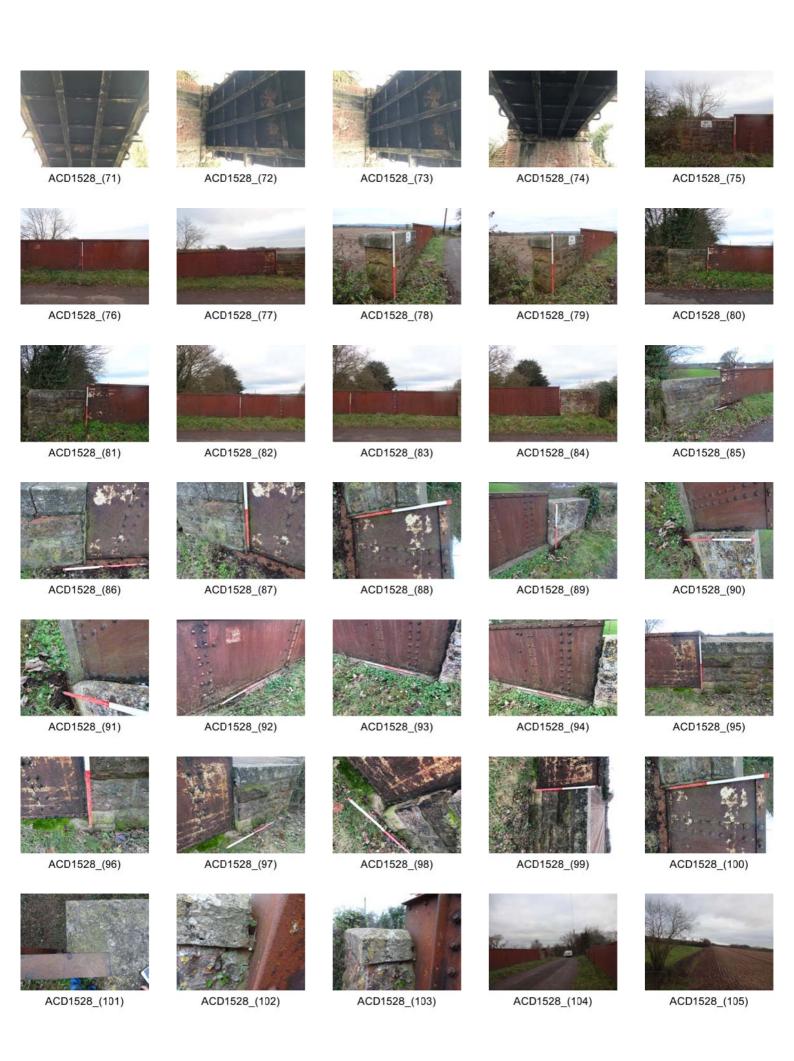
80-<u>85</u> 69-74 Underside of carriageway East parapet West parapet 105-106 107 **75-79** 86-103 Structural details 108

Photos taken at ground level

Photos taken from the carriageway













ACD1528_(107)



ACD1528_(108)

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