

# Thorney Halt Structural Infilling Works Thorney Somerset

Historic Building Recording Report

March 2017, updated June 2017





# Thorney Halt Structural Infilling Works Thorney Somerset


for

**C1 project code: C1/SBR/17/TTS**

**Crestmoor Construction Ltd on behalf of  
Somerset County Council**

## REPORT

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Date	29/03/17

Approved by	Richard McConnell, Director
Signed	
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## ARCHAEOLOGICAL DETAILS

Client project/scheme ref.	Thorney Halt Infilling Works (Bridge No. 4220303)
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Local Planning Authority	South Somerset District Council
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## Summary

*Context One Heritage and Archaeology Ltd was instructed to carry out a programme of historic building recording associated with bridge infilling works at Thorney Halt, Thorney, Somerset. The project was commissioned by Crestmoor Construction Ltd (the appointed contractor for the works) on behalf of Somerset County Council (SCC).*

*The historic building recording was requested by Somerset Heritage Centre, as the bridge (a recorded non-statutory heritage asset) is subject to substantial change resulting from the infilling works.*

*The mid-19<sup>th</sup> century railway bridge at Thorney is the only example of a plate girder bridge along the former Durston to Yeovil line, which opened in 1853 as one of the first branch lines of the Bristol and Exeter main line. Consequently, the historic building recording provides an important record of this unique structure and allows observations about the fabric and its historic significance. The installation of the railway line across the Somerset levels is a reminder of a bygone age where rural communities were, for the first time, provided with an effective means of connecting with the outside world. This widened the horizons of the rural population, for both leisure and business, and provided a more economic means of transporting goods. The parts of the bridge that would be visible to the passing passenger were designed to be aesthetically pleasing reflecting the pride of the Victorian era as they entered a new age of travel. No doubt demand led to the installation of Thorney and Kingsbury Halt in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, and the subsequent establishment of the Nestlé factory adjacent to the railway in 1932 is an example of how the countryside must have attracted investment opportunities and provided alternative sources of employment for the rural population.*

## Contents

Summary.....	1
1. Introduction.....	2
2. Site and Historical Background.....	2
3. Archaeological aims and research objectives.....	3
4. Methodology.....	3
5. Results.....	5
6. Discussion.....	14
7. Archive.....	14
8. Bibliography.....	15
Appendix 1: Photographic record.....	20

## Figures

Figure 1. Site setting.....	16
Figure 2. North elevation.....	17
Figure 3. South elevation.....	18
Figure 4. Photographic survey viewpoints.....	19

## Plates

Plate 1. Thorney Halt 1962, looking N (photo by John Cornelius).....	3
Plate 2. Nestle Dairy siding in 1962, looking SSE (photo by John Cornelius).....	3

Plate 3. Thorney Halt & Nestle Dairy siding in 1964, looking NW (photo by John Cornelius) .....	3
Plate 4. South elevation, looking NW (2m scale) .....	5
Plate 5. View along road above bridge, looking SW .....	6
Plate 6. North side of bridge parapet from road, looking N .....	6
Plate 7. South side of bridge parapet from road, looking ENE .....	6
Plate 8. North elevation, looking SE (2m scale) .....	7
Plate 9. South elevation with platform, looking NW (2m scale) .....	7
Plate 10. West side of north elevation, looking SE (2m scale) .....	8
Plate 11. West side of south elevation, looking NW (2m scale) .....	8
Plate 12. North elevation, looking SE (2m scale) .....	8
Plate 13. East side of south elevation, looking NW (2m scale) .....	8
Plate 14. West abutment & platform, looking SW (2m scale) .....	9
Plate 15. East abutment & platform, looking NE (2m scale) .....	9
Plate 16. Underside & parapet, looking NW .....	10
Plate 17. Underside, looking SW .....	10
Plate 18. Underside, looking NE .....	10
Plate 19. Benchmark .....	10
Plate 20. Former Nestle building with platform, siding & loading ramp, looking SE .....	11
Plate 21. Former Nestle loading ramp, looking ENE .....	12
Plate 22. View from bridge showing former railway line & former Nestle building, looking SE .....	12
Plate 23. South elevation following infilling with former Nestle siding, looking NW .....	13
Plate 24. South elevation following infilling, looking NW .....	123

*Front cover image: Thorney Halt, then and now (1962 & 2017)*

## 1. Introduction

- 1.1 Context One Heritage and Archaeology (C1) was instructed to carry out a programme of historic building recording associated with bridge infilling works at Thorney Halt, Thorney, Somerset (the 'Site') (**Figure 1**). The project was commissioned by Crestmoor Construction Ltd (the appointed contractor for the works) on behalf of Somerset County Council (SCC).
- 1.2 The 'Preservation by Record' was requested by Mr Nic Wall (Conservation Officer, Somerset Heritage Centre, SCC), as set-out in Appendix 1/22 of the specification for the structural infilling. The rationale for the request is that the bridge (a recorded non-statutory heritage asset) is subject to substantial change resulting from the works. As detailed in paragraphs 5 and 6, the recording equates to a Level 2/3 survey as set out in *Understanding Historic Buildings – A guide to good recording practice* (Historic England, 2016).
- 1.3 The programme of archaeological works comprised four elements: historic building survey in advance of the works; research, analysis and report production (this document); photographic record of the completed works (added to this document); and project data archiving.
- 1.4 The requirement follows advice by Central Government as set out in paragraph 141 the *National Planning Policy Framework* (NPPF) (DCLG 2012). This states:

*'Local planning authorities should make information about the significance of the historic environment gathered as part of plan-making or development management publicly accessible. They should also require developers to record and advance understanding of the significance of any heritage assets to be lost (wholly or in part) in a manner proportionate to their importance and the impact, and to make this evidence (and any archive generated) publicly accessible.'* (DCLG 2012, para 141).

## 2. Site and Historical Background

- 2.1 The Site (centred on NGR ST 42810 23110) is located on the route of the former railway line running south-east to north-west c. 200m to the north-east of Thorney village, and immediately south-west of Thorney Lakes Caravan and Camping Park (**Figure 1**). Thorney is situated on the Somerset Levels, approximately 3 miles south of the small town of Langport. Thorney Halt comprises the former railway cutting spanned by Thorney Bridge, which carries a single carriageway unclassified road from Thorney to Langport, with a railway platform underneath. Prior to the commencement of the infilling works the former railway cutting was overgrown.
- 2.2 The Pre-Construction Information prepared by Parson Brinckerhoff provides the following information. Thorney Halt is a single skew span, plate girder bridge carrying a single carriageway road measuring 6.1m wide and flanked by grass verges. The skew span of the bridge measures c. 11.85m with an abutments length of c. 8.95m, and the distance from the ground level to underside of the bottom flange varies between 3.12m and 4.66, due to the presence of an extant railway platform. Attached to the north elevation is an existing 0.38m duct. Thorney Halt is owned by the Highways England Historic Railway Estate, although SCC are responsible for ensuring the structure can carry the bridge loading.
- 2.3 Thorney Halt served the Durston to Yeovil railway from 1927 to 1964. The main Bristol to Exeter Railway (B&ER) (**HER no. 12964**) was authorized in 1836 and engineered by Brunel, starting in the north and reaching Taunton in 1842. In 1845 permission was granted to provide one of the first branch lines (**HER no. 56978**) from Durston (on the main line) to Yeovil, which at the time was not served by a railway. Opening on 1 October 1853, the single-track broad gauge line ran from a junction at Durston, through Langport, Martock, and terminated at Yeovil's Hendford station situated on the edge of the town (Maggs 2007, 85). An extension through to Yeovil Penn Mill was opened on 2 February 1857, to join up with the Wiltshire, Somerset and Weymouth Railway (*ibid*). which ultimately became part of the Great Western Railway together with the B&ER (Mitchell and Smith 1999). On 1 June 1861 Yeovil Town Joint Station opened, with Hendford becoming a goods stop (Maggs 2007, 85). The Somerset Historic Environment Record entry for Thorney and Kingsbury Halt (**HER no. 18392**) states it opened in June 1928, although this differs from the date suggested by Maggs of 28 November 1927, the concrete parts of the platform cast at the Great Western Railway's Taunton works

(Maggs 2007, 86). The platform was sheltered beneath the bridge (**Plate 1**), a flight of wooden stairs leading down from the north side of the bridge to the platform beneath, with a small office situated on the platform underneath the bridge (**Front cover**). To the south of the halt a siding served Nestlé's Dairy (for the Nestlé and Anglo Swiss Condensed Milk Company), opening in 1932 (*ibid.*, 87) (**Plates 2 & 3**). The line closed with effect from 15 June 1964, the last passenger trains running on Saturday 13 June (*ibid*) and goods traffic ceased on 6 July 1964. The southern part of the railway line was converted into a road in the 1980's, and connects Yeovil with the A303 to the south of Martock. Several bridges along the former railway line are recorded on the Somerset HER however they are all stone-built arched structures, often spanning cuttings through which the railway once passed.



Plate 1. Thorney Halt 1962, looking N (photo by John Cornelius)



Plate 2. Nestlé Dairy siding in 1962, looking SSE (photo by John Cornelius)



Plate 3. Thorney Halt & Nestlé Dairy siding in 1964, looking NW (photo by John Cornelius)

### 3. Archaeological aims and research objectives

3.1 The principal aims of the historic building recording were to:

- provide an accurate record of the structural remains prior to infilling works;
- record any significant details of the structural remains, where present;
- provide an account of the infilling works
- provide a photographic record of the structural remains on completion of the infilling works;

3.2 The research objectives were to:

- document the appearance, date and development of Thorney Halt prior to the historic fabric being permanently covered;
- document the infilling works for future interest

### 4. Methodology

4.1 C1 adhered to the *Code of Conduct* of the Chartered Institute for Archaeologists (CIfA, 2014) and the *Regulations for Professional Conduct* (2014, revised 2015) at all times during the course of the investigation.



The current Health and Safety legislation and guidelines were followed on Site. The historic building survey conformed to the *Standard and Guidance for the archaeological investigation and recording of standing buildings or structures* published by the ClfA (2014b) and *Understanding Historic Buildings – A guide to good recording practice* (Historic England 2016). The Statement also accords with the *Somerset County Council Heritage Service Archaeological Handbook* (2011).

- 4.2 The building survey conformed to recording Level 2 with elements of Level 3 as set out in *Understanding Historic Buildings – A guide to good recording practice* (Historic England, 2016). This states:

*'This is a descriptive record, made in circumstances similar to those of Level 1 but when more information is needed. It may be made of a building which is judged not to require any fuller record, or it may serve to gather data for a wider project. Both the exterior and the interior will be viewed, described and photographed. The examination of the building will produce an analysis of its development and use and the record will include the conclusions reached, but it will not discuss in detail the evidence on which this analysis is based. A plan and sometimes other drawings may be made but the drawn record will normally not be comprehensive and may be tailored to the scope of a wider project'. (para 5.2.1)*

*'Level 3 is an analytical record, and will comprise an introductory description followed by a systematic account of the building's origins, development and use. The record will include an account of the evidence on which the analysis has been based, allowing the validity of the record to be re-examined in detail. It will also include all drawn and photographic records that may be required to illustrate the building's appearance and structure and to support an historical analysis'. (para 5.3.1)*

*'The information contained in the record will for the most part have been obtained through an examination of the building itself. The documentary sources used are likely to be those which are most readily accessible, such as historic Ordnance Survey maps, trade directories and other published sources. The record may contain some discussion of the building's broader stylistic or historical context and importance. It may form part of a wider survey of a number of buildings which will aim at an overall synthesis, such as a thematic or regional publication, when the use of additional source material may be necessary as well as a broader historical and architectural discussion of the buildings as a group. A Level 3 record may also be appropriate when the fabric of a building is under threat, but time or resources are insufficient to allow for detailed documentary research, or where the scope for such research is limited'. (para 5.3.2)*

- 4.3 Prior to the survey, a literature review was carried out to establish the history of Thorney Halt and the railway which it served. The Historic Environment Record entry for the Site was also consulted.
- 4.4 The historic building survey was carried out on 23 February 2017 during dry and bright weather conditions. The vegetation was cleared by the contractor on the previous day, for a distance of up to c. 10m to the north of the bridge, and for the entire area south of the bridge where the Site compound was located. This meant the survey was free of obstacles.
- 4.5 The photographic survey comprised digital images in .jpg format captured using a Nikon D40X 10.1 megapixel digital SLR camera fitted with an 18-55mm lens. Images were captured on a 4GB SD card on site and were subsequently transferred to the C1 Cloud server for storage. Digital photographs were taken in accordance with Historic England's guidelines for Digital Image and Capture (<https://www.historicengland.org.uk/images-books/publications/digital-image-capture-and-file-storage/>). The images set the structure in context, with record shots of each elevation, the underside of the bridge, the carriageway, and illustrating architectural details featuring an appropriately sized scale. The photographic survey was accompanied by observational notes/descriptions and the completion of a photographic register. Plans and elevations provided by the architect were used as a basis for annotation.
- 4.6 All photographs have been incorporated into this report. Information recorded in the photographic register is replicated in the photo captions.
- 4.7 Following completion of the survey, the infilling works got underway and were completed in May 2017. The scope of these works was set-out by Parson Brinckerhoff within the Pre-Construction Information. In summary, the intention was to fill the void beneath the bridge to reinforce the structure and remove it from the bridge network. This included:

- Placement of granular fill beneath the structure to fill the void, with foamed concrete used to fill any remaining void spaces including beneath the deck where compaction of the fill is not practicable
- Provision of 0.60m diameter concrete pipe culvert to allow passage of small mammals
- Construction of earth embankments, including geotextiles, erosion matting, grass seeding and the like
- The Principal Contractor was responsible for taking progress photographs at regular intervals during the course of the site works as detailed in Appendix 1/22 'Progress Photographs'. C1 were not appointed for this element of the work.

4.8 C1 returned to the Site on 9 June 2017 to take record shots of the completed infilling works.

## 5. Results

### Pre-work survey

- 5.1 The north elevation of the bridge is reproduced in **Figure 2** and the south elevation in **Figure 3**, with the different constructions indicated by colour and a selection of plates displayed on the drawings. The remaining plates are interspersed with the text. Viewpoints of the digital photographs taken during the survey are shown on **Figure 4**. Some of the technical descriptions and measurements provided in the following text are derived from the Pre-Construction Information prepared by Parson Brinckerhoff.
- 5.2 Thorney Bridge is constructed of a variety of materials, each type serving a purpose. The parapets above the bridge deck (flanking the road) comprise 8 panels of riveted steel measuring c. 1.30m in height, supported by exterior stiffeners consisting of pairs of angles and tapered gusset plates bolted to the top flange of the main beam (**Plate 4**). On either side of the deck, each parapet is flanked by a masonry pier and wall which continues for a short distance alongside the road. These are constructed of red and grey bricks laid as English bond (alternating rows of headers then footers) capped with concrete coping (**Plates 5, 6 & 7**). The original wooden gate that once provided access to the platform stairs remain entangled in dense vegetation on the north-west side of the deck (**Plate 6**). The strain on the bridge superstructure is evident from undulations in the tarmac of the deck and from gaps that have appeared between the steel parapet and the flanking brick piers (**Plate 8**).



Plate 4. South elevation, looking NW (2m scale)





Plate 5. View along road above bridge, looking SW



Plate 6. North side of bridge parapet from road, looking N



Plate 7. South side of bridge parapet from road, looking ENE

- 5.3 The steel panels of each parapet are situated above two main steel beams of riveted steel plate girders measuring 1.142m deep and spanning masonry abutments (**Plates 8 & 9**). The upper parts of the abutment quoins each comprise two monumental granite lintels, the upper ones chamfered at the edges and projecting slightly above the lower ones. Beneath the lintels, the quoins are faced with brick laid as English bond, although each one differs slightly in form and appearance. The quoins on the west side are almost entirely of red brick and have square profiles (**Plates 10 & 11**), while those on the east side are of grey bricks intermingled with red bricks and have curved profiles formed by rounded bricks (**Plates 12 & 13**).





Plate 8. North elevation, looking SE (2m scale)



Plate 9. South elevation with platform, looking NW (2m scale)

- 5.4 Construction on either side of the abutments, up the embankments, is also variable. To the east side of the north-east quoin the wall is entirely faced in brick, separated from the brick parapet by a chamfered granite string-course (**Plate 12**). On the opposite side, the brickwork gives way to large coursed white lias rubble also with chamfered granite stringcourse above (**Plate 10**). Within the north embankments, two large concrete



buttresses with rounded tops adjoin the north elevation, supporting the service pipe (duct) which runs just above the bridge deck (**Plate 8, 10 & 12**). In the south elevation, the masonry of the embankment comprises coursed white lias rubble with chamfered granite string-courses above (**Plates 11 & 13**). The abutment walls are predominantly constructed of approximately equally sized large coursed white lias blocks, the edges of every block chipped off so that they appear to protrude (**Plates 14 & 15**). This gives way to the brickwork of the quoins and upper part of the walls, again constructed using English bond. At the top centre of each abutment wall is a monumental chamfered granite block, coinciding with the change in angle of the brickwork.



Plate 10. West side of north elevation, looking SE (2m scale)



Plate 11. West side of south elevation, looking NW (2m scale)



Plate 12. North elevation, looking SE (2m scale)



Plate 13. East side of south elevation, looking NW (2m scale)





Plate 14. West abutment & platform, looking SW (2m scale)



Plate 15. East abutment & platform, looking NE (2m scale)

- 5.5 The underside of the bridge deck is constructed of a series of semi-circular jack arches faced with red and some grey brick, separated by 6.02m long transverse beams faced with riveted longitudinal iron plates (**Plate 16**). The four central arches run through the entire width of the bridge, while the two arches on each side of the central arches are tapering, foreshortened by the bridge skew. The outer arches consist of a very narrow strip, while the adjacent arches start out as full width before narrowing where they coincide with the abutment walls, at which point the angle of the brick work becomes diagonal (**Plates 17 & 18**).



Plate 16. Underside & parapet, looking NW



Plate 17. Underside, looking SW



Plate 18. Underside, looking NE

- 5.6 An Ordnance Survey benchmark plaque is in the eastern abutment wall, 0.20m in from the south-east quoin and positioned above the two lower courses of white lias (**Plates 15 & 19**). The plaque is embedded in the brickwork and records a height of 249 (feet). The concrete supports for the halt platform ran through the west side of the bridge, extending from the west abutment wall by c. 5.00m and therefore taking up more than half the width of the bridge span (**Plates 4 & 14**). The concrete slabs that once formed the platform surface were no doubt removed after the line was closed, also removing traces of the office and the wooden steps leading down from the road to the platform.



Plate 19. Benchmark





Plate 20. Former Nestlé building with platform, siding & loading ramp, looking SE

- 5.7 To the south of the bridge the former Nestlé building is extant, now used as business premises. The platform and over shelter of the building remain intact (**Plate 20**), complete with loading ramp on the north side of the building (**Plate 21**). Comparisons between the 1962 photograph (**Plate 2**) and an image taken from the same point on the bridge during the present survey (**Plate 22**), allow the location of the siding to be pinpointed on the east side of the former Nestlé building.





Plate 21. Former Nestle loading ramp, looking ENE



Plate 22. View from bridge showing former railway line & former Nestle building, looking SE

#### Completion survey

- 5.8 A photographic record of the completed works comprised photographs of the south elevation. The north elevation was previously accessible by passing beneath the bridge, with no access from the road. The juxtaposition of the former railway line, bridge and former Nestle siding remains intact (**Plate 23**). While the



stone abutments are now largely obscured, the most significant evidential element of the bridge, the iron parapet is largely visible with only the lowest part of the plates obscured beneath the bank (**Plate 24**). The brick parapets alongside the road stand above the level of the bank.



Plate 23. South elevation following infilling with former Nestle siding, looking NW



Plate 24. South elevation following infilling, looking NW

## 6. Discussion

- 6.1 The infilling works at Thorney Halt have provided a unique opportunity to carry out historic recording of the bridge. Excepting the bridge deck, which carries the road, much of the structure and the adjoining former Nestlé siding have, until the recent clearance works ahead of the infilling, been obscured by dense vegetation. The bridge was constructed by 1853, when the line opened. This provided a link between the Bristol to Exeter Railway at Durston to Yeovil town, and soon after to the Wiltshire, Somerset and Weymouth Railway, and ultimately the Great Western Railway. The bridge typifies Victorian engineering and construction techniques, and the survey provides a record that may in the future contribute to a corpus of information about the redundant structures of the nation's lost railways. There is also some extant structural evidence relating to the installation of the halt in 1927 and 1928, however no further phases of development were noted beyond the inevitable dismantling following the closure of the line in 1964.
- 6.2 The survey was primarily carried out to provide a record of the bridge, as the lower parts of the elevations, the abutments and the underside will be permanently infilled and covered. Despite being a utilitarian structure, it is possible to make several observations from the study. In addition to the steel components, which may have been brought to the site on the newly built railway line, the bridge incorporates white lias, brick and granite. White lias is a rare limestone, in contrast to blue lias, that is still quarried in the Langport area. The granite would have been transported from Devon or Cornwall, the size of the blocks indicating an effective means of transportation must have been in place. This supports the theory that the railway was constructed in advance of the bridge. It is interesting to note the curved profiles of the quoins on the eastern side of the bridge, where the trains would have passed close to the wall. Together with the chamfered impostes at the top of the quoins and the special treatment of the lias facing to the abutments, the bridge was designed to be aesthetically pleasing to passing passengers.
- 6.3 The structure represents a single phase of construction, the brickwork using the same brick type and bonding pattern (English bond). Only the concrete coping stones on the brick parapets flanking the road are a later addition, probably replacing eroded coping stones. The installation of a platform to form Thorney and Kingsbury Halt did not necessitate any changes to the bridge fabric. The platform was installed underneath, utilizing the existing shelter of the bridge. It comprised concrete slabs resting on concrete supports, the latter still extant at the time of the survey, cast at the Great Western Railway's Taunton works (Maggs 2007, 86). The platform sloped down at either end, and a small wooden office (resembling a shed) was in the centre directly beneath the bridge. Behind the concrete components, the platform was infilled and covered with hardcore, housing the halt sign and four ornate iron lamps (**see Front cover**). A wide flight of wooden steps led from the north-west side of the bridge to the platform, of which only an overgrown gate now survives at road level.
- 6.4 To conclude, the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century railway bridge at Thorney is the only example of a plate girder bridge along the former Durston to Yeovil line, the historic building recording providing an important record of this unique structure. The installation of the railway line across the Somerset levels is a reminder of a bygone age where rural communities were, for the first time, provided with an effective means of connecting with the outside world. This widened the horizons of the rural population, for both leisure and business, and provided a more economic means of transporting goods. The parts of the bridge that would be visible to the passing passenger were designed to be aesthetically pleasing, reflecting the pride of the Victorian era as they entered a new age of travel. No doubt demand led to the installation of Thorney and Kingsbury Halt in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, and the subsequent establishment of the Nestlé factory adjacent to the railway in 1932 is an example of how the countryside must have attracted investment opportunities and provided alternative sources of employment for the rural population.

## 7. Archive

- 7.1 The NPPF requires that an archaeological archive arising from development works is made publicly accessible (para. 141). In this case, the archive comprises the paper/digital archive including site records and images.

- 7.2 All relevant data has been incorporated into this report and the paper/digital archive will be stored on the C1 cloud storage server or discarded.
- 7.3 A copy of this report will be provided to the client/agent and to the HES so that it can be included as part of the county Historic Environment Record. A digital copy of the report will also be deposited with the Archaeology Data Service, via OASIS (On-line Access to the Index of Archaeological Investigations – <http://oasis.ac.uk/england/>). The OASIS entry will also be completed to include details of the archive contents.

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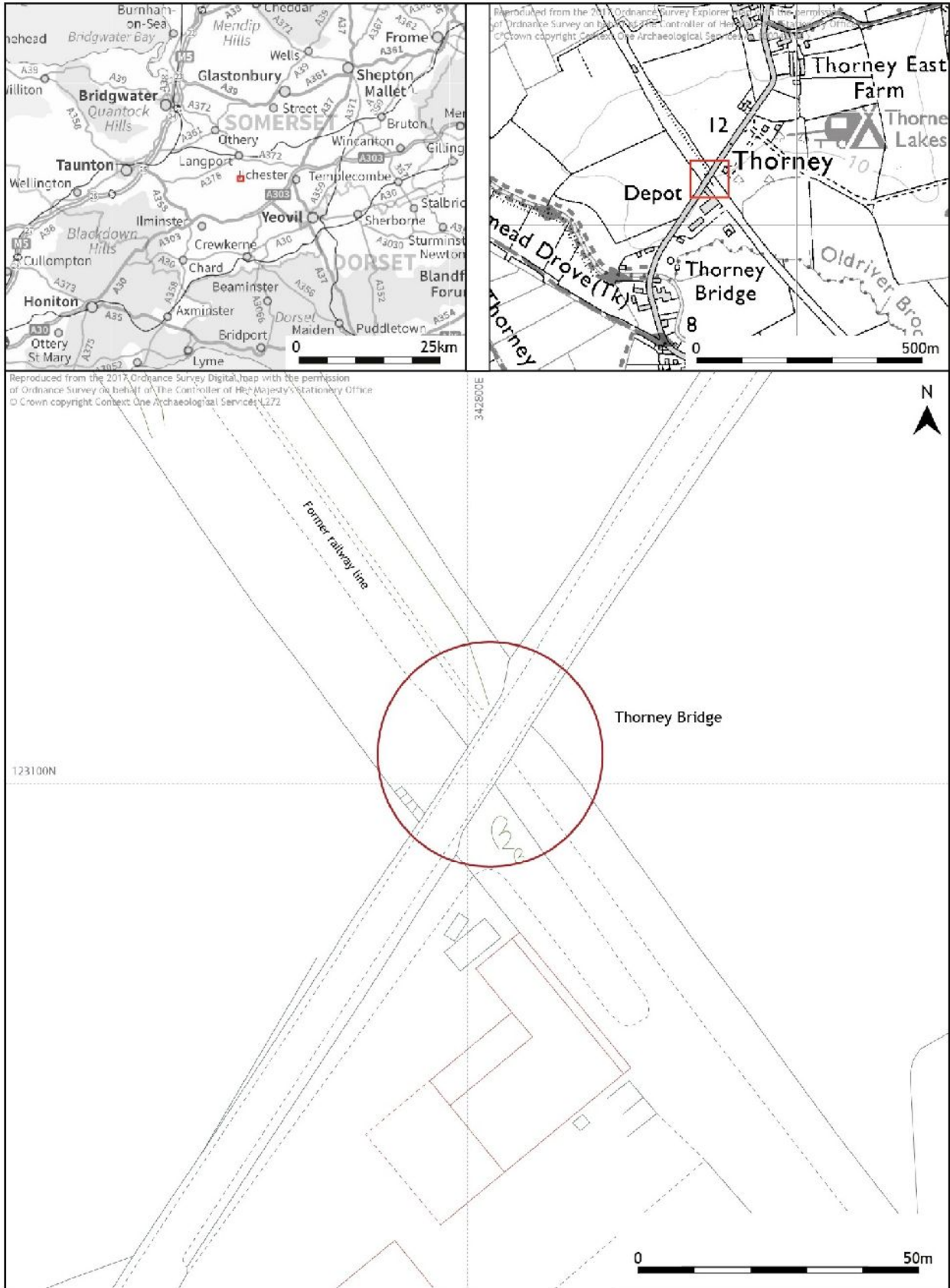


Figure 1. Site setting

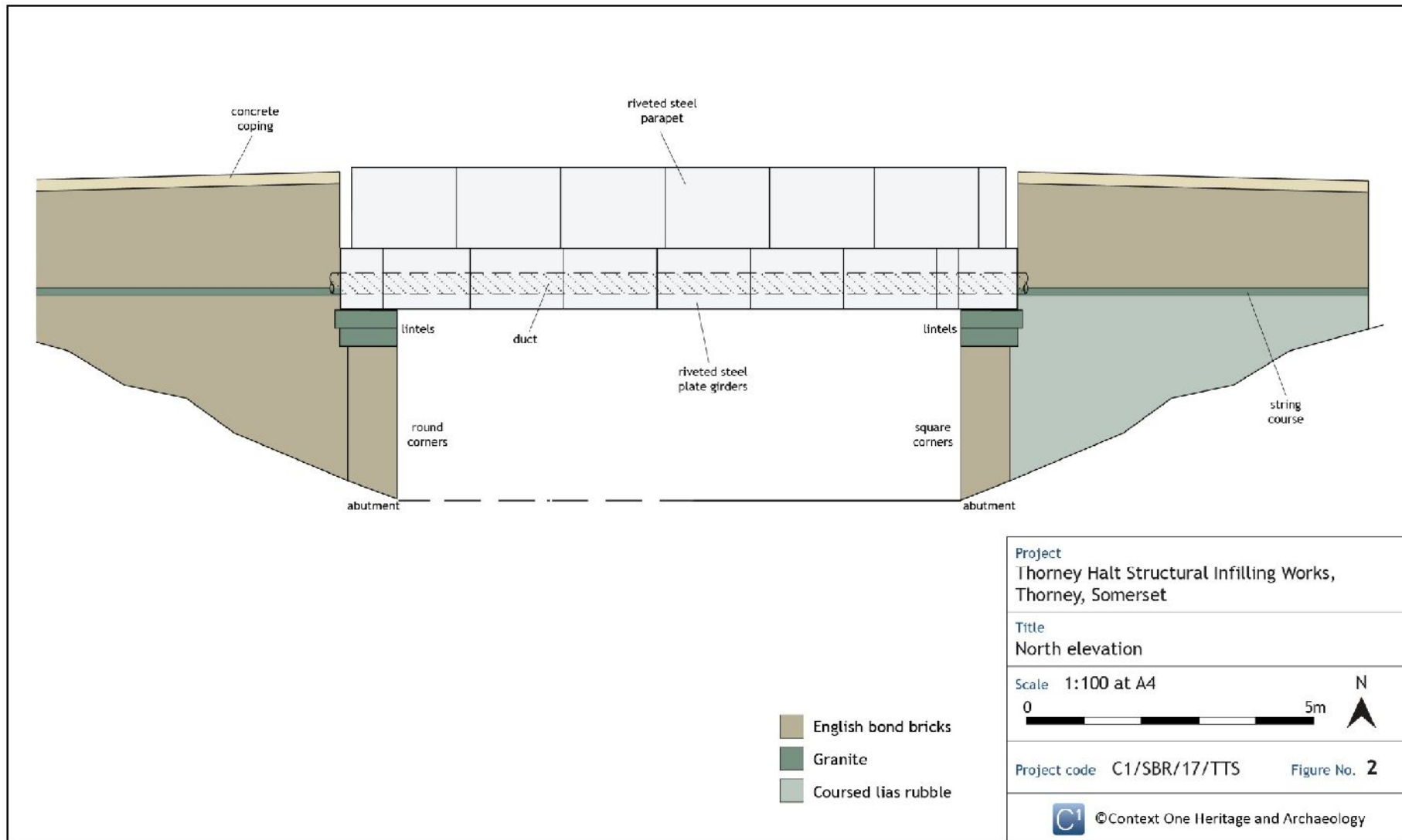


Figure 2. North elevation

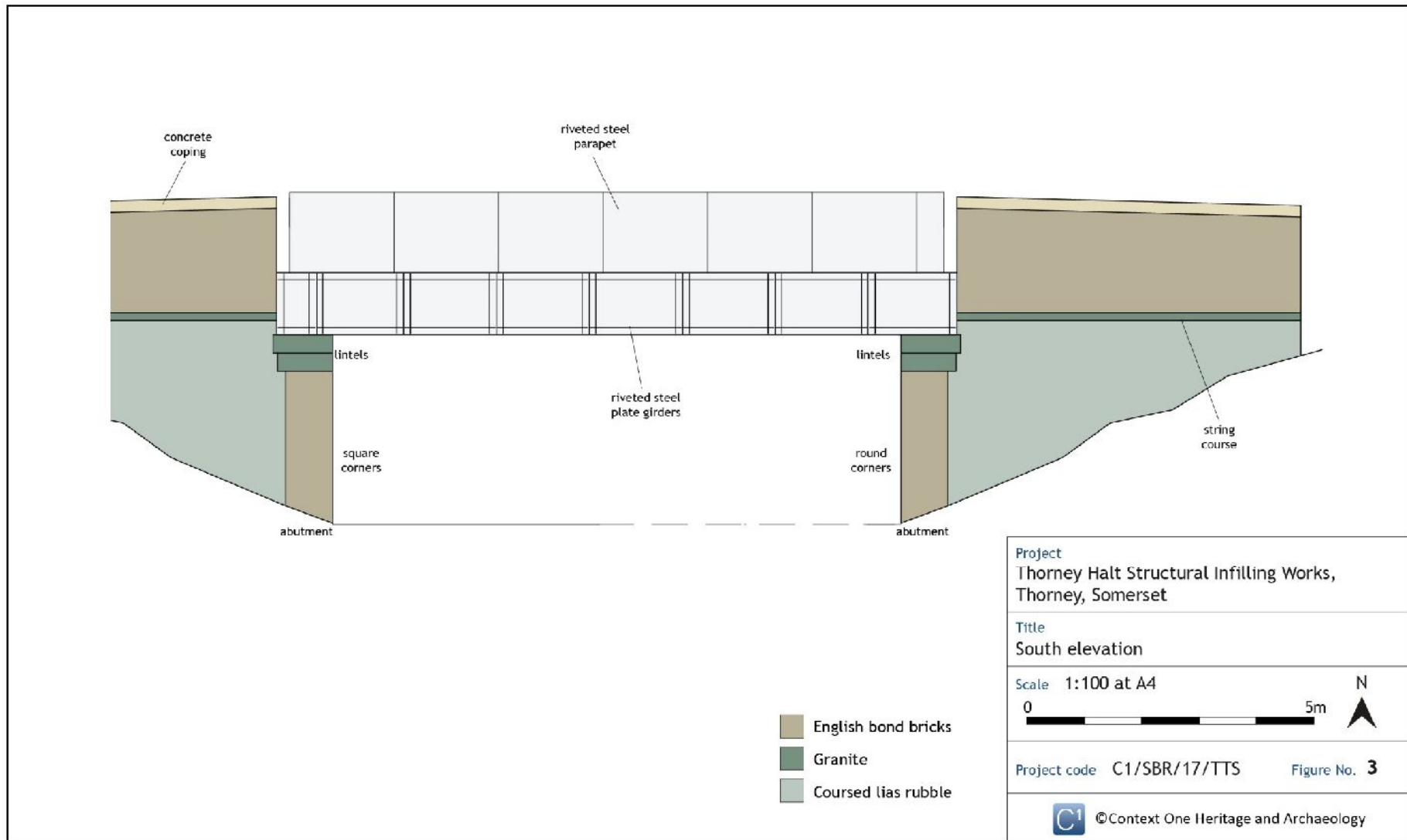


Figure 3. South elevation

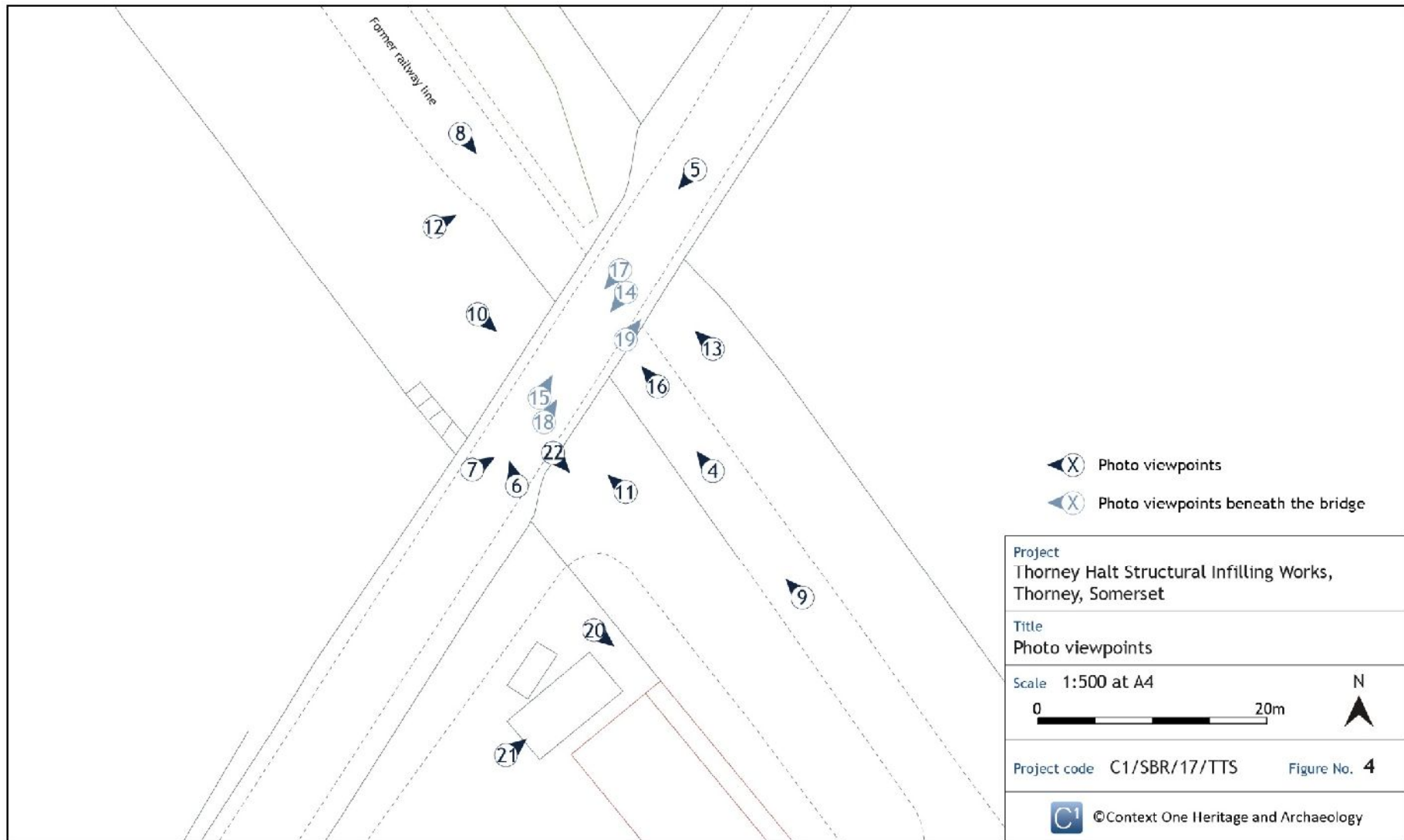


Figure 4. Photographic survey viewpoints



**Appendix 1: Photographic record**



North elevation – focussed on east side (from NNW)



North elevation – focussed on west side with platform under bridge (from N)



North elevation – east embankment (from NNW)



North elevation – west embankment (from NNW)



South elevation (from SSE)



South elevation – east embankment (from S)





South elevation – west embankment (from SSE)



South elevation – west embankment & bridge (from SSE)



South elevation – east embankment & bridge (from SSE)



South elevation – east embankment (from SSE)



West abutment wall & platform (from NNE)



East abutment wall & platform edge (benchmark next to scale) (from SSW)





West abutment - south end (from NNE)



West abutment – central (from NNE)



West abutment - north end (from NNE)



East abutment - north end (from SSW)



East abutment – central (from SSW)



East abutment - south end (note benchmark next to scale) (from SSW)





Underside of bridge (from SSE)



Underside of bridge (from SSE)



Underside of bridge (from NNE)



Underside of bridge (from SSW)



Road over bridge (from SSW)



North parapet of bridge (from S)





South parapet of bridge (from SW)



North parapet of bridge (from NE)



South parapet of bridge (from NNE)



Completion shot of south elevation & Nestle siding (from SE)



Completion shot of south elevation (from S)



Completion shot of south elevation (from SE)





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