

JOHN MOORE HERITAGE SERVICES

ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF
ON FOLLY BRIDGE, OXFORD
(SECTION OF GRANDPONT CAUSEWAY)
NGR SP 51425 05595 to SP 51405 05629 (linear)

On behalf of

Optimise

SEPTEMBER 2012

REPORT FOR Optimise
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Summary

John Moore Heritage Services carried out a watching brief on the south end of Folly Bridge, during the replacement of a water main, to ensure that only modern material was impacted upon. The depth of impact was c. 1m, and therefore well above the medieval Grandpont. During the watching brief remains of a building which formerly fronted onto Folly Bridge were observed.

Works in Folly Bridge Court were also monitored, although these only revealed modern made ground associated with the present development.

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Site location (Figure 1)

The site is Folly Bridge, Oxford (NGR SP5144805457) which is a major thoroughfare into Oxford across the river Thames. The site is situated between 57.5m on St. Aldates and 59.1m on Folly Bridge above Ordnance datum, between NGR SP 51425 05595 and SP 51405 05629 (linear).

1.2 Planning Background

Optimise replaced a water main on Folly Bridge, Oxford, part of the scheduled monument of Grandpont causeway (List Entry Number 1007486, UID 21757). A condition of the scheduled monument consent required the submission to English Heritage (EH) of a written scheme of investigation detailing the programme of archaeological works. A *Written Scheme of Investigation* was prepared by John Moore Heritage Services for the archaeological watching brief, proposing a suitable methodology to satisfy the requirements of the scheduled monument consent. The WSI was agreed with Optimise and approved by EH and the City Archaeologist.

1.3 Archaeological Background

The site is situated above Grandpont an example of a medieval causeway, few of which now survive in their original form. Although this example has been obscured by later alterations and additions, original fabric is visible from the river whilst partial excavation has demonstrated the survival of substantial archaeological remains beneath the modern road surface. The causeway is thought to have its origins in the Saxon or early Norman period and represents an important element in understanding the layout of early medieval and medieval Oxford. It is one of the very few examples where both detailed archaeological and documentary records are available.

The monument includes a 500m-long section of the Grandpont causeway which crosses the Thames floodplain to the south of Oxford. The causeway is buried beneath the modern line of the Abingdon Road and is encased in later widening and revetting. However, exposed sections of the Norman stonework, forming several of the arches and piers which make up the causeway, can be seen from the river beneath. The earliest phase of the ragstone causeway was between 3.9m and 4m wide and was constructed as a continuous linear structure with arches set along its length where

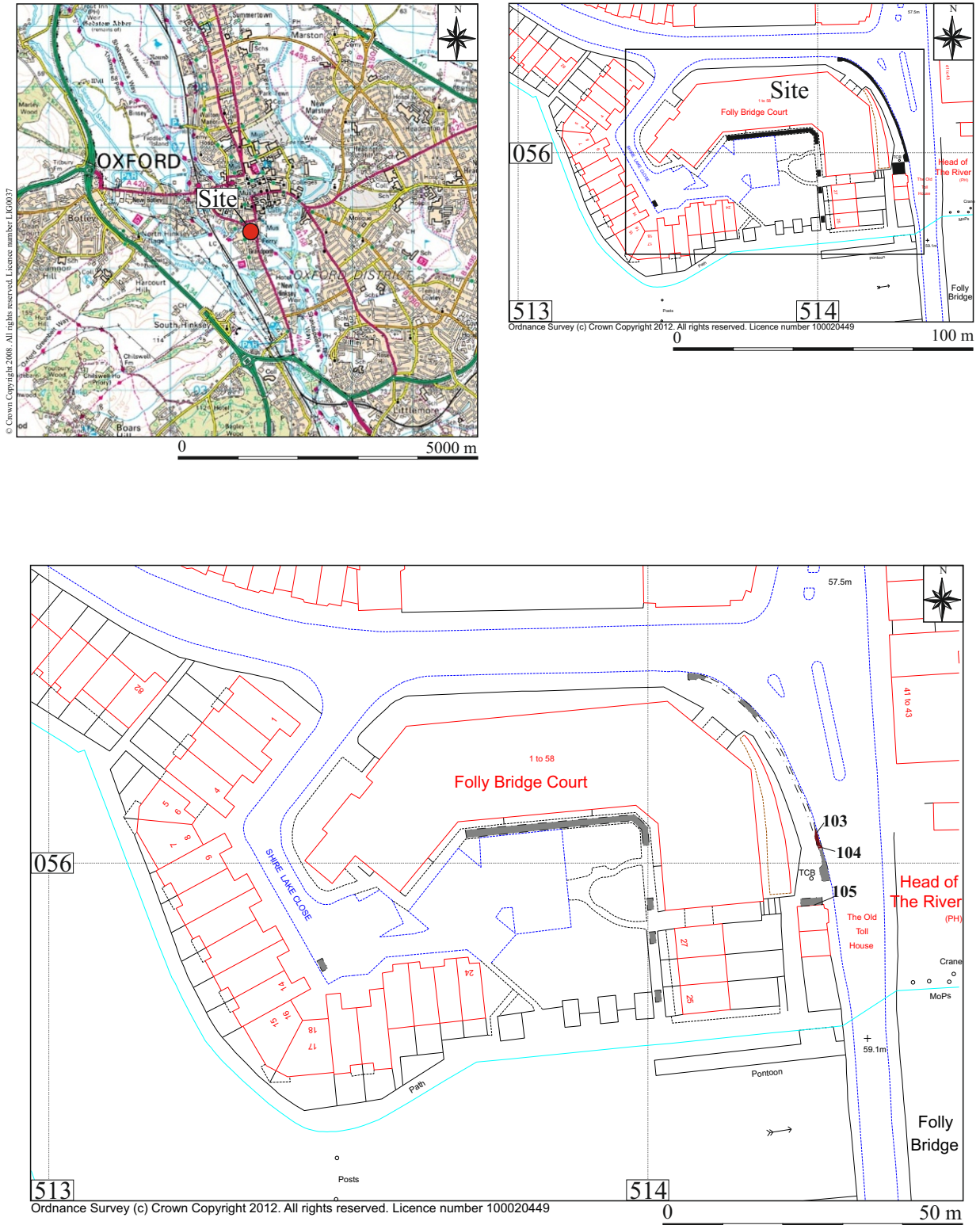


Figure 1. Site location

river channels or drainage needs dictated. The causeway has been widened on at least two occasions, giving it a modern width of c.12.5m.

It is likely that evidence survives for earlier Saxon or Norman wooden bridges beneath the Grandpont, while it is known from excavation at 33 St Aldates that a Saxon ford, which preceded the causeway, went out of use and silted up to the extent that by the late 12th century it was covered with 1.25m of accumulated silt. It is believed that the Grandpont is part of the 'Great Bridge' built by Robert d'Oilly who also built Oxford Castle.

The Folly Bridge, located midway along this section of the Grandpont, also known as 'Friar Bacon's Bridge', is a later medieval feature and included a six-sided tower with portcullis, drawbridge and heavy gates which provided a barrier to any enemy approaching the South Gate of the city along the causeway. This was partially demolished and rebuilt in 1826 having become 'so decayed' by the time of Waterloo (1815) that it was no longer safe. The tower foundations survive in the river bed.

The bridge is listed Grade II. In addition to the remains visible from the river, evidence for the survival of the Grandpont has been provided by a number of excavations and observations using existing manholes and during essential works on service trenches. These have provided evidence that the structure survives along this 500m section and beyond, although the majority of observations and the visible remains are contained in this stretch.

Although the original core only measures c.4m wide, the preservation of the monument depends upon the entire width of the carriageway (c.12.5m) being included in the scheduling. Excluded from the scheduling are the 19th-century reconstructed elements of the listed Folly Bridge, the modern road carriageway and its make-up as well as the drainage culvert and all existing service trenches which run along the causeway, although the ground beneath all these features and beneath and around the service trenches is included in the scheduling.

Previous archaeological work has been carried out on the monument and reported (Durham 1984; Dodd 2003).

The above background is drawn from the listing.

2 AIMS OF THE INVESTIGATION

The aims of the investigation as laid out in the Written Scheme of Investigation were as follows:

- To preserve by record any archaeological remains which will be impacted upon by the development
- In particular to record any archaeological remains relating to the crossing of the Thames

3 STRATEGY

3.1 Research Design

In order to obtain scheduled monument consent a *Written Scheme of Investigation* was prepared by John Moore Heritage Services and agreed with Optimise; this was submitted to and approved by EH and the Oxford City Archaeologist.

Site procedures for the investigation and recording of potential archaeological deposits and features were defined in the *Written Scheme of Investigation*. The work was carried out in accordance with the standards specified by the Institute of Field Archaeologists (1994) and the principles of MAP2 (English Heritage 1991).

3.2 Methodology

The Folly Bridge site involved the re-excavation of old service-trenches in order to replace the water main; excavation was not permitted beyond what had already been impacted upon and this condition was adhered to. Monitoring was carried out during works on Folly Bridge on June 19th, 20th 22nd –26th and subsequently July 11th-13th by the toll booth. During works in Folly Bridge Court, site visits were made following the excavation of pits and/or trench sections as this area had been extensively disturbed previously when Folly Bridge Court was built.

4 RESULTS

4.1 Fieldwork (Figures 2–5)

Folly Bridge/Grandpont

Trench excavations for the main replacement on Folly Bridge were carried out to a depth of *c* 1.2m, approximately 0.6m wide, into existing service trenches. As a consequence, the archaeology exposed was extremely limited. The removal of modern material was permitted within the terms of the scheduled ancient monument consent; however no historic material or fabric was permitted to be excavated. In most cases the depth of excavation was much less than previous impact-depths.

There was only a single location in the service trench where previous impacts were excavated to expose remains. This was located 10m north of the former tollbooth where part of a north/south stone wall 103 (Figs 2-4), in line with the front wall of the toll house, was present at the depth of the base of the service trench; this was rapidly cleaned and exposed archaeologically to permit a record to be made. This wall had previously been extensively impacted upon by other services; the fill of these was assigned (102). The top of the wall was exposed during cleaning. It comprised at least two courses. The stones – measuring an observed maximum of 650 × 40 × 20mm – were limestone, and extended beyond the northern and eastern edges of trench. At the north end it appeared to return to the west. At the south end of the exposed wall was the top of an east/west oriented single skin brick wall 104. South of this brick wall had been extensively impacted upon by a BT access chamber. The levelling and slab were assigned (101).



Figure 2. Photograph to left showing line of wall 103 and single skin brick wall extending east under Folly Bridge observed during watching brief.



Figure 3. Photograph above showing extent of wall 103.

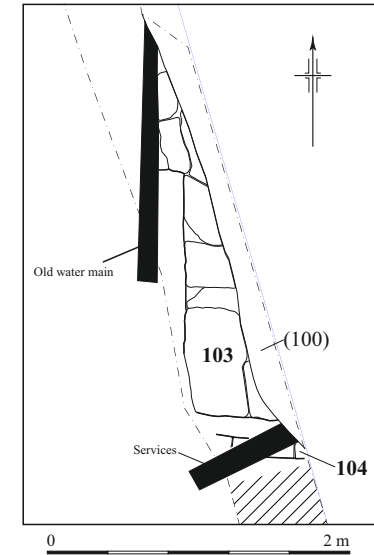


Figure 4. Plan of wall 103.



Figure 5. Photograph to right showing line of wall-footings 105 of toll booth and location of access observed during watching brief.



Figure 6. Photograph above showing close-up of access in wall 105.

Figures 7 & 8. Grandpont, Oxford, from the south-east, 1920. (Aerofilms Ltd EPW000836) The image below is a close-up of that to the right showing the building line on Folly Bridge. This building appears to be behind the line of that identified.
© English Heritage



Figure 9. 1st Ed. OS Berkshire Sheet VI. (1886). Site north of basin

To the south, a trench measuring *c.* 3m × 1m was excavated the length of the north side of the former toll booth at the north end of Folly Bridge (Figs 1, 5 & 6). The trench was within the footprint of previous excavations for services, which were revealed during the investigation.

Located beneath the north wall of the former toll booth, stone footings 105 were exposed. The full depth of the footings was not revealed as they were below the impact depth of the service trench, a depth of *c.* 1m below current ground level.. The limestone blocks were roughly shaped stone measuring approximately 650 × 40 × 20mm laid in rough coursing, similar to the north/south-oriented wall observed to the north. The footings included an access blocked with soil (Figs 4 & 6). This was not further investigated.

Folly Bridge Court

Trench excavations in the area of Folly Bridge Court were carried out within the pre-existing service trenches. Folly Bridge Court overlies the former location of Isis Street, and those houses fronting onto Thames Street. Only yellow brown sandy clay material was present here. This is associated with the construction of Folly Bridge Court.

4.2 Reliability of Techniques and Results

The reliability of results is considered to be good. The watching brief took place during clement conditions on June 19th, 20th 22nd–26th and July 11th-13th with excellent cooperation from the on-site contractors Clancy Docwra.

5 FINDS AND ENVIRONMENTAL REMAINS

5.1 Finds

No finds were recovered during the watching brief.

5.2 Environmental Remains

No palaeoenvironmental samples were taken.

6 DISCUSSION (Figures 7–11)

The watching brief revealed evidence for the former buildings fronting onto the approach to Folly Bridge. This area was redeveloped during the 1970s when the pre-existing buildings were pulled down apart from the toll booth on Folly Bridge.

The wall observed was approximately 10m north of the toll booth and is possibly the house visible on the air photographs from 1920 (Figs 7 & 8). The 1st Edition OS 1:2500 (1878) and 6" Berkshire Sheet VI (1886) (Fig. 9) show the location of the former toll booth on the corner of Isis Street and Folly Bridge, as well as the location of the house on the opposite side of Isis Street (*ibid*). It would appear unlikely that the houses represented then are the houses represented on the prints of 1862 (Fig. 10) or 1785 (Fig. 11), although whether these are the remains identified during the watching brief is uncertain, as it is apparent that the area has been built up since the



Figure 10. Friar Bacon's Study, S H Grimm, 1862, copied by J E Vincent, 1909;
building identified is possibly on the right-hand side of the picture



Figure 11. Folly Bridge and Bacon's Tower, S Hooper 1785;
building identified is possibly on the right-hand side of the picture

late 18th century at least. The air photograph from 1920 (Figs 7 & 8) seems to show the house on the north side of Isis Street in line with house to the rear of the toll booth; the map (Fig. 9) shows it forward of the house. Furthermore, the map seems to indicate the toll house at the very corner of Isis Street, whereas the photograph seems to show it set back some small distance from the corner.

The opening in the wall footings of the toll booth are not easily explained, unless the toll booth was perhaps larger originally. However, there is no such indication of this on the building. It is possible that there was a small access under the toll house; although as the extensive demolition and associated groundworks for the construction of Folly Bridge Court was not archaeologically monitored, it is not possible to assert the precise function of this access.

The watching brief was carried out in accordance with the scheduled ancient monument consent and no historic fabric was removed during machining. Where previous works had impacted upon the scheduled area and remains of potential archaeological significance were visible these were cleaned and recorded prior to reburying.

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