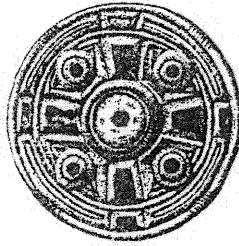Archaeological Field Unit

An Archaeological Watching Brief At Spaldwick Bridge, Spaldwick.

Andrew Hatton

2002

Cambridgeshire County Council

Report No. A 212

Commissioned by W. S. Atkins on behalf of the Environment and Transport (Bridges Section) of Cambridgeshire County Council

An Archaeological Watching Brief at Spaldwick Bridge, Spaldwick.

Andrew Hatton BSc

2002

Report No. A 212 `

SUMMARY

On the 28th and 29th of August 2002 an archaeological watching brief was undertaken at Spaldwick Bridge, Spaldwick (TL 1266/7305) by a member of staff of Cambridgeshire County Council Archaeological Field Unit (AFU). The purpose of the watching brief was to ascertain the structural condition of both the medieval bridge as well as the post-medieval bridge, which butts up against it. Preparation could then be made for any strengthening work needed.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF FIGURES

An Archaeological Watching Brief at Spaldwick Bridge, Spaldwick.
(TL 1266/7305)

1   INTRODUCTION

On the 28th and 29th of August 2002 an archaeological watching brief was undertaken at Spaldwick Bridge, Spaldwick (TL 1266/7305) by a member of staff of Cambridgeshire County Council Archaeological Field Unit (AFU). The project was commissioned by W. S. Atkins on behalf of the Environment and Transport (Bridges Section) of Cambridgeshire County Council in advance of bridge strengthening work taking place. The purpose of the watching brief was to ascertain the structural condition of both the medieval bridge as well as the post-medieval bridge, which butts up against it thus creating a wider bridge. Preparation could then be made for any strengthening work needed.
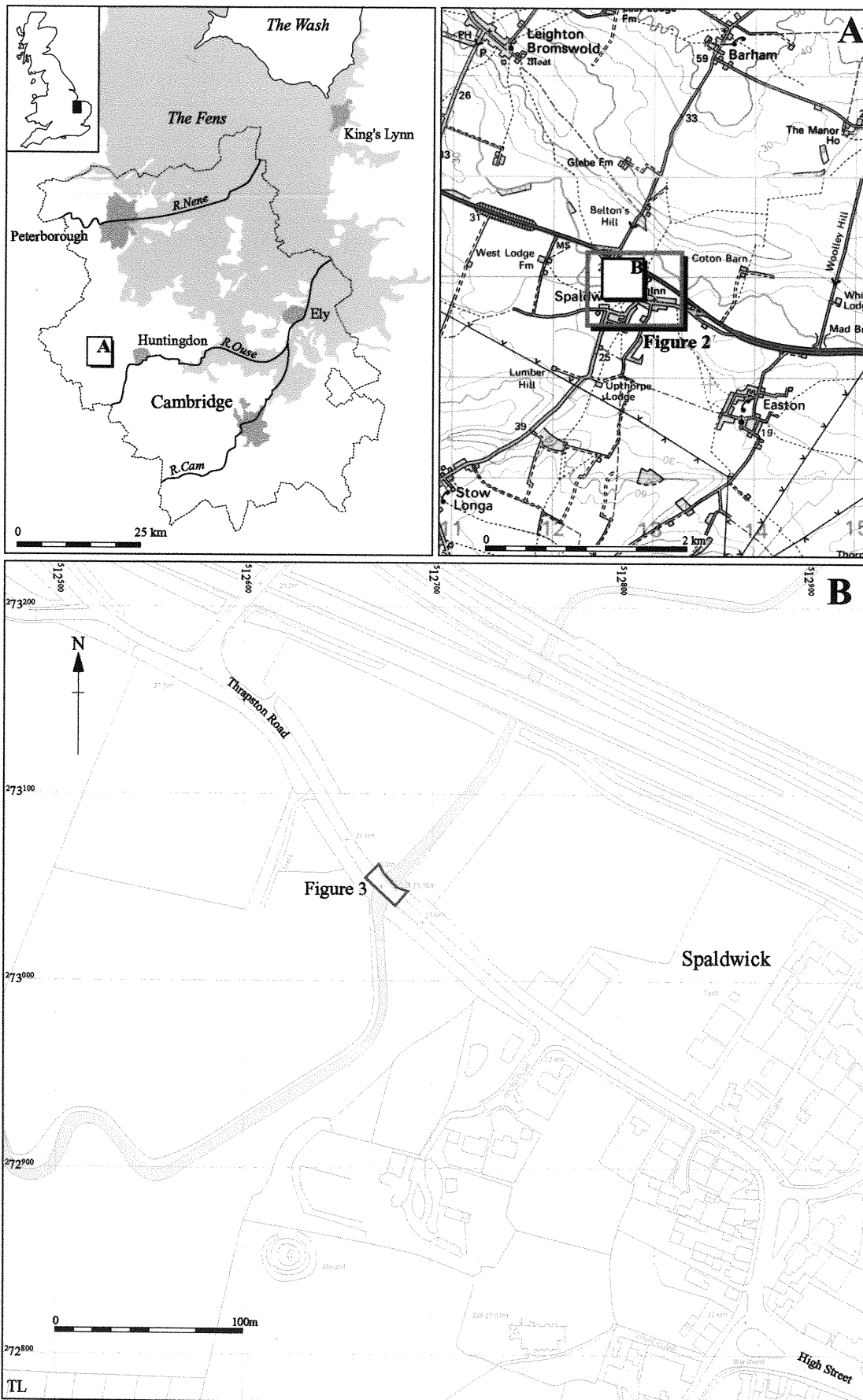
2   GEOLOGY AND TOPOGRAPHY

The village of Spaldwick lies 11 km to the west of Huntingdon (Fig. 1) on the 1st/2nd gravel terraces of the Ellington Brook (a tributary of the Alconbury Brook), which flows west-east. The gravels overlie Oxford Clays (BGS 187).

3   ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Spaldwick has been recognised by Taylor as an example of a village that has acquired its present form as a result of conscious planning, rather than a less organised "organic" growth (Taylor, 1989). The main feature of the village is the "D" shaped enclosure (Fig. 2), which contained the parish church, the Old Rectory, and open grassland. This land shows clear evidence of earthworks including a possible windmill platform, walls of a substantial building, ponds and enclosures. The whole collection has been interpreted as a "village site" (RCHME, 1926 (1))

In 991, Brithnoth, Ealdorman of Essex, left the two estates of Somersham and Spaldwick to the Abbey of Ely. At that time the Spaldwick estate included stow Longa, Easton, Little Catworth, Barnham and Upthrope. In 1109, this estate was transferred to the Bishopric of Lincoln (Taylor, 1989).

Taylor considers the remains within the enclosure to be the administrative centre of Spaldwick estate (including farm buildings and agricultural land), and a palace belonging to the medieval bishop of Lincoln. Spaldwick was not

The Wash

The Fens

King's Lynn

R.Nene

Peterborough

Huntingdon   R.Ouse   Ely

A

Cambridge

R.Cam

0   25 km

A

Leighton Bromswold

Moat

59 Barham

The Manor Ho

Glebe Fm

Belton's Hill

West Lodge Fm

Coton Barn

Woolley Hill

Whit Lodge

Spaldw

Inn

B

Figure 2

Mad Bri

Lumber Hill

Upthorpe Lodge

Easton

Stow Longa

0   2 km

B

N

Thrapston Road

Figure 3

Spaldwick

High Street

0   100m

TL

Figure 1 *Location of Site.*
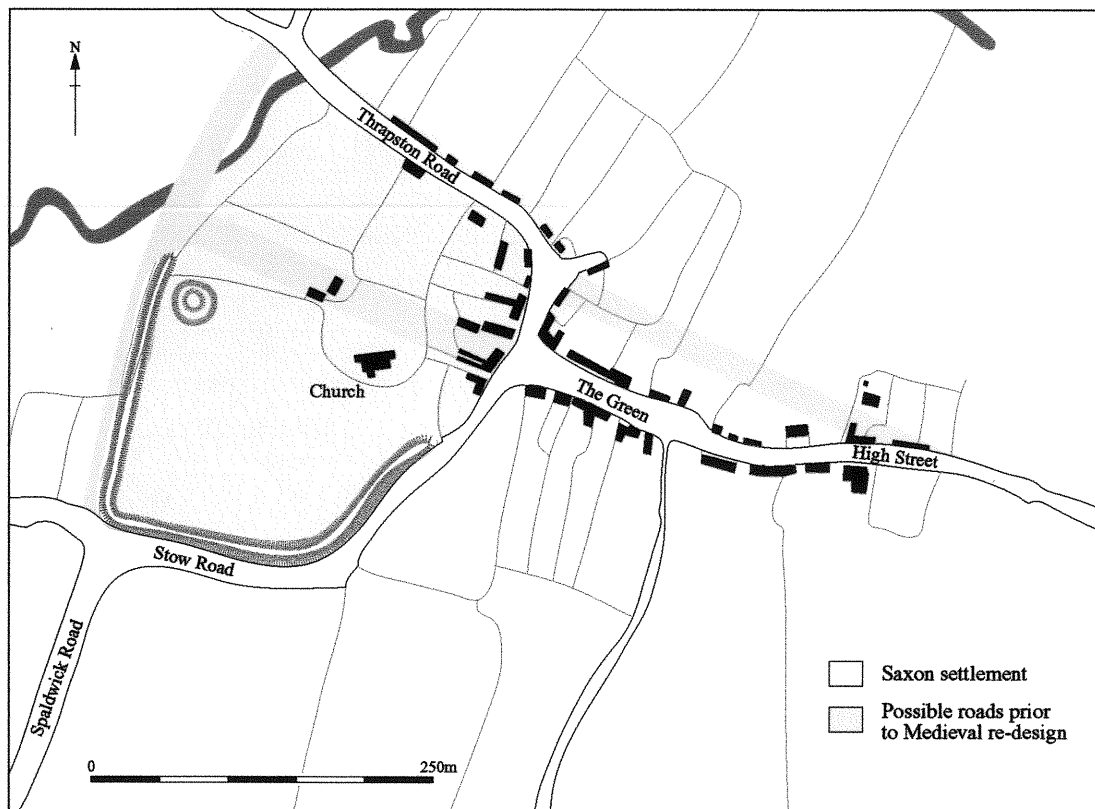
Figure 2 *Plan of Spaldwick*

as important a palace as those at Buckden or Lyddington. As with these sites, however, it may have been surrounded by landscaped gardens. An alternative interpretation of the earthworks surrounding the church (SMR 04254) at Spaldwick is that they represent a palace site and gardens rather than associated settlement (SMR 00719). If this is so, the question arises as to where the rest of the village was located at this time.

There are three likely dates for the construction of the enclosure, either 991 (for which there is no evidence), after 991, when the estate was obtained by the Bishop of Ely (for which there is also no evidence), or after 1109 when it changed hands to the Bishop of Lincoln. Taylor argues that the later date would be consistent with the evidence of similar development in other villages. This redevelopment had the effect of putting the village on its present day east-west alignment, with the High Street and village green possibly forming an approach to the main gates of the estate centre (Fig. 2). Spaldwick's redevelopment is further borne out through evidence recovered during the excavation of structural remains just off the High Street (Schlee 1996). The excavation uncovered evidence of beam slots and postholes, which represented at least two timber buildings as well as associated ditches and pits, dated to the Late Saxo-Norman/Early Medieval period. The excavation also revealed that the features were aligned on the post-enclosure

3

layout of the village, but differed from the present day alignment off the Thrapston Road.

The shape and location of the settlement in Anglo-Saxon times is not known, although the trend in villages in this part of Huntingdonshire is to lie along a succession of south-west/north-east route ways. It seems possible that the sunken trackway that forms the western extent of the enclosure, links the Spaldwick Road and the road that runs up to the Belton Hill, forming just such a south-west/north-east axis. The likely location for the early settlement before construction of the enclosure is therefore along, and between, the Thrapston and Spaldwick roads, in largely the same location as the later enclosure (Fig. 2).

3.1   Spaldwick Bridge

The point at which the present bridge spans the Brook was originally established when the village was re-planned sometime between the 10th and 12th centuries. Whether a timber bridge existed to start with is not known, but this is likely. The medieval portion of the bridge was constructed probably in the 15th century and consists of three arches (RCHME 1926). A post-medieval bridge was constructed immediately north of and abutting the medieval bridge, thus doubling its width.
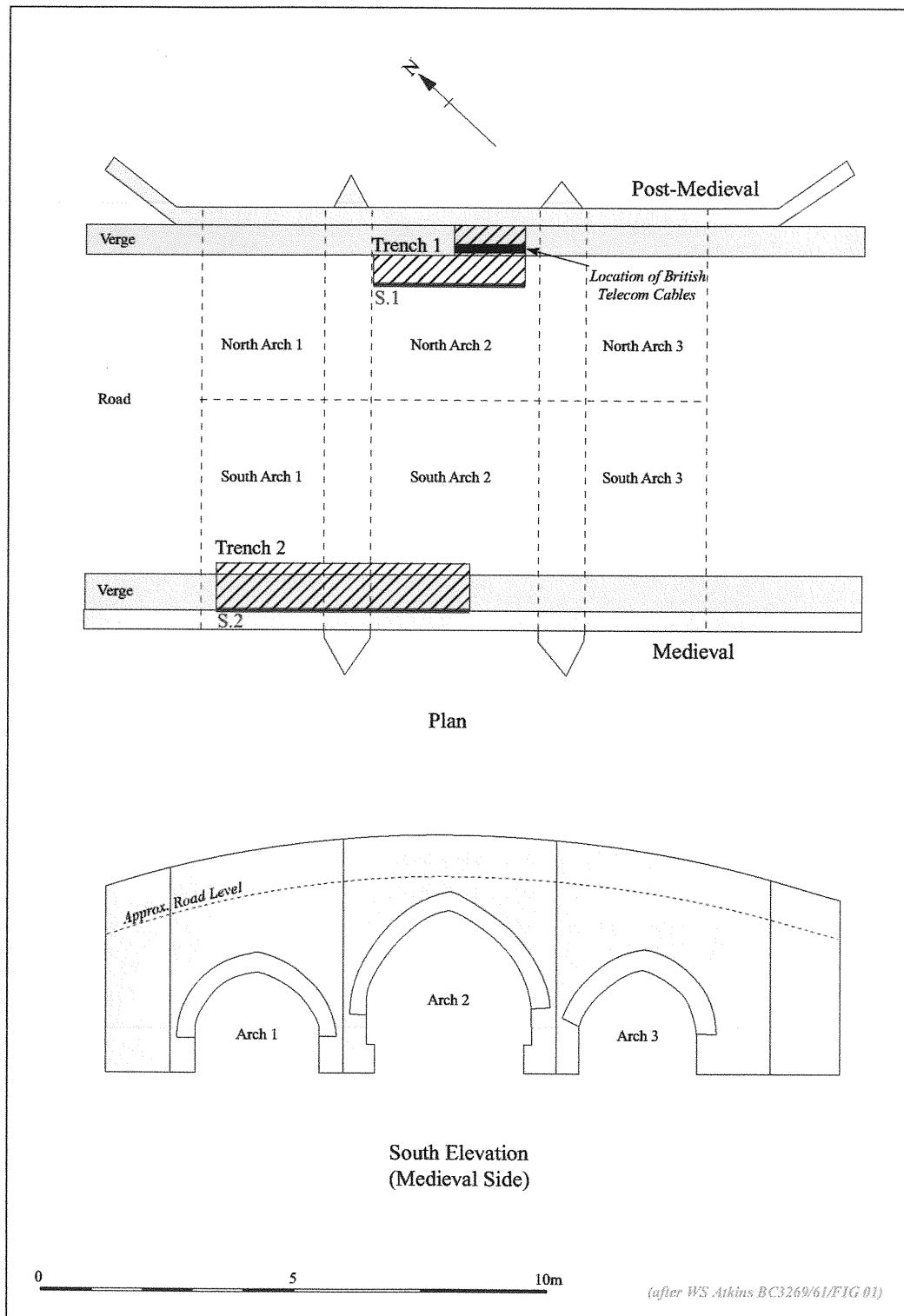
3.2   SMR Archive

The SMR maps and database entries for Spaldwick mostly relate to the standing medieval and post-medieval buildings (SMR 733a/b, SMR 04549a), stone crosses etc. (SMR 911, 734, 722), and a gravestone (SMR 721). One stray find, (a medieval token) is recorded (SMR 840). Apart from these entries there are extensive traces of ridge and furrow systems in the fields surrounding Spaldwick (SMR 719, 09853, 09855). The main focus of interest in however, the area between Thrapston Road and Stow Road, to the west of the village green, where extensive evidence of earlier buildings, banks and ditches are visible as undulations in the overlying grassland. This is interpreted in the SMR as a deserted shrunken medieval village (SMR 719).

4   METHODOLOGY

Two Trenches were excavated through the surface of the bridge using a combination of mechanical excavator equipped with a toothed ditching bucket and hand excavation. The original plan was to locate both trenches next to the parapet on either side of the bridge, which would enable both the structure of the medieval and the post-medieval bridge to be observed. However, the trench on the post-medieval side of the bridge had to be moved in order to avoid damaging underground British Telecom cables, which ran along side the parapet (Fig. 3).

4

N

Post-Medieval

Verge

Trench 1

Location of British
Telecom Cables

S.1

North Arch 1

North Arch 2

North Arch 3

Road

South Arch 1

South Arch 2

South Arch 3

Trench 2

Verge

S.2

Medieval

Plan

Approx. Road Level

Arch 2

Arch 1

Arch 3

South Elevation
(Medieval Side)

0　　　　　　　　　5　　　　　　　　　10m

(after WS Atkins BC3269/61/FIG 01)

Figure 3 *Trench Location and Elevation of Medieval Bridge*

The trenches were cleaned as necessary for feature and structural recognition. Exposed deposits were recorded and photographed using the AFU pro-forma recording sheets. Trenches were located using tapes and offset to the standing walls of the bridge.
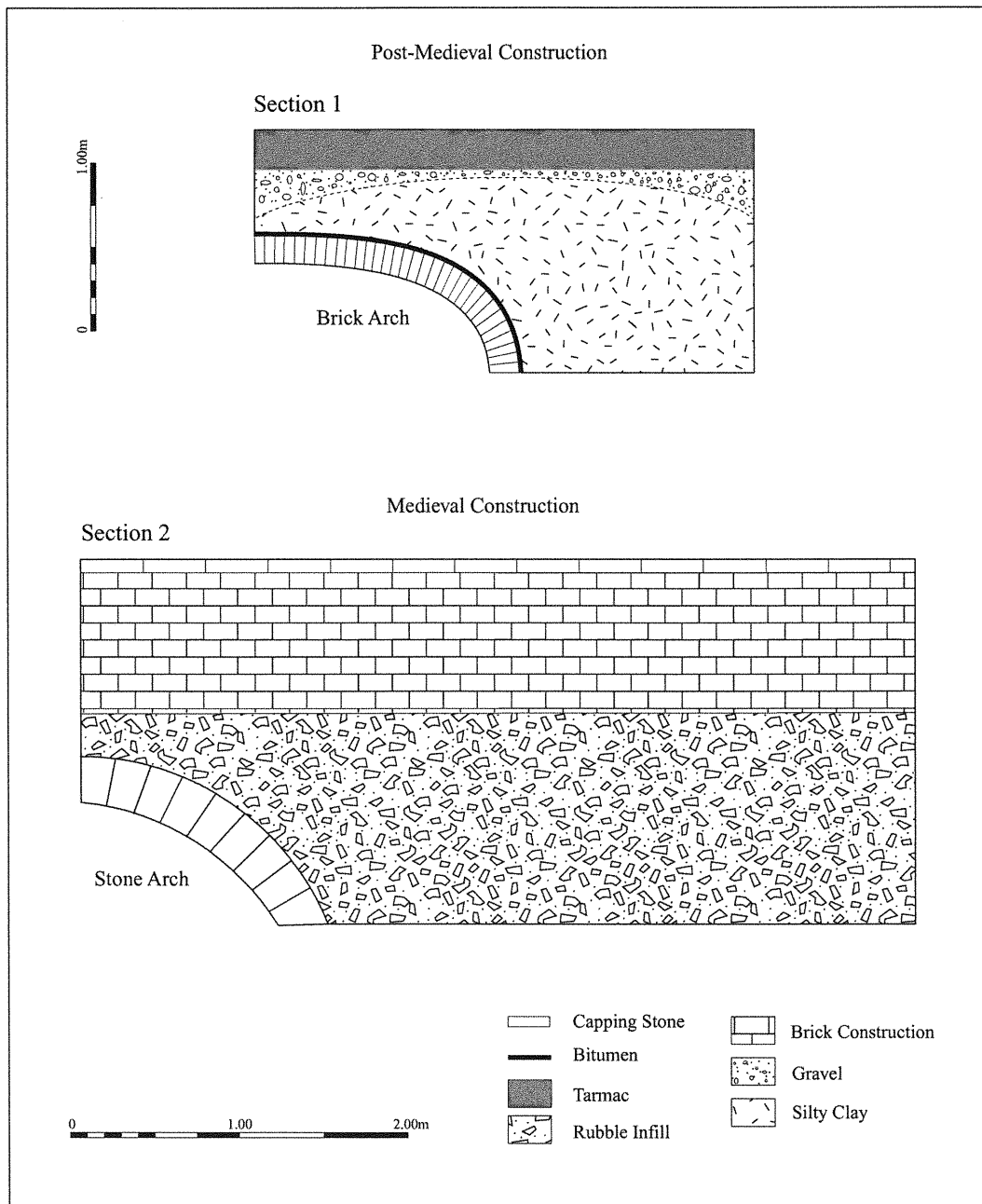
5   RESULTS

Trench 1 (Figures 3 and 4)

Trench 1 (1.4m long x 0.60m wide) was originally located immediately alongside the brick built parapet on the north-eastern side of the bridge (0.66m high and 0.25m thick, and capped by dressed sandstone), directly over the central arch of the post-medieval bridge. Excavation of the turf and topsoil (0.37m thick) revealed modern concrete, which encased British Telecom cables. Rather than remove the concrete the trench was re-positioned in order to avoid possible damage to the cables.

The new trench (3m long x 0.60m wide) was located immediately alongside the original trench creating an L – shape in plan. The relocation of the trench meant that part of the tarmac road surface had to be removed together with the remainder of the turf verge. Removal of the tarmac (0.24m thick) revealed gravel foundation material (0.30m thick). Removal of the foundation material revealed re-deposited brown silty clay, which varied in thickness between 0.38m at the top of the arch to 0.92m at the base of the arch. Removal of the brown silty clay soil exposed the curvature of the arch, which had been coated in a layer of bitumen that acted as a waterproofing agent. A small amount of bitumen was removed in order to check the condition of the underlying brickwork.

Trench 2 (Figures 3 and 4)

Trench 2 (3m long x 0.60m wide) was located immediately alongside the brick-built parapet (0.84m high and 0.25m thick, and capped by dressed sandstone), on the south-western side of the bridge directly over the central arch of the medieval bridge. Excavation of the turf and topsoil (0.20m thick) revealed sandstone rubble mixed with sandy silty. The rubble infilled the space between the arches and as a consequence varied in depth between 0.26m at the -top of the arch and 1.47m at the base of the arch. Removal of the rubble revealed the internal surface of the medieval bridge consisting of dressed sandstone blocks. The same high degree of finish was given to the internal blocks as to those on permanent display on the exterior of the bridge.

Post-Medieval Construction

Section 1

Brick Arch

Medieval Construction

Section 2

Stone Arch

Capping Stone
Bitumen
Tarmac
Rubble Infill

Brick Construction
Gravel
Silty Clay

0   1.00   2.00m

Figure 4 *Sections showing bridge construction*

6   CONCLUSION

The evaluation clearly revealed the internal construction and materials used for the medieval bridge and its post-medieval extension.

Both bridge and extension showed similarities in terms of building quality and technique despite the use of different materials, i.e. limestone for the medieval bridge and brick for the post-medieval extension.

It has to be born in mind that the excavated trenches only allowed limited recording of the structure as a whole.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

BIBLIOGRAPHY

British Geological Survey Map 1:50 000 Series. Sheet 187 (Huntingdon)

RCHME 1926, Huntingdonshire, *An Inventry of Historical Monuments in Huntingdonshire*, Vol I. London

Schlee, D. 1996, *Saxon and Medieval Structural Remains at Thrapston Road, Spaldwick.* Cambridgeshire County Council Archaeological Field Unit, Report No. 127.

SMR. Cambridgeshire County Council Sites and Monuments Record

Taylor, C, C. '*Spaldwick, Cambridgeshire*', Proceedings of the Cambridge Antiquarian Society. Vol. LXXVIII (71-75).