

# THE RIDINGATE



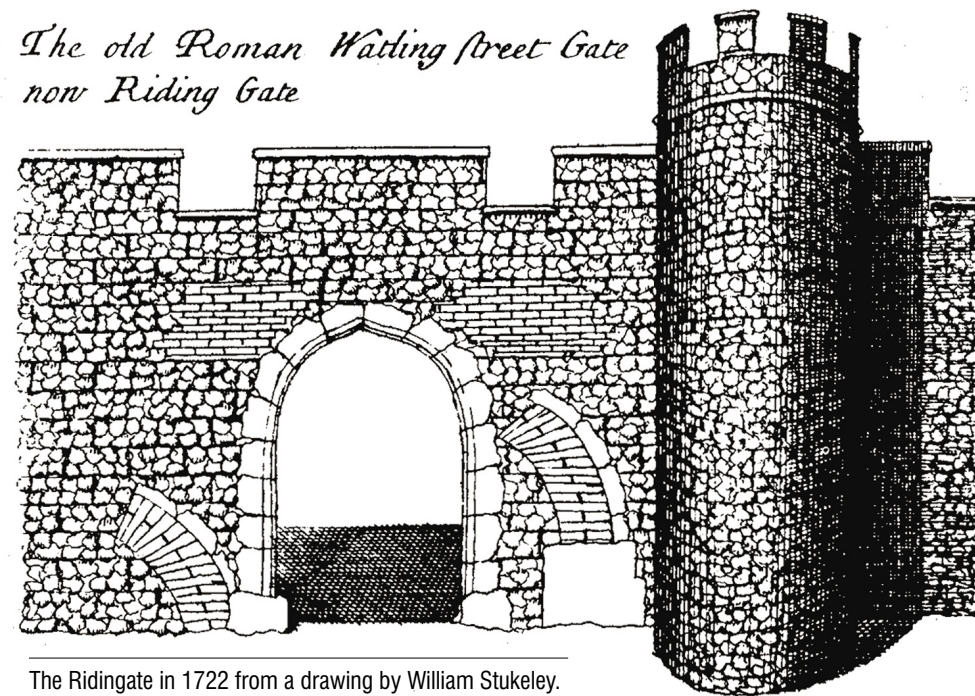
The Ridingate in the mid eighteenth century by R. Godfrey (published in *Gostling's Walks*).

## THE RIDINGATE

Until its destruction in 1782, the Ridingate of Canterbury, situated on the south east side of the City, was the finest surviving Roman gate in the defensive circuit. Ridingate was first mentioned as a Roman gate by William Somner in 1640. In 1722 William Stukeley made a drawing of the gate which shows parts of two Roman brick arches blocked and cut through at a higher level by a later medieval arch. A medieval semi-circular tower is depicted on the north-east side of the gate and a crenellated wall and parapet are shown. A more convincing engraving of the gate by R. Godfrey, published in 1777, also shows the medieval tower with a battered ashlar plinth and a gun-loop above. By this date the tower was covered by a pantile roof and was probably used as a dwelling. Godfrey's engraving also shows a seventeenth century timber framed public house, jettied on its north and east sides, with a projecting inn sign bearing the legend of the Invicta Horse. By the mid nineteenth century this inn had become the Duke of York and was probably demolished in 1883.

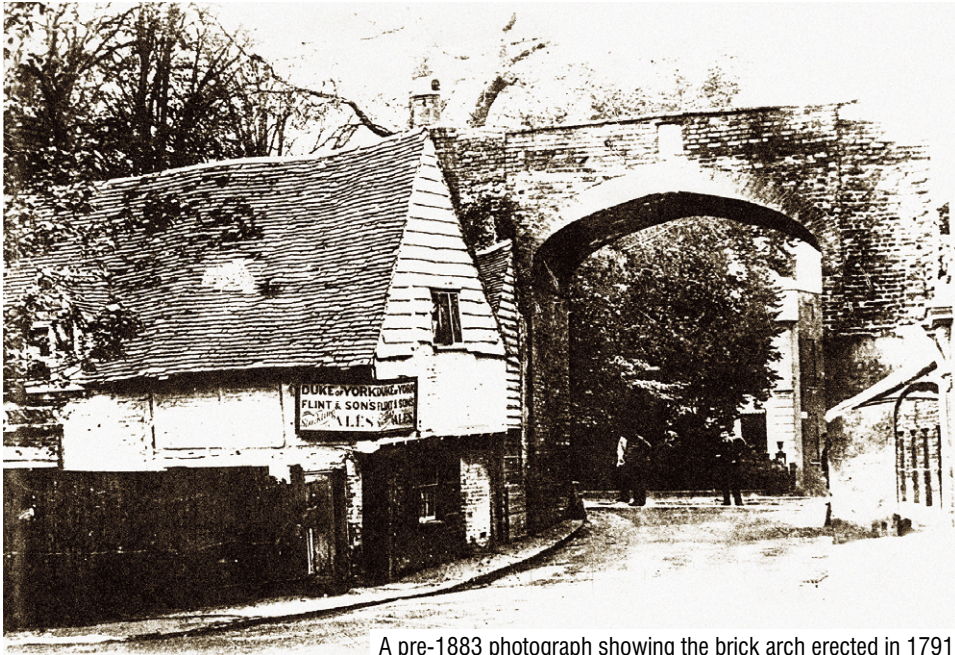
The Roman gate is exceptional in that it is the only known Roman gate in Canterbury to have two arches (the other major gates which can be expected to have had two arches were the Westgate and Burgate, but these were completely rebuilt in the later medieval period). Excavations by Professor Frere in 1953 and 1954, and recording work by Louise Millard and Frank Jenkins in 1970, revealed the guard chambers of this gate on the north and south sides under the pavement, but it is only this unique opportunity at Easter 1986 with the rebuilding of the road that has allowed the whole of the foundations of the gate to be exposed. Despite all the destruction of the last two hundred years and the cutting of many service trenches, the remains are remarkably well preserved. Particularly impressive are the surviving Roman iron and lead clamps in the Lower Greensand blocks that divide the two main carriageways.

*The old Roman Watling Street Gate  
now Riding Gate*



The Ridingate in 1722 from a drawing by William Stukeley.





A pre-1883 photograph showing the brick arch erected in 1791.

The Ridlegate is first documented in 1045 in Thorne's Chronicle of St Augustine's Abbey, when Archbishop Eadsige (1038-51) gave St Augustine's "5 acres of land outside Rndingate and one meadow belonging to the aforesaid land" on condition that the monks of St Augustine's made special mention of him in their prayers. The name Ridlegate means "the red gate" in Old English (probably from the colour of the Roman bricks), and various spellings are given in the early medieval period. From the late eleventh century the gate is frequently mentioned in charters and rentals, as is the parish church of St Edmund (King and Martyr) which was just inside the gateway on the south side. In fact observations in 1970 in the southern Roman guard chamber found a burial and part of a semi-circular niche in the east wall of the chamber. It is possible that the guard chamber became the chancel of the church of St Fdmund when it was founded by Hamo, son of Vitalis, in the late eleventh century. Vitalis (of Canterbury) was one of William the Conqueror's Norman knights and is shown at Hastings on the Bayeux Tapestry. This tiny parish church, which had St Sepulchre's Priory as its Patron from the twelfth century was united with the parish of St Mary Bredin in 1349 after Black Death depopulation of the area and was perhaps pulled down soon afterwards.

Early in the fifteenth century the Ridlegate was walled up, due to the threat of an invasion by the French, and it is probably at this time that the semi-circular tower on the north was built. Remains of the lower part of this tower, made of chalk block and with a knapped flint face, still survive abutting the Roman city wall on its north-east side. In 1430 the gate was opened up and the arch shown in the early eighteenth century views was probably made, but the Prior and Convent complained that it made the City insecure "in consideration both to the wars and the malice of these mischevious heresies and lollerdis".

At the end of the century (1497-8) the *Book of Murage* records that the bridge across the wet moat outside the Ridlegate was restored and other considerable sums were spent on the adjoining walls. Then in 1553 the gate was again blocked (with earth and timber) during the rebellion of Sir Thomas Wyatt. In the following year two labourers were paid for "the openyng of Redyngate" and repairs to the walls from Worth Gate to Ridlegate were carried out.

From this time onwards there were constant complaints about the gateway being used "for the passage of courts, carts, waggons and wains", when it was supposed to be only for foot passengers. In 1560 the Mayor and Sir Roger Manwood reported the gate was ruinous, and the latter was asked to see about enlarging the gateway so that "it may suffice for the passing in and out there all carriages to convey out of the City the compost", which for many years was kept inside the City walls and "laid on a vacant place usual for disports, commonly called Dungeon", now the Dane John Gardens. The *Book of Murage* (1560-1) records £9 "paid to Simon Brown for making of Redyngate", and the gate was to be made suitable for taking away all the City's "filth", and in future nothing was to be put on the "Dungeon field". This area had long been used for the butts for practising archery and later with muskets, and it was also used as a pleasure ground, and sometimes had a Maypole.

The *Book of Murage* has several other interesting entries relating to the Ridlegate:

1575-6 "For a planck and other tymber and pyles to amend the way over the Ridlegate"

1585-6 "For six hundreth and a quarter of bricks used to repair the wall at Redyngate"

(perhaps in preparation against the Spanish Armada)

In 1589 the Ridlegate was to "be newly amended" and one "leaf" (door) of the gate was to be "continually kept shut and locked and to that end a Hump is to be set against it and no passage to be allowed unless for carrying out of Dung". In 1601 we hear once again of the prohibition of traffic using the gate except rubbish carts (it had "never been allowed in living memory") as "by the continual passage of such carriages (many times with great burthens) the ways near the said gate both within and without are grown very noisome to the inhabitants dwelling thereabout".

When King Charles I came to Canterbury in 1625 to await the arrival of his new queen, Henrietta Maria, from France, many soldiers were brought to the area and the *Book of Murage* records a sum of money "for making fast of Ridlegate to prevent the return of souldiers that were denied billett at Sandwich". It also records "timber to amend the gate being broken".

In 1640 the bridge over the gateway had again fallen into disrepair and during the Civil War a large sum of money was used to fortify the City speedily and to mure up the City gates. In 1669, after the return of Charles II, Ridlegate and Wincheap gates were ordered to be covered for their preservation, but after this little was done to maintain them. A final entry in 1775-6 orders "the way over" the gate (i.e. the wooden bridge) to be repaired again.

In 1782 the whole gateway was demolished as a prelude to the opening up of the streets of the City to larger coaches and carriages. In the following few years many other obstructions in the streets were removed and large campaigns to pave the streets were carried out. As well as the gate, the semi-circular tower on the north was also demolished and it was not until 1791 that Alderman Simmons at "great expense" had a spacious new brick arch constructed with a terrace walk above. This was all part of his improvements to the Dungeon Field (Dane John gardens). In 1802 an extra foot passage was constructed on the north and all of this survived until 1883 when the whole lot was swept away and replaced by an iron footbridge. After bnmb damage in the Second World War and heavy rain, which undermined the south pier, the present much wider bridge was built in 1970.

Tim Tatton-Brown, April 1986

**Our Grateful thanks are extended to Kent County Council for financing the emergency excavation.**

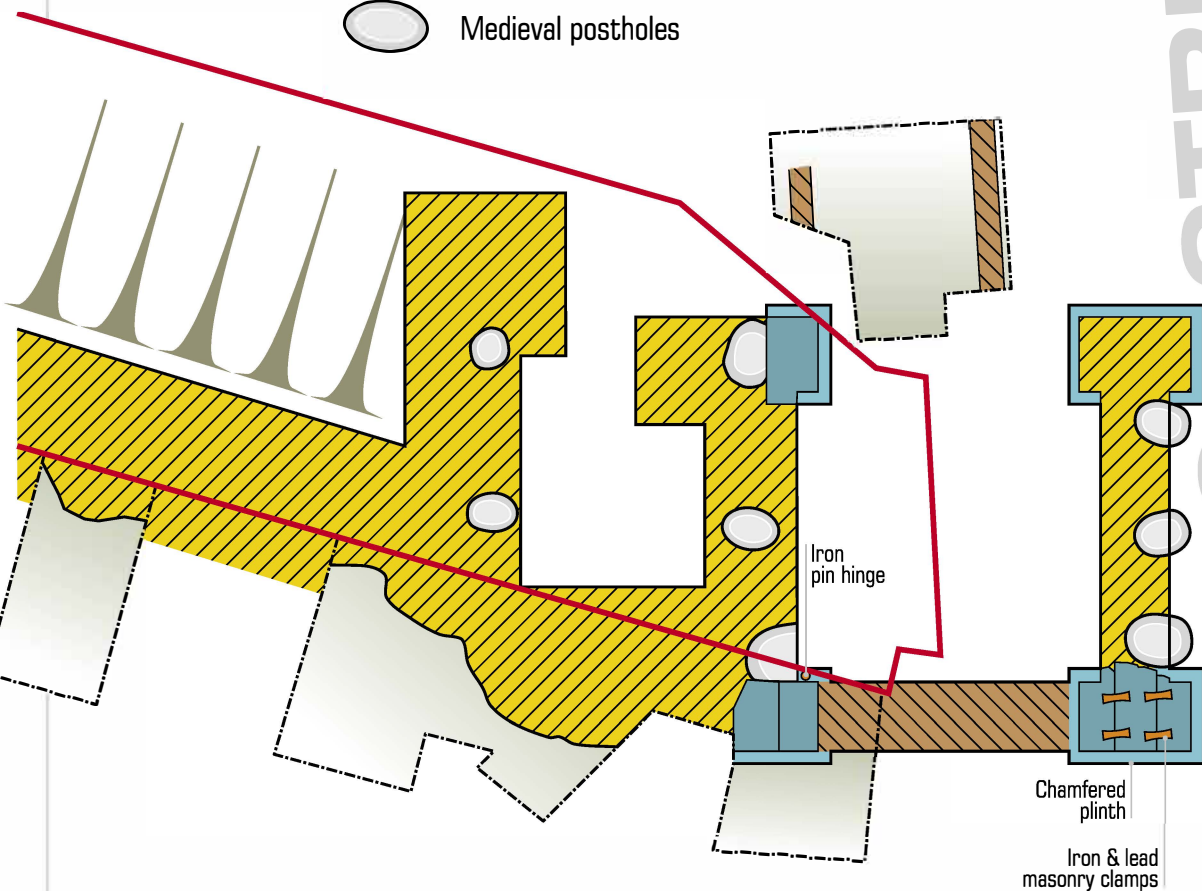


1953-4 and 1970 excavations

Roman c 270-275

Medieval C11th-C15th

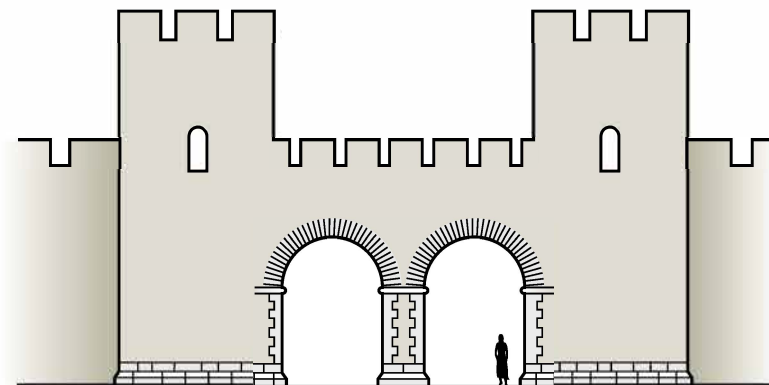
Medieval postholes



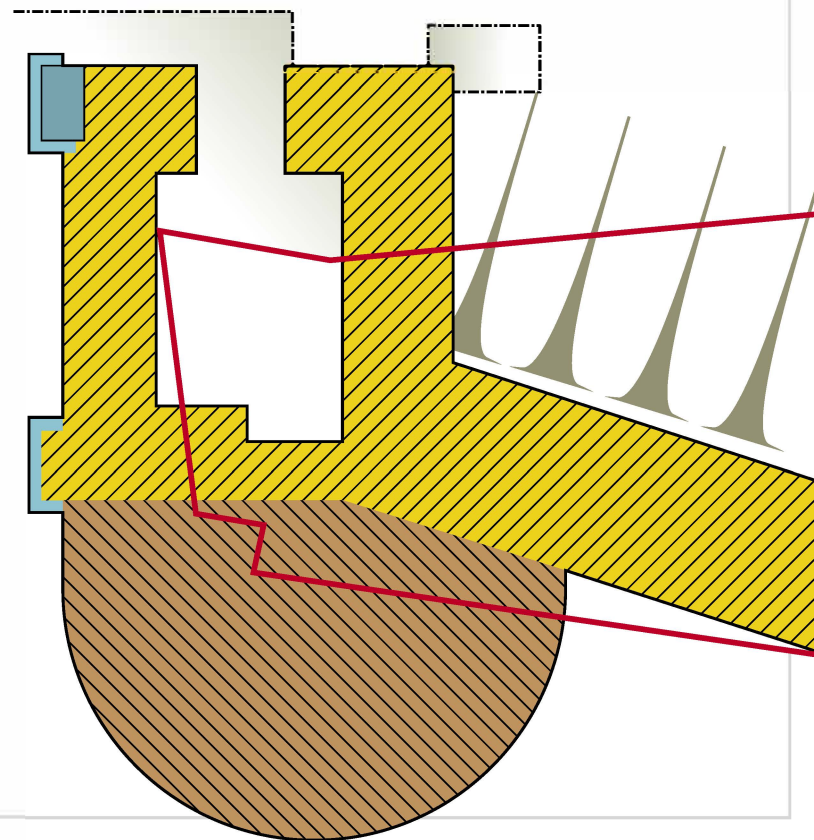
after  
J 4.4.86

0 metres 5  
0 feet 15

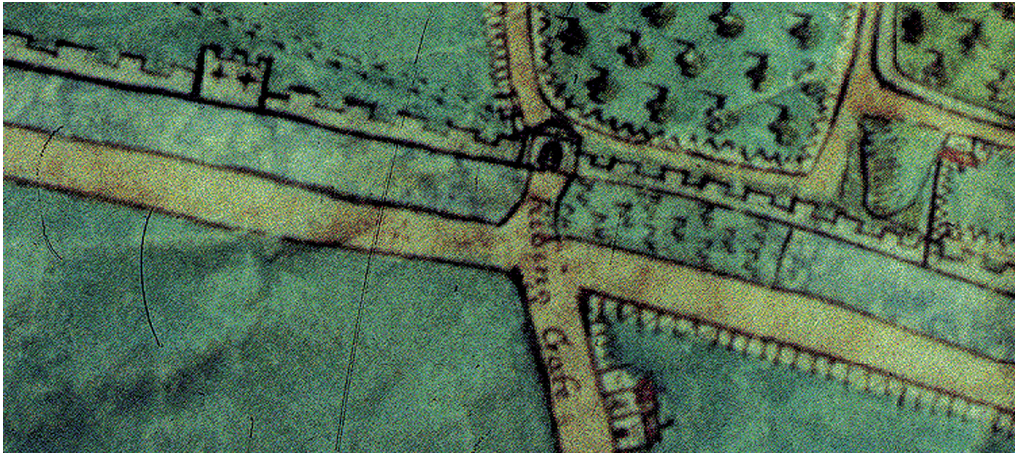
WATLING STREET



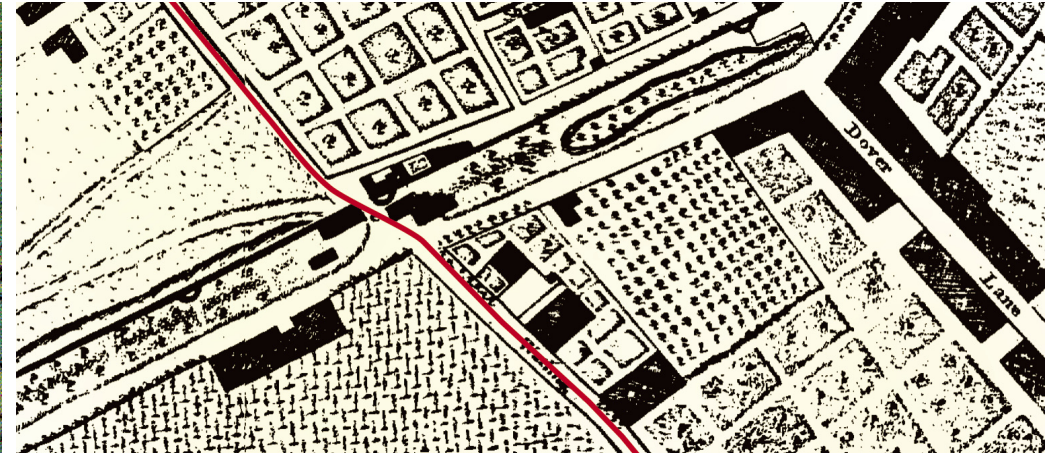
A tentative reconstruction of the Roman gate





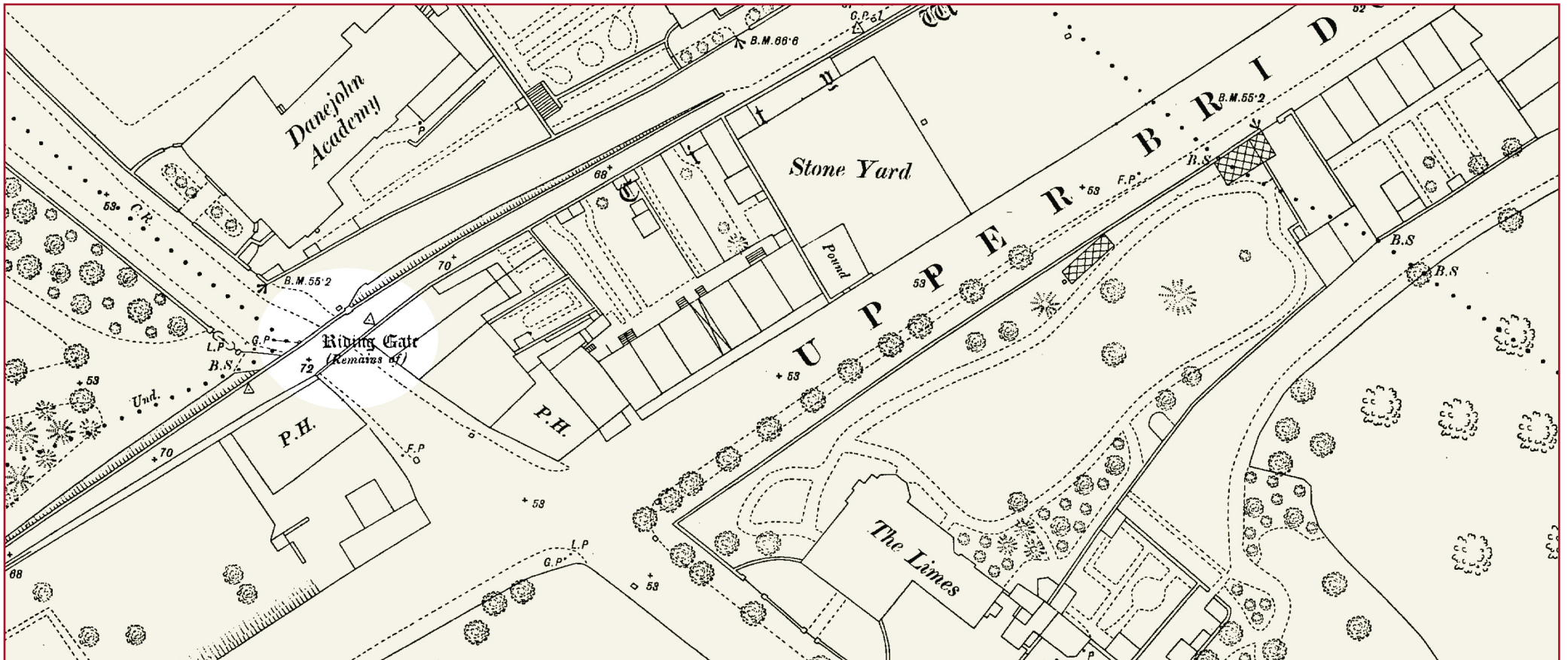


The Ridinggate area from the C.A.L.C. Map 123 (c. 1640).



The Ridinggate area from Doidge's map of 1752.

— Watling Street



The Ridinggate area from the 1st Edition Ordnance Survey, 1874.