

Chapter I

Introduction to an Archaeological Research Framework for the Solent-Thames sub-region: Resource Assessment and Research Agenda

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Introduction

This volume presents the results of the first two stages in a three-stage process for the production of a Research Framework for the historic environment covering the Solent-Thames sub-region, the western portion of the South East Region of England. The sub-region comprises the historic counties of Berkshire, Buckinghamshire, Hampshire, the Isle of Wight and Oxfordshire, including the six Berkshire Unitary Authorities, Milton Keynes, Southampton and Portsmouth (Fig. 1.1).

Following an introduction to the sub-region and its environment, and to the work undertaken as part of this study, the book is divided into sixteen chapters based on a chronological timeframe. Each period includes a chapter dealing with the *Resource Assessment* for that period in the sub-region, followed by one providing a *Research Agenda*. The *Resource Assessments*, which are the first stage of the Research Framework, describe the current level of knowledge and understanding relating to the historic environment, and explore the nature of the available resource within the area. The *Research Agendas* form the second stage, and identify those areas where there are major gaps in our current understanding and key research questions that need to be addressed. They also suggest possible methods by which this evidence could be obtained. The volume concludes with some themes which are common to many of the periods under discussion, and also some proposals for moving the Solent-Thames Research Framework project towards its next stage.

The *Research Strategy* for the sub-region will be developed in the third and final stage, and will provide a mechanism to allow Research Agenda issues to be addressed and the results reported and disseminated.

The Research Framework project

English Heritage (EH) highlighted the need for regional frameworks for the historic environment in 1996 with the publication of *Frameworks For Our Past*. The importance of Research Frameworks as a tool for ensuring that it is possible to meet long-term objectives for sustaining the historic environment, such as those identified within both

previous and existing government planning guidances) was emphasised in *Power of Place* (2000). The need for Research Frameworks was also addressed by DCMS in *Historic Environment: a Force for Our Future* (2001, paras 1.10 and 1.12), and Action Point 8 in that document stated that English Heritage had been ‘commissioned to frame a co-ordinated approach to research across the historic environment sector’. The need has again been highlighted by *The Government’s Statement on the Historic Environment for England 2010* (DCMS 2010) which accompanied the publication of Planning Policy Statement 5: Planning for the Historic Environment (PPS5). PPS5 set out the government’s objectives for the historic environment, which are being carried forward in the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF).

The historic environment is a non-renewable resource so particular care is needed to ensure that decisions that affect important sites, buildings and landscapes are carefully considered. Research Frameworks are important for providing sound contextual information and a basis for assessing the significance of the historic environment resource to planners, conservationists and developers. A record of the past is not as valuable as the historic asset itself so an offer to fund investigation cannot in itself be seen as justification for destruction. This is almost always the case, even if there is significant research interest, because such interest can normally be satisfied either elsewhere or by less destructive means.

Research Frameworks can also inform strategies for the preservation, utilisation and display of the historic environment. A wide variation in the state of knowledge and approaches to the conservation of the historic environment has been recognised across the country, which has hindered a structured approach to research into the past and access to the results for the public at large. Research Frameworks are an important element in the creation of a fundamental shift in the role that historic landscapes and seascapes, maritime heritage and buildings play in national life (English Heritage 2001).

The Research Frameworks initiative advocates the review of regional resources and the formulation of a policy for further research within a national, regional and local framework. It aims to facilitate decision

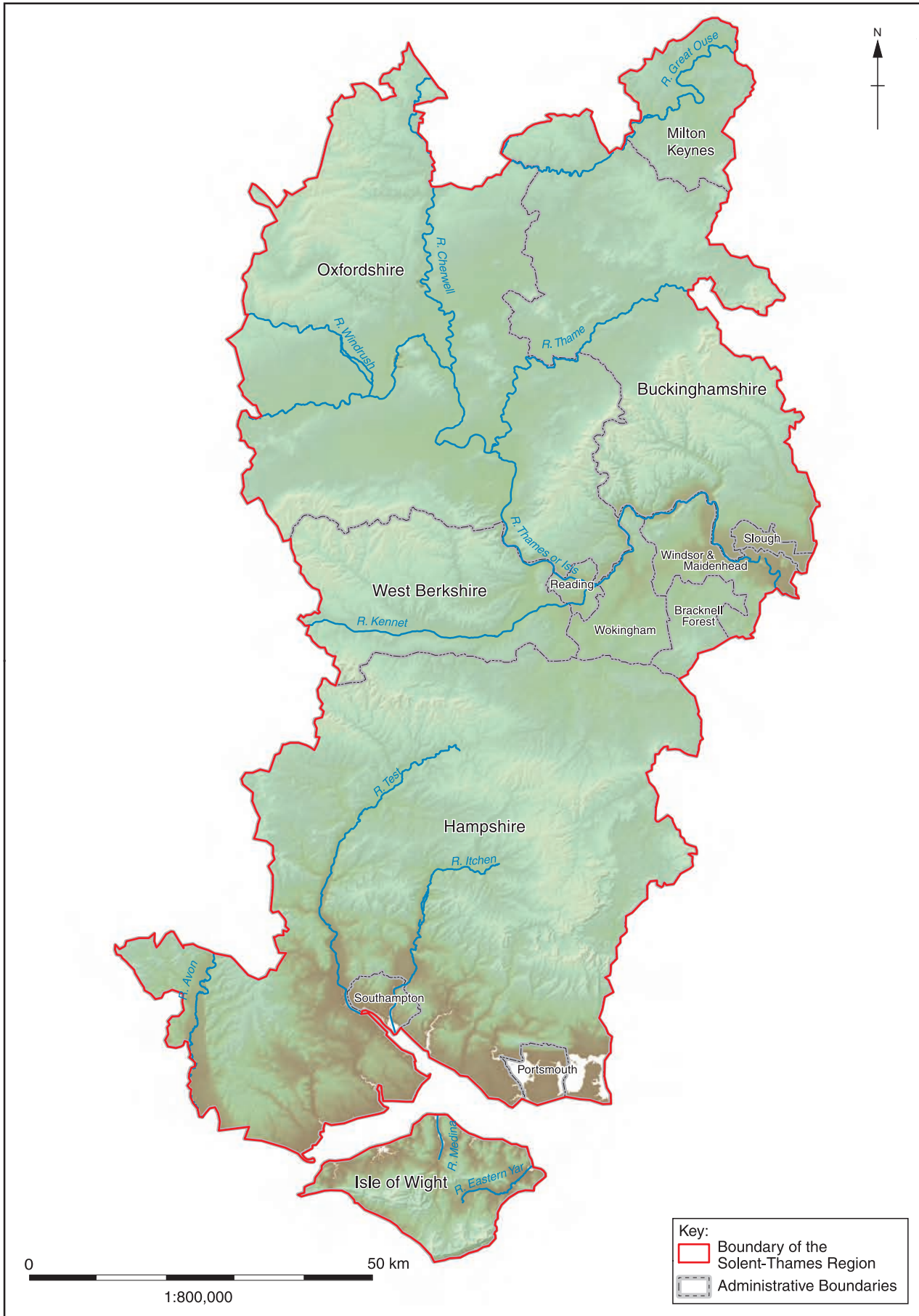


Figure 1.1 Solent-Thames sub-region showing Administrative Areas

making, to prioritise resources and to link curation, developer-funded work and research, enabling curatorial decisions to be firmly based and fairly judged. The Framework has tried to encourage the participation of all those who are active in historic environment work.

Methodology

Oxford Wessex Archaeology (OWA) is a Joint Venture combining the expertise of Oxford Archaeology and Wessex Archaeology. In 2005, OWA was invited by the Association of Local Government Archaeological Officers (ALGAO) for the South East and English Heritage to prepare a Project Design for the compilation of a Resource Assessment and Research Agenda for the sub-region and to co-ordinate this process (Oxford Wessex Archaeology 2005). This followed an extensive consultation exercise involving a wide range of interested organisations, local groups and individuals across the Solent-Thames sub-region, people in neighbouring regions who had experience of Research Frameworks, and selected national bodies who were considered to have a natural interest in the project. The project has been monitored by a Steering Group comprising representatives from those organisations, the relevant local authorities, higher education bodies and local heritage societies.

Two principal options were considered for the structure of the Research Framework: a period-based approach supplemented by a consideration of overarching themes, and a thematic-based approach with chapters addressing specific issues covering all periods. The former was adopted as it was felt to offer the most useful product for its likely users and be more effective and practical to organise. The first stage in the process was the preparation of period Resource Assessments for each county, which were undertaken by 39 individual contributors, some covering more than one period. These were followed by consultation, both in the form of public seminars held in each county and by posting the documents on the project website as they were completed. Lead authors for each of the main periods then combined the county contributions into overall period Resource Assessments and prepared draft Research Agendas. Consultation on the draft agendas was undertaken through seminars organised on a period basis, and through web-based discussion.

Resource Assessments and Research Agendas were amended to take into account comments received and uploaded onto the Project website: http://oxfordarch.co.uk/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=553&Itemid=277 where they remain available. Details of the County Contributors, Lead Authors and Steering Group are given in Appendix A.

The project has incorporated the philosophy that Research Frameworks should be undertaken in partnership with all those with historic and cultural interests at a local and regional level, and with other regional bodies. In practice, however, there were different levels of participation across the heritage sector, and strategies for engaging more fully with some curators, for example

those in the built heritage sector, need more consideration in the final phase. The project has also tried to recognise the unique qualities of the area, and the great diversity of its population, its natural and cultural environments and potential impacts upon them.

The Solent-Thames Region

Political and administrative background

The Solent-Thames sub-region has no political or administrative existence, but is a convenient sub-division of the South East Region, reflecting the variation in character of the area and the intensity of occupation of this part of England, both now and in the past. It is also an area that, in the latter part of the 20th century and early years of the 21st, has seen immense pressure from development and rapid change, with resulting impacts on its countryside, seascapes and townscapes. The lack of a historical identity for the Solent-Thames sub-region has added to the challenges of the project, but as a transect across the heart of southern England from the South Coast to the Chilterns and Cotswolds, it has provided a new perspective upon the information from this area.

The historic counties that make up the Solent-Thames sub-region underwent significant boundary changes in the later 20th century. In 1974, a large part of North Berkshire was transferred to Oxfordshire, part becoming the Vale of the White Horse District and part joining the South Oxfordshire District. Slough and its surrounding area were transferred from Buckinghamshire to Berkshire.

In 1995, the Isle of Wight, already an independent authority, and Milton Keynes, then part of Buckinghamshire, became Unitary Authorities. Two years later the same status was granted to the City of Southampton and the City of Portsmouth. In 1998, Berkshire ceased to exist as a local authority with the creation of the Unitary Authorities of Bracknell Forest, Reading, Slough, West Berkshire, Windsor & Maidenhead and Wokingham.

This remains the pattern for the region and these boundaries are shown on Figure 1.1.

Geology and topography

The Solent-Thames topography is shown on Figure 1.2. River valleys, mainly associated with the Thames, the former River Solent and their tributaries dominate the area. The Solent strait formed as the result of a gradual widening of the valley of the River Solent. These valleys are interspersed with the broadly west-east trending uplands of the Cotswolds, the Corallian Ridge, the Berkshire Downs and Chilterns, and the Hampshire and South Downs (Plate 1.1). There is nowhere within the region where the land rises above 300m and the majority lies below 100m.

The overall pattern of the solid geology across the region is a series of bands running from south-west to north-east and then in a more west – east orientation, as

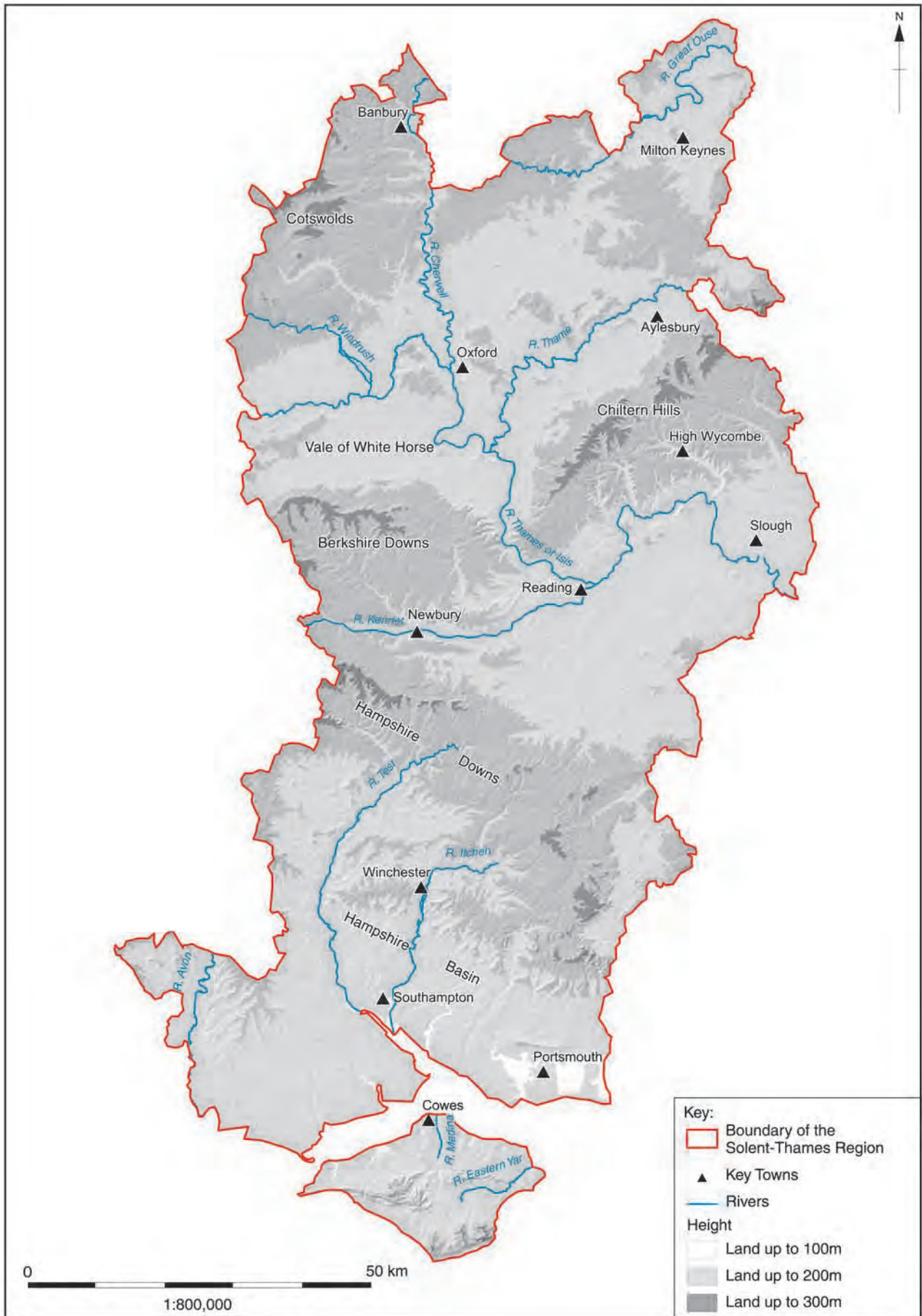


Figure 1.2 Topography of the Solent-Thames sub-region

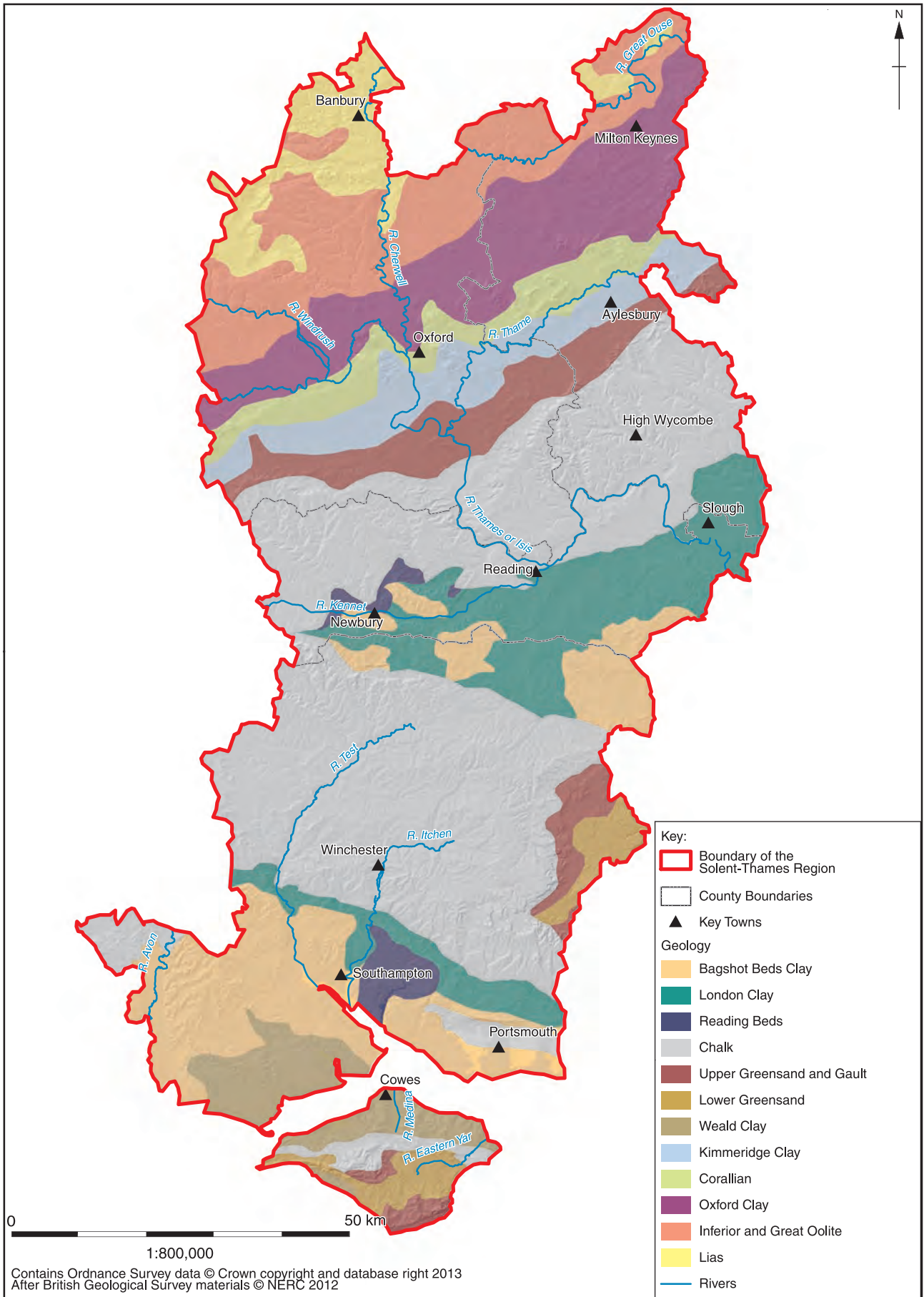


Figure 1.3 Solid geology of the Solent-Thames sub-region



Plate 1.1 Chiltern landscape, *copyright Jill Hind*

shown on Figure 1.3. Chalk, limestone and clays predominate.

The Isle of Wight has a central chalk ridge with the Needles on its western edge, and with Weald Clay to the north and Greensand to the south. In contrast to the steep southern cliffs, the northern part of the island has some distinctly marshy areas, formerly the south bank of the Solent River.

Central Hampshire is predominantly Chalk, with Bagshot Beds Clay and London Clay along the northern edge. The coastal area to the south and the New Forest to the south-west are mainly clay. The southern parts of Berkshire and Buckinghamshire are clays leading onto the dipslopes of the chalk ridge of the Chilterns to the east and the Berkshire Downs to the west.

This chalk ridge overlooks the Greensand and Gault and Kimmeridge Clay of the Vale of Aylesbury and the Vale of the White Horse, north of which is a band of Corallian limestone and sand then Oxford Clay. Oolitic limestone formations are found in the north of Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire.

Landscape Character

The combination of its geology, topography and river systems has created a wide range of environments in the Solent-Thames sub-region and these are described in the next chapter and shown on Figure 1.6. It has also led to the recognition of distinct Landscape Character Areas, which are shown on Figure 1.4. The varied character of the landscape has also influenced how people have interacted with their environment in the past and present, for example in the vast urban expansion in the east of the region close to London. These Character Areas were mapped by what is now Natural England in 1996; parts of 23 of the 159

Countryside Character Areas defined across England are represented in the Solent-Thames sub-region.

The best of the region's countryside has been recognised and granted statutory protection, as shown on Figure 1.5. Within the Solent-Thames sub-region there are two National Parks: the New Forest in the south-west, created in 2005, and the South Downs in the south-east, which was established in 2011. Five Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) are also present within the area. Two of these lie on the central Chalk uplands: the North Wessex Downs and the Chilterns, which meet at the River Thames, and large parts of the Isle of Wight form another. In the north-west, the Cotswolds AONB extends into Oxfordshire, and the western tip of Hampshire lies within the Cranborne Chase and West Wiltshire Downs AONB.

Communication routes

The Solent-Thames sub-region is crossed by a number of key routes connecting to London, and linking the North and the Midlands with the South Coast. The development of these transport networks within the region is discussed in more detail in the Post-medieval and Modern Resource Assessment chapter.

There are three main motorway links. The M40 from London to the Birmingham area passes across Buckinghamshire and Oxfordshire, while the M4 from London to South Wales bisects Berkshire. The South Coast is connected to London by the M3 through Hampshire, intersecting at Southampton with the M27, which runs along the south of the county from the New Forest to Portsmouth. The key trunk roads are the A5, which crosses Milton Keynes on its way from London to North Wales, the A34, which is still the main north-south route

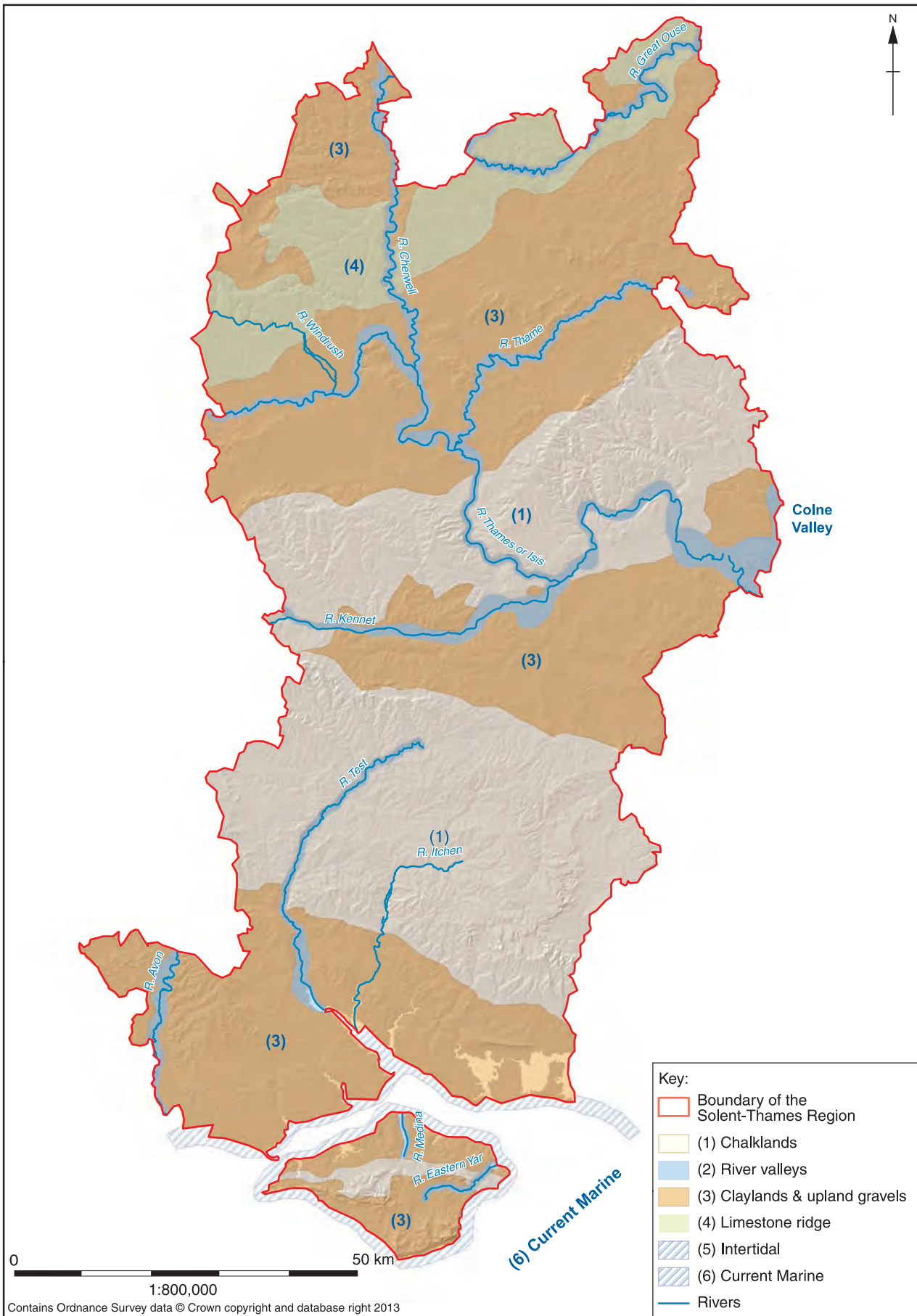


Figure 1.4 Topographic zones of the Solent-Thames sub-region



Figure I.5 Statutory protection in the Solent-Thames sub-region

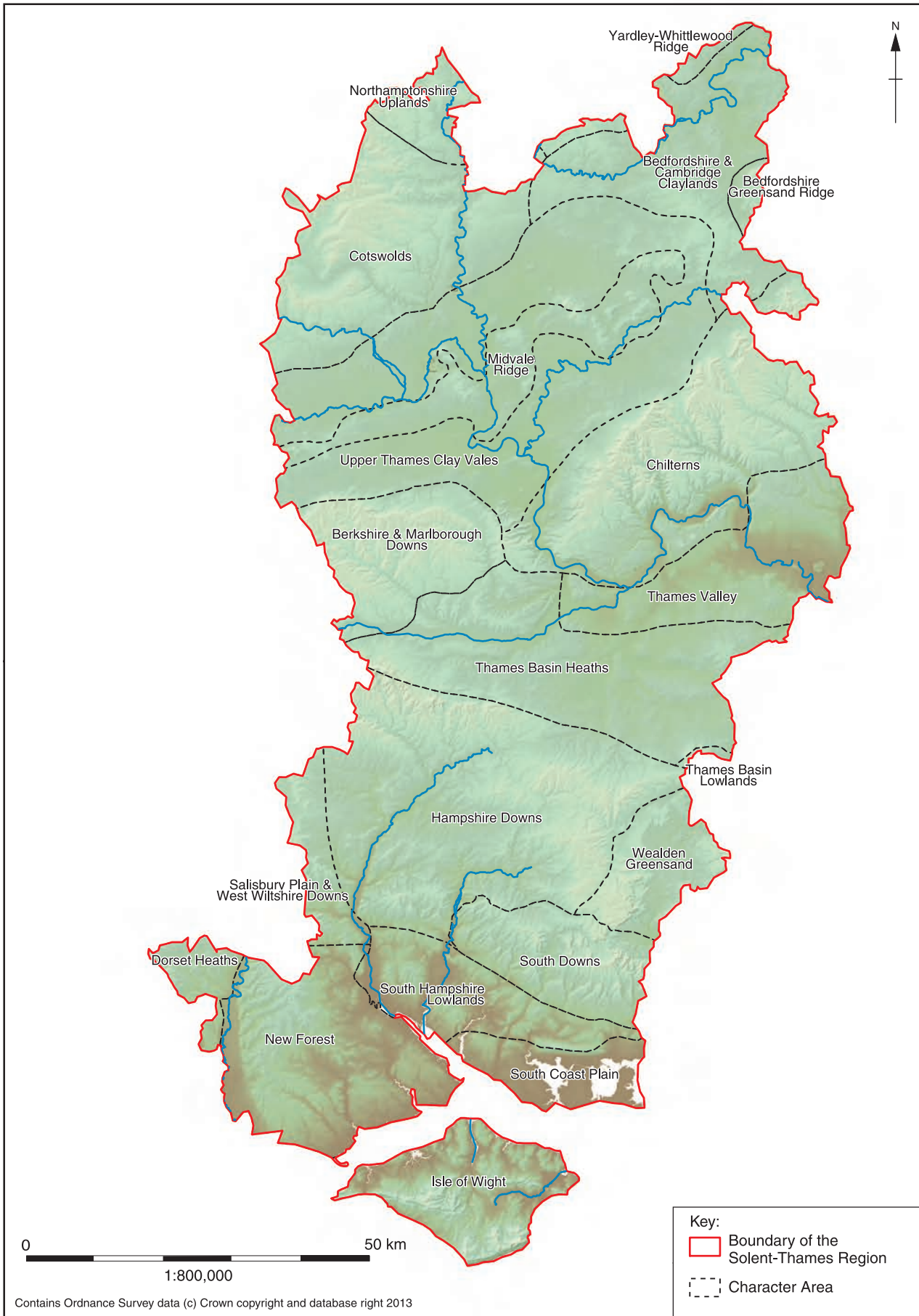


Figure 1.6 Environmental character areas of the Solent-Thames sub-region



Plate 1.2 Kennet and Avon canal, Berkshire, *copyright Jill Hind*

through the centre of Southern England, and the A303 linking the region to the South West.

Most of the major cities and towns in the region are served by railways. Rail use has increased since the end of the 20th century and there are ongoing projects to update stations, and to improve lines between Oxford and Bicester to provide an alternative route to London. The proposed new High Speed 2 rail service is due to run through Buckinghamshire.

Air links are more restricted. There are only two airports within the region with scheduled services: Southampton and London Oxford at Kidlington, although London Heathrow lies only just outside the region to the east.

Although rivers and canals no longer support significant commercial traffic, they have become important



Plate 1.3 HMS Warrior in Portsmouth Dockyard, Hampshire, *copyright Dave Allen*

parts of the region's leisure business (Plate 1.2). The sea is still a very important transport route. For the Isle of Wight, this is the only public link with the outside world, with vehicle ferries, catamarans and hovercraft services from Cowes, Freshwater, Ryde and Yarmouth to Lymington, Southampton, Portsmouth and Southsea. Ferry services from Portsmouth also serve Guernsey and Jersey in the Channel Islands, Caen, Cherbourg, Le Havre and St Malo in France, and Bilbao and Santander in Spain. Southampton remains one of the United Kingdom's most important ports, dealing with a substantial volume of containers, vehicles, oil and people (the last through the largest cruise liner terminal in the UK), while Portsmouth has continued to be a significant dockyard (Plate 1.3).

The nature of the archaeological evidence

The varying effects of acid and alkaline soils, the differing degree to which archaeological remains are buried below the modern ground surface, and the uneven distribution of post-depositional disturbance, has led to a complicated pattern of survival and visibility of archaeological remains in the sub-region. Environmental conditions across the sub-region and the preservation of environmental data are discussed in detail in Chapter 2.

Of particular importance in the Solent-Thames region is the presence of extensive alluvial floodplains in the river valleys, sealing and protecting pre-Roman remains, and sometimes those of a later date. The understanding of the process of alluviation and the periods during which it occurred are of great importance for appreciating what may survive in these locations. Although preservation may be good, sites can be very difficult to find. Air photography, fieldwalking and geophysical survey are seldom of use (unless overlying deposits are shallow) and the problems of examining small percentages of areas in trenched evaluations have been noted (Hey and Lacey 2001). These difficulties are exacerbated when archaeological remains are ephemeral in character, as so many earlier prehistoric settlement sites in these locations are.

Similar problems of survival and visibility apply to the intertidal areas along the Hampshire coast and the north coast of the Isle of Wight (Allen and Gardiner 2000). Here, however, the conditions can be much more dynamic, with some deposits exposed on a regular basis, in addition to those which are more deeply buried. They have received much less attention than inland environments and are more poorly understood (see Chapter 2).

Where soils are thinner and/or geologies are more susceptible to the effects of drought, air photography has been particularly successful in locating archaeological sites. This applies particularly to the gravel terraces of the main river valleys (see Plate 7.8). In the Thames Valley, for example, air photography has been important for recovering archaeological information in advance of gravel quarrying since the early decades of the 20th century. The Chalk Downs and limestone uplands also provide good cropmark evidence. The level of preservation in downland



Plate 1.4 Fieldwalking in progress at Yarnton, *copyright OA*

areas and in wooded areas can be particularly good. Other remote techniques, such as geophysical survey, have been successful in identifying sites in these environments.

Fieldwalking has a long history of use in the sub-region (Plate 1.4). For example, important Mesolithic assemblages have been recovered on the Hampshire Greensand since the 19th century, and have formed the basis for much of our chronology of the British Mesolithic (Reynier 2000). This method has provided a useful means of detecting the presence of archaeological

sites, though fieldwalking assemblages are also an indicator of their destruction. The impact of ploughing on the historic environment in the sub-region is of some concern and the subject of a number of current studies (<http://www.englishheritage.org.uk/publications/ripping-up-history-archaeology-under-the-plough>).

Arable cultivation can also lead to the formation of colluvial deposits, as can other processes of erosion. These events have been noted particularly in Chalklands, but can occur in small pockets elsewhere in the landscape. As with alluviation, this process serves to both protect and to hide remains sealed beneath it.

The Solent-Thames sub-region is well-populated, and contains a number of large urban centres as well as new towns and large and growing villages. House construction and related infrastructure and services have affected earlier remains, digging through and levelling off archaeological deposits and demolishing earlier buildings. These activities can however also build over and seal earlier remains and, even in our towns and cities, preservation sometimes surprises us, as the recent discovery of a Neolithic henge in the centre of Oxford, or the examples of early houses encased within later buildings have shown. Important, and sometimes extensive, archaeological excavation in advance of development has been undertaken over the last few decades, for example in Milton Keynes, Southampton, Winchester and Oxford



Plate 1.5 View of excavations in progress in the French quarter, Southampton, *copyright OA*



Plate 1.6 St George's Tower, Oxford Castle, *copyright OA*

(Plates 1.5; 1.6). Such development both provides the opportunity to investigate the urban heritage and poses a threat to its survival, an issue that needs to be addressed.

Although the Solent-Thames sub-region is not thought of as an industrial area, industry has also had an important impact upon parts of its historic environment. This includes engineering such as car and ship building and a variety of manufacturing processes, especially those associated with food processing and the nuclear industry. Gravel extraction has had a significant effect on the countryside of many of the river valleys, particularly the Thames, with important archaeological remains coming to light. This activity is now beginning to have an impact on the marine environment.

Table 1.1 HER/UAD Records

<i>HER/UAD</i>	<i>Number of records</i>
Berkshire Archaeology	10611
Buckinghamshire	36983
Hampshire	45570
Isle of Wight	13445
Milton Keynes	9000
Oxfordshire	36200
Oxford City UAD	3936
Portsmouth*	
Southampton	8836
West Berkshire	9027
Winchester – UAD	5073
Winchester – excluding UAD area	6640

*At the time of writing no access to this HER was available.

Sources of information for the Historic Environment

A number of key sources of information were consulted during the compilation of the Resource Assessments and Research Agendas presented in this volume, and many of these are available to the public at large.

Historic Environment Records

The primary sources of archaeological information are the Historic Environment Records (HERs) maintained at local authority level. Oxfordshire was, in 1964, the first county to set up a Sites and Monuments Record (SMR), as they were previously called, followed by the other historic counties. Today, West Berkshire maintains its own HER, but the other Unitary Authorities in the old county have set up a joint resource, Berkshire Archaeology, based in Reading. Milton Keynes, the City of Southampton and the City of Portsmouth have their own HERs. As part of an English Heritage-funded initiative, Urban Archaeological Databases have been created for Oxford City and for Winchester. These operate in parallel with their county-based HERs, although the relevant authorities are continuing to develop their records and Winchester now has a district-wide HER.

The data on the numbers of monuments and events recorded in the HERs in 2011 is given in Table 1.1.

In addition to databases of events and monuments, HERs are repositories of unpublished archaeological reports ('grey literature'). The National Monuments Record (NMR) in Swindon, maintained by English Heritage, has a similar database and its grey literature includes many thematic surveys of industrial buildings of particular relevance for this area. The NMR also holds large collections of architectural plans and photographs, particularly air photographs. Photographs can also be seen in local record offices and local history centres.

It is now possible to access online a version of all of the Historic Environment Records of the Solent-Thames region (apart from Portsmouth). *Heritage Gateway*, maintained by English Heritage, is increasingly used as a portal for searching both local and national records, but in several instances HER information can also be searched through the respective local authority websites, which often supply additional material such as parish surveys or Historic Landscape Characterisation studies (HLC).

Local archaeological services

The provision of local authority curatorial services very largely replicates the distribution of HERs/UADs. In addition, the New Forest National Park maintains a separate Archaeological Officer. For Listed Buildings, the responsibility usually lies at a more local level, the various districts having their own Conservation Officers.

The Portable Antiquities Scheme (PAS) was established to encourage the general public to report any archaeological finds they made, enabling this information to be entered onto a database. Information from the PAS



Plate 1.7 Finds Liaison Officer at work, Isle of Wight, *copyright Isle of Wight Council*

is fed back into HERs at intervals. To facilitate recording, a network of Finds Liaison Officers (FLOs) was established. There are five FLOs covering the Solent-Thames sub-region: the Isle of Wight; Hampshire; West Berkshire and Oxfordshire; Buckinghamshire; and East Berkshire (along with Surrey) (Plate 1.7).

Designated sites

The Solent-Thames region has a rich resource and many of the sites have been recognised as of national or international significance and awarded a designated status. There is one World Heritage Site within the region: Blenheim Palace, which was inscribed in 1986 (see Plate 17.3). Scheduled Monuments range from the Neolithic Rollright Stones (see Plate 7.12) in the north of Oxfordshire to the GAMA complex at Greenham Common, Berkshire (see Plate 17.7), via iconic sites such as Carisbrooke Castle in the Isle of Wight (Plate 1.8). There is also a wide variety of Listed Buildings of very varied character. Tables 1.2-1.5 show how designation categories are distributed across the region using data from the English Heritage National Heritage List for England in 2011.

This distribution obviously partly reflects the relative size of the areas covered by the different local authority areas, as shown on Figure 1.1: Hampshire occupies by far the largest area and, although Milton Keynes was a designated New Town, it incorporated several important villages and their hinterlands. It is also affected by the urban character of many of the Unitary Authorities. Bracknell Forest and Slough in particular are fairly recent developments.

Museums, Record Offices and Local History Centres

The Solent-Thames region is well served by museums run by local authorities, by private organisations and by trusts and, in the cases of Oxford and Reading, by their Universities. In Berkshire, there are two principal museums: Reading Museum and the West Berkshire Museum in Newbury, in addition to the Museum of English Rural Life at Reading University. The Buckinghamshire Museum is located in Aylesbury and there is also a museum in Milton Keynes and the Chiltern Open Air Museum at Chalfont St Giles. Hampshire Museum Service maintains a number of museums, and there are also independent museums in Winchester and the Cities of Portsmouth and Southampton. The Isle of Wight



Plate 1.8 Donkey wheel, Carisbrooke Castle, Isle of Wight, *copyright English Heritage*

Table 1.2 Scheduled Ancient Monuments by Authority area

<i>Local Authority</i>	<i>Number of Scheduled Monuments</i>
Bracknell Forest	12
Buckinghamshire	142
City of Portsmouth	18
City of Southampton	42
Hampshire	617
Isle of Wight	120
Milton Keynes	50
Oxfordshire	298
Reading	2
Slough	2
West Berkshire	91
Windsor & Maidenhead	17
Wokingham	18

Table 1.4 Registered Parks and Gardens by Authority area

<i>Local Authority</i>	<i>No of Grade I</i>	<i>No of Grade II*</i>	<i>No of Grade II</i>
Bracknell Forest	1	2	3
Buckinghamshire	5	11	20
City of Portsmouth	0	0	3
City of Southampton	0	1	2
Hampshire	2	22	32
Isle of Wight	0	1	7
Milton Keynes	0	2	1
Oxfordshire	9	16	33
Reading	0	0	5
Slough	0	0	4
West Berkshire	0	4	10
Windsor & Maidenhead	7	1	4
Wokingham	0	4	3

Museum Service also supports a wide range of museums, including the Museum of Island History at Newport. Oxfordshire Museum Service has its principal museum in Woodstock, but provides services to other local museums. Oxford University houses the Ashmolean Museum, the University Museum and the Pitt Rivers Museum.

Each of the counties has its own Record Office: Berkshire Record Office in Reading; the Centre for Buckinghamshire Studies in Aylesbury; Hampshire Archives and Local Studies in Winchester; the Isle of Wight Record Office in Newport; and the Oxfordshire History Centre. There are also the Southampton City Archives and Portsmouth Record Office. To supplement these, a number of the larger libraries, particularly within the Unitary Authorities, also contain a local studies collection.

Access to catalogues is available online for the Record Offices. Their websites increasingly provide direct access to many of the holdings, including for example all the enclosure maps and awards for Berkshire. 'Oxfordshire Heritage Search' includes catalogues for not just the record office, but also many

Table 1.3 Listed Buildings by Authority area

<i>Local Authority</i>	<i>No Grade I listings</i>	<i>No Grade II* listings</i>	<i>No Grade II listings</i>
Bracknell Forest	1	9	253
Buckinghamshire	135	296	5374
City of Portsmouth	12	32	406
City of Southampton	12	19	286
Hampshire	183	494	10095
Isle of Wight	29	67	1837
Milton Keynes	30	59	1001
Oxfordshire	381	689	11073
Reading	6	21	480
Slough	5	7	90
West Berkshire	42	107	1736
Windsor & Maidenhead	22	69	866
Wokingham	9	40	592

Table 1.5 Registered Battlefields by Authority area

<i>Local Authority</i>	<i>No Battlefields</i>
Bracknell Forest	0
Buckinghamshire	0
City of Portsmouth	0
City of Southampton	0
Hampshire	1
Isle of Wight	0
Milton Keynes	0
Oxfordshire	2
Reading	0
Slough	0
West Berkshire	1
Windsor & Maidenhead	0
Wokingham	0

of the county's museums, with much material, including the HER, available to view.

Societies and education

Each of the historic counties of the Solent-Thames region has at least one county society covering archaeology and/or local history. Each county society produces a journal: the *Berkshire Archaeological Journal*, the *Records of Buckinghamshire*, *Hampshire Studies*, *Wight Studies* and *Oxoniensia*. In addition, archaeological work across the region is reported in two of the Council for British Archaeology journals: *CBA Wessex News*, covering Berkshire, Hampshire and the Isle of Wight, and *South Midlands Archaeology*, which includes Buckinghamshire and Oxfordshire.

The number of societies relating to the historic environment is very large, catering for a wide range of local and specialist interests. In Berkshire, Hampshire and Oxfordshire there are umbrella organisations drawing together the various local history societies for the county. The Oxfordshire *History* website provides information about the county's past and provides many useful links. The Buckinghamshire Archaeological

Society supports the Buckinghamshire Local History Network (BLHN).

There are nine universities within the region: Buckingham, Buckinghamshire New University, the Open University, Oxford, Oxford Brookes, Portsmouth, Reading, Southampton and Winchester. Of these, Buckingham is the only one not to offer any historic environment related courses. The Open University, Oxford, Reading, Southampton and Winchester all offer archaeology at undergraduate and masters level. Oxford University also offers a wide range of continuing education courses, one of the few universities anywhere in the country to continue work of this type.

Many of the universities are involved in research projects within the region. Reading University's Silchester Project is in its 15th year, for example, the *Hillforts of the Ridgeway* project carried out by the University of Oxford is nearing completion, while the University of Southampton has been commissioned by English Heritage to prepare a *Maritime and Marine Historic Environment Research Framework*. Important contributions are also made by establishments outside the region, most notably the University of Leicester, which has been one of the partners in the *Wallingford Burgh to Borough* project since 2008, and also in the Whittlewood Project, which includes the north-east of Buckinghamshire.

Key projects

The level of research activity within the Solent-Thames region is very healthy, with the impetus for work coming from all levels, from national initiatives to projects run wholly by local societies. It is impossible to discuss all of this work, but a number of key projects are described briefly below.

Urban surveys were carried out for Oxfordshire, Berkshire and Hampshire in the 1970s. With English Heritage funding, an updated version for Hampshire and the Isle of Wight has been prepared, and work is underway in Buckinghamshire. Oxford and Winchester have also been covered by another English Heritage initiative for larger towns and cities. Each has an Urban Archaeological Database prepared following careful inspection and analysis of the records of past work. These databases form the foundation for a deeper understanding of a town's development and help formulate a specific Research Agenda. In Oxford this stage of the work is well underway.

Another relevant research programme is Historic Landscape Characterisation (HLC). This has been carried out for Hampshire; West Berkshire (including the part of Oxfordshire within the North Wessex Downs AONB); Buckinghamshire and the Chilterns (extending to areas beyond the Thames Solent Region). A Landscape Characterisation study has also been prepared for the Cotswolds AONB, which extends into Oxfordshire, and an HLC for Oxfordshire has begun in 2012.

English Heritage's National Mapping Programme has covered four areas in the Solent-Thames sub-region: the

Cotswold Hills, Hampshire South Downs, Lambourn Downs and the Thames Valley, one of its pilot projects.

There have been many local research projects over the past few years involving excavation and survey, some of which have already been mentioned. These have been undertaken variously by academic, professional and non-professional groups.

The Tidgrove Project, centred on the medieval site at Tidgrove Warren, was a joint enterprise between Kingsclere Heritage Association and the University of Southampton. As a result of the work earlier occupation from the late Iron Age and Roman periods was also identified.

The Hampshire and Wight Trust for Maritime Archaeology has been involved in many projects within the region, including the *Wootton Quarr* and *Bouldnor Cliff* projects, and work in Langstone Harbour has been examining the intertidal zone further east. The Danebury Trust spent many years studying the Iron Age hillfort and its surrounding landscape and, in *Danebury Environs Project II*, work has been extended to cover the Romano-British period.

Excavations at Silchester by Reading University, examining the Roman town, its origins and hinterland started *c.* 1974 and continue to yield exciting discoveries and excellent outreach facilities, as does the work at Marcham/Frilford undertaken by the Oxford University. The hillforts of the Berkshire Downs have also received attention, as mentioned above.

A collaborative research project at Dorchester-on-Thames, involving Oxford University, Oxford Archaeology and the local residents of Dorchester co-ordinated through the local museum, is investigating its development from Neolithic ceremonial complex to medieval monastery. This highlights the important role that local, non-professionals play in archaeological research in the area. A good example of this was the recent Whiteleaf Project, near Princes Risborough in Buckinghamshire (Plate 1.9).



Plate 1.9 Work in progress at Whiteleaf, Buckinghamshire, copyright OA

Work continues on the Victoria County History volumes for Oxfordshire and the VCH team have combined this with the *England's Past for Everyone* initiative funded by the Heritage Lottery Fund. Two volumes, one on Burford and another on Henley-on-Thames, have been produced with the assistance of local individuals and groups. A further community initiative is in place linked to preparation of the volume covering Ewelme hundred.

A number of large developer-funded projects have also played an important role in advancing our understanding of the historic environment, for example the Eton Rowing Course, the Maidenhead to Windsor Flood Alleviation Scheme, Yarnton and other projects

focused on gravel extraction, for example around Stanton Harcourt and Abingdon in Oxfordshire and Reading in Berkshire.

Oxford Archaeology is publishing four volumes in a series entitled *Thames Through Time*. This has been an Aggregate Sustainability Levy Fund project to provide an overview of the area surrounding the non-tidal section of the River Thames, where there has been so much development work in recent years. Much of this area lies within the Solent-Thames sub-region. Three volumes have been published and the Later Historical Period volume is in preparation. A *Historical Atlas of Berkshire* (ed. Joan Dils) was published in 1998 and the *Historical Atlas of Oxfordshire* (eds Tiller and Darkes) in 2010.