

Rewley Abbey Wall Upper Fisher Row Oxford



Archaeological Watching Brief



Oxford Archaeology

9th November 2001

Client Name: Oxford City Council

Issue N^o: 1

OA Job N^o: 1021

NGR: SP 5067 0846

Client Name: Oxford City Council

Client Ref No:

Document Title: Rewley Abbey Wall, Upper Fisher Row, Oxford

Document Type: Watching Brief

Issue Number: 1

National Grid Reference: NGR SP 5067 0846

Planning Reference:

OA Tender Number: 3497

Site Code: OXRAW 01

Invoice Code: OXRAWWB

Museum Accession No: 2001.142

Prepared by: James Mumford

Position: Assistant Supervisor

Date: 09th November 2001

Checked by: John Hiller

Position: Senior Project Manager

Date: 09th November 2001

Approved by: Robert Williams

Signed.....

Position: Director, Head of Business and Operations

Date: 09th November 2001

Document File Location U:\OAU\wbREPORTS\Oxford City\RewAbbWall.doc

Graphics File Location oau all drawings - *OXRAWWB*Rewley Abbey Wall

Oxford*RMS*09.11.01

Illustrated by Roz Smith

Disclaimer:

This document has been prepared for the titled project or named part thereof and should not be relied upon or used for any other project without an independent check being carried out as to its suitability and prior written authority of Oxford Archaeology being obtained. Oxford Archaeology accepts no responsibility or liability for the consequences of this document being used for a purpose other than the purposes for which it was commissioned. Any person/party using or relying on the document for such other purposes agrees, and will by such use or reliance be taken to confirm their agreement to indemnify Oxford Archaeology for all loss or damage resulting therefrom. Oxford Archaeology accepts no responsibility or liability for this document to any party other than the person/party by whom it was commissioned.

Oxford Archaeology

© Oxford Archaeological Unit Ltd 2001

Janus House

Osney Mead

Oxford OX2 0EA

t: (0044) 01865 263800

f: (0044) 01865 793496

e: info@oxfordarch.co.uk

w: www.oxfordarch.co.uk

Oxford Archaeological Unit Limited is a Registered Charity No: 285627

Rewley Abbey Wall, Upper Fisher Row, Oxford

NGR SP 5067 0846

Scheduled Ancient Monument, Oxon. No. 80

ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF REPORT

CONTENTS

Summary	1
1 Introduction.....	1
1.1 Location and scope of work.....	1
1.2 Geology and topography.....	1
1.3 Archaeological and historical background	1
2 Project Aims and Methodology	2
2.1 Aims.....	2
2.2 Methodology.....	2
3 Results.....	3
3.1 Description of deposits	3
3.2 Finds	3
3.3 Palaeo-environmental remains.....	3
4 Discussion And Conclusions	3
Appendix 1 Archaeological Context Inventory	5
Appendix 2 Bibliography and references	5
Appendix 3 Summary of Site Details	5

LIST OF FIGURES

- Fig. 1 OS Site location map
Fig. 2 Site plan of observed structures and lighting pits

SUMMARY

In October 2001, Oxford Archaeology (OA) carried out an archaeological watching brief adjacent to the towpath flanking the wall that formerly surrounded the Cistercian Abbey of Rewley in Oxford. The towpath is adjacent to the River Thames, and the work was undertaken north of the end of Upper Fisher Row. The watching brief was commissioned by Oxford City Council in advance of the construction of a new footpath with new lighting.

The watching brief revealed probable 19th century building footings and brick-built surfaces of comparable date, presumably associated with demolished structures along the riverside. The structural remains were overlain by a general spread of rich loam topsoil that had also accumulated over the former path. Medieval deposits known on the site were not impacted in the course of the work.

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Location and scope of work

- 1.1.1 Oxford City Council has granted planning permission for a new waterside footpath situated on land adjacent to the River Thames. The new path will extend from Upper Fisher Row alongside the new Rewley Road housing development of Rewley Court, Oxford (Figs 1 and 2).
- 1.1.2 Scheduled Monument Consent was granted for the scheme, subject to a programme of archaeological monitoring during the groundwork. This was in accordance with PPG 16, owing to the possibility of archaeological remains on the site of the new path.
- 1.1.3 A brief for the project was prepared by Oxford City Council's Archaeological Advisor, Brian Durham. Oxford Archaeology (OA) prepared a Written Scheme of Investigation detailing how it would maintain a watching brief during the construction work and record any archaeological remains uncovered in the course of the project.

1.2 Geology and topography

- 1.2.1 The site of Rewley Abbey and its environs lies at approximately 59.20 m OD. The abbey overlies the Thames Gravels, which are overlain by alluvial silts.
- 1.2.2 The existing path at the time of the investigation was overgrown with vegetation and modern debris, but was otherwise level.

1.3 Archaeological and historical background

- 1.3.1 The archaeological background to the watching brief was prepared for the Written Scheme of Investigation for the project (OA, 2001) and is reproduced below.

- 1.3.2 The site of the new pathway extends from the north end of Upper Fisher Row Road, alongside the wall that forms the eastern extent of the Scheduled Ancient Monument of Rewley Abbey (SAM Oxfordshire No.80). This moated complex of buildings, which was a medieval Cistercian Abbey and *studium* founded in AD 1280, lies due west of the river and riverside wall.
- 1.3.3 The Oxford Archaeological Unit (OAU, July 1994) carried out an archaeological field evaluation of the abbey site in March/April 1994. This added to the information gained by the OAU's field evaluations of 1986 and 1993 (OAU 1986, 1993). Most recently a series of watching briefs have been undertaken by Oxford Archaeology (OA) during construction work for the Said Business School on the abbey site (OAU 1998, 2000).
- 1.3.4 The limestone wall adjacent to the river is generally assumed to have formed part of the abbey complex. The wall was investigated during the 1993 evaluation by a trench cut either side of the structure (OAU 1993). The wall itself appears to have been rebuilt at least once, and a communicating gateway in the wall incorporates a re-sited stone fragment probably from the abbey itself.
- 1.3.5 In the late 19th century the land here was used briefly by one J Beesley, who practised basket making (Squires, 1928, 164).
- 1.3.6 The later history of the site is sketchy, though a map of the 1970s depicts structures on the side of the river.

2 PROJECT AIMS AND METHODOLOGY

2.1 Aims

- 2.1.1 To identify and record the presence/absence, extent, condition, quality and date of archaeological remains in the areas affected by the development.
- 2.1.2 To make available the results of the archaeological investigation.

2.2 Methodology

- 2.2.1 The site was cleared of vegetation and the ground level reduced by a mini excavator operated by the contractors.
- 2.2.2 The excavation of four holes by the contractors for the insertion of new street lights was monitored in the last phase of the work.
- 2.2.3 A site plan of the works was made at a scale of 1:100 and a brief record of the excavated deposits and the four new lighting holes made. A photographic record of the work was made using colour slide and black-and-white print film. Recording was based on procedures detailed in the *OAU Fieldwork Manual* (ed. D Wilkinson, 1992).

3 RESULTS

3.1 Description of deposits

- 3.1.1 A mini excavator was used to reduce the ground level for the base of the new path. The excavated soil was a rich dark grey-brown loam 'topsoil'. The depth varied from 0.2 m to 0.4 m and the soil overlay a number of structural features.
- 3.1.2 To the south end of the new path was the remains of a brick-surface (Fig. 2) that measured 1.5 m by 2.5 m. A maximum of three courses of bricks survived *in situ* aligned north-east - south-west, with a probable associated course of bricks aligned north-west - south-east. The surface was photographed and a plan made of its location, but it was not investigated further, nor issued with context numbers.
- 3.1.3 To the north-west of the surface were two brick-built footings, forming the remains of a rectangular structure measuring 8.7 m by 2.5 m. A further footing of similar brick-build abutted this structure. A plan was made of the structure and photographs taken. Further patchy brick surfaces were observed to the north-west in the vicinity of the 1993 evaluation trench (OAU 1993); these were photographed and a plan made of their location.
- 3.1.4 After the new path had been constructed, four holes were excavated by the contractors to install street lamps along the pathway (Fig. 2). The excavated holes were approximately 0.5 m square and 0.9 m in depth. These cut through topsoil and cultivated soil layers below. Hole 1 was excavated adjacent to the south side of the brick wall footing exposed earlier.

3.2 Finds

- 3.2.1 No finds were recovered from the watching brief; modern artefacts from the topsoil were not retained.

3.3 Palaeo-environmental remains

- 3.3.1 No environmental samples were taken.

4 DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

- 4.1.1 The excavations for the footpath and the new lighting pits did not extend into the medieval layers known from previous work on the site.
- 4.1.2 The modern topsoil appears to directly overlie the remains of probable 19th century structures, any one of which may relate to the location of the basket-making premises known from documentary sources.
- 4.1.3 The rectangular building identified near the north end of Upper Fisher Row may be that depicted on a 1977 OS map of Oxford (SP 50 NW), and one which evidently has only recently been demolished.

- 4.1.4 No further information relating to Rewley Wall or the medieval abbey site was recovered from the watching brief.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1 ARCHAEOLOGICAL CONTEXT INVENTORY

<i>Context</i>	<i>Type</i>	<i>Depth</i>	<i>Width</i>	<i>Length</i>	<i>Comments</i>	<i>Finds</i>
1	Cut	0.9 m	0.45 m	0.44 m	Cut for street light	None
2	Cut	0.9 m	0.39 m	0.45 m	Cut for street light	None
3	Cut	0.84 m	0.45 m	0.55 m	Cut for street light	None
4	Cut	0.85 m	0.48 m	0.50 m	Cut for street light	None

APPENDIX 2 BIBLIOGRAPHY AND REFERENCES

- OAU 1986 *Rewley Abbey, Oxford: an archaeological assessment of the Scheduled Ancient Monument.*
- OAU 1992 *Fieldwork Manual* (ed. D. Wilkinson, First edition)
- OAU 1993 *Rewley Road, Oxford: archaeological evaluation, October/November 1993.*
- OAU 1994 *Oxford Station (Rewley Abbey) - Archaeological Field Evaluation, March - April 1994.*
- OAU 1998 *Rewley Abbey, Oxford: Said Business School, Written Scheme of Investigation*
- OAU 2000 *Rewley Abbey, Oxford: Said Business school (external landscaping). Archaeological Monitoring and Mitigation of Proposed Development, Written Scheme of Investigation*
- OAU 2001 *Rewley Abbey Wall, Upper Fisher Row, Oxford. Written Scheme of Investigation*

Squires T 1928 *In West Oxford.* Oxford

APPENDIX 3 SUMMARY OF SITE DETAILS

Site name: Rewley Abbey Wall, Upper Fisher Row, Oxford

Site code: OXRAW 01

Grid reference: NGR SP 5067 0846

Type of watching brief: Construction of new footpath and street lighting

Date and duration of project: Two site visits in October 2001

Summary of results: The remains of 19th century brick-built structures and recent garden soils sealing the old pathway were observed.

Location of archive: The archive is currently held at OA, Janus House, Osney Mead, Oxford, OX2 0ES, and will be deposited with Oxfordshire County Museums Service in due course, under the following accession number: 2001.142



Scale 1:25,000

Reproduced from the Landranger 1:50,000 scale by permission of the Ordnance Survey on behalf of The Controller of Her Majesty's Stationery Office
© Crown Copyright.1996 All rights reserved.Licence No. AL 100005569

Figure 1: Site location.

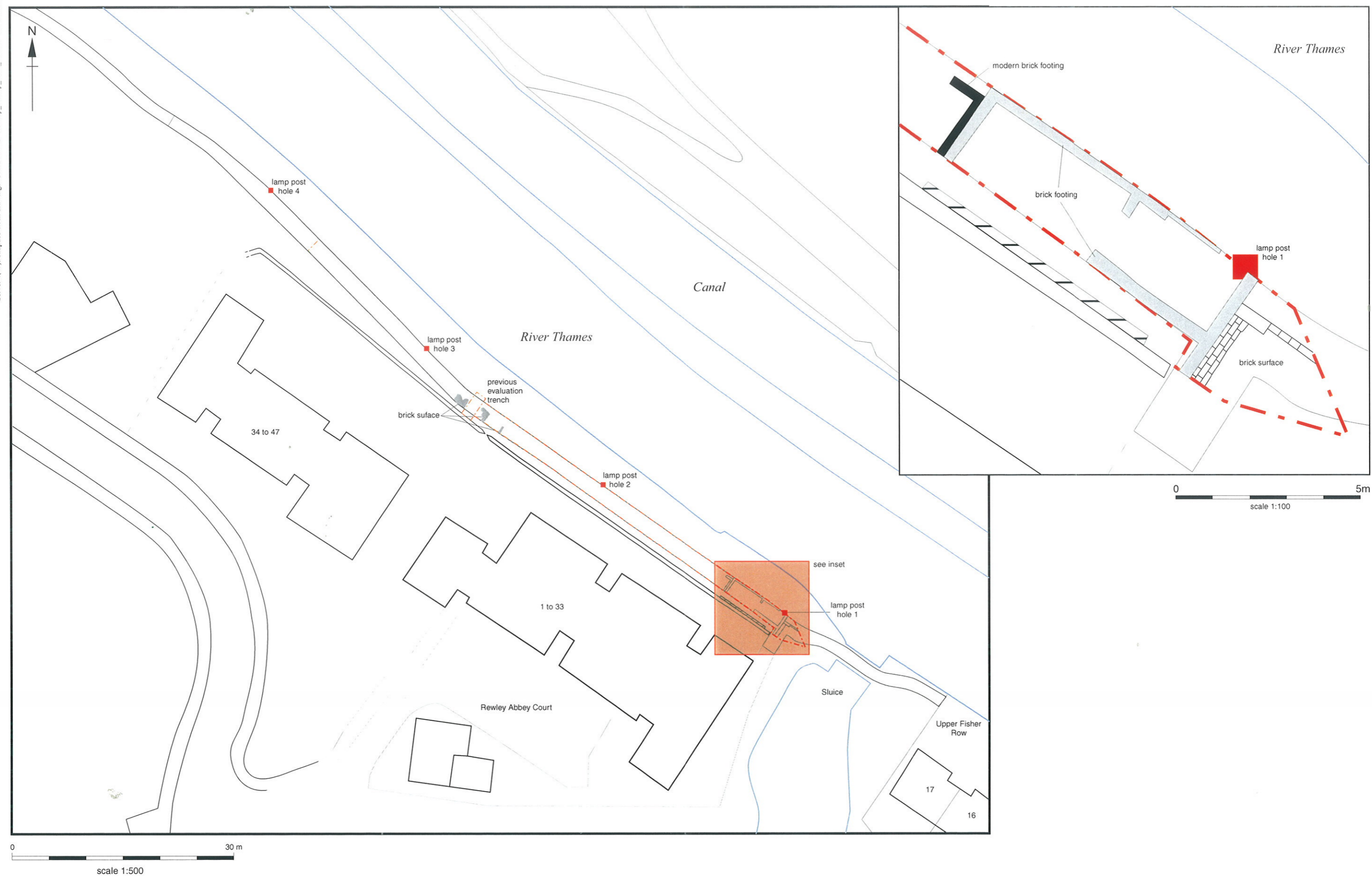


Figure 2: Trench Location



Oxford Archaeology

Janus House
Osney Mead
Oxford OX2 0ES

t: (0044) 01865 263800
f: (0044) 01865 793496
e: info@oxfordarch.co.uk
w: www.oxfordarch.co.uk



Oxford Archaeology North

Storey Institute
Meeting House Lane
Lancaster LA1 1TF

t: (0044) 01524 848666
f: (0044) 01524 848606
e: lancinfo@oxfordarch.co.uk
w: www.oxfordarch.co.uk

Director: David Jennings, BA MIFA FSA



Oxford Archaeological Unit is a
Private Limited Company, N^o: 1618597
and a Registered Charity, N^o: 285627

Registered Office:

Oxford Archaeological Unit
Janus House, Osney Mead, Oxford OX2 0ES