

Rushey Weir Oxfordshire



Archaeological Watching Brief Report



Client: Atkins

Issue No: 1
NGR: SP 322 000

Client Name: Atkins

Client Ref No:

Document Title: Rushey Weir

Document Type: Watching Brief

Issue Number: 1

National Grid Reference: SP 322 000

Planning Reference:

OA Job Number: 4272
Site Code: BURUW08
Invoice Code: BURUWWB
Receiving Museum: Oxford County Museum Service
Museum Accession No: 2008.142

Prepared by: Rowan McAlley
Position: Supervisor
Date: 16th December 2008

Checked by: Ben Ford
Position: Senior Project Manager
Date: 16th December 2008

Approved by: Nick Shepherd Signed.....
Position: Head of Fieldwork
Date: 16th December 2008

Document File Location X:\Rushy Weir, Oxfordshire JN4272
Graphics File Location \\Server21-db\invoice codes a thru h\B_invoice
codes\BURUWWB\Figures
Illustrated by Hannah Brown

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 2008

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 Archaeological Unit Limited is a Registered Charity No: 285627

Rushey Weir, Oxfordshire

ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF REPORT

CONTENTS

Summary.....	2
1 Introduction	3
1.1 Location and scope of work	3
1.2 Geology and topography	3
1.3 Archaeological and historical background	3
2 Project Aims and Methodology.....	4
2.1 Aims	4
2.2 Methodology	5
3 Results	5
3.1 Description of deposits.....	5
3.2 Finds	6
4 Discussion And Conclusions.....	6
4.1 Reliability of Field Investigation.....	6
4.2 Interpretation	6
4.3 Conclusion.....	6
Appendix 1 Archaeological Context Inventory	7
Appendix 2 Finds report.....	7
Appendix 3 Bibliography and references.....	8
Appendix 4 Summary of Site Details.....	9

LIST OF FIGURES

- Fig 1 Location Map
Fig 2 Site location and sections 1 and 2

LIST OF PLATES

- Front Cover Rushey Weir
Plate 1 Section 1
Plate 2 Section 2

SUMMARY

On the 24th November and 11th December 2008, Oxford Archaeology (OA) carried out an archaeological watching brief at Rushey Weir, Oxfordshire (NGR SP 322 000). The work was commissioned by Atkins Limited on behalf of the Environment Agency, as part of the Paddle and Rymer weirs refurbishment project. The watching brief monitored the excavation of two small test pits excavated in advance of geo-technical boreholes. A single sherd of early medieval pottery was recovered.

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Location and scope of work

- 1.1.1 Between the 24th November and 11th December 2008, Oxford Archaeology (OA) carried out an archaeological watching brief at Rushey Weir, Oxfordshire (NGR SP 322 000). The work was commissioned by Atkins Limited on behalf of the Environment Agency prior to weir refurbishment.

1.2 Geology and topography

- 1.2.1 Rushey weir is located 8 miles south of Witney and approximately 2 miles south-west of Bampton, on the river Thames (Fig. 1). The sites of the 2 boreholes were located on the south bank of the river Thames, west of Tadpole bridge, south of the lock keepers cottage and Rushey lock, and north of Charswell marsh. The site lies on river gravels at *c.* 67 m AOD. The areas excavated totalled 0.234m².

1.3 Archaeological and historical background

- 1.3.1 The river terrace gravels are the principal sources of Palaeolithic artefacts in the Oxfordshire region. There are however, some hints of activity on the higher ground in the Oxfordshire region, such as the Corallian Ridge to the south-west. There are no recorded sites or finds of Palaeolithic origin in close proximity to the site. Case (1986) has suggested that the higher ground above the Thames may have been used for Early Mesolithic settlement or exploitation and the location of the weir is relatively low lying.
- 1.3.2 Evidence of Early Neolithic settlement is sparse in this part of Oxfordshire, however Case (1986) observes that settlement and intense activity in the Middle and Later Neolithic appears to have shifted from the lower valley slopes and floodplains, again moving away from the topography on which this site is located. The areas of higher ground would have been attractive as they overlook the floodplain of the Thames Valley and include soils of varying qualities, which would have provided mixed environments for foraging, hunting and farming.
- 1.3.3 The recorded pattern of earlier Bronze Age archaeology is of a focus of settlement activity on the alluvium close to the River Thames, with ritual sites located on the higher ground of the valley slopes. Later in the Bronze Age settlement and farming activity also extended up onto the higher ground.
- 1.3.4 Iron Age activity over this region appears to primarily consist of pastoral exploitation of the valley floodplains, with more intensive arable farming again tending to be located on the higher ground. There is some evidence that arable cultivation may have spread out over previously pastoral landscapes of the valley floodplains by about the 4th century BC, when enclosed settlements become more common.

- 1.3.5 The use of the landscape in the Roman period would have been very similar to that of the later Iron Age, consisting of small farmsteads set in enclosures with mixed field systems and trackways. This pattern of land use is likely to have been spread over both the floodplain and the higher ground.
- 1.3.6 It has been suggested that the chief east-west route through Bampton formed part of an inferred minor Roman road which crossed the river Windrush at Gill Mill and entered Bampton from the north-east. This route possibly following the later Kingsway Lane, and passing just south of the later market place. The name Kingsway implies that the lane, a minor track in the 19th century, was an important route to the Anglo-Saxon royal tun. Another inferred early road ran north-eastwards from Cowleaze Corner and skirt the northern perimeter of the Deanery. Both roads may have formed part of a more extensive Roman and early medieval network which was partly preserved in the later road and field pattern, and which influenced Bampton's early topography. The road from Brize Norton, and a pre-inclosure road from Witney and Lew which formerly intersected it north of the town, were probably also ancient, and like the inferred Roman road seem to have been diverted to funnel into the market place perhaps in the 13th century. Barcote way, south of the town, a small lane in 1789, originated possibly as a southwards continuation of those roads, crossing the Thames at or near Rushey weir and continuing to Barcote in Berkshire (Crossley and Currie eds. 1996).
- 1.3.7 Early records from 1425 refer to the use of land near Rushey weir for the grazing of 'horses or ploughbeasts' Rushey weir, suggest the land was used as part of grazing land associated with nearby Bampton. There had been a flash lock further upstream known as Old Nan's Weir, which was deemed unsuitable for pound lock in 1790. Old Nan's weir was removed then later removed in 1868. In 1871 the weir was in a bad state of deterioration and was subsequently repaired. A new lock keepers cottage was built in 1894 and the lock was later rebuilt in 1898 (Fred 1920).
- 1.3.8 Rushey Weir was also a scene of particular interest to the landscape photographer Henry Taunt. His most prolific subjects were the river Thames of which, Rushey Weir was included within an extensive photographic record and survey of the river Thames.

2 PROJECT AIMS AND METHODOLOGY

2.1 Aims

- 2.1.1 To identify and record the presence or absence, extent, condition, quality and date of archaeological remains in the areas affected by the development.
- 2.1.2 To gain further knowledge of the archaeology within the area.
- 2.1.3 To make available the results of the archaeological investigation.

2.2 Methodology

- 2.2.1 The watching brief was conducted over two days in total. The first being the 24th November and the second 12th December 2008.
- 2.2.2 Plans and sections of the two pits prior to geo technical bore hole drilling were drawn at a scale of 1:10 (Fig 2). A general photographic record of the work was made using digital and black and white print film. Recording followed procedures detailed in the *OAU Field manual* (OAU, 1992).

3 RESULTS

3.1 Description of deposits

Bore hole 1

- 3.1.1 The first bore hole was excavated on the 24th November 2008. It was located to the south east of the lock keepers cottage on the south bank of the river Thames. Prior to the bore hole excavation a small 0.38m x 0.38m trench was excavated to a depth of 1.2m (65.87m AOD).
- 3.1.2 The earliest deposit was context (3), which consisted of yellow gravels at a depth of 0.98m below ground level (Fig.2.). This is most likely to represent a build up of alluvial deposits or was possibly redeposited within a feature as a single sherd of late Saxon or early medieval pottery was recovered from it.
- 3.1.3 Overlying the gravel was layer (2). This context consisted of a mid brown clay, observed to a thickness of 0.9m. No finds or dating evidence were retrieved from this layer which was overlain by 0.1m of topsoil, (1).

Bore hole 2

- 3.1.4 Bore hole 2 was excavated on the 12th December and was located to the south of the Thames in line with Rushey weir, and west of bore hole 1. Prior to the bore hole rig deployment a small test pit of 0.3m x 0.3m was excavated to a depth of 1.1m, or 64.16m AOD.
- 3.1.5 The earliest deposit was context (6), which consisted of a light orange grey gravel deposit. The top of the gravels were observed at a depth of 0.67m below ground level. No finds or dating material was recovered from the layer.
- 3.1.6 Overlying deposit (6) was a subsoil horizon (5). This consisted of a light orange brown silt sand, 0.35m thick. This may have derived through flooding deposition of the river Thames. No finds or dating evidence were recovered from the context. Deposit (5) had been overlain by layer (4) which consisted of a dark brown sand silt topsoil.

3.2 Finds

- 3.2.1 Only a single piece of pottery was found which was within earliest deposit in bore hole 1. Details of this can be seen in the specialist finds report within the appendices.

4 DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

4.1 Reliability of Field Investigation

- 4.1.1 The nature of this work only allows a small keyhole view onto the underlying deposits within the proposed development area. With such a small window with which to view these deposits it is difficult to accurately interpret the nature of the archaeology as the observation of deposits is made difficult. It should also be noted that the area investigated only represents a very small percentage of the area around Rushy Weir and is likely to poorly reflect the past land use in this vicinity.

4.2 Interpretation

- 4.2.1 The limitations on the level of interpretation that can be made are obvious and have already been highlighted in section 4.1. Bore hole 2 revealed little of archaeological significance showing a typical sequence of natural drift geology overlain by subsoil and topsoil. In contrast to this, although bore hole 1 revealed a similar sequence, the nature of the deposits was quite different.
- 4.2.2 The most significant discovery within borehole 1 was the sherd of late Saxon or early medieval pottery. The problem with this is that it was recovered from the gravel deposit at the base of the excavation. Typically this would be interpreted as natural geology and therefore devoid of cultural material. There are two possible explanations for this, the first being that the gravel layer, (3) was in fact redeposited natural forming the primary fill of a feature such as a pit or ditch.
- 4.2.3 The other possibility is that due to the size of the hole excavated, the sherd of pottery was mistakenly attributed to the gravels rather one of the overlying deposits from which it could easily have become dislodged. The overlying deposit (2) was tentatively recorded as a subsoil formation but at a depth of 0.9m this was significantly greater than the equivalent deposit within bore hole 2. It is therefore quite likely that deposit (2) is in fact the fill of a negative feature that could not be recognised in the conditions under which the investigation took place.

4.3 Conclusion

- 4.3.1 The significance of a single sherd of pottery is limited, but it does suggest activity in the area from between 875 and 1250 AD. The additional possibility for it to have been recovered from a feature such as a pit or ditch would tend to indicate permanent activity that may be associated with the use of this part of the river as a crossing point.

APPENDICES**APPENDIX 1 ARCHAEOLOGICAL CONTEXT INVENTORY**

CONTEXT	TYPE	DEPTH	LENGTH	WIDTH	COMMENTS	FINDS
1	Layer	0-0.1m	0.38m>	0.38m>	Topsoil	-
2	Layer	0.1-0.98m	0.38m>	0.38m>	Subsoil/fill?	-
3	Layer	0.98-1.2m>	0.38m>	0.38m>	River based Gravels	Pottery 875-1250AD
4	Layer	0-0.34m	0.3m>	0.3m>	Topsoil	-
5	Layer	0.34-0.67m	0.3m>	0.3m>	Subsoil	-
6	Layer	0.67-1.1m>	0.3m>	0.3m>	Gravel natural	-

APPENDIX 2 FINDS REPORT

A single piece of type OXAC pottery sherd was found within context (3). The sherd is Early medieval “cotswold” calcareous gravel tempered (Mellor 1994) dating 875-1250AD but mainly 1050-1225 in the Oxford area.

CONTEXT	WEIGHT (GRAMS)	LENGTH	WIDTH	THICKNESS	DATE
3	7	38mm	15mm	8mm	875-1250AD

APPENDIX 3 BIBLIOGRAPHY AND REFERENCES

Briggs G, Cook J and Rowley T (eds) 1986 *The archaeology of the Oxford region* Oxford University Department for External Studies, Oxford

Case H 1986 The Mesolithic and Neolithic in the Oxford region, in Briggs et al 1986, 18-37

Crossley A and Currie CRJ (ed). 1996 *A History of Oxford: Volume 13: Bampton Hundred* (Part one)

Fred S 1920 *The Thames Highway: Volume II Locks and Weirs*-re published 1968 David and Charles

Mellor M 1994 *Oxfordshire Pottery: A synthesis of middle and late Saxon and Medieval and early post medieval pottery in the Oxford region*, Oxoniensia

Wilkinson D (ed.), 1992. *The Oxford Archaeology Fieldwork Manual*, unpublished OA document

APPENDIX 4 SUMMARY OF SITE DETAILS

Site name: Rushey Weir, Oxfordshire

Site code: BURUW08

Grid reference: SP 322 000

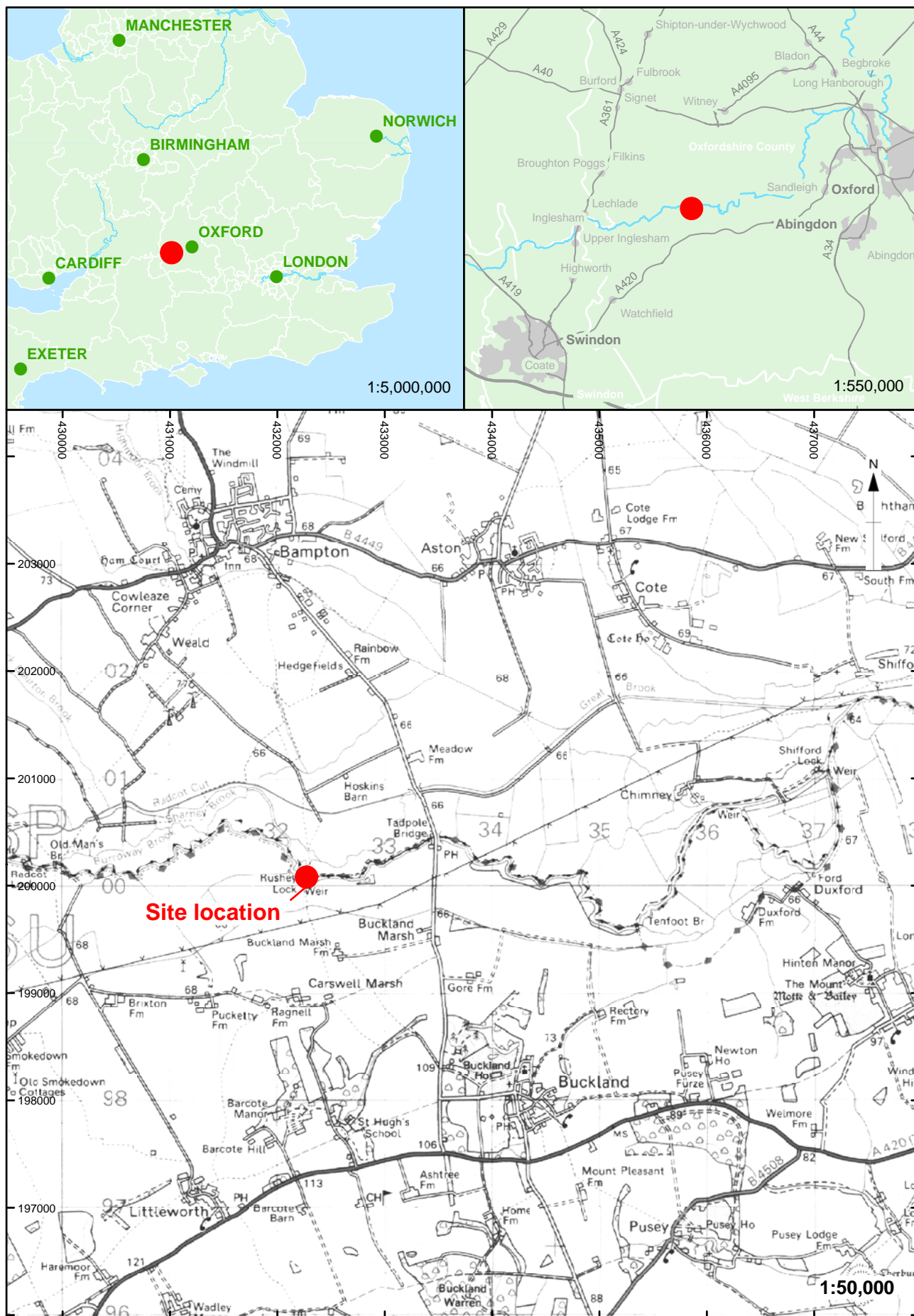
Type of watching brief: Two geo-technical bore holes

Date and duration of project: 24th November and 12th December 2008

Area of site:

Summary of results: The watching brief during works for two geo-technical bore holes as part of the Paddle and Rymer weirs refurbishment program revealed a single sherd of early medieval pottery.

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: 2008.142



Reproduced by permission of the Ordnance Survey on behalf of
The Controller of Her Majesty's Stationary Office (c) Crown
Copyright. 1996 All rights reserved. License No. AL 100005569

Figure 1: Site location

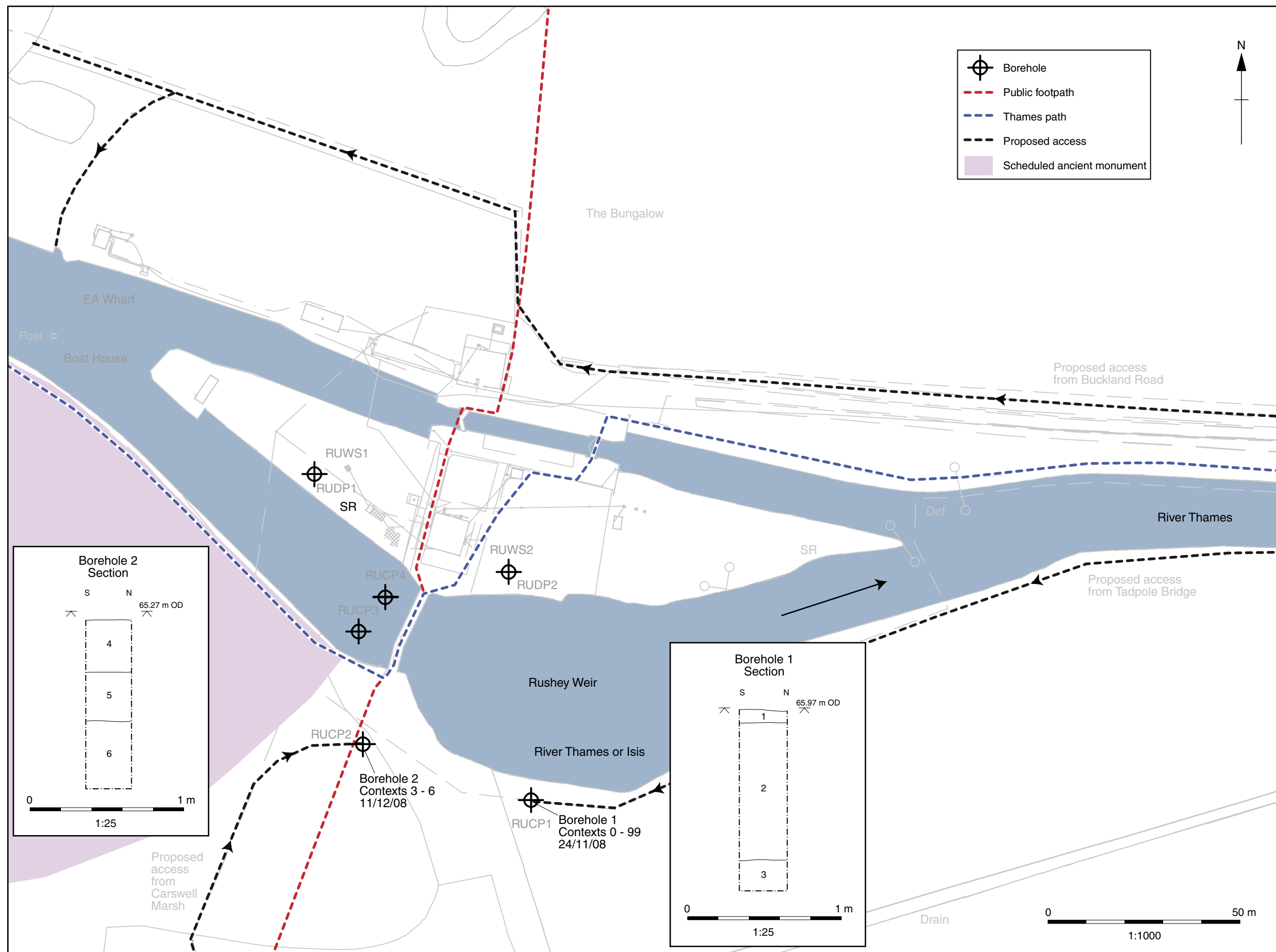


Figure 2: Site map (based on map from Atkins)



Plate 1: Section 1



Plate 2: Section 2



Head Office/Registered Office

Janus House
Osney Mead
Oxford OX2 0ES

t: +44 (0) 1865 263 800
f: +44 (0) 1865 793 496
e: info@thehumanjourney.net
w: <http://thehumanjourney.net>

OA North

Mill 3
Moor Lane
Lancaster LA1 1GF

t: +44 (0) 1524 541 000
f: +44 (0) 1524 848 606
e: [oanorth@thehumanjourney.net](mailto: oanorth@thehumanjourney.net)
w: <http://thehumanjourney.net>

OA East

15 Trafalgar Way
Bar Hill
Cambridgeshire
CB23 8SQ

t: +44 (0) 1223 850 500
f: +44 (0) 1223 850 599
e: [oaeast@thehumanjourney.net](mailto: oaeast@thehumanjourney.net)
w: <http://thehumanjourney.net/oaeast>

OA Méditerranée

115 Rue Merlot
ZAC La Louvade
34 130 Manguio
France

t: +33 (0) 4.67.57.86.92
f: +33 (0) 4.67.42.65.93
e: [oamed@oamed.fr](mailto: oamed@oamed.fr)
w: <http://oamed.fr/>



Director: David Jennings, BA MIFA FSA

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