

Fish Pass Channel Stone, near Aylesbury Buckinghamshire



Archaeological Watching Brief Report



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Fish Pass Channel, Stone, Buckinghamshire

ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF REPORT

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Front cover: New footbridge over the eastern end of the channel

SUMMARY

In November and December 2007, Oxford Archaeology (OA) carried out an archaeological watching brief on the River Thame, south-west of the village of Stone, Buckinghamshire (centred at NGR: SP 7750 1346). The work was commissioned by the Environment Agency in advance of the construction of a new fish pass channel opposite Weir House. The watching brief revealed thick deposits of alluvium throughout the site overlaid by the present day topsoil and turf. No evidence for earlier water management or any other significant archaeology was observed.

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Scope of work

- 1.1.1 In November and December 2007, Oxford Archaeology (OA) carried out an archaeological watching brief on the River Thame, located south-west of the village of Stone, Buckinghamshire (centred at NGR SP 7750 1346). The work was commissioned by the Environment Agency in respect of the construction of a new Fish Pass Channel opposite Weir House.
- 1.1.2 A condition requiring that an archaeological watching brief be maintained during the period of the groundworks was set by David Radford, the Archaeological Officer representing Aylesbury Vale District Council.
- 1.1.3 OA prepared a Written Scheme of Investigation detailing how it would meet the requirements of the brief (OA, 2007).

1.2 Location, geology and topography

- 1.2.1 The village of Stone is located 2 km south-west of the town of Aylesbury and the site is situated 1 km north-west of the village, at the bottom of a valley formed by the River Thame running through the Eythrope Estate (Fig.1). The site lies on the east bank of the River Thame between a tributary and the main river course and measures approximately 0.4 hectare lying at a height of 70 m above OD. The underlying geology is alluvium over River Terrace deposits (British Geological survey, sheet no. 237)

1.3 Archaeological and historical background

- 1.3.1 The archaeological background to the watching brief was prepared for the WSI for the project (OA, 2007) and is reproduced below.
- 1.3.2 The proposed development will impact on a stretch of water meadow adjacent to the well preserved medieval settlement of Eythrope in an area where there is potential for medieval water management features to be present (eg. channels, fish weirs, sluices etc) including waterlogged environmental deposits relating to past land use in the immediate context of Eythrope.

- 1.3.3 The manor of Eythrope is not mentioned in Domesday. It was in the hands of the D'Arches family from the 12th - 15th century when it transferred to the Dormer family who obtained a licence to impark in 1616. A watermill in Eythrope was held by Wallingford Priory before 1291 and a dovecote and fishery were appurtenant to the Capital Messuage of Eythrope in the early 14th-century (VCH, 1969, 111). The Thame divides into two channels west of Weir Lodge and the northern channel has been widened and straightened, with a long narrow arm forming a lake to the south of the main house.
- 1.3.4 The fish pass lies just outside Eythrope Park, a late 19th-century garden and park, surrounding a late 19th century house, overlying an 18th-century landscape park and incorporating medieval settlement earthworks. Eythrope Park is a Grade II Registered Park and Garden. Weir Lodge is a Grade II listed 19th century building.

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 preserve by record any archaeological deposits or features that may be disturbed or destroyed during the course of the groundworks.
- 2.1.3 To make available the results of the archaeological investigation.

2.2 Methodology

- 2.2.1 The watching brief was conducted as a series of site visits during those works likely to impinge upon archaeological deposits. The work was undertaken by a tracked mechanical excavator fitted with a toothless grading bucket.
- 2.2.2 These works included the excavation of approximately 180 m length of an 8 m wide by 1.8 m deep channel from a bend in the River Thame east of Weir Lodge and a bend in the tributary leading from the Thame, and the excavation of foundations for a new weir and footbridge abutments on the south bank of the river Thame.
- 2.2.3 A plan showing the extent of the excavations and the location of any sections was maintained at a scale of 1:100 (Fig. 2) and any recorded sections were drawn at a scale of 1:20. All excavations and features were photographed using colour slide and black and white print film. A general photographic record of the work was also made. Recording followed procedures detailed in the *OA Field Manual* (ed. D Wilkinson, 1992).

3 RESULTS

3.1 Description of deposits

3.1.1 Within both the new channel and the weir excavations, a layer of undisturbed pale grey-brown silt clay (3), was encountered at a depth of between 0.7 and 0.9 m below the current ground level (Fig. 3, Sections 1, 2 and 3). At the south-western extent of the site this layer contained lens of red-brown pebbles and grit. Within the area of the weir excavations only, a 0.25 m deep layer of light grey-brown sandy clay (4) (Fig. 3, Section 2) was encountered overlying Layer 3 at the eastern edge of the site. This contained large quantities of red-brown small pebbles and grit suggesting that this is a layer of alluvial gravel, probably glacial in origin, although its proximity to the river may suggest an alluvial origin. Sealing this deposit and Layer 3 elsewhere on site was a 0.4 m deep layer of light brown silt clay (2), a probable flood or alluvial deposit. This was overlaid by a 0.35 m deep layer of dark grey-brown clay loam (1), the present day topsoil and turf.

3.2 Finds

3.2.1 Fragments of brick, tile and clay pipe stem were recovered from Layer 1. This material seems to be 19th century in date. No earlier dating evidence was recovered.

3.3 Palaeo-environmental remains

3.3.1 No deposits suitable for paleo-environmental sampling were encountered during the course of the watching brief.

4 DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

4.1.1 The stratigraphy observed during the course of the watching brief was relatively uniform throughout the length of the excavation. The underlying alluvium (3), the gravel layer (4) and the associated lens of gravel appear to be prehistoric in origin. The thick alluvial deposit, (2), may be of more recent origin, but there was no evidence of human activity such as charcoal flecks or dating evidence observed within it. The layer of topsoil and turf (1) contained post-medieval (19th-century) dating evidence which may relate to post-medieval manuring practises.

4.1.2 The lack of dating evidence recovered from layer 2 may suggest that the area has always been prone to flooding and was only used for seasonal grazing in the medieval and early post-medieval periods.

4.1.3 The recovery of post medieval dating evidence from layer 1 suggests that there was a change of use within the area from water meadow to probable arable use during the 19th century. The presence of dating evidence throughout the depth of the deposit suggests that the area has been ploughed in the past. The absence of visible ridge and furrow may mean that this cultivation was undertaken by steam plough or possibly tractor.

- 4.1.4 No evidence was observed during the course of the watching brief on the excavations for either the new channel or the weir, for the presence of water management channels, banks or other associated features.
- 4.1.5 No evidence for the medieval settlement of Eythorpe extending within the development area, either in the form of features, deposits or residual finds was observed during the course of the watching brief.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1 ARCHAEOLOGICAL CONTEXT INVENTORY

<i>Context</i>	<i>Type</i>	<i>Depth</i>	<i>Width</i>	<i>Comments</i>	<i> Finds</i>	<i>Date</i>
1	Layer	0.3 m	-	Present day topsoil and turf	Clay pipe stem, brick, shell	C19th
2	Layer	0.4 m	-	Alluvium	-	-
3	Layer	> 0.8 m	-	Alluvium	-	-
4	Layer	0.3 m	-	Alluvial gravel	-	-

APPENDIX 2 BIBLIOGRAPHY AND REFERENCES

BCAS, 2006 *Fish pass channel on River Thame at Stone: Brief for an Archaeological Watching Brief*

IFA, 2001 *Standard and Guidance for Archaeological Watching Briefs*

OA, 2007 *Fish Pass Channel, Stone, Buckinghamshire: Written Scheme of Investigation for an Archaeological Watching Brief*

OAU, 1992 *Field Manual (ed. D Wilkinson)*

APPENDIX 3 SUMMARY OF SITE DETAILS

Site name: Fish Pass Channel, Stone, Buckinghamshire

Site code: STFISH 07

Grid reference: Centred on SP 775 134

Type of watching brief: Machine excavation of a new water channel and foundations for a new weir.

Date and duration of project: 12th November to 13th December 2007

Area of site: 3600 m²

Summary of results: The watching brief observed thick deposits of alluvium sealed by modern worked soil. No evidence for medieval water management, or for the medieval settlement of Eythrope extending within the area was observed.

Location of archive: The archive is currently held at OA, Janus House, Osney Mead, Oxford, OX2 0ES, and will be deposited with Buckinghamshire County Museum in due course, under the following accession number: AYBCM:2007.163



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Figure 1: Site location

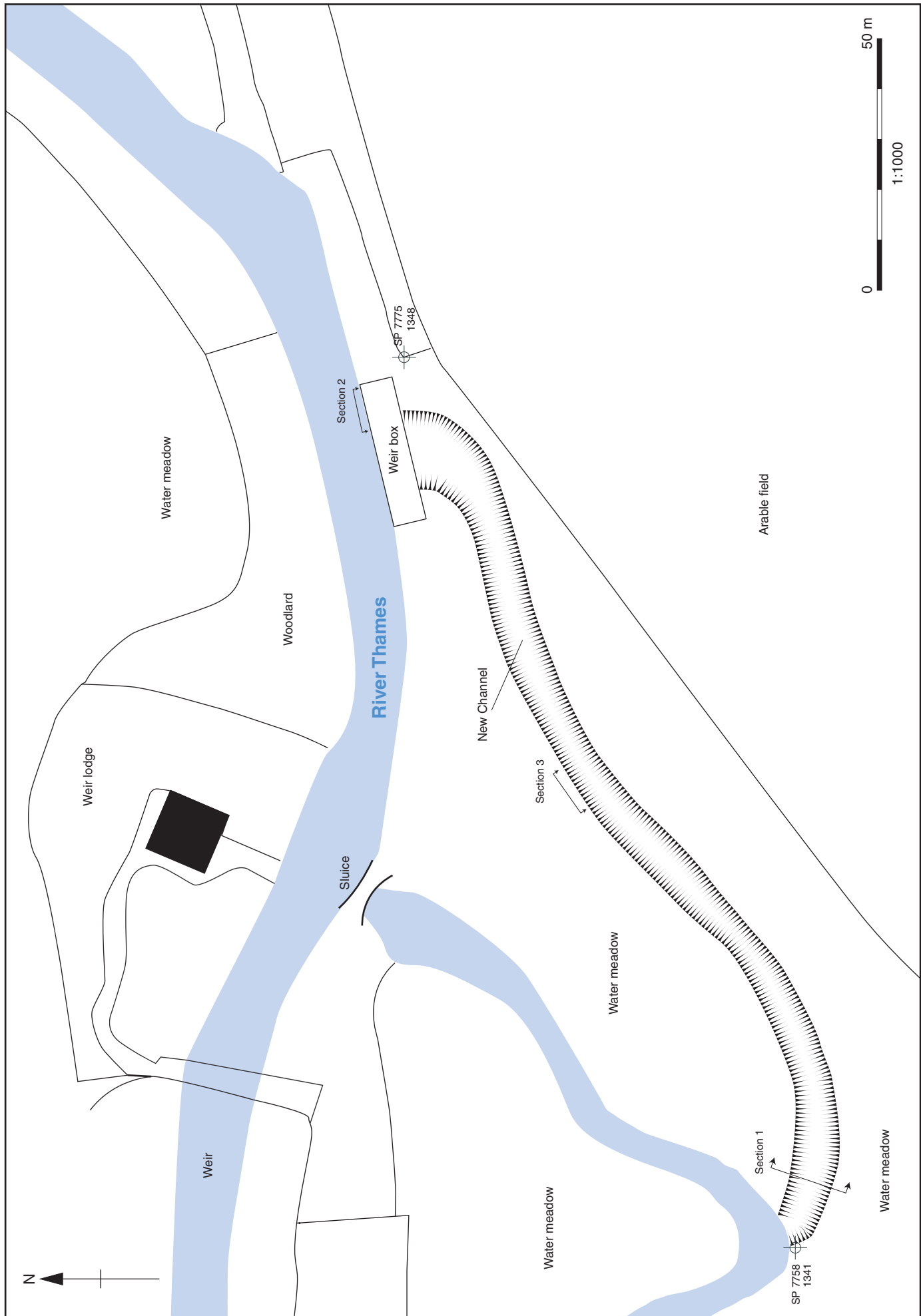


Figure 2: Site plan, location of the new channel

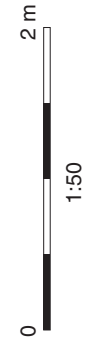
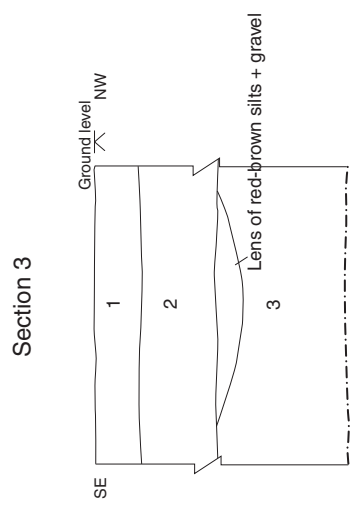
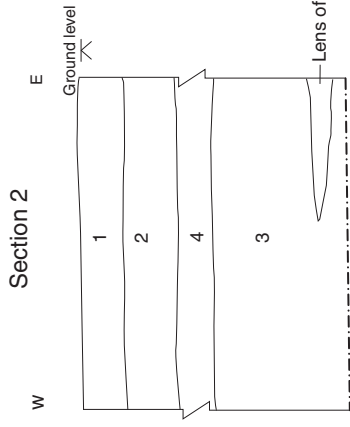
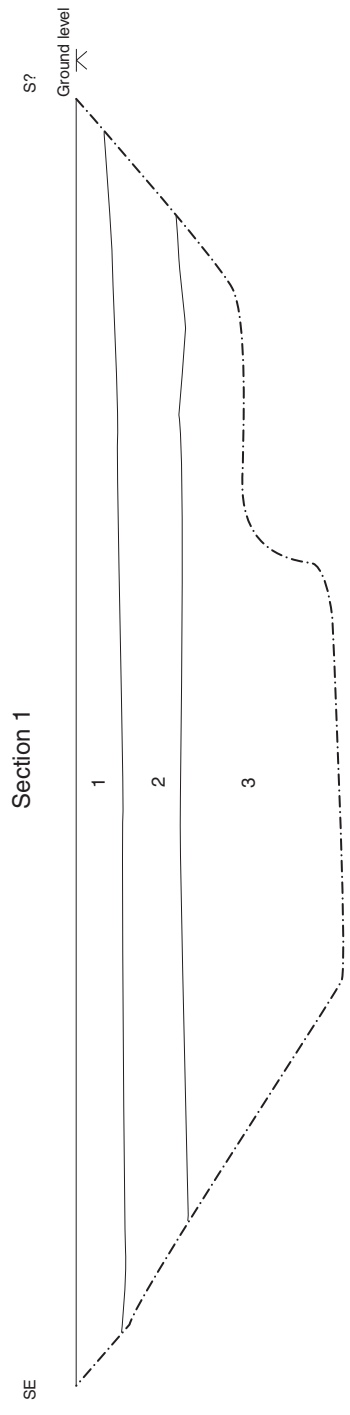


Figure 3: Sections 1, 2, 3



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