

EAST OXFORD (OX)
LITTLEMORE

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544/96

Lawn Upton School,
Sandford Road, Littlemore
Oxford

NGR SP 5370 0270

Archaeological Watching Brief Report



Oxford Archaeological Unit

June 1996

LAWN UPTON SCHOOL, SANDFORD ROAD, LITTLEMORE, OXFORD
PLANNING REF. 95/1437/NF
NGR SP 5370 0270
ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF REPORT

1 SUMMARY

A watching brief carried out during construction work identified no features or finds of archaeological significance. An undated ploughsoil and modern features were noted.

2 INTRODUCTION

The Oxford Archaeological Unit (OAU) carried out a watching brief on behalf of Westbury Homes during January and February 1996, during the construction of new houses on land adjacent to Lawn Upton School, Littlemore, Oxford (Fig. 1). The site was subject to a recent evaluation by Thames Valley Archaeological Services, who reported the presence of medieval pits and possible Roman kiln debris in the centre of the development area. As a result of these finds, The Oxford Archaeological Advisory Service (OAAS) prepared a brief for monitoring of groundwork on the site. Topsoil stripping and the excavation of foundation trenches for 11 new houses were monitored by the OAU.

3 TOPOGRAPHICAL AND ARCHAEOLOGICAL BACKGROUND

The development area near Lawn Upton School is situated on sandy subsoil and slopes gently to the south. The site lies at a general level of 64 m O.D.

Limited evidence for prehistoric activity in the area consists of records of two palaeolithic hand axes (PRN 12905) found to the north-west of this site. The most significant archaeological remains near this site relate to the Roman pottery industry of the 2nd to the 4th centuries. Pottery kilns have been located at three sites within a 1.5 km radius of Lawn Upton school (PRNs 3656, 6191, 8017), the nearest being found at the Ashurst Clinic on the Sandford Road in 1954.

Recent work carried out by the OAU at nearby Littlemore Hospital in 1995 (Littlemore Hospital, Oxford: Yamanouchi Site Redevelopment, Archaeological Evaluation Report, OAU 1995) revealed the presence of medieval and post-medieval soil horizons (which included a proportion of residual Roman pottery), suggesting that this area of Littlemore was historically used for agricultural purposes.

Prior to construction, the site consisted of a wooded copse and overgrown vegetation.

4 METHODOLOGY

The watching brief consisted of monitoring the excavation of topsoil to the top of the natural subsoil, and the excavation by the contractors of foundation trenches for eleven new houses. Groundwork for a new access road and the excavation of a trench for a new sewer was also monitored. Each deposit (soil layer, structure, feature) was assigned a single context number. The results are presented in three sections; 5.1, the south area of the site, 5.2, the north area of the site, and 5.3, the access road and sewerage trench.

Several areas of the site were not available for examination as they lay below temporary trackways used by the machines and dumper trucks. In particular, the narrow stretch of site linking the north and south areas was not available for observation.

5 RESULTS (Fig. 2)

5.1 Site south: house plots 3-7

All of the foundation trenches were inspected for the presence of archaeological features and finds. The trenches were all dug to a depth of 1.0-1.20 m, and were 0.80 m wide. The spoil heaps were examined for artifacts.

The earliest deposit observed in the house trench sections was a layer of light reddish-brown sand with patches of limestone (103). This layer was interpreted as the natural subsoil, and was exposed at a general depth of 0.60 m below the formation level of the site. Layer 103 was sealed by a friable mid-dark reddish-brown sandy loam (102) containing occasional charcoal inclusions. This layer was between 0.12 and 0.19 m thick, and was seen to thicken progressively to the south of the site. Layer 102 was sealed by 101, a friable dark grey sandy loam which was heavily disturbed by tree roots.

No archaeological features were observed in any of the trench sections.

Three brick-built structures were observed in the south area after the topsoil had been removed. It was not clear if the structures were constructed from the level of the topsoil, or from the layer below, as they were only observed after machining had taken place.

A shallow spread of brick and limestone rubble (104) orientated east-west was revealed in the north-west corner of the area. The spread was 1.5 m wide and extended for a length of c. 8 m. The bricks and stones were not coursed.

At the extreme south of the area was a circular brick-built well (105). The well was at least 2 m deep and had a diameter of 1.20 m. To the north of 105 was a brick and limestone linear structure (106) 0.80 m wide and aligned east-west, which had been heavily truncated by machining. A single course of stones was visible at the time of recording.

5.2 Site north: house plots 1, 2 and 8-11

Trench depths and dimensions were the same as for the south area.

An identical sequence of soil build up to that observed in the south area was present in all the trenches. A number of live service pipes (107) aligned east-west and leading to Lawn Upton School were seen. In the area of plots 8 and 9 a layer of tarmac (108) bedded on gravel was seen in the trench sections.

No archaeological features were observed in the trench sections.

5.3 Access road/sewer trench

Stripping of topsoil from the line of the new access road for the site was monitored but revealed no archaeological features. The sewer trench (dug approximately along the centre line of the access road) was excavated to a depth of 3 m +. No features were seen in the trench sections.

6 FINDS

The only notable find recovered from the site was a porcelain ink-well which was found during the stripping of topsoil for the access road. The ink-well presumably came from the adjacent school, although it is not closely datable. The remainder of the finds observed during the work consisted of white china and willow pattern crockery, datable to the C19 or C20. These were not retained. No other objects were recovered.

7 DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

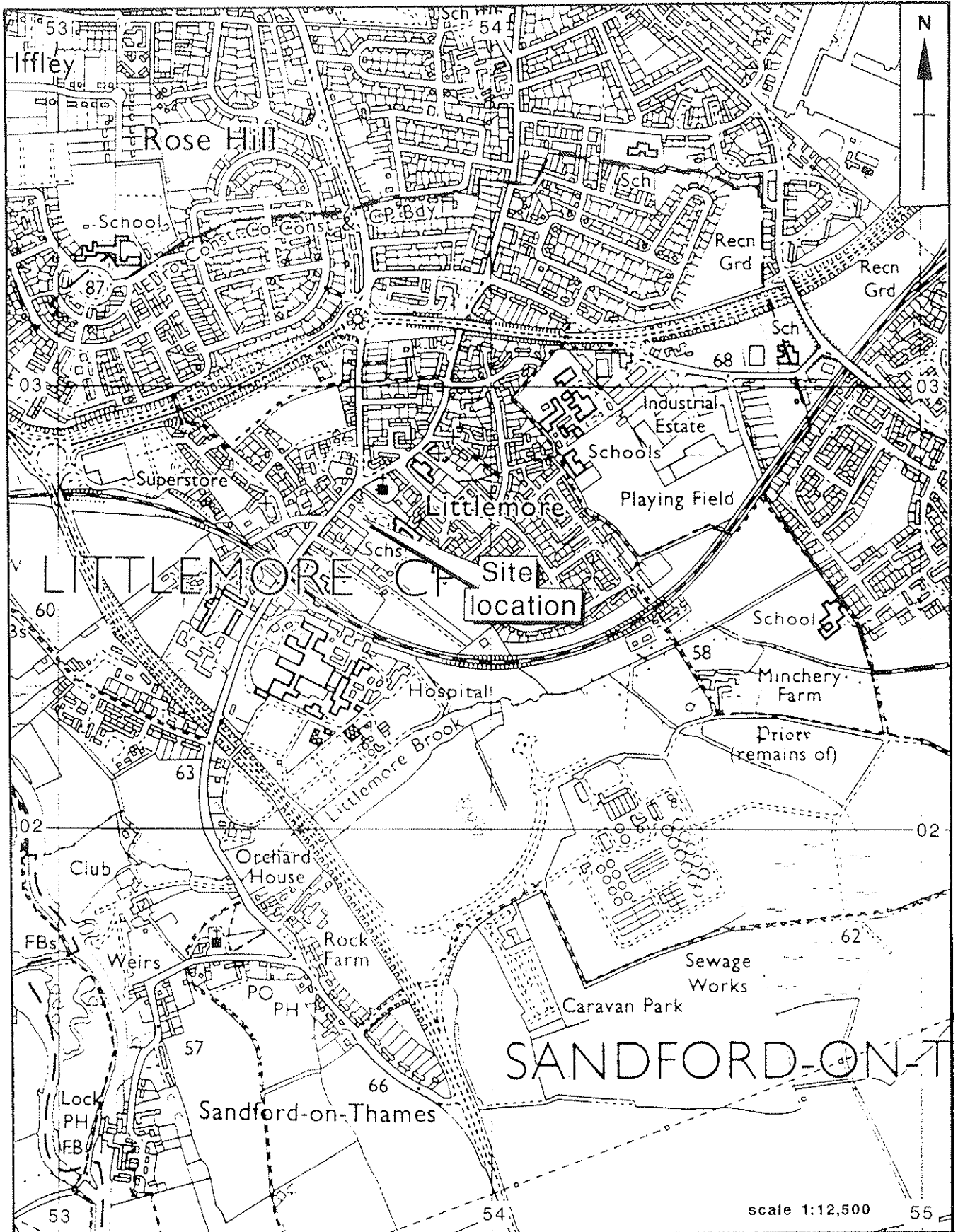
No archaeological features were identified during the excavations. Structure 104 is perhaps the remains of garden wall or greenhouse footing, of recent build. Structure 105 was a well, and probably dates to this century. East of the well was 106, a portion of a 19th or 20th century garden wall probably related to the well. The tarmac observed in the north area was the remains of a recent road surface.

The sequence of deposits observed and the absence of obvious features confirms that this area of Littlemore appears to have been primarily agricultural land over the centuries, although the probable ploughsoil (102) was not dated. It is likely that the features identified in the evaluation in the centre of the site (the area of house plot 7) were localised, as no further features were revealed in the foundation trenches for the plot. The presence of the contractors' access road in this area of the site precluded further investigation. The brick structures relate to backyard activity at the rear of modern houses along the Sandford Road. The absence even of residual material predating the 19th century is notable.

J. Hiller
Oxford Archaeological Unit, June 1996

TABLE OF CONTEXT INFORMATION

CTX	TYPE	DEPTH	WIDTH	COMMENTS
101	LAYER	0.25 m*	-	Topsoil
102	LAYER	0.12-0.19 m	-	Former ploughsoil
103	LAYER	0.80 m*	-	Natural sand subsoil
104	STRUCTURE	0.20 m	2.0 m	Demolished structure, possibly a wall
105	STRUCTURE	2 m*	1.20 m	Victorian or C20 brick well
106	STRUCTURE	0.20 m*	0.80 m	Victorian or C20 garden wall
107	SERVICE(S)	-	-	general context assigned to modern live service pipes in N area
108	SURFACE	0.15 m	-	Recent tarmac surface, road/car park area



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Figure 1

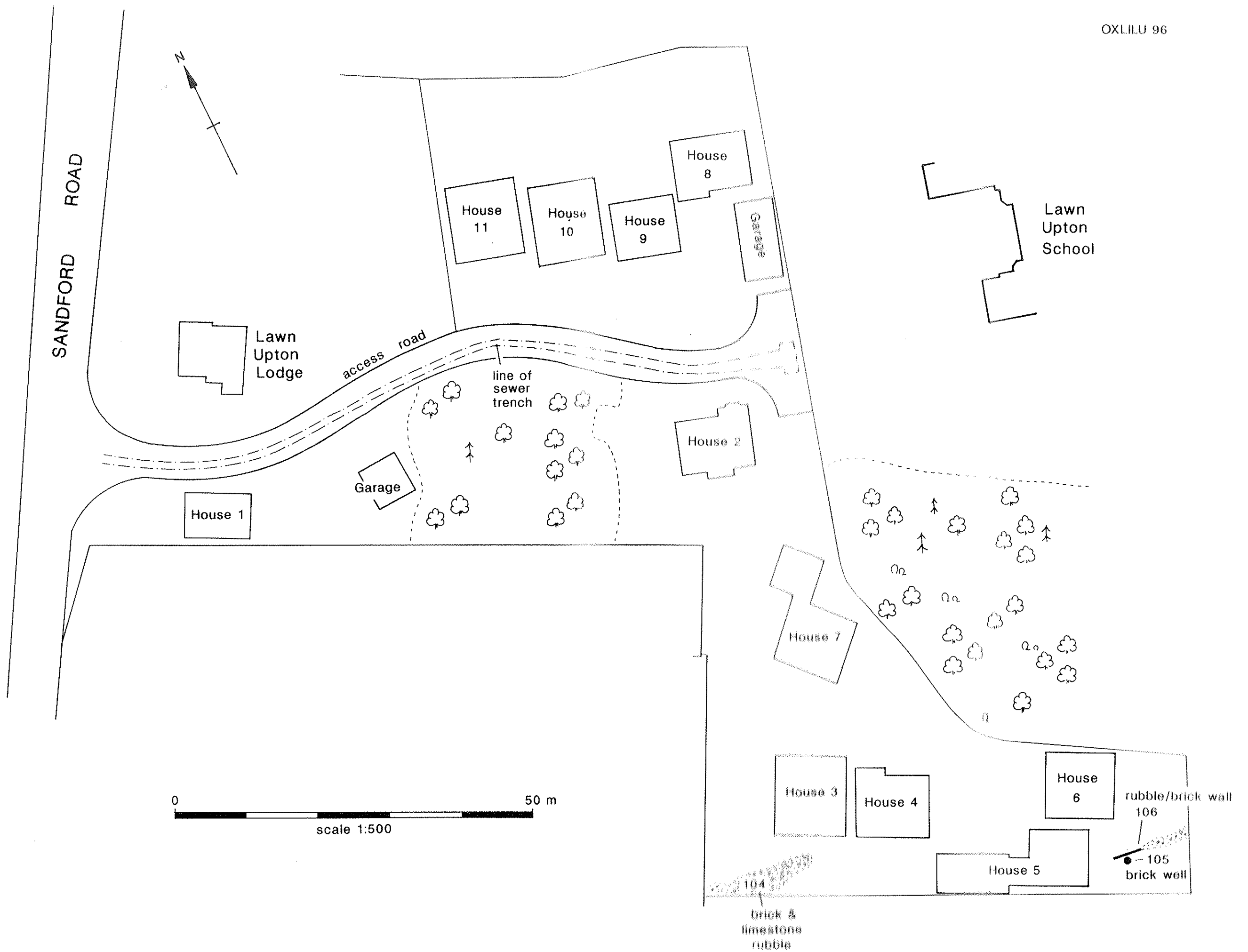


Figure 2



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