

EAST OXFORD (OX)  
LITTLEMORE

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891/93

# Lawn Upton School Littlemore, Oxford

Archaeological Evaluation

OXFORD ARCHAEOLOGICAL UNIT

December 1993



## LAWN UPTON SCHOOL, LITTLEMORE, OXFORD ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVALUATION

### Summary

The Oxford Archaeological Unit (OAU) carried out a field evaluation at Lawn Upton School, Littlemore, Oxford in December 1993 on behalf of Britannia Homes. Four parallel linear boundaries may represent the remnants of medieval fields. The site is at grid reference SP 5395 0245 (Fig.1).

### Archaeological background (Fig.1)

The site is surrounded by findspots of Roman date which may be a part of extensive settlement activity. Immediately to the W is a findspot of Roman coins and pottery (PRN 1435) and to the NE (c150 m) is (PRN 1436). According to local residents Roman pottery has been found in gardens immediately adjacent to E of the site.

To the NW lies the medieval centre of Littlemore, where multiple manorial centres are grouped (The Manor and Corpus Christi House Fig. 1), and a nunnery at Minchery Farm lies to the SE. Littlemore is mentioned in the Domesday Book but was not a parish: the mother church was St Mary-the-Virgin. The present parish church was built in the mid 19th century (VCH). To the rear of the George public house is an old yew tree, one of a line which formerly stretched from Littlemore to Marsh Baldwin (A Whiteman pers. comm.). The George is an old (?18th-century) Coaching Inn but may be older. Until Enclosure the area around the site was known as the 'West Field' (VCH), a name which may indicate its role in the medieval communal strip farming associated with the multiple manorial holdings.

### Topography

The site lies on the SE of Oxford City and is 0.69 ha in area at a height of 60-65 m OD. Until recently the site had been a part of the school playing fields. The site had been slightly landscaped recently when Lawn Upton Middle school was built.

### Assessment strategy (Fig. 2)

The assessment strategy was based on geophysical surveys (enclosed as an appendix) followed by a 3% sample of the area. The sample consisted of five 30 m long and 1.5 m wide trenches dug by a JCB mechanical excavator (see Fig. 1). Two trenches (2 and 4) were laid out in order to cover magnetic anomalies (Fig. 2) and three trenches (1, 3 and 5) were sited to sample 'quiet' areas on the geophysical survey. Following an on site meeting with the County Archaeologist this was supplemented by one further 6 m archaeological trench (6) across a banked and hedged boundary and which was the archaeological mitigation for the development.

The trenches were hand cleaned in parts and any identifiable archaeological features encountered were sampled by hand to determine their nature and depth and to recover dating evidence. The excavated features were planned at a scale of 1:100 and their sections drawn at a scale of 1:20.

## RESULTS

### Soils

The general soil type was a slightly silty sand. The underlying subsoil was sand.

### Archaeology

The large magnetic anomalies detected by the geophysical survey all proved to be large pieces of iron. For example, the anomaly numbered B in Fig 2 was a 7' angle-iron.

One boundary was identified from the geophysical surveys and was probably in the middle of Trench 2 but was not seen in the excavation. This boundary may have had a later metal fence which showed on the geophysical survey. The other linear boundaries were not located by the survey.

There were three definite linear boundaries on the site. One lay at the NE end of Trench 2 and the other two were extant as hedged banks. Trench 6 cut across the southernmost boundary.

The trenching located a shallow (0.25 m deep where measurable by 1.2 m wide) ditch aligned NW-SE at the NE end of Trench 2. The ditch was filled by an eroded ploughsoil (2/3) which was difficult to distinguish from other ploughsoils in the trench. To the SE of this ditch and in line with it was a large tree hole in Trench 1. The tree which caused the tree hole may have been part of a hedged bank similar to those surviving in the field. There was also an earthwork consisting of a slight bank visible on the same alignment as 2/4 to the NW of the site (Fig.2). This earthwork may have been disturbed by recent landscaping and so lies slightly to the E of the alignment of 2/4.

The ditch sectioned in trench 6 is of a similar size to that in trench 2 and is illustrated in Fig. 3. The natural sand subsoil rises under the bank and is overlain by a ploughsoil (6/5). This ploughsoil is shallower under the line of the bank. The bank is made of upcast material (6/4) from the shallow ditch. The lower ditch fill (6/3) is an eroded ploughsoil and the ditch is truncated on the SW by ploughing into the bank (6/2). This suggests a sequence of ploughing out and remaking the bank on the same alignment.

This supports the supposition that the banked hedges were old field boundaries and that the banks survived after the ditches silted up.

### Finds

In total 10 sherds of pottery weighing 132 g and 12 pieces of tile weighing 361 g were recovered. Ploughsoils contained all of the finds except for one sherd (from 6/3). There were three Roman, three medieval and two post-medieval sherds. The remaining sherd (from 6/3) is probably Roman, a sherd of 1st to 2nd century greyware.

### Environmental

Soil samples were not taken.

## COMMENTS ON THE RESULTS

### Reliability of field investigation

The sample size was sufficient to define and interpret the archaeology.

The weather conditions were not ideal. Rain, high winds and the attendant bad light made excavation difficult. The similarity of the feature fills to the brown natural sand subsoil in trench 2 also made locating the features difficult.

### Overall Interpretation

The archaeological deposits were quite shallow. Whether this is due to truncation by ploughing or whether the features were shallow originally is unclear. The geophysical surveys were unproductive in this case as there were no archaeological features of great significance. All of the ditches found by trenching were too small to be detected by the geophysical survey (A Bartlett pers. comm.).

The banked hedges and the feature in trench 2 coupled with the earthwork make two long thin (19-20 m wide and 40 m wide) enclosures aligned off Sandford Road. If the metal fence tentatively identified by the geophysical survey had been placed on a similar boundary then it would subdivide the c40 m wide enclosure into two c20m wide portions. This would result in four long thin enclosures, around 20 m wide and 370 to 440 m long, aligned at right-angles to Sandford Road

A slight earthwork bank aligned NW-SE (Fig. 2) lay just to the NW of the site and may be a remnant of a boundary, perhaps a continuation of the ditch in Trench 2. The earthwork may correspond to a boundary aligned off the NE rear of The George (Fig. 1). The bank sectioned in trench 6 corresponds to the line of Lanham Way to the NW (Fig. 1) and the way may have continued as the track seen on the 1:1250 OS map of the playing fields (Figs 1 and 2). The middle boundary is aligned off the SW boundary of The George.

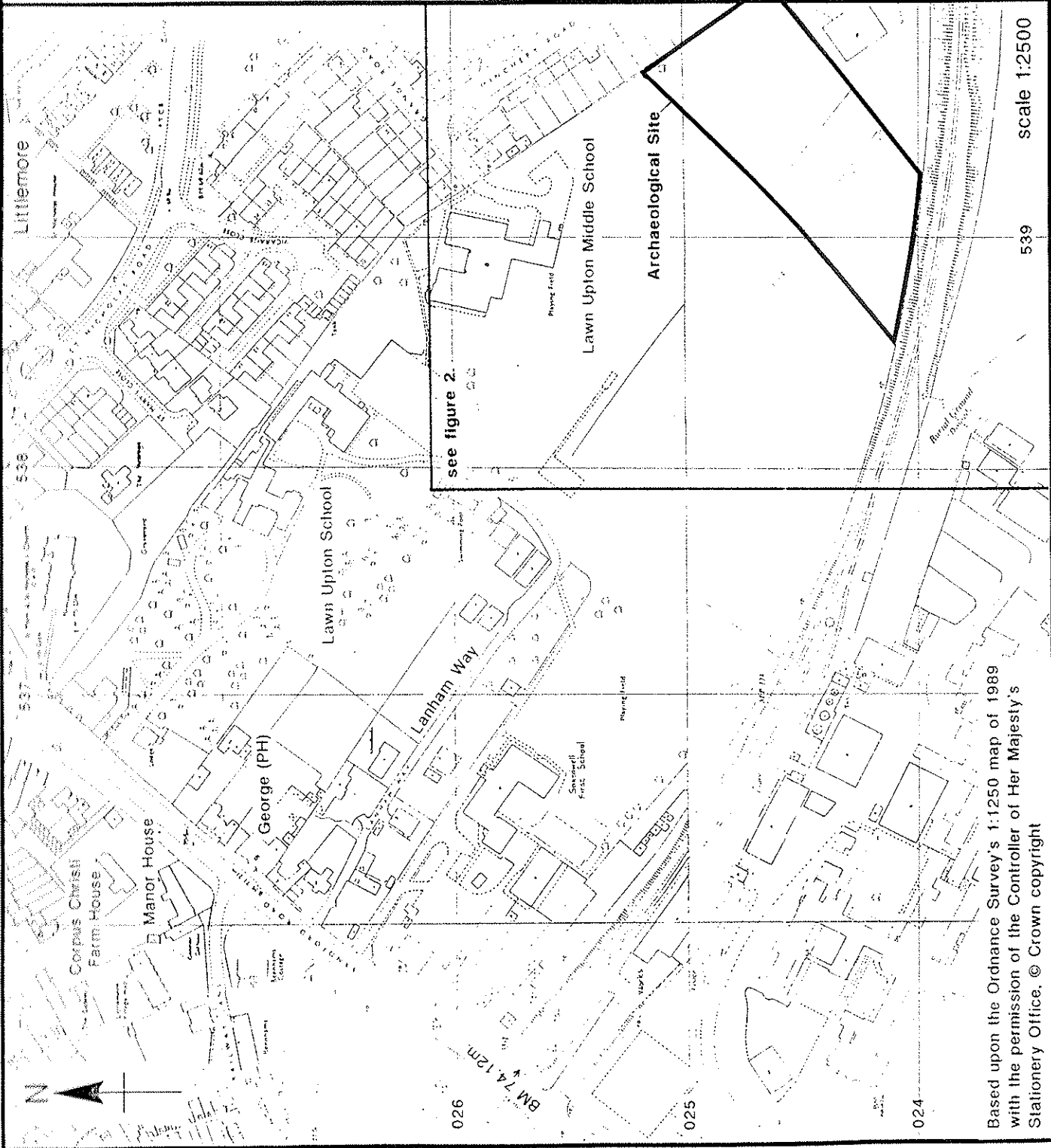
A slight earthwork aligned at right-angles to these boundaries just to the NW of the site (Fig. 2) may denote a division (?parallel to the road) in these long thin boundaries. The grounds of the British Legion to the SE of the site appeared to have been lowered by landscaping. As a result there were no obvious earthworks to be seen.

It is unlikely the strips are Roman. The ploughsoils contain medieval pottery and the (very small and abraded) Roman sherd from the fill of the S most ditch (6/3) must be residual. It is likely that these long thin enclosures relate to the use of the area as the 'West Field' as an area of medieval strip cultivation. The fossilisation of the boundaries and their preservation until recently is probably due to their position in the school playing fields, as there have been schools on this site since the mid 19th century the fields may have been a part of the land belonging to, if not used by, the schools.

M R Roberts MIFA

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# Lawn Upton School Site Location Plan

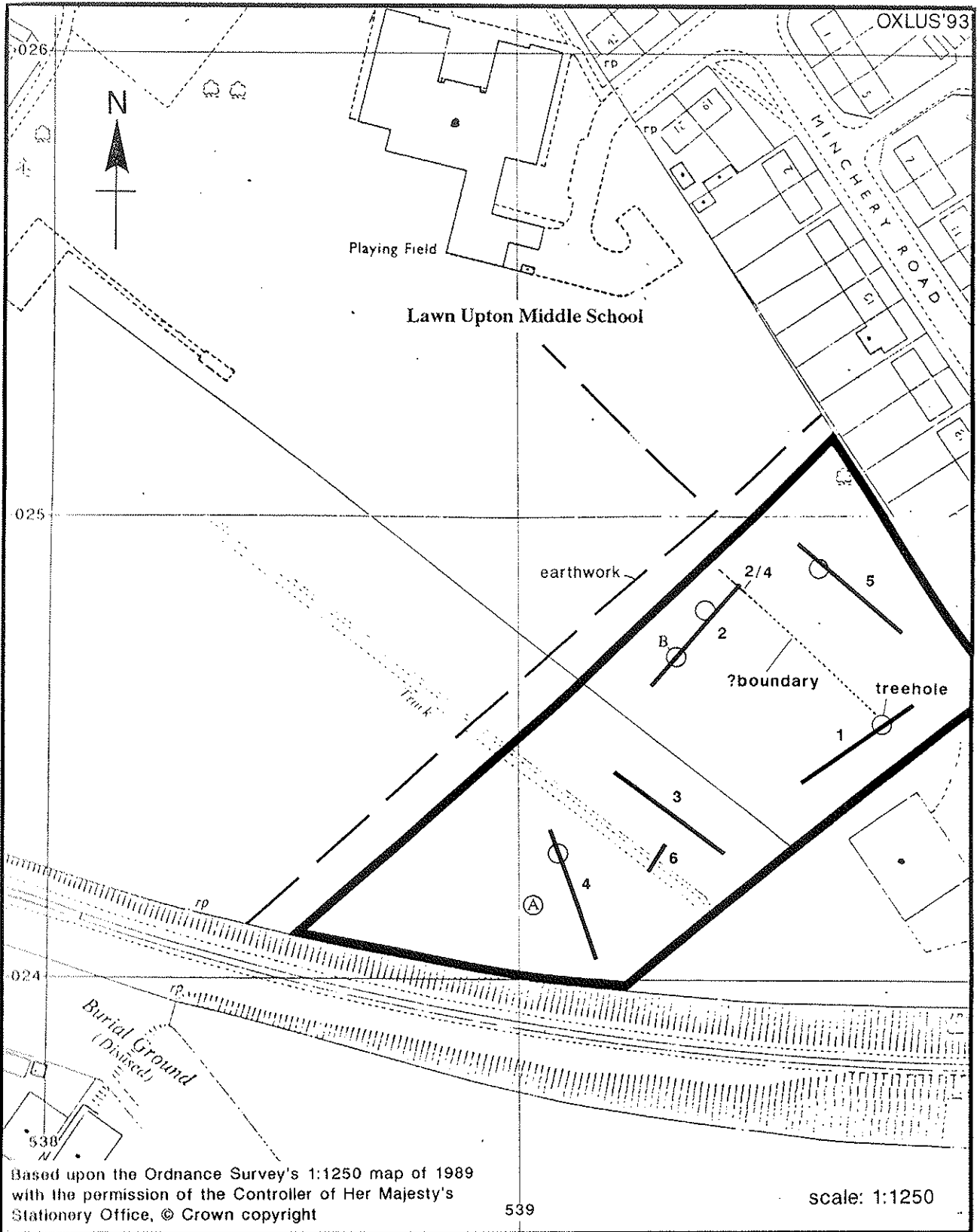


scale 1:2500

539

Based upon the Ordnance Survey's 1:2500 map of 1989  
with the permission of the Controller of Her Majesty's  
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figure 1



Lawn Upton School Littlemore Oxford  
Site Plan

KEY.




	Archaeological Trenches		Earthworks		Magnetic Anomalies
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figure 2

Trench 6  
Section 6/1

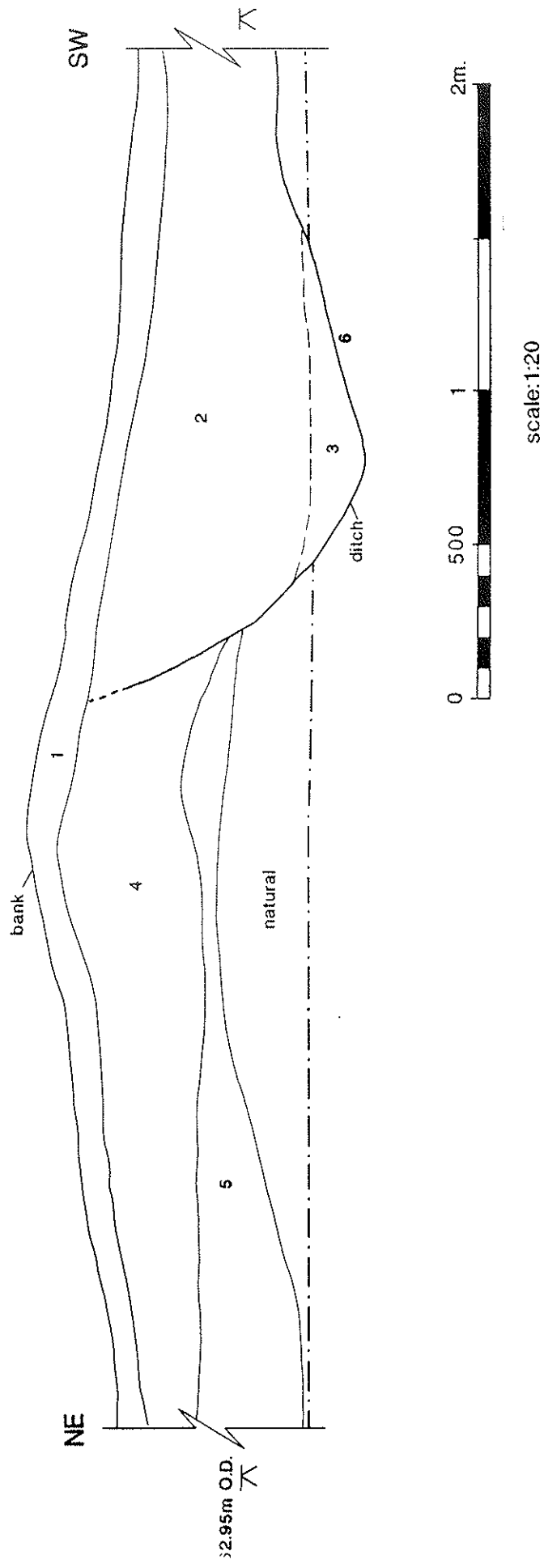


figure 3

Lawn Upton School, Littlemore, Oxford

Report on Geophysical Survey, 1993

This survey was carried out as part of an archaeological assessment undertaken by the Oxford Archaeological Unit with the purpose of discovering whether any kilns or other features associated with nearby ancient industrial activity were present at this site.

The area investigated lies within the grounds of Lawn Upton School adjoining Lakefield Road, as indicated by the bold outline on the location plan 1(i).

The site was surveyed in six sections 25m wide (23m for the section adjoining the southern site boundary), located by reference to a baseline as shown on the plan. Readings from a Geoscan FM18 magnetometer were recorded at 25cm intervals along traverse lines 1m apart to give the results as shown on plans 2-4.

An initial magnetometer scan of the site (carried out on 21 November) indicated the presence of a number of strong magnetic disturbances showing some similarity in terms of strength and extent to the magnetic anomalies to be expected from buried kilns. The anomalies were internally complex, and lacked the smooth profile characteristic of an intact kiln. This could mean they were caused by randomly oriented pieces of iron, or alternatively that any kilns present were perhaps in a broken and disordered state. The recorded survey was therefore carried out (on 2 and 4 December) to permit these disturbances to be examined more closely. A summary of the findings was provided for the start of the trial excavation on 7 December.

The magnetic anomalies as seen in the scan can be identified in the survey plots. The initial plot of the data (plan 2) shows that most of the magnetic disturbances at the site are in the form of strong narrow anomalies against a relatively quiet background. A few of the anomalies form clusters, or are wider, which could indicate the presence of larger features. Some of the more distinct examples are circled on plan 3, where the readings are plotted at a less sensitive vertical scale. This allows the stronger anomalies to be seen more clearly in profile than in plan 2. The disturbances as circled are of an intensity and width which could represent Romano-British or medieval kilns, but the plot does confirm they are more fragmented in appearance, and have stronger negative peaks to the anomalies than would be expected for such features. It therefore appears likely that the anomalies are caused by buried iron objects rather than kilns. The anomalies at A and B (labelled on plan 3) were tested with a hand auger to a depth of 80cm, but no discoloured soil or burnt clay could be seen. Two other anomalies (C and D) show double peaked profiles which can be characteristic of kilns, but they affect only a single traverse and so are narrower than would be expected if that were the case.

A further reason for doubting that the detected features are kilns is the lack of any clear plan of surrounding enclosures or other associated features. The half tone plot (plan 4) is drawn at a sensitivity which should allow ditches to be visible, but no clearly defined features can be seen. There is a broken linear pattern of disturbances at E, but it is made up of



individual anomalies which appear to represent pieces of iron. A more regular pattern of anomalies at the edge of the site (F) is likely to be a pipe.

An area of very strong negative readings at the edge of the plot (G) must be caused by a large buried iron object just outside the survey.

Magnetic susceptibility readings were also collected across the site on a 10m grid, as shown on plan 1(ii). These provide an indication of whether the magnetic properties of the soil have been affected by past human activities, and are likely to show a substantial increase at a former industrial site. The readings do show some increase towards the south of the site, but the effect is not very strong, and does not relate clearly to the magnetometer findings.

In summary, therefore, it was not thought likely that this site contains substantial remains of early industrial activity. There are a number of magnetic anomalies which show some of the characteristics of kilns, but they could be equally well accounted for by buried iron, and are not seen in a context of other features likely to be found at an archaeological site. These conclusions were borne out by the excavation findings, which identified large modern iron objects corresponding to some of the stronger magnetic anomalies. It is likely that some of the other magnetic disturbances seen in the survey may be the result of levelling carried out at the time when new school buildings were constructed in the 1970s.

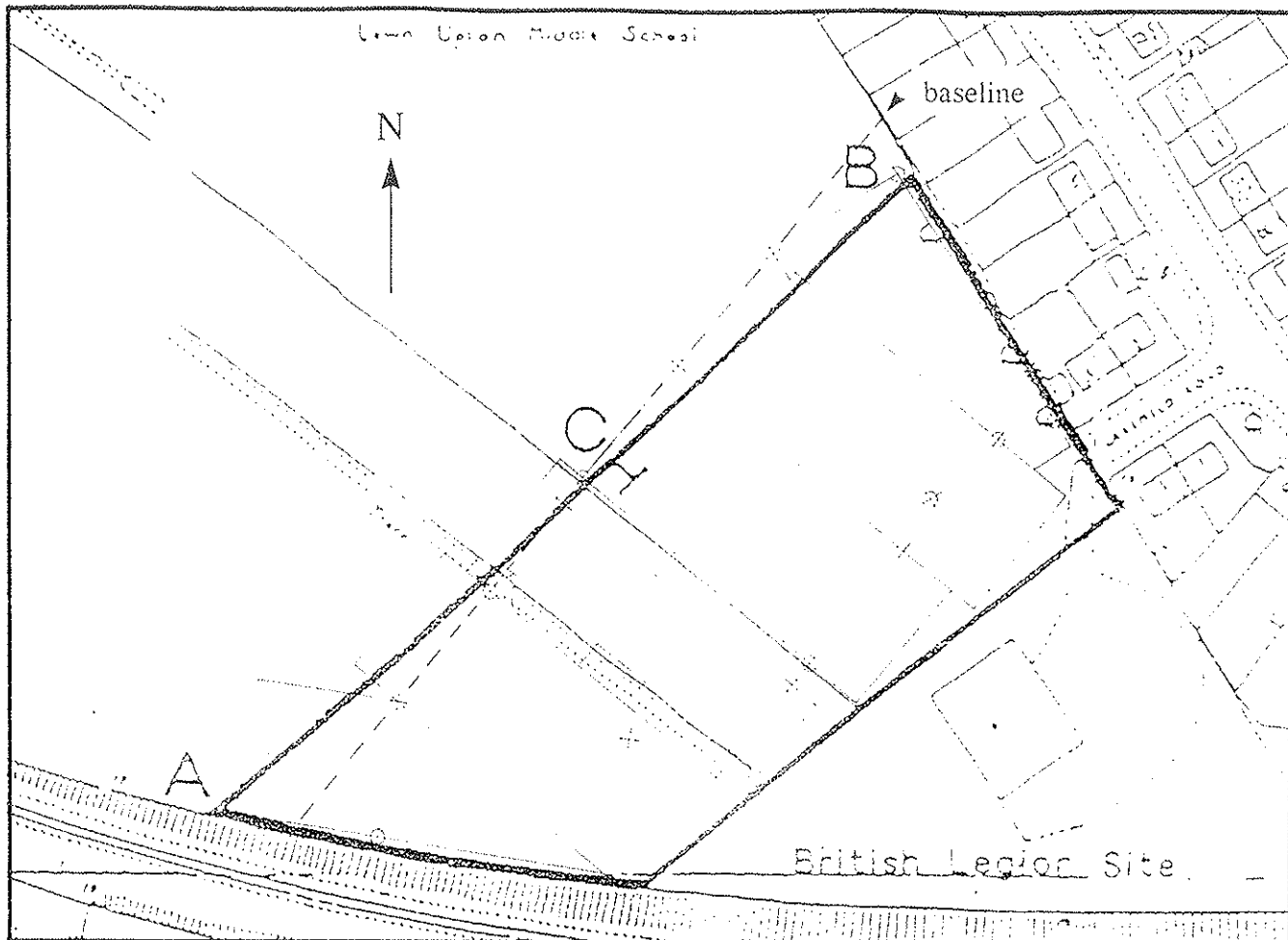
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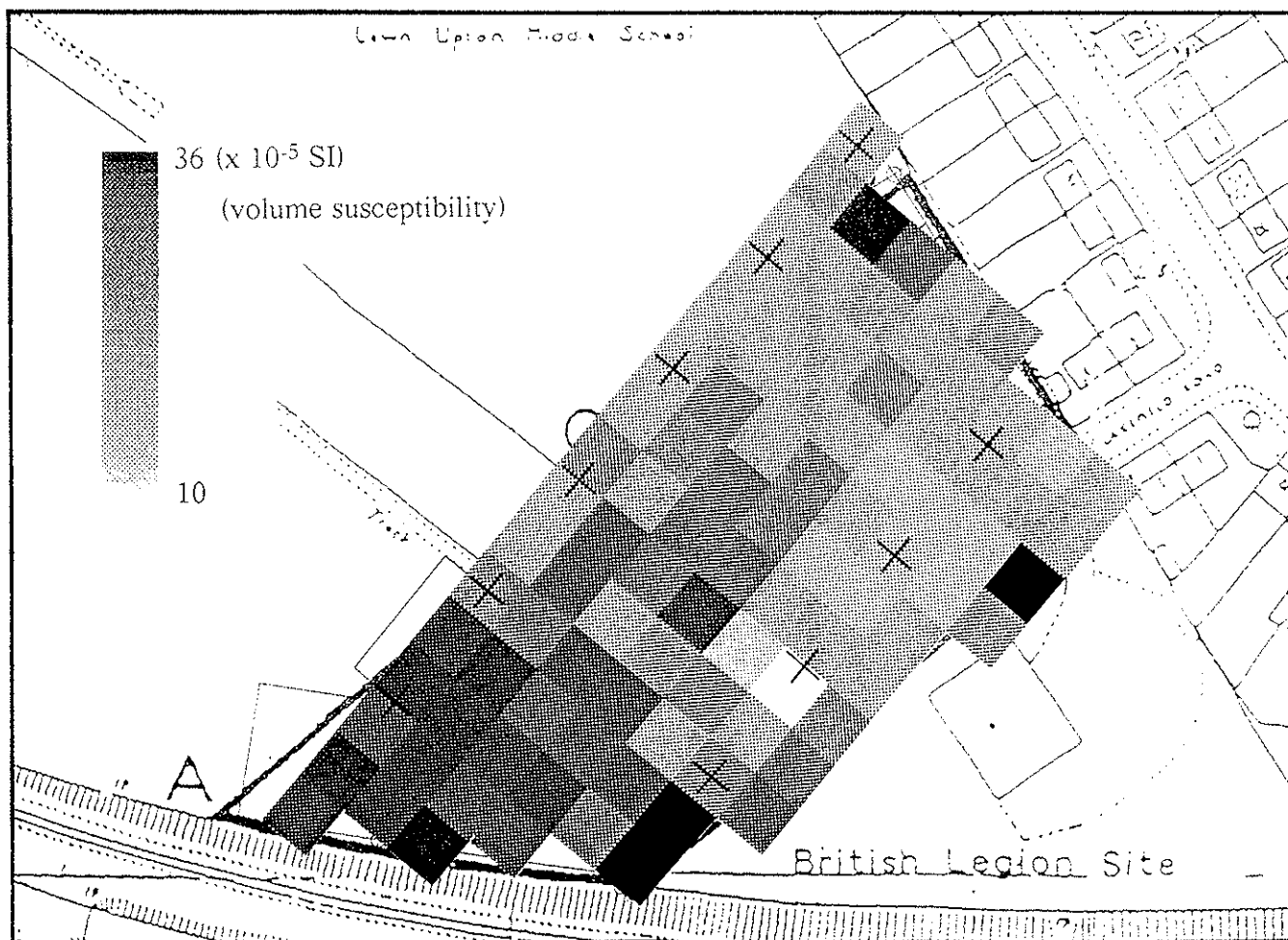
with:

B.Y. Turton MA

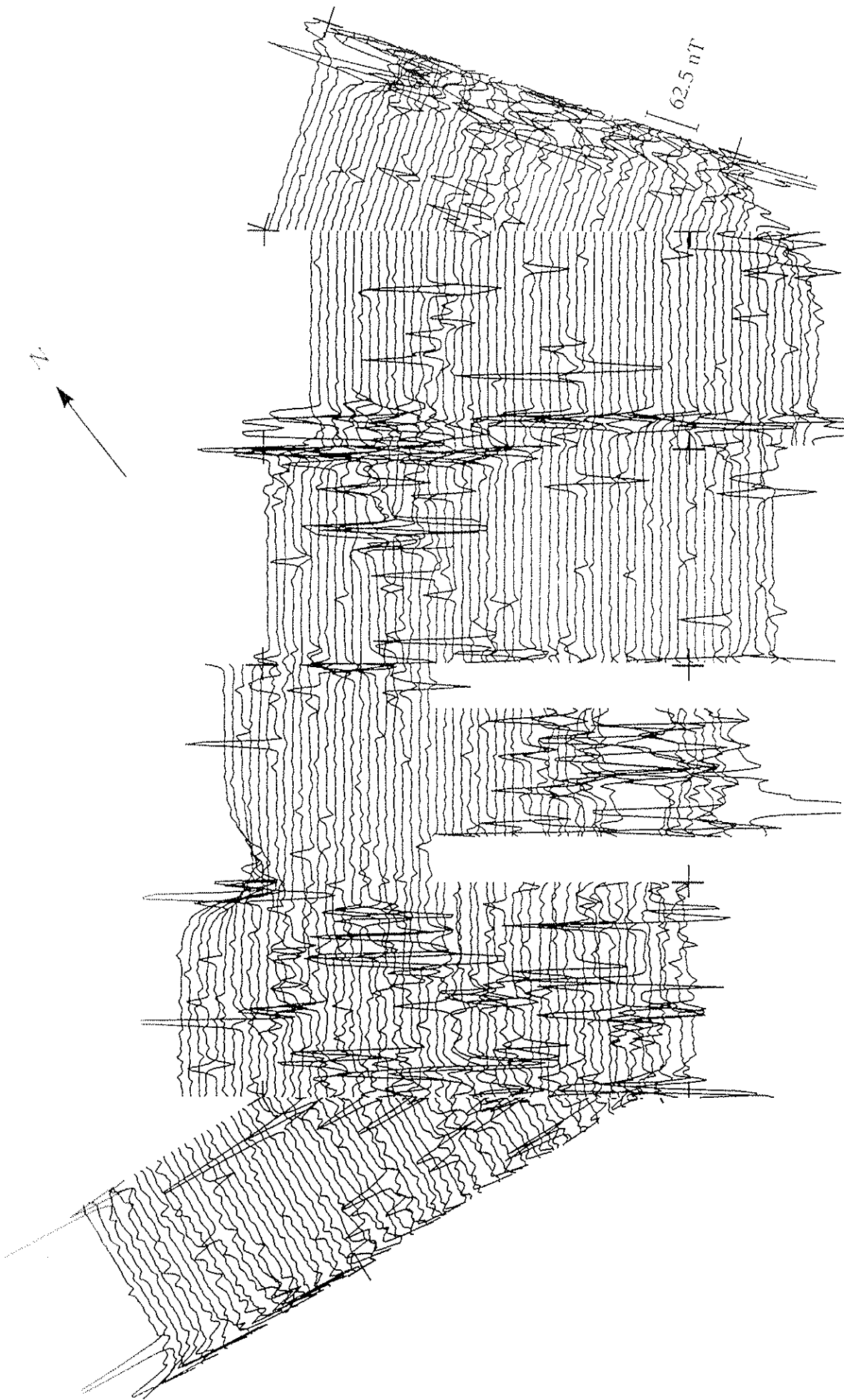
Date of report: 20 December 1993



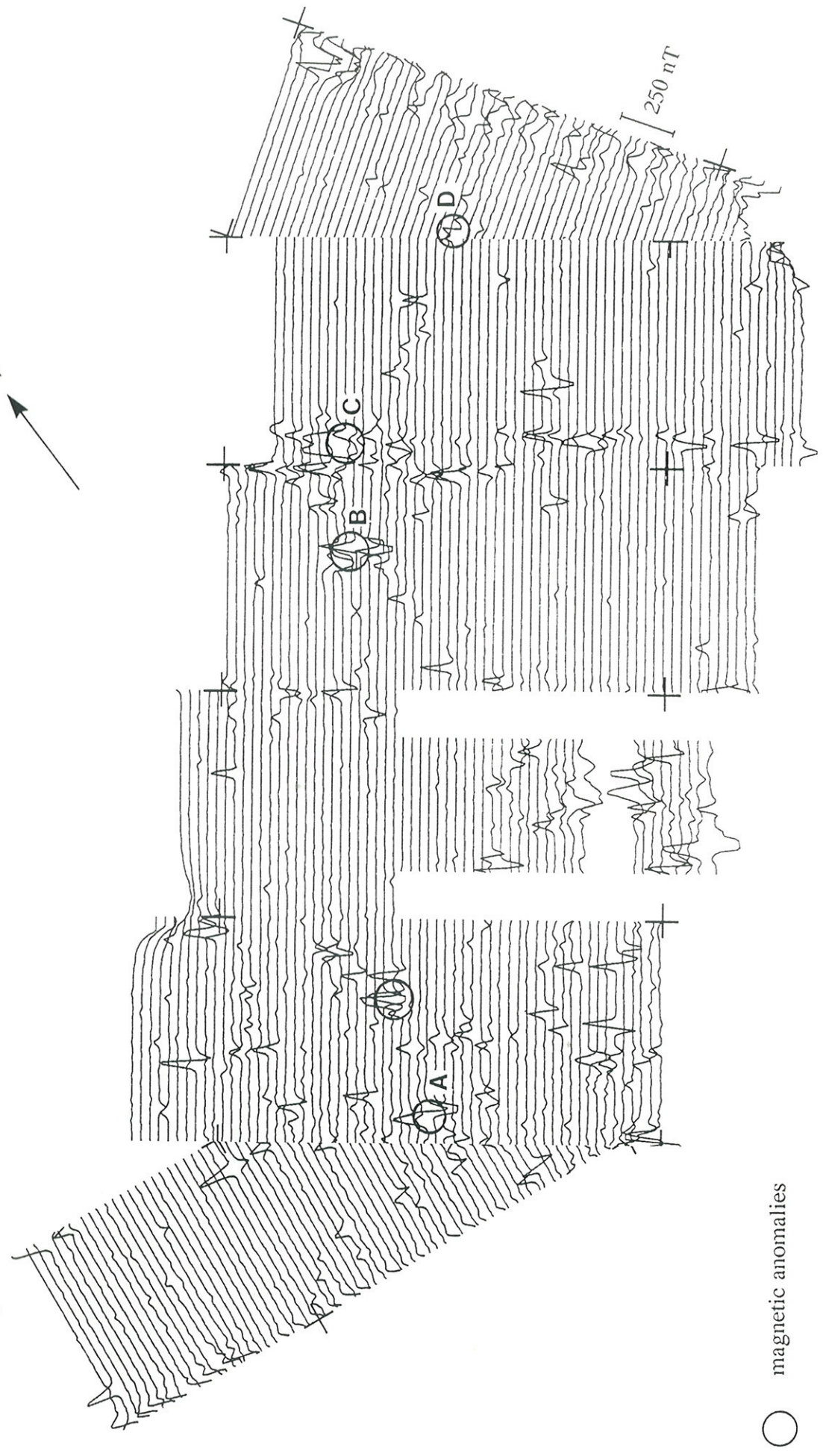
(i) Lawn Upton School: Location of Magnetometer Survey (outlined) 1:1250



(ii) Magnetic Susceptibility Survey 1:1250



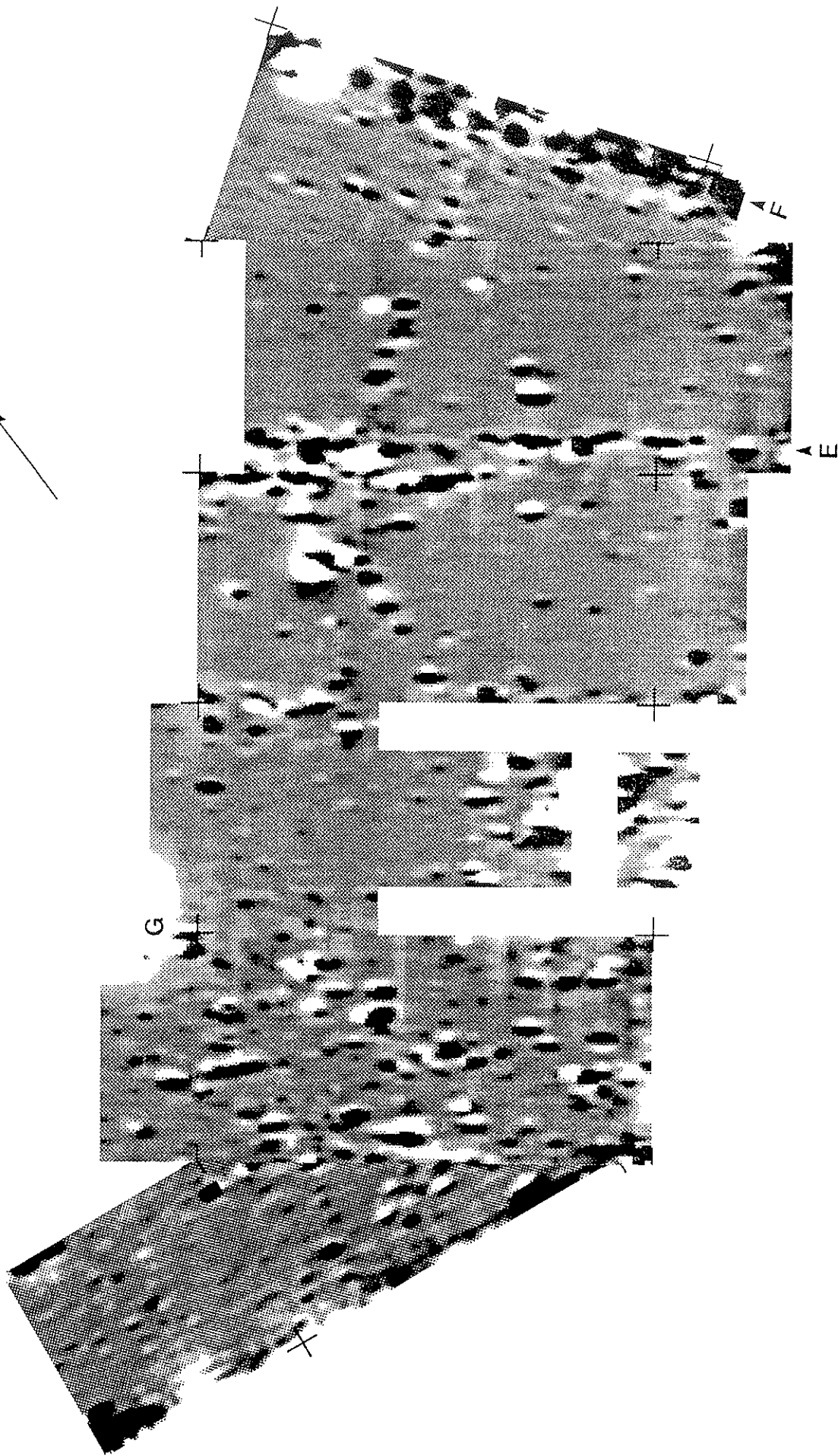
Lawn Upton School: Magnetometer Survey 1:625



○ magnetic anomalies

Lawn Upton School: Magnetometer Survey 1:625

(vertical scale 40 nT/line interval)



Lawn Upton School: Magnetometer Survey 1:625

Display range -5 nT (white) to +5 nT (black)

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