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The Old School and Manor Hotel, Bloxham, Oxfordshire

NGR SP 4296 3552

Archaeological Watching Brief Report



Oxford Archaeological Unit

November 1996

THE OLD SCHOOL AND MANOR HOTEL, BLOXHAM
OXFORDSHIRE
ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF REPORT
ON THE SECOND PHASE OF DEVELOPMENT

NGR SP 4296 3552

SUMMARY

A watching brief carried out in advance of redevelopment located no features or finds of archaeological significance.

INTRODUCTION

Redevelopment of the site of the Old School and Manor Hotel, Bloxham has been ongoing since 1994. The site lies close to the historic core of Bloxham and in view of this proximity a programme of archaeological monitoring of the development works was required as a condition of the planning consent (planning reference CHN.LBCA62/94). In August 1994 a watching brief was undertaken by the Oxford Archaeological Unit (OAU) during the construction of two houses and associated groundworks (OAU 1995), and in March 1996 a further phase of watching brief work was carried out by the OAU during the construction of two more houses (Plots 17 and 18) in the south-eastern corner of the site, adjacent to the former location of the staff house associated with the school. The latter work is reported on here.

LOCATION AND BACKGROUND (see Figure 1)

The site of the Old School and Manor Hotel is located at the southern end of Bloxham village on the east side of Church Street. The geology of the site is Middle Liassic Marlstone or Ironstone. The site was considered to have archaeological potential due to its location within the nucleus of the medieval village south of the Church.

There are no known pre-medieval remains within the village but several Roman settlements have been located within Bloxham parish; the largest being situated c. 800 m west of the present village on the Tadmarton road. Evidence for occupation from the 1st to 5th centuries includes a cemetery of at least 30 inhumations (Bond 1980; Oxfordshire County Sites and Monuments Record PRN 1712, PRN 4984). At least five other Romano-British sites are known within the parish.

The church of St Mary's was first recorded in 1067 and is noted for its 14th century tower and spire. It occupies an area of high ground within what appears to be an ovoid

area defined by Merrivale's Lane and Little Green to the north and by King's Street to the west. The ovoid shape could well be defining an early village boundary (Bond 1980). The area to the south-east near to the Old School is not defined by an existing road, but the conjectured shape and topography suggest that it is within the medieval village nucleus. Church Street bisects the main village area and is mentioned by name in medieval court rolls.

The mixed National School (PRN 1054), which forms part of the development site, was built in Church Street in 1864. The remaining area of the site once formed part of Manor Farm which has a Late Georgian front on a gabled mid 17th century house (PRN 11,780).

A substantial part of the village appears to be of 17th century date and many buildings were remodelled and enlarged in the 18th century.

AIMS AND STRATEGY

The aim of the watching brief was to identify any significant archaeological deposits or features on the site located during groundworks. It was hoped that these would enhance understanding of the morphology and character of the medieval and post-medieval village.

The excavation of foundation trenches for the new houses was monitored, trench sections were examined for archaeological features and spoil heaps were inspected for finds. The trenches were typically 0.60 m wide and c 1 m deep (for plan of trench layout see Fig 2).

No deposits of archaeological significance were noted nor finds recovered during the work and recording was therefore at a low level. Sample sections were reconstructed from the site notes and context numbers assigned to the sequence in the post-excavation phase of the project.

RESULTS (Figs 2 and 3)

The site had been levelled and made up relatively shortly before development started. A broadly similar sequence of deposits was observed in all the foundation trenches for Plots 17 and 18.

The typical sequence in Plot 17 was as follows. The natural subsoil, generally of fairly loose ironstone lumps in a matrix of red-brown clay (174), occurred at varying depths from 0.80-1.00m below the modern ground surface. Above this was a slightly mixed red-brown loamy clay, generally clean, containing fewer and smaller ironstone fragments (173). This deposit was up to c 0.25 m thick in places, but was generally c 0.10-0.15m thick. Above this were mixed deposits incorporating building material, ash and cinders, locally disturbed by service trenches, usually from 0.50-0.65m deep (172). The top of this sequence consisted of recently-levelled rubble, mostly of ironstone (171).

In sequence in Plot 18 was the same as in the Plot 17 trenches, but the interfaces in its lower part were generally less distinct. The basal layer, at a depth of about 1 m, was of ironstone fragments in a red-brown sticky clay matrix (184). The overlying material (183) was very similar, but became progressively less sticky as the clay content decreased, up to a maximum height of 0.50 m above the base of the trenches. Above these layers were the modern/disturbed deposits seen in the Plot 17 trenches. The lower part of these deposits consisted of brown clay loam with stone fragments and coal flecks (182), sealed by rubble layers (181). Together these deposits were 0.50-0.65 m deep.

No finds were recovered from any of the layers in the lower part of the sequence. A very few 19th-20th century fragments (pottery and roofing slate) from the disturbed layers at the top of the sequence were not retained. A small quantity of similar material was observed on the spoilheaps, but these were generally quite clean and did not produce any material earlier than the 19th century in date.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

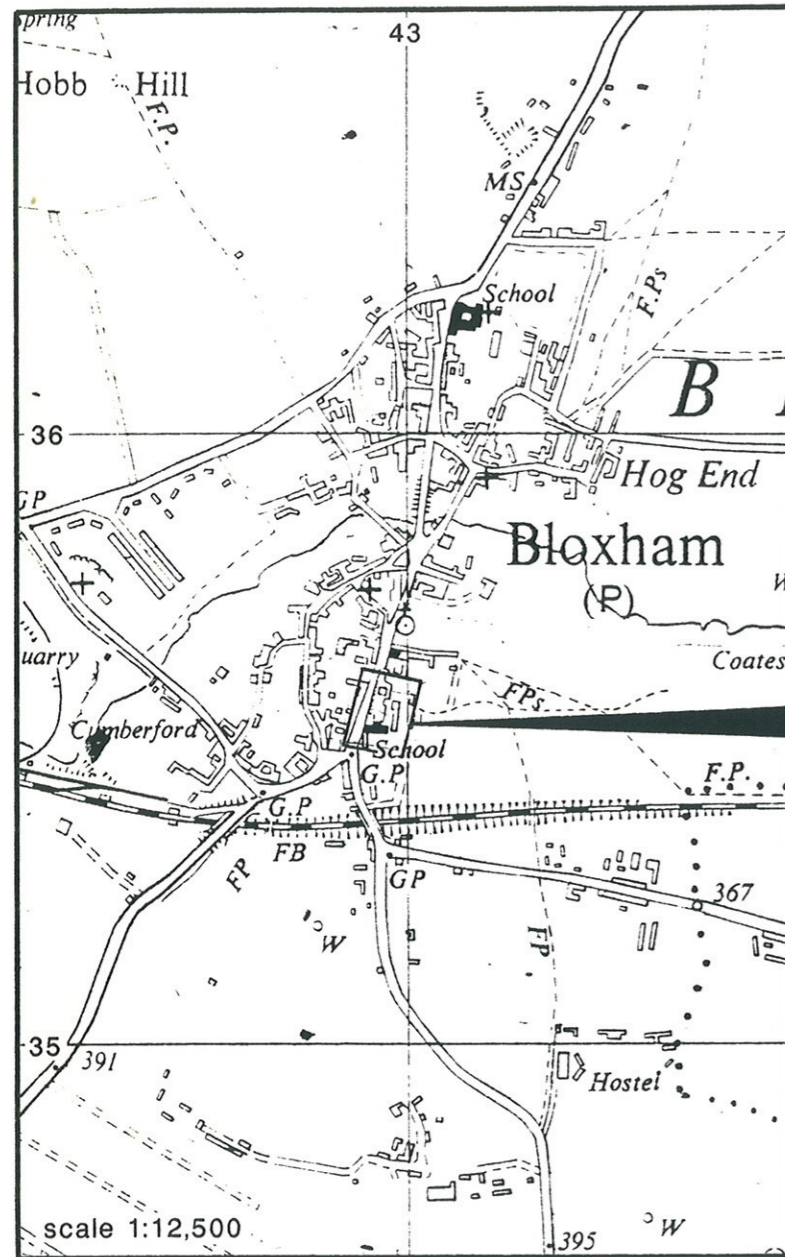
The basal layers observed in the foundation trenches for both plots represented the natural subsoil across the site. It is quite likely that the overlying layers (173 and 183), basically the same deposit though varying in the clarity of their junctions with the subsoil, were also of 'natural' origin, though they could have represented an early ploughsoil or similar horizon. The occurrence of material of recent origin (particularly coal and ash/clinker fragments) down to a depth of c 0.60 m might suggest that there was some truncation of the original sequence on the site, but this is not clear, since the matrix of layers 172 and 182 was broadly similar to that of underlying deposits. The construction of the School in 1864 could have provided a context for such truncation. If this did happen, and if earlier features had been removed at this time, they are unlikely to have been very substantial. Cut features penetrating layers 173/183 and 174/184 should still have been visible in the lower part of the trench sections. The absence of such features and the total absence of even residual fragments of pre-modern material suggest that there had been no significant archaeologically detectable activity on this site before the 19th century. This conclusion is consistent with that drawn from the earlier phase of observation and recording on the site.

Paul Booth
OAU
October 1996

REFERENCES

Bond, J, 1980, Bloxham, Oxfordshire: Village Survey, *CBA 9 Newsletter* 10, 103-123

OAU, 1995, *The Old School and Manor Hotel, Bloxham, Oxfordshire, Watching Brief, NGR SP 42960 35520*



SP 43
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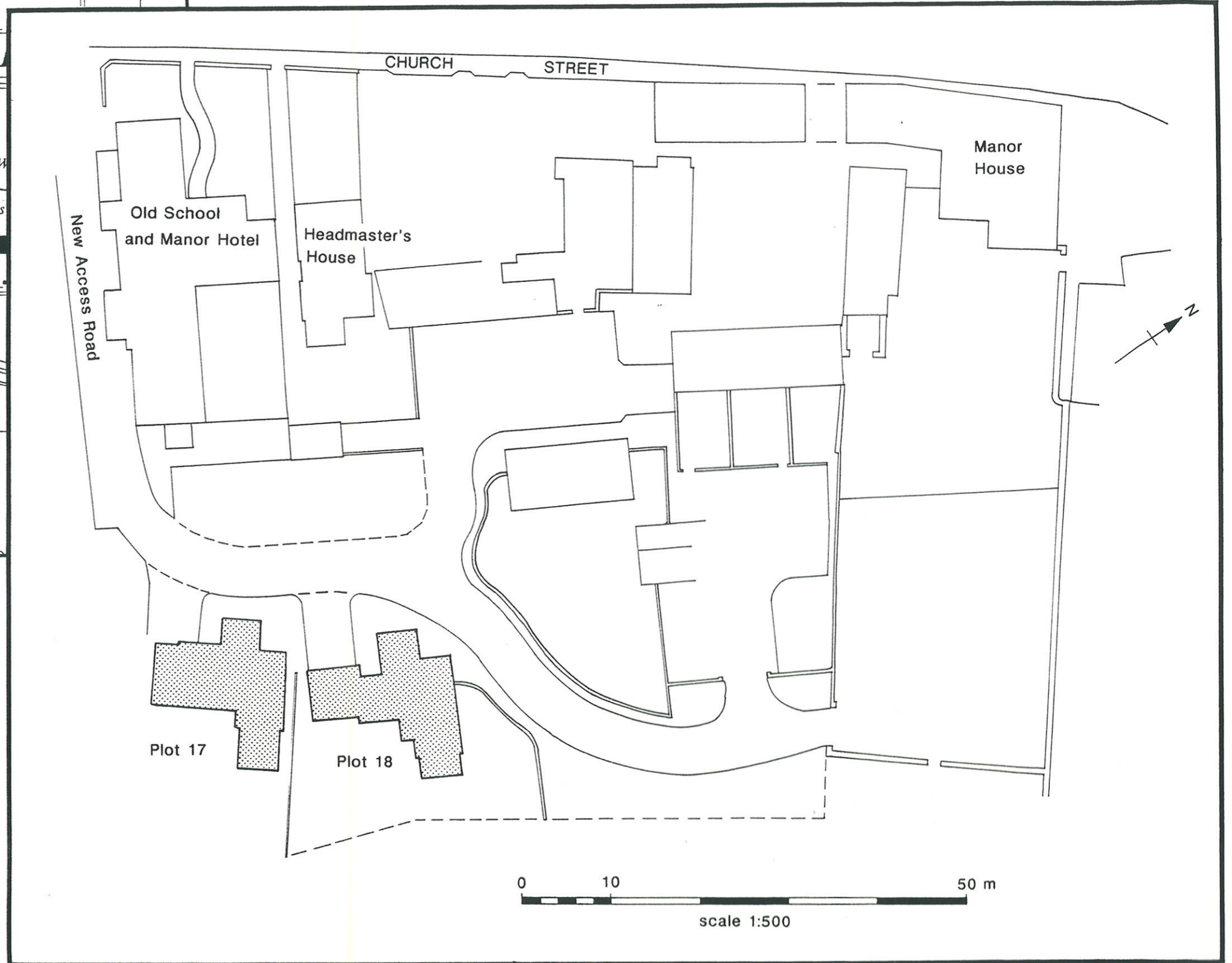


Figure 1: Site location

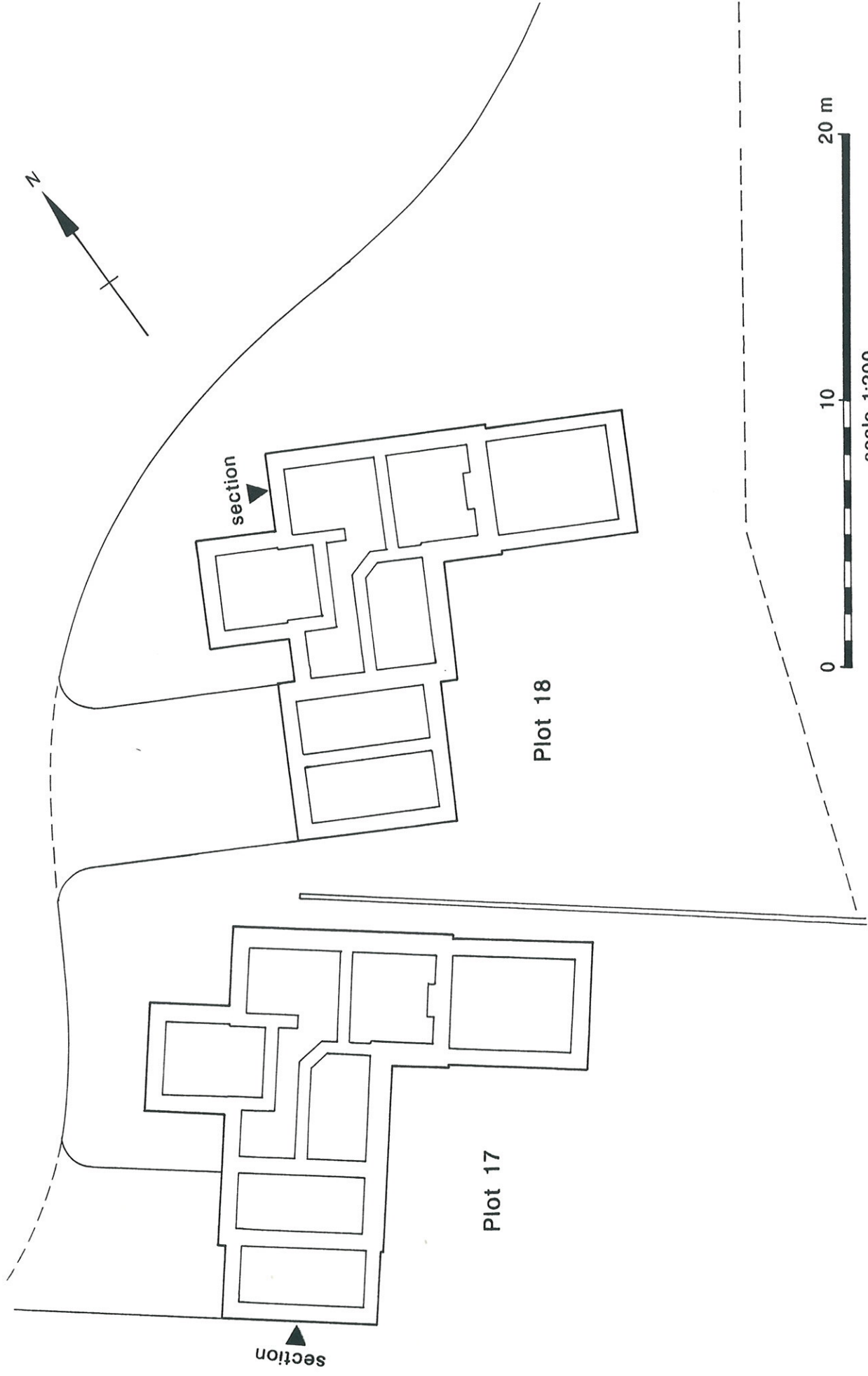
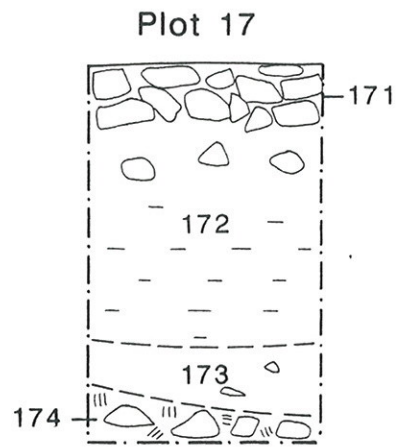


Figure 2

Schematic sample foundation trench sections



Plot 18

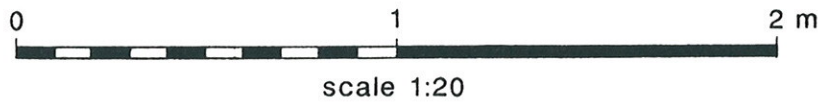
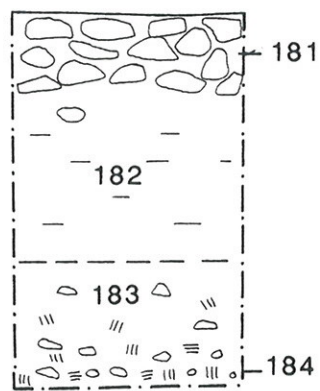


Figure 3



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