

**10 Churchfield Lane,
Benson, Oxfordshire**

**An Archaeological Watching Brief
for Berkeley Homes (Oxford and Chiltern)**

by Stephen Hammond

Thames Valley Archaeological Services Ltd

Site Code CLB 02/46

August 2002

Summary

Site name: 10 Churchfield Lane, Benson, Oxfordshire

Grid reference: SU 61350 91740

Site activity: Watching Brief

Date and duration of project: 15th July - 5th August 2002

Project manager: Steve Ford

Site supervisor: Stephen Hammond

Site code: CLB 02/46

Area of site: 0.1 ha

Summary of results: No finds or features of archaeological interest were found.

Monuments identified: None

Location and reference of archive: The site archive is currently held by Thames Valley Archaeological Services Ltd, 47 - 49 De Beauvoir Road, Reading, Berkshire, RG1 5NR. It is anticipated that the complete site archive will be deposited with the Oxfordshire Museum Service in due course.

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Report edited/checked by:	Steve Ford✓ 7.08.02
	Steve Preston✓ 8.08.02

10 Churchfield Lane, Benson, Oxfordshire An Archaeological Watching Brief

By Stephen Hammond

Report 02/46

Introduction

This report documents the results of an archaeological watching brief carried out at 10 Churchfield Lane, Benson, Oxfordshire (SU 61350 91740) (Fig. 1). The work was commissioned by Mr Jon Neville of Berkeley Homes (Oxford and Chiltern) Limited, Berkeley House, Abingdon Science Park, Barton Lane, Abingdon, Oxfordshire, OX14 3NB.

South Oxfordshire District Council has granted planning permission (P01/W0998) for the erection of a new detached house and double garage. As part of the planning consent an archaeological watching brief was required during the groundworks.

This is in accordance with the Department of the Environment's Planning Policy Guidance, *Archaeology and Planning* (PPG16 1990), and the District's policies on archaeology. The field investigation was carried out to a specification approved by Mr Paul Smith, County Archaeological Officer for Oxfordshire County Council. The fieldwork was undertaken by Stephen Hammond between 15th July and 5th August 2002 and the site code is CLB 02/46. The site archive is currently held by Thames Valley Archaeological Services Ltd, 47 - 49 De Beauvoir Road, Reading, Berkshire, RG1 5NR. It is anticipated that the complete archive will be deposited with the Oxfordshire Museum Service in due course.

Location, topography and geology

The site is located off Churchfield Lane on the western edge of Benson, near the River Thames (Figs. 1 and 2) and was formally the garden of a residence. The site occupies an area of 0.1 ha at c.48m above Ordnance Datum. The land itself is relatively flat with a slightly raised rectangular piece of ground to the south that occupies approximately one third of the total area. The underlying geology according to maps (BGS 1980) is river gravel. This was not confirmed during the watching brief.

Archaeological background

The site lies within the historic core of Benson, which was a Royal settlement in early Saxon times (Blair 1994, fig. 26). Excavations to the south of the site on the former 'Rivers' nightclub produced a wide range of deposits

of early and late Neolithic, Late Bronze Age, Early Iron Age and Early Saxon date (Pine and Ford forthcoming). A probable Iron Age occupation site is located to the north-east and produced bone, pottery and a bronze coin when investigated.

Objectives and methodology

The purpose of the watching brief was to excavate and record any archaeological deposits affected by the construction of the new buildings. This would involve the examination of areas stripped of topsoil/overburden and the inspection of any ground-intrusive work such as the digging of foundation trenches and service runs. All spoil heaps created during such work would be monitored for finds.

Results

Three elements of ground intrusive work were observed for the watching brief (Fig. 3). These consisted of: the stripping of topsoil; the digging of the foundation trench for a garden wall forming the site boundary; and the digging of ground beam trenches for the new house.

The topsoil stripping proved not to be deep enough to reveal any potential archaeologically relevant levels. A maximum strip depth of 0.30m was noted towards the northern site limit near to the hedged boundary. This depth decreased significantly further south until only 0.12m was removed near the southern limit. The stripping was designed to allow enough ground near where the house was to be positioned for a substantial layer of brick rubble to be spread over the area and compacted to the former level. This was done to facilitate the manoeuvring of a piling rig without it sinking. Less ground needed to be removed to the south because the slightly raised rectangular area of ground proved to have been made up already. Stripping in the undisturbed area revealed only patchy areas of subsoil, whilst in the raised area, removing the grass turf revealed a made ground consisting of a sandy/silty clay with very frequent gravel inclusions. The topsoil consisted of dark grey/brown clay/silt with occasional angular and sub angular flint inclusions and the subsoil (where seen) proved to be a mid grey/brown silty clay with occasional angular and sub angular flint pieces.

The foundation trench for the brick wall that was to become the site boundary revealed in section a topsoil 0.14m thick above a subsoil (mid grey/brown silty clay with occasional pieces of angular and sub angular flint gravel) 0.56m thick. The area had already been stripped to a lower level during earlier work. It was found that this in turn overlaid concrete from a previous disturbance. Digging was halted at this point. No archaeological finds or deposits were found.

It was not clear if the ground beam trenches for the foundations were dug sufficiently deep to reach the natural geology (solid gravel), or if the 'natural' in this location was the loamy, gravelly 'subsoil'. Typically the sections revealed 0.20m of brick rubble onto 0.15m of topsoil which covered 0.25m+ of subsoil (mid grey/brown silty clay with occasional angular and sub angular flint gravel). The spoilheap created from the excavation of the ground beam trenches was inspected for finds but without reward.

The raised area noted previously could be seen to a depth of 0.70m. With the turf already removed the section revealed 0.60m of made ground (loam with very frequent gravel inclusions) above a buried topsoil 0.10m thick. No deeper strata were observed.

Finds

No finds were recovered from the watching brief.

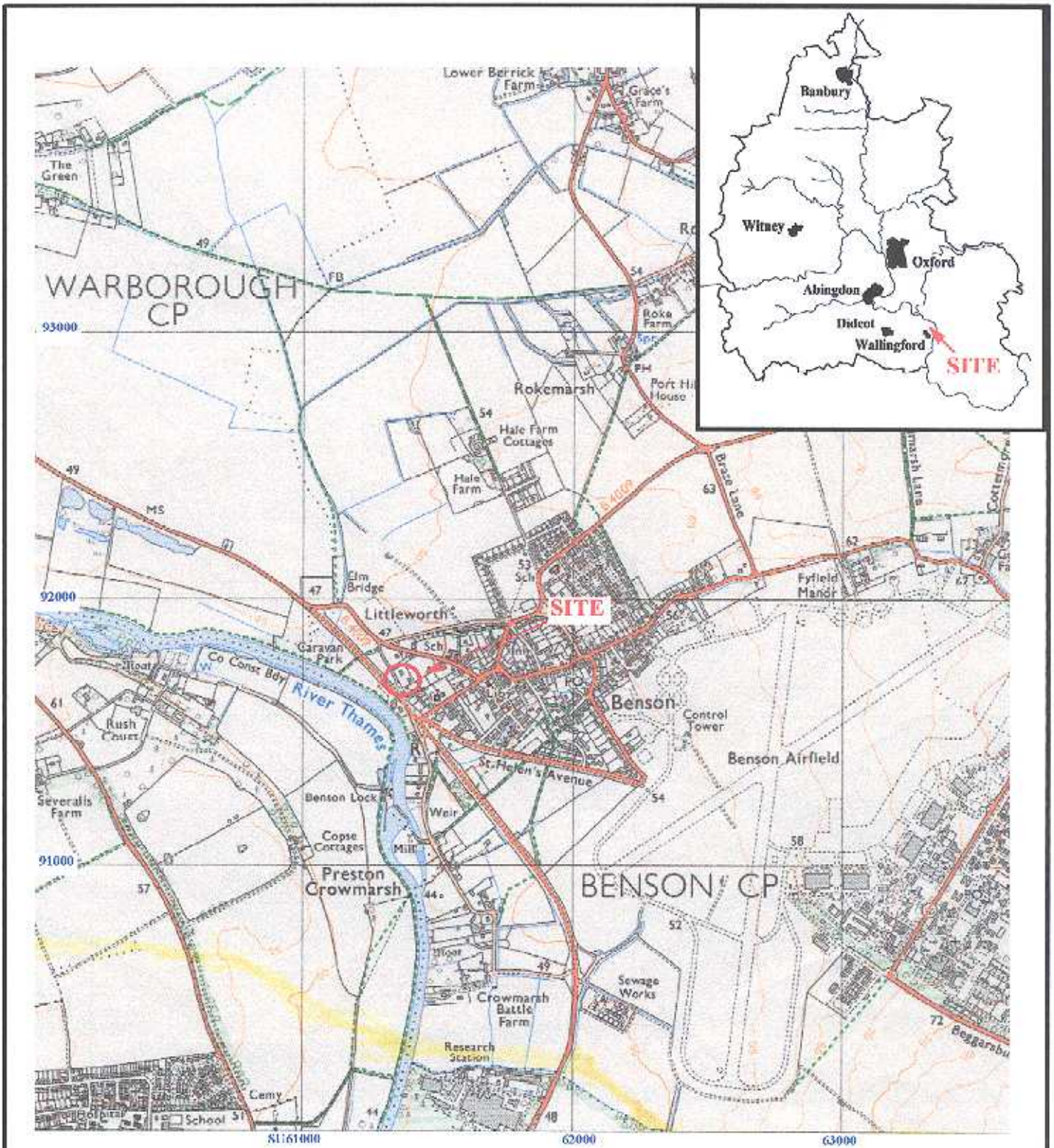
Conclusion

No finds or archaeological features were found during the watching brief. The topsoil strip proved not to be deep enough to reveal any potential archaeological levels whilst the position of the garden wall foundation trench demonstrated that this region of the site had already been disturbed in recent history. The ground beam trenches for the house did not reveal anything of an archaeological nature from the accessible sections.

Most of the spoil arising from the excavations was available for examination but no finds or archaeological interest were observed.

References

- BGS, 1980, *British Geological Survey*, 1:50000, Sheet 254, Solid and Drift Edition, Keyworth
Blair, J, 1994, *Anglo-Saxon Oxfordshire*, Stroud
Pine, J and Ford, S forthcoming, 'The excavation of Neolithic, late Bronze Age, Early Iron Age and early Saxon features at St Helen's Benson', *Oxoniensia*
PPG 16, 1990, *Archaeology and Planning*, Dept of the Environment Planning Policy Guidance 16, HMSO



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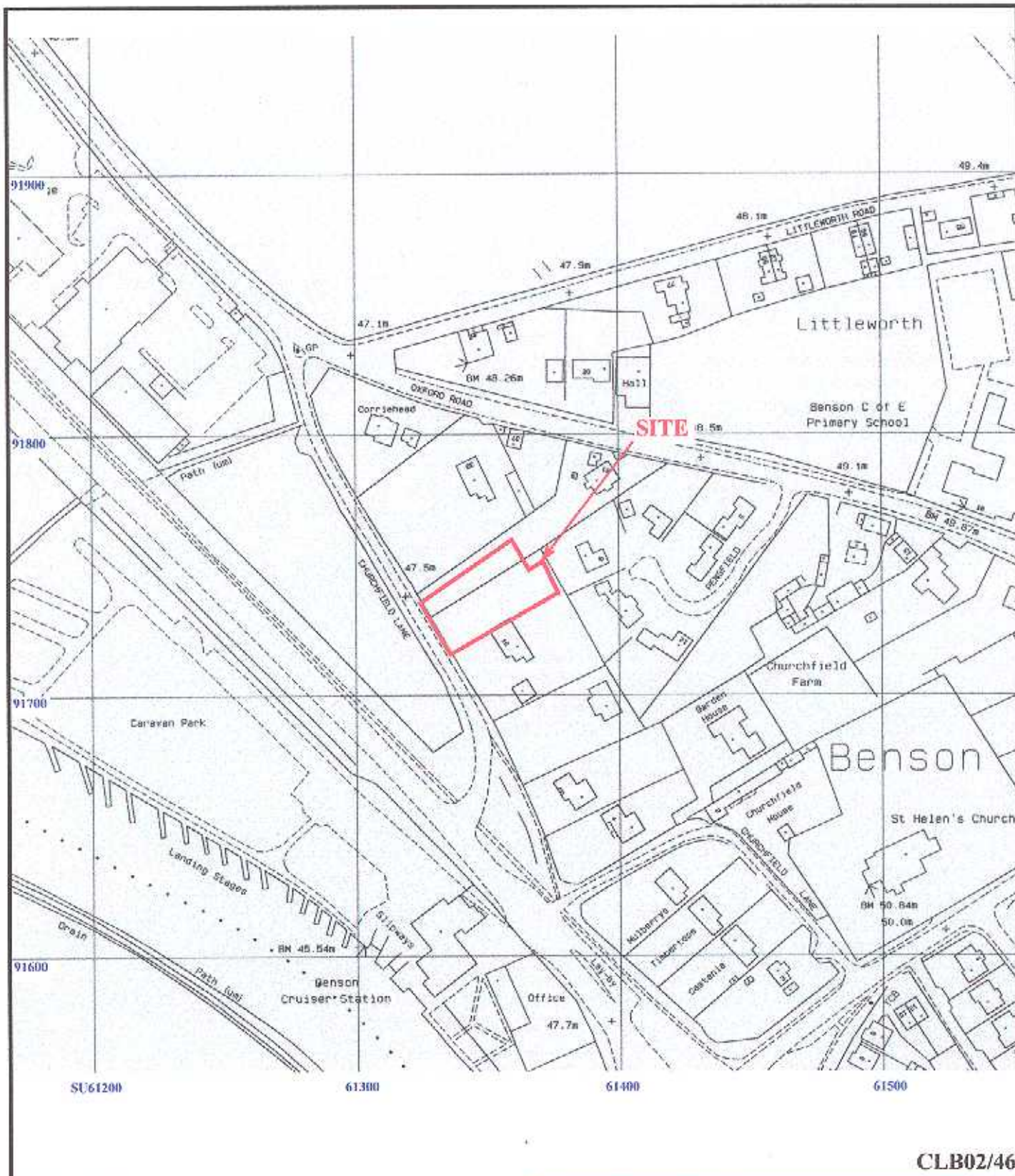
Figure 1. Location of site within Benson and Oxfordshire.

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Figure 2. Location of site within Benson and Oxfordshire.

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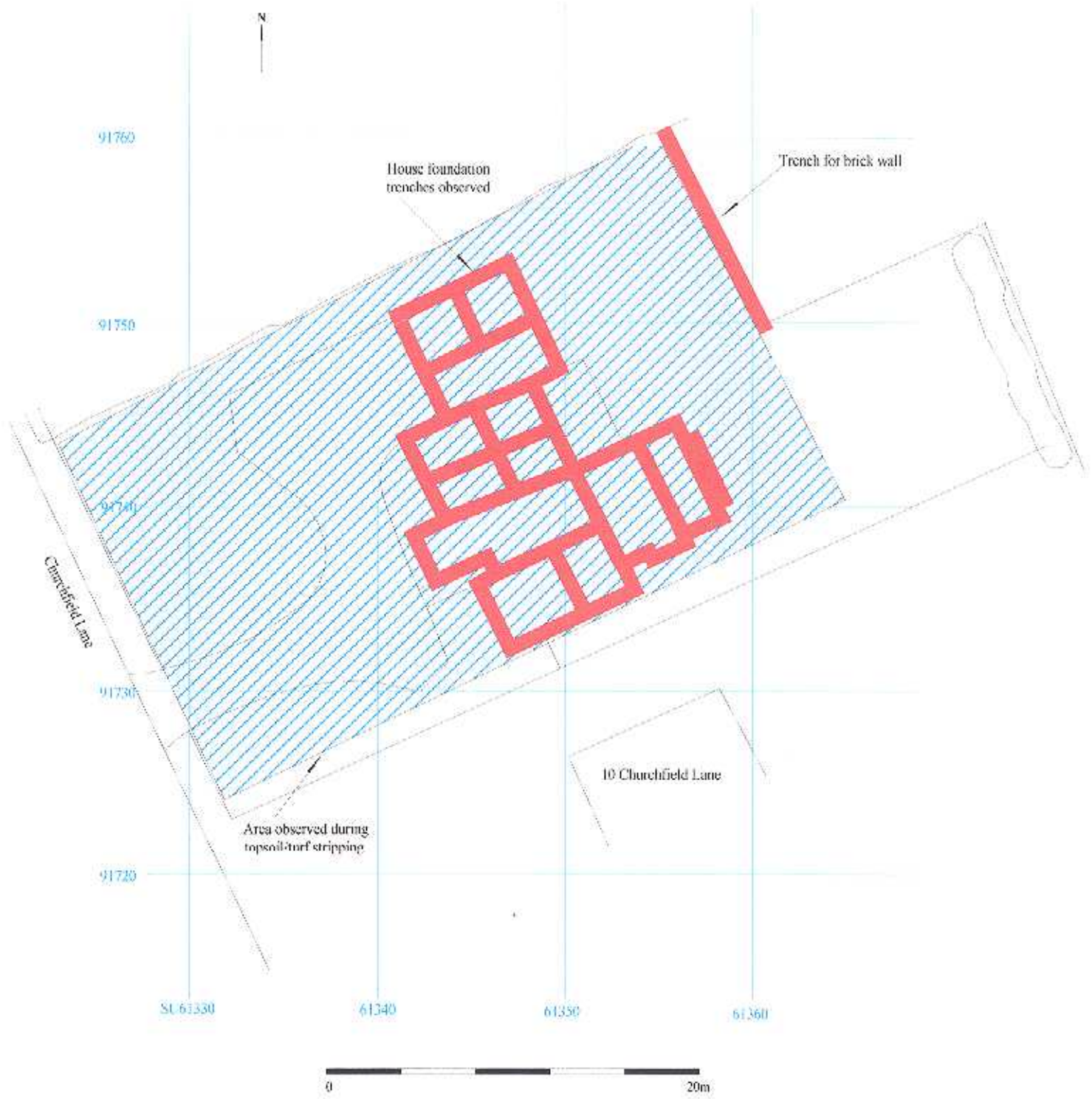


Figure 3. Detailed location of foundation trenches observed.