

# Archcliffe Fort,

## Dover

### Watching brief report

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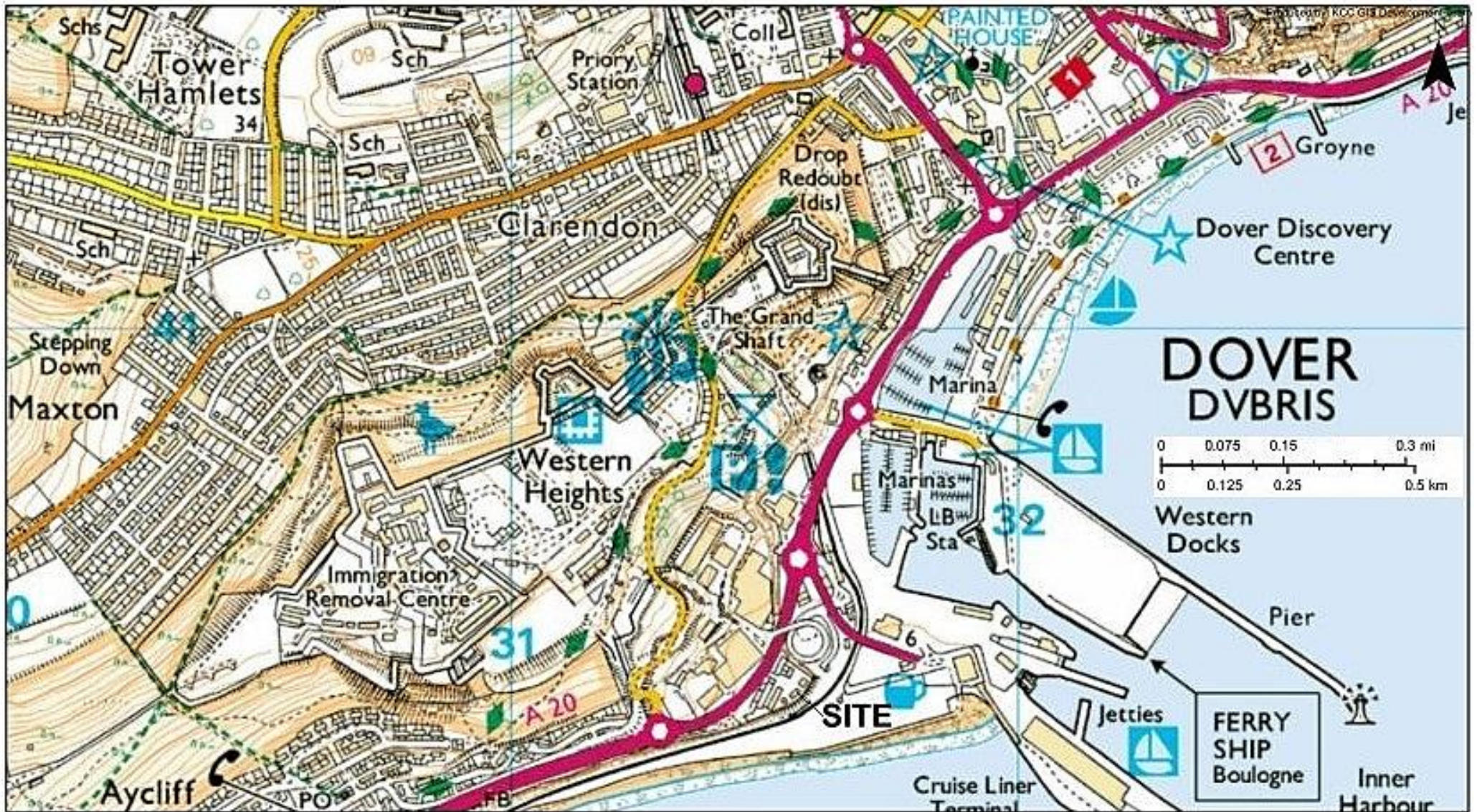
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**Fig. 1** Map showing general location of the investigated site

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**Fig. 2** Plan showing location of the investigated building in relation to the rest of the fort and adjacent structures  
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# CONTENTS

List of figures

List of plates

## 1. Summary

## 2. Introduction

## 3. Historical and archaeological background

## 4. Aims and Methodology

## 5. The excavations

*Test Pit 1*

*Test Pit 2*

## 6. Conclusions

## 7. Bibliography

## List of Figures

**Fig. 1** Map showing general location of the investigated site (*Based on the Ordnance mapping with the permission of the Controller of Her Majesty's Stationery Office, ©Crown Copyright Licence No. AL100021009*)

**Fig. 2** Plan showing location of the investigated building in relation to the rest of the fort and adjacent structures (*Based on the Ordnance mapping with the permission of the Controller of Her Majesty's Stationery Office, ©Crown Copyright Licence No. AL100021009*)

**Fig. 3** Blocks sections of deposits exposed in Test Pits 1 and 2

**Fig. 4** Plan of Archcliffe Fort showing 2016 test pits and areas previously investigated

## List of Plates

**Plate I** General view of Test Pit 1, looking north-east

**Plate II** General view of Test Pit 2, looking south-west

# Watching-brief at Archcliffe Fort, Dover, 2016

## 1. Summary

Two small test pits, dug to assess the foundations of a twentieth-century warehouse building within Archcliffe Fort at Dover (NGR 631566 140279, centred), provided another opportunity to examine the below-ground sequence of deposits preserved at the fort. No building remains or significant stratified deposits relating to earlier phases of the fort itself were encountered but undisturbed pre-fort deposits were revealed. These largely conformed to the previously established sequence for the site. No artefacts were recovered.

## 2. Introduction

**2.1** Cracking in the walls of a twentieth-century warehouse building inside Archcliffe Fort at Dover (NGR 631566 140279, centred), indicated significant structural problems and raised questions about the overall stability of the building. Accordingly, two small test pits were cut on the outside of the building on 24 and 25 February, 2016, in order to examine the state of its foundations.

**2.2** Canterbury Archaeological Trust was engaged to undertake a watching-brief during the course of these excavation works. Some useful observations were made, complementing information previously recovered from a series of earlier investigations within the fort (Parfitt 1992; 1996; 1997; 2001; 2002 & 2012).

**2.3** Archcliffe Fort stands at an elevation of about 17 metres OD, upon a low promontory below the Western Heights, overlooking Shakespeare Beach and Dover's historic Western Docks and Pier District (Figs 1 & 2). It is scheduled as Ancient Monument, No. 26797.

**2.4** In topographical terms, although the site occupies a cliff-top position, it actually lies in the bottom of a dry chalk valley, truncated obliquely by the Strait of Dover. The truncation of this valley has led to the creation of a slight bay immediately to the north-east of the Archcliffe headland.

## 3. Historical and archaeological background

**3.1** Archcliffe Fort is an important artillery fortification situated on the western outskirts of Dover, above the Pier District, with defences dating from the seventeenth to nineteenth centuries (Welby 1991; Gibbs 2004). Some damage to the seaward defences has been caused by railway expansion but contemporary buildings survive within and these remain in use.

**3.2** Inside the fort are a series of nineteenth- and twentieth-century buildings which are currently occupied by the St Martin Emmaus Community. The building that is the concern of the present report is a brick-built structure probably dating to the earlier twentieth century.

**3.3** Doug Welby provided a useful introduction to the history of the fort (Welby 1991) but this has been largely superseded in a more recent review undertaken by Liv Gibbs as part of the English Heritage Conservation Statement for the site (Gibbs 2004).

**3.4** Various excavations within the fort have previously produced small assemblages of prehistoric struck flints and calcined flints, contained within buried, undisturbed pre-fort soil deposits occurring over the natural brickearth. These are indicative of prehistoric settlement on the Archcliffe promontory, probably during the late Neolithic or Bronze Age period.

**3.5** Some medieval pottery has also been found on the fort site and this must also be connected with pre-fort activity in the area, although a late medieval watchtower is believed to have once existed on the headland here (site probably now destroyed).

## **4. Aims and methodology**

**4.1** Taking account of the overall importance of the site and as a response to the new excavation works necessary, archaeological monitoring was required. This took the form of a watching-brief, the aims of which were to:-

- a) record details of any of the historic structure and/or archaeological deposits exposed;
- b) recover any historical artefacts revealed;
- c) provide advice and guidance to the contractor and represent the views of Historic England;
- d) help safeguard the Ancient Monument from any accidental damage during the course of the works.

**4.2** All excavation works were under the general supervision of the site archaeologist, allowing close inspection of all deposits and structures exposed. Spoil from the excavations was regularly scanned for artefacts.

## **5. The excavations** (Figs 3 and 4; Plates I and II)

**5.1** Previous inspection of the warehouse building had identified significant cracks in the existing masonry walls and piers, raising questions about the overall stability of the structure. Accordingly, two test pits were cut outside the building on 24 and 25 February, 2016, in order to examine and assess the state of its foundations. The excavation of these was observed by the writer.

### **5.2 Test Pit 1**

This was cut down the face of the south-east (seaward) wall of the building, some 5 metres from its east corner (Fig. 4; Plate I). The pit measured about 1.40m (NE–SW) by 1.00m (NW–SE) but only one small area could be taken to any depth due to the presence of the solid building foundations and



**Plate I** General view of Test Pit 1, looking north-east

an adjacent concrete encased drain pipe. At the south-west end, it was possible to cut a narrow slot to a maximum depth of 1.70m (Fig. 3). In its base, the top of the natural cream chalk wash (solifluction deposit) was exposed at a depth of about 1.35m below present ground level (Fig. 3, Context 1/7).

The natural deposit (1/7) was overlain by a thin layer of dark brown clay with chalk grits (Context 1/6), which was about 0.12m thick and appeared to be the truncated base of an undisturbed, pre-fort topsoil deposit. It was sealed by a 0.50m thick layer of cream chalky silt (Context 1/5), representing a dump of re-deposited natural, that is most probably connected with earthmoving or landscaping at some stage during the construction or use of the fort. The chalky dump (1/5), was then sealed by another dump of dark grey-brown clay loam containing occasional flint pebbles and chalk lumps (Context 1/4), about 0.60m thick.

Cutting in from the top of Context 1/4 was the foundation trench for the building (F. 3). This was at least 1.60m deep and its lower part was occupied by a substantial pebble concrete foundation, over 0.90m thick. The top of the foundation lay at a depth of about 0.84m below present ground level and supported the main brick wall of the building (Context 1/8), offset to the footing by about 0.25m. The remaining part of the foundation trench had been backfilled with loose grey loam and rubble (Context 1/2). Finally, the whole area had been sealed by a 0.09m thick layer of tarmac (Context 1/1) forming a path around the outside of the building.

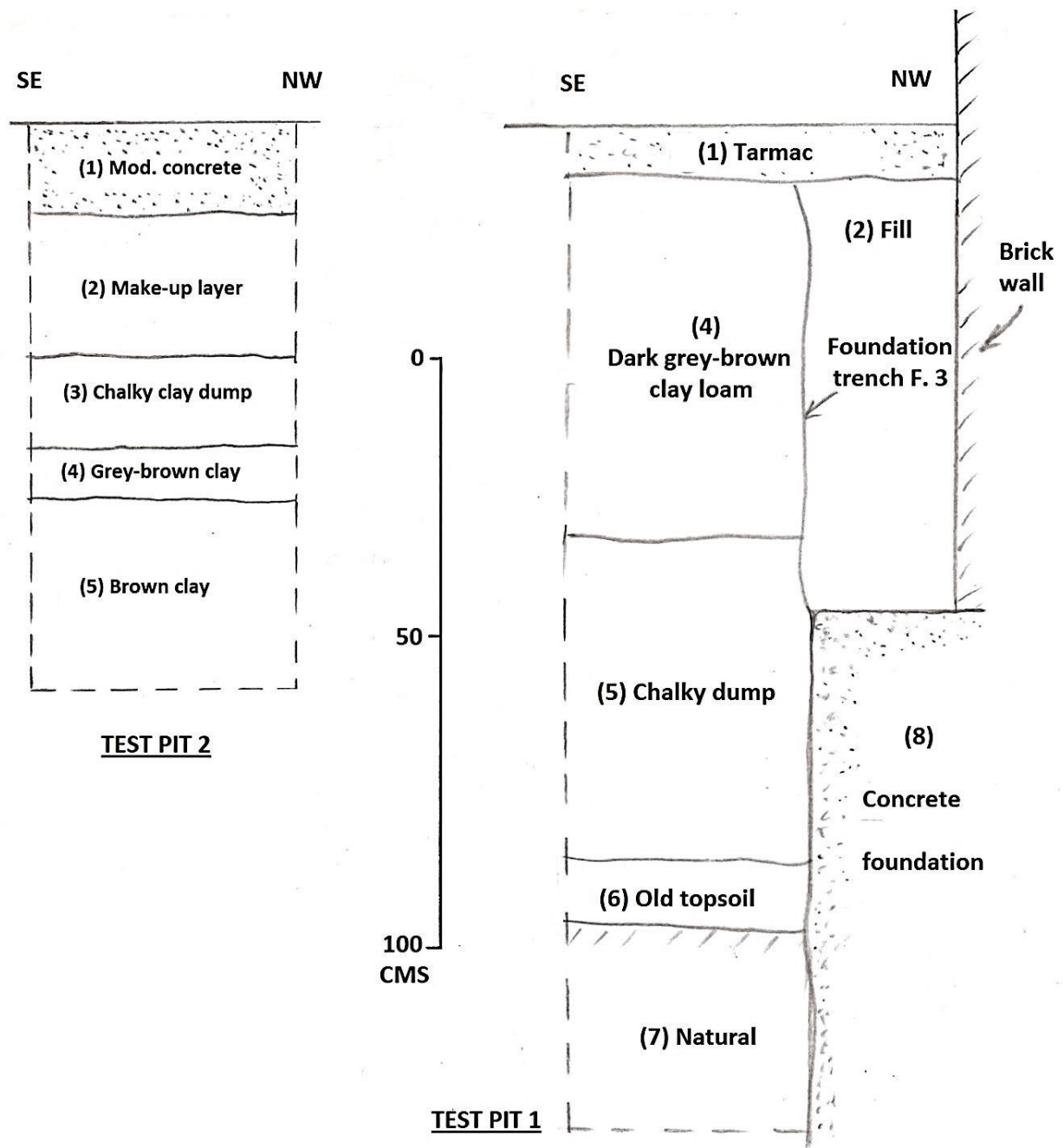
### 5.3 Test Pit 2

This was cut outside north-west wall, opposite Test Pit 1, adjacent to the main door of the building (Fig. 4; Plate II). Again, the pit measured about 1.40m (NE–SW) by 1.00m (NW–SE) but only one small area was taken to any depth. A narrow slot at the south-western end was excavated to –0.95m below present ground level (Fig. 3). In its base, the top of a layer of brown clay containing frequent small chalk lumps, at least 0.30m thick appeared to be a near natural deposit and clearly predated the construction of the fort (Fig. 3, Context 2/5). Above this, a 0.10m thick layer of dark grey-brown clay with chalk specks (Context 2/4) also appeared to be a pre-fort layer, quite possibly the same as Context 1/6 in Test Pit 1 (see above).



**Plate II** General view of Test Pit 2, looking south-west

The dark clay deposit (2/4) was overlain by a dump of cream-brown chalky clay with flint and chalk lumps (Context 2/3), which was about 0.15m thick. It was sealed by a 0.24m thick layer of compacted shingle and red brick rubble (Context 2/2), which served as a bedding for the overlying concrete yard surface (Context 2/1), which was about 0.15m thick.



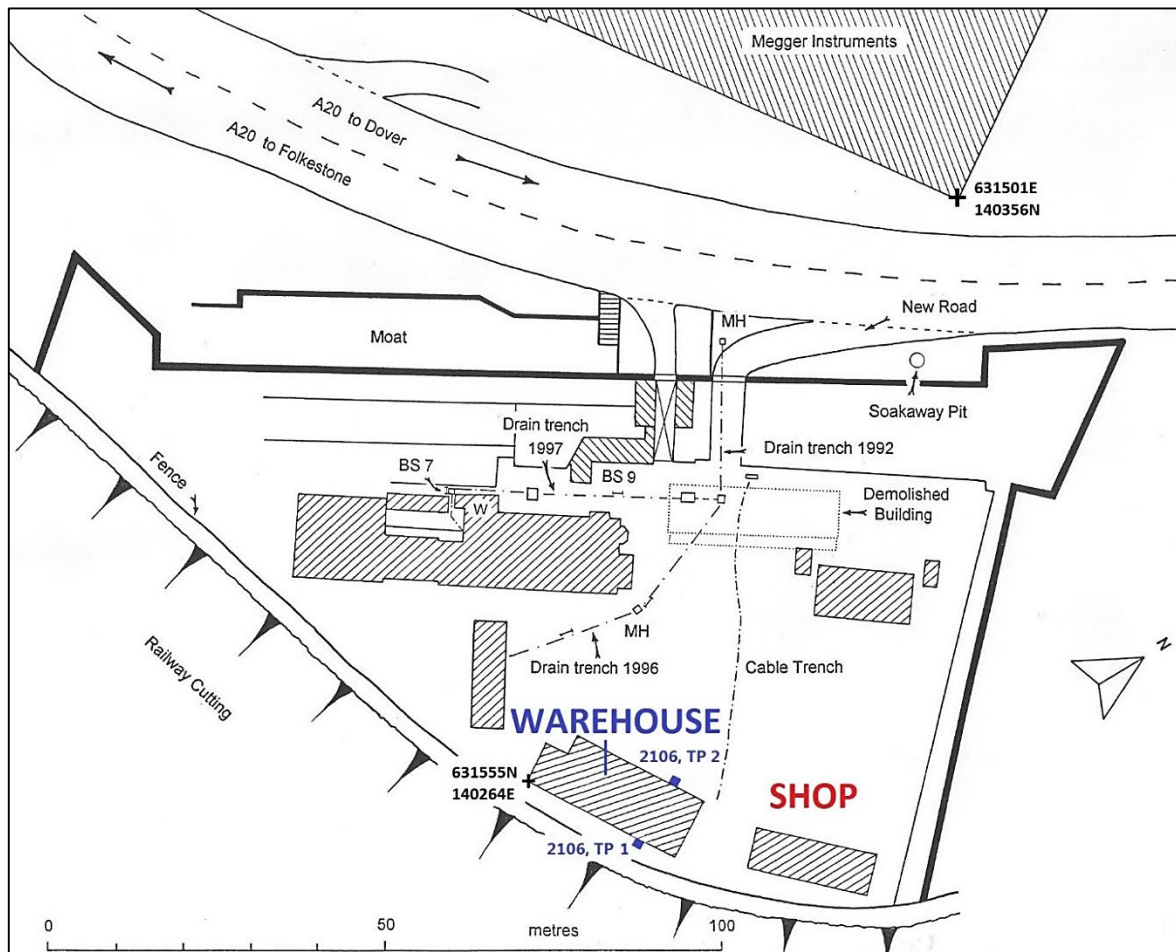
**Fig. 3** Blocks sections of deposits exposed in Test Pits 1 and 2

## 6. Conclusions

**6.1** The investigations in 2016 have served to add some further details concerning the below-ground sequence of deposits preserved at Archcliffe Fort. No building remains or significant stratified fort deposits predating the present warehouse were encountered; the main nineteenth-century gun emplacements and underground magazines relating to the fort would seem to have lain somewhat



further to the south, in the area subsequently destroyed by the railway. The substantial concrete foundations of the warehouse, itself, appeared to be sound.



**Fig. 4** Plan of Archcliffe Fort showing 2016 test pits and areas previously investigated

**6.2** In both excavated pits undisturbed pre-fort soil deposits were reached. These lay at depths of between 0.55 and 1.25m below present ground level, with relatively modern dumps and make-up layers above. More extensive exposures of such pre-fort deposits have been exposed in various pipe trenches and other excavations cut within the fort's interior over the years (Fig. 4).

**6.3** The pre-fort deposits exposed in 2016 largely conform to the sequence previously established (e.g. Parfitt 1996; Parfitt 1997). The base layer of cream chalky wash (1/7) relates to an extensive solifluction deposit occurring in this area, no doubt slumped down from the adjacent Western Heights.

**6.4** No overlying natural brickearth (previously seen in other parts of the fort) was revealed in 2016, but clay layers 1/6 and 2/5 appear broadly comparable with deposits overlying the brickearth such as have been noted before. In the past, these upper clays have yielded quantities of prehistoric flintwork but no such material was recovered from the small areas excavated on this occasion.

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