17 St Peter's Hill, Caversham, Reading Berkshire

An Archaeological Watching Brief

For T A Fisher and Sons Ltd

by Natasha Bennett

Thames Valley Archaeological Services Ltd

Site Code PHC08/42

March 2009

Summary

Site name: 17 St Peter's Hill, Caversham, Reading, Berkshire

Grid reference: SU 7065 7516

Site activity: Watching Brief

Date and duration of project: 9 April 2008–10 March 2009

Project manager: Steve Ford

Site supervisor: James McNicoll-Norbury

Site code: PHC 08/42

Summary of results: No archaeologically relevant finds or deposits were observed

Location and reference of archive: The archive is presently held at Thames Valley Archaeological Services, Reading and will be deposited with Reading Museum in due course.

Report edited/checked by:	Steve Ford✓ 12.03.09 Steve Preston✓ 13.03.09

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Report 08/42

Introduction

This report documents the results of an archaeological watching brief carried out at 17 St Peter's Hill, Caversham, Berkshire (SU 7065 7516) (Fig. 1). The work was commissioned by Mr Julian Pacey of TA Fisher and Sons Ltd, Windmill House, Victoria Road, Mortimer, Reading, Berkshire, RG7 3DF.

Planning consent (06/01511/FUL/SB1) was granted by Reading Borough Council to construct a new block of flats and associated car parking. This consent was subject to a condition relating to archaeology requiring a programme of archaeological investigation, which in this case was determined should consist of an archaeological watching brief to be undertaken during groundworks for the new structures.

This is in accordance with the Department of the Environment's Planning Policy Guidance, *Archaeology and Planning* (PPG16 1990), and the Borough's policies on archaeology. The field investigation was carried out to a specification approved by Mr David Thomason, Archaeological Officer for Berkshire Archaeology, archaeological advisers to Reading Borough Council. The fieldwork was undertaken by Steve Ford, James McNicoll-Norbury and Natasha Bennett in two phases between 9th April 2008 and 10th March 2009. The site code is PHC 08/42.

The archive is presently held at Thames Valley Archaeological Services, Reading and will be deposited at Reading Museum in due course.

Location, topography and geology

The site is located in Caversham, to the north of Reading, on the south side of St Peter's Hill (Fig. 2). Underlying geology is indicated as plateau gravel (BGS 1946) but is more correctly known as the Boyn Hill terrace (Wymer 1968) and which overlies the chalk. The river Thames flows by some 250m to the south. The site lies on level ground at *c.*68m above Ordnance Datum. The site was previously occupied by a large house and extensive garden.

Archaeological background

The site is located in an area of archeological significance especially with regards to the Palaeolithic period. The Boyn Hill terrace, marking the route of an earlier course of the river Thames, is known to contain Palaeolithic stone tools, which were often recovered in 19th and early 20th century gravel pits, often in large numbers. One such pit (Toots Pit) lies to the north of the site (Wymer 1968, 42). More recent archaeological investigations have had mixed results. At Richmond Road to the north, Palaeolithic and later flintwork was recovered (Taylor and Pine 2003) whereas other sites nearby have recently revealed nothing of interest (e.g., Milbank 2007; Ford 2008).

Objectives and methodology

The purpose of the watching brief was to excavate and record any archaeological deposits affected by the new construction work. This was to consist of examination of all areas of topsoil stripping, landscaping, ground reduction and the digging of trenches for foundations and services as necessary. Due to preserved tree constraints areas of topsoil/subsoil stripping were of limited extent, with access roads and carparking areas raised to leave tree roots *in situ*. Particular attention was to be paid to spoil arising to search for Palaeolithic flint artefacts.

Results

Main building

The main building was mostly to occupy the footprint of the previous building. It was not possible to examine the foundation trenches for the new building. However, the margins of the new building to the north and west had involved slight terracing and these exposures were available for examination. The stratigraphy noted for both the north-eastern and north-western margins comprised 0.05m of Tarmac onto scalpins/rubble which was 0.2m deep. In turn this overlay made ground which was 0.4m deep, which sealed a subsoil deposit 0.2m deep which overlay gravel geology. No archaeological deposits nor artefacts were observed and only modern truncations associated with the previous building were noted.

Drainage Trenches

Some 25m of drainage trench was observed. This trench was 2.30m wide and between 1.32m and 1.55m deep. The stratigraphy for this part of site comprised dark grey brown sandy silt topsoil to a depth of 0.2m over made ground 0.5m deep capping mid red brown clay silt subsoil to 0.45m which overlay an orange brown silty sand

with gravel inclusions (natural geology), 1.05m deep, above chalk. No archaeological deposits nor artefacts were recorded but a modern pit, 2m wide by 2.80m deep, was observed cutting from the topsoil.

Soakaway

This required an excavation 4.2m by 4.2m and 4.80m deep. The stratigraphy comprised dark grey brown sandy silt topsoil to a depth of 0.2m capping mid red/brown clay silt subsoil to 0.45m which overlay an orange brown silt sand with gravel inclusions, 1.05m deep, onto chalk.. This chalk was further removed to a total depth of 4.80m. Again no archaeological deposits were noted nor any finds recovered.

Interceptors

Two smaller holes were dug as interceptors. The northern example was 2.3m by 1.8m and 2.15m deep. The stratigraphy comprised Tarmac to a depth of 0.15m onto made ground, 0.23m deep which overlay a dark brown subsoil, 0.67m deep. This overlay an orange brown gravel, 0.44m deep which capped the chalk. The southern example was 2.4m by 2.2m and 2.15m deep with identical stratigraphy. No archaeological deposits were noted nor any finds recovered.

Finds

No finds of archaeological interest were recovered. Finds of modern date were observed but retained on site.

Conclusion

No deposits or artefacts of archaeological interest were observed during the watching brief, although the archaeologically relevant horizons had survived.

References

BGS, 1946, *British Geological Survey*, 1:63360, Sheet 268, Drift Edition, Keyworth

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Milbank, D, 2007, '125 Upper Woodcote Road, Caversham, Reading, Berkshire, an archaeological evaluation', Thames Valley Archaeological Services rep 07/31, Reading

PPG 16, 1990, *Archaeology and Planning*, Dept of the Environment Planning Policy Guidance 16, (HMSO).

Taylor, A and Pine J, 2003, 'Former Church of Our Lady, Richmond Road, Caversham, Reading Berkshire, an archaeological watching brief', Thames Valley Archaeological Services rep 03/81, Reading

Wymer, J, 1968, *Lower Palaeolithic Archaeology* in Britain, London.

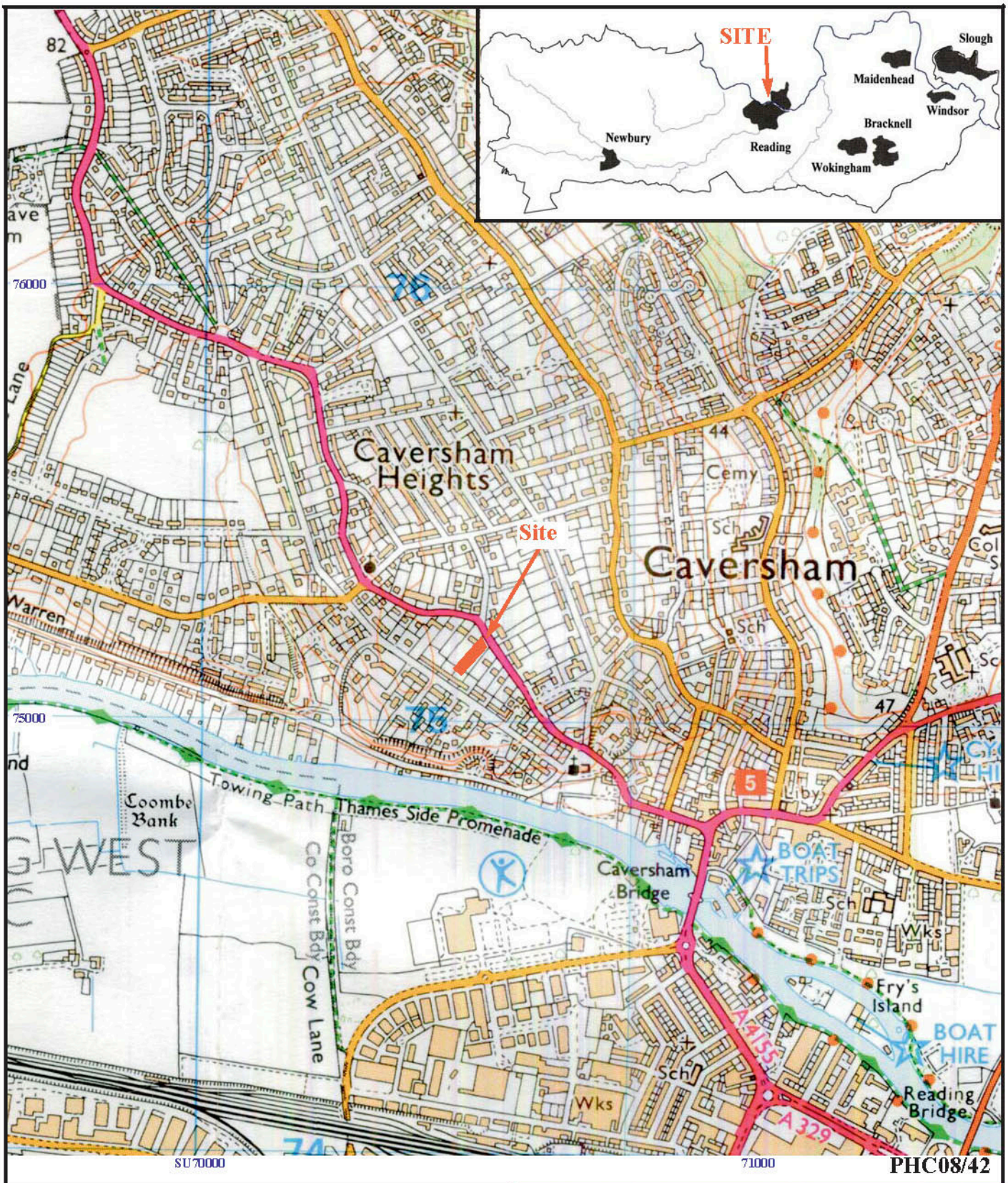

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Figure 1. Location of site within Reading and Berkshire.

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Figure 2. Detailed location of site on St Peter's Hill.

Scale: 1:1250.

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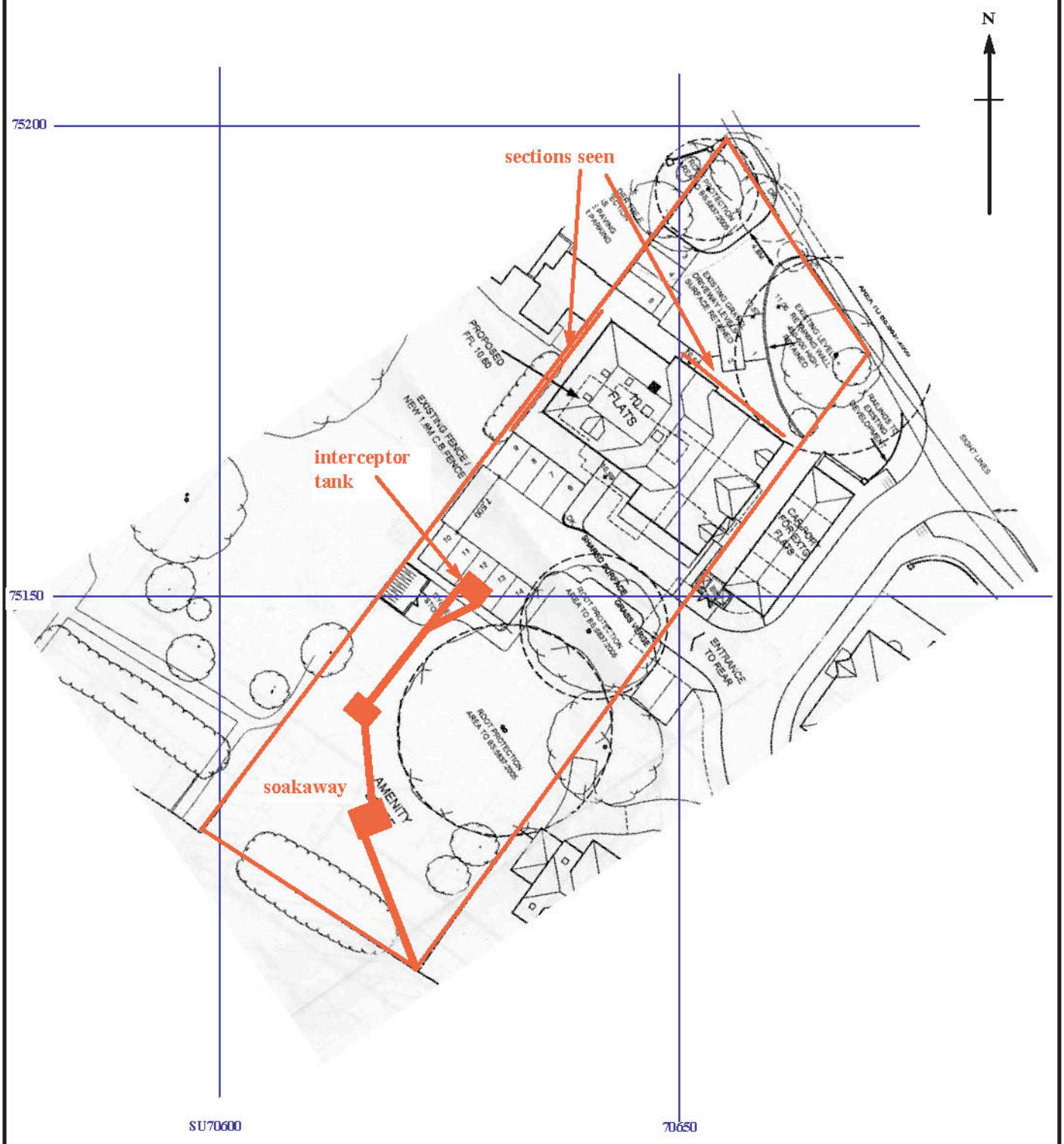

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Figure 3. Detailed location of watching brief observations

Scale: 1:625

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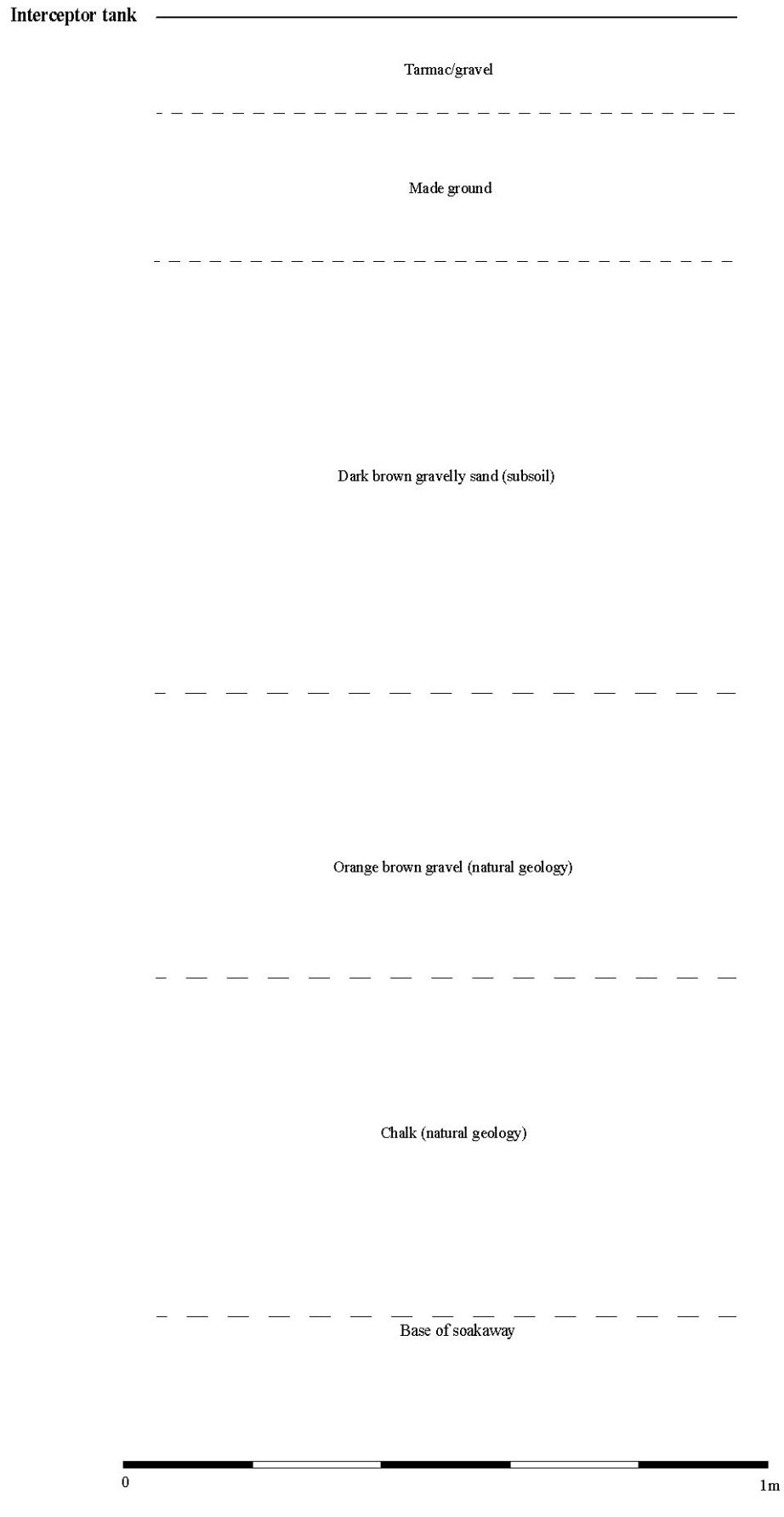

Figure 4. Representative section of stratigraphy in interceptor tank trench.

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