

The Elms, West End, Cholsey, Oxfordshire

An Archaeological Watching Brief

For Mr M. D. Beddall

by Tim Dawson

Thames Valley Archaeological Services Ltd

Site Code TEC 08/134

March 2009

Summary

Site name: The Elms, West End, Cholsey, Oxfordshire

Grid reference: SU 5807 8609

Site activity: Watching Brief

Date and duration of project: 13th January – 10th March 2009

Project manager: Steve Ford

Site supervisors: Natasha Bennett, Tim Dawson, James McNicoll-Norbury

Site code: TEC 08/134

Summary of results: No features of archaeological interest were identified

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

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Report 08/134

Introduction

This report documents the results of an archaeological watching brief carried out at The Elms, West End, Cholsey, Oxfordshire (SU 5807 8609) (Fig. 1). The work was commissioned by Mr. Richard Potter of RPA Architects, Strathfield House, Chilton Road, Upton, Oxfordshire, OX11 9JL on behalf of Mr M. D. Beddall of The Elms, West End, Cholsey, OX10 6LR.

A planning consent has been gained from South Oxfordshire District Council (P08/W0756) for construction of a new extension to the existing house. The consent is subject to a condition which requires the implementation of a programme of archaeological work, specifically an archaeological watching brief during 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 Richard Oram, Planning Archaeologist with Oxfordshire County Archaeological Service (Oram 2008) and was monitored by him on behalf of the Council. The fieldwork was undertaken by Natasha Bennett, Tim Dawson and James McNicoll-Norbury between 13th January and 10th March. The site code is TEC08/134.

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

Location, topography and geology

The site is located around the house and outbuildings of The Elms, south of the West End area of the village of Cholsey, 3km south-south-west of Wallingford (Fig. 1). The area which was observed during the archaeological watching brief is currently a Tarmac path between the house and workshop block and a paved patio between the house and lawn. As the site is occupied by the house, its outbuildings and gardens, it has been heavily landscaped and is flat (Fig. 2). The underlying geology is described as being alluvium towards the rear of the house (north-west) and first (floodplain) river gravel terrace deposits towards the front of the house and in the grounds (south-east) (BGS 1980). Gravel was observed in the groundworks. The site is at a level of c. 48m OD.

Archaeological background

As identified in a brief prepared by Oxfordshire County Archaeology Service (Oram 2008), the site lies in close proximity to the suggested site of a Benedictine Abbey that was probably founded *c.* AD 986 and (perhaps) ransacked by Danish incursions in 1006 (evidence for the latter is slender and circumstantial). Cholsey was an important Saxon centre, mentioned in the Burghal Hideage, and part of the King's domain at the time of Domesday Book (1086) and before. At the time of the Domesday survey, it was a wealthy manor, with three mills, and a relatively large population for the area. The Abbey of Mont-St -Michel also held land here, including a church (Williams and Martin 2002, 137; 155). In the medieval period, after the manor (at that time in Berkshire) had been granted to Reading Abbey by Henry I, an important grange and Abbot's residence were established. The proposal site itself lies within one of two incomplete and conjoining moated enclosures which are still visible in the grounds of The Elms (Figs 1 and 2). Medieval finds are recorded from in and around Cholsey (e.g., Coles 2005).

Objectives and methodology

The purpose of the watching brief was to observe the digging of all intrusive groundworks, in particular the excavation of foundation and service trenches. Any archaeological deposits affected by these groundworks were then to be excavated and recorded.

Results

Service trenches

Observations were made of several intersecting service trenches that were dug in the area in front of the workshop block and between the house and the workshops (Fig. 3). These were 0.30m–0.40m in width and varied between 0.40m and 0.80m deep. The stratigraphy revealed comprised primarily made-ground (Fig. 4). This consisted of orange/brown gravel and mid red/grey sandy clay with frequent modern inclusions such as brick, tile, a horseshoe, a yoghurt pot and a dressmaker's tape measure, to a depth of between 0.40m and 0.63m. The area directly between the house and the workshops was particularly disturbed, by several modern clay pipes with their associated construction trenches, and, on the north-east side, the roots of a shrubbery. All of the excavations made for the service trenches exposed the natural geology in their base and no archaeological features were identified in any of them.

Foundations

The foundations, dug to the south-west of the house (Fig. 3), were observed and no archaeological features were identified. The trenches themselves were 0.60m wide and *c.* 0.75m deep. As with the service trenches, they were dug through made-ground and exposed a natural yellow sandy gravel in their base.

Finds

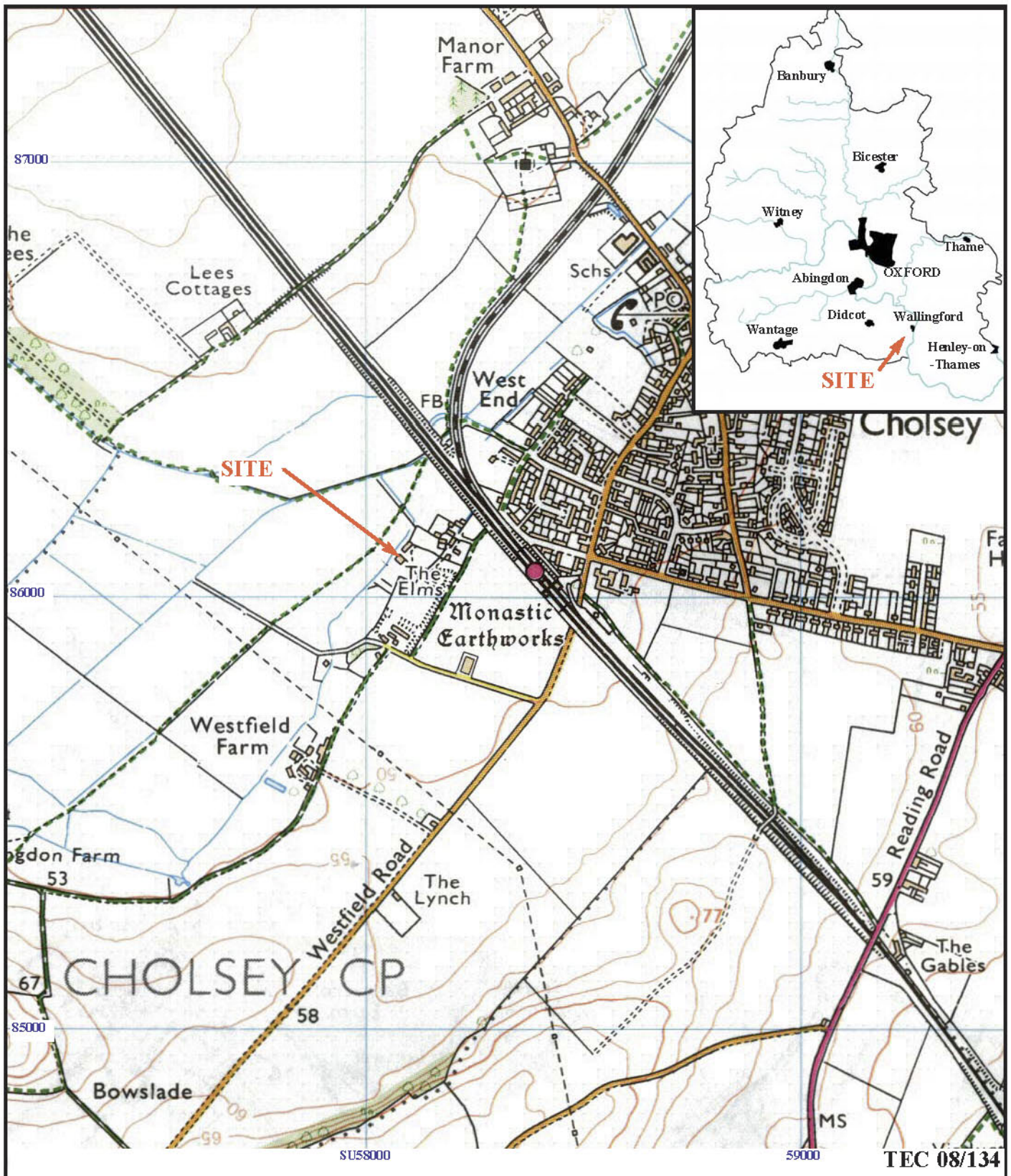
No archaeological deposits were identified and no finds recovered.

Conclusion

None of the foundations or service trenches that were excavated disturbed any archaeological deposits. The majority of the ground observed has been much disturbed by past construction, pipe trenches and a shrubbery. No evidence relating to the medieval monastery, or any other period, was observed.

References

- BGS, 1980, *British Geological Survey*, 1:50000, Sheet 254, Solid and Drift Edition, Keyworth
- Coles, S, 2005, 'The Hazels, Church Road, Cholsey, Oxfordshire: an archaeological watching brief', Thames Valley Archaeological Services rep 05/36, Reading
- Oram, R, 2008, 'P08/W0756 - The Elms, West End, Cholsey: Design Brief for Archaeological Watching Brief', Oxfordshire County Council Archaeological Services, Oxford
- PPG 16, 1990, *Archaeology and Planning*, Dept of the Environment Planning Policy Guidance 16, HMSO
- Williams, A and Martin, G H, 2002, *Domesday Book, a complete translation*, London

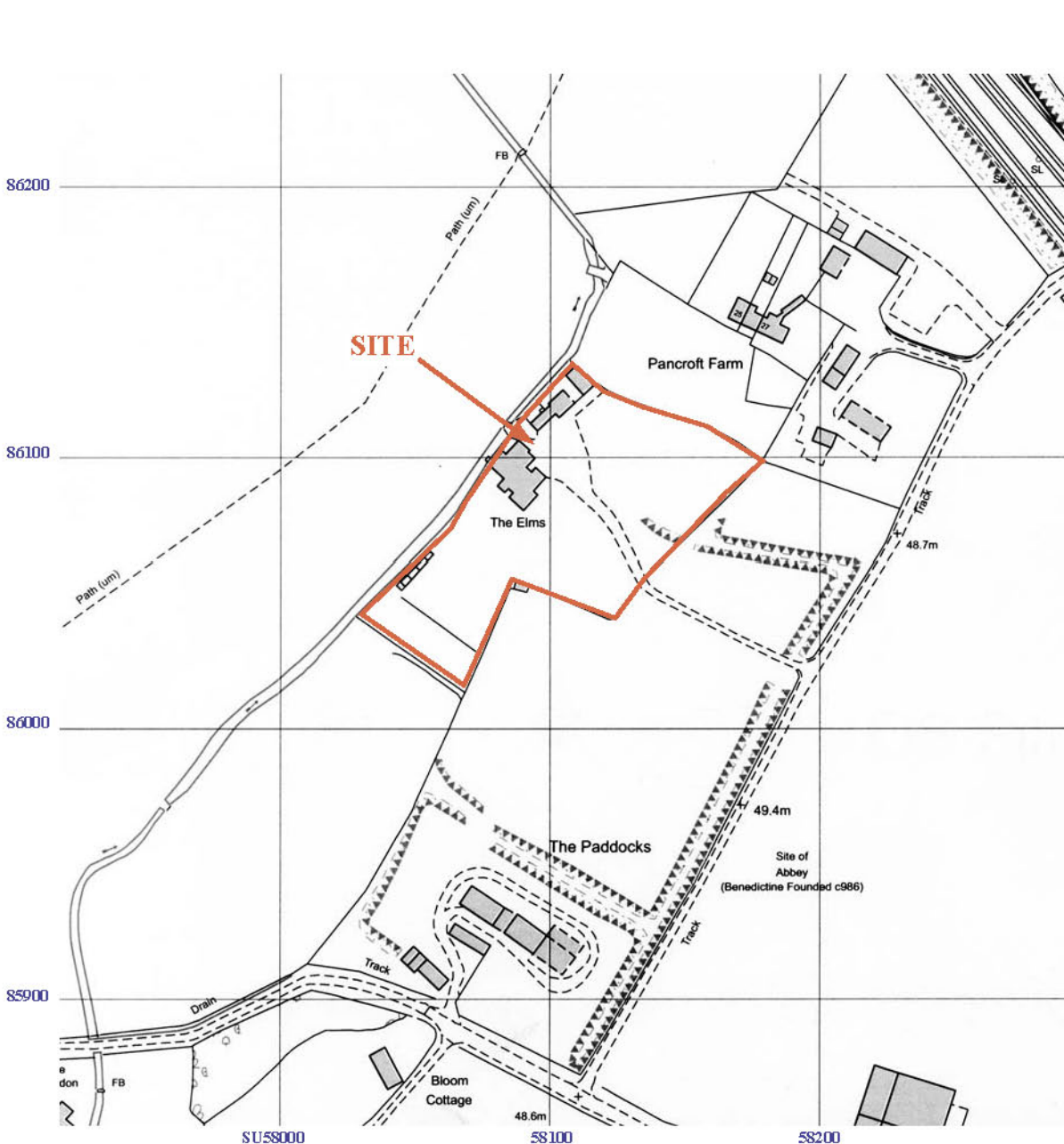


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Figure 1. Location of site within Cholsey and Oxfordshire.

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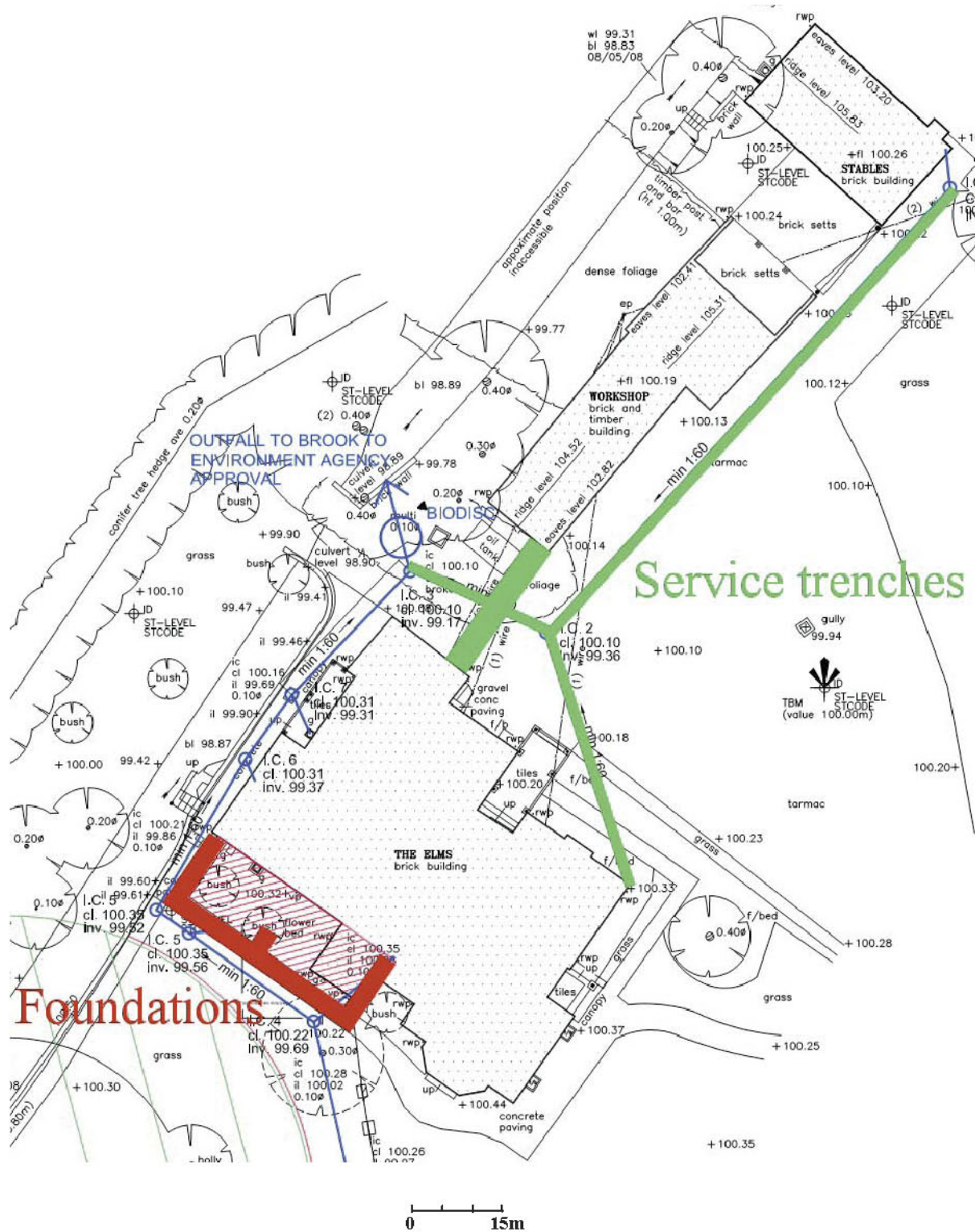
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Figure 2. Detailed location of site in West End.

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Figure 3. Location of foundations and service trenches observed on site.

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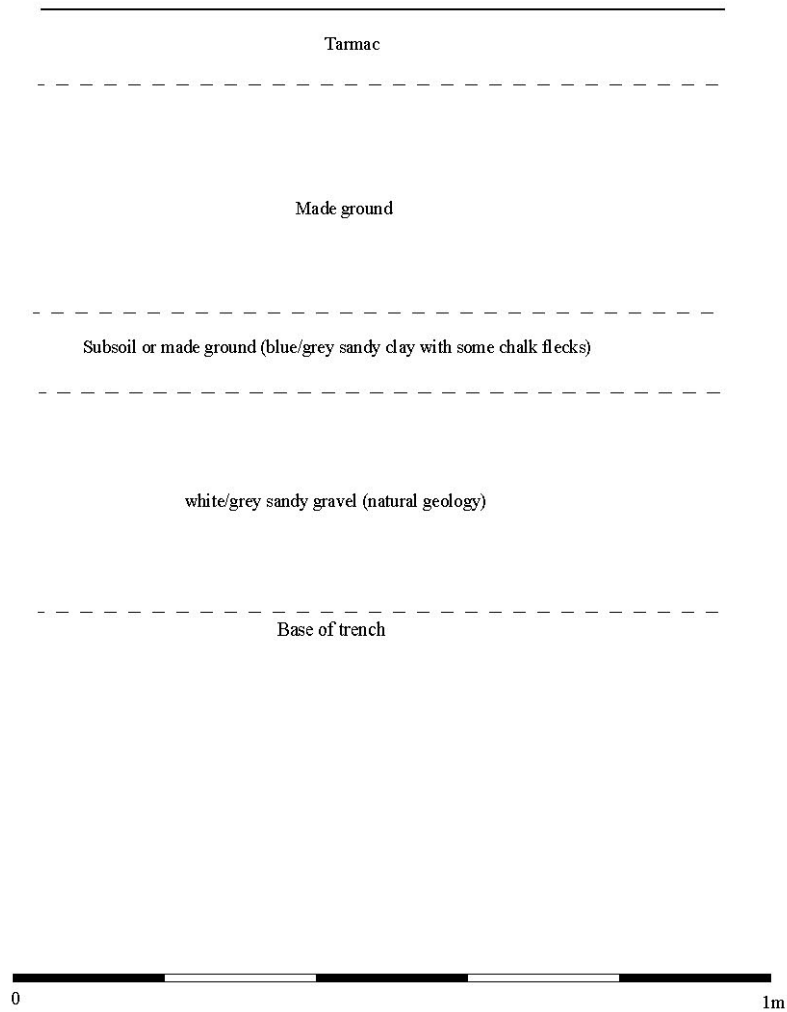


Figure 4. Representative section. service trench.