The 2006 Archaeological Excavations at Brimstone Hill

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For five weeks in July and August, 2006 University of Tennessee archaeological excavations resumed in the area of the Royal Engineers Quarters and new excavations were initiated in the area of the Enlisted Men's Barracks. Working at Brimstone Hill were nine undergraduate students enrolled in the University's archaeological field school and seven Sandy Point high school students employed by the Society to assist in the excavations and laboratory work. Dr. Gerald F. Schroedl directed the work, assisted by Bobby Braly and Elizabeth DiGangi, both Ph.D. graduate students at the University of Tennessee. Archaeological studies are jointly sponsored by the University of Tennessee and the Brimstone Hill Fortress National Park Society.

Previous work in 2005 in the Royal Engineers Quarters concentrated on the engineer's living quarters, their kitchen area, a series of connecting stairways and an associated bathtub, a brick walkway, and a structure occupied by enslaved Africans. The aim of the 2006 excavations was to clarify and further expand these investigations. The first goal was to trace the extent of the brick walkway that runs parallel to the east wall of the engineer's residence and along the base of the nearby revetment. The walkway permitted access to the courtyard at rear of the residence where a cistern, storage building, and kitchen are located and where three different stairways permitted entrance to the office building, access to the bathtub, and passage to lower levels. The 2006 excavations showed that the walkway is not preserved at either end more than a meter beyond its length recorded in 2005. In exposing the south end of the walkway, however, evidence of one and possibly two previously unknown structures were uncovered. These could represent two unidentified structures shown on the 1791 military engineer's map of the site. (This map is located in the St. Kitts archives.) One possible structure is represented only by a few cut and mortared stones forming less than a meter long wall segment. The second structure is represented by the foundation of the building's southeast corner. The east wall segment is at least 1.6 meters long, while the south wall segment is 2.7 meters long. This building was furnished with two brick floors and a floor drain. When the second floor was installed the original drain was maintained, and four large sandstone pavers rather than brick were installed in the corner.

Excavations clearly show that sometime after this building was demolished the stone courtyard was installed over it, and not long after this the brick walkway was built.

A second objective of excavations at the Royal Engineers Quarters was to recover an artifact sample, particularly a sample of animal bones, from outside and down slope of the kitchen's west side. This is where kitchen debris was thrown from the structure or was washed down the kitchen drain. Artifact samples were recovered from excavation of four by one meter squares at this location. Studies of the animal bones from this area should complement those recovered from the kitchen entrance in 2005 and should contribute immensely to the comparative study of the diets of British soldiers and enslaved Africans. The excavation also revealed a well-constructed covered stone drain from the kitchen sink that emptied into a large waste water holding tank located adjacent to the south wall of the office building and down hill from the officer's bathtub. This drain and others associated with the bathtub illustrate the elaborate design, careful attention, and construction effort that was employed to obtain fresh water and to remove waste water from the bathtub and kitchen, while preventing damage or contamination to structures, particularly the one occupied by enslaved Africans, down slope.

Excavations in 2005 in the Engineers Quarters partly uncovered a structure occupied by enslaved Africans. In 2006 the remainder of this building was revealed completely. This worked showed that another building had stood at this location at an earlier time. It is represented by two, mortared stone wall segments forming the southeast corner of the building. The building's interior was filled with rubble and covered with a packed dirt floor. The south wall is 2.4 meters long. The remainder of this wall was removed when the building was demolished. The exposed section of the east wall measures 2.6 meters. Whatever remains of it is covered by the mortar floor of the second structure.
The second building, first identified in 2005, is unlike most buildings recorded at Brimstone Hill, because at least two and possibly three walls were earthfast or post-ground construction where wall frames consist of vertical posts between which earthen materials are plastered. The east wall, which was removed when the building was demolished, is represented only by a meter long segment of stone and mortar sill at the northeast corner. The construction of this wall is similar to walls associated with buildings occupied by enslaved Africans excavated elsewhere at Brimstone Hill. The structure had two mortar floors that are partly preserved in the northern half of the building. The earliest mortar floor shows faint impressions of boards that measure about 4 inches wide. The floor that replaced it preserves thin, narrow mortar ridges representing the impressions of bricks or tiles.

Evidence, in some instances for the modification or expansion of individual buildings, or in other cases for their demolition and replacement, records the detailed effort and deliberate planning the Royal Engineers made to conceptualize, organize, develop, construct, and modify their living space. More than any other inhabitants at Brimstone Hill they had the power to decide what kinds of buildings and structures to build and they decided where to build them. They also controlled both the labor and materials to accomplish their objectives. The building design, placement, and construction methods that they used for their own accommodations all attest to their vision of the landscape and its proper use.

An important goal of the Brimstone Hill archaeological project is to compare and contrast the material culture and daily lives of British Army officers, enslaved Africans, and enlisted soldiers. To obtain comparative materials respecting enlisted men, work was initiated in the vicinity of the barracks building (Barracks No. 4) located on the east side of Brimstone Hill not far from the parade ground. This building was constructed in the late 18th century. The defensive works at this location date from even early in the Fort’s history. Excavations were placed outside the defensive walls to obtain a sample of artifacts that would represent most of the time the area was occupied. A second goal was to find possible evidence of a movable hospital building that stood here in the late 18th century. Excavations recovered a substantial number of artifacts relating to the use of the area by enlisted men dating primarily to the early 19th century, but too little area was examined to identify any direct evidence of the hospital building.

Plans are to resume excavations at Brimstone Hill in the summer of 2007. The work will focus solely on the enlisted men’s barracks. Plans are to expand the area investigated in 2006 and to locate and excavate specific facilities, such as a kitchen, latrine, and washroom associated with the use of the barracks. These contexts should produce a rich record relating to the lives of British soldiers in the late 18th and early 19th centuries. Hopefully, the investigations might also locate archaeological deposits dating even earlier. These data when compared to continuing studies of enslaved Africans and British Army officers should provide a comprehensive picture of the contrasting lives and activities that characterized the people of the Brimstone Hill community.

We apologise for the absence of Part 2 of the article on the UNESCO “Experts Meeting on Cultural Landscapes in the Caribbean: Identification and Safeguarding Strategies”. We hope to publish it in a future edition.

Answer to the photo Quiz from the March Cannonball

Ulanda was in the window of the building next to the gift shop that was formerly known as the Warrant Officer’s Quarters, but is more correctly the Commissariat Issuers Quarters.