Archaeological Excavations in the North East Work, 2007

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Archaeological work was conducted in the Horn Work area of Brimstone Hill in July and August 2007. This area is a portion of the North East Work that includes Barracks 4 and 5 located east of the parade ground at the base of Fort George. In 1994, Victor Smith reviewed documents pertaining to the history and architecture of the area and made a detailed assessment of the visible stone works, including clearing vegetation and rubble from some of the structures. The description of the buildings and their chronology presented here is adopted from his observations.

The North East Work consists of some of the earliest surviving defensive walls constructed at Brimstone Hill, with the Horn Work consisting primarily of two bastions (Right and Left) and their connecting wall. It is also the location of two barracks and associated structures where infantry troops were housed from the late 18th to the middle 19th century. The defensive walls were constructed in the 1720s, being subsequently renovated and raised in the 1790s and further increased in height in the early 19th century. During these refurbishing episodes the exterior defensive wall was buried 1 to 2 meters deep with fill. Situated between the two bastions and built in the 1790s was a mobile hospital—probably a temporary building perhaps only covered in canvas with a dry-stacked stone foundation or footers. During the late 18th century at least one married men’s hut stood at the left flank of the Right Bastion. (The British army permitted a small number of soldier’s wives to live abroad with their husbands. At Brimstone Hill these couples sometimes built small houses in and around the fort or lived in barracks built for married men of the garrison.)

Raising the defensive walls also meant filling the interior space of the bastion to elevate the ground and provide a surface for the construction of two barracks buildings. The first was Barracks 4 also commonly called the Infantry or Soldiers Barracks and now, as in the past, sometimes still referred to as the Jumbie Barracks. It and a kitchen building placed 3 to 5 meters to the north-northeast were erected no later than 1791. The building was renovated and repaired on several occasions in the 19th century because of hurricane damage. Barracks 5, a wood building, was built a few meters to the north-northeast of Barracks 4 no later than about 1810. Around 1824 this structure was replaced with a larger stone building. At the same time the original kitchen building was demolished and a new one was constructed approximately 10 meters to the north-northwest. In 1845 a large cistern was installed 2 m east of Barracks 5 and a wash house was attached to the exterior of the left flank of the left bastion. There are, in addition, at least two privies associated with the barracks. One is located about 10 meters down slope of the northeast corner of the kitchen while the second is found about 10 meters up slope from the same location. It is not clear if the privies were built and used in conjunction with Barracks 4 or if they were added about the time the second Barracks 5 was constructed.

An important research goal of the Brimstone Hill archaeological excavations is to compare and contrast the lives and interrelationships of the community of people who lived and worked at the fort. Among these were British infantry, artillery, cavalry, and engineering officers, British enlisted men from a variety of regiments, and enslaved Africans who served as artisans and laborers as well as soldiers in the St. Kitts militia and West India Regiments. Previous excavations have recovered archaeological materials representing both enslaved Africans and army officers associated with buildings of the Royal Engineers complex, with additional evidence of enslaved Africans and British soldiers coming from two buildings excavated between the Orillon and Magazine Bastions. For these reasons, the first objective of excavations in the Horn Work was to obtain artifact samples representing British
enlisted soldiers who lived in this area of the fortress. The second objective was to investigate specific areas or architectural features representing places where soldiers carried out a variety of activities at different times in the fort’s history.

Excavations to locate the mobile hospital produced numerous artifacts reflecting the occupation of the barracks area by enlisted soldiers, but found no structural remains attributable to the building. Excavations also failed to produce evidence of the married men’s hut that once stood nearby, but importantly encountered deposits that represent at least two distinctive episodes when soldiers from Barracks 4 discarded materials over the bastion wall. One of the deposits likely dates to late 18th century while the other probably dates to the early 19th century. A rough mortar floor was encountered at the base of this excavation. Because too small an area (1 by 6 meters) was uncovered and no evidence of architectural elements (e.g. walls or postholes) was identified, the deposit unlikely represents the floor of a married man’s hut, although its use is undetermined.

Excavations in the berm near the base of the right flank of the left bastion were intended to obtain artifacts representing occupation of Barracks 5 by British infantry. This work also produced a large artifact sample, and surprisingly also encountered a rough mortar floor that had been resurfaced at least once during its use. The purpose of this deposit also remains undetermined.

Excavations north of Barracks 4, the suggested location of the original kitchen building associated with this structure, also were made. The dimensions and architecture of the structure are unknown, although based on the 1791 military engineer’s map of the site the building measured approximately 8 by 10 meters. The building was demolished in the early 19th century when Barracks 5 was constructed. Additional modern disturbance of the area came from the construction of the radio and television tower located about 15 meters up the hill, and from excavations for two pit latrines now both demolished except for the prefabricated concrete slabs. Excavations uncovered scattered and irregular shaped remnants of one or more mortar floors and a large area (approximately 1 by 2 meters) of small burned brick fragments possibly representing a chimney base. It is undetermined whether the excavated features and associated artifacts represent the 1790s kitchen building, and it is possible that the remains of the building were covered by the construction of Barracks 5, particularly the west gallery, or were made unrecognizable because of the activities associated with the construction of the television and radio antennae and installation of the pit latrines.

When Barracks 5 was erected circa 1824 a new kitchen building was also constructed about 15 meters to the northwest. Excavation of this building shows that construction commenced by cutting a terrace into the hillside that was covered with a rough mortar slab, similar to the slabs observed in excavations outside the left and right bastions, upon which the kitchen was built. The kitchen measures 11.0 meters long by 5.5 meters wide. There are two entrances on the east façade, one measuring 1.0 meter wide and the other measuring 1.2 meters wide. The building had a cut stone floor that included both locally quarried stone blocks and larger sandstone flagstones that were imported from England. Three stone buttresses help stabilize the rear or west wall. Between these were built two brick stoves. Enough of the stoves were excavated to show that each had three large open burners (each about 50 cm in diameter) over which pots or griddles could have been placed and that each burner had a separate flue. Not enough of the stoves were uncovered to determine if an associated oven was constructed at the base or side of the stove.

Limited investigations (six 1 by 1 meter squares) were made of the soldier’s washroom that was attached to the north and east walls of the revetment of Barracks 5. These walls do not meet

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at a right angle, so the washroom is not square, with the rear wall measuring approximately 5.3 meters and the front or entrance side measuring 5.6 meters. The building is approximately 4 m wide. To construct the building slots for holding the rear and side roof plates for the shed roof were incorporated into the stone walls as were notches for holding the rafters. A pipe bringing water into the building from the cistern above is located at the mid point of the rear wall. There is a brick platform approximately 30 cm wide that runs the length of the rear wall; it likely served to support either a single wash basin or trough or perhaps multiple single basins. At the base of the supports is a 30 cm wide drain that exits through the east wall. The structures consists of a base layer of small angular cobbles embedded in mortar finished with a layer of smooth mortar. Access to the building was on the north side, but no stone foundation occurs here and the excavations were too small to determine whether the building was entirely open along this side or whether there was wood wall with an entrance way.

The ruins of two privies, respectively located up slope and down slope of the kitchen building were also located. Both are likely contemporary with the construction of the kitchen. Neither privy was excavated so it is unknown whether any artifact bearing deposits are associated with them. Privies often contain small personal items that were lost or dropped when the buildings were used. Further study of these two privies could provide further information about the lives and activities of the enlisted men who lived in Barracks 4 and 5.

The 2007 excavations in the North East Works investigated six areas relating to the construction and occupation of Barracks 4 and 5. Excavations in two areas outside the bastion walls were intended to recover artifact samples and architectural data associated with a late 18th century mobile hospital and married men’s hut. While unequivocal evidence of these structures was undetected, the excavations produced a mortar floor of unknown use and large samples of artifacts relating to the use of Barracks 4. A third area located outside the left bastion produced a second mortar floor, also of unknown use, as well as abundant artifacts relating to the occupation of Barracks 5. Excavations north of Barracks 4 and west of Barracks 5 were intended to locate the kitchen building that once stood here but was demolished in the 1820s. An area of fired brick fragments and portions of mortar floor were identified but no conclusive evidence of the structure was found. The shallow excavations produced moderate amounts of artifacts, but also reflect late 20th century disturbances in the area. Excavations showed that the second kitchen building constructed when Barracks 5 was built was erected on a rough mortar slab, not unlike the slabs located outside the two bastions. The kitchen had two entrances, a stone floor and two brick stoves. Investigations of the soldier’s washroom showed that the structure was designed to be attached to the outside walls on the northeast side of Barracks 5. A single or several wash basins with a drain beneath them were attached to one wall. The structure had a mortar floor, but not enough of the structure was excavated to determine the character of its entranceway on the north side.

Artifacts recovered from the excavations reflect soldiers activities conducted in and around the barracks buildings, food preparation and consumption in kitchen facilities, and personal hygiene at the wash house. The artifacts also mirror the chronology of occupation in this area of the fort from the construction and occupation of Barracks 4 in the late 18th century to the construction and use of Barracks 5 initiated in the early 19th century and concluding near mid century. Overall the investigations made an important contribution to the comparative studies of the lives and relationships of enslaved Africans and British army officers and enlisted men at the Brimstone Hill Fortress.