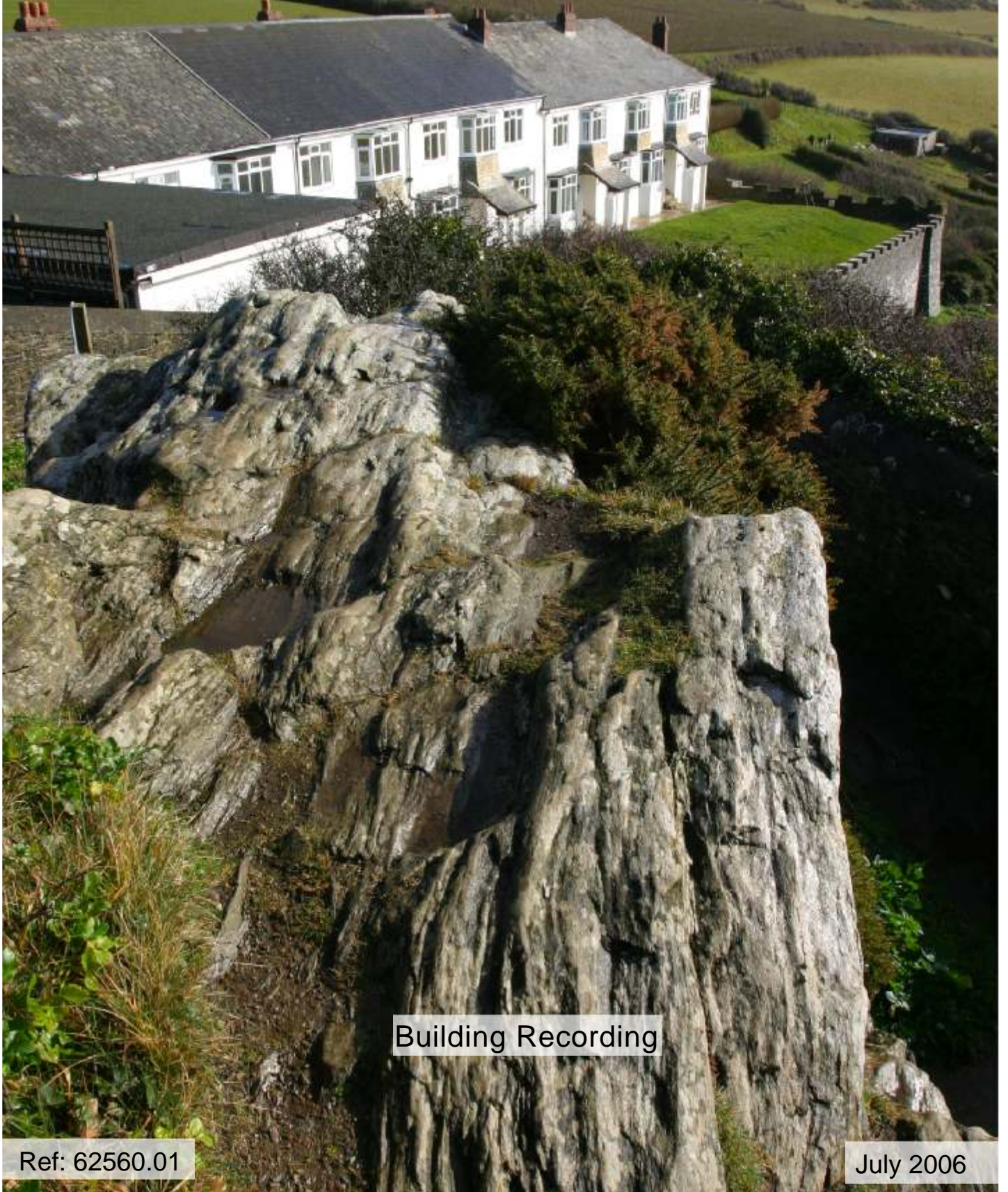




The Gara Rock Hotel, East Portlemouth, South Hams, Devon



Building Recording

**GARA ROCK HOTEL
EAST PORTLEMOUTH
SOUTH HAMS
DEVON**

Building Recording

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Summary

Wessex Archaeology was commissioned by Nisbet LLP to carry out building recording of the Gara Rock Hotel, East Portlemouth, South Hams, Devon, which is centred on Ordnance Survey NGR 27523 03711. The work was required to meet a planning condition imposed by the Local Planning Authority (Planning Application No. 20/1858/05/F) prior to its demolition and the erection of new apartments.

The hotel lies approximately 0.5km south of the hamlet of Rickham, to the south-east of Salcombe. It stands on top of cliffs with commanding views out over the English Channel and occupies the site of the 19th century Rickham Coast Guard Station. The buildings are not listed but are situated in an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty.

The building recording was carried out from 8th to 10th March before demolition and on 30th May 2006 when much of the interior cladding had been stripped. A measured survey produced a ground floor plan of the main range and a photographic survey was undertaken.

The Coastguard Station at Gara Rock, including a Watch House and cottages for those who were to man the station, was built in 1846/7. The 1890 First Edition Ordnance Survey map shows the station as a long rectangular block (cottages) with a small 'north wing' at the west end. The map labels the site as being a Coastguard Station containing a Lookout House, Watch House and Life Saving Apparatus House.

A photograph taken before 1909 appears to show the cottages as they were originally built, with walls of coursed rubble stone with squared stone dressings around the window and door openings. The single pitched roof was covered in slate.

In 1909, the Coastguard station was purchased by Richard Jordan for the purpose of setting up a family boarding house. Of the six cottages, four were used for accommodation and the remaining two as a dining room and lounge area. In 1919, the Jordans embarked on an ambitious building programme in which the original stone built cottages were rendered, and the construction of a second storey began. As the hotel grew in popularity more phases of alteration were undertaken by the Jordans.

In 1940, the RAF requisitioned the hotel. Gara Rock reopened in 1946 after the war as a family hotel under its new owner, Commander Lloyd Owen. The hotel was subsequently bought by the Richards' family and re-opened after refurbishment in June 1962.

The building recording showed that much of the original mid 19th century buildings have been removed by later alterations. Surviving features include four stone chimney stacks; the remains of one of four stone porches with a blocked window and door opening; most of the rear (north) wall of the cottages including original window openings within the north wall of the lounge or stores area. Most of the front (south) wall has been removed. Alterations by the Jordans' family in 1919-1936 and by the Richards' family in the late 20th century were also recorded.

**GARA ROCK HOTEL
EAST PORTLEMOUTH
SOUTH HAMS
DEVON**

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Acknowledgements

The project was commissioned by Nisbet LLP, and the assistance of Cliff Barnes and James Wickett is gratefully acknowledged. Wessex Archaeology would also like to thank the staff of the Gara Rock Hotel, in particular Anne Carr and Richard. The collaborative role of Bill Horner, Archaeological Officer at Devon County Council, is also acknowledged.

The project was managed for Wessex Archaeology by Charlotte Matthews. The building recording and survey was undertaken by Bob Davis and Gareth Owen. The photographic survey was carried out by Elaine Wakefield, and Matt Rous collated the documentary sources. This report was written by Bob Davis and S.E. James prepared the illustrations.

GARA ROCK HOTEL EAST PORTLEMOUTH SOUTH HAMS DEVON

Building Recording

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Project Background

- 1.1.1 Wessex Archaeology was commissioned by Nisbet LLP to carry out building recording of the Gara Rock Hotel, East Portlemouth. South Hams, Devon, which is centred on Ordnance Survey NGR 27523 03711 (**Figure 1**). The work was required to meet a planning condition imposed by the Local Planning Authority (Planning Application No. 20/1858/05/F) prior to its demolition and the erection of new apartments.
- 1.1.2 The hotel lies approximately 0.5km south of the hamlet of Rickham, to the south-east of Salcombe. It stands on top of cliffs with commanding views out over Seacomb sand into the English Channel. It occupies the site of the 19th century Rickham Coast Guard Station. The building recording was carried out in accordance with a written brief prepared by Bill Horner, Archaeological Officer at Devon County Council.
- 1.1.3 The buildings are not listed but are situated in an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty.

2 METHODS

2.1 Aims

- 2.1.1 The aim of the building recording as set out in the brief was to make a record of the standing building prior to demolition.

2.2 Cartographic and Documentary Evidence

- 2.2.1 Publicly available records together with Ordnance Survey (OS) and historic maps were consulted at Devon County Council Offices, Exeter Records Office and Studies Library on 10th March 2006. The National Coast Guard Museum was also contacted for any information. A list of all the maps consulted are listed below in the **Appendix**.

2.3 On-Site Building Recording

- 2.3.1 The building recording was carried out from 8th to 10th March and on 30th May 2006. A ground floor plan was produced of the main range using hand measurements transferred to a Tablet PC running AutoCAD 2004. At the

time of the first site visit in March, the building was still clad internally with a mixture of materials including insulating fibre board plastic and ply board. Where possible some of this material was removed by hand to expose areas of constructional interest. The building had been the subject of an asbestos survey and marked up sensitive areas were not invasively recorded.

- 2.3.2 The second site visit was made after the licensed removal of asbestos and during the initial demolition phase. Most of the internal panelling and coverings had been stripped out revealing the majority of the masonry walls. Further survey was carried out at the west end of the building using the same method as above.

2.4 Photographic Survey

- 2.4.1 External and internal elevations and interesting architectural details were digitally photographed. In total, 492 images were taken. A representative selection of these images is shown in this report.
- 2.4.2 This methodology is broadly in line with level 2 as expressed in the document *Understanding Historic Buildings: A guide to good recording practice* (English Heritage 2006).

3 RESULTS

3.1 Historical Background

- 3.1.1 The following summary of the history of Gara Rock Coastguard Station is partly taken from Sandra Braganza McCurdy's book *Gara Rock & Environs: An Historical Perspective*.
- 3.1.2 By an order dated 29th July 1842, the Board of Customs, with the Treasury's agreement established a Coastguard Station at Rickham. The crew were to consist of one Chief Officer, one Chief Boatmen, two commissioned Boatmen and four Boatmen.
- 3.1.3 By 30th March 1843 a temporary station had obviously been established for the Board of Customs in London received the following report, which drew attention to the pressure under which the service was operating, viz, they were '*...much inconvenienced for want of good accommodation paying also heavy rents....*'.
- 3.1.4 As early as 1844 plans were underway to build a Watch House and cottages for those who were to man the station. The Customs Board after much haggling over rent, reached an agreement in January 1845 to pay 20/- rent for the site. A flag staff was erected on Mr. Thornton's land, and towards the end of March 1846, Pulliblack & Warren were chosen from a shortlist of five for the completion of the station, within ten months, at a cost of £1,733-13s-0d. Construction of the boundary wall (referred to as the Great Wall of Gara in Sandra Braganza McCurdy's book) was completed in 1847 at a total cost of £241-15s-0d which included '*...boundary wall 921 perches at 5/- with gate piers and gates, hanging etc...*'.

- 3.1.5 The Rickham Coastguard Station was well positioned to observe and warn of external threat, with a vantage point which permitted a clear view of both Salcombe Harbour and the coast up to Prawle Point. Its location allowed the activities of smugglers and foreign travellers to British shores to be monitored.
- 3.1.6 The census return for 1851 lists eight entries for Gara Rock: Lt. John Walker, RN; Coastguard Chief and seven assistants: Charles Badcock, Charles Little, William King, Thomas Vye, John Dudley, John Pearce and Matthew Hodge. Together with their families, the count was 41 on 30th March 1851 for the Gara Rock community.
- 3.1.7 Some of the subsequent noteworthy events at the station include the ship wrecks of the ‘Merion’ in 1872, the ‘Pauleuri’ in 1877 and the unfortunate deaths of Coastguards Clements and Keats who lost their lives in 1880 attempting to save a sailor from the doomed schooner ‘Eugene’. In 1890 Tiverton School, anxious to raise funds for the rebuilding of the School in Horsdean sold the Rickham Coastguard Station land to the Admiralty.
- 3.1.8 The 1890 First Edition Ordnance Survey 6 inch map (not illustrated) shows the station as a long rectangular block (cottages) with a small ‘north wing’ at the west end forming an elongated ‘L’ shape in plan. A series of small structures are depicted on the north and north–west sides of the cottages. The map labels the site as being a Coastguard Station containing a Lookout House, Watch House and Life Saving Apparatus House.
- 3.1.9 The 1906 Second Edition Ordnance Survey 25 inch map (**Figure 2**) shows the station in more detail and even suggests internal divisions. To the north of the cottages, several evenly spaced buildings, probably the cottages’ privies, are shown. A flag staff (F.S.) is also depicted in the same place as the present flag staff. The site is labelled as Gatter Rock.
- 3.1.10 A photograph taken before the cottages were sold in 1909 appears to show them much as they were originally built (**Figure 3: Plate 1**). The walls were built from coursed rubble stone with squared stone dressings around the window and door openings. The single pitched roof is covered in slate. Three of the five square stone chimney stacks along the main east-west range are visible. There are rain water tanks between each of the porches. The photograph shows some of the inhabitants of the cottages with two men in what appear to be naval or coast guard uniforms. On the steps of the cottages are women dressed in white pinafores.
- 3.1.11 In 1909, the Board of Trade decided to sell at auction the Coastguard station, which was purchased for the purpose of setting up a family boarding house by Richard Jordan. Of the six cottages, four were used for accommodation and the remaining two as a dining room and lounge area.
- 3.1.12 A photograph taken just after 1909 when the Jordans bought the property (**Figure 3: Plate 2**) shows the full south facing range. The cottages appear largely as they did in the previous photo but with a change. A small alteration is noted in this photo, the central window at the west end or left hand side of

the photograph has been changed into a doorway with a small wooden porch. It is considered that the area behind this door is the part of the cottages converted into a dining area and lounge. The whitewashed window dressings around the doorway do not reach ground level.

- 3.1.13 Deck chairs and scenes of ‘tea’ on the lawn lend credence to the fact that the photograph was taken in the early years of the Jordan family ownership and prior to their programme of upgrading the cottages with external render which is not visible in this photo.
- 3.1.14 The Jordans were obviously successful hoteliers, because in 1919 they embarked on an ambitious building programme in which the original stone built cottages were rendered, and the construction of a second storey began. By 1936 the ‘Gara Rock En Pension’ could advertise itself as having many outstanding facilities for the time.
- 3.1.15 A photograph taken *c.* 1919 (**Figure 3: Plate 3**) shows the front (south) of cottages with the external render applied during this phase of the conversion by the Jordans. A maid and guest are visible on the front lawn.
- 3.1.16 A photograph taken approximately 1925 (**Figure 4: Plate 4**) shows the external render and the overhanging second storey added to the west end of the cottages. Three of the original cottages at the east end remain. Metal ‘Crittall’ windows have replaced the earlier casements on the ground floor. The single extant porch, found during the survey, can be seen between two of the iron post supports.
- 3.1.17 Another photograph taken at the same time as Plate 4 (**Figure 4: Plate 5**) shows the second storey addition plus in the background another building. It also shows the stone boundary wall later enclosed by the breakfast room.
- 3.1.18 A photograph (**Figure 5: Plate 6**) possibly taken in the 1930s shows that the second storey was extended to the east and only two of the original one storey cottages remain. The railings of the breakfast room are visible in this photograph showing that it had been built by this time. Another photograph (**Figure 5: Plate 7**) from the east, possibly also taken in the 1930s, shows the new breakfast room and the start of the infill at ground floor level below the overhanging first floor. Some of the ground floor windows have been converted into bay windows. Clearly the hotel was extended in phases as and when money allowed.
- 3.1.19 A photograph taken during further refurbishment by the Jordans’ after 1925 and before 1939 (**Figure 6: Plate 8**) shows large scale alteration of the front elevation including new bay windows. The front wall has been brought forward and in line with the front the porches (which were removed). This created the present arrangement with the frontage on one line. The photograph shows the complete removal of the roof and chimneys of the east cottages.
- 3.1.20 Under the Jordans the hotel grew in popularity and it received celebrity visitors such as Maragret Rutherford, Sir Laurence Olivier and Sir John

Betjeman. By the late 1930s, it was in its heyday and flourishing as a highly successful and prestigious hotel.

- 3.1.21 In 1940, the RAF requisitioned the hotel as a headquarters and mess for officers and WRAF's involved with the West Prawle Radar Station. This Radar Station was an early warning facility, which had become fully operational during the previous year.
- 3.1.22 The RAF remained at Gara Rock for approximately three years; they were followed by naval troops and it is likely that with U.S. troops stationed at Salcombe, Gara Rock also billeted its share of Americans.
- 3.1.23 Gara Rock reopened in 1946 after the war as a family hotel under its new owner, Commander Lloyd Owen who filled it with ex-service furniture and fittings. A photograph taken from a post war brochure (**Figure 6: Plate 9**), possibly c. 1946, shows the Jordan refurbishment completed including breakfast room and a large staff accommodation block in the background.
- 3.1.24 Part of the large stone built staff accommodation block at the west end was destroyed by fire in 1950, the discovery that the building had been under-insured, meant that the re-build took the form of the present small front entrance in place of the destroyed portion at the west end of the building.
- 3.1.25 Commander Owen retired in the 1950s and the hotel was subsequently bought by the Richards' family and re-opened after refurbishment in June 1962. Subsequent updating and rebuilding included the Balcony suite, Games Room, Laundry Room, Chefs flat, Rickham suites and Portlemouth-Pantry Kitchens. The 19th century 'lookout' used by the coastguards was refurbished and re-thatched in 1971 and is now leased from the National Trust.

3.2 The Building

- 3.2.1 The Gara Rock Hotel consists of a main east-west two-storey range subdivided into ground and first floor apartments under a single pitched roof. The main entrance, reception area and kitchens are at the west end. To the east of the reception area, the building has been entirely converted to accommodation and recreation. The survey was principally concerned with any surviving evidence on the ground floor. The original cottages were all single storey and the present two-storey arrangement is as a direct result of 20th century alterations. The various phases of the building are shown on ground floor plan on **Figure 7**.

Phase 1: Surviving mid 19th century features

- 3.2.2 Much of the original mid 19th century buildings have been removed by later alterations. Surviving features (shown in blue on **Figure 7**) include four stone chimney stacks; the remains of one of the stone porches with a blocked window and door opening; most of the rear (north) wall of the cottages including original window openings within the north wall of the lounge or stores area.

- 3.2.3 The surviving chimneys show clearly the original roof line (**Figure 8: Plate 10**). Also visible in the east and west faces of the chimneys along the main east-west range was a socket in the masonry for a ridge board which would have supported the common rafters of the earlier roof. The original chimney in the north-west part of the building (**Figure 8: Plate 11**) also shows the original roof line.
- 3.2.4 On the ground floor, the inside face of the rear wall of the lounge area shows evidence of internal partitioning in the form of vertical wall scars spaced between the surviving original window openings (**Figure 9: Plate 12**). It is likely that this area was originally a store.
- 3.2.5 Most of the front (south) wall has been removed with only fragments incorporated into the south ends of the two original masonry dividing walls (**Figure 7**). Parts of one of the original porches survive. This porch appears to have been the most westerly porch and is shown on **Figure 4: Plate 4** under the overhang of the second storey. The other porches have all been removed. Visible in the exposed west face of the porch is a blocked doorway (**Figure 9: Plate 13**). Noted either side of the blocked doorway is the dressed squared stone work indicating once exposed walls.
- 3.2.6 A section of original 19th century front (south) wall foundation was recorded at the east end of the building after a section of wooden flooring was removed (**Figure 7** and **Figure 10: Plate 14**). The rest of the building still had its floor coverings and **Figure 7** shows the extrapolated line of the original front (south) wall of the cottages.
- 3.2.7 The boundary wall referred to as the ‘Great Wall of Gara’ was noted behind panelling along the west wall of the Breakfast Room (**Figure 7** and **Figure 10: Plate 15**)
- 3.2.8 The privies shown on the OS map on the north side of the cottages were not discernable in the extant fabric. Most of the long stretch of co-joined outbuildings had been altered to such an extent that identification was not possible, however it is possible that at least some of the front (south) wall of the out buildings was original (**Figure 7**).
- Phase 2: 1919-1939 by the Jordans’ family*
- 3.2.9 The buildings underwent phases of major alteration during this period (shown in red on **Figure 7**) and as shown in photographs (**Figures 3-6**). The principal changes included the addition of a second storey, the heightening of the chimneys of the cottages, the removal of original internal partitions, the creation of a lounge area in what was probably the stores and/or equipment area (**Figure 7** and **Figure 11: Plate 16**). The easternmost cottages were virtually levelled along the south front with none of the original features kept. The entire south frontage was changed to create a similar style. The ground floor overhang was infilled and bay windows created.
- Phase 3: Late 20th century alterations by the Richards’ family*
- 3.2.10 Late 20th century alterations include various accommodation buildings to the north of the cottages (now demolished) and the upgrading of the breakfast

room and the addition of a UPVC conservatory. Stud partitioning was used to divide both the ground and first floors at the east end of the main building into separate apartments.

3.3 Conclusion

- 3.3.1 The building recording showed that much of the original mid 19th century buildings have been removed by later alterations. Surviving features include four stone chimney stacks; the remains of one of four stone porches with a blocked window and door opening; most of the rear (north) wall of the cottages including original window openings within the north wall of the lounge or stores area. Most of the front (south) wall has been removed. Alterations by the Jordans' family in 1919-1939 and by the Richards' family in late 20th century were also recorded.

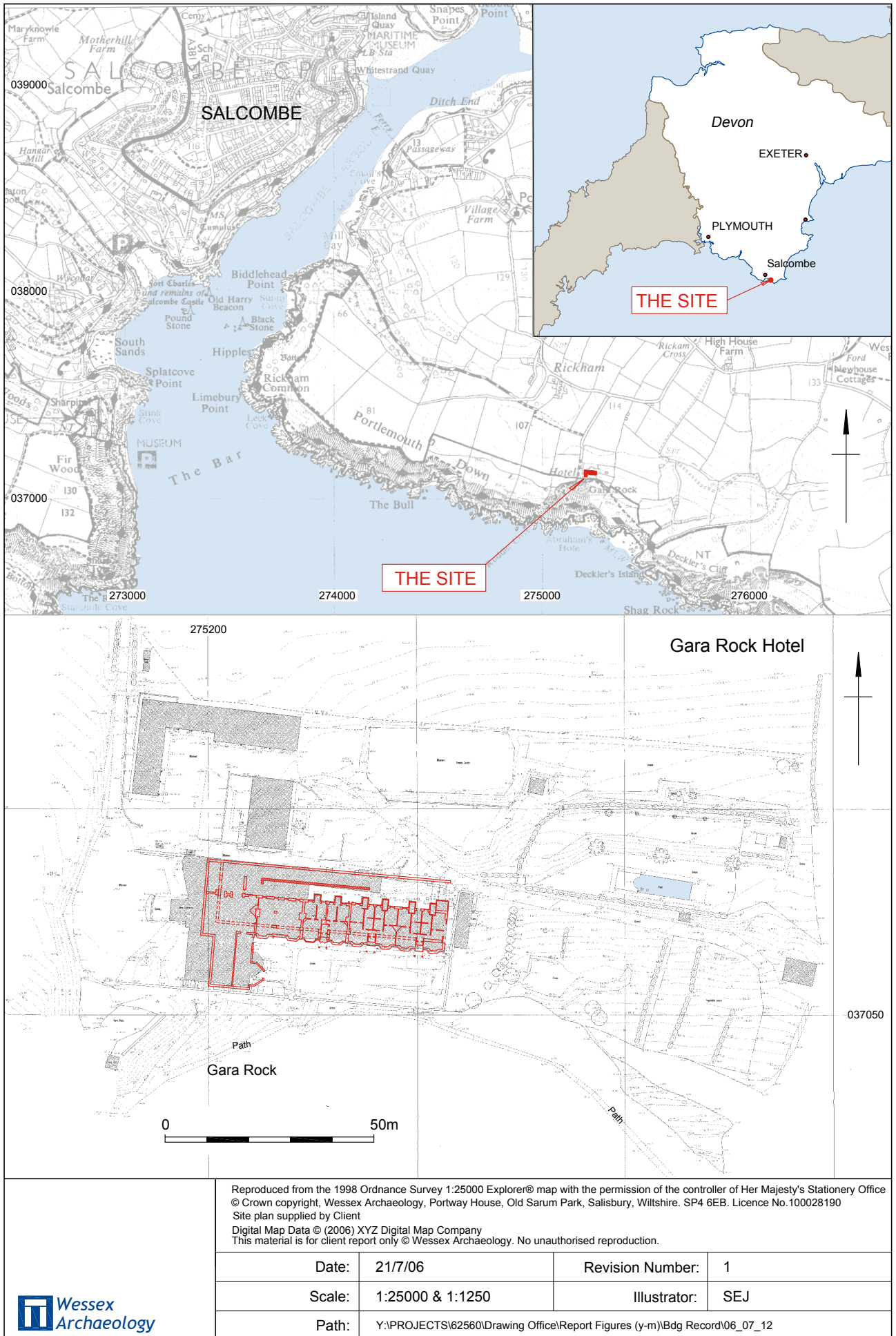
4 APPENDIX: CARTOGRAPHIC SOURCES

1890 First Edition Ordnance Survey 6 inch map

1906 Second Edition Ordnance Survey 25 inch map

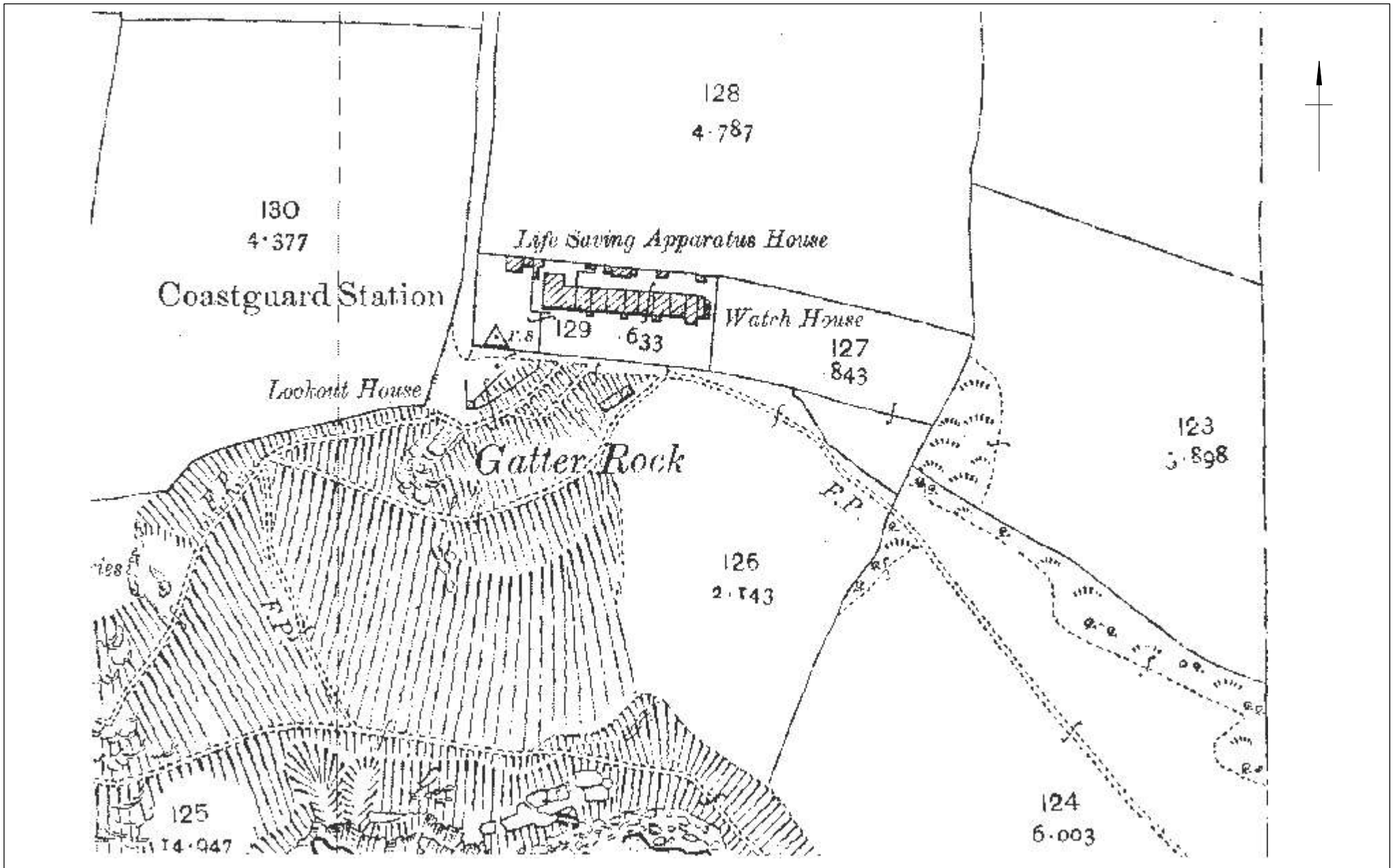
1963 Ordnance Survey 6 inch map (1:10,560) Sheet SX73NE

1991 Ordnance Survey (1:10,000) Sheet SX73NE



Site location maps

Figure 1




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Plate 1. The cottages before 1909



Plate 2. South facing range in 1909 just after the Jordans bought the property



Plate 3. South facing range circa 1919



Plate 4. South facing range *circa* 1925 showing second storey

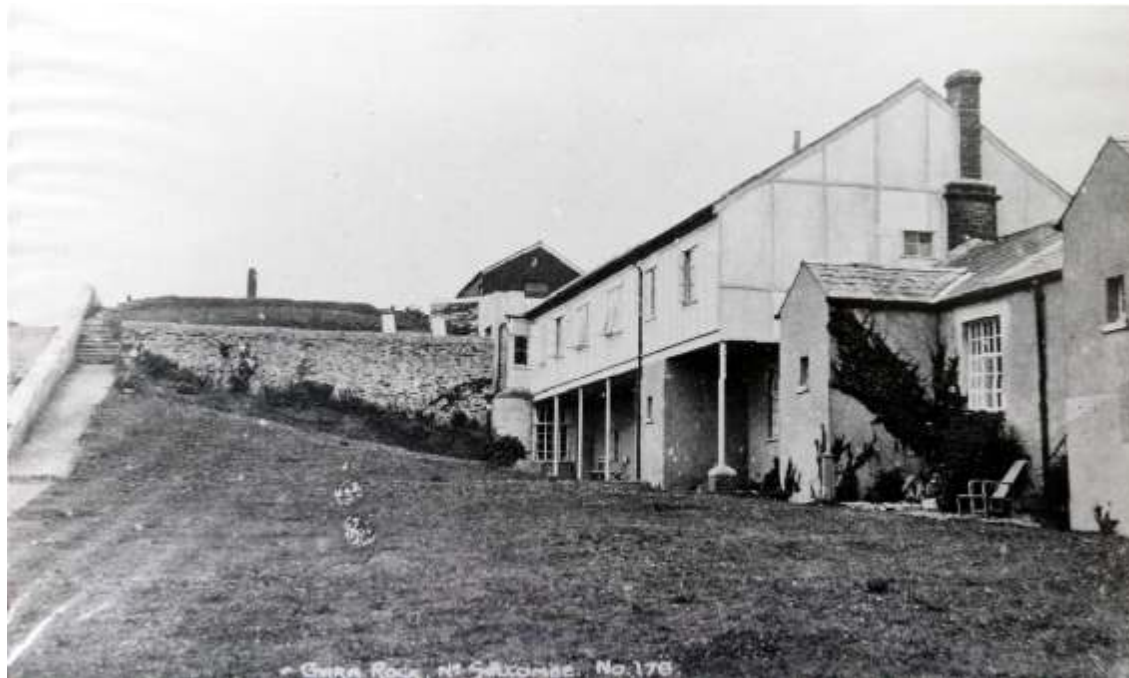


Plate 5. View looking west *circa* 1925

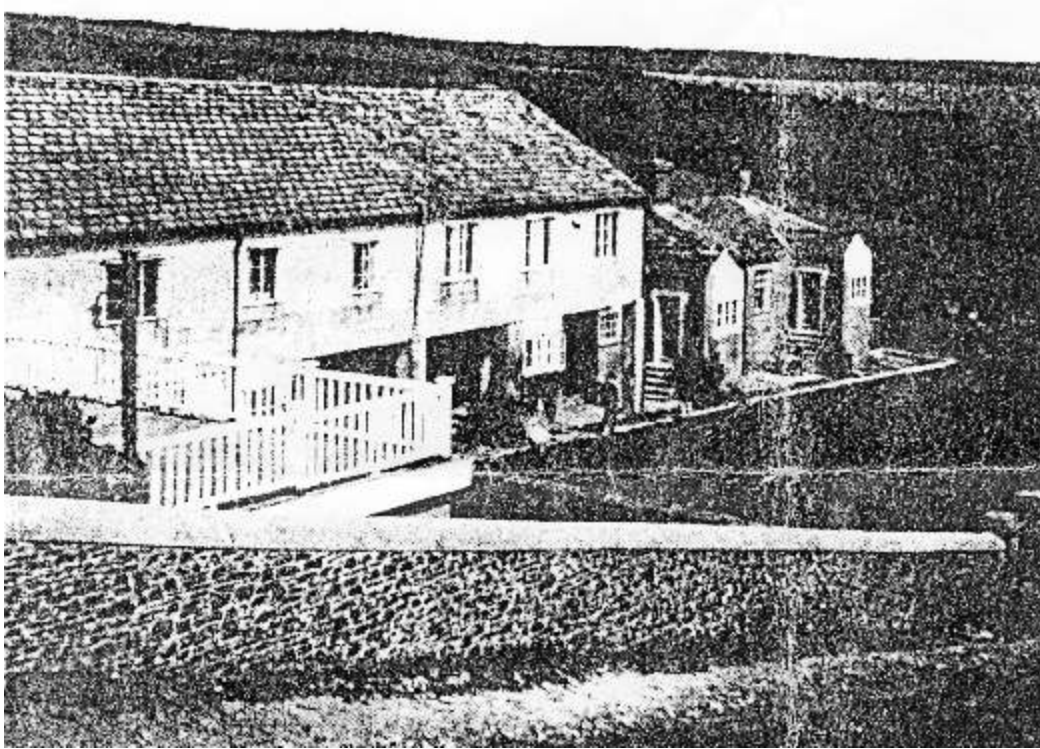


Plate 6. View of the south facing range taken after 1925 and before 1939



Plate 7. View taken after 1925 and before 1939 showing the new breakfast room



Plate 8. View of the Jordan's alterations *circa* 1925-1939

GARA
Near SALCOMBE
SOUTH

The hotel is of medium size—35 bedrooms, water—and covers for about 50 guests. All of the sea, the cliffs, and the sandy beaches. All of the rooms are divided into small private.

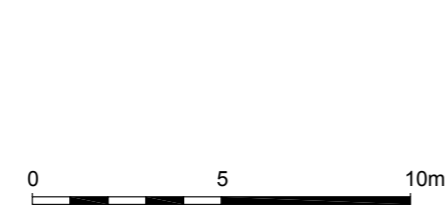
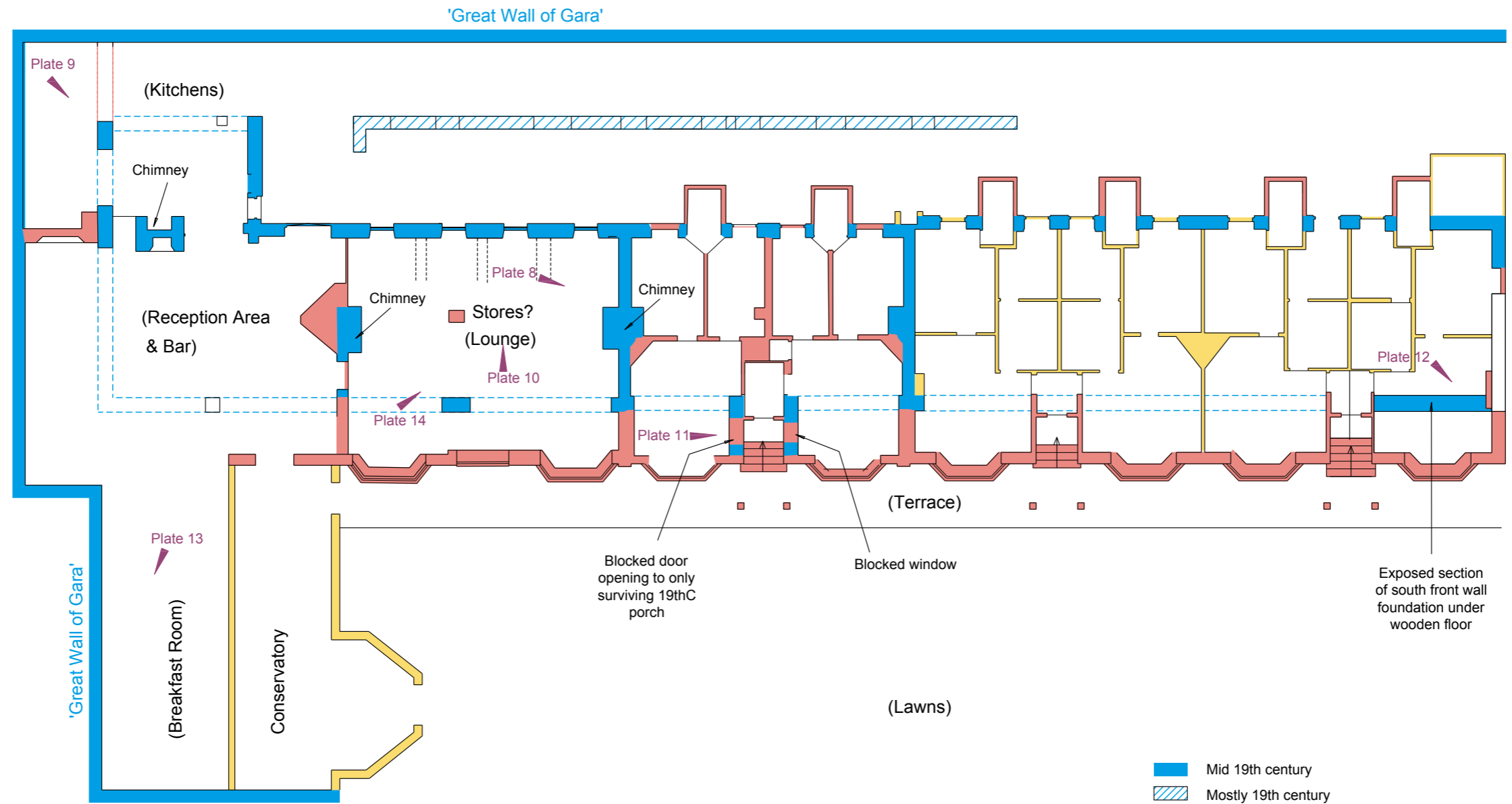
A three-roomed suite would be a sitting, heating and fireplace, two bedrooms, and a large double that, e.g. sitting-room and two bedrooms for the children, each with the

Gara Rock was originally a number of coastguard cottages. These were taken over in the early part of the century as guest houses, but in view of their popularity and the glorious surroundings the buildings were enlarged and rebuilt to make the present hotel.

Situated from high winds, the building is a sun-trap, facing due south and overlooking the very glorious—majestic—scenery of the sea coast and cliffs, running away to Prawle Point (the most southerly tip of Devon) to the east, and across Salcombe harbour entrance, to Belt Head, to the west.

Breakfast Room

Plate 9. Page from c.1946 brochure showing completed refurbishment and staff wing at the rear



- Mid 19th century
- Mostly 19th century
- 1919 -1939
- Late 20th century
- Extrapolated wall line
- ▶ Direction of Plates 8 to 14 (ground and first floor)

Phased plan of the ground floor

Figure 7



Plate 10. 19th century original chimneys and roof line within first floor space



Plate 11. North-west chimney showing original roof line at first floor level



Plate 12. Ground floor lounge showing original window openings and vertical scarring on wall, indicating partitioning



Plate 13. Surviving porch showing blocked original 19th century doorway



Plate 14. Exposed section of surviving 19th century front south wall foundation at east end of range



Plate 15. Store boundary wall; 'Great wall of Gara', behind panelling in breakfast room



Plate 16. Interior of Lounge (originally stores?)



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