

**ARCHAEOLOGICAL EXCAVATION  
AT THE GUARDHOUSE, FORT NO. 3,  
BERRY HEAD, BRIXHAM, DEVON**

**prepared for Torbay Coast and Countryside Trust**

by  
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**Exeter Archaeology**

**Report No. 09.88**

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

This report has been prepared for Torbay Coast and Countryside Trust, and presents the results of an archaeological excavation undertaken by Exeter Archaeology (EA) in February 2009, to the rear of the Guardhouse, Fort no. 3, Berry Head, Brixham (NGR SX 94330 56490). The Guardhouse is a listed building (No. 1946-1/2/8) and lies within the *Berry Head and Battery* Scheduled Monument (No. 29694). The archaeological work was required under conditions attached to the grant of planning permission and listed building consent (refs 08/1391 LB and 1392PA, Torbay Council) for the extension and reordering of the Guardhouse as a restaurant, and as a condition of the Scheduled Monument Consent for the development, granted by the Department of Culture Media and Sport, as advised by English Heritage.

### 1.1 The site (fig. 1)

The site is located within the SW corner of Fort No. 3 immediately to the rear of the Guardhouse. It was enclosed by a wooden fence and until recently was a lawn garden separated from the Guardhouse building by a concrete path. A manhole just to the rear of the Guardhouse provides access to a tunnel running beneath the Guardhouse and exiting the fort from the south.

### 1.2 Geology and topography

Berry Head is a pale grey Limestone headland and constitutes the Berry Head Member of the Brixham Limestone Formation<sup>1</sup>. The site is located on a level plateau retained to the south by a tall limestone wall beneath which the land drops away sharply into the sea.

### 1.3 Brief archaeological and historical background

Berry Head is the site of substantial 18th-century fortification. This began with the establishment of cannon and howitzer batteries in 1779-80 to protect the anchorage of Torbay and was followed by the construction of two garrisoned redoubts (Fort 3 on the headland and Fort 1 further to the south) between 1795 and 1807, built in response to the outbreak of war with France in 1793.

Previous archaeological work in and around Fort 3 consists of investigations carried out by Brixham Museum and History Society and includes the excavation of rubbish dumps down slope of the musketry wall on the south side of the fort during the 1970's, in 1998/99 and in 2006. An assessment of the fort was carried out by EA in 1989/1990, consisting of a review of available documentary and cartographic sources<sup>2</sup> and a survey of the surviving structures.<sup>3</sup>

## 2. PROJECT SPECIFICATION

Specifications for the archaeological work were provided in a brief supplied by Torbay Council's Senior Historic Environment Officer (SHEO). The principal requirements were:

- to conduct initial evaluative test pitting to inform foundation design;
- to archaeologically excavate the footprint of the proposed development to a level agreed between Torbay Council SHEO and the Project Architect;

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<sup>1</sup> B.G.S. sheet 350

<sup>2</sup> Pye 1989

<sup>3</sup> Pye and Slater 1990

- to adequately investigate and record all deposits removed or exposed;
- to report and archive results as appropriate.

### 3. METHOD

The initial test pitting entailed the hand excavation of seven pits. Pits 1-4 were each located on the corner positions of the proposed restaurant with the fifth positioned approximately mid way along the line of its rear wall. Pits 6 and 7 were positioned to expose the exterior walls of an early building known to lie partly within the development area.

Following the test pit evaluation, the entire footprint of the extension was reduced in shallow spits using a tracked excavator fitted with a toothless grading bucket. Machining continued until the top of archaeological deposits were reached. Archaeological deposits exposed were cleaned back by hand, investigated and recorded. Hand excavation was undertaken to an agreed formation level of 400mm below the existing ground surface.

Standard EA recording procedures were employed. Stratigraphic information was recorded on *pro-forma* single context record sheets, a drawn record was compiled in plan and section at scales of 1:10, 1:20 or 1:50 as appropriate and a photographic record was prepared in black and white film and digital (colour) format.

### 4. RESULTS

#### 4.1 Test pit evaluation (Plan fig. 2, sections fig. 3)

The earliest deposit exposed comprised a thick layer of crushed, locally derived limestone (1007). This was exposed within pits 1,2,4,5 & 8 at a general depth of 450mm below ground level. This was evidently a very extensive deposit and is interpreted as representing a major levelling layer associated with the construction of the fort. It was investigated most extensively within pit 3 where it had been cut through by a later feature (rubbish pit 1048, fully described in section 4.2) and proved to be in excess of 850mm thick. Neither the base of the deposit, nor natural subsoil was exposed within any of the pits.

Overlying levelling layer 1007 was a thin layer of sandy lime mortar (1006), exposed in pits 1, 2 & 5. This is interpreted as a construction or working surface. Limestone footings (1030), representing the north and east walls of a building were partially exposed in pits 6 & 7 although removed to the level of the foundations in pit 7 by a later culvert (1056). A further limestone footing was exposed in pit 2. It was set onto layer 1006 and is interpreted as an internal division of the same building. No internal or external surfaces were present, although a layer of rubble and clay (1015) overlying 1006 in pit 2, appears to represent possible floor makeup. Stone, brick and slate rubble layers exposed in pits 2, 5, 6 & 7 are interpreted as demolition layers relating to the exposed buildings. All seven test pits were sealed by up to 300mm of recent garden deposits.

#### 4.2 The excavation (fig. 2)

##### *General sequence of deposits*

Undisturbed natural subsoil was not encountered during the excavation, the earliest deposit being coarse, loosely packed limestone rubble (1007), interpreted as a substantial levelling

layer. Within this deposit were set a number of walls forming the structural, load bearing elements of two buildings (buildings A and B), and a low tunnel extending from the guard house, southwards across the site (previously surveyed by Centre Line). Sealing the primary levelling deposit over an area *c.* 7m x 8m, encompassing the western half of the site was a thin layer of mortar (1006). This appears to have been a construction layer onto which secondary levelling deposits (1015, 1027 and 1047) were lain, and at least one internal wall (1016) was built. A number of cut features were observed at this level, being stratigraphically later than the primary construction layers and structural elements. This secondary activity also included the construction of a stone and brick culvert (1056). Layers of demolition debris filled the interior of both buildings. A widespread black ashy deposit (1023) overlay the demolition rubble within building B and sealed coarse makeup deposits in the southeast quarter of the site. Above this layer, deposits across the site were sealed by garden soils.

## ***Buildings***

### ***Building A*** (plates 2 & 3)

This encompassed an area *c.* 5m x 2.8m, and continued beyond the excavation area to the south and west. Its main surviving elements comprised a deep-footed outer wall (1030), forming the north and east walls of the building, a shallow-footed internal dividing wall (1016) and a cobbled path (1046), which abutted the outer face of the north wall.

The base of the footings of wall 1030 was not seen as it lay below the limit of the excavation. The rubble levelling deposit appeared to tightly abut these footings suggesting that their construction was prior to at least the final stages of the primary site levelling, with the levelling material being deposited around the *in-situ* masonry. The wall consisted primarily of irregular limestone blocks with a yellowish sandy mortar bonding. The north wall featured a slot along its inside face which contained the remnants of a decayed timber. The outer face of the wall featured two layers of render, the first, a yellowish sandy lime mortar, had been applied before the construction of the adjacent cobbled path (1046) which abutted it. The second consisted of grey ashy lime mortar and post-dated the laying of the path. The east wall featured a curving masonry projection 2.5m long which extended out from the line of the east wall by approximately 500mm. Part of this section of walling had been cut through during the insertion of a later culvert (1056).

The building had been divided internally by an E-W aligned wall (1016) which had been set onto the mortar consolidation layer (1006). It comprised irregular limestone blocks with a yellowish sandy mortar bonding.

No internal surface survived although a clay layer (1015) was present and probably functioned as bedding or levelling for a floor. To the immediate north of the building was a fairly coarse cobbled surface (1046) forming an E-W aligned path 1.4m wide, edged along its northern side with larger cobble setts. Layers of slate and stone building debris infilled the structure and sealed the cobbled path.

### ***Building B*** (plates 2 & 4)

This encompassed an area *c.* 3m x 2.5m, continuing beyond the limit of excavation to the south. It comprised two truncated walls (1037 and 1038) forming a small building with internal dimensions of 2.2m E-W by at least 2.1m N-S. Wall 1037 formed the western and northern sides of the building and appeared to have been truncated by a service trench at its eastern extent. It was built of irregular limestone blocks with a yellowish sandy mortar

bonding. Its footings continued down into the primary makeup layer 1007 in the same manner as described for wall 1030 above, with mortar layer 1006 abutting it along its western side.

Wall 1038 formed the eastern side of the building. It had been removed at its northern end and heavily truncated and disturbed from above during demolition, only surviving at and below formation level for the new build. The outer face of the wall had also suffered disturbance from the excavation of an adjacent rubbish pit (1041). The interior of the building was infilled with stone, brick and slate demolition rubble (1036).

In the northwest corner of the building, a void *c.* 600mm wide, opened up in the masonry of wall 1037. Being below formation level, the void was not fully investigated; it may have linked into the tunnel system.

### ***Tunnels***

The fabric of the tunnel was not disturbed during the excavations. The capping stones were not exposed as they lay beneath the base level of the excavation.

### ***Features***

#### ***Culvert***

A stone and brick culvert (1056) was exposed, crossing the site on a north east-south west alignment over a distance of 9.5m. It was truncated at its northern end by later services and continued beyond the limit of excavation to the south west. The southern section of the culvert was constructed of limestone and slate, bonded with a yellowish brown sandy lime mortar. The remainder consisted of brick sidewalls with a mixture of brick and limestone capping. The culvert cut through foundations of the west wall of building A. A coin dated 1964 was recovered from below the capping stones indicating that the culvert remained functional as a drain until the late 20th century.

#### ***Pits and post holes***

A total of four pits and three post holes were revealed during the excavation, all of which cut through the makeup and levelling deposits and extended below the base of the excavation. Part of a large rubbish pit (1048) was exposed in the north east corner of site. It continued beyond the limit of excavation to the north and east and measured 3.2m across at its point of widest exposure. It was 1.15m deep where investigated by the excavation of test pit 3 and contained three distinct fills. Its primary fill (1022) consisted of very dark grey brown/black, loose silty sand, and contained abundant ash and coal fragments, burnt bone, animal bone and marine mollusc shells. A number of pottery sherds dating to the early 19th century were also recovered. This fill was overlain by a deposit of clay and limestone rubble (1021), which appeared to represent consolidation of the top of the pit. The upper fill (1020) represented the final infilling and levelling of the pit as the lower fills slumped due to decomposition of the primary fill.

A second rubbish pit (1041), located to the immediate east of structure B was not excavated; however, its upper fill was sampled and proved to contain a high proportion of animal bone. This pit appeared to have disturbed the east wall of the structure (1038), suggesting that the pit post-dated the disuse of this building.

Two further pits (1045 and 1034) and three post holes (1042, 1049 and 1051) were exposed and recorded but not excavated as they extended beneath the formation level for the new build. Each contained fragments of demolition material within their upper fill.

#### *Linear features*

One small linear feature (1053) was revealed during the excavation, located in the north west corner of site. It cut through the general makeup and leveling deposits and was not excavated as it extended below formation depth. Fragments of demolition debris were evident within its upper fill (1054).

### 5. THE FINDS

The finds assemblage contains a collection of post-medieval pottery and clay pipe. Also recovered were small collections of faunal bone and shell, ceramic building material, slate, glass and metal artefacts. No finds were recovered that pre-date the foundation of the Napoleonic fort. The finds are summarised in Table 1 and described below.

Context	Date	Post-medieval pottery		Clay Pipe		Faunal bone		Glass		Slate		CBM		Metals		Shell	
		Qty	Wgt	Qty	Wgt	Qty	Wgt	Qty	Wgt	Qty	Wgt	Qty	Wgt	Qty	Wgt	Qty	Wgt
<b>1000</b>	Victorian or later	12	328			1	6							4	2902	10	182
<b>1004</b>	19th century	5	22											1	8		
<b>1012</b>	Late 18th/19th century	12	185			5	42	4	34					1	294	18	172
<b>1014</b>	Late 18th/19th century	24	300											1		1	2
<b>1015</b>	Post 1750	13	210					2	88								
<b>1020</b>	19th century	1	6	5	12							1	236			2	14
<b>1021</b>	19th century	3	40														
<b>1022</b>	1800-30	31	346	26	90	37	362	1	2					18	82	41	132
<b>1023</b>	19th century	14	56	2	2	1	20										
<b>1025</b>	19th century			1	2									3	358		
<b>1027</b>	Post 1700											1	36	1	2		
<b>1032</b>	1820's	5	126	1	4												
<b>1035</b>	Post 1877													1	6		
<b>1036</b>	19th century	34	664	2	2	3	70	2	82	1	284			4	8		
<b>1039</b>	19th century			1		44	212							2	36	5	140
<b>1040</b>	modern													1	4		
<b>Totals</b>		<b>154</b>	<b>2,283</b>	<b>38</b>	<b>112</b>	<b>91</b>	<b>712</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>206</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>284</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>272</b>	<b>37</b>	<b>3700</b>	<b>77</b>	<b>642</b>

Table 1. Finds by context. Pottery quantified by sherd count, all weights to nearest 2 grams

#### 5.1 The post-medieval pottery

This consists principally of 19th century vessels recovered from the demolition deposits overlying structures A and B and warrants little discussion other than to note that its date is consistent with documentary evidence for the abandonment and demolition of these buildings. Exceptions to this were seven vessels and five decorative clay pipe bowls (described below) from the fill of pit 1048. The vessels consist of a creamware meat dish and cup dating to the first quarter of the 19th century, four English industrial redware vessels



broadly dated 19th century and a transfer print cup dated 18th/19th century. This collection of vessels appears to be more consistent in date with the occupation of the fort.

## 5.2 The clay pipe

The clay pipe assemblage comprises six decorative pipe bowls and a number of un-diagnostic stem fragments. Five pipe bowls were recovered from pit fill 1022 and consisted of two ribbed bowls, two bearing the Prince of Wales feathers and 1 bearing the coat of arms of George III dated 1800-30. 1 decorated bowl & stem, by J. Pearce of Stonehouse Plymouth, c. 1823/24 was recovered from demolition layer 1032.

## 5.3 The metal finds

The metal find assemblage contains three coins, a Martini-Henry bullet casing dated 1871-1900 and a large iron weight, in addition to a number of other un-diagnostic copper alloy objects, a fragment of sheet lead and several iron nails, bolts and fragments. The coins comprise a 1964 Elizabeth II half penny recovered from the fill of culvert 1056, an 1877 Victorian half penny recovered from pit 1034 and an 1806 George III half penny recovered from demolition layer 1014. The bullet casing is typical of many found on Berry Head common held in the Trust collection.

## 5.4 The faunal bone and shell

An assemblage of faunal bone and shell including material recovered from samples has been analysed by Philip Armitage at Brixham Museum. Full results of this analysis will be presented in a forthcoming report on the wider investigations at Berry Head<sup>4</sup>. In summary, the small assemblage of faunal remains is dominated by sheep bones from a fill (1022) of rubbish pit 1048, but also includes bones from cattle, pig, hare, rabbit, brown rat and house mouse. A total of 275 fish bones, representing 17 species, were recovered from the sieved samples of the fill (1039) of rubbish pit 1041. Whiting, small gadid and herring are predominant in this assemblage, but there are smaller quantities of other fish such as John Dory, which was an expensive catch at that period.

# 6. DISCUSSION

## 6.1 Late 18th/early 19th century (figs 4-6)

The stratigraphic evidence indicates that construction of the two partially exposed buildings occurred during the spreading of the upper layers of quarry waste used to level the site of the fort, and that they therefore represent primary fort buildings dating to between 1795 and 1807.

Building A, which lies to the south and west of the guardhouse, was partially visible from the surface as a raised earthwork. Excavation has revealed its north east corner which survived as limestone footings, just below the turf. The internal wall suggests a rectangular building with its long axis aligned east-west. The design of the footings indicates that they supported a timber sill beam on which a wooden structure was erected, which would be consistent with the use of timber for the barrack blocks in Fort 3 (Pye and Slater 1990, 18) and for some walls of the kitchen in Fort 1. In both these buildings, as with building A, only the footings survive as earthworks. Layers of slate within the demolition debris associated with this building suggest a slate roof. The interior floors had been removed, but the remains of a cobbled pathway survives outside of the building along its north wall. The position of the

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<sup>4</sup> Passmore 2009



building corresponds well with that of a building represented on a plan of the fort dated 1811 (fig. 4), however its function remains ambiguous. A plan produced by T.S. Blenkin in 1931 (fig. 5) labelled the building as 'Hospital (old)', but this interpretation is not corroborated by evidence from elsewhere<sup>5</sup>.

Little can be said about the function of Building B, which, unlike Building A was not visible from the surface prior to excavation. It appears to be indicated on the 1st edition OS map of 1865 (fig. 6) as a tiny square to the south of the Guardhouse. An apparent void below its north wall may suggest that it links with the tunnel system. It is possible that it represents the remains of a privy building. The tunnels were not exposed during the excavation, although it was observed that they are buried within what appears to be the primary levelling and makeup of the site, suggesting that they are also an original feature of the fort layout<sup>6</sup>

## 6.2 Early/mid 19th century

Occupation and activity within the fort during this period is represented by the primary fill of pit 1048. This fill contained ash and coal from heating and cooking, faunal remains including marine mollusc shell, and pottery including several decorative clay pipe bowls dated 1800-1830.

## 6.3 Mid/late 19th century

The disused buildings have been demolished leaving layers of slate, mortar and brick debris around structures A and B. Building A is absent from the 1st edition OS map of 1865 and pottery finds recovered from overlying demolition layers 1012 and 1013 suggest a Victorian date for this event. The destruction of building B appears, from cartographic evidence, to have occurred sometime after 1865. Pottery finds recovered from demolition rubble within the building are dated broadly 19th century. Alterations to the Guardhouse building between 1865 and 1906<sup>7</sup> are likely to have included the addition of drainage culvert 1056, which appears to service the Guardhouse whilst truncating Structure A, presumably demolished by this stage. The addition of new drainage and removal of Structure B may also hint at the possible disuse of the tunnel system during this period.

The remaining cut features appear to post-date the original occupation of the fort and most contain fragments of building demolition debris. It is likely that they represent fences or other insubstantial structures of Victorian or later date.

## 7. CONCLUSION

The excavation has provided clear evidence for the initial localised preparation of the site of the fort in order to produce a flat, level area, prior to the construction of the fort buildings between 1795 and 1807. This was achieved by the importation and spreading of a considerable amount of broken limestone fragments - possibly quarry waste, to a depth in places in excess of 1.2m.

The foundations of two primary buildings - probably timber framed and slate roofed have been exposed along with a contemporary cobbled pathway. The stone elements of these buildings appear in places to survive to their original height where not truncated by later services, and feature slate damp coursing and recesses to accommodate a timber

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<sup>5</sup> Pye and Slater 1990, 5

<sup>6</sup> Armitage and Masterson 2009

<sup>7</sup> Pye and Slater 1990, 18

superstructure. Of the two buildings, one (building B) was unknown from previous surveys of the fort, while the other (building A) corroborates the visible earthwork evidence and confirms the presence of buried structures identified in the 1990 assessment<sup>8</sup>.

The purpose of both buildings remains uncertain. However, it seems possible that small building B is a previously unrecognised privy, servicing the guard house and barrack blocks which lack any obvious sanitation<sup>9</sup>. It has been suggested that building A was a hospital and while the excavation found nothing to corroborate this, there was also no evidence to the contrary. Their demolition appears to have occurred during the mid/late 19th century. Building A is absent from the 1865 1st edition OS map and ceramic evidence recovered from rubble within and around building B suggests that its demolition followed shortly after. The area was subsequently converted into a garden associated with the adjacent guardhouse.

## 8. PROJECT ARCHIVE AND 'OASIS' REPORT

A fully integrated project archive has been compiled and will be deposited at Brixham Museum, under museum accession number A6837.

A report of the watching brief (including a pdf version of this document) has been submitted to the on-line database OASIS (On-line AccesS to the Index of archaeological investigationS), under OASIS ID: exeterar1-62828.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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<sup>8</sup> Pye and Slater 1990, fig. 12

<sup>9</sup> Armitage and Masterson 2009

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Fig. 1 location of site.

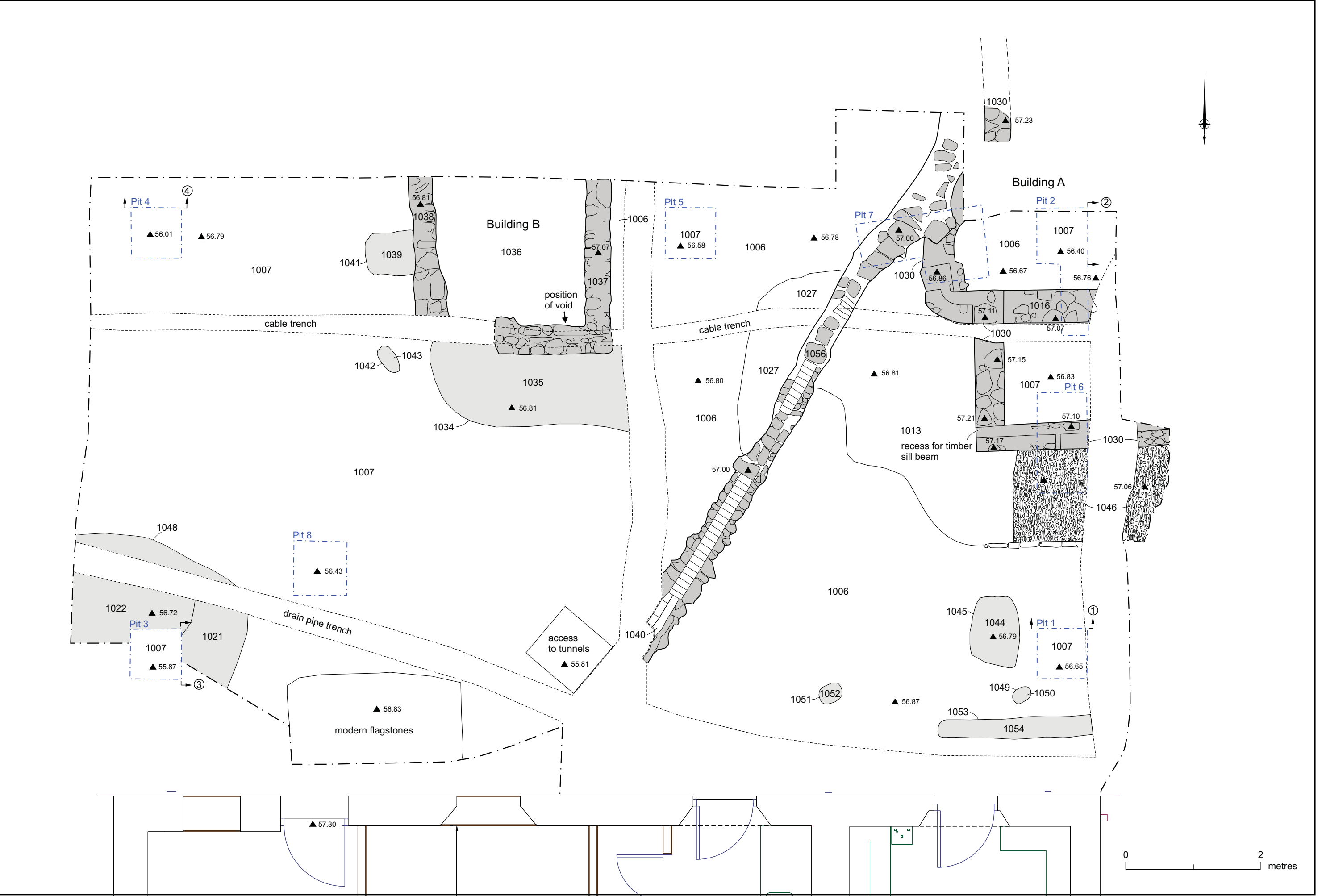


Fig. 2 Plan of site indicating levels of surviving archaeological features and locations of test pits. Scale 1:50 @ A3.

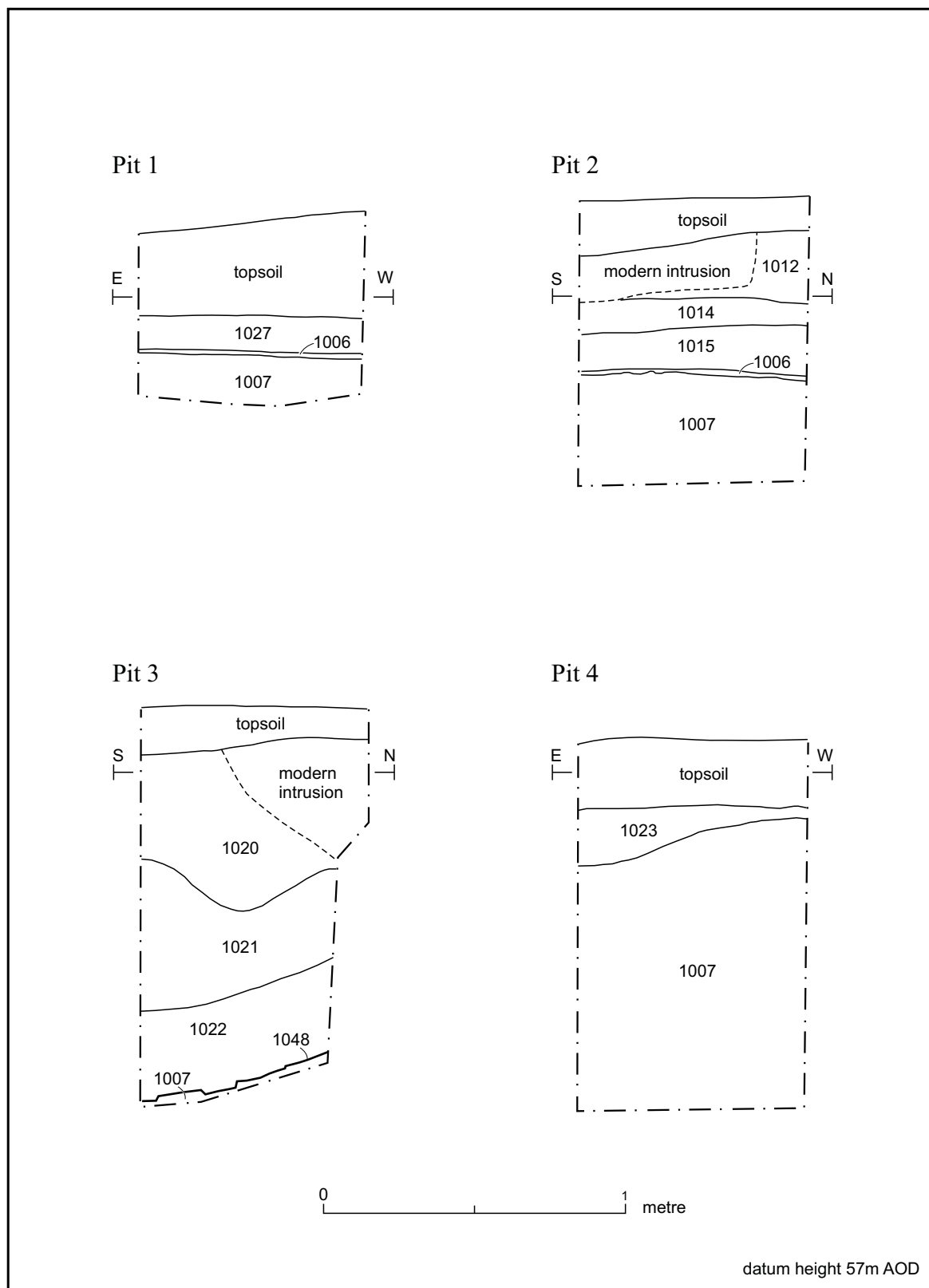


Fig. 3 Pits 1-4: sections. Scale 1:20 @ A4.



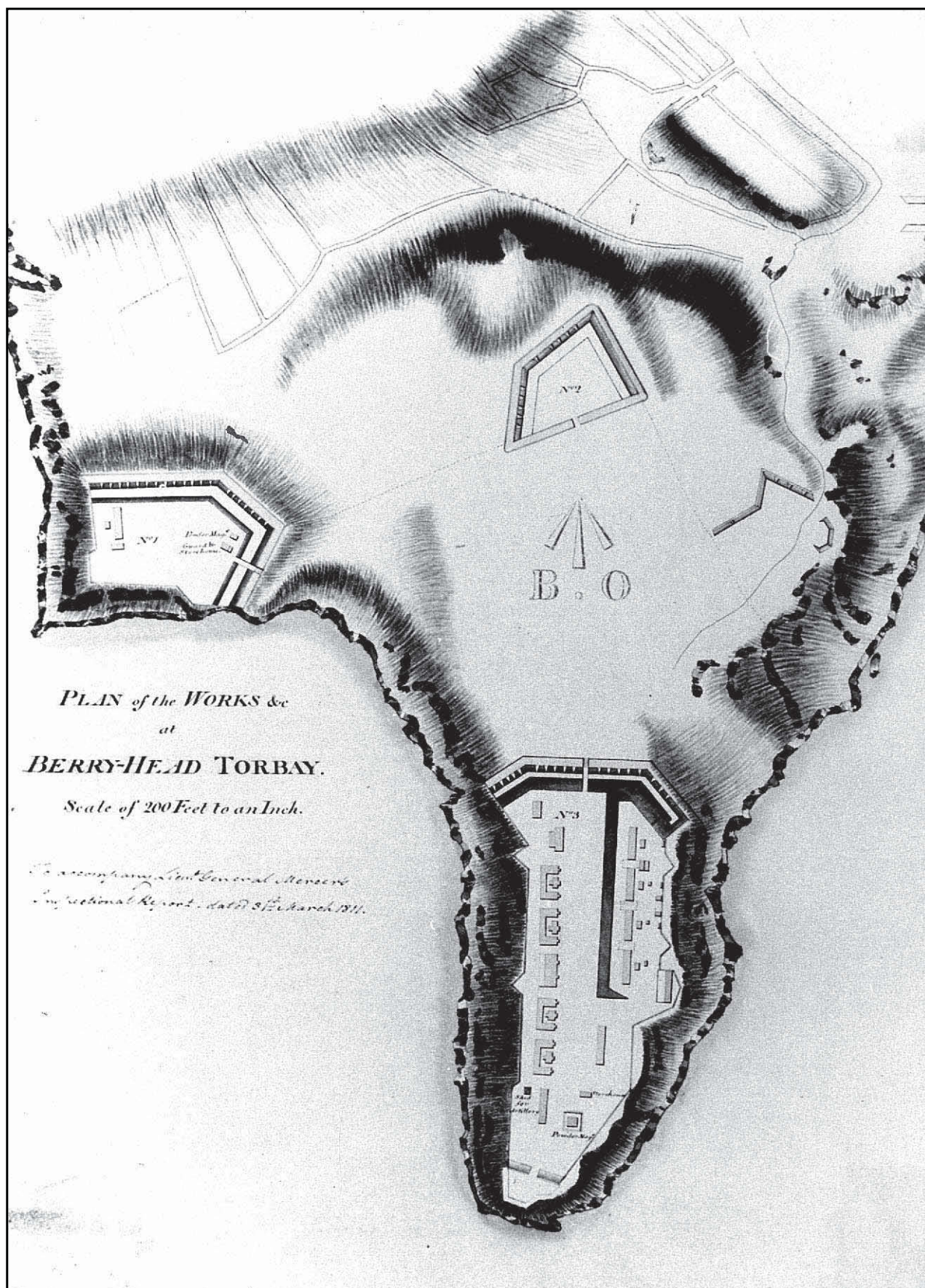
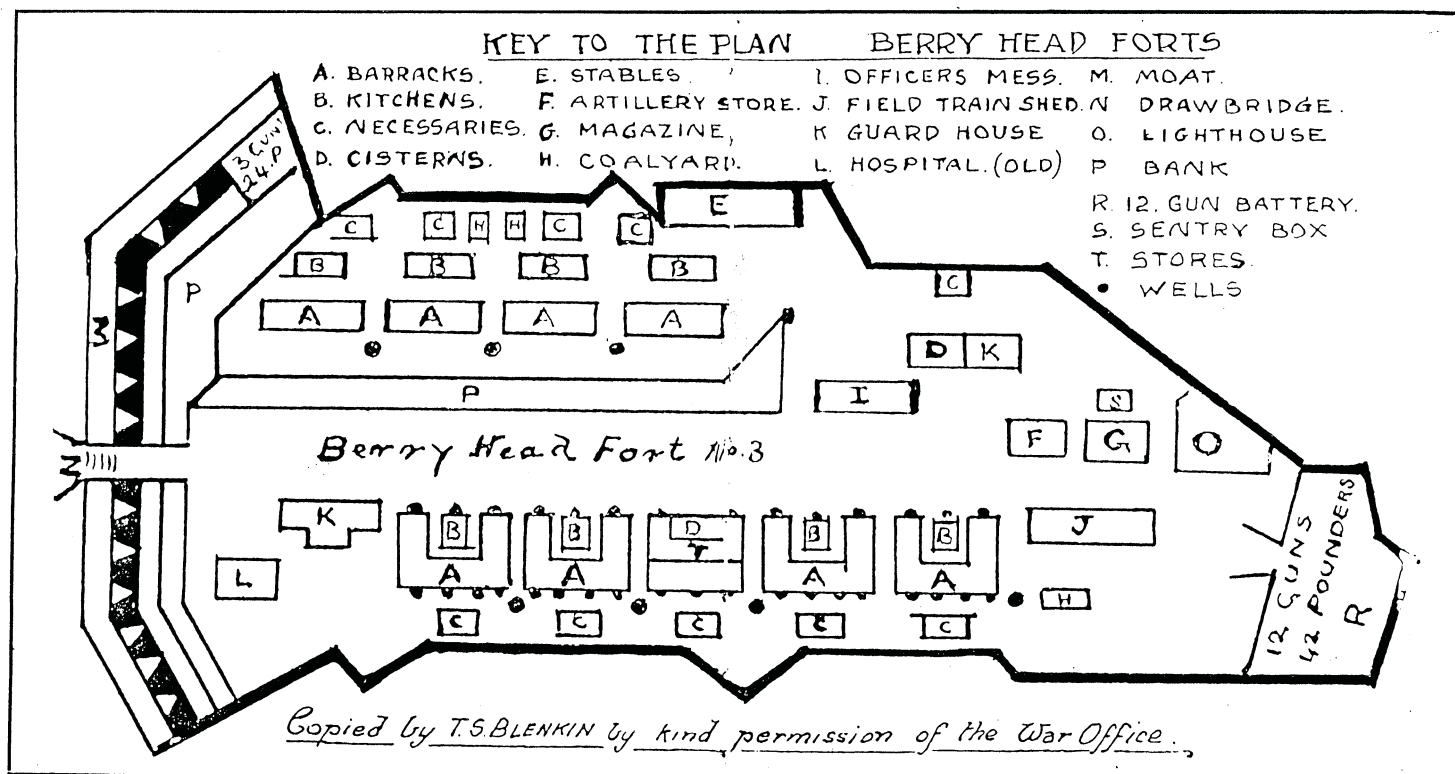


Fig. 4 Plan accompanying Lieut. General Mercer's report of 1811 (PRO ref: MPH 233/11).





## **“HAWTHORNS”**

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Bed and Breakfast. :- Full Board. :- Bay View.  
Bathing Pool. First Class Service.

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**G. COOKSLEY & SON,**  
**Builders and Contractors,**  
**29, NEW RD.,**  
**BRIXHAM.**

Builders of Berry Head Cafe,  
Brixham.

Estimates  
Free.

Fig. 5 T.S. Blenkin's 1931 plan of Fort 3 (Source Blenkin 1931, p 6-7).

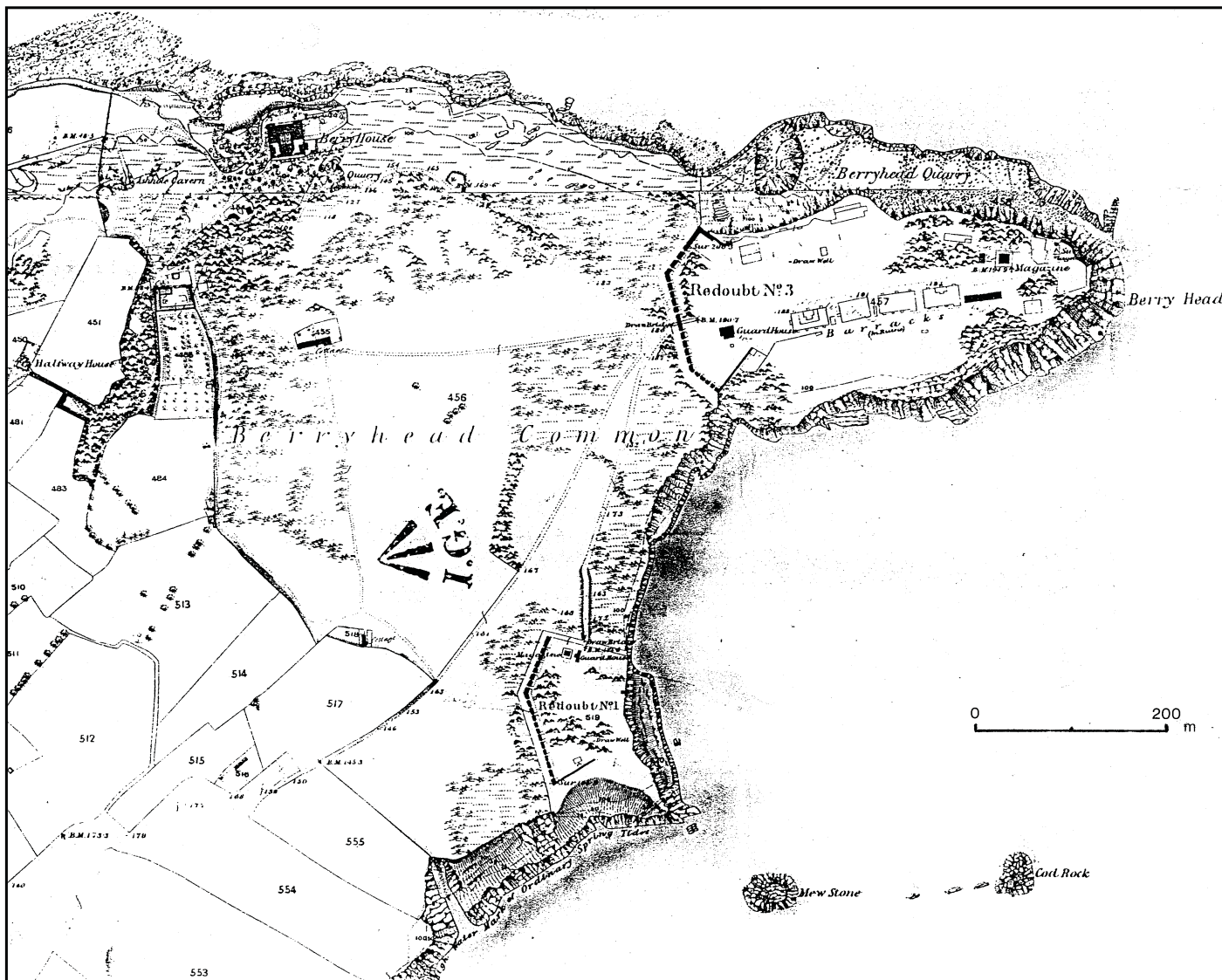


Fig. 6 War Office copy of the 1st edition (1865) OS 1:2500 map (PRO ref: WO78/589).





Pl. 1 General view of site. Looking north-west.



Pl. 2 Overview of south-west corner of site showing buildings A (right) B (left). Looking south.



Pl. 3 Detail of building A. Looking east.



Pl. 4 Detail of building B. Looking north.