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FORT HOUSE, OLD HARTLEY  
NORTHUMBERLAND,  
~ ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVALUATION ~

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JULY 2019



Prepared for: <i>Mr Ed Bartlett</i>	By: <i>The Archaeological Practice Ltd.</i>
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# FORT HOUSE, OLD HARTLEY, NORTHUMBERLAND

## REPORT ON AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL Evaluation

Prepared by:

*The Archaeological Practice Ltd.*



**Frontispiece:** Trench 7, looking south towards the water tower

*Grid Reference:* NZ 34184 75902  
*Date of fieldwork:* July 2019  
*Oasis Number:* thearcha2-373475

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## SUMMARY

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*This document reports on a process of archaeological evaluation conducted in July 2019, in advance of proposed development works at Fort House, Old Hartley, Northumberland. The Fort House site contains the remains of structures associated with one of two 'Tyne turrets', one of which, Robert's Battery, was constructed 300 m north of the current Fort House site. The fort which served as the command and support facility for the battery was largely dismantled in 1926, although its Officers' Quarters, boundary walls and several other structures survived this process and subsequent conversion to residential use, including a defensible Latrine block at the northwest corner, a Water Tower and Gaol just inside the southwest corner and a Cool Store on the north side of the current tennis courts. All visible traces of the barrack huts which occupied the greater part of the early 20th century fort interior, have been removed, but their remains, along with other ancillary features, were expected to survive below ground.*

*Following Archaeological Assessment of the site in April 2019, Northumberland County Council Conservation Team stipulated that an archaeological evaluation should be undertaken on the site to determine the character, depth and state of survival of any archaeological remains found to exist on the site prior to the determination of planning consent.*

*The evaluation took the form of 8 trenches located within those areas of the proposed development which lay over the extrapolated sites of the WWI period structures.*

*This evaluation has shown that remains of the original fort buildings survive in varying degrees across the site. Some of these structures, as seen in Trenches 2, 3, and 8, were apparently constructed around concrete pillars set within foundation cuts reaching to the underlying natural bedrock. All other trace of these buildings, other than a small amount of rubble and some lino tiles which may have covered to original floors, has been removed. Other structures on the site however, as seen within Trenches 6 and 7, survive as concrete wall founds and floor levels with recognisable features such as drains and partitions. Trench 1 contained a north-south running concrete surface between two former buildings, and Trenches 4 and 5 contained no surviving archaeological features.*

*It is concluded that most of the structures known to have existed on the site survive poorly, with only foundation rafts and posts surviving at shallow depths. Thus, whilst rare, the relatively poor state of survival somewhat reduces the overall importance of the structures. The variety of remains uncovered is a matter of some interest, however, suggesting that the range of structures on the site may have been greater than thought, or that different solutions were found to construct buildings in different ground conditions.*

*With respect to the likely impact of the proposed development upon the remains uncovered by evaluation trenching, given their shallow depth it is likely that most will be destroyed or significantly damaged.*

*Therefore, it is recommended, with respect to the currently proposed programme of works, that, where the structures can not be preserved by means of engineering solutions, they should be preserved by record.*

## 1. PURPOSE OF EVALUATION

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1.1 This document reports on a process of archaeological evaluation conducted in July 2019, to evaluate the potential impact of proposed development works within the Fort House, site at Old Hartley, south-east Northumberland (*centred on grid reference NZ 34184 75902 (Illus. 01-04)*).

1.2 The proposed development comprises a northern extension to Fort House, the construction of a leisure block and a garage, the creation of a formal garden and landscape planting. Prior to redevelopment, two modern wooden sheds - built in a similar style to the original barrack blocks - will be removed.

1.3 In line with paragraph 189 of the NPPF, the assistant county archaeologist has assessed the site (NCC Planning ref. 18/00955/PREAPP; 17th December 2018 *Internal alterations, demolition and extension to dwelling, demolition of 2no garage blocks, erection dwelling and guest block and repairs to additional listed structures. Fort House Old Hartley Whitley Bay NE26 4RL*) and required, initially, a desk-based assessment, one of the results of which was to determine the positions of trial trenches for the current Evaluation. These, in turn, will provide evidence of the extent, age and significance of the archaeological resource within the application site and, thus, the potential archaeological impact of the proposed development. The results of the combined archaeological investigation will be submitted in support of the planning application in order to inform decision-making on the archaeological impact of the proposed development.

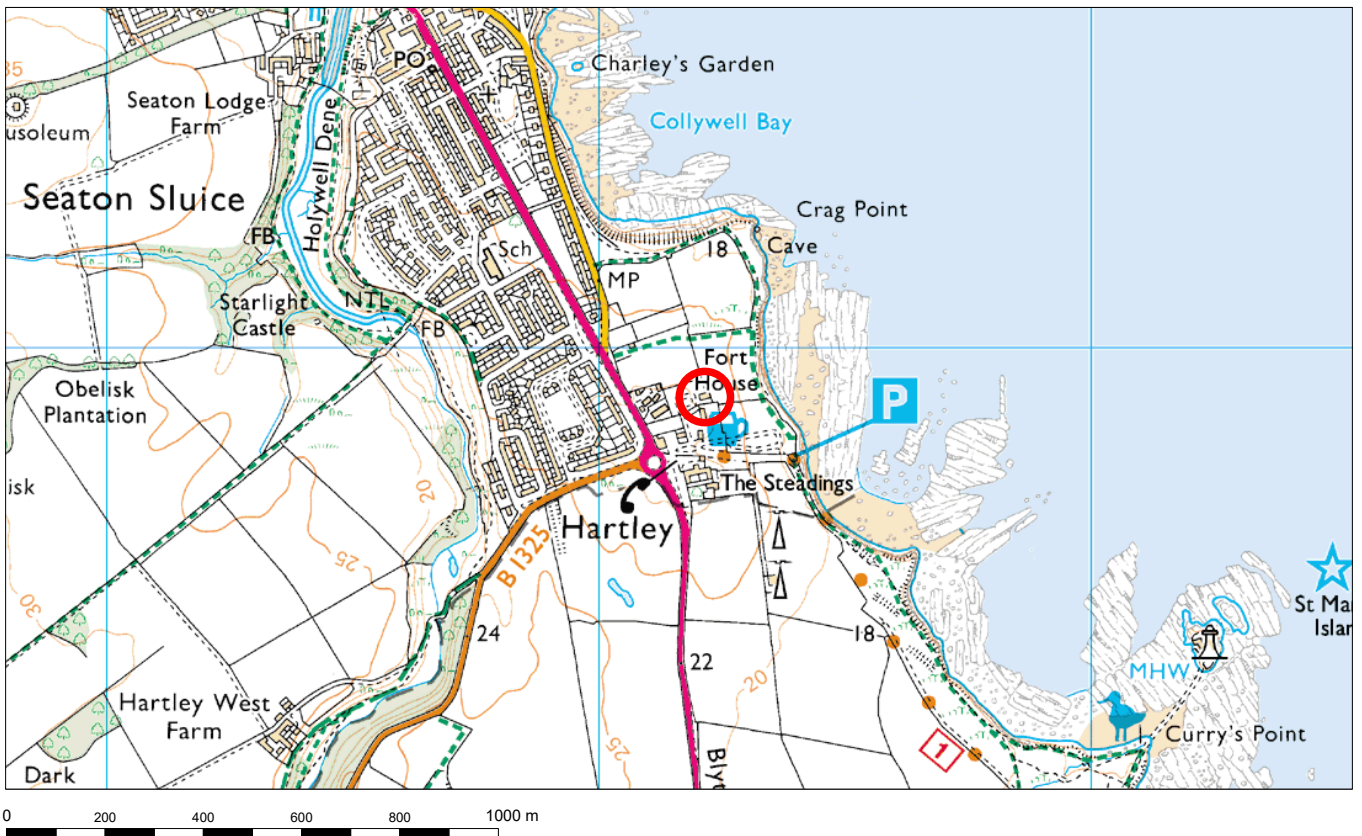
1.4 The Archaeological Assessment report collated evidence from a wide range of sources, including historic maps, secondary historical works, excavation reports and the Northumberland Heritage Environment Record (HER). A site visit was also undertaken. This resulted in the identification of a total of 35 sites and monuments within or in the vicinity of the proposed development site which provide contextual information regarding the archaeological and historical development of the area.

1.5 It was concluded that, while this prominent coastal site is likely to have experienced land-use and, potentially, settlement from as early as the resettlement of northern Britain around 8,000 B.C., no specific evidence for such activities is available until early mapping of the area confirms that it formed part of the enclosed fields of Hartley in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Part of the south boundary wall of the site probably dates to this period. Subsequently, the site seems to have remained in use as farmland until developed as one of two 'Tyne turrets', an identical pair of batteries built in 1917 to protect Tyneside from naval bombardment, one of which, Robert's Battery, was constructed 300 m north of the current Fort House site. The Battery never saw active service, and the fort which served as the command and support facility for the battery was largely dismantled in 1926, although its Officers' Quarters, boundary walls and several other structures survived this process and subsequent conversion to residential use, including a defensible Latrine block at the northwest corner, a Water Tower and Gaol just inside the southwest corner and a Cool Store on the north side of the current tennis courts. All visible traces of the barrack huts which occupied the greater part of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century fort interior, have been removed, but their remains, along with other ancillary features, may survive below ground.





*Illus. 01: The location of Seaton Sluice (circled in red) near Blyth, in the northeast of England.*



*Illus. 02: The location of Fort House (circled in red) in Hartley, Seaton Sluice.*

1.6 Fort House itself, along with its perimeter walls and a contemporary water tower, are protected as Grade II\* Listed Buildings and considered of national significance as the best-preserved example of a First World War facility surviving on the north-east coast.

1.7 In view of these findings, Northumberland County Council Conservation Team stipulated that an archaeological evaluation of the site should be undertaken to determine their character and state of survival, and to allow formulation of an appropriate mitigation strategy for those parts of the site subject to development work.

1.8 The archaeological assessment carried out by The Archaeological Practice accessed a contemporary map of the former camp, produced by the military prior to its construction. This map was aligned with the modern Ordnance Survey mapping and used to locate the above trenches (see *Illus. 05*).

1.9 The evaluation took the form of eight 1.00 m wide Trenches (*Illus. 04*). Trench 1 measured 6.10 m long, and ran north-south between the projected location of two WWI structures. To the immediate east of this, Trench 3 measured 1.00 m by 1.00 m and was positioned over the western edge of a former shower block. Trench 2 was a short distance to the east of this, measured 4.40 m long, and ran north-south over the central portion of the same former shower block.

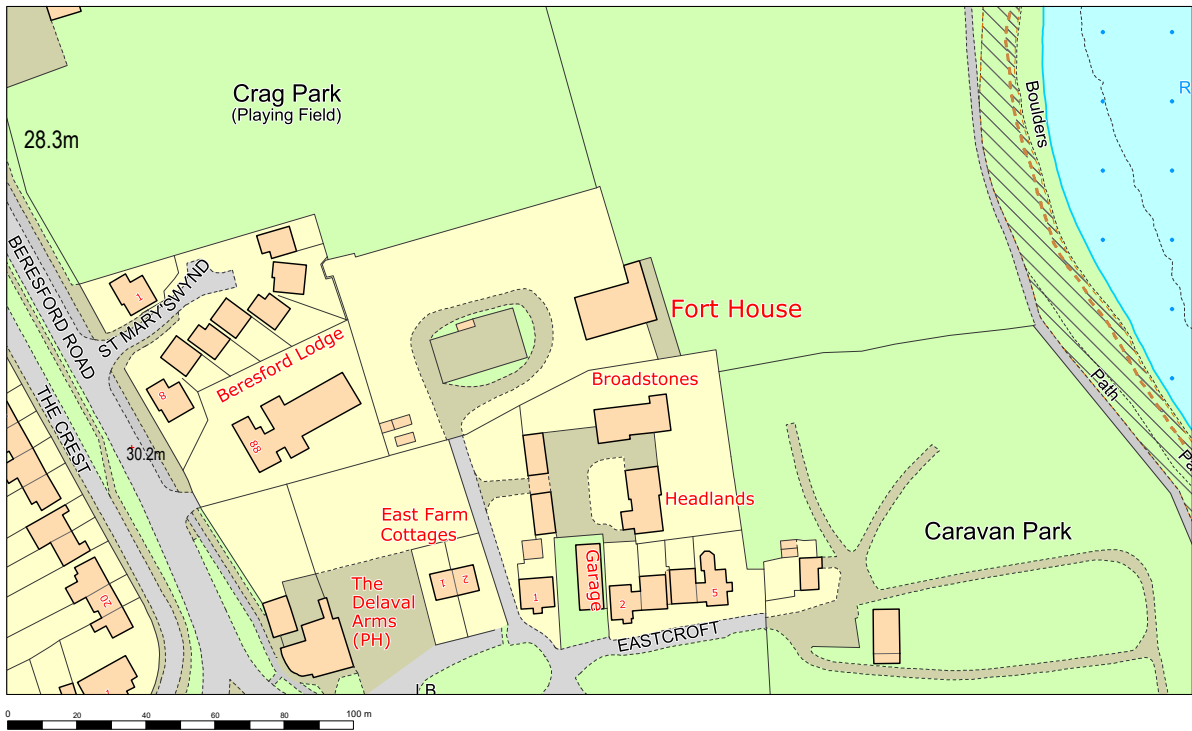
1.10 To the west of these, within the north central part of the site, Trenches 4 (5.8 m long) and 5 (4.60 m long), ran north-south over the projected position of a further two blocks, and Trench 6 (5.10 m long) to the north of Trench 5 was positioned north-south over a block through to have contained a boiler, shower drying rooms, and baths.

1.11 Trench 7 (6.40 m long) was located within the southwestern part of the site, over the location of a block containing a clerk's office. Trench 8 was a 5.00 m long, east-west orientated trench positioned over the eastern edge of a central block of buildings whose location is now largely covered by a modern tennis court.

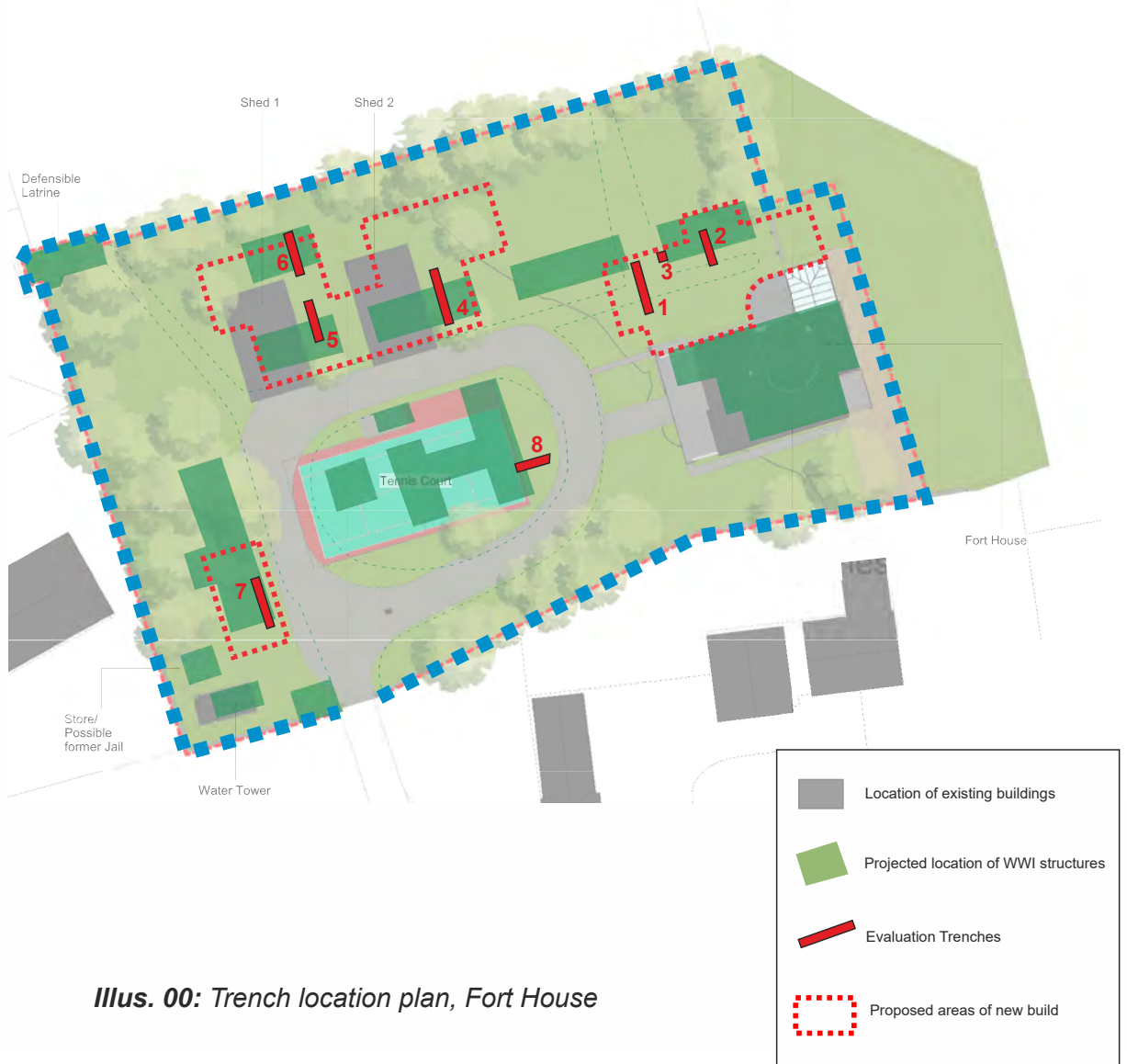


*Illus. 06:  
View of the site  
from the south-  
west during  
excavations*



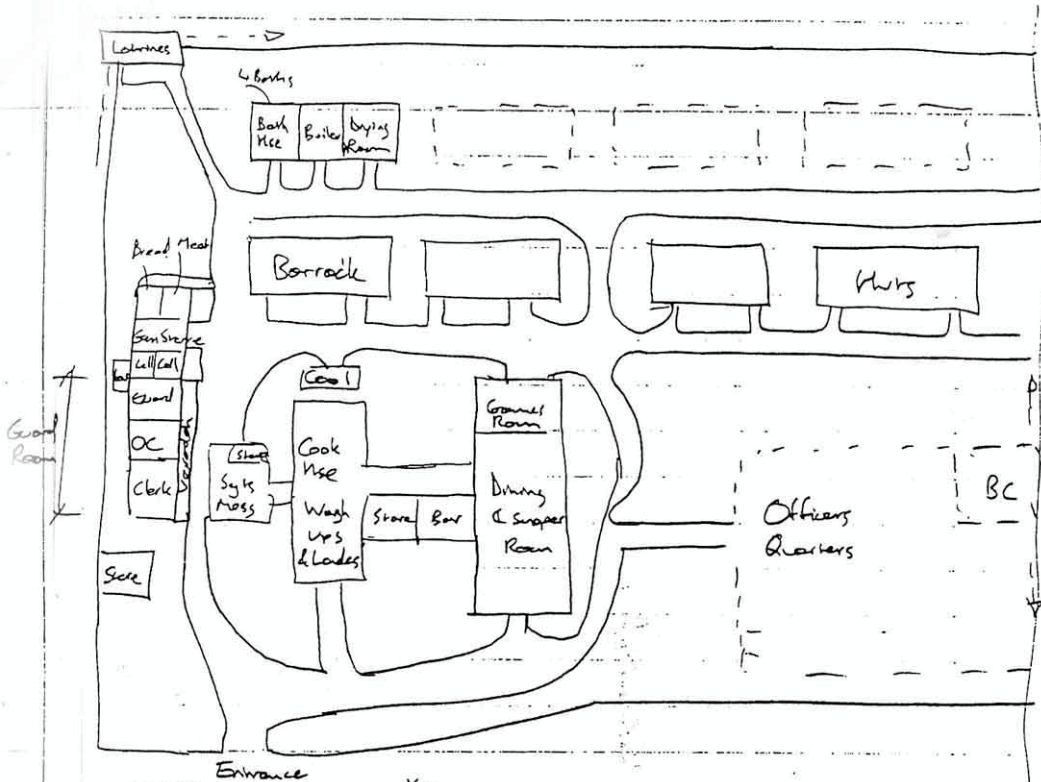


**Illus. 03:** A detailed location plan of Fort Hough in the northeast of Old Hartley, Seaton Sluice.

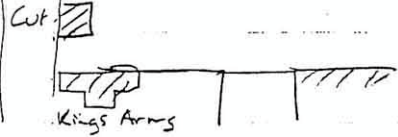


**Illus. 00:** Trench location plan, Fort Hough

26 March 1917 Hottley Plotting Layouts



54,203 14/1/18 Type Defences Section since Horizontal Receiving PF cell (North) for Roberts Bay Hottley (- as per Kildonan - DUC) Not as built ?



All negatives. Windows possible ?

- 54,208, 21/1/18 signal HV Kant South Receiving for Roberts Bay Hottley - we have a copy
- 54,131 - Proposed Officers Quarters BLS Range Funder Post - niche as copy
- 54,132 - BLS RF post - we have a copy
- 54,224 - Dotted ? niches to cut 54,263 NO - Actually for Robt Kitchener
- 54,263 - Top Plan - we have copy

Illus. 05: Layout of the site as built, recorded in officer's notes (Public Record Office)

## 2. ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVALUATION

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2.1 The aims of the evaluation were to identify and determine the character of any remains uncovered during groundworks on the site, and to make an appropriate record of such finds by photographic and other means.

2.2 The trenches were initially excavated and cleaned by hand, with a small mechanical excavator using a toothless ditching bucket on hand for deeper areas of overburden and backfilling. All such excavations were undertaken by suitably trained and experienced archaeologists from The Archaeological Practice Ltd. The evaluation took place between Wednesday 10<sup>th</sup> and Tuesday 16<sup>th</sup> July 2019.



*Illus. 07: Aerial view of the site during excavations in July, 2019*



### 3. RESULTS

#### 4.1 Location and Dimensions (see *Illus. 04-29*)

The evaluation took the form of eight 1.00 m wide Trenches (*Illus. 03*). Trench 1 measured 6.10 m long and ran north-south between the projected location of two WWI structures. To the immediate east of this, Trench 3 measured 1.00 m by 1.00 m and was positioned over the western edge of a former shower block. Trench 2 was a short distance to the east of this, measured 4.40 m long, and ran north-south over the central portion of the same former shower block.

To the west of these, within the north central part of the site, Trenches 4 (5.8m long) and 5 (4.60 m long), ran north-south over the projected position of a further two blocks, and Trench 6 (5.10 m long) to the north of Trench 5 was positioned north-south over a block through to have contained a boiler, shower drying rooms, and baths.

Trench 7 (6.40 m long) was located within the southwestern part of the site, over the location of a guard block. Trench 8 was a 5.00 m long, east-west orientated trench positioned over the eastern edge of a central block of buildings whose location is now largely covered by a modern tennis court.



*Illus. 08*: Aerial view of Trenches 1-3

#### 4.2 Trench 1 (*Illus. 04, 09-13*)

Trench 1 was a 6.10 m long, north-south trench located in the eastern part of the site, to the north of Fort House itself, positioned to investigate the site of a trackway between two blocks within the original fort compound. Immediately beneath the modern turf and topsoil [100] lay the weathered upper surface of the original trackway [101]. The width of this concrete path continued beyond both the eastern and western edges of excavation, although there was a marked camber on the surface, with a higher central line (*Illus. 05*). Towards the southern end of the trench, the concrete surface changed slightly in character, being slightly more fragmentary [102] and set upon a sandstone pebble and rubble sub-base [103]. This





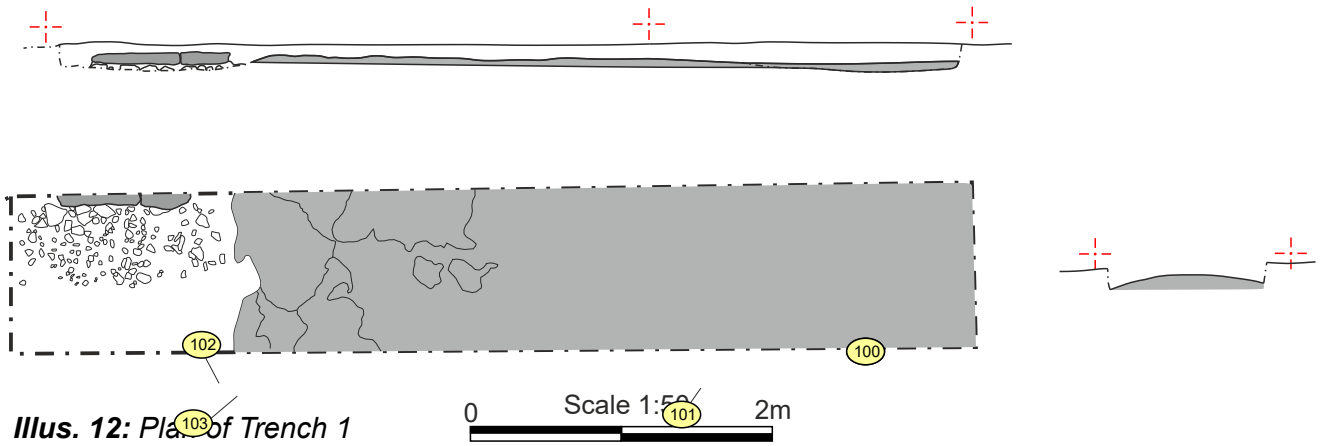
*Illus. 09: Trench 1, general shot looking southeast*



*Illus. 10: Trench 1, looking north*



*Illus. 11: Southern end of Trench 1, showing area to south of path*



**Illus. 12:** Plan of Trench 1



**Illus. 13:** Trench location plan showing Trench 1 over the line of the original path (green dashes).

corresponded with the original plan, where this trench can be seen to overly the southern edge of the path at this point.

#### Context List

- [100] Turf and topsoil
- [101] Concrete track
- [102] Concrete surface to south of track
- [103] Bedding layer for [102]

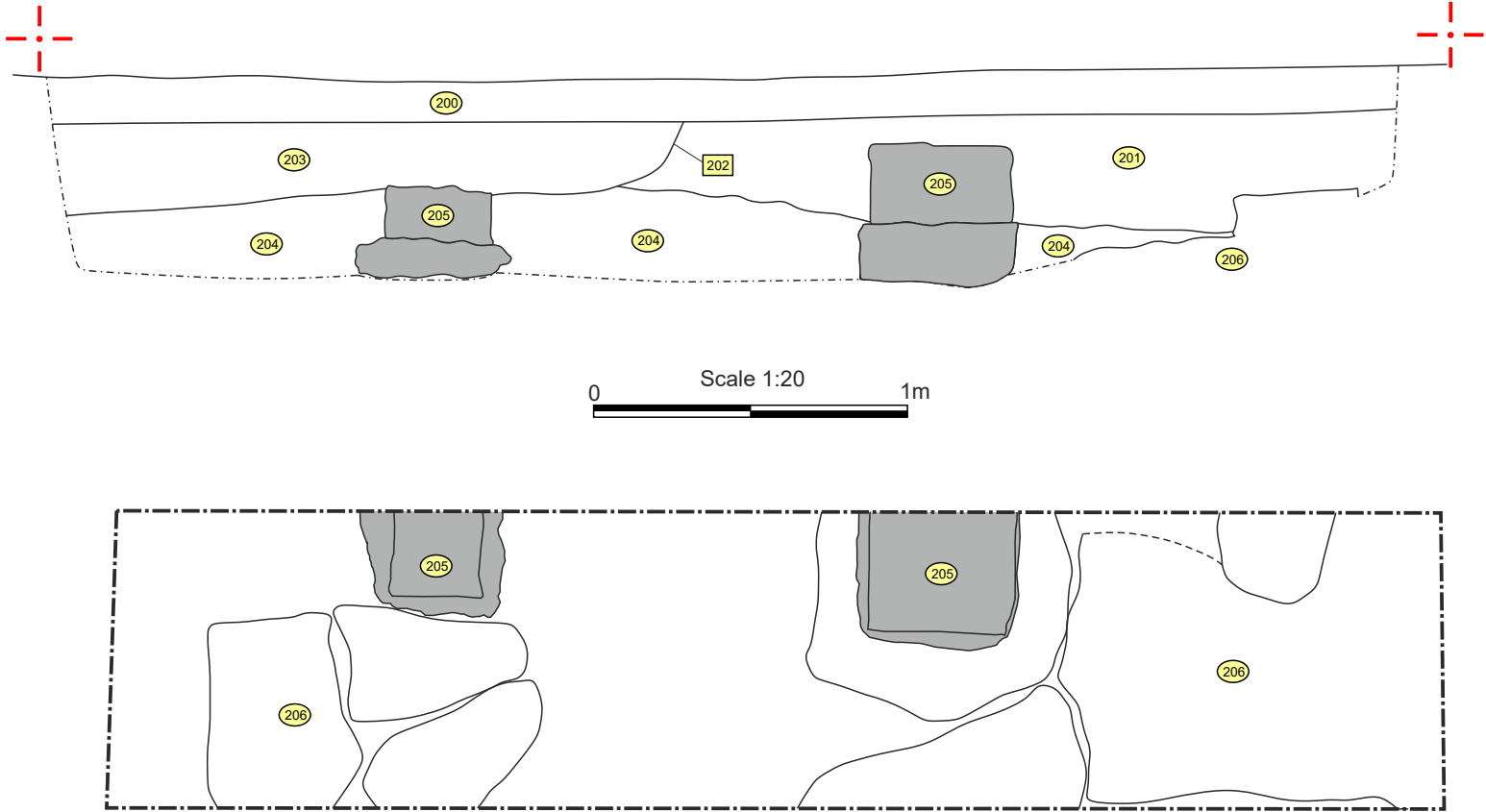
#### 4.3 Trenches 2 & 3 (*Illus. 04, 14-20*)

Trenches 3 (1.00 m x 1.00 m) and 2 (4.10 m long) were located to the east of Trench 1, over the site of a structure described as 'showers' on the officer's plan of the site (*Illus. 05*). Trench 3 was located across the central part of the western wall, whereas Trench 2 ran north-south across the south-central part of the building. Neither trench contained structural remains other than concrete foundation posts for the former building. Trench 3 contained a single squared concrete post setting [302] 0.50 m beneath the current ground surface. The concrete was set upon the underlying sandstone bedrock [303] (depth 0.95m beneath ground level) and sealed by a layer of redeposited mid-brown loam [301] and the modern turf and topsoil [300]. The block continued beneath the northern and eastern edges of the trench, with 0.35m x 0.20 m visible within the trench.

Beneath the 0.30 m thick turf and topsoil [200] of Trench 2, a short distance to the east of Trench 3, was a cut [202] containing a clean yellow-brown clay [203] apparently put down as a levelling deposit. This cut started mid-way along the trench and continued beyond the northern edge of excavation, beginning as 0.20 m deep and gradually deepening to the north (0.30 m deep at north end of trench). This was cut through a 0.30 m thick layer of redeposited mid-brown loam containing fragments of brick, modern clothes pegs, and occasional pieces of sandstone.

Beneath these layers was the demolished remains of the former shower block, again represented only by two concrete foundation posts [205] surrounded by demolition material. The posts had been set upon the underlying striated natural sandstone bedrock [206], which lay at a depth of 0.70 m below the modern ground surface. The northernmost post was on the same alignment as that within Trench 3, and was also of similar size, measuring 0.30 m (12") square. The post survived to a height of 0.12m, and was set upon a 0.46m wide, 0.20 m deep cobble and pebble foundation. The second post lay 1.20 m south of this and measured 0.43m (17") square. This post survived to a height of 0.29m and was set upon a 0.20 m deep cobble and pebble foundation of approximately the same 0.43m width as the post. At the base of the post, a small horizontal skirt may have represented the original ground level of the shower block (0.50 m below modern ground level).

Surrounding these posts, and underlying the above-mentioned clay and soil levels, was a 0.30 m deep mixed deposit of burn coal, coal dust, ash, and clinker [204]. This seems to have been deposited during the demolition and levelling of the former shower block. Contained within the upper part of this layer were a number of 0.30 m (12") square red lino tiles. These may have been part of the original flooring of the shower block, thrown back in during the demolition of the building.



*Illus. 14: Plan (below) and E-facing section (above) of Trench 2*





*Illus. 15: Vertical aerial view of Trench 2.*

### Contexts

- [200] Trench 2. Turf and topsoil
- [201] Trench 2. Redeposited soil layer
- [202] Trench 2. Cut for clay levelling
- [203] Trench 2. Clay levelling deposit
- [204] Trench 2. Mixed, burnt demolition levelling
- [205] Trench 2. Concrete posts
- [206] Trench 2. Natural sandstone bedrock
- [300] Trench 3. Turf and topsoil
- [301] Trench 3. Redeposited soil layer
- [302] Trench 3. Squared concrete post
- [303] Trench 3. Natural sandstone bedrock.

### 4.4 Trenches 4 and 5 (*Illus. 04, 21-22*)

These trenches (5.80 m and 4.60 m long respectively) were positioned over the sites of two barrack buildings in the north central part of the site. Neither of these trenches recovered any surviving evidence of the original structures, both containing only turf and topsoil overlying a redeposited soil level, which in turn lay over the natural sandstone bedrock (at approximately 0.50 m below modern ground level in each trench). It would appear from this that all remains of the former barrack blocks in this area have been removed.

### Context List

- [400] Trench 4. Turf and topsoil
- [401] Trench 4. Redeposited soil accumulation
- [402] Trench 4. Natural sandstone
- [500] Trench 5. Turf and topsoil
- [501] Trench 5. Redeposited soil accumulation
- [502] Trench 5. Natural sandstone

### 4.5 Trench 6 (*Illus. 04, 23-29*)





**Illus. 16:** Trench 2, showing lino tiles recorded during excavation

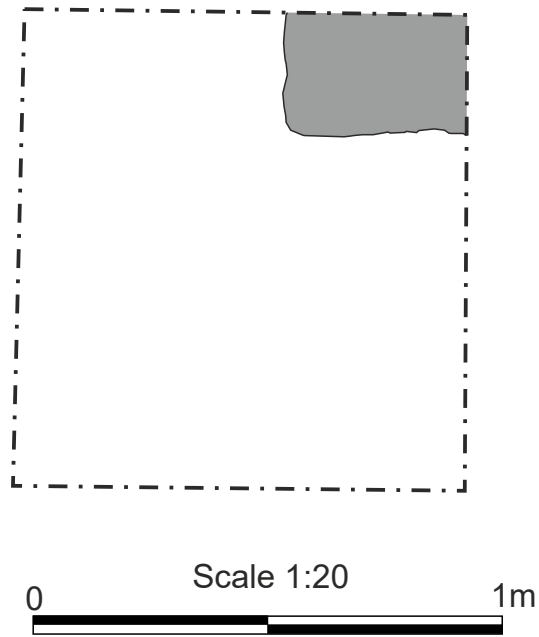


**Illus. 17:** Trench 2, looking north



**Illus. 18:** Pillar bases for buildings in Trench 2





***Illus. 19: Plan of Trench 3***



***Illus. 20: Trench 3, looking northeast***

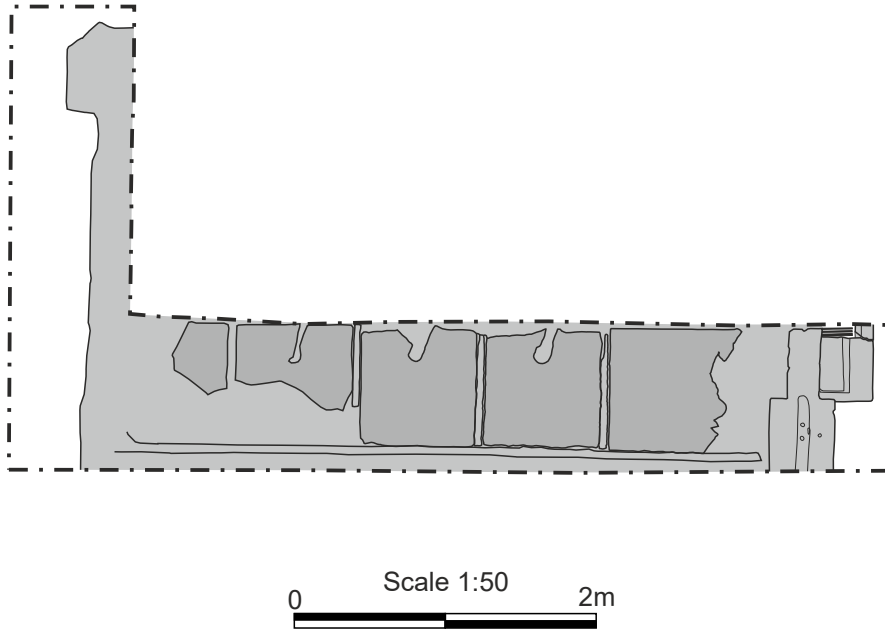


***Illus. 21: Trench 4, looking south***



***Illus. 22: Trench 5, looking south***





***Illus. 23: Plan of Trench 6***

This 5.10 m long trench was situated to the immediate north of Trench 5 over a building described on the officer's plan as containing the bath/boiler/drying rooms. The concrete floor surface [601] of this structure lay immediately beneath the modern turf and topsoil [600] and was visible as a slightly raised earthwork beneath the surrounding grass. The trench appears to have been sited across the east-central part of the structure, which can be interpreted as the drying room. A series of partitioned cubicles were visible within the concrete floor surface, separated by east-west orientated drains. Each cubicle also had an off-centre larger 'plug hole' which presumably fed into this drainage system. These are interpreted as individual cubicles designed to hold wet clothing, which would then drip dry in the warm air provided by the adjacent boiler room.

Both the northern and southern edges of the building were uncovered and consisted of a concrete wall base line. A metal drain was set against the external face of the southern wall, which would have collected rain runoff from the building roof.



*Illus. 24: Vertical aerial view of Trench 6.*

#### **Context List**

- [600] Trench 6. Turf and topsoil
- [601] Trench 6. Concrete floor level of building

#### **4.6 Trench 7 (Illus. 04, 30-33)**

This 7.00 m long trench was situated within the south-eastern part of the site over the southern part of a building described on the Officer's Plan as a Guard Room. As with Trench 6, the concrete floor surface [701] for this building lay directly beneath the modern turf and topsoil levels [700]. A north-south running wall footing along the eastern edge of the trench, with an east-west return across the southern part of the trench marked the edge of the building. Within that, the trench lay over what was annotated as 'clerk' on the Officer Plan, the southern of several subdivisions within the building – a relatively featureless, somewhat weathered concrete floor being all that remained of this room. To the immediate south of the building, a path ran east-west to a block marked as 'stores' on the Officer Plan and sometimes now known as 'the gaol'. Several unfired and unloaded bullets (i.e. without the casing or





*Illus. 25: Trench 6, looking north*



*Illus. 26: Trench 6, looking northeast*





*Illus. 27: Trench 6, southern end showing building wall and drain*

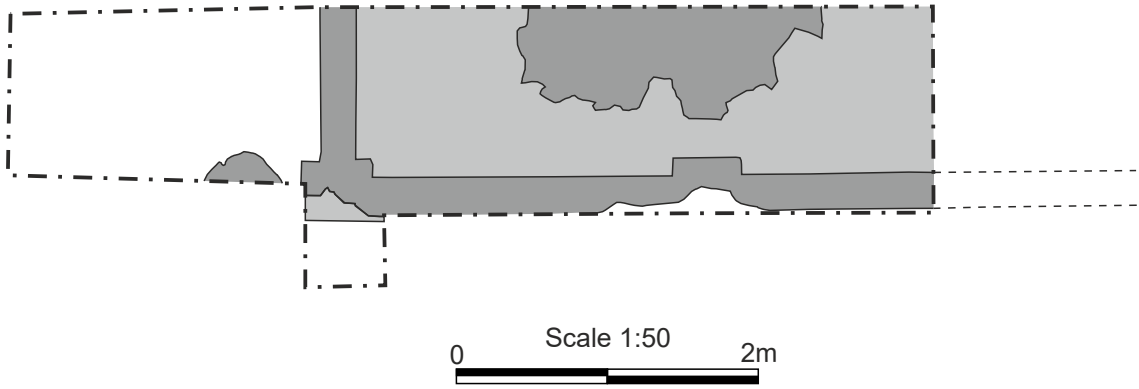


*Illus. 28: Trench 6, showing drainage channels in drain*



*Illus. 29: Northern end of Trench 6 showing building wall foundations*





***Illus. 30: Plan of Trench 7***

powder associated with a loaded shell) lay on this surface, raising the possibility that the store originally held ammunition, or munition components, for the base. Certainly the 0.30 m (12") thick walls complete with loopholes would imply a secure, defensible structure.



*Illus. 31: Vertical aerial view of Trench 7.*

#### **Context List**

- [700] Trench 7. Turf and topsoil
- [701] Trench 7. Concrete floor level of building

#### **4.7 Trench 8 (Illus. 04, 34-35)**

This 5.00 m long, east-west orientated trench was located against the eastern edge of the modern tennis court within the central portion of the site. This was formerly the site of a cluster of buildings within the original fort, and the trench was situated up against the eastern outer wall of the 'Dining and Supper Room'. The purpose of this trench was to investigate the depth, if any, of surviving archaeological levels beneath the tarmac of the tennis court.

Directly beneath the eastern edge of the tennis court lay a 0.80 m high vertical concrete wall. Only the eastern face of this wall was visible, with a narrow step out some 0.17m below current ground level. At the point where this wall continued beyond the southern edge of excavation, the corner of a pillar or buttressing post was visible, projecting 0.10 m out from the line of the wall. A step in this pillar some 0.64m below the current ground level, may represent the original ground level associated with the building.

This concrete wall most likely represents the eastern edge of the former fort building. The fact that this building, if this is so, has not been reduced to foundation levels as is commonly the case elsewhere on the site, indicates that there may be a greater amount of surviving material preserved within this central area.

A concrete post setting a short distance to the east of this was cut from the modern ground level, and most likely relates to a former fence around the tennis court visible in earlier satellite imagery.

#### **Context List**

- [800] Trench 8. Turf and topsoil
- [801] Trench 8. Concrete wall
- [802] Trench 8. Concrete post setting



*Illus. 32 Trench 7, looking south*



*Illus. 33: Trench 7, showing path at southern end*





*Illus. 34: Trench 8, looking west*



*Illus. 35: Trench 8, showing concrete wall*

## 4. DISCUSSION

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**4.1** The survival level of the original early 20<sup>th</sup> century structures of the fort complex varied across the site. Within some trenches their demolition has been total and no trace of them remained (Trenches 4 and 5), whereas in others only the foundations of the deeper concrete structural posts of these structures survived, with all internal elements having been removed (Trenches 2, 3, 8). Only in three of the eight trenches did the remains of building foundation rafts survive in a form allowing some interpretation of their original functions.

**4.2** In both Trenches 6 and 7 the original floorplan of the fort buildings survived, with enough features visible to characterise the buildings and match them with the descriptions given on the pre-construction Officer's Plan of the facility (*Illus. 05*). Significantly the surviving remains lay immediately beneath the modern turf and topsoil levels, often surrounded by noticeable raised platforms which likely indicate the survival of further remains in the immediate vicinity. Due to the shallow level of these remains, their further uncovering would not entail major excavation.

**4.3** The wall within Trench 8 (*Illus. 35*) was visible only in the end section of the trench, but it did imply the survival of contemporary remains continuing beneath the modern tennis court in the centre of the site, which may have implications for any future groundworks in that area.

**4.4** With respect to the state of survival of the remains uncovered by evaluation trenching, it is concluded that most of the structures known to have existed on the site survive poorly, with only foundation rafts and posts surviving at shallow depths. However, variety of remains uncovered is a matter of some interest, suggesting that the range of structures on the site may have been greater than thought, or that different solutions were found to construct buildings in different ground conditions.

**4.5** With respect to the rarity and importance of the remains uncovered by evaluation trenching, it is concluded that, whilst rare, the relatively poor state of survival somewhat reduces their overall importance.

**4.6** With respect to the likely impact of the proposed development upon the remains uncovered by evaluation trenching, given their shallow depth it is likely that most will be destroyed or significantly damaged.

**4.7** Therefore, it is recommended, with respect to the currently proposed programme of works, that, where the structures can not be preserved by means of engineering solutions, they should be preserved by record.