

**ARCHAEOLOGICAL RECORDING
OF A SECOND WORLD WAR BUILDING
AT WESTLANDS SCHOOL, TORQUAY
PHASE 1**

by

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Contents

1. Introduction	1
1.1 The project	1
2. Method	1
3. Results	1
3.1 West range	1
3.2 East range: prefabricated building	2
3.3 East range: brick structure with tower	3
3.4 Central range	4
4. Discussion	4
5. Further work	5
Acknowledgements	5
Sources consulted	5
Appendix	5

List of illustrations

Fig. 1 Site location.

Fig. 2 Plan of the Second World War building.

Fig. 3 East range: east and north elevations of the brick structure.

Fig. 4 South and west elevations of the west range.

1. INTRODUCTION

This report describes the results of the recording of a Second World War (WWII) building located within the grounds of Westlands School, Warbro Road, Torquay (SX92016510; Fig 1) in November 2000. The work was commissioned by Jarvis Construction (UK) Ltd in advance of the redevelopment of the site to provide a new school.

1.1 The project

The recording work was undertaken in accordance with Condition 8 of the planning permission granted by Torbay Council in January 2000 (Application No. 1999/1664 PA) and project briefs supplied by the Torbay Archaeology Officer on 15 February 2000 (Fiorato 2000) and 25 October 2000 (Bishop 2000).

Two phases of recording were requested:

- recording of the building prior to demolition (this report)
- observation of the demolition itself in order to glean any further information regarding the building construction. The building is scheduled for demolition in January 2001, and the results of this second phase will form a separate report (see Appendix).

2. METHOD

A plan of the entire building was drawn at a scale of 1:100 (Fig 2). The north and east elevations of the brick building with the tower, which forms the north end of the east range, and the west and south elevations of the west range were drawn at a scale of 1:50 (Figs 3-4). A photographic record was made of the exterior and interior of the building consisting of black-and-white prints and selective colour transparencies.

Although the long axis of the building is aligned approximately north-east/south-west, a 'site north' has been adopted for the purposes of this report. The north-east end of the building is referred to as north.

3. RESULTS

The whole building is constructed on a brick foundation and is terraced into a gentle, south-facing, natural slope. In plan the building forms an approximate 'H' shape comprising rectangular east and west ranges joined by a smaller rectangular central range. With the exception of part of the north end of the east range, the building is single-storey. However, the north end of the east range consists of a brick structure with an upper storey (tower) on its western side. The central range is also built of brick, but the west range and the bulk (southern three-quarters) of the east range are of similar prefabricated construction.

3.1 West range

The west range consists of a prefabricated hut, measuring 20.6m by 8.1m (approx. 67ft by 26ft), which is currently used as the school canteen. It is divided into 11 bays by upright posts of reinforced concrete infilled with hollow bricks on the long elevations (east and west) and standard bricks on the short elevations (north and south). The posts are chamfered, and their tops are angled inwards to follow the pitch of the roof where they are bolted to reinforced concrete rafters. The construction method of the apex is not known as this part of the roof was concealed by boarding. The roof was laid with sheets of asbestos and had circular ridge terminals at each end. A flat-roofed porch is situated against the north wall.

The range has four external doors, three of which appear to be in their original positions. These consist of a single door in the north wall, a single door in the west wall (possibly originally double), and double doors (now boarded shut) in the south wall. A recently inserted door at the south end of the east wall is probably related to the current building works. Access into the central range from the west range was originally through four open bays in the east wall, the northernmost of which has been partially blocked and turned into a servery.

The west wall contains five windows, the southernmost of which contains eight panes and the remainder 12 panes. The east wall contains two 12-pane windows at the north end, and one 12-pane and one eight-pane window at the south end. All the windows are of the same design with metal-frames and opening top sections. Original air vents survive under three of the western windows and two of the eastern windows. These vents are metal and have sliding wooden doors on the inside of the building to control the air flow. There are also larger slatted vents above the doors in the north and south walls. Two internal partitions at the north end of the range are probably later additions, and there is an inserted porch-like structure surrounding the southern doors.

The exterior walls are rendered and painted (as are those of the eastern range) and the north and south gables are covered with corrugated asbestos sheeting.

3.2 East range: prefabricated building

The prefabricated building of the east range measures 11.6m by 8.1m (approx. 38ft by 26ft), and is of the same construction as the west range, with concrete upright posts and trusses, hollow bricks on the east and west walls, standard bricks on the north and south walls, and an asbestos roof. The west wall of the building has two open bays, which give access into the central range. There are three windows in the east wall (boarded over externally), which are of the same design as those in the west range, but have internal hinged mesh screens covering the opening top sections. There are double doors in the east wall and there may have also been a door in the south wall, related to what appears to be a former porch.

There are single windows at the west end of the north wall and at the north end of the west wall, which are boarded over on the outside. These windows are not visible on the inside of the building, however, as this north-western part of the range has been blocked off.

The building was originally divided into two rooms, comprising a large main room and a small room in the north-east corner. The main room was later divided longitudinally by a plasterboard partition, probably when the west range became the school canteen. The area to the west of the partition houses the school kitchen which adjoins the central range (servery), and the room to the east is currently used as the caretaker's workshop.

The tiled floor of the building appears to be largely primary, but with some later patching. At the north end of the larger room, the north and east walls are covered with white glazed tiles to a height of 1.6m. Some original plumbing (minus fittings) survives below ceiling level and some of the original electrical fittings also survive. A metal hood with extractor fans covers a large part of the interior roof.

The recess at the south end of the range was probably an original porch, of which the west wall and part of the east wall are primary. The exterior wall has been refaced. A construction break within the east wall may represent a former doorway, perhaps in a similar position to the doorway in the north porch of the west range.

The dividing walls between the small and main rooms are built of standard brick. The smaller room (currently a technician's office) has an exterior door in the east wall, and an internal door (now blocked) in the west wall. Against the north wall are four brick supports that probably relate to a former bench.

On the exterior of the building a drain exits from the east wall, and there are ceramic transmission insulators and cables leading to the building and to the tower.

3.3 East range: brick structure with tower

The brick structure with tower was constructed as an integral part of the east range, and contains three rooms on the ground floor and a single room on the first floor. Externally, all of the windows and doors have concrete lintels and the windows have concrete sills. There is an exterior chimney stack against the west wall. The building is not rendered.

Ground floor

The western room has a door in the north wall, a four-paned metal-framed window (boarded over externally) in the west wall, and a door in the east wall (leading to the north-eastern room). The ceiling is constructed of concrete beams. A brick base, c. 0.60m high, which has been extended at its eastern end, is situated inside against the south wall. The function of this feature is uncertain, but it may have once supported a tank or boiler. A modern boiler sits on another low brick base in the north-west corner of the room and is vented through the west wall to the original external chimney stack. Some of the pipes in the room appear to be original. In the floor against the west wall is a circular drain cover. One original light switch survives on the north wall.

The north-eastern room has a door and window in the east wall, both of which are blocked with brick, and an internal door in the west wall leading to the north-west room.

The south-eastern room has a door in the east wall, which is blocked with brick. As there is no other access to this room, the interior of the room was not seen. A small lead overflow pipe extends through to the exterior of the east wall, and it seems likely that the room is a disused WC.

First floor (above north-west room)

The first floor was entered by a double door on the north wall and would have been accessed via a fixed vertical ladder. The ladder has been removed and only the wall-fixings and hand-grip remain. The first floor consists of a single room (now a store for furniture) with a concrete beam ceiling; there is no access to the roof. There are vents in the east and west walls. On the floor are two brick bases, measuring 1.3m x 0.12m x 0.03m. Two pipes, which have been cut off, run southwards from the north wall.

On the exterior of the east wall is a cast-iron drainpipe with hopper, and two pipes exit through the north wall. Just below the top of the walls is a row of tiles laid horizontally. This feature also exists in the same position on the central range, and on some of the buildings at the front of the school.

3.4 Central range

The central range is a rectangular brick structure measuring 9.25m by 4.73m (approx. 30ft by 15ft) with a flat felt roof supported on concrete beams over RSJs. It is currently used as the serving area for the canteen. Access into the east and west ranges is through the open bays in

the east and west walls. There are exterior double doors in the south wall, flanked by two four-paned windows, and a 12-paned window with opening top section in the north wall. The only original internal fitting consists of a brick support, probably for a bench, similar to that in the small room of the prefabricated building of the east range. On the exterior of the south wall is a cast-iron drainpipe with hopper.

4. DISCUSSION

It was not within the scope of the project to undertake documentary research for this particular building. The following discussion is therefore based on the architectural evidence, and with reference to the handbook of the Defence of Britain Project (conceived by the Fortress Study Group) produced by the Council for British Archaeology (Brown *et al.* 1995).

The building itself comprises two huts constructed of prefabricated concrete trusses and hollow bricks, which appear to be larger versions of the standard hut type (Brown *et al.* 1995, Fig 3f). Although utilising hollow bricks, rather than standard bricks or concrete, the huts display similar characteristics to other WWII buildings in Devon, such as the round ridge terminals, which can also be found on buildings at Exeter Airport. The brick structure with tower also appears to conform to a 'standard' design (*ibid.*, Fig 61a). Both the brick structure and the central range contain tile detailing at roof level.

The precise function of the building during the Second World War has not been established, although it probably relates to some form of civil defence activity, possibly containing an ablutions block. This interpretation is strengthened by the tiling and plumbing in the north end of the east range, which might represent the position of former showers. It has been suggested by the school headmaster (Fiorato 2000) that the area to the north was used by the Red Cross during WWII and, if so, there may be a connection with this building. The west range, which is devoid of any internal features, is well lit and ventilated and could perhaps have served as a hospital ward. In addition both huts contain double doors through which stretchers would fit.

It seems unlikely that the brick structure with tower functioned as a watchtower, since the first-floor doors face inland away from the flightpath of enemy planes, and there was no access to the roof. The tower is similar to those in ablution blocks elsewhere in the country (Brown *et al.* 1995, Fig 61a). It is larger than some surviving examples in Devon (e.g. at Winkleigh Airfield), although airfields tended to have small dispersed accommodation blocks each with their own ablutions block and associated water tower. Internally the tower contains bases, perhaps for a water tank and boiler, and the presence of a chimney (without an internal fireplace) indicates that a boiler had probably been installed on the ground floor.

5. FURTHER WORK (see Appendix)

There are certain elements of the building that were not seen, or not fully understood, during this phase of recording. However, it should be possible to glean further information about the nature and detail of the following during the demolition work (phase 2 of the recording):

- the brick structure with tower
- the blocked room to the south-east of the tower
- the blocked area at the west end of the north wall of the east range prefabricated building
- the roofs of the prefabricated buildings.

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SOURCES CONSULTED

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APPENDIX (January 2001)

The original project brief required that the demolition of the building should be observed by the archaeological consultant to enable any outstanding questions to be answered in relation to the fabric of the building (Fiorato 2000, 3, 7.1). In addition, it was proposed to examine elements of the building which had not been accessible during the building recording work undertaken in November 2000 (present report, section 5).

However, due to communication problems in the immediate post-Christmas period, the building was demolished without the archaeological consultant (EA) being notified. It was therefore not possible to complete the final phase of the recording work, and this Phase I report (with Appendix) forms the final report on the project.