

"ye strength of ye place": Defence Works in the St. John's Narrows, 1638-1780

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Volume 25, Number 2, Fall 2010

URI: https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/nflds25_2rn01

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Publisher(s)

Faculty of Arts, Memorial University

ISSN

0823-1737 (print)

1715-1430 (digital)

[Explore this journal](#)

Cite this note

Gilbert, W. (2010). "ye strength of ye place": Defence Works in the St. John's Narrows, 1638-1780. *Newfoundland Studies*, 25(2), 197-216.

RESEARCH NOTE

“ye strength of ye place”: Defence Works in the St. John’s Narrows, 1638-1780

WILLIAM GILBERT

THE NARROWS (as the entrance to St. John’s harbour is commonly known) has played a pivotal role in the defence of St. John’s since the harbour was first fortified. At its narrowest, between Chain Rock and Pancake Rock, the entrance is only 180 m (600 ft) wide and the navigable passage is considerably smaller. It must have been apparent from the time of the first settlers that a battery strategically placed in this area would close off access to the harbour by sea to even the most determined enemy.

Long before the construction of Fort William, Fort Townshend or the defences on Signal Hill, the Narrows were fortified and they continued to play a key role in the harbour’s defences right up to and including the Second World War. Yet, little is known about the fortifications that have stood at the harbour’s entrance over the last 370 or more years. Researchers are confronted with a confusing array of names such as: One A’ Clock, the North Battery, the North Fort, Chain Rock Battery, Ring Noon, the South Battery, the South Fort, the South Redoubt, the South Castle, Fort Charles and Fort Frederick. In some cases, historians have made no attempt to differentiate between these fortifications other than to assign some to the north and others to the

south side of the Narrows. In other cases, historians, such as Prowse, have added to the confusion by assuming, usually wrongly, that fortifications built in the 17th and 18th centuries corresponded to those that were still standing in the late 19th century. The following is an attempt to make some sense out of this confusing jumble of names and to place them in their proper historical and geographical context. To do this it has been necessary to bypass the popular histories and return to the original documents.

The first fortification in St. John's for which we have documentary evidence was built by Sir David Kirke. When Kirke arrived in Newfoundland in 1638 to take control of the island and establish himself at Lord Baltimore's manor house in Ferryland, he brought with him "about twenty peeces of Ordnance which hee there planted in several places and Forts in Avalon for ye better securitye of that place."¹ By 1640 Kirke was maintaining 56 guns at various places on the Avalon including St. John's. In that year, John Downing Sr. arrived in Newfoundland with orders to replace Kirke as governor. According to a statement made by Downing's son (John Downing Jr.) he found "...under the command of Sir David Kirke, their Gov'r fifty six guns mounted in several forts, as Ferryland, St. John's, Bay Bull &c, the forts fitted with small arms &c, and manned by inhabitants."² We will probably never know the exact location of Kirke's fort at St. John's. However, the most obvious place would be somewhere in the Narrows. Certainly, someone with Kirke's background and experience would have realized the strategic advantages of fortifying this area.

According to John Downing Jr., Kirke's forts were maintained until 1660. In 1676 Downing wrote a petition to Charles II complaining of certain abuses that had recently been committed against the town's inhabitants by the migratory fishermen. He also complained about the sad state of the island's defences and stated "That the said Inhabitants till your Maties happy restauracon [in 1660] had a Governor there and fifty-six guns allowed them and fforts for their securities. And that the same were maintained by the six admiralities and imposts of the said place."³ Yet, the harbour's defences were not totally abandoned after 1660.

The Second Anglo-Dutch War broke out in March of 1665. In June of that year the Dutch Admiral De Ruyter led a fleet of 20 ships in an attack against the English fishery in Newfoundland. Most historians, using Prowse as their source, have assumed that St. John's was unfortified when De Ruyter arrived off the entrance on 16 June 1665. We now know that this was not the case. According to De Ruyter's journal, he found a cable stretched across the Narrows and six eight-pound cannon mounted. However, the guns were unmanned and the Dutch managed to break the cable and enter the harbour unopposed.

The town was almost deserted. Because of the war many seamen who otherwise would have been fishing in Newfoundland had fallen victim to the king's press gangs. Most of the planters and those few migratory fishermen who had made the passage had withdrawn into the woods prior to the arrival of the Dutch fleet. De Ruyter found only

two vessels, which he claimed as prizes, anchored in the harbour. Before he left, on 20 June, he had the six cannon removed and put aboard one of his prizes.⁴

Whether the defences encountered by De Ruyter were a remnant of those established by Kirke or of more recent origin we cannot say. We know that by 1665 a coalition of planters and migratory fishermen had taken on the responsibility of defending the harbour. In a statement given on 26 January 1678, the West Country merchant Christopher Martin says that in both 1665 and 1667 he landed guns and built small earthen forts at St. John's.⁵ Whether the guns taken away by De Ruyter were Martin's or whether Martin mounted his guns to replace those taken by the Dutch admiral, we do not know. In 1673 the Dutch attacked Newfoundland a second time. On this occasion, according to Martin, they were driven from the Narrows by a battery of six guns taken from the vessel *Elias Andrews* and manned by about thirty of his men.⁶

We do not know if Martin chose new locations for his forts or utilized ones that were already established but experience shows that once a location has proven its strategic value it is frequently reused, especially if remnants of the previous fortifications can be incorporated. It may well be that one of the places fortified by Martin was in the same location as Kirke's fort. Fortunately, we can rely on more than speculation to help us locate Martin's forts.

Henry Southwood's plan of St. John's Harbour was reproduced many times during the late 17th and early 18th centuries. It was also copied and printed, with minor alterations, by other map makers of the period. The best known copy of Southwood's plan dates from 1689 and is reproduced in Prowse.⁷ However, the earliest copy of the plan so far discovered appears as an insert in Southwood's map "The Coast of Newfoundland From Cape Raze to Cape St Francis" which was printed in 1675, two years after Martin's battle with the Dutch (Figure 1). The 1675 plan contains considerably more detail than the one reproduced in Prowse, while the latter contains a number of distortions not found in the original. For example, the 1689 plan shows Maggots Cove, Virginea, One A' Clock and the North Fort all grouped together in the area around Chain Rock, yet the 1675 plan clearly shows these four as separate locations spread out from west to east along the north side of the entrance to the harbour.

The 1675 plan shows two forts in the Narrows: one on the north side and one on the south side. The North Fort is clearly shown as being on Chain Rock Point but, contrary to what some have suggested, the North Fort and One A' Clock are not one and the same place. Instead One A' Clock is located some distance to the west of Chain Rock and is not fortified. The South Fort is harder to locate precisely. However, it is considerably farther out the Narrows than the North Fort — roughly half way between Anchor Point and South Head. Ring Noon is clearly shown as the cove between Anchor Point and Cahill's Point. At this time it was not fortified. Instead, a house and wharf are shown in the cove. As we shall see, Ring Noon and One A' Clock appear to have been first fortified around 1700. Given that this plan was

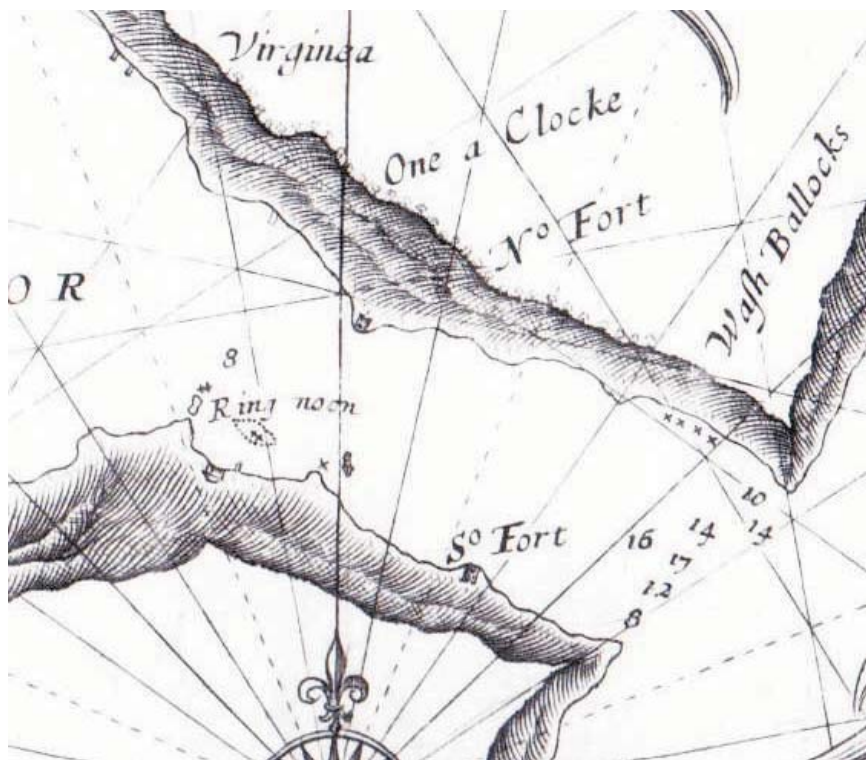


Figure 1. Detail from the 1675 version of Henry Southwood's 'Plan of St. John's Harbour' showing the location of the North Fort and South Fort in the Narrows. Courtesy of the Centre for Newfoundland Studies.

printed in 1675, the North and South Forts that it depicts are almost certainly the forts erected by Martin. Apparently, the South Fort was maintained for some time.

The Nine Years War (or King William's War) began in 1689 and in August 1693 a British fleet under the command of Rear Admiral Sir Francis Wheler arrived at Bay Bulls. Wheler's fleet was on its way back to England after an unsuccessful attempt to capture the French colony of Martinique. While at Bay Bulls the admiral received a petition from the inhabitants of St. John's asking his assistance in designing plans for the defence of the town. The townspeople were particularly concerned about the possibility of an overland attack by the French who, since 1662, had been established at Plaisance (Placentia). In response to this petition Wheler sent one of his Royal Engineers, Capt. Christian Lilly, to St John's.⁸

It was Lilly who laid out the plans for the original King William's Fort and for the short-lived Queen Mary's Fort. Lilly's journal contains not only a description of St. John's in 1693 but also a map and a drawing of the town.⁹ His map shows a forti-

fication, which he calls the Old Fort, on the south side roughly half-way between Anchor Point and South Head. While neither Southwood's plan nor Lilly's map contains sufficient detail to pinpoint the exact location of either the South Fort or the Old Fort, it is likely that the South Fort of 1675 and the Old Fort of 1693 were, if not the same, then at least in the same location. Certainly, the number of places in this area suitable for fortification is extremely limited. Lilly's drawing of St. John's is the earliest known depiction of the town. It is drawn looking in the Narrows and shows both King William's Fort and the Old Fort on the south side. The latter is clearly shown as being on a promontory between South Head and Anchor Point and there is only one such promontory — the place now commonly referred to as Fort Frederick.

The North Fort had apparently been abandoned by this time. Indeed, Lilly recommended that the guns at the Old Fort be relocated to Chain Rock Point, or "Pigg's Point" as he called it.¹⁰ Lilly's map also shows Ring Noon but, as in the 1675 plan, it is clearly a place name and not a fortification. It appears that Lilly's instructions were carried out and that the Old Fort on the south side was abandoned and Chain Rock Point re-fortified.

On two occasions during the summer of 1696 the French made unsuccessful attempts to capture St. John's by sea. Then, in November, they launched another attack. A combined force of about 100 French and 25 Native Americans, under the command of Pierre La Moyné D'Iberville, came overland from Placentia and captured and burnt the town. According to the Recollet priest Abbe Jean Baudoin, who accompanied D'Iberville on his campaign, when the French attacked St. John's they found three forts. Two of these were in the town (Queen Mary's and King William's Forts); the third was at the entrance to the harbour. "L'entree, large d'une petite portée de fusil," says Baudoin, "entre deux très haulte montagnes avec une batterie de huit canons en ce détroit."¹¹

The best known translation of Baudoin's diary was made by Madame Riballier des Isles and published in part in Prowse. Madame Riballier translated the above passage as follows: "the entrance lies between two very high mountains, distance one from the other about a gunshot. They are surmounted by a battery of eight guns."¹² This has led some to assume that a battery had been erected on the summit of one of the hills, perhaps Signal Hill, at the entrance to the harbour. However, a more accurate translation of the passage is contained in Alan William's history of the campaign, *Father Baudoin's War: D'Iberville's Campaign's in Acadia and Newfoundland 1696, 1697* and reads: "The entry, the width of a scant musket-shot, is between two very high hills with a battery of eight guns in the Narrows."¹³

Baudoin's account does not state whether this eight gun battery was on the north or south side of the Narrows. It does, however, say that ".... This latter fort protects the entrance to the harbour; although at a distance from it, it commands the harbour, and a number of the houses — the best part of St. John's — was around this fort and the best houses were built there."¹⁴ The fact that the battery was in the Nar-

rows but was still capable of commanding the harbour suggests that it was located on the north side, probably at Chain Rock. While a fort on the south side would have been capable of defending the Narrows, it would have been unable to defend the harbour itself.

The French victory in Newfoundland forced the British government to take action and in the spring of 1697 a force of 1500 men under the command of Colonel John Gibson was sent to the island to reestablish control on the English Shore and to establish a garrison at St. John's. They arrived late in June and immediately set to work re-fortifying the town. King William's fort was rebuilt in a location somewhat to the east of the original and two earthenwork batteries were erected one on either side of the Narrows.¹⁵

Royal Engineer Captain Michael Richards was charged with supervising the construction of the Narrow's defences. Work was still under way on 21 July when the French fleet appeared off St. John's. Rawlinson, one of the engineers involved in the construction, described the situation:

Being alarm'd w[i]th the Aproach of The French Fleet, from 10 in The Morning Till night we could Do but little in ye Fort most of our hands being soberly otherwise Employed.... Some [being] sent to the batterys To help to level and lay The platforms. The others busied here in Caring Them Downe the necessary Lumber.... This Night ye Marines brought us in Some Pallisades. The boomes were lay'd across ye Harbour and all possible Dilligence given to put ourselves in a position of Defence.¹⁶

The work continued through the night and into the morning. The journal continues:

This morning [July 22] at ½ hour after 2 ... Capt Richards called me to go w[i]th him to ye batterys and after haveing taken a view of Them, I received his order to take the Mast[er] Carpenter and carpenters to Fetch such old planck, and Timb[er from] King Williams Fort as was sufficient To Lay ye No[rth] Batteryes platform. They having Laid ye So[uth] ye night before.¹⁷

On 22 July the French withdrew from the harbour's entrance. They had not, however, given up. The fleet appeared off the Narrows twice more, on 18 August and 23 August, but on neither occasion did it attempt an entry. Apparently, by this time work on the defences was well advanced.¹⁸ By the end of August it had been completed and the majority of the force returned to England. However, a contingent of about 300 men under the command of Lieutenant-Colonel Thomas Handyside remained over the winter.¹⁹

The location of these two earthenworks batteries is clearly shown in Martin Beckman's 1698 map "St. John's Harbour and K. Williams Fort in Newfoundland." (Figure 2). Apparently, the Royal Engineers agreed with their civilian predecessors that Chain Rock Point was the best location for a fort on the north side. Beckman's map clearly shows it as the location of the North Fort. However, the



Figure 2. Detail from Martin Beckman's 1698 map "St. John's Harbour and K. Williams Fort in Newfoundland" showing the North and South Forts in the Narrows and the cable stretched between them. Courtesy of the Centre for Newfoundland Studies.

South Fort had been moved farther west and was now at Anchor Point. This may have been done to guard both ends of the cable stretching across the Narrows from Chain Rock. The North Fort is depicted as a main defensive wall stretching along the eastern side of the point with several short interior walls extending northwest from, and perpendicular to, the main wall. The South Fort is more elaborate, consisting of a square fortification located on Anchor Point and an outer defensive wall running parallel to the fortification's east wall then turning southeast and extending for some distance in that direction. One A' Clock is clearly shown on this map but, again, it is not fortified. Instead, it is represented as One A' Clock Stage and two large rectangular structures are shown just west of it.

There was considerable concern over whether the Narrows' defences were strong enough either to defend the harbour or to withstand the constant pounding of the seas to which they were subjected. Colonel Gibson felt that both should be upgraded. "The south Battery which hath now but Nine Gunn's ought to have at least Twentie" he stated, "And the Battery at the North side which has now but five, ought

to have Ten Gunn's."²⁰ Handyside felt it was imperative, "that the Batteries in the Harbour's Mouth ... be faced with stone or brick Else the surges of the Sea which beat against them with such rage in winter ... will Damage them."²¹

The defences remained as they were for two years. Then, on 27 May 1700, Captain Michael Richards returned to Newfoundland to supervise a major upgrade. By the time he left, on 17 September 1703, he had conducted extensive renovations on King Williams Fort, or Fort William as it was now coming to be known, and directed the construction of an extensive defence system in the Narrows.²² At the heart of Richards' Narrows defence system was an elaborate stone fortification which he referred to alternately as the South Battery and the South Redoubt, and which came to be known as the Southside Castle. He also rebuilt the North Battery (or North Fort) in stone and constructed defence works at Ring Noon, One A'Clock and a spot he referred to sometimes as Crawleys and sometimes as Limekiln Battery.

Closely related to the Beckman map is Brigadier Richards' map "Entrance of the Harbour of St. John's" (Figure 3). The outline of the Narrows shown on the Richards map bears such a strong resemblance to the Beckman map that one was almost certainly copied from the other. Indeed, there can be little doubt but that the latter was a plan used by Richards during his work on the harbour's defences (Rich-

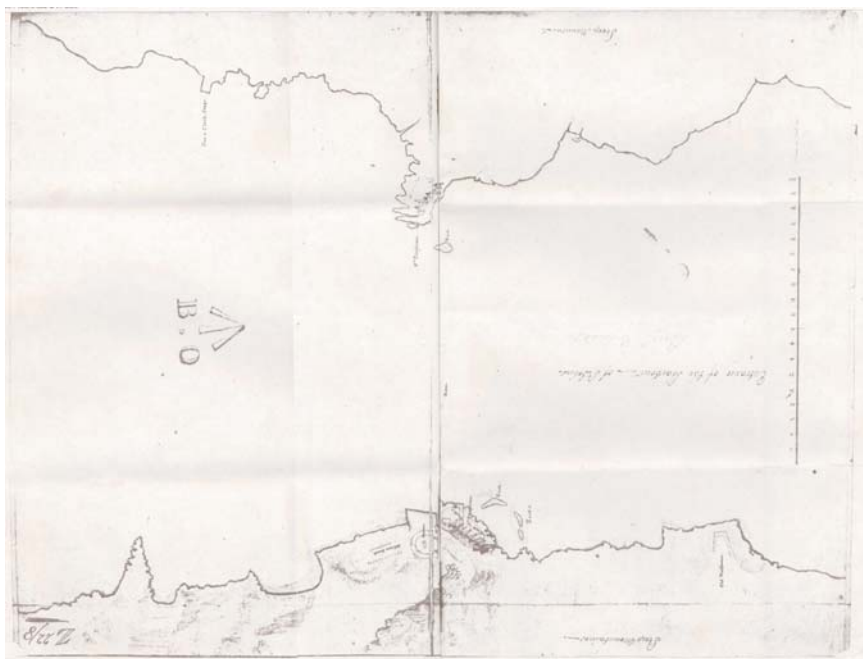


Figure 3. Brigadier Richards' map "Entrance of the Harbour of St. John's," circa 1700. Showing the location of the North Platform, South Platform and Old Platform in the Narrows. Courtesy of the Centre for Newfoundland Studies.

ards was promoted to the rank of Brigadier in 1712).²³ It also appears to date from early on in Richards' project. The plan shows defence works at both Chain Rock Point and at Anchor Point but neither Ring Noon nor Crawleys is represented; and, as in the Beckman Map, One A' Clock is shown but is not fortified. Yet, we know from Richards' correspondence that by the fall of 1701 all five of these places were fortified.²⁴ The Richards map shows five guns at the North Fort (or North Platform) and nine at the South Fort (or South Platform). Since this corresponds to the number of guns said by Colonel Gibson to have been located at these fortifications in 1697, it seems likely that the Richards map dates if not from that year then certainly from some time prior to the major changes that got underway in 1700. It may represent a plan used by Richards early on in the second phase of construction: a plan on which he was later to greatly expand.

Like the Beckman Map, the Richards Map shows the North Fort (or North Platform) as a defensive wall running along the eastern side of Chain Rock Point. The South Fort, however, differs considerably from that shown in the Beckman map. On the south side a wall mounted with nine guns extends southeast from Anchor Point for roughly 100 ft. To the west of this wall is a circular battery with two mortars mounted on a platform. Interestingly, the Richards map also shows an 'Old Platform' on the point of land just east of Frederick's Cove. An inscription on the back of the map states that "the old platform deals with the earliest fortifications of St. John's." While it may not represent the 'earliest fortifications' it does at least show the location of an earlier fortification and adds weight to the argument that Martin's South Fort was located here.

In a letter written to the Board of Ordnance in the summer of 1700, Richards described his plans. The South Battery, which he said was to be located on the Flat Rock, was to consist of a 43 foot long defensive wall facing the sea and four 24 foot long side walls. The seaward wall was to be eight feet wide at its base, six feet wide "a cordon" (i.e. near the top) and 16 feet high. Extending east from the seaward wall there was to be a battery for six guns. The main wall of this battery was to be 72 feet long, ten feet at its base, eight feet "a cordon" and twelve feet high. A "Corps de Guard a Machacoulis" with double chimneys measuring 49 feet long, 17 feet wide and eight feet high was also planned. The battery was to hold the capstan and capstan stone used to raise and lower the boom stretching across the Narrows and thus control access to the harbour. The North Battery was to be less elaborate and would consist of a mortared stone wall 72 feet long, ten feet wide at its base and twelve feet high.²⁵

On 5 June, 1700 Richards had six "great guns" hoisted out of a man-of-war on the south side;²⁶ by 22 June his masons had deposited 300 tons of locally cut stone at the site of the South Battery and by 25 June they were busy " ... cutting holes for ye foundation of ye South battery on ye flat Rock, the which," he said, "nothing can be harder."²⁷ By the fall of 1700 four culverins had been landed at Crawleys; four of the six great guns at the South Battery were mounted; four 24-pounders had been

landed at the North Battery of which two were mounted; six demi-culverins had been mounted at One A' Clock; and four demi-culverins were landed at Ring Noon.²⁸

Apparently, a small battery had been set up at South Head sometime prior to the French attack in 1696. Richards mentions that on 30 August 1701, the sailors from a man-of-war removed two iron sakers from a cliff about 120 ft above the water at South Head "w[hi]ch ye French had over sett and ye muz[z]le of one broke."²⁹

By the end of September 1701 both Ring Noon and One A' Clock Batteries had been completed. Ring Noon Battery was mounted with four demi-culverins and One A' Clock with six in standing carriages.³⁰ We know very little about the design of One A' Clock Battery. However, Richards states that Ring Noon Battery consisted of a semi-circular earthenworks wall 149 feet long, 16 feet thick at its base and eight feet high. Behind the wall six hundred tons of rubble had been placed to form a platform for the guns.

Completion of the South Redoubt was delayed due to the late arrival of the capstan stone from England. This stone, which was to be incorporated into the foundation of the structure, did not arrive until September of 1702.³¹ By this time England and France were again at war and Richards was anxious to complete the redoubt, which he described as "ye chiefe support", and secure the entrance to the harbour.³² By late November the masons were making good progress on the foundation of the redoubt and by the summer of 1703 it was nearly finished. The main defensive wall was completed and about 700 tons of rubble had been laid behind it to create a foundation of between six and eight feet above the high water mark.³³ On this foundation Richards mounted the six great guns which he had unloaded three years before.³⁴ By the time he left St. John's on 17 September 1703, his plans for the defence of the town had been completed.

John Roope was sent to St. John's in the fall of 1703 to establish proper booms at the entrance to the harbour.³⁵ The job took longer than planned and he was still in St. John's in the winter of 1704-05. During the fall of 1704, he wrote several reports to the Committee of Trade and Plantations in which he presented his views on the state of the fortifications at St. John's and proposed changes and improvements. Roope's reports are the earliest documents that refer to Richards' South Redoubt as the South (or Southside) Castle.³⁶

According to Roope, Crawleys was located "on ye Ea[s]t side of ye South Ca[s]tle" and he urged that a stone fort "of about 10 good gunns" be erected there. Such a fort would not only provide a strong defence against an enemy attempting to enter the harbour but would also prevent an enemy from fortifying it. He warned that if Crawley's was not fortified "an Enemy may there raise with ease a battery [tha]t will [s]oone incom[m]ode ye South Castle." He also proposed that another stone fort be erected near the North Battery to prevent it from being taken by the enemy. His main fear was that the North Battery would be taken and used "to batter ye South Castle, w[hi]ch," he said, "is indeed ye strength of ye place." He recommended that once these forts were built, all the "oppen battery's" including the

North Battery, Ring Noon and "Gassique's [One A' Clock?] be demolished [and] their gunns put in ye [s]tone forts." He also suggested that a small stone fort of six guns be built at nearby Quidi Vidi. If all this were done and the boom secured across the harbour's mouth, he felt that the harbour would be safe from any enemy attempting to enter it from the sea.

Rooke's stone forts were never built but his report does provide us with some important information. Obviously he considered the South Redoubt, or South Castle as he calls it, the key to the Narrows defences. If Crawleys was to the east of the Castle, but near enough to be a threat to it, then it must have been located just east of Frederick's Cove: the location of Richards' Old Platform and later of Fort Frederick. The fact that he refers to both Ring Noon and the North Battery as open batteries, and recommends they be abandoned, indicates that they were not nearly as substantial as the Castle itself. His concern over the vulnerability of the Castle to fire from both the North Battery and the batteries on the south side was to prove warranted.

St. John's was relatively unaffected by the renewal of hostilities for the first few years of the War of the Spanish Succession (Queen Anne's War). Then, on the evening of 21 January 1705, a French force of about 450, including a group of Native Americans under the command of M. de Subercase came overland from Placentia and attacked the town. They surprised the inhabitants before daybreak and succeeded in capturing many of the houses before the garrison was alerted. Once alerted, however, both Fort William and the Southside Castle managed to hold their own.³⁷

The French were expecting a brigantine, armed with a mortar and bombs, from Plaisance and did their utmost to subdue the Castle and gain control of the boom across the harbour's mouth. Both the North Battery and one of the south side batteries had been left unguarded and near the former they found a shed containing two barrels of gun powder. This they put to good use, bombarding the Castle from the North Battery and hoisting a number of guns taken from one of the south side batteries up the Southside Hills in an attempt to fire down into it. They also attacked it with fire arrows. However, the Castle withstood these assaults and when, after 33 days, the brigantine had not arrived and the powder was running short, the French departed.³⁸

The Southside Castle seems to have fared the siege well. On 2 February 1706 Reverend John Jackson, an Anglican priest who had been in St. John's since 1700, presented a statement on the conditions at St. John's to the House of Commons Committee to Inspect the Trade of Newfoundland. On the south side of the Narrows, Jackson said, was "built a pretty little Castle all of stone and substantial Timber that by nature and art is very strong, whose full complement is about 30 men [and which] cannot be easily taken, if well provided." He added that, "This Castle (as I have been inform'd by the Engineer himself) cost 12 thousand pounds, and the Garrison [i.e. Fort William] four score thousand pounds."³⁹ Despite the difference in cost Jackson considered the Castle to be far superior to Fort William. "Had the

Garison been Equivalent in strength and goodness to the Castle,” he said, “it [would have] been an impregnable place, and worthy of ye Nation’s charge b[u]t as it is [it is] more a Scarecrow or Pageant then a Fortification.”

As for Ring Noon, One A’ Clock and the North Battery, they appear to have been abandoned after Subercase’s assault. Royal Engineer Capt. Vane was in St. John’s in the fall of 1708 and examined the town’s defences. His report is brief and concentrates mainly on the boom which he says, “is broken in Severale places, the great Part whereof lies sunk near the Castle.” While Vane mentions both the fort and the castle, he makes no reference to any of the other areas fortified by Richards.⁴⁰ It seems the inhabitants had decided to put their trust in the two best fortified areas, abandoning the outer batteries that were hard to defend and could so easily be put to use against them.

In December 1708 the French and their Indian allies, led this time by St. Ovide de Brouillan, came overland from Placentia and attacked St. John’s yet again. Early in the morning of 31 December they entered the town, surprised the garrison and in a short while captured both Fort William and a second fort adjoining it. The Castle held out for 24 hours but surrendered the next day.⁴¹ St. Ovide spent longer at St. John’s than planned. The entrance to the harbour was blocked by ice until 27 March and in the meantime his forces busied themselves looting, burning houses and dismantling the fortifications. When they sailed out the Narrows, they left St. John’s in ruins and took with them as much booty as they could carry along with the officers of the garrison, the more prosperous planters and most, if not all, of the town’s ordnance.

One of the planters taken by the French, William Keen, kept a journal during this time. According to Keen, shortly before St. Ovide departed, he razed Fort William and moved his base of operations to the Castle where he remained several days. The French were determined that they would have no further trouble with the Castle. Keen reports that they filled one of its rooms with “over 20 Quintals of powder in order to blow up the Castle and demolish it.” However, there was an accident and M. Lartier, one of St. Ovide’s officers, “was blown up with powder, St. Ovide and several others [who were in the next room] had escaped the danger.”⁴²

Apparently the French did a thorough job. When Commodore Taylor, the commander of the English fleet, entered St. John’s harbour the following spring he reported that “The Castle on the South side of the Entrance of the Harbour was blown up and demolished, [and] the Cannon that were there and those that were in the Old Fort [i.e. Fort William] were carried to Placentia where they are said to be all mounted....”⁴³ A year later, Christian Lilly, who by this time held the rank of colonel, made a second visit to St. John’s. He reported that “Near the foot of this hill [on the south side] close to the narrowest part of the channel...., there was some years ago a Little Castle or Battery built which the Enemy has since destroy’d.”⁴⁴

The War of the Spanish Succession ended with the signing of the Treaty of Utrecht in 1713. By the terms of this treaty the French were forced to surrender their

possessions in Newfoundland. They were, however, allowed to retain fishing rights along a section of the Newfoundland coast. The next year the British garrison was stationed at Placentia. St. John's was to remain without a military presence until the 1740s and its defences were allowed to fall into ruin. A description of the town written in 1740 states that "the Castle at the entrance of St. John's Harbour and all the fortifications that were formerly there are totally Demolished."⁴⁵

In 1741 the commander of the Newfoundland convoy erected an earthenwork battery armed with ten 18-pounders near the water side below Fort William. He named it Fort St. George, and in 1743, 85 soldiers and a number of officers were left to defend the fort. The following year Britain was again at war and plans were being drawn up for fortifications at a number of places on the island including St. John's. By 1748 a new Fort William, constructed on the ruins of the earlier fort, was almost finished and two batteries, both on the south side of the Narrows, were nearing completion.⁴⁶

The map "A Plan of St. John's Harbour in Newfoundland, 1751" (Figure 4) shows the location of these two batteries. The easternmost of the two was a battery of 4 guns located on the point just east of Frederick's Cove. The second, referred to on the map as a 'Battery en Barbette Designed for 6 Guns,' is harder to pinpoint but appears to have been just south of Anchor Point. To the south west of this battery

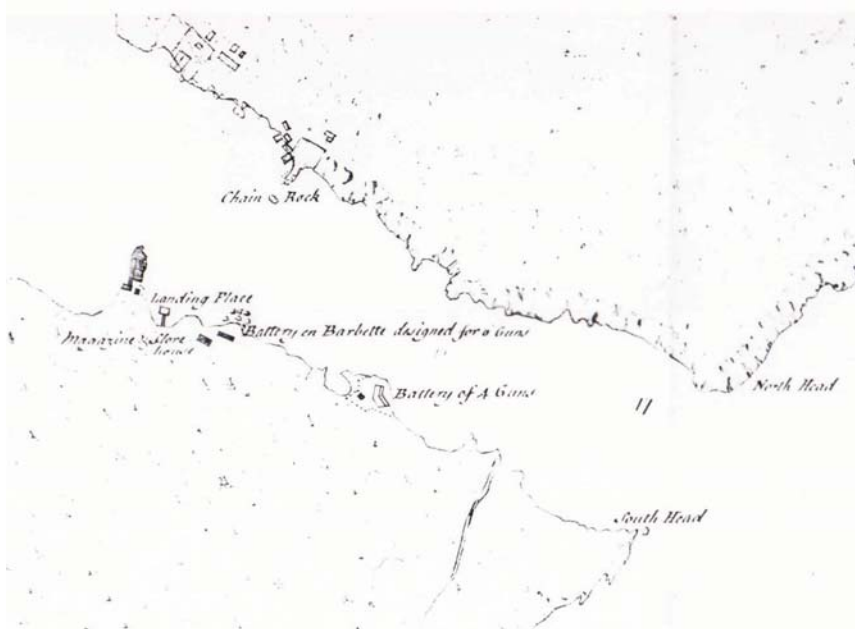


Figure 4. Detail from "A Plan of St. John's Harbour in Newfoundland, 1751" showing the location of the two batteries and the magazine and storehouse on the south side of the Narrows. Courtesy of the Centre for Newfoundland Studies.

was a rectangular structure described as a ‘Magazine and Store House.’ The battery, magazine and storehouse were apparently never used.

William Green was a Royal Engineer stationed in Newfoundland in 1752. One of his duties was to examine the fortifications at Trinity, Carbonear, Ferryland and St. John’s and make recommendations for their improvement. According to Green, the battery east of Frederick’s Cove consisted of four 18-pound cannon mounted behind an earthen parapet. A guard house and small powder magazine were also located here. By the time of Green’s visit this battery was in a considerable state of disrepair. He reported that “the Parapet is at present so bare of Earth and so very low that I am at a loss whether it should be called a Battery.” The entire complex, according to Green, was, “formerly all enclosed ... with Pallisades, but [these] are now all gone but a few of the principal Posts.”

Green says the second battery consisted of:

a Parapet of Masonary intended for six Guns but I believe there were never any Guns Mounted, nor even the Platforms laid. Nor Certainly never will, For the Direction of the Battery is so unpardonable with regards to the Defending the Entrance of the Harbour, that as long as any appearance of the present situation Remains, will be a lasting Monument of Ignorance in the use and Nature of Sea Batterys.⁴⁷

Apparently, the nearby store house and magazine were never completed “having discover’d (tho too late to save a very Considerable Expense) the mistake that the Battery was built in the Wrong Direction, and consequently these Buildings could not be appropriated to the service they were Intended.” Indeed, the battery shown on the 1751 map would have had a very limited range and would have been unable to fire on vessels coming in the Narrows until they were almost off Chain Rock.

Interestingly, Green also mentions visiting the remains of a four gun battery located at South Head and reports favourably on the location. If this is the same battery from which Richards removed two sakers in 1700, it must have been fairly substantial to have survived for 52 years.

The Seven Years War was not officially declared until 1756, but fighting between the English and French in North America had already been underway for several years by that time. In the spring of 1755, a British fleet under the command of Admiral Edward Boscawen engaged part of a French convoy, carrying 3000 troops to New France, off the coast of Newfoundland. Yet, despite this early encounter, the island suffered little during most of the conflict. Then, in May of 1762, a French convoy carrying a force of roughly 900 men eluded the British naval blockade off the coast of France and set sail for Newfoundland. They landed at Bay Bulls on 24 June and entered St. John’s three days later. The inhabitants, who by this time numbered about 1000, and the small garrison of about 60 men surrendered without resistance.

The French settled in for a long stay, expanding on the harbour's existing defences and using it as a base from which to raid English settlements up and down the coast. The British responded quickly and in August established a blockade off St. John's. On 13 September a British force of 1500 men and officers, under the command of Lieutenant-Colonel William Amherst, landed at Torbay, nine miles north of St. John's. They marched overland and succeeded in retaking the town on 18 September.

Royal Engineer Captain Hugh Debbieg was with Amherst during the recapture of St. John's. His "Plan of the Harbour, Town and Fort of St. John's in Newfoundland," dated 1763, depicts the French and English positions during the recapture and the state of the town's defences at the time (Figure 5). The "Parapet of Masonary" near Anchor Point, described by Green in 1752, had by this time been abandoned, while the battery at Frederick's Point had been upgraded to six guns. Whether this was done by the English prior to the capture or by the French while they held the town we do not know, but the fact that the map describes them as "6 cannon English" suggests the former. The French did, however, place a battery of four guns at South Head. Whether or not this battery was in the same location as the four gun battery visited by Green ten years earlier we have no way of knowing. The



Figure 5. Detail from Captain Hugh Debbieg's "Plan of the Harbour, Town and Fort of St. John's in Newfoundland," 1763, showing the location of the English and French Cannon in the Narrows at the time. Courtesy of the Centre for Newfoundland Studies.

French also placed a six-gun battery at Chain Rock Point. This was the first time the point had been fortified since 1713.

In 1766 Debbieg was again in Newfoundland. He was sent by the Duke of Richmond, Secretary of State for the Southern Colonies, to “examine such Harbours as may be found most likely to answer the object of a place where British Vessels fishing on that coast may, in case of sudden Attack, safely retreat to, and be protected from an Enemy’s Ships of War.”⁴⁸ Debbieg decided on St. John’s as the most suitable harbour and suggested that a fortification be placed at the entrance to the Narrows, “to provide early protection to fishing vessels fleeing from an enemy force.”

Debbieg’s recommendation was put into action, and work on Amherst Tower, as this fortification came to be known, started in 1771 and was completed in 1777. In the same year the South Battery was upgraded to a nine-gun battery, and by 1779 it was being referred to as Frederick’s Battery after Captain T.L. Frederick, commander of the Newfoundland station in 1777 and 1778. On the north side a new battery with two 18-pounders had been completed at Chain Rock by 1769.⁴⁹

Thus by the 1780s the Narrows defence system had taken on the basic configuration that it was to retain for the rest of the 18th and much of the 19th century. Amherst’s Tower, which by 1783 had nine 24-pounders and four 18-pounders and was the second most powerful work in St. John’s was to provide the first line of defence supplemented by Frederick’s Battery and Chain Rock Battery.⁵⁰ The defence of the harbour entrance was further strengthened in the last decade of the 18th century when the development of Signal Hill led to the establishment of Wallace’s Battery in 1795, Queen’s Battery and Duke of York Battery in 1796, and Waldegrave Battery in 1798.⁵¹

Most studies of St. John’s military history have focussed on the major fortifications such as Fort William and Fort Townsend. As important as these defence works were, it was obvious from the earliest days of settlement that the first line of defence in any attack from the sea had to be at the harbour’s narrow entrance. A few pieces of ordnance strategically placed here, especially if combined with a chain, boom or other obstacle, would secure the harbour from even the most determined attacker. As we have seen, the Dutch were able to enter the harbour in 1665 not because the Narrows were unfortified but because the fortifications there were unmanned. When they attempted it again in 1673 they were driven off by a six gun battery located there. The French realized this after their unsuccessful attempts to take the town by sea in 1696 and 1698 and because of this the successful French assaults of 1696, 1705, 1708 and 1762 all came from overland.

WHAT REMAINS?

This paper began in 1988 as part of an inventory of the archaeological resources on the Southside of the St. John's Narrows. It seems only appropriate that it should end with a brief look at the archaeological remains that still exist in the Narrows today.

Any evidence of Ring Noon Battery has long since vanished. As stated above, it was an earthenworks battery and seems to have only been fortified for about five years. Still, one might expect to find some evidence of the battery if the area had remained fairly undisturbed. As it is, construction work during the first half of the 20th century seems to have obliterated any trace of it.

Across the Narrows on the north side are three areas of high potential. The cove to the west of Chain Rock which was historically known as 'One A' Clock' has never been surveyed. As with Ring Noon Battery, One A' Clock Battery was an earthenworks and only used for about five years. However, there is a chance that evidence of it may yet be found. While there has been extensive activity in the area around One A' Clock Battery in the roughly 300 years since it was abandoned, this may not have had too disruptive of an effect. There are currently structures all over this area and doubtless there have been many others over the past three centuries. However, because of the nature of the area, many of these structures are raised above the rocks and beach on shores and posts. The battery aside, we know that One A' Clock has been utilized since at least the third quarter of the 17th century and we should not dismiss the possibility of finding some evidence of this 17th century occupation.

Slightly to the west and above One A'Clock at a height of about 50 feet (15 metres) is Waldegrave Battery. While the interior of the gun emplacement has been paved over and now serves as a parking lot, the outline of the outer wall is clearly visible. The ruins of a substantial powder magazine that was part of the Waldegrave Battery complex, is also visible on the ridge above it.

The area around Chain Rock has been fortified since at least 1675 and, aside from fish flakes, it seems to have been used for nothing else. The most obvious features in the area are several cement gun emplacements from the Second World War located on a ridge above and somewhat to the east of the point. However, on closer examination, one can see a number of mortared stone walls on both the point and the ridge directly behind it. Some of the walls on the upper ridge have been faced with cement to reinforce them. This may have been done during the Second World War. However, a cut and mortared stone wall is clearly visible in places where the cement facing has begun to break away. Farther out the point the mortared stone walls are exposed to the elements. The most recent of these walls probably dates from the last major renovation which took place in 1813. Some of the others must be considerably older and may be part of the original stone battery constructed by Michael Richards.

As with Chain Rock, the most obvious feature at Fort Amherst is the complex of cement gun emplacements that were constructed during the Second World War. Yet, a closer examination of the area reveals that there are a number of older mortared stone features incorporated into this complex. Here, too, many of these features have been faced with cement to reinforce them but the original stone work is visible in places where the cement has begun to disintegrate. Higher up, on the same level as the lighthouse, a section of a substantial semi-circular mortared stone wall is clearly visible on the surface.

The point west of Fort Amherst, commonly referred to as Fort Frederick, ranks with Chain Rock as being one of the oldest fortified areas in St. John's. Christian Lilly's 1693 sketch of St. John's clearly shows it as the location of the 'Old Fort' and it is almost certainly one of the places fortified by Christopher Martin during the 1660s. Today, two substantial stone walls, dating to the Napoleonic Wars, meet at the north end of the point and extend away from it to the southwest and southeast to form a v-shaped enclosure.

A survey of the south side of the Narrows, conducted in 1988 by Gerald Penney Associates, uncovered the remains of a substantial stone defensive wall extending east from Anchor Point. Its location and the archaeological material found in association with it leaves little doubt that it is part of the Southside Castle erected by Captain Michael Richards between 1700 and 1703 and destroyed by the French in March 1709. Based on recommendations made by Gerald Penney Associates, the site was preserved when the surrounding area was blasted to make room for the Prossier's Rock Boat Basin. Although some excavations were conducted at the site in 1988 and 1993, the ruins of the Castle have been left untouched since that time.

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Notes

¹PRO, C.O. 1/10, f. 40.

²Daniel Woodley Prowse, *A History of Newfoundland from the English, Colonial and Foreign Records*. (St. John's: Dicks, 1971, third edition, originally published in 1895), p. 205.

³*Ibid.*, p. 208.

⁴Dicky Glerum-Laurentius, *A History of Dutch Activity in Newfoundland from about 1590 to about 1680*. (MA Thesis, Memorial University of Newfoundland, 24 June 1960) pp. 61-71. Prowse states in his history that there were no guns mounted in St. John's when the Dutch entered in 1665. However, Glerum-Laurentius makes it clear that Prowse's statement is based on a single English document that was written some years later and was probably biased. The information contained in Glerum-Laurentius is based on a transcription of De Ruyter's journal kept during the expedition.

⁵PRO, C.O. 1/42 f. 62, "Deposicon of Christopher Martin about Newfoundland," received February 6, 1677/8.

⁶Ibid.

⁷Prowse, p. 204.

⁸Christian Lilly, "A Journal of the Transactions of Their Majesties Forces sent to the West Indies under the Command of the Honorable Sr. Francis Wheeler and Col Foulke. Anno 1693." Microfilm copy at Centre for Newfoundland Studies.

⁹Lilly's map and drawing are reproduced in Olaf Uwe Janzen, "New Light on the Origins of Fort William at St. John's, Newfoundland, 1693-1696." In *Newfoundland Quarterly*, Vol. LXXXIII, No. 2, pp. 24-31.

¹⁰Ibid.

¹¹Alan F. Williams, *Father Baudoin's War: D'Iberville's Campaigns in Acadia and Newfoundland 1696, 1697*. St. John's, Memorial University of Newfoundland, 1987, p. 180.

¹²Prowse, *History*, p. 232.

¹³Williams, *War*, p. 47.

¹⁴Prowse, *History*, p. 232.

¹⁵Olaf Uwe Janzen, "New Light on the Origins of Fort William at St. John's, Newfoundland, 1693-1696." *Newfoundland Quarterly*, Vol. LXXXIII, No. 2 (Fall, 1987) p. 29.

¹⁶"Rawlinson's Journal," Mss on microfilm at the Maritime History Archives, 21 July, 1697.

¹⁷Ibid., 22 July 1697.

¹⁸Ibid., 18 August, 1697.

¹⁹Prowse, *History*, pp. 223-224.

²⁰PRO, C.O. 194/1 f. 194, "John Gibson to the Council of Trade."

²¹PRO, C.O. 194/1 f. 278-279, "A Narrative in Relation to the Affairs in Newfoundland During the time I had the Honour to Command Them."

²²"Letter-book of Captain Michael Richards While Engaged in Completing Fort William, etc. at St. John's, Newfoundland, 1 April 1700-Oct 1703." Stowe Mss Item 464 (Vol. XVIII). Copy at the Centre for Newfoundland Studies.

²³"Michael Richards." Dictionary of Canadian Biography Online. John English, ed. <http://www.biographi.ca/index-e.html>

²⁴Richards, "Journal." p. 132.

²⁵Ibid., p. 21.

²⁶Ibid., p. 6.

²⁷Ibid., pp. 7-9.

²⁸Ibid., p. 54.

²⁹Ibid., p. 92.

³⁰Ibid., p. 111.

³¹Ibid., p. 187.

³²Ibid., p. 203.

³³Ibid., p. 198 & p. 255.

³⁴Ibid., pp. 255-257.

³⁵PRO, C.O. 194/3 fol. 22b, "Roope to the Board of Trade and Plantations."

³⁶PRO, C.O. 194/3 f. 117, "John Roope to the Committee of Trade and Plantations," 12 September 1704 & PRO, C.O. 194/3 f. 417 "Roope to Ye Committee of Trade and Plantation," received and read 8 December 1704.

³⁷Prowse, *History*, pp. 261-266.

³⁸PRO, C.O. 194/3 f 228-230. & C.O. 194/3 f 251, "A Memorial from Mr. Colin Campbell Relating to the Attempts Made by the French on St. John's."

³⁹PRO, C.O. 194/3 f 417, "To the Honble Members of the House of Commons, The Present Committee to Inspect the Trade of Newfoundland." 2 February 1705/06.

⁴⁰PRO, C.O. 194/4 f 273, "Capt. Vane the Engineers Accot. of Necessarys Wanting for the Repair of the Boom at Newfoundland, &c," 20 October 1708.

⁴¹Prowse, *History*. pp. 248-249.

⁴²PRO, C.O. 194/4, fols. 393-395, "Mr. William Keen's Journal of the Taking of St. John's in the Year 1709."

⁴³PRO, C.O. 194/4 fol 379, Taylor to Sunderland, 18 November 1709.

⁴⁴PRO, C.O. 194/6 fols. 74-85, "A Report Containing an Extract of a Journal to Newfoundland and a Summary account of what Place there is most Proper to be Fortified....," 1711.

⁴⁵PRO, C.O. 194/11 fols. 7-13, "Copy of an Order in Council Dated the 31 of July 1740, Directing the Board of Ordnance to Fortify St. John's in Newfoundland Pursuant to a Report of this Board on Several Petitions for that Purpose."

⁴⁶James E. Candow, *A Structural and Narrative History of Signal Hill National Historic Park and Area to 1945*. Parks Canada Manuscript Report Series, 1979. pp. 15-16.

⁴⁷PRO, C.O. 194/13, fols. 75-78, "A Report of the Fortifications of Fort William and the Other Batterys for the Defence of the Harbour of Saint Johns Newfoundland by William Green, First Engineer for St. John's, Trinity, Ferryland and Carbonear 1752."

⁴⁸Candow, *Signal Hill*. pp. 20-21.

⁴⁹*Ibid.*, p.24.

⁵⁰*Ibid.*, p.26.

⁵¹*Ibid.*, pp. 33-34.