

## Port Royal Archaeological Excavations



In 1981, the Nautical Archaeology Program of Texas A&M University, in cooperation with the Institute of Nautical Archaeology (INA) and the Jamaica National Heritage Trust (JNHT), began underwater archaeological investigations of the submerged portion of the 17th-century town of Port Royal, Jamaica. Present evidence indicates that while the areas of Port Royal that lay along the edge of the harbor slid and jumbled as they sank, destroying most of the archaeological context, the area investigated by TAMU / INA, located some distance from the harbor, sank vertically, with minimal horizontal disturbance.

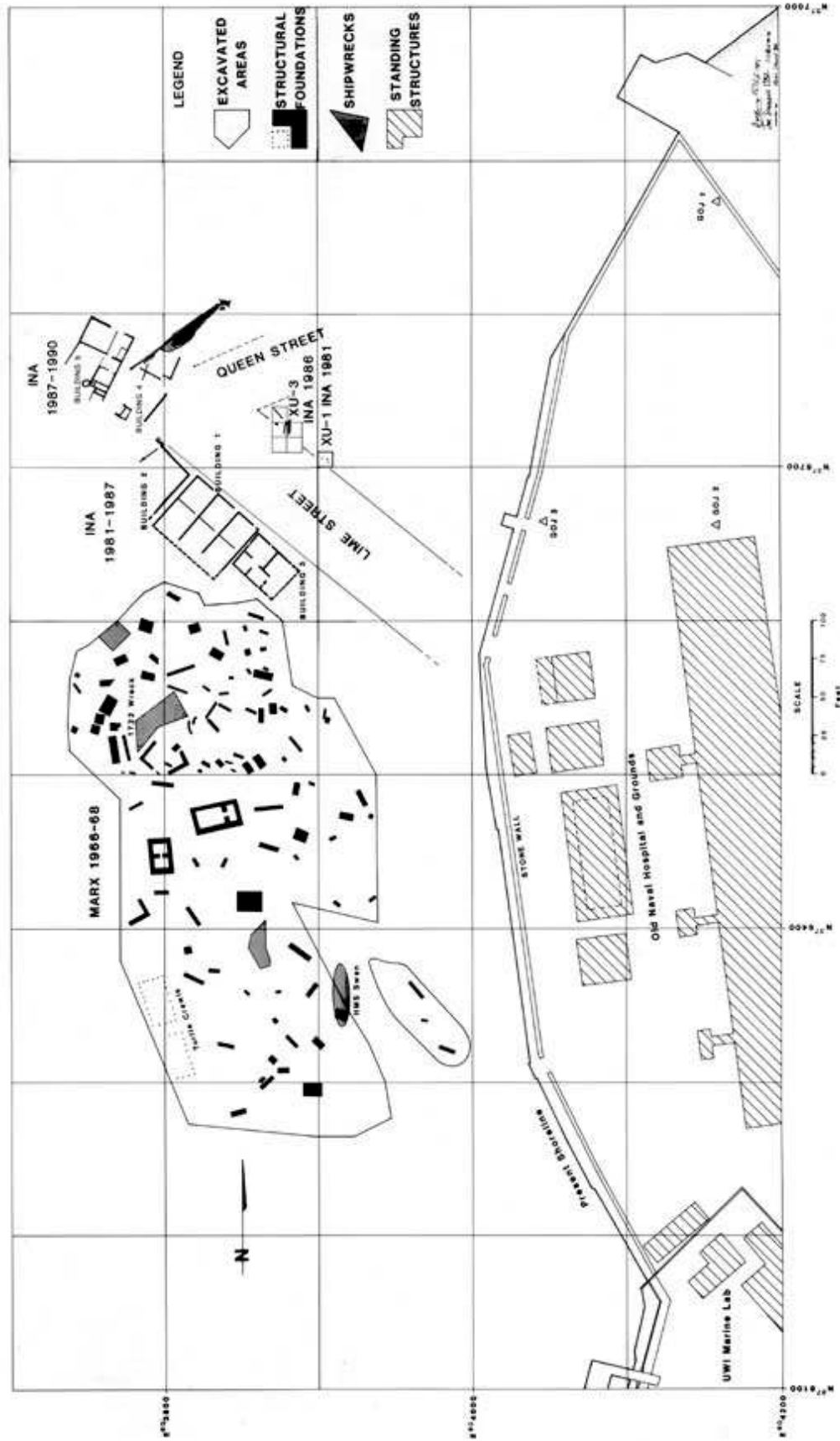
In contrast to many archaeological sites, the investigation of Port Royal yielded much more than simply trash and discarded items. An unusually large amount of perishable, organic artifacts were recovered, preserved in the oxygen-depleted underwater environment.

Together with the vast treasury of complimentary historical documents, the underwater excavations of Port Royal have allowed for a detailed reconstruction of everyday life in an English colonial port city of the late 17th century.

The Port Royal Project concentrated for 10 years on the submerged 17th-century remains on Lime Street, near its intersection with Queen and High Streets in the commercial center of the town. At present, eight buildings have been investigated. The work has resulted in a more detailed body of data on the buildings and their in situ artifacts than any previous excavations at Port Royal - on land or on under water.



# EXCAVATED AREAS of OLD PORT ROYAL, JAMAICA

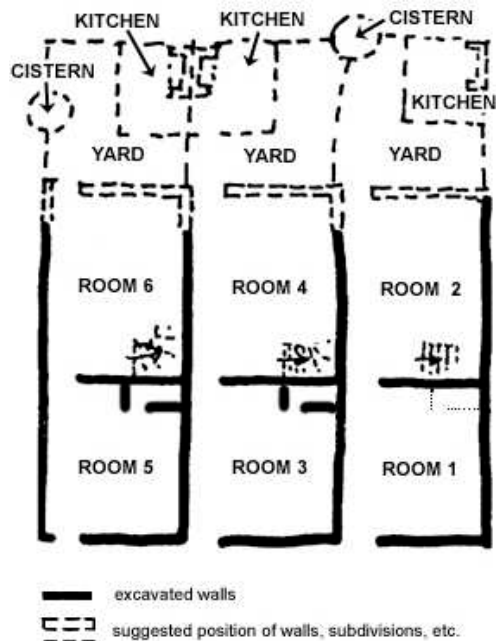


The construction features of five of the investigated buildings exemplify the variety of architectural styles found in the city's center. Some were well-built, multi-storied brick structures, while others were simple, earth-bound frame buildings, hastily erected, with no intention for them to last. In several instances, a small core building was constructed, and then rooms were tacked on as needed, until the structure formed a complex. Both brick and timber buildings have contributed significantly to our understanding of 17th-century town planning, architecture, diet, cooking activities, and other aspects of daily life.



*Drawing courtesy of Oliver Cox (1984)*

Each of the five fully investigated buildings has a complement of records that pertain, in some way, either to the owners, or the makers of the associated artifacts.



**BUILDING 1** - A well-built brick building that consists of two construction phases and which has six ground-floor rooms divided into three separate two-room combinations. These rooms were used as a probable pipe shop, a tavern, and a combination wood turner/cobbler's shop.

### **ARCHITECTURE OF BUILDING 1**

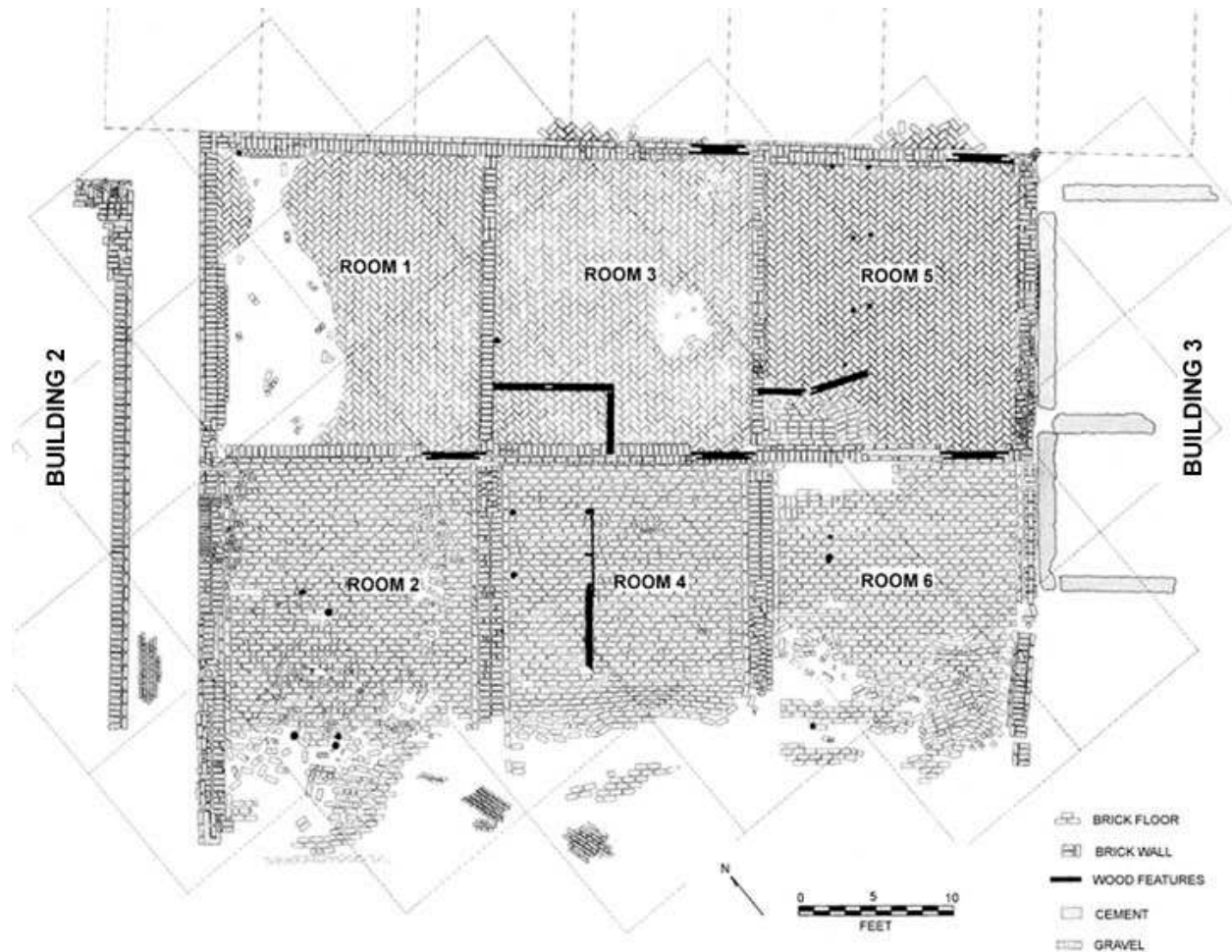
BUILDING 1 is a well-built brick building, measuring 53 ft. wide and 47 ft. deep. It consists of six ground-floor rooms divided into three separate two-room units, each of which appear to have housed a distinct business or activity. The original building consisted of Rooms 1, 3, and 5. A back two story addition was added to what was formerly the yard. The volume of fallen bricks on the floors and the remains of the ground floor wood components of stairwells in the corners of Rooms 3 and

5 shows conclusively that was also at least one upper story, which probably held living quarters. A comparable stairwell was probably present in Room 1.



The front rooms (Rooms 1, 3 and 5) are aligned with the south side of Lime Street. They are connected, respectively, by an interior wooden doorway to Rooms 2, 4, and 6, which were added later (much reducing the size of the yards). Plastered, whitewashed walls and herringbone-patterned brick floors comprise the front three rooms. The bricks of the back-room floors, in contrast, were laid out end-to-end.

Based on the pattern found elsewhere in Port Royal, each of the building's three units most likely had a separate yard, with a kitchen or 'cook-room' with a brick hearth. The cisterns in the yards were shared with adjoining yards and were fed by rainwater from nearby roofs.



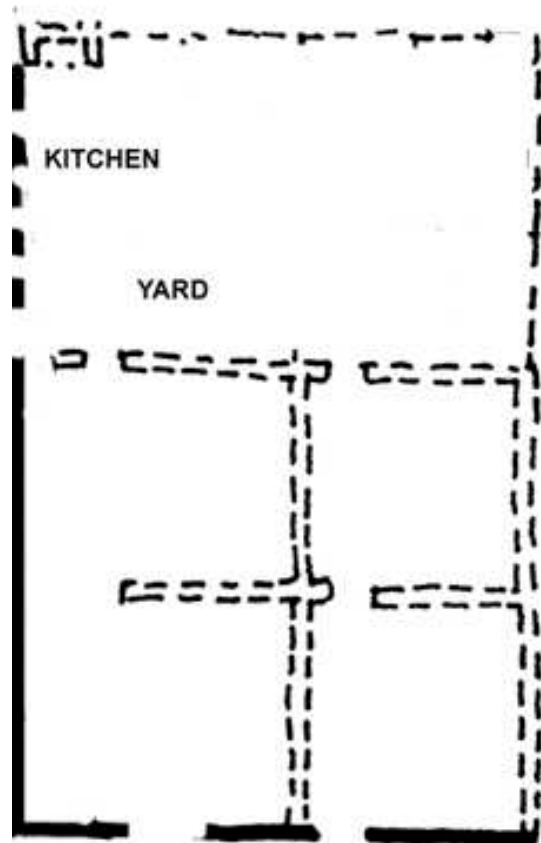
### **FUNCTION(S) OF BUILDING 1**

**Rooms 1 and 2:** From the large assortment of leather scraps, shoe soles, a wooden lathe, and some planks, it appears that this unit housed a combination cobbler/wood turner's shop. Large quantities of cut animal bones and sea turtle shells suggest also that butchering and/or food preparation occurred in the unit's back area.

**Rooms 3 and 4:** The large number of recovered artifacts associated with the selling and consumption of alcohol suggest that this unit appears to have been used as a tavern. At least 60

dark-colored glass liquor bottles, as well as jugs, tankards, and kegs, were recovered from this area.

**Rooms 5 and 6:** The artifact assemblage consisted of masses of unused clay tobacco pipes, glass bottles, and pewter plates. This suggests that this unit was used as a combination pipe/wine shop.



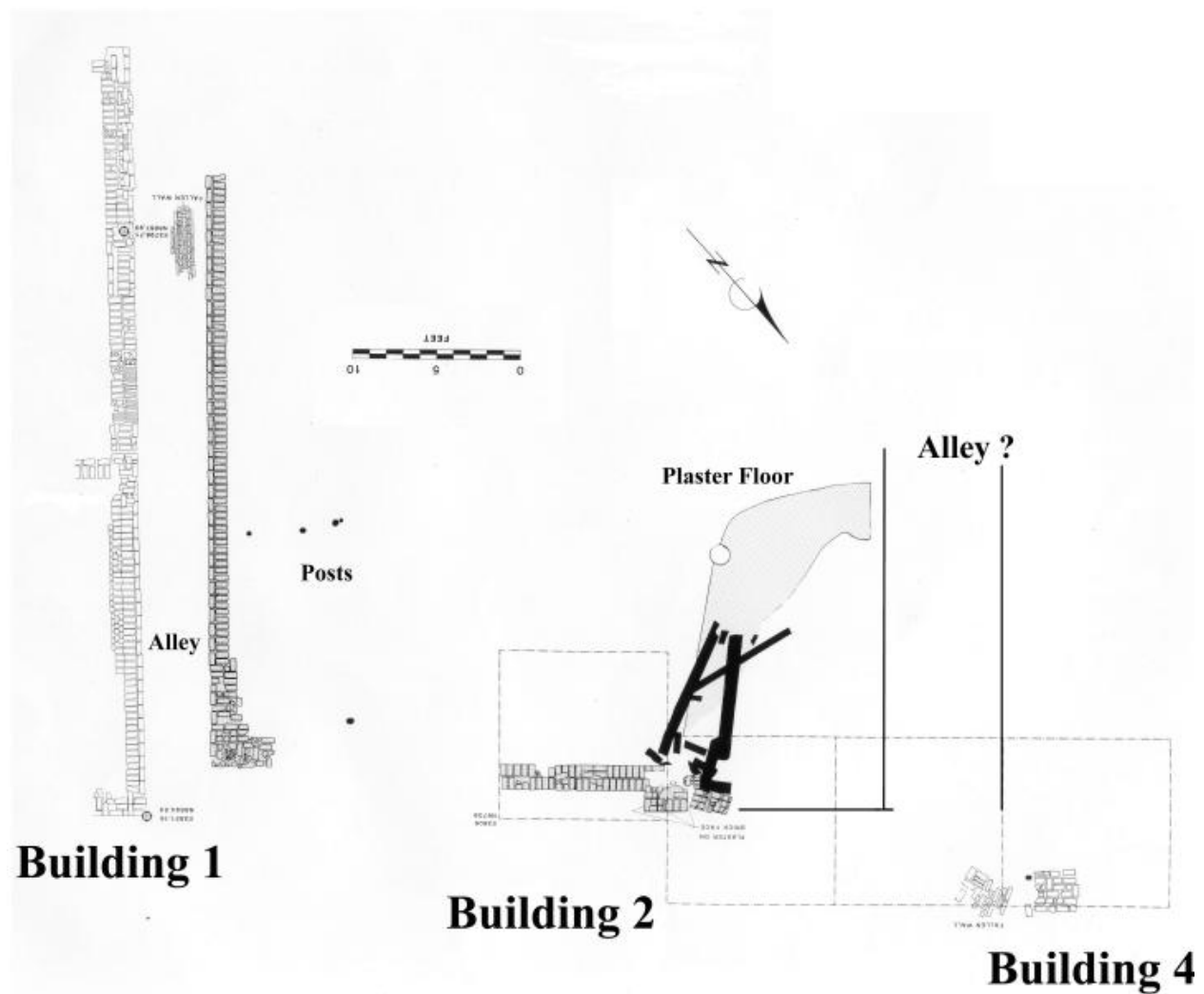
**BUILDING 2** - A poorly preserved, frame building to the west of Building 1. It has a plaster floor.

### **ARCHITECTURE OF BUILDING 2**

BUILDING 2 is a poorly preserved frame building, with few walls excavated. Its only cohesive remains were part of a plaster floor in one room and a brick floor in another. The exterior walls are 1½ bricks thick, suggesting a two story building. There is no evidence of brick flooring, but there is a fragment of a plaster floor and wood planking for a floor.

### **FUNCTION OF BUILDING 2**

While Building 2, like Building 1, faced on to Lime Street, its poor condition allows for neither its size nor function to be determined.



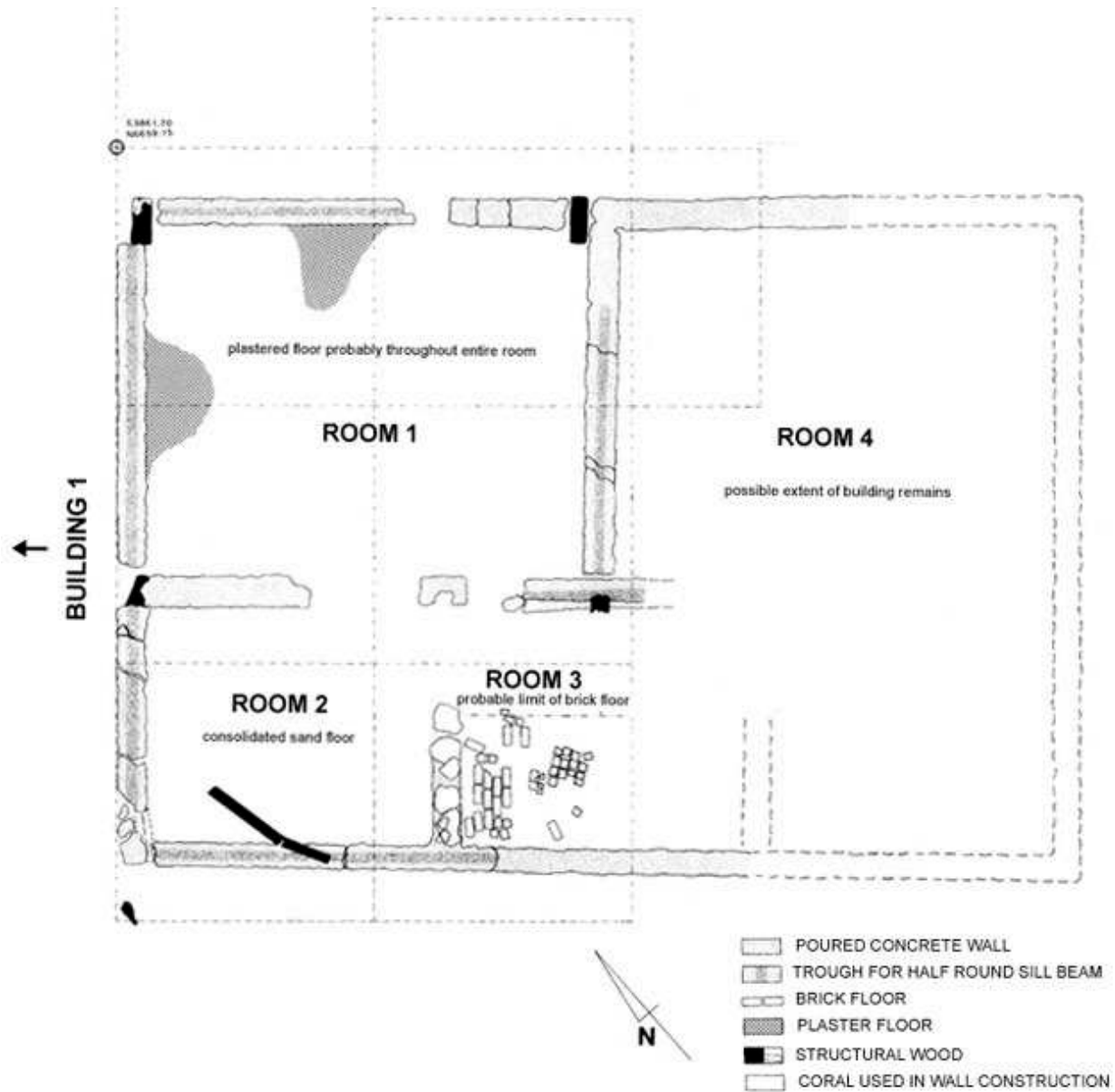
**BUILDING 3** -This building, with its raised sills on a mortar foundation and interrupted floor sills at the corners and at major intersections, lies east of Building 1. Its front rooms have plastered floors, and one room has a sand floor.

### **ARCHITECTURE OF BUILDING 3**

BUILDING 3 is a post-and-beam, timber-frame building, about 38 ft. wide and about 27 ft. deep. It has raised sills on a mortar foundation, with interrupted floor sills at the corners and major intersections. The large post size suggests that Building 3 had two stories. The stairs were possibly located at the rear.

The building's Rooms 1 and 4 face on to Lime Street; the back rooms (Rooms 2 and 3) possibly are extensions of the yard. The remains of an exterior kitchen, or 'cook room,' was also revealed in the investigation. The cistern would have been shared with Building 1, located next door.

Rooms 1 and 4 each have crumbled remnants of plaster floors; Room 2 has a consolidated sand floor. The yard and parts of Room 3 show remains of brick paving.



### FUNCTION OF BUILDING 3

The function of Building 3 could not be determined from the architectural remains. A large number of unused white clay tobacco pipes, corked and monogrammed wine bottles, and various



measuring scales and weights suggests that it was possibly used as a storage area for the various activities in the adjacent buildings and for the nearby outdoor market.

**BUILDING 4/5** - This, the final building that has been excavated thus far, is a large, rambling complex consisting of at least six rooms and three back yards. The complex is approximately 65 ft. wide and over 40 ft. long and represents at least two, and possibly three, different houses or combination houses/shops.

This well-preserved brick building complex has plastered walls, brick floors, and wooden door sills. The initial construction phase consisted of Rooms 1 and 2 and the sidewalk at the front of Building 5. Room 1, the large room to the west, has a plaster floor, while the smaller Room 2 has a herringbone brick floor and a stairwell. Rooms 3 and 4, which were added in a later construction phase, are tacked to the south of Room 2. Their purpose may have been to join an exterior kitchen to the building, represented by Room 4. Both back rooms have common bond brick floors, and Room 4 contains a large hearth and oven.

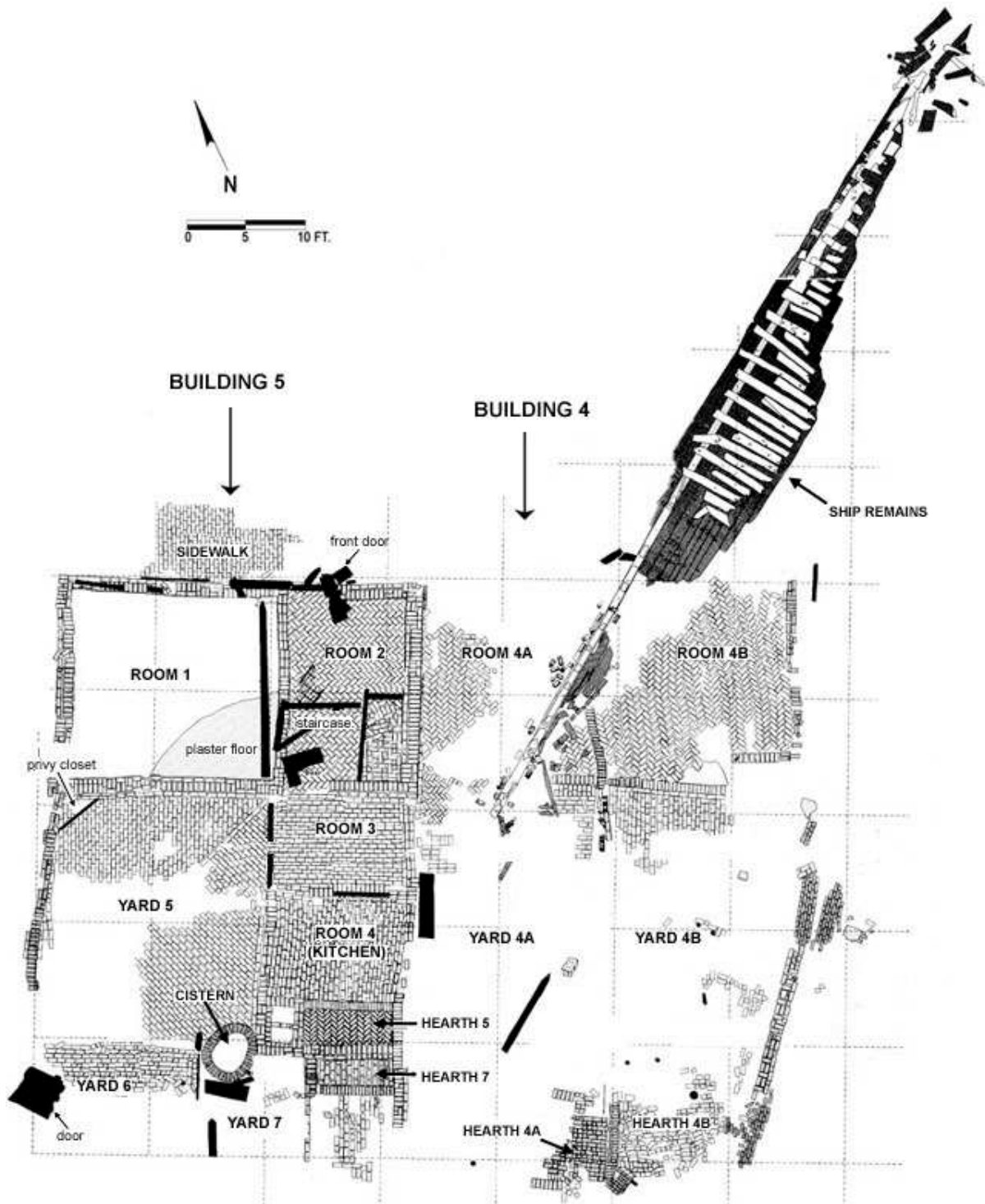


Building 4, which consists of at least two rooms, is located to the east of Building 5. It also has a hearth. The presence of half-brick-wide interior walls dividing Rooms 1 and 3 of Building 4 indicate a much less substantial, one-story building addition. Horizontal displacements, seen most readily at the east end, in Room 3, have skewed the floor and walls several feet.

Building 4/5 has produced more in situ artifacts than any building thus far excavated. To the front of the building, in what would have been a part of Lime Street, a large section of a fallen wall was discovered. This wall may have fallen out from Building 5 or from a building to the north. It was in this area of the fallen exterior wall that we found the wooden frame of a four-partition window with leaded glass panes within a wrought-iron frame. Numerous other artifacts were found in association with the building, including two sets of 28 Chinese porcelain Fo Dogs and a minimum of 28 Chinese porcelain cups and bowls. Pewter plates, candlesticks, a brass mortar, an English tin-glazed vase, a decorated Dutch Delft plate, a gold ring, a pearl with a gold attachment, silver forks and spoons, and many encrusted metal objects that are awaiting identification, conservation, and analysis were found in the same area.

The remains of a young child was uncovered from under the bricks of the fallen front wall just outside of the two adjacent front doorways. The remains of two more children were found in

Rooms 3 and 4. The remains of a ship, which ripped through the front walls and tore through the floors of the four rooms on the east side of the building complex, have also been identified.



## ARCHITECTURE OF BUILDING 4/5

BUILDING 4/5 is a large and rambling complex consisting of at least six rooms and three back yards. The complex is approximately 65 ft. wide and over 40 ft. long and represents at least two, possibly three, houses or combination houses/shops.

Architectural evidence revealed that Building 5 was the first structure of the complex to be built. It began with Rooms 1 and 2, each of which has its own front door opening onto a narrow extension of Lime Street. Room 1 shows the remains of a plastered floor, while the floor of the smaller Room 2 was paved with brick laid in a decorative herringbone pattern. The remains of a staircase in Room 2 indicate there was at least one upper story, which was probably used for living quarters. It is unknown whether this staircase was built in the initial construction phase or was added later, along with two more brick-paved rooms (Rooms 3 and 4) and a walled, brick-paved yard with a cistern (Yard 5). The purpose of Room 3 appears to have been to provide access to the yard and to join to the building an exterior kitchen (the 'cook room'), represented by Room 4.

The one-brick-wide exterior walls of Building 4 indicate that it was a much less substantial, one-story structure. Attached by a common wall to the eastern side of Building 5, it consists of two rooms, divided by an interior wall that was only one-half brick wide. Each room had its own back yard (Yards 4A and 4B), with an exterior kitchen, or 'cook area' located at the back of the yard. Both rooms in Building 4 show remains of some flooring, but the floor of Room 4B appears to have been the only one that was originally plastered (see the detailed drawing). In room 4B there was the original plaster floor that was overlain with a layer of fallen ceiling plaster. The brick floor was laid over the ceiling plaster, raising the floor level somewhat from the brick paving in the yard. The architectural layout of Building 4 was disrupted by the earthquake, which badly affected several areas of the building, including remains of doorways. Horizontal displacements, seen most readily at the east end, in Room 4B, have also skewed the floor and walls several feet. Interpretation of the building is further complicated by the ca. 70-ft. long remains of a ship that washed over from the harbor in the tidal wave that followed the earthquake. It plowed through Building 4's front wall, heeled over on to its port side, and came to rest in the middle of the rooms.

Yards 6 and 7, located behind Yard 5 and originally separated from it by a now destroyed wooden fence, were part of two structures (Buildings 6 and 7) originally located to the south of Building 4/5. It appears that all three yards used the brick-lined cistern located at their common border.

## **FUNCTION(S) OF BUILDING 4/5**

### **Building 5**

**Rooms 1 and 2:** Room 1's separate entrance, plastered floor, and collection of pewter plates may also point to it being used for entertaining/serving food to patrons, with Room 2 used as an entrance to the dwelling and to provide access to an upper floor. Stacks of about 25 pewter plates

found in a cupboard under the remains of the staircase and an assortment of unused white clay smoking pipes and uncorked glass bottles located near the door indicate the possibility that this area also functioned as a storage space.

**Room 3:** This room contained artifacts associated with food preparation, such as cast-iron and brass cooking pots, as well as a large brass strainer and a silver spice grater.

**Room 4:** This room was obviously the kitchen, or ‘cook room,’ since remains of a hearth and oven were found in this area. Several measuring weights in the old English wheat system (Smith 1997) were found near the hearth, it may indicate that the area was used bread production.

#### **Building 4**

It is more difficult to ascribe a specific activity to either of the two rooms that comprise the destroyed Building 4. The yards and kitchen areas contained an assemblage of artifacts indicative of domestic purposes/food preparation (two cast-iron cooking pots, a brass mortar), while the wood barrels, the handles of tools, and the bucket and table as noted above, as well as scrap pewter and brass indicate also some sort of domestic/manual activity in this area. A few pewter plates and bowls suggest that the more poorly constructed Building 4 was also some kind of residence-accommodation perhaps for the servants/slaves, who worked in Building 5.

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Original citation information:

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2000, Port Royal's Excavated Buildings, World Wide Web, URL,  
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