DISUSED WHALING STATIONS

Prince Olav Harbour Gazetteer

Purcell Miller Tritton LLP, 3 Colegate, Norwich, Norfolk NR3 1BN
norwich@purcellmillertriton.com www.purcellmillertriton.com
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This gazetteer is prepared in conjunction with a general report into the condition of the disused whaling stations. This report was prepared following a series of inspections in late October and early November 2010. The report was prepared for the Government of South Georgia and the South Sandwich Islands (GSGSSI) who have original copies of the main report and the various gazetteers.

The gazetteers are not intended to be a comprehensive survey of the buildings and structures, but they do represent a snapshot of the condition of the sites at a particular moment. Additional photographs are available and have been deposited with the GSGSSI.

The survey team consisted of:

- Pat Lurcock – Government Officer, GSGSSI
- Dave Peck – Clerk of Works, GSGSSI
- Tommy Moore – Thames Laboratories
- Michael Morrison – Purcell Miller Tritton LLP

The surveys at each site were necessarily very brief and were intended to make a general assessment of the overall condition of the site and a specific assessment of the asbestos hazard. Thames Laboratories have reported specifically on the asbestos and their report is also lodged with GSGSSI.

The timetable for the visits was:

- Grytviken – 29 October, 5/6 November 2010
- Husvik – 30 October 2010
- Stromness – 31 October, 4 November 2010
- Leith – 1/2 November 2010
- Prince Olav – 3 November 2010

Generally the visits were made between 0800 and 1700 hours and the weather was uniformly good.

Please note that throughout the report the use of north, east, west and south should only be taken as approximate to indicate the side of the structure that has been photographed. This is to avoid the cumbersome usage of northwest, west northwest etc. Northwest, southwest etc., are only used when there would be confusion over which face of the structure is being referred to.
This location plan is taken from the appendices of the book 'The Shore Whaling Stations of South Georgia' published by Novus Press, 15 September 2004 (ISBN-10: 8270993948) by Bjorn L Basberg. The numbering system for all the structures and the names all replicate those in the book for easy identification and comparison.
1. Flensing Platform
2. Blubber Cookery
3. Upper Meat Cookery
4. Lower Meat Cookery
5. Bone Cookery
6. Guano Factory
7. Guano Store
8. Elevated Railway
9. Winches
10. Boiler House
11. Provisions Store
12. General Store
13. Refinery and Laboratory
14. Carpenter's and Butcher's Shop
15. Blacksmith Shop
16. Foundry
17. Bathhouse
18. Old Barracks
19. New Barracks
20. Office and Slop Chest
21. Hospital
22. Kitchen and Mess
23. Bakery
24. Provisions Store
25. Old Foremen's Barracks
26. New Foremen's Barracks
27. Villa: Manager's House
28. Henhouse
29. Jetty Store
30. Boiler House
31. Pumps
32. Pigsty
33. Pigsty
34. Cinema
35. Elevated Railway
36. Magazine/Gunpowder House
37. The Brutus: barque
38. Cemetery
1 The Plan

The Plan is still clearly defined by the remains of the surrounding buildings. At its lower (eastern) edge it is approximately a metre above sea level. There is little left of the whale slip or jetty in this area as this is now where the stream flows into the sea. The boarding of the Plan largely remains in place, 250x50mm thick, the main part is laid east/west up the slope. The boarding is laid at roughly 45° to the main area where it runs up between the two meat cookeries. The stream which originally ran down to the north of the Plan area now runs across it. This is speeding up the decay of the Plan itself and is also affecting the remains of the lower meat cookery (Building No.4).
2 Blubber Cookery

The Blubber Cookery stands on the south edge on the Plan and it is likely that this was built in several stages. The central portion contains the tall upright cookers within a timber frame construction with a loft above. To the southwest of this is a further timber building with some heavy steelwork inside it, holding a heavy gridded mincing machine in the south corner.

To the south of the main building is a single storey extension, presumably used for storage and as a pump house.

On the southeast corner there are a further two buildings supported on a large steel purlin propped with a central post and supporting a mono-pitched roof. This is probably the last piece of construction. There is also a timber enclosure around four of the pressure cookers.

The whole of this building is in the state of collapse. The various boilers are still in position but they are now quite seriously corroded. They stand on timber bases and these are beginning to fail. It would seem that it is too late to save anything significant here.
2.3 The west end of the building

2.4 Cylindrical tanks at the east side of the building

2.5 Detail of remaining machinery at the southwest corner

2.6 The extension at the southeast corner
3       The Upper Meat Cookery

This was a timber framed building framed out of substantial timbers the main pieces measuring 159x159mm in a cross section. There are two rows of six cookers: the western row standing on timber bases, one cooker is missing and two have fallen and the others look insecure. The eastern row of cookers stands on iron legs on concrete bases but the concrete is spalling and in poor order. The boilers themselves are still reasonably sound although doors are missing in several cases. The building and the platform above the meat cookery has entirely collapsed and lies in a heap between and around the boilers.
4 The Lower Meat Cookery

This too was a timber framed building and like Building No.3 it has collapsed entirely. Four boilers remain standing on timber bases which are failing. Two boilers are now leaning sideways against each other. A fifth boiler is in a semi-upright position having fallen through its frame to the floor. There were certainly six and possibly more boilers standing in one central row. There are four concrete bases and two timber bases for a second row of boilers to the west although the boilers themselves have disappeared. There may have been a northward extension to the plant, as there is a row of four boilers on bases cast out of concrete (using old oil drums for shuttering) immediately north of the original timber building through the remaining position, although the concrete bases have fallen away in many cases, one has fallen completely. As in Building No.3 this was built out of substantial timbers 150x150mm which appear to have been used for the posts and there are more substantial 300 square timbers possibly used at the corners, although the collapse is so complete it is extremely difficult to tell what belongs where.
5 Bone Cookery

This has disappeared almost entirely. Timber wall plates and some small evidence of concrete footings is all that is left to indicate the outline of the building, various heavily rotted timbers lie in place. Four cookers remain in place on timber packers on concrete bases. Part of the timber is decaying but they still look reasonably solid. There are nine further bases which are on the west side of the building suggesting there were 11 cookers in rows on either side. The bases on the east side have very little fabric left. The floor appears to have been covered in heavy timber (around 100mm thick). There is a small section of steel framing at the north end of the building but none is evident elsewhere. It seems likely that this was a timber framed building.
6 Guano Factory

This was a steel framed building and a small amount of the steel frame remains standing at the west end. The rest of the building has completely collapsed. From the ovens that remain in place it would appear that there were three rotating cookers for processing the meal. One remains clearly visible, the other two are now buried in the wreckage. The brick boilers are all in poor condition and are beginning to collapse. At the southeast corner of the building there is a fine steam engine with a large fly wheel.

The building appears never to have gone the full length of the platform it is constructed on. At the west end this is a concrete platform sitting on the earth; at the east end it is supported on piers. These are concrete on the landward side and timber in the southeast corner supporting a concrete deck.
7 Guano Store

This appears to have been connected to Building No.6 by a railway and a raised walkway; possibly the elevated railway also served this area. There is a steel ‘A’ frame with an access ladder and a platform which might be part of this. Building No.7 appears to have been a timber frame building of some size, little or nothing remains other than the north wall which has fallen against the adjacent bank. This shows corrugated iron cladding and timber framing – the building was built up out of rock on the beach with a concrete platform cast over the top of it and the seaward, south side being supported by timber piles. This outer edge of deck has now partially collapsed and the inner deck of timber on concrete is in poor condition and falling away.

7.1 The line of the elevated walkway joining the Guano Factory to the Guano Store

7.2 Detail of the remains of the building

7.3 The north wall which remains leaning against the bank

7.4 General view of the Guano Store looking eastwards
8 Elevated Railway

‘Elevated Railway’ is probably a misnomer. It seems likely that this was something more akin to a bucket and a hoist. The lower supporting ‘A’ frame has collapsed but the upper station is still present. This is an open ironwork pylon with a small booth for an operator to sit in. The access ladder for the operator is no longer present. Even when braced with tie wires, of which three remain in position, it seems unlikely that this can ever have taken any great load.

The corrugated iron is falling away from the control hut but otherwise the pylon looks sound enough. The wind load on the hut must be considerable and wind is likely to bring the whole assembly down in due course.
9  The Winch House

The Winch House stands at the top of the Plan. It was probably constructed as a lean-to against the adjacent boiler house. All that remains are two upright concrete posts on the west side and there are concrete blocks at the front (east side) with iron holding down bolts. A large timber beam fitted with pulley blocks sits alongside which would presumably have spanned between the concrete blocks and been bolted to them. One large steam driven winch remains in position with an extension to a drum for wire rope on the south side. At least two other winch bases remain but there are no signs of the winches themselves. There is a small timber framed mono-pitched shed immediately to the south of the site of the Winch House. Whether this was part of the Boiler House or of the Winch House is not clear.
This too appears to have originally been a timber structure – very little of this remains at present. Five boilers remain in position with various sections of steel chimney scattered in the debris. The boilers appear to have been coal fired and there is a good deal of coal both within the boiler house itself and the large heap outside to the west. To the west of the boiler house is a later steel frame building which appears to be an extension to the original building. This western extension was a relatively lightweight construction with RSJ measuring 125x200mm and angle iron trusses in the roof. Some of the roof trusses remain partially attached to the remaining columns but little else remains of the building other than some concrete walls which define the perimeter of the building.

There is a timber and corrugated iron extension running out southwards from the west corner of the building ending in a concrete platform together with another steam winch but the purposes of this is not entirely clear, though it may have been to do with loading coal into the boiler and there is certainly plenty of coal lying about at this position.
10.4 General view of the Boiler House from the southwest looking northeast

10.5 Detail of the platform and winch at the south corner of the building

10.6 General view of the remains of the Boiler House looking southwards

10.7 The east (back) of the boilers

10.8 The coal heap to the southwest of the Boiler House
11 Provisions Store

A small rectangular brick building that was built partially into the hillside and is now surrounded on the north and west sides by the coal heap. The roof of the building has collapsed and disappeared completely and only a small amount of the wall plate remains on the north wall. The bricks are rapidly falling away with all the remaining courses all being loose.
12/15 General Store and Blacksmith Shop

This building has entirely collapsed and is now simply a heap of timber and corrugated iron. It would appear to have been raised approximately 450mm off the ground level with the timber base plate being supported by heavy timber bearers and in some places a concrete pier. The floorboards generally appear to have been very thick at around 75mm. It is difficult to determine where building No.12 ends and Building No.15 starts. Building No.15 is also in a state of complete collapse, the most visible part being the west gable end which appears to have been built up above ground level with a suspended timber floor and the outer walls of heavy stud framing with corrugated cladding externally and horizontal boarding internally. The main timbers of the stud frame being roughly 125x125mm. The same timber appears to have been used for ties and for principal rafters of the roof. These two buildings are well beyond the point where any repair is possible.
13 Refinery and Laboratory

Nothing recognisable remains of the building other than a concrete floor. This floor has recently been used for storage of various bits of metal and pipes and presumably any building remnants were cleared away before the area was used for storage. There are a few elements of timber and corrugated iron lying underneath some of the stored material. At the south end there is a steel frame supporting three tanks and the remnants of a small steam engine and belt drive. Probably this is the ‘refinery’. There are concrete bases adjacent to this area, one of which still has a tank on top of it, the other has a tank lying next to it.
14 Carpenter’s Shop and Butchery

This building is still standing although in very poor condition. At the west end is a butchery and, adjacent to it, what appears to be a blacksmith’s shop in that it has what looks like a forge in the centre of the building with part of the flue remaining in position and wide doors opening out to the adjacent waterside. This section of the building appears to have been built later than the adjacent eastern section – it is a simple timber frame with trusses consisting of a tie beam, two principals and a hanger.

The carpenter’s shop is similarly framed out of 125x125mm timbers clad externally with corrugated iron. The main roof was east/west with what appears a later addition running out northwards. This northern extension of the carpenter’s shop was supported on concrete bases cast onto the beach. These have now fallen away leaving the timber plates supporting the floor exposed and allowing the corner of the building to drop. This section of the building is in very poor condition and is also being used by elephant seals as a moulting area which must give the remaining structure considerable battering. It seems likely that this will collapse in the fairly near future. The roof over the westward arm has holes in both sides with, perhaps, 15 percent of the sheeting missing and 50 percent of it damaged to some degree.
14.4  Inside the Blacksmith's Shop in the centre of the main building looking northeast

14.5  The east elevation

14.6  The west side of the North Wing
16   Foundry

The concrete base remains at the foundry but apart from this the only surviving structure is the west wall. This appears to be an extension to the original building with a lean-to roof falling to the west. It is framed up in steel work with three heavy columns, no doubt adapted from something else supporting the north wall. These columns will be here for some years to come. The rest of the building was presumably of timber and corrugated iron.

16.1 General view of the Foundry

16.2 Looking eastwards and showing the remnant of the west wall

16.3 General view of the Foundry from the high ground to the south. One of the pylons for the Elevated Railway in the foreground.
17 Bath House

This is situated high up on the slope halfway up to Old Barracks No.80.

A concrete wall has been constructed to level a platform for the Bath House and the concrete wall and the concrete floor slab on top of it remain in position though the floor slab is now much cracked – the whole of the super structure has disappeared entirely.

17.1 The remaining base of the Bath House
18 The Old Barracks

Constructed on a concrete base which is some 1.5m out of the ground at the northeast corner and approximately 750mm below ground at the southwest corner, the building consists of central passage with rooms off either side.

The building is constructed as a braced frame of 125x75mm timbers, the walls being clad externally in corrugated iron and internally with vertical tongued and grooved boarding. The timber framed roof has trusses at roughly 2m centres supporting timber purlins and corrugated iron covering. The ground floor is suspended timber with floor joists spanning onto central spine walls. The floor is double bonded with the lower boards being some 30mm thick with 25mm boards laid at right angles over the top. The roofs are divided by internal stud walls covered with vertical boarding. The ceiling is also boarded.
The layout of the ground floor is five rooms either side of the central corridor each with a sliding sash window. Each room was fitted out with eight bunks – so eighty men could have slept in the ground floor accommodation. The upper floor was not inspected. It was accessed by a companion stair in the central passage. There are no dormer windows and with windows only in the gable ends it seems likely that the space was used primarily for storage.

The corrugated iron cladding is present on three sides of the building but the sheeting is coming away on the west side with the northwest corner of the wall having collapsed. The east roof slope is more or less intact but some 20 percent of the corrugated sheeting is missing from the west slope.
19  The New Barracks

This is constructed on similar principles to the old barracks with five rooms either side of the central corridor which is accessed from porches at both east and west ends. This space was designed for first floor use as there is a pair of sash windows in either gable end and a single dormer on the south side (which looks like an afterthought and is a metal window in a corrugated iron outshot) and double sash windows in the hipped roof section on the north side. The corrugated iron sheeting is now beginning to fall away from the walls with loose sheets on the east end and some five loose sheets on the north side. The roof has a hole on the south slope at the west end and sheets are lifting on the north side to the east of the gable and one sheet is now missing. The stairs to the east porch have collapsed.

Internally the rooms are laid out much as the Old Barracks with boarded walls and ceiling and a suspended timber floor with eight bunks in each room. However the timber frame of the New Barracks is even more substantial than that of Old Barracks with posts some 200mm square. There is little sign of any insulation but there is felt under the corrugated iron and there are also some signs of felt under the boarding internally.

The building is in poor condition with the suspended floor on the ground floor collapsing and the ceiling coming down. The first floor was not accessed.
20  **Office and Slop Chest**

This building has collapsed completely and only the roof trusses and the corrugated cladding to the roof remain intact. The whole building has fallen northwards so the roof now sits some 6m forwards of the original building line. From the size of the walls this would appear to have been a single storey building with a loft which was accessible as a solid flight of stairs remains in the wreckage. The structure of the building seems to have been based on 60mm thick tongued and grooved vertical boarding as an internal skin with battening fixed to it externally and corrugated iron on the outside of that.

20.1 The remnants of the building from the north

20.2 The remaining section of roof on the ground to the north of its original location

20.3 Detail of the remains of the building showing the staircase

20.4 General view of the collapsed building from the south
21 Hospital

This building has entirely collapsed with the exception of small sections at either end, a lean-to on the west side and an entrance porch on the east side. It appears to have been a single storey building although the roof space was probably accessible as there appears to be a window in the gable end. The wall structure appears to be vertical boarding covered directly with corrugated iron on the exterior and with vertical boarding internally.

21.1 The north side of the building

21.2 Remnants of the Hospital seen from the higher ground to the south
22 Kitchen and Mess

This building remains standing although only just. The whole building appears to have fallen northwards so the upper storey is now at ground floor level. The building was single storey with an accessible loft space with a continuous long dormer on the north side and possibly a pair of roof lights on the south side, although these may be vents for stoves. The roof covering miraculously remains more or less intact though with a substantial wave along it. At the east end of the building the southeast corner remains more or less full height. At the west end the upper floor is now at ground floor level. The concrete base remains and inside this is visible some remains of kitchen equipment and some tables of the old mess room.

The construction is much as the other buildings on the site with heavy timber stud framing clad externally in corrugated iron. Externally the corrugated iron seems to have been fixed direct to the stud frame. Internally there is vertical timber boarding fixed over roofing felt.
The south elevation

Detail of the centre of the south elevation

The remains of the east elevation showing that the building was two storeys high
23 Bakery

The north end of the bakery remains intact. This small building is single storey with a pitched roof running north/south and two side hung casement windows in the north gable end. The concrete floor and the stud frame is unclad internally. To the south is the remains of the oven built in brick. This is now in poor condition with much of the brickwork damaged and the iron fittings for the doors and reinforcing rusting and splitting off the brickwork. The south end of the building was built tight up against the adjacent bank and the brick end wall and corrugated iron gable remain in position. Other than this the southern section of the building has collapsed completely with only a pile of timber and the concrete base remaining.

23.1 The north end of the Bakery - west side with the collapsed end of the kitchen in the foreground

23.2 The north and east sides of the Bakery

23.3 The remaining brick over the south end of the Bakery
24  Provisions Store

This building has disappeared entirely apart from its concrete base which just remains visible.

24.1  The remaining concrete base

25  Old Foremen’s Barracks

The corrugated iron entrance porch to the old barracks remains at its west end in poor condition. The remainder of the barracks has disappeared completely with only a few bricks showing where it had been.

25.1  Remnant of the old Foremen’s Barracks
26 The New Foremen’s Barracks

This too has disappeared in its entirety with only some concrete and brick walls showing where it has been in the past. There is a timber construction to its north side which may have been an entrance platform but at the west end this looks as though it may have been used as a cold frame.

26.1 Remnants of the cold frame

26.2 Remains of the New Foremen’s Barracks looking eastwards. The ‘building with no number’ is in the background.
Immediately to the east of Building No.26 is a building which is not shown on Bjorn Basberg’s plan.

This is a brick single storey building with some storage space in the attic. It is accessed by a timber framed corrugated iron clad stair and ramp from the end of the disappeared Provisions Store No.24. The roof of the stair and ramp has failed and there is a hole in the southwest corner where the wall of the building has fallen in. The building is in substantial brick-and-a-half work with a cavity between the brickwork, with only the occasional headers used to provide a bond between the skins. At the northwest corner, where there was a doorway, the back wall is partially built into ground level, the front wall being raised approximately 750mm above the north side.

The building has a main beam running east/west which is propped centrally and braced. Above this are substantial king posts to prop up principal rafters which have high level collars. There is an upper floor previously used for storage with access by a companion stair. The lower floor is concrete, a considerable portion, perhaps 15 percent, of the lower corrugated iron is missing from the south side. The upper brickwork is disturbed on the south wall and there are substantial cracks through the east and west walls with further collapse likely in the not too distant future.
NN5  East elevation

NN6  Interior of the store showing propping of the attic floor

NN7  Interior of the stair and ramp looking south from the bottom
27 The Manager’s Villa

The main building is rectangular with a ridge running east/west. This has a lean-to and a smaller outshot on the south side and an entrance porch on the west side. The building has a cat slide dormer on the south side and a bay with a pitched roof hipped back into the main roof on the north side. This bay provides a front entrance and small hallway at ground floor. The building is clad externally in timber boarding which has previously been painted and has a pitched roof of corrugated iron. The porch and lean-to are both clad completely in corrugated iron. There is a pair of brick chimneys through the ridge which are now more or less fallen in. The windows on the south side have all disappeared and the two lower ones have had the boarding beneath them broken up. The roof of the lean-to on the south side is seriously damaged and the whole of the roof of the dormer has disappeared. The north slope of the roof appears to be undamaged but the missing windows and the missing roof to the dormer have taken their toll.
The whole of the ground floor, which was suspended, has fallen in and the ceiling has collapsed. Curiously there did not appear to be any remaining floorboards to the first floor – why they would have been removed is unclear. It would seem that partitions have been stripped out here as well leaving the upper floor as open – perhaps the building has been used as a ‘quarry’ for materials. The construction of the building is much the same as the others with a substantial timber frame, roughly 125x125mm principal members with vertical boarding internally and, in this case, vertical boarding externally with felt under both inner and outer boarding. The front entrance has four concrete steps and a wrought iron balustrade.
The Hen House has collapsed completely. The roof appears to have flipped over the north wall of the building, leaving the roof lying upside down and the south wall exposed having moved through 180°. The nest boxes for the hens remain on the south side of the building, the roof, remarkably, remains intact.
29  The Jetty Store and Jetty

This has collapsed completely and only one small section of roof remains propped up, the remainder is a heap of timber and corrugated iron. Part of this was built on the jetty itself. The jetty is supported by substantial timber piles of approximately 250x250mm cross section. These are at roughly 2m centres with heavy cross timbers supporting secondary beams and then a timber deck of 75mm thick boards. The deck is now significantly decayed with grass growing out of it.
30/31  Boiler House, Pump House and Tanks

Very little remains of any of these structures. The cylindrical tanks H-O have all been removed. There is no trace left of them suggesting they were dismantled for use elsewhere.

There are some remnants of standing walls and a door and frame and a good deal of brick rubble but not enough to distinguish what the buildings were at that part. One rectangular fuel tank remains in position, possibly a fuel tank for the boilers.
32  Pig Sty

This building is in slightly better condition than the other brick buildings on the site. It is built in brick-and-a-half bond of the ‘rat-trap’ type with headers tying the inner and outer skins together. The wall has failed under the windows on the north side and in a substantial area of the east elevation. The east wall which is built on top of an escarpment is the most precarious of the building. The walls have been rendered externally but most of this has now fallen away.

Above the wall plate level, gable ends are clad in corrugated iron. Internally the pig pens are built in brick with render to all sides. There are timber posts supporting beams running the length of the building which both support these and provide door posts for the pen doors. Floors are solid concrete but are covered with timber in places and may originally have been entirely covered with timber. There is no staircase to the upper floor but there is a substantial trap inside the door at the west end. The roof is reasonably steeply pitched corrugated iron with principal rafters approximately 150x150mm alternating with rafters of 65x150mm, these are tied by high collars and will receive some tying action from the floor. The space above is boarded out although this appears to be failing and was not accessed. There is a stout timber ceiling with a good deal of insulation on top of this. The ceiling boards are now falling away in several areas. The space has two ventilators from the pig area out through the ridge. There is one small chamber constructed on the southwest corner lined out with felt, possibly accommodation for the pig man? The roof is still reasonably intact and keeping this area dry.
33 Pig Sty

The structure of this building has disappeared entirely leaving only the concrete floor and the walls of the pig pens visible.

33.1 The remains of the Pig Sty with the hull of the Brutus in the background
Little now remains of the cinema which stood on top of the bank to the south of the New Barracks and the Slop Chest. There is the remains of a timber stair leading to the cinema and the location and extent of the building is still apparent from the remaining concrete foundation and some remnants of brickwork. The main superstructure of the cinema no longer exists.
35  Elevated Railway

There is nothing significant remaining of the elevated railway.

36  Magazine

This structure (if it still exists) was not inspected.

37  The Brutus

The Brutus was not inspected.

37.1  General view of the west side of the Brutus

37.2  The stern showing the corrosion of the steel plate and vegetation growth
38 Cemetery

The Cemetery was inspected by Pat Lurcock.

38.1 The replica headstone of John Anderson

38.2 General view of the Cemetery