

Remember This? 18th Century Fort Massey underneath Queen Street and South Street (3 photos)

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1 / 3 1784 Charles Blaskowitz plan of Halifax overlaid on modern street grid. Fort Massey situated at intersection of today's Queen Street and South Street. (Used with permission of Dr. Jonathan Fowler)

On Sunday, May 6th, David Jones, local historian and archaeologist, led a [Jane's Walk](#) guided tour of the [hidden burial grounds](#) of Downtown Halifax.

After visiting the parking lot of Saint Mary's Basilica, the front lawn of the former Halifax Memorial Library and the hill of Saint David's Church, walkers travelled to Fort Massey Cemetery at the corner of Queen Street and South Street.

According to the Saint Mary's University [Holy Cross Cemetery webpage](#); "Like Holy Cross the grave stones in Fort Massey cemetery represent only a small fraction of the total number of burials. The burials date back to the eighteenth-century and include soldiers that served in both the Great War and the Second World War."

In addition to being a military burial ground dating to the mid to late 18th century, Fort Massey Cemetery

is one part of the site of a large military complex: Fort Massey, built in 1778 and underneath a busy downtown Halifax intersection.

Dr. Jonathan Fowler is an Associate Professor at Saint Mary's University who specializes in the historical archaeology of colonial Nova Scotia.

In his spare time, Dr. Fowler maintains '[Archaeology in Acadie](#)', a popular Facebook page that updates the public on current local archaeological research, especially pertaining to the mid-18th century in and around the Minas Basin and Halifax. Recently, Jonathan Fowler discussed the hidden history of Fort Massey.

According to Dr. Jonathan Fowler, Fort Massey was first built in 1778 and modified in 1782.

Fort Massey shares the name of Major-General Eyre Massey who was active in the Seven Years War and later was stationed in Halifax during the American Revolution, when the fort was constructed.

Harry Piers' 1947 *The Evolution of the Halifax Fortress 1749-1928* (page 18) describes the second phase of Fort Massey as 320 feet in length and 170 feet in width, "consisting of two semi-circular works, one at each end, connected by an obtuse redan on each side, all earth and facines, with a ditch and bridge."

Dr. Fowler adds "A stout, octagonal blockhouse stood in the southernmost semi-circular work (roughly where South St. meets Queen St.), and there were also barracks sufficient to house 100 men. The fort in its second phase mounted ten 24-pound guns, three 12-pounders, and four brass mortars."

Several modern technologies and methods can be employed to search for Fort Massey, including GIS (Geographic Information System) overlays using modern satellite imagery and historic mapping, LiDAR (Light Detection and Ranging), ground penetrating radar (Dr. Jonathan Fowler of Saint Mary's University and NAR owns a ground penetrating radar unit with Sara Beanlands and Steve Garcin of Halifax-based archaeological firm Boreas Heritage) and electro-magnetic susceptibility and conductivity survey.

Dr. Jonathan Fowler has effectively used Charles Blaskowitz's 1784 plan of Halifax to highlight the Queen Street and South Street location of Fort Massey.

Although the Queen Street entrance to Fort Massey Cemetery features paneling that shows part of the burial ground's history, the intersection of Queen Street and South Street is in need of Fort Massey interpretation.

A mounted and water-proof overlay of the fort and the modern streets would provide an effective representation of the area's significant military history and archaeology.

Fowler is hopeful that citizens of Halifax will come forward with previous knowledge of archaeologically-relevant information pertaining to Fort Massey, since artifacts and features of the fort have most likely been uncovered through years of road work and infrastructural renewal in the area.

Halifax has a long and complex military history, much of which is buried underneath our feet.

David Jones is an archaeologist and historian from Dartmouth, Nova Scotia. Thursdays at Noon, David has a weekly thirty minute history segment on The Rick Howe Show, NEWS 95.7. He is working towards building a new museum to preserve and promote the rich history and archaeology of Halifax and Dartmouth and surrounding communities.

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