

**H M TOWER OF LONDON**  
**LIFT PIT IN THE BASEMENT OF THE WHITE TOWER**

**TQ 3361 8056**

**REPORT OF ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF**

**SITE CODE: TOL 75 (WB)**

**OXFORD ARCHAEOLOGICAL UNIT**

**JUNE 1998**

## CONTENTS

Page

Summary

1

Introduction

1

Methodology

1

Description

2

Discussion

2

Conclusion

2

References

2

Illustration: plan and section of the excavation (scale 1:20)

## **SUMMARY**

Personnel from the Oxford Archaeological Unit carried out an archaeological watching brief on behalf of the Historic Royal Palaces Agency during the excavation of a lift pit in the west basement of the Tower of London. A brick wall/foundation (apparently of post-medieval date) was exposed. This appears to be a spine wall built to provide a foundation for timberwork supporting the ceilings above.

## **INTRODUCTION**

Historic Royal Palaces commissioned the Oxford Archaeological Unit to undertake a watching brief (project code TOL 75) in the basement of the White Tower during the excavation of a lift pit. The work was undertaken by Linfords, the contractors for the re-presentation of the White Tower, during the middle of April 1997. The pit was 2.2 m long (east-west) and 0.8 m wide. This report describes the methods and findings of the work, and discusses the results.

## **METHODOLOGY**

OAU were asked by HRP to supervise and record excavations by the building contractors, Linfords, during April 1997. A single small trench had to be dug in the west basement of the White Tower to accommodate the base of a lift required for disabled access to the several floors of the building. OAU started a watching brief when it became apparent that archaeological deposits might be disturbed.

The excavation consisted a single trench or pit 2.2 m long (east-west) and 0.8 m wide. This was excavated to a maximum depth of 0.72 m. An existing brick-lined duct formed the southern edge of the excavation. OAU's brief was to monitor the removal of concrete, modern backfill and other material as appropriate, and record the archaeology revealed in the process. The contractor's excavation revealed a brick masonry structure, and this required careful manual excavation, cleaning and recording by OAU personnel. The monitoring was undertaken by Martin Gillard under the supervision of Duncan Wood and direction of Graham Keevill. Dr Edward Impey and Jeremy Ashbee provided input from HRP. The works were discussed with Dr Steven Brindle, Inspector of Ancient Monuments for English Heritage, who approved the stages of work.

The project was given the code TOL 75 in the continuous sequence issued by HRPA to OAU archaeology projects. Archaeological operations such as excavation and recording followed standard OAU methods and procedures (Wilkinson 1992). Eleven context numbers were assigned to layers, features and structures in a single sequence (1-11). Finds were recovered wherever possible, and brick samples were taken a masonry structure. Colour slide and black-and-white photographs were taken.

## **DESCRIPTION**

A wall or foundation (context 4) of red unfrosted bricks was found at the west end of the pit. The wall ran north-south, and only the east face was exposed; the west side lay beyond the limits of excavation, but the masonry was at least 0.44 m wide. Seven courses were visible with the top lying at 8.28 m OD, but again the base of the wall was not found within the depth of excavation. The lowest recorded course lay at 7.82 m OD. There was 50 mm-wide offset at the fourth course. Samples of the bricks were retained as part of the site archive. A linear feature (6, with fill 7) ran parallel to and 0.8 m east of the wall face, cutting a 0.4 m-thick layer of grey-brown sandy loam (10). The edge of 6 sloped at *c* 40° towards the masonry, but the stratigraphic relationship between the two could not be established with certainty. It is possible that feature 6 was the foundation trench for wall 4; the fact that it had been cut from just above the level of the offset in the masonry tends to support this proposition. A vertical circular void (11) was found running through the fill (8) of feature 6 and into the soil layer (10) below.

Fill 8 (and layer 10 to its east) was overlain by yellow-brown sandy loam 9. This was 0.09 m thick at the east end of the excavation, increasing to 0.17 m thick against wall 4. The top of this layer was level with the top of the masonry. A trench (5) for the modern brick duct (3) had been cut vertically through layer 9 along the south side of the excavation and had also truncated wall 4. The modern concrete bedding (2) for the flagged floor (1) of the basement directly overlay the duct, layer 9 and wall 4.

## **DISCUSSION**

The brick fabric suggested a post-medieval date, perhaps in the 17th century. The masonry probably belonged to a longitudinal spine wall running along the west basement. Clement Lemprière's cross-section through the White Tower of 1729 clearly shows timber posts rising through all levels of the west half of the building to support the ceilings (cf Parnell 1993, colour plate 9), and the sleeper wall is likely to have supported the eastern row of posts.

## **CONCLUSION**

Despite its small size the excavation produced some useful information regarding the structural history of the White Tower basement. No further analytical work is considered to be necessary. The archive will be retained at the Tower of London.

## **REFERENCES**

Parnell 1993, *The Tower of London* (Batsford/English Heritage)

Wilkinson D (ed) 1992, *OAU Site Manual* (Oxford Archaeological Unit)