

# Nine Hundred Years of The Tower

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A SERIES of tourist-oriented festivities marked last year's supposed Ninth Centenary of the Tower of London. Let us make an archaeological contribution, without worrying too much that the date, 1078, is simply an Elizabethan guess or rough estimate. Of any year of William the Conqueror's reign, it is in fact the least likely to have seen him inaugurate a great new royal fortress here, since he was far away fighting fairly desperately and unsuccessfully on the southern borders of Normandy. As Professor Christopher Brooke has recently reminded us, the White Tower itself is the "supreme document" of the Normans in London, "a document so obvious and so universally known that we take it for granted"<sup>1</sup>. We must try to read it from the actual stonework.

Most of the ordinary walling in rubble and a surprising amount of the cut-stone work survives from Norman times, although most of the corner-stones of the buttresses were replaced in Portland Stone in the 1630s and almost all the windows were remodelled later in the 17th Century<sup>2</sup>. The Norman stonework of the buttresses has weathered golden-brown and much of the diagonal axe-tooling still shows. There are two courses of cut-stones around the base of the Tower, just above the sloping plinth, but these, badly eroded and grey in colour, may have been inserted in the late 12th or early 13th centuries when, perhaps, the plinth itself was added.



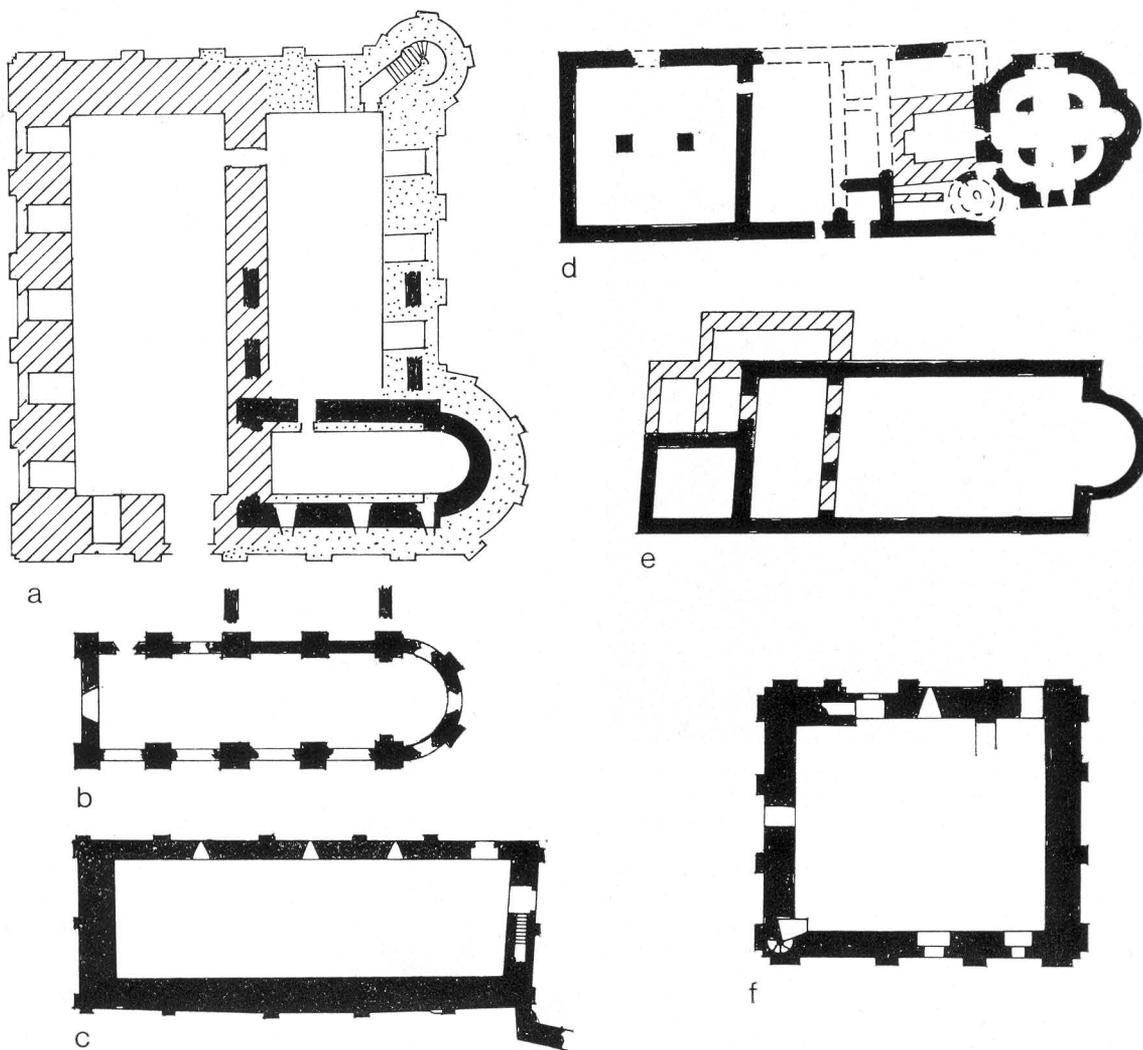
Fig. 1: Tower of London 1955 excavation. Junction of apse (left) and east front. (Crown Copyright)

Many structural inconsistencies show that there has been a whole series of changes of plan and it is quite clear from the Tower that in the 11th century, as in the 20th, no government project could be carried out as a simple operation. The walls of the Tower tell of shilly-shallying, change and uncertainty. Even the simple plan of two large rooms and an apsed chapel cannot be as originally intended. This is shown by the way two of the buttresses on the south front (those of the chapel) have quite different bases from all the others. The immensely thick walls of the lowest storey have probably been thickened-up in several stages, partly on the inside and partly on the outside. Excavations in 1955 showed that the footings of the outer face of the apse are later than the footings of the outer face of the east wall (Fig. 1), but inside the thickness of the walls, inaccessible to structural or archaeological analysis, the first-stage footings may have a different relationship.

Inconsistencies and irregularities continue right to the top of the Tower. The most obvious is the great round north-east corner-turret with its own buttresses, which is quite different from the two western corner-turrets, which also form extra-wide buttresses, but which are entirely different again from the south-east corner-turret, unhappily perched above the chapel-vaulting, as the most obvious afterthought of the whole building. The lesser buttresses show many differences too: of 21 buttresses on the Tower, excluding the western corner-turrets, three on the north-east turret and the one at the angle of the east wall and the apse go up to the roof at their full width. The 7 buttresses of the south front and the apse are diminished by one sloping step two-thirds of the way up, while the 10 remaining buttresses, 4 on the west, 4 on the north and the two central ones on the east front go in by two sloping steps. At roof-level they differ in a different way again, since the 4 buttresses on the north front die away in three sloping steps, the rest in two.

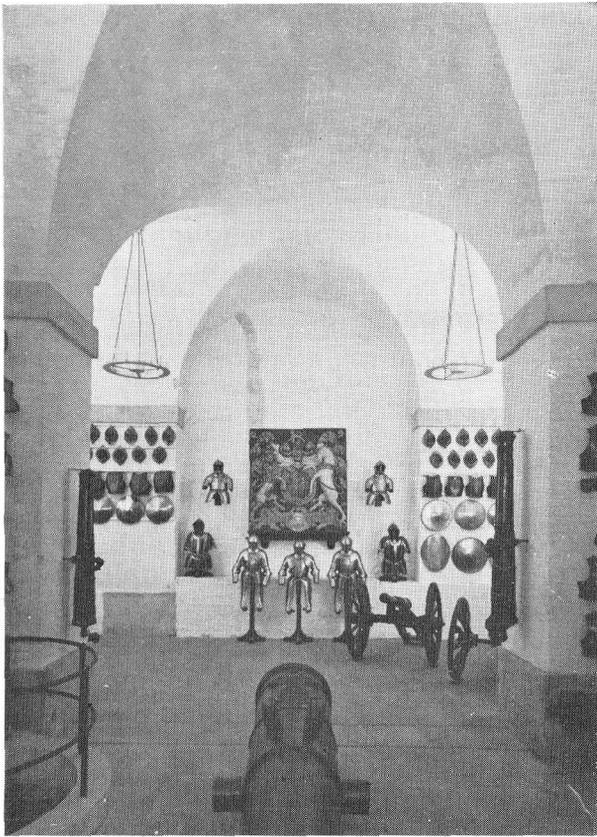
All this indicates five or six building-phases between about 1070 and 1120. The earliest is probably embedded within the walls and cannot be got at and the latest two or three, the top floor and the turrets

1. C. N. L. Brooke & G Keir, *London 800-1216*, (1975) 14.
2. H. M. Colvin (ed.) *The Kings Works*, vol. iii, 276.



**Fig. 2: The White Tower and some buildings to compare with it:**

- (a) Tower of London: phase 1 black, phase 2 hatched, phase 3 dotted, or is it the other way round?
- (b) Copford, Essex, with similar emphasis on buttresses, Bishop of London's chapel.
- (c) Chepstow, Mon., hall keep of c 1070, inside is longer than hall at London.
- (d) Ostrov Lednicki, Poland, chapel and royal residence of pre 992; 12 century work hatched
- (e) Tilleda, E. Germany, residence in imperial castle, chapel and tower of c 1000; work of c 1075 hatched.
- (f) Chauvigny, Poitou. Keep of c 1060-80.



**Fig. 3: Tower of London, basement south wall. Blocked archway, perhaps an early ground-level door. see (a) on Fig. 4. (Crown Copyright)**

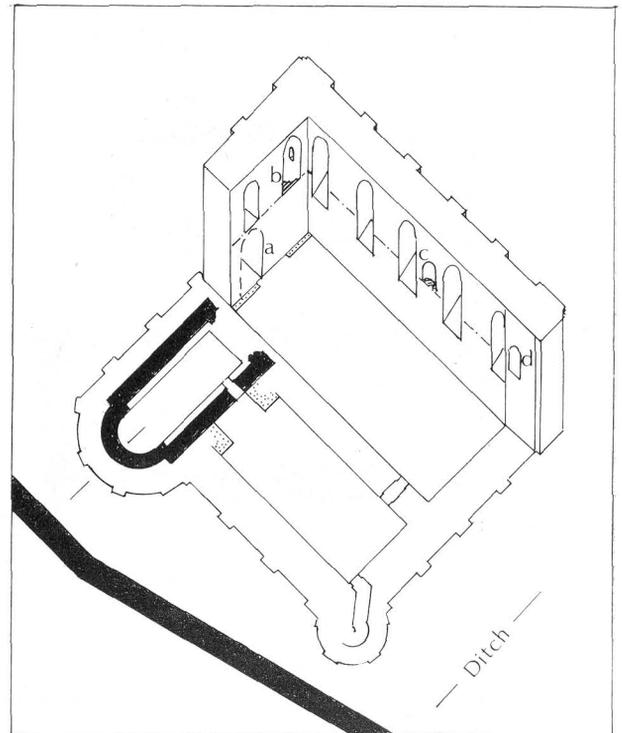
above roof-level have no real datable features at all. The middle stages contain a few vaguely diagnostic features such as the chapel-capitals and the surround of the recently reopened first-floor entrance, for which a date of about 1080-1100 seems quite in order.

Can the building of the Tower have begun, soon after the Conquest, as a ground-level residence perhaps with an attached chapel, rather like the Polish Royal castle of Ostrov Lednicki, which is somewhat earlier, or the German Emperor's castle of Tilleda, as reconstructed in about A.D. 1075 (Fig. 2)? At Castle Acre, Jonathan Coad has recently revealed this kind of sequence. A great blocked arch in the south wall of the Tower, still visible in the lowest western room (Fig. 3), may represent an early ground-level entrance. The main western first-floor windows, whose sills come down oddly into the room with the blocked arch may once have lit a great west hall, which later had a floor put in half-way up (Fig. 4), and another hall built on top.

At what stage, presumably quite early, was the

plan of the Tower doubled, to have large rooms side-by-side? Which of the two represents the earliest phase of the building? At what stage, obviously rather later, was the north-east corner-turret, with its spiral staircase up from the bottom, added to the scheme? When did they decide to incorporate an aisled chapel up on the second-floor level, so that the large first-floor arch to carry it had to be worked in? Why does the top floor have splendidly elaborate windows, as if for a luxurious solar, on the south front beside the chapel? How did it come about that these windows now merely light a wall-passage with two small openings through into the main room?

Meticulous structural analysis, based on the stone-by-stone survey that the Department of the Environment has in progress, will gradually make some of these phases clearer. Publication of the excavations and discoveries of 1954-7 east and south of the Tower and of 1965 beneath the Chapel will be most welcome. But we must also look further afield for parallels and influences.



**Fig. 4: White Tower, two lower storeys. Roman city wall and probable earliest chapel (?AD 1070) in black; ground floor hall (?AD 1075) with doorway (a) and windows; inserted floor (?AD 1080) with upper doorway (b), fireplace (c) and latrine chamber (d). Eighteenth century brick piers dotted (16 more omitted). Plinth restored in 1896 also omitted. Note the lack of relation between the axial line of the chapel and the apse buttresses.**

The Tower is a very large building indeed. But although it must have been built for the Crown, presumably under the oversight of the Conqueror's man here, the first Geoffrey de Mandeville, and under the direction of Bishop Gundulf of Rochester, we can find even grander schemes put up by mere barons. The great western halls at the Tower are a good deal shorter, inside, than William FitzOsbern's hall-keep of about 1070 at Chepstow (Fig. 2). The great thickness of the walls of the Tower and its plan, both, we may suspect, due to early changes from the original plan, are also found at Colchester Castle. Which is earlier, or are they both the result of copying the other's successive alterations. The bold and simple layout and the stepped-in buttresses are best parallel in England in the small Essex church of Copford near Colchester (Fig. 2), which must have been built by London craftsmen for their Bishop as the private chapel of one of his residences. The fine early wall- and vault-paintings here give some idea of the decorations that parts of the Tower may have had.

Other details, such as the deep parallel-sided window embrasures and the broad clasped buttresses of the north- and south-west corners are best matched in Poitou, as in the keep at Chauvigny, (Vienne) (Fig. 2). William "of Poitiers", the Conqueror's own chaplain and biographer provides one link with Poitou, although he was actually a Norman who had studied in Poitou for some time. Another court connexion was the younger Montgomery, whose English barony was at Lancaster, but who was known as Roger "of Poitou" from his wife's estates there. A west French master-builder may well have had a hand in one of the building-campaigns at the Tower<sup>3</sup>. A more exotic

link with Byzantine castle-design in the Holy land has been suggested, and indeed Bishop Gundulf's tour there as a young man is well attested from several sources. Or do the shallow arcaded window-surrounds of the storey below the top bear a closer resemblance to Ottonian practice?

We cannot take everything too seriously. The chapel windows are all Salvin's work of 1858-9. The great sloping plinth, which was taken off and redone in 1955-6, was the design in 1896 of the Works Surveyor of the day, ignorant and unscholarly John Taylor, who was knighted for rebuilding the main southern curtain-wall and the Lanthorn Tower in the wrong place.

The Tower, whatever its date, tells us of naked power and bullying, a pleasant change among all the greed and self-indulgence displayed by office-blocks in the City. Indeed, it presents to the City its most powerful aspect, the magnificently dignified and symmetrical west front, not its more confused and misbegotten back and sides. It tells us little of the Conqueror's own character, but is rather a symbol of him, put up by his deputies to overawe the largest and most unruly city of his realm. There is no evidence that he ever spent a night there. It was modestly equipped for court-functions, with six latrines and four fireplaces (one of them still blocked behind Parma's portrait) to its 8 large rooms, chapel and two undercrofts. Far more important than any internal function, its main purpose was to dominate and threaten.

3. M. Bouard (ed.), *Chateau Gaillard*, vol. vi (1973) 52, fig. 2, type B.

## Letters

### ARCHAEOLOGICAL PAY AND CONDITIONS

THE RECENT REPORT of the LAMAS Survey on full-time employment in archaeology in Greater London (Gromaticus, Vol. 3, No. 8) pinpoints many serious problems, and offers a few suggestions for the improvement of job opportunities.

The Working Party's main finding was the dissatisfaction of the majority of archaeologists working in the London area (over the period of the Survey, 1976/7) with their salaries and contracts of employment. Their solution is the introduction of common salary scales and open-ended contracts of employment; this is like treating the symptoms of a disease rather than its underlying cause. The dissatisfaction and low morale of the young archaeologists who took part in the survey arises from their realisation of the lack of career opportunities if they wish to remain in archaeology in London. By all means introduce common salary scales and more enlightened contracts of employment, but take this opportunity to integrate them into a career structure.

All credit must go to LAMAS for setting up the Work-

ing Party; no time should be lost in setting up a stronger one with a brief for introducing a proper career structure as speedily as possible. This Working Party would need to involve the DoE, Museum of London and local societies as well as representatives of the archaeologists themselves, and must have power to act.

The LAMAS group compared their sample of young archaeologists with librarians and teachers of a similar age for comparison of conditions of employment. However, in regard to career opportunities, a closer parallel can be drawn between young archaeologists and junior hospital doctors. Both careers involve a long period of practical training on entering the profession (all doctors must be graduates before they receive their clinical training, but there is no intention to restrict entry into professional archaeology to graduates, although the LAMAS report clearly shows that the majority of entrants will be graduates).

Both careers demand academic ability and interests, and are heavily oriented towards problem-solving (generally referred to as "research"). Both are heavily over-subscribed